

Genesis Of A Holy Book

April 21, 2020 Category: Religion

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Frank discussion of the (actual) origins of any given holy book is bound to be a fraught undertaking; as it requires one to navigate a gauntlet of contention from those who would prefer current impressions (based, as they are, on “received wisdom”) to be left “as is”. This is especially so in the event that inquiries lead to evidence that undermines a sanctified narrative. After all, such meddling in a homeostatic dogmatic system is bound to sew discord.

Scrutiny tends to expose faults in the ramshackle dogmatic structure—which is typically highly frangible. Such intrusions can potentially lead to fissures in the consecrated edifice.

There is an irony in the case of Islam’s holy book, though. It turns out that the religion’s most vaunted sources themselves reveal that the credence of the “Recitations” is on shaky ground...if not quicksand. In other words, one needn’t bring to bear exogenous critiques; the fatal flaws can be revealed from within the tradition.

All necessary insights can be culled from Islamic sources; which immunizes the critique from those who’s aim to uphold the tradition based on those same sources.

But why so frangible? Well, according to the Koran and Hadith, refusing to believe that Mohammed of Mecca was delivering—verbatim—messages from the Creator of the Universe is the worst possible transgression. For if the text is not deemed to be divine revelation (“tanzil”), then the credence of, well, *everything* is brought into question. {16} Consequently, there is a feeling that Islam’s holy book (as well as the historiography used to buttress its credibility) must be quarantined from critical scrutiny...lest the entire house of cards collapse.

Many myths surround what is supposed to be the earliest compilation of the “Recitations”. Take, for instance, a bit of apocrypha about a figure referred to as “Solomon [“Salmon”] the Persian”, who is supposed to have rendered the Koranic verses in Middle Persian (Pahlavi) during the fabled ministry of Mohammed of Mecca. This is only plausible—of course—insofar as some verses were actually composed during the lifetime of Mohammed of Mecca (the Seal of the Abrahamic prophets; hereafter: “MoM”). Insofar as Pahlavi was the second most relevant language in the region (after Syriac), this actually makes sense. (Classical Arabic did not yet exist.)

As legend has it, MoM relayed the verses—piecemeal—to followers over the course of almost two decades: 613 to 632. Why did it take two decades for this to happen? Well, the Abrahamic deity was feeding his appointed messenger excerpts from what was an eternal book.

The explanation given for why the deity did so in installments: It was a necessary a pedagogic stratagem given the circumstances.

And why no more than two decades? Because MoM was murdered before he could perform his charge (as a mouthpiece) any longer. The descriptor “mouthpiece” here is apt; as MoM is alleged to have been relaying WORD-FOR-WORD the (literal) speech of the Creator of the Universe. Thus the Recitations, as the Final revelation, is not just divinely-inspired exposition like the Bible; it is a **VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT** of speech from the Abrahamic deity, delivered at a specific place and time to a specific person...according to that person.

The notion of “channeling” a deity’s proclamations was nothing new in the Abrahamic tradition—as attested in, say, Deuteronomy 18:18—in which Yahweh states: “I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command.” This leitmotif comes in very handy for demagogues. For to claim that one speaks on behalf of the godhead is to assert infallibility: “To question ME is to question the Abrahamic deity. So don’t question anything I say...lest you impugn an omniscient super-being that, be forewarned, doesn’t take any guff.”

In one fell swoop, a charismatic leader can arrogate to himself limitless license—effectively granting himself a blank check. (With the imprimatur of the godhead, anything goes.) The gimmick is universal—as with, say, the “mandate from heaven” in China. (For more on this topic, see my essay on “The History of Exalted Figures”.) And this is exactly what we encounter in the Koran. Verses 31-32 of Surah 33 stipulate that god instructed MoM to tell everyone that “If you love god, then you will follow ME.” Thus to challenge the designated prophet is to challenge god himself. (Bringing his decrees into question is to countermand the Creator of the Universe!)

Once one is afforded a *casus belli* that can be put in the service of whatever one wishes, there are no limits to one’s aspirations. So it comes as little surprise that MoM insisted that ANYTHING and EVERYTHING he commanded was merely a decree channeled from the Abrahamic deity (as stipulated in 3:32, 4:65/80, 24:63, and 59:7). The Koran, then, is reputed to be a transcription of that preternatural conveyance...**down to every last word.**

How plausible is this claim? It is to this question that the present essay is devoted.

According to the prevailing hagiography, the first passage MoM received from his celestial emissary (the arch-angel, Gabriel) c. 610 correlates with verses 1-5 of chapter 96; though the nascent prophet waited three years before he began conveying this information to others. The episode occurred on the so-called “Laylat al-Qadr” [Night of Destiny; a.k.a. the Night of Power].

That inaugural pericope was followed by two more “revelations”: 74:1-7 then 53:1-18. And then the rest, received ad hoc.

Pursuant to claiming to be the anointed “rasul” of “allah”, MoM was able to accumulate a handful of “mu-hajirun” in his hometown of Mecca: the “ansar” [earliest “companions”]...which is to say: the first of the exalted “Sahabah”. It was this small band of acolytes that accompanied MoM on the famed “hijra[h]” [migration] to a Hijazi oasis settlement a fortnight’s camel-ride to the north: Yathrib. (So the story goes.)

That core group of acolytes were with MoM from the get-go; and served as the seed of his ministry when he set up shop in Yathrib.

MoM was evidently very charismatic, as most cult leaders tend to be. Yet having made minimal headway in Mecca, he was obliged to seek greener pastures. Hence the fabled “hijra” from Mecca. Upon arriving in Yathrib c. 622, the aspiring prophet managed to engineer sycophancy amongst much of the population. This is why the municipality was eventually re-christened, “Madinat an-Nabi” [City of the Prophet].

As the story goes, MoM was extremely savvy at arbitrating disputes between Yathrib's tribal leaders, thereby currying favor with, well, almost everyone in the city. He managed to leverage this renown for his own aggrandizement...which is simply to say: He shrewdly parlayed the good graces he garnered (as a dependable inter-tribal diplomat) into a phenomenally successful campaign as a full-fledged prophet.

From his initial disciples, the self-proclaimed "messenger of god" was able to grow his following at an alarming rate...in spite of the fact that there is no record of him having offered any groundbreaking new ideas...or profound insights on anything (pace, perhaps, discouraging infanticide). Bold pronouncements were enough to beguile the denizens of Yathrib.

Clearly, MoM exuded prodigious confidence—projecting a beguiling gravitas. He had an air of authority that captivated much of his audience. Over time, his purported "revelations" became increasingly brazen. That is: his pronouncements grew more self-serving—and tendentious—in proportion to the power he accrued. The last major Surah was 9—which is, not coincidentally, the most militant.

But one must wonder: Did this "messenger" always remember everything precisely as he declaimed? Well, not exactly. According to various Hadith accounts, MoM HIMSELF sometimes forgot some of the verses he recited, and needed to be reminded of them by others. Even THOSE reminders were dubious. After all, it was just various people recalling various things—things that seemed to "ring a bell" later on...in the event that MoM happened to hear them repeated back to him from this or that ardent follower.

Sometimes, scribes recommended emendations to a revelation; and MoM would respond with what amounted to: "Ooh; you're right. It sounds better THAT way. So go ahead and say it like that instead." These ignominious interludes were subsequently attested to in the "sahih" [unimpeachable] Hadith. Ironically, such incidents only succeeded in making claims of divine origin all the more implausible.

Recall that MoM was illiterate, and so needed someone to transcribe the "revelations" he proffered. One of his first scribes was a man named [Abdullah] Ibn Sa'[a]d ibn Abi Sarh [al-Amiri]. In response to Ibn Abi Sarh's suggestion to re-phrase or elaborate upon certain verses (as with the end of 23:14), MoM's effective reply was: "Uh, yeah. Sounds good. Let's go with that." Naturally, this made the scribe rather suspicious.

After all, the verses were supposed to be conveyances of verbiage emanating from the Abrahamic deity (via a celestial emissary); and so were to be taken VERBATIM. Accordingly, in response to such overtures from a well-meaning scrivener, MoM would not have entertained any suggestions. (This is especially ironic, in light of verse 6:93.)

Invariably, that particular scribe (Ibn Abi Sarh) was privy to certain things of which nobody else would have been aware at the time. This may well have become a problem for the aspiring prophet—undermining, as it would have—the inviolable nature of his asseverations. Consequently, there came to be somewhat of a personal vendetta.

As it came to pass, Ibn Abi Sarh opted to notify others about these peculiar—nay, incriminating—occurrences. As would be expected, the trusted scribe instantly became persona non grata for letting the cat out of the bag. Ibn Abi Sarh eventually fled. Due to his unique access, he was clearly aware that the "revelations" that the self-proclaimed "rasul allah" was relaying to him were of dubious authenticity.

Unsurprisingly, MoM eventually had his former scribe killed for apostasy (read: for spilling the beans).

Interesting fact: Ibn Abi Sarh was the half-brother of Uthman ibn Affan (the man who ended up becoming the third caliph).

Here's the thing. Even by the time MoM died (by being poisoned by a Jewess who's family he'd recently had slaughtered), nobody had gotten around to writing anything down. And two decades after the self-proclaimed prophet's (unexpected) death, STILL nobody had jotting down any of the Recitations—at least not in any systematic way. As one might expect, this would eventually become a problem.

Sure enough, within a generation of MoM's death, there were various versions of the "Recitations" circulating around Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant...and even westward into the Maghreb and eastward into Persia. The material would have been in the lingua franca of the region: Syriac. (I delve into the Koran's Syriac origins in another essay.)

Eventually, the purported revelations became a veritable OLIO of material—excerpts of which were collected ad hoc by various parties in various places. Even the most vaunted Hadith collection attests to this fact (ref. Bukhari 4/62, 6/201, 6/307, 6/501-510, 9/301, etc.) {16}

Attempts to divine what—exactly—the ORIGINAL "Recitations" may have been are therefore quixotic. No written record survives. Yet the vast majority of Muslims—strangely, even many Progressive Muslims—remain staunchly committed to the untenable position that the book now known as "al-Qur'an" [the Recitations] has been unchanged since the ministry of MoM (that is: each verse is exactly as it was, word for word, since the day it left MoM's mouth).

Such supplicants obstinately cling to the spurious proposition that the version of the text used today (the "Cairo" version, compiled in 1924 by a committee at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt; based as we'll see, on the Hafs lineage of transmission) is a perfect transcription of everything that MoM actually said...which was itself a verbatim account of everything the angel Gabriel had allegedly said to HIM, in private.

Note: Revelations are almost ALWAYS delivered when the recipient is alone (a phenomenon I address in my essay on "The History Of Exalted Figures"). Given what we now know about the relevant historical context (and assuming just a smidgeon of common sense is brought to bear on the matter), the claim is so highly implausible, it is rather astonishing that any sane person might hold it.

So what REALLY DID happen? We'll never know for sure; but it doesn't hurt to give the most trusted sources IN ISLAM the benefit of the doubt, and heed what they tell us. {16}

Hungry Sheep:

A well-known illustration of how slipshod the process of preserving material was is furnished by MoM's widow, Aisha. The former child-bride mentions over 286 original verses in Surah 33 (an amount of exposition comparable in length to Surah 2). Only 73 of those verses survived. Among the content redacted, she mentions, were prescriptions for stoning...and protocols for adult breast-feeding. {7}

Though the third caliph (Uthman) would eventually be the ultimate authority when it came to approving material (as we'll see forthwith), a confidant named Ubay ibn Ka'ab may well have been party to that particular redaction...in cahoots, that is, with a wayward sheep (alt. goat).

(The attitude, then, amounted to: “Don’t like what some of this says? Well, then just say a sheep at it.” Problem solved.)

A wayward sheep, you say? Indeed. The only mention of what might have happened to the (now lost) stoning and breast-feeding verses is found in a “sunan” Hadith—that of Ibn Majah (vol. 3, book 9; either no. 1944 or no. 2020 depending on the edition). {21} The passage goes beyond parody. Behold:

“It was narrated that Aisha said, ‘The verses of stoning and of breast-feeding an adult ten times were revealed; and I kept the manuscript *under my pillow*. When the messenger died, we were pre-occupied with his death; and a domesticated sheep came inside and ate it.’”

Even if we were to doubt this rather zany tale (deemed “hasan”; and thus unimpeachable), there seems to have been no problem retaining the verse in the official record. After all, Aisha obviously remembered the verses-in-question, as she was recounting it orally (that is: by memory). In any case, memorization was the only way that EVERY OTHER verse was originally transmitted.

Moreover, one would think that the Creator of the Universe could protect his final Revelation from a hungry sheep. To this day, there remains no other official explanation for these verses not being included in Islam’s holy book.

To reiterate: These verses pertained to adult-breast-feeding (as a way to discourage philandering men). So there is another reason for their eventual redaction...which also happens to be the most obvious: Husbands don’t want other men suckling their wives’ breasts. (One can also imagine that the wives were not too keen on suitors being instructed to suckle their breasts as a way to ward them off.) In the end, neither a pillow NOR the Creator of the Universe was able to protect this particular portion of the Final Revelation to mankind.

But why did such bizarre directives exist in the first place? Aisha’s testimony in Muslim’s “sahih” Hadith offers a possible answer: “It was narrated that Aisha said: Among the things revealed in the Koran was that ten breast-feedings render one ‘mahram’. {7} That was then abrogated with five breast-feedings. The messenger died when this was still among the things being recited.” As if this weren’t clear enough, the passage continues: “It was narrated from Amrah that she once heard Aisha say [regarding nursing as a qualification for making a person “mahram”] that ten breast-feedings were revealed in the Recitations, then five breast-feedings were revealed too” (no. 3597-98). It’s almost as if there was an effort to attenuate the daffy-ness of the pronouncement by coyly modifying what the revelation was supposed to have prescribed. (Surely, staving off adultery by mandating prurient acts didn’t seem to be the wisest of measures. And maybe TEN times was a tad-bit excessive. Five occasions would suffice!)

Fortuitously, no such Koranic passages (regarding either stoning OR breast-feeding) now exist. This should come as little surprise, as such prescriptions are, to be frank, asinine.

And—insofar as it was supposed to be a preventive measure to stave off fornication—men (who were the ones in charge of orally transmitting the revelations) probably did not want their wives breastfeeding other men as a prophylaxis against infidelity. The incentive to preserve those particular recitations was probably nil. An excuse for their disappearance was promptly contrived after MoM’s death.

And so it went that the daffiest account of lost verses is from Aisha, MoM's youngest wife: A sheep ate the sole copy of a key passage, which she had hidden beneath her pillow. Elsewhere, Aisha claims that much of Surah 33 was lost—bringing it from the original 286 verses down to its current 73...though the explanation for this other mishap wasn't that a hungry sheep absconded with last copy. No explanation was forthcoming. People just seemed to forget about the other material.

The peculiar episode of the “khuruf” was not an isolated incident. Another noteworthy account is from Abu Musa al-Ashari, who relayed that significant parts of the “Recitations” had been forgotten by the Salaf.

This included an entire chapter—one that may well have been the longest in the book—which contained an odd parable about a son of Adam and three valleys. In volume 2 of Muslim's Hadith (no. 2286), Abu Musa al-Ashari announces to fellow reciters at Basra: “We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity Bara'at [Surah 9; a.k.a. “at-Tawbah”]. However, I have forgotten it...with the exception of this which I remember out of it: ‘If there were two valleys full of riches for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley; and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust.’”

Such losses of material was evidently not uncommon. In his “Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'an”, Abu Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Salam reported that Ibn Umar (son of the caliph Umar) declared: “Let none of you say, ‘I have learned the whole Koran.’ For how would he know what the whole of it is when much of it has disappeared? Let him say instead, “I have learned what remains thereof.”

(In the same book, Abu Ubayd confirmed that Aisha had once reported: “Surah 33 used to be recited in the time of the Prophet with over 286 verses; but when Uthman commissioned his mushaf, he did not procure any more of it than there is today.”)

All this is quite strange, as god assures us that the entirety of the “Recitations” would be perfectly preserved (6:115; 15:9; 18:27; and 75:16-19). OF COURSE that claim needed to be included...if the veneer of credence was to be maintained. Alas.

Uthman's Koran (The Designation of Zayd):

In its earliest days, the “Recitations” were orally transmitted amongst the Bedouins who participated in the Mohammedan movement: now designated as the “Sahabah” [“companions”; i.e. those who had been personally acquainted with MoM]. The men who were charged with the responsibility of memorizing parts of (what would eventually become) “al-Qur'an” were dubbed “qurra” / “qara”.

In order to assay the credence of the claim that the “Recitations” have been perfectly preserved since the verses were conveyed to MoM (via divine emissary), we must consult the most vaunted Islamic sources to see what, exactly, transpired in the earliest days of the scripture's formation. So let's proceed.

Roughly two decades after MoM's death in 632 (thus, sometime in the early 650's), the caliph at the time, Uthman ibn Affan of the Banu Umayya (a.k.a. “Osman”; who had also been the son-in-law of MoM) surmised that there was far too much confusion about what, exactly, the “Recitations” were. Consequently, he made the decision that a singular OFFICIAL version needed to be established once and for all.

As the story goes, this monumental task was undertaken at the urging of a prominent figure named Huzaifah ibn al-Yaman (alt. “Hudhayfah”), who was governor of Kufa at the time...which just so happened to be the place after which the Kufic script (of proto-Arabic) was named...and (herein lies the rub) the script in which the earliest Korans ended up being written. For obvious reasons, Hudhayfah was becoming concerned that the discrepancies were becoming somewhat of an issue...and a potential headache for the caliphate.

But who would be assigned this lofty charge? The answer: A man named Zayd ibn Thabit—as attested in Bukhari’s Hadith (no. 4987). (This Zayd is not to be confused with the brother of Umar ibn al-Khattab: Zayd ibn al-Khattab.) Why him...and not, say, the other men who were deemed worthy of such an auspicious assignment? After all, according to Bukhari’s Hadith (no. 3758 and 3806-08), MoM himself had proclaimed that the “Recitations” should be learned from a Qurayshi shepherd named Ibn Masoud...along with the aforementioned Ubay[y] ibn Ka’ab...in addition to a man named Mu’adh ibn Jabal and a “freed slave of Abu Hudayfa” named “Salim”. [Note: The first two are alternately rendered “Abd-ullah ibn Mas’ud” and “Ubai ibn Ka’b”; and the owner of Salim is sometimes rendered “Abu Hudhaifa”.]

As it happened, the caliph may not have personally selected Zayd. The chain of command seems to have been indirect. According to Bukhari’s Hadith, Uthman charged Abu Bakr with carrying out the project...who, in turn, charged Zayd ibn Thabit with the task (9/89/301). In the same passage, we read that Zayd’s initial reaction was incredulity. He balked at the request, noting that MoM never instructed anyone to compile the Recitations into a written record—a point that Abu Bakr conceded. Yet Abu Bakr persisted, pleading: “But doing so would be beneficial.” Zayd eventually acquiesced, subsequently collecting fragments from sporadic etchings on leafless stalks, leather hides, and stones...as well as from “the breasts of men” (that is: various individuals who claimed to have learned certain verses by heart).

But did everyone concur that Zayd was the best choice? No.

Zayd’s credibility was brought into question by Umar—who evidently favored Ubayy ibn Ka’ab’s version. In Bukhari’s Hadith (no. 5005), we read that no less than Ibn Abbas (considered the father of Koranic studies) reported that Umar complained: “Ubayy was the best of the qurra; yet we disregard some of what he recites.” To bolster this proposition, Umar quoted Ibn Ka’ab as stating: “I have taken it from the mouth of god’s messenger and will not depart from it for any reason.”

It is difficult to ascertain why, exactly, Zayd was selected. What we know is rather limited. It seems there was some palace intrigue afoot. {22} Predictably, the highly-esteemed Ibn Masoud was incensed upon learning that Zayd had been selected (instead of himself) as the point-man for compiling the official version. It is documented that animus developed between the two men; and surely Ibn Masoud resented that he’d been passed over for the younger (favored) apparatchik. The records in Ibn Abu Dawood’s “Kitab al-Masahif” [“Book of Manuscripts”] provide documentation of the significant discrepancies between the versions endorsed by these two “qurra”.

Uthman has entrusted Abu Bakr, Mohammed’s closest friend, to make sure the job was done correctly. So Zayd was apparently chosen at Abu Bakr’s discretion. It’s no wonder Ibn Masoud may have resented this choice. After all, Ibn Masoud was arguably Mohammed’s most trusted confidant *after* Abu Bakr. But Zayd was evidently more chummy with Abu Bakr.

Textually speaking, the major point of contention, it seems, was Ibn Masoud's reticence to include the "Fatihah"—which would become the first Surah—in the Recitations. Ibn Masoud's version did not include Surahs 65 or 114 either. Uthman was adamant that those additional three Surahs be included in the official manuscript. Ibn Masoud dissented, and so was dismissed in favor of the more sycophantic Zayd.

Upon hearing about this decision, Ibn Masoud resigned in protest (from his official position as the preeminent mu-hadith in Kufa). He was adamant that Zayd's compilation was significantly flawed, and should not be considered authentic. (Note especially the discrepancy of 2:222...and the aforementioned dubiousness of Surah 9.) As if THAT weren't enough, even Ibn Ka'b's version of the Recitations did not align with Zayd's version. (!)

In his magnum opus, the "Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir" [Book of the Major Classes], Muhammad ibn Sa'ad ibn Mani al-Hashimi of Basra recounts Ibn Masoud's vexation: "And whoever deceives like this will bring his deceit on the Day of Resurrection. ...I like it better to read according to the recitation of him whom I love than that of Zayd ibn Thabit. ...If I knew anyone to be more conversant with Allah's Book than I am, I would surely go to him if camels could carry me there." This was written in the 9th century, which means that even almost two centuries after the fact, this account was still widely attested.

Bear in mind, it was in Kufa that Ibn Masoud enjoyed the most favor, which—to reiterate—was the place after which the Kufic script was named: the script in which the earliest Korans ended up being written.

So what, exactly, was going on? It's hard to say. What we CAN say is that Ibn Masoud—who would have written in Kufic—fell out of favor. Not only was he passed over for the honor of compiling the official version; he was severely reprimanded by the caliph (Uthman) when he protested that something was amiss with the commissioning of Zayd's "mushaf" (final draft). Shiites contend that Ibn Masoud was executed for his insolence. This is especially plausible considering he had the audacity to plead with the nascent "Ummah" to hide their own version so that they wouldn't be destroyed (per Uthman's decree, discussed forthwith).

So why the need to obfuscate this episode (the jilting of Ibn Masoud) in the official record? As mentioned, MoM himself had proclaimed that the "Recitations" should be learned from Ibn Masoud...along with Ubay ibn Ka'ab, Mu'adh ibn Jabal, and a "freed slave of Abu Hudayfa" named "Salim". Well, so much for that. Rebuffing Ibn Masoud constituted a rebuke of MoM's explicit instructions.

That interlude does not bode well for claims of perfect fidelity.

Zayd's Sisyphean Assignment:

So how, exactly, did Zayd carry out this lofty charge? It is worth quoting Bukhari's Hadith at length. (Note: In the excerpt, reference is made to the pivotal battle of Yamama, which had been waged in the Najd against rival prophet, Musaylimah, at the end of the year 632—that is: about half a year after MoM's death.)

In 6/61/509-11, a testimonial was relayed by none other than Zayd himself—who is the central figure of the account. The key passage is as follows:

"Abu Bakr [al-Siddiq] sent for me [Zayd ibn Thabit] when the people of Yamama [an Arabian town in the Najd] had been slaughtered [by the Mohammedans]; and I found Umar ibn al-Khattab sitting with him. { 1 }
Abu Bakr then said: 'Umar has come to me and reported that casualties were heavy amongst the qurra on the day of [the battle of] Yamama, and I am afraid that more heavy casualties may take place amongst the

qurra on other battlefields—whereby a large part of the Recitations may be lost. Therefore I suggest that you [Abu Bakr] order the Recitations to be collected.’ I responded to Umar: ‘How could you possibly do something that even god’s apostle did not do?’ Umar said: ‘It is a laudable project.’ Umar persisted in urging me to accept his proposal until god opened my breast for it, and I began to realize the good in the idea which Umar had proposed. Then Abu Bakr said: ‘You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write down the Revelations for god’s messenger. So you should search for the fragments of the Recitations and collect it in one book.’ [Alas.] If they had ordered me to move one of the mountains, it would not have been heavier for me than this order to collect the Recitations.”

Note the observation: “you used to write down...” as though this were an exceptional occurrence—something that made Zayd noteworthy. The passage continues, telling us about a subsequent exchange Zayd had with Abu Bakr (instead of Umar):

“So then I [Zayd] said to Abu Bakr: ‘How shall one do something which god’s messenger did not do?’ Abu Bakr replied: ‘It is a laudable project.’ Abu Bakr continued to urge me to accept his idea. [He persisted] until god opened my breast for that which he had opened the breasts of himself [Abu Bakr] and Umar. So I started looking for the Recitations and collecting them from [what had been etched on] palm stalks, thin white stones, and from the [surviving] ‘qurra’. [I did this] until I found the last verse of Surah ‘At-Tawba’ [The Repentance] with Abi Khuzayma ‘al-Ansari’ [the Helper]. I did not find it with anyone other than him.”

It would be an understatement to say that this testimony indicates a gargantuan problem (insofar as scriptural fidelity is concerned). An entire chapter of the Koran (Surah 9) was culled from the memory of a single man (Abi Khuzayma). The fact that the most violent chapter of the book is alleged to have been based on the testimony of one person—and that Zayd took his word for it—should give us pause.

As we’ve seen, another passage in Bukhari’s Hadith (9/89/301; no. 7191) explains that Zayd was obliged to collect excerpts from “leafless stalks, leather hides, stones” as well as from “the chests of men” (i.e. hearsay).

Meanwhile, an alternate source purportedly solicited by Uthman was Hafsa bint Umar—that is: Umar’s daughter, whom MoM had married. (More on her later.)

Here we find a serious concern being expressed by Zayd. Clearly, he worried—for good reason—that many passages of the “Recitations” may have already been lost; and that many more would likely be lost in coming skirmishes. Most of those who had memorized certain passages were being killed off; and—as is stipulated—some passages had been memorized by only one surviving person. (It is attested in Bukhari’s Hadith 9/89/301 that MOST of the “quara” at the time had perished in the battle of Yamama.)

The concern being expressed here was not unwarranted. In his “Kutb al-Sattah”, famed mu-hadith (and perhaps the primary collector of “sahih” Hadith), Abu Dawood of Sijistan reported: “Many of the ayat [verses] of the Recitations were known by those who died at the battle of Yamama; but they were not known by those who survived; nor were they written down; nor had Abu Bakr or Umar or Uthman collected the Recitations by that time; nor were they to be found with even one person thereafter.”

In his “Kitab al-Masahif” [Book of the Manuscripts], Persian scholar, Ibn Abi Dawood (son of the aforementioned Abu Dawood) noted that many verses that were known ONLY to the few “qurra” (almost all of whom perished in the battle of Yamama) were NOT known by the men who survived. He ALSO points out that those lost verses hadn’t been written down; nor were they even known by Abu Bakr or Umar or Uthman. Such candid testimony is striking; as it reveals much that expositors today would prefer remain elided.

Testament to the loss [“zahab”] of material during the battle of Yamama are spelled out explicitly in the “Kitab al-Masahif”. There are three passages that are worth quoting.

First: “Umar was once looking for the text of a specific verse from the Recitations, which he vaguely remembered. To his deep sorrow, he discovered that the only person who had any record of that verse had been killed in the battle of Yamama and that the verse was consequently lost.”

Then: “Many [verses] of the Recitations that had been sent down were known by those who died on the day of Yamama...but they were not known by any survivors; nor were they written down; nor had Abu Bakr, Umar, or Uthman collected the Recitations; nor were they found with even a single person after them.”

And finally: “Many of the Sahabah had their own reading of the Recitations, but they died and their readings disappeared soon afterwards.”

Clearly, this infelicitous development was a well-known at the time.

So what was Zayd supposed to do when he encountered discrepancies? Evidently, this occurrence was common enough that it warranted the issuing of a special order. As it came to pass, Uthman issued the following protocol: Whenever there is disagreement with the wording (in the version Zayd comes up with), simply resort to “the tongue of the Quraysh. As the Recitations were revealed in THEIR TONGUE” (ref. Bukhari’s Hadith 6/61/510-11).

The fact that this request (directed not only to Zayd personally, but to fellow “qurra” like Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair, Said ibn Al-As, and Abd ar-Rahman ibn Harith ibn Hisham) was made AT ALL is rather curious. For surely “their tongue” did not intimate OUR tongue...let alone GOD’S tongue (which is now surmised to be Classical Arabic, according to Mohammedan lore). Rather, it referred to a particular vernacular that was common amongst the Quraysh at the time. That tongue: a Hijazi variant of Syriac. (I explore this matter at length in my essay: “The Syriac Basis For Koranic Text”.)

That there was any question of language here is very telling. For if Classical Arabic had been a fully-developed language at the time (and especially if it had been seen as god’s signature tongue), there surely would have been little question on the matter. The need for this specification attests that the language of the oral transmission was—as it were—up for grabs. Moreover, if Classical Arabic was the firmly-established language by that point in time, the directive would have explicitly proclaimed that the verse should be written IN ARABIC (rather than obliquely referring to “the tongue of the Quraysh”). Islam’s liturgical language would surely have been referred to by name; or, if not, as the language of “Allah”.

Also bear in mind that the above accounts are not “gotcha” passages from those seeking merely to criticize Islam. They are from the most esteemed (“sahih” is generally taken to mean unimpeachable) Islamic sources. To jettison them would entail jettisoning, well, EVERYTHING anyone pretends to know about MoM.

Some of the above account is attributed to a man named Anas ibn Malik; though there are various other amanuenses cited in the “isnads” [chains of narration]. Even verses that had NOT been lost were

transmitted via several discrepant “qurra”: some via Ali (in Kufa), some via Abdullah ibn Masoud (also in Kufa), and others via Ubay ibn Ka’ab (in Damascus). Interestingly, versions from those last two men were omitted in the fabled “Uthman” Koran (that is: based on Zayd’s efforts)—which was deemed to be the first OFFICIAL compilation...at least, for the time being. (Apologist still speak of the “Uthman Koran” as if what we now have corresponds to that long-lost compilation of verses.)

We might note that Ubay ibn Ka’ab’s version of the recitations included two short Suras that were not in the final version proffered by Zayd...**NOR even in Ibn Masoud’s version** (also ref. Bukhari no. 4944, which pertains to Ibn Masoud’s alternate wording of verse 3 of Surah 92).

The degree to which such discrepancies were merely structural vs. substantive is impossible to say. The point is that there were acknowledged discrepancies even in those early days. (I discuss this matter in Appendix 1.)

It bears worth repeating: In the advent of the battle of Yamama, Zayd was forced to search for what he could find of (excerpts of) the Recitations: “collecting it from palm stalks, thin white stones, and from amongst the various reciters...until [he] found the last verse of Surah at-Tauba with Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari, which [he] did not find with anybody else” (Bukhari 6/61/511). This would not have made sense had Abu Bakr—then Umar—already possessed a completed manuscript.

Much later on (in the 9th century), the famed Islamic historian, Al-Kindi noted that under the stewardship of Uthman, “it was discovered that there was no consensus as to the true text. One man read one version of the ‘mushaf’, his neighbor another, and they differed. One man said his version was best while his neighbor said the same of his own version. So additions and omissions occurred, as well as falsifications.” Al-Kindi then recounts that “Uthman was told that different versions were in use, and that many were being tampered with; and that there was interminable strife, with all the attendant mischief of partisan fervor.” Al-Kindi reminds us that people were even killing each other over disputes during that critical period. (!) Surely, these disagreements were intense; and so of grave concern to Uthman. It’s no wonder he finally said “enough’s enough” and commissioned the compilation of a singular, official manuscript.

Al-Kindi concludes that it was well-known “what happened between Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman. How they despised each other and quarreled and corrupted the text. How each one opposed the other and refuted what he’d said. Pray tell: How are we to now know the true version? And how are we to distinguish it from the false one?” Good question. Answer: Nobody COULD know. Choices, then, were made based on...well...let’s say: other criteria. {18}

The Uthmanic “mushaf” was christened in due course.

And so it went: Zayd’s version of the “Recitations” prevailed by fiat, per Uthman’s decree. We shall never know exactly what factors played into this particular decision...or the ACTUAL criteria Zayd (privately) used to select certain passages while discarding all others. The answer may well have died with Zayd and Uthman. No documentation now exists to inform us on the matter.

Predictably: For the record, Zayd—and thus Uthman—STATED what the sole criterion was: the degree of corroboration. In other words, it was simply asserted that decisions were made based upon purported authenticity; which is to be taken as PROOF OF said authenticity.

To fail to take this (self-ingratiating) assertion without a grain of salt is to engage in circular reasoning with a radius of zero. The disclaimer effectively states: “We deemed to be most authentic what we deemed to be most authentic.” Of course, it would have been odd for these figureheads to make ANY OTHER assertion. For they had to imbue their putative “isnad” [lineage of oral transmission] with a veneer of credence; giving it an air of unassailability.

The fact remains: We’ll never really know what, exactly, the “Uthman” manuscript may have said. Whatever its contents might have been, it was almost certainly composed in Syriac...using Kufic script: the proto-Arabic script used by Arabs until their liturgical language was fully developed.

So *then* what?

The FIRST Book-burning:

After commissioning what would (temporarily) become the official version of the “Recitations”, Uthman had ALL OTHER VERSIONS BURNED. This bold act is attested in Bukhari’s Hadith (6/61/510; no. 4987). It comes as no surprise, then, that—since no other variants were allowed—no other variants from that time survived. If one picks only one version and destroys all the others, the mere fact that there ended up being no variants says nothing about the fidelity of the favored version.

The abjuration was—effectively—as follows: Eliminate all variants, then marvel at the fact that there no longer exist any variants.

This specious precedent would become common practice. According to Bukhari’s Hadith, there was an explicit directive to eliminate any extant versions of the Koran which were not approved by the caliphate thereafter: “When you receive the NEW versions, burn the old versions so that there is no record of them” (6/61/510). This was done in order not only to erase alternate versions; but to erase *all evidence for the very existence of* earlier versions. (That is: It erased THE FACT THAT there were other versions up until that point.) For if it could be shown that there had initially been alternate versions, then the argument that the “Recitations” had remained unchanged would be undermined.

As legend has it, Ibn Masoud disobeyed this order. Confident that HIS version was the best, he secretly hid his manuscripts (so the story goes).

We might note that calls to eradicate unapproved texts was nothing new in the religious world. The policy went back to Late Antiquity with disputes about canonical Judaic scripture. For instance, the Mishnah prohibits the reading of extra-biblical books (ref. Sanhedrin 10:1). The practice was pioneered by the Roman Catholic Church—especially during the 4th century, as the Vatican magisterium became increasingly involved with the Roman imperium; and the Nicene creed was being formulated (primarily by the notoriously mendacious Athanasius of Alexandria). Hence any text that was not officially approved by the powers-that-be were systematically destroyed. {13}

Fundamentalist Christians—along with fundamentalist Muslims—have been banning books ever since. {14}

The point is worth repeating: After Uthman ordered that any and all extant versions of the “Recitations” be destroyed save the one he sanctioned, it is no wonder that only one version survived. Boasting that there are now no variations is therefore tautological. We should be no more aghast that, pursuant to Uthman’s project, there was only one version of the “Recitations” than that there ended up being only one official version of the Harry Potter series published by Bloomsbury.

It stands to reason that Uthman would have put his foot down; and commissioned an official version of (what was taken to be) the “Recitations”; then had any and all other versions destroyed. Dissent was not conducive to maintaining order, or to controlling the narrative. He needed to be able to assert, unequivocally: This is how the Recitations have been *ALL ALONG*. Consequently, any and all countervailing evidence needed to be eradicated.

There can be little doubt that Zayd’s ad hoc compilation involved extensive modifications—including omissions and embellishments as it suited his (assigned) purpose. Of course, we can’t know this for sure; but to insist otherwise would be a flight of fancy.

It is indubitable that there were inadvertently lost or deliberately redacted passages. But missing verses was not the only problem. Inevitably, an array of vagaries crept into the resulting anthology of “Recitations”. This was demonstrated by the emergence of no less than seven “sab at-i ahruf” (different modes of recitation) within just the first generation of oral transmission. In the midst of these “ahruf”, the Koran would eventually be standardized (against a background of variant readings and “lost” passages). Which “harf” was favored by whom at any given time and place was based on who-knows-what. In any case, one of the seven “ahruf” was eventually designated the “true” version, while the others were dismissed as distortions. I explore the dubiousness of such claims in Appendix 1.

All in all, if we were to take the accounts thus far as historical fact (that is: if we were to take the “sahih” Hadith seriously), it would mean that an official version of the Recitations was not compiled until over two decades after MoM’s death...and then **CONTINUED** to be revamped over the course of the next one (or two, or even three) generations...*in spite* of Uthman’s efforts.

In sum: It is folly to conclude from the largely successful efforts of the powers-that-be (in establishing a **SINGULAR** official “mushaf”) that there *NEVER WERE* many variations. More to the point: To assume that the version Uthman designated as the “correct” version is the one that bore the closest resemblance to the original folklore is, to be frank, naive. Not only is there zero evidence for this, but the logistics involved are untenable.

Whatever fidelity it may have exhibited (vis a vis the ministry of MoM), the fabled “Uthman Koran” would have been most faithful to the interests of those in charge when it was compiled.

Uthman is a textbook example of the adage that history—as it has been passed down to us—is written by those in power. The only records that we now have regarding what may have happened during Uthman’s reign are, well, precisely the records that Uthman *wanted* to survive (i.e. the records cited in the present essay). Put another way: All that we can now **SEE** is—by definition—what the caliph sanctioned. What we are now told likely transpired is precisely that which **HE WANTED** us to be told transpired.

Using such records as some sort of verification of Uthman’s honesty is, therefore, question-begging.

Amidst all this, it should come as no surprise that Uthman’s acolytes claimed that Uthman was perfectly honest in his god-given commission (as a “rashidun” caliph). We are now told that his conduct was beyond reproach because that is precisely what **HE** would have said about himself.

What we now **CAN** say for sure is that Zayd’s verse-selection process was anything but impartial...and more extemporaneous than he would have liked to admit. As we’ve seen, that much is implicitly conceded, even in the most vaunted Hadith. {16} What we can be certain about is that the result—whatever it might have been—was effectively an instruction manual for getting into heaven (and avoiding hell).

In the early 11th century, a scholar named Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Ahmed ibn Hazm of Andalusia went so far as to openly state that Uthman had made changes to the Koran: “This is the description of Uthman’s

work that was compiled in the presence of the Sahabah. While copying the “masahif”, he burned what he burned from them, from what he had changed intentionally or by mistake” (ref. volume 1 of the “Ihkam fi Usul al-Ahkam”). In other words, this was still common knowledge four centuries after the fact.

A Brief Review Of Events Thus Far:

And so it went that Zayd ibn Thabit (instead of either Al-Masoud or Ibn Ka’ab, both of whom MoM had designated as the go-to authorities when it came to the “Recitations”) was appointed for the task. At his request, statements that had been jotted down on various surfaces were brought to him by numerous people...a salmagundi of material through which he sifted and sifted and sifted. He subsequently selected SOME of the material...based on who-knows-what criteria. It was all cobbled together ad hoc...and compiled into what is fabled to be the Uthmanic “mushaf”.

The subsequent directive to destroy alternate (un-approved) versions of the “Recitations” is highly problematic; for such measures attest to the fact that elision was a matter of official policy.

Predictably, it was those in power who managed to ensure it was THEIR favored version that was anointed as the only acceptable version...while competing versions were eliminated. Yet the problem remained: Some of the discarded portions included those from “qurra” whom MoM had himself anointed as unimpeachable.

Such a glaring snafu in the historical record needed to be addressed.

It should come as no surprise that in the OFFICIAL RECORD, it is stated in no uncertain terms that Zayd somehow vetted each of the (questionable) passages with someone who’d been given the prophet’s blessing. Lo and behold: Ibn Masoud was re-introduced into the narrative—POST HOC—to give it some ballast. (!) This was done by later apologists...in spite of the fact that the record was quite clear on the disputation—nay: acrimony—involved.

To those who were paying attention, the question naturally arose: Wait; weren’t those two men antagonists? And weren’t their respective versions of the “Recitations” in discrepant? Actually, it would be rather surprising if Ibn Masoud’s (retroactive) imprimatur had NOT been propounded...given his continued clout in (the still nascent) Dar al-Islam...and the high esteem in which the Seal of the Prophets held him.

But here’s the thing: If this one man had been the standard by which each verse was vetted, then why not simply use HIS version for the final edit? The answer to this question probably lies in the fact that even amongst the handful of the most esteemed “qurra” during the epoch of the “Salaf”, there CONTINUED TO BE disagreement about what to include and what not to include in the official record.

It bears worth repeating: At no point is there a record of Ibn Masoud personally endorsing the “mushaf” that Zayd ended up producing. {17} According to comments made about him in the Bukhari’s Hadith, Ibn Masoud took exception to much of what was contained within Zayd’s customized compilation. (This is to say nothing of whether or not he would have even recognized the contents of what came to be the “Cairo” edition of Islam’s holy book in 1924.)

Does all this mean that Ibn Masoud was mistaken? Per the claims of contemporary Muslims, it MUST mean that. But, if so, then there is a severe problem. If HE (the highly-esteemed Ibn Masoud) was fallible, then ANYONE that Zayd may have used as a source could have been fallible. {4}

Considering the handful of the most renowned “qurra” in those first generations, we see that EVEN THEY

couldn't agree about what was and wasn't part of the REAL "ta'lif" (version) of the Final Revelation.

The problem becomes even MORE insoluble once we consider that Ibn Masoud disagreement with Zayd is attested in the most trusted accounts. This is a fatal problem for anyone countenancing claims of inerrancy. For if we can't depend on the account proffered by the most vaunted Hadith, then EVERYTHING goes completely out the window. {16}

Suffice to say, the entire process by which Zayd would have created HIS version is—if we are to believe the official account—highly suspect. At best, Zayd's compilation was a bespoke agglomeration of hand-picked fragments from a potpourri of disparate sources...selected according to his own inclinations. Fragments from where? Well, from whatever Zayd managed to find—or whatever was brought to him—etched on "palm stalks and thin white stones" and animal hides...and from some men who claimed to have memorized certain verses (of which Zayd was otherwise unaware). There was a lot of just taking people's word for it. {6}

At the risk of flogging a steed that is already deceased, the question must again be posed: HOW did this one man determine what did and didn't qualify? Irrespective of how honest and fastidious Zayd MIGHT have been, selections would have invariably been made based on his own impressions, according to his own biases. He was, after all, only human.

Recall that, according to Bukhari's Hadith, various verses were derived from ONLY ONE SOURCE EACH—single people who were bringing passages to Zayd's attention of which he'd been completely unaware. This fact alone is an indication that Zayd's procedure for vetting—insofar as he had one—was somewhat dubious. Indeed, it did not even remotely resemble "scientific", let alone perfectly objective. This was the case even if we accord to him utmost integrity and competence; as great character does not preclude fallibility. {3}

And so it went: The so-called "Uthmanic" Koran (which we don't have, but only hear about) would have been cobbled together by a single person...from a swirling crucible of hearsay...and then eventually rubber-stamped by the caliph who had hired him to do so.

It would be an understatement to say that this does not bode well for claims of scriptural fidelity. Add to all THAT the fact that Zayd's compilation-project was specifically assigned by the third caliph in order to supersede whatever the FIRST caliph, Abu Bakr, had been using (never mind the second caliph: Umar ibn al-Khattab).

Why did Uthman do this? Obviously, he was not satisfied with the extant (i.e. earlier) versions; including Ibn Masoud's. (!) And he could not abide dissension in the ranks; as it had horrible optics. (Yes: P.R. was an important factor even in the Dark Ages.) So the third caliph commissioned what he surmised would be a new-and-improved version; and subsequently treated that as the DEFINITIVE version...once and for all. He was then obliged to pretend that it was the only version that ever had existed. A thorough book burning took care of that.

The account of Zayd ibn Thabit speaks volumes about what was most likely ROUTINELY transpiring during the first few generations after MoM's death (amongst the "Salaf"). Those with the most clout sought to establish their own version as THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE version...even as they ardently sought to eradicate any competing versions. They would then be obliged to insist that THEIR version was, of course, the version that had existed **ALL ALONG**.

Sure enough: That is precisely what was claimed.

God only knows what happened in the decades LEADING UP TO Zayd's compilation...let alone in the generations FOLLOWING that compilation...as the new liturgical language gradually evolved into what is

now called “Classical Arabic”.

Before proceeding, let’s note that there is an alternate account of this particular interlude—though one that is highly dubious. In that (rather fanciful) version of the story, Abu Bakr had a fully-written “mushaf”, which he bequeathed to his successor as caliph, Umar. Umar then bequeathed that manuscript to his daughter, Hafsa.

But that account is clearly a confabulation. As Abu Dawood of Sijistan stated in his “Kutub al-Sattah”:
“Many of the verses of the Recitations were known by those who died at the battle of Yamama; but they were not known by those who survived; nor were they written down; nor had Abu Bakr or Umar or Uthman collected the Recitations by that time; nor were they to be found with even one person thereafter.”

Lo and behold: At that pivotal juncture, neither Abu Bakr nor Umar yet had a “mushaf”. We’ve seen why. After Zayd ibn Thabit completed his version, all other versions were eliminated.

But wait, it gets worse. Even if we assume that Zayd’s “mushaf” (the fabled “Uthman Koran”) was an inerrant record of every word MoM had spoken generations earlier (not a single word of it contrived, omitted, or altered in any way), there is still a problem. Whatever THAT might have been has been lost forever. For only highly dubious derivatives of THAT manuscript—which were composed many generations later—remain.

Considering all this, shall we be generous...and STILL surmise that perspicacity was the governing principle for Zayd’s compilation project? For the sake of argument, let’s engage in this flight of fancy.

Alas, EVEN THIS charitable reading of history comes to naught once we consider what happened NEXT. For subsequent events make claims of scriptural fidelity even more far-fetched.

After Uthman:

First, a brief recap. Zayd ibn Thabit had been designated the sole custodian of the various “Recitations”. According the “sahih” Hadith, he was therefore the singular compiler of the fabled “Uthman Koran”. The available material with which he had to work was haphazardly scattered. And whatever material was and wasn’t included was entirely up to him. What he opted to include vs. discard was at his own discretion...which, as we’ve seen, did not always comport with the OTHER sources MoM had designated as the go-to custodians. Some wanted certain parts redacted (the decision not to include stoning of adulterers and prescriptions for adult-breast-feeding, for example). Others wanted certain parts embellished (the decision to include the notably militant 9th Surah, which came from only one person).

So THEN what? It’s not like there were printing presses. So the newly-minted “Uthman” edition could not be duplicated quickly and easily. The caliph had scribes at his disposal. So it makes sense that he would have had Zayd convene them...and promptly get to work.

So is that what occurred? Perhaps. But don’t be so sure. As the story goes, Zayd entrusted his “master copy” of the “mushaf” to Hafsa bint Umar, one of MoM’s surviving wives (and daughter of the late caliph, Umar) for safe keeping. She would not be the manuscript’s custodian for long, though. For she died soon thereafter.

We read in Abu Dawood’s “Kitab al-Masahif” that, after Hafsa’s death, the decisive manuscript (insofar as we suppose it ever actually existed) came into the possession of Marwan ibn al-Hakam...via a man named Abdullah ibn Omar (who did who-knows-what with it while it was in his possession). But EVEN THAT manuscript is said to have been lost or destroyed by Marwan immediately thereafter. (Thanks, Marwan.) The implication here is unavoidable: Zayd’s original manuscript (the fabled “Uthman Koran”)

was irretrievably lost.

There is no reason to protest this unhappy outcome...in spite of legends about Ali ibn Abi Talib (MoM's cousin and son-in-law; as well as the caliph following Uthman) taking a copy of the "Uthman Koran" with him to Kufa shortly after Marwan's copy went missing. That sequence of events is likely apocryphal, confabulated post hoc to get the account to comport with the desired outcome. In other words, it is a "just-so story". At best, it helps explain why copies came to be produced in Kufic script. Yet...recall that the primary figure in Kufa was Ibn Masoud: the man who's version had been REJECTED by the powers that be.

In any case, it's all a moot point; as even THAT manuscript would no longer exist. So any supposition put forth about what its contents may have been is just another in a long series of flights of fancy.

It is worth reiterating: The manuscript said to have been the "mushaf" of Hafsah (the sole "dependable" copy of Zayd's official compilation under Uthman) was lost or destroyed by Marwan immediately after Hafsah's funeral. Strangely, Providence was not attending to the preservation of what was supposed to be the most important message ever delivered to mankind.

So what, then, of the possibility of OTHER copies that may have been made from that fabled manuscript? As virtually all the earliest codices—whether whole or fragmentary—cannot be dated to earlier than about *two centuries* after MoM's death (see my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text"), it would be highly improbable that there were other copies...least of all copies that survived in a pristine form. For surely, had such copies existed, protecting them would have been of the highest priority.

So what, then? Are we expected to believe that the Rashidun and Umayyad regimes managed to conquer vast swaths of the known world (including the Egypt, the Maghreb, Anatolia, and all of Persia) within just a few generations; yet they couldn't even manage to preserve what was supposed to be the singular object that served as the *raison d'être* of their entire cause?

That makes no sense.

Another incriminating piece of evidence: In the last decade of the 7th century (about a half-century after Zayd's project), the Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan averred that it was in the month of Ramadan that "I collected the Koran." In other words, he announced that it was DURING HIS REIGN that an official version of the Koran was finally compiled: six decades after MoM's death...and almost four decades after UTHMAN'S death. This single statement contradicts accounts of a fabled "Uthman Koran"...at least insofar as that would be the final version. According to this announcement, recensions were still being done by the end of the 7th century.

There is no other conclusion than that no "Uthman Koran" survived; and variations continued to proliferate AFTER Uthman commissioned a singular acceptable version. So nobody can possibly know what it may have contained. Hypotheticals about Ali retaining a copy of Zayd's manuscript notwithstanding, this inconvenient fact cannot be avoided. But WHY would Muslims have allowed those early versions to be lost? We can only speculate.

My own theory is: Because they were composed IN SYRIAC; and so could not be retained by those who insisted the liturgical language needed to be Classical Arabic (based on the fact that THAT was god's native tongue). The "Recitations" would needed to have been ORIGINALLY delivered in Classical Arabic...for which the ACTUAL textual record would have posed a problem.

In any case, between Zayd's death (at the end of Uthman's reign) and the first available copies of what is now called "al-Qur'an", many generations of transmitters came and went. This entails a very long process of transmission—a process of which we have no records. Considering the fact that the language (and script)

was undergoing a significant metamorphosis in the intervening time, we can't help but conclude that what are now the earliest available codices bear little resemblance to anything that may have existed in the 7th century.

Even more problematic: It is not until THREE CENTURIES after MoM's death that a Koran resembling the PRESENT ("Cairo") Koran finally emerged. As I discuss in my essays on the Syriac origins of the Koran, the process would have begun in one language (Syriac) and eventually ended up in another language (the newly-coined Arabic). Suffice to say, three centuries is a formidable span of time.

Indeed, it was a tumultuous epoch in which any changes that may have been made are un-accounted for. Pretending to be certain of exactly what transpired during that period is—to put it mildly—disingenuous.

The extensive process of compiling—and collating—the disparate “Recitations” involved a slew of omissions and embellishments at key junctures, in accordance with exigencies at different times and places. We should bear in mind that there were no stenographers in the Middle East during the Dark Ages. People said all sorts of outlandish things—much of which was sincerely believed, some of which was deliberately contrived. It was all mixed together during a haphazard process in which each bit of dogmatic detritus propagated according to various memetic factors (catchy-ness, sticky-ness, overall appeal, etc.)

When it came to oral traditions, some people simply made stuff up. Other people remembered certain things in certain idiosyncratic ways, as the occasion warranted. This is the sort of thing that went on for GENERATIONS after MoM's death...before anyone decided to finally get around to writing it down in the familiar language: Classical Arabic.

Getting to the current “Cairo” Koran (114 chapters) from either Abdullah ibn Masoud's “Recitations” (111 chapters) or Ubay ibn Ka'b's “Recitations” (116 chapters) is a very long way...even if we conjecture that Zayd ibn Thabit's version (the fabled Uthman Koran) had the anticipated number of chapters.

Such disputation involves a centuries-long oral tradition punctuated by decisive modifications—each of which was mandated by the powers-that-be. That is to say: The process leading FROM the earliest “Recitations” (by Ibn Ka'ab out of Damascus; Ibn Masoud out of Kufa, Abu Musa al-Ashari out of Basra, and/or Zayd ibn Thabit out of Medina) all the way to the most recent “draft” followed a long, meandering path...with myriad twists and turns along the way.

There's a problem here, of course. For the Koran itself proclaims that it will be guarded against corruption (that is: perfectly preserved)—as in 15:9. So much for that.

As we have seen, Uthman had all copies of un-approved versions of the “Recitations” burned. But he would not be the last person to pull this stunt.

The SECOND Book-burning:

Enter the chief advisor to caliph Abd al-Malik [ibn Marwan]: Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf.

Al-Hajjaj was notorious for his aggressive persecution—and mass executions—of subversives. {2} In his campaign to establish uniformity throughout the Ummah, he decided to issue his own (redacted) version of the “Recitations”: the first to include the canonical chapter / verse designations. {15} This latest revamping occurred in the first decade of the 8th century: half a century after Uthman commissioned Zayd to compile a definitive edition of the “Recitations”.

This is probably what Abd al-Malik (the caliph) was referring to when he mentioned that it was during the month of Ramadan that he had the Recitations collected. Clearly, so far as he was concerned, an acceptable version of the Koran was not established until HE commissioned it (that is: until Al-Hajjaj's project).

And that's not all. As the story goes, it was Al-Hajjaj who first introduced diacritical marks into the emerging Arabic script. (This claim is dubious; for at that point, the "Recitations" would have still existed in its Kufic incarnation.) Pursuant to his commissioning of this new edition, passages about which there was any disagreement were redacted. This would yield YET ANOTHER (newly approved) version.

Once again, lingering disputation was ameliorated, and any problematic passages summarily expurgated from the official record (ref. the testimony of Abd al-Masih al-Kindi, mentioned earlier).

Al-Hajjaj was especially contemptuous of any "mushaf" attributable to the oral transmission of Ibn Masoud...which would have been preserved in Kufic...and which, despite the book-burning ordered by Uthman, apparently still existed. Ibn Masoud's influence had been severely attenuated due to the commissioning of the fabled Uthmanic Koran. So are we to believe that Ibn Masoud's "ta'lif" had somehow survived Uthman's manuscript purge? This may have been possible, as the "Recitations" were primarily orally transmitted (and so likely existed in memories as much as on parchments).

To recapitulate: This antipathy toward Ibn Masoud was in spite of the fact that MoM himself had proclaimed that the "Recitations" should be learned from Ibn Masoud...along with Ubay ibn Ka'ab, Mu'adh ibn Jabal, and the "freed slave of Abu Hudayfa" named "Salim" (Bukhari no. 3758 and 3806).

Clearly, the Kufic genealogy was still at issue. Al-Hajjaj decried the legacy of Ibn Masoud. "He claimed to have read the original Recitations [of god]. I swear [by god] that it is just a piece of 'rajaz' poetry of the Bedouins!" Al-Hajjaj considered Ibn Masoud a "takfir"; and made no secret of his disdain for this particular "qurra"—declaring that he would have "soaked the ground with his blood" had he ever met him.

Why such animosity? For reasons about which we can only speculate, Al-Hajjaj vociferously rebuked the entire Kufic legacy (of which Ibn Masoud was the preeminent figure). In doing so, it is likely he eradicated what may have remained of any record of the Final Revelation (that is: the "Recitations" as they would have existed in their original incarnation, assuming such a record existed at all).

We can be quite sure that, thereafter, no traces were left of the MoM's preachments in their earliest form...whatever that might have been. But, of course, that's not what the (REVISED) official record would stipulate.

Once more, the aim would have been to gloss over the shenanigans that led to the end product; not to disclose those shenanigans. (When repackaging something that is of dubious provenance, the point is to NOT show how the sausage is made.) Al-Hajjaj was no more going to announce the details of his agenda than was Uthman before him. After all, the point of obfuscation is to not keep a record of it.

Here, it helps to keep in mind that history is written by the victors. So when it came to what he did, Al-Hajjaj likely ensured that the record showed only what he wanted the record to show. After all, those who chronicled what Al-Hajjaj did WORKED FOR HIM (and the caliph). There was no independent journalism—let alone investigative journalism speaking truth to power—in the Middle Ages.

As we might expect, many were not pleased with Al-Hajjaj's draconian project—most notably: the family of Uthman (who's favored version was thereby rendered obsolete!) For more on this matter, refer to the testimony of Muhriz ibn Thabit (via Ibn Shabba).

In THIS edition of the “Recitations”, any passages that were inimical to Umayyad legitimacy were expunged. Al-Hajjaj's customized “mushaf” was then declared to be the only valid Koran...and, of course, the only version that had ever existed. (Yet another reprise of: “It's been this way all along!”)

And as with Uthman before him, Al-Hajjaj ordered the destruction of all manuscripts other than his own...which meant that by that time, there had AGAIN emerged several versions. Of course, a single version needed to be designated as definitive...lest the thread of un-impeachability be lost.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Al-Hajjaj employed the same strategy as had Uthman a generation earlier: commission a manuscript that suited those in power, and then *burn everything else*.

Note that the concern here was not with (IN)ACCURACY; it was with VARIATION (i.e. the existence of discrepancies). What posed problems for the community was the fact that there had AGAIN emerged numerous inconsistencies—a fact that undermined claims of inerrancy. The solution was not to investigate how this came to pass; rather it was to simply establish ONE VERSION [“ta'lif”]; and then destroy all available source material...to cover one's tracks, as it were.

(As I discuss in my essays on the Syriac origins of the Koran: At this time, all of this material would have STILL been in Syriac.)

All this raises an interesting question: If, in those early days, the strength of the transmission of the “Recitations” lay in MEMORIZATION, then the focus on destroying MANUSCRIPTS would not have made much sense. Put another way: If extant versions existed primarily due to oral transmission, then eliminating hard copies—while undercutting an unwanted textual record—would not have solved the underlying problem. In the midst of oral tradition, folklore persists—hard copies or not.

(Don't forget: There were well-known “qurra” who had memorized the “Recitations” during that first generation—a cadre that included men like Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan and Abu Musa al-Ashari. Perhaps such oral transmission was able to circumvent even these book burnings!)

It's actually even more complicated. Recall that Ibn Masoud and Ibn Ka'ab were not the only two men that—according to Bukhari—MoM instructed followers to treat as unimpeachable sources (re: the transmission of the “Recitations”). As mentioned earlier, this “sahih” Hadith specifies that a “freed slave of Abu Hudayfa” named “Salim” as well as a man named “Mu'adh ibn Jabal” were also approved amanuenses: designated by MoM HIMSELF (no. 3758 and 3806).

Of course, now we're in the 8th century...long after MoM's instructions would have been known first hand. Here, it's worth noting that the first DOCUMENTED recounting of what MoM actually did / said was proffered by Ibn Ishaq—roughly 120 years after Mohammed's death. However, any documents that may have been composed by Ibn Ishaq have long since been lost...and can only be referenced indirectly via redacted (read: extensively re-worked) hagiographies...the earliest of which were authored by Ibn Hisham, who died over TWO CENTURIES after MoM's death.

Suffice to say, such a significant time-span afforded prodigious time for not insignificant modification (both witting and un-).

Moreover, Classical Arabic script was not even standardized until the early 9th century—a successor to Kufic that was fashioned as the new Faith's liturgical language. This afforded plenty of time for extensive

textual transformation (read: a slew of “honest mistakes” and deliberate alterations) to occur.

The variegation in the oldest available Koranic manuscripts indicate that there existed BOTH orthographic variants AND substantive variants—as would be expected.

Apart from some fragments that cannot be reliably dated, none of the earliest manuscripts that survived—whether in whole codices or in portions—can be dated earlier than the 8th century. This makes sense, as Uthman (in the 650’s) and then Al-Hajjaj (shortly after c. 700) had all un-approved manuscripts systematically destroyed.

And now, we don’t even have the version that Al-Hajjaj would have commissioned.

Subsequent Textual Genealogies:

Starting in the 8th century, there are some vague clues as to what may have transpired...then, and THEREAFTER. As attested by Ibn Mujahid c. 900, there were fourteen known candidates for oral lineages (for the ostensive preservation of the “Recitations”), which of which purportedly began in the 8th century...originating from:

- Nafi of Medina [a.k.a. “Al-Madani”] (according to either Warsh or Qulun)
- Ibn Kathir of Mecca [a.k.a. “Al-Makki”]; though he likely operated out of Damascus] (according to either al-Bazzi or Qunbul) {19}
- Ibn Am[i]r of Damascus (according to either Hisham ibn Hamar or Ibn Dhakwan)
- Abu Am[i]r ibn al-Ala of Basra (according to either al-Duri or al-Susi) {20}
- Abu Bakr A[a]sim ibn Abi al-Najud of Kufa [a.k.a. “Asim”] (according to Hafs ibn Sulayman...who, the story goes, somehow had access to a line of transcripts going back to the long-lost “mushaf” of Zayd ibn Thabit!)
- Hamza of Kufa (according to either Khalaf or Khallad)
- Al-Kisai of Kufa (according to either Duri or Abul Harith)

Other candidates were rejected—most notably those of Ibn Miqsam and Ibn Shannabudh. As one might guess, the “winning” version of the Koran is attributed the (Kufic) textual lineage stemming from *Hafs* (and thus from “Asim”). Hafs would have died in the early 9th century. Lord only knows what that version was ACTUALLY based on.

It’s anyone’s guess how we might get from Al-Hajjaj’s version to whatever “Asim” may have had at his disposal (a span of well over a generation)...and how that was eventually transmitted to Hafs. But it is to none other than Hafs that the current textual lineage traces itself.

Those sympathetic to Ali’d historiography claim that the Hafs “mushaf” was a faithful reproduction of the “Uthman Koran” (thus: retaining the version compiled by Zayd ibn Thabit...and possibly even some key elements from Ubayy ibn Ka’ab). How so? Well, according to Shia legend, the manuscript was transmitted via Abu Abd ar-Rahman. Others claim that it came from Ibn Masoud HIMSELF (via a man named Zirr ibn Hubaysh)...which makes no sense, as Zayd’s version was NOT Ibn Masoud’s version.

Meanwhile, both Bukhari and Muslim (the preeminent Hadith writers), as well as Al-Nisai and Ibn Hanbal, ended up rejecting the Hafs-based lineage altogether. So, if we are to take the most vaunted Hadith seriously, the entire discussion is moot anyway. (!)

Well, if not the Hafs version, then who's? Nobody really knows. Because the only versions that survived are those that are traced back to THAT (Kufic) textual lineage.

Islamic apologists today dismiss these discrepant lineages as mere METHODS OF RECITATION—known as “qira’at”; and the conveyers of each as “qari”. This rationalization rides on the specious contention that each oral lineage (commonly referred to as a “rawi” / “tariq”, meaning “line of transmission”) was simply a STYLISTIC variant; nothing more. {8}

Orality is one thing (where the room for error is massive, as anyone knows who's played the game of “telephone”); but even WRITTEN records involve a degree of leeway. There is, of course, an interplay between orthographic (script-oriented) changes and changes in semantics...which invariably has an impact on CONTENT. That is to say, it is unlikely that WRITING would undergo a significant metamorphosis without somehow influencing the substance of what is written. Copying errancies are, after all, copying errancies. And modifications rarely announce themselves as such. (To reiterate, embellishment has a ratcheting effect. Subsequent editions do not contain within them a record of previous versions; as doing so would be to concede their derivative nature.)

Scribal tweaks—even if ostensibly stylistic in nature—can't help but have linguistic repercussions. Alter wording, and meaning is often altered as well. This is especially the case if, during this process, the language being used is evolving as well. It is very difficult to retain a consistent hermeneutic in the midst of orthographic / linguistic transformation.

Such is the nature of re-writes, especially MANY re-writes...over the course of many generations...using different dialects...in different scripts...by different scribes...under different circumstances...as agendas and sensibilities change. In sum: This is what happens to stories that are transmitted over long periods of time.

To track the metamorphosis of scripture—and the genealogy of an affiliated creed—the record of modification is not always available to us. But sometimes it IS available—as with the Christian Gospel accounts of JoN. The original Gospel (that of “Mark”) did not have anything about a resurrection. (The Codex Vaticanus is the oldest copy of the New Testament available. Tellingly, it does not have anything past verse 8 in the last chapter of Mark; as Mark 16:9-20 was not added until c. 400.) Embellishment does not announce itself AS embellishment; it's just done. When confabulation occurs, it does not contain a record of whatever contrivance may have been involved: “That's what others told us; and here's the part that WE made up.” Every account asserts that it is the original account. Everyone's version is passed off as authentic.

When it comes to Koranic manuscripts (“qira’at”), the elision of antecedent editions is all the more flagrant. The fact that a somewhat LIMITED variation of codices survived is easily explained by the fact that the authorities—at each juncture—were adamant about systematically destroying any un-approved version that may have existed at the time. Whoever was “calling the shots” would have taken measures to prevent alternate versions from being propagated. Obviously, those in power at any given time selected the version they selected NOT because it was the most “accurate”, but because it was the version they WANTED.

It is no wonder, then, that there aren't more variations than there are.

Even so, there remain several clues as to the disparate origins of the final edition. It is to these clues that we now turn.

A Brief Account Of Textual Clues:

As we have seen, it was Al-Hajjaj (likely at the behest of the Umayyad Caliph, Abd al-Malik) who was responsible for much of the crafting of Koranic manuscripts—beginning in the last years of the 7th century (when the inscription on the Dome of the Rock was made)...and into the first decade of the 8th century. But the metamorphosis certainly continued long after that.

More than another century elapsed before the earliest Korans start to appear in the archeological record; affording prodigious time for extensive modifications to be made. There is no record of what might have happened in the intervening time. (For an enumeration of the first Koranic manuscripts, see my essay: “The Syriac Origins of Koranic Text”.)

It is dismaying the extent to which Islamic apologists will engage in comically outlandish rationalizations in order to square this problem with an insistence that the Koran is some kind of eternal document—the transcript of which has been unaltered since June of 632. The claim is entirely spurious. Nevertheless, it remains ubiquitous throughout the Ummah. Everyone is expected to pretend it is true.

Delusion on this matter is breathtaking to behold. Shall we simply presume that a billion people have not done their homework? {9}

The short answer is: Yes.

Such widespread ignorance—both within and outside of Dar al-Islam—can be attributed to a combination of systematic indoctrination by perfidious ulama and willful blindness on the part of sycophantic votaries. Many (ostensibly Progressive) imams are innocently oblivious; but many are most likely just lying to their congregations. {10} How, pray tell, do they manage pull this off? Programmatic dissimulation.

The mendacity of fundamentalists, on the other hand, can be explained by a pathologically obstinate ideological commitment.

It is no surprise that Islamic apologists respond to critiques with by dissembling; as the alternative is to admit the preferred account of the Koran’s origins is entirely illusory. Yet there is no rejoinder the present essay; as it is merely reporting what is recounted in “sahih” Hadith collections, which are THEMSELVES centuries removed from their subject. Meanwhile, the earliest commentaries (“tafsir”) on the Koran didn’t come until the beginning of the 10th century (with Al-Tabari).

Thus far, we have been reviewing the most esteemed accounts—taken from Islam’s most trusted sources. Rather than being based on material that was written to denigrate the Koran’s legacy, the summary I have provided here is entirely based on material that would have (invariably) WHITE-WASHED the historiography.

What we have here, then, is far from a libelous historiography; it is almost certainly a *romanticized* version of events. For those who preserved such accounts would have REVERED both Islam’s prophet AND its holy book. Such people would have had no incentive to impugn what was their own Faith’s hallowed legacy (manuscript-eating sheep notwithstanding).

Okay, then. Enough of the historiographical record provided in the “sahih” Hadith. Let’s now explore the TEXTUAL evidence for the Koran’s dubitable history.

As we have seen, the compendium of verses that was eventually rendered Islam's holy book came from disparate sources—originally: from “palm stalks, thin white stones, and from amongst the various reciters.” This ineluctable fact is illustrated by the disjointed nature of the text's phraseology.

Let's review one of the most risible examples: The case in which the putative author of the Koran (that is: the book's protagonist; i.e. the Abrahamic deity himself) cannot even accurately quote HIMSELF. This is especially problematic considering the speaker is supposed to be omniscient (and so have a perfect memory); and his wording is supposed to always be perfect.

In the scene wherein the Abrahamic deity banishes Iblis (the fallen angel who becomes Satan) from heaven for refusing to bow to Adam, he cites himself. In 7:13, he claims to have declared: “Get down from here! It is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out; for you are the worst of creatures... You are granted respite [until Judgement Day].” However, in 15:34 and 38:77, he claims to have declared: “Be gone! You are rejected and cursed. My curse will remain upon you until the Judgement Day.”

Thus we have conflicting statements. This pertains to a statement MADE BY GOD about WHAT HE HIMSELF said. Bear in mind that this is something he would have said at a distinct point in time, so it could only have been a singular declaration.

Was god paraphrasing himself in one or both places? (This wouldn't make sense, as the book is purportedly eternal.) The only explanation for this discrepancy is that each re-telling of the tale came from a different amanuensis—each of whom added his own special touch to the anecdote (before passing it on to the next amanuensis in the chain of narration).

To make the retellings even more problematic, Satan's key line in this scene is ALSO quoted inconsistently. He responds in one way in 7:12 and 38:76, and in another way in 15:33. The inconsistency becomes yet more pronounced once we notice that the discrepant phrasings of the interlocutors don't even correlate with each version of the dialogue. An indication that the Koran did not come from a single source—let alone from an infallible source—is the disparity in phrasing of statements that purport to say exactly the same thing.

Considering the “Recitations” were cobbled together in an ad hoc manner, it should come as little surprise that the final product is riddled with glaring inconsistencies. Let's look at a few other tell-tale signs.

Note that the issue with (what eventually became) Surahs 1, 113, and 114 (along with Surahs 109 and 112) is that they were PRAYERS. In other words: They were a prescription for supplicants speaking to god; not a transcript of god speaking to supplicants. (Oops.)

When might also note the slew of mixed messages.

Those who claimed that MoM was the first prophet sent to the Arabians (28:46) seem to have forgotten that Abraham and Ishmael were supposed to have erected the Meccan cube at some point during the Bronze Age (per 2:125-129)...IN ARABIA. Those who touted 28:46 were also unaware of the verse stating that prophets had already been sent to all nations (10:47), and that Arabians had already experienced a prophet (3:183).

This is not a case of a single author who can't seem to get his story straight. It's what a concatenation of different narratives looks like when they are stitched together in an ad hoc manner.

Sometimes, when they were met with various accounts of a tale, amanuenses openly admitted that there were different versions...and that only god knows which is the correct one; so “don't ask” (18:22). Recall that it was god himself that is allegedly providing the account; so this discursive shrug-of-the-

shoulders is rather peculiar.

Wasn't this meant to be a "mubeen" [*clear*] message? If so, mission NOT accomplished.

There also exists a conflicting message regarding the substance from which people are created. Man is formed from a blood-clot ["*alaq*"] (22:5, 23:14, 75:38, and 96:2), dust (3:59, 22:5, 35:11, and 40:67), the earth (11:61), clay and/or mud (6:2, 7:12, 15:26-28/33, 17:61, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, and 55:14), a seed (16:4), nothing (19:67 and 52:35), water (21:30), and a small amount of liquid ["*nutfa*"] (16:4, 22:5, 23:13, 32:8, and 76:2). This is—to put it mildly—somewhat less than perfectly clear.

Some of these pithy asseverations may have referred to the origins of HOMO SAPIENS per se, while others may have pertained to embryology. Fair enough. Yet the authors clearly hadn't the faintest idea about biological evolution...let alone any understanding of gametes joining to produce a zygote. And they were certainly not cogent about what, exactly, they were trying to explain in each of the above verses.

Even if we discount mention of blood-clots (which can be chalked up to a comically erroneous explanation of embryo-genesis) and DESPISED FLUIDS (as in 32:8), we are treated to one or another version of biological alchemy to explain the genesis of homo sapiens. This flies in the face of the claim—repeated throughout the Koran—that god need only say "be" and it is. (Never mind any of that. Are we really supposed to DESPISE semen?)

Here are eight more contradictions that indicate disparate sources:

- The length of time it took for god to create the universe was both six days (7:54, 10:3, and 11:7) and $2+4+2 =$ eight days (41:9-12).
- One day for god is a thousand years (22:47) and FIFTY thousand years (70:4).
- The Earth was created before the heavens (2:29 and 41:10-12), yet the heavens were created before the Earth (79:27-30).
- Who was the first Muslim? According to the standard Islamic theology, Abraham was the first Muslim (as specified in 2:132)...though one could take Abrahamic monotheism back to Noah (or even to Adam and his son, Abel). Yet 7:143 states that Moses was the first Muslim. And 39:12 states that MoM was the first Muslim.
- Can one be forgiven for worshipping false gods? For the answer we might look to Surah 4. According to verse 153, the answer is yes. Yet according to verses 48 and 116, the answer is no.
- God pre-determines our fate in the hereafter, yet leaves it in our hands whether or not we are condemned to hellfire (see Appendix 1 of my essay on "The History Of Heaven And Hell").
- The Final Revelation both refutes and confirms previous Abrahamic scripture (see Appendix 3 of the present essay).
- Did the Pharaoh drown or survive when attempting to traverse the parted sea? The authors seem to have been confused on this matter. (They also didn't seem to know his name.) Only in the Koran can someone be both saved by god (10:92) and perish (72:10).

When it comes to any one of the ten cases enumerated above, one is obliged to ask: *So which is it?*

At best, the Koran is unclear on each of these points. Taken literally, the book contradicts itself when addressing such matters.

Upon reflection, though, there is no great mystery here. When different bits were being cobbled together, discordance was inevitable. And it isn't very surprising that such discrepancies were not noticed; as no single "qurra" was apt to have the entire collection of "Recitations" at his disposal (to assess all the material in toto). Thus inconsistencies may not have immediately presented themselves.

And by the time people were able to perform such an assessment, the well-known verses were already thoroughly instantiated. Consequently it was too late to retract those that contradicted each another.

Such inconsistency was nothing new in scripture. The Book of Kohelet[h] ben David (a.k.a. "Ecclesiastes") tells us that money is the answer for everything in 10:19 just after it condemns money in 5:10. Meanwhile, the 6th chapter in the first Pauline letter to Timothy of Lystra famously noted that the love of money is the root of all evil. Had Saul of Tarsus not read the 10th chapter of Ecclesiastes?

The most charitable interpretation of the text is simply that the book equivocates on such matters. We find this with, say, the admonition for either tempering one's consumption of alcohol or forbidding it altogether.

The problem even arises when it comes to the number of obligatory daily prayers (it seems to be TWO; though the relevant passages articulate it differently).

In assaying the text, it's hard not to notice: The Koran is not a resplendent pastiche, it's more like a hodgepodge. So over the course of a book that is supposed to be perfectly clear, we are given the impression that the identity of the first Muslim was Abraham...or Moses...or MoM. And that "shirk" is a redeemable offense...yet is also irredeemable. And that maybe wine is a good thing (but only as a deferred reward, in the afterlife). And that one should pray at the beginning and at the end of the day...but perhaps maybe more.

Again, we must ask: Is this the disquisition of a single author who can't get his story straight? OR...is it the result of disparate sources being stitched together in a crude textual patch-work?

Things are just as problematic when it comes to questions of grave import—like whether or not there should be slavery. When it comes to clarifying such important issues, the book is delinquent. Sadly, such a stunning lack of clarity—and utter dereliction of moral intrepidity—exists for everything from freedom of speech to freedom of religion (to speak nothing of basic human rights).

The format of Islam's holy book also reveals its worldly origins. The exposition haphazardly hops from one topic to another in what can only be described as a discursive cluster-fuck. The result is not a splendidly-woven tapestry of vignettes, it is a tohuwabohu of non-sequiturs.

Meanwhile, the book is festooned with syntactical incongruities. Once we consider the long, meandering process that eventually yielded the final product, the existence of such disjunctures makes sense.

There are various other signs of the book's terrestrial authorship. Bizarrely, the authors instruct the audience to include the mention of certain people IN THE BOOK. (In such passages, it is often assumed the Abrahamic deity is addressing MoM personally; but this doesn't solve the problem.) In Surah 19, we find the following instructions:

- verse 16: Also mention in the book Mary when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East.
- verse 41: Also mention in the book Abraham.
- verse 51: Also mention in the book Moses.
- verse 54: Also mention in the book Ishmael.
- verse 56: Also mention in the book Idris. {11}

And in 46:21, we read: Also mention the brother of A[a]d, when he warned his people in Al-Ahqaf [“place of the sand-dunes”]. {12}

In other words, the Koran provides advice for what to include in the Koran. Such self-referentiality would be un-necessary if we were to assume the book to be timeless. If you do not immediately recognize that this is a fatal problem, you’re not paying attention.

What is peculiar is that the Koran ITSELF refers to the Koran having been rendered piecemeal (in shreds) by those sewing dissent (15:89-91)...meaning that WITHIN the Koran is a retrospective of its own compilation (and the problems thereby encountered).

In any case, the book ITSELF is comprised of instructions to include certain things in the book; yet it never stipulates to include the INSTRUCTIONS THEMSELVES in the book. Of course, that would lead to a problem of infinite nesting; as instructions to include THOSE instructions would need to be included as well. (This amounts to the discursive equivalent of Godel’s Incompleteness Theorem, which dealt with logical systems. No system can “get outside” itself to assess itself.)

It’s not that such passages merely make it SEEM as though the Koran might be man-made; they are CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE that the Koran is man-made. The book’s fallibility is incontrovertible. When memos to include material in a book are PART OF the book that is reputed to have been authored by god beforehand, we know we’re being taken for a ride.

An indication that some of the “Recitations” were composed long after they were mere RECITATIONS can be found in 56:77-79, which concedes that the Koran is a PHYSICAL BOOK (which, we are notified, none but the purified shall be permitted to touch). Obviously, this is not a revelation that would have been delivered so long as the Koran was a merely series of orally-transmitted verses (i.e. recitations). It is plain to see that this passage could not have been written until after the “Recitations” had been rendered as a bound volume (i.e. an actual book).

One can engage in exegetical backflips, interpreting “touch” as either “tamper with” or “apprehend” to get this directive to kinda-sorta make sense. But clearly, passages referring to the Koran as a BOOK are referring to it as a corporeal object. For 2:79 refers to “WRITING the kitab WITH THEIR OWN HANDS.” 33:6 speaks of that which is “inscribed in” the book.

Moreover, “book” (“kitab”) is distinct from “recitation” (“qur’an”), as illustrated by the opening statement of Surah 15 (which refers to Islam’s holy book as BOTH a book AND a recitation that is clear). Passages like 45:2 designate the Final Revelation as a book rather than simply a set of “recitations”. Clearly, the Koran was thought of AS A PHYSICAL BOOK...which may be recited. Also ref. 43:21 and 46:4, which inquire about other BOOKS before Islam’s holy book. Such passages were clearly not referring to mere recitations.

Indeed, the term for book (“kitab”) is the same term used for OTHER Abrahamic scripture, like the Torah. {5} Such passages were obviously not referring to material that was merely recited; they were referring to AN ACTUAL BOOK, which the audience was notified they could hold BETWEEN THEIR HANDS.

But how were the “Recitations” conceptualized by the authors? While they were (purportedly) the FINAL “revelation” [“tanzilu(n)”] from the Abrahamic deity, they were variously characterized as a “warning” [“nudhir”] and as a “reminder” [“dhikr(a)”]—as in 15:9 and 57:16. (Note that another word for “warning” / “reminder” is “threat”.)

But wait. Weren’t antecedent scriptures considered “reminders” as well? As it turns out: yes. In verses 7, 48, and 105 in Surah 21, the audience is instructed to REFER BACK to extant Abrahamic

texts—which were likewise characterized as “dhikr”. In other words: The Mohammedan “Recitations” were categorized in the same way as antecedent Abrahamic revelations. The Koran, then, is yet another iteration of “dhikr”. (We promise, this is the last time!) This parity in categorization entails somewhat of a quandary. Was the Final Revelation something that re-iterated or something that transplanted?

Verses like 10:94 actually direct the audience to consult the other “people of the book” (Jews and Christians) to dispel any doubts about the verity of the “Recitations”. In other words: This Last Revelation can be validated by what was CURRENTLY AVAILABLE to the “Sahabah”: antecedent scripture that, at that point, still existed.

This brings us to another important point regarding the timeline. It is clear that all the passages that refer to Islam’s holy book as, well, a “BOOK” [“kitab”] were composed AFTER it had become a physical book (as opposed to JUST a series of orally-transmitted “recitations”, as it originally existed). Therefore, it makes no sense that these verses came from MoM’s ministry, which was exclusively oral.

In sum: The Koran is about as co-eternal with the divine as is yesterday’s gossip column. It is a historical artifact like any other ancient tract: the product of a long process of different people cobbling together choice tid-bits under different circumstances; each for his own reasons. It should not be controversial to point this out.

Islam’s holy book is the embodiment of the divine in the same way as is, say, “The Book Of Revelation” by John of Patmos. In other words: Not at all. It is eminently possible to be a Muslim and acknowledge this fact. In fact, it is the only way to be a Muslim with integrity.

So Where Does This Leave Us?

Nobody likes “truths” that they’ve deemed to be sacrosanct to be brought into question...let alone shown to be entirely spurious. The preceding inquiry, then, will surely ruffle some feathers. Anyone who suggests that the Koran is anything less than inimitable is met with a scoff. Those engaged in a candid critical analysis of sanctified dogmas quickly finds themselves personae non gratae.

What revanchists fail to recognize is that addressing this issue honestly is simply a matter of debunking a “just-so story”—a bit of overwrought farce that is taken as holy writ. Shall we all be obliged to treat such claims as inviolable? Don’t be ridiculous.

(For more on this, see R. Stephen Humphreys’ “Qur’anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography”; Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity; 1989.)

As I hope to have shown, the sequence of oral transmission that yielded what we now know as the “Recitations” (i.e. Final Revelation) was riven with a potpourri of ad hoc emendations. We’ve seen that the chain of narration (“isnad”) was punctuated by countless—mostly unknown—segues. That process led to lost and/or redacted verses on numerous topics, from stoning to breast-suckling.

It is, of course, POSSIBLE that the authorities made an honest effort to base every decision on unconditional fidelity to the oldest discernible versions of the oral tradition; but that is a big leap to make. It is an assumption that is unverifiable. One may propose that there was absolutely zero contrivance involved...by anyone...at any point; but that would be comically far-fetched.

Be that as it may, highly improbably is not quite impossible. While “exceedingly unlikely” leaves room for remote possibility, tempered credulity can only go so far until it becomes delusion. Such conjecture becomes even more improbable, though, once we factor in the staunch vested interests that were invariably at play...each and every step of the way.

And WHAT OF the putative “isnad” that are purportedly “mutawatir” (perfectly dependable)? Here’s the thing: The account of any given isnad’s credence is ITSELF part of the “isnad”. Ergo a catch-22. The reliability of any given chain of narration (including the credibility of ANY ONE OF its transmitters) is PART OF the isnad-in-question. Hence the putative “sahih” rating is nothing more than a particular “isnad” vouching for itself. Short of corroboration from independent sources, we find ourselves in a bit of a pickle. For insofar as the Hadith are the ultimate authority, we can never really “get outside” of the tradition in order to validate that tradition. (One might think of this as the narrative version of Godel’s Incompleteness Theorem.) After all, the meta-isnad assessment is, well, just another isnad.

To suppose that every amanuensis was impartial AND competent (that is: perfectly honest with a perfect memory) is to engage in a flight of fancy. It’s safe to say that staunch conflicts of interest were involved at every juncture...by SOMEONE...for SOME reason...over the course of the long, meandering process of transmission.

Unsurprisingly, along the way, every major figurehead proclaimed his own version to be THE “correct” version; and claimed its chain of oral transmission (the “isnad”) to have been meticulously documented, and each amanuensis thoroughly vetted. So the consecrated “mushaf” was summarily deemed unimpeachably authentic.

This is something that ANY party would enthusiastically proclaim when attempting to legitimize his own version. Obviously, promulgators of designated “naskh” / “ta’lif” / “haf” would make this claim for themselves; as they would have been foolish NOT to. Yet simply asserting impeccable validation does not make it so.

That said, it stands to reason that Islamic apologists have a problem with anyone correcting the record. For doing so undermines what is deemed a coveted historiography (to wit: the version of events on which their book’s divine origin is predicated). After all, GENUINE divine revelations (which don’t really exist) are not supposed to be man-made. (!) In the event that sacred apple-carts are upset, those depending on those apple-carts are bound to protest.

Pulling back the curtain to reveal the artifice behind such celestial communiques is seen as—if nothing else—extremely poor manners. For True Believers, such elucidation is taken as desecration.

In the end, the “Cairo” version of the Koran (the most widely-accepted OFFICIAL version now used by the vast majority of the world’s Muslims) was approved on July 10, 1924 by a government-appointed committee at Al-Azhar University, convened by a man named Mohammed ibn Ali al-Husayni al-Haddad. It might be noted that this version does not correspond to the manuscript evidence of ANY of the earliest versions. As mentioned, it lays claim to the lineage through Hafs...which is said to have been a faithful rendition of the fabled “Uthman Koran”. To know anything about the history of Islam’s holy book is to know that this is a risible claim.

The “Cairo” Koran’s incessant declaration that “these words have not been changed since the day they left the prophet’s lips” is—all things considered—preposterous. Such special pleading, over and over again, brings to mind the comment by Gertrude in Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”: Thou doth protest too much.

It is rather odd that the Koran incessantly pleads that it is not merely a rehashing of fables told by men of old. And it is suspiciously adamant that it was not simply lifted from extant poetry—as in 6:25, 8:31, 25:4-

6, 36:69, 46:17, 52:30, 68:15, 69:41, and 83:13.

(Ancillary note: There is evidence that some of the material was taken from the writings of the 6th-century poet, Imru al-Qays ibn Hujr of the Banu Kindah: an Arab Christian who served in the court of Ghassanid prince Al-Harish ibn Jabalah.)

All of this is entirely beside the point anyway. For the issue of the Koran being unchanged is ultimately irrelevant. Even if we were to suppose that the “Cairo” Koran is somehow a verbatim transcript of everything that MoM actually said (a feat that would be impossible without recording devices and a time-machine), doing so would not in any way detract from the fact that all that the Koran is TODAY is a word-for-word record of the pontifications of a particular Bedouin panjandrum: a charismatic leader from the Hijaz purportedly named “Mu-H-M-D”. No more; no less.

In other words, EVEN IF it could somehow be proven that the collection of “Recitations” now serving as Islam’s holy book has been completely unchanged since the moment they were uttered by MoM, that would in no way lend any credence to their content. For, even then, all the book would be is a perfectly accurate record of stuff a guy said in the Arabian desert hundreds of years ago.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 This battle occurred c. 632 in eastern Najd, near the town of Yamama. It was waged against the rival prophet, Maslamah ibn Habib of the Banu Hanifa (a.k.a. “Musaylimah”).}

{2 He is not to be confused with the 9th-century Persian writer, Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj of Nishapur: author of the vaunted “Muslim” Hadith collection.}

{3 To reiterate: There exist no copies of any text up to and including the Uthman-commissioned text. So even if we DID have original copies of what Zayd ended up compiling, there is nothing to compare it to. We’d just have to take his word for it.}

{4 We might also keep in mind that, according to Bukhari, MoM HIMSELF admitted—on several occasions—that he would forget many of the verses that HE HIMSELF had relayed. Others often had to remind EVEN HIM of things he’d uttered.}

{5 Reference 2:53/87, 3:186-187, 4:54/131/136, 5:44/48/57, 6:91/154, 7:169, 10:94, 11:17/110, 17:2-4, 29:27, 40:53, 41:45, 45:16, 46:12, and 57:16. It might be noted that “kitab” can be more widely translated as “scripture”, but this does not remedy the problem—as references are made to SEEING and to that which people can physically hold in their hands. Meanwhile, other passages (17:58, 18:49, 50:4, 56:78, 78:29, and 83:9/20) use “kitab” to mean REGISTER—that is: an official record of things. This is hardly a way one would describe something that was orally-transmitted.}

{6 It can’t be reiterated enough: This includes (as Bukhari admits) SINGLE SOURCES—as with verses from a man named “Abi Khuzaima Al-Ansari”. When we hear, “He’s the only one who was aware of that passage; so it’s a good thing we found him!” it is a hint that the process was not exactly the epitome of perspicacity.}

{7 A “mahram” is a relative with whom one is not allowed to have sex. It was believed that once a grown man suckled from a woman either five or ten times, he would be deemed “mahram” and thereby disqualified from being able to bed her (ref. Muslim’s Hadith no. 3600 and 3605). Thus a man sucking on a woman’s breast—on numerous occasions—was deemed a way to PREVENT him from having sex with her. Note that the woman has no say in whether or not this wacky prophylaxis is employed.}

{8 Though it has polemical flaws, Ibn Warraq’s “The Origins Of The Koran” contains useful information on this subject.}

{9 Perhaps. After all, we find a similar degree of widespread delusion about sacred scripture within Christendom. Being fanciful about the sources of one’s Faith is endemic to ardent religiosity. A willingness to embrace laughably far-fetched tales (spec. “just-so stories”, custom-tailored to arrive at a foregone conclusion) is typical in such situations. Hence the proliferation of apocrypha in all religious traditions.}

{10 Note that we encounter the exact same problem (programmatic disingenuousness) with clerics in the other two Abrahamic religions.}

{11 Who is Idris? Nobody knows for sure. Some suspect it might have been an oblique reference to Enoch. Oddly, the only other place where Idris is referenced (again, without any explanation of who, exactly, he was and what, exactly, he did) is another instruction to remember him—found in 21:85-86. (Why? What about? Nothing more is said.) The problem with THAT passage is that it is a repetition of 38:48...EXCEPT for the inclusion of Idris. In the former instance, we are instructed to recall Ismail, Idris, and Dhul-Kifl. In the latter instance, we are instructed to recall Ismail, Al-Yasa, and Dhul-Kifl. Why this (inexplicable) discrepancy? It’s as if two versions of an entreaty made it into the final edition. Note: “Dhul-Kifl” is taken to be Ezekiel; “Al-Yasa” is a sloppy cognate of “Elisha”; and “i-D-R-S” may have been a scribal error, as Enoch was typically called “Akhnuk” in Arabic.}

{12 Who was the brother of “Ad”? And why not just refer to him by name (seeing as how he is important enough to be designated in the Final Revelation to all mankind)? Note that there is even confusion about the identity of “Ad”. He may have been the son of Uz ben Aram ben Shem ben Noah. (That is: Noah’s great-great-grandson.) The moniker eventually came to be associated with a tribe hailing from a place somewhere near “Iram” (the city of the pillars mentioned in 89:7), which may have been in Hadramaut in southern Arabia...OR at Wadi Rum in Nabataea...OR the land of Aram in northeastern Levant (as “Iram” could be a cognate of the patriarch by that name; even though Aram is nowhere near southern Arabia). “Al-Ahqaf” (place of the sand-dunes) could be a description of any of these places. The authors seem to have been quite confused on this point. As a tribe / location, “Ad” is mentioned two dozen times in the Koran (and, per 46:24-25 and 89:6-14, was destroyed by the Abrahamic deity). It is said to have been where the Abrahamic prophet, Hud, preached and was rebuffed. (Ergo said destruction.) But who was “Hud”? Nobody knows...even though an entire Surah (11) is named after him. (He may have been a correlate of “[h]Eber”, who was a patriarch of both the Israelites and the Ishmaelites.) As for who the BROTHER OF “Ad” might have been, we can only speculate.}

{13 The Vatican’s “Index Librorum Prohibitorum” has proscribed landmark works like Nicolaus Copernicus’ “De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium”, Immanuel Kant’s “Critique of Pure Reason”, and Charles Darwin’s “Origin of the Species”. In other words, the church denounced three of the most important books ever written...simply because they contradicted Church doctrine. Johannes Kepler’s “Epitome Astronomiae Copernicanae” was on the Index until 1835. And until the modern era, the Vatican did not even want ITS OWN holy book printed in any language other than Latin (that is: in any language that would have been comprehensible to the laity)...a shortcoming that would be addressed by John Wycliffe in the 14th century, then by Martin Luther and William Tyndale in the 16th century. Of course,

the Vatican's recalcitrance knows no bounds. The curia did not see fit to pardon Galileo until 1992.}

{14 The irony is that censorship demeans the very people it purports to protect; for it presumes they are so feeble-minded so as to be incapable of even rudimentary discernment. When the Harry Potter books were banned at the turn of the millennium, it was presumed that supplicants were so credulous that were they to be exposed to children's books about pagan magic, they may become convinced that it might really exist. As usual, the penchant for censorship is born of insecurity. Thus we see—on full display—a deep-seated worry that one's own ideology is so fragile that it cannot withstand the glare of outside light.}

{15 Some Koranic chapters didn't even end up with titles. They eventually came to be referred to by the letters that happen to occur at the beginning of the Surah—as with chapters 20, 36, 38, and 50. Those alphabetic designations (dubbed “fawatih”) are inexplicable TO THIS DAY. They are likely a vestigial nomenclature from the collation process; and perhaps even a mnemonic device.}

{16 The problem with disputing passages from the most vaunted Hadith is that one is thereby forced to forswear what are deemed the best sources about MoM (and the Sunnah): the Hadith collections that have been universally deemed “sahih”. The “catch” is that they come as a package deal; so to reject ONE PART of them is to bring the entire corpus into question. To retain the full integrity of the “sahih” Hadith, one is forced to embrace them replete with all the undesirable parts: every last incriminating anecdote.}

{17 “Salaf” is the moniker used for the few generations that ensued from the so-called “Sahabah” (companions of MoM)...starting with the “Tabi-un” (successors).}

{18 There was, of course, some revisionist history that emerged on this point. The most cited of white-washed accounts is from the Sufi hagiographer, Abu Abd al-Rahman “Al-Sulami” of Nishapur c. 1000. Based on no evidence whatsoever, he blithely averred that the recitations of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Zayd ibn Thabit were *all exactly the same*. He likely assumed that nobody would actually look at the Hadith record to corroborate this claim; so nobody would notice that he was disregarding much of what was recorded by the most trusted sources.}

{19 He supposedly learned his version from someone who'd learned it from Abd Allah ibn Abbas...who had, in turn, learned it from Zayd ibn Thabit and/or Ubay ibn Ka'b.}

{20 He was a student of Abi Ishaq of Hadram, and seems to have learned much of what he knew from the Kufan school.}

{21 Volume 8 of Bukhari's Hadith notifies us that Umar reported that “among what god revealed was the verse of the ‘Rajam’ [stoning of adulterers]. We recited this verse and understood and memorized it. God's apostle carried out this punishment of stoning, and so did we after him. [Yet] I am afraid that after a long time has passed, somebody will say, ‘We do not find the verse of the Rajam in god's book.’ Consequently they will go astray by leaving an obligation which god has revealed.” Clearly, Umar was a fan of the “stoning” verses...the only copy of which had been eaten by a sheep.}

{22 There is an interesting coinky-dink regarding Masoud's stern admonishment to keep the version that HE endorsed, and thus reject the version touted by Zayd ibn Thabit. According to the “Fuqaha”, Ubayd-ullah ibn Abd-allah ibn Utbah stated: “Masoud disliked Zayd ibn Thabit copying the musahif [manuscripts]”; and so beseeched his fellow Mohammedans to “avoid copying the Recitations of this man.” Masoud then stated: “O, people of Al-Iraq! Keep the musahif that are now with you; and conceal them.” But wait. People of Iraq? This is very interesting; for Masoud did NOT have in mind people of the Hijaz. In this passage (“sunan” Jami Al-Tirmidhi; no. 3104), Masoud equates Muslims with those dwelling in Mesopotamia; and notes that it is THEY who have the correct versions. Apparently, the Recitations were NOT being retained in Arabia...where they purportedly originated. For more on this peculiarity, see my

essay on “Mecca And Its Cube” (where I make the case that Islam likely originated in Petra, not in the Hijaz).}

APPENDIX 1: On the Seven “Ahruf”

That myriad “ahruf” (seven of them officially recognized) emerged so quickly illustrates that maintaining perfect fidelity via orality (that is: during an ad hoc process of oral transmission) was an intractable task.

The seven major “ahruf” [variants] are conventionally taken to be Qurayshi, Tamimi, Hatheel, Azad, Rabiyyah, Hawazen, and that of Sa’d ibn Bakr. ALL FOUR “sahih” Hadith (Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Nasa’i, and Abu Dawood) mention the existence of disparate “ahruf” during the earliest period of oral transmission.

At best, this indicates that the “Recitations” were inconsistent. More likely, it indicates that several different versions of the recitation emerged...and then circulated amongst the earliest narrators. These variants—whatever they may have been—were invariably supplemented with whatever else each amanuensis saw fit to add in the intervening time.

For the first generation (prior to Zayd’s compilation of the so-called “Uthmanic” version of the “Recitations”), ALL of these variations were approved. They subsequently proliferated in spite of the fact that they didn’t coincide with one another.* The fabled “Uthman Koran” was intended to resolve this issue once and for all.

In order to legitimize such discrepancies in the early “Recitations” (which were supposed to be transcriptions of god’s speech), apologists typically use the following rationalization: MoM specifically REQUESTED that his (purported) revelations be delivered to him in seven “ahruf” (variants based on stylization more than substance). So the story goes, he did this in order to make things “easier” for his diverse Hijazi audience. That is to say: It was done in order to accommodate the different dialects found in Arabia at the time. The problem with this rationalization, of course, is that denizens of the Hijaz at the beginning of the 7th century primarily spoke vernaculars of SYRIAC; not of Classical Arabic...which did not yet exist. (!)

The claim is that the discrepant phrasing is hermeneutically isomorphic. In other words, there is exegetical parity between the different versions. Therefore the discrepancies ultimately don’t matter. But this does not square with the claim that the wording of every passage is perfect.

Granted, the discrepancies between the seven “ahruf” are relatively minor. That is to say: They do not amount to significant differences in SUBSTANCE. The point, though, is that they are INDICATIVE, not DEFINITIVE. In other words, they are likely the remnants of far more significant variants...which have been long lost to (read: deleted from) history. Indeed, these (more trivial) variations survive because that is all that those keeping track of the “isnad” ALLOWED to survive. It’s not that larger discrepancies never existed; it’s that such discrepancies would not have survived the winnowing process orchestrated by the powers-that-be.

Regardless, the existence of these RESIDUAL variations is sufficient to illustrate the fact that variation abounded as time progressed—as is ALWAYS the case when orality is involved.

The explanation for the various dialects is straight-forward. During the time the “Recitations” were being orally transmitted and curated (then passed along orally again and again, invariably with tweaking at the occasion warranted), Classical Arabic was still being developed as a language. The “Recitations” STARTED in Syriac, and only later would have been rendered in the new liturgical language. (For more on this, see my essay on “The Syriac Origins of Koranic Verse”.) Such post hoc rendering was bound to yield discrepancies.

Hence the seven “ahruf” should not be taken as the LIMIT OF said variation, but as an indication that variation—to whatever degree—existed; and that variation likely occurred far beyond what was permitted to remain in the official record. For the variations that remain are easy to gloss over—which is exactly why THEY are the ones that are still acknowledged to this day.

Today, the standard rationalization used by Islamic apologists is that the different “ahruf” represented merely variations in SEMANTICS, not variations in MEANING. (Again: Any discrepant phrasing was hermeneutically isomorphic.)

Muslims deserve answers to important questions about their scripture; and the Ummah will benefit greatly from being disabused of any spurious bits of “conventional wisdom” that have for so long prevailed in Dar al-Islam. In terms of early variants of the “Recitations”, the seven “ahruf” are merely the tip of what was almost certainly a gigantic, long-since submerged iceberg.

{* A worthwhile piece on this topic is a masters thesis done by Safi al-Shehada:
<http://www.alfatihonline.com/en/articles/ahruf.htm>. Various other interesting discussions of the “ahruf” can be found by other religious apologists. For example, see John Gilchrist’s “Jam Al-Qur’an” section at <http://answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/Jam/chap5.html>. Considering the former is an Islamic apologist and the latter is a Christian apologist, it is safe to assume that each commentary on this topic is biased (in one way or the other). So both should be taken with a grain of salt.}

APPENDIX 2:

Confirmation of Extant Scripture?

Many statements in the Koran end up undermining the Koran itself. This is no more evident than with the botched attempt to reconcile the Mohammedan revelations with the extant Abrahamic lore of the time. The predicament was as follows: The authors of Islam’s holy book were compelled to both affirm extant Abrahamic scripture (specifically, the Torah and the Christian “Gospels”)...AND to reject it. Why this dilemma? In one sense, the NEW (and LAST) revelation from the Abrahamic deity needed to be in keeping with all that had gone before; YET—at the same time—it required a reason to be NEEDED. Why was an update warranted? How was it justified? And how could this be squared with the fact that Abrahamic legacy had been right ALL ALONG?

Those in America are already well-acquainted with this scenario: A sect claims to rectify and/or amend an ancient creed that has—allegedly—become corrupted. The (quasi-Christian) Church of Latter-Day Saints purports to be doing just this. An arch-angel visits a man to notify him that it is delivering to him—and only him—the Final Revelation for mankind. The message will re-affirm earlier dispensations; thereby validating earlier prophets.

This yarn is a familiar one: The new revelation will confirm the verity of the (now long-lost) original scripture...which had since been sullied by unscrupulous interlopers...who fraudulently acted under the aegis of the true Faith; and made proclamations in the name of the godhead. In correcting the record, this

fatidic up-date is supposed to set things aright.

As a result, the Koran ends up vacillating between embracing and distancing itself from the claims found in antecedent Abrahamic scripture. In effect, the Koran instructs us: “Heed those scriptures because they were god’s word...YET you must reject them because they were corrupted.” All along, Jews and Christians were kinda-sorta right, yet kinda-sorta wrong. (10:93 intimates that they were right...until they were wrong.)

More than FORTY passages depict the Final Revelation as CONFIRMATION of extant Abrahamic scripture (Old and New Testaments). In the first major chapter (Surah 2), we find this position taken in verses 4, 41, 91, 97, 136, and 285.

Other passages that do this include: 3:3-4/48-50/81-84, 4:136/162-163, 5:43-48/65-68/110, 6:92, 7:157, 9:111, 10:37/94-95, 11:17, 12:111, 13:36, 16:43-44, 18:27, 19:12/58, 20:133, 21:105, 25:35, 28:51-53, 29:46, 32:23, 35:31, 37:118-119, 40:23/53, 41:43, 42:13, 45:16, 46:10-12/30, 53:36-37, 61:6/14, 62:5, and 87:18-19. In each case, the audience is exhorted to consult EXTANT scripture to confirm what has been relayed in the Final Revelation.

19:12 refers to pre-existing scripture that god had given (with regard to Zechariah). 25:35 and 40:23 refer to that which god had given Moses.

(The silliest of these is probably 7:157, in which it is claimed that MoM himself was foretold in the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels; so his existence is a fulfillment of Judeo-Christian prophecy.)

The Koran, then, is said to be confirmation of the sacred scriptures that had preceded it. 41:43 even goes so far to say that the Koran not only confirms all Abrahamic religions before it; but that it SAYS NOTHING NEW. In other words, there is nothing in the Koran that was not already said; something that couldn’t possibly be true...as the Koran refers to recent events that were unique to the Mohammedan movement. The Final Revelation to all mankind devotes prodigious time focusing on Arabians and their activities (specific battles), on MoM personally (don’t tarry after dinner!), and on novel rules that announce themselves as peculiarly specific to (the exigencies of) Hijazis during the Dark Ages.

All of this is OVERTLY new; as the focal point of the Hebrew Bible is CLEARLY not the Arabian deserts. So much for eternity.

According to all the passages listed above, the Abrahamic scripture—as it existed at the time of MoM—was VALIDATED. Not only that; the scripture that is being confirmed was available to the audience AT THAT TIME. For it enjoins the audience: If you have any doubt that these new revelations CONFIRM extant scripture, then simply ask those (contemporaries) who are familiar with antecedent scripture. This is especially clear in the passages that instruct the audience to refer to scriptures that they already had “between their hands”.

The passages listed thus far do not mention anything about the Judeo-Christian scriptures having been corrupted; as they stipulate the necessary texts STILL EXIST at the time of MoM’s ministry. They indicates that one should heed the antecedent Abrahamic scriptures AS THEY ARE NOW (at the time of MoM’s ministry). Note especially 7:157, which stipulates that both the Torah and Gospels ARE CURRENTLY WITH the followers of MoM.

The problem arises that this all corresponds to the Judeo-Christian scripture we STILL HAVE TODAY (in the 21st century). For such material is the same as it was in the early 7th century, when MoM is said to have conveyed the Final Revelation. Even worse, the historical record shows that the Christian scriptures—both canonical and apocryphal—were the same in the early 7th century as they had been since their inception in the late 1st century (i.e. when they were first written down).

Therefore the textual discrepancy on which Islamic apologia depends does not exist. The Seal of the Prophets was referring to texts as they had been from the beginning; as they remained during his lifetime, and as they remain to this day. This holds true even after we take into account the fact that the authors of the Koran were working primarily off of SYRIAC sources...which did not always coincide with the material that came to be included in the Roman canon (as that canon was primarily culled from Koine Greek sources). Hence the case for corruption collapses.

Here's the MAJOR problem. The aforementioned declarations of confirmation are found even as elsewhere the Koran is forced to hold that those scriptures were IN-correct (a.k.a. "corrupted"), as explicated in 2:59/75, 3:78, 5:12-15/65-68/78-79, 11:110, 41:45, 57:27, and 62:2. These ten passages are an explicit REPUDIATION of antecedent scripture (which had been corrupted), thereby IN-validating extant scripture (that is: scripture as it existed at the time).

The question remains: What was available to the audience at that time? These passages contend that previous revelations were subsequently distorted. Yet elsewhere the book insists that the scripture that "people of the book" NOW HAVE BETWEEN THEIR HANDS (or "what their hands have written") is valid; and should be heeded. Meanwhile, "sunan" Abu Dawood relays that the Seal of the Prophet himself summoned a hard copy of the Torah, placed it on a pillow, and proclaimed that he believed in the book and the one who revealed it (Book 38; no. 4434).

YET the "Final Revelation" was needed in order to correct the record—as the material had come to be corrupted (and so was unreliable). This isn't merely a confusing message; it is an inconsistent account. This seemingly paradoxical scenario depends on two suppositions:

ONE: What we NOW KNOW as the Torah and Gospels are corrupted versions; thus accounting for the (alleged) errancy of Judaic and Christian lore; and explaining their disjuncture with Koranic accounts. (The Koran stipulates that the Torah and Gospels in their ORIGINAL form were genuine; and in keeping with all Koranic accounts.)

TWO: That MoM and his contemporaries had available to them the original (un-corrupted) versions of the Torah and Gospels...which, by that time, most Jews and Christians were—regrettably—no longer using.

The problem with this is that we know what the Torah and Gospels looked at the time of MoM's ministry. For we HAVE COPIES of the Torah and Gospels from the 7th century; and even many copies from the centuries prior to that. And those manuscripts (we can focus on scripture used by the Syriac "Eastern Church"; i.e. Nestorians) roughly correspond with the scripture we have today (and which the Assyrians STILL USE, in the form of the Peshitta).

Thus the authors of the Koran paint themselves into a corner.

To re-cap: In referring to antecedent scripture, the verse listed earlier specify: That which you can EVEN NOW hold in your hands. (2:79 is clearly talking about physical books.) 5:43-48 goes so far as to stipulate that Christians who abide by the Gospel account (i.e. the synoptic Gospels plus the Infancy Gospel of Thomas) will be in god's good graces. This passage is especially revealing, as it states that there is no need for people to consult MoM, as they ALREADY HAVE the Torah to consult; which means that (at the time of the "Final Revelation" was being delivered) the Torah was still valid.

The Koranic passage then enjoins: Let the people of the Gospel judge according to what lies therein; which means the Gospels were also still valid—and AVAILABLE—at the time. This wasn't just about listening to what some people were saying. The "Sahabah" were told that they could look to the Abrahamic scriptures that preceded the Final Revelation to SEE that the "Final Revelation" confirms the Torah and Gospels.

So what, then, of possible corruption? There MIGHT have been corruptions in the ancient lore; but—even then—it would have already occurred by MoM's lifetime. In fact, corruption almost certainly DID occur; but would have occurred in the intervening period between the late 1st and 4th centuries: long before MoM's time. There is no alternate version (that is: one in keeping with the Koran) that would have existed at the time MoM lived...let alone an "original" version that would have existed since the 1st century up to that time...YET that somehow suddenly disappeared shortly after the "Final Revelation" was delivered (so that we are now no longer privy to it).

Hence the contention that MoM could look to the available scripture does not comport with the rationalization used for the claim that a rectification was needed. The supposition that that the "Final Revelation" confirmed what went before it is therefore erroneous.

In sum: Claims of scriptural confirmation—insofar as they exist in the "Recitations"—are self-incriminating. No amount of hermeneutic chicanery can elide this fact. Attempts to reconcile these contradictory narratives involve exegetical shenanigans; but such shenanigans only serve to amplify the predicament they're meant to resolve.

Another problem exists. If the INITIAL scriptures were, indeed, corrupted, then JoN must have been teaching Islam. This is explicated in 5:65-68, which asserts that the Torah and Gospel in their original form were, indeed, correct.

Another quandary: If the Abrahamic deity had the Koran in his back pocket all along, yet refrained from using it when delivering his message through JoN, then what was he waiting for? Would he not have ANTICIPATED that JoN's teachings (which were actually the Sunnah) would be corrupted? According to this supposition, god allowed JoN to preach, then allowed the accounts of him to be corrupted. Why this sequence of events? It makes no sense. Especially in light of statements like 5:68, which tell us to stand fast by the Torah and the Gospel.

In 5:65-68 effectively says that had the other "People of the Book" (read: Jews and Christians) only believed all that had been revealed to them (in the scripture originally given to them), they would have been admitted into heaven. The "catch" here is that the Judeo-Christian scripture—as it had come to be BY THE TIME MoM WAS PREACHING—was corrupted. Hence the non-Muslim "People of the Book" were, by that point in time, following an errant version of the revelation.

All of these passages essentially say (in one way or another) that followers of both the Old and New Testaments had been correct...at least, that is, up to some point in history (i.e. until MoM's pivotal revelation). How so? The passages point to antecedent scripture as evidence for the veracity of the NEW scripture on offer (MoM's "Recitations"), thereby tying the credence of the Koran TO the Gospels and Torah...which, we must assume, were corrupted by the time MoM undertook his ministry. Yet 10:94-95 directs MoM himself to consult those (contemporaries) who have already read "the book" in

order to ascertain what the proper message is. We can only infer from this that MoM's contemporaries still had available to them the message that had originally been given.

In other words: Such passages ostensibly validate the extant Abrahamic scripture.

Considering all this, we must STILL believe that a Final Revelation was necessary. That suggests that what was available at the time somehow fell short. What are we to make of this rebuke? Again, the idea is that the original message was, at some point, distorted by careless scribes—or deliberately modified by unscrupulous interlopers—at some point between the 1st century and 4th century (as Syriac scripture had been established in the 2nd century and the Nicene canon was established by the Edict of Thessalonica c. 380). Consequently, by the time of MoM's ministry, the version with which the world was dealing was errant; and therefore null and void...so the story goes.

The main point of contention (regarding errant doctrine) was Trinitarianism—as expressed in 5:72-73. Ironically, here the Koran actually has a point. For Trinitarianism was, indeed, NOT in the original Gospels. Even so, in order for the claim (that the original version of Abrahamic scripture was corrupted) to hold water, it would have been necessary for there to have ACTUALLY BEEN an un-corrupted version that existed at some point prior to MoM's ministry...yet that had fallen into obscurity and been transplanted by the fraudulent scriptures that came to prevail. The archeological record does not support this; as the earliest versions are—it so happens—still available to us, and do NOT correspond with the "Recitations". In other words: Between the late 1st century manuscripts to the 7th century, the only thing that changed were the scriptures that different denominations favored / discarded...with one exception. {B}

The case CAN be made that subsequent versions of the Gospel were bastardizations of the original Gospel, that of Mark. Yet the glaring incommensurability between THAT Gospel and the contents of the Koran remains. The Koran rectified nothing; it simply introduced a novel take on Abrahamic lore—replete with a revamped version of "Issa" [Jesus of Nazareth], in which he was still considered the Messiah, but neither god incarnate nor god's "son" (and shorn of vicarious redemption through resurrection).

So what of the alleged scriptural corruption? 4:46 explains that many Jews distorted the "word of god"; so have come to be deceived. And that is why the Abrahamic deity saw fit to "send down" a Final Revelation: to set the record straight to a people who'd gone awry. (Meanwhile, 3:78 and 5:13 specify that some Jews twist the Torah with their tongues, not necessarily changing the scripture itself...leaving the possibility open that the CORRECT scripture still existed, yet was being neglected.) Yet even if we were to grant this, it is apparent that the material in the Koran was lifted from SYRIAC SOURCES, dating from Late Antiquity.

And so we are left in somewhat of an exegetical pickle. The Koran both contravenes and affirms said texts, thereby contradicting ITSELF.

In light of these conflicting narratives, 2:144-146 is obliged to equivocate on the matter of whether Jews and Christians will recognize MoM's message as truth or fabrication. Ultimately, Islam's holy book is forced to hold that Jews and Christians were errant in order to provide a *raison d'être* for a SEAL of all Abrahamic prophets...even as 44:30-32 stipulates that the Jews were, indeed, the chosen people ALL ALONG. This poses a cosmogenic conundrum, to put it mildly.

Interestingly, in 20:77, god even refers to the Jews as “my [current] servants”—an appellation that conflicts with most of the Koran’s other statements about the Jews. 2:122 makes allusions to Israelites / Hebrews being the chosen people, “preferred over the worlds” (whatever that means). This is a peculiar thing when attempting to justify much of the rest of the Koran’s contents, which is a repudiation of those touting pre-Mohammedan versions of Abrahamic theology.

That the “children of Israel” were eventually led astray is crucial to the Koran’s narrative; but this need not be a problem for the rest of us NOW. For, as 27:76 (ironically) informs us, the Koran will clarify everything (about which “people of the book” currently disagree). Sounds good; except for the fact that the Koran does no such thing. Indeed, it’s hard to make heads or tails of passages like 2:87-91 (which pertains to those who turned away from previous revelations) and 3:65 (which simply reminds us that the Torah and Gospels were authored after Abraham).

Question: If the Abrahamic deity helped the Jews and then the Christians with their cause (as the Koran concedes in the aforementioned passages), and yet these groups were “misled” (due to errant scripture at a later date), then the obvious question arises: What in heaven’s name was the Abrahamic deity waiting for (that is: over such a long interim)? And why did he permit people to hijack his holy writ? {C}

Regarding the matter of the alleged “corruption” (sabotage?) of former scriptures: Wouldn’t the Abrahamic deity have FORESEEN that development, and been able to address it (or even preclude it)? The Koran is adamant that—BEING god’s word—it cannot be corrupted, because god wouldn’t ALLOW his word to be corrupted. YET, he was (allegedly) perfectly fine with allowing the Hebrew Bible and New Testaments (originally a pristine record of his word) to be corrupted. So what gives? Are we to suppose that god learned from his mistakes...which, evidently, he had to make TWICE (Old and New Testaments), before he finally got it right the third time?

To cut to the chase: Why did god tarry if—all along—he knew that he would need to CORRECT said scripture by introducing a 7th-century update?

And we might inquire even further: If—as it repeatedly stipulates—the Koran somehow CORROBORATED the Abrahamic lore that already existed, how can it proceed to so blatantly contradict much of those books?

If we verify the scriptures that “the people of the book” were using...UP UNTIL Gabriel’s visit to MoM c. 610 A.D., and that material was STILL AVAILABLE for the audience to check, then why the need for the Final Revelation as it came to be? Why not simply RE-ISSUE that which had been lost?

Unless there was supplemental material. If so: Had god been holding some crucial revelations back ALL ALONG?

If, on the other hand, those texts were, indeed, “corrupted” (as Islam NEEDS them to be in order to justify its own existence), then all the Koranic passages that deign to confirm them do not make any sense. Either way, all the statements in the Koran TAKEN TOGETHER fail to accord with one another...or to explicate a coherent narrative.

The contradictions go on and on. 3:50 CONTRADICTS 41:43 by explicitly stating that the Final Revelation makes lawful some of what had theretofore been forbidden. This only makes sense if we interpret “that which has been forbidden to you” as “that which has been MISTAKENLY forbidden to you BY OTHERS, who have perverted what was originally revealed”, per 3:78. But this is a stretch. Instead, it seems to be admitting that it is offering novel material...which the Abrahamic deity had apparently been keeping in his back pocket for thousands of years.

Meanwhile, 36:7 makes little sense, as it says: “Already the word has come into effect upon most [people], so they do not believe.” This is part of the pre-destination [“qadar”] motif—whereby god proclaims that he

has intentionally mislead people (so as to damn them from the outset). Thus: Many are doomed to disbelief, as the word has ALREADY been given to them and they didn't believe it.

This is troubling. Never mind the catch-22 we encounter when we read 36:11: The only people that can be warned are those who will believe the warning.

As if to add to the confusion, we get passages like 15:90-91, 34:44, 43:21-25, and 46:10...in which the authors of the Koran seem to be attempting to clarify the matter. (Bewilderingly, the words "Fear god and obey me" are put into the mouth of Jesus of Nazareth.) And 28:76 only further convolutes things. The problem here is that the Koran is so horribly written, it is virtually impossible to ascertain what, exactly, the authors were attempting to say on this vexing matter.

If you're not confused at this point, then you're not paying attention. This farrago of (unwitting) prevarication betrays a profound theological disorientation. Evidently, the authors of the Koran were grappling for a way to reconcile a half-baked creed with the claims of its (professed) antecedents. In an effort to address the disjointed-ness of the new-fangled narrative, a jumble of disparate comments made their way into the final editions of the holy book.

JESUS?

Of the passages announcing the confirmation of extant scripture, 5:47 and 5:68 are especially peculiar, as they command Christians to judge according to what is proclaimed in their Gospels. This (effectively) entails that almost everything else in the Koran needs to be rejected; as many of the claims of Christianity and of Islam are mutually exclusive.

3:52-55 and 5:111 explicitly state that Jesus of Nazareth ("Issa") actually preached the Koran's message. No kidding. The implication here is that the accounts were later altered...yielding the grossly errant scripture on which Nicene Christianity was based. However, by the time the Final Revelation was finally delivered, the accounts were STILL VALID...given that his followers are instructed to refer to the scriptures as they currently existed (material that they had at their disposal: "between their hands"). The dilemma of reconciling extant scripture with the Koran is thereby rendered insoluble.

It's no secret that there are several passages in the Koran that validate the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Notably, 19:16-21 describes him as divinely ordained, "a perfectly formed man", "the messenger of your Lord", "a pure son", and "a revelation for mankind". (Mary's immaculate conception is also stipulated.) 57:27 tells us that god "gave [Jesus] the Gospel, and placed kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him." The early Mohammedans opted to give the New Testament their own, extensive edit—disregarding John entirely, as well as the Pauline Letters. (Can we blame them?) Having culled their version of Abrahamic lore almost exclusively from Syriac sources, they reveal the basis for their impressions. (See my essay: "Syriac Source-Material For Islam's Holy Book".)

YET...there are problematic statements about the followers of Jesus. 3:55 and 61:14 tell us that Jesus' disciples would be "upper-most" until the Day of Resurrection. It might be feasible to square this claim with the ensuing six centuries. However, it is impossible to square it with world history ever since. With Judgement Day pending, god's promise to Jesus (that his followers would be upper-most until his return) amounts to a prophetic snafu. This snafu is hardly fixed by merely asserting that Jesus' followers were really "Muslims" (as 3:52 and 5:111 do). Moreover, there is a glaring theological glitch: Jesus' following is irreconcilable with MoM's following; considering their messages were not in alignment. (Indeed, the respective FOLLOWINGS THEMSELVES are obviously discordant.)

The only way out of this theological predicament is to suppose that the movement that came to be "Christianity" did not represent an authentic following of their savior-figure. (A view with which I concur.)
~~However, the problem remains that the AUTHENTIC following of Jesus of Nazareth did not wind up~~

being “upper-most” (whether we suppose they were members of “The Way” or the “Salaf”). This ineluctable fact is in clear contradiction to the Koranic prophecy. Alternately, if those who DID prevail were the authentic followers of Jesus (“The Way”), then Islam qua Islam has a problem—as ALL Abrahamic supplicants would then be forced to accord to Nicene Christianity a divinely ordained legitimacy.

An even more laughable prophecy can be found in 3:137, which enjoins followers to go around the world so that they may witness the demise (ruination) of those cultures of the past that did not acknowledge the Abrahamic deity. This conceit (effectively: a prescription for schadenfreude) can only result from a festering resentment in desperate need of a palliative.

Such hubris is hardly in keeping with the message propounded by Jesus of Nazareth.

VALIDATION OF WHAT, EXACTLY?

One final matter is worth broaching. When it comes to extant scripture, the authors of Islam’s holy book were working with a rather sordid Abrahamic heritage; and a raft of odious precedents.

In its open hostility toward transgression, the Koran was perfectly in keeping with antecedent Judaic tenets.

According to the Torah, what other ersatz crimes should we give people the death penalty for? Here are some gems:

- Exodus 22:20 declares, “He who sacrifices to any god, save to Yahweh only, shall be utterly destroyed.”
- Exodus 22:18 declares, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”
- Exodus 35:2 declares, “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whosoever does work therein shall be put to death.”
- Leviticus 20:13 declares, “If a man also lie with a man as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”
- Leviticus 24:13-16 declares, “And he that blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him, as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemes the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.”
- Deuteronomy 22:13-21 declares, “If any man take a wife [and find] her not a virgin...they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones so that she dies.”

Splendid. (No need to mention how many innocent people were tortured and executed over the centuries due to such passages.) Never mind other gems like Psalm 137:9, extolling mass-infanticide.

As if this weren’t bad enough, the Abrahamic deity announces that he is a jealous AND VINDICTIVE god, and so would visit punishment for the transgressions of one generation upon all their descendants...for FOUR GENERATIONS. This is reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:8-10 and Numbers 14:8...as well as in Exodus 20:5 and 34:6-7. In light of the character of the Abrahamic deity, the moral credence of the scripture becomes, at best, dubious. {A}

CONCLUSION:

During the long process of cobbling together and editing of manuscripts that eventually became the Koran, an equivoque between honoring and denouncing the incumbent scripture was contrived POST HOC. This was done in an extremely shoddy manner.

In sum: The matter of (un)adulterated scripture is left un-resolved. When asserting that God's words cannot be altered once it has been given (as is done in 6:115 and 18:27) after declaring that the Torah / Gospels were God's words (as is done in 3:3-4, et. al.), the conclusion is that antecedent Abrahamic scripture could NOT have been corrupted. Add to this the claim that such (unsullied) scripture was still in existence at the (purported) time of the Recitations' composition (as is stated in 7:157, et. al.), and the adjuration that other "People Of The Book" (who were contemporaneous with the Final Revelation) should judge according to the Torah / Gospel (5:43/47/68), which they had available to them at the time, and it is clear that there was nothing in need of correcting (that is: at the time MoM would have been conducting his ministry).

So WERE the extant Abrahamic scriptures corrupted? Certainly, they NEED to have been corrupted in order for Islam's holy book to hold water; and for Islam ITSELF to have a *raison d'être*. Yet the book insists that it confirms the scripture AS IT STILL EXISTED AT THE TIME. That such a glaring paradox survived the editing process is rather odd. The authors of the "Recitations" seem not to have thought things through before making statements concerning this matter.

{A Visiting the sins of the fathers upon their descendants has a long history in Abrahamic lore. The touting of this horrific protocol was not unique to the Torah; it was echoed throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible. In addition to the four passages already listed (from the Pentateuch), it crops up in First Kings (21:29), the Book of Lamentations (5:7), the Book of Jeremiah (32:18), the Book of Isaiah (65:6-7), the Book of Esther (9:6-16), and in the Psalms (109:14). To add insult to injury, much of this involved COLLECTIVE punishment (a.k.a. genocide). Be that as it may, the precedent seems to have been tacitly countermanded in Deuteronomy 24:16, Leviticus 26:40-42, Jeremiah 31:30, and Ezekiel 18:18-20. Equivocation on such a pressing matter is indicative of a book that—LIKE THE KORAN—was cobbled together from disparate sources. (No matter. Those four deferential statements pertain to PEOPLE punishing transgressors; and so do not contradict GOD'S penchant for visiting the sins of the fathers upon their descendants.) As is the case with Islam's holy book, the Bible is a smorgasbord of mixed messages; thereby inviting one to extract whatever happens to suit one's purpose.}

{B At the behest of miaphysite theologians, Thomas of Harqel (bishop of Mabbug) and Paul of Tella, the "Orthodox" Syriac church ended up appending five books (including Revelation) to the Peshitta...yielding an updated edition (now known as the "Harklean" version) just THREE YEARS into MoM's ministry (c. 616). THAT edition had been inspired by the recommendations of Philo-xenus of Mabbug c. 508. Miaphysites were adamantly anti-Nestorian, who were Dyophysites. Here's the catch: It was Nestorians (sans the Book of Revelation) who had the most influence on the germination of Mohammedan lore. See my essay on "The Syriac Source-Material For Islam's Holy Book".}

{C 6:114-115 and 18:27 notify us that god's Word ["logos"] cannot be changed. This claim would seem to be self-evident; as nobody has power over the Abrahamic deity. Meanwhile, the man-made RECORDS OF the (alleged) Word can be corrupted. The issue here, then, is not about the nature of what god said PER SE, but about what various people CLAIMED that god said. So we are faced with the quandary: Would god would ALLOW such corruption to take place in his name?}

EPILOGUE:

Additional Comments On The History Of The Recitations

It is often contended that there is surprisingly little variation in most of the extant Koranic manuscripts (to wit: those that were not destroyed). This is question-begging in the most obvious way. It simply indicates that only those manuscripts that were not highly variant were retained within Dar al-Islam. In other words:

We end up finding exactly what we should expect to find; and have difficulty finding exactly what we should expect should be difficult to find.

Here, it's worth quoting John Stuart Mill: "So long as opinion is strongly rooted in feelings, it gains rather than loses instability by having a preponderating weight of argument against it. For if it were accepted as the result of [sound] argument, the refutation of the argument might shake the solidity of the conviction. When it rests solely on feeling, the worse it fares in argumentative contest; and the more persuaded adherents [read: True Believers] are that their feeling must have some deeper ground, which the arguments do not reach. And while the feeling remains, it is always throwing up fresh entrenchments of [rationalization] to repair any breach made in the old [rationalization]."

I am under no illusions that weighing in on this topic will elicit anything but contempt from hidebound ideologues. But since nobody else seemed to be taking the reins on the matter, the task seemed ripe for the picking. I figured: SOMEONE'S gotta do it. If no one else is going to, then it may as well be me. (The trick is to not let one's heterodoxy become self-ingratiating. Pariah status is not one to be coveted.)

Over the last century, extensive work has been done on this topic—starting with Richard Bell's "The Origin Of Islam In Its Christian Environment" (1926) and Charles Cutler Torrey's "The Jewish Foundations Of Islam" (1933). A dozen other worthwhile sources:

- Patricia Crone's "Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World" (1977)
- J. Spencer Trimingham's "Christianity Among The Arabs In Pre-Islamic Times" (1979)
- Reuven Firestone's "Journeys In Holy Lands: The Evolution Of The Abraham-Ishmael Legends In Islamic Exegesis" (1990)
- F.E. Peters' "Muhammed And The Origins Of Islam" (1994)
- Albrecht Noth's "The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-critical Study" (1994)
- Michael Lecker's "Muslims, Jews, And Pagans: Studies On Early Islamic Medina" (1995)
- Robert Hoyland's "Arabia And The Arabs: From the Bronze Age To The Coming Of Islam" (2001)
- Jonathan Berkey's "The Formation Of Islam: Religion And Society In The Near East" (2003)
- Gordon Newby's "A History Of The Jews Of Arabia" (2009)
- Amira El-Zein's "Islam, Arabs, And The Intelligent World Of The Jinn" (2009)
- Neal Robinson's "Islam: A Concise Introduction" (2013)
- "Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam" —ed. Francisco del Rio Sanchez (2018)

Also notable from Routledge is "The Formation Of The Classical Islamic World", edited by F.E. Peters (especially vol. 3: "The Arabs And Arabia On The Eve Of Islam").

Another good reference is Robert Hoyland's "The Jews Of The Hijaz In The Quran And In Their Inscriptions" in "New Perspectives On The Quran" (p. 91–216). Gabriel Said Reynolds (of Notre Dame and the IQSA) was the editor of "The Quran In Its Historical Context" (2007) and its sequel, "New Perspectives On The Quran" (2011), both from the Routledge Studies series.

Though a plethora of books have been written on the history of Islam, no comprehensive book has ever been attempted on the history of the Koran.* This is because simply suggesting that there is any history to uncover is forbidden. In polite circles, even insinuating that it was man-made is verboten. For any attempt to articulate any historical background insinuates there exists a textual genealogy to be accounted for; which implies a derivative (terrestrial) nature. The gesture would undermine the belief that Islam's holy book is eternal, sent down from "allah", and so has no "history" in the usual chronological sense. It only has a cosmogony. And so it has gone that, according to conventional wisdom (within Dar al-Islam), there is no genealogy of the "Recitations" PER SE; so there is no history to be written by anyone, anywhere, at any time. Period.

Per the prevailing (Reactionary) mindset, merely raising questions about the DEVELOPMENT of Islam's holy book is itself sacrilegious, as it insinuates that the content isn't timeless. Consequently, in order to conduct a proper inquiry, one must extricate oneself from this discursive quagmire and commit an act of heresy.

Hence the need for a new paradigm within which it is fine to ask about, say, the Syriac origins of the Koran. It is hard to fully understand what made the Koran the Koran without coming to terms with this crucial point.

As the official story (within Dar al-Islam) goes, the book's contents have existed since the beginning of time. All there is to say on the matter, we are notified, is as follows: The "Recitations" went from the Abrahamic deity's speech—via the archangel Gabriel's supernatural conveyance—directly to MoM's ears, and then from MoM's lips to his followers' ears...and subsequently to—two decades later—Zayd ibn Thabit's pen. THAT is the Uthmanic Koran...which is identical to the Koran that is used today. End of story.

The contention, then, is that the current version of the book—a transcript of meticulously preserved orality—has existed unaltered since Uthman ibn Affan (the third Rashidun caliph) commissioned his scribe (the aforesaid Zayd ibn Thabit) to make an official compilation of the "Recitations" in the 650's. Hence the book we now have (the so-called "Cairo" edition, composed in Classical Arabic by a cadre of ulema at Al-Azhar University in the spring of 1924) is an exact replica of the "Uthman" edition (a transcript which would not have been composed in Classical Arabic, as Classical Arabic did not yet exist). That's all there is to know. To suppose anything else is to court blasphemy.

Even if we assume—against all common sense—that what is now known as "al-Qur'an" has been (literally) unaltered since its original incarnation was compiled under Uthman (c. 653-56), there is still much reason to be highly suspect of the fidelity of its contents. For that pivotal interlude occurred more than two decades after MoM's death. It is an understatement to note that much can happen to orally-transmitted folklore during the course of an entire generation...amongst highly superstitious, mostly illiterate Bedouins under the tutelage of nascent caliphs jockeying for power.

Bottom line: Nobody knows how the current version of the Koran eventually came to be how it is. There is scant evidence that would indicate the exact details of the process that yielded the book that is now known as the Koran. All we CAN say for sure is that, WHATEVER happened, MANY things happened; and we will never know exactly what.

What we DO know is that during the first two centuries of caliphs, there was—invariably—staunch vested interest in things being recorded in a certain way (namely, a way of which the caliphs approved). Of what DID they approve? Well, of course, whatever suited their own interests (i.e. abetted their agenda); and so they naturally selected material to be deemed acceptable in the manner they saw fit.

This proclivity was especially salient during the first three caliphates: that of Abu Bakr (632-634), that of Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644), and that of Uthman ibn Affan (from 644-656). As we've seen, each man (christened "rashidun") cobbled together his own version of the Mohammedan lore; yet we will never have any idea what, exactly, any of them actually did (in terms of amendments or redactions). (Abu Bakr, arguably MoM's closest confidant, never wrote anything down. The only accounts of him are found in the Hadith are flagrantly biased sources composed centuries later.) The degree to which the "Cairo" version (compiled in the spring of 1924 by a conclave of "ulema") can be attributed to the activities of the "Rashidun" caliphs, though, shall remain forever indeterminate.

The significant amount of disagreement that occurred during Islam's earliest epoch (essentially: the Faith's embryonic stage) indicates how UN-reliable any verdict ended up being. Note, for example, the fatal feud between MoM's eldest daughter, Zayneb, and his closest confidant, Abu Bakr. This would be extremely peculiar if we were to suppose that the Mohammedan phenomenon were somehow divinely ordained; and a VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT of the Final Revelation had been established at the time.

Clearly, the "Recitations" were still in gestation at the time—being cobbled together without any clear indication of what was (ultimately) to be retained. In the midst of all this, scribes were not so much PRESERVING a finished work as contributing—each in his own way—to what was a work-in-progress.

We should bear in mind that the "Recitations" as first conceived were geared primarily toward Syriac-speaking, illiterate Bedouins—many of whom were likely already roughly familiar with bits of Abrahamic lore. Indeed, denizens of the Hijaz had been made OBLIQUELY privy to relevant material via the propagation of apocrypha culled from Syriac scripture that was widely-circulated in the region at the time. This is made obvious by the Koran's countenancing of said apocrypha. (See my essay on the Syriac source-material for Islam's holy book.)

There are myriad indications that the "Recitations" were composed after MoM's lifetime. Notable is the mention of the "Night Journey" in the opening verse of Surah 17, where we're told that the flying horse ["buraq"] whisked MoM away from the masjid al-Haraam (the sacred prayer-site in Mecca) to the masjid al-Aqsa (the farthest prayer-site, conjectured to be an allusion to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem). The problem, of course, is that there was no mosque—in any sense of the word—in Jerusalem at that time. The Dome of the Rock was erected in the 690's. And it is unlikely the early Mohammedans would have referred to the Jewish / Christian holy place at the Temple Mount as a "masjid".

As I discuss in my essay on the "Syriac Source Material For Islam's Holy Book", in its earliest days, the major point of contention for the Mohammedan movement was the matter of Trinitarianism. Recall that the earliest instance of a CA inscription is on the Dome of the Rock (on the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem, rendered during the last decade of the 7th century—likely at the behest of Abd al-Malik. It is a strident anti-Trinitarian polemic that used several bits of text that wound up in the "Recitations". Tellingly, the sequencing of the text in the inscription does not correspond to its occurrence in the Koran. Moreover, it uses the first instead of the third person (as in the Koran).

The inscription even includes a clause in the opening line about "the praised one" (that god has no associates) that did not end up in the Shahadah. In fact, the honorific "Mu-H-M-D" may well have been referring to Jesus of Nazareth, in that the rest of the passage is ONLY about Jesus...and not about some other figure. This makes sense, as—read this way—the statement simply means that Jesus (the praised one)

is MERELY god's messenger (rasul allah), not his associate (i.e. god's son; god incarnate).

For the case that "Mu-H-M-D" was an honorific rather than a given name, see **Appendix 3** below.

Clearly, the "Recitations" as they came to be did not yet exist at the time this inscription was composed. In fact, Ockham's Razor entails that the Koran culled such material from the Dome of the Rock, not vice versa.

Also note that the inscription of (what would become) Surah 17 was not added until the 16th century. This is a peculiar omission if the Temple Mount had been the place where the fabled "Night Journey" was supposed to have occurred. For THAT was the rationale for erecting the dome at the particular location (the farthest masjid) in the first place.

In spite of all this, it suffices for most Muslims to now assert, post hoc, that the anointed incarnation of the Koran (the "Cairo" version) is identical to whatever Uthman held in his hands (Zayd's compilation). This is, of course, an absurd assertion to make. But even if that WERE the case, chances are that Zayd's "mushaf" could hardly reflect exactly what MoM actually said, word for word, in its entirety. In fact, even assuming unimpeachable honesty (in addition to preternatural mnemonic abilities) of every single amanuensis involved in this (extemporaneous) process of oral transmission, maintaining perfect fidelity every step of the way—over the course of CENTURIES—would still have been an intractable task.

Attempts to divine what the INITIAL messages in this "Final Revelation" might have been is therefore a fool's errand. Anthropologist Ian Morris put it best: "The greatest triumph of modern philology has been to reveal that in between splitting, fighting, damning, and persecuting one another, the successors found time to write and rewrite their sacred books so many times that sifting the texts for their original meaning can be virtually impossible" ("Why The West Rules—For Now"; p. 255).

Even more confounding is the narrative that the Koran is an eternal book ("al-Lawh al-Mahfuz") that has existed since the beginning of time—begging the question: Why did god keep it under wraps until 610 A.D.?

It is hard to square this with the narrative that god sent previous revelations (starting with Abraham, through Moses, all the way to Jesus), which were eventually corrupted...thus creating the need for a corrective: the FINAL revelation...which had been available ALL ALONG.

If the corrective had existed since the beginning of time, then why bother with the previous revelations? If god knew (all along) that the previous revelations were destined to be corrupted...thereby creating the need for the final correction (a correction that had already been in existence)...then what was the point of all the prophetic rigamarole prior to the Seal of the Prophets?

{* ...that is, pace some renegade efforts by Ibn Warraq. In my essays on the Syriac origins of the Koran, I mention a few books that broach the topic—notably Gabriel Said Reynolds' "The Qur'an In Its Historical Context" and "New Perspectives On The Qur'an"; both from the Routledge Studies series. As for pulp-trash, the list is endless. See Kenneth Cragg, Michael Sells, Jonathan A.C. Brown, Yahiya Emerick, Muhammad Asad (who's "The Message of the Qur'an was inspired by Muhammad Abduh), and Garry Wills for hyper-romanticized depictions of the Koran. Each is a case-study in unabashed eisegesis. Then there are the usual suspects: a longer roster of charlatans that includes Karen Armstrong, Reza Aslan, Martin Lings, Mark Hansen (a.k.a. "Hamza Yusuf"), Timothy Winter (a.k.a. "Abdal Hakim Murad"), etc. }

APPENDIX 3:

“Mu-H-M-D” As An Honorific

The appellation, “Muhammad” was likely derived from—and initially used by proto-Islamic sources as—an honorific (that is: a general descriptor, or even a formal title) rather than the given name of one particular person.

“Mu-H-M-D” means “one who is praised”; as **H-M-D** is the Semitic root for “praise”. (This root—in one form or another—occurs in the Koran over a hundred times.) Hence the familiar designation can be taken as a general descriptor rather than as a proper name—an interpretation supported by the fact that the messenger (“rasul”) of the book’s protagonist (the Abrahamic deity) is actually mentioned so many times, YET is only referred to as “Mu-H-M-D” [a general descriptor meaning “one who is praised”] on FOUR occasions: 3:144, 33:40, 47:2, and 48:29. Every other time this individual (the putative “nabi”) is referenced, the authors of the Koran use alternative monikers. {1} Behold a dozen:

- “bashir” [announcer; qua maker of an announcement] as in 2:119 (Medinan) {2}
- “noor” [light] as in 5:15 (Medinan)
- “nadhir” [bearer of a warning; from the term for warning, “tadhir”] as in 11:2 (Meccan)
- “mu-bashir” [announcer; qua one who bears good news] as in 11:2 (Meccan) {2}
- “da’i” [one who implores] as in 12:108 (Meccan)
- “khatam an-nabiyyin” [seal of the prophets] as in 33:40 (Medinan)
- “shahid” [witness] as in 33:45 (Medinan) {2}
- “siraj munir” [lamp] as in 33:46 (Medinan)
- “[a]H-M-D” [praiseworthy] as in 61:6 (Medinan)
- “mu-zamil” [one who is wrapped (in clothing); from the root “Z-M-L”] as in the title of Surah 73, and its opening ayah (Meccan)
- “mu-dathir” [one who is covered (in clothing); from the root “D-Th-R”] as in the title of Surah 74, and its opening ayah (Meccan)
- “mu-dakir” [one who reminds; from the root for reminder, “D-K-R”] as in 88:21 (Meccan) {3}

Of the twelve different chapters in which the messenger of the book’s protagonist is referenced (in one way or another), half are Meccan, half are Medinan. Interestingly, in Surah 33 alone, he is referred to in four different ways. In a single verse (11:2), he is referred to both as the bearer of a warning and as the bearer of good news. (The warning regards the possibility of being consigned to perdition. The good news regards the prospect of being admitted into paradise.)

Note that by simply appending the prefix “**Mu-**” (M with a duma) to certain words, a novel moniker can be derived. Generally, “Mu-” serves to render X into “one who is / does / provides X”. {4} Take, for instance, “B-R-K” (the Semitic root, meaning “knee”). Thus “barak” means “to kneel” (with the connotation: to prostrate oneself; to receive a blessing). Hence “mu-barak” simply means “one who kneels” (with the connotation: one who is penitent). Meanwhile, “baraka[h]” means “blessing”; so “mu-barak” (sans the fathah appended at the end) can be interpreted as one who is blessed. {5}

The most obvious example of this lexical feature is, of course, “Muslim” (one who submits), which is derived from appending “Mu-” to “aslim” [alt. “aslama”; “salim”; “islam”; from the Semitic root, “S-L-M”], which simply means “to submit” (i.e. to subordinate oneself). (Note: This is distinct from “shalom” / “s[h]alem” / “salam”, which means “peace”.) {6} Tellingly, the use of the (plural) moniker, “mu-minun” / “mu-mineen” in the Koran denotes (Abrahamic) “believers” rather than members of an entirely newfangled religion. {19}

Is it feasible that an honorific was retroactively treated as a given name? Yes. For there were other cases where a general descriptor was eventually rendered an appellation for specific people. For instance, “Mu-S-L-M” was eventually rendered a proper name (as with the author of the second-most-vaunted Hadith collection).

In the Koran, the Last Prophet was referred to as “mu-bashir”, “mu-zamil”, “mu-dathir”, and “mu-tadhkir”. We might ask if there are any other appellations for the Last Prophet in which “Mu-” modifies a verb. Lo and behold: “istafa” (to choose; to be chosen) yields “mustafa” (chosen one), which—yes—eventually became another common way to refer to MoM.

Another point: In the Koran, we find that there is usage of “reminder” qua memo (“D-K-R”) throughout the book (e.g. 51:55; in reference to the Koran itself). Meanwhile, we find “reminder” qua one who delivers the memo (“Mu-D-K-R”) elsewhere in the book (e.g. 88:21; in reference to a messenger). This should be an “A-ha!” moment.

“Mu-”, can be added to many other words to yield derivatives. {7} 70 more examples should suffice to illustrate this:

1. “talib” (to seek) → “mutalib” (one who seeks [knowledge], as in a student; one who is sought after) {8}
2. “shahada[a]” (to witness) → “mushahada[h]” (one who witnesses)
3. “sabbaha” / “sabbihu” [alt. “sabhana”] (to glorify) → “musabbiha” (one who glorifies)
4. “tawi” (obedience) → “mutawi” (one who obeys) {9}
5. “lika” (to destroy) → “muhlika” (one who destroys)
6. “qatala” (to kill) → “muqtal[a]” (one who kills)
7. “i’ihya” (revival) : muhy[i] (one who revives)
8. “tarjim” (translation) → mutarjim (one who translates)
9. “baligh” (eloquence) → mubaligh (one who is eloquent)
10. “nafiq” (hypocrisy) → munafiq (hypocrite)
11. “darrasa” / “daris” (to teach) → “mudaris” (teacher) [venue of teaching: “madrasa”]
12. “hisba” (enforcement of Islamic policies) → “muhtasib” (one who enforces Islamic policies)
13. “sharaf” (honor) → “musharaf” (one who is honored; “mu-izz” is one who honors)
14. “sharif” (nobility) → “musharif” (one who is noble)
15. “H-S-N” (beautification / goodness) → “mu-h[a]s[a]n” (one who beautifies / makes good)
16. “min” (to believe) [alt. “iman” (faith)] → “mumin” (one who believes / has faith) {10}
17. “ammar” (piety) → “muammar” (one who is pious)
18. “sin” (good) → “muhsin” (one who is / does good)
19. “sa’b” (disagreeable / difficult) → “musa’b” (one who is disagreeable; alt. used for one who can overcome difficulty)
20. “aqib” (to follow) → “mu[a]qib” (one who follows; one who is followed)
21. “itazala” (to separate) → “mutazila” (one who separates; one who is separated from)
22. “qawam” (to resist) → “muqawam[ah]” (one who resists)
23. “hafiz” (to keep / guard) → “muhafiz” (one who keeps / guards)
24. “rizq” (to provide) → “murtazak” (one who provides)
25. “lazim” (to need—or be obligated—to) → “mulazim” (one who needs—or is obligated—to)
26. “qadam” / “qattam” (to be determined to do something / make something happen / bring about a certain state of affairs) → “muqadam” / “muqattam” (one who is so determined; “mu-qtadir” is one who determines, based on “Q-D-R”)
27. “kalam” (verbiage qua rhetoric; alt. to apologize; apology) → “mutakalim” (an apologist)

28. “nabbi” (a prophet) → “mutanabbi” (one who may be a prophet)
29. “sid” (corruption / disruption) → “mufsid” (one who engages in corruption / disruption)
30. “harb” (war) → “muharib[ah]” (one who wages war; i.e. against god) {11}
31. “shirk” (idolatry) → “mushrik” [alt. “musrif”] (one who engages in idolatry)
32. “irtidad” / “irtadda” [alt. “riddah”] (apostasy) → “murtad” (apostate)
33. “nafiq” (hypocrisy) → “munafiq” (hypocrite)
34. “asab” (solidarity) → “muta’asib” (one who is in solidarity; as in “asabiyyah”)
35. “dawa” (to promulgate the Faith) → “mutawa” / “muta’dawa” (one who engages in “dawa”, esp. in the form of enforcing sharia; alt. “da’i”; i.e. religious police)
36. “isnad” (chain of narration) → “musnad” (one coming from a chain of narration)
37. “[ta]watur” (succession) → “mutawatir” (one coming from a succession)
38. “thawat” (esteem) → “muthawat[ir]” (one who is esteemed) {13}
39. “noor” (light) → “munir” (one who is illuminated)
40. “zafar” (victory) → “muzafar” (one who is victorious)
41. “kabbir” (greatness / majesty) → “mutakabbir” (one who is great / majestic)
42. “zahir” (support / protection) → “muzahir” (one who supports / defends)
43. “hijra” (migration) → “muhajir” (one who migrates; specifically, one who partook in the ORIGINAL migration from Mecca to Medina with MoM)
44. “wahid” (peerless-ness) → “muwahid” (one who is peerless)
45. “qadir” (destiny) → “muqadir” (one who is destined)
46. “been” (clarity) → “mubeen” (one who is clear)
47. “tahid” (to unite or be united; as in “tawhid”) → “mutahid[ah]” (one who is united with)
48. “taqlid” (to be subservient) → “muqalid” (one who is subservient)
49. “sabbaha” (to proclaim perfection) → “musabbiha” (one who proclaims perfection)
50. “ta-R-T-L” (to recite properly) → “muratil” (one who recites properly)
51. “tajwid” (to recite melodiously) → “mujawid” (one who recites melodiously)
52. “tajdid” (renewal / revival) → “mujaddid” (one who renews / revives)
53. “hadith” (traditional teachings) → “muhadith” (one who abides by—or is well-versed in—the traditional teachings)
54. “hijab” (head-scarf) → “muhajab[ah]” (one who wears a head-scarf; alt. “hijabi”)
55. “fatwa” (edict) → “mufti” (one who gives edicts)
56. “salat” (prayer) → “musala” (one who prays)
57. “adhan” (prayer call) → “muadhin” (one who issues the prayer call; alt. “muezzin”)
58. “rashid” [alt. “irshad”] (maturity / being rightly-guided) → “murshid” (one who is mature / rightly-guided; i.e. a mentor) {14}
59. “rid” (will-power, commitment) → “murid” (one who is committed) {15}
60. “nadhir” (warning) → “mundhir” (one who warns)
61. “hasiba” (to reckon) → “muhasaba” (one who reckons)
62. “tafsir” (exegesis) → “mufasir” (one who engages in exegesis)
63. “arsala” (to send) → “mursala” (one who is sent) {16}
64. “taffif” (trivial) → “mutaffif” (one who trivializes)
65. “mihna” (test) → “mumtahana” (one who is tested)
66. “tashadud” (extreme / vehement) → “mutashadid” (one who is extreme / vehement)
67. “tajsim” (positing a corporeal deity) → “mujassim[a]” (one who thinks that god has a body)
68. “qatul” (to fight) → “muqatil” (one who fights)
69. “ijtihad” (reasoning) → “mujtahid” (one who engages in reasoning) {17}
70. “jihad” (struggle) → “mujahid” (one who engages in a struggle) {18}

In the Koran, this nomenclature is even used to describe the Abrahamic deity:

- “mu-ta-kaab” / “mu-ta-kabbir” (one who is great: “akbar”)
- “mu-sawwir” (one who designs)
- “mu-jib” (one who responds / answers)
- “mu-haymin” (one who has authority)
- “mu-ntaqim” (one who avenges)
- “mu-id” (one who restores)
- “mu-mit” (one who brings death)
- “mu-bdi” (one who initiates / originates)
- “mu-qtadir” (one who is powerful)
- “mu-qaddim” (one who produces)
- “mu-ta-ali” (one who is exalted)
- “mu-qsit” (one who is equitable)

Interestingly, the Koran’s protagonist is ALSO described as “H-M-D” (“praiseworthy” without the “mu-”). That appellation occurs on four occasions (14:8, 31:12/26, and 41:42). Clearly, this was an honorific (i.e. a general descriptor, used for exaltation).

The first Salafis (namely, the anti-Ali’d forces who pioneered “takfir”) referred to themselves as “Mu-hakima”, which means those who honor “hukm” [god’s judgement].

One does not need to be a philologist to see the same thing is happening by adding “Mu-” to “H-M-D” (thus rendering “praise” into “one who is praised”). {20} The catch, though, is that NONE of these were proper names in the 6th century.

At no point do the authors of the “Recitations” see fit to explicitly state what the last prophet’s given name was—as in: “His name was X” or “People called him X”. This is a peculiar omission if we presume it is important to stipulate the (specific) identity of the Seal of the Prophets. 3:144 states that “the praised one” is only a messenger. 33:40 states that “the praised one” is not the father of any of “your men”, but is god’s messenger and the seal of the prophets. 47:2 refers to those who believe in what has been revealed to “the praised one”. And 48:29 states that “the praised one” is god’s messenger (before specifying that those who are with him are to be severe against non-believers).

Moreover, at no point does the book’s protagonist (the Abrahamic deity) address his messenger as “Mohammed” (even when speaking to him personally). Why not? This is peculiar if that were, indeed, the messenger’s given name. However, it is NOT peculiar if the moniker simply meant “he who is praised”, as god himself would not refer to him in such a manner when addressing him. (God doesn’t praise his own messenger.) Indeed, when addressing him, the protagonist of the Koran calls him “you who wraps himself” (73:1) and “you who covers himself” (74:1). These are oblique references that would make no sense if the addressee were actually named “Mohammed”. Needless to say, designating someone simply as the one who is CLOTHED (i.e. not naked) is peculiarly vague. {22}

If “Mu-H-M-D” were, indeed, merely (just another) general descriptor for the man serving as the narrative’s focal point, we would expect to find two things in the Koran:

I Other places where he is referred to as simply “H-M-D” (sans the prefix, “Mu-”).

II Other monikers used for him whereby in one place there is only the root, and elsewhere where there is the root plus the prefix “Mu-”.

As it just so happens, BOTH things occur in Islam’s holy book. The former occurs in 61:6. The latter

occurs first in 2:119, then in 11:2 (with “bashir” and “Mu-bashir”). {2} This would indicate not only that “Mu-H-M-D” MIGHT have been a general descriptor (as with those listed above); it indicates that it MOST LIKELY WAS a general descriptor (just like all the others). To wit: The nomenclature did the same thing with “H-M-D” as it did with “bashir”. In a sense, the patriarch of the movement in question may just as well have been referred to as “Mubashir”.

In various other places, the Last Prophet is referred to as “Mu-Qaffi” [one who is the terminus], as in “Seal of the Prophets”. Even in the “sahih” Hadith record (that of Muslim), it is written that the Last Prophet HIMSELF declared that “Mu-H-M-D” was merely one of several monikers by which he was to be known. “I have many names. I am Muhammed. I am Ahmed. I am al-Mahi [the eraser]. I am al-Hashir [the gatherer]. I am al-Aqib [that after which there will be none].”

In the “sirat” (biographical material), the prophet’s father is sometimes referred to as “Abu al-Qasim” (father of the distributor). It is also telling that the earliest accounts of the leader of the Arabians (those referenced by Ibn Ishaq) refer to him primarily as a “ghazi” (“raider”) per his vocation: undertaking “ghazawat” [alt. “maghazi”] (“raids”).

When the Ishmaelites / Saracens invaded Jerusalem c. 634, chronicles refer to them not as “Muslims”, but as—well—Ishmaelites / Saracens. They are described in great detail, yet at no point is it mentioned that there is any new religion, new holy scripture...or even a new prophet, designated by name. (This is attested in the “Didaskalia Iakoubou”; “Teaching Of Jacob”.) Here, reference to a “Mu-H-M-D” clearly did not pertain to a specific person who’d died c. 632. The fact that the appellation WAS used in this context demonstrates that it was used as an honorific.

Another clue: There have been two 7th-century coins that have been found whereon there was a Syriac inscription referring to a “Mu-H-M-D”. BOTH include a cross; which means that neither had anything to do with a creed that explicitly REJECTED the lore affiliated with such iconography (as Islam eventually would). Clearly, the moniker was being used as an honorific, not as a given name.

Note that other iconography (the crescent moon, used by Arab pagans) and other Semitic phraseology (“bi-ism-ullah”; meaning “by the name of god”) pre-dated the emergence of Islam as a distinct new religion...later incorporated into the new creed. So it is reasonable to assume that such onomastic cooptation occurred with figureheads as well.

As with the four passages in the Koran that use the moniker, “praised one” (3:144, 33:40, 47:2, and 48:29), the inscription on the Dome of the Rock—commissioned by Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik—simply states that the “praised one” (Mu-H-M-D) is the “messenger of god” (“rasul allah”; that is: one who was sent messages by god). It was Abd al-Malik who first minted coins that referred to “praised one”. That all occurred in the last decade of the 7th century.

What historical figure may have inspired the legendary figure referred to in this manner? The most likely candidate is the (Nestorian) Lakhmid king, Iyas ibn Kab[i]s[h]ah of Hira (alt. “Tayaye”), who was ousted by the Sassanids c. 622. He promptly joined the Saracens, then inaugurated a regime in Petra. He THEN came to be referred to as...you guessed it: the “praised one”. That occurred the EXACT SAME YEAR that the Ishmaelites (retroactively) designated as the time that a distinct identity was established. This is too much of a coincidence to blithely dismiss.

Another exigency may serve as an indication that “Mohammed” was not a GIVEN name (vis a vis the Last Prophet): An absence of anyone else in the Hijaz during the late 6th century who was given that particular name. If it was a given name in c. 570 (when MoM was seen as just a regular infant), then surely he would

have been given a name that other regular infants were being given. As it turns out, there is no record of anyone by that given name in pre-Islamic Arabian sources. Indeed, there is no record of anyone with this name until the Hadith were composed (in which case, some were retroactively assigned the name). In other words, “Muhammad” was not a name that a Qurayshi infant would have been given by pagan parents in 570.

Bear in mind that, until his first revelation in 610, the man on whom the Prophet Mohammed is based was, we are told, none-the-wiser about the Abrahamic deity—let alone privy to any special relation he may have had with that deity. A name meaning “one who is praised” IN CA would not have made much sense in a 6th-century Bedouin culture—that is: amongst people who spoke Hijazi Syriac and worshiped pagan gods. And it certainly would not have been the given name for a baby boy that was seen as just another baby boy.

Pre-Islamic Qurayshi names may have included “Syed” / “Sa[y]id”, “Imr[a]”, “Umaiya”, “Qusay[y]” / “Qays”, “Nufayl”, and “Zuhayr”; but the given name “Mohammed” did not exist at the time. {23}

Meanwhile, several given names SINCE the advent of Islam exhibit the same structure—as with “Mu-ta” / “Mu-than[n]a” [one who is obeyed], “Mu-faddal” [one who is chosen], and “Mu-tahhar” [one who is purified]...as well as uses of some of the aforementioned terms (such as “Munir”, “Mubarak”, and “Mustafa”).

Though “[a-]H-M-D” is the Hebraic root for “lovely” (and is used as such in the Hebrew Bible), its use for a given male name (as with roots like “H-K-M” or “H-S-N” or “A-B-D”) seemed to be uniquely Arabic. {24} Yet Arabic did not yet exist as a lingua franca in the 6th century. Moreover, many of the Arabicized Hebrew names (names from the Old Testament for which Syriac—and, subsequently, Arabic—versions eventually emerged) did not yet exist. In Arab communities that practiced Abrahamic lore, people retained either the Hebraic versions of their Old Testament names or the SYRIAC versions thereof.

OTHER cases in which figures in Islamic lore were retroactively named would be incriminating on this score. Lo and behold: The parents of MoM were ALSO re-named. His father was christened “Abd-ullah” [slave of god] and his mother “Amina” [faithful woman]. Such monikers were obviously contrived POST HOC; as the Bedouin couple were supposed to have been pagan. This revamped onomastic recalls the naming of the Jewish carpenter from Galilee (the “Nazarene”) who became a renowned preacher: “Yeshuah” simply meant “redeemer” in Aramaic. Surely, Miriam—a humble Jewish peasant—would not have given her son this name at birth.

Prior to caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (at the end of the 7th century), uniquely Arabic names—as well as Arabicized Hebrew names—did not exist. In other words: All of these monikers are most likely post-hoc inventions. To Recapitulate: The language of western Arabia at the time was the Hijazi dialect of Syriac (which eventually came to use the Kufic script). Nabataean was the alphabet that—via Kufic—influenced CA script. This explains why the earliest Korans were written in Syriac, using Kufic script.

Even more tellingly, the earliest known reference to a “Mu-H-M-D” [praised one] leading the Ishmaelites occurs in a Syriac chronicle c. 640’s (the aforementioned “Teaching Of Jacob”). Other than demonstrating the Syriac origins of Mohammedan lore, there’s an insoluble problem: The passage mentions “a battle between the Romans and the Arabs of ‘Mu-H-M-D’ in Palestine twelve miles east of Gaza” that occurred in the year 634. (!) THAT means that the vaunted moniker was used FOR LEADERS OTHER THAN the prophet-in-question (who, by that point, had been dead for a couple years).

Another indication that “Mu-H-M-D” was initially used as an honorific (“praised one”) rather than as a proper name is its first appearance: In the inscription on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem from the last

decade of the 7th century. The appellation is used ONLY ONCE, at the beginning of the inscription—an inscription, it turns out, that thereafter pertains to Jesus of Nazareth. (Bear in mind that JoN is himself considered a “nabi” (prophet) in Islam.) The statement is devoted to denouncing the Trinitarian view of the Abrahamic deity, which means countermanding Pauline Christology (to wit: the divination of JoN).

Hence, in the inscription, the term is used as a general descriptor. That it is used just once, in passing (in the opening line) is telling. Rather than promoting a distinct new religion, or even mentioning a distinct new holy book, the rest of the inscription focuses on a rebuke of Trinitarianism. Recall that this singular statement was the most auspicious encapsulation of the Ishmaelites’ creed at the time.

The inscription on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, specifies that “Mu-H-M-D” is a servant and messenger of god. It then goes on to specify that JoN (son of Mary) was the Messiah, as well as a servant and messenger of god; and that Mary (mother of JoN) was a messenger of god. The moniker, “Mu-H-M-D” is only used once, while the other names are invoked numerous times. The primary purpose of the inscription is to rebuke Trinitarianism.

And so it went: A “Mu-H-M-D” was not mentioned until the early 690’s (six decades after the prophet’s death); during the reign of Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik ibn Marwan. That is: All that time, during the conquests, the Arabians (variously known as “Ishmaelites”, “Hagarenes”, or “Saracens”) never saw fit to mention anyone with this moniker as a given name, NOR any holy book, NOR a novel religion.

So WHAT WAS the (actual) name of the man conventionally referred to as “Mohammed”, the Prophet of Islam? Insofar as a “praised one” existed in the germinating Mohammedan movement (as a moniker for its patriarch), that quasi-historic figure’s GIVEN name is forever lost to history. But that needn’t be a problem. It makes no difference what his birth-name really was...any more than it matters what the birth-name of, say, Christopher Columbus might have been. (Hint: It certainly wasn’t “Christopher Columbus”.) It’s all rather beside the point. {29}

To reiterate: there is a historical figure that likely inspired the legendary figure referred to as “Mu-H-M-D” [“praised one”]: the (Nestorian) Lakhmid king, Iyas ibn Kab[i]s[h]ah of Hira (alt. “Tayaye”). He was ousted by the Sassanids c. 622; and promptly joined the Saracens. He then inaugurated a regime in—you guessed it—Petra; and—sure enough—came to be referred to as “praised one”. Lo and behold: This occurred the SAME YEAR that the Ishmaelites (retroactively) established a distinct identity.

This makes sense, as the “Didaskalia Iakobou” [“Teaching / Doctrine of Jacob”] (composed in the late 630’s) refers to a sword-wielding Saracen prophet (described as “H-M-D”) who propounded the Abrahamic creed...and spoke SYRIAC.

The Syriac work, “Homily For The Child Saints Of Babylon” c. 640 refers to “the Saracens who are oppressors” (and who engage in a month of fasting). Around the same time, the Syriac chronicler now known as “Thomas the Presbyter” composed his Chronicle; and never referred to a specific prophet (by name), a new holy book, OR an entirely novel religion. Meanwhile, the biography of Gabriel of Beth Qustan (who was the Syriac Bishop of Tur Abdin) refers to this new group as the “sons of Hagar”; and mentions a s[h]ultan[a], “Umar bar Khattab” who ruled from G-z-r[t]a (present-day Cizre / al-Jazira). In other words, the Rashidun caliphs were ruling from the Northern Levant; NOT from Arabia.

We might note that the first reference to “Mu-H-M-D” was by an Armenian writer, Sebeos, who referred to the Arab conquerors NOT as “Muslims”, but as the “sons of Ishmael”. Their leader, he noted, was designated “Mahmed”, which is evidently the moniker by which the leader of the Ishmaelites was referred. It was said figure who “became prominent”, we are told, as he is the one who persuaded the Arabs to

recognize the god of Abraham. Sebeos notes that this man was versed in Mosaic lore; and consequently unified the Ishmaelites in Faith.

Does referring to this leader by the honorific, “praised one” entail that we know his given (birth) name? Of course not. Shall we suppose that Yeshua ben Yosef of Nazareth was really named “Rex / Regis Iudaeorum” (the Latin honorific meaning “King of the Jews”)? Confusing a descriptor as a proper noun is an elementary—though common—mistake when it comes to hagiographies of hallowed figures.

We might inquire: What, exactly, did this “praised one” declaim? Again, Sebeos provides a clue. In his letter, Sebeos notifies us that followers were instructed to not eat carrion, not drink wine, not speak falsehoods, and not commit adultery. Who were these followers? No mention of a novel religion or novel holy book is mentioned. Sebeos simply says that this new leader pronounced the Ishmaelites / Saracens to be the new sons of Abraham, and so were thenceforth entitled to the promises of the Abrahamic deity (presumably, as inheritors of the Mosaic covenant). {25}

It was not until the early 8th century that we find an explicit statement of Islam and of Mohammed. It appears in an inscription on the Umayyad mosque in Damascus: “Our Lord is god; Our religion is Islam; and our prophet is Mu-H-M-D.” (Still no mention of a new holy book...or of a messenger by name.) And it was not until the late 8th / early 9th century that we suddenly encounter an efflorescence of apocrypha about a specific person named “Mohammed”. (!)

This is—to put it mildly—quite striking. {26}

According to standard Islamic dogma, how does MoM (supposedly) fit into the Abrahamic scheme? He is, after all, the “Seal” of the prophets: The culmination of thousands of years of messengers sent by the Abrahamic deity to Earth in order to inform the world of their precarious existential predicament, and of the hair-raising cosmogony that accounts for it.

There is one last matter to address: that of pre-Islamic prophecy. According to the prevailing Mohammedan historiography, Jesus of Nazareth was the **SECOND TO LAST** prophet—who, so the story goes, openly recognized that the **LAST** prophet’s arrival was immanent. (Indeed, he did intimate some kind of return; though it is conventionally understood that he was referring to **HIMSELF**.) According to the conventional Islamic narrative, it was MoM who was that last prophet. That is to say: MoM was the one who temporally followed Jesus in order to rectify the errancy (corrupted scripture, and thus deviant creed) that had come to beset mankind in the intervening six centuries; thereby fulfilling Abrahamic prophecy. Ergo the Koran is seen as the **FINAL** revelation: the last update mankind will ever need (e.g. 85:21-22 and 43:2-4). {27}

This contention of prophetic fulfillment derives—in part—from the Gospel of John’s mention of the coming of a “paraclete” (found in 14:16/25-26, 15:26, and 16:7-12) at some undisclosed point in the future. The word is from the Koine Greek term, “parakletos”, which is variously translated as “counselor” / “helper” / “advocate”; and even as “comforter” (based on the use of the verbal form in Matthew 2:18 and 5:4, which pertain to being comforted).

In those passages, the term is traditionally taken as a reference to the pending arrival of the “Holy Spirit”: the spiritual aspect of the triune Abrahamic deity (i.e. something that would permeate / pervade all mankind). Said “paraclete”, it says, “will be with [mankind] forever”. (Tradition holds that the so-called “pentecost” marks said arrival.) This interpretation is corroborated by John 15:26 and 16:12-14, which both refer to the “Spirit of Truth” that is yet to come. {28} It is also corroborated by Acts 1:5-8 and 2:4/38.

However, Islamic apologists claim that the term referred instead to the coming of the next **PROPHET**,

whom they—conveniently—designate as their own. Ergo MoM’s arrival would simply be the fulfillment of a New Testament prophecy regarding the “paraclete”.

The Islamic version of this auspicious referent hinges on the way in which the Koine Greek of the earliest Gospel manuscripts is translated. Does the word “another” precede “paraclete” in John 14:16? If so, why? (This is open to interpretation.) The case has even been made (by the more brazen Islamic apologists) that “parakletos” was a redaction of the original term, “periklytos”, which might be translated as the famous / illustrious / praiseworthy / glorious one...for which the Arabic root is “H-M-D”...which is the Semitic root for “Ahmad” (correlating with the Ancient Hebrew for “lovely”, cited in various passages in the Mikra)...which is close to “Mu-H-M-D”. {12} Voila!

This is, to put it mildly, a huge stretch. It reeks more of hermeneutic chicanery than of perspicacious etymological assessment.

Note that the matter of this nebulous term is further complicated by other occurrences of the lexeme-in-question. In John 2:1, Matthew 3:10-12, and Luke 3:9-17, “paraclete” is clearly referencing JoN himself. (!) Then John 15:26 explicitly refers to the object-in-question as “the Spirit of Truth”. Meanwhile, in Matthew 5:4, JoN personally uses the term “paracletesontai”, which is taken to mean: being refreshed / encouraged / comforted (by the divine). {21}

In sum: Given names are rarely straight-forward—as illustrated by the myriad monikers the Chinese assign to auspicious figures in their history. (There’s the birth name, the tribal or ancestral name, the regnal name, etc.) The lesson here is simple: The given name of the person on whom the “Seal of the Prophets” is based in Mohammedan lore was almost certainly not “Mohammed”.

Footnotes To Appendix 3:

{1 Also note: In 33:40, the Last Prophet is referred to as the seal of the prophets (“Khatam an-Nabiyyin”) AND as god’s messenger (“Rasul-allah”).}

{2 Sometimes the “mu-” is gratuitous, as with “bashir” / “mu-bashir” (both mean announcer), “shahid” / “mu-shahid” (witness / one who is a witness), and rasul” / “mursal” (messenger / one who is a messenger). Thus one does not ALWAYS need to append “mu-” to insinuate “one who is”. This is why “Nassir” [victory] is more popular than “Mu-nassir”; and “Khalid” [eternal] is more popular than “Mu-khalid”; and “Noor” [light] is more popular than “Mu-nir” (one who is illuminated). Also note that there are other ways to say “those who are X”, by appending the suffix, “X-iyya”. For example, the Saudi television news stations are “Al-Ekhabariyya” (“those who are greatest”; from “akbar”) and “Al-Arabiyya” (“those who are Arab”).}

{3 An alternate form of this is “tadhkir”, which yields “mu-tadhkir” (one who reminds; one who is reminded).}

{4 In medieval times, other terms were coined in this manner. For example, “aman” (temporary amnesty accorded to foreigners) yielded “musta’aman” (one who is protected via an “aman”). The convention carries into modern Arabic. For example, “mu-” can be added to “handasa” (engineering) to yield the word for engineer: “muhandis”. An alternate prefix is “ma-”, meaning THAT which is.}

{5 “Mubarak” can also be used to simply mean “blessed”, as in the salutation, “Eid mubarak.” Another connotation of the variant is “baraka[h]” is “god’s grace”. Generally, it is taken to mean a divine force with which a person, place, or thing is imbued. The Semitic root “B-R-K” antedates Arabic. Ancient

Hebrew uses the same root—yielding the name “Barak” / “Baruch” (ref. Judges 4:6) as well as the verb “to cast forth”, as when god casts forth lightning (ref. Exodus 19:16; Psalms 18:14 and 144:6; Samuel 22:15; and Ezekiel 1:13). Hence in CA, “buraq” means lighting (as well as the name of the flying horse in the fabled “Night Journey”). The Semitic root is also found in Sabaeen, Palmyrene, and in Punic. }

{6 It is not always so straight-forward. Take, for example, the root “K-B-R”. This can be used in different ways. In the form “khabir”, it pertains to having information; which yields “mukhbir” (one who has information; one who informs). Hence “mukhabarat” is used to refer to intelligence agencies. Sometimes, “khabir” is used to mean “expert”. Meanwhile, “akbar”, which means “greater” (in stature), comes from the same root. The protagonist of the Koran is thus referred to as “Mu-tak[a]bir” (one who is the greatest). Hence the proclamation, “allah-u akbar” (god is greatest). It is instructive that “profound knowledge” and “profound stature” come from the same root. This makes sense, as omniscience and omnipotence are often correlated. Such semiotic bi-valence seems to stem from the notion of a revered / wise elder, to whom wisdom is conventionally ascribed, and to whom status (power) is thereby attributed or accorded. }

{7 There are some words beginning with “mu” in which it seems to be integral, as with “muhkam[at]” (that which is clear / straight-forward), “mutashabih” (that which is metaphorical / figurative), “mustahabb” (that which is recommended), “muruwah” (that which is resilient), “mustaqim” (that which is straight), “mufrad” (that which is singular), “musanna” (that which is dual), and “murakkab” (that which is plural); whereby “mu-” indicates “THAT which is” rather than “ONE who is”. There is also “mu-ta-wakil” (one who patiently relies on god) and “mu-qanna” (one who is veiled). “Mullah” is an interesting case, as it seems to mean “one who is god”—a quirk of etymology. And “muhawara” means deliberation in Urdu. }

{8 The Pashto / Dari plural is “taliban”. Note that MoM himself is said to have come from the Dar al-Abdul Mutalib [house of the slave of one who seeks]; which was the prominent family of the Hashem clan of the Quraysh. Also note the name of MoM’s uncle (and foster parent), Abu Talib. }

{9 This is the basis for “mutawa” / “mutawiyin”: those who enforce obedience (i.e. religious police). }

{10 Note that the Koran is primarily addressed not to “mu-salim”, but to “mu-mineen”. The Koran also uses the term mu-haym[in] (one who is faithful). The first references to the leader of a Mohammedan movement occurred on coinage during the last decades of the 7th century (five or six decades after MoM’s death), and referred not to a “Mu-H-M-D”, but rather to an “amir” of the “mu-mineen”: leader of the believers. This is very telling. For it indicates that the original movement was conceived primarily as a generalized Abrahamic revival movement (emphasizing monotheism) rather than a distinct (new) religion in its own right. (Note that the earliest references to the Arab conquerors was NOT “Muslims”, but Saracens, Ishmaelites, and Hagarenes.) The first traces of an explicitly newfangled religion occur during the reign of Caliph Abd al-Malik [ibn Marwan] in the 690s; not coincidentally, the potentate who first commissioned a new liturgical language, thereby inaugurating the development of CA for that purpose. }

{11 This is revealing. For it shows that the notion of (belief in) GOD is at the root of the conception of war. }

{12 The lexeme “H-M-D” occurs in the Hebrew Bible in various places. In Ancient Hebrew, it means “lovely”. In other words: It is adjectival, not nounal—let alone a proper name. Islamic apologists often claim the Hebrew Bible foretold of their prophet by pointing to the occurrence of this lexeme, when it is clearly not referring to a historical figure. In terms of MoM being the fulfillment of Judaic prophecy, Islamic apologists pull the same exegetical stunt that Christian apologists do when deigning to excavated

prophecies of JoN.}

{13 This term is used to label the most vaunted Hadith, whereby it means: that which is most esteemed. Thus: the most dependable (“sahih”) chain of narration (“isnad”).}

{14 Note that “rashid” (sans the prefix, “mu-”) can also be used to mean “guide”.}

{15 This is not to be confused with the Sufi term, “rid[h]a”, which means “contentment”. Thus one who is content is a “mu-rid”.

{16 The alternate form is “rasul”—typically translated as “messenger”. Also note “risalata” (that which is sent; a.k.a. “message”) and “Al-Mursalat” (the name of the 77th Surah in the Koran, meaning “those who are sent”).}

{17 As I discuss elsewhere, what qualifies as “ijtihad” (a nebulous term) is rather open-ended. For it connotes anything from independent thinking to just using “reason” (however “reason” might be defined). Being Usuli Shiites, the Grand Ayatollahs of Iran consider themselves “mujtahids” in a rather bizarre sense. It is paradoxical, as they also champion “marja taqlid” (i.e. unquestioning obedience to authority, in keeping with 5:101-102). So far as they are concerned, THAT is what is “reasonable”; hence their Orwellian invocation of “ijtihad”).}

{18 This is typically rendered in English, “jihadi”; as the suffix “-i” is often appended to X to mean “one who is from, characterized by, or associated with X” (as in, say, a “hajji” or a “takfiri”). Thus Arabic uses the nomenclature “al-X-i” to mean someone “OF X”, where X can be a place or a tribe. Note that the term for one who engages in jihad means WARRIOR, not someone engaging in an internal spiritual struggle.}

{19 Moreover, there is no indication that Arabian Bedouins at the time (spec. the Quraysh during the 6th century) subscribed to a theology in which they fashioned themselves the slaves of any god. So “Abdallah” would not yet have existed (as a moniker for someone in the Hijaz) either. YET this is the name ascribed to MoM’s biological father—himself son of “Abd al-Muttalib” of the (Qurayshi) Hashim clan. This seems to be a give-away that names were being fabricated post-hoc (père, fils, et al.) Obviously, “slave of El[o]jah” would not have been a name that a Hijazi infant would have been given in the mid-500’s (by pagan parents; i.e. MoM’s grandparents). The prevailing myth of the “mawlid” (birth) of the “nabi” (prophet)—replete with given names and lineages—with which most Muslims are now familiar was likely started by the Fatimids at some point in the 10th or 11th century.}

{20 Whether the verbal form of “H-M-D” means “to praise” or “to BE praised” depends on the context. While it would seem, then, that “Mu-H-M-D” could also mean “one who praises”, that is not how it is traditionally used. This makes sense, as “one who praises” would require an object to be specified, whereas “praised one” does not. In other words, “Mu-H-M-D” as “one who praises” would not work as a given name because it would need to be followed by a noun (as with “H-M-D-u li-llah”: praise to god). Ultimately, the only object worthy of praise is the Abrahamic deity. In the case where it is read as “one who praises”, the name would therefore have to be “Mu-H-M-D-ullah” (in the vain of, say, “A-B-D-ullah”: slave of god). In Islam, other than god, the only object arguably worthy of any reverence would be the “Rasul Allah” himself—which would entail using the lexeme in BOTH ways: “Mu-H-M-D-Mu-H-M-D” [one who praises the one who is praised]. In that case, the moniker would be used first as the subject and then as the object—a syntactical oddity. Yet “man who praises himself” would not be a suitable appellation for the Seal of the Prophets. The accepted nomenclature is “Ahmed” (“to praise”), leaving the original tri-root (“H-M-D”) for “praiseworthy”).}

{21 Of course, JoN would never have used EITHER of these Koine Greek terms, as he spoke Aramaic. We must bear in mind that everything we get in ANY Gospel account was originally rendered in a language that JoN and his followers neither spoke nor understood: Koine Greek. So all terms used in the earliest manuscripts are rough approximations of what would have originally been in Aramaic...thereby creating a potpourri of exegetical snafus.}

{22 One wonders: How was this even an issue? Were there lots of nudists claiming to be prophets running around the Hijaz in the 7th century? Was the most salient feature of the addressee that he happened to be wearing clothes?}

{23 This includes honorifics like “Malik”, “Sharif”, “Sa[y]id”, “Sadat”, “Amir” / “Emir”, etc. Note: “M-L-K” and “A-M-R” come from neo-Aramaic (read: Syriac) roots.*211 Other than “Ahmad” and “Mohammed”, a few other names derived from the “H-M-D” root—notably: “Hamid”, “Mahmud”, and “Mehmet”. Since the emergence of signature Arabic names was a gradual process, it is not always possible to demarcate morphemes that were explicitly CA from antecedent morphemes. A good example is the name “Abu”. “Ab” [alt. “Av”] was the Semitic root for “father” (typically rendered “Ab[b]a”). Even the Akkadians and Assyrians used “Abu” for father. So when “Abu[n]” started to be used in Arabia, at what point do we consider it a CA term? We encounter the same situation with the honorific, “Malik” (king; from the Semitic root for “power”: “M-L-K”), among many other words...all of which seem to antedate CA yet were incorporated into the CA lexicon. Bear in mind that it is common to conflate a general descriptor with a given name—as with “abd-allah” [slave of god], commonly rendered “Abdullah”. In fact, many of proper names in the Middle East are derived from what used to be general descriptors (honorifics from non-Arab cultures, as with “Khan”, “Pasha”, “Shah”, “Reza”, “Aziz”, “Bey[g]”, etc.); and the vast majority of proper names in the Far East ARE general descriptors (notably in India, Nepal, China, Burma, Siam, Japan, etc.) When it comes to gussied-up hagiography, there are other cases in which a general descriptor is eventually rendered a proper name. Take, for instance, the celebrated Samaritan woman from chapter four in the Gospel according to “John”. The Byzantines assigned her the name “Photine”, which is derived from the Koine Greek for “One who is Luminous”. This is based on nothing but pure fancy. Nevertheless, the moniker stuck. Suffice to say, “Photine” would not have been a Samaritan name. (!) This fact does not prevent the Eastern Orthodox Church from referring to her AS IF “Photine” had been her given name all along.}

{24 Use of “H-M-D” in the Mikra can be found in the Song of Songs (5:16), where it means “altogether lovely”. This is a ROUGH cognate of the tri-root in CA, which means “praise[d]”. The more brazen Islamic apologists contend that this was a premonition of the prophet of Islam.}

{25 Sebeos wrote that this new Ishmaelite leader told the Arabs: “God promised that country [presumably, Canaan] to Abraham and to his son after him, for eternity. And what had been promised was fulfilled during that time when god loved Israel [the progeny of Isaac via Jacob; i.e. the Jews]. (Note how the Promised Land is referred to as “that country” and the Jews are referred to as “Israel”.) NOW, however, YOU [the Ishmaelites] are the sons of Abraham, and god shall fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his son ON YOU.” (Emphasis is mine.)}

{26 The “Sahih al-Sadiqa” by Abdullah ibn Amir al-Aas is known only via the 9th-century writer, Ahmed ibn Hanbal.}

{27 Never mind that the Koran is also supposed to have existed “as is” since the beginning of time. (Recall that it is purported to be written on an eternal, celestial tablet.) Of course, THAT would mean the Abrahamic deity was keeping it (the most important message to mankind ever) in his back pocket ALL

THE WHILE: between Abraham and c. 610 A.D...which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever...unless, that is, we suppose that Abrahamic scripture had been corrupted SO MUCH that it had all actually been the Koranic at the time of the alleged revelation...and eventually became so unrecognizably distorted that it wound up being what we now call the Old and New Testaments...which required it to be delivered YET AGAIN in the 7th century...but this time to an illiterate Bedouin merchant. Gosh-golly.}

{28 The “paraclete” shall come at the Pentecost (conventionally designated as a few weeks after the purported resurrection, directed toward the twelve apostles). According to most interpretations, said arrival is ongoing...and will abide eternally in ALL of us. The standard understanding is that it is unseen (i.e. numinous). Trinitarian doctrine construes this as the Holy Spirit. Considering the context, it is clear that it was not referring to a specific person (i.e. a prophet).}

{29 Historians can’t even agree about exactly who Cristoforo Colombo of Genoa (a.k.a. “Cristobal Colon”; Anglicized to “Christopher Columbus”) actually was. His alias may have actually been the Galician Count, Pedro Alvarez de Soutomaior of Caminha (a.k.a. “Pedro Madruga”); thought to have passed away six years before the fabled voyage to the New World. Different theories abound. The most prudent course is to remain agnostic, pending further evidence. But agnosticism is rarely enticing; and is not amenable to weaving a captivating yarn. (One cannot craft a provocative narrative by suspending judgement.) Never mind that—whoever he was—the famed explorer never actually stepped foot on the North American mainland. (He landed on the Bahamas, the Antilles, Cuba, Jamaica, Guanaja; and the coasts of Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and perhaps as far north as Honduras in Central America.) At the end of the day, we tell the story the way we like to tell it. Once we’ve settled on the version that most tantalizes our fancy, we stick to our guns. And that’s that.}

Appendix 4: THE KORAN ON WOMEN

By the time MoM undertook his ministry (c. 613), patriarchy already had a long history in the Abrahamic tradition. The Torah is clear on the inferiority of women. Indeed, Genesis begins by establishing that men shall rule over women (3:16). In the so-called “Ten Commandments” purportedly given to Moses on mount Horeb / Sinai, women—along with slaves and livestock—were considered legal chattel (that is: a Hebrew man’s property). {1}

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 notifies us that a Hebrew girl who is raped can be sold to her rapist. Leviticus 27:3-7 specifies that women are worth between 1/2 and 2/3 as much as men. And, by the way, make sure women are forced to sleep outside for a week when they are menstruating (Leviticus 15:19-24). The Torah oozes with patriarchy. Needless to say, there were no women in the Sanhedrin. It comes as no surprise, then, that, today, there is no more flagrant misogyny than is found amongst Haredim (Orthodox Jews).

Meanwhile, women’s rights has been championed in societies that are the most secular. This is no coincidence.

When it came to Abrahamic lore, Mosaic law was only the beginning. The male-centric precedent was upheld in the Christian tradition. The subordination of women is established in Paul’s first letter to Timothy 2:11-12: “A woman must receive instruction in silence, with complete submission; and I [god] do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority of a man; but to remain silent”). In his first letter to the Corinthians 14:34, Paul declared that women should remain silent in church. To ensure the point was made loud and clear, he wrote to the Ephesians that a wife must always submit to her husband (5:22-23); and then repeated this claim to the Colossians (3:18). Also in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that the head of a woman is a man (11:3) and that women were MADE FOR men (11:6-9). Indeed, the

canonical scripture of Nicene Christianity was rife with misogyny. It should come as little surprise, then, that the (hyper-patriarchal) Roman Catholic Church has such an opprobrious record on this issue. {2}

The putative “Final Revelation” continues this odious legacy. The most notorious passages are verses 3-4, 15, 22-25, 33-34, and 43 of Surah 4. (Also risible are verses 223-237 and 282 of Surah 2; as well as verses 4-6, 8, and 13 of Surah 24—all of which make clear that women are inferior to men.) All of these passages are Medinan; and therefore take precedence. It is no wonder that Aisha is reported to have stated that she knew of no women who suffered as much as Muslim women (Bukhari no. 5825).

In sum: The Koran is hardly a clarion call for women’s rights. This is in keeping with the teachings of MoM, wherein we are notified that women are intellectually inferior to men (Bukhari chapt. 12, no. 2658; alt. 1/6/301, 2/24/541, and 3/48/826) and that hell is populated primarily by women...because they deserve it (Bukhari 1/2/29; alt. no. 304). No kidding. This makes sense, as women are less intelligent and less morally capable than men (Muslim no. 241).

In the “sahih” Hadith, we are also notified that women are not allowed pray in mosques (Bukhari 1/12/828; Abu Dawood vol. I, no. 570); and that women are not allowed to participate in leadership (Bukhari 9/88/219). It’s one wonder how anyone could come away with the impression that the Sunnah was somehow—in any way—good for women. Perhaps MoM’s child-bride, Aisha bint Abu Bakr, put it best when she said: “I have not seen any woman suffer as much as the believing women” (Bukhari no. 5825).

Not only does Islam’s holy book do absolutely nothing to advocate for equal rights for women, it repeatedly DEMEANS women. In addition to the aforesaid passages, we might note the inheritance protocol (4:11-12 and 4:176) and the testimony protocol (2:282). In the former, the superiority of men is confirmed by Koranic inheritance protocol—whereby, once more, one man is equivalent to two women. {3} (Regarding protocols for inheritance, no actuary on Earth could possibly make sense out of these passages.) In the latter, we are notified that women are not as trustworthy as men, as the testimony of two female witnesses is required to reach parity with the testimony of a single man. Women are to be sequestered, at the pleasure of male minders (either fathers or husbands); and are to play a very limited role in public life.

What of a role in political life? According to Abu Bakr: When MoM heard that Persians had made the daughter of Emperor “Khosrow” their ruler, he declared: “Never will a nation succeed that makes a woman its ruler.”

So why the unabashed misogyny? To find an explanation, we might start by noting that the Koran is addressed EXPLICITLY TO MEN. This is made clear in numerous places throughout the “Recitations”. Turning to Surah 4 alone, ten passages are illustrative:

- Verses 3-4 tells the audience that “YOU may marry women of YOUR choice” (referring to slave-girls as those whom YOU rightfully possess)...two or three or four...whatever seems good to YOU.” (Tellingly, the passage says nothing about a woman marrying the man of HER choice.) It then says that “if YOU wish, marry one of YOUR slaves.” Finally, it says that “YOU should give the bride her ‘mahr’ [dowry].” Thus the marriage was thought of as transactional; and done at the discretion of the man.
- Verses 11-12 notifies the audience that, if THEY (women) have no children, then “YOU will inherit half of what YOUR wives leave” ...whereas in the event that YOU die, “your wives will inherit a quarter of what you leave.”
- Verse 15 notifies the audience that in the event any one of YOUR women is raped, the victim should be confined to her home until she dies.

- Verse 19 forbids “believers” from inheriting women against their will. This is telling, as it indicates that even when “believers” are referenced by the authors, they have only men in mind.
- Verses 22-25 forbid YOU from taking your step-mothers, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and nieces as wives. It then explains that “all married women are forbidden to YOU except those whom YOUR right hand possesses [that is: women married to non-Muslim men on whom one has staked one’s claim; as with captives].” The audience is then told that women whom YOU may choose to marry are amongst those whom “YOUR right hand possesses [read: slave-girls].” This means that wives—as well as female captives—are the possessions of their husbands. And to ensure the pecking order is clear, men are said to be a grade above women.
- Verses 33-34 specifies that “if YOU suspect THEM [women] of being disobedient, then admonish and beat them. If THEY [women] obey YOU, then abstain from punishing them.” Thus recalcitrant wives should be physically reprimanded. Never mind recalcitrant husbands; for they are the master in the relationship.
- Verse 43 admonishes against praying after YOU have engaged in intercourse with women and are unable to wash afterward. It also specifies that if THEY [women] get out of line, then YOU can hit them; but if THEY [women] obey you, then abstain from punishing them. The passage goes on to notify “all believers” that contact with menstruating women makes YOU impure. Thus: When “all believers” is referenced, it is directed exclusively at MALE believers.
- Verse 127 reads: “They consult YOU concerning women. Say, ‘God has given YOU directions concerning THEM.’”
- Even when the Koran has verses that PERTAIN to women, it is still not ADDRESSED to them—as verse 128 makes clear.
- Verse 129 concedes that YOU may not be able to treat your wives equally, yet it cautions the intended audience against neglecting one particular wife altogether.

This Surah is helpfully entitled “The Women”. In effect, women were seen as something to be handled. (This is how YOU deal with THEM.) Unsurprisingly, there was no Surah about “The Men”. {4}

It is telling that after the “Fatihah” (the brief prologue chapter), the first seven major chapters of the Koran are entitled: The Cow, The (Progeny of) Joachim, The Women, The Table, The Cattle, The Purgatorium, and The Spoils Of War. Barring the Surah that was (ostensibly) about that which is “of Joachim” [“al-Imran”, referenced simply because he was Mary’s father], all these topics are presented as the objects of discussion. Every other chapter in the Koran that is about an iconic person (in which the given name is used) does not employ the definite article (Al-): Surahs 10, 11, 12, 14, 19, 31, 47, and 71. It is only when the topic is objectified that the definite article is employed. {5}

When it comes to revealing the intended audience, might Surah 4 have been an anomaly? Alas, no. There are myriad places throughout the Koran that indicate that the audience is exclusively men. We’ve already seen ten passages that make this apparent. Here are 32 MORE illustrative passages—which are distributed evenly throughout the book:

- 2:49 recounts how the Egyptian pharaoh slew your sons and kept YOUR women [nisa’akum]. This passage is repeated four more times. {6}
- 2:187 states that “permitted for YOU during nights of fasting is approaching your wives [nisa-ikum].”
- 2:221 admonishes the intended audience against marrying female polytheists. {7}
- 2:223-237 explains that a man’s wives are his property. This is unequivocal: They are something he POSSESSES. It effectively states that marriage is a license to fuck. We read: “YOUR wives are a place of sowing; so come to your place of cultivation however you wish.” The audience is then given instructions: “When YOU divorce women...” and “When YOU die, leaving widows...” Later, the audience is given the reassurance that “god will forgive you if YOU divorce a women before

consummating the marriage.” (Note: In verse 233: A husband is enjoined to wean from his lactating wife if he so chooses.)

- 3:14 lists earthly desires such as heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, pedigreed horses, cattle, land...and women.
- 3:61 abjures the audience to declare: “Let us gather OUR women and you YOUR women.”
- 5:5 informs the audience that chaste women of the book are lawful for YOU to take as wives (when YOU give them just compensation).
- 7:81 decries homosexual activity between men, by scornfully leveling the accusation in the event that “YOU approach men with desire instead of women.” (No word yet on lesbians.) Such opprobrium is also demonstrated when the book cites Lot’s condemnation of those who approach men instead of women “with desire” (27:55).
- 7:141 (see 2:49)
- 14:6 (see 2:49)
- 16:72 says that “god has given YOU wives from amongst yourselves.”
- 23:1-6 and 70:30 refer to followers-in-general in the third person—making reference to THEIR wives and women THEY possess. Thus “believers” are associated—by default—with men.
- 24:4 admonishes against defaming (purportedly) chaste women without producing four other (male) witnesses to corroborate one’s accusations. The admonition is repeated in 24:23.
- 24:31 instructs the audience to tell believing women to dress modestly. To be clear: It doesn’t tell believing women to dress modestly; it instructs the intended audience to relay the message to them. It is up to MEN to ensure that women dress appropriately, as it is the men’s honor that is on the line. 24:33 then admonishes the book’s intended audience: Do not force your slave-girls into prostitution in order to enrich yourself. Yet...if anyone DOES end up raping them, once they have been forcefully deflowered, god may forgive them for not being chaste. (!)
- 24:58 makes clear the “Recitations” are addressed not to those who are POSSESSED (that is: slaves and women), but to those who POSSESS OTHERS (that is: Muslim men). {8}
- 26:165-166 condemns homosexuality (between men): “Of all the creatures in the world, will YOU approach men; and leave those whom god has created FOR YOU to be your mates?” Obviously, the authors of this passage were talking to men (about MEN who approach men instead of women). The only other reading of this verse is that the Koran is enjoining lesbianism.
- 27:55 is a condemnation when YOU go lustfully to men instead of to women.
- 28:4 (see 2:49)
- 30:21 explains that “among god’s signs, he created wives [azwaj-an] FOR YOU so that YOU might take comfort in them.”
- 33:4 offers a peculiar disclaimer that god “has not made your wives [azwaj-akumu] those whom you’ve declared to be your mothers.”
- 33:49-52 gives “all believers” instructions about when YOU are permitted to engage in sexual intercourse with women; and . Women are referred to as those whom “YOU rightfully possess”. {8} It ALSO states: “O you who believe! When YOU marry believing women and then divorce THEM before having had sexual intercourse with them, no ‘iddah’ is warranted. Simply give THEM a gift and set them free in a pleasing manner.” Again, everything is done at the discretion of the man.
- 39:6 proclaims that god “created YOU”; and then—from that creation—produced women.
- 40:25 (see 2:49)
- 49:11 requests that the audience not let PEOPLE ridicule other PEOPLE...then goes on to add: “nor let women ridicule other women”. In other words, when addressing the audience, the default was men. Meanwhile, when a verse refers to women to make a point, it must explicitly say so—as with 33:35 (which states that both women and men have the same liturgical obligations). It could have just stipulated that “all people” have the same obligations; but that would have—by implication—only applied to men. So such wording would not have sufficed.

- 60:11 tells the audience what to do if any of YOUR wives desert you.
- 65:1-5 notifies the audience when YOU are permitted to divorce your wives. It then refers to those among YOUR women with whom YOU are permitted to have sex—which includes girls who have not yet menstruated. (!) Lastly, the audience is enjoined to “let women live in the same manner as YOU live yourselves.”
- Well, then, what about AFTER puberty? Along with 4:43 (mentioned above), 2:222-223 explains that YOU shall not have sex with women during menstruation. This reflects the Judaic rules concerning “nidah” (menstruating women) and “tumah” (impurity).
- 65:6 instructs the audience to let women live in the same manner as YOU live yourselves, in accordance with YOUR means; and do not harass THEM (that is: while you are waiting the appropriate period to have sex with them, after they’ve been widowed). Also, if a woman suckles YOUR infants, then YOU should pay her for the task.
- In 70:30, men are notified that they own their wives. This occurs in a passage that discusses those (men) who conduct themselves piously.

It is difficult for any descent person to read these passages without recoiling. In a patriarchal society, these are precisely the sort of statements we would expect to find. And so it was.

Given the above 42 passages, it is indubitable that the Abrahamic deity’s last message to mankind was addressed exclusively to men. This is presumably because women were not, as it were, “running the show”.

4:1 and 9:71 would have been ideal opportunities to assert that women are equal to men. But they do not. Instead, we’re told that men and women are allies in Faith, and so share the same obligations (salat, zakat, and other matters of piety). This amounts to declaring that EVERYBODY must be obedient vis a vis the Sunnah, irrespective of gender.

Several other passages attest to the fact that Islam’s holy book is CLEARLY not addressed to women. It is not for nothing that one of the “Sahabah” (Nusayba bint Ka’b al-Ansariyah) once asked MoM about the “Recitations”: “Why does god only address men?”

This should dispel any illusions that the purported “Final Revelation” is directed to anyone other than men. It’s not. {9} Let’s be clear: It is not the case that ONE PARTICULAR SECTION of the Koran is addressed solely to men. For—to reiterate—the passages enumerated above are evenly distributed throughout the book. That is to say: They occur sporadically, without any demarcation of one intended audience vs. another. There is no transition from one addressee to another (“Now we’re only addressing men; now we’re addressing everyone.”) It is implicit, then, that the audience for such passages is the same the audience to which all other parts of the book are addressed.

But wait. WHAT ABOUT all the other passages throughout the book? Am I cherry-picking here? No. As it turns out, there are only certain kinds of passages that would reveal the presumed gender of the target audience: Those that pertain to matters in which a gender distinction is salient. These are the passages enumerated above. At NO point is it intimated that the intended audience of the “Recitations” included women. The authors talk ABOUT women, but never TO them.

To reiterate: Several verses explicitly address “ALL BELIEVERS” even as they clearly pertain only to men; thus revealing the ENTIRE BOOK’S intended audience. Consequently, whenever the authors sought to refer to both men and women, they were obliged to do so explicitly—as we find in 9:71, 16:97, 33:35-36/73, and 57:12-18. The rest of the time, then, we are left to assume that this was NOT the case.

Tellingly, instead of referring simply to “believers”, there are several verses (24:12, 33:35/73, 47:19, 48:5,

57:12, 60:10-12, 71:28, and 85:10) which refer to believers in the masculine AND believers in the feminine. Presumably, this was done to ensure the audience was aware the diktat did not pertain to only men (as if to stipulate: “This applies to women too, by the way.”)

If you are a woman deigning to heed the Koran, this means reading a book that isn’t addressed to you...let alone meant for your deliberation. For a woman to even consider reading—nay, listening to the recitation of—the Koran, she is engaging in an act that is inimical to the message of the Koran. Indeed, for a woman to so much as open a Koran is a patently anti-Koranic act. The “Recitations” were not intended for her.

Try as she might, a woman will not find a passage that, say, notifies her how “you” should treat “your” husband. Instead, she will find the permission to “marry women of your choice”. (When 4:3 instructs the audience to “Marry the women that seem good to you”, it is not encouraging lesbian betrothals.) Whenever written in the 2nd person, the “you” is ALWAYS referring to a male audience, NEVER to a female audience. (Heaven forbid that a woman every be allowed to marry the man of her choice.)

It is also worth noting that the portrayal of heaven in the Koran is designed especially to appeal to men—a matter I explore in “A Brief History Of Heaven And Hell”. Denizens of “Jannah” are provided with a coterie of buxom angelic concubines (“houris”). Clearly, passages like 78:33 (emphasizing the fact that they have large breasts) were not included to entice women. An afterlife Paradise tailored to suit the primal cravings of MEN indicates who the target audience was.

All of this makes sense in light of the belief that women are less intelligent than men, as attested in Bukhari’s Hadith (vol. 6 no. 301)...in addition to verses in the Koran like 2:228/282, 4:3/11/24/34, and 33:50. Ali ibn Abi Talib is known for having declared: “Women are plentiful, and you can easily change one for another.” As the Koran states, they are there for their husbands to plow—that is: to provide sexual gratification and offspring for the men.

Much of this is obfuscated in Islamic apologia. A common example of hermeneutic chicanery is how disingenuous exegetes interpret the enjoinder to beat one’s wife for being disobedient (4:34). The phrasing here is sometimes—absurdly—passed off as a (symbolic) “slap on the wrist”—that is: performed as a kind-hearted reprimand; and as something that is to be done ONLY for serious transgressions. One does not have to be fluent in Classical Arabic to discover—after some due diligence—that this is not what the passage was meant to convey.

In this notorious verse, disingenuous Islamic apologists translate “idribuhunna” (strike / beat / hit) as a light tap—as a smack on the buttocks when scolding an unruly toddler. They do this in an attempt to make the problematic verse mean something other than what it actually means. The enjoinder, then, is taken as a recommendation to scold a disobedient wife by giving her a stern admonishment. Though that’s clearly not what the verse says, unscrupulous apologists triumphantly announce that that’s what it “really means”. (We’re expected to take their word for it; and just move on.)

Such legerdemain is par for the course in religious apologia.

Some of those who are engaged in such casuistry go a step further and engage in eisegesis. That is: They import their own (desired) meaning into the text, then pretend it inhered in the text all along. They go so far as to contrive OPPOSITE meanings, as the more fraudulent translation actually takes “idribuhunna” to mean “go away from” (by recourse to the shared Semitic root of the alternate lexeme in Arabic). Such exegetical shenanigans are nothing but a game of semantic hop-scotch.

Tragically, for credulous audiences who are eager to hear what they desperately want to hear, this gambit is

effective.

The more perfidious Islamic apologists insist that the Sunnah promotes women's rights. This is a risible claim. In fact, even the Taliban has made it. (!) The catch, of course, is the parenthetical "as is permitted within sharia" or "given what the Sunnah allows" or "in the context of Islam". Hence, in North Korea, everyone has complete freedom within the context of Juche.

The more general forms of such legerdemain include "as long as we approve of it" or "as long as it doesn't transgress the [designated] limits." This (the oft-unspoken) proviso tells us everything we need to know about the purported licensure. Think of totalitarians who claim to support "free speech" so long as it doesn't disrespect / insult / offend the powers-that-be, or involve any kind of blasphemy. (That is: Free speech within designated bounds. In other words: No free speech.)

We encounter the same treatment of "freedom of religion": a prerogative that exists as long as it doesn't subvert the protocols of the preferred religion. (In other words: theocracy with some caveats.) In the event that one wishes to exercise the chimerical "right", the result is a Hobson's Choice.

The Koran is a petition for female empowerment in the same way that—say—the American Declaration of Independence was a homage to the British monarchy.

The retort is often forthcoming: "But it wasn't THAT bad for the standards of the 7th century." Regarding the cringe-inducing passages enumerated above, we cannot use this as an excuse. For the Koran is supposed to be an ineluctable and eternal message; and thus applicable for everyone, everywhere, forevermore. The argument that Islam's holy book was a slight improvement on what came before it amongst medieval Bedouin (thus going from egregiously misogynistic to plain-old misogynistic) does not pass muster. {10}

Yet the way Koran-fetishists gush about women in Islam's holy book, one would think it was somehow—in some oblique way—a paean to female empowerment. Therefore, we might suppose, those who participated in the women's rights movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries should have been quoting the Koran left and right. They did not do this, of course. Why not? The explanation is quite simple: Because there is nothing in the Koran that remotely resembles anything advocating for gender equality.

To reiterate: The "Recitations" (as the final revelation) are supposed to be timeless. There is no "expecting too much" from a book that alleges itself to be infallible. Some Islamic apologists make the (technically accurate) point that at least some parts of the Koran were improvements over certain (EVEN WORSE) Iron Age practices regarding women. Perhaps. But we must recall that the Koran professes to be the FINAL WORD on all matters...written for all time. Slightly less bad than downright awful simply doesn't cut it.

How about: "Women should be afforded all the dignity and respect of men"? Nope. How about: "Women should be allowed to speak up...and participate equally in the governance of society"? Nope. 33:51 makes very clear that the man is the boss of his wives. 70:30 goes so far to say that men POSSESS their wives.

In the 7th century, was it too soon to propound women's rights? Was the world not yet ready for women's rights? Hardly. Hypatia of Alexandria was doing it hundreds of years earlier (before a mob of Christian fanatics killed her for it). Is female empowerment too much to expect from something composed during the Dark Ages? Not from a work allegedly authored by the Creator of the Universe.

For those who might STILL doubt whether or not the intended audience was exclusively male, we might look to some extra-Koranic evidence. MoM's most famous speech may be a good place to start. In his

(fabled) “Farewell Sermon”, the self-proclaimed (soon-to-be-assassinated) prophet was recorded as saying:

“O people, you have a right over your wives and they have a right over you. [It is your right] that they should not cause anyone of whom you dislike to tread on your beds; and they should not commit any indecency [“fahishah”]. If they do, then god permits you to shut them in separate rooms and beat them, but not severely.” That was according to Ibn Ishaq (as quoted in Ibn Hisham’s “Sirah al-Nabawiyah” and Al-Tabari’s “Tarikh”).

Muslim’s “Sahih” Hadith has it thus: ***“Fear god concerning women! Verily you have taken them on god’s approval, and intercourse with them has been made lawful to you by god’s word. You too have right over them. They should not allow anyone to sit on your bed whom you do not like. If they do, you can scold them, but not too severely. Their rights upon you are that you should provide them with food and clothing in a fitting manner”*** (Book 15; no. 159).

“Sunan” Ibn Maja has it thus: ***“I enjoin good treatment of your women, for they are your prisoners. You have no right to treat them otherwise unless they commit indecency. If they do, then forsake them in their beds and hit them; but not so much that it causes injury or leaves a mark. If they obey you, then do not seek means of reprisal against them”*** (vol. 3; book 9; no. 1851).

Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Kinani of Basra (a.k.a. “Al-Jahiz”) has it thus: ***“O people: verily you owe your women their rights, and they owe you yours. They may not lay with other men in your beds, let anyone into your house that you do not want (without your permission), or commit indecency. If they do, god has given you leave to debar them, send them from your beds; or to strike them in a way that doesn’t injure them. If they desist, and obey you, then you must provide for them and clothe them fittingly. The women who live with you are like captives [“awan”], unable to manage for themselves. You took them as a trust from god, and enjoy their sex as lawful through god’s word.”***

Clearly, the statement was addressed EXPLICITLY TO MEN. When we consider this proclamation, we find that it is in keeping with the “Recitations”. (It seems to be a take-off on 2:228 in particular.)

Bear in mind that this celebrated sermon was (purportedly) MoM’s last directive to all mankind. Of all the importune things the reputed “messenger of god” might of thought to convey to human society, THIS is what he came up with.

The standard defense of the flagrant misogyny the characterized Islam’s most hallowed scripture is that it does not go so far as to prescribe the programmatic abuse of women; and at least it doesn’t endorse female infanticide. Granted. This might be dubbed the “it could’ve been worse” defense. This seems to come from the “it only said to STRIKE your wife, not to impale here with a pitchfork, so this was actually an iota of progress” school of thought.

But the proscription against abusing women long predates the Abrahamic religions. We can go all the way back to the 11th century B.C., noting the Code of Assura (in Ancient Assyria) forbade a man from striking his wife. (The punishment for such a transgression was cutting off his finger.) The right of a man to strike his wife was never set in stone; and the Koran did nothing to help the situation. (For more on progress that had already been made elsewhere in the area of women’s rights, see my three-part series on “The Empowerment Of Women”.)

So what does all this tell us about those who composed the “Recitations”? Authors who saw men and women as equals would not have written a book like this. If, on the other hand, the authors of a holy book were misogynists, this is exactly the sort of book they would have written. Indeed, if one wanted to

maximize patriarchy, this is what such a book would look like.

The most delusive revisionists claim that the Koran gave women the right to vote. This is preposterous. To support this contention, the only verse they can refer to is 60:12, where there is reference to women making “bayy’ah” to MoM. Those engaged in exegetical shenanigans contort this to mean that women were purported to have equal VOTING rights (as if there was some kind of participatory democracy—replete with universal suffrage—prescribed in the Koran). The problem here is that “bayy’ah” is more accurately translated as “oath of allegiance to” / “contribution to” / “participation in” god’s cause. With respect to this matter, 33:35 provides context. The passage assigns men and women the same OBLIGATIONS, not the same entitlements.

In the few (notable) cases in which women WERE empowered in the Muslim world, it was man who—of their own prerogative—empowered them. They did so according to insights gleaned independently of “received wisdom”. Such felicitous developments were not due to anyone’s adherence to the dictates of this or that scripture. (I address this matter in part 2 of “The History Of Female Empowerment”.)

4:34 is probably the most notorious verse. It proclaims, in no uncertain terms, that men shall have dominion over women. Period. The statement is unequivocal on this point. A righteous woman, it declares, is an obedient woman. Notice that the verse can be taken to mean that men shall be the custodians / stewards [“qawwamuna”] of women—which sounds rather gallant—chivalrous even. {11} But WHY are men charged with this lofty station? To EMPOWER women? No. The passage explains: Because God made men superior to women (or “higher than” women, or to “excel” women, depending on the translation). It then specifies that it is within the husband’s right to strike his wife if she gets out of line. One can’t read such passages without wincing. Any claim that such passages amount to some kind paean to gender equality is manifestly false. {12}

It would be an understatement to say that this flies in the face of anything remotely resembling feminism.

Tellingly, the term used for marriage in Islamic scripture is “nikah”, which literally refers to a contract (viz. the entitlements that a man is given) for sexual intercourse. This warrant for men to bed un-accounted-for women has nothing to do with female empowerment. That this is, effectively, a license to fuck is confirmed by 2:223, which tells us that women are for plowing (like a field), at the husbands discretion. This point is reiterated at various points in Bukhari’s Hadith. In the most charitable interpretation of that verse, the audience for the “Recitations” is notified: “YOUR wives” are “a place of sowing of seed for YOU.” (Bear in mind that 65:4 specifies that men are allowed to marry pre-pubescent girls.)

Also note that the prerogative for divorce is arrogated solely to the husband (66:5). Search as one might, one will not find ANYTHING in the Koran that beseeches men to not abuse women...let alone anything that explicitly stipulates that men and women are EQUAL. If gender parity is what the authors of the Koran meant to actually convey, they probably would have gotten around to saying it somewhere in the book’s 114 surahs. No such statement exists. (There is a Hadith passage where MoM purportedly enjoins his audience to respect one’s mother above all others. This is about as earth-shattering as the Sunnah gets.)

Harsh corporeal punishment for even petty offenses (as is prescribed in 5:33-39 and 24:2) was even worse for women. Note that this is reiterated in the section on punishments in Bukhari’s Hadith (no. 6788, 6802, and 6831-33). Thus beating is considered a DISCIPLINARY measure: “darb ta’deeb”. Reprimanding women by striking them is, after all, about keeping one’s wives in line.

In conventional fiqh, this is distinguished from OTHER kinds of beating—such as “darb al-takseer” (beating that causes something to physically BREAK) and “darb al-tashaffi” (beating for sexual gratification),

which are discouraged. So go ahead and hit your wife; but maybe it's not a good thing if doing so gives you a hard-on or fractures her bones. Given this license to strike one's wife, it is unsurprising that Aisha bint Abu Bakr was physically assaulted by MoM (that is: struck hard enough to cause her significant pain and leave bruises), per her own testimony, as recounted in Muslim's Hadith (vol. 4; no. 2127).

It might be noted that, in modern Arabic, simply inserting an "h" into the term used for a sanctioned beating (thereby yielding "darb al-ta'dheeb") literally means TORTURE, which is not permissible when it comes to one's wife (at least, not according to conventional fiqh). So the query must be posed: Where, exactly, is the line to be drawn between "darb al-ta'deeb" (acceptable) and "darb al-ta'dheeb" (unacceptable)? This is anyone's guess. One might wonder: Who is there behind closed doors to monitor a husband so as to ensure he neither becomes aroused nor breaks anything (beyond his wife's will) when he hits her with permissible force?

And how is a husband, who enjoys the prerogative, to keep himself from crossing the line from "darb al-ta'deeb" (illicit assault that might possibly be "halal") into, well, "haraam" harm (discipline that involves battery)? In posing such questions, we must be reminded that the matter of CONSENT in "fiqh" (Islamic jurisprudence) is based entirely on social status; and social status is based primarily on religion (Muslims over everyone else) and sex (men over women).

It should be noted that women do far worse off in direct proportion to the strict-ness of "sharia" (as conceived by fundamentalists). Hence, when a woman is raped, the dishonor is not to HER but to her HUSBAND. This tells us much of what we need to know about why Muslimahs are sometimes compelled to do the things they do: It's all about the MEN. (In Salafi communities, the woman is punished for being raped.)

Mohammedan precedent persists to the present day in Saudi Arabia. So it comes as no surprise that women can be detained / imprisoned for disobedience to their designated male guardian (be it a father, brother, or—as is often the case—husband). Women—especially unwed mothers—face enormous discrimination regarding child custody and property rights. In Saudi court cases, a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man's, per the Koran. Contending that if a woman is harassed—or even accosted—due to not dressing "modestly" enough entails that the onus is on HER to not be abused. If she fails to cover her hair / face / wrists / ankles, it is HER fault in the event she is raped by libidinous male bystanders. Hence men who abuse—or even kill—insufficiently garbed women face little to no legal repercussions in Saudi Arabia; just as the first Mohammedans envisioned it.

To be clear: This is ALL in keeping with the Sunnah.

When all but two of the 20 worst countries in the world (assessed for the treatment of women) have instituted a strict version of sharia, it becomes plain to see that the Sunnah is certainly not helping; and is most likely a significant part of the problem. (Nations on this ignominious list that are NOT Islamic are typically the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. Honduras and Sri Lanka usually don't fair well either. North Korea is a nightmare for everyone.) When not a single Muslim-majority country is in the top 40 countries for the treatment of women, then this becomes incontrovertible.

Nation-States that base their governance on the Sunnah make Atwood's "Gilead" look like the Seneca Falls Convention.

The Sunnah in general is lightyears from a clarion call for women's rights—something that had been championed since time immemorial at various places at various times (as discussed in my essays "The

Universality Of Morality” and “The Long History Of Legal Codes”). Yet we see Progressive Pakistani’s march in the Aurat [Women’s] Parade, mouthing platitudes about “women’s rights” while complaining about the patriarchy...and in the very next breath refer to the Sunnah. This is nothing short of discursive schizophrenia. Praising the source of one’s grievance indicates grave confusion about the ideals one purports to espouse.

Happily, many of the world’s Muslim men do not think it is okay to beat their wives...for ANY reason (in spite of the Koran’s comments on the matter). That they cannot find support for such an abstinence in their holy book seems not to bother them. The ultimate source, it turns out, is their own conscience.

Footnotes For Appendix 4:

{1 These “ten terms” [“aseret ha-divarim”] constituted a contractual agreement between the Hebrews (alt. “Israelites”) and the Abrahamic deity. This fabled covenant (the Hebrews’ compact with the Abrahamic deity) actually had two versions—Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:4-21. Here, the relevant admonishment pertains to covetousness. There were also prohibitions against recognizing other deities, making idols, mixing meat and dairy, working on the sabbath, etc. The only other parts that had anything to do with (genuine) morality were admonishments against cheating, stealing, lying, and killing (one’s fellow tribesmen)—which, at the time, was not surprising news to anyone. I discuss the Mosaic decalogue in my essay: “The Universality Of Morality”.}

{2 Fundamentalist Christian denominations infamous for misogyny include Puritans, Calvinists, Pentecostals, and Mormons. Roman Catholics have a checkered track-record as well. BY FAR, the most patriarchal societies (that is: societies that have been oppressive to women) were those governed by the three major Abrahamic Faiths. The salience of Abrahamic religionism is made blindingly obvious once we look at communities characterized by the un-diluted (read: fundamentalist) instances of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In ALL such cases, said oppression is THROUGH THE ROOF. This is evident to the present day. One need only look at communities that espouse Haredi Judaism or Evangelical Christianity or Salafi Islam to see patriarchy on steroids.}

{3 Note that there was nothing new about allowing females (from within the tribe) to inherit property. The protocol was spelled out in Numbers, chapter 27.}

{4 Surah 76 (“Al-[i]N-S-an”) and Surah 114 (“Al-N-S”) are most accurately translated as “mankind” (alt. the human race; people-in-general). Odd that god opted to give two different chapters (essentially) the same title.}

{5 The only exceptions to the use of the definite article are Surah 34 (“Saba”), Surah 35 (“Fatir”), Surah 40 (“Ghafir”), Surah 41 (“Fussilat”), Surah 80 (“Abasa”), and Surah 106 (“Quraysh”)...not counting the four chapters that don’t even have a title (20, 36, 38, and 50). Sometimes the chapter title refers to the Abrahamic deity (87); sometimes it refers to the Seal of the Prophets (73 and 74). Sometimes it’s an animal (2, 6, 16, 27, 29, 100, and 105), sometimes it’s a place (7, 15, 18, 52, and 90), sometimes it’s an event (17, 22, 56, 62, 69, 75, 88, 97, and 101), sometimes it’s a phenomenon (9, 13, 24, 32, 45, 48, 51, 58, 59, 65, 81, 82, 84, 99, 103, 107, and 113), and sometimes it’s a category of people (21, 23, 26, 30, 33, 60, 63, 77, 79, 83, and 109). In virtually every other case, it is a THING—like “The Thunder” or “The Light” or “The Sun” or “The Moon” or “The Night”. In all instances where the definite article is used in a chapter title, we find the stated topic to be an object of discussion. (That is: How are MALE believers to think about, and treat, such-and-such?) Hence “The Women”.}

{6 Note that the term for “women” is “nisaa” / “nisai” (“your women” is “nisaakum” / “nisaikum”). The repetition of this anecdote is a reminder of how redundant Islam’s holy book is. Interestingly, there is discrepant wording each time it is repeated, illustrating that the “Recitations” were likely compiled from

disparate sources. Each iteration is crudely worded—indicating that the writers were not re-wording things to exhibit the dexterity of their eloquence. In each case, the idiosyncratic wording is awkward—though awkward in different ways. It’s as if each amanuensis were grasping at a way to best articulate the apocryphal tale, and ended up stumbling upon his own wording.}

{7 The distinction here is in the suffix “-at”. The term for female polytheists is “mu-shrikat” (also found in 33:73 and 48:6). The term for female hypocrites is “mu-nafiqat” (as in 9:67-68, 48:6, and 57:13). Meanwhile, female believers are “mu-minat” (ref. 24:12, 33:35/73, 47:19, 48:5, 57:12, 60:10-12, 71:28, and 85:10). Interestingly, 48:25 breaks the pattern of referring to “male believers and female believers” with the phrase, “believing men and women”. Such discrepant phraseology reminds us that different parts of the “Recitations” came from disparate sources.}

{8 The idiom here is to possess [malak(at)] “with the right hand”. The root for “possess” is “M-L-K”, not to be confused with the root for “king” (typically transliterated as “malik”).}

{9 Recall that the Koran is a relatively short book—easily under two-hundred pages (if printed in a normal format). And only a subset of the text is of such a nature that the intended gender of the audience would be made clear. Note, also, that the passages enumerated are scattered throughout the book, not concentrated in one particular place. This adumbration, then, is not the result of some cherry-picking expedition; it is simply noticing a theme that exists from cover to cover.}

{10 The Sunnah was clearly no improvement either—a point discuss in my essays on “The History Of Salafism” and “The Long History Of Legal Codes”. One might wonder: THAT is the best the Creator of the Universe could manage? Do Reactionaries in Dar al-Islam really want to stick with the claim that the Koran COULDN’T POSSIBLY be articulated any better? Are we to suppose that any and all moral insights gleaned since the 7th century are superfluous?}

{11 The terms “hafiz” [guard] and “qanitatun” [to be obedient; from “ata” / “ati[u]”] are used to describe this relationship, wherein men are put higher than women. This indicates that men are the overseers [alt. “guardians” or “custodians”] to whom women are to be “obedient”. There are, of course, two senses of guardianship: one in which the guardian serves the guarded; the other in which the guarded is subservient to the guardian. The Koranic sense is clearly the latter.}

{12 Islamic apologists often disingenuously interpret “ribuh-unna” [strike them] in this verse as a light tap on the wrist. (Strike is derived from the Semitic “R-B”; typically rendered “id-rib” in Arabic.) It is rather telling that a wife is not afforded equal license to resort to “ribuh-unna” whenever her husband steps out of line. If a light tap on the wrist, the strength disparity between the sexes would be moot. Alas.}

Appendix 5: The “Satanic Verses”

There is a rather embarrassing event often referred to as the “Qissat al-Gharaniq” [“Account of the [divine] Cranes”], as the three goddesses were referred to as “cranes” in the original version of these verses in Surah 53.

This led to the alteration of the following two ayat (53:21-22) from the original, “These are the exalted gharaniq whose intercession is to be hoped for” followed by a sort of hedge (a statement that comports better with monotheism): “They are not but names you have given them—you and your forefathers—for which god has sent down no authority” (53:23).

If the Koran so adamantly declares that god cannot have a SON (because it makes no sense if we’re to be

genuine monotheists), then it is a huge mistake to suppose he may have had DAUGHTERS. Consequently, a re-write of this passage was crucial. And so a re-write was eventually done.

Wherefore the gaff? Blame it on Satan.

The origins of these “cranes” lay in ancient Canaanite religion—as is attested in cuneiform inscriptions at Ugarit, which refer to three great goddesses: “Attart”, “Atirat”, and “Anat”. Later incarnations of this triad were roughly as follows:

- **“Allat”** [variously rendered “Athtar(t)”, “Alilat”, and “al-Lat”, per Hirmaic / Safaitic and Syriac / Nabataean inscriptions]. These were different facets of the feminine counterpart of the Semitic god, “El”; and effectively the Arabian rendering of the Assyrian goddess, Ishtar. There were major temples to her at Petra, Palmyra, Hatra, Emesa, and Hawran (ref. Jan Retso’s “The Arabs In Antiquity”). An Arabian shrine existed for her at Ta’if (primarily for the Banu Thaqif). It was destroyed in a raid by Abu Sufyan ibn Harb c. 630.
- **“Uzza”** was the Arabian rendering of the Greek goddess, Aphrodite (Roman: Venus), who was alternately referred to as “Ourania”. The etymology is from the Syriac, “Uzzay” (ref. commentary on the Syriac Bible by Theodorus bar Koni). An Arabian shrine existed for her at Nakhla (primarily for the Banu Shaiban). It was destroyed in a raid by Khalid ibn al-Walid c. 630.
- **“Manat”** was originally considered the consort of the Assyrian moon-god, Hubal. She was worshipped by the pagans of Yathrib until the Mohammedan take-over c. 622 (when the municipality was re-christened “Madina-tu al-Munawara”). She may well have also been a derivative of the goddess “Ishtar”; and perhaps inspired by the legendary demi-goddess, Semi-ramis. An Arabian shrine existed for her at Al-Mushallal [Al-Qudayd] (primarily for the Banu Aws and Banu Khazraj). It was destroyed in a raid by Sa’d ibn Zaid al-Ashhali c. 630.

For more on the three “cranes”, see the 8th-century “Book of Idols” by Hisham ibn al-Kalbi of Kufa.

Tellingly, pre-Islamic Meccans referred to their godhead (alternately considered “Allah” and “Hubal”) as “Lord of the Kaaba”. And here’s the kicker: An appellation for him was “Lord of Manat, al-Lat, and al-Uzza”. (!) These female deities were alternately portrayed as the “daughters of god” (as in Koran 53:49).

Predictably, the relevant Koranic passage for this infamous gaff has been a source of controversy; and for relatively straight-forward reasons. Being as it was a purported MIS-reporting of a (non-)revelation, the episode brings into question EVERYTHING ELSE that MoM said; and thus everything else in the Koran. (!) For it demonstrates that it was possible for MoM to have been under the impression that something was a revelation when it was, in fact, NOT.

This is precisely why Islamic apologists tie themselves in knots trying to obfuscate the fact that it occurred. Not only is it embarrassing; it undermines the theology on which traditional Islamic theology is predicated.

To the chagrin of Islamic apologists, the episode is recorded by many of the earliest Islamic sources. Indeed, four early writers of Mohammedan hagiography document it:

- Ibn Ishaq’s “Sirat Rasul Allah” (early 8th century)
- Al-Waqidi’s writings (late 8th century)
- Ibn Sa’d’s “Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir” (early 9th century)
- Al-Tabari’s “History” (c. 915)

Over the intervening centuries, other major Islamic commentators corroborated the account—notably: Musa

ibn Uqba, Abu Ma'shar, Ibn Abi Hatim, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardauyah, and Ibn Hajar.

And what of the Hadith record? Let's look at the most vaunted: that of Bukhari. That ALSO mentions the "mushrikun"—placated by MoM's concessions to their pagan idolatry—bowing "to that which [the Prophet] declared" (vol. 6, no. 385). It is clear from Bukhari's account that MoM would NOT have been uttering what the Koranic passage later came to be (after it was corrected; and as it now stands); as the later version CONDEMNS their three pagan goddesses (instead of recognizing them). In other words, the gambit to ingratiate himself with the pagan audience ACTUALLY WORKED.

What probably happened is rather straight-forward:

In the early days of his ministry (pre-Hijra), MoM sought to placate as many people as he could. Such pandering was necessary so as not to court enmity in Mecca at a time when he was still vulnerable. Naturally, the aspiring prophet was eager to bring as many Meccans as possible into the fold. So he opted to include this conciliatory revelation. That is to say: He likely produced the verses in question in order to placate—nay, to curry favor with—Qurayshi pagans; especially those who may have posed a threat to the movement in its earliest stages (were they to find it too disruptive to their traditional ways).

Thus: In deciding to announce these verses ad hoc, MoM was simply being pragmatic. He was—understandably—seeking to appease skeptical Qurayshis (including his own foster father), many of whom held sway in the city; and therefore over the Kaaba). They NEEDED to be placated; as the fealty of Mecca's key players remained to the incumbent pagan traditions.

There may have also been a personal motive: MoM likely felt a need to extend a good-will gesture—an overture that would reconcile him with his old tribe (and, for that matter, with his highly influential uncle), creating the veneer of a seamless progression from the old ways to the new.

From available accounts, it seems this sop to Meccan revanchists actually worked quite well.

The "catch" was that this particular revelation was—ultimately—inconsistent with the overarching theme of the new-fangled religion—a Faith that was adamantly monotheistic. Mohammedans were adamant about the sin of "shirk"; so could not abide any record of the shrewd theological feint. Indeed, while useful IN THE BEGINNING, the strategically-tailored passage would serve as a liability LATER ON. Recognition of these "cranes" would only serve to undermine the credence of the Mohammedan message, and thus MoM's authority; being—as it was—a blatant instance of "shirk".

Once MoM became sufficiently powerful, these verses lost their utility. That is to say, they became more an inconvenience than an asset once pagans no longer had cloud; so no longer needed to be placated.

It would have eventually become impossible to not notice this particular revelation's fundamental incongruity with the rest of Mohammedan theology. So Mohammedans found the need to not only supersede them, but to eliminate them altogether. (Merely abrogating them would have been insufficient; they needed to be erased from the record.) Subsequently, the following narrative was contrived:

These pesky verses were fraudulent ALL ALONG; for Satan had TRICKED god's messenger! The newly-minted prophet didn't make a mistake; he was HOODWINKED. By whom? Well, by Satan, of course. (The "Satan made me do it" plea had been used since time immemorial; so there was nothing novel about this ploy.)

Today, Muslim apologists' concern is as follows: If Satan was able to deceive MoM THERE (thus insinuating himself into the "Final Revelation"), then where else might this have happened? In other

words, the retro-active narrative devised by MoM and/or his early followers resolved one problem only to create another—more devastating—problem (to wit: bringing the credence of the ENTIRE KORAN into question).

Therefore, the thinking goes, the entire episode (not just the verses) had to be deleted from the account. Deny it ever even happened; and quietly move on.

Alas, the ten sources listed above make that a rather difficult feat to pull off. So all THEIR testimonies must ALSO be discounted, which—for obvious reasons—poses intractable problems. After all, the accounts come from significant sources in the Islamic canon. By jettisoning them, one risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Of course, there is a far more plausible explanation than “the devil duped me into saying it” excuse. Namely: MoM was just making things up as he went along. And this was just another unfortunate occasion when we was caught doing so. Eventually, the gaffe had to be “fixed”.

In closing: I would be remiss if I did not mention Salman Rushdie’s (in)famous novel. As it happens, the book was NOT about the actual “Satanic verses”. The title was based on a dream sequence that occurs in the fictional tale. The reverie only obliquely makes allusion to the “Satan made me do it” theme. Otherwise, the story had nothing whatsoever to do with MoM; or even with Islam per se.

Behold yet another case of irate mobs getting bent out of shape over texts they have never themselves read; and the ACTUAL contents of which they are completely ignorant. This did not prevent Iran’s Ayatollahs from issuing a “fatwa” (edict) calling for the assassination of the author for (implicitly) insulting their prophet. Good grief!

Appendix 5: Farcical Authorship

Not only is the content of a hallowed story often confabulated; in some cases, the authorship itself is part of the confabulation. The farcical attribution of sanctified lore goes back to the 13th century B.C., with the (fictional) Sumerian author, “Sin-leqi-unninni”. The practice of “pseudo-epigrapha” then proceeded through:

- Sanch[o]uniathon of Berytus / Ugarit in **Phoenicia**
- Homer, Aesop, Orpheus, Lesches, Stasinus, Arctinus Milesius, and Cinaethon in ancient **Greece** *
- Sun Tzu (putative author of “The Art of War”); Fu Xi (putative author of the “I Ching”); Zuo-Qiu-Ming (putative author of the “Zuo Zhuan”), and Bai Ze in ancient **China**
- Veda Vyasa and Vishnu Sharma in north **India**
- Tamil poets, T[h]irutakka-t[h]evar of Chola (putative author of the “Sivaka Sinta-mani”) and Agastya (a.k.a. “Agathiyar”) in south **India**
- Khana of Chandra-ketugarh / Pragjyotish[a]pur (a.k.a “Lilavati”) in **Bengal**
- Moshe [a.k.a. “Moses”] as putative author of the Pentateuch (i.e. the Torah, likely contrived by Judaic scribes during its compilation in Babylon). David is the purported author of the “mizmor-im” (Psalms); and his son, Solomon, is the purported author of the Song of Solomon and Proverbs. ** Also notable are Samuel, Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, etc.: purported authors of the respective (eponymous) books. Kohelet[h] was putative author of the “Book of Ecclesiastes”. Shimon ben Yeshua ben Eliezer ben Sira[ch] [of Jerusalem] was putative author of the so-called “Book of Ecclesiasticus” [a.k.a. “Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom”]. Jason of Cyrene was putative author of the “Book of Maccabees”. Na[c]hum of Capernaum was putative author of his eponymous

book. Jeremiah ben Hilkiah was putative author of the “Book of Lamentations” (as well as an eponymous book). Also of note is the Habakkuk of Jerusalem (c. 600 B.C.) All of this material is used in **Judaic** lore. ***

- The four eponyms of the canonical Gospels; John of Patmos as putative author of the “Book of Revelation”; as well as Abdias of Babylon and Symeon Metaphrastes in **Christian** lore.
- Skaldic poet, Bragi Boddason inn Gamli in **Norse** lore
- The preternatural blacksmith, Ilmarinen (putative author of the Kalevala) in **Finnish** lore
- Per Abbad of Castile [a.k.a. “Abbot Peter”, putative author of “Cantar de Mio Cid”] in **Spanish** lore
- Pierre Marteau of Cologne in **French / German** lore
- “Mother Goose” [“Mère l’Oye” in French]; the “Gawain Poet”; and Martinus Scriblerus in **English** lore
- Oisín [alt. “Ossian”] in **Irish** lore
- Brythonic bard, Taliesin in **Welsh** lore
- Ashik [alt. “Ashug”] in **Turkic** lore
- Hermes Trismegistus of Egypt (putative author of the “Kybalion”) in **Hermetic** lore
- Diedrich Knickerbocker in **American** letters

...to mention fifty examples. These monikers were—and, in some cases, still are—used as place-holders for what are farcical authors. In the Muslim world, legend tells of the mystical tracts composed by the fabled “Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan” of the Azd (variously said to have hailed from Tarsus, Harran, Kufa, or Tus).

We encounter a similar phenomenon with “William Shakespeare” in Elizabethan England (regarding some of the works in the celebrated oeuvre attributed to him alone, which may have been penned by others). The ploy has been used in modern publishing—as with “Carolyn Keene” (imaginary author of the Nancy Drew series) and “Franklin W. Dixon” (imaginary author of the Hardy Boys series).

In the modern era, the most notable instance of this phenomenon is Betty Crocker: one of the best-selling authors of the 20th century; and—starting in 1926—arguably the biggest female celebrity in the world. In 1945, Fortune magazine named her the most popular woman in America (after Eleanor Roosevelt). The catch: She didn’t exist. Betty Crocker was conjured by General Mills as a P.R. device. For the first two decades of her famed existence, most people assumed she was a real person rather than a persona concocted by a corporation to promote a brand...and to sell products. The ruse worked like a charm.

Note that here, we are not talking about pseudonyms. The above personae were not the noms de plum of specific people. They were fictional characters to whom the respective works were attributed. In other words, the use of these (fabricated) names was a marketing strategy.

Pen-names, on the other hand, are not fictional characters. “Publius” really existed; it was the nom de plum used by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton to keep their identity temporarily secret. “George Eliot” really existed; her name was Mary Ann Evans. “A.M. Barnard” really existed; her name was Louisa May Alcott. “Mark Twain” really existed; his name was Samuel Longhorn Clemens. “Lewis Carroll” really existed; his name was Charles L. Dodgson. “Malmoth” really existed; his name was Oscar Wilde. Richard Bachman really existed; his name was Stephen King. By contrast, the authors listed here may have never existed. A nom de plume is for VEILING the identity of the author. This is a matter of INVENTING an author. In other words: The author of the work is HIMSELF a fictional character, created by the (actual) authors of the work.

Ascribing a work to a fictional character has some benefits; as one is at liberty to romanticize the authorship ‘til one’s heart’s content—without regard to those who may have actually written it. In other

words, farcical authorship is a feature, not a bug. This was the strategy employed with the “Ellery Queen” mystery series, where the tales’ protagonist was supposed to be the author of the books. Early Mohammedans employed a similar strategy with the Koran—contending the book’s protagonist (the Abrahamic deity) was the author; and “Mu-H-M-D”, a 7th-century Bedouin merchant from Mecca, was the designated amanuensis (who was delivered the manuscript by a celestial emissary).

Sometimes, people just take cherished works and slap the name of a revered personage on them, as was done with the “Meditations Vitae Christi”; which was attributed to the Catholic saint, Giovanni di Fidanza of Latium (a.k.a. “Bonaventura”). And so it goes: Don’t know who ACTUALLY wrote a cherished work? No problem; just proceed with the desired attribution—be it farcical or actual. Veracity is beside the point.

When a narrative becomes fashionable, people are easily duped into believing tall-tales about its origins. This is exactly what happened in the 1760’s when Scottish author, James Macpherson published poems about a legendary warrior named Fingal. He convinced everyone that the material was REALLY the translation of long-lost ancient texts by the fabled Gaelic bard, Ossian, from the 3rd century—thereby imbuing the material with an aura of authenticity. The material was such a big hit, everyone got swept up in the tale of its fantastical beginnings. (The prospect of a dashing hero in one’s heritage is ALWAYS an enticing prospect.) It wasn’t until much later that people realized it was farce.

The Filipino author, José de la Cruz (a.k.a. “Huseng Sisiw”) understood that conjuring a farcical background for a text is a surefire way to give it prodigious cache. This is precisely what he did c. 1800 with his epic, “Corrido and the Life of the Three Princes”. He claimed that the tale (also rendered “Children of King Fernando and Ibong Adarna [alt. Queen Valeriana of Berbania]”) was not his own, but had come from the Occident; and that it was actually an ancient European legend. (The implication was that the story may have been TRUE.) According to Sisiw, the epic had been brought to the Philippines by the Spanish in the 16th century; and that he was merely transmitting it. This enticing backstory made the material that much more enchanting: all the better to captivate his audience. The gambit was a resounding success.

Wonder how effective this strategy can STILL be? In 2008, the novel “Charm” became an instant best-seller in the U.S. Its purported author was Kendall Hart—a character on the popular American soap opera, “All My Children”. Undoubtedly, many of those who flocked to buy the book were well aware that the author was fictional; yet this did not deter them from buying a book that was ostensibly written by a beloved personage...precisely BECAUSE it was attributed to that personage. Such occurrences are a reminder that a gratifying figment can be more compelling than Reality.

We humans are often entranced by the notion that something is from long, long ago in a land far, far away. So it goes with ancient tracts, which purport to contain timeless wisdom.

The blurring of fictional personae with real-life people is commonplace with the most avid fans of pop-fantasy—be it novels, television series, films, or video-games. Soap opera aficionados have been known to become obsessed with certain characters—often penning gushing letters to the heart-throbs with whom they have become hopelessly infatuated. (Networks provide mailing addresses.) In fact, actors are often given raises or fired based—in large part—on the amount of fan-mail they receive from fawning viewers. (That is: They are evaluated based on how much delusive thinking their performance generates.) It is no secret that the most devoted followers of fictional characters (especially in fantasy and science fiction) sometimes conflate the character with Reality, forgetting that the personae with which they have become smitten is NOT REAL.

Of course, the entire point of IMMERSION is to get us to (temporarily) lose track of the fact that Middle

Earth, Narnia, the United Federation of Planets, the Wizarding World, and Westeros aren't real. Some of us desperately want to believe that the Shire, Archenland, Starfleet Command, Hogwarts, and Winterfell really exist.

Immersing oneself in a well-crafted narrative recruits many of the same psychical mechanisms as religiosity. (Participants are, after all, looking to be “transported”.) Sometimes people become so thoroughly immersed in a fabricated universe that they remain terminally submerged in the fantasy. The fantasy thus BECOMES their “reality”. Consequently, Reality must be held in abeyance—indefinitely—in order to sustain the intoxicating illusion to which they have become addicted. This is precisely what we find in cases of religious fanaticism.

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{ Ancient commentators can't even agree on where Aesop may have hailed from. Herodotus thought he was originally from Samos. Plutarch (as well as Cassius Maximus of Tyre) surmised that he was probably from Lydia. Aristotle supposed he was from Thrace. Callimachus of Cyrene referred to him as “Aesop of Sardis”. And Roman historians assumed he was from Phrygia. Most concur that he was a contemporary of the (equally folkloric) King Croesus of Lydia; and eventually ended up in Delphi. What nobody knows for sure is whether or not he actually existed. This did not prevent people from attributing to him some of the most hallowed fables in history. Over the course of centuries, the fables commonly attributed this Lydian story-teller were transmitted by a series of scribes, who composed adaptations of the corpus in various Greek vernaculars (as well as in Vulgar Latin). Demetrius of Phalerum cobbled together a (now lost) compilation in ten volumes c. 400. Thracian writer Phaedrus of Pydna composed a Latin rendering of the fables in the 1st century A.D. Meanwhile, Roman writer, Babrius of Syria composed a Hellenized (Greek) rendering of the fables in iambic tri-meter (also in the 1st century A.D.) Later, Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius (a.k.a. “Avianus”) composed his own (Latin) version of the fables c. 400, this time as a collection of elegies. The material of “Aesop” was later lifted by a 2nd-century Syrian writer who's pseudonym was “Babrius” / “Gabrius”...and then even later by a Roman writer (possibly Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius c. 400), who's pseudonym was “Avianus”. The fables would later be popularized by the French writer, Jean de La Fontaine, in the 17th century. The famous tales continued to be revised and translated thereafter, incorporating material from whichever culture within which they were being circulated. Consequently, the fables as they are commonly known today bear little resemblance to their original form. In other words: Aesop's fables are an example of what TYPICALLY happens to stories as they are transmitted over time, and are disseminated over vast geographies, being adopted (alt. co-opted) by one culture after another. The logistics involved are roughly the same whether we're dealing with fairytales or the Hadith.}*

*{** This is instructive; as the fabled author OF the text is also a primary character IN the text. While Moses is a legendary figure, even if we assumed such a man actually existed, he could not possibly have been the actual author of the Torah—as even the earliest texts (the Deuteronomic texts) were not composed until the Exilic period (6th century B.C.) During that pivotal epoch, Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah supposedly proselytized. It was Ezra who supposedly took the finished manuscripts and brought them back to the Holy Land for posterity; and it is HIS rendering (in Aramaic) that served as the source for all subsequent editions.}*

*{*** Later, semi-historical rabbi, Judah Ha-Nasi (a.k.a. “Judah the Prince”) was said to have compiled the “Mishnah” in the late 2nd / early 3rd century. And the semi-historical authors of the Talmud were “Amoraim” like Nachmani (a.k.a. “Abaye”) and Abba ben Joseph bar Hama (a.k.a. “Rava”) in the late 3rd / early 4th century; followed by “Rav” Ashi in the late 4th / early 5th century. Other storied figures of Jewish letters were the three great theologians of the Iberian Peninsula during the 12th and 13th centuries: Yehuda HaLevi of Toledo (a.k.a. “Abu al-Hassan al-Lawi”; the “Ribal”), Moshe ben Maimon of Cordoba (a.k.a. “Maimonides”; the “Rambam”), and Moshe ben Nachman of Catalonia (a.k.a. “Nachmanides”; the “Ramban”). These were historical figures who took on a folkloric aura over time.}*