

The Collection of the Qur'an

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Chapter VIII from his Tafsir Al-Bayan))

The manner in which the Qur'an was collected is among the issues that have been used by those who maintain the belief in ta~rif (alteration) to prove that there has been tahrif [in the sense of the corruption of the text] as well as taghyir (change) in the Qur'an, and that the very manner of the Qur'an's collection would, in the normal course of events, involve this corruption and change in it.

Hence, it is imperative that the discussion [in this chapter] should be undertaken in order to complete the treatment of the subject regarding the protection of the Qur'an from corruption and its freedom from omission or any alteration. The source of this error [about tahrif] is the claim that the Qur'an was collected under Abu Bakr's order, following the slaying of seventy reciters of the Qur'an at the battle of Bi'r Mauna, and of four hundred persons at the battle of Yamama.

Fearing that the Qur'an would be lost and would disappear from the people, 'Umar and Zayd b. Thabit undertook to collect it from fragments written on palm branches, flat stones, and pieces of wood, and from the breasts of the people [who had memorized it] , provided that two witnesses would testify that what they [reported] was part of the Qur'an.

All this has been suggested in a number of accounts. Ordinarily, it is expected that some of it would be lost to those who assumed the responsibility for this task, except if they were infallible [and divinely protected from forgetting]

This can be witnessed among those who undertake to collect the poetry of one or more poets, when this poetry is scattered. This rule is inevitable and arises from habit.

The least that we can expect is that alteration has occurred, for it is possible to fail in the effort to find two witnesses on some [revelation] that was heard from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny). Hence, there can be no certainty that omission did not occur. The response [to this is as follows]

This erroneous view is based on [accepting] the soundness of the traditions that report the manner of collecting the Qur'an.

So, the first task is to relate these traditions and follow them up with a critical evaluation. Traditions about the Collection of the Qur'an Inconsistency of the Traditions Regarding the Collection of the Qur'an The Contradiction among the Traditions in Their Account of the

Collection of the Qur'an The Contrariety of the Collection Traditions to the Book of God The Contrariety of the Collection Traditions to Rational Judgment The Contrariety of the Collection Traditions to the Consensus (Ijma') of the Community Collection Traditions and the Ateration (Tahrif) of the Qur'an through Addition Summary Traditions about the Collection of the Qur'an: These are the most significant traditions that have been related about the manner in which the Qur'an was collected.

Quite aside from being reported by single narrations, and therefore inspiring no confidence, they also are defective in other aspects.

This tradition has been narrated by Zayd b. Thabit.

He said: Abu Bakr sent for me when the Muslims were slain in the battle of Yamama.

[When I entered, I found]

'Umar b. al-Khaattab with him.

Abu Bakr said, "'Umar came to me and said, 'Casualties were heavy among Qur'an reciters during the battle of Yamama, and I am afraid that heavier casualties might take place among the reciters in other battles, whereby much of the Qur'an would be lost.

I am of the opinion that you should order the collection of the Qur'an [in book form]

.'" I asked 'Umar, "How dare I do something the Messenger of God did not do?" 'Umar replied, "This, by God, is a good thing [to do]

.'" 'Umar kept urging me until God opened my chest for that and I came to view the matter as he did.

Zayd said that Abu Bakr said [to him]

: "You are a wise young man and we trust you.

You used to record the revelation for the Messenger of God.

So go and find [all the fragments of] the Qur'an and put them together."

By God, had they required me [Zayd]

to move a mountain, it could not have been heavier for me than their order to collect the Qur'an. So I said, "How dare I do something that the Messenger of God did not do?" Abu Bakr persisted in repeating his demand until God opened my chest for that, as He had done for Abu Bakr and 'Umar.

Thereupon, I traced the Qur'an, collecting it from palm branches, flat stones, and the breasts of the people [who had memorized it] , until I found the last part of "Surat al-Tawba" in the possession of Abu Khuzayma al-Ansari, having found it with no one else-"There has come to

you a messenger, [one]
of yourselves, to whom aught that you are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you; for
the believers, full of pity, merciful. Now, if they turn away [O Muhammad]
, say, "God suffices me.

There is no God save Him.
In Him have I put my trust and He is Lord of the Tremendous Throne" (Q. 9: 128-129) - till the
end of the sura.

The scrolls (suhuf) remained with Abu Bakr until he died, then with 'Umar till the end of his life,
and then with Hafsa, 'Umar's daughter.'

Ibn Shiha:b [al-Zuhri]
relates that Anas b.
Malik told him: Hudhayfa b.

al- Yaman went before 'Uthman. He had recently led the people of Syria and Iraq in the
conquest of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hudhayfa was alarmed by the dispute between them over
the reading [of the Qur'an] .

Thus, Hudhayfa said to 'Uthman, "O Commander of the Faithful, save this community before it
falls in dispute over the Book, as the Jews and the Christians [before them] have done." So
'Uthman sent [a message] to Hafsa: "Send us the scrolls [which were in her possession] , so
that they can be copied into codices (masahif) and then returned to you." Hafsa sent them to
'Uthman, who ordered Zayd b. Thabit, 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr, Sa'id b. al-'As, and, Abd al-
Rahman b. al-Harith b. Hisham to copy them into codices. [Then] 'Uthmiin told the three
Qurayshi men, "Whenever you disagree with Zayd b.Thabit on any point of the Qur'an, write it in
the dialect of the Quraysh, for it was revealed in their tongue."

They followed [these guidelines]

When they had finished copying the sheets into codices, 'Uthman returned the sheets to Hafsa,
and sent to each province one of the codices they had copied, and ordered the burning of all
other Qur'anic material, whether in fragmentary manuscripts or full codices.

Ibn Shihab went on to say: Kharija b. Zayd b.Thabit informed me that he heard [his father] Zayd
say: "I missed a verse from the [Surat] al-Ahzab when we copied the Qur'an, and I used to hear
the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny) reciting it. We looked for it and
found it with Khuzayma b.Thabit al-Ansari. [This was the following verse] : 'Among the
believers are those persons who are truthful when they promise God about something' (Q.
33:23). Thus, we inserted it in the proper place in the sura." [2]

A tradition has been related by Abi Shayba, with a chain of transmission going back to' Ali b.

Abi Talib. He said, "The greatest credit for collecting the Qur'anic text goes to Abu Bakr, for he was the first to collect that which is between the two covers."

A tradition was related by Ibn Shihab on the authority of Salim b. 'Abd Allah and Kharija: Abu Bakr al-5iddiq collected the Qur'an in sheets (qaratis).

He asked Zayd b. Thabit to scrutinize them.

But Zayd refused to do so until Abu Bakr sought 'Umar's help in persuading him, and Zayd agreed.

The books (kutub) remained in Abu Bakr's keeping until he died. Thereafter, they were kept with Hafsa, the Prophet's wife. 'Uthman sent her [a message to hand them over to him] . But she refused to do so until he promised her that he would return them to her. So she sent them to him.

'Uthman copied these sheets into codices and returned [the originals] to her.

They continued to be in her keeping. Hisham b. 'Urwa related a tradition on the authority of his father. He said: When the Muslims were slain in Yamama, Abu Bakr ordered 'Umar b. al-Khattab and Zayd b. Thabit to sit at the entrance of the mosque. He said: "Anyone who comes to you with anything from the Qur'an that you do not recognize, but is witnessed by two men--accept it. This was because a large number of the Companions of the Prophet who had memorized the Qur'an had been killed in Yamama." Muhammad b. Sirin reported that the Qur'an was not yet collected in one volume when 'Umar was assassinated.

Al-Hasan related: 'Umar b. al-Khattab inquired about a verse of the Book of God. He was informed that it was in the possession of a person who was slain in the battle of Yamama. On hearing this, he recited the verse expressing loss--"We belong to God"--and ordered the collection of the Qur'an, and thus was the first to collect it in a codex (mushaf). Yahya b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Hatib related the following tradition: 'Umar decided to collect the Qur'an. So he stood before the people [in the mosque] and said, "Whoever received any part of the Qur'an [directly] from the Messenger of God, he is to bring it to us." They had written these [parts] on sheets, tablets, and palm branches.

He would not accept anything from anyone until two witnesses testified [to its authenticity] .

He was assassinated while still engaged in his collection.

Then 'Uthman got up [for the sermon in the mosque] and said, "Whoever has any part of the Book of God is to bring it here to us." 'Uthman would not accept anything from anyone until two witnesses testified.

Khuzayma b. Thabit came to them and said, "I see that you have left out two verses, having not written them." They asked what they were, and he said, "I received these direct from the

Prophet: 'There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves. ..' [Q. 9: 128] " to the end of the sura. 'Uthman said, "And I bear witness that these verses come from God." He asked Khuzayma: "Where do you think we should place them?" He replied, "Put them at the end of the last revelation of the Qur'an." Thus, "Siirat al-Bara'a" was closed with these. A tradition was reported by 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr: 'Umar would not include a verse in the codex except if two men had testified [to its being part of the Qur'an] . A man from the Helpers (ansar) came to him with these two verses: "There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves ..." to the end of the sura. 'Umar forthwith said, "I shall not ask you for evidence at all, for the Prophet was indeed like that." A tradition was related by Sulayman b.Arqam on the authority of al-Hasan and Ibn Sirin, and by Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri. They said: When the death toll among the reciters rose in the battle of Yamama--four hundred of them fell on that day--Zayd b.Thabit met with 'Umar b. al-Khattab and said to him: "This Qur'an is what unites our religion; if the Qur'an goes, so does our religion. Hence, I have resolved to collect the Qur'an in a book." 'Umar said to him, "Wait until I ask Abu Bakr." Thus, they both went to see Abu Bakr and informed him about the situation. He said, "Do not be in haste until I consult the Muslims." Then he delivered an oration to the Muslims, informing them about the grave situation [caused by the Yamama slaughter] . They said, "You are right." So they collected the Qur'an. Abu Bakr ordered a crier to call out among the people and ask them to bring forward any part of the Qur'an that might have. Khuzayma b. Thabit related the following incident: I brought the verse "There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves. .." to 'Umar b. al-Khattab and Zayd b.Thabit. Zayd asked, "Who will testify with you [to its authenticity] ?" I said, "By God, I do not know." Thereupon, 'Umar said: "I bear witness with him on [its being from the Qur'an] ." Abu Ishaq related the following on the authority of some of his associates: When 'Umar collected the text, he asked, "Who is the greatest master of Arabic among the people?' He was told that it was Sa'id b. al-' As. He went on to inquire, "Who is the best scribe among the people?' He was told that it was Zayd b.Thabit. So he said, "Let Sa'id dictate and Zayd write it down." Thus, they made four copies of the text, and dispatched a copy each to Kufa, Basra, al-Sham (Syria), and Hijaz. The following tradition was reported by' Abd Allah b. Faddala: When 'Umar decided to collect the first complete version (al-imam) of the Qur'an, he appointed some of his associates to represent him, and said, "Whenever you disagree on a point of language, write in the dialect of the Mudar, because the Qur'an was revealed to a man of Mudar." Abu Qullaba related the following: During the caliphate of 'Uthman, different teachers were teaching different readings [of the Qur'an] to

their students.

Thus, it used to happen that the students would meet and disagree. The matter reached a point that they would take their dispute to the teachers, who would then condemn each other's [variant] readings. This situation reached 'Uthman's ears. He delivered an oration saying: "You are here by me, yet you disagree on the reading and pronunciation of .the Qur'an