

***Tawatur*: Forgotten Historical Evidence in the Studies of Wansbrough and His Followers**

Nancy Saki,¹ Muhammad Kazem Shaker²

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For Muslims, the *tawatur* of the Quran—the fact that it has been massively and consecutively transmitted from generation to generation since the time of the Prophet—is among the most important proofs which shows that the Qur'an we have today is the same scripture that was revealed to the Prophet. However, this proof has been neglected in the studies of Western scholars on the topic of the history of the Quran. Moreover, some Western scholars, such as John Wansbrough and Gerald Hawting, claim that since the Quran does not give any information about its formation and because there are no sources with information about the Quran that date back to the first two centuries of Islam, the Quran should be considered the product of the discussions and debates between Muslims and followers of other religions, with its text finalized in the early third century AH. However, contrary to Wansbrough and other like-minded scholars, who hold that the first two centuries of Islamic history are obscure and vague, a quick look at the history of Islam shows that in the first decades of Islam, Muslims had gone to different parts of the World, including some parts of Europe, and the Christians and Jews were watching the developments of this new religion. Hence, it is not possible that an important event, such as

1. Assistant professor, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran (tooba1363@yahoo.com), corresponding author.

2. Professor, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran (mk_shaker@yahoo.com).

the formation of the Quran, could occur in the second or third century AH without any of the non-Muslim historians noticing it. In addition, many Western academics who have studied Islam and the Quran in recent centuries have trusted Muslim accounts on the matter.

Keywords: *Tawatir* of the Quran, Orientalists, Quranic studies, history of the Quran, John Wansbrough.

Introduction

Western scholars of Quranic studies such as Wansbrough and some of his students maintain that the events in the early centuries of Islam, including the history of the compilation of the Quran, can rarely be discovered via Muslim written sources. They believe that these sources do not really show what really happened in that era; rather, they merely reveal what their writers thought and believed about that time. Therefore, we probably can never find out what really happened at that time (Rippin 1985, 151-63). With this assumption, they consider the Quran to be a product of an extended period of time and not exactly the same scripture that was revealed to the Prophet.

However, the conclusion that the Quran was compiled in the second or third century AH is only a hypothetical theory that requires adequate evidence in order for it to be established. In addition, the *tawatir* of the Quran is strong evidence against this theory, which has been neglected by these scholars. When a historical proposition is accepted by a great number of people over a number of generations, the proposition is *mutawatir* (reported with *tawatir*), and certainly true. Thus, the proposition that the Quran as we have it today is the scripture that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad is a *mutawatir* proposition, because all Muslims and even some non-Muslims have believed it to be true throughout history and around the world. This important evidence, which refutes the viewpoint of Wansbrough and his supporters including Gerald R. Hawting, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook, is totally neglected in their works.

All Muslims have regarded that the Quran as the precious legacy of the Prophet. The first generation of Muslims preserved it in their memories and by writing it down on leaves and animal skins; then, they read what they wrote to the Prophet, and finally these writings were collected in codices. From that period till now, Muslims have protected this precious heritage and delivered it from generation to generation, and it is for this reason that they have never doubted in the authenticity of their sacred book—the fact that the Quran they have in their hands is identical to the scripture that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

Now, the question is, what evidence can be provided for the claim that the Quran was compiled at the end of the second century—a claim that goes against the consensus of all Muslims regarding their scripture? If the text of the Quran was finalized so late, why has this fact not been reported in history? Why is there no report indicating that the Quran was formed as a result of the discussion or debates between the Muslims and the People of Book in the first centuries of Islam? How could it be acceptable that this book was produced two hundred years after the death of the Prophet and then all Muslims accepted it as the same scripture revealed to the Prophet? By considering traditional Islamic sources as unreliable, and not being able to find mention of the Quran in the writings of non-Muslims during the first century of Islam, it cannot be unequivocally concluded that the Quran was accomplished in the third century, because to simply falsify all traditional Islamic sources and only accept the sources that were written by non-Muslims is an unjust and unfair bias. It is a natural phenomenon that every nation takes pride and gives importance in recording their own cultural heritage over others. It could be assumed that non-Muslims did not have sufficient motivation to mention the Quran in their documents and writings in the first century AH. Of course, it is also never mentioned in non-Muslim sources that

Muslims have no sacred book. Not speaking about the existence of a thing does not necessarily mean that it does not exist.

For more clarity about the subject matter in question, it is necessary to clarify the status of Islam and Muslims at the end of the second century AH, the time when Wansbrough and his supporters claim that the Quran had been formed in its final form. It will become clear that Muslims and the People of the Book had very close contacts and very serious debates with each other at that time, but there is no evidence in the works of non-Muslims indicating that the Quran was compiled at that time.

1. The Background of Adducing the *Tawatur* of the Quran

It seems that the first whispers of the concept of the *tawatur* of the Quran was raised in the fourth century AH. This was aimed at emphasizing on the fact that nothing had been added to or omitted from the original text. Great Shi'ite scholars, such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413 AH) and al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 436 AH), are among the earliest scholars to adduce the *tawatur* of the Quran. This concept, moreover, was seriously taken into account since the sixth century AH in the discussions on the recitations (*qira'at*) of the Quran in order to prove the authenticity of the Quranic text (Ibn al-Jazari n.d., 1:13).

A problem that arises here is whether not adducing the *tawatur* of the Quran in the first centuries of Islam challenges this evidence. The answer is that this not only negates the *tawatur* of the Quran but could be a sign of its being an undoubted and well-established fact.

As mentioned previously, adducing the *tawatur* of the Quran began from the first half of the fourth century AH and continued more seriously from the sixth century AH. Muslims have agreed on the *tawatur* of the Quran from the beginning of Islam to the present day and have had no doubt about it. This was also accepted among Western scholars before Wansbrough; they also believed that the present Quran

is the same scripture that existed at the time of the Prophet and agreed upon the authenticity of its text, but Wansbrough and his followers neglected this evidence.

2. Evidence for the *Tawatur* of the Quran

It may seem that since the Quran is the sacred scripture of Muslims, the *tawatur* of the Quran is only acceptable for them and cannot be adduced in the discussions with non-Muslims. In response to this, it is necessary to note that the Muslim community was not independent and isolated from other communities during the first two centuries of Islam. Muslims in the early days of the Prophet interacted with Jews and Christians, and they evaluated each other's views. Moreover, Muslims have always tried to proselytize, and this has led to many interfaith debates and discussion, which are recorded in historical sources. On this basis, if the Quran appeared during the first part of the third century AH, why have these documents not mentioned the appearance of the new scripture at their time? Therefore, we could conclude that non-Muslims, as well as Muslims, were sure that the Quran of their time was the same scripture brought by Prophet Muhammad.

On the other hand, Muslims were not restricted to a specific geographic location, such as Mecca or Medina, because in the very first century of Islam, Muslims went to different parts of the world, though academics such as Wansbrough and Hawting have chosen to neglect it. According to the revisionists, in contrast to traditional orientalists, the first two centuries of Islam are obscure; none of the Muslim sources that report the events of that time belong, or are even close, to it; and later written sources cannot tell us what really happened during the Age of Ignorance, the advent of Islam, and the life of the Prophet—they merely indicate what the authors thought or wanted their readers to think about those times. Therefore, what really happened in the early centuries of Islam can rarely be discovered through the study of Muslim sources.

The idea of Wansbrough is based on five principles:

1. No written source can tell us what really happened during early Islamic history; rather, they only indicate the ideas of their authors.
2. Only an eyewitness can talk about an event, and even the report of an eyewitness may also be subject to conscious and unconscious interpretations (Rahmati 1381 Sh, 77).
3. The mere act of writing about what happened—that is, reducing it to a set of words and then imposing a particular order on it, which the reality may lack—leads to the distortion of the reality.
4. The history of the transmission of ancient documents is extremely doubtful. Here, there is not only the issue of the possibility of scribes making mistakes in copying texts but also the issue of changing the reality in a conscious way, which occurs when a writer, who is working in the framework of an accepted reading of history, intentionally changes his sources in order to adjust them to his ideas and beliefs (Koren and Nevo 1378 Sh, 570-71). As a result, written sources deceive us and only reflect the views of their authors. In other words, they are literary texts, and do not provide an analysis of history but a literary criticism of it (Koren and Nevo, 1378 Sh, 570-71).
5. Since we need external evidence to prove a view that is merely based on Muslim sources, the lack of this type of evidence is an important factor in rejecting the account provided by these sources and its historicity.

Wansbrough applies the above-mentioned points to Muslim sources, because he believes that Muslims began to put their early history into a written form after at least one hundred and fifty years. This idea is accepted by some Orientalists, such as Wansbrough's student Gerald R.

Hawting, who is skeptical about Islamic sources like his mentor. In addition to Islamic traditions, he also believes that the Quran was compiled during the late second century or early third century AH. In his *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, Hawting has also used the method of literary analysis of the Quran's text to prove his views in addition to presenting other evidence in this respect. He concludes by saying that since monotheists were not present in Hijaz at the time of the Prophet (s) to have been addressed by the Quran, the Quran must have been written at a time or place other than those of the Prophet. He says that the time and place of the Quran's advent was the third century AH and in the Middle East, but outside Arabia. He believes that the presence of monotheists in the region and their interactions with the Muslims in the second and third centuries led to the evolution of Islam in its current form. Hawting also holds that Hijaz at the time of the Prophet was an unfavorable environment for the emergence and evolution of a monotheistic religion such as Islam (Hawting 1999, 11-13; 55-58).

Hawting's presuppositions and evidence for his claim are the following:

1. From the third century onwards, the amount of Islamic writings increased rapidly (Hawting 1999, 8).
2. Islamic law gradually developed and achieved its theoretical foundations in the works of al-Shafi'i in the late second century (Hawting 1999, 12).
3. Islam, like other monotheistic religions needed a long time, a broad geographic location, and a monotheistic atmosphere to evolve and become a religion, after being a cult.
4. Scholarly research on other aspects of Islam—its theology, conversion to Islam, and the formation of Shiite Islam in its

various forms—confirms that many of its important characteristics have been established only in the third or even fourth century AH.

5. The environment of Hijaz was not suitable for a great revolution in tradition. Such a revolution occurred in some regions of the Middle East—Syria, Palestine, and Iraq—in the monotheistic traditions that were firmly established, because many of the cultural and religious changes that were necessary to advance Islam had certainly emerged in these areas before Arabs arrived there (Hawting 1999, 12-13).

Based on these reasons, Wansbrough and consequently his student Hawting hold that the final consolidation of the Quranic text took place in the late second or early third century AH, and hence they do not consider Muslim sources to be authentic in their account of the formation of the Quranic text.

To clarify this issue, it is necessary to explain the status of Islam and Muslims by the end of the second century AH, when the Quran was formed in its final form according to Wansbrough and his students. What is important in this regard is to examine the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim communities, specifically the Jewish and Christian scholars and the religious debates and controversies which occurred at that period. If the Quran was formed in the third century AH, why has no reports been found in the works of those non-Muslim scholars indicating that the Quran has been recently formed and did not exist at the time of the Prophet?!

Wansbrough and his followers have not shown any historical evidence for their claims. The Quran had a great presence among Muslims in the third century AH, and some comprehensive commentaries were written at that time on it. The assumption of these commentaries was that the text they were interpreting was the same

scripture revealed to Prophet Muhammad. This proves that the formation of the Quran took place long before the third century AH.

Some orientalist have acknowledged that there are some documents from the first and second centuries AH exhibiting the relationship between Muslims and Christians and the presence of the Quran during the first part of the second century AH. Alphonse Mingana,¹ for instance, refers to the debates, letters, and other historical evidence that show the relationships between Muslims and Christians in the first century AH and refer to the Quran in the early second century AH in some Christian documents. Mingana enumerates the following sources: (1) the dispute between ‘Amr b. al-‘As and the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch, John I, which took place and was recorded in the year 18 AH; (2) a letter written in the first years of ‘Uthman’s caliphate by the bishop of Nineveh, later known as Isho‘yahb III, Patriarch of Seleucia; (3) an account on the Muslims written by an anonymous Christian in the year 60/680; and (4) the chronicle of John Bar Penkaye written in 70/690, in the first years of the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik. According to him, concerning the writings of historians and theologians at the beginning of the 2nd/8th century, no mention has been made of a divine book in which the Muslims believe in; rather, it is only towards the end of the first quarter of this century that the Quran became the theme of conversation in Nestorian, Jacobite, and Melchite ecclesiastical circles (Motzki 2001, 167).

Now, if in 18 AH (i.e., approximately six years after the death of Prophet Muhammad) Islam and Muslims were deeply connected with Christians, why did Christians never mention that the Quran emerged

1. An ethnic Assyrian theologian, historian, Syriacist, orientalist, and a former priest, best known for collecting and preserving the Mingana Collection of ancient Middle Eastern manuscripts at the University of Birmingham, England.

and appeared at the end of the second century AH? Because the Quran was not mentioned in a few short writings, Mingana concludes that during that period the Quran did not exist, but he does not explain why after it appeared in the second century AH, its appearance was not reflected in the writings of the time.

Many sources mention the Quran as a product of the Prophet's time; there is not even one historical source that considers it a product of a later period. How, then, is it possible to think of the Quran as a product of the first two centuries of Islam? To claim that the traditions about the compilation of the Quran during the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs are fabricated just shows that the existence of the Quran and its being the same scripture given to the Prophet were obvious facts for the Muslims of the second and third centuries AH. Otherwise, hadith fabricators could not forge those traditions and ascribe the compilation of the Quran to a later time. Accordingly, given the historical background, the *tawatur* of the Quran is very important evidence that shows that the text of the Quran was finalized during the time of the Prophet.

Now, we will have a discussion about the history of the first two centuries AH in the viewpoint of Western historians and the position of Islam, Muslims, and the Quran from their perspective.

2. Muslim Historical Evidence According to Western Scholars

2.1. Until 10 AH

Because Islam expanded extraordinarily since its advent, the course of events in the first two centuries of Islamic history is clear and known for scholars. When the Prophet entered Medina, he prepared a pact regulating the relationship between the Muslims and non-Muslims, including the Jews¹ in Medina and inside the Muslim territories (Bulliet

1. In this pact, the Jews were required only to help Muslims in their battles and refrain from cooperating with their enemies. In return, Muslims would

1364, Introduction). Moreover, in the last two years of his life, the Prophet signed other pacts with certain Christian tribes,¹ including the pact with the Christians of Najran in 10 AH (Zaydan 1336 Sh, 4:116). These reports provide important evidence for the presence of Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula.

Moreover, Islam spread at the time of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina and then to all neighboring areas. After the demise of the Prophet, the expansion of Islam continued through the conquests led by the caliphs, especially the second caliph. The details of the battles of the Prophet and the conquests of the caliphs are recorded in Muslim historical sources and reflected in the works of Western scholars (Tabari 1375 Sh, 4:1281; 3:1067, 1084, 1145; Lapidus 1373 Sh, 71; *The Cambridge History of Islam* 1378 Sh, 89-90; 101-102; Noth and Conrad 1433 AH, 40-49).

Paying attention to the presence of the People of the Book in the Peninsula and their contacts and conflicts with the Muslims in the first century AH is very important evidence for the reliability and historicity of the Muslim account of the formation of the Quran.

2.2. 11 AH until 200 AH

After the death of the Prophet, vast Muslim conquests began at the onset of Abu Bakr's caliphate, and all the regions of Iraq (Hirah, Savad, Basra, etc.) were conquered by Muslims, who went as far as Syria (Baladhuri 1337 Sh, 158; Tabari 1375 Sh, 3:35; *The Cambridge History of Islam* 1378 Sh, 110-12). During the caliphate of 'Umar, Damascus was completely conquered, Baalbek and Homs peacefully surrendered in 15 AH, Yarmouk was conquered, and Jerusalem was besieged in 16

respect and protect their religious freedom, security, and financial rights.

1. One of these pacts, which is extant today in Istanbul, is the pact of the monastery of Mount Sinai, which was brought to Istanbul by Sultan Selim after he conquered Egypt (Zaydan 1336 Sh, 4: 116-19).

AH and then peacefully fell to the Muslims. Afterwards, Alexandria and Egypt were conquered in 20 AH, and the Muslims continued their conquests of Iraq and Iran. Abu ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafi was the commander of these conquests. In the era of the second Caliph, Khurasan and Sistan were also conquered. Jurji Zaydan describes the Arabs’ migration to Iraq and Syria during ‘Umar’s era and says that although the people of Iraq and Syria were Christian Arabs, since they were mistreated by the Iranians, they were open to the Arabs and helped them; regardless of their religion, they had the same culture and language. Accordingly, not only ‘Umar did not ask the Christians tribes, such Taghlib, Abad, and Namir, to pay tax (*jizyah*) but also provided them with a stipend from the Muslim treasury (Zaydan 1336 Sh, 4:35-36). This report indicates the thorough mixing of Christians and Muslims that paved the ground for debates and discussions between them. Historical sources indicate that there was a close and deep relationship between Muslims and the People of the Book, but the revisionists neglect this evidence—which is recorded in the works of Jewish and Christian historians—and claim that this account is a distortion of history by Muslims and is just their salvation history.

After the death of the second caliph, the conquests continued during the caliphate of ‘Uthman. It is said that the Arab troops conquered Tabaristan in northern Iran during this era. It should be noted that the Arab invasion of Iran refers to a series of attacks against the Sassanid Empire in the seventh century CE that had begun since the caliphate of Abu Bakr and which peaked during the eras of ‘Umar and ‘Uthman. It eventually led to the complete fall of the Sassanid Empire in the year 651 CE (31 AH) and the murder of Yazdegerd III (the last Sassanid king). ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amir was the commander of the Muslim army that conquered Nishapur in 30 AH, who conquered other lands around Khurasan, such as Herat, Faryab, and Badghis. Yazdegerd, who had fled Khurasan, was killed at a mill around 31 AH in Marv. In 32 AH,

many Arabs settled in Iran, especially in Khurasan. The only area that remained unconquered for more than two centuries was the northwest region of Iran. After the conquest of Egypt in Umar's era, North Africa and parts of Andalusia were conquered gradually till 27 AH. The first Muslim naval ship was sent to Cyprus, and then Muslims migrated to that area after its fall to them. In the western Islamic lands, the most important goal of the Muslims was moving towards Asia Minor and Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. During the period of 'Uthman, the Muslims reached the Dardanelle Strait and fought with the Byzantium Empire.

At this time, the Muslim territory stretched from the East of Sistan and Khurasan to the northwestern regions of Iran, including Azerbaijan and Armenia, and to the West, including all of what was called the Levant (i.e., Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt). These areas were previously ruled by the Byzantine Empire. People in these areas were partly Arabs and partly Romans. After Islam, the demographics of these countries changed to the benefit of Arabs, and the Arabic culture became prevalent in most of these areas. After the death of 'Uthman, Imam 'Ali became the caliph and chose Kufa as his capital, because it was so important from military and political aspects (Tabari 1375 Sh, 5:2116). In this period, due to internal conflicts and other issues, the conquests were stopped, but Mu'awiyah resumed them. He created an army for his caliphate, adopting the military model of the Levant and the Rome. During his caliphate, there was constant conflict with the Romans, and in 49 CE, Muslims reached the outskirts of Constantinople. It was during this time that more changes occurred in the Islamic Empire, as parts of Africa and Sudan were conquered and the city of Kairouan was founded as a major military base. Muslims went also to Bukhara, Samarkand, India, Sind, and Ghor.

From this time onward, we cannot find a great victory for Muslims, because, on the one hand, the Romans were prepared to fight with more courage, and, on the other hand, some events in the East prevented the Muslims from making serious efforts to conquer that region. Gradually, the conquests created problems, and the Arab tribal conflicts in the conquered lands, such as in Khurasan, prevented the Muslims from preparing themselves to continue with the conquests. In addition, the apostasy of some of the new Muslims in the conquered areas caused the power of the Muslims to diminish. Uprisings within the Islamic lands, such as those led by the Khawarij and the Shia, further weakened the central Islamic government (Zaydan 1957, 4:35-39; Baladhuri 1337 Sh, 324-25). Between the 50s and 90s AH, Muslims conquered many places. In 91 AH, which coincided with the reign of Walid ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, Andalusia was conquered (Tabari 1375 Sh, 9:3837; Baladhuri 1337 Sh, 332; Lapidus 1373 Sh, 82). However, for many reasons, such as power struggles among Muslims, most of their resources were wasted, and, thus, no significant victory was achieved until 200 AH.

Some Western historians also have reported the Muslim conquests after the demise of the Prophet in detail (Gibb 1362 Sh, 23; Adler 1384 Sh, 1:221). Armstrong reports the Muslim conquests in her book and has no doubt about them (Armstrong 1383 Sh, 225-27). William Montgomery Watt explains that a *ghazwah* (battle) was an Arab nomadic craft and sport, the most common purpose of which was kidnapping the sheep and camels of unfriendly tribes (*The Cambridge History of Islam* 1378 Sh, 91). According to Max Weber, booty and the tribal interests were the basis of all tribal wars (Turner 1385 Sh, 58).

Whether or not the abovementioned remarks are true, they show that not all Western scholars and historians regard early Islamic history as vague and undiscoverable and Muslim reports of what happened in that period as forged and unreliable. If Wansbrough or his followers had presented independent sources written during the Prophet’s era that

spoke about the Prophet and Muslims but did not refer to the Jews or the Prophet's battles, those documents could have supported their claims. But to deny the historicity of Muslim reports just because there are no independent sources among the Christian or Syriac works of that period that can confirm them is not a valid reason.

J. M. B. Jones is a researcher who has discussed early Islamic history in detail (Jones 1957, 245-80). In Jones 1959, he concludes that the reports of early Islamic history were recorded mostly in the second century AH before al-Waqidi and Ibn Ishaq, and these later writers only added some interpretive points and organized the content (Rahmati 1381 Sh, 77).

Israel Wolfensohn maintains that there is no information about the Jews who settled in the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Ban Qaynuqa', Banu al-Nadir, and Banu Qurayzah, and that the Jews of Aleppo and Damascus denied the presence of the Jews in the Arabian Peninsula during that period, because, they claimed, those who called themselves Jews there did not fully abide by monotheism and the laws of Talmud (Wolfensohn 1415 AH, 55; Shaker 2012, 13). This report, however, shows that Jews were present in the Peninsula, even though they might not have been fully faithful to their monotheistic religion and its laws.

Christian writers have approached this in a different way and have emphasized on the contacts between the Muslim and the People of the Book in the first centuries of Islamic history, the tensions and conflicts between them, and the hatred¹ of some Christians of that time towards Muslims. For instance, Sebeos, an Armenian bishop and historian,

1. For instance, Johanna Nikiu (fl. 696 CE), an Egyptian official and bishop, was furious that the Egyptians had converted to Islam. His hatred and anger is obvious in a treatise that he wrote in Greek (Nikiu 1916, 201-3).

wrote an important work on the history of Islam, which begins from the reign of Peros (459-484 CE) and ends with the rule of Mu‘awiyah in 661 CE. Sebeos’s work reports many events that were witnessed by the writer himself and, therefore, is a very important source. Among the events he describes are the Arab conquests, especially in Iran, Armenia, and Byzantine territories, and also the fall of the Byzantine Empire (Ali 1391 Sh, 33-39). Moreover, there is a Manuscript of a book in four volumes in the Vatican Library, written in 775 CE, whose fourth volume is on the events of the time of its unknown author. The author talks about Islam and Muslims in the Peninsula and the relationship between them and the People of the Book and the latter’s complaints about the heavy taxes imposed on them by their governors (Ali 1391 Sh, 33-39). In addition, the debates between scholars, especially between Christian and Muslim scholars, are important historical evidence for the presence of minorities in the Peninsula, such as the debates of Dionysius with the Muslim scholars at the court of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi in 783 CE (Ali 1391 Sh, 33-39). Moreover, Theophanes (d. 817/818 CE) presents a comprehensive report of the events of Islamic history, especially of the relations between the Arabs and Romans and the Islamic conquests (Von Grunebaum n.d., 66). Such reports show the attention of Western historians to the interactions between the Muslims and Christians. In addition, the apologetic works of the Christians of early Islamic history against Islam and Muslims are noteworthy, such as the writings of Bartholomew of Edessa (fl. 13th century CE), which show his acquaintance with Islam and Prophet Muhammad,¹ or the epistle *Liber de haeresibus* by John of Damascus (d. 749 CE), which, although its authenticity is disputed, is an important refutation by Eastern Christians against Islam (Parsa 1389 Sh, 140-41). In section 100 of this treatise, the author introduces Muslims, whom he

1. He was a fierce debater with Muslims; his hostility towards Islam was caused by the conflicts and wars between Muslims and Christians (Von Grunebaum n.d., 68).

calls Ismailis, as innovators in religion; he also quotes some verses of the Quran in the treatise, mentions the names of some surahs, and criticizes some Quranic rulings such as polygamy and divorce (Parsa 1389 Sh, 140-41).

Also, the Byzantine emperor Basil I (r. 867-886 CE) ordered his distinguished official Niketas to write a refutation of Islam, and Niketas wrote two treatises in this regard (Von Grunebaum n.d., 68). In his works, Niketas analyzes surah al-Baqarah and surah al-Kahf in detail and surveys the other surahs briefly. He translated most of the surahs that mention the gospel and/or the characteristics of Jesus. In particular, he translated the word *samad* in Quran 122:2 mistakenly as “extremely compact and sturdy,” indicating a material image of God, which is against the Quranic teachings about God (Parsa 1389, 140-41).

One of the most important polemical works is *The Apology of al-Kindi*, which contains an imaginary debate between a Muslim and a group of Christians at the time of al-Ma'mun (813-833 CE) (Eslami 1377 Sh, 21). Also, the earliest Syriac polemical text written in Muslim territories around the beginning of the eighth century CE contains the questions of a Muslim emir from Patriarch John III of Antioch (631-648 CE) on May 9, 644 CE. The Muslim emir is shown to have been 'Umayr ibn Sa'd al-Anbari¹ (see Nau 1984; Samir 1987).

Another early and famous polemical texts is undoubtedly the one that records the responses of Patriarch Timothy I (780-823 CE) to the questions of the caliph al-Mahdi (775-785 CE) in two consecutive sessions in the presence of others (Griffith 1387 Sh, 25:67). The full text and summary of this conversation written in Syriac and then its

1. More probably, he is 'Umayr ibn Sa'd al-Ansari, who had an important role in the Roman and the subsequent Sham conquests and was an agent of 'Umar in Homs (Dhahabi 1987, vol. 3; Ibn Hisham 1985, 1st section; Ibn Sa'd 1996, vol. 4).

translation into Arabic gained great popularity (Mingana 1928, 161-2). Accordingly, this text is of great importance in the study of the development of Christian polemical literature in the Muslim world.

Therefore, the Christian polemical writings against Islam in the eighth and ninth centuries CE and the debates between Christians and Muslims include important historical evidence that has been ignored in Wansbrough's research.

Conclusion

The vast expansion of Islam, the contacts between Muslim and Christians and Jews, and other historical evidence show that Muslims were not a small and isolated group in the world until the third century AH, all of a sudden known in Iraq with their scripture gathered based on their debates with the non-Muslims in that era.

In other words, the argument of Wansbrough for the late compilation of the Quran is a proof by contradiction, based on the lack of reference to the Quran in the Muslim and non-Muslim sources of the first two centuries AH. However, the evidence that was presented in this article confirmed the existence of references to the Quran in the early Muslim and non-Muslim sources and verified the historicity of the Muslim reports of the first two centuries AH.

Moreover, a literary analysis approach does not provide convincing proofs for historical and geographical conclusions about the exact date of the final compilation of the Quran. Of the other objections to Wansbrough's and Hawting's conclusions is the influence of their assumptions on their research. These assumptions include using traditions and historical documents later than the first two centuries AH to support their hypotheses, regarding other Muslim traditions as fabricated, and neglecting historical evidence recorded by independent, non-Muslim sources.

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