

Was Muhammad Illiterate?

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Muslims like to say, "how could a man who didn't know how to read or write produce the Koran?" Well first, Muhammad most certainly could read and write. The fact that he ran a major business proves he could. Unless he could read and write, he could not properly run his business affairs. Second, the Koran wasn't even written during the time of Muhammad, so even if he couldn't read or write, it is obvious he never saw the Koran, as Muslims have it today.

- Whatever Arabic tradition may have assumed from a wrong interpretation of a word in the Koran, it seems certain that Muhammad learned to read and write. But except for a few vague and unreliable pointers in his life and work we have no way of knowing the extent of his learning. (Mohammed, Maxime Rodinson, 1961, translated by Anne Carter, 1971, p 38-49)
- The Meccans were in general familiar with reading and writing. A certain amount of writing would be necessary for commercial purposes. (Muhammad's Mecca, W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-53)
- In view of this familiarity with writing among the Meccans particularly, both for records and for religious scriptures, there is a presumption that Muhammad knew at least enough to keep commercial records. (Muhammad's Mecca, W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-53)
- The probability is that Muhammad was able to read and write sufficiently for business purposes, but it seems certain that he had not read any scriptures. This conclusion gives Muslim scholars all that is essential for apologetic purposes. They have, however, argued that the word ummi which is applied to Muhammad implies complete inability to read and write. One of their arguments is that the plural ummiyyun in 2.78 means 'illiterate' or 'unlettered': 'among them are ummiyyun who do not know the book except from hearsay'. The rendering 'except from hearsay' (which is Pickthall's) is much disputed but hardly affects the argument. While kitab suggests writing as well as 'book', careful reading of the verse shows that the reference is to people without a written scripture, and Pickthall in fact translates kitdb as 'scripture'. This meaning suits the other instances where the plural occurs. In 3.75 some of the People of the Book say, 'We are not bound to justice in respect of the ummiyyun'; and from this it may be concluded that the word has been adopted from the People of the Book, that is, the Jews. The Jews, however, applied it to others and not to themselves, for

* I do not agree with many of the views displayed on www.bible.ca. However, I still chose to present this article because it offers some valid points to consider.

in 3.20 Muhammad is commanded, 'Say to the People of the Book and the ummiyyun, Have you surrendered (to God)?' The ummiyyun, then, must be the non-Jews or Gentiles, who had no written scriptures and were in fact 'heathen' (as often translated); the word has presumably been derived from the Hebrew phrase ummot ha-'olan, the peoples of the world' or genties. This sense of ummi as 'Gentile' or 'unscriptured' fits the verses where it is applied to Muhammad: (God) it is who sent among the ummiyyun a messenger, (one) of themselves, to recite to them his signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom, though before they were in clear error. (62.2) Again God is described as saying to Moses that his mercy will be 'written' for those 'who follow the messenger, the ummi prophet, whom they find written in the Torah and the Evangel which they have . . .' (7.157). In the next verse Muhammad is commanded to address all the people and to conclude with the words: 'so believe in God, his messenger, the ummi prophet, who believes in God and his words' (7.158). Thus the ummi' prophet is the non-Jewish or Gentile prophet, whom Muslims held to be foretold in the Bible, and who was sent by God to his own non-Jewish or heathen people, as well as to the Jews and perhaps the Christians. Thus ummi does not mean 'illiterate' in the strict sense, though it could be rendered 'unscriptured'; but this still means-as is indeed obvious-that Muhammad had no direct knowledge of the Bible. (Muhammad's Mecca, W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-53)

Muhammad was not a prophet of God but the inventor of Islam.

The religion of Islam simply did not exist anywhere in history prior to Muhammad. Inventing the myth that Jesus and Abraham were Muslims in the 600's AD is further proof that Islam, as practiced today, was conceived in the 7th century. Even this devout Muslim admits that Islam was unknown before Muhammad came along:

"SINCE WHEN IS ANYONE A MUSLIM? Islam began as a world religious movement in the first decade of the seventh century C.E. in the city of Makkah (Mecca) in Arabia. It was taught by Muhammad, son of 'Abdullah, of the tribe of Quraysh and the clan of Hashim. When Muhammad was forty years old, he began to have visions in which God sent down a series of revelations through the Angel Gabriel. The revelations, recited in Arabic form, were a disclosure not of God, but of His will or commandments." (Islam, Isma'il R. Al Faruqi 1984, p13-14, Muslim)

Other notes and Quotes:

1. Was Muhammad a prophet? He was a man in whom creative imagination worked at deep levels and produced ideas relevant to the central questions of human existence, so that his religion has had a widespread appeal, not only in his own age but in succeeding centuries. Not all the ideas he proclaimed are true and sound, but by God's grace he has been enabled to provide millions of men with a better religion than they had before they testified that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God. (Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman, W. Montgomery Watt, 1961, p229-235)
2. If it is true, as we are often told, that Christianity is Christ, there is also a sense in which it is true that Islam is Muhammad. It was from his preaching in seventh-century Arabia that the religion got its start. Its Scripture, the Qur'an, bears the impress of his mind, with its enthusiasms and its limitations, from the first page to the last. The sunna enshrined in the corpus of Traditions, both canonical and uncanonical, is from one point of view nothing more than an attempt to get Muhammad's personal authority as backing for every detail of public or private conduct. In this sense it is an attempt to provide the faithful Muslim with material for an imitatio Muhammedis more far-reaching in its consequences than any imitatio Christi has ever been. (Islam: Muhammad and His Religion, Arthur Jeffery, 1958, p 3-4)
3. WAS MUHAMMAD A PROPHET? ... I would begin by asserting that there is found, at least in some men, what may be called 'creative imagination'. Notable instances are artists, poets and imaginative writers. (Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman, W. Montgomery Watt, 1961, p229-235)
4. Once established in Madina, Muhammad became less a preacher and prophet than a community leader and man of state, and we witness that curious change of character which develops steadily until his death from a wasting fever in 632. (Islam: Muhammad and His Religion, Arthur Jeffery, 1958, p 3-4)
5. In Muhammad, I should hold, there was a welling up of the creative imagination, and the ideas thus produced are to a great extent true and sound. It does not follow, however, that all the Qur'anic ideas are true and sound. In particular there is at least one point at which they seem to be unsound. The idea that 'revelation' or the product of the creative imagination is superior to normal human traditions as a source of bare historical fact. There are several verses in the Qur'an (II. 51; 3. 39; 12. 103) to the effect that 'this is one of the reports of the unseen which We

reveal to thee; thou didst not know it, thou nor thy people, before this '. One could admit a claim that the creative imagination was able to give a new and truer interpretation of a historical event, but to make it a source of bare fact is an exaggeration and false. (Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman, W. Montgomery Watt, 1961, p229-235)

Jinns.

Islamic belief in Jinn is superstitious Arab paganism. Jinn are unique to Arab paganism. Jinn are the "mythical bad guys" of Arab culture. Rather than discarding the wide spread concept of the "Jinn" believed by the Pagan Arabs, Muhammad rubber stamped these mythical manmade creatures and brought them right into the Koran!

1. EARLY Arab history is a mixture of fact and fantasy ... Tradition tells us that Allah made the jinn two thousand years before He made Adam. Though invisible, they loved and married, begat children and died. In the beginning, all jinn were good, but long before the time of Adam they rebelled against their settled existence and tried to change the order of things. During the course of the revolt, one of the evil jinn, Iblis, gained great power and became the Satan of the Arab world. Iblis retained his power even after the angels of Allah had quelled the rebellion. Jinn haunted ruins and dwelt in rivers and oceans. The Arab saw them in whirlwinds and waterspouts. The jinn's main abode, however, was a mysterious mountain called Kaf which, in the imagination of the Arab, was founded on an immense emerald. Indeed, this sparkling gem gave the azure tint to the sun's rays so often in evidence over desert regions. (Islam and the Arabs, Rom Landau, 1958 p 11-21)
2. The Bedouin peopled the desert with living things of beastly nature called jinn or demons. These jinn differ from the gods not so much in their nature as in their relation to man. The gods are on the whole friendly; the jinn, hostile. The latter are, of course, personifications of the fantastic notions of the terrors of the desert and its wild animal life. To the gods belong the regions frequented by man; to the jinn belong the unknown and untrodden parts of the wilderness. A madman (majnun) is but one possessed by the jinn. With Islam the number of jinn was increased, since the heathen deities were then degraded into such beings.'(History Of The Arabs, Philip K. Hitti, 1937, p 96-101)

3. "Before Islam, the religions of the Arabic world involved the worship of many spirits, called jinn. Allah was but one of many gods worshiped in Mecca. But then Muhammad taught the worship of Allah as the only God, whom he identified as the same God worshiped by Christians and Jews." (A Short History of Philosophy, Robert C. Solomon, p. 130)
4. Among these gods there may be some that were originally jinn, mythical ancestors or legendary heroes, elevated little by little to the rank of god. On the other hand, some of the gods developed directly from the personification of natural forces (in Quzah, for example, one may still discern the features of a storm god). It should not be thought, however, that these gods must first have passed through a spirit or demon stage, and that celestial beings are posterior to earth spirits." Pre-Islamic Arabic stellar myths (which are, at least in part, Bedouin in origin)" prove that the sky was studied and that stars also were personified. (Studies on Islam, edited by Merlin L. Swartz, Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion, by Joseph Henninger, 1981, p 3-22)
5. There are also references to magic practices, notably a mysterious process of 'blowing on knots'(113.4). A defense against magic was to 'take refuge with (adha) some superior power. The last two suras of the Qur'an are formulas of 'taking refuge' against certain specified evils, and are known as the Mu'awwidbatayn. In these two suras and elsewhere Muslims are encouraged to 'take refuge with God' both from Satan (7-200; 16.98; 41.36) and from men (40-56; etc.); pagans are criticized for 'taking refuge' with jinn (72.6). All this shows something of the variety of religious practice in Arabia the Arabia of 600 AD. (Muhammad's Mecca, W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic, p26-45)
6. There is much in the Qur'an about both angels and jinn, but apart from this identification with the goddesses they belong not to the divine world but to the created world, in which they constitute orders distinct from that of human beings. Some of the jinn even became Muslims (72-1-19). Muhammad's Mecca, W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p 26-45)

Other notes and Quotes:

- "Arabian literature has its own version of prehistoric times, but it is entirely legendary." (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 2: 176)
- "there is no historical evidence for the assertion that Abraham or Ishmael was ever in Mecca, and if there had been such a tradition it would have to be explained how all memory of the Old Semitic name Ishmael (which was not in its true Arabian form in Arabian inscriptions and written correctly with an initial consonant Y) came to be lost. The form in the Quran is taken either from Greek or Syriac sources." (Islam, Alfred Guillaume, 1956, p 26-27, 61-62)
- The first positive reference to the Arabians extant occurs in an inscription of the Assyrian, Shalmaneser III, who speaks of the capture of a thousand camels from Gindibu, the Arabian, in 854 B.C. (Islam and the Arabs, Rom Landau, 1958 p 11-21)
- According to Muslim tradition, God told Abraham to begin the rite of pilgrimage to Becca (now Mecca). In a rite called tawaf, Arab pilgrims from time immemorial circled the stone counterclockwise seven times and ran seven times between the two promontories in memory of Hagar's seven passages. The historicity of this Abrahamic tradition is difficult to confirm; the first verifiable reference to the Arab people occurs in an inscription of Shalmaneser III dated 853 BC. (The Joy of Sects, Peter Occhigrosso, 1996, p394-397)
- "The pure Arabs are those who claim to be descended from Joktan or Qahtan, whom the present Arabs regard as their principle founder...The 'Arabu 'l-Musta'ribah, the mixed Arabs, claim to be descended from Ishmael. they boast as much as the Jews of being reckoned the children of Abraham. This circumstance will account for the preference with which they uniformly regard this branch of their pedigree, and for the many romantic legends they have grafted upon it...The Arabs, in their version of Ishmael's history, have mixed a great deal of romance with the narrative of Scripture." (A Dictionary of Islam, pgs. 18-19)
- "Muhammad was not informed about the family of Abraham." (Encyclopedia of Islam) I: 184. See also pages 544-546.
- "There is a prevalent notion that the Arabs, both of the south and north, are descended from Ishmael; and the passage in Gen. xvi.12, "he (Ishmael) shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren," is often cited as if it were a prediction of that national independence which, upon the whole, the Arabs have maintained more than any other people. But this supposition is founded on a

misconception of the original Hebrew, which runs literally, "he shall be before the faces of all his brethren," i.e., (according to the idiom above explained, in which "before the face" denotes the east), the habitation of his posterity shall be "to the east" of the settlements of Abraham's other descendants...These prophecies found their accomplishment in the fact of the sons of Ishmael being located, generally speaking to the east of the other descendants of Abraham, whether of Sara or of Ketuah. But the idea of the southern Arabs being of the posterity of Ishmael is entirely without foundation, and seems to have originated in the tradition invented by Arab vanity that they, as well as the Jews, are of the seed of Abraham--a vanity which, besides disfiguring and falsifying the whole history of the patriarch and his son Ishmael, has transferred the scene of it from Palestine to Mecca." (McClintock and Strong, Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, (Vol. 1:339)

- In the Qur'an, "Gen. 21.17-21...are identified with Mecca." (The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam, p. 193). It also states that the Southern Arabs come from Qahtan, not Ishmael (p. 48).