COLLECTING AND EDITING

ʿAlī as a Collector of the Koran

A variety of traditions mention ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, a cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, as the author of a collection of qurʾāns. According to one tradition, he started his collection while the Prophet was still alive, and on the latter's explicit order. It is said that ʿAlī collected the Koran from leaves, silk rags, and scraps of paper that he discovered under the Prophet's pillow; immediately vowing not to leave the house before he completed the task.¹ Others move the event to the time immediately after Muḥammad's death, and suspect ʿAlī to have used this vow as an excuse to delay homage to Abū Bakr.² It is also said that in the face of Muḥammad's death ʿAlī realized the fickleness of man and was determined to complete the writing in three days.³

The author of the ʿFiḥrist even claims to have seen a fragment of the original. The fact of the matter is that there is absolutely no truth to this claim.

Even the sources of these accounts—Shīʿite commentaries on the Koran, and Sunnite historical works with Shīʿite influence—are suspect, since everything that Shīʿites say about the most saintly man of their sect must be considered a priori a tendentious fabrication. The content of these reports contradicts all sound facts of history. Neither the traditions regarding Zayd b. Thābit's collection of the Koran nor those about other pre-ʿUthmānic collections know anything of an analogous work by ʿAlī. He himself never refers

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² Ibn Saʿd (al-Ṭabaqāt), vol. 2, part 2: Letzte Krankheit, Tod und Bestattung Muhammeds, p. 101, ll 16–20; al-Suyūṭī, al-İtqān, p. 134 sq. Both sources, however, challenge the credibility of the information. In Ibn Saʿd's work ʿIkrima when questioned replies that he does not know anything about it. al-Suyūṭī quotes Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's remark that jamaʿa in that tradition means "to remember."
³ al-ʿFiḥrist, edited by Flügel, p. 28.
to his own collection, neither during his caliphate nor before, and it is certain that the Shiʿites were never in possession of such a document.4

According to al-Yaʿqūbī,5 the arrangement of the sūras in ‘Alī’s collection of the Koran established shortly after the death of Muḥammad is said to be as follows: 2, 12, 29, 30, 31, 41, 51, 76, 32, 79, 81, 82, 84, 87, 98 (first section.)—3, 11, 22, 15, 33, 44, 55, 69, 70, 80, 91, 97, 99, 104, 105, 106 (second section.)—4, 16, 23, 36, 42, 56, 67, 74, 107, 111, 112, 103, 101, 85, 95, 27 (third section.)—5, 10, 19, 26, 43, 49, 50, 54, 60, 86, 90, 94, 100, 108, 109 (fourth section.)—6, 17, 21, 25, 28, 40, 58, 59, 62, 63, 68, 71, 72, 77, 93, 102 (fifth section.)—7, 14, 18, 24, 38, 39, 45, 98, 57, 73, 75, 78, 88, 89, 92, 110 (sixth section.)—8, 9, 20, 35, 37, 46, 48, 52, 53, 61, 64, 65, 83, 113, 114 (seventh section).

Although some sūras are accidentally omitted in the manuscript transmission (sūras 1, 13, 34, 47, and 107), the method of arrangement is quite clear. It is based on a particular combination of the canonical edition with the sections or reading parts (ajzāʾ, sing. juzʾ). Whereas in other cases these sections represent incisions in the text according to the transmitted order, here, in each of the seven sections a fixed number (16–17) of select sūras is united. Yet this selection is not entirely arbitrary, since every section regularly begins with a lower numbered sūra (2–7), according to the authorized order of sūras, and then on through the different decimals—with minor exceptions that are themselves probably subject to textual corruptions—and then continues to the high numbers, so that every section offers in some measure a cross section of the entire Koran.

If thus the arrangement of the sūras testifies to a dependence on the ‘Uthmānic recension, so much more does this apply to the later division into reading portions, which did not appear until the Umayyad period.

According to yet another equally untenable account,6 the arrangement of the six first sūras of the ‘Alid Koran was as follows: 96, 74, 68, 73, 111, 81.

The Collection of Sālim b. Maʿqil

Another collection that, as it seems, allegedly appeared immediately after the death of Muḥammad is ascribed to Sālim b. Maʿqil,7 a client of Abū