

Oldest known Koran text fragments discovered

July 23 2015, by Bob Yirka



Credit: University of Birmingham

Two pages of text written on parchment that are believed to be sections of the Koran (Chapters 18 and 20) have been discovered by a PhD student in a British university library and are believed to be the oldest ever found. The two pages, written in Hijazi, were discovered by Alba Fedeli bound in a newer version of the Koran in the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham in the U.K.

It is believed that the Koran was written by people close to Mohammad after Caliph Abu Bakr ordered collections of Koranic material be put into book form. The words are believed to have come to Mohammad through the angel Gabriel—he passed them on to associates who originally wrote them down on stone tablets, leaves, even the shoulder blades of camels. Mohammad is believed to have lived from 570 to 632

A.D., with his associations with the angel occurring over the last decade of his life.

Fedeli has told the press that she was studying Koranic material in the Mingana Collection when she came across the early Koran and noticed that a couple of pages appeared to have been written by a different person. After reporting what she had found to officials at the University, the parchment was carbon dated and was found to have been made sometime between 568 and 645 A.D., making the discovery the oldest Koran fragment ever found. So old in fact, that it appears the pages were created very nearly around the time when Mohammad was still alive, or very shortly after his death, which means it is possible it was written by someone that actually knew him. The team still has to test the ink however, because it is possible the text was not put onto the parchment until a much later date.

The fragments, and the older Koran text in which they were found are part of a collection amassed in the 1920's by Alphonse Mingana, an Iraqi Chaldean priest—they have been part of the Birmingham library collection (which consists of over 3,000 documents purchased in the Middle East) and housed for nearly a hundred years in Britain, which means the newly found text has been hiding in plain sight for nearly a century.

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