Egocentric or Scientific: The Christian Perspective of the Qur'ân?

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Abstract

This article attempts to analyze the Protestant missionary representation of the Qur'an as exemplified by the journal of *The Moslem World* (*MW*). The analysis has focused on two major themes, namely, the collection of, and textual variety in the Qur'an. This representation, as will be shown, is coloured by the writers' beliefs as well as assumptions about the Qur'an in particular, and Islam in general. It can be said that the reasons for their distorted view of Islam are to be found within both Western society and their Christian faith. The manner and method by which the Qur'an was depicted originated primarily from Evangelical Christian's conviction of their own faith as the ultimate religious truth and the sole legitimate form of religious belief and expression. In fact, *MW* was conceived with such a view of Islam in general given its missionary nature, a view championed and reinforced by its founder and then editor, Samuel Zwemer.

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1. Introduction

The aim of the present article is to carry out a study of one field of Western Christian evaluation of a major aspect of Islam- *the Qur'ân*. It is not, however, specifically intended as a contribution to the debate on the theory of 'Orientalism' initiated by Edward Said's controversial book. Its more modest objective is to explore one important category of the 'Orientalist' not explicitly treated by Said in his work, although he may have implicitly intended to include it. His first category is the academic who "*teaches, writes about or researches the Orient - and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist…*"[1]. Related to the academic sphere, albeit in a more general sense, are those whose "*style of thought*" is based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and Occident. Among this large category are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators[2]. The missing category, at least implicitly, is the specifically Protestant mission which could fall into either or both of these two broad categories, and which is exemplified in the present article by *MW* when first conceived in 1911 by the important evangelist missionary figure of Samuel Zwemer to cater for a Christian missionary audience educating them about the widest variety of aspects of Islam and Muslims in contrast with the other journals of a 'scientific nature' such as the *French Revue du Monde Musulman* which Zewemr deemed "*invaluable to the student of Islam,… Its standpoint is purely scientific and wholly neutral as regards the Christian faith*"[3]. It is worth mentioning though that the journal of *The Muslim World* today does not represent as much the Christian stand that was intended for it by its founder. Given the goal of this article, our study will cover only the period from 1911 to 1947. Whilst established initially to solve the 'Moslem problem' with the ultimate aim of achieving the dissolution of Islam, the *MW* in recent years has not only opened its pages to Muslim writers who could be critical of western Christian image of Islam[4] but the journal's current editor is a Palestinian Muslim, a clear testimony of the *MW*'s radically altered, and scholarly approach to Islamic themes. The

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[1] E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, p. 2.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Zwemer, "Editorial", *MW*, I (January 1911), p. 1.

[4] See, for example, K. Ahmad, "Islam and the West: Confrontation or Cooperation", *MW*, LXXXV (January 1995).

story of the transformation of the *MW* following Zwemer's retirement in 1945 is another tale waiting to be told.

Prior to discussing the main topic of this article, *MW*'s view of the textual history of the Qur'ân, it may be helpful to give a brief description of the meaning and perception of it. The Qur'ân, divine scripture, is divided into 114 *surahs*[1] of unequal length, and uses terms such as *Qur'ân*, *kitâb*, *furqân*, *ḥikmah*, *dhikr*, *âyah*, *tanzîl*, and *waḥy* to refer to itself. The word *waḥy* became the technical term in Islamic theology for the communication of messages or revelations to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)[2]. The modern Muslim thinker al-Zarqânî defined *waḥy* as when "*Allah reveals to the chosen amongst His slaves that which He wants him to know of all kinds of guidance and knowledge*"[3]. The term *waḥy* is similar in its meaning to divine revelation, provided by this we do not necessarily exclude the verbal mode, as the Qur'ân itself states in several places that it is revealed verbally and not merely a revelation in terms of meaning and ideas[4].

The word *waḥy* is also used in the Qur'ân with the meaning of a quick suggestion, an inner prompting, or an inspiration from within[5]. The usage of *waḥy* as prompting from within is illustrated by God's prompting the bees to build hives (Qur'ân, 16:68). In the Qur'ân, God is not the only source of this usage, as *Satan* could inspire his *Jinn* (Qur'ân, 6:122). Thus, Watt concluded that "*the fundamental sense of the word* [waḥy] *as used in the Qur'ân seems to be the communication of an idea by some quick suggestion or prompting*". Both Roger Bell

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[1] Its singular form is *sûrah* or *sûrat* when postmodified by another Arabic word. *Sûrah* and *âyah* are often referred to in the Orientalist literature as *chapter* and *verse* respectively. It should be noted however that the original terms consist of nuances of meaning that cannot go over in all their subtlety to the receiving language. At the same time, their translations consist of intertextual nuances which do not correspond to the original meaning. Thus, terms used by Orientalists such as *chapter, verse* and *inspiration* will only be used in this article to refer the Christian/Orientalist perspective.

[2] R. Bell, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, completely revised and enlarged by W.M. Watt, p.20. See also A. Jeffery, *The Qur'ân as Scripture*, pp.51-54; R. Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ân*, pp. 32-33.

[3] M. A. al-Zarqânî, *Manâhil al-'irfân fî 'ulûm al-Qur'ân*, p. 63.

[4] F. Rahman, *Islam*, pp. 30-31.

[5] An illustration of the Muslim perspective on the types of *waḥy* can be found in M. al-Qaṭṭân, *Mabâḥith fî 'ulûm al-Qur'ân*, pp. 30-50.

and William M. Watt argued that chronologically within the Qur'ân the concept of inspiration was the primary use in the earlier passages and the concept of revelation was the major use in the later ones[1]. On the other hand, the historical Muslim position holds that the sense of revelation from without applies to the whole Qur'ân; hence, the emphasis on the externality of the Prophet's revelation. Fazlur Rahman, in his book *Islam*, tried to combine both concepts, i.e. of external revelation and inner inspiration, in dealing with the divine nature of the Qur'ân and the Prophetic function. He claimed that "*the Qur'ân is entirely the Word of God and, in an ordinary sense, also entirely the word of Muhammad. The Qur'ân obviously holds both, for if it insists that it has come to the 'heart' of the Prophet, how can it be external to him?*"[2]. Rahman's conciliatory hypothesis does not represent the historical Muslim position which emphasizes that the externality of the Prophet's revelation applies to the whole Qur'ân; the neutrality of the Prophet in regard of revelation is also upheld by the Qur'ânic description of Mohammad as *al-ummî*, usually translated as 'the illiterate', and testifying to the sincerity of Muhammad's prophetic conviction.

A different position, generally adopted by *MW* writers, concerning the nature of the Prophet's revelation excluded its divine origin and maintained that it was nothing but a figment of the Prophet's imagination. It is generally this assumption which determined the *MW* critique of the Qur'ân in terms of its collection, and textual history. These are three main themes that received relentless attention by *MW* and, by and large, Orientalist writers. Of course, a number of other issues concerning the Qur'ân were raised in the pages of *MW*, and a single article would not be able to give them the attention due. In view of the limitation of time and resources, we have, therefore, confined ourselves to those themes that received central focus in the journal, namely, the collection and textual history of the Qur'ân.

2. On the Collection of the Qur'ân

The Qur'ân in circulation today is believed throughout the Muslim world to be precisely that which Allah revealed to the Prophet, and

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[1] See Bell, R., *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, completely revised and enlarged by W.M. Watt, p.22.
[2] Rahman, *Islam*, p. 31.

it is further believed that, contrary to the Bible, it has been preserved intact by the power of God. The Qur'ân itself proclaims: "*Verily it is We Who sent down the Dhikr* [i.e. the Qur'ân] *and surely we will guard it (from corruption)*" (Qur'ân, 15:9). Muslim writers often maintained the scrupulousness of the Qur'ân's collection and compilation, hence their claims that:

> *All the great religions of the world have their sacred books but it is the proud claim of Islam that the Qur'ân is the only sacred book to have survived absolutely unchanged since it was first revealed and written down fourteen hundred years ago*[1].

> *The purity of the Qur'ânic text is and will forever remain the greatest miracle of all history*[2].

> *It is a truly miraculous fact that the text of the Qur'ân has been preserved absolutely pure and entire, down to the last vowel point*[3].

The Muslim claim that the Qur'ân has been exceptionally well preserved and its text is that which was first compiled at the inception of Islam has even been accepted by some Western scholars, such as Muir and Noeldeke, for whom the Qur'ân was never considered as a divine revelation.

> *There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure [in the sense of physical preservation] a text*[4].

> *[Le texte du Koran] était aussi complet et fidèle qu'on pouvait l'attendre*[5].

> *Le Koran est aujourd'hui le seul livre sacré qui ne présente pas de variantes notables*[6].

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[1] M. Khalifa, *The Sublime Qur'ân and Orientalism*, p. 3.
[2] M. H. Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. lxxxvi.
[3] Zafrulla Khan, *Islam: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, p. 89.
[4] W. E. Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and History of Islam*, I, p. xxi.
[5] Noeldeke, in M.A. Draz, *Initiation au Koran*, p. 24.
[6] Leblois in *ibid*., p. 25.

Nevertheless, the stand of *MW* was substantially different. *MW* writers usually expressed their Christian sympathies; after all, the main goal of the journal was missionary. They also knew very well how much revered the Prophet, his Traditions, and the Qur'ân were amongst Muslims. In fact, the whole faith of Islam is based on them. Thus, for *MW* to serve its goal (the hastening of Muslim conversion to Christianity)[1], it must, first of all, shake Muslims' faith in these foundations which were considered as severely hindering for the missionary project in the Muslim world. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Qur'ân, like the Prophet and his Traditions[2], was subjected to the same evaluative and often prejudiced examination. Although some of the *MW* contributors conceded that the Qur'ân in its present form might consist of an integral part of the revelations which actually occurred, the journal's general attitude was that it was not as pure as Muslims claimed it to be. They maintained that the Qur'ân contained additions, omissions, and/or interpolations, and that a study of the early collection of the book would show that the popular sentiments of Muslims, as expressed in the quotes above, were not entirely supported by the evidence at hand.

2.1 The Qur'ân at the End of the Prophet's Life

MW writers generally believed that the collection and compilation of the Qur'ân did not take place at this juncture. They maintained, however, that the records in Tradition relaying its history were confusing as a result of preconceived internal contradictions in them. Mingana argued in this respect that,

> *The first historical data about the collection of the Kur'an have come down to us by the way of oral Hadith, and not of history. This is very unfortunate; because a critic is thrown into that medley and compact*

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[1] Setting out the goal of the journal in its inaugural issue, Zwemer states:

> *We hope to interpret Islam as a world-wide religion in all its varied aspects and its deep needs, ethical and spiritual, to Christians; to point out and press home the true solution of the Moslem problem, namely, the evangelisation of Moslems; to be of practical help to all who toil for this end; and to awaken sympathy, love and prayer on behalf of the Moslem world until its bonds are burst, its wounds are healed....*

S. Zwemer, "Editorial", *MW*, I (January 1911), p. 1.

[2] See Abdulkareem, Ph.D. thesis for a discussion of *MW* writers' treatment of the subjects of Tradition and the Prophet.

body of legends, true or false, genuine or spurious[1]....

MW writers appear to have come to the same conclusion when the subject concerned the unreliability of Muslim sources, and this, as they often claimed, was the result of 'scrupulous' and 'scientific' studies. One may wonder, however, how such 'non-Muslim', 'non-fictitious', and scientific studies did not often yield the same conclusions when it came to providing their own alternative interpretations of 'what really happened'. Could it be that, given the often contradictory nature of their syntheses, their judgement of Muslim sources was just as unreliable?[2] Or that they were unable to crack the code of the early Islamic sources?

In fact, the question of origins not only fascinated *MW* writers but also determined the path of Orientalist scholarship for generations to come. The Orientalists' views about the Orient, as Said pointed out, remained "*more or less constant*" in a way that "*their differences* [are] *in form and personal style,* [but] *rarely in basic content*"[3]. Thus, we find later scholars like Wansbrough and his disciple Rippin holding similar views as their predecessors, namely, that the historicity of the collection of the Qur'ân could never be established. Muslim sources, in their view, could only serve as "Salvation history", that is, Muslim accounts may offer the researcher "*an understanding of history that sees God's role in directing the affairs of humankind*... [but not] *The actual 'history' in the sense of 'what really happened'*"[4].

Generally, *MW* writers tended to favour the hypothesis, which is in line with the Muslim belief, that the collection of the Qur'ân's text into its final form took place after the Prophet's death. They asserted what we have today is what could be gathered together somewhat later by the leaders of the community when they began to feel the need of a collection of the Prophet's proclamations.

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[1] A. Mingana, "The Transmission of the Koran", *MW*, VII (July 1917), p. 224.

[2] See Abdulkareem, Ph.D thesis for more discussion of the reliability of Muslim sources.

[3] Said, *Orientalism* , p. 206.

[4] A. Rippin, "Literary Analysis of Qur'ân, Tafsir, and Sira: The Methodologies of John Wansbourgh", in R.C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam*, pp. 154-155.

> *The Koran was not collected during the prophet's lifetime; this is clearly stated by good authorities*[1].

> *In brief outline, the history of the Qur'ân is this. When Muhammad died there was no collection of his revelations in any official form*[2].

This view is based on Muslim accounts that during the lifetime of the Prophet, the Qur'ân could not be collected owing to its continuous and abrogating nature. Lammens argued that it was under the Prophet's instructions that the Qur'ân was not compiled during his lifetime, reflecting the 'pragmatic' character of the Prophet as his decision was intended to cover 'internal inconsistencies' in the Qur'ân[3]. Thus, Lammens, by referring to the Qur'ânic extract,

> *Move not thy tongue concerning the (Qur'ân) to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect and to recite it* (Qur'ân, 75:16-17),

concluded that "*Le Prophéte s'était fait intimer par Allah l'ordre de ne pas se presser pour éditer le Qoran, comme recueil séparé. La précaution était prudente, étant donné le caractère inconsistant de certaines révélations*"[4]. While Lammens claimed 'inconsistencies' to be the reason why the Prophet did not wish the Qur'ân to be collected, Jeffery used the same reason but for the opposite purpose. He believed that the Prophet might have meant "*to make such a collection to clear up finally what had been abrogated and what not, but he died before this was done*"[5].

MW writers generally accepted that the writing and memorization of portions of the Qur'ân were not uncommon during the lifetime of the Prophet; although, no compilation of the whole Qur'ân into a single codex had been initiated or completed. Jeffery maintained that "*Portions*

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[1] Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", *MW*, V (October 1915), p. 380.
[2] Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Qur'ân Text", *MW*, XXV (January 1935), p. 7.
[3] The term 'inconsistency' in this context is the equivalent of the Muslim technical word 'abrogation' (*naskh*).
[4] In Mingana, "The Transmission of the Kuran to Christian Writers", *MW*, VII (October 1917), p. 413.
[5] Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Qur'ân Text", p. 7.

of revelations had been written down during his [the Prophet's] lifetime by various persons in his community, portions had been memorized and indeed some portions had been used liturgically in the community"[1]. Bell, a frequent contributor to *MW*, even claimed that the Qur'ân in its present form was the compilation of the Prophet himself. His study of the chronological ordering of the Qur'ân, which according to him, suggested the Prophet's revisions and alterations, was proof that the Prophet attended to the compilation of the Qur'ân. He argued that "*the most conclusive proof of the Prophet's part in the compiling of the surahs comes from a detailed study of their structure, which discloses evidence of revisions and alterations such as could hardly have been made without his authority*"[2].

Bell's hypothesis was also reiterated by the more recent scholar John Burton. Burton sought in his book *The Collection of the Qur'ân* to prove that the Qur'ân text that has been handed down to us was in fact quite simply that which the Prophet himself actually defined, collected, and arranged towards the end of his life. He concluded his book with the statement that "*What we have today in our hands is the mushaf of Muhammad*"[3]. He was constrained to admit, however, that his thesis was *ex vacuo* as far as the evidence was concerned and indeed somewhat contrary to it. He conceded that the Traditions, while conflicting at times, were nevertheless unanimous in teaching that the Qur'ân was not collected in its present form before the Prophet's death[4].

Mingana's view was substantially different from Jeffery's and Bell's. He expressed scepticism as to the existence of a writing system, let alone the collection of the Qur'ân, during the Prophet's life and argued that

> *...very few oracular sentences, if any, were written in the time of the Prophet. The kind of life that he led, and the rudimentary character of reading and writing in that part of the world in which he appeared, are sufficient witnesses of this view. Our ignorance of*

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ân*, p. 83.
[3] J. Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ân*, pp. 239-240.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

> *the Arabic language in that early period of its evolution is such that we cannot even know with certainty whether it had any writing of its own in Maccah and Madinah*[1].

Leaving aside the question of whether parts were indeed written during the Prophet's life and whether a writing system did exist, it can be said that there was almost unanimity amongst *MW* writers that it was not gathered during this period. Traditions also generally traced back the collection of the Qur'ân to one of the first three Caliphs who succeeded the Prophet. Thus, when refuting the hypothesis that the Qur'ân was compiled by the Prophet, Noeldeke asked, "*If the Kor'an was collected in the time of the Prophet, why should people have taken such trouble to collect it after his death?*"[2].

Strangely, this argument is sometimes adduced by some Christian writers who draw a comparison between the history of the Qur'ân and the Bible's textual history. For instance, Mingana, building on the thesis of Hirschfeld (the writer of *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*) that the Qur'ân is a counterfeit of the Biblical text, claimed that the same verdict should apply in the context of the compilation of the Qur'ân. He argued that "*No disciple of Moses or of Christ wrote the respective oracles of the two religious leaders in their lifetime, and probably no such disciple did so in the case of the Prophet*"[3]. Christian writers, Guillaume for instance, assumed, "*the textual history of the Qur'ân is very similar to that of the Bible*"[4] and built the framework of their study of the Qur'ân on this assumption. It is unquestionable that Christian presuppositions influenced the *MW* contributors' account of the Qur'ân. Islam as a whole was not generally presented or assessed according to its own standards, but by those of Christianity. The adoption of such criteria for the evaluation of the many facets of Islam while excluding the views of Muslims for their allegedly lacking objectivity and inadequate comprehension of their own religion, virtually assured an inferior, often inaccurate depiction of Islam.

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[1] Mingana, "The Transmission of the Kuran to Christian Writers", p. 412.
[2] In *ibid.*, p. 228.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 412.
[4] A. Guillaume, *Islam*, p. 58.

2.2 The Pre- and Post-Uthmanic Collections of the Qur'ân

It is widely stated in the works of Muslim Tradition that the first attempt to collect the Qur'ân was only made during Abu Bakr's reign as Caliph after the Prophet's death. A war followed the Prophet's death in Arabia and, in one of Abu Bakr's major campaigns against apostasy, at the Battle of Yamama, many of the Qur'ân readers[1] were killed. This event, and with the insistence of Umar, prompted Abu Bakr to endeavour to preserve the Qur'ân in a written, collected form. This account was endorsed by Noeldeke, whose views influenced the position of other Western writers. Acknowledging the authority of Noeldeke, but by no means the authority of Muslim sources which Noeldeke himself used in this context, Mingana stated that "*the famous tradition*[2] *endorsed by many historians, and recently by the present writer*[3] *also, under the authority of Noeldeke ... states that the Kur'an was collected in the time of Abu Bakr*"[4].

Interestingly, contributors to *MW* often accepted the truthfulness of a Muslim Tradition only when it served their own theses, such as to demonstrate the 'degenerate' character of the Prophet and 'forgery' in Muslim sources. Otherwise, the remainder of Tradition sources was quickly dismissed as unreliable[5]. Their judgement of these sources in connection with the Qur'ân was no exception. Thus, we find that the

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[1] Companions of the Prophet who were known for their memorization of the Qur'ân.

[2] This Tradition refers to a narrative which reads:

> *Narrated by Zaid bin Thabit: Abu Bakr al-Siddiq sent for me when the people of Yamama had been killed ... Then Abu Bakr said (to me): 'You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Apostle. So you should search for (the fragmentary scripts of) the Qur'ân and collect it (in one book)'. By Allah! If they had ordered me to shift one of the mountains, it would not have been heavier for me than this ordering me to collect the Qur'ân. Then I said to Abu Bakr, 'How will you do something which Allah's Apostle did not do?' Abu Bakr replied, 'By Allah, it is a good project'. (Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî, VI, p. 477).*

Zaid is then said to have responded to the appeal and set about collecting the text of the book.

[3] As will be discussed shortly, Mingana, in a later article, will endorse a different opinion concerning the first official collection of the Qur'ân.

[4] Mingana, "The Transmission of the Koran", p. 225. It should be noted that Adams (in his article "Qur'ân: the Text and its History", in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*) quoted, as we shall see shortly, a different view of Noeldeke concerning the story of Abu Bakr's collection of the Qur'ân.

[5] See Abdulkareem, Ph.D. thesis.

generally accepted Muslim account, which sets forth that the Qur'ân was first collected by Abu Bakr, then passed to the exclusive care of the Caliph Umar and to his daughter Ḥafṣah and one of the Prophet's wives, was thought by *MW* writers to contain contradictions and, therefore, to be unreliable. In their view it was incomprehensible that the Qur'ân was 'strangely concealed' in the private possession of the first two Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar, and thereafter by Ḥafṣah, very much a recluse after the death of the Prophet, instead of being copied and promulgated as the standard text. Thus, Caetani asked,

> *...if the death of so many Moslems at al-Yamamah endangered the preservation of the text, why did Abu Bakr, after making his copy, practically conceal it, entrusting it to the guardianship of a woman*?[1]

Caetani's view found its supporters amongst Western scholars. It should, however, be pointed out that the rejection of the truthfulness of Muslim accounts created a vacuum in respect of their sources of historicity. Thus, they often relied on their own interpretations which were often speculative. Watt, for instance, hypothesized in his revision of *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân* that if such a collection (in the time of Abu Bakr) was made, it would be hardly probable that it would pass out of official keeping, even into the hands of the Caliph's daughter. Then, he concluded on the basis of this speculative assumption, "*It seems practically certain that no complete collection was officially made during the caliphate of Abu-Bakr*"[2]. Muslim accounts were often severely criticised by *MW* writers for being too subjective and biased. Yet, these *MW* writers rarely made any effort to reduce the interference of their own subjectivity. Their assessment of the history of the collection of the Qur'ân was mainly based on purely subjective interpretations of 'what should really have happened" and not on what Muslims reported had happened. The Muslim account that the Qur'ân was gathered by Abu Bakr was severely criticized by Adams, following Noeldeke[3]. No 'scientifically historic' evidence was provided to support this critique

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[1] Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", *MW*, V (October 1915), pp. 380-381.
[2] Bell, R., *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, completely revised and enlarged by W.M. Watt, p.42
[3] Adams, "Qur'ân: the Text and its History", p. 162.

apart from speculation as to what must have happened. For them, the reign of Abu Bakr (four years) was too short for such a formidable task as gathering the Qur'ân to be completed[1]. Yet, no evidence was offered for why a period of four years was an insufficient period within which to gather a book which was very well preserved by a community of readers who were centred within the confinements of a very small town (Madina).

For *MW* writers, the first official collection of the Qur'ân was generally thought to have taken place during the reign of the third caliph, Uthman, as word was brought from the outlying provinces that the Muslims in those areas were reciting the Qur'ân in different ways. *MW* writers never succeeded in purging their accounts of what happened from their highly interpretive assessments. The story from the Traditions, which traced back the first collection of the Qur'ân to Abu Bakr, was considered to be a fabrication by later Traditionists who, in the opinion of Caetani, "*would dearly have liked to speak evil of Uthman*"[2]. Traditionists' 'antipathy' towards Uthman explained their action in inventing a previous compilation of the Qur'ân during the reign of the 'unimpeachable' Abu Bakr[3]. This resentment, which brought about Uthman's murder, was, according to Caetani, the result of his decision to collect the Qur'ân, which was more political than religious[4]. The collection of the Qur'ân was intended by Uthman to eliminate the political and religious authority that the readers of the Qur'ân had started to enjoy and which interfered with the authority of the Caliph and his governors[5].

The Muslim account is substantially different from Caetani's as well as other writers'. The former held that resentment towards Uthman was mainly the result of the allegation of political nepotism rather than his action to compile the text of the Qur'ân. The Uthmanic Codex is thought to be a mere edition of the Qur'ân gathered by Abu Bakr with no modifications whatsoever, except for some insignificant dialectal variations. Uthman was believed to have ordered Zaid, upon whom he

[1] *Ibid.*
[2] Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", p. 389.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 390.
[4] Margoliouth, "Textual Variations of the Koran", *MW*, XV (October 1925), p. 336.
[5] Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", p. 388.

conferred the task of compiling the Qur'ân, along with two or three helpers, to write it in the dialect of Kuraish should any differences arise between them. A valid question which rises concerning this account is: why did Uthman assume the possibility of disagreement between the editors if their task was limited to the mere compilation of an already completed text (i.e. Abu Bakr's Codex)? A range of answers may be speculated in response to this question. One of them, which is adopted by some *MW* writers, was that there never existed a Codex of Abu Bakr. Other plausible answers could be that more dialectal precision was introduced to the Arabic writing system after Abu Bakr, or that Abu Bakr's Codex included different dialectal versions of the same text. Irrespective of whether a previous standard Codex existed during the reign of Abu Bakr, Uthman's order to Zaid to write the Qur'ân in the dialect of Kuraish, if true, presupposes a textual variation between different codices of the Qur'ân. The existence of textual variation is not as much contested by Muslims as is its type and range, as will be discussed in the following section.

Whatever form and status the Codex of Uthman took, it is unlikely, Mingana suspected, that its writing was carried out by any of the collectors mentioned in the Traditions. According to him, these collectors lacked the necessary literary proficiency to perform such a task. Thus, he concluded that "*the greater part of their work must have been accomplished by some skilled Christian or Jewish amanuensis, converted to Islam*"[1].

The controversy among *MW* writers over the first compilation of the Qur'ân does not end with Uthman. al-Ḥajjâj bin Yûsuf, the Umayyad governor (d. 714), was believed by Migana to have been the first collector of the Qur'ân in codex form. Indeed, Muslim accounts recorded that al-Ḥajjâj had set up a committee of Muslim scholars who issued a new edition of the Qur'ân. The difference between the two accounts is that Muslim Tradition holds that all al-Ḥajjâj did was introduce a more refined orthography without making any alterations or modifications to the content or structure of the Uthmanic Codex[2]. But this is not exactly

[1] Mingana, "The Transmission of the Kuran to Christian Writers", p. 413.

[2] U.I. Raḍwân, *Ârâ' al-Mustashriqîn ḥawla l-Qur'ân al-Karîm wa-Tafsîrihi: Dirâsah wa-Naqd*, I, p. 430.

the same story as relayed by Mingana, among other Christian writers. He did not rule out the possibility that some new material from some oral reciters of the Prophet's oracular utterances might have been added to the text of the Qur'ân by al-Ḥajjâj bin Yûsuf. But such conclusions were often based on interpretive, sometimes contradictory, assumptions. We have seen earlier that Mingana adopted the view which traced the first collection of the Qur'ân to Abu Bakr. Nevertheless, he concluded the second part of his article with a substantially different opinion. He seemed to concur with Casanova's view that all traditions which related that the Qur'ân was officially collected before al-Ḥajjâj bin Yûsuf were nothing but legend. Quoting Casanova, he agreed that "*Le Coran a été mis, par écrit, pour la première fois par les soins d'al Hajjaj qui probablement s'appuyait sur la légende d'un prototype dû à 'Outhman. Il est possible qu'il y ait eu des transcriptions antérieures, mais sans caractère officiel, et par conséquent sans unité*"[1].

3. Imperfection in the Text of the Qur'ân

Related to the theme of the collection of the Qur'ân is the question of the imperfection of its text. Study of the history of the Qur'ân by *MW* writers leant upon the argument that the procedures of its collection were too weak to have correctly transmitted the original text. More than one variant for the same text can be historically traced although, in their view, Traditions sought to conceal such variation or play down its seriousness. They argued that the state of the internal structure of the present Qur'ân did not support the Muslims' claim for its purity and perfection. Imperfections, according to *MW* writers, ranged from the existence of more than one variant in the text of the Qur'ân, omissions which could still be traced in other sources, and its incoherent internal structure.

3.1 Textual Variation in the Qur'ân

Traditions inform us that different manuscripts of the Qur'ân had been written out and that they were in use elsewhere when Uthman ordered the canonization of Abu Bakr's Codex. Different provinces of the Muslim world adopted a different reading of the Qur'ân, for instance, Ibn Mas'ûd in Kûfa, Ibn 'Abbâs in Makkah, Zaid bin Thâbit in Madina,

[1] Mingana, "The Transmission of the Kuran to Christian Writers", p. 414.

and Abû Mûsâ al-Ash'arî in Basra. The reason was that variation between such readings was a source of conflict between Muslims from different regions of the Muslim world, especially in the then newly conquered territories. To avoid unrest, Uthman ordered his appointed committee of collectors to write down the Qur'ân in the dialect of Kuraish. The story was branded as legendary by some *MW* writers for, Mingana argued, "*We all know how ill adapted was the Arabic writing even of the eighth century to express all the phonetic niceties of the new philological schools; it is highly improbable, therefore, that it could express them in the first years of the Hijra*"[1]. It is true that the Uthmanic writing system could not possibly describe the phonetic variations between the Arabic dialects. Nonetheless, dialectal variation is not always phonetic or phonological, but could also be lexical as well as structural, in which case Mingana's argument would not necessarily hold true. Indeed, one of the reasons which led Uthman to order the collection of the Qur'ân is the appearance of unauthenticated readings referred to in Arabic as *qirâ'ât shâdhdhah*, and which reflected this type of variation. For example, an unauthenticated reading for part of *sûrat al-Qâri'ah* (Qur'ân 101:5) before Uthman's collection was "*Wa takûnu l-jibâlu kal-sûfi l-manfûshi*". The word *sûf* (wool) was not however commonly used in the Kuraishi dialect, but instead its corresponding term '*ihn* (wool), also reported in a different reading. In this case, the dialectal variation is lexical[2].

Nonetheless, dialectal variations alone could not have triggered so serious religious conflicts that Uthman ordered the standardization of the Qur'ân. Uthman's mandate that all Codices should be burnt indicates that they had serious textual differences between them and the manuscript in Ḥafṣah's possession. Thus, Jeffery argued that "*to pretend that it was merely a matter of dialectal variations is to run counter to the whole purport of the accounts. The vast majority of dialectal variations would not have been represented in the written form at all, and so would not have necessitated a new text*"[3].

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 413.

[2] Al-Qaṭṭân, *Mabâḥith fî 'Ulûmi al-Qur'ân*, p. 166. Other examples include *tabût* and *tabûh*. The former was chosen because it conformed to the dialect of Kuraish. See U. I. Raḍwân, *Ârâ' al-Mustashrîqîn ḥawla l-Qur'ân al-Karîm wa-Tafsîrihi: Dirâsah wa-Naqd*, I, p. 475.

[3] Jeffery, *The Qur'ân as Scripture*, p. 96

There was general agreement among Muslim and *MW* writers alike that the variation which existed between the different texts of the Qur'ân was more than dialectal. They differed, however, as to the way they perceived the nature of the variation. Muslim records reported that variations, referred to as *al-aḥruf al-sab'ah* (the seven readings)[1] and which led to the Uthmanic collection, existed even in the lifetime of the Prophet, but did not involve any variation in meaning[2]. On the other hand, for *MW* writers, the opposition excited by the Caliph's act in Kûfa indicated that Traditionists' refusal to admit divergences in meaning accorded ill[3]. Margoliouth illustrated variation in meaning between the textual variants of Qur'ân 5:89, which, in the official text, contains the clause *faṣiyâmu thalâthati ayyâm* (fast for three days). According to him, many of the other codices supplementing the Uthmanic text but agreeing with one another add the expression *mutatâbi'ât*, meaning that the expiation for an unfulfilled oath was a fast on three successive days. This addition made the penance much more severe. Among those who had this reading were the famous Ibn Mas'ûd and Ubayy bin Ka'b[4].

Tisdall, in his article "A New Light on the Text of the Qur'ân", also reviewed some of the claims concerning textual variants of the Qur'ân made by Lewis and Mingana following their discovery of an early manuscript. He supported their hypothesis that the manuscript was an authentic copy of the Qur'ân which originated before the appearance of the Uthmanic Codex but varied significantly from it. The variants discovered in the manuscript were claimed to "*fit better into their context and are more likely to have been dictated by the Prophet and written*

[1] The definition of *al-aḥruf al-sab'ah* is not a settled issue among Muslim scholars and may refer to different types of variation. See *Tafsîr al-Ṭabarî*, annotated by Shâkir, I, p. 57, for a discussion.

[2] There were also readings which differed substantially from the Uthmanic Codex. They were referred to as *qirâ'ât shâdhdhah* (unauthenticated readings) as they did not satisfy the criterion of *tawâtur* set by the compilers of the Qur'ân. A discussion of the process of *tawâtur* in respect of the Qur'ânic text can be found in M.H.A. al-Saghîr, *Tarîkh al-Qur'ân*, p. 173. The textual variations caused by the existence of different readings were explained by Muslims as marginal glosses and notes which were confused with the text of the Qur'ân by later readers and scribes. Discussion of this hypothesis can be found in Khalifa, *The Sublime Qur'ân and Orientalism*, p. 49.

[3] See Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", p. 382.

[4] Margoliouth, "Textual Variations of the Koran", p. 335.

by Zaid bin Thabit than those which have been doing duty for 1,300 years"[1]. The writers did not, however, offer any convincing evidence regarding the historicity of the discovered manuscripts. Following the same line of argumentation presented by Mingana and his associates, Tisdall endorsed their claim on the basis of[2]:

(i) The fact that Uthman destroyed all texts which differed from the official Codex; thus, the unlikelihood that textually different copies of the Qur'ân would be written after Uthman's decree. But, as admitted by Tisdall and Mingana, this argument does not provide any conclusive support for their hypothesis for other copies of Qur'ân were later forged by other non-Sunni groups of Muslims such as the Shi'a for political purposes. If some Muslim factions could commit forgery despite "*the well-known Mohammedan reverence for the text of the Qur'ân*"[3], it is just as likely that non-Muslim groups (be they Christian, Jewish, or other) could perpetrate the same act.

(ii) The evident antiquity of the fragments as shown in the ancient character in which they were written. The writers did not, however, offer any explanation for the fact that the character of the three discovered manuscripts (Mingana named them A, B and C) differed substantially from each other. Only C was written using the early Arabic writing system which lacked diacritical points, and A was also more ancient than B.

(iii) The fact that the Qur'ânic text of the manuscripts had been obliterated before the Arabic text of the Christian Homilies was written on the vellum. The writers did not mention here that as much as this fact might indicate a purging of an earlier variant of the Uthmanic Codex, it might equally suggest various other interpretations such as unfamiliarity of the original writer with the Arabic writing system as more than one script was discovered. It might also imply a later deliberate attempt to promote a certain reading using the old script to forge its authenticity. The list of speculations could be longer, but the above will suffice to show the inconclusiveness of the arguments adduced by Tisdall, and Mingana and his associates.

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[1] C. Tisdall, "New Light on the Text of the Qur'ân", *MW*, V (April 1915), p. 145.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
[3] *Ibid.*

Explaining how such variation took place between different codices, Caetani argued that "*in the texts made in the provinces…there should have crept in apocryphal or insufficiently authenticated verses, or others which the prophet and his most interested friends and Companions did not want to see preserved*"[1]. The interpretation of the Qur'ân's textual variations reached its extreme with Margoliouth who asserted that, "*For a long time there was uncertainty as to what was Koran and what was not. Verses of poets were at times cited in the pulpit as the Word of Allah*"[2]. For *MW* writers, these were facts which Muslim Traditionists tried to hide when they were unable to explain them away. Jeffery claimed that "*Later orthodoxy made desperate efforts to obliterate the memory of even these readings* [of other codices]"[3] but, as mentioned earlier, the existence of different readings or codices is not contested by Muslims and their experts in Tradition. Yet, for Caetani, this was only part of a bigger scheme, as "*The small number of verses which tradition will allow to be doubtful seem to me little pieces of traditionist fraud, adduced to show the scrupulous exactness of the compiler and the absolute security of the official text*"[4].

Variation was not limited to the divergences between the canonical text of Uthman and other Codices. The Uthmanic Codex itself allowed a range of possible readings as its collection was merely consonantal. That is, the text was a set of clusters of unvowelled consonants which could be read in different ways. The consonantal system itself was incomplete as more than one phoneme was represented by the same graphological sign. In several cases, as Margoliough pointed out, such ambiguities which led to various readings were of little consequence. For, instance, when *Allah* was the subject, the verb might be read as *He shall* or *We shall* without affecting the sense[5]. Yet, there are occasions, Margoliouth argued, wherein textual ambiguities were by no means unimportant. He illustrated this with the account of the miracle of Badr, in which it was believed that angels intervened to assist the Muslims (Qur'ân 3:11). The nature of the miracle would vary seriously depending on

[1] Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", p. 381.
[2] Margoliouth, "Textual Variations of the Koran", p. 337.
[3] Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Qur'ân Text", p. 8.
[4] Caetani, "Uthman and the Recension of the Koran", p. 381.
[5] Margoliouth, "Textual Variations of the Koran", p. 340.

whether the text was read "*ye saw them*" or "*they saw them*". Muslim attempts to account for this type of variation, which consisted of tracing readings to contemporary authorities were deemed unreliable by *MW* writers. Margoliouth argued that "*Where the readings are traced to contemporary authorities, there is at times a suspicion that this evidence is fictitious*"[1].

In conclusion, the general view of the Qur'ân that can be inferred from *MW* writers was that its text that has been handed down through the centuries was not that to which the Companions of the Prophet gave their unqualified assent but purely one form of it, uncorroborated in every point by the others in circulation, yet finally established as the standard text to the exclusion of the others.

3.2 The Missing Verses in the Qur'ân

The Qur'ân we have today, as well as being only one variant of other codices, was described in *MW* as incomplete. Whole passages of the Qur'ân were thought to have been, sometimes deliberately, deleted. Jeffery argued, "*That a great many quite genuine Proclamations ... could no longer be found ...is certain*"[2]. *MW* writers adduced several examples from Muslim traditions for this purpose. "*Let none of you say*" averred Abd Allah the son of the Caliph Umar, "*'I have learned the whole of the Qur'ân,' for how does he know what the whole of it is, when much of it has gone? Let him rather say, 'I have learned what is extant thereof'* ". Jeffery, in his article "Abu 'Ubaid on the Verses Missing from the Qur'ân", provided a translated list of Traditions which suggested omissions in the text of the Qur'ân. One of these Traditions was the famous *Stoning Verse: "The shaikh and the shaikha, when they fornicate, stone them outright, as an exemplary punishment from God. God is mighty, wise*"[3]. The *hadith* makes Umar report that the punishment for adultery, according to *Kitab Allah* (the Book of Allah) was death by stoning; yet, the *âyah* found in the Qur'ân today prescribes a different penalty: "*The woman and the man guilty of fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes*" (Qur'ân 24:2).

[1] *Ibid*., p. 341.

[2] Jeffery, "Abu 'Ubaid on the Verses missing from the Qur'ân", *MW*, XXVIII (January 1938), p. 61.

[3] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ân*, p. 80.

The Tradition referred to is also found in Abu Ubaid's folio on *âyahs* thought to be missing from the Qur'ân. It makes reference to the Stoning *âyah*, and reads as follows:

> *Ubai b. Ka'b said to me, "O Zirr, how many verses did you count (or how many verses did you read) in Surat al-Ahzab?" "Seventy-two or seventy-three", I answered. Said he, "Yet it used to be equal to Surat al-Baqara (ii), and we used to read in it the Verse of Stoning." Said I, "And what is the Verse of Stoning?" He said, "If a grown man and woman commit adultery, stone them without hesitation, as a warning from Allah, for Allah is mighty, wise"*[1].

There are also many Traditions which record that the Prophet imposed the stoning punishment on adulterers. Here is an example:

> *Ibn Shihâb reported that a man in the time of the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) acknowledged having committed adultery and confessed it four times. The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) then ordered and he was stoned.*[2]

The evidence at hand seems to suggest that the Prophet prescribed the punishment of stoning, but whether as part of the establishment of his Sunna, or the implementation of the rulings of the Qur'ân cannot be firmly answered. If the latter were the case, as Burton pointed out[3], a very serious question for Muslim *fiqh* arises in view of the fact that the stoning punishment is not only non-existent in the text of the Qur'ân, but also incompatible with the penalty of flogging stated in the Qur'ân: "*The woman and the man guilty of fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes*" (Qur'ân 24:2). On the other hand, if stoning is to be viewed as part of the Sunna, which is also the Muslim perspective, Burton claimed that "*the Sunna had [then] incontrovertibly abrogated the Qur'ân ruling, for all we find there is a flogging penalty introduced in Q 24.2*"[1]. Contrary to Burton's assumption, Muslim scholars claim

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[1] Jeffery, "Abu 'Ubaid on The Verses missing from the Qur'ân", p. 62.
[2] *Muwatta' Imam Malik*, p. 350
[3] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ân*, pp. 71-72.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 71.

that the Sunna in this case does not necessarily abrogate the Qur'ân as each applies to a different context (flogging for the sin of fornication and stoning for adultery); both penalties are still prescribed to the present day in some Muslim countries. That the punishments of flogging or stoning have distinct contexts of application is attested by Muslim Traditions, one of which is the Hadith transmitted by 'Ubada. Its basic form, as summed up by Burton, runs as follows:

> *The Prophet said, "Take it from me! God has now appointed a way for women: the virgin with the virgin, one hundred strokes and a year's banishment; the non-virgin with the non-virgin, one hundred strokes and stoning"*[1].

MW writers and other later Western scholars, Burton for instance, adopted the view that "*the stoning verse had been revealed as part of the Qur'ân*"[2]. Burton found the version of the Stoning Verse as relayed to Zirr bin Hubaish to be "*a fair imitation of the Qur'ân style, drawing upon both Q 24.2, and Q 5.38, which is a penal verse*"[3]. On the other hand, Watt argued that "*The* [stoning] *verse is assigned either to surah 24 or to surah 33; but the rhythm does not fit to surah 33, while the prescription of stoning contradicts 24,2 where flogging is ordered*"[4]. He concluded that "*on the whole it seems unlikely that the punishment of stoning was ever prescribed in the Qur'ân*"[5]. Noeldeke also observed that terms used in the supposedly missing verse such as *shaikha* and *battata* were alien to the vocabulary of the Qur'ân[6].

The *Stoning Verse* is just one of those passages that were thought by *MW* and other Western writers to have been excluded from the Qur'ân. If they have been, it would prove that the Qur'ânic text, as we have it today, is somewhat incomplete. Not only was the Qur'ân incomplete in the view of *MW* writers, but it also contained discrepancies in the

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[4] Bell, R., *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, completely revised and enlarged by W.M. Watt, p. 55.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] See Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ân*, p. 80.

textual structure and in the unity of the text.

3.3 Internal Structure of the Qur'ân

The Qur'ân is known for the lack of chronology in the sequence of its *sûrahs*, some of which are composites of passages dating from both the Prophet's years of preaching in both Makkah and Madina. As a result, Bell pointed out, this state of affairs created an 'unevenness' in its style ranging from breaks in its grammatical construction, repetition, and contradiction to abrupt changes in theme, rhyme and length of verses[1]. He argued, "*So common are these things in the Qur'ân that they have often been regarded as characteristic of its style not calling for further study*"[2]. Indeed, not only did Muslims accept the present form of the Qur'ân as the eternal Word of God, but it was also used as a chief reference in the construction of the rules and principles of the Arabic language[3]. Bell insisted, however, that the 'roughnesses' in the Qur'ân required an explanation which could be found in some revision and alteration of an earlier text conducted by the Prophet himself. In his translation *The Qur'ân*, he indicated these alterations by rearranging the text on the page and by various brackets which he felt were justified because the unit of composition was the short passage not the whole *sûrah*[4].

MW writers used the development in the Qur'ânic text especially between Makkah and Madina to prove the Prophet's 'decreasing prophetic consciousness' and growing 'pragmatic' nature[5]. Equally, as in the case of Bell's *The Qur'ân*, the interpretation of the text of the Qur'ân, and the rearrangement of and contrast between its Makkan and Madinan *âyahs* were undertaken in the light of the historical development of the Prophet's life and environment. The contrast between the Makkan and Madinan Qur'ân was viewed as a purely logical development. The Madinan passages did not compare in style, diction or content with the elevated spirit of the Makkan passages and this retrogression, rather than

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[1] Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ân*, p. 85.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] See M.S. al-Rifâ'î, *I'jâz al-Qur'ân wa l-Balâghah al-Nabawiyyah*, pp. 64-72.

[4] A brief discussion of Bell's critical approach in his rearrangement of the verse of the Qur'ân was provided in 3.1 and shall not be pursued any further. For an elaborate review, however, the reader could refer to A. Rippin's article "Reading the Qur'ân with Richard Bell".

[5] Abdulkareem, Ph.D. thesis.

'true development', was a reflection of the similar 'deterioration' found in the character of the persevering Prophet of Makkah who became the 'autocratic' and, at times, 'ruthless ruler' of Madina.

Another aspect of the 'roughnesses' of the Qur'ân discussed by *MW* writers was its contradictions or parallel passages, as Elder termed them in his article "Parallel Passages in the Koran", which was a polemical response to Muslims' supposed attack on the Bible. Much of the evidence brought by Elder in defence of his criticism concerned the Qur'ân's lack of any systematic foundation and clarity, which is not surprising given the polemical nature of his article. He cited several passages from the Qur'ân which allegedly illustrate "*a considerable lack of harmony*[1]". Suffice it here to illustrate with the example of *Surat al-Qaṣaṣ* (28:32), which according to him, speaks of two miracles as two proofs from the Lord, while *al-Naml* (27:12) speaks of nine.

> *Put your hand in your bosom, it will come forth white without a disease, and draw your hand close to your side to be free from fear ... These are two Burhans (signs, miracles,...) from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs (Qur'ân 28:32)*
>
> *And put your hand into your bosom, it will come forth white without hurt. (These are) among the nine signs (thou wilt take) to Pharaoh and his people (Qur'ân 27:12)*

The author failed to distinguish between the fact that, though interrelated, these passages do not have the same referent. The two miracles revealed in *al-Qaṣaṣ* refer to the credentials given to Moses in order to convince Pharaoh and his people, while the nine signs in *al-Naml* refer to the nine divine punishments sent on them for not believing in the Word of God brought to them by Moses (and proven by the two credentials). The nine signs, which are only referred to by number in *al-Naml*, are each described in *Surat al-A'râf* (7:130-132).

According to *MW* writers, Muslims believe the Qur'ân was eternal and mechanically dictated to the Prophet; hence, their unwillingness to

[1] Elder, "Parallel Passages in the Koran", *MW*, XV (July 1925), p. 257.

admit its imperfections[1]. They fear to allow any idea of a development in the Qur'ânic text as this seems to imply it had much to do with the Prophet's 'growing prophetic consciousness'. Muslim scholarship, in the view of the Western writer, rarely approaches the Qur'ân in a critical way; thus, Jeffery claimed that "*It is an amazing fact that up to the present we have no critical text of the Qur'ân*"[2]. It is thought that, in the light of Western criticism, the Muslim claim about the perfection of the text of the Qur'ân cannot withstand the acid test of critical analysis.

4. Conclusion

The survey of *MW* attitude towards the Qur'ân has shown biased tenets of interpretation on which its contributors judged Muslim accounts of the collection and authenticity of the text of the Qur'ân as lacking historicity and objectivity. As with their interpretation of the character of the Prophet, *MW* writers centred their efforts on questioning the historicity of Muslim accounts concerning the scrupulous collection of the Qur'ân in order to force their own interpretation, namely, that the Qur'ân we have today is not as pure as Muslims claim it to be. For this reason, *MW* writers endeavoured to construct their own version of the textual history of the Qur'ân. Their study was founded on the presupposition of the unreliability of Muslim sources. Thus, the Muslim account of the textual unity of the Qur'ân was replaced by the hypothesis of textual variation. Their efforts were mainly devoted to proving this assumption and controverting the Muslim view rather than objectively tracing its actual history. We took note of *MW* contributors' zeal to reject the authenticity and purity of the Qur'ân. If they were successful in their task, Christian writers of *MW* believed that this would bring the Muslim world over to Christianity.

1 Cf. Bell, R., *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ân*, completely revised and enlarged by W.M. Watt, p.114.

2 Jeffery, "Progress in the Study of the Qur'ân Text", p. 5.

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