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Second Reason: Justifications Of `Umar Ibn Al-Khattab

`Umar’s justifications can be concluded from the following texts:

(1) It has been narrated on the authority of `Urwah ibn al-Zubayr that when `Umar had intended to record the Holy Sunnah, he consulted the companions of the Holy Prophet, and they advised him to record. For about a month, `Umar set to seek Almighty Allah’s proper guidance in this regard. One morning, after Allah had decided for him, `Umar said,

‘I had intended to record the Holy Sunnah, but I remembered some past nations who applied themselves completely to the items they had written and, as a result, neglected the Book of Almighty Allah. By Allah I swear! I will never allow anything to interfere with the Book of Allah.’^{[1](#)}

Yahya ibn Ju`dah narrated that after `Umar ibn al-Khattab had intended to record the Holy Sunnah, he changed his mind and distributed a missive in the countries ordering people to erase any item of the Holy Sunnah that they might have recorded.^{[2](#)}

(2) It has been narrated on the authority of al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu-Bakr that `Umar, after he had received news confirming that people started to hold (or write) books, denied and disliked the matter saying,

‘O people: I have been informed that you have started to hold books. Allah’s most beloved books must be the fairest and the straightest. Now, I order you all to bring me all the books that you hold so that I will decide about them.’

Thinking that `Umar wanted to correct and submit the books to a certain criterion, all people brought their books to him. Instead, he set them all to fire and said,

‘This is a false wish just like that of the Christians and the Jews.’^{[3](#)}

According to Ibn Sa'd, in his *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, `Umar said, 'This is a Mishna⁴ just like that of the Christians and the Jews.'⁵

From the previous text, we understand that the justifications that `Umar ibn al-Khattab presented for the prohibition of recording the Holy Sunnah can be summed up in the following points:

1. The anticipation that the Holy Qur'an would be abandoned and replaced by other things.
2. The apprehension that other things would be mixed with the texts of the Holy Qur'an.

The earlier justification can be refuted by the following points:

First: It is clear that this justification was based upon previous convictions and special circumstances, because he said, 'as I remembered some past nations...' and, 'This is a false wish just like that of the Christians and the Jews.'

Details will be given about the backgrounds of this justification during the discussion of the last reason.

Furthermore, `Umar should not have had such a conception about the grand Sahabah whom must not be subjected to such convictions and cases.

Second: The justification is ambiguous to a great extent; therefore, we doubt its being the direct reason beyond Umar's decision of prohibition. No Muslim would ever deny the fact that to abandon and ignore the Holy Qur'an so as to attend to something else is unlawful and is forbidden by the Shari'ah, but the claim that to attend to something other than the Holy Qur'an results in the abandonment of it is obvious confusion and inaccurate wording.

Undoubtedly, what is actually resulting in the abandonment of the Holy Qur'an is only what contradicts it, such as the adoption of the other Scriptures along with the doctrines written therein; but to regard the attention to the interpreter of the Holy Qur'an; namely the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet about whom Almighty Allah says,

'And We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them, 16:44'

to regard such attention as the main cause beyond the negligence of the Holy Qur'an is definitely delusion and confusion between the right and the wrong. Logically, to attend to the Hadith is to attend to the Holy Qur'an, since the Hadith interprets and reveals the true meanings of the Holy Qur'an.

Third: Umar's justification implies that the Sahabah are accused of their incapacity to make distinction between the Words of Almighty Allah that they memorized and reported and the words of the Holy Prophet that stood for the interpretation and explanation of the Holy Qur'an. Everybody knows that the Holy Qur'an enjoys such an incomparable style of typical eloquence, unique phraseology, and spiritual

attraction that it cannot be confused with the Hadith.

The Qur'anic verses enjoy such a special motif and coherence that they cannot be confused with any other speech. If `Umar anticipated the occurrence of confusion between the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, like that which occurred to some of the Sahabah who confused a few words of a verse with the Holy Prophet's words, he could deal with the matter by ordering the narrators to be sure of a text, before reporting it, by asking the other experts who were many in that period. When he compiled the scattered papers of the Holy Qur'an, Abu-Bakr did the same thing.[6](#)

However, such a simple question does not require general prohibition of the reporting and recordation of the Hadith. Having taken notice of this point, Abu-Bakr did not claim such confusion as the justification for the prohibition after he had solved this problem and dispensed with the method that was later on taken by `Umar in his dealing with the issue.

Umar's justification might have found a ground if the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah had been written in the same papers. However, none of the Muslims had ever mixed the texts of the Holy Qur'an with those of the Holy Sunnah in the same paper. Despite the passage of long ages, the earliest books of Tafsir (Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an) reached at our hands without having any single confusion between the texts of the Holy Qur'an and those of the Holy Sunnah.

The latter justification adopted by `Umar ibn al-Khattab can be refuted by the following points:

First: As far as style and eloquence are concerned, indisputable characteristics have distinguished between the Qur'anic and the narrative texts. The Qur'anic texts have been revealed in the form of inimitability, challenging all the Arab polytheists, who were masters of eloquence, to produce the like of it. More than once and in different eloquent and reproachful styles, the Holy Qur'an challenged the unbelievers to bring its like. Listen to the following Qur'anic texts,

“Say: Then bring some (other) book from Allah which is a better guide than both of them, (that) I may follow it, if you are truthful.” (Holy Qur'an: 28:49)

“Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of others.” (Holy Qur'an: 17:88)

“Or, do they say: He has forged it. Say: Then bring ten forged chapters like it and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.” (Holy Qur'an: 11:13)

“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 witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful. But if you do (it) not and never shall you do (it), then be on your guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers.” (Holy Qur'an: 2:23-4)

The articulacy, fluency, and expressiveness of the Holy Qur'an astonished the polytheists shockingly that

they found nothing to say about it except being ‘transient magic’. On the other hand, the Hadith has not been challenging the eloquence of the polytheists.

Second: The main topic of the Holy Prophet’s words was to explain the religious laws, aside from the eloquence of his language. Moreover, some of the narrations that are reported from the Holy Prophet conveyed only the meaning, not the very words spoken by him. In the meantime, Muslims have recognized, favored, and memorized the Holy Qur’an since it has occupied a special position in each and every Muslim’s heart. For instance, they should never touch its letters unless they are pure, for their compliance with Almighty Allah’s saying,

[“None shall touch it save the purified ones”](#). (Holy Qur’an: 56:79) Finally, they have been always observing and reciting the Holy verses day and night.

Inasmuch as Muslims used to care for the Holy Qur’an to such a great extent, it is illogical to anticipate its confusion with the Holy Sunnah! Likewise, the Sahabah were too aware to lack distinction between what is divinely revealed and what is said for mere explanation.

Nevertheless, everybody admits to the fact that the Holy Prophet’s articulation was so expressive that it was easily distinguished from ordinary people’s diction, since he was the most eloquent of the Arabs. It is thus claimed that not all people were talented enough to tell apart between the Holy Qur’an and the Holy Prophet’s words.

However, such a claim is too far from the truth; in addition to the aforementioned differences between the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah, the latter embodies words, deeds, and confirmations half of which have been ordinary statements that never promote to the level of the Holy Qur’an. Moreover, even if the previous claim is accepted, yet supposedly, it should apply only to some of the verbal part of the Holy Sunnah. In addition, we have previously cited that some of the narrations that were reported from the Holy Prophet conveyed only the meaning, not the very words spoken by him.

Third: Supposing the aforementioned claim is accurate, it does not necessitate the desertion of the Holy Sunnah in order to observe the maintenance of the Holy Qur’an, because the Hadith is the explanatory body of the Holy Qur’an and, as a result, to report, record, and study it achieves a big service for Muslims to understand the Holy Qur’an without making any contradiction with it.

What must be verified and checked is the reporting from the Holy Prophet. In this regard, the Holy Prophet said,

“Anyone who attributes false reports to me must certainly find himself a place in Hellfire.”

A deep look at this Prophetic statement shows that the Holy Sunnah, unlike the Holy Qur’an, can be exposed to forgery.

Let us now wonder how `Umar ibn al-Khattab had been so ignorant that he could not appreciate such

clear-cut facts and, consequently, claimed matters revealing the absence of differences between the texts of the Holy Qur'an and those of the Holy Sunnah in aspects of eloquence and perspicuity!

In addition, let us wonder how it is possible that none paid attention to the clear-cut question that such confusion leads to disbelief and that one who claims confusion between the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Sunnah must be regarded as belying Almighty Allah's saying—in the Holy Qur'an,

“And indeed it is a Book of exalted power. No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it: It is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise.” (Holy Qur'an: 41:41-42)

“We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from distortion).” (Holy Qur'an: 15:9)

It is not unlikely that `Umar ibn al-Khattab, in order to find foundations for his own opinions, had to resort to various justifications, such as the anticipation of confusion between the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, or that he recalled the manners of peoples of bygone times who dedicated all their efforts to studying the books of their doctors of laws and rabbis and left the Book of their Lord, or that he intended to be sure of the authenticity of the reports ascribed to the Holy Prophet as being within his Sunnah... etc.

Due to such justifications, `Umar ibn al-Khattab reduced the reporting of the Holy Prophet's traditions and tightened the grip around the throat of anyone who had kept a report from the Holy Prophet.

In any case, as `Umar ibn al-Khattab prohibited the reporting and recording of the Hadith, he violated the unanimous consensus of the Muslims on the acceptability of the single-reporter narration (*khbar al-wahid*). He also violated the majority of the Sunnite Muslims who believe in the ultimate decency of all the Sahabah.

Moreover, he violated the rational principle of respecting the report of the trustworthy. Such being the case, `Umar ibn al-Khattab, the caliph, caused a large number of the Holy Prophet's traditions to be lost and aroused suspicions around the principles of the Islamic legislation since the majority of the Sahabah heard, from the Holy Prophet, what many others had not heard; while the caliph's determination decided the impermissibility of such reports unless a witness and proofs on their having been said by the Holy Prophet would be presented.

Of course, such proofs could not be presented by most of the Sahabah except in a few cases such as that of Abu-Musa al-Ash'ariy, which happened by chance.

From the above, we reach the conclusion that the justifications of `Umar ibn al-Khattab for prohibiting the reporting and recordation of the Hadith have not been sufficiently convincing. We therefore have to search for other justifications, hoping that we may find a persuasive answer!

¹. Mu`ammar ibn Rashid: al-Jami` 11:257; `Abd al-Razzaq: al-Musannaf 11:258 H. 484; al-Madkhal Ila'l-Sunan al-Kubra 1:407; al-Khatib al-Baghdadiy: Taqyid al-'Ilm 49 and `Abd al-Ghaniy Abd al-Khaliq: Hijjiyyat al-Sunnah 395 as quoted

from al-Bayhaqi and Ibn `Abd al-Barr.

[2.](#) Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi: Kanz al-`Ummal 10:292 H. 29476; Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi: Taqyid al-`Ilm 35 and Abd al-Ghaniy Abd al-Khalq: Hijjiyyat al-Sunnah 395.

[3.](#) `Abd al-Ghaniy `Abd al-Khalq: Hijjiyyat al-Sunnah 395.

[4.](#) Mishna is the collection of precepts and customs which form the basis of the Talmud and is held to embody the contents of Jewish oral law. Hence, Umar likened the Holy Sunnah that had been recorded by the major Sahabah who received it directly from the mouth of the Holy Prophet to the collections of the Jewish oral laws that were neither revealed to nor said by Prophet Moses. Of course, such likening is aimed at belying and despising the Holy Sunnah that included innumerable Hadiths respecting the Ahl al-Bayt's merits and true positions as well as the divine commissions that they must succeed the Holy Prophet and must be unconditionally obeyed by all Muslims. (See Abu-Na'im: Dala'il al-Nubuwwah 638, Sayyid Ja'far Murtada al-`Imiliy: al-Sahih min Sirat al-Nabi al-A'dham 1:59, The Simplified Arabic Encyclopedia: 543 (Talmud), Muhammad Rida al-Jalaliy: Tadwin al-Sunnah al-Sharifah 340 and The Encyclopedia of al-Mawrid 4:199)

[5.](#) Ibn Sa'd: al-Tabaqat al-Kubra 1:140.

[6.](#) Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti: al-Durr al-Manthur 4:332; Al-Mubarakfuriy: Tuhfat al-Ahwadhiy fi Sharh Jami' al-Tirmidhiy 8:408; al-Itqan fi `Ulum al-Qur'an 1:162-163.

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