

[Reply for Stephen Shoemaker about his post in Bart Ehrman blog: Radiocarbon Dating of the Qur'an. Has It Solved the Problem? – Friday, July 15, 2023]

Thank you, Stephen.

I would like to highlight the following 5 points related to your analysis.

1# When the Birmingham manuscript was dated, Jay Smith claimed that the Quran existed before the birth of Muhammed. Many atheists follow his claim to the point that it caused Rebecca Watson (an atheist youtuber) to ask atheists to stop discussing this subject because it makes atheists look bad.

[Ref: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TFTj-7JHDo>

See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzceTMtfGec>]

She then explained a bit about the carbon-dating and highlighted that it is related to the skin of the parchment, not necessary the date of writing.

So, yes, carbon-dating doesn't give a pinpoint date, but it does give a probability range, and with it, we can increase the probability-of-accuracy of some conclusions over others.

So, the question here: did the carbon-dating increase the probability-of-accuracy of the Islamic tradition claim?!!

[The Chain Oral Tradition is vital in this discussion, but I will leave it to your previous post, and here I will just use the term "Islamic tradition"].

2# You spoke about 4 lab-results: 388-535, 433-599, 590-660, 611-660. These results might be meaningless if you are looking for a pinpoint date, but we aren't looking for that. Are we!

We can clearly conclude from these results that the animal was highly-likely killed before 660AD. Can't this data increase the probability-of-accuracy for the Islamic tradition claim?!!

Also, the first datum can be regarded as a statistical anomaly. The next three data have a shared band which also can provide useful average statistical data. Can't this data increase the probability-of-accuracy for the Islamic tradition claim?!!

3# Just on last Thursday, Bart put a post about dating the NT. He explained that dating is based on paleography, which is using the hand-writing style for dating. This doesn't give a pinpoint date, but it gives a valuable range of probabilities and the NT Scholars are happy with it.

We can use the same method with ancient Quranic Manuscripts, but in this case the probability range is much more accurate: Arabic script has no short vowels. This script was influenced by the Nabataean script which was influenced by the Canaanite script. The Arabs, Nabataeans and the Canaanites didn't have any problem in writing and reading their scripts. However, when non-Arabs started to learn the Quran, they found this script to be confusing, therefore, Scholars started to put signs, dots and

dashes (Diacritics) to guide the pronunciation of the words. But this happened gradually, and this development was documented.

Would the analysis of the diacritics and the carbon-dating increase the probability-of-accuracy for the Islamic tradition claim?

This is an important subject, so have you covered this subject in your “critical analysis” of the Quran?!!

4# It has been said that the Sunna and Shia have a different version of the Quran. This is totally false: The Shia in Iran and Iraq have the same Quran of the Sunni in Arabia.

However, there are two main Qera’at (which Westerns call it “versions”) between the Muslims in Arabia and the Muslims in North Africa. In Arabia, the Qera’t of “Aasim” is the dominant, while in North-Africa, the Qera’t of “Nafi” is the dominant. But let us call them here versions. These versions are not “news”, they are discussed thoroughly in the ancient books. So, this is not “critical analysis”, this is just a description.

When the NT Scholars started to “critically analyze” the NT, they started to compare the manuscripts. They found that the difference between the NT manuscripts is about 400k words. (k=1000), with many words that are “contradicting”. This was a very valuable “critical analysis” for the NT field.

Did you cover this angle in your critical analysis of the Quran?! This is a very important angle for the origin of the Quran as it was an important angle for the origin of the NT.

What are the differences between Aasim version and Nafi’ version? Because just saying that {there are versions for the Quran} is truly misleading.

The difference between the versions of the Quran doesn’t exceed 1000 words. This is based on my quick counting to the differences that was collected by Abu Bakr As-Sijistani (died 928AD) in his book Kitab al-Masahif. It should be noted that none of these differences causing any contradictions to the verses of the Quran.

These differences represent about 1.3% of the 77,437 words of the Quran. I will double the count for safety margin, so we have about 2.6% of differences, and I will round this figure to 3%. Therefore, we have about 1300 words as a safety-margin at the top of the 1000 original count. This would cover any possible lost differences.

In the hidden (lower-text) of the Sana’a manuscript (which we can say that it was ancient due to the lack of diacritics), the well-known article of Sadeghi and Goudarzi identified 60 points of differences between this manuscript and Aasim version. Many of these points related to one word, some were for 2 words, and rarely for 3 words. For safety calculations, we will regard all the points for 3 words, which will give us 180 words difference.

The readable part of this manuscript is about 10,259 words (based on approximate calculation for the number and percentage of the readable parts of the folios). So, we

have about 1.75% difference. It should be noted here that these 180 words don't make any contradictions for the verses of the Quran.

The 180 words can be included within the 1300 words safety-margin that we have established. So, we still have the 3%. It should be noted that the Scribe of the hidden manuscript was not professional as it is shown by his style of writing, but this is a different story.

The appeared (upper-text) of the Sana'a manuscript (which is ancient by the style of writing) is almost identical to Aasim version, the same as the Birmingham manuscript.

So, all versions have 100% of the meaning with a "minimum" of 97% of its exact wording.

How significant is this?

With all of the quick and miraculous expansion of the Muslims to the east and west, then the civil wars and the defragmentation, but still, the Muslims from the far east of the old world to the far west of that world have the Quran with 100% of the meaning and at least 97% of its exact wording, and the 3% don't give any contradictions to the verses.

Doesn't this support the claim that the Quran has one source?!! Doesn't this support the claim of the Islamic tradition?!!

Have you covered this part in your "critical analysis" of the Quran?

5# My understanding to the "critical analysis" is to detach from previous conclusions, then to gather data (specially the raw data from the source), analyze the data, and then form the conclusions accordingly.

But I truly feel that you have reversed this process in your analysis to the Quran. I feel that you have already formed your conclusions and you were gathering the data that support these conclusions, and most of these data are just the opinions of other Westerners Scholars.

So, I think you have very detailed descriptions of many Westerners Scholars supporting opinions, but with very little in-depth analysis for the raw data from the source.

I acknowledge that this is my opinion, but I have examples to support it:

From the first TV recorded debate between Muslims and Westerners (early 1970's), the Muslims always say that Othman standardized the "script", and this is supported by "detailed ancient data". Still, the Western Scholars of Islamic Studies (WSIS) continue to say that Othman collected the Quran, standardize the Quran, finalized the Quran, etc.

So, I am requesting the WSIS: Will you please start by clarifying the data "as is" from the source, and then attach any opinion you want!

I would rather prefer that opinions to be supported by evidences (and the opinions of other Scholars are not evidences). But still, I am limiting my request to the WSIS for

one thing only: Just start by clarifying the data “as is” from the source, and then attach any opinion you like.

Is this a fair request!

Also (as a supporting example to my previous opinion) no ancient Islamic source said that Al-Bukhari reject 593K of the hadith from 600k. This is not true. The ancient sources said that Al-Bukhari selected 7k from 600k of the Hadith. This is because Al-Bukhari had a strict criteria for his Saheeh. No ancient Islamic source said that Al-Bukhari regarded the 593k to be forgeries.

Again, I am requesting the WSIS to start by presenting the data “as is” from the source, then they can attach any opinion they like.

I also think that if I dig more, then I would probably find more examples to support my previous opinion.