In the Name of God

Documents and Sources of Religions and Schools as a Yardstick of a Brief Criticism

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Name of book: **Documents and Sources of Religions and Schools as a Yardstick of a Brief Criticism**

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isbn: 978-622-6562-13-3

Publisher:**arses-mashhad**

Circulation:**500**

printing office:**Gandhi**

Year:**2019**

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Introduction

In examining different thoughts, one of the most fundamental aspects to be considered is the source of that thought.

That means whenever an idea is put forward by an individual or a group, their reasons for authenticity of their words must be first examined, so that the investigation of the source helps us understand other aspects of the subject. Obviously, this is if those words are rooted in the sources of the past, otherwise, if a new idea or comment is expressed in the form of a new theory with no historical basis, there is no need to examine its historical trail.

Therefore, if there is a historical trail, it should be referred to; and the closer you

get to the founding point of that thought, the more reliable the attribution of that idea to its originators.

This method of investigation can be seen and adopted in all sciences and their branches, but the most striking example of it is seen in the study of the course of religions and schools, where there is always a strong competition between religions and schools in attributing weaknesses or strengths to one another, so that each considers its own source and thinking to be authentic, and accuses others of having weak beliefs.

This raise the question of what is the first step to determine the closeness of a word to the truth in our time. This is especially important when the subject of the debate is

a religion-not a school-because religions have always had a greater scientific and practical scope compared to schools arisen from other thoughts, a fact that makes religions more important.

The answer to this question depends highly on determining the existence of that source, that is, when a subject is raised, it should be examined to see if it is actually and originally existed in the real world.

Many of the opinions expressed and reviewed in the public and even academic arena lack documentation, and it is only after determination of existence of the documents that other related aspects, such as the structure of contents, can be evaluated.

With this in mind, we come into the fact that all religions and schools attribute themselves to a document or a source to measure the authenticity of their own thoughts and acts. And what is being widely promoted today are material that are claimed, by their supporters, to be found in a specific source or document.

Now, by referring to what has been recorded in the history and found in the historical and archaeological documents, we prove that many of what has been attributed to some religions and schools lack valid historical documents acceptable by scientific or social communities.

Namely, some people have attributed an idea to a particular book or source, considered themselves its supporters,

and propagandized it while historical documents show no sign of indication for that idea being actually expressed at the era of origination of that monotheistic book or promotion of that particular school.

The absence of a definitive document can be due to several reasons, but this book assesses the historical connection or disconnection between the sources and the prophet or the founder. Many problems rise if there is no evidence of the connectivity of a given source to its promoter, the most important of which would be distrust toward that source. That is because how one can consider their ideas and actions as right if there are many doubts about the very existence of the source believed to be authentic? In fact,

there may have been some manipulations of the documents after the death the Prophet or the founder based on analogy or understanding. Therefore, by investigating the historical trail of intellectual trends, we can evaluate the value of their sources, especially historical and ancient ones.

SINA SABERI

Text Ascribed to God or Certain Figures within the Framework of Historical and Source Criticism

In order to examine an incidence, it is necessary to have sufficient knowledge of how it has occurred. This means that there must be a clear definition of the nature and origination of that incidence to overcome any ambiguities.

This is true in all areas of sciences, theoretical or practical. One of the subjects the origin of which should be referred to

includes human beliefs and religions, something that has been associated with various challenges since its inception.

This is what causes human beings to ask themselves why they should do or not do things within the framework of religions and schools.

What are the reasons for these commands and interdicts?

Do such commands exist in the real world?

Are these really words of God?

Are those people who reinforced this commands really existed?

If they really existed, haven't they made any mistake in receiving and delivering those commands?

These and tens and hundreds of other

questions exists in the mind of human beings.

In search of the truth, and sometimes due to lack of interest towards religious commands and rituals, human beings ask these questions to relieve themselves of following these commands.

Whatever the motive, these questions need to be answered properly since it is the useful answers that guide us to the truth, not the ones given based on emotions, imaginations and disbeliefs.

Different hypotheses, opinions, and, consequently, various disciplines have been created in an attempt to find useful answers to these questions and the likes.

However, the subject of this book will only include the first circle of these

questions since obviously, if this circle is made clear to the readers, they do not need to answer others as many of these questions are extensions of the first circle.

In religious questions, this first circle refers to **whether or not the words attributed to the religion are actually expressed by God or the promoters of that religion and school**.

This is the most fundamental question to be asked and its answer should be sought only in the sources of religions and schools. That means we need to first seek the original source of those commands and consider them divine only if we can find them in the original source. However, they still require to meet certain conditions, the most important being the authenticity of

the source. That means we need to determine whether or not the source really belongs to that specific epoch.

Here, the first step is to find a sign in our lifetime which proves that the text is related to the time of the revelation and the Prophet. **Now, can we trust those who say, "This is the words of God"?**
What if they were mistaken?!
What if they were delirious?!
What if these were all their delusions?

The best solution is to see if there is a direct way to connect us to the revelation after so many years.

To find this connection we merely need evidence and documents. That is, those written at the same era or near that era. This way, when the Prophecy of a person

has been established by miracles, one can say that this word is based on revelation proven by miracles and left for the posterity to follow. Otherwise, how can we follow a text written years after the death of that Prophet, which may have unnecessary omissions and additions or how can we ensure that this text does not promote an unnecessary thing, with the notion that it is divine, while it is not true in principle?

These texts are primarily a kind of data with uncertain validity, which have been recorded in historical sources. Therefore, the first step in historical investigation is to determine the accuracy of this data.

Errors and Shortcomings of Historical Narrators

In examining historical texts and narratives presented by their narrators, there are subjects that can be problematic if we cannot find a text or writing created at the era of the corresponding prophet. These are same problems faced by the narrators after that the epoch of that prophet, which have consequently been extended to years and centuries that followed. These obstacles and problems can be categorized in various methods, but I prefer to classify them into two main groups in this book:

A. Deliberate Mistakes and Distortions

1. The trustworthiness of the narrator in narration must be proven, lest he would be accused of being a courtier or spiteful.

For example, Jona Lendering, a Dutch historian addressed the misuse of Iranian history by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi by saying, "With false propaganda, Mohammad Reza Shah used the name of Cyrus and his Cylinder only to consolidate the Pahlavi regime."

Other historians, such as Klaus Gallas and Amélie Kuhrt, the Middle East historian, have mirrored these criticisms.

Another example is the research of Amir Mahdi Badie(1915-1994), an Iranian historian, writer and scholar, on the history

of Herodotus[1], which refers to the lies and contradictions of Herodotus concerning Iranians.

Moreover, Aristotle called Herodotus a fabulist and Plutarch[2] wrote a book about Herodotus, proving he has conspicuously and deliberately lied about all those Greek cities that opposed Athens.

2. The ideology and worldview of the narrator should be identified, knowing that certain thoughts will definitely affect narration since everyone looks at things

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[1]- Greek-speaking historian whose works remain to this day.

[2] - Ancient Greek historian and biographer

from the viewpoint of their own mental reserves.

For example, Ubbay ibn Ka'ab narrates a hadith on the special merits of reciting Surahs of Quran. He mentions special rewards for reading the Surahs Al-A'la,[1] Al-Ghashiya,[2] Albayyinah,[3] Al-Baqarah,[4] and Aal-i-Imraan[5]. He has mentioned merits for reading each surah quoting the Prophet. Someone asked the narrator,

[1] The 87th Chapter of Quran, also known as "Sabbah Ism" (the first words of the first verse)

[2] The 88th Chapter of Quran

[3] The 98th Chapter of Quran, also known as "Lam Yahun" (the first words of the first verse)

[4] The 2nd Chapter of Quran

[5] The 3rd Chapter of Quran

"How come no one else has narrated it?" to which he responded, "Honestly, I've invented this hadith for the sake of God, I saw people telling pre-Islamic myths and stories and reciting pagan poetry when they get together and I thought they are wasting their times.

I invented this hadith attributing it to the Prophet, so that people are encouraged to read Quran instead of wasting their time like that. I don't think there is any harm in that."[1]

3. The narrator must have knowledge of the subject, so that not to be accused of lacking awareness or expertise (although,

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[1] Collections of Shahid Motahari Works, Vol. 16, p. 99

this can also be considered as an inadvertent error).

B) Inadvertent Errors and Distortions

1. The narrator must be good at recording, i.e., they have to be able to keep an intact record of events. This is applicable both when they witness something and record it, and when they are quoting someone. And in the latter case, rather than paraphrasing, the narrator has to quote the exact words. That is because paraphrasing will raise doubts about the purpose of the speaker and the perception of the listeners.

Note: All errors that may occur in Listening and Observing are included in this group (and are explained in 5).

2. The narrator must be mentally healthy; in the case that they suffer a mental problem in the course of life, the starting date and duration must be perfectly clear, so that it is not perceived that they had the problem for their entire life.

3. They should be known for their positive social and psychological characteristics (as oppose to negative ones) because traits such as extremism, extrava gance, carelessness, illusionism and the like will certainly undermine their historical narrations.

4. There should not be any kind of omission of events or details in the

narrator's works. Unfortunately, there are many cases of "omission" in historical sources due to lack of equipment and information in the distant past, which can cause confusions and misconceptions in the mind of the reader.

5. Inevitable human errors should be rarely found in the works and character of the narrator. Unintentional errors in observing an event of, say, war can change the entire mindset of the reader. For example, when the tents are set on fire, the narrator may assume that it was enemy who did it and report the event accordingly, whereas in reality, one of the torches in a tent may have fallen down during the chaos of the

combat and caused the entire camp to burn down.

6. Precedence of a Date to an Event:

The closer the narration to the actual date of occurrence, the more reliable it will be. For example, an event was recorded in the 1st century AH, and then the same incident was recorded in a different scenario in the 3rd century AH. In this case, the report closer to the event would be more acceptable for the people, because they know that passage of long periods of time

(years, decades, or centuries) will not leave any trace of that event.[1]

7. Geographical Precedence of a Date to an Event:

In the case of two different interpretations (in terms of words, concepts, subjects) in recording an event, the one closer to the geographical location of the incident or event, will be more acceptable.

As you see, if no text is recorded during the lifetime of the Prophet or the person who claims guidance, there will be

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[1] -It should be noted that in the eyes of the future people, the analysis of an event is different from changing the remained scenario

problems after their death and the posterity will be unable to understand and fulfill obligations ordered in the Holy Writ. How can one act based on a text with such issues?

Now, let's have a look at the methods of narration in historical sources (including religious and school-related texts) to see which method is more in line with human intellect and whether or not a religion or a school can promote itself if it has a low-level narration method?

First, we need to explain the meaning and definition of joint and disjoint references in order to help you understand the remaining parts of this book more clearly.

Joint and Disjoint Reference

Joint References :

References transferred from a person or time to another person or time without any ambiguous interval.

For example, **A** passes a word to the **B**. Then, **B** passes the word to **C**, and subsequently that word is passed from **C** to **D** and so on and so forth. Now, say, **D** should not quote **A** directly because then, **B** and **D** are omitted from the chain and we cannot be sure whether **D**'s quote is free of

distortion. Therefore, the chain of narrators mush be clear and continuous without the slightest interruption. That means in this example, **D** quotes back the word from **C** to **A**.

Disjoint References:

References transferred from a person or time to another person or time with an ambiguous interval.

For example, in the above-mentioned case, **D** quotes a word from **A**. Or someone narrates an event occurred in the 1st century AD while the document itself is originated in the 3rd century AD with no other evidence of document dated to this nearly one century interval. In this case, we cannot be sure that these documents have

been transferred without any addition or omission from the first to third centuries.

Reliability of Narration Methods in Historical Sources from Highest to the Lowest

I. A source with joint **written** reference and several **reliable** narrators

II. A source with joint **verbal** reference and several **reliable** narrators

III. A source with joint **written** reference and a few **reliable** narrators

IV. A source with joint **verbal** reference and a few **reliable** narrators

V. A source with joint **written** reference and narrators with **undetermined reliability**

VI. A source with joint **verbal** reference and narrators with **undetermined reliability**

VII. A source with disjoint **written** reference and **reliable** narrators

VIII. A source with disjoint **verbal** reference and **reliable** narrators

IX. A source with disjoint **written** reference and narrators with **undetermined reliability**

X. A source with disjoint **verbal** reference and narrators with **undetermined reliability**

XI. A source with **joint** reference and narrators known to be **unreliable**

XII. A source with **disjoint** reference and narrators known to be **unreliable**

XIII. A source without a **written** document, but with an **indication** for the existence of that subject (this may be a historical, archaeological, geographical or customary evidence)

XIV. A source without any reference and **written** or **verbal** indication of existence

In addition to these fourteen groups, there are other criteria that can be considered to determine the more reliable source between the two.

Now, let's find the answer to the question whether a religion or school with

sources of group 1^1 is equal to religion or school with sources of group 9^2? (And all the other assumptions that the reader of historical texts can consider when comparing).

Any reasonable and mature person knows the answer to this question is negative because more reliable documents are always accepted over less reliable ones.

However, with the advent of various schools and sects that promote their

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1- A source with joint **written** reference and several **reliable** narrators

2 - A source with disjoint **written** reference and narrators with **undetermined reliability**

thoughts with particular material motives, many people have been driven into the negligence and departed the right path that human intellect can find easily and with a little reflection. The situation is similar to what we saw in the famous story of Pinocchio in his childhood. The author, Carlo Collodi, tells us about a day where the Fox and the Cat, want Pinocchio's gold coins, bring him to a land where according to them, if you plant your gold coins you get a tree of gold coins for every coin. This poem expresses exactly the theme of this story:

The rose has been destroyed and the thorn remained.
The treasure has been taken and the serpent left.

It is better that one's eye be fixed on a spear-head
Than that it should behold the face of an enemy.[1]

What happens to us that we still believe deceivers despite being taught not to through such stories? It is as if we forget those rational teachings when we grow up.

So far, we explained that every claim needs proof and the claimants themselves cannot confirm their claim without any evidence.

Consider this example: if someone stops at your door and tells you that half of your property belongs to him, will you just give

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[1]- The Golestan of Saadi, Chapter 7, on Love and youth

away half of your belongings only because he claims that?

That is why the content of books of religions and schools should be backed by signs of Prophecy-miracles that are proof of legitimacy of the prophet. It is only after such a miracle that the commandments of the Messenger are recorded to be left for later generations, so that they have evidence of events of the era of the prophet and a base for their arguments. We cannot have people emerging years after the death of the prophet and quote him because there must by some documents for their quotes. However, such documents are not available for most of the religious books and writings at present, except for the "Quran" and, at a much lower level, for the "Bible."

These two have the largest volume of written evidence that can be cited to in accordance with what was said earlier about the necessity of the availability of documents. (of course, new documents may be discovered in the future that will change some of our current notions, but what has been said about the valuation of documents must always be considered as a principle and any document discovered in the future should also be studied within the framework of this very principle).

It is only after authentication of the chain of narrators that we can analyze the document in terms of linguistic aspects and alike, which are great indicators of defect and distortion, but won't have a reliable

base for analysis until the source is authenticated.

The importance of documents' link to the original source (revelation) is because of the fact that the speaker (God, Gabriel, etc.) has used phrases that can mean differently with the slightest change, so that attribution of an act to one of the five states of Haram (forbidden), Halal (permissible or lawful), Mustahab (recommended), Makruh (detestable), and Mubah (permitted) or the subject matter can completely change.

We can never accept prohibition or legitimacy of something based on texts after long periods and considering issues explained about narrators of historical

narratives because they are evidently likely to contain errors.

Unfortunately, even today, we can see claims of communication with God through revelation and inspiration. These claimants are either liars or people with psychological disorders, or those who are suffering from delusion or some kind of mistake. It should be noted that this has been significantly common among the ancient communities due to their belief in things such as priesthood, divination, and the like. These belies along with deviant thoughts they had about the creator and the creature, were a huge source for claims related to religious and supra-religious experiences.

The documents that cannot be attributed to "revelation" will only have historical value, even if it is proven that they were used during the era of the corresponding prophet or messenger because, like other inscriptions and texts, they can be written based on the order of a king, a wise man or the like.

In such a historical setting, concepts such as distortion, defect, etc. will be out of the question and we can assume what was sent to the man through revelation and duties that were put upon him, have remained intact from that epoch on.

Having the above-mentioned explanations in mind, we will study sources of existing religions and schools and investigate their historical and ancient

documents in order to ascertain the authenticity of their words in the most fundamental phase of the our study, which will clarify many opinions and beliefs. Consequently, considering that objective and definitive observations are the most vivid element for humankind, we will build other related ethical and scientific topics around existing documents.

Zoroaster

As stated in numerous books, there are so many contradictions about the life of Zoroaster that Hashem Razi[1] suggests a mere list of all these contradictions requires writing an independent treatise. [2]

It is clear, however, that the exact era of his living is not known, but it can be deducted that he dates back to before 10th BC.Many cities, including Khorasan, Khwarazm[3], Sistan[4], Azerbaijan, and Ray[5],

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[1] - An Iranian writer, translator and Iranologist

[2] - Zoroaster and his teachings, pages 9 and 45

[3] - The myth of Zoroaster's life, page 22; Zoroastrian religion and law, page 13

[4] - Zoroastrian religion and law, page 13

[5] - Gathas, page 23

have also been mentioned as his hometown.

Before discussion what is remained of the Zoroaster's era, it is necessary to talk about the terminology needed to understand Iranian documents and sources. To this end, we will begin by examining historical trail of Iranian languages[1].

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[1] - Retrieved from the book of "The History of Iranian Literature before Islam"

The Ancient Era

The written works of this period include two languages.

A) The Avestan Language: The oldest books written in this language date back to the eighth to tenth centuries BC. Apart from the Avesta and its accessories, there is no other work in this language. This language was spoken in the eastern parts of Iran, probably around Khwarazm, Sistan and northern Khorasan[1].

B) Ancient Persian Language: This is a language spoken by residents of Fars

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[1] -I think a book has been found a while ago in the Avestan language, which was not included in the texts of Avesta during the initial estimates.

region. The inscriptions of the Achaemenes kings (559-330 BC) were also written in this language, the oldest dating back to the fifth century BC. The only remaining works of this era are Cuneiform scripts.

The official language or the language of royal correspondence in this era was Aramaic (one of the Sami languages with its oldest works being inscriptions dating back to the 9th and 8th centuries BC).

"A number of leather parchments containing correspondence dated back to the 5th century BC were found in Egypt, which belonged to the Satrab of Egypt,

Arsames."[1] After the overthrow of the Achaemenid, Aramaic language was replaced with Parsik (also known as Pahlavi).

Some of the most important ancient Persian inscriptions are as follows:

I. Ariaramnes inscription (about 640-590 BC): talks about the King's lineage and the fact that Ahura Mazda has presented this land to him.

II. Arsames inscription (about 590 to 559 BC): also refers to the King's lineage, praises Ahura Mazda and asks Him for support.

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[1] - The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 23

III. Cyrus inscription (559-530 BC): talks about the Cyrus himself.

IV. Behistun inscription: As the most detailed ancient Persian inscription, this one tells the story of becoming the king and defeating Bardiya.

There are other inscriptions, such as Fars, Susa, Suez, Alvand and Persepolis, most of which contain praise of the Ahura Mazda and introduction of the king, land and various palaces.

The Middle Era

This language epoch starts around 300 BC and continues to 700 AC and include two groups of languages:

A) Parthian, Pahlawānīg or Arsacid Pahlavi language: This was the language of the Arsacid Parthian Empire (248 BC – 224 AD) in the north and northeastern parts of Iran and there are written works in this language dated as far as the early Sassanid era.

B) Middle Persian or Pahlavi: This language was used during the Sassanid era in the south and southwestern parts of Iran.

C)

The Modern Era

Different versions of Persian language, spoken inside and outside of Iran, are categorized in this group.

Avesta and Zoroaster

The word "Avesta" is not included in the Avestan texts, and its meaning is also unknown. However, it is assumed that the word means "praise." According to Avestan and Pahlavi texts, Avesta was entirely disclosed to Zoroaster by Ahura Mazda himself.

"The Avesta's text is not uniform as far as the grammar is concerned. Some parts have an older style and are more in line with the correct

grammatical rules of the Avesta while, in some other parts, the grammatical rules have not been observed. This can be attributed to two factors: a) some parts of the book are older than others and b) there may have been differences of dialect between the two groups of work." [1]

The surviving texts of the Avesta consists of five sections: Yasna(s), Visperad, Yashts, Vendidad, and Khordeh Avesta (the Lesser Avesta), which is only about a quarter of its size during Sassanid era. Avestan texts are also divided into two

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[1]- The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 36

groups of Gathan texts and Late Avestan texts based on characteristics and antiquity of the language.

Gathas

Gathan texts include Gathas, Yasna Haptanghaiti and four prayers in Yasna 27.

The Gathan section is the oldest part of the Avesta consisting of 17 hymns, and in the existing Avesta they are located between the Yasnas; i.e. from 28 to 34, 43 to 51 and 53.

Gathan is divided into 5 sections, each of which has chapters called Hat, Hador or Ha. After the Gathan, Yasnas of 35-41,

known as the Haptanghaiti are considered the oldest part of the Avesta.

The Late Avesta

This section includes parts of Yasnas, Visperad, Khordeh Avesta, Yashts, Vendidad, Hadokht Nask, Avagmadaich, Vaethanask, Afarin-e-Peyghambar Zartosht[1] and Vishtaasb Yasht, which encompasses five sixth of the holy book of Zoroastrians.

According to some Avestologists and historians, this part of the Avesta contains thoughts related to eras before or after Zoroaster and cannot be regarded as pure Zoroastrian thoughts. However, neither the

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[1] Praise Zoroaster, the Prophet

Late Avesta, nor Gathan have any definitive document indicating the inclusion of Zoroaster's thoughts. That means, there is an equal lack of evidence for these thoughts purely belonging and not belonging to Zoroaster. As mentioned in the beginning of our discussion, in order to attribute a statement to a person or a source, first the existence of that person and source must be proven before examining the historical narration chain and the content of related documents. However, in this case, not only there is no chain of historical narratives, but also the existing narrations are disjoint, discontinuous and far apart.

Another point is that their words and interpretation are as brief and as insensible

as possible and therefore, they cannot be considered valuable other than for their historical and ancient information.

The evidence for this notion is the most widely used [Avestan] words in the Iranian society, i.e. good thoughts, good words, good deeds. Now, in order to label something as good, we have to define badness first. That means bad thoughts, bad words and bad deeds should be first explained in order to distinguish the deeds and duties of the people based on them. In other words, goodness must be fully explained in order to prevent it from being mixed anything else.

In Vendidad, and other sections related to the religious rules, it can clearly be seen that various commands in ancient Iran have

been carried out by Zoroaster or others, suggesting that every authorization is accompanied with a prohibition, so that knowing them will lead to goodness and the opposite will lead to badness. That means goodness is not what is perceived by individuals, but it is what is expressed by the Prophet or the promoter of the religion of a nation and the followers of that prophet or religion must find their duties in accordance with that.

Yasnas

Yasna means Worship and Prayer. Counting Gathas and the Seven Seasons in, Yasna is consisted of 72 sections, otherwise, it will be 38.

Yasnas 1-8 consist of prayers for Yazatas that are recited at the Yasna ceremony.

Yasnas 9-11 are called Hom Yasht. The syrup of Haoma Plant and other related matters are described in the Yasna 9. Yasna 11 describes the curse of cattle, horses and humans to those who do not treat them according to the rules. Yasnas 12 and 13 are dedicated to acknowledgement of the Zoroastrian religion. Yasnas 14 to 18 are prayers that include names of Yazatas. And so on.

Visperad

This section has many similarities to Yasnas as its topics are derived from Yasnas. Visperad has 24 sections.

Lesser Avesta

The Lesser Avesta includes prayers that are used by the general public as oppose to those specific to clerics. Wile is not possible to specify the date of its creation, the compilation of the Lesser Avesta has been attributed to Azarbad Maharspandan, the grand priest in the court of Shapur II of Sassanid Empire(309-379).

The most important parts of the Lesser Avesta include:

A) Nyayesh (adoration): Includes five prayers titles Sun, Mehr, Moon, Water and Fire.

B) Gah (time): Includes prayers for each day.

C) Sirosa (thirty days): Includes prayers dedicated to the Yazatas of every day of the month. These prayers seem to have been said during a period of 30 days after the death of a person.

D) Afrinagan (blessing): Includes prayers recited together while presenting. Four section of Afrinagan are currently available:

The Afrinagan-e-Dahman, which is recited for the dead.

The Afrinagan-e-Gahan, which is recited in the last five days of the year, which were considered to be a time for the spirits of the dead to visit the earth.

The Afrinagan-e-Gahanbar, which is recited at the Gahanbar ceremony.

The Afrinagan-e-Repiton, which is recited at the beginning and the end of summer.

E) Three Zoroastrian Prayers

F) Soroush Baaj (prayer of Yazata Soroush)

G) Hushbam (Praise of the dawn)

Some copies of the Lesser Avesta include important pieces, such as Afarin-e-Peyghambar Zartosht and Vashtasb Yasht. The latter is described as follows:

"In this text, Zoroaster summarizes principles of his religion to Vishtasba, in the same manner that Ahura Mazda states them to Zoroaster in the 19th Fargard of Vendidad. This Yasht quotes parts of Vendidad, often with numerous grammatical errors. The beginning of this Yasht is devoted to the Zoroaster's prayer to Vishtasba (which is an imitation of Afarin-e-Peyghambar Zartosht). It then speaks about the King's duties towards clerics and supporting religion and his citizens. Subsequently, the importance of some religious rituals is mentioned and finally an explanation of what

the soul experiences after death is provided. Like Afarin-e-Peyghambar Zartosht, Vishtasba Yasht is likely to have originally belonged to the second Nask of the 21 Nasks in Sassanid era which is called Vishtasba Sant."[1]

Yashts

Yashts were prayers mostly said to praise the Iranian past gods such as Mehr and Nahid. Of all Yashts, only 21 Yashts are available. The names of these Yashts are as

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[1]- The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 64

follows (the word "Yasht" should be added to each name):

1. Hormizd (Ourmazd)

2. Hafft Tan (Amshaspandan)

3. Ordibehesht

4. Khordad

5. Aredvisur (Aban, Nahid)

6. Khorshid (the Sun)

7. Mah (the Moon)

8. Tishtar (Tir)

9. Darvasp (Goosh)

10. Mehr

11. Soroush

12. Rashnu

13. Farvardin

14. Bahram

15. Vio (Ram)

16. Daena (Chista)

17. Ashi (Ard)

18. Ashtad

19. Khorrah

20. Haoma

21. Vanand

It appears that Yashts 1-4, 12, 18, and 20 have been compiled more recent that the others.

Vendidad

Vendidad is a contraction of the word Vi-daevo-dato, which literally means a person who follows "the law against demons (Daeves)." Daeves were basically Iranian and Indian gods rejected by Zoroaster. Vendidad is the 19th Nask of the Sasanian Avesta, and the only Nask that is fully available. It contains many commands and dictations of the Zoroastrianism in 22 Fargard or chapters. It is said that, compared with Yashts, Vendidad has inaccurate grammar. Some believe that Vendidad has been written after the Achaemenid era, but its content seems to be older.

Hirbodistan and Neyrangistan

The first half of this book, i.e. Hirbodistan, refers to the education and duties of Hirbadan (the Zoroastrian clerics) while its second half, Neyrangistan, talks about religious rules similar to parts of Vendidad.

Hadokht Nask

This is also the sixth Nask of the Sassanid era, of which three peices are available. The first piece is related to the prayer of Ashem Vohu while the second and third refer to after-death issues, which are similar to the 19th Fargard (chapter) of Vendidad.

Agemadaicha

This appears to have been a part of Hadokht Nask and it is about death.

Vitha Nask

In some ways, it can be considered a collection derived from other writings. A part of Vitha Nask discusses the case of a marriage between a Zoroastrian man and a non-Zoroastrian woman, the children born as a result and the inheritance rules apply to them. This is one of the latest Avesta texts.

Other sources written in the Avestan language include: Shāyast, Na-Shāyast, Pursishnīhā Vejarkard Dini, and Traditions of Farnbog Soroush.

The History of Avesta

The most accurate suggestion about compilation and writing of Avesta is that it has not been written during the lifetime of Zoroaster. In this regard, Dr. Tafazoli believes:

"There is no document available to make clear that what language Avesta was written in before the present script. The significance of the oral tradition and the preservation of religious works by words of mouth in Iran imply that the Avesta was kept more verbally than in writing…According to the book of Denkard, «It is logical to give more importance to the word of mouth (oral

speech) than what is written.» And elsewhere in says that a written work is not a complete form. [1]

….In pre-Islamic Iran, it was not common to keep literary and religious works in the writing. Therefore, that these works have been preserved for centuries from one person to the other and it was not considered necessary to record them. At that time, only state-owned, political, and economic documents [such as the content of the inscriptions of ancient Persian and Pahlavi, and those written on leather (parchments) and pottery] were

[1]- The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 68

considered to be worth writing. Avesta was preserved for centuries from one person to the other until it was finally recorded in the writing during the Sassanid era. Even after that, priests rarely used the written book to conduct religious ceremonies. To them, reciting Avesta by heart was more important."[1]

It was probably decided during the reign of Vologases I or early Sassanid era record the oral Avesta in the writing. Since the Aramaic alphabet (such Pahlavi) commonly used in Iran had defects such as the lack of signs for vowels, which caused

[1]- The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 13

confusion between some consonants and vowels and consequently, it had negative impacts on a religious books, the priests decided to create a new script based on Pahlavi. Avesta is written in this newly invented script.

"This script was invented with high precision and dedication of time; and it is likely that a panel of clerics and scholars involved in the process. In order to avoid any ambiguity in the recording of the Avesta, the scientists decided to consider a single letter for each Avestan phoneme, and therefore, they introduced changes to those Pahlavi letters that indicated several phoneme to create new letters. For example, the letter of Pahlavi alphabet

represents four phonemes of a, ā, Ḥ, Ḥā.

The inventors of the Avestan script dedicated this letter to represent the Avestan phoneme of a, by adding an indentation to its en) they made a new letter representing the phoneme of ā, by adding a ring, they invented the letter for the phoneme Ḥ and finally, by adding a tail, they invented Avestan Ḥā.

 In addition, they attempted to show all the details of the pronunciation of a word in the shape of the letter."[1]

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[1] - The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 70

The Avestan script (alphabet) has about 58 letters, which may be counted as 53 or 60, depending on some conditions. It is important to note that the invention date of this script is not clear; therefore, it is not possible to determine a date for the writing of Avesta using this script. However, because of the importance of religion during the reign of Shapur II and Anushiruwān, some have speculated that the present Avesta has been written around 6th -4th centuries AD.

Available Codices

Mary Boyce, professor and researcher of Zoroastrian studies, believes that the oldest manuscript written in Avestan language (K=Copenhagen/K١) dates back to 1323 AD.

Hashim Razi also believes that the oldest manuscript from Bahman Yasht, or in other words, Zand-e Vohuman Yasn, with its interpretation and translation in Pahlavi, is a transcription and derivation written about 600 years ago[1], i.e. the codex of the University of Copenhagen[2]. In his book on

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[1] - This word has been written in the book published in 1983

[2] - Avesta, page 244

the history of Iranian literature before Islam, Dr. Ahmad Tafazzoli suggests:

"There are several manuscripts available of Avesta, none of them alone contains the complete text. Some codices are accompanied with Pahlavi translations, so that Pahlavi translation of a sentence is written under the Avestan text. The oldest copy of Avesta is called K7 (kept in the library of the University of Copenhagen). This codex, an image of which has been published and contains only the Visperad, has been written in 937 Yazdgerdi, i.e. 1298 AD (or 1288 AD). Other old codices have been written in 14th century in Iran and

the latest codices have been transcribed in India since the 17th century.[1]

....There is a relatively long interval between the writing date of the available Pahlavi manuscripts and their date of origination (3rd century AH/9th century AD).

The oldest colophon indicates that the transcription of Denkard has taken place in 399 Yazdgerdi year (1020 AD). This colophon has been quoted in the K43 codex, which dates back to the 16th century.

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[1] - The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 71

The oldest available codices date back to the 14th century, and most of them have been written in Kerman. Indian codices have been transcribed based on copies taken from Iran to India.

Transcription has been prevalent in India since the 14th century, but most copies of Avesta have been transcribed during the 18th and 19th centuries. There are some differences in terms of writing style between Persian and Indian codices."[1]

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[1] - The History of Iranian Literature before Islam, page 325
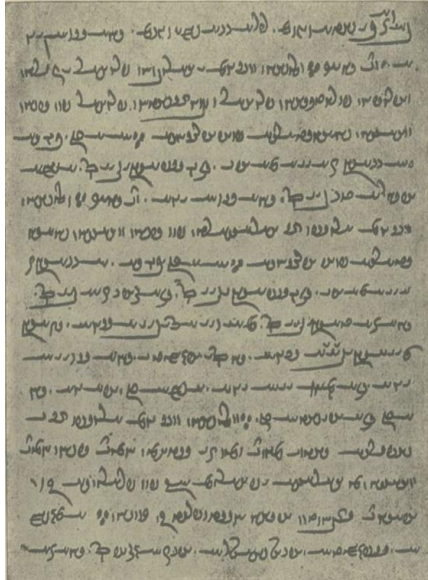
A page of the manuscript of Avesta and Zand (= Yasna K5) is one of
the oldest codices of Avesta which is kept at the library of [the
University of] Copenhagen. It has been written in 1325 AD
(According to Gelnner, 1323 AD) by Mehrban Keikhosro.[1]

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[1]- Retrieved from the website of Iranology society,
iranologysociety.blogspot.com

Indian Religion and Schools

Vedas

The word Veda comes from "Vid" meaning knowledge. It refers to a collection of old writings that are believed by many Hindus to be Apauruṣeya, which means "not of a man" and "superhuman." They believe that these writings have been revealed to holy men.

This collection is the first or one of the first Indo-European works and since its inception, it has long been transmitted orally by successive generations. Due to the lack of information about the author of this book and the date of its completion, nothing can be said about its date of origination.

In this regard, in an article introducing the Vedic literature, Dr. Mohammad Javad Shams states:

"Their exact date of origination is not known, and there are disagreements between Hindus and western Hindu scholars about their origins.

According to Dasgupta, there are important comments on this issue, but none of them is correct because ancient Hindus rarely recorded and preserved historical reports about their literary, religious, and political works". [1]

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[1] Introduction of Vedic literature, page 64

It includes chapters such as Rig Veda[1], Samhita[2], Yajur Veda[3], Athara Veda and the oldest text in the collection is Rig Veda. Duson presented a classification for Vedas, so that each of the four aforementioned Vedas is assigned a collection of anthems (Samhita), a set of rules (Brahmana) and a Sutra. Each Brahmana is then divided into three parts, called Wedhi (rules and commands), Arthawada (explanation of rules) and Upanishads."

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[1] - Prayers

[2] - Hymns

[3] - Worshipers

Assumptions about the origination date of these four chapters of the Vedic literature are as follows:

Samhita: 2000 to 1100 BC

Brahmana-Aranyaka: 1100-800 BC

Upanishads: 800-500 BC

Sutra-Vedange: 500 BC onward (Article)[1]

About Vedas

Rig Veda is the oldest text of the Vedas, which has ten sections (Mandala), two to seven of which are considered to be the oldest.

There is a great deal of controversy about their origination date between scholars, as

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[1]- Introduction of Vedic literature, page 167

Max Muller believes that Vedas have been written about 1200-1500 BC while Hugh talks about 2400 BC. Hindu astronomers believe that they have been written in the 3rd and 6th millennia BC; a notion that has been rejected by McDonnell who believes that these texts are similar to Avesta and the old parts of the Avesta have not been written before 800 BC. There are a number of statements about the content of this work in the book of *Indian Religions and Philosophical Schools*:

"Most 19-century orientalists believed that Veda's hymns were the result of childish imaginations of early human beings. That is, people who were

afraid of the mysterious forces of nature and horrified by the wrath of these elements tried to characterize them and title them as gods worthy of worship, so that to receive their mercy by sacrificing for them and donating gifts and charities in order to be safe from their wrath."

According to Max Muller, "If you read rhymes of Rig Veda you will clearly realize that they refer to the main phenomena of the nature, so that understanding of these hymns does not

require pre-knowledge, since even children are also able to understand them." [1]

Samhita does not have any particular value, because much of this text is a derivation of Rig Veda. Yajur Vedais completely devoted to Vedic rituals. The Athara Veda or Vedas of the Commons have nothing to do with the Rig Veda. The other name of this Veda is Veda Bharma Veda and its content is apparently older than other Vedas."

[1] - Indian religions and philosophical schools, page 34

Upanishads

The Upanishads (Vedanta) is the final part of the Vedas collection. About 10 to 12 of the Upanishads have the oldest and most important texts that have apparently been quoted for centuries. Some believe that these texts have probably been written in the 7th or 8th BC and before the lifetime of Buddha (before the 6th century BC). These sections include:

- The oldest texts: Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya (their language is similar to Vedic Sanskrit)

- The texts that are likely to date back to the 5th or 6th century BC: Mundaka, Isha, Ketha, Svet asvatara, Mahanarayan

- The texts that are likely to have been written in the late 5th century BC: Preshna, Jabala, Mandokieh, Maitrayan (a language similar to the classic Sanskrit).[1]

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[1]- Introduction of Vedic literature, page 186

Buddhism

Gautamabadada was born in the 6th Century BC (560 BC) in Lumbini in southern Nepal. As is the case with many myths of nations, his birth is associated with unacceptable legends. It is said that before his was born, he was a potential Budha (A Budhi Satvaei) who was living in the Tushita heaven and when he was supposed to be born, he chose his own parents. As a result, his mother dreamed that a white elephant is descending from the sky and entered her womb. At the moment of birth, the child sang the hymn of victory and walked in ten directions but did not see anyone in the world who could confront him.

On the day of Buddha's birth, there were several earthquakes, it rained, and beautiful flowers flourished. The aroma of the flowers filled everywhere, heavenly hymns were heard and salt water became sweet.

He was a prince of the Shakia or Shiakiyah tribe. At the age of 29 and as a married man, he encountered with the signs described to his father at the time of his birth, when he was walking around in the city. He finally decided to live in seclusion. Therefore, he went home, said goodbye to his wife and children who were sleeping and crossed the gate of the city- which was open by the power of his gods- with his chariot and horse. Eventually, he settled deep in the jungle, took the appearance of monks, and visited two

professors in order to teach him the eternal tranquility and immortality of Nirvana. Those two professors could not fulfill Buddha's expectation to the fullest extent and therefore, he separated from them and, with several other ascetics, started an extreme course of austerity until he lost his strength. After six years of doing this, he realized that absolute truth could not be found in this way and, as a result, he returned to his natural life. At this time, his companion ascetics separated from him because they thought that Buddha had forsaken his path. He then sat under a tree and the story goes:

"Buddha sat facing East under a tree, later called Awakening and Lightening, and said to himself: "I

will not move from this place, until I find the truth." Then, he began to think and concentrate on spiritual power and meditation. However, the devilish Mara tried to seduce him. By threatening and then sending charming and beautiful women, Mara tried to stir up the lusts of the great sadhu (ascetic), distract his attention from the truth, and prevent him from understanding the reality of the world. This, however, had no effect on the immutable will of Gautama, and eventually at night, the truth revealed itself to him. He gradually reached higher and more superior levels of consciousness and awareness and an endless blaze flowed in the deepest

core of his existence. Consequently he learned the secrets of the world with an intuitive knowledge."[1]

Eventually, he traveled and promoted his thoughts in India for forty years. According to Pali texts, he died in 480 BC, at the age of eighty.

Some, like Rice Davids, believe that Buddha was a Hindu believer. However, given fundamental differences between the two worldview, he cannot be considered a follower of Hinduism.

"Although it is possible that the Hindu spirituality, especially the

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[1]- Indian religions and philosophical schools, page 136

Upanishads, has found its way to Buddhism, there is no doubt that there has been a great difference between the two from the beginning, which led to their decisive separation. Moreover, the Hindu religion considered the Buddhist cult non-religious and outlaw. That is because the Buddhists initially did not accept the spiritual doctrine of the Vedas, and denied the Atman ritual, which was the basis of the teachings of Upanishads."[1]

[1]- Indian religions and philosophical schools, page 28

The Oldest Works

The oldest Buddhist works are mostly written in Pali and then Sanskrit. These writings consist of three sets (Pitaka-tri) entitled Sottapi Taka, Winayapi Taka, and Aphi Damapi Taka. Sotta(s) are considered to be older than Aphi Dama. However, like Hindu sources, the exact date of their writing cannot be determined, although there are relevant theories. One believes the writing completion date of this collection to be around around 241 BC, when the third largest Buddhist council was formed under Ashoka's rule. [1]

1- Ibid, page 130

The Buddhist council was an association consists of Buddha's disciples who gathered to preserve Buddha's thoughts and teachings after his death. The first council was formed at the very time of Buddha's death while it the second one was not formed for the next hundred years. The formation of this council led to separation of the two groups of Buddhist monks, as they disagreed about the ten principles of spiritual practice. Eventually, a group of monks who believed in the original teachings of Buddha left the meeting while the rest created changes in the Buddha's creed, leading to the formation of Mahayana school. The third council was formed during the empire of Ashoka.

Jainism

Jainism is a monastic formation that strives to achieve eternal peace by means of principles and rules. Like Buddhism, Jainism did not accept the heavenly nature of Vedas, but it is considered to be a branch of Hindu religion as is Buddhism.

According to the sacred book of Jain religion, their leader, Mahavira, was living before 500 BC, and was missioned to promote Jain religion under the approval of God. Dariush Shaygan, however, believes that Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism; because before him, a man called Pershva was promoting this religion in the 8th century BC. Additionally, followers of Jainism believe that before Pershva, there

was another person, Arishtanemi, who joined Nirvana at about 84,000 years ago.[1]

On the early days of Mahavira's austerity, it is believed that he was dressed for one year and a month before becoming a naked ascetic. This, and perhaps other physical austerities that he imposed on himself caused him to endure many wounds from people. [2]

According to the *Holy Books of the East*:

"In the 13th year, squatting ... under the burning heat of the sun ... with his knees upward and his head downward, deep into his thoughts and

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[1] - Ibid, page 185

[2]- The World's Living Religions, page 85

in a pure state of austerity, he found Nirvana the absolute infinite (Kuala Lara), complete and full, with no impediments."[1]

Like other myths, various legends have been created about Mahavira. For example, it is believed that he knew the thoughts of all scientists and had an infinite sense of perception and knowledge. Mahavira eventually joined Nirvana in 526 BC in Pawa.[2]

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[1]- Ibid, page 86

[2]- Indian religions and philosophical schools, page 185

The Oldest Works

The texts containing the teachings of Jainism are called Agamas or Siddhantas.

The language of the sacred texts of Jainism is Prakrit (the local and native language of India). Commentaries and other Jain books are in Sanskrit.

The oldest text of this collection is called Angaha, which contains early narratives of the Jain monastic system as well as sermons and the conversations of Mahavira (6th century BC).

There is a controversy among the followers of this religion regarding the authenticity of the Jain texts:

"The cult of Stehnach Vesti believes only thirty three texts of this

collection are authentic, while the Śvētāmbara considers forty five texts as legitimate and valid. Some followers of this religion also believe that the sacred texts of Jainism comprises of eighty four texts as."[1]

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[1] - The world's living religions, page 88

Puranas

Puranas is a collection of writings considered to be sacred by their believers. Even some of the followers of Hindu tradition believe that this collection is as worthy as the Vedas. Some of them even consider a value higher than Vedas for some parts of Puranas. This collection include Vishnu - Shiva - Bhagavata - Naradia - Brahma Virvata - Linga - Varaha - Brahma - Padma - Marcandia - Agni - Bahawishia - Garuda - Brahmanda - Scanada - Vamana - Kurma - Matsya.

These texts are in Sanskrit, and refer to topics such as the epochs of the world, the genealogy of the gods, the genealogy of mystics and kings and stories of creation. They can be considered an encyclopedia or

a hymnal of the folk literature. It has always believes that there are 18 Puranas with different writing dates. Similar to other great and ancient Indian schools and thoughts, the origination date of Puranas is unclear. In this regard, Dariush Farhang believes:

"It may be that the oldest Puranas have been created after the great war of Bharatra, i.e.500 BC because the genealogy of the kings, mystics and the great sages of that land end at the same date in Purana. However, it should be noted that we don't have Puranas in their original form. The present Puranas, of course, are an adoption of the older sources, and it is

not possible to have a decisive judgment about how they were developed and to which era they belong. Wilson believes that available Puranas can be dated back to the 8th and 9th centuries, and they belong to a period preceding the era of Shankaracharia, the great Wiseman of Vedanta, who lived in the 8th and 9th centuries AD."[1]

[1]- Indian Religions and Philosophical Schools, page 280

Bhagavat Gita

Bhagavat Gita is considered to be one of the most sacred works for Hindus; so that it is considered as valuable as the Upanishads.

This collection deals with the story of the battle between the children of Bharat, which took place in an area near the today's city of Delhi.

"Gita has eighteen speeches, the first of which has an epic theme, while others have poetic expressions of philosophical and religious topics. Neither their style is epic, nor does their context have any relation to war and battlefield. It seems that Gita's creator has made the story of war an instrument to express their thoughts.

This kind of work is common, especially among the writers and poets of the East, such as the stories and legends of Simorgh, Lily and Majnoon, Khosrow and Shirin, Joseph and Zulikha, which were used by Iranian poets as a means for expressing philosophical and mystical thoughts."[1]

Like other Hindu sources, there are different views about the origination date of this work. Having their own reasons and proofs, none of these views can definitely determine the date of origination. Some,

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[1]- Gita, page 13

such as Lorincer, believe for the origination date to be after Christ and Buddha as it has been derived from the Four Gospels. Quit contrary, people like Dasgupta believe that this is fictional and Bharat belongs to the pre-Buddhism era. There is a third view presented by Garb, who believe that this work dates back to the first half of the 2nd Century BC and there have been some changes in this book after this period.[1]

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[1]- Indian Religions and Philosophical Schools, page 287

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is the only book validated by Jewish people that has been written by various writers in the course of years and centuries. The only fact here is that there is no information available on the exact date of the writing of its most important parts. In fact no information is available on when exactly the Jewish Prophet, Moses, lived. This is the subject of disagreement between scholars, although some believe him to have been a contemporary of Rameses II (1279-1213 BC)[1]. However, there seems to be some errors in this theory.

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[1]- [The third pharaoh] of the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt that lived before Seti I and after Merneptah.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament comprises the first part of the Holy Scripture, which consists of 39 books and 929 chapters. According to the Jews, the Old Testament was written in the course of about a thousand years, meaning it was started about 1400 BC by Moses himself and completed with the book of Malachi at about 400 BC. The book of Deuteronomy, 31:9-12, says on the initial composition of parts of Torah:

And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, "At the end of

every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law."

According to the Jews, this Testament is divided into three sections: Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim.[1]

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[1]- Some non-researchers think that because the so-called holy book refers refers to its own writing or non-distortion, it should be so; while it should be understood that the holiness and non-distortion must first be proved, and then the subject matter of the books can be evaluated. One of the ways to prove the holiness is the same mentioned throughout this book.

Torah

Torah is consisted of five books entitled:

1. Genesis (Bresheit, creation of the world)

2. Exodus (Shemot, exit from Egypt)

3. Leviticus (Vayicra, the rules of the priests)

4. Numbers (Bambidbar, Census)

5. Deuteronomy (Devarim, repeating the rules of Torah) (Preface to the translation of the Torah)

According to the Jews, these five books were the commandments of God to Moses, given to him in 1312 BC.[1]

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[1] - Shofar, number 268

Nevi'im

The second part of the Old Testament is the Book of Prophets or Nevi'im, which consists of 21 chapters:

The first group include: Joshua, judges, the first Samuel, the second Samuel, the first kings, and the second kings.

The second group include: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Younis, Mika, Nahum, Habukhuk, Safmania, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Ketuvim

The third part of the Old Testament includes a hymnal of writings with various

themes.

The Written Language

The main language of the Old Testament is Hebrew, which is the ancient language of the Jews. The other language used in this work is Aramaic. Both Hebrew and Aramaic are branches of the Sami language.

Sources of Torah

From around the 1850s, various views were presented criticizing the Torah and other parts of the Holy Scripture, one of the most important of which was the source of the their texts.

There are also two very important theories, one being that the today's Torah

has nothing to do with the Torah of Moses because the Torah has been missing for centuries it was compiled by Ezra, the scribe after a part of it was found. The other theory mentions the multiplicity of the writers of the Torah, one of which may be considered to be Moses.

The Oldest Codices

The Old Testament books were carefully transcribed and copied by the Jewish scribes and thus transmitted from generation to generation.

Every time a scribe duplicated a new copy of the Holy Scripture, they would destroy the old one. That is why the original oldest codices of the Old Testament are not available. In fact, the oldest full copy of the Old Testament was duplicated in the 10th century AD. [1]

The Dead Sea scrolls were also written around the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. [2]

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[1]- The New Testament Applied Commentary, page 155

[2]- Ibid, page 155

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest manuscript of the Old Testament was the Leningrad Codex developed in 916 AD. We now have codices of Isaiah and Daniel belonging to about 100 BC.[1]

Bruce Vaticke believes, "None of the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible can be certainly attributed to pre-400 BC through archeology and nuclear physics."[2]

The only full text of the Hebrew Old Testament is considered to be the "Măsură" codex which dates back to around 900 AD.

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[1]- The evolution of the Bible, page 230

[2] - The Evolution of the Bible, quoted from the Biblical Criticism, page 51

Gospel

Christianity-approved texts are found in the second part of the Holy Scripture, "the New Testament." The New Testament, which unlike the Old Testament is only approved by Christians, consists of 27 books and treatises, supposedly written by nine or eight people. The five most important sections of this collection are the four gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John plus the Acts of the Apostles. It is noteworthy to mention that, contrary to popular belief, these four gospels are not written by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. In fact, in the Greek scriptures of Gospels, these names are accompanied with the word Kata, which causes the titles of the Gospels to be translated as: "The Gospel

attributed to Matthew or Gospel in the words of Matthew," and so on.[1]

[1]- The evolution of the Bible, page 227

A Brief Introduction

The Gospel of Mark: Mark has been introduced as a disciple of the Apostle Peter, and this Gospel has probably written around the 60 AD.

The Gospel of Matthew: It has believed to have been written between 50 and 80 AD.

The Gospel of Luke: It has believed to have been written at about 60 AD by Luke, who was a physician. In addition to this book, he is considered to be the writer of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Gospel of John: There are many disputes over the writing date of this

Gospel, which in general, dates back to 50-140 AD.

   Acts of the Apostles: The writing of this book, which is believed to be a continuation to the Gospel of Luke, dates back to about 60 AD.

The Oldest Codices

The oldest codex of today's New Testament is a piece of papyrus, known as John Rylands, which is a Gospel of John and is estimated to date back to 125 AD while its official date is 150 AD.[1]

> "Irenius is the first ancient writer who mentions the Four Gospels. He quoted them nearly 400 times, mostly from Paul's treatises. The Clement of Alexandria has 320 quotations from the New Testament, many of which are of the Gospels. Tertullianus have no less than 700 quotations from the

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[1]- Ibid, 230

Gospels. This number of quotations at the beginning of the third century after two centuries of absolute silence shows that Gospels were not previously known and they were written between 170 and 180 AD. That means these Gospels were written when the disciples of Jesus were long gone…. At the time of the Ireneus and the Trotolianus, i.e. about 200 AD, there were at least 40 Gospels, 40 Acts of the Apostles and their memorial, 20 revelations, and hundreds of New Testament codices. Of these, they chose 4 Gospels and 16 other texts and

preserved 40 codices. Others were missing without any trace."[1]

1- Ibid, pages 224 and 225

At the end of this section, I will refer to an email I received from Dr. Evans in reply to my inquiry about the oldest codex of the Gospel and his final viewpoint about Gospel based on the research he has conducted so far:

> 27September 2018
>
> ...The oldest documents (manuscripts) or copies of the New Testament Gospels date to the second century, about 100 years after the Gospels were originally written. These manuscripts are only small fragments. The oldest, largest manuscripts of the Gospels date to about 250 years after the Gospels were written. The two great books (or codices) are Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, both of which date to around 340 AD .

I attach a chapter for a book that I am writing on this subject. It is technical and scholarly, so it might difficult for you to read. But it is the only thing that I have that I can send you. I hope it helps.

I should also tell you, because you live in Iran, which is a Muslim country, that the Christian Gospels were written about 40 to 50 years after the time of Jesus, that is, they were written 77 – 90 AD. The Quran, which also talks about Jesus, was written 600 years after the time of Jesus. Besides the four Christian Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), Jesus is described in the book of Acts and in several New Testament letters, all dating from the first century AD, only a few years after the time of Jesus.

I hope this helps you .

Sincerely yours ,

Craig Evans, Ph.D., D.Habil   .

Houston Baptist University

Quran and the Prophet [Muhammad]

The exact year of the birth of the Prophet of Islam is not clear, although some people, such as Ibn Hisham, have mentioned that he was born in the year of Āmu l-Fīl. However, it is not exactly clear what year that is. Nevertheless, given that according to historians the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) passed away in 632 AD (11 AH) and he was 63 years old at the time of his death, his birth date can be deducted to have been around 569 AD. Muhammad's first revelation is also known to have taken place when he was 40 years old, which means about 509 AD. [1]Therefore, we can

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[1] -Analytical history of Islam, pages 37 and 41

conclude that the emergence of Quran was started around 509 AD.

Another point we would be needing in the in the future discussions is the date of the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. With a little discrepancy in recording, it is believed that the prophet started his migration from Mecca on Rabi Al-Awwal of the fourteenth year after his first revelation (622 AD). Other dates that can help you understand some of the subsequent topics are as follows:

Name of Caliph	Reign
Abdallāh bin Abī Quḥāfah	11-13 AH
Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb	13-23 AH
Uthman ibn Affan	23-35 AH
Ali Ibn Abu Tallib	35-40 AH

According to the above, there must be documents dated back to the time of Prophet's death that proves that no or little no change has been made in the word of God when the Prophet was no longer able to guide the additions and deficiencies that arise in the thoughts of the posterity; otherwise, in the absence of such documents, one cannot be certain about the originality and authenticity of the main source of Islam.

Until recently, before the following texts were discovered, it was generally perceived that the existing historical evidence indicate that Quran was not written at the time of the Prophet. However, the discovery of these Quran codices reinforced other viewpoints that reflect the possibility of the writing of Quran during the lifetime of the Prophet. We will now discuss some of these codices.
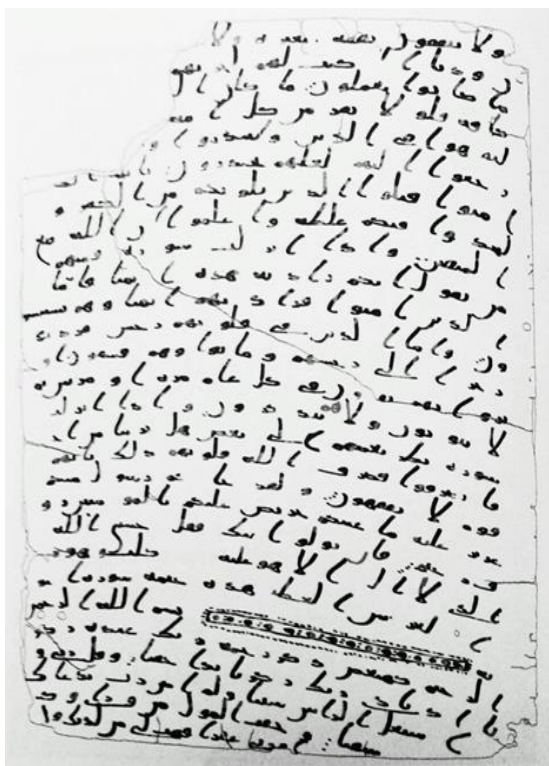
The Sana'a Palimpsest

The Sana'a Palimpsest, discovered inside the ceiling structure of the Great Mosque of Sana'a, contains eighty pages in total, with a volume close to the Paris-Petersburg manuscript. Two different dates were

determined for this manuscript. The first is the date of the Quran first written on the parchment and the second is the date of writing of a second Quran that was written on the same parchment, after partial cleaning of the first written text.

"A radiocarbon analysis was conducted on a detached leave, which is now preserved in a personal collections in the United States. With a probability of 95%, the result showed that the parchment was produced between 45 BH and 49 AH and, that it belongs to the period between 8 BH to 36 AH with a probability of 68%...However, the second or upper

text was written in the 2nd Century AH...Other tests conducted on two specimens taken from the two parchments (2 and 8), Inv. No. 01-27.1, indicated the dates between 81 BH to 22 AH and 198 BH to 23 AH, respectively, with a probability of 95%."[1]

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[1]- Qurans of the Umayyad, pages. 95-104

An image of Sana'a Palimpsest, Inv. 01-27.1

(Derived from *Qurans of the Umayyad*, p. 299)

An image of Sana'a Palimpsest, Inv. 01-27.2

(Derived from *Qurans of the Umayyad*, p. 319)

The Codex of Birmingham University

An image of the Codex of Bermingham University

The following is based on what has been written in the Birmingham University's website on this codex:

A Qur'an manuscript held by the University of Birmingham has been placed among the oldest in the world thanks to modern scientific methods.

Radiocarbon analysis has dated the parchment on which the text is written to the period between AD 568 and 645 with 95.4% accuracy. The test was carried out in a laboratory at the University of Oxford. The result places the leaves close to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, who is generally thought to have lived between AD 570 and 632.

Researchers conclude that the Qur'an manuscript is among the earliest written textual evidence of the Islamic holy book known to survive. This gives the Qur'an

manuscript in Birmingham global significance to Muslim heritage and the study of Islam.Susan Worrall, Director of Special Collections (Cadbury Research Library), at the University of Birmingham, said: *'The radiocarbon dating has delivered an exciting result, which contributes significantly to our understanding of the earliest written copies of the Qur'an. We are thrilled that such an important historical document is here in Birmingham, the most culturally diverse city in the UK.'*

The Qur'an manuscript is part of the University's Mingana Collection of Middle Eastern manuscripts, held in the Cadbury Research Library. Funded by Quaker

philanthropist Edward Cadbury, the collection was acquired to raise the status of Birmingham as an intellectual centre for religious studies and attract prominent theological scholars.

Consisting of two parchment leaves, the Qur'an manuscript contains parts of Suras (chapters) 18 to 20, written with ink in an early form of Arabic script known as Hijazi. For many years, the manuscript had been misbound with leaves of a similar Qur'an manuscript, which is datable to the late seventh century.

Susan Worrall said: *'By separating the two leaves and analysing the parchment, we have brought to light an amazing find within the Mingana Collection.'*

Explaining the context and significance of the discovery, Professor David Thomas, Professor of Christianity and Islam and Nadir Dinshaw Professor of Interreligious Relations at the University of Birmingham, said: *'The radiocarbon dating of the Birmingham Qur'an folios has yielded a startling result and reveals one of the most surprising secrets of the University's collections. They could well take us back to within a few years of the actual founding of Islam.*

'According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad received the revelations that form the Qur'an, the scripture of Islam, between the years AD 610 and 632, the year of his death. At this time, the divine message was not

compiled into the book form in which it appears today. Instead, the revelations were preserved in "the memories of men". Parts of it had also been written down on parchment, stone, palm leaves and the shoulder blades of camels. Caliph Abu Bakr, the first leader of the Muslim community after Muhammad, ordered the collection of all Qur'anic material in the form of a book. The final, authoritative written form was completed and fixed under the direction of the third leader, Caliph Uthman, in about AD 650.

'Muslims believe that the Qur'an they read today is the same text that was standardised under Uthman and regard it as the exact

record of the revelations that were delivered to Muhammad.

'The tests carried out on the parchment of the Birmingham folios yield the strong probability that the animal from which it was taken was alive during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad or shortly afterwards. This means that the parts of the Qur'an that are written on this parchment can, with a degree of confidence, be dated to less than two decades after Muhammad's death. These portions must have been in a form that is very close to the form of the Qur'an read today, supporting the view that the text has undergone little or no alteration and that it can be dated to a point

very close to the time it was believed to be revealed.[1]

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www.birmingham.ac.uk [1]

Kairouan Codex, Islamic Art Museum

An image of the Kairouan Codex R38

(Derived from *Qurans of the Umayyad*, p. 321)

With 210 pages, this Quran is kept in the Museum of Islamic Arts of Kairouan, under the code R38. The radiocarbon analysis on some parts of this Quran indicates that this Quran has been written between 691-648 AD, with the probability of 95.6%. However, the author of *Qurans of the Umayyad* believes that this Quran has been written more recently.[1]

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[1]- Qurans of the Umayyad, page 220

The Manuscript of the University of Tübingen

Using scientific techniques, experts have determined that this version has been written between 649 and 675 AD with the probability of 95%. This manuscript includes verse 37 of Surah 17 to verse 57 of Surah 36 and it is written in Hijazi Kofi script.
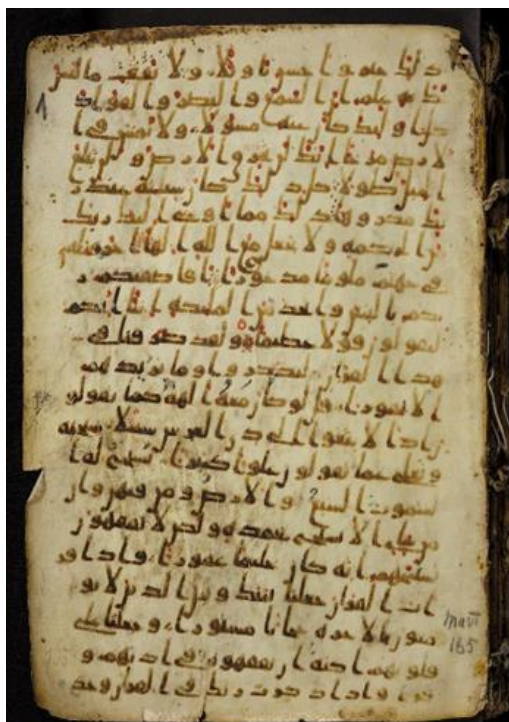
Image taken from www.idb.ub.uni-tuebingen.de [1]

At the end of this section, we would like to discuss two ancient codices that were determined to belong to the first half of the 1st Century AH based on script and artistic evidence. The only shortcoming of these codices could be lacking radiocarbon test.

A. A codex attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib held at the Astan Quds Razavi Collection.

An image taken from the codex 18, Astan Quds Razavi,

Mashhad, Iran

(Derived from *Qurans of the Umayyad*, p. 325)

B. The codex attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, which a part of Golestan Palace collection.

The *Quranic Manuscripts and Documents* states about this manuscript:

"It is written in Kufic script on a piece of dear skin and without diacritics. Only one page, containing the final verses of the Surah al-Balad, Surah al-Shams and the beginning of Surah al-Layl has diacritics. The manuscript starts with Surah al-Tabarak and ends with Surah al-Mursalat. On another page, the phrase "written and gilded by Ali ibn Abi

Talib in the year seven[1]" indicates the date of writing.

If the authenticity of this important document is proven, it can be an important proof for Islamic historians for determining dates of events in the dawn of Islam."[2]

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[1] كتبه و ذهبه على بن ابى طالب سبع هجريه

[2] - Quranic Manuscripts and Documents attributed to the 14 Infallibles, page 137

An image of the Quran attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib

(Taken from *Quranic Manuscripts and Documents*, p. 138)

In addition to the aforementioned Quranic manuscripts, there is other evidence, such as letters addressed to rulers of different territories known to be written by the Prophet of Islam. Although the authenticity of some of these letters has been approved by a number of experts, due to the possible errors that they may contain, they will be discussed briefly. However, it should be noted that, even with errors, these letters are better and stronger evidence compared to most other religions and schools.

The Letter of the Prophet of Islam to Khosrow Parviz, King of Iran
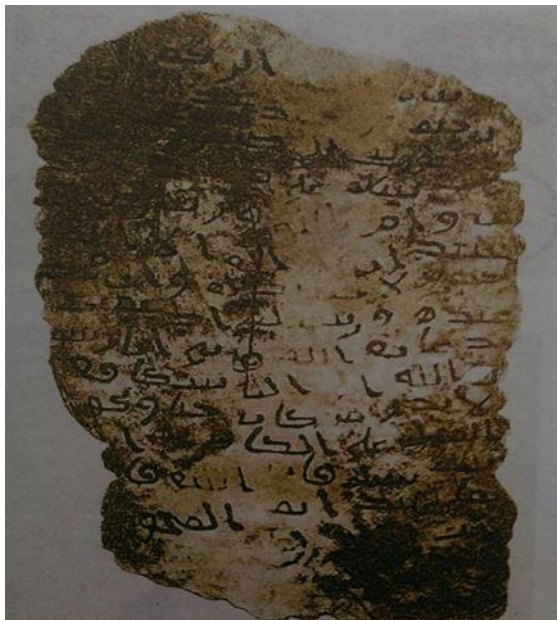
An image of the letter of the Prophet to Khosrow Parviz, sent to the Cultural Heritage Organization

(Taken from *Quranic Manuscripts and Documents*, p. 210)

Regarding the research conducted on this letter, the religion scholar, Mohsen Jafari Mazhab, wrote in an article entitled "An Investigation of the Prophet's Letter to Khosrow Parviz":

"In 1963, Dr. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munağğid, who is an expert on works written in ancient scripts, wrote an article in the Beirut newspaper, Al-Hayat (May 1963), announcing the discovery of the original letter of the Prophet of Islam to Khosrow Parviz. The letter is written on a 21 × 31 cm parchment in 15 lines, sealed as "Mohammad Rasool-Allah" at the end. The letter was a part of the collection of Henry Pharaoun, former

Lebanese foreign minister, who bought it for 150 gold coins during the First World War.Dr. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munağğid, who is one of the famous bibliographers and codicologists of the Islamic world, had examined the letter and expressed his confidence in its belonging to the epoch of the Prophet of Islam through radiocarbon test. He also had no doubt in its authenticity in terms of graphology and style of phrases through its comparison with similar invitation letters of the Prophet of Islam."[1]

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[1]- A Survey of the Prophet's Letter to Khosrow-Parviz, Mohsen Jafari Mazhab, an endowment for the Miras-e-Javidan Vol 1. Edition 40

There were objections to his comments in this regard, which Dr. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munaǧǧid addressed. However, one should not forget that when something is proved experimentally and with relative certainty, it is more powerful than those accepted with speculation and therefore, it can change what the content of the history, chronicles, books, and opinions.

The Letter of the Prophet Muhammad to Al-Muqawqis, the Ruler of Egypt
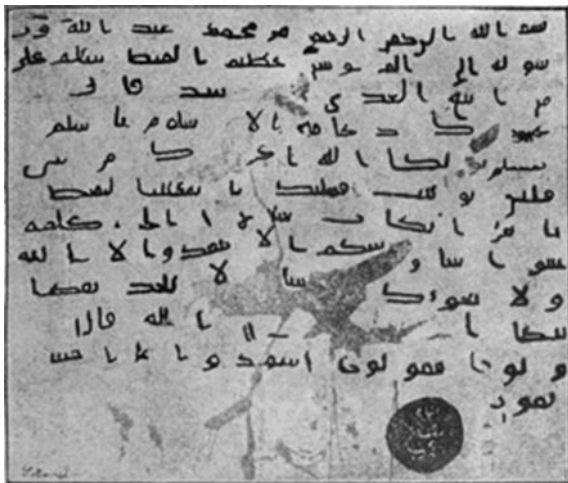
Simulated version of the original letter of the Prophet
Muhammad to Al-Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt, Published in
the Egyptian al-Hilal Magazine in 1904
Location of the original copy: Topkapi Palace Museum,
Istanbul, Turkey
(Taken from the website of the History of Islam and the
Quranic Books, Documents and Manuscripts, p. 214)

The Letter of the Prophet of Islam to the Great Roman Emperor, Heraclius

An image of the letter of the Prophet of Islam to the
Great Roman Emperor, Heraclius
Location of the original copy: Royal Amman Museum,
Jordan Hashemi
(Taken from the special website of the History of Islam)
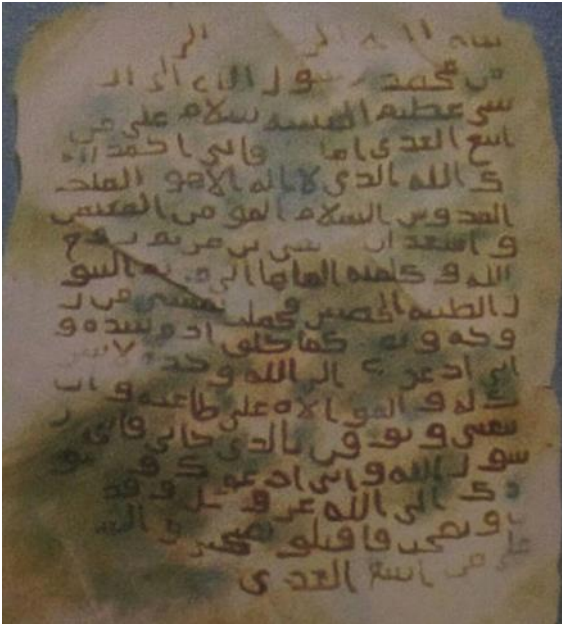
The Letter of the Prophet of Islam to the Manzar Bin Savi, King of Bahrain

The image of the letter of the Prophet of Islam to the
Manzar Bin Savi, King of Bahrain
Location of the original copy: Vienna Library, Austria
(Taken from the special website of the History of Islam)

The Letter of the Prophet of Islam to Najaish, King of Abyssinia

The letter of the Prophet of Islam to Najaish,
King of Abyssinia

(Taken from *Quranic Manuscripts and Documents*, p. 213)

The Final Point

Regarding the preference of the two dating methods, i.e. radiocarbon analysis, and artistic evaluation and calligraphic styles, experience indicate that each has its own advantages and disadvantages. The radiocarbon analysis has failed to accurately determine the exact date of a document so far; however, the fact that it can determine a time span in many cases and reduce bias factor of scientific centers, individuals, religions and governments (which has been occurred many times) is an advantage. On the other hand, the artistic evaluation and calligraphic styles, with all of their subcategories, which are carried out by the experts without radiocarbon analysis, also have their own

deficiencies such as speculation in determining the date of documents or subjects under study. Nevertheless, given the historical course of the comparative observation of resources and documents, this method can cover the weaknesses of the radiocarbon analysis to some extent. Therefore, the experts can provide more accurate time span for documents using both of these methods.

The Last Word

This book was built around the current issue of many people turning into innumerable quarrels and controversies insisting on the correctness of their own thoughts and form countless sects and schools with academic or traditional assemblies, without trying to authenticate the foundation and sources of their beliefs, which is actually the first link of the chain. Obviously, this is just the beginning, because there are many links that should be properly arranged all the way to the present. This requires expertise, study and research without interruption, so that the link is not turn into the trick. Therefore, the first step that needs to be taken for such thinking is to find the first link of the

chain, without which one will no longer be able to defend and accept the imaginary and fictional stories made in the minds of the people. This is just like when a person wants to climb a solid and tall tree to reach its upper most branch. They would need lower branches to help them reach first the middle ones and then the upper ones until they reach the upper most branch. Here, if the lower branches are broken, there will no longer be any normal way to reach the upper most branch.

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