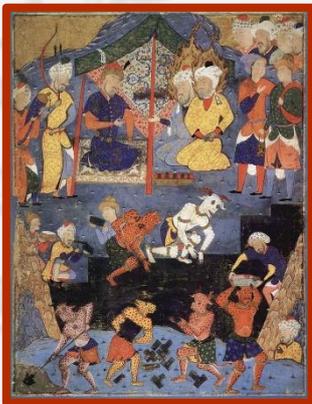
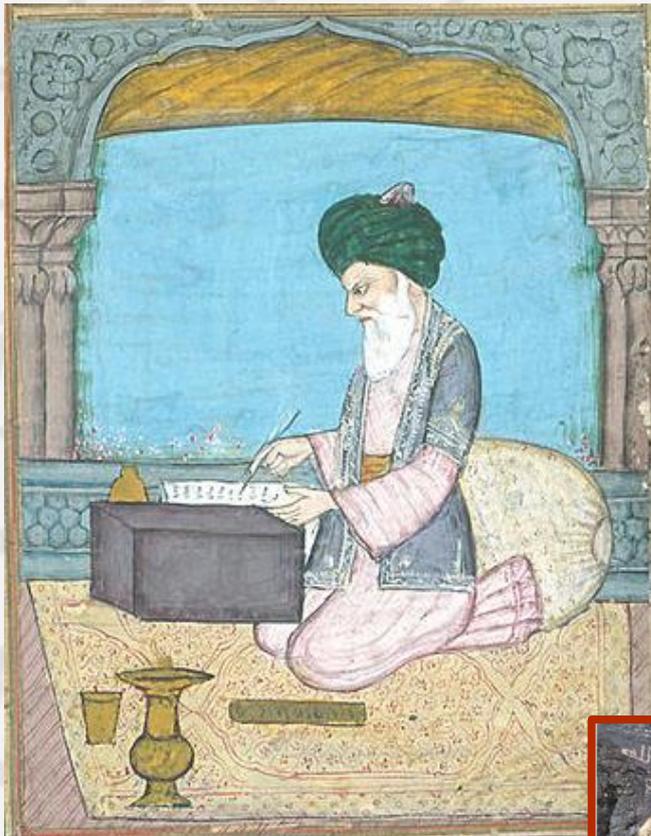


The Islam Research Group



Who Wrote the Qur'an? Some Conclusions



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Introduction

The unreliability of the traditional Islamic narrative that was based primarily upon Ibn Ishaq's (now lost) biography of Muhammad, and the six great collections of the hadith has now been clearly demonstrated in many books starting in the late 1970s with *Quranic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu, Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* by John Wansbrough and *Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World* and *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook. The genre has now expanded to include many other titles including:

Quranic Geography, Daniel Gibson,

Shadow of the Sword, Tom Holland

What the Koran Really says and *Why I am not a Muslim*, Ibn Warraq,

Crossroads to Islam, Yehuda Nevo,

The Hidden origins of Islam and *Early Islam: A Critical Reconstruction Based on Contemporary Sources*, ed. Karl Heinz Ohlig,

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men', David S Powers,

Death of a Prophet, Stephen Shoemaker,

Did Muhammad Exist?, Robert Spencer, and

Questioning Islam and *The Mecca Mystery*, Peter Townsend.

Many of these authors have proposed alternative histories for the rise of Islam, but amongst revisionists, no consensus has emerged. Neal Robinson¹ compared finding the chronological order of the Qur'an's surahs with solving a crossword puzzle, but the point that he makes is true for determining the origins of the Qur'an more generally:

For further progress to be made, there is a need for thematic studies ... Such studies would have to take into account all the Qur'anic references to a specific subject, but without being rigidly tied to any one chronological classification of the sūrahs. On the basis of each study, one would draw conclusions about the probable chronological order in which the references to the subject occurred.

The conclusions would, however, be provisional and might have to be modified or even abandoned in the light of the findings of other researches working on different themes. The whole enterprise would be rather like trying to solve a difficult crossword puzzle. A solution to clue 5-down may appear outstandingly brilliant, but it is nonetheless only provisional until matching solutions have been found to 11-across, 13-across and 16-across (or whatever clues intersect with it).

¹ *Discovering the Qur'an*, pp. 95–6, cited in *The Qur'an Made Linear: A Study of the Geschichte des Qorâns' Chronological Reordering*, Journal of Quranic Studies, 2008, Emmanuelle Stefanidis

The **Islam Research Group** has produced a series of documents ***Who wrote the Qur'an?*** that summarise the evidence concerning the origin of Islam, grouped according to the evidence type, and propose inferences therefrom. These are:

<i>Who wrote the Qur'an?: I</i>	<i>Manuscripts</i>
“	“ II <i>Qur'anic themes and sources</i>
“	“ III <i>The structure of the Qur'an</i>
“	“ IV <i>Non-canonical and variant Qur'ans</i>
“	“ V <i>Early accounts of 'Islam'</i>
“	“ VI <i>Inscriptions</i>
“	“ VII <i>Coins</i>
“	“ VIII <i>The Masjid al Haram</i>
“	“ IX <i>The Church of the Kathisma</i>
“	“ X <i>Qiblas</i>

This document is an attempt to draw together the inferences reached in these documents and to construct a plausible overall scenario based upon them. To avoid repetition, the evidence cited in and inferences drawn from these documents will in this document be summarised rather than recited in full, and the reader is invited to refer to the above documents where they are mentioned within the body of the text or cited alongside it (appearing as **WWQ I. Manuscripts**, etc.)

1. When the Qur'an was composed

The Qur'an's story of Dhu'l Qarnayni, {18.83-98}, is heavily dependent upon a Syriac text, *Neṣḥānā d-leh d-Aleksandrōs, The Victory of Alexander*, which must have been written after 628. Consequently, the Qur'an can only have reached its final canonical form on or after that year date.

(WWQ II. Quranic Themes and Sources).

Radiocarbon dating of early Qur'an manuscripts have shown nine separate manuscripts to have been created on parchments made before 690. The earliest confirmed parchments are the **Chester Beatty** and **Birmingham Manuscripts**, for which these results show, with 95.4% likelihood, a parchment creation date range no later than 643 and 645 respectively.

(WWQ I. Manuscripts).

Given that all the earliest Qur'an manuscripts (save, possibly, for the Sana'a Palimpsest lower script) appear to have been indirect copies descended from a single canonical rasm, it is considered highly unlikely that the canonical text of the Qur'an could have been significantly altered after the creation of the Chester Beatty and Birmingham Manuscripts, although some limited additions and exclusions of text cannot be entirely ruled out.

There is very strong evidence that the Qur'an reached its final canonical form at some time between 628 and 645.

Where the Qur'an was announced

A fertile land

Several Qur'an verses, including **{2.164}**, **{6.99}**, **{6.141}**, **{13.12}**, **{32.27}** and **{80.24-32}**, invite its audience to reflect upon the blessings of '*abundant rainfall*' and a fertile land as visible signs of God's providence, with references to '*grain in closely packed rows*', dates, grapes, pomegranates and olives. Olives are especially significant since they only naturally grow in the Mediterranean basin.

Twice, **{4.199}** and **{80.32}**, the Qur'an addresses arable farmers amongst its audience.

A sea-faring audience

Other verses, including **{10.22}**, **{17.67}**, **{31.32}**, **{29.65}** appeal to the experience of seafarers caught in a storm.

Specific geographical references

There are more specific references to:

- Mount Sinai, **{23.20}** and **{95.2}**,
- Midian, including **{7.85-91}**, **{11.84-94}** and **{29.36-37}**,
- the site of Sodom, that its audience are said to '*pass by ... in the morning, and at night*', **{137.137}**, and to
 - deserted rock hewn dwellings, supposedly of the people of 'Ad, and possibly referring to the ruined city of Petra, that were apparently visible to its audience:

'And those are their houses, lying desolate', {27.52}.

(WWQ II.
Quranic Themes and
Sources).

Yathrib

In one verse, {33.13}, the Qur'an refers to its audience -from its context at that stage clearly organised as a fighting force - as '*people of Yathrib*'. The purported use of Yathrib (modern Medina) by the Quranic community as a base, is corroborated by the reproduction in Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad the text of a document regulating the affairs of the inhabitants of Yathrib, known as the ***Constitution of Medina***, which purports to govern the affairs of several tribes in Yathrib.

The evidence from the text of the Qur'an is strong that parts of it were composed and announced in the fertile crescent. Since there is no location where locals would both passed the ruins of Sodom daily and have the ruins of Petra visible to them, and the population of neither the site of Sodom nor of Petra would be especially likely to include seafarers, one might reasonably speculate that for part of the Qur'an's announcement history, its author was travelling around Syria, Jordan and Palestine.

Later, during military action, the Quranic community was based in Yathrib.

Notwithstanding the general unreliability of the traditional biography of Muhammad, it is possible that it may contain two clues to its original setting in the place names used. Muhammad is said to have received his first revelation upon a mountain called **Hira** and to have received oaths of protection at a place called **Aqaba**. Both of these places are assumed by Muslim historians to be locations around Mecca, however both are the names of actual cities that may well have featured in the story of the Qur'an's announcement:

Al-Hira, on the bank of the Euphrates, was the episcopal seat of the Patriarch of the Church of the East, and effective capital to the Sassanian Arab proxy armies defending their Empire's south-western border.

The port city of **Ayla/Aqaba** lies on the Red Sea where excavations have uncovered a very early mosque, that may have originally faced south-west towards **Mount Sinai** (see ***WWQ X. Qiblas***).

Although admittedly somewhat speculative, it is suggested that both these place names may preserve evidence that the Qur'an announcer gained familiarity with Jewish and Christian texts and formed his sense of a religious vocation whilst in the seminary at al-Hira, and to have accepted oaths of protection at Aqaba.

3. The Masjid al-Haram

Several surahs of the Qur'an show a geographic focus upon a place that it principally calls the '*Masjid al-Haram*' ('*forbidden place of prostration*'), but also as the '*Sacred, 'Ancient*' (etc) *House*' and the '*Ka'aba*' ('*the Cube*'). This was:

(WWQ VIII. The Masjid al-Haram)

- ✦ the destination of a religious pilgrimage that the believers are themselves instructed to make, **{2.196-200}**,
- ✦ the direction that believers are instructed to face towards when they pray, **{2.144}**,
- ✦ a place from where the Quranic audience had been expelled, and which they were instructed to fight to regain, **{2.190-191}**,
- ✦ a place where the believers signed a peace treaty, **{9.7}**, but from where they were eventually to exclude their former enemies, **{9.28}**,
- ✦ the departure point from whence '*God's servant*' was taken on a journey to the '*furthest place of prostration*' in **{17.1}**.

As described in **WWQ VIII. The Masjid al-Haram** the Qur'an's Masjid al-Haram has many features in common with the site of the former Jewish Temple in Jerusalem:

- Both are, in some sense, **cube shaped buildings** (the Masjid al-Haram being referred to as '*the Cube*'; the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple being cubic in shape: **1 Kings 6.20, Exodus 26** and **Ezekiel 41.4,**)
- Both involve a structure for which **Abraham had raised the foundations, {2.217} / Genesis 22** (the structure in **Genesis 22** being the altar upon which he was intending to sacrifice Isaac),

- Both sites are the destinations of **pilgrimage**:
 - in the Qur'an called the '**hajj**',
 - in **Deuteronomy 16**, the feasts of:
 - '**ḥaḡ** *hammaṣṣōt*' (Passover);
 - '**ḥaḡ** *šābū'ōt*', (the seven day Feast of Weeks), and
 - '**ḥaḡ** *hassukkōt*' (the Feast of Tabernacles),
 (**ḥaḡ** being the Hebrew word for feasts, used particularly for these three pilgrimages).
- Both the Quranic **hajj** and (between them), the three Jewish festivals (**ḥaḡ**) involve:
 - the sacrifice of animals,
 - the circumambulation of a building, and
 - the commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son,
- In **{2.158}** the Masjid al-Haram is associated with '*the rituals of **Marwah and Safa***': the former bearing a similarity to Mount **Moriah**, the hill upon which the Jewish temple was built (**Genesis 22.2, 2 Chronicles 3.1**),
- Both are associated with a place called **Bakkah {3.97}/Psalm 84**.

All these factors common to the Masjid al-Haram and the Jewish Temple are highly unlikely to be a series of coincidences. Moreover, the suggestion that it was the Jewish Temple that the Quranic community had as its focus is corroborated by:

- the importance of Jewish history and scriptures to framing the way in which the Qur'an depicts its message, with several verses having been addressed directly to the Children of Israel, affirming the presence of Jews amongst its audience,

- the description of Muhammad having formed a Jewish and Arab alliance in the **Armenian chronicle of pseudo-Sebeos** (see below)

The association of the Masjid al-Haram and the Jewish Temple are strengthened by the activities of the Arab conquerors of Jerusalem:

(**WWQ V: Early accounts of 'Islam'**)

- **Patriarch Sophronius's** 638 account of the Arabs immediately building a structure upon the Temple Mount,
- **Arculf's** description of having seen a large prayer hall there in the 670s, and
- **Abd-al Malik's** construction of the **Dome of the Rock** in the 690s,

(**WWQ VIII. The Masjid al-Haram**)

This building activity upon the temple Mount contrasts with the Arabs having constructed no other major primarily religious structure until after 750.

The Qur'an's references to the Masjid al-Haram allude to the site of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

'Makka'

The Qur'an contains several instances in which pairs of characters in a story are presented with altered names so that their names are identical other than for the initial letter. This is the case with:

- two angels **Hālūt and Mālūt**, {2.102},
- Aaron and Korah who appear in the Qur'an as **Hārūn and Qārūn**,
- two demons, Gog and Magog, who in the Qur'an become **Yājūj and Mājūj**, {18.94-98}, and
- King Saul's being referred to in the Qur'an as **'Ṭālūt'** apparently for no other reason than that his name should rhyme with that of his enemy Goliath (in the Qur'an **'Jālūt'**, derived from the Hebrew *'Golyat'*).

It is suggested that the Quranic place name 'Makkah' may similarly have been an invention of the Qur'an's author (probably to represent a real place known to its audience) in order to rhyme with Bakkah, but seized upon by Ibn Ishaq a century later to construct a new location for the supposed story of Muhammad in the Hijaz.

4. An Abrahamic alliance

The earliest description of Muhammad's military strategy and aims is contained in the account recorded by **pseudo-Sebeos** in the *Armenian Chronicle*. This was apparently written less than 30 years after the death of Muhammad and the establishment of post-Byzantine Arab rule in Jerusalem. Pseudo-Sebeos describes how Muhammad attracted Jews who had been expelled from Edessa whom he distributed amongst Arab tribes loyal to him.

WWQ V.
Early accounts of
'Islam'

This account finds corroboration in the references to '*the Jews of...*' various Arab tribes found in the *Constitution of Medina*.

This account is also consistent with those verses of the Qur'an which:

- '*confirm*' the Torah,
- are addressed to Jews,
- present a world view heavily dependent upon the Jewish religious ideas.

Later verses, apparently after the breakdown of relations between Muhammad and the Jews, condemn '*some amongst the Jews*', refer to Jews having been given only '*a portion of the Book*', employ anti-semitic tropes, curse Jews and ultimately condemn Jews generally as idolaters.

Muhammad formed and led an army that included Jews that had been expelled or otherwise forced to leave Palestine and also Arab tribes to whom Muhammad preached had preached a form of Abrahamic monotheism.

Arabs traditionally believed themselves to be the descendants of Abraham's first-born son, Ishmael. Since according to the Torah, God had promised the Holy Land to the descendants of Abraham, it would have made sense that, with the weakness/collapse of the Byzantine military in the Middle East, an Arab leader might have sought to motivate Arabs to fight under his command, by presenting their enterprise as the realisation of God's ancient promise to Abraham, either alongside, or in place of, the children of Abraham's second son, Israel.

5. 'Muhammad'

The accounts of raids led by a 'Muhammad', by **Thomas the Presbyter** and in the **British Library Syriac gospel page**, demonstrate that a real historical person known by the name Muhammad was leading an Arab fighting force in 630s.

WWQ V.
Early accounts of
'Islam'

It seems highly unlikely that 'Muhammad' was the name given to the Qur'an's author at birth. In **{61.6}**, the Qur'an depicts Jesus saying:

'Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which came before me and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me whose name is Aḥmad.'

This passage seems to recall Jesus's promise in **St John's gospel** of an entity referred to by John (writing in Greek) as '*the Paraclete*' and invariably associated in Christianity with the holy Spirit. '*Aḥmad*' literally carries a literal meaning of '*blessed*' or '*desired*'.

{61.6} is treated in Islamic tradition as Jesus predicting instead the prophethood of Muhammad, but if this verse had been announced by an individual who was called Muhammad, in order to have Jesus predicting him by name, there is no reason why he would not have had Jesus refer to him by his full name '*Muhammad*', rather than the shorter '*Aḥmad*'. It seems far more likely that the Qur'an announcer composed this verse, and afterwards adopted assumed the name '*muḥammad*' to claim the identity of the Messenger predicted by Jesus (in which he may have been consciously or otherwise, following the example of the Persian prophet **Mani**, who had also claimed to be the incarnation of the Paraclete.)

'Muhammad' was not the author of the Qur'an's given name at birth, but was a title meaning 'the blessed' or 'the chosen' one², - possibly, given the terms of {61.6} the 'prophesied one', that he adopted during the later stages of the Quran's composition.

² Nevo translates Muhammad as '*the Chosen One*,' *Crossroads to Islam*

6. Muhammad in Palestine

The accounts of **Thomas the Presbyter** and in the **British Library Syriac gospel page**, and the reference to 'a prophet armed with a sword' in *Doctrina Iacobi* (see [WWQ V. Early accounts of 'Islam'](#)) all provide good evidence of a warlord known as Muhammad leading raids across Palestine around 634.

[\(WWQ V. Early accounts of 'Islam'\)](#)

These groups are likely to have been the same 'godless saracens' that **St Sophronius** described as having prevented him from attending the 634 Christmas mass in Bethlehem. St Sophronius's inability to make the short (about six miles) trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem because of the threat from Saracens corroborates Stephen Shoemaker's thesis that the Quranic account of the birth of Jesus and the miracle of the date palm, **{19.23-26}**, were composed by somebody who was familiar with the Church of the Kathisma which was located on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

[\(WWQ IX. The Church of the Kathisma\)](#)

By 634 the Qur'an author had adopted the name Muhammad and was leading violent raids across Palestine. It was around this time that he composed and announced the Qur'an's account of the birth of Jesus.

It is notable that whilst Jews are addressed directly as part of the Qur'an's audience, but come to be the object of a litany of accusations, central amongst which is that they have breached their covenant with God, Christianity is not mentioned at all in the earlier surahs. In the later surahs, whilst the Qur'an condemns the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the trinity as false, Christians never receive the same detailed, collective condemnation as Jews. On the contrary, the Qur'an author appears to have striven to accommodate as many Christian doctrines and titles for Jesus as possible (the virgin birth of Jesus, his status as the Messiah and as the 'spirit' and 'word' of God, and his being strengthened by the Holy Spirit) even though these additional theological elements seem to contribute nothing to the Qur'an's core message. Christians themselves are described in the Qur'an as '*closest in affection*' to the believers, **{5.82}**, and the word '*ansari*' meaning '*helpers*' is twice used for the followers of Jesus, in **{3.52}** and **{61.14}**, probably involving a pun on the Qur'an's word for Christians, '*nasari*', with which it shares the consonantal root n-s-r.

It is suggested that as Muhammad sought to establish himself in Palestine, he deliberately sought to accommodate the Christians that he found there.

7. The stages of the Qur'an's announcement

Adopting the stylometric analysis of Behnam Sadeghi that is set out in [WWQ III. The Structure of the Qur'an](#), and especially in the fifty-nine 'intact' surahs (i.e. those with internally consistent verse length and word use), the Qur'an can be seen to have been announced in several distinct stages. Sadeghi outlines seven stages, but for the purposes of this document, the first two of these stages can be combined, giving a six-stage analysis:

I Apocalyptic Rhapsodies

The Qur'an's initial theme was that of an imminent apocalypse. Whilst the overall apocalyptic theme and imagery unmistakably Judeo-Christian, specific Jewish and Christian references are few, suggesting that this may have been directed, at least in part, towards pagan Arabs. The earliest surahs give no sign, other than the occasional insertion of the word 'Say' (which in some cases, eg **Surahs 113** and **114**, was almost certainly inserted after the rest of the surah had been composed), that they were intended to be understood as the words of God Himself, rather than a prophet. **Surahs 113** and **114** may well have adopted pre-Qur'anic pagan invocations.

[\(WWQ II. Quranic Themes and Sources\)](#)

II Jewish and Arab Punishment Stories

Making frequent testy references to the scepticism of its audience, the Qur'an author supplements predictions of the Last Day with a series of stories of God smiting those who disbelieve in his prophets within history. In this stage the Qur'an deliberately alternates references to biblical characters with stories from Arab lore suggesting that its announcer is consciously trying to fuse Jewish/Old Testament tradition and Arab lore into a single message for a predominantly Arab audience.

II The Quiet Period

The stylistic analysis suggests a stage from which only two fairly unexceptional surahs are included in the current Qur'an.

IV Judeo-Christian Exegesis

In the fourth period, the references to biblical stories become far more detailed and varied than had been the case previously, the author drawing upon a wide range of non-canonical sources and showing a detailed knowledge of scripture, and assuming a similar knowledge on the part of his audience. For the first time, the Qur'an also includes reference to Jesus and other New Testament figures.

(WWQ II. Quranic Themes and Sources).

It is in relation to this period that the Qur'an adopts the name '*al-Rahman*' as an epithet for God, indicating that it had come under a South Arabian/Ethiopic influence. The Jabal Dabūb basmala is evidence that the basmala was first adopted by a South Arabian mystic as a formula for unifying North and South Arabian monotheism. The incorporation of this phrase may coincide with the Quranic community's time based at Yathrib, which was under South Arabian influence.

(WWQ IV Inscriptions)

V. The Warlord Prophet

Surahs announced during the fifth period are clearly drafted to support a military campaign to recapture the Masjid al-Haram. Despite some setbacks, the war seems to go well with verses devoted to the distribution of the spoils of war, the treatment (or from a modern perspective, mistreatment) of captives and the punishment of deserters. Any theological message, such as references to past prophets or future judgment, is subordinated to the need to motivate fighters for the military task in hand.

VI. The Islamic State

The final surahs are primarily concerned with the government of the community, directed at such mundane matters as prohibited conduct, permitted punishments, the resolution of disputes, family law, inheritance, diet, and dress. The Qur'an announcer's position appears unassailable, with revelations from God announced as commands and laws rather than appeals. The position of the prophet now becomes central with numerous orders to obey him, and some revelations address matters entirely personal to the prophet himself.

Surah 9, is generally regarded as the final surah to be announced, with its condemnation of all Jews and Christians as idolaters, and orders that they be excluded from the masjid al-Haram, forced to pay the jizya infidel tax or even slain *en masse*.

The Qur'an author commenced as an apocalyptic preacher to pagan tribes in Arabia.

He sought to weave Arab and Jewish themes together to create the myth that the sons of Ishmael had preserved a 'pure' Abrahamic religion. The self-serving theme of God smiting those who reject His prophets is paramount in this stage, with the apocalypse (which, if taken too literally, may detract from the building up of a durable religious community) appearing less frequently and appearing less imminent.

The Qur'an author commenced a holy war to capture the Masjid al-Haram (Jerusalem) from which the Jews had been expelled. During this campaign, the author based himself in Yathrib, which became his 'place of religious rule' ('madiīa'). Here the author incorporated his Jewish followers into the Arab community as described by Sebeos. It is also at this time that the author adopts the 'basmala' refrain, combining the North Arabian 'Allāh' and South Arabian 'Rahman', developing an idea that found its first expression in the Jabal Dabūb inscription (which itself could have been the work of the author).

As the force besieged Jerusalem, it adopted Christian themes (including an account of the nativity that conflated the nativity story with the miracle of the date palm that its author learned of through his occupation of the Church of the Kathisma) to encourage the support of Christians in the captured Palestinian territory. The relationship with the Jews soured, however, resulting in ever more hostile denunciations of them.

The Qur'anic community's campaign to capture Jerusalem was ultimately successful. A treaty was agreed there, referred to in {9.7}, and in its final phase the Qur'an focussed upon establishing laws for the community its author governs. Some verses address matters entirely personal to its author.

In the Qur'an's final verses, Jews and Christians were simultaneously denounced as idolaters {9.30}: they are exiled from Temple Mount, {9.28}, and believers instructed to fight them 'at every opportunity', {9.5}, and 'until they pay tax in submission', {9.29}.

A proposed timeline of the announcement of the Qur'an

Year	Known historical event	Notes on relevance of historical event to the origin of the Qur'an	Proposed timeline for the narration of the Qur'an (referring to the six-stages outlined above)
590	<p>Sassanian emperor Hormizd IV was blinded and deposed by his brothers, during a civil war that saw the throne seized by a general, Bahram Chobin.</p> <p>Hormizd's son, Kusrow (II), sought and obtained assistance from the Byzantine emperor Maurice to regain secure his throne, in return for surrendering territory to Byzantine Empire.</p>	<p><i>Daniel Beck suggests that Hormizd is the 'blind man' of Surah 80.³</i></p>	
600	<p>Kusrow II executed (by crushing to death by elephants) the last king of the Lakhmid dynaty, Al-Numan III, ibn al-Mundhir. Al-Numan had, it is thought, converted to Christianity and refused Kusrow his daughter in marriage.</p>	<p><i>Daniel Beck suggests that the 'companions of the elephant' (Surah 105) is a reference to Kusrow, drawing attention to the Sassanian empire's frequent use of the elephant as a symbol of their might.⁴</i></p>	

³ *Evolution of the Early Qur'an: From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet (Apocalypticism)*, 2018, Daniel Beck

⁴ Ditto

	<p>Kusrow then granted dominion of Al-Hira and the surrounding region, to a member of the Tayyaye tribe, Iyas ibn Qabisah al-Ta'i.</p>	<p><i>A hadith recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari 1.7.⁵ describes a visit by Abu Sufyan (who according to the traditional Islamic narrative was the Meccan leader and Muhammad's father in law) to the court of Heraclius, in which Abu Sufyan describes Muhammad, referring to him, without explanation, as 'Ibn-Abi-Kabsha.'</i> ⁶</p> <p><i>It is also to be noted that Thomas the Presbyter in the first historical account of Muhammad, describes him as leading the Tayye.</i></p> <p><i>As noted in 2. Where the Qur'an was announced, above, according to Islamic tradition, Muhammad received his first revelation on a mountain of al-Hira.</i></p> <p><i>Consequently it is suggested that Muhammad may have been closely associated with the Tayyaye court of Abu Qabsha.</i></p>	
602	<p>Maurice was murdered by his general Phocas who seized the Byzantine throne, and Kusrow launched an offensive against the Byzantine Empire.</p>		

⁵ Bk 1 hadith 7, the full hadith produced as **Annex 1**

⁶ This information coming to me via the Youtube channel **Sneakers Corner: 'The hunt for the real Muhammad (we found him!)**', 5.6.2020.

604	Sassanian armies capture Dara and Edessa and commence raids against Syria.	<p><i>It is likely in reference to the success of Kusrow II's offensive that {30.1}: 'The Romans have been defeated in a land nearby...'</i></p> <p><i>was announced, although the following passage, which predicts the Romans' eventually triumph, may have been announced after this victory had in fact occurred.</i></p>	<p>Stages: I. Apocalyptic Rhapsodies. and II. Jewish and Arab Punishment Stories</p> <p><i>'Muhammad' preaches first an imminent apocalypse, then God's punishment on those who reject his prophets. Surahs fuse Jewish and Arab themes to appeal to Arabs to see themselves as the inheritors of the Abrahamic tradition.</i></p> <p><i>Anti-Sassanian propaganda is evident in earlier surahs.</i></p>
610	Phocas is deposed by another general, Heraclius		
613	Sassanian armies capture Damascus and Jerusalem.		
622	Heraclius launches counter offensive against Sassanians	<i>Start date of the Arab calendar, traditionally associated with Muhammad's supposed hijra.</i>	III. The Quiet Period
624	Heraclius's army launches a surprise invasion of the Sassanian Empire from the north, through Armenia, threatening the Sassanian heartland.		
626	Kusrow's army similarly strikes at Constantinople, which it besieges but fails to capture.		

<p>628</p>	<p>With Heraclius besieging the Sassanian capital Ctesiphon, Kusrow leaves to seek reinforcements, and is deposed and killed. His son Kavadh II agrees peace terms with Heraclius, who returns to Constantinople, via Jerusalem, in triumph.</p> <p>According to the Armenian chronicle of pseudo-Sebeos, a group of Jews took over Edessa following the withdrawal of the Sassanian army, but they were expelled from there.</p>	<p><i>The Neṣḥānā d-leh d-Aleksandrōs / The Victory of Alexander, is composed to celebrate Heraclius's victory, and, because it is the source of the Qur'an's story of Dhu'l Qarnayn, this provides the earliest possible latest date for the completion of the Qur'an, (see WWQ II. Quranic Themes and Sources.)</i></p> <p><i>Pseudo-Sebeos reports that after their expulsion from Edessa, these Jews formed an alliance with Arabs under the leadership of Muhammad. It is suggested WWQ V: Early accounts of 'Islam' that this account is corroborated by the text of the Constitution of Medina, (in fact Yathrib) suggesting that the one Qur'an verse that addresses believers, in the context of an exhortation to fight, as 'O people of Yathrib...', {33.13}.</i></p>	<p>Stage IV. Judeo-Christian Exegesis</p> <p>Muhammad uses the doctrine of the Arabs preserving a pure hanifist faith given to them by Abraham, to merge an Abrahamic alliance with the Jews. Substantial efforts are made to expand upon Jewish traditions to incorporate them into this message. Muhammad portrays himself as prophet, lawgiver and nation-founder, fulfilling for the Arabs the role that Moses had had for the Jews.</p>
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		<p><i>The suggestion has been made at 2. Where the Qur'an was announced, above, that the tradition that an oath of loyalty was made to Muhammad at Aqaba (in Mecca) may preserve the memory that such an oath was made at Aqaba on the Red Sea.</i></p> <p><i>It has also been noted that this is the site of the ruins of an early mosque, with a disputed qibla – either SW to Mount Sinai or NE to Petra, (WWQ X: Qiblas.)</i></p>	<p>The Quranic community may have been based around a mosque in Ayla/Aqaba, initially praying towards Mount Sinai. There he took oaths of loyalty from Jews expelled from Edessa (who would have been expelled from Jerusalem beforehand), and announces that he has been commanded by God to fight to capture Jerusalem. He presented this as the fulfilment of God's promise to the children of Abraham.</p> <p>At this time he may have required his people to turn 180° in the general direction of the Masjid al-Haram (Jerusalem).</p> <p>Thereafter he established a base at Yathrib to build up his army.</p>
634	<p>The earliest reference to Muhammad from Thomas the Presbyter who wrote of destructive raids by the 'tayyaye d-Mhmt', east of Gaza (see WWQ V: Early accounts of 'Islam').</p>	.	<p>Stage V -Part I: The warlord prophet</p> <p>With the Byzantine community exhausted by years of war and with the armies of Heraclius returned to Anatolia, Muhammad returned, by sea from Yathrib to Ayla/Aqaba, and began a series of violent raids against civilian targets Palestine, referred to in the Qur'an's jihad verses, with the ultimate aim of capturing Jerusalem.</p>

636	A Byzantine army is defeated at the Battle of Yarmouk, where it became trapped in the muddy banks of a river.	<i>The traditional Islamic narrative attributes the command of the Muslim army to Kalid bin Walid and Abu Ubayda, during the caliphate of Umar, although if, as argued above, the Masjid al-Haram is in fact Temple Mount, Muhammad must still have been alive at this stage.</i>	The only major military confrontation recorded between the Arab insurgency and a Byzantine army could be the great (and apparently surprising) victory celebrated in Surahs 8 and 47 (traditionally associated with the story of the Battle of Badr). It may be noted that the Qur'an refers to 'water' having been sent down to help the believers, consistent with the Byzantine army being trapped in the mud of Yarmouk.
638	Sophronius described 'godless Saracens' preventing him celebrating Christmas in Bethlehem.	<i>Half-way between Jerusalem and Bethlehem lie the ruins of the Church of the Kathisma, that Stephen Shoemaker has demonstrated played a role in the composition of the Qur'an's account of the nativity of Jesus in Surah 19, <u>WWQ IX. The Church of the Kathisma</u>.</i>	Stage V – Part II: Disagreements between Muhammad and his Jewish allies show themselves in increasingly anti-Jewish verses. As Muhammad gains control over territory with a Christian population, the Qur'an comes to adopt many verses adopting many Christian dogmas.

	<p>Arab assumption of control over Jerusalem</p>	<p><i>The Qur'an refers to a treaty made at the masjid al-Haram.</i></p>	<p>The inclusion in the Qur'an of the story of Dhu'l Qarnayn (based upon <i>The Victory of Alexander</i>, written to commemorate Heraclius's conquest of Jerusalem) may have been made to celebrate Muhammad's conquest of Jerusalem ten years later. The figure of '<i>the two horned one</i>' appears devised to conflate Alexander the Great (used as a heroic archetype for Heraclius) with Moses (often presented with two horns, and appearing in the role of Alexander a few verses earlier).</p> <p>Stage VI: The Islamic State</p> <p>With his control over Jerusalem, Muhammad first makes a treaty with Jews and Christians at the Masjid al-Haram, {9.7}, then breaches it demanding jizya, {9.28}, and finally, as a pretext denouncing Jews and Christians as generally guilty of shirk, ordering their permanent exclusion from Temple Mount on pain of death, {9.5}.</p>
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8. The Canonisation of the Qur'an:

In the eighth century in the *Kitab al-Masahif*, Abdullah ibn Dawood meticulously lists variants in the Qur'an text from more than a dozen alternative Qur'an manuscripts. Dawood's record has now been corroborated by similar variants appearing in the Sana'a manuscript lower text.

(WWQ IV.
Non-canonical and
variant Qur'ans)

Three factors suggest that the canonical Qur'an was an exercise in harmonising different Qur'an texts:

- Compared with the non-canonical texts recorded by Ibn Dawood, Sadeghi and Goudarzi comment upon the fact that the canonical text tends to adopt the text used by the majority of non-canonical manuscripts,
- of five disputed surahs, of which the manuscript of Ibn Ka'b had included none and Ibn Masud had included all five, the canonical manuscript had accepted three, and
- in an apparent dispute over whether **Surah 9** was in fact a continuation of **Surah 8**, it was decided to include it as a separate surah, but immediately following **Surah 8** and without a bismillah.

Despite these variants there appears to have been agreement within the Qur'anic community over the vast majority of the Qur'an's content including the order of the surahs and the presence of the bismillah. Since the Qur'an could not have been completed prior to 628 and since the canon appears to have been fixed no later than 645, it is suggested that it is unlikely that an ur-Qur'an was compiled, copied several times with multiple scribal errors, and then lost, requiring a subsequent process of harmonisation.

It is likely that all or most of the Quranic variants date back to the lifetime of the Qur'an announcer himself who may have announced verses differently on different occasions, or whose words may have been incorrectly recorded, and not corrected. An authoritative figure, probably the Qur'an announcer himself, appears to have settled the order of surahs at an early stage and there is widespread agreement on the verse order within surahs, but this person appears not to have completed the process of ensuring a single text by the time of their death.

9. Post-Byzantine Arab rulers I: The death of Muhammad to 690

The Umayyads and the legacy of Muhammad

There is no evidence that the post-Byzantine Arab rulers that succeeded Muhammad made any attempt to follow or promote the Qur'an as the word of God.

The facts that:

- they minted coins incorporating crosses in the west and Zoroastrian fire altars in the
- the name of one early ruler, Muawiyah, is presented alongside a cross on the inscription of the Baths of Gaddera
- St John of Damascus was a senior official at Damascus despite his only partial knowledge and his overt contempt for the Qur'an and the figure of Muhammad
- There is no reference in any inscription or coin to Islam, Muhammad or the Qur'an until 690, no Islamic literature is produced until 750, and no reference in non-Islamic accounts to awareness of an Arab holy scripture until the 720s, and to an individual called Muhammad until the 730s,

(WWQ VII. Coins),

(WWQ VI. Inscriptions),

(WWQ V. Early accounts of 'Islam')

are all strong evidence that the traditional understanding of the Rashidun 'rightly guided' Islamic caliphate believing its authority to derive from being successors to Muhammad, and obedient to the Qur'an is incorrect.

At least until the early eighth century, and probably until the Abbasid revolution in 750, it would not be accurate to describe the post-Byzantine Arab rulers as Muslims, as the term is understood today

Qur'anic evidence of discord within the Qur'anic movement

The Qur'an contains several indicators that during its war phase, the believers' movement was a coalition of tribes that needed to be encouraged to act together:

{4.92} makes provision where a believer is accidentally killed by another believer, with whom the clan of the victim is an enemy,

{49.9} permits a believer to take a side on the basis of justice where different groups of believers to fall to fighting

in **{15.90-91}** the Qur'an refers to those amongst the believers who '*shred*' its meaning, and

{19.107-108} refers to a party that had established '*a mosque of harm and disbelief to divide the believers*'.

Dynastic alliances

Although the traditional Islamic narrative is inherently unreliable, it is suggested that its genealogies are more likely to be accurate than its accounts of events, and it is possibly significant that according to Ibn Ishaq:

- **Muhammad married Ramla**, the daughter of his rival Abu Sufyan, and
- **Uthman**, Abu Sufyan's cousin married two of Muhammad's daughters: **Ruqayyah** and, after Ruqayyah's death, **Umm Kulthum**.

These marriages, if correctly recorded, indicate not religious devotion by Uthman and Ramla to Muhammad, but the sealing of an alliance by mutual marriages. About a decade after Muhammad's death, the leadership of the Arab state passed to Uthman and thereafter to Muawiyah, Abu Sufyan's son, establishing the Umayyad dynasty that rules the Arab state until 750. Of Muhammad's own bloodline, Ibn Ishaq reports:

Muhammad's cousin and son in law was denied leadership of the Arab community until 656, and then faced a civil war that meant that he was unable to establish effective control over it,

Muhammad's grandson Hussayn and several other members of his family were killed by Umayyad supporters at the battle of Karbala in 680.

It seems likely that Uthman was, rather than Muhammad's disciple, in fact his rival for leadership of a tribal coalition, with no genuine belief in Muhammad's revelations. The leaders of the post Byzantine Arabs (Abu Bakr, Umar and the Umayyads) showed no interest in promoting the status of Muhammad or the Qur'an after Muhammad's death – which may have strengthened the claims to power of their rivals, his descendants – until at the earliest 690. This was ten years after the killing of Hussayn in 680.

Petra and the rebellion of Ibn Zubayr

Dan Gibson has shown that many buildings built by the early post-Byzantine Arab rulers from 630 to 750 were in fact oriented either towards Petra or to a mid-way point between Petra and Mecca (see [WWQ X. Qiblas](#)). This is very unlikely to be a coincidence.

Gibson notes that:

- that later histories, especially that of al-Tabari, describe a twelve year rebellion by Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, from 680-691.
- there is a year (70 AH or 689-690) in which the surviving history of al-Tabari barely records anything concerning this rebellion, other than that al-Zubayr destroyed the 'Ka'aba' and bought many horses and camels, and
- an inscription found near Ta'if which commemorates '*the building of the Ka'aba*' in 697 (see [WWQ VI. Inscriptions](#)).

He postulates that:

- the early Arab rulers oriented their buildings towards Petra because this was the site of the Masjid al-Haram, but that the true significance of the location was the presence of the Black Stone (that features in the traditional Islamic narrative and fragments of which are currently embedded into the Ka'aba in Mecca),
- al-Zubayr, in order to prevent this stone falling into the hands of his enemies send a party of his supporters to take it deep into the Hijaz for safe-keeping,
- in 697, after the defeat of his rebellion, the guardians of the stone established it as a new pilgrimage site at the location of Mecca in Arabia (as commemorated by the Ta'if inscription),
- after the Abbasid revolution, Ibn Ishaq was commissioned to write a hagiographic history of Muhammad and set it in the distant location of the new shrine of the black stone, depicting Muhammad's principal rivals as polytheists.

If the Qur'an's references to the Masjid al-Haram are references to Temple Mount in Jerusalem which Muhammad had focussed his campaign upon capturing, and given that there is no evidence of the Umayyads recognising Muhammad in any way between 632 – 690, it is extremely unlikely that the orientation of Umayyad buildings within this period was connected with Muhammad in any way.

However, it is suggested another element of Gibson's thesis, that the change in the orientation of Umayyad buildings from the Petra qibla to directions that related to both Petra and Mecca (the 'between qibla' and the 'parallel qibla'), during the course of Ibn Zubayr's rebellion occurred as a result of the movement of a sacred artifact such as the Black Stone, is the best explanation for the facts that he uncovered. The scenario that the Umayyad rulers retained a private pagan commitment to the Black Stone is, of course, entirely consistent with their neglect of Muhammad legacy.

In the first early decades of Umayyad rule, the Umayyads were pagan, orienting their court and religious buildings towards Petra, seat of the Black Stone.

10. Post-Byzantine Arab rulers II: 690-750

The Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock ambulatory inscription, is dated 691-2. It contains the **bismillah**, and the **two limbs of the modern shahada** (*'There is no god but God'* and *'Muhammad is the Messenger of God'*) six times, although the form of words varies slightly and the statement concerning Muhammad follows directly after the assertion of monotheism on only two occasions, indicating that the two statements were probably seen as separate. It also contains several short passages of Quranic text and two units of text that may have been original compositions or possibly passages of announced as part of the Quranic revelation, but excluded from the canon:

'Oh God, bless Your Messenger and Your servant Jesus'

and

'O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation. The blessing of God be on him and peace be on him, and may God have mercy.'

The inscriptions are essentially statements honouring the person of Jesus whilst denying his divinity. We do not know when the Dome of the Rock structure was built, but only that its inscriptions were dated 72 AH (ie 691-692). It seems highly unlikely that to project this anti-Trinitarian message was the original purpose of a shrine built over the foundation rock of the Jewish Temple. Jesus's main association with the Temple (after his being inadvertently left behind there by his parents following a pilgrimage, and his driving out money-lenders from the temple precincts) was his having been condemned there for blasphemy). One may therefore reasonably treat the building of the Dome of the Rock and the creation of the mosaic inscription as two separate episodes. The structure itself is clearly an attempt in some way to reconstruct the Jewish Temple, pursuant to the suggested presentation by Muhammad of the Arab conquest of Jerusalem as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. However, the inscriptions are anti-Christian propaganda, pursuing the practical aim of establishing Arab dominance over the Christian-majority city.

(WWQ VIII.
The Masjid al-
Haram)

The reference to Muhammad in the inscriptions appears only in variations of the stylised phrase – *Muhammad is the Messenger of God*’, which also appears in coins from about this time.

**(WWQ VII:
Coins)**

After 690 the Umayyads began to recognise and honour the name of Muhammad. However, official demonstrations of respect for Muhammad were limited to short and formulaic mottos. As late as the 730s, copies of the Quran remained little known and there was no biography of Muhammad written.

Since the early Arab rulers had effectively ignored Muhammad and the Qur’an from his death until 690, one must wonder why the Umayyads would have adopted the motto ‘*Muhammad rasul Allah*’ and phrases from the Qur’an on coins and upon the Dome of the Rock from 690.

There is evidence of a rising popular appeal of such phrases in popular inscriptions (as surveyed by Yehuda Nevo see **WWQ VI. Inscriptions**) which may have driven the adoption of such Arabic religious terminology by the elite.

It is also possible that the Umayyads had felt more secure in their position as rulers after any threat posed by Muhammad’s descendants had been effectively neutralised by the Battle of Karbala (680) and after the defeat of Ibn al-Zubayr’s rebellion (680-91).

11. The Abbasid Revolution, 750

Shortly after 750 Ibn Ishaq wrote the first biography of Muhammad, followed by a less well known biography by Ibn Rashid. Both Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Rashid claimed to draw upon, as one of their principal sources, one **Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri**, who in turn is said to have gained his information from individuals who were born in the years following Muhammad's death, especially including an **Urwa ibn al-Zubayr**, brother of **Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr** who had led the 680-690 rebellion against the Umayyad rulers. Separate to these biographies, al-Zuhri, Urwa and Urwa's son, Hisham, were also amongst the principal sources for the ***Al-Muwatta of Malik bin Anas***, the earliest collection of hadith.

It will be recalled that **Dan Gibson** has theorised - it is suggested quite plausibly - that **Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr** had sent the **Black Stone** south into the Hijaz to prevent its capture by the Umayyads for safety and that his supporters had constructed a shrine to it at the location that became modern Mecca.

This thesis is corroborated by the Ta'if inscription commemorating '*the building of the Ka'aba*' in 697.

(WWQ VI. Inscriptions)

Whilst one cannot reconstruct the exact sequence of events it is suggested that:

- ✦ the concern over the fate of the Black Stone indicates that Ibn-al-Zubayr's rebellion had been based upon an appeal to Arab pagan identity,
- ✦ In the sixty years following the crushing of the rebellion the popularity of the cult of Muhammad as a great Arab warrior and hero favoured by God had continued to grow,
- ✦ Guardians of the shrine of the Black Stone may have sought to incorporate the memory of Muhammad into its recent mythology to attract more pilgrims,
- ✦ After the Abbasids seized control from the Umayyads they had an interest in both claiming the legacy of Muhammad but also in interpreting the Qur'an's message to make it more Arab and less dependent upon Jewish and Christian sources and less focussed upon the Jewish Temple,

- ✦ the existence of the new shrine to the Black Stone at Mecca and possibly imaginative stories by Urwa ibn al-Zubayr provided the opportunity for the Abbasids to commission a biography by Ibn Ishaq, depicting Muhammad as an idealised warrior (by the standards of the times) and a composite of biblical prophets, revealing God's Law for the Arabs whilst fighting with polytheists in the remote Arabian desert.

The Abbasid caliphs commissioned a 'biography' of Muhammad from Ibn Ishaq, weaving an imaginative story to explain the verses of the Qur'an set around the Black Rock shrine in the Hijaz, which was allocated the conveniently available Quranic name 'Mecca'.