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Abrogation of Recitation a Fact or a Myth

Most of the Sunni *Ulama*' have mentioned that the recitation of some parts of the Qur'an was abrogated, confirming at the same time, through the reports, that those abrogated parts were in the Qur'an during the days of the Prophet ('s). We will quote some of those reports here to prove that such a belief makes it necessary to also believe that an interpolation took place.

Tradition n. 1

(a) Ibn Abbas reports that Umar said while on the pulpit:

"God sent Muhammad ('s) with Truth, and sent down unto him the Book. And among that which was revealed was an ayah about rajm which we read, understood and heeded. And based on that, the Prophet ('s) stoned, and after him, we stoned. I fear that with the lapse of time, people may say: 'we do not find the ayah of rajm in the book of God', and thus go astray by abandoning that which God has ordained. The ordinance of stoning was indeed prescribed for the adulterers in the book of God And then, among verses we read, there was a verse which said1

or it was

And Suyuti has mentioned: Ibn Ashtah has reported from Layth b. Sa'ad, who said:

"The first person to collect the Qur'an was Abu Bakr and Zaid wrote it down ... And Umar came up with the ayah of rajm, but he did not record it because Umar was the sole reporter".2 This verse of *rajm* which Umar claimed to have been in the Qur'an, and was rejected, has been reported in several forms; among them are:

(i)

and (ii)

and (iii)

Whatever be the case, there is nothing in the Qur'an today which indicates the law of stoning the adulterers. And if the reports are to be considered true, then it follows that an *ayah* has definitely disappeared from the Qur'an.

Tradition n. 2

(b) Tabrani has reported with reliable chain of narration from Umar b. al_Khattab:

"The Qur'an had one million and twenty seven thousand letters".3

While the existing Qur'an does not have even one third of the number. So, one is led to believe that more than two_third of the Qur'an has been lost.

Tradition n. 3

(c) Ibn Abbas reports from Umar:

"God sent Muhammad ('s) with Truth and sent down unto him the Book. And among things revealed was an ayah of rajm. So the Prophet ('s) stoned and after him we stoned too". Then Umar added: "We used to recite4

ان كفرا بكم ان ترغبوا عن آبائكم

Tradition n. 4

(d) Nafe' reports that Ibn Umar said:

"One of you might claim that he has taken the complete Qur'an, but what does he know of the Complete Qur'an? Much from the Qur'an has disappeared, so he should say: I have taken what has been traced 5.

Tradition n. 5

(e) Urwah b. Zubair reports from Aisha:

"The Surah of al_Ahzab as read during the times of the Prophet ('s) comprised of two hundred verses. When Uthman prepared the codex, we did not get except what it has remained to be 6.

Tradition n. 6

(f) Hamidah binti Anas says:

It was read before my father who was 80, from the codex of Aisha:

ان لله وملئكته يصلون على النبي يا ايها الذين آمنوا صلو عليه وسلموا تسليما وعلى الذين يصلون الصفوف الاولى

She says: `This was before Uthman changed the texts'.

Tradition n. 7

(g) Abu Harb b. Abil Aswad reports from his father:

"Abu Musa Al_Asha'ri sent for the Qura' (the reciters of Basrah), and three hundred men called upon him, who had all read the Qur'an. Then he said: 'You are the best of the people of Basrah, and their reciters. Read the Qur'an constantly, otherwise. before too long, your heart may harden the way the hearts of your predecessors had hardened. We used to read a Surah which we compared, in length and severity, with the Surah of Bara'ah, but I have now forgotten it, except a verse which says:

لو كان لابن آدم واديان من مال لا بتغى واديا ثالثا ولا يملأ جوف ابن آدم الا التراب

And we used to read a Surah which we compared with one of the musabbihat (Surahs which begin with sabbaha or yusabbihu) but I have forgotten it except a verse I remember7:

Tradition n. 8

(h) Zarr says: Ubayy b. Ka'b told me, O Zarr: "How much of Surah of al Ahzab do you read?" I said: "Seventy three verses". He said: "though it was equal to the Surah of al Baqarah, or it was longer than that". 8

Tradition n. 9

(i) Ibn Abi Dawud and Ibn Ambari report from Ibn Shihabi: "We have been informed that much more of the Qur'an had been revealed _ but those who knew it were killed at Yamamah. They had preserved it, and it was never known or written after them..."9

Tradition n. 10

(j) Umrah reports from Aisha: "Among that which was revealed in the Qur'an, is the following verse:

then it was abrogated to read

خمس معلومات

and they remained in the Qur'an till the Prophet ('s) died. 10

Tradition n. 11

(k) Miswar b. Makhramah reports: "Umar inquired from Abdul Rahman b. Awf if he had found the following ayah in the Qur'an:

Abdul Rahman answered that the ayah had disappeared along with the lost parts of the Qur'an. 11

Tradition n. 12

(I) Abu Sufyan al_Kala'i says that Muslimah b. Mukhallad al_Ansari told them one day: "Inform me about those two verses of the Qur'an which were never recorded". None would answer, not even Abul Kanood, Sa'ad b. Malik who was there. Then Ibn Muslimah recited 12:

ان الذين آمنوا وهاجروا و جاهدوا في سبيل الله باموالهم وانفسهم الا أبشروا انتم المفلحون والذين آووهم ونصروهم وجادلوا عنهم قوم الذين غضب الله عليهم اولئك لا تعلم نفس ما اخفي لهم من قرة اعين جزاء بما كانوا يعلمون

And it has been narrated in various ways that the copies of Ibn Abbas and Ubayy b. Ka'ab contained two extra *Surahs*: Al_Khala' and Al_Hafd. It reads13:

اللهم انا نستعينك ونستغفرك ونثني عليك ولا نكفرك ونخلع ونترك من يفجرك اللهم اياك نعبد ولك نصلى ونسجد واللهم انا نسعى ونحفد نرجو رحمتك ونخشى عذابك ان عذابك بالكافرين ملحق

It is now evident that to say that certain parts of the Qur'an have been excluded from recitation means to confirm interpolation and omission in the Qur'an.

This can be further explained this way. The abrogation of those recitations was either recommended by the Prophet ('s) himself, or it was done by those who came to power after the Prophet's death. If one says that the Prophet ('s) himself recommended it, then it is a claim which calls for substantiation.

All *Ulama*' are agreed upon the principle that the Qur'an cannot be superseded or abrogated by an isolate report _ i.e. a tradition which has been reported singly. The jurists have made this abundantly clear in their works on the principles of jurisprudence. In fact, Shafi'i and many other scholars go further to say that the Book of God, (i.e. the Qur'an) cannot be superseded or abrogated by even those traditions which have reached continuity and acquired wide spread currency. This has been confirmed by Ahmed b. Hanbal in one of the two traditions reported by him. Even those who proposed that a continuous and widespread *Sunnah* may potentially supersede the Qur'an, have confirmed that such a situation has in reality never occurred. In view of the foregoing, it is incorrect to ascribe the abrogation to the Prophet ('s). Even those reports which mention the omissions clearly say that it occurred after the Prophet ('s).

But if it is proposed that the abrogation was perpetrated by those who assumed leadership after the Prophet ('s), then that indeed is tampering with the Qur'an. It can safely be asserted that the occurence of *Tahrif* in the Qur'an is supported by the majority of Sunni *Ulama*', because they believe that certain *ayah*s of the Qur'an were abrogated, in as far as their recitation was concerned, irrespective of whether the law contained in that *ayah* remained in force or not. Interestingly enough, we find certain scholars

among them disputing whether a person in the state of *janabah* can recite those verses whose reading have been reportedly abrogated, or whether a person without *wudhu* would be permitted to touch the script of such a verse. Some of them have adopted a view that this would not be permissible. Yes, among the Mutazilites, there is a group which believes that an abrogation of recitation never occurred 14.

Is it not surprising to find Sunni *Ulama*' disputing the fact that some of them are supporters of *Tahrif*. Alusi has censured Al_Tabrasi of having falsely accused *Hashawiyyah*. He wrote: "Not a single scholar among the Sunnis has ever supported that view". Then he proceeds to presume that al_Tabrasi has been insisting on the absence of *Tahrif* to alleviate the harm done by some Shia scholars who believed to the contrary. All this makes a pathetic reading especially when it is well known that the Shi'a scholars do not subscribe to *Tahrif* in the Qur'an, while Al_Tabrasi himself has extensively quoted Sayyid Murtadha, enumerating all his arguments in support of the Qur'an's purity.

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1. Sahih, Bukhari v8, p.26.; Sahih, Muslim v5, p.116, without the last sentence "And then, among verses .... "
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- 2. Al_Itqan, v1, p. 101
- 3. Al_Itqan, v1, p. 121
- 4. Musnad, Ahmed Hanbal, v1, p.48
- 5. Al_Itqan, V. 2, p. 40-41
- 6. Al_Itqan, V. 2, p. 40-41
- 7. Sahih, Muslim v3, p. 100
- 8. Muntakhab Kanzul Ummal, on the margin of Musnad, Ahmad Hanbal v2, p.43
- 9. Muntakhab Kanzul Ummal, on the margin of Musnad, Ahmad Hanbal v2, p.50
- 10. Muslim, Sahih, v4, p. 168
- 11. al Itqan, v2, p.42
- 12. al Itqan, v2, p.42
- 13. al-Itqan, v1, p. 122, 213
- 14. Al_Ahkam fi Usul il Ahkam, Amedi v3 p.217

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