

Muhammad Quran Story Fake? World's Oldest Muslim Holy Book Predates Official Founding Of Islam

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A fragment of a Quran manuscript is seen in the library at the University of Birmingham in England, July 22, 2015. PHOTO: REUTERS

The world's oldest Quran may predate the accepted founding date of Islam by the Prophet Muhammad, according to radiocarbon dating carried out by experts at the University of Oxford. The British researchers said the Quran fragments found last month were created between the years 568 and 645 A.D., which flies in the face of Muslim belief.

"This gives more ground to what have been peripheral views of the Quran's genesis, like that Muhammad and his early followers used a text that was already in existence and shaped it to fit their own political and theological agenda, rather than Muhammad receiving a revelation from heaven," Keith Small of Oxford's Bodleian Library told reporters. "If the dates apply to the parchment and the ink, and the dates across the entire range apply, then the Quran — or at least portions of it — predates Mohammed, and moves back the years that an Arabic literary culture is in place well into the 500s."

Muhammad is generally believed to have lived from 570 to 632. Muslims view the Quran as a divine scripture revealed to the prophet by God. The Arabic word "Quran" means "the Recitations" or "the Revelations."

Muhammad is said to have founded Islam sometime after 610. The first Muslim community was founded in Medina, in present-day Saudi Arabia, after he fled Mecca in 622. The first known formal text of the Quran was created in 653, after Muhammad's death. Before that, the scripture had circulated through oral tradition and had been written down on stones, leaves, parchment and bones.

It destabilizes, to put it mildly, the idea that we can know anything with certainty about how the Quran emerged, historian Tom Holland told the Times of Israel about the new findings. And that in turn has implications for the historicity of Muhammad and [his followers].

Others, however, said the new tests don't necessarily mean the Quran predates Muhammad. "If anything, the manuscript has consolidated traditional accounts of the Quran's origins," said Mustafa Shah of the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

The two pages from Islam's holy book were discovered in a library at the University of Birmingham in England last month. They had been mistakenly bound in a Quran dating to the seventh century. The fragments written on either sheepskin or

goatskin were part of a collection of 3,000 Middle Eastern texts taken from Iraq in the 1920s.