

THE QUR'ĀNIC TEXTUAL PURITY AND AUTHENTICITY A DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS

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Introduction

It is worth noting that all, friends and foes alike, have already acknowledged that the purity of the Qur'ānic text has been maintained through fourteen centuries. Islam knows no such thing as 'redactions of its holy text'.¹ Even those who most stoutly and vehemently denied it being the 'Word of God' are unanimous in testifying that it contains exactly the same words spoken by Muḥammad fourteen centuries ago.² The testimony of a few such unwilling witnesses is that the text of the Qur'ān is the purest of all the works of antiquity;³ 'Uthmān's compilation has remained the authorized text from the time it was made until the present day;⁴ the text substantially corresponds to the actual utterances of Muḥammad himself;⁵ all sects and parties of the Muslim community have the same text of the Qur'ān;⁶ it is of immense merit that there is no doubt as to its genuineness... that the words of the Qur'ān have remained unchanged through nearly thirteen hundred years;⁷ the Qur'ān at the time of 'Uthmān has been handed down to us unaltered, and there is probably in the world no other work which has remained for twelve centuries with so pure

¹ 'Abd al-Mājid al-Daryābādī, *Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān. Holy Qur'ān Translation and Commentary* (Lucknow: Academic of Islamic research and Publications, Nadwatul 'Ulamā', 1981), x.

² *Ibid.*

³ Wherry, E. M., *Commentary on the Qur'ān* (London: Trubner, 1882-1886), vol. 1, 349.

⁴ Palmer, L. *The Qur'ān With an Introduction* by R. Nicholson, First published in 1880, (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), iv.

⁵ Sir Thomas Walker Arnold, *The Islamic Faith* (London: Ernest Benin, 1928), 9.

⁶ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism: Lectures on its Origin, its Religious and Political Growth, and its Present State* (New York: Putnam, 1916), 18.

⁷ Lane and Lane-Poole, *Selections from the Kuran* (London: Trubner, n.d), Introduction, c.

a text;⁸ the Qur'ān has retained beyond all reasonable doubt the exact words of Muḥammad without subtraction or addition;⁹ and the Qur'ān was his singular contribution and lies before us essentially unchanged from the form in which Muḥammad himself gave it.¹⁰

Even though the above remarks show that the text of the Qur'ān is undoubtedly pure and authentic, yet several other Orientalists' as well as contemporary writings raise serious doubts on its early documentation, textual order, purity and authenticity. Their conclusion gives rise to much confusion and misunderstanding. Therefore, it warrants a thorough intellectual review to investigate the phenomenon of its textual purity. In an attempt to discredit Islam and its teachings, a new version of the Qur'ānic text has been circulated in which verses concerning *jihād*¹¹ and other conceptual and doctrinal issues believed to be objectionable from the perspective of Judeo-Christian traditions were dropped. This has further aggravated the misunderstandings.

This article proceeds as follows: The first section revisits the early Islamic legacy, highlights the art of writing and textual documentation and Occidental views. The second section refers to the Islamic view on early documentation and the roles of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), and of Abū Bakr, the first Caliph and 'Uthmān, the third Caliph in preserving, collecting, and standardizing the text. The third section presents an analysis of the issue of the Qur'ān's textual order to see whether it was divine or man-made. The fourth section examines the art of inscription and installation of diacritics and vowels. Finally, it studies the allegations and brings into the limelight some research findings that prove the purity and authenticity of the text.

⁸ William Muir, *Life of Mahomet* (London: Smith, 1860), Introduction, xxii-xxiii.

⁹ Bosworth Smith, *Mohammad and Mohammedanism* (London, n.p., 1874), 22.

¹⁰ Charles Culter Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 2.

¹¹ Here it refers to the so-called 'holy war'.