

The Constitution of the Koran as a Codified Work: Paradigm for Codifying *Hadīth* and the Islamic Sciences?

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The Koran¹ was already a book during the life of the Prophet—although only as an objective or an idea, not in reality.² It wasn't until 20-25 years after the death of the Prophet that it became an actual book. The codification process progressed from occasional notes to deliberate collections to an edited and published book.

Hadīth (the tradition, singular), that is, the transmitted reports (traditions or *hadīths*, plural)³ on the words and deeds of the prophet Muhammad, were originally to have been taught and passed on purely orally and not in writing. Some *hadīth* scholars (also called traditionists) nonetheless occasionally made notes from the beginning; later (from about 680 CE on) they compiled collections, and, as of the middle of the eighth century, systematic collections subdivided into chapters according to content-relevant criteria.⁴ After about another 100 years, *hadīth* was in existence in (more or less) codified works, the most important of which, the canonical collections of al-Bukhārī (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj (d. 875), almost equal the Koran in importance for the religion of Islam.

Based on observations that the codification process of both Koran and *hadīth* exhibits considerable similarities and that the codification of many Arabic-Islamic sciences proceeds analogously to that of *hadīth*, the following will examine whether the codification of the holy book of Islam was *paradigmatic* for the codification process of *hadīth* and the other Arabic-Islamic sciences. “Paradigm” here is understood not as a “mystical” prefiguration, but as a pattern of development that repeats itself two or more times because the same or similar

¹ For the codification of the Koran, see Nöldeke 1909-38:iii; Neuwirth 1987:101ff.; Motzki 2001; and Schoeler 2002:31ff.

² The fact that, in the text of the Koran, the term *al-qur'ān* (“recitation”) was in the course of time more and more replaced by *al-kitāb* (“book”) as the term for the revelation as a whole clearly demonstrates that the ideal of an actual book came more and more into focus.

³ For the *hadīth*, see Sezgin 1967-84:i, 53ff.; Motzki 2004, espec. xiiiff. and Introduction; Goldziher 1890; and Juynboll 1983. For the codification of the *hadīth*, see Goldziher 1890:194ff.; Sezgin 1967-84:i, 55ff.; Schoeler 2002:43ff. and 2006.

⁴ These are the first six chapters of al-Bukhārī's *as-Sahīh* (see below): 1. The beginning of the revelation, 2. faith, 3. knowledge, 4. the ablution before prayer, 5. the major ritual ablution, 6. the menstruation.

prerequisites elicit the same or similar effects. The question as to whether such a pattern exists can demand a certain interest: if a positive answer can be arrived at, it would be possible to demonstrate a regularity according to which the development from speech to writing took place in Islam.

The Koran

Initially, when the revelations were still short, there was possibly no need to write them down. This situation changed, however, when they became longer and more frequent. It is most probable that Muhammad began to have revelations put into writing early on, during the so-called second Meccan period (615-20) (Nöldeke 1909-38:i, 45f. and ii.1ff.; Watt 1977:37 and 136; Bellamy 1973:271; Neuwirth 1987:102). Islamic tradition provides numerous details regarding this process of writing, including the names of the various individuals to whom Muhammad dictated Koranic passages. Suffice it to mention here the most important “scribe of the revelation” (*kātib al-wahy*), Zayd ibn Thābit (d. ca. 666). These writings were, however, nothing more than mnemonic aids to help the faithful in their recitation.

We do not know precisely when the project of producing a “book,” a veritable “scripture,” became a priority. The fact, however, that within the Koran itself the term *kitab* (“scripture,” “book”) began to be used in increasing measure to describe the sum total of the revelation, effectively replacing the term *qur’ān* (Koran) (“recitation”), shows that the idea of a scripture, in book form, like those possessed by the “people of the book” (Christians and Jews), namely a lectionary (Neuwirth 1987:102f.), gained more and more prominence.

Yet no “scripture” or compiled “book” existed at the time of Muhammad’s death—Muslim tradition and the majority of modern scholars are in agreement on this point.⁵ According to Muslim tradition, all that existed at the time, besides oral tradition, were scattered writings on various materials, such as fragments of parchment and papyrus, slates, pieces of leather, shoulder blades, palm stalks, and *suhuf*, sheets, “containing the Book” (*fīhi al-kitāb*) (Ibn Abī Dāwūd 1936-37:24 [Arabic]).

According to the dominant opinion in Muslim tradition, the first collection of the Koran was ordered by Abū Bakr on ‘Umar’s advice, a task then undertaken by Zayd ibn Thābit, the most important “scribe of the revelation”: this resulted in the compilation of a copy on leaves of the same shape and dimension. A book “between two covers” (*bayna l-lawhayn*), an actual codex, thus came into existence. This collection, called *suhuf* (“leaves”) in the sources, was a personal copy that the caliph wanted to have available for his private use. When ‘Umar died, it was inherited by his daughter Hafsa.

Yet the caliph and his family were not the only ones to have in their possession a copy of the Koran for their private use. According to Muslim tradition, there also existed other collections, initiated by various individuals who were contemporary with the Abū Bakr/‘Umar collection. Tradition credits numerous prominent individuals with copies, the most well-known

⁵ John Wansbrough (1977) and John Burton (1977), whose theories contradict one another, are exceptions in this regard.

of whom are (d. 640, or some years later) Ubayy ibn Ka‘b (d. 640 or later) and ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 653 or later), who are said to have had in their possession complete copies based on their own collections.

In the absence of an official “edition,” however, marked variants became the object of disputes about the “correct” form of the sacred text. When disputes even arose in the army, threatening the sense of Muslim unity, the Caliph ‘Uthmān (ruled 644-56) decided to commission an official edition of the Koranic text. That recension came to be known as the ‘Uthmānī codex (*mushaf*).

The task of collecting and editing the revelations fell once again to Zayd ibn Thābit, this time with the help of an advisory commission (three members of noble Meccan families). On this point, Muslim tradition is unanimous. The majority of accounts agree that Zayd and those who assisted him based themselves on the collection (*suhuf*) in the possession of Hafsa, ‘Umar’s daughter. ‘Uthmān gave the edition he had commissioned official status by ordering that copies be sent to all the provincial capitals of the empire, where they were to serve as authoritative exemplars. In addition, he ordered that all collections not conforming to the new official edition be destroyed.

The Koran had now become in reality what it had only been in theory at the time of the Prophet: a book of (almost) definitive form and configuration, a codex (*mushaf*). What is more, it was, in the minds of the central authority, a “published book,” the text of which was binding on every single Muslim. It was “published” in the sense that exemplar copies had been sent to the provincial capitals. “With the ‘Uthmānic recension, the main emphasis in Koranic transmission shifted toward the written book” (Nöldeke 1909-38:iii, 119).

The oral transmission of the Koran proceeded from the start alongside written transmission and was carried primarily by the “caste” of Koran “readers” (or rather reciters). Before the ‘Uthmānic recension, their recitation was the only way of dissemination and “publication” of the text. Afterwards this “caste” lost part of its importance because it was now no longer the sole custodian of the text of the Holy Book. This is why the Koran readers also appear to have been vehemently opposed to the undertaking. Their opposition is clearly visible in the charge later leveled against ‘Uthmān by numerous rebels: “The Koran was (many) books; you have discarded them except for one.” (at-Tabarī 1879-90:i, 2952.) The Koran readers were nonetheless able—with limitations—to maintain their importance even after the editing; in view of the fact that the ‘Uthmānic text was an undotted and unvocalized consonantal text (*rasam*),⁶ that is, unable to be read correctly without the guidance of experts, the Koran reciters still had enough to do. From now on, however, they were obliged to take the ‘Uthmānic consonantal text as the basis for their recitations.

The *Hadīth*

Unlike the Koran, *hadīth* was originally intended to be taught and transmitted purely

⁶ Initially, only consonants were written, and even these were not adequately distinguished from one another, since the same written shape may sometimes indicate two or even more consonants.

orally. This surely did not rule out that already in early times many companions of the Prophet had made notes as a supplement to memory. We have ample testimony of this practice. Many companions are reported to have had *suhuf* (notebooks). Ibn ‘Abbās, the cousin of the Prophet and purported founder of Koran exegesis, is said to have been seen carrying “tablets” (*alwāh*) “upon which he wrote something of the doings of the Messenger of God” (Ibn Sa‘d 1904-28:ii, 2, 123). All of this recording, however, was the result of sporadic, unsystematic efforts.

This approach didn’t change until the first generation of the “followers,” who, roughly estimated, were active in the last quarter of the seventh century and in the first quarter of the eighth century and themselves had no direct experience of Muhammad. Some of them pointedly began to make inquiries with different persons about the life and words of the Prophet, namely with the companions who were still alive. They compiled these reports, the *hadīths*, one way or another. It is immediately seen that the compilers, before launching their report, generally named their informants; later transmitters proceeded in like manner so that chains of transmitters arose that were placed before the respective texts (so-called *isnāds*; for example, “A said, B told [or transmitted to] me from C”). This procedure was to become obligatory later on; in this way, each *hadīth* consists of two parts: a chain of transmitters (*isnād*) and the text proper (*matn*).

The most important scholar of the first generation of followers is ‘Urwa ibn az-Zubayr (ca. 643-ca. 712), the son of a cousin of the Prophet and the nephew of his favorite wife, ‘Ā’isha.⁷ On the one hand he collected numerous juristic traditions and on the other historical reports on Muhammad’s life, which formed the matrix of the later *Sīra* (that is, the Biography of Muhammad) books. Named most frequently as his informant is his aunt, ‘Ā’isha. The sources expressly mention that he had written documents in his possession for his juristic *hadīths*. He customarily recited them arranged content-wise in chapters—indeed a precursor of *tasnīf* that became common practice only at a later date (see below). Thus, he used to begin with the chapter on divorce (*talāq*), then treated divorce requested by the wife (*khul’*), then the pilgrimage (*hajj*), and so on (al-Fasawī 1981:i, 551). ‘Urwa and his contemporaries disseminated their collected traditions orally through public instruction. The imparting of knowledge in this way, in which transmission and instruction were one, and in which the lecturer referred to an informant, or a series of informants (*isnād*), became determinant from that point on in many Arabic-Islamic sciences. We speak of the “methodology” of the traditionists.

It is possible that ‘Urwa initially received the stimulus towards his occupation with the life of the Prophet from the court of the caliph. The caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik (685-705), sent him letters with questions about events in Muhammad’s life, and these he answered by means of letters. The content of these epistles was transmitted further by ‘Urwa in his lectures; the letters survive in this transmitted form and represent the oldest extant written testimony on the life of Muhammad. The first large-scale collections of juristic *hadīth* are also supposed to have been launched by the initiative of the court, namely the Umayyad caliphs ‘Umar II (717-20) and Hishām (724-43). They are, however, no longer extant (Goldziher 1890:208ff.; Sezgin 1967-84:i, 55ff.; Schoeler 2006:123ff.).

Two generations later—around the middle of the eighth century—a more systematic

⁷ For ‘Urwa see Schoeler 2002:45ff.; Bearman, Bianquis, et al. 1960-2005:x, 910-13, s.v. ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (G. Schoeler).

method for presenting the transmitted material emerged: *tasnīf*, that is, arrangement according to chapter content (Goldziher 1890:226ff. [213ff. in Mālik's *al-Muwatta'*]; Sezgin 1967-84:i, 55ff.; Schoeler 2002:71ff.).⁸ The relevant works are called *musannafāt* (singular, *musannaf*). The most famous example of a *musannaf* collection of juristic *hadīths* and doctrines is Mālik b. Anas' (d. 795) *Muwatta'*; and the most famous Prophet-vita compiled this way in this time is Ibn Ishāq's (d. 767) "Book of Campaigns." This movement continued for a century and beyond; the canonical collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim are *musannafāt*. The oldest compilations of this type made in the eighth century were still little more than ordered leaves (or other mnemonic aids) that were the basis of oral lectures; from the ninth century on, however, the canonical works had more or less fixed texts. By "more or less fixed texts," I mean that all of these *hadīth* collections, even the canonical, exist in multiple recensions and manuscripts, exhibiting differences in chapter arrangement and text structure. Of the *Sahīh* of al-Bukhārī, something akin to a "critical edition" appeared only in the thirteenth century (Fück 1938:79ff.). It is nonetheless certain that some of the ninth-century compilers penned their works with a reading public in mind; the *Sahīh* of Muslim b. al-Hajjāj demonstrates this clearly: his canonical collection is the only one with an Introduction addressed to the readership—the unmistakable mark of a "proper" book (Muslim 1972).

The entire codification process of *hadīths*—until the canonical works came into being in the ninth century—was accompanied by a vehement discussion between traditionists about whether it was allowed at all to write down *hadīths* (Schoeler 2006:111ff; Cook 1997). One faction of the *hadīth* scholars took the position that the traditions should be transmitted only orally and that only the Koran was entitled to exist in writing. From the point of view of these scholars, the Koran was the only book of Islam and should remain so. Many scholars thus lectured their collected traditions from memory, leaving their notes (which, in spite of everything, they almost always had) at home or hidden. They forbade their pupils to write down the *hadīths* they heard in class. Whereas in Iraq, in the centers of Basra and Kufa, the postulate of strict oral transmission was held onto until well into the ninth century, it was already abandoned from the middle of the eighth century in the centers of the Hijaz in Medina. One of the first *Fiqh* works that has come down to us (not in its original form, but in versions transmitted by students) is the previously mentioned *Muwatta'* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 795). The texts of the different recensions of this work, however, still differ substantially.

As time passed the orality of *hadīth* gradually became mere postulation; in practice, there was more and more copying of written texts. When the codification processes of Koran and *hadīth* are compared, we see that in both cases three phases can be discerned. These were already recognized by indigenous scholarship and, in the case of *hadīth*, provided with a terminology.⁹

Codification of the Koran proceeded as follows:

1. Unsystematic writing of the revealed texts on disparate materials (fragments of

⁸ A precursor of *tasnīf* was 'Urwa's method for presenting his collections of legal *hadīths*; see note 10 below.

⁹ For the Koran, see Nöldeke 1909-38:ii, 11ff. and 47ff.; for the *hadīth*, see Sezgin 1967-84:i, 55ff.

parchment and papyrus, pieces of leather, sheets, palm stalks, shoulder blades, and so forth) during the life of the Prophet Muhammad (up to his death in 632).

2. Deliberate collections on sheets of equal size (*suhuf*) very soon after Muhammad's death. Examples are the Koran copies of 'Umar, Ibn Mas'ūd, and Ubayy.
3. Definitive official recension under 'Uthmān (around 650). Production of a *rasm* (that is, undotted and unvocalized consonantal text) *ne varietur* (*mushaf*). Dissemination by depositing samples in the big cities, later through copying manuscripts.

Codification of the *hadīth*:

1. Unsystematic notes (*kitāba*) at the time of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and earliest followers (632-80) on tablets and sheets and in notebooks.
2. Deliberate collections (*tadwīn*) of scattered material in the last quarter of the first and first quarter of the second century AH (ca. 680-740 CE).
3. Production of compilations arranged systematically according to chapter content (*tasnīf*), as of around 125 AH / 740 CE into the ninth century and beyond; since the ninth century more or less final, redacted compositions.

Alongside the conformities,¹⁰ there are also differences to be noticed between the codification processes of Koran and *hadīth*. It is important to keep in mind that while the Koran got its final form (at least with respect to *rasm*, the undotted and unvocalized consonantal text) already approximately 25 years after Muhammad's death, that is, around 650, the first *hadīth* works with more or less fixed texts did not emerge until about 250 years afterwards, in the ninth century. Nonetheless, the conformities in the codification processes of both of Islam's most important literary phenomena are still conspicuous and in need of an explanation.

Why Were Only Loose Notes Made in the First Phase of Codification for Koran and *Hadīth*?

a) Koran. The pre- and early- Islamic Arabs had only vague ideas of a "real," that is, a complete and edited, book. Aside from the Torah scrolls of the Jews, which were not to be seen at all outside the Jewish places of teaching, the only edited books known were lectionaries, liturgical books used by Syriac- or Arabic-speaking Christian clerics. Hence when the Koran terms itself a book, it is certainly a lectionary that is meant. During the lifetime of the Prophet, however, the Koran could not be edited because the revelation was ongoing and because juristic

¹⁰ In reality, the three stages were not quite as schematic as the above exposition implies. Indeed, for the official recension of the Koran an organizing principle was implemented that had already been developed and applied to the first deliberate Koran collections, namely the decreasing length of the suras under arrangement. And for the deliberate collections of *hadīth*, as we have seen, at least one was already a compilation systematically arranged by content: 'Urwa's collection of legal traditions.

stipulations were occasionally modified (abrogated).¹¹ There was also no need whatsoever to edit the text of the Koran, because, as a lectionary, or liturgical book, only individual sections were recited at a time. The “secretaries of the revelation” and Koran readers thus did not have occasion during the lifetime of the Prophet to produce an edited book. Notes for bolstering the memory were sufficient.

b) *Hadīth*. As we have seen,¹² the Koran, even before receiving its definitive form, was “the book” *par excellence* in Islam, even if initially only as an objective, or an idea. All the more must the following notion have imposed itself subsequent to the definitive recension: edited book equals book of God. Although not all traditionists shared this view—from the mid-eighth century on there were also proponents of writing—for a long time this notion hampered, even prevented, the emergence of books beside the Koran. This situation explains the resistance to putting the *hadīths* into writing. This aversion is even reflected in *hadīth* itself; for example, Muhammad is to have said, when someone wanted to write down his words: “Do you want a book other than the book of God?” (al-Khatīb 1975:33ff.)—and to a “follower” (or successor; that is, a member of the generation that followed the companions of Muhammad): “Do you wish to adopt it as copies of the Koran?” (36ff.). And another notion coalesced with this one, namely that the “people of the book” (*ahl al-kitāb*), the Jews and Christians, had corrupted their religions by accepting additional books that were not revealed. Muhammad is reported to have said: “The peoples before you were led into error by those very books that they wrote in addition to the book of God” (33ff.). (The concern here is in great measure with the oral doctrine of the Jews [Mishnah and Talmud] that likewise was originally not supposed to be written down.) This is why *hadīth* (and the other Arabic-Islamic sciences as well) is taught and transmitted only orally by means of lectures in scholarly assemblies. However, notes and mnemonic devices (later on even comprehensive compilations, arranged according to chapter content) proved to be ever more necessary and were able—despite objections—to assert themselves in increasing measure.

How Did the Deliberate Collections Come About?

a) Koran. With the death of the Prophet, revelation came to a standstill. The proclamations could now be viewed as a self-contained corpus. Many of the companions, in particular of course the successors of Muhammad, the caliphs, now wanted to have private examples at their disposal. So they produced deliberate collections. We hear nothing of any opposition to these initiatives.

b) *Hadīth*. Deliberate collections of Muhammad’s words and reports about his deeds emerged in the time that the generation of Muhammad’s contemporaries was dying out. In the meantime, the idea of the exemplary character of Muhammad’s way of life began to form among the legal scholars, or at any rate among a section of them (Juynboll 1983:30f.); the reports about his words and deeds that were expressed in the *hadīths*, and until then had been transmitted

¹¹ This is why Burton’s (1977) theory that the Prophet himself had already edited the Koran is highly improbable!

¹² Cf. note 2 above.

unchecked, should be preserved and compiled and made available. We repeatedly hear about such projects initiated by the court. Here is where the aspect of bias comes into its own; we hear that the caliphs intended, through their inquiries (for example, with ‘Urwa) and by means of the collections they commissioned, to get access to material suitable to themselves (Schoeler 1996:150 and 2006:123ff.; Petersen 1963:102ff.). Unlike the case of the Koran, during this second phase of committing *hadīths* to writing, considerable and enduring controversies arose. Throughout the eighth century and beyond, the traditionists discussed whether it was allowed to write traditions down, and the court-commissioned deliberate collections, in particular, were sharply criticized.

How Were the Koran and Later Collections of Traditions Redacted?

a) Koran. The readers of the Koran had become accustomed to transmitting and publishing the Koran through oral recitation, which was surely based for the most part on their written notes. In this regard it was of no matter to them whether their texts were identical or not. Each took the position that he was in possession of the best text. For the reigning powers, on the other hand, the different forms in which “the Book” existed in writing and in speech was a problem, particularly since disputes had arisen in this regard, even in the army. Thus it became necessary to produce a definitive, uniform, and binding text for what, in the meantime, had become a huge empire. This text was the ‘Uthmānic recension. The first written vouchers we have of this recension (Koran specimens from Sanaa) date from the reign of the caliph al-Walīd (705-15) (von Bothmer 1991:46); the ‘Uthmānic recension must therefore already have been in widespread circulation at this time.¹³ Opposition to the undertaking seems to have arisen from the Koran readers, who feared the loss of their monopoly.

b) *Hadīth*. Indigenous transmission connects the emergence in the middle of the eighth century of the *tasnīf* movement with the spread of scholars into the provincial towns and the rise of the heretical movements: “This was at the time when scholars had spread out to the large cities and when heretical . . . innovations had become more numerous” (Ibn Hajar 1978:5). That could be understood to mean that comprehensive compilations were deemed necessary at that point in time when the scholars, who were in part no longer in Medina, the home of the *sunna*, but in other centers, had to deal with more numerous traditions, authentic and inauthentic alike, and which they now had to subject to inspection. This is indeed also the time when *hadīth* critique came into being (Juynboll 1983:xx, 134ff.). Large collections, however, in order to be usable, needed a system; an arrangement according to chapter content was particularly convenient (*tasnīf*), but a bit later another one came into use, that is, arrangement according to the earliest

¹³ With this, Wansbrough’s (1977) theory, according to which the Koran did not receive its definitive form until the beginning of the ninth century, must be deemed refuted.

transmitters (*musnad*) (Sezgin 1967-84:i, 55; Juynboll 1983:22). It took at least another century for these works to attain a more or less fixed form.¹⁴

Now let us return to the question posed at the outset: does the codification of the Koran represent a paradigm for the codification of *hadīth* and the other Arabic-Islamic sciences? A detailed examination of the single stages in the codification of Koran and *hadīth*, and of the respective underlying reasons and backgrounds, has shown that it was only in part the same motives that led to the same or similar results. If we divide the motives that promoted or hampered progress in codification (for a certain period of time) into “practical” and “ideological,” several points can be ascertained.

First, it was on practical grounds that the first writing-down of both Koran and *hadīth* was undertaken. Script served in both cases to bolster memory. In this first phase of codification there were no ideological reasons opposing the undertaking. Second, there were practical grounds for the deliberate collections of Koran and *hadīth* (second phase of codification): individuals, above all ruler and courtiers, wanted to have copies of the Koran and collections of *hadīth* at their disposal for private use. While there was no reason to oppose a non-official codification of copies of the Koran for private use, strong ideological reservations arose against codification of the *hadīths*. It was precisely the existence of the now-codified Koran that hindered for a long time the development of a second prospectively codified body of religious texts. There were additional reasons: in particular, the apprehension that the compilers, or their commissioners, would sneak erroneous, uncertain, and tendentious traditions into their collections and so make such dubious texts binding for all time.

The final, official recension of the Koranic text, and the systematic collection and definitive redaction of the *hadīths* (third phase of codification), also had practical grounds: in both instances one wanted to produce uniform and authentic texts (note the name *as-Sahīh*, “the correct, authentic [collection],” for al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s canonical works.). Both undertakings ran into ideologically grounded opposition. In the case of the Koran it was from the professional interests of the Koran readers who appeared to lose their monopoly as the sole custodians of the Holy Book; in the case of the *hadīth* there were continued misgivings about

¹⁴ The sequence of (unsystematic) note-taking, deliberate collection of scattered material, content-wise arrangement of collections (more or less redacted) also holds for the biography of the Prophet (Sezgin 1967-84:i, 237ff., 251ff., and 275ff.; Schoeler 2002:45ff. and 71f.; 1996:40ff. and 75ff.), Koran reading (as a genre of systematic writing) (Nöldeke 1909-38:ii; Sezgin 1967-84:i, 3ff.; Schoeler 2006:78ff.), Koran exegesis (Sezgin 1967-84:i, 19ff.; Schoeler 2002:49ff., 79), history (Sezgin 1967-84:i, 237ff. and 257ff.; Sezgin 1971:79ff.; Schoeler 2002:79f.), philology, especially compilation of poetry (Sezgin 1967-84:ii, 24ff.; Schoeler 2002:18ff. and 115ff.; 2006:65ff.), and lexicography (Sezgin 1967-84:viii, 7ff.; Versteegh 1993; Schoeler 2002:91ff. and 100ff.). The similarity is explained in that the scholars of all of these sciences followed the methodology of the *hadīth* scholars (imparting knowledge through lectures in a way in which instruction and transmission were one; adducing chains of transmitters, and so on). In addition to that, for the biography of the Prophet, the borders to *hadīth* are blurred. Koran exegesis too—although exegetical traditions are never traced back to the Prophet—has much in common with *hadīth*; found in al-Bukhārī’s *hadīth* collection are chapters with traditions treating the biography of the Prophet (*Kitâb al-Mab’ath*, “Book of the mission [of Muhammad]”; *Kitâb al-Maghâzī*, “Book of the campaigns”) as well as a chapter containing exegetical traditions (*Kitâb at-Tafsīr*, “Book of the commentary [on the Koran]”). The historical traditions spanning the time of the first caliphs and the great conquests are nothing other than the temporal continuation of the Prophet-biographical traditions. And philology emerged in intimate contact with Koran exegesis (Versteegh 1993:1ff. and *passim*).

placing similar text corpora alongside the Koran, the spreading of uncertain and tendentious traditions, and so forth.

Hence, while the motives for the codification of Koran and *hadīth* were the same or similar, the reasons for obstructing codification were completely different. Notably, the Koran was *the* redacted book of Islam for centuries and demonstrably prevented the definitive codification of *hadīth*. Regularity can be seen only to the extent that groups of experts who transmit large bodies of texts tend—with the availability of writing and for practical reasons—to redact this corpus in writing. “Ideological” objections can forestall this process for a long period of time. Examples of this from other cultures are the extremely delayed codifications of the Vedas (von Hinüber 1990) and Avesta (Hoffmann and Narten 1989), which took some 1000 years (or more) to become codified.¹⁵

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¹⁵ I would like to thank Dr. G. Bertram Thompson for his excellent English translation.

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