

# The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter

*Essays in Honour of David Thomas*

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## Scholarly Reception of Alphonse Mingana's "The Transmission of the Qur'an:" A Centenary Perspective

*Gordon Nickel*

One of the most interesting scholarly gatherings in the world during the past three decades has been the Mingana Symposium, held every four years at the Woodbrooke Study Centre in Birmingham, England. The gathering focuses on the writings of Christians who lived within the Arab Empire during the early centuries of the Muslim conquest and domination of the Middle East. Papers from the gatherings have been published in collections such as *Christians at the heart of Islamic rule* and *The Bible in Arab Christianity*.<sup>1</sup> A special feature of the symposium, besides taking place at peaceful Woodbrooke, is its proximity to the Mingana Collection, a collection of over 3,000 Middle Eastern manuscripts in over 20 languages brought together during the 1920s by the Iraqi Christian scholar Alphonse Mingana (1878–1937). At the most recent Symposium, for example, a special session on early Qur'anic manuscripts was held in the very room of the collection at the University of Birmingham where the Arabic manuscripts from the Mingana Collection are preserved. David Thomas has been involved with organizing the Mingana symposia since the second symposium in 1994. He has also edited the papers presented at the symposia into handsome volumes for the "History of Christian-Muslim Relations" book series or for the journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*.<sup>2</sup>

In the background of all of these gatherings and publications has been the shadow of Alphonse Mingana or perhaps, better expressed, his lingering glow. Among the considerable scholarly output of Mingana are a number of articles that were striking at the time of publication and are still mentioned regularly in academic discussions about the Qur'an.<sup>3</sup> For example, Min-

1 David Thomas, ed., *Christians at the heart of Islamic rule: Church life and scholarship in Abbasid Iraq* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); David Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

2 For example, the articles published in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22.2 (2011).

3 Samir Khalil Samir, "Alphonse Mingana, 1878–1937, and his contribution to early Christian-Muslim studies" (Birmingham: Selly Oak Colleges, 1990), 53–60.

gana's article, "Syriac influence on the style of the Qur'an,"<sup>4</sup> is still commonly cited and even reprinted in current discussions of a possible *Urtext* of the Qur'an.<sup>5</sup>

The present essay focuses on another of Mingana's articles, "The Transmission of the Qur'an," published in 1915. In this article Mingana questioned traditional Muslim accounts about the collection, editing and distribution of the Qur'an. Mingana clearly interacted with contemporary scholarship on the Qur'an written in Europe prior to the First World War. He was also responding to a kind of German scholarly hegemony on study of the Qur'an that had much to do with the writings of Theodore Nöldeke. By expressing the new ideas in English, however, and by adding materials with which he had become familiar through his own research, Mingana produced an article that is still a touchstone of scholarly discussion and debate a century later.<sup>6</sup> The issues which Mingana raised concerning Muslim tradition continue to the present: not only the question of evidence and the scholarly treatment of this evidence, but also the approach to the subject area in general.

This essay describes the content of Mingana's article and situates it within the context of scholarly writings about the Qur'an in the early twentieth century. The essay then traces the scholarly reception of Mingana's article and its ideas up to the present.<sup>7</sup> The discussion extends beyond Mingana to explore trajectories flowing from his way of thinking, that is, developments in recent years that Mingana may not have imagined but for which his thinking provided

4 A. Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Koran," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927), 77–98.

5 For example, Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'an in its historical context* (London: Routledge, 2008); and Ibn Warraq, ed., *What the Koran really says: Language, text, and commentary* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2002).

6 For example, Nicolai Sinai, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part 1," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77 (2014): 273–292 (273 n. 3, 274 n. 6, 280 n. 45, 281 n. 50, 285 n. 72).

7 The same could be done for a number of other Mingana publications related to the Qur'an, including: *Leaves from three ancient Qur'ans possibly pre-Othmānic with a list of their variants* (with Agnes Smith) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914); "An important old Turki manuscript in the John Rylands Library," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 2 (1915): 129–138; "Notes upon some of the Kur'anic manuscripts in the John Rylands Library," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 2 (1915): 240–250; and "An ancient Syriac translation of the Kur'an exhibiting new verses and variants," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9 (1925): 188–235.

open space. Finally, the article offers an analysis of key themes in the discussion of Mingana's ideas.

### Muslim Traditions about the Collection of the Qur'an

Muslims account for the origins of the Qur'an by telling stories of two main collections during the first decades after the death of the messenger of Islam. The stories attained their best-known expression in the collection of *ḥadīth* by al-Bukhārī (d. 870) known as his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>8</sup> The first story is set during the reign of Abū Bakr (d. 634), the first caliph after the death of the messenger of Islam. According to al-Bukhārī, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) is concerned that among the large number of deaths in the battle of al-Yamama may be many Muslims who know the Qur'an well (*qurrā*). He fears that for this reason "a large part of the Qur'an may be lost." 'Umar therefore comes to Abū Bakr and urges him to collect the Qur'an. Abū Bakr then delegates the work to Zayd ibn Thābit. According to Bukhārī, Zayd collects the Qur'an from "the leafless stalks of the date-palm tree and from pieces of leather and hides and from stones, and from the chests of men." After the death of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, the sheets are deposited with 'Umar's daughter Ḥaḥṣa.

The second collection story takes place during the reign of the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (d. 656). Again al-Bukhārī indicated a crisis on the battlefield as the spur for action. Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamām is concerned about the differences in the recitation of the Qur'an by the Muslim soldiers fighting in the conquest of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hudhayfa says to 'Uthmān, "Commander of the believers, set this people right before they disagree about the book in the manner of the Jews and the Christians." 'Uthmān sends for the sheets kept by Ḥaḥṣa, and then commands Zayd and three others to edit the sheets. When the editing work is completed, 'Uthman sends a copy of the edition to each part of the empire, and orders that every sheet or volume remaining that contains a part of the Qur'an in a different form be burned.

8 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1981), 6:98–99 (book 61, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān, bāb jam' al-Qur'ān*). Also al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī musammā Jāmi' al-bayān fi ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2005), 1:48–50; and al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Riyad: Maktabat al-ma'ārif, 1996), 1:163–181 (*naw'* 18). An English translation of two of the most popular episodes is James Robson, trans., *Mishkat Al-Masabih* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1970), 1:468–470.



### Mingana's "Transmission"

Alphonse Mingana published his article, "The Transmission of the Qur'an", in 1915 at the start of the First World War.<sup>9</sup> Mingana began his article by clarifying that the Muslim traditions about the collection of the Qur'an come from "oral *ḥadīth*" rather than from history.<sup>10</sup> He drew attention to the time gap between the events in the traditions and their first setting down in writing by Ibn Sa'd (d. 844), al-Bukhārī (d. 870), and Muslim (d. 874). Ibn Sa'd's traditions, Mingana pointed out, mention ten companions who had collected the Qur'an during the lifetime of Islam's messenger.<sup>11</sup> The traditions also tell about a collection by 'Uthman during the reign of 'Umar,<sup>12</sup> as well as about a collection by 'Umar,<sup>13</sup> but no stories of a collection under either Abū Bakr or 'Uthmān.<sup>14</sup> Mingana asked why western scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930) should prefer al-Bukhārī's traditions of collections during the reigns of Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān, when Ibn Sa'd at least had the advantage of "priority of time."<sup>15</sup>

Mingana noted the polemical atmosphere between Muslims and communities of the "people of the book" during the period the Muslim collection stories were set down by al-Bukhārī, and wrote that this should be seen as a factor in according them credence.<sup>16</sup> The discrepancies in the Muslim sources, wrote Mingana, continue into the various traditional Muslim lists of those who collected the Qur'an during the lifetime of Islam's messenger, from such writers as al-Bukhārī, al-Wāqidi (d. 822), al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 998) in his *Kitāb al-fihrist*. Mingana described a "second series of traditions" from Ibn Duqmāq (d. 1407), al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) that credits a collection of the Qur'an to the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (d. 704) and his governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 714).<sup>17</sup> Finally he offered an account from Yāqūt (d. 1229), attributed to al-Khaṭṭbī, of the arrest and flogging of Ibn Shanabūdh (d. 939) for reciting the variant readings of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b in the fourth Islamic century.<sup>18</sup>

9 Alphonse Mingana, "The Transmission of the Qur'an," *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society* 5 (1915–1916): 25–47.

10 Mingana, "Transmission," 26.

11 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 1957), 2:355–357.

12 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2:356.

13 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2:356–357.

14 Mingana, "Transmission," 27.

15 Mingana, "Transmission," 30.

16 Mingana, "Transmission," 30.

17 Mingana, "Transmission," 32–33.

18 Mingana, "Transmission," 33–34.

In an attempt to get outside of the confusion he found among the Muslim traditions, Mingana asked whether there were any written sources closer in time to the alleged collections than Ibn Sa'd and al-Bukhārī. He proposed that such sources may be found in works written by non-Muslims who witnessed the Arab conquest and domination of the Middle East. Mingana noted that these sources from the seventh and early eighth centuries do not mention the Qur'an.<sup>19</sup> It is only toward the end of the first quarter of the eighth century, he argued, that the Qur'an became a subject of conversation in Christian writings.

Of early non-Muslim accounts related to the transmission of the Qur'an, Mingana highlighted the *Apology* of 'Abd al Masiḥ al-Kindī, which he dated to 40 years before al-Bukhārī.<sup>20</sup> Al-Kindī had written about a collection made by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib immediately after the death of Islam's messenger that had spurred Abū Bakr to order his own collection.<sup>21</sup> Even so, however, the Muslims disagreed about which version to follow among the variant collections of Abū Bakr, 'Alī, Ubayy ibn Ka'b or Ibn Mas'ūd, according to al-Kindī. Al-Kindī wrote that, because of this disagreement, 'Uthmān ordered a new collection and edition, distributed the new version, then destroyed whatever remained. "Then followed the business of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, who gathered together every single copy he could lay hold of, and caused to be omitted from the text a great many passages."<sup>22</sup> Al-Kindī wrote that al-Ḥajjāj distributed his new version in a way similar to that found in the 'Uthmān story, "and destroyed all the preceding copies."<sup>23</sup>

Mingana concluded that the recitations were not written down at the time of Islam's messenger, but rather later by a number of the messenger's companions, including Ubayy ibn Ka'b and Ibn Mas'ūd. He raised questions about the development of the Arabic script and the prevalence of reading and writing in Arabia in the first half of the seventh century, as well as the literacy level of the companions. It was 'Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, wrote Mingana, who put the Qur'an together in a book form from whatever materials existed by their time.<sup>24</sup>

19 Mingana, "Transmission," 35–39.

20 Mingana, "Transmission," 39–42. Al-Kindī, *Al-Risāla*, ed. Anton Tien (London: SPCK, 1870), English trans., Anton Tien, "The Apology of al-Kindī," in *The early Christian-Muslim dialogue: A collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries (632–900 A.D.)*, ed. N.A. Newman (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 381–516.

21 "Apology of al-Kindī," 455.

22 Mingana, "Transmission," 41; "Apology of al-Kindī," 455.

23 Mingana, "Transmission," 42; "Apology of al-Kindī," 457.

24 Mingana, "Transmission," 46.

### Context in Early Twentieth-Century Scholarship

Mingana explicitly linked many of his ideas in the “Transmission” to the writings of a number of French scholars in the years immediately preceding World War I. For example, Paul Casanova had advocated the idea of the edition under ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf in a 1911 publication, apparently for the first time among western scholars. Mingana also quoted favorably from the writings of Henri Lammens, René Dussaud, and Clément Huart. On the other hand, Mingana issued some new challenges to scholarly perspectives on the Qur’an that had become firmly established by this time.

Göttingen University professor Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930) had been one of the first academic scholars to write a full monograph on the Qur’an. Nöldeke presented the story of the Qur’an’s formation basically as he found it in the Muslim tradition. In his 1860 *Geschichte des Qorāns* Nöldeke related the *ḥadīth* of al-Bukhārī about a first collection under Abū Bakr and a second collection under ‘Uthmān.<sup>25</sup>

By the time of the first revised edition of the *Geschichte*, however, scholars had begun to take a more careful approach to these *ḥadīth*. Nöldeke’s student Friedrich Schwally, who prepared the revised edition, included a much longer section on “Die Sammlung des Qorāns” in which his conclusions were quite different from Nöldeke’s.<sup>26</sup> Schwally argued against the historical reliability of the Muslim story of the collection under Abū Bakr.<sup>27</sup>

One of the factors that likely encouraged Schwally to take a more critical approach to the traditions was the scholarly study on the *ḥadīth* by Ignaz Goldziher in his *Muhammedanische Studien*.<sup>28</sup> Goldziher argued that the *ḥadīth* are not what they claim to be. He detected an historical progression from *sunna* as the practice of the Muslim community during the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid periods to *sunna* as the practice of the messenger of Islam. He concluded that the *ḥadīth* gave authority to local rulings of a later time by associating them with Islam’s messenger. From this Goldziher suggested that the *isnād*, or “chain of transmitters” leading back to Islam’s messenger, is essentially a fiction.

25 Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860), 190–233.

26 Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Zweite Auflage (Leipzig: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1919), part 2, 1–121.

27 Friedrich Schwally, “Betrachtungen über die Koransammlung des Abū Bekr,” in *Festschrift Eduard Sachau zum siebzigsten Geburtstage* (Berlin, 1915), 321–325.

28 Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, vol. 2 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1899–1890), English trans., *Muslim Studies*, C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 2:17–251.

Since the earliest traditions about the collection of the Qur'an are part of the same *ḥadīth* collections, Goldziher's arguments affected the scholarly treatment of the collection stories as well. For example, Italian scholar Leone Caetani argued in his *Annali dell'Islām* that the tradition of a collection under Abū Bakr was invented.<sup>29</sup> The same argument appears later in Schwally's revision of *Geschichte des Qurāns*. Caetani and Schwally made the case that the traditional lists of Muslims killed in the battle of al-Yamāma contain very few names that are also found in traditional lists of persons well-known for their knowledge of the Qur'an.<sup>30</sup>

Even prior to Caetani, but going well beyond both Caetani and Schwally, was the case made by Casanova in his 1911 study, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*.<sup>31</sup> Professor of Arabic at the Collège de France, Casanova was the first academic scholar to argue that contrary to the traditions of al-Bukhārī, the Qur'an was first collected and officially distributed during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (d. 705) on the initiative of his governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 714).<sup>32</sup> Casanova also mentioned the *Apology* of al-Kindī and advocated its importance for the discussion of the history of the Qur'anic text.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, wrote Casanova, the story of a recension under 'Uthmān is nothing but a "child of whimsy" and a "fiction."<sup>34</sup>

Mingana therefore had significant precedent to question both the Muslim traditions about the Qur'an's collection and the European scholarly consensus that had formed around the writings of Theodor Nöldeke. His expression of these questions in English, however, may help account for the prominence of "The Transmission of the Qur'an" to the present day in English language scholarship. Mingana's article was reprinted soon after its initial publication in the *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society* in the larger-circulation journal *Moslem World*.<sup>35</sup>

29 Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1914), 7:388–418. An abridged translation of Caetani's argument about the collection stories appeared as "Uthman and the recension of the Koran," *Moslem World* 5 (1915): 380–390.

30 Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām*, 7:398–400; Schwally, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, part 2, 20; Schwally, "Betrachtungen," 321–325.

31 Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde: Étude critique sur l'Islam primitif* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1911).

32 Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, 110–142.

33 Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, 119–122.

34 "... n'a qu'une filiation fantaisiste" and "une fable." Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, 127.

35 Mingana, "The Transmission of the Qur'an," *Moslem World* 7 (1917), 223–232, 402–414.

## Reception in Subsequent Scholarship

At the end of his survey of scholarly perspectives on the traditional Muslim collection stories up to the end of the twentieth century, Harald Motzki gives a prominent place to Mingana and “The Transmission of the Qur’an.”<sup>36</sup> After describing Mingana’s article, Motzki writes, “For many decades this radical view was not adopted by most Western scholars, who followed the more moderate position of Schwally, a few even that of Nöldeke which coincided with the dominant Muslim tradition.”<sup>37</sup> However, writes Motzki, the views of Mingana subsequently became associated with some of the most remarkable scholarship on the Qur’an during the second half of the twentieth century.

“This situation changed when in 1950 Joseph Schacht’s book, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* was published,” writes Motzki.<sup>38</sup> Following the lead of Ignaz Goldziher, Schacht took another look at Muslim traditions. His focus was Muslim legal thinking in the second century of Islam, shown in such works as the *Kitāb al-umm* of al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 820), the *Muwāṭṭa’* of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), the *Kitāb al-Āthār* of Abū Yūsuf (d. 798), and the *Kitāb al-Āthār* of al-Shaybānī (d. 805).<sup>39</sup> Schacht wrote that Muslim legal thinking grew out of the “living tradition” of each of the ancient schools of law around the middle of the second Islamic century, and moved from there to traditions attributed to the messenger of Islam only toward the end of the second Islamic century at the insistence of al-Shāfi‘ī. He also found a tendency for *isnāds* to grow backwards with time: first they go back to the figureheads of the schools of law, then later back to the Successors, then further back to the Companions, and finally to the messenger of Islam.<sup>40</sup>

Schacht laid out his investigation in detail in *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.<sup>41</sup> He commented specifically on the “historical” traditions that include the stories of the collection of the Qur’an. “The important point is that to a much higher degree than hitherto suspected, seemingly historical infor-

36 Harald Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur’an: A reconsideration of Western views in light of recent methodological developments,” *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 8–14.

37 Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur’an,” 10.

38 Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur’an,” 10.

39 Joseph Schacht, “A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1949): 145–146.

40 Schacht, “A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions,” 147.

41 Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammad Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

mation of the Prophet is only the background for legal doctrines and therefore devoid of independent value."<sup>42</sup> Schacht wrote that it was possible to observe the growth of material concerning the messenger of Islam throughout the second Islamic century, with new traditions appearing at every successive stage of doctrine. He concluded, "A considerable part of the standard biography of the Prophet in Medina, as it appeared in the second half of the second/eighth century, was of very recent origin and is therefore without independent historical value."<sup>43</sup>

The writings of Schacht, drawn as they were from his careful study of Muslim source materials, naturally exerted an influence on the academic study of Islam.<sup>44</sup> Two British scholars published major studies on the collection and canonization of the Qur'an in the 1970s. University of Aberdeen professor John Burton, and University of London scholar John Wansbrough, both accepted the conclusions of Schacht about the *ḥadīth*,<sup>45</sup> and they found the Muslim traditions about the collections of the Qur'an "confused and contradictory."<sup>46</sup> Beyond this, however, they took very different approaches. Looking for evidence outside of the traditional stories, Burton found a clue in the tendency of Muslim legal scholars to distinguish between the Qur'an and the *muṣḥaf*. By "Qur'an" Muslim scholars meant the concept of the totality of revelation given to the messenger of Islam. By *muṣḥaf* they meant the book that Muslims use. Burton found the Muslim scholars virtually unanimous that the entire Qur'an was never collected.<sup>47</sup> The traditional Muslim accounts of the collection of the Qur'an "are a mass of confusions, contradictions and inconsistencies," Burton concluded. "By their nature, they represent the product of a lengthy process of evolution, accretion and 'improvement'."<sup>48</sup>

Wansbrough also looked outside of the Muslim collection traditions for another approach to the question of the Qur'an's formation. The clues he found, however, were in the text of the Qur'an itself. He scrutinized major themes and

42 Schacht, "A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions," 150.

43 Schacht, "A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions," 151.

44 Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 10.

45 John Burton, "The Collection of the Qur'an," *Glasgow University Oriental Society, Transactions* 23 (1969–1970, pub. 1972), 42; John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 44.

46 Burton, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 44. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 50.

47 Burton, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 42.

48 John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 140.

motifs, formulaic patterns, and differing versions of the same narratives, which he called “variant traditions.”<sup>49</sup> He argued that close literary analysis of the Qur’an suggests that Muslim scripture is composite and that the establishment of its text must have taken more than a single generation.<sup>50</sup> Wansbrough’s study of the structure and content of the Qur’an suggested to him “not the carefully executed project of one or of many men, but rather the product of an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, the Muslim collection stories do not match the evidence that the Qur’anic text itself gives about its origins.

Regarding canonization, Wansbrough also brought forward the use of the Qur’an in early Muslim legal sources. As a starting point, he accepted Schacht’s thesis that in general terms, Islamic Law was not derived from the contents of the Qur’an. The practice of deriving law from the Qur’an, Wansbrough argued, flourished only in the ninth century. He also found it significant that the Qur’an is not mentioned in the *Fiqh Akbar I*, a Muslim legal text dated to the middle of the eighth century. He explicitly referred to Mingana’s comment in “The Transmission of the Qur’an” about the silence about the Qur’an in early Christian writings.<sup>52</sup> From this and other information Wansbrough concluded that though Qur’anic material existed during the first two centuries of Islam, the establishment of a standard text of the Qur’an—as the ‘Uthmān collection story implies—could not have taken place before the period of intense Muslim literary activity at the end of the second Islamic century.

One of Wansbrough’s arguments was that the Muslim collection stories show a polemical character.<sup>53</sup> The Muslim stories about the collection of the Qur’an, after all, are part of a larger package of Muslim religious claims that attempt to make the case that “the sequence of worldly events centered on the time of Muḥammad was directed by God.”<sup>54</sup> Islam was distinguishing its scripture from the Torah and Gospel. Collection stories also had much to do with making a case for the prophethood of Islam’s messenger. This should alert the scholar to the fact that the stories come from the realm of religious truth

49 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 21.

50 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 44.

51 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 47.

52 John Wansbrough, *The sectarian milieu: Content and composition of Islamic salvation history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 58 n. 2.

53 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 50; see also Wansbrough, *Sectarian milieu*, 58.

54 Andrew Rippin, “Literary Analysis of *Qur’an*, *Tafsīr* and *Sīra*: The methodologies of John Wansbrough,” in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 154; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 43.

claims. Scholars now acknowledge the significance of the time gap between written Muslim accounts and the events in early Islam that they purport to recount (150 years now seems to be the minimum agreed-upon gap). The question for many scholars has simply been whether these written accounts were trustworthy. In other words, it is a matter of faith. A unique feature of Wansbrough's research is that he asked, in the absence of both historical evidence and a faith commitment to the truth claims of Islam, "What can the scripture itself tell us about how it may have come together?"

At the end of the twentieth century, Motzki still found the views of Wansbrough and Burton to be the two main scholarly perspectives to contend with, and he put Mingana together with the modern British scholars.<sup>55</sup> Motzki wrote that the three scholars had in common the opinion that the traditional Muslim collection stories were created in the third/ninth century, and that all three debated the historicity of an official collection under 'Uthmān. Motzki took issue with Mingana's dating of the collection traditions, calling it erroneous.<sup>56</sup> He questioned what he described as Mingana's assumptions that the *ḥadīth* reports are historically unreliable because they were transmitted only orally; that the date of a report can be determined by the date of its first appearance in writing; that later sources are less reliable than earlier sources; and that the earlier, written Christian sources are more reliable than the later Muslim sources. Motzki criticized Mingana's argument from the silence of early Christian sources about the existence of the Qur'an, and called al-Kindī's account "a distorted summary of several Muslim traditions" and therefore of limited value.<sup>57</sup>

Motzki's own position is that the Muslim traditions about the collections were in circulation well before they were written down by Ibn Sa'd and al-Bukhārī. He brought forward evidence of traditions about Abū Bakr's collection in earlier written sources, some of which have become available only recently.<sup>58</sup> Motzki was not able to do the same for the story of a collection under 'Uthmān: complete versions of this story are only found in works by authors who died in the ninth century or later. However, he argued that "*isnād* analysis" leads back to the figure of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 742) as transmitter of both stories.<sup>59</sup>

55 Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 10.

56 Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 14.

57 Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 14, 20.

58 Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 15–20.

59 Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an," 21–29.



Another academic scholar who defended the reliability of *ḥadīth* was Leiden scholar G.H.A. Juynboll.<sup>60</sup> Juynboll noted that “the basic historicity of what [the Abū Bakr and ‘Uthmān collection] stories tell us remains a matter of dispute among dispassionate historians.”<sup>61</sup> At the same time he made a case for an “historical source” for the tradition of the Abū Bakr collection even earlier than Motzki’s examples. The *Maghāzī* of Mūsā ibn ‘Uqba (d. 758), is said to have contained the tradition. However, Juynboll’s reference for this appears in the very late *Fath al-bārī* of Ibn Ḥajar (d. 1448), and the *Maghāzī* itself is lost except for a small fragment.<sup>62</sup>

### Discussions in the Twenty-First Century

Motzki’s critique of Mingana and Wansbrough, and his case that the collection traditions were in circulation prior to the writings of Ibn Sa’d and al-Bukhārī, have not stopped many scholars from moving ahead in directions indicated by the ideas in Mingana’s article.

Michael Cook’s 2000 book *The Koran: A very short introduction* offers at the same time a summary of scholarly perspectives after Wansbrough and an indication of things to come later. Cook reviews the Muslim tradition about a collection under ‘Uthmān and then addresses “problems in terms of both what happened afterwards and what went before.”<sup>63</sup> What happened afterwards is that there were Muslim writers quoting Qur’anic passages that do not match the present text. Cook cites in particular the quotations in a letter that claims to have been written around 700 by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728).<sup>64</sup> Such sources suggest that the text of the Qur’an was not yet as firmly fixed in the decades after ‘Uthmān as it came to be later.<sup>65</sup>

As for “what went before” the date of a collection under ‘Uthmān according to al-Bukhārī, various other traditions give credit for the major collection to

60 Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur’an,” 16. Motzki also includes Gregor Schoeler among the scholars using “*isnād* analysis” and “*matn* analysis” to make a case for earlier dates for the traditions.

61 G.H.A. Juynboll, “Ḥadīth and the Qur’an,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006), 2:376–397 (384).

62 Juynboll, “Ḥadīth and the Qur’an,” 2:384.

63 Michael Cook, *The Koran: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 120.

64 Cook, *The Koran*, 120–121; citing Hellmut Ritter, “Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit I. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,” *Der Islam* 21 (1933): 67–82.

65 Cook, *The Koran*, 121.

Abū Bakr or 'Umar, and some tell that the material had already been assembled during the lifetime of Islam's messenger. Some traditions tell of 'Uthmān merely editing a codex that had already been prepared before him, while other traditions describe 'Uthmān as actively collecting bits of text written on shoulder blades of animals and stripped palm branches. "We thus face serious contradiction in our source material regarding two issues: who collected the Koran, and what it was collected from. In historical terms, the differences between the rival accounts are not trivial."<sup>66</sup>

In 2005 and 2006 a number of scholars published studies that focused on the figures of 'Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf. Chase F. Robinson writes that the work of establishing the text of the Qur'an suited the reign of 'Abd al-Malik much better than the reign of 'Uthmān.<sup>67</sup> He questions the plausibility of the official distribution of a fixed text by around 650. The processes of fixing the text of other monotheist scriptures took a long time, Robinson reasons. In the case of Arabic, moreover, the early script only imperfectly described vowels and consonants. 'Uthmān was deeply unpopular in many quarters and his reign was short and contentious. Did he really, Robinson asks, have the authority and military power to do what he is credited with? There is also the evidence of early Qur'anic manuscripts that depart from the "official" version. Robinson writes, "Scholars committed to the idea that the Qur'an was fixed and closed at a very early date minimize the myriad ways in which these texts differ from the received version."<sup>68</sup> 'Abd al-Malik, by contrast, had the motivation and would have had the power to order a redaction of the Qur'anic text and impose it, concludes Robinson.<sup>69</sup>

Other scholars who have recently highlighted the role of 'Abd al-Malik include Pierre Larcher,<sup>70</sup> Alfred-Louis de Prémare,<sup>71</sup> Omar Hamdan,<sup>72</sup> Matthias

66 Cook, *The Koran*, 125.

67 Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 100–104.

68 Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 102.

69 Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 103–104.

70 Pierre Larcher, "Arabe Préislamique—Arabe Coranique—Arabe Classique. Un Continuum?" in *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2005), 248–265 (252).

71 Alfred-Louis de Prémare, "Abd al-Malik b. Marwān et le processus de constitution du Coran," in *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2005), 179–212.

72 Omar Hamdan, "The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A step towards the canonization of the Qur'anic Text," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and literary investigations into the Qur'anic milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 794–835.

Radscheit,<sup>73</sup> Stephen Shoemaker,<sup>74</sup> and François Déroche.<sup>75</sup> Larcher wrote in 2005, “For most Islamologists, the *muṣḥaf* ‘Uthmān is the ‘conventional’ name of the official version imposed by the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik.”<sup>76</sup> Even more recently, Stephen Shoemaker suggests that “The reign of ‘Abd al-Malik has emerged as a period in which the Qur’an’s final collection and standardization seems highly likely.”<sup>77</sup>

The approach of evaluating Muslim tradition on the basis of historical criteria is shared by Lawrence Conrad. He enquires into the circumstances of the rule of the so-called Rāshidūn caliphs and suggests that their authority remained at the level of tribal leaders. “So far as we can tell from the early Arabic tradition, at no time in his career ‘Uthmān enjoyed the vast ‘power over ...’ that would have been required to compel Muslims everywhere to bow to his will on a matter like codification of the Qur’an.”<sup>78</sup> Taking a slightly different angle, Gerhard Böwering reasons that the Muslim community was focused on conquest at the time of ‘Uthmān, rather than on standardizing the text of the Qur’an.<sup>79</sup>

F.E. Peters treats the question of the Qur’an’s formation in the context of similar treatments of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.<sup>80</sup> Peters’ approach to the question is to enquire into the history of Arabic writing and reading, and the development of the Arabic script in the seventh and eighth centuries. In his view, literacy was not widespread in Mecca or Medina in the seventh century. He notes the absence of Arabic literature at the time, and finds the possibility of skilled scribes under ‘Uthmān in Medina “highly problematic.”<sup>81</sup> Regarding the Arabic script, Peters writes that in the seventh

73 Matthias Radscheit, “The Qur’an—codification and canonization,” in *Self-Referentiality in the Qur’an*, ed. Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 93–102 (96–99).

74 Stephen J. Shoemaker, “In Search of ‘Urwa’s *Sīra*: Some methodological issues in the quest for ‘authenticity’ in the life of Muḥammad,” *Der Islam* 85 (2011): 311 n. 121.

75 François Déroche, *Qur’ans of the Umayyads* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 96–99.

76 Larcher, “Arabe Préislamique,” 252.

77 Shoemaker, “In Search of ‘Urwa’s *Sīra*,” 311 n. 121.

78 Lawrence I. Conrad, “Qur’anic Studies: A Historian’s perspective,” in *Results of contemporary research on the Qur’an: The question of a historio-critical text*, ed. Manfred Kropp (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007), 12. F.E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 148, also raises this concern: “There is no reason to think that in 650 the caliph’s reach was so broad or his grip so firm that he was able to achieve such an end.”

79 Gerhard Böwering, “Chronology and the Qur’an,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, 1:316–335 (333).

80 F.E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books*, 67–79, 127–150.

81 Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books*, 143, 147.

and eighth centuries, Arabic was a defective script. At first it had no way of recording vowels and only a very limited supply of consonantal symbols. "At that stage of its development the Arabic script was a crude instrument indeed and hardly adequate for making notes, much less taking them down from dictation."<sup>82</sup> For these and other reasons Peters finds it impossible that the text of the Qur'an was written down and fixed under 'Uthmān around 650 as Muslim tradition claims.

Scholars of the development of the Arabic script and the earliest manuscripts of the Qur'an have also commented on the Muslim traditions in the light of their expertise. Peter Stein, a scholar of Ancient South Arabic, addresses the question of the level of literacy in the area of Mecca and Medina in the first half of the seventh century. He writes that a few people "may have possessed the rudimentary kind of literacy necessary to conduct commercial activities," but that "mastery of the more advanced skills necessary to read literary works, for example, can be ruled out."<sup>83</sup> François Déroche, director of studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, views the Muslim traditions from the perspective of what he has learned from the development of the Arabic script in the earliest Arabic manuscripts. He concludes: "The various deficiencies noted in the *ḥijāzī*-style manuscripts mean that it was not, in fact, possible to adequately preserve the integrity of the Qur'an through writing as the caliph 'Uthmān intended when, according to the tradition, he decided to document the revelation."<sup>84</sup>

At the present time, academic scholars are divided in their approach to Muslim traditional sources.<sup>85</sup> In a recent book titled *The death of a prophet*, Stephen J. Shoemaker makes a vigorous case for the fixing of the Qur'anic text during the

82 Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books*, 145–146.

83 Peter Stein, "Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia: An analysis of the epigraphic evidence," in *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and literary investigations into the Qur'anic milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 255–280 (273).

84 François Déroche, "Written Transmission," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 172–186 (173–174).

85 The disagreements are well represented by a number of recent scholarly collections, including Reynolds, *The Qur'an in its historical context*; Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'an in context*; and Ohlig and Puin, *Die dunklen Anfänge*. Mention should also be made of three collections of reprinted articles edited by Ibn Warraq, which make extensive use of Mingana's articles: *The Origins of the Koran* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998) (contains "The Transmission of the Qur'an"); *What the Koran really says: Language, text, and commentary* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2002); and *Which Koran? Variants, manuscripts, linguistics* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2011).

era of ‘Abd al-Malik.<sup>86</sup> In doing so, he explicitly references Mingana and “The Transmission of the Qur’ān.”<sup>87</sup> Shoemaker again refers to Mingana and his article when indicating contemporary Christian sources.<sup>88</sup> Shoemaker notes the element of “conviction” and “assumption” in the dedication of some scholars to Muslim tradition, highlighting the comment of Angelica Neuwirth, whose approach—in her own words—“presupposes the reliability of the basic data of the traditional accounts about the emergence of the Qur’an.”<sup>89</sup> Shoemaker argues that such an approach reveals the unevenness between scholarly study of the Qur’an and the New Testament. He asserts that in fact many of the historical questions are the same, writing that the collection and standardization of the Qur’an “likely took place over an interval of time comparable in length the gospel tradition.”

Nicolai Sinai, to the contrary, argues for the traditional Muslim dating of the Qur’an, and against the dating to ‘Abd al-Malik’s era, in a two-part article in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*.<sup>90</sup> In doing so he explicitly describes Casanova and Mingana as “triggering” the debate about the historical reliability of the Muslim traditions about collections under Abū Bakr and ‘Uthman.<sup>91</sup> Sinai also argues against Mingana’s thesis that Muslim reports of the Abū Bakr and ‘Uthmān recensions are not attested before the ninth century, citing Motzki while acknowledging Shoemaker.<sup>92</sup> Sinai further takes issue with Mingana’s highlighting of al-Kindī’s account and his use of other early Christian sources.<sup>93</sup> That, after 100 years, a scholar interacts so directly with “The Transmission of the Qur’ān” bears testimony to the power of the ideas in Mingana’s article.

Sinai’s articles demonstrate the extent to which basic historical issues are still being debated among the world’s top Qur’anic scholars. Sinai argues for

86 Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet: The end of Muhammad’s life and the beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 137, 147–150, 152, 158.

87 Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 321 n. 131.

88 Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 322 n. 139.

89 Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 141–142; Angelika Neuwirth, “Structural, linguistic and literary features,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97–113 (100).

90 Sinai, “Consonantal skeleton of the Quran I,” 273–292; Nicolai Sinai, “When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part II,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77 (2014): 509–521.

91 Sinai, “Consonantal skeleton of the Quran I,” 274 (references to “The Transmission of the Qur’ān” at 273 n. 3, 274 n. 6, 280 n. 45, 281 n. 50, 285 n. 72).

92 Sinai, “Consonantal skeleton of the Quran I,” 275.

93 Sinai, “Consonantal skeleton of the Quran I,” 282 and 285.

the traditional Muslim dating of around 650 for the fixation of the text of the Qur'an, with 'Uthmān as agent. He makes heavy use of the writings of Motzki, Behnam Sadeghi, and Gregor Schoeler. His chief antagonists, on the other hand, are Shoemaker, Wansbrough, de Prémare, Robinson and Patricia Crone.

### Analysis of Main Themes

The scholarly reception of Mingana and the discussion of ideas expressed in "The Transmission of the Qur'an" seem to revolve around a number of distinct themes in the thinking of scholars.

#### 1 *The Question of Historical Reliability*

In the early stages of academic study of the Qur'an, western scholars tended to evaluate one particular Muslim tradition on the basis of other traditions that came from the same body of traditional material. Later scholars realized that they would need to make a decision on the historical reliability of the whole body of traditional material before they could use one part to judge another. As Hugh Kennedy notes, "For the historian approaching the early Muslim period, it is vital to form an opinion as to how far this material can be trusted."<sup>94</sup>

Mingana questioned what he considered the arbitrary choice of western scholars like Nöldeke to accept the traditions crediting Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān, but not the traditions about a collection during the lifetime of Islam's messenger. Nöldeke justified his choice by asking why—if the collection had already been made previously—would Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān have gone to so much trouble.<sup>95</sup> Of course, this question betrays a prior commitment to the truth of Muslim tradition on Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān. Wansbrough suggested, many years later, that the advocacy of particular traditions by Nöldeke and Schwally was "accepted with conspicuous lack of intellectual vitality by Orientalist scholarship."<sup>96</sup>

The Muslim collections stories are part of a larger body of traditional material about the origins of Islam. Goldziher and Schacht urged that scholars approach this material with caution. More recently, University of California professor R. Stephen Humphreys writes, "Both the accuracy and authenticity of every report attributed to [the first decades of Islam] are open to credible

94 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London: Longman, 1986), 353.

95 Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, 160; Mingana, "Transmission," 30.

96 John Wansbrough, "Review of *The Collection of the Qur'an*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978): 370–371 (370).

challenge.”<sup>97</sup> Similarly, F.E. Peters writes, “At every turn historians of Muḥammad and of early Islam appear to be betrayed by the sheer unreliability of their sources.”<sup>98</sup>

It is interesting to note that Motzki, though he goes to great lengths to argue that the traditions of a collection under Abū Bakr and an official edition under ʿUthmān were circulating by the beginning of the second Islamic century, declines to express an opinion as to their plausibility, “let alone their historical reliability.”<sup>99</sup>

## 2 *Two-Century Time Gap*

In the minds of some scholars, the trustworthiness of the collection stories is related to the fact that the tradition of the collection under ʿUthmān first appeared in writing around 200 years after the event it purports to describe. Mingana seems to have been one of the first scholars to draw attention to the time gap (“238 years after the Prophet’s death,” he wrote).<sup>100</sup> Motzki, after a careful study, could find no written source for the complete ʿUthmān story earlier than versions attributed to authors who died in the third/ninth century.<sup>101</sup> Princeton University professor Patricia Crone puts the time gap in perspective in her comment about the challenge to historians from the earliest biography of the messenger of Islam, written by Ibn Ishāq (d. 767) but available only in an edition by Ibn Hishām (d. 833): “Consider the prospect of reconstructing the origins of Christianity on the basis of the writings of Clement [d. 215] or Justin Martyr [d. 165] in a recension by Origen [d. 253].”<sup>102</sup>

## 3 *Confusion among the Collection Stories*

Burton and Wansbrough described the various Muslim accounts of the early collections as confused and contradictory, as detailed above. Mingana was one of the first to query the diversity among the Muslim collection traditions. Burton has conveniently set out and discussed the details of different collection accounts.<sup>103</sup> A.T. Welch wrote, “Most of the key points are contradicted by

97 R. Stephen Humphries, “Taʾriḫ. II. Historical Writing,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2009), 10:271–276 (274).

98 F.E. Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23 (1991): 291–315 (306).

99 Motzki, “The Collection of the Qurʾān,” 30.

100 Mingana, “Transmission,” 26.

101 Motzki, “Collection of the Qurʾān,” 28–29.

102 Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 202 n. 10.

103 Burton, *Collection of the Qurʾān*, 117–189.

alternative accounts in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections and other early Muslim sources.<sup>104</sup> For example, he noted, "each of the first four caliphs is reported to have been the first person to collect the *Qurʾān*."<sup>105</sup>

#### 4 *The Roles of ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf*

Within the past decade a number of scholars have affirmed a suggestion that was first made more than a century ago: that rather than seeing Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān as responsible for the fixing of the text of the *Qurʾān*, one should look to the involvement of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and his governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf. This modern convergence seems to have surprised some other scholars like Sinai.<sup>106</sup> It was Casanova and Mingana who first highlighted this Muslim story in the West. Both mentioned the account of al-Kindī in which the role of al-Ḥajjāj is featured.<sup>107</sup> Arthur Jeffery also noted the reference to the role of al-Ḥajjāj in another early Christian document, the correspondence attributed to Leo III.<sup>108</sup> After a considerable hiatus, the story has been picked up by a wide range of scholars for a variety of reasons.

#### 5 *Plausibility and Other Questions*

Academic scholars who are—as Chase Robinson puts it—"committed to the idea that the history made by Muslims is comparable to that made by non-Muslims,"<sup>109</sup> take the freedom to ask a variety of questions of the traditional Muslim collection stories. Böwering asks whether ʿUthmān would have had the time and energy, not to mention the inspiration and insight, to guide the standardization of the *Qurʾān* at a time of vigorous conquest.<sup>110</sup> Peters and other scholars wonder whether ʿUthmān really had the power around 650 to enforce a standardized text.<sup>111</sup> "ʿUthmān was deeply unpopular in many quarters; his reign was short and contentious."<sup>112</sup>

104 A.T. Welch, "Qurʾān" (Sections 1–8), in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5:400–429 (405).

105 Welch, "Qurʾān," 405. Burton, *Collection of the Qurʾān*, 120–128. Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Zweite Auflage, 15–18.

106 Sinai, "Consonantal skeleton of the Quran 1," 274–275.

107 The importance of al-Kindī as a witness has been picked up recently by Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 103; and Clare Wilde, "Is there room for corruption in the 'books' of God?" in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 225–240 (232).

108 Arthur Jeffery, trans. "Ghevond's text of the correspondence between ʿUmar II and Leo III," *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 269–332 (298).

109 Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 103.

110 Böwering, "Chronology and the Qurʾān," 333.

111 Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books*, 148; also Conrad, "Qurʾanic studies," 12.

112 Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 102.



Scholars also ask questions about how the Arabic script in the mid-seventh century would have been able to fix the sounds of the original “recitation.” On the basis of his investigation of the earliest manuscripts of the Qur’an, François Déroche writes that it was not possible to preserve the integrity of the Qur’an at that time. On this basis he questions the traditional Muslim account of ‘Uthmān’s motivation. According to the famous *ḥadīth*, ‘Uthman’s edition intended to solve the problem of Muslim warriors reciting the Qur’an in differing ways. However, writes Déroche, the Arabic script at that stage of development would not have allowed ‘Uthman’s edition to do this:

the manuscripts of that period, with very few diacritics, no short vowels or orthoepic marks, simply could not have provided the solution which the caliph is said to have been seeking according to the classical account of this event. The additional variants found in the manuscripts and a review of the canonical lists suggest that the *rasm* itself did not reach the shape we know until a later date.<sup>113</sup>

A number of scholars also ask whether it is possible for the canonization of a major scripture to take place within something like two decades, as Muslim tradition claims. Wansbrough quoted Schwally’s opinion that the formation of the Qur’anic canon was fundamentally different from that of the Jewish and Christian scriptures,<sup>114</sup> and then he wrote, “It seems to me at least arguable that the evidence of the Qur’an itself, quite apart from that of the exegetical tradition, lends little support to that assertion.”<sup>115</sup> Instead, Wansbrough argued that the evidence indicates a longer period of development.<sup>116</sup>

## 6 *Scholars Disagree*

The last 40 years have seen a number of theories of Qur’anic origins emerge that question both Muslim tradition and the western scholarly “consensus.” Motzki has suggested a reasonable way of approaching these new theories: “Each is a sophisticated piece of scholarship that deserves to be carefully studied for the quality of its arguments and methods.”<sup>117</sup>

113 Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, 178; Déroche, *Qur’ans of the Umayyads*, 72.

114 Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Zweite Auflage, part 2, 120.

115 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 44.

116 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 43–51, 77–84. More recently, on this point, see Robinson, *‘Abd al-Malik*, 101–102; and Radscheit, “The Qur’an—codification and canonization,” 93.

117 Harald Motzki, “Alternative accounts of the Qur’an’s formation,” in *The Cambridge companion to the Qur’an*, 59–75 (71).

Academic scholars disagree with one another. Wansbrough modeled a way of writing about ideas with which he strongly disagreed in a review of Burton's *The Collection of the Qur'ān*.<sup>118</sup> Wansbrough acknowledged areas of agreement and affirmed wherever possible; he was straightforward in disagreement, providing reasons; and he confined his comments to the arguments and methods in Burton's work, thus highlighting their importance. One wonders whether Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* has been extended the same courtesy in the 38 years since its publication. Even when the theories of a particular scholar may be doubted or even become very unpopular, the scholar's careful research upon which he based his conclusions may be helpful to many. Shoemaker writes, "... although Wansbrough's suggestion that the *ne varietur* Qur'an dates only to the early ninth century does not seem very likely, his arguments for the Qur'an's formation much later than the Islamic tradition remembers are generally persuasive."<sup>119</sup>

The approach of Wansbrough has come to be called "revisionist"<sup>120</sup>—a term that is sometimes used in modern scholarly writing with a pejorative twist.<sup>121</sup> However, explains Conrad, "Its results may be sceptical, but its methodology simply asserts that in historical research all evidence must be considered and its relative merits assessed: the great majority view of the sources is not correct simply because it is the majority view."<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

Mingana's article "The Transmission of the Qur'ān" has exerted a remarkable influence since its publication a century ago. Though—as Motzki describes it—Mingana's "radical view" was not adopted by most western scholars in the first half of the twentieth century, the article has enjoyed steady citation during the past four decades. Perhaps even more significant than the article and its author, however, may be the trajectories of the way of thinking demonstrated in

118 John Wansbrough, "Review of *The Collection of the Qur'ān*," 370–371.

119 Shoemaker, "In Search of 'Urwa's *Sīra*," 311 n. 121.

120 Nicolai Sinai and Angelika Neuwirth, "Introduction," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and literary investigations into the Qur'ānic milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2–10.

121 For example, Jacob Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern scholarship, medieval realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 39–43. Ziauddin Sardar, *Muhammad: All that matters* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012), chapter 1.

122 Conrad, "Qur'ānic Studies," 15.

the article. Shoemaker has noted the element of “presumption” and “commitment” in the “consensus” of many non-Muslim western scholars to assert the historical reliability of Muslim tradition, even when there may be very little outside independent evidence to support it.<sup>123</sup> Shoemaker has also spotlighted the unaccountable discrepancy between the western scholarly treatment of the Qur’an and the New Testament.<sup>124</sup> As Conrad has expressed it, “There are ... times when it seems that the rules of evidence that prevail everywhere else in historical studies are simply waived off when it comes to the study of early Islam.”<sup>125</sup>

Mingana’s article took the freedom to question both Muslim tradition and the emerging scholarly “consensus” on the basis of the evidence at hand, and in so doing created open space for subsequent scholars to do the same. Other articles of his could be traced through in the same way, notably “Syriac influence on the style of the Kur’ān.” Mingana’s articles lend color to the legacy of the Iraqi scholar that one experiences in the halls of the Mingana Collection and the happy Woodbrooke proceedings of the Mingana symposia. David Thomas felicitously organized the latest Mingana Symposium in September 2013 around the theme “The Qur’an and Arab Christianity.”

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123 Shoemaker, *Death of a prophet*, 136–142.

124 Shoemaker, *Death of a prophet*, 136–153.

125 Conrad, “Qur’ānic Studies,” 15.