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# *Taḥrīf* in the Digital Age<sup>1</sup>

*Sara Schulthess*

## 1 Introduction

The present subject occurred to me during my research about the role of the Internet in the discipline of New Testament textual criticism.<sup>2</sup> If one is interested in New Testament textual criticism and conducts research on the Internet wanting to know more about manuscripts, ancient versions, editions, etc., one will quickly find Islamic websites presenting topics on New Testament textual criticism. This fact, though it might be surprising to some, is actually related to a classical topic in Islamic debates against Christianity, the *taḥrīf*. To understand this unexpected meeting between a specialized field and a notion, which over time involved into polemics, it is first necessary to establish the definition of the notion and then its interesting historical development. Thereafter, we will analyze how *taḥrīf* is used in the digital age and interacts with New Testament textual criticism.

## 2 Definition

According to Lazarus-Yafeh, *taḥrīf* means:

[C]hange, alteration, forgery; used with regard to words, and more specifically with regard to what Jews and Christians are supposed to have done to their respective Scriptures, in the sense of perverting the language through altering words from their proper meaning, changing words in form or substituting words or letters for others. (Lazarus-Yafeh 2012)

Caspar and Gaudeul underline the importance of the *taḥrīf* in interreligious relations: “Since the beginning, the *Taḥrīf* (alteration or falsification) of their

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1 The article is part of the Swiss National Science Fondation project no. 143810 (2013–2016), lead by Claire Clivaz, co-lead by David Bouvier, with Sara Schulthess as PhD student (University of Lausanne/SIB), co-direction with Herman Teule (Radboud University Nijmegen).

2 On this topic see e.g. Clivaz 2013 and Schulthess 2013.

Scriptures by Jews or Christians has been one of the main topics in the Islamic-Christian polemic” (Caspar and Gadeul 1990, 61). Does “since the beginning” mean that we already find *tahrīf* in the Qur’ān? In the Qur’ān, we have the same root as in the word *tahrīf* (حرف ḥ-r-f) in four places as a verb, concerning Jews or Christians:

- Al-Baqara (2) 75: “Do you covet [the hope, O believers], that they would believe for you while a party of them used to hear the words of Allah and then distort the Torah after they had understood (*yuḥarrifūnahū*) it while they were knowing?”
- An-Nisā’ (4) 46: “Among the Jews are those who distort words (*yuḥarrifūnahū*) from their [proper] usages and say, ‘We hear and disobey’(...)”
- See also: Al-Mā’ida (5) 13 and 41.

Here in the *Sahih International Translation*, which is a modern translation probably influenced by the today acceptance of *tahrīf*, the verb is translated as “to distort”. In an article about these verses, Nickel renders the verb by ‘to tamper’ (Nickel 2007). Accad underlines the differences between two kinds of *tahrīf*: (1) *tahrīf al-ma’na*: falsification of the meaning, that is a misinterpretation of the text. Accad considers this to be the meaning of the verbs found in the Qur’ān; (2) *tahrīf al-lafẓ* (or *tahrīf an-naṣṣ*): falsification of the text that is an intentional textual corruption (Accad 2003).<sup>3</sup>

This distinction is not new and already existed among early Islamic scholars, for example by Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 1210), the Persian Sunni theologian, exegetist and philosopher, who knows both meanings but prefers the meaning of a textual alteration, as he explains:

The *tahrīf* is either about the text, or about its meaning. But the word *tahrīf* applies better to the alteration of the letter than to the alteration of meaning. Indeed, if the Word of God still is how it was and only its interpretation has been altered, then only its meaning and not the Word of God as we hear it has been changed. So, if this significance (alteration of the text) is possible [...], it should be preferred. If it is not possible, we should apply the word to the alteration of the interpretation [...]. (in *al-tafsīr al-kabīr*, cited in Caspar and Gadeul 1990, 65–66).<sup>4</sup>

3 The idea of scriptural falsification was present in late antiquity (by the Samaritans or the Marcionites, for example). Reynolds rejects a direct influence (Reynolds 2010, 197).

4 All citations from French articles have been translated into English.

### 3 History

Martin Accad postulates that the notion has evolved significantly since the beginning of Islam and as a Christian from the Middle East, he knows how important the *taḥrīf* has become in interreligious dialogue today: “If the accusation of *taḥrīf* has often become the starting point of Muslim-Christian encounter today, it is certainly worth knowing, both for Christians and Muslims, that it has not always been the case, and that it is therefore possible to think otherwise” (Accad 2003, 96).

#### 3.1 *Ibn Ḥazm in the Eleventh Century as the First Turning Point?*

Indeed, before the eleventh century, the notion of *taḥrīf* was not employed polemically: “[...] until the time of Ibn Ḥazm in the eleventh century, the accusation of *taḥrīf* in the sense of ‘intentional corruption of the Holy Scriptures’ was virtually non-existent. [...] In the traditional, pre-Ibn Ḥazm period, the Bible was used ‘positively’ to build pro-Islāmic arguments against Christian doctrines” (Accad 2003, 95). Authors such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrahim ar-Rāsi (d. 860), at-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 850), Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897) quoted from the Gospels to prove the veracity of Islamic claims (as e.g. the prophethood of Muhammed) or to point out Christian errors (Griffith 2003; and 2006).

However, the situation changed after the eleventh century: “In the new approach of Ibn Ḥazm and his inheritors, the Bible is used ‘negatively’ to demonstrate its textual corruption” (Accad 2003, 95). To prove the inconsistency of the Gospels, Ibn Ḥazm insisted on the contradictions in the four Gospels in particular, as it can be seen in this passage:

Matthew and Mark agree to affirm that the first Disciples of Christ were Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, the two sons of Jonas. This happened after the arrest of John the Baptist. Jesus found them throwing their fishing nets into the sea. Now Luke says that they started to be his Disciples when he met them after they landed ashore to wash their nets after a night without fishing anything. And John says that the beginning of the discipleship took place when Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was a fellow of John the Baptist [...]

So here we have four lies about one story. [...] But such things can come neither from God – be he magnified and exalted! – nor from a Prophet, nor from a truthful transmitter. It can only come from an ignominious liar. (In *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī-l-mīlal wa-l-ahwā’ wa-l-niḥal*, cited in Caspar and Gadeul 1990, 78–80)

According to Ibn Ḥazm, the Evangelists are responsible for the incoherencies and have falsified the true Gospel. Those coming after Ibn Ḥazm have adopted this argument and remained suspicious regarding the Christian and Jewish Scriptures until today:

Nevertheless, the most common understanding of the word *tahrīf* among Muslim authors, particularly from the 5th/10th century until today, is the one accusing Jews and Christian of having deliberately falsified the text of their respective Scriptures. (Lazarus-Yafeh 2012).

This evolution of the Islamic conception of the biblical texts, which are not considered as authoritative anymore, is of great importance for the future Islamic-Christian debates (Thomas 2014).

### 3.2 *Modern Biblical Criticism as Second Turning Point?*

“Sometimes Ibn Ḥazm seems [...] to predict modern Biblical criticism”, says Lazarus-Yafeh (1992, 138–139). In fact, the *tahrīf* has engaged with modern criticism over the course of the last centuries. In 1997 Schirmmacher wrote an interesting article proposing that modern biblical criticism as initiated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries influenced Islamic apologetics and their ways of understanding the *tahrīf*:

In the 19th century a new wave of criticism emerged in Europe and quickly found its way into the Muslim world. In European universities all miracles reported in the Old and New Testament were called into question, historical events were doubted, the formulation of Christology, trinity, and the deity of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection were discussed from their very foundation. All these doubts and critical remarks of European theology found their way into the Muslim world and were enthusiastically taken as proofs of the traditional Muslim view of a corrupted Christian Bible. This way of arguing against the reliability of the Old and New Testament has marked the form of controversy especially since al-Kairānawī. (Schirmmacher 1997).

The Islamic scholar Rahmatullah al-Kairānawī (1818–1891) played an important role in this process: “al-Kairānawī was – ostensibly – the very first apologist in the Muslim world who referred to these books and Bible commentaries in order to fight Christianity with its own weapons” (Schirmmacher 1997). The context of his work is the one of British colonization and Indian rebellions, and notably the arrival of protestant missionaries from Germany, with the

figure of Karl Gottlieb Pfander, a German Protestant missionary. In 1854, Pfander and al-Kairānawī take part in a public debate in Agra. Discussion topics as the Trinity, the Qur'an being the Word of God and the sending of the Prophet were planned but it seems that the debate had centered around one subject, namely the *tahrīf*. In 1867, al-Kairānawī wrote *Truth Revealed (Izhār al-ḥaqq)*, which is a response to Pfander's book *Balance of Truth (Mizān al-ḥaqq)*, an apologetic tool for Christian missionaries.<sup>5</sup> Al-Kairānawī's *Izhār al-ḥaqq* contains six books and the first two are about the Bible, its incoherence and its corruption.<sup>6</sup> In book 1, al-Kairānawī mentions similar arguments as Ibn Ḥazm, listing for example the contradictions found in the Bible. In book 2, he focuses on "corruptions of the text" and distinguishes three categories: alterations, omissions and interpolations. To support his arguments, al-Kairānawī frequently cites biblical scholars from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Adam Clarke, Thomas Hartwell Horne, Thomas Scott, Nathaniel Lardner, etc.), as well as the first critical editions of the New Testament, such as the editions of Scholz and Griesbach. It is for example the case in the section "Interpolations" and his analyze of John 5:7–8:

31st proof: We read in the First Letter of John (5:7,8): "For there are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Verb and the Holy Spirit; and these three agree. There are also three that testify on earth: the spirit, the water and the blood, and these three agree." According to exegetes, verse 7 was not in the original text and was added by supporters of the Trinity. Griesbach and Scholz agree with this; Horne, despite his partiality, has to admit it too; and Scott and Adam Clarke are of the same opinion. (al-Kairānawī 1880, 237)

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- 5 Pfander's work, originally published in German in 1829, has three parts: (1) In Proof That The Old Testament And The New Are The Word Of God, And That They Have Been Neither Corrupted Nor Abrogated; (2) Of Which The Aim Is To Set Forth The Principal Doctrines Of The Holy Scriptures, And To Show That Their Teaching Is In Conformity With The Criteria Of The True Revelation As Stated In The Introduction; (3) A Candid Inquiry Into The Claim Of Islam To Be God's Final Revelation. English translation: Pfander, C.G. 1910. *The Mizan ul-Haqq (Balance of Truth)*. Thoroughly Revised and Enlarged By W. St. Clair Tisdall. London. This version can be found on the website *Answering-Islam.org* (see our part 4.3): <<http://answering-islam.org/Books/Pfander/Balance/index.htm>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.
- 6 *Izhār al-ḥaqq* was translated into French in 1880 (see bibliography). The first book is about the Bible and its errors, the second book is about textual corruption of the Bible, the third book is about the question of the abrogation, the fourth book is about the trinity, the fifth book is about the authenticity of the Qur'an and the hadīths, the sixth book is about the Prophet.

Thereafter, he presents in details Horne's external and internal evidences against the presence of verse 7 in the original text. Schirmmacher describes al-Kairānawī and his contemporaries as follows: "[Muslim apologists] feel confirmed in the traditional Muslim view that the Bible is corrupted just as the Qur'an states. Muslim apologists have known this for centuries already, but now European theologians have confirmed it themselves through scientific studies in history, geology or archaeology" (Schirmmacher 1997).<sup>7</sup> If Schirmmacher is right to point out the scientific studies of this time, we can see that al-Kairānawī shows a particular interest for the question of the "original text" of the Bible. The part on "corruptions of the text" is central in his work and compared to the others books, al-Kairānawī paid particular attention to refer regularly to Western scholars.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.3 *Tahrīf Today: New Testament Textual Criticism as a Third Turning Point?*

This focus on textual criticism today is very clear. It is obvious if we look at the Wikipedia page about *tahrīf*: "Tahrīf (Arabic: 'distortion, alteration') is an Arabic term used by Muslims for the alterations which Islamic tradition claims Jews and Christians have made to *Biblical manuscripts*, specifically those that make up the Tawrat (or Torah), Zabur (or Psalms) and Injil (or Gospel)."<sup>9</sup> For the authors of the page, *tahrīf* is directly related to manuscripts. We will see that this focus is even more obvious on certain Islamic apologetic websites.

## 4 The *Tahrīf* in the Digital Age

This is for example the case on the website *Islamic-awareness.org*. The website has a clear objective: "The primary purpose of the Islamic-Awareness website is to educate Muslims about the questions and issues frequently raised by the Christian Missionaries and Orientalists. You will find a variety of excellent

7 After al-Kairānawī and his inclusion of biblical criticism, the Gospel of Barnabas will become important in the polemics against Christianity. Referring to al-Kairānawī, Leirvik says: "The origin of modern Muslim polemical use of the Gospel of Barnabas lies in India." (Leirvik 2002, 10; see also Schirmmacher 1992).

8 It is also interesting to see that the versions of *Izhār al-ḥaqq* that are to find online in English (<[http://pages.cs.wisc.edu/~ilikhan/din/izhar-ul-haq/Izhar\\_ul\\_Haq\\_\[eng\].pdf](http://pages.cs.wisc.edu/~ilikhan/din/izhar-ul-haq/Izhar_ul_Haq_[eng].pdf)>, last accessed February 9, 2016) or French (<<http://islamhouse.com/fr/books/229870/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016) only contain parts of book 1, 2 and 4 (about the trinity).

9 "Tahrif." Wikipedia article, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tahrif>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

articles and responses to missionary and orientalist writings.”<sup>10</sup> The Bible and manuscripts section offers precise descriptions of manuscripts and discusses opinions of New Testament textual criticism scholars as Metzger, Aland, etc. The more recent works by Eldon Epp, David Parker and Bart Ehrman are frequently cited.<sup>11</sup> Beside these informative articles, there is a more polemical discourse on some pages:

Why would the Word of God need the restoration? Was it because it got corrupted in its transmission and hence requires restoration to its pristine form? The question that needs to be addressed first is the problems surrounding the New Testament manuscript tradition. *The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible* succinctly defines it as: ‘It is safe to say that there is not one sentence in the NT in which the MS tradition is wholly uniform’ [...] In conclusion, an act of restoration has connotations of a previous corruption. It can be easily seen that the restored New Testament that we have in our hands today is a product of human endeavor (i.e., a text agreed by a Committee) rather than the actual “Word” of God.<sup>12</sup>

The knowledge of the New Testament manuscripts and the discipline of textual criticism are used to support the idea of falsification and this phenomenon has some characteristics that we will develop here.

#### 4.1 *Use of Images*

Images of digitalized manuscripts have become more widely available online and are frequently reused in the context of the *tahrīf* discourse. A research in *Google Images* with the Arabic terms *tahrīf maḥṭūṭāt al-kitāb al-muqaddas* (falsification of the manuscripts of the Scriptures) gives many results and shows

<sup>10</sup> <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> A few times, entire articles are proposed. For example: Epp 1999, <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/original.html>>, last accessed February 9, 2016 or Ehrman 2000, <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/Mss/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016, linking to <<http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol05/Ehrman2000a.html>>, last accessed February 9, 2016. If Ehrman's article is in open access, Epps article rises the question of the violation of copyright. We find also numerous works of Ehrman online without permission. For example: Ehrman 2009, <<http://www.usislam.org/pdf/Jesus-interrupted-Bart-D-ehrman.pdf>>, last accessed February 9, 2016 or Ehrman 2006, <[http://islamic-replies.ucoz.com/Bible\\_Books/Studies\\_in\\_the\\_Textual\\_Criticism\\_of\\_the\\_New\\_Testam.pdf](http://islamic-replies.ucoz.com/Bible_Books/Studies_in_the_Textual_Criticism_of_the_New_Testam.pdf)>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/criticaltext.html>> (we made a few orthographical corrections), last accessed February 9, 2016.



the importance of the phenomenon. On several pages, users question the divinity of Christ by showing that divine attributes in the text were simply substitutions or later additions. Twenty examples of such “corruptions” are given on the forum *Sheekh-3arb.net*, in different editions as well as in some papyri and codices, with the help of digitalized pictures.<sup>13</sup> See the example of Mark 1:1 in Codex Sinaiticus, with the early variant lacking “Son of God” and the later addition (Wasserman 2011; Figure 11.1).

If the use of manuscript images for the purpose of the *tahrif* can be surprising, the fact to find such images is a characteristic of the involvement of the New Testament textual criticism discipline in the digital age. The number of New Testament manuscripts available online is constantly increasing. The *Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts*, an independent American center, plays a significant role, providing more than 100'000 images on the site.<sup>14</sup> The *New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room*, a project of INTF (Münster) provides images and tools to study New Testament manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> This development is encouraging for the research and explains the new popularity of the discipline: “Viewed in the second part of the 20th century as a subsidiary task, textual criticism is today one of the most rapidly expanding fields in New Testament studies, thanks notably to the ‘explosion’ of new manuscripts discovered or published online.” (Clivaz 2012) But the availability of images has a downside. Ulrich Schmid, pleading for a fully interactive digital edition of the New Testament, drew attention to the emergence of a “pseudo-scholarship:” “The Internet is full of pseudo-scholarship that exhibits images equipped with uneducated interpretations as if knowledge is easily culled from a quick glance at an image taken out of context” (Schmid 2012, 302). In our case, the image of the Codex Sinaiticus could come from the CSNTM, which provides scans of facsimiles of the manuscript,<sup>16</sup> or from the website *Codex Sinaiticus Project* which offer high quality images and tools to study the manuscript.<sup>17</sup>

13 <<http://www.sheekh-3arb.net/vb/showthread.php?t=2127>>, last accessed January 9, 2015. The forum is not available anymore at this URL; it still can be consulted on the Internet Archive *Wayback Machine*: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20140703081604/>> <<http://www.sheekh-3arb.net/vb/showthread.php?t=2127>>, last accessed February 9, 2016

14 <<http://csntm.org>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

15 <<http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

16 Lake, K. 1911. *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus: The New Testament, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas*, Oxford. Available at <[http://www.csntm.org/Manuscript/View/GA\\_01](http://www.csntm.org/Manuscript/View/GA_01)>, last accessed February 9, 2015.

17 <<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

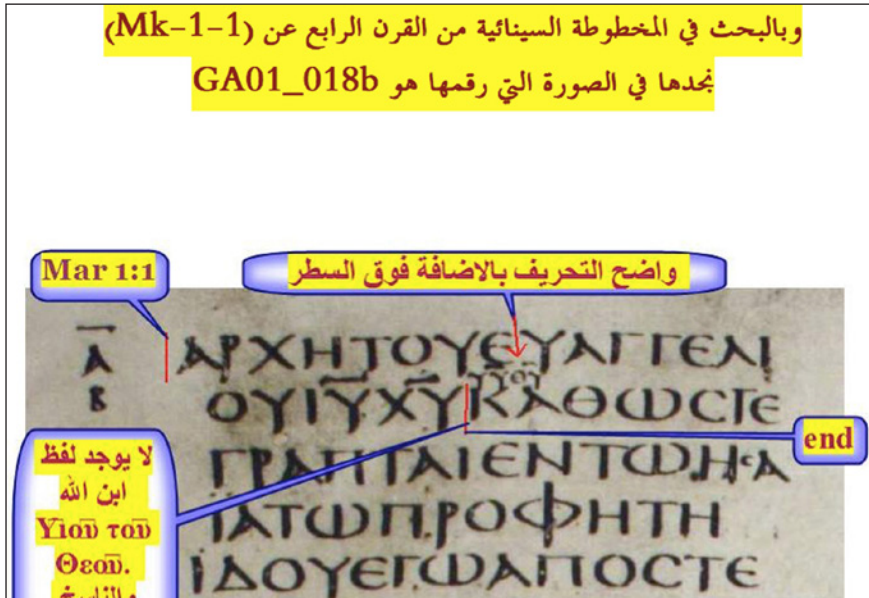


FIGURE 11.1 *Mark 1:1 in the Codex Sinaiticus in Sheekh-3arb.net.* <<https://web.archive.org/web/20140703080949/>> <<http://www.sheekh-3arb.net/vb/showthread.php?t=2127&page=3>>, last accessed February 9, 2016. See note 13.

#### 4.2 Use of Videos

The occasional use of videos is also interesting. Here on the *Youtube* platform, a debate between James White, a well-known American Christian apologist, and an imam, Shabir Ally, arguing on the case of Mark 1:1 and the presence or absence of “Son of God”. (Figure 11.2)

This importance of the visual, images or videos, participates to the *new literacies* or *multiliteracies*.<sup>18</sup> With Internet and new technologies, literacy becomes plural, with other medias than writing subsequently gaining importance.

We have seen the beginning of this process recently as new technologies such as blogs, wikis, massively multiplayer online games, social networking technologies, and video and music dissemination technologies such

<sup>18</sup> “Different terms, like 21st century literacies, Internet literacies, digital literacies, new media literacies, multiliteracies, information literacy, ICT literacies, computer literacy and so on, are used to refer to phenomena we would see as falling broadly under a new literacies umbrella.” (Coiro et al. 2008, 10). About literacies, see also the volume *Reading Tomorrow. From Ancient Manuscripts to the Digital Era* (Clivaz et al. 2012).

**À suivre** Lecture 2

**What Must I Do To Be Craig vs. Shabir Ally**  
 ThomisticTheist  
 64 865 vues

**The Classical Debate Shabir Ally**  
 Nicene International  
 114 678 vues

**Dr. James White ackr 16:9-20 are FORGERI**  
 MuslimByChoice  
 15 180 vues

**Honor, killing is in the Dr. Shabir Ally explain**  
 MuslimByChoice  
 3 695 vues

**Pastor Ray Heginns Says Bible Are Fake?**  
 WorldMagazineJamaica  
 5 341 vues

**Can we trust the Mus Shabir Ally answers**  
 MuslimByChoice  
 1 889 vues

**Christianity and Islam Session 4 - Dr. James**  
 Solo Scriptura  
 2 285 vues

**Did the original discip him God?**  
 ...

**Is the Phrase 'Son of God' in Mark 1:1 a FORGERY? Dr. Shabir Ally answers Dr. James White**

MuslimByChoice **28 519** Abonnés

1 448 vues

40 likes

Partager Plus

FIGURE 11.2 Youtube video about Mark 1:1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05ogs1u2B7U>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

as YouTube and Bebo have rapidly spread by means of the Internet, each with additional, new literacy forms and functions that, in turn, get reshaped by social practices. [...] Literacy is no longer a static construct from the standpoint of its defining technology for the past 500 years; it has now come to mean a rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose, and communicate information. (Coiro et al. 2008, 5)

The use of photos or videos is not confined to the particular sphere of interreligious debates but can also be perceived in the academic world. For example, we have seen that the digitalization of the images of manuscripts is playing a great role in the diffusion of knowledge. Furthermore, projects try to find new ways to communicate knowledge, mixing texts, images, sounds, videos.<sup>19</sup> The fact that research goes out of the usual boundaries of the academic publications was well illustrated at the time of the discovery of the Jesus Wife's Gospel, with the large diffusion of the image of the fragment and a videotaped interview of Karen King on the Harvard Divinity School website.<sup>20</sup> In another register, we can also think back to the videos of the New Testament textual critics Dan Wallace and Bart Ehrman, both very presents on the Internet. We find on *Youtube* several interviews and debates with catchy headings, as "Is the Original New Testament Lost?"<sup>21</sup> with a great number of views.

### 4.3 *Interactions*

In general, it is intriguing to see how the thematic of the *tahrif* stirs up passions on the Internet. Many Christian websites attempt to answer the accusations of *tahrif* and we can observe interactions between "apologists" from opposite communities. For example, on the website *Answering-islam.org*, several pages

19 See for example the etalk project: <<http://www.unil.ch/ritesfuneraires/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016. We could also think at the popularity of the TED conferences: <<http://www.ted.com>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

20 The video was removed from the website (see <<http://hds.harvard.edu/news/2012/09/18/hds-scholar-announces-existence-new-early-christian-gospel-egypt>>, last accessed February 9, 2016) but can be found on Youtube: "Jesus said to them, my wife." Youtube video. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlmoILjM4M>>, last accessed February 6, 2015. See Clivaz's analyzes: <<http://claireclivaz.hypotheses.org/category/jesus-wife-gospel>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

21 "Is The Original New Testament Lost? A Dialogue with Dr. Bart Ehrman & Dr. Daniel Wallace." Youtube video. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg-dJA3SntA>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

are responses to the website *Islamic-awareness.org*.<sup>22</sup> We observe that an awareness of the importance the *tahrīf* has spread to religious discourses:

For many years since the internet debates have been unfolding (and for centuries prior to the internet age), Muslims and Christians have been grappling with the all-important matter of the integrity (or lack thereof) of the Biblical text. In light of recent attacks on the integrity of the Biblical text, especially the New Testament, this essay seeks to examine the implications of the textual variations that exist in the New Testament manuscript tradition.<sup>23</sup>

However, the discussions do not only take place on apologetic websites such as those exemplified above, but also on specialized forums. On the forum *Yahoo Bible Textual Criticism*,<sup>24</sup> regularly visited by New Testament scholars and amateurs of textual criticism, we found several interactions. On one of the subjects,<sup>25</sup> a user offers a valuable comparison between the New Testament Arabic manuscript Sinai Arabic 72 and the Greek Gospel of Matthew – after some research, this user can be identified as co-editor of the “Arabic Textual Criticism Journal”, a webpage related to the website *Sheek-3arb.net* (Figure 11.3).

#### 4.4 Hybrid Scholarly Discourse

It is actually a goal of these websites to be as close as possible to recent academic research. On the website *Islamic-awareness.org*, we find such affirmations: “The dating of the manuscripts listed below represent consensus among the scholars. As the New Testament scholarship progressed, the dating was changed in some cases and we have followed the latest dating that has been accepted by the majority of the scholars;”<sup>26</sup> “Lastly, we have made sure that we use the references of Judeo-Christian scholars of repute not the apologetical literature for very obvious reasons.”<sup>27</sup> How can we define this will

22 <<http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Saifullah/index.html>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

23 <[http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/wildcat/nt\\_variants.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/wildcat/nt_variants.html)>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

24 <<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/textualcriticism/info>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

25 <<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/textualcriticism/conversations/topics/6127>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

26 <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/Mss/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

27 <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

to “do research” on websites involved in polemical interreligious debates?<sup>28</sup> We propose the concept of “hybrid scholarly discourse”. In her analyze of Japan’s media culture, Spielmann describes the “hybrid culture” as a contemporary phenomenon mixing different medias, cultural contexts and discourses, inherent in the age of the globalization and the digital (Spielmann 2010). In fact, if the discourses found on the Islamic websites are characteristic of a digital hybrid culture, mixing the polemic exercise of the *tahrif* (which seems not to correspond with our academic standard) and New Testament textual criticism scholarship.

But the hybridity is not a phenomenon which only concern Islamic websites. For example, we can see that the website of the *Center for the Study of the New Testament Manuscripts*, offers an index of the Codex Vaticanus which was made by the previously cited Islamic website *Sheek-3arb.net* (Figure 11.3).

This raises questions about the status of each of these productions, which are both “hybrid” – what if we find an index on the website of an independent Christian Center led by professors of the New Testament or on an Islamic website whose mission is to study the New Testament for polemic and apologetic purposes?

In a 2013 lecture, Clivaz noted: “Whereas print culture has helped to unify the appreciation of authoritative voices, web culture has lead to diversifying and multiplying the opinions.”<sup>29</sup> This is exactly what we have to deal with in the case of *tahrif*, with some perplexity from certain sides. On the forum *Evangelical Textual Criticism*, on a subject entitled “Islamic apologetics book on NTTC,” some posts complain about the existence of apologetic books of Islamic provenance on New Testament textual criticism. One anonymous user asked: “Will you consider the work of a Muslim apologist who openly denounces Christianity, when he writes on the manuscript history of Bible?”<sup>30</sup> This aptly illustrates the moment of realization within the subjectivity of the scholarship, on a level enlightened by the possibility of dialogue, confrontation, and negotiation of the text – a growing possibility in the digital age.

28 See for example the page “Polemics”: <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Polemics/>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

29 Society of Biblical Literature, International Meeting, St-Andrews, Clivaz, C., “When ‘Humanities’ Goes beyond History and Sociology in Digital Biblical Studies,” 8 July 2013.

30 <<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.ch/2013/02/islamic-apologetics-book-on-nttc.html>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

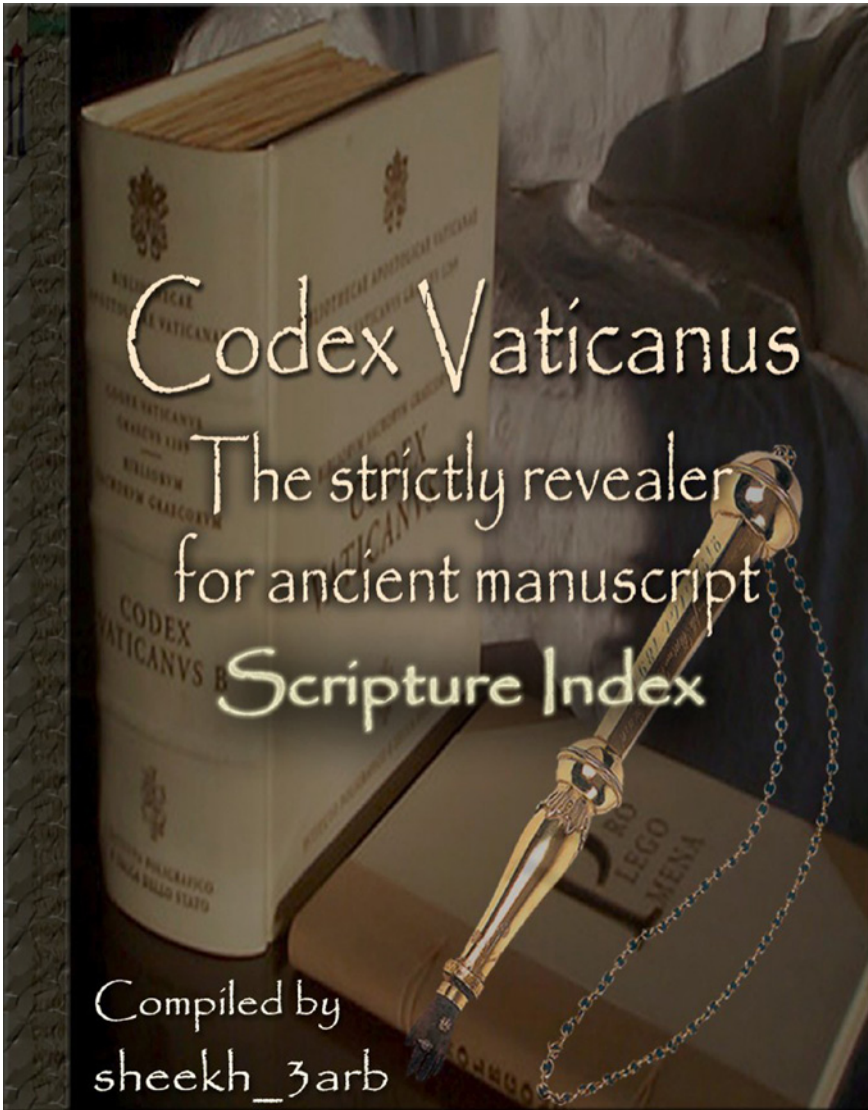


FIGURE 11.3 *Index of the Codex Vaticanus*. The Index is to find here: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20140708230105/>> <<http://www.sheekh-3arb.net/Library/Programs/e-sword/sheekh-3arb-modules/The-strictly-revealer-for-ancient-manuscript.pdf>>, last accessed February 9, 2016. See note 13. We find the same index here: <[http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA\\_03/Vaticanus-Scripture-Index.pdf](http://images.csntm.org/Manuscripts/GA_03/Vaticanus-Scripture-Index.pdf)>, last accessed February 9, 2016.

#### 4 Conclusion

The concept of *tahrīf* has evolved over its long history. Scholars have already noticed the transition from a falsification of meaning to textual falsification; today, the focus on New Testament manuscripts is very obvious. This interest for New Testament textual criticism has become a central issue throughout discourses on the Internet, with the development presenting some characteristics only possible in a digital culture, such as forms of *multiliteracies* through images or videos. We can notice that to a certain extent the *tahrīf* has evolved in parallel to Western disciplines. It was already the case with modern Biblical criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Schirmacher noticed. The interest for the discipline of New Testament textual criticism could also come from a rediscovery of the field in the New Testament studies themselves. Clivaz said that “we are witnessing the rebirth of the phoenix” for the discipline of New Testament textual criticism (Clivaz 2011, 16). This is notably due to digital evolution as digitalization of manuscripts, online tools, network research. In any case, this development of the *tahrīf* in the digital era results in unexpected interactions between defenders of the *tahrīf* and Western scholars, with a “hybrid scholarly discourse” as the consequence. In his review on Spielmann monograph, Koller asks rightly: “Hybridity correlates elements from different scientific and cultural contexts and discourses. The blurring of practices deconstructs existing science cultures. Does this mean that a new global science culture is going to be established?”<sup>31</sup> It belongs to the numerous questions and challenges that scholarship will have to face in the future.

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31 Koller, G. “Hybridity, a Cultural and Scientific Model for the Future.” <<http://wethink.hypotheses.org/926>>, last accessed February 9, 2016.



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