

Uncomfortable Questions: An Authoritative Exposition

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An Answer to the Mischievous Writings of Joseph Smith High Ranking Spokesman of the Hyde Park Christian Fellowship

Introduction

All Prais□ is due to Allah, who has no partners, Peace and Blessings be upon His Final Messenger, Muhammad, and upon his family and companions. Amīn!

Wh□t follows is the paper based on the debate between Mr A. Green and J. Smith at South Bank University on Wednesday, 29 May 1996. There apparent□y seemed to be some confusion by the Christian contingent about the title of the debate, which they seemed to think was “Is the Qur’an the Word of God”.

However, it has always been very clear from the first invitation to Jay Smith for this debate, that the title was “The Sources of Is□am”, and the subject matter was to be the various papers written by J. Smith on his external historical critique of Islam.

The writers of this paper assume readers to be familiar with Smith’s material, so for the most part do not give details on Smith’s arguments within the paper.

To Be or Not to Be Authentic? That is the Question

The first thing that we need to clarify is the issues at stake. The primary question we intend to address is the authenticity of the sources upon which the religion of Islam is derived.

There can be no doubt of the importance of the authenticity of any give religious scripture. This is because once a text has shown to have been corrupted and altered in order to make it comply with doctrinal or political

expediencies and if there is no reliable means to distinguish the corrupt from the pure, then there is not one passage of that text that cannot be called into question. This is not so easy with a pure and preserved text. This is well understood by the Christian fundamentalists. If it is not the Word of God, then what real value does it possess as guidance, except as a collection of wisdoms?

How, therefore is the authenticity of any given text, or texts to be established. The fact is that the methodology used and accepted by Islam and the Muslims is historically different from those used by modern Biblical criticism. It must be remembered that the historical and political circumstances that brought about the rise of modern Biblical criticism are unique to that collection of books and the religion of Christianity that claims to be based on it.

To demand that the text of Islam should be subjected to the same type of criticism is somewhat fallacious. The very aspects that made the Bible open to criticism in the first place; internal and external contradiction, the variation between numerous documents and the complete lack of means to verify the validity of the Biblical texts as contemporaneous to the events they describe, and the growing realization that the Biblical canon was something that developed in the context of other Christological traditions, none of which seemed to offer any more of a supportable claim to truth than the other, except that the Pauline tradition was that which managed to dominate, are not present in the Qur'an and the historiography of Islam.

It is noteworthy that the Biblical criticism is something that grew up from within the Christian tradition after some one thousand five hundred years. Muslim had developed a critical apparatus within the earliest years of its history.

In the most direct sense the source of Islam is none other than the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Mighty the Powerful, the Wise, Allah. He is sufficient as a witness to truth of His religion. As a nation we believe that Islam proves itself to be the true religion revealed by Allah for the benefit of all mankind.

This proof is composed of several different categories of evidence. We do not intend to go into them here. However these evidences lead the believer in them to the conclusion that the religion of Islam is the true religion of Allah, and thus what the Qur'an, the actual Word of God, and its explanation, the divinely guided Prophetic example, is true and correct.

Since the Qur'an itself states that:

“We have revealed to you the reminder, and upon Us is the preservation of it”

The believer accepts as a fact that both the Qur’an and its explanation the Sunnah have been preserved. This is a fact even if we were to accept Smith’s claims of a second century compilation the reality of its undisputed preservation without any deviation or difference throughout the whole Muslim world is without doubt remarkable.

It is certainly not something the Bible can claim. To the believer the issue might be a rather different one, i.e. how or through what means did Allah cause His religion to be preserved? This is ultimately all that we are obliged to answer. We do not feel that it is necessary to prove Islam’s authenticity through another criterion that someone else might wish to set up.

The Qur’an speaks of similar challenges to the Prophethood of Muhammad by the pagan Arabs:

**“And they say; We shall not believe in you until you cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us or you have a garden of date palms and grapes and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst abundantly, or you cause the heavens to fall upon us in pieces as you have pretended, or you bring Allah and the angels before us face to face, or you have a house of gold and silver, or you ascend up into the sky, and even then we will put no faith in your ascension until you bring down for us a book that we will read”
(Qur’an 17:90-3)**

“They say, ‘Why has not a treasure been sent down to him? Or an Angel has come to him – But you are only a warner and Allah is the Disposer of affairs”(Qur’an 12:12)

The Qur’an ordered the Prophet Muhammad to declare his inability to provide them with that which they asked.

He was a mere man, and the miracles and signs were in the hands of Allah. Then Allah went on to state that:

“Say: O Muhammad. Glorified be my Lord over all that they associate with Him! Am I anything but a man sent as a Messenger”

The Prophet himself would have liked to have met their demands, and this was from his love and concern for his people, and his great desire for them to be guided.

In the light of the manners of he whom Allah endowed with the best of manners, and seeking to follow the way of him whose way is the best, we

shall try to provide them with that which they ask, but with the understanding that what Allah has provided is more than enough for those who are sincere.

In this context an examination of the type of proof that Smith is demanding leads to the conclusion that it in fact proves nothing. To give an example, if we were to discover an ancient copy of Homer's Iliad, some contemporaneous non-Greek sources, plus architectural evidence, would that mean that Achilles actually was the son of a god, that we should start to worship him, and Zeus and Aphrodite, or similarly with Krishna and Baghavad Gita, or Buddha, etc., . . .

Furthermore, even if we do not have what Smith demands it does not prove that it is not the truth, just as the Prophet Mohammed's inability to bring a house of gold or ascend up a ladder into the sky does not prove that he was not a Prophet. In fact what is really exposed by these demands is the incorrect understanding and methodology and aims of the contenders.

Facts or Fictions

An important issue to understand for the unwary travelers through this unfamiliar territory is the context of these ideas, conjectures and theories that Smith declares as historical facts.

It truly seems that the writing of some of these new historians like Wansbrough, Crone and Cook, whose ideas have been adopted by Rippin, and now Smith, is an attempt to drag Islam into the same quagmire that Christianity finds itself in by attempting to attribute the problems from which the Bible and Christianity suffers onto the Qur'an and Islam. They have, of course failed.

The ideas of Crone and Cook have not succeeded in winning support from other Western scholars let alone the Muslims.

In this context it might be helpful to briefly explain the nature of Western scholarship as opposed to what we are used to in Islam. A scholar in the West is expected to arrive at novel or even radical new approaches to a subject, or at least to contribute significantly to a previous theory. It is quite acceptable, nay in their opinion even desirable, to propound and defend even the most incredulous ideas and feel they quite free to ignore evidence that contradicts their ideas.

There was, for example, a well respected scholar of Christianity, who was even a member of the elite group of scholars put in charge of the

translation of the Dead Sea scrolls, who propounded a theory that Jesus was in fact a member of an ancient magic mushroom cult! Merely repeating previously accepted notions is not considered “scholarship.”

Humphrey's writes about Crone and Cooks book Hagarism that it should be viewed as a ‘what-if’ exercise rather than a research monograph. R. B. Sergeant writing in The Journal of Royal Asiatic Society complains about having to plod through “this tiresome travesty of history.” We rather share his sentiments, not only on this issue, but also the whole mass of J. Smith's tiresome lies and distortions.

There is little doubt that the likes of Smith are aware of the facts, and the weakness of the Wansbrough/Crone and Cook school, yet in his papers he consistently refers to their ideas and speculative conclusions as established history.

(Orientalism and Evangelism)

We should have no doubt that the origins of Orientalism are anything but friendly or even impartial attempts to assess the religion of Islam. Orientalism has its roots firmly grounded in a colonial past and neo-colonialist present. It was always intended to undermine the Muslims adherence to their religion, and make easier the task of ruling the Muslim lands.

The works of Orientalists, far from being objective scientific studies are often wrought with prejudice. As one writer states, whilst giving examples of Orientalism's “more obnoxious representatives”: “One of the best examples of contemporary Islamophobic Orientalism is in Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook.” (Sardar and Davies, Distorted Imagination)

When this prejudice is combined with the interests of Christian missionary activities we can dismiss completely any resemblance of impartiality and honesty. Fundamentalist Evangelical Christian Missionaries with whom J. Smith is involved. It seems they have only the slightest hesitation in deceiving and telling outright lies.

Indeed this is not something surprising after having been taught this unscrupulous doctrine by their predecessor in deception, namely Paul, who we find declaring: ” If through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to His glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner.” (Romans 3:7), thereby disregarding and contradicting his own book where we read:

**“A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.”
(Proverbs 14:5).**

All this rather reminds us of the type of techniques used amongst the poor and starving Muslims of Africa and Asia. There are reported incidents of Christian Missionaries giving ill and suffering people infected water to drink “In the name of Mohammed” and after their illness worsens they give them proper medicine to take “In the name of Jesus.”

The history of Orientalism is hardly one of unbiased examination of the sources of Islam especially when under the influence of the bigotry of Christianity. From the fanatical distortions of John of Damascus to the apologetic of later writers against Islam, that told their audiences that the Muslims worshipped three idols! Peter the Venerable (1084-1156) “translated” the Qur’an which was used throughout the Middle Ages and contained nine additional chapters.

Sale’s infamously distorted translation followed that trend, and his, along with the likes of Rodwell, Muir and a multitude of others attacked the character and personality of Muhammad. Often they employed invented stories, or narration’s which the Muslims themselves considered fabricated or weak, or else they distorted the facts by claiming Muslims held a position which they did not, or using the habits practiced out of ignorance among the Muslims as the accurate portrayal of Islam.

As Norman Daniel tell us in his work Islam and the West:

“The use of false evidence to attack Islam was all but universal . . .” (p. 267) Smith’s papers are replete with examples of this type of approach. Muslim scholars and apologists have more than effectively refuted this outpouring of lies and abuse. The fact that Smith has resorted to the approach of Crone, Cook and Wansbrough is rather indicative of the effectiveness of the Muslim counter arguments.

Let us therefore examine these ideas in more detail.

‘Whence Islam?’ – Fruits of Tasteless Polemic

It is self evident, and Smith will be the last to deny the allegation, that the bulk of the material and proposed hypotheses put forward in the arguments of Smith have been plagiarized from the infamous fruits of the work initially started by Wansbrough and then continued by Crone and Cook. His reliance on them is due to the simple fact that they are the only ones who ascribe themselves to these theories.

Although it could never be assumed that credit could be given to Smith for concocting such strange theories, it would be hoped that his approach would be reflective of his mentors. One will sadly find it is not. This is not to say that he is totally autonomous from the many mistakes and absurd assumptions (to be discussed later) carried in the work of Wansbrough, Crone and Cook, this is without doubt clearly apparent.

The difference lies in Smith's deep ignorance of the subject matter he is involved in. One cannot deny the astounding scholastic levels reached by the likes of Wansbrough. Juynboll writes about Wansbrough's book Qur'anic Studies,

“Readers who do not have a thorough knowledge of German, Latin, Greek and Hebrew, apart from Arabic and English (the language in which the book is written although that is not obvious in many instances!) will probably find no use for it and are advised not to take it up.” (Journal of Semitic Studies).

Can Smith really have a claim to associate himself with the likes of these academics? Perhaps if he did understand what they were actually saying he probably would not have chosen the avenue of thought that they have now become recognized with. It is well known to any student of Islamic Studies, whether they be Muslim or non-Muslim that the approach, now commonly known as the ‘de-mythologizing’ approach propounded by Wansbrough, Crone and Cook is one of the poorest interpretations of Islamic History ever constructed.

Totally lacking in any convincing evidence it is merely concerned with inventing a theory and then selecting any evidence which fits that theory, rather than looking for a real explanation of history.

N. Daniel says:

“Enemies of this methodology must inevitably say that it consists in . . . magnifying points of evidence in proportion as they conform to an arbitrary theory; and above all in treating anything as definitely having happened, once it has been suggested that it might have.” (Journal of Semitic Studies).

The whole approach leaves established methods of Islamic historical analysis for methods which are so defective that at times they cause the authors themselves to abandon them for conventional ones.

What Wansbrough, Crone and Cook can be acknowledged for, and this illustrates the immense difference between them and the contemporary minion Smith is the following;

Firstly:

Analyzing history through one's own criteria cannot cause a problem when all one is interested in is expressing one's opinions. This is illustrated perfectly in Wansbrough's own confession about the "conjectural nature" of his work and calls his analysis "strictly experimental" and the "emphatically tentative" nature of his conclusions (QS xi, SM, x).

Secondly:

If one starts from a position of an already fixed theory, and then looks for evidence to fit that theory, then obviously this is all the evidence one will have acquired. How many times does Smith echo the words: "There is no evidence for . . .", "There is no mention of . . ."

There is no evidence, obviously because the writers didn't want the evidence. Again Crone and Cook are happy to admit this. In the preface to the book Hagarism, Crone and Cook tell us that they intend to ignore a rock inscription dated from the mid 600's with the phrase "AHL AL ISLAM". They then carry on in the book to inform that the words MUSLIM and ISLAM appeared in the late 700's!!!

It is in attempting to present this viewpoint as fact, something which his sources would not claim for an instance, that Smith reveals his ignorance and total incomprehension of the very material proffered as the foundation of his theories.

If Smith feels that he has uncovered areas which appear to be unanswerable by Muslims due to their apparent ignorance of the questions that are raised then this is accepted. Muslims don't know and do not need to know of the interpretations of any of the so called academics. Crone and Cook tell us this themselves;

"This is a book written by infidels for infidels, and it is based in what from any Muslim perspective must appear an inordinate regard for the testimony of infidel sources." Hagarism (p.viii)

This material was never aimed to be an authoritative exposition on the early history of Islam, or to be read by the general masses, but rather aimed solely for the realm of academia and discussion in scholastic circles. Humphreys summarizes this aptly by saying;

"In the end perhaps we ought to use Hagarism more as a 'what-if' exercise than as a research monograph." (Islamic History) (p.85)

Some rather less impressed critics are more direct in their reservations,

“One of the best examples of contemporary Islamophobic Orientalism is in Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook . . .” tell us Sardur and Davies.

Leonard Binder, under the heading of ‘Bad Orientalism’, states:

“There is no more outrageous□ antagonistic critique of Islam than that which calls itself Hagarism”

R. B. Sergeant informs that:

“Hagarism . . . is not only bitterly anti-Islamic in tone, but anti-Arabian. Its superficial fancies are so ridiculous that at first one wonders if it is just a ‘leg pull’, pure ‘spoof’.” (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society)

And Joseph Van Ess seems to think that:

” . . . a refutation is perhaps unnecessary since the authors make no e□fort to prove it (the hypothesis of the book) in detail . . . Where they are only giving a new interpretation of well-known facts, this is not decisive. But where the accepted facts are consciously put upside down, their approach is disastrous.” (The Making of Islam)

Lastly, it seems rather insincere for a Christian to use a particular work to criticise another religion, when the writers are as critical of Christianity as o□ others religions. Crone and Cook inform us that Christianity is an amalgamation of various different cultures, namely Judaism, Roman Imperialism and Hellenism, which clash together to form Christianity, but over time has lost its cohesion and has now fallen apart. This is what M□slims have been claiming for years. Smith should now accept this view of history, part and parcel with the one he is now propounding.

Rejecting the Unrejectable – Rejecting Muslim sources

Perhaps one of the most clearly unacceptable positions offered by Crone and Cook is their refusal to accept the Muslim traditions outright. One might find room for sympathy in treating the Muslim reports with skepticism, as being liable to bias and exaggeration. Indeed this is the pattern in most historical documentation. It must be recognized however, that material written by non-Muslims is liable to be equally, if not more unreliable. To reject the whole corpus of Muslim documentation is in itself absurd, but to reject it in favor of purely hostile sources is even more ridiculous. We find it even more remarkable that Smith uses this type of

argumentation when he has rejected it outright himself when used against his own prophet "Paul."

This grave error in methodology has been pointed out by several scholars in their critique of the "demythologizers":

"This is the argument: it the existence of the Koran is not attested by "hard evidence" till the end of the seventh century, or attested in its historical context before the middle of the eighth, "the historicity of the Islamic tradition is in some degree problematic", and there are no "cogent internal grounds for rejecting it" or cogent external grounds for accepting it" . . . The Islamic sources are not able to "arbitrate" between these two different approaches and "the only way out of the dilemma is thus to step outside the Islamic tradition altogether and start again." That is, two approaches are equally feeble, and therefore the only way is to adopt one of them; if it is the "only way", why is it not unreasonable to proceed in the usual fashion, that is do just the opposite?" (N. Daniel, Journal of Semitic Studies)

What is noteworthy is that the accepted methodology is to use the Muslim sources, and not reject them, something which the present writers cannot escape. N. Daniel comments:

"The first characteristic of the method is the rejection of Islamic evidence, except when it suits . . . The weakness of the method is that the actual evidence used, even if it were true, is not evaluated; nor is more than a cursory attempt made to evaluate the Islamic evidence which was discounted in advance – apart from eighth-century evidence when convenient." (Journal of Semitic Studies)

The charge leveled by Smith in his papers, that Muslims have been afraid to respond to the challenges of modern critical scholarship is either an expression of his ignorance or a blatant lie. He is obviously completely unaware of the devastating refutation against Goldziher and Schacht by the likes of Azami and others. If Smith's complaints are concerning Hagarism then even Crone and Cook admit in the preface to their book that:

"This is a book written by infidels for infidels, and it is based in what from any Muslim perspective must appear an inordinate regard for the testimony to infidel sources. Our account is not merely unacceptable; it is also one which any Muslim whose faith is as a grain of mustard seed should find no difficulty in rejecting." (Hagarism, (p.viii)

The fact of the matter is that the so-called Christian and Jewish witnesses are less likely to produce a reliable source for our information about the origins of Islam.

N. Daniel continues:

“It is easier to believe that Muslims are better witnesses to Islam than Christian or Jewish who may more naturally be supposed to have known very little about it. Even after living among Muslims for a millennium they often knew very little; and they do not make more acceptable witnesses for the earliest days. But the authors are happy to take evidence from Christians and Jews in the eighth century, though without explaining why this now becomes acceptable evidence for ‘religious events in the seventh century’.”

Smith is himself a proof of these very phenomena. We find his work replete with misunderstandings, errors and misinformation concerning Islam. Incredibly simple mistakes are made, such as the Muslim’s five prayers all being in the day, and his mentioning the six beliefs of Imān. Even in his paper on the topic of the sources of Islam he misunderstands the significance of different genres, he claims the Qur’an is the “mother of the books” whereas in-fact the “mother of the books” are the preserved tablets in which everything is written concerning the beginning of creation to the end. He also mentions that Muhammad’s cousin was Waraka, when in fact it was his wife Khadija’s cousin, and that “even Muslim sources state” he was a Catholic, and that Bahira was a Nestorian, whereas in fact Muslim sources say nothing of the sort. This was the propaganda of the medieval polemicists like John of Damascus. In fact Smith is so confused that he contradicts himself later on the same issue. Now if this is the case of someone who has a degree in Islamic studies, how about someone less informed? The fact is that these sources are not only likely to be replete with ignorant statements, but also with outright lies and distortions. Are we to believe, for example, that because Peter the Venerable added nine chapters to his “translation” of the Qur’an, that in fact the Qur’an at that time did have nine more chapters, and that the Muslim sources that report otherwise are not to be trusted, or for example, that Joseph Smith’s words are more likely to be trusted in respect to information about Islam than these.

Joseph Van Ess in The Making of Islam arrives at a similar conclusion:

“A second methodological problem is the deliberate reduction of the available sources. The authors proceed from contemporary non-Muslim (Christian and Jewish) reports and leave aside the entire Muslim tradition itself . . . But we should not forget that these texts, though contemporary, only show how the new phenomenon was seen, not how it actually was. If we agree that Islam, at this early stage, was still trying to define its “identity” then we cannot demand that an observer from outside who could even less evaluate the radical novelty of the event should have a clearer concept of what was really happening.”

Jews, Grecos and Doctrinas – The Missing Links

Having taken the foolhardy step of rejecting Muslim sources (except, of course, when it is useful) Crone and Cook are left with a void that needs to be filled. This void is thus filled with the small amount of non-Muslim contemporary documentation available. It has already been shown that these are likely to give a significantly less accurate picture even with the assumption of biased Muslim documentation. So is this step an acceptable one to take?

“Why should the Syriac sources, not new of course to Islamic historians, be considered more trustworthy than the Arab historians?” asks R. B. Sergeant in the Journal of Royal Asiatic Society.

So what is this evidence? Crone and Cook tell us it “begins” with “a Greek anti-Jewish tract . . . in the form of a letter from a certain Abraham, a Palestinian Jew” which was “in all probability” written in the seventh century by Rabbis in which a new Saracen Prophet was foretold. Who was this Jew? Can he be relied upon? Or is it the case that . . .

“We should rather expect that he tried to describe the phenomenon with his own categories – which would have been messianism; in the case of a Palestinian Jew. And the fact that he mixed up or ignored important details ceases to be surprising when we compare the kind of knowledge people of our well-informed age may have of Arabia or Islam.” (Joseph Van Ess, *The Making of Islam*)

The next piece of evidence is provided by an Armenian chronicle of the 660's; Jewish refugees from Edessa join with the Prophet to conquer the land of Israel. This story, the authors admit to be “geographically implausible” as well as chronologically impossible. Need one say more? Anyone unfamiliar with the book will be surprised to learn that this constitutes all of the evidence that they (and now Smith) have for their thesis. A whole colorful picture of the early history of Islam is based upon it, with obviously more derived from their own imaginations than anything else.

A perfect example of:

“magnifying points of evidence in proportion as they conform to an arbitrary theory” (N. Daniel, *Journal of Semitic Studies*)

But perhaps the best argument against using non-Muslim or hostile sources is the following statement:

“It is inexcusable to rely on material for supposedly truthful information about a person or movement which is not only distant from the source, but also the avowed enemy of that person or movement. Would we go to Serbian generals to ascertain the facts of the Bosnian conflict today?”

Words of wisdom. And the source? Mr. Jay Smith, in Who Founded Christianity?

A logical explanation for this type of behavior is a mental condition known as schizophrenia. Smith should see a specialist at the earliest opportunity.

And is this evidence even authentic? Crone and Cook make no attempt to ascertain the authenticity of these materials, or even the Islamic evidence which was discounted in advance. (N. Daniel, Journal of Semitic Studies and Wansbrough BSOAS.)

What the non-Muslim sources say:

Having already examined the problems of using non-Muslim sources let us take a more in-depth examination of some of the conclusions Smith draws concerning the information contained in them.

Firstly, Smith talks of a papyrus dated 643CE (21AH) which speaks of the year twenty-two, suggesting something happened among the Arabs which coincides with the year of Hijra. Well there you go! Why does he expect us to presume that it was anything other than that? We are not told what the Nestorian ecclesiastical documents from 676CE (54AH) and 680CE (58AH) actually say. If it talks about the “exodus” of Arabs to the “Promised Land” then this is simply the language familiar to them, and cannot be construed to mean that the Arabs considered themselves to be partaking in an “Exodus”, and that they considered Jerusalem to be their “promised land.” Smith’s use of the tradition in the Sunan of Abu Dawood stating that “there will be Hijra after the Hijra, but the best Hijra is that of Abraham” proves absolutely nothing. First the word Hijra is not the same as the word exodus. Hijra simply means to leave one thing, or place for another. The “best” Hijra is explained in another Prophetic narration: “The best of those who perform Hijra are those who abandon that which Allah has prohibited and the best jihad is the one who strives against his own self for the sake of Allah the Mighty and Majestic.” (at-Tabarane in al Kabir) So this is the Hijra of Abraham, the khalil of Allah, who abandoned disobedience for obedience to Allah. All this data rather confirms exactly what the Muslim sources say. Now Smith tries to support this nothing with more nothing.

Qibla

Smith claims that archaeological evidence points to mosques that are not aligned towards Makkah. Now what does this prove? In order to give any credibility to his theory he needs to show a consistent pattern of mosques pointing towards Jerusalem, but what he shows us is a selection of mosques pointing in a number of different directions.

It is quite noteworthy how unreliably archaeology can be. During a cursory glance through one of the internet sights that cover the Dead Sea Scrolls, one particular page was talking about the archaeological findings on the Qumran site. It mentioned that concerning the building, opinions differed as to whether it was a garrison, fort and military installation, a monastery, or a palace. The so called archaeological excavations of Father DeVaux claimed to have discovered a scriptorium, which conveniently fitted his theories. However an impartial archaeological team from Scandinavia actually discovered it was not a scriptorium at all but a dining hall.

This is what Creswell says concerning early mosques: “their architectural resources, before they started in their career of conquest, were barely enough to give expression to their needs. In other words Arabi constituted an almost perfect architectural vacuum . . . The first mosques in the great hiras, or half nomadic encampments of the conquest, such as Basra, Kufa and Fustat, were primitive in the extreme, and in Syria the first mosques were churches that had been converted or merely divided: in fact there is no reason for believing that any mosque was built as such in Syria unto the time of Al Walid or possibly Abdal Malik, For over a generation the Arabs remained quite untouched by any architectural ambitions. “It is worth noting that the Prophet disliked extravagance and impressive architecture in buildings, especially mosques. The relative simplicity of early mosques is in fact a historical example of how the Prophet’s Companions diligently followed his wishes.

Let us now turn our attention to the direction of these mosques. In the face of what Creswell says we wonder how exactly archaeologists determined that their discoveries were indeed mosques and how they decide in which direction the Qibla was. It is noteworthy that the use of the mihrab did not appear until its introduction by Coptic workers who were expanding the Prophet’s mosque in Medina (88AH) and placed a mihrab there. This mihrab still exists. The Prophet’s mosque is one of many examples of early mosques facing Makkah, as is the “mosque of the two Qiblas ” in which the Prophet was praying while Allah revealed the command to change the Qibla from Jerusalem to Makkah, and also the Quba mosque in the outskirts of Medina which also still exists. Creswell gives further examples of early mosques that were converted from churches which contradict Smith’s conclusions:

“Al Hims, for example, they took a fourth part of the church of St John. How was a church converted into a mosque? One can easily guess. In Syria the kibla is due South, where as churches are turned towards the east. Under these circumstances it was only necessary to close the western entrance, pierce a new entrance in the north wall and pray across the aisles. This is exactly what happened as can be verified in the Great Mosque of Hama where the west front of the Kanisah al Uzma (Great Church) which was converted into a mosque in 15AH/636-7, now forms the west end in the sanctuary, Its three western doors have been converted into windows and is now entered from the north.”

Creswell also mentions examples of other Jamia mosques such as the one Basra, constructed 45AH (665CE), and Kufa 50AH.

Furthermore if we do look at a map of the region, we find this very example, the mosque of Amr bin al As in Fustat outside Cairo, quoted by Smith as facing slightly south of east is in-fact facing towards Makkah, and not Jerusalem!!! What now becomes almost unbelievable is that Smith quotes Jacob of Edessa to support his argument that the Muslim Qibla was not fixed whereas Jacob of Edessa actually says:

” . . . that it is not to the south that the Jews and Mahgraye here in the regions of Syria pray, but towards Jerusalem or the Ka’ba, the patriarchal places of their races.”

This, in actuality, proves the opposite of Smith’s claim. The structure of the sentence clearly shows that there were two different places: Jerusalem and the Ka’ba. Any attempt to claim that there was more than one Ka’ba is merely clutching at straws. The word “Ka’ba” in Arabic means “cube” and the only Ka’ba is that found in Makkah.

Now to answer Smith’s question “What is happening here?” There is a simple answer to this issue of the Qibla, and the way that Smith tries to dismiss it, by telling us how the lives and livelihood of these camel traders depended on finding their way, is only illustrative of his ignorance the fact is that the means of accurately determining the Qibla was in fact not available. Even the means of determining the Qibla was disputed, as David King’s book Astronomy in the Service of Islam, backed by the latest research into recently discovered documents, explains:

“In the first two centuries of Islam, when mosques were being built from Andalusia to Central Asia, the Muslims had no truly scientific means of finding the Qibla. Clearly they knew roughly the direction they had taken to reach wherever they were, and the direction of the road in which pilgrims left for Mecca could be, and in some cases actually was, used as a Qibla. But

they also followed two basic procedures, observing tradition and developing a simple expedient.

In the first case, some authorities observed the Prophet Mohammed had prayed due south when he was in Medina (north of Mecca) and they advocated the general adoption of this direction for the Qibla. This explains why many early mosques from Andalusia to Central Asia face south.

Other authorities held that the Qur'an required one to stand precisely so that one faced the Ka'ba. Now the Muslims of Meccan origin knew when they were standing in front of the walls or corners of the Ka'ba they were facing directions specifically associated with the rising's and settings of the sun and certain fixed stars. The major axis of the rectangular base of the edifice is said to point towards the rising point of Canopus, and the minor axis is said to point to summer sunrise and winter sunset. These assertions about the Ka'ba's astronomical alignments, found in newly-discovered medieval sources, and have been confirmed by modern measurements . . .

. . . The corners of the Ka'ba were associated even in pre-Islamic times with the four main regions of the surrounding world, Syria, Iraq, for example, one should stand in the same direction as if one were standing right in front of the north-eastern wall of the Ka'ba. Thus the first Muslims in Iraq built their mosques with the prayer walls towards winter sunset because they wanted the mosques to face the north-eastern wall of the Ka'ba. Like wise the first mosques in Egypt were built with their prayer walls facing winter sunrise so that the prayer hall was parallel to the north-eastern wall of the Ka'ba. Inevitably there were differences of opinion, and different directions were favoured by particular groups. Indeed, in each major region of the Islamic World, there was a whole spectrum of directions used for the Qibla. Only rarely do the orientations of medieval mosques correspond to the Qiblas derived by computation. Recently some medieval texts have been identified which deal with the problem of the Qibla in Andalusia, the Maghrib, Egypt, Iraq and Iran, and Central Asia. Their study has done much to clarify the orientation of mosques in these areas. In order that prayer in any reasonable direction be considered valid, some legal texts assert that while facing the actual direction of the Ka'ba is optimal, facing the general direction of the Ka'ba is also legally acceptable." This is clearly based on the Hadith of the Prophet: 'Qibla is between the East and the West.'"

In the light of these facts the Wasit and Baghdad mosques being off by 33 and 30 degrees towards north respectively is not so bad. They certainly do not point directly to Jerusalem. As for Baladhuri's comment, if correct, does not imply that the Qibla was pointing due west, but rather lay to the west, implying its being deviated towards the West.

Dome of the Rock

Having dealt with the issue of Qibla, we are left with the contentions concerning the Dome of the Rock and Jerusalem being an important shrine and the real object of Muslim aspirations. Firstly, that which the Jews call Temple Mount, is known in the Qur'an as Masjid al Aqsa – the Furthest Mosque. It is the place from which God's final Messenger Muhammad made his miraculous ascension through the heavens, where he saw the angel Gabriel and spoke with Allah beyond the furthest lote tree. All this is alluded to in the Qur'an:

“Praise be to Allah, who took his slave from the inviolable mosque to the furthest mosque the neighbourhood whereof we have blessed, in order that we might show him our signs. Verily He is the All-Hearer the All-Seer.”
Surah al Isra (17:1)

Smith claims that the inscriptions contain no mention of the Prophet's night journey, whereas in fact this very verse is present along with seven verses of the same chapter according to Alister Duncan's *The Noble Sanctuary*.

Mohammed Rafiq tells us that “just the existence of the four verses on the building alone negates, nay obliterated, all of your arguments concurring the Prophet, Mecca, the miraaaj (ascension), the position of the People of the Book, the Qibla, the dating of the Qur'an and the accuracy of the Qur'an's transmission.”

As if this were not in itself sufficient, we find in a pilgrims guide to Jerusalem and surrounding areas called *De Locis Santis* which is dated 80AH (702-9CE), comments of the Frankish Bishop Arculf who performed pilgrimage in 48AH (670CE) reports that he witnessed an argument between a believing and non-believing Jew over an alleged funeral shroud of Jesus, which was settled by the Saracen King Maviqas, meaning of course the Caliph Mu'awiya, and he goes on to say:

“But in the renowned place where once the Temple had been magnificently constructed, placed in the neighbourhood of the wall from the east, the Saracens now frequent a quadrangular place of prayer, which they have built rudely, constructing it by setting great beams on some remains of ruins; this house can, it is said, hold three thousand men at once.”

Creswell tells us that “this may be called the first Aqsa Mosque”. In fact, he also mentions that Christian historians such as Theophanes, Elias of Nisibis,

and Michael the Syrian tell us that a mosque was built by Umar ibn al Khattab at the capitulation of Jerusalem.

This proves that the al Aqsa mosque predates the Dome of the Rock (which is an octagon, not quadrangle) and that it was the only Saracen building of note and that it was a place of prayer, not of circumbulation.

Furthermore the Qur'anic inscriptions contain the following verses:

“thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you. And We appointed the Qibla which ye formally observed only that we make known him that follows the messenger from him who turns on his heels. In truth it was a hard test save for those whom Allah guided, But it was not Allah's purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is full of pity, merciful towards mankind. We have seen the turning of your face to heaven. And now verily We shall make you turn to a Qibla which is very dear to you. So turn your face to the inviolable Place of Worship, and ye, wheresoever you may be turn your faces toward it, Lo! Those who have received the scripture know that this is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do. And even if thou broughtest unto those who have received the Scripture all kinds of portents, they would not follow your Qibla, nor can you be a follower of their Qibla, nor are some of them the followers of the Qibla of others. And if you should follow their desires after the knowledge which has come to you, then surely you are one of the wrong doers.”

I think these verses speak for themselves.

As for the other inscriptions inside the Mosque of al Aqsa and the claim of Smith that they differ from the Qur'an today, (although he doesn't show where and how they differ, which is obvious because they don't), then this is also nonsense.

According to Brockett they are identical to the verses from the Qur'an today:

“The reading tamtaruna (Q.19:34) as opposed to yamtaruna of the Hafs and Warsh transmissions provides no evidence of a text substantially different from what it is now. Differences such as these have no real effect on the meaning; indeed, the extent of the agreement of the inscriptions with the text must, in fact, have already been fixed. Nor can such inscriptions be considered to be actual copies of the Qur'an requiring strict adherence to the rules of transmission.” (Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an)

Makkah

Here Smith introduces one of his favoured techniques, a technique which we find replete throughout his papers, and that is attributing a belief to the Muslims which they do not hold and then proceeding to refute it.

Smith tells us that “Muslims maintain that Mecca was not only a great and ancient city, but it was, as well the centre of the trading routes for Arabia in the seventh century and before.” Having checked the famous Tafsīr’s of Ibn Kathīr, Tabari and Qurtubi, there is no mention of this at all. Nor indeed is there any such claim in Guilleme’s translation of the Seerah of Ibn Ishaak. Indeed the Qur’an calls Makkah “Umm ul-Qura”, literally translated as the “Mother of the Settlements”, not the “Mother of all Settlements”. But the meaning is not that which Smith assigns to it. Tabari explains that “Umm ul-Qura” means the centre of settlements in and around Makkah. Ibn Ishaak’s Seerah further explains this as the place where the sons of Ishmael spread out from into the surrounding areas. Ibn Kathir mentions the building of the Ka’ba by Adam, but this is not an authentic story, however we find that he attributes the following Hadīth to the Prophet, “Makkah is the most beloved place to me and the most beloved place to Allah.” The importance of Makkah lies in the fact of its containing the first House raised for the worship of Allah alone, al Ka’ba, and thus the settlement (not city) that grew up around it was primarily for the worship of Allah alone, and this indeed reflects the very purpose for which mankind has been created.

Indeed we must agree that Mecca is situated in a barren valley, as the Qur’an itself mentions the supplication of Abraham as saying this, leaving his firstborn Ishmael there. Nothing has greatly changed. Mecca until this day would hardly be described a great city, or the centre of trade, but the fact is that every year millions of people go there for essentially one purpose, and that is to worship the one true God, Allah, the One free of all imperfections. It is this that was then the primary attraction of Makkah, that caused this far away barren place to even come to be mentioned by Ptolomy. In fact it seems he is not the only ancient historian to have mentioned Makkah, for according to Thomas Carlyle, Sisus who lived 70BC, stated that Makkah was the greatest centre of pilgrimage in the whole world and the oldest (Thomas Carlyle, ...Heroes and Hero Worship). So it is on the religious dimension that Makkah is made important. Crone and Cook’s question as to why such a barren place should be considered so important, whilst Taieef, with plentiful water and greenery and even a sanctuary, was close by is in fact a proof of the high standing of Makkah amongst the Arabs.

“What commodity was available in Arabia that could be transported such an inhospitable environment, and still be sold at a profit large enough to support the growth of a city in a periphery; site bereft of natural resources” So we will ask exactly the same question about Mecca today: what commodity brings five million people every year from every corner of the world to the inhospitable, barren, inaccessible valley? Truly: “la illah il Allah.”

So what follows from Smith on this issue is entirely irrelevant, except that we feel obliged to point out that he completely misquotes Buillet in order to try and support his already baseless argument. According to Smith, Buillet says that:

“Mecca was simply not on the major trading routes. The reason for this, he contends, is that, Mecca is tucked away at the edge of the peninsula. Only by the most tortured map reading can it be described as a natural cross-roads between a north-south route and an east-west one”

However, Buillet does not contend anything of the sort. This is what he actually does say:

“Mecca is situated on the main trade route paralleling the Red Sea coast of Arabia halfway between the incense producing lands of the south and the incense consuming lands of the north. Its location is often described as being a natural one for the growth of a commercial centre but nothing could be further from the truth. It is situated in a barren valley incapable of sustaining a large population without substantial importation of goods, only by the most tortured map reading can it be described as a natural cross-roads between a north-south route and an east-west one.” (Buillet, p. 105)

So Buillet agrees that it is situated “on the main trade route”, not “on the edge of the peninsula”, and goes on to explain how and why it became that way in spite of its unfavourable position:

“Mecca gained control of the trade by organising under her suzerainty the surrounding camel-breeding tribes which, on the one hand, supplied transportation and, on the other, were capable of raiding caravans. The Meccans were able to organise the trade so that each tribe gained more from co-operating with caravans traversing its territory than if stood to gain from raiding the caravans and thereby depressing the total volume of trade. To do this, however, Mecca had to fight the Fijar war with an important neighbouring tribe. That all of this should have been accomplished in such a short space of time clearly shows that control of trade was a specific goal of the Quraish. Their selection of Mecca as the site for their settlement, while influenced, certainly, by the religious shrine

there . . . was primarily dictated by the need to dominate and as far as possible from potential sources of imperial interference in Syria and Yemen.”

Thus we can conclude from Buillet’s “extensive research” that: Mecca was the centre of settlements in that area, as the correct Tafsīr of the verse explains, and that it was on the trade routes. Another reason is offered for its choice as a centre (apart from the “undoubted” advantage of the sanctuary) is its strategic advantage.

We have further explanations concerning reasons for Mecca’s importance as a trading centre. Mohammed Rafīq points out in his refutation of Smith’s ideas;

“Patrica Crone’s understanding of economics and trade is pitifully weak. She asks what commodity was available in Arabia that could be sold at a profit large enough to support the growth of a city? I therefore simply counter with what commodity do the British trade, that makes an island as geographically insignificant, rank among the G5 . . . and allows it to pick the fruit of the so called third world.”

The answer is, the cancer of humanity: usury. The big earner for the Quraish was their money lending and their highly profitable caravan financing. We find that under “Makkah” the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam by Leiden and Brik quotes Strabo, an early Roman historian as saying that: “. . . every Arab was either a trader or a broker” and the encyclopaedia tells us that Mecca was “primarily a trading house, a banking town. Mecca has customs and institutions peculiar to this kind of transaction and to finance “and that” the Meccan tadjir was not distinct from the financier, his first article of trade was money.”

Finally, Smiths insistence on the remoteness of Makkah, and the absence of even a significant sanctuary in this most barren and tucked away of places, leaves us completely baffled as to how it ever came to be established as the centre of pilgrimage for the whole Muslim world? Who instituted it? Was it Hajjaj? If so why choose this insignificant inaccessible place, and how did he go about persuading everyone to make pilgrimage there?

Why not choose Taieef, or any place more accessible, or just leave it at Jerusalem?

The Jews

Again, Smith has got his facts wrong. Firstly by claiming that the Qur’an

states that Muhammad severed his relationship with the Jews in 2 AH (624CE) is simply untrue. First because the Qur'an does not contain any dates, and secondly Muhammad never severed his ties with the Jews (see Constitution of Medina) except those who had betrayed the fledgling state at Medina during the Battle of the Ditch, and others who acted treacherously, and even then he (peace be upon him) treated them with the utmost leniency. It was only on the Prophet's death bed that he ordered that no two religions should remain in the Hijāz, but this order was applicable to both Jews and Christians.

As for the *Doctrina Iacobi*, all that this says is that this Jewish convert will not renounce his beliefs even if the Jews and Saracens catch him and cut him to pieces. Now you could understand a number of different things from this, but is by no means evidence that the Jews and Saracens worked hand in hand, or were part of a unified force. What has to be remembered when we examine these documents is the prevailing atmosphere at the time. Jews, it must be remembered, were hated and despised by all Christians at that time, and then, as now, the anti-Semite was ready to ally the Jews with any possible enemy. The anonymous Armenian chronicler only tells a similar story. It does not prove that this was the fact; rather it only shows us what some of the Christians perceived, or indeed the pure propaganda that they were using. This is one possibility; the other is that they simply perceived Islam as some form of Judaism. There were indeed amongst the Muslims large numbers of Arab Jews who had reverted to Islam, and the idea of a right to the Holy Land is also understood in the context of the fact that the Prophet Muhammad had prophesied that the Muslims would conquer Sham. If one was to examine these sources in this light we would see confirmation of Islamic historiography, not a contradiction of it.

What is more telling is how Smith has completely ignored that piece of evidence (from non-Muslim writers) that without doubt supports what the Islamic sources tell us, namely John of Damascus!

Manuscript Evidence

Smith says: "Other Muslim scholars maintain that a further reason for the absence of early documentation can be blamed on old age. They believe that the material upon which the primary sources were written disintegrated over time, leaving us with few examples."

In order to refute his own argument (he doesn't mention any Muslim scholars who made this claim), Smith refers the reader to early Christian documents which have survived and were compiled well before early

Islamic material. However, it is amazing to see that Smith points only to 'secondary' Christian artefacts (Codex Syriaticus and Alexandrinus) which are dated over four centuries after the advent of Christianity. Why does he not mention any 'primary' documents which are earlier than this, because if he had they would only have strengthened his argument? The fact is that he has no primary sources to refer to. We assume he would have wanted Muslims to write their books on materials similar to those used for early Christian documents about which we read: "The original copies of the New Testament books have, of course, long since disappeared. This fact should not cause surprise. In the first place, they were written on papyrus, a very fragile and perishable material." [The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, under the heading 'Text, NT']

Can we really excuse Smith for making foolish claims about the supposed absence of early documentation? After all he has positioned himself as somewhat of an authority – or father figure – amongst his Christian peers. Alas, if only they knew how absurd his claims sound to an informed ear. One doesn't even need to accept the views of biased Muslims, apparently so ready to ascribe anything to their Prophet without a question of authenticity. Are one's eyes and ears closed and sealed to the work of many Orientalists who have documented and published very early Muslim documentation. How about Hasan al Basri's Qadar letter to 'Abd al-Malik, which according to some must have been written before 110AH? And what about al Alim wa' l-muta'allim and Risala ila Uthman al Batti both ascribed to Abu Hanifa (d.150). Or even the manuscripts published by Van Ess, a Radd ala 'l-Qadariyya attributed to al Hasan b. Muhammad b. Al Hanafiya, Ali's grandson, died between 86 and 100 AH, and a Risala of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (d.101AH) in which he refutes the Qadarites? All the above mentioned manuscripts abound in Qur'anic quotations, which present no textual variants, putting to rest equally absurd claims about the collation of the Qur'anic text.

The final deadly blow in this one sided war against a weak and ill-equipped enemy comes from an extremely strange quarter. It is the legacy of one who was the fountain of all Christian polemic, namely the Christian hero, John of Damascus (to be disregarded and thrown to the dogs by his latter day minions?). Born in Damascus in the year 675 (i.e. 22AH), he was later regarded as the first Christian authority on Islam. His tract De Haeresibus became the 'armory for all future controversial writings against Islam'. [J. W. Voorhis, John of Damascus]. John held in his book that the Qur'an was not revealed, but created. He attempted to discredit the Prophet Muhammad by spreading false rumors that a Christian monk, Bahira, had helped in the creation of the Qur'an. John also labeled Arabs as "Saracens" from a Jewish name, (ibid). The "Saracens" became the common name by which they were referred to in the early literature on Islam in the West. So what was he writing about? A Qur'an which wasn't compiled? A Prophet

which didn't exist? A religion that had not yet been formulated? In this, finally, John of Damascus has given some real guidance to his Christian progeny.

Letters of the Prophet

There exist several letters attributed to the Prophet Muhammad which have been authenticated by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Our Dr M. Hamidullah has attested to the authenticity of all of them. Most of the criticisms put forth by the Orientalists are not strong evidences against their authenticity and are based on the following points:

Mere claims: Regarding the letter to Muqauqis, Schwally declared that a letter wrote at the time of the Prophet would probably not contain so many "Kufic" looking characters in it. However his predecessor Noldeke declared the letter to be authentic, as did Lamens.

Lack of knowledge: Especially concerning ancient Arabic, spellings, character shapes and writing techniques.

Fisher, for example, claims the existence of mistakes in the letter to al Mundhīr. In fact his proof against turns out to be a proof for, because ancient Arabic spelling differed from the modern Arabic. These objections specifically refer to the use of double letters (for e.g. the letter TA) whilst in fact this is exactly the correct ancient usage.

In favor of the letters authenticity is the lack of any diacritical marks. Adolph Grohmann confirms that these letters predate Umar's caliphate. Furthermore, a technical study of the letter sent to Heraculus using microscopes and ultraviolet light showed the skin on which the letter was written to be tanned using a method not as evolved as the one practiced in the second century of Hijra. Likewise the quality of the ink is older than that used in the second century. Dr Reed of Leeds University declared the above scientific study accurate.

A further point worth mentioning is the presence of the seal from the ring of the Prophet which is in colored ink. This seems to be a further guarantee of authenticity since clay seals were first introduced under the Caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab.

The Constitution of Medina

Humphrey's writes: "The first will focus on that rare beast, a document of almost unchallenged authenticity . . . the Constitution of Medina . . . As we shall see, this text is a very remarkable one both in content and language.

Even more remarkable, no doubt, is that both Western and Muslim scholars agree unanimously that the piece is authentic . . . “[Islamic History, pp. 91-95]

The Constitutio□, drawn up in the years immediately after the Hijra, (approx 625CE) clearly mentions the Prophethood and Messengership of Muhammad, as well as calling the believers ‘Muslims’.

Inscriptions

This is a red herring. We have already explained and quoted Creswell as to the complete lack of architectural pretensions of the early Muslims. We would hardly expect to find a dearth of inscriptions praising and eulogizing the Prophet Muhammad. We do, however have two early examples of inscriptions containing the name, and mentioning the Prophet□ood of Muhammad, one in Ta’if, and the other in Khandaq, the latter is dated 5AH. There also exist a few other inscriptions, which have been ph□otographed and published by Mohammed Hamidullah.

As far as the so called extensive research of Yehuda Nevo, which Smith claims shows that there are no inscriptions which contain the title of Prophethood, then it is known by anyone who is familiar with the work of Yehuda (Smith obviously isn’t one of them) that his research was restricted to a very small section of the Negeb desert some 500-600km away from Makkah. Nevo’s □esearch also conveniently excluded any inscriptions found in the Arabian peninsula This already means that his research is inconclusive.

□ven if we look at Nevo’s research analytically we find nothing. Some rock inscriptions in some far-off desert, written by some anonymous peo□le that do not mention the Prophethood of Muhammad. Why would we expect someone who doesn’t accept the Prophethood of Muhammad to refer to h□m as a Prophet? Do we refer to Smith as an expert on Islamic History, just because his cronies do?

Nevo’s research proves absolutely nothing.

□ouble Standards

What also may be mentioned here, if it hasn’t been picked up already, is another totally absurd characteristic of Smith’s approach. Smith is so emphatically insistent that any documentation that is provided must be checked, tested, burnt, radio-accelerated, and on□y by a list of people he is

comfortable with. If this list includes his grandmother, then that is what must be done before he is willing to offer his acceptance. The documentation we have provided has been attested by both Muslim and non-Muslim experts as has been mentioned. What Smith is obviously unaware of, and if he had bothered to read anything himself, he would have known, that the documentation he is providing for his own theories have not themselves been attested. He is formulating a preposterous theory on the basis of unattested evidence! Such evidence does not remotely imply what Smith is claiming, whilst we are proving unequivocal facts from documentation that has been attested. Smith's schizophrenia appears to be returning.

In conclusion, we can say that the various non-Muslim sources, even if authentic prove nothing. The dearth of material that contradicts Smith's ideas and the admission by Crone and Cook that they are ready to ignore material that contradicts their views allows us to safely conclude that we can likewise ignore their hypotheses.

Qur'an VERSION BETA? – Smith and The Qur'an

Manuscript Evidence

The first point:

That we need to highlight is that the absence of manuscripts does not prove that the Qur'an in the hands of the Muslims is not the Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Secondly, the existence of early documentary evidence does not actually prove that these were the words spoken by Muhammad, or indeed any other historical character. Although this is something that a Western historian would like or indeed demand, it is in fact not necessarily that reliable. The Muslims of the earliest generations, including that of the Prophet, indeed the Prophet himself considered writing a useful tool, both of preservation and reference, but it has never been accepted as sufficient in and of itself. An example of this is when Umar ibn al Khattāb was approached by a group of Jews from Khaibar claiming that they had a document from the Prophet guaranteeing their right to stay. Umar rejected it, claiming it was a fake on the basis that it contradicted what was orally transmitted from the Prophet on the issue. This highlights three issues of benefit to our discussion. First the possibility of forgery of a document, even though contemporaneous and

Secondly:

The benefit and need for a sound chain of oral transmission, and

Thirdly:

That hostile parties certainly do not formulate a more reliable source of information.

Early Qur'anic Manuscripts in our Possession

Most of the early original Qur'an manuscripts with us now date from after the 2nd century. There are however a number of odd fragments of Qur'anic papyri which date from the 1st century as mentioned in Die Entstehung des Qur'an. There is also a complete Qur'an in the Egyptian National Library on parchment made from gazelle skin which has been dated 68AH.

Narrations differ as to how many copies were directly ordered and sent out by the Caliph 'Uthmān, but they range from four to seven. It seems certain from various Muslim historical sources that several were lost, through fire amongst other things. There are four copies that are attributed to Uthmān.

1) The Tashkent manuscript.

It seems that the copy in Tashkent also known as the Samarkand manuscript may be the "Imām" manuscript which Uthmān kept for himself and was killed while reading it. A book has been written called Tarikh al Mushaf al Uthman fi Tashkent by Makhdun in which he gives a number of reasons for the authenticity of the manuscript;

The mushaf is written in a script used in the first 50 years of Hijra.

It is written on parchment made from gazelle.

There are no diacritical marks which is indicative of early manuscripts.

It does not have the vowelling marks which were introduced by Du'ali who died in AH 68 suggesting that it is earlier than this.

As for Smith's objections to the Tashkent document, then concerning the presence of illuminations between the surahs, this does not necessarily mean that it is not the Uthmanic manuscript.

Two other possibilities present themselves:

a) that these medallions were used from an early time, and

b) they were added at a later date.

Secondly, the irregularity of the code also suggests two possibilities a) as suggested by Lomax, that the manuscripts have been repaired as the pages disintegrated or b) the document was originally written by several different scribes.

As for the difference between the Samarkand and Tashkent manuscripts in terms of the number of lines per page, etc., then these are not arguments that in any way disprove the early dating of these manuscripts or their attribution to the scribes working under Zaid ibn Thabit.

Smith further exposes his ignorance when he talks about the various scripts.

The Kufic Script

To begin with the quote of a Muslim, al-Kalkashandi, he maintains (Kitāb al-A'sha 3/p.15) that Kufic is said to have been the earliest script from which the others developed, he writes: "The Arabic script (khatt) is the one which is now known as Kufic. From it evolved all the present pens." This is a very profound statement as its findings differ greatly from Smith's assertions!

Though Nabia Abbott's conclusions perhaps may not go so far as to agree ad totum with this conclusion we find that she does say: "... the Muslim tradition that the original Arabic script was Kufic (that is, Hiran or Anbaran) is one of those statements which, though known to be half wrong, may yet be half right." [Abbott, Rise and Development, p.17]

The terms that came to be applied to these scripts by early Arabs themselves could not have the chronological significance that some later Arabs and most Western writers have put to them. For is it the case that the name of a thing (e.g. Kufic) necessarily indicates its ultimate origin? The fact is that the script which later came to be known as Kufic has its origin far earlier than the founding of the town of Kufah.

Atiq Siddiqui writes:

"The Kufic or the angular variety of the Arabic script, has been traced about a hundred years before the foundation of the town Kufa, 638CE (AH17) to which place the style owes its name." [Siddiqui, The Story of Islamic Calligraphy, p.9] That is to say, the town was founded in AH17, and the Kufic style originated 100 years before that time! Where does this leave Smith's theory?

This conclusion is agreed upon by other writers; we read in *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy*: “However, Kufic script cannot have originated in Kūfa, since that city was founded in 17/638, and the Kufic script is known to have existed before that date.” [Sijelmasi and Khatibi, *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy*, p.97]

Smith’s arbitrary dating of the origins of this script also contradicts early coin and rock inscriptions which have been commented upon by Western writers, some of them being:

31 A. H.

Tombstone of Abdar-Rahmān ibn Khair al-Hājari

Naḥia Abbott writes: “The earliest Muslim inscription, the tombstone of Abdar-Rahmān ibn Khair al-Hājari, dated 31/652 . . . It is certainly not Makkan and can safely be considered as poor Kufic.” [Abbott, *Rise and Development*, p.19]

Pre-93 A. H.

The milestone, dated from the time of the Caliph Abdal-Malik (reign 685 – 705CE), written in Kufic script. [See Welch, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World*, p.44]

107 A. H.

Umayyad coin, minted in Damascus, inscribed in early Kufic script. The inscription reads: “There is none worthy of worship but Allah, He is One and has no partner” [British Museum, Room 34]

108 A. H.

Umayyad coin, minted at Wasit, Iraq, inscribed in early Kufic script. The inscription reads: “There is none worthy of worship but Allah, He is One and has no partner” [British Museum, Room 34]

These dates alone are from between 60 years to 140 years before the period to which Smith alludes!

Smith insists that if the Qur’an had in fact been first compiled in the Hijāz during the Caliphate of Uthmān then it we should expect it have been written in one of two other script’s, amongst which he names the Mashq script. Little does he realize that the Mashq script itself had its origins in the same region (Iraq) as the Kufic. Why should then the Kufic script be excluded from its usage especially now that we have shown its early origin?

Baladhuri’s account of the origins and spread of the North Arabic script [Futuh al-Buldaan, pp.471-74] points, as do other sources, to Hirah as the

seat of the North Arabic script by the close of the 5th century. What is of note here is that it is the Hiran (or Anbaran) script which later came to be classified as the Kufic. Abbott writes: “. . .

Kūfah and Basrah did not start their careers as Muslim cities until the second decade of Islam But these cities were located closer to Anbar and Hirah in Iraq, Kūfah being but a few miles south of Hirah. We have already seen the major role the two earlier cities played in the evolution of Arabic writing, and it is but natural to expect them to have developed a characteristic script to which the newer cities of Kūfah and Basrah fell heir, so that for Kūfic and Basran script one is tempted to substitute Anbaran and Hiran . . . our study so far shows that the script of Hirah must have been the leading script in the 6th century and as such must have influenced all later scripts, including the Makkan – Madinan.” [Nabia Abbott, Rise and Development, pp.6-7]

The city of Kūfah therefore inherited and took on the script which was already prevailing in Hirah. The script, as we have mentioned, which was later to be titled as Kūfic.

Baladhuri states further that Bishr ibn Abdul-Malik, a Christian, used to frequent Hirah, where he learned to write Arabic. Later Bishr came to Makkah and taught the writing there. Abbott in discussing the Makkan, Madinan, Kūfic and Basran scripts highlights that: “. . . one need hardly expect any spectacular variations in the scripts of these four leading cities, for as we have already seen, increased activities in writing in Makkah and Madinah date from the days of Bishr (note: approx 500CE), who avowedly taught the script he had himself learned in Hirah. Thus a fundamental similarity of the four scripts is to be expected.” [Abbott, ibid, p.18]

The use, therefore, of a script which was later recognised as Kūfic in the Hijāz during the time of the Prophet and after is no surprise since Bishr, who himself had learnt this script from its point of origin in Hirah, had already begun to teach it in the Hijāz some 100 years earlier!

Smith also argues that it is the view of both Martin Lings and Yasin Safadi that the Kūfic script ‘did not appear until late in the eighth century (790’s and later)’. It is difficult to see how this view can be ascribed to Safadi, because he himself, in his work Islamic Calligraphy (p.11), details the tombstone from the period of the Caliph Abdal-Malik (see above) which he describes as being in the Kūfic script. This is a minimum of 80 years before the date which Smith ascribes to Safadi.

Safadi writes:

“The Kūfic script, which reached perfection in the second half of the eighth century . . . “[ibid, p.10]. Can we then assume from this, taking into account the previous evidence that Safadi held the belief that the script first originated at this time? No, rather he is clearly stating that it is here when it reached its ‘perfection’. Martin Lings and Safadi again arrive at a similar conclusion for their book in honour of the 1976 Qur’an exhibition at the British Museum (□.12)!

Smith is found to be not only incorrect in his dating of the origins of the Kūfic script, but also erroneous in his opinion that Kūfic is not a script that we would expect to have been employed in the Hijāz during the Caliphate of Uthman. In respect to Lings and Safadi, he has □erely misread their claims.

To conclude, Abbot thinks that the Uthmanic Qur’an’s probably were in Makka-Madani scripts ” . . . yet when these Qur’ans were written Kūfa was already in the foreground, and indeed, even before the edition of Uthman was undertaken, prominent Kūfans were working on a similar, though non-official project. Furthermore Sa’id ibn al Kais, a member of Zaid’s Qur’an committee, was at the same time gove□nor of Kuffa.” [Rise and Development]

2) The Topkapi manuscript.

Concerning the Topkapi manuscript there is an interesting clause in the Tre□ty of Versailles Article 246: “Within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty, Germany will restore to his majesty King of Hijāz, the original Qur’an of Caliph Uthman.”

It seems that the manuscript reached Istanbul but not Medina. However, again, the suggestion is that it is actually just after the first century.

Sheikh Mohammed Shaibanee from the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society in Kuwait certai□ly considers it as Uthmanic. Mohammed Hamidullah also seems to agree but with more caution. Martin Lings, amongst others, considers it second century.

The reason for this late attribution is the development of the writing style (not script) and its comparative sophistication suggests a later period than the first century

3) The Islamic Museum in Istanbul.

This again does not seem to be an original □thmanic manuscript, but the

oldest copy from the original. It is written in Makki script, and is almost certainly before the end of the first century. 4) Hussain mosque in Cairo. This is the oldest of all the manuscripts, and is either original or an exact copy from the original with similarity to the Madini script.

There are also other Qur'ans attributed to Uthmān. Ibn Nadim and Ibn Ain Aba claim that Ali ibn Abi Talib wrote three Qur'ans of which there is one in Dar al Qutb, Najaf in Iraq and it has written on it "Ali ibn Abi Talib wrote it in the year 40H", one in Egypt and one in Iran.

It seems almost impossible that the Imān Riba manuscript in Iran is actually written by the hand of Ali because the script, although developed at his time, would not have been learnt by him since the dissensions in his rule kept him too busy to be able to learn such an art. It is however possible that he ordered someone else to write it.

The most significant Qur'an attributed to Ali ibn Talib is that in the Hussain Mosque in Egypt. The writing is early Kufic, it has many similarities to Madini, which is the form of writing that Ali would have used. It could well be Ali's own writing.

There are also existing Qur'anic writings attributed to Hassan and Hussain and Zain al Abidīn (sons of Ali ibn Talib.). There are also other Qur'ans such as the one attributed to Hajjāj ibn Muwawiya dated AH49 and Ukba ibn Amir dated AH52 in Turkey. More information on this topic can be found in Tarikh al Khatim al Arabi of Dr Salah ud Din al Munjid from where these details have been extracted.

It is also worth mentioning that there is no deviation in these manuscripts from the Qur'an in our possession today.

The "Institute fur Koranforschung" of the University of Munich, Germany, had collected and collated some 42,000 complete or incomplete copies of the Qur'an, gathered from all over the world. After some fifty years of study they reported that in terms of differences between the various copies there were no variants, except occasional mistakes of copyists which could easily be ascertained. The institute was destroyed by American bombs during the Second World War.

The Qur'an: Histrography

The first problem that we encounter with the suggestion that the Qur'an was not written until two hundred years after Hijra is that of histography, i.e. what we know of the history of that period makes this an impossibility,

most notably the fact that **Malik ibn Marwan**, and his general **Al Hajaj**, were fighting against the claim of Caliphate by **Abdullah ibn Zubair**, whose mother **Asma** was the sister of **Aisha**, the wife of Prophet **Muhammad**.

In fact the explanation that **Creswell** gives for the impressive construction of the **Dome of the Rock** is because **Mecca** was under the control of his rival, **Abdullah ibn Zubair**. It was his attempt, he claims, to set up **al Aqsa** as an attractive alternative to the **Hajj** that lead him to construct the **Dome**. This theory that the **Dome of the Rock** was given such importance rather works against **Smith's** ideas.

If he proposes that the **Qur'an** that we have today was compiled and enforced under **Al Hajaj**, and he must admit that that same **Qur'an** calls mankind to make **Hajj**, to **Mecca**, and to the house built there by **Abraham**, for the worship of the one God **Allah**. This poses a problem. Why would **Malik ibn Marwan** expend so much time and effort to build the **Dome on the Rock** and then turn people away from that to **Makkah**.

Furthermore, how would he persuade the people of this empire stretching from **Spain** to **India** to make **Pilgrimage** to a hot, barren, remote, desolate place, the journey to which itself is a danger to life and limb, and which, he is reluctant to admit, contained anything at all of any significance?

Secondly, if, as **Smith** asserts, the **Qur'an's** sophistication is a product of the **Arabs** contact with other civilizations. More likely than this is that a unsophisticated, primitive people would adopt the religion of their subjects as happened with the **Goths** and **Tartars** and each group of **Arabs** would have developed their own distinct religious tradition according to the land they conquered.

Even a successful conqueror such as **Alexander** and his successors with a strong **Macedonian/Greek** culture behind him could not resist the lure of adopting the various religions of the various conquered nations.

Indeed it would seem unique in history that a primitive nomadic people managed not to get absorbed into the cultures and religions of their respective conquered people, but rather managed to establish their own unique culture and civilization. **Smith** openly admits this himself in his introduction:

“In the early 7th century, Islam, a religion of immense sophistication, of intricate laws and traditions was formulated in a backward nomadic culture and became fully functional in only 22 years.”

“How did it come together so neatly and quickly? There is no historical precedence for such a scenario. One would expect such a degree of

sophistication over a period of 1 or 2 centuries provided there were other sources, such as neighbouring cultures from which traditions and laws can be borrowed, but certainly not within an unsophisticated desert environment and certainly not within a period of a mere 22 years.”

In fact Crone and Cook consider it a fault that the Arabs failed to assimilate. Strange therefore that Smith has described the Qur’an as a product of assimilation.

The rapid expansion of Islam also poses another serious problem for Smith’s thesis, and that is the task of imposing a single text on such a vast empire. Indeed not only the Qur’an, but also the history, and story of the life of Mohammed, his sayings, Prophethood, and the lives and histories of his companions and family and all the theological and legal issues that were already being debated at that time, and all of this without a single voice of objection from any of the Arabs or Muslims? Joseph Van Ess comments in *The Making of Islam*:

“If we work with the hypothesis of an intentional “editing” of the past on the scale assumed by the authors we would have to presuppose not one forger, but a host of them, and not only one in Syria, where AbdulMalik could have “manipulated” the process, but also in Iraq and in the Hijāz.

Not only a historical tradition would have been invented, but also much poetry showing the impact of the religion (cf. Doctoral thesis of Omar A. Farrukh, 1937 – obviously unknown to the authors). In this respect, the situation is different from that in early Christianity; we are not dealing with a few isolated gospels.”

Abu Hanifa was already teaching in Kūfa. It seems that he might have supported the claim of rulership of Abdullah ibn Zubair, and sent monies to help him. It is incredible that no mention was made of this “new” Qur’an being introduced, since Abu Hanifa’s rulings were based heavily on it. R. B. Sergeant comments in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* on this issue that:

“An historical circumstance so public cannot have been invented.”

Furthermore, one of the arguments that secular historians have always used to explain the phenomenal conquests of the Muslims was the fervour of their faith, and their unity upon one Book and one Prophet calling to universal brotherhood of all believers before God, whatever their race or color. “These are the things that made Islam a power in human affairs . . .”, as H. G. Wells comments in *A Shorter History of the World*. How does one then explain this phenomena that H. G. Wells goes on to call “the most amazing history of conquest in the history of our whole race.”

Another devastating fact that makes the 200 AH compilation theory next to impossible is the existence of various sects, namely the Shi'a and the Khawarij, who trace the origins of their factionalism to the Caliphates of Ali ibn Talib and Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan.

They had every reason to try and prove their claims by referring to their own versions of the Qur'an, but the undeniable fact of their agreement until this day upon a single text of the Qur'an, and their inability to even bring one single different ayaat proves that a standard text had become completely established at a very early stage.

These groups would have been the first to exploit any attempt by Hajjaj to compile and introduce a new version, let alone a completely different book. This fact has been well recognized by many Orientalists, including Muir who comments in his Life of Mohamet [sic]:

“Contending and embittered factions, talking their rise in the murder of Othman himself within a quarter of a century from the death of Mahomet, have ever since rent the Muslim world. Yet but one Coran has been current amongst them; and the consentaneous use by them all in every age up to the present day of the same scripture, is an irrefragable proof that we have now before us the very text prepared by command of the unfortunate Caliph.

There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text.”

The fact is that the greatest evidence in this regard is the lack of evidence. The statement of Crone and Cook concerning Hajjaj “destroying the writings of the hagerines” is not enough to prove anything. It has several other acceptable historical explanations. Furthermore it seems, according to Wansbrough's review of Crone and Cook's book (Hagarism) published in the BSOAS that the non-Muslim source Levond, who is supposed to have reported Leo's description of this event, does not contain any such account!

Is it possible that this book, compiled or even authored under the dictates of Hajjaj, then enforced upon an empire was done so without a single word recorded anywhere by anyone? Then there comes a list of questions that this fairytale poses. Who were the authors of this book that until this day captures the hearts and minds of millions, which moves men to tears, and which history testifies that the masters of the Arabic language, even after the time of Hajjaj, have been unable to emulate?

Why refer back to Muhammad as a Prophet, in fact why should not Hajjaj announce himself as a Prophet?

“When they speak of “the belated and imperfect editing of materials from a plurality of traditions” they are begging the question of where this plurality came from. A lot of revelations? A lot of prophets? One fact that needs to be taken into account with other facts is that the Koran has given profound satisfaction to millions of people over fourteen centuries. Are we to fall back on the notion that just anyone could have written any of it?” (N. Daniel, Journal of Semitic Studies)

Yet again the Qur’an has all the hall marks of an oral, not of a written form, as Smith himself admits disparagingly in his apologetic.

“There remains the basic question whether the early Muslims can really be viewed, in their attitude towards the Koran, as editors patching fragments together and whether they were not rather believers who recited the Koran in their liturgy; “Qur’an” after all means ‘recitation’.” (Joseph Van Ess, The Making of Islam)

There remain several other important issues. One of them is the content of the Qur’an itself. How does one explain a vast array of verses that Smith declares himself in another paper, that contradict completely these assertions, that they “reflect the mind of Mohammed.” What does “He frowned and turned away...” mean? Who frowned and turned away, and from whom? Then there is the issue of Meccan and Medinan surahs. G. H. A. Juynboll remarks:

“What makes Wansbrough’s theories so hard to swallow is the obvious disparity in style and contents of Meccan and Medinan surahs. If, for the sake of argument, we assume, as he states, that the Qur’anic canon is the end product of a basically oral transmission of logia ascribed to “an Arabian prophet”, but which most probably originated gradually with later generations, how then can we account for that difference between the one genre and the other which is, with the acceptance of the historicity of the Hijra and with that of at least the main traditions of the Sira, so adequately explained?” (Journal of Semitic Studies)

In conclusion it seems that one of the strangest positions taken by Crone and Cook and Wansbrough in all of their restructured offering is their assertions on the Qur’an. This is an area which has probably the most unanimous agreement upon by all Muslim as well as non-Muslim Orientalist researchers. How they arrive at such an extraordinary position? R. B. Sergeant comments on the work of Crone and Cook:

“One learns with astonishment that “there is some reason to suppose that the Koran was put together out a plurality of early Hagarene religious works”, and that “the Islamic Imāmate is a Samaritan calque”. Have these young authors ever read the Qur’an attentively, or, in their more modest

way, are they seeking the fame won by the ingenious Hebraist who associated Jesus Christ with the mushroom?" (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society)

And on Wansbrough he comments:

“Wansbrough avers (p.47) that in certain Qur’anic passages “ellipsis and repetition are such as to suggest not the carefully executed project of one or many more men, but rather the product of an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission”. In this he is, of course, attempting to fit the process by which the canon of the Bible was established, onto the Qur’an, but it won’t wash!” (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society)

The claims of both groups, Crone and Crook and Wansbrough, on the issue of the Qur’an have been almost universally rejected by all recognized scholars. This isn’t surprising however, when one considers the superficial nature of the work of both groups in comparison to the depth of the studies carried out by the likes of Watt and Muir.

Both contemporary and traditional Orientalists excluding of course, the present writers, have researched extensively into the collection and codification of the Qur’anic text and the emergent view is unanimous. One recent writer, John Burton, whose book was published at the same time as the work of Crone, Cook and Wansbrough, arrives at precisely the same position regarding the Prophet’s direct association with the Qur’an as his preceding learned progenitors.

R. B. Sergeant remarks:

“J. Burton in his recent Collection of the Qur’an (Cambridge, 1976), argues vastly more cogently than Wansbrough’s unsubstantiable assertions, that the consonantal text of the Qur’an before us is the Prophet’s own recension.” (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society)

Even Wansbrough himself comments:

“This remarkable work is the fruit of many years’ study, much discussion, and not a little tenacity. To my persistent efforts at demolition, or at least modification of his thesis, Dr. Burton has reacted by seeking even closer definition and more extensive documentation. Its final form is truly impressive.” (BSOAS)

The list of earlier scholars who correspond to this unified position include Watt, Muir, Arberry, Rodwell, Gibb, Margolouith, Guillame, Glubb and Paret. A brief examination into a few statements from some of these

writers would be indicative of the majority opinion on the issue and of its Divine nature.

Adrian Brockett:

“The transmission of the Qur’an after the death of Muhammad was essentially static, rather than organic. There was a single text, and nothing significant, not even allegedly abrogated material, could be taken out nor could anything be put in. This applied even to the early Caliphs. The efforts of those scholars who attempt to reconstruct any other hypothetical original versions of the (written) text are therefore shown to be disregarding half the essence of Muslim scripture.” (Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an, p.44)

Arthur J. Arberry:

“Apart from certain orthographical modifications of the originally somewhat primitive method of writing, intended to render unambiguous and easy the task of reading and recitation, the Qur’an as printed in the twentieth century is identical with the Qur’an as authorised by Uthmān more than 1300 years ago.” (From his introduction to his translation of the Qur’an)

John B. Taylor:

“Thus we can feel confident that the Qur’an which we have today is as far as is humanly possible the text which was established within a few years of the Prophet’s death.” [J. B. Taylor, Thinking about Islam]

Harry Gaylord Dorman:

“It is a literal revelation of God, dictated to Muhammad by Gabriel, perfect in every letter. It is an ever-present miracle witnessing to itself and to Muhammad, the Prophet of God. Its miraculous quality resides partly in its style, so perfect and lofty that neither men nor jinn could produce a single chapter to compare with its briefest chapter, and partly in its content of teachings, prophecies of the future, and amazingly accurate information such as the illiterate Muhammad could never have gathered of his own accord.” [Towards Understanding Islam, p.3., New York: 1948]

Laura Veccia Vaglieri:

“On the whole we find in it a collection of wisdom which can be adopted by the most intelligent of men, the greatest of philosophers and the most skilful of politicians . . . But there is another proof of the Divinity of the Qur’an; it is the fact that it has been preserved intact through the ages

since the time of its Revelation till the present day . . . Read and re-read by the Muslim world, this book does not rouse in the faithful any weariness; it rather, through repetition, is more loved every day. It gives rise to a profound feeling of awe and respect in the one who reads it or listens to it.” [Apologie de l’Islamisme, pp.57-59]

It is in the disregard of the legacies of these writers that have caused their divergence from the authoritative position by the present writers, and have led to the unanimous rejection of their theories by critics.

One Very Long List of Names – Smith and Hadith

Smith says: “Schacht pinpoints the origin for this undertaking, stating that it was the scholar Shāfi‘ī (died in 820 C.E.) who stipulated that all traditions of law must be traced back to Muhammad in order to retain their credibility.”

Smith shows a blatant ignorance of the works of ash-Shāfi‘ī, his contemporaries and predecessors. His claim is erroneous because the printed works of ash-Shāfi‘ī’s contemporaries and predecessors had for so long insisted on this and taken this view to be the natural and correct one:

The Muwatta of Mālik (compiled by ash-Shāfi‘ī’s teacher) traces its knowledge back to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Smith admits this in a later paper when he says “the Mudawwana does not speak of Muhammad’s Prophetic authority whereas the Muwatta does.” Consequently, he is now endeavoring to cast doubt on the authentic dating of the Muwatta; his assertions will be answered elsewhere.

The Kitāb az-Zuhd of Ibn al-Mubārāq traces its knowledge back to the Prophet.

The Musnad of Dawūd at-Tayalasi gives its ahādīth with chains of transmission back to the Prophet.

The recent discovery of the Sahifah of Hammam ibn Munabih (compiled prior to 59 AH, English translation available). In it we find that Hammam introduces his text with the words: “Abu Hurairah told us in the course of what he related from the Prophet”, thus giving the source of his information in the form of an isnād and tracing it back to the Prophet.

These are but a few of those which may be cited, limiting ourselves to some of those which are available in print, let alone the many which are still in

manuscript/papyrus form (some of which are described here). One of the above alone is sufficient to show the falsity of Smith's claim.

From an Islamic viewpoint, the issue of tracing knowledge back to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and seeking his verdicts is answered by the Qur'an itself. The reader is referred to the following verses: Qur'an 4:65, 24:51 and 63, 33:21, 33:36 and 59:7, amongst others.

It should be noted that Smith here, as elsewhere, relies heavily on the theories of Joseph Schacht, quoting him a number of times in his paper. In fact, Smith in his discussion of Hadith brings neither any new argument nor fresh analysis to the works from which he has simply lifted his grievances. Because Smith's criticism here is not dissimilar from that of Schacht it will be good to briefly discuss Schacht's level of competence in the field of Hadith so that there will be little need for us to refer to it later:

Examples from the Errors of Joseph Schacht:

1. Schacht (Origins, pp.176-77) criticizes the isnad – Malik from Nafi from Ibn Umar on the grounds that Malik was too young at the time of Nafi's death, and therefore could not have heard Hadith from the latter. It is strange to see that Schacht says: "Nothing authentic is known of Malik's date of birth". If he believes this then how can he adduce that Malik was too young?

This argument, however, assumes that the reader will not check the facts for himself, for Malik was almost 23 years of age when Nafi died, and was hence in a perfectly good position to study under him, as can be adduced from a study of their respective biographies.

2. Schacht (Origins, pp.36-37) takes the statement of Ibn Sirin that: "They did not ask about the isnad but when the fitna (civil war) occurred they said: 'Name to us your men ...'" and declares it to be a fabrication on the basis that the civil war referred to in the statement was the one which started with the death of the Umayyad Caliph Walid bin Yazid who died in 127AH, whereas Ibn Sirin had already died in 110AH!

Schacht's whole argument rests on his arbitrary interpretation of the word fitna (civil war). The death of Walid bin Yazid has never been a conventional date in Islamic History. Furthermore, there were many civil wars before this date, which Schacht appears to have overlooked. There was the unrest at the time of the death of the Caliph Uthman, the rift which occurred between Ali and Mu'awiyah, and that between Ibn az-Zubair and

Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, all of which occurred between 40 to 80 years before the death of Ibn Sirin.

Schacht takes the word fitna in the sense which suits his preconceived theory, without any historical justification. This, of course, is logically absurd.

3. Schacht (Origins, p.60) says that Ibrahim an-Nakhi confirms certain things by “pointing out the absence of any information on that matter from the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Umar” and Schacht refers to the work of Abu Yusuf, Athar, pp.349-52. Schacht assumes then that the Hadith from the Prophet on the matter under discussion must have been fabricated after the time of Ibrahim; otherwise he would not have failed to mention them. This is erroneous for two simple reasons:

Firstly,

the very reference which Schacht cites, namely, Abu Yusuf, pp.349-52, has explicit statements which contradict his own assertions. Here we find two traditions, both narrated by Ibrahim, describing the practice of the Prophet.

Secondly,

even if we accept that Ibrahim did not know of any Hadith from the Prophet on the subject at hand. Schacht is then guilty of making the absurd assumption that Ibrahim must have known all of the Prophetic Hadith on every subject. He fails to take into consideration the obvious possibility that Ibrahim’s failure to mention a narration was because he himself was unaware of one and because one did not exist.

4. Schacht (Origins, pp.241-42) in order to support his theory that incomplete and broken isnads were perfected and completed by later authors gives an example of one such broken isnad from the works of ash-Shafiee which he asserts was corrected and remedied by Malik in his book al-Muwatta.

Schacht blatantly reverses the evidence to prove his point. He fails to inform the reader that Malik’s book al-Muwatta was compiled some forty years earlier than ash-Shafiee’s. In other words the correct and complete isnad is dated earlier than the one which Schacht quotes as broken. So, according to Professor Schacht, the mistake was remedied before it was ever committed!

It is analysis such as this on the part of Schacht and at times his complete lack of understanding of the source material which has subsequently led Western scholars to express grave doubts about his work.

For example, we find that those who have studied his all too readily formulated and at the same time sweeping theories, have said that:

“Some Western scholars, too, have expressed reservations about the hypotheses of Goldziher and Schacht. My own position is that the wholesale rejection of the Hadīths as mere invention and fabrication misses the point that many of the Hadīths can be shown to spring from an ancient source in the primitive exegeses.” [John Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadīth*, p.181: Edinburgh University Press:1994]

“Schacht’s references to Umayyad administrative or to popular ‘practice’ are always mere blunt assertion. Not one single instance of such presumptions has been substantiated.” [ibid, p.xxii – Introduction]

“The present writer regards Schacht’s conclusion as too rigid, particularly because his arguments concerning the ‘relative position’ of a Hadīth ‘in the history of the problem with which it is concerned’ are not always wholly convincing.” [The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, pp.232-33]

“Schacht’s approach, then might be considered somewhat too narrow because he rigidly identifies the development of law with the growth of Hadīth and fails to take proper account of intrinsically legal issues of this kind.” [ibid, p.320]

Similar objections to Schacht’s opinions are aired by N. J. Coulson, who finds them “Too rigid” and “not wholly convincing” [N. J. Coulson, *European Criticism*, p.319] while James Robson and Nabia Abbott are even more critical.

However, the most rigorous articulation of this skepticism comes from Muhammad M. Azami, whose *Studies in Early Hadīth Literature and On Schacht’s Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* can be considered the definitive rebuttal of Schacht’s theses.

We find that M. M. Azami says:

“It does not appear that Professor Schacht has made any thorough investigation of isnāds of a considerable part of legal traditions necessary to put forward a theory of this nature, let alone his investigation of all of them or most of them. A theory of such common application is unacceptable on such meager evidence.”

It seems that he has two kinds of measurements for research. To formulate a theory, he uses the term ‘common occurrence’, basing his research on a few examples that suit his theory; and if there are cases which cover 99% of the subject that refute his theory, then he uses the word ‘occasionally’ to minimize their effect.

This dual standard of argument shows his prejudice and bias and consequently jeopardizes the conclusions of his whole research.” [M. M. Azami, Studies in Early Hadīth Literature, p.235: 1992]

- **Smith says: “As a result the great mass of legal traditions which invoke the authority of the Prophet originated during the time of Shafiī and later.”**

This is answered by Abbott in her study where she concludes that: “One must therefore question sweeping statements that, toward the end of the second century, isnād’s that go back to Muhammad were manufactured freely in response to Shafiī’s insistence on such isnād’s.

For it seems much more likely that a strict process of selection rather than a wholesale fabrication of isnād’s accounts for the bulk of the Hadīth al-nabi that has survived in the standard collections and particularly in the Sahīhain of Muslim and Bukhārī.” [Nabia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri, Vol. II, p.174. Chicago: 1967]

If there was a need to project Hadīth back into the mouth of the Prophet, why is it that some legal doctrines are traced back only as far as one of the four rightly guided Caliphs, or other of the Companions, and not to the Prophet himself?

It is also worth replying here to the comments of other European scholars who have envisaged a natural course of events in which those who associated with the Prophet for a long period would have reported more traditions from him than those who only knew him for a short while. This, however, was not the case. The younger generation of Companions reported far larger numbers of Hadīth than their older brethren.

These questions have already been raised by classical Hadīth scholars themselves, who point out that since the older Companions passed away not long after the death of the Prophet, they had less time to pass on all the traditions known to them, whereas the younger Companions, such as Ibn Abbās, Abu Hurairah, Aisha, lived for a longer period, and were therefore able to disseminate the narrations known to them much more extensively.

This serves as an argument against the accusation of later fabrication as J. Fuch points out, it in fact supports the veracity of the traditionalists; for if

all the isnād's had been forged by them, they would have tried to produce isnād's from the older Companions in larger numbers. [J. Fuch, Die Rolle des Traditionsalismus, p.17. ZDMG XCIII: 1939]

- Smith says: "Patricia Crone takes the arguments one step further by contending that credibility for the traditions has consequently been lost due to the bias of each individual compiler."

Crone's works and conclusions are no more reliable than any of the others which Smith quotes as the basis for his hypotheses. D. S. Powers of the Cornell University – writing in the Journal of Semitic Studies (discussing the book Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law) comments on some of Crone's views regarding the Prophetic Hadīth and their development, he says:

"Stated in these terms, Crone's position will be unacceptable to many non-Muslim scholars, for several reasons. First, in my view, Crone has merely replaced one a priori assumption (authenticity) with another (inauthenticity); between these two extreme positions, however, lies much ground for historical investigation . . . in at least one instance Crone has exaggerated an alleged discrepancy between the early jurists and Prophetic Hadīth.

To corroborate her conclusion about the contribution of Near Eastern provincial law to the origins of Islamic law, she attempts to demonstrate conclusively that the legal maxim 'no bequest to an heir' could not have been instituted by the Prophet, as Islamic tradition maintains, because all of the early Iraqi jurists appear to have forgotten what the Prophet allegedly had said (pp.93-6).

But her analysis rests upon a clear misreading of the Prophetic Hadīth, making it appear as if the early jurists disagreed with the Prophet when in fact they did not (for a detailed critique of her argument, see again my article 'On Bequests in Early Islam'). One wonders whether a close examination of other instances in which Crone attributes 'wild disagreement' to the early jurists might not yield similar results.

Be that as it may, Crone's inability to demonstrate the inauthenticity of this Prophetic Hadīth does not inspire confidence in her blanket rejection of the authenticity of all statements attributed to the Prophet."

- Smith says: "A further problem with these traditions is that of proliferation" and he also says, "Furthermore, the sheer number of Hadīths which suddenly appear created a good deal of suspicion. It has been claimed that by the ninth century there were over 600,000 Hadīth, or early stories about the Prophet." Smith is somehow under the delusion that 600,000 Hadīths means 600,000 separate bodies of

text! He fails to remember that a Hadīth consists of both a text (matn) and a chain of transmission (isnād), in the science of Hadīth the same text with ten chains of transmission is not one Hadīth but rather ten Hadīths (despite the fact that the text attached to each chain is the same in every case.)

This increase in the number of Hadīths included in the later collections is easily fathomed by anyone conversant with the history of the collection of Hadīth. With the expansion of the Islamic empire, the custodians of the Hadīth's travelled widely and settled throughout the new dominions, narrating those aHadīth known to them to create a provincial corpus.

It was only after students of Hadīth had traveled through all these countries and collected together the traditions known to the specialists living there, and narrated them to their own students, that larger and more complete collections of Hadīth could be compiled.

Take a high simplified example of one Companion narrating a single Hadīth from the Prophet onto two students, these students themselves teaching that narration again to two pupils each and so on until we reach the time of Bukhārī and his contemporaries.

We will find that in Bukhārī's generation at least 16 individuals will be hearing the Hadīth from their respective teachers. Because each individual chain of transmission counts as a separate Hadīth, what started out as a single narration transmitted by one Companion only, has evolved within a short period of time to 16 Hadīth's; an increase of 1600%.

The true nature of affairs, however, being far greater, with a far greater number of Companions transmitting a far greater number of narrations to a far greater number of students. This then is the form in which proliferation took place, the dispersion of narrators and chains of transmission, not, as Smith seems to think, by the emergence of newly formulated texts!

Nabia Abbott writes: "... the traditions of Muhammad as transmitted by his Companions and their Successors were, as a rule, scrupulously scrutinised at each step of the transmission, and that the so called phenomenal growth of Tradition in the second and third centuries of Islam was not primarily growth of content, so far as the Hadīth of Muhammad and the Hadīth of the Companions are concerned, but represents largely the progressive increase in parallel and multiple chains of transmission."
[Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, Vol.II, p.2: Chicago: 1967]

She also finds that: "... using geometric progression, we find that one to two thousand Companions and senior Successors transmitting two to five

traditions each would bring us well within the range of the total number of traditions credited to the extensive collections of the third century.

Once it is realized that the isnād did, indeed, initiate a chain reaction that resulted in an explosive increase in the number of traditions, the huge numbers that are credited to Ibn Hanbal, Muslim and Bukhārī seem not so fantastic after all.” [Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, Vol.II, p.72: Chicago: 1967]

- Smith says: “. . . the ruling Caliph asked Al-Bukhārī, the well-known scholar, to collect the true sayings of the Prophet out of the 600,000.” Wrong again! Rather it was his teacher Ishaq ibn Rahaḡaiḡ who urged him onto this task as is well-known to those who have taken it upon themselves to study the matter. Smith, in his eagerness, has obviously confused himself with similar instructions given by the Caliph Umar ibn Abdul Aziz to az-Zuhri some 130 years earlier!
- Smith says: “Bukhārī never spelled out the criteria which guided his choice, except for vague pronouncements of ‘unreliability’ or ‘unsuitability’ (Humphreys 1991:73).” Smith again puts his words into the mouths of his sources. Humphreys doesn’t make mention of Bukhārī at all on page 73! Furthermore, Humphreys uses the words ‘reliability’ or ‘suitability’ which Smith magically transforms into ‘unreliability’ or ‘unsuitability’ to add extra emphasis to an already weak argument.

In actual fact the criteria for adducing the weak from the authentic Hadīth had already been determined by Bukhārī’s teachers and the scholars that went before him; the likes of Yahya ibn Maeen, Ali ibn Madini, Ibn al-Mubarak, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, ash-Shafi’ee, Malik, az-Zuhree and so on. Bukhārī’s own printed works – *Tarikh as-Saghir*, *Tarikh al-Kabir* and *ad-Du’afa* – help us determine the standards he maintained in evaluating the isnād. Al-Hazimi, al-Ayni and al-Qastallani in their respective commentaries to the *Sahīh* have all given details of the very exacting principles set by Bukhārī in compiling his work.

- Smith says: “In the end, he retained only 7,397 of the Hadīth. Allowing for repetition, the net total was 2,762, gathered, it is said, from the 600,000. What this means is that of the 600,000 Hadīth 592,603 of them were false, and had to be scrapped! This beggars belief!”

Rather it beggars belief as to why Smith even dares to speak on a subject which he clearly knows very little about! Who before Smith said that the 592,603 were false and had to be scrapped? A number of inaccuracies have to be cleared up here:

1. Where does Bukhārī claim that he intended to include ALL of the authentic Hadīth known to him? Rather he said the exact opposite in that: “I left out many more authentic traditions than this to avoid unnecessary length.” [al-Khateeb in his Tarikh 2/8-9]. We find Muslim making a similar statement in his Sahīh where he says: “I have not included in this every Hadīth which I deem authentic.” [Sahīh Muslim, English translation, Vol. 1, p.222, no.801., India:1987]. How many of the 592,603 were authentic with Bukhārī and Muslim but they chose not to include them?

2. Smith is again under the delusion that 600,000 Hadīths somehow means 600,000 separate narrations or bodies of text! In theory, the 592,603 Hadīth omitted by Bukhārī could have had the same single text through 592,603 separate isnāds, to him that would have counted as 592,603 Hadīth – albeit in theory that is, but this simply goes to show that the situation is not quite what Smith imagines it to be. It would be more accurate to say, for Smith’s benefit if nothing else, that the figure of 592,603 alludes to individual chains of transmission, not texts.

3. The fact that Bukhārī has compiled other works in which he has included authentic Hadīth not found in his Sahīh clearly shows that other authentic Hadīth were known to him. For example, his printed works Juz Raf’al-Yadain, Qiraa’at Khalf al-Imaam, Khalq Af’al al-Ibaad, Al-Adab al-Mufrad and others.

4. The fact that the works of other writers contain many authentic Hadīth (not included by Bukhārī) is again ample proof that the figure of 592,603 does not consist merely of false narrations. We have the Sahīh books of Muslim, of Ibn Hibban, Ibn Khuzaimah, Abu Awanah and the vast library of Sunan, Musnad and Musannaf titles. Mention should also be made here of the Mustadrak of al-Hakīm who compiled his work on the criteria that he would include in it some of the authentic Hadīth which met the standards of either Bukhārī or Muslim but they did not themselves include them in their respective works. All of these have to be catered for in the 592,603!

5. The Sahīh (authentic) Hadīth is itself split into two categories. That which is Sahīh li-dhatihi (authentic of its own accord) and Sahīh li-ghairihi (authentic due to supporting narrations). Bukhārī intended only to collect those Hadīth in his book which were of the level of Sahīh li-dhatihi. Therefore the countless number of Hadīth classified as Sahīh li-ghairihi have all to be catered for in the 592,603!

6. The Sahīh Hadīth is not the only authentic type of Hadīth, there are also those of the hasan (good) class. Since Bukhārī intended only to collect the authentic Sahīh Hadīth, the countless number of Hadīth classified as hasan have all to be catered for in the 592,603!

7. The 600,000 narrations were not purely traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) but included the individual sayings of the Companions and their Successors, their legal decisions and commentaries; the word ‘Hadīth’ covers all of these subject matters in some scholars’ terms. Therefore the countless number of non-Prophetic narrations have to be accounted for in the figure of 592,603!

8. R. S. Humphreys (who Smith is so apt to quote elsewhere) clearly states in his work: “These compilations did not claim to include all the materials which the ancient historical tradition had produced. On the contrary, a compiler would select only a small number of those known to him.” [Humphreys, Islamic History – Revised Edition, p.73. Princeton University Press:1991]

Where does all this leave Smith’s theory? Or rather the theory he transcribed from others without any verification on his own part!

- Smith says: “Ironically it is just this sort of scenario which puts doubt to the authenticity for any of the Hadīths.” Smith would want us to accept that because SOME of the Hadīth may have doubt concerning them then we should simply discard ALL of the other narrations on the same basis! This is akin to a coinsmith who finds a forgery amidst his pile and promptly proceeds to dispose of the rest of the coins without giving to them the individual scrutiny that they deserve. This would be ludicrous! (Using the same analogy, we could say that Christians should dispose of the four canonized gospels because of the existence of numerous apocryphal gospels!)**

If Smith accepts that Bukhārī and other compilers endeavored to sift the authentic from the weak, then why doesn’t he accept their efforts and himself reject only those narrations which were shown to be false? This certainly would be more just and exacting in the end. Of course we don’t expect Smith to be so welcoming.

- Smith says: “The fact they suddenly materialized at this period (ninth century), and were just as suddenly rejected, seems to suggest either their creation or their adoption at this time, and not at an earlier date.”**

Why would Muslims create a host of traditions which they themselves would promptly reject? Smith is also under the delusion that nothing exists until it is put into writing. For him the spoken word holds no lasting value whatsoever. The mere compilation of a work at a given time in no way implies that its contents were not available or did not exist well beforehand. Smith says:

“...seems to suggest either their creation or their adoption at this time.” Which is it going to be: ‘creation’ or ‘adoption’? The first (creation) implies something new and the other (adoption) the acceptance of something already in existence. Smith can’t have it both ways. (Medication still absent)

- Smith says: ” This echoes the statement made earlier by Schacht concerning the need by compilers of the ninth century to authenticate borrowed laws and traditions by finding a link with the Prophet.”

Professor Schacht’s capabilities have already been discussed. Schacht was of the view that the law and the practice existed first [Origins, p.63] and were then given an air of authority by linking them to the Prophet! To support his argument he quotes Ibn Qasim from the Mudawwana (4/28) who concludes by saying: “So the traditions remained neither discarded (in principle) nor adopted in practice . . . and actions were ruled by other traditions which were accompanied by practice.”

Schacht fails to grasp the meaning behind his source. Ibn Qasim’s whole discussion is based on the point that there are two groups of traditions: one group which is accompanied by the practices of the Companions and the Successors, and another group which is not accompanied by any sort of practice. So, if there were a conflict between these two groups, then the one accompanied by the practice would be given precedence. No where does he indicate that the practice came first and the tradition later!

- Smith says: “The Maghazi, which are stories of the Prophet’s battles and campaigns, are the earliest documents which we possess. They should have given us the best snapshot of that time, yet they tell us little concerning the Prophet’s life or teachings.”

If Smith admits that such works were concerned with describing the battles and campaigns of the Prophet, why should we expect them to cover other aspects of his life and teachings also? Smith is asking too much, he would have us believe that from any book written about the Prophet and Islam we should be able to draw all the relevant information we could wish to have. Why should a book on battles be anything other than that?

- Smith says: “A further problem with the traditions is that of internal contradictions. Certain authors wrote reports which contradict other reports which they had themselves written (Humphreys 1991:73).”

Smith is adept at making claims without giving suitable examples. He refers here to Humphreys who himself similarly fails to quote any examples. Despite this, in terms of offering a general response, we can say: There is no doubt that some Hadith appear to contradict others.

However, Smith should bear two strong possibilities in mind:

9. That it is often the case of a weak/inauthentic narration contradicting one that is established as authentic.

10. That it is often the case of a later tradition abrogating an earlier one.

For it is a natural thing for the leader of a fast-developing movement to change the instructions he issues to his followers in order to respond to a changing situation. Hence we find that the Prophet at times issued advice or instructions which superseded those which he had given earlier. In some cases, the clashes can be resolved by pointing out the different circumstances under which the apparently differing instructions were given. Is this then regarded as contradiction?

One cannot but be surprised to find that some European scholars have cited traditions as evidence of contradictions in the literature when Muslim scholars have for a thousand years and more dismissed those very traditions as spurious, or cases of abrogation. On other occasions, they have cited narrations traditionally considered authentic as forged!

- Smith says: “Al-Tabari, for instance, often gives different, and sometimes conflicting accounts of the same incidents (Kennedy 1986:362).”

Smith again is silent by way of examples, and I have been unable thus far to obtain a copy of Kennedy’s work to see what he has to say. Therefore, without discussing specific grievances, we can say in terms of a general response:

Smith has himself previously indicated that such authors were not themselves writers but rather compiler who drew together the information passed on to them. Al-Tabari himself alludes to this in the Introduction to his History when he says: “Let him who studies this book of ours know that in everything I say about the subjects which I have decided to recount here, I rely only on what I transmit from explicitly identified reports and from accounts which I ascribe by name to their transmitters . . .

And if we mention in this book any report about certain men of the past which the reader finds objectionable or the hearer offensive . . . let him know that this is not our fault, but is rather the responsibility of one of those who has transmitted it to us. We have presented (them) only in the form in which they were presented to us.”

That is to say, Al-Tabari did not take it upon himself to extensively edit the sources in his History but faithfully displayed them in the manner in which

he received them. Can he then be accused if any conflicting accounts should arise?

Furthermore, Smith expects that once a scholar arrives at a given writing then there is no allowance for him to alter his standing at some later stage. If due to progressive research an individual finds it necessary to amend a previously held viewpoint are we then to label him with contradiction and conflicting reports?

- Smith says: “. . . many of the traditions reflect the same material as the others, implying the recycling of the same body of data down through the centuries.”

In the previous section Smith pushed forward the accusation of contradiction and then here promptly proceeds to contradict himself! He concludes that because of similarity this data must have been recycled ‘through the centuries’. Yet in the very next passage he asserts that ‘Because of their similarities, they seem to point to a singular source early in the ninth century.’ What happened to his theory of ‘through the centuries’?

- Smith says: “take for example al-Tabari’s History of the life of the Prophet which is much the same as Ibn Hisham’s Sira, and much the same as his Commentary on the Quran, which is much the same as Bukhārī’s Hadīth collection. Because of their similarities, they seem to point to a singular source early in the ninth century...”

To say that al-Tabari’s History, which covers the period from the creation of Adam to life in al-Tabari’s own generation (printed in approx. 30 volumes in English) is “much the same as Ibn Hisham’s Sira”, whose main aim is to detail the 23 years of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh); and also that al-Tabari’s ‘Commentary’ on the Qur’an which covers the entire scripture from beginning to end in approx. 15 volumes, is “much the same as Bukhārī’s Hadīth collection” which dedicates only a small portion to Quranic commentary and even then covering only 350 or so verses, is deception at its highest level. Smith assumes that his readers/listeners are unable to check the true facts for themselves.

Despite this, what difficulty is there in accepting that three authors writing about a common event (i.e. the life of the Prophet), all from the same Islamic and historical perspective, should produce works which hint of similarity? Why should we expect their works to differ?

Smith on Isnaad

- **Smith says: "The larger the list within the chain the greater its credibility."**

This is a laughable error and reeks of ignorance! Had he even bothered to read the most basic, introductory work in the field of Hadīth and isnād he would have realized without fail that great efforts were always exerted in trying to obtain the shortest chain for each narration. The following few quotes should help clarify the matter:

"... the students of Hadīth are concerned chiefly with attaining the briefest isnād." [Ibn al-Jawzi in Sayid ul-Khaatir, p.216]

"Seeking for the shortest isnād is a sunnah from those who have preceded." [al-Khateeb in Al-Jaami li-Akhlaaqir Raawee, 1/123]

"Seeking brevity of isnād is a means of drawing closer to Allah – the Most High." [ibid]

Documentary Evidence

- **Smith says: "Earlier written material, they say, was no longer relevant for the new Islam, and consequently was either discarded or lost."**

Which Muslim scholar has said that earlier written material "was no longer relevant for the new Islam"? I fear Smith, as usual, is misquoting his sources, not even having the decency to copy with any degree of accuracy. He refers the reader here to R. S. Humphreys Islamic History, page 72. I have the revised edition which reads:

"So great was the prestige of the classical compilations, and so compelling were the interpretations that they proposed, that most of the texts written earlier simply ceased to be copied or read in any systematic way, though it is clear that many titles were still available (and occasionally studied) down at least to the 7th/13th century."

- **Smith says: "While there is some credence to this theory, one would assume that even a few of these documents would have remained, tucked away in some library, or within someone's collection. Yet there is nothing."**

A little amount of thought is sufficient to show that Smith's statement "Yet there is nothing" (before the 200-300 years he mentions earlier in the paper) can only backfire on him and help to show his deep lack of skill in the field of research. Perhaps he overlooked (or ignored) the following

works, all compiled before the dates to which he alludes and available today, covering various topics:

Sahifah of Hamaam ibn Munabih – edited and printed edition.

Nuskah of Suhail bin Abu Salih – Ms. Zahiriyah Library; Damascus.

AHadith ibn Juraij of Ibn Juraij – Ms. Zahiriyah Library, Damascus;

Musnad of Ishaq ibn Rahaawaih – Ms. Zahiriyah Library, Damascus;

Yazid ibn Abu Habib – his traditions transmitted by al-Laith ibn Sa'd – Ms. Zahiriyah Library, Damascus;

Musannaf of Abdur Razzaq – edited and printed edition;

Jaami' of Ma'mar ibn Rashid – printed along with Musannaf of Abdur Razzaq;

Musnad of Humaidi;

Musnad of Dawud at-Tayalasi;

Kitab az-Zuhd of Ibn al-Mubarak;

Muwatta of Malik ibn Anas – edited and printed edition;

Al-Athar of Abu Yusuf;

Muwatta of Muhammad ash-Shaibani;

and others . . .

- Smith says: “But unlike those who write forwards today, the ninth century compilers had no documentation to prove that their sources were authentic.”

Smith may be excused here for slipping up in an area where his forefathers were to do the same. Smith has a misconception about isnāds which to him implies solely oral transmission, whereas in many instances a chain of transmission actually comprised of a series of books which were referred to by the name of their author rather than the name of the book itself.

The main reason for this assumption is usually due to a misunderstanding of the term – hadathana – (i.e. he narrated/informed to us) which outwardly seems to suggest oral transmission but which was regularly

used for the transmission of books also. In some instances a document is referred to directly in the isnād. Take the following four examples:

- In the Musnad (1/418) of Ahmad the isnād: “Yahya bin Adam informed us that Abū‘ullah ibn Idris dictated to him from his book.” Here a book is employed for the transmission of a narration yet still the words “informed us” are used for this purpose.
- Abu Dawud transmits a portion of the booklet of Samurah in various chapters of his Sunan without mentioning the document but at all times referring to the author and employing the term “he narrated/informed to us”.
- In the Sunan (1/45) of an-Nasa’i the isnād: “Muhammad bin al-Muthnee narrated to us, saying, Ibn Abi Adee narrated to us from his book and then from his memory.”
- The Muwatta of Malīk is a well known book. The book was entitled by the author himself. Yet the authors from the later period, utilizing the material of the Muwatta freely, referred only to Malīk without mentioning the book.

Therefore, the use of an isnād does not necessarily imply that no books were present for the purpose of transmission or that they were not available for consultation. But again, it must be said that Smith is assuming that authenticity lies only in documentation!

The Uncontested Evidence – The Qur’ān

The Qur’an was recited by the Prophet Muhammad who, being illiterate himself, used scribes to write it down on bones, skin and palm leaves as an aid to memorization. These written portions were sometimes given to visiting tribes to take away and learn from.

After the death of the Prophet many of the Huffāz (those who had memorized the whole Qur’an) were killed in the Battle of Yamāma against the apostates.

Umar ibn al Khattāb suggested to Abu Bakr that they should gather together the whole Qur’an into one written book in case some of it became lost. They chose one of the Huffāz and scribes of the Prophet, Zaid Ibn Thabit, for the task. He referred to all those who had written copies and found two corresponding witnesses besides himself for each verse, and put them in the order in which the Prophet had recited in front of him twice in the year he died.

This written Qur'an, called a mushaf, was handed from the then Caliph Abu Bakr to Umar ibn al Khattab who handed it on to his daughter Hafsa. In the time of Caliph Uthman, Islam had spread from Khurasan to Morocco. The Prophet Muhammad had allowed the people to recite the Qur'an in seven different dialects (as it had been revealed in that way), but this had become a cause for dissension so Hudaifa went and pleaded with Uthman to unite the Muslims under one reading.

Uthman decided on the Quraish dialect, which the Prophet himself had used. Zaid ibn Thabit was called in again and he repeated the task, assembling the Qur'an in the Quraishi dialect, again with the confirmation of two authorities who had it in writing, with the exception of one verse which he found with only one in a written form (but many in oral)

Copies of this Qur'an were then sent to various parts of the empire to be used as the standard, and all other writings were ordered to be burnt. This was done with the agreement of all the living Companions and memorizers of the Qur'an.

Now to establish the reliability of the Mutawatir oral transmission of the Qur'an let us use an example given by Jay Smith himself in his apologetic paper "The Qur'an",

Smith says: "If after I had read this paper out-loud, everyone was to then write down all I had said from memory when they returned home, there would certainly be a number of variations. But we could find out these variations by putting them all together and comparing the many copies one against the other, as the same errors would not be written at the same place by everyone.

The final result would be a rendering which is pretty close to what I had said originally. But if we destroyed all of the copies except one, there would be no means of comparing, and all precision would be lost. Our only hope would be that the one which remained was as close to what I had said as possible. Yet we would have no other rendering or example to really know for sure. Consequently, the greater number of copies preserved, the more certitude we would have of the original."

Now imagine that everyone who read this text memorized faithfully parts of it, and some faithfully memorized the whole of it, and some faithfully wrote it down on pieces of paper. Now also imagine that you are all devoted followers of J. Smith, and you believe every word he speaks. Furthermore, you believe that if you faithfully remember his words without mistake he will give you good marks. Now Joseph dies and his most promising student decides that we must publish the paper of Joseph as the definitive refutation of Islam.

So he asks one of Joseph's other devoted students, who although young, had memorized the whole paper, but just to be sure he tells him to check with all those who had written copies of the whole paper in case he might have left something out. He does this and finds that there were a couple of lines he had written that were with no one else. So he keeps searching and eventually finds it with a couple of other students.

So he includes it all in his final draft. Now after several years some American students of the students of Smith start arguing with some English students of the students about the use of "cookies" in stead of "biscuits" and "chips" instead of "fries" and they are ready to fight about it. So a top student of Smith hears about this, and although he knows that Smith allowed both usages in his students recitals and notes he decides for the sake of unity to use only the American usages as that was the language in which the paper was originally read.

So he calls that same young student, who repeats the same process, and comes up with the same result. So the order is given for everyone to destroy every copy, and all the notes they have to prevent any future arguments, and the young students copy, of which every word has been agreed upon by at least two students who had complete written copies, was then published.

This publication was agreed upon by every living student who had memorized the whole paper to be verbatim the same paper as taught by Smith and as memorized by them. Would you doubt that this was exactly what Smith's paper said?

Now further imagine that thousands of people all around the world had memorized this paper, and the original young student's copy was destroyed, yet when you gathered together these memorizers and copies of the compilation from all over the world and found that they all agreed, would you doubt that this was exactly Smith's original paper?

To give another example, let us imagine a gathering of Beatles fans who start singing their songs. Most of them would know the words to most of the songs, and even if someone made a mistake they would immediately recognize it. Now these people have probably never read the words of the songs, and even if the records and tapes from which they were taken were lost, etc., one would have little doubt that these were the words sung by the Beatles due to the unanimous agreement of all the fans upon a given wording.

It must be remembered that the Qur'an is read and re-read by Muslims every day of their lives in their prayer, in the morning and sunset and night prayer it is read out loud. It is a habit of many Muslims to read the

entire Qur'an in three days, some in a week and many in a month. A greater number still read the whole Qur'an at least once a year.

Its ease of memorization is renowned (as the Qur'an itself states) as we can find children as young as six that have memorized the whole of it. It is of course considered the very Words of God and so is given the utmost respect and attention, and cannot be compared to mere stories and such like.

One of the most enduring arguments for the Qur'an's authenticity is the total agreement throughout the vast Muslim empire upon one text, which proves that it must have been agreed upon from the very earliest times. This is given more weight by the fact that from the different sects, such as the Shia who trace their pretensions to Ali ibn Talib, the cousin of the Prophet, the Khawarij, the Qadariya and the Jahmiya and other sects that arose in the earliest period of Islam, none of them were able to make a basis for their claims except through the same Qur'an that we have in our possession today. The fact that these sects could never invent or add a single verse to the Qur'an proves the Muslims were unanimously united upon a single text from the earliest times.

Reliability of Oral Transmission

Smith says: "The problem with oral transmission, however, is that by its very nature, it can be open to corruption as it has no written formula or documentation with which it can be corroborated and tested. Thus it can be manipulated depending on the agenda of the orator."

-Thus Smith assumes that only written accounts have any degree of accuracy. Is it the case that if something is put into writing that it is always recorded accurately? The fact is that written accounts are easily open to corruption, the Christian Bible being a prime example, which has led some authors to conclude that: "It is safe to say that there is not one sentence in the New Testament in which the manuscript tradition is wholly uniform." [The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, Abingdon Press: 1962 in 4 volumes, under the heading 'Text, NT'.]

- Again, for Smith the spoken word holds no value at all.
- Smith presumes that all narrators in an isnad were incapable of passing on what they heard with any degree of accuracy, that they were all out to deceive and willingly corrupted the teachings of their religion. That's not to say that there did exist innovators and heretics who might have sought to do so. This is where the biographies and evaluation of each individual narrator played an important role.

Narrations were rejected from known liars and heretics to ensure purity of transmission. Narrators were individually evaluated for academic accuracy and memory retention.

Montgomery Watt writes:

” . . . it would have been easy to invent sayings of Muhammad. Because the cultural background of the Arabs had been oral the evidence that came to be expected was the chain of names of those who had passed on the anecdote containing the saying . . . It was soon realized that false Traditions were in circulation with sayings that Muhammad could not possibly have uttered. The chains of transmitters were therefore carefully scrutinized to make sure that the persons named could in fact have met one another, that they could be trusted to repeat the story accurately, and that they did not hold any heretical views.

This implied extensive biographical studies; and many biographical dictionaries have been preserved giving the basic information about a man’s teachers and pupils, the views of later scholars (on his reliability as a transmitter) and the date of his death. This biography-based critique of Traditions helped considerably to form a more or less common mind among many men throughout the caliphate about what was to be accepted and what rejected.” [W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam?*, pages 124-125, Longman Group Ltd:1979]

- Smith also ignores the mutawattir narration here (though he does mention it briefly elsewhere). By mutawattiris meant that narration which is reported by such a large number of individuals in each generation and at every stage of transmission that it is impossible that they could have all gathered together upon reporting a lie/mistake. Perhaps Smith should look to familiarize himself with the books of mutawattir hadith. Indeed, the common feature of a good many traditions is the great number of transmitters who belong to different provinces and countries. It was hardly possible for all these individuals to consult each other so as to give a uniform sense in transmitting a particular tradition. If a particular tradition is transmitted by so many persons with a similar form and sense, then its genuineness cannot be questioned, as the trustworthiness of the individuals has been vouchsafed by their contemporaries.**

Smith himself accepts this methodology later in his paper when he asks: “Can We Use These Non- Muslim Sources?” He argues that because the non-Muslim sources he produces are spread over a “wide geographical and social distribution” they could not all have gathered together and agreed to vent “their anti-Muslim feeling with such uniform results”.

· To repeat, Smith says: “The problem with oral transmission, however, is that by its very nature, it can open to corruption.”

It will be noted that Smith consistently bends over backwards to deny the credibility of oral transmission. What he fails to admit (or realize) is that the very same ‘oral transmission’ is replete in the history of his own book – the Bible:

Oral Transmission of the Biblical Text

“Most of the material in our Gospels existed for a considerable time in an oral stage before it was given the written form with which we are familiar.” [New Bible Dictionary – Second Edition, p.436. Inter-Varsity Press: 1982]

“The Old Testament includes many ‘memories’ older than script, and many stories stamped by the storytellers’ oral style. In fact, behind every type of LITERATURE represented there, lies a longer or shorter time of oral tradition.” [The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, vol.4, p.683. Abingdon Press: 1962]

“Many of the characteristics of the style forms point clearly back to the oral origin of the species . . . the artistic mastership of the old tales of Genesis, Judges, Samuel, is just due to the fact that they were given their form by the storytellers, not by the rhetoric ‘literates’ of that time, the scribes.” [The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, vol.4, p.683. Abingdon Press: 1962]

“Even long after the more occasional use of script the oral transmission of ‘spiritual’ knowledge was considered normal. In the East learning by heart is unto this day the normal way of transmitting even the longest written texts, as the Koran and its commentaries. With the Jews both the Mishna and Talmud were orally transmitted for centuries; in the synagogue it was long forbidden to say the Torah from a written scroll; also the Aramaic and Greek translations were originally given orally, but in a traditional fixed form.” [The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, vol.4, p.684. Abingdon Press: 1962]

Commenting on the transmission of the Old Testament, The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, writes: “The common memory of the circle and the ‘chain of traditionalists’ were for long considered to be securer than the script. (It must be remembered that here we have to do with generations whose memory was not spoiled by magazines and dictionaries)” [The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, vol.4, p.684. Abingdon Press: 1962]

Similarly, in Peake's Commentary on the Bible, commenting on the New Testament, we read: "The soil of this plant was oral tradition. The retentiveness of the Oriental memory enables the disciples of Jesus, like the disciples of the Jewish rabbis, to preserve not inaccurately the main sayings and deeds of their Master in the original Aramaic.

The sacred book of the new religion was the Old Testament. No need was as yet felt for committing the tradition to writing, partly on account of the superiority attached in the Greek as well as in the Jewish world to the spoken word over the written as a means of training and informing the mind . . ." [Peake's Commentary on the Bible, p.604. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd: 1919]

Metzger writes that Papias towards 130 C.E. still preferred oral tradition to books! [Bruce Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament, p.78. Oxford University Press; 1987]

Where does this leave Smith's views on oral transmission? If it is 'open to corruption' then we would have to assume that he has to accept what distortion has occurred to the text of the Bible? Smith, however, chooses to employ his theories as and when they suit his agenda! Sadly, though for Christianity, the oral transmission of the Bible nowhere near meets the strict criteria demanded by Muslim traditionists.

The Value of Oral Tradition (Its relevance to both Qur'an and Hadith)

What was the form in which knowledge was preserved and passed on before the advent of the written word? For in ancient times, when writing was not used at all or scarcely used, memory and oral transmission was exercised and strengthened to a degree now almost unknown. [Michael Zwettler, The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry, p.14. Ohio State Press: 1978 – all references slightly adapted and abridged for continuity.]

For whether sacred or secular, the works that have given rise to a textual tradition seem invariably to have existed in some sort of oral form prior to being set down. This oral form of the work was, to a certain extent, preserved by memory and passed on by word of mouth. Such a process has long been accepted by scholars who spoke of a period of 'oral transmission' or 'oral tradition', scholars could call in to their help the 'fantastic memories' so 'well attested' of illiterate people. They felt that a text could remain from one generation to another unaltered. [ibid, p.4]

Indeed, 'orality' has been demonstrated, in works such as Greek poetry – Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns, Delphic oracular utterances – as well as in areas as diverse as medieval French and German epics, Babylonian and Hittite epics and Old Testament verse, and more. [ibid, p.5]

The very educational systems that brought about relatively high rates of literacy amongst segments of some pre-modern societies and fostered a proliferation of the written word – Arab, Islamic civilization for instance, the Greco-Roman world, and India – all relied heavily upon memorization and recitation as a chief means of ensuring the acquisition and retention of knowledge. [ibid, p.19]

The poetry of the Arabs, in the ages which preceded the rise of Islam, was perpetuated by oral tradition, being a remarkably reliable method for the retention of information.

Long after the more occasional use of script the oral transmission of 'spiritual' knowledge was considered normal. In the East learning by heart is unto this day the standard way of transmitting even the longest written texts. With the Jews, both the Mishna and the Talmud were orally transmitted for centuries; in the synagogue it was long forbidden to say the Torah from a written scroll; the Aramaic and Greek translations were also originally given orally. [The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol.4, p.684. Abingdon Press: 1962]

Today, we live in a world increasingly dominated by the printed word. For most if not all of us, the fixed, visible page of print is the fundamental medium of both information and proof. If anything is truly important, we have to 'get it in writing'. We want tangible evidence of 'documentation', we need things of importance 'signed and sealed'. To a degree unknown in any other culture of history, knowledge for us is 'book-learning'; and no orally communicated word carries the kind of authority for us that a written or printed document does.

Ours is not only a literate, but a book and print culture; the written word has become the basic form of language. There is no doubt that today, religious scriptures of the past, are viewed in exactly the same light and with the same expectations. Scripture is widely understood today as a tangible document that fixes the fluid sacred word and gives it substance and permanence. We have focused all but exclusively on religious texts as solely written documents or artifacts: that is, as physical objects, as 'sacred books' in the most trivial sense of the term.

Yet such a restricted use of the term 'scripture' to refer only or principally to a physical book contains unnecessarily the scope of the idea of scripture. The idea hardly even occurs that a sacred text could exist for

long without being written. Our current Western notions too easily take for granted the written text as the focus of piety and faith in religious communities. Too often lost to us is the central place of scriptural words being recited, memorized, transmitted orally, preserved in the minds of the people, taught to both the young and the old by word of mouth. [William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, pp. ix, x, 9. Cambridge University Press: 1993]

In Islam, the written word of the Qur'an has always been secondary to a strong tradition of oral transmission that far surpasses that of Judaic or Christian usage. In Islam, the functions of the Holy Book as an oral text have predominated over its functions as a written or even a printed one.

For countless millions of Muslims over more than fourteen centuries of Islamic history, 'scripture', al-kitab has been a book learned, read and passed on by vocal repetition and memorization. The written Qur'an may 'fix' visibly the authoritative text of the Divine Word in a way unknown in history, but the authoritativeness of the Qur'anic book is only realized in its fullness and perfection when it is correctly recited. The Book of Islam is ultimately not a written or printed document, but a 'reciting' or 'recitation'. [ibid, pp.79-80]

John Burton writes: "The method of transmitting the Qur'an from one generation to the next by having the young memorize the oral recitation of their elders had mitigated somewhat from the beginning the worst perils of relying solely on written records . . ." [John Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadith*, p.27. Edinburgh University Press: 1994]

Kenneth Cragg further elaborates: "This phenomenon of Qur'anic recital means that the text has traversed the centuries in an unbroken living sequence of devotion. It cannot, therefore, be handled as an antiquarian thing, or as a historical document out of a distant past. The fact of hifz has made the Qur'an a present possession through the entire lapse of Muslim time and given it a human currency in every generation never allowing its relegation to a bare authority for reference alone." [Kenneth Cragg, *The Mind of the Qur'an*, p.26. George Allen & Unwin: 1973]

A Scientific Process – The Hadith

Hadith: An Islamic Overview

Indeed, Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah – peace and blessings upon him – explained to the people, completely and clearly, what their Lord had revealed for them; both the detailed matters and the important ones, the

apparent matters and the hidden ones, to such an extent that he – peace and blessings upon him – taught them what they needed to know with respect to drawing closer to Allāh – the Most High, as well as in matters of eating, drinking, marriage, clothing and housing.

He taught them the etiquette's of social behavior, such as kindness to parents, keeping ties of kinship, caring for the neighbor and keeping good companionship. He explained to them all that was pleasing the Creator of the heavens and of the earth and those things made forbidden for them, in fact, to such a complete extent that his Companion Abu Dharr said:

“Indeed the Messenger of Allāh – peace and blessings upon him – passed away and there is not a bird flapping its wings in the sky, except that he mentioned to us some knowledge about it.” [Ahmad 5/153]

This then was the example, the living teaching of the final Messenger sent to the whole of mankind. He did not hesitate in calling the people back to their Lord in accordance with what he had been commanded:

“O Messenger! Proclaim that which has been sent down to you from your Lord.” [Qur'an 5:67]

“We have sent down to you the Reminder, that you may explain to mankind what has been revealed to them, that perhaps they may reflect.” [Qur'an 16:44]

The Messenger of Allāh – peace and blessings upon him – would explain the intent of the Revelation often by means of a statement, at other times he would do so by an act, and yet other times he would do so by means of both. For example, the Qur'an commanded the Believers to establish regular Prayer, so the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – prayed among his followers and then told them: <> [Bukhārī 1/604]

On some occasions an act would be performed in his presence or with his knowledge or similarly a statement made about which he would not express disapproval, thereby indicating its permissibility. Accordingly, the Creator made obedience to His Messenger an obligation upon the people, to follow his example and receive his teaching:

“Whatsoever the Messenger gives you take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from it.” [Qur'an 59:7]

“Indeed in the Messenger of Allāh you have the best example to follow for him who hopes in the meeting with Allāh and the Last Day and remembers Allāh often.” [Qur'an 33:21]

It is for these reasons that the Companions of the Prophet were meticulous about his teachings. All his actions served them as an ideal, and hence a precedent (Sunnah); every word which he uttered was a law to them, while his moral choices, so different from those of their age, yet so immediate in their impartial wisdom, provided them with a system of personal and social virtue which they tried to follow faithfully. Given this intense devotion to the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him, inspired by his charisma and integrity, the Companions made a point of observing his life and recording for posterity everything that they could.

Thus we find that Abu Hurairah kept his constant company, sacrificing all worldly pursuits, in order to see and hear what the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – said and did, and regularly devoted a period of time to fixing in his memory the words he had heard; so much so that the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – said to him on one occasion:

“O Abu Hurairah! I have thought that none will ask me about this hadīth before you, as I know you’re longing for hadīth.” [Bukhārī 8/574] Even those Companions who may have lived at a distance and were unable to attend the Prophet every day, made an agreement with other Companions that they would be present with him on alternate days, and report to each other everything they saw or heard from him.

It is said to have been a common practice among the Companions that whenever any two of them met, one would inquire from the other whether there was any hadīth, and the other would tell him what he knew.

The Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – himself attached the utmost importance to the knowledge of his own hadīth and would encourage his followers to be attentive when he was imparting the message with which he was sent. Often he would be seen to repeat his words to ensure that they had been properly retained. We find the Companion Anas ibn Malik declaring: “Whenever the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – spoke a sentence, he used to repeat it thrice so that the people could understand it properly from him.” [Bukhārī 1/95]

He would ask his Companions to make his hadīth as widely known as possible by instructing: “It is incumbent upon those who are present to inform those who are absent . . .” [Bukhārī 1/67] and would also say: “May Allāh make joyful a person who heard my saying and preserved it, then transmitted it from me.” [Ibn Maḥjah 1/236]

The Companions did not simply commit as many of the hadīth as they could to memory. Some of them collected them in books known as Sahifas, which they used as a basis for lectures, and which were later preserved by their families, and by the next generation of Muslims, the Successors. This

writing of knowledge was directly from the command of the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – himself. When on one occasion he had delivered an address to the people he was asked:

“O Messenger of Allāh , have that written for me.” So he ordered his Companions to write it out for him [Bukhārī 1/112]. A bu Hurairah himself describes that a book was kept by Abdullah ibn Amr al-Aas [Bukhārī 1/113], and concerning this we find Nabia Abbott declaring: “The sources are unāimously emphatic that Abdullah ibn Amr al-Aas from the start recorded hadīth and sunnah.”

[Abbott, Studies, Vol. II, p.37] M. M. Azami in his Studies in Early Hadīth Literature (pp.34-60) gives details of 50 Companions who at one time or another preserved the hadīth in writing. The letters which the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – himself had sent to various provinces are no different from his hadīth.

As mentioned, the writings compiled by the Companions were often preserved and passed on by their families before being incorporated into later works. This led to numerous family chains of transmission about which Abbott writes:

“Family isnāds of several generations of literate traditionists imply continuous written transmission, an implication that is reinforced by the large number of traditions accredited to the members of such families and by the appearance of clusters of such traditions in the standard collections.” [Abbott, ibid, p.37] She also concludes that:

“The development of the family isnād and continuous written transmission lead to the third inescapable conclusion, namely that the bulk of thā hadīth and sunnah as they had developed by about the end of the first century was already written down by someone somewhere . . . ” [ibid, p.39]

In this way, the hadīth literature originated in the early life of the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him, developed largely through his lifetime and immediately after, and spread simultaneously with the spread of Islam throughout the new Muslim dominions. The Muslim armies āhich reached Syria, Palestine, Persia and Egypt included a large number of Companions who carried the hadīth with them.

In particular, hadīth flourished not only in Makkah and Medīnah, but also Kūfah, Basrah, Damascus, Fustat and Merv. Even the distant lands of North Africa and Spain received the hadīths before the end of the first century. And to the east, the message of the Qur’an and the Sunnah had been received by āndia even before the conquest of Sind.

The death of the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – signaled the end of direct Revelation. With this the importance of hadīth inevitably increased and the Companions were no less anxious in seeking out and acquiring that knowledge which had been missed by them during the Messenger’s lifetime. Abdullah ibn Abbās (himself a Companion) relates:

“When the Messenger of Allāh died, I said to one Ansāri, ‘Let us ask the Companions of the Prophet as there are still a lot!’ He replied to me, ‘Quite curious, do you think, O Ibn Abbās, that people will be in need of you while a great number of the Companions of the Prophet are still surviving?’

Ibn Abbās continued: ‘So I left him and started asking the Companions. Sometimes when a hadīth was reported to me by anyone of them, I used to approach their houses and found them taking rest at noon. So I would rest my head on my cloak at their door while the wind blew dust on my face till the man came out and said: ‘O cousin of the Prophet, what brought you here?’ Why did you not call for me; so that I could come to you myself?’ I would say: ‘No, you deserved to be visited by me.’ Then I asked him concerning the hadīth.” [Mustadrak 1/107]

It will be noted that this comprises an early isnad, namely, one Companion narrating from another, from the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him. Abu Ayyub al-Ansāri travelled to Uqba ibn Amīr in order to ask him about a hadīth which, no one who remained alive, had heard it direct from the Prophet, except them. He said to the Governor of Egypt:

“A hadīth which I heard from the Prophet and now no one except me and Uqba are alive who heard it from the Prophet. So please provide me with anyone who can guide me to his house. So he sent for a person who showed him the house of Uqba. Uqba on hearing the news of his arrival came out hurriedly as well and said: ‘What brought you here, O Abu Ayyub?’ He replied: ‘A hadīth about protecting a believer which I heard from the Prophet and no one else except me and you are left who heard it from the Prophet.’ Uqba said: Yes, I heard the Prophet saying: <> Abu Ayyub said: ‘You have told the truth.” [al-Hakim, Marifat, pp.7-8]

The Companions settled themselves in the various towns and provinces of the Islamic empire. In these towns they were surrounded by a large number of Muslims who had not met the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – and who were eager to hear reports of his words and deeds from those who had associated with him and had heard his counsels.

These Successors not only learnt from them the hadīths but also acquired the ethos and questing for the Traditions, and their careful cultivation and preservation. Upon them devolved the preservation and propagation of the

narrations for over a century, firstly in association with the Companions, and, when the latter had passed away, with the help of their own pupils.

These descending generations shared in common an astonishing zeal for the pursuit of hadīth. Rich men and women among them sacrificed their wealth for its sake, while the poor devoted their lives to it in spite of their poverty. James Robson writes

“It may safely be assumed that from the very beginning Muslims were interested in what the Prophet said and did, and that after his death, when Islam spread widely, new converts would be anxious to hear about him. Those who associated with him would be listened to eagerly as they told about him.

While this was largely conveyed by word of mouth, there is reason to believe that some men made small collections for their own use. These can hardly be called books, but nevertheless the material they contained was incorporated in later works.” [James Robson, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol.1, p.iii, Lahore: 1991]

M. M. Azami (pp.60-106) gives details of over 100 Successors who wrote down hadīth. The Successors, with the disappearance of eyewitnesses, realised the need to preserve and ensure the authenticity of the statements attributed to the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him. An isnād (chain of transmission) was therefore indispensable to them, though signs of its use had appeared during the time of the Companions themselves. Abbott writes:

“There was no call for emphasis on source until the first Civil War, which occurred in the fourth decade, and until the Successors were brought into the chain of transmission.” [Nabia Abbott, *Studies*, Vol. II, p.1]

We therefore have the famous statement of Ibn Sirin (d.110H): “They did not ask about the isnād until when the Fitna (Civil War) arose they said: ‘Name to us your men.’ Those who belonged to the People of the Sunnah, their traditions were accepted and those who were innovators, their traditions were neglected.” [Muslim]

This statement implies that isnād were used even before the Fitna. After the Civil War the people became more cautious and began to inquire about the sources of information and scrutinise them. The Companion Ibn Abbās had himself already said: “We used to report from the Prophet when the lies were not credited to him but when the people mixed up, we abandoned reporting from them.” [Muslim] These were amongst the first signs of ascertaining the status of the narrator, liars, as always were not to be

trusted in their reports. At the end of the first century the science of isnād was fully developed. James Robson writes:

“There is therefore reason to believe that Ibn Sirin is to be credited with the words attributed to him. If that is granted, it would support Horowitz’s theory that the isnād entered the literature of tradition in the last third of the first century, as its use so early would be bound to be represented soon in writing.” [Robson, *Isnād in Muslim Tradition*, pp.21-22]

Such was the importance of the isnād that Muslim scholars, both early and late, have warned the people from neglecting it and insisted on its preservation. From them:

Al-Awza‘ī (d.157H) said: “The passing away of knowledge is not except the loss of the isnād.” [at-Tamhīd 1/57]

Ibn al-Mubārak (d.181H) said: “The isnād is part of the Religion, if it were not for the isnād then anybody would have said whatever they liked.” [Muslim]

Ibn al-Arabī (d.543H) said: “Allāh has honoured this Nation with the isnād which He did not give to anyone else. So beware of following the way of the Jews and the Christians, will you narrate without isnād, and thus remove Allāh’s blessing from yourselves. Opening yourselves to attack and seeking to keep your position whilst you are partners with a people whom Allāh has cursed and is angry with, and following their way.” [Fihrisul-Fahāris 1/80]

Al-Manawī (d.1031H) said: “Allāh has favoured this Nation with the isnād and has made it one of those things particular to it to the exclusion of others. And He inspired them to strictly check and research it.” [Faydul-Qadīr 1/434]

With the earlier dispersion of the Companions throughout the Muslim lands and their imparting the narrations known to them over such a wide area, it was felt, in the period of the Successors, to travel extensively and gather together these narrations. The Caliph Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz (d.101H) took steps to bring about their collection. He wrote to the great Traditionist of Medinah, Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Hazm (d.120H) requesting him to write down the hadīth for him [see Bukhārī, Vol.1, p.79].

He also asked Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d.124H) to collect hadīths in the form of books in order to have these circulated throughout his dominions. According to Abu Nu’aym’s ‘History of Isfahan’, Umar also wrote a circular letter asking the hadīth scholars living in the various parts of his country to collect in the form of books as many hadīths as were available. All of this

was going on whilst individual scholars were themselves traveling to collect hadith for their own private collections.

Makhul (d.112H) travelled through Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Hijaz and gathered the knowledge of all the hadith which he could obtain from the Companions who still lived there. He used to boast that for the sake of knowledge he had 'travelled round the world' [Dhahabi, Tadhkira, 1/71]. Al-Sha'bi (d.104H) said when asked how he had gathered the knowledge of such a voluminous quantity of hadiths:

"By hard work, long travels, and great patience" [Ibn Abdul-Barr, Jami, 1/95]. Masruq (d. 63H) travelled so widely for the sake of learning that he was known as 'the father of travelling'. Saeed ibn al-Musayyib (d.94H) used to travel for days just to learn a single hadith from its narrator.

One author wrote:

"The migration of the Companions, the scholars' open sessions in Makkah and Medina, especially during the annual pilgrimage season, and the journeys in search of knowledge speeded the transmission of Tradition. Evidence of continuous written transmission of Tradition from the second quarter of the first century onward is available in early and late Islamic sources." [The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, p.297]

Coupled with the appearance of these literary works an elaborate method of teaching was employed. A teacher would often read from his book to his students, this being the most preferred method of transmission at this stage. Even if regular meetings were held for the teaching, only a few narrations were taught in one lesson, perhaps three or four.

On other occasions the book would be read by the student back to the teacher or by a reciter and other students compared the narrations with their individual books or only listened attentively. On other occasions, the teacher would write the hadith himself for the student. Many other such methods were employed.

A regular record of attendance was kept and after the reading of a book was completed, a note was written by the teacher giving details of attendance, e.g. who listened to the complete reading of a book and who joined partially, what part they read and what part was missed by them, giving dates and places.

In this way permission was only granted to pass on those hadith for which a student had been in attendance. It helped to ensure that individual narrators had taken their knowledge in the correct manner and were

capable of passing on what they had acquired. A student would often stay with a teacher for many years.

Comparing the narrations of various students was one of many excellent ways of ensuring the continuous accuracy of the hadīth. A prime example is that of Yahya ibn Ma'īn (d.233 H) who traveled to see eighteen of the pupils of Hammaad ibn Salamah in order to compare their hadīth and ascertain if any of them had been mistaken in their reporting [Ibn Hibbān, al-Majruhīn].

The employment of such a method guaranteed that fabricated narrations would not go unnoticed if transmitted in this way. If a student was seen to narrate a hadīth which was previously unknown or rare (perhaps because he had fabricated it) then it would be a simple task to compare his report with other students who sat with him in the company of their teacher, and it would be found that none of them had heard this narration from their teacher except him though they had all been in attendance at his sittings! He would then be suspected of forging that narration.

With such activities thriving and with more and more people being continually exposed to the hadīth, the value and importance of the Prophet's words, however, were never forgotten and always kept to the forefront. The status of the Messenger of Allāh – peace and blessings upon him – and the awe in which he was held by the people ensured that his words were given the utmost respect that they deserved and that they were not altered or amended in any way. Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728H) in his Qāidah Jaleelah Tawwassul wal-Waseelah (p.92), whilst describing the early generations and their respect for the status of the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – writes:

‘It is mentioned that Malīk (d.179H) was asked about Ayyūb as-Sakhtiyānī, so he said: ‘He is the most excellent from those whom I narrate hadīth to you from. He performed Hajj twice and I did not hear (narrate) from him until I observed that as the Prophet was mentioned he wept until I felt mercy for him. When I saw what I saw about his veneration for the Prophet I wrote hadīth from him.’ Malīk ibn Anas would also relate:

‘I have seen Muhammad ibn al-Munkadar – and he was a leading reciter – that whenever he was asked to narrate hadīth, he wept until we had mercy on him. I have seen Jāfar ibn Muhammad – he was very facetious and given to laughter – that whenever the Prophet was mentioned to him, he would turn pale, and I have never seen him narrating except in a state of purification.

Whenever Abdur-Rahmān ibn al-Qāsim mentioned the Prophet, he turned pale as if the blood in his face dried up and his tongue turned dumb with

awe of the Messenger of Allah – peace and blessings upon him. I have seen az-Zuhri – he was jolly and very sociable – that when the Prophet was mentioned to him, he would become so perturbed that he would not recognise you nor would you recognise him. I visited Safwan ibn Salim – and he was one of the true worshippers and jurists – that whenever he mentioned the Prophet he cried and did not cease crying until the people would get up and leave him.’”

It is therefore not surprising to learn that the scholars were extremely exacting in their verification of the narrations and would question deeply the ones who reported hadith to them. Such sincere enthusiasts were not content with the mere scrutiny of the reporters. They also attempted to publicize for the whole Islamic community the character of those responsible for forgery, or for incompetent and erroneous reporting.

Likewise, they would highlight those individuals who were known for their accuracy and care for the Prophetic hadith, mentioning their teachers, students, and often times extremely detailed descriptions of their lives. These came to be known as the ‘books of rijal’, giving authenticating or disparaging remarks against 1000’s of reporters.

In the earliest period, the critics of the narrators were comparatively small because of the small number of weak reporters, and the reduced chances of mistakes and forgeries. When, towards the middle of the second century, less reliable narrators increased in number, a group of important traditionalists discussed the subject, and debated the integrity and reliability of various reporters.

There existed then, as there continues to do so in every generation to this present day, a core of committed and competent scholars, men and women, who take it upon themselves to dedicate their lives towards carefully ascertaining what was authentic, preserving its purity and genuineness, and propagating it among the community at large.

They would not accept narrations related by persons who held heretical views, nor persons who were known to commonly tell lies (even if they were not accused of it in connection with hadith), or people with weak memories, or who were unfamiliar with the subject matter of the material they were reporting, however pious and eminent they might appear. This careful scrutiny of those who related traditions continued with unabated vigor at each stage of transmission. Montgomery Watt writes:

“The chains of transmitters were therefore carefully scrutinised to make sure that the persons named could in fact have met one another, that they could be trusted to repeat the story accurately, and that they did not hold any heretical views. This implied extensive biographical studies; and many

biographical dictionaries have been preserved giving the basic information about a man's teachers and pupils, the views of later scholars (on his reliability as a transmitter) and the date of his death.

This biography-based critique of Traditions helped considerably to form a more or less common mind among many men throughout the caliphate about what was to be accepted and what rejected." [W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam?*, pages 124-125, Longman Group Ltd: 1979]

Thanks to the precision and vigor of the elite, the vital core of the hadith literature was preserved intact. Abbott concludes

"Deliberate tampering with either the content or the isnads of the Prophet's Traditions, as distinct from the sayings of and deeds of the Companions and Successors, may have passed undetected by ordinary transmitters, but not by the aggregate of the ever watchful, basically honest, and aggressively outspoken master traditionalists and hadith critics" [Nabia Abbott, *Studies*, Vol. II, p.132].

Thus, through the energy and scrupulousness of the Companions, the Successors and the later generations of Muslims collected together the reports of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet – peace and blessings upon him – which had been scattered throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic world. Once begun, the collection of hadiths accelerated rapidly.

Within two hundred years almost all the important hadith works were compiled. Scholars traced the lives and discussed the characters of all the reporters of traditions, and produced, side by side with their collections, a vast literature on the reporters as an aid to the formal criticism of hadith. Professor Margoliouth was indeed right when he stated that: "... its value in making for accuracy cannot be questioned, and the Muslims are justified in taking pride in their science of tradition." [Lectures on Arabic Historians, p.20. Calcutta University: 1920]

Sahifah of Hammam ibn Munabih

To take one of the above documents as an example, the Sahifah of Hammam ibn Munabih, the student of the Companion Abu Hurairah. He must have compiled his work before 58H because this is the date when Abu Hurairah died.

We can see that of the 138 narrations in the Sahifah, 98 of them are faithfully witnessed in the later collections of Bukhari and Muslim, both

through narrations of Abu Hurairah and witnessing narrations from other Companions.

We also see that all but two of the narrations are found in one section of the Musnad of Imaam Ahmad, again witnessing the preservation of hadith and that earlier works were faithfully rendered in later documents.

The History of Isnad

Arbitrary use of an isnād (chain of transmission) has been traced to the Indians long before Islam. An occasional use, for instance, can be found in ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Jain literature. In the Mahabharata, we read: ‘Vysda composed it, Ganesa served as a scribe, and the work was handed down by Vaisampayana, who communicated it to the king Janamejaya; Sauti who was present at the time, heard it and narrated it to the assembly of sages.’ [Mahabharata, Book 1, Canto 1]. The Puranas also contain some short isnāds of this type.

The Sutras (exegetical works of Vedic literature) contain brief chains mentioning some of the transmitters through whom they have been handed down. It appears that isnād was used casually in some literature in the pre-Islamic Arabia in a vague manner. The system was also used to some extent in transmitting pre-Islamic poetry. [Nasiruddin Asad; Masadir Shi’r al-Jahili, pp.255-267, 2nd Edition. Cairo:1962]

When did the Isnād system begin in Islam?

Many Western non-Muslim scholars who have made an in-depth study of the subject have differed as to an exact date for the commencement of the use of an isnād when transmitting items of Islamic knowledge (including Prophetic hadith, commentaries of the Qur’an, biographies etc.) Many of them placing it at a very early period, from them we read:

Nabia Abbott – Placing it from the very earliest period to 40AH: She writes: “Analysis of the content and the chains of transmission of the traditions of the documents and of their available parallels in the standard collections, supplemented by the results of an extensive study of the sources on the sciences of Tradition – ulum al-hadith – lead me to conclude that oral and written transmission went hand in hand almost from the start . . .” [Nabia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri, Vol. II, p.1. Chicago: 1967]

She also says: “There was no call for emphasis on source until the first Civil War, which occurred in the fourth decade of Islam, and until the Successors

were brought into the chain of transmission.” [Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, Vol. II, p.1. Chicago: 1967]

Josef Horovitz – Placing it prior to 75AH: Horovitz concluded that the first appearance of isnāds was not later than the last third of the first Muslim century. After adducing a series of facts to demonstrate this, he says: “Isnād in its primitive form was then – somewhere about the year 75AH – already established, and one has not right, merely because it appears only incidentally in the letters, to deny to Urwa (d.92AH) without further consideration, those ahadīth supplied with statements of authorities for which he stands as sponsor . . . Isnād was, indeed, already customary in his (Urwa’s) time, but it was not yet an absolute necessity.” [Josef Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors*, pp.550-51: 1927]

R. S. Humphreys writes: “A number of very capable modern scholars have defended the general authenticity of isnāds . An important early contribution was Josef Horovitz, *Alter Und Ursprung des Isnād*, Islam, viii (1918), 39-47, 299; xi (1921), 264-65, who connected the earliest use of isnāds to the turmoil of the second civil war of the 60s/680s when it became an urgent matter to be able to identify the provenance of doctrinally loaded statements concerning Muhammad and the Companions.” [R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History – Revised Edition*, p.82. Princeton University Press: 1995]

Ignaz Goldziher – Placing it at a very early period: Goldziher, an Orientalist, whose views on hadīth and conclusions are at most times highly questionable, yet even he has to admit the use of isnād at a very early stage in the history of Islam. He studied under the Ottomanist scholar and revert to Islam, Arminius Vambery.

He writes: “Many a Companion of the Prophet is likely to have carried his Sahifa (book) with him and used it to dispense instruction and edification to his circle. The contents of these Sahifas were called matn al-hadīth (lit. text of the hadīth); those who disseminated these texts named in succession their immediate authorities, and thus the isnād came into being.” [Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, II p.22. London: 1967]

It would be of interest here, and not out of place, to quote Goldziher’s view of Islam in general. We find him boasting in 1890 whilst writing in Damascus that: “I truly entered in those weeks into the spirit of Islam to such an extent that ultimately I became inwardly convinced that I myself was a Muslim and judiciously discovered that this was the only religion which, even in its doctrinal and official formulation, can satisfy philosophical minds. My ideal was to elevate Judaism to a similar rational

level.” [Raphael Patai, Ignaz Goldziher and His Oriental Diary, p.20. Wayne State University Press: 1987]

Compare this with his study and findings in respect of Christianity, he says that:

“Islam signifies a mighty advance in relation to Christianity.” In recollecting in 1890 the impression Christianity made on him he lets loose one of his most vehement attacks. He writes: “In this abominable religion, which invented the Christian blood libel, which puts its own best sons to the rack, they want to entice away the believers in the one and only Jehova – in Muslim lands.

This is an insolence of which only Christians, the most abominable of all religions, is capable. It has no forehead to become aware of the insolence that forms its historical character. The forehead of a whore, that is the forehead of Christianity.” [Raphael Patai, Ignaz Goldziher and His Oriental Diary, p.21. Wayne State University Press: 1987]

· Smith says: “What’s more, the science of ISNAD, which set about to authenticate those very isnāds only began in the tenth century, long after the isnāds in question had already been compiled, and so have little relevance for our discussion. (Humphreys 1991:81)”

Smith quotes the gist of what Humphreys has to say and then adds his own words into the reference, again casting doubt on his ability to accurately interpret what his sources are trying to convey. To give the full excerpt from Humphreys, he says on page 81: “Medieval Muslim scholars were of course aware of this and ultimately evolved a very elaborate science on this subject.

Unfortunately, the procedures of this science were not fully articulated until the 4th/10th century, well after the major compilations of hadīth and historical akhbar had been assembled. Even so, isnāds and the principles which govern them are only intelligible through the work of Muslim scholars; any modern analysis must reflect a sound knowledge of their critique.”

In comparing Smiths claims with that of his reference, we may ask the following questions:

Where does Humphreys state that the science of isnād “only began in the tenth century ““Rather he says that they were not “fully articulated” until that time; that is to say, they reached their perfection then and the works appeared more numerous, not that nothing existed before this time!

Where does Humphreys state or imply that such works “have little relevance for our discussion”? Rather he categorically states that they must be relied upon when he confirms that “.isnāds and the principles which govern them are only intelligible through the work of Muslim scholars; any modern analysis must reflect a sound knowledge of their critique.”

Neither has Smith relied on the works of Muslim scholars nor does he reflect any sound knowledge of their critique, thereby producing laughable errors when dealing with even the most basic principles.

The references compared, let’s take another look at Smith’s claims in this paragraph, for he has indeed reached erroneous conclusions, defied common sense and copied blindly without verification: 1. If he had bothered to carry out any meaningful research he would have found strong evidence of isnād analysis and criticism well before the period to which he alludes.

The following examples, most of which are available in print, shows the futility of his baseless comments:

- Ar-Risalah of ash-Shafi’ī (containing specific sections on the standards and criteria for an authentic hadīth as well as a chapter on the authenticity of narrations which come through only one chain of transmission)
- Tarikh ar-Rijāl wal-Ilal of Yahya ibn Maeen (evaluating the narrators in the isnād as well as discussing hidden defects which might be contained in the chain).
- Al-Ilal of Ali Ibn al-Madini.
- Ar-Ruwāt ad-Du’afā’ of al-Fallaās (discussing weak narrators in the isnad)
- Al-Ilal wa Marifat al-Rijāl of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (evaluating the narrators in the isnād as well as discussing hidden defects which might be contained in the chain).
- Tarikh al-Kabīr of al-Bukhārī (evaluating the isnād through its narrators).
- Tamyiz of Muslim (The methodology of hadīth criticism)
- Abu Dawud in his famous letter to the citizens of Makkah (describing, for the benefit of his readers, the varying degrees of authenticity of the hadīth in his Sunan).

2. Smith himself has already indicated that the likes of Bukhārī took a vast quantity of hadīth, accepting some of them and rejecting others. We know from their respective works that both Bukhārī and Muslim set themselves the task of only collecting some of those hadīth which were of the saḥīḥ

class. How could they have gone about this duty if, as Smith claims, the science of evaluation “only began in the tenth century”? What's more, the books from the tenth century onwards are full of praise for Bukhārī and Muslim for fulfilling their task accurately, showing that the science of hadīth analysis was already in place in their time.

3. The Sunan works of at-Tirmidhī and Abu Dawud contain the authors' comments after many of the hadīth showing the reliability or weakness of the isnad. How could they have done this if the science of evaluation “only began in the tenth century”?

4. There are the critical comments of the likes of Malik ibn Anas, az-Zuhri, Sufyan ibn Uyaynah, Yahya ibn al-Qattan, Shu'bah and numerous others littered throughout the biographical works, all speaking of the science of hadīth and the evaluation of the narrations.

5. James Robson writes: “By the second century the criticism of traditions was well developed, and warnings were given against unreliable transmitters.” [James Robson, *Mishkat al-Masabih – English translation*, Vol.1, Introduction, p.iii. Lahore: 1991]

Despite all of this, what difficulty does it pose – if it were true – that the science of isnād analysis was not developed until the tenth century? We are only today perfecting techniques for the authentication and verification of age old artefacts. Are we to say then that such verification is of no value because it was only developed and carried out years after the artefacts first went into circulation? The application of Smith's arguments into other fields shows their complete absurdity.

· Smith says: “Consequently, because it is such an inexact science . . .” Smith finds it easy to make such sweeping statements, largely based on his own fractured research (or lack of it). From what has preceded and that which is to follow we can see the futility of Smith's assertions and the weak foundation upon which he has built his argument.

Bernard Lewis writes: “But their careful scrutiny of the chains of transmission and their meticulous collection and preservation of variants in the transmitted narratives give to medieval Arabic historiography a professionalism and sophistication without precedent in antiquity and without parallel in the contemporary medieval West.

By comparison, the historiography of Latin Christendom seems poor and meagre, and even the more advanced and complex historiography of Greek Christendom still falls short of the historical literature of Islam in volume, variety and analytical depth.” [Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History*, p.105. Open Court Publishing:1993]

Professor D. S. Margoliouth says: “its value in making for accuracy cannot be questioned, and the Muslims are justified in taking pride in their science of tradition.” [Lectures on Arabic Historians, p.20. Calcutta University: 1920]

The Final Word – Conclusion

Smith began by posing a dichotomy:

“in the early 7th century, Islam, a religion of immense sophistication, of intricate laws and traditions was formulated in a backward nomadic culture and became fully functional in only 22 years.’

‘How did it come together so neatly and quickly? There is no historical precedence for such a scenario. One would expect such a degree of sophistication over a period of one or two centuries provided there were other sources, such as neighbouring cultures from which traditions and laws can be borrowed but certainly not within an unsophisticated desert environment and certainly not within a period of mere 22 years.’

He tell us that secular historians cannot simply accept the position posited by the latter (Muslim) that “in the early 7th century, Islam, a religion of immense sophistication, of intricate laws and traditions was formulated in a backward nomadic culture and became fully functional in only 22 years.’ It is part of the consistent problem faced by the Christian and secularist polemicist.

Their prejudicial stance in their mutual refusal to accept the Prophethood of Muhammad forces them to try and find any alternative explanation. Their inability to fight Islam according to the sources of Islam, and the fact that their attempts to discredit the Prophethood of Mohammad have proved mutually contradictory has now forced them to adopt their radical “demythologising” alternative.

The fact that we have amply illustrated with evidence, including that which must be acceptable to any unbiased “secular” historian, that the Qur’ān and authenticated traditions of the Prophet are not only reliable historical information but rank in authenticity far above anything Christianity can offer, or anything ancient and indeed much of modern history.

All this leads inevitably to the conclusion that Muhammad was indeed the Universal Prophet of Allah and the early Muslim community was guided by the Light and Wisdom that ensued from Divine guidance. It is this that accounts for the phenomena of Islam, even if the disbelievers detest it.

