THE *FADÂIL AL-QUR'ÂN* GENRE AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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ÖZET

FEDÂİLÜ'L-KUR'ÂN TÜRÜ VE SOSYO-POLİTİK ÖNEMİ

Fedâilü'l-Kur'ân, muhtelif hadîs koleksiyonlarmdaki bölümlere ya da Kur'ân'm faziletlerini konu edinen müstakil çalışmalara verilen genel bir başlıktır. Genel olarak, bu konuyla ilgili literatür görmezden gelinmiş ve tarihçi için ciddi anlamda malzeme içermediği düşüncesiyle derinliğine çalışılmamıştır. Ben bu makalede, hem dinî tarih hem de sosyal tarih çalışanları için bu literatürün çok yararh olduğunu ve Kur'ân tarihiyle ilgili veriler yanında, ilk dönem dinî ve entelektüel muhitin oluşumuyla ilgili de zengin bir muhteva taşıdığını göstermeye çalışacağım. Bunun için de fedâilü'l-Kur'ân türünde oluşturulmuş belli başlı eserlerin muhtevasım tespit ve tahlil edeceğim.

SUMMARY

Fadâil al-Qur'ân is the usual title given to chapters in various hadith compilations or to individual works that deal with the "excellences" or "virtues of the Qur'ân." It is a sub-category of a rather voluminous literature in Islam called fadâil or manâqib ("virtues" or "excellences"). In general, the fadâil material has not been studied in depth, usually dismissed as praise or hagiographie literature that is not worthy of the historian's serious attention. In this paper, I seek to show that both the religious and the social historian may profitably mine the fadâil al-Qur'ân literature for valuable insights into, for example, early attitudes towards writing conventions in the mushafs, manner of recitation, the probity of accepting wages for teaching the Qur'ân, and the authoritativeness of oral vs. written transmission of the Qur'ânic text. It also shows that vestiges of these issues encoded in fadâil al-Qur'ân traditions have broader implications for the reconstruction of the religious

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and intellectual milieu of the formative period of Islam. To this end, this article will discuss the contents of some of the principal compositions in the fadâil al-Qur'ân genre, seeking to trace in diachronic fashion a continuum and evolution in the kind of issues with which this literature deals. Our proposed study will also allow us to refine and qualify a body of received wisdom regarding the nature of the fadâil al-Qur'ân traditions and their origins.

Fadâil al-Qur'ân: Some Principle Compositions

The hadith that deal with the excellences of the Qur'ân may well be the oldest strand of *fadâil* traditions to have circulated in Islam's early centuries.

The *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions found in common in the so-called canonical and non-canonical hadith compilations have to do largely with the memorization of the Qur'ân, its compilation and writing down, its best reciters, the excellences of certain chapters and verses, among other topics. The *Sahîh* of al-Bukhârî (d. 256/870) has a separate chapter entitled *fadâil al-Qur'ân*; the *Sahîh* of Muslim b. al-Hajjâj (d. 261/875) has a section so titled. The Sunan works of al-Tirmidhî, Ibn Mâja, al-Nasaî, and Abû Dâwûd also contain *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions, although these traditions are not necessarily grouped in a separate section.

One of the earliest extant *fadâil al-Qur'ân* chapters in a *hadîth* compilation is the one contained in the *Musannaf* of ᶜAbd al-Razzâq (d. 211/827).[1] If we compare the *Musannaf* of ᶜAbd al-Razzâq with the *Sahîhân* of al-Bukhârî and Muslim, we find that these three relatively early *hadîth* compilations indicate in common that these *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions (which may justifiably be regarded as the more archaic forms) were concerned with describing the excellences of the Qur'ân (as a whole and of specific individual chapters and verses) and the excellences of those people who taught it and recited it with proficiency.[2] Thus it appears that up to the time when al-Bukhârî and Muslim started compiling their *hadîth* works (roughly mid-3rd/9th century), *fadâil* in this context connoted the positive traits of objects, places, and regions.

In the early part of the 3rd/9th century, separate works on *fadâil al-Qur'ân* began to emerge. According to many, Muhammad b. Idrîs al-Shafiî

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1 ᶜAbd al-Razzâq al-Sanᶜânî, *al-Musannaf*, ed. Habib al-Rahmân al-Aᶜzamî (Beirut, 1390/1971), 3:335-84. This *kitâb* is not entitled *fadâil al-Qur'ân* at its beginning but at its end where it is stated "the end of the book on the excellences of the Qur'ân" *(âkhir kitâb fadâil al-Qur'ân)*.

2 For arguments in favor of the reliability of ᶜAbd al-Razzâq's *Musannaf* and the provenance of its traditions from the 1st/7th century based on *isnâd* analysis, see the article by Harald Motzki, "The *Musannaf* of ᶜAbd al-Razzâq al-Sancânî as a Source of Authentic ahâdîth of the First Century A.H.," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 50 (1991):1-21.

(d. 204/820) was the first to compose such an independent treatise on *fadâil al-Qur'ân* called *Manâfiᶜ al-Qur'ân*.[3] This work appears not to be extant. Other works are listed under the title *manâfiᶜ al-Qur'ân* and *thawâb al-Qur'ân*. The titles *Manâfiᶜ al-Qur'ân*,[4] and *thawâb al-Qur'ân*, are alternative titles for collections of *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions.[5] This suggests that by the late 2nd/8th century or early 3rd/9th century, the term *fadâil* had also begun to acquire the connotations of "merits" and "benefits" in addition to the basic and earlier meaning of "[positive] characteristics." Rudolf Sellheim's blanket statement to the effect that the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions were generated "to win back to the study of the incomparable holy book those Muslims who had occupied themselves all too exclusively with profane science ...," would apply only to specific traditions in the later material which list the exaggerated merits of many *sûras* with the presumed intention of exhorting people to focus on the study of the Qur'ân. Sellheim's statement cannot be generalized to an earlier layer of traditions, which, as our article will attempt to show, is possible to detect. In fact, our survey indicates that the term *fadâil* underwent a semantic evolution similar to that which Charles Pellat posits for the term *manâqib*.[6] Furthermore, as our following discussion will show, the later layer of fadâil al-Qur'ân traditions express a sentiment not only against the practice of "profane" sciences ("humanistic" sciences would be a better term) but also against newly-emerging religious disciplines such as ᶜulûm al-hadîth (analysis and classification of hadîth).

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3 See Hâjji Khalîfa, *Kashf al-zunûn ᶜan asâmî'l-kutub wa-'l-funûn* (Istanbul, 1941-47), 2:1277. Al-Shâfiᶜî is typically depicted as pitting himself against the *ahl al-Qur'ân*, see John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ân* (Cambridge, 1977), 24-29. His composition of a *Manâfiᶜ al-Qur'ân* work, therefore, lends further support to our thesis that the inception of the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* genre should not be attributed to the Qur'ân advocates in a vaunting spirit vis-?-vis the *hadîth* advocates; see further below for our continuing discussion of this issue.

4 For a list of works, in Arabic and Persian, called *Manâfiᶜ al-Qur'ân*, ŝee *al-Dharîᶜa ilâ tasânîf al-shîᶜa* (Tehran, 1393/1976), 22:306-13. There is an anonymous treatise called *Manâfiᶜ al-Qur'ân* at the Leiden University library Oriental manuscript collection, catalog number OR 411, fols. 70b-88a. *GAL*, S, 2:985 lists a *Manâfiᶜ khawâss al-Qur'ân* by a certain al-Hakîm al-Tamîmî; cf. *Dharîᶜa*, 22:312. A similarly titled work is attributed to Abû ᶜAlî Muhammad b. Saᶜîd al-Tamîmî (d. 380/990), *GAL*, S, 1:422. Both of these works are extant in manuscript form.

5 See, for example, al-Nasaî, *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*, ed. Fârûq Hamîda (Casablanca, 1400/1980); 123 where the work ends by stating *"tamma kitâb thawâb al-Qur'ân bi-hamdi'llâhi wa-ᶜawnih."* *GAS*, 1:45 refers to Abû Bakr ᶜAbd al-Salâm who composed a *Kitâb Thawâb al-Qur'ân* in the 4th/10th century.

6 *EI*^{2}, art. "Manâkib," 6:349-57. See especially 6:357 where Pellat provides a useful summary of the semantic evolution of the term *manâqib*. Pellat finds that in the earliest centuries of Islam, *manâqib* is equivalent to genres he calls neutral, by which he means straightforward biographies designated as *tarjama, akhbâr*, and *taᶜrîf*, or those that were more "expressive," that is genres that accentuated the positive and noble traits of individuals of certain groups such as *fadâil, mafâkhir*, and *ma'âthir*. Later *manâqib* works, from the 4th/10th century onwards, like the *fadâil*, would acquire edificatory purposes to spur the people to emulate their moral betters.

Comparison of the Contents of Some Representative Works

For the purposes of comparison, I will now briefly describe the contents of the following individual works available in published form (mainly on account of the convenience) according to the chronology of their authors in order to see the continuities and progression in the range of topics that occur in this literature. These works are *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* of Abû ᶜUbayd al-Qâsim b. Sallâm al-Harawî (early 3rd/9th century);[7] 2) *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* of Ibn al-Durays (late 3rd/9th century);[8] 3) *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* of al-Nasaî (late 3rd/9th century/early 4th/10th century); 4) *Kitâb Fadâil al-Qur'ân wa-tilâwatih* of al-Râzî (mid-5th/11th century); 5) *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* of Ibn Kathîr (8th/14th century); 6) Shi'î *Fadâil* Works: Unfortunately, none of the early Shi'i *fadâil al-Qur'ân* works referred to earlier appears to be extant (or available). The 4th/10th century scholar, al-Kulaynî, has a section entitled *Kitâb Fadâil al-Qur'ân* in his *hadîth* compilation *al-Kâfî*.[9] It became evident from my study that individual *fadâil al-Qur'ân* works deal with more variegated topics in comparison with the shorter, similarly-named sections in *hadîth* compilations. Some of the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions included in the individual works deal in a more detailed manner with various modes of recitation, with lengthier lists of the excellences of the *sûras*, the merits of reciting these chapters, and the consequent generous recompense earned in the hereafter. Some reports encode the controversy surrounding the vowelization and diacriticization of the consonantal ᶜUthmânic text and the growth of a more elaborate etiquette concerning the preservation, adornment, and dissemination of *mushafs*. Another group of traditions implicitly manifest an increasing concern with the religious and socio-political implications of, among other issues, assigning greater excellence to the *ahl al-Qur'ân* compared to other groups of people and of the probity of commercial transactions involving the sacred text. I will now elaborate on some of these controversies and implications.

Reflections of Socio-Political Concerns in the Literature

The first three centuries of Islam were its most intellectually, theologically, and politically intense. That some of the theological, intellectual, and political issues of the time find reflection in the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* works,

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7 Abû ᶜUbayd, *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*, 39.

8 The title of this work is given as *Fadâil al-Qur'ân wa-mâ nazala min al-Qur'ân bi-Makka wa-mâ nazala bi'l-Madîna* in *GAS*, 1:42.

9 Al-Kulaynî, *Usûl al-Kâfî*, ed. Muhammad Shams al-Dîn (Beirut, 1411/1990), 2:561-97.

whose floruit was from the 3rd/9th century on, should come as no surprise to us. These issues may be arranged under the following three broad rubrics based on our study of this kind of literature:

1) **Reaction of the piety-minded against "professional" scholars** [sc. grammarians, the professional *qurrâ'*, Qur'ân reciters and teachers]: Some *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions encode negative attitudes on the part of their propagators towards those who seem to be excessively concerned with the mechanics of the language of the Qur'ân. For example, Ibn al-Durays in his *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* records the following report from al-Hârith b. Qays[10] who said,

> I was a man with a defect in my speech *(fî lisânî lukna)* and it was said to me, "Do not learn the Qur'ân until you have learned Arabic." Then I came to ᶜAbd Allâh [Ibn Masᶜûd] and I mentioned that to him. I said, "They were laughing while they said, `[Learn] Arabic.'" At that ᶜAbd Allâh said, "You are at a time when the commandments (lit. "limits," *hudûd*) of the Qur'ân are preserved and not much attention is paid to its words (lit. "its letters," *hurûfih*) whereas the people after you will be [living] at a time when the words of the Qur'ân will be preserved but its commandments will be lost."[11]

If this report did in fact emanate from al-Hârith, it is an early indictment of an incipient class of grammarians and philologists, who were perceived to be preoccupied with the words of the Qur'ânic text at the expense of the divine injunctions contained therein. To the piety-minded this rather excessive concern with the mechanics of language -- and thus with "humanistic" rather than with religious pursuits[12] -- represented an unhappy trend and harbingered grave moral decay.[13]

Reports that express sentiments against vocalization of the Qur'ânic text, against elaborate ceremonies connected with Qur'ân recitation, and the

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10 For whom see al-Bukhâri, *Kitâb al-ta'rikh al-kabîr* (Beirut, 1986), 2:279, #2461; Ibn Hajar al-ᶜAsqalâni, *Tahdhîb al-tahdhîb* (Beirut, 1416/1996), 1:336; Ibn al-Jazari, *Ghâyat al-nihâya fî iabaqât al-qurrâ'* (Cairo, 1351/1932), 1:201, #924. He is reckoned among the companions *(ashdb)* of Ibn Mascûd.

11 Ibn al-Durays, *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*, 26. A slightly variant report, also attributed to al-Hârith b. Qays, is recorded in Ibid., 27 with a different chain of transmission.

12 For this kind of "humanistic" studies *(adab)* centered on the study of language and literature, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh, 1990), esp. 97 ff.

13 The scholars in turn would come to posit a salubrious connection between adab and the religious sciences; a report to this effect cites four people as God's gifts to Islam: al-Shâfici, Ibn Hanbal, Yahyâ b. Macin, the tradilionist, and Abu cUbayd, the philologist; see Makdisi, *Rise of Humanism*, 97, 111.

practice of adorning the *mushaf* with certain purely ornamental features are plentiful in the literature. The famous Kufan scholar Ibrâhîm (al-Nakhâî, d. 96/715), who is counted among the *qurrâ'*,[14] reported that the Companion al-Mughîra (b. Shucba, d. 48-51/668-71)[15] had declared that he [sc. al-Mughîra] disliked voweling the Qur'ânic text *(al-mushaf)*, or that its reading/recitation be grandly concluded *(yukhtamu)* or that every ten verses be indicated *(yuᶜshar)* or that Qur'ân copies be sold or bought. Another report states that the Basran *tâbiᶜî* Abû'l-ᶜAliya (d. 90/708-9 or 96/716)[16] used to dislike breaking up verses in tens, placing stylized decorations to indicate the beginning and end of each *sûra*, and he further stated, "Strip the Qur'ân [i.e of its embellishments]."[17]

Traditions that express pious aversion to the notion of earning a livelihood and worse, becoming wealthy, through teaching the Qur'ân are plentiful in the literature.[18] One such report attributed to al-Hasan al-Basrî (d. 110/728) draws attention instead to the spiritual and eternal riches that inhere in the Qur'ân. Al-Hasan states, "By God, there is no wealth without the Qur'ân and no deprivation after it."[19] Another report that expresses similar sentiments is recorded by Ibn al-Jawzî in his collection of forged traditions; this report emanates from Ibn ᶜAbbâs who related that the Prophet said, "If one to whom God teaches the Qur'ân should complain of poverty, God will inscribe poverty between his eyes until the Day of Resurrection."[20] Al-Shawkânî (d. 1250/1834) lists a similar spurious tradition which reprimands, "If one to

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14 See Ibn al-Jazarî, *Ghâyat al-nihâya*, 1:284-85, #1272.

15 For whom see *EI*^{2}, s.v., 8:347.

16 For whom see Ibid., s.v., 1:104-5. Ibn Abî Dâvûd declared him to be the most knowledgeable in Qur'ân recitation *(aᶜlam bi-'l-qirâ'a)* after the Companions; see *Tahdhîb al-lahdhîb*, 1:610-11; cf. Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabî, *al-Tafsîr wa-'l-mufassirûn* (Cairo, 1396/1976), 115.

17 Ibn al-Durays, *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*, 42-43. For a description of these *fawâtih* (sing. *fâtiha*) and *khawâtim* (sing. *khâtima*) as ornamental embellishments at the beginning and end of *sûras*, see al-Zarkashî, *al-Burhân fî ᶜulûm al-Qur'ân* (Beirut, 1408/1988), 1:164-86. Outside of Qur'ânic *masâhif*, these *fawâtih* and *khawâtim* had become quite commonplace for chancery texts by the Mamluk period. See al-Qalqashandî's detailed treatment of this topic in his *Subh al-aᶜshâ fî sinâᶜat al-inshâ'*, ed. Yûsuf ᶜAlî Tawîl (Beirut, 1408/1987), 6:582 ff.

18 Teaching the Qur'ân in itself is, of course, a highly meritorious act. The oft-quoted *hadith*, "The best of you is one who learns the Qur'ân and teaches it," is found, for example, in al-Bukhârî, *Sahîh*, section on *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*; ᶜAbd al-Razzâq, *Musannaf*, 3:367-68; al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, 3:9; Ibu Mâja, *Sunan*, ed. Muhammad Mustafâ al-Aᶜzamî (Riyad, 1403/1983), 1:41; al-Dârimî, *Sunan*, section on *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*, 2:437.

19 Al-Nawawî, *Tibyân*, fol. 38a.

20 Ibn al-Jawzî dismisses this as an unreliable report since its narrators were all disreputable. Al-ᶜAqîlî warned that neither the chain of transmitters nor the text of the *hadith* should be memorized since it was basically unsound *(lâ asla lahu)*; see *Mawdûᶜât*, 1:254.

whom God has given the Qur'ân considers someone wealthier than him, then he has mocked God's verses."[21]

The above reports preserve for us the vestiges of a pietistic reaction against the efforts of the grammarians and philologists to fix the reading of the sacred text. To this piety-minded and purist coterie, this appears to have represented unwarranted textual "tampering." On record is also their aversion to showy and expensive adornment of copies of the Qur'ân and to ostentatious ceremonies to commemorate one's conclusion of reading the sacred text, as appears to have become common. Some of the traditions above also record sentiment critical of the increasing "professionalization" and "commercialization" of the teaching of the Qur'ân. There is an implicit, and not-so-implicit, assumption that the professional *qurrâ'*[22] and the *ᶜulamâ'* in general master the Qur'ân mainly to enhance their scholarly reputations and for monetary aggrandizement, a trend that is vilified in many traditions.

By the late 4th/10th century, traditions about the moral superiority of the *ahl al-Qur'ân*, i.e. people of the Qur'ân had proliferated. Al-Râzî, for example, in his *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* devotes six chapters to the *ahl al-Qur'ân* and their excellences.[23] These six headings are: a) chapter regarding [the fact] that the people of the Qur'ân are the people of God; b) chapter regarding [the fact] that they are the best of the community *(khayr al-umma)*; c) chapter regarding [the fact] that they are the most excellent of the community *(afdal al-umma)*; d) chapter regarding [the fact] that the best among people is one who recites the Qur'ân and is the best reciter of it *(aqra'uhu)*; e) chapter regarding [the fact] that they are the best people of the community *(khiyâr al-umma)*; and finally, f) chapter regarding [the fact] that they are the noblest of the community *(ashraf al-umma)*. The use of the terms *khayr/khiyâr, afdal*, and *ashraf* are indicative of the kind of excellence being attributed to the *ahl al-Qur'ân* in these traditions. The first two terms clearly impute greater moral excellence to them while the last, *ashraf*, in its general signification, is more indicative

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21 *Al-Fawâ'id al-majmûᶜa fî 'l-ahâdîth al-mawdûᶜa* (Jidda, 1380/1960), 297, #7 and #6 for a variant. Compare with the variant tradition given by al-Ghazâlî, *Ihyâ' ᶜulûm al-dîn* (Cairo, n.d.), in his eighth book entitled *"Kitâb âdâb tilâwat al-Qur'ân,"* 1:272-73, which states "Whoever reads the Qur'ân and then is of the opinion that someone has been given [something] more excellent than what he has been given has diminished what God Almighty has exalted."

22 ᶜUmar is said to have been the first to formally appoint a *qârî'* to recite from the Qur'ân durîng prayers, one for the men and one for the women; see al-Tabarî, *Ta'rîkh al-umam wa'l-mulûk* (Beirut, 1417/1997), 2:570; cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, "Qur'ân Recitation in Early Islam," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 20 (1974):245.

23 Al-Râzî, *Faddil al-Qur'ân*, 79-88.

of social prominence and genealogical superiority.[24] The parallelism of these traditions strongly suggest, however, that the social status of these *ashraf*, here in reference to the ahl al-Qur'ân, is predicated in no small measure on their presumed moral excellence and is a deliberate challenge to the tribe-based nobility of certain groups.[25]

2) **The relation between religious piety and** social equality: By the 3rd/9th century, the discourse about piety and social equality (and also, one should add, legitimate leadership) came to be focused particularly on the possession of *ᶜilm* (religious and general knowledge). In some reports, knowledge and frequent recitation of the Qur'ân appear to be great social equalizers. Knowledge of the Qur'ân in greater measure and proficiency in its recitation blur artificial demarcations of social status and privilege. In one significant report, Nâfiᶜ b. ᶜAbd al-Hârith[26] met ᶜUmar b. al-Khattâb who asked the former, "Who did you leave in charge of Makka?" The answer was Ibn Abzâ. ᶜUmar asked, "[Is he] a *mawlâ*?" Nâfica replied, "Yes, he is a reciter of the Book of God the Exalted." ᶜUmar said, "God enhances [the sta-

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[24] See *EI*[2], art. "Sharif," 9:329 where a *sharîf*, in both pre-Islamic and Islamic usage, is defined as "a free man who can claim a distinguished rank because of his descent from illustrious ancestors ...; that is, a person possessed of nobility *(sharaf ...)*, whether conferred by inherited or personally acquired glory and honourable conduct or, preferably, both."

[25] Juynboll in his "The *qurrâ'* in early Islamic history," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 16 (1973): 113-29 and "The Qur'ân Reciter," 22-23, is of the opinion that the *qurrâ'* were of low social rank and were villagers. He considers the qurrâ' to be the same as *ahl al-Qur'ân* (with which I do not disagree) but then considers the term *ahl al-Qur'ân* to be a corruption of *ahl al-qurâ*, following M. A. Shaban's reading of *qurrâ'* as *qurâ* in his *Islamic History A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132), a New Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1971), 23, and n. 3. This argument seems rather hastily founded; see also Redwan Sayed's criticism of this argument in his *Die Revolte des Ibn al-Aşᶜat und die Koranleser: Ein Beitrag zur Religions- und Sozialgeschichte der frhhen Umayyadenzeit* (Freiburg, 1977), 277-78. Rather, I would suggest that the debate here is being cast in terms of moral excellence *(fadîla)* and moral precedence/priority *(sdbiqa)* particularly in converting to Islam, two notions that became very important in the ordering of early Islamic society. The Kufan *qurrâ'*, drawn from the early *sahâba*, benefited particularly from the principle of *sâbiqa* first systematically applied by ᶜUmar, the second caliph, in the setting up of the *dîwân*, the registry of pensions. But under ᶜUthmân, who reversed ᶜUmar's policy in many ways, they saw their influence eroding which must have induced considerable anxiety on their part; see Hinds "Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D.," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2 (1971): 348 ff.; idem, "The Murder of the Caliph cUthmân," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (1972): 462 ff. The principle of sâbiqa had conferred on the *qurrâ'* what Hinds terms "Islamic *sharaf*" (*Kufan Political Alignments*, 347) as opposed to "genealogical *sharaf*," for which latter notion they are said to have harbored contempt. Many of the *qurrâ'* were in fact drawn from the Madinan Ansâr and the *mawâlî* (cf. Sayed, Revolte *des Ibn al-Aşᶜat*, 284, 290 ff.); subscription on their part to norms of Islamic piety and egalitarianism, expressed best in their loyalty to the Qur'ân, made them the equals, at least religiously speaking, of the Makkan high-born Muslims, as in the case of Ibn Abzâ, referred to below.

[26] For whom see *Isâba*, 6:226, #8651.

tus] of certain people by this Qur'ân and diminishes [that of] others by it."[27] This well-attested tradition underscores unambiguously that a non-Arab could have precedence over an Arab on account of the former's superior knowledge of the Qur'ân. That this report is attributed to ᶜUmar is not without significance. ᶜUmar after all was the caliph who had set up the *dîwân*, the register of pensions, based on the principle of *sâbiqa* (priority in conversion to Islam, in emigration, and participation in the major battles of Islam) that *ipso facto* favored the Muhâjirûn, the overwhelming majority of whom were Arabs and, to a considerable extent, from the Quraysh. That even ᶜUmar could concede the great levelling effect of knowledge of the divine text sends home this point forcefully.

The *Fadâil al-Qur'ân* of al-Râzî contains a report that again points to this egalitarian consequence of knowledge of the Qur'ân. The report is attributed to Abû Hurayra who reported that the Prophet sent a military detachment who was asked to recite the Qur'ân. A young boy *(shâbb)* bested them in the recitation of the Sûrat al-Baqara. Muhammad told the boy, "You are the leader of the detachment *(al-qawm)*." At that an elderly man is said to have become enraged who protested, "O Messenger of God, do you appoint him as leader while I am older than him?" The Prophet replied that "he [sc. the boy] was greater than they with regard to [knowledge of] the Qur'ân."[28]

In these reports we discern a religious, egalitarian attitude subversive of socially and culturally constructed superiorities based on age and ethnic affiliation.

3) **The Authoritativeness of Oral vs. Written Transmission:** One may read into many of the reports contained in the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* works the insecurities generated in a society that is rapidly making the transition from an oral-transmission based society to that based on written transmission. Starting with Nabia Abbott, modern scholars have marshalled impressive arguments and a considerable body of evidence to indicate that this transition occurred much earlier than has been commonly assumed and that written documents were prevalent as early as the late 1st/7th and early 2nd/8th centuries.[29] Such

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[27] Ibid., 100; also reported by al-Dârimî, *Sunan*, 2:443; Ibn Mâja, *Sunan*, 1:42; Muhammad b. ᶜAbd al-Wâhid al-Maqdisî (d. 643/1245), *Fadâil al-Qur'ân wa-thawâb man tacallamahu wa-callamahu*, Ms. Leiden University Library, OR 2467, fol. 2a. See also note 83 above.

[28] Al-Râzî, *Fadâil al-Qur'ân*, 98-99.

[29] See Fuat Sezgin, GAS, 1:62 ff; Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri: Historical Texts* (Chicago, 1957), 1:1-31; Gregor Schoeler, "Die Frage der schriftlichen oder mbndlichen tberlieferung der Wissenschaften im frbhen Islam," *Der Islam* 62 (1985):201-30; idem, "Weiteres zur Frage der

a transition brought about an attendant transfer of religious authority and social power from the traditional piety-minded elite to an emerging professional class of religious scholars, whose expertise was defined in large measure by mastery of the written text. Abbott has pointed to this historical tension between oral and written transmission in Islam's first century which found moral overtones. She states that those groups who represented "pious scholarship" and, therefore, were "orthodox," were the ones who "struggled to hold onto the idea of the absolute primacy of oral transmission."[30] This attitude is believed to have stemmed primarily from ᶜUmar's edict against the writing down of *hadîth* as reported by some sources.[31] It was very likely during the period of al-Zuhrî (d. 124/742) that written transmission began to gain favor over the oral.[32] Such an early attitude would explain to a considerable extent why these "pious scholars" would resist further additions in the nature of diacriticization and vocalization to the ᶜUthmânic consonantal text, not sanctioned by the Râshidîn caliphs.[33]

One account nicely encapsulates the apprehension generated by the ascendancy of the *mushaf* (the written Qur'ân copy) over oral transmission. The account states that when ᶜIkrima b. [Abî] Jahl (d. 105/723-24) heard that the *mushaf* had become widespread *(intashara)*, he swooned *(ghashiya ᶜalayhi)* and (apparently on coming to) lamented, "It is the speech of my Lord *(kalâm rabbî)*; it is the speech of my Lord!"[34] The emphasis on speech *(kalâm)* draws attention to what Brinkley Messick has termed "a culturally specific logocentrism"[35] in Islam, borrowing the term from Jacques Derrida.[36] This logocentrism privileged the spoken word for "while recitation was thought to maintain a reliable constancy of meaning, the secondary medium of writing was seen as harboring a prospect of misinterpretation."[37] William

schriftlichen oder mbndlichen bberlieferumg der Wissenschaften im Islam," *Der Islam* 66 (1989):38-67; idem, "Writing and Publishing on the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam," *Arabica* 44 (1997):423-35.

30 Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, 2:24.

31 Cf. Ibn Sacd, *Kitâb al-Tabaqât al-kabîr*, ed. Edward Sachau (Leiden, 19040, 5:140.

32 Ibid., 2:53, 80ff.

33 For some possible reasons for the eventual spread of vocalization and the beautification of Qur'ân *mushafs*, see Adrian Brockett, "The Value of the H,.afs,. and Warsh Transmissions for the Textual History of the Qur'ân," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ân*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford, 1988), 45. For a comprehensive treatment of this tension between orality and written transmission, particularly in the case of *hadîth*, see Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition," 437-523 and references therein.

34 See *Tibyân*, fol. 38b.

35 *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley, 1993), 25.

36 *Of Grammatology*, tr. by G. C. Spivak (Baltimore, 1974).

37 Messick, *Calligraphic State*, 25.

Graham, among others, has rightly emphasized the Qur'ân's role as an oral text in Muslim religious life and the primacy of its orality in Islam's early centuries.[38] Such a recitational logocentrism would be severely challenged by the rise to prominence of a class of professional scholars and scribes by the third/ninth century whose discursive medium became the written word. We may see this socio-historical development reflected in the transmutation that the report cited above from ᶜIkrima undergoes. The "transmuted" report, also attributed to ᶜIkrima, now states that he placed the mushaf upon his face and said, "The book (kitâb) of my Lord, the book of my Lord!"[39] ᶜIkrima's original dismay over the prevalence of the mushaf now appears to have turned into exaltation of the written text.[40] The trend towards preference for written transmission finds further reflection in a statement by the 7th/13th century scholar al-Nawawî who exhorts the believer to recite from the *mushaf* rather than from memory *(ᶜalâ zâhri'l-qalb)* since "looking at the written text is a desirable [act of] worship," and, he continues, "it has been reported by many that the righteous forebears *(al-salaf)* would recite from the mushaf."[41] This may

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38 William Graham, "The Earliest Meaning of Qur'ân," *Die Welt des Islams* 23-24 (1984): 361-77; "Qur'an as Spoken Word," 23-40; idem., *Beyond the Written Word*, esp. 88-92.
I would read the report that Juynboll cites in his "The Qur'ân Reciter," 24 from Ibn H,.anbal's *Musnad*, ed. Ahmad M. Shâkir (Cairo, 1946-56), 1:86, #656, as a classic showdown between the authoritativeness of oral vs. written transmission. In this report, after the battle of Siffîn, Alî turns to a Qur'ân *mushaf* and says, "O *mushaf*, inform the people!" The people (described as *qurrâ' al-nâs*) gathered there remonstrated, "It is only ink on paper, we argue on the basis of what we have [orally] transmitted from it!"

39 Al-Dârimî, *Sunan*, 2:440.

40 Brockett in his "The Value of the H,.afs,. and Warsh Transmissions," 45, states that neither the oral nor the written transmission of the Qur'ân was primary and suggests that the two processes were rather simultaneous and coeval in importance. It is eminently sensible of course to emphasize the oral and written transmissions of the Qur'ân as complementary, parallel activities as the sources themselves suggest (cf. Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, 2:57 ff., *EI²*, art. "Kitâb," 5:207; Sayed, *Revolte des Ibn al-Aşᶜat*, 279 ff. where he points out that the earliest *qurrâ'* were proficient in writing as well). But I think Brockett goes too far in denying the primacy of the oral aspect over the written aspect of the Qur'ân particularly in the earliest centuries of Islam; certainly as a liturgical, recitational text, the orality of the Qur'ân was and, in many ways, remains its dominant feature. We are also faced with the rather strong sentiment expressed in some of the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* traditions, which I take to be the archaic versions, against extensive written transmission of the Qur'ân or exclusive reliance upon the *mushaf*. Cook in his "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition," 476 ff. similarly concludes that prophetic *hadîth* and other reports which express hostility to the written recording of traditions are older. Through internal evidence teased out from the traditions themselves, he concludes quite convincingly that ambivalent attitudes towards written transmission persisted through the 2nd/8th century to give way to a favorable attitude by the 3rd/9th century, a conclusion that accords nicely with what we have encountered in the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* literature.

41 *Tibyân*, fol. 42b. It is interesting, therefore, to note the following statement, which is at odds with al-Nawawî's exhortation, attributed to the Kufan *qâri'* and *qâdî* Muhârib b. Dithâr, "Whoever recites the Qur'ân from memory *(ᶜan zahr qalbih)* has an invitation *(daᶜwa)* [from God] in this world and in the

in fact reflect historical truth. From another perspective, these reports clearly make a religious virtue out of the bookish erudition of the *ᶜulamâ'*, a trait that is grafted retroactively onto the moral exemplars of the early centuries of Islam to create a pious precedent.

Conclusion

The *fadâil al-Qur'dn* works, compared to sections similarly named in the *Musannaf* of ᶜAbd al-Razzâq and the *Sahîhân* of al-Bukhârî and Muslim, for example, show many points of convergence on issues that point to both the unique properties of the Muslim revelation and the excellence of it as a whole and of its parts. The traditions in common in this kind of literature are concerned primarily with the excellence of those who learn and teach the Qur'ân and with the merits of specific *sûras*, particularly Sûrat al-Baqara, al-Fâtiha and al-Ikhlâs. Our discussion also clearly shows a certain evolution in the kind of themes this type of literature is concerned with. In tandem with other *fadâil* genres, particularly the *fadâil al-sahâba*, the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* genre also became deployed by certain interest groups as literature of advocacy. By this I mean to say that they came to serve, in part at least, as literary vehicles to advocate the greater excellence of the people/advocates of the Qur'ân *(ahl al-Qur'ân)* over other groups who were negotiating for precedence *(sâbiqa)* and excellence in an increasingly merit-conscious society.

In conclusion we may state that a significant number of traditions contained in the *fadâil al-Qur'ân* works that we looked at and in sections within collections such as al-Kulaynî's *al-Kâfî* and Ibn aI-Jawzî's *Mawdûᶜât* quite patently display the parenetic and partisan purposes motivating their propagation. The unraveling of these purposes that are interwoven into the texts provides fascinating insights into Islam's contested past.

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hereafter;" recorded in al-Dârimî, *Sunan*, 2:469. For Muhârib, see Ibn al-Jazarî, *Ghâyat al-nihâya*, 2:42, #2661; *Tahdhîb*, 4:29, where he is generally declared to be a *thiqa*. He is said to have died ca. 116/734. For some of these conflicting reports regarding the merits of Qur'ân-recitation from memory vs. from the written text, see al-Suyûti, *Itqân*, 1:338-39.