

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



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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'im⁴ 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, *Tārīkh 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 Twelfth 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.' 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'rīfati Hujajillāh '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.

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 Ḥaṭīb 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'ī 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,

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-adim* 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-Suyūṭī:

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-

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-Mizān*, 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, Sālīm – 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-tiwāl*) – *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, Tā 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 *hā mīm* (*hawāmīm*), 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.

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-Anbārī, al-Kirmānī and al-Ṭayyibī²⁶ 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 (*hifẓ*) 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, *hifẓ* 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.

²⁸ See Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Khoī, *al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, (Qum: 'Ilmiyyah, 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 similar 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 miṣ'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

³¹ Al-Mufid, *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 Muḥammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-Lughah* (Hyderabad: 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.

³⁴ Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān 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 explanations 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 days³⁷ 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:

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 Muḥīd says in *al-Masā'il al-Sarawīyyah*:

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, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 92, 88.

⁴⁴ Majlisī, *Bihār 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 Hajar 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 Tālib 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 One⁴⁷ 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:

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-Aṣḡagh 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'ālā*) 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*, *shizāz*, *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 camel⁵⁵ – 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. *Shizāz* means sharpened wood, and the plural is *ashizẓah*. *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 (*awṣiyya*) 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?

⁵⁶ Abū Dharr's narration says: 'And So-and-So looked at it and lo, there were things in it.' See Abū Maṣṣūr 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-Ṣāfi 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

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

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

⁶³ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 7, 447; *Tārikh 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?'

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-Anṣārī. 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:

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, *Uṣd 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:

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, *Fath 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-Qaṣṭalānī:

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

Ibn Hajar 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

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 Qaṣṭalānī, *Irshād al-Sārī fī Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Amīriyyah, 1323 q.), vol. 7, 449.

⁷⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 7, 447.

⁷⁶ Ibn Hajar, *Fath 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, *Fath 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-Ṣhahādatayn⁸⁵ 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.

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 Ḥaḥṣah 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 Ḥaḥṣah 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 *Khāndanihā* (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

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 Hajar, *Fath 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'an⁹⁴

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.

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 Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, 187.

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

⁹⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, *Uṣd 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

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'adh 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 Māhāk:

I was with 'Ā'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

¹⁰⁰ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh*, vol. 3, 55.

¹⁰¹ As believed to be possible by Ibn Hajar in *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 36.

¹⁰² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, 228.

¹⁰³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh*, 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 Ḥafṣ 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 recitation¹¹⁰ [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-Maṣāhif*, 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.

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'tn: 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-Hijr, The Thunder, Sheba, The Originator Abraham, Ṣād, Muhammad, Luqmān and The Troops.*

4) *Al-Hawāmīm: 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-daffatayn*) 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 Hajar 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

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 Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 8, 571; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, 416.

¹²⁴ Ibn Hajar, *Fath 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 Hajar'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

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:

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

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 fī 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-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, 213.

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

¹³⁴ See Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl 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 aydiyahumā*) (5:38) as the right hands, because Ibn Mas'ūd 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-qist* (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

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 Ḥamid Muhammad, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-'Uthmāniyyah, 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'siru 'inaban)*, instead of, *I dreamed that I was pressing wine (a'siru 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 (unzurūnā)* (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

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

¹⁴¹ Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab*, vol. 1, 171; Yahyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an* (Egypt: Dār al-Miṣriyyah li al-Ta'lif 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.

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-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ al-Zarqānī 'alā al-Muwatṭa'* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'at al-Khayriyyah, 1411 q.), vol. 1, 255.

And, *I dreamed that I was pressing grapes (a'şiru 'inaban)*, instead of, *I dreamed that I was pressing wine (a'şiru 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 (unzurūnā)* (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 (şayḥah)* (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

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

¹⁴¹ Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab*, vol. 1, 171; Yahyā 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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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

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 raḥṭaka 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 *fathah* 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 mim mā*) He is pleased with, meaning deeming it to be good and telling of His complete contentment, or astonishment at what ('*ajiba mim mā*) 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.

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 نستعينك و نستغفرک، و نثني عليك الخير و لا نكفرک، و
نخلع و نترك 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 ایاک نسعی و نحفد، نخشى
عذابک و نرجو رحمتک، ان عذابک بالكفار 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 nahfid*). We fear Your punishment and hope for Your Mercy. Verily Your punishment catches up with the unbelievers.'¹⁶¹

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

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-Duḥā*) and *The Expanding* (*al-Inshirāh*) 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:

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 aḏā'a lahum [marrū fih or sa'aw fih]

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

instead of:

they walk in it...(mashaw fih) (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 ajalīn 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 show it to you? *ukhfīhā (min nafsī fa kayfa uḏhirukum 'alayhā)*].¹⁷²

in order to explain the verse.

Also:

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 Ḥamid Husayn Laknahuwi, *'Abaqāt al-Anwār fī Ma'rifat al-A'immat al-Aṭḥār* (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-Hijr
16	Tā Hā	The Cave	The Bee

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'UD'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 Ḥā	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

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

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 <i>Muhammad</i> .]	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

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

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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 Ḥā	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

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

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 <i>Muhammad</i> .]	Explained in Detail
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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 <i>The Calamity.</i>]	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

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

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 <i>The Winds That Scatter.</i>]	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'UD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
76	The Dealers in Fraud [Ibn al-Nadīm places this after <i>The Enveloper.</i>]	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 <i>The Resurrection.</i>]	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

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

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 <i>The Clear Sign.</i>]	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 (<i>al-Khul'</i>)	The Great Calamity

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

CHAPTER NUMBER	IBN MAS'ŪD'S CODEX	UBAYY'S CODEX	CODEX OF THE PRESENT DAY
102	Quraysh	Quick Pace (<i>al-Hafd</i>)	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 <i>The Forenoon</i> .]	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 <i>The Palm Fibre</i> (<i>al-Masad</i>).]	The Help	Sincerity
113	...	The Palm Fibre	The Daybreak
114	...	The Unity	Mankind

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

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 <i>The Elephant</i> and <i>Quraysh</i> 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 differences 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, "ʿAbdullāh'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 Mālīk 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, *Fath 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

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

¹⁸¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath 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?

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'd¹⁸⁹ 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

¹⁸⁷ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 17; Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 17.

¹⁸⁸ Sijistānī, *al-Maṣāḥif*, 25.

¹⁸⁹ Qaṣṭalānī, *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 Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 16. This is what Muṣ'ab ibn Sa'd's tradition states. However, its import is debatable.

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 9, 16; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 62; Ibn Hajar, *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:

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Fath 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 enthusiastic 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 maṇḍūd (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:

¹⁹⁹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'at 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-Shawādh*, 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, *Wasā'il 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 second²⁰⁷ – 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:

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-Istiḳāmah), vol. 3, 204 or *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Dār al-Ma'ārif), vol. 4, 242.

²⁰⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath 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-Fihri. 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

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

²¹¹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath 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'id'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-Wāqidi, '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 Hajar'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.

²¹⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-'itidāl*, 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 Hajar, *Fath 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 Ḥaḥṣah'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. Ḥaḥṣah 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 Mālīk 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 Hānī' 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 khalqī [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 us²³¹ – 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 Thaḳīf, 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 Thaḳīf 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 excellence*, 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.

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:

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

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

²³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍāil al-Qur'an*, 15.

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

²⁴¹ Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Khīṭaṭ 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-Iṣṭiwānī 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-'Alawīyyah 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

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

²⁴³ Al-Zarqānī, *Manāḥil 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 Khālīd 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:

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 seventh²⁴⁸ or eighth²⁴⁹ 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 'Abbās²⁵⁰ 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

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*, *hā'* 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 *تَبْلُو* *tablū* (shall examine), *نَبْلُو* *nablū* (we examine), *نَتْلُو* *natlū* (we recite), *تَتْلُو* *tatlū* (you recite) and *يَتْلُو* *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* ليكون 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); ننشورها *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

ننجزيك *nunajjika* (10:92) (We shall deliver thee); ننحكك *nunahhika* (We shall take you away);²⁵⁹

لنبوئهم *la nubawwi'annahum* (29:58) (We shall surely lodge them); لننويهم *la nuthwiyannahum* (We shall surely lodge them);²⁶⁰

نجازي *nujāzī* (34:17) (We ever punish); يجازي *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'at 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 *Hijāzī* 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

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-Rahmān 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 'Aṭīyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī* (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1395 q.), 22; 'Abd al-Fattāh '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.

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 initial 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-rahmah*

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 اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ وَرَسُولُهُ *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 اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ مِّنَ 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 fatha'], put a dot above it; when I draw my mouth together [meaning 'when I pronounce a damma'] 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 'Iyād'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 'Atīyya, *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 *fathah*, 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 *fathah* 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 *fathah* 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 vowelless letter (*al-ḥarf al-mutaḥarrik*),

²⁷² Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islamī*, vol. 3, 61.

²⁷³ Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 27; Zanjanī, *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.

²⁷⁵ Al-Ṣadr, *Ta'sīs al-Shī'ah li 'Ulūm al-Islam*, 52, quoting *al-Miṣbāḥ* by Salāmah ibn 'Iyād.

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-fajrī) (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.

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 anomalies and contradictions in the way the words are written, and if recitation of the Qur'an had not been widely heard and circulated, 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 Thaḳīf, this would not have been found in it.'²⁸⁰

It is clear from this narration that 'Uthmān knew Hudhayl's style of recitation and Thaḳīf'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 sorcerers (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:

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, *Dalā'il 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'i*) 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 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)	واختلف الليل
2	يأتيهم انبأؤا (٦:٥)	يأتيهم انباء

²⁸⁴ Paraphrasing 41:42.

²⁸⁵ The meaning and the pronunciation are the same in all cases. [Editor.]

	Recorded	Correct
3	ينثون عنه (٦:٢٦)	وينأون عنه
4	بالغدوة (٦:٥٢)	بالغداة
5	فيكم شركاء (٦:٩٤)	فيكم شركاء
6	ما نشؤا (١١:٨٧)	ما نشاء
7	انه لا يائس (١٢:٨٧)	انه لا يياس
8	ألم يأتكم نبا (١٤:٩)	ألم يأتكم نبا
9	فقال الضعفا (١٤:٢١)	فقال الضعفاء
10	ولا تقولن لشيء (١٨:٢٣)	ولا تقولن لشيء
11	لو شئت لاتخذت (١٨:٧٧)	لو شئت لاتخذت
12	قال يينؤم (٢٠:٩٤)	قال يا ابن ام
13	او لاذبحنه (٢٧:٢١)	او لأذبحنه
14	يا ايها الملوأ (٣٧:٢٩)	يا ايها الملأ
15	شفعوأ (٣٠:١٣)	شفعاء
16	لهو البلوأ المبين (٣٧:١٠٦)	لهو البلاء المبين
17	واصحاب لثيكة (٣٨:١٣)	واصحاب الأيكة
18	وجاي بالنبيين (٣٩:٦٩)	وجيء بالنبيين
19	وما دعوأ الكافرين (٤٠:٥٠)	وما دعاء الكافرين
20	بأيكم 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 *لَتَخَذْتَ* (*latakhadhta*) (thou couldst have taken) (18:77) has a 'double' *tā'* (*mushaddadat al-tā'*)? There is a significant difference between that and *لَتَخَذْتَ* (*latakhadhta*) with a "single" *tā'* prefixed by the emphatic *lām*. How does the reader know that the extra *alif* in *لَاذْبَحْهُ* (*la adhbaḥannahu*) (*I will slaughter him*) (27:21) or one of the extra *yā's* in *وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ* (*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 *نَشَاؤُا* (*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	إذا لاتخذوك
	Law shi'ta lattakhadhta (18:77)	idhan la [a]ttakhadhūka (17:73)
2	اصحاب النيكّة	اصحاب الإيكة
	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 الضعفاء	ليس على الضعفاء
	fa qāl al-ḍu'afā' (14:21)	laysa 'alā al-ḍu'afā' (9:91)
4	فلا يستأخرون ساعة	لا يستأخرون ساعة
	fa lā yasta'khirūna sā'atan (10:49)	lā yasta'khirūna sā'atan (7:34)
5	وما دعوا 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 zallāmin li al-'abīd (22:10)	laysa bi zallāmin li al-'abīd (3:182)
7	ضربوا لك الامثال	ضربوا لك الامثال
	ḍarabū laka al-amthāl (25:9)	darabū laka al- amthāl (17:48)
8	ويمح الله البطل	ويمحو 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 <i>alif</i> is also dialectal.]
	īlāfihim riḥlat ... (106:2)	Li īlāf Quraysh (106:1)
11	قال بينوم	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 لسنن 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 bayyinatīn minh (35:40)	'alā bayyinatīn 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 لشيء	وكان الله على كل شيء
	wa lā taqūlanna li shay' (18:23)	wa kān Allāh 'alā kulli shay' (18:45)
19	فقال الملوأ	وقال الملوأ
	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 *بسطه* (*baṣṭah*) (*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 باييد (bi aydin) (with might) and بایيكم (bi ayyikum) (which of you); how can they arrive at the secret of the extra alif in سعو (sa'aw) (strive) in *The Pilgrimage*, and the omission thereof in سعو (sa'aw) (strive) in *Sheba*; the secret of the extra one in عتوا (they insolently defied) wherever it appears, except in *The Criterion*, or the secret of the extra one in آمنوا (āmanū) (they believed), but its omission in باؤ (bā'ū) (they were visited [with]), جاؤ (jā'ū) (they came), تابؤ (tabawa'ū) (they made their abode) and فؤ (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 لاَذْبَحْنَهُ (*la adhbaḥannahu*) (I will slaughter him) was only added to indicate that the slaughter did not actually take place, and the extra *ya'* in وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ (*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 لاَذْبَحْنَهُ (*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 يَرْجُوا (*yarjū*) (he hopes) and يَدْعُوا (*yad'ū*) (he calls) to indicate that the verb is heavier than the noun because of

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 āyātīnā 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:

كانهم لؤلؤا

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:

وجاء يومئذ جهنم

Wa jā'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:

بأيدي

bi aydin

with might (51:47),

to distinguish between it and الأيدي (*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 بالشّر

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 (*baṣṭah*) (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 لا اذبحنه (*la adhbahannahu*) (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 باييد (*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

²⁸⁹ Ṣubḥī Ṣālīḥ, *Mabāḥith fi '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 fundamentals 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-Ālūsī 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.

²⁹² Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 101-120.

²⁹³ *Supra* under 'Extreme Fanaticism.'

²⁹⁴ See al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irḥān*, 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 Muḥammad 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-qiyyāsāt al-shar'īyyah*).

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-'Azīm 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, *Manāḥil 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-Zarqānī 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 *فَتَبَيَّنُوا* (*fa tabayyanū*) (ascertain the truth) and *نُنْشِزُهَا* (*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 *وَضَى* (*waṣṣā*) (charged) in form II and *اَوْضَى* (*awṣā*) (charged) in form IV, and similarly *تَحْتَهَا الْاَنْهَارُ* (*taḥtahā al-anhār*) (rivers ... under it) in one codex and *مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهَارُ* (*min taḥtiḥā al-anhār*) (rivers ... from under it) with an extra *مِنْ* (*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 'Ilaliḥā 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 occurred 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 يقولون 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.]

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Cow	116	<p>قالوا اتخذ الله ولدا</p> <p>qālū ittakhadha Allāhu waladan</p>	<p>قالوا</p> <p>qālū</p>	<p>وقالوا</p> <p>wa qālū</p>	<p>وقالوا</p> <p>wa qālū</p>	<p>...</p> <p>...</p>
The Cow	132	<p>واوصى به ابراهيم</p> <p>wa awṣā bihi Ibrāhīm</p>	<p>واوصى</p> <p>wa awṣā</p>	<p>ووصى</p> <p>wa waṣṣā</p>	<p>ووصى</p> <p>wa waṣṣā</p>	<p>...</p> <p>...</p>
The Family Of 'Imrān	133	<p>سارعوا الى مغفرة من ربكم</p> <p>sāri'ū ilā maghfiratin min Rabbikum</p>	<p>سارعوا</p> <p>sāri'ū</p>	<p>وسارعوا</p> <p>wa sāri'ū</p>	<p>وسارعوا</p> <p>wa sāri'ū</p>	<p>...</p> <p>...</p>
The Family of 'Imrān	184	<p>جاؤوا بالبينات والزبر</p> <p>jā'ū bi al- bayyināt wa al- zubur</p>	<p>وبالزبر</p> <p>wa bi al-zubur</p>	<p>والزبر</p> <p>wa al- zubur</p>	<p>والزبر</p> <p>wa al- zubur</p>	<p>...</p> <p>...</p>

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran 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 يرتدد man yartadda	من يرتدد 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	Başran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Cattle	63	لئن انجيتنا la in anjaytanā	... ... ...	لئن انجانا la in anjānā	لئن انجيتنا la in anjaytanā	.........
The Heights	3	قليلًا 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 المأ qāl al- mala'	وقال المأ wa qāl al-mala'	وقال المأ wa qāl al-mala'	وقال المأ 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 للنبي ma kān li nabiyyin	ما كان للنبي ma kān li nabiyyin	.........

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran Codex	Meccan Codex
Repentance	100	... ... ...	... ... ...	... ... ...	تجري تحتها الانهار tajrī taḥtahā al-anhār	تجري من تحتها الانهار tajrī min taḥtiḥā al- anhār
Repentance	107	الذين اتخذوا مسجدا ضارا 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 subhāna Rabbī	... ...	قل سبحان ربي qul subhāna Rabbī	قل سبحان ربي qul subhāna Rabbī	.........

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran 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	مكنني makkannī	مكنني makkananī	......
The Prophets	4	قل ربّي يعلم qul: 'Rabbī ya'lam...'	... ...	قال ربّي يعلم qāla: 'Rabbī ya'lam...'	قال ربّي يعلم qāla: 'Rabbī ya'lam...'	... ...
The Prophets	112	... ...	... ...	قال رب احكم qāla: 'Rabb ihkum...'	قال ربّي احكم qāla: Rabbī ihkum	......
The Believers	87	قل من رب السموات... 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'	... ...

THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Baṣran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Poets	217	فتوكل على العزیز fa tawakkal 'alā al- 'Azīz	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 Sin	35	وما عملته wa mā 'amilat- hu	... ...	وما عملت* wa mā 'amilat	وما عملته wa mā 'amilat- 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 yuzhirū fī al-arḍ	وان wa an	أو أن aw an	أو ان aw an	......

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Counsel	30	فَمَا كَسَبَتْ اَيْدِيكُمْ bimā kasabat aydīkum	فَمَا كَسَبَتْ اَيْدِيكُمْ bimā kasabat aydīkum	فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ اَيْدِيكُمْ fa bimā kasabat aydīkum	فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ اَيْدِيكُمْ fa bimā kasabat aydīkum	*** ***
The Adornment	68	يَا عِبَادِي yā 'ibādī	يَا عِبَادِي yā 'ibādī	يَا عِبَاد yā 'ibadi	يَا عِبَاد ya 'ibadi	*** ***
The Adornment	71	مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ mā tashtahīhi al-anfus	مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ mā tashtahīhi al-anfus	مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ mā tashtahī al-anfus	مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ mā tashtahī al-anfus	*** ***
The Sand Dunes	15	بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَسَنًا bi wālidayhi ḥusna	... ...	بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا bi wālidayhi iḥsānan	بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا bi wālidayhi iḥsānan	*** ***
Muhammad	18	إِنْ تَأْتِيهِمْ بَغْتَةً an ta'tīhim baghtatan	... ...	... ...	إِنْ تَأْتِيهِمْ an ta'tīhim	إِنْ تَأْتِيهِمْ an ta'tīhim
The All- Merciful	12	وَالْحَبُّ ذَا العَصْفِ wa al- ḥabbu dha al-'aṣf	وَالْحَبُّ ذَا العَصْفِ wa al- ḥabbu dha al-'aṣf	وَالْحَبُّ ذُو العَصْفِ wa al- ḥabbu dhu al-'aṣf	وَالْحَبُّ ذُو العَصْفِ wa al- ḥabbu dhu al-'aṣf	*** ***

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran 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 اما ادعوا ربي qāla 'Innamā ad'ū Rabbī...'	... ...	قل اما ادعو ربي qul 'Innamā ad'ū Rabbī...'	قل اما ادعو ربي qul 'Innamā ad'ū Rabbī...'	... ...

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCES OF THE QUR'AN

Chapter	Verse	Medinan Codex	Syrian Codex	Kufan Codex	Başran Codex	Meccan Codex
The Man	15-16	قواريرا قواريرا من qawārīran qawārīra min	***	قواريرا قواريرا من qawarīran qawarīra min	قواريرا قوارير من... qawārīra qawarīra min	***
The Sun	15	فلا يخاف عقباه 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 Khālīd 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 Ishāq ibn al-Nadīm:

I saw a codex in the handwriting of Ali's companion, Khālīd 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

Calligraphers 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).

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-Thānīyah*.

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-Hāfiz '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 Abdūlmecid 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-Khaṭṭāt al-Baghdādī*, 16).

³⁰⁷ Turkī 'Aṭiyyah, *al-Khaṭṭ al-'Arabī al-Islamī*, 171; Nāji 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 recitation).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 *yastahī* (يَسْتَحِي), *nuhī* (نُحِي) and *uḥī* (وَحِي); or the *yā'* (ي) might be deleted altogether, as in *ilāfihim* (إِلَافِهِمْ), which would be written *ilāfihim* (إِلَافِهِمْ), 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 *إِلَافِ قُرَيْشٍ* (106:1) without the *hamzah* (ء) and without pronouncing the *yā'* (ي) as *إِلَافِ قُرَيْشٍ*, and the verse *إِلَافِهِمْ رَحْطَ الشَّيْءِ وَالضُّيْفِ* (106:2) as *إِلَافِهِمْ*, with the omission of the *yā'* and without pronouncing the *hamzah*.³¹⁴

However, Ibn Filayyāḥ would read *ilāfihim* 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, *lanasfa'an* (لَنَسْفَعًا) (96:15) would be written as *lanasfa'an* (لَنَسْفَعًا), and the verse *وَلَيَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الصَّغِيرِينَ* (wa layakūnan mina al-ṣāghirīn) as *وَلَيَكُونَا....* In other words, instead of *nūn*, *alif tanwīn* was used to emphasise the verb. Hence, the verse *وَلَا تَتَّبِعُهُمْ مِنْ تَدُنَا أُجِرًا عَظِيمًا* (4:67) would also be written as ... *وَلَا تَتَّبِعُهُمْ*.

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 *عَادَ الْأَوَّلَى* (53:50) and be written as *عَاد الْأَوَّلَى*, 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 *جَاءَانَا*, 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-Zam'an*, (Tripoli: Maktabat al-Najāḥ, n.d.), 143.

³¹⁵ Ṭabrisī, *Majma'al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 316; al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Zam'an*, 47.

³¹⁶ Al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Zam'an*, 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:

إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَثْنِي

فَلَا يَرِيوَا

نَبَلُوا أَخْبَارَكُمْ

مَاتَلُوا الشَّيَاطِينَ

The following are examples of the second case:

فَاؤُو

جَاؤُو

تَبَوُّوا الدَّارَ

سَعَوْ

عَتَوْ

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 (17:23) *وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِلَهُهُ* as *وَوَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِلَهُهُ*, and said: 'This verse was originally like that, but because of the joining of *wāw* with *ṣād*, the people would read *قَضَىٰ* (*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 *وَقَضَىٰ* (*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 *أَقْلَمَ يَتَبَيَّنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا*. He was told that what was written in the manuscript was *أَقْلَمَ يَتَأَسَّسُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا*, but he said: 'I think the scribe was mistaken; he has not written the curves

³¹⁷ Al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Zam'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, *يَبِين* did not look much different to *يَبِين*.

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'jahah* (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), *hā'* (ح) and *khā'* (خ); *ṣād* (ص) and *dād* (ض); *ṭā'* (ط) and *zā'* (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 *إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا* (*fatathabbatū*), whereas it is *فَتَبَيَّنُوا* (*fatabayyanū*) in other readings.³²⁰ Similarly, Ibn 'Āmir and the Kufans read *نُنْشِرُهَا* (*nunshizuhā*) in 2:259, while others read it as *نُنْشِرُهَا* (*nunshiruhā*);³²¹ Ibn 'Āmir and Ḥafṣ read *وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ* (*wa yukaffiru 'ankum*) in 2:271, while others read *وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ* (*wa nukaffiru 'ankum*),³²² and Ibn Sumayqa' has read 10:92 as *فَالْيَوْمَ نَنْخِيكَ بِيَدِكَ* (*nunahḥīk*), while others read *نَنْجِيكَ* (*nunajjīka*).³²³ With the exception of 'Āsim, the Kufans read 29:58 as *لَا نُثَوِّيْهُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ غُرْفًا* (*la nuthawwiyyannahum*), while others read *لَا نُبَوِّئُهُمْ* (*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.

³¹⁹ Ibn Hajar, *Fath 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 اَعْلَمُ اَنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلَىٰ 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 تُسَالِ عَنْ اَصْحَابِ الْجَنَّةِ (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 tā' (with tashdīd) in the present jussive form (yaṭṭawwa'), while others read it with a tā and a non-emphatic tā' 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 *alifs* 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 *سَمُوت*).

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 yukhādī'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 عَلَىٰ قُرَيْشٍ أَهْلُكُنَا هَآ أَتُهُمْ لَا 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 *وَإِذْ وَاعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ* (*wā'adnā*) in *سُورَةُ الْأَعْرَافِ* (2:51) in the same *surah*, as well as in *Sūrah al-A'rāf* and *Sūrah Tā-Hā*, without an *alif* (*wa'adnā* وَعَدْنَا), while others read it with an *alif* as above. Nāfi' read *ghayāba* in *سُورَةُ الْغَايَةِ* (2:101) as *ghayābāt* (غَايَاتٍ الْغُيُوبِ), because in the manuscript it was written as *غَيْبَاتٍ الْغُيُوبِ*. 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 factors³³³ 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:

³³⁰ Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Kashf*, vol. 1, 224.

³³¹ Al-Tūnisī, *Sharḥ Mawrid al-Zam'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 Khālīd (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 Khālīd (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 Kāzīrūn 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 jurists (*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 acknowledged (*mashhūr*), widespread (*mustafīd*), through a single narrator (*āḥād*), sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), good (*ḥasan*), through a broken chain (*mursal*), weak (*daʿīf*) 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 *mustafīd* 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*.

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, 'Isā 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

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 أَطَهَرُ لَكُمْ (11:78) with the word اَطهر 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 Hajar, *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 تَتِمُّوْا الْخَيْبَ

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 شَهْرٌ رَمَضَانَ and 8:7 ذَاتِ الشُّوْكَ تَكُوْنُ.³⁴⁷

The objection to Ḥamzah regarding the reading of 18:97 قَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا as قَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا (with *tashdīd* on *tā'*); that is, assimilating the letter *tā'* (ت) with *tā'* (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 'Abbāsīd caliph Maḥdī went on the ḥajj pilgrimage, he asked al-Kisā'ī to lead the

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* (ادغام): 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* (نبي) with a saturation of the *yā*, which produced a *hamzah* at the end (نبيء).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: 'يَا نَبِيَّ، الله' (*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 بِمِثْلٍ 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 لَا يُعَذِّبُ (lā yu'adhdhib) in the verse 89:25 أَفَيُؤْمِنُ لَا 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 *fathah*?' 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 (*khbar 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 fi Gharīb al-hadith* (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 يَعْذِبُ with a *fathah* 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 *huffāz* (those who memorise the Qur'an), even though they may be very few.

Ibn al-Jazarī also states:

Some have regarded the narration of Khārīja from Nāfi' concerning معانث (with *hamzah*) to be of this kind. The narration of Ibn Bakkār from Ayyūb, from Yahyā, on the authority of Ibn 'Āmir, regarding أَذْرِي أَقْرِبُ (with *fathah* 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 سَاجِرَانِ تَظَاهَرَا (with accentuated (*mushaddad*) *zā*) (*sāḥirāni tazẓāharā*) (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 شركاؤهم (*shurakāwuhum*) and احببواؤه (*aḥibbāwuh*) (with *wāw*), or بداكم (*badā'kum*) and اخاء (*akhāh*) (with *alif*) (26:36 ;7:111), all belong to this category. Also the reading of رَا (*rā*) instead of رَايَ (*ra'ā*), تَرَا (*tarā*) instead of تَرَايَ (*tarā'ā*), اشمزت (*ishmazat*) instead of اشمازت (*ishma'azzat*) and فادارتهم (*faddārtum*), instead of فاداراتهم (*faddāra'tum*), which are called written contraction (*takhfīf rasmi*), 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 ahruf*),' and which is interpreted as alluding to the Seven Readings.

Ahruf, 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 *ahruf*, and each Imām can give an opinion in at least seven ways.³⁵⁶

Scholars have interpreted *ahruf* 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 [*ghālīn*] 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.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. *ḥadīth* 44.

³⁵⁸ Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, 196.

³⁵⁹ In Sunni hadith terminology *mursal* (literally 'hurried,' pl. *marāsīl*) is a *ḥadīth* 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 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* (*Ṣaḥīḥ 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-Ṣāfi 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 (*kufṛ*).'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 ḡhafūran 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

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-Nabawīyyah, 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, *Minḥāj 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-Muṣannaḥ* (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 *kufṛ*.’ 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.’ Hākim 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 (*jadāl*), stories (*qasaṣ*) 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:

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: ...إِنَّ الْكُتُبَ كَانَتْ تَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ... 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-ʿĀliyah 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 *tawaddu 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-ʿĀmilī, *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 Tālib 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 acknowledged 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 *izhār* (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-sūf 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 fih* (2:20) as ...*marrū fih* or ...*sa'aw fih*,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-Uḍabā'*, 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-Ḥuffāz*, (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-dhakrī al-'azīm. Innaka lamīna 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'in* (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

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 *ummaḥ* 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.'

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

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-'Aṣḥar*, 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 (*shādhah*) 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 *ḥarḥs* 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 satisfies 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 *shādhah* (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 codices⁴⁰⁹ 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 Imāms⁴¹¹ 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 *sūrahs* 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 *ḥarfs*), 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 Ṣādiq 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 forbade 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 the 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 *hamzahs* such as *الْخَبْءُ* (*al-khab'a*) in the verses:

يسجدوا لله الذي يخرج الخبء (٢٧:٢٥);

لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ (١٦:٥);

and فَادَارَأْتُمْ (*fāddāra'tum*) (٢:٧٣).'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, 'Atā', 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,

⁴¹² Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār* (Najaf, 1971), 327.

⁴¹³ See al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār*, 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 Ishāq, 'Īsā ibn 'Umar, Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', 'Āṣim al-Jahdarī and Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī; and in the Levant, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir, 'Aṭīyyah ibn Qays, 'Abdullāh ibn Muḥājir, 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 Ishāq, 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 Transoxiana⁴¹⁷ 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-Ṭabarī (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-Mabḥaj* 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'āfi 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 Shanbūdh 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-Wāhid 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 Shanbūdh⁴²¹ and Ibn Muqsim⁴²² in a court of jurists (*fuqahā*) in order to prevent them from exercising *ijtihād* in order to choose a specific *qirā'ah*. Dr. Şubhī Şālih 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.

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 fi 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 fi Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, vol. 2, 123.

⁴²³ Şubhī Şālih, *Mabāhith fi '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. Şubhī Şālih 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 Hātim 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 Şubhī Şālih, *Mabāḥith fi '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-Shāfi*, 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-Thaqāfiyyah, 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'imma al-'Asharah*. He also composed an elegy called *Ṭibat 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 *Ithāf 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

Naṭwayh 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.

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 Maṣṣūr Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī (d.762/1326) says

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 Ṣafādī. 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'tīn 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 Tabaqāt 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 Ḥafṣ⁴⁵⁴ 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

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-Tahrīm* (ch. 66) under the verse (عَرَفَ بَعْضُهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ), (*'arrafa ba'dahu wa a'raḍa 'an ba'd*), 'Allāmah Ṭabrisī mentions that: 'Al-Kisā'ī was the only person who read عَرَفَ 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 Hafṣ Ever Disagree with 'Āṣim?

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:

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 Ṭibah al-Nashr*, 406-407; al-Dānī, *al-Taysīr*, 212; Abū Zar'ah 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muhammad, *Hujjat 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-Muḥadhdhab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1389 q.), vol. 2, 417.

It is God who created you from [a state of] weakness (ḍaʿf) then He gave you power after weakness. Then, after power, He ordained weakness and old age (30:54).'

'Āṣim would read the word ḍaʿf with a *fathah* on *ḍād*, but Ḥafṣ would read it with a *ḍammah* on *ḍād* (ḍuʿf).⁴⁵⁹ Abū Muhammad Makkī says: 'Abū Bakr and Ḥamzah would read this word in all the three instances with a *fathah* 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 *fathah* 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 terms⁴⁶¹ 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 (*ḥuffāz*) 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 'Āsim and Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur. The first person to have improved the writing of the manuscript was Khālīd 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 'Āsim, Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur, 'Āsim 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' (*tabaqāt al-qurrā'*) in Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2.

Furthermore, the present recitation, which is the *qirā'ah* of Ḥaḥṣ, is a purely Shī'a recitation. Ḥaḥṣ, 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 jurists (*fuqahā'*) are of the opinion that they may. The late Sayyid Muhammad Kāzim 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

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 Kāzim 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 jurists 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-Zarkashī⁴⁷⁰ and Ayatollah Khoī⁴⁷¹ 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 *ijtihāds* 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 Ḥaḥṣ, 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, *Tahrīr al-Wasīlah*, vol. 1, 152, issue 14.

CHAPTER VIII

**THE AUTHORITY OF
THE APPARENT MEANINGS
OF THE QUR'AN**

EXEGESIS (*TAFSİR*) AND INTERPRETATION (*TA'WİL*)

It is said that *tafsir* 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 *tafsir* 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'wil is derived from *awl*, which means 'to refer to.' *Ta'wil* is used when something has an element of perplexity, as with something which is *mutashābih* (allegorical), for example. Hence, *ta'wil* 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'wil also has another meaning, which includes both the allegorical (*mutashābih*) and definitive (*muḥkam*) verses of the Qur'an. In this case, *ta'wil* 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'wīl* 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 (*miṣḍāq*) 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 (*ḥaṣṣ*) 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

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 Qur'an 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-taqṣīm*), 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 relevant, 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*) should 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 *ghanimah* (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

Ihkām 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 *ihkām* 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) [mutashābih]... (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 *mutashābih* 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 be 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 ambiguity 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 Sarw⁴⁸³ 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:

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.

Nazar is of three types: *i'tibār* (receiving moral lessons), *intizār* (expectation) and *ru'yah* (vision). *I'tibār* has no place on the Day of Resurrection. *Intizār* must not be joined with the suffix *ilā*, as in the verse:

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 *nazar* is also suffixed in Arabic with the word '*ilā* (إِلَى). The Arab poet says:⁴⁸⁶

Innī ilayka li mā wa'adta la nāẓirun

nāẓara 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. *Istiḥā' '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' (*istilā*). 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 *ihkām* 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:

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 Baṭūṭah*, 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 unequivocal has just one.

11) The equivocal requires explanation, while the unequivocal does not.

12) The equivocal is closed to reason, while the unequivocal 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.

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 oratorical 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-Mizān*, 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:

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

⁴⁹³ See Abū al-Walīd Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf'an Manāhij al-Adillah fi '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-Mizān*, 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 circumstantial 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 آمنّا 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 illāllāh*) 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 (*zāhir*) 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:

⁴⁹⁹ It is thus said regarding the Attributes of God: وَدَعَ الْمُبَادِئِ خذِ الْغَايَاتِ

'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-ʿālim* (the All-Knowing) is derived from Knowledge (*ʿilm*); *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 Muʿtazilites 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-Ashʿarī, *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 identity ('*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), *fawqīyyah* (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:

⁵⁰⁴ See Ma'rifat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, 111-113, 115-116; al-Ash'arī, *al-Ībānah*, 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:

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.

Fawqiyah: The use of *fawqiyah* 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 verses⁵¹⁰ 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'tihimullāh) (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 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 *nazar* (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 *nazar* 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 place, 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, *nazar* 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-Ibānāh*, 6, 49-59.

Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the deed) 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 (*idlāl*) or Abandoning (*khidhlān*)

Idlāl 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, *idlāl* 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

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-Ṣāfi fī Taḥsīn 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 (*mukallaḥīn*) 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 committed 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 been 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 (*tahrif*) 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 breastfeeding⁵¹⁷ 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);

⁵¹⁷ *Irdā'*: 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-Hawālik fī Sharḥ Muwaṭṭa'* Mālik (Cairo: 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad al-Ḥanafī, n.d.), vol. 3, 42; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 12, 127.

established by a solitary report (*khbar 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 Prophet⁵²⁷ 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 Sarakhshī 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.

⁵²³ *Khbar 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'rīfat, *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'rīfah, 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 contradictions 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 inconsistencies 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 junāh)* 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-Ṣāfi fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, 204.

⁵³⁴ *Tafsīr al-Shubbar*, 76.

⁵³⁵ See al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shi'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

⁵³⁷ See Khoī, *al-Bayān*, 305, 395-402.

⁵³⁸ Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fi 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:

⁵⁴² See Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, 20; *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol. 1, 227-228; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi 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 inheritance 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 relevant 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 likewise ... (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

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 فَقَدُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ نَجْوَاكُمْ صَدَقَهُ (Sūrah al-Mujādalah 58:12)	الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَقْدُمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ نَجْوَاكُمْ صَدَقَاتٍ فَإِذْ لَمْ تَقْعَلُوا وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ (Sūrah al-Mujādalah 58:13)
Verse on the Number of Combatants	يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ خُذْ مِنَ 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)	الآن 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 يَتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لِّأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَّتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:240)	وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْتُمْتُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:235) وَلَكُمْ يَنْصَفُ مَا تَرَكَ أَزْوَاجُكُمْ إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُنَّ وَلَدٌ (Sūrah al-Nisā' 4:12)
Verses on Debauchery	وَاللَّاتِي يَأْتِينَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ فَأَسْتَشْهِدُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةٌ مِنْكُمْ (Sūrah al-Nisā' 4:15) وَاللَّذَانِ يَأْتِيَانِيَا مِنْكُمْ فَأَذُوهمَا فَإِنْ تَابَا وَأَصْلَحَا فَأَعْرِضُوا عَنْهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا (Sūrah al-Nisā' 4:16)	الرَّائِيَةُ وَالرَّائِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا مِئَةَ جَلْدَةٍ (Sūrah an-Nūr 24:2)
Verse on Inheritance by Faith	إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا... أُولَئِكَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ (Sūrah al-Anfāl 8:72)	وَأُولُو الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَى 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	قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَغْفِرُوا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ أَيَّامَ اللَّهِ (Sūrah al-Jāthiyah 45:14) فَاعْفُوا وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّى 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

Tahrīf, 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. *tahrīf* in the structure of speech (verbal *tahrīf*) and *tahrīf* in the content of speech (substantial *tahrīf*).

Tahrīf in the structure of speech, or verbal *tahrīf*, 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 (*tahrīf lafẓī*) and any opinionated interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*) can be considered to be conceptual distortion.

Tahrīf 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

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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*, 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 *tahrīf*. In

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 *tahrīf* 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-Mīl wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rīfah, 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-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī mentions *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf* of a word from its position means changing it, and *tahrīf* 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:

Tahrīf 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, *tahrīf* 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, *tahrīf* 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 *Tahrīf*

In a technical sense *tahrīf* has the following seven meanings:

1) Distortion of the meaning of a word (*tahrīf 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

⁵⁶⁷ Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, 517.

⁵⁶⁸ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, 53, no. 16.

⁵⁶⁹ Muhammad Muhsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Shāfi' (Talkhīṣ al-Wāfi)*, (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 *lahn*, 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) *Tahrīf* 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) *Tahrīf* 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 'Ajrād, one of the Kharijite leaders), who did not consider

⁵⁷⁴ See Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Rahmān*, vol. 1, 113-114.

⁵⁷⁵ See Ma'rīfāt, *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'ūdhu*) 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 *sūrahs* must have been deleted from the codex.'⁵⁷⁷

7) *Tahrīf* 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 *hā mīm 'ayn sīn qāf* (حم عسق) as *hā 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 *Tahrīf*

The Qur'an has used the word *tahrīf* 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*). *Tahrīf* in this sense refers to a distortion of the meaning.

Earlier we discussed the verses:

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, *Fath 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'ihī 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 *tahṛīf* 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 *tahṛīf* as misinterpretation (*sū' al-ta'wīl*). Ṭūsī says in *al-Tibyān*: '*Tahṛīf* 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 *tahṛīf* 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 *tahṛīf*. For their pretext in denying the Prophet and his prophethood lies in this meaning [of *tahṛīf*]. As such, they would misinterpret the glad tidings of his prophethood.⁵⁸¹

'Abduh implies that the plausible meaning of *tahṛīf* 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.

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 Book⁵⁸³ distorted certain meanings without changing the words.

Finally, *tahrīf* in the sense of addition, deletion or the changing of words to others – which is the technical meaning of *tahrīf* – 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: *faṣīyāmu thalāthati ayyāmin mutatābī'āt*. This recitation (with the addition of *mutatābī'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 Qādī 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 (*khbar 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), *Faṭḥ al-Mannān fī Naskh al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabat Khānjī, 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.

⁵⁹³ As quoted by Professor 'Urayḍ in *Faḥ 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 Ishāq 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 Khudrī 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:

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* (أَنْ جَاهِدُوا كَمَا جَاهَدْتُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ) '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: *اِنَّ اِنتِفَانِكُمْ عَنْ اَبَانِكُمْ كُفْرٌ بِكُمْ* '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: *اَلْوَلَدُ لِلْفِرَاشِ وَلِلْعَاہْرِ الْحَجَرُ* '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 *tahrīf* (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 *tahrīf*, 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 unprecedented, 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 Sībawayh⁵⁹⁹ 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 (*mutawāṭiran*) 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 Sībawayh* 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 (*khābar 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 Maṣṣūr 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:

⁶⁰¹ Mīrzā Mahdī Burūjirdī, *Burhān-i Rūshan (al-Burhān 'Alā 'Adam Tahrīf al-Qur'an)* (Qum: Ismā'īliyyān, 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.

TAHRĪF ACCORDING TO THE SUNNĪ ḤASHWIYYAH⁶⁰⁴

As mentioned earlier, *tahrīf* refers to irregular (*shādhah*) 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 traditionists⁶⁰⁵ 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

⁶⁰³ Sayyid Muhammad Jawād 'Āmilī, *Miftāḥ al-Karāmah fī Sharḥ Qawā'id al-'Allāmah* (Beirut: Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li Ihya' 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 *tahrīf* recorded in the great collections of *ḥadīth* such as the *Ṣiḥāh 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 *tahrīf* 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:

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 البتة

(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.

⁶¹² Al-Suyūṭī, *Tanwīr al-Ḥawālik*, vol. 3, 42-43. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath 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 فإنه كفر بكم

or

أَنْ كُفِرَ بَكُمْ إِنْ تَرَبَّعُوا عَنْ آبَائِكُمْ

(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:

أَنْ تَنْفَاقَكُمْ عَنْ آبَائِكُمْ كُفْرٌ بَكُمْ

(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:

إِنْ جَاهِدُوا كَمَا جَاهَدْتُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ

(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:

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 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'ammār, Ṣāliḥ ibn Kaysān, 'Aqīl and other *ḥuffāz*.

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 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

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath 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

⁶²⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 198.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-'itidāl*, 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 Ḥafsa 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.

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

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 *Ḥanifiyyah*, 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

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 Mālīk 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 *Musabbihāt*

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:

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 Qunūt⁶⁴⁸

Also falsely attributed to the great Companion Ubayy was the alleged inclusion of two *sūrahs*, known as *al-Khal'* (Casting Off) and *al-Hafd* (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 *sūrahs* 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.

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 *sūrahs* in which refuge in God is sought, i.e., the last two *sūrahs* of the Qur'an (*al-Falāq* and *al-Nās*), which are two consecutive short *sūrahs* beginning with 'Say: I seek refuge in the Lord... (*Qul a'ūdhu bi-rabbī...*)'. [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 *Sūrah al-Barā'ah* 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

⁶⁵¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 184.

⁶⁵² See Ma'rīfat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 313-314.

⁶⁵³ The *basmalah* consists of the words *Bismillāhi al-rahmāni al-rahīm* (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 *sūrahs*, 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:

إِنِّي أَنَا الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِينِ

Innī ana al-razzāq dhū al-quwwat al-matīn

Indeed I am the All-Provider, Lord of Power, the Strong,

instead of:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِينِ

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).

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 *tahrīf* 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

⁶⁶⁰ Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 2, 234, 249.

⁶⁶¹ See Ma'rīfat, *al-Tamhīd*, vol. 1, 319.

⁶⁶² Kaykhusrū Isfandiār, *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 manuscripts⁶⁶⁶ I have meticulously

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-Khiṭāb* 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 *tahrīf* 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, skimmers, 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 *Īdāḥ al-Maknūn fī al-Dalīl 'alā Kashf al-Zunūn*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-Fiḳār 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.

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, *Īdāḥ al-Maknūn fī al-Dhayl 'alā Kashf al-Zunūn* (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 *tahrīf* 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-mukhrajin*' (26:116), and in the account of Prophet Lūṭ (Lot) it was stated '*min al-marjūmin*' (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 (*ḵabar 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

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-Waṭ', 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.

TAHRĪF ACCORDING TO THE AKHBĀRĪS

Above we discussed the futile claims of certain Sunnī Ḥashwiyyah regarding *tahrīf*. Now we shall examine another baseless view postulated by another extremist sect known as the Akhbāriyyah.⁶⁸⁵ By accepting the

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 Akhbārīs 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 Ḥashwīyyah 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, *tahrīf* – 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 (*ṣāhib 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, Thiqaṭ 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'im⁶⁸⁶ 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

⁶⁸⁷ *Idghām* (ادغام): 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-Najāh, 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 *tahrīf* have unreliable chains of transmission, while those whose chains are authentic have nothing to do with *tahrīf*. 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-Ihtijāj*.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-Ihtijāj* is unknown, although it has been attributed to Ṭabrisī. Baḥr al-'Ulūm has identified six possible authors

⁶⁸⁹ See Tabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, vol. 1, 377.

of *al-Ihtijāj*.⁶⁹⁰ It is the opinion of some researchers that the author was perhaps someone else who originated from Ṭabaristān⁶⁹¹ 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-muḍārī* (present/future tense), which were later coined by the grammarians.⁶⁹³

Regarding the words *kuntum khayra a'immaḥ...* ('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:

⁶⁹⁰ Preface of Tabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, 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's⁶⁹⁴ recitation, but as we said before in the discussion on recitations (*qirā'āt*), a difference in recitation has nothing to do with *tahrīf*. Moreover, it is impossible to establish verses or chapters of the Qur'an on the basis of a solitary report (*khābar 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'immaḥ*), 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-nahy '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 *tahrīf*.

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'id*:

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 *fi '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 *fi 'Alī* is an integral part of the verse. It is only 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd's recitation that states:

⁶⁹⁹ *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1, 171.

⁷⁰⁰ Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fi 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 Arbīlī (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

⁷⁰² Ḥasakānī, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, 191.

⁷⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, 298.

⁷⁰⁴ 'Alī ibn 'Īsā Arbīlī, *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 *tahrīf* 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* (Tabriz: 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 *tahrīf* 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

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 *tahrīf*.

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 synonyms 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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*.

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 *tahrīf*.⁷²⁰

Some of these narrations have already been examined while dealing with the issue of *tahrīf* 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 Tāwūs 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 *tahrīf* 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 *umma* 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 Surhūb 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 Surhūb. The Surhūbiyyah, a derivative of the Zaydiyyah, is attributable to him. Imām al-Bāqir would call him by this name. It is said that Surhūb 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

⁷²⁶ According to al-Najāshī in his *rijāl*, vol. 2, 208.

⁷²⁷ Jārūdiyyah is an offshoot of Zaydiyyah.

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 'Isā 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

him as weak (*da'if*); 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 *tahrīf* 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.

⁷³⁶ This refers to a rule based on the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Here he means that those who believe in *tahrīf* say that *tahrīf* has occurred throughout the Qur'an, while those who deny it say that no *tahrīf* 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 *Tahrīf*

Perhaps, the most important support for the proponents of *tahrīf* is a set of scattered narrations collected from different sources, which according to them, stipulate the issue of *tahrīf* either in general terms or in particular instances which explicitly indicate places where *tahrīf* has occurred. Muḥaddith Nūrī has cited as his eleventh proof narrations which indicate *tahrīf* in general terms, and those which indicate *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*. 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 *tahrīf* except those who have narrated accounts of fatalism (*jabr*), delegation (*tafwīd*) 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 *tahrīf* 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 Muḥaddith 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 *tahrīf* 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.

⁷⁴⁰ See Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Rahmān*, 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 Wāqifiyyah 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 l'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 *Bihār 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 Mufid 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) *Qir'āt* by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Sayyārī (d. 268/881).⁷⁴⁴

The Shaykh says: 'Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Sayyār al-Kātib was one of the scribes of Āl Ṭāhir (the Ṭāhirites). He is weak in narration,

⁷⁴³ See Khoī, *Mu'jamu Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 1, 141-142; vol. 8, 216-228; Tehrānī: *al-Dhari'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 Kitāb al-Qir'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 Surḥūbiyyah. 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 Khoi, *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 Khoi, *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-Dhānī'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-Ihtijāj* by Ṭabrisī.

It was stated earlier that the book of this name is attributed to Ṭabrisī (Ṭabris is the Arabic form of Tafresh⁷⁵²). 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 Maṣṣūr, 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*.

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 Muḥid.

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 Astarābād⁷⁵⁴ whose properties were confiscated by Emir Dā'īl 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. The Imām asked them to let their two sons stay with him in order to acquire knowledge, and they complied. These two sons committed themselves 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 *Mufasssīr 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 Khaṭīb Astarābādī has not been established. In addition, the status of Abū Ya'qūb and Abū al-Ḥasan – the transmitters

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 *Mufasssīr* 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-Ṣadūq'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 Salāmī 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-Dhari'ah*, vol. 4, 295.

ibn Sa'id *mu'an'an*,⁷⁵⁹ on the authority of so-and-so.' Also, in place of the chains of transmission, by mentioning *mu'an'an*, 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'wīl al-Āyāt al-Zāhirah*, 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

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-Zāhirah* (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-Zāhirah*. 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 Āqānajaḥ 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 'uqbāhā*.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 *faṭḥah*, 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) Thiqaṭ 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.

⁷⁶⁷ The verse is read as *Wa lā yakhāfu 'uqbāhā* (91:15).

⁷⁶⁸ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 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 *tahrīf*.

iv) Kulaynī narrates from Abū Naṣīr that for the verse:

...wa in talwū aw tu'ridū

...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.

⁷⁷² Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, no. 45, 421.

⁷⁷³ Nūrī, *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*, 276.

⁷⁷⁴ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, no. 349, 249.

⁷⁷⁵ See Bahrānī, *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 *tahrīf*.

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-Kāfi* and Ṭabrisī in *Majma' al-Bayān*. However, the chains of transmission are mostly weak.

i) In *al-Tahdhīb*, Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifāh al-Ṭūsī has narrated on the authority of Shaykh Muḥid, 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 *tahrīf*.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' 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 *tahrīf*.

⁷⁸⁰ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 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, *Hujjat 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 conjunctors (*'āṭif*) and the conjuncted (*ma'fūfun '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 (*'atf*) on the position of declension (*maḥall*), for wiping (*mash*) 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 (*mamsūh*) 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 Jarqūṭī.

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 *takhfif* (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 *takhfif* pertain to the variation in recitation, and have nothing to do with the issue of *tahrīf*. 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 *tahrīf* 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-Kāfi*, vol. 8, no. 241, 200.

When Imām al-Kāẓim was in the prison of Hārūn (the 'Abbāsīd 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 *ḥarraḥūnī* (they distorted me) there is *ḥarraqūnī* (they burnt me).

ii) Muhammad ibn Qawlawayh has narrated on the authority of Ḥasan ibn 'Aṭīyyah that Imām Ṣādūq 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 *ḥadīth*:

⁷⁹⁰ Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, 10.

⁷⁹¹ Al-Ṣādūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Section 3, no. 232, 174.

⁷⁹² Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* (lithograph, Najaf offset, 1356 q.), sections 79 and 197.

⁷⁹³ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 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. *Tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*, 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' (*aḥl 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 *tahrīf* (that is, literal distortion), when he says:

The narrations cited are sufficient to establish the occurrence of *tahrīf*, 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 *saqt* (omission or slipping from memory), *maḥw* (effacement), *naqṣ* (diminution) and the like.

He continues:

The narrations which contain the word *tahrīf* have the same implication as well, for the technical meaning of the word *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf* in the Torah and the Evangel are of this category. Yet everybody considers *tahrīf* here to refer to its technical meaning. If we assume that this word does not imply contextual *tahrīf* in this context, we then have no option but to consider *tahrīf*, 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 (*tahrīf*) 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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*, 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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*.

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 Siffin. *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 Siffin, 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; Arbīlī, *Kashf al-Ghummaḥ*, 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-Bizantī al-Kūfī (d. 221/836):

Imām Mūsā ibn Ja'far gave me a manuscript before I was guided⁸⁰⁰ 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-Bizantī. Kashshī has reported al-Bizantī to have said:

When the mercenaries of Hārūn (the 'Abbāsīd 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

⁸⁰⁰ Aḥmad al-Bizantī was one of the descendants of Mehrān (the Mehranids) who were Wāqifis. Al-Bizantī 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 Ridā 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 Kāshānī 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

⁸⁰⁴ Mawlā Muhammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi* (Tehran: Islāmiyyah, 1375 q.), vol. 2, 273.

⁸⁰⁵ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 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-Kāfi* (a commentary on *al-Kāfi*) written by Mullā Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī, 'Allāmah Abū al-Ḥasan Sha'rānī 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-Wāfi*, reports this narration from *al-Kāfi* emphasising with certainty the phrase 'seven thousand verses.' This implies that the original copy of *al-Kāfi* 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-Wāfi*, '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, *Hāshiyah Sharḥ Uṣūl Kāfi 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-Ihtijāj* 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.

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-Wāfī*, '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.

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'ahs*, 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-Tawhīd*. The Imām said: 'Anyone who recites *Qul huw Allāhu aḥad* and believes in it has indeed recognized *tawhīd* (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).

⁸¹⁴ *Ṣalāt al-Shaf'* and *Witr*: the last three *rak'ahs* (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 Kufa⁸¹⁹ 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 Muḥid reports Imām al-Bāqir as saying:

When the Qā'im of Muḥammad'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.

⁸¹⁸ Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 4, 483, no. 5.

⁸¹⁹ Usually interpreted as a reference to Najaf (Trans.)

⁸²⁰ Al-Muḥid, *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.

⁸²² Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 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'ahs*, 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

⁸²⁸ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 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 *tahrīf* 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 *tahrīf*, 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 'Alī having no equal,' and also: 'God sent down no verse without 'Alī being above it.'

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 *tahrīf* 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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