

The concept of revelation in Islam, from the book of traditions of al-Bukhârî.

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Abstract / Résumé / Resumen

The present article deals with the notion of revelation in Islam through the study of one of the sources of Islamic dogma: the *Sunna* or “tradition”, a corpus constituted of hadîths (accounts about the Prophet Muhammad or his companions). It investigates what information is provided about the Qur’ân in one of the most canonical collections of hadîths: the *Ṣaḥîh* (“authentic”) gathered by Abû ‘Abdullâh al-Bukhârî (d. 256 h./870 CE). The first part shows that a substantial portion of the text was used to support and reinforce the status of the Qur’ânic text, and the authority which proceeds from it. The second part analyzes the other important component of the speech about the Qur’ân: the speech about the Qur’ânic reading-reciting-psalmody and about the bodily movements, postures, and conditions that accompany it. This research has shown the conceptualization of the relationship of the believer towards the Qur’ân as is put forth by the collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî: the concept of an *external* relationship though the performance of Qur’ânic recitation.

Cet article traite de la notion de révélation en islam à travers l’étude de l’une des sources du dogme islamique : la *Sunna* ou « tradition », un corpus composé de hadîths (des récits concernant le prophète Mahomet ou ses compagnons). Il explore quelle information est donnée sur le Coran dans l’une des collections de hadîth les plus canoniques : le *Saḥîh* (« l’authentique ») compilé par Abû ‘Abdullâh al-Bukhârî (mort en l’an 256 de l’hégire/ 870 ap. J.C.). La première partie montre qu’une part substantielle du *Saḥîh* a été utilisé pour soutenir et renforcer la définition du statut du texte coranique et l’autorité qui émane de celui-ci. La seconde partie analyse l’autre composante du discours sur le Coran : le discours sur la récitation-lecture-psalmodie du Coran et sur les mouvements du corps, les postures, et les conditions qui l’accompagnent. Cette recherche a mis en évidence la conceptualisation de la relation entre le croyant et le Coran telle qu’elle est mise en avant dans la collection de hadîths de al-Bukhârî : le concept d’une relation *externe* à travers la pratique de la récitation du Coran.

El presente artículo trata de la noción de la revelación en el islam a través del estudio de una de las fuentes del dogma islámico: la *Sunna* o “tradición”, un corpus constituido por *hadîths* (relatos sobre el profeta Mahoma o sus compañeros). Este artículo investiga la información sobre el Corán que figura en una de las colecciones más canónicas de hadîths: el *Saḥîh* (“la auténtica”), recopilada por Abû ‘Abdullâh al-Bujârî (muerto en el año 256 de la Hégira/ 870 D. de C.). La primera parte muestra que un fragmento sustancial del *Saḥîh* se utilizó para apoyar y reforzar el estado del texto coránico y la autoridad que emana del

mismo. La segunda parte analiza el otro componente importante del discurso sobre el Corán: el discurso sobre la lectura-recitación-salmodia del Corán y sobre los movimientos corporales, posturas, y condiciones que la acompañan. Esta investigación pone en evidencia la conceptualización de la relación del creyente con el Corán tal como está planteada en la colección de hadîths de al-Bujârî: el concepto de una relación *externa* por medio de la práctica de la recitación del Corán.

Key Words / Mots-clés / Palabras clave

Islam, hadith, Sunna, Qur’an (Koran/Quran), Islamic dogma, tradition, Bukhârî, authority, recitation, rituals, beliefs, religious practice, inter-religious dialogue.

Islam, hadith, Sunna, Qur’an (Coran/Quran), dogme islamique, tradition, Bukhârî, autorité, recitation, rituels, croyances, pratique religieuse, dialogue interreligieux.

Islam, hadith, Sunna, Qur’an (Corán/Quran), dogma islámico, tradición, Bukhârî, autoridad, recitado, rituales, creencias, práctica religiosa, diálogo interreligioso.

The dialogue between religions constitutes a vital issue today, and this includes the dialogue that deals with the dogmas enunciated by these religions. The creation of the *Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue*, initiated by eminent representatives of the three main monotheist religions, is a prominent sign of this. The support granted by this *Foundation* to the development of mutual knowledge among religions is fundamental, because it places this knowledge within the framework of scholarly knowledge, that is, within the framework of scientific and critical knowledge which aims at being independent and neutral. It refuses to serve religious edification or, on the contrary, the “destruction” of religions. It seeks to support an objective knowledge of religious dogmas and facts. Thus, such knowledge is designed to improve the mutual understanding of religions as well as the conceptualization and comprehension of religions by the states,

governments, administrations, companies, institutions, groups, or persons of whatever religious affiliation.

The present article comes out a long research conducted within the framework of the fellowship provided by this *Foundation*. It thus lies within a framework that seeks to establish objective knowledge about religions. It deals with the notion of “revelation”. Indeed, the notions of “revelation” as well as those of “Scripture” or “revealed Scripture” are central notions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Their concepts are specific: for instance, generally speaking, according to Judaism the Torah was “revealed” to Moses as the action of Adonai towards His chosen people; according to Christianity the person of Jesus Christ is the “revelation” of the love of God the Father towards all humans; and according to Islam the qur’ânic Scripture was directly “revealed” by God and recited by Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets. Whatever their particular concepts might be, each of the three main monotheisms has the concept of “revelation” as a central aspect of the definition of its own faith. Therefore, a dialogue which seeks genuineness beyond general considerations should not be initiated without considering developing a mutual knowledge concerning the different concepts of “revelation” and “Scripture.” A discussion of such concepts cannot be achieved, I believe, without a study of the founding texts, in their own original language, with suitable linguistic tools, and situated within the historical and cultural context where they appeared and developed.

Let us focus on the notion of “revelation” in Islam. A first philological analysis led me to observe that there was no term that expressly encompassed this notion in Arabic, and that this notion was for the most part inadequately translated in Western-European languages by the word “revelation.” “Revelation” in the English language as well as in similar western idioms refers to the “unveiling of something which is hidden.” In a civilization imprinted by Christianity – and of course in relation to Judaism – the term means “unveiling of the identity of God, leading humans to realize or discover who He is and what He does, that is, His love towards all mankind.” Now, in the Arabic language, in the qur’ânic text as well as in the Islamic literature and tradition which goes along with it, the terms generally translated later on by the word “revelation” do not exactly carry this meaning. The term *wahy* means,

among other things, “inspiration,”¹ and was used within a religious framework to name the mode of mysterious communication, by which God transmitted His divine Word to Muhammad. Whereas the term *tanzil* literally means “the fact of having something come down, of making something come down,”² and refers as well to the mode of transmission of the divine Word to Muhammad, defining the fact that God is “higher” than mankind, that is, “transcendent.” The concept of “revelation” in Islam is thus different from the one in Christianity and from the one in Judaism. Nevertheless, the Islamic concept of revelation is meant, from the beginning and from the qur’ânic text itself, to be following upon the Christian and Jewish concepts of “revelation.” It indeed possesses their main feature: the dimension of transcendence, of divinity. The notion of “revelation” in Islam, just as in Judaism and Christianity, is understood as the communication of something which originates in the divinity; however, each religion understands this in its own specific way.

Thus, using this brief example, one can see that this notion does not refer to the same concept in each of the three dogmas, but that it nevertheless implies a shared common definition. It is essential to understand this nuance: the same notion refers to three distinct concepts, but these three concepts have some features in common. Thus, the use of these concepts requires a certain caution, because to try to understand them is more delicate than to try to understand concepts which have nothing in common. One has to make clear what they have in common and what is different in the same notion. The present article will try to contribute to this by providing more information about the notion of revelation in Islam through the study of one of the sources of Islamic dogma: the *Sunna* or “tradition.”

The “Sunna”

By “tradition” (in Arabic *Sunna*) is meant here something more specific than the common use of the word “tradition” in English, which has a broad meaning including all kinds of culturally transmitted items. The *Sunna*-tradition refers

¹ Semantically, the term can also mean, for instance, a written letter. Cf. Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même*, p. 137-145.

² Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même*, p. 131-137.

to transmitted short accounts of what the prophet Muhammad said, or did – or did not say in a particular circumstance – or what his companions said, did, or did not say. Each unit account is termed “a *hadîth*,” but this word also designates the whole of the knowledge emanating from a number of *hadîths*. This latter meaning generally somehow equates with the term of “*Sunna*,” as the knowledge about the “tradition” or “way of doing” of Muhammad, which has to be imitated by the believers and the community. The “ways of doing” of the companions of Muhammad are also presented as an example. For Shii Muslims, the *hadîths* also include the “ways of doing” of the Imâm (who are the religious leaders descending from the family of the prophet via his daughter Fâtîma, wife of ‘Alî).

Each single *hadîth* is normally composed of two parts: the first is a chain of transmitters indicating the names of who is said to have heard the *hadîth* from whom, back to Muhammad, or one of his companions (or an Imâm), and the second part is an account of what happened, or what was said (by Muhammad, his companions, or an Imâm). The chain of transmitters is called *isnâd* and the account is called *matn*. Nevertheless, some *hadîths* do not have an *isnâd*, whereas some *isnâds* are quoted without mentioning the full *matn* if similar to an adjacent *hadîth* in a collection. The *hadîths* were gathered during the classical period of Islam by scholars called the *muḥaddithûn* (sing. *muḥaddith*). Six collections of *hadîths* have been considered by the Sunni Muslim milieu as valuable: those of al-Bukhârî (d. 256/870)³, Muslim (d. 261/875), Ibn Mâja (d. 273/886), Abû Dawûd (d. 275/888), al-Tirmidhî (d. 279/892), and al-Nasâ’î (d. 303/915). The most highly recognized are the first two, called “authentic, true” *Ṣaḥîḥ* – the two of them referred to as “the *Ṣaḥîḥayn*.” To these six books can be added the collection of a predecessor: the *Muwatta’* of imam Mâlik (d. 179/795), and other collections such as the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). Shii Muslims do not rely on these collections but have their own. Only a portion of the *hadîths* are common to both Sunni and Shii collections.

Because the Sunni collections of *hadîths* exposed what Muhammad and his companions had done or said, and that these deeds and words were considered as a model, the “six collections” are thus representative of what was supposed to be the duty, or what was supposed to be believed,

in the Sunni milieu of the ninth century. They provide a testimony of the predominant religious vision in Sunni Islam some two and half centuries after the death of Muhammad.

I have chosen to conduct my research using the collection gathered by Abû ‘Abdullâh al-Bukhârî (the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of al-Bukhârî). Along with the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of Muslim, it is the collection which has received the highest degree of canonicity. Nevertheless, a researcher recently showed that the two *Ṣaḥîḥ* were not immediately canonized, and were even quite criticized in the beginning.⁴

Methodology of this research

One question was important to address before starting my research: What was the relationship between the accounts (*matn*) provided by each *hadîth* of the collection and the historical truth? Indeed, it is well known that forgery (fabrication) of *hadîths* took place at several periods of Islamic history, especially during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. This was identified by Muslim scholars during the classical period of Islam, and they tried to organize ways of guaranteeing the validity of *hadîth* through both a “science of *hadîth*” (*ilm al-ḥadîth*) and a “science of the transmitters” (*ilm al-rijâl*), checking, for instance, whether two transmitters of an *isnâd* could actually have met. Contemporary scholars also tried to investigate the reliability of *hadîth* by questioning the validity of transmissions and went a step further than ancient Muslim scholars by critically addressing the construction of *isnâds* as a claim for their authenticity: quotable in this regard are the pioneer works of Ignaz Goldziher⁵ and Joseph Schacht⁶, and those of more recent scholars such as Gautier H.A. Juynboll⁷,

³ First date in Hegirian calendar, second in Common/Christian Era calendar.

⁴ Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhârî and Muslim. The Formation and Function of the Sunnî Hadîth Canon*, 2007. Cf. the book review by L. Daaif.

⁵ Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, vol. 2, 1890.

⁶ Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 1950.

⁷ Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition. Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadîth*, 1983; *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadîth*, 1996.

John Burton⁸, Harald Motzki⁹, Asma Hilali¹⁰, Lahcen Daaif¹¹, or Nicolet Boekhoff-Van der Voort¹².

For each *hadîth* I studied in the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of al-Bukhârî, there were two possibilities:

- either the *hadîth* was “authentic,” in the sense that it had transmitted faithfully an event which had really occurred: a word, an action, or an attitude of Muhammad, or of one of his followers;
- or this *hadîth* was “false,” in the sense that what it transmitted did not actually happen, and that this *hadîth* was invented at a later period.

In this latter case, the *matn* is no longer about what Muhammad did or said, but rather about what some people found worthy of expressing and transmitting during a period which took place at some point in time after the beginnings of Islam and possibly until al-Bukhârî’s time. These people thus transmitted it by investing this material with religious authoritativeness – or they may even have transmitted it without any idea of investing it with a religious authority, and their text may have received such authority later on.

The position of scientific research is to suppose that a collection of *hadîths* such as the one of al-Bukhârî includes both these types of *hadîths*, and that each *hadîth* can possibly have been modified or altered during its transmission. It maintains that it is impossible to state precisely if such or such a *hadîth* is close to what historically happened or not.

Nevertheless I believe that an analysis of the content of the text of *hadîths* can be done while putting these issues to one side, and only taking them into consideration when analyzing the results. Regardless of these questions, my current study deals at the very least with what was important for the *muḥaddith* (ancient *hadîth* scholar) al-Bukhârî to transmit to his contemporary believers.

The research I conducted deals with the question: What is the information provided in the collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî about the Qur’ân? In a previous work, I had shown what information was provided about the Qur’ân in the

Qur’ânic text itself, that is, I had analyzed the “self-referential speech” of the Qur’ân¹³. The present article is about exploring how this self-referential speech and the dogmas it generated in the Islamic faith are seen in the *hadîth* texts: Do these latter continue the Qur’ânic speech or bring new specificities about the definition of the Qur’ân?

Let me emphasize at this juncture that this article does not deal with the issue of the global effective link between the Qur’ân and the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of al-Bukhârî. The study of such a link would consist of how the information provided about all the possible topics dealt with by the Qur’ânic text – from the story of Muhammad to religious dogmas – appears or does not in the *hadîths* and how; whereas in this article the focus is only on one particular topic: the description of the Qur’ân.

In the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of al-Bukhârî, speech about the Qur’ân is scattered in different chapters, and is expressed in both explicit and implicit ways. The *Ṣaḥîḥ* is divided into 97 chapters about very eclectic topics, which reflect the divisions of the sub-disciplines of Islamic law. Each chapter lists a number of entries, whose title usually provides the juridical application or the dogmatic concept which is supported in it. Following each entry are a number of *hadîth* units which are related more or less to the entry topic – and more or less to the chapter topic – and next to these *hadîths* appears a commentary here and there, some Qur’ânic verses, and some information which looks like a *matn* without *isnâd*. The same *hadîth* appears in several chapters and entries, either in an identical shape or in a variant shape (same story or same idea transmitted, but with different details in the *matn* and/or different *isnâd*). Most probably al-Bukhârî tried to obtain as many deductions as possible out of a single *hadîth*, and thus he classified it in as many

⁸ Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadîth*, 1994.

⁹ Motzki (ed.), *Hadîth. Origins and Developments*, 2004; and Motzki, e.a., *Analysing Muslim Traditions. Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghâzî Hadîth*, 2009.

¹⁰ For instance, Hilali, “Compiler, exclure, cacher. Les traditions dites « forgées » dans l’Islam sunnite (VIe/XIIe siècle),” 2011.

¹¹ For instance, Daaif, “Dévôts et ‘renonçants’ : l’autre catégorie de forgeurs de hadîths,” 2010.

¹² For instance, Boekhoff-Van Der Voort, e.a. (ed.), *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam*, 2011.

¹³ Boisliveau, “*Le Coran par lui-même*”: *l’autoréférence dans le texte coranique*, (doctoral thesis), 2010.

entries as possible; when doing so, he usually gave only one or few versions of this *hadîth* in one entry, and put the other versions in other places.

Several chapters have titles explicitly relating to the Qur'ân. The one which provides the most explicit discourse on the Qur'ân is Chapter B66¹⁴, entitled *Fadâ'il al-qur'ân*, namely, the “excellent qualities of the Qur'ân.” It is located in the middle of the collection, after the chapter on qur'ânic commentary. It deals with miscellaneous aspects of the Qur'ân, from the mode of the revelation of the first verses to Muhammad, to the powers given to the performance of recitation of such and such a surah. Chapter B96, the penultimate chapter, concerns the fact of “relying on the Scripture of God (i.e., the Qur'ân) and the Sunna” (*al-i'tisâm bi-l-kitâb wa-l-sunna*). It reminds the reader of the precedence of the Qur'ân, but even more so the precedence of *Sunna*, and then describes late elements such as the role of the Islamic judge (*qâdî*). Chapter B65 is an interpretative commentary (*tafsîr*) of parts of the Qur'ân: it is similar to classical works of *tafsîr*, commenting on the verses in their qur'ânic order by quoting related *hadîths* which provide either the circumstances of the apparition of verses, or words and deeds of Muhammad, or his companions which in some way bring about an interpretation of the verses. The last chapter, B97, is called *Tawhîd*, “Of the unicity of God,” but is far from concerned only with the idea of the oneness of God. Indeed the term *tawhîd* had, in the first centuries of Islam, come to designate the whole science of Islamic dogmas. It thus deals with issues debated by later theologians, such as the names and attributes of God, free will, and the importance of the Qur'ân. Chapter B17 is entitled “Of prostration [during] the recitation [of the Qur'ân]” (*sujûd al-qur'ân*). A number of other chapters are associated with this chapter, more particularly B8 to B22, as well as chapters linked to the ritual purification required to perform the recitation (B4, B5, B7).

Nevertheless, the information about the Qur'ân does not appear only in the chapters I just mentioned but are everywhere in the collection. What is more, some titles are not followed by related elements; thus it was necessary to research not only the chapters I mentioned above but the whole corpus – although I excluded from my scope of inquiry the *tafsîr* chapter, as I estimated this would require a specific study unto itself.

To the best of my knowledge, a study of this question has not been done before. The great *hadîth* scholar G. Juynboll dealt partially with the definition of revelation by the *hadîth* texts; but in so far as the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of Bukhârî is concerned, his study seems limited to the chapters *Ba'd al-wahy* and *Fadâ'il al-Qur'ân*, and he only briefly mentions the *tafsîr* chapter¹⁵. Rather, his main concern is the analysis of the transmission of each *hadîth*, whereas my work focuses on the contents of the *hadîths* (*matn*) and not on the chains of transmitters.

Summary of the results

Before starting this work, I had supposed that, contrary to what is the case in the qur'ânic text, *hadîth* texts would deal only (as far as the Qur'ân is concerned) with prescribing “how to behave towards the Qur'ân,” especially towards the Qur'ân as a material object, for instance, describing the rules of purity to respect when handling the book of the Qur'ân. But my work on speech about the Qur'ân in the *hadîth* collection of al-Bukhârî has enabled me to grasp that such was not the case. Indeed, on the one hand, the text presents notions about the status of the Qur'ân that al-Bukhârî – or the other people involved in the origin and transmission of these *hadîths* – had about it, or wanted the reader to have about it. On the other hand, the text deals with the performance of reading-recitation-psalmody of the Qur'ân, and all the obligations which go along with this.

The first part of my study showed that a substantial part of the text was used to support and reinforce the status of the qur'ânic text, and the authority which proceeds from it.

This concerns first, of course, the definition of what the qur'ânic text is, that is, what are its delimitations, its origin, and its mode of transmission. Nevertheless, in many *hadîths* these elements are implied and not directly expressed. As in the qur'ânic text, parts of these elements

¹⁴ My way of quoting the *Ṣaḥîḥ* is by the letter “B” for “Bukhârî,” followed by the chapter number and the entry number, followed by the 4-digit general *hadîth* number.

¹⁵ Juynboll, “Hadîth and the Qur'ân,” p. 377.

restate the divine origin of the Qur'ân and its status as sacred scripture – though in a more unostentatious way than in the qur'ânic text. Other parts of these elements mention the history of the Qur'ân and its modes of transmission, both during the period of Muhammad's life and after his death.

Second, speech concerning the role of the Qur'ân completes the qur'ânic speech on the same topic. Compared to what happens in the latter, the role is described in the *hadîth* text as a role of guidance: the Qur'ân guides the believers. But this role is presented here as its role as a source of political and juridical authority – although only very few *hadîths* deal with this matter. The idea that the role of the Qur'ân includes granting the possibility to Muhammad of being exempt from certain habitual practices is also expressed but very rarely. Another idea is that the *Sunna* also starts to play a part in the role of guidance, and not just the Qur'ân itself.

The third point concerns a speech on the “excellent qualities” (*faḍâ'il*) of the Qur'ân. These “qualities” are not directly expressed in the qur'ânic text; nevertheless, it develops speech about the superiority of the Qur'ân to the other sacred scriptures and to any human word. In the collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî, the “excellent qualities” of the qur'ânic text are directly expressed and are intertwined with the “excellent qualities” which appear through – or proceed from – the performing of the reading-recitation-psalmody of this text. The believer who performs it deserves the credit for it, and, at the same time, his performing of it is described as being able to generate certain powers (healing powers, notably) and, at the very least, as being of special importance.

The second part of my study analyzed the other important component of the speech about the Qur'ân which is displayed in the *hadîths* collected by al-Bukhârî: a speech about the qur'ânic reading-reciting-psalmody. Through my research I became aware that it is necessary to describe this performance by these three words (reading, reciting, and psalmody) in order to understand what is exactly meant by what is usually termed “recitation.” First, this speech presents the modes of this “recitation,” and the modes of the process of learning it by heart. Second, it provides details about the circumstances, under which

such a “recitation” has to be performed. I noted the specific place for what is called *ṣalât* (“ritual prayer”), and the presence of the “recitation” at the heart of many everyday rituals. Third, the speech of *hadîth* deals with the bodily movements and postures, as well as the practical conditions necessary for the performance of the “recitation.” This latter dimension is the one which takes up the most space in speech about the Qur'ân that one can find in the collection of al-Bukhârî.

Thus, the results of my inquiry are as follows. Speech about the Qur'ân in the collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî is composed of:

- 1) a confirmation of the positive status given to the Qur'ân – in continuity with speech which is developed in the qur'ânic text; and
- 2) the institution or confirmation of practice accompanying the performance of the reading-reciting-psalmody, and the institution or confirmation of the performance of this reading-reciting-psalmody itself.

1) *Confirmation of the positive status given to the Qur'ân*

The *hadîths* of the *Ṣaḥîḥ* of al-Bukhârî developed a positive discourse on the Qur'ân by confirming its authoritativeness as proceeding from its divine origin – just as does the positive discourse put forth in the qur'ânic text. Some *hadîths* even extend this speech to the period after the death of the prophet. Nevertheless this affirmation of the authority of the Qur'ân is not as strong or as developed as it is in the qur'ânic text. It does not represent the main part of the speech conveyed by the *hadîths*. Indeed, the idea that the Qur'ân is what God has transmitted to Muhammad, and that Muhammad has transmitted this without alteration, seems to be an idea already known and believed among the community of people producing or receiving this collection of *hadîths* – even though one can feel the expression of a need for a reaffirmation of this idea.

What is more, beyond the reaffirmation of the dogma of qur'ânic authoritativeness, the *hadîths* also provide stories of characters (Muhammad and his companions) with

whom the believer is called upon to become acquainted, and towards whom he is pressed to feel confidence and familiarity. The acquaintance with or even intimacy with the character of Muhammad reinforces his status – that of an authentic prophet – and therefore, reinforces the idea that the Qur’ân is of divine origin.

2) *Institution or confirmation of practice around the performance of the reading-reciting-psalmody*

The *hadîth* sets up – or confirms – the practice of reading-reciting-psalmody and all the other practices which accompany its performance, notably, the ritual of *ṣalât*, and by means of everyday circumstances. My research led me to some observations:

2a) The reading-reciting-psalmody and the practices around it appear as *a mode, a dealing with the power of the Qur’ân*, that is, a mode of human reaction or human response when face-to-face with a sacred power (the power of the Qur’ân). After all, the speech on the “recitation,” and the way it has to be performed, makes explicit *how the authoritative status of the Qur’ân has to be “dealt with” by the believers*. In other words, it states what has to be done when faced with the strong affirmation about the authoritative status of the qur’ânic text: What does this affirmation entail for those who subscribe to it? In this regard, performing the reading-reciting-psalmody means demonstrating the acknowledgement and faith that one has in this authoritative status. It also demonstrates how conciliatory and submissive the believer is towards the source of power. This source of power is seen as supernatural: It is considered to be God, as the author of the Qur’ân. Thus, to deal with this source of power appears to be difficult for the human believer, because he cannot master it. His only possible response is to seek ways to express his submission in order to reduce the arbitrariness of potential punishment by the source of power.

2b) Showing acknowledgment of the authoritative status of the Qur’ân has consequences for the

believer: This generates an even greater certainty about this authoritative status. By integrating practices linked to the reading-reciting-psalmody in his daily life – as is strongly suggested by the *hadîth* text – in a repetitive way and without neglecting any aspect of his life, the believer tends to believe even more in this status. Furthermore, these practices have a social dimension: When all the believers practice together all these rituals around the “recitation,” then they persuade one another of the veracity of the authoritative status of the Qur’ân and of the necessity of performing such rituals. Their belief in this authoritative status is reinforced by practice.

2c) Finally, what should be noted is that the *hadîth* text strongly implies that the relationship between the believer and the Qur’ân has to be “external.” By “external” I mean here that what is seen to be of primary importance is not the relationship of the believer with the heart of the text, its contents, and its meanings. Rather, what is important appears here to be the relationship of the believer to, on the one hand, the status of the text (through rituals he reminds himself constantly of the authoritative status of the Qur’ân) and with, on the other hand, the oral shape of the text: its pronunciation, its sounds, the physical feeling of the bodily movements that accompany the “recitation,” and the obligations surrounding this. The attention of the believer does not need to focus on the text but rather on its recitation and what accompanies this performance.

This very point is related to the ambivalence I noticed in the use of the word *qur’ân*. *Qur’ân* means “recitation” and designates both the qur’ânic text and the performance of its reading-recitation-psalmody, and I have pointed out that, in the *hadîth* texts, most of the time it designates this performance. The Qur’ân is seen first as the performance of the recitation of its text, rather than the text itself and its meanings. Furthermore, and more precisely, what seems more important in the performance of reciting the Qur’ân is not even this recitation but what surrounds it and accompanies it (bodily movements, postures, conditions for performing it). Of course, the contents of the Qur’ân have

an importance; however, it appears that according to the *hadîth* texts, this is far less important than its status and its oral shape, and these are even far less important than the way the believer has to deal with them every day.

Thus, the *hadîths* collected and presented by al-Bukhârî go in the same direction as the qur'ânic text. According to both, what prevails is the status of the Qur'ân and not its contents¹⁶. But whereas in the qur'ânic text this status is viewed abstractly, in the *hadîth* texts it is viewed from the standpoint of “what one has to do” when being aware of this status. In the *hadîth* texts, the believer's submission towards the Qur'ân is manifested through an everyday repetition of movements and words – not by an abstractive debate on its status.

There is a slight drawback that I should mention here. The “speech on the Qur'ân” in the *hadîth* collection of al-Bukhârî is not restricted to the two aspects I have dealt with. In the collection of al-Bukhârî, information is also gathered about the interpretation of the qur'ânic text and about rules for this interpretation, mainly in the chapter called *tafsîr* (“exegesis, commentary”) (B65). I did not research this chapter, as it deserves a study unto itself but would like to do so soon to deepen the analysis. Nevertheless I noticed that this implies the authoritative text has to be understood through specific traditions, that is, according to what has been transmitted from the interpretation of early scholars. Thus, while an important part of the *hadîths* deals with the affirmation of the authoritative status of the Qur'ân, another part seeks paradoxically at providing a framework (i.e., limits) for its interpretation. Even when the authority of the Qur'ân is put forth, its interpretation is henceforth bound by the limits, criteria, and guidance canonical *hadîth* texts impose. This argues again in favor of a concern for the claim of the status of the Qur'ân, rather than for the study of its text.

The core conclusion of my work is that the *relationship of the believer towards the Qur'ân is here one of external performance*. The believer is called upon to perform recitations within the framework of definite rituals such as *ṣalât*, together with definite bodily movements in definite time periods. These rituals and the movements, postures, and time conditions are what have to be done; thus they are considered as the most important thing for the believer.

The collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî – and the earlier *hadîths* it includes – are designed in order to prompt the believer towards an *external* concept of the recitation of the Qur'ân. The believer has to put all his effort into performing the exact bodily movements that accompany this reading-recitation-psalmody and into respecting its imposed conditions. And putting all one's effort into a performance leads to the thinking that this performance is of extremely great importance. The *Ṣaḥîḥ* does not teach the believer – in so far as what concerns the Qur'ân – to put all his effort into understanding the divine message. On the contrary, it teaches the believer to put all his effort into a technical practice which accompanies the recitation (and to a lesser extent to the technical pronunciation of the text). Thus, *the believer is lead to see the importance of these technical performances (postures, bodily movements, conditions, pronunciation), and this is what constitutes, taken as a whole, his relationship towards the Qur'ân.*

In reinforcement of these conclusions, I observed that there are some, rather few, *hadîths* which concern the “application” of the Qur'ân. What is meant here by “application” is rather “to pay attention when the Qur'ân is recited” or “to perform the recitation with sincerity.” According to Ibn 'Abbâs, in the verse “When We recite it, then, follow its recitation!”¹⁷ “follow its recitation” means, act according to it (*i'mal bihi*)¹⁸. But in another *hadîth* about the same qur'ânic passage, again according to Ibn 'Abbâs, this means “listen to it and pay great attention to it” (*istami' lahu wa-nṣit*)¹⁹. The same appears in a *hadîth* which

¹⁶ What is more, a significant part of the contents of the qur'ânic text is itself the affirmation of its status. Cf. Boisliveau, “*Le Coran par lui-même*”.

¹⁷ Q75: 18. In this verse, the word for recitation is qur'ân.

¹⁸ B65, (surah 75), 2 - بِأَبِّ قَوْلِهِ (فَيَذَّاءُ قِرْآنَهُ) وَاللَّيْلُ قِرْآنَهُ (قَالَ أَبُو عَبَّاسٍ) عَمَلٌ بِهِ .

¹⁹ B96, 43 (7524) حَدَّثَنَا قُتَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عَوَانَةَ عَنْ مَوْسَى بْنِ أَبِي عَتَابَةَ عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ جَبْرِ عَنْ أَبِي عَبَّاسٍ فِي قَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى (لَا تُحْرَكُ بِهِ لِسَانُكَ) قَالَ كَانَ النَّبِيُّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - يُعَلِّمُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ شَيْئًا ، وَكَانَ يُحْرَكُ شَفْتَيْهِ - قَتَالَ لِي أَبُو عَبَّاسٍ يُحْرَكُهُمَا لِلَّذِي كَمَا كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - يُحْرَكُهُمَا إِذْ قَالَ سَعِيدٌ أَنَا أُحْرَكُهُمَا كَمَا كَانَ أَبُو عَبَّاسٍ يُحْرَكُهُمَا فَحَرَكْتُ شَفْتَيْهِ - فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ (لَا تُحْرَكُ بِهِ لِسَانُكَ) لِيُعْمَلَ بِهِ إِنْ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعُهُ وَقِرْآنَهُ (قَالَ جَمْعُهُ فِي صَدْرِكَ ثُمَّ تَقْرؤُهُ . (فَيَذَّاءُ قِرْآنَهُ) فَاتَّبَعْتُ قِرْآنَهُ (قَالَ فَاسْتَمِعْتُ لَهُ وَأَنْصَبْتُ ثُمَّ إِنْ عَلَيْنَا أَنْ تَقْرؤَهُ . قَالَ فَكَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - إِذَا أَنَا جَبْرِيلُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ - اسْتَمِعْتُ فَيَذَّاءُ انْطَلَقَ جَبْرِيلُ قِرْآنَهُ النَّبِيُّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - وَكَمَا أَقْرؤَهُ .

compares different types of people to different sorts of fruits according to their different types of beliefs and practice of recitation²⁰. In one of its versions, it is said that the best type of people are the believers who recite the Qur'ân and “act according to it” [or: apply it] (*ya 'malu bihi*)²¹, as opposed to the believers who do not recite it, and a fortiori to the “hypocrites” who recite and to the “hypocrites” who do not recite. Therefore, “to apply the Qur'ân” does not mean to believe in the dogma and in the contents of the Qur'ânic text – as this is what any believer would do – but rather, “to apply the Qur'ân” means in this case to perform the recitation sincerely. The performance of a sincere recitation is better than belief alone. In other words, according to this *hadîth*, “to apply the Qur'ân” or “acting according to the Qur'ân” means to recite with sincere intention and not “to apply the principles of the Qur'ân in one's everyday life”. (Let me specify here that this does not mean that to apply the principles of the Qur'ân is not considered a good thing!) But what is to be noted here is that once more the relationship of the believer towards the Qur'ân is a relationship towards *its recitation*, before it could possibly be a relationship towards the meaning of its contents.

This research has enabled me to show the conceptualization of the relationship of the believer towards the Qur'ân as is put forth by the collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî: the concept of an *external* relationship. The collection seems to have been designed in order to be influential in three ways: via establishing proximity and familiarity with the life of Muhammad as presented, via positive speech about the status of the Qur'ân, and via the institution or description of practices such as recitation and what accompanies its performance.

But is it the *Ṣaḥîh* of al-Bukhârî which effectively, and historically, influenced Muslim practice (and the Muslim vision of the relationship of the believer towards the Qur'ân) – or was this practice an already ongoing practice (and the vision of the relationship towards the Qur'ân already spread) when the *Ṣaḥîh* was composed? This ques-

tion remains open to discussion. I suppose, however, that the answer would be doubly positive: these practices could possibly have already been ongoing at that time and would have been then reinforced by their description and “officialization” in the *Ṣaḥîh*. The same goes for the vision of the relationship towards the Qur'ân.

Indeed, the collection of *hadîths* of al-Bukhârî, together with the one of Muslim, strongly influenced generations and generations of Sunni jurists. The concept of “Qur'ânic revelation” that it sets forth participates highly in the construction of Islamic belief.

One can note here a connection with traditional ways of dealing with the Qur'ân, for instance, in Qur'ânic schools in West Africa in more recent time periods. The Qur'ân is learned by heart through the practice of reading-recitation without concern for the meaning when the student is at an early age; it is only when older that the student reaches the stage of knowledge where Qur'ânic commentaries are introduced. Furthermore, the relationship towards the Qur'ân is implemented in practices related to the body, as, for instance, the act of licking or drinking the ink which has been used to write the Qur'ânic text on the tablet in order to erase it and symbolically to absorb it²². The external relationship to the text – even though here in a highly physical dimension – seems to preponderate here as well.

²⁰ Particularly B66, 17 (5020).

²¹ B66, 36 (5059).

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى عَنْ شُعْبَةَ عَنْ قَتَادَةَ عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى عَنِ النَّبِيِّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - قَالَ « الْمُؤْمِنُ الَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ وَيَحْمِلُ بِهِ كَالْفَرْحَةِ ، طَعَمَهَا طَيْبٌ وَرِيحُهَا طَيْبٌ ، وَالْمُؤْمِنُ الَّذِي لَا يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ وَيَحْمِلُ بِهِ كَالثَّمَرَةِ ، طَعَمَهَا طَيْبٌ وَلَا رِيحَ لَهَا ، وَمَثَلُ الْمُنَافِقِ الَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ كَالرَّيْحَانَةِ ، رِيحُهَا طَيْبٌ وَطَعَمُهَا مُرٌّ ، وَمَثَلُ الْمُنَافِقِ الَّذِي لَا يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ كَالْحَتَّالَةِ ، طَعَمُهَا مُرٌّ - أَوْ حَبِيبٌ - وَرِيحُهَا مُرٌّ » .

²² See, for instance, the works of Rudolph T. Ware: “Qur'ân Schooling, Society, and State in Senegambia, c.1600-2000”; “Comment (ne pas) lire le Coran : Logiques de l'enseignement religieux au Sénégal et en Côte d'Ivoire.”

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