



The Islam Research Group

Who Wrote the Qur'an?

I. Early Qur'an Manuscripts



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1. Qur'an manuscripts radiocarbon dated to before 690

Radiocarbon dating is a method by which the time that has elapsed since organic material ceased to be alive can be calculated through analysis of the decay of an isotope, carbon 14 compared to levels of carbon 14. To date, nine parchment manuscripts containing portions of Quranic text have been subjected to radiocarbon dating that have yielded results, with 95.4% accuracy, that the animal from which the parchment was made died earlier than 690. These are:

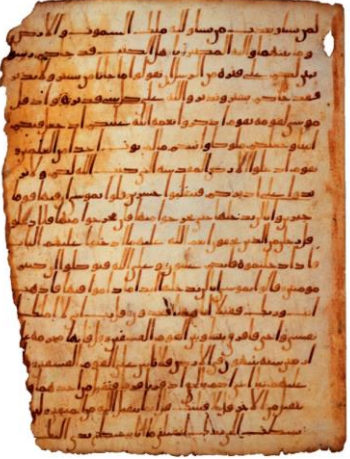


	<p>DAM 1 – 27 – 1 (<i>'the Sana'a Palimpsest'</i>)</p> <p>One of 926 Qur'an manuscripts identified from 12,000 fragments discovered in 1972, in the eaves of a mosque undergoing renovation in Sana'a, Yemen.</p>	<p>578-669 (95.4%)</p> <p>(testing by University of Arizona on a fragment in a private collection: 75% likelihood that pre-646.)</p> <p>606-649 (the result of three tests on folios in Sana'a:</p> <p>Folio 2: 595-650 Folio 11: 611 – 660 Folio 13: 590 – 650)</p> <p>(tests by University of Oxford, ETH (Zürich), University of Kiel and CDR Lyons)</p>
	<p>DAM 1 – 25 – 1 (see DAM 1-27-1 above)</p>	<p>643 – 653 (95.4%) (testing by CDR Lyon)¹</p>

¹ C. J. Robin, 'L'Arabie Dans Le Coran. Réexamen De Quelques Termes À La Lumière Des Inscriptions Préislamiques', in *Les Origines Du Coran, Le Coran Des Origines*, 2015; M. J. Marx & T. J. Jocham, 'Radiocarbon (14C) Dating Of Qur'ān Manuscripts', in A. Kaplony, M. Marx *Qur'ān Quotations Preserved On Papyrus Documents, 7th-10th Centuries*, 2019

	<p>Arabe 328(c) / 'The Birmingham manuscript'</p> <p>One of several manuscripts acquired by French diplomats from the Mosque of 'Amr in Fustat during the Napoleonic Wars, most held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France ('BnF'). Six different Qur'ans have been identified, catalogued at the BnF as BnF Arabe 328 (a) through to (f).</p> <p>In 2015 two folios of a Qur'an that formed part of a collection of documents at Birmingham University (under the catalogue entry Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a) were recognised to have originally formed part of the same Qur'an manuscript as BnF 328 (c).</p>	<p>568 – 645 (95.4%) (University of Oxford)²</p>
	<p>DAM 1 – 29 – 1 (see DAM 1-27-1 above)</p>	<p>633-665 (95.4%) (the cumulative result of tests on two folios: Folio 7/8: 638 – 669 Folio 13: 615 – 660)</p> <p>A further folio was separately tested yielding a result of 603-662.</p> <p>(CDR, Lyon)³</p>

² A. Fedeli, *Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, And The Alphonse Mingana Papers Held In The Department Of Special Collections Of The University Of Birmingham*, 2015

³ C. J. Robin, 'L'Arabie Dans Le Coran. Réexamen De Quelques Termes À La Lumière Des Inscriptions Préislamiques', in F. Déroche, C. J. Robin & M. Zink (Eds.), *Les Origines Du Coran, Le Coran Des Origines*

	<p>The 'Qaf' Manuscript / the Cairo Manuscript (Held at Cairo and Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)</p>	<p>600-655 (95.4%) ETH (Zürich)⁴</p>
	<p>The Tübingen Manuscript</p>	<p>649-675 (95.4%) (the cumulative results of tests upon three folios: Folio 23: 637-758 (95.4%) (637-690 (94.8%)) Folio 28: 611 – 669 (95.5%) Folio 37: 655 – 767 (655-718 75%) ETH (Zürich)⁵</p>
	<p>TIEM 51/57 (Mostly at TIEM, (Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts), Istanbul</p>	<p>Two tests: 610-770 (95.4%), using a more detailed method 609-694 (95.4%)⁶</p>

⁴ M. J. Marx & T. J. Jocham, '*Radiocarbon (14C) Dating Of Qur'ān Manuscripts*', in A. Kaplony, M. Marx , *Qur'ān Quotations Preserved On Papyrus Documents, 7th-10th Centuries, 2019*

⁵ . J. Marx & T. J. Jocham, "Radiocarbon (14C) Dating Of Qur'ān Manuscripts", in A. Kaplony, M. Marx (Eds.), *Qur'ān Quotations Preserved On Papyrus Documents, 7th-10th Centuries, 2019,*

⁶ Y. Dutton, "*An Umayyad Fragment Of The Qur'an And Its Dating*", *Journal Of Qur'anic Studies*, 2007,

	<p>CBL 1615 I Chester Beatty Museum, Dublin</p>	<p>591-643 (95.4%) ETH (Zürich)⁷</p>
	<p>Raqqaden Manuscript</p>	<p>648-691 (95.4%)⁸</p>

⁷ *Variants and readings in CBL 1615 I, A Multi-layered manuscript From the Seventh century*, 7/6/18College de France video

⁸ . Déroche, *Qur'ans Of The Umayyads: A First Overview*, 2014,

The Sana'a Palimpsest

DAM 01-27.01 is a palimpsest, meaning that an original text has been washed or scraped off and overwritten by a different text. Consequently, given the apparent antiquity of the parchment, by far the greatest interest in the manuscript lies in the original text. With the passage of time this is becoming once again visible to the naked eye, but it can only be clearly read by careful viewing of the manuscript in ultraviolet light or X-ray. Even the upper writing is generally thought by experts to have been written in the eighth century.

Analysis of the lower text is incomplete, but to the extent that it has been studied, the lower text follows the structure of the canonical Qur'an, in that

every word appears in the same order within a verse as with the canonical Qur'an,

every verse appears within the same order within a surah

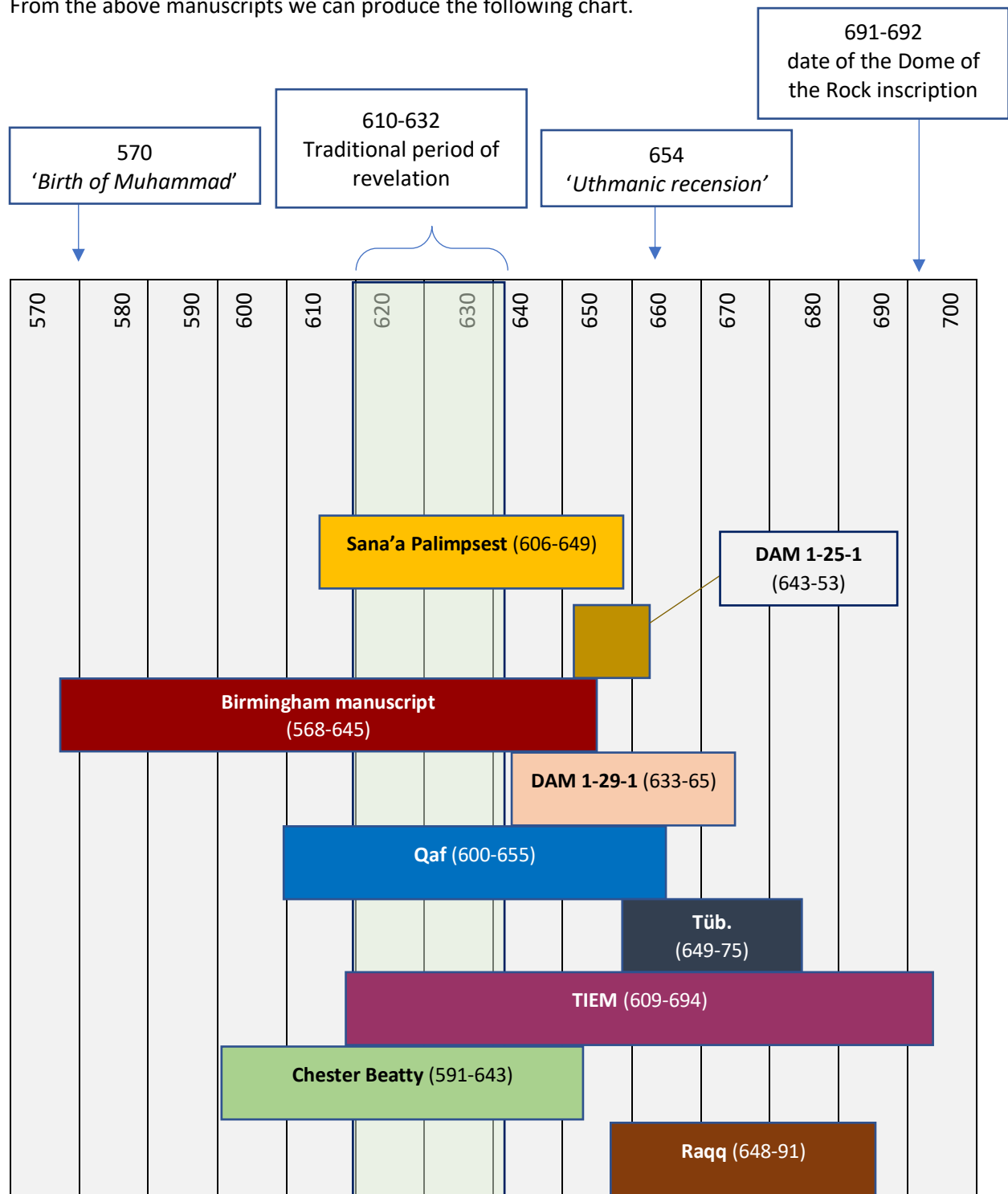
the surahs appear in the same order

subject to some variations. These variants from the orthodox canon are significantly greater than any other ancient Qur'an manuscript, and so one might say that the Sana'a Palimpsest Lower Text is the only ancient non-canonical Qur'an.

For more on the Sana'a palimpsest, see ***Who Wrote the Qur'an IV, Variant and non-Canonical Qur'ans***

Timeline of radio-carbon date ranges of the seventh century manuscripts

From the above manuscripts we can produce the following chart.



Surahs written on parchment radiocarbon dated with 95.4% accuracy to earlier than 690



Where a surah's number appears against a light blue background,
part of this surah exists on a manuscript radiocarbon dated pre-700,



Where a surah's number appears against a dark blue background,
the whole of this surah exists on manuscript radiocarbon dated pre-700.



Where a surah's number appears against a white background,
none of this surah exists on manuscript radiocarbon dated pre-700.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110
111	112	113	114						

2. Mapping textual variations

Written Arabic consists of the consonantal skeleton of a word (the rasm) upon which additional marks are added. These additional marks are necessary to distinguish between consonants that have an identical rasm, to indicate short vowels, and some other purposes. Of the twenty-eight consonants of the Arabic alphabet only six have a unique rasm: the other twenty two require diacritical marks, usually presented as dots or dashes above or below the rasm, to be added to the letter to make the identification of the consonant specific. For example, the shape ب, when appearing in the midst of a word, may without diacritical marks may indicate any one of five letters: ب (b), ت (t), ث (th), ي (y or ī) or ن (n). The earliest Qur'an manuscripts very rarely had these marks, leaving considerable scope for a word's interpretation.⁹

Prior to the examination of the lower script of the Sana'a Manuscript, the oldest Qur'ans almost invariably contain the same rasm, although they contain substantial variation in their positioning of diacritical and vowel markers. In a series of videos entitled *The Qur'an's Many Problems*¹⁰ presented by Dr Jay Smith and Al Fadi, Dr Smith refers to the work of Hatun Tash in cataloguing almost 60,000 variations in the Qur'an's Arabic text, observed in thirty one different editions of the Qur'an she had purchased from across the Islamic world, each of which was based upon a manuscript from the eighth or ninth centuries.

Discussions concerning the possible differences of vowels are well known and a topic of open discussion by Islamic scholars. Some hadith even, implausibly, assert that Mohammed accepted seven different methods of reading the Qur'an on the basis that these were merely the accommodation of early Arabic 'dialects'. However, despite the scope for rasms to be read in a vast number of ways, there is in fact a high degree of consensus in the Muslim world concerning which words were intended.

One leading scholar in this area, Marijn van Putten, describes the significance of these variations:

Orthographic idiosyncrasies occur rather frequently in the Quran. When we find such variations in spelling, we must conclude that they carry no linguistic value, as they express the exact same phrase with the same meaning. Such spelling variations then appear to have been attributable to the discretion of the scribe. But there is much more to these orthographic idiosyncrasies than merely reflecting the whims of a scribe. Such orthographic idiosyncrasies allow us to show that the Quranic manuscripts go back to a single written archetype from which all of these documents were copied. If two manuscripts do not descend from copies of a single archetype, we would not

⁹ In *Early Christian Arabic Texts (The Qur'an in its Historical Context 2: New Perspectives on the Qur'an)*, Clare Wilde suggests that this may have been to emulate the Hebrew script of the Torah.

¹⁰ Episode 9

expect the same spelling to occur in the exact same location time and time again. However, this is exactly what we find: highly idiosyncratic spellings occur again and again in the same spelling in the exact same location across all early Quranic manuscripts. Such variation can only be the result of precise written transmission...

A second implication of these results is that, from the very beginning of the text's standardization, every single manuscript that belongs to the Uthmanic text type must have been copied from a written exemplar. It is exactly these kinds of orthographic idiosyncrasies that would be impossible to reproduce through a process of writing down from dictation.¹¹

These textual variants can be tracked across manuscripts to demonstrate regional variants, and then to create a stemma showing how one manuscript was copied from another, each manuscript transmitting the minor variations of the manuscript from which it was copied, sometimes adding their own. These takes the form of '*a family tree, just as similar phenotypes signify evolutionarily related species of animals and plants,*' (per Behnam Sadeghi).¹²

These variations were first analysed by Michael Cook in **The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran**, and further, to date unpublished research has been carried out by **Hythem Sidki** and **Marjin van Putten**. Mapping these variations tends to support the traditional Islamic account of an original manuscript, the canonical archetype, from which three copies were made and dispatched to separate locations and from which regional codices other copies were subsequently made,

The following page contains a list of some of these variants used by Morteza Karimi-Nia in as part of an analysis of a specific codex (with added colour-coding).¹³

The page after that contains a stemma produced on the basis of information provided by Hythem Sidki in a symposium, the footage of which is posted on the **College of France** website¹⁴.

¹¹ "**The Grace of God**" as evidence for a written Uthmanic archetype: the importance of shared orthographic idiosyncrasie, Maijn van Putten

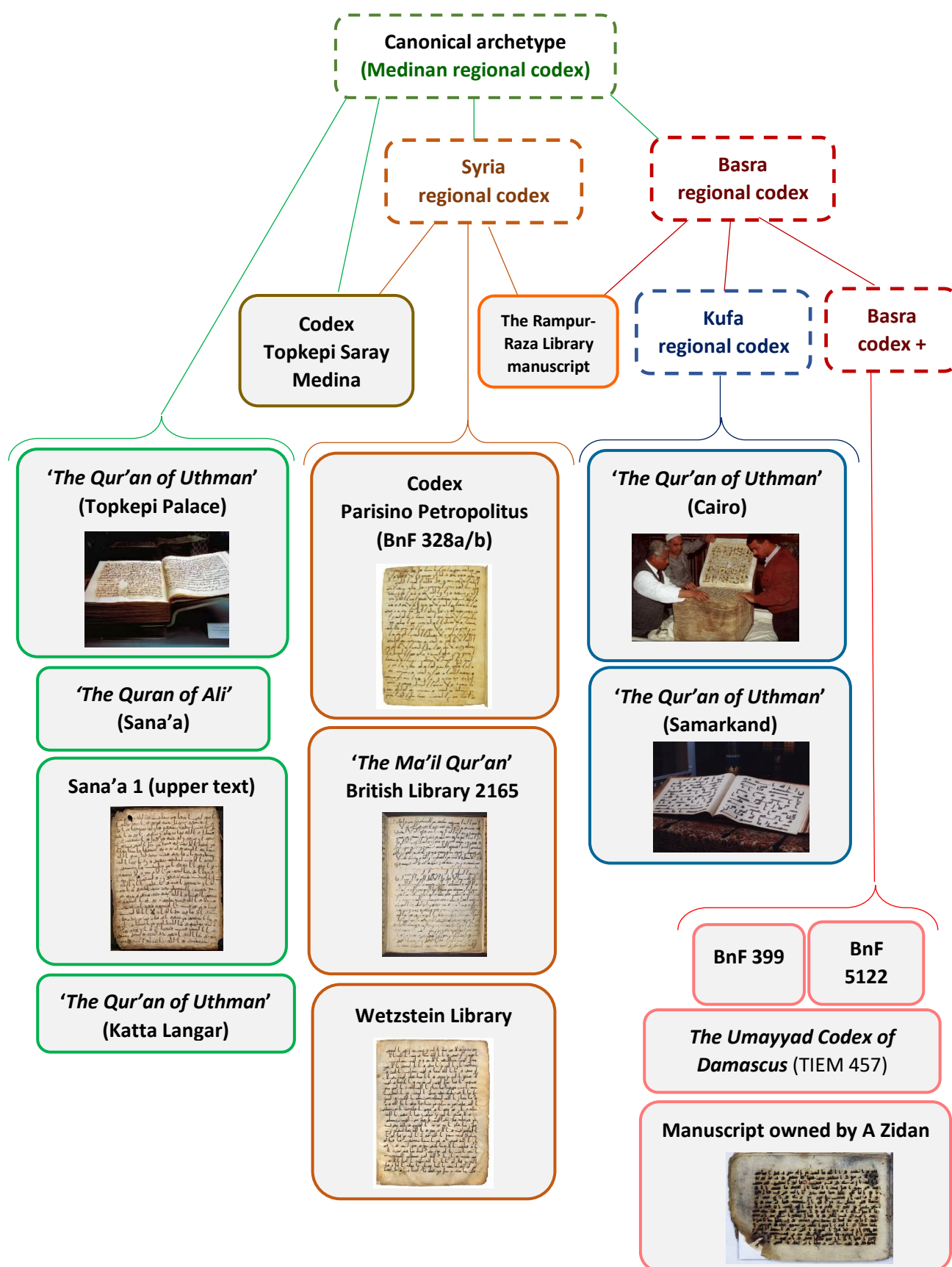
¹² "**The Codex Of A Companion Of The Prophet SAW** Benham Sadeghi & Uwe Bergmann

¹³ **A New Document in the Early History of the Qur'ān, Codex Mashhad, an 'Uthmānic Text of the Qur'ān in Ibn Mas'ūd's Arrangement of Sūras**, 2019, by Morteza Karimi-Nia

¹⁴ **On the Regionality of Qur'anic Codices: A philological and phylogenetic study**, available to watch as a video on the **College de France** website.

Verse	Medina	Mecca	Kufa	Basra	Damascus
Q. 2:116	وقالوا اتخذ	وقالوا اتخذ	وقالوا اتخذ	وقالوا اتخذ	قالوا اتخذ
Q. 2:132	واوصى	ووصى	ووصى	ووصى	واوصى
Q. 3:133	سرعوا	وسرعوا	وسرعوا	وسرعوا	سرعوا
Q. 3:184	والزير	والزير	والزير	والزير	وبالزير
Q. 4:66	الا قليل	الا قليل	الا قليل	الا قليل	الا قليلا
Q. 5:53	يقول	يقول	ويقول	ويقول	يقول
Q. 5:54	من يرتد	من يرتد	من يرتد	من يرتد	من يرتد
Q. 6:32	وللدار	وللدار	وللدار	وللدار	ولدار
Q. 6:63	انجيتنا	انجيتنا	انجيتنا	انجيتنا	انجيتنا
Q. 7:3	تذكرون	تذكرون	تذكرون	تذكرون	تذكرون
Q. 7:43	وما كنا	وما كنا	وما كنا	وما كنا	ما كنا
Q. 7:75	قال الملاء	قال الملاء	قال الملاء	قال الملاء	وقال الملاء
Q. 7:141	انجينكم	انجينكم	انجينكم	انجينكم	انجاكم
Q. 9:100	تجرى تحتها	تجرى من تحتها	تجرى تحتها	تجرى تحتها	تجرى تحتها
Q. 9:107	الذين اتخذوا	والذين اتخذوا	والذين اتخذوا	والذين اتخذوا	الذين اتخذوا
Q. 10:22	يسيركم	يسيركم	يسيركم	يسيركم	ينشركم
Q. 18:36	خيرا منها	خيرا منها	خيرا منها	خيرا منها	خيرا منها
Q. 18:95	ما مكنى	ما مكنى	ما مكنى	ما مكنى	ما مكنى
Q. 23:87	سيقولون لله	سيقولون لله	سيقولون لله	سيقولون الله	سيقولون لله
Q. 23:89	سيقولون لله	سيقولون لله	سيقولون لله	سيقولون الله	سيقولون لله
Q. 25:25	ونزل	ونزل	ونزل	ونزل	ونزل
Q. 26:217	فتوكل	وتوكل	وتوكل	وتوكل	فتوكل
Q. 27:21	ليأتينى	ليأتينى	ليأتينى	ليأتينى	ليأتينى
Q. 28:37	وقال موسى	قال موسى	وقال موسى	وقال موسى	وقال موسى
Q. 36:35	ما عملته ايديهم	ما عملته ايديهم	ما عملت ايديهم	ما عملته ايديهم	ما عملته ايديهم
Q. 39:64	تامرونى	تامرونى	تامرونى	تامرونى	تامرونى
Q. 40:21	اشد منهم	اشد منهم	اشد منهم	اشد منهم	اشد منكم
Q. 40:26	وان يظهر	وان يظهر	او ان يظهر	وان يظهر	وان يظهر
Q. 42:30	بما كسبت	فيما كسبت	فيما كسبت	فيما كسبت	بما كسبت
Q. 43:68	يعبادى	يعباد	يعباد	يعباد	يعبادى
Q. 43:71	نشتيه	نشتى	نشتى	نشتى	نشتيه
Q. 46:15	حسنا	حسنا	احسانا	حسنا	حسنا
Q. 47:18	ان تاتيهم	ان تاتيهم	ان تاتيهم	ان تاتيهم	ان تاتيهم
Q. 57:10	وكلا وعد	وكلا وعد	وكلا وعد	وكلا وعد	وكلى وعد
Q. 57:24	الغنى	هو الغنى	هو الغنى	هو الغنى	الغنى

Qur'an manuscript stemma (adapted from Hythem Sidki)



3. Textual corrections

To further complicate the search for the original text of the Qur'an, in ***Corrections in Early Qur'an Manuscripts, Twenty Examples***, Daniel Alan Brubaker demonstrates that many of the most well known ancient manuscripts show erasures, amendments and insertions.

Conclusion

The radiocarbon dating of BnF 328(c)/the Birmingham Manuscript appears to show that the Qur'an was in existence from 645 at the latest. Although the possibility that verses were added, removed or varied after this date cannot be entirely excluded,

- the lack of any major variation in any surviving text (even the Sana'a palimpsest lower text),
- the stemma of Qur'an manuscripts demonstrating the descent of all manuscripts from a canonical archetype,

makes this unlikely.

Four possible objections might be raised to this conclusion:

The radiocarbon testing process may have been inaccurate.

This is possible but it is noted that results from five early manuscripts are broadly consistent, which supports the accuracy of the method.

The parchment was written on much later than the animal it was taken from died

Radiocarbon dating can only ascertain the date upon which an organic being, such as an animal, died. The general assumption in such cases is that parchment would have been written on shortly after it was made. The prospect that a parchment maker stored sufficient hides to make even one complete Qur'an (let alone five) for a period in excess of six decades in the hope that they, or more likely their children, would be able to sell them for an increased price to a person seeking to make a document seem older than it was, seems unlikely. Nor in this case would there be any clear reason for

making a Qur'an manuscript appear older than it in fact was. A new-looking Qur'an could be readily explained as a copy of a lost original.

The Qur'an verses that are not contained in the tested folios could have been subsequently altered.

alternatively

328(c) was not a Qur'an at all but an earlier book that was incorporated wholesale into the Qur'an.

It is conceivable that verses not written on the 7C folios referred to above, were added removed or amended after the time that those folios were created. However, the fact that all Qur'an manuscripts agree on the word, verse and surah order of the portions of text that they do contain tends to suggest that the canon was fixed when these folios was created. Moreover, the stemma research tends to strongly support the derivation of all Qur'ans from a single canonical archetype. If multiple later Qur'ans had been made with new material added, it is unlikely that the scribes would have copied the orthographic idiosyncrasies of local editions rather than establishing a central Qur'an production workshop. Similarly, it seems fairly unlikely that a caliph would have been able to have destroyed every copy of a religious text that had become inconvenient to him across a territory stretching from North Africa to Central Asia.