

7. PURITY OF THE QURANIC TEXT

Among all the religious books of the world, the Holy Qur'ān is the only Book which enjoys the distinction of having a pure text. Every word and letter of the Holy Book, as we have it today, is as it left the lips of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad to whom the Book was revealed, and it is for this reason that, through all the centuries since it was revealed and among all the Muslims from East to West, among the numerous contending sects, there is only one Qur'ān. It is the only revealed Book in which one can have access, with the fullest certainty, to that Divine light which was revealed to the heart of a prophet of God. The factors which contributed to this safe preservation of the text are its being reduced to writing under the direction of the Prophet himself and its being committed to memory by a large number of people, at the time of its revelation.

7.1: EVERY PORTION OF THE HOLY QUR'ĀN WAS WRITTEN AS IT WAS REVEALED

Writing known at Makkah.

The first and the most important circumstance which assisted in the preservation of the text of the Holy Qur'ān is that every verse of it was put into writing in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet before his own eyes. Writing was known at Makkah and Madinah before the advent of Islām, and though the Arabs generally relied upon a wonderfully retentive memory for the preservation of thousands of verses and long lists of genealogies, yet they reduced to writing their more important compositions, and hung them in some public place where their compatriots could see and admire them. Hence their seven famous odes are known as *Al-Sab' al-Mu'allaqāt* — *The Seven Suspended Ones*. These odes were so named from the circumstance that they were suspended in the Ka'bah by their authors at the pilgrimage season as odes of unequalled poetic beauty, and there they remained placarded for some time.

Muir bears testimony to both facts, to writing being known at Makkah and Madinah, and to the Qur'ān being written:

“But there is good reason for believing that many fragmentary copies, embracing amongst them the whole Qur'ān, or nearly the whole, were during his lifetime made by the Prophet's followers. Writing was without doubt generally known at Mecca long before Muhammad assumed the prophetic office. And at Medina many of his followers were employed by the Prophet in writing his letters or despatches. ... The poorer captives taken at Badr were offered their release on condition that they taught a certain number of Medina citizens to write. And although the people of Medina were not so generally educated as those of Mecca, yet many are noticed as having been able to write before Islam” (Muir's *Life of Muhammad*, Intro., p. xviii).

Internal evidence as to the writing of the Qur'ān.

The first thing we notice about the Holy Book is that there is a hint as to the use of the pen in the very first revelation that came to the Holy Prophet. The first five short sentences revealed to the Prophet were:

“Read in the name of thy Lord Who creates —
 “Creates man from a clot,
 “Read and thy Lord is most Generous,
 “Who taught by the pen,
 “Taught man what he knew not” (96:1–5).

It is an established fact that the Prophet knew neither reading nor writing. Strange as it may appear, in the very first message that he received from On High, he is told not only to read but also to seek the help of the pen, which was the only means of the preservation of knowledge. It was due to this that from the very first he made arrangements to have every revelation reduced to writing as it came down to him, in addition to having committed it to memory, which he did by reading it out to those around him. Moreover, the Holy Qur’ān itself furnishes abundant evidence that it existed in a written form. It again and again calls itself a *kitāb*, which means *a book*, or *a writing which is complete in itself* (see 2:2*b*). The Qur’ān is also designated as *ṣuḥuf*, which means *written pages*: “A Messenger from Allāh, reciting pure pages, wherein are right books” (98:2). The *pure pages* are the pages of the Holy Qur’ān, and the right books are its chapters; for not only is the entire Qur’ān called *al-Kitāb* or *the Book*, but its different chapters are also called *books*. Again: “Nay, surely it is a Reminder. So let him, who will, mind it. In honoured books, exalted, purified, in the hands of scribes, noble, virtuous” (80:11–16). The word *ṣaḥīfah* (whose plural *ṣuḥuf* is used here, translated here as books) is the very word applied to the collection made by Zaid in the Caliphate of Abū Bakr and later in that of ‘Uthmān. Thus we see that the Holy Qur’ān describes itself in clear and unmistakable words both as a *kitāb* and as a *ṣaḥīfah*, words used in the Arabic language to denote a written book, a fact to which every dictionary of the Arabic language testifies. From the same root *ṣaḥaf* is derived the word *Muṣḥaf*, a name to this day applied to the Holy Qur’ān, which means a book or a volume consisting of a collection of *ṣaḥīfahs* or *written pages*.

There are many other references in the Holy Qur’ān showing that its chapters existed in a written form at an early date. Thus: “Surely it is a bounteous Qur’ān, in a book that is protected, which none touches save the purified ones” (56:77–79). The chapter in which these verses occur is one of the earliest revelations. Rodwell gives the following footnote under this passage: “This passage implies the existence of copies of portions at least of the Qur’ān in common use. It was quoted by the sister of ‘Umar when, at his conversion, he desired to take her copy of *sūrah* 20 into his hands. Verses 78, 79 were directed by the Caliph Muḥammad Abu-l-Qāsim ibn ‘Abd Allāh to be inscribed on all copies of the Qur’ān”. It is an admitted fact that every portion of the Holy Qur’ān was regarded with equal reverence by the Muslims, and every word of it was believed to be the Word of God. It is, therefore, quite unreasonable to suppose that some portions of the Holy Qur’ān were written, while others were not. There is not a single circumstance in the whole history of Islām which can entitle us to make any such distinction between the different portions of the Holy Qur’ān, and to suppose that while some chapters were written, others were not thought fit to be written, or that equal care was not taken of all the parts. Again, it is in a chapter revealed at Makkah that we meet with the following challenge to the unbelievers: “Or, say they: He has forged it. Say: Then bring ten forged chapters like it, and call upon whom you can besides Allāh, if you are truthful” (11:13). A similar challenge is contained in a chapter of a still earlier date: “Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur’ān, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of

others” (17:88). And in a chapter revealed at Madīnah we have: “And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allāh if you are truthful. But if you do it not — and you can never do it — then be on your guard against the Fire” (2:23, 24). Now, all these challenges to the opponents to produce one *sūrah* or ten *sūrahs* like the Qur’ān imply that the *sūrahs* of the Holy Qur’ān existed in a written form at the time of the challenge; otherwise the challenge would have been meaningless.

Historical evidence as to the writing of the Qur’ān.

There are numerous anecdotes showing that when the Holy Prophet received a revelation, it was immediately reduced to writing. The general practice is thus described, by no less a personage than ‘Uthmān, the third Caliph whose name is in particular associated with the collection of the Qur’ān and who, being one of the earliest converts to Islām, remained with the Prophet almost since the Call:

“It was customary with the Messenger of Allāh, when portions of different chapters were being revealed to him, that when any verse was revealed, he called one of those persons who used to write the Holy Qur’ān and said to him, Write these verses in the chapter where such and such verses occur” (AD. 2:123; Tr. *Abwāb Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, on *Sūrah* 9).

This report mentions, not what the Holy Prophet did on one occasion, but what he always used to do whenever any verse of the Holy Qur’ān was revealed to him. Thus we have the clearest testimony that every verse of the Divine revelation was put into writing by the order and in the presence of the Holy Prophet, while additional care was taken by him to point out the place and chapter of a verse, when there were two or more unfinished chapters, so that the scribes might not confuse the verses of one chapter with those of another.

The Prophet’s Scribes.

Other reports of the highest authority support the evidence of ‘Uthmān. Thus Bukhārī narrates under the heading *The Amanuenses of the Prophet*:

“When the verse *lā yastawī-l-qā’idūn* ... (4:95) was revealed, the Prophet (peace and the blessing of Allāh be upon him!) said, ‘Bring Zaid to me, and let him bring the tablet and the inkstand’. Then he said to him (Zaid), ‘Write *lā yastawī* ...’ (the verse revealed)” (B. 66:4).

According to another report under the same heading, Abū Bakr sent for Zaid and said to him: “You used to write the revelation for the Messenger of Allāh (peace and the blessings of Allāh be upon him!)” (B. 65: ix, 20). Besides Zaid, who did by far the greater part of the work of writing the revelations of the Holy Prophet at Madīnah, many other persons are mentioned who did this work at Makkah and, in the absence of Zaid, at Madīnah. Among these are mentioned Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Zubair ibn ‘Awām, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa’d, Khālid and Abān, sons of Sa’id, Ubayy ibn Ka’b, Ḥanzalah ibn Rabi’, Mu’aiqab ibn Abū Fāṭimah, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Arqam ibn Shuraḥbil, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawḥah (FB., vol. ix, p. 19). In fact as many as forty-two of the Companions are related to have acted as scribes for the Holy Prophet. The importance given to the writing down of the revelations as they came down to the Prophet was so great that in the historic Flight of the Prophet from Makkah to Madīnah, pen, inkstand and writing material were among the essential necessities of the journey. There was no paucity of scribes as besides the Holy Qur’ān many other things were written. Some of the Companions used to

write the words uttered by the Holy Prophet, which were generally reported only orally (B. 3:39). Letters were written by order of the Holy Prophet to several potentates (B. 64:84). The truce at Ḥudaiyah was also written (B. 54:15). Correspondence was also kept up with the Jews in Hebrew (B. 94:40). Not only could men read and write, but even women were taught the art. Among the wives of the Holy Prophet, at least ‘Ā’iṣṣah and Ḥafṣah could read and write, as many reliable reports show. But it is not to be supposed that these were the only persons among the Companions who could write, or who actually transcribed copies of the Holy Qur’ān. These were the men who performed the work of amanuenses for the Holy Prophet. There were many others who wrote copies of the Holy Qur’ān for their own use.

Besides these reports, which directly establish the fact that every verse of the Holy Qur’ān was written at the time of its revelation, there are many other anecdotes indirectly supporting the same conclusion. For instance, the Holy Prophet is reported to have said: “Do not write from me anything except the Qur’ān” (FB., vol. ix, p. 10). This direction, which was meant as a precautionary step against the confusion of the Holy Qur’ān with what the Holy Prophet spoke on other occasions, takes it for granted that the Holy Qur’ān was written. This conclusion is further corroborated by the circumstance that where there was no danger of confusion on the part of the writers, the writing of certain ḥadīth was also allowed (B. 3:39).

There is another report mentioned by Ibn Hiṣhām, in the story of the conversion of ‘Umar, which shows that written copies of the chapters of the Holy Qur’ān were in common use among the early Muslim converts at Makkah. ‘Umar, with a drawn sword in his hand, one day left his house with the intention of murdering the Holy Prophet. On the way he learnt that his own sister and brother-in-law were secret converts to Islām. So he turned his steps to his sister’s house. “At that time there was in the house a third man, Khabbāb, who had with him a book containing *Ṭā Hā* (the 20th chapter of the Holy Qur’ān), which he was teaching to ‘Umar’s sister and her husband. When they perceived ‘Umar coming, Khabbāb hid himself in a corner of the house, and Fāṭimah, ‘Umar’s sister, took the book and hid it. But ‘Umar had already so far approached them that he had heard the voice of Khabbāb reciting the Holy Qur’ān. So the first question he asked, when he entered the house, was as to what they were reading. They replied, ‘You have not heard anything’. He said, ‘Yes, I have heard, and I have been informed that you have followed Muḥammad in his religion’. Then he caught hold of his brother-in-law Sa‘id son of Zaid. His sister advanced towards him to protect her husband and was severely hurt in the struggle. Then ‘Umar’s sister and her husband told him that they were really converts to Islām and that he might do what he liked. When ‘Umar saw his sister bleeding, he was sorry for what he had done, and asked her to let him have the book which they had been reading, so that he might see what it was that Muḥammad had brought to them. ‘Umar himself could read and write. On hearing his demand, his sister expressed the fear that he might destroy the volume. ‘Umar gave her his word, and swore by his idols that he would return the volume to her after perusing it. Then she told him that, being a *mushrik* (one who set up false gods with God), he was impure and could not touch the Qur’ān, because there was a verse in it to the effect that none should touch it except the pure. Then ‘Umar washed himself, and his sister handed over to him the book which had *Ṭā Hā* written in it. ‘Umar read a portion of it, and began to admire it and showed a reverence for the book. Thereupon Khabbāb, seeing that he was well disposed towards Islām, asked him to accept Islām” (IH). This long quotation, which is a part of the lengthy report of the

conversion of ‘Umar, shows conclusively that at that early period copies of the Qur’ān were commonly used by the believers, *Tā Hā* being a revelation of the early Makkan period.

It is sometimes argued that such anecdotes only show that *some* chapters were written, and that therefore there is no evidence that every verse of the Holy Qur’ān was reduced to writing. But there is a fallacy in this argument. The statement that the 20th chapter of the Holy Qur’ān existed in a written form before the conversion of ‘Umar is not made for the purpose of giving any importance to that chapter, or to show that the reporter mentioned it because of its peculiarity. It is made incidentally in a narrative reported with quite a different object, and hence it is only illustrative of the practice of the Holy Prophet and the Muslims at that early date. Even if there were no other evidence of the writing of the Holy Qur’ān except this anecdote, still we should be justified in drawing from it the conclusion that the portions of the Holy Qur’ān revealed up to that time existed in a written form, and that it was the practice to write the revelation. The existence of the 20th chapter in a written form, and the use made of the manuscript in ‘Umar’s sister’s family, shows that similar use was made of this and other chapters among the believers. They were also aware that the sacred manuscripts could not be touched by impure hands.

The above conclusion is corroborated by another report: “We were forbidden to travel to the enemy’s land with the Qur’ān” (B. 56:129). This report conclusively proves that written copies of the Holy Qur’ān existed in abundance, and Muslims were forbidden to take such copies to the enemy’s country, for fear lest they should fall into the hands of men who might spitefully treat them with disrespect.

Abū Bakr collected manuscripts of the Qur’ān written under the Prophet’s directions.

The circumstances attending the collection of the Holy Qur’ān in the time of Abū Bakr also show that every verse of the revelation had been written down in the presence of the Holy Prophet. Thus we read of two verses which, in spite of Zaid’s knowledge that they formed part of the Holy Qur’ān, were not admitted until a written copy of them was found with one of the Companions. “So I searched the Qur’ān ... until I found the last portion of the chapter entitled *The Immunity* with Abū *Khuzaimah*, one of the Anṣār” (B. 66:3). In explaining the report, part of which has been quoted here, the famous commentator of *Bukhārī*, the author of *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, says:

“Abū Bakr did not order the writing of anything (i.e., any verse) which was not already written (i.e., in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet), and it was for this reason that Zaid hesitated to write the concluding portion of the chapter *Al-Barā’at* (The Immunity) until he found it written, though it was known to him and to those who are mentioned with him”.

And a little further on:

“And the whole Qur’ān was written in manuscripts, but the manuscripts were dispersed, and Abū Bakr collected them in one volume” (FB., vol. ix, p. 10).

Another report by Ibn Abī Dāwūd is also mentioned, according to which “‘Umar publicly announced (when the collection of the Qur’ān was taken in hand by Abū Bakr) that whoever possessed any portion of the Qur’ān, which he had directly received from the Messenger of Allāh (may peace and the blessings of

Allāh be upon him!) should bring it; and they used to write these on paper and tablets and palm-stems shorn of leaves. Nothing was accepted from anybody until two witnesses bore witness”; to which it is added: “And this shows that Zaid did not deem it sufficient that a verse was written until somebody bore witness who had heard it directly from the Holy Prophet’s mouth, though Zaid himself remembered it. This he did for greater precaution” (FB., vol. ix, p. 12). There is another report mentioned by Zuhri, which says: “The Messenger of Allāh died while the Qur’ān was written upon palm-stems shorn of leaves and skins” (N. under ‘*asb*). After mentioning some of these reports the commentator adds:

“And their object was that nothing should be copied except from what had been written in the presence of the Prophet, not from memory only” (FB., vol. ix, p. 12).

All these reports point to the certain conclusion that every verse and chapter of the Holy Qur’ān had been written by the direction of the Holy Prophet in his own presence.

7.2: ALL REVELATION WAS COMMITTED TO MEMORY

Memory safest of repositories with the Arabs.

Every portion of the Qur’ān was committed to memory as soon as it was revealed. With the Arabs memory was the safest of repositories. In fact, they placed so great a reliance upon memory that they took a pride in being called *ummi*s, i.e., men who did not know reading or writing, and for whom, therefore, memory served the purpose of writing. They had learnt all their poems and long genealogies by heart. We learn from numerous reports that whenever a passage was revealed, it was recited by the Holy Prophet to those who happened to be present at the time and many of his followers committed it to memory at once, others again learning it from those who heard it from the mouth of the Prophet. The importance of the Holy Qur’ān for the Companions lay not only in the fact that for them it was a code of moral and social laws; it was not sufficient for them to know only its general purport. They believed every word and every letter of it to proceed from no other than the Divine source, and hence every word of it was for them a heavenly treasure they had on earth, so they secured it in the securest of places, viz., their hearts. For its sake they suffered all kinds of persecution and forsook their friends, their relatives, their properties, and their homes. Every new verse revealed breathed new life into them. Hence they tried their utmost to keep themselves acquainted with every fresh revelation. Those among them who followed trade or any other profession spent a part of the day in the transaction of their affairs and the rest in the company of the Holy Prophet. Those who lived at a distance from the mosque used to go to the Prophet by turns. Thus ‘Umar says: “When I went to the Holy Prophet, I returned to bring him (his neighbour) the news of that day relating to revelation and other things, and when he went, then he brought me the news” (B. 3:27). There were also the *Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffah* who passed their whole time in the mosque, and were ever ready to commit to memory any fresh revelation that the Holy Prophet announced.

Stress laid by the Prophet on learning and teaching the Qur’ān.

The Holy Prophet himself laid the greatest stress upon the learning, reciting, and teaching of the Holy Qur’ān. According to one report:

“The Holy Prophet came out and we were in the *ṣuffah* (annexe) of the

mosque, and he asked, 'Which of you likes to go every day to Baḥḥā' or 'Aqīq and bring two female camels with large humps upon their backs, without doing any wrong to anybody or to a relative?'. We replied, 'O Messenger of Allāh, we all like it'. He said, 'Does not one of you come in the morning to the mosque, and teach or repeat two verses of the Book of Allāh, which is better for him than two camels? And three verses are better than three camels, and four verses better than four camels: in this way is any number of verses better than the same number of camels'' (Ms. 6, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 7).

'Uthmān reported that the Holy Prophet said: "The best man among you is he who has learnt the Qur'ān and teaches it". Some other reports run as follows: "'Ā'ishah says that the Holy Prophet said: The skilful in reciting the Qur'ān are classed with the scribes, who are honoured and virtuous; and he who reiterates in reciting the Qur'ān, on account of his inability to recite it, has a double reward" (Ms. 6, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 4). Ibn 'Umar reported that the Messenger of Allāh said: "No one is to be envied but two persons — one, a man to whom Allāh has given the Qur'ān, and he recites it day and night and acts upon it, and the other a man whom Allāh has given wealth, and he spends it in the way of Allāh day and night" (B. 95:5). Hence the Companions of the Prophet not only acted upon the Qur'ān but they also recited it aloud. This fact is specially mentioned in connection with Abū Bakr, of whom it is related that he recited the Holy Qur'ān aloud in the compound of his house, which was situated on a public thoroughfare, and the disbelievers objected to this on the ground that he thus influenced the minds of others and persuaded them in favour of the Qur'ān (B. 39:4).

Various other reports of undoubted authenticity, showing that the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān was an important obligation which rested upon every Muslim, are contained in the collections of reports. *Bukhārī* has a chapter named *The chapter on the istidhkar of the Qur'ān and its ta'ahud* (B. 66:23), that is, "Reciting the Qur'ān frequently and recurring to it time after time". In this chapter various reports are narrated enjoining the frequent recitation of the Holy Qur'ān. The same renowned collection has another chapter headed *The teaching of the Qur'ān to children* (B. 66:25), a third with the heading *The most excellent of men is he who learns and teaches the Qur'ān* (B. 66:21), and a fourth which is headed *The reciting of the Qur'ān from memory* (B. 66:22). For the sake of brevity I give simply the headings of the chapters. These headings are sufficient to show that committing the Qur'ān to memory was enjoined by the Holy Prophet upon all his followers, and it was considered by his Companions to be a duty fraught with great religious merit. Hence it was necessary that everyone of them should commit to memory at least some parts of the Holy Book. Though even now there are thousands of men in every Muslim country who can repeat the whole of the Qur'ān from memory, the peculiar conditions existing in Arabia facilitated the task to a far greater extent. This is admitted even by a hostile critic:

"Passionately fond of poetry, but without the ready means of committing to writing the effusions of their bards, the Arabs had long been used to imprint these, as well as the traditions of genealogical and tribal events, on the living tablets of the heart. The recollective faculty was thus cultivated to the highest pitch; and it was applied, with all the ardour of an awakened spirit, to the Qur'ān" (Muir).

Greater knowledge of the Qur'ān entitled a person to be Imām.

There were other reasons which made the Companions vie one with another in committing the Holy Book to memory. The office of *imāmat*, or leading of public prayers, was as a rule bestowed upon the man who had the greater knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān (Tr. 2:61). All authentic reports establish this point. One report tells us that in a certain tribe a boy eight years old used to lead the prayers because he knew a greater portion of the Holy Qur'ān than any other member of that tribe. This boy, 'Amr ibn Salamah, thus relates his own story:

“We (i.e., the tribe to which the narrator belonged) had alighted in a place by water, and people who went to the Holy Prophet passed by us. When they returned they used to repeat to us the revelations which they heard from the Holy Prophet. I had a good memory, and so, while there, I committed to memory a great portion of the Holy Qur'ān from the visitors. After a time my father also went to the Holy Prophet with some people of his tribe to declare their acceptance of Islām. The Holy Prophet taught them the prayers, and told them that the prayers should be led by a person who knew more of the Qur'ān than others. On account of what I had already committed to memory, I satisfied this condition. So they made me their *imām*” (Msh. 4:26).

The distinction of having the office of *imāmat* conferred on one was a practical incentive to a greater knowledge of the Qur'ān. Similarly, when a new tribe accepted Islām, the man who was chosen to be sent to them to teach them the doctrines and principles of the new faith was one who was most acquainted with the Qur'ān. There are many reports which show that the reciters of the Qur'ān were highly honoured and respected in every way among the Companions.

The Prophet himself recited the Qur'ān frequently.

These were the reasons which led a great number of the Companions of the Holy Prophet to engrave the words of the Qur'ān on the tablets of their hearts. The Holy Prophet himself set an example in frequently reciting the Holy Qur'ān in public as well as in private. It was not only in prayers that long portions of the Holy Book were recited. We have on record instances showing that the Prophet recited the Holy Qur'ān when travelling on the back of a camel (B. 66:24). He also loved to hear others recite the Holy Word. Still another reports a Companion as saying: “The Messenger of Allāh said to me, ‘Recite to me the Qur'ān’. I replied, ‘Shall I recite to thee and to thee it has been revealed?’ He said, ‘I love to hear others recite it’. Thereupon I began to recite the chapter entitled *The Women*” (B. 66:33).

These anecdotes show that the Holy Prophet induced his Companions by his own example to recite the Holy Qur'ān. These inducements were not without their effect. The Muslims treasured up the Word of God in their hearts, and its reading and teaching became very common. So common, indeed, had the recitation of the Qur'ān become, that when the Holy Prophet spoke of the disappearance of the knowledge of the Qur'ān at some future time, Ziyād, son of Labid, one of the Companions, at once cried out: “How could knowledge disappear, O Messenger of Allāh, when we read the Qur'ān and teach it to our women and children” (Tr. 39:5). This question arose out of a misapprehension of the words of the Holy Prophet, who meant, not that the words of the Holy Qur'ān would disappear, but that people would not act in accordance with the spirit of those words.

Limits placed on recital of the Qur'ān.

Eagerness to commit the Holy Qur'ān to memory and recite it frequently was in fact so great that the Prophet had to place a limit as to the number of days in which the whole Qur'ān should be recited. According to one ḥadīth the Prophet, on being asked as to how much time one should take to finish one reading of the Qur'ān, laid down the limit of thirty days (B. 66:34). The division of the Qur'ān into thirty parts seems to be based on this direction. This ḥadīth goes on to say that the minimum limit allowed was seven days. It is stated that one of the Companions who finished the recitation of the whole of the Qur'ān once every night, was expressly enjoined by him not to finish it in less than seven days, and was forbidden to go through the whole once every night (B. 66:34). In fact, the Prophet himself apportioned the Holy Qur'ān into seven *manzils* (FB., vol. ix, p. 39), and thus practically laid down the restriction that the Holy Qur'ān should not be recited in less than seven days. Ibn Mas'ūd relates that the Holy Prophet said: "Read the Qur'ān in seven days, and do not read it in less than three days" (FB., vol. ix, p. 83). According to another report, 'Ā'ishah said that "the Holy Prophet did not usually finish the Qur'ān in less than three days" (FB., vol. ix, p. 83). All these reports show clearly that the Companions vied one with another in the frequent recitation of the Qur'ān. In fact, so frequently was the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān resorted to, that injunctions became necessary to stop a too rapid recitation. It is also clear from these reports that the whole of the Qur'ān was committed to memory by many of the Companions, otherwise it could not be spoken of as being *finished* in a stated interval of time. That it was recited from memory is clear from the fact that it was recited at night.

Persons who knew the whole Qur'ān by heart.

These conclusions are further supported by many trustworthy reports, which show that there were numerous men among the Companions who could recite the whole Qur'ān from memory. These men were called *qurrā'* (pl. of *Qāri'*) or the reciters, and they were known to have committed the whole Qur'ān to memory. FB explains the word *qurrā'* as meaning "persons noted for committing the Qur'ān to memory and for teaching it to others". Of course, the word also signified persons having a sound knowledge of the Qur'ān. Seventy of the *qurrā'* were treacherously put to death at the Bi'r Ma'ūnah by a tribe of the unbelievers (B. 64:30). The fact that such a large number of them were murdered in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet shows that there were hundreds of them among the Companions. In the chapter headed *The Qurrā' from among the Companions of the Holy Prophet*, Bukhārī relates several anecdotes. In the first of these, 'Abd Allāh, son of 'Amr (who, as we have already seen, had committed the whole of the Qur'ān to memory), is reported to have said, when speaking of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd: "I shall ever love him, for I heard the Holy Prophet say, 'Learn the Qur'ān from four men, from 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, Sālim, Mu'adh, and Ubayy ibn Ka'b'." This, of course, did not imply inability on the part of the other Companions to teach the Holy Qur'ān, nor did the words mean that none of the Companions besides these four retained the whole of the Qur'ān in their memory. In fact, to be a good teacher of the Holy Qur'ān, it was not sufficient that a person should be able to recite the Holy Book from memory. It was absolutely necessary that he should have a good understanding and a sound knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān. Probably they were named because they always tried to learn the revelations directly from the Holy Prophet. One of them, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, it is reported, used to say that he received over seventy chapters

of the Holy Qur'ān directly from the mouth of the Holy Prophet (B. 44:8). Other reports tell us that there were many other Companions who could recite the whole of the Qur'ān from memory.

To take an example, Abū Bakr is not named in the above report, but it is a fact that he retained the whole of the Qur'ān in his memory. It was Abū Bakr whom the Holy Prophet appointed on his death-bed to lead the public prayers. Authentic reports, as already stated, show that the person appointed to lead the prayers was always one who knew the Qur'ān most. In cases where several persons had equal knowledge, as, for instance, when they all knew the whole of the Qur'ān by heart, other tests were applied. Now, it is certain that there were men among the Companions who could recite the whole of the Qur'ān from memory. Therefore Abū Bakr could not be appointed to lead the prayers, if he did not know the whole of the Qur'ān by heart. Hence it follows that Abū Bakr also could recite the whole of the Qur'ān from memory. Similarly 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar retained the whole of the Qur'ān in his memory, finishing its recital every night, whereupon the Holy Prophet told him to finish the recital once in a month (B. 30:38). In fact, many persons are mentioned as being able to recite the whole of the Qur'ān from memory in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, among these being the four Caliphs, viz., Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Ali, and such renowned Companions as Ṭalḥah, Sa'd, Ibn Mas'ūd, Sālim, Abū Hurairah, etc., while three women, viz., 'Ā'ishah, Ḥafṣah and Umm Salamah are also named in the same category. Several other persons are also named from among the *Anṣār* as being able to recite the whole of the Qur'ān from memory. But it is not to be supposed that only those persons were the reciters whose names have been preserved to us in reports. Seventy of them were killed by treachery in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, and about the same number fell in the battle of Yamāmah, which was fought a few months after his death.

Recital of the Qur'ān was necessary in public as well as private prayers.

The recitation of the Qur'ān and its committal to memory were not, however, only optional, for the Qur'ān formed a part of public as well as private prayers. Five times a day had the Muslims to pray publicly, but every public service had an additional part, called *sunnah*, to be performed privately, while prayers in the later portion of the night were purely of a private nature. The recitation of portions of the Holy Qur'ān in all these prayers was obligatory, and thus every Muslim had of necessity to repeat certain portions of it every day. Now, it is an established fact that generally very long portions were recited in the prayers, especially in those said during the latter part of the night. The Holy Prophet himself is related to have often recited the long chapters in the beginning of the Qur'ān in his *tahajjud* prayers. His Companions also followed his example. Thus one Companion is said, in an anecdote left of him, to have recited in his *tahajjud* prayers the second chapter, which forms a twelfth part of the Qur'ān. Even in the public prayers long chapters were recited. The evening prayers are the least suited for the recitation of the longer chapters, but even in these the Holy Prophet recited such chapters as the *Ṭūr*, ch. 52 (B. 10:99). One Companion recited the second chapter in prayers at the nightfall, and a complaint was made against him by one who was tired by a whole day's labour (B. 10:60). In their private prayers also, the Companions recited long chapters. Thus not only was it necessary that every one of them should commit the whole or a certain portion of the Holy Qur'ān to memory, but the part so committed was always kept fresh in the mind by constant recitation in prayers. One ḥadīth relates how a certain chapter, *Qāf*, was learned by heart by a Companion from its

frequent recitation in the Friday gatherings (Ms. 7:13). In fact, if there had been no other means of giving publicity to the Qur'ān, its mere recitation in prayers was sufficient to give it such publication as would have guarded it against any possible alteration or loss.

There is only one ḥadīth the evidence of which is considered to be conflicting with that furnished by all the ḥadīth cited above. It runs as follows:

“Anas reported that the Holy Prophet died while none had collected the Qur'ān with the exception of four men: Abū Dardā' and Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, and Zaid ibn Thābit and Abū Sa'id” (B. 66:8).

In a report to the same effect narrated by the same authority, the name of Ubayy is mentioned instead of Abū Dardā'. This ḥadīth does not speak of committing the Qur'ān to memory but of the collection of its manuscripts. There is no doubt that the word *jam'* (collecting) is used in Ḥadīth in both senses, *collection of the manuscripts* and *the retaining of the whole of the Qur'ān in memory*, but the latter significance is out of the question here, for it is a fact established beyond all doubt that a very large number of Companions knew the whole of the Qur'ān by heart. Nor can an objection be raised to the first significance on the ground that, if the manuscripts of the Holy Qur'ān had already been collected by these four men, why Abū Bakr and 'Umar were so anxious for its collection when many of the *qurrā'* fell in the battle of Yamāmah and why Zaid considered it a very heavy task, when he was chosen for collecting the scattered manuscripts of the Holy Qur'ān into one volume. The fact is that Zaid sought the manuscripts that were written in the presence and by the direction of the Holy Prophet.

Even if we admit, for the sake of argument, the existence of certain differences in the various reports quoted above, the one conclusion upon which they all agree is absolutely certain, viz., that among the Companions of the Holy Prophet there were persons who retained in memory the whole of the Qur'ān as taught by the Holy Prophet, and who at his death had the whole of it engraved on the tablets of their hearts. All this was done in obedience to the injunctions of the Holy Prophet, who laid great stress upon the reciting of the Qur'ān and the committing of it to memory. And these measures to guard the text of the Holy Qur'ān were in addition to writing. It may also be pointed out here that the gradual revelation of the Qur'ān afforded great facility in committing it to memory. The interval between the revelation of two verses or two chapters afforded the Companions an opportunity to repeat it as often as they liked. The entire Qur'ān was revealed in the long period of twenty-three years, and if Muslim boys of the age of ten or twelve years can even now commit the whole Qur'ān to memory within one or two years, the Arab possessors of wonderfully retentive memories, to whom the importance of the Qur'ān was far greater than to any Muslim of a later age, would not find it difficult to memorize it within the long period of twenty-three years, especially when it was given to them gradually.

7.3: ARRANGEMENT OF VERSES AND CHAPTERS WAS THE PROPHET'S OWN WORK

The Holy Qur'ān was revealed piecemeal during a long period extending over twenty-three years. Some of the chapters were revealed complete, but the revelation of many others was fragmentary and extended over long periods. Now, the arrangement of chapters and verses in the copies of the Holy Qur'ān at present in the hands

of the Muslims does not follow the order of revelation. The important question before us, therefore, is whether the Holy Prophet himself arranged the verses and chapters in an order different from that of their revelation, and, if so, whether the present arrangement is the work of the Holy Prophet? In other words, was the Holy Qur'ān left by the Holy Prophet in the same condition, as regards the arrangement of its verses and chapters, as that in which we now find it, or is its present condition different from that in which the Holy Prophet left it?

Internal evidence about the arrangement.

That the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Holy Qur'ān was effected by the Holy Prophet under the guidance of Divine revelation is shown in the first place by the Holy Qur'ān itself. There we read:

“Surely on Us rests the collecting of it and the reciting of it. So when We recite it, follow its recitation” (75:17, 18).

This is one of the very earliest revelations, showing that the collection of the Holy Qur'ān, that is, its gathering into one whole, with an arrangement of its various parts, was according to the Divine scheme to be brought about by the guidance of Divine revelation. Arrangement and collection were, therefore, as much the work of Divine revelation as the reading of a verse to the Holy Prophet, i.e., its revelation. In another chapter, revealed a little later, we have:

“And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Qur'ān been revealed to him all at once? Thus, that We may strengthen thy heart thereby and We have arranged it well in arranging” (25:32).

The Qur'ān itself, therefore, makes it clear that its collection and arrangement were also brought about by Divine revelation. It should be borne in mind that the word *jam'* in 75:17 above (“collecting”) implies both *collection* and *arrangement*, since no collection could be brought about without an arrangement. These verses describe the arrangement and collection as a process different from the revelation of a verse to the Holy Prophet, thus showing that from the first it was meant that the verses and the chapters of the Holy Qur'ān should be arranged in an order different from that of their revelation. If the order in collection were to be the same as the order of the reading of the different verses to the Holy Prophet, i.e., the order of their revelation, collection and reading would not have been described as two different things.

Historical evidence as to arrangement.

History bears ample testimony to the truth of the above assertion made in the Holy Qur'ān, and we meet with the clearest proof in authentic and reliable reports that the Holy Prophet left at his death the complete Qur'ān with the same arrangement of the verses and chapters as we have now in every Arabic Qur'ān. We will consider the arrangement of verses and that of chapters separately, and in each enquiry we shall have to discuss the following points:

1. Was any arrangement followed by the Holy Prophet himself and by his Companions in his lifetime?
2. Was that arrangement different from the order in which the verses of the chapters were revealed?
3. Does the present arrangement differ from that followed by, or which existed in the lifetime of, the Holy Prophet?

That such a large book, treating of so many and such varied subjects, should have been committed to memory and regularly recited in and outside prayers, and taught by one man to another, without there being any settled arrangement of its parts, is a most preposterous proposition, but there is hardly a Christian critic of Islām who has not advanced it. The grounds for this assertion are the same in every case. Not the least regard is paid to historical evidence, and mere assertion that no arrangement is discoverable in the verses and chapters is made the basis on which the proposition rests. The following short paragraph from Muir's Introduction to his *Life of Muḥammad* is not only illustrative of the assertions of Christian critics in general, but it also shows how the author himself has evaded the historical evidence:

“We are not, however, to assume that the entire Qur’ān was at this period repeated in any fixed order. The present compilation, indeed, is held by the Muslims to follow the arrangement prescribed by Muḥammad; *and early traditions might appear to imply some known sequence.** But this cannot be admitted; for had any fixed order been observed or sanctioned by the Prophet, it would unquestionably have been preserved in the subsequent collection. Now the Qur’ān, as handed down to our time, follows in the disposition of its several parts no intelligible arrangement whatever, either of subject or time; and it is inconceivable that Muḥammad should have enjoined its recital invariably in this order. We must even doubt whether the number of suras, or chapters, was determined by Muḥammad as we now have them. The internal sequence at any rate of the contents of the several suras cannot, in most cases, have been that intended by the Prophet”.

Some of the footnotes given under this paragraph show the struggle in the writer's mind between historical facts and religious prejudice. Thus, while denying the existence of any fixed order in the Qur’ān in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, Muir had to admit that “We read of certain Companions who could repeat the whole Qur’ān in a given time, which might be held to imply some usual connection of the parts”. In another footnote it is admitted that there were four or five persons who could repeat “with scrupulous accuracy” the whole of the Qur’ān, and “several others who could very nearly repeat the whole, before Muḥammad's death”. Again, while denying that even the number of *sūrahs* was determined by the Holy Prophet, he adds the following footnote:

“But there is reason to believe that the chief *suras*, including all passages in most common use, were fixed and known by name or other distinctive mark. Some are spoken of, in early and well-authenticated traditions, as having been so referred to by Muḥammad himself. Thus he recalled his fugitive followers at the discomfiture of Honein by shouting to them as ‘the men of the *sura Bacr*’ (i.e., Sura ii).

“Several persons are stated by tradition to have learnt by heart a *certain number of suras* in Muḥammad's lifetime. Thus ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ūd learned seventy *suras* from the Prophet's own mouth, and Muḥammad on his deathbed repeated seventy *suras*, ‘among which were the seven long ones’. These traditions signify a recognized division of at least some part

*Italics are mine (MA).

of the revelation into *suras*, if not a usual order in repeating the *suras* themselves.

“The liturgical use of the *suras* by Muḥammad must, no doubt, have in some measure fixed their form, and probably also their sequence.”

In connection with the same subject it is said in another footnote that:

“the traditions just cited as to the number of *suras* which some of the Companions could repeat, and which Muḥammad himself repeated on his deathbed, also imply the existence of such *suras* in a complete and finished form”.

Thus almost every remark made in the paragraph quoted first is contradicted in the footnotes on the basis of historical facts met with in authentic reports. Though the statements in the footnotes are made reservedly, yet the contradictions are too clear to escape unnoticed by any careful reader, and the struggle in the writer’s mind can be easily discerned. In the text it is asserted that there was no fixed order or arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Holy Qur’ān, and historical evidence is produced in the footnotes showing that there was a connection. The text makes the allegation that even the *sūrah*s were not distinctly marked out by the Holy Prophet and their number was not determined by him, and the footnote brings forward historical testimony to the effect that there was a recognized division and that the form of the chapters was no doubt fixed. The reservations contained in such expressions as “some part” and “some measure” were only natural, considering the allegations in the text. It can easily be seen that if “seventy *suras*, including the seven long ones”, existed “in a complete and finished form”, as the footnote admits — and there is no evidence showing that the remaining forty-four short *sūrah*s, which were, no doubt, generally recited in prayers, did not exist in the same form — the presumption will be that all the *sūrah*s existed “in a complete and finished form”. This conclusion becomes clearer still, when it is borne in mind that the same writer has also admitted that there were several Companions who could repeat, not only seventy *sūrah*s, but the *whole Qur’ān*, and that too “with scrupulous accuracy”.

Without a known order of verses the Qur’ān could not be committed to memory.

The assertion that no arrangement was followed in the case of single verses revealed at different times is so absurd on the very face of it that it hardly requires a refutation. How was it possible for anybody to commit the Holy Qur’ān to memory, if there was no settled order in which the verses were read? What order did the different copies follow? Or was it that each copy of the Holy Qur’ān current at the time followed a different order? And every man who knew any portion of the Holy Qur’ān — and every one of the Companions knew some portion — followed a different arrangement? Does any evidence support these assertions? Or did each reciter follow a different order? What, again, was the order of the verses followed by those who led the public prayers? Is it conceivable that a book which was so widely committed to memory, and which was so frequently recited by thousands of men, existed in such an orderless state?

If there were no other evidence to show that the verses in the different chapters of the Holy Qur’ān followed some arrangement, the mere fact that the Holy Book was committed to memory by the Companions would be sufficient to establish that conclusion. There are many chapters containing more than a hundred verses each, and unless these were arranged in a settled order, no one could be said to have

committed to memory the whole of any chapter. Take the different permutations of only a hundred verses, and you will see that no two out of a hundred thousand men could have agreed upon one arrangement. In such a case there would have been not one Qur'ān, which the Companions could learn from each other, but everybody would have his own Qur'ān, and no one would be certain of the correctness of what his brother recited. Moreover, we learn from authentic reports that when any person, while reciting a portion of the Holy Qur'ān from memory in prayers, made a mistake or left out a verse, someone of those who listened to him corrected the mistake or pointed out the particular verse. Now, this could not be done unless the same arrangement of verses was followed by all. In fact, it was simply impossible to commit the whole Qur'ān or any part of it to memory unless there was some arrangement to be followed.

Chronological order could not be observed.

Considerations such as the above clearly show that some arrangement of verses was necessarily followed. Was it the order of revelation? There is clear historical evidence that the Holy Prophet arranged the verses, not according to their chronological order, but according to matter. There were, no doubt, many chapters that were revealed complete, but there were others, particularly the longer ones, that were revealed by portions. Chronologically, verses of one chapter were followed by those of another, and hence in the arrangement of verses in chapters the chronological order could not be observed. The practice of the Holy Prophet in such cases is clearly stated in authentic reports. As 'Uthmān tells us, in a report already quoted: "It was customary with the Messenger of Allāh, when portions of different chapters were being revealed to him, that when any verse was revealed, he called one of the amanuenses and said to him, 'Write these verses in the chapter where such and such verses occur.'" From this it appears that the place and chapter for every verse were pointed out by the Holy Prophet himself. With such obviously conclusive testimony before him, no sensible person would deny that the work of the arrangement of the verses in every chapter was done by the Holy Prophet himself, and, as the Holy Qur'ān tells us, it was done under the guidance of Divine revelation, and the arrangement did not follow the chronological order of the revelation of verses.

No change was ever introduced by 'Uthmān or anybody else.

If the arrangement of verses was different from the order of their revelation, the next question that arises is, Was the arrangement different from the one upon which the whole Muslim world is now agreed? We must answer this question in the negative. The arrangement of the verses in the Qur'ān we have in our hands is not in accordance with the order of revelation; and hence, if there is no trace in the history of the Qur'ān of any change having been brought about in the arrangement of its verses at any time, the conclusion that the present arrangement is exactly the same as that followed by the Holy Prophet is absolutely certain and final. Now, it is admitted on all hands, and the truth of the fact has not been questioned by the most hostile critics of Islām, that there has not been the slightest change in any word or letter of the Qur'ān or in the arrangement of its verses or chapters since the time of 'Uthmān, the third Caliph. Our copies of the Qur'ān are admittedly exact copies, true and authentic in every way, of the copies made by 'Uthmān, and hence, to prove that the arrangement of verses and chapters at present is the same as that followed by the Holy Prophet, we have only to show that the collection made by

‘Uthmān followed the original arrangement. It can easily be seen that at the time of his making the collection ‘Uthmān had no motive for changing the fixed arrangement which up to that time was followed by the Companions of the Holy Prophet. That an arrangement different from the chronological order of revelation was followed by the Holy Prophet and that the same arrangement was followed by the Companions in the learning and teaching of the Holy Qur’ān, has already been shown. That that arrangement was changed by ‘Uthmān, there is not the slightest evidence to show. When ‘Uthmān began to make copies of the Qur’ān from Abū Bakr’s collection, thousands of the Companions of the Holy Prophet were still living, and no change in the arrangement of verses could have remained unnoticed. Moreover, the task of making the required copies was not in the charge of ‘Uthmān personally, but in that of several of the best-known Companions, reputed for their knowledge of the Qur’ān, and none of these can be shown to have had any motive for altering the arrangement of verses existing at the time. Nor is there the slightest trace in the historical record of the time that the arrangement was altered. No charge has ever been preferred against ‘Uthmān by any sect of Islām or any individual that he had changed the arrangement of the verses in the chapters of the Holy Qur’ān. In fact, the only charge against him is that he disallowed certain readings, and the nature of this charge I will describe later on. But of any alteration in the arrangement of verses there is absolutely no mention whatever in any report, authentic or unauthentic.

Positive evidence that the present arrangement is the Prophet’s arrangement.

Besides the negative proof cited above, which conclusively shows that at no time in the history of the Qur’ān was the arrangement of its verses altered in the slightest degree, there is positive evidence leading to the same conclusion. This evidence may be gathered from incidental remarks made in certain authentic reports. Bukhārī relates the following:

“The Holy Prophet said, ‘Whoever reads the last two verses of the chapter entitled *Baqarah* on any night, they are sufficient for him’ ” (B. 64:12).

This shows that the Holy Prophet himself followed an arrangement which he had made known to his Companions, and they all followed the same arrangement; for if such had not been the case, he could not have referred to two verses as the *last two verses* of a certain chapter. The report unmistakably proves that every verse had a known and fixed place in a chapter, which no reciter of the Qur’ān could change. In the second place, it shows that the verses with which the second chapter now ends were also the concluding verses of that chapter in the time of the Holy Prophet, and therefore the arrangement in the copies of the Qur’ān at present is the same as that followed by the Holy Prophet. In support of this, there is another report in which the concluding verses of the second chapter are identified with the 285th and 286th verses of that chapter as enumerated in the present Translation. According to another *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet told his followers to recite the “first ten verses” of the chapter entitled *The Cave* at the appearance of Antichrist (AD. 36:13). Had there been no arrangement of verses, the “first ten verses” would have been a meaningless phrase, because it would not have indicated any particular ten verses. The last ten verses of the same chapter are also mentioned in this connection according to another report (AD. 36:13). A third speaks of the last ten verses of *Āl ‘Imrān*, the third chapter, being recited by the Prophet when he got up for his *tahajjud* prayers

(B. 65: iii, 19). All these ḥadīth and numerous other similar ḥadīth show conclusively that the arrangement of verses in the chapters was the Prophet's own work. That this arrangement was the same as that followed now in the copies of the Holy Qur'ān is shown by the absence of any other arrangement in the whole Muslim world.

Arrangement of chapters was also the Prophet's own work.

Conclusive evidence that not only the verses but even the chapters were arranged by the Holy Prophet himself is afforded by the following ḥadīth reported by Anas:

“I was in the *Thaqif* embassy at the time of the Bani *Thaqif*'s conversion to Islām. ... The Holy Prophet said to us, ‘My portion of the Holy Qur'ān has come to me unexpectedly, so I do not intend to go out, until I finish it’. Thereupon we questioned the Companions of the Holy Prophet, as to how they divided the Qur'ān into portions. They said: ‘We observe the following division into portions, three chapters and five chapters, and seven chapters, and nine chapters, and eleven chapters, and thirteen chapters, and all the remaining chapters beginning with *Qāf*, which are termed the *mufaṣṣal*’ ” (FB., vol. ix, p. 39).

There is good reason to believe the authenticity of this report. It divides the Holy Qur'ān into seven *manzils* or portions, each portion to be recited in one day, and the recital of the whole Qur'ān was thus finished in seven days. From other trustworthy ḥadīth already quoted we learn that the Holy Prophet enjoined his Companions not to finish the Holy Qur'ān in less than seven days; and the two reports, communicated through entirely different channels, corroborating as they do the testimony of each other, testify to each other's truth and authenticity. Moreover, they are both accepted by eminent collectors of Ḥadīth. Now, the ḥadīth quoted above shows clearly an arrangement of chapters, for the division into portions mentioned in this report is observed to this day by the whole Muslim world. The seven portions are called the seven *manzils*, or stages, and they include the same number of chapters as is mentioned in the ḥadīth. The seventh portion begins with the chapter entitled *Qāf*, as stated in the report, and the total number of chapters contained in the first six portions is forty-eight, as in the copies of the Qur'ān in our hands. It should be borne in mind that in our copies, *Qāf* is the fiftieth chapter, the difference arising from the fact that in the report quoted above the *Fātiḥah*, or the Opening Chapter, is not included. This report affords the clearest and most conclusive testimony that the arrangement of the chapters of the Holy Qur'ān was brought about by the Holy Prophet himself, like that of its verses, and their present arrangement does not differ in the least from the original.

It may perhaps be objected that such an arrangement was not possible, as the Qur'ān was not complete till the death of the Holy Prophet, and verses and chapters were constantly being revealed. It is quite true that the Qur'ān could not be said to be complete so long as the recipient of the Divine revelation lived, but this could not interfere with the arrangement of verses and chapters. The word “Qur'ān” signified the part of the Qur'ān that had been revealed. The report quoted above speaks of the conversion to Islām of the *Bani Thaqif*, which happened in the ninth year of the Hijrah, in which year the chapter entitled *The Immunity*, which is looked upon as the latest in chronological order, was revealed. Hence at the time of which the report speaks, almost the whole of the Qur'ān had been revealed, and the division into seven portions, which speaks of the number of chapters in each

portion, has in its favour the authority of the Holy Prophet himself. The verses that were revealed afterwards were put in their proper place in the chapters to which they belonged. Only one short *sūrah* entitled *The Help* (ch. 110) was revealed afterwards and it found its proper place in the arrangement of chapters, without interfering with the enumeration of the chapters as contained in the first six portions, as it is placed in the seventh portion, the number of chapters in which is not specified.

Tālif Ibn Mas'ūd.

As regards the suggestion that some of the Companions followed a different arrangement of chapters, it is simply a misconception. The best-known of these is what is known as the *Tālif Ibn Mas'ūd* or the Combination of Ibn Mas'ūd. The fact is simply this that the Holy Prophet sometimes combined certain shorter chapters in his *tahajjud* prayers and Ibn Mas'ūd had a particular liking for that combination. But it should be borne in mind that in prayers everybody was free, as every Muslim even now is free, to recite any portion of the Qur'ān he liked. This freedom is expressly given in a ḥadīth which says that the recital of the *Fātiḥah* which is obligatory in every *rak'ah* of the prayer may be followed by the recital of any other portion of the Qur'ān which one chooses (AD. 2:134). Similarly, two or more chapters could be read in a single *rak'ah*, and in some cases there were combinations of such chapters for recital in prayers. In his *tahajjud* prayers, for instance, the Holy Prophet used sometimes to recite twenty chapters, eighteen of which were termed the *mufaṣṣal*, or the shorter chapters towards the close of the Qur'ān, beginning with *Qāf* (ch. 50) and two *Hā Mims*, or chapters commencing with *Hā Mim*. Thus in each *rak'ah* two of these chapters were recited, the total number of *rak'ahs* being ten. The Holy Prophet made a peculiar combination which has been preserved to us through Ibn Mas'ūd, and accordingly it is known as the *Tālif Ibn Mas'ūd* or the Combination of Ibn Mas'ūd. Now, this combination has nothing to do with the arrangement of chapters of the Qur'ān, nor was it followed on all occasions. This peculiar combination was, in fact, preserved and mentioned only on account of peculiarity and departure from the original arrangement of chapters. Even in the public prayers the arrangement of chapters was not necessarily followed. On one occasion the Holy Prophet recited the fourth chapter in the first *rak'ah* and the third in the second, and the incident has been preserved to us in a report only because a departure was made in this case from the recognized arrangement (FB., vol. ix, p. 36). Many other instances of the same kind are on record. It is related for instance that the Prophet used to recite the 32nd chapter in the first *rak'ah* and the 76th chapter in the second *rak'ah* in his morning prayers on Fridays (B. 11:10). Another ḥadīth shows that a person had a special liking for the 112th chapter of the Qur'ān and he recited it in every *rak'ah* of prayer, following it with any other chapter that he liked and the Prophet did not object to it (Tr. 43:11). The so-called *Tālif Ibn Mas'ūd* has therefore nothing to do with the arrangement of chapters in the Qur'ān.

Ubayy and 'Ali's Collections.

Two other persons are named as having followed a different arrangement of chapters in the collection of the Qur'ān, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and 'Ali. The case of the former may be disposed of at once, as there is no testimony worth the name which shows that Ubayy followed a different arrangement of chapters. The only thing stated about him is that he placed the fourth chapter before the third. If that was the only difference of arrangement, it is quite immaterial, and the error may, as in the case of Ibn Mas'ūd, be due to the reason that the Holy Prophet himself once recited

the fourth chapter before the third in one of his prayers. As regards 'Alī, he is said to have collected the chapters in order of revelation, and there is a report stating that he did not rest after the Holy Prophet's death, until he had collected the Qur'ān, arranging its chapters in chronological order. The authenticity of this report has been questioned, for such a Qur'ān was never handed down to posterity, though 'Alī reigned as Caliph immediately after 'Uthmān. And according to one report 'Alī himself said that "the greatest of men as regards the collection of the Qur'ān is Abū Bakr; he is the first man who collected the Qur'ān" (FB., vol. ix, p. 10). Besides this, Ubayy and 'Alī were among the men under whose directions the copies of the Qur'ān were written in the time of 'Uthmān and this is conclusive testimony that they considered the present arrangement of chapters as the right one.

Why the ninth chapter does not commence with *Bismillāh*.

There is one ḥadīth more which may be mentioned in connection with the arrangement of chapters. Ibn 'Abbās says:

"I said to 'Uthmān, 'What led you to put *al-Anfāl* (the eighth chapter) in juxtaposition with *al-Barā'at* (the ninth chapter) and you did not write between them the *Bismillāh*, thus classing these two chapters with the seven long ones?' 'Uthmān said: 'It was customary with the Messenger of Allāh, when portions of different chapters were being revealed to him, that when any verse was revealed, he sent for one of his amanuenses and told him to write down those verses in the chapter where such and such verses occurred. Now *al-Anfāl* was one of the chapters revealed early at Madinah, and *al-Barā'at* was one of the latest revealed chapters, and the subject-matter of these two chapters was identical. Therefore I believed that the latter chapter was a part of the former chapter, and the Holy Prophet died, and he did not distinctly say to us that it was a part' " (AD. 2:123; Tr. *Abwāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, on *Sūrah* 9).

This report, far from ascribing the arrangement of chapters to the judgment of 'Uthmān, makes it clear that the arrangement of chapters was effected by none other than the Holy Prophet. It shows that, except in the case mentioned in the report, the Holy Prophet had "distinctly" told his Companions where a verse was to be placed in a chapter, or where a chapter was to be placed in the whole. It also shows that the arrangement was effected according to subject-matter by the Holy Prophet himself. In this particular case the Prophet did not distinctly state that the *Barā'at* was a continuation of the *Anfāl*, therefore the two were treated as two chapters, though the *Bismillāh*, not being revealed at the commencement of the *Barā'at*, the latter appeared to be a continuation of the preceding chapter. It only shows how scrupulous the Companions of the Prophet were in carrying out his directions.

7.4: ABŪ BAKR COLLECTED ORIGINAL WRITTEN MANUSCRIPTS OF THE QUR'ĀN

No written collection of the Qur'ān could be made while the Prophet was alive.

The primary work of the collection of the Holy Qur'ān, as shown above, was done by the Holy Prophet himself under the guidance of Divine revelation. But we have seen that such collection was needed only by those who wished to commit the whole of the Qur'ān to memory and that it was in reciting the whole that the arrangement of chapters was needed. Hence, though the whole Qur'ān existed in a

complete and arranged form in the memories of the Companions, yet there did not exist an authorized collection of it in writing. Every verse and every chapter was, no doubt, committed to writing as soon as it was revealed, but so long as the recipient of the Divine revelation lived, the whole could not be written in a single volume. At any time a verse might be revealed which it was necessary to place in the middle of a chapter, and hence the very circumstances of the case made the existence of a complete written volume impossible. Such a collection became, however, a necessity after the death of the Holy Prophet. It was also needed to facilitate reference to and circulation of the Holy Word, and to give it a more permanent form than was secured to it in being consigned to memory. Such was the object with which the collection of the Holy Qur'an was taken in hand by Abū Bakr.

Need of a written collection first felt by 'Umar.

A reference to the report which describes the circumstances necessitating the collection of the Qur'an in the time of Abū Bakr confirms the statement made above. The account is given by Zaid ibn Thābit. Soon after the death of the Holy Prophet, Abū Bakr had to send an expedition against Musailimah. A battle was fought at Yamāmah, in which great carnage occurred among the Muslims, and many of the *qurrā'** (reciters) of the Holy Qur'an lost their lives. 'Umar apprehended great danger, if more reciters fell in some other battle. Straightaway he went to Abū Bakr and advised him to give immediate orders for the collection of the written portions of the Qur'an into one volume. "A great number of the reciters of the Qur'an have been slain in the battle of Yamāmah," he said, "and I fear that slaughter may again wax hot among the reciters of the Qur'an in other fields of battle, and that much of the Qur'an may thus be lost. In my opinion it is absolutely necessary that thou shouldst give immediate orders for the collection of the Qur'an". "How can I do a thing," replied Abū Bakr, "which the Holy Prophet (peace and the blessings of Allāh be on him!) has not done?" "But," urged 'Umar, "that is the best course under the circumstances." Abū Bakr was convinced, after some discussion, and Zaid was sent for. "Thou wast wont to write the revelations of the Prophet. Search, therefore, for (the written portions of) the Qur'an and collect it (into one volume)." The first impulse of Zaid was the same as that of Abū Bakr. "How canst thou do a thing," said he, "which the Holy Prophet (peace and the blessings of Allāh be on him!) has not done?" And so heavy did the task appear to him, that at that time he thought: "It would not have been more difficult for me, if I had been asked to remove a mountain". But at last he was prevailed upon, and began the search (B. 65: ix, 20).

Written collection was necessary to supplement its preservation in memory.

The report quoted above proves several points. Firstly, it shows that the whole of the Qur'an was safe in the memories of the reciters who had learned it in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet. There was nothing to be feared so long as the reciters were safe, but, if they perished in battles, then, it was feared, certain portions of the Holy Qur'an might be lost, because the manuscripts of different chapters and verses had not been up to that time collected in one place. Secondly, it appears from it that the collection of the Qur'an undertaken in the time of Abū Bakr was meant only to supplement its preservation in memory. The apprehensions in the mind of 'Umar arose

*By the *qurrā'*, or reciters, are meant people who had committed the whole Qur'an to memory.

because he feared that, as many reciters had perished in the battle of Yamāmah, many others might be lost in some other battle. Memory was a good repository, no doubt, but such a collection could at any time be entirely lost by the loss of those who retained the Holy Book in memory. Thirdly, the report proves that up to the time when Abū Bakr took in hand the collection of the written Qur'ān no portion of it had been lost, and that there were still many reciters who had it safe in their memories. To sum up, the report shows that the entire Qur'ān was safe in the memories of the reciters, and that 'Umar only desired to make a collection of the Qur'ān in writing in addition to the collection existing in the memories of the reciters.

We have now to explain what was meant by Abū Bakr when he said that he could not do a thing which had not been done by the Holy Prophet. 'Umar's question related, not to the mere collection of the Qur'ān, but to the collection of the Qur'ān in writing. The complete Qur'ān with a perfect arrangement of its chapters and verses existed in the safest of repositories, the memories of men, but the different writings containing different portions of the Qur'ān had never been collected together and arranged. 'Umar asked Abū Bakr to collect these writings, and this was what the Holy Prophet had not done, and therefore, in the first instance, Abū Bakr refused to do it. But 'Umar's case was based on strong and sound reasoning. The Prophet himself had done both works: he had every portion revealed to him reduced to writing and committed to memory. Abū Bakr was thus convinced of the truth and advisability of what 'Umar said.

Original manuscripts made in the Prophet's presence were to be collected.

Another point to be elucidated in the report quoted above is the statement of Zaid as to the great difficulty which he thought he was likely to experience in the performance of the task with which he was entrusted. Indeed, he thought that it would not have been more difficult for him if he had been asked to remove a mountain. What were his difficulties? A report narrated by Ibn Abī Dāwūd makes it clear:

“ 'Umar rose and declared that whoever had received anything directly from the Holy Prophet should bring it (to Zaid), and they (i.e., the Companions) used to write it upon papers and tablets and palm-stems in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, and nothing was accepted from anybody until two witnesses bore testimony” (FB., vol. ix, p. 12).

The object of the collection undertaken by Abū Bakr was to gather together what had been written in the presence of the Holy Prophet. Zaid's collection was meant to secure the original writings, and this was the great difficulty to which Zaid alluded. A great portion of the Holy Qur'ān had been revealed at Makkah, and even the portion that was revealed at Madinah was not wholly in the possession of Zaid. Zaid had to search writings made *in the presence of the Holy Prophet*. He was chosen for the task because he had written the greater portion of the revelation at Madinah and was presumed to have all those copies safe in his custody. But the task before him was a very difficult one. He had to search all the original writings and then give them an arrangement in accordance with that of the verses and chapters as followed in the recitation of the entire Qur'ān from memory, in obedience to the directions given by the Holy Prophet. That these writings were safe cannot be doubted. Everything relating to Divine revelation was preserved with the utmost care. But the task was no doubt an arduous one, and required hard labour and diligent search; hence Zaid, with a true appreciation of the difficulties before him, said that it was equivalent to the removing of a mountain.

Abū Bakr's orders.

There are clear considerations showing that the service with which Zaid was entrusted was the collection and arrangement of the original manuscripts of the different verses and chapters made in the presence of the Holy Prophet. The object of Abū Bakr and 'Umar was not to have a volume of the Holy Qur'ān prepared by Zaid writing down the Holy Book as recited by the reciters, but to prepare a book by collecting the original writings. This is the reason that the word *collection* (Ar. *jam'*) is always used in connection with this task, not arrangement or compilation. Hence also the first direction of Abū Bakr to Zaid was to "search for the Qur'ān and collect it", and it is easy to see that a search had only to be made for writings. If the object of the new collection for which 'Umar contended were simply to reduce the Qur'ān to writing as recited by the *qurrā'*, sufficient accuracy could have been obtained by gathering together a few reciters, and Zaid had only to write out the Holy Qur'ān as dictated by them and approved by the Companions. But 'Umar's object and Abū Bakr's orders were to gather the original writings which had been written according to the directions of the Holy Prophet himself, and thus to make the accuracy of the text doubly certain.

Zaid made a complete search and collected the original manuscripts.

The report further tells us that Zaid actually followed this course; for, after being convinced that Abū Bakr and 'Umar were right, he thus describes what was done:

"Then I began to search for the Qur'ān, and to collect it from palm-stems and tablets of stone and the hearts of men, until I found the concluding verses of the chapter entitled *The Immunity* in the possession of Abū Khuzaimah Anṣārī, and I did not find them in the possession of anybody else" (B. 65: ix, 20).

This shows that Zaid had two things to do; to search for the writings and to collect them into a single volume. Now, collection required an arrangement of verses and chapters, for the writings themselves were found in the possession of different men, and they could give no clue to the arrangement that was to be followed. It was for the sake of arrangement that Zaid had to resort to the reciters, and it is to this that the words "hearts of men" refer in the report quoted above. In fact, without the help of reciters the collection of the writings in the form of a complete volume was not possible. It was for this reason that 'Umar urged that the collection should be commenced whilst a large number of reciters were still alive, and it is for this reason that Zaid mentions that in collecting the writings he had to resort to memory, or "the hearts of men", as he puts it. The words do not indicate that he sought for some chapters from writings and for others from memory, for if he could trust memory alone in the case of one part of the revelation, he had no need to search for writings for the rest, and the whole could have been easily written down from the dictation of the reciters.

Abū Bakr's collection in writing accorded with the Prophet's collection as preserved in memory.

The most important question with regard to the collection made under the orders of Abū Bakr is: Did it accord in every respect with the Qur'ān as stored and collected in the memories of the Companions, and as repeated and recited, publicly as well as privately, in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet? There is not the least reason to believe that it did not. In the first place, none of the compilers was

actuated by any motive to make any change in the text. The earnest desire of all those engaged in the task was to have a complete and faithful collection of what had been revealed to the Holy Prophet, and Zaid had only undertaken the task after a full appreciation of the difficulties. Secondly, the collection began only six months after the death of the Holy Prophet, while almost all of those who had heard the Qur'ān from his lips were still alive. The Qur'ān, as recited by the Holy Prophet, was still fresh in the memories of the Companions, and any tampering with the text could have been easily brought to notice. Thirdly, there were many among them who could repeat the whole of the Qur'ān from memory. There were others who knew large portions, and these were kept fresh in memory by constant recitation in and apart from prayers. It was impossible that any variation from the text as prevalent in the time of the Holy Prophet should have found its way into the collection in the presence of such men. Fourthly, there were many transcripts of the revelations current among the Companions. And since every verse was written at the time of its revelation, and copies of it were then made by the Companions, there were ample means of testing the accuracy of the collection of Zaid. These writings were in the possession of different Companions, and so they all had a chance to see for themselves that the collection made by Zaid was a faithful collection of the original writings. Moreover, the writings in the possession of one man could be compared with those in the possession of another, and thus, as in the case of recitation, there was no possibility of any error creeping into the text. Memory and writing thus corroborated the already unimpeachable testimony afforded by each. Fifthly, there is no mention at all in any report whatever that anything was left out of the collection made under the orders of Abū Bakr, or that anything had been added to it which was not considered to be part of the Divine revelation. As Muir says:

“We hear of no fragments, sentences, or words omitted by the compilers, nor of any that differed from the received edition. Any such would undoubtedly have been preserved and noticed in those traditional repositories which treasured up the minutest and most trivial acts and sayings of the Prophet.”

7.5: 'UTHMĀN ORDERED FURTHER COPIES FROM ABŪ BAKR'S ORIGINAL COLLECTION

Circumstances which necessitated 'Uthmān's making further copies of the Qur'ān.

As shown above, there are strong and conclusive arguments showing that the collection made under the orders of Abū Bakr agreed in every way, in text as well as in arrangement, with the collection made under the direction of the Holy Prophet himself and preserved in memory by the reciters. The collection thus made remained, we are told, in the possession of Abū Bakr, and after his death in that of 'Umar. After the latter's death, the copy was transferred to the custody of Ḥafṣah, the daughter of 'Umar, and a widow of the Holy Prophet. Thus the collection made by the orders of Abū Bakr came down to the reign of 'Uthmān without any alteration in its text or arrangement. But some circumstances coming to the notice of 'Uthmān, he deemed it necessary to circulate official copies, transcribed by official scribes, and suppress all those made by private persons, either from the collection of Zaid or from other writings still prevalent among them.

The circumstances which made it necessary are thus described:

“Anas relates that there came to ‘Uthmān, Ḥudhaifah who had been fighting with the people of Syria in the conquest of Armenia and with the people of ‘Irāq in Azarbaijan, and who was alarmed at their variations in the modes of reading, and he said to ‘Uthmān: ‘O Commander of the Faithful, stop the people before they differ in the Holy Book as the Jews and the Christians differ in their Scriptures’. So ‘Uthmān sent word to Ḥaḥṣah asking her to send him the Qur’ān in her possession, so that they might make other copies of it and then send the original copy back to her. Thereupon Ḥaḥṣah sent the copy to ‘Uthmān, and he ordered Zaid ibn Thābit and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Zubair and Sa‘id ibn al-‘Āṣ and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Hārith ibn Hishām, and they made copies from the original copy. ‘Uthmān also said to the three men who belonged to the Quraish (Zaid only being a Madinite): ‘When you differ with Zaid in anything concerning the Qur’ān, then write it in the language of the Quraish, for it is in their language that it was revealed’. They obeyed these instructions, and when they had made the required number of copies from the original copy, ‘Uthmān returned the original to Ḥaḥṣah and sent to every quarter one of the copies thus made, and ordered all other copies or leaves on which the Qur’ān was written to be burned” (B. 66:3).

The Caliph was told by one of his generals that there were variations in the modes of reading the Qur’ān in such distant parts of the kingdom as Syria and Armenia. No such differences are pointed out to have existed at Madinah or Makkah, or anywhere within Arabia. It was only in newly converted countries, where Arabic was not spoken, that these differences were noticed. As to the nature of these differences, it is stated in clear words that they were only differences in *qirā’at*, or modes of *reading*. But it was feared that, if nothing was done to put a stop to the *slight* differences existing at that time, they might, after the lapse of a few generations, develop into serious ones. What the differences exactly were it is difficult to say, but a reference to earlier anecdotes casts some further light upon their nature. We are told in authentic *ḥadīth* that different modes of reading certain words were allowed by the Holy Prophet himself, and some Companions, unacquainted with the permission, at first severely took to task anybody whom they heard reading any word of the Holy Qur’ān in a different method. The reason for this permission was that people belonging to certain tribes could not pronounce certain words in the ordinary way. These people were allowed to read them in the manner in which they could easily pronounce them. This subject has been more fully discussed further on.

Unnecessary variations in readings were forbidden by ‘Umar before.

The permission to read any word in a different method was based on a necessity. Only those could avail themselves of this permission who, on account of their being accustomed from their very childhood to pronounce certain words in a certain manner, could not pronounce them in the pure dialect of the Quraish. But when Islām spread beyond Arabia, the need to read certain words in a different method disappeared, for the foreigners could pronounce a word in the dialect of the Quraish with the same facility as in any other dialect. Some people, however, still taught the Qur’ān adhering to certain readings which were not in accordance with the pure style of the Quraish. Some of them may even have abused the permission and

favoured certain readings, though they had no need for them. This evil seems to have spread at Kūfah, and it was to this that Ḥudhaifah referred when he was alarmed at the variation in the readings. This conclusion is corroborated by an anecdote relating to a period earlier than the time of 'Uṭhmān. 'Umar was told that Ibn Mas'ūd read *'attā ḥin* instead of *ḥattā ḥin*, both meaning *till a time* (FB., vol. ix, p. 24). Now, in the dialect of the Hudhail and the Ṭhaqif, *ḥattā* was pronounced *'attā* (LL under *'attā*). Ibn Mas'ūd did not belong to either of these tribes, but he favoured a peculiar reading which had been permitted only because people belonging to certain tribes could not utter the word otherwise. When 'Umar was told that Ibn Mas'ūd taught *'attā* instead of *ḥattā*, the Caliph wrote to him that the Qur'ān was revealed in the language of the Quraish, and that he should not read it in the dialect of the Hudhail: "so teach it to the people in the language of the Quraish and not in that of the Hudhail" (FB., vol. ix, p. 24).

'Uṭhmān only followed 'Umar's action.

It was to put a stop once for all to the continuity of such variations that 'Uṭhmān ordered the burning of all private copies of the Qur'ān. The instructions which 'Uṭhmān gave to the syndicate of the scribes further supports this conclusion. To the members of the committee who belonged to the Quraish he gave the direction: "When you differ with Zaid in anything concerning the Qur'ān, then write it in the language of the Quraish, for it is in their language that it was revealed" (B. 66:3). This direction, we are told, was obeyed. 'Uṭhmān then went no further than 'Umar. Only the variations of readings became more pronounced in his time, and became the source of much evil, and he took a step which was calculated to wipe out once for all those variations which 'Umar also wanted to put a stop to. The significance of the differences alluded to in the above report is explained by another report, where the words are: "When you differ with Zaid in an *'arabiyyat* in the *'arabiyyāt* of the Qur'ān" (B. 66:2). The word *'arabiyyat* signifies the Arabic language. The word clearly implies that by *difference* in the report is meant difference in the method of pronouncing a word in different dialects. Zaid did not belong to the tribe of the Quraish, and hence, when there was a difference in the manner of reading or writing a word, the decision of the Quraish members was to be accepted. The only example of the difference alluded to has been preserved to us in the following anecdote: "And they differed on that occasion as to *tābūt* and *tābuh*. The Quraish members said that it was *tābūt*, and Zaid said that it was *tābuh*. The difference was reported to 'Uṭhmān, and he directed them to write it *tābūt*, adding that the Qur'ān was revealed in the dialect of the Quraish" (FB., vol. ix, p. 17). This anecdote shows that the differences were really of a very trivial nature, but even such trivial differences had to be removed.

The copies made under 'Uṭhmān's orders were faithful copies of Abū Bakr's collection.

Did the copies transcribed under the orders of 'Uṭhmān differ from the original collection made by Zaid in the time of Abū Bakr? The report tells us that, when variations of readings were brought to the notice of 'Uṭhmān, the only action that he took was to obtain the collection made in the time of Abū Bakr, and to have other copies transcribed from it for circulation. Thus copies of the Qur'ān transcribed under his orders were true and faithful copies of the collection of Abū Bakr, which, as we have seen, was in the custody of Ḥaḥṣah after the death of 'Umar. Zaid was one of the men who were now called upon to make fresh copies

from it. To remove any difference of dialect or variation in the mode of writing certain words that might possibly arise, ‘Uthmān gave the orders that the reading of the Quraish should be adopted in preference to any other reading. But the only example of such variation that has been preserved to us in reports is that Zaid read a word as *tābuh* and the Quraish read it as *tābūt*, there being a very slight difference as to the manner in which the final letter of the word was to be written, without there being the slightest change in significance; and such importance was given to this trifling difference that the matter was reported to ‘Uthmān for decision. Hence we have conclusive testimony in our hands showing that the copies of the Qur’ān made and circulated under the orders of ‘Uthmān were exact and faithful copies of the original collection of Zaid made in the time of Abū Bakr. Had there been any difference between the original and the copies made, it would no doubt have come to light in the long reign of ‘Uthmān or in that of ‘Alī, when Muslims had been divided into factions, and that copy was still in the possession of Ḥaḥṣah. The men who murdered the aged and venerable Caliph could not have failed to bring to light any difference that might have existed between the copy of Ḥaḥṣah and the copies made under his orders. But there is nothing on record to show that any such charge was brought against ‘Uthmān even by his murderers.

‘Uthmān’s action in burning private copies supported by all.

Had the action of ‘Uthmān in destroying all private copies of the Holy Qur’ān been arbitrary or unjustifiable, the Companions of the Holy Prophet would never have yielded to it. They, however, not only approved of his action, but also willingly carried out his orders. A request had come to him from distant Syria that he should take immediate steps to put a stop to variations in readings, and this he could not do except by issuing official copies of the Holy Qur’ān as collected by Abū Bakr and suppressing all private copies, which were perhaps not made with sufficient care and might have contained any variation of reading. Nor did ‘Uthmān take this step without consulting the Companions. ‘Alī is reported to have said:

“Do not say anything about ‘Uthmān but what is good, for he did not take the step with regard to the suppression of the private copies of the Qur’ān except after consultation with us. He spoke to us, saying, What do you think of this reading? I have been informed that some of them say to others, my reading is better than yours. This, I think, may amount to heresy. We asked him what steps he thought advisable to take in this matter. He replied that he thought it necessary to gather people on one reading. To this we all heartily agreed” (FB., vol. ix, p. 16).

Thus it was only after consultation with the general body of the Companions that ‘Uthmān took this step.

There are said to have been twelve members in the syndicate which superintended the transcription of the copies. Among these were Zaid, Sa’id, Ubayy, Anas ibn Mālīk, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, and others. It appears that originally there were four members only, but that others were added later on, perhaps because a larger number of copies than that imagined at first was required. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas’ūd was the only Companion noted for his knowledge of the Qur’ān, who was not included in the Committee, but his exclusion was not due to any prejudice against him, but to his residence at Kūfah, a considerable distance from Madinah. ‘Uthmān began his work after due consultation with the general body of the Companions, and they approved of his action after its completion. According to a report, Muṣ‘ab ibn Sa’d said that he

met many Companions when 'Uṭhmān gave order for burning all private copies of the Qur'ān, and they were all pleased with it, and none of them took exception to it (FB., vol. ix, p. 18). In fact, 'Uṭhmān's apprehensions and those of the Companions, as the words of 'Ali reported above show, were not due so much to the existence of variations in readings as to the differences resulting from these variations.

The present Quranic Text is exactly as the Prophet left it.

The work of collecting the written manuscripts of the Qur'ān was thus carried out by Abū Bakr after the death of the Holy Prophet, and 'Uṭhmān did nothing but order the necessary number of copies to be made from Abū Bakr's collection. He acted after consultation with the Companions, securing the services of the most eminent men who were noted for their knowledge of the Qur'ān to carry out and superintend the work of the transcription. The copies made by his orders were recognized as true copies by the whole Muslim world. The bitterest foes of 'Uṭhmān, who cut off his head while he was reading the Qur'ān and who had the whole power in their hands, never charged him with having tampered with the Qur'ān, though ordering the burning of the copies of the Holy Book was one of their charges against him. Even during the reign of 'Ali, no one pointed out a word which had been omitted by 'Uṭhmān, and 'Ali is himself stated to have transcribed copies of the Qur'ān from the official copies circulated by 'Uṭhmān.

The purity of the text of the Qur'ān is thus conclusively demonstrated. The collection of Abū Bakr was a faithful reproduction of the revelation as reduced to writing in the presence of the Holy Prophet, and agreed every whit in text as well as in arrangement, with the Holy Qur'ān as preserved in the memories of the Companions; the copies circulated by 'Uṭhmān were true and faithful copies of Abū Bakr's collection, and these copies have admittedly remained unaltered through the thirteen centuries that have since elapsed.

7.6: DIFFERENCES OF READINGS

The significance of differences of readings.

Alleged differences of readings are said to interfere with the purity of the Quranic text in two ways. It is alleged that certain readings which had been permitted by the Holy Prophet were suppressed by 'Uṭhmān, and thus with their loss a portion of the original text was lost. Another objection is that the variety of readings existing at the present time makes it difficult to decide with any degree of certainty as to which is the original or the authentic reading. These objections really arise out of a misconception of the significance of the word "reading" when used with regard to the Quranic text, and out of confusion between the meanings of *ḥarf* and *qirā'at* when used to denote "reading", and accordingly, it is necessary to inquire first into the true nature of the differences of readings.

In the first place it should be borne in mind that the Arabic word used in the reports to denote *reading* is *ḥarf*. This word means "a dialect, an idiom or a mode of expression, peculiar to certain of the Arabs" (LL). It is this meaning which the word conveys in the reports speaking of the variety of readings, as Lane himself adds: "So in the saying of Muḥammad, *the Qur'ān has been revealed according to seven dialects*, of the dialects of the Arabs: or this means, according to seven modes or manners of reading: whence (you say) such a one reads in the manner of reading of Ibn Mas'ūd". These quotations would show that differences spoken of in certain reports were only those arising from the variations of the dialects, which necessitated

the reading or expressing of certain words in a different manner by various tribes.

Ḥadīth on differences of readings.

According to the Ḥadīth, the permission to read the Qurʾān in other dialects was granted when many of the Arabian tribes had embraced Islām, i.e., towards the close of the Holy Prophet's ministry. Conclusive testimony on this point is afforded by B. 66:5, according to which 'Umar was surprised by Hishām, who accepted Islām after the conquest of Makkah, reading certain words in a different manner. And it is a fact that more than nine-tenths of the Qurʾān had been revealed before the conquest of Makkah, and the whole of that was revealed in the language of the Quraysh. The differences of the readings were only such as were naturally necessitated by the influx into Islām of unlearned tribes, who spoke an idiom which was Arabic for all practical purposes, but which in the pronunciation of certain words differed slightly from the pure idiom of the Quraysh. Examples of these differences have already been given. The Quraysh say *hattā* (meaning *until*), while the Hudhail pronounce the same word as *'attā*, there being no difference in the significance of the two words. Other variations of the same kind are *ti'lamūn* instead of *ta'lamūn*, as the tribe of Asad read it; *yāsin* instead of *āsin* in 47:15; the reading of *hamzah* (one of the letters of the alphabet), by the Tamīm where the Quraysh did not read it; and so on (FB., vol. ix, p. 25).

In support of the above I may quote the following:

“The Holy Qurʾān was first revealed in the language of the Quraysh and such of the Arabs as were in their neighbourhood and spoke the chaste Arabic idiom; then it was permitted to the other Arab tribes to read it in their own idioms, to the use of which they were habituated from their childhood and they differed (from the pure idiom) in the pronunciation of certain words and the vowel-points. Therefore none of them was compelled to leave his own idiom for that of another, because of the difficulty which they would have experienced in doing so, and because of their great regard for their own idioms, so that they might easily understand the significance of what they read. All this was subject to the condition that there should be no change in the significance” (FB., vol. ix, p. 24).

Reports dealing with this subject point out the reason for which the permission was granted, and in each case we find the reason to be in accordance with what is stated above. For instance, according to one of the reports, the Holy Prophet asked the angel to “make it easy” for his people, showing that they experienced a difficulty in reading it otherwise (Ms. 6:13, *Faḍā'il al-Qurʾān*). According to another, he is made to say that his people “could not bear it” (Ms. 6:13) — in other words, all the Arab tribes could not read in one dialect. According to a third, he pleads for his people, saying that they were unlearned, and among them were the old woman and the old man, and the boy and the girl, and the man who had never learned to read a book (Tr. *Abwāb al-qirā'āt*). Hence they were permitted to read certain words according to their own dialects. We have also one report ending with the words, *therefore read it in the manner in which you find it easy to do so* (B. 66:5), which shows that the permission to read the Qurʾān in dialects other than that of the Quraysh was meant to afford facility to certain people.

To what extent the various dialects in which the recital of the Qurʾān was permitted differed from each other is not a question of much importance, but there seems to be no doubt, as many instances preserved in reports show, that the variations

were very slight and generally very unimportant. While holding this on the basis of historical evidence, so far as access can be had to it, we have no reason for denying that in certain cases a word of one dialect may have been allowed to be expressed by its equivalent in another dialect, where the latter dialect did not possess the original word. This is what is meant when it is said in certain reports that the expression of meaning by a synonymous word was allowed in certain cases. Such a case is exemplified in one report by the use of any of the words *ta'āli*, *halumma* and *aqbil*, all meaning "come". This is not an actual case of variation of reading in the Holy Qur'ān but the example is only given to show the nature of variation in such cases. Other variations of reading in these dialects were of a much more insignificant nature, and related to certain changes in vowel-points. Thus the meaning was in no case altered. There were differences in the utterance of certain words, but there was no difference at all in the significance conveyed.

Variations of reading never formed part of the Text.

It must be further borne in mind that the variations at no time formed a part of the text of the Holy Qur'ān, nor were they ever meant for permanent retention. The necessity which had given rise to them was of a purely local and temporary nature. They did not in any way alter the text of the Holy Qur'ān as it was originally revealed. The Holy Prophet himself never recited in his public prayers any portion of the Holy Qur'ān in any dialect other than that of the Quraish, for if he had done so, men like 'Umar and Ubayy, who said their daily prayers with the Holy Prophet, would not have found fault with dialectic variations, as they are reported to have done. The practice of the Holy Prophet, therefore, shows that the permission to use certain dialectic variations did not alter the original text of the Holy Qur'ān in the slightest degree. Another evidence that the Holy Prophet intended only the dialect of the Quraish to be retained for permanent use, and permitted the variations only for a temporary need, is to be met with in the circumstance that the writing of the Qur'ān, even after the permission as to dialectic variations, suffered no change.

No variation is met with in any copy of the Qur'ān.

We may now consider the second objection. It is alleged that the existence of certain readings, which are to be met with in certain *ḥadīth* and commentaries, makes it uncertain which is the original and the revealed text. Now, whatever may be the nature of the readings referred to above, the one consideration which settles the absolute purity of the text of the Holy Qur'ān is that no different text is met with in any copy of the Holy Qur'ān, anywhere in the world. During all the ages and in all countries, with all the differences, there has been only one text. Not a single one of the alleged various readings has ever replaced any word of the current text anywhere in the Muslim world. There are Muslim countries situated farthest off from each other, there are Muslims who have been separated from each other for long ages, there are Muslim sects bearing the utmost enmity towards each other, yet they have always followed the same text of the Holy Qur'ān, and not a single copy can be produced with a varying text. This certainly is not due to the exercise of any temporal authority for there has never been a single authority over the whole Muslim world. Moreover, if such authority could not or did not interfere with the recital of these readings, there is no reason to believe that it could or did interfere with their writing in the text. Therefore, if the men to whom those readings are attributed had given them the same value as the critics now give, they would certainly have introduced them into their private copies and replaced the text by

those readings. But there does not exist a single copy varying from the received edition in the slightest degree. I have dealt with this subject in a separate book, *The Collection and Arrangement of the Holy Qur'ān*, and for further information on the differences of readings, as also regarding certain allegations against the purity of the Quranic text, I would refer the reader to that volume.

I may, however, here add that, even if a certain person expressed views which were opposed to the collective testimony of all the Companions, it was the collective testimony that was to be accepted. 'Uthmān, as already shown, worked with the consent of the general body of the Companions. Even if it be admitted for the sake of argument that he suppressed anything, it could not have remained hidden after him. Even the men who murdered 'Uthmān did not interfere with the circulation of 'Uthmān's copy of the Holy Qur'ān, nor did they put into circulation a different edition or a new chapter or even a single new verse. They never pointed out that a single word in the Divine revelation had been changed by 'Uthmān. When 'Uthmān's power ceased to exist or when he himself was murdered in cold blood by the insurgents, what hindrance was there then to the circulation of parts which 'Uthmān might have suppressed? The end of 'Uthmān's reign would have seen the circulation of all those parts which, it is alleged, had been suppressed by him, and such parts would no doubt have then been embodied in the copies of the Qur'ān. But history shows no trace of any such happening. With all their differences, different men and different sects have always used one and the same copy of the Qur'ān.

There is only one Qur'ān in the whole Muslim world.

It is sometimes asserted that the Shi'ahs regard the Qur'ān as incomplete. The following remarks from Muir's *Life of Muḥammad*, which has raised and answered this question, will be a sufficient answer:

“Assuming, then, that we possess unchanged the text of 'Uthmān's recension, it remains to inquire whether the text was an honest reproduction of Zaid's, with the simple reconciliation of unimportant variations. There is the fullest ground for believing that it was so. No early or trustworthy tradition throws suspicions upon 'Uthmān of tampering with the Qur'ān in order to support his own claims. The Shiahs, indeed, of later times pretend that 'Uthmān left out certain *sūrahs* or passages which favoured 'Ali. But this is incredible. When 'Uthmān's edition was prepared, no open breach had taken place between the Omeyyads and the Alyites. The unity of Islam was still unthreatened. 'Ali's pretensions were as yet undeveloped. No sufficient object can, therefore, be assigned for the perpetration by 'Uthmān of an offence which Muslims would have regarded as one of the blackest dye. Again, at the time of the recension, there were still multitudes alive who had learnt the Qur'ān by heart as they had heard it originally delivered; and copies of any passages favouring 'Ali, if any such passages ever existed, must have been in the hands of his numerous adherents, both of which sources would have proved an effectual check upon any attempt at suppression. Further, the party of 'Ali, immediately on 'Uthmān's death, assumed an independent attitude, and raised him to the Caliphate. Is it conceivable that, when thus arrived at power, they would have tolerated a mutilated Qur'ān, mutilated expressly to destroy their leader's claim? Yet we find that they continued to use the same Qur'ān as their opponents and raised no shadow of an objection against it.”

To this I would add a few words from a *Shi‘ah* commentator of the Holy Qur‘ān, Mullā Muḥsin, who says in his *Tafsīr Ṣāfi*:

“Certain men from among us and the Ḥaṣḥwiyah masses have reported that the Qur‘ān has suffered loss and alteration. But the true belief of our friends is against this, and such is the belief of the vast majority. For the Qur‘ān is a miracle of the Holy Prophet and the source of all knowledge relating to law and all religious injunctions, and the learned Muslims have taken the utmost pains for its protection, so that there is nothing relating to its vowel-points, its recital, its letters and its verses, which they do not know. With such strong measures of protection and such faithful preservation of the Holy Book (by the Muslims) it cannot be supposed that any alteration or loss could take place” (p. 14).

The learned author goes on to say:

“Surely the Qur‘ān was collected and arranged in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet exactly as it is in our hands. This is inferred from the fact that the Qur‘ān was even then recited and committed to memory as a whole, and there was a body of the Companions whose duty it was to commit it to memory. It was also recited and read out as a whole to the Holy Prophet (by the angel).”

Dr. Mingana’s Leaves.

Before concluding this subject, I may make a few remarks about what Dr. Mingana considers a great discovery — *Leaves from three Ancient Qur‘āns*. These are certain leaves, none of them being a complete copy of the Qur‘ān or even a copy of any substantial portion of the Qur‘ān, said to have been bought by Dr. Agnes Lewis from a commercial antiquary, containing three writings crossing each other, the oldest of these writings being some passages of the Qur‘ān. When these passages were written and who wrote them are questions which Dr. Mingana has not answered. All statements to the effect that they are pre-‘Uṭhmānic, or copies made from pre-‘Uṭhmānic manuscripts, are simply conjectures, boldly put forward as “facts”. And what are the differences that are shown to exist? That certain words are written in a different style of writing; that there are some variants (three in all); that there are three omissions, *huwa*, *kāffah* and *mā-lakum* in three places, and that there is one addition, the word *Allāh*.

The bold assertion is made on this basis that ‘Uṭhmān changed the text of the Qur‘ān, while even a cursory glance at these “Leaves” shows them to be an additional proof that the text of the Holy Qur‘ān is one and the same and has always remained the same, for these leaves do not show the omission, addition or variation of any verse or part of a verse, or any change in the order of chapters or in the order of the verses contained in a chapter, nor do they show that any verse was misplaced. Substantially, the portions of the Qur‘ān as found in these manuscripts are the same as in the received text. If there are any differences, they are such as would necessarily arise in the transcription of copies by inexperienced hands. Mistakes would necessarily occur in making transcriptions from other copies and it was to guard against such mistakes that ‘Uṭhmān ordered the official copies to be prepared, so that all copies made should be compared with them and mistakes arising in the transcription should thus be corrected. It is clear that the very few mistakes discovered in these *Leaves* are the mistakes of transcription by

inexperienced hands, as the text given by Dr. Mingana clearly shows; for instance

writing اعرض instead of اعرضن : اضل instead of اضلل :
 ينالوا instead of ينلوا : قرن instead of قران :
 بركنا instead of بركنا : اذنا instead of اذاننا ,

and so on. These are clear mistakes of transcription, or perhaps sometimes a small vowel-point or part of a letter was obliterated by the rubbing-off process. It is rather amusing to find the purity of the text of the Holy Qur'ān contested, on the basis of stray leaves, containing unknown and uncultured writing, once obliterated to give place to quite another writing. The alleged variations, it may be said without entering into details, are partly due to a slip of the pen of the scribe, partly to the rubbing-off of the vellum for a second writing, partly to cross super-impositions, and partly, perhaps, to doubtful reading on the part of Dr. Mingana.