The Genesis of Literature in Islam
From the Aural to the Read

In the beginning was the Qur'an, the first book of Islam and also the first book of Arabic literature. Motivated by the need to understand and interpret the word of God, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims made an inventory and study of their tradition. This involved the collection, transmission, and instruction of the sacred text, of the words and deeds of Muhammad, and also of poetry, from both before and after the rise of Islam—indeed of all matters regarded as pertinent to the proper and scholarly study of the tradition.

This activity, which began in the last third of the seventh century, relied predominantly on oral study with a master, that is, on oral communication between teacher and student, although writing was already an integral part of this process.

Here Gregor Schoeler explains how Muslim scholarship evolved from aural to read. The result was the genesis of one of the richest literatures of late antiquity and the early middle ages, as is clear from the widespread dissemination of scholarship through writing and the attendant proliferation of books.

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REVISED EDITION

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in collaboration with and translated by
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The American University in Cairo Press
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Author's preface

This is a revised edition and English translation of my French book, Écrire et transmettre dans les débats de l'Islam. The text for this new edition has been carefully revised, corrected and enlarged. The most important revision is the addition of Chapter 7, ‘Books and their readership in the ninth century’, dealing essentially with al-Jahiz, to whose work I had devoted only a few pages in the first French edition. For this new chapter, I have made use of ideas I first put into words for a paper I presented at the International Conference, ‘Al-Jahiz: A Muslim Humanist for our Time’, held in Beirut in January of 2005. Another important modification is the conclusion, which I have significantly rewritten.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Shawkat Toorawa, the spiritus auctor of the project to translate my book into English, and also the editor of this work. Thanks to his expert knowledge in the field, Professor Toorawa has mastered the difficult task of translating my work with consummate skill. In addition, he suggested many corrections to the text and contributed many ideas of his own to the book.

In a word, he was not only the work's ideal translator but also the best collaborator I could wish for. What is more, our collaboration was a wonderful experience: during our common labour a deep mutual sympathy and friendship developed: I shall remember our collaboration with great pleasure and deep gratitude.

My thanks go to all those who have contributed to this project and brought it to fruition. I am in particular much obliged to Professor Carole Hillenbrand at the University of Edinburgh for her willingness to include this book in the New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys Series, and to our editor at Edinburgh University Press, Nicola Ramsey.

Basel, Switzerland

Translator's preface

At the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society in San Diego in 2004, Beatrice Gruendler mentioned Professor Gregor Schoeler's Écrire et transmettre dans les débats de l'Islam (Paris, 2002) during a presentation. I had not yet seen the work but immediately bought and read it. That summer I travelled to Edinburgh and proposed to Professor Carole Hillenbrand that the book be included in the New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys Series. To my delight, Edinburgh University Press subsequently acquired the rights to the book, and invited me to translate it. I am grateful to the outside referees who endorsed me as a translator, and to Carole Hillenbrand, Nicola Ramsey and Eddie Clark at the Press for their confidence, limitless patience and goodwill.

I began translating in Delhi in mid-2006, and continued in 2007 in Oxford, while on a leave supported by a New Directions Fellowship from the Mellon Foundation. I am grateful to Chase Robinson and Jeremy Johns for sponsoring me as a Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College, and to Farhan Nizami for providing me with an office at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. I completed the translation upon my return to Cornell University. I am especially grateful to my chair, Kim Haines-Eitzen, and to Maude Rith, Chrissy Capalongo, Julie Graham and Shelly Marino, for making the Department of Near Eastern Studies such a conducive and wonderful place to work.

I thank the members of RRAALL (www.rnall.org) for their pubh; James Montgomery for very kindly sharing a pre-publication copy of the English translations of Professor Schoeler's German articles, published together in 2006 as The Oral and the Written in Early Islam; Joseph Lowry for nuancing my understanding of German and much else besides; Michael Carter for generous and expert assistance with the English rendering of Sibawayh's chapter headings; and my wife Parviné Bahemis for bringing to bear her intuitive knowledge of French. As always, the support and indulgence of my family—Parviné, our children, Maryam and Asiya-Tanveer Jahan, and my late father, Mahmood, who eagerly awaited the appearance of this translation, but passed away a few weeks before it was completed—cannot be quantified or repaid.
Professor Schoeler and I corresponded regularly as we attempted to convey precisely his ideas as originally expressed, as they have been refined in light of the development of his thinking in the six years since the original French appeared, and as we re-ordered sections within chapters, and even added a chapter. Our conversations meant that I was able to engage, learn from, collaborate with, and befriend a formidable scholar. For this opportunity and pleasure, I reserve my greatest thanks.

Ithaca, New York

Introduction

Literature, as it is understood in this book, is the body of finalised, published written works belonging to a language or people – for our purposes, the Arabic language or the Arabic-speaking Muslim community. ‘Finalised’ means that those written works constituting ‘literature’ were definitively rephrased and edited by their authors, and ‘published’ means that they were produced with a public readership in mind. Taken in this wider sense, literature perforce includes scholarly works, documents, official letters and the like, i.e. works serving practical needs. Besides contracts, official letters and so on, for more than a century after the appearance of Islam, there existed only one piece of literature in Arabic: the Qur’an. But even this exceptional work – the very first work of Arabic literature – needed some twenty-five years to become an actual ‘book’, an actual ‘literary work’. The Hadith, the reports of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad disseminated and transmitted soon after his death, needed up to 250 years to become ‘literature’; as for Arabic poetry, which had been in existence since long before the rise of Islam, it needed up to 300 years to become ‘literature’. What was the nature of this early material? What form did it take and under what circumstances did it subsequently become actual literature? In what ways were the materials of this literature transmitted? And how did it go on to become one of the largest and most multifaceted of all the world’s literatures? These are questions this book attempts to answer.

Since the matter of the genesis of Arabic literature is closely bound up with the nature and character of its transmission, and since this has been difficult for scholars to appreciate, I deal with this in the first part of this Introduction. In the second part, I briefly describe my methodology, in particular my attitude toward the sources. This account is necessary because incorrect recent assessments of both the nature and reliability of the sources we have available – even the historicity of Muhammad, for instance, has been called into question – are having a truly damaging effect on the value accorded these sources and the events they report.
The problematic of the ‘oral’ and the ‘written’

The relationship, in the early stages of Arabic literature, in particular during the first two centuries of Islam (ca. 600-800 CE), between the oral and the written is complex. Because of its complexity, this relationship has been difficult for scholars to grasp fully. This applies first and foremost to the Qur’an. The Prophet Muhammad (d. 11/632) is said to have dictated several Qur’anic surahs, or parts of surahs; indeed, several of his Companions are reported to have had complete copies in their possession shortly after his death. Yet, in order to produce the first ‘collection’ of the Qur’an under Abu Bakr (d. 13/634) or ‘Umar (d. 29/644), the compiler, Zayd ibn Thabit (d. ca. 45/666), is said to have relied on notes written on various materials (pieces of papyrus, flat stones, palm leaves and so on) as well as on oral transmission. According to Muslim tradition, this was not until twenty-five years after Muhammad’s death, under ‘Uthman, that the Qur’an acquired its definitive written form.

The relationship between the oral and the written is even more difficult to assess when it comes to Hadith, the corpus of traditions (ahadith, sing. hadith) relating Muhammad’s words and deeds. Although some Companions of Muhammad who knew how to read and write appear initially to have made a practice to write down some of his words and to display no scruples about doing so, Hadith scholars argued throughout the eighth century, and indeed in the subsequent century too, about the permissibility of writing down hadiths. Many were of the opinion that it was forbidden, averting that the Qur’an should remain Islam’s one and only book. This argument presupposed, of course, that a significant amount of material had already been put into writing; an undertaking that had its own active supporters and whose slogan was ‘Shackle knowledge’ (iqra’idu al-’ilm). Moreover, biographical literature frequently makes mention of the ‘books’ (kutub) that Hadith scholars had in their possession, and the claim is made that the leading scholar al-Zuhri (d. 144/762) undertook to collect and write down hadiths on a large scale (tadabbur) under official impetus – this in spite of the fact that he is portrayed as an opponent of writing in several accounts. Yet, after his death only one or two notebooks were found among the things he left behind.

According to the information in the biographical literature, it was around the middle of the eighth century that works that can be classified as magrar qaṭīf, ‘compilations systematically arranged according to content’, first appeared in the various fields of Islamic scholarship. Nevertheless, the sources state about some of the compilers of these works that they ‘possessed no book but rather reported everything’ from memory (la ṣabba lahu ḥadith, inna ma’ana rija’u yaghayya’tu). Even in the ninth century, at a time when the production of literary works had begun on a truly large scale, several scholars are said to have recited their teachings from memory without ever having used a book – the ninth-century compiler, Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849), for example, states at the beginning of several chapters in his magnum opus, ‘This is what I know by heart from the Prophet’. And yet, we are told that a number of these very same scholars had in their homes a large number of ‘books’.

If we turn to poetry and its transmission, we find that the situation is almost as complex. It is undeniable that for ancient Arabic poetry, composition, recitation and also transmission were all oral, whereas the haphazard attempts by American scholars of the late twentieth century to transpose onto ancient Arabic odes (qaṣīda, pl. qaṣi‘āt) the ‘theory of oral formulaic composition’ developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord,9 this theory proposes that epics and other poetic texts preserved only in writing – but which supposedly first existed in popular oral forms – must have been improvised during recitation because of their reliance on recurrent formulae, a feature termed ‘formulaic diction’ or ‘formulaity’. The famous ninth-century poet Abu Tammān, al-Bahṣūrī and Ibn al-Rūmī did not find it necessary to produce editions of their own poetry. Indeed, most of the modernist ‘Abbasid poets (muḥallathūn) of the ninth and tenth centuries left it to later generations to compile their poems and to edit them in diwāns, but we know for a fact that they used written notes and even had written collections. Specific references to written poetic collections appear very early, at the latest in the middle of the Umayyad period (ca. 700), in particular in poems of undeniable authenticity, such as one flying (naqṣād, pl. waqṣā‘āt) by al-Farazdaq (d. ca. 110/728).10 Certainly, poetic compositions were always intended for oral recitation.

This confusing and often contradictory picture has led both modern Western and modern Arab scholarship to an understanding of the relationship between the oral and the written that is only partly tenable – if it is tenable at all – notwithstanding the research undertaken by two formidable scholars, Niẓār al-dīn al-Asad in poetry and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Dūrī in historiography. Western scholarly interest in this thorny issue dates from the nineteenth century. Surprisingly, Aloys Sprenger, the very first scholar to have given serious thought to this question, is also the one to have proposed one of the most satisfactory answers. All credit is due to him for having pointed out a fundamental distinction that was almost completely forgotten by the second half of the twentieth century, when the debate around this question intensified, a distinction that has had to be rediscovered. In his monumental study of the Prophet Muhammad, Sprenger pointed out that ‘We have to distinguish between aides-mémoire, lecture notebooks, and published books’. An earlier article by Sprenger on Ḥadith is similarly replete with apposite observations about this question; he pointed out, for example, that the oldest notes in the domain of Ḥadith were intended as aides-mémoire and not as actual books.11

After Sprenger, Ignaz Goldziher published an overview of the historical development of Ḥadith, one that is still correct in the fundamentals and which
to this day still elicits admiration. Goldziher, following Sprenger, accurately qualified the hadiths written down in the earliest period and mentioned in the biographical sources as 'notebooks, perhaps collections of individual sayings ... for private use'. He also described with great precision the debate among Hadith scholars about recording hadiths in writing. On the other hand, he failed correctly to appreciate two decisive stages of development, that of tacit, the movement to collect material on a large scale often under official impetus, and that of taqāṣīf, the systematic movement to arrange material into thematic chapters. Thus, Goldziher was convinced that one had to reject as pure fiction any information about the large collections of hadiths systematically arranged into thematic chapters that are said to have existed in the eighth century. In order to support his denial of the existence of such collections a century before those of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), even when biographical sources make repeated mention of them, Goldziher relied on statements which he gleaned from the very same sources, according to which many of these compilers are said to have 'possessed no book' and to have been 'committed to transmitting from memory'. At most, he was willing to accept that certain juridical collections of that period (but which he did not qualify as Hadith collections) were systematically organised, a position he had to adopt because of the existence of such works as the Muṣannaf of al-Bukhārī (The Well-Trodden Path) of Malik ibn Anas (d. 759/796).

Goldziher’s views prevailed virtually unchanged in Western scholarship until the 1960s. Joseph Schacht, for example, accepted Goldziher’s views as self-evident in several of his works, including The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence, a work that had no real stake in the question of the oral or written transmission of hadiths. Goldziher’s propositions were even enlisted to explain the appearance of other kinds of literature – history, literary history, Qur’anic commentary, and so on – which, in terms of the transmission of knowledge, followed the procedure customary in hadith transmission of relying on a chain of authorities (nādāl, pl. nādāni). This led, among other things, to an incorrect and contradictory evaluation of the sources of the great compilations of the ninth and tenth centuries. Jean Sauvaget consequently termed the sources upon which al-Ṭabarî relied for his monumental universal history ‘oral’ ones, whereas Rudi Fatah, author of the article on al-Ṭabarî in the first Encyclopaedia of Islam, divided these sources into ‘oral transmission’ and ‘written sources’, taking the latter to mean actual books.

Martin Hartmann, a contemporary of Goldziher’s, had already disputed the validity of the latter’s views about the late beginning of the taqāṣīf movement (i.e. not until the ninth century), but his objections fell on deaf ears. Hartmann had invoked the existence of a part of the Muṣannaf (The Systematically Arranged Collection) of ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubṭalīn (d. 181/972) preserved in later recen-
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What these studies underscored above all was that the alleged early works discovered by Segin were nothing of the sort: at best they were later recensions of these works, transmitted and often reworked by subsequent generations of disciples. This can be seen clearly with the Qurʾān commentary attributed to Mujāhid. In their careful analysis Georg Stauth and Fred Leemhuis have shown that it is categorically not the original (and frequently cited) work by this early commentator, but rather a ninth-century compilation in which numerous exegetical traditions attributed to Mujāhid are combined with other exegetical material not originating with him. The Mujāhid traditions it contains correspond not at all, or only partially, to those contained in well-known later compilations (e.g. al-Ṭabarī’s Taṣfīr). As for the historian Abū Mihknaṭ’s Kitāb al-Ghārāʾid (Book of Raids), it turns out to be the section on ghārāʾid in the Kitāb al-Futūḥ (Book of Conquests) of Ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qāḍī (d. 220/832) in which the latter exclusively quotes reports originating with Abū Mihknaṭ.

Curiously, it was Rudolf Sellheim, an Arabist at Frankfurt University, the very same institution as Segin’s, who set himself the task of refuting his colleague’s hypothesis regarding the purported early literacy of the Islamic tradition and the alleged existence of early written works. Sellheim’s own studies, especially the doctoral and habilitation theses of his students, set out to show that the late compilations of al-Ṭabarī or of Ibn ʿAbd Rabīḥ (d. 328/940) cited information that had reached these authors exclusively through oral transmission.27 The results of these studies, too, have proven only parts of the hypotheses that occasioned them. Once again it turns out that late compilations almost never transmitted word for word from the earlier sources as Segin had supposed. Thus, Sayf. M. Al-Samukh was able to show that it was impossible to reconstruct word for word and in its original form the Kitāb al-Magāẓī (The Book of the Campaigns) of Muhammad Ibn Ṭabāṭaba (d. 150/967), an eighth-century work surviving only in later recensions, preserved notably in Ibn Ḥishām and al-Ṭabarī.28 When parallel Ibn Ṭabāṭaba accounts in these later compilations are taken one by one and compared, they often turn out to have significant divergences. In another study, Stefan Leder showed that some of the “books” attributed to al-Haytham ibn ʿAdi (d. 207/821) in later compilations (al-Baladhuri [d. 259/872], al-Ṭabarī and others) actually consist of material marshalled by al-Haytham for his teaching sessions and passed on in his lectures, and which was only later, during the process of transmission, or as a result of it, gathered together into written works.29 On the other hand, these studies uncovered more and more evidence that written works, too, could be counted among the sources of these later compilations: thus, side by side with materials passed on in teaching sessions there also existed numerous works organised by al-Haytham himself and “published” by him, not as books for readers, it is true, but as works to be recited orally as part of his teaching.30 And Walter Werk-
meister showed that the encyclopaedic compilation of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihhi, the Kitāb al-‘Iklī al-fardī (Book of the Unique Necklace) depended at least partly on written books and that writing had played a role even in the ‘oral’ tradition of the teaching sessions.31

Important research undertaken at other universities (and not as a direct outgrowth of this debate) includes Herbert Horst’s study on the sources of al-Tabarī’s Qur’ān commentary at the University of Bonn,32 and two studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg on works by Abū al-Fārāj al-Iṣbahānī (d. 356/967): Manfred Fleischhammer’s study on the sources of the Kitāb al-Aghānī (Book of Songs) and Sebastian Günther’s study of the Kitāb Maqātīl al-Talhibīyyīn (The Book of the Murders of the Descendants of Abī Talib).33 Günther has observed in later research on the same subject that some of the sources of the Kitāb Maqātīl al-Talhibīyyīn occupy an intermediate position, between ‘class notes’ and ‘actual books’.34

In these studies, as in those of Leder and Werkmeister, one conclusion emerges quite clearly, that the specificities of the transmission of Islamic scholarship in the first four centuries of Islam (ca. 600–1000) cannot be conceived of through the dichotomy oral/written. It is worth mentioning, in this context, that we never find the terms shāfīḥan or al-niwaḥay al-shafāhīyyah in our texts, terms that would be the exact equivalents of ‘orally (transmitted)’ and ‘oral transmission’. What we do find, however, are sa’ādīn and al-niwaḥay al-masāra’ah, i.e. ‘(transmitted by) audition’ and ‘aural transmission’ or ‘audited transmission’.35

We are in fact in the presence of a unique phenomenon, one that requires careful characterisation and equally careful analysis. I have myself, in research spanning some twenty-five years, tried to identify this phenomenon and comprehensively to characterise it. As my research progressed little by little, and as I critically examined and re-evaluated earlier studies, it became clear to me that, in order to find a satisfactory answer to the question about the relationship between the oral and the written, the opposition between oral and written had to be rejected; it also became clear to me that we had to return to Sprenger’s original conclusions. In a 1985 article, I accordingly adopted his distinction between aids-mémoire, lecture notebooks and actual books, placing that insight in the context of Muslim scholars’ repeated emphasis on the importance of ‘oral’ or ‘audited’ transmission (which applies to all three of Sprenger’s categories).36 I then published a study in 1989 in which I focused on the very first book in Islamic scholarship, Sīhawayhi’s al-Kitāb (The Book) and in which I also introduced the terms syγγραμμα (written composition, systematic work) and ἱγγυσμόν (written reminder, notes), a pair borrowed from the Greek.37

Another 1989 article, one on the debate between Ḥadīth scholars about the permissibility of writing down Ḥadīth, provided me with the opportunity to examine the reasons adduced by eighth-century and later scholars in opposing the use of writing.38 In a fourth study, which appeared in 1992, I commented on two discrete concepts: on the one hand, ‘writing’, which does not necessarily imply a piece of published writing; and on the other ‘publishing’, which for a long time was only undertaken orally.39 In a 1996 book-length study on the biography of Muhammad, I addressed both the question of the modifications undergone by Ḥadīth in the course of transmission, and also the question of the very authenticity of that transmission.40 In the present work, I present in detail the conclusions I reached in those studies, and complement that presentation with an in-depth study of the fifth century: it is during the fifth century that actual books, properly speaking— that is, written works that are definitively redacted and edited—first made their appearance in significant numbers, signalling a shift in Islamic scholarship away from aural transmission toward the written book, culminating, as it were, in the preparation in the thirteenth century of a ‘critical edition’ of al-Bukhārī’s (al-Janī) al-Ṣaḥīḥ (The Sound [Compilation]).

Methodological considerations

A word about my methodology, in particular regarding the nature of the sources I use and my attitude toward these sources, is in order.41 None of the accounts we have about any event in the seventh century— the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, or the collection of the Qur’ān, for example—are in any way contemporary with the events they describe. The same holds true for most of the events of the eighth century. These accounts are all exclusively transmitted according to established protocols in something like lecture courses, termed ‘sessions’ (majālis) or ‘scholarly circles’ (halaqāt) in Arabic. Their definitive redaction did not take place until the ninth and tenth centuries. There is, therefore, often an interval of one to two hundred years, sometimes more, between the time when these accounts first appear and the time when they are definitively written down. Take for example, the definitive recension of the Qur’ānic text, said to have taken place during the caliphate of Uthmān (ruled 2/644–3/656). The oldest source, as far as we know, is the eighth-century Kitāb al-Raddāh wal-futūḥ (Book of Aposiocy [Wars and Conquests]) of Syāfī ibn ‘Umar (d. ca. 184/800);42 and the source most often cited in later works discussing this key event is later still, namely the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī.43 In relating their accounts, both rely on witnesses, following the procedure customary in Ḥadīth transmission, viz. listing a chain of authorities (‘Ṣaḥīḥ, on the authority of Muhammad and Talhah, reports . . . ’). But we do not have any manuscripts reproducing the original version of Syāfī’s text; all we have is a later recension, which was only put together three generations after the author’s version,44 and which is therefore not even earlier than al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ.45

Can we, therefore, believe what the later sources report? Western research
has yielded two quite different answers to this question. Some scholars totally reject Muslim tradition, or almost totally. To justify this critical or hypercritical approach they cite the considerable span of time during which hadiths were transmitted and the absence of any mechanism to control transmission. They also adduce the accounts’ numerous divergences and contradictions, the occurrence of serious misunderstanding and obvious errors, and the presence of legends and unbelievable stories. As for the material in the tradition that relates to historical events, Leone Caetani and Henri Lammens both suggested at the beginning of the twentieth century that the very historicity of even this material was extremely doubtful. In the mid-twentieth century, Joseph Schacht and Régis Blanchère took a similar position, on that has more recently been adopted by John Wansbrough, Michael Cook and Patricia Crone. Wansbrough, for example, questions the historicity of the accounts transmitted in Muslim tradition regarding the recession of the Qur’an and suggests that the Qur’anic text did not take definitive shape until the end of the eighth century or even the beginning of the ninth century.

There are Western scholars, however, who believe that it is possible to subject the tradition to close critical examination in an attempt to discriminate between credible elements and accounts on the one hand and material that cannot be accepted on the other. The difficulty is establishing appropriate criteria. Evidence of obvious religio-political bias can provide one such criterion for the evaluation of a given report: one would reject or, at the very least, use with great caution a report in which one detected a pro-‘Abbâsid or pro-‘Alid bias for instance. This was the method adopted by most of the great German positivist scholars of the nineteenth century and by their twentieth-century successors; indeed, this was the method used in the early twentieth century by Theodor Nöldeke, Gottsche Begrässer and Otto Pretzl, the authors of the fundamentally important Geschichte des Qorâns. In more recent times, William Montgomery Watt and Robert B. Sergeant formulated a methodological principle that they believed could validly be applied to historical inquiry. Their position is as follows: a report or tradition should be considered authentic, and its content considered trustworthy, as long as no reasons are found to reject it wholly or in part, reasons such as the inclusion of apocryphal material, or of contradictions. Michael Cook, a representative of the hypercritical school, invoking the special character of the Islamic tradition, has countered this view with the following proposition, ‘Yet it may equally be the case that we are nearer the mark in rejecting whatever we do not have specific reason to accept, and that what is usually to be taken for drawback is no more than shifting sand.’

The method I have followed in my research is essentially that of Nöldeke and his successors. Generally speaking, no inference or conclusion is dependent on the historicity of any single report. It is true that a single report might well be altered, or even be false or fabricated, but we can, to my mind, be sure that the totality of the accounts at least accurately describes the essential outlines of events or prevailing practices even if it does not preserve the details. By way of illustration, let us return to my earlier example, the definitive recession of the Qur’anic text. Many reports praise the caliph ‘Uthmân for this undertaking, others criticize him for it; the latter characterize him as ‘the one who burned/tore the Qur’anic text’ (bārā‘a fi’kkhārā‘ al-masāhib), that is, the non-‘Uthmânic codices. But these accounts – evidently often quite divergent – all revolve around the figure and role of ‘Uthmân in such a way as to make it impossible, in my opinion, to deny either his role in the recession of the Qur’an or the fact of its occurrence. One independent fact confirms this. We now have fragments of a Qur’anic manuscript from Sanaa (Yemen) reliably dated by art historians to the second half of the first Islamic century, specifically to 710–15, during the reign of the caliph al-Walid (r. 705–715); an analysis using carbon dating has even suggested an earlier date, between 657 and 690. These fragments show the ‘Uthmânic text (masûm) with orthographic variants, but no textual ones, and even include the first and last suras, absent from some non-‘Uthmânic codices. The definitive recession of the Qur’anic text must therefore have taken place earlier than the date of these fragments, effectively setting aside Wansbrough’s hypothesis that the recession was not produced until the end of the eighth century/beginning of the ninth century. Even if we had no reports whatsoever describing ‘Uthmân’s initiative, we would have to postulate a recession of the Qur’an at approximately the time of ‘Uthmân.

When it comes to our knowledge of teaching and learning practices, indeed of anything having to do with the methods of scholarly transmission in the first two centuries of Islam (ca. 670–800), we have no documents contemporary with the events on which to depend – our only recourse is to reports preserved in later biographical sources. In this case, though, the time lag between the occurrence of a particular event and the appearance of an account that reports the event is far shorter than the time lag between the collection of the Qur’an and the reports that document it. Thus, Ibn Sīd (d. ca. 1085–786) in his biography of Ibn Ishaq (ca. 895–924/925), who in his biography of Ibn Ishaq (ca. 535/724–92), and the report that documents it. Thus, Ibn Sīd (d. ca. 1085–786) in his biography of Ibn Ishaq (ca. 895–924/925), who in his biography of Ibn Ishaq (ca. 535/724–92), provides us with information about the origin and transmission of the latter’s work on the life of the Prophet, lived only some decades after Ibn Ishaq. Moreover, the essential points of earlier teaching practices and methods of transmission that can be gleaned from ninth-century accounts describing them are confirmed by their clear influence on subsequent practices.

Indeed, later circumstances often cannot properly be understood unless we also rely on corresponding accounts dealing with an earlier period. At the beginning of various chapters of his Muṣnun, Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849) writes, ‘Here is what I know by heart from the Prophet .…’, illustrating that
in his milieu in Kufa at the time, it was still normative, indeed required, to represent Hadith collections as aides-mémoire, and not as actual books. This underscores the plausibility of everything the biographical literature recounts about the refusal to commit Hadith to writing in Kufa one and two generations before Ibn Abi Shaybah. Indeed, if the later literature did not report anything about an eighth-century debate among the Hadith scholars on this matter, we would have to postulate its existence. And if we did not know, thanks to information provided by biographers, that Ibn Ishaq had produced a definitive recension of his Kitab al-Maghazi, we would in this case too have to postulate its existence. In fact, the various forms of this work as transmitted by later authors, even taking into consideration the variants and often quite stark divergences, nevertheless permit us to discern a systematically organised book, one markedly different from other musammam works of the same period.

In sum, our sources, which for a long time are exclusively transmitted reports, can indeed be used systematically. To be sure, we cannot expect that these sources will provide information that is as accurate and as precise as the information we might glean from sources contemporary with the events they describe. But, if we examine them judiciously, always keeping in mind their individual specificities, we will find that they can often provide us with evidence or strong indications about matters that would otherwise remain nothing more than postulations or mere speculation.

Notes
4 A. Sprenger, Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed (Berlin, 1869), vol. 1, xiii and af.
5 ‘Uber das traditionswesen bei den Arabern’, ZDMG 10 (1856), pp. 5–6 and af.
7 Ibid., p. 196 = Muslim Studies, vol. 2, p. 182.
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41 See the introduction to Schoeler, Charakter und Authentizität.
42 Sayy ibn Umar, Khatib al-Bukhari wa-sayy A'isha wa-Uth, ed. Q. al-Samarra'i (Leiden, 1995), pp. 48 ff. (nos. 50, 52).
44 In this compilation of accounts attributed to Sayy, each account is introduced by the following chain of authorities: Salih told us: Shu'ayb told us: Sayy told us, on the authority of ... This is in fact the method with which al-Tabarī introduces material emanating from Sayy ibn Umar, cf. GAS, vol. 1, p. 311 ff. Al-Tabarī does not, however, narrate the account of the collection of the Qur'an.
45 I do also on occasion cite much later biographical works, such as the Span of al-Dhahabi (14th c.) and the Tahākho of Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (14th c.). Typically, these sources rephrase what earlier authors have written, Ibn So`d, al-Fawwād and others, for example, in corresponding passages, variants do naturally appear. If I do not avoid using these works, it is because they very conveniently synthesise a mass of much earlier, scattered information.
48 For historiography, see Schacht, "On Mūsārāt; for law, see Schacht, The Origins of
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Contracts, treaties, letters

The Qur'an is the very first book of Islam and also the very first book of Arabic literature. This does not mean, however, that writing was not used before the appearance of Islam. The use of writing in ancient Arabia to record contracts, treaties, letters and so on must date from the Jāhiliyyah, the so-called 'time of ignorance [before Islam]. As for written treaties, letters and other documents in early Islam, their existence is undeniable. Since it is extremely unlikely that the use of writing for these purposes was introduced suddenly at the time of the Prophet, we can be certain that such documents were already in existence one or two generations before the appearance of Islam, at least in urban centres of Arabia such as Mecca and Medina.

Arab tradition also confirms for us the existence of written contracts during the Jāhiliyyah. It would certainly be unreasonable to insist that all the accounts describing them are reliable, but these accounts nevertheless constitute a valuable source of information about the practices and customs of early Arabia. Muhammad ibn Ikhlib (d. 248/862) preserves information about a pact of confederation (hilf) between the Khūṭā tribes and ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of Muhammad. He writes:3

They entered the house of council [in Mecca] and resolved to draft between them a document in writing (an ṣuḥāf bi-hayyah kinān) ... and suspended the document (ṣiḥṭ) inside the Kābah.

The Sīrah ([The Prophet's] Biography) mentions a contract made two generations later, also in Mecca – while Islam was gaining ground, the Quraysh resolved not to contract marriages with members of the Banū Hashim and Banū Muṭṭalib tribes.4

They met and deliberated on drawing up a document (an ṣuḥāf bi-kitāb) ... When they had decided on this, they wrote it on a sheet (or sheets) (kitābuhu fi ṣuḥāfah) ... then they suspended the sheet(s) inside the Kābah.

The Qur’an itself recommends using a scribe to record debts in writing:

O you who believe! When you deal with each other in contracting a debt for a fixed term, then write it down! And have a scribe write it down between you faithfully! Let no scribe refuse to write, as it is God Who has taught him. Let him write, and let the debtor dictate ... (Qur'an 2:282).

The famous ‘Constitution of Medina’, was known at the time of the Prophet Muhammad simply as ‘kitāb’ (‘writing’). It opens as follows:5

This is an agreement in writing by Muhammad the Prophet (kitāb min Muhammad al-nabi) – God bless and honour him – between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them ...

In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Iṣḥaq uses the same term: ‘The agreement in writing (kitāb) which the Messenger of God contracted between those who had left Mecca and the ‘Helpers’ of Medina’.6 Other evidence of writing includes the famous Treaty of al-Hudaybiyyah (6/628) between Muhammad and the Meccans, and the numerous letters sent by Muhammad to various Arab tribes. Written treaties are also attested in contemporary poetry, such as the following verse from one of the poems of the Median poet Qays ibn al-Khāṭīb (d. 2 b.H./623):7

When, in the early morning, their battle lines appeared The relatives and leaves (ṣuḥāf, i.e. the treaty) called for us The treaty concluded between the two tribes was recorded on the leaves (ṣuḥāf) mentioned in the verse. From the point of view of their function, official letters, safe-conducts and legal regulations from early Islam, or earlier still, can be likened to treaties and contracts.8

The ‘publication’ of official documents

In the absence of archives or a place specifically set aside for the preservation of documents in ancient Arabia, the respective parties customarily kept such documents in their homes or carried them on their person. The letters of the Prophet to the Arab tribes containing the conditions under which they were admitted into the Islamic community were apparently kept by notable families.9 Very often we are told that a document was tied to someone’s sword, or kept in its sheath; on the death of the owner of the sword or sheath, the document was passed on to family members.10 There is a persistent hadith that ‘the Prophet wrote out the ma’qūf’, that is, the provisions of the blood-wite.11 According to one version of the hadith, Muhammad wrote the text on a leaf (ṣuḥāfah);12 and in the version cited by al-Ṭabarī among the events of the second year of the Hijrah (6–2), the place the Prophet kept this document is also mentioned, namely ‘attached to his sword’.13
According to our sources, significant contracts – at least those concluded in Mecca – were suspended or stored inside the Ka'bah in order to underscore their weight and importance. A similar situation seems to have recurred in the early 'Abbasid period: al-Mas'udi reports that Hārūn al-Rašīd (ruled 170/986–193/809) deposited the contract he made between his sons al-ʿĀmin and al-Maʿmūn in the Ka'bah.44

The practice of keeping official documents and other important texts in special places – temples, archives, libraries – was very widespread in Antiquity, in both East and West.45 In Egypt, legal documents were preserved in temples and later in the libraries of Coptic monasteries.46 In Samuel I 10: 25 we read:

Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord.

Heracleitus is said to have placed three logos (orally delivered teachings), edited and collected into a book, in the temple of a deity.47 Tacitus says of Caesar and Brutus ’For they did write poems and deposited them in libraries.’48 And, according to H. S. Nyberg, the written Avesta, which was codified by the Sasanian but never accepted by the Zoroastrian priests in this written form, existed in only a few copies kept in the most important political and religious centres of the empire. This was done so that the texts could serve as a model.49 For their part, the priests had meticulously transmitted the text orally for centuries with the utmost scrupulousness.

The purpose of depositing an important document in a temple or in any other revered site is clear: it draws attention to the nature and character of its content and, more importantly, it confers on the document the status of an authentic, perdurable, reproducible original, one that can be consulted by anyone, at any time. This is evidently a form of publication, or at least ‘something that anticipates publication’.50

Poetry and tribal accounts: oral dissemination and the role of writing

That personal letters and other private documents were written is undeniable;51 these would have included promissory notes (sakāk), redemptions of slaves (mukāṭabāt), land grants (jība)52 and so on from early Islam, and maybe even from the Jāhiliyyah. The question is whether the poetry of the period, and of the period immediately following, was put into writing. ʿAṣṣār al-dīn al-ʿĀsād and Fuat Sezgin have argued that it was and have suggested that this writing down of poetry dates to a very early time.53

There is no doubt that ancient Arabic poetry was intended to be recited and to be disseminated orally – the same was true of genealogies (nasāḥ), of proverbs (anwūl), and of tribal narratives, both the legendary material that came to be known as ayyām al-ʿArab, ‘the battle-1 days of the Arabs’, and the

historicobiographical material that came to be known as ākhbār, ‘accounts’. The act of recitation incorporated both the place of transmission and the place of publication. The process of publication for poetry, therefore, was utterly different from the process of publication for contracts, and recitation remained the regular method for the publication of poetry for a very long time, even after written collections began to be compiled. While a poet was alive, he or his transmitter(s) (ṣāḥiḥ, pl. ṣāḥiḥāt) recited and disseminated the poems.54 After the death of the poet, recitation and dissemination were exclusively the task of the transmitter(s). When the transmitter(s) died, wider circles of individuals, starting with those in the poet’s tribe, undertook to learn and disseminate the poems.55 According to the sources, Bedouin (ʾaṭrāb), in particular the tribal elders or chiefs (ṣayḥ, pl. ashayḥ), played a role in this transmission, but so too did other male and female members of the poet’s tribe.56 And just as tribal chiefs and other Bedouin transmitted verses to subsequent generations, so too did the poet’s descendants – a grandson of ʿAṣṣir is mentioned in one account, for example.57 Moreover, poets themselves often transmitted the poetry of others. ʿAbū al-Rumah (d. 117/735), ʿAṣṣir (d. ca. 111/729) and al-Farazdaq (d. ca. 110/728), are representative of this category of ‘transmitter-poets’.58

From about the second quarter of the eighth century, a new kind of transmitter appeared, in particular in southern Iraq – the learned nawāʾir or nawāʾiḥ (pl. nāwāʾiḥ).59 Prominent learned nāwāʾir included ʿAbū ʿAbd Allāh al-Maʾṣūm (d. ca. 156/770–1 or 155/772), Ḥammād ibn al-Rawāyah (d. ca. 156/772), ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbū (d. ca. 163/778). These transmitters, some of whom were of non-Arab, typically Persian, origin (nāwāʾiḥ, pl. nāwāʾiḥ), played an important role, producing collections on a large scale and not confining themselves to material from a single tribe. As Régis Blachère has noted of this virtually academic enterprise:59

They preserved every work in verse, provided it was noteworthy. In this way, these works acquired almost limitless diffusion after having initially enjoyed only local circulation.

The aim of the transmitters and the learned transmitters alike was not simply to preserve the material they had undertaken to disseminate, but also to preserve the quality of that material, sometimes even improving upon it when possible. One famous poet and transmitter, al-Ḥaṭṭāy al-Dāʾir (d. ca. middle of the 2nd/7th century), is said to have exclaimed shortly before he died, ‘Woe be to poetry which falls into the hands of a bad transmitter!’60

Several other testimonies confirm this state of affairs in early Islam. The poet ʿAbd Allāh ibn Musḥib (d. after 355/965 or 70/662) is reported to have said:61

‘I send the verses out cooked then the transmitters straighten them out [i.e. correct them and then recite them in an improved form].’
As for the great Umayyad poets Jarîr (d. ca. 111/729) and al-Farazdaq (d. ca. 110/729), they used to have their transmitters polish their poems. The Kitâb al-Aghâne (Book of Songs) preserves very interesting details about the methods of the transmitters in a long account recounted by Abû al-Faraj on the authority of al-Farazdaq’s uncle.\(^{34}\)

Then I came to al-Farazdaq . . . and went to his transmitters. I found them straightening out whatever was ‘crooked’ in their poetry . . . I then came to Jarîr . . . When I went to his transmitters, I found them putting right whatever was ‘crooked’ in his poetry and correcting the occurrences of impure rhyme (sinâd).

This account shows inter alia that the transmitters corrected faults in rhyme.

Khalaf al-Ahmar, one of the most prominent learned transmitters, is said to have told his student, the philologist al-Asma‘i, ‘In the past, transmitters were wont to improve the poems of the ancients,\(^{33}\) and to have ordered al-Asma‘i to correct a verse by Jarîr, even though there was no question that Jarîr had composed it that way, and no question that al-Asma‘i had correctly recited it in the presence of the transmitter Abû al-‘Ali‘. The correction involved the substitution of a preposition. Jarîr is reported to have said:\(^{34}\)

What a memorable day, the good fortune of which appeared before its misfortune (khayrun hu gabla shurru), when the slanderer was still far and the abuser still quitter.

Khalaf thought dîna (‘far less’) would work better than qabla (‘before’), giving:

What a memorable day, the good fortune of which was far less than its misfortune (khayrun dîna shurru) . . .

According to Khalaf, such situations occurred because Jarîr was not in the habit of polishing (his poetry), and his expressions were not apposite.\(^{35}\) Al-Asma‘i is also reported to have corrected a line of Imru‘ al-Qays by replacing an expression he thought ill-chosen with one he thought was more appropriate.\(^{36}\) Transmitters sometimes also corrected mistakes in language, i.e. in the use of pure Arabic (‘arabîyyah).\(^{37}\) The saying ‘The transmitter is a poet (too)’ reveals that the transmitters would often independently intervene in the material they transmitted.\(^{38}\)

In this period, then, the emphasis was not on textual accuracy or on faithful transmission of the original but, rather, on the preservation and even improvement of the artistic and linguistic qualities of the poetry. This concept of transmission is, of course, incompatible with the idea of a definitive written redaction that will then form the basis for the literary publication of a text. In the case of documents such as contracts, the idea was indeed to make public a definitively redacted written text. With poetry, on the other hand, publication was inseparable from personal and oral transmission and dissemination. In the case of documents, there is a strong desire to preserve and to fix the content of a given text and to make sure it remains unambiguous and perdurable. In the case of poetry, however, the text perforce remains flexible; there is a desire to keep what is good, but there is no desire to preserve what has not yet fully matured, or what has not yet been perfected. The mechanism for such improvement cannot be a written text, no matter how well crafted: only a qualified individual will do.

It is essential to keep in mind that this is in no way meant to suggest that the use of writing is excluded in the transmission of poetry. In fact, we have a great deal of textual evidence for the Umayyad period proving that poets and transmitters had in their possession written notes, indeed even substantial collections of poems, and we can safely assume that this practice started earlier, probably with the poets and transmitters of the preceding generation. The written texts used by the transmitters were, however, intended neither for public dissemination nor for literary publication: they were meant to serve as aides-mémoire. The function of writing in this context was therefore completely different from its function in the drawing up of a contract or safe-conduct, and naturally completely different also from the function it would have in connection with actual books intended for publication. For contracts, safe-conducts and books proper, writing had a fundamental and intrinsic role to play, but in the case of poetry its role was purely auxiliary.

The Arabic word kitâb denotes all forms of writing, from notes and drafts to contracts, from epigraphic inscriptions to books proper.\(^{39}\) By turning to the two Greek terms hypomnêma and syngramma, however, we can introduce an accurate conceptual and terminological distinction: hypomnêma (pl. hypomnêmata) describes private written records intended as a mnemonic aid for a lecture or discussion, and draft notes and notebooks. Syngramma (pl. syngrammata) describes actual books, composed and redacted according to the canon of stylistic rules, and intended for literary publication (edósis).\(^{40}\) This distinction between hypomnêma and syngramma is useful in distinguishing between various kinds of writing and, though borrowed from a Greek context, can fruitfully be applied to the Arabic context.

In one of his nagâ’il (flights), al-Farazdaq enumerates many earlier poets whose verses he transmits. In one line about Labîd and Bishr ibn Abî Khattâm, he says:\(^{41}\)

Of al-Jâ’farî and Bishr before him, I have a written compilation (al-kitâb al-mujâmal) of their poems.

A few verses later he adds:\(^{42}\)

They left me their ‘book’ (kitâbatum) as an inheritance.

It is clear from these passages that al-Farazdaq had in his possession ‘books’, or rather draft notebooks, containing large collections of poems. The private char-
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As is clear from the exchange with Dhu al-Rumah cited earlier, however, Hammād did have ‘books’—or, rather, written notes or drafts—in his possession, but he only used them in a private capacity. According to an account in the Kitāb al-Naḍim, reported on the authority of Hammād himself, he was once summoned by the caliph al-Walid ibn Yazid (r. 129/743–136/744). Before presenting himself to the caliph, he refreshed his memory by consulting two of his ‘books’, the Kitāb Quraysh and Kitāb Thaqif, thinking (mistakenly, as it turned out) that the caliph would question him about the Quraysh and Thaqif tribes; but al-Walid questioned him instead about the Bālṭ tribe.49 Hammād evidently conducted himself in his private audience with the caliph the way he would have conducted himself during a scholarly lecture, that is, by leaving his books at home—he did not need the help of writing, or, at least, that is the impression he wanted to give.

This report also shows that Hammād, and no doubt other transmitters too, organised their compilations according to tribe and confirms the hypothesis of Goldziher and Birūnī that such tribal collections were the original form of poetical collections and that they preceded the later ḏu‘a’ā’ of individual poets.50 But we must be careful not to equate these aṣīda-memoire with the tribal collections redacted by philologists in the ninth century (such as the Du‘ā‘ al-Ma‘ālikī, the only such collection still extant); they are at most precursors to these later compilations. Moreover, such eighth-century collections as these were very likely not only anthologies of poetry, but may well have included historical and biographical material about the tribe, proverbs (as is apparently the case with the Kitāb Banī Tamīm mentioned in the verse by al-Tirmīzhī cited above), and much else besides.

In an elegy, the poet Abū Nuwas (d. ca. 200/815) praises his teacher Khalaf al-‘Alamār as follows:51

He was not given to making the meaning of words obscure (i.e., by schooling them in obscure expressions), nor to reciting with the help of notebooks (at least by relying on notebooks).

And al-Jāḥîṣ (d. 253/868–9) reports on the authority of Abū ‘Ubaydah (d. 267/882 or slightly later) as follows about the ruwāyah Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā‘ī:52

The books he had written, recorded from Bedouin of pure and correct speech (fusḥā) al-arab, filled one of his rooms almost to the ceiling.

Even if Abū ‘Amr had not later burned his ‘books’, as al-Jāḥîṣ notes in a subsequent passage, these written notes would not have been transmitted to posterity: they were written through dictation and were thus akin to lecture notes for private use, not actual books. In keeping with contemporary practice, Abū ‘Amr had acquired his knowledge through ‘audited’ transmission (sama‘).53

acter of these is underscored by the poet’s remark that he acquired them through inheritance. Even poets and transmitters alive (at least) one generation before al-Fārābī must have possessed such notebooks or else he could not have said that they had left him ‘their’ notebooks. In the case of one of al-Fārābī’s tābi‘īn, Ibn Mattawiyah, it is explicitly stated that he wrote down al-Fārābī’s poems.43 As for Jarīr, when he resolved to compose a lampoon of the Banū Numayr, he instructed his nāṣir Ḥusayn as follows:44

Put more oil in the lamp tonight, and make ready the (writing) tablets (also al-bīg) and ink!

In the same period, ‘books’ containing tribal accounts already existed, as is attested in the following verse by the poet al-Tirimīzhī (d. ca. 122/739), in which he describes a dictum he found in a certain Kitāb Banī Tamīm:45

In ‘The Book of the Tamīm tribe’ we found: ‘The best horse for a race is a borrowed one.’

In an anecdote reported in the Kitāb al-Muwaddah (The Adorning) of al-Marrāqīn (d. 384/994), Hammād al-Rawiyah reads back Dhu al-Rumah’s poems to him (qam‘a ‘ala), and Dhu al-Rumah, who evidently knows how to read, proceeds himself to verify and correct the notes that Hammād has taken.46

The above examples show that the use of writing as an aide-mémoire is attested among poets and transmitters in the first quarter of the eighth century and earlier. What is more, these accounts shed some light on the methodology of the learned transmitters who in this period were beginning to collect poetry on a large scale. Their method, known in Arabic as qir‘ah, was to write down the poems for their own personal use, then recite what they had written back to the poets and transmitters; if necessary, the latter corrected the text. Therefore, the notes which the transmitters kept at home for their personal use, and which they consulted when the need arose, have nothing to do with actual books. The reciting of poetry—which for the learned transmitters often became a form of scholarly lecture—remained oral, in keeping with the custom of the Bedouin poets and transmitters. The learned transmitters recited the poems they collected from memory—just as the Bedouin poets and their transmitters had always done, and just as their Ḥadīth scholar contemporaries in Basra and Kufa were doing—and they left no written, edited materials intended for publication.

In his entry on Hammād al-Rawiyah, Ibn al-Naḍīm notes:48

No-one had ever seen a book by Hammād. People did transmit (material) from him. The books (attributed to him) were composed after his death.
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defensible up to a point. He goes on to adduce various other points in support of his theory, including the following Qur’ānic verse (Anbiyya’ 21:105):

Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the land.

The above verse includes an almost verbatim passage from Psalm 37(36), verse 29:

The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.

Georg Graf, the author of a voluminous history of Christian Arabic literature, has advanced an entirely opposite theory to Baumstark’s. For Graf, the very fact that the majority of the Arab Bedouin before Islam were illiterate argues against the possibility of an Arabic liturgy or any sort of literary production in Arabic for that matter; the only Christian literature in Arabia before Islam would perforce have to have been written in Greek or Syriac.63 Whereas the liturgy would admittedly have been in one or two of these foreign languages, religious instruction and, closely related to it, the reading of Bible passages, would have been done in Arabic. The texts were translated orally, as they were being used. In addition, Graf adduces four arguments in support of his position:69

1. In the first place, the oldest extant versions of the Bible in Arabic can be dated to no earlier than the tenth century.
2. Second, when it comes to the numerous Biblical echoes in the Qur’ān, in spite of some almost literal citations (such as the Anbiyya’ 21:105 passage cited above), the divergences between the Qur’ānic and Biblical versions are usually considerable. This suggests that the Christians of Mecca with whom the Prophet Muhammad may have had contact had only oral traditions to draw upon.
3. Third, the most important Muslim author to cite passages from the Bible was the apostate ‘Ali ibn Rabban al-Ṭabar (d. ca. 250/864), who used his own Arabic translation of a Syriac text for his apologetic work, the Knīb al-dīn wal-dawlah (Book of Religion and the State).65 The assumption that he had relied on an Arabic translation possibly datable to the pre-Islamic period is thus groundless.
4. Finally, the passages of Scripture that appear in the writings of the earliest Arab-Christian authors who cite the Bible – Theodore Abū Qurrah (d. after 364/976) for the Melkites, ‘Abd al-Maṣṭūḥ al-Knīa’ī (d. 319/930 c. 4) for the Nestorians, and Severus ibn al-Maqūfī (d. 418/1026 c.) for the Copts – do not all emanate from a single Arabic translation; each has taken it upon himself to produce an Arabic version based on a text in another language. We are forced to conclude, therefore, that no common or widely recognised Arabic version of the Bible existed when they were writing, neither among Christian Arabs in general, nor within the respective churches in particular.

Was there a Christian literature in Arabic before Islam?

Although this primacy of the Qur’ān as the very first book of both Islam and Arabic literature is very widely accepted, Anton Baumstark, an eminent specialist of Syriac literature, has advanced an alternative theory. He proposes that the Qur’ān is predated by the existence of Arabic liturgical books such as Gospels (especially of Palestinian origin) – he is therefore postulating at least a partial translation of the Bible into Arabic before Islam. His main argument rests on the fact that the Church’s attested practice was to use vernacular languages for the liturgy whenever it proselytised, thus Syriac, Coptic, Georgian and Ethiopic, for instance, in the East, and Gothic in the West. Why not suppose, then, Baumstark asks, that the Church would have followed the same practice with Arab populations? Baumstark’s argument depends on an analogy which is admittedly
The existence of an Arabic translation of the Bible dating from pre-Islamic times, then, is even more improbable and, consequently, one must conclude that there was no Arabic literature before Islam.

Graf's arguments are, it must be said, stronger than Baumstark's and tip the balance in his favour. If nothing else, the absence of an Arabic literature before Islam seems all but ineraduble. But could religious instruction and the reading of passages from the Bible - done in Arabic, as Graf himself recognizes - really be accomplished without written translations? Was it really an exclusively oral tradition? Some clues suggest that this was not the case, at least in early Islam. In fact, clerics at that time may well have used translations and notes in Arabic as aides-mémoire. The strongest evidence in support of this view comes from the Qur'an, where in Fursan 25:5, we read:

[The unbelievers] say jahāl: 'These are the tales of preceding generations (asāb al-auswātn), which he [i.e. the Prophet] has caused to be written and which are dictated to him morning and evening."

Asāb al-auswātn here may refer to religious accounts. This reference has certainly generated much debate, but what is important is the fact that Muhammad's religious opponents in Mecca regarded the use of writing in this context as perfectly normal. It is not unreasonable to surmise that it was from Christian monks and missionaries recounting the life of Jesus in Arabic that they got their idea that someone could, for his own personal purposes, write asāb and have them dictated to him."

Muslim tradition too assumes that the Arabic-speaking 'People of the Book' (that is, to whom God had revealed a Scripture) were in possession of religious texts in Arabic in the early days of Islam. It is reported several times that such and such a person had copied a book of this type for personal use. According to one account 'Umar is said to have copied 'one of the books of the People of the Book' and shown it to the Prophet. The latter is said to have become angry, in keeping with the position 'No book, except the Qur'an.' 'Umar, for his part, is said to have struck one of the members of the 'Abd al-Qays tribe who had copied Kitāb Dānayyil (The Book of Daniel) and then ordered him to erase it (it was apparently on parchment). A contemporary of the Prophet is also said to have had in his possession a book titled Majadda Luqmana, 'meaning a book containing the wisdom (jaba'ah) of Luqman.' The Prophet is said to have asked this man to recite this 'book' to him and to have recognised some merit in it.

Graf does not dispute that 'particular churches, and especially monasteries, had Biblical texts in Arabic in their possession and used these texts in different ways', but Graf's observation applies to a slightly later period. Whatever the case may be, in every instance in the accounts quoted above, the texts which people copied were for personal use, notebooks intended for presentation orally, i.e. for recitation ('ārd, qarnā'ah); these copies did not circulate. In no case can these be thought of as literary works intended to be disseminated in written form. They are therefore not actual books but, rather, private writings. The same observation will hold true when we look closely in the next chapter at the first phase of the writing down and 'fixing' of the Qur'an.

Notes
8 See al-Jahān, Kitāb al-Ḥayawān, ed. A. M. Ḥarīn (Cairo, 1965), vol. 1, p. 69.
13 al-Tabari, Tārīkh al-rais al-psr al-ḥaṣib (Annales), Series 1-3; ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1870-1901), vol. 1, p. 3567 - The Foundation of the Community, The
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42 ibid., vol. 1, no. 39, verse 61 (p. 201).
43 ibid., vol. 2, p. 908, line 11.
44 ibid., vol. 1, p. 430, line 12.
53 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 320.
54 Führer, p. 69 = Führer, p. 75.
57 Ibid., p. 566.
58 S. Graf, Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur, vol. 1, Die Übersetzungen (Vatican City, 1944), vol. 1, p. 36 ff.
59 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 39-52.
63 Snah, vol. 1, p. 472; al-Ṭabâtî, Tiwârî, vol. 1, p. 1208. Luqâmân is a legendary figure, celebrated for his wisdom.
66 This also holds true for what is regarded as the oldest surviving manuscript of a portion of the Bible in Arabic, a fragment of Psalm 77 (cf. Graf, Geschichte, vol. 1, p. 114). This two-folio parchment fragment discovered in Damascus is supposed to date to the end of the eighth century. It consists of the text in uncial Greek and an interlinear Arabic version transcribed in Greek characters. It is doubtless a translation for personal use, and therefore a written document that we can characterise as something like a hypomnemá.
The Qur'ān and Qur'ān 'readers' (qurrā')

The Qur'ān

Even though the Qur'ān was Islam's first real book, it did not exist in that form during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad; it was only as a result of a process that lasted some twenty-five years after Muhammad's death that the Qur'ān acquired the form in which we know it today.¹

According to the dominant opinion in Muslim tradition, the first revelation received by the Prophet was 'Alaq 96: 1–5, which opens with an invitation to recite:

Receiv in the name of your Lord (qur'ā' bismi rabbi) ... Other surahs dating from early in Muhammad's mission begin with the almost synonymous imperative 'Say' (qul) (Kāfirūn 109, Ikhlās 112, Fālāq 113, Nas 114). This means that the Prophet first recited the surahs, or parts of them, and then had his audience repeat them. Initially, when the revelations were still short, there was probably no need to write them down. This situation changed, however, when the Qur'ānic proclamations became longer and more frequent. It is most probable that Muhammad began to have revelations put into writing early on, during the so-called second Meccan period (615–20),² the tradition provides numerous details regarding this process of writing, including the names of the various individuals to whom Muhammad dictated Qur'ānic passages.³ Sufficient to mention here the most important 'scribe of the revelation' (kāṭib al-waḥyi), Zayd ibn Thābit (d. ca. 45/666).⁴ These writings were, however, nothing more than mnemonic aids to help the faithful with their recitation.⁵

We do not know precisely when the project of producing a 'Book', a veritable 'Scripture', became a priority. The fact, however, that within the Qur'ān itself the term kāṭib began to be used in increasing measure to describe the sum total of the revelation, effectively replacing the term qur'ān, shows that the idea of a 'Scripture' in book form like those possessed by Christians and Jews, the 'people of the Book', gained more and more prominence.⁶ This development need not be seen as contradictory since the earlier term, qur'ān, means both 'recitation' (the infinitive of the verb qara'a) and 'lectionary' (borrowed from the Syriac quaṣṣān);⁷ indeed, 'recitation' by no means excludes the possibility of a written text, and 'lectionary' actually presupposes one.

Yet, no 'Scripture' or compiled 'Book' existed at the time of Muhammad's death—Muslim tradition and the majority of modern scholars are in agreement on this point.⁸ According to Muslim tradition, all that existed at the time, besides oral tradition, were scattered writings on various materials, such as fragments of parchment and papyrus, slates, pieces of leather, shoulder blades, palm stalks and so on.⁹ There were also ʿṣabāḥ, sheets, 'containing the Book' (īḥā al-kīthāb),¹⁰ but the sources do not tell us enough to establish whether any longer and continuous text was written on these sheets.¹¹

According to the dominant opinion in Muslim tradition, the first recension of the Qur'ān was ordered by Abū Bakr on 'Umar's advice, a task then undertaken by the 'scribe of the revelation', Zayd ibn Thābit: this resulted in the compilation of a copy on sheets of the same shape and dimension.¹² A book 'between two covers' (biyya al-luḥayyn), an actual codex, thus came into existence.¹³ Even though a number of statements in the tradition suggest otherwise, this collection could not yet have been an official 'state copy'¹⁴ or else, when 'Umar died, it would have devolved to his successor, rather than being inherited by a family member, his daughter Ḥafṣah. This collection, called ʿṣāḥif (‘sheets’) in the sources (and only rarely mushaf, ‘codex’),¹⁵ was thus a personal copy that the caliph wanted to have available for his private use. This explains why there appears to have been no opposition to it—it was not, after all, an official copy and consequently laid no claim to being a definitive recension of the Qur'ānic text.

The Qur'ānic verse, 'We have sent down the Book (al-kīthāb) to you that it be recited to them' ('Ankabīt 29: 51), makes clear that writing was only one of the methods used for the preservation and transmission of Revelation. After the idea of a written Revelation gained prominence, the original idea of an oral recitation of the sacred text was by no means lost. 'Recitation' and 'Book', i.e. oral and written transmission, were two aspects of a single Revelation. Already, during the Prophet's lifetime, recitation and oral transmission of the Qur'ān had been vouchsafed to 'readers', or rather 'reciters' (qāṭīr, pl. qāṭār);¹⁶ They recited from memory the passages of Revelation out loud in public; as for those who could read and write, they relied on written notes recorded on various materials which they kept at home as aide-mémoire. Their methods were thus the same as those of the transmitters of ancient poetry. Edmund Beck was the first to recognise and carefully describe the close relation between qāṭīr and rāfīt, noting that 'both recite the words of a predecessor, the rāfīt the words of his poet, the qāṭīr the words of Revelation as given to Muhammad'.¹⁷

The caliph and his family were not the only ones to have in their possession a copy of the Qur'ān for their own private use. According to Muslim tradition,
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differed in an important way in poetry, free oral publication and dissemination continued without any restrictions; but for the dissemination of the Qur'an, a single text became the basis for its transmission.

One pre-‘Uthmān account shows that some welcomed this development. Supporters of the ‘Uthmānic codex maintained that 67

If ‘Uthmān had not ordered the Qur’an to be written down, we would have found people reciting poetry (i.e., we would have thought that those people were reciting poetry when they were in fact reciting the Qur’an).

According to them, there was a real risk that the Qur’ānic transmitters would manipulate the sacred text in the same way that poets and transmitters (rusūṣ) had the habit of manipulating the texts of the poems they transmitted. But ‘Uthmān’s initiative also had its detractors. For the Qur’ānic reciters, the establishment of an official edition of the sacred text disrupted their way of doing things. They had always published the way the transmitters of poetry published, by reciting the texts, relying only on written versions as aides-mémoire. The indignation of these detractors is echoed in the following later report of ‘Uthmān by political rebels: 68

The Qur’an was (several) books you discarded them except for one (Kura al-qur’ān husnahan fa-ta’abbadhi illa wadiidun)

The reciters (qarrā‘) and their supporters were simply not willing to accept the ‘Uthmānic codex as the single authoritative version of the Qur’an; for them, that recension was nothing more than one version among many. One emblematic figure in this group, Ibn Mas‘ūd, even succeeded in imposing ‘his’ Qur’an for a short time in Kufa (where he was then qadi and treasurer). 69 This is a reflection of the considerable freedom enjoyed by poetry transmitters, a freedom they regarded as quite normal. In fact, in the pre-‘Uthmānic period, certain reciters regarded transmission of only the meaning of the sacred text as sufficient. 70 They deemed it legitimate, for example, to replace certain terms by their synonyms or to change the order of words. One reciter, Anas ibn Malik, a contemporary and a Companion of Muhammad, is said to have recited aqāwa‘ī (more accurate) instead of aqāmu (‘firmest’) in Q Muzzammlāl 73:6 (Surely the rising by night is the firmest way [aqāmu] to thread and the most suitable for recitation) and to have justified this substitution by declaring, ‘aqāmu, aqāwa‘ī, ahyā‘u, it’s all the same thing!’71 Disputes among Qur’ānic reciters in the pre-‘Uthmānic period about the correct transmission of the sacred text were precursors, therefore, of later discussions among traditionists about whether transmission faithful to meaning (riyādah bil-ma‘ād) was sufficient, or whether it was necessary to transmit the text verbān (riyādah bil-ja‘f). 72

The reciters had not, to be sure, lost all their prerogatives. The Qur’an was after all the word of God, which it was necessary to present orally, through

The Qur’ān and Qur’ān ‘readers’ (qarrā‘)
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Nevertheless, the later development of the ‘Science of Readings’ was characterised by two tendencies: an increasingly strong attachment to the ‘Uthmanic codex on the one hand, and a growing weight of tradition on the other. The weight of tradition was so great that it ended up more or less arbitrarily legitimising the readings of certain reciters: in this way, the ‘Seven Readings’ became normative. By the tenth century, at the latest, the era of ‘creative’ readings was decidedly over: one was now constrained to read the text according to the traditions of the school of reading to which one was affiliated, such as the definitive victory of the principle of tradition.10

We know that the Qur’anic text was read out loud or recited during lectures, the teacher indicating the correct ‘reading’ of a problematic word and explaining the difficult passages.46 And, as Bergsträsser and Pretzl have shown, from the very beginning students noted down their teachers’ explanations. The earliest such notes are attested from before the middle of the eighth century and thus originate with the younger canonical Qur’an readers, or with the students of the older ones.47 Ibn al-Jazari and others expressly state that certain readers from the generation of ‘Hamza (d. 150/767), notably ‘Nafi’ (d. 169/785) and Abū ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd al-‘Alā (d. 154/770 or 157/774) used written notes.48

He [the student] had a notebook (filled with notes taken during the lecture) from which the teacher [taṣawwur ‘āmuṣ naṣīḥah].

Less often we find, ‘He wrote down the reading from’ (katahu al-qira‘at ‘an), and, in one instance, ‘I read before ‘Nafi’ his Qur’an reading and wrote down in my book’ (qara‘tu ‘alā ‘Nafi’ qira‘atuhu ... wa-katahuha fi kātibī). Bergsträsser and Pretzl are right, therefore, in maintaining that these ‘books’ (kutub) or notebooks (nasab) were not actual published books but in fact notes intended for private use. They do not constitute ‘strictly speaking a Qur’an readings’ literature but rather its precursor’.49 According to them, these notes contained only ‘brief remarks about how the Imam in question read problematic passages’.

The Kitāb of ‘Nafi’s disciple was a notebook containing notes taken during the master’s teaching; these notes concerned the readings themselves, of course, but probably also included ‘Nafi’s explanations about them. A number of other books bearing the title Kitāb al-Qira‘āt (Book of Qur’an Reading) from the same period are likely to have been of the same type. Writings of this sort are attributed to Abū ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd al-‘Alā (d. 154/770 or 157/774) and al-Kisā‘ī (d. 189/905).50 These evolved into such treatises as Ilkā‘al-Nafi’ wa-‘Ismahā (The Difference/Disagreement between [the readings of] ‘Nafi’ and ‘Ismahā), containing the readings of the two named authorities.51 Subsequently, authors began to compile books with titles such as Kitāb al-Qira‘āt (Book of Qur’an Readings), comprising the readings of several authorities. According to Ibn al-Jazari, the third/ninth-century authors Abū al-‘Ubayd (d. 224/838) and Abū

repetition. True, there was now an official text, but it was still only a consonantal structure (raṣm) without any discritical marks or vowels, which allowed for different readings since some consonant marks could be read in different ways; and the fact that vocalisation was not initially marked allowed for even further permutations. Moreover, the exemplar copies ‘Uthman sent to the provincial capitals included variants and also dialectal forms that had slipped into the text and that consequently needed to be studied to determine whether they needed to be corrected according to the ‘arabīyyah, or pure Arabic,51 which was the norm in matters of proper usage. The reciters continued for a time to enjoy vestiges of the freedom they had known before, but the standardisation of the ‘Uthmanic codex and its dissemination in writing marked the end of the ‘great freedom enjoyed by the qira‘ah regarding the Qur’anic text during the pre-‘Uthmanic period’.52 The almost definitive consonantal text of the ‘Uthmanic codex (masāḥāf) had shackled that freedom.

The seven ‘readers’ and the ‘Science of Readings’

In the tenth century, seven methods of reciting the Qur’an were elevated to the status of canonical readings and were the only ones deemed acceptable by the political and religious authorities. These readings derived from seven ‘readers’ (i.e. reciters) of the eighth century who gained followers in different cities of the empire, namely ‘Nafi’ in Medina, Ibn Kathir in Mecca, Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā in Basra, Ibn ‘Amir in Damascus, and ‘Aṣim, ‘Hamza ibn Ḥābid and al-Kisā‘ī in Kufa. Some of these men were of the same generation as the learned transmitters (mawārid) of ancient poetry; one, Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā, was both Qur’an reciter and transmitter. As Beck notes, ‘It is not surprising, therefore, that the same forces were at work in the two areas [qira‘ah and riwa‘iyah].’53 Poetry transmitters claimed it was their right not only to transmit a poem, but also to improve upon it whenever possible. Certain reciters (qira‘ah) active until about 750 claimed a similar prerogative, arguing that it was their right to follow their own linguistic knowledge rather than the dead letter of the consonantal masāḥāf, in particular when it came to dialectal forms in the ‘Uthmanic codex.54 We thus find Abū ‘Amr asserting his knowledge of the pure ‘arabīyyah in favour of the reading wa-‘inna haddhāni (showing the expected accusative case) instead of the ‘Uthmanic recension’s wa-‘inna haddhāni (not showing the accusative case) at Q Tihrīm 66: 20.55 He effectively deemed the ‘Uthmanic recension’s wa-‘inna haddhāni to be faulty Arabic and justified his move by citing a tradition in which the Prophet says:56

‘In the masāḥāf there are dialectal expressions (lān), but the Arabs will put them in order.’

10. The Qu Ris and Qur'awi ‘readers’ (qira‘ah)
Hatim al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869) were the first to compile works of this type.46 This progression is an exact parallel to the developments in Ḥadīth, philology and other disciplines of Islamic scholarship: that is, actual books were preceded by notes, taken for private purposes and intended as aides-mémoire, and by lecture notebooks. And, as in other domains, Abū ʿUbayd was the first to produce a manual in this field.

The primacy of the aural

The system of education in Islam required that every text to be studied – including the ones that existed as actual books – be ‘heard’ or ‘read’ in the presence of the author, or of an authorised transmitter, even if these texts were in fact often only disseminated through written copies. In the study of Ḥadīth and philology (which had their own specificities), but also in other disciplines, personal contact with the teacher was absolutely essential: transmission of a text by audition (al-nuṣūṣ al-maṣāmuṭ) was of paramount importance. If a scholar simply copied notebooks (ṣūḥaf), he was called a ṣūḥaf (or ṣūḥafī),47 and the material he transmitted through (mere) copying (kāthib, kātabah) was deemed of low value (daʿīf, lit. ‘weak’). If someone produced or possessed such a notebook, he was supposed to read it aloud in the presence of the author or of an authorised transmitter in order to check the text and correct it under the supervision of the teacher.

Statements such as ‘People used to correct their Qur’ān copies (maṣṣāṣfahun) according to his reading’, said of ‘Aṭīyah ibn Qays (d. 121/739),48 show that what we have suggested about other kinds of texts also applied to copies of the Qur’ān. Qur’ān manuscripts copied without authorised control were only ‘notes’, the errors in which would only be corrected during instruction, under the direct supervision of the teacher, through audition (ṣamāʿ) or by reading aloud (ṣādāq). Just as there were ṣūḥafīs in other areas of scholarship, in the discipline of Qur’ān readings there correspondingly were maṣṣāṣfahun, individuals whose knowledge of the readings derived solely from consulting written copies of the Qur’ān. This is why Abū Hatim al-Sijistānī and others strongly advised their students against basing their knowledge on manuscript copies of the Qur’ān.49

‘Do not recite [i.e. learn] the Qur’ān from people who (merely) rely on Qur’ān codices (maṣṣāṣfahun), and do not convey knowledge (of the Ḥadīth obtained) from people who rely (only) on notebooks (ṣūḥafyūn).’

In conclusion, it seems that at no point did the ‘Book’ (al-kitāb) cease to be regarded as the orally recited word of God, not even after its definitive written canonisation in the ‘Uthmānic codex. The Qur’ān itself underscores recitation: ‘We have sent down the Book (al-kitāb) to you that it be recited to them’ (Q

Notes

1. The following paragraphs are indebted to GdQ, vols 2 and 3; W. M. Watt, Bell’s Introduction to the Qur’ān (Edinburgh, 1977); and A. Neuwirth, ‘Koran’, in GAQ, vol. 2, pp. 96-135.
3. They are all named at GdQ, vol. 1, p. 46, n. 5.
8. Wansbrough and Burton, whose theories contradict one another, are exceptions in this regard (see bibliography).
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17 GidQ, vol. 2, pp. 27 ff.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 47 ff.

20 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 48 ff.

21 Ibid.; Sayed, Die Reise, pp. 203 ff.


27 Al-Tabari, Tahrir, vol. 1, p. 2052.


32 Beek, 'The 'ummanische Kodex', esp. pp. 361 ff.; Beek, 'Die Kodizesvarianten'.


35 See note 33 above.


39 G. Bergstrasser, 'Die Koranlesung des Hasan von Basra', Islamica 2 (1926), p. 11: 'we are dealing with transmission that was oral in the first instance and only later fixed by writing'.


41 Ibn al-Jazari, Tabaqat = Ghaybat al-nilahya fi tabaqat al-qurani' (Das biographische Lexikon

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44 Führer, p. 35; Führer, p. 38; cf. GidQ, vol. 3, p. 206, n. 5.

45 It can be that writings of this type (and some others too) arising out of the kanb al-qur'aanī bā'īd belong to the category I am styling 'literature of the school', for the school intended for recreation; see Chapter 5 below.


The beginnings of religious scholarship in Islam: *Sirah, Ḥadith, Tafsīr*

The beginnings of ‘academic instruction’ in Islam

The history of the beginning of Islam coincides with the history of the life and work of its founder, the Prophet Muhammad. The deliberate study of the history of early Islam and the collection of narratives describing the events of that time were first undertaken in Medina. Those who engaged in this activity belonged to the younger representatives of the first generation of Followers (sahīḥīn), that is, those who came just after the generation of Muhammad and his Companions (sahābā).¹

If Muslim tradition is to be believed, certain contemporaries or Companions of Muhammad occasionally took notes in order to record his words and actions.² Muhammad’s cousin and the putative founder of Qur’ānic exegesis, Ibn al-‘Abbās (d. ca. 68/687), for instance, is said to have had in his possession several writing tablets (al-ḥadrā) on which he is said to have written ‘some of the deeds of the Messenger of God’. Another companion by the name of Abū Shāh is even said to have recorded in writing in its entirety the sermon delivered by the Prophet upon the conquest of Mecca.³ It is, however, difficult to regard things being put into writing in such a haphazard way as a ‘deliberate endeavour’.⁴

The activity first undertaken in Medina by those individuals living in the last third of the seventh century and the early part of the eighth century, namely the Umayyad period, was completely different, since they had not themselves met Muhammad. They began systematically to collect information about his words and deeds, grouped these accounts, and then transmitted them to their listeners following a method that we elaborate upon below.⁵ They gathered this information from various informants, in particular from those Companions of Muhammad who were still living. As Johann Fick has observed, the children and grandchildren of the very first believers, ‘excluded, as things turned out, from participation in the political life of the times, and removed from the activities of the larger world, now devoted themselves to a study of the glorious past’.⁶ Their narratives were designated by the term ḥadīth, a word initially used only in the singular, and which essentially meant ‘narrative, account’; later, however, this word acquired a much more restricted accepted meaning.⁷ These systematic activities were naturally not confined to matters historical; they also encompassed jurisprudence, questions about ritual obligations, Qur’ānic exegesis, and other matters.

Scholars transmitted their ‘knowledge’ (‘ilm – the word often has the same meaning as Ḥadīth) to contemporaries with a thirst for learning, an activity that resulted in the development of a kind of ‘academic instruction’. This transmission took place within mujādils (sing. mujādil), and ḥalaqāt (sing. ḥalaqā, or ḥalaqah), as the sessions and learned circles that formed around the scholars came to be known, especially in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina (but also in private homes). These took the form of classes, consisting on the one hand of the accounts and reports transmitted by the teacher, and on the other of replies to questions posed. From the very start, those who transmitted an account would on occasion name their informant, that is, the authority they invoked, as follows: ‘I say ḥaddāḥān B ‘im C’; ‘A said, ‘B told (or transmitted to) me from C’. This was the beginning of the notion of the imād (or sanad), a term customarily used to describe the chain of authorities involved in the transmission of a given report. In time, this practice became very widespread.

Over the course of the following generations, several factors contributed to the development of this kind of academic instruction, in particular the influx of large numbers of Muslims from every part of the Islamic world first to Medina and Mecca, and subsequently to Basra and Kufa (and elsewhere), which like the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in their turn also became important centres of learning. Among the factors that contributed to this development were the end of the first wave of expansion through conquest, the fact that Medina lost political significance after the battle on the Ḥarrah in 63/683, and the end of the civil war that had lasted from 60/680 to 72/692.⁸

‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, the first representative of the Medinese school of law and history

One of the first, and certainly the most important, of these early scholars was the ‘historian’ and jurist ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, who was born into a noble family in 33/653 or later and who probably died in 94/712.⁹ His father, al-Zubayr ibn al-Awām, an eminent companion and cousin of the Prophet, had died during the Battle of the Camel in 36/656; his mother was the daughter of the caliph Abū Bakr; his brother was the famed anti-caliph ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr; and his maternal aunt was none other than ‘A’ishah, Muhammad’s beloved wife. ‘Urwah would have obtained much information from these leading personalities, especially ‘A’ishah, but also from other Companions of the Prophet. As a result, Islamic tradition regards ‘Urwah as an eminent authority on religious law and history, in particular on anything having to do with the life of Muhammad.
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‘Urwah addressed most of his questions to ‘A‘ishah, her answers to which he is said to have recorded in writing.8 We have a few other details about ‘Urwah’s activities as a collector of information:10 for instance, he is reported to have one day sent a message to three of the Prophet’s Companions, among them Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allâh,11 questioning them about an incident during the migration to Medina (the Hîrâh). As for his teaching, on the other hand, we have very few details, which makes what little information we do have very precious, since it sheds light on the beginning of academic instruction in Medina, indeed on the beginning of academic instruction in the whole Islamic world. It is reported, for example, that:14

People came together (to listen) to the hadiths of ‘Urwah.

Indeed, ‘Urwah taught publicly – in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina13 – but also at home. During his public sessions, he forbade his sons from disturbing him with questions, though they were permitted to address him once he was alone.14 He used to present the information he had collected on matters of religious law (fiqh) according to a systematic classification based on content: he began with the chapter on divorce (takfîr), then treated divorce requested by the wife (khul‘), then the pilgrimage (hajj), and so on.13 This was the precursor of tâ’fîf, a method of presenting knowledge which consisted in classifying collected material systematically into ‘books’ (kutub) subdivided into chapters, a method that would take hold in the eighth century.10 ‘Urwah would then have his sons repeat the hadiths he had recited;17 this clearly represents the beginnings of the method that would later come to be known as muhikârah.18

It goes without saying that at this time recitation was done from memory; but Muslim tradition explicitly reports that ‘Urwah had in his possession notes or draft notebooks which contained his legal hadiths and/or his juridical opinions (kutub fiqh). He is, however, reported to have burned these writings on the day of the battle on the Hîrâh, i.e. during or immediately following the failed revolt of the Medinan against the Umayyads in 63/683, an act he was later to regret.19 Another version of this report gives an alternative motivation for his act, namely that he erased his notes (on parchment, perhaps) because he was – temporarily – of the view that the only book in Islam ought to be the Qur’ân; according to this report too, he would later regret his hasty act.20 The view that only the Qur’ân, i.e. Revelation, was worthy of being written down, was a fairly widely held view in the eighth century;21 we shall have cause to mention this again on several occasions.

The historical reports transmitted by ‘Urwah demonstrate that he collected information about all the significant events in the life of the Prophet. He thereby established the foundation for the specific historical discipline of Maghârî (lit. ‘campaigns’, but in fact more generally, life of the Prophet).22 The sources do

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not state explicitly whether he put into writing the accounts he collected on the Prophet’s life, but he did respond, in writing, to specific questions posed, also in writing, by the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik on this and other subjects; we shall return to ‘Urwah’s epistles (nâ‘îl) when we broach the question of the impetus given by the caliphal court to the birth of Arabic literature (in Chapter 4 below).

‘Urwah thus composed written material which can be characterised as ‘specialised treatises’ on certain aspects of Islamic history; these treatises – in letter form – are therefore the Islamic world’s first scholarly writings (sya‘rigrâmat). It is true that these works had not originally been composed for a wider, public audience, but instead for a very limited circle consisting only of the caliph and his court; however, ‘Urwah’s son, Hishâm, transmitted these epistles in the same way apparently that regular hadiths were transmitted, that is, in the course of public teaching. By virtue of this, ‘Urwah’s writings survived: they are, for instance, quoted in al-Tabari and later historians.13

‘Urwah did not put together and author a Kitâb al-Maghârî (Book of Campaigns), notwithstanding the views expressed by certain much later authors such as Ibn Kathir and al-Hajj Khalifah, who make statements such as:24

He [Urwah] was the first to compose (a book) on the Maghârî, subdivided into chapters.

This contradicts the propositions of Western scholars about the level of Arabic literature’s development in the first two centuries of Islam;23 but it also contradicts the dominant view within the Arabic literary tradition itself, which maintains that works systematically subdivided into chapters (masâ‘imafât) did not appear in all disciplines, including writings on the Maghârî, until the middle of the eighth century, that is in the heyday of Ma‘mar ibn Rabî‘id (d. 154/770), Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), Malik ibn Anas (d. 170/786) and Ibn Ishaq (d. 150/767), each in their respective discipline.46

That ‘Urwah was, in later times, considered the author of a systematically organised Kitâb al-Maghârî is perhaps due to the fact that his students had collected his historical accounts and collated them into books titled kutub Maghârî (lit. ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr’s (‘books of Campaigns by ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr’). ‘Urwah’s adopted son, Abû al-Awsad Yatim ‘Urwah (d. 131/748 or later),27 for instance, transmitted a Kitâb al-Maghârî in Egypt on the authority of his adopted father.28 And in the tenth century, Ibn al-Nadîm refers in his bio-bibliographical Fihrist (Catalogue), to a Kitâb Maghârî ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr transmitted on the authority of another scholar, al-Hasan ibn ‘Uthmân al-Ziyâdî (d. 243/857).29 It is often the case that the authorship of ‘books’ comprising material going back to early authorities, but collected together and compiled by later ones, is attributed to the earlier ones.30

If, on the other hand, we think of the Kitâb al-Maghârî in this specific context as a rough draft, or a hyponyma consisting of notes for private use, including
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drafts or copies of the epistles, then it is entirely conceivable that 'Urwa wrote a Kitab al-Maghazi, especially in light of the fact that he also had in his possession—or had had at one time—juridical notebooks (kitab fiqh). It bears repeating that the sources are silent on this point. It is accordingly fruitless to speculate on the structure of this hypothetical draft notebook of 'Urwa's; it is, for instance, impossible to know if it was divided into chapters. It is, however, all but certain that it was not ordered chronologically since 'Urwa's historical reports that he transmits almost never provide the dates of the events they describe.34

We are certainly entitled to think of 'Urwa as the founder and first head of a 'Medinese historical school'.35 Besides his epistles (ruz'il), a significant number of hadiths survive, comprising, on the one hand, reports about the life of the Prophet and early Islam, and on the other, information on various legal and religious matters. These include instructions about ritual matters, especially questions of ritual purity and prayer, and information relating to the Qur'an and Qur'anic exegesis, especially details about the circumstances around the revelation of a particular verse of the Qur'an and information about the meaning of particular words.36 'Urwa often names his informants, but not unfailingly: his use of smâd, therefore, is sometimes inconsistent. To judge from those occasions when he does name his source, in two-thirds of the cases his aunt, 'A'ishah, is the origin of the information he reports.35

The historical reports and legal hadiths collected by 'Urwa were used in instruction by 'Urwa himself, then by his students, and then by his students' students, and so on. 'Urwa had numerous students who transmitted these historical and legal hadiths. One of these was his son Hishâm (d. 146/763),36 another his above-mentioned adopted son Abû al-Aswad Yâtim 'Urwa (d. 131/748 or later).37 The most famous of his students, however, was al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), discussed below. Reports were transmitted in this way for generations; it was only in the ninth and tenth centuries that they found their way into the compilations that have come down to us, such as the Sunnah of Ibn Hishâm, or the canonical and non-canonical hadith collections (e.g. the Maâmar of 'Abd al-Razzâq or the Sâhîh of al-Bukhârî and Muslim). In the present day, a few scholars have devoted themselves to collecting the scattered reports transmitted by 'Urwa about the life of the Prophet with the aim of collecting them into a single corpus.38 Modern scholars and medieval scholars alike collected and published his reports as a book proper, the Kitab al-Maghazi li-'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr—posterity has thus been able to do what 'Urwa himself never did.

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Mujâhid ibn Jabr, representative of the Meccan School, and of Qur'anic exegesis

To understand better the developments in Islamic scholarship in 'Urwa's time, we can turn to the figure of Mujâhid ibn Jabr,39 an illustrious representative of the Meccan school, which flowered at the same time as the Medina school, or shortly thereafter. Mujâhid was born in Mecca in 21/643 and died there in 124/742. He was a Qur'anic reciter (qâhir) and had his own recitation (lihâyâr), though he was not one of the 'Seven Qur'anic readers'.40 He was also a scholar learned in law and Hadith, making him both a faqih (jurist) and muhaddith (Hadith scholar). His principal area of expertise, however, was exegesis of the Qur'an.

In Qur'anic exegesis, Mujâhid's most important teacher was the celebrated Ibn al-'Abbâs, in whose presence he had recited the Qur'an several times—according to one version, as many as thirty times.41 According to another version of the account, Mujâhid is said to have remarked as follows:42

I recited the Qur'an three times in the presence of Ibn al-'Abbâs, breaking after every yâhû [verse division] to ask him why and where under what circumstances it (the yâhû) was revealed.

Many of Mujâhid's students transmitted from him, and the exegetical hadiths he transmitted can be found in almost all later exegesists; the Tajîr of al-Tabari, for instance, is replete with such hadiths.43 Like 'Urwa, his Medinese contemporary, Mujâhid recited and transmitted his material in the context of his teaching. His students are reported to have taken down in writing his tafṣîr while studying with him,44 but the transmission of the exegetical information he had collected seems to have been undertaken slightly differently from the way in which 'Urwa's information was transmitted. According to the famous critic, Ibn Hibbân (d. 354/965),45

al-Qâsim (Ibn Abî Bazâž)46 was the only (student) who heard the tafṣîr (directly in its entirety) from Mujâhid. [...] Ibn Abî Najîb,47 Ibn 'Umar and Ibn 'Urwa and others relied on the 'book (kitâb) of al-Qâsim ibn Abî Bazâz and did not hear it (directly) from Mujâhid.

This would mean that only one of Mujâhid's students, al-Qâsim ibn Abî Bazâz, received the Tafṣîr (in its entirety) through 'aural/oral' transmission (sâmâ'; he would have put into writing the entire exegesis of his teacher and would thus have found himself in possession of a kitâb, in the sense of a 'notebook' or 'draft notes', which included the whole Tafṣîr. According to Ibn Hibbân, all the other transmitters simply copied this kitâb of al-Qâsim's. This method of transmission, kitâbah, though, in theory, never fully recognised, was in practice frequently employed. In fact, transmitters were obliged to indicate in their smâd precisely
how they came to be in possession of their teachers’ learning; if transmitters copied a ‘book’ without having personally heard its contents delivered, they were in principle required to make this explicit. Transmitters often concealed the fact, however, that they had relied on this method of transmission, and it turns out that this was the case with Mujâhid’s students—not a single one makes it explicit, a dishonesty (tadlis) remarked upon in traditional Islamic scholarship. Clearly, in the seventh and the first half of the eighth centuries, the transmission of hadiths through writing alone was strongly looked down upon in Mecca, but also in Medina and in the Muslim world generally, even if it seems that the writing down of hadiths for personal use enjoyed less disapproval in Mecca than in Medina.

In this connection, an observation concerning the teaching system of a later period may be worth mentioning. From the eleventh century onward, certificates of audition (jâzâ’ al-sana’, sam‘a‘) appear in the manuscripts. Comparing the certificates of audition and the recorded chains of transmission in a given manuscript with its colophon, where the copyist provides his name and the date of the work’s completion, reveals that sometimes students were in the habit of attending ‘classes’ of a particular teacher without taking any notes. When such students subsequently wished to teach and transmit the material they had earlier heard, it sometimes happened that they had to borrow a copy of the work, that of the teacher himself or that of someone who had written down what the teacher had taught; they would then copy it for their own personal use, and that copy would then serve as the basis for their own teaching. Since they had indeed at some point received direct instruction from the teacher and had personally heard him say the words they were transmitting, they were consequently authorised to use the formulations in their imâds that suggested direct audition (haddâthan x or sam‘a‘ an x). On the other hand, they do not include the name of the person whose notebook they copied in their imâds.

Now, there does exist a relatively old Tâfir attributed to Mujâhid. Segin believed that this was veritably a book by Mujâhid, ‘in the recension of Ibn Abi ‘Abbas’. In spite of the fact that the exact title, ‘Tâfir Warqâ’ an ‘Abî ‘Abd-Allâh ibn Abî Jeish, pointed to a work compiled by a later authority. Two studies, one by Georg Stauth and another by Fred Leemhuis, have independently shown that a large number of exegetical hadiths originating with authorities other than Mujâhid were added not only by Mujâhid’s student Ibn Abi ‘Abd-Allâh ibn ‘Abd-Allâh, but also by ‘Abd-Allâh ibn ‘Abd-Allâh, the transmitter of the Tâfir from Warqâ’. The Tâfir is not, therefore, a book by Mujâhid, but a ninth-century compilation by ‘Abd-Allâh ibn ‘Abd-Allâh, consisting mainly, but not exclusively, of exegetical hadiths originating with Mujâhid.

Stauth and Leemhuis compared these hadiths with those al-Tâbirî and other later exegesis dates as originating with Mujâhid; this revealed that the material cited in the Tâfir Warqâ’ was not identical to the material appearing in the Tâfir of al-Tâbirî. What we have, generally speaking, are on the one hand hadiths common to both texts, close scrutiny of which nevertheless reveals divergences and variants between parallel passages, and on the other hadiths originating with Mujâhid, but which are to be found in only one of the two compilers. We are once again led to the conclusion that, in this period, material was transmitted selectively, only ‘conveying the meaning, or sense’ (al-rûyah bil-ma‘nâ), i.e. the gist, rather than ‘conveying the wording’ (al-rûyah bil-la‘fî). This was so even when the transmitters were able to rely on draft notes written by one of them; indeed, this appears to have been the case with the Tâfir Warqâ’.

The surviving manuscripts of the Tâfir Warqâ’ was copied in 544/1149, it included a chain of transmission (rûyah), certificates of audition (sam‘a‘), and a colophon. What is more, the method of transmission we described above is clearly discernible: the copyist, one Ibn Hamdî, ‘heard’ the text of the Tâfir without taking notes, and obtained permission to teach (jâzâ’i) from his teachers. In order to have a personal written copy, he later copied the teacher’s ‘book’, which had passed to one of the latter's students when he died.

Al-Zuhri and the writing down of hadiths

We turn now to the Medinese Ibn Shihâb al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), the most illustrious student of ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr. Focusing on this scholar allows us to identify various developments that affected the second generation of Followers (Abâ’ ibn ‘Abd-rânî). Like his teacher, al-Zuhri was a hadith scholar, a jurist, and, last but not by means least, a major scholar of maghâri. He was born in 870/460 or a little later and studied with ‘Urwa and important scholars such as Sa‘îd ibn al-Masâ‘îd, Abûn ibn ‘Uthmân, and others. He also asked questions of informants who were not scholars, young and old alike: he would, for example, go to the homes of the Anṣûr (Helpers) in Medina, even going so far as trying to obtain information from their wives.

The reports describing al-Zuhri’s search for hadiths and his use of writing while he gathered his information appear to be contradictory. According to al-Zuhri’s student Malik ibn Anas, an eminent scholar in his own right, when he asked al-Zuhri whether he used to write down hadiths, al-Zuhri replied that he did not. It is reported in several other places, however, that al-Zuhri did make it a habit of writing down hadiths in large numbers while collecting them. According to Ma‘mar ibn Rashîd, another of al-Zuhri’s students, a companion of al-Zuhri’s called Shâhîb ibn Kaysîn (d. after 140/757–8) reported as follows:
al-Zuhri and I met while collecting hadiths (naqd al-'īm). We agreed to write down the practices of the Prophet (nun). So we wrote down everything that we heard on the Prophet's authority. Then we wrote what we heard on the authority of his Companions.

According to another of al-Zuhri's companions, al-Zuhri always carried tablets and sheets with him and would write down everything that he heard. The contradiction between these accounts can to a certain point be resolved if we accept that al-Zuhri initially deemed unacceptable the writing down of hadiths, a widely held view during his time, especially in Medina. Much later, he may have changed his position and started to use writing more and more, as circumstances required. Other reports appear to confirm this. It would appear that in the beginning al-Zuhri transmitted his learning exclusively through academic instruction. A small number of his many students, however, wanted to have easier access to the materials he had collected. One of them, al-Layth ibn Sa'd (d. 161/778), is said to have asked his teacher to compile a book containing all the hadiths he knew, proposing as follows:64

O Abu Bakr, if you would only organise and compile these 'books' [i.e. notebooks] for people's benefit, you would be able to free yourself of all this work.

But al-Zuhri is said to have refused and to have adopted a different method instead, one that was far more practical: he lent his notebooks to his students and had them copy them. A number of reports describing this procedure of al-Zuhri's have come down to us, so it is reasonably certain that he is the originator of this new method of transmission, called mu'tazalah, never fully recognised, but which became significant from this time period on.65 His illustrious student Malik ibn Anas sometimes used this procedure to transmit his Musaṣṣaṣ.66

Regarding al-Zuhri's later scholarly activity, we also find two apparently contradictory accounts. On the one hand, we are told that several muleloads were required for the draft notes of the hadiths that al-Zuhri had been ordered by the caliphal court to dictate to scribes (kanub or dafā'ar), and which were removed from the caliph's library after the assassination of al-Walid II in 125/743.67 On the other hand, two of al-Zuhri's students report that their teacher had at his home only one book, or only two books, the one 'a book containing his family's genealogy', the other 'something about his family's genealogy and some poems'.68

The two accounts need not be incompatible: those who opposed the writing down of hadiths - among whom al-Zuhri counted himself his whole life long - thought it worse to own and bequeath written materials, in particular ones relating to religious matters, than to dictate such materials to others. There was even a widely held view that if one owned any writings, these had to be destroyed, before, or even after, one died. This was justified by quoting the following hadith of the Prophet transmitted by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (d. 74/693 or later):69

Write nothing from me except the Qur'an. If anyone has (already) written down anything from me other than the Qur'an, then let him erase it.

Al-Zuhri's collections have not come down to us in their original form. What survives is a multitude of hadiths scattered in later works of Hadith, of religious law (fiqh), and relating to the Prophet's campaigns (maqāmāt). Thanks to a relatively early work, however, namely the Musaṣṣaṣ of 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/829), we can get a general idea about the nature and basic shape of al-Zuhri's collections relating to the life of the Prophet. The Musaṣṣaṣ contains in it a Kāf al-Maghtāz, the bulk of the material for which 'Abd al-Razzāq obtained from his teacher Ma'mar ibn Rāshid (d. 154/770).70 Ma'mar must therefore be considered the true compiler of this particular book. As for Ma'mar, he himself obtained approximately half of the material he cites from his teacher, al-Zuhri. These narratives, which are typically quite long, invariably go by the name hadith, in the singular. Frequently, but not in every case, these accounts include chains of authorities in which al-Zuhri often names his teacher 'Urwa. Sometimes, events of central importance, such as the Battles of Badr or Uhud, are dated at the beginning of the hadith text.

In light of the foregoing, it is nevertheless clear that al-Zuhri's Kāf al-Maghtāz was not yet a book proper, not yet one arranged systematically into thematic chapters, like the one which would be put together by Ibn Iṣāq, another of al-Zuhri's students. Al-Zuhri's 'book' was in all likelihood nothing more than a collection of historical hadiths about the life of the Prophet, loosely arranged, and thus similar to the Kāf al-Maghtāz of 'Abd al-Razzāq/Ma'mar which survives. We therefore concur with Abd al-'Azīz al-Durri that, in going beyond the pioneering work of 'Urwa, al-Zuhri 'gave the first definite frame of the Sīrah and that he drew its lines clearly, to be elaborated later, in details only'.71

In the first half of the eighth century, there were several different kinds of written texts: (1) simple notes, not always systematically arranged, intended for personal use; (2) detailed draft notes ('lecture notebooks'), containing the hadiths the teachers would teach during their 'classes' (sometimes handed over to others to be copied, but intended for use by the teacher in oral recitation); (3) official collections produced by order of the caliphal court, and for the exclusive use of the court.72 Al-Zuhri was not only unable to prevent the compilation and dissemination of written materials of the first type (simple notes), or indeed of the second (detailed draft notes), he even ended up authorising his draft notes. The difference between notes and draft notes or notebooks is, in reality, a minor one: in Greek, both are indistinguishably termed hypomnēmata. What is more, al-Zuhri found himself engaged in producing writings of the third type, compiling them himself, by order of the caliphal court. An oft-cited report describes the most celebrated of these compilations: a collection, or official recension, of the Hadith, comparable to the Qur'an recension undertaken during the reign
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of 'Uthmân. Such large-scale collection was termed tadhkîn, and al-Zuhrî is credited with originating the procedure.

The first person to have collected and written down knowledge (i.e. hadîthha) on a large scale (waswîn min dawwana al-'ilm wa-kutubaha) was Ibn Shihab (al-Zuhrî). In this way, a huge step was taken in extending the use of writing. But, it must be emphasised that in this period the readership for such compilations was extremely limited, effectively only the court, consisting of the caliph, princes and other dignitaries. We will return to the subject of al-Zuhrî’s ‘official’ collections when we investigate the role of the court in providing the impetus for such works.

In any event, by compiling hadîth collections and other works intended for a public readership, al-Zuhrî broke a taboo that had been in force for decades and that had prevented the production of religious writings or, at least, the publishing of ‘books’ on religious matters, other than the Qur’ân (and in the generation after al-Zuhrî, opposition to the writing down of Hadîth came to an end, at least in Medina). But it appears that al-Zuhrî faced quite a few problems for having done so: he justified his move on many occasions, each time adducing new arguments. According to the best known justification, it was because of pressure from the Umayyad leadership that he began to write things down, and that he could no longer stop anyone from doing so.

We disapproved of writing down knowledge (i.e. hadîthha) (lamnun naba’ahta hadîth ‘al’îm) until these rulers compelled us to do it. Then we were (i.e. now we are) of the opinion that we should not prohibit any Muslim from doing so.

Notes


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52 GAS, vol. 1, p. 29.
53 The complete title is Tafsir [Adam Ibn Abī Ḥassāʾin]; ‘an Ibn Abī Naṣr ‘an Muḥājīd (The Qurʾān commentary of Muḥājīd) on the authority of Ibn Abī Naṣr on the authority of Muḥājīd.
54 Stauth, 'Die Überlieferung'; Leemhuis, 'Ms. 1075 Tafsīr'.
59 Fischer, Biographien, p. 69.
70 This also applies to al-Zahrāʾ's juridical hadiths; see H. Mottok, 'Der Fuqahā des Zahrāʾ: Die Quellenprämissen', Der Islam 68 (1991), p. 6.
72 For a fourth type of writing, namely the epistle (rijādīh), see Chapter 4 below.