MUHAMMAD HADI MA'RIFAT

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

VOLUME II



INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

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Volume II

SAMT

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ISBN: 978-1-910178-03-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-910178-02-7 (pbk)

SAMT Publications
www.samt.ac.ir

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CHAPTER VI

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

Compilation of the Qur'an

Compilation of the Qur'an in its present form in terms of the arrangement of its verses and the order of its chapters, and similarly in terms of vowelling, the inclusion of dots and its division into parts and sections was not the product of a single worker and was not completed at the time of the original revelation. Many years passed between the time of the Message and the standardisation of the codices (*maṣāḥif*) in the time of 'Uthmān, followed by the perfection of the vowelling by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 173/789) the grammarian (*al-Naḥawī*), and the resulting Qur'an as we know it.

This section is a treatment of the historical circumstances through which this eternal Holy Scripture passed. However, the immediate issue is the period of the collection and compilation of the Qur'an into a codex, and the elements which contributed to this important phase. Hence, we will look in detail at this first stage, which comprised no longer than half a century, and then talk briefly about the vicissitudes of the later stages. This study is in two basic stages:

Firstly, an examination of the arrangement of the verses within a chapter and the individual numbering of the verses in relation to other verses. This was established by the instruction of the Prophet at the time the Message was received, and is entirely unchanged:

> *Lo! It is We Who reveal the Remembrance, and We verily are its Guardian* (15:9).

Secondly, the sequencing of the chapters as they appear in the codex as it is today. This was done after the Prophet's death, because verses and chapters were expected to be revealed for as long as he was alive.

The Arrangement of the Verses

The vast majority of the work of putting the verses within each chapter together as we know them today was done in accordance with the order

of their revelation. A chapter would begin with 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,' and the verses from the same chapter revealed thereafter would be gradually recorded one after the other in accordance with the revelation until another *basmalah*[1] came down, making it known that one chapter had ended and another one had begun.

Imām al-Ṣādiq explains:

> The end of a chapter would be known by the revelation of 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate', the beginning of another.[2]

Ibn 'Abbās said:

> The Prophet would know chapter division by the revelation of 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate' – he would know that one chapter had ended and another had begun.[3]

After the *basmalah* indicating the order of revelation, the scribes recording the words were aware of the need to document the verses within a chapter one after another as they were revealed, without any need for an explicit instruction in relation to each verse.

Thence, the chapters' verses were put in order in line with the order of their revelation during the Messenger's time. This is what is known as the 'natural order.' It is the primary way in which the overwhelming majority of completed verses, with rare exceptions, were arranged.

It is well known that Ali's codex followed this natural order of revelation accurately, which marked it out from all the other companions' codices, as we shall allude to.

Jābir narrates on the authority of Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir:

> When the *Qā'im*[4] rises he will set up camps for those who teach people the Qur'an as God, Sublime is His Glory, revealed it. It

[1] A contracted form of *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* meaning 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.' (Trans.)

[2] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 19.

[3] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaiḥayn*, vol. 1, 231; Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārikh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 27.

[4] From the phrase al-Qā'im bi Amrillāh, meaning the Executor of God's Command i.e. the Twelth Imam. (Trans.)

> will be the most difficult thing for anyone who has memorised it today. because its arrangement is different.[5]

This refers to the current arrangement with regard to the order of the chapters and some verses as we shall draw attention to.

There was another factor in the arrangement of verses, and that would have been if the Prophet had given a specific instruction in this regard. He would sometimes instruct that a verse be put in a particular place within an earlier chapter which had already been finished. There is no doubt that he would see a close link between the verse just revealed and the verses which had been revealed before, and instruct that they be put with them, with Almighty God's permission.

This exceptional departure from the order of revelation needed an explicit instruction. Aḥmad narrates in his *Musnad* on the authority of 'Uthmān ibn Abī al-'Āṣ:

> We were sitting with the Messenger of God when all of a sudden he fixed his gaze, then righted it. He then said, 'Gabriel came to me and told me to put this verse in this place in this chapter:
>
> *Lo! God enjoineth justice and kindness and giving to kinsfolk...* (16:90).'

So it was put in *The Bee* (*al-Naḥl*) between the verses on raising witnesses (*āyāt al-istishhād*) and the verses of covenant (*āyāt al-'ahd*). He narrates that the last verse to be revealed was the following:

> *And guard yourselves against a day in which ye will be brought back to God* (2:281).

Gabriel indicated that it be put between the two verses on usury and debt in *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*).[6] It is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās and al-Suddī that it was the last part of the Qur'an to be revealed. Gabriel said, 'Put it after two hundred and eighty.'[7] The close link between it and the two verses on usury and debt are obvious. The same applies to the previous verse from *The Bee*. It is also narrated on the authority of Ibn

[5] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, 339 and Sheikh Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'mān al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī Ma'rifati Ḥujajillāh 'Alā al-'Ibād*, (Qum: International Congress on Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of Sheikh Mufīd, 1413 q.), vol. 2, 386.

[6] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 173.

[7] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2,394.

'Abbās that a time came when the longer chapters were revealed to the Messenger, and when this happened, he would summon one of those who acted as a scribe and say, 'Put these verses in the chapter in which such-and-such is mentioned.'[8]

There is no dispute over this, as 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr explicitly states:

> The order of the verses in the chapters is as per his instruction and command, without any dispute over this among the Muslims.[9]

Some of a chapter may have been revealed and another begun before the first was completed. The latter might be completed before the former. This would also be according to the Prophet's instruction, as with the additon to *The Cow*, which was in fact the first chapter whose revelation was to commence in Medina after the Migration. However, its revelation carried on for more than six years, one of the later verses being:

> *Indeed, Ṣafā and Marwa are among the indications of God. It is therefore no sin for him who is on pilgrimage to the House (of God) or visiteth it, to go around them...* (2:158).

This was revealed when the Muslims refrained from passing back and forth between Ṣafā and Marwa because the idols of Isāf and Nā'ilah were on top of them, and it was the pagan custom to go back and forth between them and touch them. The verse was revealed to refute the mistaken belief that it was forbidden, which indicates that it had to have been revealed after the treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah on the compensating 'Umrah (*'umrat al-qaḍā'*),[10] which was in the sixth year after the Migration. It may be that the Prophet instructed that the verse be put in this place in the chapter, but only God knows.

Similarly the verses on pilgrimage were revealed the same year and were put in this very same chapter.

Therefore, we find in certain chapters verses which were not necessarily revealed chronologically. This could either have been according to the Prophet's instruction or for some other reason which remains unknown.

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[8] Al-Tirmidhī states it via a good (*ḥasan)* chain, and al-Ḥākim via an authentic chain. See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 241 and Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 36.

[9] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 172.

[10] Narrated on the authority of Imām al-Ṣādiq. See *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 70; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 123.

One example is what we see in *She Who is Tested (al-Mumtaḥanah)*. The chapter begins with verses 1-9 which were revealed in the eighth year after the Migration, are about Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah, who had written to the Quraysh informing them of the Prophet's preparations for attacking Mecca, a fact which the Prophet was trying to conceal.

Following these verses are two verses revealed in the sixth year after the Migration, and are about Subay'at al-Aslamiyyah, who had come to the Prophet as a Muslim migrant, abandoning her infidel husband, who thereafter came after her. She sought the Prophet's protection, arriving at the same time as the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, wherein the Prophet had made a pact with the Quraysh to return to them anyone who came to him from Mecca. Hence, the husband started arguing with the Prophet, saying, 'Return my wife to me in accordance with the conditions you have made with us, the ink of which is not yet dry.' The Prophet was put in a difficult position, but then the two verses were revealed.

After these two verses are verses concerning the women's pledge of allegiance the year of the Conquest, which was the ninth year after the Migration.

However, the last verse in the chapter is completely connected to the verses at the beginning. Hence it is said that this chapter illustrates a departure from the natural order of the verses with no known reason.[11]

Another example is found in *The Cow* in the verses on provision and the period of waiting. The original ruling on women whose husbands die was that they had to wait an entire year without leaving their husbands' houses, their only inheritance being provision for them for that year. The verse concerning this is the following:

> *And those of you who are about to die and leave behind them wives, they should bequeath unto their wives a provision for the year without turning them out...* (2:240).

This law was then abrogated by the verse on waiting periods – four months and ten nights – within the same chapter (2:234), and by the verse on inheritance (4:12).

Imam Ṣādiq says the verse on provision was abrogated by the verse:

[11] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 67.

> *...they shall wait, keeping themselves apart, for four months and ten days* (2:234),

and by the verse on inheritance.[12] However, the nature of abrogation dictates that the verse which abrogates should come after the verse which is abrogated, but this one comes six verses before.

The same applies to the Almighty's Words:

> *And guard yourselves against a day in which ye will be brought back to God ...* (2:281).

It is said that this was the last verse to be revealed to the Messenger, and that he only lived a few days or weeks thereafter. The verse has been placed in *The Cow* even though it was the first chapter to be revealed in Medina after the Migration, and twenty or so chapters were revealed after it. It is narrated that it was Gabriel who indicated to the Prophet where it should appear in *The Cow* as stated above.

Ibn 'Abbās says about the verse of completion:

> *This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion Islam* (5:3).
>
> No duty was revealed after that.

Al-Suddī, al-Jubbā'i and al-Balkhī agree,[13] and it is also narrated on the authority of the two Imāms al-Ṣādiq and al-Bāqir.[14]

Ibn 'Asākir and al-Khaṭīb say:

> They were revealed at Ghadīr Khumm when he was returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage, after he had appointed Ali as Master. So Gabriel brought it down.

In al-Suddī's words, no ruling on what is or is not permissible was revealed after that.[15]

However, it is situated as the third verse of *The Table* (*al-Mā'idah*), and there are many verses containing rulings after it, such as the fourth verse,

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[12] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 232; Ḥājj Mīrzā Husayn Nūrī Ṭabrisī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il* (lithograph, Tehran, Islāmīyyah Offset, 1382 q.), vol. 3, 21.

[13] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, 257-259; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 159.

[14] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 159.

[15] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, 259.

which mentions that all good things and hunting are lawful, verse 5 on the food of the People of the Book, verse 6 on ablution from minor impurity, verse 38 concerning thieves, verse 89 on oaths, verse 90 on wine, verse 95 on the unlawfulness of hunting while in pilgrim sanctity, verse 103 forbidding what the pagans have made lawful, and verse 107 on having testaments witnessed. All of these are legislative rulings recorded after the verse of completion, even though they were without doubt revealed before it. There must be a reason for inserting a verse like this between others which forbid carrion, blood and meat of the swine, even if it is not apparent.

We should not be unaware of the aspect of 'the presumption of the style of the expression' (*aṣālat al-siyāq*) with regard to the verses, that it is preserved in accordance with its original nature, meaning that the first principle is to assume that the order is the order of revelation unless there is evidence to prove otherwise – which is only rarely proven – and because exceptions to the natural order of revelation can only be established by the Prophet's specific instruction, for which there would have been a palpable reason. Hence, for these two reasons, i.e., the presumption of the style of the expression and the prescriptive nature of the order of the verses, the order of revelation cannot be but the natural order.

The Arrangement of the Chapters

Gathering the chapters together in order and putting them in the form of a bound book (*muṣḥaf*) took place after the death of the Prophet. The prophetic era came to an end while the Qur'an was still scattered about on palm branches (*al-'asīb*),[16] delicate white stones (*al-likhaf*), pieces of cloth and tanned leather, shoulder bones and ribs, silk, parchment and, of course, in men's hearts.

The chapters were completed in his time, their verses put in order and they had names. However, collating them into a codex had not yet happened, because it was expected that Qur'anic revelations would continue throughout his lifetime, and since they had not stopped, it was not right that they should be made into a book until it was complete, and this

[16] *Al-'asīb* is a palm branch with its leaves stripped off; *al-lakhf* is a delicate white stone, and *al-adīm* is tanned leather.

would only happen at the end of the prophetic era and the completion of the revelation.

Abu al-Husayn ibn Fāris explains in *al-Masā'il al-Khams*:

> There were two kinds of collation of the Qur'an: one was the collation of the chapters, such as putting the seven long ones first and following them with the *mi'īn*.[17] The companions took charge of that. The other was the collection of the verses into chapters; this was prescriptive and was taken charge of by the Prophet.[18]

According to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭi:

> The whole of the Qur'an was written out during the time of God's Messenger. However, it was not collated together in a single place or its chapters arranged in order.[19]

Similarly, Sayyid 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī takes the position that the Qur'an was not collated together during the Messenger's lifetime. He says:

> The collation of and the putting together of the Qur'an as a single book indubitably only took place after the Prophet was taken.

He stresses that the order of the chapters as it is today is something which happened at the hand of the companions and on the basis of their personal judgement. He disagrees with those who claim that the order of the chapters is prescriptive.[20]

The first to undertake the collecting together of the Qur'an immediately after the Prophet's death, in accordance with his own instructions, was the Imām Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib. According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> The Messenger of God said to Ali, Ali, the Qur'an is behind my bed on scrolls, silk and parchment. Take it, collect it together and do not lose it.[21]

Thereafter, Zayd ibn Thābit undertook the collection of it under Abū Bakr's instruction, as also did Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Abū Mūsā al-

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[17] The chapters containing roughly 100 verses. (Trans.)

[18] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 237.

[19] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 164.

[20] See Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 12, 124, 131, and vol. 3, 78-79.

[21] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 48; *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 451.

Ash'arī, Sālim – Abū Ḥudhayfah's freeman – and others until the time when 'Uthmān undertook the standardisation of the codices and the distribution of them far and wide. He charged people with reciting it and forsaking all other copies as we shall discuss.

Ali's compilation was in line with the order of revelation, the Meccan before the Medinan, abrogated verses before those which abrogated, and with an indication of where they were revealed and the circumstances of the revelation. Al-Kalbī says:

> When God's Messenger died, Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib sat in his house and gathered it together in the order it was revealed. If his codex could be found, there would be much knowledge in it.[22]

According to 'Ikrimah:

> If mankind and the jinn gathered together to compile it as Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib compiled it they would not be able to.[23]

The compilations of the other companions were done differently, placing the long chapters before the short ones. They situated the seven long ones (*al-sab' al-ṭiwāl*) – *The Cow*, *The Family of Imrān*, *The Women*, *The Table*, *Cattle*, *The Heights* and *Jonah* - before the ones containing approximately a hundred verses (*al-mi'īn*) – *The Spoils of War*,[24] *The Repentance*, *The Bee*, *Hūd*, *Joseph*, *The Cave*, *The Night Journey*, *The Prophets*, *Ṭā Hā*, *The Believers*, *The Poets*, *Those Arrayed in Ranks*. These were followed by the oft-recited ones (*al-mathānī*) – approximately twenty chapters containing fewer than a hundred verses – followed by the chapters beginning with *ḥā mīm* (*ḥawāmīm*), and then the chapters with short verses (*mufaṣṣalāt*), since there are so many breaks between them.[25] The latter are the last chapters in the Qur'an.

As we shall see, this is more or less the order in which the chapters are arranged today.

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[22] Ibn Juzayy, *al-Tas-hīl li 'Ulūm al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 4.

[23] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 166.

[24] This is as in Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex. However, it is one of the oft-repeated chapters in Ibn Mas'ūd's codex because it has fewer than a hundred verses, 75 in total. See the list below.

[25] Many breaks because of the brevity of the chapters. (Trans.)

Zayd's compilation was not actually arranged and ordered as a codex. The only concern at the time was to gather together the Qur'an to prevent it from getting lost, and to make a record of the verses and chapters that had been memorised in order to avoid their loss with the death of those who had memorised them. Thus the material was written on scrolls, put in a jacket and deposited with Abū Bakr for the duration of his lifetime, and then with 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb until God took him. At that point it went to his daughter Ḥafṣah, and this was the copy taken by 'Uthmān for the codices to be checked against. He then returned it to her and it remained in her possession until she died. Marwān seized it from her heirs when he was Mu'āwiyah's governor of Medina, and ordered it to be ripped apart. This will be examined below.

Examination of the Opposing View

What we have stated above is what has been commonly accepted by hadith narrators (*ruwāt al-āthār*) and Qur'anic researchers from the early times up until the present day. Biographers and historians agree almost unanimously on the matter. However, in spite of that, there are others who reject this account and believe that the present composition and arrangement of the Qur'an took place during the Messenger's lifetime.

A number of scholars such as al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-Ṭayyib, Abū Bakr ibn al-Anbāri, al-Kirmānī and al-Ṭayyibī[26] have taken this position, and 'Alam al-Hudā al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā agrees with them. He claims:

> The Qur'an was gathered and compiled together as it is now within his [the Prophet's] lifetime.

[26] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 176.
Imām Badr al-Dīn Zarkashī tried to reconcile the two groups and maintain that the difference was semantic. This is in view of the fact that those who say that the order is prescriptive mean that that was indicated to them on the basis of their knowledge of the reasons for its revelation and the placing of its words (which is why Imām Mālik states: 'They only compiled it on the basis of what they remembered from the Prophet') by saying: 'The order of the chapters was on the basis of their own personal judgment, and so the source of the dispute is whether that is prescriptive or merely based on the evidence of what was actually done in order to allow scope for debate.' See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 257.

He seeks to prove his statement on the basis of the fact that the Qur'an was studied and memorised in its entirety during that time, so much so that a group of companions were appointed to do just that. It would be shown to the Prophet and recited back to him. Moreover, a number of the companions, such as 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and others, completed a number of recitations of the Qur'an to the Prophet. All that proves, with the slightest reflection, is that it was gathered together and the verses arranged into chapters, rather than there being brief passages scattered about.[27]

However, the memorisation (*ḥifẓ*) of the Qur'an means the memorisation of all the chapters, the verses of which were complete, irrespective of whether the chapters had been arranged in order or not. Thus, a complete recitation of the Qur'an meant a recitation of all the chapters in no particular order. Alternatively, *ḥifẓ* meant keeping hold of all the Qur'an revealed up to that point and protecting it from being lost and split up, something which does not prove that there was any particular ordering of the chapters as there is now.

However, our teacher Sayyid Imām Khoī took the following position:

1) The hadiths on the compilation of the Qur'an after the death of the Prophet both contradict and conflict with each other. Some of them specify that the compilation was in the time of Abū Bakr, others in the time of 'Umar, and a third group specify the time of 'Uthmān, while others indicate that the first person to gather the Qur'an together was Zayd ibn Thābit, others that it was Abū Bakr and a third group that it was 'Umar. There are other such obvious contradictions.

2) There are hadiths that contradict others which indicate that the Qur'an was collected together in the Prophet's lifetime, such as al-Sha'bī's hadith, which states:

> Those who collected the Qur'an together within his lifetime were six people: Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thābit, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, Abu al-Dardā', Sa'd ibn 'Ubayd and Abū Zayd.

Anas' hadith says that there were four of them: Ubayy, Mu'ādh, Zayd and Abū Zayd, and there are other similar narrations.

3) There are hadiths contradicting the verses which lay down a challenge and indicate that the chapters of the Qur'an were complete

[27] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 15.

and distinct from each other. They also contradict the Qur'an's being called a book in its own words, the literal meaning of which is that it was a book collected and compiled together.

4) There are items contradicting what reason dictates, i.e., that the Prophet had a duty to take the compilation and recording of the Qur'an seriously in order to prevent loss or neglect.

5) These matters contradict the consensus of the Muslims, since they consider narrations from many sources – on the authority of the Prophet himself – whereas others indicate that the compilers were content with the testimony of one or two men after the Messenger was gone.

6) This would inevitably mean that passages of the Scripture were corrupted, because a later compilation by its very nature would indicate that some of the Qur'an would be lost or added to. This contradicts one of the fundamental beliefs of the religion.[28]

Some narrators add that there is a proof in the distinctive way one chapter follows another, and that this order of arrangement was by the Messenger's instruction, for no one else would know such unique connections.

However, it should be acknowledged that the matter of the compilation of the Qur'an is a historical matter,[29] and not simply one of common sense which might be questionable. Thus, one has to consult sourced historical texts, with no scope for mental conjecture.

The consensus of historians and biographers endorsed by hadith collectors was referred to above: that the arrangement of the chapters was something which happened after the death of the Messenger, and were not arranged in the order in which the chapters were revealed to him.

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[28] See Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Khoī, *al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, (Qum: 'Ilmīyyah, 1394 q.), 257-278.

[29] Hence, there has to be a historical record, especially for such an important event, and it needs to be confirmed. An historical fact has three aspects: the event itself, and where and when it took place. Whoever claims that the compilation of the Qur'an into a book took place within the Prophet's lifetime and according to his instruction firstly has to identify who was charged by the Prophet with undertaking such an important task, then, whether it was before or after the Migration and in what year, and finally, whether it was in Mecca or Medina, or somewhere else. If these aspects are unknown with regard to such an important incident, it is better not to address the issue. Therefore, there is no proof for this claim, historically speaking.

Having said that, we do not see any contradiction amongst the narrations on the compilation of the Qur'an, because there is no doubt that it was 'Umar who suggested the compilation to Abū Bakr, and it was Abū Bakr who had previously told Zayd to take charge of the matter. Therefore, it would be correct to attribute the original compilation to any of the three in some respect.

It is true that attributing the compilation to 'Uthmān concerns the standardisation of the text and the making of a codex. As for the standardisation of the codices by 'Umar, this is undoubtedly confusion on the part of the narrator, because, according to the consensus of the historians, it was 'Uthmān who did so.

The hadith about six or eight people compiling the Qur'an in the Prophet's lifetime means their learning by heart all the verses revealed up to that time. However, it does not prove that the chapters were arranged in any specific order.

As for what is said about the challenge (*al-taḥaddī*), it concerns the verses and chapters themselves – since every verse or chapter is Qur'an – and does not concern the order in which the chapters were arranged, and therefore cannot be relied on as a proof. In addition, the challenge was also raised in Meccan chapters,[30] and the Qur'an had definitely not been made into a compilation before the Migration.

The importance the Prophet gave to the Qur'an cannot be denied. He was keen for the verses to be placed in their appropriate chapters as soon as they were revealed, hence the arrangement of the verses within each chapter happened in his lifetime, but placing the chapters in a standardised codex would not have happened then, because of the expectation that the Qur'an would continue to be revealed to him. As long as the revelation had not ceased, it would not have been right to compile the Qur'an into a book. However, when he was dying, and he was sure that the revelations had stopped, he instructed Ali to do so.

What the *tawātur* of the Qur'anic text means in this context is having certainty that it is the Qur'an, and this was done by comparisons and testimony, especially from the earliest companions, which Zayd adhered to in the original compilation, as will be discussed below. *Tawātur* is not used here in the technical sense of the word as understood by later scholars.

[30] 10:38, 11:13 and 17:88, which are all Meccan.

There is no evidence that a later compilation inevitably led to a corruption of the Scripture, given our knowledge of those who recorded it, their being close to the time of the revelation of the verses, and the strict precautions taken to leave no room for the possibility of loss or for interpolations to creep in.

Finally, the claim by some people regarding the inherent link (*munāsabah*) between each chapter and its preceding and subsequent chapters is nothing more than the empty fancy of certain pretentious exegetes. It is a false view, given the consensus of opinion that the chapters are, without a doubt, arranged in an order different from that in which they were revealed. The hadith on the camps set up to teach the Qur'an in a different order from that we are used to was referred to above.[31]

For some recent researchers it appears that the use of the word *muṣḥaf* (codex) in some of the Messenger's own words and hadiths suffices as evidence that the arrangement of the chapters took place at that time, since if there had been no compilation it would have been inappropriate to use the words *muṣḥaf* (codex) or *maṣāḥif* (codices) to refer to the Qur'an.[32] However, this cannot be regarded as evidence, since *muṣḥaf* is a noun which means a collection of written pages. They might be bound with thread of some sort or placed within a jacket, satchel or something similiar to protect it, irrespective of the order of their arrangement.

Ibn Durayd explains:

> Al-Ṣuḥuf (singular: ṣaḥīfah) means pieces of white skin or parchment which are written on. The plural is ṣaḥā'if, or alternatively, ṣiḥāf – also, miṣḥaf with a kasrah under the mīm in the dialect of Tamīm. This is because they are pages (ṣuḥuf) put together, and so they use the mif'al form to indicate something taken in the hand. The people of Najd say muṣḥaf with a ḍammah above the mīm – as if they are saying it was put together (uṣḥifa) – so it is muṣḥaf when it is put together.[33]

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[31] Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 386; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, 339.

[32] Al-Sayyid Ja'far Murtaḍā al-'Āmilī, *Ḥaqā'iq Hāmmah Ḥawl al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār Āl al-Ṣafwah, 1992), 82.

[33] Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-Lughah* (Hyderabadd: Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif, 1345 q.) vol. 2, 162.

And al-Khalīl says:

> A muṣḥaf is so-called because it was made into a storage place for pages which are written on and placed between two boards (uṣḥifa).[34]

A Qur'anic chapter would be completed and its verses would be written down in the order in which they were revealed until another chapter was sent down through the revelation of its *basmalah*. They would be written on pages made out of paper, skin or parchment, and recorded immediately. The same applied to every chapter, and naturally these completed chapters would be kept together in something like a box or a sack. However, this was done without putting them into what we know as the current order, because the revelation of the Qur'an was regarded as unfinished for as long as the Messenger was alive.

Thus, all the revelations recorded on parchment were stored in a container. There may have been many of them in the companions' possession, each with various portions. Thus, it is correct – in this respect only – to use the word *muṣḥaf* to refer to each of the portions.

Consequently, it can be understood why the words Qur'an and *muṣḥaf* are used interchangeably. However, the former refers to the recitation and the latter to words written on parchment or suchlike. Just as the name 'the Qur'an' can be used to refer to apart or much of it, so too can the word muṣḥaf.

Hence we find the word *muṣḥaf* substituted by Qur'an in the same traditions relied on as evidence by those seeking to prove the point, as is acknowledged by them.[35]

This assumes that the attribution of the use of the word *muṣḥaf* to the Prophet in the narrations containing it to be correct, as opposed to the words of the narrator conveying the meaning, in accordance with what was conventional later. What is more likely is that it conveyed the meaning as opposed to the exact words.

Thus, our opponents have no evidence to change our resolve regarding the explanations of the hadiths concerning the compilation which follow.

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[34] Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-'Ayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-Arabi, 2001), vol. 3, 120.

[35] Ja'far Murtaḍā, *Ḥaqā'iq Hāmmah*, 85.

Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib's Codex

The first to set about compiling the Qur'an directly after the Prophet's passing, and according to his instruction, was Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib.[36] He remained in his house, busy compiling the Qur'an and putting it in the order in which it was revealed, along with explantions of what might be unclear, the reasons for revelation and where it happened, until the task was completed.

Ibn al-Nadīm narrates via a chain of narration which states that Ali saw people in a state of agitation at the death of the Prophet, so he swore that he would not put on his robe (*ridā'*) until he had compiled the Qur'an. Thereupon, he sat in his house for three days[37] until he had finished it. It was the first codex in which the Qur'an was put together from his memory.[38] This codex was in Ja'far's family's possession.

He says:

> I saw in our time, in the possession of Abu Ya'lā Ḥamzah al-Ḥasanī, a codex in Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib's handwriting from which pages had fallen out, and which the children of Ḥasan had passed down from generation to generation.[39]

Aḥmad ibn Fāris narrates the same on the authority of al-Suddī on the authority of 'Abd Khayr, on the authority of Ali.[40]

Muhammad ibn Sīrīn narrates on the authority of 'Ikrimah:

> At the beginning of Abū Bakr's caliphate, Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib sat in his house compiling the Qur'an.

He goes on to say:

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[36] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 451; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 48 and 52.

[37] This may be a slip on the narrator's part, since he took six months to compile the Qur'an, during which time he would only put on his robe for prayer. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, 40.

[38] Ibn 'Abbās says that God put the Qur'an together in Ali's heart, and Ali finished putting it together six months after the Messenger of God's death. See Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, 40.

[39] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 47-48.

[40] Abu al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Fāris, *al-Ṣāḥibī fī Fiqh al-Lughah (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Salafiyyah, 1910), 200.*

I asked 'Ikrimah, 'Was anyone else's compilation as it was revealed, the first part first, and so on?' He replied, 'Were mankind and the jinn to join together to compile it like this they would not be able to.'

Ibn Sīrīn says:

So I sought that book and wrote off to Medina with regard to it, but I was not able to get it.[41]

According to Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī:

During the Prophet's time, the Qur'an was scattered on pages and in the hearts of men. Thus, when he passed away, Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib put it together in the order in which it was revealed. If his codex had been found, there would have been great knowledge in it. However, it was not found.[42]

Imām al-Bāqir states:

No one but a liar says that he put together the whole of the Qur'an the way God revealed it. No one put it together and kept it the way God revealed it apart from Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib.[43]

Sheikh Mufīd says in *al-Masā'il al-Sarawiyyah:*

The Commander of the Faithful had compiled together the Qur'an as sent down from beginning to end, and arranged it as it should be arranged. He put Meccan before Medinan, what is abrogated before what abrogates, and put everything where it should be.[44]

According to 'Allāmah Balāghī:

What is known among the Shi'a is that after the death of the Messenger of God, Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, did nothing but put on his robe for prayers before he had put the Qur'an

[41] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 47-48.
al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 166; see Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, 2:101.
[42] Ibn Juzayy, *al-Tas-hīl li 'Ulūm al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 4.
[43] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 88.
[44] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 74.

> together in the order in which it was revealed. He put that which is abrogated before what abrogated it.

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in *al-Istī'āb* and Ibn Sa'd state on the authority of Muhammad ibn al-Sīrīn:

> I was told that Ali delayed in pledging allegiance to Abū Bakr and so he said, 'Do you hate my being commander?' He replied, 'I swore by my right hand that I would not put on my robe for anything else but prayer until I have put the Qur'an together.

He continues:

> They claim that he wrote it as it was revealed.
>
> If I could get hold of that book there would be great knowledge in it.[45]

Ibn Ḥajar explains:

> Tradition says that Ali put the Qur'an together in the order in which it was revealed after the death of the Prophet. This is reported by Abū Dāwūd.[46]

According to Ibn Shahrāshūb:

> What is amazing about him is that there was not a single field of knowledge whose experts did not make him their leader. What he said became a benchmark of the shariah, and the Qur'an was heard from him. Al-Shīrāzī says on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās in Nuzūl al-Qur'an, 'God guaranteed to Muhammad that Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib would put the Qur'an together after he was gone.'

He continues:

> So God put the Qur'an together in Ali's heart and Ali finished putting it together six months after the Messenger's death.

Also:

> According to Abū Rāfi's traditions, during the course of his illness from which he died, the Prophet said to Ali, 'Ali, this is God's Book.

[45] Muhammad Jawād Balāghī, *Tafsīr Ālā al-Raḥmān*, 2nd ed. (Qum: Maktabah Wijdānī, n.d.), vol. 1, 18, ft. See Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, 101.

[46] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 202.

> Take it with you.' So Ali gathered it up in a cloak and went off to his house. When the Prophet was taken, Ali sat and compiled what God had revealed. He had immense knowledge of it.

And also:

> Abu al-'Alā' al-'Aṭṭār and al-Muwaffaq, Khaṭīb Khawārizmī (the preacher in Khawārizm), narrated to me in their books, via a chain of narration on the authority of Ali ibn Ribāḥ, that the Prophet told Ali to compile the Qur'an. So he compiled it and wrote it down.

Abū Nu'aym in *al-Ḥilyah* and al-Khaṭīb in *al-Arba'īn* narrate, via a chain of narration on the authority of al-Suddī, on the authority of 'Abd Khayr from Ali:

> When the Messenger of God was taken, I swore that I would not put my robe on my back until I had assembled what is between the two boards, so I did not put on my robe until I had gathered together the Qur'an.

Also:

> The traditions of the People of the Household say that he swore to himself that he would not put his robe over his shoulder for anything other than prayer until he had compiled the Qur'an and put it together. So he cut himself off from all for a while until he had put it together. Then he took it out to them, carrying it in a loincloth, when they were gathered in the mosque. They did not like him coming along after cutting himself off from the group, and they remarked, 'Abu al-Ḥasan has surely come for a reason.'
>
> When he was in the middle of them, he put the Book between them and then proclaimed: 'God's Messenger said, 'Verily I am leaving amongst you that which if you cling fast to it, you will never go astray – God's Book and my close relations, the People of my Household.' This is the Book and I am the close relations.'

> The Second One[47] rose and told him, 'If you have a Qur'an, we have one like it, and we have no need of you.'
>
> So he picked up the Book and took it back after having placed the proof before them.

A long narration on the authority of Imām al-Ṣādiq says that he picked it up and turned back towards his house saying:

> But they flung it behind their backs and bought thereby a little gain. Verily evil is that which They have gained thereby (3:187).[48]

Description of Ali's Codex

Five of the special features of Ali's Codex were:

1) It was arranged in the order in which it was revealed, and done with outstanding accuracy.

2) The passages of the Book were recorded without changes or words or verses omitted.

3) The correct recitation was recorded, letter by letter, the way the Prophet had recited it.

4) In the margins, there were explanations of the circumstances which caused the verse to be revealed, the place and time it was revealed, and references to the people about whom it was revealed.

5) It had comments on the general applicability of the verses so as not to restrict them to a particular time, place or person, for they flow as the sun and moon flow. This is what is meant by *ta'wīl* in his words:

> I have brought you the Book with its *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl*.[49]

Tanzīl refers to the situation at the time which caused the revelation, whereas *ta'wīl* explains how it applies universally.

Ali's Codex contained all these fine points which he learned from God's Messenger, without forgetting or becoming confused over anything. He said:

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[47] In Shi'a traditions the Second One usually refers to the second de-facto ruler while the First One refers to Abū Bakr. [Editor].

[48] See Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, 40-41; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 51-52.

[49] Balāghī, Ālā' al-Raḥmān, vol. 1, 257.

> Not a single verse was revealed to God's Messenger without his reading it to me and dictating it to me for me to write by my own hand. He taught me the ta'wīl of it, the exegesis of it, which parts were abrogated by other parts, the clear verses and those capable of more than one interpretation. He prayed to God to teach me understanding of it and [for me] to memorise it, so I have not forgotten a single verse from God's Book, nor any knowledge which he dictated to me. Thence I wrote it down from the time he prayed for what he prayed for me.[50]

It is narrated on the authority of al-Aṣbagh ibn Nubātah that:

> The Commander of the Faithful came to Kufa, led them in prayer for forty mornings, reciting Magnify the Name of thy Lord the Most High [Sūrah al-A'lā], and so the hypocrites said, 'No, by God, Abu al-Ḥasan cannot recite the Qur'an well. If he could recite the Qur'an, he would recite something else besides this chapter for us.'

He continues:

> This came to Ali's attention, and so he said, 'Woe is them. Verily I know the parts which are abrogated from those which abrogated them, that which is clear and that which is equivocal, the beginning of a chapter from the end of a chapter and its letters and its meanings. I swear by God, there is not a single letter revealed to Muhammad of which I do not know about whom it was revealed and on what day and in what place. Woe is them! Do they not read, *Verily, this is in the ancient scrolls, the Books of Abraham and Moses* (87:18-19)? I swear by God, they are with me. I inherited them from God's Messenger and God's Messenger inherited them from Abraham and Moses. Woe is them! I am he of whom God revealed *...and that heeding ear might remember* (69:12). We would just be with God's Messenger and he would tell us the revelation. I, along with whoever heeded it, would heed it, and then when we went away, they would ask, 'What did he just say?'[51]

However, al-Ya'qūbī has a strange description of Ali's codex:

[50] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 16.

[51] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 14.

> He divided it into seven parts, each part containing fifteen or sixteen chapters, making a total of one hundred and eleven chapters. The verses in each part had to reach three hundred and eighty-six verses, making the total number of verses in the codex six thousand two hundred and two verses.
>
> He made the beginning of the first part The Cow *(al-Baqarah)*, followed by Joseph *(Yūsuf)*, then The Spider *('Ankabūt)*, concluding with The Most High *(al-A'lā)* and The Clear Sign *(al-Bayyinah)*. He called it the part containing The Cow *(Juz' al-Baqarah)*.
>
> He made the beginning of the second part The Family of 'Imrān *(Āl-i 'Imrān)*, followed by Hūd, then The Pilgrimage *(al-Ḥajj)*, and concluding with the The Elephant *(al-Fīl)* and Quraysh. He called it the part containing The Family of 'Imrān *(Juz' Āl-i 'Imrān)*.
>
> He made the beginning of the third part The Women *(al-Nisā')* and the end of it The Ant *(al-Naml)*, calling it the part containing The Women *(Juz' al-Nisā')*.
>
> He made the beginning of the fourth part The Table *(al-Mā'idah)* and the end of it The Unbelievers *(al-Kāfirūn)*, the beginning of the fifth part The Cattle *(al-An'ām)* and the end of it The Rivalry *(al-Takāthur)*, the beginning of the sixth part The Heights *(al-A'rāf)* and the end of it The Help *(al-Naṣr)*, the beginning of the seventh part The Spoils of War *(al-Anfāl)* and the end of it Mankind *(al-Nās)*.
>
> Thus, the long chapters were spread out at the beginning of the seven parts, gradually progressing towards the short ones, and each part took the name of the chapter with which it began.[52]

This description completely contradicts that of the others – that it was arranged in the order in which it was revealed.

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> Ali's codex began with Read *(Iqra')*, then The Shrouded *(al-Muddaththir)*, then Nūn, then Enwrapped *(al-Muzzammil)*, then Perish *(Tabbat)*,

[52] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 125.

then Rivalry (*al-Takāthur*) and so on to the end of the arrangement of the chapters in the order in which they were revealed.[53]

Hence this description also contradicts the consensus of biographers and historians.

It is strange that he made *Alif Lām Mīm Tanzīl* and *Sajdah* to be two chapters, *Ḥā Mīm* and *Mu'min* two chapters, *Ṭā Sīn* and *Ankabūt* two chapters, and *Ṭā Sīn Mīm* and *al-Shu'arā'* two chapters, when in each case they are two names for a single chapter. He refers to *The Prophets* (*al-Anbīyā'*) as *Iqtarabat*, when in fact it begins with *Iqtaraba li al-nās ḥisābuhum*.

This kind of a slip by someone like Aḥmad ibn al-Wāḍiḥ al-Kātib al-Akhbārī is very unusual.

The Lifespan of Ali's Codex

Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī narrates on the authority of Salmān al-Fārisī:

> When the Commander of the Faithful (may God's blessings be upon him) saw the people's betrayal of him, he stayed in his house and devoted himself to the Qur'an, compiling it and putting it together. He did not leave his house until he had finished. It was on ṣuḥuf, shiẓāẓ, ashār and riqā'.[54]
>
> The people sent for him to pledge allegiance, but he excused himself on account of his being busy compiling the Qur'an. They kept quiet about him for days until he had put it together in a single wrapping and sealed it. He then went out – according to al-Ya'qūbī's narration, he carried it on a camel[55] – to the people who were gathered around Abū Bakr in the mosque.
>
> He addressed them, saying, 'I have been busy since the Messenger was taken, washing and preparing him, then with the Qur'an until I had assembled it together within this single wrapping. God did not reveal a single verse to His Prophet which I have not gathered up. There is not a single verse the explanation of which

[53] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 176.

[54] *Ṣuḥuf* is the plural of *ṣaḥīfah* meaning a leaf of a book or sheet of paper. *Shiẓāẓ* means sharpened wood, and the plural is *ashiẓẓah*. *Ashār* means wood, leaf or flattened hinged bone. *Riqā' is the plural of ruq'ah*, which is a piece of paper which is written on.

[55] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 125.

> God's Messenger did not teach me, so that you would not be able to say tomorrow that we were not aware of this.'
>
> And so one of the prominent people stood up before him,[56] and said, 'Ali, take it back, because we have no need for it. What we have of the Qur'an makes redundant what you are calling us to.'

Thereafter, Ali went home.[57]
Another narration states that Ali said:

> I swear by God you will never see it again after this day. It was merely my duty to tell you when I had assembled it, so that you could read it.[58]

Ibn al-Nadīm's opinion was referred to above:

> ...the children of Ḥasan had passed down Ali's Codex from generation to generation.[59]

What we believe to be correct is that the Successors (*awṣīya'*) and the Imāms pass it on to each other, one after the other, without showing it to anyone else.[60]

During 'Uthmān's reign when there were discrepancies between the codices, and there was an outcry among the Muslims. Ṭalḥah asked the Commander of the Faithful why he did not bring out his codex to the people – the one they had rejected:

> What is stopping you, may God have mercy on you, from bringing God's Book out to the people?

Ali initially refrained from answering him, and so Ṭalḥah repeated the question, saying to him:

> I do not see you giving me an answer to what I asked you regarding the Qur'an. Why do you not show it to the people?

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[56] Abū Dharr's narration says: 'And So-and-So looked at it and lo, there were things in it.' See Abū Manṣūr Aḥmad ibn Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib Ṭabrisī , *al-Iḥtijāj* (Najaf, 1386 q.), vol. 1, 225-228.

[57] Al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn al-Qays*, 81-82.

[58] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 25.

[59] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 48.

[60] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 42.

He replied:

> Ṭalḥah, I intentionally refrained from answering you. Tell me about what the people have written. Is it all Qur'an or is some of it not Qur'an?

Ṭalḥah said:

> Nay, it is all Qur'an.

He replied:

> If you follow what is in it you will be saved from the Hellfire and go to Heaven.

Ṭalḥah said:

> It is enough for me. If it is Qur'an, it is enough for me.[61]

Thus the Imām and his Successors were keen to preserve the nation's unity, so that they would not disagree amongst themselves after having reached a consensus on what was the Qur'an.

Zayd ibn Thābit's Codex

The cruel rejection of Ali's codex caused people to think about undertaking the task of gathering the Qur'an together no matter what the cost. They felt it was necessary to collect the Qur'an together in one place, especially in view of their Prophet's instruction to put it together so it would not be lost, the way the Jews had lost their Torah.[62]

Besides, the Qur'an was the primary source of Islamic legislation and the fundamental basis for building society at that time, so it was not right that it should remain scattered about on palm branches, white stones or in men's hearts, especially in view of the fact that the slaying of many of those who had memorised the Qur'an had become a serious matter, and the Qur'an had almost been lost along with those who had memorised it, for seventy of them – or four hundred according to another narration – had been killed at the Battle of Yamāmah.[63]

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[61] Al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*, 124; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 42.

[62] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 451; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 48.

[63] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 7, 447; *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 3, 296 says: Three hundred and sixty of the Migrants *(Muhājirūn)* and Helpers (*Anṣār*) who lived in Medina were

'Umar expressed this to Abū Bakr – the leader of the Muslims at the time – and suggested that someone qualified to undertake such an important task should be appointed, so they chose Zayd ibn Thābit, a young man who had the pliancy of youth and a history of scribing the revelation. He had an inherent aptitude with none of the fear that the new caliphate had of other, more senior companions, who nonetheless had some power of resistance to following all the inclinations of the government of the time.

According to Zayd:

> Abū Bakr summoned me after the people were killed at Yamāmah, and 'Umar was sitting with him.
>
> He said, 'This man [pointing to 'Umar] came to me and said, 'Many reciters of the Qur'an were killed at the Battle of Yamāmah. I fear that many of them will be killed on other battlefields and much of the Qur'an will be lost.' He suggested putting the Qur'an together, and so I said to 'Umar, 'How can we do what God's Messenger did not do?' He replied, 'By God, it is good.' 'Umar kept reminding of this until God expanded my breast to the matter and I shared 'Umar's opinion.'

Zayd continues:

> Abū Bakr told me, 'You are an intelligent young man. We have no charge against you. You used to scribe the revelation for God's Messenger, so seek out the Qur'an and assemble it.

He recalls:

> I swear by God, if they had charged me with moving a mountain it would not have been more onerous than what they had asked me to do, so I said, 'How can you do something which God's Messenger did not do?'

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killed, along with three hundred Migrants who did not live in Medina, as well as three hundred successors.

Abū Bakr's letter to Khālid (vol. 3, 300) said: 'The blood of one thousand two hundred Muslim men is not yet dry.'

> Thereafter, Abū Bakr and 'Umar kept pestering me until God expanded my breast as He had done with Abū Bakr and 'Umar.

He continues:

> So I began seeking out the Qur'an, gathering it together from palm branches, delicate white stones and men's hearts.[64]

Zayd's Method

Zayd embarked upon the project and collected together the Qur'an from palm branches, white stones, skin and paper. It was scattered amongst the companions and in their hearts, and a group of them came to his aid.

The first task he undertook was to direct a general call to everybody: 'Whosoever received any of the Qur'an from God's Messenger should bring it.'

According to al-Ya'qūbī's narration,[65] a committee of twenty-five members was set up, and 'Umar supervised it personally.

They met at the door of the mosque every day, and people would bring them verses and chapters of the Qur'an, each according to what they had.

They would not accept anything from anyone until he brought two witnesses to testify to the authenticity of whatever he had of the Qur'an, except for Khuzaymah ibn Thābit. He brought the two verses at the end of *The Repentance* (*al-Tawbah*), and they accepted it from him without asking for witnesses, because God's Messenger considered his uncorroborated testimony to be equivalent to that of two witnesses.[66]

Zayd explains:

> I found the end of The Repentance with [Abū] Khuzaymah al-Anṣāri. I did not find it with anyone else.[67]

We shall come back to what is between square brackets.

It is strange that 'Umar brought the verse on stoning and claimed it to be part of the Qur'an:

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[64] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 225; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 6; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 56; vol. 2, 247; Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 233.

[65] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 125.

[66] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 2, 114 and Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 6-9.

[67] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226.

> The old man and old woman, if they fornicate, stone them both as an exemplary punishment from God.

However he faced rejection, and it was not accepted from him because he could not get two witnesses to it.[68] 'Umar's soul remained troubled by that, and he would say during his caliphate in reference to the verse on stoning:[69]

> If it were not for the fact that people would say that 'Umar has added to God's Book I would write it with my own hand.

Zayd did not arrange the chapters of the Qur'an or put them in order as a codex. He only put the verses and chapters on pages and placed them in a jacket in order to keep them together and prevent them from being separated and lost. Hence, his compilation is not known as a *muṣḥaf*.

According to al-Muhāsibī:

> The Qur'an was scattered on parchments, shoulder bones and delicate white stones. The truthful one (*al-ṣiddīq*) [meaning Abū Bakr] only instructed [because the epithet is misappropriated] that it be copied from one place to another where it could all be kept together on pages, so he kept them all together and bound them with thread so that none of them would be lost.[70]

Ibn Ḥajar explains:

> The difference between the pages (*ṣuḥuf*) [mentioned in the narration on Zayd's compilation] and the *muṣḥaf* is that the pages were just leaves on which the Qur'an was put together during Abū Bakr's time. They were loose chapters, the verses of which had only been put in order, but which themselves were not arranged in order one after the other. Only when they were copied and arranged in order, one after the other, did they become a codex.[71]

Aḥmad al-Amīn says:

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[68] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 167-168.

[69] Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm, (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), vol. 3, 261; Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, 35; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 2, 26.

[70] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 168.

[71] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 16.

> During Abū Bakr's time, he ordered that the Qur'an be collected together, not in a single codex, but instead, the different pages which had verses and chapters of the Qur'an on them were collected together, and the many pages which had Qur'an on them were deposited with Abū Bakr.[72]

Al-Zarqānī comments:

> The verses, but not the chapters, were placed in order in Abū Bakr's scrolls *(ṣuḥuf)*.[73]

These pages were deposited with Abū Bakr and remained with him throughout his life. Then they were with 'Umar, and after him, with his daughter Ḥafṣah. During the days when the codices were standardised, 'Uthmān borrowed it from her to check the copies against it and then gave it back to her. When she died, Marwān took it from her heirs when he was appointed governor of Medina by Mu'āwiyah, and ordered that it be ripped up.[74]

The text of Bukhārī says:

> I found the end of *The Repentance* with Abū Khuzaymah...

However, some wonder who Abū Khuzaymah is.
According to al-Qasṭalānī:

> He is Ibn Aws ibn Yazīd ibn Ḥizām, but known by his teknonym *(kunyah)* without his name being known.[75]

Ibn Ḥajar thinks it is possible that he is al-Ḥarth ibn Khuzaymah, as Abū Dāwūd's narration states.[76]

The correct answer is that it is an addition mistakenly made by the narrator or copier. It just means Khuzaymah without any 'Abū,' proven by the fact that Zayd accepted his testimony as equivalent to that of two people. There is no one else thus characterised among the companions.[77]

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[72] Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1965), 195.

[73] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 262.

[74] Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muhammad Qasṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sārī fī Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Amīriyyah, 1323 q.), vol. 7, 449.

[75] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 7, 447.

[76] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 12.

[77] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 4, 90.

So, too, was Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī sure that it meant Khuzaymah, whose testimony God's Messenger made equivalent to two men's.[78] Hence, he incorporated it into the text without adding 'Abū'.[79]

Alternatively, it could be said that Abū Khuzaymah is Khuzaymah ibn Thābit. He was also called Abū Khuzaymah, since Abū Ashtah's text has his name as Abū Khuzaymah ibn Thābit.[80]

All the other narrations, except Bukhārī's, have Khuzaymah ibn Thābit without 'Abū.'[81] Hence we believe that the most likely explanation is that it is a copyist's error.

Another question is raised over the condition of having two witnesses before accepting a text as Qur'anic, according to Abū Dāwūd's wording, via a reliable (*mu'tabar*) chain of narration.[82]

Ibn Ḥajar explains:

> What is meant by two witnesses concerns memorisations and writing.[83]

Al-Sakhāwī says:

> ...two witnesses to testify that that which was written was written before the Messenger of God. Alternatively, what is meant is that they testified to the authenticity of its recitation and that it was one of the officially revealed Qur'anic reciting styles (*min al-wujūh allatī nazala bihā al-Qur'an*).

According to Abū Shāmah:

> It was as if the intention behind that was that nothing but that which was actually written before God's Messenger, not just memorised, should be written down.

Jalāl al-Dīn suggests:

> Alternatively, what is meant is that they were two witnesses to the fact that that was part of what was read back to the Prophet

[78] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 234.
[79] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 239.
[80] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 58.
[81] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 296.
[82] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 168.
[83] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 12.

> in the year of his death. It was the final recitation the companions agreed upon and which people recite today.[84]

My comment is that it means there should be two witnesses – one to bring the verse and another who is just (i.e., one of the companions, for example, to vouch for him) – to testify that they had heard that part of the Qur'an from the Prophet, as with the acceptance of the testimony of Khuzaymah ibn Thābit (who brought the end of *The Repentance*) being equivalent to two men's testimony. That is what Ibn Ashtah's text says, cited in *muṣḥafs* on the authority of al-Layth ibn Sa'd:

> The people would come to Zayd ibn Thābit, but he would only write down a verse testified to by two witnesses of good character *(shāhiday 'adlin)*. He only found the end of The Repentance with [Abū] Khuzaymah ibn Thābit Dhū al-Ṣhahādatayn[85] and so he said, 'Write it down, for God's Messenger made his testimony that of two men,' so he wrote it down. 'Umar brought the verse on stoning, but he did not write it down, because he was on his own.[86]

Doubts and Objections

Blachère says:

> Why did Abū Bakr choose someone like Zayd – a young man who was no older than twenty – for this important task when there were senior companions qualified for it? Let us assume the turmoil of the situation presented an obstacle to turning to an important personage such as Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib. But why did they ignore the rest of the good companions, who had a longer history of dealings with the revelation of the Qur'an and companionship of the Messenger? Did the Battle of Yamāmah kill off all the reciters out of the original companions, and was there no one except Zayd, who was new to reciting the Qur'an? This is something which stirs up our doubts in the matter. We can hardly believe that it was Zayd who compiled the Qur'an.

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[84] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 142 and 167

[85] His nickname meaning his testimony was equivalent to that of two men's. (Trans.)

[86] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 168.

> I add to that the fact that history does not record exactly when he began and completed this task. If it is true that he undertook compiling the Qur'an after the Battle of Yamāmah, there would only have been fifteen months of Abū Bakr's life left. This is too little time to complete this important task, which required great efforts to collect together all the sources and meet with men who had verses and chapters and were spread throughout the lands, all of which would require more time and many assistants to make it impossible to complete it in that short period of time.
>
> Moreover, the narration says that Zayd put the Qur'an together on pages and deposited them with Abū Bakr, then they passed to 'Umar, and then his daughter Ḥafṣah inherited them.
>
> If the purpose behind putting the Qur'an together was to take care of public interest, as testified to by the fact that Abū Bakr's heirs were not exclusively entitled to those pages – instead they passed to 'Umar, the caliph after him – why did 'Umar make them the exclusive inheritance of his daughter Ḥafṣah and not make them publicly available to the Muslims? Similarly, why did the pages become an exclusive deposit with Abū Bakr without being put in a publicly accessible place?

Blachère deduces the following from these doubts:

> It was the senior companions who undertook the compilation of the Qur'an after the Messenger's passing, assembled it and put its chapters in order, something which was the Islamic caliphate's job, but which it omitted to do. This disregard may have led to criticism among those who did the job for them. Hence, it fell to a young man whom they could not accuse, to copy a codex from some of the companions' codices through which the caliph could also make his mark. As for initiating the compilation of the Qur'an, this was not something he did.[87]

My comment is that if the prerequisites for fulfilling a task, no matter how big, are easily met and the means are readily available, it can be

[87] Translated and abridged from a Persian magazine entitled *Khāndanīhā* (Year eight, no. 44, Bahman 1326 s.), 12.

achieved in a short time, especially if some urgency is attached to the work and if those in charge try their best to accomplish it as soon as possible. And certainly the compilation of the Qur'an was one such task.

As for the primary sources, these were available in Medina itself, kept at the disposal of the trustworthy companions. The carriers and memorisers of it were there, night and day, and remained in the mosque of their Master who had recently passed away. What was retrieved from them was easy to digest, especially given that the chapters of the Qur'an were complete, and all that remained was no more than to assemble it all together in one place. Thus the means were furnished and the circumstances conducive. I add to that the fact that, if the government – which has the power – tries to accomplish a task like this, it has the means at its disposal, and a long period is not needed to complete it under these circumstances.

Moreover, Zayd was only compiling the Qur'an to protect it from becoming lost. He was not arranging it in order or doing any other intellectual work. Such straightforward work does not require protracted efforts or a great length of time.

It is acknowledged that the purpose was in the public interest of protecting the Qur'an from being lost, which was achieved by depositing the pages containing the whole of the Qur'an in a safe place. There was no need at that time to refer to these pages, given that there were many people who had memorised the Qur'an, and that at the time, many others had memorised most of the verses pertaining to everyday life, politics and so on.

Moreover, at the end of 'Umar's time, there were a lot of codices containing all the verses and chapters of the Qur'an, a number of which were at the disposal of trusted companions, and he saw that the public need for the pages deposited with him had greatly diminished. Hence, he took personal possession of it, and there was no further need for it until the process of standardisation during 'Uthmān's time.

Zayd's Worthiness

As for the matter of choosing Zayd for such an important task, al-Zarqānī states:

> Abū Bakr took the view, through God's light, that one of the best men out of the companions should be appointed to carry out this important task: Zayd ibn Thābit, because he had gifts important for putting the Qur'an together which other men did not have, for he was one of those who had memorised the entire Qur'an and was one of the scribes of the Qur'an for the Messenger. He witnessed the final exposition of the Qur'an, and beyond that, he was known for his intelligence, piety, great trustworthiness, perfectly good manners and the rectitude of his faith.[88]

Al-Zarqānī believed that Zayd alone, amongst all the other companions of the Prophet present at the time, had these attributes! This is something we simply cannot believe, because we know from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and other sources that there were four people who had collected together and memorised the whole of the Qur'an during the Prophet's time, whom the people had been told to consult, and from whom to learn Qur'anic recitation, and Zayd was not one of them. These four were 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal and Sālim (Ḥudhayfah's freeman).[89] They also had the other attributes referred to by al-Zarqānī, so why did Abū Bakr not choose one of them?

As for the person who witnessed the final exposition of the Qur'an, it was Ibn Mas'ūd, not Zayd. Ibn 'Abbās explains:

> The Qur'an was recited to the Messenger once every Ramaḍān, except for the year in which he was taken when it was recited to him twice. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd was in attendance and witnessed what was abrogated and changed.[90]

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[88] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 250.

[89] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 5, 34 and vol. 6, 229; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, hadith no. 110, 2. Anas' hadith says, 'Only four people assembled the Qur'an together in his time: Abu al-Dardā', Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thābit and Abū Zayd...' *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 230. However, Anas made this claim and then leading critics and examiners responded to it. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 43 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 199-200.
If Zayd was one of those who assembled the Qur'an in the Prophet's time, why did Anas think it was such an issue that Abū Bakr should suggest giving the task of assembling the Qur'an to him?

[90] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, part 2, 104.

Moreover, Ibn Mas'ūd's longer history with the Qur'an and the special attention given him by the Messenger, who used to teach him the Qur'an, were well known.[91]

Ubayy ibn Ka'b had taught the Prophet's companions how to recite, since God had commanded the Prophet to show Ubayy the whole of the Qur'an.[92] He was known as the master of the reciters.[93]

The same is true of Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, of whom the Prophet said:

> He is the leader *(imām)* of the scholars in terms of *rutwah* [elevation]. He [the Prophet] appointed him in Mecca to teach them faith and how to recite the Qur'an[94]

This indicates that Zayd was not as qualified as other senior companions, just as the matter of his scribing the revelation was only when others were not available. According to Ibn 'Abd al-Barr:

> The Prophet would summon Zayd to act as a scribe for him if Ubayy ibn Ka'b was not around.[95]

Moreover, al-Zarqānī does not provide any evidence for Zayd's unique attributes.

Admittedly, Zayd did have an attribute which none of the other companions had, which *al-Bukhārī* has alluded to:

> You are an intelligent young man. We have no charge against you.

He had a clear record which suited the government's aims at the time, and which was apparent on the day of the Saqīfah, when he took a sharp stance in defence of the Migrants (*muhājirūn*), even though he was one of the Helpers (*anṣār*), by saying:

> God's Messenger was one of the Migrants and we are his Helpers. The leader can only be an Migrant and we will be his Helpers.

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[91] See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 5, 35 and vol. 6, 229-230; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, part 2, 105; Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 220.

[92] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 230; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, part 2, 103.

[93] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, 187.

[94] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, part 2, 107-108.

[95] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 1, 50.

Abū Bakr's face lit up at this unusual statement, and he wished him a great reward, saying:

> May God reward you, ye Helpers, the best reward He ever gives to a tribe, and may He strengthen that one who said that [i.e., Zayd]. By God, if you said anything else, we would not make peace with you.

He also said to him one day:

> You are trusted by all of us.[96]

Abū Bakr did not forget this important stand. Hence, he appointed him to compile the Qur'an and had no doubts in his mind, which knew what would be for the best.

Zayd was eleven years old when the Prophet arrived in Medina, and was clever enough for the Prophet to charge him with learning Hebrew at the Jewish schools, and to engage him as a scribe and read the letters he received which were in Hebrew.[97]

He also took charge of scribing the codices in Uthman's time with a group of Quraysh boys comprised of Sa'īd ibn al-'Ās, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr and 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn al-Ḥārith.[98]

Other Codices

For a time after the death of the Prophet, a number of senior companions undertook the task of compiling the Qur'an and putting its chapters together between two boards, each in his own order of arrangement. Such an arrangement is known as a *muṣḥaf*.

It is said that the first person to put the Qur'an together in a *muṣḥaf* (i.e., put the chapters in order as an organised book) was Abū Ḥudhayfah's freeman Sālim. They deliberated over what to call it, and one of them said, 'Call it a *sifr*.' Salim replied, 'That is a Jewish name,' and they did not like it. Thereafter, he said, 'I have seen the like of it called *muṣḥaf* in Ethiopia,' and so they agreed to call it a *muṣḥaf*. This is cited by Ibn Ashtah in *al-Maṣāḥif*.[99]

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[96] Ibn 'Asākir, *al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 5, 244 and 446; vol. 6, 132. See also Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 5-10.

[97] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, part 2, 115-117.

[98] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226.

[99] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 166; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 11-14.

Similarly, compiling the Qur'an was undertaken by Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn al-Ka'b, al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, and Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, who called his codex *Lubāb al-Qulūb* (*The Core of Hearts*).[100]

It appears from the hadith about the Iraqi who came to see 'Ā'ishah, asking her to show him her codex, that she also had one of her own. Bukhārī narrates on the authority of Ibn Māhak:

> I was with 'A'ishah when an Iraqi came to her to ask her questions, including asking her to show him her codex. He said, 'Mother of the believers, show me your codex.' She asked, 'Why?' He replied, 'So that I can compile the Qur'an based on it, because it is recited *ghayr mu'allaf* [i.e., not in any particular order or arrangement, or on account of disagreement over the order of the verses],'[101] and so she said, 'It does not matter how you recite it.'... So she got out a codex and dictated the verses of the chapters *(āya al-suwar)*.[102]

Some of these codices had an elevated position in Islamic society at that time. Thus, the people of Kufa recited in accordance with 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's codex, the people of Baṣra in accordance with Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī's codex, the people of the Levant in accordance with Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex, with the exception of the people of Damascus, who recited in accordance with al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad's codex. The narration in *al-Kāmil* says that the people of Homs used to follow al-Miqdād's recitation.[103]

The lifespan of the various Codices

These codices were around for a very short period of time, which came to an end with the standardisation of the Qur'an in 'Uthmān's time, when the companions' codices were ripped apart and burned.

According to Anas ibn Mālik:

> 'Uthmān sent the codex they had copied to every horizon, and ordered that any Qur'an written on any other page or in any other codex be burned.[104]

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[100] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 55.

[101] As believed to be possible by Ibn Ḥajar in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 36.

[102] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 228.

[103] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 55; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 225; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 11-14; Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 239-243.

[104] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226.

It is true that some of these codices survived longer, such as the one in Ḥafṣah's possession, which 'Uthmān asked for to check copies of the Qur'an against, and which she refused to give to him until he had promised to return it.[105] Hence, he returned it to her and it remained in her possession until she died. Thereafter, Marwān ordered that it be brought forth and ripped it apart.

It appears from Abū Bakr ibn Abī Dāwūd's narration that Ubayy ibn Ka'b's children kept a copy of their father's codex out of the reach of other people. He says:

> People came from Iraq seeking Muhammad ibn Ubayy, and they asked him to bring out his father's codex. So he said, "Uthmān seized it.' They pestered him, but to no avail, which indicates the level of fear of the ruling in force, and so he did not show it to the Iraqis.[106]

Ṭabarī's narration says that Ibn 'Abbās gave a codex to Abū Thābit, and described it as Ubayy ibn Ka'b's recitation. It remained with him before passing on to Naṣīr ibn Abī al-Ash'ath al-Asadī al-Kūfī. Thereafter, Yaḥyā ibn 'Īsā al-Fākhūrī came along one day and read in it:

> And those of whom you seek content up to an appointed time *(ilā ajalin musammā)* ...[107]

This indicates that it had survived up to the end of the second century, because Yaḥyā ibn 'Īsā died in the year 201.[108]

According to al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān:

> A reliable source from among our co-religionists said:
>
> The compilation of chapters according to Ubayy ibn Ka'b's recitation is in Baṣra, in a village two *farsakhs* away called Qaryat al-Anṣār, at Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Anṣārī's (d. 150) house. He brought out a codex for us and told us it was Ubayy's codex, which

[105] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 9.

[106] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 25.

[107] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 9. This appears to be 4:24. It diverges from the Ḥafs recitation through the addition of 'up to an appointed time' (*ilā ajalin musammā*). However, the addition may have been the explanation added by Ubbay or Ibn Abbas. [Editor.]

[108] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 11, 263.

> we have narrated on the authority of our forefathers. I looked in it and ascertained the beginnings and endings of the chapters, and the number of verses in each chapter.[109]

Among the narrations from the People of the Household is what Imām al-Ṣādiq said:

> As for us, we recite in accordance with Ubayy's recitation[110] [i.e., Ubayy ibn Ka'b].

As for Ibn Mas'ūd, he refused to give his codex to the caliph's messenger, and stubbornly held onto it, which led to a fierce conflict between him and 'Uthmān, that resulted in his being banished from his commission and ultimately his death.

When the caliph's messenger came to Kufa to take the codices, Ibn Mas'ūd got up to give a speech, saying:

> People, I have proffered a deception regarding my codex. Whoever is able to do likewise regarding a codex should do so, for whoso deceiveth will bring his deceit with him on the Day of Resurrection [3:161]. What an excellent deception the codex is.[111]

That is how he would urge people to take direct action to resist the law, and it is what caused him so much trouble. The caliph despatched him to Medina and there were strong words between them. He ended up beating him up, breaking his teeth and throwing him out of the mosque in a degrading manner.

Al-Wāqidī narrates via his own chain of narration and that of others:

> When Ibn Mas'ūd was summoned to Medina he entered at night, on a Thursday night. When 'Uthmān learned of his entry, he retorted, 'People, an insect has dropped in on you. When he walks on his food, he vomits and drops excrement.'
>
> Ibn Mas'ūd said, 'I am not like that. On the contrary, I was a companion of the Messenger of God at the Battle of Badr, his companion at the Battle of Uḥud, his companion at the pledge

[109] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 46.

[110] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 821.

[111] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 15.

of allegiance of satisfaction *(bay'at al-riḍwān)*, his companion at the Battle of the Trench *(Yawm al-Khandaq)* and his companion at the Battle of Ḥunayn.'

'Ā'ishah shouted, "Uthmān! Do you say this to the Prophet's companion?' and 'Uthmān said, 'Silence.'

Then he told 'Abdullāh ibn Zama'ah ibn al-Aswad, 'Throw him out roughly,' and so Ibn Zama'ah seized him, carried him to the door of the mosque and threw him to the ground, breaking one of his molars. Ibn Mas'ūd protested, 'Ibn Zama'ah the unbeliever has killed me by 'Uthmān's command.'

The narrator comments:

It is as if I can see the small bone of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's shanks, his legs hanging over the back of 'Uthmān's freeman's neck, until he was thrown out of the mosque, saying, 'I implore you by God, do not throw me out of the Mosque of my bosom friend the Prophet.'[112]

It is said:

Ibn Mas'ūd became ill, and so 'Uthmān came to visit him. He asked, 'What is this talk of you which has reached me?' He replied, 'I only mentioned what you did to me. You gave an order for my abdomen to be trodden on, and I have not had the mental faculty for the noon prayer or the afternoon prayer. You have withheld my grant.' 'Uthmān said, 'I shall let you retaliate against me – do to me what was done to you... And this is your grant, so take it.' Ibn Mas'ūd replied, 'You deprived me of it when I was in need of it, and you give it to me now that I am able to dispense with it and have no need for it.' So Ibn Mas'ūd remained angry with 'Uthmān until he passed away. 'Ammār ibn Yāsir performed the funeral prayer for him without 'Uthmān's knowing. Similarly, when al-Miqdād died, 'Ammār performed his funeral prayer according to his testamentary instruction, and so 'Uthmān's anger towards

[112] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, 43-44.

> 'Ammār became severe. He said, 'My adversity is towards the son of the black woman. I knew what he was up to.'[113]

However, in spite of all that, his codex remained in circulation until much later on. According to Ibn al-Nadīm (297-385):

> I saw several codices, the copiers of which stated that they were 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's. Some of them were written two hundred years ago.[114]

It appears also from Zamakhsharī that this codex was well known until the sixth century, for he says:

> Ibn Mas'ūd's codex says ...

It is likely that this means that he found something in the codex itself, not that it was narrated to him.[115]

A General Description of the Companions' Codices

A shared characteristic of the codices of the time was that the longer chapters were placed before the shorter ones in a more or less methodological order:

1) First of all, the seven long chapters: *The Cow, The Family of 'Imrān, The Women, The Heights, Cattle, The Table* and *Jonah.*[116]

2) Next, *al-Mi'īn*, consisting of roughly twelve chapters, each approximately a hundred verses in length.

3) The oft-repeated chapters (*al-Mathānī*), which have fewer than a hundred verses. There are about twenty of them. They are called *al-Mathānī* because recitation of them is repeated (*tuthannā*) more than for other chapters such as the long ones and *al-mi'īn.*

4) *Al-Ḥawāmīm*, which are the seven chapters beginning with *Ḥā Mīm.*

5) *Al-Mumtaḥanāt*, consisting of approximately twenty chapters.

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[113] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārikh al-Ya'qūbi*, vol. 2, 160.

[114] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 46.

[115] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, 410; vol. 4, 40.

[116] These are the seven long chapters according to the companions' codices. However, 'Uthmān resolved to put the chapter entitled *The Spoils of War* (*al-Anfāl*) first, claiming that it and *The Repudiation* (*al-Barā'ah*) were a single chapter, making it one of the seven longer ones, as discussed below. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 172-173 and Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 221.

6) *Al-Mufaṣṣalāt*, which begin with *The Merciful* up to the end of the Qur'an. They are so called because the divisions (*fawāṣil*) between them are close together and there are many breaks (*fuṣūl*).

These are the general characteristics of the companions' codices. Reference in most of them was to that of Ibn Mas'ūd, although they differ from each other in that some chapters come before others and some have more chapters than others. This is examined below.

Description of Ibn Mas'ūd's Codex

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd's codex was arranged in the following order:[117]

1) The seven long chapters: *The Cow*, *The Women*, *The Family of 'Imrān*, *The Heights*, *Cattle*, *The Table* and *Jonah*.

2) *Al-Mi'īn*: *The Repentance*, *The Bee*, *Hūd*, *Joseph*, *The Cave*, *The Night Journey*, *The Prophets*, *Ṭā Hā*, *The Believers*, *The Poets* and *Those Arrayed in Ranks*.

3) The Oft-Repeated (*al-Mathānī*): *The Confederates*, *The Pilgrimage*, *The Narrations*, *The Ant*, *The Light*, *The Spoils of War*, *Mary*, *The Spider*, *The Romans*, *Yā Sīn*, *The Criterion*, *al-Ḥijr*, *The Thunder*, *Sheba*, *The Originator Abraham*, *Ṣād*, *Muhammad*, *Luqmān* and *The Troops*.

4) *Al-Ḥawāmīm*: *The Believer*, *The Adornment*, *Explained in Detail*, *The Counsel*, *The Sand Dunes*, *The Crouching* and *The Smoke*.

5) *Al-Mumtaḥanāt*: *The Victory*, *Iron* (N),*The Prostration*, *Qāf* (N), *Divorce*, *The Pen*, *The Chambers*, *The Kingdom*, *The Mutual Disillusion*, *The Hypocrites*, *The Congregation*, *The Ranks*, *The Jinn*, *The Disputer*, *She Who is Tested* and *The Prohibition*.

6) *Al-Mufaṣṣalāt*: *The Merciful*, *The Star*, *The Mount*, *The Winds That Scatter*, *The Moon*, *The Indubitable* (N), *The Inevitable*, *Those Who Tear Out*, *The Ways of Ascent*, *The Shrouded*, *The Enwrapped*, *The Dealers in Fraud*, *He Frowned*, *The Man*, *Those Sent Forth*, *The Resurrection*, *The Good Tidings*, *The Rolling Up*, *The Splitter*, *The Enveloper*, *The Most High*, *The Night*, *The Dawn*, *The Constellations*, *The Sundering*, *The Blood Clot*, *The City*, *The Forenoon*, *The Night Star*, *The Chargers*, *Charity*, *The Great Calamity*, *The Clear Sign*, *The Sun*, *The Fig*, *The Traducter*, *The Elephant*, *Quraysh*,

[117] This is according to Ibn Ashtah's text (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 181). We have filled in the missing parts from Ibn al-Nadīm's text (Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*: 45) and indicated where we have done so with the symbol (N).

Rivalry, *The (Night of) Power*, *The Earthquake*, *The Help*, *The Abundance*, *The Unbelievers*, *Palm Fibre*, *The Unity* and *The Expanding*.

This amounts to a hundred and eleven chapters with the omission of *The Opening* and the *Mu'awwidhatayn*, as will be discussed.

Another aspect in which Ibn Mas'ūd's codex was unique was through its omission of *The Opening*, not on account of a belief that it was not part of the Qur'an, but rather because the recording of the chapters in the codex was to keep them from being lost. This chapter (*The Opening*) was inherently safe from being lost, and Muslims still recite it ten or more times a day. Ibn Qutaybah made reference to this, as we shall see.

Alternatively, it may be because he believed it to be equivalent to the Qur'an on account of God's:

We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an (15:85).

The seven oft-repeated (verses) are *The Opening*.

In any event, leading experts on the subject agree that his codex omits *The Opening*, as Ibn al-Nadīm narrates on the authority of al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān [i.e. with a small "a" at the beginning]. Last sentence of same para should also say: Hence he places what al-Faḍl says above what he has witnessed for himself.[118]

According to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī:

> As for the omission of The Opening, it is stated by Abū 'Ubayd via an authentic chain of narration.[119]

He had also made reference to the narration before that.[120] Ibn Qutaybah says:

> As for the omission of The Opening from the codex, it is not on account of his not knowing that it is part of the Qur'an. How can that be, given that he was one of the companions who paid the most attention to the Qur'an? All the time, he would hear God's Messenger lead the prayer with it, and say:
>
> There is no prayer without The Praise (*Sūrah al-Ḥamd*).
>
> They are the seven oft-repeated and the Mother of the Book.

[118] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 46.

[119] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 222.

[120] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 184.

> However, he took the position, according to the theorists, that the Qur'an was only written down and put together between the two boards *(al-ḍaffatayn)* out of fear of doubt, forgetfulness, addition and omission, and believed that The Praise was safe from that on account of its brevity and because it is recited twice in every prayer, and on account of the fact that every Muslim has a duty to learn it. Given that it was safe from loss – which was the reason why the codex was written – he did not write it down, even though he knew it was part of the Qur'an.[121]

A third way in which it differed was in the omission of the *Mu'awwidhatayn* (*The Daybreak* and *Mankind*), believing that they were an incantation pronounced to keep away the Evil Eye or witchcraft, as tradition says: the Prophet would seek refuge through them from the witchcraft of the Jews, and said:

> No seeker of refuge has sought refuge with better than, *Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak...'* and *Say, 'I seek refuge in the Lord of Mankind...'*[122]

The omission of the *Mu'awwidhatayn* from the codices is attributed through a correct chain to Ibn Mas'ūd, and his saying:

> Do not mix with the Qur'an that which is not part of it. They are not part of God's Book. The Prophet simply gave an instruction to seek refuge through them.

Ibn Mas'ūd would not recite them in his prayer.[123]

Nevertheless, according to what Ibn Ḥajar narrates on their authority, some scholars, such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Ḥazm, deny that this is attributable to Ibn Mas'ūd. He then responds to them by saying that it is correct to attribute this to him:

> Criticising the authentic narrations without an evidential basis for doing so is not acceptable. On the contrary, the narration is authentic, but interpretation is possible.[124]

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[121] Abdullāh ibn Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1393 q.), 47-49.

[122] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 416-417.

[123] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 571; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 416.

[124] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 571.

Al-Bāqillānī explains this interpretation as follows:

> Ibn Mas'ūd did not deny their being part of the Qur'an. He only disputed their being recorded in the codex. He thought that nothing should be recorded in the codex that the Prophet did not allow to be written in it. It is as if the licence to do so did not reach him. This was his own interpretation and is not a denial that they are part of the Qur'an.

Ibn Ḥajar's comment is:

> This is a fair interpretation apart from the fact that the explicit narration to which I have referred refutes that, because it says, '...and he claims that they are not part of God's Book.' Yet it is possible to construe the words 'God's Book' as the codex, which makes the aforementioned interpretation work.[125]

My comment is that this last interpretation also does not fit in with what he said:

> Do not mix with the Qur'an that which is not part of it.[126]

We should note that some may think that what is attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd contradicts what is said about the Qur'anic text being narrated via so many sources as to be indisputable.

However, it is no secret that Ibn Mas'ūd did not deny that they were revelations in the general sense of the word. He only denied their being Qur'anic revelation qua part of God's Book. Everybody agrees that the *Mu'awwidhatayn* are revelations from God. The only dispute is over whether they part of God's Book *(the Qur'an)* or not? This does not affect the aforementioned consensus.

Another aspect is that according to the author of *al-Iqnā'*:

> *The Repentance* (*al-Tawbah*) has a *basmalah* in Ibn Mas'ūd's codex.

But he comments that:

> That cannot be followed.[127]

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 416.

[127] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 184.

He means by this last statement that Ibn Mas'ūd had eccentric or divergent views which were rejected by the companions and the successors. There may have been personal judgments which others say he was wrong about, such as his position on *taṭbīq*.[128]

Ibn Ḥazm says *taṭbīq* during prayer is not allowed because it was abrogated. However, Ibn Mas'ūd used to do it. He would clap his hands together behind him, and his companions would do the same. What we have narrated on the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd is what he said on the subject:

> God's Messenger taught us how to pray – he started the prayer, and thereafter, when he wanted to bow he would put his hands together *(ṭabbaqa)* between his knees and bow.

Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ heard of this and commented:

> My brother speaks the truth; we used to do that. Then, he told us to do this, that is, to grasp [our] knees.[129]

Imām Rāzī says regarding Ibn Mas'ūd's divergent views:

> We have to give him the benefit of the doubt and say that he abandoned these opinions.[130]

Another point is the discrepancy between his recitation and the official text (*mashhūr*) with regard to many verses. This was attributed to replacing words with their synonyms, and was usually with the purpose of clarification and explanation.

Ibn Mas'ūd's school was known for its relaxed approach to the wording of the Qur'an. He would allow for one word to be replaced with a synonym if it was clearer and did not change the original meaning.

He said:

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[128] *Taṭbīq* (putting together) here means placing the palms of one's hands together and putting them between one's knees when bowing in prayer.

[129] Ali ibn Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *al-Muḥallā* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijārī li al-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Nashr, n.d.), vol. 3, 274.

[130] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, 213.

> I have heard the reciters and they are similar to each other. Recite as you have been taught [by the teacher of recitation], for it is like saying *halumma* (come on) or *ta'āl* (come on).[131]

> He was teaching a non-Arab man the Qur'an and said, *The Zaqqūm tree shall be the food of the sinner* (*al-athīm*) (44:43-44), but the man said, 'the food of *al-yatīm* (the orphan),' and was incapable of saying *al-athīm* (the sinner), so Ibn Mas'ūd told him: 'Say, 'The food of *al-fājir* (the grave sinner)."

> Then Ibn Mas'ūd said, 'It is not a mistake in the Qur'an to recite *al-ḥakīm* (the Wise) instead of *al-'alīm* (the All-Knowing). It is, however, a mistake to change a verse of punishment for a verse of mercy.'[132]

Similar to this is what Ṭabarī narrates:

> Ibn Mas'ūd would say that Ilyās is Idrīs and so he would recite, 'Verily, Idrīs was one of the envoys,' and recite, 'Peace be upon Idrāsīn' (37:123 and 130).[133]

Ibn Qutaybah states that Ibn Mas'ūd would recite, *wa takūn al-jibālu ka al-ṣūf al-manfūsh* (And the mountains will be like carded wool) instead of *ka al-'ihn al-manfūsh* (like carded wool) (101:5),[134] because *'ihn* (wool) means the same as *ṣūf*. However, the latter is clearer and more familiar.

Hence, when some of the early exegetes had difficulty understanding an unfamiliar word in the Qur'anic text, they would refer to Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation. He would invariably have substituted it for a synonymous word that was clearer and better explained the original meaning.

According to al-Mujāhid:

> We did not use to know what *al-zukhruf* was until we saw *aw yakūna laka baytun min dhahabin* (or else you come to own a house made

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[131] Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt ibn 'Abdillāh al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1411 q.), vol. 4, 193 in the entry on Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Yazdād ibn Rustum; see also Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fi al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), vol. 1, 21; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 134.

[132] Rāzī, *al-Tafsir al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, 213.

[133] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 23, 62.

[134] See Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an*, 24.

> out of gold) [instead of *aw yakūna laka baytun min zukhrufin*] in Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation.[135]

Zamakhsharī explained the Almighty's Words, *And the thief, male and female: cut off the hands of both (fa [i]qṭa'ū aydīyahumā)* (5:38) as the right hands, because Ibn Mas'ud recited it as, 'cut off their right hands (*fa [i] qṭa'ū aydiyahumā*).'[136]

Ghazālī states that part of the protocol of selling goods is the accuracy of the tongue of balance, for profit and loss result from manipulating them. He relied on Ibn Mas'ūd's reading of 55:9 as evidence for that:

> but observe the measure through the tongue and skimp not in the balance [*wa aqīmu al-wazna bi al-lisān* (tongue) instead of *bi-al-qisṭ* (fairness)].

He says:

> ...because fairness – according to the generally accepted reading – is only observed through the tongue of balance.[137]

Some editions of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* correct this in accordance with the generally accepted version, and thereby miss the import of the author's relying on it as evidence.

Similarly he would recite, *I have vowed to the All-Merciful* silence (*ṣamtan*), *and today I will not speak to any man*, instead of *I have vowed to the All-Merciful a fast* (*ṣawman*) (19:26),[138] because the 'fast' which was vowed was a vow of silence.

Also, he would recite, *there is no fault in them that they put off their* jalābīb (*jalābībahunn*), *so be it that they flaunt no ornament*, instead of *there is no fault in them that they put off their clothes* (*thiyābahunn*), because what was meant by putting off their clothes was none other than putting off their *jalābīb*.[139]

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[135] Ibn Mas'ūd's variant reading of 17:93. See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 109.

[136] See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 632.

[137] Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamīd Muhammad, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-'Uthmānīyyah, 1933), vol. 2, 79.*

[138] See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 14 and Abū Ḥayyān Muhammad ibn Yūsuf al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1412 q.), vol. 6, 185.

[139] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 222.

And, *I dreamed that I was pressing* grapes (*a'ṣiru 'inaban*), instead of, *I dreamed that I was pressing wine* (*a'ṣiru khamran*) (12:36), because it is grapes that are pressed.[140]

He would recite *wa thūmihā* instead of *wa fūmihā* (2:61), since both mean the same thing [i.e. and its garlic].[141]

Also, *Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed,* Wait for us (*amhilūnā*), *so that we may borrow your light,* instead of *Wait for us* (*unẓurūnā*) (57:13),[142] because what is meant is slowing down (*al-imhāl*).

And also, *It was only one crowing (zaqiyyah)* instead of *It was only one cry* (*ṣayḥah*) (36:29 and 53).

'Allāmah Ṭabrisī explains this last point:

> It comes from 'the bird crowed' (*zaqā al-ṭayr*). It is as if Ibn Mas'ūd used a cock's crowing to draw attention to the fact that, in spite of the great power and the stirring of the dead from the graves, the Resurrection is easy for God, like a bird's crowing. It is like The Almighty's Words:
>
> *He created you not, nor shall He resurrect you, save as if you were a single soul* (31:28).[143]

Note that some may use this difference in recitation of the Qur'anic text as an excuse to criticise Ibn Mas'ūd, as the German orientalist Goldziher did in his book *Schools of Islamic Exegesis*,[144] which he wrote for that purpose.

However, it is an attempt doomed to failure, given that we know that the difference refers to a variant recitation of the Qur'anic text as has been recorded from the early days of Islam up to the present time. Hence, it has not been altered, even to correct orthographical errors.

It is true that there was a concern amongst some of the early Muslims (*al-salaf*) to make things easy for the people by allowing them to recite

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[140] Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab*, vol. 2, 15.

[141] Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab*, vol. 1, 171; Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an* (Egypt: Dār al-Miṣriyyah li al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1360 s.), vol. 1, 41.

[142] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 134

[143] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 421.

[144] *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (1920; reprint, Leiden, 1970).

any way they liked, as long as it reproduced the original meaning, which was in some cases a marked departure from the recorded script.

Hence Ibn Mas'ūd allowed the non-Arabs to say *ṭa'ām al-fājir* instead of *ṭa'ām al-āthim* (the food of the grave sinner).[145]

In so doing he would substitute a word, which was easier for the non-Arab to pronounce, for a difficult one. However, it was neither recorded in the Qur'anic text, nor a licence to alter it. Far be it from him to do such a thing.

This is similar to the advice given by 'Ā'ishah to an Iraqi, 'It does not matter how you recite it [the Qur'an],'[146] demonstrating a relaxed approach to recitation, but not a deviation within the Qur'anic text itself, which is Revelation from Heaven. There is no doubt that her own codex was authentic.

It may also have been possible that Ibn Mas'ūd made explanatory comments interspersed within the original text.

This would reflect his school of thought, having a relaxed approach to the wording with the purpose of clarification, while still preserving the original text.

Thus leading experts on the subject considered these additions in Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation to be exegesis (*tafsīrāt*). They did not consider them to be part of a distinct Qur'anic text attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd, which disagreed with the early Muslims (*al-salaf*) over the wording of the Revelation.

It is possible that this relaxed approach by Ibn Mas'ūd was inappropriately indulgent with regard to the Qur'anic text. It may have exposed the original text to alteration, which was completely incompatible with the care and attention which should have been accorded to a Revelation from Heaven. Some insensitive people may have relied on this as evidence that it was permissible to include what is not part of the Qur'an in the text for the purpose of clarification.[147] This, however, is to branch out from an unsound basis.

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[145] Supra under the fifth aspect of the Description of Ibn Mas'ūd's Codex: A Fifth Respect

[146] See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 228.

[147] See Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ al-Zarqānī 'alā al-Muwaṭṭa'* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'at al-Khayrīyyah, 1411 q.), vol. 1, 255.

And, *I dreamed that I was pressing* grapes (*a'ṣiru 'inaban*), instead of, *I dreamed that I was pressing wine* (*a'ṣiru khamran*) (12:36), because it is grapes that are pressed.[140]

He would recite *wa thūmihā* instead of *wa fūmihā* (2:61), since both mean the same thing [i.e. and its garlic].[141]

Also, *Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed,* Wait for us (*amhilūnā*), *so that we may borrow your light,* instead of *Wait for us* (*unẓurūnā*) (57:13),[142] because what is meant is slowing down (*al-imhāl*).

And also, *It was only one crowing (zaqiyyah)* instead of *It was only one cry* (*ṣayḥah*) (36:29 and 53).

'Allāmah Ṭabrisī explains this last point:

> It comes from 'the bird crowed' *(zaqā al-ṭayr).* It is as if Ibn Mas'ūd used a cock's crowing to draw attention to the fact that, in spite of the great power and the stirring of the dead from the graves, the Resurrection is easy for God, like a bird's crowing. It is like The Almighty's Words:
>
> *He created you not, nor shall He resurrect you, save as if you were a single soul* (31:28).[143]

Note that some may use this difference in recitation of the Qur'anic text as an excuse to criticise Ibn Mas'ūd, as the German orientalist Goldziher did in his book *Schools of Islamic Exegesis,*[144] which he wrote for that purpose.

However, it is an attempt doomed to failure, given that we know that the difference refers to a variant recitation of the Qur'anic text as has been recorded from the early days of Islam up to the present time. Hence, it has not been altered, even to correct orthographical errors.

It is true that there was a concern amongst some of the early Muslims (*al-salaf*) to make things easy for the people by allowing them to recite

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[140] Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab*, vol. 2, 15.

[141] Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab*, vol. 1, 171; Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an* (Egypt: Dār al-Miṣriyyah li al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1360 s.), vol. 1, 41.

[142] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 134

[143] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 421.

[144] *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (1920; reprint, Leiden, 1970).

any way they liked, as long as it reproduced the original meaning, which was in some cases a marked departure from the recorded script.

Hence Ibn Mas'ūd allowed the non-Arabs to say *ṭa'ām al-fājir* instead of *ṭa'ām al-āthim* (the food of the grave sinner).[145]

In so doing he would substitute a word, which was easier for the non-Arab to pronounce, for a difficult one. However, it was neither recorded in the Qur'anic text, nor a licence to alter it. Far be it from him to do such a thing.

This is similar to the advice given by 'Ā'ishah to an Iraqi, 'It does not matter how you recite it [the Qur'an],'[146] demonstrating a relaxed approach to recitation, but not a deviation within the Qur'anic text itself, which is Revelation from Heaven. There is no doubt that her own codex was authentic.

It may also have been possible that Ibn Mas'ūd made explanatory comments interspersed within the original text.

This would reflect his school of thought, having a relaxed approach to the wording with the purpose of clarification, while still preserving the original text.

Thus leading experts on the subject considered these additions in Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation to be exegesis (*tafsīrāt*). They did not consider them to be part of a distinct Qur'anic text attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd, which disagreed with the early Muslims (*al-salaf*) over the wording of the Revelation.

It is possible that this relaxed approach by Ibn Mas'ūd was inappropriately indulgent with regard to the Qur'anic text. It may have exposed the original text to alteration, which was completely incompatible with the care and attention which should have been accorded to a Revelation from Heaven. Some insensitive people may have relied on this as evidence that it was permissible to include what is not part of the Qur'an in the text for the purpose of clarification.[147] This, however, is to branch out from an unsound basis.

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[145] Supra under the fifth aspect of the Description of Ibn Mas'ūd's Codex: A Fifth Respect

[146] See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 228.

[147] See Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ al-Zarqānī 'alā al-Muwaṭṭa'* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'at al-Khayrīyyah, 1411 q.), vol. 1, 255.

In any event, interpolations are attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation, some of which we shall refer to in what follows, where they are marked in square brackets:

He would recite:

> The people were one nation [but then they fell into disagreement *(fa [i]khtalafū)*]; then God sent forth the Prophets, good tidings to bear and warning, and He sent down with them the Book with the Truth, that He might decide between the people touching their differences (2:213).[148]

This addition clears up an apparent ambiguity in the verse: was the sending of the Prophets the cause of the disagreement or quite the opposite? The end of the verse indicates the latter, but the addition was intended to provide greater clarification of this point.

He would recite:

> The Prophet is a greater authority over the believers than their selves [and he is a father to them *(wa huwa abun lahum)*], and his wives are their mothers (33:6).[149]

This addition was to clarify the reason for the prophet's authority over the believers.

He recited:

> I have come to you [with signs *(bi āyāt)*],

whereas the official version says:

> with a sign *(bi āyah)* from your Lord; so fear you God [on account of what verses I have brought you *(li mā ji'tukum bihi min al-āyāt)*, and obey you me [with regard to what I am calling you to *(fī mā ad'ūkum ilayh)*]. (3:50).[150]

He used to recite:

> *And his wife, standing by* [and him sitting down], *laughed...* (11:71)[151]

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[148] See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 255.

[149] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 523.

[150] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 365.

[151] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, 410.

He would recite:

> *Three men conspire not secretly together,* [but God] *is the fourth of them, [neither four but God is the fifth of them], neither five men,* [but God] *is the sixth of them, neither fewer (wa lā adnā) than that, neither more,* [but God] *is with them* [when they whisper into each other's ear] (58:7),[152]

whereas the official version reads in each case: *but He.*
Also:

> Behold, this, my brother has ninety-nine [females (unthā)] and I have one [female] sheep. (38:23).[153]

And:

> And warn thy clan, thy nearest kin [your band from among them being the sincere ones *(wa rahṭaka minhum al-mukhlaṣīn)*] (26:214).[154]

Ibn Mardawayh states that Ibn Mas'ūd said:

> We used to recite during the Prophet's time:
>
> *O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord* [that Ali is the Master of the believers]; *for if thou dost not, thou wilt not have delivered His Message. God will protect thee from the people* (5:67).[155]

It is likely that he was interpreting the verse, for this was how it was interpreted in his time.
He used to recite:

> Nay, [I] marvel (*bal 'ajibtu*) and they scoff,

with a *ḍammah* above the *tā'* – *'ajibtu* (I marvel) – whereas the generally accepted reading is:

> *Nay thou marvellest* (bal 'ajibta) *and they scoff* (37:12),

[152] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 490.
[153] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 85 and Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'an*, 38.
[154] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 206; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 164.
[155] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, 298; vol. 3, 117.

with a *fatḥah* above the *tā'* – *'ajibta* (thou marvellest).[156] Shurayḥ al-Qāḍī denies this and explains:

> God does not marvel. It is only someone with no knowledge who marvels.

Al-A'mash says:

> I mentioned this to Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, and he said: 'Shurayḥ was impressed with his own opinion. 'Abdullāh would recite, 'Nay I marvel *('ajibtu)*,' with a *ḍammah*, and he knew better than Shurayḥ. There is tradition which attributes *al-'ajab* to God that says, 'Your Lord is impressed by *('ajiba Rabbukum bi)* a young man who does not have youthful passion,' and 'Your Lord is astonished by *('ajiba Rabbukum bi)* your anguish and your despair.'
>
> There can be two sides to that – being impressed by what *('ajiba mimmā)* He is pleased with, meaning deeming it to be good and telling of His complete contentment, or astonishment at what *('ajiba mimmā)* He hates, meaning disavowal and censure.'[157]

We consider the narration to be authentic on the basis of Ibn Athīr's *Nihāyah*.

Zamakhsharī reflects:

> Should one ask can *'ajab* be attributed to God given that it is astonishment *(raw'ah)* which overcomes a person when he thinks it is amazing, and astonishment does not pass over God? The answer is: there are two possible meanings [for *'ajab*]; one just means to deem something to be great and the second is that astonishment is imagined and supposed. Tradition says, *"Ajiba rabbukum* by your anguish and your despair, and the speed of His response to you.'[158]

We have set out this discussion here as evidence of how important the great man Ibn Mas'ūd's recitations are considered by exegetes, and how much attention is paid to them by the leading scholars.

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[156] See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 38 and Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 23, 29.

[157] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 440.

[158] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 37.

Description of Ubayy ibn Ka'b's Codex

The arrangement of Ubayy's codex was very similar to that of Ibn Mas'ūd's, except that he brought forward *The Spoils of War*, putting it after *Jonah* and before *The Repentance*, and put *Mary*, *The Poets* and *The Pilgrimage* before *Joseph*, and so forth, as clarified in the table below.

This codex contained a hundred and fifteen chapters. He made *The Elephant* and *Quraysh* a single chapter, and added two chapters – *al-Khul'* (Casting Off) and *al-Ḥafd* (Quick Pace), as we shall discuss. It began with The Praise (*Sūrah al-Ḥamd*) and ended with the *Mu'awidhdhatayn*, as in the present one.[159]

He also included two supplications said in the qunūt,[160] which he believed to be two chapters.

Al-Khul' is as follows:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، اللهم انا نستعينک و نستغفرک، و نثنی عليک الخير و لا نکفرک، و نخلع و نترک من يفجرک.

'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: O God, we seek Your help and seek Your forgiveness and praise You. We do not disbelieve in You and cast off and forsake whoever sins gravely against You.'

Al-Ḥafd is as follows:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، اللهم اياک نعبد و لک نصلی و نسجد، و اليک نسعی و نحفد، نخشی عذابک و نرجو رحمتک، ان عذابک بالکفار ملحق.

'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: O God, Thee alone we worship, to Thee we pray and prostrate. Towards Thee we strive and hasten (*wa naḥfid*). We fear Your punishment and hope for Your Mercy. Verily Your punishment catches up with the unbelievers.'[161]

Another characterisitic is that he omits the formula *In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate* (*al-basmalah*) between the chapters

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[159] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 181 and 184.

[160] A supplication said in a standing position with one›s hands cupped in front of oneself during prayer. (Trans.)

[161] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 185.

entitled *The Elephant* and *Quraysh*, treating them as a single chapter.[162] Traditions on the authority of the People of the Household also say that they are a single chapter, albeit with a *basmalah* between them. Thus, if a person recites *The Elephant* in his prayers, he should also recite *Quraysh*, because they are recited as they were a single chapter, but written as two chapters, contrary to what is in Ubayy's codex.

Al-'Ayyāshī narrates on the authority of Abu al-'Abbās, on the authority of either Imām al-Bāqir or Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> *Hast thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with the people of elephant...* and *For the harmony of Quraysh* are a single chapter.[163]

Similarly, it has been narrated that *The Forenoon* (*al-Ḍuḥā*) and *The Expanding* (*al-Inshirāḥ*) are a single chapter,[164] and our scholars have ruled accordingly. According to al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī:

> Our co-religionists narrate that *The Forenoon* and *The Expanding* are a single chapter, and the same is true of *The Elephant* and *Quraysh*. It is not permissible to separate one of them from its companion in any rak'ah.[165]

Majma' al-Bayān says:

> It is narrated that Ubayy ibn Ka'b did not separate them in his codex.[166]

Also, *The Troops* (*al-Zumar*) began with *Ḥa Mīm* in this codex, making the number of *Ḥawāmīm* (*Ḥa Mīms*) eight. Ibn Ashtah states in *al-Maṣāḥif*:

> ... then *The Troops* which begins with *Ḥa Mīm*...[167]

As with Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation, there are variations in his recitation that differ from the generally accepted script. There follow some examples:

He would recite:

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[162] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 186.

[163] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 744.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Al-Shaykh Mohammad Hasan Najafī, *Jawāhir al-Kalām* ((Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1365 s.), vol. 10, 20.

[166] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 544.

[167] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 181.

yā waylanā! [man ḥabbanā] min marqadinā? (Alas for us! Who roused us out of our sleeping place?) (36:52).[168]

The official recension reads:

yā waylanā! man ba'athanā min marqadinā

Also:

kullamā aḍā'a lahum [marrū fīh or *sa'aw fīh]*

'whensoever it gives them light, they [pass into it or run into it],'

instead of:

they walk in it...(mashaw fīh) (2:20).[169]

Also:

fa ṣiyāmu thalāthati ayyāmin [mutatābi'ātin] fi al-ḥajj

then a fast of three [consecutive] *days on the Pilgrimage* (2:196),[170]

in view of the fact that the days have to be consecutive. He therefore made this clear with the addition.

Also:

and to those from whom you seek pleasure [up to an appointed time *(ilā ajalin musammā)*] give them their wages apportionate (4:24),[171]

in order to make it clear that it is temporary marriage (*mut'ah*).

Also:

The Hour is coming; I almost hide it (20:15) [from Myself so why would I would show it to you? ukhfīhā (min nafsī fa kayfa uẓhirukum 'alayhā)],[172]

in order to explain the verse.

Also:

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[168] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 428.

[169] See Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 134.

[170] See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 242.

[171] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 9.

[172] See Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'an*, 25.

> When the unbelievers set in their hearts zealotry, the zealotry of the Age of Ignorance, [and if you are zealous like they are zealous the Holy Mosque will be spoiled], then God sent down His Tranquility upon His messenger and the believers (48:26).[173]

In what follows there is a table comparing the early Muslim codices with the arrangement of our codex today. We have taken it from Ibn Ashtah's text,[174] and filled in the gaps in accordance with Ibn al-Nadīm's text, indicating with (N) where we have done so. Ibn al-Nadīm relies on al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān's narration preferring it over what he had seen for himself. He says:

> I saw several codices, the transcribers of which stated that they were Ibn Mas'ūd's codex, but none of which match up with each other. Most of them are on parchment with a lot of crossing out. I saw a codex written more than two hundred years ago with the Opening of the Book *(Fātiḥat al-kitāb)* in it. Al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān was one of the leading authorities *(imāms)* on the Qur'an and traditions. That is why we have made reference to what he says instead of what we have seen.[175]

[173] See al-Sayyid Ḥāmid Husayn Laknhuwi, *'Abaqāt al-Anwār fī Ma'rifat al-A'immat al-Aṭhār* (Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Bi'thah, 1405 q.), *mujalladu Ḥadīth Madīnat al-'Ilm* (the volume on the hadith regarding the City of Knowledge), 518

[174] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 181.

[175] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 46.

TABLE COMPARING THE THREE CODICES

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
1	...	The Opening	The Opening
2	The Cow	The Cow	The Cow
3	The Women	The Women	The Family of 'Imrān
4	The Family of 'Imrān	The Family of 'Imrān	The Women
5	The Heights	The Cattle	The Table
6	The Cattle	The Heights	The Cattle
7	The Table	The Table	The Heights
8	Jonah	Jonah	The Spoils of War
9	The Repentance	The Spoils of War	The Repentance
10	The Bee	The Repentance	Jonah
11	Hud	Hud	Hud
12	Joseph	Mary	Joseph
13	The Cave	The Poets	The Thunder
14	The Night Journey	The Pilgrimage	Abraham
15	The Prophets	Joseph	Al-Ḥijr
16	Ṭā Ḥā	The Cave	The Bee

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
17	The Believers	The Bee	The Night Journey
18	The Poets	The Confederates	The Cave
19	Those Arrayed in Ranks	The Night Journey	Mary
20	The Confederates	The Troops (Beginning with Ḥā Mīm)	Ṭā Ḥā
21	The Pilgrimage	Ṭā Hā	The Prophets
22	The Narrations	The Prophets	The Pilgrimage
23	The Ant	The Light	The Believers
24	The Light	The Believers	The Light
25	The Spoils of War	Sheba	The Criterion
26	Mary	The Spider	The Poets
27	The Spider	The Believer (The Forgiver)	The Ant
28	The Romans	The Thunder	The Narrations
29	Yā Sīn	The Narrations	The Spider
30	The Criterion	The Ant	The Romans
31	Al-Ḥijr	Those Arrayed in Ranks	Luqmān
32	The Thunder	Ṣād	The Prostration

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
33	Sheba	Yā Sīn	The Confederates
34	The Originator	al-Ḥijr	Sheba
35	Abraham	The Consultation	The Originator
36	Ṣād	The Romans	Yā Sīn
37	Muhammad	The Adornment (N)	Those Arrayed in Ranks
38	Luqmān	Explained in Detail (N)	Ṣād
39	The Troops	Abraham (N)	The Troops
40	The Believer	The Originator (N)	The Believer (The Forgiver)
41	The Adornment	Iron [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *Muhammad*.]	Explained in Detail
42	Explained in Detail	The Victory	The Consultation
43	The Consultation	Muhammad	The Adornment
44	The Sand Dunes	The Disputer	The Smoke
45	The Crouching	The Kingdom	The Crouching
46	The Smoke	The Criterion (N)	The Sand Dunes
47	The Victory	The Prostration	Muhammad

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
17	The Believers	The Bee	The Night Journey
18	The Poets	The Confederates	The Cave
19	Those Arrayed in Ranks	The Night Journey	Mary
20	The Confederates	The Troops (Beginning with Ḥā Mīm)	Ṭā Hā
21	The Pilgrimage	Ṭā Hā	The Prophets
22	The Narrations	The Prophets	The Pilgrimage
23	The Ant	The Light	The Believers
24	The Light	The Believers	The Light
25	The Spoils of War	Sheba	The Criterion
26	Mary	The Spider	The Poets
27	The Spider	The Believer (The Forgiver)	The Ant
28	The Romans	The Thunder	The Narrations
29	Yā Sīn	The Narrations	The Spider
30	The Criterion	The Ant	The Romans
31	Al-Ḥijr	Those Arrayed in Ranks	Luqmān
32	The Thunder	Ṣād	The Prostration

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
33	Sheba	Yā Sīn	The Confederates
34	The Originator	al-Ḥijr	Sheba
35	Abraham	The Consultation	The Originator
36	Ṣād	The Romans	Yā Sīn
37	Muhammad	The Adornment (N)	Those Arrayed in Ranks
38	Luqmān	Explained in Detail (N)	Ṣād
39	The Troops	Abraham (N)	The Troops
40	The Believer	The Originator (N)	The Believer (The Forgiver)
41	The Adornment	Iron [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *Muhammad*.]	Explained in Detail
42	Explained in Detail	The Victory	The Consultation
43	The Consultation	Muhammad	The Adornment
44	The Sand Dunes	The Disputer	The Smoke
45	The Crouching	The Kingdom	The Crouching
46	The Smoke	The Criterion (N)	The Sand Dunes
47	The Victory	The Prostration	Muhammad

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
48	Iron (N)	Noah	The Victory
49	The Mustering	The Sand Dunes	The Chambers
50	The Prostration	Qāf	Qāf
51	Qāf (N)	The Merciful	The Winds That Scatter
52	Divorce	The Inevitable	The Mount
53	The Pen [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Calamity*.]	The Jinn	The Star
54	The Chambers	The Star	The Moon
55	The Kingdom	The Ways of Ascent	The Merciful
56	Mutual Disillusion	The Enwrapped	The Inevitable
57	The Hypocrites	The Shrouded	Iron
58	The Congregation	The Moon	The Disputer
59	The Ranks	The Smoke	The Mustering
60	The Jinn	Luqmān	She Who is Tested
61	Noah	The Crouching	The Ranks
62	The Disputer	The Mount	The Congregation

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
63	She Who is Tested	The Winds That Scatter	The Hypocrites
64	The Prohibition	The Pen	Mutual Disillusion
65	The Merciful	The Indubitable	Divorce
66	The Star	The Mustering	The Prohibition
67	The Mount [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Winds That Scatter*.]	She Who is Tested	The Kingdom
68	The Winds That Scatter	Those Sent Forth	The Pen
69	The Moon	The Good Tidings	The Indubitable
70	The Indubitable (N)	Time (N)	al-Ma'ārij
71	The Inevitable	The Resurrection	Noah
72	Those Who Tear Out	The Rolling Up	The Jinn
73	The Ways of Ascent	Divorce	The Enwrapped
74	The Shrouded	Those Who Tear Out	The Shrouded
75	The Enwrapped	The Mutual Disillusion	The Resurrection

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
76	The Dealers in Fraud [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Enveloper.*]	He Frowned	The Man
77	He Frowned	The Dealers in Fraud	Those Sent Forth
78	Time	The Sundering	The Good Tidings
79	Those Sent Forth [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Resurrection.*]	The Fig	Those Who Tear Out
80	The Resurrection	The Blood Clot	He Frowned
81	The Good Tidings	The Chambers	The Rolling Up
82	The Rolling Up	The Hypocrites	The Splitting
83	The Cleaving Asunder	The Congregation	The Dealers in Fraud
84	The Enveloper	The Prohibition	The Sundering
85	The Most High	The Dawn	The Constellations
86	The Night	The City	The Night Star
87	The Dawn	The Night	The Most High

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
88	The Constellations	The Splitting	The Enveloper
89	The Sundering	The Sun	The Dawn
90	The Blood Clot	The Constellations (N)	The City
91	The City	The Night Star	The Sun
92	The Forenoon	The Most High	The Night
93	The Night Star	The Enveloper	The Forenoon
94	The Chargers	The Ranks [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Clear Sign.*]	The Expanding
95	Charity	The Clear Sign	The Fig
96	The Great Calamity	The Forenoon	The Blood Clot
97	The Clear Sign	The Expanding	The (Night of) Power
98	The Sun	The Great Calamity	The Clear Sign
99	The Fig	Rivalry	The Earthquake
100	The Traducer	The Declining Day	The Chargers
101	The Elephant	Casting Off (*al-Khul'*)	The Great Calamity

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
102	Quraysh	Quick Pace (*al-Ḥafd*)	Rivalry
103	Rivalry	The Traducer	The Declining Day
104	The (Night of) Power	The Earthquake	The Traducer
105	The Earthquake	The Chargers	The Elephant
106	The Declining Day	The Elephant	Quraysh
107	The Help	Quraysh [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Forenoon*.]	Charity
108	The Abundance	Charity	The Abundance
109	The Unbelievers	The Abundance	The Unbelievers
110	The Palm Fibre	The (Night of) Power	The Help
111	The Unity	The Unbelievers	The Palm Fibre
112	The Expanding [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after *The Palm Fibre* (*al-Masad*).]	The Help	Sincerity
113	...	The Palm Fibre	The Daybreak
114	...	The Unity	Mankind

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
115	...	The Daybreak	...
116	...	Mankind [This would make a total of 116 chapters, but since in Ubayy's codex *The Elephant* and *Quraysh* are a single chapter, the total comes to 115.]	...

Standardisation of the Codices

It was stated above that the Prophet's passing was the time when the Qur'an was put together. The senior companions attended to the compilation of the verses and chapters into their own codices in accordance with what knowledge and competence they had been given. Others lacked the skills and so they turned to others to copy from codices for them, or to put verses and chapters together on pages. Thus, the number of codices began to increase continuously in line with the expansion of Islam's territory. The Muslims, who were growing in number and spread out over vast territories, felt the urgent need for copies of God's Book, because it was the only heavenly constitution upon which they organised all the important aspects of their life. It was their source of law, legislation and administration.

Some of these codices enjoyed an elevated position, commensurate with the status of the compiler to whom it was attributed. The codex of the noble companion 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd was the reference for the people of Kufa, a city of knowledge and a centre for advanced Islamic studies; Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex spread in the Levantine regions, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī's in Baṣra, al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad's in Damascus, and so forth.

Discrepancy between Codices

Because there were many compilers of the Qur'an who lived far apart, had different levels of competence, and had different materials, since each copy contained what the owner had collected, this meant that what one had collected did not completely conform with others. There were naturally discrepancies in the compilations of those codices in terms of style, arrangement, recitation and other matters. These differences in the early codices were set out above.

These dfferences would undoubtedly cause disagreement between people when they came together in a council. Muslims from distant parts may have gathered and disputes would have broken out, one disavowing another with regard to what school of thought (*madhhab*), belief or opinion they supported.

Examples of Disagreements amongst the People

There follows a brief exposition of examples of disagreement over the original style of recitation:

1) At the battle of the Armenian steppe, after Ḥudhayfah set off to return home from the Battle of the Gate (*Ghazw al-Bāb*) (on the Armenian-Azerbaijani steppe) he said to Sa'īd ibn al-'Ās, who was accompanying him:

> 'I have seen on this journey of mine something, which if left alone, would cause such disagreement over the Qur'an that they would never attend to it again.'
>
> Sa'īd asked: 'What was that?'
>
> He replied: 'I saw people from Homs claiming that their recitation was better than other people's recitation, and that they had learned the Qur'an from al-Miqdād. I saw the people of Damascus say that their recitation was better than others, and saw the people of Kufa say the same, and that they had recited to Ibn Mas'ūd. The people of Baṣra said the same thing, and that they had recited to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, and they called his codex *Lubāb al-Qulūb* (*The Core of Hearts*).'
>
> When Ḥudhayfah and Sa'īd's company arrived in Kufa, Ḥudhayfah told the people about the matter, and warned them about what he feared; the Messenger's companions and many of the successors agreed with him.
>
> Ibn Mas'ūd's companions said to him: 'What you renounce, do we not recite in accordance with Ibn Mas'ūd's recitation?'
>
> So Ḥudhayfah and those who agreed with him became angry and replied: 'You are just a Bedouin, so be quiet. You are wrong.'
>
> Ḥudhayfah said: 'By God, if I live I will go to the commander of the faithful,' meaning 'Uthmān, 'and tell him to come between the people and that man.'

Thereafter, Ibn Mas'ūd spoke rudely to him and Sa'īd became angry and stood up. The people dispersed, Ḥudhayfah became angry and went off to 'Uthmān.[176]

2) In the Kufa Mosque:

> Yazīd al-Nakha'ī said:'I was in the Mosque [the Kufa Mosque] during the time of Walīd ibn 'Utbah [the governor of Kufa appointed by 'Uthmān] in a study circle attended by Ḥudhayfah, and at that time there were no doorkeepers or guards for the mosque, when someone called out: 'Whoever recites in accordance with Abū Mūsā's recitation should come to the corner by *Bāb Kindah* (the door used by Kindah). Whoever recites in accordance with 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's recitation should come to the corner which is by 'Abdullāh's house."
>
> They disagreed over a verse from *The Cow*. One group recited, 'Fulfil the pilgrimage and the visitation *unto the House*,' and the other group recited, 'Fulfil the pilgrimage and the visitation *unto God*' (2:196).
>
> So Ḥudhayfah became angry and his eyes became red. Then he got up and undid his long shirt where his loincloth was tied while he was still in the mosque and said:
>
> 'Either someone else should ride to the commander of the faithful or I will ride. This is the way people of previous faiths behaved.'

Abū Sha'thā"s narration tells us:

> Ḥudhayfah said: 'The recitation of the son of the mother of a slave and the recitation of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī! By God if I am still alive to get to the commander of the faithful, I will tell him to make a conforming recitation,' and so 'Abdullāh became angry and said a harsh word, silencing Ḥudhayfah.

A third tradition says:

[176] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 55.

> Ḥudhayfah complained: 'The people of Kufa say, "Abdullāh's recitation,' and the people of Baṣra say, 'Abū Mūsā's recitation'! By God, when I go to the commander of the faithful I will tell him to drown these codices!'
>
> And so 'Abdullāh said to him: 'By God, if you do that, God will drown you in something other than water,' meaning hell.[177]

Ibn Ḥajar narrates:

> Ibn Mas'ūd told Ḥudhayfah, 'Your doing [such and such] has come to my attention.'He replied, 'Yes, I recoiled from the way So-and-So and So-and-So's recitation might lead them to fall into disagreement, the way the People of the Book fell into disagreement.'[178]

3) In Medina itself: Ibn Ashtah states that Anas ibn Mālik reported:

> They disagreed on the Qur'an in the time of 'Uthmān. One teacher began teaching one man's recitation,

meaning that of one of those who had a codex,

> and another teacher began teaching another man's recitation,

meaning that of another one of those with a codex,

> and the boys would meet up and fall into disagreement until the matter was brought up with the two teachers. Thereafter they began disavowing each other's recitation, and it came to 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān's attention. So he said: 'You who are close to me reject it and mispronounce it, so whoever is far from me will be worse in rejecting and mispronouncing it.'[179]

According to Muhammad ibn Sīrīn:

> One man would recite until the other man would tell his companion: 'You have become an unbeliever through what you say!' This was

[177] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 11-14.

[178] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 15.

[179] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 170; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 21.

> brought up with 'Uthmān and it troubled him, so he gathered twelve men from Quraysh and the Helpers.[180]

Bukayr al-Ashajj states:

> With people in Iraq, one of them would ask the other about a verse, and when the other would recite to him, he [i.e., the one asking the question] would say: 'Verily I do not believe in this recitation.' That spread among the people, and one of them spoke to 'Uthmān about it.[181]

So there were incidents involving discrepancies in the recitation of the Qur'an which did not bode well and threatened the outbreak of strife (*fitan*), were matters not nipped in the bud by astute men such as Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān and his kind.

Hudhayfah's Arrival in Medina

When Ḥudhayfah returned from the Battle of Armenia, angry about the disagreements over the Qur'an, he sought the counsel of the Messenger's companions who were in Kufa with regard to solving the problem before it got out of hand. He wanted 'Uthmān to standardise the codices and have the people all recite it one way. The companions all agreed that this was correct,[182] except 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd. Ḥudhayfah was resolved on the matter, and travelled to Medina to try to urge 'Uthmān to save Muhammad's nation before it could become disunited. He said:

> 'Commander of the Faithful, I am a mere warner. Rescue this nation before it falls into disagreement like the Jews and the Christians.' 'Uthmān asked: 'What are you talking about?' He replied: 'I fought on the Armenian steppe, and there were people of Syria reciting the way Ubayy ibn Ka'b recites, which the people of Iraq had never heard, and there were people of Iraq reciting the way Ibn Mas'ūd recites, which the people of Syria had never heard, and thereafter they were declaring each other unbelievers.'[183]

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[180] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3:2, 62; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 25.

[181] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 16.

[182] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 55.

[183] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 19-20; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 56.

'Uthmān Seeks the Companions' Counsel

Those and similar incidents were the dire consequence which made 'Uthmān take the matter seriously and work diligently. Had the matter not disturbed him, sudden shock that it was, he would, like those who preceded him, not have resolved to do it. This is without taking into consideration the difficulties he could foresee in carrying it out, because copies of the codices were scattered throughout the lands, and some of the senior and well-respected companions of the time accepted them. They may have protected and defended them, thus creating insurmountable obstacles.

Hence, he gathered the Messenger's companions present in Medina and sought their counsel on the matter. They all agreed on the need to undertake the project at whatever cost. Ibn al-Athīr says:

> So 'Uthmān gathered the companions, told them the news, and they all thought the same as Ḥudhayfah.[184]

The Standardisation Panel

'Uthmān eventually resolved to implement the idea, and first of all sent a call out to all the companions:

> Companions of Muhammad, gather and write down an imām for the people.[185]

He then appointed a dedicated group of four: Zayd ibn Thābit (an Anṣārī), Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ, 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hāshim (the latter three Qurayshi). These four were the core members in the formation of the standardisation panel.[186] Zayd took charge of the others, as is evident from Ibn Mas'ūd's disapproval of Zayd's being given this position. He said:

> O ye Muslims, shall I give up copies of the codices into the charge of a man who was still in the loins of an unbeliever when I became a Muslim?

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[184] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 56.

[185] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 59 citing Ibn Ashtah; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 21.

[186] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226.

By this he meant Zayd ibn Thābit.[187] In any event, 'Uthmān would deal with them personally.[188]

However, these four were unable to undertake the core tasks, since they lacked the competence. Hence they sought the help of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mālik ibn Abī 'Āmir, Kathīr ibn Aflaj, Anas ibn Mālik, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, Muṣ'ab ibn Sa'd[189] and 'Abdullāh ibn Fuṭaymah,[190] making a total of twelve, as narrated by Ibn Sīrīn, Ibn Sa'd and others.[191]

During this stage Ubayy ibn Ka'b took the lead. He would dictate to them and the others would write. According to Abu al-'Āliyah:

> They put together the Qur'an from Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex. Men would scribe and Ubayy ibn Ka'b would dictate to them.[192]

Ibn Ḥajar says:

> To begin with, Zayd and Sa'īd were in charge, because 'Uthmān asked, 'Who is the best writer?' They replied, 'Zayd.' He then asked, 'Who is the most eloquent?' They replied, 'Sa'īd.' Then he said, 'Sa'īd will dictate and Zayd will act as scribe.'[193]

Ibn Ḥajar continues:

> Thereafter, they needed people to help them with the writing because of the need for several codices to send to the cities on the horizons, and so they added those mentioned previously to Zayd. They then sought Ubayy ibn Ka'b's assistance in dictating.[194]

The Companions' Position on the Codices Project

It was stated above that Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān was the first to consider standardising the codices, and that he went to the caliph and exhorted

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[187] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 17; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 17.

[188] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 25.

[189] Qasṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sārī*, vol. 7, 449.

[190] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 33.

[191] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 25; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 62.

[192] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 30.

[193] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 16. This is what Muṣ'ab ibn Sa'd's tradition states. However, its import is debatable.

[194] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 16; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 62; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, 187.

him to establish a single recitation,[195] just as he sought the counsel of the Messenger's companions in Kufa, and all of them except Ibn Mas'ūd agreed with him on these matters.[196]

'Uthmān gathered the companions who were in Medina and sought their counsel in this regard, and they immediately agreed. Ibn al-Athīr says:

> So he gathered the companions, told them the news, and they thought it was splendid, and all thought the same as Ḥudhayfah.[197]

Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, expressed his agreement with the project as such. Ibn Abī Dāwūd says on the authority of Suwayd ibn Ghafalah:

> Ali said: 'By God! What 'Uthmān did with regard to the codices was not other than the result of a consultation and consent from us. He sought our counsel on the matter of the recitations and said:
>
> 'It has come to my attention that some of them say, 'My recitation is better than your narration,' and this is tantamount to becoming an unbeliever.'
>
> We asked: 'So what do you think?'
>
> He replied: 'I think people should agree on a single codex and there should be no division or disagreement.'
>
> We said: 'What a good idea you have had."[198]

According to another tradition:

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[195] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 15.

[196] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 55.

[197] Ibid.

[198] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 22. Jalāl al-Dīn says that the chain of narration is authentic: al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 59. In Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Sa'd al-Su'ūd*, 278 al-Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs narrates Muhammad ibn Zayd ibn Marwān's tradition: Zayd compiled the Qur'an during Abū Bakr's time. Then 'Uthmān did it again, and so the codex was compiled in conformity with our Master Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib's opinion.
Abū 'Abdallāh al-Zanjānī also narrates this in *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 45.

> If I had been put in charge of the codices the way 'Uthmān was put in charge, I would have done as he did.[199]

Ibn Abī Dāwūd also states on the authority of Suwayd ibn Ghafalah:

> Ali said, when 'Uthmān burned the codices, 'If he had not done it, I would have done so.'[200]

After he succeeded to the caliphate, Ali was most enthusiatic in adhering to the official codex, even if there were orthographical errors therein, in order to protect God's Book from tampering by the hand of forgery later on in the name of reform. He said on the subject:

> The Qur'an will not be disturbed again after today.

They state that a man recited within the Imām's earshot:

> *Wa ṭalḥin manḍūd* (and serried acacias) (56:29);[201]
>
> and so the Imam began muttering to himself:
>
> What has *ṭalḥ* got to do with it? It is *tal'* (clusters) like in the Almighty's Words:
>
> *lahā ṭal'un naḍīd* (with ranged clusters) (50:10).

That was not a criticism by the Imām of the reciter, nor was it a call to change the word. On the contrary, it was simply the Imām muttering to himself.

However, people heard what he said, and they quickly suggested to him:

> Should we not change it?

The Imām was astonished at this suggestion, and made the perennial and decisive statement:

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[199] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fi al-Qirāalt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 8; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 23.

[200] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 12.

[201] There is disagreement over what *ṭalḥ* means. It is said that it means banana. It is strange that Ibn Khālawayh says in *al-Shawādhdh*, 151, that the first person to plant a banana tree in Medina was Imām Ali, the Commander of the Faithful.

> Verily the Qur'an will not be disturbed today, nor will it ever be changed.[202]

And the Imāms from his offspring followed in his path.

In the presence of Imām al-Ṣādiq, a man recited from the Qur'an in a way different to how the people recited, and so the Imām told him:

> Stop! Stop! Cease this recitation and recite the way people recite.

He said in reply to the person who asked him about rhythmic recitation of the Qur'an:

> Recite as you have been taught.[203]

Hence, the consensus of our co-religionists – the *Imāmiyyah* – is that what is in our hands is the authentic Qur'an,[204] untouched by the hand of tampering, and that the generally accepted way of reciting (as recited by *Ḥafṣ*) is correct, and in accordance with what is permissible in prayer along with other rules which they apply to the text in circulation. They consider this, and nothing else, to be the Qur'an which was revealed to the Prophet.

As for Ibn Mas'ūd, I do not think that his opposition was fundamental. He was just annoyed that people were selected who were not competent enough for such a noble project, and for which the likes of him would have been more worthy. He used to say that men who had not been given permission to do so were interfering with the Qur'an of their own accord.[205] Therefore, he fiercely resisted handing over his codex to the caliph's emissary. According to Abū Maysarah:

> A man came to me while I was praying and said, 'I see you praying though an order has been given that God's Book be ripped up completely.'
>
> I carried on with my prayer and sat for a while. [But] I went home and did not sit; I walked up and down and did not sit. All

[202] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 27, 104; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 218.

[203] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasāail al-Shīlah*, vol. 4, 821.

[204] See Ṭalḥah's conversation with the Imām: Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 41-42.

[205] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 17.

of a sudden I was with al-Ash'arī, and Ḥudhayfah and Ibn Mas'ūd were arguing with each other.

Ḥudhayfah said, 'Give them the codex.'

He replied, 'By God, I will not give it to them. God's Messenger dictated seventy odd chapters to me, then I give it to them? By God, I will not give it to them.'[206]

The Year the Project Was Begun

Ibn Ḥajar explains:

> This story was in the year twenty-five, the third – or second[207] – year into 'Uthmān's caliphate.

He continues:

> Some of our contemporaries overlook that, and claim that it was around the year thirty, but do not refer to any evidential basis.[208]

Ibn al-Athīr – and those who follow him without checking – consider it to be one of the events of the thirtieth year. He says:

> In this year, Ḥudhayfah raided the Gate (*al-Bāb*), helping out 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Rabī'ah. There, Ḥudhayfah witnessed much disagreement amongst the people about the Qur'an. When he returned he suggested a compilation of the Qur'an to 'Uthmān, and he did so.[209]

I think Ibn al-Athīr is mistaken with regard to this timeline:

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[206] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 228.

[207] This uncertainty is on account of the difference in opinion over the day on which allegiance was pledged to 'Uthmān. It is said that it was in the last tenth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, 23AH. Based on that, the panel was established at the beginning of the third year of his caliphate. Alternatively, it is said that it was in the first tenth of Muḥarram, 24AH. Based on that, the panel was set up at the end of year two. See *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (al-Istiqāmah), vol. 3, 204 or *Tārikh al-Ṭabarī* (Dār al-Ma'ārif), vol. 4, 242.

[208] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 15.

[209] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 55; Aḥmad Zaynī Dahlān, *al-Futūḥāt al-Islamiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1998) vol. 1, 175.

First of all, the battle for Azerbaijan and Armenia was in the year 24, according to Abū Mikhnaf's tradition cited by Ṭabarī. Al-Walīd ibn 'Uqbah made the raid because they withheld what they had agreed with Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān when he raided them in the year 22 during the time of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.[210]

According to Ibn Ḥajar:

> Armenia was conquered during 'Uthmān's caliphate. The commander of the army was an Iraqi called Salmān ibn Rabī'ah al-Bāhilī. 'Uthmān had commanded the people of Syria and the people of Iraq to work together on that. The Syrian commander of that army was Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah al-Fihrī. Ḥudhayfah was one of the group who raided with them. He was one of the people of al-Madā'in, which is one of the governorships of Iraq.

He then says:

> The year twenty-five is the date when historians say that Armenia was conquered, at the beginning of the governorship of Walīd ibn'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'īṭ over Kufa, appointed by 'Uthmān.[211]

And:

> The raid carried out by 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Rabī'ah was in the year twenty-two, and it was Ḥudhayfah ibn Usayd al-Ghifārī who was there, not Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān al-'Ansī.[212]

And:

> In the year thirty-three, Sa'īd was appointed governor of Kufa in Walīd's place. At the same time, he was getting ready to raid Ṭabaristān. Ibn al-Zubayr, Ibn 'Abbās and al-Ḥudhayfah accompanied him on the raid.[213] Sa'īd did not return to Medina until the year thirty-four, and 'Uthmān was killed the following year.[214]

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[210] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 4, 246-247.

[211] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 13-14.

[212] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 4, 155.

[213] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 4, 269-271.

[214] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 4, 330-365.

None of this fits in with Sa'īd's being the second member of the panel, if it was set up in the year 30. The same applies to Ibn al-Zubayr and Ibn 'Abbās on the basis of the above.

In addition, al-Dhahabī states that Ubayy ibn Ka'b was one of those who passed away in the year thirty. He says:

> According to al-Wāqidī, 'It is the most correct opinion in our view.'[215]

And we know that Ubayy dictated to the members of the panel, and was their highest authority on copying and checking.

Also, Yazīd al-Nakha'ī's aforementioned tradition says, 'I was in the mosque during the time of al-Walīd ...'[216]

What inevitably proves that the event took place before the year thirty, or in Ibn Ḥajar's words, at the beginning of Walīd's governorship of Kufa,[217] is that Walīd's appointment at Kufa was at the beginning of the year twenty-six, or according to Sayf's tradition, the year before.[218]

And again, possibly the strongest proof is what Ibn Abī Dāwūd narrates on the authority of Muṣ'ab ibn Sa'd:

> 'Uthmān delivered a sermon when he began compiling the Qur'an and said, 'Your Prophet was taken fifteen years ago, and you have fallen into disagreement over the Qur'an. I have resolved that whoever has anything of the Qur'an which he heard from God's Messenger should bring it to me...'[219]

These words pinpoint exactly when the project was set up: the twenty-fifth year after the Migration.

Finally, Ibn al-Athīr is on his own when he reports from Ṭabarī on Ḥudhayfah during the events of the year thirty. In particular, it seems hard to believe that the detail he includes in his history is taken from a historical document. The overwhelming suspicion is that a number of traditions which he believed were linked have been lumped together and set out amongst the events of that year.

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[215] Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, vol. 2, 84; see Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, 62.

[216] Supra under the heading 'Examples of Disagreements Among the Public,' no. 2.

[217] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 13-14.

[218] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 4, 251.

[219] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 24.

We should note that Ṭabarī himself does not trust the timeframe he refers to when identifying the events. He sometimes wavers over whether an incident took place in the year 18 or 21, such as the Battle of Nahāwand,[220] for example. Therefore, to ascertain the date of every incident, there is no alternative other than looking for the contexts and causes, instead of rushing in and relying on dates given by historians.

Stages in the Project

The panel that was sorting through the codices carried out their work in three basic stages:

1) Gathering together the codices or pages with Qur'anic passages on them from the far reaches of the Islamic lands and destroying them.

2) Searching for authentic documents with the aim of making a standardised codex from them.

3) Comparing the copies of the standardised codex to ensure they were correct and that there were no discrepancies, then distributing it among the Muslims.

Finally, they were to ensure that all the Muslims recited the Qur'an accordingly, and no other way. Even though the panel followed these steps, there was some disregard of complete precision, especially in the third stage, which needed more attention.

During the first phase, 'Uthmān sent people far and wide to gather up any books or pages that included Qur'anic verses, and ordered that they be burned.[221]

Al-Ya'qūbī explains:

> He decreed the collection of all codices from the horizons until they were collected. Then he cooked them in boiling water and vinegar – alternatively it is said that he burned them. Not one codex was left without that being done to it, except for Ibn Mas'ūd's – he refused to give his codex up to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir. 'Uthmān issued a decree to banish him, and so Ibn Mas'ūd entered the mosque while 'Uthmān was giving a sermon and 'Uthmān said, 'An evil beast has walked in on you.'

[220] Ṭabarī is explicit about his uncertainty over the matter of the Battle of Nahāwand vol. 4, 114: *Ḥawādithu Sanah 21* (The Events of Year 21).

[221] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226.

> Thereafter, Ibn Mas'ūd said something discourteous, and so 'Uthmān gave the order and he was dragged out by his feet, breaking two of his ribs. Then 'Ā'ishah spoke, saying much.[222]

During the second phase, 'Uthmān at first thought it would be an easy task, and he chose a group not qualified to do it. Then he eventually turned to a group of others among whom were those more competent, such as the master of reciters,[223] the great companion Ubayy ibn Ka'b, and he also sent for the *rub'ah* that was in Ḥafṣah's house – the pages on which the Qur'an had been compiled during the days of Abū Bakr – and requested them, for they would be a reliable documentary basis for checking against and copying from. Ḥafṣah refused at first to give it to him – possibly because she feared that it would be torn up or burned like the other volumes – until 'Uthmān promised to return it to her, and she sent it to him.[224]

Thus, he directed a general call to all the Muslims:

> Whoever has any of the Qur'an which he heard from God's Messenger should bring it to me.[225]

People began bringing him boards, shoulder bones and palm leaves with Qur'anic verses on them. It seems that the committee thought it possible that people who had more recent experience of the final exposition might bring them the Qur'an.

According to Ibn Sīrīn:

> If they disagreed over a verse, they would put it off. Some scholars say that it may have been that they would put it off to wait for someone with more recent experience of the final exposition, and write in accordance with what he said.[226]

Anas ibn Mālik recalls:

> I was among those who were dictated to. It may be that they disagreed over a verse. They would mention the man who had

[222] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 159-160.

[223] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, 187; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, 62.

[224] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 9; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 226.

[225] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 24.

[226] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 25.

> heard it from God's Messenger, and it may be that he was away or in one of the deserts, so they would write down what came before it and what came after it, leaving a space until the man came or was sent for.[227]

On the other hand, it may be that Ubayy ibn Ka'b would dictate the Qur'an to them and they would write it down, or that they would send it to him, and he would make a correction where they had misheard the recitation.

Abu al-'Āliyah's tradition says:

> They compiled the Qur'an from Ubayy's codex. Men would write down, while Ubayy ibn Ka'b would dictate to them.[228]

'Abdullāh ibn Hāni' al-Barbarī, 'Uthmān's freeman, says:

> I was with 'Uthmān and they [the committee] were showing the codices [i.e. they were comparing the copies with each other] and he sent me with a sheep's shoulder bone to Ubayy ibn Ka'b with *lam yatasanna* (years have not passed), *lā tabdīl li al-khalq Allāh* (there is no altering in the creation of God), and *fa amhil al-kāfirīn* (so give respite to the unbelievers) on it, so Ubayy called for ink and erased the two *lāms* and wrote *li khalqi* [*A*]*llāh* (to God's creation), erased *fa amhil* and wrote *fa mahhil* (so give respite), and wrote *lam yatasannah* (years have not passed over it), adding a *hā'* to it.[229]

As for the third phase, the laxity involved emerged in orthographical errors and contradictions left in the 'Uthmānī codex which cannot be overlooked, as well as inconsistencies in the copies made from it and which were distributed far and wide. The committee, and especially 'Uthmān himself, should be reproached for this.

Ibn Abī Dāwūd tells us about one of the Syrians:

> He used to say, 'Our codex and the people of Baṣra's is a better record than that of the people of Kufa, because when 'Uthmān wrote the codices, the recitation of the people of Kufa in accordance with 'Abdullāh's recitation (*ḥarf*) came to his attention, and so he

[227] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 21.

[228] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 30.

[229] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 2, 271.

> despatched the codex to them before it was shown [i.e., before it was compared to all the other copies], whereas our codex and the people of Baṣra's were shown before they were despatched.[230]

This indicates that the codex was hastily despatched to a large region before it was carefully checked.

So, too, the discrepancy between the codices of the two cities – according to what Ibn Abī Dāwūd also tells us[231] – is evidence of the extent of the negligence in checking the copies and ensuring their accuracy.

A more scandalous aspect of this remarkable laxity is what Ibn Abī Dāwūd also narrates:

> When they finished copying the codices, they took them to 'Uthmān. He looked at them and said, 'You have done well. I see some dialectal deviation in it. However, the Arabs will straighten it out with their tongues.'
>
> He then said, 'If the person dictating had been from Hudhayl, and the scribe had been from Thaqīf, this would not be in it.'[232]

My comment is to ask why is there this remarkable lack of responsibility? Was God's Noble Book not worthy of being taken seriously to ensure that it would be free of error and dialectal deviation? Furthermore, why did he not appoint someone from Hudhayl to dictate and a scribe from Thaqīf in the first place, if he knew they were worthy and competent, except that he would have been unable to appoint his friends at the time?

The result of this laxity was that discrepancies in recitation occurred later on, which was exactly what they were trying to avoid in the first place. We shall discuss this in more detail in the forthcoming sections.

The Number of 'Uthmānī Codices

Historians disagree over the number of standardised codices despatched to the distant cities. According to Ibn Abī Dāwūd:

> There were six of them in line with the number of important metropolises which had particular centrality: Mecca, Kufa, Baṣra,

[230] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 35.

[231] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 39-49. We refer to this in a later section.

[232] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 32-33.

Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. The seventh, which was called the mother (*Umm*) or the *imām*, was kept in Medina.[233] Al-Ya'qūbī adds Egypt and al-Jazīrah (in northern Iraq).[234]

Thus, the number of codices which the committee copied was nine. One – 'the mother' or *imām* – remained in Medina, and the rest were despatched to the centres of the Islamic lands at that time.

The codex despatched to every region was kept in the regional capital. Copies of it were made, and it was referred to whenever there was a disagreement over recitation. It was therefore the arbitrator (*ḥujjah*). Recitation in accordance with it was official, and any version of it or recitation at odds with it was considered forbidden and punishable.

As for the Medina codex – the template (*imām*) – it was the reference *par excellance*, and if there were any incongruity elsewhere, the authoritative recension was the leading codex (*al-muṣḥaf al-imām*) in Medina, and any correction had to be made in accordance with it.

It is narrated that 'Uthmān despatched a reciter with every codex to instruct the people in recitation. For example, 'Abdullāh ibn Sā'ib was despatched with the Meccan codex, al-Mughīrah ibn Shihāb with the Syrian codex, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī with the Kufan codex, 'Āmir ibn 'Abd al-Qays with the Baṣran codex, and so on. The reciter and teacher of recitation in Medina appointed by the caliph was Zayd ibn Thābit.[235]

On the other hand, the great importance attached to these codices, the preservation of them by the authorities, and the vigour with which people were encouraged to look after them and study them, meant that they would have lasted forever, except that there were developments later on – the adding of dots, vowelling, the division into *ḥizbs* (*taḥzīb*),[236] and eventually a change in the script from the primitive Kufan that was used in the time of 'Uthmān to Kufan as we know it, and thereafter to the beautiful Arabic *naskh* script and others which were in circulation later on. All that caused the original 'Uthmānī codices to become forgotten and abandoned without trace.

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[233] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 34.

[234] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 160.

[235] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 403-404.

[236] There is dispute over what a *ḥizb* is. The modern meaning is a sixtieth. (Trans.)

Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626 AH) stated that 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān's codex – which he is said to have written himself – was in the Damascus Central Mosque.[237]

This codex was seen by Ibn Faḍlullāh al-'Umarī (d. 749 AH), who says:

> On the left hand side of the Central Mosque in Damascus is the 'Uthmānī codex in 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān's handwriting.[238]

It is not recorded that 'Uthmān wrote any codex himself. Perhaps it is the Syrian codex which survived up to that time. It is referred to by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH) without his saying that it is in 'Uthmān's handwriting. He explains:

> As for the 'Uthmānī codices, the most famous of them today is the one in Syria in the Central Mosque of Damascus in the eastern restricted corner. It was formerly in the city of Ṭabariyyah. Then it was moved to Damascus in around 518. I saw an enormous book in beautiful, clear, strong handwriting in bold ink on parchment which I think is camel skin.[239]

According to the prolific traveller Ibn Baṭūṭah (d. 779 AH):

> In the eastern corner of the mosque, in line with the prayer alcove, is a large storeroom containing the Noble Codex which 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān sent to Syria. That storeroom is opened every Friday after prayer, and people gather to kiss that Noble Codex. There, people make their debtors and anyone against whom they have made a claim swear an oath.[240]

It is said that this codex remained in the Damascus Mosque until it was burned within it in the year 1310.[241]

Dr Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ recalls:

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[237] Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 2, 469.

[238] Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Faḍl 'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār* (Dubai: al-Majma' al-Thaqāfī, 1423 q.), vol. 1, 195.

[239] Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍāail al-Qur'an*, 15.

[240] Abū 'Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭūṭah* (Cairo: Al-Maktabat al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1377 q.), vol. 1, 54.

[241] Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Nūrī, 1983), vol. 5, 279.

> My colleague Dr Professor Yūsuf al-'Ishsh told me that Judge 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Isṭiwānī told him that he saw the Syrian codex before it was burned. It was stored in the restricted area and lived in a wooden house.[242]

According to Professor al-Zarqānī:

> We do not have any indisputable proof that the 'Uthmānī codices still even exist today, never mind finding their locations.

As for the historical copies kept in the Egyptian book repositories, they are said to be 'Uthmānī codices. We have grave doubt about this assertion because they have ornamentation and engravings within them as markers for separating the chapters and indicating the tenth parts of the Qur'an. It is well known that the 'Uthmānī codices did not have any of this, or dots or vowelling.

It is true that in the storeroom in Mashhad there is a codex attributed to 'Uthmān, written in the old Kufan script with hollow, very wide letters. The script is consistent with the script of the Medinan or Syrian codex in view of the fact that all of them had *man yartadid* (whosoever turns) with two separate *dāls* (instead of *man yartadda*) in *The Table*. So it is most likely that this codex was copied from the 'Uthmānī codices emulating the script of one of them.[243]

Similarly, a codex in old Kufan script is attributed to the Commander of the Faithful, for written at the end of it is, 'Written by Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib in the year forty after the Migration.' Some of its pages are kept in the 'Alawī storeroom in the Holy City of Najaf.

Professor Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī says:

> In Dār al-Kutub al-'Alawiyyah in Najaf, in the month Dhū al-Ḥijjah in the year 1353, I saw a codex in Kufan script written at the end of which was: 'Written by Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib in the fortieth year after the Migration.' On account of Abī and Abū looking the same in Kufan script, someone without any experience may think that he wrote Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib with a *wāw*.[244]

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[242] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm, 1974), 89, ft.

[243] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-Qur'an*, 404-405.

[244] Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 46.

In an antiquities storeroom at the Ḥusaynī Mosque in Cairo there is also a codex said to be written in Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib's own hand. It is also written in old Kufan script. According to Professor al-Zarqānī:

> It is possible that it was written by Ali or that he ordered it to be written in Kufa.[245]

Ibn Baṭūṭah states:

> In the Commander of the Faithful Ali's mosque in Baṣra there is a Noble Codex which 'Uthmān was reading from when he was killed. There is a blood-stain on the page where God's Words, God will suffice you for them; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing (2:137) are,[246] and it is strange.

Al-Samhūdī narrates on the authority of Muḥarrir ibn Thābit:

> It has come to my attention that 'Uthmān's codex passed to Khālid ibn 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān, and so when al-Mahdī (al-'Abbāsī) became caliph, he despatched a codex to Medina – the one read from today – and al-Ḥajjāj's codex, which is in a box before the pulpit, was put away.

Ibn Zabālah says:

> Mālik ibn Anas told me that al-Ḥajjāj despatched codices to the centres of all townships, so he sent a large codex to Medina. This codex was in a box to the right of the pillar which was made a marker for where the Prophet stood. It would be opened up on Fridays and Thursdays. Thereafter, al-Mahdī despatched two there; they were put in a box, and al-Ḥajjāj's codex was put aside.

Al-Samhūdī comments:

> There is no mention in the words of any of the early historians of the codex that is found there today in the cupolaed structure which is in the middle of the Mosque being attributed to 'Uthmān.

Ibn al-Najjār, who was the first to report on the mosques' codices, says:

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[245] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 405.

[246] See Ibn Baṭūṭah, *Rihlat Ibn Baṭūṭah*, vol. 1, 116.

> The original codices were scattered over time and their pages separated from each other, and so there was nothing left of them after that.[247]

General Description of the 'Uthmani Codices

The 'Uthmānī codices were generally in a specific order similar to that of the companions' codices as regards the basic method of putting the long chapters before the short ones, with some minor differences.

They did not have any markings to differentiate letters of the alphabet or to indicate vowelling, or to divide it up into *ḥizbs*, tenths or fifths.

They were also full of orthographical errors and inconsistencies in the script, because of the primitive writing known to the companions at the time.

There follows a discussion of the general characteristics of the codices.

1- Arrangement

As discussed above, the compilation of the 'Uthmānī codex, the one still used today, was drawn from those of the companions, especially that of Ubayy ibn Ka'b. However, it differed in a few places.

An example of this is that the companions considered *Jonah* to be one of the long chapters, and was the seventh[248] or eighth[249] chapter according to the arrangement of their codices.

However, 'Uthmān took it upon himself to make *The Spoils of War* and *The Repentance* the seventh of the long chapters, believing them to be a single chapter, and he put *Jonah* amongst the chapters containing approximately a hundred verses (*suwar al-mi'īn*). This caused Ibn 'Abbās[250] to object to 'Uthmān, saying:

> What made you take *The Spoils of War* – even though it is one of the oft-repeated chapters *(al-mathānī)*[251] – and *The Repudiation* – even

[247] See Ali ibn 'Abdullāh al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-Wafā' bi Akhbār Dār al-Muṣṭafā* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Arabī, 1393q.), vol. 2, 667-668.

[248] In Ibn Mas'ūd's codex.

[249] In Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex.

[250] It was stated above that his membership of the panel only came later on.

[251] Perhaps with regard to Ibn Mas'ūd's codex, which makes it one of the oft-repeated. In Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex, on the other hand it is amongst those with approximately

> though it is one of the chapters containing roughly a hundred verses *(al-mi'īn)* – and join them together without In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate between them,[252] and place them with the seven long chapters?

'Uthmān replied:

> The long chapters were being revealed to the Prophet, and when something was revealed, he would call one of those who acted as a scribe and say, 'Put these verses in the chapter in which such-and-such is mentioned.'
>
> *The Spoils of War* was one of the first to be revealed in Medina and *The Repudiation* was the last of the Qur'an to be revealed. Its story is similar to that of the other, and so I considered it to be part of it. Thereafter, the Prophet was taken, and he did not explain to us whether or not it was a part of it. Because of that, I joined them together, did not write In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate between them, and placed them among the seven long chapters.

According to al-Ḥākim:

> The hadith is authentic according to the criteria established by the two sheikhs.[253]

This proves that the companions exercised their own personal judgment in arranging the chapters. 'Uthmān knew that the revelation of some verses of certain chapters might come later on, and at such a time the Prophet would instruct that they be put in their place in an earlier chapter. Thus, 'Uthmān believed that *The Repudiation* was the end of *The Spoils of War*[254]

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a hundred verses.

[252] As also in Ibn Mas'ūd's codex, which gives *The Repudiation a basmalah.*

[253] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 221 and 330.

[254] Al-'Ayyāshī (vol. 2, 73) narrates the same thing via his chain of narration on the authority of one of them. He says, *'The Spoils of War and The Repudiation* are a single chapter. There is disagreement among the scholars over whether they are a single chapter or two separate ones.' See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 2. It may be that what is narrated regarding the *basmalah* introducing a new chapter favoured the opinion that they are a single chapter. See *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 19.

because of their general similarities, for example, the harsh treatment of the enemies of Islam – the unbelievers and the hypocrites – and calling upon the believers to be firm and struggle to establish God's Word on the earth. Since there was no tradition on them, he joined them and made them the seventh long chapter.

It may be that he did not refer to the fact that *The Repudiation* was revealed as vengeance against the unbelievers. Hence, the Name of Mercy was not revealed with it, because it would have been inappropriate to introduce words of vengeance with the Merciful Name. The Commander of the Faithful said:

> The basmalah is an assurance of safety, and *The Repudiation* was sent down with the sword.[255]

Hence there are minor differences between the 'Uthmānī codex and the rest of the codices, not with regard to the methodology of the general arrangement, but rather the aforementioned system of classification. The table above clearly sets out these matters.

2 – Dots and Vowelling

In accordance with the style of writing in circulation among the Arabs of the time, the 'Uthmānī codices did not have any markings distinguishing ambiguous letters of the alphabet. Thus there was no distinction made between a *bā'* and a *tā'*, between a *yā'* and a *thā'*, or between a *jīm*, *ḥā'* and *khā'*. Similarly, they had no internal vowelling or desinential inflection. It was up to the reader to differentiate between them according to the context, as well as to recognise the form of the word and provide any desinential inflection.

Hence, recitation of the Qur'an in the early days depended solely on listening and narration. Were it not for reading aloud to others and teaching them to recite, deciphering the Qur'anic text would have been extremely difficult.

For example, no distinction was made between the words تبلو *tablū* (shall examine), نبلو *nablū* (we examine), نتلو *natlū* (we recite), تتلو *tatlū* (you recite) and يتلو *yatlū* (he recites). Similarly no distinction was made

[255] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 330; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 184; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 2.

between the words يعلمه *ya'lamuhu* (he knows it), تعلمه *ta'lamuhu* (you know it), نعلمه *na'lamuhu* (we know it) and يعلمه *yu'allimuhu* (he teaches it).

Thus, some may have read *that thou mayest be a sign to those after thee* لتكون لمن خلفك آية (*li takūn li man khalfaka āyah*) (10:92) as '[that thou mayest be a sign] of Him who created you لمن خلقك (*li man khalaqak*).'

In what follows, there are some actual examples over which there was disagreement regarding recitation as a result of there being no dots:

> ننشزها *nunshizuhā* (2:259) (We set them up); ننشرها *nunshiruhā* (We resurrect them); *nanshuruhā* (We resurrect them);[256]
>
> يعلمه *yu'allimuhu* (3:48) (He will teach him); نعلمه *nu'allimuhu* (We will teach him);[257]
>
> تبلو *tablū* (10:30) (she examines); تتلو *tatlū* (shall recite);[258]
>
> ننجيك *nunajjīka* (10:92) (We shall deliver thee); ننحيك *nunaḥḥīka* (We shall take you away);[259]
>
> لنبوئنهم *la nubawwi'annahum* (29:58) (We shall surely lodge them); لنثوينهم *la nuthwiyannahum* (We shall surely lodge them);[260]
>
> نجازى *nujāzī* (34:17) (We ever punish); يجازى *yujāzī* (He ever punisheth);[261]
>
> فتبينوا *fa tabayyanū* (49:6) (ascertain the truth); فتثبتوا *fa tathabbatū* (ascertain the truth).[262]

There are many other examples.

Moreover, the absence of distinguishing markings in the original codices was the main reason for divergent readings later on, because listening and memorisation had been relied upon. After some time it may have been misheard, or there may have been a mistake in relaying it, for Man is vulnerable to forgetfulness and confusion, no matter how careful

[256] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 368.
[257] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 444.
[258] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 105.
[259] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 130.
[260] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 290.
[261] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 384.
[262] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 94 and vol. 9, 131.

he is, if he does not record a text in writing. Hence it is said: 'That which is memorised escapes, but that which is written remains.'

Added to that was the spread of non-Arab peoples in the peninsula, expanding uninterruptedly throughout the vast Islamic territory. It was incumbent upon the codices panel to think about the future of the Islamic nation, and put markings where it was thought possible there would be mistakes in the recitation of the Qur'an before they occurred. But, alas, there was a laxity in this respect amongst those responsible.

Nevertheless, Ibn al-Jazarī said something strange, claiming that those responsible purposefully eschewed putting markings for a reason. He says:

> This was so that the writing could convey the authentic narration and the proven recitation from the Prophet, for reliance was placed on listening and memorisation, and not just writing.[263]

Al-Zarqānī agrees with this shocking defence:

> They would write it one way without dots and vowelling to convey this.[264]

However, this can be no excuse once we realise that the Arabs were new to writing and their script was inherently free of all distinguishing markings. They were unfamiliar with alphabetisation, vowelling and other such matters.

Development of Arabic Writing

There is nothing in the archaeological record of the Arabs in the Ḥijāz to indicate that they knew how to write until shortly before the advent of Islam. This was because their way of life was basically nomadic, and they were always migrating, warring or raiding. Thus, they were not preoccupied with matters pertaining to the arts, writing being an art of sedentary civilisation.

However, some Arabs who travelled to Syria and Iraq for trade or visits began to adopt the standards of the people there, adopted writing and calligraphy and returned, with some of them able to write Nabatean

[263] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, vol. 1, 7.

[264] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 258.

or Syriac script, which remained familiar to the Arabs until after the Islamic conquest.

The *naskhī* script, familiar to us today, was the successor to the Nabatean script, and the Kufan script was the successor to the Syriac script. This was known as *Ḥīrī* script, from al-Ḥīrah, an ancient Arab city near modern Kufa, where the transformation took place. After Kufa was built and Arab civilisation moved there, the name of the script was changed to Kufan, which remained familiar amongst the Arabs for a long period.

The Arabs learned the Nabatean script - transformed into *Naskhī* script - in the course of their trade journeys to Syria, and the *Ḥīrī* or Kufan script from Iraq. They used both styles of writing, the former for correspondence and commonplace writing, and the latter for important writings, such as the Qur'an and hadith.

A proof that the Kufan script developed from the Syriac is that they wrote الكتب in the Qur'an instead of الكتاب and الرحمن instead of الرحمان. This rule occurs everywhere in the Syriac script, where they would omit the long *alif* in the middle of a word.

Islam appeared at a time when writing was not familiar amongst the Ḥijāzī Arabs, and very few of them knew how to write. These the Prophet used to write out the revelation, and he began to encourage Muslims to learn how to write until their number multiplied.

The two styles of writing – *Naskhī* and Kufan – remained the familiar ones amongst the Muslims, and they developed them right up until the beginning of the fourth century AH, when Ibn Muqlah added outstanding improvements to the *Naskhī* script. Thus the *Naskhī* script reached the apogee of its perfection, as we have it today.

In contrast, the Kufan script began to decline until it was completely abandoned. Thereafter, the Qur'anic codices were written in a beautiful *Naskhī* script, whereas before, for two whole centuries or more, they had been written in Kufan script.[265]

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[265] See Wajdī, *Dā irat al-Ma'ārif*, vol. 3, 621; Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islamī*, vol. 3, 58-60; Abū Zayd 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā Muhammad, n.d.), 417-421; Khalīl Yaḥyā Nāmī, *Aṣl al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī* (Cairo, n.d.) vol. 3; Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī* (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabi, 1395 q.), 22; 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Ibādah, *Intishār al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Ḥindīyyah, 1915), 13-15; Nājī al-Muṣarrif, *Muṣawwar al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī*, (Cairo, 1967), 338; Muhammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī wa Ādābuh* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1939), 54.

The First Person to Add Dots to the Codex

When the Arabs adopted the script from the Syrians and Nabateans it was free of dots. To this day, Syriac writing is still free of dots. Therefore the Arabs wrote without dots until the middle of the first century. Shortly after that, Arabic writing began moving into a new phase, when dots and vowelling were added. The marking of vowels is discussed later.

After al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī had been appointed governor of Iraq by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, (75-76 AH), people were getting used to the dots on letters of the alphabet to distinguish ambiguous characters (*al-ḥurūf al-muhmalah*), which had been introduced by Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur and Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim, who were two of Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali's pupils.[266]

A reason for this is that the number of [non-Arab] freed men (*mawālī*) increased in the Islamic lands at the time, many of whom were unfamiliar with the Arabic language. Some of them were scholars and reciters, even though Arabic was not their native language. Thus it was inevitable that mispronunciation would creep into their speech, and this would disturb the Muslims if it happened in Qur'anic recitation.

Abū Aḥmad al-'Askarī narrates that people carried on reciting from 'Uthmān's codex for forty or so years up to the time of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Mispronunciation then increased and spread in Iraq, so al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf turned to his scribes for help and asked them to put markings on graphically identical characters. It is said that Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim undertook the task, adding dots singly and in pairs in different places.[267]

According to al-Zarqānī:

> The first people to add dots to the Codex were Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur and Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim, two of Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali's pupils.[268]

The First Person to Vowel the Codex

Similarly, at that time, Arabic writing was free of marks indicating the internal vowelling and desinential inflection of words (*tashkīl*), and naturally the Qur'anic text was also free of such markings.

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[266] Wajdī, *Dāairat Ma'ārif al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*, vol. 3, 722; al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 399-400; Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 68.

[267] Abū Aḥmad Hasan ibn 'Abdullāh al-'Askarī, *Sharḥ Mā Yaqa' fih al-Taṣḥīf wa al-Taḥrīf*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1963), 13.

[268] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 406.

However, during the intial stage, the Qur'an was kept in men's hearts and protected from error and mispronunciation, since the Arabs would recite it correctly in accordance with their inborn disposition which was preserved up to that time. Add to that the high level of attention which they paid to learning by listening to teachers (*mashāyikh*) who had recently experienced the age of Prophecy. Thus there were plenty of reasons for it to be remembered and recorded correctly.

However, after the middle of the first century, the number of immigrants who were foreigners to the language and lacked the aforementioned disposition increased, and they were in the direst need of markings to protect them from errors of mispronunciation.

For example, the Arabs inherently knew that the word k-t-b (كتب) is read as an active in, for example:

كتب ربكم على نفسه الرحمة *kataba Rabbukum 'alā nafsihi al-raḥmah*

Your Lord has prescribed for Himself mercy (6:54);

and as a passive in the following:

كتب عليكم الصيام *kutiba 'alaykum al-ṣiyām*

Fasting is prescribed for you (2:183).

But the non-Arab would confuse the active with the passive. Similarly, Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali heard someone recite:

God is quit of the pagans and His Messenger

أَنَّ اللهَ بَرِيءٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ وَرَسُولِه *anna [A]llāha barī'un min al-mushrikīn wa rasūlih,*

with a *kasrah* under the *lām* instead of:

God and His Messenger are quit of the pagans (9:3)

أَنَّ اللهَ بَرِيءٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ وَرَسُولُهُ *anna [A]llāha barī'un min al-mushrikīn wa rasūluh,*

with a *ḍammah* over the *lām*. Thus he said:

I did not think that the people's state had come to this.

Thereafter, he went back to Ziyād ibn Abīh, who was the governor of Kufa (50-53 AH) who had asked him to work a leader *(imām)* to the people

through whom God's Book would be known. Abu al-Aswad asked him to relieve him of his duties until he had heard this mispronunciation for himself, at which point he resolved to carry out what Ziyād had asked of him.[269] Thereafter, he said:

> I do what the emir has ordered. An excellent scribe should be found for me to do what I say.

Thence they brought him a scribe from 'Abd Qays, but he did not please him. Thereafter they brought him another who was attentive and whom he considered good.

Abu al-Aswad said to the scribe:

> When you see me open my mouth with a letter [meaning 'when I pronounce a fatḥa'], put a dot above it; when I draw my mouth together [meaning 'when I pronounce a ḍamma'] put a dot in front of the letter; and when I break [meaning 'when I pronounce a kasra'] put a dot under the letter.[270]

And in Ibn 'Iyāḍ's words:

> ...and if I follow that with nasalisation (*ghunnah*), use two dots,

so he did so.[271]

People continued using these dots as markings for internal vowelling, which were generally written in a different colour – usually red — to that of the text.

It appears that a change from using black dots to red dots happened after the alphabetical diacritical marks were added to the letters by the aforementioned Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim, thus differentiating between vowel and consonantal markings.

Jurjī Zaydān recalls:

> We saw a Kufan Codex marked like this in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyyah. They found it in 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ' Central Mosque close to Cairo. It

[269] It is said that it was Ziyād who plotted this way to force Abu al-Aswad to accept what he had requested from him, and so he got one of his followers to sit along Abu al-Aswad's route and intentionally mispronounce in the course of his recitation. See Turkī 'Aṭiyya, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 26.

[270] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*: 66: *al-Fann al-Awwal min al-Maqālah al-Thāniyah*.

[271] Al-Ṣadr, *Ta'sīs al-Shī'ah li 'Ulūm al-Islam*, 52.

> is one of the oldest Qur'ans in the world and is written on large parchment in black ink with red dots on it. A dot above the letter is a *fatḥah*, beneath it is a *kasrah*, and in front of it is a *ḍammah*, as prescribed by Abu al-Aswad.[272]

In al-Andalus, four colours were used: black for the letters themselves, red for the vowels, yellow for *hamzahs*, and green for *alifs* which are elided (*alifāt al-waṣl*).[273]

Later improvements

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> During the early period, the internal vowelling was by way of dots – a *fatḥah* was a dot at the beginning of the letter, a *ḍammah* at the end and a *kasrah* under the beginning of it. Al-Dānī followed that system. What is common now is to mark vowels using internal vowelling derived from the letters – it is as Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī said: thus, the *fatḥah* is an elongated shape above the letter, the *kasrah* is the same but below it, the *ḍammah* is a small *wāw* above it, and *tanwīn* is marked by adding another of the same.

He goes on to say:

> The first to put markings to indicate glottal stops *(hamzahs)*, markings to indicate double letters *(shaddahs)*, a slurred vowel sound *(rawm)* and making the consonant have the 'smack' of the *ḍammah* or kasrah *(ishmām)* was also Khalīl.[274]

Thus as time went by, people paid more attention to the Qur'an, simplifying its script from time to time until at the end of the third century after the Migration, it had reached the pinnacle of its excellence and beauty. People began competing to choose beautiful styles of calligraphy and inventing unique markings. They ended up using the head of a *khā'* as a *sukūn* above a letter to indicate that a vowelless letter (*al-ḥarf al-musakkan*) was lighter (*akhaff*) than a vowelled letter (*al-ḥarf al-mutaḥarrik*),

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[272] Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islamī*, vol. 3, 61.

[273] Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 27; Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 68 narrating on the authority of 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī in his book *al-Muqanna'*.

[274] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4,162; Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, *Kitāb al-Nuqaṭ*, (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1997),133.

or with the head of a *mīm* indicating that the letter was 'at rest' (*al-harf musakkan fa lā tuḥarrikhu*). The marking for a double letter (*shaddah*) was an indication to 'pull' (*shadd*) the letter forcefully. They used the head of a *ṣād* to indicate elided *alifs* (*alifāt al-waṣl*), which indicate that it is linked to the next letter (*ṣil hādhā al-ḥarf*). Hence the art of calligraphy became truly elegant, and its borders were decorated with beautiful and graceful designs.[275]

It is said that the subsequent markings for putting in fifths and tenths, and the divisions into *ḥizbs* (*taḥzīb*) and thirtieths (*tajzi'ah*), was done under the instruction of al-Ma'mūn al-'Abbāsī, or alternatively, that it was al-Ḥajjāj. According to Aḥmad ibn al-Husayn:

> Al-Ḥajjāj sent for the reciters of Baṣra, gathered them together and chose a group out of them. He then said, 'Count up the letters of the Qur'an.' They counted them for four months and lo, they were 77,439 words and 323,015 letters [or 340,740 letters according to another narration].

The Qur'an divides into two halves at the *fā'* in *wa'l yatalaṭṭaf* (let him be courteous) (18:19). The number of verses according to the Baṣran narration – which is the most correct – is 6,236 verses.

It became common to divide the Qur'an into one hundred and twentieths, and to divide it into thirty parts to make it easier to recite. Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 643 AH) states in his book *Jamāl al-Qurrā'* (The Beauty of the Reciters) that it was the work of Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd (d. 144 AH) at the request of al-Manṣūr al-'Abbāsī (d. 158), who asked him to divide the Qur'an into parts in line with the days of the year (360) to make it easier to memorise each day. Thus, Abū 'Uthmān undertook this task and divided the Qur'an into thirty parts, and each part into twelve *ḥizbs*, making three hundred and sixty *ḥizbs*.[276]

The longest chapter in the Qur'an is *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*), and the shortest is *The Abundance* (*al-Kawthar*).

The longest verse in the Qur'an is *Āyat al-Dayn* (the verse of borrowing) (2:282), which contains 128 words comprising 540 letters.

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[275] Al-Ṣadr, *Ta'sīs al-Shī'ah li 'Ulūm al-Islam*, 52, quoting *al-Miṣbāḥ* by Salāmah ibn 'Iyāḍ.

[276] See Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-Qurrā* wa *Kamāl al-Iqrā* , (Beirut, 1993), vol. 1, 379-380.

The shortest verse is والضحى (*Wa al-ḍuḥā*) (By the forenoon) (93:1), then والفجر (*Wa al-fajri*) (By the dawn) (89:1); they have 6 written letters, 5 of which are pronounced.

The longest word in the Qur'an is فاسقيناكموه (*fa'asqaynākumūhu*) (We gave it to you to drink) (15:22), with eleven written letters, all of which are pronounced.[277]

Aḥmad states in his *Musnad* on the authority of Aws ibn Ḥudhayfah:

> I was in the delegation of those of Banū Mālik from Thaqīf who had become Muslim and who came to the Messenger of God. He accommodated us in a tent of his and used to visit us on his way to his houses and to the Mosque. When he prayed the evening prayer *(al-'ishā' al-ākhirah)* he used to turn to us and tell us about what he had encountered at the hands of his people in Mecca and after the Migration to Medina. However, he stayed away from us one night until it felt to us that a long time had passed after the evening prayer.

He continues:

> We asked, 'What kept you from us, O Prophet?'
>
> He replied, 'A *ḥizb* from the Qur'an occurred to me at an unexpected time, and I did not want to go out until I had finished it.'
>
> Thereafter, we asked the companions when we woke in the morning, 'How do you divide the Qur'an into *ḥizbs*?'
>
> They replied, 'We divide it into six chapters, five chapters, seven chapters, nine chapters, eleven chapters, thirteen chapters and the *ḥizb* of *mufaṣṣal* from *Qāf*, until we reach the end.'[278]

It is likely that the last part of this is the words of Aws, elaborating on what the companions may have said, because the Qur'an at that time was comprised of separate chapters, and had not been compiled into a codex. They would divide the chapters into equal numbers to make it easier to recite according to the day or the time.

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[277] See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 249-252.

[278] Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 4, 343.

Inconsistencies in the Orthography

Writing was invented to express the meaning of the spoken word itself, and it captures the word and expresses the intended meaning. Therefore, writing has to match the spoken word exactly for the writing to be a measure of the word, without adding or taking anything away. The problem was that styles of recitation and writing differed greatly from this rule. However, there is no harm in that as long as it conforms to a general convention and causes no doubt or confusion over the intended meaning.

Nevertheless, the way the Qur'anic text was written even deviated from general convention. There were a lot of orthographical anomolies and contradictions in the way the words are written, and if recitation of the Qur'an had not been widely heard and circulatied, and the Muslims not passed it on extremely carefully from one generation to the next, the reading of many words in the Qur'an correctly would have become impossible.

The reason for that, as mentioned above, is attributable to the Arabs not being familiar with the written word at the time. Indeed, only a small number of them knew how to write, and in an extremely primitive script, as is apparent from samples of writing which have survived from the early period of Islam.[279]

Similarly, it seems that those whom 'Uthmān appointed to write the Qur'anic text had extremely bad handwriting and were ignorant of writing styles.

As mentioned above, Ibn Abī Dāwūd tells us that after they had finished copying out the texts, they presented 'Uthmān with a codex which he looked at and said, 'You have done well. I see some dialectical deviation in it which the Arabs will straighten out with their tongues.' He then said, 'If the person dictating had been from Hudhayl and the scribe from Thaqīf, this would not have been found in it.'[280]

It is clear from this narration that 'Uthmān knew Hudhayl's style of recitation and Thaqīf's good handwriting, which were not incorporated into the codex put before him. Hence his original appointment can be reproved for not having been given due consideration.

Al-Tha'labī narrates in his exegesis, regarding the following words:

[279] See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 419-438.

[280] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 32-33.

ان هذان لساحران *in hādhāni la sāḥirān*

Lo! These two men are sorcerors (20:63),

that 'Uthmān said that there is dialectical deviation in the codex which the Arabs will straighten out with their tongues. He was asked, 'Are you not going to change it?' meaning, 'Are you not going to correct it?' and he replied (out of laziness or laxity), 'Leave it, for it does not make lawful that which is unlawful or make unlawful that which is lawful.'[281]

Nevertheless, Ibn Ruzbahān uses weak reasoning here:

> As for not correcting the words of the Qur'an, it is because it was incumbent upon him [i.e. upon 'Uthmān] to follow the form of the orthography and similarly what was written in the codices, and it was not permissible for him to make changes, so he left it since it was the dialect of some of the Arabs.[282]

We do not know what he means by saying 'was written in the codices.' Which codices? How can he reconcile this with what he says at the end: that it was the dialect of some of the Arabs?

In any event, the laxity of those in charge at the time, caused the nation to perpetually put up with errors and contradictions in the Qur'anic text without the Arabs or anyone else daring to remedy them.

There was, of course, the fear that the Qur'an would thereafter be vulnerable to tampering by wrongdoers on the pretext of correcting its errors, and this was a reason why they did not attempt to adjust the Qur'an after that, since God's Book might become easy pickings for capricious people with the ulterior motive of tampering with it.

Ali said these immortal words:

> Verily the Qur'an will not be disturbed today nor will it be changed,[283]

and so it became an ordinance which the Muslims thenceforth adhered to.

However, we should note that orthographical errors in the Qur'anic text do not affect its holiness:

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[281] Muhammad Ḥasan al-Muẓaffar, *Dalā'il al-Ṣidq li Nahj al-Ḥaqq* (Cairo: Dār al-Mu'allim, 1396 q.), vol. 3, 196.

[282] Al-Muẓaffar, *Dalāail al-Ṣidq*, vol. 3, 197.

[283] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 27, 104

Firstly, the Qur'an is in reality that which is recited, not that which is written, so we may allow it to be written in whichever way, for no harm is done provided that the recitation remains intact, and as it was originally recited during the time of the Prophet and his companions.

There is no doubt that the Muslims have from the earliest times to the present day preserved the text of the Qur'an through its correctly recited wording, and that it will be transmitted in this way through various channels, thus making it indubitable (*fī tawāturin qaṭ'ī*) for eternity.

Secondly, any mistakes discovered in the text reflect upon the original scribes' ignorance or laxity, and are not a criticism of the Book itself, from which no falsehood comes.[284]

Thirdly, if there are mistakes which have remained unchanged, this helps Muslims argue that their Book has remained free from alteration throughout the centuries, for orthographical errors are of no importance. Initial correction may have been of help, but in spite of this, it it has remained free of change out of deference for the early Muslims (*salaf*) who wrote it down. It was thenceforth better for the text to remain unaffected by any changes whatsoever. We have just said that the reason for retaining the mistakes was fear for the Book itself, so that no evil hand could touch it under the pretext of reform. Hence, it became an impregnable barrier to the desires of those with an ulterior motive. Thus, God's Book was impelled onwards towards the eternity of Islam.

Examples of Orthographical Errors

A table could be drawn up to cover all the errors in the 'Uthmānī orthography in detail. However, we now only refer to the most conspicuous examples:[285]

	Recorded	Correct
1	واختلف الليل والنهار (٢:١٦٤)	واختلاف الليل
2	يأتيهم انباؤا (٦:٥)	يأتيهم انباء

[284] Paraphrasing 41:42.

[285] The meaning and the pronunciation are the same in all cases. [Editor.]

	Recorded	Correct
3	ينئون عنه (٦:٢٦)	وينأون عنه
4	بالغدوة (٦:٥٢)	بالغداة
5	فيكم شركؤا (٦:٩٤)	فيكم شركاء
6	ما نشؤا (١١:٨٧)	ما نشاء
7	انه لا ياينس (١٢:٨٧)	انه لا ييأس
8	ألم يأتكم نبؤا (١٤:٩)	ألم يأتكم نبأ
9	فقال الضعفؤا (١٤:٢١)	فقال الضعفاء
10	ولا تقولن لشاي۽ (١٨:٢٣)	ولا تقولن لشيء
11	لو شئت لتخذت (١٨:٧٧)	لو شئت لاتخذت
12	قال يبنؤم (٢٠:٩٤)	قال يا ابن ام
13	او لااذبحنه (٢٧:٢١)	او لأذبحنه
14	يا ايها الملؤا (٢٧:٢٩)	يا ايها الملأ
15	شفعؤا (٣٠:١٣)	شفعاء
16	لهو البلؤا المبين (٣٧:١٠٦)	لهو البلاء المبين
17	واصحاب لثيكة (٣٨:١٣)	واصحاب الأيكة
18	وجاي۽ بالنبيين (٣٩:٦٩)	وجيء بالنبيين
19	وما دعؤا الكافرين (٤٠:٥٠)	وما دعاء الكافرين
20	بأييكم المفتون (٦٨:٦)	بأيكم المفتون

The dialectal mispronunciation of these twenty examples was particularly surprising, especially if we realise that codices of the time

did not have any markings to distinguish between identically shaped letters of the alphabet (*i'jām al-ḥarf*) to show vowels or the correct spelling. For example, how does the reader of the codex know that لتخذت (*lattakhadta*) (thou couldst have taken) (18:77) has a 'double' *tā'* (*mushaddadat al-tā'*)? There is a significant difference between that and لتخـذت (*latakhadhta*) with a "single" *tā'* prefixed by the emphatic *lām*. How does the reader know that the extra *alif* in لاذبحنـه (*la adhbaḥannahu*) (*I will slaughter him*) (27:21) or one of the extra *yā*'s in والسـماء بنيناها بايید (*wa al-samā'a banaynāhā bi aydin*) (*and heaven - We built it with might*) (51:47) is not pronounced? Similarly, without any marking one would not know that the *wāw* is redundant, the *alif* is prolonged, and the *hamzah* is pronounced after the *alif* in نشؤا (*nashā'u*) (*we will*) (11:87), because there is nothing at all in the word to indicate that.

Inconsistencies in the 'Uthmānī Orthography

A stranger occurrence is that there are inconsistencies in the 'Uthmānī orthography when a word is written one way in a particular place and the same word is written differently elsewhere. This causes some surprise and makes one think that the early scribes were far from knowing the fundamentals of writing, or at the very least, took no care to ensure consistency in the orthography.

There follow some examples of noteworthy inconsistencies:

	The Word in its Dialectal Form	The Word in its 'Correct' Form
1	لو شئت لتخذت	اذا لاتخذوك
	Law shi'ta **lattakhadhta** (18:77)	idhan la [a]**ttakhadhūka** (17:73)
2	اصحاب الئيكة	اصحاب الايكة
	aṣḥāb al-**aykah** (26:176) and (38:13)	aṣḥāb al-**aykah** (15:78) and (50:14)

	The Word in its Dialectal Form	The Word in its 'Correct' Form
3	فقال الضعفؤا	ليس على الضعفاء
	fa qāl al-ḍu'afā' (14:21)	laysa 'alā al-ḍu'afā' (9:91)
4	فلا يستئخرون ساعة	لا يستأخرون ساعة
	fa lā yasta'khirūna sā'atan (10:49)	lā yasta'khirūna sā'atan (7:34)
5	وما دعؤا الكافرين	وما دعاء الكافرين
	wa mā du'ā' al-kāfirīn (40:50)	wa mā du'ā' al-kafirīn (13:14)
6	ليس بظلم للعبيد	ليس بظلام للعبيد
	laysa bi ẓallāmin li al-'abīd (22:10)	laysa bi ẓallāmin li al-'abīd (3:182)
7	ضربوا لك الامثل	ضربوا لك الامثال
	ḍarabū laka al-amthāl (25:9)	darabū laka al-amthāl (17:48)
8	ويمح الله البطل	ويمحوا الله ما يشاء [Although the addition of an extra *alif* after the *wāw* is a mistake, because the subject of the verb is singular.]
	wa yamḥu Allāh al-bāṭil (42:24)	wa yamḥu Allāh mā yashā' (13:39)

	The Word in its Dialectal Form	The Word in its 'Correct' Form
9	فاحيكم ثم يميتكم	احياكم ثم يميتكم
	fa **aḥyākum** thumma yumītukum (2:28)	**aḥyākum** thumma yumītukum (22:66)
10	اي لفهم رحلة	لايلف قريش [Although the omission of the *alif* is also dialectal.]
	īlāfihim riḥlat ...(106:2)	Li **īlāf** Quraysh (106:1)
11	قال يبنؤم	قال ابن ام
	qāla ya **[i]bna umma** (20:94)	qāla **[i]bna umma** (7:150)
12	في اموالنا ما نشؤا	في الارحام ما نشاء
	fī amwālina mā **nashā'** (11:87)	fī al-arḥām mā **nashā'** (22:5)
13	وان تعدوا نعمت الله	وان تعدوا نعمة الله
	wa in tu'iddū **ni'mat** Allāh (14:34)	wa in tu'iddū **ni'mat** Allāh (16:18)
14	فلن تجد لسنت الله	ولن تجد لسنة الله
	fa lan tajida li **sunnat** Allāh (35:43)	wa lan tajida li **sunnat** Allāh (48:23)
15	على بينت منه	على بينة من ربه
	'alā **bayyinatin** minh (35:40)	'alā **bayyinatin** min Rabbih (47:14)

	The Word in its Dialectal Form	The Word in its 'Correct' Form
16	لدا الباب	لدى الحناجر
	ladā al-bāb (12:25)	ladā al-ḥanājir (40:18)
17	طغا الماء	انه طغى
	ṭaghā al-mā'(69:11)	innahu taghā (79:17)
18	ولا تقولن لشايء	وكان الله على كل شيء
	wa lā taqūlanna li **shay'** (18:23)	wa kān Allāh 'alā kulli **shay'** (18:45)
19	فقال الملؤا	وقال الملأ
	fa qāl **al-mala'** (23:24)	wa qāl **al-mala'** (23:33)
20	ايه الثقلان	ايها المجرمون
	ayyuha al-thaqalān (55:31)	**ayyuhā** al-mujrimūn (36:59)

These are a further twenty examples of discrepancies found in the 'Uthmānī recension. One's astonishment may increase if one observes the inconsistencies in the orthography within a single chapter, as happens in chapters 18 *The Cave* and 23 *The Believers*, just as بسطة (*basṭah*) (*abundantly*) was written with a *sīn* in 2:247 and with a *ṣād* at 7:69, and similarly, يبسط (*yabsuṭu*) (*dispenses*) with a *sīn* in 13:26 and with a *ṣād* in 2:245. These are further examples of inconsistency within a single chapter, of which there are many others.

Extreme Fanaticism

Some narrow-minded people are fanatical about the old orthography, claiming it to be prescriptive according to the Prophet's specific instruction, without the original scribes having any input into the orthography in

the form it is, and that behind these orthographical mistakes is a hidden secret known to no one else but God.

Ibn al-Mubārak narrates on the authority of his sheikh, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dabbāgh:

> The orthography of the Qur'an is one of God's secrets and the apogee of sublimity. It issues from the Prophet, and it was he who ordered the scribes to write it in this form. They did not take away or add anything to what they heard from the Prophet.

He then says:

> Neither the companions nor anyone else inserted even so much as a single hair in the orthography of the Codex. It is naught but a prescription from the Prophet, and it was he who ordered them to write it down in the recorded form, with an extra alif or one omitted, because they contain secrets to which minds cannot be led. It is one of God's secrets which He made exclusive to the Qur'an, and to the exclusion of all the other Heavenly Books.
>
> Just as the arrangement of the Qur'an is inimitable, so too is its orthography.

How can minds be led to the secret of an extra alif in مائة *(mi'ah)* (one hundred) but not in فئة *(fi'ah)* (group), or of the extra yā' in بأييد *(bi aydin)* (with might) and بأييكم *(bi ayyikum)* (which of you); how can they arrive at the secret of the extra alif in سعوا *(sa'aw)* (strive) in *The Pilgrimage*, and the omission thereof in سعو *(sa'aw)* (strive) in *Sheba*; the secret of the extra one in عتـوا (they insolently defied) wherever it appears, except in *The Criterion*, or the secret of the extra one in آمنـوا *(āmanū)* (they believed), but its omission in بـاؤ *(bā'ū)* (they were visited [with]), جـاؤ *(jā'ū)* (they came), تبـوؤ *(tabawa'ū)* (they made their abode) and فاو *(fa'wū)* (then take refuge) in *The Cow*.

He then asks rhetorically:

> How can it arrive at the omission of some *tā's* and the use of *tā' marbūṭahs* in some places? All this is because of divine secrets and prophetic purposes. They are only hidden from the people because they are esoteric secrets which can only be perceived through inspiration from the Lord. It is like the words and disjointed

> letters which appear at the beginning of the chapters, for they have great secrets and many meanings. Most people are not led to their secrets and they do not understand any of the divine meanings to which they refer. That is why the writing which is in the Qur'an was decreed letter by letter.[286]

Nevertheless, some have uncovered this hidden secret and disclosed strange matters achieved through a cunning art – he claims that the extra *alif* in لاذبحنه (*la adhbaḥannahu*) (*I will slaughter him*) was only added to indicate that the slaughter did not actually take place, and the extra *ya'* in والسماء بنيناها بايید (*wa al-samā' banaynahā bi aydin*) (*and heaven - We built it with might*) (51:47) is to indicate the greatness of God's Power with which He built heaven, and that no power is like it, in accordance with the famous rule:

> Extra characters indicate extra meanings.[287]

Abu al-'Abbās al-Marākishī, known as Ibn al-Bannā' (d. 721 AH), clarifies this in his book *'Unwān al-Dalīl fī Marsūm al-Tanzīl* (The Epitome of the Guide to the Writing of the Revelation), and explains that the appearance of these letters in the script differs according to the difference and circumstances of the words' meanings, and that they contain a hidden wisdom and beautiful secrets, including drawing attention to both the present world and to levels of existence in the unseen. The script is only written on the basis of reality, not imagination.

We shall mention in what follows some extracts from what he says which indicates the level of his extremism with regard to the orthography, and his astonishingly contrived affectation.

1) An extra *alif* was added to لاذبحنه (*la adhbaḥannahu*) (I will slaughter him) to draw attention to the fact that the slaughter was more severe than the punishment mentioned at the beginning of the verse:

> *Assuredly I will punish him with a terrible punishment, or I will slaughter him...* (27:21).

2) An extra *alif* was added to يرجوا (*yarjū*) (he hopes) and يدعوا (*yad'ū*) (he calls) to indicate that the verb is heavier than the noun because of

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[286] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 382-383, citing Ibn Mubārak's book *al-Ibrīz*.

[287] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 419; Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 374.

its having to 'carry' the subject pronoun. Hence, when a verb is made lighter, its *alif* is omitted, even if it is a plural verb as in:

والذين سعو في آياتنا معاجزين

[Wa alladhīna] sa'aw fī āyātinā mu'ājizīn

[And those who] strive against Our signs (34:5),

because striving for something which cannot actually be achieved is futile.

3) The *alif* was added after the *hamzah* in the words:

كأمثال اللؤلؤا

ka amthāl al-lu'lu'i

as the likeness of hidden pearls (56:23),

in order to draw attention to the meaning of the hidden whiteness and purity compared to that which is not hidden. Hence the *alif* is not added in the following:

كأنهم لؤلؤ

ka annahum lu'lu'un

as if they were ... pearls (52:24),

in order to convey ambiguity and to hide the detail.

4) The *alif* was added in:

وجائ يومئذ بجهنم

Wa jī'a yawma'idhin bi jahannam

And hell is brought out that day (89:23),

in order to indicate that this bringing out has the characteristic of display, unlike any ordinary bringing out.

5) The *alif* was added in مائة (*mi'ah*) (a hundred), but not فئة (*fi'ah*) (group), because it is a noun comprising multiplicity separated by two decimal places of ones and tens.

6) The *wāw* was added in:

ساوريكم آياتي

sa ūrīkum āyātī

I shall show you My signs (21:37),

to indicate existence on the highest level of clarity.

7) The *yā'* was added to:

بايید

bi aydin

with might (51:47),

to distinguish between it and الايـدي (*al-aydī*) (hands), which is the plural of اليد (*al-yad*) (hand). The might with which God built the Heavens is worthier of existence than hands, so the *yā'* was added to clearly distinguish the word regarding the perception of the heavenly within existence.

8) The *waw* was omitted from:

سندع الزبانية

sa nad'u al-zabāniyah

We shall call on the guards of Hell (96:18),

because it shows the speed of the action, the response of the guards and the force of the attack.

9) The *wāw* was omitted from:

ويدع الانسان بالشر

wa yad'u al-insān bi al-sharr

man prays for evil (17:11),

to show that it is easy for him and he hastens to it, just as he does for good.

10) بسطة (*basṭah*) (abundantly) is written with a *sīn* in 2:247 and with a *ṣād* in 7:69, because with a *sīn* it means relative abundance, whereas with a *ṣād* it means complete abundance.[288]

Dr Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ comments:

[288] See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 380-430.

> There is no doubt that this is an excessive veneration of the 'Uthmānic recension, and a contrivance for understanding in the most extreme way. It is not at all logical that the orthography should be prescriptive or that it should have the same secrets as the beginnings of the chapters. There is no comparison between this and the disjointed letters at the beginnings of the chapters, which are indubitably part of the Qur'an. The scribes just settled on this convention during 'Uthmān's time, and the caliph agreed with them.[289]

'Allāmah Ibn Khaldūn says:

> Do not pay any attention in that regard to what some simple-minded people say – that the companions were proficient in the art of writing and that it is a mistake to believe that in their writing there are breaches of the fundamental rules of orthography. On the contrary, there is a reason for all of them.

They say regarding the addition of an extra alif in لاذبحنه *(la adhbaḥannahu)* (I will slaughter him), for example, that it is to draw attention to the fact that the slaughter did not actually take place, and regarding the addition of an extra yā' in بايید *(bi aydin)* (with might), that it is to draw attention to the completeness of the Lord's Power. There is no basis whatsoever for such things, other than mere irrationality.[290]

Ibn al-Khaṭīb explains:

> Because the people of the first age were deficient in the art of writing and lacking in orthography skills due to their illiteracy and simplicity and their distance from the sciences and arts, their writing of the Qur'anic text was faulty, and its penmanship was not proficient. Thus the original scribes recorded a blend of monstrous errors and clear contradictions in the spelling and orthography.[291]

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[289] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, 277.

[290] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, 419 and 438.

[291] Muḥammad Muḥammad 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1948), 57.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the 15th century AH, Muhammad Ṭāhir Kurdī makes a strange statement. He regresses to outrageous extremism with regard to the old 'Uthmānī orthography. After setting out a number of mistakes and contradictions in the 'Uthmānī orthography, he reflects:

> It remains for us to find out why the original scribes did not write the text in accordance with the rules of proper writing and why they did not maintain consistency when writing it.
>
> This question has to be directed at those who wrote it at 'Uthmān's command. Far be it from us to do so, given that they are buried in the earth. Thus scholars say that the 'Uthmānī orthography is one of the secrets which no one can fathom.

He warns:

> Do not suspect them of inadvertence, error or ignorance of the fundaments of writing. This is a false suspicion. We believe with certainty that the companions knew full well the rules of orthography and writing, and shall seek to prove what we have said scientifically on the basis of three matters:
>
> Firstly: al-'Allāmah al-Ālūsi said in his exegesis *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* (The Spirit of the Meanings):
>
> It appears that the companions were proficient at orthography, knowing the rules of writing. They just breached the rules in some places, intentionally so, for good reason.

(He may mean by that some of al-Marākishī's aforementioned cunning divinations).

He continues:

> And al-Ālūsī – a sea of knowledge as a scholar and author of a great exegesis – would only say as much after consideration and investigation, even if he does not refer to any pieces of evidence to support what he said.
>
> Secondly: they corresponded with kings and princes, so they had to be proficient at writing.

> Thirdly: there was a quarter of a century between the spread of writing in the Arabian peninsula and 'Uthmān's reign, so is it conceivable that the companions would not have become proficient at writing during this long period of time?[292]

'Allāmah Ibn Khaldūn's comment suffices as a response to his nonsense:

> Do not pay any attention in that regard to what some simple-minded people say...[293]

Ibn al-Khaṭīb went to great lengths in responding to this scandalous claim, and came up with a comprehensive statement, which includes the following:

> Al-Ja'barī says in the context of his comment on the Codex's spelling:
>
> The greatest of its benefits is that it is a veil preventing the People of the Book from reading it correctly.[294]

Also:

> One of the leading reciters *(aḥad a'immat al-qurrā')* utters prattle like this. Those who think we need to maintain the old spelling rely on statements like this as evidence, even though what is said is clearly false and perditious.
>
> There are several verses in the Qur'an which address the People of the Book, inviting them to become believers, so how can they be kept from reciting?

He then complains:

> One of the direst things attributable to a person of sound mind is what al-Ṣabbāgh states:
>
> The benefits of this orthography are many and its secrets are various, including its not being possible to be led to correct recitation of it except through a teacher, the way it is with every precious science which is protected by its custodians.

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[292] Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 101-120.

[293] *Supra* under 'Extreme Fanaticism.'

[294] See al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 373, for he also came up with the claim of benefits to be derived from the old 'Uthmānī orthography.

He exclaims:

> Calamity of calamities! The Qur'an has become like the knowledge of divination, logarithms, talismans, astrolabes, geomancy, astrology and other such sciences which they claim are valuable because of the secrets which they contain which can only be reached through great effort and lengthy pursuit.
>
> Besides, The Almighty said:
>
> *Indeed We have made the Qur'an easy for remembrance* (54:17).
>
> We should ask ourselves, was the orthography of the codices invented so that it could be read, or so that it could remain a talisman passed amongst the readers alone, and taught by them to whoever wants to learn it out of those who ingratiate themselves with them with their money and self, and deprive those they see fit to deprive, those who do not confer prestige or money upon them?
>
> I have with my own eyes and ears seen and heard many cultured and literary people mispronounce when reciting the Qur'an, because of their lack of familiarity with the strange orthography and lack of knowledge of the styles of recitation as they have been transmitted.[295]

The Definitive Opinion

Thus Ibn al-Khaṭīb would prefer for the orthography of the codex to be adjusted to what is familiar to the general public and what has now become culturally conventional.

This is the opinion of a number of serious academics who have taken the position that it is permissible to change the old way of writing into a modern one, given that the first generation's orthography was not prescriptive and was simply their convention, or alternatively, that writing was at a primitive and unperfected stage. With advances in styles of writing and clarifications which make reading easy for everybody, orthography has to be changed to the modern convention, so that the Qur'an can be

[295] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān*, 62-86.

within the reach of all people. Therein lies the purpose for which this eternal Book was revealed: for it to be a guidance for all people for all time.

In his book *al-Instiṣār*, al-Qāḍī Muhammad ibn al-Ṭayyib Abu al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 AH) says regarding this:

> God did not place any obligation on the nation with regard to writing, for He did not choose for the scribes of the Qur'an any particular way of writing to the exclusion of others, making them forsake all others, because the duty to do so can only be understood if it is heard and prescribed. There is nothing in the literal *(nuṣūṣ)* or implied meanings *(mafhūm)* of the Book to indicate that orthography and pronunciation of the Qur'an can only be one particular way, within a parameter which cannot be transgressed. Nor is there anything in the explicit instructions of the Sunnah which makes that a duty or indicates it, or anything in the consensus of the nation which makes that a duty or is indicated by legal analogies *(al-qiyāsāt al-shar'iyyah)*.
>
> On the contrary, the Sunnah indicates that it is permissible to write it in any easy way, because God's Messenger would order that it be written down but not explain any particular way to them or forbid anyone from writing it down. That is why the writing in the codices would vary – some of them would write a word phonetically; others would add or omit on the basis of their knowledge or what was conventional and that people would know. Because of this, it was permissible to write in Kufan letters and the original method of writing, making the *lām* the same shape as the *kāf* and making the *alifs* crooked, or to write in a different way; to write the codex in the two old styles or using modern handwriting. Alternatively, it is permissible to take a middle road between the two.
>
> If the writing style and many of the letters in the codices took different forms, with the people's approval, allowing every one of them to write as was his custom – whatever was easiest, most familiar and preferred, without any recrimination or disapproval – one realises that no particular guidelines, such as those set for recitation or the call to prayer, have been set.

> The reason is that writing simply consists of marks and shapes which act like signs. Every mark that indicates a word and which helps with reading has to be correct, and the writer who uses them has to be considered to be doing the job correctly, no matter what form it takes.
>
> In summary, anyone who claims that people have to use a particular script has to prove such a claim, and how can this be done?[296]

This is how Sheikh 'Abd al-'Aẓīm al-Zarqānī summarises what Judge Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī said. However, he follows it up with several reasons for refuting it. Our comment is that their insignificance in the face of this sound conclusion is obvious.

Hence, Dr Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ comments on this statement:

> Judge Abū Bakr's opinion is worth following; it is clear and penetrating, for he did not confuse the feeling of veneration for the early Muslims *(salaf)* with the quest for a proof of matters pertaining to the orthography of God's book. As for those who take the position that the Qur'anic orthography is prescriptive, they have let their emotions be the judge, and surrendered a poetic Ṣūfī interpretation to their personal tastes and passions. Tastes are relative, and have nothing to do with religion, and a legal truth cannot be deduced from them.[297]

Differences Between the Codices

The purpose of despatching the codices far and wide was to ensure conformity and that the Muslims would agree on one way of reciting to the exclusion of others. These codices should have been copied in one style and standardised in every respect. Hence it was incumbent upon the members of the project to check their consistency and to compare the copies with the utmost care.

However, that is not what happened in reality. The codices emerged different from each other. The Medinan codex was different to the Meccan codex, and the Meccan codex was different to the Syrian one, the Syrian different to the Baṣran and Kufan and so on, which clearly proves that

[296] See al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 380-381.

[297] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, 279.

the panel was also lax when checking them against each other. Thus, they did not exercise the utmost care to ensure that the codices that were sent out were the same.

This difference in the codices was one of the most important reasons for the development of divergent readings later on.

Naturally, everyone would recite according to what was in the codex they had. They also had to use their own judgement to decide how to pronounce the vowels and graphically identical characters, since there were no dots or vowels marked in the text. Therefore, views on the matter were bound to differ.

As for listening to the narration from a teacher (*sheikh*), it should be set down verbatim, otherwise confusion is inevitable, especially if there is a long period between the original teacher and the last reciter.

Hence, the Meccan, Medinan, Baṣran, Kufan and Syrian recitations and others led to what they were trying to avoid.

Al-Zarqāni claims that these differences in the text were intentional, so that the word could sustain every possible method of recitation; that they were written differently – with omissions, changes and so on – because 'Uthmān intended them to cover the seven *aḥruf*, and that the form (*rasm*) of some words such as فتبينوا (*fa tabayyanū*) (ascertain the truth) and ننشزها (*nunshizuhā*) (We set them up) could be read more than one way.

Words which cannot sustain more than one recitation were nevertheless written one way in one codex and differently in another, such as وصّى (*waṣṣā*) (charged) in form II and اوصى (*awṣā*) (charged) in form IV, and similarly تحتها الانهار (*taḥtahā al-anhār*) (rivers ... under it) in one codex and من تحتها الانهار (*min taḥtihā al-anhār*) (rivers ... from under it) with an extra من (*min*) (from) in another.[298]

My comment is that this is a poor excuse, given that the point of copying and standardising the codices was to eliminate disagreement over recitation, for each party would claim that their recitation was better than the others. So that bitter disputes would not happen again, the codices project was set up with the unanimous agreement of the companions. However, even after the panel had accomplished its task, there were still divergent readings.

[298] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 258.

The matter of the seven *aḥruf*, explained as seven ways of reciting, is a hadith capable of more than one interpretation; indeed there are forty possible meanings,[299] the weakest of which is that there are different ways of reciting, because it is not confirmed that the Prophet recited the Qur'an seven different ways, whereas there are reasons given for the different readings of various reciters which are theirs alone. Abū Muhammad Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib discusses these in detail in his book *al-Kashf 'an Wujūh al-Qirā'āt al-Sab' wa 'Ilalihā wa Ḥujajihā* (Light on the Reasons for the Seven Ways of Reciting, the Excuses and Proofs for Them). We shall discuss the hadith on the seven *aḥruf* in a later section. Our preferred opinion is that it just means different tones of expression and recitation.

However, Professor al-Abyārī believes that the differences occured only between versions which preceded 'Uthmān's codex, which was intended to eliminate such differences.[300]

Yet this is a view which conflicts with the documentary evidence that there were differences in the 'Uthmāni codices themselves.[301]

In any event, these differences are regrettably a reality, and were the seeds for later divergent readings.

In what follows is an illustration of some of these differences, for which we have relied on Ibn Abī Dawūd's *al-Maṣāḥif*, 39-49.

It should be noted that today's Qur'an conforms mostly to the Kufan codex except for in a few places marked by star sign (*) in the table.

However, the Baṣran codex was more precise than all the others, as indicated by the Syrian's *hadith* mentioned above. Verse number 87 of *The Believers* in the Baṣran codex proves this:

قل من رب السماوات السبع ورب العرش العظيم سيقولون الله

Qul man Rabb al-samawāt al-sab' wa rabb al-'arsh al-'aẓīm? Sa yaqūlūn Allah

Say: 'Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the great throne?' They will say: 'God.'

The Kufan and other codices say:

[299] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 131.

[300] Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1991), 99.

[301] See Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 39.

سيقولون لله

sa yaqūlūn lillāh

They will say: 'God's.'[302]

The same applies to verse 89 of the same chapter and verse 33 of *The Originator*, written in the Baṣran codex as follows:

من ذهب ولؤلؤ

min dhahabin wa lu'lu'in

of gold and pearl;

and in others as:

من ذهب ولؤلؤا

min dhahabin wa lu'lu'an[303]

of gold and pearl.

There are other examples.

Below is a table indicating discrepancies between the codices of Damascus, Kufa, Baṣra and Mecca – the most important towns to which the codices were despatched – and a comparison between them and the main one (*al-muṣḥaf al-imām*) from Medina.

[302] In this reading there is inconsistency between the question and the answer. [Editor.]

[303] This reading is grammatically difficult to explain. [Editor.]

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Cow	116	قالوا اتخذ الله ولدا qālū ittakhadha Allāhu waladan	قالوا qālū	وقالوا wa qālū	وقالوا wa qālū	... ...
The Cow	132	واوصى به ابراهيم wa awṣā bihi Ibrāhīm	واوصى wa awṣā	ووصى wa waṣṣā	ووصى wa waṣṣā	... ...
The Family Of'Imrān	133	سارعوا الى مغفرة من ربكم sāri'ū ilā maghfiratin min Rabbikum	سارعوا sāri'ū	وسارعوا wa sāri'ū	وسارعوا wa sāri'ū	... ...
The Family of'Imrān	184	جاؤوا بالبينات والزبر jā'ū bi al-bayyināt wa al-zubur	وبالزبر wa bi al-zubur	والزبر wa al-zubur	والزبر wa al-zubur	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Women	66	... ...	ما فعلوه الا قليلا ma fa'alūhu illā qalīlan	الا قليل illā qalīl	الا قليل illā qalīl	... ...
The Women	171	... ...	... ...	فامنوا بالله ورسله fa āminū bi [A] llāh wa rusulihī	فامنوا بالله ورسله fa āminū bi [A] llāh wa rusulihī	... ورسوله wa rusulihī
The Table	53	يقول الذين آمنوا yaqūlu [a] lladhīna āmanū	يقول yaqūlu	ويقول wa yaqūlu	ويقول wa yaqūlu	... ...
The Table	54	من يرتدد man yartadid	من يرتدد man yartadid	من يرتد man yartadda	من يرتد man yartadda	... ...
Cattle	32	...	ولدار الآخرة wa la dār al-ākhirah	وللدار الآخرة wa la al-dār al-ākhirah	وللدار الآخرة wa la al-dār al-ākhirah	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Cattle	63	لئن انجيتنا la in anjaytanā	... ...	لئن انجانا la in anjānā	لئن انجيتنا la in anjaytanā	... ...
The Heights	3	قليلا ما يتذكرون qalīlan mā yatadhakka-rūn	يتذكرون yatadhakka-rūn	تذكرون tadhakkarūn	تذكرون tadhakkarūn	... ...
The Heights	43	ما كنا لنهتدي mā kunnā li nahtadiya	ما كنا mā kunnā	وما كنا wa mā kunnā	وما كنا wa mā kunnā	... ...
The Heights	75	قال الملأ qāl al-mala'	وقال الملأ wa qāl al-mala'	وقال الملأ* wa qāl al-mala'	وقال الملأ wa qāl al-mala'	... ...
The Heights	41	واذ انجاكم wa idh anjākum	واذ انجاكم wa idh anjākum	واذ انجيناكم wa idh anjaynākum	واذ انجيناكم wa idh anjaynākum	... ...
The Heights	195	ثم كيدوني thumma kīdunī	ثم كيدوني thumma kīdunī	ثم كيدون thumma kīdūn	ثم كيدون thumma kīdūn	... ...
The Spoils of War	67	... ...	ما كان للنبي ma kān li al-nabiyy	ما كان لنبي ma kān li nabiyyin	ما كان لنبي ma kān li nabiyyin	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
Repentance	100	... ...	... ...	... ...	تجري تحتها الانهار tajrī taḥtahā al-anhār	تجري من تحتها الانهار tajrī min taḥtihā al-anhār
Repentance	107	الذين اتخذوا مسجدا ضرارا alladhīna [i] ttakhadhū masjidan ḍirāran	الذين alladhīna	والذين... wa [a] lladhīna	والذين... wa [a] lladhīna	... ...
Jonah	22	هو الذي ينشركم Huwa [a] lladhī yunshirukum	هو الذي ينشركم Huwa [a] lladhī yunshirukum	هو الذي يسيركم Huwa [a] lladhī yusayyirukum	هو الذي يسيركم Huwa [a] lladhī yusayyirukum	... ...
The Thunder	42	وسيعلم الكافر wa sa ya'lam al-kāfir	... ...	وسيعلم الكفار wa sa ya'lam al-kuffār	وسيعلم الكافر wa sa ya'lam al-kāfir	... ...
The Night Journey	93	قال سبحان ربي qāla subḥana Rabbī	... ...	قل سبحان ربي qul subḥāna Rabbī	قل سبحان ربي qul subḥāna Rabbī	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Cave	36	لأجدن خيرا منهما la ajidanna khayran minhumā	منهما minhumā	منها minhā	منها minhā	... ...
The Cave	95	قال ما مكني qāla: 'Mā makkannī...'	مكنني makkananī	مكني makkannī	مكنني makkananī	... ...
The Prophets	4	قل ربي يعلم qul: 'Rabbī ya'lam...'	... ...	قال ربي يعلم qāla: 'Rabbī ya'lam...'	قال ربي يعلم qāla: 'Rabbī ya'lam...'	... ...
The Prophets	112	... ...	... ...	قال رب احكم qāla: 'Rabb iḥkum...'	قال ربي احكم qāla: Rabbī iḥkum	... ...
The Believers	87	قل من رب السماوات... سيقولون لله sayaqūlūna lillāh	سيقولون لله sayaqūlūna lillāh	سيقولون لله sayaqūlūna lillāh	سيقولون الله sayaqūlūna Allāh	... ...
The Believers	89	قل من بيده ملكوت... سيقولون لله sa yaqūlūna: 'lillāh'	سيقولون لله sa yaqūlūna 'lillāh'	سيقولون لله sa yaqūlūna 'lillāh'	سيقولون الله sa yaqūlūna 'Allāh'	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Poets	217	فتوكل على العزيز fa tawakkal ʻalā al-ʻAzīz	فتوكل fa tawakkal	وتوكل wa tawakkal	وتوكل wa tawakkal	... ...
The Originator	33	من ذهب ولؤلؤا min dhahabin wa lu'lu'an	... ...	ولؤلؤا wa lu'lu'an	ولؤلؤ wa lu'lu'in	... ...
Yā Sīn	35	وما عملته wa mā ʻamilat-hu	... ...	وما عملت* wa mā ʻamilat	وما عملته wa mā ʻamilat-hu	... ...
The Believer (The Forgiver)	21	كانوا هم اشد منكم kānū hum ashadd minkum	... ...	منهم minhum	منهم minhum	... ...
The Believer (The Forgiver)	26	وأن يظهروا في الارض wa an yuẓhirū fī al-arḍ	وان wa an	أو أن aw an	او ان aw an	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Counsel	30	بما كسبت ايديكم bimā kasabat aydīkum	بما كسبت ايديكم bimā kasabat aydīkum	فبما كسبت ايديكم fa bimā kasabat aydīkum	فبما كسبت ايديكم fa bimā kasabat aydīkum	... ...
The Adornment	68	يا عبادي yā ʻibādī	يا عبادي yā ʻibādī	يا عباد yā ʻibadi	يا عباد ya ʻibadi	... ...
The Adornment	71	ما تشتهيه الانفس mā tashtahīhi al-anfus	ما تشتهيه الانفس mā tashtahīhi al-anfus	ما تشتهي الانفس mā tashtahī al-anfus	ما تشتهي الانفس mā tashtahī al-anfus	... ...
The Sand Dunes	15	بوالديه حسنا bi wālidayhi ḥusna	... ...	بوالديه احسانا bi wālidayhi iḥsānan	بوالديه احسانا bi wālidayhi iḥsānan	... ...
Muhammad	18	ان تأتيهم بغتة an ta'tīhim baghtatan	... ...	... ...	ان تأتيهم an ta'tīhim	ان تأتهم an ta'tihim
The All-Merciful	12	والحب ذا العصف wa al-ḥabbu dha al-ʻaṣf	والحب ذا العصف wa al-ḥabbu dha al-ʻaṣf	والحب ذو العصف wa al-ḥabbu dhu al-ʻaṣf	والحب ذو العصف wa al-ḥabbu dhu al-ʻaṣf	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The All-Merciful	78	تبارك اسم ربك ذو الجلال والاكرام tabarāka [i]smu Rabbika dhu al-jalāli wa al-ikrām	ذو الجلال dhu al-jalāli	ذي الجلال dhi al-jalāli	ذي الجلال dhi al-jalāli	... ...
Iron	10	وكل وعد الله الحسنى wa kullun wa'da Allāhu al-ḥusnā	وكل wa kullun	وكلا wa kullan	وكلا wa kullan	... ...
Iron	24	ان الله الغني الحميد inna Allāha al-Ghaniyyu al-Ḥamīd	ان الله الغني inna Allāha al-Ghaniyyu	ان الله هو الغني inna Allāha Huwa al-Ghaniyyu	ان الله هو الغني inna Allāha Huwa al-Ghaniyyu	... ...
The Jinn	20	قال انما ادعوا ربي qāla 'Innamā ad'ū Rabbī...'	... ...	قل انما ادعو ربي qul 'Innamā ad'ū Rabbī...'	قل انما ادعو ربي qul 'Innamā ad'ū Rabbī...'	... ...

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Man	15-16	قواريرا قواريرا من qawārīran qawārīra min	... ...	قواريرا قواريرا من qawarīran qawarīra min	قواريرا قواريرا من... qawārīra qawarīra min	... ...
The Sun	15	فلا يخاف عقباها fa lā yakhāfu 'uqabaha	فلا يخاف fa lā yakhāfu	ولا يخاف wa lā yakhāfu	ولا يخاف wa lā yakhāfu	... ...

The Qur'an Through Phases of Decoration and Embellishment

Right from the beginning, the Qur'an was constantly being decorated and embellished, especially the calligraphy. Senior calligraphers played their part in improving the calligraphy and making it beautiful.

The first to become proficient at writing beautiful calligraphy in the codices was Khālid ibn Abī al-Hayyāj (d. 100 AH), a companion of Ali, the Commander of the Faithful. He was known for the beauty of his handwriting and his refined taste. It is said that Sa'd, who was al-Walīd's freeman and chamberlain, chose him to write codices, poetry and news for al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (86-96 AH). It was he who engraved the *qiblah* of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina with gold lettering from the chapter *The Sun*. This was after 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the governor of Medina appointed by al-Walīd, had by his command renovated and extended the mosque, finishing the building work in the year 90 AH.[304]

'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz sought after him to produce a codex, and so he wrote a fine-looking Qur'an for him. 'Umar began leafing through it and considered it beautiful. However, he thought it was worth too much and gave it back to him. It appears that this was during the time of his reign as caliph (99-101), a time when he was frugal.

According to Muhammad ibn Isḥāq ibn al-Nadīm:

> I saw a codex in the handwriting of Ali's companion, Khālid ibn al-Hayyāj. It was in a collection of archaeological codices in the possession of Muhammad ibn al-Husayn, known as Ibn Abī al-'Izzah. They then were passed to Abū 'Abdillāh ibn Hānī (may God hallow his secret).[305]

Calligrapers continued writing codices in the Kufan script until the end of the third century after the Migration. Then the beautiful *naskhī* script took its place at the beginning of the fourth century, at the hand of the famous calligrapher Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Muqlah (272-328 AH).

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[304] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 3, 30 and 36.

[305] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 10: *al-Fann al-Awwal min al-Maqālāt al-Ūlā* and 66-67: *al-Fann al-Awwal min al-Maqālāt al-Thāniyah.*

It is said that he was the first to write in the *thuluth* and *naskh* scripts, and the first to establish a proportional writing system, for he was a genius at proportion. He wrote the rules for them and set out the principles for writing them. Researchers agree that the greatest debt owed in the development and beautification of Arabic Islamic calligraphy is to this ingenious calligrapher, the like of whom has not since been born within Islam.

A number of archaeological codices have been attributed to him, such as the one in the museum in Herat, Afghanistan. However, it is said that he wrote out the whole Qur'an twice.[306]

The *naskh* script reached the peak of its beauty and excellence during the seventh century with the Musta'simī calligrapher Yāqūt ibn 'Abdillāh al-Mawṣilī (d. 689 AH). He wrote seven codices in his splendid hand, which was extremely proficient. He wrote in all the styles, ultimately becoming an example to be followed.[307]

Codices were written in the style of Yāqūt until the eleventh century AH. Then, from the beginning of the twelfth century AH, the Ottoman Turks took an interest in Arabic calligraphy, especially after Sultan Selim's conquest of Egypt and the end of Mamlūk rule there, and it began developing at the hands of Persian calligraphers employed by the Ottomans in their empire.

Sultan Selim moved all the calligraphers and artists to his capital, and added new calligraphic styles, such as *ruq'ah*, *dīwānī*, *ṭughrā'ī*, *islāmbūli* and so forth, which are still used in ordinary writing.

Among the Ottoman calligraphers whose influence spread were al-Ḥāfiẓ 'Uthmān (d. 1110), al-Sayyid 'Abdullāh Effendi (d. 1144 AH), al-Ustādh (master) Rāsim (d. 1169 AH), and Abū Bakr Mumtāz Bey Muṣṭafā Effendi who invented the *ruq'ah* script, which is the easiest and most straightforward style to use. He established its rules and wrote in it for the first time in the year 1280 AH, during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid Han.[308]

As with calligraphy, the printing of the Holy Book went through stages of improvement and beautification. The Qur'an appeared for the

[306] Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 155 (citing *al-Khaṭṭāṭ al-Baghdādī*, 16).

[307] Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 171; Nājī al-Muṣarrif, *Muṣawwar al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī*, 92.

[308] Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 123.

first time in print in Venice in approximately the year 950 AH/1530 CE. However, the Church authorities issued an order for it to be destroyed it as soon as it appeared.

Then, Hengelmann printed the Qur'an in Hamburg, Germany in the year 1104/1694. He was then followed by Maracci with a printed version in Padua in the year 1108/1698.

Mulay Usman produced a purely Islamic print version of the Qur'an in St Petersburg, Russia, in 1200/1787. A similar one appeared in Kazan.

Flügel produced a special print edition of the Qur'an in Leipzig in the year 1252/1834. The Europeans received it with unparalleled enthusiasm because of its uncomplicated print. However, like all the other European print editions, it did not succeed in the Islamic world.

The first Islamic state to successfully undertake the printing of the Qur'an was Iran.[309] Two beautiful and refined large-sized lithographs were printed, one in Tehran in 1243/1828 and the other in Tabriz in 1248/1833. They each had a translation under every line and were indexed.

At this time, a number of printed editions of the Qur'an appeared in India.

Then, in Istanbul, commencing in the year 1294/1877, the Ottoman Turks oversaw the printing of very fastidious and refined editions of the Qur'an.

In 1323/1905, Tsarist Russia undertook the printing of a large-size copy of a Qur'an in old Kufan script which is believed to be one of the original 'Uthmānī codices, free of dots and vowelling, and from which pages had fallen out at the beginning and the end, commencing at:

> *And of mankind are some who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day,' when they believe not* (2:8),

and finishing with:

> *And lo! in the Source of the Book, which We possess, it is indeed sublime, wise* (43:4).

They came across it in Samarkand, and the Royal Library in St Petersburg took possession of it. Then, the museum of artifacts in Tashkent took charge

[309] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, 99. On this matter, he cites important information on the authority of the orientalist Blachère which we have relied on in this exposition.

of printing fifty photocopies in the same form and size, and presented them as gifts to the most important universities of the Islamic countries, including a copy to Tehran University Library, recorded under publication number DSS/14403.

Latterly, in the year 1342/1923, Egypt printed an excellent Holy Qur'an under the supervision of the Sheikhs of al-Azhar, at the instigation of a panel selected by the Ministry of *Awqāf*. The Islamic world received it warmly, and other editions followed it, such as an outstandingly delicate edition of the Qur'an which appeared in Iraq in 1370/1950. Similarly, the Islamic nations in various regions also took it upon themselves to follow suit, by printing and publishing the Holy Book in the best of styles and with the most beautiful embellishments, and continue to do so.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEVEN RECITERS AND READINGS

The reading or recitation of Qur'anic verses may be regarded as one of the most important issues regarding the Qur'an, and from the very beginning many people have made great efforts to devote themselves to reciting the Qur'an and teaching it to Muslim society. The classes of Qur'an reciters (*qurrā'*) include prominent Companions such as 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Abū Dardā' and Zayd ibn Thābit in the first degree, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, Abū al-Aswad Du'alī, 'Alqamah ibn Qays, 'Abdullāh ibn Sā'ib, Aswad ibn Yazīd, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī, and Masrūq ibn Ajda' in the second degree, as well as other prominent personalities in the third up to the eighth degrees. After these classes of reciters come the period when the recitations (*qirā'āt*) were systematised, and as a result the Seven Reciters (*qurrā' sab'a*) were established.

The series of *qurrā'* and readings continued from one century to the next until the time when, at the beginning of the fourth century AH, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (245/868-324/936), the *Sheikh al-Qurrā'* of Baghdad, officially recognised seven readings by seven renowned reciters. Later in different periods seven others were added, and altogether fourteen readings gained prominence. Since each of these readings had two transmitters, the total number of readings amounted to twenty-eight.

There has been a great deal of discussion over the authority of readings and their *tawātur*,[310] as to whether or not they were reported sentence by sentence from the Holy Prophet. In general, from these discussions, the negation of *tawātur* of such readings is concluded because according to the opinion of researchers, no more than one reading from the Holy Prophet has reached us, and that is the one common amongst the Muslims. Any reading that conforms with it can be accepted, otherwise it should be dismissed.[311]

[310] The term *tawātur* means that there are enough sources of a particular report to indicate with certainty that the report is indeed true. [Trans.]

[311] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2, 42 ff; 218-226.

The Definition of *Qirā'ah*

Qirā'ah means the recitation or reading of the Qur'an. Technically, it refers a type of recitation with specific characteristics, in the sense that it is correct whenever it accords with the text of the Divine Revelation and is based on the opinion of one of the eminent reciters, as well as with the recorded principles of the science of *qirā'ah*. Nevertheless, the Qur'an is a unique text, and different readings came about according to the access to the original text that a particular reciter might have had.

Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq says:

Indeed the Qur'an is one, revealed from the One. The differences originate from the transmitters (of its recition).[312]

The renowned Qur'anic reciters are the transmitters and narrators of the same Qur'an which was revealed to the Prophet, and differences among them were caused by many factors stemming from the transmission of the text. The main factors are the following:

> Differences of the primary manuscripts, both before and after their standardisation during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān;
>
> The lack of vowel signs and dots to distinguish certain letters in the text;
>
> The primitive written form at the time.

Factors Leading to Different Readings (*Qirā'āt*)

The factors that contributed to the different readings of the Qur'an can be traced to the period of the Companions after the passing away of the Holy Prophet. During that time, the Companions had different opinions regarding the collection, compilation and writing of the Qur'an, and because of this there would sometimes also be a difference of opinion among the reciters on the recitation of the Qur'an. Each group preferred its own reading, and at times this led to disagreement.

These differences prompted the compilation of a single manuscript at the time of 'Uthmān, on the basis of which numerous uniform manuscripts were prepared and distributed to important centres in the Muslim world.

[312] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 630, *hadith* 12.

However, although these texts were intended to be identical, there was still some variation between them which subsequently led to different readings. Some of these differences were provided in the last chapter.

All the efforts to standardise the manuscripts seemed to be somewhat in vain, since variations had grown almost daily. At one time there were variations in the Companions' readings, but later, following the standardisation, they occurred in the manuscripts themselves. Of course, the Caliph 'Uthmān had observed certain flaws in some of the manuscripts at the very beginning, and questioned why they were there. He said: 'I can see writing errors in it.' He was asked: 'Shall we change it?' but he said: 'No, it is already late. The Arabs can read it correctly in their own pristine language,' without thinking that different peoples with different languages would have to read this Qur'an in the future, and that even the Arabs themselves would not retain the flavour of classical Arabic in days to come.[313]

At any rate, there were many factors contributing to variations in the manuscripts even after their standardisation. Some of the most important ones are as follows:

The primitive form of writing;

The absence of dots above or below some letters;

The absence of signs and vowels;

The absence of the letter alif in words.

1. The Primitiveness of Writing

Written Arabic at the time was quite primitive. The principles of writing were yet to be established, and the Arabs were unaware of a precise method of writing, and would write many words according to the pronunciation. Nowadays, remnants of this style of writing can still be seen in calligraphy, where certain words might not be clearly legible. The letter *nūn* (ن) would be written at the end of a word in such a way that it would not be easily distinguishable from the letter *rā'* (ر), and the same applied to the letters *wāw* (و) and *yā'* (ي). In many instances, in the early Kufan style the letter *mīm* (م) at the end of a word would be written

[313] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2, 4-8.

similar to a *wāw* (و), the letter *dāl* (د) like a *kāf* (ك), and the medial form of an *'ayn* (ع) like the letter *hā'* (ه). Sometimes the letters of a word were separated from one another. For example, the letter *yā'* (ي) would be written separately in يستحي (*yastaḥī*), نحي (*nuḥī*) and احي (*uḥī*); or the *yā'* (ي) might be deleted altogether, as in ايلافهم (*īlāfihim*), which would be written إلافهم (*ilāfihim*), thereby creating confusion for the reader. As a result, some reciters (*qurrā'*) would recite *ilāfihim* as it was written, i.e., without the *yā'*. For example, Abū Ja'far is known to have read the verse لإيلافِ قُرَيْشٍ (106:1) without the *hamzah* (ء) and without pronouncing the *yā'* (ي) as ليلافِ قُرَيْشٍ, and the verse إِيلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ (106:2) as إلافِهِمْ, with the omission of the *yā'* and without pronouncing the *hamzah*.[314]

However, Ibn Filayyaḥ would read إلافِهِمْ with the *hamzah*, but dropping of the letter *yā'* and a sukūn over the *lām* (ل). Each of the reciters has read this word in an odd manner because of the primitive form of the writing. Similarly, nunnation (*tanwīn*) was sometimes indicated by the letter *nūn* (ن), and the *nūn* itself would appear as an *alif*. For example, لَنَسْفَعًا (*lanasfa'ān*) (96:15) would be written as لَنَسْفَعن (*lanasfa'an*), and the verse وَلَيَكُونَنْ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ (*wa layakūnan mina al-ṣāghirīn*) as وَلَيَكُونا.... In other words, instead of *nūn*, *alif tanwīn* was used to emphasise the verb. Hence, the verse وَإِذًا لَآتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ لَدُنَّا أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا (4:67) would also be written as ... وَإِذن.

In the primitive form of writing of the time, the letters *wāw* and *yā'* might also be omitted for no apparent reason, and this in itself is considered one of the most important factors contributing to the ambiguities and difficulties encountered in readings and exegesis. For example, in the verse وَصَالِحُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (66:4) the *wāw* would be omitted from صَالِحُوا, and the verse written as وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ, making it unclear whether it is in the singular or the plural.[315]

At times the letter *alif* would also be omitted from عَادًا الأُولَىٰ (53:50) and be written as عَاد الأولَىٰ, and as a result, the reader would not know if عَاد is a verb or noun.[316] In some manuscripts the *alif* was added to جَاءَنَا (43:38) to become جَاءانَا, in which case the word could be either in the singular

[314] Ṭabrisī, *Majma'al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 544; Ibrāhīm ibn Aḥmad al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Ẓam'ān*, (Tripoli: Maktabat al-Najāḥ, n.d.), 143.

[315] Ṭabrisī, *Majma'al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 316; al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Ẓam'ān*, 47.

[316] Al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Ẓam'ān*, 125.

or dual form.[317] Also, in many instances when the *wāw* is the last letter of a word (*wāw al-fi'l*), an *alif* would be added, thereby giving the impression that this *wāw* signifies the plural, and conversely, the *alif* would be omitted from the plural *wāw*. The following are examples of the first case:

إنما أشكوا بثّى

فلايربوا

نبلوا أخباركم

ماتتلوا الشياطين

The following are examples of the second case:

فاؤو

جاؤو

تبوؤ الدار

سعو

عتو

In sum, such idiosyncrasies in the primitive form of writing in the manuscripts – traces of which still exist today – caused several problems, one of which was the emergence of considerable differences among the reciters. Some of our predecessors lost confidence due to these peculiarities in the written manuscripts, and considered them errors made by the primary scribes of the Qur'an. It is reported that 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās used to read the verse وَقَضَى رَبُّكَ أَلا تَعْبُدُوا إِلا إِيَّاهُ (17:23) as ووصّى رَبُّكَ أَلا تَعْبُدُوا إِلا إِيَّاهُ, and said: 'This verse was originally like that, but because of the joining of *wāw* with *ṣād*, the people would read قَضَى (*qaḍā*).' Of course, it is clear that in the primary writings there were no dots, and therefore there are grounds for such an assumption.

Ibn Ashtah says: 'When writing the word وَقَضَى (*wa qaḍā*), the scribe used too much ink, and as a result *wāw* is joined to *ṣād*.'[318] And it is also reported that Ibn 'Abbās would read verse 13:31 as أَفَلَمْ يَتبيّن الّذِينَ آمَنُوا. He was told that what was written in the manuscript was أَفَلَمْ يَيْأَسِ الّذِينَ آمَنُوا, but he said: 'I think the scribe was mistaken; he has not written the curves

[317] Al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Ẓam'ān*, 128.

[318] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 180; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 170.

of the letters correctly.'[319] One should note that in the primitive script, curves were put in the middle of a word instead of *alif*, and so, according to the number of curves, يبنس did not look much different to يتبيّن.

2. The Absence of Dots above and below Certain Letters

One of the factors that created many problems in Qur'an recitation was the absence of dots for the *mu'jamah* (dotted) letters, making them indistinguishable from the *muhmalah* (without dots) letters. Hence, there was no difference between the letters *sīn* (س) and *shīn* (ش) when they were written. There was also no difference between the letters *bā'* (ب), *tā'* (ت) and *thā'* (ث); *jīm* (ج), *ḥā'* (ح) and *khā'* (خ); *ṣād* (ص) and *ḍād* (ض); *ṭā'* (ط) and *ẓā'* (ظ); *'ayn* (ع) and *ghayn* (غ); *fā'* (ف) and *qāf* (ق); or *nūn* (ن) and *yā'* (ي). The reader would have relied on the composition of the words and the context of the sentence in order to determine which letter was which.

Accordingly, Kisā'ī's reading of 49:6 includes إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَإٍ فَتَثَبَّتُوا (*fatathabbatū*), whereas it is فَتَبَيَّنُوا (*fatabayyanū*) in other readings.[320] Similarly, Ibn 'Āmir and the Kufans read نُنْشِزُهَا (*nunshizuhā*) in 2:259, while others read it as نُنْشِرُهَا (*nunshiruhā*);[321] Ibn 'Āmir and Ḥafṣ read وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنكُمْ (*wa yukaffiru 'ankum*) in 2:271, while others read وَنُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ (*wa nukaffiru 'ankum*),[322] and Ibn Sumayqa' has read 10:92 as فاليوم ننحّيك ببدنك (*nunaḥḥīk*), while others read نُنَجِّيكَ (*nunajjīka*).[323] With the exception of 'Āṣim, the Kufans read 29:58 as لنثوينهم من الجنة غُرَفاً (*la nuthawwiyyannahum*), while others read لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُم (*la nubawwi'annahum*).[324]

3. The Absence of Signs and Vowels

In the first manuscripts the words were written without vowel signs. The form (*wazn*), vowel (*i'rāb*) and basis (*binā'*) of a word would be unclear, making it difficult even for those familiar with Arabic to determine the form and vowels of a word, but especially for the non-Arabic speaker.

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[319] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 282-283; see *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 13, 104; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 185.

[320] See Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar ibn Qāsim al-Anṣārī, *al-Mukarrar fīmā Tawātara Min al-Qirā'āt al-Ṣab' wa Taḥarrar* (Cairo: 1940), 141.

[321] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 310.

[322] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 316.

[323] Ṭabrisī, *Majma'al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 130.

[324] Ṭabrisī, *Majma'al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 290.

For example, it was difficult to determine whether اعلم was an imperative (*i'lam*), the first person present tense of the first form (*a'lamu*), the comparative form (*a'lam*), or the past tense of the fourth form (*a'lama*).

Ḥamzah and Kisā'ī read the verse قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (2:259) in the imperative (*i'lam*), while others read it in the first person present tense (*a'lamu*).[325] Similarly, Nāfi' reads the verse وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْجَحِيمِ 2:119)) in the negative imperative (*lā tas'al*), while others read the same verse in the passive third person present tense (*lā tus'alu*).[326]

Ḥamzah and Kisā'ī also read the verse وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ (2:158) with a *yā'* and an emphatic *ṭā'* (with *tashdīd*) in the present jussive form (*yaṭṭawwa'*), while others read it with a *tā* and a non-emphatic *ṭā'* in the past tense.[327]

Ibn Abī Hāshim says:

> The cause of differences in the Seven Readings is that the manuscripts sent to the Muslim cities and regions were bereft of specific signs, dots and formal distinctions. The people would understand the Qur'an through those manuscripts. Hence, differences emerged in the readings among the reciters from different cities.[328]

The great teacher Ayatollah Khoī has said: 'It is not clear that the different readings can be attributed to the transmissions, but rather to the personal understanding (*ijtihād*) of the reciters. This view is supported by explicit statements from the great scholars in this regard, and is substantiated by the fact that the initial manuscripts, as we can see, had no dots or vowel symbols.'[329]

4. The Absence of the Letter *Alif*

Another factor that caused problems in the written form was the absence of the letter *alif*. The Kufan Arabic written form is derived from Syriac writing. In Syriac it was uncommon to write an *alif* in the middle of a word, where it would be dropped. Since the Qur'an was initially written in the Kufan script, the *alif*s in the middle of words like سماوات

[325] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 312.

[326] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 262.

[327] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 268.

[328] Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 86; Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 86.

[329] Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 181.

would not be written, and appear as سموت. Later on, when specific symbols were created, the *alif* was merely written in the form of a small *alif* on top of the word (that is, as سمٰوٰت).

Subsequently this state of affairs (the dropping of the *alif* in the middle of a word) became in many instances the source of differences in readings. For example, Nāfi', Abū 'Amr and Ibn Kathīr read وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ (*wa mā yakhda'ūna*) (2:9) as وَمَا يُخَادِعُونَ (*wa mā yukhādi'una*)). Since the verb at the beginning of the verse had been written in the latter form with its *alif* dropped, it was supposed that this verb would be the same,[330] because the meaning of the verse dictates that the second instance of the verb should be without an *alif*. Also, since in the verse حَرَامٌ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا أَنَّهُمْ لا يَرْجِعُونَ (*ḥarāmun*) (21:95) the ر was written without an *alif*, Ḥamzah, Kisā'ī and Shu'bah read it as حرم (*ḥirmun*).[331]

Abū Ja'far and the people of Baṣra read وَاعَدْنَا (*wā'adnā*) in وَإِذْ وَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً (2:51) in the same *surah*, as well as in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* and *Sūrah Ṭā-Hā*, without an *alif* (*wa'adnā* وعدنا), while others read it with an *alif* as above. Nāfi' read *ghayāba* in فِي غَيَابَةِ الْجُبِّ as *ghayābāt* (فِي غَيَابَاتِ الْجُبِّ), because in the manuscript it was written as في غيبت الجب. Therefore, everyone would read it as singular or plural according to his own *ijtihād*, and elaborate on the reasons for his version.[332]

In sum, these and other factors[333] were the cause of different readings amongst the reciters, each of whom would justify his reading according to his own *ijtihād* and the proofs available to him.

The Seven Reciters and Their Transmitters

For the reasons mentioned, there were therefore certain differences in the reading of the Qur'an among the reciters; also, over the course of many years the number of reciters had increased, until a time came when Ibn Mujāhid selected seven from amongst them, each of whom had two transmitters:

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[330] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 224.

[331] Al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Ẓam'ān*, 126.

[332] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, 5.

[333] One may refer to at least nine primary factors in the emergence of different readings, as we have mentioned in volume 2 of *Al-Tamhīd*.

1) Ibn 'Āmir: 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir Yaḥṣabī (d. 118/736), the reciter of the Levant. His two transmitters were Hishām ibn 'Ammār (153/770-245/859) and Ibn Dhakwān (173/789-242/856), neither of whom ever met Ibn 'Āmir.

2) Ibn Kathīr: 'Abdullāh ibn Kathīr Dāramī (d. 120/738), the reciter of Mecca. His two transmitters were Bazzī (170/786-250/864) and Qunbul (191/807-295/908), neither of whom met him.

3) 'Āṣim: 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd al-Asadī (d. 128/746), the reciter of Kufa. His two transmitters were his son-in-law, Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (90/709-180/796), and Shu'bah Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh (95/714-193/809). Ḥafṣ regarded 'Āṣim's reading as more precise and therefore endorsed it. It is still common today, and is the same reading which is prevalent in most Muslim countries today.

4) Abū 'Amr: Zabbān Abū 'Amr ibn 'Alā' al-Māzanī (d. 154/771), the reciter of Baṣra. His two transmitters were Dawrī, Ḥafṣ ibn 'Umar (d. 246/860) and Mūsā Ṣāliḥ ibn Ziyād (d. 261/875), neither of whom met him. They learned his reading through Yazīdī.

5) Ḥamzah: Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb Zayyāt (d. 156/773), the reciter of Kufa. His two transmitters were Khalaf ibn Hishām (150/767-229/844) and Khallād ibn Khālid (d. 220/835), who learned his reading through an intermediary.

6) Nāfi': Nāfi' ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Laythī (d. 169/786), the reciter of Medina. His two transmitters were 'Īsā ibn Mīnā' (120/738-220/835), better known as Qālūn, and the son-in-law of Nāfi', and Warsh, 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd (110/728-197/813), the latter being prevalent in some Arab countries of North Africa.

7) Kisā'ī: Ali ibn Ḥamzah (d. 189/805), the reciter of Kufa. His two transmitters were Layth ibn Khālid (d. 240/854) and Dawrī, Ḥafṣ ibn 'Umar, who was also a transmitter of Abū 'Amr.

The Ten Reciters

Later on, three others were added to the seven:

8) Khalaf: Khalaf ibn Hishām (d. 229/844), a transmitter of Ḥamzah and reciter of Baghdad. His two transmitters were Abū Ya'qūb (d. 286/899) and Abū al-Ḥasan (d. 292/905).

9) Ya'qūb: Ya'qūb Ḥaḍramī (d. 205/821), the reciter of Baṣra. His two transmitters were Ruways (d. 238/853) and Rūḥ (d. 235/850).

10) Abū Ja'far: Abū Ja'far Makhzūmī (d. 130/748), the reciter of Medina. His two transmitters were Ibn Wardān (d. 160/777) and Ibn Jammāz (d. 170/787).

The Fourteen Reciters

Four others were later added to these ten, and although their readings were irregular (*shādhdh*), they gained acceptance among the people:

11) Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: Ḥasan ibn Yasār (d. 110/728), the reciter of Baṣra. His two transmitters were Shujā' Balkhī (120/738-190/806) and Dawrī (d. 246/860), neither of whom met him, having learnt his reading through an intermediary.

12) Ibn Muḥayṣin: Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 123/741), the reciter of Mecca. His two transmitters were Bazzī (170/787-250/864) and Ibn Shanbūdh (d. 328/940), each of whom learnt his reading through an intermediary.

13) Yazīdī: Yaḥyā ibn Mubārak (d. 202/818), the reciter of Baṣra. His two transmitters were Sulaymān ibn Ḥakam (d. 235/850) and Aḥmad ibn Faraj Ḍarīr (d. 303/916), each of whom learnt his reading through an intermediary.

14) A'mash: Sulaymān ibn Mihrān Asadī (d. 148/765), the reciter of Kufa. His two transmitters were Shanbūdhī (300/913-388/998) and Muṭawwa'ī (d. 371/982), each of whom learnt his reading through intermediaries.

These fourteen famous readings, each of which has been transmitted by two transmitters, constitute the twenty-eight identified transmissions.

With the exception of Ibn 'Āmir and Abū 'Amr, five of the Seven Reciters were originally Persians. Ibn 'Āmir was of unknown origin and Abū 'Amr belonged to the tribe of Māzan Tamīm, although Qāḍī Asad Yazīdī believed that he came from the village of Kāzirūn in Fārs, east of Shīrāz.

'Āṣim, Abū 'Amr, Ḥamzah and Kisā'ī would openly declare that they were Shī'a, while Ibn Kathīr and Nāfi' were probably Shī'a as well on account of their being from Fārs. But Ibn 'Āmir, who grew up in the Umayyad family, was known to be a reckless person of ill-repute.[334]

[334] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2, 226-231.

The Question of the *Tawātur* of the Seven Readings

An important issue regarding the Seven Readings is the question of *tawātur* – whether or not these readings are indubitable (*mutawātir*), or decisively authoritative. For if they were *mutawātir*, they would be widely narrated and there would be no doubt concerning their authority.

The matter of the *tawātur* of the Seven Readings has been raised by many writers and certain jurisprudents (*fuqahā*), who have proposed that these readings are all indubitable and have religious authority. This would mean that someone who prays may select any one of them to recite when praying.

Researchers, however, deny the *tawātur* of these readings, considering it unimaginable – what is meant by the *tawātur* of the Seven Readings? If it means the general transmission of these readings from the Seven Reciters themselves, then this is devoid of any value, for the source of *tawātur* must be infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) in order to be deemed authoritative. And if there is a claimed transmission from the Prophet to the reciters (*qurrā'*), this still has to be proven, because most reciters lack even a chain of transmission, let alone *tawātur*. Moreover, most of the readings were based upon personal *ijtihād*, and were never substantiated by any tradition or narration. Even if we hypothetically accept that the reciters received their readings through *tawātur*, it would be inconsequential, because *tawātur* applies only to the person personally involved, and not others. Thus if a transmission from the Prophet to the reciters is indubitable, and all other intermediaries received it through them, then it lacks *tawātur*, because the fundamental condition of *tawātur* is that it must be widely transmitted from the source to the target audience at all levels through chains of transmission. Therefore this assumption would not apply if there is only one transmitter as intermediary – the reciter himself – and is not *tawātur*.

Let us assume that each of these Seven Readings is *mutawātir* from the Prophet up to the reciter himself, from whom it is transmitted to others. This assumption necessitates that at the time of the reciter himself, others must also have transmitted the same reading (*qirā'ah*). If it is not so, and no one other than him ever transmitted it to others, it follows that the *qirā'ah* loses the basic condition of *tawātur*, because there has been no general transmission at all levels.

Therefore, the question of the *tawātur* of the Seven Readings is basically untenable, because at the time the only transmitter of *tawātur* was the reciter himself, otherwise the reading would not have been attributed exclusively to him. Let us elaborate further.

The Meaning of *Tawātur*

Tawātur is a technical term used in the science of *hadith*, in which traditions (*hadith*) are classified as indubitable (*mutawātir*), widely acknowleged (*mashhūr*), widespread (*mustafīḍ*), through a single narrator (*āḥād*), sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), good (*ḥasan*), through a broken chain (*mursal*), weak (*ḍa'īf*) and so forth. A *mutawātir* tradition is one with numerous transmitters at all levels that are so extensive that it is certain that it would have been essentially impossible for them to have concocted it. As such, a *mutawātir* tradition must have the following conditions:

> Complete connectivity of the tradition's chain of transmission (*sanad*) from the primary source to the last transmitter;
>
> The number of transmitters and narrators must exceed the number of transmitters of the *mustafīḍ* and *mashhūr* traditions, to the extent that there can be no possibility of their having invented it;
>
> Multiple transmitters in every chain and at all levels. As such, the required group for *tawātur* must have transmitted the tradition from an earlier required group, until it reaches back to the primary source.

Therefore, if at one of the levels there were only a few transmitters, or in one instance it passes through a single transmitter and thereafter an increased number of transmitters, such a tradition is not technically called *mutawātir*, but regarded instead as an *āḥād* tradition. This summarises the whole concept of *mutawātir* readings. The transmission of a reading from the reciter (*qārī*) himself may be *mutawātir*, but it might lack this condition in relation to the period prior to him up to the time of the Companions and the Prophet. Such a tradition may certainly be classified as *āḥād*, on the condition that it has an unbroken chain of transmission (*sanad*).

Ceremonial Chains of Transmission

Authors of the treatises on *qirā'āt* have endeavoured to discover chains of transmission for readings, particularly those of the Seven Reciters, and present them as authorised by the Prophet. In this way, they have succeeded in presenting chains of transmission through the masters (*mashāyikh*) of reciters. The rule indicates that a chain of masters cannot be regarded as a chain of transmission if the student who learned from a master is his trainee and not his transmitter. Every trained reciter expresses his opinion and uses discretion in the reading, and not the opinion of the master or teacher from whom he received a narration. In reality, every reciter exercises *ijtihād* in choosing his style of reading; hence, we treat him as using his own discretion rather than that of the earlier narrator of his master's reading. As such, the reading of each of the reciters is attributed to the reciter himself. In a similar manner, the views of a jurisprudent are his own, and not those of his teacher, for it to acquire the status of a narration (*riwāyah*). Yet the reciters themselves have not made such claims for most of the readings.[335] In the compilations of readings, rational proof is adduced for the choices of each reciter, and this evidence is recognised as the basis of his decision to choose his style of reading. This shows that the basis of the reading of every great reciter is his *ijtihād*, and not founded on any tradition from his teacher. As such, the chains of transmission that can be found in certain books on readings such as *al-Taysīr*, *al-Taḥbīr*, *al-Mukarrar* and others, are in reality ceremonial chains of transmission. In a bid to elevate the standing of famous reciters, they have striven to make use of the chain of the master as the chain of transmission. The sheikh or teacher would train his students to become scholars, and not merely inculcate his own acquired learning in his students in order to transmit the selfsame thing to others.

Interestingly enough, in the case of some reciters this endeavour did not bear much fruit. Researchers have been unable to discover even a chain of masters. For example, they have been unable to identify the

[335] From among the *qurrā'*, only 'Āṣim attributes to his teachers the two styles of reading which he taught to his two students (Ḥafṣ and Shu'bah). The style of reading he taught to Ḥafṣ was taught to him by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who in turn learned it from Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, while the style of reading he taught to Shu'bah was taught to him by Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, who learned it from 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd. Such textual foundations have not been presented by other famous reciters.

masters of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir Yaḥṣabī, who, of all the Seven Reciters, was the closest to the time of the Companions, thereby failing to present a chain of transmission for his reading. Ibn al-Jazarī mentions nine different opinions regarding the chain of Ibn 'Āmir's sheikhs, and finally gives preference to the view that he learnt his style of reading from Mughīrah ibn Abī Shihāb al-Makhzūmī, who in turn learnt it from 'Uthmān, who learnt it from the Prophet. This is while some consider it unclear from whom Ibn 'Āmir learnt his style of reading,[336] and in the case of Mughīrah, it is also doubtful that he really learnt his reading from 'Uthmān.[337]

In addition, Mughīrah, who was introduced as Ibn 'Āmir's master in reading, seems to be unknown. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī says: 'It is supposed that he was a *qārī* in Damascus during the reign of Mu'āwiyah in the Levant, and Ibn 'Āmir must have learned the style of reading from him.' He adds: 'Apart from in the statement of Ibn 'Āmir, Mughīrah ibn Abī Shihāb has not been known.'[338] In addition, Ibn 'Asākir, in his *Tārīkhu Dimashq* – wherein he profiles prominent personages of Damascus – does not mention the name of Mughīrah ibn Abī Shihāb other than in a description of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir. According to Ibn Asākir, the latter was confronted regarding his recitation and asked: 'From whom have you learned the reading?' He said: 'From Mughīrah, who in turn has learned it from 'Uthmān.'[339]

Moreover, there is no available information about Mughīrah as a master in recitation. Nothing is recorded of his character or his instruction from 'Uthmān. Basically, to advance the notion of 'Uthmān as a teacher in *qirā'ah* – given all his responsibilities – is questionable, and no convincing explanation for this has yet been found.

Solitary Report and *Mutawātir*

Granted that the chain of transmission between the reciter and one of the early Companions has been established, such a chain is classified as a single narration (*āḥād*), and does not have the conditions of *tawātur*.

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[336] Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1400 q.), vol. 1, 424.

[337] Ibid. vol. 2, 305.

[338] Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrāa al-Kibār* (Egypt: Maṭba'ah Dār al-Ta'līf, n.d.), vol. 1, 43.

[339] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah*, vol. 2, 305.

For example, 'Abdullāh ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738) was the second closest reciter to the time of the Companions. There are only three transmitters mentioned in his chain of transmission, viz., 'Abdullāh ibn Sā'ib, Mujāhid ibn Jabr (Ibn 'Abbās' freedman), and 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd, who was the third person closest to the time of the Companions. His *sanad* also has two channels, viz., Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī and Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh.

The person most distant from the time of the Companions was Kisā'ī, who passed away in 189/805). Three persons are mentioned in his *sanad*: Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb, 'Īsā ibn 'Umar and Muhammad ibn Abī Laylā. The question is: can *tawātur* be established through two or three channels over such a long period of time?

Similarly, the *sanad* of Nāfi' includes five persons, that of Ḥamzah has seven persons, and that of Abū 'Amr twelve. These numbers also do not qualify for the status of *tawātur*, and in the parlance of the sciences of *hadith*, they are regarded as single narrations (*āḥād*). Moreover, there are questions regarding the transmitters of these *sanads*. Some of them were unqualified, since their status would not allow them to be regarded as reciters. For example, Imām Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq has been mentioned as one of the masters of Ḥamzah, even though the lofty status of the Imamate and its responsibilities would surely not have allowed him the opportunity to engage in other works. Also, we cannot see any trace of the Imām's reading in that of Ḥamzah, and no reading of Ḥamzah's can be attributed to the Imām. For this reason Abū Shāmah says:

> The most that the proponents of *tawātur* can say is that these readings are *mutawātir* back until the reciters themselves, but their being *mutawātir* from the reciters back to the Prophet is unfounded.[340]

At any rate, in this case *tawātur* is wide open to doubt, because we find no trace of it in the books of our predecessors. In fact, this notion is one of the concoctions of the third century AH, when expertise in *qirā'ah* was prevalent. There is also no authentic report that any of the reciters ever claimed that his reading was consecutively transmitted from the Prophet. Even assuming that the Prophet's reading was transmitted to the reciter, it still falls short of the conditions of *tawātur*, since every reciter narrates his reading according to his own terms.[341]

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[340] Abū Shāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1975), 178.

[341] See Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 165.

Criticism of the Reciters by Great Personalities

The strongest evidence to substantiate the lack of recognition of the *tawātur* of these readings is the censure of earlier scholars to some of the well-known *qurrā'*, including the Seven Reciters. So how could a conservative Muslim dare deny a *mutawātir* reading from the Prophet?

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal objected to many of the readings of Ḥamzah, and regarded his recitation in prayer of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and other chapters as unacceptable. If the reading of Ḥamzah – who was, after all, one of the Seven Reciters – was unquestionably transmitted from the Prophet, in the sense that the Prophet used to recite it in the same manner and it was definitely transmitted uninterruptedly to Ḥamzah, who could ever regard it as unacceptable?

Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh says: 'In our opinion, Ḥamzah's reading is a form of religious innovation (*bid'ah*).' Ibn Durayd says: 'I wish I could prohibit Ḥamzah's reading in Kufa.' And Ibn Mahdī has said: 'If I had the power, I would scald the bodies of those who read the Qur'an according to Ḥamzah's style.' Yazīd ibn Hārūn also strongly disliked Ḥamzah's style of reading.[342]

Scholars of syntax and literature have expressed their views on the errors of many of the reading styles of prominent reciters. But can any Muslim dare oppose a style of reading which has been undoubtedly transmitted from the Prophet, or attribute any error to it? Of course, this could not be so, and these scholars have not denied the *mutawātir* reading from the Prophet. What they objected to was what was attributed to the reciters themselves. Sometimes they expressed their reasons, and this in itself shows that the objections relate to the errors of the reciters. Abū al-'Abbās al-Mubarrad contested the reading by the people of Medina of the verse هَؤُلَاءِ بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ (11:78) with the word اطهر in the accusative case (*aṭhara*), and to justify this he said: 'This is the reading of Ibn Marwān, who was unacquainted with Arabic writing and grammar.'[343]

In one chapter of his book, Ibn Qutaybah has collected examples of the inaccuracies of famous reciters including Ḥamzah and Nāfi', and says:

[342] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, 27-28.

[343] Abū al-'Abbās Muhammad ibn Yazīd al-Mubarrad, *al-Muqtaḍab* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Awqāf, 1994), vol. 4, 105.

'Rarely has any one of this group not fallen foul of error.'[344] Similarly, Muhammad 'Aḍīmah compiled many of the pertinent mistakes of scholars of syntax, some of whom were reciters, and accused them of insufficient knowledge. He reports that Ibn Jinnī describes the reciters in his book *al-Khaṣā'iṣ* as generally having an inadequate understanding, and in his other book, *al-Munṣif*, he mentions mistakes they made on the grounds that they had no basis for analogy.[345]

In *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, there is a section on the objections made by scholars of Arabic grammar and literature to certain readings by the reciters, some of which are as follows:

The objection to al-Bazzī, who, in 31 instances of future tense verbs in the Qur'an, has read the first letter tā' with tashdīd joined with the previous letter, as in the verse 2:267 وَلَا تَيَمَّمُوا الْخَبِيثَ;

The objection to Abū 'Amr regarding the assimilation of letters *(idghām)*;[346] he would assimilate two identical letters in two neighbouring words regardless of whether the preceding one has a vowel or not, as in these two verses: 2:185 شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ and 8:7 ذَاتِ الشَّوْكَةِ تَكُونُ.[347]

The objection to Ḥamzah regarding the reading of 18:97 فَمَا اسْطَاعُوا as فما اسطاعوا (with *tashdīd* on *ṭā'*); that is, assimilating the letter tā' (ت) with ṭā' (ط).[348] In this regard, there are many similar errors of the reciters, who are described as having weak understandings and drawing on imagination.[349]

The objections of the lay people to most of the Seven Readings are also worth mentioning. In many instances, these objections prompted reciters to abandon their preferred readings and adopt what was commonly accepted. This in itself shows that their own readings were derived from their respective *ijtihāds*. One example is the people's objection to Kisā'ī. Ibn Athīr narrates in *al-Nihāyah*, during the year when the 'Abbāsid caliph Mahdī went on the *ḥajj* pilgrimage, he asked al-Kisā'ī to lead the

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[344] Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'an*, 61.

[345] Muhammad 'Abd al-Khāliq 'Uḍaymah, *Dirāsāt li Uslūb al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1970), vol. 1, 32 ff.

[346] *Idghām* (إدغام): the contraction of two identical letters into one and pronouncing it with tashdīd. [Trans.]

[347] See Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, *al-Taysīr* (Istanbul: Maṭba'ah al-Duwali, 1930), 83.

[348] Al-Dānī, *al-Taysīr*, 146.

[349] Al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 174 ff.

congregational prayer whilst in Medina. During the prayer, he recited *nabī* (نبـى) with a saturation of the *yā'*, which produced a *ḥamzah* at the end (نبىء).[350] The people objected, saying: 'In the Mosque of the Prophet you read the Qur'an in such a way, whereas the Quraysh have not accepted this reading.' Also, a man addressed the Prophet thusly: 'يـا نَبـيء اللـه' (*yā nabī'a Allāh*), and the Prophet reprimanded him, saying: 'We of Quraysh do not pronounce *nabī* (prophet) with a saturation (*ishbā'*) of the *hamzah*.' And in another tradition the Prophet is reported to have said: 'Do not pronounce my epithet in that way.'[351]

Ibn Mujāhid says: 'Qunbul [one of the proponents of Ibn Kathīr] narrated to me that in 851/237 al-Qawwās said to him: 'Go to al-Bazzī [another proponent of Ibn Kathīr] and ask him why he would contract the reading of 14:17 وَمَا هُوَ بِمَيِّت when it is inconsistent with our reading.' He relayed this to al-Bazzī and he refrained from that reading.'[352] If al-Bazzī had not established the reading through his own *ijtihād*, and it had been uninterruptedly transmitted from the Prophet, then abandoning it would have been unwarranted, and any objection to it would have been unjustified.

Ibn Mujāhid also recounts that Muhammad ibn Ṣāliḥ said: 'I heard someone asking Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā': 'How do you read the phrase لا يعذّب (*lā yu'adhdhib*) in the verse 89:25 فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ?' and he answered: 'I read it with a *kasrah* under an accentuated (*mushaddad*) *dhāl*.' The man then asked: 'Why do you do that, when the Prophet is said to have read it as a *dhāl* with *fatḥah*?' Abū 'Amr told him: 'If someone claims that he has heard a style of reading from the Prophet, I do not accept it. Do you know why? It is because I do not believe any claim which is contrary to the common people's reading, and one person's claim is doubtful.''[353]

That Abū 'Amr should believe what the common people have accepted is worthy of consideration,[354] as is his paying no attention to a solitary report (*khabar wāḥid*), given that al-Kisā'ī (one of the Seven Reciters),

[350] This is technically called nabr (نبر), which has been prohibited.

[351] Al-Mubārak ibn Muhammad ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-hadīth* (Cairo: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1421 q.) vol. 5, 7.

[352] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 1, 452.

[353] Al-Jazarī, ibid.

[354] We will point out in the following discussion that this is regarded as the main criterion for the authenticity and acceptance of *qirā'ah*.

Ya'qūb (one of the Ten Reciters) and Ḥasan (one of the Fourteen Reciters) would read لا يعذب with a *fatḥah* and an accentuated *dhāl* (*lā yu'adhdhabu*).

Does it make sense for a widely reported (*mutawātir*) tradition to have existed and be available to Kisā'ī, who lived in the latter part of the second century AH, but for Abū 'Amr, who lived at the beginning of the same century, to be unaware of it? Ibn al-Jazarī believes that readings which have been transmitted through a trustworthy person, but are inconsistent with Arabic grammar, should not be accepted, even though they may be consistent with the writing of the Qur'an manuscript. He considers it certain that such readings are mistakes caused by forgetfulness and incorrect recording, and that they are not unknown to scholars and the *ḥuffāẓ* (those who memorise the Qur'an), even though they may be very few.

Ibn al-Jazarī also states:

> Some have regarded the narration of Khārija from Nāfi' concerning معائش (with *hamzah*) to be of this kind. The narration of Ibn Bakkār from Ayyūb, from Yaḥyā, on the authority of Ibn 'Āmir, regarding أدري أقريبٌ (with *fatḥah* on *yā'* and a *hamzah*) (72:25 ;21:109); the narration of Abū 'Alī al-'Aṭṭār from 'Abbās, on the authority of Abū 'Amr, concerning ساحِرانِ تظاهَرا (with accentuated (*mushaddad*) *ẓā'*) (*sāḥirāni taẓẓāharā*) (20:63); and what has been narrated by some commentators of *al-Shāṭabīyyah* regarding *waqf hamzah*, as in اسمايهم (*asmāyihim*) and اوليك (*ulāyika*) (with *yā'*), or شركاوهم (*shurakāwuhum*) and احبّاوه (*aḥibbāwuh*) (with *wāw*), or بداكم (*badā'kum*) and اخاه (*akhāh*) (with *alif*) (26:36 ;7:111), all belong to this category. Also the reading of را (*rā*) instead of رأى (*ra'ā*), ترا (*tarā*) instead of تراءى (*tarā'ā*), اشمزت (*ishmazzat*) instead of اشمأزت (*ishma'azzat*) and فادارتم (*faddārtum*), instead of فادّاراتم (*faddāra'tum*), which are called written contraction (*takhfīf rasmī*), have no place in the Arabic language.

And he adds:

> These cases, even if they were transmitted by a trustworthy person, are not acceptable, because there is nothing to substantiate them.[355]

It should therefore be stated that this assertion is the strongest evidence that the Seven Readings were not transmitted consecutively from the

[355] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 16-17.

Prophet, for otherwise there would be no reason whatsoever for rejecting them, and they would have to be accepted unconditionally.

The Tradition on the Seven *Ahruf*

The evidence that is invariably presented for establishing the authority of the Seven Readings is the well-known narration that states: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in Seven Letters (*sab'ati aḥruf*),' and which is interpreted as alluding to the Seven Readings.

Aḥruf, the plural form of *ḥarf* (letter), has been interpreted as *qirā'ah* (reading or recitation), but we will demonstrate later that *ḥarf* in this tradition means nothing other than 'accent' (*lahjah*). The different Arab tribes used to pronounce their prayers in their own respective accents, and did not have the same pronunciation as the Quraysh, who were the most eloquent of the Arabs. Some of the Companions asked the Prophet whether all Arabs – and all other peoples – should recite the Qur'an with the Qurayshi pronunciation? The Prophet answered: 'No, the Qur'an has been revealed in seven *accents*, and it is not limited to the Qurayshi *accent*.' The number seven here denotes multiplicity, and not a specific number.

We shall examine the above-mentioned traditions from both the Shī'a and Sunnī perspectives, first in the traditions narrated by *Ahl al-Bayt*, and then in Sunnī narrations.

Narrations of *Ahl al-Bayt*

1) In a *sanad* which includes Muhammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣayrafī (who is otherwise unknown), Abū Ja'far al-Ṣāduq has narrated on the authority of Ḥammād ibn 'Uthmān, from Imām Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq:

The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *aḥruf*, and each Imām can give an opinion in at least seven ways.[356]

Scholars have interpreted *aḥruf* in this tradition as referring to inner (*buṭūn*) meanings, in the sense that every verse has different layers of meaning which may be hidden from the common people, but are known by an infallible Imām, who can therefore express an opinion on them.

2) In a chain of transmission which includes Aḥmad ibn Hilāl (who was an extremist [*ghālin*] whose religious beliefs were questionable), it

[356] Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 'Abwāb *al-Sab'ah*,' vol. 2, 358, *ḥadīth* 43.

is narrated from 'Īsā ibn 'Abdillāh al-Hāshimī from his father that the Prophet said:

A messenger came from God telling me that He had said: 'Recite the Qur'an in a single *ḥarf.* I appealed: 'O Lord! make it easy for my *ummah.*' It was then declared: 'Verily God commands that you recite the Qur'an in seven *aḥruf.*'[357]

In this tradition *aḥruf* (*ḥarfs*) refers to the different Arab accents, and in Sunnī traditions the same meaning is indicated and intended, for God has provided a wide margin for the *ummah* to recite the Qur'an in their respective accents.

3) According to a *sanad* which is uncertain (since it is unsure whether it was on the authority of Ibn Abī 'Umayr or someone else), Muhammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār reported on the authority of Jamīl ibn Darrāj from Zurārah, that Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir said:

Exegesis of the Qur'an can be done according to seven *aḥruf*, some of which have been done, while there are others not yet accomplished, yet the Imāms know them.[358]

In this tradition, *aḥruf* means that every verse can be interpreted in different ways. In other traditions this is sometimes described as *buṭūn* (interiors).

4) In a *mursal*[359] tradition, Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī has reported that Imām 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, said:

> The Qur'an has been revealed in seven ways, every one of which is sufficient and healing. There are commands, prohibitions, encouragements, threats, reasonings, parables and stories.[360]

Clearly, this tradition tells us that the Qur'an has various applications.

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[357] Ibid. *ḥadīth* 44.

[358] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, 196.

[359] In Sunni hadith terminology *mursal* (literally 'hurried,' pl. *marāsīl*) is a *hadīth* whose *sanad* goes only as far back as a *tābi'ī* ('follower,' or member of the second generation of Muslims) who does not mention the name of the Companion (*ṣahābī*) of the Prophet from whom he heard it. In Shi'ī hadith terminology, however, any incomplete chain of transmission can be called *mursal*. [Trans.]

[360] Al-Kātib al-Nu'mānī, *Risālat al-Nu'mānī fī Ṣunūf Āy al-Qur'ān*, in Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, 3.

In reconciling these traditions, Muḥaddith Kāshānī says: 'It is possible to say that the verses of the Qur'an are of seven kinds, that every verse has seven 'interiors' (*buṭūn*), and also that it has been revealed in seven accents.'[361]

These are all the traditions narrated from the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt* in this regard, but their chains of transmission are have not been proved reliable according to Ayatollah Khoī and, before him, his teacher 'Allāmah Balāghī and others. It therefore becomes clear that there cannot be any definitive proof to substantiate the validity of the Seven Readings.

Sunnī Narrations

Amongst Ahl al-Sunnah, the foremost compiler of these traditions is Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Shāmah al-Maqdisī. In the third section of his book, under the heading *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, he mentions them in the following order:

1) In the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* (*Ṣāḥīh al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*), Ibn Shihāb is reported to have said: "Ubaydullāh ibn 'Abdillāh has narrated on the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās that the Prophet said: 'Gabriel recited to me the Qur'an in one *ḥarf*, and I always requested him to recite it in more than one *ḥarf* until finally it ended up in seven *ḥarfs*.'"[362]

2) In the same two books it is also narrated by Ibn Shihāb that 'Umar [ibn al-Khaṭṭāb] observed that Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam would read the Qur'an in prayer in a way previously unknown to him. He brought Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam to the Prophet, and the Prophet said: 'It has been revealed in such a way. The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*. Recite whichever of them is easier for you.'[363]

3) Ubayy ibn Ka'b is reported to have said: 'We were in the mosque when someone came and recited the Qur'an in such a manner that prompted us to protest to him. All of us went to the Prophet. Another person also joined us, and we differed in all kinds of verses each of us recited. The Prophet confirmed all [recitations]. Doubt and uncertainty enveloped me; my heartbeat increased and I perspired intensely. The Prophet told me: 'God revealed the Qur'an in a single *ḥarf*, and so I recited in the same way, but I asked God to make it easier for my *ummah*. Then the permission came for me to recite it in two *ḥarfs*. Again, I asked Him

[361] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, Preface to the Eighth Edition, vol. 1, 40.

[362] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 277; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, 202.

[363] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 288; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, 202.

to make it much easier. For a third time, He commanded: 'Recite the Qur'an in seven *ḥarfs*.'"[364]

4) Ubayy ibn Ka'b narrated that the Prophet said: 'O Ubayy! I used to recite the Qur'an in one, two and three *ḥarfs*, until it increased to seven *ḥarfs*, and each of them is sufficient to convey the meaning. If instead of *samī'an 'alīman* (All-Hearing, All-Knowing) what is recited is *'azīzan ḥakīman* (All-mighty, All-wise), and as long as a verse of chastisement is not recited with an expression of mercy, and a verse of mercy is not recited with an expression of chastisement, there is nothing wrong.'[365]

5) Ubayy ibn Ka'b also narrated that the Prophet met [Archangel] Gabriel and said to him: 'I have been sent to a people who are illiterate. Some of them are incapable and aged, while others are slaves or those who have never read a book.' In reply, Gabriel said: 'O Muhammad! The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*.'[366]

6) Abū Juhaym al-Anṣārī is reported to have said: 'Two persons who disagreed with each other concerning a verse of the Qur'an went to the Prophet. The Prophet said to them: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*. Do not dispute about it, for disputing about the Qur'an is faithlessness (*kufr*).'"[367]

7) Abū Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs* and there is no difference between *'alīman ḥakīman* and *ghafūran raḥīman*.'[368]

8) 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd narrated that the Prophet said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*, and there is an apparent (*ẓāhir*) and a hidden (*bāṭin*) for every *ḥarf*; there is a limit (*ḥadd*) for every *ḥarf*, and for every *ḥadd* there is a 'beginning' (*maṭla'*).'[369]

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[364] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, 203; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 5, 127.

[365] Sulaymān ibn Ash'ath Abū Dāwūd Sijistānī, *Sunan* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah, n.d.), vol. 2, 102.

[366] Muhammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ)* (al-Maktabat al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), vol. 5, 194, *ḥadīth* 2944.

[367] Husayn ibn al-Hasan al-Ḥalīmī, *Minhāj al-Dīn fī Shu'ab al-Īmān* (Egypt: Dār al-Kitāb, 1930), vol. 1, 372 from Bayhaqī; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 4, 169.

[368] 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1409 q.), vol. 7, 182.

[369] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, 9.

9) 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd also narrated that the Prophet said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*, and dispute over this is *kufr*.' He repeated this statement thrice, and then said: 'Act upon that which you know, and of that which you do not know, ask from those who know it.'[370]

10) As narrated by Zayd ibn Arqam, a man came to the Prophet and said: "Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Zayd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b recited a verse for me, and each recitation differed from the others. Whose recitation should I follow?' The Prophet remained silent. 'Alī, who was then sitting beside the Prophet, said: 'Everyone should recite the Qur'an the way he knows and has been taught; all of them are good and acceptable.'[371]

In 'Abdullāh's version of the hadīth, the Prophet pointed to 'Alī, and 'Alī said: 'The Prophet commands that each of you should recite the way you know. Therefore, each of us may recite in a way another person would not.' Ḥākim Nayshābūrī says: 'The *sanad* of this tradition is sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*).'[372]

11) Ibn Mas'ūd narrated that the Prophet said: 'The Primary Book was revealed from a single branch (*bāb*) in a single *ḥarf*,[373] and the Qur'an has been revealed from seven branches in seven *ḥarfs*: chastisement (*zajr*), command (*amr*), lawful (*ḥalāl*), unlawful (*ḥarām*), definitive (*muḥkam*) and allegorical (*mutashābih*) verses, and anecdotes (*amthāl*).'[374]

12) Abū Qilābah narrated that the Prophet said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*: command, chastisement, encouragement (*targhīb*), warning (*tarhīb*), reasoning (*jadal*), stories (*qaṣaṣ*) and adages (*muthul*).'[375]

These are the main relevant Sunnī traditions which some claim to be *mutawātir*;[376] but the meaning and content of these traditions vary from one to the other and do not conform to the definition of *tawātur*, a condition for which is agreement amongst all of them. As such, these traditions can be divided into four groups:

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[370] Ibid. vol. 1, 9.

[371] Ibid. vol. 1, 10.

[372] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 223-224.

[373] The 'Primary Book' refers to the books revealed to the previous prophets, as stated in another tradition: إنّ الكتب كانت تنزل من السماء من باب واحد.... See al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 553 ,1.

[374] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, 23; al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 1, 549.

[375] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, 24.

[376] See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, vol. 1, 21.

1) Traditions which imply differences of pronunciation; for example, traditions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10.

2) Traditions which suggest the acceptability of interchanging synonymous words; for example, traditions 4 and 7.

3) Traditions that indicate that each verse is subject to different interpretations, some of which are 'outward' meanings and others 'inward'; for example, traditions 8 and 9.

4) Traditions which indicate the division of verses into seven branches (*abwāb*); for example, traditions 11 and 12.

Most of the traditions belong to the first group, that is, differences in pronunciation (*lahjah*) in the recitation of verses. This corresponds with the position of most of the scholars regarding the 'seven *ḥarfs*' which the Prophet permitted for the recitation of the Qur'an, whereas other alternative views are considered unusual or invalid, and the major scholars reject them. The preeminent scholar in this field is Ibn al-Jazarī, and he has explored ten possible meanings pertaining to the traditions on the seven *ḥarfs*.[377] Therefore, it is appropriate to examine them separately. In brief, they are as follows:

The first group of these traditions – that is, concerning differences of pronunciation – is in reality a means of alleviating difficulties for the *ummah* regarding the recitation of the Qur'an. The Bedouins did not recite the Qur'an the same way as the city-dwellers, and there are differences in how illiterate and literate people express words, as there are between an adult's pronunciation and a child's. Moreover, there would be different intonations amongst the tribes, each pronouncing words in ways to which they were accustomed. So it is also with the non-Arabs of the Muslim *ummah*, who have difficulty with Arabic words and may not be able to pronounce many of them. Therefore, since the recitation of the Qur'an according to a single *lahjah* is beyond the capacity of many people, everyone is permitted to recite it according to the *lahjah* with which he is acquainted, as in the verse:

God does not task any soul beyond its capacity (2:286).

Imām al-Ṣādiq narrated on the authority of his forefathers that the Prophet said: 'A non-Arab of my *ummah* recites the Qur'an with a non-

[377] Ibid. vol. 2, 21-54.

Arabic intonation, but the angels elevate it in Arabic.'[378] This has the same meaning as when the Prophet said: 'I have been sent to an *ummah* amongst whom there are old men and women, young men and women, and individuals who have never read a book.' Hence, he permitted his *ummah* to recite the Qur'an in seven *ḥarfs* according to their various dialects, without a specific method of pronunciation – which they may not be able to manage – is not being incumbent upon them. In yet another tradition, the Prophet said: 'Recite the Qur'an in whichever way you like, that is, in whichever way you can,' and alternatively, 'Each one should recite the Qur'an in the way he has been taught.' In this respect, Abū al-'Āliyah has narrated that five persons recited some verses of the Qur'an before the Prophet, and the pronunciation of each of them differed one from the other, but the Prophet approved of the recitation of each of them.[379]

Ibn Qutaybah says:

> One thing God has facilitated is that He commanded the Prophet that every community may recite the Qur'an in its own dialect and teach it according to its custom. For example, the tribe of Hudhayl recites *'attā ḥīn* instead of *ḥattā ḥīn* (23:54), because they pronounce this phrase in that way. The tribe of Asad pronounces *ta'lamūna* as *ta'lamū* and *taswaddu wujūhun* (3:106) with the letter *tā'* with a *kasrah* vowel, and *a'had* in the verse *alam a'had ilaykum* (36:60) with a *kasrah* vowel (*a'hid*). The tribe of Tamīm would utter *hamzah* where the tribe of Quraysh would not. Some would read the words *qīla* (2:11) and *ghīḍa* (11:44) with the *ishmām*[380] of *ḍammah* with a *kasrah*, while others would read the word *ruddat* (12:65) with the *ishmām* of *kasrah* with a *ḍammah*. Others would pronounce *mā laka lā ta'mannā* (12:11) with the *ishmām* of *ḍammah* and merging (*idghām*). This is because every [speaker of a] language is accustomed to a certain thing, and they are incapable of pronouncing words in ways they are not used to. If each group of these people – children, young and old – were duty bound to change their spoken language and abandon what they are accustomed to, it would be very hard and complicated, and

[378] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 866.

[379] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, 15.

[380] *Ishmām* is the pronunciation of *u* with a trace of *i*, or vice versa. [Trans.]

> they would have many difficulties before their habit were changed and their speech habituated to something new. As such, out of His Mercy and Grace, God has desired to provide to the *ummah* facility in this regard, just as He has provided facility regarding the essence of religion.[381]

Ibn Yazdād al-Ahwāzī says: "Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās are reported to have said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed for the pronunciation of each of the Arab tribes." It is stated in a narration from Ibn 'Abbās that the Prophet used to recite the Qur'an to the people in a particular way [style of speech, *lahjah*], and that this was difficult for the people. Thus, Gabriel came down and said: 'O Muhammad! Recite the Qur'an to every community in its own language.'

Abū Shāmah confirms this when he says:

> This is the very truth, because, if in terms of facilitation for the Arab people, the recitation of the Qur'an is permissible in other than the dialect of the Quraysh, it is inappropriate for other communities to be disallowed to recite the Qur'an with their own respective pronunciation, and for this facility to be meant for a certain group and not for another, for no one has any duty other than that which is within his capacity. If certain people are permitted to pronounce the words of the Qur'an according to their dialect by shortening the *hamzah*, merging letters, adding *ḍamma* to the *mīm* of the plural, joining the letter *hā'* in certain words and the like, how can others be deprived of this and be obliged to recite the Qur'an only in a particular manner? There are some who pronounce the letter *shīn* like *jīm*, *ṣād* like *zā'*, *kāf* like *jīm*, and *jīm* like *kāf*. They may not be able to articulate some letters and there is stammering in their speech; no one is obliged beyond their capacity, although it is up to everyone to strive hard, as much as they can, and learn the correct pronunciation.[382]

This is essentially the same as we have acknowleged in interpreting the seven letters (*al-aḥruf al-sab'ah*) – that is, different pronunciations in the Arab dialects. And it was narrated earlier from al-Suyūṭī that *lughah*

[381] Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 39-40.

[382] Al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 96-97.

(used in the tradition) refers to certain features of speech, including *iẓhār* (manifestation), *idghām* (merging), *tafkhīm* (velarisation), *tarqīq* (non-velarisation), *imālah* (a closed variant), *ishbā'* (a six-vowel length), *madd* (vowel prolongation), *qaṣr* (a two-vowel length), *tashdīd* (accentuation), *talyīn* (softening) and the like.[383]

Ḥarf literally means 'edge' or 'side.' Ibn Saydah narrates that when someone says: 'So-and-so is situated on a *ḥarf* of his work,' it means that he is not involved in the essentials of his work, but with marginal elements, so that if interrupted, he could immediately break off from it. In the Qur'an, the same expression is used, as in the following verse:

> *And amongst the people are those who worship God on a ḥarf (the very fringe)* (22:11).

This means that whenever ill-fortune befalls them, they immediately turn away from their faith. Al-Azharī reports from Abū Haytham that *ḥarf* indicates the fringe of things; for example, *ḥarf al-jabal* means a hillside, *ḥarf al-nahr* is riverside, and *ḥarf al-sayf* is the blade of a sword.

Therefore, whenever a word is expressed (or in this case recited) in different forms, each of these forms is regarded as a *ḥarf*, because the form of a thing appears through a particular aspect; and since recitation (*qirā'ah*) is the utterance of one or more words, it is considered as the aspect (which becomes apparent) of the form of oral expression, and hence it is called a *ḥarf* (pl. *aḥruf*).

When interpreting the statement: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in seven *'Aḥruf*, Abū 'Ubayd said: 'It is revealed in seven Arab dialects,' and al-Azharī narrates from Abū al-'Abbās that: '*Aḥruf* [here] means nothing other than dialects.' Al-Azharī says: 'Abū al-'Abbās, who in his time was uniquely skilled in Arabic literature, accepted Abū 'Ubayd's statement in this regard and considered it correct.'[384]

Lughāt refers to languages, in this case Arabic with its various dialects. Al-Baghawī says: 'The most precise statements regarding this tradition, and the strictest interpretation of the external meaning, is that *aḥruf* (letters) refers to *lughāt* (dialects), in the sense that every Arab tribe can recite the Qur'an in its own dialect and may read each word according

[383] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 46.

[384] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, under the entry ḥ-r-f (حرف).

to his style – including *idghām*, *iẓhār*, *imālah*, *tafkhīm*, *ishmām*, *itmām*, *talyīn* and other modes – such that every word can be read in seven different ways.'[385]

There are different opinions regarding the second group of traditions (traditions 4 and 7), those which suggest the possibility of interchanging synonymous words on condition that the essential meaning is not changed, and does not transform a verse of mercy into one of chastisement or vice versa. Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b considered such interchanges acceptable. Ibn Mas'ūd has said: 'I have heard the readings of the reciters, and I have found them similar to each other. One may also recite the Qur'an the way one has learned it, and there is no difference between *halluma* and *ta'āla*.'[386]

He told of a non-Arab man who could not pronounce the word *al-athīm* (sinner) correctly in the verse *inna shajarata al-zaqqūmi ṭa'āmu al-athīm* (44:43-44), and instead would say it as *al-yatīm* (orphan), and say *ṭa'āmu al-fājir* (sinner) instead of *ṭa'āmu al-athīm*.'. He also said that there is nothing wrong if we say *al-'alīm* (the All-Knowing) instead of *al-ḥakīm* (the All-Wise) while reciting the Qur'an. He even considered it permissible to interchange a verse of mercy and verse of chastisement.[387] He would replace *Ilyās* with *Idrīs* and recite *salāmun 'alā ilyāsīn*[388] as *salāmun 'alā idrāsīn*. He would read *aw yakūna laka baytun min dhahab*[389] instead of *aw yakūna laka baytun min zukhruf* (17:93); *al-ṣūf al-manfūsh*[390] instead of *al-'ihni al-manfūsh* (101:9); and *innī nadhartu li al-raḥmāni ṣamtā* instead of *innī nadhartu li al-raḥmāni ṣawmā* (19:26).[391]

Ubayy ibn Ka'b would read *kullamā aḍā'a lahum mashaw fīh* (2:20) as *...marrū fīh* or *...sa'aw fīh*,[392] and he also believed that there is no difference in reading *ghafūran raḥīmā* as *samī'an 'alīmā* or *'alīman samī'ā*, since God

[385] Abū Muhammad al-Husayn ibn Mas'ūd al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, (Cairo: Dār al-Iḥyā', 1940), 140; al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 134.

[386] Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, vol. 4, hadith no. 33, 1933.

[387] *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*, vol. 2, 213.

[388] This alludes to 37:130. See *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 23, 96.

[389] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 23, 96.

[390] Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 19.

[391] Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1419 q.), vol. 1, 340.

[392] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 47.

is described with all these attributes, and no wrong is done as long as a verse of chastisement is not turned into a verse of mercy or vice versa.[393]

Anas ibn Mālik and Abū Hurayrah agreed with this. Anas used to recite *inna nāshi'at al-layli hiya ashaddu waṭa'an wa aṣwabu qīlā*. He was told: 'O Abū Ḥamzah! the verse is '*wa aqwamu qīlā*' (73:6), and he would say: '*Aqwam*, *aṣwab* and *ahdā* are all the same.'[394] Also, Abū Hurayrah would permit *'alīman ḥakīmā* to be changed to *ghafūran raḥīmā*.[395]

According to many erudite scholars, however, changing the words of the Qur'an is never justified, and has been regarded by most Muslims throughout history as unacceptable, for every word in every phrase has a certain peculiarity which cannot be expressed in any other way, no matter how synonymous it may appear to be, let alone if it is completely different. *Al-'alīmu al-ḥakīm* (the All-Knowing, the All-Wise) is significantly different from *al-ghafūru al-raḥīm* (the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful). The same applies to other synonymous words, since each has its own peculiarity. If the speaker carefully observes them all, his speech is admired for its excellence, and it is this that distinguishes eloquence. In this respect the Holy Qur'an is a miracle par excellence, and the way it determines suitable words is often hard to pronounce for even for the most articulate Arabic speaker. For this reason, people have acknowledged and accepted that the language of the Qur'an is inimitable. The great teacher Ayatollah Khoī says:

The notion of the permissibility of replacing words of the Qur'an with synonymous words brings destruction into the very foundation of the Qur'an, which is an eternal miracle and proof for all mankind. And no sensible person has any doubt that this methodology – that is, inattention to the status of the Qur'an – renders it obsolete. Can any sensible person conceive that the Prophet would have allowed anyone to read *Sūrah Yā Sīn* in the following manner: *Yā Sīn. Wa al-dhakri al-'aẓīm. Innaka lamina al-anbiyā'. 'Alā ṭarīqin sawīy. Inzāla al-ḥamīdi al-karīm. Litakhuwwafa qawman mā khuwwifa aslāfuhum fahum sāhūn*? Can anyone allow such changes and interpolations in the words of the Qur'an? It is narrated that the Prophet

[393] Balāghī, in the introduction to *Tafsīr Shubbar*, 20, as quoted in al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*.

[394] *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, 18.

[395] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 47.

taught a supplication (*du'ā'*) to Barā' ibn 'Āzib, a part of which says: *wa nabiyyika al-ladhī arsalta* (...and Your Prophet whom You have sent). He read it as follows: *wa rasūlika al-ladhī arsalta* (...and Your Messenger whom You have sent). The Prophet told him: 'Do not change the word *nabī* to *rasūl*.' If such a thing is not allowed with regards to supplication, how can it be allowed with regards to the Qur'an, which is the eternal Word revealed by God?[396]

Perhaps Imām al-Ṣādiq's denial of the tradition on the seven *aḥruf* expresses the same sense, in that the tradition deflects the Qur'an from its original inimitability. When Fuḍayl ibn Yasār asked the Imām about it, he said: 'The enemies of God have told a lie. In fact, the Qur'an has been revealed in a single language from the One and Only.'[397]

There are no objections to the meaning of the third and fourth groups of traditions, provided that their chains of transmission are authentic. The main thing is that the first group of traditions, referring to the different Arab dialects, is apparently preferable.

What is meant by 'seven' here is a relative multiplicity, as when God says:

> *...and the sea replenished with seven more seas [were ink]...* (31:27);

or like the word *sab'īn* (seventy) in this verse of the Qur'an:

> *Even if you plead forgiveness for them seventy times, God shall never forgive them* (9:80).

There is nothing wrong with a word being expressed in a different dialect as long as it is customarily considered to be correct. An exception would be the case of those who are simply unable to say a word correctly. But those who have the ability to say it correctly, even if they struggle to learn it, are not permitted to pronounce it incorrectly.

The Prophet said: 'Learn the Qur'an according to the Arab ways and means, and avoid *nabr* – the expression of *hamzah* – in it.'[398]

Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'Learn *'arabiyyah*,[399] because it is the Word in which God has spoken to His creatures and with those who have passed away.'[400]

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[396] Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 197-198.

[397] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 630.

[398] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 865.

[399] *'Arabiyyah* may refer to the Arabic language and dialect, and it is possible that it denotes Arabic grammar and literature.

[400] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 866.

Imām Muhammad al-Jawād said in a meeting: 'Two persons are not equal before God when one of them excels in literature.' He was told: 'We are acquainted with such superiority when meeting people and in social interaction, but what is not clear is the reason for this superiority before God.' The Imām said: 'It is because of his recitation of the Qur'an in the way it has been revealed, and his recitation of supplications free of error, because an incorrectly recited supplication does not ascend to God.'[401]

Of course, it is enough for those who are incapable of reciting the Qur'an to do so to the best of their ability, because God does not demand anything beyond anyone's capacity. According to the report from Imām al-Ṣādiq quoted earlier, the Prophet said: 'When a non-Arab of my *ummah* recites the Qur'an with a non-Arab intonation, the angels elevate it to the status of eloquent Arabic.'

The Traditions of the Seven *Ahruf* and their Relation to the Seven Recitations

None of the authorities in this field have been known to have ever established a relationship between the tradition that the Qur'an was revealed in seven *ḥarfs* and the Seven Recitations. Nevertheless, such a notion has gained widespread acceptance amongst the common people, even though there is no reliable proof to support it. Many knowledgeable and critical scholars, such as Ibn al-Jazarī, Abū Shāmah, Zarkashī, Abū Muhammad al-Makkī and Ibn Taymiyyah, have rejected this common notion. Ibn al-Jazarī attributes this claim to ignorant, illiterate people with no knowledge.[402]

Abū Muhammad al-Makkī says: 'Anyone who imagines that the recitation of each of these reciters (*qurrā'*) is one of the seven *ḥarfs* stipulated by the Prophet is committing a blunder.'[403] Abū Shāmah says: 'Some have imagined that the seven *ḥarfs* mentioned in the tradition refers to the Seven Recitations – a notion which is prevalent even up until now, even though it is contrary to the consensus of all the people of knowledge.

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[401] Ibid.

[402] Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Jazarī, *Taḥbīr al-Taysīr* (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'ī, 1392 q.), 10.

[403] Abū al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Dīn*, (Hyderabad, n.d.), 3; al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 151.

It has only been discussed by various simpletons.'[404] He also says: 'Some of those who are inproficient in the science of recitation (*qirā'ah*) have imagined that the recitation of the seven sheikhs is the one referred to by the Prophet in the tradition that the Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*, and that the recitation of each of them is one of these seven *ḥarfs*. Those who attribute this notion to Ibn Mujāhid are mistaken.'[405]

Ibn Taymiyyah says: 'All the prominent and realistic scholars believe that the seven *ḥarfs* mentioned by the Prophet do not refer to the famous Seven Recitations. The first person to have compiled the Seven Recitations was Ibn Mujāhid, and he meant that the recitations are consistent with the number of *ḥarfs* on the basis of which the Qur'an was revealed. It is not that he believed that the Seven Recitations are the same seven *ḥarfs*, or that no one should accept anything other than the recitation of the Seven Reciters. This is something which none of the scholars, including Ibn Mujāhid, believe.'[406]

What further discredits this notion is that, according to this understanding, the seven *ḥarfs* on the basis of which the Prophet supposedly permitted the recitation of the Qur'an remained unknown until the Seven Recitations gradually emerged, when the seven *ḥarfs* permitted for the entire *ummah* by the Prophet were understood to be the readings of the Seven Reciters. Despite this, there were many other reciters who were better than these seven, but were excluded by the tradition. How is it possible for the Prophet to have explained this application of the seven *ḥarfs* only to Ibn Mujāhid and no one else?

Abū Muhammad Harawī says: 'It is incorrect to say that the tradition of the seven *ḥarfs* refers to the Seven Recitations whose reciters were born later, for it renders the tradition meaningless before that time. Besides, the corollary of this claim would be that none of the Companions would have been allowed to recite the Qur'an unless he knew in advance the way those who were to become the Seven Reciters in the future would recite.' He adds: 'I have specifically made mention of this because some of the laity accept it.'[407]

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[404] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 80.

[405] Al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 146.

[406] Ibn al-Jazarī has recorded this religious edict (*fatwā*) from Ibn Taymiyyah in *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 39.

[407] See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 33.

Summary of the Discussion

It is clear from the previous discussions that it is impossible to demonstrate that the narrations concerning these recitations go back to the Prophet, or were widely acknowledged (*tawātur*), for several reasons:

There is no proof to substantiate the claim;

Factors which caused differences amongst the reciters led to the different readings;

All chains of transmission of the readings mentioned in the books on recitation belong to the category of a solitary *(āḥād)* sanad, and none of them is *mutawātir*. In addition, there is doubt regarding the veracity of the chains, and traces of forgery can be discerned. In many instances, the chains are either concocted or 'ceremonial';

Many scholars and prominent personalities of the ummah have misgivings concerning several aspects of the readings of these reciters. However, if they were *mutawātir* from the Prophet, no Muslim would ever dare raise an objection to them;

The existence of irregular *(shādhdh)* recitations by the Seven Reciters which are inconsistent with *tawātur*;

Conventional theoretical explanations for substantiating these recitations show that they are based on *ijtihād*; but if a recitation is *mutawātir*, there is no need to produce a conventional proof to substantiate it;

There are contradictions amongst the recitations, which negates their *tawātur* from the Prophet, for two contradictory accounts do not accord with *tawātur*;

There is no corollary between the *tawātur* of the Qur'an, which is accepted by all, and the claimed *tawātur* in relation to the recitations, and only the uninformed have promoted this notion;

There is no relation between the tradition that the Qur'an was revealed in seven *ḥarfs* and the notion of the *tawātur* of the recitations, and according to Imām Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī it is a misgiving to which certain laymen succumb.

The Rules for Identifying Correct Recitation

The authorities in the science of recitation (*qirā'ah*) have laid down certain rules for identifying a proper recitation and distinguishing it from incorrect ones. Three conditions have been given:

1) It must have an authentic *sanad*, or chain of transmission, that can be traced back to one of the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*).

2) It must be consistent with the script of the codex (*muṣḥaf*).

3) It must be consistent with the literary rules of Arabic.

Any recitation which satifies these three conditions is authentic and therefore acceptable. If any of the conditions is absent, the recitation is to be regarded as inauthentic and unacceptable. Technically, such a recitation is called *shādhdh* (irregular).

The three conditions are the elements of acceptable recitation. In describing these elements, it is said that a recitation does not necessarily have to be consistent with the highest standards of eloquence. Skilled grammarians have regarded many of the recitations as inconsistent with standard classical Arabic grammar, but even though they may be irregular, it is enough if they are consistent with one of the Arabic dialects and are reported from one of the Seven Reciters.[408]

However, it must be stated that the Qur'an was revealed in a most eloquent form of Arabic, and unusual or irregular Arabic dialects could never be the criteria for its recitation. Such stipulations by scholars such as Ibn al-Jazarī degrade the station of the Holy Qur'an. It is the unjustified acknowledgement of the authority of the Seven Readings that has led them to make such unreasonable statements.

Ibn al-Jazarī also says: 'By consistency with the script of the codex we mean that a consistency with the script of any of the 'Uthmānī codices is sufficient as the criterion for a correct recitation.' This is while we know for a fact that the seven 'Uthmānī codices themselves varied. So how could they be the criteria for correct recitation?

Concerning the *sanad*, it was mentioned earlier that most of the chains of transmission of the reciters were 'ceremonial,' and were created in order to support the foundation of a recitation. The fact is that the

[408] See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī 'l-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 10.

sheikhs and teachers of recitation with whom each of the reciters studied were put forward as the chain of transmission.

The Acceptable Criterion

What we consider to be the criterion for valid recitation is consistency with the recitation of the Muslim population, as opposed to the recitation of the mentioned reciters, for the Qur'an has passed through two parallel channels. The first is that of the people, whereby Muslims have passed down to us today by memory, person to person from father to son, what was heard from the Prophet.

This recitation of the people is that of Ḥafṣ, which is consistent with the text of all existing codices[409] throughout the centuries. This is because it is the same recitation of Imām 'Alī, which is what the main body of the people heard from the Prophet. This channel is *mutawātir*, and it is through this channel that the Qur'an has reached us as *tawātur*. Yet the channel of the reciters and their recitations is *ijtihād* (except the recitation of 'Āṣim), and *ijtihād* is not permitted with respect to the text of Qur'an, because it has no religious authority. There are three conditions to identify the correct and *mutawātir* recitation as narrated and recorded by the majority

1) Consistency with the text of the existing codices as recorded throughout the centuries by competent people. All the written and printed copies of the Qur'an – especially in the Muslim East – have been passed on unchanged.

2) Consistency with the eloquence and accepted principles of the Arabic language, for the Qur'an was revealed in the most eloquent mode with no linguistic irregularities.

3) Consistency with the unalterable principles of the *sharī'ah* and definitive intellectual rules, for the Qur'an is the lasting foundation of the *sharī'ah* and correct ideology, against which it is not permitted to transgress.

In this regard,[410] there are particular sayings of the Infallible Imāms[411] which are given below:

[409] In all centres where the recitation and the reproduction of the manuscripts originated, such as Kufa, Baṣra and other regions in the eastern part of the Muslim world at the time.

[410] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2.

[411] See Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 'Kitāb Faḍl al-Qur'ān,' 'Bāb al-Nawādir,' *ḥadīths* 8, 12-13, 15, 23 and 27, 627.

1) Muhammad ibn Warrāq has said: 'I showed a volume which contained a copy of the Qur'an to Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq. Its signs and symbols were made of gold, and one of its last *sūrah*s was also written in gold. The Imām did not mention any imperfection in it, except that he said: 'I do not like the Qur'an to be written in other than black ink, as it was inscribed for the first time."

This bespeaks the vehement strictness of the Imām regarding the protection and preservation of the Qur'an, so much so that he wished to maintain the original colour of the ink, so that the Qur'an would not be confused with anything else due to additions or embellishments.

2) Imām Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Bāqir has said: 'The Qur'an is one, and it has been revealed by the One and Only God, and these differences come from the narrators.' This means that the recitation revealed by God is unique and that the Qur'an was revealed in one form, and that the differences in the narration of the text is derived from the *ijtihād* of the reciters. The next tradition explains this point.

3) Imām Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in one *ḥarf* from the One God.' This means that the common recitations which the people have supposed to have been *mutawātir* from the Prophet are negated. The Imām denied such a notion because the Qur'an was revealed in one form, but he did not negate the difference in dialects (according to our interpretation of the seven *ḥarf*s), as indicated in other traditions narrated earlier.

4) Sālim ibn Salamah said: 'Someone recited some verses of the Qur'an before Imām al-Ṣādiq, and as I heard it, his recitation was different from that of the people. Imām Ṣadiq told him: 'Refrain from this recitation and recite in the same way the people recite [the Qur'an]." Perhaps, this person was reciting the Qur'an as an exercise in the art of recitation, and since such recitations are tantamount to playing with the text of the Qur'an, the Imām forbad it. He told the man to choose the same popular recitation adopted by the people, for the correct recitation which is enjoined in the *sharī'ah* is the same recitation received generation after generation from the Prophet, given by Gabriel from God, the Almighty, and one must pay no attention to reciters who use the science of recitation as a vehicle for innovation or novelty in their profession. Therefore only the recitation which is consistent with that of the generality should be followed.

5) Sufyān ibn Samṭ has said: 'I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the revelation (*tanzīl*) of the Qur'an. He said: 'Recite it the way you have learned it."

He had asked about the original text as it was revealed for the first time, because he had noticed that the reciters had different opinions in this regard, and the Imām replied that the original text is that which is prevalent today amongst the people. His declaration: 'Recite the way you have learned it,' signifies that 'It is incumbent upon you [that is, the Muslims as a whole] to recite the Qur'an as you have learned it through your predecessors from the Prophet.'

6) 'Alī ibn al-Ḥakam said: "Abdullāh ibn Farqad and Mu'allā ibn Khunays spoke with me in the presence of Imām al-Ṣādiq, and Rabī'ah al-Ra'y was also with us. The virtues of the Qur'an were mentioned, and Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'If Ibn Mas'ūd was not reciting the Qur'an according to our recitation, then he had strayed.' Rabī'ah wandered aloud: 'Strayed?' and the Imām replied: 'Yes, strayed.' The Imām added: 'We recite the Qur'an according to the recitation of Ubayy."

Perhaps it was that the discussion was focused on the unusual recitation of Ibn Mas'ūd, and the Imām reminded them that they were invalid and that the correct recitation is none other than the recitation of th common Muslims. Thus anyone who goes against this common way of the masses has strayed, because such a person deviates from the way of the Muslims as passed down by the Prophet from generation to generation. And if Ibn Mas'ūd allegedly recited the Qur'an contrary to the way of the Muslims, he had strayed, for the middle path is that taken by the Muslim community, and anyone, whoever it may be, who deviates from the middle path has strayed.

Meanwhile, the statement of the Imām that 'We recite the Qur'an according to the recitation of Ubayy' points to the standardisation of the Qur'an during the time of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, when Ubayy ibn Ka'b used to dictate the Qur'an and an appointed team would write it according to his dictation. Whenever there was a difference concerning the original text, they would refer to him in order to resolve the matter. Hence, the existing codice which is acceptable to the Muslim populace is attested to by Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Therefore 'according to the recitation of Ubayy' alludes to that which the Muslim masses presently follow.

7) Shaykh Ṣadūq narrates on the authority of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who narrated from his forefathers that the Messenger of God said: 'Learn the Qur'an in the same superior Arabic, and refrain from *nabr* in the Qur'an [that is, the exaggeration of *hamzah*].'[412]

Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'The over-expression of the *hamzah* is tantamount to adding something to the Qur'an, with the exception of the original *hamzah*s such as الخَبْء (*al-khab'a*) in the verses:

يسجدوا لله الذى يخرج الخبء (٢٧:٢٥);

لَكُمْ فيها دِفْءٌ (*dif'un*) (١٦:٥);

and فَادّارأتُمْ (*fāddāra'tum*) (٢:٧٢).'[413]

In some manuscripts, the word *al-nabr* has been written with *zāy*, i.e., *al-nabz*, which is a mistake. As mentioned earlier from *al-Nihāyah* by Ibn al-Athīr, *al-nabr* is correct, and al-Kisā'ī read it as such.

The fact that 'Recite the Qur'an in pure Arabic'[414] is mentioned in the traditions of *Ahl al-Bayt* shows the ardent desire to preserve the original language of the Qur'an – classical Arabic and its prevalent dialects – so that the Qur'an would be immune from any sort of distortion or misreading, and no changes would find a way into it.

The Codifications of Famous Recitations

From the very beginning, the Muslims used to recite the Qur'an in the way they heard from the Companions of the Prophet, and after the Companions, in the way they learned it from the Successers (*tābi'ūn*) and the great predecessors who lived in different cities. In Medina there were Sa'īd ibn Musayyib, 'Urwah ibn Zubayr, Sālim ibn 'Abdillāh al-'Adawī, Mu'ādh ibn Ḥārith, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Hurmuz, Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihāb, Muslim ibn Jundub and Zayd ibn Aslam; in Mecca there were 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr, 'Aṭā', Ṭāwūs, Mujāhid, 'Ikrimah and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Malīkah; in Kufa there were 'Alqamah, Aswad, Masrūq, 'Ubaydah, 'Amr ibn Sharḥabīl, Ḥārith ibn Qays, Rabī' ibn Khuthaym, 'Amr ibn Maymūn,

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[412] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣaduq, *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār* (Najaf, 1971), 327.

[413] See al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār*, 98.

[414] See Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 6, chapter 30, on the recitation of the Qur'an, *ḥadīth* 1, 222.

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, 'Ubayd ibn Naḍīlah, Abū Zar'ah, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī and Sha'bī; in Baṣra there were 'Āmir ibn 'Abd Qays, Abū al-'Āliyah, Abū Rajā', Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim, Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur and Jābir ibn Zayd; and in the Levant there were Ibn Abī Shihāb and Khalīd ibn Sa'd, the companion of Abū al-Dardā'.

At the time, they and others like them were considered scholars of the *ummah* in different quarters, and experts to whom the Muslims would refer in various aspects of Islamic studies. Their expertise was comprehensive and not confined to Qur'anic recitation. Later on, some concentrated on the science of recitation as their own field of expertise. They became well known for their recitation and teaching of the Qur'an, and were the forerunners in this field to whom people would come from far and wide to learn the Qur'an.

There would usually be a reciter (*qārī*) in each city or region from whom the people would learn the Qur'an, and because of their social standing, different recitations became attributed to them. Among those who gained prominence in Medina were Abū Ja'far Yazīd ibn Qa'qā', Shaybah ibn Naṣṣaḥ and Nāfi' ibn Abī Nu'aym; in Mecca, 'Abdullāh ibn Kathīr, Ḥamīd ibn Qays and Muhammad ibn Muḥayṣin; in Kufa, Yaḥyā ibn al-Waththāb, 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd, Sulaymān al-A'mash, Ḥamzah and al-Kisā'ī; in Baṣra, 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Isḥāq, 'Īsā ibn 'Umar, Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', 'Āṣim al-Jaḥdarī and Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī; and in the Levant, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir, 'Aṭiyyah ibn Qays, 'Abdullāh ibn Muhājir, Yaḥyā ibn Abī al-Ḥārith al-Dhamārī and Shurayḥ ibn Yazīd al-Ḥaḍramī.

Following them the number of reciters increased, and were scattered throughout the different regions of the Muslim lands of the time, one generation succeeding another. As indicated earlier, however, they had different ways of teaching the Qur'an. Some of them were systematically erudite in the recitation of the Qur'an, observing both the narration (*riwāyah*) and the rationale (*dirāyah*), but others had shortcomings in this respect, and differences emerged. Gradually the transcriptions of the recitations developed imperfections in more and more radical ways. In the words of Ibn al-Jazarī: 'It was feared that falsehood would wear the garb of truth.'[415] Thus, distinguished scholars and others within the *ummah* stood firm, and strove hard to study the texts and distinguish what

[415] See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 9.

was well-established from the spurious, and to specify the principles of recitation. As a result, Qur'anic recitation emerged as a specific science with its own distinct rules. Within this framework, there was also a process of selection and *ijtihād*, as explained to some extent earlier.

The first reliable imām to comprehensively record and codify legitimate recitations was Abū 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Salām al-Anṣārī (d. 224/839), who is regarded as a student of al-Kisā'ī. Ibn al-Jazarī says: 'According to my reckoning, he has limited the number of reciters to twenty-five, and those who later became known as the Seven Reciters were included amongst them.'[416]

After him, Aḥmad ibn Jubayr ibn Muhammad Abū Ja'far al-Kūfī (d. 258/872), who lived in Antioch, wrote a book in which he compiled the five recitations that had been established in the Muslim territories. Thereafter, Qāḍī Ismā'īl ibn Isḥāq, a companion of Qālūn (d. 282/895), wrote a book on recitation in which the recitations of twenty of the imāms are recorded. After him, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) wrote *al-Jāmi'*, in which there are more than twenty recitations.

Shortly after, Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dājūnī (d. 324/936) wrote a book on recitation in which he added Abū Ja'far – who was one of the Ten Reciters – to the others. Afterwards, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Mūsā 'Ibn Mujāhid' (d. 324/936) continued Dājūnī's work, and he was the first to limit the number of recitations to seven.

After Ibn Mujāhid, others wrote books according to his model. Amongst them were Aḥmad ibn Naṣr al-Shadhā'ī (d. 370/980) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn ibn Mihrān (d. 381/991). Aḥmad added three more to the Seven Reciters, and the term 'the Ten Reciters' came into being. Another writer was Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Khuzā'ī (d. 408/1017), who wrote a book entitled *al-Muntahā* in which he covered certain topics that were not mentioned in previous writings.

These recitations were not prevalent in Andalusia and the Maghrib until the latter part of the fourth century AH, when certain proponents of recitations from Egypt travelled to these lands and promulgated their recitations there. Abū 'Umar Aḥmad ibn Muhammad al-Ṭalamankī (d. 429/1037), the author of *al-Rawḍah*, was the first person to promote such recitations in Andalusia.

[416] Ibid. vol 1, 34.

After him, Abū Muhammad al-Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437/1045), the author of *al-Tabṣirah* and *al-Kashf 'an Wujūh al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'*, and then Ḥāfiẓ Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī (d. 444/1052), the author of *al-Taysīr* and *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, continued this work.

Abū 'Alī Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Ahwāzī (d. 446/1054) wrote books on recitation in Damascus. During the same period, Abū al-Qāsim Yūsuf ibn 'Alī al-Hudhalī (d. 465/1072) travelled from the Maghrib to the East, visiting different countries where he spoke on the recitations of the imāms of *qirā'ah*. He reached Transoxiana[417] and engaged in Qur'anic recitation in Ghazni and other cities. He then wrote a book entitled *al-Kāmil* in which he mentions fifty recitations of the famous imāms and 1,459 traditions. He writes: 'From the farthest parts of Morroco to the gates of Fergana I have met three hundred and sixty-five masters of recitation.'

After al-Hudhalī, Abū Ma'shar 'Abd al-Karīm ibn 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Ṭabari (d. 478/1085) wrote *al-Talkhīṣ* and *Sawq al-'Arūs* on the eight recitations, in which he includes 1,550 chains of transmission and narrations. According to Ibn al-Jazarī: 'We know of no one better than these two in codifying the science of recitation, other than Abū al-Qāsim 'Īsā ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Iskandarī (d. 629/1231), whose book *al-Jāmi' al-Akbar wa al-Baḥr al-Azkhar* contains 7,000 traditions and channels of transmission.' Ibn al-Jazarī adds: 'Writing books on the recitations still continues, and the authors tell of sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or irregular (*shādhdh*) recitations on the basis of their research or what they consider authentic, and they cannot be denied by anyone. In fact, they are following their predecessors, for *qirā'ah* is a practical tradition handed down from one person to another, which has been followed in the way mentioned in the books *al-Kāmil* by al-Hudhalī, *Sawq al-'Arūs* by Ṭabarī, *al-Iqnā'* by Ahwāzī, *al-Kifāyah* by Abū al-'Izz, *al-Mabhaj* by Sibṭ al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Rawḍah* by al-Mālikī, and the like. They recite according to the narrations in these books, whether they are weak (*ḍa'īf*) and irregular, those of the Seven Reciters, the Ten Reciters or others, and we have come across no one who objected to this method or opposed it.'[418]

[417] Transoxiana [*mā warā' al-nahr* (beyond the (Oxus) river)]: roughly corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan. [Trans.]

[418] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 36.

Restricting Recitations to the Seven Recitations

The attention given by the Muslims to the recitation of the Qur'an is clear, and it has been demonstrated how at all times the people took great pains to preserve, codify and adopt the recitations of well-known personalities. Moreover, those of each region paid most attention to the local reciters, and no one – Sunnī or Shī'a – has ever raised any objection to this lasting practice. Thus, the research of the reciters and their *ijtihād* when choosing and adopting a recitation was accepted by all and, within the framework of specific conditions that were mentioned earlier, they would learn and adopt a recitation.

This method of learning and teaching *qirā'ah* persisted until the beginning of the fourth century AH, when the celebrated genius of Baghdad, Ibn Mujāhid, appeared. He was expert in winning the hearts of the people and influencing the governing officials. He had officially earned the title of *shaykh al-qurrā'* (Master of the Reciters), and most of the people turned their attention to him. But he had rivals who were superior to him and had more experience in Qur'anic sciences. They would denigrate Ibn Mujāhid on account of his poor knowledge, his limited number of narrations from the sheikhs, his not having travelled in search of knowledge, and his ignorance of the science of recitation and the various recitations transmitted from the great imāms.

Al-Mu'āfī Abū al-Faraj says: 'One day I went to Ibn Shanbūdh. In front of him were piles of books. He told me to open the door of his library. There were cabinets inside and books of a particular field of studies in each cabinet, and I took and opened no book which Ibn Shanbūdh did not know by heart as he knew *Sūrah al-Ḥamd*. He then told me: 'In spite of this, there is high acclaim for Ibn Mujāhid."

Al-'Allāf also narrates: 'I asked Abū Ṭāhir: 'Who is superior and more meritorious, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid or Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Shanbūdh?' Abū Ṭāhir replied: 'The intellect of Ibn Mujāhid is superior to his knowledge, while the knowledge of Ibn Shanbūdh is superior to his intellect."[419]

Ibn al-Jazarī has said: 'As may happen to partners and peers, there was also a dispute between Ibn Mujāhid and Ibn Shanbūdh, such that Ibn Shānbūdh would not accept as a student anyone who was once a student

[419] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 2, 54-56.

of Ibn Mujāhid, saying: 'This person has not let his feet touch the dust of the path of knowledge."

Ibn Mujāhid would rigidly replicate the recitation of his predecessors. 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Abī Hāshim says: 'Someone asked Ibn Mujāhid: 'Why do you not choose a distinct recitation?' He said in reply: 'Our need in preserving the achievements of the preceding imāms is more than in choosing our own recitation to be established after us."[420]

It was on Ibn Mujāhid's account that Ibn Muqlah the vizier summoned and condemned Ibn Shanbūdh[421] and Ibn Muqsim[422] in a court of jurists (*fuqahā*) in order to prevent them from exercising *ijtihād* in order to choose a specific *qirā'ah*. Dr. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ says: 'Both court hearings were held by the order of Shaykh Al-Qurrā' [Ibn Mujāhid], who was the first person to codify the Seven Readings. Ibn Mujāhid learned *qirā'ah* from Ibn Shādhān al-Rāzī. Ibn Muqsim and Ibn Shanbūdh were also among the students of Ibn Shādhān. However, their commonality in learning *qirā'ah* from the same teacher or sheikh did not prevent Ibn Mujāhid from violently opposing his two peers.'[423]

Ibn Shanbūdh's objection to the policy of Ibn Mujāhid (of limiting the recitations to seven) was also vehement. Ibn Muqsim also strongly protested against the elimination of choice and adopting a particular recitation, saying: 'Just as Khalaf ibn Hishām, Abū 'Ubayd and Ibn Su'dān were able to choose a particular recitation and were allowed to do so, others who have come after should also do the same.'[424]

Ibn Mujāhid left no stone unturned in the attempt to remove *ijtihād* in *qirā'ah*, and to a certain extent he succeeded, for the prevailing conditions at that gloomy and chaotic time in Muslim society helped him fulfil his desire and isolate his opponents. Limiting the recitations to seven was one of his tasks, and if there were any faults or inconsistencies involved, he was to be blamed for carrying it out hastily.

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[420] Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 217.

[421] He is Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ayyūb ibn Shanbūdh. See Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 2, 52.

[422] He is Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Ya'qūb ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muqsim. See Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 2, 123.

[423] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 251-252; see al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 221, 247.

[424] Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 249.

Dr. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ says: 'The one who has the lion's share of condemnation for this illusion (of considering the Seven Readings as the only credible recitations) is Ibn Mujāhid, who, at the threshold of the third/ninth century in Baghdad, embarked upon the codification of the Seven Readings of the seven imāms of Mecca, Medina, Baṣra, Kufa and the Levant, popularising them as the only accurate and reliable recitations. There was no real basis for this, but merely probability, because amongst the leading reciters, there were a considerable number who were superior to the Seven Reciters.'[425]

Admittedly, when scholars such as Abū 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Salām, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, as well as others, were writing their works on the science of Qur'anic recitation, they made no reference to 'the Seven Readings,' and the expression was barely known. In their writings they mention more recitations. The term 'Seven Readings' was popularised in the first half of the fourth/tenth century by Ibn Mujāhid, who did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the traditions and had not travelled to gain knowledge.[426] As a result, the laity imagined that the 'Seven Readings' were identical to the 'seven *ḥarfs*' mentioned in the traditions of the Prophet. As such, all prominent personalities and critics have strongly disapproved of Ibn Mujāhid's methods, since he was responsible for creating this false notion and degrading the status of other imāms who were better than the Seven Reciters.

Examples of these condemnations are given below:

- Imām Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Ammār al-Mahdawī, a qārī and exegete of the Qur'an, strongly condemns Ibn Mujāhid, saying: 'The originator of the limitation of the recitations to seven did something improper, and brought the notion that the Seven Readings are the same as the seven *ḥarfs* mentioned in the tradition to the simple-minded laity. Perhaps if he had established a number other than seven, this false notion would not have come about, and there would have been no misgiving at all. Moreover, he had set a limit of two narrators as proponents of every imām, thus if someone heard a recitation from a third party other than the two narrators, it would be considered invalid. This is while in many instances this same

[425] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 148, 247.

[426] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 327.

recitation might be authentic and more popular, and so it is possible for the ignorant to go to extremes, ending up in error and disbelief.'[427]

- Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī has said in this regard: 'It should not be thought that only the seven recitations are approved, so that other recitations such as those of Abū Ja'far, Shaybah and A'mash, who were equal to the seven reciters – nay, even better – are disallowed.' After mentioning this comment of Ibn al-'Arabī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī says: 'Others have also mentioned this, and among them Abū Muhammad Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Abū al-'Alā' al-Hamdānī and other imāms of the reciters can be mentioned.'[428]

- Athīr al-Dīn Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī says: 'In the books of Ibn Mujāhid and those who followed him, only a limited number of the famous reciters have been mentioned. In the case of Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', seventeen narrators have been mentioned, but in the book of Ibn Mujāhid, there is only the name of al-Yazīdī. Ten individuals have narrated from al-Yazīdī, and Ibn Mujāhid only mentions al-Sūsī and al-Dawrī, whereas these two were in no way superior to others, since they were all the same in discipline, resilience and knowledge of *qirā'ah*, and we cannot see any reason for this exclusion other than his lack of adequate knowledge.'[429]

- The master imām Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Qarrāb, in the first part of his book al-Shāfī, says: 'Clinging to the Seven Readings and relinquishing other recitations is not anchored in any document, text, method or practice, and its only basis is that from amongst the late-comers [alluding to Ibn Mujāhid], who were unfamiliar with more than seven readings, a book has been brought forth entitled *al-Sab'ah* which only contains seven readings. And because of the author's popularity and reputation, the laity have imagined that it is not permitted

[427] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 80.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid.

to adhere to recitations other than the Seven Readings. After Ibn Mujāhid, many others have written books on *qirā'ah*, and for every imām of *qirā'ah* many traditions and differences have been mentioned, but no one has said that on account of these traditions a certain recitation is not allowed if it is not mentioned in the book of Ibn Mujāhid.'[430]

- Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muhammad (the teacher and sheikh of Abū Shāmah) says: 'In the latter part of the fourth/tenth century, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid, with whom ended the leadership of *qirā'ah* and who was superior to the people of his time, collected the recitations that were consistent with the writing of the codices and selected the reciters whose recitations were popular. And in view of the number of codices 'Uthmān dispatched to the major Muslim centres, and based on the saying of the Prophet that the Qur'an has been revealed in seven *ḥarfs*, he selected seven reciters and their readings and regarded them as the imāms of *qirā'ah* in their respective places and regions. Therefore, Ibn Mujāhid was the first to restrict the number of reciters to seven, and wrote a book on their recitations. And in this regard, the people have followed him, but prior to him, no one had ever codified the recitations of these seven persons.'[431]

- Abū Muhammad Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib also says in this regard: 'All these seven readings are regarded as part of the 'seven *ḥarfs*' on the basis of which the Qur'an has been revealed. But it is a serious mistake to suppose that the recitation of each of these reciters is one of the seven *ḥarfs*, for the outcome of this belief is that any recitation which has not been adopted by the seven reciters should be rejected.' He also adds that the imāms of *qirā'ah* have mentioned in their books more than seventy people of a higher standing than these seven. Moreover, some scholars have set aside these seven reciters

[430] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 46.

[431] Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-Qurrā' wa Kamāl al-Iqrā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfīyyah, 1993), 111. See al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 160.

> and refrained from mentioning them in their books on *qirā'ah*. For example, Abū Ḥātim and others have not mentioned Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī and Ibn 'Āmir in their books, while citing around twenty of the imāms of *qirā'ah* who were superior to the Seven Reciters. Similarly, in his book al-Qirā'āt, Ṭabarī mentions fifteen other scholars in addition to the Seven Reciters. Abū 'Ubayd and Ismā'īl al-Qāḍī also do the same.

He adds: 'Therefore, how is it permissible for someone to think that the recitations of these seven individuals from a later generation are the same as the seven *ḥarfs*? This is a great mistake. Is this claim based upon a textual proof from the Prophet, or something else? How can it be accepted that al-Kisā'ī would suddenly be included amongst the Seven Reciters during the period of al-Ma'mūn, while the seventh reciter was Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī, and Ibn Mujāhid replaced him with al-Kisā'ī around the year 300/912?'[432]

- Ḥāfiẓ ibn al-Jazarī says: 'I have heard from certain ignorant people that the correct recitations are those of the Seven Reciters. In fact, many simpletons and uninformed people suppose that the correct recitations are those that are mentioned in *al-Shāṭibiyyah* and *al-Taysīr*. Some recitations which are not mentioned in these two books, or not from one of these seven reciters, are even considered irregular and contrary to the rule, even though they are more correct. This misunderstanding is derived from the false notion that the Seven Recitations are the same as the seven *ḥarfs* mentioned in the tradition.'

He adds: 'Many of the later imāms have condemned Ibn Mujāhid's limitation of the number of reciters to seven, attributing error of judgment to him, and saying: 'Had he chosen a number lesser or greater than seven or categorically stated his intent, the ignorant would not have succumbed to this misunderstanding."[433]

[432] See al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah*, 102; al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-Wajīz*, 151-153.

[433] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 36.

- Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī says: 'The former authorities have strongly protested against those who imagined that the famous recitations are those which are mentioned in such books as *al-Taysīr* and *al-Shāṭibiyyah*, and the last person to have made this clear was Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn al-Subukī.'[434]

These were the objections of the authorities against Ibn Mujāhid for limiting the recitations to seven, yet they seem to have been of little avail.

A survey of existing works shows that from the beginning of the fourth/tenth century the laity have maintained the same notion, and have limited the reciters to seven by blind imitation. Indeed, later scholars seem to have been unable to remain neutral or adopt a position contrary to the common view, and have in effect followed the same downward trajectory. One such scholar is Abū Muhammad Makkī (d. 437/1045), who was one of the sternest opponents of limiting the recitations to seven. Nonetheless, in his book entitled *al-Kashf 'An Wujūh al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'* he decided to deal with the Seven Recitations only.

Another such scholar was Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī (d. 444/1052), who likewise only dealt with the Seven Recitations in his book *al-Taysīr*. Yet another example is Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Shurayḥ Ishbīlī (d/ 476/1083), who exclusively dealt with the Seven Recitations and their narrators in his book *al-Kāfī*. Similarly, Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar ibn Qāsim al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī focused only on the Seven Recitations in his book *al-Mukarrar*.

Abū Muhammad Qāsim ibn Fīrruh al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1194) composed an ode called *Ḥirz al-Amānī wa Wajh al-Tahānī* about the Seven Recitations, and following the common belief, in imitation of Ibn Mujāhid has mentioned two narrators for every reciter. Other writers have also written similar works, and all of them have limited the number of recitations to seven.

Only some of the later scholars have added three other *qārīs* to the Seven Reciters, and following Ibn Mujāhid have mentioned two narrators for each of the additional three. Among them was Shams al-Dīn Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), who wrote a two-volume book entitled *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar* and another entitled *al-Taḥbīr fī Qirā'āt al-A'immah al-'Asharah*. He also composed an elegy called *Ṭībat al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar* after the same fashion. Since the time of Ibn al-Jazarī until

[434] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 81.

recently, all writers on *qirā'āt* have done the same. Amongst contemporary writers is Muhammad Sālim Muḥaysin, who has written *al-Muhadhdhab fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*.

Some have added four more reciters from amongst the irregular *qārīs* to the ten, increasing the number of trusted reciters to fourteen. The book *Itḥāf Fuḍalā' al-Bashar fī al-Qirā'āt al-Arba'at 'Ashar* written by Aḥmad ibn Muhammad al-Damyāṭī (d. 1117/1705) is based on such an innovative approach.

The followers of the Shī'a school of thought, however, are of the opinion that the only basis for the credibility of a recitation is that it fulfils the conditions already mentioned and is consistent with that known to the majority of Muslims; and that is no more than one reading, for the text of the Qur'an is singular and has been revealed by the One and Only God – *al-qur'ānu wāḥidun nazala min 'indi al-wāḥid*. All the differences in recitation stem from the *ijtihād* of those reciters who regarded themselves as the narrators (proponents) of the text of the Qur'an. *Mutawātir* hearing and transmission is the sole criterion for receiving the text of the Qur'an, and any kind of *ijtihād* involved is of no value. According to the narration of Ḥafṣ, these characteristics apply exclusively to the recitation of 'Āṣim.

Distinctions Regarding the Recitation of Ḥafṣ

Therefore the only recitation with an authentic chain of transmission and supported by the Muslim populace is the recitation of Ḥafṣ, and it has prevailed amongst the Muslims throughout the centuries until now for the reasons that follow.

The recitation of Ḥafṣ is that of the majority of Muslims, because Ḥafṣ and his teacher 'Āṣim adhered strictly to an authentic *mutawātir* narration that was also consistent with the common recitation. 'Āṣim learned the recitation from his sheikh, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who in turn learned it from Imām 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, who followed no other recitation than that of the original text of the Revelation which was consecutively transmitted by the Muslims uninterruptedly from the Prophet. This was imparted by 'Āṣim to his student Ḥafṣ, and as such, it has won the trust of Muslims throughout the course of Islamic history, solely because it conforms with the original text and the common recitation. The attribution of this recitation to Ḥafṣ does not mean that

it is based upon his *ijtihād*. Rather, it is only an honorific attribution to identify it as such, since it is the recitation adopted and accepted by Ḥafṣ, and from the very beginning it has been *mutawātir* and widespread amongst the Muslims.

Amongst the reciters 'Āṣim was known for his excellent characteristics which distinguished him as a personality. He had a good and reliable memory, and was very cautious when learning the Qur'an from others. He did not receive his recitation from anyone else but Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who in turn had learned it from 'Alī. He presented the recitation to Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, who had learnt recitation from Ibn Mas'ūd.

Ibn 'Ayyāsh has said: 'Āṣim told me: 'No one except Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān ever recited a word of the Qur'an to me, and whenever I learnt from him, I would relay whatever I had learnt of the Qur'an to Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān learnt the recitation from 'Alī, while Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh learnt it from 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd.'[435] It is for this reason that according to Ibn Khallikān: 'In the *qirā'ah*, only 'Āṣim has been held in high regard.'[436] As such, throughout Muslim history 'Āṣim's *qirā'ah* has been the recitation common amongst the Muslims and given preference over others. Qāsim ibn Aḥmad al-Khayyāṭ (d. 292/904) was proficient and reliable, and was the leading scholar and expert in the recitation of 'Āṣim, and for this reason the consensus of opinion amongst the people gave preference to his recitation.[437]

At the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, in the *qirā'ah* learning sessions of Ibn Mujāhid, the *qārī* of Baghdad, there were fifteen experts in the recitation of 'Āṣim, which was the only one Ibn Mujāhid would teach.[438]

Naftwayh Ibrāhīm ibn Muhammad (d. 323/934), who taught the Qur'an for fifty years, would recite the Qur'an according to 'Āṣim's recitation whenever he began his classes. Thereafter he would deal with other recitations.[439]

Also, the people of Kufa, who were virtuous and learned, accepted the recitation of 'Āṣim,[440] and it was preferred by Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.

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[435] Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 75.

[436] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, n.d.), vol. 3, *ḥadīth* 315, 9.

[437] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 2, 11.

[438] Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 217.

[439] Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, 109.

[440] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 5, 39.

As narrated by al-Dhahabī: 'Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal said: "Āṣim was reliable, and I have adopted his recitation."[441]

Hence, all the imāms of *qirā'ah* have tried to link the chains of transmission of their respective recitations to 'Āṣim, in accordance with the narration of Ḥafṣ in particular. Imām Shams al-Dīn al-Dhāhabī says: 'The main concern is to acquire the recitation of the Glorious Qur'an through 'Āṣim.' He then narrates his chains of transmission (*isnāds*) up to Ḥafṣ, from 'Āṣim, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, Imām 'Alī, and from Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh from Ibn Mas'ūd. And these two [Imām 'Alī and Ibn Mas'ūd] heard it from the Prophet, who received it from God through the agency of Gabriel.[442]

As such, the prominent *Imāmiyyah* scholars and jurists favoured the recitation of 'Āṣim as narrated by Ḥafṣ, for they regarded it as the only one consistent with the eloquent dialect of the Quraysh in which the Qur'an was revealed, and on which the Arabs and Muslims all agree.

The prominent warrior scholar, Abū al-Ḥasan Thābit ibn Aslam al-Ḥalabī, who was an exemplary student of Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī and his successor, and who attained the lofty status of martyrdom in 460/1068, wrote a book on the pre-eminence of 'Āṣim's recitation and its justification, where he explains how it is the same recitation as that of the Quraysh.[443]

Also, Abū Ja'far Rashīd al-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Alī ibn Shahrāshūb(d. 588/1192) says in his valuable book *al-Manāqib*: "Āṣim learnt the *qirā'ah* from Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who in turn learnt the recitation of the entire Qur'an from 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful.' He adds: 'The most eloquent recitation is the recitation of 'Āṣim, for he learnt it from its source, and where others have strayed, he has chosen the straight path.'[444]

Similarly, the distinguished jurisprudent (*faqīh*) Abū Manṣūr Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar al-'Allāmah al-Ḥillī (d.762/1326) says

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[441] Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, vol. 2, 358.

[442] Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 77.

[443] As quoted by Ṣafadī. See *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 18, *ḥadīth* 92, footnote 1, 176; Introduction to Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 18; al-Amīn, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 7, line 2. Sayyid 'Āmilī narrates from al-Dhahabī the attribution of the book to him.

[444] Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, 43.

in his book *al-Muntahā*: 'For me the best of recitations is the recitation of 'Āṣim.'[445]

The great *qārī* 'Imād al-Dīn Astarābādī – one of the *'ulamā'* of the ninth/fifteenth century – wrote a book on 'Āṣim's recitation, wherein he gives the chain of transmission. This treatise is unique in this respect, and was written for the daughter of Shāh Ṭahmasb Safawī. In its concluding part, he mentions and redresses whatever was not pointed out by al-Shāṭibī in his ode *Shāṭibiyyah*.[446]

The great teacher and *qārī* Muṣṭafā ibn Muhammad Ibrāhīm al-Tabrīzī (born 1007/1598), who lived in the Holy City of Mashhad during the eleventh/seventeenth century, wrote a valuable treatise on the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) of the recitation of 'Āṣim.[447] In sum, numerous books have been written by the *'ulamā'* regarding the value of 'Āṣim's recitation, and scholars have consistently been in unison with the Muslim population in holding 'Āṣim's recitation in high esteem. This in itself adds more credit to this recitation.

Ḥafṣ himself promoted the recitation of 'Āṣim throughout different regions. He was known for his distinctive discipline and diligence, and because of this the people liked to learn 'Āṣim's recitation as narrated by him in particular. In addition, Ḥafṣ was the most knowledgeable in *qirā'ah* amongst the companions of 'Āṣim, and ahead of his peer Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh in memorising and preserving the recitation of 'Āṣim.[448]

Abū 'Amr al-Dānī says: 'Ḥafṣ was the one who would introduce 'Āṣim's recitation to the people, and strived hard in promoting it. Both in Baghdad and Mecca he diligently learnt 'Āṣim's recitation.'[449]

Ibn Munādī has said: 'The predecessors considered Ḥafṣ superior to Ibn 'Ayyāsh in the memorisation and preservation of the Qur'an, describing his memorisation of the recitation he learnt from 'Āṣim as complete and accurate.'[450]

Critics and researchers regard Ḥafṣ' narration of 'Āṣim as authentic. Ibn Ma'īn says: 'The authentic narration of 'Āṣim's recitation which

[445] *Muntahā al-Maṭlab*, vol. 1, 273, issue 6.

[446] See Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 17, 55, *ḥadīth* 304.

[447] Ibid. vol. 12, *ḥadīth* 1542, 236.

[448] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 1, 254.

[449] Ibid.

[450] Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 1, 156.

survives [up to now] is the narration of Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān.'[451] Hence, the recitation which has prevailed amongst the Muslims is that of 'Āṣim as narrated by Ḥafṣ. Moreover, the chain of transmission up to 'Āṣim and Ḥafṣ from 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, is concise and authentic and unequalled by others.

First of all, 'Āṣim learnt the complete recitation from no one other than his teacher and sheikh, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who was considered a great and honourable person, and if ever 'Āṣim compared the recitation to that of someone else, it was merely for the sake of acquiring certainty. Ibn 'Ayyāsh says: "Āṣim told me: 'No one has ever recited a single word of the Qur'an to me except Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who learnt it from 'Alī. Whenever I left Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān, I would impart whatever I had learnt to Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, who learnt the recitation from 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd."[452]

Secondly, 'Āṣim had never shown any objections to his teacher and sheikh, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, for he was certain that whatever he learnt from him was the same as what his teacher had heard from 'Alī. In this regard, 'Āṣim says: 'Concerning the *qirā'ah* I had no dispute with Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, and I have never had any objection to his recitation, for I know for certain that he had in no way deviated from the recitation of 'Alī.'[453]

And thirdly, 'Āṣim transmitted this wonderfully short *sanad* of his recitation only to his stepson Ḥafṣ[454] and no one else, and so this was a great boon for Ḥafṣ alone, and no other reciter. This distinction made Ḥafṣ a central figure for those who accepted only his recitation. He has said: "Āṣim told me: 'The recitation I imparted to you is the same recitation which I have learnt from Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who in turn learnt it word for word from 'Alī; and the recitation I imparted to Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh is the recitation I presented to Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, which he had learnt from Ibn Mas'ūd."[455]

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[451] Ibid.

[452] Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kibār*, vol. 1, 75.

[453] Ibid; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, 348.

[454] Ḥafṣ was the son of 'Āṣim's wife, and was brought up by him.

[455] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 1, 346.

It would be useful here to point out that in the exegesis of *Sūrah al-Taḥrīm* (ch. 66) under the verse (عَرَّفَ بَعْضَهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ), (*'arrafa ba'ḍahu wa a'raḍa 'an ba'ḍ*), 'Allāmah Ṭabrisī mentions that: 'Al-Kisā'ī was the only person who read عَرَّفَ with a single *rā'* (*'arafa*), while the rest of the reciters read it with *tashdīd* (*'arrafa*).' He then says: 'Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh, one of the two narrators of 'Āṣim, has adopted the recitation with a single consonant (*takhfīf*), and is reported to have said: 'This is one of the ten recitations I have inserted in the recitation of 'Āṣim, which he learnt from 'Alī. I wanted to purify the recitation of 'Alī.' He then added: 'The recitation with *takhfīf* is the recitation of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī.'"[456]

In this regard, Ṭabarī says: 'All the reciters of all the cities, with the exception of al-Kisā'ī, have recited this with *tashdīd*, and it is al-Kisā'ī who attributed the recitation with *takhfīf* to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī and Qatādah.'[457]

It is explained in books on *qirā'ah* that, with the exception of al-Kisā'ī, no one recited this word with *takhfīf*,[458] and it is not clear where Ṭabrisī got his narration, as no trace of it can be found in existing sources. In addition, the claim is contrary to the statement of 'Āṣim himself, who said that the recitation he taught Ḥafṣ was learnt by him solely through Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī from 'Alī, and that it is inconceivable that Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh had been involved or undertaken any change. It seems that there has been a certain indulgence in making this unwarranted attribution.

Does Hafs Ever Disagree with 'Āsim?

Ibn al-Jazarī states:

> Ḥafṣ said: 'In no instance did I ever go against the recitation of 'Āṣim, except in the case of the word *ḍa'f* (weakness) which is repeated thrice in the verse:

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[456] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 312.

[457] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 28, 103.

[458] See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashar*, vol. 2, 388; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Sharḥ Ṭībah al-Nashr*, 406-407; al-Dānī, *al-Taysīr*, 212; Abū Zar'ah 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muhammad, *Ḥujjat al-Qirā'āt*, (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1399 q.), 713; Jamāl al-Dīn Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1422 q.), vol. 8, 309; Muhammad Sālim Muḥaysin, *al-Muhadhdhab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1389 q.), vol. 2, 417.

It is God who created you from [a state of] weakness (ḍa'f) then He gave you power after weakness. Then, after power, He ordained weakness and old age (30:54).'

'Āṣim would read the word *ḍa'f* with a *fatḥah* on *ḍād*, but Ḥafṣ would read it with a *ḍammah* on *ḍād* (*ḍu'f*).[459] Abū Muhammad Makkī says: 'Abū Bakr and Ḥamzah would read this word in all the three instances with a *fatḥah* on *ḍād*, and it is said that Ḥafṣ has also narrated it from 'Āṣim like that. He himself, however, would read it on the basis of the narration of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, with a *ḍammah* on the *ḍād*.' Ibn 'Umar has said: 'I read this word with a *fatḥah* on *ḍād* in the presence of the Prophet and he corrected my reading, and read it in all the three instances with a *ḍammah* on the *ḍād*.' Makkī adds: 'Ḥafṣ is reported to have said: 'In the recitation I learnt from 'Āṣim, I had no disagreement with him other than with the reading of this word in all the three instances with a *ḍammah*.''[460]

It appears that this attribution is completely unjustifiable, for Ḥafṣ had never disagreed with the recitation of 'Āṣim and has never said as much. This is why Makkī has not explicitly attributed the statement to Ḥafṣ, and has narrated it in ambiguous terms[461] by beginning the narration with words such as 'It is said that' or 'It is reported that,' thus implying some doubt on the matter. It seems that its accuracy is apparently unclear to him. This is an issue to which we give credence, because it is unreasonable that someone like Ḥafṣ should have confidence in Ibn 'Umar, who spent his life in confusion and bewilderment, and prefer him over his own teacher and sheikh, who was known for his reliability and discipline, especially in view of the fact that the recitation of 'Āṣim is anchored in an authentic and sublime chain of transmission back to Imām 'Alī, and that 'Āṣim handed it to his own trainee Ḥafṣ, who was most trusted by him. This is not something that can be rendered doubtful by a single narration by someone whose credibility is questionable. How is it possible for such a question regarding a verse of the Qur'an to be known only by Ibn 'Umar, and not by other great and trustworthy Companions of the Prophet? Is it reasonable that Ḥafṣ would set aside the reading of his trusted sheikh, which came from 'Alī and which he faithfully and

[459] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 1, 254.

[460] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, 186.

[461] 'It is said that Ḥafṣ...' or 'Ḥafṣ is reported to have said...'

sincerely learnt from al-Sulamī, and adopt a different reading only on the grounds of a narration whose accuracy is unproven?

In view of the fact that we are aware of the degree of accuracy of the Kufans, particularly during the period of the Successors (*tābi'ūn*), as well as their loyalty to *Ahl al-Bayt*, we can be certain that the above attribution is incorrect, and we do not believe that Ḥafṣ questioned the recitation of his teacher 'Āṣim, just as 'Āṣim had no disagreement with al-Sulamī, his having followed Imām 'Alī. Therefore it seems that Ḥafṣ never read the word in question with a *ḍammah*, and he never opposed his sheikh in this respect.

The Inseparable Relationship of the Shī'a with the Qur'an

The reason for raising this topic is that statements by certain narrow-minded and uninformed individuals, who prefer to adopt the prejudices of their predecessors, contain false assertions which hide a deep-rooted rancour. Thus it is necessary to refute them and clarify the position of a great community whose only fault seems to be their love of the Prophet's progeny.

Some have accused the Shī'a of having a distinct codex of their own, called *al-Muṣḥaf al-Shī'ī* (the Shī'a Codex), while the Shī'a themselves have remained completely unaware of such a codex from the start. In order to demonstrate the Shī'a attachment to the text of the present Qur'an, we have no option but to elucidate the following points.

If we examine the history of the Qur'an from generation to generation, we will find that the text as it exists today is basically the product of Shī'a efforts. It is they who strove hard to record and preserve the Qur'an, and left no stone unturned in compiling it in the best possible manner. In reality, if ever there could be a 'Shī'a codex,' it is the same one that exists today. Indeed, in view of the role of the Shī'a Imāms, reciters (*qurrā'*), memorisers (*ḥuffāẓ*) and artists throughout history in this regard, the Qur'an as it is should be attributed to the Shī'a.

'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, was the first person to express the idea of collecting the Qur'an together after the Prophet's demise.

Although his own compilation of the Qur'an was not accepted by those in power, the very idea of compiling the Qur'an left an impact, so much so that others agreed.

The important Qur'anic manuscripts which were available before their standisation were those of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Abū al-Dardā' and Miqdād ibn Aswad. All of these were recognised as being under the special guardianship of the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt*. The credibility of other manuscripts did not compare with these, and the scrolls of Abū Bakr were not yet compiled into a book at that time.

The first person to suggest to 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān the idea of standardising the manuscripts was Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān. Ubayy ibn Ka'b was put in charge of dictating the Qur'an at the time when the manuscripts were transcribed, and he was consulted regarding discrepancies in the recording of words.

The formatting and the placing of dots was done by Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī and his two students, Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim and Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur. The first person to have improved the writing of the manuscript was Khālid ibn Abī al-Hayyāj, who was a companion of Imām 'Alī. The placing of short vowels (*ḥarakāt*) in their present form was the work of the great teacher Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, and it was he who introduced the *hamzah*, *tashdīd*, *rawm* and *ishmām*. All these individuals were high-ranking Shī'a scholars.

It was the Shī'a who researched the principles of *qirā'ah* and founded its rules. With the utmost fidelity, they introduced subtleties and modifications to the science of *qirā'ah*.

At least four, if not six, of the Seven Reciters were Shī'a. Moreover, some of the imāms of the great *qurrā'* were considered Shī'a, amongst whom were 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Abū al-Dardā', Miqdād, Ibn 'Abbās, Abū al-Aswad, 'Alqamah, Ibn Sā'ib, al-Sulamī, Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim, Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur, 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd, Ḥamrān ibn A'yan, Abān ibn Taghlib, A'mash, Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī, Ibn 'Ayyāsh and Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān. There were other great imāms who were foremost in *qirā'ah* at different times and places.[462]

[462] Their short biographies are mentioned under the heading 'Categories of the Reciters' (*ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'*) in Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2.

Furthermore, the present recitation, which is the *qirā'ah* of Ḥafṣ, is a purely Shī'a recitation. Ḥafṣ, a companion of Imām al-Ṣādiq,[463] narrated it from his own teacher, 'Āṣim, who was also considered a prominent Shī'a scholar and learnt the *qirā'ah* from his own sheikh, al-Sulamī. Similarly, al-Sulamī was a close companion of Imām 'Alī, from whom he had learnt the *qirā'ah* directly,[464] and who in turn had learnt it from the Prophet himself.

The Authority of the Seven Readings

The question remains as to whether the Seven Readings have any authority and value so that any of them may be chosen to be recited in prayer? Most jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*) are of the opinion that they may. The late Sayyid Muhammad Kāẓim Yazdī in his *al-'Urwat al-Wuthqā*, and the late Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan Iṣfahānī in his *Wasīlat al-Najāt*, have ruled that prayer should be recited within the range of the Seven Readings as a precautionary recommendation, although their religious edicts state that it is permissible to adopt any correct recitation, whether it is one of the seven or not.[465]

Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Khoī considered it permissible to adopt the recitation common during the time of the Imāms,[466] interpreting the tradition 'Recite [the Qur'an] in the way the people recite [it] (*Iqra'ū kamā yaqra'u al-nās*)' to mean the widely known recitations of that time. Imām Khomeini has cautioned not to go beyond the Seven Readings.[467]

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[463] See Ṭūsī, *al-Rijāl*, 176.

[464] See al-Ṣadr, *al-Ta'sīs*, 346; Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shushtarī, *Majālis al-Mu'minīn* (Tehran: Islāmiyyah, 1354 s.), vol. 1, 548; Ibn Qutaybah has included him among the companions of Imām 'Alī and those who have learnt jurisprudence from the Imām (Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Ma'ārif*, 230). Many authors of books on *rijāl* (*ḥadīth* narrators) regard him to be one of the close companions of the Imām (al-Ṣadr, *al-Ta'sīs*, 242).

[465] Sayyid Muhammad Kāẓim Yazdī, *al-'Urwat al-Wuthqā*, (Qum: Mu'assat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1417 q.), 'Ādāb al-*Qirā'ah* wa Aḥkāmuhā,' issue 50; *Wasīlat al-Najāt*, '*Qirā'ah*,' issue 14.

[466] Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Khoī, *Minhāj al-Ṣāliḥīn* (Qum: Mihr, 1410 q.), vol. 1, 'Kitāb al-Ṣalāt,' 167, issue 119.

[467] Sayyid Rūḥullāh Khomeini, *Taḥrīr al-Wasīlah* (Najaf, Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1390 q.), vol. 1, 'Kitāb al-Ṣalāt,' 152, issue 14.

It is popular amongst jurisprudents to allow the possibility of choosing any of the Seven Readings, although in the tradition of Imām al-Ṣādiq it is stated: 'Indeed the Qur'an is one, revealed from the one and only God; the differences originate from the reciters.'[468] The infallible Imāms, however, authorised any of the prominent recitations, and the tradition 'Recite [the Qur'an] in the way the people recite [it]' has been taken as proof to substantiate this claim. The way to reconcile these two traditions is to follow one of the prominent recitations. For the sake of ease, however, people are not obligated to be familiar with and abide by just one recitation. Nevertheless, it is a recommended precaution that it should be consistent with the Seven Readings and not some other.

In *Mustamsak al-'Urwah*,[469] the late Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm says: 'The said tradition cannot refer to the Seven Readings, because the phenomenon of limiting the recitations to seven began at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, which is two centuries after the tradition appeared.' Therefore, in this case the tradition would refer to the well-known recitations during the time of the Imāms, which were more than just the Seven Readings. Hence, any recitation which could be established as popular amongst the people at the time of the Imāms would be permissible.

We believe that the Qur'an revealed by God to the Prophet is of one form, and it is the same Qur'an which remains with the people. The correct recitation is that which the people have learnt from the Prophet, which was inherited from generation to generation and has nothing at all to do with the recitations of the *qurrā'*, which are products of their personal *ijtihāds*. Indeed, the inherited Qur'an is distinct from the *ijtihādī* Qur'an.

Great personalities like Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī[470] and Ayatollah Khoī[471] are of the opinion that the Qur'an and the recitations are two different realities. One is the Divine Revelation which was sent to the Holy Prophet, and the other is the result of differences amongst the *qurrā'* regarding knowledge of the Revelation, and is mostly based on their personal *ijtihāds*.' Thus, the tradition 'Recite [the Qur'an] in the

[468] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 630, *ḥadīth* 12.

[469] Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm, *Mustamsak al-'Urwat al-Wuthqā* (Najaf, Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1391 q.), vol. 6, 242-245.

[470] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 318.

[471] Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 173.

way the people recite [it]' refers to the truth which is accessible to the people, and which has been inherited from the Prophet, but not the result of the *ijtihād*s of the reciters, over which they dispute. Therefore, the recitation that is commonly popular is the one that is credible and has religious authority, and is the one that has remained established and unchanged. This is why all the codices that existed within a genuine scholarly milieu throughout the different periods of history have been identical, with no incongruities in the established text. As such, all the written copies of the Qur'an throughout history and the printed copies of the last few centuries have remained the same,[472] all of them based on the recitation of Ḥafṣ, the one popular amongst the Muslims. This is probably the reason behind Imām Khomeini's edict on *qirā'ah* in prayer:

> What is safe is not to recite other than what is preserved in the existing codices which are in the hands of the Muslims.[473]

[472] It should be noted that the recitation of Warsh as narrated by Qālūn was only recently printed in Libya, and was challenged by Muslims in general as well as the authorities in some Islamic countries.

[473] Khomeini, *Taḥrīr al-Wasīlah*, vol. 1, 152, issue 14.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AUTHORITY OF THE APPARENT MEANINGS OF THE QUR'AN

Exegesis (*tafsīr*) and Interpretation (*ta'wīl*)

It is said that *tafsīr* is 'to lift the veil from the face of difficult words.' When there is ambiguity, it is the exegete (*mufassir*) who strives to clarify it with the means at his disposal.

The word *tafsīr* is derived from *fasara al-amr*, which means 'to clarify' or 'discover a meaning.' *Fasara* and *fassara* both have the same meaning, and both are transitive verbs that apply to an object. However, based on the maxim that 'the extension of foundations indicates an extension of meanings,' *fassara* with an additional letter implies an intensification. In a similar way, *kashafa* (uncovered) is more general than *iktashafa* (uncovered), because *kashafa* denotes a simple uncovering, while *iktashafa* means that more effort has been made. Thus, *fasara* denotes a straightforward clarification or explanation, while *fassara* means that more effort has been put into it, since it was not such an easy matter.

Ta'wīl is derived from *awl*, which means 'to refer to.' *Ta'wīl* is used when something has an element of perplexity, as with something which is *mutashābih* (allegorical), for example. Hence, *ta'wīl* is used in order to remove any apparent doubt about an issue, and place it in its proper perspective.

When the mysterious companion of Moses found him in bewilderment, he gave him the glad tidings that he will inform him of the secrets behind his actions, and impart the meaning of his deeds:

> *I will inform you about the interpretation of that over which you could not maintain patience* (18:78).

Ta'wīl also has another meaning, which includes both the allegorical (*mutashābih*) and definitive (*muḥkam*) verses of the Qur'an. In this case, *ta'wīl* is applied to what is called the 'interior' (*baṭn*) of the Qur'an, referring to the inward dimension of the Book. *Baṭn* is the opposite of the outward or

literal meaning, which is called *ẓahr al-Qur'ān*, and this inward meaning exists in all verses. The Holy Prophet said:

> There is no verse in the Qur'an that does not have an exterior (*ẓahr*) and an interior (*baṭn*).

Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir was once asked: 'What do *ẓahr* (outward) and *baṭn* (inward) mean?' and he replied:

> Its outward is its revelation (*tanzīl*) and its inward is its interpretation (*ta'wīl*); some of this *ta'wil* has been and some is yet to come; it runs [perpetually], as do the sun and the moon.

That is to say that the *ẓahr* of the Qur'an refers to its outward form, which is comprehended through the language, context and circumstances of the revelation of particular verses, while the *baṭn* of the Qur'an refers to inner meanings and a wider understanding of the text based on various contexts and different dimensions.[474]

It is this general and universal understanding which has persisted throughout various times and places, thereby ensuring the perpetuity of the Qur'an for all time. If it were not so, the Qur'an would have lost its eternal application.

Another meaning of *ta'wīl* refers to 'the interpretation of dream,' which is used eight times in *Sūrah Yūsuf* (12:36). Yet another meaning is 'the outcome of the affair,' which refers to the literal meaning. We thus read in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*:

> *When you measure, observe fully the measure, [and] weigh with an even balance. That is better and fairer in outcome (aḥsanu ta'wīlan)* (17:35).

Ibn Taymiyyah does not regard *ta'wīl* as purely conceptual, but a part of an objective reality. He writes:

> Every thing has four existential stages: mental existence, verbal existence, written existence and concrete existence. All the things mentioned in the Qur'an have the first three stages of existence – mental, verbal and written – and their *ta'wīl* is their concrete existence. For example, when we speak of Mecca, Minā, 'Arafāt and the Mash'ar, their actual existence is considered their *ta'wīl*

[474] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, 195.

> , and in fact the actual manifestation of every thing makes up its *ta'wīl*, for the root of all stages of existence of every thing is its concrete existence.[475]

Of course, what Ibn Taymiyyah has called *ta'wīl* is known to others as 'objective' or 'external,' but this is merely a different application.

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī also regards *ta'wīl* as the objective or external manifestation, but not in the same sense as Ibn Taymiyyah, who has mistakenly identified the external instance (*miṣdāq*) as *ta'wīl*. In 'Allāmah's view, the criteria for law and religious instruction and obligations is their *ta'wīl*, because all laws and so forth emanate therefrom. Consequently, each should be referred to a criterion, the real aim being simply their realisation.

The Exterior (*Ḥafṣ*) and the Interior (*baṭn*)

As mentioned earlier, the Holy Prophet said:

> There is no verse in the Qur'an which does not have an exterior (*ẓahr*) and an interior (*baṭn*).

And Imām Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Bāqir, when asked about this, said:[476]

> Its outward is its revelation (*tanzīl*) and its inward is its interpretation (*ta'wīl*); some of this *ta'wīl* has been and some is yet to come; it [perpetually] runs as do the sun and the moon.

That is to say, the exterior (*ẓahr*) of every verse relates to the conditions and cause of its revelation, and pertains more to specifics of a particular situation, and is naturally treated as such. Whereas the *baṭn* of the verse has a broader meaning and implication, and for that reason one needs to delve deeper.

In the same tradition, Imām al-Bāqir likens this general concept to the 'working of the sun and the moon,' that is, just as the sun and the moon persist day after day, the Qur'an also persists, but every day a new understanding may appear. In the end the Imām said: 'If the revealed verses were only limited to the subject matter of their revelation, then

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[475] See *al-Khalīl*, 17-18.

[476] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 10-11; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, 195.

every precept of the Qur'an would today be dead, and like an account recorded in the pages of history, it would have no further role to play.' Therefore, it is its *baṭn* that keeps the Qu'ran alive, not its *ẓahr*. These two types of application – the outward and the inward – are a distinctive feature of the Qur'an.

The Holy Prophet said: 'I fought with the polytheists over the revelation (*tanzīl*, i.e., the outward meaning) of the Qur'an, and 'Alī will fight with the hypocrites over the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'an,'[477] which means the application of the Qur'an over the course of time.

The *baṭn* of the Qur'an is called the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'an because it universalises its specific exterior to a broad and open-ended meaning. For this reason, since the perpetuity of the Qur'an depends on its interior, it is only proper for us to discuss it in detail.

Definition of *baṭn*

As indicated earlier, the *baṭn* (interior) of a verse refers to the broad and enduring concept which is hidden behind the *ẓahr* (that is, the manifest, which pertains to those features which are the subject of the particular revelation). Under certain conditions, this broad meaning must be deduced from the *baṭn* through *ta'wīl*, by which the specific manifest meaning leads to the general meaning. If we take it as a rule that credibility is given to the general meaning of a term, but not to a particular application of it, then the focus is upon the *ta'wīl* or *baṭn* of the verse, which clarifies its purpose and intent.

Therefore, *ta'wīl* can be described as referring to the general and multi-dimensional conceptions without considering the particular characteristics of the literal sense. Of course, these conceptions constitute the universal and all-embracing message of the Qur'an, and the secret behind its eternality is embedded in it. It is the same thing which frees the Qur'an of particularisation and endows it with universality. As such, it is very important, and the principles of *ta'wīl* have to be determined.

The Criteria of *Ta'wīl*

Knowing the interior (*baṭn*) or correct interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of a verse has a crucial condition, any shortcoming in which will not only lead to

[477] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 15.

an incorrect interpretation, but will also be considered as a conjectural interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*), something which is strongly proscribed in both religious and rational argument. Most of the mystical interpretations have neglected this condition and, instead of discovering the *baṭn* or correct interpretation, have resulted in conjecture.

Therefore, at such a point, one must employ the rule of 'probing and classification' (*al-sabr wa al-taqsīm*), in the sense that all features of a verse must be taken into account one by one and measured with reference to the purpose behind the verse. Whatever has a particular connection to this purpose is to be considered relevent, and that which is unconnected should be discarded. This must be done meticulously and with the utmost caution. Then whatever salient features remain are to be regarded as the main criteria for the meaning of the verse. In other words, the derived meaning, whether positive or negative, revolves around an axis, and the other features are treated as void.

An example is the verse in which God speaks of the polytheists who doubted that a man could be the transmitter of a divine Message, and says that the People of Remembrance (*ahl al-dhikr*) shoud be asked:

> *We did not send [any apostles] before you except as men, to whom We revealed. Ask the people of remembrance if you do not know* (21:7).

In this verse the polytheists who doubted the possibility of prophethood were told to ask the Jewish and Christian scholars who were recognised by the Arabs as learned men. This is the most important feature of the verse.

Now, we can ask ourselves whether being a polytheist is an important factor here, or is the straightforward issue of ignorance? Is the question of prophethood of particular concern, or is there an underlying factor? Also, are the People of the Book (the Jews and the Christians) of particular significance, or could this designation refer to any learned authority? By looking beyond the particularities, what can be deduced from the verse is that anyone who has doubt should refer to those who are learned or, in other words, it is incumbent upon the ignorant to ask the learned about that which they do not know.

This general and comprehensive conception, with all its universal implications, is then deduced from the text of the verse after the particularities are pared back to reveal the main criterion. Hence, the *baṭn* (interior) of the verse is embedded in its manifest aspect.

When Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'We are the People of Remembrance and we must be asked,' he was referring to the *baṭn* derived from the text, and it is worth mentioning that this verse is one of the proofs supporting the permissibility of the emulation (*taqlīd*) of a *mujtahid*.

Another example of *baṭn* is to be found in the verse on *khums*:[478]

> *Know that whatever thing you may come by, a fifth of it is for God and the apostle, for the relatives and the orphans, for the needy and the traveller, if you have faith in God* (8:41).

This verse was revealed in connection with the spoils of the Battle of Badr in the second year after the Migration, thereby determining the amount of *khums* payable out of the gains; but later on, it was cited to substantiate *khums* in regard to all other spoils of war. According to a narration from Imām al-Ṣādiq, this verse encompasses all such benefits, whether acquired through warfare or income from industry, trade or even farming: 'As regards spoils and benefits, it [*khums*] is incumbent on them every year.' The Imām then quotes the verse above. The argument is that *ghanīmah* (benefit) is general, includes every type of profit and cannot be limited to the spoils of war as in the particular case of the Revelation. Imām al-Kāẓim says in this respect: '*Khums* covers everything from which people benefit, whether it is big or small.'[479]

In sum, when all the particularities surrounding the Revelation, including the spoils of war, have been superceded – based on the relative pronoun *mā* and expanding the concept of *ghunm*, which is 'profit' in general – a general ruling can be deduced.

A third example is the verse on spending in the cause of charity (*al-infāq fī sabīlillāh*):

> *Spend in the way of God, and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction; and be virtuous. Indeed God loves the virtuous* (2:195).

Sabīlillāh ('in the way of God') has been interpreted here to mean *jihād* for the sake of Islam and establishing the foundations of the sovereignty of God. The injunction in the verse is not to neglect the spending of one's

[478] In Islamic terminology, *khums* refers to the one-fifth tax on any income or benefit which is in excess of yearly needs and provisions. It should be paid to the Imām or to his successor. [Trans.]

[479] See al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 9, 503.

wealth to provide for *jihād*, so as to maintain the glory of Islam and avoid putting oneself on the verge of destruction through neglect of this duty.

By closely examining the content and purport of the verse, however, it can be inferred that one must strive hard to establish the foundations of a just Islamic government, and not neglect the provision of all facilities along the way, one of which is *jihād* in the way of God and shouldering its expenses. Obviously, the latter is not a priority, but refers to a time when assisting the rulers was on the whole done in that way. Nowadays, however, with an expanded government administration with large financial needs in many areas, obviously the context of the verse cannot specifically refer to the expenses of *jihād*; indeed, the people's assistance in providing for many other expenses is essential.

An obvious example is taxation in accordance with the government's needs in its various branches and the financial capacity of the tax payer. The acceptance of taxation by an Islamic government is a primary Islamic law, and can be construed from the text of the verse by going beyond its particularistic application. Perhaps the first person in Islam to have called for taxation was 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, who annually levied two dinars for every riding horse and a dinar for every draft horse.[480] And during the Imamate of Imām Abū Ja'far al-Jawād, when the Shī'a community was in dire economic difficulty, he prescribed that, in addition to religious payments, those who were economically able should pay tax for one year in 220/835.[481]

[480] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 9, 77.

[481] Ibid. 501-502.

CHAPTER IX

UNEQUIVOCAL (*MUḤKAM*) AND EQUIVOCAL (*MUTASHĀBIH*) VERSES

THE *EQUIVOCAL* VERSES (*MUTASHĀBIHĀT*) IN THE QUR'AN

In the Qur'an it is said:

> *He it is who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning)* [unequivocal]*; they are the foundation of the Book* [and any complexity in other verses shall be removed by referring to them]*: others are not of well-established meaning* [equivocal, thus eliciting different possibilities at first glance, but their interpretation is clarified by unequivocal verses]. *But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning* [i.e., equivocal]*, seeking discord, and searching for its* [wrong] *hidden meanings, but no one knows its true meanings except God, and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord;' and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding* (3:7).

According to this verse, some verses of the Qur'an are equivocal and ambiguous, and have even been given subversive interpretations. Before dealing with the significance of equivocal verses, we shall mention some points as an introduction.

Ihkām and *Tashābuh*

Iḥkām has been used in the Qur'an in three ways, in reference to three meanings:

1) The definitiveness of an unambiguous statement or action. Its opposite is *mutashābih*, which refers to an ambiguous statement or doubtful action.

2) To be fixed and permanent rather than subject to change. The fixed rulings are called *muḥkam* in *sharī'ah* in contrast to abrogated (*mansūkh*) rulings. For example, concerning abrogating (*nāsikh*) verses and those which are abrogated (*mansūkh*), the term *iḥkām* is used, and a verse which is not abrogated is called *muḥkam*.

3) Firmness and precision in an action or statement which rests on a strong foundation is called *muḥkam* or *mustaḥkam*. This meaning encompasses all the verses of the Qur'an. Thus it is stated in *Sūrah Hūd*:

> *(This is) a Book with verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [muḥkam] – further explained in detail – by One Who is Wise and Well-Acquainted (with all things)* (11:1).

Iḥkām in the first sense is used merely in contrast to the *mutashābih* (ambiguous), and it is this meaning that is the main point here.

Muḥkam is derived from *ḥakama ḥakman* in the sense of *mana'a man'an* (prevention). It is that which deters or prevents all kinds of disturbance or destruction. For this reason, a horse's bridle is called *ḥakamat al-faras* in Arabic, since it deters the horse from waywardness. According to Rāghib Iṣfahānī: '*Ḥakama* was originally used to mean 'to prevent' or 'to restrain,' or to prevent corruption for the sake of wellbeing.' Therefore, any statement whose meaning is clear and cannot be misconstrued is *muḥkam*, that is to say, rational and sound.

The word *tashābuh* is used in the Qur'an in two ways:

1) To be identical and similar, as in *Sūrah al-Zumar*:

> *God has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful message in the form of a book, consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects) [mutāshābih]...* (39:23).

This in itself shows that the Qur'an has been revealed by God, and is not a human discourse, for if it were similar to human speech it would not be *mutāshābih* in all its verses, but there would be some kind of incongruity:

> *Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy in it* (4:82).

2) To be confusing, in the way that speech or an action that is open to different interpretations might be confusing, while its real purpose remains hidden. In verse 7 of *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān*, *mutashābihāt* has been used in this sense, and it is this meaning which is the subject of our discussion here.

Tashābuh is derived from either the gerund *shibh*, in the sense of 'the same' or 'similar,' or from the infinitive *shabah* meaning 'to be the same.' And it is this similarity which brings about confusion. The technical

meaning of *mutashābih* can be described as that whose manifest meaning does not disclose the real meaning. Yet this definition is still somewhat inadequate, because in addition to *mutashābih* it includes the ambiguous (*mubham*), which requires explanation (*tafsīr*) and not interpretation (*ta'wīl*). In addition to being unclear and ambiguous, *mutashābih* must also be a cause of confusion and error. Therefore, in defining it Rāghib Iṣfahānī says: 'The *mutashābihāt* of the Qur'an are those things which are difficult to explain, because they are similar to something else.' And that 'something else' is nothing but deviation and misguidance:

> *Apart from truth, what remains but error?* (10:32).

Hence, whenever the Word of Truth in the Qur'an appears to express something other than the truth and seems false, it can regarded as *mutashābih*. Therefore, what is meant by *tashābuh* in the *mutashābih* verses is the resemblance of the truth to falsehood, and apart from drawing a veil of ambiguity over a saying or action, *tashābuh* must also cause some confusion. As such, every *mutashābih* requires both *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* in order to remove any ambiguity or confusion. So, *ta'wīl* is a kind of *tafsīr* which, as well as removing ambiguity, also clears up confusion. Therefore, compared to that of *tafsīr*, the subject of *ta'wīl* is more specific. Wherever there is *ta'wīl*, there is also *tafsīr*. *Tafsīr* pertains to the ambiguous which exists in both the *muḥkam* and the *mutashābih*, while *ta'wīl* only pertains to the *mutashābih* with both ambiguitiy and confusion.

Presumed Equivocality

Some important questions are raised regarding whether the equivocality (*tashābuh*) in certain verses of the Qur'an is relative or absolute. Is the equivocal nature of a verse its essential quality, having always been so, even to scholars? Or is there in fact no *tashābuh*, with equivocality only existing for those with insufficient knowledge?

First of all, it should be made clear that the equivocality of certain verses is neither relative nor essential, but rather presumed (*sha'nī*), in the sense that, when there is a concise expression with a deeper meaning, the words themselves may seem inadequate, thereby creating the grounds for *tashābuh*. Typically in these instances doubts and mistakes emerge, because the meaning cannot be directly expressed. Yet there are sometimes those who are acquainted with the secrets of these meanings and do not

make such errors. As such, the *tashābuh* in the Qur'an is neither relative nor essential, but presumed, due to inadequate knowledge.

Inherent and Accidental Equivocality

There are two types of equivocality in the Qur'an: inherent and accidental. The former refers to what might be expected due to the brevity of an expression with a wide range of meaning. Arabic words and expressions are on the whole concise, and it is sometimes difficult to express something either comprehensively or profoundly. In addition to this, the Qur'an is in classical Arabic:

> *We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand (and learn wisdom)* (43:3).

Therefore, a transcendent meaning is often expressed figuratively through metaphor or allegory in ways which were extraordinary even for the Arabs of the time. For example:

> *... when thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but God's...* (8:17).

This refers to man's inadequacy as agent of his own voluntary actions, which are all realised by the permission of God, yet some of the Arabs understood it as fatalism.

Another example is the following verse:

> *O ye who believe! Give your response to God and His messenger, when He calleth you to that which will give you life; and know that God cometh in between a man and his heart, and that it is He to Whom ye shall (all) be gathered* (8:24).

This raises the issue of *ḥaylūlah* (the notion of God's intervention between man and his heart), which is a threat to those who seek to defy the demands of the *sharī'ah*. What, then, does *ḥaylūlah* mean?

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and the followers of his school of thought have cited the verse above to support the notion of fatalism and the inevitability of belief or unbelief, by stating that if the unbeliever (whom God has destined to be so) wants to believe, God will prevent it from happening; and likewise, if the believer whom God has destined to believe inclines to unbelief, God will also prevent that from happening. Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī

al-Ash'arī affirmed this interpretation, saying: 'This verse is contrary to the Mu'tazilite School, which does not espouse predetermination (*jabr*).'[482] However, an examination of other verses shows that the 'intervention of God' does not indicate fatalism, but is rather an outcome of man's own actions.

Typically, verses that speak of creation and the return (*mabda' wa ma'ād*), man's will, responsibilities and the like, can be classified as equivocal verses, since a few words are used to express a deep and abstract meaning. For example, the verses concerning God's will, knowledge and plan, the trust given to man and his vicegerency, the nature of the heavens and the earth, divine permission, guidance, deviation and the like, all seem to be equivocal, and therefore require a considerable amount of interpretation.

An incidental resemblance of certain verses to Greek philosophical notions emerged when these latter ideas prematurely found their way into the Islamic domain, giving rise to considerable theological polemic. But in actuality the verses in question did not seem equivocal to the early Muslims, who considered them with the utmost devotion and sincerity, and who generally understood the meanings and implications. Verses that were earlier *muḥkamāt* and quite clear have become *mutashābihāt* and decidedly ambiguous. The undue divergences of certain theologians and polemicists dulled the luminosity of such verses. The following verse is an example:

> *Some faces, that Day, will beam (in brightness and beauty), looking towards their Lord* (75:22-23).

According to the conventional usage of the Arabs, this implies the expectation of grace from the sublime vision of God.

By way of comparison, Zamakhsharī says:

> I saw a small girl from the people of Sarw[483] at noontime; at the time when people were lying in comfort, she was begging, and spoke thus: 'My little eyes are fixed on God and you people!'[484]

And Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936) interprets it to mean physical vision, by saying:

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[482] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 15, 147-148.

[483] Sarw is a large village near Mecca whose inhabitants were destitute.

[484] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 662.

> *Naẓar* is of three types: *i'tibār* (receiving moral lessons), *intiẓār* (expectation) and *ru'yah* (vision). *I'tibār* has no place on the Day of Resurrection. *Intiẓār* must not be joined with the suffix *ilā*, as in the verse:
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> *Fa nāẓiratun bima yarji' al-mursalūn (27:35).*

Therefore the verse does not mean anything other than physical sight.

In reply to the hypothetical question: 'Why should we not suppose that the verse really means *ilā thawāb rabbihā* (expecting the *reward* of their Lord)?' Al-Ash'arī says that since the verse has no such intimation in the Qur'an, we have to keep to the literal meaning of the statement.

With regards to the verse:

> *No vision can grasp Him; but His grasp is over all vision* (6:103),

he says: 'This means visual perception in this world, and not in the Hereafter; it may also mean that the unbelievers are deprived of the bliss of seeing the Lord in both worlds.'[485] However, he failed to realise that the sense of expectation in *naẓar* is also suffixed in Arabic with the word *'ilā* (إلى). The Arab poet says:[486]

> *Innī* ilay*ka li mā wa'adta la nāẓirun*
>
> *naẓara al-faqīri* ilā *al-ghaniyy al-mūsiri.*

Also, in the words of the Arab girl mentioned above, when she says 'looking at God and the people,' both elements are prefixed with *ilā*. Similarly with the verse:

> *(God) Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority)* (20:5)

It is clear that this implies sovereignty and dominion. *'Arsh* (throne) here alludes to the knowledge that presides over the universe, just as *kursī* (chair) alludes to the all-encompassing dominion, sovereignty and authority of God. *Istiwā' 'alā al-'arsh* is the 'dominion of the Throne.' This never caused any confusion until later, when some imagined it to mean 'reclining on the throne,' which would require God to have a physical

[485] See al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah*, 10-19; *al-Lam'*, 61-68.

[486] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 97.

body,[487] whereas in conventional Arabic, it means 'dominion' (*istīlā'*). The famous poem says:

Qad istawā bishrun 'alā al-Irāqi

Min ghayri sayfin wa damin muhrāqi.

Similarly with the the word 'shank' in:

The day when the shank is laid bare and they are summoned to prostrate themselves, they will not be able [to do it] (68:42).

This alludes to the gravity and intensity of the matter, as when it might be said that 'the battle stands on the shank,' which means that the battle has intensified. 'Uncovering the shank' alludes to being completely prepared for some task, in the same sense as 'to gird one's loins,' since it requires the uncovering of the shank by folding up the robe to be girt.

According to conventional usage, the above verse implies that the Day of Resurrection will be an intense event, and the unbelievers will be in straitened circumstances, as Zamakhsharī says in *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*.[488] But the Ash'arites and the anthropomorphic interpreters have taken the words literally, saying: 'It means the foreleg of God shall be uncovered on that Day, and the unbelievers shall be commanded to prostrate, but be unable to do so.'[489]

Other Interpretations of *tashābuh*

Many other interpretations have been suggested for *iḥkām* and *tashābuh*, most of which overlap with only slight differences.Some have pointed to instances, or have mistaken the equivocal with the vague (*mubham*). In his exegesis, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has mentioned as many as sixteen suggested meanings, some of which are mentioned below.

1) 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās is reported to have said that the unequivocal verses are those like the verse:

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[487] Ibn Baṭūṭah has written in his travelogue: 'I entered the Damascus Mosque and saw Ibn Taymiyyah mounting the pulpit, talking about the corporeality of God and giving accounts of God's sitting on the Throne of Authority. He then said: 'God descends from His Throne as I dismount the pulpit.' He then stood up and went down a few steps while there was a hue and cry.' *Riḥlat Ibn Bāṭūṭah*, vol. 1, 57.

[488] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 592-594.

[489] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 144, 152.

Say: 'Come, I will rehearse what God hath (really) prohibited you from':
join not anything as equal to Him... (6:151),

and that the equivocal verses are those like the single letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa'ah*) at the beginning of some chapters.

2) Some have said that the equivocal verses are those which are abrogated (*mansūkh*), and that the unequivocal are those which abrogate (*nāsikh*).

3) Some say the unequivocal verses are those dealing with legal and liturgical matters (*āyāt al-aḥkām*), and that the equivocal are all other verses.

4) That the unequivocal verses are those related to the stories of the prophets and the earlier nations, and the equivocal refers to the ambiguities existing within these verses.

5) That the equivocal verses deal with the Attributes of God, the Exalted.[490]

6) That equivocal verses pertain to the conditions of the Day of Resurrection and the Hereafter with its fearful events.[491]

7) That the equivocal is ambiguous and has no clear meaning.

8) That the equivocal has a complex meaning, while the unequivocal is clear and decisive.

9) The way to find the meaning of the equivocal is closed, while that of the unequivocal is open.

10) The equivocal contains more than one meaning, but the unquivocal has just one.

11) The equivocal requires explanation, while the unequivocal does not.

12) The equivocal is closed to reason, while the uequivocal is not.

13) In the equivocal verses the apparent meaning of the expression is not intended, while the meaning of the unequivocal is clear.

14) The exegetes have a consensus of opinion regarding the interpretation of the equivocal verses, while they have no consensus concerning the unequivocal ones.

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[490] Ibn Taymiyyah quoted in Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1960), vol. 3, 167.

[491] Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh in Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, vol. 3, 167.

15) Interpreting the equivocal is difficult, whereas interpreting the unequivocal is easy.[492]

Equivocation in the Qur'an

One grouping of equivocal verses has in fact an accidental equivocality which has been imposed on them. The verses are expressed in conventional Arabic and are actually quite explicit, never having provoked doubts in earlier times. However, after the growth of theological and intellectual disputes amongst the various Muslim groups, they unfortunately became the subject of *tashābuh*.

A genuine equivocation is natural when it occurs as a result of expressing a profound idea with conventional words. In order to convey exalted meanings, the Qur'an uses language which is comprehensible to both the common people and the learned. It is on the whole a combination of oratorial and demonstrative styles which forms one coherent unit by using both popular and rational arguments. Although the two styles are different, the Qur'an has reconciled them, and this in itself can be considered as one of the proofs of the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'an.

In this regard, the famous scholar and philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d. 595/1199) considered that people fall into one of three groups regarding the teachings of the *sharī'ah*:

1) Those who possess wisdom and behave resolutely when faced with difficulties;

2) The common people who are typically unconcerned with higher learning, but have sound dispositions, pure hearts and sincere intentions;

3) Those who are not among the righteous scholars and, at the same time, do not identify with the common people, but rather regard themselves as superior and learned even though they do not have the necessary qualities.

There is equivocality only for the third group, since the scholars – with their knowledge and virtue dedicated to truth – and the common people – in their simplicity and acceptance of apparent meanings – never entertain doubts concerning the teachings of the *sharī'ah*. In the same way that wholesome and clean food is beneficial for a healthy body and

[492] See Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 3, 31-42.

disposition, the teachings of the *sharī'ah* are good for a healthy soul, but harmful for a few. As God has said:

> *By it He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path; but He causes not to stray, except those who forsake (the path)* (2:26).

This kind of confusion happens with some people in the case of some verses. It usually happens with verses which speak of the intangible world, which has no similarity to the world of sensible perception. Therefore, in order to become comprehensible, such a verse alludes to the most proximate thing that corresponds to the reality. This has led some people to pay attention to the apparent meaning and consider it as literally expressing the essential meaning. God has thus said:

> *But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings* (3:7).

Ibn Rushd adds:

> These were the same polemicists and founders of theological schools... In its teachings, the *sharī'ah* has adopted a method which is acceptable not only to the common people, but also to the learned. The Qur'an itself uses language which both types may comprehend. The common people content themselves with the apparent meanings of analogy, consider the object of analogy to be something similar or close to what is stated, are convinced to that extent and decide not to go further. The learned, however, can perceive the truth behind analogy. As an example, since light is considered the highest existent in the tangible world, it is used as an analogy:
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> > *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth (24:35).*

By this conceptual example, the door to the understanding of the incorporeal is open for the common people, in the sense that they can gain an assessment of real existence with the help of the power of imagination, thereby making it acceptable to them.

Nor are these words confusing for the learned, because they know that the purpose behind what is expressed is only to increase knowledge and

certainty. In many instances, if it is said to the common people that such expressions are merely superficial, and the truth is something other, they will not accept it, because either they suppose that whatever is intangible does not exist, or they cannot conceive of anything incorporeal, assuming such a thing to be completely unreal. This is especially true if they are told that God is neither within nor without the universe, neither above nor below. This why the *sharī'ah* has never avoided speaking of corporeality [in the case of God's attributes], and speaks of it plainly. Such is the case when the Qur'an states:

> *...there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees all things* (42:11);

and:

> *No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things* (6:103).

The one who reflects will discover that although the *sharī'ah* resorts to analogy for conveying such meanings to the common people, it also informs the learned of the subtleties and secrets of these expressions, disclosing the truths to them.[493]

It is clear that in comparing an intangible to a tangible, the best analogy for the Essence of God is the similitude of light. It is a truth which is manifest in itself and which manifests everything else, as well as being the most hidden. Hence God is most manifest, but at the same time His Essence is hidden. No one has ever discovered His Essence, and no one ever can.

With the exception of light, other similitudes for the Essence of God cannot be found in the realm of sense perception. In this respect, Imām Fakhr Rāzī, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh and 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī have followed the style of Ibn Rushd.[494]

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[493] See Abū al-Walīd Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adillah fī 'Aqā'id al-Millah* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-Arabiyyah, n.d.), 89, 96-97, 107.

[494] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 172; *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, 170; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 3, 58-62.

Who May Know the Meanings of Equivocal Verses?

This question can be approached in two ways. First of all, what can be deduced from the apparent meaning of the verse under consideration? And secondly, is it in fact possible to really understand the meaning of an equivocal verse?

From the apparent meaning of the above verse 6:103 alone, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī believes that knowledge of the meanings of the equivocal verses is God's alone, and for others there is no other way than total submission to Him; but for reasons expressed elsewhere, access to the hidden truth of the equivocal verses seems to be open for the seekers of truth. We will briefly examine this understanding of the distinguished 'Allāmah's.

It goes without saying that it would seem inappropriate for the treasury of Divine Knowledge hidden in the Qur'an to be completely inaccessible. The following verse indicates this:

> *Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up...?*(47:24).

If it is assumed that there are verses in the Qur'an which are completely indecipherable – to all the scholars, thinkers, Imāms, and the Holy Prophet himself – then the Divine Wisdom as a whole might be put into question. How can the Book, which has been sent to guide humanity for all time, contain ambiguities which are unknown even to the Holy Prophet? Such an assumption is out of the question, and far removed from the Wisdom of God. In this respect 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī says:

> The apparent meaning shows that *those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say...* (3:7) is a new phrase, and the sentence is resumed; and the words *those who are firmly grounded in knowledge* are not those mentioned earlier in the verse, but indicates those who have the same knowledge as Him. In fact in the statement *But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning*, the main point is as follows: *But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning... and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in the Book.'* This indicates that the difference between the two groups is that the first group approaches the equivocal verses

with evil intentions, but the second group totally submits to such verses with pure hearts and sincere intentions,

Moreover, if the letter *wāw* is a conjunctive in the sense that those grounded in knowledge know the interpretation of the equivocal verses, then certainly the Holy Prophet is the forerunner of this group, and he would have to be mentioned separately; thus the verse would state: *But no one knows its true meanings except God*, the Apostle *and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge,* because such is the prerequisite for the elevated station of apostleship.This separate mention has been made in other instances in the Qur'an. Amongst many similar verses, take for example the following:

> *The messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith* (2:285);

and:

> *...as are also this prophet and those who believe...* (3:68).

Hence, what is clear in this verse is that knowledge of the interpretation is exclusive to God, although there is nothing wrong if for some reason an exception is made elsewhere. For example, the verses stating that the knowledge of the Unseen belongs solely to God accommodate this verse as an exception:

> *He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make anyone acquainted with His mysteries – except a messenger whom He has chosen* (72:26-27).

Therefore, the verse in question has only stated one dimension of *those who are firmly grounded in knowledge* (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*), and refers to the observance of such verses and firmness with regard to confusions. However, through another proof, it is established that *those who are firmly grounded in knowledge* know the interpretation of equivocal verses, and that it is possible for them to have access to the hidden truths of the Qur'an.[495]

In this regard, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī says: 'The conjunction in the verse is far from eloquence and if it were really to be a conjunction, the clause *and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in the Book,'*

[495] See Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 3, 26-27.

should be preceded by the circumstantial (*ḥālīyyah*) *wāw*: *wa hum yaqūlūna* or *wa yaqūlūna*.'[496]

The following points should not be overlooked:

1) Those who are *grounded in knowledge* cannot be compared with those *in whose hearts is perversity*, because there is no common relationship between the two. Those who are perverse differ from those with sound dispositions and tranquil hearts, inasmuch as those who disregard knowledge are in contrast to the seekers of true knowledge. Therefore, the two do not compare.

2) From the perspective of the proportionality of subject and predicate, the predicate of those *grounded in knowledge* must be proportional to the degree of knowledge. Therefore, if the meaning is that those grounded in knowledge submit in ignorance, the subject of the predicate would be purity of faith, because then it is pure faith that brings about total submission. In contrast, the seeking of knowledge implies dynamism and investigation, in so far as the subject does not surrender before he knows or understands. In sum, the proportionality of the subject and predicate requires that the predicate of such a noble stature must be consistent with knowledge and not ignorance.

3) As to why the Messenger of God is not mentioned separately from those who are *grounded in knowledge*, in many instances in the Qur'an a group of believers in which the Holy Prophet is included, is praised without separately mentioning him, as for example:

> *There is no god but He: this is the witness of God, His angels, and those endued with knowledge* (3:18).

Here the Prophet is obviously included in *those endued with knowledge*.

4) The phrase, *those who...say: 'We believe in the Book'* is in the present tense, and denotes a firm faith. This prompts *those...grounded in knowledge* to appreciate the Divine Wisdom, and in order to perceive the hidden truths, they study the meanings of the equivocal verses, since they are firm in knowledge and have no doubts regarding equivocal verses, believing that they emanate from the same Source as the unequivocal verses. In that way they realise the meanings of the equivocal verses.

[496] See Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 177.

5) If a circumstanial sentence (*al-jumlah al-ḥālīyyah*) begins in the affirmative present tense, it does not have the letter *wāw*. Ibn Mālik says in his Alfiyyah:

Wa dhātu bad'in bi muḍāri'in thabat

ḥawat ḍamīran wa min al-wāwi khalat

(If a circumstantial phrase is written with the verb in the present tense, it should have a pronoun but no *wāw*).

The basis for Fakhr Rāzī's statement is unclear, and is contrary to what is said by other scholars. Zamakhsharī in *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1,338, Ibn Qutaybah in *Ta'wīlu Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, 72, Abū al-Baqā' in *Imlā' mā Manna bih al-Raḥmān*, vol.1,124, Sayyid Murtaḍā in *al-Amālī*, vol. 442-431 1,, session 33, Zarkashī in *al-Burhān*, vol. 2,73, Ṭabrisī in *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 410, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh in *Al-Manār*, vol. 3,167, as well as others, have all agreed that يقولون آمنا به (*[they] say: 'We believe in the Book'*) is a circumstantial phrase.[497]

6) Even if we regard *and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say...* as a different clause, the verse does not indicate that knowledge of the equivocal verses is closed to everyone, for the exclusivity in the expression *He* [God] *alone knows the Unseen* is relative, and its aim is to emphasise that God is the ultimate Knower and Doer, as for example in 'There is no rulership except God's' (*lā ḥukma illā lillāh*), 'There is nothing effectual in existence except God' (*lā mu'aththira fī al-wujūd illāllāh*), 'No one knows the Unseen except God' (*lā ya'lamu al-ghayba illallāh*) and the like, where the intent is the negation of such attributes in others. The exclusivity in these verses means that their foundation abides within God. Therefore, there is no inconsistency in verses such as:

> *Say: None in the heavens or on earth, except God, knows what is hidden* (27:65);

and:

> *He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make anyone acquainted with His mysteries - except a messenger whom He has chosen* (72:26-27).

[497] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 40 ff.

Moreover, it would be illogical for God, the All-Wise, to present a book of guidance to mankind and then tell them that there are passages in it which are incomprehensible, and that there can be no way for them to understand them. It is, however, reasonable to say that there are indeed ambiguous passages which become diversions for the crooked-minded, and the key to understanding them is with God, and it is only through God that one may be guided to this understanding. Hence, the exclusivity in these verses is solely meant to deny knowledge of their meanings to the crooked-minded.

Examples of Equivocal Verses

It was mentioned earlier that equivocation in certain Qur'anic verses is of two types: inherent equivocation and accidental equivocation. Inherent equivocation is where the words themselves do not suffice to convey the higher meaning, and can be confusing as a consequence. These verses relate mostly to the principles of belief. As mentioned before, there are very few such verses compared with others, and they may be clarified by referring to unequivocal verses which form the foundations of the Book, as well as to the traditions of the Holy Prophet, the Imāms and the pious predecessors.

Accidental equivocation is mainly a by-product of a conflict of opinion, and the emergence of different schools of thought in different periods following the time of revelation. Each school of thought would have its own interpretation of the Qur'an to justify itself, and this sometimes introduced confusion into what was otherwise understandable. Most of what are presently regarded as equivocal verses are of this type. Examples of each of these two types are given below.[498]

The Attributes of Beauty (*jamāl*) and Majesty (*jalāl*)

God has two types of Attributes: those of Beauty (*jamāl*) and Majesty (*jalāl*). The Attributes of Beauty (*al-ṣifāt al-thubūtīyyah*) are positive or affirmative, while the Attributes of Majesty (*al-ṣifāt al-salbīyyah*) are negative in the sense that the Essence of God is completely independent and distinct from manifestation, for which reason they are also known as Attributes of Transcendence (*ṣifāt al-tanzīh*).

[498] These examples are cited according to the classification in Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3.

Whether or not God possesses the Attributes of Beauty and Majesty is a subject of dispute amongst Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite theologians. The Mu'tazilites deny the ascription of any Attribute to the Essence of God, for this would amount to assigning a quality to the Essence, as in other cases where the essence of a thing is characterised by an attribute, with the attribute and the essence in a sense combined. For example, a person may be called 'knowledgeable' if knowledge is part of his essential nature, but the Essence of God is free of any contingency or conjunction. Based on this argument, any description of this kind mentioned in the Qur'an or the traditions pertains to effects, and is not a direct description.[499] That is to say, if we attach the attribute of knowledge (*'ilm*) to God and say: 'He has knowledge of all things,' the purpose is to express that nothing is hidden from Him, since everything is in His presence, and not that knowledge is added to or conjoined with the Divine Essence. So also with other Attributes, such as power, life, wisdom, and even will, pleasure and wrath. In all these cases, the manifestation of the attribute is meant, and not that the attribute exists alongside the Essence.[500]

On the other hand, the Ash'arites consider this type of analysis to be based on conjectural interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*) devoid of any proof, arguing that the exterior (*ẓāhir*) and apparent meaning of the Qur'an must be understood, and searching beyond the literal meaning for an interpretation is impermissible. God has described Himself with these Attributes, speaking in the language of the people, and this must be conceived in the way it is customarily understood. Thus, the application of the description 'All-Knowing' to God works in the same way as an attribute or description is normally applied to anything else, and therefore implies that the Essence and the Attribute concur with each other.

The founder of Ash'arism, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, says in this regard: 'Indeed, God, the Exalted, is All-Knowing through the conjunction of His Essence with Knowledge, and He is All-Powerful with the conjunction of His Essence with Power,' and he has cited the following verses:

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[499] It is thus said regarding the Attributes of God: خذ الغايات ودَعِ المبادئ
'Consider the purpose and discard the base of the attributes.'

[500] See Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Istiqlāl al-Kubrā, 1384 q.), 182 ff.

Know ye that this revelation is sent down (replete) with the knowledge of God (11:14);

But God beareth witness that what He hath sent unto thee He hath sent from His (own) knowledge (4:166);

And no female conceives, or lays down (her load), but with His knowledge (35:11);

Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge... (2:255);

Did they not see that God, Who created them, was superior to them in strength? (41:15);

For God is He Who is the Provider, the Lord of Power, the Steadfast (51:58).

He goes on to say:

> In these verses God has established Himself as the origin of the Attributes of Knowledge and Power, and regarded them as conjoined to His Essence, describing Himself thus.

And adds:

> The description *al-ḥayy* (the Ever-Living) is derived from life (*ḥayāt*); *al-'ālim* (the All-Knowing) is derived from Knowledge (*'ilm*); *al-qādir* (the All-Powerful) is derived from Power (*qudrah*)... Hence, do these descriptions have any meaning or not? Without any doubt, they have their own conventional meanings which are customarily prevalent in Arabic.[501]

Of course, resorting to these verses as evidence is somewhat misleading, because although the Knowledge and Power of the Divine Essence are mentioned, it is not said that the Essence concurs with Knowledge and Power. Moreover, the Mu'tazilites do not deny God the Attributes of Knowledge, Power and Life, but they reject their conjunction with the Divine Essence. They recognise God as the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful and the Ever-Living, in the sense that the Divine Essence – which is completely transcendent – possesses these Attributes without coexisting with them. This contrasts with other explanations which say that the origin of the Attributes is their very conjunction with the Essence.

[501] See al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah*, 44-48.

The Imāmiyyah theologians have analysed this issue with more clarity and adopted a middle way, which is that of neither the Ash'arites nor the Mu'tazilites. They believe that the Divine Essence, without addition or conjunction, is the origin of all the Attributes of Beauty and Majesty, and that any manifestation of perfection in the world of being has emanated from His Essence. It is impossible for the Divine Essence not to have these perfections, since if they do not actually exist in the Divine Essence, they could not appear from anywhere else. As such, the Divine Essence is the assemblage of all the Attributes of Perfection, and whatever exists is derived therefrom. Nothing is added or conjoined to God, and there is only He, and nothing but Him, in eternity.

This is the meaning of the identicality (*'aynīyyah*) of the Attributes to the Essence of God, where all the Attributes are derived from this very Essence. Thus, the comparison used by the Ash'arites where the Divine Attributes are the same as those of creation is false, because:

> ...*nothing is like unto Him* (42:11).

'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, said:

> The pinnacle of religion is the acknowledgment of Him [God]; the perfection of acknowledging Him is to testify to Him; the perfection of testifying to Him is to believe in His Oneness; the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to worship Him sincerely, and the perfection of sincerity in worship of Him is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed, and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute. Thus, whoever attaches attributes to God, the Glorious (*ṣubḥānahu*),[502] has conjoined Him, and whoever conjoins Him regards Him as two [that is, regards the Divine Essence as composed of two elements]; and whoever regards Him as two recognises parts in Him [because a compound necessitates parts]; and whoever recognises parts in Him has mistaken Him.[503]

[502] *Ṣubḥān* is a word used for God as a way of purifying His Essence. That is, God is pure and free from any unfitting description.

[503] Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 1.

Negation of Spatial Characteristics (*taḥayyuz*)

Taḥayyuz means occupying a space, or have spatial bearings. This is a characteristic of physical beings, inasmuch as they occupy a space composed of six dimensions (right, left, front, rear, top and bottom). *Taḥayyuz* cannot be applied to the Essence of God because He is incorporeal, that is to say, He is a metaphysical Being free of physical characteristics.

The Ash'arites, however, recognise *taḥayyuz* in relation to God, where He would occupy a space and have a direction in the above sense. They cite the following Qur'anic verses in support:[504]

> *(God) Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority)* (20:5);
>
> *He rules (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth; in the end will (all affairs) go up to Him* (32:5);
>
> *They all revere their Lord, high above them* (16:50);
>
> *Do ye feel secure that He who is in heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up...?* (67:16);
>
> *To Him mount up (all) words of purity: it is He Who exalts each deed of righteousness* (35:10);
>
> *And thy Lord cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank* (89:22);
>
> *Will they wait until God comes to them in canopies of clouds...?* (2:210).

Keeping in mind the verse, *Nothing is like unto Him* (42:11), which is one of the unequivocal verses, the Imāmiyyah and the Mu'tazilites regarded God to be free of any similitude to anything in creation, and embarked upon interpreting figuratively the above-mentioned verses, which the likes of Ash'arī regarded as unequivocal.

Before embarking upon further elaboration, certain words, such as *'arsh* (throne), *kursī* (chair, also throne), *istiwā'* (establish), *samā'* (heaven), *fawqiyyah* (situated upon), *nuzūl* (descent) and *ṣu'ūd* (ascent), which are used in such verses, should first be explained.

'Arsh: In the Qur'an, *'arsh* is mentioned 21 times in relation to God, *kursī* once, and *istiwā'* seven times.[505] *'Arsh* is a metonym that alludes to the throne of authority, as in:

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[504] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 111-113, 115-116; al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah*, 26-28.

[505] Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 121.

Then He established himself on the throne (of authority), regulating and governing all things (10:3).

Its literal meaning (couch or throne) is not intended. In Arabic this word is often used as a metonym. In many verses, the word *'arsh* is accompanied by *tadbīr* (authority) to convey the same metaphorical meaning:

Indeed your Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He established Himself on the throne (of authority): He draweth the night as a veil over the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? (7:54).

It can be seen that in both the previous verses that 'governing' or 'authority' is coupled with or follows *established...on the throne*, especially in the second of the two, which speaks of the creation and then God as *established...on the throne*, and finally the two are combined in *Is it not His to create and govern?* What is meant by *amr* (command) is the command to govern, which is a function of God *established...on the throne.*

Expressions like these accompany each other in other chapters (32:4-5; 57:4-5; 40:15; 20:5-6). In *Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah*, where the subject is the higher spiritual realm (*jabarūt*) and the universal authority of God on the Day of Resurrection, *'arsh* is again mentioned:[506]

And eight will, that Day, bear the throne of thy Lord (69:17).

As such, *'arsh* is nothing but an allusion to *tadbīr*. In his interpretation of *'arsh*, Imām 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā says: 'And *'arsh* is the name of knowledge and power.[507] In other words, the power and knowledge of directing affairs is given the name *'arsh.'*

Kursī: This alludes to the absolute authority of God over the universe. The following verse refers to the universality of the absolute dominion and sovereignty of God:

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[506] In many places in the Qur'an, the absolute authority of God on the Day of Resurrection is mentioned, when 'the command' is solely in the hands of God:
Master of the Day of Judgement (1:4);
Surely His is the command, and He is the swiftest in taking account (6:62);
There, the (only) protection comes from God, the True One (18:44);
His will be the dominion the day the Trumpet will be blown (6:73).

[507] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, 131.

His throne (kursī) doth extend over the heavens and the earth (2:255);

and goes on:

And He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them (2:255).

In the Persian language, when speaking of the overarching sovereignty of a king, it can be said: 'The pillars of his throne embraced the world.' In cases such as this, the meaning is universalised and not literal.

Istiwā': If coupled with *ilā* (to) – as in *Then He turned to the heaven* (*thumma 'stawā ila al-samā'*) (2:29) – *istiwā'* signifies *'amada*, which means 'to attend to,' or 'to pay attention to'; and if it is used with *'alā* (on/upon) – as in *Then He established Himself on the throne* (*thumma 'stawā 'ala al-'arsh*) (7:54; 10:3; 13:2) – it denotes dominion and universal authority. Similarly, the poet Akhṭal said:

Qad istawā *bishrun* 'alā *al-Irāqi*

Min ghayri sayfin wa damin muhrāqi

In this couplet the poet praises Bishr (the brother of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān) for being able to assume the governorship of Iraq without bloodshed.[508]

Therefore, when the words *'arsh*, *kursī* and *istiwā'* appear in the Qur'an, a wider metaphorical meaning is intended, and not the literal one.

Fawqiyyah: The use of *fawqiyyah* or *fī al-samā'* (in [the] Heaven) regarding God, and *nuzūl* (descent) and *ṣu'ūd* (ascent), are totally spiritual and metaphorical, and do not imply a physical position, but refer to a world superior to this physical world from whence emanate all blessings to those here below. The place of God – if such a 'place' is conceived – is this superior realm, to where the righteous acts of His servants 'ascend' towards Him. Other than in this sense, God does not occupy any particular space:

Whithersoever ye turn, there is God's Countenance (2:115).

When people look upwards and raise their hands toward the sky whilst praying, it symbolises the Source of blessings being beyond the sphere of the physical world.[509]

[508] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 9, 7.

[509] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 126.

> *And there is not a thing but its (sources and) treasures (inexhaustible) are with Us; but We only send down thereof in due and ascertainable measures* (15:21).

This 'sending down' alludes to a descent from the high station of the metaphysical world. Words such as *nuzūl*, *inzāl* and *tanzīl* that are used in the Qur'anic verses[510] are of this type.

In addition, in verses such as *And thy Lord cometh...* (*jā'a rabbuka*) (89:22) and *...(until) God should come to them* (*ya'tīhimullāh*) (2:210), where movement within space is ascribed to God, this kind of metaphorical ellipsis is one of the most common metaphors used in Arabic. For example, the verse *And thy Lord cometh*, which apparently ascribes movement to God, implies 'your Lord's *command* cometh,' just as *...ask (at) the town...* (12:82) means 'ask the people of the town.' Testimony to this kind of ellipsis and its implications are evidenced by other verses where it is absent:

> *But when the command of God issued, the matter was decided in truth and justice...* (40:78);
>
> *Do they wait until the angels come to them, or there comes the command of your Lord?* (16:33).

Such expressions and ellipsis abound in various places in both the language of the Qur'an and in common Arabic usage. Hence, in one place there is *Or your Lord Himself should come?* (6:158), and in another, *Or there comes the command of thy Lord* (16:33).

Similarly, regarding the taking of the souls, it is said, *It is God that takes the souls at death* (39:42), and in another place, *Soon will ye be vanquished and gathered together* (3:12). In the first verse God is said to directly take the souls Himself, and in the second verse it is the 'angel of death' (*malak al-mawt*) who takes them by the permission and order of God. Such verses are not contradictory, and the real meaning is clear.

The Vision of God (*ru'yah*)

The Ash'arites are of the opinion that God can be seen, and that at the time of the Resurrection, after the Judgement, the believers will be blessed with a vision of the Face of of God. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī cites

[510] They are used more than ten times regarding the revelation of the Qur'an. See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 115-116.

as testimony to this the verse: *Some faces, that day, will beam (in brightness and beauty) - looking towards their Lord* (23-75:22), which states that the faces of the believers will be radiant as they see the Face of their Lord. He says that in the Arabic language *naẓar* (نظر) is used in three ways:

1) To express a moral lesson: *Do they not observe (yanẓurūna) the camels, how they are made?* (88:17);

2) To wait or expect: *They will not have to wait (yanẓurūna) for aught but a single blast: it will seize them while they are yet disputing...* (36:49), that is, it will not be long before the blast suddenly summons them to the Resurrection;

3) Seeing with the eyes: *Some faces, that Day, will beam (in brightness and beauty) - looking towards (nāẓirah) their Lord* (75:22-23), for on that Day there will be no more time to learn, and *naẓar* in the sense of waiting cannot be suffixed by the word *ilā* (to, toward).

As to why we do not take the word *thawāb* (reward) to be implied in *Looking towards* the reward of *their Lord* (75:23) Ash'arī says:

> If we doubt the occurrence of ellipsis, the original principle is that no ellipsis takes palce, for ellipsis is contrary to the literal meaning. The apparent meaning of the verse shows that they will look at their Lord Himself, and if we regard the word *thawāb* as being implied, it follows that they would look at other than their Lord, and it is not proper for us to interpret the statement of a speaker contrary to the apparent meaning of his words, or to imply something that will change his statement and be construed otherwise.

And regarding the verse, *No vision can grasp Him* (6:103), Ash'arī says:

> This is a negation [of such comprehension] in this world, but does not contradict the possibility of such a vision in the Hereafter, for seeing (*ru'yah*) the Countenance of God is one of the best of pleasures reserved for the higher realm. It may also mean a denial of *ru'yah* for the unbelievers who will be deprived of seeing God.[511]

As we have said earlier, however, *naẓar* in the verse under discussion means 'to expect,' and not 'to view,' and this conveys the same meaning

[511] See al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah*, 10-19.

of 'awaiting' which exists in current Arabic usage, and it is also suffixed with *ilā* (to, toward).

As such, the meaning of the verse is that some faces will be jubilant and fresh in expectation of the Divine Grace.

Bodily Organs and Limbs

The Ash'arites have the notion that God has hands, feet, a face and eyes, citing Qur'anic verses in which such words as *yad* (hand), *wajh* (face), *'ayn* (eye) and *sāq* (shank) are used, as for example:

> *The Jews say: 'God's hand is tied up.' Be their hands tied up and be they accursed for what they utter. Nay, both His hands are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth* (5:64).

But there is no basis here for the Ash'arite notion, because the 'tying up of the hand' denotes incapacity, in contrast to the 'outstretched hands' which signify power and ability. This kind of usage is quite common in Arabic, as for example, in another verse:

> *Make not thy hand tied to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute* (17:29).

It is clear that the literal meaning of these phrases is not intended; rather they allude to the trials of life and an over-generosity which may become a source of regret. Thus, the expressions where the hand is 'tied' or 'outstretched' in the above verse imply the same as what is mentioned in *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān* in terms of poverty and affluence:

> *God hath heard the taunt of those who say: 'Truly, God is poor and we are rich!'* (3:181);
>
> *Say: 'All bounties are in the hand of God: He granteth them to whom He pleaseth...'* (3:73).

In another verse there is:

> *Grace is (entirely) in His hand, to bestow it upon whomsoever He wills, for God is the Lord of Grace abounding* (57:29).

The word *yad* (hand) is attributed to God twelve times in the Qur'an, and in all instances it means power, dominion, potency and so forth. *Wajh* (face) is used eleven times, and connotes the Divine Essence, as in:

Everything (that exists) will perish except His own Face (28:88).

'Ayn (eye) is mentioned five times – once in the singular, and four times in the plural – and in all cases it means God's attention or protection:

Now await in patience the command of thy Lord; for verily thou art in Our eyes (52:48);

And (this) in order that thou mayest be reared under Mine eye (20:39).

In common Arabic usage, *kashf al-sāq* (literally, 'uncovering of the shank') alludes to the seriousness of a matter, and indicates that the time for flippancy regarding this world has come to an end, and a time for seriousness and earnestness has arrived. In the Persian language, *dāman bih kamar zadan* (to tuck up the skirt) is used instead of *kashf al-sāq* to convey the same meaning.

Volition and Free Will

One of the issues which has some bearing on the concept of equivocation in the Qur'an, and which has been a cause for debate between the Ash'arites and the Advocates of Justice,[512] is that of man's voluntary actions. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī says that the Unity of Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) necessitates that whatever exists in the world of being, including the apparently voluntary actions of man, is a direct result of the Will of God, and that to believe otherwise implies multiple lordship and is tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*). It would mean that something other than God is also a cause for bringing things into existence, whereas there is no cause except God. In this case, Ash'arī cites at least twenty-five verses, some of which are as follows:

But God has created you and your handiwork! (37:96);

God is the Creator of all things (39:62);

No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence (57:22);

[512] The Advocates of Justice, or Justice Advocates (*'adliyyūn*), refers to those (Imāmiyyah and Mu'tazilites) who regard God's actions as emanating from His Attributes of Justice and Wisdom. Thus, any action outside these parameters cannot be from God, and therefore anyone who willingly commits a sin is blameworthy and deserves punishment.

That it is He Who granteth laughter and tears (53:43).

Those who believe in predetermination have added:

But ye will not except as God wills (76:30);

...they are not the ones to believe, unless it is in God's plan (6:111);

Many are the jinns and men We have made for Hell (7:179).

In this last verse they have, in other words, been created to be corrupt and punished, and play no part in the corruption for which they will be punished.[513]

The Voluntary Nature of Actions

However, there is no doubt that man's own will plays a role in voluntary actions. For this reason, man's actions are attributed to him and he is responsible for the consequences. This is something that everyone can discover in his own conscience, as well as being common sense. In other words, the issue is one of intuition, and requires no reasoning or proof. Moreover, praise, reproach, reward or punishment can only be justifiable if good or evil deeds are done voluntarily. The entire Qur'an is replete with instances of both praise and blame for different kinds of moral behaviour, not to mention the issue of religious duties, which implies the ability to act freely and choose, for otherwise it would be meaningless.

The numerous Qur'anic verses mentioning moral responsibility are considered unequivocal, since they are attuned with fundamental human nature (*fiṭrah*) and intuition, while verses which apparently challenge them are equivocal and have to be interpreted by way of the definitive verses.

Certain verses which substantiate the nature of voluntary action are the following:

Those who do wish for (the things of) the Hereafter, and strive therefor with all due striving, and have faith - they are the ones whose striving is acceptable (to God) (17:19);

Whoever works any act of righteousness and has faith - his endeavour will not be rejected: We shall record it in his favour (21:94);

(Yet) is every individual in pledge for his deeds (52:21);

[513] See al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibanāh*, 6, 49-59.

Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that hands of men have earned (30:41);

What kept men back from belief when guidance came to them...? (17:94);

If anyone does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (4:110);

On no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns (2:286);

Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error (2:256);

Those who give partners (to God) will say: 'If God had wished, we should not have given partners to Him, nor would our fathers: nor should we have had any taboos.' So did their ancestors argue falsely, until they tasted of Our Wrath. Say: 'Have ye any (certain) knowledge? If so, produce it before us. Ye follow nothing but conjecture: ye do nothing but lie' (6:148).

Basically, the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) thought that man had no free will, that he was caught in a web of destiny, and that anything he did was due to the Will of God. By thinking in such a way, their unseemly behaviour would be accounted for. God reproaches them for this superstition, for how could such a thing be entertained by God? Thus, He says in other verses:

Say: 'Do ye indeed inform God of something He knows not...?' (10:18);

Say: '...Is it that ye will inform Him of something He knoweth not on earth...? (13:33);

Verily this is an admonition; therefore, whoso will, let him take a (straight) path to his Lord! (73:19).

Leading Astray (*iḍlāl*) or Abandoning (*khidhlān*)

Iḍlāl means to lead astray, or away from the true path. Since the issue of misguidance is raised in many verses of the Qur'an and attributed to God, one must be careful to understand the intended meaning, in order to be clear that it has a figurative or metaphorical, rather than literal dimension, which is never the case.

In relation to God, *iḍlāl* connotes *khidhlān*, that is, to leave people to their own devices and deprive them of attention as a result of their rebellion against God. In other words, they themselves do not want to be given attention by God, and due to their unwillingness they are left to themselves.

> *God will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm, in this world and in the hereafter; but God will leave, to stray, those who do wrong* (14:27).
>
> This is the meaning of *Truly God leaveth to stray whom He will* (13:27), *But He leaves straying whom He pleases* (16:93) and *For God leaves to stray whom He wills* (35:8), because *...He guideth to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence* (13:27). Hence, those whom God leads astray (that is, leaves to themselves) are precisely those who do not want to humbly turn to Him in penitence (*inābah*).

Then those who believe in God, and hold fast to Him – soon will He admit them to Mercy and Grace from Himself, and guide them to Himself by a straight way (4:175).

CHAPTER X

ABROGATION (*NASKH*) IN THE QUR'AN

One of the most debated issues concerning the Qur'an is *naskh* (abrogation), since it raises some confusing questions. There is the question as to why there are any abrogated (*mansūkhah*) verses and other definitive (*muḥkam*) ones given as proof of it. Basically, the question is: what benefit could abrogated verses possibly have?

For our predecessors, *naskh* had a broader meaning than it does today. In the past, a change in an earlier law would be called abrogation. *Naskh* would also include an exclusion from a general ruling (*takhṣīṣ*), or a qualification to an absolute decision (*taqyīd*). Nowadays, however, *naskh* means the replacement of an old rule by a new one, where one rule is abrogated and replaced by the abrogating (*nāsikh*) rule. All current misgivings revolve around this more recent interpretation.

The Importance of the Topic

The significance of this discussion will become apparent when it is acknowledged that there are abrogated verses alongside *muḥkam* (clear) non-abrogated verses in the Qur'an.[514] Hence, it is necessary for the Qur'anic researcher to identify the abrogated verses and distinguish them from the *muḥkam* ones. A jurisprudent (*faqīh*) who wants to determine a ruling from the Qur'an, or a theologian who seeks knowledge therein, must be able to determine this distinction. Therefore, the jurisprudent or judge who wishes to issue a religious edict (*fatwā*) or judgment must be careful not to base his decision on abrogated verses.

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī has narrated that Imām 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, met one of the judges of Kufa and asked him: 'Do you consider the abrogating verses separate from the abrogated verses?' The judge answered: 'No,' and the Imām said: 'In that case, you have ruined yourself as well as others.'[515]

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[514] *Muḥkam* is used in contrast to *mutashābih* (equivocal), and at times in contrast to *mansūkh* (abrogated), as it is meant here.

[515] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 12, *ḥadīth* 9.

Imām al-Ṣādiq asked a jurisprudent of Kufa: 'Are you called 'jurisprudent' by the people of Iraq?' He answered: 'Yes.' Then the Imām asked: 'In your deduction of rulings, what bases do you use?' He said: 'The Qu'ran and the *sunnah* of the Prophet.' The Imām asked: 'Do you have a correct understanding of the Book of God, and can you entirely distinguish the *nāsikh* (abrogator) from the *mansūkh* (abrogated)?' He replied: 'Yes.' Then the Imām said: 'You claim to have a vast knowledge – something which is only endowed by God on the deserving ones.'[516]

Of course, in traditions such as these, *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* have a general meaning which also includes statements that exclude a case from a general ruling or qualify it as an absolute law. In other words, any subsequent law which is different from the previous law is called *nāsikh*, whether it removes a previous law completely or limits its scope. It is clear that acting upon a general or absolute ruling prior to the examination of a specifying or restricting clause is disallowed, as is acting upon the abrogated rather than the abrogating.

The Wisdom behind *Naskh*

In every reform there is a need to abrogate certain rules and regulations, since in a gradual movement the successive changes in conditions necessitate a reassessment of the program. Change continues as long as the movement has not reached an optimum point or its goal. Whenever a program becomes complete, the issue of *naskh* is out of the question. Thus, *naskh* in a particular *sharī'ah* continues so long as the relevant prophet is alive, but there is no *naskh* after he passes away.

Successive *naskh* in a nascent *sharī'ah* is like the prescriptions of a doctor which might change according to the condition of the patient. Yesterday's prescription was of benefit in its own time, and today's prescription is suitable for today. Hence, God says:

> *None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar...* (2:106).

That is, each abrogation fits in correctly with particular conditions for the betterment of the community. *Better or similar* refers to the two conditions. If one compares yesterday's ruling with the conditions of

[516] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, Preface to the Second Edition, vol. 1, 13.

today, today's ruling is better, but when considering the application of each of them to its own time and place, then both are the most suitable in their own contexts.

The difference between *naskh* (abrogation) and *insā'* (removal) is that *naskh* refers to a situation where an earlier ruling still holds, but conditions have changed and a new ruling is needed. But if over time the earlier ruling has been forgotten or distorted, it is known as *insā'*.

In sum, the above verse tells us that, whether or not there is either direct abrogation or an earlier ruling has been forgotten and replaced by a new one, in both cases the criterion is for the greater good of the people. The verse is intended to refute the notion that abrogation suggests that there has been a mistake or a change of opinion, which would imply that the earlier law was somehow inadequate. This topic is dealt with in more detail under the heading 'Confusions on the Issue of Abrogation.'

Definition of *Naskh*

In current parlance, *naskh* means that a new law completely replaces an earlier one, which continuously applies up until the time the new one is instigated. There are perhaps some points here that need to be taken into account:

1) Law (*ḥukm*) in this case – whether abrogated (*mansūkh*) or abrogating (*nāsikh*) – means the religious law, which includes religious duties (*al-ḥukm al-taklīfī*) and religious legal implications (*al-ḥukm al-waḍ'ī*). Therefore, as far as we are concerned here, it does not include any changes or modifications that occur outside the compass of the religious law.

2) The presumption of an unqualified continuity of the previous law with regards to its time and place, as inferred by the customary conception, since every religious duty has three areas of application: to the people, to the conditions and to the time. Therefore, the command is incumbent upon everyone, covers all conditions, and for all intents and purposes is fixed in time for all those who are duty-bound (*mukallafīn*) to it.

3) It is impossible to merge the previous and succeeding laws since they are inconsistent, which is known technically as 'mutual exclusivity' (*tabāyun kullī*). If the two laws can coexist, then no abrogation has taken

place, in which case the earlier law remains general or absolute while the new one qualifies it. But in this case the new law is not said to be an abrogating law; it merely limits the scope of the previous law, but does not nullify it. This is in fact a kind of customary conciliation which is quite common, but falls outside the scope of *naskh*. Therefore, the difference between abrogation (*naskh*) and particularisation (*takhṣīṣ*) is that *naskh* cancels out the previous law, whilst *takhṣīṣ* modifies certain aspects of the earlier law which otherwise remains generally binding.

The Conditions of *Naskh*

The following are conditions concerning the application of *naskh*: disparity between the abrogating and the abrogated; the impossibility of merging the two; the restriction of *naskh* to religious laws, whether ritual or legal; and binding application in all circumstances, such as instances of necessity or when travelling. Any change of a ruling in such cases is beyond the scope of *naskh*. This is because every instance has its own rules, and a change of circumstances means a change in the rules, but such a change cannot be regarded as an abrogation of the law as some have mistakenly supposed, thereby including numerous specifications in the inventory of the abrogated (*mansūkhāt*).

There is another additional condition worthy of note, which is when the earlier law is limited to a particular timeframe, and therefore there is no need for abrogation. But it should not be forgotten that a given timeframe must be specified, for if it is ambiguous, then the previous law endures until a new one is announced. This is because any ambiguity in the timeframe means the original law remains until such a time that it is clarified by a jurisprudent. As long as no such clarification is given, the earlier law remains firm as before. For example, the following verse can be regarded a case in point:

> *If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, take the evidence of four (reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them, or God ordain for them some (other) way* (4:15).

With respect to this verse, we should realise that during the early period of Islam, the rule was that women who commited indecency were kept in their houses and not allowed out before death overtook them,

unless God revealed a different course of action. Although the expression *or God ordain for them some (other) way* points to the fact that the rule in question may not be perpetually binding, and that sooner or later it could be replaced by another, the time when this might happen is not specified. Therefore, as long as a new law has not be revealed, the same law endures and must be observed. This is one of the most important features of *naskh*.

The Literal Meaning of *Naskh*

What has been said so far refers to a more or less universal definition of *naskh*, where *naskh* is the replacement of an earlier law with a new one. This might involve a change of opinion, such as when the lawgiver having given an apparently enduring definition of a rule, changes his opinion according to developing conditions. However, if these changes had been foreseeable, then the lawgiver would have specified the earlier law as limited. However, if he had foreseen the changing circumstances and specified the earlier law as absolute, it would have been an error on his part, but this is something which could not apply to the Eternal Knowledge of God.

Abrogation in this sense is something quite normal in the case of man's own legislations, since he cannot foresee future consequences. As such, abrogation in the literal sense is a change of opinion, and does not apply to Divine Law. Therefore, abrogation in the case of Divine Law is in a sense simply apparent; it seems as though abrogation takes place, but does not in reality, since from the very time of issuing the first law, God knew that it was limited, but upheld it according to requirements. This is technically a postponement of a declaration until the appropriate time, and is recognised by scholars of jurisprudence (*uṣūliyyūn*). This being so, it can be said that in reality there is no abrogation in Divine Law, for God would have known from the very beginning, when issuing a law, that it was limited in time, but had not declared when until the appropriate time.

The Similarity Between *Naskh* and *Badā'*

Badā' (revision) signifies a change of course in the affairs of the creation. Based on what is manifest, people assume the destiny of a thing to be

unchangeable, and are unaware that it is destined to alter. They only become aware of this at the appointed time, and thus assume that *badā'* has taken place. The two issues of *naskh* and *badā'* are the same in this respect, except that *naskh* pertains to legislation, while *badā'* relates to what is created. A verse concerning *naskh* was mentioned earlier, whilst the following, in *Sūrah al-Ra'd*, refers to *badā'*:

> *God doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book* (13:39).

This means that God can destroy what appears to be permanent and prolong what seems transient. Knowledge of the permanence or transience of things belongs solely to God. This will be elaborated on further.

Types of *Naskh* in the Qur'an

Abrogation in Qur'anic verses has been understood in various ways, some of which are legitimate, whilst others are not:

1) Abrogation of the verse and its content in the sense that the words of the verse are omitted from the Qur'an as well as the ruling stated in it;

2) Abrogation of the verse alone, in the sense that the words used in the verse are omitted from the Qur'an, but the ruling contained in the verse remains binding;

3) Abrogation of the content alone, in the sense that the words of the verse remain as they are, but the ruling contained therein is abrogated;

4) Conditional abrogation, where under certain conditions a ruling is abrogated by the revelation of another verse, but the first verse stands as it is with the addition of circumstantial conditions, in the absence of which the original ruling remains binding. As a result, the application of each of the two rulings – the abrogated and the abrogating – depends on circumstances.

Details of these types of *naskh* follow.

Abrogation of a Verse and Its Contents

In our opinion, this type of abrogation is invalid, because the reasons given for it would undermine the credibility of the Qur'an and create the possibility of its distortion (*taḥrīf*) after the death of the Holy Prophet,

whereas it is impossible for an abrogating verse to be revealed after the passing away of the Prophet.

The issue of an impermissible marriage due to breastfeeding[517] is not mentioned in the Qur'an, but 'Ā'ishah is reported to have said that there was such a verse, that it used to be recited until after the death of the Prophet, but that it was lost when the text was eaten by a goat. She is reported to have said: 'It had been revealed in the Qur'an that ten sucklings make marriage unlawful. This was then abrogated to five sucklings. These two verses [the abrogating and the abrogated] were written on a piece of paper, and it was under my bed. We forgot it and a goat entered my room and ate the paper, and it was lost.'[518]

This attribution is certainly untrue. How it is possible for a verse of the Qur'an to be lost because it was eaten by a goat? According to the narration, the verse was recited by the Companions. In other words, it could not have been recorded on just one sheet of paper, since the loss of the written version would not erase what had been memorised.

What is more interesting is that some prominent Sunnī jurists have regarded the chain of transmission of these narrations as authentic, and they have issued religious edicts on the basis of them. For example, Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī in the book *al-Muḥallā*,[519] as well as some contemporary scholars like Zarqānī in *Manāhil al-'Irfān*.[520]

From the Qur'anic point of view, the following verses clearly deny such a possibility:

> *We have, without doubt, sent down the message; and We assuredly will guard it (from corruption)* (15:9);
>
> *No falsehood can approach it from before it or behind it; it is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, worthy of all praise* (41:42);

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[517] *Irḍā'*: breastfeeding which establishes the mother-child relationship or the bond between a brother and a sister, making a *maḥramiyyah* (unmarriageable kin) relationship, thus prohibiting certain marriages.

[518] 'Before the Messenger of God passed away, these verses were recited, but then a goat ate it [the copy] and it was lost.' See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, 167; *Sunan Tirmidhī*, vol. 3, 456; Abū Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dāramī, *Sunan* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah, 1346 q.), vol. 2, 157; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 1, 224.

[519] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 10, 15-16.

[520] Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 2, 214-216.

And God hath full command over His affairs; but most among mankind know it not (12:21).

Abrogation of the Verse Alone

This happens if a verse containing a legal ruling has been abrogated but the ruling itself remains binding. As evidence, certain alleged verses are identified, an example of which is the so-called 'verse of stoning' (*āyat al-rajm*):

When an old man (*shaykh*) and old woman (*shaykhah*) commit adultery, stone them as a punishment from God, and God is All-Mighty, the Wise.[521]

The second caliph insisted that this verse was part of the Qur'an, but for no apparent reason Zayd ibn Thābit did not record it in the codex. He maintained this belief until the end of his life, although none of the Companions ever acknowledged it.

In the Holy Qur'an, only the punishment of lashing (*jald*) (a hundred times) for fornication is mentioned. Yet 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb believed that in addition stoning (*rajm*) was mentioned in this alleged verse, with the addition of the words *shaykh wa shaykhah*, meaning 'old man and old woman.'

Those who have supported 'Umar's belief have remained puzzled over the interpretation of *shaykh* and *shaykhah*, for why should stoning be exclusively for the aged? In his *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, Mālik ibn Anas (the founder of the Malikī school of jurisprudence) has interpreted the two terms as 'permanently married or widowed man and woman' (*thayyib* and *thayyibah*).[522] But this is also incorrect, because *rajm* is restricted to the *muḥṣan* and *muḥṣanah* (a permanently married man or woman). This is more specific than *thayyib* and *thayyibah*, which applies also to the widow and widower.

As mentioned, none of the Companions accepted this, including Zayd ibn Thābit, who began compiling the Qur'an on the instruction of Abu Bakr and under the supervision of 'Umar, since the Qur'an could not be

[521] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 11, 234-236; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, 208-211; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, 167 and vol. 5, 116; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 1, 23 and vol. 5, 132-138.

[522] See Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Tanwīr al-Ḥawālik fī Sharḥ Muwaṭṭa' Mālik* (Cairo: 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad al-Ḥanafī, n.d.), vol. 3, 42; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 12, 127.

established by a solitary report (*khabar wāḥid*).[523] Other alleged verses are also reported by 'Umar, such as 'the verse of *raghbah*': *allā targhabū 'an ābā'ikum fa innahu fusūqun bikum* (Do not turn away from your fathers as it is disbelief on your part);[524] 'the verse of *jihād*': *an jāhidū kamā jāhadtum awwala marrah* (Make *jihād* as you made *jihād* at first);[525] and 'the verse of *firāsh*': *al-waladu li al-firāsh wa li al-'āhir al ḥajar* (The child is recognised by the marriage, and the adulterer gets the stone).[526] It is possible that he regarded the metrical rhymed prose he heard from the Prophet[527] to be part of the Qur'an.

It is amazing that some Sunnī authorities have issued religious edicts (*fatāwā*) on the basis of these assumptions. The famous jurist Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Aḥmad Sarakhsī has accepted abrogations like these. On the question of three consecutive days of fasting as a substitute for the sacrifice in the *ḥajj* pilgrimage, he has issued a religious edict on the basis of Ibn Mas'ūd's *qirā'ah*, which reads *faṣīyāmu thalāthati ayyāmin mutatābi'āt* (a fast of three consecutive days).[528] He says: 'This reading was prevalent up to the time of Abū Ḥanīfah, and there is no doubt concerning the veracity of Ibn Mas'ūd; it therefore must be accepted.'[529] Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī mentions the same thing in his *al-Muḥallā*.[530]

According to these claims, the verses quoted were allegedly abrogated after the death of the Prophet. But this is contrary to reason, because based on that a verse which is the basis of a fixed legal ruling would be taken from the Qur'an while its content which is an inalterable legal ruling remains binding without any evidence or proof. As such, the *Imāmiyyah* jurists have not taken such narrations as valid proofs in jurisprudence.

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[523] *Khabar wāḥid* or *āḥād* is a 'solitary report,' or any report that is not *mutawātir*. [Trans.]

[524] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, 208-211; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, 167; vol. 5, 116.

[525] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 106.

[526] Ibid.

[527] See Muhammad Hādī Ma'rifat, *Ṣiyānat al-Qur'an min al-Taḥrīf* (Qum: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn, 1418 q.), 159-162.

[528] The actual verse is *faṣīyāmu thalāthati ayyām* (2:196)

[529] Sarakhshī, Shams al-Dīn Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Aḥmad, *al-Uṣūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1393 q.), vol. 2, 81.

[530] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 11, 234-236.

Abrogation of the Contents Alone

This type of abrogation is predominantly accepted by all scholars, who have given it three categories:

> Abrogation on the basis of consensus *(ijmā')* and authentic sunnah;
>
> Abrogation by another verse which has a bearing on the original one;
>
> Abrogation by another verse which has no bearing on the first one. This is when there is a contradiction between the two verses, but the abrogating verse is more recent than the first.

Ayatollah Khoī has accepted the second case only, found no justification for the former, and regarded the third as impossible. This is because it is impossible for there to be contraditions in the Holy Qur'an, and God has said:

> *Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy* (4:82).

In other words, there are no inconsistences or contradictions therein, and this in itself is a proof that the Qur'an is divinely revealed, since if it were in the words from the mind of man, there would be bound to be many inconsistencies.[531]

Those who advocate the three types of abrogation of the content alone have cited examples in each case. For the first type, the verse of *tamattu'* (availing of provision) is given as evidence:

> *Those of you who die and leave widows should bequeath for their widows a year's maintenance (matā') and residence; but if they leave (the residence), there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves, provided it is reasonable. And God is Exalted in Power, Wise* (2:240).

According to an earlier practice, the woman's right to make use of her deceased husband's property lasted for only a year, and apart from that she would not inherit anything. The waiting period (*'iddah*) for widows (before they may re-marry) was also one year. This verse was then abrogated by 2:234, which stipulates the inheritance for the deceased husband's widows as a quarter of the property in the absence of a child,

[531] See Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 306.

and one-eighth if there is a child,[532] and a period of four months and ten days as the waiting period. Therefore, although the wording of the verse still stands, its content (that is, the ruling itself) is abrogated.[533]

However, there is no apparent contradiction between the verses on inheritance and the waiting period, and it is possible that the verse of *tamattu'* is a matter of recommendation, as one learned teacher says, and that the verses on inheritance and the waiting period primarily state the main obligation. Yet exegetes have claimed a consensus of opinion that the content of the verse on *tamattu'* has been totally abrogated, as Sayyid 'Abdullāh al-Shubbar says: 'This verse has been abrogated according to consensus.'[534] Moreover, many traditions have confirmed the abrogation of this verse,[535] and it is thus established by both consensus and traditions.

It is worth mentioning that in the verse of *tamattu'* there are no apparent mandatory clauses, and a waiting period of one year cannot be deduced. What is understood from the verse is that it is improper for the heirs to remove their father's wife from her dwelling for a period of one year, so she would be able to continue to enjoy the same mode of life she that was accustomed to. Nonetheless, the words *but if they leave (the residence), there is no blame on you* (*fa-in kharajna falā junāḥ*) show that remaining at the house is not mandatory for the widow. From the apparent meaning of the verse, the inheritance and one year waiting period can only be deduced with the help of consensus (*ijmā'*) and the traditions stated earlier. Yet, according to the standards of the science of the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), this consensus is based on known evidence (*madrakī*)[536] – in the sense that those who hold the consensus take the traditions into consideration – and cannot be regarded in itself as an independent proof. However, the chains of transmission of

[532] This explanation can be found in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, verse 12.

[533] See Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 204.

[534] *Tafsīr al-Shubbar*, 76.

[535] See al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, section 30 (*abwāb 'idad*), vol. 22, 237-239; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 309.

[536] In the science of the principles of jurisprudence, the consensus which is given credence and can be cited as evidence is the one which is independent and does not rely upon existing proofs. In the latter case, these proofs – and not the consensus which relies on them – must be examined. Such a consensus is technically called *madrakī* and is below the status of an independent proof.

these traditions lack credibility, and are only quoted in the *tafsīr* known as *Tafsīr al-Nu'mānī* (which is of uncertain provenance), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (also uncertain), and *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* (which has an interrupted chain). As such, although this writer in earlier writings had subscribed to the popular view, I now favour the view of the teacher, Ayatollah Khoī, who said:

The content of the verse on *tamattu'* is a recommendation, and not a mandatory order, and there is no contradiction at all regarding the verses of inheritance and the waiting period, and the consensus and traditions which express the contrary lack credibility.

To sum up, there is apparently no verse whose content has been abrogated on the basis of consensus or authentic *sunnah*. Although the possibility cannot be denied, there seems to be no evidence.

Regarding the second assumption – where the abrogating and the abrogated verses have some bearing on each other – the verse of *najwā* (secret talk) has been cited:

> *O ye who believe! When ye consult the messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That will be best for you, and most conducive to purity (of conduct). But if ye find not (the wherewithal), God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful* (58:12).

In the early days people would frequently intrude upon the Prophet's time with quite trivial issues. Hence, in order to curb this, there came the instruction to offer charity to the poor for consulting him, and the problem subsequently subsided. It was Ali who substituted a *dīnār* with ten *dirhams* to give as charity when he took necessary questions to the Holy Prophet, up until the time when the instruction was abrogated by the following verse:

> *Is that ye are afraid of spending sums in charity before your private consultation (with him)? If, then, ye do not do so, and God forgives you, then (at least) establish regular prayer; practise regular charity; and obey God and His messenger. And God is well-acquainted with all that ye do* (58:13).

It is clear that this later verse relates specifically to the previous one. Basically, the criterion for this kind of relationship between two verses is that if the earlier ruling does not exist, the second verse appears ambiguous,

for the second verse is presented in such a way that it supplements or redresses the earlier one.

This kind of abrogation, where the abrogating verse has a bearing upon the abrogated verse, is accepted by all, including the respected teacher who is of the opinion that the only case where abrogation takes place is the abrogation of connected verses.[537]

Another verse can be cited in this regard, which deals with the number of combatants in warfare. The initial rule was that every believer was equivalent to ten unbelievers in battle. Therefore, if the number of the unbelieving combatants was ten times the number of the believers, it was incumbent upon the believers to face them and fight them, and they were promised victory. The verse is as follows:

> *O Prophet! rouse the believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding* (8:65).

But the believers held back, showing little courage to follow this instruction. On account of their reluctance and weakness of faith, God granted them a remission, telling each of them to confront two of the enemies:

> *For the present, God hath lightened your task, for He knoweth that there is weakness in you: but (even so), if there are a hundred of you, Patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of God: for God is with those who patiently persevere* (8:66).

This verse clearly has a bearing on the one before, otherwise there is no point in saying *God hath lightened your task, for He knoweth that there is weakness in you*, and it becomes clear that after the first instruction the Muslims failed, showing a weakness, and this led to the second instruction. Therefore, the second verse abrogates the first, and is regarded as an example of the abrogation of related verses. Imām al-Ṣādiq says in this regard: 'Confronting two men abrogated the order to confront ten men.'[538]

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[537] See Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 305, 395-402.

[538] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 676.

However, Ayatollah Khoī denies abrogation in this case, saying:

> It is not clear whether or not there was a time interval between the revelation of the first and the second verses, and it is possible that both verses were revealed together. Moreover, in abrogation, the abrogated verse must have been acted upon before the revelation of the abrogating verse, otherwise the initial legislation was to no avail. In abrogation, one of the conditions is a time interval, and another is that the former order must have been acted upon, after which abrogation may take place.[539]

He goes on:

> The style of both verses is itself testimony that both were revealed together. Hence, the first instruction is recommended and supererogatory in nature, while the second is mandatory and binding in spirit.[540]

Of course, he has not presented evidence to show that the style of the two verses confirms their being revealed together. In fact, on the contrary, the style and tone of the second verse testifies to its being a later revelation, because it implies that some time had passed and the Muslims had displayed a weakness that led God to lighten the burden of the responsibility. Also, regarding the conditions for abrogation, it should be noted that there is no necessary requirement for an action to have been done, and inactivity can in fact justify an abrogation.

Concerning the third assumption, in which the abrogating verse has no bearing on the abrogated verse, many cases have been mentioned – such as the verse on the punishment for adultery – in which the first command was, should a (married)[541] woman commit adultery, that she must be confined in her house until death takes her or another command is issued:

> *If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, take the evidence of four (reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify,*

[539] Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 375.

[540] Ibid. 376.

[541] This description is based on the reckoning of some by which they have tried to remove the contradiction between this verse and the subsequent one.

confine them to houses until death do claim them, or God ordain for them Some (other) way (4:15);

If two among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, leave them alone; for God is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful (4:16).

Imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said that both these verses have been abrogated by the order for one hundred lashes and stoning. There are many traditions in this regard, and the exegetes have a consensus of opinion here.[542] However, some have disputed it, including the great teacher whose argument was mentioned elsewhere.[543]

Another verse which might be considered here as evidence is the verse on inheritance on the basis of brotherhood in faith, which was stipulated at the beginning of the *hijrah* (the Migration to Medina), according to which the inheritor to a migrant was his brother in faith, and not his unbelieving relatives who stayed behind. Concerning this, Imām al-Bāqir said: 'The Muslims used to inherit from one another according to the initial pledge of brotherhood.'[544] The verse in question is as follows:

Lo! those who believed and adopted exile, and fought for the faith, with their property and their persons, in the cause of God, as well as those who gave them asylum and aid - these are all friends and protectors (awliyā'), one of another (8:72).

The first group referred to in this verse are the Migrants (*muhājirūn*), and the second are the believers of Medina known as the Helpers (*anṣār*). The Prophet concluded a pact of brotherhood between the *muhājir* and the *anṣār*, thus *awliyā'* ('friends,' sing. *walī*) is used here in the spirit of this brotherhood as 'close relatives' who can be considered inheritors. This ruling remained in force until the revelation of the following verse from *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, which restricted close relationship (*wilāyah*) regarding inheritance to blood relatives, annulling the issue of inheritance on account of *hijrah* and faith:

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[542] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 20; *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 227-228; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 339.

[543] Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, volume 2, page 308.

[544] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 561.

> *And those among (blood) relationship with each other are more entitled to inheritence from one another, in the Decree of God, than the (brotherhood) of the believers and the migrants* (33:6).

All the exegetes have a consensus of opinion on this point.[545]

Conditional Abrogation

This type of abrogation may be unfamiliar, but by reflecting on many of the verses considered to be abrogated, it is discovered that their abrogation is not absolute, but rather depends on certain conditions of the time, in the sense that with a change in circumstances the previous ruling is abrogated and replaced with a more suitable one. However, should the same circumstances reappear, then the relevent ruling would again become applicable and binding.

The clearest examples of conditional abrogation are the verses concerning forgiveness for the troubles caused by the enemies of Islam. The early Muslims were told to remain steadfast and patiently persevere against persecution by the polytheists of Mecca, since they were in a position of weakness, and if they retaliated, they would have been destroyed. It is thus stated in *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, the sixty-fifth *sūrah* revealed in Mecca:

> *Tell those who believe, to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God...* (45:14).

> *The Days of God* alludes to the formidable events and painful punishments decreed by God, and the verse gives warning of the chastisements which will come at the appropriate time.[546] Otherwise, those who do not fear Divine Wrath – that is, they do not fear God or His just reprisal – do not deserve the forgiveness or amnesty inherent in Islam. The command to forgive is merely due to the Muslims' position of weakness, which they had to take into consideration. When the Muslim community gained strength, the permission to fight was given:

[545] See Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, 8.

[546] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 75; vol. 6, 304.

> *To those who are being fought against, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged - and verily God is Most Powerful for their aid...* (22:39).

And then the actual order to fight came in these verses:

> *O prophet! rouse the believers to the fight* (8:65);
>
> *...assault ye him likwise ...* (2:194)

It is to be noted that all these verses were revealed in Medina. Similarly, in dealing with the Jews of Medina, initially the order to forgive was given, but, at the same time, it was clear that this remission was temporary:

> *...but forgive and overlook, till God accomplishes His purpose...* (2:109).[547]

Yet after the Muslims gained strength and the Jewish conspiracy within Medina expanded, the order to fight against them was issued until such a time as they accepted the paying of the *jizyah*:[548]

> *...until they pay the tribute with willing submission...* (9:29).[549]

Some have interpreted such forgiveness as within the spirit of religious tolerance that should prevail within Islam, and do not regard these verses on forgiveness as abrogated.[550] As mentioned earlier, however, forgiveness in the face of a hardhearted and perfidious enemy might be considered a compromise inconsistent with the dignity of Islam, unless particular circumstances so demand.

We have presented these verses as 'conditional abrogation,' because the abrogated verses relate to specific conditions where forgiveness is binding. Other verses that stipulate gradual changes in legal rulings are also of this type. This is where a ruling has initially been issued in a soft tone and then becomes more severe, as, for example, verses giving permission to fight (22:39-40). They later included fighting with hostile unbelievers (8:61; 4:91), and thereafter included unbelievers who were in

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[547] The revelation of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* began in 2 AH, and is regarded as the first Medinan *sūrah*.

[548] *Jizyah* is a tax levied on the non-Muslims by the Islamic state in exchange for the protection they receive and in lieu of the taxes, such as *zakāt*, that only Muslims pay. [Trans.]

[549] *Sūrah al-Tawbah* was revealed in the latter years of the *hijrah*.

[550] See Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 308.

neighbouring territory (9:123). Finally, a declaration for fending against all hostile unbelievers and polytheists was issued (9:5, 36). Verses concerning the prohibition of intoxicants also follow a similar pattern.

These types of degrees are flexible, and in accord with the prevailing conditions of time and place. Therefore, there is no absolute abrogation in such verses.

The Number of Abrogated Verses

Those who have disregarded the prescribed conditions for abrogation, or failed to understand the general sense of *naskh* as understood by the predecessors, have identified up to 228 abrogated verses. This seems to be an exaggerated figure and inconsistent with the rules of *naskh*.

Ayatollah Khoī does not accept more than one abrogated verse (the verse on private consultation [*najwā*]), and that is because the abrogating verse has a bearing on the abrogated verse. However, considering the others mentioned here of this type, as well as the matter of conditional abrogation, the number of abrogated verses would be more than twenty, although in most cases it is not a matter of absolute abrogation. As such, the question of abrogated verses in the Qur'an should not be a cause of confusion for students of the Qur'an.

Examples of Abrogated Verses

	Abrogated Verse	Abrogating Verse
Verse on Private Consultation	يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نَاجَيْتُمُ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ نَجْوَاكُمْ صَدَقَةً (*Sūrah al-Mujādalah* 58:12)	أَأَشْفَقْتُمْ أَنْ تُقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ نَجْوَاكُمْ صَدَقَاتٍ فَإِذْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ (*Sūrah al-Mujādalah* 58:13)
Verse on the Number of Combatants	يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ حَرِّضِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَى الْقِتَالِ إِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ عِشْرُونَ صَابِرُونَ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتَيْنِ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفًا مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ (*Sūrah al-Anfāl* 8:65)	الْآنَ خَفَّفَ اللَّهُ عَنْكُمْ وَعَلِمَ أَنَّ فِيكُمْ ضَعْفًا فَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ صَابِرَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتَيْنِ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أَلْفٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفَيْنِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ (*Sūrah al-Anfāl* 8:66)

	Abrogated Verse	Abrogating Verse
Verse on Widows' Provisions	وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لِأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ (*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:240)	وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْنَنتُمْ فِي أَنفُسِكُمْ (*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:235) وَلَكُمْ نِصْفُ مَا تَرَكَ أَزْوَاجُكُمْ إِن لَّمْ يَكُن لَّهُنَّ وَلَدٌ (*Sūrah al-Nisā'* 4:12)
Verses on Debauchery	وَاللَّاتِي يَأْتِينَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مِن نِّسَائِكُمْ فَاسْتَشْهِدُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنكُمْ (*Sūrah al-Nisā'* 4:15) وَاللَّذَانِ يَأْتِيَانِهَا مِنكُمْ فَآذُوهُمَا فَإِن تَابَا وَأَصْلَحَا فَأَعْرِضُوا عَنْهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيمًا (*Sūrah al-Nisā'* 4:16)	ٱلزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِئَةَ جَلْدَةٍ (*Sūrah an-Nūr* 24:2)
Verse on Inheritance by Faith	إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا... أُولَٰئِكَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ (*Sūrah al-Anfāl* 8:72)	وَأُولُو الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ (*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* 33:6)
Verses on Treaty	*Sūrah al-Nisā'* 4:89-90; *Sūrah al-Anfāl* 8:72; *Sūrah al-Mumtaḥanah* 60:10, etc.	*Sūrah al-Tawbah*
Verses on Forgiveness	قُل لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَغْفِرُوا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ أَيَّامَ اللَّهِ (*Sūrah al-Jāthiyah* 45:14) فَاعْفُوا وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ (*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:109)	The verses that include the order to resist and fight back

Misgivings about Abrogation

1) Just like *badā'* within creation, *naskh* in legislation – in its literal sense – is impossible for God, for both concepts have a similar meaning, that is, 'the emergence of a new opinion' due to a lack of foresight, or a change leading to a new legislation or creation in the face of certain obstacles. This would mean that there was an earlier ignorance, and this is inconsistent with the eternal Knowledge of God.

However, although both *naskh* and *badā'* appear as such, in reality, and according to God's Knowledge, such a change has been foreseen, but since this is unknown to the people, it seems like a change of position or attitude. It means that when the right time comes, God makes it clear that an obligation which was stipulated earlier as absolute was actually limited and temporary from the very beginning. In the case of *badā'*, changes that take place in creation have all been foreseen, and come about at the appropriate time. Therefore, both *naskh* and *badā'* superficially appear to be changes of position, while in reality there is no change.

2) Misunderstandings regarding abrogation have caused some to deviate and act ignorantly upon the abrogated verses. The reply is clear, because the ignorance of some comes from themselves, and if they had knowledge, they would easily distinguish the abrogating from the abrogated, the general from the specific, and the absolute from the limited. Likewise, distinguishing the equivocal from the unequivocal, although difficult for some people, is easily achieved by those grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm*).

3) Misgivings over the existence of abrogating and abrogated verses in the Qur'an which appear to contradict one another. Such contradictions are denied by the verse:

> *Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy* (4:82).

This negates any possibility of contradiction or inconsistency in the Qur'an.

We should bear in mind that a contradiction is established when there is a real opposition, and not necessarily when there just seems to be one. If the ruling in the abrogated verse is different to the ruling in the abrogating verse in terms of time and place, relevant to which each

ruling addresses certain points, then there is in fact no contradiction between the two rulings.

4) Another misgiving questions whether the existence of abrogated verses in the Qur'an has any benefit if the words no longer have any meaning.

Most of the abrogated verses in the Qur'an that have been presented here are conditional, and each of the apparently abrogated verses has a specific function in its own context; hence the criterion for its validity cannot be dismissed altogether. In addition, the very existence of both abrogating and abrogated verses in the Qur'an demonstrates different stages in the application of the legal rulings. This in itself has historical-religious value by illustrating the developments in perfecting the *sharī'ah*.

CHAPTER XI

THE IMMUNITY OF THE QUR'AN FROM DISTORTION (*TAḤRĪF*)

Introduction

Taḥrīf, which means to twist, distort or change a word from its original meaning, is a deliberate act done for a purpose in either of two ways, viz. *taḥrīf* in the structure of speech (verbal *taḥrīf*) and *taḥrīf* in the content of speech (substantial *taḥrīf*).

Taḥrīf in the structure of speech, or verbal *taḥrīf*, can take three forms:

1) reduction by the omission of certain words on which the desired meaning depends. An example of this type, according to Muslims, is the omission of the glad tidings of the previous prophets in relation to the coming of the Prophet of Islam in the Torah and the New Testament.

2) the addition of a word or phrase so that the original meaning is lost. An example is the addition of superfluous topics, such as the attribution of major sins to the prophets in the Old and New Testaments.

3) a change in the structure of a word so that it has another meaning.

A distortion in the content of the speech (conceptual distortion) means that, although the structure of the speech is not interfered with, the meaning is twisted to mean something different from that intended. Mu'āwiyah's distortion of the well-known statement of the Holy Prophet to 'Ammār ibn Yāsir: 'You shall be killed by a rebel group (*al-fi'at al-bāghiyah*),' by referring it to the army of Imām 'Alī for whom 'Ammār fought, is an example of conceptual distortion.

It is obvious that any fabrication or interpolation is verbal distortion (*taḥrif lafẓī*) and any opinionated interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*) can be considered to be conceptual distortion.

Taḥrīf in respect of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* can refer to both verbal and conceptual distortion.

Distortion of the wording of the *sunnah* was mostly related to verbal distortion. The Prophet anticipated such a thing, and gave warning of it during his farewell pilgrimage (*ḥajjat al-widā'*):

Lies attributed to me have multiplied, and will multiply further. Thus, anyone who intentionally attributes a lie to me should prepare for his place in the hellfire.[551]

As history bears witness, fabrications of traditions of the Prophet reached such a level that when Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī decided to make a compilation of them, he came across a whole pile of fabricated narrations. He himself said that he selected his authentic traditions, which come to more than seven thousand, from six hundred thousand narrations. However, in spite of his rigorous research, some Sunnī scholars still believe that some of the traditions in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* are weak (*ḍa'īf*).[552]

However, the distortion with regards to the Qur'an as the foremost source of the religion has been a conceptual distortion which is described in the traditions as 'opinionated interpretation' (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*). Those who make opinionated interpretations, which according to some are *mutawātir*[553] and widespread, are told: 'Whoever interprets the Qur'an, moulding it to his opinion, should prepare for his place in the hellfire.'[554]

Tafsīr bi al-ra'y, or opinionated interpretation, entails the manipulation of the revealed text in order to reconcile it with particular objectives. It has the same meaning as that mentioned in relation to conceptual distortion.

The emergence of diverse sects and schools of thought within Islam that regard their respective ideas as founded on the Qur'an in one way or another bespeaks conceptual distortion. Interestingly enough, distortion of the first type, i.e., verbal distortion as fabrication, has never been mentioned in the traditions transmitted from the Prophet that concern the Qur'an.

In a tradition transmitted from Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir with reference to distortion of the Qur'an, conceptual distortion is emphasised where

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[551] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 5, 80.

[552] In the parlance of the sciences of *ḥadīth*, a weak (*ḍa'īf*) tradition is one that does not fit into the categories of authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or good (*ḥasan*). [Trans.]

[553] A *mutawātir ḥadīth* is one which has been reported by so many different chains of transmission that such a number of narrators in every generation would normally not be able to agree on fabricating a tradition without the fact becoming known. [Trans.]

[554] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 16.

the Imām explains a verse about how the Jews abandoned the book:[555] 'Their casting of the Book was that they safeguarded its letters (words) but distorted its limits.'[556]

Muslims have no differences of opinion about the occurrence of distortion in the meanings of the Qur'an. What they consider debatable is verbal distortion. Be that as it may, they all acknowledge that verbal distortion in the sense of addition has not happened with the Qur'an, because this would necessitate speech equal to that of the Qur'an, the challenge (*taḥaddī*) having been met and the Qur'an's ceasing to be inimitable. Therefore the contentious issue is verbal distortion in the sense of omission from the Qur'an.

We should bear in mind from the outset that the notion of omission has proponents in both the Sunnī and Shī'a schools of thought, for if the claims of *taḥrīf* are based on the traditions of *taḥrīf* as recorded in *ḥadīth* collections, it is well known that this sort of narration is to be found more in Sunnī collections of *ḥadīth* than in Shī'a collections. And if the opinion of a scholar is needed, again we know that this view is maintained by both the Shī'a author Muḥaddith Nūrī, who wrote *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb fī Taḥrīf Kitāb Rabb al-Arbāb*, and the Sunnī author Ibn al-Khaṭīb Muhammad Muhammad 'Abd al-Laṭīf, in his *al-Furqān*.

Generally speaking, *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an can be traced back to the time when there was disagreement between those who were in possession of the first manuscripts, when there was close rivalry over the writing down of the text, the correct spelling and recitation, each group considering only its own version to be correct. This continued until the reign of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, when the manuscripts were standardised by those who were not qualified enough for this pivotal task, giving rise to differing copies of the Qur'an, and as previously mentioned, inconsistency between these copies and the main original manuscript which was kept in Medina as a reference. In addition, some of the Companions and Successors were critical of certain copies of the manuscripts and recitations (*qirā'āt*). Most of these criticisms came from 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, 'Ā'ishah, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and their kind. There were accounts which emerged from

[555] The Quran, 3:187: *They cast it behind their backs and bought thereby a little gain.*

[556] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, 53.

these arguments that the *Ḥashwiyyah*[557] had a strong desire to record in their most important sources of *ḥadīth*, thereby giving rise to the matter of *taḥrīf* in the text of the Qur'an.

With the technical means at their disposal, researchers attempted to resolve the problem of these narrations and the clear suggestion of *taḥrīf*, but since they were bound by the soundness of their chains of transmission (*isnād*), their efforts bore no fruit, and so finally they resorted to conceiving the notion of the 'abrogation of recitation' (*naskh al-tilāwah*). This is while the false nature of this kind of abrogation has been clarified on the basis of rules according to the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Here the scholars were faced with two options: either these narrations, and all they implied, had to be accepted, and religious edicts be given on their basis – which a particular group did, thinking that the chains of transmission were authentic – or if there is no room for an acceptable interpretation, they should be totally rejected. For this reason, although Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī was a perspicacious jurist (*faqīh*), he regarded *rajm* (stoning) as explicitly justified in the Qur'an, and in this regard, he would cite a narration reported by Ubayy ibn Ka'b:

> [He said,] 'How many verses are contained in *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*?' and he was told: 'Seventy-three or seventy-four verses.' He said: 'How is that, when this *sūrah* was equal to *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, or larger than it, and it contained the Verse of Stoning *(āyat al-rajm)*: 'Whenever an old man (*shaykh*) or an old woman (*shaykhah*) commits adultery, stone them, as this is the punishment set by God, and God is All-Mighty, All-Wise'?'

Ibn Ḥazm says: 'The chain of transmission of this narration is as clear as the shining sun, and it is therefore indubitable.' He then adds: 'Although this verse is amongst those whose words are abrogated, its ruling

[557] *Ḥashawa* literally means cotton or wool and the like which is put inside quilts, pillows and mattresses. In Islam, *ḥashwiyyah* is a pejorative term applied by some Muslim theologians such as the Mu'tazilites to the traditionists of *Ḥadīth* (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), because the latter mostly believe in anthropomorphism and similitude to God. In addition, *ḥashwiyyah* is applied to the traditionists of *Ḥadīth* because they would haphazardly insert in their theology certain traditions reported from the Messenger of God that had no authentic source. [Trans.]

remains.'[558] In the following chapters, we shall examine the inaccuracy of Ibn Ḥazm's testimony.[559]

In addition, on the issue of determining the amount of breastfeeding which establishes a *maḥram*[560] relationship, he says:

> Those who claim that breastfeeding fewer than five times does not foster a *maḥram* relationship have cited a narration from the Mother of the Faithful (*umm al-mu'minūn*), 'Ā'ishah, on the authority of Ḥammād and 'Abd al-Raḥmān, on the authority of 'Urwah, stating thus: 'What was initially revealed in the Qur'an is the following: 'Nothing fosters as *maḥram* relationship except breastfeeding ten times.' It was then revealed: 'Five times acknowledged breastfeeding (would foster *maḥram* relationship).'' According to 'Abd al-Raḥmān, it is thus stated: 'Amongst the verses being revealed and later abrogated is the verse, 'Nothing fosters the *maḥram* relationship except breastfeeding ten times,' and then it was followed by 'Five times acknowledged breastfeeding.'' 'Ā'ishah adds: 'As long as the Prophet was alive, these verses were being recited.'

Ibn Ḥazm goes on to say: 'In terms of accuracy, honesty and reliability of the narrators, these two narrations occupy the highest level...' He then deals with the problem in the text: how it could be possible for something to be deleted from the Qur'an after the death of the Prophet. This is a great offense with respect to the Qur'an. Thereafter, he tries to find justification by saying that it was the text of the passage that was deleted, but its ruling remains binding – exactly as with the Verse of Stoning.[561] It is very clear that this is unacceptable.

This kind of perception enticed some of our predecessors, such as Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), to subscribe to the notion of *taḥrīf*. In

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[558] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 11, 234-235.

[559] It is said that he is the first person to have accused the Shī'a of believing in the notion of *taḥrīf* and thereby unjustly cursing them, while this curse is more compatible with the acceptance of his views. See Ali ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1395 q.), vol. 4, 182.

[560] *Maḥram* refers to those with whom marriage is prohibited (usually because of close kinship). [Trans.]

[561] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 10, 14-16.

his book *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī mentions *taḥrīf* and that the 'Uthmānī copy of the Qur'an is defective:

> Some of the people of mystical disclosure (*ahl al-mukāshafah*) think that many of the abrogated verses have been deleted from the 'Uthmānī codex.

He goes on:

> If the Prophet himself were putting the Qur'an into writing and compiling it, and deleted such verses, there would be no objection, and we would have completely accepted it.

Elsewhere he says:

> Had it not been for some narrow-minded people, and had it not been equal to imparting wisdom to the undeserving ones, we would have certainly stated what has been excluded from the 'Uthmānī codex, although there is no doubt about the present content of the 'Uthmānī codex.

Sha'rānī says: 'But he says in the book *al-Futūḥāt al-Miṣriyyah* that there is the consensus of the *ummah* with respect to this codex, believing that nothing had been deleted in it.'[562]

Some recent scholars are deceived by such narrations, such as the author of *al-Furqān*, who has embellished his book with accounts such as those mentioned earlier, thereby initiating much public outrage throughout Egypt. On the other hand, the Imāmiyyah jurists rejected these groundless notions, regarding them as inconsequential, and did not rely on them for any religious edict (*fatwā*) or issue of jurisprudence (*fiqh*).[563]

[562] See 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Ahmad Sha'rānī, *al-Yawāqīt wa al-Jawāhir* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1378 q.), vol. 1, 139.

[563] There are none amongst the *Imāmiyyah* jurists of the past or present who have ever been deceived by the apparent meaning of such groundless narrations.

The Literal and Technical Meaning of *Taḥrīf*

Literal Meaning of *Taḥrīf*

Taḥrīf refers to the moving of something from one place to another. It is derived from *ḥarf al-shay'*, which means an integral component of something.

The Qur'an says:

> *And among mankind is he who worships God as if on a fringe ('alā ḥarfin), so that if good befalls him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalls him, he turns his face* (22:11).

In his exegesis to this verse, Zamakhsharī says:

> That is, they situate themselves on the fringe of religion and not at the core of it. And this is an adage which reflects that, in relation to their religion, they are in a state of agitation and apprehension and not at peace and tranquil. It is like one who lodges on the fringe of an army, so that if victory is in the offing, he is at ease and assured, otherwise he would escape.[564]

Taḥrīf in relation to a word or phrase means interpreting it in a way other than its real meaning, or in a way which is not obvious. It is as if the innate implication of a word has a specific ground that accords with its primary nature, but it has been uprooted and placed elsewhere.

It is clear that *taḥrīf* in this sense means diverting a word from its true course and manipulating its substance. Therefore it is tantamount to changing the meaning of the word, for as God says:

> *...there are those who displace (yuḥarrifūna) words from their (right) places...* (4:46);
>
> *They change words from their contexts...* (5:13).

This means that they interpret words in a way that differs from the conventions of speech, and is therefore nothing but a distortion.

According to *Lisān al-'Arab*:

[564] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 146.

> The *taḥrīf* of a word from its position means changing it, and *taḥrīf* of the Qur'an means to substitute the meaning of a word or expression with something similar to its real meaning, as the Jews used to change the meanings of the Torah to something close to the intended meaning. For this reason, God describes their actions, thus: *They displace (yuḥarrifūna) words from their right places* (4:46).

By 'close to the intended meaning' (*qarībatu al-shabīh*) he means that the meaning of the word is replaced with a meaning which is very close to its real and original meaning. This expression is consistent with the meaning of *ḥarf*, which implies alongside a thing and conceptually close.

Rāghib Iṣfahānī says something similar:

> *Taḥrīf* of a word means that a word is interpreted in a particular sense although it is capable of being interpreted in more than one way. In other words, *taḥrīf* is done when the word has two possible meanings etymologically, and one limits it to one of these in a way contrary to of the intent of the speaker.

In his exegesis of the verse, *They change words from their context (mawāḍi'ih)*, Ṭabrisī says:

> That is, they interpret it contrary to what has been revealed, and change the descriptions of the Holy Prophet. Hence, *taḥrīf* is done in two ways, namely malicious interpretation and changing and substitution. An example of the latter is explained by the verse, *And they say: It is from God, when it is not from God* (3:78)[565]

And Sha'rānī says:

> *Mawāḍi'* in this noble verse signifies the meanings and implications of the verses. It means that they do not interpret the words according to their apparent meanings, but rather in a way very far from the apparent meanings.[566]

It also means that they take a word from where it should be:

> *They change words from their right places* (5:41)

[565] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 173.

[566] In the margin of Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 55.

Zamakhsharī explains:

> The meaning of the verse is that the word has a position in which it deserves to be placed. The distorters take it from its position and separate it, just like a stranger who is away from his home town.[567]

In this regard, Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir is reported to have said:

> Among the instances of throwing the Book away [by the Jews] was that they would honour its letters but distort its limits [and meanings]. They were engaged in quoting its expressions but heedless in observing its meanings. The ignorant are pleased to preserve their narration, but their lack of understanding makes the learned grieve.[568]

What the Imām is implying here is that they are concerned with letters and words, but they misinterpret the meanings of the verses. As such, not acting upon the real intent of the Book of God is tantamount to throwing it away. In another tradition, Imām al-Bāqir says:

> Some reciters of the Qur'an honour its words but through lack of respect to the Qur'an they spoil its limits [and meanings], dealing with it like a receptacle. May God not multiply such bearers of the Qur'an![569]

Technical Meaning of *Taḥrīf*

In a technical sense *taḥrīf* has the following seven meanings:

1) Distortion of the meaning of a word (*taḥrīf ma'nawī*), where speech is construed in a way different from its accepted meaning, conventional implications and common usage. For this reason such an interpretation is rejected and prohibited by the sacred law (*sharī'ah*), where it is called *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (opinionated interpretation). The Prophet says: 'Whoever interprets the Qur'an by his own opinion should prepare for his place in the Fire.'[570]

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[567] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 517.

[568] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, 53, no. 16.

[569] Muhammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Shāfī (Talkhīṣ al-Wāfī)*, (lithograph, n.d.), vol. 2, 24.

[570] Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī, *'Awālī al-Li'ālī* (Qum: Sayyid al-Shuhadā', 1403 q.), vol. 4, 104, no. 154.

Tafsīr bi al-ra'y takes place when a person intentionally imposes his own opinion on the Qur'an. Earlier, Ṭabrisī had described it as *sū' al-ta'wīl* (misinterpretation) which is close to the literal meaning of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. As will be shown later, the Qur'an has only used the word *taḥrīf* in the sense of 'corruption of the meaning' (*taḥrīf ma'nawī*).

2) Positional distortion (*taḥrīf mawḍi'ī*). This means that the recording of a verse (*āyah*) or chapter (*sūrah*) is contrary to the arrangement of its revelation. This is very rare, but, as explained earlier, the recording of the chapters in the structure of the Qur'an is different to the order of their revelation.

3) Distortion in the reading of the Qur'an (*taḥrīf al-qirā'ah*), or to read a word contrary to the common reading prevalent amongst the Muslims. This concerns most of the speculative preferences certain reciters use in a bid to promote readings (*qirā'āt*) which cannot be traced back to the early period of Islam; their own inventions lead to such distortions. In our opinion this is impermissible, because, as mentioned in the noble tradition, the Qur'an is one and is revealed by the One and Only God.[571]

4) Distortion in the utterance of words, as with the differing dialects of the Arab tribes. This is permissible so long as the original structure of the word is not undermined and its meaning is unchanged. We believe that the traditions on the Seven *Aḥruf* – assuming that their chains of transmission are sound – refer to pronunciation in the different Arab dialects. And even if it is not an Arab dialect, the tradition still covers it, for according to another tradition: 'The angels take it up in Arabic.'[572] But if a difference in dialect causes *laḥn*, i.e., error, and is inconsistent with the rules of Arabic grammar, it is impermissible, as God says:

> *(It is) an Arabic Qur'an, without any crookedness* (39:28).

And in compliance with the ruling 'Learn the Qur'an in its Arabic (language),'[573] we are obliged to recite it in correct Arabic. Similarly, if a distortion in dialect brings about a change in the meaning of a word, it is impermissible in our view, especially if it is done intentionally and with an evil objective. For example, as mentioned by Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-

[571] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 630, no. 12.

[572] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 866, no. 4.

[573] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 4, 865, section (*bāb*) 30, no. 1.

Maghribī,[574] when uttering *rā'inā* ('listen to us') (2:104), the Jews would change the accent of the letter *'ayn* and turn it into a term which means 'you are our villain.' Also, it is stated in *Sūrah al-Nisā'*:

> *Some of those who are Jews change words from their context and say: 'We hear and disobey,' and 'Hear thou as one who heareth not,' and 'Listen to us!' ('rā'inā') distorting (layyan) with their tongues and slandering religion* (4:46).

Interpreting *layyan* in this verse, Rāghib Iṣfahānī says: 'They would utter the word distortedly and erroneously.'

5) *Taḥrīf* by substituting a word with one similar or different. This was deemed permissible by 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd if the actual intended meaning is maintained. He claimed that, provided a verse of majesty is not changed into a verse of mercy, or vice versa, there is no harm if instead of *al-'alīm* (All-Knowing), *al-ḥakīm* (All-Wise) is said:

I listened to the recitation of different reciters and I found them close to one another. So, recite the Qur'an in the manner you have learnt it; for example, *halumma* and *ta'āl* can be interchanged.

We stated earlier that such a practice with respect to the text of revelation is impermissible, because the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'an, which is based upon its meaning, depends on its wording.[575]

6) *Taḥrīf* by addition. This is also attributed to 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and some other Companions. In order to clarify an ambiguity in the wording of a verse, they would add certain words to the text, but did not regard the additional words to be part of the Book. If no error results and the abovementioned condition is met, there is nothing wrong with it. The addition of words in the interpretation of certain verses that occurs in some of the traditions transmitted from the immaculate Imāms is similar to this.

Seemingly no Muslims have ever claimed that there is any addition in the existing text of the Qur'an except the 'Ajāridah (the followers of 'Abd al-Karīm ibn 'Ajrad, one of the Kharijite leaders), who did not consider

[574] See Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Raḥmān*, vol. 1, 113-114.

[575] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 316-324.

Sūrah Yusuf to be part of the Qur'an. They regarded this *sūrah* to be a love story, and not worthy of being part of divine Revelation.[576]

One of the errors of Ibn Mas'ūd was to think that the *mu'awwidhatān* (*Sūrah al-Falaq* and *Sūrah al-Nās*, which begin with *qul a'ūdhū*) are not an integral part of the Qur'an. He said: 'Do not add that which is not part of the Qur'an, and these two *sūrah*s must have been deleted from the codex.'[577]

7) *Taḥrīf* by omission. This has two types, one of which is omission in recitation. For example, Ibn Mas'ūd is reported to have been reciting the following verse without the phrase *Him Who hath created* (*mā khalaqa*):

> *By the night enshrouding and the day resplendent, and Him Who hath created male and female...* (92: 1-3).[578]

Also, A'mash used to recite *ḥā mīm 'ayn sīn qāf* (حم عسق) as *ḥā mīm sīn qāf* (حم سق) without the *'ayn*. It is claimed that Ibn 'Abbās also recited in the same way. [579]

The other type is when there is any omission in the present text of the Qur'an in the sense that a letter, word, sentence, verse or chapter is taken out.

Regarding each of these types, there are narrations recorded in authoritative books of tradition, such as the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sittah* (the six canonical Sunnī collections of *ḥadīth*) and others which we have mentioned before and intend to elaborate on.

The Qur'an and the Word *Taḥrīf*

The Qur'an has used the word *taḥrīf* only in its literal sense, i.e., distortion in the meaning of a word and interpreting it incorrectly, and this is known as misinterpretation (*sū' al-tafsīr*) or opinionated interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*). *Taḥrīf* in this sense refers to a distortion of the meaning.

Earlier we discussed the verses:

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[576] Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 1, 128; but according to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, this attribution has not been proven. He says: 'It is reported that they do not believe in *Sūrah Yūsuf* as part of the Qur'an, although this has not been proven to us.' See Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, 178.

[577] See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 571.

[578] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 211; vol. 5, 35.

[579] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 21.

...[they] change words from their context... (4:46),

and:

They change words from their places... (5:13).

'An mawāḍi'ihi in these verses refers to when the import of words is distorted as a betrayal of trust after being used in its real sense, which is based on its apparent meaning or the circumstantial evidence present at the time. The meaning of *min ba'di mawāḍi'ih* (5:41) explicitly indicates *taḥrīf* in the sense of changing words to mean something else.

It is stated in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*:

> *...though a party of them heard the Word of God, and distorted it after they had understood it knowingly* (2:75).

That is, after understanding the real meaning – which is what God intends – and discovering that it is contrary to their own interests, they would distort it so that it became favourable to them.

Ṭabrisī and Shaykh Ṭūsī before him have described this kind of *taḥrīf* as misinterpretation (*sū' al-ta'wīl*). Ṭūsi says in *al-Tibyān*: *'Taḥrīf* is of two types, namely, misinterpretation and changing or substitution.'[580] This happens if the intonation of a word is changed in such a way that its meaning is distorted, as mentioned in verse 78 of *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān*.

Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh says:

> Amongst the meanings of *taḥrīf* is the opinionated interpretation of a word in the sense that it is construed in a way different from its conventional meaning. This is the closest meaning we understand from *taḥrīf*. For their pretext in denying the Prophet and his prophethood lies in this meaning [of *taḥrīf*]. As such, they would misinterpret the glad tidings of his prophethood.[581]

'Abduh implies that the plausible meaning of *taḥrīf* mentioned in these verses refers to a distortion of meaning, and what gave them courage to misinterpret the glad tidings and therefore deny the prophethood of the Messenger was this type of distortion.

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[580] Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 3, 470.

[581] Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Manār*, vol. 5, 140.

In his exegesis of the verse *[they] change words from their contexts* (4:46), and 5:13, where the same statement occurs, Zamakhsharī says: 'They pervert the word from its [supposed] position,'[582] for if a word is not interpreted according to its apparent meaning or implications, it is tantamount to removing it from its position.

In addition, the distortion of the Old and New Testaments which is indicated in the Qur'an is either through misinterpretation, in the sense of manipulating them contrary to the truth – without any changing of the words – or in addition to that, changing the pronunciation of words when reading. As God says:

> *And lo! there is a party of them who distort the Scripture with their tongues, that ye may think that what they say is from the Scripture, when it is not from the Scripture. And they say: 'It is from God,' when it is not from God; and they speak a lie concerning God knowingly* (3:78).

This is because if a word is pronounced contrary to the way it should be, it will be treated as another word and not the original word. And in a bid to conceal the truth and not to disclose the glad tidings of the coming of the Holy Prophet, some of the People of the Book[583] distorted certain meanings without changing the words.

Finally, *taḥrīf* in the sense of addition, deletion or the changing of words to others – which is the technical meaning of *taḥrīf* – has not been used in the Qur'an, as can be observed.

The Notion of the Abrogation of Recitation

The abrogation of recitation is mentioned by several traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) and a group of orthodox Sunnīs. With this concept they have tried to solve problems surrounding certain narrations which in their opinion are authentic, and which indicate the deletion of a considerable number of Qur'anic verses. In this way they affirm that the recitation of a particular group of verses has been abrogated, but their rulings remain intact; for example, the verse on the ten instances of breastfeeding,[584]

[582] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 633.

[583] The People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) is the respectful title given to the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an. [Trans.]

[584] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, no. 3421, 740.

the verse that mentions the stoning of an old man and woman,[585] the verse saying that nothing fills the belly of Adam's son except dust,[586] and many other such alleged verses, which, they believe, had been in the Qur'an and were recited during the time of the Prophet, but were later taken out and subsequently forgotten. Nevertheless, acting accordingly remains obligatory. With this peculiar methodology they strive to justify traditions which they believe to be authentic.[587] Shī'a scholars, however, have rejected all such narrations – which explicitly contradict the Qur'an – and do not consider any of their chains of transmission authentic. Basically, the notion of the abrogation of recitation is an unjustifiable claim made by certain Sunnī scholars.

A leading Sunni *uṣūlī* academic, Muhammad ibn Aḥmad Sarakhsī, is one such scholar. Although he strongly rejects the idea of abrogation after the demise of the Prophet, he has accepted that it is possible that it occurred during the Prophet's lifetime, even though it remained unknown to the first Companions. He says:

> The declaration of the abrogation of recitation while the ruling remains in force – according to the statements of our scholars – is as follows: the compensatory fasting for a vow (*qasam*) is three consecutive days according to this recitation of Ibn Mas'ūd: *faṣiyāmu thalāthati ayyāmin mutatābi'āt*. This recitation (with the addition of *mutatābi'āt*) was well known until the time of Abū Ḥanīfah, but it has not been narrated through *mutawātir* narrations, since the Qur'an has been established by them. On the other hand, there is no doubt about the veracity and reliability of Ibn Mas'ūd. So, there is no option but for us to say that the Qur'an used to be read with the recitation of Ibn Mas'ūd. Then it was

[585] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, no. 817, 537-543; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3, no. 4194, 912.

[586] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, nos. 444-447, 296-298; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, no. 2286, 500-501.

[587] Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) strived hard to defend some of his predecessors, for it is said that they claimed that certain verses of the Qur'an which used to be recited during the time of the Prophet – such as the verse on stoning and the like – have been deleted. He tried to prove that these verses – assuming that they are authentic – are amongst those whose recitation has been abrogated (*mansūkh al-tilāwah*), since otherwise such an attribution is false. See Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, , *Nukat al-Intiṣār li Naql al-Qur'an* (Alexandria: Munshi'at al-Ma'ārif, 1971.), 95-108.

> abrogated during the lifetime of the Prophet, in the sense that God erased it from the hearts; but it remained in the heart of Ibn Mas'ūd in that its ruling remains in force through his narration. This is because a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) necessitates acting upon it, and the recitation of Ibn Mas'ūd is not inferior to his narration (that is, if his narration – though it stands alone – requires implementation, his recitation is also equally binding). Therefore, this constitutes the perpetuity of this ruling after the abrogation of its recitation.[588]

An openly convoluted and unrealistic justification is conspicuous in this statement.

All the elements advanced by Sarakhsī to justify his claim are like castles in the sand, since they have no basic evidence, and his argument is an attempt at justification after the event, like looking for a cure for something that has already happened.

Secondly, whenever the renown of a recitation reaches a latter period, like other famous recitations, in Sunnī parlance it is a proof, and there is no need for it to be established by a *mutawātir* narration from the Prophet. And as stated earlier, the famous recitations are neither *mutawātir* from the time of the Prophet nor from that of his Companions. In addition, the existing Qur'an accords with the famous *mutawātir* recitation. In view of this, the contradiction in Sarakhsī's statement becomes evident.

Also, as mentioned before, additional words which can be found in early Muslims', especially Ibn Mas'ūd's narrations, even if written in the Qur'anic manuscript, are additional notes for exegeses of the verses. In many instances, these are considered by some jurists as an expression of the understanding of a prominent Companion, and not specifically his narration as Sarakhsī supposed.

In addition, God says:

> *Such of Our revelations as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring (in its place) one better, or the like thereof* (2:106).

According to this verse, there is no abrogation (*naskh*) without an abrogating verse (*nāsikh*), and this is the same as with non-legal matters,

[588] Shams al-Dīn Abū Bakr Muhammad Sarakhsī, *al-Uṣūl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1393 q.), vol. 2, 80.

as stated in the discussion on the conditions for abrogation. On this basis, we may ask Sarakhsī where the abrogating verse is in his argument. How is the wording of a verse abrogated but its ruling preserved? And what is the benefit of the abrogation of the wording if the wording is the basis of a ruling, for if a ruling remains in force, would not the wording also remain? This is the main problem with this notion, and this will be elaborated upon later.

After accepting that the verse of stoning was in *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* (which was allegedly equal to or longer than *Sūrah al-Baqarah*) and was later deleted – in the sense that its wording was abrogated while its ruling remained in force – Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī says:

> Some have supposed that the verse of stoning has been omitted for a reason other than abrogation. Their basis is a narration from 'Ā'ishah, which states that: 'After their revelation, the verses of stoning and breastfeeding were recorded in a manuscript. It was kept under my bed, and when the Prophet passed away, we were busy with the burial ceremonies, and it was at this time that a domestic fowl got inside and ate the manuscript.'

He adds:

> This tradition is authentic, and it is not what they have thought, for the verse of stoning was known after its revelation, kept in the hearts and acted upon by the Prophet. Yet, the scribes of the Qur'an did not write it in the manuscripts, and it was not recorded in the Qur'an. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked the Prophet to write it for him, but received no answer. So the abrogation of its wording is authentic, and the manuscript in which this verse was written – as stated by 'Ā'ishah – was eaten by a domestic fowl. So no one has needed it.

He continues:

> If the Prophet was duty-bound to convey the verses which were lost, he would have done so, and by his conveyance it would be preserved, and the death of the Prophet would not arbitrarily affect it, just as his death did not affect the conveyance of the remaining verses. And if the Prophet should not have conveyed a

> verse, or if he conveyed it and he and the rest of the people forgot it, or the Prophet did not order its transcription in the manuscript of the Qur'an, such a verse has certainly been abrogated by God and it is not permissible to add it to the Qur'an.[589]

This is all the justification that the Sunnī scholars can provide in trying to support the abrogation of the recitation of some of the verses of the Qur'an. Be that as it may, the weakness of it can be clearly seen, since first of all, stoning is undoubtedly a legal ruling which has been established in the *sharī'ah* and the Prophet has ordered it, and jurists – both of the past and the present – have a consensus of opinion on it. However, the idea that a verse of the Qur'an was also revealed based on this ruling is an illusion by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and notwithstanding his persistence, none of the other Companions agreed with him on this.

In his report, Zayd ibn Thābit says:

> I heard the Prophet saying: 'When an old man (*shaykh*) and old woman (*shaykhah*) commits adultery, stone them,' and by *shaykh* and *shaykhah* it means *thayyib* and *thayyibah*, which allude to a married man and woman.

This is a tradition which Zayd heard from the Prophet without claiming it to be an integral part of the Qur'an. But 'Umar supposed that it was a Qur'anic revelation. He says: 'When this verse was revealed, I went to the Prophet and requested him to order its transcription, but the Prophet did not give a reply.' The *ḥadīth* narrator says: 'It seems that the Prophet disliked the idea of putting it into writing.'[590] It appears that upon hearing 'Umar's request the Prophet was surprised, for the suggestion shows either his lack of due reflection on the Qur'an or his inability to distinguish the Qur'an from tradition (*ḥadīth*). For this reason, as a reproach to him, the Prophet did not respond to him.

But worse than 'Umar's error is Ibn Ḥazm's understanding of this tradition. He justified the Prophet's disdain by saying that he was displeased with the idea of recording this statement in the manuscript of the Qur'an! If stoning was really a Qur'anic ruling established in the *sharī'ah*, why should it not be recorded in the manuscript? This is what Ibn Ḥazm disregards.

[589] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 11, 235-236.

[590] Ibid. vol. 11, 235.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, abrogation in non-legal matters has no meaning, let alone there being any benefit to be derived from such an unreasonable abrogation. In other words, what is the wisdom behind the abrogation of a verse but keeping its ruling in force without any evidence? It is this oversight in their argument that prompted them to invent such a claim. Proponents of this notion argue that the occurrence of such an abrogation (the abrogation of a recitation) is the best proof for its possibility, because they assume that the pertinent traditions are authentic.[591] And with such an unconventional approach, they have striven to solve the problem. This is while the rules of the science of *ḥadīth* dictate that such narrations should be rejected, because on the one hand they put into question the sanctity of the Qur'an, and on the other, they contradict the essential ruling that all verses of the Qur'an must be established by *mutawātir* reports, not solitary (*wāḥid*) ones.

A contemporary writer has duly criticised this unrealistic notion by saying:

> A group of contemporary scholars has rejected this kind of abrogation and denies that it has occurred in the Qur'an, for such a thing is a flaw and unworthy of the Wise Legislator, it is a futile action with no rational benefit, and is contrary to the wisdom of God, the All-Wise.

He also adds:

> The fact is that although this kind of abrogation is rationally possible, it has not taken place in the Qur'an, for such narrations are solitary reports, and the Holy Qur'an cannot be established by solitary narrations, irrespective of the status of those who report it. In fact, as all the scholars of the past and present have agreed, *tawātur* in confirming the Qur'an is indispensable. Moreover, if ever what they say were true, it would have been well known to the Companions, memorised by them and written in their manuscripts. This is while nothing – except from the narrators of such narrations – has reached us. Therefore, one cannot be certain that the said verses were put into writing during the time of the Prophet and recorded in the manuscripts by the scribes of the

[591] See al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, vol. 2, 215-216.

> revelation, but later abrogated, and as some of the Companions have told, were deleted from the manuscript, yet their ruling remains in force and must be acted upon.

Moreover, the only way to establish a ruling is by the text of the ruling. So, with the elimination of the text, the ruling will also be rendered void, and there seems to be no wisdom in merely rendering the text void, because with the existence of the ruling and its non-abrogation, what can be the benefit of the abrogation of its recitation? It is also argued that perhaps what 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb meant by the phrase 'We used to read it in the Book of God' were books which he and others had committed to memory, and as a way of hyperbole in striking similarity between the rulings laid down by the Prophet and the verses of the Qur'an, he made use of 'the Book of God,' because obedience to the dictates of authentic traditions and the Holy Qur'an is obligatory. On the other hand, for the sake of easy memorisation, some Companions would write traditions until such a time that the Prophet prohibited the writing of anything else but the Qur'an, with the exception of the manuscript (*ṣaḥīfah*) of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may God honour him). At this juncture, it can be concluded that this verse as claimed by 'Umar was a ruling which he had memorised from the words of the Prophet himself, and his description of it as a Qur'anic verse is an allegorical figure of speech, although 'Umar himself really meant it literally and not as a rhetorical expression.[592]

Professor 'Urayḍ's words are not devoid of elegance, because he has allusively raised this point as to how such an important matter could leave 'Umar in confusion and unable to distinguish between the words of the Prophet and the Word of God. Instead of considering the similarity metaphorically, he made the mistake of really meaning it as such. This is clearly an illusion, but 'Umar was convinced of it until the end of his life.

In the end Ibn Ḥazm also realised his own error in defending the idea of the abrogation of recitation, and tried his best to present it in a different light. He said:

[592] Shaykh 'Alī Ḥasan al-'Urayḍ (researcher-preacher at al-Azhar University), *Fatḥ al-Mannān fī Naskh al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabat Khānijī, 1973), 224-226.

Perhaps, what is meant by 'verse' in 'Umar's statement is a legal ruling on the basis that the Qur'an has described the Prophet in this manner:

> *...Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire: it is naught but an inspiration that is inspired (53:3-4).*

He also says in *Kitāb al-Aḥkām*:

> Some people believe that the verse of stoning and the verse of breastfeeding are not part of the Qur'an. We also do not see anything wrong in accepting this belief, as we are uncertain whether they are Qur'anic and were recited in ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*). Nevertheless, we believe that they were revelations sent down by God to His Prophet. So whatever was recited and was written in the manuscripts would be read in ritual prayer. However, the remaining revelation, like the other sayings of the Prophet which were inspired but not part of the Qur'an, were narrated, preserved in the memories and acted upon.[593]

In the section on breastfeeding in *al-Muḥallā*, Ibn Ḥazm says:

> The narrator says: 'The Prophet passed away at a time when these verses were being recited along with the others. This statement is unacceptable and a crime before the Qur'an, for it is impermissible for anyone to accept that something is deleted from the Qur'an after the demise of the Prophet.

In reply, Ibn Ḥazm says:

> It is not what you have imagined. In fact, what the narrator means is that they would be recited along with the Qur'an, and in them were things that were not recorded in the manuscripts.[594]

What he means here is that such verses have been inspired in a similar way to the Qur'an although they cannot be considered part of the Qur'an. At any rate, Ibn Ḥazm had no option but to back down, and has refrained from acknowledging the permissibility of the abrogation of a recitation in the Qur'an without the abrogation of its ruling.

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[593] As quoted by Professor 'Urayḍ in *Fatḥ al-Mannān*, 226-227.

[594] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 10, 16.

We shall quote here the explicit remarks of some scholars who have considered the notion of abrogation of recitation unacceptable:

Ibn al-Khaṭīb says:

> One of the most remarkable things is the claim that the recitation of some verses of the Qur'an has been abrogated while their legal ruling remains in force. This statement would never be made by anyone reasonable. The abrogation of the rulings of some verses – while their recitation remains – is rational and acceptable, for some rulings were not revealed decisively and all at once, but little by little in gradual stages. But the abrogation of the recitation of some verses while their rulings remain in force is unacceptable to anyone with self-respect who acknowledges the importance of the divine gift of intellect, because where is the wisdom in such a thing?[595]

In Abū Isḥāq Shīrāzī's *al-Lum'ah fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* it is stated:

> Some scholars believe that it is impermissible for a ruling to remain in force while its recitation is abrogated, because a ruling depends on the recitation, and the dependent cannot remain in the absence of that upon which it depends.

In his book *Tārīkh al-Tashrī' al-Islāmī*, Shaykh Muhammad Khuḍrī says:

> It is unacceptable for a recitation to have been abrogated while its ruling remains in force. Many Mu'tazilites have rejected it; however, the majority of the scholars have accepted it, based on a solitary report, even though a solitary report is not proof. That God would withdraw a recitation while its ruling remained in force is incomprehensible to me. A legal verse in the Qur'an is intended both to indicate the law and establish the inimitability of the Qur'an in harmonious order. Therefore, what is the benefit of withdrawing a verse while its ruling still remains in force? This is unreasonable, and there appears to be no proof for it.

In his book *al-Naskh fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (*Abrogation in the Holy Qur'an*), Dr. Muṣṭafā Zayd says:

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[595] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān*, 156-157.

> We regard the abrogation of recitation and the continuity of its ruling (*mansūkh al-tilāwah bāqī al-ḥukm*) as merely a concept with no basis. For this reason we believe it is unreasonable and unacceptable.

Dr. Muhammad Sa'ād says:

> We cannot be convinced that the abrogation of a recitation while the ruling continues is correct, because inclusion in the Qur'an is only established by a definite textual proof, and the abrogation of a definite proof must be established. Therefore, in order to establish that a text has been abrogated in the Qur'an, two definite proofs must be established. One of them must establish that the text is first of all part of the Qur'an, and the other one must prove that it was abrogated and removed. Neither of these proofs has been established for the texts in question. Hence, it cannot be accepted that they were part of the Qur'an and later abrogated. The only thing which is correct in this matter is, according to us, the abrogation of a ruling without the abrogation of the recitation.

It is also stated in Ālūsī's exegesis:

> A continuing ruling after the abrogation of the wording of a verse requires proof, in the absence of which it is better for us to say the abrogation of the wording causes the ruling to be withdrawn as well.

The Issue of *Insā'* (Causing to Forget)

'Causing to forget' is another notion which in terms of artificiality is similar to the notion of the abrogation of recitation. It is said that some verses were forgotten to such an extent that they disappeared from memory, and this has been used in an attempt to solve the problem of narrations which are supposed authentic and which indicate an alleged loss of many Qur'anic verses after the demise of the Prophet.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī quotes 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as saying, addressing 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf: 'Is not the verse, *An jāhidū kamā jāhadtum awwala marrah* (أن جاهدوا كما جاهدتم أول مرّة) 'Make *jihād* just as you did the first time' among the revealed verses? So, how is it that we cannot find it in the Qur'an?' Ibn 'Awf replied: 'It is among the deleted verses.'

He also said to Ubayy ibn Ka'b: 'Were we not reciting this verse as one amongst those of the Qur'an: انّ انتفانكم عن آبائكم كفر بكم 'It is indeed disbelief on your part to deny your descent from your fathers'?' Ubayy answered: 'Yes.' He then asked: 'Were we not reciting before: الولد للفراش وللعاهر الحجر 'The child belongs to wedlock and the adulterer gets the stone,' which we cannot find in the Qur'an now?' Ubayy replied: 'Yes.' Based on this, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar used to say: 'It is not proper for you to say that we have received the entire Qur'an, because no one knows what the entire Qur'an was, since much of it has been lost.'[596]

'Ā'ishah is reported to have said: 'During the time of the Prophet we used to recite *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* in two hundred verses, but when 'Uthmān collected the manuscripts, we only found the verses that current exist thereof.'[597] Also, regarding a verse which she supposed was revealed about breastfeeding, she says: 'Then the Prophet passed away at a time when these verses were recited like the other verses of the Qur'an.'[598]

Many such traditions can be found which attempt to explain how certain verses were forgotten and erased from the hearts. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī points to the expression *or cause to be forgotten* which follows *Such of Our revelations that We abrogate* (2:106). However, it should be noted that *naskh* (abrogation) and *insā'* (causing to forget) have a similar meaning, *naskh* being the removal of something from its place, and *insā'* the removal of something from the memory.

The verse quoted above refers to the People of the Book who, when casting doubt upon the beliefs of the Muslims, said that the religion of God is fixed and unchangeable, and that there is no room for a new religion. The verse was revealed to refute their claim. It means that for as long as human life is in a constant state of change, mankind's needs will also change. So, the abrogation of a previous *sharī'ah* by a new *sharī'ah* accorded with the needs at the time, just as all religions in their time and context are not only beneficial but the best means. And the phrase *or cause to be forgotten* refers to that which, due to a long history is no longer spoken of, and all traces have been removed from memory.

[596] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 106.

[597] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 72.

[598] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 1, 14-16.

Naskh and *insā'* are two religious concepts which are exclusive to the period of revelation when a ruling mentioned as *mansūkh* (abrogated) or *mansī* (forgotten) could be changed to something similar or better. But after the demise of the Prophet, when the process of revelation ended, so did *naskh* and *insā'*, as stipulated by all *uṣūlī* scholars. This means that the belief that something might be removed from the Qur'an after the conclusion of the period of apostleship is tantamount to *taḥrīf* (corruption). Therefore it is to be resolutely avoided.

WHY HAS *TAHRĪF* NOT OCCURRED?

Historical Testimony

A sound mind dictates that a book like the Qur'an must be immune from the possibility of any changes or alterations, because from the very moment of its revelation it was under the vigilant scrutiny of the *ummah* and given the utmost honour and respect. This kind of attention is not surprising, because the Qur'an was the primary source of all aspects of the religious and socio-political life of the Muslims. It is the pillar of the religion, the basis of the *sharī'ah*, and the foundation of all the issues of belief and practice. Therefore, throughout history people have striven hard to preserve its integrity and originality.

In order to refute the notion of *taḥrīf*, Sayyid Murtaḍā 'Alam al-Hudā and the great Shaykh Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' have advanced solid arguments. Sayyid Murtaḍā says:

> Our knowledge of the authenticity of the narration of the Qur'an is similar to our knowledge of large cities, great events, famous books and the poetry of the Arabs. The fact is that the motive to preserve, transmit and bestow care on the Qur'an was deeper than that given to anything else. The attention given to the Qur'an was uprecedented, because it is the miracle of prophethood, the source of the knowledge of the *sharī'ah* and the religious laws. Muslim scholars have spared no effort to protect and preserve it, to the extent that they have recorded the minutest differences in its vowels, letters, verses and methods of recital. How could

> there then be anything changed or omitted from it, with all this sincere care and strict precision?

He also says:

The knowledge of the authenticity of the details of the Qur'an is the same as the knowledge of the whole Qur'an regarding the accuracy of its transmission. It is similar to what is known of other well-known works, like the Book of Sībawayh[599] and that of al-Muzanī.[600] We are certain that every detail in these books was written by the authors, because just as both these books have been given care and attention, their details and interpretation have also been given such attention that if anyone should introduce an extraneous chapter on grammar in either of them, it would immediately be known and recognised as spurious.

He continues:

> And we know that the care and attention in recording and transmitting the Qur'an was much higher than that used in transmitting the Book of Sībawayh and the collections of the poets.

The Chief of the Jurists (*shaykh al-fuqahā'*) Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' says:

> According to the dictates of reason, one cannot accept the apparent meaning of those reports which tell of omissions in the Qur'an, especially those which talk of the deletion of a third or a considerable part of the Qur'an. This is because, if such reports were true, due to the existence of significant motives, it would have to have been successively (*mutawātiran*) narrated by several and not one. And the faithless would have used it as a most potent tool against Islam and the Muslims.

He then continues:

> How can such a thing (omission in the Qur'an) be possible when the Muslims have exerted much effort in recording the letters

[599] Abū Bishr 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qanbar al-Baṣrī, commonly known as Sībawayh (d. ca. 180/796-7) was an influential Persian linguist and grammarian of the Arabic language, and his book *Kitāb Sibawayh* was the first one written on Arabic grammar. [Trans.]

[600] Ismā'īl b. Yaḥyā ibn Ismā'īl, Abū Ibrāhīm, commonly known as Imām Muzanī (d. 264/876) was a student of Imām Shāfi'ī and was considered a key promoter of the Shafi'ī school. The well-known book *al-Mukhtaṣar* is a summary of the school's rulings. [Trans.]

> and verses of the Qur'an? The proponents of such a view cite as evidence that the names of many hypocrites were mentioned in the Qur'an. But how can the mentioning of the names of hypocrites be compared with the conduct (*sīrah*) of the Prophet, who would cover their secrets and treat them like other Muslims?

Finally he says:

> It is suprising that some people suppose that such traditions – which have been transmitted by different mouths and recorded in different books in the course of 1,200 years – have remained in their original form, believing that these traditions have been immune from alteration, since otherwise their flaw would have become manifest. Yet they maintain that the Qur'an has undergone alteration, and that these omissions have remained secret throughout all this time.

The Necessity for *Tawātur* of the Qur'an

Amongst the solid proofs that refute the notion of *taḥrīf* is the necessity for *tawātur* for the whole of the Qur'an – for the chapters, verses, sentences, words, letters and spelling, and even for its recitation. As stated in the discussion on recitations, the only correct recitation is the well-known recitation prevalent amongst the Muslims which is established by *tawātur* and conforms with the recitation of 'Āṣim as narrated by Ḥafṣ.

If the inclusion of every letter, word and expression of the Qur'an must necessarily be proved to be *mutawātir* from the time of apostleship (*risālah*) throughout the generations, then there can be no room for the possibility of *taḥrīf*, because the claim that certain verses have been omitted from the Qur'an has reached us through a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*), and even if the chain of transmission (*sanad*) of the report is authentic, in this case it is not a proof (*ḥujjah*). Therefore, any report that reaches us in this way is unacceptable, since it is a solitary report that can only be referred back to whoever reported it.

In the book *Nihāyat al-Wuṣūl ilā 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, Ayatollah Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Manṣūr Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar 'Allāmah Ḥillī (d. 726/1326) has made the same argument:

> Everyone agrees on the point that whatever is narrated to us from the Qur'an in the form of *tawātur* is a proof, because the Qur'an is the certification of prophethood and the eternal miracle of the Prophet. Thus, if it does not reach have the status of *tawātur*, one cannot be definite about the Prophet's prophethood.

He also says:

> In this case, one cannot confirm whatever is not consecutively transmitted from the Prophet, even if this narration were authentic. If a narrator claims that what he mentions refers to the Qur'an, this statement is considered wrong, but if he does not say that it refers to the Qur'an, and it is not clear whether this report is from the Prophet or his own opinion, his report is not authoritative.

We all believe that it was incumbent upon the Prophet to transmit the Qur'an to the people in the form of *tawātur*, because the Qur'an is a miracle which substantiates the truthfulness of the Prophet. Hence, if the Prophet had not transmitted the Qur'an in the form of *tawātur*, his miracle would be rendered void, and would not remain as evidence to substantiate his prophethood.[601]

Other erudite *uṣūlīs* like Sayyid Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī are of the same view. In *Wasā'il al-Uṣūl*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī says:

> Whatever is from the Qur'an – in its entirety or in part – must be established by *tawātur*, because details of a book such as the Qur'an are normally narrated in *tawātur*. On the other hand, the Qur'an is the great miracle and the foundation of the religion of Islam. As such, there is a great motivation to narrate its entirety and details. Hence, if anything is narrated as a solitary report and does not reach the level of *tawātur*, we can be certain that it is indeed not part of the Qur'an.[602]

After quoting what other prominent personalities have said on this matter, the erudite scholar Sayyid Muhammad Jawād al-'Āmilī says:

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[601] Mīrzā Mahdi Burūjirdī, *Burhān-i Rūshan (al-Burhān 'Alā 'Adam Taḥrīf al-Qur'an)* (Qum: Ismā'īliyān, 1374 q.), 111.

[602] Ibid. 120-121, quoting the author of *Kashf al-Irtiyāb*.

> Practice dictates that the details of the Qur'an – all its parts, wording, vowel-points, pauses and contexts – must be established by *tawātur*, because there has been much enthusiasm to transmit it. The Qur'an is the miracle and source of the entire legal rulings [of Islam]. Therefore, the contrary views or scepticism of anyone in this context is not worthy of attention.[603]

There are many such declarations from eminent personalities, but in order to avoid prolonging the discourse further, we consider that enough has been mentioned so far.

Taḥrīf According to the Sunnī Ḥashwiyyah[604]

As mentioned earlier, *taḥrīf* refers to irregular (*shādhdh*) traditions transmitted by certain traditionists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) which drew the attention of certain irresolute individuals. Certain literalist traditionists, known as *Ḥashwiyyah*, who go to extremes to transmit traditions without considering their meanings or refraining from examples which contradict the foundations of *sharī'ah* and the principles of Islam, have relied on this type of tradition in order to multiply their transmissions without paying attention to their contents. Therefore, it does not matter for them where the tradition comes from or what the basis is for transmitting it. Ibn Jawzī says:

> The traditionists[605] have indeed gone to extremes; they are accustomed to increasing their traditions even with baseless and false statements. This is reprehensible and unworthy of them, because in an authentic narration the Prophet is reported to have said: 'Anyone who attributes a false tradition to me is a liar.'[606]

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[603] Sayyid Muhammad Jawād 'Āmilī, *Miftāḥ al-Karāmah fī Sharh Qawā'id al-'Allāmah* (Beirut: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1998), vol. 2, 390.

[604] As stated earlier, this refers to certain Sunnī traditionists who have been inaccurate in acquiring and recording *ḥadīth*.

[605] As stated earlier, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār considered them a sect of the Ḥanbalī school. See Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 527.

[606] Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Mawḍū'āt* (Madīnat al-Munawwarah: Maktabat al-Salafiyyah, 1389 q.), vol. 1, 240.

In this regard, we have quoted a *ḥadīth* from Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir, who said: 'The ignorant ones are pleased with their memorisation of the traditions, while their lack of understanding make the learned grieve.'[607]

Interpreting the verse *Will they then not reflect on the Qur'an, or are there locks on their hearts?* (47:24), Shaykh Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī says: 'This verse refutes the claim of the ignorant proponents of *ḥadīth* who believe that one can narrate a tradition in any way it is transmitted even if its meaning is absurd.'[608]

In short, it is through the same weak and baseless approach that the Ḥashwiyyah filled their minds with strange reports, thereby paving the way for the spread of *isrā'īliyyāt*[609] and imaginary stories, and compiling treatises out of these stories.

As history bears witness in many instances, we can observe in a few Ḥashwiyyah writings a plethora of reports on *taḥrīf* recorded in the great collections of *ḥadīth* such as the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sittah* and other famous Sunnī books on *ḥadīth*. Some people adhered to the apparent meanings of these traditions, supposing them to be absolutely true. Then by euphemistically changing the label *taḥrīf* into *naskh al-tilāwah* (abrogation of the recitation), these Sunnī theologians tried their best to reinterpret it by distorting the meaning.

We said earlier that changing a label not only fails to solve a problem but can even exacerbate it, especially in view of the fact that some of these traditions openly suggest that a given verse would even be recited after the demise of the Prophet.[610]

Fortunately this problem was solved amongst the Imāmiyyah, and they discarded such worthless narrations. They regard their chains of transmission as inauthentic and consider them incompatible with the principles of the faith:

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[607] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, 53.

[608] Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 9, 301.

[609] *Isrā'īliyyāt* are traditions and legends narrated by Jewish converts to Islam which infiltrated and perverted *ḥadīth* literature with ideas that were not originally there. See 'Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍlī, *Introduction to Ḥadīth Including Dirāyāt al-Ḥadīth by al-Shahīd al-Thānī* (London: ICAS Press, 2002), 155-157. [Trans.]

[610] See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 10, 14 and 16.

> *No falsehood can approach it from before it or behind it: it is a revelation sent down from the Wise, Worthy of Praise* (41:42).

We shall examine some examples of traditions transmitted by the Ḥashwiyyah and recorded in compilations of *ḥadīth*, and then give the opinion of Imāmiyyah scholars regarding each of them.

1. The Verse of Stoning (*āyat al-rajm*)

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb believed that the verse mentioning the stoning of elderly adulterers was part of the Qur'an, and would be recited during the lifetime of the Prophet, yet for an unknown reason it was erased from memory. On the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, Bukhārī and Muslim have recorded that after returning from his last *ḥajj* pilgrimage, 'Umar delivered a sermon in which he said:

> Certainly God sent Muhammad with the truth and revealed to him the Book. One of the revelations which came to him was the verse of stoning. We read it and understood it. The Messenger of God stoned them [the adulterers], and we stoned them after him. Therefore I am concerned that, as time goes on, someone might say: 'By God, we do not find the verse of stoning in the Book of God.' Thereby the Muslims would deviate by neglecting a commandment the Almighty revealed. Stoning is in the Book of God. It is the right punishment for one who commits adultery if the required witnesses are available, or if there is pregnancy without marriage or adultery is admitted.[611]

It is stated in *al-Muwaṭṭa'* by Mālik ibn Anas:

> Upon his return from the *ḥajj* pilgrimage, 'Umar delivered a sermon in which he said: 'Beware lest you should be misled due to your negligence of the verse of stoning. I hear people saying 'We did not find in the Qur'an the terms of punishment for the adulterer,' while, the Prophet stoned [the adulterer] and we would do so after him. I swear by the One in whose Hand is my soul! Would

[611] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, 208-211, section on stoning a pregnant woman; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 5, 116; Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 1, 23; vol. 5, 183; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 4, 'Kitāb al-Ḥudūd,' section 9, 115-116; *Sunan al-Dāramī*, vol. 2, 'Kitāb al-Ḥudūd,' section 16, 179.

> the people not say: "Umar has added something to the Book of God!' I would have written this verse in it:
>
> الشيخ والشيخة إذا زنيا فارجموهما ألبتة.
>
> (Whenever a *shaykh* or *shaykhah* commits adultery, stone him or her). We used to recite it before.

Mālik said: 'Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd has narrated on the authority of Sa'īd ibn Musayyib thus: 'Before the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah ended, 'Umar was murdered. I heard Mālik [ibn Anas] saying: '*Shaykh* and *shaykhah* refer to married man and woman, respectively.' '[612]

It is interesting to note that during the first stage of the collection of the Qur'an – which took place during the rule of Abū Bakr – 'Umar mentioned the verse of stoning, but no one concurred with him. Zayd ibn Thābit demanded that he produce two witnesses to testify to its authenticity, but 'Umar failed to do so.[613] In spite of this, he insisted on his claim and would declare it from time to time, until eventually he explicitly stated it at a later period of his life. The decree of stoning is exclusive to those who are married, whether young or old, and Mālik interpreted the two terms to mean married (*thayyib*). It is likely that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb misinterpreted the terms *shaykh* and *shaykhah*.

Most probably 'Umar may have heard the decree of stoning from the Prophet and erroneously supposed that it was a Qur'anic verse, just as he thought that the well-known tradition 'The child belongs to wedlock and the adulterer gets the stone' was also in the Qur'an. What apparently happened was that, because of the rhyme and rhythm of these expressions, 'Umar may have thought that they were Qur'anic verses, when they were in fact statements made by the Prophet. Concerning the eloquence of it, it is said that the Prophet was the most eloquent speaker of Arabic. Therefore, this mistake by one such as 'Umar is not surprising. Earlier, the narration of Zayd ibn Thābit was mentioned that states: 'I heard the Prophet say: 'Whenever a married man and woman commit adultery, you must definitely stone them." It is therefore clear that this is a *ḥadīth* and not a Qur'anic verse.

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[612] Al-Suyūṭī, *Tanwīr al-Ḥawālik*, vol. 3, 42-43. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 12, 127.

[613] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 168.

2. The Verse of Renunciation (*āyat al-raghbah*)

Another verse which 'Umar supposed was part of the Qur'an and later deleted is the verse of renunciation. He is reported to have said:

We used to read as part of the Qur'an:

لا ترغبوا عن آبائكم فانّه كفر بكم

or

انْ كفرا بكم ان ترغبوا عن آبائكم

(Do not scorn the fatherhood of your fathers, because it is disbelief on your part to renounce your fathers).[614]

Perhaps, this was also a *ḥadīth* of Messenger which 'Umar supposed to be a Qur'anic verse. But what is the reason for the doubt regarding the text of this tradition? In all its versions it lacks coherence, and is inconsistent with other sayings of the Prophet in view of the fact that faithlessness (*kufr*) with respect to oneself has no meaning. Another version of the tradition is as follows:

انْ انتفائكم عن آبائكم كفر بكم

(Negating your relation to your fathers is disbelief on your part.)

3. The Verse of *Jihād*

A third verse which 'Umar thought had been deleted from the Qur'an is the verse of *jihād*. He said to 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf: 'Was this verse not amongst the verses revealed to us:

ان جاهدوا كما جاهدتم أوّل مرّة

(Make *jihād* as you made *jihād* the first time)? So, why can we not find it in the Qur'an?' Ibn 'Awf replied: 'It is amongst the deleted verses.'[615]

4. The Verse of the Bed of Wedlock (*Firāsh*)

The fourth verse which 'Umar thought to have been deleted from the Qur'an is this saying of the Prophet:

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[614] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8, 208-211.

[615] Ibid.

الولد للفراش و للعاهر الحجر

(The child belongs to wedlock and the adulterer gets the stone).[616] This was discussed along with the verse of stoning.

These four statements were supposed by 'Umar to be verses which were deleted from the Qur'an. However, none of the Companions – neither Zayd ibn Thābit, Ubayy ibn Ka'b nor others – confirmed this, otherwise they would have recorded such a thing in their manuscripts. Nevertheless, they agreed with 'Umar that these phrases were divinely revealed and were like other Islamic decrees declared by the Prophet. The unified opposition of the Companions to 'Umar's assumption made him doubt his understanding, and even during his rule he had no desire to issue the order to include them in the Qur'an. However, the pretext that he was afraid lest the people should say that he had added something to the Book of God is inadequate, because everyone knew that if 'Umar decided to do doing something, the people's opposition could not hinder him.

Therefore, it cannot be established that the statements were part of the Qur'an, even by the one who later doubted himself. Ibn Ḥajar has said:

> The Imāms of *ḥadīth* have narrated this narration on the authority of Mālik, Yūnus, Mu'ammar, Ṣāliḥ ibn Kaysān, 'Aqīl and other *ḥuffāẓ*.

He has then himself quoted this on the authority of Mālik, and at the end said: 'In *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*,' when describing the personality of Dāwūd ibn Abī Hind, it is stated stated on the authority of Sa'īd ibn Musayyib, quoting 'Umar: 'I would record it at the end of the Qur'an'; and in the narration of Abū Ma'shar: 'Had they not said that 'Umar has added something to the Book of God, I would have written it';[617] and in the narration of Tirmidhī: 'I would write it in the margin of the Qur'an.'[618]

Imām Badr al-Dīn Zarkashī has written an elaborate explanation in order to justify what 'Umar said, quoting the statement of Ibn al-Jawzī in the book *Funūn al-Afnān fī 'Ajā'ib 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Yet, he has still failed to solve the problem.[619]

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[616] Ibid.

[617] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī fī Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 12, 127.

[618] *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 3, 261.

[619] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, 35-37.

5. The Qur'an as Having 1,027,000 Letters

Another of 'Umar's assumptions was that the Qur'an had more than a million letters. Ṭabarānī has narrated on the authority of Muhammad ibn 'Ubayd ibn Ādam that 'Umar said: 'The Qur'an consists of one million and twenty seven thousand letters. Anyone who recites it with reflection shall be granted a maiden in paradise for every letter recited.'[620] This is while 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās is reported to have said that the Qur'an consists of 323,671 letters, which is correct.[621] Dhahabī says: 'Only Muhammad ibn 'Ubayd has transmitted this false narration (of 'Umar).'[622] If this claim of 'Umar and Ibn 'Ubayd were correct, it would follow that more than two-thirds of the Qur'an must have been deleted.

6. Deletion of Many Verses

Perhaps these false claims prompted 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar – according to a narration of Abū 'Ubayd – to say: 'No one of you should claim that he has committed to memory the entire Qur'an. How can they know the entire Qur'an? For many parts of it have been deleted. Thus it would be appropriate to say: 'I have learned what is available of the Qur'an.'[623]

We do not know how, when or why these parts of the Qur'an would have been deleted as Ibn 'Umar claimed, in view of the fact that God has said:

> *We have, without doubt, sent down the Message, and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)* (15:9).

Perhaps the reason for Ibn 'Umar's assumption was that he had heard that the Qur'an had been lost with the martyrdom of a considerable number of *qurrā'* during the Battle of Yamāmah.

7. The Qur'an was Lost with the Martyrdom of the *qurrā'* in the Battle of Yamāmah

Ibn Abī Dāwūd has narrated on the authority of Ibn Shihāb that:

It has been transmitted to us that many parts of the Qur'an were revealed, but those who had memorised them were martyred in the

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[620] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 198.

[621] Ibid.

[622] Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, vol. 1, 198.

[623] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 72.

Battle of Yamāmah. After them, no one has ever known or recorded those verses...[624]

But the question remains as to whether the Qur'an was preserved only in the memories of these reciters, and not by other reciters from amongst the Companions, especially those who were alive after the Prophet had passed away? And more to the point, who were these reciters who were collectively martyred, when we have no knowledge of them?

8. Existing Additions in the Manuscript of 'Ā'ishah

There was a period after the demise of the Messenger up until 30 AH, when different manuscripts that had been gathered or taken from other manuscripts were in circulation. Amongst them was that of Ā'ishah, which may have been copied from other manuscripts by her order. Some assume that this manuscript included additions that distinguished it from others, but which were omitted during the standardisation of the manuscripts.

Abū 'Ubayd has narrated on the authority of Ḥamīdah bint Abī Yūnus, the servant of 'Ā'ishah:

> At the age of 80, my father read to me from the manuscript of 'Ā'ishah the following:
>
> > *Surely, God and His angels shower blessings on the prophet, O ye who believe, ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation* (33:56) and upon those who pray in the first lines.

Ḥamīdah said: 'This extra phrase had been extant in the Qur'an until the time when 'Uthmān standardised the manuscripts.'[625]

This is a false and baseless claim; 'Ā'ishah never had a personal manuscript of her own, and the Qur'an compiled by Zayd during the time of Abū Bakr was with Ḥafsah bint 'Umar. 'Uthmān took it as a trust from her, and at the end of the task, he returned it to her. Moreover, the so-called addition does not compare with the exalted language of the Qur'an.

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[624] Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 2, 50.

[625] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 73.

9. The Verse of Breastfeeding Eaten by a Domestic Fowl

In *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, Mālik quotes 'Umrah bint 'Abd al-Raḥmān as saying on the authority of 'Ā'ishah that this verse was part of the revealed Qur'an:

> There was in what was revealed in the Qur'an the command that ten acknowledged instances of wet nursing establishes close familial relationships (*maḥramiyyah*). This verse was later replaced by five acknowledged times. The Prophet died at a time when this was read in the Qur'an.[626]

Similarly, in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim has narrated such a tradition on the authority of Mālik and Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd.[627] But afterwards Mālik says: 'This narration has not been acted upon.'

In the margin of Muslim's narration, Zay'alī comments:

> This tradition has no authority. 'Ā'ishah considered it part of the Qur'an, claiming it to be in a manuscript kept under her bed. Accordingly, when the Prophet passed away and they were busy with the burial ceremonies, a goat or domestic fowl entered and ate it.

Zay'alī adds:

> Be that as it may, it has been established that these words are not part of the Qur'an, because they have not reached us by *tawātur*. So it is not permissible to recite them or record them in the manuscript. Had it really been part of the Qur'an, it would be recited today, for abrogation is invalid after the Prophet.[628]

In view of the oddity of this tradition, Bukhārī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal discarded it. In this regard, Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī made a strange remark which was quoted earlier.[629]

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[626] Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *Tanwīr al-Ḥawālik*, vol. 2, 118, the last book on breastfeeding.

[627] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, 167; *Sunan Dāramī*, vol. 2, 157; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 2, 224.

[628] *Ḥāshiyat Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, 167.

[629] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, vol. 11, 234-236.

10. Two Verses from *Sūrah al-Bayyinah*

Ubayy ibn Ka'b allegedly said that two verses have been deleted from *Sūrah al-Bayyinah*. Through a chain of transmission going back to Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal reports Ubayy ibn Ka'b as saying:

> The Prophet said to me: 'God, the Exalted, has commanded me to teach you the recitation of the Qur'an.' He then recited:
>
> > *Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolators were not going to depart (from their ways) till the clear proof came unto them, a messenger from God with purified scrolls containing scripture right and straight. Nor were the People of the Book divided until after the clear proof came to them* (98: 1-4). The true faith with God is *Ḥanīfiyyah*, not polytheism or Judaism or Christianity. And whoever does good, his goodness will not be denied. *And they are commanded naught else but to serve God, keeping religion pure for Him, as men by nature upright...* (98: 5).

Shū'bah, the *ḥadīth* narrator, says:

> He then read the succeeding verses, and added:
>
> > 'Should the son of Adam have two valleys full of wealth, he would ask for a third valley. Nothing would fill the abdomen of the son of Adam except the soil.'
>
> He then finished reciting the *sūrah* to the end.[630]

Through another chain of transmission, he reports:

> The Prophet said: 'God, the Blessed and Exalted, has ordered me to teach the Qur'an to you.' Then he recited thus:
>
> > *The faithless from amongst the People of the Book...* (98:1).

Continuing with the verses, he recited:

> 'Should the son of Adam ask for a valley full of wealth and I grant it to him, he would ask for another valley. And if I grant him that,

[630] Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 5, 132.

> he would ask for a third valley. Nothing would fill the abdomen of the son of Adam except the soil. God accepts the repentance of him who repents. The religion in the eyes of God is the *Ḥanīfiyyah*, not polytheism or Judaism or Christianity. Whoever does good, his goodness will not be denied.'[631]

This tradition has indeed been falsely attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka'b, one of the scribes and compilers of the Qur'an. because if this was as he really thought, the additions would have been noticed in his manuscript. The same tradition has been attributed to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī through other chains. It is possible that it was also attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka'b in order to camouflage it.

Surprisingly, the tradition on 'filling the abdomen of the son of Adam' has been transmitted in different forms. At one time it was attributed to the Prophet, as in the narration of Anas.[632] Also, on the authority of 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ on the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī reported Ibn Jurayj as saying:

I heard the Prophet say: 'Should the son of Adam ask for two valleys of gold, he would seek a third valley. Nothing would fill the abdomen of the son of Adam except the soil. God accepts the repentance of him who repents.' And Abū Nu'aym comments: 'This tradition is authentic and accepted by all.'[633] Another time it was claimed to be part of the Qur'an, as stated in the tradition of Abū Mūsā and Ubayy ibn Ka'b. And yet another time it was said to be a *ḥadīth qudsī*[634] according to the tradition of Abū Wāqid al-Laythī. However, perhaps the most accurate view regarding this tradition is Aḥmad's report through his chain of transmission, on the authority of Abū Wāqid, which has 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār say:

> When revelation came down to the Prophet [in a general sense, which includes the Qur'an and *ḥadīth qudsī*], we would come to

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[631] Ibid. 131.

[632] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3, 99-100.

[633] Abū Nu'aym Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 3, 316, under the description of the personality of 'Aṭā', no. 244.

[634] *Ḥadīth qudsī* (or sacred *ḥadīth*) is a sub-category of *ḥadīth*, which are sayings of God, but differ from the Qur'an, as they are expressed in the words of Prophet Muḥammad. [Trans.]

> the Prophet and he would narrate a tradition to us. One day he said: 'Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, says:

'We sent down wealth for the performance of prayer and the payment of *zakāt*, and if a person had a vast land, he would desire another, and if he had another land, he would desire a third land. Nothing would fill the abdomen of the son of Adam except the soil. Allah accepts the repentance of anyone who repents."[635]

11. Two Verses Not Written in the *Muṣḥaf*

Abū 'Ubayd narrated from Abū Sufyān al-Kalā'ī (who is unknown) from Maslamah ibn Mukhallad al-Anṣārī (who was no more than ten years old when the Prophet passed away) that one day he said:

'Tell me of two verses of the Qur'an that were not recorded in the *Muṣḥaf*.'[636] They could not say, although Abū al-Kannūd Sa'd ibn Mālik was amongst them. Then Maslamah recited:

> 'You who believed and migrated, and fought in the way of God with their wealth and their lives: be of good cheer! You are indeed the prosperous ones. And those who sheltered them, supported them, and defended them against those with whom God is wrathful: for those, not a soul knows what is in store for them that would please their eyes, a reward for what they have performed.' [637]

It is obvious that such expressions are incompatible with the unique style of the Qur'an. Perhaps, Maslamah (d. 62/681) – who was appointed by Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah as the governor of Egypt – said this during the later part of his life when he suffered from imbecility and dementia.

12. A *Sūrah* Being Equal in Length to *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* or Similar to *Musabbiḥāt*

Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī believed that the Qur'an has been altered, with a considerable part of it deleted.

In his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim narrates from Abū al-Aswad:

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[635] Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 5, 219.

[636] It is to be noted that *muṣḥaf* was then a new term used during the time of the first Caliphs.

[637] *Al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 74.

> Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī invited the *qurrā'* of Baṣra. Three hundred reciters responded to his invitation. He told them: 'You are the reciters and the best of the people of Baṣra. Recite the Qur'an and do not neglect it. Otherwise, a long time may elapse and your hearts will be hardened as the hearts of those who came before you were hardened. We used to read a *sūrah* from the Qur'an similar to *al-Barā'ah* in length and seriousness, but I forgot it. I can remember from that chapter only the following words: 'Should the son of Adam own two valleys full of wealth, he would seek a third valley, and nothing would fill the son of Adam's abdomen but the soil.' We used to read a *sūrah* similar to one of the *musabbiḥāt*[638] and I forgot it. I only remember from it the following: 'O you who believe! Why do you say what you do not do? Thus, a testimony will be written on their necks and you will be questioned about it on the Day of Judgement."[639]

Because of this, Abū Mūsā was apprehensive of the Qur'an. However, what weak and frivolous remarks he had made; there is no similarity between his supposed verses and the unique Words of God. But based on certain chains of transmission, Muslim has regarded this as a saying of the Prophet, and as stated earlier, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī also considered it a prophetic narration.[640]

13. *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* as Originally Longer than *Sūrah al-Baqarah*

It was falsely attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka'b that he believed that *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* was equal in length or longer than *Sūrah al-Baqarah*.

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal reports on the authority of Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh that Ubayy ibn Ka'b said:

> How many verses are contained in *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*? I said: 'Seventy-three verses.' He said: 'Only that? I used to read it when it was equal in length to *Sūrah al-Baqarah* [with more than 280 verses, i.e., four times the existing number of verses] and the verse of

[638] These are the Sūrahs beginning with *sabbaḥa* or *yusabbiḥu*: chapters 57, 59, 61, 62 and 64.

[639] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3, 100.

[640] Ibid. 99-100; Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 3, 316.

> stoning was included in it.' I said: 'What is the verse of stoning?' He said: 'If an old man (*al-sheikh*) and an old woman (*al-sheikhah*) commit adultery, then certainly stone them – a punishment from God. God is All-Mighty and All-Wise.'[641]

In *Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummāl* the following is also stated: '[*Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*] was equal in length to *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, if not longer.'[642]

'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr narrated on the authority of her aunt 'Ā'ishah, who said:

> *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* used to be recited during the lifetime of the Prophet and had two hundred verses. But when 'Uthmān ordered the compilation of the manuscripts, we could not count more than what is there now.[643]

'Ā'ishah supposed that this *sūrah* contained the verse known as 'the verse of stoning': 'The old man (*al-sheikh*) and the old woman (*al-sheikhah*): certainly stone them because of what they have done to fulfil the lust.'[644]

It is obvious that this narration was concocted and attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka'b, because there is no evidence that his manuscript was different in this respect from those of the other Companions. Perhaps the intention of fabricating the narration was to portray 'Umar as not being alone in affirming the verse of stoning. The chain of transmission intentionally includes prominent Shī'a personalities such Yazīd ibn Abī Ziyād al-Hāshimī, the chief of Banī Hāshim in Baṣra, of whom Ibn Ḥajar says: 'He was one of the great Shī'a personalities.'[645] Also included are Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh al-Kūfī al-Mukhaḍram – who was, according to 'Āṣim, 'one of the companions of 'Alī, having a high rank above all others'[646] – and Ubayy ibn Ka'b, one of the great Companions, the chief of reciters (*sayyid*

[641] Ibid. 132; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 72.

[642] Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 2, 43.

[643] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 72.

[644] Ibid.

[645] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 11, no. 630, 329.

[646] Ibid. vol. 3, no. 597, 322.

al-qurrā'), and one of those who remained loyal to Imām 'Alī during the Event of Saqīfah.[647]

It must be noted that there was disputation and enmity between 'Ā'ishah and 'Uthmān, and it is possible that 'Ā'ishah intended to take revenge against 'Uthmān by making this claim.

14. Two Supplications in Qunūt[648]

Also falsely attributed to the great Companion Ubayy was the alleged inclusion of two *sūrah*s, known as *al-Khal'* (Casting Off) and *al-Ḥafd* (Quick Pace),[649] in the concluding part of his manuscript. There is an authentic chain of transmission, but they were apparently supplications which the Prophet may have recited during *qunūt* in his prayers, which Ubayy recorded at the end of his manuscript in accordance with the practice of the compilers of sometimes putting supplications at the end of their manuscripts.

It is improbable that Ubayy believed that these supposed expressions were *sūrah*s of the Qur'an, especially in view of the fact that their order and structure are in no way compatible with those of the Qur'an, and that this would not have remained hidden from someone like Ubayy.

Abū 'Ubayd reports from Ibn Sīrīn:

> Ubayy ibn Ka'b recorded *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and *al-mu'awwidhatayn*,[650] 'O God, we seek Your help' (*allāhumma innā nasta'īnuk*), and 'O God, You alone do we worship' (*allāhumma iyyāka na'budu*) in his manuscript, but ibn Mas'ūd left them out, and from them, 'Uthmān recorded *al-Fātiḥah* and *al-mu'awwidhatayn* in his manuscript.

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[647] See Ibn Abi al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, 51-52; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, section 12, 461, no. 4; Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-Mu'minīn*, vol. 1, 232; Sheikh Muhammad Taqī Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl* (Tehran: Nashr-e Kitāb, 1379 q.), vol. 1, 236.

[648] *Qunūt* is a supplication recited in the *ṣalāt* after the second *rak'ah*, in the standing position, with the palms of the hands raised upward. [Trans.]

[649] For more information, see Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 323.

[650] *Al-mu'awwidhatayn* (the two verses of Refuge) refers to the two *sūrah*s in which refuge in God is sought, i.e., the last two *sūrah*s of the Qur'an (*al-Falāq* and *al-Nās*), which are two consecutive short *sūrah*s beginning with 'Say: I seek refuge in the Lord... (*Qul a'ūdhu bi-rabbi...*).' [Trans.]

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī says: 'Ubayy recorded the supplication of *khal'* and *ḥafd* at the end of his manuscript,'[651] but apparently Ibn Mas'ūd did not include them in his manuscript, because he regarded *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* as equal and similar to the Qur'an and not part of the Qur'an itself, and treated *al-mu'awwidhatayn* as two supplications like *khal'* and *ḥafd*.[652]

During the reign of 'Uthmān, however, the committee he assigned to compile the Qur'an wrote every part recognized as the Qur'an and left out the rest. This practice in itself is a proof that *khal'* and *ḥafd* were recognised as supplications and not as chapters of the Qur'an.

15. Only One Quarter of *Sūraḥ al-Barā'aḥ* Remains

Mālik ibn Anas believed that *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* (or *al-Tawbah*) was equal in length to *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, and that the *basmalah*[653] and certain other verses at the beginning of it were deleted.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī says: 'Mālik used to say: 'As the beginning of *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* was deleted, the *basmalah* was also deleted along with it, and it is clear to us that *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* used to be equal in length to *Sūrah al-Baqarah*.''[654]

Ḥākim – who regards the chain of transmission of this tradition to be sound – reports Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān, a prominent Companion, as saying: 'Whatever you recite is one quarter of *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* – the same which you call *Sūrah al-Tawbah*, whereas it is *Sūrah al-'Adhāb*.'[655]

It is stated in another narration: 'What you call *Sūrah al-Tawbah* is *Sūrah al-'Adhāb*. By God, it is not unaffected, and you only read one quarter of it.'[656]

How apt is the saying 'The liar has no memory'! *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* contains 129 verses, which is less than half of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* with 286 verses. Firstly, how was it possible for this to be unknown to the likes of Ḥudhayfah and Mālik, and for them to claim that 'What you read today

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[651] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 184.

[652] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 313-314.

[653] The *basmalah* consists of the words *Bismillāhi al-raḥmāni al-raḥīm* (In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the All-Merciful) at the beginning of every *sūrah* except *Sūrah al-Tawbah*. [Trans.]

[654] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 184.

[655] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 330-331.

[656] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 208.

is only one fourth of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*'? Secondly, whose names have been deleted in this *sūrah* – names of the polytheists or names of the hypocrites? And when did this deletion take place? Was it during the lifetime of the Prophet or after his death? Who dared to delete them? Was it done by the polytheists who were killed, or by the hypocrites who were always afraid of being exposed? Thirdly, if *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* was of such a length during the time of Ḥudhayfah, it would have been grouped amongst the long *sūrah*s, and Uthmān would have had no reason to place it after *Sūrah al-Anfāl*, saying: 'It was the last *sūrah* to be revealed to the Prophet and its background is similar to that of *Sūrah al-Anfāl*. Therefore, I surmise that it was part of that *sūrah*.'[657] Fourthly, Ḥudhayfah was amongst the pioneers in the standardisation of the manuscripts, and it was he who convinced 'Uthmān to embark on the task.[658] Therefore, how was it possible for him to openly indicate a discrepancy in the manuscripts after their standardisation?

In sum, these are some of the lies attributed to the followers of *Ahl al-Bayt*[659] in a bid to tarnish them, even at the expense of undermining the sanctity of the Qur'an.

16. Interchanging Words

Ḥākim has narrated that 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd used to recite as follows:

إِنِّيْ انا الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِيْن

Innī ana al-razzāq dhū al-quwwat al-matīn

Indeed I am the All-Provider, Lord of Power, the Strong,

instead of:

إِنَّ اللّٰهَ هُوَ الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِيْن

Inna Allāha huwa al-razzāq dhu al-quwwat al-matīn

Indeed it is God Who is the All-Provider, Lord of Power, the Strong (51:58).

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[657] See Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 330.

[658] For further explanation, see Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 335 ff.

[659] Ḥudhayfah was the first of the righteous Companions who stood up to express support and defend the right of the Commander of the Faithful during the Event of Saqīfah. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, 51.

And he would say: 'The Prophet has recited this verse to me.'[660]

Perhaps the above verse was either confused by Ibn Mas'ūd, or he altered it according to his opinion that it is permissible to change words as long as the meaning is not affected.[661] However, it is unlikely that he believed that this was the original text of the Qur'an.

17. Addition of Words

Ḥākim has also reported that Shahr ibn Ḥawshab said on the authority of Asmā':

I heard the Prophet reciting thus:

> *Say: O My servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the mercy of God, for God forgives all sins* and He is not troubled (39:53).

Perhaps, the additional phrase, 'and He is not troubled,' (*wa lā yubālī*, ولا يبالي), at the end of the verse was an explanation by the Prophet expressing God's position regarding His penitent servants, for His Mercy towards His servants is that He does not withhold anything, and nothing could hinder Him from showering His Mercy upon them. In addition, the chain of transmission of this narration is not flawless. Ḥākim says: 'This tradition is *gharīb*, and in my record I have reported only this one narration from Shahr. Moreover, Muslim and Bukhārī would not rely on his traditions.' Ibn Ḥajar says: 'Shahr was truthful, but in his narrations he had many broken chains and much fantasy.'

18. The Fabricated *Sūrah al-Wilāyah*

There is a widespread fabrication of an alleged *sūrah* which the author of the book *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* has attributed in the name of Shi'ism to unknown personalities, claiming that they believe that there is *taḥrīf* in respect of the Qur'an. He says:

There are some who say that 'Uthmān burned the manuscripts, thereby obliterating the *sūrahs* telling of the virtues of *Ahl al-Bayt*. Amongst them is the alleged *sūrah* which begins as follows:[662]

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[660] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 234, 249.

[661] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 319.

[662] Kaykhusrū Isfandiyār, *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* (With the Notes of Raḥīm Riḍā Malik) (Tehran: Gulshan Printing Press, 1362 s.), vol. 1, 246-247.

> 'O you who believe! Believe in the two lights We have sent down; they tell you of My signs and warn you of the chastisement of a great day. The two lights are intertwined; and I am the All-Hearing, All-Knowing...'

Muḥaddith Nūrī says:

> I did not find any trace of this *sūrah* in the Shī'a books; however, it is reported that Ibn Shahrāshūb said in the book *al-Mathālib* that the entire *Sūrah al-Wilāyah* has been deleted. Perhaps, what he means is the alleged *sūrah* mentioned above.[663]

Muḥaqqiq Āshtiyānī (d. 1319/1901), the author of *al-Ḥāshiyah*,[664] has also said of this alleged *sūrah*: 'Apart from the book *Dabistān-i Madhāhib*, I did not find it anywhere, but it is said that Ibn Shahrāshūb mentioned it in *Al-Mathālib*.' He has added:

> One knows that this so-called *sūrah* has no similarity at all to the verses of the Noble Qur'an – which were uniquely sent down to the heart of the Prophet – and one can definitely tell that the various phrases have no coherence, let alone any meaningful content.

It would be interesting to know where in *al-Mathālib* Muḥaddith Nūrī found the passage, as he does not directly quote from it and uses the expression *ḥukiya* (it is said).

This seems to be yet another allegation against the Shī'a. The false attribution of the passage to *al-Mathālib* is found in the *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* of Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī al-Baghdādī (d. 1270/1854), and no one other than him and the author of *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* has made this affirmation.[665] On the contrary, in the book *Mathālib al-Nawāṣib* which was recently published in India and whose two handwritten manuscripts[666] I have meticulously

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[663] Mīrzā Husayn Nūrī Ṭabrisī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb* (lithograph, Tehran, n.d.), 179-180, no. 68 of proof 8.

[664] *Baḥr al-Fawā'id fī Sharḥ al-Farā'id*, vol. 1, 101. This book was finished in 1307 q. in Tehran and published in 1314 q. after *Faṣl al-Khaṭāb* was written (1292 q.) and printed in 1298 q. in Tehran.

[665] See Abū al-Faḍl Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Arabi, n.d.), vol. 1, 23. It is clear that Shaykh Nūrī was deceived twice by this double allegation.

[666] These two manuscripts presently exist at the Centre for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (Qum), film no. 68, dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 5, 1416 q. The more legible manuscript

studied, not only is there no trace of it, but many proofs to substantiate the absence of *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an have been presented. In the same manner as Sayyid Murtaḍā, the author has proved that the Qur'an – exactly as it is – has been preserved from the time of the Prophet until now.

This point is also stressed in *Mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān*.[667] Given so much emphasis by the author of *al-Mathālib*, how can one then believe that he would have mentioned the supposed *Sūrah al-Wilāyah* in his book without it being found in any other manuscripts?

It is clear that the alleged *sūrah* is a fabricated passage, nothing more than a crude invention with no genuine basis. The alleged *sūrah* is inconsistent with the primary rules of Arabic declension (*i'rāb*), let alone lacking the elevated style of the Qur'an. This is exacerbated by the strangeness of the attribution of this alleged *sūrah* to certain Shī'a, because the Shī'a – notwithstanding the differences of opinion amongst some of their groups – have always been known as masters of Arabic literature and rhetoric, as well as experts in Arabic grammar and syntax. Hence there is no doubt that such passages are the worthless creations of immature minds, and have estranged those who are fair-minded by creating blind animosity through attributing such lies to the Shī'a.

Commenting on this, 'Allāmah Balāghī says: 'The author of *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb* is one of the diligent scholars of *ḥadīth* (*muḥaddithūn*), narrating many traditions and much engaged in collecting unusual narrations, which he tracks down in the book *Dabistān al-Madhāhib*, and yet he admits that: 'No trace of these passages can be found in Shī'a books.' What, then, is the source for this attribution to the Shī'a by the author of *Dabistān al-Madhāhib*, and in which Shī'a book did he find this piece of information?'[668]

Professor Raḥīm, the critical editor of *Dabistān al-Madhāhib*, says:

> What the author of *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* has presented about religions and sects are mostly popular beliefs that he has heard from lay followers that are skilfully gathered together. In order to provide material for his writing, he went to gatherings of drug addicts and hashish smokers, and has presented as principles of belief whatever fantasies they have uttered. During his travels, in order

was written in 845 q..

[667] Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Mutashābih al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, 77.

[668] Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Raḥmān*, vol. 1, 24-25 (item 5).

> to pass the time on long and dreary walking tours, he interacted with fellow travellers, skinners, porters, dervishes, coffee-house keepers, vendors, pedlars, pilgrims and the like, and has recorded whatever he heard from them as the beliefs of a given religion or sect... I suspect that, with the hope of gaining something from the author of *Dabistān*, certain individuals who had discerned his interest in unusual matters concerning religions and sects might have fabricated certain ideas which they narrated to him, and he, in turn, naïvely believed them and recorded them in the name of tricksters and fabricators masquerading as devotees.[669]

The author of *Dabistān-i Madhāhib*

In his book *Tārīkh-i Īrān*,[670] Sir John Malcolm identified the author of *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* as Muḥsin Kashmīrī, whose pen-name is Fānī. In the book *Īḍāḥ al-Maknūn fī al-Dalīl 'alā Kashf al-Ẓunūn*[671] he is introduced as Mawbad Shāh Hindī.[672] In the margin of the book *Dasātīr*,[673] Mullā Fīrūz has identified him as Mīr Dhū al-Fiqār Ali. The most recent opinion amongst researchers is that he was Mawbad Kaykhusrow Isfandiyār, the son of Āzar Kaywān, the founder of the Kaywānīyyah sect in India during the reign of the Taymurid king, Akbar Shāh (963/1556-1014/1605). He was born in the third decade of the eleventh/seventeenth century, in the city of Patna in India. According to available written accounts regarding his book, he lived to over seventy years of age. He used to invite people to the Kaywānī faith – which recognised the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) – to denounce all other creeds and to acknowledge the book *Dasātīr*, which he regarded as the Mother of all Books, containing all the religious laws which he attributed to a prophet named Sāsān. In the book *Dabistān* he tried his best to undermine the beliefs of all other religions and propagate the new faith of his father, Āzar Kaywān.

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[669] *Dabistān-i Madhāhib*, vol. 2, 126, 129 (ft).

[670] Sir John Malcolm, *Tārīkh-i Īrān*, vol. 1, 59.

[671] Ismā'īl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Īḍāḥ al-Maknūn fi al-Dhayl 'alā Kashf al-Ẓunūn* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1945), vol. 3, 442.

[672] In the Zoroastrian religion *mawbad* is a title of the religious leaders.

[673] Mulla Fīrūz, *Farhang-i Dasātīr*, 231.

The first person to have lauded this book was Francis Gladwin, who translated it into English in 1789. It was first published in Calcutta, India, in 1809 (Dhū al-Qa'dah 1224 AH) at the order of British Deputy William Billy. The book was thereby published and distributed by the imperialist agents in India and Iran, and its translation was also published in other countries. The secret behind these widespread and successive publications is clear to anyone with a little intelligence.

19. The Catastrophe Brought by the Book *al-Furqān*

In its own time, the book *al-Furqān*[674] created a violent outcry in Egypt, and declaring it a fraud and condemning the author, al-Azhar University demanded that the government confiscate all copies.[675]

The author has gathered in this book stories attributed to the early period of Islam, such as the traditions of 'Ā'ishah that speak of four instances of inaccuracy in the Qur'an in – and which was examined earlier – and traditions attributed to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, Sa'īd, Ḍaḥḥāk and the like. Based on these traditions –which he regards as decisive proof – the above-mentioned Companions would have believed that the scribes of the first text of the manuscript made mistakes, as indicated by the title of his discourse.[676]

He considered the chains of transmission of all these traditions authentic, unaware of the fact that this amounts to an admission of *taḥrīf* in the text of the revelation. Such claims are attributions that were intentionally or unintentionally made by those in the past against the Word of God. However, a sound mind is aware of the immunity of the

[674] *Al-Furqān* was written by Muḥammad Muḥammad 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ibn al-Khaṭīb, one of the famous scholars of Egypt. It was published in 1948 (1367 q.) by Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, and created such violent opposition that al-Azhār University demanded that the Egyptian government confiscate all copies of it. In response, the Egyptian government superficially complied, while plenty of other copies were still available here and there. For example, a considerable number still exist in our current libraries. The copy at my disposal is a first edition which is recorded in Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm (Qum) with the reference number 42/12/1542. This book was also reprinted in Beirut, reflecting exactly the same topics.

[675] See the article of Professor Muḥammad Muḥammad Madanī in *Risālat al-Islām* Magazine (Cairo: Dār al-Taqrīb, issue 11, no. 44), 382.

[676] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān*, 41-46, 90-91.

early Muslims from such undue attributions, and cannot accept that such ideas were really made by them, because they justifiably wished to preserve the Qur'an.

More unbelievably, the author believed that the despotic ruler Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī had altered the manuscript in twelve places, changing its first writing – which was then prevalent and popular amongst the Muslims – and turned it into its current recitation. For example, he says:

> In *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, in the account of the Prophet Nūḥ it was stated '*min al-mukhrajīn*' (26:116), and in the account of Prophet Lūṭ (Lot) it was stated '*min al-marjūmīn*' (26:167), but Ḥajjāj interchanged them.[677]

The weakness of such claims is obvious to any fair-minded person, for Ḥajjāj was immersed in his world of cruel politics and had no connection with matters of religion and the Qur'an.

Ibn Khaṭīb has narrated this fabricated story from *Sijistānī*'s *al-Maṣāḥif* from 'Awf,[678] on the authority of 'Abbād ibn Ṣuhayb. As far as *rijāl*[679] scholars are concerned, 'Abbād is a fabricator and regarded as *matrūk al-ḥadīth*,[680] and Abū Dāwūd is the only person to have paid attention to his narration.[681]

Imām Ḥāfiẓ Muhammad ibn Ḥayyān says: "Abbād would narrate unknown traditions from prominent personalities which would be easily detected by even the uninitiated whenever they hear them."[682] Amongst these narrations was this absurd story which was believed by Ibn Khaṭīb and presented by him in his book as definitely authentic. At the end of the book he mentions recitations (*qirā'āt*) attributed to the Companions which are contrary to the common recitations prevalent amongst the Muslims. These recitations were transmitted by a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) and are not authoritative, and for this reason cannot be relied upon. The text of the Qur'an has been established by definite *mutawātir* transmission agreed upon by the Muslims. How can we attribute a contrary

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[677] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān*, 50-52.

[678] Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 49-50.

[679] *Rijāl* or *'Ilm al-Rijāl* is a branch of the science of *ḥadīth* dealing with the biographies of the *ḥadīth* transmitters or reporters. [Trans.]

[680] *Matrūk al-ḥadīth* is a person whose narrations are rejected. [Trans.]

[681] Al-Dhahabī, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 1, 326, no. 3037.

[682] Abū Ḥātim Muhammad Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddithīn wa al-Ḍu'afā' wa al-Matrūkīn* (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'ī, 1396 q.), vol. 2, 164.

transmission to the Companions when they knew very well the original text which they had heard from the mouth of the Prophet? We consider it improbable for them to have deviated from the text transmitted from the Prophet by *tawātur*. This is a false attribution which offends the high rank of the Companions, particularly the recitations attributed to the Commander of the Faithful, Ali,[683] since his recitation is the same as the present one, which was transmitted by Ḥafs from 'Āṣim, who heard it from Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who, in turn – as we have examined in detail in the discussion on recitations – heard it from Imām 'Alī himself.

Even stranger is the fact that Ibn Khaṭīb attributes to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb the belief that it is permissible for those who cannot recite the Qur'an correctly to replace words with synonymous ones. He says:

> One day 'Umar was teaching this Qur'anic verse to a bedouin man:
>
> > *Indeed the tree of zaqqūm will be the food of the sinful (ṭa'ām al-athīm)* (44:43-44).

This man would recite *ṭa'ām al-yatīm* (the food of the orphan). When 'Umar realised that he could not pronounce *athīm*, he told him: 'Say, *ṭa'ām al-fājir* (*fājir* being synonymous with *athīm*, meaning 'sinful').' The man recited the verse thus: *Inna shajarat az-zaqqūmi ṭa'amu al-fājir*.[684]

These are fabricated stories whose falsity is indeed obvious.

Taḥrīf According to the Akhbārīs

Above we discussed the futile claims of certain Sunnī Ḥashwiyyah regarding *taḥrīf*. Now we shall examine another baseless view postulated by another extremist sect known as the Akhbāriyyah.[685] By accepting the

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[683] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān*, 106.

[684] Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Furqān*, 115.

[685] In his book *Maṣā'ib al-Nawāṣib*, al-Tustarī has described the Akhbarīs as *shirdhimatun qalīlah*, i.e., those who are in minority in the Shī'a Imāmiyyah. See Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Raḥmān*, vol. 1, 25-26.

Akhbarism (*akhbāriyyah*) is a movement which started within the Shī'a world about four hundred years ago. Its originator was Mullā Muhammad Amīn ibn Muhammad Sharīf al-Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623-24). He openly attacked the Shī'a *mujtahids* in his

notion of *taḥrīf* and imprudently undermining the sanctity of the Qur'an, they have become one with their Ḥashwiyyah brethren.

It was clearly established in earlier chapters that learned scholars, *mujtahids* and holders of authority amongst the Shī'a have all refuted the possibility of *taḥrīf* on the basis of *mutawātir* textual and rational proofs, consistently upholding the original stance which the Qur'an stipulates. Similarly, most of the great Imāmiyyah *ḥadīth* scholars (*muḥaddithūn*) have agreed with the other scholars in denying the notion of *taḥrīf*. This state of affairs has continued from the time of the pioneering *ḥadīth* scholar, Abū Ja'far al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), up to the time of the two prominent *ḥadīth* scholars, Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679) and al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1104/1692), and their stance has been steadfastly maintained from generation to generation.

In short, the notion of *taḥrīf* has been propagated in recent times by a small deviant group whose opinion has no credibility for the Shī'a. This started when their leading scholar, Jazā'irī (1050/1640-1112/1700), preached his idea on the fringes of the Persian Gulf. He founded this idea on the basis of weak arguments, unknown narrations and inaccurate records.

He was succeeded by certain confused thinkers until finally their foremost scholar, Muḥaddith Nūrī (1254-1320 AH), appeared and followed the same thread in his *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, which attempts to reject the Qur'anic proofs and negate its authority.

We shall now examine some of the reasons Jazā'irī states in his *Manba' al-Ḥayāt*:

> Widespread *mutawātir* reports show that addition, deletion and distortion have found their way into the Qur'an. Amongst them is a narration from the Commander of the Faithful, Ali, which has been transmitted in reply to a question regarding the compatibility of two sentences from the following verse:

work *al-Fawā'id al-Madaniyyah*, vehemently contesting the *Uṣūlīs*' claim that reason is one of the sources of *fiqh*. The *Uṣūlīs* hold the Qur'an, the *Sunnah*, reason and *ijmā'* (consensus) as valid sources for the deduction of the rules of the *sharī'ah*. The *Akhbārīs* accepted the validity of only the *Sunnah* and rejected the rest. Understanding the Qur'an, they claimed, is beyond the capacity of the commoner, being restricted exclusively to *Ahl al-Bayt*. [Trans.]

> *If you fear that you may not do justice to the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four...* (4:3).

The Imām said: 'More than a third of the Qur'an has been deleted within this verse!'

On the exegesis of the verse *Kuntum khayra ummatin ... You are the best of people, brought forth for mankind...* (3:110) Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said: 'How can this nation be the best, considering that they killed the son of the Prophet?' The correct revealed form of the verse is as follows: *Kuntum khayra a'immatin* ('You are the best Imāms (*a'immah* instead of *ummah*'), and it refers to the Imāms from *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Moreover, it is transmitted in many reports that the revealed verse of Ghadīr is as follows:

> *O Messenger, make known that which hath been sent down to you* concerning 'Alī *from thy Lord. If thou do it not, thou will not have conveyed His message* (5:67).

There are also other narrations which, if gathered together, would amount to a huge book.

He continues:

> Keeping all this in view, *taḥrīf* – in terms of addition and deletion – took place with the Qur'an on two occasions, i.e., during the lifetime of the Prophet and during the period of the Companions. The Qur'an was revealed little by little according to needs and circumstances, and the scribes of the revelation – who were fourteen from amongst the Companions under the leadership of Imām 'Alī – would in most cases record verses concerning legal rulings and which were revealed in public; but only 'Alī would be informed of the verses which were revealed privately in the house of the Prophet, for he was always in the company of the Prophet. Therefore, the Imām's manuscript was more comprehensive than others.

He adds:

> After the demise of the Prophet and the scattering of the people, 'Alī embarked upon compiling the Qur'an according to the order of revelation. After finishing it, he covered it with his robe and

brought it to the mosque. The first and second caliphs and other Companions were then in the mosque. The Imām said to them: 'This book is the true revealed Qur'an.' 'Umar said: 'We are not in need of your manuscript, for the manuscript of 'Uthmān is at our disposal.' The Imām said: 'Neither you nor others will ever see it until such time when my son, the Master of the Time (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*), appears and urges the people to recite it and act upon its laws. Until such a day, God will take this manuscript to heaven.' After becoming caliph, 'Umar tried his best to get hold of this manuscript and burn it, as he did with that of Ibn Mas'ūd. He asked 'Alī for it, but the Imām refused to grant it to him.

Jazā'irī says:

> This Qur'an has been preserved by the Imāms, and they would secretly recite it, although they would instruct some of their more intimate followers with it. For example, Thiqat al-Islām Kulaynī has reported Sālim ibn Salamah to have said: 'Someone was once reciting the Qur'an in the presence of Imām al-Ṣādiq. I heard some words of the Qur'an [being recited] contrary to the common recitation. Imām al-Ṣādiq told the man: 'Desist from this recitation and recite the Qur'an the way it is commonly recited until such a time that our Qā'im[686] rises up. On that day, he will recite the Qur'an the way it should be recited, and he will bring forth the manuscript which 'Alī used to keep.

Jazā'irī adds:

> This tradition which has reached us, and others that say the same, have allowed us to recite the existing manuscript and act upon its rulings.

Elsewhere he states:

> Because of the multiple manuscripts due to the many scribes of revelation, Abū Bakr and 'Umar decided to select the manuscript of 'Uthmān and parts of others, and to collect the rest and boil them in a large pot full of hot water... If the manuscripts were

[686] Qā'im is one of the honorific titles of Imām al-Mahdī, which means 'the executor (Qā'im) of God's command.' [Trans.]

> uniform, they would not have committed such an abhorrent act for which they are condemned.

And:

> Praise for *Ahl al-Bayt* and condemnation of the hypocrites and Banū Umayyah were both openly and implicitly reflected in the manuscript, but in order to conceal their flaws and out of jealousy for the family of the Prophet they deleted such verses.

Again:

> In his *Sa'd al-Su'ūd*, the trusted scholar, 'Alī ibn Ṭāwūs, reports from Muhammad ibn Baḥr Rahanī, a prominent Sunnī scholar: 'The manuscripts that 'Uthmān dispatched to the cities varied, and the words and letters were inconsistent, although all of them were inscribed by 'Uthmān himself.'

Jazā'irī then comments:

> If the manuscripts which 'Uthmān himself had inscribed were such, the condition of the manuscripts of other scribes and their respective proponents is obvious.

Therefore, during the second period, which was the time of the *qurrā'*, the Qur'an was distorted, for the manuscript at their disposal had no dots or declension (*i'rāb*), as did the manuscripts at the disposal of 'Alī and his immaculate descendants. I have seen some of them in the library of Imām Rīḍā.

In short, the manuscripts at the disposal of the reciters were devoid of dots and inflection, and thus they exercised their discretion with regard to the dots, *idghām*,[687] the spelling and the like.[688]

The errors and inconsistencies in this passage are so clear that there is no need to investigate them. His insufficient knowledge of the history of the compilation of the Qur'an is evidenced when he says: 'As 'Alī brought his manuscript to the people, 'Umar rose up and said: 'The manuscript of 'Uthmān is sufficient for us." But 'Uthmān's manuscript

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[687] *Idghām* (إدغام): the contraction of two identical letters into one and pronouncing this with tashdīd. [Trans.]

[688] Sayyid Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī, *Manba' al-Ḥayāt* (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Najāḥ, n.d.), 68-70.

did not exist at that time. He also says: 'The manuscripts dispatched to the [different] cities were inscribed by 'Uthmān,' as if 'Uthmān wrote all the manuscripts himself.

He added the following: "Umar burned the manuscript of Ibn Mas'ūd, and also intended to do the same with that of 'Alī; in order to acquire it, he resorted to different ways, but he failed.'

He also said: 'Abū Bakr and 'Umar burned the manuscripts and selected some parts of what 'Uthmān wrote in his one, while boiling the rest in a big pot. Even stranger was his saying: 'Many manuscripts in 'Alī's handwriting were sent to the [different] cities.' It is as if the Imām had so much free time that he could have written all the manuscripts which were in fact compiled by others. He also regarded the different recitations as a proof of the distortion of the Qur'an, even though the Qur'an is one thing and the recitations another.

Jazā'irī's main proof was a number of narrations which he identified as *mutawātir* to substantiate his point. He quoted some of them and supposed that they were the clearest textual proof. We shall deal with these narrations in detail at an appropriate juncture. Here we shall only look over them in order to demonstrate their weaknesses, since narrations which indicate *taḥrīf* have unreliable chains of transmission, while those whose chains are authentic have nothing to do with *taḥrīf*. Other narrations are also of the same kind.

The tradition about the alleged deletion of one third of the Qur'an from the third verse of *Sūrah al-Nisā'* has only been mentioned by the author of *al-Iḥtijāj*.[689] Like many other fabricated narrations quoted by this author, the narration is fabricated and *mursal*, and does not have an unbroken chain of transmission. For this reason, his book has no credibility and Shī'a scholars have not relied on it. Even Sayyid Hāshim Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695) considered it implausible and did not mention it in his exegesis *al-Burhān*, which was written on the basis of traditions related to the circumstances of the revelation of the verses. Neither have 'Ayyāshī (d. 320/932), Qummī (d 329/941) or other famous exegetes quoted this narration.

In addition, the author of *al-Iḥtijāj* is unknown, although it has been attributed to Ṭabrisī. Baḥr al-'Ulūm has identified six possible authors

[689] See Tabarsī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, 377.

of *al-Iḥtijāj*.[690] It is the opinion of some researchers that the author was perhaps someone else who originated from Ṭabaristān[691] or Tafresh,[692] and that his name was Arabised as 'Ṭabrisī' (from Ṭabaristān) or Ṭabrisī (from Tafresh).

The tradition itself is baseless and contrary to reason and faith, for it states that: 'Within the edicts relating to justice to orphans and the marrying of women, more than one-third of the Qur'an containing stories and admonitions has been deleted.' In other words, the hypocrites have deleted all the verses (more than two thousand verses) which were part of a single verse, i.e., the third verse of *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, although it is unclear why they should have done so.

Moreover, the narration is completely incompatible with the style of speech of Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, which was extremely eloquent and mirrors the example of the Qur'an.

It is obvious that this tradition – considering all its details and dimensions – has been fabricated by one of the polemicists, for he disputes therein with the atheists who found fault with the style of the Qur'an, and has replied to them according to his own frame of mind and level of knowledge, attributing it to the Imām so that the lay people would accept it. The reason for this claim is that the author has used some terms which have become prevalent in later periods; for example, the title *Baqiyyat Allāh* (the Remaining [Proof] of Allah) for Imām al-Mahdī and the terms *fi'l al-māḍī* (past tense) and *fi'l al-muḍāri'* (present/future tense), which were later coined by the grammarians.[693]

Regarding the words *kuntum khayra a'immah...* ('You are the best of Imāms...') (3:110), which Qummī has narrated with a chain of transmission, and mentioned in a *mursal* and fabricated narration in *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, Imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said: 'This verse was revealed in this way.' This has two possible meanings:

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[690] Preface of Tabarsī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, v. 1.

[691] Ṭabaristān (or Tapuria) is the name of the former historic region in the Southern coasts of the Caspian Sea roughly in the location of the northern and southern slopes of the Elburz range in Iran, and roughly corresponding to the modern Iranian provinces of Mazandaran, Golestan and northern Semnan. [Trans.]

[692] Tafresh is an academic centre and the capital of Tafresh County, Markazi Province, Iran. [Trans.]

[693] Ibid. 375.

1) The recitation is correct, for it is mentioned in 'Ayyāshī's *mursal* narration that it was like that in 'Alī's[694] recitation, but as we said before in the discussion on recitations (*qirā'āt*), a difference in recitation has nothing to do with *taḥrīf*. Moreover, it is impossible to establish verses or chapters of the Qur'an on the basis of a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*), even if it has an authentic chain of transmission.

2) The comment is not about recitation, but to explain that the word *ummah* in this verse refers to the Imāms (*a'immah*), because as stated in the tradition transmitted by Qummī, they have the main responsibility to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil (*al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahyi 'an al-munkar*).[695]

Therefore, *nuzūl* (revelation) in Imām al-Ṣādiq's statement refers to a suitable meaning according to the circumstances of the revelation, which is the real interpretation of the verse, as, for example, *tanzīl* is sometimes the opposite of *ta'wīl* and means *tafsīr* (exegesis or interpretation).

The second possibility seems more plausible because there are other traditions interpreting this verse.

Imām al-Ṣādiq has said:

> It refers to the *ummah* to whom the supplication of Ibrāhīm (Abraham) was granted. It is the *ummah* whom God chose for him. They are the middle way and the best *ummah* ever evolved for mankind.

'Ayyāshī has quoted this narration in his exegesis, where he says:

> We should place this verse alongside this other:
>
> > *Let there arise from amongst you a nation (ummah) who invite to the good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong...* (3:104) (because of the words *from amongst you*, the *ummah* refers to some of them).
>
> We then realise that in both verses, what is meant by the *ummah* that enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong are the Imāms who are the leaders and forerunners of the *ummah*.

[694] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 195.

[695] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1, 110.

In response to the question: 'Is it incumbent upon the entire *ummah* to bid what is right and forbid what is wrong?' Kulaynī has reported that Imām al-Ṣādiq replied in the negative. He was asked: 'What is the reason?' and he said: 'This is incumbent upon anyone who is strong, is obeyed, and is aware of what is right and what is wrong; but it is not obligatory for those who are weak and incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood.'

The Imām continues:

> The basis of this claim is the noble verse, *Let there arise from amongst you a nation who invite to the good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong* (3:104), because the verse addresses a particular group and is not a general one. This is similar to the verse:
>
> > *Amongst the people of Moses is a community who lead with truth and establish justice therewith* (7:159).

It does not say: 'The nation of Moses, or all his people...' At the time, the people of Moses consisted of numerous nations. Moreover, the word *ummah* can be applied to a single person or more. For example, God says:

> *Indeed, Abraham was a nation obedient to God* (16:120).

It therefore follows that there is no harm in abandoning this obligation for anyone who does not have the necessary power, support and followers.[696]

We should note how the responsibility of the *ummah* is placed on the leaders on the basis of the Qur'an and elegant reasoning.

From what has been said, it becomes clear that this tradition – however it may be interpreted – has nothing whatsoever to do with the issue of *taḥrīf*.

Regarding the alleged deletion of the name of 'Alī from the verses of the 'perfection of religion' (*āyat al-kamāl*) and the 'verse of conveyance' (*āyat al-tablīgh*) (5:3, 67), 'Ayyāshī has reported that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:

> On a Friday, Gabriel came to the Prophet in 'Arafāt, and said to him: 'O Muhammad! God sends His salutation to you and says: 'Say to your *ummah*:

[696] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 307-308.

> *This day have I perfected your religion for you* with the guardianship of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *and completed My favour unto you, and chosen for you as religion al-Islam'* (5:3)."

According to Jazā'irī, the additional phrase has to be part of the verse in order to complete it. Kulaynī reported that Imām al-Bāqir said in the tradition of *farā'iḍ*:

> The verse of guardianship (*āyat al-wilāyah*) was revealed when Gabriel came down to the Prophet on a Friday in 'Arafāt and recited thus: *'This day have I perfected your religion for you, and completed My favour unto you'* (5:3). The perfection of religion was realised with the guardianship of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[697]

In this tradition, the Imām stipulates that the perfection of religion in the verse was materialised with the bestowal of the guardianship of Ali. On this basis, therefore, the verse directly indicates the guardianship of the Imām, which is not an incidental part of it.

Ḥākim Ḥasakānī has narrated that, regarding the tradition on the religious precepts, Imām al-Bāqir said:

> Then Gabriel came down and said: 'God has ordered you to introduce to the people their guardian (*walī*) and leader (*imām*), just as you had conveyed to them [the decrees on] prayer, fasting and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), so as to complete to them the argument in all of this.' The Prophet said: 'My people are close to the Age of Ignorance (*al-jāhiliyyah*), and rivalry and the seeking of glory are prevalent amongst them. There are none amongst them for whom the guardian (*walī*) is not unpleasant, and I am anxious.' Following that, God revealed this verse:
>
> > *O Messenger, make known that which hath been revealed unto you from your Lord, for if thou do it not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message [that is, you will not have communicated it in full]. God will protect thee from mankind (5:67).*[698]

The Imām added the words in parenthesis to explain the content of the verse. Based on numerous narrations, Jazā'irī supposed that the verse

[697] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 488, no. 1.

[698] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 191.

of conveyance (*āyat al-tablīgh*) was revealed as follows, with the addition of *fī 'Alī*, the omission of *min rabbik*, the changing of *wāw* to *fā'* in *fa'inna*, and the plural form of *risālātah*:

> 'O Messenger, make known that which has been revealed unto you from your Lord *about 'Alī; thus,* for if thou do it not, thou wilt not have conveyed His messages.'

We have not come across this narration in the writings of Shī'a scholars, whether they were exegeses, books of merits (*kutub al-manāqib*) or *ḥadīth* compilations.

It is thus stated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*: 'The verse *O Messenger, make known that which hath been revealed unto you from your Lord, for if thou do it not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message* was revealed concerning 'Alī.'[699]

In the exegesis of Fayḍ Kāshānī, it states:

> The verse *O Messenger, make known that which hath been revealed unto you from your Lord* has been revealed concerning [the guardianship of] 'Alī, because the Imāms are reported to have said: 'It has thus been revealed.' That is, it has been revealed concerning the Imamate of 'Alī and his chieftainship (*imārah*).'[700]

There are other such exegeses based on certain narrations.

> Similarly, Ibn Shahrāshūb has also quoted *Tafsīr al-Tha'labī* in connection with the meaning of the verse, *O Messenger, make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from your Lord*, where Imām al-Bāqir mentioned the merit of 'Alī.[701]

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās is reported to have said: 'This verse has been revealed to express the right of 'Alī.' Tha'labī has also quoted Imām al-Bāqir as saying: 'The meaning of the verse is 'Make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from your Lord about 'Alī.'' Therefore, the narrations concerning the verse of conveyance all agree that it concerns the right of 'Alī, but none of them say that the phrase *fī 'Alī* is an integral part of the verse. It is only 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's recitation that states:

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[699] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1, 171.

[700] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 456.

[701] See Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 490.

> *O Messenger, make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from your Lord* that 'Alī is the master of the believers, *and if thou do it not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message. God will protect thee from mankind* (5:67).[702]

Ibn Mas'ūd says: 'We used to read this verse in that way during the lifetime of the Prophet.' Al-Suyūṭī has quoted this narration in his exegesis.[703] Also, under the section 'What has been revealed from the Qur'an concerning the right of 'Alī,' 'Alī ibn 'Īsā Arbilī (d.693/1294) quotes the same thing from Ibn Mas'ūd on the authority of Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh.[704]

It was stated earlier that what Ibn Mas'ūd means by this is obviously the interpretation of the verse. He wanted to say that it used to be interpreted in that way during the lifetime of the Prophet.

What has been quoted so far are the most obvious attempts made by this group to prove the occurrence of *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an, and Jazā'irī has cited the most important of them, claiming that there are many of them, and they are transmitted by *tawātur*. But none of them seems convincing.

> *...their deeds are like a mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man parched with thirst mistakes for water; until he comes to it, he finds it to be nothing* (24:39).

All in all, the entire import of most of what is cited as proof of the occurrence of *taḥrīf* depends on the narration on 'the deletion of one-third of the Qur'an within the third verse of *Sūrah al-Nisā'*,' which, as stated earlier, is only mentioned by the author of *Al-Iḥtijāj*. Apart from the author's identity being unknown, the narration itself has no chain of transmission. Other ineffective arguments from this group will be cited while examining the statements of Muḥaddith Nūrī.

The Presumptions of the Author of *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*

Muḥaddith Nūrī wrote *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb* with three introductory parts, twelve chapters and a long epilogue. In the twelve chapters he presents his arguments for the occurrence of *taḥrīf*. What prompted him to write the book was that he thought that certain enemies had deleted passages

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[702] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 191.

[703] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, 298.

[704] Ali ibn 'Īsā Arbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah* (Tabrīz: 1381 q.), vol. 1, 319.

mentioning the merits of *Ahl al-Bayt* and the shortcomings of their adversaries from the Qur'an. By writing his book, he wanted to reply to certain scholars of India who had asked him why the names of *Ahl al-Bayt* were absent in the Qur'an.

In chapter nine, he deals with the names of *Ahl al-Bayt*, and how they would have been mentioned in the Old and New Testaments:

How can a fair-minded person suppose that God has not mentioned the names of the successors to the Seal of the Prophets and his daughter in the Book which is the Mother of all previous scriptures, and not introduced them to the *ummah*, the noblest of nations, when this is far more important than other obligations which are repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an?

Thereafter he backs up his claim with a narration by the Jewish convert, Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who was under the patronage of Mu'āwiyah. Ka'b al-Aḥbār claimed to have read the dates of birth of *Ahl al-Bayt* in 72 books that were all allegedly sent down from Heaven, and in which it was said that, after the Prophet, they would be the best of creation and the divinely instituted leaders on earth. Muḥaddith Nūrī says: 'Ka'b mentioned this to Mu'āwiyah, who was not pleased with what he heard, and got up and left in anger...'[705]

Prior to him, Jazā'irī had imagined the same thing. He says:

> They have committed the most heinous crimes against religion; for example, altering the Qur'an by twisting its words, and deleting words of praise for *Ahl al-Bayt* and expositions against the hypocrites.[706]

We should take a brief look at the proofs advanced by Muḥaddith Nūrī and discuss them to some extent. He says: 'Firstly, there was distortion of the Torah and the Evangel, and the similarity between past and present events necessitates the occurrence of *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an.'[707]

It was explained earlier that the distortions in the Torah and the Evangel were incorrect interpretations. Moreover, many original passages were deleted from, but what remained – as stipulated by the Qur'an –

[705] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 183-184.

[706] Sayyid Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-Nu'mānīyyah* (Tabrīz: Shirkat Printing Press, n.d.), vol. 1, 97.

[707] See Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 35-95.

stayed intact up to the time of the Prophet's apostleship. What is meant by the 'similarity of the nations' is a similarity on principles of morality and social intercourse, notwithstanding any different acquired styles that fitted in with the particular circumstances of each period.

He continues thus:

> Secondly, the styles adopted by the compilers of the Qur'an led to the oversight of certain words and verses, especially in view of the fact that a thorough comprehension of the Qur'an was impossible for anyone who had not compiled the Qur'an in its entirety during the lifetime of the Prophet.[708]

The three stages of the compilation the Qur'an from the time of apostleship up to the standardisation of the texts during the reign of 'Uthmān have been covered in detail, and it should be noted that two of these stages happened during the lifetime of the Prophet, namely, writing it down and the organisation of the verses. Only the arrangement of the chapters took place after the time of the Prophet, and did not by any means necessitate any changes.

Nūrī says:

> Thirdly, the reason given by the Sunnīs to explain the narrations on *taḥrīf* that suggest abrogation of the recitation (*naskh al-tilāwah*) is false, because the narrations stipulate that many of the distortions were done by none other than 'Uthmān himself during his reign.[709]

It was mentioned before that these narrations have no credible basis, and are concoctions of the Ḥashwiyyah which found their way into the Sunnī books of *ḥadīth* out of negligence.[710]

He adds: 'Fourthly, Imām 'Alī had his own manuscript, which must have differed from the other manuscripts.'[711]

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[708] Ibid. 96-104.

[709] See Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 105-120.

[710] See the previous chapter, which deals with the Ḥashwiyyah and their position on the issue of *taḥrīf*.

[711] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 120-134.

Yes, as explained before, the Imām's manuscript differed from the others in the arrangement of the chapters and because it had explanations in the margins.[712]

He also argues: 'Fifthly, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd also had his own personal manuscript.'[713] However, the difference between Ibn Mas'ūd's manuscript and the others was its recitation, and he would sometimes add explanations in order to clarify ambiguous points by substituting more recognisable synonynons for unfamiliar words. Amongst the salient features of his manuscript are the exclusion of the *mu'awwidhatān* (*Sūrah al-Falaq* and *Sūrah al-Nās*) on the assumption that they were supplications, and of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* on the basis that it is equal to the Qur'an rather than a part of it. These are the distinctive features of his manuscript. Be that as it may, he was not implying that there was any distortion *(taḥrīf)* of the Qur'an.[714]

Muḥaddith Nūrī continues: 'Sixthly, the manuscript of Ubayy ibn Ka'b had more verses than the existing manuscript.'[715] Yes, because Ubayy's manuscript included two supplications which he assumed to be chapters, which were known as *Sūrah al-Khal'* and *Sūrah al-Ḥafd*. And at the beginning of *Sūrah al-Zumar* he added the disjointed letters *ḥā' mīm*, which meant that there were a total of eight disjointed letters, contrary to the conventional number. Like Ibn Mas'ūd, he would sometimes also add some words of explanation in his manuscript. We have examined all of them before, and they have nothing at all to do with *taḥrīf*.

He adds:

> Seventhly, 'Uthmān has omitted certain words and verses from the manuscript which were incompatible with the continuity of his rulership. The two preceding caliphs did not omit them, and he redressed their negligence. There were also other motives that led him to make alterations and deletions. In addition, the differing manuscripts which 'Uthmān dispatched to cities far and wide are decisive proof of *taḥrīf*.[716]

[712] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 292-295.

[713] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 135-143.

[714] Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 312-323.

[715] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 144-148.

[716] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 149-170.

In a bid to prove his assumptions, he resorts to the time of the Qur'an's compilation, its standardisation, and the dispatch of the manuscripts to the different cities during the reign of 'Uthmān, which all happened in the presence of the Companions and with their approval.[717] Yet, none of this is acceptable evidence that there were ever any distortions made by 'Uthmān or the two previous caliphs. It is unclear how Nūrī arrived at his conclusions concerning *taḥrīf* at the time of the compilation of the manuscripts, and interestingly enough, he himself sensed the weakness of his arguments by finally saying:

> Although the certainty that the second compilation conforms to the first indicates a trust in the veracity of the scribes and their recordings, in our view this may not be enough, for the argument is nonetheless tenable, even though the claim of deleted verses requires the presentation of proof.[718]

The process of the standardisation of the manuscripts has already been examined in detail,[719] and the conclusion was that it is certain that it did not entail any alteration to the text of the revelation. If ever there were any differences, it was to do with the handwriting styles. It thus becomes clear how weak the relationship is between differences in the manuscripts and the issue of *taḥrīf*.

He continues:

> Eighthly, the narrations of Ahl al-Sunnah – transmitted by the Ḥashwiyyah and quoted by al-Suyūṭī in his book of exegesis and in *al-Itqān*, as well as by other *ḥadīth* scholars in their respective works – are a proof that substantiates the claim of *taḥrīf*.[720]

Some of these narrations have already been examined while dealing with the issue of *taḥrīf* according to the Ḥashwiyyah. As long as such

[717] It was previously mentioned that 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, had agreed in principle with the standardisation of the manuscripts, and Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn ibn Ṭāwūs states in his book (*Sa'd al-Su'ūd*, 278) that 'Uthmān did so in the presence of the Imām.

[718] This phrase in itself shows that he was unsure of his evidence. See Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 153.

[719] See the previous chapter on the Ḥashwiyyah.

[720] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 171-183.

narrations explicitly contradict the Qur'an and the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the Muslims, they have no credibility, whether in terms of the chains of transmission or of reasoning. Since all these narrations have already been examined, we will deal no more with them.

It is interesting to note that Muḥaddith Nūrī has quoted the fictitious *Sūrah al-Wilāyah* from the book *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* in toto,[721] considering it in this respect to be a narration of the adversaries. In the end, he tries to prove that this alleged *sūrah* has also been mentioned in Shī'a books. After quoting the text, he states:

> The apparent indications in *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* are that this *sūrah* has been taken from Shī'a books, although I have found no trace of it there, except that Ibn Shahrāshūb – according to what has been said about him – has stated in *al-Mathālib* that they have deleted the entire *Sūrah al-Wilāyah* from the Qur'an. Perhaps he refers to this very *sūrah*. And God knows best.[722]

Al-Mathālib has already been discussed earlier.[723]
Nūrī also argues:

> Ninthly, God, the Exalted, has mentioned the names of the successors of the Seal of the Prophets and the name of his daughter Lady Fāṭimah, as well as some of their characteristics, in all the blessed scriptures revealed to the previous prophets. He has done so either to favour those communities in such a way that they could seek their intercession to fulfil their needs and provide solutions to their problems, or in order to elevate their status and worth. By mentioning these names prior to the appearance of the Imāms, God may have wished to promote their standing. Nevertheless, how can a fair-minded person assume that God, the Exalted, neglects mention of their names in the Qur'an, which is superior to the other scriptures and will forever remain so? Why has He not introduced them to 'the nation of the Prophet,' who are the best of nations and most favoured by God? The mention of their names, pre-eminence and characteristics in the Qur'an is easier,

[721] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 179-180.
[722] Ibid. 180.
[723] In the section on the assumptions of the Ḥashwīyah (item 18).

more evident and more important than the other obligations which are repeatedly mentioned therein.

He continues:

> Although this argument may seem merely improbable, however, in reality it is based on complete induction or definitive realisation of the criterion (*tanqīḥ al-manāṭ*). ... This improbability is better than the improbable claim of those who deny *taḥrīf* on the basis of the extent of the efforts made by the Companions to protect and preserve the Qur'an.

He also adds:

> It is necessary for us to mention the documentary proof which consists of a number of narrations, one of which is that of the Jewish convert Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who claimed to have read in seventy-two heavenly scriptures of the births of the Prophet and his progeny.[724]

This narration was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

He has also reported another unlikely narration on the authority of Hishām Dastwā'ī, on the authority of 'Amr ibn Shimr, on the authority of Jābir al-Ju'fī from Sālim ibn 'Abdillāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. The report says that Sālim ibn 'Abdillāh told Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir of a narration while they were beside the Black Stone (*al-ḥajar al-aswad*) in Mecca, saying that his father, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, had told him:

> I heard the Prophet saying: 'God, the Blessed and Exalted, revealed to me during the night of ascension (*mi'rāj*) the following: 'O Muhammad! Do you wish to see the names of the Imāms from amongst *Ahl al-Bayt*?' I said: 'Yes,' and He said: 'Look forward.' I did so, and I suddenly saw the names of 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, Muhammad ibn 'Alī, Ja'far ibn Muhammad, Mūsā ibn Ja'far, 'Alī ibn Mūsā, Mūḥammad ibn 'Alī, 'Alī ibn Muhammad, Ḥasan ibn 'Alī and al-Ḥujjat al-Qā'im, which were like glowing stars. I said: 'O Lord! Who are they?' He said: 'They are the Imāms of the *ummah*."

Jābir then says:

[724] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 183-209.

> Then, as Sālim proceeded on his way, I followed him and said: 'I ask you to swear by God: was there anyone other than your father who told you of these names?' He said: 'It is not a tradition [directly heard] from the Prophet. Rather, along with my father, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, I was in the company of Ka'b al-Aḥbār, and I heard him saying: 'The Imāms of this *ummah* are the same in number as the chiefs (*nuqabā'*) of the Children of Israel.' At that time, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib came. Ka'b said: 'This is the first amongst them, and the other eleven will be from his descendants.' Thereafter, Ka'b recounted their names according to the Torah: Taqūbīt, Qaydhū, Dabīrā, Mafsūrā, Masmū'ā, Dūmūh, Mashyū, Hadhār, Yathmū, Baṭū, Nūqas and Qaydhmū.'

And Hishām Dastwā'ī says:

> I met in Ḥīrah a Jewish man named 'Aththū ibn Awsū who was a famous learned man. He told me these names, saying: 'These are the Hebrew names and descriptions as mentioned in the Torah.' Then he interpreted each of them in this manner: 'Taqūbīt means 'the first executor of will (*waṣī*) for the last prophet'; Qaydhū means 'the second executor of will'; Dabīrā means 'the doyen of the martyrs'; Mafsūrā means 'the chief of the worshippers'; Masmū'ā means 'the inheritor of the knowledge of the first and the last'; Dūmūh means 'the truthful speaker of God'; Mashyū means 'the best of prisoners'; Hadhār means 'the one confined in a strange land'; Yathmū means 'the short-lived one with far-reaching impact'; Baṭū means 'the fourth name'; Nūqas means 'his uncle's namesake'; Qaydhmū means 'the hidden one who will rise up by the command of God.'"[725]

In this way, the Ḥashwiyyah and the Akhbārīs joined forces to cite the testimony of Jewish converts who contributed to the confusion, and then circulated nonsensical narrations. We should remind the likes of Muḥaddith Nūrī not to spread falsehoods in a bid to substantiate their own assumptions:

[725] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 191-192.

> *And be not like her who unravelleth the thread, after she hath made it strong...* (16:92).

Here, disregarding the textual weakness of the two narrations, we shall examine their transmission. The first narration was transmitted by Muhammad ibn Sinān (a completely weak source – no tradition from him can be relied upon)[726] on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd, then Ziyād ibn Mundhir, known as Surḥūb and the chief of Jārūdiyyah,[727] from a Sunnī narrator, Layth ibn Sa'd, (94-175 AH). The *hadīth* is as follows:

> Layth said that when Ka'b was in the presence of Mu'āwiyah [yet Mu'āwiyah died in 60 AH, 34 years before Layth was born], I asked him: 'How did you find the description of the birth of the Prophet in the books you have read? And did you find mention of the virtue of his progeny?' Ka'b turned to Mu'āwiyah in order to share his view. God let the following flow from his tongue... [and so on].

It is clear that this story was fabricated by Abū al-Jārūd. Abū 'Amr Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz Kashshī says:

> Abū al-Jārūd was known as Surḥūb. The Surḥūbiyyah, a derivative of the Zaydiyyah, is attributable to him. Imām al-Bāqir would call him by this name. It is said that Surḥūb is the name of a blind devil that lives in the sea. Abū al-Jārūd was both literally and figuratively blind.[728]

Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī says: 'Our scholars have disowned the narrations which Muhammad ibn Sinān has transmitted from him.'[729]

The second narration was transmitted by the author of *Muqtaḍab al-Athar*, Abū 'Abdillāh Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī,[730] on

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[726] According to al-Najāshī in his *rijāl*, vol. 2, 208.

[727] Jārūdīyyah is an offshoot of Zaydīyyah.

[728] Abū 'Amr Muhammad ibn 'Umar Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl, (Rijāl al-Kāshshī)*, Najaf Edition, n.d., 199, no. 104.

[729] Muhammad ibn Ali Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-Ruwāt* (Qum: Maktabah Muṣṭafawī, n.d.), vol. 1, 339.

[730] He and his father were amongst the prominent figures in Baghdad. He was credited with many works, but during the latter part of his life, he suffered from a mental disturbance and passed away in 401/1010. Najāshī says: 'Our sheikhs have identified

the authority of Thawābah al-Mawṣilī, on the authority of Abū 'Arūbah al-Ḥarrānī, on the authority of Mūsā ibn 'Īsā al-Ifrīqī (all of whom were unknown), on the authority of Hishām ibn Sanbar Dastwā'ī (who was one of the great Sunnī traditionists and regarded by al-Ṭayālasī as the foremost in *ḥadīth*),[731] on the authority of 'Amr ibn Shimr ibn Yazīd (who was weak in *ḥadīth*). The latter transmitted the book of Jābir and added certain things to it. For this reason, the narrations of Jābir transmitted through him are regarded as doubtful.[732]

'Allāmah Ḥillī says: 'I do not trust any of his narrations.'[733] And he narrated the tradition from Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī who himself is reliable. However, Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī says: 'Most of the narrators [who narrated] from him were weak.' Najāshī says: 'A group that was weak and would be taunted narrated from him who himself was eclectic.' 'Allāmah Ḥillī also says: 'In my opinion, it is better for us to suspend our judgment on whatever the group which included 'Amr ibn Shimr would narrate through him.'[734]

It is evident that the source of the problems with this tradition stem from 'Amr ibn Shimr, who fabricated it by quoting Jābir al-Ju'fī. Jābir transmitted the tradition from Sālim ibn 'Abdillāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 106/724), who was one of the seven great jurists (*fuqahā'*) of Medina. His mother was the daughter of Yazdigerd, who was one of the Persian captives whom 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, offered in marriage to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, while her sister was given in marriage to the Imām's own son, Imām Ḥusayn, from whom was born Imām 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn. Another of her sisters was offered in marriage to Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, from whom was born Qāsim ibn Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr. The Imām assumed the custody of these three sisters.[735]

The fact that 'Amr ibn Shimr has attributed this tradition to the grandson of 'Umar is intentionally confusing. The rest of the chains

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him as weak (*ḍa'īf*); hence, we do not narrate from him.' See Sheikh Abdullāh Māmaqānī, *Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl* (Qum: lithograph, 1350), vol. 1, no. 517, 88.

[731] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 11, 43.

[732] *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, vol. 2, 132.

[733] 'Allāmah Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar Ḥillī, *al-Rijāl* (Najaf Edition, Qum: Khayyām, 1381 q.), 242.

[734] Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-Ruwāt*, vol. 1, 144.

[735] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, 438.

of transmissions upon which Nūrī has relied are of the same nature; hence, we shall refrain from repeating them. A structure built on shaky foundations is worthless, and explicit mention of the names of *Ahl al-Bayt* in the Torah and the Evangel has not been demonstrated and is therefore a false claim.

The tenth proof which Muḥaddith Nūrī cites for proving the occurrence of *taḥrīf* is variation in the recitations. He says:

> Without doubt, the reciters disagreed over many words of the Qur'an, and the forms of the words. This is while the Qur'an has been revealed with identical words [and language] without any change and variance, [but] since the existing manuscript is not devoid of some of these incorrect recitations, and even most of its words are not in conformity with the revelation, our point that it lacks total conformity with what has been revealed is established.

He adds:

> Although this is sufficient proof of the deletion of a *sūrah*, a verse or even a word, since the reciters do not differ in such cases, by applying the rule of 'the absence a third stance' (*'adam al-qawl bi al-faṣl*),[736] one can make the claim.[737]

We have discussed in detail the famous reciters and recitations, and stated that there is no necessary relationship between the issue of the various recitations and the wider transmission (*tawātur*) of the Qur'an, for the Qur'an and the different recitations are two different things. The Qur'an is a *mutawātir* (widely transmitted) text that was revealed to the Prophet and preserved unchanged by the forerunners of religion and the Muslim people throughout the ages. The recitations, however, are a matter of *ijtihād* and personal opinion regarding the interpretation of the text and the manner of reciting it.

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[736] This refers to a rule based on the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Here he means that those who believe in *taḥrīf* say that *taḥrīf* has occurred throughout the Qur'an, while those who deny it say that no *taḥrīf* has ever occurred in the Qur'an. So there is no specific division between the two cases. Technically, it is called 'compound consensus.'

[737] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 209-233.

It should be stated that the principle of 'the absence a third stance' (*'adam al-qawl bi al-faṣl*) does not apply in this case, since it concerns the application of the principles of jurisprudence to speculation, but not to revealed sciences which are founded on examination and evaluation. We shall now examine Nūrī's most significant proofs, the eleventh and twelfth.

The Most Important Proof for the Notion of *Taḥrīf*

Perhaps, the most important support for the proponents of *taḥrīf* is a set of scattered narrations collected from different sources, which according to them, stipulate the issue of *taḥrīf* either in general terms or in particular instances which explicitly indicate places where *taḥrīf* has occurred. Muḥaddith Nūrī has cited as his eleventh proof narrations which indicate *taḥrīf* in general terms, and those which indicate *taḥrīf* in particular instances as his twelfth proof. He collected these narrations from different sources, most of which have no credibility, the rest being nothing at all to do with *taḥrīf*. Interestingly enough, Nūrī challenged his opponents by relying on the extent of his research and his acquisition of references known only to a few. In exposing Sayyid Baghdādī – who says in *Sharḥ al-Wāfiyah:* 'No one has brought forth reports on *taḥrīf* except those who have narrated accounts of fatalism (*jabr*), delegation (*tafwīḍ*) and other matters contrary to religion' – Nūrī says: 'There is no fault in Sayyid Baghdādī saying this, because, due to the paucity of books at his disposal, his research was insufficient.'[738]

Ḥujjat Balāghī says:

> According to his own assumptions, Muḥaddith Nūrī has tried to collect a large number of narrations on *taḥrīf* by increasing the number of *musnad*[739] narrations by adding *mursal* narrations, which are essentially derived from the same *musnad* narrations. Amongst these *mursal* traditions are those of 'Ayyāshī, Furāt and others. In addition to that, a significant number of the chains of transmission of his *musnad* narrations go back to a few narrators who have been subjected to criticism in *rijāl* biographies. Some of these narrators are liars, and so corrupt and despicable that

[738] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 350.

[739] *Musnad* literally means 'supported'; a tradition supported by a known chain of transmission that goes all the way back to the Prophet. [Trans.]

narrating from them is not permissible. Some are also staunch enemies of *Ahl al-Bayt*. It is evident that most of these narrations are of no benefit.[740]

The most important sources from which Muḥaddīth Nūrī has taken narrations follow on.

Unreliable Books Cited by Muḥaddith Nūrī

1) ***A treatise of unknown origin.*** One of the books relied upon by those who subscribe to the notion of *taḥrīf* is a treatise of unknown origin with different titles attributed to various persons. It is sometimes identified as *Risālah al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, and attributed to Sa'd ibn 'Abdillāh al-Ash'arī (d. 301/913); as *Mā Warada fī Ṣunūf al-Qur'ān*, attributed to Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī (d. 360/971); or as *Risālah al-Muḥkam wa al-Mutashābih*, attributed to Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044).[741]

It must be pointed out that a treatise such as this – with an unknown author, an inauthentic chain of transmission, and unrecognised by scholars – cannot be treated as a reference for narrations, except by the likes of Muḥaddith Nūrī who seems to have been clutching at straws in order to fill the pages of his book *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*. The other references that were used are no better.

2) ***Al-Ṣaqīfah* by Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī (d. 90/709).** Sulaym was one of the much-loved companions of 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful. He wrote a book containing some of the secrets of the Imamate (*imāmah*) and guardianship (*wilāyah*), which was one of the most precious books amongst the Shī'a at that time, although many researchers have doubted the veracity of the existing manuscript.

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[740] See Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Raḥmān*, preface, 26.

[741] This book is also attributed to Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ḥamzah al-Baṭā'inī who was one of the leaders of the Wāqifīyyah sect, because, based on a statement by Najāshī (*al-Rijāl*, vol. 1, 133), he had a treatise entitled *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* in which his chains of transmission are the same as those mentioned in the introduction to the treatise of Nu'mānī. But this is improbable, because it is possible that both Nu'mānī and Najāshī took it from a single book, and Nu'mānī reported from this treatise a narration attributed to Imām al-Ṣādiq which ended with the phrase *faḍḍalū wa aḍallū*. Therefore, there is no reason for attributing the entire treatise of Nu'mānī to him, and granted that it belongs to Baṭā'inī, his citation of him is no better than others.

Shaykh Mufīd says:

> This book cannot be relied upon. It is not permissible to act upon most of its contents, for it is marred with errors and guile. It is inappropriate for any devout person to act upon anything it says, and one should refrain from relying upon it or narrating its traditions.[742]

This scepticism is due to the fact that Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī pursued him in order to shed his blood, but he escaped and sought refuge in Abān ibn Abī 'Ayyāsh (Fīrūz). Upon his death, he offered the book to Abān as a reward for his favour. In his *al-Khulāṣah*, 'Allāmah states that: 'The book of Sulaym has been transmitted from Abān, and only through him.'

Abān was one of the Followers (*tābi'ūn*) and a companion of Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq. In his book on *rijāl*, Shaykh Ṭūsī considers him 'weak' (*ḍa'īf*). Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī also says of him: 'He is weak and unworthy of attention.' Our scholars have accused Abān of altering Sulaym's book by making additions, and some have even attributed the book to Abān himself. Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī says: 'Our scholars attribute the book of Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī to Abān.'

Shaykh Ṭūsī reports that the book of Sulaym passed through two channels, namely, from Ḥammād ibn 'Īsā and 'Uthmān ibn 'Īsā, on the authority of Abān, from Sulaym; and through Ḥammād on the authority of Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Yamānī, on the authority of Abān, from Sulaym

The esteemed teacher, Ayatollah Khoī says:

> The Shaykh's tracking (*ṭarīq*) of Sulaym's book through both chains of transmission is weak. The Shaykh says: 'We have no access to the book of Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī as narrated through Ḥammād ibn 'Īsā, for in this channel is Abū Samīnah, and Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Ṣayrafī who is weak as well as fraudulent.

This book is well known for containing diverse manuscripts, and perhaps its transfer from one scribe to another over the course of time made it susceptible to modifications stemming from different outlooks and ways of thinking – something which might happen with any author who fails to publish his book himself during his lifetime.

Muḥaqqiq Tehrānī says:

[742] Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyyah*, 149-150.

> I have discovered that various manuscripts of this book differed in three ways: the chains of transmission mentioned at the beginning of the manuscripts; the order and arrangement of the traditions; and in the number of the traditions.

Another aspect mentioned by some researchers in the introduction to the book is as follows: many traditions are reported on the authority of Sulaym, and narrated by 'Allāmah Majlisī in the various volumes of *Biḥār al-Anwār*, as well as by other great figures in their own books (such as Kulaynī, Shaykh Ṣadūq, 'Allāmah Ḥillī in his abridgment of *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb in *'Uyūn al-Mu'jizāt*, Ṣaffār in *Baṣā'ir*, and others). However, none of these traditions is reflected in the present manuscripts of Sulaym's book. Many of them were narrated through other than Abān or directly through Sulaym himself, and this in itself affirms Abān's interpolation in Sulaym's book. In conclusion, it must be noted that this book is made up of discontinuous parts, for it repeatedly states: 'I heard from Abān ibn Abī 'Ayyāsh, on the authority of Sulaym ibn Qays...' Therefore, it is most probable that it was altered and added to by Abān, who himself set it out in its present form with some additions or deletions. It is therefore more accurate to attribute the book – as it is in its present condition – to Abān rather than Sulaym, even though the original was that of Sulaym. As such, one must not attribute the unlikely accounts in the book to Sulaym.

In short, what Shaykh Mufīd said in his masterful research on this book is correct. As mentioned above, the Shaykh said:

> This book cannot be relied upon. It is not permissible to act upon most of its contents, for it is marred with errors and guile. It is inappropriate for any devout person to act upon anything it says, and one should refrain from relying upon it or narrating its traditions.[743]

3) *Qirā'āt* by Aḥmad ibn Muhammad al-Sayyārī (d. 268/881).[744]

The Shaykh says: 'Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Sayyār al-Kātib was one of the scribes of Āl Ṭāhir (the Ṭāhirites). He is weak in narration,

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[743] See Khoī, *Mu'jamu Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 1, 141-142; vol. 8, 216-228; Tehrānī: *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 2, 152-159; al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*, preface, 19-39; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 321.

[744] A critical edition of this book has recently been published with a detailed introduction by Etan Kohlberg and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: The Kitab al-Qira'at of Ahmad B. Muhammad Al-Sayyari*, Brill, 2008.

irreligious and many of his traditions do not have a continuous chain of transmission (*kathīr al-marāsīl*).'

Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī says of him: 'He is extremely weak, an extremist and a distorter.' Muhammad ibn 'Alī ibn Maḥbūb has also said in *al-Nawādir al-Muṣannafah* that he believed in the transmigration of the soul.[745] As Shaykh Ḥasan ibn Sulaymān al-Ḥillī stated in *Mukhtaṣar Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, this book is better known as *al-Tanzīl wa al-Taḥrīf* (Revelation and Distortion), and this title is closer to the content of the book than the title that refers to recitations.

Muḥaddith Nūrī had a copy of it at his disposal, and quoted from it in *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*.[746]

In their books of *ḥadīth*, the *ḥadīth* scholars (*muḥaddithūn*) of Qum used to delete all the narrations transmitted by al-Sayyār.

4) The *Tafsīr* of Abū al-Jārūd Ziyād ibn Mundhir, better known as Surḥūb (died 150/767).

We mentioned earlier that he was the leader of the Jārūdiyyah also known as the Surḥūbīyyah. Kashshī says: 'Abū al-Jārūd was both literally and figuratively blind.'

It is narrated that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'May God curse him! He was blind and had no insight.' Muhammad ibn Sinān has said of him: 'Abū al-Jārūd drank wine before his death and submitted to the guardianship of the unbelievers.'[747] His *Tafsīr* is as Abū Sahl Kathīr ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Qaṭṭān narrated from him. The Shaykh and Najāshī's channel (*ṭarīq*) in Abū al-Jārūd's *Tafsīr* ends up with Abū Sahl, and the Shaykh says: 'Abū Sahl is weak.'[748]

5) The *Tafsīr* of 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 329/941)

It was pointed out before that this exegesis (*tafsīr*) is attributed to him, but not his own writing. In reality, it is a blend of his own dictations to his student, Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās ibn Muhammad al-'Alawī into which a considerable portion of Abū al-Jārūd's *Tafsīr* was inserted by Abū al-Faḍl, and then supplemented with narrations of his own. He wrote an

[745] Khoī, *Mu'jamu Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 2, 282-284.

[746] Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 7, 322.

[747] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 267.

[748] Khoī, *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 7, 322.

introduction in which he brought in a few narrations on the verses of the Qur'an attributed to 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful.

Abū al-Faḍl al-'Alawī took from his teacher al-Qummī narrations from Imām al-Ṣādiq (*'a*) which were in his exegesis of the Qur'an, as well as Abū al-Jārūd's *Tafsīr* as transmitted from Imām al-Bāqir. And in order to enhance the benefit of the book, he has added other narrations on *ḥadīth* from his own sheikhs. Therefore, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* is a blend of narrations from al-Qummī and Abū al-Jārūd and other narrations transmitted by Abū al-Faḍl himself.

From what we have said, it becomes clear that this exegesis – in its present form – was composed by Abū al-Faḍl al-'Alawī. Yet, since for the narrations he has benefited more from his teacher, al-Qummī, he has attributed the book to him. Muḥaqqiq Tehrānī says: 'Abū al-Faḍl's interpolation includes the main body of the Qur'an, that is, from the beginning of *Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān* up to the end of the Qur'an.'[749]

This exegesis commences with: 'Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās ibn Muhammad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Ḥamzah ibn Mūsā ibn Ja'far narrated to us that 'Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm narrated to...'

There are two unknown persons here: the one who narrated from Abū al-Faḍl al-'Alawī,[750] and Abū al-Faḍl himself, because none of the authors of the biographies of narrators mention anything about him. The only available information about him is that he was one of the grandchildren of Ḥamzah, the son of Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far. He was an 'Alawī (descendant of Imām 'Alī) and might possibly have been one of the students of 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī. And so, just as the identity of the first person and his genealogy are unknown, Abū al-Faḍl 'Abbās al-'Alawī is unmentioned in the books of *rijāl*. Therefore, since the chains of transmission are interrupted, or what is technically called *majhūl* (unknown), the exegesis has no credibility in the eyes of *ḥadīth* scholars.

6) *Al-Istighāthah* by 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Kūfī (d. 352/963).

[749] Tehrānī, *al-Dhārī'ah*, vol. 4, 302-303.

[750] The contemporary scholar Ayatollah Sayyid Mūsā Zanjānī supposes that the one who said, '...narrated a tradition for me' was a person named 'Alī ibn Ḥātim ibn Abū Ḥātim al-Qazwīnī, who was one of the weak narrators. He has narrated much, because all of those from whom he has narrated were included in the chains of transmission of this exegesis. It is evident, therefore, that the first narrator of the exegesis from Abū al-Faḍl was the same 'Alī ibn Ḥātim.

According to Najāshī:

> He himself claimed that he was amongst the Ṭālibiyyūn (descendants of Abū Ṭālib). In the later part of his life, he inclined toward extremism (*ghuluww*) and his faith (*madhhab*) was corrupted. He wrote an ample number of books, but most of them are superficial and worthless. As the Shaykh said, this book (*al-Istighāthah*) is of this type. The Shaykh says: 'He was an Imāmī and on the right track, writing good books such as *al-Awṣiyā'*, and one on *fiqh* in the style of al-Muzanī. In the end, however, he was drawn toward deviation and eclecticism, propagating the School of the Five Persons and writing a book on *ghuluww* and eclecticism.'

Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī says: 'He was a liar, an extremist and an innovator (in religion). I have seen many of his books which are not worthy of attention.'

'Allāmah Ḥillī says:

> What *takhmīs* (the dividing into five parts) means for the extremists (*ghulāt*) is that Salmān al-Fārsī, Miqdād, 'Ammār, Abū Dharr and 'Amr ibn Umayyah have been deputed by God to manage the universe.

Moreover, the esteemed teacher, Ayatollah Khoī, says: 'The Shaykh's channel down to him is unknown.'[751]

7) Al-Iḥtijāj **by Ṭabrisī.**

It was stated earlier that the book of this name is attributed to Ṭabrisī (Ṭabris is the Arabic form of Tafresh[752]). However, the identity of this Tabrisī is not clear. In the introduction, Sayyid Muhammad Baḥr al-'Ulūm gives six names of prominent persons to whom this book is possibly attributed:

1) Abū Manṣūr, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Ṭabrisī (died 620 AH). In *Kashf al-Maḥajjah*, Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs has attributed this book to him.

2) Abū 'Alī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan ibn Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), the author of *Tafsīr Majma' al-Bayān*, whom Muḥaddith Astarābādī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī, the author of *'Awālī*, considered likely.

3) Abū Naṣr, Ḥasan ibn Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, the author of *Makārim al-Akhlāq* and son of Amīn al-Islām al-Ṭabrisī, the author of *Tafsīr Majma' al-Bayān*.

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[751] Khoī, *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 11, 246-247.

[752] A city in the central region of Iran, 222 kilometres south-west of Tehran.

4) Abū Faḍl, 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Faḍl, grandson of the author of *Tafsīr Majma' al-Bayān*. He wrote *Nathar al-Li'ālī* and *Mishkāt al-Anwār* as supplements to his father's work, i.e. *Makārim al-Akhlāq*.

5) Abū 'Alī, Muhammad ibn Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī, who was one of the students of Shaykh Mufīd.

6) Abū 'Alī, Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Muhammad al-Ṭabrisī, a contemporary of Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.

Regarding the book itself, however, it must be pointed out that its traditions are *mursal* and without chains of transmission, and most of them are a blend of transmitted narrations and rational arguments. However, one can only rely on the arguments but not on their chains of transmission. For this reason, the scholars have not relied on the transmissions of the narrations themselves, but focussed attention on the rationality of the text. This necessarily affects the book's status as a historical *ḥadīth* document, and perhaps for this reason the author intentionally left his name undisclosed. He gives his motive for writing the book as teaching the Shī'a a method of convincing argumentation and to encourage them. To this end, he has brought together debates on various aspects of the religion, which he has attributed to prominent figures to back this up. He says:

> We have not given the chains of transmission of most of the traditions we mention. This is either because there is a consensus on them, that they conform with rational argument, or on account of their fame in the biographies and *ḥadīth* collections.

Therefore, this book is more akin to a book of scholastic theology (*kalām*) than one of *ḥadīth* or history, since the rational argumentation outnumbers the narrations. Amongst these many debates the author cites the reply to an atheist who had supposed that the Qur'an contained contradictions.

He has attributed this dialogue to'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, whilst most probably it was a hypothetical case which he used to teach how to argue and reason well, even though some narrations are included here and there in the argument. For this reason, he is the only one to

have quoted this narration with such elaboration and in such a disorderly arrangement.[753]

8) ***Tafsīr* attributed to Imām Ḥasan al-'Askarī.**

This exegesis is partial and broken, containing an exegesis of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and most of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* up to verse 282 – the longest in the Qur'an – where there is the phrase:

> *The witnesses should not refuse when they are called* (2:282).

It was compiled by two authors who, according to Shaykh Ṣadūq, are identified as Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Muhammad ibn Ziyād and Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muhammad ibn Sayyār. According to the authors, it was dictated to them by Imām Ḥasan al-'Askarī over the course of seven years, when they would frequently meet with the Imām and write down whatever he would say in relation to the Qur'an. The authors were sons of rich men of Astarābād[754] whose properties were confiscated by Emir Dā'ī ilā al-Ḥaqq, the leader of the Zaydiyyah in Astarābād. Their parents went with their families to Iraq and entered Sāmarrā'. The Imām accepted them and prayed for prosperity in their works. After receiving the good news of the retrieval of their properties, they went to the Imām and asked for his permission to return to their home town Astarābād. Th Imām asked them to let their two sons stay with him in order to acqui knowledge, and they complied. These two sons committed themselve to being in the presence of the Imām for seven years, and they would regularly visit him every day in his house.

Abū al-Ḥasan Muhammad ibn Qāsim al-Khaṭīb, better known as *Mufassir* Astarābādī (the exegete of Astarābād), has narrated from these two persons, and this is the channel Abū Ja'far al-Ṣadūq used for this exegesis.[755]

However, the reliability of Khaṭib Astarābādī has not been established. In addition, the status of Abū Ya'qūb and Abū al-Ḥasan – the transmitters

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[753] Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, 358-384. The tradition about the alleged contradictory verses – briefly, yet referenced with chains of transmission – can be found in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, 255-270, and Majlisī has mentioned both of them in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 9, 98, 127-142.

[754] Astarābād, the former name of Gorgan, the capital of Golestan province in the north of modern-day Iran. [Trans.]

[755] Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 4, 285.

of the exegesis – is also unknown. Hence, all three of the sources of this book are virtually unknown.

Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī says in this regard:

> Muhammad ibn Qāsim *Mufassir* Astarābādī is weak and a liar. Abū Ja'far has reported from him an exegesis through the transmission of two unknown persons. The exegeses of Sahl Dībājī from his father is also a fabrication full of inadmissible and unbelievable traditions.

The esteemed teacher, Ayatollah Khoī, says:

> Muhammad ibn Qāsim has not been relied upon by any of the predecessors, including al-Ṣadūq, who narrates much from him. Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī considers him weak, and scholars of later periods such as 'Allāmah, Sayyid Dāmād and others also regard him as weak... In reality, this person is of unknown character. Neither his reliability nor his weakness has been proven to us. And a plenitude of al-Ṣaduq's transmissions from him, especially in his books other than *al-Faqīh*, does not prove his reliability. At any rate, the exegesis attributed to Imām 'Askarī through his transmission has not been established.[756]

Ayatollah Khoī continues:

> In addition, anyone who cares to take a look at this exegesis would entertain no doubts about its falsity, because writing such a book is not worthy of an erudite scholar, let alone an Imām who is the proof of God over His creation.[757]

9) Exegeses *(tafāsīr)* whose chains of transmission are broken.

Several famous scholars have written some advanced exegeses whose original manuscripts are unfortunately mainly lost, leaving extant only parts without a chain of transmission. In many instances, the traditions therein are disorderly and have interpolations, which put into question the genuineness of most of them. Here we shall mention some examples:

a) The exegesis of Abū Naṣr Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd ibn 'Ayyāsh Salamī Samarqandī (d. 320/932), better known as *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*. For the

[756] Khoī, *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 17, 156-157.

[757] Ibid. vol. 12, 147.

sake of brevity, some scribes have omitted the chains of transmission of the narrations contained within it.
'Allāmah Majlisī says:

> Whoever omitted these chains of transmission has offered an excuse worse than sin. He gives as his excuse: 'I looked at the chains of transmission of this exegesis and I liked them. I looked for the one who might have heard it from the author or somebody else. Yet I did not find anyone who heard it personally or was granted permission by the author to narrate it. Therefore, I omitted the chains of transmission and wrote the rest as it was, for it to be easy for the scribes and readers. If I later find someone who heard it or was granted permission by the author to narrate it, I will mention the chains of transmission the way they were written by the author.

Majlisī adds:

> Yet, from this fragmented exegesis, only half of it – up to the end of *Sūrah al-Kahf* – has survived.[758]

b) The exegesis of Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Furāt al-Kūfī (d. circa 300/913), who has restricted himself to narrations transmitted from the Imāms and reported much from Ḥusayn ibn Sa'īd al-Kūfī al-Ahwāzī who was a resident of Qum, where he died, and was a companion of Imām Riḍā, Imām Jawād and Imām Hādī. He has also narrated from Ja'far ibn Muhammad Fazārī and 'Ubayd ibn Kathīr al-'Āmirī as well as from his other teachers (who were more than a hundred, all of whom were narrators of our traditions). But neither the names nor descriptions of most of these people are mentioned in our books of *rijāl*. There is no mention of Furāt himself, either positive or negative.
Muḥaqqiq Tehrānī says:

> It is very regrettable that some have intentionally omitted most of these chains of transmission and satisfied themselves with less significant phrases such as 'Furāt, on the authority of Ḥusayn

[758] See Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 4, 295.

> ibn Sa'īd *mu'an'anan*,[759] on the authority of so-and-so.' Also, in place of the chains of transmission, by mentioning *mu'an'anan*, he wanted to say that a narration was *musnad* and *mu'an'an*, but for the sake of brevity, he omitted the chains.[760]

c) The exegesis of Muhammad ibn 'Abbās Māhyār, better known as Ibn Ḥajjām (d. circa 330/942.). He was righteous and reliable, and has written a book entitled *Mā Nazala min al-Qur'ān fī Ahl al-Bayt*. Najāshī says:

> A group of our associates say that no such book has been written so far on this subject. It is said that this book had a thousand pages.[761]

The Shaykh's channel for this book is correct, but none of the succeeding researchers has seen this exegesis. The apparent meaning of Najāshī's statement suggests that he himself had not seen the book, and quoted what others had said concerning its size.

Muḥaqqiq Tehrānī says:

> In the book *Ta'wil al-Āyāt al-Ẓāhirah*, Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn, the student of al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 940/1534), has narrated from him. Therefore, it is evident that this book was extant until that time, but afterwards no one knew of its whereabouts.

Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn quotes a group of our scholars as saying that no book of this kind has ever been written, and adds:

> I have only seen half of this book, but not its entirety; from the following verse up to the end of the Qur'an:
>
> > *And they indeed strove hard to beguile thee away from that wherewith We have inspired thee, that thou shouldst invent other than it against Us...* (17:73).[762]

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[759] The expression *mu'an'an* is a term which means 'So-and-so narrated on the authority of so-and-so, on the authority of so-and-so...'

[760] Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 4, 298.

[761] Khoī, *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 16, 198.

[762] Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn Ali Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-Āyāt al-Ẓāhirah* (Qum: Amīr Printing Press, 1407 q.), vol. 1, 284.

'Alī ibn Ṭāwūs has narrated from him in the treatise *Muḥāsabat al-Nafs*, and as stated in *al-Yaqīn* that the book under discussion was, according to him, complete, saying that it is in ten parts in two large volumes. Ibn Ṭāwūs says: 'He has reported its narrations through the channel of great Sunnī figures to provide convincing proofs.' Muḥaqqiq Tehrānī says: 'In *al-Yaqīn* Ibn Ṭāwūs has quoted narrations from both of its volumes.'[763]

But Muḥaddith Nūrī was confused on this point. In *Ta'wīl al-Āyāt al-Bāhirah* he has reported narrations from Shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn al-Najafī which apparently indicate the occurrence of *taḥrīf* by supposing that they are an integral part of *Tafsīr Māhyār*.[764] This error is strange, because it was Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn Astarābādī who narrated from *Tafsīr Māhyār* in the book *Ta'wīl al-Āyāt al-Ẓāhirah*. We should bear in mind that *Ta'wīl al-Āyāt al-Bāhirah* is the Persian translation of Sharaf al-Dīn's book which, as mentioned at the end of the book,[765] was written by Shaykh Muhammad Taqī, better known as Āqānajafī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1332/1914), who was an outstanding and influential personality of his time in Iṣfahān. The beginning of the book, as well as the title given to it by the publishers, has led some people to assume that the book was written by him. This has confused many people, just as it has Muḥaddith Nūrī.[766]

We shall briefly examine the narrations which Muḥaddith Nūrī supposed were indicative of *taḥrīf*, some of which indicate *taḥrīf* in general terms, while others specify particular instances.

Seven Groups of Narrations Cited by Muḥaddith Nūrī

There are over a thousand of these narrations (1,122 to be exact), 61 of which in his view indicate the general occurrence of *taḥrīf*, and 1,061 which do so explicitly. However, he has taken most of these narrations from unreliable sources, such as were mentioned earlier. They are either of unknown origin, fragmentary, fabricated or unsubstantiated. This amounts to 815 narrations, and if these as discounted, there is a remainder

[763] Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 3, no. 1129, 303-304; vol. 19, 29-30.

[764] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, no. 14, 237-238, from proof 11 and elsewhere. Before him, the author of *Amal al-Amal* had made the same mistake and the author of *al-Riyāḍ* has charged him with it. See Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah*, vol. 3, 305.

[765] Where it states: 'I finished transcribing this book on the night of Friday, Jumādā al-Awwal 13, 1297 q.'

[766] The same error has occurred in Nūrī Ṭabrisī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 1, 279, no. 11.

of 307, many of which are about variations in recitation, especially those quoted from Ṭabrisī's *Majma' al-Bayān* which includes 107. Some of these are as follows:

(1) It is reported that 'Alī would read the word *fawasaṭna* (100:5) with a *tashdīd* (doubled) letter *sīn*. (2) Kisā'ī would read *yarahu* (99:7, 8) with the letter *yā'* with a *ḍammah*, and 'Alī would read it the same way. (3) The Prophet, as well as 'Urwah ibn Zubayr, would read the phrase *mā wadda'aka* (93:3) without *tashdīd*. (4) In *Sūrah al-Shams*, Ibn 'Āmir and the people of Medina would read *Falā yakhāfu 'uqbīhā*.[767] This reading has also been transmitted from Imām al-Ṣādiq. (5) Kisā'ī, Ya'qūb and Sahl would read *wa lā yūthiqu* (89:26) with the letter *thā'* with a *fatḥah*, and in a narration from Abū Qallābah it is said that the Prophet would read it the same way. And there are many other such narrations on the recitation of the Qur'an which are transmitted from the Imāms. This set of narrations is not authoritative because, first of all, it is transmitted through a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*), and also, it has nothing to do with *taḥrīf*.

We shall now examine the narrations which, according to Nūrī, indicate the occurrence of *taḥrīf*. These consist of approximately two hundred narrations which Muḥaddith Nūrī has quoted in *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb* from reliable sources, considering them as proof of the occurrence of *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an. They are in seven groups, and an example is given of each of them.

Group 1. This group consists of exegeses intended to explain given verses by stating the circumstances of the revelation and determining the evident application. The practice of those in the past was to write an explanation in the text itself in order to remove any ambiguity in a given verse and thereby clarify it. Most of these narrations are of this type, and some examples are given below:

i) Thiqat al-Islām Kulaynī has reported that 'Alī has recited thus:

> *And when he turns away, his aim is to spread mischief in the land and destroy crops and animals...* (2:205);

and then he would add *bi-ẓulmihi wa sū'i sīratih*[768] (with his injustice and misbehaviour) in order to state the cause of perdition, that is, injustice and misbehaviour in the management of affairs.

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[767] The verse is read as *Wa lā yakhāfu 'uqbāhā* (91:15).

[768] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, no. 435, 289.

ii) Regarding the verse:

> *Those are they the secrets of whose hearts God knoweth. So let them alone and admonish them, and speak to them a word to reach their very souls* (4:63)

Kulaynī also reports that, after *So let them alone*, Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far added *faqad sabaqat 'alayhim kalimat al-shaqā' wa sabaqa lahum al-'adhāb* (for wretchedness is decreed for them, and chastisement is ordained for them), and then recited the rest of the verse.[769]

Muḥaddith Nūrī says: 'The apparent context of the verse suggests that the extra phrase was part of the Qur'an and not an interpretation.' He made this statement to refute 'Allāmah Majlisī's view that the narration is authentic, and to show that the Imām meant it as an interpretation of the verse; that is, because of their wretchedness and their ordained chastisement, God has given the command to leave them alone.[770] It should be pointed out that the style of the narration conforms with Majlisī's view, since he was acquainted with the import of the Imāms' words, unlike Muḥaddith Nūrī whose weak reasoning is evident.

iii) Concerning this verse:

> *...they can have no real faith until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their hearts no resistance against your decisions, but accept them with full submission* (4:65),

it is reported that Imām al-Ṣādiq recited:

> *...and find in their hearts no resistance against your decisions* regarding the issue of wilāyah and submit obediently to God *with full submission.*"[771]

Evidently the speaker intends to elucidate any ellipsis in the verse, and it cannot be ascribed to *taḥrīf*.

iv) Kulaynī narrates from Abū Naṣīr that for the verse:

> *...wa in talwū aw tu'riḍū*
>
> *...and if you distort or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that ye do* (4:135),

[769] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, no. 211, 184.

[770] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 275.

[771] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, no. 210, 184.

Imām al-Ṣādiq said:

> ...*wa in talwū* al-amra *aw tu'riḍū* 'ammā umirtum bihi
>
> ...*and if you distort* the command *or decline* what you are commanded to do, *verily God is well-acquainted with all that ye do.* [772]

Muḥaddith Nūrī – who has quoted this tradition as illustrating *taḥrīf* – has himself acknowledged that the tradition appears to be an exegesis, but insisted on his original position by saying: 'Perhaps it is a clerical error (*sahw al-qalam*).'[773]

v) Abū Rabī' al-Shāmī is reported to have said:

I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq concerning the noble verse:

> *No leaf falls but that He knows of it, not a grain within the darkness of the earth, nor anything fresh or withered, but it is in a manifest book* (6:59).

The Imām said:

> '*Leaf* means an aborted child; *grain* refers to a child; *darkness of the earth* denotes the wombs; *fresh* are those who are born alive; *withered* are those born dead; and all these are gathered in the manifest Imām.'[774]

Regarding the verse:

> *And all things We have kept in a clear* Imām (36:12)

'Allāmah Majlisī expressed that the transposition of book (*kitāb*) into *imām* in the statement of the Imām is an exegesis of the verse, and this is confirmed by a narration concerning the verse transmitted by both Sunnī and Shī'a sources which states: 'When this verse was revealed, the Prophet said while pointing to 'Alī, 'This is the manifest Imām.''[775] However, Muḥaddith Nūrī was not content with this, and in a marginal note wrote: 'This confirmation is flawed,'[776] meaning that the narration suggests *taḥrīf* and nothing else.

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[772] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, no. 45, 421.

[773] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 276.

[774] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, no. 349, 249.

[775] See Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 4, 6-7; *Mir'āt al-'Uqūl*, vol. 26, 320-322.

[776] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 284.

vi) Kulaynī has narrated from Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī that concerning the verse:

> *These two opponents dispute with each other about their Lord: but those who deny...,*

Imām al-Bāqir said: '...and of the guardianship of 'Alī (*bi-wilāyati 'Alī*)...,' and then recited the remaining part of the verse:

> *...for them will be cut out a garment of fire* (22:19).[777]

This insertion illustrates the most obvious instances of disbelief, for the denial of guardianship (*wilāyah*) is indeed a denial of one of the most manifest signs of God on earth, i.e., the divinely designated Guardian

In a section on divine proof (*kitāb al-ḥujjah*), Kulaynī also narrates through the channel of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'Our guardianship is the same guardianship of God, Who did not appoint any prophet without [guardianship].'[778]

There can be no doubt about this, for an effect (*athar*) is due to a cause, or 'that which effects' (*mu'aththir*), and a denial of the effect is tantamount to denial of the cause. Therefore the narration is merely an exegesis of the verse, even though Muḥaddith Nūrī tries in vain to prove that the insertion was an integral part of the Qur'an.[779]

Group 2. As pointed out earlier, this group of narrations consists of recitations (*qirā'āt*) which have been transmitted from the Imāms through a channel of solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*), and are regarded as irregular (*shādhdh*) and generally contrary to the recognised (*mashhūr*) recitation. It has been said before that such narrations are not authoritative, because the Qur'an is established by a widely known transmission (*mutawātir*), not a solitary report. At the same time, an inconsistency in a recitation does not necessarily indicate a discrepancy in the text of the revelation, because the Qur'an and its recitation are two different things. Therefore, these kinds of recitations cannot be considered proof of the occurrence of *taḥrīf*.

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[777] See Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, no. 51, 422.

[778] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, no. 3, 437.

[779] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 309.

Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'The Qur'an is revealed in one *ḥarf* by the One and Only God.'[780] In another narration, it is added: 'But the differences in it are caused by the narrators.'[781] These were the reciters who supposed that the text of the revelation is exactly the same as the recitation of the narrators. However, as mentioned earlier, the Qur'an cannot be established by solitary report, even if the reciter were one of the prominent figures of the past, unless the Muslims as a whole affirm it, as in the case of the recitation of Ḥafs.

We shall now cite some examples of the recitations attributed to the Imāms which have been mainly recorded by Kulaynī in *al-Kāfī* and Ṭabrisī in *Majma' al-Bayān*. However, the chains of transmission are mostly weak.

i) In *al-Tahdhīb*, Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah al-Ṭūsī has narrated on the authority of Shaykh Mufīd, on the authority of Ghālib ibn Hudhayl:
Regarding the verse:

> *Wamsaḥū bi ru'ūsikum wa* ***arjulakum*** *ila al-ka'bayn*
>
> *...and wipe a part of your heads and your feet, up to the ankles* (5:6),

I asked Imām al-Bāqir whether *arjul* (feet) is in *jarr*[782] or *naṣb*.[783] He said: 'It is in *jarr*.'[784] And since the known recitation is in *naṣb*, Muḥaddith Nūrī has mentioned this tradition as a basis for his assumption of *taḥrīf*.[785] This is while three of the Seven Reciters, namely, Ibn Kathīr, Abū 'Amr and Ḥamzah, have read it in *jarr*, and three others, namely, Ibn 'Āmir, Nāfi' and Kisā'ī have read it in *naṣb*, but 'Āṣim has read it in two ways, that is, in *naṣb* according to the narration of Ḥafṣ and with *jarr* according to the narration of Shu'bah.[786] Shaykh Ṭūsī also clarified this point.[787] In addition, variance in the recitations can never be a proof of the occurrence of *taḥrīf*.

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[780] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, no. 13, 630.

[781] Ibid. no. 12.

[782] *Jarr*: to pronounce the final consonant or a word with *i* and place it in the genitive case; hence, to pronounce it as *arjuli* instead of *arjula*. [Trans.]

[783] *Naṣb*: to pronounce the final consonant of a word with *a* and to put it in the accusative (noun) or subjunctive (verb) case; hence, to pronounce it as *arjula*. [Trans.]

[784] Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 1, 71. The changing of *wāw* into *fā'* in the original is another proof of the flaws in the narration.

[785] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khitāb*, 280.

[786] Abu Zur'ah, *Ḥujjat al-Qirā'āt*, 221, 223.

[787] Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 1, 71.

In our view this narration holds no credibility, for Shaykh Mufīd reported it only on the authority of Ḥammād, on the authority of Muhammad ibn Nu'mān, on the authority of Ghālib ibn Hudhayl or Abū Hudhayl, who is unknown. It is said that he was a poet of Kūfah and Shaykh Mufīd has identified him as one of the companions of Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq. For this reason, it cannot be authentic in terms of the chain of transmission. Meanwhile, in addition to the fact that the recitation in *jarr* is contrary to the popular recitation that conforms with that of Ḥafṣ and the Muslims in general – which is the first condition of the veracity of the various recitations – it is also inconsistent with the rules of declension (*i'rāb*), which is the second condition.

Let us elaborate. Ahl al-Sunnah have considered the recitation with *naṣb* correct on account of the conjunction of *arjul* (feet) to *wujūh* (faces). That is, '...wash your faces and your hands... and your feet...' However, since there is another phrase between the conjunctor (*'āṭif*) and the conjuncted (*ma'ṭūfun 'alayh*) – that is, *wamsaḥū bi ru'ūsikum* (and wipe a part of your head) – the argument is unacceptable, for disjunction with an extraneous expression is not permissible in eloquent Arabic. As such, Shaykh Raḍī al-Dīn Astarābādī regarded it as genitive (*majrūr*) in terms of a conjunction (*'aṭf*) on the position of declension (*maḥall*), for wiping (*masḥ*) is a transitive verb; but since wiping with the wet hand over the head – in the way 'wiping over it' applies, with no need to include the entire head – is obligatory, there is the letter *bā'* on the wiped (*mamsūḥ*) part of the body – that is, the head (*ru'ūs*) – to convey the meaning that mere wiping with a wet hand over the head is sufficient. That is, a mere touching of the hand on the place where the head is wiped. For this reason, the letter *bā'* is added, and since the act of wiping happens with the first touch, there is no reason to continue wiping over the entire head.[788] In wiping the feet, however, it is obligatory to include the talar domes. As such, conjunction on the position is genitive. In other words:

wamsaḥū arjulakum ila al-ka'bayn

'Wipe your feet up to the talar domes,'

is like:

[788] This is one of the teachings of the erudite and spiritual teacher, Shaykh Muḥammad Riḍā Iṣfahānī Jarqūī.

waghsilū aydiyakum ilā al-marāfiq

'And wash your hands up to the elbows.'

This provides proof that the verse is meant to state the extent of the washing of the hands and the wiping of the feet. If *arjulakum* (your feet) is read in *jarr* (*arjulikum*), it means that wiping any part of the feet is sufficient, whereas that is not what the verse means.

Therefore, the recitation in *naṣb* is consistent with the conditions for accepting a recitation, and for this reason it is authoritative in our view.

ii) Al-Kulaynī has reported from 'Imrān ibn Maytham:

A man recited in the presence of 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful:

Fa innahum lā yukadhdhibūnaka walākinna al-ẓālimīna bi āyātillāhi yajḥadūn.

Yet it is not you that they deny: it is the signs of God which the wrongdoers impugn (6:33).

The Imām said: 'Yes, by God! They would even impugn the Prophet.' The wording of the verse is in *takhfīf* (not *tashdīd*): lā yakdhibūnaka, which means: *lā ya'tūna bi bāṭilin yakdhibūna bihī ḥaqqaka* ('They could not bring falsehood with which they could impugn you').[789]

It must be pointed out that even granted that this narration is authentic, *tashdīd* and *takhfīf* pertain to the variation in recitation, and have nothing to do with the issue of *taḥrīf*. The phrase *lā ya'tūna bi-bāṭilin* is an explanation of *lā yakdhibūnaka* ('it is not only you that they deny').

Therefore, according to the Imām's statement, its meaning is as follows: they are not simply content with denying and rejecting the Prophet, but they even strive to refute the faith and disprove the apostleship (*risālah*). By doing so, they are actually enemies of the Apostle of God and deny His signs. This meaning is the difference between the *if'āl* and *taf'īl* verb forms, and indicates the minute grammatical attention to details in this tradition.

Group 3. This consists of narrations in which the word *taḥrīf* is mentioned. Some have supposed that it refers to the distortion of words, whereas it actually refers to contextual distortion and inaccurate interpretation:

i) Kashshī has reported that 'Alī ibn Suwayd said:

[789] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, no. 241, 200.

When Imām al-Kāẓim was in the prison of Hārūn (the 'Abbāsid caliph), he wrote to me thus: 'O 'Alī! [In reply to your question] as to from whom you should learn the principles of your faith: do not learn the principles of your faith from other than our followers. If you learn them from someone other than our followers, it follows that you will have learned them from those who have betrayed God, His Apostle and the divine benefits. The preservation of the Qur'an was entrusted to them, but they distorted (*taḥrīf*) and manipulated it. May God curse them...'[790]

In *al-Khiṣāl*, Shaykh Ṣādūq has reported on the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abdillāh that the Prophet said:

> On the Day of Resurrection, three things will protest before God, namely, the Qur'an, the mosque and the [Prophet's] progeny (*'itrah*). The Qur'an will say: 'O Lord! they distorted and fractured me.' The mosque will say: 'O Lord! they abandoned and corrupted me.' The [Prophet's] progeny will say: 'O Lord! they killed and displaced us...'[791]

And in some manuscripts, instead of *ḥarrafūnī* (they distorted me) there is *ḥarraqūnī* (they burnt me).

ii) Muhammad ibn Qawlawayh has narrated on the authority of Ḥasan ibn 'Aṭīyyah that Imām Ṣāduq said: 'O Lord! curse those who impugned Your prophets, destroyed Your *Ka'bah* and distorted Your Book.'[792]

There are many similar narrations, but what has been mentioned should suffice. As stated earlier, what is meant by *taḥrīf* literally and technically – in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* – is contextual distortion. That is, the incorrect interpretation which is described as *ta'wīl bāṭil* (false interpretation). Earlier we reported the narration of Imām al-Bāqir in which he wrote a letter to Sa'd al-Khayr saying: 'They thrust aside the Book in such a way that they would guard its words and letters but distort its limits.'[793]

What testifies to this claim is a narration from the same Imām in which he classifies the reciters of the Qur'an. He says in part of the *hadīth*:

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[790] Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, 10.

[791] Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Section 3, no. 232, 174.

[792] Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-Zīyārāt* (lithograph, Najaf offset, 1356 q.), sections 79 and 197.

[793] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, no. 16, 53.

'And there is a person who reads the Qur'an and preserves its words and letters but damages its limits...'[794] Here the word *ḍayya'a* (damages) is used instead of *ḥarrafa* (distorts). What is meant by 'damaging the limits' of the Qur'an is that they abandon it and do not act upon it. In the same way, what is meant by distortion of the Qur'an is not placing it in the correct context. *Taḥrīf* is derived from the root word *ḥ-r-f*, which means to set aside.

In a tradition transmitted by Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Khashshāb, Imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said:

Innahum battarū al-Qur'an wa abṭalū al-sunan wa 'aṭṭalū al-aḥkām

'This is because they have abandoned the Qur'an, falsified its precedents (*sunan*) and discarded its laws.'[795]

In the narration, *tabtīr* (to make ineffectual) is used instead of *taḥrīf*, for when the Qur'an is not acted upon, it becomes obsolete and ineffective.

Another analogy given in these narrations is the placing of 'the distortion of the Qur'an' alongside 'the destruction of the *Ka'bah*' and 'the shutting down of mosques.' It is evident that in the latter two cases, the literal meaning is not intended. 'The destruction of the *Ka'bah*' indicates the paucity of pilgrims making the pilgrimage for the sake of seeking nearness to God, and 'the shutting down of mosques' means few 'people of certainty' (*ahl al-yaqīn*) who worship God. Thus, according to the rule of comparison, 'the distortion of the Qur'an' does not allude to its literal meaning.

Nevertheless, Muḥaddith Nūrī insists that these narrations denote technical *taḥrīf* (that is, literal distortion), when he says:

> The narrations cited are sufficient to establish the occurrence of *taḥrīf*, for they are complete in terms of the chains of transmission and implications... The completeness of the chains of transmission means that there are authentic and reliable narrations amongst them. In addition to the fact that most of them can be found in reliable books, these narrations are contextually *mutawātir*, and to harbour doubt regarding them is a kind of obsession from which we ought to seek refuge in God. As with their chains of transmission, the implications of most of these narrations are

[794] Ibid. vol. 2, no.1, 627.

[795] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 7, 5.

> also complete, especially those which mention such terms as *saqṭ* (omission or slipping from memory), *maḥw* (effacement), *naqṣ* (diminution) and the like.

He continues:

> The narrations which contain the word *taḥrīf* have the same implication as well, for the technical meaning of the word *taḥrīf* can be understood from them, because its literal meaning is 'to change,' and distortion of a statement involves moving words from their proper places. And this proves that the form of the Qur'an has been changed.[796]

He also adds:

> All the reports which imply the occurrence of *taḥrīf* in the Torah and the Evangel are of this category. Yet everybody considers *taḥrīf* here to refer to its technical meaning. If we assume that this word does not imply contextual *taḥrīf* in this context, we then have no option but to consider *taḥrīf*, as mentioned in these narrations, to mean literal distortion and outward change, and not contextual distortion. Many pieces of evidence denote this point: (1) some narrations point to the omission and deletion of some words and phrases from the Qur'an; (2) the distortion (*taḥrīf*) of the Qur'an has been likened to the distortion of the previous scriptures of divine origin. As such, the distortion of the Qur'an as well as that of the previous scriptures must necessarily mean the changing of words and their displacement; (3) we have not come across a single verse which refers to contextual distortion (changing the meaning or changing the interpretation of the verse) being attributed to the caliphs, and we have not found any case in which they have interpreted the verses contrary to God's intent. If ever there should be such cases, they must be very few.

In short, contextual *taḥrīf* in the sense of opinionated interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*) was prevalent amongst exegetes such as Qatādah, Ḍaḥḥāk, Kalbī and others who were contemporaries of the Imāms, as well as amongst their followers throughout history. However, what has been

[796] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 23-24.

reported from the earlier caliphs was contrary to the Qur'an in practice and nothing more, and this is not *taḥrīf*, although some like Zamakhsharī have considered it a kind of contextual distortion. In this regard, refer to what Zamakhsharī, Rāzī and others have said concerning the verses, *O Messenger! proclaim...* (5:67) and *Your friend can be only God...* (5:55).[797]

The weak points in Muḥaddith Nūrī's reports are evident. Firstly, none of the narrations of *taḥrīf* has an authentic chain of transmission, because most of them are *mursal* and have broken chains. Moreover, they are not mentioned in reliable manuscripts, and are only found in insignificant texts. Secondly, the word *taḥrīf* is used lexically only to mean contextual distortion. For example, as we have pointed out, this is the sense in which it applies to the Qur'an. The earlier use of the term should not be interpreted in the same way as its more recent usage, and the explanation given by Muḥaddith Nūrī begs the question. We will later discuss the explanation given by scholars for the use of such terms as 'omission,' 'diminution,' 'effacement' and the like.[798] Thirdly, there was ample practical opposition at the time when the intended interpretation of the Qur'an was established, including the position on different meanings of the verses. It is for no other reason that, by interpreting the Qur'an on the basis of their carnal desires and misunderstanding its meaning, the *qāsiṭūn*, *nākithūn* and *māriqūn*[799] rose up against 'Alī.

Group 4. This consists of the narrations which, as those who subscribe to the notion of *taḥrīf* suppose, imply the omission of a word, verse or sentence from the Qur'an. In explaining these narrations the pioneering *ḥadīth* critics observed that the additions in these narrations are explanatory

[797] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 248-249.

[798] In the section related to the fourth exposition of the alleged narrations on *taḥrīf*.

[799] *Qāsiṭūn* (literally, those who deviate from the true path): a title given to Mu'āwiyah and his companions who fought against Imām 'Alī during the Battle of Siffīn. *Nākithūn* (literally, those who break allegiance): a title given to those who paid allegiance to Imām 'Alī in 36 AH and violated it by staging the Battle of the Camel. *Māriqūn* (apostates): a title given to a group of Muslims who first joined Imām 'Alī's army to fight against Mu'āwiyah in the Battle of Siffīn, but separated from him after the imposed arbitration, condemning arbitration as a violation of religious bounds. See al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 191. The Prophet has been quoted as telling Imām 'Alī to fight against these three groups in the future. See Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimishq*, vol. 42, 272; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 7, 370; Arbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, 261. [Trans.]

phrases accompanying the verses, and not part of the text itself. Yet those who subscribe to the notion of *taḥrīf* pointlessly cling to them. Some examples of this type of narrations are as follows:

i) Kulaynī has narrated from Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abī Naṣr al-Bizanṭī al-Kūfī (d. 221/836):

> Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far gave me a manuscript before I was guided[800] and told me not to look at it, but I did not comply, and opened it. I recited *Sūrah al-Bayyinah*, where I found the names of seventy men from Quraysh along with the names of their fathers. The Imām sent someone to me asking me to return the manuscript to him.[801]

In this tradition, there are questions raised by Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Kashshī regarding the personality of al-Bizanṭī. Kashshī has reported al-Bizanṭī to have said:

> When the mercenaries of Hārūn (the 'Abbāsid caliph) captured Imām al-Kāẓim and sent him to Qādisiyyah,[802] I was then in Qādisiyyah. The Imām sent a manuscript to me and I opened it. Suddenly, my eyes fell on *Sūrah al-Bayyinah*. I read in it some information which I committed to memory. A traveller with a handkerchief, clay and a seal came to me. He said: 'Bring the manuscript here.' I brought the manuscript to him. He placed the manuscript in the middle of the handkerchief, put clay on it and imprinted the seal. Thereafter, I forgot all the things I had committed to memory, and no matter how I tried, still I could not remember even a single letter of it.[803]

Once we compare this tradition with that of Kulaynī, some of the ambiguities in each of them will be removed, for what he allegedly read in *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* were the names of seventy men from Quraysh and

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[800] Aḥmad al-Bizanṭī was one of the descendants of Mehrān (the Mehranids) who were Wāqifīs. Al-Bizanṭī was formerly one of them, but Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far guided him. The Wāqifiyyah is a long-extinct Shī'a sect which stopped (*waqf*) at the Imāmate of Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far and refused to recognise Imām Riḍā and the Imāms after him.

[801] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, no. 16, 631.

[802] Qādisiyyah: a historical city in southern Mesopotamia, southwest of Ḥillah and Kufa in Iraq. [Trans.]

[803] *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, 492, no. 481.

their fathers. It was entrusted to him by the Imām lest it should fall into the hands of the agents of Hārūn; and similarly, the Imām dissuaded him from glancing at its content lest he fall into temptation. But he looked at it nonetheless. Afterwards, when it became clear that he had not been worthy of trust, the Imām sent someone to take the manuscript back from him.

At any rate, perhaps the names which he is supposed to have seen were those of the Quraysh chiefs who either died as unbelievers, or who embraced Islam under duress of circumstances and played a crucial role in the affairs of the Muslims after the demise of the Prophet. These names explain instances of 'the faithless' (*alladhīna kafarū*) in verses 98:1 and 6, and it would undoubtedly have been written in the margin of the manuscript, as mentioned before when describing the characteristics of the manuscript of 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful.

The meticulous *ḥadīth* scholar (*muḥaddith*) Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshāni says:

> Perhaps it means that he saw those names which were written in the manuscript as indications of the term *the faithless* in the Revelation, but not that these names were actually in the text of the Qur'an.[804]

Quite simply this tradition is a *mursal* tradition and cannot be cited as authoritative. The narrator believed in *waqf* and did not acknowledge the right of all the Imāms from the Prophet's progeny. Moreover, the recording of the names in the margin of the manuscript – should the tradition be authentic – has nothing to do with *taḥrīf*.

ii) Kulaynī has also reported on the authority of Hishām ibn Sālim (or Hārūn ibn Muslim in some manuscripts) that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'The Qur'an which was revealed by Gabriel to Muhammad consisted of seventeen thousand verses.' Kulaynī mentions this at the end of a section on rare traditions (*nawādir*) in a chapter on the merits of the Qur'an (*kitāb faḍl al-qur'ān*).[805]

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[804] Mawlā Muhammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Wāfī* (Tehran: Islāmiyyah, 1375 q.), vol. 2, 273.

[805] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, no. 28, 634.

The wording of this tradition is indeed extraordinary, for the commentators are at a loss to explain it. This is because, according to current knowledge, there are a little over six thousand, two hundred verses in the Qur'an, and this conforms with sayings of the Prophet, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the successors (*tābi'ūn*),, Ṭabrisī and other exegetes. Therefore, there could be no more than seven thousand, let alone seventeen thousand.

In his marginal notes to *Sharḥ al-Kāfī* (a commentary on *al-Kāfī*) written by Mullā Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī, 'Allāmah Abū al-Ḥasan Sha'rāni has stated categorically that the word *'ashar* (ten, which would change 'seven' to 'seventeen') was added by either the scribes or the narrators, and that the narration originally mentions seven thousand verses, which is more or less consistent with the established number.[806] Likewise, Fayḍ Kashānī, the author of *al-Wāfī*, reports this narration from *al-Kāfī* emphasising with certainty the phrase 'seven thousand verses.' This implies that the original copy of *al-Kāfī* at his disposal had the same phrase (i.e., 'seven thousand' rather than 'seventeen thousand'), and that he did not consider any other possibility.

In his own marginal note to *al-Wāfī*, 'Allāmah Sha'rānī writes:

In the manuscript described by Majlisī in *Mir'āt al-'Uqūl* it states 'seventeen thousand.' Perhaps this was done by one of the scribes who thought the number 'seven' was little and added 'ten (thousand)' to it. However, what is consistent with the verses of the existing Qur'an is 'seven thousand.' The apparent implication of the tradition is that the Imām did not intend to mention the exact number of the verses, but rather to state a round number that was consistent with the reality. Such instances happen when the motive is not to mention what is short, as when it is said that Imām al-Sajjād cried for forty years after the martyrdom of his father, when in fact, after the demise of his father, he did not live for more than thirty-five years.

Sha'rānī adds: 'This explanation of the addition of the word *'ashar* (ten) is unacceptable.' He then examines the baseless arguments of those who subscribe to the notion of *taḥrīf*, and referring to the book *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb* he says:

[806] Sha'rānī, *Ḥāshiyah Sharḥ Uṣūl Kāfī Mawlā Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī*, cf. Māzandarānī vol. 11, 76.

> I have studied this book from cover to cover, but found nothing in it that genuinely substantiates the notion of *taḥrīf*; and there is nothing except some narrations with weak chains of transmission that contain unknown material which neither Nūrī's teachers nor other scholars have ever confirmed, as they are against the principles of our school. An example is what is mentioned in the book *al-Iḥtijāj* about the deletion of one third of the Qur'an within a single verse of *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, which would imply that this *sūrah* was equivalent to roughly half of the Qur'an. This is not to mention the fact that the narrator is unknown. It is like what is in the alleged book of Sulaym ibn Qays, which is fabrication that cannot be traced back to the Companions, and also what is in the *Dabistān al-Madhāhib*, an equally baseless book.[807]

Muḥaddith Nūrī has himself acknowledged the differences in the manuscripts, saying: 'It is possible to find the phrase 'seven thousand verses' in some manuscripts of *al-Kāfī*.' And he adds:

> In *al-Wāfī*, Fayḍ Kāshānī has contented himself with this manuscript, not mentioning other manuscripts. This act of his is a kind of treachery. I think the word *'ashar* (ten) has been omitted from his copy, and either the author or the one who supervised the writing had turned the word *alf* (one thousand) into *ālāf* (thousands), thereby rendering it consistent with the rules of Arabic syntax, but without referring to other manuscripts.[808]

However, Muḥaddith Kāshānī is considered one of the giants in the field of *ḥadīth* scholarship. He was one of the pioneers in the study and criticism of *ḥadīth*, and had a vast knowledge of the personalities of various narrators. He is a renowned Shī'a figure and a source of pride, as all the Akhbārīs have mentioned, including Muḥaddith Nūrī himself in other places. But here, since his observations do not tally with Nūrī's, he is all of a sudden regarded as a traitor and a falsifier of *ḥadīth*. For such accusations to be thrown against such an authority and erudite scholar of the religious law as Fayḍ Kāshānī is implausible.

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[807] Ibid. vol. 5, 232-234.

[808] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 236.

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ has been recognised as a sound scholar of *ḥadīth* and meticulous in terms of narration. Since it deals with all the important matters of the religion in both creed and practice, his encyclopedic work on *ḥadīth* is entitled *al-Wāfī* (The Adequate), and in addition to the texts of traditions, it includes his research and explanations. In reality, in terms of its order, style and approach, *al-Wāfī* can be considered one of the finest, most authentic and accurate of books, and has been consulted and relied upon by our associates whenever there have been differences of opinion. When explaining why he chose to elucidate and comment on *al-Wāfi*, 'Allāmah Muḥaqqiq Abū al-Ḥasan Sha'rānī said:

> This book has distinctive features which can hardly be found in other books. Many of our later scholars have embarked upon writing books that include all the narrations in *al-Uṣūl al-Arba'ah*,[809] and amongst these works two are most prominent, namely, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah* and *al-Wāfī*, each having its own characteristics.

The excellence of *al-Wāfī* lies in the fact that it includes narrations about both the creed and the practice of religion, and explains the narrations without quoting them haphazardly. But its most important and salient feature is the authenticity of its existing manuscripts.

Wasā'il al-Shī'ah lacks those features. In particular, the authenticity of its existing manuscripts has been doubted, unless one refers to the *Uṣūl* from which *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah* took the narrations, but then it is clear that consulting the source (*aṣl*) makes us have no need for this book.[810]

iii) In the description of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's personality in the book *Rijāl Abū 'Amr al-Kashshī*, it is narrated on the authority of Abū 'Alī Khalaf ibn Ḥāmid (who is an unknown person), on the authority of Abū Muhammad Ḥasan ibn Ṭalḥah (who is yet another unknown person), on the authority of Ibn Faḍḍāl, on the authority of Yūnus, on the authority of 'Ijlī that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'God has mentioned the names of seven persons in

[809] It refers to the most important collections of Shī'a traditions, known collectively as *al-Kutub al-Arba'ah* (the Four Books), viz., Shaykh Ṭūsī's *al-Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*; Shaykh Ṣadūq's *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqih*; and Shaykh Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*. It is not claimed, however, that all the traditions contained therein are authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*). [Trans.]

[810] Sha'rānī, Introduction to *al-Wāfī*, cf. Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Wāfī* vol. 1, 2.

the Qur'an, but the Quraysh have deleted six names, leaving only the name of Abū Lahab.'[811]

With a weak and unsubstantiated chain of transmission from one unknown person to another, this narration has been used by Shaykh Nūrī and his like for claiming the occurrence of *taḥrīf*.[812] Apart from the weakness of its chain, the text (*matn*) itself is ambiguous, for whose were the names, where were they, and when and for what reason did the Quraysh delete them?

Perhaps, this is the same narration about the seventy men from Quraysh transmitted by a group of the Wāqifiyyah, and the number has decreased from seventy to seven. Seventy possibly seemed too many, and it was therefore reduced.

Group 5. This consists of narrations which, despite the fact that they would under no circumstance constitute a proof, have been given as such. Some examples follow:

i) Under *ḥadīth* 31 in the book *Arba'īn Ḥadīth*, Abū Sa'īd al-Nayshābūrī has narrated on the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abdillāh al-Anṣārī:

> The Prophet said to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib:
>
> 'O 'Alī! The people have been created from diverse trees, and you and I have been created from the same tree, for God, the Exalted, says:
>
> *And in the earth are neighbouring tracts [of diverse kinds]...'*
>
> He continued reciting until:
>
> *'...which are watered by one water* (13:4).'

The Prophet recited it thus, that is, he inculcated its meaning and interpretation to himself and his brother 'Alī. Muḥaddith Nūrī has regarded this narration as a proof of the occurrence of *taḥrīf*.[813]

I do not understand how this narration could be a proof of *taḥrīf*? Perhaps, he imagined that the phrase 'he continued reciting until' (*ḥattā balagha*) is an addition to the recitation of the text, although it is very clear that this phrase was that of the narrator who wanted to shorten the verse in the narration.

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[811] Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, no.135, 247.

[812] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 296.

[813] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 296.

ii) Imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said: 'Whenever my father performed *Ṣalāt al-Shaf'* and *Witr*,[814] he would recite *Qul huw Allāhu aḥad* (*Say: He is God, the One*)[815] in all the three *rak'ah*s, and then at the end he would say: '*Kadhālik Allāhu rabbī*' ('It is so, God, my Lord!'). Ibn Muhtadī asked Imām Riḍā about *Sūrah al-Tawḥīd*. The Imām said: 'Anyone who recites *Qul huw Allāhu aḥad* and believes in it has indeed recognized *tawḥīd* (divine Unity).' He asked: 'How should it be recited?' The Imām said: 'In the way the people recite it,' and added: '*Kadhālik Allāhu rabbī, kadhālik Allāhu rabbī*.'[816] Nūrī says: 'It can be deduced from this narration that this sentence is part of the Qur'an.'[817] What strange reasoning!

iii) The following has been reported:

Whenever Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn would recite:

> *Indeed, We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment* (97:1),

he would say: 'God, the Glorious and Exalted, said the truth – that the Qur'an was sent down on the Night of Ordainment.'

> *And what will explain to thee what the Night of Ordainment is?* (97:2).

The Prophet said: 'I did not know [what the Night of Ordainment was, and how great it is], and God said:

> *The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months (in which there is no Night of Ordainment)* (97:3).'

He asked the Prophet: 'Do you know why the Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months?' The Prophet replied: 'I do not know, but God said it is because:

> *In it the angels and the Spirit descend by the leave of their Lord, with every command* (97:4),

and whenever God gives leave to something, He is pleased with it.

> *It is peaceful until the rising of the dawn* (97:5).

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[814] *Ṣalāt al-Shaf'* and *Witr*: the last three *rak'ah*s (cycles) of the supererogatory night prayer (*ṣalāt al-layl*). [Trans.]

[815] That is, the Prophet would recite *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ* (112). [Trans.]

[816] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 4, no. 16, 521; no. 5, 523.

[817] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 296.

God says: 'O Muhammad! The angels and the Spirit, from the beginning of their descent until the appearance of the dawn, send salutations to you."[818]

I am surprised how Muḥaddith Nūrī inferred that all those words of the Imām were integral parts of the text of the Qur'an which were later omitted, although it is very clear that they were an elaboration and nothing more.

Group 6. This group consists of narrations which discuss the tents that will be set up in the outskirts of Kufa[819] at the time of the reappearance of Imām al-Mahdī, and say that the recitation of the Qur'an will be imparted to the people according to the manuscript of 'Alī, which will be difficult to learn for those who have memorised it as it is today, because it is different from the present version. Through these narrations, Muḥaddith Nūrī's supporters try to demonstrate that the manuscript of the Imām differs from the present one in several respects. However, this is not what these narrations imply:

i) Through the channel of Jābir al-Ju'fī, Shaykh Mufīd reports Imām al-Bāqir as saying:

> When the Qā'im of Muḥāmmad's progeny rises up, he will set up tents for the teaching of the Qur'an in the manner it was revealed, and since that *muṣḥaf* will be different from the existing Book in arrangement style, it will be difficult for those who have memorised the Qur'an today.[820]

There are many narrations like this, with similar wordings.[821]

Imām al-Bāqir has said that the difficulties referred to will be due to a different arrangement in the structure and organisation of the chapters and verses, for the manuscript of the Commander of the Faithful conformed most accurately in its arrangement to what God had revealed. No other aspects of the Revelation, such as particular times, places and occasions, or the arrangement and other matters relating to the understanding of any of the verses, had been hidden. However, as stated earlier, all of this had been written in the margins, and not in the text itself.

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[818] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 4, 483, no. 5.

[819] Usually interpreted as a reference to Najaf (Trans.)

[820] Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 386.

[821] See Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, no. 85, 339; nos. 139-141, 364.

ii) Kulaynī has reported Sufyān ibn Samṭ as saying: 'I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the revelation of the Qur'an. The Imām said: 'Recite the Qur'an the way it is imparted to you.'"[822]

iii) One of the companions of Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far asked him about the recitation of those verses of the Qur'an which were inconsistent with the popular recitation:

> May I be ransomed for you! We hear verses of the Qur'an which are not in conformity with what we know, and we are unskilled in reciting them the way they are transmitted from you. Are we sinful [for this]? The Imām said: 'No. Recite the Qur'an the way it is imparted to you. The one who will teach you will come soon.'[823]

iv) Kulaynī has also narrated from Sālim ibn Salamah the following:

> A man recited the Qur'an in the presence of Imām al-Ṣādiq, and I found his recitation differed to the people's recitation. The Imām said to him: 'Stop this recitation, and recite the Qur'an the way the people recite it until such time that the Qā'im rises up, for when he rises up, he will recite the Book of God, the Glorious and Exalted, according to its limits, and he will present the manuscript kept by 'Alī.'[824]

There are quite a number of such traditions which imply slight differences between the manuscript of Imām 'Alī and the present one. But as to whether or not this difference is in the text of the Qur'an, its arrangement or another matter is unspecified in these traditions, except in the first tradition above, which is somewhat more specific in terms of the order and arrangement, but not in any other way. This tradition provides the best evidence for explaining the nature of the differences mentioned in other narrations.

Hence, if the issue of order is one of the most important outward and structural aspects of speech – and is inextricably interwoven with the issue of expression and understanding – then one may be assured that the manuscript of 'Alī would excel in this respect when compared to others.

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[822] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, no. 15, 631.

[823] Ibid. no. 2, 619.

[824] Ibid. no. 23, 633.

On the other hand, the Muslims have learnt the Qur'an based on its present structure and arrangement and are therefore familiar with it, having memorised and passed it on throughout the centuries. Since it would be difficult for them to readjust and learn through practice a new recitation, the task will be shouldered by the Imām of the Time upon his reappearance. Thus, it would be true if the Imām had said: 'He will recite the Qur'an according to its limits.' That is, he will recite the Qur'an in its original structure, which is the same form upon which the manuscript of 'Alī is founded.

v) Amongst the narrations which indicate that the codex which Imām al-Mahdī will bring is no different to the present codex, is a narration transmitted by 'Ayyāshī from Imām al-Bāqir. He reports that the Imām said: 'When our Qā'im rises up, the Qur'an will affirm him.'[825] That is, the Qur'an as it exists – as indicated by the verses about the advent and implementation of justice on earth by the Imām – will affirm his legitimacy, since if what affirms him were only in his codex and not in the present Qur'an and the Muslims had no prior knowledge of it, there would be a causal loop in his argument which would undermine his legitimacy, because nothing can define itself.

As such, the Imām of the Age will certainly point to those passages in the Qur'an which show his rightfulness and the truthfulness of what he says that was previously hidden. Through his enlightenment, people will discover the manifest truth of which they had no knowledge, and which they could not previously infer from the Qur'an.

Group 7. This consists of the narrations concerning the virtues of *Ahl al-Bayt* which cannot be discerned in the Qur'anic verses. It is argued that such an important issue could not have been left out of the Qur'an, but the fact that there is no mention of this in the Qur'an is evidence of its omission.

However, this argument is baseless, for if the Qur'an is read the way it was revealed by God – without concealing its true meaning – it indeed supplies manifest evidence of the noble station of *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Certainly, through many clear proofs, the virtue and nobility of Ahl al-Bayt have been sanctioned in the Qur'an in verses praising their

[825] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 6, 13.

lofty station. Any unprejudiced person who looks with insight will find these verses.

Kulaynī has narrated Abū Masrūq as saying:

> I said to Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'I debate and argue with people relying on the verse:
>
> *O ye who believe, obey God and obey the messenger and those charged with authority among you* (4:59).

In reply, they say that this verse was revealed in reference to the commanders in battle; and when I argue with them relying on the verse:

> *Your friend can only be God, His messenger...* (5:55),

they say that this verse was revealed concerning the right of the faithful (*mu'minūn*); I argue [with them] relying on the verse:

> *Say, no reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin* (42:23).

They say that this verse was revealed concerning the Muslims' relatives. In this respect I reported to the Imām whatever verse I could remember from the Qur'an...[826]

Therefore, remove the veil of prejudice and free our souls from the yoke of the ignorance:

> *So observe the effects of God's mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death* (30:50).

This is exactly the meaning of the traditions cited by Nūrī in this group.

i) Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'If the Qur'an is recited the way it was revealed, you will certainly find our signs in it.'[827]

The Imām's phrase 'the way it was revealed' means that the Qur'an will be understood provided that the darkness of illusion does not contaminate its clear horizons.

In the words of the Imām:

> *La alfaytanā fīhi musammīn*

[826] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 513-514.

[827] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 4, 13.

'You will certainly find our signs in it,'

does not mean that their names are mentioned in the Qur'an, but signs which indicate their distinct virtues.

The justification for this is a narration Kulaynī transmits from Abū Baṣīr, who said:

> I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the verse:
>
> > *O ye who believe, obey God and obey the messenger and those charged with authority among you* (4:59).
>
> He said: 'It was revealed concerning 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.' I said: 'The people ask why the names of 'Alī and *Ahl al-Bayt* are not mentioned in the Qur'an.' He said: 'Tell them that the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) has been revealed to the Prophet, but it is not mentioned in the Qur'an whether it consists of three or four *rak'ah*s, but that the Prophet explained it to them...'[828]

Continuing this theme, the esteemed teacher Ayatollah Khoī has said:

> This authentic tradition prevails over all the narrations which apparently suggest that their names have been deleted from the Qur'an, and it explains God's way of mentioning them therein; that is, by means of mentioning in the Qur'an their distinctive traits, but not by mentioning them by name.[829]

ii) This statement of Imām al-Ṣādiq has the same meaning: 'Anyone who cannot recognise in the Qur'an our affair is not safe when he falls prey to temptation.'[830] That is to say, 'Anyone who cannot recognise our position concerning the guardianship (*wilāyah*), according to the description stated in the Qur'an, which applies only to us and nobody else, will lose faith when he falls prey to temptation.'

iii) Imām al-Bāqir said: 'There is a right for us from God in His firm Book which remains the same whether they omit it and say that it is not from God, or if they they do not know it at all.'[831] The Imām implies that 'Our qualifications and the description of our position in relation to the

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[828] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, 286.

[829] See Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 251.

[830] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 1, 13.

[831] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 2, 13.

question of guardianship (*wilāyah*) are clearly mentioned in the Qur'an in a way worthy of this sublime station. And whether they omit them or are unaware of them in the sense that they were unknown to them right from the beginning, it is the same.' In other words, ignorance of the existence of the description of the Prophet's progeny in the Qur'an amounts to the same as omitting it from the Qur'an.

iv) With this in mind, the meaning of the following tradition will also become clear: 'Had there been no addition or deletion in the Qur'an, our right would never have been hidden from any reasonable person.'[832] This is because what is meant by 'addition or deletion in the Qur'an' is the insertion of interpretations or beliefs which consequently distort the Word of God. Or it may mean talking about the Qur'an without knowledge and divine guidance, which is technically called opinionated interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*).

Moreover, concealing the truths of the Qur'an from the people is tantamount to undermining its manifest proofs. This being so, the tradition 'If they recite the Qur'an the way it was revealed, they will find our names in it' has the same meaning as the one quoted earlier, on the necessity of a fresh approach to the Qur'an, free of delusion.

Therefore, the meaning of the 'addition or deletion in the Qur'an' is not what the proponents of *taḥrīf* have supposed, because if this were the case, it would be contrary to the consensus of all Shī'a scholars and therefore rejected. For no one – not even the Akhbārīs – has given any credibility to the notion of any addition to the Qur'an, and even Muḥaddith Nūrī has acknowledged this consensus. Hence, he tried his best to explain this tradition in the manner adopted by the Akhbārīs before him.[833]

Ayatollah Khoī, says: 'All Muslims, including the proponents of *taḥrīf*, are of the opinion that not even a single letter has been added to the Qur'an.'[834]

v) On account of the many verses of the Qur'an which were revealed, explicitly or implicitly, in honour of this family, Imām al-Bāqir said:

> The Qur'an has been revealed in four parts. A quarter is about us. Another is about our enemies. Yet another is about the laws

[832] Ibid. no. 6.

[833] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 236.

[834] Khoī, al-*Bayān*, 252.

> and obligations, and the last quarter is about the traditions and parables, and the words of praise of the Qur'an belong to us.[835]

And in another version, it states:

> The Qur'an has been revealed in three parts. One third is about us and our enemies, another is about the traditions and parables, and the last third is about the obligations and laws.[836]

The purpose in these narrations is to state the types of verses of the Qur'an, and not to numerically classify them. A major part of the Qur'an is revealed about the station of guardianship (*wilāyah*), which in itself is the foundation of the obligations, and the rest consist of the laws, traditions, words of wisdom and parables. This important aspect of the Qur'an has prompted some of the greatest and most learned thinkers of the *ummah* to write valuable books. Amongst them is the great *ḥadīth* scholar 'Ubaydullāh ibn 'Abdillāh, better known as al-Ḥākim al-Ḥasakānī, who has written a valuable encyclopedia of the virtues of *Ahl al-Bayt* and the verses revealed about them.

In exposing the one who, by speaking ill of the leader of the 'Alāwīs at that time, misguided the people and then belittled the dignity of the 'Alāwī leader's forefathers, claiming that none of the exegetes are aware that the revelation of *Sūrah al-Insān* and other verses of the Qur'an are about 'Alī and his *Ahl al-Bayt*, al-Ḥākim al-Ḥasakānī says:

> I considered his audacity in making this serious accusation improper, and thought it necessary to erase the unease of my friends (the Shī'a *ḥadīth* scholars), and so I began compiling this book...[837]

vi) In chapter 5 of his book, al-Ḥasakānī narrates through the channel of Sa'īd ibn Jubayr on the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās: 'The range of verses in the Qur'an revealed about 'Alī is unequalled by those about anyone else.'

vii) Mujāhid has said: 'Seventy verses have been revealed concerning 'Ali having no equal,' and also: 'God sent down no verse without 'Alī being above it.'

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[835] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 1, 9; Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, no. 4, 628.

[836] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, no. 3, 9; Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, no. 2, 627.

[837] Introduction to Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, 14.

viii) Ibn Abī Laylā also says: 'Eighty selected verses of the Qur'an have been revealed about 'Alī and his having no equal in this *ummah*.'

ix) He has also reported that Imām 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn said: 'The Qur'an was revealed to us and its words of praise pertain to us.'[838]

Al-Ḥasakānī has quoted over 1160 other authentic narrations concerning the arrangement of the *sūrah*s in the Qur'an which are considered authentic by both Sunnīs and Shī'a.

In short, none of these traditions imply literal *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an. Those which narrate the Imams saying things such as 'You would find our names in the Qur'an' or 'One quarter (or one third) of the Qur'an is about us,' mean that whoever has insight may find clear descriptions in the existing Qur'an. Muḥaddith Nūrī's supposition that such traditions imply omissions or deletions in the Qur'an has no basis.[839] May God protect us from slips of the heart and sight!

[838] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 39-42.

[839] Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 237, 239, 246-247.

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[840] All *al-*s are deleted from the beginning of Arabic surnames in this bibliography.

[841] *q* refers to the Islamic lunar (*qamarī*) calendar and *s* refers to the Islamic solar (*shamsī*) calendar.

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MUHAMMAD HADI MA'RIFAT

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

VOLUME I



INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

Mohammad Hādī Ma'rifat

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Volume I

SAMT

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ISBN: 978-1-910178-01-0 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-910178-00-3 (pbk)

SAMT Publications
www.samt.ac.ir

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INTRODUCTION

I

'Ulūm al-Qur'an, or Qur'anic sciences, is a discipline which deals with those aspects of the Qur'an which are not usually discussed in exegeses (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'an. In this discipline, unlike *tafsīr*, the contents of the verses are not discussed, rather general information about the Qur'an and different groups of verses are provided and analysed.

The scholars of *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* differ in the number of topics discussed in this discipline. Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) has listed forty-seven related topics,[1] while Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) has increased this to eighty.[2] The range of titles includes historical discussions on topics such as the nature, duration, chronology and causes of revelation; compilation, the preservation and unification of the Qur'an; consonantal and vocal texts; and different modes of recitation and their origins. They also include theological and conceptual topics such as the immutability of the Qur'an, or the impossibility of its alteration; the inimitability of the text; and types of verses in terms of ambiguity or clarity, abrogation or continuity, and universality or contextuality.

As is manifest, there is no logical or didactic order between most of the above-mentioned topics. Thus the word 'sciences' is in the plural in order to denote the independence of most of these topics from each other. What brings all these together is the fact that they all revolve round the one unifying theme of the Qur'an.

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[1] Badr al-Dīn Muhammad Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1957), vol. 1, 9-12.

[2] 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūtī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), vol. 1, 27-30.

However, certain classifications have been suggested for organising these sciences in a logical order. One suggestion is that these topics can be divided into three main categories: literal, conceptual and historical. The first category includes topics which deal with literal aspects of the Qur'an, and these include the science of pronunciation (*tajwīd*), recitation (*qirā'ah*), calligraphy (*rasm al-khaṭṭ*), and the number of chapters, verses, words and letters of the Qur'an. The second category includes topics such as exegeses (*tanzīl*) and figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*), esoteric (*bāṭin*) and exoteric (*ẓāhir*) meanings, abrogation (*naskh*), univocal (*muḥkam*) and equivocal (*mutashābih*), and abstract (*mujmal*) and lucid (*mubayyan*) verses. The third category deals with historical issues such as the history and order of revelation, the history of its writing, collection and compilation, the phases of its preparation and so forth.

An analysis of Islamic traditions and historical records shows that some of the topics included in the sciences of the Qur'an date back to the time of the companions of the Prophet. These records show that not only were some of these topics discussed at that time, but they were also regarded as indispensible for anyone dealing with the Qur'an as a legal, theological or political source. In his *Path of Eloquence* (*Nahj al-Balāghah*), Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 401/1010) reports from Imam Ali (d. 40/660) that *univocal* and *equivocal* verses of the Qur'an should be clearly distinguished, as well as *abrogating* and *abrogated* verses,[3] in a tone critical of those who disregarded this knowledge. The concepts of equivocality and abrogation are among the most discussed topics in the sciences of the Qur'an. Moreover, Imam Ali used to assert that he had learnt the knowledge of such verses from none other than the Prophet himself: 'No single verse of the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet without him having me recite it. He dictated it to me and I wrote it in my own hand. He taught me its figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and outer explanation (*tafsīr*), its abrogating and abrogated verses, as well as its univocal and equivocal verses.'[4] He also said: 'By God, there is no single verse in the Book of God of which I do

[3] Al-Sharīf Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Qum: Dār al-Dhakhā'ir, 1412 q.), sermon 1, 25.

(Note: In all footnotes q. refers to the Islamic lunar (*qamarī*) calendar and s. refers to the Islamic solar (*shamsī*) calendar)

[4] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmi, 1405 q.), 285.

not know whether it was revealed during the night or the day, or if it was revealed on a mountain or a plain,' and 'no verse was revealed that I know not where it was revealed, about what it was revealed, and with whom it was revealed.'[5] All these were topics which were later discussed in books of *'Ulūm al-Qur'an*.

Based on the above reports, it is but logical to find books and epistles written on different topics of these sciences from the early years of Islamic scholarship. However, such epistles, which started to appear early in Muslim history towards the end of the first/seventh century, beginning with *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* (The Book of Recitations) of Yahyā ibn Ya'mur (d. 89/708), did not deal with all these sciences in one place. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995) lists 250 such books and epistles in his catalogue up to the year 377/987.[6] The more comprehensive books, with the newly coined title of *'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, started to appear at the beginning of 4th/10th century, notably with such works as *al-Ḥāwī fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* of Muhammad ibn Khalaf ibn Marzbān (d. 309/921) and *al-Mukhtazan fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936). This era culminated in the monumental work of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, in the 9th/15th century.

II

Since the early days, Shī'a scholars, showed great dedication to the sciences of the Qur'an, more than any other Islamic subjects. The Shī'a contribution to *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* is usually overlooked, therefore it would be appropriate to mention very briefly some of the work in this field.

Obviously, the initial concern of all Muslim scholars who were experts in the field of the Qur'an was the proper method of recitation and the orthography of the Scripture. Hence, we find books on *qirā'āt* and discussions on variant nuances of recitation to be among the foremost topics appearing in *'Ulūm al-Qur'an*. Great personalities with Shī'ī inclinations were among the first scholars to focus on the different aspects of *qirā'āt* such as grammar, recitation and orthography. These scholars were later followed by others who drew greatly on their expertise.

[5] Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Leiden, 1325 q.), vol. 2, 292.

[6] Muhammad ibn Isḥāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Cairo: Istiqāmah, n.d.), 37-41.

Despite the availability of other scripts such as Nabataean and Syriac, the early companions chose to transliterate the Qur'an in the Kūfic script. However, as is well known, the Kūfic script lacked dots or diacritics to indicate certain phonetic sounds and to distinguish graphically identical words. The onerous task of creating new signs for this script was first done by Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī (d. 69/688), who introduced this development in the Kūfic script merely for the correct recitation of the Qur'an.

A close disciple of Imam Ali, al-Du'alī fought for him at the Battle of Ṣiffīn and was appointed by him as governor of Basra after 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, a post held by Abū al-Aswad until his death. According to Shaykh Ṭūsī (d. 460/1068), al-Du'alī was a student of the first four Shī'a Imams.[7] Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) reports that he was the first person to systematise Arabic grammar, a matter of utmost importance for the correct recitation of the Qur'an.[8] Al-Du'alī authored a text on grammar called *al-Ta'līqah* primarily composed of Imam Ali's instructions on grammar and his own annotations.[9] In order to assist the Muslims in reciting the Qur'an in a grammatically correct fashion, al-Du'alī improvised diacritical dots to distinguish different phonetic values.[10]

Abu al-Aswad al-Du'alī trained famous scholars including his Shī'a student, Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur,[11] and others such as Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Hurmuz, all of whom became famous grammarians in their own rights and improved on his work. Additionally, two prominent reciters of the Qur'an (*qurrā'*), Abān ibn Taghlib (d. 141/758) and Ḥamrān ibn A'yan (d. 130/747), who were also disciples of the fifth and sixth Imams, are considered to have been his students.

Abu al-Aswad originally invented the system of dots to indicate vowel sounds (*i'rāb*) rather than consonantal sounds (*i'jām*). Dots were later

---

[7] Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Al-Khoī, *Mu'jamu Rijāl al-Hadith* (Qum: Markaz Nashr al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmiyyah, 1413 q.), vol. 10, 187.

[8] Abdullāh ibn Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Ma'ārif* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Arabi, 1390 q.), 434.

[9] Ibn al-'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimishq* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415 q.), vol. 7, 55; Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mīzān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1405 q.) vol. 1, 83.

[10] Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah fī Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥābah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1415 q.), vol. 3, 455; Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn al-'Āmilī, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1998), vol. 1, 130.

[11] Ibn Khallikān has regarded him as a Shī'a; see al-Amīn, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 1, 163.

specified for *i'jām* and dashes for *i'rāb* by another Shi'a grammarian and lexicographer, Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 173/789), a philologist from what is today Oman who migrated to Basra at an early age. According to al-Suyūṭī, Khalīl invented the *hamzah*, the *tashdīd*, *rawm* and *ishmām*.[12] He is best known for introducing the current system of marking the Arabic consonantal sounds (*ḥarakāt*) in his *Kitāb al-Nuqāṭ wa al-Shakl*; for the invention of Arabic prosody (*al-'arūḍ*); and for *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, considered to be the first Arabic dictionary, which he arranged phonetically rather than alphabetically, following the pattern of pronunciation of the Arabic alphabet from the deepest letter from the throat, (*'ayn*), to the last letter pronounced by the lips, (*mīm*). The renowned Arabic grammarian Sībawayh (d. 180/796) was one of his students.

Grammar flourished in Kūfa through Shī'a students of al-Khalīl, such as Ali ibn Ḥamza al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805), who was known as 'the leader of the Kufans in grammar' (*imām al-kūfiyyīn fī al-naḥw*), and Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ru'āsi, a disciple of the fifth and sixth Imams and who, according to Ibn al-Nadīm, was the first Kufan to write about grammar,[13] and also authored a work on Qur'anic recitations known as *Kitāb al-Qirā'ah*,[14] which addressed an urgent need among Muslims in the first and second centuries to ascertain the correct recitation (*qirā'ah*) of the Qur'an, a topic of expertise for Shī'a scholars in Kūfa.

Of the seven famous masters of Qur'anic recitation (*al-qurrā' al-sab'ah*), four are thought to have been Shī'as. The first is 'Āṣim ibn Abi al-Najūd Bahdalah al-Kūfī (d. 128/745), who learned his recitation from the *tābi'ī* Shī'a master of recitation, Abū Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who in turn learned it from Imam Ali. 'Āsim's *qirā'ah*, through Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (d. 180/796), is now the commonest *qirā'ah*, according to which almost all Qur'ans are printed throughout the world. The second is Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā' al-Baṣrī (d. 154/771), who took his recitation from Sa'īd ibn Jubayr (d. 94/712), who was one of the closest disciples of Imam Zayn al-'Abidīn (d. 95/713). The third is Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt al-Kūfī (d. 156/773), who took his *qirā'ah* from Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765)

[12] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 2, 454.

[13] Al-Amīn, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 1, 163.

[14] Āghā Buzurg Tehrānī, *al-Dharī'ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī'ah* (Tehran: Islāmiyyah, 1398 q.) vol. 17, 53.

and learned from prominent Shī'a Qur'anic scholars such as Ḥamrān ibn A'yan and Sulaymān ibn Mihrān al-A'mash. He authored many books on different aspects of the Qur'an, including *Kitāb al-Qirā'ah* (*The Book of Recitation*), *Kitāb Asbā' al-Qur'an* (*Classification of the Qur'an in Seven Parts*), *Kitāb Ḥudūd Āy al-Qur'ān* (*The Number of the Verses of the Qur'an*), *Kitāb Mutashābih al-Qur'an* (*Equivocal verses of the Qur'an*) and *Kitāb fi Maqṭū' al-Qur'ān wa Mawṣūlih* (*Jointed and Disjointed Verses of the Qur'an*).[15] And the fourth is Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Ḥamzah al-Kisā'ī al-Kūfī (d. 189/805), who took his recitation from Abān ibn Taghlib, and from Ḥamzah through Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. According to Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn, Abān ibn Taghlib was the first person to author a book on *qirā'āt*.[16] The remaining three famous reciters were Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738), Nāfi' (d. circa 170/786) and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir (d. 118/736), from Mecca, Medina and Damascus respectively.

Shī'a scholars were also forerunners of *tafsīr* or Qur'anic exegesis. Kufan study of *tafsīr* can be traced back to Maytham ibn Yaḥyā al-Tammār, who was killed in 60/679 by 'Ubaydullāh ibn Zīyād. Records indicate that a complete book of *tafsīr* was written in Kūfa by Sa'īd ibn Jubayr (killed in 94/712 by al-Ḥajjāj) which, according to Ibn al-Nadīm, was the first book of *tafsīr* ever written in Islam. On mentioning his book, al-Suyūṭī reports from Qatādah that Ibn Jubayr was the most knowledgeable in *tafsīr* of the second generation of companions (*tābi'ūn*).[17] Mention is also made of a *tafsīr* authored by the controversial Shī'a scholar Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī (d. 128/745).[18] There is a better known *tafsīr* by a more famous exegete, al-Suddī al-Kabīr (d. 127/744), a *mawlā* from Kūfa whose *tafsīr* is described by al-Suyūṭī as the best of all commentaries (*amthal al-tafāsīr*). He was a companion of the fourth, fifth and sixth Shī'a Imams.[19] According to Ibn 'Adī[20] (d. 365/975), the most sizable *tafsīr* was written by Muhammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), another renowned Shī'a scholar of Kufa.

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[15] Al-Sayyid Hassan al-Ṣadr, *Ta'sīs al-Shī'ah li 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Baghdad: Sharikat al-Ṭab' wa al-Nashr al-'Irāqiyyah, 1370 q.), 346-347.

[16] Al-Amīn, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 1, 131.

[17] Ibid. 125.

[18] Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Ali al-Najāshī, *Rijāl: Fihris Asmā' Muṣannifī al-Shī'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', 1408 q.), 128.

[19] Al-Khoī, *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Hadith*, vol. 4, 63.

[20] Al-Amīn, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 1, 125.

Since Ibn 'Adī died in 365/975, it could be assumed that no *tafsīr* was written as large or as famous as al-Kalbī's before the second half of the fourth century, including Ṭabarī's.

This early scholarly output shows the importance early Shī'a scholarship attached to the sciences of the Qur'an. Merely to list the names of known Shī'a Qur'anic scholars during this period would require numerous pages.

III

Early Muslim scholars had concerns about the translation of the Qur'an into other languages. The nature of the concern was of two types, and the first was that the Qur'an was the word of God revealed in Arabic, and so how could man change this revelation by translating it into another language? The second concern was about the beauty, tone and delicate nuances of meaning which would be lost in translation.

The Jewish philosopher, Moses ibn Ezra (d. 530/1135), is quoted as saying that once in his youth a Muslim scholar in Granada had asked him to translate the Ten Commandments into Arabic. In response, he asked the scholar to read for him the first chapter of the Qur'an in Latin, a language that the latter spoke fluently. The reading turned out to be awkward and unfamiliar, and the scholar realised the significance and did not insist on his request.[21]

This example shows how difficult it is to translate any religious or inspirational text into another language. However, none of these concerns prevented Muslims from translating the Qur'an from the very early days. During the lifetime of the Prophet those parts of chapter 19 of the Qur'an which relate the story of Mary were translated into Amharic for the Emperor Negus of Abyssinia. A group of Iranian Muslims had asked Salmān al-Fārisī, the Persian companion of the Prophet, to translate the Qur'an for them into Farsi, which he did with the Prophet's sanction.[22] Whether Salmān translated the whole Qur'an or only the first chapter, *fātihat al-kitāb,* is yet to be investigated.

[21] Kāmrān Fānī, *Bayt al-Ḥikmah wa Dār al-Tarjamah* (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dāneshgāhī, 1365 s.), 113.

[22] Shāhfūr ibn Ṭāhir Isfarāyīnī, *Tāj al-Tarājim fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an li al-A'ājim* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī Farhangī, 1375 s.), vol. 8, 8.

It was actually this translation which caused a controversy amongst some of the great jurists. Abū Hanīfa (d. 150/767) was of the opinion that, based on this approval, it was permissible to replace the Arabic text by the translation even in formal prayers, while other jurists were of the view that the translation, if at all permissible, was only for conveying the meanings and concepts, and could never replace the original Arabic in any ritual context.[23]

Historically the Iranians were the first nation to translate the whole Qur'an into their own language. This took place some time towards the end of the third/ninth and beginning of the fourth/tenth centuries. It was previously thought that the translation of Ṭabari's *Tafsīr* in 345/956, which naturally included the translation of all the verses, was the first Persian translation of the Qur'an, but the discovery of *Qur'an Quds*, which is dated about a century before that, means that this assumption is now under question.[24] However, the translation of Ṭabari's *Tafsīr* has a more established history. It was undertaken by order of the Sāmānid King, Mansūr ibn Nūḥ (d. 365/975), after he obtained a *fatwā* from the scholars of Khorāsān and Transoxiana regarding the permissibility of translating the Qur'an.

As for other languages, the oldest extant Turkish translation of the Qur'an dates back to 734/1333, while the first Urdu translation was completed much later in 1190/1775. It is interesting to know that a Malay translation was completed in the 11th/17th century before the Urdu version, by Sheikh Abdur Ra'ūf al-Fansūri of Aceh, in *Tafsīr Tarjumān al-Mustafīḍ*. This translation was in classical Malay, which later evolved into Indonesian and the modern Malaysian languages.

IV

The study of the Qur'an in the West has been marked historically by polemics and prejudice. This process began with the first translation of the Qur'an into a European language in the twelfth century by the English scholar Robertus Ketenensis (Robert of Ketton), and was completed in

[23] For an elaborate discussion of this subject see, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr) (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-Arabi, 1420 q.), vol. 1, 209-213.

[24] Bahā' al-Dīn Khorramshāhī, *Qur'an Shinākht* (Tehran: Nāhīd, 1387 s.), 113-114.

537/1143. He did not entitle his translation 'the Qur'an,' but *Lex Mahumet Pseudoprophete* (The Law of Muhammad the False Prophet). The translation was in Mediaeval Latin and was commissioned by Peter the Venerable (d. 1157), the great abbot of the monastery of Cluny in France.

Although the purpose of this translation was both to study and to refute Islam, it barely resembled the original, due to arbitrary omissions and additions and a preference for improbable and distasteful meanings over likely and appropriate ones. It was stored in the vaults of the church until it was published four centuries later, in 1543, by authorisation of Martin Luther in three editions, all of which were prefaced by Luther himself. This was the only Qur'an translation available to Europeans for more than five centuries, from which Italian, German, Dutch, French and Russian renditions were produced. The Italian translation was derived directly from Ketenensis, and was used to develop the German translation, which was used in turn for the Dutch.[25] It is not hard to imagine how poor and erroneous such translations would be by the time the second and third-hand renditions were produced.

The second Latin translation of the Qur'an was produced in 1698 by Father Ludovico Marracci (d. 1700), and was dedicated to the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I. The book had an introduction containing *A Refutation of the Qur'an*, and its main purpose, as stated by the author himself, was to discredit Islam by inserting elaborate quotations from Muslim authorities themselves. Many European translations were based on Marracci's work, including the French translation of Savory (1751), which stated on the title page of one of its editions that it was published in Mecca in 1165 AH to give it a better sense of authenticity.[26]

Drawing on this work in attitude, and especially in its 'Preliminary Discourse,' George Sale (d. 1736) later compiled the first English translation of the Qur'an, which professed to have been derived directly from Arabic. Released in 1734, it was 'to expose the imposture' and to have 'the glory of its overthrow.'[27]

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[25] Afnān Fatānī, 'Translation and the Qur'an,' in Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: an encyclopedia* (UK: Routledge, 2006), 667.

[26] Ibid.

[27] George Sale, *The Koran* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1801), v.

Sale's translation remained in circulation in successive editions. Compared to previous translations it was an impartial rendition, despite the fact that it makes a tedious reading, nothing at all like the original Arabic. It was after reading this translation that Thomas Carlyle (d. 1881) found the Qur'an as tedious a piece of reading as he did ever undertake, which was 'wearisome,' 'confused' and 'crude,' and advised that 'nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran.'[28] Edward Gibbon (d. 1794) found it to be an 'endless incoherent rhapsody of fable' which did not excite any sentiment or any idea.[29]

This negative attitude towards the Qur'an did not improve later when polemicists were replaced by Orientalists. Parvez Manzoor, a critic of Orientalism, believes that the Orientalist method for studying the Muslim scripture may be called anything but the 'natural mode of apprehension of the rationalist man.'[30]

This generation includes personalities such as Reverend J. M. Rodwell (d. 1900), who published his English translation in 1861. He claimed that his translation attempted to imitate the 'imperfect style' of the original Arabic. His observation on the literary merit of the Qur'an proves nothing but his insufficient knowledge of Arabic literature, a deficiency which could be found in most members of this brand of translators. Rodwell believed that the Qur'an was the 'most unreadable and incongruous patchwork' of literature, which contained 'fragments of disjointed truth – that is based upon Christianity and Judaism partially understood.'[31] Another member of this group was E. H. Palmer, a Cambridge scholar who published his translation in 1880, and believed that the style of the Qur'an was 'rude and rugged,' and for that reason it had to be translated into colloquial language.[32]

The above statements about the literature of the Qur'an should be left to Arab littérateurs to judge in addition to chapter ten of this book

[28] James Kritzeck, *Anthology of Islamic Literature* (New York: Penguin Group, 1975), 22.

[29] Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), vol. 1, 11.

[30] Parvez Manzoor, 'Method against Truth: Orientalism and Qur'anic Studies,' in *The Qur'an - Style and Contents*, vol. 24 (ed.) Andrew Rippin (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), 382.

[31] J.M. Rodwell, *The Koran* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. 1909), 2, 13 and 14.

[32] Fatānī, 'Translation and the Qur'an', 668.

where Ayatollah Ma'rifat elaborates on the inimitability of the Qur'an from a literary perspective.

The most notable of this group, however, is the German scholar Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930), who, with the publication of his award-winning book *Die Geschichte des Qorans* (History of the Qur'an), advanced the first systematic work on the study of the Qur'an in the West based on a historical-critical approach. Unlike Sale, who saw beauty in the language of the Qur'an, Nöldeke views the Qur'an as a text in which 'little care is taken to express all the transitions of thought,' in which indispensable clauses are frequently omitted, and extended narratives are 'vehement and abrupt,' that uses a 'great deal of superfluous verbiage,' and whose syntax even 'betrays great awkwardness.'[33] Such statements are clearly contrary to the unanimous views of all Arabic littérateurs who have considered the Qur'an the most elegant and eloquent example of Arabic literature. It only implies a lack of literary comprehension in a non-Arab who tries to digest a Shakespearean-like text of Arabic literature.

Nöldeke's works, despite their academic value and their insightful analyses of the etymology and grammar of the Qur'an, betray a prejudice driven by religious motivations in an effort to defend Christianity and Judaism against Islam.[34] He is prejudiced against the Prophet of Islam and does not shy away from expressing this in language which is occasionally insulting.

Nöldeke is also critical of the content of the Qur'an, and considers it to be a bad copy of the Bible. This, in his view, is mainly because the Prophet did not read the scriptures, but his knowledge of them was 'by oral communications from the Jews who knew a little and Christians who knew next to nothing' about the scriptures. This knowledge was probably 'picked up in a conversation with any Jew or Christian,' and that is why the deviations from the biblical narratives in the Qur'an are conspicuous.

The eloquence of the text of the Qur'an was better appreciated by the Scottish scholar Richard Bell (d. 1952), who considered the Prophet to

[33] Theodor Nöldeke, *The Qur'an: An Introductory Essay*, (ed.) N. A. Newman (Hatfield: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 5 and 12.

[34] Ibid. 29-31.

be a poet, 'but not of the ordinary Arab type,' for his themes were hardly touched upon by other poets.[35]

Following in the footsteps of Weil and Nöldeke, Bell's translation in 1937 suggested a rearrangement of the Qur'anic chapters. However, it took the sifting operation as far as reordering the whole text by separating it up into small fragments in order to 'unravel the composition of the separate suras' and 'remove the confusions' from the Qur'an.[36] To this end he undertook a verse by verse examination of the Qur'an, and tried to recast the entire text in a new mould.

Bell's method was based on the assumption that the Qur'anic literature suffered from abrupt changes of rhyme, the intrusion of extraneous subjects into passages otherwise homogeneous, breaks in grammatical structure, sudden changes of the dramatic situation, and other literary-based assertions.[37] Based on this conjecture, he theorised that the parts of the Qur'an he deemed disjointed were due to 'discarded material' being confused with the original text at the time of its collection and compilation. He explains that the Qur'an was revised in Medina by the Prophet, and while this revision was being done the scribes noted down the revised version on the back of the sheets on which the original verses were written. Later, editors inserted the old verses back in the text. It is to these 'scraps' that got into the Qur'an by mistake, Bell says in his preface, 'rather than to textual defects, or to confusion in Muhammad's own thought and style that the dreary welter of the Qur'an' is due.[38]

The reader can find adequate arguments in the second chapter of this book regarding the above which render most such perceived shortcomings to be due to the lack of proper knowledge of 'Shakespearian' Arabic.

In dealing with the Qur'an, Bell allowed himself the liberty of assuming that any perceived unevenness in the style would justify rearrangement of the verses according to his own ideas of stylistic fitness; something that no scholar after him would take up. In essence, Bell is not a translator, but

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[35] Mohammad Khalīfa, *The Sublime Qur'an and Orientalism* (Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, 1989), 20.

[36] Richard Bell, *The Qur'an: Translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), vi.

[37] W. Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 93.

[38] Bell, *The Qur'an: Translated*, vi.

an author. He not only rearranges the order of the chapters, but actually restructures the order of the verses according to what he believes to be the thematically correct order of the text. On the lexical level, some very common and familiar words in Arabic are mistranslated so as to make the text appear ludicrous. Moreover, in many instances he allows himself to comment on the content of the text he translates in an ostensibly biased way. For example, next to his rendering of the oath at the beginning of *sura* 89, he writes: 'An absurd oath.'[39]

I cannot imagine that anyone would allow himself the liberty of treating any text as Bell did in treating the Qur'an. His theory of unconnected pieces was so extreme that it was criticised by his student William Montgomery Watt (d. 2006). In his revised version of Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Watt argues that Bell was inconsistent in the application of his theory, and thus little was to be gained by his distinctive hypothesis.[40] However, no scholar has ethically criticised Bell for his adventurous attitude towards an established sacred text. As Fatānī reminds us: 'The fact that Bell took a coherent Arabic text, readily understood by any native speaker of the language, and cut and pasted it into something incoherent and disjointed clearly raises ethical questions that have yet to be addressed.' [41]

Generally speaking, the persistent problem with most Western translations of the Qur'an has been that they were undertaken by Christian missionaries and Orientalists who had hardly any rigorous knowledge of the Arabic language.[42] This problem has been addressed since the 1930s by Muslim translations of the Qur'an in different European languages.

V

The idea that the Qur'an was a distorted version of the Bible or heavily copied from it is not restricted to Nöldeke. It has been a common view among the Orientalists and later academics, and usually labelled as an historical-critical perspective. We can find this view in writings as early as the first half of the 19th century in the works of Abraham Geiger (d. 1874),

[39] Fatānī, 'Translation and the Qur'an', 659.

[40] Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 106.

[41] Fatānī, 'Translation and the Qur'an', 659.

[42] Ibid. 658.

the German rabbi and scholar who founded Reform Judaism,[43] and whose book could be regarded as a pioneering work in the historical approach. Although this allegation is as old as the Qur'an itself, and certain verses of the Qur'an speak of disbelievers charging the Prophet with rewriting the old fables of the past as dictated to him by another person (25:5), or being taught to him by a foreigner (16:103), the Orientalists believe that by the critical-historical method they have shed new light on this old allegation.

The nineteenth century is marked by a number of biographies of the Prophet Muhammad by Western Orientalists, notably Gustav Weil (1843), William Muir (1861) and Aloys Sprenger (1861-65). Inevitably these biographical works contained some introductory material related to the study of the Qur'an and its biblical provenance.

The German Orientalist Gustav Weil (d. 1889) believed that Muhammad learnt Jewish stories and concepts from existing Jewish tribes, and incorporated them into Islamic teachings with the help of figures like Waraqah ibn Nawfil, Abdullah ibn Salām, Salmān Fārisī and Baḥīrā, a monk Muhammad met on his way to Boṣrā and who was, according to Weil, a baptised Jew.[44] His references, however, are mainly to legends from biblical sources incorporated into Islamic traditions, commonly called *isrā'īliyyāt*, rather than the Qur'an.

Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893) rejects Muhammad's claim of revealed knowledge about the previous Books, and maintains that he learnt of them from Jewish and Christian sources. He even goes one step further to name his probable teachers in this regard. He believed Muhammad never named his teachers in order to pretend miraculous knowledge, and the fact that all his teachers died in the early days of his career allowed him to cover up for it.

One of the people he names as a secretive teacher of Muhammad is the 'eccentric' *Zayd* from the Addy tribe, who followed the true religion of Abraham. In *The Life of Mohammad, from Original Sources,* published in 1851, he postulates that it was Zayd who 'first instilled purer notions

[43] Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, tr. F. M. Young, 1896, (http://answeringislam.org/Books/Geiger/Judaism/index.htm), xxx.

[44] Gustav Weil, *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud; or Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), viii-xi.

respecting God into his mind, and induced him to read biblical history.'[45] Then there was Waraqah, who, according to Sprenger, before his death had helped the Prophet to write the Qur'an. Addās, a monk of Nineveh who lived in Mecca and taught Muhammad biblical stories, is another figure, along with Rabbis of the Ḥijāz who taught him their legends.[46]

Learning about biblical history is one thing, but reading it was even more improbable for Muhammad, as he was known to be illiterate and, in any case, no Bible was translated into Arabic at the time. To overcome the first problem, Sprenger rejects the official Islamic view that the Prophet was illiterate, and believes that he pretended to appear illiterate 'in order to raise the elegance of the composition of the Qur'an into a miracle.'[47] To overcome the second issue he conjectures that there should have been Arabic translations of the Bible available at the time.[48]

To prop up his opinion he further argues that some of the closest companions of the Prophet, such as his stepson Zayd ibn Thābit and the Abyssinian ex-slave Bilāl, were former Christians who could have taught the Prophet about the biblical scriptures.[49]

Obviously, none of these claims could be supported by historical data; most of them are based on insignificant stories scattered around the sources which have been blown out proportion by Orientalist scholars. The story of Waraqah is given a good critical examination in the present book.

William Tisdall (d. 1928) is another figure of this ilk. A British historian and philologist who served as the Secretary of the Church of England's Missionary Society in Isfahan, he cites a number of events in the Qur'an that he believes had been copied from the Old Testament.[50] However, since there are certain clear discrepancies between the accounts in the Qur'an and those in the Bible, on these occasions Tisdall, like Nöldeke, concludes that Muhammad's knowledge of the Bible was imperfect and partial.

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[45] Aloys Sprenger, *The Life of Mohammad, from Original Sources* (Oxford: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1851), 95.

[46] Ibid. 96-99.

[47] Ibid. 102.

[48] Ibid. 100 ft.

[49] Ibid. 161-162.

[50] William St Clair Tisdall, *The Sources of Islam*, tr. Sir William Muir (USA: CSPI, LLC, 1902), 9.

But if Muhammad was inspired by the Bible, where did these differences come from? Tisdall answers this question by resorting to the existence of unorthodox Christian sects in Medina and greater Arabia at the time of the Prophet. Muhammad's knowledge of the Bible came from the followers of these sects who did not have a proper knowledge of the Bible and taught Muhammad from their unorthodox sources.[51]

Apart from unorthodox Christian teachings, Tisdall further argues that Mohammad was influenced by other cultures that existed in the region, for example, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Muhammad's companions such as Salmān Fārisī informed Muhammad about Persian tales, and Muhammad subsequently introduced them into the Qur'an. Nevertheless, he fails to specify which Persian tales were included in the Qur'an.[52]

Hartwig Hirschfeld (d. 1934) widens the sources of such influences to other lettered communities. In his book, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an*, published in 1902, he argues for a strong biblical influence on Muhammad which did not only come from Jews and Christians of Mecca and Medina, but also from the region of the Dead Sea which Muhammad passed through when he was leading a trading caravan to Syria.[53] However, he admits that these fleeting encounters did not consist of systematic study or regular instruction, and rejects Sprenger's view regarding the role of Baḥīrā as the secret tutor of Muhammad and the author of the *Ṣuḥuf*.

Throughout his work, Hirschfeld points to the similarities between Qur'anic concepts, such as 'human soul,' 'resurrection,' 'miracle' and so forth,[54] and biblical concepts.

It should be pointed out here that Muslims never deny the similarities between the concepts and the stories of the Qur'an and those of the Bible. On the contrary, the Qur'an insists on such a similarity.[55] The difference between Muslim scholars and the Orientalists is the paradigm in which they accommodate this fact. The Muslim paradigm is that the similarities are, and should be, there because both books come from the same source;

[51] Ibid. 30.

[52] Ibid. 50-61.

[53] Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 28.

[54] Ibid. 41-44.

[55] For example, see the Qur'an 5:48, 35:31, 41:43, 46:12, among many other verses.

they are both revealed books to chosen people. The Qur'an states that it approves of what is in previous books and is a yardstick for its accuracy: *We have sent you down the Book with the Truth, to confirm what was already there from the previous Book, and to safeguard it* (5:48). The Orientalists, on the other hand, by assuming that the Prophet of Islam was an imposter, have tried to find an alternative explanation for this similarity, and it could only be that he had taken it or learnt it from the Jews and Christians of his time. This latter paradigm, however, is lacking in historical fact, and to accept it one must draw on a creative imagination rather than solid data.

Such a creative imagination abounds in Alfred Guillaume's (d. 1966) article, 'The Influence of Judaism on Islam' (1927). According to him, Islam made use of Judaic sources through 'an intermediate legatee,' which was Christianity. He bases his argument on the existence of the Jewish diaspora throughout the Arabian peninsula at the time of the Prophet. These Jews had been present in the peninsula from the time of Solomon for commercial reasons, and by the seventh century they were well established in the various cities, including Khaibar, Medina and Ṭā'if.[56]

He rightly mentions the referential style of some Qur'anic stories, in the sense that certain stories in the Qur'an are unintelligible without referring them back to the Old Testament.[57] This observation is not out of place, since the Qur'an is to act as a safeguard for those stories, and is not in position of retelling them in full. For example, in chapter 38, Surah *Ṣād*, the accounts of David and Solomon appear as corrections and annotations to the biblical accounts, in order to acquit these two personalities of the faults attributed to them in the Bible. Thus, his conclusion that Muhammad was an unsuccessful 'interpreter of Judaism'[58] could only be acceptable according to the Orientalist paradigm, and not according to the Muslim paradigm.

The speculative venture of Orientalist paradigm reached its climax with Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959) in *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, published in 1938. By examining 318 non-Arabic words in the Qur'an and tracing them back to their original roots, Jeffery concludes that the Qur'an was

[56] Alfred Guillaume, 'The Influence of Judaism on Islam,' in *The Legacy of Israel*, (ed.) Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 129-133.

[57] Ibid. 39.

[58] Ibid. 147.

influenced by both Jewish and Christian sources, since followers of both religions were strongly visible in the Arabian Peninsula during the time of Muhammad, and, according to him, Muhammad was greatly impressed by the higher civilisation surrounding Arabia, 'particularly by the religion of the great Empire of Rome.' His conception of his mission was therefore to provide the Arabs with the benefits of such a civilisation. 'It was therefore natural that the Qur'an should contain a large number of religious and cultural terms borrowed from these surrounding communities.'[59]

It is difficult to imagine how a scholar like Jeffery is able to postulate such a grand theory merely by finding 318 non-Arabic words, most of which were used by Arabs of the time, among 77437 words of the Qur'an.

More strangely, Sir Hamilton Gibbs (d. 1971) believed that Syriac Christianity influenced the formation of the Qur'an, for although concepts such as *tawḥīd* (monotheism) were already known to the Arabs through the *ḥanīf*s, the significant concept of the Day of Judgment was clearly influenced by the works of the fathers and monks of Syriac Christianity. His evidence for this is the ignorance of the Arabs of such concepts as clearly reflected in the Qur'an.[60]

However, probably no one of the Orientalist paradigm has ever made as bold and as unwarranted a claim as Christoph Luxenberg, a pseudonym of the author of *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*. Luxenberg claims in this book that he attempts to place the text of the Qur'an in its historical context, and to analyse it from a new philological perspective, with the aim of arriving at a more convincing understanding of the text.[61] His main thesis is that the 'Ur-Qur'an' was not written in Arabic, but in Syriac, yet later scholars either 'forgot or attempted to disguise' this fact. He further postulates that until the reign of 'Abd al-Malik the official language of the Islamic territories was Syriac, which he replaced with Arabic. Rejecting the Muslim heritage regarding the history of the Qur'an, he denies that there was any oral tradition of Qur'an transmission, and that the Muslims

[59] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1938), 30.

[60] Sir Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 37-39.

[61] Luxenberg, Christoph, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: a Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (New York: Prometheus, 2007), 22.

were left with a text which they knew neither how to read, nor in what language it was written.[62]

Luxenberg uses all types of methods to restore the Qur'anic expressions to their original Aramaic and Syriac roots, and believes that by doing so many expressions of the Qur'an that previously did not make sense would become clear.[63]

I leave the judgment of such sweeping theories to the reader. However, one may question the ethical standards and academic etiquette that would allow a researcher to postulate such theories, which insult the intelligence and the very existence of scholars throughout the history of a great civilisation with 'findings' which indicate that they were so confused and stupid that they did not know what language their forefathers were speaking.

VI

Since Wansbrough, *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* in the Western academic sphere has been more than ever under Goldziher's spell, in the sense that his fabrication theory was extended to the Qur'an and the Qur'anic sciences. Influenced by this theory, Wansbrough and his students regarded *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* as a tool that was invented to give the Qur'an historical value, and to justify the religious edicts of different legal schools. Here the Orientalist's prideful narrow-mindedness reached its apogee, by assuming that all Muslim scholars without exception were either a collection of liars and fabricators, or stupid simpletons incapable of critical thought.

For Wansbrough, all literature regarding *asbāb al-nuzūl* was a fabrication by jurists to incorporate the scripture into the existing legal system. By means of this corpus of fake traditions, Muslim scholars could establish historical order to the text of the Qur'an; it was subjected to the same requirements as legal *ḥadiths* and was produced in much the same way.[64]

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[62] Ibid. 78.

[63] Ibid. 327.

[64] Herbert Berg, 'The Skepticism and Literary Analysis of J. Wansbrough, A. Rippin, Et Al.,' in *The Koran: Translation and Exegesis*, (ed.) Colin Turner (London: Routledge, 2004), 273.

In *The Collection of the Qur'an*, John Burton comes to a completely different conclusion about the compilation of the Qur'an, and believes that it was collected at the time of the Prophet, yet his methodology suffers from the same prejudicial views.

Burton bases his argument on the conjectures of J. Schacht, who, following Goldziher, came to believe that Islamic legal traditions were all forgeries of the Islamic legal systems. There was such fierce rivalry between these legal schools that they were ready to defend their positions at any cost, which meant that each created a corpus of supporting *hadiths*, while disregarding the clear rulings of the scripture.[65] Burton extends this hypothesis to all traditions related to the Qur'an.

The process of fabrication needed a number of tools to give the forged traditions validity and credibility. Above all, they needed to devise a system by which they could establish the credibility of their own corpus of *hadiths*, and undermine those of rival schools. This gave rise to the introduction of the discipline of *hadith* criticism, and the creation of an *isnād* (chain of transmission) for every single tradition forged by any school of law. Traditions were classified according to the historical reliability of each individual who made up the chain of narration of the *hadith*.[66]

According to Burton, the jurists tried to solve the contradiction between the opinions of their legal schools and verses in the Qur'an by devising *asbāb al-nuzūl* ('occasions of revelation'). *Asbāb al-nuzūl* was a body of *hadith* literature which was created to give a 'context' to various Qur'anic verses, in order to bring them in line with the views of the legal schools.[67]

However, *asbāb al-nuzūl* alone was not enough to 'manipulate' the Qur'an. The Qur'an was a powerful source for the provision of legal rulings, and as such posed a serious obstacle for the legal schools to assert their arbitrary rulings. Hence, according to Burton, the method of *al nāsikh wa al mansūkh* ('abrogation and the abrogated') was improvised as a handy tool for the legal schools to offset the effect of certain verses that went against their legal judgments, as well as finding legitimacy for them in the Qur'an.[68]

[65] John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 10.

[66] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, 14-15.

[67] Ibid. 15.

[68] Ibid. 17.

The concept of abrogation worked well for dealing with most of the problematic verses of the Qur'an; however, an additional method was needed to deal with more 'inflexible' verses. Thus, the technique of variant readings of the Qur'an was devised. Through this technique, the legal schools could easily twist the Arabic grammar of the text to give the desired meaning and bear out their point of view.[69]

Burton tries to show how variant readings of the Qur'anic verses led to different legal rulings, and concludes that the assumption that *fiqh* was derived from the Qur'an is false, but that instead, the variant readings of the Qur'an were derived from *fiqh*. [70]

Most of the above issues, especially the issue of variant readings, are discussed extensively in the present book where the highly speculative nature of all such statements is made clear. Nonetheless, one has to admire such imaginative creativity in the academic circles. A fact that these Orientalists forget to consider is that the scholars about whom they are theorising were not machines, but ordinary human beings who have the right to be given credit for their scholastic knowledge and a degree of conscience and professional integrity; something it seems that many in the West have yet to learn about other people.

VII

As I mentioned above, both Muslim and Western scholarship equally accept certain facts about the Qur'an, yet they are often explained and accommodated by them in different ways. The example examined was about the similarities that exist between stories and concepts in both the Qur'an and the Bible. The dispute between Muslim scholars and Orientalists in this regard is not whether such similarities exist, but the paradigm in which they are accommodated. The Muslim paradigm is that the similarities are and should be there, because the Islamic faith is a continuation of the Jewish and the Christian faiths, and that the Qur'an and the Bible are both revealed from the same source. The overlapping of themes and motifs, and even linguistic expressions, in the Qur'an and other scriptures exhibit the identity of the transcendent Source of

[69] Ibid. 31-32.

[70] Ibid. 34

these Books, rather than 'borrowings' and 'appropriations.' The Qur'an has come 'to confirm what was already there from the previous Books, and to safeguard it' (5:48).

The Orientalist paradigm, on the other hand, is based on the belief that Muhammad was an imposter who tried to create a new religion for his people by copying and imitating the earlier scriptures, which he did rather poorly and inadequately. It should be clear that both of these paradigms are faith-based, and neither can claim to be more objective than the other, although, at least as a Muslim, I believe that the evidence adduced for the latter paradigm is lacking in strength and logic.

It would be futile to try to make a compromise between these two paradigms, since they diametrically oppose one another. However, this does not mean that the subscribers to either paradigm cannot benefit from the research and the studies of the other group. Despite the resentment and repugnance that the Orientalist view has created among Muslims in general, and Muslim scholars in particular, I still think that by taking a couple of steps back from each other, these two branches of scholarship can reinforce one other in their researches, and push forward our understanding of the content and history of the Islamic faith.

For its part, Western scholars should abandon their condescending and patronising attitude. They have to let go of the idea that they are the only ones free from prejudice by being unattached to the Islamic faith, and should realise that their rejection of Islam and its Prophet may be an equally misleading prejudice. They have to refrain from postulating rushed and unfounded theories based on gross and unwarranted conjectures, such as the 'Hagarian' theory of Cook and Crone or the Syriac literature theory of Luxenburg.

Western students of Islam work on the assumption of there being a total cultural void in pre-Islamic Arabia, and a complete lack of knowledge, discretion, acumen and integrity in the post-Islamic era. They work under the assumption that the traditional Muslim view is always influenced by theological and dogmatic considerations, and must of necessity be discarded. Such a pathological Islamophobic trait would leave no room for symbiotic interaction. Western scholarship should stop ignoring the huge contribution of Muslim scholarship over the centuries, and distrusting everything that is consensual and conformist in the Muslim

tradition. In studying past Muslim scholarship, Orientalists could try to be more realistic, and could portray an appropriate etiquette by refraining from phantasmagorical theories which presume all Muslim scholars to be liars, fabricators and ignorant opportunists; something that could never happen in the real world.

Muslim scholars, on their part, could appreciate the critical studies of the history and content of Islam by scholars who are not attached to it; who can see things from a different angle, and consequently add insight and depth to different aspects of this huge body of knowledge through critical analysis. They should not insist on their traditional opinions if evidence is adduced against it. They could also appreciate that modern scholarship has a much broader knowledge of comparative philology and more sophisticated methods of linguistic analysis, which puts it in a better position to shed light on some 'obscure' words and terminology, provide more plausible explanations, give more solid etymologies and trace more foreign words than was possible for the traditional Muslim scholars.

And finally, they have to accept other people's rights to study Islam within the framework of their own paradigms, for Islam is a vast meta-historical event which has changed the topography of human history, and as such, people of all persuasions have a right to study and analyse it.

VIII

It is for all the aforementioned reasons that the present book makes an indispensible contribution to the field of Qur'anic studies. It is an example of a good academic endeavour which tries to address many critical issues about the Qur'an and its history in an unprejudiced manner. Although, as one should expect, it is set within the Islamic paradigm, its critical approach and cross-dimensional and denominational analyses makes it stand out as an example of a work which can form a bridge between two perspectictives.

The text is an abridged translation of Ayatollah Mohammad Hādī Ma'rifat's magnum opus, *al-Tamhīd fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an). The original work is in Arabic and is published in ten volumes. Although the book does not address the Orientalist theories directly, the richness of its investigation and the wealth of information

it contains make most of their doubts and speculations irrelevant, for it shows the inadequacy of the information upon which the Orientalists have conjectured.

Ayatollah Ma'rifat (d. 2007) was one of the most prominent contemporary experts in *'Ulūm al-Qur'an*. He was born in Karbala to a family of the clerical tradition. His forefathers were all religious scholars going back to the famous Sheikh Ali ibn Abd al-'Ālī al-Maysī of Jabal 'Āmil (d. 938/1531). Al-Maysī was the author of *al-Risālat al-Maysiyyah*, and migrated to Isfahān at the invitation of the Safavid king along with his teacher al-Muhaqqiq al-Karakī; hence the Isfahāni origin of Ayatollah Ma'rifat.

More information about his personal life, his education and his other works can be found in his autobiography which follows this introduction. What I have to emphasise here are the innovative ideas he has contributed towards elevating our knowledge of the Qur'an to a higher level. His research and analysis clarify many previously vague aspects of *'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, and address many difficult questions in different areas of this discipline. In addition to the rich historical and conceptual information, the reader will find in the chapters of this book original theories and well considered suggestions for solving certain problematic matters related to this science.

An example of such a theory is his contribution regarding the orality of the Qur'an, which can be applied to the criticisms we discussed earlier regarding the abrupt transitions and disconnected nature of some sections of the Qur'an. Although he does not directly refer to Richard Bell or Theodor Nöldeke, and probably had never read their work, his theory is a clear response and the direct antithesis of their claims, and most certainly unravels Bell's theory on this issue.

Ayatollah Ma'rifat stipulates in this relation that the phraseology of the Qur'an is that of the spoken word, rather than that of a written book. One of the distinguishing features of the primarily written word is the coherence of the contents from beginning to end; something usually lacking in speech. Although a speaker should make sense in what is said, speech is not constrained by a strict verbal or conceptual order. In fact, unlike the written text, abrupt transitions are sometimes desirable. A speaker may jump from one subject to another on account of something

which occurs to him while speaking. According to Ayatollah Ma'rifat, this is something we encounter in the Qur'an on many occasions.

This style involves switching from the third person to the second person or from the second person to the third person. It may also involve the use of different pronouns and demonstrative pronouns without matching the nouns to which they refer, or switching from explicit to implicit and other such features. These sudden shifts from one state to another are permissible and sometimes desirable in the style of spoken as opposed to written word. It is also permissible to use parenthetical remarks in the spoken word but not in the written word. Such instances, according to Ayatollah Ma'rifat, have occurred in the Qur'an in different forms as follows.

Sudden Switching: One of the unique features of oral communication is that it is permissible to switch suddenly from one subject to another or from one situation to another relying upon contextual indicators provided by the setting. He mentions *Surah al-Qiyāmah* as an example; this surah begins by talking about Man and his state with regard to the coming of the Hour. Then all of a sudden, the discourse turns to address the Prophet by saying: *Move not thy tongue with it to hasten it; Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it. So, when We recite it, follow thou its recitation. Then Ours it is to explain it* (75:16-19). After this interjection the discourse goes back to confront Mankind with an adjunct: *No indeed; but you love the hasty world, and leave the Hereafter* (75:20-21). Drawing on a tradition from Imam Riḍā, Ayatollah Ma'rifat explains that this sudden shift may have been due to the fact that upon revelation of these verses the Messenger hurried to recite them fearing they would get lost. So he was immediately told not to; and then the discourse on the subject continues.

Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes (*Iltifāt*): According to Ayatollah Ma'rifat such meandering in discourse is not appropriate in the written word while it is regarded as beauty of style in the spoken word. He cites many examples from different verses including *Fātiḥat al-Kitāb* where one begins by praising God in the third person, and then the discourse turns to petitioning Him in the second person, which is a beautiful grammatical shift in the spoken discourse.

Paying attention to rhyme: One of the distinguishing features of rhyming prose is being able to notice the rhyme if it is heard out loud as opposed

to being written down. There is a lot of rhyming prose in the Qur'an – at the expense of articulated speech – which cannot be properly rendered in a mere book.

Among many examples is the verse: *Bal al-insānu 'alā nafsihī basīrah wa law alqā ma'ādhīrah* (75:14-15); the words only rhyme if there is a pause after both *basīrah* and *ma'ādhīrah* when it is uttered and recited with a *yā'*, *rā'* and *hā'* at the end of them; something which cannot be achieved in the written word. Another example is

Wa al-fajri wa layālin 'ashr wa al-shaf'i wa al-watr wa al-layli idhā yasr (89:1-4);

where the *yā'* at the end of *yasrī* has been omitted to preserve the rhyme when it is said aloud. This is how it was recited to the Prophet and how he recited it to the people, and it is always mandatory to copy it in this way. The written form therefore follows that of recitation, since the recitation of the Qur'an is what came first.

Melodies and tunes: An important feature of the Qur'an is its innovative vocal arrangement to melodies and tunes which has a captivating effect on the feelings of its audience. This can only be achieved by reciting it out loud as steered by the tune of the performance, not whispering it under the cover of secrecy. This is a matter overlooked by those who suppose that the formation of the Qur'an was composed in writing as opposed to epic oral performance.

Ayatollah Ma'rifat provides more evidence for his view which you can find in the related chapter in this book. This is not the only innovative view one can find in contributions of Ayatollah Ma'rifat. Unfortunately, some volumes of this huge work do not submit to translation as they discuss the eloquence and semantic aspects of the Qur'anic literature which only make sense in Arabic.

Notwithstanding, I am sure that the students of *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* will find many interesting and thought provoking ideas in this translation which makes this book an indispensible asset for the students of the sciences of the Qur'an.

IX

I cannot thank enough the people who made the creation of this English abridged edition of *al-Tamhīd fī Ulūm al-Qur'an* possible. First of

all, I have to thank the SAMT Institute whose generous help, support and financial contribution was behind this project from day one to the end. I cannot name all the individuals at SAMT who worked hard for this project as it would make a long list, but special mention should be made of Dr Ahmad Ahmadī, Dr Abolghāsemī, Shaykh Muhammad Rezā Nūrullāhiyān and Dr Saeedī.

Special thanks and gratitude are due to Dr. Khalīl Tousī for his dedicated and diligent management of the project and for his enthusiasm, without which this project would neither have started nor come to fruition. I should say a big thank you to the translators of this highly technical text, Mr Salim Rossier of Cambridge and Dr Mansoor Limba of Manila, whose brilliant English rendition made the task seem easy. Also my thanks and appreciations are due to Mr Seyfeddin Kara and Ms Aliya Gokal for helping with the research.

Last but not least, I have to thank the English editor, Trevor Banyard, who added much beauty and smoothness to the text, and all those who helped out in proof reading, design, lay-out and printing.

All these helping hands and facilitating means did, of course, come together under the auspicious care of God, Whom we cannot thank enough.

Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour

FOREWORD

An Overview of My Life

My name is Muhammad Hādī Ma'rifat, and I was born to a family of men of religion in the Holy City of Karbalā in the year 1349 AH. My father was Sheikh Ali ibn al-Mīrzā Muhammad Ali, one of the grandsons of Sheikh 'Abd al-'Ālī al-Maysī al-Iṣfahānī, a well-known preacher in Karbalā at that time. My father migrated with his parents from Iṣfahān to Karbalā in the year 1329 AH, when he was fifteen years old. He then died there in the year 1378 AH, when he was nearly 63 years of age, and was buried in the courtyard of the shrine of 'Abu al-Faḍl al-'Abbās. He was a brilliant scholar and preacher, and blessed with the respect of the people of Karbalā. All of my ancestors going back three centuries were from a noble chain of religious scholars.

As for my mother, she was Al-Sayyidah Zahrā', daughter of Al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Tājir (the trader) al-Rashtī, who settled in Karbalā, where he died in the year 1404 AH and was buried there.

Academic Career

When I reached the age of five, my father sent me to a private school set up by Sheikh Bāqir. I then studied the preliminaries (*al-muqaddimāt*) at the hand of Ustādh Hājj Sheikh Ali Akbar al-Nā'īnī and subsequently my father. After that I studied literature and logic with the teachers at the *ḥawzah* in Karbalā. I learned a number of astronomical and mathematical sciences. My teachers at this time were the following: my father, Al-Sayyid Sa'īd al-Tunikābūnī (a specialist Arabic literature teacher), Ayatullāh al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Shīrāzī, Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Māzandarānī and Sayyid Murtaḍā al-Qazwīnī.

The next phase in my studies consisted of jurisprudence and an introduction to philosophy. My teachers were my father, Sheikh Muhammad

al-Kalbāsī, Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Māzandarānī, Sheikh Muhammad al-Khaṭīb (a *marja'* and great scholar at the *ḥawzah*), Sayyid Muhammad Mīr Qazwīnī (one of the most famous scholars in the *ḥawzah* and a student of the late Ākhund Khurāsānī), Sheikh Muhammad Mahdī al-Kābulī (with whom I studied some of *Qawānīn al-Usūl*), and Sheikh Yūsuf al-Biyārijmandī al-Khurāsānī (one of the late Nā'īnī's most famous students, and who was knowledgeable in the principles of jurisprudence), with whom I studied *al-Fuṣūl, al-Rasā'il, al-Makāsib*, a complete course in the principles of jurisprudence, and a large part of jurisprudence at *baḥth khārij* level. Since he was a student of the great literary expert al-Nīsābūrī,, I also studied *al-Muṭawwal* with him. This course lasted until the year 1379 AH.

Starting to Give Something Back

In addition to these studies, I also took up teaching and research in the literary and technical fields in the *ḥawzah 'ilmiyyah*s, as well as holding weekly religious circles for young people, activities which were warmly received and from which many students graduated. I also took the initiative of setting up and publishing a monthly magazine entitled *Ajwibat al-Masā'il al-Dīnīyyah* (Answers to Religious Questions) accompanied by and with the help of a number of *ḥawzah* luminaries, such as al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Shīrāzī, al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Riḍā al-Shahristānī, al-Sayyid Muhammad Ali al-Baḥrānī, al-Sheikh Muhammad Bāqir al-Maḥmūdī and others. We worked on it in all earnestness, and this led to its having a wide readership, especially in universities, and in particular a number of universities outside Iraq. The magazine had a long lifespan and contained articles on religion of a technical nature. Some of the articles were of such importance that they were later reprinted as a book or treatise, such as *Ḥuqūq al-Mar'ah fi al-Islām* (Women's Rights in Islam), *Tarjamat al-Qur'an: al-Imkāniyyah, Al-Naqd, al-Ḍarūrah* (Translation of the Qur'an: Whether It Is Possible, Criticism, and the Need for It), *Firqatā al-Sheikhiyyah* (The Two Sects of the Sheikhiyyah), *Ahamiyyat al-Ṣalāt wa Ta'thiruhā 'alā al-Ḥayāt al-Fardiyyah wa al-Ijtimā'iyyah* (The Importance of Prayer and its Impact on Individual and Social Life), and so forth. Some of these were translated into Persian.

In the Wake of the *Hawzah 'Ilmiyyah*

After my father's death in 1380 AH, I moved to the holy city of Najaf, accompanied by my family, with the purpose of completing my studies. The main goal was to participate in the study circles of the luminaries of scholarship and jurisprudence. I gained as much as possible from senior teachers and jurisprudents such as al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm, al-Sayyid Abu al-Qāsim al-Khoī, al-Mīrzā Bāqir al-Zanjānī, al-Sheikh Husayn al-Ḥillī, al-Sayyid Ali al-Fānī al-Iṣfahānī and latterly the late Imam Khomeini, may God hallow all their souls.

Al-Sayyid al-Ḥakīm was exceptionally proficient and precise in setting out the opinions of the jurisprudents, and this meant that there was something special about his classes. He cared incessantly for the opinions of the early jurisprudents, as much as he did for the words of the Infallible Ones.

Al-Sayyid al-Khoī was brilliant at clarification and in his ability to reason, combining eloquence and depth with simplicity of expression. He was unrivalled in his ability to explain the principles of jurisprudence and related matters, replete with subtle technicalities, in record time.

Al-Sayyid al-Zanjānī specialised in presenting and clarifying different viewpoints, and had an agreeable way of explaining the profundities of an issue.

Al-Sheikh al-Ḥillī was characterised by his immense skill in presenting various opinions on every issue, studying their proofs and criticising them. He also has an unparalleled innovative legacy in the study of jurisprudence; the number of his pupils was limited, but they were among the best and most outstanding at the *Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah*. The late Sheikh had a unique style of teaching, and would not necessarily state his own opinion explicitly. Rather, it could be discerned by reading between the lines of his presentations of the opinions of others. Whenever he was asked to outrightly state his opinion, he would answer, 'It is not in your interest.' This was because pupils incline towards their teachers and may incline towards their opinion without realising it, when in fact this can be misleading and limit the thinking process. That was the way of the professor, and he was able to educate strong students who enjoyed freedom of thought.

As for al-Sayyid al-Fānī, he was a farsighted and knowledgeable researcher who exerted most of his efforts on giving select students an academic grounding. In addition to daily study circles, al-Sayyid Riḍwānī (a current member of the Constitutional Council in Iran), al-Sayyid Ghadīrī (currently responsible for answering jurisprudential questions in the leader al-Khāmeneī's office) and I would come to him on Thursdays and Fridays, from early morning until midday, to hold discussion sessions on various subjects through which we acquired great technical abilities.

Imam Khomeini was set apart by his special skill at presenting the opinions of great scholars and his extensive criticism and analysis of them. He believed that it was only the sayings of the Infallible Ones which were sacred, and he raised his students on that; the words of senior scholars were respected, but not considered sacred, and due deference towards them is based on criticism and analysis, not slavish acceptance. He would deal with the subject matter entirely appropriately, and not be disgruntled by questions or his students' refutations. Thus, he was able to kindle thought and prepare students with a critical eye; may God grant him the best reward.

At this stage, I studied a little philosophy, especially transcendental philosophy with the erudite scholar al-Riḍwānī. In addition to my studies at the academic centres, I also did some teaching; I spent the mornings studying and the afternoons teaching.

Nor did I neglect research or writing academic articles. We had weekly sessions with a number of the *ḥawzah*'s well-known luminaries, such as al-Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Khoī (Ayatollah Khoī's son), al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Nūrī, al-Sayyid 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, al-Sheikh Muhammad Riḍā Ja'farī Ishkevārī, Dr Muhammad Ṣādiqī (the author of the exegesis) and Professor 'Amīd Zanjānī, in order to research various subjects, each according to his own specialisation and interest, wherein I chose the field of Qur'anic sciences. In addition, I published articles in magazines such as *Ajwibat al-Masā'il al-Dīniyyah* (Answers to Religious Questions), which was still being published at that time, and wrote on various matters including *Tanāsukh al-Arwāḥ* (Reincarnation), refuting this theory which was popular at the time. This book had a wide readership among university students in Baghdad, and was translated into Persian in Iran. I also had a treatise published under the title *Tamhīd al-Qawā'id* (Introduction to

the Principles) on performing duties left undone (*qaḍā' al-fawā'it*), and which constituted a transcript of Ayatollah al-Khoī's lessons. This was the beginning of my work in discursive jurisprudence (*al-fiqh al-istidlālī*), where I shed light on jurisprudential matters in a new way.

The Pivotal Position of the Qur'an and its Exegesis

The impetus behind dealing with issues pertaining to the Qur'an – in addition to jurisprudence and the principles and practice of jurisprudence – was my clash with a bitter truth in the course of my reading and research in preparation for teaching the subject of exegesis. This involved the lack of a living study on Qur'anic matters in the Shi'a academic library at that time. I developed this impression whilst consulting the specialist Qur'anic library to write an article on the translation of the Qur'an. I came across many books on the subject, some of them in two volumes, and similarly several treatises and articles written by contemporary scholars in Egypt, whereas in the *ḥawzah* of Najaf I found no more than a catalogue entry for a single page by Ayatollah al-Sheikh Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā'. This weighed heavily upon me, and prompted me to set out the words of scholars past and present on Qur'anic issues. The result of that tireless work was *al-Tamhīd (The Introduction), in seven volumes, and al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn* (Exegesis and Exegetes), in two volumes. The latter was more or less a critical analysis of Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, and a rectification of what had eluded him, when he had unfairly claimed not to know the status of the Shi'a in the field of Qur'anic studies.

From Najaf to Qum

In the year 1392 AH, the Ba'athist regime in Iraq issued an edict to expel Iranians, so I travelled with my family to the *Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah* in Qum, taking important books with me, in particular my handwritten manuscripts. The rest of my books were later sent on.

No sooner had I arrived in Qum, I began applying the methodology which I had followed in the *ḥawzah*s in Karbalā and Najaf. However, I only attended one class: that of the late Mīrzā Hāshim Āmulī. I devoted the rest of my time to teaching and academic research. With regards to teaching, I began teaching *al-Rasā'il*, *al-Makāsib* and *al-Kifāyah*, and then jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and its principles (*uṣūl*) at *dars al-khārij* level. In

addition, I taught at Madrasah Ḥaqqānī al-'Āliyah (the Ḥaqqānī School of Advanced Studies), at the invitation of its director, Martyr Quddūsī, teaching matters pertaining to the Qur'an, especially the Qur'anic sciences (*'Ulūm al-Qur'an*). Worthy individuals who are now luminaries in that field would attend that class.

In addition to exegesis and Qur'anic sciences, I was asked to teach jurisprudence, based on *al-Makāsib* by al-Sheikh al-Anṣārī, and the principles thereof, based on his *al-Rasā'il*. As well as teaching, I settled down to some serious research and subjected the critical studies which I had completed in Najaf to a serious and comprehensive review. They were to become improved and honed into *al-Tamhīd*, each part coming to light one after another.

In the year 1399 AH, at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, the third volume was ready for print. Then Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, attached to Jāmi'at al-Mudarrisīn, reprinted them in six volumes. Realising that after the Revolution had settled down the subjects set out in this book were deemed by the *ḥawzah* to be fundamental study material, I began teaching them at the *ḥawzah* centre. After these classes many people graduated, various academic fields such as exegesis and the Qur'anic sciences were modernised, some started writing and teaching in this field, and its influence spread to the point where we now have fourteen colleges specialising in Qur'anic sciences alongside the specialist academic *ḥawzahs* all over the country.

Pickings and Fruits

In this context, I wrote other books as circumstances dictated, including *Ṣiyānat al-Qur'an min al-Taḥrīf*[71] (The Qur'an's Being Immune to Tampering) in defence of the sacredness of the Holy Qur'an and as a response to a Pakistani writer Iḥsān Ilāhī Ẓāhir, who had written a book critical of the Shi'a, accusing them of believing that the Qur'an has been tampered with.

Striving on my part to refute this accusation and to defend the sacred essence of the Qur'an, I made a firm resolution to write this book, completing it in six months (Ramaḍān 1407 AH – 30 Ṣafar 1408 AH). It received a great deal of attention, was reprinted several times and was translated

[71] Muhammad Hādī Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Qum: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn, 1396 q.), vol.8.

into Persian twice, once abridged and once unabridged. The same thing happened with *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn* (Exegesis and Exegetes) in two volumes, which I also translated into Persian.

Regarding *al-Ma'ārif al-Qur'aniyyah*,[72] I wrote several magazine articles and a sum of five volumes ready for print.

The last work I have taken up, commencing at the beginning of 1421 AH, and which is of great importance, constitutes the collection and arrangement of both sects' exegetical traditions (*riwāyāt*). The work is proceeding quickly with the help of two panels of ten people from the *ḥawzah*s and graduates of the Qur'anic school. The exegetical traditions are there in the books in a raw format, untouched by the hand of personal judgement or critical examination, the way the traditions pertaining to laws and jurisprudence (*al-aḥkām al-fiqhiyyah*) have been dealt with, whereby the sound and valuable ones have been mixed up with the unsound ones of no value.

Besides the Qur'anic work, I have been involved in activity in the field of jurisprudence since the time I was in the Holy City of Najaf; I have written several books and treatises in this field, such as *Tamhīd al-Qawā'id* (Introduction to the Principles), *Ḥadīth La Tu'ād* (The Tradition Regarding Non-Repetition of Prayers), *Wilāyat al-Faqīh: Ab'āduhā wa Ḥudūduhā* (The Authority of the Jurist: Its Dimensions and Limits), *Mālikiyyat al-'Arḍ* (Land Ownership) and *Masā'il fi al-Qaḍā'* (Issues Pertaining to Judgment), all in Arabic.

As for the huge opus on jurisprudence which I was and still am dedicated to, it involves the derivation of modern jurisprudential opinions on the basis of the development of *ijtihād*[73] in the last few centuries. It is the result of jurisprudential classes at *khārij* level and arranged in the order of the jurisprudential chapters of *Jawāhir al-Kalām*, from the beginning

[72] This is a reference to a collection of studies on topics such as the matter of monotheism (*tawhid*), Divine Attributes, the present life and the Hereafter, the matter of volition and religious responsibility, predestination, free will, good and evil, divine laws, reward and punishment, and other matters which appear in the text of the Qur'an and which are studied by scholars and exegetes (see below). [Trans.]

[73] The derivation of laws based on textual evidence in the text where it is apparent, and the determination of an appropriate course of conduct based on legal presumptions where no textual basis can be found. [Trans.]

of *Kitāb al-Ṭahārah* (The Book on Ritual Purity) to the end of *Kitāb al-Diyāt* (Damages for Death or Personal Injury and Criminal Compensation for Offences Against the Person), and is entitled *al-Sharḥ wa al-Ta'līq li Jawāhir al-Kalām* (Explanation of and Commentary on *Jawāhir al-Kalām*). This work is nearly complete with the Almighty's help.

Today, in the year 1421 AH, I still practise – praise to Almighty God – with verve and vigour, inasmuch as I teach jurisprudence and its principles at *khārij* level and Qur'anic sciences in a modern style, and conduct research in the fields of jurisprudence and exegesis in accordance with the firm principles accepted by critical researchers.

It is God Who grants success.

Qum - Muhammad Hādī Ma'rifat
25/12/1421 AH

CHAPTER I

ON THE QUR'AN AND THE QUR'ANIC SCIENCES

The Qur'an and its names

The Qur'an is a proper noun and the name of the Scripture revealed to the Prophet of Islam.

The Scripture is mentioned by this name along with the definite article[74] more than fifty times within the text:

> *And this Qur'an (hādhā al-Qur'ān)[75] has been revealed to me that I may warn you thereby, and whomsoever it may reach (6:19);*

and without the definite article in fifteen places:

> *And a Qur'an We have divided, for thee to recite it to mankind at intervals, and We have sent it down successively (17:106).*

The name 'Qur'an' is used to refer to the text in its entirety as well as just part of it:

> *In whatever business thou mayest be, and whatever Qur'an thou may be reciting from it- and whatever deed ye may be doing - We are Witnesses thereof when ye are deeply engrossed therein...(10:61).*

This is because here an adjectival meaning – its being recited – is intended. Thus the universal applicability generated by the lack of qualification is correct.

The word has a deep Arabic root. At its root is the verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of *qara'a* (he recited), *yaqra'u* (he recites), *qirā'ah* (recitation), and *Qur'ān* (recital), derived from the same form as *ghufrān* (forgiveness), *rujḥān* (preferability) and *kufrān* (ungratefulness). It is used as a verbal noun in the following Words of God:

> *...and the recital (Qur'ān) of dawn; surely the recital of dawn is witnessed (17:78);*

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[74] The definite article indicating a reference back to a previously used adjectival meaning; Ibn Mālik said that it is used with some proper nouns to refer back to something previously mentioned.

[75] The definite article in *hādhā al-Qur'an* is omitted in translation, i.e. 'this Qur'an.' [Trans.]

and:

> *It is for Us to gather it and to recite it (qur'ānahu): but when We have recited it, follow thou its recital (qur'ānahu) (75:17-18).*

Derived meanings with many possible conjugations and declensions – especially tri-radical – are indications that a word is a native part of the language.

According to Ibn Fāris:

> The *qāf, rā'* and the weak letter are a valid root which means 'collecting' and 'gathering.' The word *qariyah* (village) comes from that. It is so called because people gather there. If it is given a *hamzah* it equally means the same thing. They say that this also applies to the Qur'an. It is as if it were so called on account of its comprising rules, stories and other things.[76]

Al-Rāghib says:

> The root meaning of Qur'an is a *masdar* along the lines of *kufrān* and *rujḥān*. The Almighty said: *It is for Us to gather it (jam'ahu) and to recite it (qur'anahu): but when We have recited it (qara'nāhu), follow thou its recitation (qur'anahu)* (75:17-18). The name is exclusively used for the Scripture revealed to Prophet Muhammad and has become like a proper noun for it. According to some, out of all God's Scriptures, this Scripture was called the *Qur'an* on account of its combining the benefits of all His Scriptures and indeed of all fields of knowledge as mentioned in the verse:
>
> *...and [it is] a detailed description of everything (12:111).*
>
> and:
>
> *...as an explanation of everything (16:89).*
>
> Thus the conjecture of those who thought the word to be foreign and taken from a Syriac root, *Quryānah*, meaning 'the recitation of religious texts' is pointless, because there is nothing remarkable about Eastern languages, especially Semitic ones, having shared roots, as everybody knows.

[76] Abu al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Fāris, *Mu'jamu Maqāyīs al-Lughah* (Qum: Maktab al-I'lām al-Islamī, 1404 q.), vol.5, 78-79.

Furqān

Al-Furqān (the Criterion) is another name for the Qur'an on account of its being speech which distinguishes between truth and falsehood. The Almighty said:

> *Blessed be He who has sent down the the Criterion (furqān) upon His servant, that he may be a warner to all beings (25:1).*

This attribute is obvious in a verse such as:

> *...the month of Ramadan, wherein the Qur'an was sent down to be a guidance to the people, and as clear signs of the Guidance and the Criterion (furqān) (2:185).*

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq has said, 'The Qur'an is the whole Book and the *Furqān* is the clear part which has to be acted upon.'[77]

This attribute was also used to describe Moses' Scripture:

> *And when We gave to Moses the Book and the Criterion (furqān), that haply you should be guided* (2:35).

"The Criterion" here is joined by a clarificatory conjunction to "the Book". Clearer than that are the Words of the Almighty:

> *We gave Moses and Aaron the Criterion and a Radiance, and a Remembrance for the God-fearing* (21:48).

In this respect the *Furqān* is not a name which is exclusive to the Qur'an. It was only used for it on account of its having that attribute.

Other Names

These two names – the Qur'an and the *Furqān* are the most well-known names of the Wise Remembrance. Two other names come after these in terms of how well they are known: *al-Kitāb* (The Book), which is a general noun, and *al-Dhikr* (The Remembrance) on account of its being a reminder (*mudhakkir*) and a general adjective.

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[77] Aḥmad ibn Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib Ṭabrisī , *Majma' al-Bayān* (Tehran: Islāmiyyah, 1382 q.), vol.2, 276.

The author of *al-Burhān* and others got carried away with names by regarding all adjectives used in the Qur'an to describe the Book as names for it, such as:

> *...it is surely a noble (karīm) Qur'an* (56:77);
>
> *And this is a blessed (mubārak) Remembrance that We have sent down* (21:50).

They thought that *Karīm* was one name and *Mubārak* another, and so on up to fifty-five names according to the author of *al-Burhān*'s reckoning! One commentator went all the way up to ninety or so names,[78] which is clearly an affected expression of unnecessary prolix.

'Ulūm al-Qur'an (the Qur'anic Sciences)

'Ulūm al-Qur'an is the name of a variety of studies that seek a technical understanding of various matters mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, each in accordance with its own principles and criteria. These disciplines often differ significantly from one another in the principles and evidence they employ, as do their conclusions. They share neither fundamentals nor subsidiary matters. That is why each topic is a separate science in terms of its evidence, subject matter and the questions it raises, and they should be categorised as different sciences.

The study of divergent readings is an example. This includes the origin of various readings, how they vary, their being limited to seven, their being reported by so many sources as to be indubitable (*mutawātir*) and their evidential value. Matters such as this all revolve around discussions of a single topic – in this case recitation – and each forms a science in itself with no link between it and discussions on what abrogates and what is abrogated in the Qur'an. The same is true of what is clear and what is equivocal in the Qur'an, the collecting together and compilation of the Qur'an, its inimitability, its being protected from alteration and so forth. Every issue is a separate subject and has its own material. What brings them all together is that they are studies on various matters pertaining to the Qur'an. They form several rather than a single science on account

[78] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, 273-376.

of their different subject matter, and they are therefore not placed under one umbrella.

This is in contrast to another technical term which has recently come into circulation, namely *Ma'ārif al-Qur'an*, which refers to a collection of studies on subjects such as monotheism (*tawḥīd*), the Divine Attributes, the present life and the Hereafter, the matter of volition and religious responsibility, predestination, free will, good and evil, the Divine Law, reward and punishment, and other matters which appear in the text of the Qur'an and are studied by discerning scholars and senior exegetes. If such topics are thematically studied either all together or separately – by singling out related verses and studying them systematically – then this type of discussion and Qur'anic elaboration is regarded as thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) and is an important exegetical discipline. We have referred to the importance of such studies in our work on methodologies of exegesis, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn* (Exegesis and Exegetes) (parts 9 and 10 of *al-Tamhīd*).

In *'Ulūm al-Qur'an* the subjects under discussion are Revelation and the sending down of the Qur'an, the duration and order of the Revelation, the circumstances surrounding it, the collection and recording of the Qur'an, the scribes who recorded it, the standardisation of the manuscripts, the origin and emergence of different readings (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'an, the Qur'an's authority and immunity from distortion (*taḥrīf*), the issue of abrogation (*naskh*) in the Qur'an, equivocal verses (*mutashābihāt*) in the Qur'an, the Qur'an's inimitability (*i'jāz*) and so on. And since each of these issues has its own framework and is considered distinct from the others, this science is placed in the plural form, *'ulūm*, which literally means 'sciences.'

As for the reason for the importance of Qur'anic sciences – the study of various matters pertaining to the Qur'an – it suffices to know that one can only arrive at the true meaning of the Qur'an through these studies, and that they are the principles and stepping stones facilitating that desired objective.

If we look at the themes of this science issue by issue we find that each of them has a fundamental role in enabling one to derive benefit from the Qur'an. For example, studies of the value of evidence of the apparent

meanings[79] of the Qur'an are what pave the way for the jurisprudent to deduce laws from the appropriate verses. The same applies to knowing the difference between verses that abrogate others and those which are abrogated, and between those which are capable of more than one interpretation and those which are clear. In the same way, the study of the evidential value of divergent readings and whether they are reported by enough sources as to be indubitable plays an important role in getting to know the text of the Qur'an. The same is true of studies refuting the allegation that the Qur'an has been altered, on the matter of its inimitability and other topics. They all have an indispensable part to play in familiarising oneself with the text.

The history of Qur'anic Sciences

From the beginning, the Prophet's most senior companions and eminent successors (*tābi'īn*) made great efforts studying various aspects of the Holy Qur'an. They concerned themselves with which parts abrogated others (*nāsikh*) and those which were abrogated (*mansūkh*), which parts were clear (*muḥkam*) and which were capable of sustaining more than one interpretation (*mutashābih*), literal (*tanzīl*) and allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of it, its general (*'āmm*) and particular parts (*khāṣṣ*), its unqualified (*muṭlaq*) and qualified parts (*muqayyad*), rhythmic recitation (*tartīl*) and beautiful recitation (*tajwīd*), and other disparate issues. Similarly, the scope of Qur'anic studies has flowed and expanded throughout the centuries, as hadith collections and exegetical texts with various functions have abounded.

Here I try to give an overview of the most important books written on the subject in a chronological order.

The First Century

Writings on the subject date back to the end of the first century of the Islamic calendar. The first to write about recitation was Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur (d. 89 AH), one of Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī's pupils. His book *al-Qirā'ah* (Recitation) was written in the village of Wāsiṭ. According to

[79] If a statement is capable of two or more interpretations, the principle of the 'evidential value of the apparent meaning' (*ḥujīyyat al-ẓuhūr*) establishes that the more apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) that comes to mind before the others should have priority [Editor].

Fu'ād Sazgīn in *Tārikh al-Turāth al-'Arabī* (The History of Arab Culture), it comprises the differences noticed in the known Qur'anic codices.

The Second Century

In the second century, al-Ḥasan ibn Abī al-Ḥasan Yasār al-Baṣrī (d. 110 AH) wrote his book *'Adad Āy al-Qur'an* (The Number of Verses in the Qur'an).

'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir al-Yaḥṣabī (d. 118 AH) wrote *Ikhtilāfu Maṣāḥif al-Shām wa al-Ḥijāz wa al-'Irāq* (The Difference Between Qur'anic Codices in Syria, the Hijaz and Iraq) and *al-Maqṭū' wa al-Mawṣūl* (The Disjointed and the Jointed) on pausing (*waqf*) or joining together (*waṣl*) the ends of phrases or verses.

Abū Muhammad Ismā'īl ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī al-Kabīr (d. 128 AH) has a book *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* (That Which Abrogates Other Parts and That Which is Abrogated).

Shaybah ibn Naṣṣāḥ al-Madanī (d. 130 AH) wrote *Kitāb al-Wuqūf* (The Book on Pausings).

Abān ibn Taghlib (d. 141 AH), a companion of Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Sajjād, was the first to write on *al-Qirā'āt* (Divergent Recitations) after Ibn Ya'mur. He also wrote a book called *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an* (The Meanings of the Qur'an).

Muhammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146 AH) was the first to write on *Aḥkām al-Qur'an* (Laws Contained in the Qur'an).

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān the exegete (d. 150 AH) wrote a book called *al-Āyāt al-Mutashābihāt* (The Equivocal Verses).

Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā' Zabbān ibn 'Ammār al-Tamīmī (d. 154 AH) wrote *al-Waqf wa al-Ibtidā'* (Pausing and Starting) and *al-Qirā'āt* (Divergent Recitations).

Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb (d. 156 AH), one of the seven reciters and a companion of Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sādiq, wrote *al-Qirā'ah* (Recitation).

Mūsa ibn Hārūn, one of Abān ibn Taghlib's pupils (d. circa 170 AH) wrote *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* (Different and Similar Meanings).

Ali ibn Ḥamzah al-Kisā'ī (d. 179 AH) wrote *al-Qirā'āt* (Divergent Recitations), *al-Hā'āt* – on the use of the pronoun *hā'* in the Qur'an – and other books.

Yaḥya ibn Ziyād al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH) wrote *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an* (Meanings of the Qur'an), which has been printed in three volumes, and *Ikhtilāf Ahl*

al-Kūfah wa al-Baṣrah wa al-Shām fī al-Muṣḥaf (The Difference between the Kufan, Basran and Syrian Qur'anic Codices), *al-Jam' wa al-Tathniyah fī al-Qur'an* (The Plural and Dual in the Qur'an) and other books.

Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī (d. 207 AH), the erudite writer and famous historian, wrote *al-Raghīb* on Qur'anic sciences and misinterpretations.

Abū 'Ubaydah Mu'ammar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 209 AH) wrote *Majāz al-Qur'an* (Metaphors in the Qur'an), which has been printed in two parts, and *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an* (The Meanings of the Qur'an).

The Third Century

In the third century, Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām (d. 224 AH) wrote *Faḍā'il al-Qur'an* (The Merits of the Qur'an), *al-Maqṣūr wa al-Mamdūd* (That Which Is Not Drawn Out and That Which Is) on types of recitation, *Gharīb al-Qur'an* (Rare Words in the Qur'an), *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* and other texts.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Ali ibn Faḍḍāl (d. 224 AH), one of al-Ridā's companions, wrote *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*.

Ali ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234 AH) wrote on reasons for Revelation.

Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 236 AH) wrote *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an* (The Intellect and Understanding the Qur'an).

Abu al-Faḍl Ja'far ibn Ḥarb (d. 236 AH) wrote *Mutashābih al-Qur'an* (Passages of the Qur'an Capable of Sustaining More than One Interpretation).

Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Īsā al-Ash'arī (d. circa 250 AH), the sheikh and head of the people of Qum, wrote *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*.

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255 AH) wrote *Naẓm al-Qur'an* (The Coherence of the Qur'an).[80]

Abū Ḥātim Sahl ibn Muhammad al-Sijistānī al-Baṣrī (d. 255 AH) wrote *al-Qirā'āt* and *Ikhtilāf Maṣāḥif al-Amṣār* (The Difference between the Qur'anic Codices of the Metropolises).

Abū 'Abdillāh Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Sayyār (d. 268 AH), the scribe for Āl Ṭāhir and a companion of the Imams al-Hādī and al-'Askarī, wrote *Thawāb al-Qur'an* (The Reward of the Qur'an) and *al-Qirā'āt*, which was also called *al-Tanzīl wa al-Taḥrīf* (Revelation and Falsification).

[80] Poets and composers of rhyming prose liken their work to arranging pearls on a string. This aspect of the Qur'an is examined in this and similar works. [Trans.]

Abū Muhammad 'Abdullāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH) wrote *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'an* (The Interpretation of What is Ambiguous in the Qur'an), *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'an* (Exegesis of Rare Words in the Qur'an), *Gharīb al-Qur'an* (Rare Words in the Qur'an) and *al-Qirā'āt*.

Abu al-'Abbās Muhammad ibn Yazīd al-Mubarrad the grammarian (d. 286 AH) wrote *I'rāb al-Qur'an* (Desinential Inflection in the Qur'an).

Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Ayyūb ibn Ḍurays (d. 294 AH) wrote *Fīmā Nazala bi Makkah wa Mā Nazala bi al-Madīna* (On That Which Was Revealed in Mecca and That Which Was Revealed in Medina) and *Faḍā'il al-Qur'an* (Merits of the Qur'an).

Abu al-Qāsim Sa'd ibn 'Abdillāh al-Ash'arī al-Qummī (d. 299 AH) wrote a comprehensive treatise on categories of verses in the Qur'an, which 'Allāmah Majlisī came across and cited in chunks in his magnum opus, the encyclopedia called *Biḥār al-Anwār*.[81]

Abū 'Amr Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn Sa'īd al-Bāhilī (d. 300 AH) wrote *I'jāz al-Qur'an* (Inimitability of the Qur'an), the first book by this title to appear, and which examines the inimitable quality of the Qur'an.

The Fourth Century

The fourth century was marked by the flourishing of the Islamic sciences and a variety of arts, especially on the subject of the various facets of the Qur'an.

One of those to write on Qur'anic sciences at the beginning of this century was Muhammad ibn Yazīd al-Wāsiṭī (d. 306 AH), one of the finest theologians and the author of *al-Imāmah* (The Imamate). Ibn al-Nadīm says he had a book on *I'jāz al-Qur'an fi Naẓmihi wa Ta'līfih* (The Inimitability of the Qur'an With Regard to Its Coherence and Composition). It is said that he was the first to elaborate further on the inimitability of the Qur'an. Sheikh 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī wrote two brilliant commentaries on it.

Muhammad ibn Khalaf ibn Ḥayyān (d. 306 AH) wrote *'Adad Āy al-Qur'an* (The Number of Verses in the Qur'an).

Muhammad ibn Khalaf ibn Marzbān (d. 309 AH) wrote *al-Ḥāwī fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (The All-in-One on Qur'anic Sciences) in 27 parts.

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[81] 'Allāmah Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Wafā' 1403 q.), vol. 93, 97.

Abū Muhammad al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. circa 310 AH) wrote *al-Tanzīh wa Dhikr Mutashābihāt al-Qur'an* (The Refutation of Anthropomorphism and Discussion of the Passages of the Qur'an Capable of Sustaining More Than One Meaning).

Abu 'Ali al-Ḥasan ibn 'Ali al-Ṭūsī (d. 312 AH) wrote *Naẓm al-Qur'an.*

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Dāwūd 'Abdullāh ibn Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 316 AH) wrote *al-Maṣāḥif, al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* and a treatise on divergent recitations.

Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī (d. 320 AH) wrote *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh.*

The authority on literature and linguist 'Allāmah Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Azdī, known as Ibn Durayd (d. 321 AH), wrote a book on rare words in the Qur'an called *Gharīb al-Qur'an.*

Abū Zayd Aḥmad ibn Sahl al-Balkhī (d. 322 AH) wrote *Mā Ughliqa Min Gharīb al-Qur'an* (The Most Complicated Rare Words in the Qur'an), *al-Ḥurūf al-Muqaṭṭa'ah fi Awā'il al-Suwar* (The Disjointed Letters at the Beginning of Chapters), *al-Baḥth 'an Kayfiyyat al-Ta'wīlāt* (Study on How to Carry Out the Various Kinds of Exegesis) and other books.

Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Mūsā al-'Aṭshī, known as Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH), wrote his famous book *al-Sab'ah* (The Seven) on the seven different recitations. It was he who limited them to seven.

Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Ali ibn Ikhshīd (d. 326 AH) wrote *Naẓm al-Qur'an.*

Thiqat al-Islam, Muhammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329 AH), wrote *Faḍā'il al-Qur'an*, which he included in the sublime *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī.*

Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn al-'Azīz al-Sijistānī (d. 330 AH) is famous for his book on *Gharīb al-Qur'an* which he called *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* (Delight of the Hearts), arranged in alphabetical order and completed in fifteen years.

Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn Muhammad al-Naḥḥās (d. 338 AH) wrote *I'rāb al-Qur'an, al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* and *Ma'āni al-Qur'an.*

Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm known as Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Kātib al-Nu'mānī (d. around 350 AH) wrote about categories of verses of the Qur'an which 'Allāmah Majlisī cited in *Biḥār al-Anwār.*[82] He was a close friend of al-Kulaynī and scribed *al-Kāfī* for him.

Abū Muhammad al-Qaṣṣāb Muhammad ibn Ali al-Karkhī (d. circa 360 AH) wrote *Nukāt al-Qur'an* (Subtleties of the Qur'an).

[82] See Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 93, 3.

Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Ali al-Rāzī al-Jassās (d. 370 AH) wrote about laws contained in the Qur'an (*Aḥkām al-Qur'an*). It is a comprehensive and overflowing book printed in three large volumes, and is the most complete and most useful book on the subject.

Abū 'Ali al-Fārisī (d. 377 AH), one of the luminaries of the *Imāmiyyah*, is one of those who signalled the heyday of the fourth century in terms of merit, nobility and literary achievement. He wrote *al-Ḥujjah fī al-Qirā'āt* (The Proof on Divergent Recitations), which is the best, most complete and most accurate book on the subject.

Abū al-Ḥasan Ali ibn 'Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 384 AH) wrote *al-Nukāt fī I'jāz al-Qur'an* (Subtleties on the Inimitability of the Qur'an) and a short treatise pervaded with a deep theological flavour on polemical Mu'tazilism.

Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abbād al-Ṭāliqānī (d. 385 AH), the father of al-Ṣāḥib ibn Abbad, wrote a book on laws contained in the Qur'an (*Aḥkām al-Qur'an*).

Abū Muhammad 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Qayrawāni (d. 386 AH), one of the north African luminaries of jurisprudence, wrote a book on the inimitability of the Qur'an.

Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Adfawi (d. 388 AH) wrote *al-Istighnā'* (Sufficiency) in a hundred parts on Qur'anic sciences. The author of *al-Tāli' al-Sa'īd* (Fortuitous Star) had seen twenty of them.

One of Zayd ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's grandsons, Abū Sulaymān Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khaṭṭābī al-Bustī (meaning from Bust in the lands of Kabul) (d. 388 AH), wrote a short treatise on *Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'an* (Explanation of the Inimitability of the Qur'an) in which he treated the subject expertly, demonstrating its incomparability, explaining it in terms of coherence and that its arrangement and the selection of words are completely appropriate to their context. It may be the most complete study to ever appear which explores this aspect of the inimitability of the Qur'an.

Abu al-Fatḥ 'Uthmān ibn Jinnī (d. 392 AH) wrote *Al-Muḥtasab*, shedding light on the reasons for deviant recitations.

Al-Qāḍī (the Judge) Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 AH) wrote *I'jāz al-Qur'an* (The Inimitability of the Qur'an) and *Nukat al-Intisār* (Points of Triumph) on divergent recitations, and the gathering together and compilation of the Qur'an.

Abu al-Hasan Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 404 AH) wrote *Talkhīs al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'an* (Abridged Explanation of

Metaphors in the Qur'an) and *Haqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl* (Truths about Interpretation of Revelation Capable of Sustaining More Than One Interpretation), of which only the fifth part has been found. Mu'assassat Muntadā al-Nashr (The Publication Forum Foundation) in the Holy City of Najaf happened across it, checked it and prepared it for publication in the year 1355 AH. Thereafter, it was printed in Najaf and Beirut.

The Fifth Century

In the fifth century, the Judge Abū Zar'a 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muhammad (d. circa 410 AH) wrote *Ḥujjat al-Qirā'āt* (The Proofs of Divergent Recitations), following the example of *al-Ḥujjah fī al-Qirā'āt* by Abu Ali al-Fārisī and copying its style and methodology. It was printed at Benghazi University in Tunis and thereafter several editions were printed in Beirut.

Abu al-Qāsim Hibatullah ibn Salamah (d. 410 AH) wrote *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*.

Abū 'Abdillah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Nu'mān (d. 413 AH), who was known as al-Sheikh al-Mufīd (The Enlightening Sheikh), wrote a book on *I'jāz al-Qur'an* and *al-Bayān* (The Explanation), on the various kinds of Qur'anic sciences.

Abu al-Hasan 'Imād al-Dīn al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 410 AH), the Mu'tazilite theologian, wrote *Mutashābih al-Qur'an* in two parts and *Tanzīh al-Qur'an 'an al-Maṭā'in* (Declaring the Qur'an to Be Unharmed by Attacks).

Abu al-Qāsim al-Husayn ibn Ali (d. 418 AH), the Imami Moroccan vizier, the grandson of Ibn Abī Zaynab and of Persian origin, wrote *Khaṣā'iṣ al-Qur'an* (Unique Features of the Qur'an).

Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Iskāfī (d. 421 AH), known as al-'Allāmah al-Musaddad (the Guided and Most Learned One), wrote *Durrat al-Tanzīl wa Ghurrat al-Ta'wīl* (The Pearl of Revelation and the Best Interpretation) on the allegorical passages in the Qur'an. It also contains wise sayings and proverbs from Qur'anic verses.

Abū al-Hasan Ali ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Sa'id al-Hūfī (d. 430 AH) wrote *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (The Rational Demonstration on Qur'anic Sciences), a study and exegesis of the Qur'an.

Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā 'Alam al-Hudā Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mūsawī (d. 436 AH) wrote *al-Durar wa al-Ghurar* (The Pearls and the Finest) and *al-Mūḍiḥ min Jihat I'jāz al-Qur'an* (The Expounder of the Aspect

of the Inimitability of the Qur'an), in which he discussed the inimitability of the Qur'an from the viewpoint of the Obstruction Theory (*Ṣarfah*).[83]

Abū Muhammad Makkī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 437 AH) wrote *al-Kashf 'an Wujūh al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'* (Light on the Reasons for the Seven Ways of Reciting) in two large parts, a brilliant work wherein he discusses comprehensively the reasons for the divergent recitations and the proofs for them.

Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) wrote *al-Taysīr* on the seven divergent recitations, *al-Muḥkam* (The Strong) on dots in the text, and *al-Muqni'* (The Fulfilling Book) on the orthography of the Qur'anic codices of the various metropolises. They are highly respected books on this subject.

Abū Muhammad Ali ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd (d. 456 AH), known as Ibn Hazm al-Ẓāhirī (The Literalist) al-Andalūsī, wrote a treatise on well-known recitations which were circulating widely enough in the metropolises for one to be sure of their validity.

In the introduction to his exegesis *al-Tibyān* (The Exposition), Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460 AH) has splendid discussions on various matters pertaining to the Qur'an in which he refutes the beliefs in the allegations of alteration in the Qur'an, and shows that their attribution to the Shi'a Imamiyya – who are far from holding such beliefs – to be false. He also discusses other matters by providing well-established rational arguments.

Al-Khaṭīb (The Preacher) al-Nīshābūrī al-Hasan ibn al-Husayn al-Khuzā'ī (d. circa 460 AH) authored *I'jāz al-Qur'an.*

Abū al-Hasan Ali ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d. 468 AH) wrote *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (The Causes of Revelation), *Faḍā'il al-Qur'an*, *Nafy al-Taḥrīf 'an al-Qur'an* (Refuting the Allegation that the Qur'an Has Been Altered) and other treatises in which he discussed matters pertaining to the Qur'an.

Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH) authored *Asrār al-Balāghah* (Secrets of Eloquence), *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* (Proofs of Inimitability) and thirdly *al-Shāfiyah* (The Curative), in which he plays devil's advocate by challenging the Qur'an and demonstrating the inability of the Arab poets to match it.

[83] The theory of *Ṣarfah* holds that although imitating the Qur'an is potentially possible for ordinary man based on human capacities and talents, however, God in one way or another obstructs them from doing so [Editor].

Abū 'Abdillah Muhammad ibn Shurayḥ al-Ru'aynī (d. 476 AH), one of the luminaries from Seville, abridged *al-Ḥujjah* by Abu Ali al-Fārisī and wrote a book on divergent recitations entitled *al-Kāfī* (The Sufficient).

Abū Ma'shar 'Abd al-Karīm ibn 'Abd al-Samad al-Ṭabarī (d. 478 AH) wrote *al-Talkhīs* (The Summary) on eight divergent readings – the established seven plus Ya'qūb's. He also has books entitled *al-Waqf wa al-Ibtidā'*, *Hijā' al-Masāhif* (Alphabetical Index of Codices), *al-'Adad* (Numbers) and others.

Abu al-Qāsim al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502 AH) wrote *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'an* (The Vocabulary of Rare Words in the Qur'an). This work is astonishing in its excellence. He also wrote *al-Muqaddimah* (The Introduction), in which he discusses various matters pertaining to the Qur'an, especially studies linked to exegesis, its conditions and its etiquette. It is an excellent and sublime book. It is like an introduction to his exegesis *al-Jāmi'* (The Encyclopedia).

Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn Ḥamzah al-Kirmānī (d. 505 AH) wrote *Asrār al-Tikrār fī al-Qur'an* (The Secrets behind Repetitions in the Qur'an), *'Ajā'ib al-Qur'an* (Wonders of the Qur'an) and *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl* (The Quintessence of Interpretation).

Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH) wrote *Jawāhir al-Qur'an* (The Jewels of the Qur'an), in which he discusses the link between the Qur'an, the humanities and the secrets of nature, as well as the section in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) he dedicated to a discussion of matters pertaining to the Qur'an.[84]

As for my own work, from the time I first learned how to read I have been busy studying matters concerning the Holy Qur'an and reading books about its various facets. I derived from that such immense enjoyment that I waded into its depths. Indeed, it is a pressing need which every Muslim has to familiarise himself with if he aspires to be a strong support for this pure religion. I started studying the appropriate subject matter carefully and diligently, making notes on what I had read, either censuring views which I doubted or admiring what I thought to be original ideas.

[84] The author continues listing works of later centuries up to the present time, which we decided to omit in this abridgement. He emphasises that these are but a sample of the most important works on the subject. What follows here is the story of his own venture into the field of Qura'nic studies and the motives behind his extensive research on the topic [Editor].

Now, years later, a huge number of those large notebooks have accumulated and I have started putting them in order. They are even good enough to constitute a book with chapters and sections on various Qur'anic studies. I have called it *al-Tamhīd* (The Introduction) because I have made these studies an introduction to my exegesis *al-Wasīṭ* (The Intermediate). I ask the Almighty to grant me the success to complete it, and that I may have served my generation of Muslims with new views on the Holy Qur'an which might not be found elsewhere, or which may be in large volumes that are difficult for them to digest or beyond the general public's understanding.

What strengthened my resolve to complete this humble work was that, even though they had once been rich, I detected an absence in the Shi'a libraries of our times of books that deal exhaustively with Qur'anic studies, apart from a few documents dealing with certain aspects of the Qur'an. Many other aspects remained in obscurity, and should the researcher wish to apprise himself of the Shi'a opinion in the light of the school of Ahl al-Bayt he would be unable to find them.

Thus, I began studying works and views, criticising them objectively, scrutinising them against confirmed historical sources and traditions that either had been reported so widely as to generate certainty of their authenticity, or were surrounded by indubitable contextual evidence.

The extent of the deviation which took hold of many leading critics and researchers due to their rushed judgment, or their fanatical devotion to a *madhhab* or a particular way of investigating opinions and works, will be revealed through the discussions coming up. I did not conclude a matter until I was sure of its correctness and certain of its purity of origin to the best of my efforts.

Neither during the time I lived in the Holy City of Najaf (1379-1391 AH), nor after I migrated to the Holy City of Qum (at the end of 1391), did I neglect delivering university lectures to students of the higher religious institutes, and giving them the opportunity to debate amongst themselves. This was with the purpose of complete circumspection regarding whatever new views I had breathed fresh life into, and leaving it up to consensus to decide on matters which I had resolved to settle once and for all.

CHAPTER II

REVELATION *(WAḤY)* AND THE QUR'AN

The Phenomenon of Revelation

The linguistic meaning of *waḥy*

Waḥy means to pass information on quickly and secretly, whether by way of a signal, whisper or secret note. Anything passed swiftly to someone in order to make him understand is *waḥy*.

The Almighty said of Zakarīyyā:

> *So he emerged before his people from the Temple, and signalled (awḥā) to them that they should glorify God morning and evening* (19:11).

So he came forth to his people and made some kind of sign to them.

According to al-Rāghib:

> The root meaning of *waḥy* is a quick signal. On account of its incorporating the meaning of speed one says, *amrun waḥyun*, meaning a quick instruction. That can be orally by way of signal or insinuation, or it could be by way of a disjointed sound, signalling with one of one's limbs or in writing.[85]

Ibn Fāris explains:

> *W-ḥ-y* is a root which means to pass on knowledge in secret or in some other way to someone else. *Waḥy* can be a signal. *Waḥy* can be a book or message. Everything you pass to someone else to let him know is *waḥy*, no matter how it is done.[86]

It may be that the wider meaning accorded by Ibn Fāris to the concept of *waḥy* was part of the original meaning for which it was coined. However, it became used for that which is secret.

Abū Isḥāq says:

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[85] Abu al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muhammad, known as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1381 q.), 515.

[86] Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, 6:93.

The root meaning of *waḥy* throughout the language is to let someone know secretly. That is why inspiration (*ilhām*) is known as *waḥy*.

Ibn Birrī writes:

> *Waḥā ilayhi* and *awḥā* mean that he spoke to him in words which he hid from everyone else. Also, *waḥā* and *awḥā* mean 'he signalled.'

It may be that the meaning of secrecy is on account of the speed in it. A quick signal is normally inherently hidden from anyone else apart from the person who is being signalled to. One says *mawtun waḥyun*,, meaning a quick death. *Al-waḥā al-waḥā* comes from it, meaning: 'Hurry! Hurry!' One says that when one is in a hurry.

And al-Zamakhsharī comments:

> *Awḥā ilayhi* and *awmā* mean the same thing (he signalled to him). One says *waḥaytu ilayhi* or *awḥaytu* if one said to him what one had hidden from everyone else. *Tawaḥḥā* means hurry.

Waḥy in the Qur'an

The Qur'an uses *waḥy* in four senses:

1. The same dictionary meaning: a secret signal. It appears in the verse mentioned above in *Surah Maryam* (19:11).

2. A deep-seated natural instinct; it is natural disposition of things; the sense of communicating by words is metaphorically borrowed to refer to communication through a thing's essence. This is because of the secrecy common to the way in which the information is passed and received in both cases. Because *waḥy* is telling someone secretly, it is appropriate to borrow it to refer metaphorically to all hidden, natural feelings, including what appears in the following verse:

> *And thy Lord inspired (awḥā) the bee, saying: 'Choose thou habitations in the hills and in the trees and in that which they thatch. Then eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of thy Lord, made smooth (for thee)'* (16:68-69).

The bee follows its instinct and allows itself to be guided by the depth of its natural disposition, subject to the instinct of organised toil which has been placed in it. Hence it does not stray from that path.

Another example is the Almighty's Words:

...and inspired (awḥā) in each heaven its mandate (41:12),

meaning 'He destined.'

3. Spiritual inspiration; a feeling or sensation inside, the source of which sometimes seems a mystery. One might think it is from God, but it may be from some other source.

This meaning is known to spiritualists as telepathy (mental communication at a distance). It is a momentary secret inspiration the source of which is unknown. They say that it is an idea which passes from one person's mind to another's, even though the distance between the two of them may be great. Alternatively, it is thought to be spiritual instruction from high or low spirits. It is also said that it is an idea from the All-Merciful which the angels inspire. They blow it into the heart of a person whom God wants to guide. Conversely, it may be satanic whispering which demonic *jinns* recite to lead a person astray.

An example of inspiration by the All-Merciful is the following:

> *And We inspired (awḥaynā) the mother of Moses, saying: 'Suckle him and, when thou fearest for him, then cast him into the river and fear not nor grieve. Lo! We shall bring him back unto thee and shall make him (one) of Our messengers'* (28:7).

According to al-Azharī:

> *Waḥy* here means instruction delivered by God to her heart. What comes next indicates – but God knows best – that it is inspiration from God to inform her, to reassure her, 'for We shall return him to thee...' It is said that *waḥy* means inspiration here. It is possible that God sent instruction to her heart that he would be returned to her and that he would be a Messenger. However, informing her is a clearer meaning for *waḥy* in this place.[87]

Sheikh Mufīd understood *waḥy* here to mean secretly communicating, as his book *Awā'il al-Maqālāt* says. However, in his book *Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqād* he construes it as a dream (*manām*), or words which Moses' mother heard in a dream. He says, by way of an explanation of *waḥy*:

[87] Muhammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), vol. 15, 380.

> The original meaning of *waḥy* is talking secretly. It may be used for anything intended to make the other person understand whilst keeping it secret from everyone else.[88]

As for using *waḥy* to refer to Satan's whisperings and his enticement to evil thoughts and corruption, it appears in the Almighty's Words:

> *Thus have We appointed unto every prophet an adversary - devils of men and jinn who inspire (yūḥī) in one another plausible discourse through guile* (6:112).

God also says:

> *Indeed the devils do inspire (layūḥūna) their minions to dispute with you...* (6:121);

which is explained by His Words:

> *...the sneaking whisperer, who whispereth in the hearts of mankind, of the jinn and of mankind* (114:4-6).

The Almighty's Words also use *waḥy* to refer to commands which God inspires in the angels for them to perform immediately:

> *When thy Lord inspired (yūhī) the angels, (saying): I am with you. So make those who believe stand firm* (8:12).

The use of *waḥy* to refer to a message God passes to one of His prophets, with or without an angel as intermediary, is a fourth meaning used in the Qur'an, and is the subject of the discussion in the following section.

The Revelation of a Message (*al-Waḥy al-Risālī*)

'Revelation of a message' is a fourth meaning used in the Qur'an in more than seventy places, by referring to the Qur'an as *waḥy* passed down to the Prophet:

> *We relate unto thee (Muhammad) the best of narratives, in that We have revealed (awḥaynā) to thee this Qur'an* (12:3).

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[88] Sheikh Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'mān al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt fī al-Madhāhib wa al-Mukhtārāt* (Qum: Dāvarī, 1370 q.), 39, and al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥu I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyyah* (Qum: International Congress on the Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of Sheikh Mufīd, 1413 q.), 56.

> *And thus We have revealed (awḥaynā) to thee an Arabic Qur'an, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and all around her* (42:7).
>
> *Recite that which has been revealed to thee (ūḥiya ilayka) of the Book* (29:45).

The phenomenon of *waḥy* as God's Message is the primary characteristic distinguishing the prophets from pretenders and inspired reformers endowed with genius. Among the messengers, Muhammad was not unprecedented in having this prophetic characteristic, and he was not the first to address the people in the name of heavenly revelation (*waḥy*). Hence, there is no surprise in his being selected for such a mission. Throughout mankind's weary journey, there have been accompanying reformers who have called out to invite people to God in the name of revelation (*waḥy*) and the propagation of God's Message.

> *Is it a wonder for mankind that We have revealed (awḥaynā) to a man among them, saying: 'Warn mankind and bring unto those who believe the good tidings that they have a sure footing with their Lord'? The unbelievers say, 'Lo! this is a mere sorcerer'* (10:2).

To rebut this strange rejection, the Qur'an says:

> *We have revealed (awḥaynā) to thee as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and We revealed (awḥaynā) to Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms; and messengers We have mentioned unto thee before and messengers We have not mentioned unto thee; and God spake directly unto Moses* (4:163-164).

Revelation of a message (*al-waḥy al-risālī*) does not extend far beyond the dictionary meaning, given that it is a secret communication. It is a hidden link between God and His Messenger. It manifests in three forms, as this verse tells us:

> *And it was not [vouchsafed] to any mortal that God should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation (waḥyan) or from behind a veil, or [that] He sendeth a messenger to reveal (fa yūḥī) what He will by His leave. Lo! He is Exalted, Wise* (42:51).

The first form is a casting into the heart and a blowing into the soul. The second is speaking from behind a veil by creating a voice in the air that reaches the Prophet's ears.[89] Since the form of the Speaker is unseen, the likeness of speaking from behind a veil is given. The third form is the sending to the Prophet of an angel, who may be either visible or invisible to him, although the Message is audible.

Thus the difference between revelation to a Messenger and all other kinds of secret communication is the aspect of its supernatural origin, transcending matter. It is secret communication from the world above.

Observation:

Since a revelation is a spiritual phenomenon, the place to where it descends to a prophet is his heart (his inner person, his soul), regardless of whether it is a revelation directly from God or through an intermediary such as Gabriel. The Almighty said:

> *For he it is who has revealed it to your heart* (2:97).
>
> *Which the True Spirit has brought down upon thy heart, that thou mayest be (one) of the warners* (26:193-194).

The heart is the essence of something and its true reality. Sayyid Ṭabāṭabā'ī writes in this regard:

> This is an allusion to the manner in which he received the Qur'an, and to the fact that that which received it from the Spirit was his noble soul without the involvement of external senses which are tools to perceive specific things in the outside world. He would see the form of the angel and hear the voice of revelation, but not with this physical sense of hearing or sight. Otherwise, it would have been something common to him and to other people, and he would not have heard or seen to the exclusion of everyone else. So the pangs of revelation took hold of him while he was among the people and he would receive revelation without anyone present knowing about it.[90]

[89] But not with the physical ear. The Almighty said: *For he (Gabriel) it is who hath revealed it to thy heart* (2:97).

[90] Al-Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1392 q.)*, vol. 15, 346: 'the mill of revelation'; the severity of its

Details on the ways in which the Message was revealed, and what the Prophet would be exposed to, will be discussed later.

Explanation of the Revelation of the Message

The revelation of the Message is a type of direct spiritual link between the heavenly host and the Messenger's inner personality. This is because of exceptional traits within him which qualify him for this unique supernatural link. Hence, the spiritual revelations, in which he clearly sees the high heavens without confusion and without vagueness, are made possible for him. Such a revelation is different from being inspired with vague knowledge, as its source is as clear as the noonday sun, in contrast to inspiration, the source of which is a mystery to the person who is inspired.

Similarly, it is different from drawing inspiration from within oneself, insofar as the latter is reflecting personal thoughts which have accumulated and which sometimes become clear, perhaps without one's realising it. Revelation to a Messenger is drawn from outside the self, from the Heavenly Host, from the presence of the Lord of All Worlds. It is known to the Prophet with certainty, without hesitation or doubt, that what has been revealed to him is a revelation from heaven. Hence, he is not fearful or anxious, as we shall discuss in more detail.

Ways in Which a Message Is Revealed

> *It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with God's permission, what God wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise* (42:51).

Three ways for the revelation of a message are alluded to in the above verse. Here *by revelation* indicates that it is like an inspiration and flashing within the Prophet's soul, casting within him what seems to be a brilliant page written on his soul. This type of revelation may also occur in a vision or dream.

Or from behind a veil is when God speaks to him in plain speech; he hears the sound without seeing a form, in the way God spoke to Moses by creating a voice in the air, shrilling in his ears, or coming at him from everywhere, and likewise in the way He spoke to the Prophet on the Night

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discomfort and pain.

of the Ascension (*al-mi'rāj*). Speaking from behind a veil is a metonym likening God to someone speaking while hidden away. Alternatively, what is meant by the veil is figurative, on account of the enormous gulf separating the perfection of the Necessary Being from the imperfection of the contingent beings.

Or by the sending of a messenger, that is, one of the angels, *to reveal, by God's permission, what God wills*, by either casting it upon his hearing or reverberating in his heart.

> *And thus* (i.e., in either of these three ways – inspiration, speech or by sending an angel)[91] *have We revealed to thee a Spirit of Our command; thou knowest not (before) what was the Book and what was faith; but We have made it (the Qur'an) a Light, wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will; and verily thou dost guide (men) to the straight way* (42:52)

These methods of revelation are meant generally. As for the Prophet Muhammad, revelation would sometimes come to him in dreams – this was mostly at the beginning of his prophethood – and at other times as direct revelation from God without an angel as intermediary, and thirdly, with Gabriel as an intermediary. However, the Qur'anic revelation was exclusively via the latter two – either directly or with an angelic intermediary. Some details follow.

1- Dreams which came true

> The Revelation started with dreams which came true. The Prophet would not have any dream which did not come true like the break of dawn – a metonym for a shining radiance which would reveal itself to his soul as a prelude to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. At such a time he preferred being alone, and he would spend time in solitude in the Cave at Ḥirā', seeking religious purification (*yataḥannath*)[92] for several nights before returning to his wife. He would thus prepare himself, then go back to Khadījah, who

[91] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 246.

[92] *Taḥannuth* or *taḥannuf* means inclining towards purity, which is the servant's worship as a means of purification. Ibn Hishām says, 'The Arabs say *al-taḥannuth* or *al-taḥannuf*. They use a *fā'* instead of a *thāh* as in *jadath* and *jadaf*, meaning 'grave." He also says, 'Abū 'Ubaydah told me that the Arabs say *fumma* instead of *thumma* (for 'then').' See

> would once more give him provisions to return again to Ḥirā', where on one such occasion the Truth took him by surprise and the angel came to him and said: *Recite.*

Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī reports:

> When the Prophet turned thirty-seven, he would in his sleep see as if someone was coming towards him, calling him, 'Messenger of God.' He was like that for a while throughout which time he hid it, when all of a sudden one day, while he was herding one of Abū Ṭālib's flocks, in the crevices between the mountains he saw a person say to him, 'Messenger of God!' He asked him, 'Who are you?' He replied, 'I am Gabriel. God sent me to you to appoint you as a Messenger.'[93]

Imām al-Bāqir is reported to have said:

> A prophet, he it is who sees a vision like Abraham's in his sleep and like the effects of prophethood that the Messenger of God [the Prophet Muhammad] would see before revelation until Gabriel brought him the Message from God.[94]

What he means by 'before revelation' is before the revelation of the message which he was commanded to propagate, because this explanation is an interpretation of the concept of a 'prophet' before he becomes a 'messenger.' It is a person who has received a revelation without being commanded to propagate it. He is spiritually linked to the Heavenly Host and the heavens are revealed to him, as happened to our Prophet shortly before his prophetic mission.

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī writes in this regard:

> This means that his holy self had the attribute of prophethood and the Message came to him from God covertly and secretly before he had the attribute of being a Messenger, that is, Gabriel's visibly descending on him with audible speech. In other words,

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Muhammad ibn Isḥāq, corrected by Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah* (Cairo: Muhammad Ali Ṣubayḥ & Sons, 1963), vol. 1, 251.

[93] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 184, hadith 184; vol. 14, 194, hadith 30.

[94] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, *al-Kāfī* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1363 s.), vol 1, 176; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 266.

> Gabriel only came to him in visible form once he had all the means of accomplished prophets like Abraham – dreams which came true, consecutive notifications, true knowledge of things and revelations of hidden things. In a nutshell, the Prophet's inside and soul attained perfection before the attribute hidden in him crossed into the open, thus characterising his outside with the attribute of his inside, in harmony with it. The former is the end of the journey from creature to the Truth, and the latter is the end of the journey from the Truth via the Truth to the creature.[95]

It is agreed that, at times, dreams which came true were the means by which he was sent revelation, and sometimes knowledge would be passed to him in dreams, as the Commander of the Faithful said, 'Prophets' dreams are revelation.'[96] However, none of that was the Qur'an. The Qur'anic revelation never happened to him in a dream, even though it is true that some of his dreams were causes for Qur'anic revelations, as we are told in the verse:

> *Truly did God fulfil the vision for His messenger: Ye shall enter the Sacred Mosque, if God wills ...* (48:27).

For the Prophet had seen this during the year of Ḥudaybiyyah (sixth year AH), and it came true during the year of the Conquest (Year eight AH).

Also there is the verse:

> *We granted the vision which We showed thee, but as a trial for men – as also the cursed tree (mentioned) in the Qur'an* (17:60).

Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī and Ibn 'Asākir cite Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab as saying that:

> The Messenger of God saw the Umayyads on the pulpits. That saddened him and so God revealed to him: It is just worldly gain which they have been given. And this is the meaning of *We granted the vision...*[97]

[95] Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, lithograph (Tehran: Maktabah Maḥmūdī, 1391 q.), vol. 3, 454.

[96] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī* (Qum: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1414 q.), 315; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 11, 64.

[97] Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993), vol. 4, 191; Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1972), vol. 15, 77.

Nevertheless, some have stated that *Sūrah al-Kawthar* was revealed to the Messenger of God in a dream, on account of Anas ibn Mālik's narration:

> While the Messenger of God was among us, he dozed off. He then raised his head, smiling, and we asked, 'What made you laugh, Messenger of God?' He said, 'A chapter was just (*ānifan*) revealed to me.' So he recited: *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: Surely We have given thee abundance...*(108:1)[98]

Al-Rāfi'ī says about this:

> They understood from that that the chapter was revealed during that nap. However, what is more likely is that *al-Kawthar*, which had been revealed to him prior to that, came to his mind during that slumber and so he recited it to them and explained it to them.

He further says:

> It could also be construed as the state which would possess him when revelation came down upon him. It is referred to as the paroxysm of revelation. It is a lethargy similar to sleepiness which would affect him from the weight of the revelation.

Jalāl al-Dīn opines:

> What al-Rāfi'ī says is extremely sound. The second explantion is more correct than the first, because the term *ānifan* negates the possibility of its having been revealed prior to that [since *ānif* means shortly before this time]. In fact it was revealed in that state. The lethargy was not the lethargy of sleep. On the contrary, it was the state which possessed him when revelation occurred.[99]

However, it should be noted that *Sūrah al-Kawthar* is Meccan without any doubt. This is the majority opinion among exegetes to such an overwhelming extent that it nearly reaches indubitability (*tawātur*).[100] It was revealed in Mecca when the pagans found fault

[98] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 401.

[99] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, Vol. 1, 65-66.

[100] Reported through so many different chains of transmission as to generate certainty of its authenticity. [Trans.]

> in him for being *abtar* – not having any children – or for being cut off from his people – ostracised.
>
> Thus, when his son 'Abdullāh died, the Quraysh went to each other to give each other the 'good' news. They said: 'This juvenile one was cut off (*butira*) tonight.'[101]

And Ibn 'Abbās reports:

> The Messenger of God entered through the Ṣafā Gate and went out through the Marwah Gate. Al-'Ās ibn Wā'il al-Sahmī met him and went back to the Quraysh. The Quraysh said to him, 'Whom did you just meet, Abū 'Amr?' He said, 'That *abtar*,' by which he meant the Prophet, and so God, Sublime is His Majesty, revealed *Sūrah al-Kawthar* to console His Prophet's pure soul.[102]

Further, Anas had not reached twenty years of age at the time of the Prophet's death. Thus, when he came to Medina, he was a child who was no older than nine. It is said he was eight years old. How can we be sure of a hadith from him which contradicts the unanimous agreement that the opposite was the case, i.e., that it was revealed in Mecca, the story behind which is reported by a number of sources which exceeds the level of *tawātur*?

This is a matter which gives credence to Imām Rāfi'ī's first choice. Alternatively, we disregard Anas' tradition altogether.

It is true that Muslim and Bayhaqī cite this narration from another source which does not contain '...was revealed to me.' It says that the Prophet dozed off, then he raised his head and recited *Sūrah al-Kawthar.*

Bayhaqī says:

> This wording is more appropriate, because it does not contradict what the exegetes and panegyrists say – that the chapter entitled *al-Kawthar* was revealed in Mecca.[103]

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[101] See Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (in the margin of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), vol. 2, 142; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 401.

[102] 'Izz al-Dīn Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Abī al-Karam Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥābah* (Tehran: Ismā'īlīyān, n.d.), vol. 1, 127.

[103] *Al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 401.

2- Gabriel's Descent

It was the angel Gabriel who brought the revelation down to the Prophet and recited it. Sometimes the Prophet would see him either in his original form – this happened twice – or resembling the form of a man called Diḥyah ibn Khalīfah. At other times he would not see him, and the angel would just bring the revelation down upon the Prophet's heart: *With it [the Revelation] came down the Spirit of Faith and Truth [Gabriel] – to thy heart and mind* (26:193-194).

In respect of Gabriel, an elaboration could be found in *Sūrah al-Najm*: *Your companion [the Prophet] is neither astray nor being misled, nor does he say (aught) of (his own) desire. It is naught but a revelation sent down to him: he was taught by one mighty in power* (53:2-5), meaning Gabriel, an emanation of the force of the Almighty's Power. *For he appeared (in stately form)* (53:6), remaining firm in his original form – this was the first time at the outset of the Revelation; *While he was in the higher (part of the) horizon* (53:7), thereby blotting out everything between the east and the west. *Then he approached and descended* (53:8), coming closer to the Prophet... *at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer* (53:9); and thus through the intermediary of Gabriel, *So did (God) reveal to His servant [Muhammad] what He revealed* (53:10). *The (Prophet's) (mind and) heart in no way falsified that which he saw* (53:11), meaning that his heart discerned the truth of what his eyes saw. *Will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw? For indeed he saw him at another descent* – at another time on a lower level than the first – *near the Lote Tree of the utmost boundary: near it is the Garden of Refuge. Behold, the Lote Tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable). (His) sight swerved not, nor did it go wrong* (53:12-17). Therefore, what he saw was true reality, neither illusion nor imagination.

And in other verses:

> *Verily the Qur'an is a word (conveyed by) a noble messenger [Gabriel], endued with Power, with rank before the Lord of the Throne secure, with authority there, (and) faithful to his trust. And your companion [Muhammad] is not one possessed; and without a doubt he saw him [Gabriel] in the clear horizon* – another allusion to the first occasion (81:19-23).

Ibn Mas'ūd said that the Messenger of God saw Gabriel in his true image only twice: once when he asked him if he could see him in his

true form, and he showed him his true form, thus blocking the horizon, and the second time was when Gabriel took him up on the Night of the Ascension, to which the verse *while he was in the higher horizon* alludes.[104]

The truth is that the first of these two occasions was at the beginning of the Revelation at Ḥirā'. Gabriel appeared to him in the form in which God had fashioned him, filling the sky's horizon from the east to the west. The Prophet was extremely afraid of him, and so Gabriel came down to him in human form and hugged him to his chest. Thereafter, he would only come down to him in a beautiful human form.

The second time was when the Prophet asked him to do so, according to traditions. Gabriel had continued coming to him in human form, and so the Messenger of God asked him to show himself to him for a second time in the form in which God had fashioned him. So he showed him his form and blocked the horizon. Therefore, *while he was in the higher horizon,* refers to the first time while *another time* refers to the second time.[105]

The Messenger of God said, 'Sometimes the angel appears to me in the form of a man and speaks to me, and I hear what he says.'[106]

Imām al-Ṣādiq comments:

> Gabriel would come to the Prophet and not enter until he had asked permission. When he came in, he would sit before him the way a slave sits.[107]

Moreover, whenever Gabriel appeared to the Messenger of God, he would appear in a form resembling Diḥyah ibn Khalīfah al-Kalbī, as Ibn Shihāb says:

> The Messenger of God would compare Diḥyah al-Kalbī with Gabriel whenever he appeared to him in human form.[108]

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[104] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 123.

[105] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 173, vol. 9, 175; vol. 10, 446; Muhammad al-Muḥsin ibn Murtaḍā ibn Maḥmūd al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr, 1416 q.), vol. 2, 618.

[106] Abū Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Maṭābi' al-Sha'b, 1378 q.), vol. 1, 3.

[107] Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 85,

[108] Abū 'Umar Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Isti'āb fī Ma'rifat al-Aṣḥāb bi Hāmish al-Iṣābah* (Cairo: al-Sa'ādah, 1328 q.), vol. 1, 474.

That is because Diḥyah was the most handsome man in Medina. Whenever he came to town, the girls would come out to look at him.[109]

The Messenger of God said, 'Gabriel would come to me in the form of Diḥyah al-Kalbī' and, 'Dihyah was a handsome man.' However, It is likely that the latter phrase is from Anas, the narrator of the hadith.[110] This form that resembled Diḥyah caused the companions to imagine that he really was Diḥyah. Hence, the Messenger of God would tell them not to come and see him if they saw Diḥyah with him. He said, 'If you see Diḥyah al-Kalbī with me, no one should come and see me.'[111]

Gabriel would also appear in Diḥyah's form to the companions in battles like the one against Banī Qurayẓah, in the fifth year after the Hijra. The companions saw him on a white mule.[112]

Ali also saw him a number of times in the Prophet's presence, speaking to him while the Prophet was asleep.[113]

Yet the angel also frequently brought down revelation to him without his seeing him, either by reciting to his ears with the Prophet listening attentively, or by inspiration in his heart that stayed there indelibly. The Almighty said:

> *Verily this is a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds: with it came down the Spirit of Faith and Truth, to thy heart and mind, that thou mayest be one of the warners, in a clear, Arabic tongue* (26:192-195).

When the angel first started bringing him the Revelation, the Prophet feared he would forget the words. Hence, he would move his tongue and lips to try to remember it. Thus, he would immediately repeat every letter Gabriel recited to him, but the Almighty told him not to, promising him that it would be preserved and guarded by Him:

> *Move not thy tongue (with it) to make haste therewith. Indeed, upon Us is the collection (in thy heart) and to (make possible) its recitation.*

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[109] Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Isābah*, vol. 1, 473.

[110] Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 1, 473; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥābah*, vol. 2, 130.

[111] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 37, 326 citing Ibn al-Athīr.

[112] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, 245.

[113] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 20, 210; vol. 22, 331-332; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 351.

So when We have recited it, follow thou its recital. Then upon Us is its clarification (75:16-19).

Sometimes the Prophet would recite the Qur'an to his companions as soon as Gabriel had recited it to him, and before the Revelation had ended or the verses were finished, keen to have a verbatim record made of it. The Almighty told him not to do this also, saying:

Be not in haste with the Qur'an before its revelation to thee is complete, but say, 'O my Lord, increase me in knowledge ...' (20:114).

And so the Almighty reassured him it would be remembered and preserved in its entirety. Thereafter when Gabriel came to him, the Messenger of God would listen to him, and when he had gone, he would recite it as he had made him recite.[114] This is also mentioned in:

By degrees shall We teach thee to recite (the Message), so thou shalt not forget (87:6).

Alluding to this kind of revelation – which is like an itch in the heart – he said:

'The Holy Spirit blew into my *raw'*.'[115]

Raw' is the blackness of the heart, and represents the hidden interior which in turn alludes to his noble soul.

3- Direct Revelation

According to the companions' description of the Prophet's condition at the time when a revelation came down, it may be that most of it was direct and not through the intermediary of an angel. His soul would experience severe pressure that required a great exertion to withstand, and a feeling of faintness would take hold of him. He would lower his head, his face would become cold and he would sweat. Terrible fear would assail those present. They would also lower their heads on account of the frightening scene. The Almighty said:

Verily, soon shall We shall cast upon thee a weighty word (73:5).

According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

[114] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 198-199.

[115] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 127.

> That was when revelation came without an angel between him and God. A lethargy (*sabtah*)[116] would take hold of him, and that particular state fell on him as it did on account of the weight of revelation upon him, whereas when Gabriel brought him revelation, he would say, 'This is Gabriel,' or say, 'Gabriel said to me...'[117]

Sheikh Abū Ja'far al-Ṣadūq writes in this regard:

> The Prophet would be among his companions and he would faint and sweat. When he came to, he would say, 'God said such and such,' or 'He commanded you to do such and such and told you not to do such and such.'

He continues:

> Most of our opponents have claimed that that was when Gabriel came down to him, and so Imām al-Ṣādiq was asked about the fainting which would come over the Prophet. Was it when Gabriel came down? He said, 'No. When Gabriel came to the Prophet, he would not enter without asking his permission. When he entered, he would sit before him the way a slave sits. It only happened when God spoke to him directly, without an interpreter or intermediary.'[118]

In what follows are descriptions in the words of the companions of what would happen, referring to the state they witnessed taking hold of the Messenger of God at the time when revelation came to him:

The Commander of the Faithful said:

> *Sūrah al-Mā'idah* (The Table) was revealed to the Prophet while he was on his grey mule. The revelation weighed so heavy upon him that it stopped and stretched out its stomach until I saw its navel nearly touch the ground. The Messenger of God fainted until he put his hand on Shaybah ibn Wahb al-Jamaḥī's forelock.[119]

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[116] It means a lethargy which looks like sleepiness.

[117] Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin* (Qum: al-Majma' al-'Ālamī li Ahl al-Bayt, 1413 q.) vol. 1, 69; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār* vol. 18, 271.

[118] Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 85-86; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 260.

[119] Abū Naẓr Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Sulamī al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* (Tehran: al-Maktabat al-'Ilmīyyah al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), vol. 1, 288; a *dhu'ābah* is a lock of hair at the front of the head.

'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit said:

> When revelation came down upon the Prophet, it would burden him and his face would glower.[120]

And in another report:

> He would lower his head and his companions would lower their heads. Then, when it had quit him he would raise his head.[121]

'Ikrimah said:

> When revelation came down to him, the Prophet would be felled (*wuqidha*) by it for an hour, looking like a drunk person.[122]

Ibn Arwā al-Dūsī said:

> I saw revelation come down upon the Prophet when he was on his mount. It brayed and spread its front legs until I thought that its front legs would break. It may have knelt down or stood up, its front legs rigid until the weight of revelation was quit of him. [Sweat] poured from him like pearls.[123]

'Ā'ishah recalls:

> I saw revelation come down to him on a bitterly cold day. It was quit of him and his forehead poured with sweat.[124]

She also said:

> Revelation would come to the Messenger of God while he was on his mount and he would strike the front part of its neck.[125]

Ibn 'Abbās explains:

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[120] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 131; *kuriba* in the passive means his soul would be taken and his state would change; *tarabbada* means the colour of his face changed to a dusty hue.

[121] Muhammad Farīd Wajdī, *Dā'irat Ma'ārif al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn, 4th ed.* (Dā'irat Ma'ārif al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn Printing Press, 1386 q.), vol. 10, 712.

[122] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 197; *wuqidha* in the passive means that he fainted. A *mawqūdh* is someone overcome by sleepiness; hence he became like a drunk person.

[123] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* vol. 1, 131.

[124] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 3.

[125] Ṭabrisī , *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 378; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 263.

> When revelation came to the Prophet he would have to deal with hardship, severe pain and weight from that and his head would ache.[126]

Ibn Shahr Āshūb writes:

> It is narrated that when revelation came to him, he would lower his head and his companions would lower their heads. Because of that one speaks of the paroxysm of revelation.[127]

Ibn Qayyim narrates:

> One time revelation came to him and his thigh was on Zayd ibn Thābit's thigh. It weighed so heavy on him that it nearly crushed it.[128]

The author of *al-Muntaqā* narrates that:

> An accepted (*maqbūl*) hadith says that revelation came to him while he was on his camel, and so it knelt down and laid the front part of its neck on the ground, unable to move. 'Uthmān [ibn Maẓ'ūn] used to act as a scribe for the Prophet, and so his thigh was on 'Uthmān's thigh. The revelation made him pass out. His thigh weighed so heavily on 'Uthmān's thigh that he said, 'I was afraid it would crush it.'[129]

Finally, the Prophet described in astonishing terms how revelation came to him:

> 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar asked him, 'Do you feel the revelation?' So he said, 'I hear clanking. Then I go quiet at that. There is not a single time when revelation came to me that I did not think that my soul would be taken.'[130]

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[126] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār* vol. 18, 261.

[127] Muhammad ibn Ali Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Māzandarānī, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* (Najaf: al-Maṭba'at al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1956), vol. 1, 41.

[128] Muḥammad Ibn-Abī-Bakr : Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zād al-Ma'ād fī Hady Khayr al-'Ibād* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1998), vol. 1, 18.

[129] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 263-264, 268, 269. This 'Uthmān is 'Uthmān ibn Maẓ'ūn, as explicitly stated in a narration on the authority of Imām al-Bāqir in Abu al-Qāsim Ali ibn Mūsā ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Ṭāwūs, *Sa'd al-Su'ūd* (Qum: Manshūrāt al-Raḍī 1363 q.), 122.

[130] Al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, vol. 1, 128, citing Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir), vol. 2, 222.

> Al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām asked him, 'Messenger of God, how does revelation come to you?' So he said, 'Sometimes it comes to me like the clanking (*ṣalṣalah*) of a bell. It is the most difficult kind for me. When it leaves me I remember what it said.[131] Sometimes the angel comes to me in the form of a man and speaks to me, and I remember what he says.[132] It is the easiest for me.'[133]

Following on from this tradition – which is almost *mutawātir* – we have to draw the reader's attention to some important points.

Firstly, the clanking of a bell in this tradition indicates a repetitive, ringing sound, and would signal a direct revelation. He would listen attentively with his entire being until he had received it in its entirety. It would have a severe impact on his soul. This expression – 'the clanking of a bell' – informs us of the severity of the impact, because the repetitiveness of incessant noise has an effect on one's hearing, and penetrates into the depths. So it is as if it was repeatedly and forcefully grabbing the core of the heart. Hence he said, 'I thought that my soul would be taken.'

Recognising that this clanking was likely to be a prelude to revelation coming to him, he could prepare himself for the powerful spiritual link. Hence he said, 'Then I go quiet at that,' meaning, 'I listen attentively at the indication that revelation is coming down.'

True, revelation itself made an extremely loud noise which the inhabitants of the highest heavens could not withstand.

Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Bāqir said by way of exegesis of the Almighty's Words:

> *So far that when terror is lifted from their hearts, they will say, 'What is it that your Lord commanded?' They will say, 'That which is true and just; and He is the Most High, Most Great'* (34:23).
>
> The people of heaven had not heard revelation in the period between Christ and Muhammad's prophetic mission. When God despatched Muhammad on his mission, the people of heaven

[131] These words are among the things explained *infra*.

[132] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 3; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 132; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 260-261; *ṣalṣala* is the sound of iron beating on iron.

[133] This addition appears in Abū 'Awān's narration in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol, 129; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Shihāb al-Dīn, *Fatḥ al-Bārī fī Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1400 q.), vol. 1, 20.

> heard the sound of the revelation of the Qur'an like the sound of iron falling upon rock and they were all dumbfounded. When God finished the revelation, Gabriel descended. As he passed by the inhabitants of each heaven, he would remove the fear from their hearts – meaning he would clear that covering from them – and they would start saying to each other, 'What said your Lord?' They would say, 'The Truth; and He is the Most High, Most Great.'[134]

Ibn Mas'ūd's narration says:

> When God spoke through revelation, the people of heaven heard a clanking like the clanking of a chain on *ṣafwān* (a smooth stone), and so they were afraid.[135]

Ibn 'Abbās said:

> When revelation came, its sound was like iron falling on smooth stone. The people of heaven would be dumbfounded, 'until the terror was lifted from their hearts, and they would say 'What said your Lord?' The Messengers would say, 'The truth...'"[136]

It is narrated that the Messenger of God said:

> When God wanted to reveal a commandment, he would speak through revelation. When He spoke, severe trembling from fear of Almighty God would take hold of heaven, and the people of heaven would be dumfounded and throw themselves down prostrate.[137]

Therefore, if the people of heaven could not withstand the terrifying sound, we can hardly be surprised at the fainting which would take hold of the Messenger of God when revelation came to him.

Secondly, this kind of powerful revelation which fell upon his noble soul was exclusive to direct revelation as mentioned above, just as the tradition itself informs us, because the first category it lists is the clanking of a bell, so it was the sound of revelation coming to him directly – hence, he said, 'It was the most difficult for me' – and the second category it

[134] Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Najaf, 1387 q.), vol. 2, 202.

[135] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 126.

[136] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 235.

[137] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 236.

lists is when the angel spoke to him and he would understand what was revealed to him that very moment, because he was in his normal state.

Jalāl al-Dīn claims that one of the two kinds referred to by the tradition was when the angel bringing down the revelation was hidden from sight, and the other was when he appeared in a form,[138] but this contradicts what the tradition itself says, as our Sheikh Ṣadūq points out[139] and as Imām al-Ṣādiq's hadith[140] says.

Thirdly, the powerful spiritual pull of the first kind may have given the impression that some of the revelation may have escaped him when he would visibly lose consciousness. However, he dispelled this impression by finding everything that had been revealed to him there in his mind when he recovered. It was just as if it had been written in a book, with none of it eluding him. This is what he means by, 'When it leaves me I remember what it said.'

The reason for that is that revelation in its direct form would seep into the depths of his being, God having caused it to penetrate his heart:

> *By degrees shall We teach thee to declare [recite] (the Message),so that thou shalt not forget* (87:6).

Thus the meaning of the hadith narrated by Ibn Abī Salāmah on the authority of his uncle becomes clear.

> It reached him that the Messenger of God would say: 'Revelation would come to me in two ways. Gabriel would come to me and recite it to me the way a man recites to another man[141]. That is what slips away from me. Alternatively, it comes to me in something[142] like the sound of a bell until it blends with my heart. That is what does not slip away from me.[143]

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[138] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 128-129.

[139] Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 85; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 260.

[140] Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin: Kitāb al-'Ilal*, vol. 1, 69; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 271.

[141] i.e. the way a man recites his words to his companion. This is the second kind, as mentioned above.

[142] i.e. the revelation came to him without an angel as intermediary. It is the first kind as mentioned above.

[143] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 131.

His words: 'That is what slips away from me,' mean 'what would *almost* slip away from me' because it was hearing the revelation directly from the angel, for as soon as a person hears something from someone else, he forgets it if he does not memorise it. This kind of revelation is what was at risk of being forgotten and was feared to slip away – as is the case with hearing only, if it is not recorded by writing it down straight away – not that it would *actually* slip away from him. As for direct revelation, because it would blend with his heart by penetrating to its depths, he would have no fear that it would slip away from him.

This is what was about this hadith that caused some researchers to fall into error[144] and others to reject it. However the meaning as we have stated is correct and in accordance with all the other traditions.

The Wording of the Qur'an is the Product of Revelation

The Holy Book – in addition to traditions reported by so many sources as to be indubitable – explicitly states that both the exact wording and meaning of the Qur'an came down in its entirety from God's presence, and that the composition and arrangement of all its sentences and expressions is the precise phrasing of the revelation and the product of heaven. No one else whatsoever had a hand in it, neither Gabriel the entrusted one, nor the Prophet. Various verses of the Qur'an explicitly state that it is the Word of God.[145] Words cannot be attributed to anyone unless they are his own work in terms of arrangement, composition, phraseology and meaning.

The same is true of the explicit statement that it is what God recited to the Prophet.[146] It does not qualify as recitation unless it is a recitation word

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[144] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 118.

[145] *They wish to change God's decree ...* (48:15); and *If one amongst the idolaters seeks of thee protection, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of God* (9:6). The Messenger of God said: 'Almighty God said: He who explains my Words in accordance with his own opinion does not believe in Me' (al-Sheikh al-Ṣadūq Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Mūsā ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī: *al-Amālī*, (Najaf, n.d.), 6. Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, said of the Qur'an: 'It is the Word of God and interpretation of it is not like human speech (Ṣaduq, Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1346 q. 264.)

[146] *It is for Us to gather it and to recite it: but when We have recited it, follow thou its recitation* (75:17-18).

for word. Simply conveying the meaning is not good enough, because that is not recitation of the Qur'an. It is no more than conveying the meaning.

Similar to that is the word used to signify that it is an instructed recitation (*iqrā'*) received by the Prophet.[147] The same is true of its saying that he 'received' the Qur'an.[148] Receipt (*talaqqī*) of the Qur'an means word for word in a given order, and not just the meaning of it, for the Qur'an is that which is recited and not that which is understood and perceived.

In the same vein, there are the verses specifying that the Prophet used to recite and not 'speak' the Qur'an.[149] This is in addition to the fact that the Qur'an is the eternal miracle of Islam, for mankind in its entirety is unable to produce the likes of it, even if they all work together. This sweeping statement also applies to the Prophet himself. It is beyond the Prophet's capability as a man to compose words the way the Qur'an is composed. How can it be thought that it is his creation, given that he would be unable to come up with the likes of it even with the help of all mankind?

Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī reports someone quoting al-Samarqandī[150] as citing three views on what was revealed to the Prophet:

> 1) The dominant opinion is that what was revealed to the Prophet was both the words and the meanings as the Qur'an explicitly states.
>
> 2) That Gabriel just brought the meanings and the Prophet would word them in the phrasing of the language of the Arabs. Those who ascribe to this rely on the apparent meaning of the verses such as *Which the True Spirit hath brought down upon thy heart'* (26:193-194) and *For he (Gabriel) it is who hath revealed it to thy heart by God's leave* (2:97), claiming that what the heart can retain is just the

[147] *By degrees shall We teach thee to recite (sanuqri'uka) (the Message), so thou shalt not forget* (87:6).

[148] *The Qur'an is bestowed upon thee from the presence of One Who is Wise and All-Knowing* (27:6).

[149] *A Qur'an which We have divided, in order that thou mayest recite it unto mankind at intervals* (17:106).

When thou recitest the Qur'an We place between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter a hidden barrier (17:45).

And when thou recitest the Qur'an, seek refuge in God from Satan the outcast (16:98).

[150] Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Yamān al-Samarqandī (d. 268). He was a Ḥanafī jurisprudent and theologian.

meanings and not specific words, which have to be picked up by one's hearing.

3) That Gabriel, having received it, would discharge the recitation in packages of words in Arabic to the Prophet. Thus, the inhabitants of Heaven would listen to Gabriel's Qur'an and start reciting it in Arabic. However, there is no evidence for this opinion apart from purported traditions on the sending down of the complete Qur'an to *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr* or to *Bayt al-'Izzah* in the lowest or the Fourth Heaven. It would then have been sent down gradually to the Messenger of God over twenty years.[151]

Al-Juwaynī has this to say on the matter:

There are two kinds of revelation. One is where God would tell Gabriel to say to the Prophet, 'Do such-and-such a thing,' or 'God commands such-and-such a thing.' Gabriel would receive the meaning and cast it into the Prophet's heart. The second is where He would say to him, 'Recite such-and-such a thing to the Messenger of God.' This he would deliver in the wording he received without any change, just as kings would write down messages and send them in the hands of messengers for them to deliver without any paraphrasing or change.

After citing the above from al-Juwaynī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī opines that:

The Qur'an is like the second kind. Gabriel would receive it word for word and recite it to the Prophet as he had received it, without making any change either to its wording or to its meaning. It was not permissible for him merely to convey the meaning. The secret behind that is that what is intended by the Qur'an is to adhere explicitly (*ta'abbud*) to its exact wording in addition to acting explicitly in accordance with its meaning. Because this is evidence of its inimitability, no one – neither Gabriel nor anyone else – can come up with a word to take the place of another. Behind every letter of it there are meanings too numerous to reckon. No one can come up with a substitute which would cover them.[152]

[151] See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 229-230; also cited by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 126.
[152] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 127-128.

Al-Zarqānī also says that:

> Some people sank low, claiming that Gabriel would bring the Prophet the meanings of the Qur'an and the Messenger would express them in the language of the Arabs. Others claimed that the wording was Gabriel's, and that God would only reveal the meaning to him. Both opinions are false and sinful, and clash with the explicit words of the Scripture, Sunnah and consensus. They are not worth the ink they were written with. My belief is that it was interpolated into the Muslims' books. Otherwise, how could the Qur'an be a miracle if the wording was either Muhammad's or Gabriel's? Further, how could it be validly attributed to God if the wording is not God's?[153]

As for the verses relied upon by those who propose such an interpretation, they are more indicative of the opposite! That is because what is meant by the heart is the Messenger's hidden personality which was qualified to receive revelation from God's presence, and not the circulatory organ hidden in the chest. Our senses are not equipped to receive such metaphysical things, and they only work within a limited framework.

A parallel to this limitation in material matters is wireless wave broadcasts received by purpose-built machines. They receive the exact same words, and even pictures, forms and colours, from a distant place which cannot be received by a normal external sensor. The same is true of souls which deserve to perceive matters which ordinary senses are unable to perceive, and which do not reach the level of refinement suited to the Heavenly Host!

Furthermore, the verse from *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'* (The Poets), *'brought down by the Trusted Spirit upon thy heart'* is followed by the phrase *'in a clear, Arabic language'* (26:193-195), which specifies that what is revealed from God's presence and at the hand of Gabriel, the Trusted Spirit, is this Qur'an, verbatim, in its clear Arabic wording! So the verse is more indicative of the opposite of what it was claimed to prove.

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[153] Al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1362 q.), vol. 1, 49.

At any rate, some have attributed this opinion to Mu'ammar ibn 'Abbād al-Sulamī (d. 215 AH), one of the leaders of the Mu'tazilites,[154] on the basis of syllogism by equations (*qiyās al-musāwāt*), for he makes no explicit statement to that effect. It is just concomitant with his position on the Almighty's speech, according to their claim. This is because he says that speech as such is an accident (*'araḍ*), and an accident, according to the Mu'tazilites, is movement which subsists within the body (*jism*). It is, therefore, impossible for it to subsist in the Almighty, because He cannot be a locus (*maḥall*) for accidents. Thus God's Words are no more than what issues from the locus – be it a tree or a human being. Speech which issues from the tree is its action, and speech which issues from humans is their action, even if it is by God's will.[155]

What that means, according to them, is that God's Words which issue from the locus are tantamount to the capacity to receive – created by God in the tree or the human being. Thus the locus recites the speech through which God's will manifests. The speech issuing from the locus is its own action, even though it may be attributed to God, since it only issues forth in accordance with God's Will.

They further rely on what al-Rāwandī attributes to Mu'ammar:

> He claimed that the Qur'an is not God's action or one of His Attributes within Himself as the common people believe. Rather, it is one of Nature's acts.

However, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khayyāṭ al-Mu'tazilī categorically rejects this attribution, saying:

> Know – may God guide you to goodness – that Mu'ammar used to claim that it was God who spoke the Qur'an, that the Qur'an

[154] Abu al-Mu'tamir ibn 'Amr. It is also said that he was Ibn 'Abbād al-Baṣrī. There were debates and disputes between him and the government. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1993), vol. 10, 546 no. 176.

[155] Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Ismā'īl Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1980.), vol. 1, 268. He states: 'The fifth group is the followers of Mu'ammar. They claim that recitation (*al-Qur'an*) is an accident (*'arḍ*) and that it is impossible for God to have truly done it, because they believe it to be impossible for accidents to be actions performed by God. They claim that recitation (*al-Qur'an*) is an action performed by the locus from which it is heard. If it is heard from a tree then it is the tree's action. From whence it is heard is the locus in which it inheres.'

> is God's speech, His words and His revelation and His sending down. No one but He said it or spoke it. He also believed that the Qur'an was temporally created (*muḥdath*), brought into being after it did not exist.[156]

However, in spite of that we find that one foreign orientalist[157] followed by one Muslim writer[158] – who did so without checking – held the view that Mu'ammar said that the Qur'an is not God's Words and that God, Exalted is He, gave His Prophet the licence to formulate words into which the Will of God poured, which he would receive through revelation into his soul.

It is an erroneous conclusion based as it is on pure analogy and not on his explicit words. Further, God's Words, *and unto Moses God spoke directly (taklīman)* (4:164), confirm that God Himself uttered these aforementioned words and that it really was speech, and not figurative expression (*majāz*) or metaphorical borrowing (*isti'ārah*). Otherwise this emphasis through the *maf'ūl muṭlaq*[159] would not be possible. What Mu'ammar said can be construed as meaning that speech which is heard from any thing was only made by God to be heard from that thing, not that it is the product of that thing. And so, if it is heard from the wind it is the wind's action, i.e., it issues from the wind even though God caused it to do so. It is then the same case with the tree. As for what issues from a human being like the Prophet, it is through the inspiration of God to him, produced by God and not the Prophet himself.

The Qur'an Phrased as Spoken Word rather than as Book

One of the distinguishing features of books is the coherence of the contents from beginning to end. There is not a single article in a newspaper, treatise in a book or publication which is not interconnected and arranged coherently, each part joined to another like links in a chain.

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[156] See Abu al-Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Muhammad ibn al-Khayyāṭ al-Mu'tazilī, *al-Intiṣār 'alā Ibn al-Rāwandī al-Mulḥid*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, n.d.), 104.

[157] Harry Austryn Wolfson in *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Harvard University Press, 1979, translated by Aḥmad Ārām), 298, 302.

[158] Maqṣūd Farāsatkhāh, *Zabān-e Qur'an* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī-Farhangī, 1376 s.), 305.

[159] A literal translation of Qur'an 4:164 might be '*and unto Moses God spoke a speaking.*' The words 'a speaking' are rendered by a single word in Arabic – *taklīman* – which is an adverb or *maf'ūl muṭlaq*. It is considered to be emphatic, and is often translated as 'utterly' or 'thoroughly,' e.g. 'destroyed them utterly' as opposed to 'destroyed them a destroying,' and 'cleanse you thoroughly' as opposed to 'cleanse you a cleansing.'

Such coherence is frequently lost in speech, since the speaker is not so constrained by word order, either verbally or in terms of meaning. He may jump from one subject to another on account of something which occurs to him as appropriate while speaking, even if there is not such a strong link between the subject matter. This is something we encounter often in the Qur'an. The tendency to switch from the third person to the second person and vice versa, the use of pronouns and demonstrative pronouns that do not match the nouns to which they refer, switching from explicit to implicit meanings, as well as other characteristics, all indicate that it is composed in the style of the spoken word rather than written prose. Otherwise, the abrupt changes from one form to another would simply be poor grammar! When speaking it is also permissible to use types of parenthetical remarks which would not work well in writing. There follow some examples that demonstrate unique features of the spoken word which we find in the Qur'an.

1- Sudden Switching

A unique feature of oral communication is switching suddenly from one subject to another by relying on contextual indicators provided by the setting. There may not be any apparent link between the two, which would be considered to be a flaw in the discourse's coherence if it were a book and not the spoken word.

Take for example *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah* (The Resurrection), which begins by talking about Mankind, his state with regard to the coming of the Hour, up until it comes to the Almighty's Words:

> *O, but man is a telling witness against himself, although he tenders his excuses* (75:14-15).

Then suddenly the discourse turns to address the Prophet:

> *Stir not thy tongue herewith to hasten it. Lo! upon Us (resteth) the putting together thereof and the reading thereof. And when We recite it, follow thou its recitation; then upon Us (resteth) the explanation thereof* (75:16-19).

It abruptly goes back to confront Mankind with an adjunct:

> *Nay, but you love the fleeting world and neglect the Hereafter* (75:20-21).

Then it turns to talk about man's condition on the Day of Resurrection:

> *Upon that day will faces be resplendent, looking toward their Lord* (75:22-23).

And so on right up to verse 30. After that it talks about the arrogant person who did not believe or pray, but instead denied and turned away, gleefully going back to his household. Thus we find the thread twists and turns. One moment there is condemnation, the next rebuke, and then fearful warnings up until the end of the chapter.

So this kind of advance and withdrawal occurs for no other reason than its being in the thread of the spoken word. The switch is made six times in this chapter, and is without a doubt one of the innovative features which makes the Qur'an unique.

Commentating on the words *Stir not thy tongue herewith ...* (75:16), Imām Rāzī says by way of defending this type of radical and sudden grammatical shift for rhetorical purposes (*iltifāt*):

> It is possible that it so happened that, when these verses were revealed, the Messenger hurried his recitation of them fearing they would get lost. So of course he was immediately told not to. This is like when a teacher is giving his pupil a lesson, the pupil starts turning to the right and the left, the teacher brings his attention to it immediately, saying, during the lesson, 'Do not turn to the right or to the left,' and then goes back to the lesson. If that entire lecture is recorded along with the interruption – such as if it is put onto tape – someone with no knowledge of the situation would not understand the reason, whereas someone who knows would realise that it is in order.[160]

2- Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purpose (*Iltifāt*)

Within *Sūrah Yā Sīn* one finds a clear example of the rhetoric beauty known as *iltifāt*:

> *Lo! those who merit Paradise this day are happily employed, they and their wives, in pleasant shade, on thrones reclining; theirs the fruit (of their good deeds) and theirs (all) that they ask; the word from a Merciful*

[160] See Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 30, 222-223. Here, as elsewhere, the author combines paraphrasing with his own commentary. [Trans.]

> *Lord (for them) is: Peace! But avaunt ye, O ye guilty, this day! Did I not charge you, O ye sons of Adam, that ye worship not the devil - Lo! he is your open foe! - but that ye worship Me? That was the right path. Yet he has led astray of you a great multitude. Had ye then no sense? This is hell which ye were promised (if ye followed him). Burn therein this day for that ye disbelieved. This day We seal up their mouths, and their hands speak out to Us and their feet bear witness as to what they used to earn* (36:55-56).

One may notice here that initially the discourse relates to the inhabitants of Heaven, in the third person. Then it turns to sending them a greeting, addressing them in the second person. The second person address suddenly turns to the sinners in *But avaunt ye* ('begone,' 'away with you'). Then, however, it goes back to the third person with the words *This day We seal up their mouths.*

This kind of meandering in a written discourse is usually inappropriate, but is regarded as beauty of style in the spoken word.

Another example can be seen in *Sūrah al-Fatḥ* (The Victory):

> *God was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance unto thee beneath the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down peace of reassurance on them, and hath rewarded them with a near victory, and much booty that they will capture. God is ever Mighty, Wise. God promiseth you much booty that ye will capture ...* (48:18-20).

This starts with God addressing the Prophet in the second person, talking about the believers in the third person, and then turns to address the believers themselves in the second person.

This style is very elegant for the spoken word, but unsuitable for prose.

In *Sūrah al-Fatihah* or *al-Ḥamd* (The Praise) one begins by praising God in the third person, then the discourse turns to petitioning the Almighty in the second person. This is wonderful grammatical shift.

3- Attention to Rhyme

One of the distinguishing features of rhyming prose emerges when hearing it as opposed to reading it. There is a much rhyming prose in the Qur'an – at the expense of articulated speech – which cannot be adequately rendered in a written text.

For example:

> Bal al-insānu 'alā nafsihi baṣīra[tun] wa law alqā ma'ādhirah[ū]
>
> *O, but man is a telling witness against himself, although he tender his excuses* (75:14-15).

The words only rhyme if there is a pause after both *baṣīra* and *ma'ādhirah* when they are pronounced with a *yā'*, *rā'* and *hā'* at the end, which cannot be achieved in the written word.

The same is true in the following:

> *Wa [i]ltaffati [a]l-sāqu bi al-sāq[i] ilā Rabbika yawma'idhini [a]l-masāq[u]*
>
> *And (the) leg is wound about (the) leg; unto thy Lord that day will be the procession* (75:28-29).

The prose only rhymes when it is recited with a pause after *bi [a] l-sāq* and *al-masāq*.

> *Fa ammā man ūtiya kitābahu bi yamīnihī fa yaqūlu hā'umu [i]qra'ū kitābiyah. Innī ẓannantu annī mulāqin ḥisābīyah fa huwa fī 'īshatin rāḍīya[tin] fī jannatin 'ālīya[tin] quṭūfuhā dāniya[tun]*
>
> *Then, as for him who is given his record in his right hand, he shall say: Here, take and read my book! Surely I knew that I should have to meet my reckoning. Then he will be in a blissful state in a lofty Garden whereof the clusters are in easy reach* (69:19-23).

This only rhymes in articulated speech when there is a pause after every *tā' marbūṭah*.

> *Wa ammā man khaffat mawāzīnuhū fa ummuhū hāwīya[tun] wa mā hiyah nārun ḥāmiya[tun]*
>
> *But as for him whose scales are light, his refuge will be an abyss. And what will convey unto thee what that is?* (101:8-10).

This only rhymes if there is a pause after the *tā' marbūṭah* in both *hāwiya* and *ḥāmiya*, making them consistent with the pausal *hā'* in *māhiyah*. This is exclusive to recitation as opposed to the written word.

This is how it was recited to the Prophet and how he recited it to the people. It is mandatory to follow this way forever more. Even the

written form here follows the style of recitation, because recitation of the Qur'an is what came first.

4- Melodies and Refrains

An important feature of the Qur'an, which suits its being recited as the spoken word rather than read as written lines, is its innovative vocal arrangement in melodies and refrains, which is what initially had the effect of captivating the Arabs' feelings before they could proceed further. The Prophet had instructed that the Qur'an be read in these melodies in Arabic as the first step. This can only be done by reciting it aloud, guided by the tunefulness of the performance, as opposed to saying it quietly to oneself.

This is in addition to the fact that the tune followed in its phrases is either threatening, frightening, informative of glad tidings or warnings, wistful, sorrowful or something similar. It is only giving voice to it using one of those melodies that makes it effective.

This is a matter overlooked by those who suppose that the composition of the Qur'an was in writing rather than epic oral performance.

Indeed, there is an old adage that says, 'The Qur'an is preserved through its recitation not through its writing.'

5- Reliance on Sources Beyond the Confines of the Text

If communication is in the form of a book, its meaning has to come across in the actual wording, either before, after or during the expression (adjunct contextual indicators). Reliance on evidence unconnected to the text[161] is not permissible – but is allowed if the communication is in the form of the spoken word. The Qur'an is of the latter type. To understand its meanings one must normally rely on knowledge of the reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).

It is not permissible for someone who composes a text to rely on specific events which are generally unknown to others and expect them to understand it, because the readership is general and not restricted to just those who know about the events. As for the Qur'an, it relies on many matters of context separated from its text – known as the reasons for

[161] It is worth pointing out that if rational evidence – like rational deduction – can be clearly inferred from the text, then it is deemed to be adjunct contextual evidence and not evidence disconnected from the text.

revelation – to convey its meanings. In order to recognise the contextual meanings within the Qur'an, there is no recourse other than to have prior knowledge of them, because the text becomes impossible to understand if one does not know the rationale behind the various sections.

Take as an example the following:

> *Lo! (the mountains) of Ṣafā and Marwah are among the indications of God. It is therefore no sin for him who is on pilgrimage to the House (of God) or visiteth it, to go around them. And he who doeth good of his own accord, (for him) God is Responsive, Aware* (2:158).

Whoever does not know the reason why this verse was revealed would think - on the basis of the literal meaning of *it is therefore no sin for him* – that going back and forth between Ṣafā and Marwah is not mandatory. However, if one knows that it was revealed regarding those believers who were too reluctant to go back and forth between Ṣafā and Marwah – after the idols were returned to them – out of fear that it would amount to veneration of them in the way the pagans venerated them, one realises that the verse was revealed to rebut this misconception. It is, therefore, not a mere licence to perform it without fear of doing something wrong, but rather the licence to perform it as a mandatory act without fear of proscription. However, this cannot be understood from the verse until one knows the reason why it was revealed, for there is no indication of it in the explicit wording.

There are many verses like this, which would be most unsuitable for writing a book intended as a general manifesto and a universal call.

This is the most important evidence that the wording of the Qur'an is that of the spoken word as opposed to that of the written word.

The Prophets and Revelation

At this juncture there are two very important matters pertaining to the Message of the Prophets and the truthfulness of their call to God which need to be dealt with in a scientific and acceptable way. *Ahl al-Sunnah* have all spoken of it in uncustomary ways which are perhaps not easy for instinctive reason to digest. As for our scholars – the *Imamiyya* – they have spoken of it rationally on the basis of logical reasoning supported by evidence transmitted on the authority of the Imams from the People of the Household.

Firstly, how did the Prophet know that he had been given a mission? Why did he not think that perhaps the one who had come to him was a devil? Why was he sure it was Gabriel?

Secondly, is it possible:

i) for the Prophet to make a mistake with regard to what is revealed to him;

ii) for false things which he had imagined to fool him to present themselves to him in the form of revelation, or,

iii) for the deceiver (*Iblīs*) to recite to him what he thinks is revelation from God?

With regard to the first matter, the majority hold that the Prophet was at first terrified, fearing that he had been touched by madness. He sought refuge in the embraces of his loyal wife, who in turn sought the help of her uncle Waraqah ibn Nawfil to reassure him and confirm that he was a Prophet, thus calming him and setting his mind at rest.

As for the second matter, it has been said that it was possible for the deceiver to interfere with revelation from heaven, and to recite to the Prophet what he thought was revelation – as in the cranes hadith – were it not for Gabriel's putting things right and foiling the Devil's plot.

In relation to both matters, the Imams of the Household have taken the position that neither case applies, since the Prophet is too precious to God for Him to let this happen, and not to illuminate him with clear evidence of his prophethood at that difficult time. Similarly, He would not allow the Devil to take hold of the Prophet's feelings:

So wait patiently for thy Lord's decree, for surely thou art in Our sight; and proclaim the praise of thy Lord when thou risest up (52:48).

Furthermore, in order to maintain the dignity of the Messenger of God, it is worth discussing each of these issues comprehensively.

Propethood Linked to Shining Proofs

It is God's duty – in the sense of a duty dictated by His Grace and Compassion for His Servants – to link His appointment of a Prophet with shining proofs which leave no room for doubt to creep into his soul, just as He showed Abraham the Kingdom of Heaven and Earth so that he would be certain,[162] and as with Moses:

[162] Paraphrased from 6:75.

... he was called by name: O Moses, I am thy Lord... (20:11-12);

Lo! it is I, God, the Mighty, Wise (27:9);

O Moses! fear not! Indeed, the emissaries fear not in My presence (27:10).

This is what the Rule of Grace (*qā'idat al-luṭf*) dictates, and which theologians (*'ulamā' al-kalām*) have discussed.

Zurārah ibn A'yan says on this topic:

> I asked Abū 'Abdillāh how the Messenger of God was not afraid that what came to him from God was not something the Devil insinuated. So he said: 'If God makes a servant a Messenger he sends assuredness [*al-Sakīna*] and mental balance [*al-Waqār*] down upon him. So what came to him from God was like what he saw with his own eyes.[163]

This means the plain truth which was unobscured. He clearly sees the truth, and there is no doubt or disturbance in his mind. The Imam made that plain in another tradition, when he was asked how the Messengers knew that they were Messengers? He said:

> The veil was lifted from them.[164]

'Allāmah Ṭabrisī explains:

> God only ever reveals to His Messenger with bright proofs and clear signs to prove that what has been revealed to him is from God Almighty alone, so he does not need anything else apart from them. He is not terrified and he is not dismayed.[165]

Al-Qāḍī 'Ayād al-Yaḥṣabī writes:

> It is not right [i.e. in the Almighty's Wisdom – an allusion to the Rule of Grace (*Qā'idat al-Luṭf*)] for the Devil to appear to him in the form of an angel and to confuse matters for him, not at the outset of the Message or thereafter. The Prophet's confidence in that is evidence of its being a miracle. Indeed, the Prophet does not doubt that what comes to him from God is the angel and His

[163] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, 201; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 262.

[164] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 11, 56.

[165] Ṭabrisī , *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 384.

> true messenger, either through instinctive knowledge God has created in him or through clear proof which God shows him, so that your Lord's Words can be perfect in truth and justice, with no man capable of changing God's Words.[166]

So when the Prophet is despatched as a Prophet, he has to have knowledge of certainty (*'ilm yaqīn*), or indeed the heart of certainty (*'ayn al-yaqīn*), about his task without doubting or being agitated. His mind is convinced and reassured through Almighty God's care, protection and Grace, assisting him and supporting him, especially at the outset of the mission. So the Clear Truth (*al-Nāmūs al-Akbar*) comes to him as though he sees it with his eyes and witnesses it in his heart. It is a defining and critical point at which a prophet should not waver or be afraid:

> *... the emissaries fear not in My presence* (27:10).

Furthermore, God only chose the Prophet for his mission once He had perfected his mind and taught him those secrets of the heavens and the earth of which he was worthy, so that he could perform his task as ambassador and propagator of God's Message among all beings, just as He had done with His bosom friend (*al-Khalīl*) Abraham. Imām Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, said:

> From the time he was weaned, God linked His greatest angel to him to lead him night and day to the world's best and finest of manners.[167]

Imām 'Askarī said that God found the Prophet's heart to be:

> ... the best and most attentive of hearts, and so He chose him as a prophet.[168]

Similarly, he said:

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[166] Abu al-Faḍl 'Ayāḍ ibn Mūsā al-Yaḥṣabī, *al-Shifā bi Ta'rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1984), vol. 2, 112.

[167] Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah, : al-Khuṭbah al-Qāṣi'ah* (*The Sermon of Disparagement*) (no. 192), 300.

[168] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 205-206.

> God did not send a single prophet or messenger until his intellect had been perfected, and thus his mind was better than all the minds of his nation.[169]

'Allāmah Majlisī explains:

> From the time that God perfected his intellect, he remained supported by the Holy Spirit. He would speak to him, and he would hear His voice and have dreams which came true until God sent him on his mission as a messenger and prophet.[170]

The proofs that he had received God's Grace and special attention from the very beginning are many. His people knew him to be a genius and inherently worthy. They recognised his honesty and astuteness, and found him to be a blend of rectitude and soundness of judgment, until he became dear to all the people and they nicknamed him 'the trustworthy, truthful one' (*al-Ṣādiq al-Amīn*), whose judgment and behaviour they could trust.

According to Ali ibn Ibrāhīm's tradition,[171] the signs of prophecy appeared in him three years before he was given his mission, when he was thirty-seven. He would have dreams which came true and spend time on his own in the Cave at Ḥirā' pondering the Essence of God and the secrets of the Heavens and Creation, until the truth suddenly came upon him at the age of forty. His soul was prepared and he knew the signs of what was to happen – something which had been on the brink of happening for some time.

Such a person is not terrified and is not dismayed. He does not think he is insane or vulnerable to evil, or seek refuge in a woman with no experience of the secrets of prophecy or a man[172] whose knowledge was based on corrupted and extinct books – works which had not been proven at that time to have touched on truths regarding the dominion (*mulk*) and heaven (*malakūt*) and not to have been transformed from their original form.

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[169] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, 12-13.

[170] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 277.

[171] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 184 and 194.

[172] Namely, Waraqah ibn Nawfil, Khadījah's paternal cousin.

Thus, the Prophet's position with regard to the revelation of the Truth to him at the outset of his mission was that of someone who is aware of the true state of the matter, knowing the essence of the Truth being revealed to him, and extremely confident and self-composed. We may rest assured that he did not hesitate or doubt, and was neither agitated, terrified nor dismayed. We shall tell the story of the outset of this mission according to the traditions of the People of the Household, which explain aspects of the Prophet's position at the time, and which are majestic, deferential, reverent and sublime.

The Story of Waraqah ibn Nawfil

What was mentioned above is the story of the Despatch according to the traditions of the People of the Household, and who know best what went on in their own domestic situation. There follows another account regarding the Prophet Muhammad's despatch according to what other traditions say:

Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Hishām, Ṭabarī and the like narrate:

> While the Prophet was spending time alone in the Cave at Ḥirā', all of a sudden he heard someone calling him. Terror took hold of him and he raised his head. Why, it was a terrifying form which was calling him. The terror grew in him and the horror of his position stopped him dead. He began turning his face away from what he saw and lo, he saw it on all horizons of the sky drawing near and moving away. The form would not go away no matter which way he turned. He occupied himself with that for a time, oblivious to himself. He almost threw himself from the top of the mountain on account of the severity of the horror of the terrifying scene which had overcome him. Meanwhile, Khadījah had sent someone to look for the Prophet in the cave, but he could not find him. This continued until the form went away. He went back, his heart agitated, full of fear and dread until he walked in on Khadījah, shivering from fear as if he had a fever. He looked at his wife the way one seeking refuge and help looks, saying, 'Khadījah, what is wrong with me?' He told her what he had seen and informed her of his fears that his eyes were deceiving him. He said, 'I felt sorry for myself. The only thing I think can be wrong with me is

that I have been touched by a jinn.[173] The cursed one [meaning his own self] is a soothsayer or a madman!'

His faithful wife looked at him with a sympathetic glance and said, 'Not so, cousin. Rejoice and be strong. God will never disgrace you. By Him in whose hand Khadījah's soul rests, I wish you to be this nation's Prophet. You will maintain good relations with kin, speak the truth, entertain your guests generously and assist in the face of calamity. You have never committed a lewd act.' In this way she calmed him with her sharpened words.

Then she carried out a successful experiment. She said, 'Cousin, can you tell me about this friend of yours who comes to you?' 'Yes,' he replied. She continued, 'When he comes, tell me.' So the angel came as he would come to him and the Messenger of God then said, 'Khadījah, this is he who has come to me.' She replied, 'Get up cousin and sit on my left thigh.' So the Messenger of God got up and sat on [her thigh]. She asked, 'Can you see him?' He replied, 'Yes.' She said, 'Turn around and sit on my right thigh.' So the Messenger of God turned around and sat on her right thigh. She asked, 'Can you see him?' He replied, 'Yes.' 'So turn around and sit on my lap.' He then turned around and sat on her lap. She then bared her head and cast off her headscarf with the Messenger of God sitting on her lap. She asked, 'Can you see him, cousin?' He replied, 'No,' and so she said, 'Cousin, rejoice and be strong. By God, it is an angel and not a devil.'

Then to corroborate what she had deduced from her experiment, she set off to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfil. He had become a Christian and read the Scriptures. She told him the story of her cousin Muhammad, and so Waraqah said, 'Holy! Holy! If you were to believe me, Khadījah, the Archangel Gabriel who used to come to Moses has come. So tell him to be strong and that he is this nation's Prophet. I wish I could stay alive for his days, to protect him and help him.' Khadījah went back to the Messenger of God

[173] Ibn al-Athīr's interpretation of *'uriḍa lī*.

and told him what he had said. At that, his mind was put at rest, his fear subsided and he was convinced that he was a Prophet.[174]

There is no doubt that the story of the Prophet's being terrified by that shocking image is a myth weaved by feeble minds ignorant of the sacredness (*maqām*) of God's noble Prophets , and hence of their elevated importance.

First of all, it is surprising that scholars, who are people of analytical reasoning, prefer the intellect of a person who had nothing to do with the secrets of prophecy over the intellect of a perfect man, who had reached a pinnacle entitling him to carry God's Message, then for her to carry out a critical experiment unknown to the Messenger of the Lord of All the Worlds, for him to be reassured by what she said, or by what was said by a man whose prestige rested on his knowledge of books which had undoubtedly been corrupted. We do not know what it was that the Messenger of God found in what she said that was the source of his reassurance, which he did not find in the Truth revealed to him from the presence of God, the Mighty and Wise.

Did not the true dreams which preceded his despatch on his mission, the angel's greeting him with 'Peace be upon you, Messenger of God' at the time of the despatch, the trees, stones and everything he passed on his way home to Khadījah's house greeting him, and his inherent knowledge which had deepened during the time spent alone at Hirā' convince him of the matter, such that he had to seek the reassurance of a woman, or a man who had become a Christian? This is nothing but a terrible detraction from the sacred standing of God's Messenger, if not an atrocious sacrilege.

Also, there is discrepancy in the rendition of the account which does not fit together, evidence *ab initio* that it does not stand up. According to one narration, Khadījah set off alone to Waraqah and told him what had happened. In another:

[174] See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 252-255; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 3-4; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, 97-99; Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk (Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī)*, (Cairo: al-Istiqāmah, 1358q.), vol. 2, 298-303; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 30, 161; Muhammad Ḥasanayn Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1354 q.), 95-96.

> ... she set off with me to Waraqah and said, 'Hear from your nephew.' He asked me and I told him. He said, 'This is the Archangel Gabriel who was sent down to Moses.

There is another narration according to which Waraqah ibn Nawfil met him while he was circumambulating the House and said, 'Nephew, tell me what you have seen and heard.' Thereafter the Messenger of God told him and so Waraqah said to him, 'I swear by Him in Whose Hand rests my soul that you are this nation's Prophet. If I live to see that, God knows what help I will give Him. Another says, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that Waraqah ibn Nawfil said, 'I said, "Muhammad, tell me about this one who comes to you," meaning Gabriel. He said, "He comes to me from Heaven, his wings are pearl and the bottoms of his feet are green."'[175] This is not in Khadījah's accounts regarding Waraqah or according to what the aforementioned authentic books (*ṣiḥāḥ*) say. Yet another says that Abū Bakr went to see Khadījah and she said, 'Set off with Muhammad to Waraqah,' and they set off together and told him the story.[176]

If the account is true, why did Waraqah not believe in him at that time, if he knew that he was a Prophet who had been sent?

According to the correct hadith, he died an unbeliever, not believing in the Prophet. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī says:

He was the last person to die during the period [the first years of the prophetic mission] and he was buried in al-Ḥujūn.

And adds:

> He was not a Muslim.

The same is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās:

> He died as a Christian.[177]

The matter of the Prophet's dream – where Waraqah was dressed in white – is also fabricated, and its chain of narration is broken. Otherwise, Waraqah would have been recorded among those who believed in the Prophet. Ibn 'Asākir says:

[175] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 5, 88; the narration is weak on account of Rawḥ ibn Musāfir. Waraqah died before Ibn 'Abbās was born.

[176] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 71.

[177] See Ali ibn Burhān al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Sīrat al-Ḥalabiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 1, 250.

I do not know anyone who has said that he became a Muslim.[178]

This is in spite of the fact that Waraqah lived beyond the commencement of the prophetic mission – the author of *al-Imtā'* says that Waraqah ibn Nawfil died after the fourth year. Burhān al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī writes:

What *Sīrat ibn Isḥāq* says agrees with it, as does *Kitāb al-Khamīs*.[179]

It is narrated that he passed by Bilāl while he was being tortured.[180] Ibn Ḥajar says that this proves that he lived beyond the beginning of the Prophet's call, his invitation to Bilāl and the latter's becoming a Muslim.

So why did he remain an unbeliever and not become a Muslim the way other people did? Why did he not help him the way other people helped him? He broke the promise mentioned in the myth.

Revelation Cannot Be Confused with Anything Else

This is the second matter referred to above. The Prophet cannot make a mistake over what is revealed to him. The matter can never be confused with anything else. When revelation was sent to the Prophet, the veil would be lifted from his eyes and he would see reality through his spiritual aspect, cut off from the vicissitudes of matter. At such a time, he would perceive manifestations and radiant illumination covering him from the heavenly realm, so that he could devote himself completely to meeting God's Spirit and receiving His Words. He would see the Essence of the Truth revealed to him with understanding and piercing vision, like someone who sees the sun in broad daylight. There is no possibility of error in his vision or confusion over what he understands.

Thus, revelation was not an idea which sprang from inside his mind, making it prone to error by inferring conclusions or the possibility of confusion in its application.[181] On the contrary, it is the clear perception of a present reality that rules out the possibility of error.

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[178] Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 3, 633.

[179] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 250.

[180] Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 3, 634.

[181] Error is only possible in two fields: either in the field of thought or seeing things in the real world, for example, because rational deduction has conditions and rules, which, if are ignored by the thinker, cause him to fall into error. The same applies to seeing things in the real world – if seen from afar, there may be error in terms of the application of deep-seated principles and information within oneself to the particulars

This illustrates a practical, philosophical method[182] which leads us to acknowledge the impossibility of revelation being erroneous. Hence God's law (*sharī'ah*) as revealed to His messengers is clear from the beginning of any possibility of error.

There is another rational method which demonstrates the infallibility of the prophets regarding what they communicate from God. Theologians discuss this in detail, and it can be summed up by saying that the prophet who communicates from God must, in accordance with the Law of Grace (*qā'idat al-luṭf*), be blessed with complete soundness of sensory perception and intellect, as well as in his opinions, speculation, moral behaviour, and even disposition and form. In a nutshell, God has to choose as a messenger someone with perfect formal qualities and ethics, so that people do not turn away from him, and instead have confidence in what he communicates from God. Otherwise, it would defeat the purpose of devising a code of law (*tashrī'*).

Therefore the Prophet is protected (*ma'sūm*) from error and forgetfulness, especially with regard to communicating the laws of the sharī'ah. This is the consensus of Muslims and other rational people who obey the Message of the Prophets. Otherwise, adhering to religious laws would be a folly which good sense would been inclined to reject.[183]

Also, it is impossible for Iblīs to come in disguise and interfere with what is revealed to the Prophet, by making evil insinuations in the form of revelation and tricking the Prophet into claiming that it is from God, because the Devil cannot take possession of the minds of God's messengers and honoured servants:

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observed. The error lies in this personal application and not in the actual thing seen, because seeing means imprinting an image from outside – an unchangeable reality – on the mind through the medium of the eye. This is a natural phenomenon which happens under given conditions. Admittedly, it is one's self which makes a decision on what is observed: 'That it is such-and-such.' But the error can only occur in the interpretation, and not in the actual perception. Therefore, insofar as revelation has nothing to do with either, that is, thinking or seeing from afar, and is the perception a present reality, there is no room for error.

[182] See Tabātabā'ī, *Wahy Ya Shu'ūr-e Marmūz* (Qum: Dār al-Fikr. n.d.), 104.

[183] See *Mabāhith al-'Iṣmah*, which is the third matter in the fourth *Maqṣad* (objective) of *Mabāhith al-Nubuwwah al-'Āmmah* (The Discussions on General Prophethood) in Jamāl al-Dīn al-Hasan ibn Yūsuf ibn 'Ali ibn al-Muṭahhar al-'Allāmah al-Hillī, *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharh Tajrīd al-I'tiqād* (Qum: Mu'assasatal-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1417 q.), 195.

> *Lo! My (faithful) bondmen - over them thou hast no power ...* (17:65);

for it would contradict the Almighty's Words:

> *And if he had invented false sayings concerning Us, We assuredly had taken him by the right hand ...* (69:44-45);

and:

> *Nor doth he (Muhammad) speak of (his own) desire. It is naught but an inspiration that is inspired, which one of mighty powers (Gabriel) hath taught him* (53:3-5);

the Devil having already said:

> *But I had no authority over you, save that I called unto you, and you responded to me* (14:22).

Therefore the supposition contradicts the Rule of Grace (*qā'idat al-luṭf*) referred to above and is inconsistent with the Almighty's Wisdom in sending prophets as explained earlier on.

It is true that Sunni hadith scholars believe that it is possible for the Devil to take possession of the Messenger's mind, as their tradition on the story of the cranes says, but this is something we believe to be impossible and, accordingly, a fabrication interpolated by those who want to detract from the Messenger's status and capture feeble minds. It is a story ripe for the picking by the enemies of Islam. Here is the text of the myth followed by a critique of it:

The Myth of the Cranes

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī narrates via a chain of narration which he claims to be authentic, on the authority of Muhammad ibn Ka'b, Muhammad ibn Qays, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, Ibn Abbās and others, that the Prophet was among a group of pagans from Quraysh in the open area around the Ka'bah or in one of its outhouses. It afflicted his soul if some of the Qur'an brought about fierce quarrelling between him and his people, because he was upset at being distanced from them and wished for harmony, at no matter what cost. When the chapter entitled *The Star* (*Sūrah al-Najm*) was revealed to him, he began reciting it until he reached:

> *Have ye thought upon Al-Lāt and Al-'Uzzā and Manāt, the third, the other?* (53:19-20);

and then the Devil recited to him: 'Those high cranes – their intercession is desired.'[184]

He thought it was revelation and recited it to the crowd of Quraysh. Then he carried on and recited the remainder of the chapter. When he completed it, he prostrated, the Muslims prostrated and the pagans also prostrated out of deference for the agreement Muhammad had shown them in honouring their gods and desiring their intercession. This news spread until it reached the migrants in Ethiopia, and they began returning to their homes in Mecca, joyful over this sudden accord, just as the Prophet, too, was joyful at the realisation of his old dream of uniting his people.

It is said that a white devil is what appeared to the Prophet in Gabriel's form and recited the words to him.

It is also said that the Prophet was praying by Abraham's footprints (*Maqām*) when drowsiness took hold of him, and the words rolled across his tongue without his realising it.

Alternatively, it is said that the Prophet spoke the words of his own accord, out of desire for Quraysh's hearts to be in accord, and later regretted it, for it was a lie about God.

Then, when night came, Gabriel came and said to him, 'Read me the chapter.' So the Prophet began reciting it until he reached the point in question. Then Gabriel said, 'Indeed! From where did you get these words?' So the Messenger of God felt remorse and said, 'I attributed them falsely to God and said that God had said what He did not say.' Then he felt severe sorrow and had a great fear of God.

It is said that the Prophet said to Gabriel, 'Someone who came to me in your form brought it to me and cast it upon my tongue.' So Gabriel said, 'God forbid that I should have recited this to you.' That troubled the Messenger of God and the following was revealed:

> *And they indeed strove hard to beguile thee from that wherewith We have inspired thee, that thou shouldst invent other than it against Us; and then would they have accepted thee as a friend. And if We had not*

[184] Cranes (*gharānīq*); here, *gharnūq* (sing.) means a soft, white youth. Its root meaning is the name of a waterbird (*mālik al-ḥazīn*), and it likens the pagan gods to white birds hovering in the sky, symbolising their nearness to God.

> *made thee wholly firm, thou mightest almost have inclined unto them a little. Then had We made thee taste a double (punishment) of living and a double (punishment) of dying, then hadst thou found no helper against Us* (17:73-75).

The Messenger's sorrow over this surprising incident was profound, and he remained grief-stricken and worried until the following was revealed:

> *Never sent We a messenger or a prophet before thee but when he recited (the message) Satan proposed (opposition) in respect of that which he recited thereof, but God abolisheth that which Satan proposeth. Then God establisheth His revelations. God is the Knower, Wise* (22:52).[185]

This was a consolation for his sorrowful heart, and his worry went away and his soul was happy.[186]

Criticism of the Hadith's Chain of Narration

Orientalists and those attacking the pure Islamic faith have become fond of this fabricated myth of the cranes, which is falsely attributed to the Prophet, and have broadcast it and stirred up false suppositions,[187] whereas it is a lie forged by the talents of storytellers and attributed by them to some of the successors (*tābi'īn*) and companions up to Ibn 'Abbās. The proof that it is a lie and falsely attributed is clear from its content.

Firstly, the chain of narration does not go back without a break to any of the companions. It is merely attributed to a number of successors and others who were not present at the time of the Prophet. Accordingly, the hadith has an unspecified source (*mursal*) and therefore lacks an unbroken chain of narration.

As for its being attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, this can hardly be the case, since Ibn 'Abbās was born in the third year before the Migration, and could not possibly have witnessed the incident. It could only possibly have been narrated to him.

Thus in all its forms, the tradition does not have an unbroken chain of narration going back to any witness to the incident, assuming it actually

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[185] This is discussed at the end of the section.

[186] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 17, 131-134; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 194 and 366-368; *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 333.

[187] See *The History of the Islamic Peoples* by Karl Brockelmann, 34.

happened. The rules governing the chains of narrations do not allow such a *mursal* hadith to be relied upon as evidence.

Secondly, Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqī, the Shafi'ī Imam known widely for his precise scrutiny says:

> This hadith is not proven in terms of narration. Its narrators are all disparaged.[188]

And al-Qāḍī 'Ayāḍ has said:

> None of the authors of authentic collections have cited this hadith, nor has it been narrated by any reliable source via a sound, unbroken chain of narration. Only historians enamoured of every strange thing and who piece together from pages every sound and sickly thing are enamoured of it.

Thirdly, the consensus of the critical judges among the scholars of Islam, both historically and latterly, is that the hadith is fabricated. They have decided it is an obvious lie, without paying attention to whether its chain of narration is unbroken or broken, sound or 'sickly,' because above all it contradicts the explicit text of the Qur'an, according to which:

> *Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or from behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise, the Owner of Praise* (41:42).

Imam Rāzī says:

> This is the account of all literalist exegetes. As for critical judges, they deem it to be false and fabricated. It has been argued against using many rational and textual arguments.[189]

Sayyid Ṭabāṭabā'ī says that the indisputable proofs of the infallibility of the Prophet refute the wording of the hadith even if its chain of narration is presumed to be authentic. It is essential to clear the Prophet's holiness of falsehoods like these which detract from the esteem in which the prophets are held.[190]

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[188] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 23, 50.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 14, 435.

Scribes of the Revelation

Ali, peace be on him, was the first to act as scribe for the Prophet in Mecca, and continued until the end of his lifetime.

One of his unique characteristics was that he did not let any revelation elude him and would write it all down in a book. The Prophet would even keep that which was revealed in his absence for him until he came back, and dictate it to him.

Another unique characteristic was that he would not restrict himself to writing down the text of the revelation, but would accompany it with whatever interpretation it needed and write that down as well.

Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilāli al-'Āmirī (who died around 90 AH and was one of the most eminent companions) narrates:

> I sat with Ali in Kufa in the mosque, and the people were around him. He said, 'Ask me before you lose me. Ask me about the Book of God, for I swear by God, not a single verse of the Book of God was revealed without God's Messenger making me recite it and teaching me the interpretation of it.' So Ibn al-Kawwā'[191] said, 'What about that which was revealed while you were away?' So he said, 'Yes. He would keep what I had missed and when I came to him, he would say to me, "Ali, God has revealed such-and-such and such-and-such while you were away." Then he would recite it to me. "The interpretation of it is such-and-such," and he would teach it to me.'[192]

The first to act as a scribe in Medina was Ubayy ibn Ka'b al-Anṣārī. He was one of the few who could write well at that time. He was the first to end letters with 'and So-and-So wrote.' The Prophet personally presented him with the Qur'an in its entirety, and he was among those

[191] His name was 'Abdullāh of Banī Yashkur. He was one of the Khārijite chiefs when they rebelled against Ali at the Battle of Ṣiffīn. He and a group then returned to the fold after being advised by Ibn 'Abbās. He would stay close to Ali asking him difficult questions, not with the intention of trying to understand but rather with the intention of trying to cause annoyance. Nevertheless, the Imām would give him wise answers a large number of which, filled with various fields of knowledge and humanities, have been preserved for us.

[192] Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* (Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 213-214.

who attended the last presentation. Later, he took on the supervision of the scribes during 'Uthmān's time, and was the authority they turned to whenever they disagreed with each other.[193]

Zayd ibn Thābit used to live near the Prophet and was a fortitudinous youth who wrote well. If Ubayy was away, the Prophet would send for Zayd to act as a scribe for him until he became one of the official scribes. Mostly he would attend to writing his letters and orders. The Prophet instructed him to learn Hebrew in Jewish schools of the time, called *māsilah*, to help him write his letters in Hebrew.

The main official scribes were Ali, Ubayy and Zayd, while others were secondary. Ibn al-Athīr writes:

> 'Abdullāh ibn al-Arqam al-Zuhrī was a regular letter writer. As for covenants and treaties, Ali would write them. A number of Companions were deemed to be his scribes including the three caliphs, Zubayr ibn al-'Awām, Khālid and Abān sons of Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ, Ḥanẓalah al-Usaydī, 'Alā' ibn al-Ḥaḍramī, Khālid ibn al-Walīd, 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah, Muhammad ibn Maslamah, 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Sullūl, Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, Jahm or Juhaym ibn al-Ṣalt, Mu'ayqab ibn Abī Fāṭimah and Sharḥabīl ibn Ḥasanah.

He adds:

> The first from Quraysh to write for him was 'Abdullāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Sarḥ. He migrated with him to Medina, then he apostatised and fled to Mecca, denouncing the Messenger of God, making fun of the matter of revelation. He would say to the Quraysh: 'I would turn Muhammad any way I wanted. He would dictate to me: 'Mighty, Wise,' and I would say, 'Or All-Knowing, Wise?' He would say, 'Yes, it's all correct.' On the day of the Conquest, the Prophet wanted to spill his blood. However, 'Uthmān – who was his milk brother through sharing the same wet nurse – interceded on his behalf, persisted and continued to do so until the Prophet

[193] See Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, part 2, 59; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 1, 19; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb*, vol. 1, 50-51; Abdullāh ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif* (Cairo, 1355 q.), 30

> forgave him after a long silence, wanting someone to take the initiative and kill him. He died under Mu'āwiyah's sponsorship in the year thirty-seven.[194]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says:

> What biographers say is that Ali, Zayd ibn Thābit and Zayd ibn Arqam used to write down the revelation. Ḥanẓalah ibn al-Rabī' al-Taymī and Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān used to write to kings and tribal chiefs for him, write down his daily requirements, and write down what charity monies came in and what shares were given to whom.[195]

It appears that those we mentioned were the number known for their knowledge of writing and the Messenger of God's using them for his needs in this respect.

Al-Balādhurī cites al-Wāqidī as saying:

> Islam appeared among the Quraysh when seventeen men knew how to write: Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ, Talḥah ibn 'Ubaydillāh, Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān, Abū Ḥudhayfah ibn 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah, Ḥāṭib ibn 'Amr brother of Suhayl ibn 'Amr al-'Āmirī, Abū Salamah ibn 'Abd al-Asad al-Makhzūmī, Abān ibn Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ ibn Umayyah, Khālid ibn Sa'īd and his brother 'Abdullāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī al-Sarḥ al-'Āmirī, Ḥuwayṭib ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā al-'Āmirī, Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb ibn Umayyah, Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, Juhaym ibn al-Ṣalt ibn Makhramah ibn al-Muṭṭalib ibn 'Abd Manāf and al-'Alā' ibn al-Ḥaḍramī.
>
> Among the women who knew how to write when Islam appeared were: Umm Kulthūm bint 'Uqbah, Karīmah bint al-Miqdād and al-Shifā' bint 'Abdillāh al-'Adawiyyah. The Messenger of God asked the latter to teach Ḥafṣah bint 'Umar how to write the way she

[194] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 1, 50 at the end of the entry for Ubayy ibn Ka'b and vol. 3, 173 under the entry for 'Abdallāh himself.

[195] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1959), vol. 1, 338.

had taught her *raqnat al-namlah*.[196] Umm Salamah knew how to read the Codex (*al-Muṣḥaf*) but did not know how to write. The same is true of 'Ā'ishah bint Abī Bakr.

He further reports from al-Wāqidī:

Ḥanẓalah ibn al-Rabī' ibn Rabāḥ al-Usaydī from Banū Tamīm happened to write in front of the Messenger of God once and he was named Ḥanẓalah the scribe.

And also:

Few among the Aws and Khazraj knew how to write Arabic. Some of the Jews knew how to write Arabic and the children in Medina had learnt from them since olden times. So when Islam came along there were among the Aws and Khazraj a number who knew how to write: Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah ibn Dulaym, al-Mundhir ibn 'Amr, Ubayy ibn Ka'ab and Zayd ibn Thābit – he could write Arabic and Hebrew[197] – Rāfi' ibn Mālik, Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr, Ma'an ibn 'Udayy al-Balawī, Bashīr ibn Sa'd, Sa'd ibn al-Rabī', Aws ibn Khūllī and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī al-Munāfiq.[198]

[196] *Al-Raqnah* means making oneself up with henna and saffron. *Raqnat al-namlah* may have been a way in which women made themselves up.

[197] Al-Wāqidi states via his chain of narration going back to Khārijah ibn Zayd that his father Zayd ibn Thābit said: The Messenger of God told me to learn Jewish writing. He said to me, 'I do not trust any Jew to do my writing for me. It only took me a little while to learn it. Then, I would write to the Jews for him. If they wrote to him I would read their letter.

[198] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 456-460.

CHAPTER III

THE DESCENT OF THE QUR'AN

There is an important matter linked to the revelation of the Qur'an and how it ties in with the beginning of the Message. This is because the commencement of the Prophetic Mission, which was in the month of Rajab, coincided with the revelation of some of the Qur'an (five verses from the beginning of *The Blood Clot* (*Surah al-'Alaq*), whereas the Qur'an explicitly states that it was revealed on the Night of Destiny during the month of Ramaḍān. How can this be reconciled? The same applies to determining the period over which the Qur'an was gradually revealed and the chapters which were revealed before the Migration, technically making them Meccan, and which were revealed after that, making them Medinan. Are there any verses which are exceptions regarding the chapters in which they are placed? The best answer is that there are no exceptions. If a chapter is Meccan, then all its verses are Meccan. The same principle applies to the Medinan chapters, because there is no reliable evidence of any exceptions, as we will explain in the detailed discussion of these elements which follows.

The Start of the Revelation - the Prophetic Mission

According to the eminent and reliable Sheikh Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, when the Prophet turned thirty-seven, he would see someone coming towards him in his dreams saying, 'Messenger of God!' He kept that to himself for some time. One day he was tending one of Abū Ṭālib's herds along the clefts in the mountains, when he saw someone who said to him, 'Messenger of God!' He asked, 'Who are you?' and the other replied, 'I am Gabriel; God sent me to you to make you a messenger.' He began teaching him ablution from minor impurity, and prayer. That was when he was forty. So one day Ali came in while he was praying. He asked, 'Abu al-Qāsim, what is this?' He replied, 'It is the prayer which God has told me to perform.' So he began praying with him. Khadījah joined them as a third. Ali would pray on the Messenger of God's right hand side and

Khadījah would be behind him. Thereafter, Abū Ṭālib told his son Ja'far to pray on the Messenger of God's left hand side. Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, the slave freed by the Messenger of God,[199] had become a Muslim when the Messenger of God became a Prophet and he would also pray with them. Through this group the seed of Islam was planted.[200]

The Imam's exegesis[201] says that:

> The Messenger of God would go out to Ḥirā' every morning and look at the signs of God's Mercy, pondering on the Kingdom of Heaven and the Earth and worshipping God as He should be worshipped until he was about to turn forty. God found his noble heart to be the best, most sublime, most obedient and humblest of hearts. He granted permission for the Gates of Heaven to open. He granted the angels permission to descend and for Muhammad to observe. Mercy came down upon him from the leg of the Throne. He looked at the trustworthy one, Gabriel, crowned with light. He came down to him, grabbed his upper arm, shook it and said, 'Muhammad, recite!' He asked, 'What shall I recite?' He replied:

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[199] It is said that the Messenger of God bought him for Khadījah. When he married her she gave him to him as a gift. The Messenger of God freed him. Alternatively, it is said that Khadījah asked her nephew Ḥakīm ibn Ḥuzām ibn Khuwaylid to give him to her as a gift when he came to Mecca with slaves, among whom was Zayd, who was still a boy who had not yet reached adolescence. He said to her, 'Aunt, choose whichever of these slaveboys you like.' She chose Zayd, then gave him to the Messenger of God as a gift. The Messenger of God freed him and adopted him.

[200] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 184 and 194.

[201] *Tafsīr al-Imām*, 157. This exegesis is attributed to the eleventh Imām, al-Ḥasan ibn Ali al-'Askarī. Some careful critics have refuted this attribution because of the shocking things it contains. However, if what is meant is that it is the Imām's work written by him personally and his own composition, then it is categorically unacceptable. However, if the imputation is with regard to the narrator's having attended the Imām's class and asked him things pertaining to the exegesis of verses of the Qur'an, then having returned home and written down what he remembered, possibly adding or omitting things in accordance with his personal knowledge, then it is something which cannot be denied. This is what we believe. Thus, we rely on much of what is included in this exegesis that is in accordance with other authentic sources. See also Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 205-206.

Recite: In the Name of thy Lord Who createth, createth man from a blood clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, teacheth man that which he knew not (96:1-5).

Then he revealed to him what he revealed. Gabriel ascended to his Lord and Muhammad came down from the mountain. He had fainted from God's greatness and the sublimity of His splendour which gave him a severe fever. The fear of Quraysh's calling him a liar and attributing it to insanity weighed on him, his being the most rational of God's creatures and the noblest of his created beings. The thing he hated most was the devil and the things mad people do, so God wanted to encourage his heart and sooth his breast, so every time he passed by a stone or tree it would call out to him, 'Peace be upon you, Messenger of God.'

In his commentary on Nahj al-Balāghah, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says:

One of Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Bāqir's companions asked him about God's Words, Mighty and Sublime is He:

> *... save unto every messenger whom He hath chosen, and then He maketh a guard to go before him and a guard behind him ... (72:27).*

He replied, 'Almighty God appoints angels for His prophets to count their deeds and to report to Him on their propagation of the message. He appointed a great angel for Muhammad from the time he was weaned to guide him towards good deeds and the best manners and keep him away from evil deeds and bad manners. It was he who would call out to him, 'Peace be upon you, Muhammad, Messenger of God,' when he was a young man and had not yet reached the state of being a messenger. He would think it was coming from a stone or the earth and look closely but not see anything.'[202]

See the Sermon of Disparagement for some of the Commander of the Faithful's words on this matter, some of which is cited above. It is Sermon no. 238 in *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd.

According to *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*:

[202] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, 207.

> Before Gabriel appeared to the Messenger of God with God's Message to him, he would receive and be marked out with the signs of someone whom God wants to honour and single out for His favour. An example of that was the aforementioned tradition about the two angels who came to him, cleft open his belly,[203] and extracted the rancour and impurity from it while he was with his wetnurse Ḥalīmah. Another example was his never passing a tree or stone when walking along a road without their greeting him.

Similarly:

> When he went out on errands he would go out so far that he could not see any houses. He would reach the clefts [between mountains] and the bottoms of valleys and not pass by a single stone or tree without its saying, 'Peace be upon you, Messenger of God.' He would turn to the right, left and right around but not see anyone.[204]

Based on al-Ya'qūbī's account:

> Gabriel would appear to him and speak to him or perhaps call to him from Heaven, from a tree or from a mountain. Then, he would say to him, 'Your Lord commands you to avoid the impurity of idols.' That was his first order. The Messenger of God would come to Khadījah, daughter of Khuwaylid, tell her what he had heard and talk about it. She would say to him, 'Keep it quiet, cousin. I swear by God that I hope God will do you good.[205]

The Messenger of God was forty when he was despatched on his prophetic mission. It was ten years into the reign of Khusraw Abarwīz ibn Hurmuz ibn Anushirwan.[206] According to al-Ya'qūbī:

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[203] These words do not appear in any hadith transmitted from the People of the Household. They may signify intangible matters, and be for protecting him from shameful characteristics.

[204] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 2, 294-295.

[205] Aḥmad ibn Abī Ya'qūb ibn Ja'far ibn Wahb ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Najaf: al-Maktabat al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1384 q.), vol. 2, 17.

[206] 'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1399 q.), vol. 2, 29-30.

> He was despatched on the prophetic mission in the month of Rabī' al-Awwal, or as stated in the alternative, Ramaḍān. According to the non-Arab calendar it was in February.

He continues:

> Gabriel came to him on Friday night and Saturday night. Then, he appeared to him with the Message on Monday.[207]

Ibn Sa'd states:

> The angel came down to the Messenger of God in Ḥirā' on Monday the seventeenth of the month of Ramaḍān.[208]

According to Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī:

> This, that is, the revelation of the Message to him on a Monday, is something over which no people of knowledge disagree. They only disagree over which Monday it was. Some of them say that the Qur'an was revealed to God's Messenger on the eighteenth of Ramaḍān. Others say the twenty-fourth. Others say the seventeenth of the month of Ramaḍān. They rely on the Almighty's Words, *and that which We revealed unto Our slave on the Day of Separation, the day when the two armies met* (8:41), as evidence of that. It refers to God's Messenger's confrontation with the pagans at Badr, which was on the morning of the seventeenth of Ramaḍān.[209]

However, there is no indication in the verse that his despatch coincided with that date, first of all, because what is meant is the proofs of truth and signs of victory sent down to him, not the entire Qur'an or the commencement of its revelation. Secondly, we shall refer to the fact that the commencement of the revelation of the Qur'an, as heavenly scripture, came after the day he was despatched with the message, for he was despatched as a messenger to the people on 27 Rajab, and the Qur'an was revealed to him in the month of Ramaḍān on the Night of Destiny. It is possible that it was after a period of three years, as stated below. Thirdly, 'the Day of Separation' means the day on which truth was separated from and defeated falsehood, making it wane. It was a critical

[207] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 17-18.

[208] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 129.

[209] *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 2, 293-294.

day in the life of the Muslims. The Devil despaired on that day of ever being worshipped or obeyed.[210]

According to al-Mas'ūdī:

> The first part of the Qur'an to be revealed to him was:
>
> *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord...*
>
> Gabriel came to him on Friday night, then on Saturday night and addressed him, and communicated the Message to him on Monday. That was in Ḥirā'. It was the first place in which the Qur'an was revealed. He uttered the first chapter to him up to the words:
>
> *taught man what he knew not,*
>
> and the rest was revealed after that.That was five years after the Ka'bah was built, at the beginning of the twentieth year into Khusraw Abarwīz's reign and at the beginning of the two hundredth year after the treaty at Rabadhah.[211]
>
> It was six hundred and nine years after the birth of Christ.[212]

In our opinion, the correct date for his despatch on the mission was the twenty-seventh day of the month of Rajab, according to the People of the Household's traditions. It is commendable to fast and perform rites exclusive to that day, which the Imami Shi'a adhere to every year in veneration of this hallowed day on which blessing descended upon all people of the earth from the Gates of Heaven. It is because the Prophet was sent as a mercy to all the worlds that is is such a blessed day.

According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> On the twenty-seventh day of Rajab, prophethood came down upon the Messenger of God.[213]

He says:

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[210] See al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, *Tafsīru Shubbar* (Cairo: al-Sayyid Murtaḍā al-Raḍawī, 1966), 195.

[211] Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-Dhahab* (Beirut: al-Sharikah al-'Ālamiyyah li al-Nashr, 1989), vol. 2, 282.

[212] Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islamī*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥilāl, 1958), vol. 1, 43.

[213] Ibn al-Sheikh, *al-Amālī* (Najaf, n.d.) 28; see Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 189.

> Do not fail to fast on the twenty-seventh day of Rajab, for it is the day on which prophethood came down upon Muhammad.[214]

Imām Riḍā explains:

> God, Mighty and Sublime is He, sent Muhammad as a mercy to all the worlds on the twenty-seventh of Rajab. God will record sixty months' fasting for whoever fasts on that day.[215]

The People of the Household's traditions on this matter are numerous.[216] Similarly, Ahl al-Sunnah have traditions specifying the same day.

In his biography, Ḥāfiẓ Dimyāṭī cites Abū Hurayrah:

> Almighty God will record sixty months' fasting for whoever fasts on the twenty-seventh of Rajab. It is the day on which Gabriel brought the Message down to the Prophet and the first day on which Gabriel came down.[217]

Bayhaqī narrates on the authority of Salmān al-Fārisī in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*:

> There is a night and day in Rajab. Whoever fasts that day and stands that night in prayer will be as one who has fasted for a hundred years and stood in prayer for a hundred years. It is three days before the end of Rajab. On that day God despatched Muhammad on the mission.[218]

The author of al-Manāqib narrates on the authority of both Ibn 'Abbās and Anas ibn Mālik:

> God revealed to Muḥammad on Monday the twenty-seventh of Rajab. He was forty years old.[219]

According to 'Allāmah Majlisī:

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[214] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, 149.

[215] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 4, 149.

[216] See Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī), vol. 7, 329.

[217] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 238.

[218] Ali ibn Ḥasān al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummāl*, (printed in the margin of Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), vol. 3, 362.

[219] Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 1, 173; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 205.

They have five divergent opinions on the day on which the Prophet was despatched:

First: the seventeenth of the month of Ramaḍān;

Second: the eighteenth of the month of Ramaḍān;

Third: the twenty-fourth of the month of Ramaḍān;

Fourth:the twentieth of Rabī' al-Awwal;

Fifth: the twenty-seventh of Rajab.

The Shi'a are agreed on the last one.[220]

My comment is that there are two more opinions – the eighth of Rabī' al-Awwal and the third of Rabī' al-Awwal – referred to by Ibn Burhān al-Ḥalabī in his biography. He then states the opinion that it was the twelfth of Rabī' al-Awwal – the day of the Prophet's birthday – to conform with the opinion that he was despatched at the beginning of the fortieth year.[221]

We consider that the majority of those who say that he was despatched in the month of Ramaḍān may have confused the beginning of his prophethood with the commencement of the revelation of the Qur'an as a Book in which there is clarification of everything. This confusion seems to arise from the interpretation of everything that indicates that the Qur'an was revealed on the Night of Destiny in the month of Ramaḍān as evidence of the date of his despatch. We can demonstrate that there is no link between the two incidents. He was despatched on the 27th Rajab. However, the Qur'an began to be revealed to the Prophet in the month of Ramaḍān – on the Night of Destiny– three years after he had become a prophet. The duration of his prophethood was twenty three years. However, the revelation of the Qur'an was spread over twenty years. It commenced at the beginning of the fourth year after the despatch and ended with his death in the tenth year after the Migration.

[220] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 190.

[221] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 238.

The Beginning of the Revelation of the Qur'an

There is no doubt that the Qur'an was revealed to the Messenger of God on the Night of Destiny in the blessed month of Ramaḍān according to the Almighty's Words:

> *The month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the Qur'an* (2:185);
>
> *We have sent it down in a blessed night* (44:3)

and:

> *Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Destiny* (97:1).

According to us, the Night of Destiny is one of two of the last ten nights of the blessed month of Ramaḍān – either the 21st or the 23rd. It is more likely to be the latter on the basis of al-Juhanī's tradition.[222]

According to al-Ṣadūq:

> Our Sheikhs unanimously agree that it is the twenty-third night.[223]

Working out the date of the Night of Destiny is not the matter at hand. All that concerns us is the assessment of certain aspects of it, such as the revelation of the Qur'an on a single night – the Night of Destiny – within the month of Ramaḍān.

Firstly, it appears to contradict what we have stated above regarding the Shi'a consensus and a number of traditions circulated by others which say that the despatch was in Rajab. There is no doubt that the despatch coincided with the revelation of some verses – five verses from the beginning of *The Blood Clot* (*Sūrah al-'Alaq*) – so how can that be, considering the belief that the Qur'an was revealed in its entirety or partially at the beginning of its revelation in the month of Ramaḍān on the Night of Destiny?

Secondly, what is meant by the Qur'an being revealed on a single night – the Night of Destiny? Was the entire Qur'an revealed in one go on that night, even though we know that the Qur'an was revealed in instalments

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[222] See al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 7, 262.

[223] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl* (Qum: Jāmi'at al-Mudarrisīn, 1403 q.), 519.

over a period of twenty or twenty-three years, coinciding with various incidents and circumstances called the reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*)? How do these matters relate to each other?

And thirdly, what was the first verse or chapter of the Qur'an to be revealed? If it were *The Blood Clot* (*Sūrah al-'Alaq*), or verses from it, why is *The Praise* (*al-Ḥamd*) called *The Opening of the Book* (*Fātiḥat al-Kitāb*)? It cannot mean that it was written at the beginning of the codex, because this arrangement came after the death of the Prophet, or at the very least during a late stage in his life, in spite of the fact that it had from the time it was first revealed been known as *The Opening*. According to a tradition from the Prophet's tongue, there is no prayer without *The Opening*[224].

To answer these three questions in broad terms, we say that the beginning of the mission is different from the commencement of the Qur'an's revelation as Heavenly Scripture, because the Prophet was only commanded to tell everyone that he was a prophet three years after having become one, during which period he invited people in secret, until the following verse was revealed:

> *So proclaim that which thou art commanded, and withdraw from the idolaters* (15:94).

From that time onwards, the Qur'an began to be revealed serially as a Book sent down from Heaven. It was recorded over twenty years on palm leaves and pottery, written down by a small number of believers who knew how to write.

The revelation of the Qur'an commenced after the initial phase, on the Night of Destiny, in the month of Ramaḍān. In this respect, it is true to say that the Qur'an was revealed on the Night of Destiny, even though its revelation was spread over twenty years, because every important event has a particular duration, and history records its first appearance, as will be discussed in detail.

As for the earliest revelation, it was the first five verses of *The Blood Clot* (*Sūrah al-'Alaq*). The rest of it was revealed later on. However, the first complete chapter of the Qur'an to be revealed was *The Praise* (*Sūrah al-Ḥamd*), and hence it was called *The Opening* (*al-Fātiḥah*). This is a summary of these matters which are followed up in more detail below.

[224] Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 3, 180.

The period of three years

Let us suppose that the despatch was in Rajab, in line with the tradition of the People of the Household and a number of others. However, the Qur'an, as a Heavenly Book and eternal, divine constitution, was only revealed three years later; in the interim, the Prophet hid his mission from the people at large and invited individuals to God in secret. Hence, apart from verbal attacks, the pagans did not set about harassing him, because they did not see in his affair anything to fear for their religion.

Four people would pray with the Messenger of God at that time: Ali, Ja'far, Zayd and Khadījah. Every time a crowd of Quraysh passed by them they would mock them.

According to Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī:

> After three years, God revealed to him: *So proclaim that which thou art commanded, and withdraw from the idolaters. Lo! We defend thee from the scoffers ...* (15:94-95). He says that that was three years after he was made a Prophet.[225]

Al-Ya'qūbī states:

> The Messenger of God remained in Mecca for three years, hiding his mandate.[226]

Muhammad ibn Isḥāq says:

> Three years after he was despatched, *So proclaim that which thou art commanded...* was revealed and he was instructed to make his call public and issue counsel for everyone.[227]

According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> The Messenger of God remained in Mecca for thirteen years after revelation came to him from Blessed and Almighty God, including three years out of view and afraid, not exposing his mandate

[225] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1. 378; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 53 and 179.

[226] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 19.

[227] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, 1:280; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 1, 43; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 193-194.

> until God told him to proclaim what he had been commanded and make his call known.[228]

If we consider these traditions in conjunction with the traditions that say that the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet over a period of twenty years, they tell us that the Qur'anic revelation comenced three years after the despatch, because there is no doubt that the revelation continued right up until the year of his death. This fits in with the opinion that the Qur'anic revelation commenced in the month of Ramaḍān on the Night of Destiny, as explicitly stated in the Holy Qur'an itself.

Imām al-Ṣādiq said:

> Then the Qur'an was revealed over twenty years.

This is according to Kulaynī's[229] and al-'Ayyāshī's[230] traditions, and al-Ṣadūq[231] and Majlisī[232] alluded to it; there are many texts which specify that the period during which the Qur'an was revealed was twenty years.[233]

The tradition on the authority of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab makes a similar allusion:

> Revelation came down to the Prophet when he was forty-three years old.[234]

This would be so, because there is no doubt that prophethood devolved upon him when he had completed forty years. If everyone else agrees on this, then how can it elude someone like Sa'īd?

Al-Wāḥidī narrates via a chain of narration going back to al-Sha'bī:

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[228] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghaybah* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Ma'ārif al-Islamiyyah, 1411 q.), 333; al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, 344; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 177.

[229] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 628-629.

[230] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 80.

[231] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Mūsā ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt fī Dīn al-Imāmiyyah* (lithograph, Tehran: Markaz Nashr Kitāb, 1370 s.), 101.

[232] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 250 and 253.

[233] See al-Suyūṭī *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 118 and *Tafsīru Shubbar*, 350.

[234] Abū 'Abdillāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah), vol. 2, 610.

> God divided up His Revelation and its beginning to end was a period of twenty years, or roughly twenty years.[235]

Even clearer is what Imām Aḥmad narrates via an unbroken chain back to 'Āmir al-Sha'bī:

> Prophethood came down upon the Messenger of God when he was forty years old, so Raphael was linked to his prophethood for three years. He would teach him, but the Qur'an was not revealed. After three years, Gabriel was linked to his prophethood and the Qur'an was revealed upon his tongue over twenty years, ten in Mecca and ten in Medina. He died when he was sixty-three years old. According to Ibn Kathīr, it is an authentic chain of narration back to al-Sha'bī.[236]

Even though this tradition contains things which we do not concede, which may be the result of al-Sha'bī's own interpretation (*ijtihād*), what is of use to us in this narration is the reference to the Qur'an's revelation taking twenty years, and that it commenced three years after the despatch. This is something upon which there is consensus.

Views and Interpretations

Scholars have various opinions and interpretations of what is meant by the revelation of the Qur'an on the Night of Destiny in the month of Ramaḍān. In view of the fact that we know that the Qur'an was revealed serially over twenty or twenty three years, and at particular times and in various circumstances, the following assertions have been made:

1) That the revelation began on the Night of Destiny in the month of Ramaḍān.

This is the view of Muhammad ibn Isḥāq[237] and al-Sha'bī[238]. According to Imām Rāzī:

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[235] Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Aḥmad al-Wāhidī, *Asbābu Nuzūl al-Āyāt* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakā'ihi li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1968), 3.

[236] Abu al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1988), vol. 3, 4; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 128; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 127; Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 18.

[237] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 276.

[238] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 119.

> That is because calendars are based on when nations and states begin, on account of their being the most important times, and because they are also precise, known times.[239]

Zamakhsharī also explains the verse this way:

> Its revelation to him began then.[240]

This is the opinion we adopt in view of the fact that if any important event is protracted over a period of time, history records its start date, just as with the time of the formation of a state, foundation or particular group, or some other particular event; for if one is asked about such things, the answer will invariably be the date when it began.

Also, there are God's Words, *wherein the Qur'an was sent down* (2:185), and other such verses, for if it were otherwise, they would be in the present tense or adjectival. These very words are evidence that some of the Qur'an was revealed after the Night of Destiny, unless of course they are interpreted without reference to evidence, as will be explained below, just as the the relevence of different verses accord with particular circumstances. This the greatest proof that they were revealed in different places, because it links every specific verse with a particular time and place. This is true of every verse that pertains to a particular incident at a particular time – the verse is revealed there and then, to address the situation. All this proves that the Qur'an was not all revealed at once. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for the pagans to say:

> *Why is the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?* (25:32).

The Almighty responded as follows:

> *(It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart therewith; and We have arranged it in right order* (25:32)

This means that it was more supportive for the revelation to be in instalments and at appropriate times, so that the Prophet's heart would be reassured with the realisation of the presence of God's continuous care at all times and on every occasion.

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[239] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, 85.

[240] Abu al-Qāsim Jārallāh Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1947), vol. 1, 227.

Ibn Shahr Āshūb also expresses this opinion in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, where he says:

> The month of Ramaḍān wherein the Qur'an was sent down means the revelation began.

In *Mutashābihāt al-Qu'rān* he contends that:

> The correct view is that 'Qur'an' here does not mean the whole of it. Instead it means the genus. Anything revealed fits the literal meaning.[241]

It appears from the end of his response to Abū Ja'far al-Ṣadūq *infra* that Sheikh Mufīd is also of this opinion:

> What may be meant by the tradition which says that the Qur'an was revealed *jumlatan* on the Night of Destiny is that a portion (*jumlatun*) of it was revealed on the Night of Destiny. Then, it was followed by revelations up until the Prophet's death. As for its being revealed in its entirety on the Night of Destiny, that is far from what the literal meaning of the Qur'an, indubitable traditions (*al-mutawātir min al-akhbār*) and the consensus of the scholars dictate, in spite of the difference in their opinions.[242]

2) What people needed that year from the Qur'an would be revealed to the Prophet every Night of Destiny. Then, as needed, Gabriel would bring down what Almighty God told him to. Thus, what is meant by 'Ramaḍān' is every Ramaḍān, not a specific Ramaḍān. It is an explanation which Imām Rāzī believed to be possible.[243]

This opinion is adopted by Ibn Jurayj[244] and al-Suddī, and also attributed by the latter to Ibn 'Abbās.[245] Al-Qurṭubī cites it on the authority of Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān, and al-Ḥalīmī and al-Mārūdi agree with it.[246]

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[241] Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 1, 173; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Mutashābih al-Qur'an wa Mukhtalafuh* (Qum: Bīdār, 1328 s.), vol. 1, 63.

[242] Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥu I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyyah*, 58.

[243] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, 85.

[244] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 189.

[245] Ṭabrisī , *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 276.

[246] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 118.

However, this choice contradicts the literal meaning of the Almighty's Words *wherein...was sent down* (2:185) and *We sent it down* (97:1), which refer to a past event, otherwise it would have been more appropriate to say, 'We are sending it down (*nunazziluhu*).'

Another problem with this is what we think to be remote about the fifth opinion (see *infra*), which asks why the Qur'an would be revealed before it is needed. And this is indicative of its being revealed in relation to particular incidents, and not before.

3) *Shahru Ramaḍān alladhī unzila fīhi al-Qur'an* means 'The month of Ramaḍān, about which the Qur'an was revealed,' and is used in this context to mean that fasting was made mandatory, just as one says the Qur'an was revealed about So-and-So or about such-and-such an occasion. What is meant here by 'the Qur'an' is one or more verses of it.[247]

According to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, *Shahru Ramaḍān alladhī unzila fīhi al-Qur'an* (2:185) means the month of Ramaḍān regarding which the duty to fast was revealed in the Qur'an.[248] This is the opinion chosen by al-Husayn ibn al-Faḍl and Ibn al-Anbāri.[249]

However, this explanation is restricted to the verse in *The Cow* (*Sūrah al-Baqarah*). It does not apply to the verses in *The Smoke* (*Sūrah al-Dukhān*) and *The (Night of) Destiny* (*Sūrah al-Qadr*), as is obvious, not to mention that it is an interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the wording for which there is no reason or evidential basis.

4) Most of the Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramaḍān. Hence it is correct to attribute the whole of it to it. This is a second explanation considered to be possible by Sayyid Quṭb. He asserts:

> The month...wherein the Qur'an was sent down means either that its revelation began in the month of Ramaḍān or that most of it was revealed during months of Ramaḍān.[250]

However, there is no evidence that most of the verses of the Qur'an were revealed during months of Ramaḍān, or specifically on the Night of Destiny. It may be more realistic to dismiss this possibility altogether.

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[247] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 276; Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 227.

[248] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 190.

[249] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, 85.

[250] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1400 q.), vol. 2, 245.

5) The Qur'an was sent down complete on one night, namely the Night of Destiny, to the House of Might (*Bayt al-'Izzah*) or the Inhabited House (*al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*). Then, it was sent down to the Messenger of God at different times in relation to particular events over a period of twenty or twenty- three years. A number of hadith scholars believe this in light of the literal meaning of various traditions.

Sheikh Ṣadūq states:

> The Qur'an was sent down complete in the month of Ramaḍān on the Night of Destiny to the Inhabited House in the Fourth Heaven. Then it was sent down from the Inhabited House over a period of twenty years. God gave the knowledge to the Prophet in one go. Then, He said to him: *And hasten not with the Qur'an ere its revelation hath been perfected unto thee...* (20:114).[251]

'Allāmah Majlisī says as a follow-up to this statement:

> Verses indicate that the Qur'an was sent down on the Night of Destiny. It is likely that it was sent down in its entirety. Textual evidence and oral narrations indicate that it was sent down over twenty[252] or twenty-three years.[253] Some traditions say that the Qur'an was sent down on the first night of the month of Ramaḍān. Some indicate that its revelation began with the despatch.[254] They can be reconciled by saying that on the Night of Destiny, the Qur'an came down complete from the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) to the Fourth Heaven (the Inhabited House), to come gradually down from the fourth heaven to the earth.
>
> The whole of the Qur'an came down to the Prophet on the first night of the month of Ramaḍān for him to know, but not to recite to the people. Then, it began to be revealed verse by verse and

[251] Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt fī Dīn al-Imāmiyyah*, 101.

[252] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 628-629.

[253] The length of his prophethood, assuming that the revelation began on the day he was despatched on the prophetic mission and ended with his passing.

[254] Narrations indicating that the first chapter to be revealed was *The Blood Clot*, revealed at the beginning of the despatch on 27 Rajab. See Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 39; vol. 18, 206.

> chapter by chapter at the despatch and at other times for him to recite to the people.[255]

Ṭabarānī and others cite on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that the Qur'an was sent down complete on the Night of Destiny to the Lower Heaven and it was placed in the House of Might (*bayt al-'izzah*). Thereafter, it was sent down to the Prophet serially over twenty years.

According to Jalāl al-Dīn, this is the likeliest and most commonly held opinion. Many traditions, most of which are deemed to be authentic, are narrated to that effect on the authority of Hākim, Ṭabarānī, Bayhaqī, Nisā'ī and others.[256]

Ṭabarī narrates via his chain of narration on the authority of Wāthilah ibn al-Asqa' that the Prophet said:

> The scrolls of Abraham were sent down on the first night of the month of Ramaḍān, the Torah was sent down six days into Ramaḍān, the Gospel was sent down thirteen days in, and the Qur'an was sent down on the twenty-fourth of Ramaḍān.[257]

Ṭabarī also says that al-Suddī says on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās:

> 'The month of Ramaḍān' and 'the Blessed Night' mean the Night of Destiny, for the Night of Destiny is the Blessed Night. And it is in Ramaḍān. The Qur'an was sent down in one go to the Inhabited House. It is the position of the stars in the world's heaven where the Qur'an fell. Then it came down to Muhammad after that, with regard to commands and prohibitions and about wars, little by little.[258]

Doubt about this verse had crept into 'Aṭiyyah ibn al-Aswad's soul, because the Qur'an had come down in all the months of the year. So he asked Ibn 'Abbās about it and he gave him the above answer.[259]

So, too, narrates Jalāl al-Dīn via his chain of narration back to Jābir ibn 'Abdillāh al-Anṣāri:

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[255] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 253-254.

[256] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 116-117.

[257] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 84.

[258] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 84-85.

[259] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 189.

> God sent the scrolls of Abraham down on the first night of Ramaḍān, sent the Torah down to Moses six days into Ramaḍān, sent the Psalms down to David twelve days into Ramaḍān, sent the Gospel down to Jesus eighteen days into Ramaḍān, and sent the Furqān down to Muhammad twenty-four days into Ramaḍān.[260]

Via our chains of narration, 'Ayyāshī narrates that Ibrāhīm asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the Almighty's Words:

> *The month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the Qur'an...* (2:185)
>
> How was the Qur'an sent down in this way when the Qur'an was sent down over twenty years from beginning to end?

The Imām replied:

> The Qur'an came down complete in the month of Ramaḍān to the Inhabited House. Then it was sent down from the Inhabited House over twenty years.

He then continued:

> The Prophet said, 'The scrolls of Abraham came down on the first night of the month of Ramaḍān, the Torah was sent down six nights into the month of Ramaḍān, the Gospel thirteen nights into the month of Ramaḍān, the Psalms were sent down on the eighteenth of Ramaḍān, and the Qur'an was sent down on the twenty-fourth of Ramaḍān.[261]

The same hadith also appears in *al-Kāfī*, except that it says at the end:

> ...and the Qur'an was sent down on the twenty-third of the month of Ramaḍān.

The narration is on the authority of al-Ḥafṣ ibn Ghiyāth.[262]

Part of the hadith appears in *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, narrated by Abū Baṣīr. At the end it says:

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[260] Ibid.

[261] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 80.

[262] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 628-629.

...and the Furqān came down on the Night of Destiny.[263]

These are collected traditions which explain the Qur'an's being sent down in one go in one night, either to the Inhabited House in the Fourth Heaven according to Shi'a narrations, or to the House of Might in the Lower Heaven according to some Sunni narrations; from there, its verses came down separately, little by little to the Messenger of God in relation to particular circumstances.

Hadith literalists take these traditions at face value, and seek comfort for themselves by straightforward acceptance.

In contrast, critical scholars were not content to merely accept what seemed incomprehensible; there is, after all, no duty to slavishly accept anything which has nothing to do with the fundamentals of worship. Hence, they began criticising these hadiths in a scholarly fashion, asking themselves what palpable good there was in the Qur'an's coming down all at once to one of the High Heavens, then coming down gradually to the Messenger of God.

In answer to this question, Fakhr Rāzī says that it may be that it was to make it easy for Gabriel, or for the benefit of the Prophet who would be awaiting revelation from the nearest point.[264]

However, this response is very weak and has no foundation. Furthermore, it is conjecture about the unseen. We are surprised at such empty words issuing from someone so skilled in analysis.

Mawlā[265] Fayḍ Kāshānī says:

> It is as if this means its coming down to the Prophet's heart, as in the Almighty's Words, *Which the True Spirit brought down upon thy heart...*(26:193-194). Thereafter it came down in instalments spread over twenty years, from the bottom of his heart to the tip of his tongue, every time Gabriel brought him revelation and recited it to him in words.[266]

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[263] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām fī Sharḥ al-Muqanni'ah li al-Sheikh al-Mufīd* (Tehran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1365 s.), vol. 4, 193-194.

[264] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, 85.

[265] Honorific title translatable as 'Master.' [Trans.]

[266] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 42.

He interprets the Inhabited House as the Messenger's heart, and it is possible that al-Ṣadūq also means the same by saying that:

> He gave the knowledge to the Prophet in one fell swoop.

Sheikh Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī also favours the same interpretation of this tradition. He contends:

> We may say that the spirit of the Qur'an, namely the universal objective for which it is intended, manifested to his noble heart on that night: *Which the True Spirit brought down upon thy heart...* (26:193-194). Then it appeared on his actual tongue spread over twenty years: *And (it is) a Qur'an which We have divided, that thou mayst recite it unto mankind at intervals, and We have revealed it by (successive) revelation* (17:106).[267]

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī takes this interpretation and explores it further, asserting:

> The Book has another reality beyond what we comprehend through ordinary understanding. It is a reality with a coherent unity which cannot be divided up or broken into parts, on account of its going back to a single meaning with no parts or sections. This division into sections seen in the Scripture only happened subsequent to the coherent unity. God said, *(This is) a Book whose verses are perfected (uḥkimat) and then expounded (fuṣṣilat), from One Wise, Informed ...* (11:1); *this is indeed a noble Qur'an in a Book kept hidden which none toucheth save the purified* (56:77-79); and, *Verily We have brought them a Scripture which We expound with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe* (7:52).
>
> So what is meant by the Qur'an's being sent down on the Night of Destiny is the Book's consolidated reality being sent down, all at once, to the Messenger's heart, just as the divided up Book was gradually sent down in parts, also to his heart, throughout the duration of his calling as a prophet.[268]

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[267] See *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 10.

[268] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 2, 14-16. This is heavily paraphrased as is the author's custom when quoting. [Trans.]

What he says is all very well. However, it is no more than a particular reading which has no evidence. Above all, the matter is textual, and neither rational nor academic. Hence we might ask these luminaries what the basis is for interpreting the Inhabited House – which is in the Fourth Heaven according to Shi'a traditions, or the House of Might according to Sunni traditions – as the Prophet's heart. Why was this expression worded this way?

In the section on allegorical verses, we shall debate Sayyid 'Allāmah's view of there being more than one dimension to the Qur'an.

A useful enquiry

According to al-'Allāmah al-Sheikh Abū 'Abdillāh al-Mufīd:

> The basis of the position taken by Abū Ja'far under this heading is a *khabar wāḥid* i.e. it is not indubitable (*al-mutawātir al-maqtū' bihi*). It does not make knowledge or action necessary. Revelation of the Qur'an for reasons occurring, incident by incident, indicate the opposite of what this hadith says. For the Qur'an contains rulings on what happened, and states what occurred the way it occurred. That is only plausible if revelation occurred at the time of the reason for the said revelation.
>
> For example there are the Almighty's Words, *God has heard the saying of her that disputeth with thee concerning her husband, and complaineth unto God. And God heareth your dialogue ...* (58:1).
>
> This verse was revealed in relation to Khawlah bint Khuwaylid, who came to complain about her husband Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit, who had divorced her by way of *ẓihār* – a type of divorce which was valid during the days of ignorance.[269]
>
> Other examples are the Almighty's Words, *But when they spy some merchandise or pastime they break away to it and leave thee standing* (62:11); and, *Of the believers are men who are true to what they covenanted with God. Some of them have fulfilled their vow by death (in battle), and some of them still are waiting; and they have not altered in the least ...* (33:23).

[269] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 246.

> Words in the past tense – 'they said' (*qālū*), 'they came' (*jā'ū*) and 'he came' (*jā'a*) – are common in the Qur'an. It also contains that which abrogates and that which has been abrogated. None of this is compatible with its having been revealed complete, at a time before any of that had happened.

He says further:

> If we follow up the stories in the Qur'an, we find that what we have referred to comes up frequently – there is not enough room in the treatise to deal with it all. How similar this hadith is to the position (*madhhab*) of the anthropomorphists who claim that God has always spoken the Qur'an, i.e., belief in the sempiternity of the Qur'an, telling of what will be using the past tense. Monotheists (*ahl al-tawḥīd*) have responded to them in the way we have stated.
>
> It is possible that the tradition which says that the Qur'an was sent down *jumalatan* on the Night of Destiny means that the essential meaning (*jumlah*) of it came down on the Night of Destiny, then it was followed by what came down periodically up to the death of the Prophet. The whole of it coming down in its entirety on the Night of Destiny is a departure from what is dictated by the literal meaning of the Qur'an, unquestionable traditions and the consensus of scholars, despite the different opinions of the latter.[270]

According to al-Murtaḍā 'Alam al-Hudā:

> If the position taken by Abū Ja'far ibn Bābawayh – certainty of its being revealed in one go – is based on traditions narrated by him, those traditions are hadiths narrated via one or only a very few chains (*āḥād*), and this is not grounds for certainty. Conversely, there are many other more widely circulated traditions which state that it was not revealed all at once, that some of it was revealed in Mecca and some in Medina. That is why some of the Qur'an is said to be Meccan and some Medinan. When events such as *ẓihār* divorce and other such things occurred, he would wait for what would be revealed to him from the Qur'an, saying, 'Nothing has been revealed to me on this matter.' Had the Qur'an been sent

[270] Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥu I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyyah*, 58.

> down all at once, that would not have happened, and the ruling on *ẓihār* and other matters over which he hesitated would have been known to him. One does not resile from such evident, widely circulated matters solely on the basis of isolated narrations.
>
> As for the Qur'an itself, it states, *And those who disbelieve say: Why is the Qur'an not revealed unto him all at once?* (25:32). If it had been sent down all at once, the response to them would have been that it was sent down as you suggested, and not, *(It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart therewith; and We have arranged it in right order (wa rattalnāhu tartīlā)* (25:32).

All the exegetes have interpreted that by saying that it means: 'We sent it that way, i.e., in instalments, to give it a chance to be heard and to progress gradually, enabling it to be digested. *Tartīl* also means 'one thing appearing after another.' Construing it otherwise is incorrect, because the literal meaning contradicts it, and the people did not say, 'Why did we not know that the Qur'an was sent down all at once?' They said, 'Why has the Qur'an not been revealed all at once?' If it had been sent like that, the response would have been, 'It was as you asked,' and there would have been no argument for it being revealed in instalments as the end of the verse states.

As for the verse, *The month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the Qur'an* (2:185), it indicates that the genus of the Qur'an – most of it or the beginning of it – came down in this month. It does not indicate that the whole of it came down then.

And as for the verse, *And hasten not with the Qur'an ere its revelation hath been perfected unto thee* (20:114), we do not understand how it can mean that it was sent down all at once. It should be explained how it could mean that. The verse is more indicative of the opposite, because the Almighty said, *Ere its revelation hath been perfected unto thee*, which indicates that more was to come before it was completed.

A long time ago I was asked to write an interpretation of this verse and wrote a comprehensive treatise on it. I cited two explanations given by the exegetes and added a third explanation which was mine alone. One of the two exegeses was that when the angel brought some of the Qur'an, the Prophet would recite before the angel had finished, keen to

remember and master it. So he was told to wait until the recitation was finished, because parts of it depended on others.

The second one was that he was told not to pass on any of the Qur'an before it had been revealed to him, along with its meaning and interpretation.

My own explanation was that he was told not to demand what had not yet been revealed to him of the Qur'an, because whatever he needed would inevitably be revealed to him without his asking, because God does not withhold what he needs. What he does not need is not sent down in any event, and so there is no need to ask. Thus the verse has nothing to do with the matter at hand.[271]

The Difference between *Inzāl* and *Tanzīl*

Another point relied upon by those who say that the Qur'an was sent down twice – first complete and then gradually – is the difference between the words, *inzāl* and *tanzīl*, which are used in this context. They say that whenever *inzāl al-Qur'an* is used, what is meant is its entire revelation. Examples of this phraseology are in God's words:

> *The month of Ramaḍān in which the Qur'an was revealed* (unzila) (2:185);
>
> *Lo! We revealed it* (anzalnāhu) *on a blessed night* (44:3);

and:

> *Lo! We revealed it* (anzalnāhu) *on the Night of Destiny*(97:1).

As for the word *tanzīl*, it means coming down gradually:

> *And (it is) a Qur'an that We have divided, that thou mayest recite it unto mankind at intervals, and We have revealed it* (wa nazzalnāhu) *by (successive) revelation.* (17:106).

Al-Zamakhsharī asks rhetorically why it is that God says *nazzala* in respect of the Book, and *anzala* regarding the Torah and the Gospel, in the following:

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[271] *Jawāb al-Masā'il al-Ṭarābulusīyyāt* (Answer to the Three Questions from Tripoli), in the first group of treatises in al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Rasā'il al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā* (Qum: Dār al-Qur'an al-Karīm, 1405 q.), 403-405.

> *He hath revealed* (nazzala) *unto thee the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was before it, even as He revealed* (wa anzala) *the Torah and the Gospel* (3:3).

And he answers himself by saying that the Qur'an came down in instalments whereas the other two Scriptures came down all at once.[272]

According to al-Rāghib:

> The difference between *inzāl* and *tanzīl* describing the Qur'an and the angels is that *tanzīl* is exclusively used to indicate that it is sent down one instalment after another whereas *inzāl* is general.

His comment on the first three verses is:

> The only reason for using the word *inzāl* instead of *tanzīl* is because of what is narrated – that the Qur'an came down all at once to the lower heaven and then came down instalment by instalment. In the Almighty's Words, *The wandering Arabs are more hard in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which God hath revealed* (anzala) *unto His Messenger* (9:97).
>
> The word *inzāl* is used to refer to either. Also in the verse, *If We had caused* (law anzalnā) *this Qur'an to descend upon a mountain...* (59:21), God did not say *law nazzalnā*, thus drawing attention to the fact that if it had been revealed to the mountain once what was conferred upon the Prophet in several parts, then *...thou wouldst have seen it humbled...*(59:21).[273]

Our Sayyid 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī followed them in that and confirmed it, insisting that *inzāl* was only used on account of the non-composite (*basīṭ*) reality of the Qur'an coming down all at once on the Night of Destiny in the month of Ramaḍān. As for its *tanzīl*, it means its distinct parts coming down gradually throughout the Prophet's lifetime.[274]

However, the truth appears to be something else, for the unbelievers asked:

> *Why is the Qur'an not revealed* (nuzzila) *unto him all at once?* (25:32).

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[272] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 336.

[273] Al-Rāghib, *al-Mufradāt*, 489.

[274] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 2, 14.

So the Qur'an coming down all at once is referred to as *tanzīl*. There is also:

> *...We would have sent down* (nazzalnā) *for them from heaven an angel as messenger* (17:95).

But an angel is an individual entity, and does not come down gradually in parts.

And even though the sign comes down alone, the same is true in the following:

> *They say: Why hath no portent been sent down* (nuzzila) *upon him from his Lord?* (6:37).

The same applies to God's Words:

> *And those who believe say: O, if only a chapter were revealed* (nuzzilat)*!* (47:20),

meaning all at once,
And:

> *Had We sent down* (nazzalnā) *unto thee (actual) writing upon parchment, so that they could feel it with their hands...*(6:7),

which here means all at once.
And in the Almighty's Words:

> *It is He who sent down* (anzala) *upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others allegorical* (3:7),

the phraseology challenges the 'Allāmah's assertion that the word *inzāl* is exclusive to those things which are non-composite, because the Book sent down (*munzal*) has verses which are clear and others which are allegorical, therefore the Qur'an can be said to have distinct parts.

God has said:

> *Shall I seek other than God for judge, when He it is Who hath revealed* (anzala) *unto you this Scripture, fully explained? Those unto whom We gave the Scripture aforetime know that it is revealed* (nuzzila) *from thy Lord in truth.* (6:114).

That which came down fully explained is the Qur'an which came down in instalments.

Both words are used in relation to the Qur'an in a single verse:

> ...*and We have revealed* (anzalnā) *unto thee the Remembrance that thou mayest explain to mankind that which hath been revealed* (nuzzila) *for them* (16:44).

Zamakhsharī makes two mistakes here. Firstly, he considers the Gospel to be a Scripture, when in fact it was nothing but good news which Jesus recited to the Apostles. He did not have a Scripture in the technical sense of the word,[275] for what is meant in the verse where Jesus says:

> ...*He hath given me the Scripture...* (19:30),

is the code of religious law (*al-sharī'ah*), since it is a commonly used technical term. Also, where the Qur'an states:

> ... *to instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom...* (2:129),

this means to teach them the code of religious law (*sharī'ah*) as well as wisdom or insight into the religion.

Secondly, he regarded the Torah as coming down from Heaven in the form of a book, when in fact it was stone tablets which Moses took with him to write down what the Merciful dictated to him on Mount Sinai. Moses' Book, according to the Qur'an,[276] was written by his own hand. What came to Moses was what God dictated to him gradually throughout his stay on Mount Sinai.[277]

The First Revelation

Researchers disagree over various matters pertaining to the Qur'an, including concerns over which verses or chapters came down first. There are three opinions on the matter:

1) *The Blood Clot* (*Sūrah al-'Alaq*), because the prophetic mission began with the revelation of three or five verses from the beginning of *The Blood*

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[275] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, vol 8, 'What happened to the Gospel which came down to Christ' (not included in this abridgment); 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, 1386 q.), 399.

[276] *Yet before that, the Book of Moses was an example and a mercy* (46:12).

[277] See Exodus 34:27.

Clot. That was when the truth came to the Prophet by surprise while he was in the Cave at Ḥirā' and the angel told him, 'Recite.' He then protested, 'I cannot recite.' Thereafter, he covered him completely and told him:

> *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who createth, createth Man from a clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,*[278] *Who teacheth by the pen, teacheth Man that which he knew not* (96:1-5).[279]

Tafsīr al-Imām (The Imam's Exegesis) states that Gabriel:

> ...came down to him, grabbed his upper arm, shook it and said, 'Muhammad, recite!' He said, 'What shall I recite?' He said, 'Muhammad, *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who createth, createth Man from a clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen, teacheth Man that which he knew not'* (96:1-5).[280]

It is narrated on the authority of Imām al-Ṣādiq that:

> The first thing to be revealed to the Messenger of God was, *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; Recite: In the Name of thy Lord*; and the last thing to be revealed to him was *When comes the help of God.*[281]

2) *The Shrouded* (*Sūrah al-Muddaththir*), on account of what is narrated by Umm Salamah:

> I asked Jābir ibn 'Abdillāh al-Anṣārī, 'Which part of the Qur'an was revealed first?' He replied, '*O thou shrouded in thy mantle.*' I suggested, 'Or *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord?*' He replied, 'I will tell you what the Messenger of God told me: 'I confined myself at Ḥirā' and then, when I finished my confinement, I went down and headed for the bottom of the valley. Then I looked towards the sky, and there he was,' meaning Gabriel. 'Trepidation took

[278] *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 3.

[279] See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, 97.

[280] Imam al-Ḥasan 'Askarī ('Alayhi al-Salām), *Tafsīr* [attributed to] *al-Imām* (Qum, 1409 q.), 157; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 206; al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān* (Tehran: Āftāb Printing Press, 1374 q.), vol. 4, 478 .

[281] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 628-629; Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1984), vol. 1, 9; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 39; Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 29.

> hold of me and I went to Khadījah. I told her to shroud me in my mantle and she did so. Then, God revealed to me: *O thou shrouded in thy mantle, arise and warn!*"[282]

On the other hand Jābir may have worked out for himself that it was the first chapter, because there is no other indication in the Prophet's words. The preferred opinion is that Jābir said this after a period during which revelation had come to a halt, therefore he thought it was the commencement of the revelation.[283] Here is the hadith on the period during which the revelation had come to a halt, also in accordance with Jābir's narration:

> I heard the messenger of God speak of the time of revelation. He said, 'While I was walking, I heard someone call out from heaven, so I raised my head and there was the angel who had come to me at Ḥirā', sitting on a chair between heaven and earth. I was terrified of him, so I went back. I said, 'Wrap me up, wrap me up, shroud me in my mantle,' and so Blessed and Almighty God revealed: *O thou shrouded in thy mantle, arise and warn! Thy Lord magnify, thy raiment purify, defilement shun* (74:1-5),'meaning the idols. He said: 'Then revelation resumed.'[284]

In Bukhārī's words:

> revelation increased and resumed.[285]

3) *The Opening* (*Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*). According to Zamakhsharī:

> Most exegetes say that *The Opening* (*al-Fātiḥah*) was the first thing to be revealed.[286]

'Allāmah Ṭabrisī narrates on the authority of his teacher Aḥmad al-Zāhid's book *al-Īḍāḥ* via its chain of narration back to Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, that Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib said:

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[282] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, 99.

[283] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 206.

[284] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, 98; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 4.

[285] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, 98; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, 4.

[286] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4, 775; Ibn Ḥajar challenges it superficially, but there is no room to include it after the explanation below on how to reconcile the three opinions. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 548.

> I asked the Prophet about the reward in the Qur'an and so he told me about reward, chapter by chapter, in the order it came down from heaven. The first thing that came down to him in Mecca was *The Opening of the Book* (*Fātiḥat al-Kitāb*), then *Recite in the Name of thy Lord*, then *Nūn, The Pen*...[287]

Al-Wāḥidī narrates in *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, via his chain of narration back to Abū Maysarah 'Amr ibn Sharḥabīl, that when the Messenger of God was off on his own, he would hear a call and be terrified by it. The last time, the angel called to him, 'Muhammad.' He replied, 'I am at your service.' He continued, '*In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate: Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds*' until he reached, '*Nor of those who go astray.*'[288]

My comment is that there is no doubt that the Prophet prayed from the time he was despatched, and that Ali, Ja'far, Zayd ibn Ḥārithah and Khadījah would pray with him,[289] and that there is no prayer for someone who has not recited *The Opening of the Book*.[290] The tradition says that Gabriel began by teaching him ablution and prayer,[291] so *The Opening* had to have been linked with the despatch.

According to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī:

> It is not recorded that there was ever any prayer without *the Opening of the Book* in Islam.[292]

Furthermore, we do not see any fundamental contradiction between the three opinions in view of the fact that the three or five verses from the beginning of *The Blood Clot* only came down to give glad tidings of the Messenger's prophethood. This is the consensus of all. Secondly, after a while, verses also came to him from the beginning of *The Shrouded*, as Jābir's hadith says. As for *The Opening*, it was the first complete chapter to be revealed. As for other verses which were revealed before it, they came down for other purposes, although they were recorded later on within the verses and chapters of the Qur'an.

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[287] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 405.

[288] Al-Wāhidī, *Asbābu Nuzūl al-Āyāt*, 11.

[289] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1, 378.

[290] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 1, 238-239; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, 9.

[291] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 260-261; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 184; vol. 14, 194.

[292] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 30.

Thus it is correct to refer to *The Praise* as *The Opening*, meaning the first complete chapter revealed in this specific capacity. The extreme importance given to it at the beginning of the prophetic mission, and its unique aspect of being mandatory in all prayers, made it equivalent, in terms of merit, to the whole of the Qur'an:

> *We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated (verses) and the great Qur'an* (15:87).

God conferred this special revelation as a grace to His Messenger equivalent to the rest of the Qur'an.

True, if you count chapters by their beginnings, *Praise* comes fifth according to Jābir ibn Zayd's tradition[293] – *infra.*

The Last to be Revealed

Our traditions say that the last to be revealed was *The Help* (*Sūrah al-Naṣr*). It is narrated that when it came down and the Prophet read it to his companions, they were happy and rejoiced, except for 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who wept. The Prophet asked, 'What is making you cry, Uncle?' 'Abbās replied, 'I think that you have announced your death to yourself, O Messenger of God,' and he said, 'It is as you say,' and so he only lived for two more years after that.[294]

According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> The last chapter to come down was *When comes the help of God, and victory...*[295]

Muslim cites Ibn 'Abbās as saying:

> The last chapter to come down was *When comes the help of God, and victory...*[296]

It is narrated that the last chapter to be revealed was *The Repudiation* (*Sūrah al-Barā'ah*). It came down in the ninth year, after the year of the Conquest on the return from the Battle of Tabūk. Verses from the beginning

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[293] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 72.

[294] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 554.

[295] Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 29.

[296] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 79.

of it were revealed, and the Prophet sent them with Ali to recite them to an assembly of pagans.[297]

Alternatively, it is narrated that the last verse to be revealed was *And guard yourself against a day in which ye will be brought back to God. Then every soul will be paid in full that which it hath earned, and they will not be wronged* (2:281), which Gabriel brought down and told the Prophet to put after verse 280 of *The Cow*. The Messenger of God only lived another twenty-one days – some say seven days – after that.[298]

According to Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī:

> It is said that the last to be revealed to him was, *This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion al-Islam* (5:3).

His comment on the above is that:

> It is the authentic, confirmed and explicit narration. Its revelation was on the day of the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib's appointment at Ghadīr Khumm.[299]

My comment is that there is no doubt that *The Help* (*Sūrah al-Naṣr*) was revealed before *The Repudiation*, because it was glad tidings of the Conquest. Alternatively, it was in Mecca, during the year of the Conquest.[300] *The Repudiation* was revealed a year after the Conquest. The way to reconcile these traditions is that the last complete chapter to be revealed was *The Help*, when the Prophet said, 'My soul has announced my death.'[301] The last chapter opening to be revealed was *The Repudiation*.

As for the verse, *And guard yourself against a day in which ye will be brought back to God* (2:281), if it is true that it was revealed at Minā on the day of the ritual slaughter during the farewell pilgrimage, as Māwardī's tradition says,[302] the last verse to be revealed was the verse of completion (*āyat al-ikmāl*) – as al-Ya'qūbī says – because it was revealed on the 18th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah during the return from the farewell pilgrimage. Otherwise, if it is correct that the

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[297] Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 680.

[298] *Tafsīru Shubbar*, 83.

[299] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 35.

[300] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 145.

[301] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 394.

[302] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 187.

Prophet lived for another twenty-one, seven or nine days after the verse *And guard against...* was revealed, then it was the last verse to be revealed.

In our view, the most correct opinion is al-Ya'qūbi's, in view of the fact that it is the verse telling of the completion of the religion, and so a warning to the Prophet, upon the end of the revelation, to be delivered and carried out. It may be the former verse was the last of the verses pertaining to laws (*āyāt al-aḥkām*) and the latter was the very last verse of revelation.

There are other opinions which have no value, and are not based on the evidence of an explicit statement by one of the Infallibles.

Al-Qāḍī (Judge) Abū Bakr says in *al-Intiṣār*:

> There is nothing in any of these opinions which was raised with the Prophet. It is possible that whoever said them did so based on his own judgment and putting his assumption first. Knowledge of that is not one of the duties of the religion such that critics have to criticise, as they have done, for lack of precision. It is possible that each of them narrated, on the authority of someone else, what he had heard on the authority of the Messenger of God, and someone else heard him after that; and it is also possible that the verse which was the last one to be revealed, was recited by the Messenger along with other verses revealed with it. So, the order was given to write down what had been revealed with it, and for it to be recited to them after having written down and reciting the last verse to be revealed, leading the listener to think that it was the last in order to be revealed.[303]

Meccan or Medinan

There is a great benefit in knowing where the verses and chapters were revealed – whether Mecca or Medina – and their relevance to particular reasons for revelation. This helps the exegete and jurist work out the general meaning of the verse, determine aspects of abrogation, distinguish the general from the particular and the qualified from the unqualified and so on. Hence, scholars have made great efforts to tell apart the Meccan and Medinan revelations. They have reached a consensus on a large

[303] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 210.

number of them and disagree on others. Similarly, they have said that there are Medinan verses within Meccan chapters and vice versa. This will be discussed with a fresh approach later on.

Different Ways of Telling Meccan from Medinan

The criteria for distinguishing Meccan from Medinan varies in line with different views on the matter. In what follows are three general perspectives.

The first is a determination based on the Migration and the Prophet's arrival in the Radiant city of Medina (*al-Medina al-Munawwarah*). Whatever was revealed before setting off for the Migration, including during the journey itself, is Meccan, whereas whatever was revealed after that is Medinan.

The criterion for this is that of time. Whatever was revealed before the time of the Migration, even if was not actually in Mecca, is Meccan. Whatever was revealed after the Migration, even if it was not actually in Medina, and even if it was revealed in Mecca the year of the Conquest or on the farewell pilgrimage, is Medinan, in light of its having been revealed after the Migration. According to this terminology, all the verses which were revealed in relation to wars and journeys are Medinan, since they were revealed after the Migration.

According to Yaḥyā ibn Salām:

> Whatever was revealed in Mecca or on the way to Medina before he got there is Meccan. Whatever was revealed after his arrival in Medina, on his travels or during battles, is Medinan.

Jalāl al-Dīn's comment is:

> This is a subtle distinction. From it can be understood that whatever was revealed on the journey of Migration is Meccan, according to the terminology.[304]

An example of this is God's Words:

> *He who hath given thee the Qur'an for a law will surely bring thee home again* (28:85).

[304] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 23.

It is said that it was revealed at Juḥfah when the Prophet was in flight on the way to Medina.[305]

The second method of determination is that whatever was revealed in Mecca and its environs is Meccan, even if came after the Migration. Whatever was revealed in Medina and its environs is Medinan. Whatever was revealed outside both towns and far away from both is neither Meccan nor Medinan, according to God's Words:

> *Thus We send thee unto a nation, before whom other nations have passed away, that thou mayest recite unto them that which We have inspired in thee, while they are disbelievers in the Beneficent. Say: He is my Lord; there is no god save Him. In Him do I put my trust and unto Him is my recourse* (13:30).

It is said that this was revealed at Ḥudaybiyyah when the Prophet made a peace treaty with the pagans from Quraysh. The Messenger of God told Ali, 'Write in the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate...,' and Suhayl ibn 'Amr and the rest of the pagans said, 'We do not know any Merciful apart from the man in charge of Yamāmah,' meaning Musaylamah al-Kadhdhāb (Musaylamah the Liar), and so the verse was revealed.[306] Similarly, the verse in The *Spoils of War* (8:1) revealed at Badr when the Muslims argued amongst themselves about how to divide the booty,[307] is neither Meccan nor Medinan according to this terminology.

The third determination is that whatever addresses the people of Mecca is Meccan and whatever addresses the people of Medina is Medinan. This is taken from Ibn Mas'ūd's words:

> Everything that says, 'O people...,' was revealed in Mecca, and everything which says, 'O ye who believe...,' was revealed in Medina.[308]

Zarkashī adds:

> ...because what took hold of the people of Mecca was infidelity, and what took hold of the people of Medina was faith.[309]

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[305] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 197.

[306] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 293.

[307] See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, 322.

[308] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 3, 18.

[309] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 187

This difference of opinion caused disagreement over whether many verses and chapters are Meccan or Medinan.[310] However, of all these definitions the first is predominant, and is the majority opinion of scholars.[311] Our arrangement of the chapters in the order in which they were revealed, as set out below, relies on this definition.

It is a fact that there are very few ways to ascertain the actual places of revelation – whether Mecca, Medina or elsewhere – because the earliest scholars did not pay attention to this important aspect, except what they stated by way of digression in their expositions, and it is thus of precious little benefit. Therefore, to find out it is necessary to refer to the evidence of contextual indicators within the wording of verses, such as deducing information from the tone of what is said and the situation in which the people are addressed, whether it was in battle or not, whether it is a promise, a threat, guidance or dispensing duties. Where that generates a decisive solution to any confusion arising from the wording of a verse such as the following:

> *It is therefore no sin for him who is on pilgrimage to the House (of God) or visiteth it, to go around them ...* (2:158),

the problem of whether it means unqualified permission rather than an obligation is solved by what the reason for the revelation is claimed to be.[312] This generates confidence in the authenticity of the tradition, regardless of the chain of narration. Hence, the above verse is Medinan.

According to al-Ja'barī, there are two ways to distinguish Meccan from Medinan:

> ...the method based on tradition (*simā'i*), and the method based on analogical reasoning (*qiyāsī*): *simā'i* is word that has reached us telling us that it was revealed in one of the two. *Qiyāsī* is as 'Alqamah ibn Mas'ūd said: every chapter containing, 'O, people...' as the only form of address, or '*kallā*', or at the beginning of which are letters

[310] As with the verse on trusts (4:58). Al-Naḥḥās claims that it is Meccan on account of Ibn Jurayj's tradition. See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 63.

[311] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 187 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 23.

[312] The Muslims were embarrassed to walk and run between Ṣafā and Marwah, claiming that it was a custom of the days of ignorance to venerate the position of Isāf and Nā'ilah,, and so the verse was revealed to nullify this misconception. See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 240.

> of the alphabet – with the exception of the *zahrāwayn* (*The Cow* and *The Family of Imran*) and *The Thunder* – or which contain the story of Adam and Iblīs, with the exception of the longest (*The Cow*), or which contains stories of the prophets and extinct nations, is Meccan. Every chapter containing a punishment or duty is Medinan. Every chapter containing, 'O ye who believe...' is Medinan.

The Order of Revelation

In this exposition we have relied on several traditions upon which there is a consensus and upon which the majority of scholars rely. The most important of them is Ibn 'Abbās' tradition narrated via chains of narration acknowledged by leading scholars on the subject.[313]

According to Imam Badr al-Zarkashī:

> The tradition of reliable narrators has settled on this arrangement.[314]

We have adopted this as the authoritative statement in this exposition, and filled in the gaps using traditions of Jābir ibn Zayd and others along with reliable historical texts.[315] It is true that there is some disagreement between them, either over which were Meccan or Medinan chapters or over the number of each. This amounts to a disagreement over whether more than thirty chapters are Meccan or Medinan.

In this exposition a preponderance was given to the beginnings of the chapters, so if some verses from the beginning of a chapter were revealed, then another chapter was revealed and the first one was completed afterwards, the first one comes before the second according to this terminology.

There follows a list of Meccan chapters, which are eighty-six in number, followed by the Medinan chapters, of which there are twenty-eight. Chapters over which there is disagreement are discussed in a later section.

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[313] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 405-406 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 26 and 72.

[314] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 193-194.

[315] See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 44 and Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 26.

Meccan Chapters

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
1	The Blood Clot (*al-'Alaq*)	96
2	The Pen (*al-Qalam*)	68
3	The Enwrapped (*al-Muzzammil*)	73
4	The Shrouded (*al-Muddaththir*)	74
5	The Opening (*al-Fātiḥah*) [*The Opening* is omitted in Ibn 'Abbās' tradition. We have included it on the basis of Jābir ibn Zayd's narration – see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 25 – and the text of Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 26.]	1
6	Palm Fibre (*al-Masad*)	111
7	The Rolling Up (*al-Takwīr*)	81
8	The Most High (*al-A'lā*)	87
9	The Night (*al-Layl*)	92
10	The Dawn (*al-Fajr*)	89
11	The Forenoon (*al-Ḍuḥā*)	93
12	The Expanding (*al-Sharḥ*)	94
13	The Declining Day (*al-'Aṣr*)	103
14	The Chargers (*al-'Ādiyāt*)	100
15	The Abundance (*al-Kawthar*)	108

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
16	Rivalry (*al-Takāthur*)	102
17	Charity (*al-Mā'ūn*)	107
18	The Unbelievers (*al-Kāfirūn*)	109
19	The Elephant (*al-Fīl*)	105
20	The Daybreak (*al-Falaq*)	113
21	Mankind (*al-Nās*)	114
22	The Unity (*al-Tawḥīd*)	112
23	The Star (*al-Najm*)	53
24	He Frowned (*'Abasa*)	80
25	The (Night of) Destiny (*al-Qadr*)	97
26	The Sun (*al-Shams*)	91
27	The Constellations (*al-Burūj*)	85
28	The Fig (*al-Tīn*)	95
29	Quraysh (*Quraysh*)	106
30	The Great Calamity (*al-Qāri'ah*)	101
31	The Resurrection (*al-Qīyāmah*)	75
32	The Traducer (*al-Humazah*)	104
33	Those Sent Forth (*al-Mursalāt*)	77
34	Qāf (*Qāf*)	50

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
35	The City (*al-Balad*)	90
36	The Night Star (*al-Ṭāriq*)	86
37	The Moon (*al-Qamar*)	54
38	Ṣād (*Ṣād*)	38
39	The Heights (*al-A'rāf*)	7
40	The Jinn (*al-Jinn*)	72
41	Yā Sīn (*Yā Sīn*)	36
42	The Criterion (*al-Furqān*)	25
43	The Originator (*Fāṭir*)	35
44	Mary (*Maryam*)	19
45	Ṭā Hā (*Ṭā Hā*)	20
46	The Inevitable (*al-Wāqi'ah*)	56
47	The Poets (*al-Shu'arā'*)	26
48	The Ant (*al-Naml*)	27
49	The Narrations (*al-Qaṣaṣ*)	28
50	The Night Journey (*al-Isrā'*)	17
51	Jonah (*Yūnus*)	10
52	Hūd (*Hūd*)	11
53	Joseph (*Yūsuf*)	12

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
54	al-Ḥijr (*al-Ḥijr*)	15
55	The Cattle (*al-An'ām*)	6
56	Those Arrayed in Ranks (*al-Ṣāffāt*)	37
57	Luqmān (*Luqmān*)	31
58	Sheba (*Saba'*)	34
59	The Troops (*al-Zumar*)	39
60	The Believer/The Forgiver (*al-Mu'mīn/Ghāfir*)	40
61	Explained in Detail (*Fuṣṣilat*)	41
62	The Counsel (*al-Shūrā*)	42
63	The Adornments (*al-Zukhruf*)	43
64	The Smoke (*al-Dukhān*)	44
65	The Crouching (*al-Jāthiyah*)	45
66	The Sand Dunes (*al-Aḥqāf*)	46
67	The Winds That Scatter (*al-Dhārīyāt*)	51
68	The Enveloper (*al-Ghāshiyah*)	88
69	The Cave (*al-Kahf*)	18
70	The Bee (*al-Naḥl*)	16
71	Noah (*Nūḥ*)	71
72	Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*)	14

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
73	The Prophets (*al-Anbīyā'*)	21
74	The Believers (*al-Mu'minūn*)	23
75	The Prostration (*al-Sajdah*)	32
76	The Mount (*al-Ṭūr*)	52
77	The Kingdom (*al-Mulk*)	67
78	The Indubitable (*al-Ḥāqqah*)	69
79	The Ways of Ascent (*al-Ma'ārij*)	70
80	The Good Tidings (*al-Naba'*)	78
81	Those Who Tear Out (*al-Nāzi'āt*)	79
82	The Rending (*al-Infiṭār*)	82
83	The Sundering (*al-Inshiqāq*)	84
84	The Romans (*al-Rūm*)	30
85	The Spider (*al-'Ankabūt*)	29
86	The Dealers in Fraud(*al-Muṭaffifīn*)	83

Medinan Chapters

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
87	The Cow (*al-Baqarah*)	2
88	The Spoils of War (*al-Anfāl*)	8
89	The Family of Imran (*Āl 'Imrān*)	3
90	The Confederates (*al-Aḥzāb*)	33
91	She Who is Tested (*al-Mumtaḥanah*)	60
92	The Women (*al-Nisā'*)	4
93	The Earthquake (*al-Zilzāl*)	99
94	Iron (*al-Ḥadīd*)	57
95	Muhammad (*Muhammad*)	47
96	The Thunder (*al-Ra'd*)	13
97	The Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)	55
98	The Man (*al-Insān*)	76
99	Divorce (*al-Ṭalāq*)	65
100	The Clear Sign (*al-Bayyinah*)	98
101	The Mustering (*al-Ḥashr*)	59
102	The Help (*al-Naṣr*)	110
103	The Light (*al-Nūr*)	24

ORDER OF REVELATION	CHAPTER	ORDER AS PER THE MUṢḤAF
104	The Pilgrimage (*al-Ḥajj*)	22
105	The Hypocrites (*al-Munāfiqūn*)	63
106	The Dispute (*al-Mujādalah*)	58
107	The Chamber (*al-Ḥujurāt*)	49
108	The Prohibition (*al-Taḥrīm*)	66
109	The Congregation (*al-Jumu'ah*)	62
110	The Mutual Disillusion (*al-Taghābun*)	64
111	The Ranks (*al-Ṣaff*) [In *al-Burhān*, Zarkashī placed the chapter entitled *The Ranks* after *Prohibition* and before *The Congregation.*]	61
112	The Victory (*al-Fatḥ*)	48
113	The Table (*al-Mā'idah*) [In *al-Burhān*, Zarkashī put *The Repentance/ The Disavowal* before *The Table* and made the latter the last chapter.]	5
114	The Repentance (*al-Tawbah*)	9

Chapters over which there is disagreement

Based on the above, the Meccan chapters are eighty-six in number. The first is *The Blood Clot* (*al-'Alaq*) and the last is *The Dealers in Fraud* (*al-Muṭaffifīn*). The Medinan chapters are twenty-eight in number, the first of which is *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*) and the last *The Repentance* (*al-Barā'ah*).

However, not everyone agrees on this order as set out in the two tables, in certain cases on more than thirty chapters. A brief exposition of the disagreement follows, along with a short outline of how we arrived at our conclusion on the matter. We shall postpone a detailed discussion of this to our *tafsīr* book, *al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*.

1- The Opening (*al-Fātiḥah*)

According to Mujāhid it is Medinan.[316]
Al-Husayn ibn al-Faḍl says:

> This is a mistake on Mujāhid's part, because scholars disagree with what he says[317] on account of what Ali said:
>
> > *The Opening of the Book came down in Mecca from a treasure trove under the Throne.*[318]
>
> and because of the Almighty's Words:
>
> > *We have bestowed upon thee the seven oft-repeated (verses) and the mighty Qur'an (15:87).*
>
> *and because it is the first complete chapter to be revealed to the Messenger of God, taught to him by Gabriel,*[319] *and it was named the Opening of the Book.*[320] *Further, 'There is no prayer without the Opening of the Book.'*[321]

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> It is not recorded that there was ever any prayer without the Opening of the Book.[322]

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[316] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 17.
[317] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 30.
[318] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 30.
[319] Ḥalabī, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah bi Hāmish al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*, vol. 1, 161.
[320] As mentioned under 'The First to be Revealed.'
[321] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, 9; Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, vol. 1, 238 and 239.
[322] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 31.

2- The Women (*al-Nisā'*)

Al-Naḥḥās claims that it is Meccan in view of the Almighty's Words:

> *God doth command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due ...* (4:58).

Ibn Jurayj says that it was revealed in Mecca in the year of the Conquest and relates to the key to the Holy House. The Prophet wanted to give it to 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, but God told him to give it to 'Uthmān ibn Ṭalḥah, because he had taken it from him.[323]

However, exegetes agree that it is Medinan in view of the weakness of the chain of narration of this hadith, and also based on the fact that the revelation of a verse or chapter in Mecca in the year of the Conquest does not make it Meccan. According to the terminology used by the majority, whatever was revealed after the Migration is Medinan, even if it was revealed in Mecca.

Finally, an entire chapter does not get classified according to a single verse within it, where the revelation of that verse does not concur with that of the chapter as such.

3- Jonah (*Yūnus*)

A 'rogue' tradition on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās says that it is Medinan.[324] This tradition has not been confirmed, irrespective of the fact that it contradicts the aforementioned explicit statement (*naṣṣ*) on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās himself on the order in which the chapters were revealed, and upon which there is practically a consensus.

4- The Thunder (*al-Ra'd*)

According to Muhammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī, Muqātil and 'Aṭā', it is Meccan.[325] The same is true of a tradition on the authority of Mujāhid, based on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.[326]

Sayyid Quṭb has the following view:

> This chapter's being Meccan is painfully clear, both with regard to the nature of its subject matter, the way in which it is recited

[323] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 63.

[324] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 31.

[325] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 42; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 273.

[326] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 24.

> and its general atmosphere, the fragrance of which cannot be mistaken by anyone who lives under the shade of this Qur'an.[327]

However, the consensus of the traditions regarding the order is that it is Medinan, and was revealed after the chapter on fighting, according to 'Ikrimah and al-Husayn ibn Abī al-Ḥasan's tradition, as well as Khuṣayf's tradition on the authority of Mujāhid, which has authority from Ibn 'Abbās himself.[328] Al-Ḥasan and Qatādah agree.[329]

As for the context of the chapter, it includes various concepts from general directives for mankind to the verses of 'the challenge' (*al-taḥaddī*), something common to both Meccan and Medinan chapters, like many verses in *The Cow* and other Medinan chapters. The main evidence is the consensus of traditions on the sequential order, which will become clearer in the discussion on *The Merciful.*

5- The Pilgrimage (*al-Ḥajj*)

According to Abū Muhammad al-Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, it is Meccan.[330] On the authority of Mujāhid via his chain of narration, which, however, has some weakness in it,[331] he narrates:

> I asked Ibn 'Abbās about the revelation of the chapters until he reached *The Pilgrimage*. He said, 'It was revealed in Mecca except for three verses from it (19, 20 and 21) which were revealed in Medina.[332]

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[327] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 13, 63, ft.

[328] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 27.

[329] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 273; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 42.

[330] Abū Muhammad Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf 'An Wujūh al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'* (Damascus: Majma' al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah, 1974), vol. 2, 116.

[331] Because of Abū 'Ubaydah Mu'ammar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 210), regarding whom it is said: 'He believed in the Khārijites' belief; despicable and sacrilegious, he paid little attention to the Qur'an. When he recited it, he would recite it based on opinion. He was one of the biggest linguists and literary experts. He was the first to write on *Gharīb al-Qur'an* (unusual vocabulary in the Qur'an). He wrote a book on the Arabs' shortcomings cited by Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām.' See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 85, Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl* (Egypt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1386 q.), vol. 4, 155 and Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1325 q.), vol. 10, 247.

[332] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 24.

What Ṭabarī says regarding the hadith on the cranes,[333] along with its severe tone, is consistent with its having been revealed in Mecca.

My comment is that all of this does not overcome the consensus of the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters together with historical documents, not to mention the weakness of the chain of narration of Mujāhid's tradition.[334] As for the cranes hadith, it is a folk tale with no basis to it. As for the tone, it works most of the time, but not throughout, so it is not a suitable evidential basis for arriving at a ruling on the matter.

6- The Criterion (*al-Furqān*)

Al-Daḥḥāk claims that it is Medinan in view of the verses at the end of it, and it is indeed said that it is Medinan.[335] Yet this on its own is not suitable evidence for its being Medinan, given the consensus of the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters.

7- *Yā Sīn*

It has been said to be Medinan,[336] but the person who made this claim and the evidence upon which he relied are not known. The consensus is that it is Meccan.

8- *Ṣād*

It is also said to be Medinan,[337] but this is a rogue opinion contrary to the consensus.

9- *Muhammad*

There is a weak claim that it is Meccan,[338] which is strange given that it is a chapter on fighting!

10- The Chambers (*al-Ḥujurāt*)

It has been said to be Meccan, but the consensus is that it is Medinan.[339]

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[333] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 17, 131-132.

[334] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 27 and 72; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 44 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 342.

[335] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 27.

[336] Ibid.

[337] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 32.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Ibid.

11- The Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*)

According to the text of *al-Fihrist* and *al-Ya'qūbī* it is Meccan. The majority also take that position. Jalāl al-Dīn agress that this is correct, on account of what al-Tirmidhī and al-Hākim say on the authority of Jābir:

> When the Messenger of God recited *The Merciful* to his companions, after he had finished, he said, 'How come I see you silent? The jinn had a better response than you! I did not once recite: *Then which of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny?* (55:13) without their saying, 'And we do not deny any of Your bounties, O Lord, so praise be to Thee."

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> The story of the jinn happened in Mecca.[340]

He says:

> More explicit than that is what Aḥmad narrates in his *Musnad* on the authority of Asmā', daughter of Abū Bakr: 'I heard and the pagans heard the Messenger of God say while he was praying near the corner (*al-rukn*), before shouting what he was commanded: *O which of your Lord's bounties will ye deny?* (55:13).[341]

His comment is that:

> This proves that it was revealed before *al-Ḥijr*.

Sayyid Quṭb says:

> Characteristics of the Meccan Qur'an are clear in the arrangement of the chapter.[342]

My own comment is that there is no doubt that its reproachful tone resembles the tone of the majority of the Meccan chapters, and indeed the heaviest of them upon the soul's ears. However, this alone is not proof that it is Meccan, given that it is not a unique feature, and can also be found in Medinan chapters such as *The Earthquake*, *The Clear Sign*, *The Man*

[340] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 33.

[341] Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 6, 349.

[342] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 27, 670.

and others. Further, many Meccan chapters such as *Joseph*, *Jonah*, *Hūd*, *The Cattle*, *The Heights* and several others have a dulcit tone.

As for the hadith about the jinn, there is no evidence that it is Meccan, since there is no concomitance between this hadith and the hadith on the revelation in Mecca of *The Jinn*. It is possible that it happened in Medina.

As for tradition regarding Asmā', assuming it to be authentic, it indicates that it was revealed in the early days of the transmission – which no one claims – because she said, '...before shouting what he was commanded.' This is in addition to the weakness of the hadith as it appears in the *Musnad*, due to the inclusion of Luhay'ah, a judge of Egypt, in its chain of narration. He has been criticised, and therefore Ibn Mu'īn considers him to be weak. He says:

> His narration cannot be relied upon as evidence. Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd did not think he amounted to anything.[343]

Finally, such weak reasons do not overcome the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters, upon which there is agreement.[344]

12- Iron (*al-Ḥadīd*)

A number have said that it is Meccan, relying on the hadith on 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb becoming a Muslim as evidence. He went to see his sister and found in her possession a scroll which had the chapter *Iron* on it. He read it until he reached *What cause have ye why ye should not believe in God?* (57:8) and found Islam was to his liking, so he went to the Prophet and became a Muslim at his hands.[345]

This hadith contradicts Ibn Isḥāq's hadith, in which *Ṭā Hā* was on the scroll, and he read it until he reached *...that every soul may receive its reward by the measure of its endeavour* (20:15). Alternatively, it is said that *Ṭā Hā* was on the scroll and that 'Umar read it until he reached *...then shall each soul know what it has put forward* (81:14) and his heart inclined to Islam.[346]

It also contradicts Shurayḥ ibn 'Ubayd's hadith, which claims that 'Umar said, 'I went out to raise objections with the Messenger of God before I became a Muslim, and found that he had beaten me to the Mosque, so

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[343] See al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, vol. 2, 475 and Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 5, 374.

[344] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 405 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 27 and 72.

[345] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 4, 54.

[346] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 370.

I stood behind him; he began *The Indubitable* (*al-Ḥāqqah*) and I began to be amazed at the Qur'an's composition. When he finished it, Islam fell right into my heart.'[347]

These two hadiths both have broken chains of narration (*mursal*) cited by those who cannot be relied upon. According to Ibn Ḥajar:

> The hadith is via a chain of narration which contains Isḥāq ibn 'Abdillāh ibn Abī Farwah.[348]

He alluded thereby to a flaw in the chain of narration, because this Ibn Abī Farwah is criticised and his traditions are rejected.[349]

Some rely on Ibn Mas'ūd's hadith as evidence:

> There were only four years between our becoming Muslims and our being reproached by the Almighty's Words, *Has not the time arrived for the believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of God ... and that they should not become like those to whom was given revelation aforetime ... and their hearts grew hard? For many among them are rebellious transgressors* (57:16), and so the believers began reproaching each other.[350]

My comment is that his hadith is also contradicted by others which either explicitly state that it was revealed in reference to the hypocrites a year after the Migration,[351] or that it was after some of the believers had become wealthy and their hearts had become somewhat mean.[352]

13- The Ranks (*al-Ṣaff*)

According to Ibn Ḥazm it is Meccan.[353] However, a majority of the scholars and traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters

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[347] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 4, 53; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 2, 519.

[348] Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 2, 519.

[349] See Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, 240; Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *al-Mughnī fi al-Ḍu'afā'* (Aleppo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1391 q.), vol. 1, 71 and al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, vol. 1, 193.

[350] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 237; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 33.

[351] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 237.

[352] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fi Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, vol. 9, 94.

[353] Ali ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh fi al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1406 q.), vol. 2, 199.

contradict what he says. The correct opinion is that it is Medinan, since Ibn al-Gharas attributes that to the majority.[354]

14- The Congregation (*al-Jumu'ah*)

This is Medinan by consensus. There is an unknown scholar who claims otherwise. Jalāl al-Dīn says it is confirmed in authentic texts that it is Medinan in its entirety.[355]

15- The Mutual Loss and Gain (*al-Taghābun*)

According to 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, it was revealed in Mecca. He attributed that to Ibn 'Abbās,[356] except that the consensus of the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters is that it is Medinan in its entirety.

16- The Kingdom (*al-Mulk*)

There is a strange claim that it is Medinan,[357] but the correct view by consensus is that it is Meccan.

17- The Man (*al-Insān*)

According to 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, and a number of those who like denying the People of the Household's having any merit, it was revealed in Mecca.[358] The core of this strange claim[359] is Ibn al-Zubayr's enmity towards the People of the Household, which is well known.

Similarly, Sayyid Quṭb insists that it is Meccan in a similar context:

> The possibility that this chapter is Medinan is in our opinion very weak, and can almost be ignored.[360]

Ḥāfiẓ Ḥasakānī asserts:

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[354] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 33.

[355] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 34.

[356] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 296.

[357] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 34.

[358] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 297; *Tafsīru Shubbar*, 542.

[359] 'Ubaydullāh ibn Abdillāh Ḥākim Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1393 q.), vol. 2, 299.

[360] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 29, 391.

> Some of the Nawāṣib[361] have objected by saying that this chapter is Meccan according to the consensus of the exegetes. This story, if anything, is Medinan, so how can it have been the reason for the revelation of the chapter?

He says in response:

> How can he claim consensus when the majority agree that it is Medinan?

He then makes reference to the clear statements (*nuṣūṣ*) of the leading scholars on the order of the revelation of the chapters which make it clear that it was revealed in Medina after *The Merciful* and before *Divorce*, in line with what we have stated above.[362]

Ṭabrisī confirms the same in his exegesis, as do other cautious exegetes.

The main evidence is the consensus of the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters to which there is not a single exception.[363] Thus, the matter of context is weak, given that it is not a universal rule which always applies.

According to al-Sayyid Shubbar, the claim that it is Meccan is disproven by authentic textual evidence.[364]

18- The Dealers in Fraud *(al-Mutaffifīn)*

Al-Ya'qūbī states that it was the first chapter to be revealed in Medina.[365] It is said that it was revealed to the Prophet during the Migration to Medina.[366] According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> When the Prophet arrived in Medina, the people there were most devious with regard to weights and measures, and so God revealed this chapter. Thereafter, they were fair in their weights and measures.[367]

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[361] The *Nawāṣib* (singular: *Nāṣibī*) are those who show open enmity to the Prophet's family through word or deed (translator).

[362] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 2, 310 and 315.

[363] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 405.

[364] *Tafsīru Shubbar*, 542.

[365] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 35.

[366] Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, vol. 2, 202.

[367] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 34.

My comment is that this contradicts the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters, on which there is consensus, which say that it was the last Meccan chapter. Similarly, the harsh tone of the chapter is incompatible with the Prophet of Mercy's arrival in Medina and first dealings with its people, who were, after all, giving themselves over to him, especially given the repetition of the word[s] 'No indeed' (*kallā*), which indicates stubbornness on the part of the audience and is inconsistent with the environment of healthy belief which the people of Medina displayed at that time. What al-Ja'barī says – that every chapter containing *kallā* is Meccan – was discussed above.[368]

19- The Most High (*al-A'lā*)

It is said that it is Medinan because of the Almighty's Words: *But those will prosper who purify themselves, and mention the name of their Guardian Lord, and (lift their hearts) in prayer* (87:14-15), an allusion to the Eid (*'īd*) prayer and Zakāt al-Fiṭrah.[369]

My comment is that the verse is general, and the tradition – assuming it is authentic – came along to apply this general rule to one of its instances; it is not meant to inherently exclude anything else. Further, even if we were to concede that these two verses were revealed in Medina, this does not indicate that the entire chapter is Medinan.

What is correct is that the chapter is Meccan even if some of its verses are Medinan, not to mention its tone's testifying to its being Meccan.

20- The Dawn *(al-Fajr)*

This is Meccan by consensus. No one is known to say otherwise.[370]

21- The City *(al-Balad)*

This is Meccan by the consensus which avers it refers to the blessed city of Mecca. It would be very difficult to claim that it is Medinan.[371]

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[368] *Supra* under the heading: 'Different Ways of Telling Meccan from Medinan.'

[369] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 34. Zakāt al-Fiṭrah is the charity given on the day of the 'Īd before the 'Īd prayer. The 'Īd to which this refers comes immediately after the month of Ramadan on the first day of Shawwal. (translator).

[370] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 35.

[371] Ibid.

22- The Night *(al-Layl)*

It is said that it is Medinan based on a tradition concerning the reason it was revealed. A date palm overhung the home of a poor man, and his children would eat its dates. The owner of the date palm – a rich man – would treat them harshly, and so the Prophet tried to bargain with him, offering a date palm in heaven, but he refused until an Anṣārī man bargained with him over forty date palms. He bought them from him and gave them to the Prophet as a gift. The Prophet then gave them to the poor man as a gift. It is said that thereafter was revealed: *But as for him who hoardeth and deemeth himself independent, and disbelieveth in goodness ...* (92:8-9). However, the chain of narration is broken, not uninterrupted. Furthermore, the verse does not completely fit the intended meaning of the story.

The correct opinion according to many of our traditions and those of many others is that the verse is universally applicable to anyone who is miserly with God's right, and does not fear His punishment.[372]

23- The (Night of) Destiny *(al-Qadr)*

According to Ibn Ḥazm and Abū Muhammad, it is Medinan,[373] on account of what al-Hākim narrates on the authority of al-Ḥasan ibn Ali:

> The Prophet saw the Umayyads jumping on his pulpit like monkeys and this upset him, so it was revealed to console his noble mind.[374]

Jalāl al-Dīn reports al-Mazzī as saying that it is a disavowed hadith,[375] but this is an ignominious prejudice, since al-Ḥākim narrates it via an authentic chain of narration and al-Hāfiẓ al-Dhahabī confirms it in *al-Talkhīṣ*. He adds another chain of narration and confirms that, too, to be reliable. He continues:

> I do not know where the hadith's unsoundness comes from.[376]

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[372] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 502; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 142 and Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, 825.

[373] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, 385 and Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, vol. 2, 203.

[374] Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 3, 171.

[375] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 36.

[376] Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Talkhīṣ al-Mustadrak bi al-Hāmish* (Abridged Version of *al-Mustadrak* In the Margin of Nayshābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*), vol. 3, 170.

My comment is that the claim of its unsoundness came from an Umayyad grudge which infused hearts overcome by ignorant and tribalistic (*qawmiyyah*) leanings, thus making it difficult for them to bow to the truth even when it is at the level of indubitability (*tawātur*) and certainty.[377]

However, this alone does not prove the point, because it is possible that he was shown it in Mecca before his migration as glad tidings of the elevation of his position, as well as giving him a brief view of the usurpation which would be perpetrated by the most evil ones from his nation. So there is no conflict at all between this tradition and the traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters.

To support this, we assert that the verse *We granted the vision which We showed thee, but as a trial for men - as also the cursed tree in the Qur'an* (17:60) alludes to the same vision mentioned above. The verse is from *The Night Journey* which by consensus is Meccan. No one claims that any of this chapter is an exception, even if they believe that verses in other chapters are exceptions, as will be discussed below.

Ibn Abī Hātim cites Ibn 'Umar as saying that the Prophet said:

> I saw the progeny of al-Ḥakam ibn Abī al-'Āṣ on the pulpits like monkeys and God revealed with regard to that: *We granted the vision which We showed thee, but as a trial for men - as also the cursed tree in the Qur'an* (17:60). The cursed tree means al-Ḥakam and his progeny.

He also cites Ya'lā ibn al-Murrah as saying on the authority of the Messenger of God:

> I was shown the Umayyads on the earth's pulpits. They will speak to you and you will find them to be evil-doers. The Messenger of God became saddened and so the verse was revealed.

Ibn Mardawayh also cites 'Ā'ishah as saying that it was revealed about Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam:

> I heard the Messenger of God say to your father and grandfather: 'Verily you are the cursed tree in the Qur'an.'

[377] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 77 and vol. 30, 167; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 191 and vol. 6, 371 and al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 3, 250.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī and Ibn 'Asākir cite Sa'īd ibn Musayyab as saying:

> The Messenger of God saw the Umayyads on the pulpits and that upset him. Thereafter God revealed to him that it was just wordly gain given to them and so he was glad (*qarrat 'aynuhu*). That is what the Almighty's Words: *We granted the vision which We showed thee, but as a trial for men - as also the cursed tree in the Qur'an* (17:60) are about. It means a trial for men.[378]

24- The Clear Sign (*al-Bayyinah*)

According to Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib it is Meccan.[379]

However, the consensus of the traditions and explicit statements on the order of the revelation of the chapters is that it is Medinan. What is reported about the Prophet's calling Ubayy ibn Ka'b when it was revealed to him and reciting it to him[380] supports that - Ubayy was Anṣārī and became a Muslim at the hands of the Messenger of God in Medina.

25- The Earthquake (*al-Zalzalah*)

Al-Daḥḥāk and 'Aṭā' claim that it is Meccan. So, too, says Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Sayyid Quṭb agrees with them, in view of its rousing tone.[381] However, it is the consensus of the traditions that it is Medinan.[382] Further, Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites Abū Sa'īd al-Khidri as saying:

> When *and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it* (99:7) was revealed, I said, 'Messenger of God, I will see my deeds?' He replied, 'Yes.' I asked, 'The major, major ones?' He replied, 'Yes.' I said, 'The tiny, tiny ones?' He replied, 'Yes.' I said, 'Then my mother should be bereaved of me!'[383].

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[378] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 191.

[379] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, 385.

[380] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 378.

[381] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 524; Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 2, 386; Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 30, 639.

[382] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 44; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 405; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 27; *al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 379.

[383] *Al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 381.

Abū Sa'īd al-Anṣārī (i.e., Abū Sa'īd al-Khidri) only attained puberty after the Battle of Uḥud.[384]

26- The Chargers (*al-Ādiyāt*)

According to Qatādah, it is Medinan[385] on account of a tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās:

> It was revealed about horses which the Messenger of God despatched in a military detachment. They were late back and it troubled him, so God told him what had happened to them.[386]

However, there is obvious intrigue and incoherence in the tradition, and at the same time, it is contradicted by what is also narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās by Ibn Jurayr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Anbārī, al-Ḥākim – who further says it is authentic – and Ibn Mardawayh:

> Ali reproached him for interpreting the chargers as horses becoming fervent in God's cause.

He explained to him:

> It is the flood (of people) from 'Arafāt to Muzdalifah.

Ibn 'Abbās comments:
So I gave up what I had been saying and went back to what Ali said.[387]

27- Rivalry *(al-Takāthur)*

Jalāl al-Dīn's chosen view is that it is Medinan and he relies on the following matters as evidence for this:

1) Ibn Buraydah's tradition that it was revealed about two Anṣārī tribes who were boasting to each other.
2) Qatādah said that it was revealed about the Jews.
3) It is reported from Ubayy ibn Ka'ab, the Anṣārī:

> We used to believe that [the Prophet's statement], 'If the son of Adam had two valleys of gold he would wish for a third' was a Qur'anic verse until *al-Takāthur* was revealed.

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[384] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 36; Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 3, 563.
[385] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 527.
[386] *Al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 383.
[387] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 383; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 30, 177.

4) That it is reported from Ali:

> We used to doubt in the punishment of the grave until it was revealed.

Jalāl al-Dīn's comment is:

> Punishment of the grave was only mentioned in Medina, in accordance with the authentic narration on the story of the Jewish woman.[388]

However, all the evidence he relied on is invalid:

Firstly, this chapter has nothing to do with boasting to each other, and only addresses the aspect of rivalry.

Secondly, how could Ubayy ibn Ka'b, given that he was his chief scribe, remain in doubt about a Qur'anic verse until his doubt was dispelled by the revelation of a chapter that had no involvement in proving something else not to be of the Qur'an, and not ask the Messenger of God?

Thirdly, how can we allow ourselves to believe a tradition that attributes doubt about matters pertaining to the Hereafter to someone like Ali, the Commander of the Faithful and gateway of the Prophet's knowledge?

As for its being revealed exclusively about the Jews, it is restriction of the general intended meaning of the chapter, which deals with mankind's life being wasted on lowly pursuits.

The correct view, according to the consensus of traditions on the order of the revelation of the chapters, is that it was one of the first Meccan chapters. Jalāl al-Dīn himself explicitly states so in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, narrating on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.[389]

This is in addition to the stern tone we note in the chapter that suits the environment of Mecca, which was strongly dominated by materialistic tendencies. Use of the word[s]: 'No, indeed!' (*kallā*) exclusively to the people of Mecca – as mentioned above – emphasises this sternness.

28- Charity *(al-Mā'ūn)*

According to al-Ḍahhāk, it is Medinan.[390] However, the traditions on the order of revelation and explicit statements upon which there is consensus refute this statement. Added to that is the chapter's tone

[388] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 37.

[389] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 386.

[390] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 546.

of stern rebuke of those who do not believe in the Day of Judgment, so it is more likely to be one of the earliest Meccan chapters. It was the seventeenth in order of revelation, after *Rivalry*.[391]

29- The Abundance *(al-Kawthar)*

According to 'Ikrimah and al-Ḍahhāk, it is Medinan.[392] Jalāl al-Dīn prefers this opinion, as does al-Nawawī in *Sharḥ Muslim*, on account of what Muslim narrates on the authority of Anas:

> While the Messenger of God was among us, he dozed off. He then raised his head and ... said, 'A chapter was just (*ānifan*) revealed to me.' So he recited it.

However, we have discussed this hadith[393] and shown that it does not mean that the Qur'an was revealed to him in that state, with reference to al-Rāfi'ī's interpretation of the hadith as its occurring to the Prophet in that state followed by his reciting it to them. Further, Muslim himself supports that – he narrates this hadith without the words '...was...revealed to me' via another chain of narration. He says:

> The Prophet dozed off, then he raised his head and recited it.[394]

Finally, the consensus of the exegetes is that it is Meccan, and was revealed to console the Messenger of God's mind when that accursed, childless man (*abtar*) showed hate for him.[395] This is in addition to the traditions on the order of revelation all saying that it was revealed in Mecca. Therefore, it is inappropriate for such an unreliable hadith to create doubt regarding the consensus.

30- The Unity *(al-Tawhīd)*

Jalāl al-Dīn prefers the view that it is Medinan on account of traditions concerning its revelation. He asserts:

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[391] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 28; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 405; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 27.

[392] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 548.

[393] Under the heading 'Dreams which came true'.

[394] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 401.

[395] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 142; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 404; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 549.

> It was revealed about a group of Jews in Medina who asked the Messenger of God to describe his Lord to them. So Gabriel brought down *The Unity*.[396]

However, there are other traditions which refer to the pagans' question:

> They said: 'Relate your Lord to us, Muhammad,' and so it was revealed.[397]

This is in addition to the consensus of the traditions on the order of revelation.

Hence, some researchers have said that it was revealed twice!

My comment: That would not be surprising. However, the revelation of a chapter on two occasions means that the second time was a reminder to the Prophet of its relevance to the matter at hand. It is possible, based on this hypothesis, that the Jews asked the Prophet a question similar to one the pagans had already asked, and so the Prophet hesitated in reciting to them the same chapter that had answered the pagans' earlier question. That was in view of the difference in level between the Jews and the pagans. So Gabriel revealed the adequacy of the original response, given that Qur'anic chapters are neither particular to one people to the exclusion of others, nor to one level, because in spite of the difference in their levels, all people can benefit from all the verses of the Qur'an, even though the type of benefit may vary according to their cultural level.

Thus, the chapter is Meccan, even if it was revealed again in Medina.

31 & 32- The *Mu'awwidhatān*[398]

Al-Ya'qūbī considers them to be among the last of the Medinan,[399] and Jalāl al-Dīn says:

> The preferred view is that they are Medinan, because they were revealed with regard to the story of Lubayd ibn al-A'ṣam's sorcery.[400]

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[396] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 147; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 37.

[397] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 410.

[398] The name given to the last two chapters of the Qur'an, because after 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,' they commence with the words: 'Say: I seek refuge... (*Qul A'ūdhu...*).' [Trans.]

[399] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 35.

[400] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 37.

The story, as reported in the two 'authentic' books (*al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*),[401] is told by 'Ā'ishah:

> A man among the Jews of Banī Zurayq, called Lubayd ibn al-A'ṣam, bewitched the Messenger of God.

She continues:

> It reached the point that the Messenger of God was made to think that he was doing something which he was not. In other words he was bewitched, making him think he had been intimate with his wives when he had not.

Sufyān says:

> This is the most powerful sorcery there can be.[402]

She states:

> Then one day or one night the Messenger of God invoked God, and kept on invoking Him and invoking Him. Thereafter, he said to me: 'Do you realise that God has given me a ruling on what I asked Him for a ruling on? Two men[403] came to me, and one of them sat at my head and the other at my feet. The one who was at my head asked the one who was at my feet: 'What is ailing this man?'
>
> He replied: 'Magic has been cast on him.'
>
> He asked: 'Who cast it on him?'
>
> He replied: 'Lubayd ibn al-A'ṣam.'
>
> He asked: 'Using what?'
>
> He replied: 'On a comb, the hair on it, and the husk of a male palm spathe.'
>
> He asked: 'Where is it?'
>
> He replied: 'In Dharwān's well.'

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[401] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, 148; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 7, 14.

[402] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 7, 77.

[403] One tradition says: 'Gabriel and Michael...So the former asked the latter...' See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 10, 194.

She continues:

> So the Messenger of God went there with some of his companions, came back and said: 'Ā'ishah, I swear by God its water was the colour of an infusion of henna and its palms like devils' heads.'

She said:

> So I asked him: 'Did you try to take it out?'
>
> He replied: 'No. As for myself, God cured me, and I feared that that would stir up evil against the people.'
>
> Then he ordered that the well be filled up with earth.

In a different version of hadith, the first man asked, 'Where is it?' and the other replied, 'On the husk of a male spathe under a stone (*rā'ūfah*)[404] in Dharwān's well.' And 'A'ishah said:

> So the Prophet went to the well and got it out. He said: 'This was the well I was shown. Its water was like an infusion of henna and its palms like devils' heads.'
>
> She asked: 'So would you not?' meaning, 'Would you not expose it?'
>
> He replied: 'As for myself, God cured me, and I recoil from stirring evil against any of the people.'[405]

This story, as mentioned in the two authentic books, does not contain any reference to the revelation of the two chapters. Al-Suyūṭī noticed that, hence, he sought evidence for the matter from sources of which the chains of narration are not authentic. In *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* (Evidence of Prophethood), Bayhaqī cites 'Ā'ishah as follows:

> The Messenger of God had a Jewish slave boy called Lubayd ibn A'ṣam who served him. The Jew remained with him until he cast magic upon the Prophet. He was wasting away, not knowing what was causing his pain.

According to another version:

[404] A *ra'ūfah* is a solid rock or stone put at the mouth of a well and which cannot be removed. The person drawing water stands on it. Alternatively, it is put at the bottom for whoever cleans the well to sit on.

[405] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 7, 178.

He was turning over, not knowing what was causing his pain.[406]

While the Messenger of God was asleep one night, two angels came to him and sat down, one of them at his head and the other at his feet. The former said to the latter, 'What is causing his pain?' The latter replied, 'He's had magic cast upon him.'

The first asked, 'Who cast it upon him?'

The second replied, 'Lubayd ibn A'ṣam.'

The first then asked, 'What did he use to cast it upon him?'

And the second replied, 'A comb, the hair on it and the husk of a male palm spathe at Dhū Arwān. It is under the well's stone.'

When the Messenger of God woke up in the morning, he set off for the well, his companions with him, and a man went down and took the spathe out. Why, God's Messenger's comb and some of the hair of his head was in it, and lo and behold, there was a candlewax doll – a doll of the Messenger of God. And there were pins sticking out of it and a rope with eleven knots on it. So Gabriel brought him the *mu'awwidhatayn* and instructed:

O Muhammad, say, *I take refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak...*

A knot came undone.

...From the evil of what He has created...

Another knot came undone, and so on until he reached the end of it and all the knots had come undone. He started pulling the pins out and did not pull a single one out without feeling pain. Thereafter he found comfort. He was asked, 'Messenger of God, why don't you kill the Jew?' He replied, 'God cured me. God's punishment, which will come to him, is more severe.'

Another tradition says:

A Jew cast magic on the Prophet and he suffered, so Gabriel brought him the *mu'awwidhatayn*. He said: A Jewish man has cast magic on you. The charm is in So-and-so's well.

[406] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 10, 193.

> So he sent Ali, and he came to it. He told him to undo the knots and recite a verse. He began reciting and untying until the Prophet got up as though he had been released from hobbling.[407]

It is also said:

> Lubayd's daughters were witches, so they and their father used magic on the Messenger of God and knotted eleven knots against him. So God sent down the *mu'awwidhatayn* – eleven verses, one for each knot – and God cured the Messenger of God.[408]

However, even if we were to accept this story, there is no evidence in the narrations in the authentic books that the *mu'awwidhatayn* verses were revealed in relation to it. As for the rest of the sources, they cannot be relied on as evidence, let alone their forming the evidential basis for a ruling in relation to matters pertaining to the Qur'an, on which a Muslim should not speak without knowledge or without reliable evidence.

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> As for the entire basis of the story, it is evidenced by the two authentic books with the exception of the revelation of the two chapters.

He then comments:

> However, there is evidence from elsewhere.

By this he means what al-Bayhaqī cites, on the authority of al-Kalbī, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, which contains a reference to the story and the revelation of the two chapters.[409]

However, Jalāl al-Dīn himself, in al-Itqān, states that the weakest chain of narration back to Ibn 'Abbās is al-Kalbī, then Abū Ṣāliḥ, then Ibn 'Abbās.[410] He then refers to further evidence in what Abū Nu'aym cites in *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* via Abū Ja'far al-Rāzī on the authority of al-Rabī' ibn Anas, on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik.[411]

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[407] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 417.

[408] Muhammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Juzzī al-Kalbī, *al-Tas-hīl li 'Ulūm al-Tanzīl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabī, 1393 q.), vol. 4, 225.

[409] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 148.

[410] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, 209.

[411] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 148.

Further, Ibn Ḥibbān contends:

> Hadith specialists stay clear of al-Rabī' ibn Anas' hadith if Abū Ja'far al-Rāzī is narrating on his authority, because there is much disorder in his hadiths.[412]

So is it not surprising how a man so well-versed in the arts of hadith and exegesis could get himself embroiled in contradictory rulings and fall into disorder by adducing inappropriate evidence, and thereafter speak on matters of the Qur'an without reliable evidence?

As for the Shi'a, the fundamentals of our beliefs negate the possibility of influence on the Prophet's heart – the safe repository of God's revelation and His knowledge. In other words, Lubayd was incapable of manipulating a mind like that of God's Messenger, the best of God's creation and the noblest of prophets.

The Qur'an says:

> *Lo! My faithful bondmen – over them thou hast no power, and Thy Lord sufficeth as (their) guardian* (17:65).

Therefore, even less would Lubayd be able to possess the heart of God's noblest servant, since his heart is the property of Almighty God, and pollution could never approach it.

Thus, if we entertained the possibility of the Prophet being influenced in such a way that he could be made to imagine he had done something which he had not, faith would be lost in what he says being revelation. It could just be the work of an unclean sorceror that would cause him to think that it is revelation.

According to 'Allāmah Ṭabrisī:

> This is not possible, because it is to describe him as touched by magic, as if his mind had been befuddled. God refutes such a thing in His Words, *And the evil-doers say, 'Ye are but following a man bewitched.' See how they coin similitudes for thee, so that they are all astray...* (25:8-9).

However, it is possible that the Jew and his daughters, according to what is narrated, strove to do so but were unable, and God apprised His Prophet of the despicable act they had carried out, enabling him to

[412] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, 239.

remedy it. This is evidence of his truthfulness, for how could the illness have been a result of what they did? If they had been able to do that, they would have killed him and many of the believers, given the strength of their enmity towards them.[413]

'Allāmah Majlisī says:

> General opinion among the Shi'a is that magic does not have any effect on the Prophets and Imāms (God's blessings be upon them). Hence they have interpreted some of the traditions in this connection in a non-literal manner and rejected others, that is, those which cannot be interpreted.[414]

Al-Quṭb al-Rāwandī states:

> It is narrated that a Jewish woman made a charm against him and thought that her scheme would work – but magic is futile and impossible – except that God showed him to it and so he sent someone to take it out (of the well). It was as they described it with the same number of knots, some of which someone would not even have noticed if they had seen it.[415]

According to *Ṭibb al-A'immah*:

> Gabriel came to the Prophet and said to him, 'So-and-so the Jew has charmed you.' He described the charm and where it was, and so the Prophet sent Ali to the well. He looked for it but could not find it. He struggled to find it, eventually did so, and then took it back to the Prophet. Why, it was real. It had a piece of the lower ends of palm branches inside comprising a cord with eleven knots in it. Gabriel had sent down the *mu'awwidhatayn* and so the Prophet told Ali to recite them at the cord. Every time he recited, a knot came undone until he reached the end. Thus, God relieved the Prophet of what had charmed him, and cured him.[416]

Even though this tradition's chain of narration is not authentic, it does not say anything about any influence on the Messenger's mind. It is

[413] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 568.

[414] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, 70.

[415] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 57, 11.

[416] Abdullah ibn Sābūr al-Zayy al-Naysābūrī, *Ṭibb al-A'immah* (Qum: Amīr, 1411 q.), 118.

true that another tradition does mention an effect on his body that made him feel severe pain. This is the meaning of 'God relieved the Prophet of what had charmed him, and cured him' in the narration in *Ṭibb al-A'immah*, i.e., He cured him of the pain he felt. This is something which is possible. However, the more correct opinion in our view is what al-Quṭb al-Rāwandī said, namely, that magic has no effect on him. They wanted to scheme against him but they ended up as the losers.

Verses Which Are Exceptions

The earliest scholars said that certain verses are exceptions – they were revealed in a different place to the chapters in which they appear, so a Meccan chapter may contain Medinan verses and vice versa. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī dealt with this thoroughly in *al-Itqān*. However, he relied on traditions which we consider to be weak, and then later scholars relied on his findings without checking,[417] when in fact the majority who attest to these exceptions have done so on the basis of conjecture or exercising

[417] Exceptions appear in large letters in the Amīrī codex printed in Cairo with the permission of the Sheikhs of al-Azhar and under the supervision of the Board for Monitoring Islamic Studies (*Lajnat Murāqabat al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah*). However, this is simply the copying of texts the overwhelming majority of which have no basis. It is also how Sheikh Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī records them in his book, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*. Add to that the contradictions which appear in such texts. For example, the Amīrī codex says that the chapter *Alif Lām Mīm Tanzīl* (*Sūrah Sajdah*) was revealed after *The Believer* (*al-Mu'min*) and that the *Ḥā MīmTanzīl* (*Sūrah Fuṣṣilat*) was revealed after *The Forgiver* (*al-Ghāfir*), even though *The Believer* and *The Forgiver* are, in fact, two names for the same chapter.

Abū 'Abdillāh sets out two tables in *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* with regard to the order of the chapters, and states in the first table that the chapter entitled *The Cattle* (*al-An'ām*) was revealed after *al-Ḥijr*, and in the second table, that it was revealed after *The Cave*. He also states in the first one that *The Heights* (*al-A'rāf*) was revealed after *Ṣād* and in the second one that it was revealed after *The Spoils of War*. He states that there are eighty-five Meccan chapters and twenty-eight Medinan chapters without noticing that that is one short of the total number of chapters in the Qur'an. I think in so doing he was just copying Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī.

A codex printed in Iran during the time of the Qājārs contains two lists, the first showing the year each chapter was revealed, the second recording the order of revelation. The first list says that *Those Arrayed in Ranks* (*al-Ṣāffāt*) was revealed in the fifth year of the despatch (*bi'thah*) and that *The Cattle* (*al-An'ām*) was revealed in the thirteenth. Then, the second list says that *Those Arrayed in Ranks* was revealed after *The Cattle*. There are many such contradictions.

their own judgement, without relying on any text containing an authentic tradition as evidence. Ibn al-Ḥaṣṣār says:

> There are among the people those who have relied on deduction as opposed to orally transmitted evidence with regard to exceptions.[418]

In knocking on this door we shall cast aside everything they have said on the matter, because it is not based on any acceptable evidence. For there is no doubt that the verses were recorded one after the other in a natural order, in line with the revelation in every chapter, after 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,' which appears at the beginning of them. As for a Meccan verse remaining unentered in any chapter until a chapter was revealed in Medina and then being inserted, or Medinan verses inserted in Meccan chapters, it is irregular and outside the known method of recording, and therefore needs to be proven with an explicit statement. Conjecture and theoretical deduction do not enter into the matter.

According to Ibn Ḥajar:

> As for part of a chapter being revealed in Mecca and the revelation of the main part of the chapter being delayed till Medina, I have only seen this rarely. They are in agreement that *The Spoils of War* (*al-Anfāl*) is Medinan. However, it is said that God's Words, *And when the unbelievers plot against thee* (8:30), were revealed in Mecca, then *The Spoils of War* was revealed in Medina. This is very strange.[419]

We shall come to the refutation of this claim.

There follow some examples of both interpretations, along with a summary of the correct view.

Exceptions Within Meccan Chapters

1- The Opening (*al-Fātiḥah*): Meccan

Abū Layth al-Samarqandī reports an opinion stating that half of it was revealed in Medina.

Jalāl al-Dīn's comment is:

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[418] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 38.

[419] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 38.

> There is no evidence for this opinion.[420]

As stated above, it was one of the first chapters to be revealed in its entirety in Mecca, and the Muslims would recite it in prayer.

2- The Cattle (*al-An'ām*): Meccan

It was revealed in Mecca and a thousand angels followed in procession. They gave off a soft humming sound of glorification and praise, and filled the whole space between heaven and earth. It was a Thursday night and they descended in grandeur. The Messenger of God began saying, 'Exalted is God, the Great, Exalted is God, the Great,' and fell down prostrate. Then he called the scribes and they wrote it down that very night.

This hadith is widely circulated (*mustafīḍ*), narrated by both sects via channels which support each other.[421] Jalāl al-Dīn's comment is:

> These are pieces of evidence which add strength to each other.[422]

Hence there is no weight to Abū 'Amr ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's claim:

> The aforementioned tradition comes from Ubayy ibn Ka'b's hadith, and there is weakness in his chain of narration. We have not seen an authentic chain of narration for it. That which contradicts it has been narrated.[423]

My own comment is that the numerous channels back to a number of other companions in addition to Ubayy ibn Ka'b means it is reliable evidence. Furthermore, the tradition which contradicts it is weak and unconfirmed.

Ibn Haṣṣār states:

> Nine verses are said to be exceptions, but there is no authentic hadith to support this.[424]

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[420] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 30 and 38.

[421] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 353; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 271; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 2.

[422] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 108.

[423] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 199.

[424] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 38.

We shall discuss what are claimed to be authentic traditions regarding the exceptions.[425]

The Amīrī Codex and those who copied it say, with no corroboration, that nine verses are exceptions. We shall discuss each one of them in what follows:

1) the Almighty's Words:

> *Those unto whom We have given the Book recognise (this revelation) as they recognise their sons* (6:20).

2) the Almighty's Words:

> *Then will they have no contention save that they will say, 'By God, our Lord, we never were idolators'* (6:23).

There is no evidence at all for claiming that these two verses are exceptions. The reason may be that they refer to the People of the Book, though this is not entirely clear in the second one, since there is no evidence for that, given that the People of the Book are mentioned in several Meccan verses such as:

> *And argue not with the People of the Book unless it be in (a way) that is better...* (29:46).

No one has claimed that to be an exception.
The same is true of God's Words:

> *In like manner We have revealed unto thee the Book, and those unto whom We gave the Book aforetime will believe therein ...* (29:47).

There are several others which are similar.

3) the Almighty's Words:

> *And they measure not the power of God its true measure when they say, 'God hath naught revealed unto any mortal.' Say: 'Who revealed the Book which Moses brought, a light and guidance for mankind, which ye have put on parchments which ye show, but ye hide much (thereof), and (by which) ye were taught that which ye knew not yourselves nor (did) your fathers (know it).' Say: 'God.' Then leave them to their play of cavilling* (6:91).

[425] Exceptions are nos. 7, 8 and 9.

Ibn Kathīr and Abū 'Amr read it as:

> They put it on parchments, revealing them but hiding much...[426]

It is said that it was revealed in relation to a group of Jews who asked, 'Muhammad, has God sent a Book down to you?' He replied, 'Yes.' Their response was, 'We swear by God, that He has not sent any Book down from Heaven.

It is also said that it was revealed in relation to Mālik ibn al-Ṣayf, who was one of the rabbis among the Jews of Qurayẓah – hence revealed in Medina. He was fat, and so the Prophet said to him:

> I implore you by Him who sent the Torah down to Moses, did you not find in the Torah, 'Verily, God hates fat rabbis?' He became angry and said, 'God has not sent anything down to any man.'

It is further said that the one who opposed the Prophet with regard to these words was Fanḥāṣ ibn 'Āzurā' the Jew.

It is said also that it was revealed in relation to the pagans from Quraysh because they denied all prophethood.[427]

Abū Ja'far Ṭabarī says:

> The most likely to be correct is the last of these opinions, because there had been no mention of the Jews before that. Denial of revelation to mankind is not something the Jews ascribe to. On the contrary, what is known of their religion is a confirmation of Abraham and Moses' Scrolls and David's Psalms. The tradition saying that it was revealed in relation to the Jews is not an authentic tradition with an unbroken chain of narration, nor have exegetes reached a consensus on that. Further, the context of the chapter from start to finish pertains to the pagans, so it is appropriate that this verse should also be linked to what precedes it and not cut off therefrom. We can only claim that it is separate on the basis of indubitable proof, either traditional or rational.

[426] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 440.

[427] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 177; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 333.

> What made this person fall into the aforementioned misconception is his reading it as 'You put it...,' in the second person. However, the correct reading is in the third person.[428]

My comment is that while we agree with Abū Ja'far with regard to this finding, we add that the story they mention on the matter of the dispute between Mālik ibn al-Ṣayf and the Prophet is wholly incompatible with the Messenger of God's impeccable manners. The Prophet never hurt a person's feelings at all, and similarly, God's Book is far above addressing such petty matters which are of no value, or for a verse to be revealed in relation to them.

Thus, the words *...ye were taught...* addresses the pagans in the second person after the account of the People of the Book in the third person – as preferred by Abū Ja'far.

As for the generally accepted reading – in the second person for all – it does not necessarily mean it is addressed to the People of the Book alone, but rather to all mankind, on account of the actions of some of those to whom the Book was revealed, especially in view of the pagan Arabs' contact and mingling with the Jews in the peninsula. Hence, there is a lot of talk about the Children of Israel in many Meccan chapters, such as *The Heights* (*al-A'rāf*), 7:102, 7:160.

The Almighty's Words addressed to the people of Mecca testify to that:

> *Ask the followers of the Remembrance if you know not* (16:43).

The same statement is also found in *The Prophets* (*al-Anbīyā'*), which is also Meccan. As a matter of fact, the Arabs had strong links with and trust in the People of the Book. They knew them as people of knowledge and that they could be relied upon. They would often ask them about the history of peoples and prophets and rely on what they said, and therefore they liaised with the Jews round about them, with whom they mingled and whom they trusted.

4) the Almighty's Words:

> *Who is guilty of more wrong than he who forgeth a lie against God, or saith: 'I am inspired,' when he is not inspired in aught; and who saith: 'I will reveal the like of that which God hath revealed'?* (6:93).

[428] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 178. Similarly, Sayyid Quṭb agrees with him in *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 7, 302-303.

Concerning this they say:

> The Almighty's Words, *Who is guilty of more wrong...*, were revealed in relation to 'Abdullāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Sarḥ, who was breastfed by the same woman as 'Uthmān. He had become a Muslim and acted as a scribe for the Messenger of God. When *We created man from a product of wet earth* (23:12) was revealed, the Prophet summoned him and dictated to him. When he reached the words, *and then produced it as another creation* (23:14), 'Abdullāh was amazed by the details of man's creation, and so he said, 'Blessed be God, the fairest of creators.' And so the Messenger of God said: 'That is how it was revealed to me.'
>
> At that point 'Abdullāh had doubt, and said, 'If Muhammad is telling the truth, revelation will come to me the way it has come to him. If he is lying, I will say as he has said,' and so he apostasised from Islam and rejoined the people of Mecca. They began to ask him, 'How did you write the Qur'an for the son of the father of a sheep?' He replied, 'I would write as I liked.' That is because the Messenger of God would dictate to him, 'All-Knowing, All-Wise,' and he would write, 'All-Forgiving, All-Merciful,' interpolating, deleting and making changes to the Book of God without the Prophet's realising. Hence he doubted his being a messenger, became an unbeliever and rejoined Quraysh. So the Prophet wanted to spill his blood. However, 'Uthmān gave him shelter on the Day of the Conquest and pestered the Messenger of God until he pardoned him.[429]

They also say in relation to God's Words, *he who... saith, 'To me it has been revealed,' when aught has been revealed to him*, that they were revealed in relation to Musaylamah and al-Aswad al-'Anasī. who both claimed to be prophets within the Messenger's lifetime.[430]

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[429] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 335; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 30; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 181; Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 13, 84; Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 7, 306; Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 200.

[430] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 335; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 30; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 181; Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 13, 84; Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 7, 306; Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 200.

However, the hadith is entirely fabricated, because *The Believers* (*al-Mu'minūn*) is Meccan and nobody has said that any of its verses are an exception. So how can Ibn Abī Sarḥ have acted as a scribe in Medina and then retreated back to Mecca? Further, far be it from a man to forge lies against God, claiming to be inspired, when God has guaranteed the protection of His Noble Book, and for the Messenger not to be aware of interpolations by a liar, falsely attributing things to God with regards to what God has revealed? If this possibility is accepted, can any faith remain in the Qur'an being exempt from false interpolations?

It is true that there are three verses from three chapters which are said to have been revealed in relation to Ibn Abī Sarḥ, and this is one of them. The second is:

> *but whoso findeth ease in disbelief...*(16:106),[431]

and the third:

> *Those who believe, then disbelieve and then (again) believe, then disbelieve, and then increase in disbelief...* (4:137).

This last one is most appropriate and worthy of being accepted as narrated on the authority of the two Imāms Muhammad ibn Ali al-Bāqir and Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq.[432]

Therefore the correct opinion on the first verse is what Abū Ja'far Ṭabarī said:

> It is general, describing mankind's overall position towards the messages of the prophets. Among them are stubborn people who do not accept any message sent by God. Others are gullible and weak, and believe any claim to be a messenger, even if it is Satanic insinuation, without hesitation or proper thought. Hence, the verse admonished this latter category of lowly gullibility and the former one of iniquitous insolence towards the Lord of Glory,

[431] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 181.

[432] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 281. As for what appears in the exegesis attributed to Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, vol. 1, 210 about the verse from *The Cattle* (6:93) being revealed in relation to Ibn Abī Sarḥ, there are shocking things within it which negate the possibility of its having issued from an Infallible, for it says that the Messenger of God endorsed the changing of the text and said, 'It is the same thing...'

leading to the false and hostile forging of lies against Him. So the verse has nothing to do with the matter of Ibn Abī Sarḥ specifically.

Furthermore, the words, *I will reveal the like of that which God hath revealed* (6:93), do not apply to Ibn Abī Sarḥ's position towards the Messenger of God. They might have applied if the verse had said, 'I will reveal the like of that which Muhammad hath revealed...'

Sayyid Quṭb contradicts himself in relation to the verse. In one place he considers it more likely that the chapter is Meccan, and in another he relies on the traditions on exceptions.[433]

5) the Almighty's Words:

Shall I seek other than God for judge, when He it is Who hath revealed unto you (this) Book, fully-explained? Those unto whom We gave the Scipture (aforetime) know that it is revealed from thy Lord in truth (6:114).

There is nothing in this verse that makes one think that it is Medinan except for the reference to the People of the Book. It was stated above that this alone is not proof. The likes of it appear in several Meccan verses. The reason goes back to the trust the pagan Arabs had in the People of the Book neighbouring their towns. They saw them as people of knowledge and cognisance. Hence the Almighty said, *Ask the followers of the Remembrance if ye know not!* (16:43),[434] meaning the People of the Book, especially the Jews. This verse is Meccan by consensus, except what is attributed to Jābir ibn Zayd. However, al-Suyūṭī refutes it on two counts.[435]

6) the Almighty's Words:

He it is Who produceth gardens trellised and untrellised... Eat ye of the fruit thereof when it fruiteth, and pay the due thereof upon the harvest day... (6:141).

It may be that whoever said it was Medinan interpreted 'the due' as *zakāt*, and *zakāt* was only decreed on defined amounts of agriculture and fruit in Medina.

However, this meaning is not specified in the verse because it has been explained as *ṣadaqah* (charity) generally without any qualification.

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[433] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, vol. 7, 106 and 306.

[434] Also 21:7, but without the ending.

[435] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 9.

This general sense was compulsory in Mecca, and there is reference to it in, *And in their wealth the beggar and the outcast had due share* (51:19), the nineteenth verse of *The Winds That Scatter* (*al-Dhārīyāt*), which is Meccan by consensus. References to provision for and charity appear in several Meccan verses.

Several traditions say that the 'share' in these verses means providing for orphans and the destitute, on the authority of Sa'īd ibn Jubayr and others. They were then later abrogated by the verse on *zakāt*.[436] This is also narrated on the authority of Imam Abū 'Abdillāh al-Ṣādiq, on the authority of his forefathers.[437]

7) the Almighty's Words:

> *Say: 'Come, I will recite unto you that which your Lord hath made a sacred duty for you...'* (6:151).

8) the Almighty's Words:

> *And approach not the wealth of the orphan save with that which is better...*(6:152).

9) the Almighty's Words:

> *This is My straight path, so follow it* (6:153).

According to al-Suyūṭī:

> The narration on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that these three verses are exceptions is authentic.[438]

This tradition is what Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās cites in his book, *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh*, via Abū 'Ubaydah Mu'ammar ibn al-Muthannā on the authority of Yūnus, on the authority of Abū 'Amr, on the authority of Mujāhid, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.[439]

This Abū 'Ubaydah was a man with odd views; he believed what the Khārijites believed, was foulmouthed, sacrilegious and paid little attention to the Qur'an. If he recited it, he would recite it according to his own

[436] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 49 and Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 44.

[437] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 375.

[438] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 39.

[439] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 24.

opinion.[440] Hence any narration of his on scripture or the *sunnah* is not relied upon, unless of course it is a narration on poetry and literature. We do not know on what basis Jalāl al-Dīn considered the chain of narration of this tradition to be authentic.

Furthermore, Abū Nu'aym and al-Bayhaqī both narrate in *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* that Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib said:

> When God commanded His Prophet to put himself out there in front of the tribes, he went out to Minā. I was with him and so was Abū Bakr who was an expert on genealogy. So he stood at their campsites at Minā, greeted them and they replied. He spoke with the people until they asked him, 'What are you calling to, brother of Quraysh?'
>
> So the Messenger of God recited, *Come, I will recite unto you that which your Lord hath made a sacred duty for you...*, reciting all three verses.
>
> God's Words amazed them and they said, 'We swear by God, these are not the words of the people of earth. If they were, we would know them.'[441]

So the verses were revealed at that time in Mecca,[442] in addition to the fact that the tone of the verses and their style of expression also testify to their being Meccan.

In summary, the whole of *The Cattle* is Meccan. There is not a single Medinan verse in it. None of what is said to be an exception has been corroborated, either by way of hadith or rational proof, as stated above.

3- The Heights *(al-A'rāf)*: Meccan

Ibn Ḍurays, al-Naḥḥās and Ibn Mardawayh cite Ibn 'Abbās as saying, via many chains of narration, that it was revealed in Mecca.[443]

Qatādah says:

> Except for one verse:

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[440] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 85; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 10, 247; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*, vol. 4, 155.

[441] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 54.

[442] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 60.

[443] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 67.

And ask them of the township that was by the sea... (7:163),

which according to him was revealed in Medina.[444]

Another source says up to the end of verse 171, i.e., the words:

And when We shook the mountain above them as if it were a canopy...

My comment is that Qatādah's contention is that it addresses the Jews, which fits in, according to his claim, with its being in Medina. However, there is no evidence that the pronouns refer to the Jews. It may refer to the pagans themselves on account of their familiarity with the story of the people who transgressed the Sabbath. The township of Eilat was beside the Red Sea, towards the limit of the Ḥijāz in the environs of Syria, and was a small but prosperous Jewish town[445] which the summer caravans of the Quraysh would pass. News from there would reach them, hence they were familiar with its Jewish inhabitants who had broken their Lord's commandment.

As for what the other source said, there is no evidence at all for it, and no recognised chain of narration. So the correct view is that these verses fit in with other such stories passed down to Quraysh for those of the Prophets' people with the sense to learn from them. Thus, the opinion that all of it is Meccan without exception is favoured.

4- Jonah *(Yūnus)*: Meccan

Some them say that four of the verses are exceptions:

1) the Almighty's Words:

And of them is he who believeth therein, and of them is he who believeth not therein, and Thy Lord is best aware of those who corrupt (10:40).

Some claim that it was revealed in relation to the Jews. However, the context refutes this.

2) the Almighty's Words:

And if thou art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee (10:94).

3) the Almighty's Words:

[444] Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 460.

[445] Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt ibn 'Abdillāh al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1376 q.), vol. 1, 292.

And be not thou of those who deny...(10:95).

4) the Almighty's Words:

Those for whom the Word of thy Lord hath effect... (10:96).

It is claimed that they, too, were revealed in relation to the Jews, but they have no evidence for it. Furthermore, it is a single, unbroken thread. It may be that the reference to the People of the Book is what provoked this claim, even though it is plain that these verses are no more explicit than His Words, *Ask the followers of the Remembrance...* (16:43), a Meccan verse by consensus.

It is also said that verse 40 and right up to the end of the chapter was revealed in Medina,[446] but there is no evidence at all for this opinion. In addition, the tone and vernacular of the verses also refute this.

In summary, whoever says that there are exceptions within this chapter has no reliable evidence on which to rely. Similarly, the context indicates that it is clearly Meccan. Hence, we prefer the view that it is Meccan in its entirety.

5- ***Hūd*: Meccan**

Three of its verses have been said to be exceptions:

1) the Almighty's Words:

A likely thing, that thou wouldst forsake aught of that which hath been revealed unto thee, and that thy breast should be straitened for it, because they say: 'Why hath not a treasure been sent down for him, or an angel come with him?' (11:12).

However, the context clearly testifies to its being Meccan. What also incontrovertibly makes it Meccan has been narrated regarding the reason for its revelation.[447]

2) the Almighty's Words:

Is he (to be counted equal with them) who relieth on a clear proof from his Lord, and a witness from Him reciteth it, and before it was the Book of Moses, an example and a mercy? Such believe therein, and whoso disbelieveth therein of the clans, the Fire is his appointed place... (11:17).

[446] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 40.

[447] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 146.

Those who say that it is Medinan rely on the words 'the Book of Moses' and 'of the clans' (*min al-aḥzāb*).

However, neither phrase proves this, given that Moses is referred to in several Meccan verses.

'The clans' is a reference to the Arab tribes who resisted the Messenger. They had banded together since the time the pagans first sensed that there was a danger of Islam penetrating the peninsula and spreading quickly.[448] There is no evidence that it refers to the Battle of the Clans (*Waq'at al-Aḥzāb*).

3) the Almighty's Words:

> *Establish worship at the two ends of the day and in some watches of the night. Lo! good deeds annul ill-deeds* (11:114).

Abū Ja'far narrates via his chain of narration that Abū Maysarah said:

> A woman came to me to buy dates, and so I said to her, 'There are better dates in my house.' So I let her into my house, felt a desire to kiss her and get everything from her that a man gets from his wife except sexual union, to the point that I touched her bottom. Then I went out and mentioned it to Abū Bakr and 'Umar.
>
> They said, 'Keep that to yourself and don't tell anyone.'
>
> I then mentioned it to the Prophet and he asked, 'Have you equipped a warrior?'
>
> I replied, 'No.'
>
> He asked, 'Have you looked after the family of a warrior?'
>
> I replied, 'No.'
>
> He said, 'Seek your Lord's forgiveness and pray four *rak'ahs*.'
>
> He then recited, *Establish worship at the two ends of the day and in some watches of the night. Lo! good deeds annul ill- deeds*, and said, 'It is for people generally.'

Another tradition says that Gabriel brought it down at that very moment.[449]

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[448] Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Qum: Jāmi'ah Mudarrisīn, 1413 q.), vol. 5, 461.

[449] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 12, 82-83.

The context of this tradition is definitely false, because it encourages sin. It would mean that anyone could do whatever he wanted, then apply himself to prayer as penance, not to mention the incoherence in the tradition itself and its not fitting in with the verse, which is another proof of its weakness. Furthermore, it is recorded in other narrations that most traditions containing: 'Then he recited the verse to him...' do not mean that it was revealed there and then.

The correct view in our opinion is that *Hūd* is Meccan in its entirety, in view of the singularity of its context and its innovative, scolding style, which is consistent with a Meccan chapter.

6- Joseph *(Yūsuf)*: Meccan

The Amīrī Codex says that the first three verses are exceptions, as well as:

> *Verily in Joseph and his brethren are signs for the inquiring* (12:7).

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> It is very weak and should not be paid any attention to.[450]

My comment is that we are surprised at the likes of Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī following what is set out in the Egyptian Codex without checking and recording it in his excellent book.[451] There can be no illusions over the weakness of the matter.

7- Abraham *(Ibrāhīm)*: Meccan

Al-Zarkashī claims:

> Except for two verses revealed about the pagans killed at Badr:
>
> *Hast thou not seen those who gave the grace of God in exchange for thanklessness and led their people down to the abode of loss, (even to) Hell? They are exposed thereto. A hapless end!* (14:28-29).[452]

The evidential basis for this is what is narrated on the authority of Sa'd, on the authority of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb:

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[450] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 40.

[451] Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1388 q.), 28.

[452] See Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 200.

> Those who exchanged the bounty of God with unthankfulness were the two most depraved houses of Quraysh: Banū al-Mughīrah and Banū Umayyah. As for Banū al-Mughīrah, you wiped them out at the Battle of Badr.

Alternatively, he said:

> God extirpated them at the Battle of Badr. As for Banū Umayyah, they have been allowed to enjoy themselves for a time.[453]

The same thing is narrated on the authority of Imām al-Ṣādiq, with the addition of:

> In fact, it is the whole of Quraysh.[454]

However, there is no indication therein that it was revealed at or after the Battle of Badr. The Battle of Badr was just one example of the ruin they were warned about. As for the higher interpretation, it is Hell, of which it is said 'they are exposed thereto' and is 'a hapless end.' Considering this an exception was the result of not reflecting on the allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of this verse.

8- *Al-Ḥijr*: Meccan

Jalāl al-Dīn claims:

> God's Words, *And verily We know the eager among you and verily We know the laggards* (15:24) should be considered an exception on account of what al-Tirmidhī cites, 'It was revealed in relation to the rows of [congregational] prayer.'[455]

Al-Ḥasan says:

> Except for God's Words, *We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated ...* (15:87) and, *Such as We send down for those who make divisions, those who break the Qur'an into parts* (15:90-91).[456]

My comment is that the context of verse 24 refutes its being construed as congregational prayer, as testified to by God's Words before this verse:

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[453] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 13, 146.

[454] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, 229; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 887-888.

[455] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41.

[456] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 326

> *Lo! it is We, even We, Who quicken and give death, and We are the Inheritor* (15:23).

The meaning is: 'We knew the dead who are gone and know the living who remain.'[457]

As for al-Tirmidhī's tradition, it is truncated and there is weakness in its chain of narration. Furthermore, it does not fit the verse.

Th claim that the second verse is an exception is based on Mujāhid's opinion that *The Opening* (*al-Fātiḥah*) was revealed in Medina. It was stated above that that was a slip on his part, and that the consensus supports the opposite.[458]

As for the verse about 'those who make divisions,' they claim that it was revealed in relation to the Jews and Christians, who were among those who believed in parts of the Qur'an but not others.[459] However, this is false, because the Jews did not believe in any of the Qur'an and they were not those to whom the Qur'an was revealed. It is true of their belief in the Scriptures which were revealed to them – that they would believe in some but not others.

The correct view is that the aforementioned verse was revealed in relation to the pagans who said that some of the Qur'an was sorcery, tales of the ancients, fabrication and so on. They would split up and man the gates to Mecca, turning people away from the Qur'an and telling lies about God.[460] Al-'Ayyāshī narrates on the authority of the two Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq that it was revealed in relation to Quraysh.[461]

9- The Bee *(al-Nahl)*: Meccan

Qatādah says:

> Except for His Words, *And those who became fugitives for the cause of God after they had been oppressed...* (16:41), and it is said that from here right up to the end of the chapter was revealed in Medina.[462]

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[457] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 14, 16 and vol. 14, 18.

[458] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 30.

[459] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 14, 42.

[460] See Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 12, 205.

[461] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, 251-252.

[462] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 347 attributes it to al-Ḥasan and Qatādah.

According to 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār:

> Except for His Words, *If ye punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith ye were afflicted...*(16:126), up to the end of the chapter – three verses – which were revealed in relation to the incident at Uḥud, after Ḥamzah was killed.[463]

A tradition on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās says that the following verses were revealed in Medina:[464]

> *And purchase not a small gain at the price of God's covenant ... in proportion to the best of what they used to do* (16:95-96).

My comment is that, as far as verses 41 and 42 are concerned, there is no indication that what is meant is the second migration to Medina. In fact the apparent meaning is that it was the first migration to Ethiopia, as also narrated on the authority of Qatādah.[465]

As for the opinion that everything after verse 40 to the end of the chapter was revealed in Medina, there is no evidence for it, and the context of the verses also contradicts it.

As for verses 95 and 96, it is said that they were revealed in relation to Imru' al-Qays al-Kindī. He had seized land from 'Abdān al-Ashra' al-Ḥaḍramawti and so the latter complained about him to the Prophet. Imru' al-Qays denied it and so 'Abdān al-Ashra' made him swear an oath, but Imru' al-Qays thought it too serious a matter to perjure himself. Thereafter, the verse was revealed.[466] The event took place in Medina.

However, the story is uncorroborated, the tone of the verse is general and its context testifies to its fitting in perfectly with the verses aimed at fiercely scolding the stubborn pagans. A quick perusal of the verse makes us confident that it is wholly linked to verse number 91, *Fulfil the covenant of God when ye have covenanted...*, both emphasising it and strengthening the position of the believers at that time, telling them not to sell what they had covenanted to God for a paltry price, thereby

[463] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 135.

[464] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 347.

[465] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 118.

[466] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 384.

placing the life of this world on an equal footing with the great reward they had been promised.[467]

As for the verse, *If ye punish, then punish with the like of that which wherewith ye were afflicted. But if ye endure patiently, verily it is for the patient* (16:126), exegetes have three different opinions on it.

The first is that it was revealed on the day of the Battle of Uḥud, when the Prophet stood over Ḥamzah's mutilated body. It caused him distress, and he said: 'I swear by God, I will mutilate seventy [or thirty] of them in return for you!'

Thus, when the Muslims heard that, they said, 'If God gives us the upper hand over them, we will mutilate their living, never mind their dead.'

Some of them said, 'We will mutilate them in a way the Arabs have never seen,' and so Gabriel brought the verse down, the Prophet rescinded his oath, and refrained from doing what he had said.

The second opinion is that it was revealed on the Day of the Conquest. The Muslims wanted to descend upon the pagans and brutally kill them in order to make themselves feel better after what had been inflicted upon them at the Battle of Uḥud – there had been sixty-four casualties from the Helpers (*ansār*) and six from the Migrants (*muhājirūn*), including Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, whom the pagans had mutilated. So the *ansār* said, 'If we have a day like this against them, we will do worse to them.' When the Day of the Conquest came and God granted the Muslims victory over the pagans, the verse was revealed in order to restrain the Muslims, so that they would not exceed the bounds of what God had revealed.

The third view is that it has a general relevance, and applies to all who are oppressed who, when God has granted them victory, then seek vengeance on the oppressor. This verse came as a compromise between just revenge and forgiveness, something which tallies with the mood of the Muslims when they were in Mecca. They say that it was abrogated by the verses commanding them to fight (*āyāt al-qitāl*):

> *And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Verily God loveth not aggressors* (2:190);

and:

> *...but if they attack you then slay them* (2:191),

[467] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 129.

which were revealed at the beginning of the Muslims' time in Medina.

Regardless of the abrogation, this last opinion is the correct one in view of the context of the verse itself and its complete compatibility with the verses before and after it.

For the Almighty said:

> *Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way* (16:125);
>
> *If ye punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith ye were afflicted* (16:126);

and:

> *Endure thou patiently. Thy endurance is only by (the help of) God. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they devise* (16:127).

This last verse came to give solace to the Prophet over the pagans' harassment, and to console him over his sorrow for them, not the sorrow caused by them. It is proof that the verse was revealed at the time when the pagans defied the Prophet's call and set about harassing him, and believing souls refused to put up with the wrongs they inflicted, and tried to get revenge on them no matter what hardship it entailed.[468]

10- The Night Journey *(Isrā')*: Meccan

They say that seventeen of its verses – 26, 32, 33, 57, 60, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 85, 88 and 107 – were revealed in Medina. This is an exaggeration, for there is no evidence regarding most of them. Some of the details are as follows:

The first of these verses is:

> *And give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and squander not (thy wealth) in wantonness* (17:26).

It is said that it was revealed in Medina after God had granted the Messenger of God victory at Khaybar, and he had given the oasis of Fadak to Fāṭimah.[469]

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[468] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 393; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 135.

[469] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 177; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 411.

Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī cites Abū Daylam as saying:

Ali ibn al-Husayn asked a Syrian man, 'Have you read the Qur'an?'

He replied, 'Yes.'

He asked, 'Have you not read in *The Children of Israel: And give the kinsman his due...*'?

The man asked, 'Are you the kinsman to whom God, sublime is His Praise, has commanded us to give his due?'

He replied, 'Yes.'[470]

Ḥāfiẓ Ḥasakānī cites a hadith with several chains of narration that says it refers to the Prophet giving Fadak to Fāṭimah .[471]

My comment is that the apparent meaning of the verse is that it is nonetheless a general duty for every Muslim, and mentions in distinct terms the duty to maintain kinsmen and the poor – in the nature of other examples of Meccan legislation. Later the paramaters were defined after the migration to Medina.

The universal applicability (*'umūm*) of the verse includes the Prophet, for he too, like any other Muslim, is commanded to maintain relations with his kin and to support both them and the poor.

However, it may be that the verse was sent down a second time after the conquest of Khaybar. After God had provided booty for the Messenger and the believers, Gabriel brought it down, thereby reminding him of the duty to maintain relations with his kin. Thereupon he summoned Fāṭimah and gave her Fadak. There is no evidence that the verse was revealed for the first time at that point.

It is possible that the verse revealed at Khaybar on maintaining relations with kin was another one. Minhāl ibn 'Amr's hadith says, on the authority of Ali ibn al-Husayn, that it is about the following:

> *That which God giveth as spoil unto His messenger from the people of the townships, it is for God and His messenger and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer ...* (59:7).

[470] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 53.

[471] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 338-341.

The 'people of the townships' means Banū Qurayẓah and Banū Naḍīr. The cities are Fadak, Khaybar, 'Uraynah and Yanbu', which became booty at the Muslims' disposal. The verse was revealed in relation to them at that time.[472]

If it is correct that Gabriel also brought the first of these verses, it was a reminder to the Prophet of the previous ruling, and a confirmation of the ruling at hand. This is so, providing that the narrator did not confuse one of the verses with the other.

The second verse is:

> *And come not near unto adultery. Lo! it is an abomination and an evil way* (17:32).

And the third verse is:

> *And slay not the life which God hath forbidden save with right* (17:33).

Whoever claims that these two verses are an exception does not give any explanation.[473] It may be because they mention the unlawfulness of adultery and the taking of life, and legislative matters took place in Medina.

However, what would have been missed is that the parameters and particulars of various laws were established in Medina. As for the bare bones and generalities of the religious law (*sharī'ah*), they were frequently revealed in Meccan chapters, and these two verses were revealed in Mecca in the same way.

Al-Suddī says that the verse, *And come not near unto adultery...*, was revealed at a time when there were no set punishments, for they were sent down after that in *The Light* (*Sūrah al-Nūr*), which is Medinan.[474]

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk says about the verse on slaying:

> The pagans would slay the Prophet's companions at that time, so the companions were about to do the same to them. Hence, He said, Sublime is His Remembrance, that if someone slays, his father should not be slayed in return, nor his brother, nor any of the pagans, as was the custom in the days of ignorance, which was

[472] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 260-261; there is also an allusion to it in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 189.

[473] Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 28.

[474] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 179.

to kill someone's brother, or others from that person's tribe, in retaliation for one's own brother being killed. One of you should only slay the slayer himself.[475]

The fourth verse is:

Those unto whom they cry seek the way of approach to their Lord, which of them shall be the nearest ... (17:57).

The verse, in the context of the verse preceding it, fits in with its having been revealed in Mecca. We cannot find any reason why the Amīrī Codex or others might have this as an exception.

The fifth verse is:

... and We appointed the vision which We showed thee as an ordeal for mankind, and (likewise) the accursed tree in the Qur'an (17:60).

According to Jalāl al-Dīn, this is an exception because the verse was revealed about the Messenger's vision, in which he saw the Umayyads jumping like monkeys on his pulpit, and which saddened and troubled him so much, that he was not seen laughing again until he died.[476]

In any case, the Prophet did not have a pulpit in Mecca.

We have already stated our opinion on this, that he was shown the elevation of his blessed calling and the usurpers' hands reaching out to his divinely appointed position, and it was this that troubled him.[477]

The sixth, seventh and eighth verses are as follows:

And they indeed strove hard to beguile thee away from that wherewith We have inspired thee, that thou shouldst invent other than it against Us; and then would they have accepted thee as a friend. And if We had not made thee wholly firm thou mightest almost have inclined unto them a little. Then had We made thee taste a double (punishment) of living and a double (punishment) of dying, then hadst thou found no helper for thee against Us (17:73-75).

There is no doubt that these verses are Meccan and were revealed about the pagans from Quraysh who offered the Prophet a truce with

[475] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 181.

[476] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 191.

[477] Stated above in relation to the chapter entitled *The Power* and in the section, 'Chapters over which there is disagreement.'

their gods. He rebuffed them and these verses were revealed to reinforce his position and to make the pagans despair once and for all of trying to coerce the Messenger of God – the propagator of pure monotheism and destroyer of polytheism – into a compromise which contradicted his call to the One God Who has no partner.[478]

We do not know any valid reason for saying these three verses are an exception, as Jalāl al-Dīn,[479] the Amīrī Codex and others have.

The ninth and tenth verses are:

> *And they indeed wished to startle thee (li yastafizzūnaka) from the land that they might drive thee forth from thence, and then they would have stayed (there) but a little after thee. (Such was Our) method in the case of those whom We sent before thee (to mankind), and thou wilt not find for Our method aught of power to change* (17:76-77).

What is given as the reason for its revelation is also the reason for making it an exception:

> The Jews came to the Prophet and said to him, 'If you are a Prophet, go to the Levant,[480] the land of the prophets, and make them believe.'
>
> He fought the Battle of Tabūk for the sole purpose of reaching the Levant, but when he reached Tabūk, God revealed these two verses to him, commanding him to return to Medina where his life, death and resurrection on the Day of Resurrection was to be.[481]

However, it is contradicted by another tradition which says that they were revealed in relation to the pagans of Mecca who plotted to expel the Messenger from Mecca in the same way. They said to him, 'The Prophets all lived in the Levant, so why do you live in this land?'

Alternatively, they tried to expel him by force, because *istifzāz* means 'shaking out by force.' The literal meaning of the verse supports the latter, because when the pagans behaved in this way, God's wont with regard to His creatures later came to bear upon them, beginning with

[478] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 431; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 194.

[479] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41.

[480] The Levant comprises Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. [Trans.]

[481] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 432; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 195.

those killed at Badr and culminating in the conquest of Mecca and the final expulsion of the pagans.[482]

The eleventh to fourteenth verses are:

> *Establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn. Lo! (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn is ever witnessed. And some part of the night awake for it, a largess for thee. It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a praised estate. And say: 'My Lord, cause me to come in with a firm incoming and to go with a firm outgoing. And give me from Thy presence a sustaining power.' And say: 'Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished away. Lo! falsehood is ever bound to vanish'* (17:78-81).

The one who says these are an exception claims that they are a conclusion to the previous two verses revealed in Medina.[483] However, this is a false claim given that the primary matter is not confirmed, let alone the secondary.

Abu Nu'aym and Bayhaqī cite on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that God's Words:

> My Lord, cause me to come in with a firm incoming...

were revealed in Mecca shortly before the Migration.[484]

At any rate, the unbroken context of the preceding and subsequent verses itself testifies to their having been revealed in Mecca, and they do not fit the opinion that they were revealed in Medina at all.

The fifteenth verse is:

> They will question thee concerning the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord. You have only been given a little knowledge.'

A number of hadith specialists have said that the question referred to was asked by the Jews in Medina after the Migration.[485]

However, it is contradicted by a tradition which says that it was the pagans from Quraysh who asked him about the Spirit mentioned in the

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[482] Ibid.

[483] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41.

[484] *Al-Suyūṭī, al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 198; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 100.

[485] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 199; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 105.

Qur'an,[486] or that the Jews suggested that the pagans ask Muhammad the question, saying, 'If he answers you, he is not a prophet, but if he does not answer you, he is a prophet.'[487]

This is in addition to the fact that the end of the verse testifies to the fact that it was a conversation with the pagans. According to 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār the words, *You have only been given a little knowledge*, were revealed in Mecca.[488]

The sixteenth verse is:

> *Say: Verily though mankind and the jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers one of another* (17:88).

Ṭabarī claims that this verse was revealed to the Messenger in Medina because a group of Jews had argued with him over the coherence of the Qur'an. They denied its being coherent and claimed that the Torah was more coherent.[489]

However, the reproachful tone of the verse indicates that it was revealed about the pagans from Quraysh, challenging them when they asked the Prophet for strange miracles and inane requests, rather than revelation.

It was revealed by way of an introduction to the condemnation directed at them in the following verses:

> *And they say, 'We will not put faith in thee till thou cause rivers to gush forth...'* (17:90),

up to the end of the four verses and those which follow on, up to the seventeenth verse after this, which one may refer to independently.

The last verse is the seventeenth:

> *Say: Believe therein or believe not, lo! those who were given knowledge before it, when it is read unto them, fall down prostrate on their faces, adoring...'* (17:107).

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

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[486] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 437; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 199.

[487] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 437; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 199.

[488] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 105-106.

[489] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 106.

> It was revealed in Medina on account of the reasons for revelation which we have cited.[490]

However, he cites nothing on the matter either in *Lubāb al-Nuqūl* or in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*.

The context of the verse testifies to its being Meccan. It was revealed as a rebuke of the pagans' defiance towards the revelation of the Qur'an and their refusal to believe it, and it alludes to the fact that their stubborn resistance was the result of the blind ignorance which enveloped their souls. As for the people of Medina and those of culture, they perceived the clear truth of the Qur'an straight away and had no doubts, and the contrast indicates just how far from knowledge and culture these pagans were – hence their scorn and disdain.

11- The Cave *(al-Kahf)*: Meccan

Some say that thirty-two verses are exceptions, claiming that they were revealed in Medina. This is excessive, because it would mean that a third of the chapter, including the first eight verses, were Medinan.

Jalāl al-Dīn claims:

> The beginning of it up to His Word[s], ... *barren dust*, verses one to eight, was revealed in Medina.[491]

There is no evidence at all for claiming they are an exception, because it is the beginning of a chapter and some of its first verses that decide whether a chapter is Meccan or Medinan. Further, the complete consensus is that *The Cave* is Meccan.[492]

It may be that the person who said they were an exception did so on account of the Almighty's Words:

> *...and to warn those who say: God hath chosen a son* (18:4).

However, just because there were Jews in Medina does not necessarily mean that it had to have been revealed in Medina. In fact it is general,

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[490] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 205; Ibn Jarīr cites on the authority of Mujāhid: Those given knowledge before him were some of the People of the Book who heard what God had revealed to Muhammad. However that does not mean that it was revealed in Medina as is obvious.

[491] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41.

[492] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 208.

and is also relevant to the Christians and pagans, because a verse being revealed in relation to a Jewish story does not mean it had to have happened at the time when they were resisting Islam. There are many verses like this in Meccan chapters, because of the close link between the Jews and pagans before the Prophet's migration to Medina, as alluded to above.

> He also says that the words, *Restrain thyself along with those who cry unto their Lord at morning and evening...* (18:28),[493] are an exception.

They claim that they were revealed about 'Uyaynah ibn Ḥiṣn, who suggested to the Messenger – who was in Medina at the time – that he keep his distance from where poor believers gathered if he wanted the noblemen of the land to become Muslims.[494]

However, the correct opinion is that they were revealed about Umayyah ibn Khalaf, who suggested the same thing to him when he was in Mecca – he called on the Prophet to cast out the poor and to favour the nobles from Quraysh.[495] The tone and context of the verse also shows that.

The Amīrī Codex and al-Zanjānī's *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* claim that nineteen verses are exceptions, from *They will ask thee of Dhū al-Qarnayn...* up to ... *and who could not bear to hear* (18:83-101).

They claim that it was the Jews themselves who put this question to the Prophet. Hence the revelation of these verses as a response must have taken place in Medina.[496]

The correct view is that it was the pagans who asked this question. However, it was by Jewish instruction. The pagans had sent someone to ask the Jews about the Messenger's attributes, and they responded by providing questions to put to him. If he could answer them, he truly was a prophet.

Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī narrates that the Quraysh had sent al-Naḍir ibn al-Ḥarith and 'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'ayṭ to the Jewish rabbis in Medina and told them, 'Ask them about Muhammad. Describe him to them and tell them what he has said, for they are the People of the First Book – the Torah – and they have knowledge of the prophets which we do not have.' They set off, eventually reaching Medina, and asked the Jewish rabbis

[493] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 41; Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 29

[494] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 220.

[495] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 230; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 220.

[496] Al- Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 340.

about the Messenger of God. They described his affair to them along with some of what he had said. They said, 'You are the people of the Torah, and we have come to you so that you can tell us about this friend of ours.' So the Jewish rabbis replied, 'Ask him about three things which we will tell you. If he tells you about them, he is a prophet sent. If he does not, he is a charlatan. Ask him what happened to the youths who went away in the First Age. Theirs is an amazing story. Ask him what the tidings were of the man who travelled around, reaching the eastern and western horizons of the earth. Ask him what the Spirit is. If he tells you about that, he is a prophet, so follow him...' The hadith is long, and at the same time curious.[497]

Al-Itqān says that four verses are exceptions:

> *Lo! those who believe and do good works, theirs are the Gardens of Paradise for welcome,*

up to the end of the chapter (18:107-110).[498]

However, he does not explain his evidence for this strange claim. It may be oversight or careless words, for nothing in the verses suffices as evidence of their being Medinan and there is no tradition interpreting them in such a way that would indicate their having been revealed in Medina.

Admittedly it is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* that Mujāhid said:

> There were among the Muslims those who fought, and wanted to see their position, and so God revealed, *and whoever hopeth for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work...* (18:110).[499]

However the tone and meaning of the verse do not fit in with that. Ṭabrisī narrates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās:

> When God's Words, *...and of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little* (17:85), were revealed, the Jews retorted, 'We have been given the Torah and there is much knowledge in it,' and so God revealed, *Say: Though the sea became ink for the Words of my Lord...* That is why al-Ḥasan said, 'By 'words' He means knowledge.'[500]

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[497] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 15, 127; vol. 16, 7; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 210; al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 228.

[498] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 42.

[499] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 255.

[500] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 499.

However, this does not mean that it was necessarily revealed in Medina, as stated more than once above.

12- Mary *(Maryam)*: Meccan

Jalāl al-Dīn claims that two of its verses are exceptions,[501] of which the first is the Verse of Prostration:

> *These are they unto whom God showed favour from among the prophets, of the seed of Adam and of whom We carried with Noah...they fell down, adoring and weeping.* (19:58)

What refutes this is the fact that this verse was revealed as a comment on the verses before it, from the beginning of the chapter up until this point, which talk in detail about matters pertaining to the prophets and past nations. Then praise for them all in general terms came along in this verse as a kind of summary and culmination. We either have to say that all of them, from the beginning of the chapter to this verse, are Medinan, or that they are all Meccan. There is no room for this strange exception, the evidence for which has not been explained.

The second exception he claims is:

> *There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is a fixed ordinance of thy Lord* (19:71).

This, like the previous one, is completely linked to the verses preceding and following it, which leaves no room for it alone being an exception.

13- *Ṭā Hā*: Meccan

Two verses have been said to be exceptions, the first of which is:

> *Therefore, bear with what they say, and celebrate the praises of thy Lord ere the rising of the sun and ere the going down thereof...* (20:130).

However the verse follows on from those preceding it, and its tone is exclusive to Meccan verses. There are also confirmations of its having been revealed in Mecca in traditions describing its exegesis.[502]

The second is:

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[501] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 42.

[502] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 16, 168.

And strain not thine eyes toward that which We cause some wedded pairs among them to enjoy ... (20:131).

Jalāl al-Dīn says:

... on account of what al-Bazzāz cites on the authority of Abū Rāfi':

The Prophet had sent him to borrow food from a Jew, and he refused to do so without charging interest. The Messenger of God was sad about that and so the verse was revealed.[503]

However, this story, assuming it to be true, does not mean that the verse had to have been revealed in relation to it. Furthermore, there is no correlation at all between the story and the meaning of the verse.

14- The Prophets *(al-Anbiyā')*: Meccan

The words, *See they not how We visit to the land, reducing it of its outlying parts?* (21:44),[504] are said to be an exception, but those who say so have not provided any evidence.

However, the context is indisputably Meccan. Something similar was also said about verse 41 of *Thunder* (*al-Ra'd*). Its tone might be thought to be Meccan if it were not for the consensus of traditions on order being that it is Medinan, as stated above.

15- The Believers *(al-Mu'minūn)*: Meccan

Thirteen verses are said to be exceptions:[505]

Till when We grasp their luxurious ones with the punishment...

to

...they are aghast thereat (23:64-77).

There is no evidence at all for saying so. Whoever claims so perhaps had a regard to traditions which explain chastisement as what happened to the pagans at the Battle of Badr or on the Day of the Conquest. However, he overlooks the fact that it is explanation of a promise previously made, and not a report on what currently was. See Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī and others.[506]

[503] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 42; See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 16, 169.

[504] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 42.

[505] Ibid.

[506] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 18, 28.

16- The Criterion *(al-Furqān)*: Meccan

Three verses – 68, 69 and 70 – are said to be exceptions.

However, these verses fit in completely with verses preceding and following them, making it impossible for them to stand alone as exceptions. There is a confirmation of their having been revealed in Mecca in *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*.[507]

17- The Poets *(al-Shu'arā')*: Meccan

Five verses are said to be an exception:

The first verse is:

> *Is it not a token for them that the learned of the Children of Israel know it?* (26:197).

Ibn Gharas says that this is Medinan,[508] possibly on account of what tradition says by way of exegesis, that what is meant by the learned of the Children of Israel here is Asad, Usayd, Ibn Yāmīn, Tha'labah and 'Abdullāh ibn Salām.[509]

However, the object of the verse is without doubt the pagans of the Quraysh and it is a sharp rebuke to them. As for the exegesis in the tradition, it does not mean that the verse was revealed after those Jews became believers. It is just an explanation of an instance to which the verse applied, but which happened later on.

The pagans consulting the Jews about recognising the Messenger of God was referred to above.[510] They would acquaint them of his characteristics and attributes, and the verse means simply that. This is something the People of the Book knew even before the Migration. They only denied it later out of greed for the vanities of the world. The verse does not signify their belief, only their acknowledgment. Thus, the exegesis in the tradition does not serve to situate the revelation of the verse in Medina.

The next four verses are:

> *As for poets, the erring follow them* (26:224),

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[507] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 19, 26.

[508] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 42.

[509] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 19, 69; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 95.

[510] This was with regard to the saying God willing as per *The Cave*.

and up to the end of the chapter. The claim of this as an exception is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.[511] The evidence of its being an exception is a narration – that it was revealed in relation to two men, one from the Helpers (*anṣār*) and the other from the Emigrants (*muhājirūn*), who ridiculed each other in satiric verse at the time of the Prophet.[512]

However it is contradicted by what has a stronger chain of narration and is reported via more sources – that it was revealed about the pagans from Quraysh whose poets ridiculed the Messenger in satiric verse, and the verse was revealed as a rebuke to their character and to criticise their hateful behaviour. Ṭabrisī gives a very detailed account of the names of these pagans.[513] Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī also prefers this opinion.[514]

18- The Narrations *(al-Qaṣaṣ)*: Meccan

It is said that the following four verses are an exception:

> *Those unto whom We gave the Scripture before it, they believe in it...*
>
> to
>
> *...Peace be unto you! We desire not the ignorant* (28:52-55).

It is said that they were revealed concerning a group of the People of the Book who had become Muslims, including 'Abdullāh ibn Salām, Tamīm al-Dārī, al-Jārūd al-'Abdī and Salmān al-Fārisī.[515]

Alternatively, it is said that it was revealed concerning the Negus' companions who came to Medina and participated in the Battle of Uḥud.[516]

However, if the two aforementioned interpretations are correct, it means foretelling what was to come, not reporting what was, never mind that these interpretations contradict that of it concerning a group of the People of the Book who believed in the Prophet before he was despatched, of whom there were forty men according to *Ṭabrisī's, Ṭabarī's* and others' exegeses.[517]

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[511] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 24 and vol. 1, 42.

[512] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 99; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 19, 78.

[513] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 208.

[514] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 19, 78.

[515] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 258.

[516] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 42.

[517] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 258; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 20, 57; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 133.

What we have stated is confirmed by God's Words:

> *And argue not with the People of the Book unless it be in a way that is better, save with such of them as do wrong ...* (29:46).

This verse is Meccan and came down in relation to dispute with the People of the Book.

It is also confirmed by God's Words:

> *In like manner We have revealed unto thee the Scripture, and those unto whom We gave the Scripture aforetime will believe therein...* (29:47).

This is also Meccan by consensus.

This is exactly like the verse discussed regarding foretelling what was to come.

The verse:

> *Lo! He who hath given thee the Qur'an for a law will surely bring thee home again...* (28:85),

is also said to be an exception, revealed to the Prophet when he arrived at al-Juḥfah, whilst migrating to Medina.[518] According to the second classification,[519] the verse is neither Meccan nor Medinan.

However, the generally accepted choice of classification is the first one, based on which the verse is Meccan, as stated above.

19- The Spider *(al-'Ankabūt)*: Meccan

From the beginning of it up to the eleventh verse is said to be an exception. They say that it was revealed in Medina:[520]

> The verses were revealed about Muslim people who lagged behind the Migration. Then God's Messenger's companions wrote to them and they resolved to migrate, but the Quraysh held them back, so there was fighting and violence between them.[521]

However, the verse is general, and was revealed about the believers in Mecca who fell into hardship. It was a test for them to ascertain the

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[518] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 268.

[519] *Supra* under the heading Different Ways of Telling Meccan from Medinan.

[520] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 43.

[521] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 32.

truth from error. That is how Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī explains it.[522] There is also an tradition to that effect on the authority of Abū 'Abdillāh al-Ṣādiq,[523] not to mention the fact that if it is correct that the beginning of the chapter is Medinan, that would make the whole of the chapter Medinan according to the aforementioned classification.[524] Furthermore, no one disputes its being Meccan.

The Almighty's Words:

> *And how many a beast there is that beareth not its own provision! God provideth for it and for you. He is the Hearer, the Knower* (29:60).

According to Jalal al-Din this is an exception on account of what Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates via a weak chain of narration on the authority of Ibn 'Umar:

> I set off with the Messenger of God until he entered one of the orchards of Medina. He started picking dates and eating them, then said:
>
> 'This is the fourth morning I have not tasted or found food.'
>
> Ibn 'Umar said, 'We remained, not moving until, *And how many a beast...*, was revealed.[525]

The tradition's chain of narration is criticised, not to mention the incoherence of its wording and the inconceivability of its import.

Moreover, it is narrated on the authority of Muqātil and al-Kalbī that the words were revealed in connection with a group of poor believers who were under pressure whilst staying in Mecca before the Migration, and had fallen into difficulty and hardship. So they were instructed to migrate to Medina, and they said. 'How can we go out to a land where we have no home, no land and no means to make a living?' Thereafter, the following verses were revealed:[526]

> *O My bondsmen who believe! Lo! My earth is spacious. Therefore serve Me only ...And how many a beast ...* (29:56-60).

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[522] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 20, 83.

[523] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 272.

[524] *Supra* under the heading Order of Revelation.

[525] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 43; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 149.

[526] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 290.

The second tradition is more appropriate to the wording of the Book, and worthier of being given credence. Hence it is authentic (*ṣaḥīḥah*) and accepted (*maqbūlah*).

20- The Romans *(al-Rūm)*: Meccan

The Amīrī Codex, Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī's *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* and *Majma' al-Bayān* say that the following verse is an exception:[527]

> *So glory be to God when ye enter the night and and when ye enter the morning* (30:17).

There is no evidence for this, not to mention the verse's strong link to the verses preceding and following it.

21- *Luqmān*: Meccan

Three verses are said on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās to be exceptions:

> *And if all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with seven more seas to help it...*
>
> to
>
> *...God is informed of what ye do* (31:27-29).

He explains the reason for their revelation as follows:

> The Jewish rabbis in Medina said to the Messenger of God, 'We have been given the Torah and it contains much knowledge.'
>
> So he replied, 'Next to God's knowledge, it is little.'
>
> And so the verse was revealed.[528]

However, even though the reason could hypothetically fit in with verse 27, it does not fit in with the two verses after it, and therefore this does not suffice as a reason for its revelation.

The correct view is that the three verses, like those preceding and following them, fit in with each other. They are all an exposition of the greatness of the Lord of the Worlds. There is no reason for them to be separated from the surrounding verses. Hence, there is no reason at all for saying they are an exception.

[527] See Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 30; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 293.

[528] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 5:167; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 43.

If the aforementioned tradition on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās is authentic, it would have to mean that the Prophet recited them to them when they put this challenge to him, not that they were revealed there and then.

22- The Prostration *(al-Sajdah)*: Meccan

The following verse is said to be an exception:

> *Who forsake their beds to cry unto their Lord in fear and hope, spend of that We have bestowed on them* (32:16).

Jalāl al-Dīn explains that this is:

> ...on account of what al-Bazzāz and Ibn Mardawayh cite on the authority of Bilāl:
>
> We were sitting down while some of God's Messenger's companions were praying after Maghrib and 'Ishā' prayers, and so it was revealed.[529]

My comment is that the verse is general and its compatibility with the adjacent verses is plain to see, not to mention that it does not fit in at all with the purport of the tradition.

According to the Amīrī Codex and al-Zanjānī's *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, the words:

> *No soul knoweth what is kept hid for them of joy...* (32:17),

are an exception. That may be in view of the fact that they are a culmination of the previous verse. However, the correct view, as with the previous example, is that it is general.

It is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that the Almighty's Words:

> *Is he who is a believer like unto him who is ungodly?...*
>
> to
>
> *...a welcome (in reward) for wthat they used to do* (32:18-19),

are an exception.

This is on account of what is narrated via several well-regarded (*mu'tabarah*) routes and chains of narration – that it was revealed about

[529] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 43; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 175.

an argument between Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib and al-Walīd ibn 'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'ayṭ at the Battle of Badr. Walīd said to Ali, 'Be quiet! For you are just a boy and I am more simple-tongued than you, sharper of tooth than you and more useful to the troop.' So Ali said to him, 'Calm down! For you are ungodly and it is not as you say.'

This has been cited by Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī in *al-Aghānī*, al-Wāḥidī in *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn 'Asākir via routes leading back to Ibn 'Abbās. Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Jarīr cite it on the authority of 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār. Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites it on the authority of al-Suddī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā. Thus the believer mentioned in the verse is Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib and the ungodly is al-Walīd.[530]

Ḥāfiẓ Ḥasakānī cites it via twelve routes which may be considered indubitable (*tawātur*).[531]

My comment is that the context of the verse is general and is linked to the rest of the adjacent verses. This becomes clear upon the slightest perusal of the chapter.

It is true that a verse may be revealed a second time on an occasion which calls for it, something which happened in several cases which we will point out. It is possible that the aforementioned dispute came to the Prophet's attention and he recited a verse appropriate to the situation. This same Walīd was called ungodly in other verses.

> *...If an ungodly man bring you tidings, verify it...* (49:6)

This was revealed specifically in connection to him, as cited by Jalāl al-Dīn via chains of narrators (*rijāl*) who are reliable (*thuqāt*).[532]

23- Sheba *(al-Saba')*: Meccan

The following verse is said to be an exception:

> *Those who have been given knowledge see that what is revealed unto thee from thy Lord is the truth and leadeth unto the path of the Mighty, the Owner of Praise* (34:6).

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[530] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 178; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 21, 68; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 332.

[531] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 445-453.

[532] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 80-82.

This verse is an allusion to the fact that real people of knowledge have a sincere belief in the Book through knowledge and certainty. There is no doubt that this should be so, that reasonable, observant people and those of virtue and maturity do not hesitate to believe the Qur'an as soon as they are introduced to it. Such is the case with every clear truth. This is the interpretation favoured by 'Allāmah Ṭabrisī, who says:

> This is more appropriate on account of its general applicability (*'umūm*) ... because they reflect and ponder on it and realise through consideration and reasoning that it is not of human origin.[533]

However, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī explains the verse primarily in terms of the People of the Book who became Muslims, such as 'Abdullāh ibn Salām and the like.[534] Hence, some claim that the verse is Medinan and was revealed after such people became Muslims.[535]

Nevertheless, Abū Ja'far did not rely on hadith evidence to arrive at that explanation.[536] He simply narrates on the authority of Qatādah that they were Muhammad's first and earliest companions who discovered Islam to be the plain truth, and embraced it on the basis of knowledge and certainty. There is some discrepancy between his narration and his opinion.

Seven other verses are also said to be exceptions:

> *There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place...*
>
> to
>
> *...and thy Lord taketh note of all things* (24:15-21).

Farwah ibn Musayk narrates that he asked the Messenger of God – or heard a man ask him – whether Sheba was a mountain or a land, a man or a woman, and the verses were revealed in response. The question was asked after returning from raids on the tribes of Sheba. The Messenger of God recalled him because he had not been commanded to go.[537]

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[533] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 378-379.

[534] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 22, 44.

[535] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 16.

[536] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 378 states that it is what al-Ḍaḥḥāk said.

[537] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 386; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 22, 53; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 231.

According to Ibn al-Ḥaṣṣār:

> This means that the verses were revealed in Medina, because Farwah's migration happened after Thaqīf became Muslim, nine years AH.[538]

However, he says after that:

> It is possible that the words, *There was indeed a sign for Sheba...*, referred to what had been revealed earlier in Mecca before the Migration, not to its being revealed there and then.

My comment is that if the story is to be believed, it has to be construed as referring back, for the possibility is extremely remote of a verse being revealed in response to the question of a man whose curiosity regarding the tradition would have been satisfied by being given an answer. It would not require the detail into which the verses went. A fleeting consideration of the story of Sheba as it appears in the Qur'an suffices as proof that, like all the other stories which appear in the Qur'an, it was aimed at guiding mankind towards proper conduct, drawing their attention to errors in times gone by, so that they might learn a lesson on how to proceed in the present.

The correct view on the story of Farwah is that he asked the Prophet about the story of Saba' after he had read it in the Qur'an. He asked whether Sheba was a man or woman, a land or a mountain, and the Prophet explained to him that it was an Arab man who had such and such a number of sons.[539] This indicates that the question came after the revelation of the verse.

Finally, the tradition about Farwah is incoherent and self-contradictory, and this makes it impossible to rely on as evidence on the revelation of verses.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites Ali ibn Rabāḥ as saying:

> So-and-So told me that Farwah ibn Musayk al-Ghaṭafānī came to the Messenger of God and said to him, 'O, Prophet of God, Sheba were a people who had combat experience in the days of ignorance. I fear that they will apostasise from Islam. Should I fight them?'

[538] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 43.

[539] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 386.

> So he replied, 'I have not been given any instruction with regard to them yet.'
>
> And so the verse, *There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place...*, was revealed.[540]

This tradition is disorderly in terms of its chain of narration, wording and style, and what it says does not relate to the revelation of such a verse. This makes us sure that it was woven by a person who paid little attention to what he said. The same is true of other traditions on the matter.[541] If occasions such as this called for a revelation of the Qur'an, we would be better off avoiding making connections with any particular incident, for the number of them that people might find would be overwhelming.

24- The Originator (*al-Fāṭir*): Meccan

Al-Ḥasan makes an exception of two verses:

> *Surely those who read the Book of God, and establish worship, and spend of that which We have bestowed on them ...* (35:29),

and:

> *Then We gave the Scripture as inheritance unto those whom We elected...* (35:32).

The first one may be on account of the reference therein to prayer. The second one is on account of its being followed by:

> But of them are some who wrong themselves and of them are some who are luke-warm, and of them are some who outstrip (others) through good deeds...

'Ikrimah narrates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that those who wrong themselves are the hypocrites.[542]

However, prayer was made compulsory in Mecca, and applying 'those who wrong themselves' to the hypocrites does not mean that the verse had to have been revealed, according to the explanation of Ibn 'Abbās, in Medina, where the hypocrites were – and assuming the hadith to

[540] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 55.

[541] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr* and others.

[542] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 399 and 409.

be correct. Furthermore, the wording is general and not restricted to a particular application.

25- *Yā Sīn*: Meccan

Two verses are said to be exceptions:

Firstly:

> *Verily, We it is Who bring the dead to life. We record that which they send before (them), and their footprints. And all things We have kept in a clear register* (36:12).

Al-Ḥākim and al-Tirmidhī cite Abū Sa'īd al-Khidrī as saying:

> Banū Salamah were on the outskirts of Medina, and they complained to the Messenger of God about the remoteness of their homes from the Mosque and praying with him, so the verse was revealed, and the Messenger of God told them, 'What you have sent before is recorded.'

Therefore they did not move house.[543]

However, this story does not account for the revelation of every part of the verse. It may be that the Prophet relied on part of it as evidence after they complained about the remoteness of their homes, because the best deeds can be the most painful ones.

And secondly:

> *And when it is said unto them: 'Spend of that wherewith God hath provided you,' those who disbelieve say unto those who believe: 'Shall we feed those whom God, if He willed, would feed?' Ye are in naught else than error manifest* (36:47).

According to Ibn 'Abbās, this was revealed in reference to the hypocrites in Medina.[544]

However, it is clearly addressed to those who became unbelievers. Also, Abū Ja'far explicitly stated that it refers to the pagans.[545] In addition, the context of the verse itself testifies to the same thing.

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[543] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 418; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 43; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 22, 100.

[544] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 413.

[545] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 23, 9.

The Amīrī Codex and al-Zanjāni's *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* say that verse 45 is an exception. However they may have got the number mixed up. On the assumption that it is correct, however, it is in the same context as verse 47, and what was said about that applies here as well.

26- The Troops *(al-Zumar)*: Meccan

These Words of the Almighty have been said to be an exception:

> *Say: O My bondmen who believe! Observe your duty to your Lord. For those who do good in this world there is good, and God's earth is spacious. Verily the steadfast will be paid their wages without stint* (39:10).

Al-Sakhāwī narrates on authority in *Jamāl al-Qurrā'* that it was revealed in Medina.[546]

However, the verse itself illustrates that it is Meccan and was revealed to urge the poor believers to migrate. The same is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.[547]

The following is also said to be an exception:

> *God hath (now) revealed the fairest of statements, a Book consistent, (wherein promises of reward are) paired (with threats of punishment), whereat doth creep the flesh of those who fear their Lord...* (39:23).

Ibn al-Juzrī also narrates on the authority of one other that it was revealed in Medina.[548]

However, the resonant tone that plucks at the heartstrings testifies to the fact that it is Meccan, as does the context, so there is no reason at all for saying that it is an exception.

Similarly, three other verses are said to be exceptions:

> *Say: O My slaves who have been prodigal to their own hurt!...*
>
> to
>
> *....when ye know not...* (39:53-55).

[546] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44.

[547] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 492.

[548] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44.

It is said through a weak chain of narration on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that they were revealed about Waḥshī, the slayer of Ḥamzah![549]

However, via an authentic chain of narration Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites Ibn 'Abbās as saying:

> This verse was revealed about the Meccan pagans.[550]

Abū Ja'far explained it the same way, on the basis of hadith evidence transmitted via many routes (*ṭuruq*).[551]

Nevertheless, Waḥshī – a monster in human form – does not deserve a verse to be revealed about him with such a tender emotional resonance and hidden allusions that are imperceptible to all but those with a mature understanding and acute faculties.

'Allāmah Ṭabrisī contends:

> It is incorrect to say that this verse was revealed about Waḥshī, because the verse was revealed in Mecca and Waḥshī became a Muslim many years after that. However, it is possible that the verse was recited to him and was the reason for his becoming a Muslim.[552]

27- The Believer or The Forgiver *(al-Mu'min* or *al-Ghāfir)*: Meccan

Three of its verses are said to be an exception.

The first is:

> *...and hymn the praise of thy Lord at fall of night and in the early hours* (40:55).

Al-Ḥasan says that this is because it refers to the sunset prayer and the dawn prayer. It is confirmed that the obligation to pray was revealed in Medina.[553]

My comment is that this is strange, because prayer was the first duty to be imposed and that happened in Mecca. The Muslims used to pray both in congregation and individually. It was stated above that prayer

[549] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 63.

[550] Ibid.

[551] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 24, 10.

[552] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 503.

[553] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 528.

was the first thing brought by Gabriel at the beginning of the Prophet's mission, when he taught him the ablution from minor impurity and how to pray.[554]

Furthermore, the beginning of the verse, *Then have patience. Lo! the promise of God is true. And ask forgiveness of thy sin*, is evidence that it is Meccan, not to mention its context.

The second and third verses are:

> *Verily, those who wrangle concerning the revelations of God without a warrent having come to them...*
>
> to
>
> *...but most of mankind know not* (40:56-57).

According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> Ibn Ḥamīd and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, via an authentic chain of narration, cite Abu al-'Āliyah as saying:
>
> The Jews came to the Prophet and said, 'The Antichrist (*dajjāl*) is among us. He will appear at the end of time...'
>
> They began extolling his importance and so God revealed these two verses which contain:
>
> *Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater...* (40:57).[555]

My comment is that we seek refuge in God from vain talk. How can a Qur'anic verse be revealed refuting an insignificant claim that a Jew bragged about, making a comparison between the deceit of the Antichrist and the creation of the heavens and the earth?

Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī did well[556] in not mentioning any of those vacuous hadiths with which Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī filled his exegesis. We declare the Holy Qur'an to be completely free of them.

Next, the verse compares the creation of the heavens with the creation of mankind, making the former greater, and this is evidence of a disavowal which took place with regard to man's creation, which is something that does not fit in with such an absurd claim.

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[554] *Supra* under 'The First to be Revealed.'

[555] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 353; al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 65.

[556] Ṭabarī, *Jami' al-Bayān*, vol. 24, 50.

It is strange that Ṭabrisī[557] should have fallen in with the likes of al-Suyūṭī with regard to this vacuousness.

28- Consultation *(al-Shūrā)*: Meccan

The following three verses are said to be exceptions:

> *Or they say: 'Hath he invented a lie concerning God?'...*
>
> to
>
> *...As for the disbelievers, theirs will be an awful doom* (42:24-26).

It is said that they were revealed about the Helpers (*anṣār*). Al-Ṭabarānī narrates this on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās via a weak chain of narration.[558]

Also, it is said that the Almighty's Words:

> *And if God were to enlarge the provision for His slaves... He is Informed, a Seer of His bondsmen* (42:27),

were revealed about the poor refugees who lived off charity (*aṣḥāb al-ṣuffah*). Al-Ḥākim cites this and declares it to be authentic.[559]

My comment is that it would be very surprising if the first of these verses were revealed about the Helpers (*anṣār*). How can the words, *'Hath he (the Prophet) invented a lie concerning God?'* conceivably be attributed to them? Next, the tradition states that the Helpers thought ill of the Messenger of God and that he was fighting exclusively in defence of the People of his Household, and so this verse was revealed!

As for the last verse, it is general. If the tradition narrated on the authority of Ali is authentic, it means that it applies to the poor refugees on account of its generality (*'umūm*), and not that it was revealed exclusively about them. Assuming that to be the case, it would be a scolding rebuke of the poor refugees who lived off charity. Far be it from the Qur'an to hurt the feelings of a group of believers on account of their poverty.

Ṭabrisī also adds:

> *Say: 'I ask of you no fee therefor, save loving kindness among kinsfolk'* (42:23).

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[557] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 528.

[558] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 68.

[559] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 68.

Ibn 'Abbās says that when this verse was revealed, a man said, 'God has not revealed this verse!' and so God revealed:

Or say they: 'He hath invented a lie concerning God'? (42:24).

The man then repented and felt regret, and so, *And He it is Who accepteth repentance from His bondsmen... And as for disbelievers, theirs will be an awful doom* (42:25-26), was revealed.

He says on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās and Qatādah that four verses were revealed in Medina.[560] It may be with regard to the verse about love for kinsfolk being revealed regarding the Messenger's kinsfolk from his Pure Family, as we have confirmed.[561] However, that does not contradict the idea of the 'fee' for the Message being love for one's kinsfolk, and recorded as a debt owed by the believers because it was for their own good, and they would be aware of that from the beginning of their Islamic life.

Similarly, they thought:

...and whose affairs are a matter of counsel... (42:38),

was revealed after Islam was established in Medina, for the Muslims did not have an institution when they were in fear of the pagans in Mecca.

However, the verse indicates the modus operandi for a group of believers, whatever condition they are in, whether weak or strong. They should work as one wherever they settle and wherever they travel.

The Almighty's Words:

And those who, when wrong is done to them, defend themselves...

to

...there is no cause of blame against them. (42:39-41).

Ibn al-Gharas narrates on the authority of one of them that it was revealed in Medina,[562] except that the context is completely Meccan and the verses preceding and following it are definitely linked to it, making it impossible for it to be an exception. They were all revealed about the believers in Mecca in the days when they were considered weak. This cannot be doubted by anyone who refers to the verses.

[560] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayan*, vol. 9, 20.

[561] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, part 8: 'Consideration of the Traditions, The Seventh Kind.'

[562] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44.

29- The Adornment *(al-Zukhruf)*: Meccan

The following is said to be an exception:

> *And ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before thee: Did We ever appoint gods to be worshipped beside the Beneficent?* (43:45).

According to al-Muqātil this was revealed at the Dome of the Rock at the time of the Night Journey.[563] Alternatively, it is said that it was revealed in Medina.[564] However, the verse is closely linked to the surrounding verses, and was revealed in the tone of, 'I am talking to you but I want others to listen,' so it is without a doubt Meccan, and concerns the pagans. As for its being revealed in Heaven or at the Dome of the Rock, that would not make it Medinan. It is only Meccan on account of its being revealed before the Migration, in accordance with the aforementioned classification.[565] The Amīrī Codex and those who follow it say that verse 54 is an exception, but this could be confusion over the number.

30- The Crouching *(al-Jāthiyah)*: Meccan

According to Qatādah, the following was revealed in Medina:[566]

> *Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God* (45:14).

The correct view is that it is one of the verses of forgiveness which were revealed in Mecca in the days when the believers were considered weak. Hence it was abrogated later, when Islam's power became strong in Medina.[567]

31- The Sand Dunes *(al-Aḥqāf)*: Meccan

The following is said to be an exception:

> *Bethink you that if it is from God and ye disbelieve therein, and a witness of the Children of Israel hath already testified to the like thereof and hath believed, and ye are too proud...* (46:10).

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[563] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 38; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 19.

[564] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44.

[565] *Supra* under 'Different Ways of Telling Meccan from Medinan.'

[566] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 70; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44.

[567] See *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 25, 87.

Ṭabarānī states that it was revealed in Medina and concerns how 'Abdullāh ibn Salām became a Muslim.[568] It is indeed odd how the exegetes seem infatuated with connecting every verse where there is an allusion to the People of the Book becoming believers with 'Abdullāh ibn Salām and his kind.

The correct view is that it is rebuke of the Quraysh for dragging their heels in believing in a religion brought at the hand of one of their own and in their native tongue, while those such as the Children of Israel and others believed in it. The only reason the Children of Israel were singled out for mention is the extra attention given them by the Arabs at the time, and the trust they had in their knowledge and culture.

Moreover, Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites Masrūq as saying:

> This verse was revealed in Mecca about the pagans.

Abū Ja'far states the same via several chains of narration.[569]

Five other verses are said to be exceptions:

> *We have commanded unto man kindness toward parents...*
>
> to
>
> *...and they will not be wronged* (46:15-19).

It is said that they were revealed about Abū Bakr – because he was kind to his parents – and his son 'Abd al-Raḥmān when he was recalcitrant towards his parents when they were trying to persuade him to become a Muslim.[570]

However, the verses are general, as evidenced by the plural form indicative of generality in both cases. Thus, they are a portrayal of anyone who is kind to his parents as compared with obstinacy towards them.[571]

In any event, deeming it to have been revealed about Abū Bakr and his son 'Abd al-Raḥmān does not mean the verses have to be Medinan, given that the relevant story – assuming it to be true – took place in Mecca.

Similarly, there is no reason for saying that God's Words:

> *Then have patience even as the stout of heart among the messengers of old had patience* (46:35),

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[568] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 72; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 26, 8; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 44.

[569] Ṭabarī, *Jami' al-Bayān*, 26:7; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 6:39.

[570] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 41; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 26, 13.

[571] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 87.

are an exception, given their Meccan tone and their melody being directed at the pagans of Quraysh. It was revealed during the days when the Muslims were weak, and was abrogated later by the verse telling them to fight (*āyat al-qitāl*).

32- *Qāf*: Meccan

Ḥākim and others state that the following verse was revealed in Medina in response to a Jewish claim that God rested on the Sabbath after creating the heavens and the earth in six days:[572]

> *And verily We created the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in six days, and naught of weariness touched Us* (50:38).

Majma' al-Bayān adds:

> ...up to His Words, *and before the setting of the sun* (50:39), on the authority of al-Ḥasan.

My comment is that it is true that it was revealed in response to a false claim, but not that it was revealed in Medina. This is because the Arabs, as repeatedly stated, were in constant contact with the People of the Book, and they may have accepted teachings pertaining to the creation of the heavens and the earth from them, making them well known among the pagan Arabs. So this response – assuming it to be a response – does not prove that it was revealed in Medina. It may be that the tradition which says that it was revealed about the Jews means what we have stated – that it was revealed about teachings they had spread among the Arabs.

Testimony to the fact that the verse is Meccan, is what comes after it – one of the verses of forgiveness that were abrogated later:

...so bear with what they say...(50:39).

33- The Star *(al-Najm)*: Meccan

The following is said to be an exception:

> *He is Best Aware of you (from the time) when He created you from the earth, and when ye were hidden in the bellies of your mothers. Therefore ascribe not purity unto yourselves. He is Best Aware of him who wardeth off (evil)* (53:32).

[572] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 110; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 45.

Al-Wāḥidī states that Thābit ibn al-Ḥarth al-Anṣārī said:

> The Jews would say, 'Righteous (*Ṣiddīq*),' if one of their small boys died. That came to the attention of the Messenger of God and so he said, 'They're lying. There is not a single soul created by God in his mother's womb who is not either wretched or happy.' So at that, God revealed, *He is Best Aware of you...*[573]

My comment is that if the tradition is authentic, it does not indicate that the verse was revealed in Medina. It may be that what was said by the Jews – who spread their corrupt teachings among the Arabs – reached the Messenger when he was in Mecca and thence the verse was revealed there.

However, the tradition has nothing at all to do with the import of the verse, because God's Words, *He is Best Aware of you*, are an explanation of *....wide in His forgiveness*, meaning that mankind has a propensity to succumb to base desires in accordance with human nature, which consists of tendencies and cravings, and which God knows very well. Hence, He covenanted forgiveness upon Himself as a mercy to mankind and out of compassion for man's particular position.

Nine verses are said to be exceptions, beginning with:

> *Didst thou observe him who turned away ...* (53:33-41).

It is said that they were revealed about a man who came to the Prophet when he was setting out for battle, asking him for a mount and weaponry, but none could be found. So he met up with a friend of his and said, 'Give me something.' He replied, 'I will give you this in exchange for your bearing my sins.' He agreed, and so these verses were revealed.[574]

However, the verses do not tally with the meaning of the story at all. They were simply revealed in reference to one of the leaders of Quraysh in a long story referred to by Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī.[575]

34- The Moon *(al-Qamar)*: Meccan

Three verses are said to be exceptions, firstly:

> *The hosts shall all be routed, and will turn and flee* (54:45).

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[573] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 88-89; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 128.

[574] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 128.

[575] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 27, 41-42.

It is claimed that this was revealed at the Battle of Badr.[576]

The truth is that they promised the Muslims victory later on and so the Battle of Badr took place.[577]

The second and third are:

> *Surely the godfearing shall dwell amid gardens and a river in a sure abode, in the presence of a King Omnipotent* (54:54-55).

However, whoever said that these are exceptions gave no reason, nor is there any reason for their being so, given the unbroken context (*waḥdat al-siyāq*) of the verses and their being firmly in keeping with those before and after.

The Amīrī Codex says that verses 44, 45 and 46 are exceptions, but this may be because of confusion over the numeration.

35- The Inevitable *(al-Wāqi'ah)*: Meccan

The following is said to be an exception:[578]

> *A multitude of those of old and a multitude of those of later time* (56:39-40).

This may be on account of Ibn Mas'ūd's tradition about a vision the Messenger of God had. He told his companions of it, and then recited the two verses.[579] This is said to have happened in Medina.

However, his reciting it does not prove that it was revealed there and then.

Also, the following verses are said to be exceptions:

> *Nay, I swear by the places of the stars - and lo! that verily is a tremendous oath, if ye but knew - that (this) is indeed a noble Qur'an in a Book kept hidden which none toucheth but the purified, a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. Is it this Statement that ye scorn, and make denial thereof your livelihood?* (56:75-82).

This is on account of what Muslim, Ḥākim and others narrate, that the companions were either afflicted by drought or their water ran out

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[576] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 90.

[577] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 194; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 45 and 104; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 27, 65.

[578] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 45.

[579] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 219.

during a journey or at the Battle of Tabūk. They then complained to the Prophet and he rose up and prayed two *rak'ahs*. He then petitioned God, Who sent a cloud which rained down on them. Thereafter some of them started whispering to each other, 'We have been given rain by the setting of such-and-such a star,' and so the verse was revealed.[580]

However, the verses do not apply to this story. They are a response to those who rejected the revelation from God, and have nothing whatsoever to do with the setting of the stars, either in their literal meaning or their import, just as the verses preceding and following them make it impossible to accept the aforementioned tradition.

36- The Kingdom *(al-Mulk)*: Meccan

It is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that the whole chapter, apart from three verses, was revealed in relation to the people of Mecca.[581]

My comment is that this does not mean that all of it was revealed in Mecca other than three verses which were revealed elsewhere.

On the contrary, this chapter was revealed as a reprimand to the pagans of Mecca. All the verses are a threat to them except for three verses about the believers, which are as follows:

Surely those who fear their Lord ... (67:12);

It is He who made the earth ... for you ... (67:15);

Say: 'He is the All-Merciful. We believe in Him ...' (67:29)

The correct view, as in Ibn Khudayj's hadith, is that the whole chapter was revealed in Mecca.[582]

37- The Pen *(al-Qalam)*: Meccan

Al-Sakhāwī narrates in *Jamāl al-Qurrā'* that these seventeen verses are exceptions:

Lo! We have tried them as We tried the owners of the garden...

to

...if they did but know (68:17-33);

[580] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 92-93.

[581] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 246.

[582] Ibid.

along with another three verses:

But wait thou for thy Lord's decree...

to

...and He placed him among the righteous (68:48-50).

It is claimed that these twenty verses were revealed in Medina.[583] *Majma' al-Bayān* adds verses 51 and 52.[584]

Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Jurayj state that Abū Jahl said at the Battle of Badr: 'Take them, tie them with ropes and do not kill any of them,' and so, *Lo! We have tried them...*, was revealed.[585]

However, what Abū Jahl said does not ostensibly fit in with the import of the aforementioned verses, such that it could account for their revelation.

The correct view is that they were revealed about the pagans in general, in keeping with the rest of the verses in the chapter. That is how 'Allāmah Ṭabrisī and Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī explain them.[586]

As for, *But wait thou for thy Lord's decree...*, they are without a doubt Meccan verses of forgiveness. We do not know the reason for the strange belief that they are an exception.

38- Enfolded *(al-Muzzammil)*: Meccan

Al-Iṣbahānī narrates that the following are exceptions:[587]

And bear with patience what they utter...

to

...and do thou respite them awhile (73:10-11).

However, the two verses are a consolation to the Prophet in the face of harassment by the pagans, and a threat to them. Thence they are Meccan verses of forgiveness, and there is no reason to think that they are Medinan.

Ibn al-Gharas narrates that God's Words:

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[583] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 46.

[584] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 330.

[585] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 253.

[586] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 336 and Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 29, 19.

[587] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 46.

Lo! thy Lord knoweth how thou keepest vigil...

to

...God is Forgiving, Merciful (73:20),

are an exception.
According to Jalāl al-Dīn:

> What Ḥākim states – that it was revealed a year after the beginning of the chapter – refutes this. That was when standing in prayer all through the night was mandatory – when Islam first came along – before the five prayers were made mandatory.[588]

'Abd ibn Ḥamīd narrates the same on the authority of 'Ikrimah:

> The Muslims carried on doing what they were doing for a whole year after, *O, thou enwrapped in thy robes, keep vigil at night...*, was revealed. It was difficult for them and their feet cracked, until the end of the chapter, *Recite, then, of the Qur'an, that which is easy for you*, abrogated it.[589]

My comment is that whoever says that the verse is Medinan relies on the belief that prayer and charity were not made obligatory in Mecca.[590] It is a strange reasoning, because prayer was the first duty to be imposed in Mecca.[591] As for charity, it does not mean compulsory almsgiving with prescribed parameters and a minimum quantity of property that incurs liability (*niṣābs*). At the time, it simply meant a discretionary but compulsory amount, as in God's Words:

...And who are payers of the poor-due (23:4)

and:

...Who give not the poor-due, and are disbelievers in the Hereafter (41:7).

It is true that specific rulings came about in Medina, but there was undoubtedly a compulsory foundation of alms-giving in Mecca.

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[588] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 46.

[589] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 280.

[590] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 372.

[591] See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 259.

The narrator might rather have relied on God's Words, *...and others fight in God's cause...*, and the fact that fighting was only made part of the law in Medina. However, that would have to be based on the presumption that what is meant by fighting is actual fighting, and not that which would be made a duty and which would take place later on. The second possibility is more likely in view of the fact that, in this verse, God mentions the reasons for which the first difficult duty would be replaced by another, easier one. A reason for fighting being made part of the law later on, was that there was no clear evidence of what was meant by actual fighting.

39- Those Sent Forth *(al-Mursalāt)*: Meccan

It is said that the following of God's Words are an exception:

> *When it is said unto them: Bow down, they bow not down* (77:48).

According to Muqātil it was revealed when the Messenger told the Banu Thaqīf to pray and they protested, 'We do not bow because that is dishonour for us.'[592] They became Muslim in Medina.

However, the complexion of the verse and its context indicates that it refers to the pagan Arabs. There is no reason for there to be a space left in the chapter for this verse, to be filled in the last years after the Migration, because that would rupture the harmony and eloquence of the chapter.

Nevertheless, in this context 'bowing' means submission to God, obeying his commandments, and not bowing in the technical sense as a part of prayer, for example. This is Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī's favoure opinion,[593] in the same way as, *And perform the prayer, pay the alms and bc with those that bow* means the same thing.

See *Tafsīru Shubbar*, where it says:

> Alternatively, it means submission and obedience to the Truth.

It states with conviction regarding *Those Sent Forth*:

> *If they are told to bow*, means submitted, humbled themselves and followed.[594]

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[592] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 419 .

[593] See Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 29, 150.

[594] *Tafsīru Shubbar*, vol. 46, 545.

Therefore the verse has nothing to do with the matter of the Banu Thaqīf becoming Muslims. Instead, it talks generally about the pagans' stubborn resistance in the face of manifest Truth.

40- The Dealers in Fraud *(al-Muṭaffif īn)*: Meccan

They say that the beginning of this chapter was revealed in Medina when the Messenger of God first arrived there. The people of Medina were amongst the most unfair with regard to weights and measures, and so God revealed the first six verses, beginning with:

> *Woe unto the dealers in fraud ...* (83:1).

Thereafter, they were reformed.[595]

It was stated above that it would be extremely surprising for the Messenger to confront the Helpers (*anṣār*) with such sternly-worded verses upon his first meeting with them, when they had given him refuge in their own territory, and gone to great efforts to help him in the cause of spreading the word of Islam.

Hence, the correct view is that the whole chapter is Meccan.

There are yet more verses said to be exceptions, but we have omitted them to avoid prolixity and because they are not based on adequate evidence. Some of these are in *The Night* (*al-Layl*) and *Charity* (*al-Mā'ūn*), and are referred to by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*.

Exceptions within Medinan Chapters

It was stated above that it would be surprising if a verse remained unrecorded in a Meccan chapter until a later Medinan chapter was revealed in which it was. Others, including Ibn Ḥajar in *Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, believe that to be a remote possibility.[596]

Nevertheless, it is said that several verses which are recorded in Medinan chapters are in fact Meccan. These will be examined in the order in which they appear in the Noble Codex (*al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf*) and comment on them.

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[595] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 47; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 324; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 452.

[596] *Supra* under 'Verses Said to Be an Exception.'

1- The Cow *(al-Baqarah):* Medinan

Three of the verses are said to be exceptions.

The first of these is:

> *... Forgive and be indulgent (toward them) until God gives His command* (2:109).

They claim that they were revealed about the pagans in the days when the Muslims in Mecca were weak.

However, the beginning of the verse:

> *Many of the People of the Book long to...*

is testimony to its having been revealed about the People of the Book shortly after the Messenger's migration to Medina, before Islam had become strong. It was later abrogated by:

> *Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not...until they pay the tribute readily, Being brought low* (9:29).

See Tabarsī regarding the revelation of the verse and its abrogation by a verse freeing them from obligation (*āyat barā'ah*).[597]

The second verse is the Almighty's Words:

> *The guiding of them is not thy duty...* (2:272).

This is also claimed to have been revealed regarding the pagans' stubborn resistance to accepting the Truth, as in His Words:

> *Thou guidest not whom thou lovest...* (28:56).

However, the verse was revealed in connection with the Muslims' expenditure on the disbelievers, because they had refused to do so, believing it to be forbidden because the disbelievers did not follow their religion.[598]

The third verse is:

> *And guard yourself against a day in which ye will be brought back to God ...* (2:281).

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[597] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 184-185; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 107.

[598] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 385; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 357.

It is said that this was the last verse to be revealed to the Messenger of God when he was at Minā on the Farewell Pilgrimage.[599] Assuming that to be the case, it is Medinan as stated above.

2- The Women *(al-Nisā')*: Medinan

Ṭabrisī claims that the following are exceptions:

> *God commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners ...* (4:58),

and:

> *They ask thee for a pronouncement. Say: God hath pronounced for you concerning distant kindred...* (4:176).

However, he gives no evidence and no others agree.[600]

The reason for the first verse may be that it is said on the authority of Ibn Jurayj that it was revealed after the conquest of Mecca, and is addressed to the Prophet, instructing him to give the key of the Ka'bah back to 'Uthmān ibn Ṭalḥah, having taken it from him on the day of the conquest, intending to give it to to al-'Abbās.[601]

However, what determines whether a verse is Meccan is whether it was revealed before the Migration, as stated above. Moreover, the verse does not apply to the aforementioned story because the key was not given to the Prophet for safekeeping or as a deposit. Otherwise, far be it from the Prophet to betray a trust and have his attention drawn to it by God through the revelation of a verse. Ṭabrisī also rejects this explanation for the revelation.

As for the second verse, we neither acknowledge the reason given, nor that it is even possible. Ṭabrisī refers to explanations for its revelation which are inappropriate as evidence for saying that it is an exception.[602] The tone of the verse also cries out that it is Medinan, because it is one of the verses containing a ruling (*āyāt al-aḥkām*).

However, the declaration that it is an exception is based on the second system of classification. As for the first system, which is generally accepted,

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[599] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 1, 370.

[600] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 1.

[601] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 63.

[602] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 149.

whatever was revealed after the Migration is Medinan, even if it was revealed in Mecca. The verse is therefore Medinan.[603]

3- The Table *(al-Mā'idah)*: Medinan

The following Words of God are said to be an exception:

> *This day are those who disbelieve in despair of (ever harming) your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me. This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion Islam* (5:3).

It is said that this was revealed to the Messenger of God while he was staying in 'Arafah on the Farewell Pilgrimage.[604] Abū 'Abdillāh al-Zanjānī claims the same in *Tārīkh al-Qur'an.*[605]

However, Abū 'Abdillāh al-Ṣādiq explains:

> The verse was revealed after the Messenger of God appointed Ali as the banner of the nation on the Day of Ghadīr Khumm on his way back from the Farewell Pilgrimage. So God revealed on that day:
>
> *This day have I perfected your religion for you...* [606]

So, too, is it recorded by Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī:

> It was revealed on the day he appointed Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib Commander of the Faithful at Ghadīr Khumm.

He comments:

> It is the tradition which is confirmed and clear.[607]

Hāfiẓ Ḥasakānī cites it via several routes.[608]

Furthermore, the verse being revealed at 'Arafah or at Ghadīr Khumm does not make it an exception to the Medinan chapters according to the generally accepted classification.

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[603] *Supra* under 'Different Ways of Telling Meccan from Medinan.'

[604] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, 257.

[605] Zanjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 27.

[606] Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 3, 435.

[607] Ibn Wāḍiḥ, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. 2, 35.

[608] Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 156-160.

4- The Spoils of War *(al-Anfāl)*: Medinan

The following is said to be an exception:

> *And when those who disbelieve plot against thee to wound thee fatally, or to kill thee or to drive thee forth; they devise, but God deviseth; and God is the best of devisers* (8:30).

It is said that this was revealed in relation to the story of the council hall (*dār al-nadwah*) where the Quraysh had gathered to plot against the Messenger of God, and their plot was foiled by the Messenger's Migration and Ali's sleeping on his bed.[609]

However, this does not mean that the verse had to have been revealed there and then, especially in view of the adverbial preposition of time, which indicates the past tense – *idh* (when) – at the beginning of the verse, referring to a past event.

According to the Amīrī Codex and Zanjānī's *Tārīkh*, verses 31 to 36 are exceptions in view of the fact that they were revealed about the pagans from Quraysh. However, the verse mentioned refers to a past event and there is no evidence that it was revealed there and then. Further, His Words:

> *But God would not punish them while thou wast with them, nor will He punish them while they seek forgiveness* (8:33),

also refer to the past and speak of the present, meaning that God did not punish them before because the Prophet was among them, and does not punish them now after his leaving them because of the presence of a group of believers who were unable to leave, even though they were determined to migrate. Thus God lifted the punishment from the people of Mecca out of respect for the forgiveness sought by those believers who remained among them.[610]

Moreover, Jalāl al-Dīn narrates on the authority of Qatādah:

> The verse, *And when those who disbelieve plot against thee...*, was revealed in Mecca.

However, this is refuted by what is authentically narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that this very same verse was revealed in Medina.[611]

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[609] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 537.

[610] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 539.

[611] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 39.

It is stated in *Asbāb al-Tanzīl* on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that the verse was revealed after the Prophet's arrival in Medina.[612]

Ibn al-'Arabī and others say that the following of God's Words are an exception:[613]

> *O Prophet! God is sufficient for thee and those who follow thee of the believers* (8:64).

This is on account of what is stated by Abū Muhammad via Ṭāriq on the authority of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb:

> I was the fortieth to become Muslim and so, *O Prophet, God is sufficient for thee and those who follow thee of the believers*, was revealed.

The same is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.[614]

However, it is contradicted by what is narrated on the authority of al-Kalbī. He says that this verse was revealed in the desert at the Battle of Badr.[615] According to al-Wāqidī, it was revealed in Medina about Banī Qurayẓah and Banī al-Naḍīr.[616]

Moreover, the context of the verse testifies to its being Medinan. It was revealed when fighting was first made lawful both with the pagans and with the People of the Book. The verse is preceded by the Almighty's Words:

> *Those of them with whom thou hast made a pact, then at every opportunity they break their pact ...* (8:56);
>
> *If thou comest upon them in the war, deal with them...* (8:57);
>
> *And let not those who disbelieve suppose that they can outstrip (God's purpose). Lo! they cannot escape.* (8:59);
>
> *Make ready for them all thou canst of (armed) force and of horses tethered...* (8:60);
>
> *And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it...* (8:61);
>
> *And if they would deceive thee, then lo! God is sufficient for thee. He it is that supporteth thee with His help...* (8:62).

[612] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 170.

[613] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 39.

[614] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 200.

[615] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 557.

[616] Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 5, 152.

Then comes:

> *O Prophet! God is sufficient for thee and those who follow thee of the believers* (8:64);

followed by:

> *O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight...* (8:65).

Looking at the verse within its context, each part of which fits in with the others, makes us confident that it is a part of a coherent whole that was revealed together.

Furthermore, it makes no sense, since they were still a weak force, as if forty men becoming Muslim was enough. This confirms that the verse was revealed in Medina, because the Muslims' power was increasing by the day.

This is how Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī explains it:

> He says to them, Sublime is His Praise, 'Resist your enemy, for God will suffice you, and do not let the size of their numbers and the paucity of yours frighten you. For God will support you with His Help.'

He refers to traditions in support of this explanation and does not address any of the traditions which claim that it was revealed in relation to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's becoming a Muslim.[617]

5- The Repentance *(al-Barā'ah)*: Medinan

Four verses have been said to be an exception.

The first and second are:

> *It is not for the Prophet, and those who believe, to pray for the forgiveness of idolaters, even though they may be near of kins...*
>
> to
>
> *...Abraham was soft of heart, long-suffering* (9:113-114).

It is claimed that they were revealed about Abū Ṭālib when death came upon him. The Prophet went to see him and Abū Jahl and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Umayyah were with him. The Prophet said, 'Say: 'There is no god but God,' Uncle, and I will rely on it as evidence in God's presence.' So the two

[617] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 26.

Qurayshi men said, 'Do you have a distaste for 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's religion?' Every time the Prophet put the testimony of faith to him they repeated what they had said. Abū Ṭālib's last words were that he followed 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's religion and refused to say that there is no god but God, so the Prophet said, 'I will seek forgiveness for you provided I am not told otherwise.' Thereafter, the verse was revealed, as also was:

> *Thou guidest not whom thou lovest, but God guideth whom He will...* (28:56).[618]

It is also said that it was revealed about the parents of the Prophet; he wanted to seek forgiveness for his father, and similarly, sought his Lord's permission to visit his mother's grave, and was granted it. It occurred to him to seek forgiveness for her, and so the verse was revealed telling him not to. The Messenger of God was never seen crying more than he did that day.[619]

My comment is may God destroy ignorant fanaticism. It is an Umayyad leaning set on detracting from the Hashimites' dignity and on distorting the image of the Prophet's relatives, making out that his parents were pagans and that Abū Ṭālib died an unbeliever, when in fact he was the first protector and only defender in his time of the Messenger of God. The Almighty said:

> *...and those who are akin are nearer one to another in the ordinance of God* (8:75).

There is no doubt that Abū Ṭālib was the first to give him refuge, help him and defend him with his life and property. The verse above is a general testimony which undoubtedly includes him.[620]

What he said in his ode (*qaṣīdah*) in which he defended the Messenger of God suffices as evidence of his sincere belief:

> *They know that none of us calls our son a liar and that he does not occupy himself with telling falsehoods;*

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[618] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 282; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 2, 119; 6:87.

[619] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 11, 319.

[620] Al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn fī Ma'rifat Usūl al-Dīn* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1997), vol. 1, 100.

He became the most laudable among us in origin short of which the vehemence of the insolent falls;

I took care of him by myself, protected him with shelter and chests;

The Lord of the servants supported him with His help and manifested a religion, the truth of which is not falsehood.[621]

As for us, the Imāmiyyah, the fundamentals of Shi'a beliefs dictate the necessity of the purity of the Prophet and the Imams' ancestors, both male and female, unpolluted in the slightest by the stain of polytheism. They continued throughout the generations, as the seventh salutation (*ziyārah*) of Imām Abū 'Abdillāh says:

> I testify that you were light in the noble loins and pure wombs. The days of ignorance did not sully you with impurity or clothe you in darkness.

A hadith from Ibn 'Abbās on the authority of the Prophet says:

> God kept moving me from the noble loins to the pure wombs, cleansed and refined.[622]

An interpretation of the Almighty's Words says the same:

...and your movement among those who fall prostrate (in prayer) (26:219);

that is to say, your seed moved from believer to believer. Mujāhid explains:

> ...from Prophet to Prophet until you were brought out as a Prophet.[623]

According to 'Allāmah Ṭabrisī :

> It is said on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, narrated by 'Aṭā' and 'Ikrimah, that it means your turning over in the loins of the monotheists, from Prophet to Prophet until you were brought out as a Prophet. It is what is narrated on the authority of Imam Muhammad ibn Ali al-Bāqir and Abū 'Abdillāh Imām Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq:

[621] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, 299.
[622] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 294.
[623] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 5, 98.

> ...in the loins of Prophets, Prophet after Prophet until He took him out of his father's loin, via marriage, not fornication, from the time of Adam.[624]

The correct view on the reason for the revelation of this verse is what Abu Ali al-Ṭabrisī says:

> The Muslims came to the Prophet asking him to seek forgiveness for their dead who had passed on as unbelievers or hypocrites. They said, 'Will you not seek forgiveness for our forefathers who died in the days of ignorance?' and so the verse was revealed.[625]

What proves the authenticity of this narration is that the verse is worded: 'It is not for the Prophet and those who believe...' If the first narration were authentic, there would be no conceivable reason to include other believers with him in this severe rebuke.

Finally, this verse – verse 80 – and verse 84 were revealed in the same way. The reason for their revelation is one thing: that the believers hoped that the Prophet would invoke mercy upon their kinsfolk who had died as unbelievers, begging the Prophet to help them. The following verses were revealed to scupper this hope, if they knew that their kinsfolk had remained polytheists until they died:

> *Lo! God forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto Him. He forgiveth (all) save that to whom He will...* (4:48),

and:

> *Lo! God pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will* (4:116).

For more clarification, see the exegesis of the two verses.[626] The third and fourth verses are the following:

> *There hath come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto whom aught that ye are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful. Now, if they turn away say: God sufficeth*

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[624] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 207.

[625] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 76.

[626] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 137 and 141; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 54 and 56; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 264 and 266.

> *me. There is no god save Him. In Him have I put my trust, and He is Lord of the Mighty Throne* (9:128-129).

They are the last two verses of the chapter.

According to Ibn al-Gharas they are Meccan. Jalāl al-Dīn says that this is strange given that it is said that they were the last thing to be revealed.[627]

My comment is that the claim that the two verses were revealed in Mecca is not corroborated, and the one who claimed that they were gives no evidence for it. The placing of the verse in a Medinan chapter – especially the last Medinan chapter – is in itself proof that it was revealed in Medina, given that the first principle of situating verses is to place them where they naturally belong, in line with revelation, and in addition to what is said regarding the reason for its revelation. When the Messenger of God first came to Medina, Juhaynah came to ask him for a promise of security, and so the two verses were revealed.[628] Similarly, it is narrated that they were the last Qur'anic verses to be revealed in Medina.[629]

6- The Thunder *(al-Ra'd)*: Medinan

Abū Sheikh reports from Qatādah:

> *The Thunder* is Medinan except for the Almighty's Words:
>
> > *...As for those who disbelieve, disaster ceaseth not to strike them because of what they do, or it dwelleth near their home, until the threat of God come to pass...* (13:31).[630]

According to Ṭabrisī:

> *Had it been possible for a Qur'an to cause the mountains to move...* (13:31)
>
> to the end of the verse and what follows it are an exception.[631]

However, the verse is a rebuke of the pagans' fluctuating position and intimidation of them, just as it announces the glad tidings of the Muslims' imminent victory. Therefore, since it is nothing but a conclusion to the previous verses, it is more likely to have been revealed about the

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[627] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 39; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 296.

[628] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 297.

[629] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 297; Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 86.

[630] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 40.

[631] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 273.

treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah.[632] It is said on the authority of 'Ikrimah that it was revealed in Medina concerning the Prophet's raiding parties. The 'striking' is the raiding party which would subjugate them, and the 'threat' is the conquest.[633]

7- The Pilgrimage *(al-Hajj)*: Medinan

According to Jalāl al-Dīn, three verses, beginning with the following, were revealed in Medina:[634]

> *These twain (the believers and the disbelievers) are two opponents...* (22:19).

My comment is that, on that basis, one would have to go all the way to verse 22, or even verse 24 – six verses – in view of the tight link between them, which indicates that they cannot be separated.

In addition, there is no evidence for saying that these verses constitute an exception. Hence it is a strange claim, especially when considered in conjunction with a solid tradition which says that they were revealed in connection with three believers, Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 'Ubaydah ibn al-Ḥārith and Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, and three of the unbelievers, 'Utbah and Shaybah, sons of Rabī'ah, and Walīd ibn 'Utbah, who went out to meet each other in combat. Ali said: 'I will be the first to fall on his knees before God in the dispute on the Day of Resurrection,'[635] and so the verse was revealed either during or after the Battle of Badr.[636]

Four other verses are also said to be an exception:

> *Never sent We a messenger or a prophet before thee but when he recited (the message) Satan proposed (opposition)...*
>
> to:
>
> *...the doom of a disastrous day* (22:52-55).

[632] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 6, 292.

[633] Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 13, 105.

[634] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 24.

[635] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 123 and 124; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 8, 246.

[636] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 348-349; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 17, 99.

Ibn Mundhir states on the authority of Qatādah that they are Meccan.[637] They say that they were revealed in Mecca in relation to the cranes story.[638]

We have shown the cranes hadith to be a fabrication concocted by the atheists to damage the reputation of Muhammad and the Qur'an.[639]

The verses allude to the innovations which beset the prophets' codes of religious law (*sharā'i' al-anbiyā'*) at the hands of forgers. However, God preserves His religion at the hands of His scholars in every age, who foil the innovations of mischief-makers, as the hadith says.[640] These alternative narrations are a temptation for those with sickness in their hearts.

According to the Amīrī Codex and Zanjānī's *Tārīkh*, the verses were revealed between Mecca and Medina. However, there is no known rational or orally transmitted basis for this qualification.

8- *Muhammad*: Medinan

The following is said to be an exception:

> *And how many a township stronger than thy township which hath cast thee out, have We destroyed, and they had no helper!* (47:13).

Al-Sakhāwī reports in *Jamāl al-Qurrā'*:

> It is said that when the Prophet set off on his migration towards Medina, he stopped and looked towards Mecca and wept, and so it was revealed as a consolation for his noble heart.[641]

However, the context of the verse fits in snugly with the verses preceding and following it, leaving no scope to claim that they can be separated. Either they are all Meccan or all Medinan.

Given that the chapter is a stern rebuke of the pagans, and a general incitement for the believers as a prelude to making fighting lawful, it is Medinan, and revealed in a sharp tone that enumerates the misdeeds committed by the Quraysh, threatening them with terrible failure and

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[637] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 342. See also Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 202.

[638] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 90; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 17, 131; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 366.

[639] *Supra* under 'The Myth of the Cranes.'

[640] Sheikh Abbās Qummi, *Safīnat al-Biḥār wa Madīnat al-Ḥikam wa al-Āthār* (Tehran: Dār al-Uswah, 1414q.), vol. 1, 204 under article a-w-l.

[641] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 55-56; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 48.

a quick death in return for their stubborn resistance to the Truth. The aforementioned verse fits this pattern, without departing from the other verses in its context.

9- The Chambers *(al-Ḥujurāt)*: Medinan

It is said that Ibn 'Abbās claimed that the following is an exception:[642]

> *O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female...* (49:13).

It may be on account of its being addressed to 'mankind,' which some believe to be one of the proofs that a passage was addressed to Meccans. We stated above that this proves nothing, as is clear from the occurrence in *The Cow* of:

> *O mankind! Worship your Lord...* (2:21).

10- The Merciful *(al-Raḥmān)*: Medinan

The following is said to be an exception,[643] but the reason for this strange claim is unknown:

> *All that are in the heavens and in the earth entreat Him...* (55:29).

11- The Dispute *(al-Mujādalah)*: Medinan

The following is said to be an exception,[644] but the reason for this is also unknown:

> *There is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth...* (58:7).

12- The Prohibition *(al-Taḥrīm)*: Medinan

According to Qatādah, the first ten verses are Medinan and the rest is Meccan.[645] This is refuted by the fact that the last two verses are a conclusion to the similitude struck by God by way of advice to the Messenger's wives who had been insolent to him. If they are separated from the rest of the verses of the chapter, there would be nothing innovative about them.

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[642] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, 128.

[643] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 45.

[644] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 46.

[645] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 46.

13- The Man *(al-Insān)*: Medinan

The following verse up to the end of the chapter is said to be an exception:

So submit patiently to thy Lord's command... (76:24).

It is claimed that these verses were revealed about Abū Jahl.[646]

However, the verse follows on from the previous verses, so to separate it from them is out of the question. Nevertheless, the instruction to be patient in the face of stubborn opposition and the aberrations of ignorant people is a particularity of the prophets at all stages of their lives of striving for good. Hence, it is said that the verse is general, and applies to any disobedient person, sinner or unbeliever.[647]

There are other Medinan chapters which are said to contain strange exceptions, but which we have not included, since the discussion is already protracted, and what we have already said is enough to prove that there is no basis at all for claiming that they are exceptions. This applies to both Meccan and Medinan chapters. Such claims are either based on guesswork or weak traditions, and there is no reason to rely on them.

This concludes the discussion, and praise be to God, the First and the Last.

[646] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 302; *Ṭabrisī, Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 402 and 413.
[647] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 413.

CHAPTER IV

THE REASONS FOR REVELATION

ASBĀB AL-NUZŪL

Knowing the Reasons for Revelation

The Qur'an was revealed serially, in periods separated from each other and on various occasions which called for the revelation of a verse or verses to deal with the context. These occasions have been termed 'reasons for revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) or 'background to revelation' (*sha'n al-nuzūl*) – there is a difference between the two – and it is an important and noble science pertaining to the very essence of the meaning of revelation, and directs the exegete in search of guidance and the jurist who seeks to deduce rulings on the straight path.

In order to carry out this study comprehensively, we must look at a number of issues. What is the value of this knowledge and its contribution in the fields of jurisprudence and exegesis? How can one be guided to an understanding of the reasons for a revelation? Is there a difference between the expressions 'reason for' and 'background' to a revelation, or between reasons for revelation and allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*); and similarly, the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*baṭn*) meaning of a verse according to the terminology of the original generation (*salaf*)? What does it mean when it is said that a verse was revealed about such and such a thing? Is it necessary for the original narrator of the reason for revelation to have been present at the scene? Is what matters most the general meaning of the wording or the specifics of the situation in which it was revealed? What does it mean that the Qur'an was addressed to one person but that others should pay attention? Or that it courses like the sun and moon? How can one be guided to the main pointers in the Qur'an and by what means do we find them? There are wide-ranging and extensive discussions of this type.

The Value of This Knowledge

Knowing the background to the revelation plays an important role in understanding the meaning of the Qur'an, and solves problems of exegesis in both the fields of fundamentals (*uṣūl*) and secondary issues

(*furū'*). It lifts the veil on many aspects of verses that were revealed to address problems contemporary to that time. However, at the same time, these verses also have a general message for the problems of a nation throughout its duration. It may be that pausing over the original reason is one of the best ways to clear up ambiguity in a verse, for there would most certainly be an allusion to that within it.

According to al-Wāḥidī:

> It is not possible to know the exegesis of a verse without pausing over the story behind it and explaining the reason for its revelation.

Al-Suyūṭī contends that the benefits of knowing the reasons for revelation are the arrival at an accurate meaning and the removal of ambiguity.[648] He considers this unavoidable, given that the verse is linked to the incident which provoked its revelation.

Al-Qushayrī explains:

> Clarifying the reasons for the revelations is a robust way of understanding the meanings in the Mighty Book.[649]

There are examples of that in the Revelation itself:

> *Ṣafā and Marwa are among the indications of God. It is therefore no sin for him who is on pilgrimage to the House (of God) or visiteth it to go around them ...* (2:158).

The expression 'it is...no sin for him' has confused some exegetes, because it removes blame without meaning that there is any obligation. Therefore, the verse means that it is permissible, not compulsory, to pass back and forth (*al-sa'y*) between Ṣafā and Marwa, even though the consensus considers it compulsory.

However, if we know the reason why it was revealed, there is no confusion. That is because the rites of the *ḥajj* and *'umrah* were well known since the age of ignorance, except that the Arabs had polluted these rites with innovations they had made, including the placing of an idol in the form of a man called Isāf on Ṣafā, and an idol in the form of a woman called Nā'ilah on Marwa, claiming that they had fornicated in the Ka'bah and God had transfigured them into two stones, which they

[648] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 82.

[649] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 22.

placed on the two mountains so that a lesson could be learned from them. Then, after much time had passed, the Arabs began worshipping them out of ignorance, and would rub them to seek a blessing as they passed back and forth between them.

Then, when Islam came along and the idols were smashed, the Muslims refrained from this passing back and forth, believing that obtaining blessings from the two idols was an innovation from the days of ignorance. However, the verse was revealed in order to remove this misconception from the minds of the Muslims.[650]

According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> The Muslims believed that Ṣafā and Marwa were among the innovations of the people of ignorance, and so God revealed this verse.[651]

It is also narrated on his authority that it was when making up for the missed *'umrah* (*'umrat al-qaḍā'*). That was because the Messenger of God had imposed a condition upon the Quraysh to remove their idols, and one of the companions had seen that they had been put back. They came to the Messenger and asked him about it. He was told that So-and-So had not passed back and forth between them, because the idols had been replaced. Thereafter, God revealed this verse.[652]

God has said:

> *There shall be no sin (imputed) unto those who believe and do good works for what they may have eaten (in the past). So be mindful of your duty (to God), and believe, and do good works; and again: be mindful of your duty, and believe; and once again: be mindful of your duty and do right. God loveth the good.* (5:93).

It might be claimed that there is no harm in drinking wine if a man's faith is strong and his deeds are good, because drinking moderately does no harm. This is what 'Amr ibn Mu'dī Karb is said to have claimed.[653] Alternatively, it is said that it was a claim made by Qudāmah ibn Maẓ'ūn,[654]

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[650] See Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 25.

[651] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, 240.

[652] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 70.

[653] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 83.

[654] Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 1, 60.

except that this verse was revealed in connection with those who had done so in the past but had repented, become a believer, and done good deeds. They had then been guided, and God forgave what was in the past.

The Almighty said:

> *It is not righteousness that ye go to houses from the backs thereof, but the righteous man is he who wardeth off (evil). So go to houses by the gates thereof, and observe your duty to God, that ye may prosper* (2:189).

The beginning of the verse states:

They ask thee of new moons. Say, 'They are fixed seasons for mankind and for the pilgrimage.'

The reason for the link between the two is obscure, as is the reference to entering houses.

However, if we refer to the reason for the revelation concerning the entering of houses, which is that the puritans (*al-ḥums*)[655] or six Arab tribes who, when they were in the state of pilgrim sanctity, would refrain from entering tents and houses any other way than from the back, and would accordingly make a hole to pass through, then the confusion is cleared up on both counts.

Again, the Almighty said:

> *The postponement (al-nasī') (of a sacred month) is only an excess of disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled; they allow it one year and forbid it (another) year, that they may make up the number of the months which God hath hallowed, so that they allow that which God hath forbidden. The evil of their deeds is made fairseeming unto them* (9:37).

The Arabs used to believe in the sanctity of four months as a throwback to Abraham's religion. However, it was difficult for them to go for thee whole months without raiding, or if a war were in progress when the crescent moon heralding one of the holy months appeared, thus making it difficult for them to abandon fighting. Therefore they would postpone the month to another time, allowing them to continue raiding and plundering.

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[655] *Al-Ḥums* with a *ḍammah* followed by a *sukūn* is the plural of *aḥmas* and *ḥamsā'*, meaning 'rigorous in his religion and school of thought.' It was said of the six well-known tribes: Quraysh, Khuzā'ah, Kinānah, Thaqīf, Jashm and Banī 'Āmir ibn Ṣa'ṣa'ah. See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 284.

Similarly, they would postpone the pilgrimage so that it coincided with springtime every year. Before the Farewell Pilgrimage, the pilgrimage fell in Dhū al-Qa'dah. When the Prophet went on his pilgrimage the following month, he said in his sermon:

> Lo! Time has rotated the same as the first day on which the Lord created the heavens and the earth. Surely the number of months with God is twelve months, in God's ordinance, since the day when He created the heavens and the earth, of these four being sacred, three consecutive ones – Dhū al-Qa'dah, Dhū al-Ḥijjah and Muḥarram – and Rajab which is between between Jumādā and Sha'bān...

By this he meant that the holy months had been returned to their rightful places, the pilgrimage had been returned to Dhū al-Ḥijjah, and that postponement was wrong.[656]

Ascertaining the Reasons for Revelation

There are accepted ways of ascertaining the correct reasons for revelation that specialists normally use, such as ensuring that the attribution is authentic, or that the narration is widespread (*mustafīḍ*) or indubitable (*mutawātir*). With these one can be sure that the incident truly occurred. However, there is another way which may be more precise and reliable, and more in keeping with the principles of the study of history, that is, the oral tradition that provides the background of the revelation, since this can completely clear up any apparent ambiguity in a verse and solve the problem of its exegesis, provided it is not incompatible with the fundamentals of religion or counterintuitive to sound reason. This alone suffices as testimony to the authenticity of a hadith, no matter what its chain of narration may be.

It is worth bearing in mind in this section that the majority of hadiths on the background to revelation are characterised by weak or broken chains of transmission and unknown narrators, not to mention fabrications, interpolations and forgery. This is how the imams describe them:

According to Imām Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī:

[656] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 29.

> One must be wary of ones with weak chains of narration and fabricated ones, because there are many.

Al-Maymūnī says:

> I heard Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal say, 'There are three types of hadith which do not have any basis,' or 'There is no basis to three types of hadith: the battles (*maghāzī*), apocalyptic (*malāḥim*) and exegesis (*tafsīr*),' meaning that there is no basis which can be relied upon. The careful researchers among his companions say, 'It means that the majority do not have authentic, unbroken chains of narration. Otherwise, much of it would be authentic.'[657]

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī complains:

> Very little of it is authentic. In fact it is extremely rare for there to be an evidential basis of an unbroken chain of narration.

Al-Suyūṭī, at the end of his book, refers to approximately three hundred hadiths with unbroken chains (*marfū'*) ranging from weak to 'thin' to problematic. The rest are narrated omitting the narrator in between the successor and the Prophet (*mursal*), and which are of no evidential value at all.[658]

What the early Muslims (*salaf*) can be accused of is their sloppiness with regard to the recording of events. Hence, what we know today about the matter is extremely little, and is of little help to the exegete.

Al-Wāḥidī himself inclined towards collecting anomalies amongst the reasons for revelation, therefore he could not have been wary of weak and unknown narrators and of that which is of no evidential value. For example, we see that he often narrates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās via al-Kalbī, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.

According to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī:

> The weakest line of exegesis is via al-Kalbī on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. If the narration of Muhammad ibn Marwān al-Suddī al-Ṣaghīr is appended to that

[657] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, 156.

[658] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, 181, 214-257.

it is a chain of falsehood. Al-Tha'labī and al-Wāḥidī often quote from the latter chain.[659]

He says regarding God's Words, *When they meet those who believe they say: 'We believe,'...* (2:14), that al-Wāhidī and al-Tha'labī state via al-Suddī on the authority of al-Kalbī, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, 'This verse was revealed about 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy and his companions...'

He then says, 'This chain is very weak, for al-Suddī al-Ṣaghīr is a liar, as is al-Kalbī, and Abū Ṣāliḥ is weak.'[660]

With regard to The Almighty's Words, *God is not ashamed to strike a similitude...* (2:26), he says what al-Wāḥidī states via 'Abd al-Ghanī ibn Sa'īd al-Thaqafī – who is very weak.[661]

There are misprints in the printed edition of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. There is reference to a tradition on the authority of 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Sa'īd,[662] but there is no reference to him in the catalogues of narrators (*kutub al-tarājim*).

The following was revealed as a response to the Jews over their recrimination of the Muslims for changing the direction in which they prayed (*qiblah*), as stated above:

Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God... (2:115).

According to al-Suyūṭī:

The chains of narration of the traditions which say this are strong. The import is also meaningful, so it can be relied upon.[663]

He says:

There are other, weak traditions on the verse...including what al-Wāhidī and others narrate on the authority of Ash'ath al-Sammān.[664]

[659] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, 209.
[660] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 9.
[661] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 11, ft.
[662] Al-Waḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 13.
[663] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 24.
[664] Al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 20.

He explains:

> Ash'ath is reckoned as weak regarding hadith.[665]

Al-Dhahabī's comment is:

> Ash'ath ibn Sa'īd Abu al-Rabī' al-Sammān is weak. Al-Dāraquṭnī and others disregard him.[666]

We see reliance on narrations that omit the narrator between the successor and the Prophet, and narrations with unknown narrators by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī himself, who criticises al-Wāḥidī, embroiling him in unlikely things contrary to reason and religion in some of his explanations of the causes of revelation in his book *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*.

For example, he narrates via Bayhaqī on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet stood over Ḥamzah, who had been martyred and mutilated at Uḥud, and said, 'I will mutilate seventy of them in return for you,' as the background for the following:[667]

> *If ye punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith ye were afflicted. But if ye endure patiently, verily it is better for the patient. Endure thou patiently. Thine endurance is only (by the help of) God. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they devise. Surely God is with those who keep their duty unto Him and those who are doers of good* (16:126-128).

He says:

> Al-Tirmidhī states on the authority of Ubayy ibn Ka'b:
>
> Sixty-four of the Helpers (*anṣār*) and six of the Emigrants *(muhājirūn)* were struck down at Uḥud, including Ḥamzah who had been mutilated. The Helpers said, 'If we get a day like this against them, we will do worse to them.' When the day of the Conquest came, God revealed these verses.

This is in spite of knowing that *The Bee* (*al-Naḥl*) is Meccan. All its verses were revealed in Mecca before the Migration, as stated above.

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[665] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 25.

[666] Al-Dhahabī, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 1, 91.

[667] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 213.

Nevertheless, al-Suyūṭī himself noticed the aforementioned weakness. Hence, he resorted to supposing that the verse was revealed three times – before the Migration, after it at Uḥud, and then again in Mecca on the day of the Conquest.[668]

What makes matters worse is the presence of strange things like this in major hadith collections like *Bukhārī*, *Muslim* and others, which according to Sunni understanding are the most authentic books of hadith. However, in spite of this claim, they are full of such myths which are unbecoming to the sacredness of Islam.

We spoke above about the myth of the cranes and the story of Ibn Nawfil – deemed to be authentic by the people, but which violate the sanctity of the Qur'an and the holiness of the station of prophethood. Here is another example from al-Suyūṭī:

> Ṭabarānī, Ibn Abī Shaybah in his *Musnad*, al-Wāḥidī and others state via a chain of narration including someone who is unknown, on the authority of Ḥafṣ ibn Maysarah al-Qarashī, on the authority of his mother, on the authority of her mother Khawlah who was God's Messenger's servant, that a puppy entered the Prophet's house, went under his bed and died. Three days went by without the Prophet's receiving any revelation so he said, 'Khawlah, what has happened in God's Messenger's house? Does not Gabriel come to me?' So I said to myself, 'What if I clean the house?' So I got down to clean under the bed and got the puppy out. The Prophet came along, trembling with shame – whenever revelation came down to him he would be overcome with trembling – and God revealed, *By the morning hours...* up to *...so that thou wilt be content* (93:1-5).[669]

Ibn Ḥajar says in *Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*:

> The story about Gabriel's delay because of there being a puppy under his bed without his noticing is well known. However, its being a reason for revelation would be strange. In fact it is odd and refuted.[670]

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[668] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 96; al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 214.

[669] See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 92; al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 135-136.

[670] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 545.

My comment is that the alleged story is Medinan, but no one disputes that the chapter is Meccan. However a liar's memory betrays him.

The two Sheikhs (Bukhārī and Muslim) state on the authority of al-Musayyab:

> When death came to Abū Ṭālib, the Prophet came to see him. Abū Jahl and 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Umayyah were with him. The Prophet said, 'Uncle, say, 'There is no God but God,' and I will rely on it as evidence in God's presence.' So Abū Jahl and 'Abdullāh said, 'Abū Ṭālib, do you have a distaste for 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's religion?' Then the Prophet said, 'I will seek forgiveness for you provided I am not told not to.' Thereafter was revealed:[671]
>
> *It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to pray for the forgiveness of idolaters, even though they may be near of kin after it hath become clear that they are people of hell-fire* (9:113).

What refutes this claim, or rather this fabricated lie, is the fact that Abū Ṭālib died three years before the Migration and was the Messenger's strong support. As for the verse of *The Repentence* (*al-Tawbah*), it was revealed in the ninth year after the Migration, i.e., twelve years after Abū Ṭālib's death. This is not to mention the abundant proofs of Abū Ṭālib having become a Muslim which we have cited.

Al-Suyūṭī resorted to the verse's having been revealed twice.[672]

The traditions on the reasons for revelation which appear in the major books of hadith giving chains of narration, plus those with broken chains, those which omit the narrator between the successor and the Prophet, and those with narrators who are unknown, all demonstrate the pedigree of the narrations we have on this subject. Now that one is aware of their value, one can appreciate what Imām Aḥmad said:

> There is no reliable basis to three types of hadith: the battles (*maghāzī*), apocalyptic (*malāḥim*) and exegesis (*tafsīr*).

Take another example from al-Suyūṭī, who gives five explanations for the following:

> ...*whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God* (2:115).

[671] See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 87 and vol. 2, 119.

[672] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 95.

1) It is about the change of the direction in which one should pray (*qiblah*) and the Jews' doubt regarding that, according to Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim via Ali ibn Abī Ṭalḥah on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.

2) One should pray in whichever direction one's mount faces. Al-Ḥākim and others state that on the authority of Ibn 'Umar.

3) It was on a journey on a dark night. Every man prayed in whichever direction he was facing, not knowing the direction of the *qiblah*. Al-Tirimidhī states this from 'Āmir ibn Rabī'ah's hadith, and similarly, al-Dāraquṭnī does so from Jābir's hadith.

4) When *Call upon Me and I will answer you* (40:60) was revealed, they asked, 'Where to?' and so it was revealed. Ibn Jarīr states that on the authority of Mujāhid.

5) Qatādah says that the Prophet said, 'Your brother has died, so perform the funeral prayer for him. They protested, saying, 'He did not used to pray towards the qiblah,' and so it was revealed.

Al-Suyūṭī's comment is:

> These are five different reasons, the weakest of which is the last one on account of its enigmatic nature, followed by the one before it on account of its omission of the narrator between the successor and the Prophet, followed by the third one on account of the weakness of its narrators. The second is authentic; however, it says, 'It was revealed about such and such a thing,' and does not explicitly state the reason. The first one is authentic and explicitly states the reason, so it is the one which can be relied upon.[673]

Reasons for Revelation (*Sabab al-Nuzūl*) versus Background to Revelation (*Sha'n al-Nuzūl*)

What is the difference between the 'reason for revelation' and the 'background to revelation'?

A cause or reason for a Qur'anic revelation to appear would be if there had been a present problem which did not have a clear-cut solution.

This is more specific than the background to revelation, because the background is more general. According to the scholastic terminology, the background refers to any matter for which a verse or chapter of the

[673] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 93.

Qur'an was revealed in order to clarify or explain. A majority of the stories of people of ages past, including the lives of prophets and saintly people, have been distorted. Hence the Qur'an was revealed to deal with such things and to clarify the truth of the matter by explaining what really happened. In this way, doubts and confusion are dispelled, and the holy name of the noble friends of God is restored.

Thus the difference between cause and background according to the terminology is that the former refers to an existing problem presented by some event, whereas the latter refers to any matter in need of clarification, either present or past. This, then, is the terminology, over which there is no dispute.

When they say 'it was revealed about such and such,' it could mean either of the two: a present cause or something which happened in the past. Sometimes, the clarification of a religious duty is intended. Al-Zarkashī explains:

> It is known to have been the custom of the companions and successors for one of them to have meant, if he said that this verse is about (*fī*) such and such a thing, that the verse contains this ruling and not that this was the reason for its revelation.[674]

However, al-Suyūṭī believes that the term 'reason' for revelation exclusively refers to the first kind, and that a clarification of something in the past cannot be a reason for the revelation of a Qur'anic chapter or verse. Hence, he challenges what al-Wāḥidī says in *Asbāb al-Nuzūl:*

> *The Elephant* was revealed in relation to the story of Abrahah's companions who came along to destroy the Ka'bah.[675]

His response is:

> What is clear with regard to the reason for revelation is that the verse was not revealed during the days when it happened so as to justify what al-Wāḥidī said about *The Elephant* – that the reason for it was the story of the Ethiopians' coming – because that was by no means one of the reasons for its revelation. On the contrary, it falls under the heading of relating past events, like the stories

[674] Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 31-32.

[675] Al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 259.

> of the people of Noah, and of 'Ād and Thamūd, the building of the House and so on.[676]

This is in spite of the fact that al-Wāḥidī did not explicitly state that it was the reason. On the contrary, he only stated that it was revealed about (*fī*) the people with the elephant. Thus, there is no reason for al-Suyūṭī's constraining himself and others, given that what are termed reasons for revelation are the events which were the reasons for the revelation of the Qur'an, irrespective of whether they were current events, a disagreement over a secondary legal (*shar'iyyah far'iyyah*) or doctrinal matter, a historical account with a lesson to learn, or any other disagreement which Almighty God wanted to clarify.

Exoteric (*tanzīl*) and Esoteric Meaning (*ta'wīl*)

Al-Fuḍayl ibn Yasār asked Imām Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir about the well-known hadith: There is not a single verse in the Qur'an which does not have an exoteric and esoteric meaning.

> He said: 'Its exoteric meaning (*ẓāhiruhu*) is the reason for its revelation (*tanzīluhu*) and its esoteric meaning (*bāṭinuhu*) is its allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīluhu*). Part of it is what is past and part of it is what has not yet been, coursing the way the sun and moon course...[677]

He also said:

> The exoteric meaning of the Qur'an refers to those about whom it was revealed and its esoteric meaning refers to those who do as they do...[678]

That is because the verse has an aspect linked to an event which occurred, which caused it to be revealed, and another aspect which has a universal context. Therefore, its particularity addresses a given problem, whereas it also has a timeless and universal application.

Imām Abū Ja'far said:

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[676] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 1, 5.

[677] Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt* (Qum: Maktabat Aytollah Mar'ashī, 1404 q.), 196

[678] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 11.

> If a verse is revealed solely about a people and those people die, the verse would die and nothing would be left of the Qur'an. However, the beginning of Qur'an proceeds in accordance with the end of it for as long as the Heavens and Earth remain. There is good or ill derived therein for every people that recite it.[679]

Hence, the wisdom in the revelation of a verse or chapter is not just a temporary cure for a particular problem, such that its benefit ends with a change in circumstances. On the contrary, every verse and chapter of the Qur'an was revealed to remedy problems throughout all time. This is what the following alludes to:

> The Qur'an was revealed by way of: 'I'm talking to you, but I want the neighbour to listen.'[680]

This universality is the greater revelation hidden behind the particular, shedding light from behind an exoteric veil.

Part of the uniqueness of the Qur'an is its having two sides to its meanings – the particular and the universal. Hence it has a meaning which is *tanzīl* (for a particular situation) and one which is *ta'wīl* (a universal application). The former is the exoteric meaning and the latter is the esoteric meaning.

However, understanding the hidden meanings of the verses and knowledge of the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an is exclusive to those firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilm*), who have been firm on the path and to whom their Lord has given *copious water to drink* (72:16).

Hence, Imām Abū Ja'far said after reciting this verse, 'We know it,'[681] i.e., its interpretation (*al-ta'wīl*). Another tradition states, 'The Imāms know it.'[682]

The Almighty says:

> *Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God. Lo! God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing* (2:115).

This verse is an example of the verses which have two sides – that for which they were revealed (*tanzīl*) and their true interpretation (*ta'wīl*),

[679] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 10.

[680] *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 10.

[681] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, 196.

[682] Ibid.

the exoteric and esoteric meanings. Only those with insight into religion, the Infallible Imams, know the universally applicable hidden secret.

On the face of it, this verse appears to contradict those verses instructing the believers to face towards the Sacred House in prayer (2:144, 149, 150). However, taking into consideration the reason for its revelation – that it was to refute a misconception held by the Jews, and to dispel their doubt over the change of direction in which one prays (*qiblah*) – it becomes clear that there is no contradiction, and any ambiguity is cleared up. That is because the direction in which one faces in prayer and other acts of worship is purely subjective, and ultimately depends on God and the interests He sees as dictated by circumstances and situations. God's Face is not limited to the Holy Mosque of Jerusalem or the Blessed Ka'bah.

Thus, any initial problem presented by the verse is solved and its ambiguity is cleared up. It is not simply a licence to face in any direction.

However, the Imāms also deduced something else from the hidden meaning of the verse – since allegorical interpretation is an ongoing process – that it is permissible to perform supererogatory prayers in whatever direction one's mount is facing, and that if the direction of the *qiblah* is not known, one can pray in any direction. We have found traditions explicitly stating this on the authority of the Imāms of the People of the Household.[683]

Sayyid Ṭabaṭabā'ī says that if one peruses the words of the Imāms on the general and particular and the unqualified and qualified within the Qur'an, one will often find a deduction of one ruling from the general meaning of the verse followed by another ruling deduced from its particular meaning. Commendability (*istiḥbāb*) may be understood from the general meaning of a verse and obligation from its particular meaning. Similarly, lawfulness or reprehensibility (*karāhiyya*) may be understood from ferent interpretations of a verse.

He explains:

> Through this criterion one may discover principles which are the keys to many things locked away in the verses. One will only find them in their words, no one else's.

He continues:

[683] See al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah* vol. 3, 225 and 239 and *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 56-57.

> Thus one can deduce two fundamental rules from the gist of what is said regarding Qur'anic knowledge:
>
> Firstly, that every element within a single verse means something and sheds light on one of the laws of the *sharī'ah*. Then along with the element which follows it, it produces another rule and along with the third one, a third rule and so on.
>
> For example, in God's Words:
>
> *Say: 'God,' and leave them to their idle chatter* (6:91)
>
> 'Say: 'God,'' produces a complete meaning. Along with 'and leave them' it means something else which is also complete. And similarly, along with 'to their idle chatter' there is a complete statement which means something complete.
>
> The same can be applied to any of the Qur'an's verses.
>
> Secondly, if two stories or two meanings share a sentence or the like, they both refer to the same concept.

And:

> These are two secrets beneath which there are many secrets, and God is the Guide.[684]

It is narrated on the authority of Sa'īd ibn Jubayr that God's Words:

> *And the places of worship (al-masājid) are only for God, so pray not unto anyone along with God* (72:18),

are said to concern the *jinn* who sought the Messenger's permission to attend his mosque, but for whom it was difficult because they were spread throughout the earth. Therefore it was revealed that any place on earth can be a place for the worship of God. The only provision is that the worship has to be of Him alone.[685]

This is if *al-masājid* is understood to mean places of worship (*al-ma'ābid*). It may be interpreted as meaning the verbal noun – that all acts of worship are for God alone. It is not permissible to worship anyone else apart from Him. This is narrated on the authority of al-Ḥasan.

[684] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, 262.

[685] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl*, vol. 2, 121.

A number of exegetes, such as Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, al-Zajjāj and al-Farrā', say that there are seven parts of the body with which one prostrates. They belong to God because He created them, and He it is who blessed mankind with them. One should not use them to worship anyone else apart from Almighty God.[686]

Imām Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Jawād adopted this explanation when al-Mu'taṣim al-'Abbāsī asked him about this verse. He told him:

> It means the seven parts of the body on which one prostrates.[687]

This hadith appears in the story of a thief who was brought to al-Mu'taṣim's royal court. The jurists present disagreed with each other over the 'cut-off point' for the hand. The Imām believed that it should be cut off at the finger joints. When al-Mu'taṣim asked him why, he answered that the palm of the hand is one of the seven parts of the body on which one prostrates (*mawāḍi' al-sujūd al-saba'ah*), and that the parts on which one prostrates (*al-masājid*) belong to God and should therefore not be cut off.[688]

Thus, in this unique way he deduced a legal ruling from the words of the Qur'an which was a decisive, permanent solution to the jurists' problem.

This is part of the hidden and esoteric meaning of the Qur'an – known to the Imāms of every time – which 'flows' with every age in accordance with the need of that time. According to Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> The Qur'an has an esoteric meaning (*ta'wīl*). Some of it concerns what has already been, and some of it concerns what is yet to come. If the *ta'wīl* occurs in the time of one of the Imāms, the Imām of that time knows it.[689]

Imām Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir explains:

> No one but the Executors can claim that he has the whole of the Qur'an – both its literal meaning and its hidden meaning.[690]

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[686] This is how the Imāms from the People of the Household explained it according to hadith-based exegesis (*al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*). See also Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 372 and Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 4, 394-395.

[687] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 372.

[688] Al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 18, 490.

[689] Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, 195.

[690] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, 228.

Al-Ṣādiq said:

> I swear by God that I know the Book of God from beginning to end as though it is in my hand. It contains information on Heaven and information on the Earth, information on what was and is. It contains an exposition of everything, as the Almighty says.[691]

Does the Person Narrating the Cause of Revelation Have to Have Been Present?

Al-Wāḥidī states:

> It is only permitted to speak of the causes of revelation on the basis of hearing from those who witnessed the revelation, who knew the reasons for it, and seeking knowledge of them.[692]

This condition is only to ensure that what is narrated is first-hand witness evidence and not personal judgment or guesswork. We then know that the narrator is truthful, reliable and alert in what he says, avoiding conjecture and uncertainty. Such a person may be trusted, even if he was not present at the scene. Hence we can rely on the best of the companions, even if they do not explicitly state that they were there, and similarly, the reports of their successors and the imams after them.

For the same reason, we can rely on what our Infallible Imams say concerning the exegesis of the Qur'an, the reasons for its revelation and its esoteric meaning (*ta'wīl*), because they are the most knowledgeable in the sciences of the Qur'an and both its literal and hidden meaning. It is important to know that narrations attributed to them are authentic and indubitable.

The general meaning is what matters, rather than specific use

This is a general *uṣūlī*[693] rule with regards to all laws of the *shariah*. Whatever issues from the Source of Revelation to explain God's Laws and

[691] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, 229. This refers to 16:89: *'And We reveal the Scripture unto thee as an exposition of all things...'*

[692] Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 4.

[693] Usul al-Fiqh is a study of legal presumptions, e.g., the presumption that what is said is what is meant, what is not said is not intended, that things are as they were

the servant's duties to Him is not specific to one situation and exclusive of others. The law did not come along simply to deal with current events, but for all time, and this is why jurists overlook specifics in order to glean a universally applicable law (*iṭlāq al-ḥukm*), on the basis of the wording (*lafẓī*) and a full explanation (*maqāmī*)[694] of the terminology.

This applies to all the laws of the *shariah*, both from the Sunnah and the Scripture, even though it is more definite with regard to the Scripture. One is already familiar with the traditions which explicitly refer to this universality in the verses of the Qur'an. Thus the jurists look at all the laws and duties that appear in the verses of the Qur'an as universal legislation, without attaching undue significance to the specifics of where they appear.

Of course, there are some messages addressed to particular groups of the time as specific propositions (sing. *qaḍiyyah khārijiyyah*).[695] This means that the specifics do not literally apply to everyone, whereas the principle involved may apply universally if it can be determined with certainty. There are many examples of this in the Qur'an.

The Almighty said:

(*istiṣḥāb*), and that with regard to a given matter one has no obligation either way until proven otherwise (*aṣālat al-barā'ah*). (Trans.)

[694] A reference to the general applicability to be inferred from *maqām al-bayān*. *Maqām al-bayān* is the status of a speaker who intends to explain his intention fully. For example, a woman must switch to a *ḥajjah mufradah* followed by an *'umrah mufradah* if she begins menstruating before entering the state of pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām*), or can choose to do so if she starts menstruating after entering *iḥrām*. In either case, she is not required to perform *ḥajj al-tamattu'* the following year. This is because in the traditions which say that she should perform a *ḥajjah mufradah* say nothing about the need to perform *ḥajj al-tamattu'* the following year. Had that been incumbent upon her, the Imām would have drawn attention to it. For in his speech, we presume that the Imām is in the position of intending to explain fully what he means (*maqām al-bayān*) with regard to what it is she is required to do. Therefore, by saying nothing about *ḥajj al-tamattu'*, the meaning is that she is not required to perform one the following year, and this is based on the assumption that the speaker is in the position of intending to explain fully what he means and not qualifying his statement (*iṭlāq maqāmī*). (Trans.)

[695] A term used in logic meaning that the subject in the proposition is already present, as when it is said for example, 'Treat with deference whoever is in the school,' the meaning applies to whoever is currently in the school at that time, and does not apply to all times or all schools.

> *As for those who heard the call of God and His messenger after the harm befell them (in the fight): for such of them as do right and ward off (evil), there is great reward. Those unto whom men said: 'Lo! the people have gathered against you, therefore fear them.' (The threat of danger) but increased them in faith and they cried: 'God is sufficient for us! Most Excellent is He in Whom we trust!'* (3:172-173).

The verses were revealed about the believers after they dispersed from the Battle of Uḥud. They were badly wounded and Abū Sufyān tried to make a comeback and regretted leaving the fighting. News of this reached the Muslims, and the one who spread the news was Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd al-Ashja'ī according to the hadith on the authority of the two Imāms al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.[696] It is said that the riders Abū Sufyān slipped in were to spread lies among the believers. It is also said that they were the hypocrites in Medina.

However the sincere believers remained firm in belief and resolved to confront the enemy with all their efforts, and the Messenger of God commissioned them to terrify the pagans. At the forefront of those commissioned was the Commander of the Faithful.

This is indicated in the words, *those unto whom men said*, which is an allusion to known people or a known individual. What is meant here by 'men' is those who had been gathered together for them, i.e., Abū Sufyān's cohorts.

The whole incident teaches us to remain firm in belief and not fear an enemy, and that we should not doubt the truth for God helps us and cares for us, excellent Master and Helper that He is.

As for the Almighty's Words:

> As for the unbelievers, alike it is to them whether thou has warned them or has not warned them, they do not believe. God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering, and there awaits them a mighty chastisement...

This indicates only those who were unbelievers at the time, who stubbornly resisted and were unyielding, even after the truth was clear with shining proof, and not necessarily unbelievers thereafter. This was

[696] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 541.

an instruction to the Prophet to desist, so that his soul would not be distressed over them.

According to 'Allāmah Ṭabaṭabā'ī:

> It would not be surprising if what is meant is the chiefs of Quraysh and the elders of Mecca who stubbornly resisted and were unyielding with regard to the matter of religion, and spared no effort in that, because it is not possible to carry on saying this about all unbelievers. Otherwise, the door of guidance would be closed. It is more likely that the unbelievers (*alladhīna kafarū*) here and elsewhere refers to the unbelievers of Mecca at the outset of the Mission unless there is a contextual indicator to the contrary. Likewise, what is meant in the Qur'an by 'those who believe,' if there is nothing in the context to indicate that all believers are meant, is the vanguard, the first of the believers, exclusively addressed as such out of deference to them.[697]

Similarly, he says by way of exegesis of *The Unbelievers*

> Those are people previously referred to, not every unbeliever. What proves it is the instruction to the Prophet to tell them of his disavowal of their religion and their refusal to accept his religion.[698]

Thus the problem presented by many verses in which this and similar expressions appear is solved.

Nevertheless, this rule also applies to those who are like them, in terms of stubborn resistance to the truth, once it has become clear.

[697] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, 50.

[698] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 20, 526.

CHAPTER V

INIMITABILITY (*I'JĀZ*) OF THE QUR'AN

I'jāz is derived from the root word *'ajaza*, which means 'to render incapable.' This can be interpreted two ways, one of which is when a particular ability is forcibly taken from someone and he is rendered incapable. For example, if a person has wealth and position and these are taken from him by force, he is 'made incapable.' The other is when one does something and others are incapable of doing the same thing, without them being actively prevented from doing so. For instance, someone may advance to a state of excellence that others cannot achieve, and they may give up out of disappointment. If it is said: 'So-and-so rendered his adversary incapable,' then he has advanced beyond the shortcomings of others who are no match for him. The poet says:

> *To the grief and sorrow of those who envy him and the anger and anxiety of his enemies;*
>
> *It is enough for the seer to open his eyes and for the listener to lend his ears.*

In other words, his virtue is so pervasive that anyone who opens his eyes and lends his ears cannot but see or hear anything else, and thus those who envy him have to give up.

The *i'jāz*, or inimitability, of the Qur'an is of this second type. Therefore, in rhetoric, eloquence, consistency, clarity of expression, gnosis, legal rulings and other features, it is far beyond any human ability. For this reason, the Qur'an is known as 'the eternal miracle.'

Background of the Discourse

The inimitability of the Qur'an has been discussed by scholars from the very beginning. According to Ibn al-Nadīm,[699] one of the first to deal with this topic in writing was the great theologian Muhammad ibn Zayd al-Wāsiṭī (d. 307/919), who wrote the theological works *al-Imāmah* and *I'jāz al-Qur'ān fī Naẓmih wa Ta'līfih* ('The Inimitability of the Harmony and Authority of the Qur'an'). Some have mentioned Abū 'Ubaydah Mu'ammar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 209/824), who wrote a two-volume tract on the same topic, and a book by Abū 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Salām (d. 224/839). However, none of these writings are extant today.

The oldest available book on this subject is a treatise entitled *Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, written by Abū Sulaymān Ḥamad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm

[699] See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 63, 259.

Khaṭṭābī Bostī[700] (d. 388/998). This work has recently been published in a collection entitled *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān.*[701] The author has dealt with the material in an interesting fashion, and covers the rhetoric of the Qur'an and the harmonious and perspicacious choice of words.

Another treatise in this collection was written by Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 386/996), who was one of the great theologians and scholars in the Muslim world. His writings on Qur'anic sciences are invaluable, and are much referenced by Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī in his important exegesis *al-Tibyān.* Another treatise is *al-Shāfiyah* by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), who was the founder of the science of rhetoric (*balāghah*) as a specific discipline. This great personality in the field of knowledge and literature has left for posterity two other books on this subject, namely, *Asrār al-Balāghah* and *Dalā'il al-I'jāz.* His treatise *al-Shāfiyah* is a summary of the discussions in these two books, and serves as an introduction to a discussion on inimitability.

Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012), Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1209) and Kamāl al-Dīn Zamalkānī (d. 651/1253) each wrote an extensive book in this field. Imām Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamzah ibn 'Alī al-'Alawī al-Zaydī (d. 749/1348) wrote *al-Ṭarāz fī Asrār al-Balāghah wa Ḥaqā'iq al-I'jāz* in three volumes, in volume 3 of which he compares the rules and secrets of eloquence and literary techniques within the Qur'anic verses. In addition, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 910/1504) wrote three volumes under the title *Mu'tarak al-Aqrān fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān.*

Recognising the Divine Miracle

The miracle of the Qur'an is such that the people of the time recognised its sublimity. This is so for all time, because it is necessary to make clear that the function of the prophets is totally beyond human ability, since they are inspired by the Will of a supernatural Being. If one were to say hypothetically that they functioned in conventional terms, and that this remained concealed from others, it would mean that the prophets skilfully deceived the people with their claims of prophethood.

[700] Bost is a district near Kabul where he lived.

[701] See the introductions to *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān,* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1976), and Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd,* vol. 1, 8.

Yet the prophets performed deeds far beyond human capabilites. Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of the Arabs of the time was their language and speech. The miracle of Islam is the Qur'an, which was presented in the most eloquent and expressive form of the Arabic language, so full of meaning that the Arabs could easily recognise that it could never have been composed by a human being. In terms of harmony, content or any other characteristic, the zenith of the Arabic language is the Qur'an.

Walīd ibn Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī, who was a powerful speaker and a high-ranking chief of the Arabs, said this of the Qur'an: 'By God! What the son of Abī Kabshah[702] recites is neither poetry, nor magic, nor the vainglory of the unwise, and indeed it is nothing but the word of God.'

Also, upon passing the Prophet and hearing him recite some verses of *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn* in prayer, he said:

By God! Recently I have heard speech from Muhammad which is neither like that of a man nor like that of a *jinn*. By God! His speech has a special melody and elegance. It is like a tall abundant tree whose branches are full of fruits, whose trunk is firm with roots well entrenched. Indeed it is superior [to other speech] and none can surpass it.[703]

Ṭufayl ibn 'Amr al-Dūsī, who was known as a leading poet, thinker and noble man of Quraysh, went to the Ka'bah. Some people surrounded him in order to prevent him from approaching the Prophet and listening to him, but they failed. After listening to the words of the Prophet, he hurriedly returned to his tribesmen and told them what he had experienced, and all of them subsequently embraced Islam and he himself became one of its most outstanding propagators. He narrates thus:

I found Muhammad in the mosque and listened to his speech. He welcomed me. I followed him and told myself: 'Woe to you as you listened

[702] This is what the polytheists would call the Holy Prophet, thereby associating him with Abū Kabshah who belonged to the tribe of Khuzā'ah and opposed the Quraysh in matters of religion. It is said that he was a maternal forefather of the Prophet, who was for this reason associated with him.

[703] See *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 29, 98; *Sīrah Ibn Hishām*, vol. 1, 288; Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-Anaf*, vol. 2, 21; Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 2, 90; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb*, vol. 1, 412; Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣābah*, vol. 1, 410; Qāḍī 'Ayāḍ, *al-Shifā'*, 220; Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1, 281; Sayyid Hibat al-Dīn Shahristānī, *al-Mu'jizah al-Khālidah*, 21; Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 507; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 283.

to him! Accept if he tells the truth, and if not, disregard it.' I followed him up to his house and told him: 'Present to me whatever you have.' He presented Islam to me and recited to me some verses of the Qur'an. By God! I had not heard such eloquent and elegant speech before, nor more valuable content. As such, I embraced Islam and verbally testified to the truth from my heart and soul.[704]

Naḍr ibn Ḥārith ibn Kaldah was one of the chiefs of Quraysh and had a brilliant mind, but he was an open enemy of the Prophet. Hence, the testimony of someone like him regarding the greatness of the Qur'an and its influence in the advancement of the mission is worth considering. Concerning how they should deal with the Prophet, he said to the chiefs of Quraysh:

By God! Something has happened to you for which you have not yet thought of a solution. Amongst you is Muhammad, a handsome youth, acceptable to all; he is the most truthful in speech and the most trustworthy. It was so until his beard turned white and he brought what he brought. Then you said: 'He is a sorcerer.' No, by God! He is no sorcerer. You said: 'He is a magician.' No, by God! His words are not those of a magician. You said: 'He is a poet.' No, by God! His speech is not poetry. You said: 'He is mad.' No, by God! His behaviour does not indicate that he is mad. So, you yourselves must know and realise that something great has happened which must not be taken lightly.[705]

Aspects of the Qur'an's Inimitability

Scholars have studied extensively the significance of the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'an and have put forward different ideas on the subject amongst which there are some divergent opinions. Early scholars had particular understanding, while contemporary scholars have a different one and have added certain points to the views of their predecessors. The different views could be summed up as follows:

1) Arab litterateurs and rhetoricians regard the Qur'an as inimitable due to its high degree of eloquence and rhetoric. The clarity of diction and

[704] *Sīrah Ibn Hishām*, vol. 2, 21-25; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 3, 54.

[705] *Sīrah Ibn Hishām*, vol. 1, 320-321; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, 180. For more information on the testimonies of Arab rhetoricians and prominent personalities on the Qur'an, see Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 4.

fluency of expression observed in the choice and ordering of words have created a cohesive composition in every verse and chapter. All of these features point to the power and force of the Divine Speech. Moreover, the choice of words is so distinctive that substituting them with other words could never be possible. This is a secret discovered by men of knowledge and literature, who have said it would be impossible to change any word in the Qur'an, because no other could be found that conveyed the same meaning and harmony, or that was in such unison with those preceding and following it. This shows that the words have been chosen with a precision beyond human ability. Such comprehensive precision demonstrates that no matter how advanced and prepared a person is in the knowledge of the particularities of words, he would never possess such overarching wisdom. It has been said in this respect: 'If one word of it were taken from its place, and then all the Arabic language searched for a similar word to replace it, nothing would be found.'[706]

2) The modes of expression, composition and arrangement in the Qur'an are totally unprecedented and inimitable. Although the arrangement and composition were different, they were not outside the framework of Arabic styles of expression. The forms of verbal expression that were common amongst the Arabs were poetry, prose and rhyming prose, each of which has its own merits and drawbacks. The value of poetry is its elegance, which makes it attractive and reaches the depths of the heart, but the constraints of rhyme and a specific measure somehow deprive the speaker of freedom. On the other hand, the merit of prose lies in the freedom given to the speaker. He freely chooses any words and expressions that suit his intended meaning, but it lacks the grandeur and attractiveness of poetry. It is true that sometimes rhyming prose is seemingly elegant and may be considered a kind of oral art, but the difficulty in composing it sometimes entails the use of unsuitable words that diminish it.

The Qur'an combines these three types of speech, with the merits of each, but without their drawbacks. This is one of the wonders of the Qur'anic style. It has the splendour of poetry, the freedom of prose, and the

[706] The quotation is from Abū Sulaymān Ḥamad ibn Muḥammad Bostī, Ibn 'Aṭīyyah Ghanāṭī, the author of *Tafsīr al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz* and Shaykh 'Abd al-Qāhir Jurjānī, and other authorities in learning and literature whose details are given in Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vols. 4-5.

beauty of rhyming prose. These astonishing features have been obvious to Arab rhetoricians and verbalists from the very beginning. Many great scholars and men of letters, including Shaykh 'Abd al-Qāhir Jurjānī, Sakkākī and Rāghib Iṣfahānī, regarded this as the most outstanding feature of the Qur'an's inimitability.

Successive scholars have added that the language is composed in such a melodious way that it soothes the soul. The harmony of the letters of every word in relation to the letters of the adjacent words is so accurate that it bespeaks of ever-increasing melodies of serenity. All the appeal of poetry is manifested in this rhymed prose.

Both short and long phrases in the Qur'an are composed in such a way that they are in unison with voice tones and melodies, and unless the reciter is familiar with the range of voice tones, he cannot recite the Qur'an in the way its phrases are formed. This is a truth which the Holy Prophet stated from the very beginning and has been emphasised by the Imāms of guidance, and which is widely acknowledged today.[707]

3) The Qur'an contains transcendent knowledge and wise teachings which were beyond human ability to acquire at the time. The astonishing wisdom of the Qur'an about the secrets of creation and the wonders of existence; its exposition of the Attributes of Beauty and Majesty; the philosophy regarding the Divine spark hidden in the human constitution; man's origin and ultimate destiny: these are all amongst the uncertainties of the time that were clarified by the Qur'an.

A brief perusal of the unestablished notions of the time and the contradictory statements of today's secular scholars, compared with the wisdom of the Qur'an, demomstrates very well the superiority of the teachings of the Qur'an and is evidence of its inimitability.[708]

4) The style of reasoning in the Qur'an is unique, and this can be considered to be one of the forms of literary inimitability in the combination of two styles, namely, the demonstrative and persuasive. In essence, these two styles are at odds, for demonstrative reasoning is based upon definitive premises (*a priori* data and axioms), where the emphasis is on the elite who need definite proof; but the persuasive style relies on conjectural premises (widely accepted facts and common sense) and

[707] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 5.

[708] See Ibid. vol. 6.

its goal is to convince the common people. The Qur'an has reconciled these two apparently conflicting styles and addresses both groups. With a single message, it has been able to win the acceptance of both the elite and the generality. The arguments of the Qur'an – notwithstanding their simplicity of expression – have much depth and profundity. The common people who are not well-versed in the secrets of rational arguments are convinced by persuasive arguments. The elite, however, benefit from the precision of expression and the secrets contained therein.

In this regard, Ibn Rushd al-Andalusī has cited a clear example in his valuable book *al-Kashf 'An Manāhij al-Adillah*:[709]

> In order to know the Essence of God, the Qur'an has given the metaphor of light:
>
> *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth (24:35).*

This simple metaphor for knowing the Essence of God, and His Station in the world of being is sufficient for the common people and can convince them. Yet, at the same time, it is so accurate and descriptive that it can be regarded as the most eloquent and accurate way of likening an intangible to a tangible. It is a metaphor which reflects all aspects of the Essence of God.

God is the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) and all existence depends on Him. His Essence is utterly hidden whilst at the same time His Being is perceptible within existence to all.

Nothing in the tangible world can be found with these characteristics other than the example of light. Its radiance encompasses all creatures and manifests all things; the appearance of everything depends on light. Yet, the appearance of light is self-generated. The substance or reality of light itself is unknown, but its luminosity and the effects of its existence are known and apparent to all. If a sage wanted to express a metaphor for the Essence of God, no better could be found than this Qur'anic symbol.

5) Unique scientific indicators, in the sense that occasionally we encounter in the Qur'an some passing indications that reflect the Author's knowledge of the secrets hidden in nature:

> *Say: The (Qur'an) was sent down by Him Who knows the Mystery (that is) in the heavens and the earth* (25:6).

[709] Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adillah*, 92-93.

In the expressions of the Qur'an, some of the secrets of nature are sometimes indicated by God, although the essential intention or main goal is not to state them; they are never emphasised or elaborated upon, since the main intent is to give spiritual precepts and guidance. Only erudite scholars can detect these secrets and passing indications, which constitute a proof of the Qur'an's uniqueness.

Of course, it should be pointed out that scientific achievements must not be imputed to the Qur'an, because they are impermanent, while the content of the Qur'an is unalterable truth compared to which there is nothing.

However, according to some, established scientific facts can be used to understand some of the scientific indications in the Qur'an, although not with definitive certainty. The reason for this is that if this apparently fixed scientific theory changes, it would not undermine the status of the Qur'an. According to this view, whenever a verse of the Qur'an apparently contradicts a scientific hypothesis or proven scientific theory, the words of the Qur'an prevail, and we should regard the supposed scientific theory or hypothesis as erroneous.

In my opinion, the scholars who have accepted such a theory are mistaken. I have cited elsewhere many instances where definitive technical research has unveiled some of the scientific hints in the Qur'an.[710]

6) Unique firmness of expression. The text of the Qur'an is homogeneous and free of inconsistencies and contradictions. Although the Qur'an was revealed gradually over a relatively long period in different places, and in some instances has repeated certain ideas and statements, never has there been any inconsistency. If it were human speech, certain inconsistencies would be expected over the course of a long period in differing circumstances when reiterating particular topics. The words of the Qur'an give this as one of the proofs of its inimitability:[711]

> *Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy* (4:82).

7) The concept of *ṣarfah*, whereby certain scholars are not convinced by the explanations given for the inimitability of the Quran and impossibility

[710] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 6, 'On the Scientific Inimitability.'

[711] Ibid. vol. 7, 'On Removing Scepticism.'

of challenging it in those areas. They have put forward a very different view regarding inimitability. Great personalities like Abū Isḥāq al-Naẓẓām (d. 231/845) and his student, Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) and Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (d. 466/1073) are of the opinion that the secret behind the inimitability of the Qur'an lies in the concept of *ṣarfah*, in the sense that God Himself is the deterrent of those who want to challenge the Qur'an. According to this view, although it is possible for individuals to challenge the Qur'an, they are prevented from doing so by the overpowering Will of God.

> *Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right - them will I turn away from My signs* (7:146).

According to those who subscribe to the notion of *ṣarfah*, *turn away from My signs* here means preventing them from harming the Qur'an by challenging it or disproving it.

However, this verse has many different interpretations; many have considered 'turn away' to mean the refutation of objections made by the arrogant who wanted to corrupt the Signs of God, meaning that God presents His proofs so clearly that any avenue for doubt or distortion is closed.[712]

Critics state that *ṣarfah* deprives the Qur'an of merit, and attributes the inimitability of the Qur'an to an external cause which overrides any alternative by forceful prevention. However, this claim conflicts with the apparent – and at times even explicit –ntrinsic.

The notion of *ṣarfah* can be interpreted in three ways, as stated by Amīr Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamzah al-'Alawī al-Zaydī (d. 749/1392):[713]

(i) that God would deprive individuals of their intention to challenge the Qur'an. That is, the motive or drive which prompts them to challange the Qur'an would die down at the time of acting upon it, and they would experience a state of disinterest and indifference.

(ii) that God would deprive them of the relevant faculties of knowledge or skills necessary for challenging the Qur'an, since these facilities are not in man's control. This is exactly the meaning of *ṣarf* in the

[712] See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, 477-478.

[713] Amīr Yaḥyā al-'Alawī, *al-Ṭirāz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), vol. 3, 391-392.

abovementioned verse. Also the following verse states that mankind does not have at its disposal the knowledge contained in the Quran:

> *Nay, they charge with falsehood that whose knowledge they cannot compass...* (10:39).

If this is the case, by what means are they to challenge it? Also, another verse states that the turning aside of the hearts is the outcome of their own incompetence to discern the truth:

> *God hath turned their hearts (from the light); for they are a people who understand not* (9:127).

(iii) that they are forcibly dissuaded. Although they have the necessary means at the time of executing their plan, they would experience a state of lethargy, and would thereby be unable to vilify the Qur'an.

The difference between this and the first interpretation is that in the first one, their motive, enthusiasm and ambition would be suppressed, while here the motive remains but they would lose the courage to take action. It is like someone who is hindered by force despite his efforts and strong motive.

It seems that the first and the third interpretations and the first part of the second view are contrary to historical knowledge and incompatible with the propositions of the Arabs of that time, for if it were really so, then the Arabs should have been bewildered by the change in their inner state, rather than being astonished by the pleasant and attractive melody of the Qur'an. This is especially true in view of the fact that some like Abū Jahl and others in the tribe of Quraysh would plug the ears of their tribemen when entering the Sacred Mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*), or prevent them from getting close enough to hear the recitation of the Qur'an. This in itself is testimony to the appeal of the Qur'an and its spiritual attraction, its inimitability and the impossibility of challenging it.

Admittedly, the concluding part of the second interpretation seems reasonable to some extent, and it is implied in the opinions of Sayyid and other great personalities. However, in reality, all good is embedded in the essence of the Qur'an, and mankind is incapable of challenging it.[714]

[714] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 4, 135-190.

The Challenge of the Qur'an (*taḥaddī*)

Taḥaddī literally means to challenge. Technically it is the challenge the Qur'an has repeatedly posed to those who deny it, which is in effect that if you do not believe that this Qur'an is the word of God and you suppose that it is a human invention, then this is easy to test. Persuade your litterateurs and orators to join forces and compose an oration as eloquent, consistent and full of wisdom as the Qur'an. You could never do so, because you know very well that the Qur'an is totally unlike human speech.

The Stages of Challenge

The Qur'an has put forth several challenges:

1) to produce something similar:

> *Or do they say: 'He fabricated it (the message)'? Nay, they have no faith! Let them then produce a recital like unto it – if (it be) they speak the truth* (52:33-34).

2) to produce just ten chapters (*sūrahs*), no matter how short:

> *Or they may say: 'He forged it.' Say: 'Bring ye then ten sūrahs forged, like unto it, and call (to your aid) whomsoever ye can, other than God! – if ye speak the truth!'* (11:13).

3) then to produce just one *sūrah* like the Qur'an:

> *Or do they say: 'He forged it'? Say: 'Bring then a sūrah like unto it...* (10:38).

4) then again a most decisive statement regarding the unbelievers' inability:

> *And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a sūrah like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (if they are any) besides God, should you be truthful.*
>
> *But if ye cannot – and of a surety ye cannot – then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones – which is prepared for those who reject faith* (2:23-24).

5) and the Qur'an declares its inimitability and a challenge for all times to come:

> *Say: 'If the whole of mankind and jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support'* (17:88).

It is interesting that in the verses that lay down a challenge – especially the last two verses – there is a striking remark which clarifies more than anything else the secret of uniqueness. In verse 24 of *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, the expression *and of a surety ye cannot* informs us regarding the future in absolute terms, in that it is impossible to challenge the Qur'an for all time to come. In verse 88 of *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, all the *jinns* as well as mankind are incapable of challenging the Qur'an. This is an account of the unseen which could not come from anyone else but 'the Knower of the seen and the unseen.'

To draw a parallel, an athlete who wants to challenge others will try as much as he can to assess the strength of his opponents against his own in order to tell whether or not he is superior. But no one would dare consider himself superior to all future challengers, because he has no knowledge of them. Yet, the Qur'an has the confidence to do so, by declaring that mankind is impotent to challenge the Qur'an for all time to come. This boldness is the greatest proof of the inimitability of the Qur'an.

Challenge on the Superiority of Language

People do not have the same abilities when it comes to the art of oration and powers of expression, which differ from person to person according to their zeal, taste, thought patterns and insight. Also, the styles of writing and speaking of each person differ from one another. So how can one compare them if people cannot compete with one another in this respect?

In reply, it must be stated that the essence of the Qur'an's challenge to others is not that they might produce speech similar or identical to that of God, in such a way that the syle of expression is completely identical, for such a similarity is impossible except by imitation.[715] The challenge is rather to bring forth speech which is like the Qur'an in terms of sublime spirituality in the most eloquent rhetoric. Based on

[715] This kind of imitation is that which was done by Musaylamah the Liar and others, whereby they merely embarrassed themselves. See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 4, 228, 257.

specific criteria, rhetoricians have determined levels of superiority and inferiority in terms of every word.

We do not deny that every person's speech is a product of an inner constitution and particular disposition, and it is never possible for anyone to be identical to another in their way of thinking. But the point here concerns correspondences in the degree of excellence of literature, which would determine the superiority of one form of literature over another. Such a comparison is based upon the powers of expression, lucidity and subtleties of speech.

After enumerating the criteria for the evaluation of literature, al-Sakkākī writes in *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*:

> The elevation or demotion of the status of literature depends on the observance of the above points and subtleties. The more these points are observed, the more elevated the literature becomes, and the less they are observed, the more its status diminishes. Rhetoric progressively excels until it reaches the level of inimitability which is the highest degree in the art of rhetoric or somewhere close to it.[716]

It can be inferred from this statement that the stage of inimitability has different degrees, but the stage of the Qur'an is at a level beyond human reach.[717]

In sum, the superiority or similarity of two forms of speech depends on points of rhetoric and other subtleties. The rhetorical criteria mentioned in the science of rhetoric give more importance to the meaning and content than to the words and expressions. As Shaykh 'Abd al-Qāhir Jurjānī states:

If an expert of literature who is acquainted with the values of speech appreciates a poem or commends prose, he would say the following words: 'It is pleasant and fine; it is beautiful and graceful; it is lucid and pleasing; it is interesting and charming.' So, be it known that this description does not bespeak the melody of its words. Neither does it depend on the order of the words. Rather, it has something to do with a

[716] Sakkākī, Yūsuf ibn Abī Bakr, *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1356 q.), 80, 84, 196.

[717] See Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar Taftāzānī, *al-Muṭawwal* (Islāmbūl, 1330 s.), 31.

dimension which affects the human heart, and it is a superiority which illuminates reason.[718]

Inna al-kalāma la fī al-fu'ādi wa innamā

Ju'ila al-kalāmu 'alā al-fu'ādi dalīlā

That is to say, all speech is an indication of the truth that dwells within the heart.

The Dimensions of Inimitability

Nowadays three essential aspects of the uniqueness of the Qur'an are discussed: the rhetorical, the scientific and the legislative.[719]

Rhetorical inimitability deals mostly with the terminology, the use of apposite expressions, and oratorical features and subtleties in which meaning and content play a pivotal role.

Scientific inimitability deals with the passing suggestions of some of the secrets of nature which are sometimes spontaneously found amongst the phraseology of the Qur'an, which scholars have discovered with the passage of time and advancing scientific knowledge.

The legislative inimitability pertains to the original approach that the Qur'an adopted in terms of wisdom and edicts, which at the time was inaccessible to mankind, and even since then is impossible to achieve without the guidance of religion. The Qur'an contains a comprehensive ontology as well as a multi-dimensional system of legislation.

1. Rhetorical Inimitability

The rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an can be divided into five areas: (i) the choice of words, (ii) the mode and style of expression, (iii) the harmonious melody, (iv) thematic unity and consistency, and (v) beauty and subtlety.

i) The Choice of Words

The choice of words in the Qur'an is perfectly measured. If any word were replaced with another, the new word would be lacking in certain

[718] 'Abd al-Qāhir Jurjānī, *Asrār al-Balāghah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 3.

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respects. This is because the words in the Qur'an have a symmetry whereby the sounds of the letters of adjacent words are concordant, thus making the recitation of the Qur'an easy and smooth. Secondly, there is a spiritual congruence of words, which forms cohesive combinations of meanings. Moreover, the choice of words according to the conditions of eloquence set by the science of rhetoric is observed completely. These three aspects closely take into account the special features of every word. In sum, each word is specifically placed in such a way that it cannot be substituted.

In this regard, Ibn 'Aṭiyyah says:

> 'The Book of God is such that if a word were taken out and all the Arabic language were searched to replace it with something better, nothing could be found.'

Abū Sulaymān Bostī says:

> Known that the basic foundation of rhetoric of the Qur'an which combines together the above qualities is that all kinds of terms – in which the aḅove particularities are present – is correctly used in its place, which is exclusive and suitable, such that if another term is used in its place, either the meaning would totally change and lead to a distortion of the intended meaning, or it would lose its smooth flow and resplendence and fall from the ideal level of rhetoric.[720]

Shaykh 'Abd al-Qāhir Jurjānī states:

> Litterateurs and rhetoricians were completely enamoured by the choice of words in the Qur'an, for they have not found any word which is unsuitable in a given place or located in a strange place, or another word more suitable, more deserving or more appropriate. Instead, they have found such cohesion and accurate arrangement that the wise have been astounded, and everybody has been rendered incapable of imitating it.

Such praise from great rhetoricians and men of letters for the unique choice of words in the Qur'an is plentiful. Of course, this accuracy in the choice of words depends on two conditions which are by nature impossible for mankind to fulfil: a comprehensive knowledge of the specific

[720] Ma'rifat, *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 29.

aspects of each word, to the extent that the particularities throughout the language are known and can be used appropriately; and a thorough comprehension of each word so that no vacillation or confusion occurs. It seems impossible for common individuals to fulfil these conditions .

The most illustrious example in this regard is the verse on retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*):

> *Wa lakum fi al-qiṣāṣi ḥayātun yā ulī al-albāb la'allakum tattaqūn.* (2:179)
>
> *And there is for you in legal retribution (saving of) life, O ye (people) of understanding, that ye may restrain yourselves* (2:179).

In order to easily memorise their civil and penal laws, the Arabs were accustomed to stipulating them in concise, elegant statements, and they sought the assistance of their outstanding orators to codify their laws in the most concise and articulate way. They eventually agreed to coin the expression *al-qatl anfā li al-qatl*, that is, killing is the best deterrent for killing, but their choice overlooked certain points. First of all, nothing negates itself, and it is a big mistake to regard killing as such as the antidote for killing. It can only be regarded as a deterrent if it is done as retribution.

Secondly, in the opposition of 'retribution' (*qiṣāṣ*) and 'life' (*ḥayāt*) in the verse, the special pun of *ṭibāq* is used, which is a combination of opposites. Retribution, which is a type of killing, is the opposite of life, yet in the verse it is regarded as the source of life.

Thirdly, in the same expression, the comparative form is used without mentioning the noun with which the comparison is made. From a literary point of view this is deficient, for it is a source of ambiguity; in other words, it is not clear what killing is more of a deterrent for.[721] Nevertheless, such a deficiency does not exist in the verse. The guarantee of life hinges solely on retribution (*qiṣāṣ*).

Fourthly, the verse is affirmative while the stated expression is negative. From a literary point of view, an affirmative expression is superior to a negative one, especially in the codification of legal matters.

And finally, by the use of the word *qiṣāṣ*, the concept of legal justice is invoked, and suggests that the law emanates from a source of justice. This

[721] If the ellipsis is *min kulli shay'* (from all things), it is totally incorrect, and if it is *min ba'ḍ al-ashyā'* (from certain things), it is ambiguous, and should not be so in legal texts.

is while using the word *qatl* at the beginning, previously unmentioned, lacks this property. Moreover, the word *qatl* is somewhat aversive, whereas *qiṣāṣ* affirms a sense of justice, peace of mind and retribution.[722]

ii) The Mode and Style of Expression

There is no similarity or parallelism between the style of expression in the Qur'an with any other conventional style of Arabic.

The wonder of the Qur'an is that it has a style which is acceptable to Arabic speakers even though it is different from their conventional styles of speaking. What is more remarkable is that it possesses all the merits of conventional linguistic styles, but with no trace at all of any of their drawbacks.

It was stated above that each of the three conventional styles of poetry, prose and rhyming prose, has its own merits and drawbacks. The Qur'anic style has the charm and elegance of poetry, the liberty of prose, and the beauty and fineness of rhyming prose, without the restrictions of rhyme, rhythm or any difficulty in composition. This was why the Arab orators were astounded by it.

iii) The Harmonious Melody

One of the most striking dimensions of the rhetorical uniqueness of the Qur'an – which recently has been given more attention by scholars – is its melody, which is so elegant that from the very beginning the Arabs had to confess that the language of the Qur'an was beyond human capability, and could only be words from God.

In this respect Sayyid Quṭb thus says:

> Such melody is produced as a result of a special orderliness and symphony of letters in a word, as well as the concordance of words in a space. For this reason, the Qur'an has the peculiarities of prose as well as the salient features of poetry. This superior rhetoric in the Qur'an has rendered it needless of the restrictions of rhyme, and it has a complete liberty of expression. At the same time, among the features of poetry, it possesses its own inner music and intervals which create a kind of rhythm.

[722] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 5, 90-130.

At the time of reciting the Qur'an, its inner tune can be completely felt. This tune is more manifest in short *sūrah*s with their short intervals, and in descriptions and depictions as a whole, and less manifest in long *sūrah*s, but the system of its tune is alway intact. For example, we read thus in verses 1-22 of *Sūrah al-Najm*:

Wa [a]l-najmi idhā hawā

Mā ḍalla ṣāḥibikum wa mā ghawā

Wa mā yanṭiqu 'an al-hawā

In huwa illā waḥyun yūḥā

'Allamahū shadīd al-quwā

Dhū mirratin fastawā

Wa huwa bi [a]l-ufuqi [a]l-a'alā

Thumma danā fatadallā

Fa kāna qāba qawsayni aw adnā

Fa awḥā ilā 'abdihī mā awḥā

These intervals have an approximately equal rhythm – but not according to the Arab system of prosody – and rhyme is observed in it as well, and out of the concordance of the letters of words and the symphony of words within the sentences, a musical rhythm is produced. Because of inner feeling and musical perception, this peculiarity makes one rhythm differ from another, even though they might have the same intervals and metres.

As we have said, such a melody in the verses and intervals is obvious throughout the Qur'an. The reason for our claim is that if we change a word which is used in a particular form to another of its other forms which has the same meaning, or if we omit or change the word order, there would be a disruption of this tuneful order.

An example of the first kind is the story of Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) in *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'* (26: 75-82), where, in order to maintain rhyme with such words as *ta'budūn*, *al-aqdamūn*, *al-dīn* and the like, *yā' al-mutakallim* in the words *yahdīn*, *yasqīn*, *yashfīn* and *yuḥyīn* is omitted.

Another example can be found in these verses (*Sūrah al-Fajr* 89:1-5):

Wa [a]l-fajr

Wa layālin 'ashr

Wa [a]l-shaf'i wa [a]l-watr

Wa [a]l-layli idhā yasr

Hal fī dhālika qasamun li dhī ḥijr

Here the original *yā'* of the word *yasr* is omitted for concordance with *fajr*, *'ashr*, *al-watr* and *ḥijr*.

Another example is in *Sūrah al-Kahf* 18:64:

Qāla dhālika mā kunnā nabgh *fartaddā 'alā āthārihimā qaṣaṣā*

Here, if we prolong the letter *yā'* of *nabghi* according to general rule, the rhythm would be somehow disrupted.

Hence, as stated earlier, there is a kind of inner music in the words of the Qur'an that can be felt but is beyond description. This music is hidden in the warp and woof of the words as well as in the composition of the sentences, and it can only be discerned with that inward sense which is a sublime faculty.[723]

As Rāfi'ī writes:

> The Arabs were contesting with one another in writing prose and reciting poetry, thereby taking pride in themselves. Yet their style of speech was always based on a single manual. They were free in logic and expression, knowing the art of oration. Of course, the Arabs' eloquence, on the one hand, was innate, and on the other, was inspired by nature. When the Qur'an was revealed, however, they observed that the Qur'an was put forth in a different scheme. The words were the same as those they used to know, but it flowed successively without any interruption, and the composition, symphony and harmony were exquisite. The Arabs were astonished by its splendour, realising the fundamental weakness and insignificance of their mental framework. The eloquent Arabs also heard a kind of speech which was previously unknown to them. They could discern a resplendent melody in

[723] Sayyid Ibrāhīm Husayn al-Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1980), 80-83.

> the letters, words and sentences of this new kind of speech. All these words were so compatibly grouped together that they are as if a single unit. The Arabs readily sensed this melody in the words, which left them weak and helpless.

All those who can discern the musical secret and psychological philosophy of the Qur'an believe that no kind of art can rival the natural harmony and melody of the Qur'anic text, nor can any fault be found in it. This being said, it should be noted that the Qur'anic melody is much superior to music, to the extent that it cannot be called music.

In the musical tones, variation of the voice, flow, resonance, subtlety, vigour and the different accompanying movements, in addition to the modulation and vibration known as the 'rhetoric of sound' in musical language, bring about a spiritual stirring. If we take this dimension of the Qur'an into account in recitation, we find out that no language could be more eloquent than that of the Qur'an, and it is this very dimension which arouses feelings in people, whether Arabic speakers or not. Taking this into consideration, the exhortation to recite the Qur'an in a loud voice becomes clear.

The intervals with which the Qur'anic verses end are complete silhouettes of the musical sentences. Each of these intervals is itself compatible with the sounds, and has a unicity with the type of voice in which it is expressed. In addition, most of these intervals end with one of the two letters *nūn* and *mīm*, both of which are common in music, or with letters with a stretching sound (*madd*).[724]

Some experts have said that most of the intervals in the Holy Qur'an end with *madd* and *līn* letters and the addition of the letter *nūn*, and the reason for this is to create a kind of melody. Sībawayh has also said:

> Whenever the Arabs wished to give a melody to what they said, they would add the letters *alif*, *yā'* or *nūn*, thereby prolonging the words, and if this were not their intention, they would refrain from adding those letters. This method is also used in the Qur'an, but in a richer way. However, if a word cannot end with one of these letters – for example, if it should end with a *sākin* letter – then, of course, this letter becomes in line with the tone of

[724] Ma'rifat, *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 188-216.

> the sentence and the grouping of its words, and maintaining consistency with the tune of the statement, it is placed in the most appropriate way. Such letters mostly occur in short sentences and from *qalqalah* (shaking, echoing)[725] letters or similar ones, which in music are believed to contain melody. The effect in people's hearts is but natural. In a recitation of the Holy Qur'an, the unmatchable tunefulness of the voice addresses all – both those who can understand the language and those who cannot.

It is said that this unmatchable dimension of the Qur'an is traceable to the multi-layered feelings in the heart of the reciter or listener. In other words, the letters are placed alongside each other in an unprecedented manner, such that by listening to them unaided by any template of music, rhyme, rhythm or poetic metre, the resplendent cadence of the words can be heard.

The Inward Melody of the Qur'an

Melody in literature might refer to such manifest artistic achievements as rhyme, metre, the division of rhymed speech into equal hemistiches, and other conventional rhythms and measures which can all be regarded as abstract verbal frameworks. However, the 'inward' melody is a result of the beauty of expression that emanates from the substance of literature. The difference between these two types is immense, for in the second type, words and meaning are elegantly interwoven in a way that produces a melody that caresses the spirit and arouses the inner self.

Professor Muṣṭafā Muhammad writes: 'This secret is one of the most profound secrets of the rhetorical structure of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not poetry, prose or rhyming prose, but rather a sort of speech architecture which discloses inward music.'

One should be aware of the great difference between straightforward harmony and an inner harmony. For example, let us recite a couplet from the poems of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'ah whose poems are known for being accompanied by music and melody:

Qāla lī ṣāḥibī li ya'lama mā bī

[725] Whenever one of the letters *qāf*, *ṭā'*, *bā'*, *jīm* or *dāl* carries a *sukūn*, the letter is 'shaken' or echoed (*qalqalah*). [Trans.]

atuḥibbu al-qatūla ukhta al-rubābī

When people listen to this couplet, they are aroused by its music, but the music is of an outward nature. Two equal hemistiches with a homologous rhyme – an elongated *yā'* – in either of the two hemistiches has helped make the couplet melodious. But the music comes from outside and not from within. In other words, rhyme, rhythm and cadence create a musical harmony. But when we recite the following verse:

Wa [a]l-ḍuḥā

Wa [a]l-layli idhā sajā

By the glorious morning light, and by the night when it is still... (93:1-2),

we are faced with a hemistich with no conventional rhyme or rhythm, and yet it is full of melody, and each of the letters produces a pleasant sound, an inner melody. How and from what does this melody originate? Inward melody is one of the architectural secrets of the Qur'an, and no other literary structure has ever compared. The following verses have an intrinsic musical structure whose melody emanates from within in an astonishing manner:

Al-raḥmānu 'ala al-'arsh istawā,

The All-Merciful is firmly established on the throne (20:5);

Qāla rabbi innī wahana al-'aẓmu minnī washta'ala al-ra'su shaybā wa lam akun bi du'āika rabbi shaqiyyā,

He said: 'O my Lord! indeed my bones have become feeble, and the hair of my head doth glisten with grey, but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to Thee!' (19:4);

Inna [a]l-sā'ata ātiyatun akādu ukhfīhā litujzā kullu nafsin bimā tas'ā...,

'...Verily the Hour is coming – My design is to keep it hidden – for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its endeavour...' (20:15);

Innahū man ya'ti rabbahū mujriman fa inna lahū jahannama lā yamūtu fīhā wa lā yaḥyā,

Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner (at Judgement) – for him is hell; therein shall he will neither die nor live (20:74).

When the Qur'an gives the account of the Prophet Moses, it adopts a wonderful symphonic approach, thus:

> *Wa laqad awḥaynā ilā Mūsā an asri bi 'ibādi faḍrib lahum ṭarīqan fi al-baḥri yabasā lā takhāfu darakan wa lā takhshā,*
>
> *We sent an inspiration to Moses: 'Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, without fear of being overtaken (by Pharaoh) and without (any other) fear (20:77-79).*

The words are an effortless concordance. Such words as *yabasan* or *lā takhāfu darakan* – which means *lā takhāfu idrākan* – are an embodiment of sympathetic accord. It is as if the words melt in the hands of their Creator, acquire a harmony, and a unique melody manifests in them.

There is no similarity whatsoever between this melody and either the poetry of the Age of Ignorance (*al-jāhiliyyah*) or contemporary poetry and prose, and notwithstanding those enemies who wished to undermine the status of the Qur'an, not a single example of anything similar has been recorded in history. Amidst all this clamour, the Qur'anic text has preserved its distinctive features as an indescribable phenomenon. The only convincing explanation for this is that the Qur'an emanates from something beyond the reach of man.

Reciting the Qur'an Melodiously

And recite the Qur'an with a measured tone (73:4).

As we become generally familiar with the wonderful inner melody of poetical sound and tone in the Qur'an, we realise why reciting the Qur'an in melodious tone has been recommended. The reciter is enjoined to observe all the subtle points of recitation, including voice range, pitch, resonance and the like. There are some traditions in this regard:

The Messenger of God said:

> Everything has an ornament, and the ornament of the Qur'an is a beautiful voice;
>
> Amongst the most beautiful things are beautiful hair and a pleasant voice;

Recite the Qur'an in [clear] Arabic tones, but avoid the [vulgar] tone of those who are corrupt;[726]

A beautiful voice is an ornament for the Qur'an;

Make the Qur'an pleasant with your voice, for a pleasant voice increases the beauty of the Qur'an;

Embellish the Qur'an with melodious tones.

On the interpretation of *And recite the Qur'an in a measured tone* (73:4) Imām al-Ṣādiq has said: 'This means that you should recite it with reflection and make your voice pleasant.'[727]

Imām al-Bāqir has said: 'Recite the Qur'an tunefully, for God, the Almighty, likes the Qur'an to be recited with a beautiful voice.'[728]

The Messenger of God said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed in a melancholic tone. So, recite it with weeping [out of ecstasy], and if you cannot weep, have a weeping tone and recite it with a pleasant tune, for whoever does not recite it with a pleasant tune is not of us,' and 'He is not of us who does not recite the Qur'an with a pleasant tunefulness.'[729]

Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'The Qur'an has been revealed with melancholy. So, recite it in a melancholic tone.'[730]

Of course, there are plenty of sayings of the Holy Prophet narrated by his companions, as well as proof to substantiate those sayings.

iv) Thematic Unity and Consistency

Another salient feature of the Qur'an is the consistency of the concepts and meanings throughout the verses, even though they may not have been revealed together, but a little at a time over longer or shorter periods. The dispersion of the revelations due to various circumstances would seem to dictate that there would not be a relationship or consistency in the verses, and that this would be clear. Particularly in recent times, close examination of content of each *sūrah* by scholars has meant that, on the whole, they have come to the conclusion that all the verses in each *sūrah*

[726] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 614-616.

[727] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 89, 'Kitāb al-Qur'ān,' 190-195.

[728] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 616.

[729] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 89, 191.

[730] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 614.

are summed up by a particular purpose expressed in the whole *sūrah*. This is nowadays called the 'thematic unity' of the *sūrah*. It is the same thematic unity which constitutes the unity of style of that *sūrah*, and an aspect of inimitability originates from this point.

The scholars cite certain proofs to substantiate this claim, amongst which is the different number of verses in the *sūrah*s. This cannot be accidental, because it would indicate a lack of reason, calculation and wisdom, and it is impossible for any uncalculated action to have come from a Wise Agent. Most *sūrah*s of the Qur'an, especially the short ones, were revealed in a complete form. The longer *sūrah*s of the Qur'an would also begin with *Bismillāhi al-raḥmāni al-raḥīm* (In the Name of God, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful), and every subsequent verse would be recorded by instruction of the Holy Prophet until another *Bismillāhi al-raḥmāni al-raḥīm* indicating the conclusion of one *sūrah* and the beginning of the next. Hence, the number and arrangement of the verses of every *sūrah* is intentional, through revelation and the instruction of the Prophet.

Now, this question is raised: what is the reason for this difference in the number of verses of the *sūrah*s? The correct answer has been stated. That is, every *sūrah* pursues a certain goal, and having done that a *sūrah* would end, and this accounts for different numbers of verses in the *sūrah*s. It was never accidental or without a reasonable cause, and this is something which constitutes the thematic unity or unity of style in every *sūrah*; that is, there is a conceptual relationship and close harmony amongst the verses of every *sūrah*.

Contemporary exegetes have realised this fact and worked hard to discover the specific aim of each *sūrah* with a certain amount of success. Amongst them is Sayyid Quṭb who, in the introduction to an exegesis of each *sūrah*, briefly explains its intention according to his understanding. One of his students, 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shaḥātah, in his book *Ahdāf Kull Sūrah wa Maqāṣiduhā*, has also attempted this with some success.

Professor Muhammad 'Abd Allāh al-Darrāz also says in this regard: 'Although the Qur'an has been revealed according to the demands of particular circumstances at various times, it has preserved a logical and literary unity, and this is the greatest testimony to the inimitability of the Qur'an.'[731]

[731] Muhammad 'Abd Allāh al-Darrāz, *al-Madkhal ilā al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Cairo, 1957), Preface.

Professor Muhammad Muhammad al-Madanī, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at al-Azhar University, also emphasises this point, believing that an accurate understanding of the objectives of each *sūrah* is the best way to understand the meaning as a whole. He says: 'Unless you look at the general picture of the *sūrah* with an open mind, you will never be able to discern the details drawn out throughout the *sūrah*.'[732]

In sum, contemporary scholars acknowledge that every *sūrah* is cohesive throughout, and this plays a role in the integration and connectivity of the verses, and the primary duty of the exegete, before embarking on the exegesis of a verse, is to understand the all-encompassing unity prevailing in the *sūrah* in order to detect its objectives. Moreover, rhetoricians have regarded the 'good opening' (*ḥusni maṭla'*) and 'good ending' (*ḥusni khitām*) of each *sūrah* as one of the axiomatic merits of the Qur'an. As such, every *sūrah* begins with an elegant opening and ends with a subtle conclusion. It is said that the essence of rhetoric dictates that the speaker commence his speech with the utmost agility by preparing the listener and indicating the main point of the speech. This way of beginning a speech is called the 'the excellence in opening' – the skill to draw the attention of the listener. Ibn Ma'ṣūd, the famous accomplished litterateur, says: 'The beginnings of all the *sūrahs* of the Holy Qur'an observed this fundamental principle of rhetoric in the best and most effective manner.'[733] Ibn Athīr also mentions the beginning of the *sūrahs* of the Qur'an as the best example.[734]

Regarding the 'good ending' (*ḥusn khitām*), Ibn Abī al-Iṣba' says:

> The speaker must end his speech with the utmost elegance, because the effect of the final phrases remains in the mind of the listener. So he must try to end his speech with the most expressive and appropriate turn of phrase.

He then goes on to elaborately examine each of the *sūrahs* and cla the style of each of the endings from the perspective of oration.[735]

The rhetoricians have a consensus of opinion that the endings of th *sūrahs*, like their openings, are expressed with the utmost subtlety and

[732] Muhammad Muhammad Madanī, *al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī* (Cairo: Dār al-Iḥyā', 1935), 5-7.

[733] Ibn Ma'ṣūm, *Anwār al-Rabī' fī Anwā' al-Badī'* (Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Nu'mān, 1389 q.), vol. 1, 34.

[734] 'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-Sā'ir*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Thā'ir, 1379 q.), vol. 3, 98.

[735] Ibn Abī al-Iṣba', *Badī' al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 1377 q.), 343, 346-353.

elegance. Ibn Ma'ṣūm says: 'The closing parts of the surahs, like their beginnings, all accord with the strictest rules of rhetoric.' Thereafter, he mentions the ending of some *sūrah*s and presents their merits, and concludes: 'And if you ponder on the closing sentences of all the other surahs, you will find them at the peak of eloquence and ultimate beauty.'[736]

In his book *Mu'tarak al-Aqrān*, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭi has dealt extensively with this topic.[737]

2. Scientific Inimitability

The scientific inimitability of the Qur'an refers to points which are indicated by certain verses without being the main purport, for the Qur'an is not a book of science but a guidance for mankind. As such, if we sometimes encounter a scientific clue in the Qur'an, it is because the source of the text is divine Wisdom, the fountainhead of infinite knowledge.

> *Say: 'It was sent down by Him Who knows the mystery (that is) in the heavens and the earth'* (25:6).

It is to be expected that the statements of any learned person – even when talking about something outside his expertise – will sometimes contain expressions that reflect his area of expertise. For example, if a jurist (*faqīh*) speaks on a common subject, those who are familiar with jurisprudence might detect from his expressions that the speaker is a urist, even though he may not deliberately intend it. This is how it is vith scientific indications in the Qur'an, which are but sprinklings within :he main purpose of the text. Before presenting some examples of these clues, there are three points worth considering:

1) There are some who suppose that within the Qur'an are comprised all the fundamentals of natural sciences, mathematics, astronomy, and even industrial sciences, technology and the like. They have attempted to illustrate this false notion with passages from the Qur'an such as the following:

> *...and We have sent down to thee a Book explaining all things* (16:89);

[736] Ibn Ma'ṣūm, *Anwār al-Rabī'*, vol. 6, 325.

[737] Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Mu'tarak al-Aqrān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.), vol. 1, 75-79; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, 316-319. See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 5, 290-304.

Nothing have We neglected in the Book (6:38);

...nor anything fresh or withered but is (inscribed) in a record clear (6:59).

It is thus stated in a tradition narrated by 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd: 'Whosoever desires knowledge of the people of the past and of the people of the future should reflect on the Qur'an.'[738] Had such notions not issued from certain prominent figures[739] or been attributed to them, we would not have contested them, because the weakness of their bases is obvious.

The first question that should be asked is how and where can these sciences, crafts, and ever-increasing discoveries be inferred from the Qur'an? Why were our predecessors not aware of them, and why do our contemporaries not pay attention to them? Moreover, the verses cited are unrelated to the claim. The verse in *Sūrah al-Naḥl* concerns the all-encompassing provision of the religious law, and aims to exhaust the arguments of the unbelievers regarding the Day of Resurrection, when every prophet will be called as a witness to the actions of his community, as the Holy Prophet is the witness to his community. Hence, everything is laid down complete in the Book and the law (*sharī'ah*) sent to him:

...and We shall bring thee as a witness against these (thy people); and We have sent down to thee a Book explaining all things... (16:89).

That is to say: 'We have not left any shortcoming in the guidance, mercy and good news sent to the Muslims.' By examining the background to this revelation, it becomes very clear that 'explaining all things' refers to the comprehensive nature of the religious law.

In principle, the scope of the meaning of each word should be determined by the status of the speaker. For example, Muhammad ibn Zakariyyā, who wrote *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Ṭabīb*, declared as an expert physician that whatever is needed is provided in that book. What he meant by 'whatever is needed' is within the framework of medicine. In the same way, Shaykh Ṣadūq wrote *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh* in a bid to present whatever was needed within the domain of jurisprudence. In the same

[738] Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm*, vol. 1, section 4, 'Ādāb Tilāwat al-Qur'ān,' 296.

[739] Among them are Abū al-Faḍl Marsamī (d. 655/1257) and Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī al-Ma'āfarī (d. 544/1149), and implications in the statements of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī also seem to agree. Of course, these statements are subject to other interpretations, as we have stated in the introduction to volume 6 of *al-Tamhīd*.

manner, since God is the Legislator, He uses such expressions in relation to the books and codes of law (*sharā'i'*) solely to imply the universality of the legislation.

The same applies to the words *Nothing have We neglected in the Book* (6:38), if 'the Book' in this case refers to the Qur'an. However, the apparent meaning is something else, and refers to the Book of Creation and the eternal Knowledge of God. The whole verse is as follows:

> *There is no animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you. Nothing have We omitted from the Book, and they (all) shall be gathered to their Lord in the end* (6:38).

The following verse makes it even clearer that all creatures and their actions and thoughts are recorded and actually present in the Knowledge of God:

> *With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge; there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or withered, but it is in a record clear* (6:59).

However, the tradition of Ibn Mas'ūd relates only to the field of religious science with which he was acquainted, and 'the first (*awwalīn*) and the last (*ākhirīn*)' means the earlier and succeeding prophets and their respective doctrines as presented in the Qur'an.

2) A second point is that it is extremely difficult to draw conclusions about science from the Qur'an, because scientific claims change with the passage of time. In many cases a scientific theory assumes the status of fact for a while before being displaced. Therefore, if we equate Qur'anic concepts with unreliable theories, we will undermine the unchangeable and truth-based meanings of the Qur'an with unstable interpretations. Therefore it seems inappropriate to draw conclusions about scientific achievements from the Qur'an.

If ever a scientist manages by scientific means of which he is certain to explain some of the ambiguities in the clues supplied by the Qur'an, it might be acceptable provided that he uses the provision 'perhaps,' and concedes that perhaps this is what the verse means. In this way, even if there is some change of theory, it would not arbitrarily affect the Qur'an,

and we would know that the scientist's interpretation was wrong. A firm connection between a definitive religious vision and changeable scientific views cannot be established.

3) The third point concerns whether the challenge of the Qur'an or *taḥaddī* as a manifestation of the Qur'an's inimitability also covers this scientific dimension of the Qur'an, in the sense that it also challenges any rival with these scientific clues. Or, is it the case that the discovery of previously unknown scientific facts hinted at by the Qur'an is part of the clarification of its inimitability? In other words, after scientists have explained with the tools at their disposal what were previously ambiguous clues, do we then realize that the clues in the Qur'an could only have originated from God's Knowledge as Lord of the Universe? This is one more reason why the question of the scientific inimitability of the Qur'an is raised.

Some believe that these scientific clues are a proof of inimitability, although there is no *taḥaddī* in this regard. This is because the challenges in those particular verses are addressed to people unacquiainted with the sciences in question. On this basis, from a scientific perspective, the Qur'an is the same as other books with a heavenly origin which did not challenge their audience, although scientific clues in them may well be a proof of inimitability (*i'jāz*).[740]

Examples of Scientific Clues

1. Contraction (*Ratq*) and Expansion (*Fatq*) of the Universe

Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were a joined entit (ratq) and We clove them asunder (fatq)? (21:30).

Ratq means to be interwoven, while *fatq* indicates an unravelli It is stated in this verse that the heavens and the earth were at fi interwoven and then unravelled. Most exegetes were of the opinion th the interweaving and unravelling refer to the opening of the sky and th pouring down of rain:

So We opened the gates of heaven, with water pouring forth (54:11).

It is also suggested that it means the opening up of the earth and the growing of plants:

[740] See Aḥmad Abū Ḥijr, *al-Tafsīr al-'Ilmī li al-Qur'ān fī al-Mīzān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1970), 131.

And We split the earth in fragments, and produce therein grain (80:26-27).

'Allāmah Ṭabrisī says in this regard: 'This interpretation has been narrated from two Imāms (Imām Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir and Abū 'Abdillāh al-Ṣādiq).'[741] In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī* there is a tradition with a weak chain of transmission from Imām al-Bāqir, while in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* there is a tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq which has no continuous chain of transmission.

Another interpretation tells us that initially the heavens and the earth were once interwoven and then split and expanded to how they are today. For instance, we read in *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat:*

> *Then He turned to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth: 'Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly' They said: 'We do come willingly.' And He completed them as seven firmaments* (41:11-12).

This verse bespeaks a scientific fact which modern science has more or less realised, and that is that the origin of the universe was gaseous in form. In this case, the Arabic word *dukhān* (smoke) is the most opportune for describing the original matter that constituted the universe.

As recorded in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the Commander of the Faithful has time and again pointed this out. In the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah* concerning the creation of the universe, we read:

> Then the Almighty created the openings of the atmosphere, the expanse of the firmament and the strata of winds.[742]

And in Sermon 211:

> Then He made it from layers, and separated them into seven skies after they had joined together.[743]

Therefore, in his commentary on *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, 'Allāmah Majlisī comments on the two traditions; he mentions: 'These two traditions are inconsistent with what has been transmitted from the Commander of the Faithful.'[744]

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[741] Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 7, 45.

[742] Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 1.

[743] Ibid. Sermon 211.

[744] 'Allāmah Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'Uqūl* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1394 q.), vol. 25, 232. As such, the abovementioned two traditions cannot be cited on account of weakness in the chain of transmission. Only the statement of the Commander

The Role of Mountains in the Stability of the Earth

In nine places in the Qur'an mountains are referred to as *rawāsī* (13:3; 27:61; 15:19; 50:7; 16:15; 31:10; 21:31; 41:10; 77:27):

> *And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake them* (21:31).

Mountains are described as *rawāsī* because they are the 'firm ones' based on strong foundations. The term *rawāsī* is derived from *rasā al-safīnah*, which means 'the ship anchored.' Because of the anchor, the ship remains stable in the middle of the raging sea, and as such, the mountains are like anchors that prevent the earth from shaking with its tectonic movements.

Mountains are also referred to as *awtād*, meaning 'pegs,' for they keep the earth from falling apart:

> *Have We not made the earth as a wide expanse, and the mountains as pegs?* (78:6-7).

In this regard, the Commander of the Faithful said the following:

> He also created high hills, rocks of stones and lofty mountains. He put them in their positions and made them remain stationary. Their peaks rose into the air while their roots remained in the water. In this way He raised the mountains above the plains and fixed their foundations in the vast expanse wherever they stood. He made their peaks high and made their bodies lofty. He made them like pillars for the earth and fixed them in it like pegs. Consequently, the earth became stationary; otherwise it might bend with its inhabitants or sink inwards with its burden, or shift from its positions. Therefore, glorified is He who preserved it after the flowing of its waters.[745]

This means that, notwithstanding its movements, the earth is prevented from shaking and falling apart. From this it can be inferred that the earth has various movements, yet despite these movements, it remains stable and firm; that the earth's surface is firm and solid so that its inhabitants

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of the Faithful which has an authentic chain of transmission can be an interpretation of the verse. See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 6, 129-139.

[745] Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 211, 328.

and the forms upon it do not sink into it; and that in its rotation and other movements, the earth is constant and firm, and does not swerve from the axis determined for it. These points have been confirmed by scientific research. In view of the vital role the mountains have in making life possible on earth, they are scattered on the surface of the earth like chains around it.

Now we can better grasp the subtle elements in what Imām 'Alī says in the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, in which instead of *jibāl* (mountains) the word *ṣukhūr* (rocks) is used. In an interpretation of the verse:

> *And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with them* (21:31).

The Imām connects the mountain's being *ṣakhrah* to the stability and firmness of the earth.

The mountain ranges, with their curves and contours, therefore play a vital role in maintaining the stability of the earth's surface, notwithstanding the fiery activity beneath the surface.

Difficulty in Breathing with the Increase in Height

> *Those whom He willeth to leave astraying - He maketh their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies* (6:125).

This verse deals with the difficulties faced by the misguided ones, and likens them to those who ascend to the higher layers of the atmosphere where they would experience difficulty in breathing and narrowness of the breast.

Earlier exegetes had different views regarding the nature of the metaphor in this verse. Some of them were of the opinion that it refers to anyone who tries in vain to fly in the air like the birds. Since this is not possible for him, he becomes intensely frustrated and breathing becomes difficult. Others have said that it refers to young trees that desire to grow in a thick jungle: the thick foliage of the mature trees closes their path, and the young trees hardly have any space to grow. But none of this clearly conveys the meaning of the verse.

Today, however, because of the discovery of the correlation of air pressure with blood pressure inside the body causing external and internal pressure, the nature of simile becomes clearer than the earlier explanations,

whose mistake lies in the interpretion of *yaṣṣa'adu fī [a]ll-samā'* – with an emphatic (*tashdīd*) *ṣād* and *'ayn*, and the preposition *fī* (in) – as an endeavour to ascend to the sky. If this were actually so, then the preposition *ilā* (to/toward) should have been used instead of *fī*. Moreover, lexically the word *yaṣṣa'adu* does not convey the meaning of *ṣu'ūd* or ascending. Instead, this word – in the *tafa'ul* verb form (*taṣa'ud*) – is used to indicate the constriction of breathing due to intense difficulties. *Taṣa'ada nafsuhu* means difficulty in breathing, a narrowing of the breast and the feeling of anxiety and pain. The words *ṣa'ūd* and *ṣa'ada*, on the other hand, mean passing through difficult terrain, and are used to describe any extremely difficult task. It is thus stated in *Sūrah al-Jinn*:

> *But if any turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He will cause him to undergo a growing* (ṣa'adā) *penalty* (72:17).

Also, in *Sūrah al-Muddaththir*:

> *Soon I will visit him with a mount of calamities* (ṣa'ūdā) (74:17).

As such, the meaning of *ka annamā yaṣṣa'adu fī [a]ll-samā'* is that he is like someone who experiences hardship and extreme difficulty in breathing at elevated heights. In reality, anyone who forgets God in his life is like one who climbs such heights, experiencing pain, distress and difficulty in breathing. Hence, it can be easily inferred from this expression that someone located in an elevated place with no means of protection will experience these problems.

Water as the Origin of Life

> *We made from water every living thing* (21:30).

The Holy Prophet has said: 'Everything is created from water.'[746] According to the verse above and this saying of the Prophet, all creatures have derived their existence from water. Shaykh Ṣadūq narrates on the authority of Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī – who is regarded as one of the prominent figures amongst the Successors (*tābi'ūn*)[747] – that Imām Baqir was asked questions regarding the origin the universe, and the Imām replied: 'The

[746] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 54, 208; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, 317.

[747] *Tābi'ūn* (Successors) refers to the second generation of Muslims who came after the Companions, who had met the Companions but had not seen the Prophet.

first thing He created from amongst His creation is something through which everything originates, and that is water.'[748]

In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, Shaykh Kulaynī has recorded a tradition from Imām al-Bāqir which was a reply to a man from the Levant:

> He created first the thing through which all things emanate, and that thing from which all things are created is water. As a result, God traces the origin of everything to water, but traces no origin to water.[749]

Also, Muhammad ibn Muslim, a man with a prominent reputation, has narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq:

> *Everything was water and His Throne was upon the water;*[750]
>
> *He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days - and His Throne was upon the water...* (11:7).

This verse shows that prior to the emergence of the universe – including the heavens and the earth – there was water, because in the expression *and His Throne was upon the water* the word *'arsh* alludes to the Throne of measure and management (*tadbīr*), by which is meant God's Knowledge to do whatever was good and necessary for the creation at a time when nothing existed other than water. As such, the verse alludes to the fact that in the beginning was God and there was nobody with Him, that God made water prior to the creation of the universe, and that all other creatures were created from water. And in several places the Holy Qur'an identifies the source of life – whether as the origin or the essential substrate – as water:

> *...and We made every living thing of water* (21:30);
>
> *God has created every living thing from water* (24:45).

And regarding mankind:

> *It is He who has created man from water* (25:54).

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[748] Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, 67.

[749] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, 94.

[750] Ibid. 95.

Here, water may mean the same water which is the source of all beings, as stated in the other verses, or it may mean semen, as in the following:

He is created from a fluid emitted (86:6);

Did We not create you from a base fluid? (77:20).

Most exegetes, however, have maintained that the *mā'* in the verse refers to the same initial substance from which all phenomena emanated: 'The first thing created by God was water.'[751] This is because the seed of the first living being only comes from water, the same primary seed which changed into simple creatures as well as those with complex parts composed of billions of cells.

However, the origin of life in the seas is one of the most complex issues yet to be resolved by empirical science. The theory of evolution – in whatever form it has been presented – has examined the stage after the emergence of the living cell, but what was prior to that remains unknown. What is known so far is that life came into being by the divine Will which has power over all existence, and there is no option other than accepting this, for both infinite regress and self-creation are impossible, as empirical science today admits.[752]

The Atmosphere as Protection for the Earth

We made the sky as a canopy well guarded; yet they turn away from its portent (21:31).

The planet earth is surrounded by an atmospheric covering estimated at about anything up to 1000 kilometres thick, and as consisting of approximately 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, 0.93% argon, 0.04% carbon monoxide, and small amounts of water vapour and other gases. This atmospheric covering is like an impenetrable shield surrounding the earth, protecting it from meteoroids that approach the earth in abundance from all directions[753] and are seen as a terrible threat.

The fact that the earth's inhabitants are protected from the manifold rocks that fall from the sky as well as the menace of radiation is in itself

[751] Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 24, 16.

[752] See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 6, 31-61.

[753] Every day innumerable rocks fall from the sky to the earth.

a manifestation of the divine Mercy, for otherwise life on earth would be impossible. Moreover, the ozone layer around the earth is also vitally important, since it protects the earth from the harmful rays of the sun. Without it life on earth would be unsustainable, therefore it must be declared that:

> *Glorified is He Who hath subdued these for us, and we were unable to have control over it* (43:13).

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