Early Islamic Sources and the Problem of Authenticity

A Critical, Manuscript-Based, and Historiographical Study

Preface / Author's Note

This book is the result of several years of sustained, methodical, and critically grounded research into the earliest sources of Islam. It was not written with the intention to provoke, offend, or dismantle faith traditions, but to examine historical claims using the same standards applied to all other civilizations, religions, and textual corpora.

Islamic tradition presents itself as uniquely preserved, uninterrupted, and divinely safeguarded. Such claims, however, are historical claims—and history does not operate on inheritance, reverence, or consensus, but on evidence. When the Qur'an, sīrah literature, hadith collections, legal schools, and doctrines of authority are examined through modern historiographical methods, a different picture emerges: one of gradual formation, retrospective canonization, political patronage, and narrative consolidation—primarily during the Abbasid period.

This work deliberately separates faith-value from historical verifiability. A text may hold religious meaning for believers while still remaining historically complex, mediated, and non-transparent. To conflate devotion with documentation is to abandon scholarship.

The central thesis of this book is simple but consequential:
Islam's foundational texts and institutions reached their final, authoritative forms later than traditionally claimed, and through human processes rather than uninterrupted divine transmission.

This study draws on manuscript evidence, non-Muslim contemporaneous sources, internal textual analysis, and the findings of leading modern scholars in Qur'anic studies, early Islamic history, and historiography. It does not ask readers what they should believe—but asks whether prevailing claims can withstand critical examination.

If the conclusions presented here are uncomfortable, that discomfort arises not from hostility, but from honesty. History does not bend to piety, and scholarship does not yield to tradition.

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Introductory Chapter

(Background, the Core Problem, and the Methodology of Inquiry)

Islamic history and the Qur'anic texts have, for centuries, been presented within the dominant religious narrative as an unquestionable and self-evident "established truth." To raise questions about this narrative has not merely been regarded as undesirable, but often as intolerable. According to this traditional account, Islam emerged in the seventh century as a complete, clear, and fully organized divine religion, whose teachings, texts, and historical traditions were transmitted to later generations without interruption and in an unchanged, verbatim form.

Modern scholarly research, however—particularly in the fields of textual criticism, manuscript studies, comparative historiography, and the examination of contemporaneous non-Islamic sources—has made it increasingly necessary to reassess and re-evaluate this inherited assumption.

In recent decades, a number of serious researchers and specialists have drawn attention to the fact that a substantial portion of Islamic tradition—especially the codification of the Qur'an, the formation of sīrah and maghāzī literature, the compilation of the ḥadīth corpus, and the crystallization of legal and theological systems—was formulated, systematized, and stabilized during the second and third centuries of the Hijrah, particularly under the Abbasid period. State patronage, the establishment of scholarly institutions, official historiography, and the standardization of religious narratives played a decisive role in this process.

This complex and weighty situation inevitably raises a fundamental question in the mind of every inquisitive observer: **Had this process of codification and narrative construction not occurred, would Islam have survived into the present in its current comprehensive and highly systematized form?**

The objective of this study is by no means to negate or insult any belief. Rather, its aim is to understand the beginnings of Islamic history through a **critical methodological framework** instead of a purely affirmatory one. In other words, it seeks to present an impartial academic assessment by examining the nature of the sources, chronological gaps, manuscript conditions, contemporaneous non-Islamic evidence, and the influence of state politics—so that readers may themselves arrive at conclusions on the basis of evidence.

Part (1) — Research Summary and Introduction 📘

Summary of the Research

Within the inherited Muslim scholarly tradition, the Qur'an has generally been assumed to be a complete, perfectly ordered, fully preserved, doubt-free, and ahistorical text. As a consequence, scholarly inquiry remained largely confined to doctrinal, theological, isnād-

based, legal, and apologetic defenses, rather than extending to the historical formation of the text, its stages of compilation, or its material evidence.

In contrast, modern independent scholars—such as **John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, Fred Donner, François Déroche, and Gerd Puin**, among others—have examined the Qur'an freely as a historical and material text, unrestrained by political pressure, religious verdicts, traditions of excommunication, or fear of violence. Through the study of manuscripts, script styles, textual variants, contemporaneous non-Muslim sources, and archaeological evidence, they systematically framed and articulated a range of critical questions.

As a result of this modern research, for the first time it became possible to examine the present Qur'anic text comparatively in relation to its earliest forms, stages of codification, and historical linguistic content. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the scholarly efforts of the past half-century—both in methodological rigor and analytical perspective— have proven far more critical, intellectually sound, and historically grounded than much of the long-standing inherited Islamic scholarly tradition. This observation constitutes the very foundation and driving motivation of the present study.

This research seeks to investigate and comprehend the actual historical reality of early Islamic sources. The absence of numerous early written texts related to Islam, the scarcity of early manuscript evidence, the lack of corroborating material traces, and the much later compilation of Islamic traditions have all intensified the importance of the question: **Have Islamic sources truly been preserved securely and reliably from the earliest period, as their traditional attribution claims?**

This installment focuses in particular on those foundational Islamic texts that traditional narratives regard as indispensable components of early Islam, such as:

- The *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Imām Anas b. Mālik

- The *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wāqidī

- The *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* of Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. Yasār

Critical examination reveals that none of these works possesses an original autograph manuscript, or that the earliest surviving manuscripts date several centuries later. Similarly, a profound "gap" exists in the first one and a half centuries of Islamic history—a gap that was later filled artificially through retrospective narrative construction. What was produced under Abbasid state patronage in terms of scholarly, historical, and religious material is what is today collectively referred to as "Islam" or "Islamic tradition."

The purpose of this research is to understand and clarify this entire process through a purely academic and non-partisan lens.

The conclusion of this study is that a substantial difference exists between **"Islamic tradition"** and **"the original history of Islam,"** and that there is an urgent need to replace

traditional affirmatory methodologies with non-traditional critical approaches as the foundation of serious inquiry.

Written Evidence in Human History vs. Its Absence in Early Islam

Human history is marked by the widespread survival and presence of written artifacts. In striking contrast, the written material evidence for early Islam is astonishingly sparse.

One of the greatest distinguishing features of human civilization is its ability to preserve its existence, thought, religion, environment, social order, legal systems, and governance in written form. In archaeology, this written legacy is referred to as **material culture**.

Every ancient civilization that demonstrably existed has left behind written records, inscriptions, material remains, legal codes, literature, artistic expressions, and religious texts as primary manifestations of its culture. These texts constitute the **primary sources** of those civilizations.

Primary Sources and Material Evidence of Major Ancient Civilizations Still Accessible Today

(1) Sumerian Civilization — c. 4000 BCE

The Sumerian civilization is rightly regarded as the first literate civilization in human history. Its most significant achievement was the invention of writing, through which spoken language was transformed into written form, allowing human thought to transcend the limitations of time and space.

Its written sources survive in their original form as:

- Hundreds of thousands of **clay tablets**, preserved today in:
    - The British Museum (London)
    - The Louvre Museum (Paris)
    - The Pergamon Museum (Berlin)
    - The Iraq Museum (Baghdad)

These texts were written in **cuneiform script**, which initially consisted of pictorial signs and later evolved to represent sounds, meanings, and complex expressions.

Religious and intellectual texts include:

- Deities such as **Tammuz**, **Enki**, and **Enlil**
- Prayers and hymns

- Mythological poetry

- Creation narratives

- The *Epic of Gilgamesh*—considered the world's oldest literary masterpiece, dealing with themes of mortality, friendship, conflict, and ethical struggle.

Legal and administrative sources:

- The **Code of Ur-Nammu**, the earliest known written legal code, detailing:

  - Crimes

  - Offenses

  - Punishments

  - Social obligations

Material remains:

- **Ziggurats**—monumental religious structures symbolizing both worship and state authority.

Conclusion:
The religion, law, literature, art, and economy of Sumerian civilization are all directly substantiated through surviving written evidence.

(2) Egyptian (Pharaonic) Civilization — c. 3000 BCE

Egyptian civilization represents a culture in which writing, architecture, and religion were fused into an indestructible unity.

Written sources include:

- **Hieroglyphics** (*Hieroglyphs*) …

- **Engraved on:**

- The walls of temples

- The pillars of tombs

- The inner galleries of the pyramids

- **These inscriptions record in writing:**

- Royal conquests

- Religious beliefs

- State laws

- In short, every major aspect of public life

- **Religious Texts**

- **The Book of the Dead**, which constitutes a complete religious corpus dealing with:

- Life after death

- The journey of the soul

- Moral judgment and accountability

- **Texts written on papyrus**, including:

- Collections of prayers

- Magical and religious treatises

- Instructions for burial and funerary rites

- **Royal and Political Writings**

- Decrees of the Pharaohs of Egypt:

- Commands

- Prohibitions

- Testaments and final admonitions

- Records of royal military victories

- **Concrete Material Evidence**

- The Pyramids of Egypt

- The Valley of the Kings

- The Temples of Karnak and Luxor

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 Every religious, political, social, and intellectual dimension of Egyptian civilization remains alive and enduring today solely on the basis of its contemporary written inscriptions and material records.

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- **An Important Note**

- Moses, the Pharaoh opposed to him, and Joseph—three figures mentioned in the Qur'an (and the Bible) as specific historical individuals—are **not demonstrably attested** in the written history of ancient Egypt.

- Ancient Egypt was an exceptionally writing-oriented civilization. Through royal inscriptions, temple walls, papyri, official lists, and religious texts, it preserved its

political, religious, social, and collective events with remarkable detail and sophistication. **Despite this**, Egyptian sources contain:

- No reference to the collective enslavement of the Israelites

- No mention of the Exodus

- No account of the splitting of the sea

- No trace whatsoever of the drowning of a pharaoh's army

- Likewise, "Pharaoh" is a **royal and dynastic title**, not a personal name. Among the dozens of known Egyptian pharaohs, not a single individual has been conclusively identified as a contemporary of Moses. Similarly, there is no evidence in Egyptian records of a foreign Hebrew slave named Joseph rising to become vizier of Egypt, nor is there any independent Egyptian testimony regarding the management of a seven-year famine.

- Consequently, according to modern historiography and Egyptology, Moses, the Pharaoh of Moses, and Joseph are **not historically established personalities**, but rather figures constructed within religious narrative traditions.

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- Furthermore, **Qur'an 10:92 (Sūrat Yūnus)** is often presented as an extraordinary historical or scientific miracle. However, upon linguistic and historical examination, this claim does not hold. The phrase *"nunajjīka bi-badanik"* does not necessarily mean preserving the body alive or safeguarding it intact for centuries; it can equally denote the casting of the corpse onto dry land after drowning. The Qur'an does not explicitly assert the preservation of a mummy, the identification of a specific pharaoh, or the future discovery of a well-preserved body.

- In Egypt, the preservation of bodies through mummification was a **routine funerary practice**, not an extraordinary phenomenon. Moreover, no historically verified identification of the "Pharaoh of Moses" exists, and none of the mummies associated with this claim show clear evidence of death by drowning. Therefore, interpreting this verse as a prophetic reference to the later discovery of mummies represents a **post-event reinterpretation**, rather than a miracle demonstrable from the text itself or from historical evidence.

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- **(3) Greek Civilization — c. 8th century BCE to 146 BCE**

- Greek civilization laid the foundations of reason, logic, philosophy, and historiography in human history.

- **Primary Texts**

- Dozens of ancient manuscripts of Greek dramas

- Multiple parallel copies from different cities and periods

- Key works include:

- *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* — Homer

- *Theogony* — Hesiod

- *Histories* — Herodotus

- Political and military histories — Thucydides

- These texts:

- Exist in the original Greek language

- Survive in multiple ancient manuscripts

- Are preserved through rigorous comparative analysis

- **Legal and Intellectual Sources**

- Laws of Athens

- Philosophical dialogues of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle

- Written treatises on the state, ethics, and logic

- **Material Remains**

- Temples

- Theaters

- Shrines

- Laws and directives engraved in marble

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 Greek civilization possesses an independent, continuous, and self-critical written historical tradition.

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- **(4) Roman Empire — c. 753 BCE to 476 CE**

- Roman civilization represents the highest classical example of a state governed through written law and administrative order.

- **Written Sources**

- **Roman Law**, which remains the foundation of:

- European legal systems

- Modern judicial and court structures

- **Roman Edicts**, bearing:

- The signatures of emperors

- Official imperial seals

- **Official Records**

- Population censuses

- Tax registers

- **Military recruitment records**

- **Judicial verdicts and court decisions**

- **Material Evidence**

- Roads

- Bridges and arches

- Fortresses and defensive walls

- Government buildings

- bearing official inscriptions carved into stone

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 The history of Rome constitutes an uninterrupted and continuous chain of written documentation.

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- **(5) Ancient Indian Civilization — c. 1500 BCE to 500 BCE**

- **Primary Sources**

- Royal inscriptions

- Coins

- Buddhist and Hindu religious texts

- Detailed accounts of Chinese travelers

- State donation charters (*Copper Plate Grants*)

- **Royal Inscriptions and Copper Plates**

- Gupta and post-Gupta period inscriptions

- Reign of **Harsha Vardhana** (*r.* 606–647 CE)

- Chalukya, Pallava, and Rashtrakuta rulers

- These inscriptions record:

- Wars and military campaigns

- Diplomatic relations

- Religious endowments

- References to foreign peoples

- **Numismatic Evidence**

- Coins predating the 7th century CE are still extant

- Specimens engraved with Hindu, Buddhist, and royal titles

- **Religious and Intellectual Texts**

- Buddhist manuscript traditions

- Brahmanical śāstras

- Jain religious traditions

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 Vedic Indian civilization ranks among the world's major civilizations that permanently inscribed their history onto stone cliffs, iron, and copper plates through writing, symbols, and iconography.

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- **(6) Indus Valley Civilization — c. 3800 BCE to 1300 BCE**

- **Archaeological Evidence**

- Thousands of artifacts in the form of seals, tablets, pictographic symbols, industrial layouts, and handicrafts

- Harappa and Mohenjo-daro are not merely scattered inscriptions or fragmentary remains, but fully preserved urban centers still visible on the ground today

- This fact alone renders them exceptionally significant in human history.

- **Primary Evidence**

- Complete urban planning

- Straight, grid-based street systems

- Clear division of residential, commercial, and religious zones

- Advanced drainage systems surpassing those of many modern cities

- Baked bricks, standardized measurements, and uniform construction techniques

- These features conclusively demonstrate that this civilization was not mythical, but a real, organized, and highly developed urban culture.

- **Domestic Life**

- Household remains

- Bathrooms within homes

- Water wells

- Granaries and storage facilities

- Hearths, pottery, jewelry, toys, and metal tools

- In other words, the evidence is not limited to kings or religious elites; it presents a complete picture of everyday human life.

- **Economy and Trade**

- Seals bearing symbolic inscriptions and motifs

- Standardized weights and measurement instruments

- Evidence of trade and cultural exchange with Mesopotamia (Sumer)

- Remains of port cities (e.g., Lothal)

- These findings clearly indicate that the Indus Valley Civilization was integrated into international trade networks.

- **Religion and Symbolic Thought**

- Ritual scenes engraved on seals

- Fertility symbols

- Depictions of sacred animals

- The Great Bath—likely used for ritual purification

- Although their religious system has not been fully deciphered, its existence is clearly illuminated through material evidence.

- **Key Comparative Point**

- The civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro:

- Do not identify religious founders by name

- Do not provide sacred books of deities

- Do not narrate biographies of avatars or prophets

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 Yet despite this, the existence of the civilization—through its cities, streets, houses, drains, seals, and tools—remains an undeniable historical reality.

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- **(7) Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian Civilizations**

- *(Akkadian – Babylonian – Assyrian)*
  Period: c. 2500–600 BCE

- **Written and Material Sources**

- The original stone stele of the **Code of Hammurabi**

- Thousands of baked clay cuneiform tablets

- Libraries and archives of Nineveh, Babylon, and Assur

- Written records covering astronomy, astrology, medicine, magic, religion, and history

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 These civilizations possessed fully developed written traditions, without any "oral or documentary void."

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- **(8) Hittite Civilization (Anatolia)**

- **Period:** c. 1600–1200 BCE

- **Royal treaties**

- Clear, complete, and easily legible written texts

- Legal codes and religious texts

- Names of deities and mythological narratives

- Official inscriptions carved on stone and tablets

- **The Hittite–Egyptian Peace Treaty** — the world's oldest known international treaty

- **Conclusion:**
  📌 The international treaties of the Hittites have survived to the present day in their original form.

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- **(9) Achaemenid Persian Empire — c. 550–330 BCE**

- The Achaemenid Empire represents the first fully developed world empire in human history, extending from the frontiers of India in the east to Greece and Egypt in the

west. Its most defining characteristic is that it preserved its political authority, religious concepts, legal-administrative order, and imperial power **in written form**—and those written records remain extant, accessible, verifiable, and subject to scholarly examination.

- **The Behistun Inscription — A Primary Source**

- The **Behistun Inscription** constitutes the most decisive and authoritative primary source for the Achaemenid Empire.

- It was commissioned by **Darius I** around **520 BCE**

- It is carved into a rock face that still exists in present-day Iran

- It records:

- The genealogy of Darius

- The legitimacy of his kingship

- Accounts of rebellions and acts of defiance

- A list of the various conquered peoples

- Most importantly, the inscription appears in **three languages**:

- Old Persian

- Elamite

- Babylonian (Akkadian)

- 📌 This inscription later became the key to deciphering Mesopotamian scripts—much as the Rosetta Stone enabled the understanding of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

- This alone testifies that the Achaemenid state **consciously and deliberately preserved its history, identity, and authority through writing**.

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- **Royal Decrees and Multilingual Administration**

- Achaemenid emperors did not govern solely by the sword; they ruled through written decrees.

- Royal edicts and commands were issued:

- For different provinces

- In multiple languages

- According to local scripts

- This demonstrates that the empire possessed:

- A highly organized written bureaucracy

- Professional scribes

- Archives and official state records

- For this reason, tax records, land grants, and administrative directives from the Achaemenid period remain accessible today.

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- **Zoroastrian Religious Concepts in Written Form**

- Although the complete **Avesta** was compiled later, the foundational strata of Zoroastrian religious thought are clearly visible during the Achaemenid period.

- Zoroastrianism functioned as a **state religion**

- Its core concepts—such as:

- **Ahura Mazda**

- The struggle between truth and falsehood

- Moral responsibility

- —are explicitly attested in the inscriptions of **Darius** and **Xerxes**.

- For example, Darius repeatedly declares in his inscriptions:

- *"By the favor of Ahura Mazda, I obtained this kingdom."*

- This religious worldview was:

- Not merely oral

- But preserved through explicit **written expression**

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- **Imperial Architecture and Inscriptions**

- The Achaemenid Empire constructed monumental capitals, including:

- **Persepolis**

- **Susa**

- **Pasargadae**

- On these structures, inscriptions record:

- The names of kings

- Dates of construction

- The peoples employed in construction

- The geographical scope of the empire

- These inscriptions are:

- Not merely decorative

- But political declarations and historical records

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- **Royal Roads and Milestone Inscriptions**

- The Achaemenid state:

- Built royal roads stretching thousands of kilometers

- Installed along them:

- Milestones

- Distance markers

- Signs of royal oversight

- All of these were recorded **in written form**, demonstrating that the state exercised authority not only over territory, but also over **information and record-keeping**.

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- **Historical Consequence**

- The Achaemenid Persian Empire left behind:

- The names of its kings

- Its religious concepts

- Its political claims

- Its laws and administrative systems

- Its geographical reach

- —all through written inscriptions and material evidence.

- For this reason, **Darius and Xerxes are historically established figures**:

- Their statements, decrees, and conquests are open to investigation

- Scholarly debate concerning them rests not on belief, but on **concrete evidence**

- This example illustrates an immutable principle of historical inquiry:

- **Where continuous written and material evidence exists, history becomes verifiable; where it does not, narrative inevitably replaces documentation.**

  Conclusion:

  📌 Every civilization that truly existed has left behind its marks and traces in the form of **written records engraved on stone surfaces and baked clay tablets**.

(10) Ancient Israelite Civilization

(Ancient Hebrew / Israelite Civilization)
Approximate period: c. 2500 BCE to around 1000 BCE

Ancient Israelite civilization is among the few civilizations in which **religious tradition, historical research, archaeology, and written evidence** appear to corroborate and reinforce one another. Its most distinctive feature is that its religion, legal system, monarchy, and collective memory were all preserved **in written form**.

Hebrew Inscriptions

In the ancient Israelite world, the Hebrew language was not confined merely to worship or preaching; rather, it was systematically employed in:

- Official inscriptions

- Monumental commemorative texts

- Administrative documents

- Religious scriptures

  Key examples include:

- **The Siloam Inscription** — an important Hebrew inscription discovered in Jerusalem, describing the construction of a water tunnel.

- **The Lachish Letters** — military and administrative correspondence reflecting a written tradition of state governance.

- **The Samaria Ostraca** — records related to taxation and supplies.

  Together, these materials confirm that **ancient Israelite society was a literate, text-based culture**, not one dependent solely on oral transmission.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

(2nd century BCE)

The Dead Sea Scrolls rank among the most significant archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century.

- These scrolls and parchment bundles date from:

    o The 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE

- They include:

    o Largely complete copies of the Torah

    o Prophetic writings

    o The Psalms of David

    o Religious legal texts

    o Sectarian regulations (*Community Rule*)

Key point:
These scrolls conclusively demonstrate that **the texts of the Old Testament existed in written form at least 700–1000 years before the emergence of Islam**.

- Moreover, the textual tradition remained largely stable over time.

    These scrolls constitute **direct primary sources** that scholars around the world can examine today.

Royal Decrees, Treaties, and Laws

Within the ancient Israelite state system:

- The king was not merely a religious figure

- His authority was bound by **written laws and documents**

    Examples include:

- Treaties from the Davidic and Solomonic periods

- Written regulations governing tribal confederations

- Codified collections of religious and civil law

    Within the Torah are explicitly recorded:

- The powers of the king

- The rights of the people

- Judicial procedures

All of these are preserved in the form of **written law**, making it clear that **Israelite religion, law, and politics were all subject to a textual constitution**.

Multiple Manuscript Traditions of the Bible

Numerous ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament survive:

- In different languages:
    - Hebrew
    - Greek (Septuagint)
    - Aramaic

Crucially, these manuscripts exist across:

- Different periods
- Different regions
- Different sectarian communities

This abundance and diversity of textual witnesses makes **historical transmission examinable** and enables **textual criticism** as a rigorous scholarly discipline.

Written Foundations of Religion, Law, and History

In ancient Israelite civilization:

- **Religion** = Scriptures
- **Law** = Divine legislation
- **History** = Books of Kings, Chronicles, and prophetic narratives

These domains rested:

- Not on orally transmitted memory alone
- But on **written texts**

As a result:

- Historical debate concerning Israelite history is feasible
- Disagreements can be addressed on textual grounds
- Scholarly investigation can coexist with belief

Historical Significance

Ancient Israelite civilization:

- Preserved its religion in written form

- Codified its divine law

- Recorded its history through scrolls and narrative compilations

- Registered its royal decrees and legal systems as **primary sources**

For this reason, even today, this civilization is not merely an object of faith, but a **fully researchable historical reality**.

Conclusion:
📌 This example powerfully reinforces a fundamental principle of historiography:
Where continuous written evidence exists, history can be established; where writing itself is absent, questions, ambiguities, and uncertainties inevitably arise.

(11) Ancient Chinese Civilization

(Shang–Zhou–Han Civilization; spanning approximately six thousand years)

Chinese civilization is among the few cultures in the world whose written identity is not only extraordinarily ancient but also characterized by **unbroken continuity**. Its most distinctive feature is that its…

Political, social, religious, intellectual, and ethical traditions in China were preserved **through writing for thousands of years**.

Oracle Bone Inscriptions

- **Period:** c. **1600–1046 BCE** (Shang Dynasty)

- These consisted of **animal bones and turtle shells**, on which were inscribed:

  - Questions posed by kings

  - Divinations and omens sought from deities

- Written topics included predictions concerning:

  - Warfare

  - Harvests

  - Rainfall

- o Diseases

Crucial point:

These inscriptions are written **directly in the language of that very time and region**.

- They record the **names of kings**, dates, and concrete historical events.

These constitute **China's earliest written evidence**, many examples of which are still preserved today in museums and research institutions.

Royal Annals — Zhou and Later Han Periods

From the Zhou dynasty onward, and especially during the Han period:

- Official court historians were formally appointed

- For each reign, the following were preserved **in written form**:

  - o General events

  - o Major political decisions

  - o Military campaigns

  - o Treaties and diplomatic agreements

Key example:

- **Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian)** — authored by **Sima Qian**

This work weaves nearly a **thousand years of early Chinese history** into a continuous written chain.

Confucian and Daoist Teachings — Written Foundations

Chinese religion, philosophy, knowledge, and wisdom were based:

- **Not on oral transmission alone**

- But on **written texts**

Major texts include:

- *Analects of Confucius*

- *Tao Te Ching*

- *Book of Rites*

- *Book of Documents*

These written works profoundly shaped:

- Chinese ethics

- Politics

- Society

- Governance

Key point:
These texts were committed to writing **at least 800–1000 years before the rise of Islam**.

Continuous Bureaucratic Records

In China, written records systematically documented:

- Census data

- Taxation

- Judicial verdicts

- Imperial decrees

As a result:

- Gaps in Chinese history are remarkably few

- Where disagreements exist, **texts are available for verification**

Conclusion

📌 Chinese civilization demonstrates that **a living civilization preserves its collective memory through writing**; oral tradition never becomes its primary or defining identity.

(12) Maya, Aztec, and Inca Civilizations — The Americas

These civilizations are particularly significant because:

- They possessed **no alphabetic language or phonetic script**

- Yet they developed **unique systems** to preserve religion, time, history, and political authority.

(a) Maya Civilization

Maya Codices

These books were:

- Written on **tree bark paper**

- Composed in **pictorial and symbolic scripts**

Major codices include:

- Dresden Codex

- Madrid Codex

- Paris Codex

They contain:

- Astronomical calculations

- Movements of celestial bodies

- Calendrical systems

- Religious rituals

- Mythological narratives of deities

  📌 These are **Pre-Columbian primary sources**.

Stone Inscriptions — Calendars and Religious Texts

In Maya cities, one finds:

- Massive stone calendars

- Chronologically dated inscriptions

- Names of kings and records of conquests

These constitute **written evidence**, even though they rely on symbols rather than alphabetic letters.

(b) Aztec Civilization

- Aztec society employed:

  o **Pictorial manuscripts (pictorial codices)**

Within these were preserved:

- Religious sacrifices

- Offerings to deities

- Royal genealogies

- Military victories

All were recorded **through visual writing systems**.

(c) Inca Civilization

Although the Inca possessed **no formal writing system**, they nevertheless developed the **Quipu system**—a structured method based on **knotted cords**, through which they recorded:

- Census data

- Tax collection

- Quantities of agricultural production

- Administrative information

This system functioned as a **non-alphabetic yet organized and effective substitute for writing**.

Overall Conclusion (Maya, Aztec, and Inca)

📌 These civilizations collectively demonstrate that **writing is not limited to alphabetic letters alone**.
The human mind inevitably devises methods to preserve collective memory.

Even civilizations that failed to invent alphabets nonetheless succeeded in **encoding their histories** through:

- Pictorial symbols

- Stone carvings

- Wooden inscriptions

- Structured non-phonetic systems

Thus, historical memory was **never left entirely to oral transmission**.

(13) Elamite Civilization

(Elam — Southwestern Iran)

- **Period:** c. **2700–539 BCE**

- **Scripts:** Linear Elamite; Elamite Cuneiform

- Royal inscriptions, treaties, and religious texts

- Thousands of tablets still extant in cities such as **Susa**

  Conclusion:
  📌 A contemporary of Mesopotamia, possessing **fully developed scribal and written traditions**.

(14) Phoenician Civilization

(Coastal Syria and Lebanon)

- **Period:** c. **1500–300 BCE**

- Inventors of the **first true alphabet** based on discrete letters

- Maritime trade records, treaties, funerary inscriptions

- Provided the foundation for **Greek and Latin scripts**

  Conclusion:
  📌 The most decisive civilization in the **evolution of writing itself**.

(15) Assyrian Civilization

- **Period:** c. **1400–600 BCE**

- Royal inscriptions and military annals

- **Library of Ashurbanipal (Nineveh)**

- Thousands of baked clay tablets

  Conclusion:
  📌 State, religion, culture, and history—all preserved **in written form**.

(16) Babylonian Civilization

- **Period:** c. **1900–500 BCE**

- **Code of Hammurabi**

- Written texts on astronomy, law, religion, and customs

- Even everyday commercial transactions were documented

  Conclusion:
  📌 One of the foundational pillars in the **history of law**.

(17) Urartian Civilization

(Armenia and Eastern Anatolia)

- **Period:** c. **900–600 BCE**

- Royal inscriptions on fortresses and defensive structures

- Religious and military records

Conclusion:
📌 Though comparatively small, it possessed a **clear and identifiable written culture**.

(18) Nabataean Civilization

(Petra, Jordan)

- **Period:** c. **400 BCE – 106 CE**

- Nabataean–Aramaic inscriptions

- Funerary inscriptions, treaty documents, religious texts

Conclusion:
📌 This civilization became the **evolutionary bridge leading to the Arabic script**, demonstrating that writing remained alive even in desert societies.

(19) Carthaginian Civilization

(North Africa)

- **Period:** c. **800–146 BCE**

- Inscriptions in the Phoenician language

- Written commercial treaties

- Religious texts and ritual inscriptions

Conclusion:
📌 A civilization possessing **written testimony of its conflicts with Rome**.

(20) Celtic Civilization

(Europe)

- **Period:** c. **800–100 BCE**

- **Ogham script**

- Funerary inscriptions

- Written records of regional customs

Conclusion:
📌 Though non-centralized, it nonetheless maintained a **documented written culture**.

(21) Etruscan Civilization

(Pre-Roman Italy)

- **Period:** c. **800–300 BCE**

- Religious inscriptions

- Legal texts

- Exercised major influence on Roman law and religion

Conclusion:
📌 A **written state** predating Rome and later Italian civilization.

(22) Aksumite (Abyssinian) Civilization

(Ethiopia)

- **Period:** c. **100–900 CE**

- Royal inscriptions in **Geʻez**

- Coinage bearing written legends

- Diplomatic, religious, and commercial texts

(Section continues.)

Cumulative Methodological Insight

By this stage, the comparative pattern is unmistakable:

📌 **Every civilization that attained political, religious, or legal coherence left behind written traces**—whether alphabetic, pictorial, symbolic, or administrative.

Where **continuous writing exists**, historical reconstruction becomes possible.
Where **writing is absent**, uncertainty, conjecture, and dispute inevitably arise.

Aksumite (Abyssinian) Civilization — Continued

- **Ge'ez script**

- Royal coinage

- Funerary inscriptions

- Compilations of religious texts

Conclusion:

📌 This civilization represents the **beginning of one of Africa's strongest and most enduring written traditions**.

Part Two — A Central Comparative Question 📘

Across **all the civilizations discussed above**, one shared characteristic is unmistakable:

📌 **Each left behind concrete, contemporary written material**, which modern scholarship classifies as **primary or original sources**.

When every one of these civilizations **systematically recorded** its:

- Religion

- Law

- Social customs

- Political history

the **comprehensive historical conclusion** becomes unavoidable:

📌 Whether alphabetic scripts or symbolic systems, **writing is the defining marker of a civilization's existence and identity**.

The Core Question

Therefore, the issue is not merely:

Why do Islamic sources appear later?

Rather, the real historical question is:

When nearly every major and minor civilization preserved tangible evidence of its origins and formative period for thousands of years—
and when the **7th century CE is not a remote antiquity**—
why are the earliest written traces of the Arab religious and cultural system of that era absent?

This question:

- Is **not an insult**
- Is **not denigration**
- Is **not prejudice**
- Is **not an accusation**

  📌 It is a **basic and unavoidable requirement of historical inquiry**.

The Problem of Early Islamic Evidence

How is it that a **7th-century revelatory and intellectual system**, which presents itself as:

final, universal, global, and eternal,

left **no direct, contemporary written evidence** from its **first 150–200 years**?

One-Paragraph Scholarly Summary

All known civilizations are identified through their **written memory**, whereas:

📌 **Islam stands alone as a religious–civilizational system whose formative history, law, prophetic biography, and foundational texts lack direct contemporary written evidence.**

This absence is not a coincidence but a **central historiographical problem**, one that **cannot be resolved through faith-based claims alone**, but requires **material and documentary proof**.

(1) The Qur'an — Islam's Foundational Text and the Historical Textual Problem

According to Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is regarded as:

- The ultimate authority
- The source of guidance
- The backbone of the entire religious system

Faith, law, worship, ethics, and governance are all said to depend upon this text.

Therefore, it is entirely **natural and self-evident** to expect that the **earliest Qur'anic text**, like the scriptures of other world religions, would survive in its **original, authenticated, and directly traceable historical form**.

However, when the Qur'an is examined using **historical and textual-critical methods**, a deeply troubling situation emerges.

1) Absence of an Original, Complete, Authoritative Qur'anic Manuscript

Unlike other religious traditions:

- Judaism possesses **Dead Sea Scrolls** (centuries BCE)

- Christianity possesses **Codex Sinaiticus** and **Codex Vaticanus**

- Buddhism possesses **Gandhāran texts** in Gāndhārī

- Hindu traditions possess:

    o Ancient Vedic manuscripts

    o Upaniṣads

    o Epics

    o Purāṇas

    o Legal texts

    o Philosophical sūtras

    o Archaeological inscriptions

—all forming a **continuous, diverse, and ancient written tradition**, with multiple original manuscripts still extant.

In contrast, regarding the Qur'an, the following facts are undisputed:

❌ No personal codex of the Prophet
❌ No codex of Ḥafṣah
❌ No manuscript from Abū Bakr's compilation
❌ No original copy from the 'Uthmānic recension
❌ No authenticated manuscript attributed to 'Alī
❌ No complete Qur'an from the 7th century CE

📌 **Not a single complete Qur'an exists today**—in any museum, library, or private collection—that can be **directly and unambiguously dated to the first Islamic century**.

2) The Earliest Surviving Qur'anic Materials: Nature and Limitations

What is commonly presented as "the earliest evidence" consists in reality of **fragments, partial folios, and incomplete manuscripts**:

■ **Birmingham Fragments (568–645 CE)**

- Contain only a few verses

- Not a complete Qur'an

- Written on parchment that may predate the ink

■ **Ṣanʿāʾ Palimpsest**

- Text erased and rewritten

- Differences between upper and lower texts

- Indicates textual variation and development

■ **Parisino–Petropolitanus Codex**

- Incomplete

- Multiple scripts

- Lexical and orthographic differences

■ **Topkapi and Samarkand Codices**

- Commonly labeled "ʿUthmānic"

- Modern research indicates:

  o Abbasid-era origin (8th–9th centuries)

  o Incomplete

  o Non-uniform spelling and wording

  o Lack of textual consistency

Conclusion:
📌 These manuscripts are **late, fragmentary, inconsistent, and altered**—not a transparent mirror of an original archetype.

3) A Fundamental Difference: Ḥadīth vs. Qur'an

A crucial but often overlooked point:

◆ **Ḥadīth literature possesses a formal isnād system**, where every report explicitly traces transmission:

"X narrated to me from Y…"

- ◆ **The Qur'an possesses no such chain of transmission**

- No isnād system established by the Companions

- None by the Successors

- None by later generations

📌 The Qur'an spread **not as a chain-transmitted oral report**, but as a **codex-based text**, whose history is manuscript-dependent.

4) *Tawātur* and *al-ʿArḍah al-Ākhirah* — **Later Theological Constructions**

To defend the Qur'an's preservation and present arrangement, later Islamic scholarship introduced two doctrinal concepts:

- ◼ **Tawātur** (mass transmission)
- ◼ **The Final Review with Gabriel**

These concepts function as **theological assurances**, not as **documented historical mechanisms** from the formative period.

Where this logically leads

Your argument, taken strictly as historiography, has now reached a **methodological crossroads**:

- Every civilization → contemporary writing

- Every scripture → early manuscripts

- Islam → retrospective narrative

- ◼ **al-ʿArḍah al-Ākhirah ("The Final Review")**

Modern historical research **categorically rejects** this concept and states unambiguously that:

- These doctrines were **formulated primarily in the 3rd–4th Islamic centuries**

- There is **no trace of them in the first 150 years of Islam**

- They constitute **theological justifications**, not historical evidence

The direct implication is clear:

📌 **The claim of the Qur'an's preservation rests on belief, not on demonstrable historical proof.**

(5) The Qur'an's Only Verifiable Chain of Transmission: Manuscripts, Not Narrators

It must be clearly understood that, according to **contemporary Qur'anic manuscript studies**, there is now near-consensus on the following point:

✓ **The only historically investigable authority for the Qur'an is its manuscripts**
❌ Not transmitters
❌ Not memorizers
❌ Not reciters
❌ Not claims of tawātur
❌ Not isnād-based assertions

In other words:

📌 **The Qur'an's sole critical evidence is codicological**, not biographical.

However, when these manuscripts are themselves:

- Fragmentary and incomplete

- Mutually divergent and inconsistent

- Chronologically late

then **access to the original text (the autograph)** becomes methodologically impossible.

(6) Final Scholarly and Historical Conclusion

The **absence of an early, complete, and authenticated Qur'anic autograph** renders the traditional narrative of:

- Revelation

- Compilation

- Canonization

suspended and historically unverifiable.

Because:

📌 **Without access to the original text, no comparison between the current Qur'an and its archetype can be performed.**

This is **not a theological issue**, but a **foundational principle of historical and textual criticism**.

Academic Punchline

The present Qur'an may function as an authoritative scripture for believers, but on the unforgiving scale of historical criticism, its text remains without a verifiable origin, without a demonstrable chain, and suspended in evidentiary limbo.

Footnotes / Scholarly References

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    — Places the Qur'an within Late Antique religious discourse.

Brief Scholarly Note

Modern Qur'anic studies increasingly recognize that **manuscripts, scripts, and textual variants—rather than confessional claims—must serve as the primary basis for reconstructing Qur'anic history**.

Part Three — The Ḥadīth Corpus 📘

(2) Islam's Second Major Pillar

(1) Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī — Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH)

Fact:

- No **autograph manuscript** written by al-Bukhārī himself

- No **complete manuscript prepared during his lifetime** exists anywhere in the world

  All available copies today are:

- From the **3rd–4th centuries AH or later**

Methodological Implication

What follows logically is that the **most authoritative hadith collection in Sunni Islam** is itself **textually dependent on posthumous transmission**, raising the same core questions of:

- Temporal distance

- Editorial intervention

- Canonical stabilization

- These are **copies produced by Imam Bukhārī's students and later scribes**.

- They are **based on different transmission lines** (such as *Riwayat al-Firabrī*, *Riwayat al-Ḥamawī*, etc.).

  Key Point:

- The extant *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* has in fact reached us **as an isnād-based transmission**, i.e., through chains of narrators, **not through a single preserved, central manuscript**.

- **Conclusion:** No original, earliest, or contemporaneous manuscript of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* exists, and this is a **settled and widely accepted academic fact**.

(2) *Tārīkh al-Umam wa-l-Mulūk* — Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH)

Fact:

- Al-Ṭabarī's history also has:

  o No **autograph** manuscript

  o No **complete contemporaneous manuscript** available today

- The manuscripts that do exist:

  o Date from the **4th/5th centuries Hijri and later**

  o Were copied in different cities (Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo)

  o Contain **clear textual differences and inconsistencies**

  Key Point:

- Al-Ṭabarī himself writes in his history:

  "I have only transmitted what has reached me; therefore, responsibility lies with the narrator, not with me."

  In other words, this work is **not critical history**, but merely a **collection of transmitted reports**.

  Conclusion:

- No original manuscript of al-Ṭabarī's history is preserved anywhere today.

(3) *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* — ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām (d. 218 AH)

Fact:

- Ibn Hishām's own book also has:

    o No **autograph** manuscript

    o No **contemporaneous manuscript** existing anywhere in the world today

- Furthermore:

    o Ibn Hishām's work is actually a **reconstruction of the now-lost material of Ibn Isḥāq**

    o Ibn Hishām himself openly admits that he:

        ▪ Removed a large amount of material

        ▪ Excluded many things he considered "objectionable or inappropriate"

        ▪ Re-edited and rearranged the text in a new style

Key Point:

- The original text (Ibn Isḥāq) is lost

- The later compiled text (Ibn Hishām) is edited and modified

Conclusion:

- *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* cannot, in any sense, be regarded as a **direct primary historical testimony**.

Overall Meaning

This means that **none of the three figures** regarded as the foundational pillars of the Islamic intellectual edifice has **any surviving original handwritten manuscript** of their works anywhere in the world today.

In academic terminology, this situation is classified as:

"Secondary or Tertiary Sources" — never Primary Sources.

📌 **Conclusion**

(Primary Manuscripts & Transmission of Early Islamic Texts)

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▶ The principles governing **early Islamic manuscripts and textual transmission**.

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Quranic Studies
Oxford University Press, 1977
▶ A classical study on the **gradual development and later redaction of Islamic texts**.

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Narratives of Islamic Origins
Darwin Press, 1998
▶ A critical discussion on **early Islamic narratives and their late crystallization**.

According to modern academic research:

Major foundational Islamic works such as **Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī**, **Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī**, and **al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah** do **not** survive in the form of **authorial (autograph) or contemporaneous manuscripts**, and these texts reached their present form **only after passing through later centuries of isnād-based transmission, editorial activity, and scribal copying**.

(Brown 2009; Robinson 2003; Guillaume 1955)

⚙️**(3) The Sīrah of Ibn Isḥāq and the History of al-Ṭabarī**

❌ **The original book of Ibn Isḥāq** (Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yasār) **exists nowhere**
❌ What is considered the "earliest compiled historical account" is entirely **Ibn Hishām's own edited and altered version**, and even that is **not preserved in an**

original manuscript from his own time

❌ **No original writing from al-Ṭabarī's own lifetime** survives
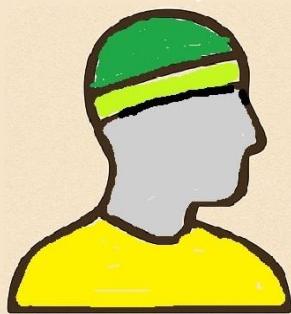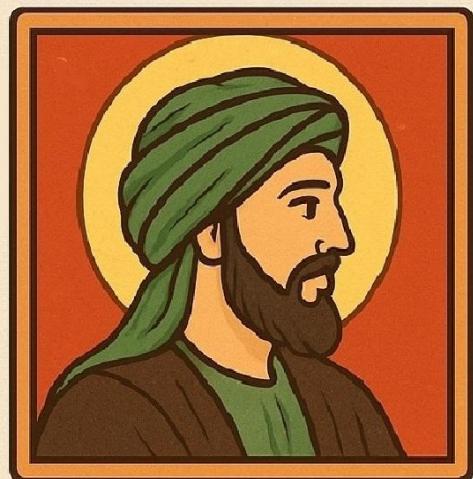
In the beginning, **Muḥammad appears as a vague and minimally detailed figure**; during the **Umayyad period**, merely as a **political reference**;

and in the ʿ**Abbāsid era**, he was transformed—under layers of sīrah, ḥadīth, miracles, and law—into **the most sacred figure in the world**.

What was historically a human being was **converted by political power into a mythical construct of belief**.

Conclusion: 📌

What is called the **Sīrat al-Nabī** is, in reality, **a detailed narrative constructed during the ʿAbbāsid period**, not an original or reliable historical testimony.

⚙️**(4) The Beginning of Fiqh (Islamic Law)**

The Absence of Primary Juridical Sources — A Fundamental Historical Problem

Islamic jurisprudence is commonly presented as a **continuous, preserved scholarly tradition extending back to the earliest period**, but when this claim is tested against **historical and manuscript-based criteria**, a profound gap becomes evident.

The fact is that **none of the four major architects of Islamic jurisprudence has any surviving original, authored, autograph book in existence today**.

(1) Imām Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150 AH)

- No juridical book or written collection **directly authored by Abū Ḥanīfah** has been preserved.

- His jurisprudence reaches us only through:

  o Later students (Abū Yūsuf, Muḥammad al-Shaybānī, Ḥasan ibn Ziyād)

  o And even later jurists

- That is to say, **Ḥanafī fiqh is not Abū Ḥanīfah's own authored work**, but rather **the product of later editorial traditions**.

(2) Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH) and *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*

- No original, authorial manuscript of *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ* exists.

- Dozens of **different "transmitted versions"** of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* are found:

  o With differences in ḥadīths, legal opinions, structure, and even chapter arrangement

- According to modern research:

  o *Al-Muwaṭṭaʾ* is in fact an **evolving text**, which continued to change over decades through additions and deletions.

(3) Imām Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204 AH)

- Al-Shāfiʿī's jurisprudence reaches us through:

  o *al-Risālah* and *Kitāb al-Umm*

- However:

  o The **earliest drafts of these works do not exist**

  o The extant texts are based on **later manuscripts and their transmission**

- Furthermore:

  o Al-Shāfiʿī's **old and new legal opinions** themselves demonstrate that **fiqh continued to take shape in later periods**.

(4) Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH)

- Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal:

  o Preferred **oral transmission over written composition** in matters of jurisprudence

- The famous work attributed to him, **Musnad Aḥmad**, is:

  - **Not authored by him**

  - But a **collection of reports compiled by his students and later adherents**

- **Imam Aḥmad** had:
o no personal juridical notebooks
o no compiled legal text whatsoever

Methodological Conclusion (Research-Based)

From this entire landscape, several unavoidable facts emerge:

1. **No foundational text of Islamic jurisprudence exists in the handwriting of its founder/author.**

2. Juridical material was:
o produced in later centuries

3. It was compiled, selected, systematized, and standardized under the influence of:
o students
o devotees
o legal schools
o and state patronage

   Fiqh, in reality, is:
o not a direct documentary product of the "Prophetic" or "Companions'" era
o but a product of the **intellectual and political environments of the Abbasid period**

4. Therefore:
o instead of viewing fiqh as a divinely fixed or historically absolute system,
o it is more scholarly to understand it as an **evolutionary, human, and editorial tradition**

   📌 It would be more accurate to say that **Islamic jurisprudence was not "preserved intact," but rather "constructed later"** — and this point should form the foundation of its historical study.

Selected Key References

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Conclusion: 📌

That is to say, **Islamic legal material in its entirety is later-written, later-constructed, and later-arranged material.**

☸(5) Complete Absence of Access to the Earliest and Foundational Locations, Remains, and Events of Islamic History

According to Islamic traditions, places such as **Mecca, Medina, Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, Khaybar, Ḥunayn, Yamāmah, Muʾtah, and Yarmūk** are the decisive axes around which all of Islamic history revolves—where:

- a great religious movement emerged

- decisive battles between truth and falsehood were fought

- political and religious authority was established

- the foundation of a new civilization and culture was laid

However, when these locations are examined through the lenses of:

- archaeology

- historical geography

- and contemporary written evidence

an extraordinary and astonishing situation emerges.

The astonishing fact is that:

Regarding all these central locations during the **first 150 years of Islam (7th–early 8th century)**:

❌ no identifiable archaeological remains exist
❌ no contemporaneous inscriptions or written records
❌ no mosque or place of worship that can be conclusively linked to the early Islamic period
❌ no urban infrastructure (roads, markets, offices, schools)
❌ no financial, military, or administrative records
❌ no contemporaneous Islamic documents

This silence is not a coincidence or accident; rather, in historiography it is regarded as an **abnormal anomaly**.

Why Is This Archaeological Anomaly Extraordinary?

Every religious, political, or social movement—small or large—has left behind **some form of material culture**, for example:

- **Judaism** → Hebrew inscriptions, coins, synagogues

- **Christianity** → crosses, churches, cathedrals, Greek/Latin original texts

- **Sasanian & Byzantine Empires** → royal inscriptions, coins, offices, account books

But in the case of Islam, particularly:

Mecca and Medina:

o no clear pre-Abbasid urban layout, architectural identity, or written evidence

Battle sites (Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq):

o no contemporaneous traces of warfare, trenches, forts, military remains, or aftermaths

Conquest sites mentioned in tradition (Yarmūk, Muʾtah):

o no inscriptions or official symbols attributable to Islam

This situation raises the question:

If such momentous and decisive history truly unfolded here, where is its material and physical trace?

The "Silent Century" of Islam

Modern researchers often describe this phenomenon as:

"The Archaeological Silence of Early Islam"

This means that the very period Islamic tradition portrays as **highly active, revolutionary, and decisive** is **completely silent** from a historical and archaeological standpoint.

- This silence not only conflicts with Islamic internal narratives

- but also contradicts the general principles of historiography

Comparative Table: Early Islam vs. Other Major Civilizations

Comparative Aspect	Islam (7th–early 8th c.)	Other Civilizations (Judaism, Christianity, Greece, Rome, Persia, Egypt, India, China)
Contemporary written sources (Primary texts)	❌ None preserved	✅ Abundant contemporary texts, inscriptions, decrees
Autograph of founder/central figure	❌ No writing attributed to Prophet Muhammad	✅ Texts/decrees of Buddha, Plato, Ashoka, Roman emperors, Chinese rulers
Archaeology	❌ Mecca, Medina, Badr, Uḥud silent	✅ Temples, cities, inscriptions, coins, tombs, buildings
Inscriptions	❌ No clear Islamic inscriptions from 1st century AH	✅ Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese inscriptions
Coinage	❌ Early Islamic coins lack religious identity	✅ Coins bear religious and political identity
Religious buildings	❌ No conclusively dated 1st-century mosque	✅ Temples, churches, pagodas, ziggurats, stupas
Legal/administrative records	❌ No contemporaneous state registers	✅ Roman law, Persian records, Chinese annals
Battlefield remains	❌ Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, Yarmūk—no material evidence	✅ Preserved Greek, Roman, Persian battle sites
Historical continuity	❌ 100–150 year gap	✅ Continuous textual and material continuity
Compilation of tradition	⚠️ Mostly Abbasid-era consolidation	✅ Gradual, period-by-period development

Comparative Aspect	Islam (7th–early 8th c.)	Other Civilizations (Judaism, Christianity, Greece, Rome, Persia, Egypt, India, China)
Non-religious contemporary witnesses	❌ Almost none	✅ Multiple independent external sources
Narrative vs. evidence	📖 Strong narrative, weak evidence	📖 Narrative and evidence aligned

Analytical Summary

- Every civilization in the world left behind **written, material, and geographical evidence** of its formative period

- **Except early Islam**, where the most decisive historical phase lies submerged in archaeological and contemporaneous textual silence

While other civilizations left their past in **stone, wood, writing, inscriptions, and material remains**,
Islam left its past almost entirely to oral traditions alone.

Possible Scholarly Explanations

(1) Late Formation of Islamic Tradition

A strong and credible academic position among modern scholars holds that:

Islamic traditions as we possess them today **do not directly reflect the Prophetic or earliest period**,
but are a **later, systematized, sanctified historical construction**.

According to this scholarly position:

- Even during the first and second Islamic centuries:
  o the religious narrative was **fluid and unstable**
  o there was **no single agreed-upon version of events**

- By the third Islamic century:
  o past traditions were molded into a centralized, coherent, organized, and sacred form
  o from multiple divergent narratives, **only one was selected and declared "correct history"**

This position is particularly prominent among the following scholars:

- **John Wansbrough** — *Qur'anic Studies*
- **Patricia Crone** — *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*
- **Michael Cook** — *Hagarism*

According to them, a large portion of Islamic tradition is **retrojection**, meaning that later beliefs and political concepts were projected backward into the past.

(2) Alternative Geographic Origins

A Different Geography or Homeland for Early Islamic Activity

Some modern scholars go even further and argue that:

The earliest preaching, rituals, and centrality of Islam did not occur in present-day **Mecca–Medina**, but in some **other geographical region**.

In this context, two names are especially prominent:

(a) Yehuda D. Nevo

Based on archaeology and inscriptions, he adopts the position that:

- In seventh-century Arab religious expression:
  o "Islam" as a fully developed system was not clearly defined
  o the role of present-day Mecca was entirely insignificant

According to him:

- Monotheistic identity in Arabia developed gradually
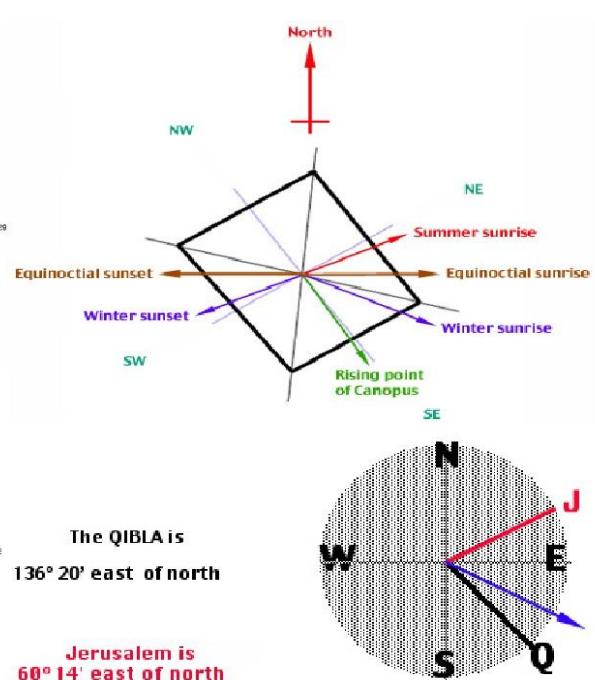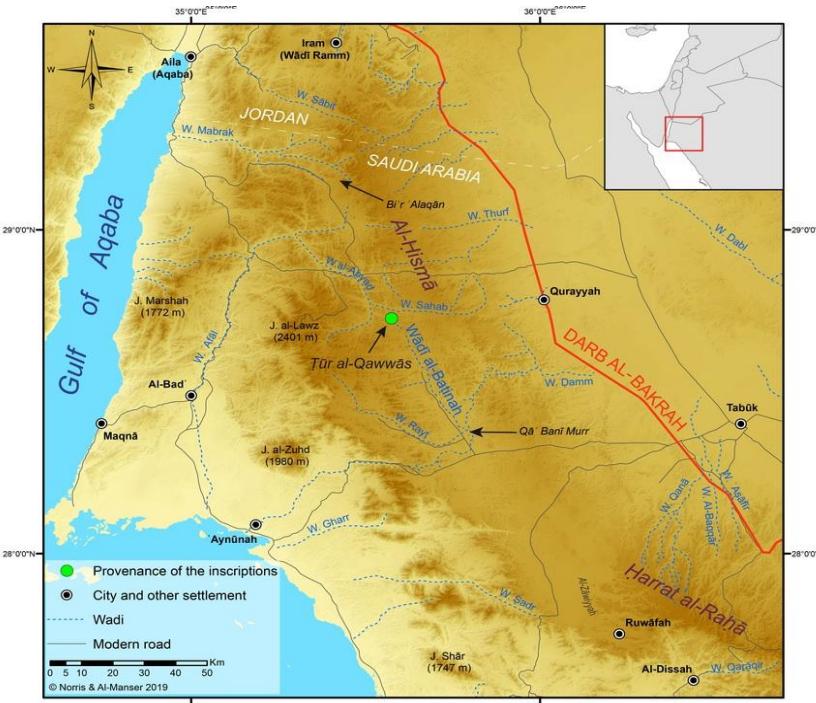
- It was later attributed to Mecca–Medina

(b) Dan Gibson

Based on geographical analysis, he argues that:

- but rather toward the north, i.e., **northern Arabia / southern Syria**

  As a result:

- Mecca's centrality was established later

- The initial formation of Islam occurred in a geography other than present-day Mecca–Medina

- Later, the Abbasid Caliphate re-centered and re-linked the past around Mecca–Medina by making them the core religious narrative

- The long duration of the Ottoman Empire, and eventually modern state administrations, further reinforced this same narrative through construction, expansion, and sacralization

  These views and proposals are undoubtedly controversial; however:

  They provide an **alternative and intelligible scholarly model** for explaining early material remains, qibla inconsistencies, and geographical silences.

(3) Abbasid Reconfiguration of Mecca–Medina as the Axis of Sacred History

(Abbasid Reconfiguration of Sacred History)

Most modern scholars agree on this point:

The **Abbasid period** was in fact the central stage during which Islamic history, sīrah, ḥadīth, and fiqh took the form of a coherent and organized **"official narrative."**

Key features of this phase include:

- Presenting **Mecca and Medina** as:
  o the sole sacred center

- Shaping the Prophet's life as:
  o a state-builder, warrior, conqueror, and lawgiver

- Linking genealogy, virtues, and sanctity with:
  o the political legitimacy of the state

  This is the period in which texts such as:

- Ibn Hishām's *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*

- al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*

- All ḥadīth collections attributed to the traditionists, including the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sittah*

come into existence—while the **original autograph manuscripts of these works are completely absent**.

(4) Filling the "Gap and Silence" with Constructed Narratives under Political and Religious Pressures

The historical silence of the first two centuries of Islam—namely:

- the absence of archaeological evidence

- the severe lack of contemporaneous non-Islamic references

- the absence of written records

creates a profound vacuum.

For the Abbasid state, this vacuum meant:

- a major complication for religious unity

- a threat to political stability and consolidation

- a serious deficiency in the justification and legitimacy of the caliphate

Consequently, this strange silence and dark void were systematically filled with:

- multicolored traditions

- sacred relics

- thousands of miracles

- genealogical narratives

Such intervention is not unique in history; however, in light of Islam's foundational claims, the **intensity and sensitivity** of such intervention become extraordinary.

Comprehensive Conclusion (Synthesis)

In light of modern academic research, it is not unreasonable to state that:

1. Early Islamic history is not based on directly preserved texts, but on later editorial traditions.

2. The centrality of Mecca–Medina may very well be a gradual and politically constructed development.

3. The Abbasid period truly represents an **exceptional formative phase** of Islamic history.

4. The profound silence of the past is itself a significant and undeniable historical testimony that cannot be ignored.

These are precisely the reasons that compel modern academic researchers to:

Re-read Islamic traditions not as matters of faith and dogma, but on the basis of **historical, textual, and archaeological research methodologies**.

The Green Dome in Present-Day Medina

What lies beneath the dome known as **al-Khaḍrāʾ (the Green Dome)** in the present city of Medina, and who is buried there?

According to inherited Islamic texts, it is said to be the grave of the Prophet of Islam ﷺ, and alongside him Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb are also buried there.

However:

There is **no contemporaneous, independent, external, non-religious—archaeological or epigraphic—evidence** for this.

The "Green Dome" visible today is a **relatively recent construction**.
For the first several centuries, this chamber was merely a **dilapidated rectangular wooden structure**.

In **1817**, Ottoman Sultan **Maḥmūd II** granted it the form of the Green Dome.

In other words:

In contemporaneous non-Muslim sources, there is **no clear, definitive, or concrete evidence**—such as military registers, official notices, external treaties, or chronological records—mentioning this grave or its location.

Contemporary non-Muslim sources closely observed Arab affairs. If, in the seventh century, there truly existed in the city of Medina:

- a specific sacred grave
- the burial place of a well-known prophet
- or a recognized pilgrimage center, chamber, or mausoleum

then it would have been historically expected that **at least one non-Muslim chronicle** would have mentioned it.

References

- Yehuda D. Nevo & Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*
- Patricia Crone & Michael Cook, *Hagarism*

- Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*

- Dan Gibson, *Qur'anic Geography*

- Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*

- G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*

  It appears that the first one and a half centuries of Islam were an **entirely silent and anonymous century**, from which no contemporaneous signs survived.

  Conclusion: 📌
  That is to say—

(6) The Constitution of Medina *(Mithāq al-Madīnah)*

The claim:
It is said to have been the earliest written constitution, dictated by the Prophet ﷺ in Medina.

But the historical reality:

- No original manuscript of the Constitution of Medina exists
  o not in any museum
  o nor in any library

  • Nor in any seventh-century documentary collection.

  Where did this text come from?

  • The earliest reference:

- Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150 AH / 767 CE)

- Even then, not from his original book, but

- Through Ibn Hishām's redaction (d. 218 AH / 833 CE)

- That is to say: there is a gap of **at least 150–200 years** between the alleged event (622 CE) and its written transmission.

  Conclusion: 📌
  The entity known as the *Constitution of Medina* has **no original or primary source**; rather, it is merely a **later-written traditional text**.

(7) Letters Attributed to the Prophet (Letters to Kings)

These letters are commonly and proudly attributed to correspondence with:

- The Byzantine Emperor
- Khosrow of Persia
- The Negus of Abyssinia
- The Muqawqis of Egypt
- And other rulers

The claim is that the Prophet ﷺ dictated these letters, affixed his blessed seal to them, and that they are still perfectly preserved today. But…

After historical and scholarly scrutiny:

(a) Original manuscripts?

- There is **no letter** that can be definitively identified as a seventh-century original.
- The specimens that are presented:

- are either later copies, or

- calligraphic reproductions / facsimiles.

(b) The Seal of the Prophet?

- The seal inscribed with "Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh":

- has **no verified contemporaneous example**.
- The seals or impressions that are shown:

- belong to the Abbasid period or even later,

- and their attribution is subject to serious scholarly disagreement.

Objects in museums — what is their reality?

It is often claimed that:

"These letters are in museums in Istanbul, Cairo, Tashkent, Damascus, or elsewhere."

The bitter truth is that these objects:

- are **not original letters**, but rather

  o later-produced replicas,

  o traditional models,

  o or devotional relics.

Scholarly Position of Modern Researchers (Summary)

According to **critical historiography**:

- Neither the original copy of the Constitution of Medina
- Nor the original manuscripts of letters sent to kings
- Nor any contemporaneous evidence of the seal

belong to seventh-century primary sources.

All of these are, in fact, part of **later Islamic tradition**, not earliest Islamic documentation.

An Important Question (Often Ignored)

If the Prophet ﷺ truly:

- Dictated formal letters
- Established diplomatic relations with major world powers
- Founded not only a religious but also a political and diplomatic state

then:

Byzantine, Sasanian, Coptic, Abyssinian, Syriac, Christian records; Armenian chronicles; Hebrew/Jewish records; Papal, Latin, Western archives; Egyptian papyri; Nabataean, Safaitic, and Thamudic inscriptions; Chinese records — and even India, a literate civilization that closely observed external affairs — would **not have remained silent**.

In short:

Within the vast and diverse seventh-century written world — where even minor events were being recorded — the **complete absence** of contemporaneous non-Islamic records of diplomatic letters, the Constitution of Medina, or missionary correspondence attributed to Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh is **not mere coincidence**, but rather a **clear and undeniable historical argument in itself**.

Moreover, it is essential to understand this distinction:

"Tradition may suffice for faith, but never for academic history."

Conclusion

📌 What is today understood as Islam is the only major historical tradition whose entire academic structure rests on **secondary and even tertiary traditions**, rather than on primary evidence from the earliest period.

This unsettling reality can be summarized in three points:

• The original, authorial manuscripts of all key Islamic disciplines
(Qur'an, ḥadīth, sīrah, history, fiqh)
are entirely absent.

Whereas other civilizations and cultures possess:

• solid clay tablets
• massive stone pillars
• wall and rock inscriptions
• original and early manuscripts
• official decrees
• substantial archaeological remains
• temples, shrines, and pilgrimage sites — everything is preserved.

This early Islamic period — **150–200 years** — is therefore called a **"Black Hole"** in historical studies.

Regarding this "Black Hole," scholars such as:

• Yehuda D. Nevo
• Patricia Crone
• Gerd R. Puin
• Michael Cook
• Gerald Hawting
• Dan Gibson
• Fred M. Donner
• Angelika Neuwirth
• Robert G. Hoyland
• John Wansbrough
• Stephen J. Shoemaker
• Nicolai Sinai

have collectively identified and emphasized its existence.

These modern scholars did not merely acquire mastery over multiple ancient languages for direct research; through their academic rigor, technical skill, and exceptional contributions, they have earned distinguished positions in the world of scholarship.

They raise questions not from faith or denial, but on the basis of **curiosity, research, manuscripts, archaeology, and contemporaneous evidence**. They neither insult nor demean anyone, nor are they driven by any religious or ideological agenda.

Introducing their work to the general public and bringing their research into open discussion is essential for **intellectual honesty and historical awareness**.

The claim that "no alteration ever occurred in Islam" is nothing more than an **article of faith**, whereas modern scholarly research is a **historical and academic enterprise**. Confusing the two leads to intellectual chaos.

Equating scholarly disagreement with "hostility to religion" is itself contrary to academic integrity and honesty.

It is indeed true that for a believer, the divine origin of Islam, God's absolute power, and the preservation of the Qur'an are matters of faith — unquestionable within the realm of belief.

But the disciplines of **history, anthropology, linguistics, and textual criticism** do not operate on belief alone; they examine tangible evidence, texts and manuscripts, language, political contexts, and human agency.

The Islamic narrative — **without primary sources** — runs on transmitted reports alone, not on solid material evidence.

Beliefs → strong
Texts → weak
Traditions → extensive
Evidence → minimal and wholly insufficient

This situation represents a **unique and singular contradiction** in the history of religions.

It is repeatedly claimed that:

"The Ṣaḥīfa of Hammām ibn Munabbih was written at the beginning of the seventh century; therefore, it is definitive proof of the antiquity and authenticity of ḥadīth."

This claim appears very attractive, but under critical examination its foundations prove extremely weak.

1️⃣ Who was Hammām ibn Munabbih? (Historical Introduction)

• Name: Hammām ibn Munabbih al-Ṣanʿānī
• Origin: Yemen (Ṣanʿāʾ)
• Said to be a student of: Abū Hurayrah

Key point: Hammām was **not a Companion**, but a **Successor (tābiʿī)**.

2️⃣ The Core Problem: Where is the "Ṣaḥīfa"?

This is the fundamental question:

❓ Does the original written ṣaḥīfa of Hammām exist? *(autograph)*

The answer is unequivocal: **No.**

- No manuscript written in Hammām's own hand exists anywhere in the world
- Not in any museum
- Not in any library
- Not in any private collection

What does exist is **not Hammām's own text**, but rather:

A narrated version included in the *Musnad* of **Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal** (d. 241 AH), which was later labeled as the "Ṣaḥīfa of Hammām."

That is to say: …

Hammām → Ibn Ḥanbal: Approximately 130–150 Year Gap

3️⃣ **What is the Source of the Current "Ṣaḥīfa of Hammām"?**

The reality of the text presented today:

- It is a **collection of narrations included in Musnad Ahmad**.
- It was only given the form of a separate book in the **20th century**.
- The oldest manuscripts:

- Belong to the **10th or 11th centuries or later**

- That is, at least **300 years after Hammām's death**.

Hence, claiming that:

"This is an original seventh-century Ṣaḥīfa"

is **historically inaccurate**.

The Fundamental Question of Islamic History

Which are the **primary sources of Islam** that have survived intact from the earliest period / first century to the present?

The traditional claim is that the Islamic body of knowledge has been transmitted **generation to generation through an unbroken chain**, but when we examine **manuscripts, material evidence, and historical sources**, the reality appears very different.

The foundational texts of the **7th and 8th centuries CE**, upon which the entire edifice of Islamic knowledge and understanding was built, **do not survive in their original form**.

The extant copies belong to the **4th, 5th, and 6th centuries AH**, and this delay introduces **serious and profound questions** for the entire scholarly heritage.

The Early Islamic Historical Gap

The first **150 years of Islam** are **very obscure and dark** in terms of material evidence and facts.
For that period:

• No reliable and authentic manuscript
• No trustworthy historical record
• No systematically organized collection
• No impartial testimony
• No detailed account

is available to us.

This is why **modern serious scholars** refer to this period as the **"Silent / Black Era of Islamic History."**

The fundamental and unavoidable question arises:

"What were the factors and reasons that made such a crucial period at the beginning of the Islamic state **devoid of written records, contemporaneous documents, official records, and institutional memory**, while other civilizations of the world were flourishing in documentation?"

Political and Social Context

According to traditional sources, **immediately after the Prophet ﷺ's death**:

- Due to the effects of poisoning, there was delay in burial

- At Saqifah, there was **struggle for the caliphate and emirate**

- Political factions emerged and conflicts arose

  This political vacuum shows:

- There was **no written constitution**,

- No agreed institutional procedure,

- No clearly announced successor.

  The **urgency for political control** preempted historical documentation; **politics took precedence, history was written later**.

Implications

Political vacuums often generate **intense conflict**, in **any civilization**. Islamic history is **no exception**.

Examples include:

- The mysterious death of Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah

- Successive assassinations of the Rightly Guided Caliphs

- Bloody battles such as Jamal, Ṣiffīn, Nahrawān

Regardless of the religious status of participants, history shows that **politics repeatedly overrode religious and ethical principles**.

Incidents like **Karbala** and **the event of Ḥarrā** highlight that **religious sanctity failed to restrain political actions**.

These are tragic examples where religion became a **justification for political power**.

Ironically, all this occurred during the period of those companions who are traditionally glorified as:

"Khairu al-Nās Qurnī"
"Khairu al-Qurūn Qurnī"

During the early stage of Islam, **political conflicts, tribal and familial rivalries, and sectarian disputes** led to extreme bloodshed.

The issue was **political struggle for power**, not faith or ethics — and when politics donned the cloak of sanctity, disputes were resolved **by the sword rather than reason**.

Abbasid Era and Scholarly Reorganization

The **Abbasid period** played the **largest role** in shaping Islamic tradition. The Abbasids:

- Recorded traditions in written form
- Established academic centers and schools
- Developed principles of jurisprudence
- Compiled collections of ḥadīth
- Produced major collections of sīrah and history

All of this was accomplished **1.5 to 2 centuries after the beginnings of Islam**.

Conclusion: The **original structure of Islamic tradition and history** reflects **the intellectual, political, religious, and expansionist priorities of the Abbasid era**.

Scholarly Implications

This raises a fundamental academic question:

Does the current Islamic corpus of knowledge **truly represent the era of the Prophet ﷺ and the first century**, or is it a **later organized "official tradition"**?

The goal of research and analysis is to:

1. Reassess the **early history of Islamic texts**

2. Present a **neutral analysis of manuscript evidence**

3. Reveal the effects of **Abbasid scholarly reorganization**

4. Highlight the difference between **tradition and history**

5. Evaluate the **documentary status of early Islamic sources**

Methodology

This study adopts **three main approaches**:

(a) Manuscript Analysis
• Scribe handwriting
• Paper and ink
• Date of writing
• Revisions and textual variants

(b) Historical Criticism
• Layers of transmission
• Later additions or deletions
• Stages of compilation
• Chronological and geographic inconsistencies

(c) Political and Social Context
• Goals and ambitions of the Abbasid state
• Academic patronage
• Suppression of opposing narratives
• Construction of Abbasid ideologies

Structure of the Study

1. Severe crisis of early Islamic manuscripts

2. Causes of the absence of earliest texts

3. Scholarly reorganization during the Abbasid period

4. Ḥadīth as political and strategic literature

5. Compilation of sīrah and associated issues

6. Textual evolution of Qur'anic expressions

7. Comparison with literary heritage of People of the Book and other religions

8. Case studies: Muwaṭṭa, Maghāzī, and Sīrah

9. Differences between pre-Abbasid and post-Abbasid narratives

10. Summary and conclusions

Crisis of Early Manuscripts — Section 4 📘

Introduction:
Islamic tradition claims that foundational texts — Qur'an, ḥadīth, sīrah, maghāzī, and fiqh — have survived **intact for centuries**.
However, **neutral analysis of historical evidence, manuscript continuity, and textual sources** reveals a very different reality:

- No authentic manuscript of any **original text from the first 150 years** of Islamic history exists.

- This void and silence are **not coincidental**, but point to a **major historical gap**.

Written Silence in the Early Islamic Period

The **7th and 8th centuries CE** — considered the period of Islam's emergence and expansion — are **strangely silent** in the world of manuscripts and archaeological evidence.
From this period, there is **no**:

• Complete book
• Comprehensive jurisprudential compilation
• Organized ḥadīth collection
• Full sīrah historical narrative
• Official administrative record
• Even a complete Qur'an from the Prophet or the Rightly Guided Caliphs

What survives is **fragmentary**, or later revised and edited drafts.

This raises the question:

What was the **original textual image** of the early Islamic period?

Lost or Intentionally Erased?

Traditional Islamic texts often claim:

"Early manuscripts were lost due to wars, sedition, or calamities."

Modern scholars regard this as **merely a traditional excuse**, questioning:

- If a **broad religious and ethical civilization** was emerging, why were its **foundational scholarly texts not preserved**?

- In contrast, **Christian, Jewish, Persian, Roman, Indian, and Chinese civilizations** preserved ancient texts to a large extent.

- Why not Islamic texts?

- Is it possible that they were **never formally recorded**, or were **deliberately destroyed** due to political considerations?

These questions are **not hypothetical**, but **scholarly and principled**.

Were Early Islamic Books a Later Abbasid Production?

Three books are considered the **roots and main sources of traditional Islamic thought**:

1. *Muwaṭṭa* — by Imām Mālik ibn Anas

2. *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* — by Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī

3. *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* — by Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq

Reality: None of the original manuscripts of these three survive.
All extant copies are:

- From the **4th century AH or later**
- Or later copies from the **5th, 6th, and 7th centuries AH**
- Contain numerous scribal revisions, additions, and marginal notes

Hence, the **original texts, language, style, and content** cannot be definitively known.

Abbasid Scholarly Reorganization

Without doubt, the **Abbasid period marks the origin of organized scholarly writings**.
During this time:

- Ḥadīth collections were compiled
- Sīrah and maghāzī narratives were established
- Principles of fiqh were formalized
- Islamic history underwent compilation and editorial processes
- Qurʾanic recitations were standardized

Quran, Sharia, and the Abbasid Influence on Early Islamic Texts

- **The current arrangement of the Qur'an** was justified through the creation of the **"Ṭawātur and Final Revelation"** narrative.

- The structure of **Sharia** was built upon **Qur'an, ḥadīth, ijmāʿ, and qiyās**.

- Question arises: If the foundational books of Islam **emerged only during the Abbasid period**, what was the **original scholarly and doctrinal form** of the early Islamic period?

- Moreover, did **Abbasid political ambitions, personal interests, opposition, and ideological framework** not play a crucial role in shaping Islamic tradition? If so, the absence of early Islamic manuscripts and traces is not coincidental but a **"predetermined outcome."**

Why Early Manuscripts Could Not Survive: Historical, Political, and Intellectual Causes

The most critical question in Islamic history is **not what we have today**, but:

Why did the original documents fail to survive?

This is not merely a religious question, but one with **principled, historical, cultural, and political weight**.

When viewed on a **broad historical canvas**, several major factors emerge:

1. Political Strife, Civil War, and Revolutions

- The first century of Islamic history was marked by **constant conflict, killings, civil war, and struggles for power**, not political stability.

- **Umayyad → Abbasid transition**: A pervasive revolutionary upheaval occurred, including:

  - Political maneuvering

  - Familial and tribal rivalries

  - Ideological confrontations

  - Reinterpretation of religious texts

Consequences:

- Umayyad symbols, texts, and documents were **politically deemed suspicious**

- All Umayyad-related manuscripts and records were **deliberately destroyed**

- Even Qur'ans associated with the Umayyads were considered a **political threat**

- The Abbasids **reorganized official history under the guise of religion**

History shows that in any revolutionary regime, **written heritage is the first target**, as texts and manuscripts testify to prior authority.

2. Late Formation of a Central State

- In the first decades, the Islamic state was essentially **scattered tribal or loosely organized units**.

- **No central bureaucracy**, no **archives**, no **institutionalized documentation system** existed.

- When the political structure itself was unstable, **preserving written records became secondary**.

3. Oral Nature of Early Society

- Early Islamic society relied on:

    o Oral culture

    o Storytelling

    o Public speeches and recitations

    o Memory and narrative

    o Poetry and oral transmission

- Writing was limited to **small elite groups** and was **not the primary method** for preserving religious material.

- Consequently, transmission of history and religious statements **through oral means** naturally led to **alteration, omission, addition, and disputes**.

- Human memory is **selective and prone to distortion** (cognitive psychology), and narratives naturally change over time.

4. Standardization during the Abbasid Period

- With the **stabilization of the Abbasid state**, large-scale efforts were made to **standardize religious narratives**.

- Texts and traditions **incompatible with the new official narrative** were **rejected or deemed unreliable**.

- Likely, much material that did not fit the Abbasid ideological framework was **deliberately erased**.

5. Gradual Sanctification of Texts

- Centuries later, Islamic texts were **bestowed with sanctity** and declared **infallible**.

- By then, however:

  - Most **first-hand texts** from the early period were **lost**

  - Early manuscripts were **nonexistent or destroyed**

  - What remained was in the hands of **later copyists or unknowing transmitters**

Sanctification came **after the original material was gone**, leaving only **later reconstructions**.

Scholarly Consensus in Modern Research

- Most modern scholars conclude:

  - **Autograph texts of early Islamic tradition do not exist**

  - What survives is largely **reconstructed or edited in later centuries**

  - The **historical silence** of the first centuries is significant and meaningful

- Abbasid-era compilations of tradition, sīra, and ḥadīth **do not directly represent the Prophet ﷺ or the Rightly Guided Caliphs**.

- **Later additions and editorial processes** are a well-documented reality.

- This is described in scholarship as:

"The Severe Crisis of Early Islamic Documentary Absence."

Inescapable Scholarly Implications

1. Early Islamic tradition does **not rest on direct, authentic written foundations**.

2. Most surviving material is the **product of later centuries' official and political needs**.

3. Religious concepts and beliefs about the first century owe **much to Abbasid political and ideological narratives**.

4. Traditional Islamic claims **cannot stand on solid, independent evidence** when confronted with modern historical research.

Therefore, the study of Islamic tradition must be **historical, analytical, and critical**, not merely **hereditary or devotional**.

Early Sīra and Maghāzī: Formation and Challenges

- Islamic consciousness and traditional beliefs **rely heavily on sīra and maghāzī**.

- They transmit details about:

  - Prophet's life, family, and personal affairs

  - Early Islamic preaching in Mecca

  - Miracles, battles, migration

  - Revelatory incidents

  - Companions and treaties

  - Conflicts with Jews and polytheists

  - Causes and contexts of revelation

- **However**, the **entire narrative is based on 2nd and 3rd-century AH manuscripts**, and **no 1st-century document survives**.

- Meaning: There is **no original document** from the Prophet's lifetime to serve as a foundation.

Muhammad ibn Ishāq and Constructed Narrative

1. **Muhammad ibn Ishāq**:

   - Traditionally credited as the founder of *Sīrat Rasūl Allah*

   - No original manuscript exists

   - His text is **only available indirectly**, through:

     - Ibn Hishām's edited and abbreviated version

     - Later narrators' transmissions

     - Components deleted and then re-inserted in new forms

- We **do not read Ibn Ishāq's autograph sīra**, but a **reconstructed narrative from later periods**.

2. **Ancient Criticism of Ibn Ishāq**

   - Early Tābi'ūn and transmitters **also criticized Ibn Ishāq** for:

- Fabricating traditions

- Including unverified Isra'iliyyat

- Relying on popular tales

- The disappearance of his original text seems **selective and deliberate**, not accidental.

3. **Ibn Hishām: Compilation or Reconstruction?**

   o What is known today as *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* is:

     - Compiled during the **Abbasid period**

     - Under **Abbasid political and intellectual patronage**

     - By Ibn Hishām, who **admitted editing and omission**

Redaction, Editing, and Ideological Filtering in Early Islamic Texts

- **Objectionable and indecent narratives** were deleted

- **Obscene, vulgar, or disliked material** was removed

- A significant number of **poems and verses** were erased

- Some passages were **reorganized in a new style**

  In modern textual studies, this process is called **Textual Criticism**, **Redaction, Editing, and Ideological Filtering**.

  In other words, this is **not mere transmission** but **reconstruction**.

  Key question:
  When the **original text is lost**, and the surviving text is **admittedly edited**, on what basis can it be considered a **true historical reflection**?

Al-Wāqidī's *Al-Maghāzī*: Source or Problem?

- Muhammad ibn Umar al-Wāqidī's *Al-Maghāzī* is generally regarded as:

  o The **primary source for military narratives**

  o The **foundation for the military and martial aspects** of the Sīra

- **Reality:**

  o Most hadith scholars considered Wāqidī:

    - **Weak (ḍaʿīf)**

    - **Unreliable**

- Some even **fabricator**

- **Critical issues:**

  o No **original or contemporary manuscript** of Wāqidī survives

  o Existing copies are either:

    ▪ **Transmissions from the 5th century AH**

    ▪ **Edited or newly arranged editions from the 19th century**

If the foundation itself is weak or lifeless, the **entire historical structure built upon it collapses**.

Abbasid State and the Political Framing of Sīra and Maghāzī

With the consolidation of the Abbasid Caliphate:

- A **systematic religious and ideological narrative** was established

- A **historical image of a capable Prophet** was required to:

  o Justify the caliphate

  o Support authority, dominance, and expansion

This portrayal emphasized the Prophet as:

- **Brave and combative**

- **Victorious and powerful**

- **Lawgiver and founder of a new order**

Such a depiction does **not appear in pre-2nd-century non-Islamic records**, indicating that **much of the Sīra and Maghāzī was reconstructed** to meet **Abbasid official and ideological needs**.

The Silent First Century: Did a Sīra Exist?

- During the Prophet's lifetime and immediately afterward:

  o No organized sīra or biographies were written

  o Life details and records were **not documented**

  o **Daily logs of battles** did not survive

  o **No companion maintained manuscripts**

  o **No official archive compiled history**

The literary silence of the first century implies that the **Islamic narrative was primarily oral**, later **formalized into written form** for political and administrative purposes.

It is a historical principle that **oral traditions, when connected to political and doctrinal purposes, produce sanctity more than historical accuracy**.

Internal Contradictions — Ideological Rather Than Historical

Sīra and Maghāzī texts show:

- **Chronological inconsistencies**

- **Geographical errors**

- **Different versions of the same event**

- **Unrealistic battle figures**

- **Abundant miraculous narratives**

These signs indicate that these texts are **not modern historical accounts**, but rather **faith-based, narrative-driven, and politically shaped**.

Reconstruction is Evident

All the above factors point in a single direction:

- Sīra and Maghāzī are **not preserved history**

- They are the result of **centuries-long reconstruction**, involving:

    o **Selection**

    o **Deletion**

    o **Addition**

    o **Alteration**

    o **Editing**

    o **Ideological harmonization**

Hence, these texts should be read **as interpretations of later religious and political agendas**, not as direct historical evidence.

Modern Scholarly Consensus

- **Original Sīra and Maghāzī texts do not survive**

- Existing copies are the **product of Abbasid-era compilation and editing**

- Determining the **historical personality of the Prophet** through these narratives is **not feasible**

- These works present a **doctrinal narrative rather than historical accuracy**

   Core conclusion: Sīra and Maghāzī are **religious templates of history**, not history itself.

Hadith Compilation and Its Historical Challenges

Introduction

- Hadith is the **basis for interpreting the Qur'an, practical Sharia, and religious life**

- Historical facts show:

   o **No hadith collections were compiled during the Prophet's lifetime**

   o **No organized books existed during the Companions' era**

   o **No systematic storage in the Tābi'īn period**

- Hadith compilation began in the **2nd–3rd century AH**, roughly **150–200 years after the Prophet**

   This **time gap** raises serious questions about the **historical reliability of hadith material**.

1. First 150 Years: Silence and Oral Transmission

- Prophet prohibited writing hadith (according to some reports)

- Companions **did not record** narratives systematically

- No governmental office **maintained or organized transmission**

- During the Tābi'īn period:

   o Narratives spread **orally**

   o Narrators transmitted according to **memory and understanding**

   o Different regions developed **different versions**

Consequently, **no authentic hadith book existed** in the first century. This was **not accidental**, but a **natural outcome of oral culture**.

2. Narrator Crisis: Personalities, Classes, and Contradictions

- The credibility of hadith **depends on narrators**, but:

  - Narrators' biographies were compiled **two centuries later**

  - Integrity assessments were made by **later scholars**

  - Some scholars called the same narrator **truthful**, others **liar**

  - Many narrators were **influenced by political and jurisprudential affiliations**

Key question: If the narrators' reliability was determined centuries later, can they **truly reflect the Prophet's life**?

3. Political Exploitation of Narratives

- **Umayyad and Abbasid periods** used narratives to **support political power and religious legitimacy**

- **Umayyads (41–132 AH)**:

  - Justified dynastic succession

  - Promoted **virtues of Syria** and loyalty to Umayyad family

  - Framed opposition as **rebellion and sin**

- **Abbasids (after 132 AH)**:

  - Created a **new narrative** to legitimize their authority

  - Emphasized **virtues of Ahl al-Bayt**

  - Depicted Abbasids as **more legitimate than Umayyads**

  - Criticized Umayyads as corrupt and unjust

  - Politically exploited Prophet's lineage to validate rule

4. Scholar Selection and Editing: A Human Process

- Hadith scholars:

  - Collected **hundreds of thousands of narrations**

  - Rejected the majority as fabricated

  - Accepted only **a few thousand**

Question: If millions of statements were attributed to the Prophet, on what basis was **absolute trust** placed in accepted narrations?

- Decisions were influenced by:

    o Scholars' personal judgment and critical sense

    o Contemporary intellectual trends

    o Sectarian and political biases

Resulting in:

- **Discrepancies**

- **Contradictory narrations**

- **Divergent wording**

- **Conflicting content**

5. From Words to Understanding: The Gap

- The Prophet's **own words are not preserved**

- Hadith represents the **summaries or meanings** transmitted by narrators, not verbatim speech

Hadith: Historical Complexities and Critical Analysis

1. Early Silence and Oral Transmission

The compilation of Hadith **did not begin during the Prophet's ﷺ lifetime**. The Companions refrained from writing Hadith, and in the early period, Islamic traditions were **transmitted orally**.

- Each narrator transmitted according to their **memory and understanding**, introducing additions, omissions, or modifications.

- Different regions had **varying versions**, leading to a **lack of uniform and authentic written foundation**.

Conclusion: **Full reliance on early Hadith material is not possible**, as it emerged from an oral culture.

2. Narrators' Biography and Reliability

- Information about narrators' **lives and integrity was compiled centuries later**.

- Scholars often gave **conflicting judgments** about the same narrator: some deemed them truthful, others unreliable.

- Narrators were often influenced by **political, jurisprudential, or personal affiliations**.

Question: If the assessment of narrators occurred centuries later, can we truly rely on them to reach the **authentic Hadith**?

3. Political and Jurisprudential Exploitation

- During the **Umayyad and Abbasid periods**, Hadith and traditions were used for **justifying power and political legitimacy**.

- Umayyads: traditions emphasized **hereditary rule** and the virtue of Syria.

- Abbasids: traditions emphasized the **virtues of Ahl al-Bayt** and legitimized Abbasid authority.

  Hadith became a **political and ideological tool**, rather than merely a religious record.

4. Selection and Editing by Hadith Scholars

- Scholars collected millions of narrations but **accepted only a few thousand**.

- The selection was influenced by **personal, sectarian, political, and intellectual factors**.

- Result: current Hadith collections are **subject to human judgment**, not purely historical material.

5. Words vs. Meaning

- The **original words of the Prophet ﷺ are not preserved**.

- What exists is the **narrators' understanding, summaries, or meanings**, not the literal wording.

  This distinction implies Hadith should be seen as **interpretive and ideological**, not direct historical testimony.

6. Modern Scholarly Consensus

Contemporary scholars largely agree:

1. **Original Hadith compilations** from the early period no longer exist.

2. Current collections are the **product of later compilation, editing, and official or doctrinal needs**.

3. Historical reconstruction of the Prophet's life **cannot rely solely on Hadith**.

4. Like Sīra and Maghāzī, Hadith reflects a **constructed narrative shaped by ideology and politics**.

Conclusion:

Hadith cannot be treated as **direct historical evidence**. It is a **naturally and politically constructed tradition** formed through:

- Oral culture

- Political and doctrinal motivations

- Later compilation and selective transmission

Scholarly integrity demands that Hadith be studied using **critical, historical, and analytical methods**, rather than solely relying on sanctity or traditional acceptance.

1. Narrators and Personal Transmission

- Narrators **used their own words from memory**, influenced by personal understanding.

- This **inevitably altered meanings**, while pronoun references and historical context became unclear.

- Scholars term this **"bilā al-maʿnā transmission"**, meaning the collection reflects **narrators' minds and memory more than actual events**.

2. Compilation of Hadith Collections

- Major compilations include:

  o **Sahih al-Bukhari** (c. 230–250 AH)

  o **Sahih Muslim**

  o **Sunan al-Arbaʿah**

  o **Muwatta Malik** (current versions do not reflect the original autographs)

- These collections were compiled **150–200 years after the Prophet ﷺ**, under political patronage.

- Question: Could oral traditions have been preserved accurately for so long? History provides **no precedent**.

- Modern scholarship rightly asks: do these Hadith reflect the **Prophet's actual life**, or are they a product of **later religious construction**?

3. Internal Contradictions and Historical Challenges

Hadith literature shows:

- Problems with chronology and geography

- Differences in narrator names

- Conflicting texts

- Implausible details in events

- Miraculous or supernatural elements

- Instructions incompatible with reality

- Discrepancies with historical facts

  Indicating that Hadith is primarily a **religious narrative**, not a reliable historical source.

4. Modern Scholarly Perspective

Contemporary researchers agree that:

1. Hadith compilation occurred **long after the Prophet's lifetime**.

2. No written Hadith from the Prophet's era survives.

3. Narrators' biographies were **constructed later**.

4. Political and social circumstances influenced the Hadith material.

5. Hadith displays **narrative diversity, not historical unity**.

6. Useful for ethical guidance but **not historical verification**.

   Conclusion: Hadith represents a **religious and jurisprudential narrative**, not the Prophet's original words.

5. Abbasid Patronage and State Control

- Abbasid caliphs **supported scholars, jurists, historians, and exegetes**, guiding them to:

    - Produce Hadith and history **aligned with state interests**

    - Establish the Abbasid rule as **religiously legitimate**

    - Portray the Umayyad period as **morally and religiously inferior**

    - Interpret the Prophet, Ahl al-Bayt, and Sharia in line with **state priorities**

- Many scholars chose **silence or compromise** due to political risk.

- Islam gradually became **an instrument of state morality and law**.

  A significant portion of religious sciences came **under direct or indirect state influence** during the Abbasid era.

6. Abbasid Institutionalization of Religious Narrative

- **Quranic readings were standardized**.

- **Sīra and Hadith were reshaped**.

- **Fiqh schools emerged**, aligned with state policies.

- **Doctrinal systems** were organized and codified.

- A comprehensive **religious framework** emerged, influencing Islam as practiced today.

7. Abbasid Revolution: Ideological and Political Project

- Abbasid victory over the Umayyads was more than political; it **reorganized religious narrative**.

- Challenges:

  1. Provide **religious legitimacy** for Abbasid rule

  2. Erase Umayyad records and narratives

  3. Establish a new religious identity to unite the Ummah

- Abbasids created a **new religious framework** controlling the core sources of authority:

  - **Allah** → supreme ruler supporting political decisions

  - **Prophet** → political leader, warrior, legislator

  - **Quran** → official codified text

  - **Ummah** → unified under centralized political authority

  Religious authority became **concentrated in the state**, making Islam inseparable from governance.

8. Rewriting Sīra and History

- **Ibn Hisham** edited Ibn Ishaq's text

- **Al-Tabari** reorganized history

- Tribal narratives were filtered

- The Prophet's life was presented as **a victorious, political figure**

- Wars, treaties, and conquests were **exaggerated**

- Miracles were **numerous and prominent**

- Enemies' depictions were **distorted**

- Islam was emphasized as a **military-political movement**

  This representation **does not align with first-century non-Muslim sources**; it is a **constructed Abbasid narrative**.

9. Hadith as a State Instrument

- Large-scale compilation served to:

  o   Resolve jurisprudential disputes

  o   Establish religious unity

  o   Provide legal justification for state policies

- Millions of Hadith were collected, most rejected

- Selected compilations justified:

  o   Obedience to the caliph as a **religious duty**

  o   Jihad and conquests as **religiously sanctioned**

  o   Suppression of political opponents

  o   Division of Sunni and Shiʿa narratives

Hadith thus became **both a religious and political tool**.

10. Fiqh and Legal Schools

- Prominent jurists:

  o   **Hanafi – Abu Hanifa**

  o   **Maliki – Malik ibn Anas**

  o   **Shafiʻi – Muhammad ibn Idris**

  o   **Hanbali – Ahmad ibn Hanbal**

- Fiqh rulings often **aligned with Abbasid political policies**:
  - o Punishments and penal laws
  - o Apostasy
  - o Jihad/war
  - o Slavery
  - o Jizya
  - o Political obedience
  - o Suppression of rebels

Politics shaped fiqh, which in turn **reinforced state authority**.

11. Theology and Doctrinal Organization

- Two major theological schools emerged:
  - o **Muʿtazila (rationalist)**
  - o **Ahl al-Hadith (traditionalist)**
- Muʿtazila emphasized:
  - o The Quran as **created**
  - o God's **justice and rationality**

1. Ahl al-Hadith and Sunni Orthodoxy

- **Ahl al-Hadith** (traditionists) took God's attributes **literally**.
- They **prioritized transmitted reports (Hadith) over reason**.
- This ideological struggle was **the central theological conflict** of the Abbasid era.
- Ultimately, the state **favored the Ahl al-Hadith narrative**, establishing **official Sunni doctrine**.

2. Abbasid Control Over Religious Authority

- The Abbasid strategy subordinated key sources of Islamic authority—**Allah, the Prophet, the Quran, and the Ummah**—to the state:
  - o **Allah** → endorsed caliphal decisions
  - o **Prophet** → model of political leadership

- o **Quran** → standardized official text

- o **Ummah** → loyal to Abbasid central authority

- For the first time in Islamic history, **the state was not subject to religion**; rather, **religion became a tool of the state**.

- This marks the **emergence of the form of Islam widely practiced today**.

3. Abbasid Sponsorship of Islamic Sciences

- Key Islamic sciences codified under Abbasid supervision:

  - o Quranic readings (**Qira'at**)

  - o Tafsir (exegesis)

  - o Hadith

  - o Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh

  - o Aqidah (theology)

  - o Tasawwuf (Sufism)

  - o Linguistics and rhetoric

- **The foundational structure of Islam as known today** was largely shaped under Abbasid patronage.

- **Early Islam's organized forms did not survive fully**; what we have reflects **Abbasid-era cultural and religious engineering**.

4. Abbasid Period: Shaping the Islamic Narrative

- The Abbasid era was the **most formative period in Islamic history**:

  - o Core religious texts and narratives were standardized

  - o Hadith, Sira, Fiqh, and theology were shaped to fit **state interests**

  - o The state claimed **absolute religious authority**

- Conclusion: **Contemporary Islam is a historically engineered product**, not a purely "revealed" continuity.

5. The History of Quranic Texts and Readings

- **The Quran is considered the most preserved word of God** by Muslims.

- Yet its textual and historical journey shows:

  o The **original written form** is unknown

  o The **first compiled Mushaf** is unknown

  o **Variants of the text circulated**

  o **Early readings (Qira'at) emerged gradually**, without historical clarity

  o **Official canonization** occurred later, with ambiguous sources

Quranic text history is a **dynamic, complex, and evolutionary human process**, not a single instantaneous revelation in a fixed, written form.

6. Abbasid Influence on Quranic Standardization

- During the Abbasid era, major Islamic pillars (Sira, Maghazi, Hadith, Fiqh, Usul, History) were **standardized under state supervision**.

- The **Medinan collections** likely received **limited but purposeful editorial intervention**, given:

  o No pre-Abbasid complete Mushaf survives

  o No uncontested "baseline text" exists for comparison

- Therefore, the idea that the corpus **remained entirely unaltered** is a **faith-based assumption**, not a historically proven fact.

- Some **targeted textual additions**, e.g., the word "Muhammad," can plausibly be attributed to Abbasid editorial strategies.

- Just as Caliph ʿUthman standardized the Mushaf politically, the **Abbasids, with greater centralized power, could have influenced the Medinan compilations**.

- During the Abbasid period, when all the major pillars of Islamic tradition — such as Sīrah, Maghāzī, Hadith, Fiqh, Usūl al-Fiqh, and historiography — were being systematically organized, standardized, and canonized under direct state patronage, and when the Qur'anic text itself had not yet been definitively frozen or textually finalized, it is historically and methodologically reasonable to assume that limited yet purpose-driven editorial intervention must have occurred within the Medinan corpus.
- There exists no strong archaeological or historical barrier to reject this possibility, because:
- • No complete pre-Abbasid codex (mushaf) has survived;
  • Nor do we possess any uncontested baseline text against which the present text could be critically compared in order to determine what is original and what may have been later added or omitted.

- When no original "baseline" standard exists, the question naturally arises: during the Abbasid period, who was in a position to hold accountable a power that possessed absolute authority and narrative control?
- Under such circumstances, to claim that the Medinan corpus remained entirely untouched and immune from intervention may constitute a belief-based assumption, but it does not qualify as a historically established fact.
- Within this framework, it becomes historically legitimate to examine certain key points within the Medinan sections — such as the limited yet targeted appearances of the term "Muhammad" — in relation to Abbasid editorial strategy.
- If it is an accepted historical reality that Caliph 'Uthman enforced the official status of his codex by eliminating all parallel manuscript traditions through state power, then it is entirely reasonable to ask why the Abbasids — who possessed far greater political authority, administrative structure, ideological consciousness, and narrative dominance than the Umayyad or 'Uthmanic era — would have been incapable of executing limited and purpose-driven editorial interventions within the Medinan corpus.
- This question becomes even more compelling given that, prior to the Abbasid period, the Qur'an did not exist in a universally agreed, frozen, and uncontested final form, and that Umayyad-era codices were regarded by Abbasid elites not only as questionable but also as a political threat to the legitimacy of their new empire.
- It is within this background that, when the Medinan sūrahs — particularly al-Anfāl, al-Tawbah, Muhammad, al-Mumtaḥanah, al-Nisā', and al-Mā'idah — are subjected to internal textual analysis, they appear markedly different from the Meccan corpus in terms of style, language, themes, and ideological tension.
- Their mode of address is directed not primarily to an individual but to an organized collective; moral exhortation gives way to legal injunctions; issues of war and peace, identification of internal enemies, regulation of political loyalties, social order, justification of coercive power, and assertions of state supremacy recur frequently. Their language exhibits firmness, severity, and sharp differentiation; sentence structures are more prescriptive and regulatory; and the tone reflects that of a ruling authority engaged in the consolidation, legitimization, and expansion of power.
- Although no single, definitive, and directly documentary proof currently exists to conclusively establish this hypothesis, the cumulative force of historical indicators, political context, textual divergences, and the systematic construction of major religious traditions during the Abbasid era renders this possibility not only worthy of consideration but deserving of serious scholarly investigation.
- It is precisely at this point that the discussion moves beyond devotion and belief, and becomes firmly anchored in the interrelationship between history, text, and power.

7. Crisis of Early Quranic Texts

- First-century Islam lacked:

  - Comprehensive Sira, Hadith, Tafsir, or complete Quran

- Oldest extant manuscripts (e.g., Samarkand, Istanbul, Cairo, Damascus, Birmingham) are:

    o **Post-second-century** or fragmentary

    o Contain **variant readings and textual differences**

8. Companions' Mushafs and Textual Variants

- Early companions' Mushafs differed:

    o Ibn Masʿud, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Salim, Muʿadh ibn Jabal, Hafsa bint Umar

- Differences included:

    o Words, sentences, number and order of verses

    o Surah names and sequences

    o Inclusion of supplications like Qunut

- Later efforts **attempted to unify texts**, but these differences reflect **the real early history of the Quranic text**.

9. ʿUthmanic Compilation

- ʿUthman allegedly burned variant Mushafs to impose an official text:

    o This was **a political, not divine, decision**

    o Early text lacked **dots, vowels, or diacritical marks** → multiple readings possible

    o No original "Uthmanic Mushaf" survives

- What exists are **late second-century copies or later copies by scribes**

- The "Uthmanic Mushaf" functioned as a **political unification tool**, not necessarily as the final inspired text.

10. Script and the Emergence of Multiple Readings

- Original script: **consonantal, without vowels or diacritics**

- This allowed **many possible readings from one consonantal text**:

    o e.g., تَقْتُلُونَ, يُقْتَلُونَ, تَقْتُلُ, نَقْتُلُ, يُقَاتِلُونَ → different meanings and rulings

- The system of readings was thus **built on a single ambiguous consonantal framework**, challenging the idea of a **unitary, preserved text**.

11. Standardization by Ibn Mujahid

- By the 3rd century AH, **Ibn Mujahid** designated **seven canonical readings**

- All others were deemed **rare, invalid, or unreliable**

- This decision was **based on scholarly consensus and practical standardization**, not divine revelation

1. Quranic Readings (Qira'at) as Human and Political Decisions

- Early standardization of readings was **not based on divine guidance** or decisions of the Companions.

- Rather, it was **purely a human and political choice**.

- Over time, the number of recognized readings expanded:

    ○ 10 → 20 → 40 → 70 → over 200

- **Conclusion:** The "definitive and final standard" of Quranic readings is the **product of a human evolutionary process**, not a divinely mandated decision.

2. Abbasid Standardization of Quranic Script and Grammar

During the Abbasid period:

- **Script (Rasm)** was standardized

- **Grammar rules (Nahw)** were codified

- **Vowels and diacritics** were systematically implemented

- **Lexicon** was formalized

Prominent grammarians such as Sibawayh, Khalil ibn Ahmad, Yunus ibn Habib, Abu Khattab Akhfash, and Isa ibn Umar established the **rules and regulations for Quranic recitation**, which were then followed universally.

- Sequence of process:

    1. Original consonantal text existed

    2. Rules and grammar were formulated

    3. Text was read according to these formalized rules

- **Observation:** If the Quran were originally in clear Arabic ("Lisanun 'Arabiyyun Mubin"), such an elaborate post-facto codification would have been unnecessary.

3. Uniformity of Mushafs and Readings

- Today's widely circulated Quran (Hafs reading) is based on:

  - **One official reading**

  - **Standardized grammar**

  - **Standard script**

  - **Dots, vowels, and diacritics**

Historical reality:

- **1st century:** Quran existed in multiple forms

- **2nd century:** Script diverged regionally

- **3rd century:** Numerous readings developed

- **4th century:** The state enforced a single official reading and script

Conclusion: The unity of the present Quran is **not divine**, but a **political and jurisprudential standardization by the state**.

4. Historical Reality of Quranic Text and Readings

- The Quran was **not a book revealed all at once in 23 years**

- Meccan and Medinan portions developed **gradually over multiple stages**

- Current text reflects **evolutionary, human, and state-led compilation**

- The multiplicity of readings emerged inevitably from **oral transmission**

- The unpointed script naturally generated **many possible readings**

- The Abbasid period **fixed readings into the standardized form** known today

Conclusion: The Quran as commonly received is **not a preserved divine text**, but the result of **a long historical process of human editorial activity**.

5. Abbasid Influence on Islamic Sciences

Overview

- Modern Islamic sciences include:

- Tafsir, Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, Kalam, Lexicography, Grammar, Rhetoric, Sira, Hadith, Aqidah, History, Isnad, Qira'at, Sufism, Philosophy, Law, Economics

- These sciences form an **integrated intellectual structure**, largely **codified under Abbasid supervision**

- Prior to the Abbasids, these disciplines **did not exist in organized form**

- Abbasid state shaped them **for political and religious purposes**

- Thus, Abbasid period marks the stage where **Islam became a system, not just a religion**

6. Tafsir (Quranic Exegesis)

- Early Islam had **no written tafsir or comprehensive explanations**

- Systematic compilation began **only in the Abbasid era**

- Example: **Al-Tabari's Tafsir**

    - First **comprehensive and organized exegesis**

    - Shaped to fit **Abbasid political narratives**

        - Sanctification of the caliphate

        - Justification of war and conquest

        - Interpretive emphasis on obedience to rulers

        - Strong anti-Jewish and Christian rhetoric

        - Conferral of divine legitimacy on Abbasid authority

- Abbasid-era tafsir **blended historical, mythical, and political stories**

7. Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh (Jurisprudence)

- Contemporary jurisprudence (prayers, fasting, inheritance, marriage, divorce, hudud, qisas, jihad, jizya, etc.) is **not directly from the Prophet or Companions**

- Four main schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) **formalized and systematized during the Abbasid period**

- **Two primary goals:**

    1. Strengthen **state's autonomous legal system**

    2. Promote **centralized religious jurisprudence**

- Key principles codified during Abbasid times:
    - Consensus (Ijma)
    - Analogical reasoning (Qiyas)
    - Juristic preference (Istihsan)
    - Public interest (Masalih Mursalah)
    - Blocking the means (Sadd al-Dhara'i)
- **State influence in Fiqh:**
    - Punishment of rebels
    - Obedience to the caliph
    - Rules of jihad
    - Punishment of apostates
    - Slavery regulations
    - Strict jizya rules
- **Conclusion:** Fiqh is **a human creation**, not a purely divine mandate

8. Kalam (Theology)

- Core Islamic beliefs formed under Abbasid influence:
    - Predestination
    - Divine attributes
    - Creation of the Quran
    - Miracles
    - Intercession
    - Sin and salvation
    - Punishment in the grave
    - Stages of resurrection
- Major theological trends:
    - **Mu'tazila:** rationalist, Quran as created, focus on divine justice
    - **Ahl al-Hadith:** prioritized tradition over reason, literal divine attributes
    - **Ash'ari:** mediating position between the two

- Abbasid-era theological formation **favored political goals over purely religious factors**

9. Lexicography and Grammar

- Arabic grammar and lexicon were **not contemporaneous with Quranic revelation**

- Rules were developed **later to facilitate Quranic recitation and interpretation**

- Major grammatical schools:

    o **Basra school**

    o **Kufa school**

- Notable scholars:

    o **Sibawayh:** authored *Al-Kitab*, foundational Arabic grammar

    o **Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi:** inventor of prosody, lexicon and stylistics

- **Conclusion:** Lexicon, grammar, and rules were **post-Quranic tools** for its proper reading and interpretation

1. Abbasid Approach: An Integrated "Factory" of Religious Sciences

During the Abbasid period, Islamic sciences were systematically organized into a **cohesive and centrally controlled structure**:

- Tafsir (Quranic exegesis)

- Hadith (Prophetic traditions)

- Fiqh (Jurisprudence)

- Usul al-Fiqh (Principles of jurisprudence)

- Lexicography

- Aqidah (Creed)

- Qira'at (Quranic readings)

- Rhetoric (Balagha)

- History

Key Features of Abbasid Framework:

- **Political centralization + Religious sanctification + Obligation of obedience**

- Resulting interpretations:

    o The Prophet portrayed as a **militant ruler**

- o Quranic interpretation aligned with **state interests**

- o Hadith selection influenced by **political needs**

- o Fiqh structured to **strengthen the caliphate**

- o Creed organized for **political obedience**

- o Lexical and grammatical rules crafted to present Quran as **linguistically superior**

Conclusion: The Abbasid era became a **systematic "factory" for Islamic sciences**, producing the structure of what is now the established Islamic tradition.

2. Could Islam Have Taken Its Current Form Without the Abbasids?

Modern scholars largely agree:

- Nothing now considered "Islam" existed in **final or organized form** before the Abbasids.

- Abbasids **did not merely preserve** Islamic sciences—they **created and systematized** them.

- Present-day Islam is essentially the **"Abbasid-formed Islam,"** not the original revealed Islam.

- Without Abbasid patronage, many religious, social, and intellectual movements of the period **would have disappeared into obscurity**.

3. "Revealed Islam" vs. "Historical Islam"

(a) "Revealed Islam"

- The Quran, in its text, presents a **short, general, ambiguous, unstructured, and non-legalistic message**.

- Daily life practices—such as naming, adhan at birth, circumcision, bismillah, prayer rituals, fasting, zakat, Hajj, burial practices, Eid celebrations, and social customs—are **not explicitly in the Quran**.

- **Implication:** If the Quran were complete guidance, why was daily Islamic life built primarily on **later traditions rather than the Quran**?

(b) "Historical Islam"

- Constructed and systematized **250–500 AH** by:

- o Abbasid caliphs

- o Fiqh scholars

- o   Mujtahids (jurisprudential authorities)

- o   Mufassirun (exegetes)

- o   Muhaddithun (hadith scholars)

- o   Historians, grammarians, and biographers

- Features of historical Islam:

  - o   Complete Fiqh and Usul

  - o   Comprehensive Sharia system

  - o   Structured Sira of the Prophet

  - o   Extensive Hadith collections

  - o   Organized Tafsir

  - o   Robust creed system

  - o   Integration with **political authority**

Conclusion: Present-day Islam = historical construction by Abbasids, not original revealed Islam.

4. Pillars of the Established Islamic System and Their Historical Origins

Core components of today's Islamic system:

1. Hadith

2. Ilm al-Rijal (biographical evaluation)

3. Tafsir

4. Sira (Prophetic biography)

5. Fiqh

6. Usul al-Fiqh

7. History

8. Aqidah (Creed)

9. Kalam (Theology)

10. Lexicography

11. Qira'at (Readings)

12. Grammar

13. Political interpretation of Caliphate & Jihad

14. Organized Sharia

Historical Reality:

- None of these pillars existed as organized texts in the **7th century**.

- All were **developed under Abbasid patronage**.

- These pillars are **historical constructs, not direct revelations**.

5. Abbasid Era as the Workshop of Established Islam

Challenges faced by the Abbasids:

1. Political centralization

2. Religious sanctification

3. Intellectual and legal control over the masses

Measures taken:

- Standardization of Quranic readings

- Compilation and filtration of Hadith

- Recognition of four major Fiqh schools

- Formalization of grammar and lexicon

- Structuring of the Sira and Maghazi narratives

- Codification of jihad and political authority

- Elevation of the Caliph as the "deputy of God"

Conclusion: The Abbasid court became the **largest policy laboratory for Islamic sciences**, shaping the religion to meet state needs.

6. Was the Quran's Current Form Influenced by Abbasids?

- Standardized Mushaf emerged **after 200 AH**

- Qira'at chains recorded **after 300 AH**

- Script, dots, hamza, vowels, and grammatical rules finalized **under Abbasids**

- Early manuscripts (Sana'a, Paris, Petersburg, Birmingham) show **textual variations**

- **Implication:** Today's Quran = **blend of original text + Abbasid codification**

7. The Political and Official Nature of the Established Islamic Narrative

Evidence shows the fusion of religion and politics:

- Obedience to rulers (Oulul-Amr) leveraged politically

- Punishments for apostasy designed for **state stability**

- Jihad as a tool for **territorial expansion**

- Jizya system as **economic exploitation**

- Sira and Hadith narratives embellished for **political legitimacy**

- Canonical Hadith collections (Bukhari, Muslim) influenced by state patronage

    Conclusion: The foundational structures of modern Islam were **constructed to serve political and administrative purposes**.

8. Present-Day Islam: Historical Construction vs. Revealed Reality

- **Reality:** Present Islam is a **major civilizational tradition** with deep social, moral, and cultural influence.

- **But:** It is **not a direct mirror of "revealed Quranic Islam"**.

- Constructed through:

    o Human intellectual effort

    o Political context

    o Abbasid court policies

    o Fiqh and Hadith schools

    o Literary and linguistic codification

9. Key Conclusions (Episode 8–9)

1. The shape of modern Islam **solidified under Abbasids**

2. All core sciences—Hadith, Sira, Fiqh, Tafsir, Grammar—**emerged during this era**

3. Quranic text = combination of **original revelations + Abbasid editorial codification**

4. Established Islamic narrative = **historical and political construct, not purely divine**

5. "Revealed Islam" was limited, ambiguous, and non-legalistic

6. "Established Islam" = complete system of life, **crafted by Abbasid caliphs and scholars**

Additional Note:

- Concepts such as Hadith, Sunnah, nasikh-mansukh (abrogation), ilm al-rijal, ijma (consensus) **do not exist explicitly in the Quran**.

- These frameworks are **post-Quranic, human constructs**, confirming that a significant portion of Islamic tradition arises from **human interpretation and historical formation**, rather than direct revelation.

Final Verdict:

- Modern Islam = **a grand architectural construction of the Abbasid era**

- Not a direct continuation of original, revealed Islam.

- In the **Medinan texts**, this word (Muhammad) suddenly appears **four times**.

- In **early manuscripts**, the word appears in a **disputed manner** in a few places.

- Viewed in the **context of the text**, the word seems more like a **title or descriptor** than a proper name.

Scholarly implication: It becomes possible to interpret the word **"Muhammad" as a title rather than a proper noun**, opening the door to many academic debates.

3. The Universe of Hadith — An Intellectual Miracle of the Abbasid Era

The complete system of Hadith, including:

- Chain of transmission (Isnad)

- Text (Matn)

- Narrators (Rawi)

- Ilm al-Rijal

- Classification

- Jarh wa Ta'dil

- Commentaries

…did **not exist until the 150th Hijri**.

Hadiths were recorded under **political necessities**:

- To legitimize monarchy in the name of the Caliphate

- To suppress opponents and adversaries

- To support specific jurisprudential schools

- To portray the Prophet as an ideal ruler

- To give sanctity to the Caliphate

    In reality: Hadiths = historical ideas, moral guidance, and political wisdom, later given the status of "religion."

5. Sīrah of Muhammad — A Historical Narrative, Not a Revealed Reality

- Ibn Ishaq's original text **does not exist**

- Ibn Hisham's compilation was **produced under political expediencies**

- Miracles, battles, Mecca, Medina, Hijrah — all later additions

- The original Quran contains **no reference to Muhammad's biography (Sīrah)**

    Bitter conclusion: The Sīrah is **not a mirror of the Prophet's life**; it is **literary literature reflecting the desires of Muslims/Abbasids**.

6. Islamic Jurisprudence — A Political-Legal Framework

- **Not present in the Quran**

- **Not based on Hadith**

- Fatwas and Sharia were created **to serve the state**.

    Examples:

- Punishment for apostasy

- Hudood for slander (Qazf)

- Regulations on Jizya (tax on non-Muslims)

- Laws of slavery

- Jurisprudence of Jihad

- Rules regarding women

    All of these were **not in the Quran**, but formulated within the **political and historical context of the four Sunni schools of law**.

7. The First 150 Years — Silence, Void, Darkness, Gaps

Research based purely on scholarly evidence shows:

- The **original narrative of the 7th century is entirely missing**

- No preservation of **primary manuscripts**

- No trace in **contemporary history**

- No **eyewitness accounts** of the Prophet

- No external evidence of battles

- No material or archaeological traces in Mecca or Medina

   Conclusion: The early phase of Islam is effectively a **"historical dark zone."**

8. Conclusion: Conventional Islam — A Great Civilization, but Human-Made

This research does **not claim Islam is meaningless or worthless**. Rather, historically and empirically:

- Conventional Islam, through **human effort**, became a **great civilization**

- However, calling it **revelatory, divine, celestial, or supernatural** is merely a **claim without historical or scholarly evidence**

Future Research Directions

Several new scholarly avenues open up:

1. **Original language of the Quran:** Was it truly Arabic, or a mix of Syriac and Arabic?

2. **Meaning of "Rasul":** An individual or a collective role?

3. **Muhammad as a title** rather than a personal name — requires further manuscript evidence

4. **Political impact of Abbasids before Islam** — a research-worthy topic

5. **Comparative study of Quran and Judeo-Semitic literature**

6. **Sīrah of Muhammad** — purely literary or historically accurate? A comprehensive monograph is needed

7. **Compilation of Hadith** — a political narrative? Each major collection requires renewed scholarly analysis

Final Summary of Section 9

- The Quran in its current form **underwent evolutionary stages, historical compilation, and editorial arrangement**

- Hadith, Sīrah, Fiqh, Tafsir — all **Abbasid-era creations**

- Strong possibility that the word "Muhammad" is a **title or descriptor**

- The Meccan portion of the Quran **remains silent** on this word

- Early manuscripts **differ from the standardized text**

- The **Abbasid version of Islam** is one of the **most successful political constructions in history**

- Religious Islam = **human creation**

- Historical Islam = **political narrative**

- Revealed (nazuli) Islam = **limited, concise, ambiguous, and vague text**

A Critical Question

If the **original manuscripts do not exist**, and the available material was written **300–500 years later**, can we call it **history** or merely a **belief**?

- Is it **divine revelation** or **the constructed narrative of conquering rulers**?

- Is it a **divine religion** or a **state product**?

Answer from manuscript science:

- Conventional Islam is **not a revealed "Wahi" (divine revelation)**

- Rather, it is the outcome of a **comprehensive cultural, political, and intellectual project of the Abbasid era**

Final and Decisive Conclusion

After careful analysis:

- Conventional Islam as we know it today is the **result of a long editorial, formative, and narrative process**

- The **Abbasid era holds a central and decisive role** in its formation

- Lack of ancient complete manuscripts, missing original texts of Sīrah and Maghazi, later compilation of Hadith and Fiqh, and **150 years of historical silence** — all these are **empirical realities** forcing serious scholars to question traditional claims

Historical assessment:

- If the Abbasid era had **not implemented systematic compilation, state patronage, and formation of religious narratives**, Islam in its current, cohesive, and organized

form **would probably not have existed**, just as many contemporary religious and intellectual movements of the same period were lost to history

- **Acknowledging this does not negate Islam**, but represents a **scholarly, honest understanding of history**

Epilogue

This book is not an attempt to destroy faith, but a courage to question history.
It does not seek to strip belief, but to awaken reason.
Any tradition that fears questions is not truth — it is a construction of power.
History is not what is narrated, but what can be demonstrated with evidence.
Where original sources are absent, claims may be belief — but never history.
When religion is placed above inquiry, it ceases to be knowledge and becomes control.
This work offers no final answers — it opens doors.
It imposes no conclusions — it restores freedom of thought.
Now the choice belongs to the reader:
Will you question… or merely believe?

Because history ultimately moves forward not by faith, but by questions.