

Dating the tradition of " Kānat sūratu l-aḥzābi li-taʿdila sūrata al-baqarah " On the Issue of Distortion of the Deficiency of the Holy Qur'an

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Abstract

Regarding the issue of the verbal distortion of the Holy Qur'an, the point of contention among the exegetes and scholars of the Qur'an is the belief or non-belief in the distortion of imperfection. In this regard, the believers to the distortion have always referred to numerous reports in hadith and historical sources and have relied on them to present their views. One of these traditions is "**Kānat sūratu l-aḥzābi li-taʿdila sūrata al-baqarah**", in which an attempt has been made to date this tradition by using the methods of dating the hadith. In the first step, the analysis of the source shows the reception of the hadith sources in the second half of the second century and the mention of this hadith for the first time in Musnad al-Ṭayalīsī(204). However, in the continuation of this narrative, it is faced with the trend of decreasing the tradition in the hadith sources and of course the increase in the details of the text. In the next step, the documentary dating of the tradition indicates the singularity of the way of Zar ibn Hubaysh from Ubayy ibn Ka'b and branching of the three ways from Ibn Hubaysh as the apparent common link of the tradition, but among them, the singularity and invalidity of two ways of Yazid ibn Abi al-Ziyad and the unknown narrator in Juz' Ali ibn Shadhan indicate that Asim ibn Abi al-Najud

al-Kufi is real as the main publisher of this tradition with tradition for eight people in the beginning.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The textual integrity of the Qur'an remains a significant issue in Qur'anic and Islamic studies. Although the majority of Muslim scholars have rejected textual distortion and advanced various arguments for the preservation of the Qur'an, several reports in early hadith sources have been cited in support of the contrary view. Among them is the report stating that "the sūrah of al-Aḥzāb was equivalent to the sūrah of al-Baqarah," attributed to Ubayy b. Ka'b and associated with the alleged omission of the stoning verse. The report has been transmitted in ten textual versions through twelve isnāds in various hadith sources. This study employs an isnād-cum-matn approach to examine the transmission history and textual development of the report. By analyzing the relationships among its textual and isnād variants, the study seeks to identify its earliest recoverable form and assess its probable historical provenance. It also examines the role of major transmitters in its dissemination and development.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a historical-critical approach to hadith dating, combining traditional source criticism with contemporary isnād and matn analysis. The primary materials consist of the extant textual and isnād variants of the report stating that "the sūrah of al-Aḥzāb was equivalent to the sūrah of al-Baqarah," as transmitted in the available hadith sources. First, all identifiable versions of the report were collected from the relevant early and later hadith compilations, and their textual variants and Isnad were documented and compared. The report's occurrence in the earliest available sources was also examined in order to establish the earliest securely attested point of its transmission, while avoiding the assumption that its absence from earlier sources necessarily indicates its non-existence.

Second, the isnāds were analyzed by constructing a transmission diagram to identify the principal common link (CL), putative partial common links (PCLs), and isolated transmission routes. The historical reliability and actual transmission relationships represented by the CL and PCLs were subsequently assessed through a critical examination of biographical and rijāl sources,

including the chronological compatibility of transmitters and the possibility of direct transmission between them. Third, the textual variants were systematically compared in conjunction with their corresponding isnāds. Particular attention was paid to shared and divergent narrative elements, additions, omissions, lexical and structural variations, and the distribution of these features across different transmission branches. Finally, the correlation between textual development and the structure of transmission networks was evaluated in order to reconstruct the earliest recoverable form of the report, trace its subsequent development, and assess its probable temporal and geographical provenance.

Results and findings

The findings of this study indicate that the transmission history of the report “Kānat Sūrat al-Aḥzāb li-ta’dila Sūrat al-Baqarah” does not conform to the expected pattern of progressive expansion in hadith transmission. Although the report appears in several sources predating the Kutub al-Sitta, particularly from the late second century AH onward, it is notably absent from the canonical collections. At the same time, its textual content shows a gradual increase in some versions, particularly through formulations that more explicitly support the claim of Qur’anic textual omission. The chronological distribution of the sources, together with the considerable variation among the extant textual versions, therefore suggests a process of textual development within a particular historical transmission milieu rather than the continuous and uniform dissemination of an established tradition.

The isnād analysis further reveals a highly restricted transmission network. The report is attributed to Ubayy b. Ka’b and appears to have been transmitted from him through Zar ibn Ḥubaysh. The routes subsequently branching from Zar form three identifiable lines of transmission, two of which are isolated. The route through Yazīd b. Abī Ziyād is problematic because of its isolation and the lack of evidence for his direct audition from Zur. The version preserved in the Juz’ of ‘Alī ibn Shādhān is likewise weakened by the unidentified transmitter immediately following Zar and by the insufficient identification of several other transmitters. Although the textual features of this version and the presence of multiple routes through ‘Āṣim make it plausible that the unidentified transmitter was ‘Āṣim, this identification cannot be established conclusively.

The remaining major route is that of ‘Āṣim b. Abī al-Nujūd, whose transmission of the report is represented through eight transmitters. Nevertheless, the attribution of his transmission to Zar is itself subject to chronological and biographical uncertainty. The evidence therefore supports the conclusion that ‘Āṣim played an important role in the systematic dissemination of the report during the early second century AH, but it does not justify identifying him as its originator or fabricator.

Finally, the findings concerning the reading attributed to ‘Āṣim indicate that its later prominence should not automatically be projected onto the earliest Islamic period. Its reception and diffusion were not necessarily uniform across different regions. Moreover, applying later Sunni–Shi‘i classifications retrospectively to the transmission networks of the first two Islamic centuries can obscure their historical complexity. Accordingly, characterizing the report transmitted through ‘Āṣim as exclusively Shi‘i is not adequately supported by the available evidence.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the report reflects a restricted and historically complex transmission process, marked by textual instability and limited isnād support. Although ‘Āṣim b. Abī al-Nujūd appears to have contributed significantly to its early dissemination, the evidence does not establish him as its originator, nor does it support categorizing the report as exclusively Shi‘i.

Keywords: Verbal distortion of the Qur'an, dating of hadith, Asim ibn Abi al-Nujud, Zar ibn Hubaysh, common link.