

[A pdf reply by Omar Abur-Robb to Stephen Shoemaker about his third post in Bart Ehrman blog: Creating the Qu’ran: Where Did the Scripture of Islam Really Come From? Guest post by Stephen Shoemaker – Tuesday, August 8, 2023]

Hi Stephen,

My reply here is the same as my replies in your previous two posts with some new points. It is a bit long, so I preferred to put it in a 2nd-pdf reply (as the 1st-pdf reply in the previous post). I truly preferred it this way so to put it as part of the “Opinion and the Opposite Opinion” for this sensitive subject.

1# You said in this post: “if you look back over many of the comments to my earlier posts, those with the strongest objections tend to base their critiques in references to the authority of traditional Islamic materials – all of which were written much later than the period in question”.

I suppose I am among those mentioned here, but I didn’t base my critiques on these authorities, I based it on the available data, and my true criticism was about the methodology: you decided to ignore the “Chain-Oral-Tradition (COT) without proper discussion (as I have discussed in your two previous posts).

Let me here clarify the following point again: Scholars have made a good critical analysis to the New-Testament (NT), and although the NT is based on Anonymous-Oral-Tradition (AOT), which then documented by Anonymous-Authors, but still, these Scholars have established a criteria to filter the data in the NT because “Oral Traditions” do have right data that are mixed with false data.

This is the core of critical analysis: to create an objective criteria in which we faithfully apply to filter the available data. This means that this criteria will be the tool for our decision in accepting or refusing a piece of data. But you didn’t do this here: you have decided without proper discussion that the COT is not reliable, and then you based your conclusions in disputed AOT data. So, what are your criteria in deciding that this info is right, and the other info is wrong; because if you didn’t have this criteria then you are just making cherry-pickings!

Just to clarify here: If I am allowed to use the rumors and the disputed data in the yellow newspapers in the West then I can prove anything and everything, but this is not critical analysis; because this analysis require a clear and discussed criteria of how we will decide that one info is false and the other is true.

2# You said in this post: “If one were to peruse the scholarly literature on the Qur’an from the last century and a half, one would find that the vast majority of scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, follow the (Sunni) Islamic tradition in ascribing the collection of the Qur’an as we have it today to the fourth Caliph (“successor” of Muhammad)”.

But this is totally false, and the Muslims have discussed this subject tera times now, and I did discuss it extensively in your first post (Othman just standardized the script) and I

made a plea there that I am going to make it here again: When the Western-Scholars-Of-Islamic-Studies (WSIS) discuss this matter, would they please just explain the Islamic raw-data as-is first before presenting their opinions. I think this would probably be a little bit more professional because this matter has mostly one source, which is the Islamic data.

3# I did look at the book in brief to see from where you got the conclusion that Abd-Malik is the one who collected the Quran, and I have the following comments to some of the parts that I looked into:

3.1# You said in page 41: “Uthmān was deeply unpopular in many quarters; his reign was short and contentious”.

How this is right!

The first Caliph (Abu-Baker) ruled for 2 years, the second Caliph (Omar) ruled for 11 years, Othman ruled for 12 years, and Ali ruled for 5 years. So how this 12 years are short!

Also, The 1st, 2nd and 4th Caliphs died at about 63 years of age, but Othman Died at 82 years of age. So how this 12 years are short!

Of course, if you want to compare it to the ruling of Queen Elizabeth then yes, it is very short, but if you want to compare it to the Caliphs before and after, then this is not short.

For the unpopularity part, this is true but at the end of this reign (about the last 5 years), but in the beginning of his reign, he was popular, and he has overseen the ruling of new many territories.

The interesting part is that you didn't cite this info from an ancient Islamic source but from a WSIS source, and this why I think you are just making cherry-pickings!

3.2# You said in Page 44: “There seems to be little doubt that ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjāj played a critical role in establishing the text of the Qur’an”.

I didn't find clear ancient sources to support this claim, so from where you got it!

The idea here is that if you are basing this info on obscure sources based on AOT that does not fit with the general “Islamic Tradition” then in the least it is “unfair” to regard this info as part of the “Islamic Tradition”. I am not here discussing which info is right or wrong, I am here discussing the methodology itself from a clear common sense: if there was an ancient Greek scholar who had an opinion X that was in the margin, then it is misleading and “unfair” to say that this X was part of the “Greek tradition”.

I truly think here that you have pre-decided your conclusions and you were just looking for any data that supported them and ignoring the rest (including the COT). If this was the case, then this research is just a record of your personal judgments and it is not part of a critical analysis.

3.3# You said in page 45: “Other reports from the Islamic tradition instead describe ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj as making considerable alterations to the Qur’anic text”.

The same comment in 3.2 applies here, as you didn’t clarify the “Islamic Tradition” sources. Let me just clarify this again: when you say that this is supported by the “Islamic Tradition” then I expect that you are referring to the main stream (or at least a highly recognized stream) of the Muslim Scholars, but it will be truly misleading to regard an obscure sources as part of the “Islamic Tradition”.

I also want to clarify another major important point here: ‘Abd al-Malik did have a stable reign but it wasn’t unanimous as he was in constant fighting with Al-Khawarij, and they continue fighting his state much after him, and actually the ruling family in Oman today are descendants from them.

Now ... Al-Khawarij did accuse Abd al-Malik with so many things, but altering the Quran wasn’t among their claims!

3.4# You said in page 45: “Abd al-Malik is reported to have said that he feared death in the month of Ramadan, since “That is the month in which I was born, it is the month in which I was weaned, it is the month in which I gathered together the Qur’ān [jama‘tu l-Qur’ān]”.

What is the source for this report? You didn’t mention the ancient source! So, if this was from an obscure source (or recent source) then you cannot regard this info to be part of the “Islamic Tradition”!

3.5# You mentioned the letters of Leo to Omar II. I haven’t look deeply into these letters therefore, I am just going to discuss here your methodology:

You regarded that the letter of Leo is a high-quality source --- but is it really!

There was a new civilization that is trying to overcome an older one, and the new civilization is claiming that the Christians are forging their holly books. Would you expect the leader of the Christians to keep silent! There is an interest here that could have motivated the writing of this letter.

I did make a quick search and found the following dissertation about these letters:

<https://cuilandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/cuilandora%3A64674/datastream/PDF/view>

It discussed the Byzantine Chroniclers (which was the first to mention these letters) and its major compiler: Theophilus of Edessa (8cAD), who reported that Omar II forced the Christians to convert to Islam (among other claims)!

Would you regard this piece of information to be a high-quality source that prove beyond doubt that Omar II did force the conversion of Christians to Islam!

I am just going to refer to a known letter that presumably was written by the Samaritan leader to Antiochus IV that they weren't related to the Jews and that they were descendants of the Medes and Persians.

Is there a clear interest here that motivated the compilation of this letter at that time - or - this is a high-quality source that the Samaritans are truly not related to the Jews!

Ironically, the Karaite Jews were saved in Poland from the Nazis by their claim that they weren't Jewish, which was supported by some Jewish historians at that time, highly-likely to save the Karaites from the Nazis.

So, can anyone today use this letter as a high-quality source to prove that the Karaites are actually not Jewish -- or -- we could agree that there was a persistent interest that dictated the writing of this letter!

This is what I am referring to over and over again: I truly think that you didn't establish a clear criteria to filter the available data and you were just picking the data that fit your pre-decided conclusions. To me, this is not critical analysis.

4# You said in the post: "For instance, in purely historical terms, caliphal (Islamic) state at the time of Uthman does not seem to have been sufficiently organized that it could have established a stable, canonical Qur'an, as the tradition maintains".

How this is evident from historical terms!

Let me just make a comparison here; suppose someone claiming the following: The expansion of Alexander (supposedly the great) is not really true from purely historical terms, because Alexander was so young to have the needed skills. This all was falsified data that came from the "Greek Tradition", and the expansion itself was due to many generations after Alexander.

Is Alexander being young is an evidence (from purely historical terms) that the related Greek Tradition is false!

Is this really based on logical deductions or are they just sentences that were glued together to give a perception of logic!

However, this "unsophisticated" state before the time of Othman managed in just two decades to cripple one superpower and overcome the other, and then ruling a vast size of people in this large large land, and that was much before 'Abd al-Malik. So, I think there should have been a good level of sophistication here unless you started to believe in true miracles.

This is actually the main argument that I have presented over and over again in your previous posts:

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 (until today) 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 (as I have discussed in detail in your previous post).

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

I looked briefly in the book just to form this reply, and if I took a deeper look, then I would probably find more stuff as I truly think that the problem here is in the methodology. If the methodology of the road is false, then you would probably find a lot of broken cars at both of its sides.