

8. The Collection of the Qur'an

Synopsis: The way the Qur'an was collected; a review of the traditions about the collection of the Qur'an; their contrariety and inconsistency; their discord with those accounts that indicate that the Qur'an was collected during the lifetime of the Prophet; their incongruity when compared with the Book and the intellect; their disagreement with the consensus of the Muslims that the Qur'an cannot be established except through its uninterrupted [transmission]; using these traditions as evidence necessitates maintaining the belief in *tahrif* [in the sense of] addition, whose invalidity has been accepted [by all the scholars].

The manner in which the Qur'an was collected is among the issues that have been used by those who maintain the belief in *tahrif* (alteration) to prove that there has been *tahrif* [in the sense of the corruption of the text] as well as *taghyir* (change) in the Qur'an, and that the very manner of the Qur'an's collection would, in the normal course of events, involve this corruption and change in it. Hence, it is imperative that the discussion [in this chapter] should be undertaken in order to complete the treatment of the subject regarding the protection of the Qur'an from corruption and its freedom from omission or any alteration.

The source of this error [about *tahrif*] is the claim that the Qur'an was collected under Abu Bakr's order, following the slaying of seventy reciters of the Qur'an at the battle of Bi'r Ma'una, and of four hundred persons at the battle of Yamama. Fearing that the Qur'an would be lost and would disappear from the people, 'Umar and Zayd

Thabit undertook to collect it from fragments written on palm branches, flat stones, and pieces of wood, and from the breasts of the people [who had memorized it], provided that two witnesses would testify that what they [reported] was part of the Qur'an. All this has been suggested in a number of accounts. Ordinarily, it is expected that some of it would be lost to those who assumed the responsibility for this task, except if they were infallible [and divinely protected from forgetting]. This can be witnessed among those who undertake to collect the poetry of one or more poets, when this poetry is scattered. This rule is inevitable and arises from habit. The least that we can expect is that alteration has occurred, for it is

possible to fail in the effort to find two witnesses on some [revelation] that was heard from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny). Hence, there can be no certainty that omission did not occur.

The response [to this is as follows]. This erroneous view is based on [accepting] the soundness of the traditions that report the manner of collecting the Qur'an. So, the first task is to relate these traditions and follow them up with a critical evaluation.

Traditions about the Collection of the Qur'an

1. This tradition has been narrated by Zayd b. Thabit. He said:

Abu Bakr sent for me when the Muslims were slain in the battle of Yamama. [When I entered, I found] 'Umar b. al-Khattab with him. Abu Bakr said, "'Umar came to me and said, 'Casualties were heavy among Qur'an reciters during the battle of Yamama, and I am afraid that heavier casualties might take place among the reciters in other battles, whereby much of the Qur'an would be lost. I am of the opinion that you should order the collection of the Qur'an [in book form].'" I asked 'Umar, "How dare I do something the Messenger of God did not do?" 'Umar replied, "This, by God, is a good thing [to do]." 'Umar kept urging me until God opened my chest for that and I came to view the matter as he did. Zayd said that Abu Bakr said [to him]: "You are a wise young man and we trust you. You used to record the revelation for the Messenger of God. So go and find [all the fragments of] the Qur'an and put them together."

By God, had they required me [Zayd] to move a mountain, it could not have been heavier for me than their order to collect the Qur'an. So I said, "How dare I do something that the Messenger of God did not do?" Abu Bakr persisted in repeating his demand until God opened my chest for that, as He had done for Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Thereupon, I traced the Qur'an, collecting it from palm branches, flat stones, and the breasts of the people [who had memorized it], until I found the last part of "Surat al Tawba" in the possession of Abu Khuzayma al-Anas, having found it with no one else—"There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves, to whom aught that you are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you; for the believers, full of pity, merciful. Now, if they turn away (O Muhammad), say, **"God suffices me. There is no God save Him. In Him have I put my trust and He is Lord of the Tremendous Throne"** (*Qur'an 9: 128-129*)—till the end of the sura. The scrolls (*subuf*) remained with Abu Bakr until he died, then with 'Umar till the end of his life, and then with Hafsa, 'Umar's daughter.¹

2. Ibn Shihab [al-Zuhri] relates that Anas b. Malik told him:

Hudhayfa b. al-Yaman went before 'Uthman. He had recently led the people of Syria and Iraq in the conquest of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hudhayfa was alarmed by the dispute between them over the reading [of the Qur'an]. Thus, Hudhayfa said to 'Uthman, "O Commander of the Faithful, save this community before it falls in dispute over the Book, as the Jews and the Christians [before them] have done." So 'Uthman sent [a message] to Hafsa: "Send us the scrolls [which were in her possession], so

that they can be copied into codices (*masahif*) and then returned to you." Hafsa sent them to 'Uthman, who ordered Zayd b. Thabit, 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr, Sa'id b. al'a. and 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Harith b. Hisham to copy them into codices. [Then] 'Uthman told the three Qurayshi men, "Whenever you disagree with Zayd b. Thabit on any point of the Qur'an, write it in the dialect of the Quraysh, for it was revealed in their tongue." They followed [these guidelines]. When they had finished copying the sheets into codices, 'Uthman returned the sheets to Hafsa, and sent to each province one of the codices they had copied, and ordered the burning of all other Qur'anic material, whether in fragmentary manuscripts or full codices.

Ibn Shihab went on to say:

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

3. A tradition has been related by Abi Shayba, with a chain of transmission going back to 'Ali b. Abi Talib. He said, 'The greatest credit for collecting the Qur'anic text goes to Abu Bakr, for he was the first to collect that which is between the two covers."

4. A tradition was related by Ibn Shihab on the authority of Salim b. 'Abd Allah and Kharija:

Abu Bakr al-Siddiq collected the Qur'an in sheets (*qaratis*). He asked Zayd b. Thabit to scrutinize them. But Zayd refused to do so until Abu Bakr sought 'Umar's help in persuading him, and Zayd agreed. The books (*kutub*) remained in Abu Baker's keeping until he died. Thereafter, they were kept with Hafsa, the Prophet's wife. 'Uthman sent her [a message to hand them over to him]. But she refused to do so until he promised her that he would return them to her. So she sent them to him. 'Uthman copied these sheets into codices and returned [the originals] to her. They continued to be in her keeping

5. Hisham b. 'Urwa related a tradition on the authority of his father. He said:

When the Muslims were slain in Yamama, Abu Bakr ordered 'Umar b. al-Khattab and Zayd b. Thabit to sit at the entrance of the mosque. He said: "Anyone who comes to you with anything from the Qur'an that you do not recognize, but is witnessed by two men accept it. This was because a large number of the Companions of the Prophet who had memorized the Qur'an had been killed in Yamama."

6. Muhammad b. Sirin reported that the Qur'an was not yet collected in one volume when 'Umar was assassinated.

7. Al-Hasan related:

'Umar b. al-Khattab inquired about a verse of the Book of God. He was informed that it was in the

possession of a person who was slain in the battle of Yamama. On hearing this, he recited the verse expressing loss—"We belong to God"—and ordered the collection of the Qur'an, and thus was the first to collect it in a codex (*mushaf*).

8. Yahya b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Hatib related the following tradition:

'Umar decided to collect the Qur'an. So he stood before the people [in the mosque] and said, "Whoever received any part of the Qur'an [directly] from the Messenger of God, he is to bring it to us." They had written these [parts] on sheets, tablets, and palm branches. He would not accept anything from anyone until two witnesses testified [to its authenticity]. He was assassinated while still engaged in his collection. Then 'Uthman got up [for the sermon in the mosque] and said, "Whoever has any part of the Book of God is to bring it here to us." 'Uthman would not accept anything from anyone until two witnesses testified. Khuzayma b. Thabit came to them and said, "I see that you have left out two verses, having not written them." They asked what they were, and he said, "***I received these direct from the Prophet: 'There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves . . .' [Qur'an 9: 128]***" to the end of the sura. 'Uthman said, "And I bear witness that these verses come from God." He asked Khuzayma: "Where do you think we should place them?" He replied, "Put them at the end of the last revelation of the Qur'an." Thus, "Surat al-Bara'a" was closed with these.

9. A tradition was reported by 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr:

'Umar would not include a verse in the codex except if two men had testified [to its being part of the Qur'an]. A man from the Helpers (*ansar*) came to him with these two verses: "There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves . . ." to the end of the sura. 'Umar forthwith said, "I shall not ask you for evidence at all, for the Prophet was indeed like that."

10. A tradition was related by Sulayman b. Arqam on the authority of al-Hasan and Ibn Sirin, and by Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri. They said:

When the death toll among the reciters rose in the battle of Yamama—four hundred of them fell on that day—Zayd b. Thabit met with 'Umar b. al-Khattab and said to him: "This Qur'an is what unites our religion; if the Qur'an goes, so does our religion. Hence, I have resolved to collect the Qur'an in a book." 'Umar said to him, "Wait until I ask Abu Bakr." Thus, they both went to see Abu Bakr and informed him about the situation. He said, "Do not be in haste until I consult the Muslims." Then he delivered an oration to the Muslims, informing them about the grave situation [caused by the Yamama slaughter]. They said, "You are right." So they collected the Qur'an. Abu Bakr ordered a crier to call out among the people and ask them to bring forward any part of the Qur'an that might have. . . .

11. Khuzayma b. Thabit related the following incident:

I brought the verse "There has come to you a messenger, [one] of yourselves . . ." to 'Umar b. al-Khattab and Zayd b. Thabit. Zayd asked, "Who will testify with you [to its authenticity]?" I said, "By God, I

do not know." Thereupon, 'Umar said: "I bear witness with him on [its being from the Qur'an]."

12. Abu Ishaq related the following on the authority of some of his associates:

When 'Umar collected the text, he asked, "Who is the greatest master of Arabic among the people?" He was told that it was Sa'id b. al-'As. He went on to inquire, "Who is the best scribe among the people?" He was told that it was Zayd b. Thabit. So he said, "Let Sa'id dictate and Zayd write it down." Thus, they made four copies of the text, and dispatched a copy each to Kufa, Basra, al-Sham (Syria), and Hijaz.

13. The following tradition was reported by 'Abd Allah b. Faddala:

When 'Umar decided to collect the first complete version (*al-imam*) of the Qur'an, he appointed some of his associates to represent him, and said, "Whenever you disagree on a point of language, write in the dialect of the Muqar, because the Qur'an was revealed to a man of Mudar."

14. Abu Qullaba related the following:

During the caliphate of 'Uthman, different teachers were teaching different readings [of the Qur'an] to their students. Thus, it used to happen that the students would meet and disagree. The matter reached a point that they would take their dispute to the teachers, who would then condemn each other's [variant] readings. This situation reached 'Uthman's ears. He delivered an oration saying: "You are here by me, yet you disagree on the reading and pronunciation of the Qur'an. Therefore, those who are far away from me in the provinces must be in a greater dispute, making greater grammatical errors. O Companions of Muhammad, come together and write a complete version (imam) [of the Qur'an] for the Muslims."

Abu Qullaba added:

Malik b. Anas (who, according to Abu Bakr b. Abi Dawud, was the grandfather of [Imam] Malik b. Anas) reported to me: "I was among those to whom the Qur'an was dictated. Sometimes they would disagree on a verse. Then they would remember a person who had received it from the Messenger of God, and who would happen to be absent or out in the valleys. In such a situation, they would write the verses that come before and after it, and would leave a place for it, until that person had returned or was summoned. When the text was completed [in this way], 'Uthman wrote to the people in the provinces that 'I have done such and such a thing [in copying the text] and I have destroyed the other material that I have, and you should destroy the other material you have.'"

15. A tradition has been related by Mus'ab b. Sa'd:

'Uthman stood up to make the sermon to the people. He said: "O people, it is now thirteen years since our Prophet left you, and you are still wrangling about the Qur'an. You refer to the reading of Ubayy and that of 'Abd Allah, and some of you [go as far as to] say, 'By God, your ['Uthman's] reading is not in order!' I therefore summon every one of you to bring forward any part of the Book of God that you have in your possession." Thus, people would come with parchments and scraps of leather with [parts of] the

Qur'an on them, until there accumulated a large number of them. After this was done, 'Uthman came in and called them one by one, and implored each to say whether he heard [a part of the Qur'an] from the Messenger of God or whether it was dictated to him by the Messenger. They would answer in the affirmative. When this was done, 'Uthman said, "Who is the best scribe among you?" They said, "The scribe of the Prophet, Zayd b. Thabit." Then he asked, "Who is the greatest master of Arabic?" They said, "Sa'id b. al-'As." 'Uthman said, "In that case, let Sa'id dictate and Zayd write."

Hence, Zayd wrote down [the text], and ['Uthman] prepared the codices and distributed them among the people.

I [Mus'ab] heard one of the Companions of the Prophet say, "He ['Uthman] did well [by undertaking the task]."

16. Abu al-Malih has reported that "when 'Uthman b. 'Affan decided to write down the text of the Qur'an, he said, 'Let [a man from] the Hudhayl dictate and [a man from] the Thaqif write.'"

17. 'Abd al-A'la b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Amir al-Qarashi related:

When the codex was completed, it was brought to 'Uthman. He examined it and said, "You have done well and you have acted decently. I see minor grammatical mistakes the Arabs would correct with their tongues [i.e., through proper recitation]."

18. 'Ikrima related:

When 'Uthman was brought the [completed] codex, he noticed minor grammatical errors in it. So he said, "Had the one dictating been from the [tribe of] Hudhayl and the scribe from the [tribe of] Thaqif, such an error would not have crept into the text."

19. 'Ata' related:

When 'Uthman b. 'Affan decided to copy the Qur'an into codices, he sent them to Ubayy b. Ka'b. Ubayy used to dictate to Zayd b. Thabit, who used to write, and with them was Sa'id b. al-'As, who used to vocalize the text [in accordance with the rules of Arabic grammar]. This text was according to the reading of Ubayy and Zayd.

20. Mujahid reported, "'Uthman ordered Ubayy b. Ka'b to dictate, Zayd b. Thabit to write, [and] Sa'id b. al-'As and 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Harith to vocalize [the Qur'an] in accordance with the rules of Arabic."

21. Zayd b. Thabit reported:

When we copied the codices, a verse was missing which I used to hear from the Messenger of God. I found it in possession of Khuzayma b. Thabit. [This was]: "**Among the believers are persons who are truthful in what they promise to God . . .**" [*Qur'an 33:23*]. Khuzayma was nicknamed "He of the Two

"Testimonies" because the Messenger permitted his testimony to be equal to that of two persons.

22. Ibn Ashatta reported the following tradition on the authority of al-Layth b. Sa'd:

The first to collect the Qur'an was Abu Bakr, and it was written by Zayd. The people used to bring what they had [of the Qur'an] to Zayd b. Thabit, who would not write a verse without two righteous persons testifying [to its authenticity]. The last part of "Surat al-Bara'a" [sura 9] was not found except in the keeping of Khuzayma b. Thabit. [Abu Bakr] said: "Write it down. The Messenger of God made Khuzayma's testimony equal to that of two witnesses. Thus, Zayd wrote it down. However, 'Umar brought the stoning verse, but we did not write it down because he was alone [in reporting it]."³

These are the most significant traditions that have been related about the manner in which the Qur'an was collected. Quite aside from being reported by single narrations, and therefore inspiring no confidence, they also are defective in other aspects.

Inconsistency of the Traditions Regarding the Collection of the Qur'an

The traditions contradict each other and, therefore, it is not possible to trust anything in them. It is worth mentioning a number of these contradictions by raising certain questions and answering them.

- a. When was the Qur'an collected into a single codex? The apparent sense of tradition 2, [cited above], suggests that the collection was undertaken during the time of 'Uthman (644–656). The clear statement of traditions 1, 3, and 4, and the apparent sense of a few others, indicate is that it was undertaken during Abu Bakr's time. The clear statement of traditions 7 and 12 indicates that it was during 'Umar's time (634–644).
- b. Who undertook the task of collecting the Qur'an during Abu Bakr's time? According to traditions 1 and 22, the person who undertook this task was Zayd b. Thabit, whereas, according to tradition 4, it was Abu Bakr himself, and he asked Zayd only to examine what he had collected from the sheets (*kutub*). On the other hand, tradition 5, as well as the apparent sense of some other reports, suggest that it was both 'Umar and Zayd who undertook the task.
- c. Was Zayd delegated to choose which verses would be included in the Qur'an? It appears from tradition 1, or, in fact, it is clear, that Abu Bakr delegated the task to him. What 'Umar said to Zayd is clear in this regard: "You are a wise young man and we trust you. You used to record the revelation for the Messenger of God. So go and find [all the fragments of] the Qur'an and put them together." Tradition 5 and a few others mention that the material was included in the text only on the testimony of [at least] two witnesses, to the extent that when 'Umar came forward with the verse regarding the stoning, it was not accepted from him because he was the only one reporting it.

d. Did any verse remain unrecorded until the time of 'Uthman? The apparent sense of many traditions – in fact, their explicit statement–suggests that there was nothing left out until that time. However, tradition 2 clearly states that some verses had been left out and were not recorded until the time of 'Uthman.

e. Did 'Uthman strike out anything that was recorded before him? The apparent sense of many traditions, or, rather, their explicit statement, suggests that 'Uthman did not strike out anything from the text recorded before him. But tradition 14 explicitly states that he did strike out something that was recorded before him, and that he ordered the Muslims to do the same.

f. From what source did 'Uthman collect the codex? Traditions 2 and 4 state explicitly that in collecting the Qur'an he depended on the scrolls (*suhuf*) collected by Abu Bakr. In contrast, traditions 8, 14, and 15 explicitly state that 'Uthman collected it on the [basis of the] testimony of two witnesses, and from the reports of those who had heard the verse from the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny).

g. Who asked Abu Bakr to collect the Qur'an? Tradition 1 says that it was 'Umar who asked him, and Abu Bakr agreed with him after initially refusing to do [the collection]. He then sent for Zayd and asked him to undertake the task. Zayd also agreed with him after initially refusing to do it. Tradition 10 mentions that both Zayd and 'Umar asked Abu Bakr to do it, and that he agreed with them after consulting the Muslims.

h. Who collected the first complete version (imam) of the Qur'an and sent copies of it to the different centers of the empire? Tradition 2 states clearly that it was 'Uthman, whereas tradition 12 also states clearly that it was 'Umar.

i. When were the two last verses of "Surat al-Bara'a" appended? Traditions 1, 11, and 22 state clearly that they were appended during Abu Bakr's time. In contrast, the clear statement of tradition 8 and the apparent sense of other traditions suggest that this was done during 'Umar's time.

j. Who came forward with these two verses? Traditions 1 and 22 state clearly that it was Abu Khuzayma. However, traditions 8 and 11 also state clearly that it was Khuzayma b. Thabit. As mentioned by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, there is no relationship whatsoever between these two men.⁴

k. How was it established that these two verses were from the Qur'an? From the apparent sense of the first tradition, and from the clear statement of traditions 9 and 21, it was established on the testimony of a single person. According to the clear statement of number 8, 'Uthman testified [as a second witness] with him; and according to the clear statement of number 11, 'Umar was the one who testified [as a second witness] with him.

l. Whom did 'Uthman appoint to write the Qur'an and to dictate it? Tradition 2 states explicitly that 'Uthman appointed Zayd, Ibn al-Zubayr, Sa'id, and 'Abd al-Rahman for writing, whereas number 15 states explicitly that he appointed Zayd for writing and Sa'id for dictating. Tradition 16, however, asserts

that he appointed a person from the tribe of Thaqif to write, and another from the tribe of Hudhayl to dictate. But tradition 18 states clearly that the writer was not from the Thaqif, and that the one who dictated was not from the Hudhayl. Tradition 19 states explicitly that the person who dictated was Ubayy b. Ka'b, and that Sa'id b. al-'As vocalized what Zayd wrote, in accordance with the rules of Arabic grammar. This is asserted also by tradition 20, with the addition of 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Harith to oversee the vocalization with Sa'id.

The Contradiction among the Traditions in Their Account of the Collection of the Qur'an

All these traditions are contradicted by information that indicates that the Qur'an was collected and recorded during the lifetime of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny). This information has been transmitted by a number of people, including Ibn Abi Shayba, Ibn Habban, al-Hakim, al-Bayhaqi, and al-Qiya' al-Maqdisi, all reporting on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, who said:

I asked 'Uthman b. 'Affan: "What made you turn to 'Surat al-Anfal' [sura 8, "The Spoils"], which is one of the *mathani* suras,⁵ and to 'Surat al-Bara'a' [sura 9], which is one of the *mi'in* suras,⁶ and put them next to each other without writing between them the *basmala* invocation [In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate]? What made you do that?" 'Uthman replied: "There were times when [long] suras with numerous [verses] used to come down to the Messenger of God. And when something was revealed to him, he would call for one of those who used to transcribe for him and say, 'Include these verses in the sura in which this and that is mentioned.' More verses would come down to him and he would say: 'Include these in the sura in which this and that is mentioned.' 'Al-Anfal' was among the first of the revelations in Medina, and 'al-Bara'a' was among the last revelations of the Qur'an. The contents of 'al-Bara'a' resembled those of 'al-Anfal,' so I assumed that it belonged to it. The Prophet died without clarifying for us that it was part of it. It is for this reason that I put them together without writing the line *bism Allah al-Rahman, al-Rahim* [i.e., the *basmala*], and I placed them among the seven long suras."⁷

In another tradition, related by al-Tabarani and Ibn 'Asakir, al-Sha'bi says:

The Qur'an was collected, during the lifetime of the Messenger of God, by six individuals from the Ansar (Helpers): Ubayy b. Ka'b, Zayd b. Thabit, Mu'adh b. Jabal, Abu al-Darda', Sa'd b. 'Ubayd, and Abu Zayd. Moreover, Majma' b. Jariya had collected [all of the] Qur'an except for two or three suras.⁸

Qatadah reports the following:

I asked Anas b. Malik, "Who collected the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet?" He replied, "Four persons, all of them from the Aniir (Helpers): Ubayy b. Ka'b, Mu'adh b. Jabal, Zayd b. Thabit, and Abu Zayd."⁹

According to Masruq, one day 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar remembered 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud, and said, "I

continue to love him. I heard the Prophet say, 'Learn the Qur'an from four: 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud, Salim, Mu'adh, and Ubayy b. Ka'b.'"¹⁰

Al-Nasa'i reports a tradition with a sound chain of transmission going back to 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, who said, "I collected the Qur'an and I used to read [all of] it every night. The Prophet came to know about it and told me: 'Read it in a month'"¹¹ We shall presently cite the tradition from Ibn Sa'd regarding the collection of the Qur'an by Umm Waraqah.

It is possible to argue that the notion of collection (*jam*) in the aforementioned traditions implies collection in the memory and not in recording (*tadwin*) the revelation in a volume. However, such an assertion rests on no evidence. Additionally, during the Prophet's time, more people than could be counted memorized the text of the Qur'an. How then could they be limited to four or six persons, as these traditions do? Anyone who has examined the history of the Companions and the Prophet would know with certainty that the Qur'an existed in the form of a complete collection during the Prophet's time, and that the number of people engaged in collecting it was fairly sizable. However, as for the tradition related by al-Bukhari on the authority of Anas, which says that the Prophet died and no one had collected the Qur'an except four—Abu Darda', Mu'adh b. Jabal, Zayd b. Thabit, and Abu Zayd—it has to be rejected and discarded because it contradicts all the preceding traditions, including those reported by al-Bukhari himself. Moreover, this tradition is hard to believe, for how could Anas, the narrator of the report, have information about every individual Muslim at the time of the Prophet's death—they were large in number and spread out in the region—to enable him to limit the persons who collected the Qur'an to four? This assertion is nothing more than a conjecture about the unknown and an opinion without knowledge. To recapitulate, in view of the abovementioned traditions regarding the Qur'an's existence in the collected form during the Prophet's time, how can one believe that Abu Bakr was the first to collect it after assuming the caliphate? If we do accept the validity of such a claim, then the question arises as to why he ordered Zayd and 'Umar to collect it from palm branches, flat stones, and the memories of men? Why did he not take it from 'Abd Allah, Mu'adh, and Ubayy, who were alive at the time of the collection, and who, along with Salim, were, according to the Prophet's instructions, the persons from whom the Qur'an should be acquired? It is true that Salim had been killed in the battle of Yamama, and thus the Qur'an could not be acquired from him. Nevertheless, Zayd, as it appears from this tradition, himself was one of the compilers of the Qur'an. As such, there was no need to look for, or ask, someone else, especially as he was a wise and trusted man, as Abu Bakr himself said. Besides all these points, the tradition about the "two things of high estimation" (*thaqalayn*) indicates that the Qur'an existed as a complete collection during the Prophet's time, as we shall explain further below.

The Contrariety of the Collection Traditions to the Book of God

These traditions are evidently contrary to the Qur'an. For many verses of the Noble Book demonstrate that the suras of the Qur'an were distinct in form and content from each other, and were widely spread among the people, including the idolaters of Mekka and the people of the Book. Significantly, the

Prophet had challenged the unbelievers and idolaters to produce the like of the Qur'an, and the like of ten suras from it, and even one sura. This means that the suras of the Qur'an were available to them.

Numerous verses apply the word *al-kitab* (the Book) to the Qur'an. Moreover, in the famous tradition of *al-thaqalayn*, the Prophet says, "I leave among you two things of high estimation: the Book of God and my Family." In this tradition there is evidence that the Qur'an had been collected and written, because it is not correct to call it *al-kitab* when it is merely in the [people's] memories. Indeed, it is even inappropriate to apply the word *al-kitab* to the fragments written on palm branches, flat stones, and shoulder blades, except when such an application is figurative and from particular attention. But a word may not be used metaphorically without something to indicate that. The word *al-kitab* obviously signifies a single and united entity. It is not applied to a text which is scattered and not collected, let alone [one which is] still unwritten and preserved only in the memories.

The Contrariety of the Collection Traditions to Rational Judgment

These traditions are also contrary to rational judgment. Undoubtedly, the greatness of the Qur'an in itself, the measures taken by the Prophet to memorize it and recite it, the importance attached by Muslims to the measures taken by the Prophet, and the divine reward they will get for that—all these factors go against the collection of the Qur'an in the way it is described in these traditions. There are numerous aspects to the Qur'an, any one of which would be sufficient cause for the Qur'an to be a subject of attention for Muslims, and a reason for its popularity, even among children and women, let alone men. These aspects are [the following]:

1. The eloquence of the Qur'an: The Arabs used to attach much importance to the memorization of eloquent speeches, and for this reason they used to memorize the pre-Islamic poetry and speeches. Thus, how would they fail to memorize the Qur'an, which challenged all the eloquent speakers with its eloquence, and silenced all the articulate speakers with its expressive language. Indeed, all the Arabs had turned toward it, regardless of whether they were believers [in it] or unbelievers. The believer memorized it because of his faith, and the unbeliever did so because he aspired to counter it and invalidate its evidential character.
2. The Prophet's expression of his desire to memorize it and to protect it: He had special power and authority in the community, and customarily, when the leader expresses his desire to protect a book or to read it, that book would become widespread among the subjects who wish to gain his pleasure for the sake of religious or worldly gain.
3. Memorization of the Qur'an was a cause for raising the stature of a person among the people and gaining their respect. Those who are well informed about history know that the readers and the memorizers of the Qur'an enjoyed enormous prominence and great prestige among the people. This was

one of the most powerful reasons for the people to have an interest in memorizing the Qur'an, either in its entirety, or any portion of it possible.

4. Requital and reward [in the hereafter] accrued to the reader and memorizer of the Qur'an for reciting and preserving it.

These are the most important factors that induced the people to memorize and to safeguard the Qur'an. The Muslims attached great importance to the Qur'an and safeguarded it more than their own selves, or their wealth and their children. It has been related that a number of women collected the entire Qur'an. Ibn Sa'd, in his *al-Tabaqat* relates the following narrative:

Al-Faql b. Dakin informed us, al-Walid b. 'Abd Allah b. Jami' related to us, saying: "My grandmother told me about Umm Waraqa bint 'Abd Allah b. al-Harith, whom the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny) used to visit and call a martyr (*shahada*), and she used to collect the Qur'an. When the Messenger of God was about to leave for the battle of Badr, she said to him, 'Do you allow me to come out with you to nurse your wounded and take care of your sick? Maybe God would lead me to martyrdom (*shahada*).'" The Prophet replied, 'Indeed, God has planned martyrdom for you through your collection of the Qur'an."[12](#)

If this was the case with women in the matter of the collection of the Qur'an, what would be the case with the men? A large number of those who memorized the Qur'an during the Prophet's time are cited in the sources. Thus, al-Qurtubi writes: "Seventy Qur'an reciters were killed during the battle of Yamama, and a similar number had been killed during the Prophet's time at Bi'r Ma'una."[13](#)

In tradition 10, cited above, it was mentioned that the reciters who were killed in the battle of Yamama numbered four hundred. Moreover, the importance that was attached by the Prophet to the Qur'an—in fact, he had many scribes, particularly since the Qur'an was revealed gradually in twenty-three years—impels us to conclude with certainty that the Prophet had ordered the writing of the Qur'an during his lifetime. To this effect, Zayd b. Thabit reported, "We used to record the Qur'an from parchments in the presence of the Messenger of God." And, about this tradition, al-Hakim says: "According to the rules set by the two shaykhs [al-Bukhari and Muslim], this tradition is sound, although they have not mentioned it. Hence, this tradition provides clear evidence that the Qur'an was collected during the Prophet's time."[14](#)

As for memorization of some suras or part of a sura, this was very common. In fact, there was rarely a Muslim man or woman who did not do that. 'Ubada b. al Samit reports:

The Messenger of God used to be busy. Thus, when any person immigrated and came to the Messenger, he would send him to one of us to teach him the Qur'an."[15](#)

Kulayb related:

I was with 'Ali (peace be upon him). He heard the voices of those who were reciting the Qur'an in the

mosque. At that he said, "Blessed be those. . ." [16](#)

In another tradition, 'Ubada b. al-Samit says:

When a person used to migrate [to Medina], the Messenger of God used to turn him over to one of us to teach him the Qur'an. Thus, the mosque of the Messenger of God used to reverberate with the sounds of recitation of the Qur'an, until the Messenger of God ordered them to lower their voices so as not to make errors." [17](#)

It can be maintained with certainty that memorization of the Qur'an, however partially, was prevalent among Muslim men and women, to the extent that a Muslim woman used to make her bridal gift [i.e., she accepted her husband's teaching her as being the bridal gift to which she was entitled] teaching her a sura or more from the Qur'an. [18](#) In the light of all this interest, how is it possible to say that the collection of the Qur'an was delayed until the caliphate of Abu Bakr, and that Abu Bakr, in collecting the Qur'an, needed to have, [for every fragment], two witnesses who would testify that they had heard it from the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny)?

The Contrariety of the Collection Traditions to the Consensus (Ijma') of the Community

These traditions contradict the consensus of all Muslims that the Qur'an cannot be established except through an uninterrupted and successive narration from the Prophet himself. The traditions say that the verses of the Qur'an, at the time of their being collected, could be established only through the testimony of two witnesses, or through the testimony of one witness if his testimony equaled that of two; hence, it follows that the Qur'an could also be established through a single narration. Is it possible for a Muslim to abide that? It is enigmatic how one can accept as sound the traditions which indicate that the Qur'an was established through testimonies, and, simultaneously, can hold the view that the Qur'an cannot be established except through uninterrupted transmission from the Prophet. Is not the absolute necessity that the Qur'an be uninterruptedly transmitted reason enough to regard all these traditions as absolutely false? It is strange that some scholars, like Ibn Hajar, have identified the two witnesses in the traditions as meaning the existence of a written text and an [oral tradition dating back to the Prophet]. [19](#) One may conjecture that he was compelled to offer this explanation by the generally held condition about the necessity of uninterrupted transmission of the Qur'an. However, this explanation is obviously distorted on the following grounds.

First, it contradicts the explicit statement of all traditions, cited above, that indicate that the Qur'an was collected.

Second, according to this explanation, it becomes necessary to maintain that those who collected the Qur'an did not write that which was proven to be part of the Qur'an through successive transmission; in other words, they dropped from the Qur'an that which was already proven through uninterrupted

transmission.

Third, there was no need to write down and memorize a verse which was already established through uninterrupted transmission. At the same time, writing and memorizing could not establish any verse as being part of the Qur'an if its transmission was not uninterrupted. At any rate, there is no point in making them a precondition in the collection of the Qur'an.

To summarize, these traditions must be discarded because they make the point that the Qur'an can be established without its having been uninterruptedly transmitted. This view has been discredited through the consensus of all Muslims.

Collection Traditions and the Alteration (Tahrif) of the Qur'an through Addition

If these traditions were authentic, and if it were possible to use them as evidence that alteration through omission (*naqs*) occurred in the Qur'an, it would follow that whoever made this deduction would take them as evidence of alteration through addition (*ziyada*). The reason is that the method presumably employed in collecting the Qur'an entails this corollary. It is not possible for anyone to deny this on the grounds that the extent of inimitability of Qur'anic eloquence precludes the possibility of adding to its text, and for that reason no analogy can be drawn between alteration through addition and alteration through omission. The reason that such an argument cannot be made is the fact that while the Qur'an's inimitability can preclude the possibility of matching a whole sura, it cannot prevent the addition to its text of a word or two or even a full verse, especially if it were a short one. Had such a possibility not existed, there would have been no need for the testimony of two witnesses, as related in the collection traditions, for a verse brought by a single person could have proved itself, by its eloquence, to be part of the Qur'an. Therefore, whoever maintains that *tahrif* occurred cannot avoid the corollary that additions have occurred as well, and this is absolutely against the consensus of the Muslims.

To conclude, the attribution of the collection of the Qur'an to the caliphs is an imagined view, contrary to the Book of God, the Sunna of the Prophet, and reason. It is not possible, for those who believe that *tahrif* occurred, to use this belief in their arguments and assertions. Even if we were to admit that Abu Bakr was the one who collected the Qur'an during his caliphate, then we should have no doubt that the method of collection described in these traditions is fallacious, and that the collection of the Qur'an was based on its uninterrupted transmission among Muslims. All that happened, in other words, is that the collector recorded in a codex what was preserved in the memories by means of successive transmission from the Prophet. There is, however, no doubt that 'Othman collected the Qur'an during his time, not in the sense that he collected the verses and the suras in one volume, but in the sense that he united the Muslims on the reading of one authoritative recension, destroyed all the other texts that disagreed with it, wrote to the other regions of the empire to [have them] destroy all the copies in their possession, and forbade people to dispute the manner of reading the Qur'an. These facts have been accepted explicitly

by a large number of Sunni scholars.

Al-Harith al-Muhasibi writes:

The prevalent view among people is that the one who collected the Qur'an was 'Othman, but they are wrong. 'Uthman compelled people to read [the Qur'an] in a uniform way on the basis of a selection which he agreed upon with the *Muhajirun* (Emigrants) and *Ansar* (Helpers) who were present at the time. He did this because he feared the outbreak of sedition as a result of the dispute between the people of Iraq and Syria regarding the "styles" (*harfs*) of the readings. Before this, several versions of the text existed, based on the seven *harfs* in which the Qur'an was revealed²⁰

As for the one reading on which 'Othman united the Muslims this reading was the one in circulation among Muslims, and which reached them through uninterrupted transmission from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny). Moreover, he banned the other readings, which were founded on the traditions that spoke about the revelation of the Qur'an in seven *hiatf s*. We demonstrated the falsity of these traditions earlier in this study. This action by 'Uthman was not criticized by anyone among the Muslims because the dispute over the readings was causing a conflict, sedition, and loss of unity among Muslims, to the extent that they were accusing each other of disbelief. As noted in some of the traditions, the Prophet had prohibited disputes in the matter of the Qur'an. The thing which 'Uthman was criticized for was his destruction of the rest of the codices and his ordering other regions of the empire to do the same with those texts that were in their keeping. Indeed, a group of Muslims protested against 'Uthman for doing that and called him "the destroyer of the [Qur'anic] texts."

Summary

It has been adequately demonstrated that the tradition about *tahrif* (corruption of the text in any form) is nothing more than a delusion and an imagination, maintained by those with weak reasoning, or those who fail to take into consideration all the pertinent details needed to derive a sound opinion, or those who are compelled to hold such an opinion. Any rational person can detect the weakness of the argument of those upholding such a distorted view of the state of affairs in the early history of Islam.

1. Bukhari, Sahih, vol. 6, pp. 477–78

2. Ibid., pp. 478–80. These two traditions, and the nineteen that follow, are quoted in Ibn 'Abd al-Muttaqi, *Muntakhab Kanz al- 'Ummal* in the margin of Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, pp. 43–52.

3. Suyuti, *al-Itqan*, sec. 18, vol. I , pp. 167–68

4. Qurtubi, *Tafsir*, vol. I, p. 56

5. The *mathani* suras (as the term occurs here) are those consisting of less than a hundred verses, but more verses than those in the short suras in the last portion of the Qur'an, known as *al-mufassal*. (Opinions diverge widely as to where this portion of the Qur'an starts, some putting it as early as sura 50.)—Trans.

6. The *mi'in* suras are those with more than a hundred verses.—Trans

7. Ibn 'Abd al-Muttaqi, *Muntakhab Kanz al- 'Ummal*, vol. 2, p. 48

8. Ibid, p. 52.

9. Bukhari, Sahih, vol. 6, p. 487

10. Ibid
11. Suyuti, al-Itqan, sec. 20, vol. I , p. 202
12. Ibid., 20, pp. 203–4
13. Ibid., p. 200. Al-Qurtubi, in Tafsir, vol. I , p. 50, says: "And among them [the reciters], on that day [yawm (a battle of) al-Yamama] seven hundred were killed, as reported."
14. Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn fi al-Hadith wa fi Dhaylihi Talkhis al-Mustadrak , 4 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat wa Marba'at al Nasr al-Hadithah, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 611
15. Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, vol. 5, p. 324
16. Ibn 'Abd al-Muttaqi, Kanz al- 'Ummal, vol. 2, p. 185
17. Zurqani, Manahil al- 'Irfan, p. 324
18. This tradition has been related by al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, and al-Nasai. See Mansur 'Ali Naif, Kitab al-Taj al-Jami li-al-Usul fi Ahadith al-Rasul (Cairo: Matba'at 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, n.d.) vol. 2, p. 332
19. Suyuti, al-Itqan, sec. 18, vol. 1, p. 167
20. Ibid., p. 171

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