

History of the Quran

The **history of the Quran** refers to the oral revelation of the Quran to Islamic prophet Muhammad and its subsequent written compilation into a manuscript. It spans several decades and forms an important part of early Islamic history.

According to Muslim belief and Islamic scholarly accounts, the revelation of the Quran began in 610 C.E. when the angel Gabriel (Arabic: جبريل, *Jibrīl* or جبرائيل, *Jibrā'īl*) appeared to Muhammad in the cave Hira near Mecca, reciting to him the first verses of Sura Iqra (al-`Alaq). Throughout his life, Muhammad continued to have revelations until before his death in 632.^[1] The Quran we see today was compiled into book format by Zayd ibn Thabit and other scribes under Uthman, the third caliph (reign 644 to 656). (A caliph is the political leader of a Caliphate (Islamic government).) For this reason, the Quran as it exists today is also known as the Uthmanic codex. According to Professor Francis Edward Peters, what was done to the Quran in the process seems to have been extremely conservative and the content was formed in a mechanical fashion to avoid redactional bias.^[2]

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Origin according to Islamic tradition

According to traditional Islamic beliefs, the Quran was revealed to Muhammad, starting one night during the month of Ramadan in 610 AD, when he, at the age of forty, received the first revelation from the angel Gabriel, who had given him the responsibility for inscribing these messages from God to give to mankind.^[3]

Muslim scholars believe that Muhammad was illiterate, as mentioned in the Quran itself,

"Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them....."Quran 7:157.

According to Bukhari, Muhammad's wife Aisha described that the first Quranic revelation occurred when angel Gabriel visited Muhammad and asked him to recite. Muhammad responded *ma ana bīqāre'u*, which could be translated into a number of ways: 'I do not read' or 'what am I to read/recite?' or 'I will not read/recite'. Gabriel pressed him "until all the strength went out of me; thereupon he released me and said: 'Read!'" This was repeated three times and upon the third, Gabriel released him and said, "Read in the name of the Sustainer who created humankind from a clot! Read! And your Sustainer is the most Beautiful."^{[4]:39–41} After this Muhammad continued sporadically over a period of twenty-three years to have revelations, until shortly before his death in 11/632.^{[4]:45}

Muslims believe that Gabriel brought the word of God to Muhammad verbatim, without any alteration or change. The Quran emphasizes that Muhammad was required only to receive the sacred text and that he had no authority to change it (10.15). It is also believed that God did not make himself known through the revelations; it was his will that was revealed. There is nothing in the Quran that suggests that Muhammad saw God during his revelations.^[5] For Muhammad, the revelations were real and he believed the context was objective, but he was only able to describe the experience through metaphorical terms.^[5]

When asked about the experience of revelation Muhammad reported,

"sometimes it is revealed like the ringing of a bell. This form of inspiration is the hardest of them all and then it passes off after I have grasped what is inspired. Sometimes the Angel comes in the form of a man and talks to me and I grasp whatever he says."^{[4]:43}

At times, it was also reported that the experience was painful for Muhammad. For example, he had been heard saying, "Never once did I receive a revelation without thinking that my soul had been torn away from me."^{[4]:43}

After Muhammad would receive revelations he would later recite it to his companions, who also memorized it or wrote it down. Before the Quran was commonly available in written form, speaking it from memory prevailed as the mode of teaching it to others. The practice of memorizing the whole Quran is still practiced among Muslims. Millions of people have memorized the entire Quran in its original Arabic. This fact, taken in the context of 7th-century Arabia, was not an extraordinary feat. People of that time had a penchant for recited poetry and had developed their skills in memorization to a remarkable degree. Events and competitions that featured the recitation of elaborate poetry were of great interest.^[6]

People questioned the nature and modes of Muhammad's revelations. The Meccans of Muhammad judged the Quranic revelation based on their understanding of 'inspiration'. For them, poetry was closely connected to inspiration from a higher spiritual source. For this reason when Muhammad began preaching and reciting the Quran, the Meccans accused him of being a poet (21.5) or a 'poet possessed'(37.36).^[7]

Due to the fact that the Quran was revealed in disjointed verses and chapters, a point came when it needed to be gathered into a coherent whole text. There are disagreements among both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as to when the Quran was compiled. Some believe Muhammad compiled it before he died, while others believe it was collected by either Ali ibn Abu Talib or Abu Bakr.^[8]

Muhammad

The society during the time of Muhammad was predominantly oral and for this reason he would recite the Quranic verses to his Companions and instruct them to memorize it. Due to this, people question whether the Quran was ever written and collected during the time of Muhammad. While writing was not a common skill during Muhammad's time, Mecca, being the commercial center, had a number of people who could write. Some scholars believe that up to 48 scribes including Zayd ibn Thabit and Ubay ibn Ka'b recorded verses of the Quran. This provides an explanation as to how the Quran existed in written form during the life of Muhammad, even if it was not compiled into one text.^{[4]:83}

Most Sunni and Shia scholars believe that the Quran was written down in its entirety at the time of Muhammad's death. Muhammad's cousin Ibn Abbas describes the way in which the final version of the Quran was fixed: "the prophet recited the book before Gabriel every year in the month of Ramadan, and in the month in which he died he recited it before him twice."^[9] It is believed that the term "reciting the Quran twice" means compiling all the Quranic revelations into a complete and final version. It is understood that toward the end of Muhammad's life a special act of revelation occurred in which a final and complete version of the Quran was created. The term 'recite', which is used here, is referring to the custom where a Quranic scholar recites the entire Quran from beginning to end a number of times before a senior scholar. According to this tradition the act of recital is being performed by Muhammad, with angel Gabriel playing the role of superior authority.^[10]

In one of the hadith Muhammad supposedly said, "I leave among you two things of high estimation: the Book of God and my Family."^[11] Some scholars argue that this provides evidence that the Quran had been collected and written during this time because it is not correct to call something *al-kitab* (book) when it is merely in the [people's] memories. The word *al-kitab* signifies a single and united entity and does not apply to a text which is scattered and not collected.^[12]

Another argument these scholars bring up is the importance that Muhammad attached to the Quran. They believe that since Muhammad put so much importance to the Quran he had to have ordered the writing of it during his lifetime. For example, Zayd ibn Thabit reported, "We used to record the Quran from parchments in the presence of the Messenger of God."^[13]

Some authors believe that, as long as Muhammad was alive, there was always the expectation of further revelation as well as occasional abrogations. Any formal collection of the material already revealed could not properly be considered a complete text.^[14]

Ali ibn Abu Talib

Shia scholars are unanimous that Ali ibn Abu Talib possessed a personal transcript of the Quran, which he collected six months after Muhammad's death, and that this was the first compilation of the Quran. The unique aspect about this version is that it was collected in the order it was sent,^[15] which mainstream Shi'ism hold is the only difference between the Quran we have today and Ali's.^{[4]:89–90}

A few Shia scholars argue that Ali presented his Quran to the community, but they refused to acknowledge his copy. One report states, "he had brought the complete Book [of God], comprising the interpretation and the revelation, the precise and ambiguous verses, the abrogating and the abrogated verses; nothing was missing from it, [not even] a letter *alif*, nor *lam*. But they did not accept it from him"^[16] They also believe that Ali's version of the Quran contained verses that are not seen in the Uthmanic codex we have today. They believe changes in the order of verses and suras did take place and that there were variant readings, *tabdil*, exchange of words such as *umma* to *imma*, rearrangement of words and deletion of words pertaining to the right of Ali being the first caliph.^[17]

The contemporary Shia scholar Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei provides a counter argument to this belief. He states that even if Ali's Quran incorporated additions that are not part of the existing Quran, this does not mean that these additions comprised parts of the Quran and have been dropped from it due to alteration. Rather, these additions were interpretations or explanations of what God was saying, or were in the form of revelations from God, explaining the intention of the verses in the Quran. These additions were not part of the Quran and not part of what the Messenger of God was commanded to convey to the Muslim community.^[18]

Abu Bakr

According to Sunni scholars, during the life of Muhammad parts of the Quran, though written, were scattered amongst his companions, much of it as private possession.^[19] The amount of Scribes was 43 companions. And there were many people who though were not scribes also were complete memorizers. After Muhammad's death, Abu Bakr initially exercised a policy of *laissez faire* as well. This policy was reversed after the Battle of Yamama in 633.^{[20][21]} During the battle, 700 Muslims who had memorized the Quran were killed. The death of Salim, however, was most significant, as he was one of the very few who had been entrusted by Muhammad to teach the Quran. Consequently, upon Umar's insistence, Abu Bakr ordered the collection of the hitherto scattered pieces of the Quran into one copy.^{[20][22]}

Zayd ibn Thabit, Muhammad's primary scribe, was assigned the duty of gathering all of the Quranic text. He gives an insight into what happened during the meeting between Abu Bakr, Umar, and himself:

" Abu Bakr sent for me at a time when the Yamama battles had witnessed the martyrdom of numerous Companions. I found 'Umar bin al-Khattab with him. Abu Bakr began, Umar has just come to me and said, 'In the Yamama battles death has dealt most severely with the qurra', [Reciters of the Quran] and I fear it will deal with them with equal severity in other theatres of war. As a result much of the Quran will be gone. " 'I am therefore of the opinion that you should command the Quran be collected.'" Abu Bakr continued, "I said to 'Umar, 'How can we embark on what the Prophet never did?' 'Umar replied that it was a good deed regardless, and he did not cease replying to my scruples until Allah reconciled me to the undertaking, and I became of the same mind as him. Zaid, you are young and intelligent, you used to record the revelations for Muhammad, and we know nothing to your discredit. So pursue the Quran and collect it together." By Allah, had they asked me to move a mountain it could not have been weightier than what they requested of me now". (Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Jam'i al-Qur'an, hadith no. 4986; see also Ibn Abu Dawud, al-Masahif, pp. 6-9)

His reaction to the task and its difficulties are further explained:

"...By Allah, if he (Abu Bakr) had ordered me to shift one of the mountains it would not have been harder for me than what he had ordered me concerning the collection of the Quran... So I started locating the Quranic material and collecting it from parchments, scapula, leafstalks of date palms and from the memories of men."^[Bukhari Sahih al-Bukhari, 6:60:201 (<http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/060-sbt.php#006.060.201>)]

Al-Zarakhsi comments,^[23]

What Zaid means in fact is that he sought out verses from scattered sources, to collate them against the recollections of the *huffaz*. In this way everyone participated in the collection process. No one possessing any portion of it was left out, and so no one had reason for expressing concern about the verses collected, nor could anyone complain that the text had been gathered from only a select few.^[23]

Zayd also said:

"So I started looking for the Holy quran and collected it from (what was written on) palm-leaf stalks, thin white stones, and also from men who knew it by heart, until I found the last verse of Surat at-Tauba (repentance) with Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 6, p. 478).^[24]

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani draws special attention to Zayd's statement, "I found two verses of Sura al-Bara'a with Abu Khuzaima al-Ansari," as demonstrating that Zayd's own writings and memorisation were not deemed sufficient. Everything required verification.^[23] Ibn Hajar further comments:

Abu Bakr had not authorised him to record except what was already available [on parchment]. That is why Zaid refrained from including the final ayah of Sura Bara'a until he came upon it in written form, even though he and his fellow Companions could recall it perfectly well from memory.^[23]

The task required Zayd ibn Thabit to collect written copies of the Quran, with each verse having been validated with the oral testimony of at least two companions. The Quran was collected under the auspices of committee of four senior ranking Companions headed by Zayd ibn Thabit.^[25] This compilation was kept by the Caliph Abu Bakr, after his death by his successor, Caliph Umar, who on his deathbed gave them to Hafsa bint Umar, his daughter and one of Muhammad's widows.^[21]

It should be noted that Sunnis dismiss the Shia version of the Quranic compilation as nothing more than Twelver Shia fabrications. They point to the fact that Zaydi Shias who form the oldest living Shia sect believe in the above events described in Sahih Bukhari.^[26]

The famous ten People who form the chains of narration regarding the Quran are as follows.

- Umar ibn al Khattab^[27]
- Uthman bin Affan^[28]
- Ali ibn abi Talib^[29]
- Abu Musa al Ash'ari^[30]
- Ubay Ibn Ka'b^[31]
- Abdullah ibn Masood^[32]
- Zayd Ibn Thabit^[33]
- Abu Hurairah^[34]
- Abdullah Ibn Abbas^[35]
- Abu al-Darda^[36]

Amongst those ten the two most important people were Zayd ibn Thabit the personal scribe of Muhammad and Ubay ibn Ka'b who was the foremost authority on the Quran after Zaid.^{[37][38]}

Uthman ibn Affan and the canonization

The Quranic canon is the form of the Quran as recited and written in which it is religiously binding for the Muslim community. This canonical corpus is closed and fixed in the sense that nothing in the Quran can be changed or modified. The process of canonization ended under the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan (r. 23/644–35/655), which was about twenty years after the death of Muhammad.^[39]

By the time of Uthman's caliphate, there was a perceived need for clarification of Quran reading. The Caliphate had grown considerably, expanding into Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Iran, bringing into Islam's fold many new converts from various cultures with varying degrees of isolation.^[40] These converts spoke a variety of languages but were not well learned in

Arabic, and so Uthman felt it was important to standardize the written text of the Quran into one specific Arabic dialect. Another reason for compiling the Quran was that many Muslims who had memorised the Quran in its entirety (*huffaz*) were dying, especially in battle.

According to the dominant version narrated by Bukhari, the reason for the final collection of the Quran was a dispute between Muslim forces from Iraq and Syria over the correct way of reciting it during communal prayers while on an expedition to Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It is believed that the general Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman reported this problem to the caliph and asked him to establish a unified text. According to the history of al-Tabari, during the expedition there were 10,000 Kufan warriors, 6,000 in Azerbaijan and 4,000 at Rayy.^[41] If there was disagreement amongst such a vast number of soldiers on the correct way of reciting the Quran, it is understandable why Hudhayfah pushed for a unified text. An example of the confusion at this time is seen during a campaign in Tabaristan, where one of the soldiers asked, Hudhayfah "How did the Messenger of God pray?" Hudhayfah told him the soldier prayed before fighting.^[42]

It is believed upon Hudhayfah's request Uthman obtained the sheets of the Quran from Hafsa and appointed a commission consisting of Zayd and three prominent Meccans, and instructed them to copy the sheets into several volumes based on the dialect of Quraysh, the main tribe of Mecca.^[43]

Uthman's reaction in 653 is recorded in the following:

"So Uthman sent a message to Hafsa saying, "Send us the manuscripts of the Quran so that we may compile the Quranic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you." Hafsa sent it to Uthman. Uthman then ordered Zaid bin Thabit, Abdullah bin Az Zubair, Said bin Al-As and Abdur Rahman bin Harith bin Hisham to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. Uthman said to the three Quraishi men, "In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thabit on any point in the Quran, then write it in the dialect of Quraish, the Quran was revealed in their tongue." They did so, and when they had written many copies, 'Uthman returned the original manuscripts to Hafsa. 'Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Quranic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. Zayd bin Thabit added, "A Verse from Surat Ahzab was missed by me when we copied the Quran and I used to hear Allah's Apostle reciting it. So we searched for it and found it with Khuzaima bin Thabit Al-Ansari. [That verse was]: 'Among the Believers are men who have been true in their covenant with Allah.' "[Quran 33:23 (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2002.02.0006%3Asura%3D33%3Averse%3D23>)] [Bukhari Sahih al-Bukhari, 6:61:510 (<http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/061-sbt.php#006.061.510>)]

When the task was finished Uthman kept one copy in Medina and sent others to Kufa, Baṣra, Damascus, and, according to some accounts, Mecca, and ordered that all other variant copies of the Quran to be destroyed. This was done everywhere except in Kufa, where some scholars argue that, Ibn Mas'ūd and his followers refused.^[43] It is also important that the compilation of the Quran during the time of Caliph Abu Bakr which was inherited by Caliph Umar's daughter Hafsa (and a wife of Muhammad) was not destroyed but was passed back to her. This would imply that the first compilation, during the time of Abu Bakr, was not at variation with the Uthmanic compilation.

It is generally accepted that the Uthmanic text comprises all 114 suras in the order known today.^[39]

According to Ayatollah Khu'i there is no doubt that Uthman collected the Quran during his time, but not in the sense that he collected the verses and suras in one volume, but in the sense that he united the Muslims on the reading of one authoritative recension. He also argues that the one reading on which Uthman united the Muslims was the one in circulation among most Muslims, and that it reached them through uninterrupted transmission from Muhammad.^[44]

This is one of the most contested issues and an area where many non-Muslim and Muslim scholars often clash.^[39]

Origin according to academic historians

The origin of the Quran has been a subject of sustained academic research.^[45] Most scholars accept the basic outlines of the traditional account, which separates Muhammad's role as the recipient of revelation from the role played by the early caliphs in compiling the text.^[45] There have also been a number of proposals for refinement of the traditional view and even its fundamental reevaluation.^[45] Fred Donner summarized the state of the field as of 2008 in the following terms:^[46]

Qur'anic studies, as a field of academic research, appears today to be in a state of disarray. Those of us who study Islam's origins have to admit collectively that we simply do not know some very basic things about the Qur'an – things so basic that the knowledge of them is usually taken for granted by scholars dealing with other texts. They include such questions as: How did the Qur'an originate? Where did it come from, and when did it first appear? How was it first written? In what kind of language was – is – it written? What form did it first take? Who constituted its first audience? How was it transmitted from one generation to another, especially in its early years? When, how, and by whom was it codified? Those familiar with the Qur'an and the scholarship on it will know that to ask even one of these questions immediately plunges us into realms of grave uncertainty and has the potential to spark intense debate. To put it another way, on these basic issues there is little consensus even among the well-trained scholars who work on them.

Some scholars, such as John Wansbrough, Michael Cook, and Patricia Crone, have been unwilling to attribute the entire Quran to Muhammad (or Uthman), arguing that there "is no hard evidence for the existence of the Quran in any form before the last decade of the 7th century...[and that]...the tradition which places this rather opaque revelation in its historical context is not attested before the middle of the eighth." "There is no proof that the text of the Quran was collected under Uthman, since the earliest surviving copies of the complete Quran are centuries later than Uthman. (The oldest existing copy of the full text is from the 9th century.^[47]) They contend that Islam was formed gradually over a number of centuries after the Muslim conquests, as the Islamic conquerors elaborated their beliefs in response to Jewish and Christian challenges.^[48]

It is claimed that such scholars have been proven wrong by subsequent scientific evidence, including carbon dating of early manuscripts of the Quran. "The opening chapters of Fred Donner's *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* claims to refute the theoretical and methodological flaws of the skeptical school and instead dates the composition of the Quran, as a closed canon, to an Arabian context of early believers preceding ... the first civil war in 656."^[49] Donner's perspective now represents mainstream scholarly opinion.^[50] The findings in 2015 of the Birmingham Manuscripts lead Joseph E. B. Lumbard, Assistant Professor of Classical Islam, Brandeis University, to comment:^[51]

These recent empirical findings are of fundamental importance. They establish that as regards the broad outlines of the history of the compilation and codification of the Quranic text, the classical Islamic sources are far more reliable than had hitherto been assumed. Such findings thus render the vast majority of Western revisionist theories regarding the historical origins of the Quran untenable.

— Joseph E. B. Lumbard

The Dome of the Rock with its inscriptions are interesting in the dating of the text.^[52] These inscriptions have been known to scholars for more than a century and have repeatedly been the subject of interpretation, yet little attention has been paid to the elements from which they were composed. On the inner face of the octagon the declaration of faith is followed

by conflated verses describing the powers of God. Next Muhammad is introduced, with a blessing that, though not directly quoted from the Quran, was clearly already in use in 694 AD. Then comes an exhortation to Christians that Jesus was also a prophet and mortal, followed by the claim that God is sufficient unto Himself. Finally comes a command to bend to His will and the threat of reckoning for those who do not.^[52]

Wansbrough wrote in a dense, complex, almost hermetic style,^[52] and has had much more influence on Islamic studies through his students than he has through his own writings. His students Crone and Cook co-authored a book called *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977), which was extremely controversial at the time as it challenged not only Muslim orthodoxy, but the prevailing attitudes among secular Islamic scholars.

Crone, Wansbrough, and Nevo argue that all the primary sources which exist are from 150–300 years after the events which they describe, and thus are chronologically far removed from those events^{[53][54][55]}

The absence of contemporaneous corroborating material from the very first century of Islam has raised numerous questions as to the authenticity of the account provided by later traditionalist sources. All that is preserved from this time period are a few commemorative building inscriptions and assorted coins.^[56] However, some scholars deny such a belittlement of key sources from the era. Besides the Dome of the Rock inscriptions mentioned above, there are also brief Quranic passages on coins issued from the time of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan from the period 697-750. These passages include, in addition to the shahadah, verses 112:1-3 (or 4) complete (except for the initial *basmallah* and the introductory word "say"), and part of 9:33, but with some variations: "He sent him with the guidance and the Religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion". In parallel to the contemporary inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock these extracts are clearly intended to declare the primacy of the new religion of Islam over Christianity, in particular.^[52]

Skeptical scholars, nonetheless, point out that the earliest account of Muhammad's life by Ibn Ishaq was written about a century after Muhammad died and all later narratives by Islamic biographers contain far more details and embellishments about events which are entirely lacking in Ibn Ishaq's text.^[57]

Patricia Crone, studying the origins of the Quran, has focused on the examination of the vast body of the Greek, Armenian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Coptic accounts of non-Muslim neighbors of the 7th and 8th centuries which in many cases contradict the traditional Islamic narratives. She argues that the consistency of the non-Muslim sources spread over a large geographic area would tend to rule out a non-Muslim anti-Islamic motive to these sources.^[58]

The skeptic approach has been further expanded by Christoph Luxenberg, who supports claims for a late composition of the Quran, and traces much of it to sources other than Muhammad. Luxenberg is known for his thesis that the Quran is merely a re-working of an earlier Christian text, a Syriac lectionary.^[59] (See also the articles Gerd R. Puin, and Alexander the Great in the Quran.)

Fred Donner has argued for an early date for the collection of the Quran, based on his reading of the text itself. He points out that if the Quran had been collected over the tumultuous early centuries of Islam, with their vast conquests and expansion and bloody incidents between rivals for the caliphate, there would have been some evidence of this history in the text. However, there is nothing in the Quran that does not reflect what is known of the earliest Muslim community.^[60]

In 1972, during the restoration of the Great Mosque of San'a in Yemen, laborers stumbled upon a "paper grave" containing tens of thousands of fragments of parchment on which verses of the Quran were written. Some of these fragments were believed to be the oldest Quranic texts yet found.^[61]



Dome of the Rock. The structure, the oldest extant example of early Islamic architecture, was completed in 691 AD

Similarities to the Bible

Skeptical scholars account for the many similarities between the Quran and the Jewish and Hebrew Scriptures by saying that Muhammad was teaching what he believed to be a universal history, as he had heard it from the Jews and Christians he had encountered in Arabia and on his travels - as well as his exposure to the Hanif tradition by way of his paternal-grandfather, Abdul Muttalib. These scholars also disagree with the Islamic belief that the whole of the Quran is addressed by God to humankind. They note that there are numerous passages where God is directly addressed, or mentioned in the third person, or where the narrator swears by various entities, including God.^[62]

Varying codices and the start of the canonization

Before Uthman canonized the Quran there were different versions or codices, none of which have been discovered to date. These codices never gained general approval and were viewed by Muslims as the personal copies of individuals.^{[4]:93} However, "the search for variants in the partial versions extant before the Caliph Uthman's alleged recension in the 640s has not yielded any differences of great significance".^[63] The two most influential at this time are 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's and Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codices. Al-Qurazi recounts seeing the Mushafs used by Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy, and Zaid b. Thabit, and finding among them no differences.^[64]

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's codex

The most influential of the allegedly varying codices was that of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's, an early convert who became a personal servant to Muhammad. It is reported that he learned about seventy suras directly from Muhammad, who appointed him as one of the first teachers of Quran recitation. Later he was appointed to an administrative post in Kufa by the caliph 'Umar, where he became a leading authority on the Quran and hadith. Some sources suggest that Ibn Mas'ud refused to destroy his copy of the Quran or stop teaching it when the 'Uthmanic codex was made official.^[43]

There are two points on which Ibn Mas'ud's version is alleged to differ from the 'Uthmanic text: the order of the suras and some variants in the readings. Muhammad Mustafa Al-A'zami lists three reports concerning the omission of three suras (Al-Fatiha and Al-Mu'awwidhatayn the two short suras with which the Quran ends (Suras 113 and 114)), he then states that "early scholars such as al-Nawawi and Ibn Hazm denounced these reports as lies fathered upon Ibn Mas'ud."^[65] Most of the other differences involve only altered vowels with the same consonantal text, which caused variations in recitation.^[43] However, Al-Qurazi recounts seeing the Mushafs used by Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy, and Zaid b. Thabit, and finding among them no differences.^[64]

Ubay ibn Ka'b's codex

The second most influential codex was Ubay ibn Ka'b's, a Medinan Muslim who served as a secretary for Muhammad. It is believed that he may have been more prominent as a Quran specialist than Ibn Mas'ud during Muhammad's lifetime. There are reports that he was responsible for memorizing certain important revelations on legal matters, which from time to time Muhammad asked him to recite. In a few hadith, Ubay is seen in a variety of roles. For instance, the "sheets" of Ubay are sometimes mentioned in some instances instead of those of Hafsa, and sometimes he is also mentioned in some hadith instead of Zayd, dictating the Quran to scribes.

His version of the Quran is said to have included two short suras not in the 'Uthmanic and Ibn Mas'ud texts: *Sūrat al-Khal*, with three verses, and *Sūrat al-Hafd*, with six. The order of suras in Ubayy's codex is said to have differed from that of Uthman's and Ibn Mas'ud's as well,^[43] although these are structural differences rather than textual variations.

The first so called sura entitled al-Khal' (separation), translates as follows: 'O Allah, we seek your help and ask your forgiveness, and we praise you and we do not disbelieve in you. We separate from and leave who sins against you.'

The second so-called sura, entitled al-Hafd (haste) translates as follows: 'O Allah, we worship You and to You we pray and prostrate and to You we run and hasten to serve You. We hope for Your mercy and we fear Your punishment. Your punishment will certainly reach the disbelievers.' Obviously these two pieces constitute so-called 'qunut', i.e. supplications which Muhammad sometimes said in the morning prayer or witr prayer after recitation of suras from the Quran. They are in fact identical to some parts of qunut reported in the collections of hadith. See: Nawawi, al-adhkar, Cairo, 1955, pp. 57–8.

As to the single additional so-called aya, its translation is as follows: 'If the son of Adam was given a valley full of riches, he would wish a second one, and if he was given two valleys full of riches, he would surely ask for a third one. Nothing will fill the belly of the son of Adam except dust, and Allah is forgiving to him who is repentant.'

Again this text is known to be a hadith from Muhammad. See Bukhari, VIII, No. 444-47. According to Ibn 'Abbas (No. 445) and 'Ubay (No. 446) this text was at times thought to be part of the Quran. However Ubay himself clarifies that after sura 102: I had been revealed, they (i.e. the sahaba) did not consider the above to be part of the Quran. See Bukhari, VIII, No. 446.

This explanation of Ubay also makes it very clear that the Companions did not differ at all about what was part of the Quran and what was not part of the Quran when the revelation had ceased. It is also important to note that the hadith appeared in the mushaf of Ubay because it was for his own personal use, in other words, his private notebook, where he did not always distinguish between Quranic material and hadith, since it was not meant for general use and he himself knew well what to make of his own notes. The same is true of the other copies of the Quran, which some of the Companions had for their own personal use.

Also those who transmitted to us the reports about these copies of the Quran of the Companions have only narrated to us the various differences which occurred there according to reports that reached them (e.g. the hadith in Bukhari, VIII, No. 446 that Ubay at some early stage held this sentence to be part of the Quran). However the actual manuscripts of these copies of the Quran of the Companions have not come down to us, since all of them agreed on the correctness and validity of the copies which 'Uthman had arranged to be written and distributed for general use. Hence their own personal notebooks became obsolete and were destroyed.^[66]

Early manuscripts to the final canonical text

After Uthman had the other codices destroyed there were still variations in the reading and the text of this Quran. However, scholars deny the possibility of great changes of the text arguing that addition, suppression or alteration would have led to controversy 'of which there is little trace'. They further state that even though Uthman became unpopular among Muslims, he was not charged with alteration or mutilation of the Quran in general.^[67]

During the manuscript age, the Quran was the most copied Arabic text. It was believed that copying the Quran would bring blessings on the scribe and the owner.^[68]

The Arabic script as we know it today was unknown in Muhammad's time (as Arabic writing styles have progressed through time) and the Quran was preserved through memorization and written references on different materials. As Arab society started to evolve into using writing more regularly, writing skills evolved accordingly. Early Quranic Arabic lacked precision because distinguishing between consonants was impossible due to the absence of diacritical marks (*a'jam*).

Vowelling marks (*tashkil*) to indicate prolongation or vowels were absent as well. Due to this there were endless possibilities for the mispronunciation of the word. The Arabic script as we know it today, the *scripta plena*, which has pointed texts and is fully vowelled was not perfected until the middle of the 9th century.^{[4]:92}

Umayyad Period (44/661–132/750) – Hijazi script

The earliest known manuscripts of the Quran are collectively called the Hijazi script, and are mostly associated with the Umayyad period.^[68]

Most of the fundamental reform to the manuscripts of the Quran took place under Abd al-Malik, the fifth Umayyad caliph (65/685–86/705).^[68] Under Abd al-Malik's reign, Abu'l Aswad al-Du'ali (died 688) founded the Arabic grammar and invented the system of placing large colored dots to indicate the tashkil. The Umayyad governor al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi later enforced this system.^[69]

During this time the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in 72/691–92 was done, which was complete with Quranic inscriptions. The inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock in fact represent the earliest known dated passages from the Quran. In these inscriptions, many letters are already provided with diacritical points.^[68]

The earliest codices of the Quran found in the Umayyad period were most likely made in single volumes, which can be determined from the large fragments that have survived. Also during this time, the format of the codex went from being vertical to horizontal in the 8th century. It is believed this change to horizontal formats and thick/heavy-looking scripts may have been done to show the superiority of the Quran and to distinguish the Islamic tradition from the Jewish and Christian ones, who used vertical formats for their scriptures.^[68]

During this time, there was a diversity of styles in which the Quran was written. One characteristic seen in most of these manuscripts is the elongated shafts of the free-standing alif and the right-sided tail (foot) of the isolated alif. Also, these manuscripts do not have headings of chapters (suras). Instead, a blank space is left at the end of one sura and at the beginning of another.^[68]

Abbasid Period (132/750–640/1258)

Early Abbasid Style

Unlike the manuscripts from the Umayyad Dynasty, many of the early Abbasid manuscripts were copied in a number of volumes. This is evident from the large scripts used and the smaller number of lines per page. Early Qur'anic manuscripts provide evidence for the history of the Qur'anic text and their formal features tell us something about the way art and its deeper meaning were perceived in the classical age of Islam. Both its script and layout turned out to be constructed according to elaborate geometrical and proportional rules.^[70]

The main characteristic of these scripts was their writing style. The letters in most of these manuscripts are heavy-looking, relatively short and horizontally elongated. The slanted isolated form of the alif that was present in the Umayyad period completely disappeared and was replaced by a straight shaft with a pronounced right-sided foot, set at a considerable distance from the following letter. Also, unlike the Hijazi scripts, these are often richly illuminated in gold and other colors. Another difference is that sura headings are clearly marked and enclosed in rectangular panels with marginal vignettes or palmettes protruding into the outer margins. These Qurans of the early Abbasid period were also bound in wooden boards, structured like a box enclosed on all sides with a movable upper cover that was fastened to the rest of the structure with leather thongs.^[68]

New Abbasid Style

The New Abbasid Style (NS) began at the end of the 9th century C.E. and was used for copying the Quran until the 12th centuries, and maybe even as late as the 13th century. Unlike manuscripts copied in Early Abbasid scripts, NS manuscripts had vertical formats.^[68]

During this time, Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi (died 786) devised a tashkil system to replace that of Abu al-Aswad. His system has been universally used since the early 11th century, and includes six diacritical marks: fatha (a), damma (u), kasra (i), sukun (vowel-less), shadda (double consonant), madda (vowel prolongation; applied to the alif).^[71]

Another central figure during this time was Abu Bakr b. Mujāhid (died 324/936). His goal was to restrict the number of reliable readings and accept only those based on a fairly uniform consonantal text. He chose seven well-known Quran teachers of the 2nd/8th century and declared that their readings all had divine authority, which the others lacked. He based this on the popular ḥadīth in which Muhammad says the Quran was revealed to him in "seven aḥruf". During this time there was strong Quranic traditions in Kufa, Baṣra, Medina, Damascus, and Mecca. Due to this, Ibn Mujāhid selected one reading each for Medina, Mecca, Baṣra, and Damascus—those of Nafi' (died 169/785), Ibn Kathir (died 120/737), Abu 'Amr (died 154/770), and Ibn 'Amir (died 118/736), respectively—and three for Kūfa, those of 'Asim (died 127/744), Hamza (died 156/772), and al-Kisa'i (died 189/804). His attempt to limit the number of canonical readings to seven was not acceptable to all, and there was strong support for alternative readings in most of the five cities. In the present day the most common reading that is in general use is that of 'Aasim al-Kufi through Hafs.^[43]

The 11th-century eastern Qur'anic manuscript contains the 20th juz' (section) of a Qur'an that originally consisted of 30 parts. The arrangement into 30 parts corresponds to the number of days in the month of Ramadan, during which the Muslim is obliged to fast and to read through the whole of the Qur'an. Other sections or fragments of this magnificent manuscript lie scattered in various collections all over the world. A Turkish note ascribes the Qur'an to the hand of the Caliph Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and thus demonstrates the high significance of this manuscript. The text is written in Eastern Kufic, a monumental script that was developed in Iran in the late 10th century. The writing and the illumination of the manuscript bear witness to the great artistic skills of the calligrapher and the illustrator. The manuscript is at the Bavarian State Library in Munich, Germany.^[72] Out of seven complete or nearly complete semi-Kufic Qur'ans from before the end of the eleventh century, four contain a verse count. Although admittedly a small sample, it does suggest that the use of a verse count was a prevalent and quite deeply rooted practice in semi-Kufic Qur'ans between ca. 950 and ca. 1100.^[73]

Abu Ali Muhammad ibn Muqla (died 940), an accomplished calligrapher from Baghdad, was also a prominent figure at this time. He became vizir to three Abbasid caliphs and is credited with developing the first script to obey strict proportional rules. Ibn Muqla's system was used in the development and standardization of the Quranic script, and his calligraphic work became the standard way of writing the Quran.^[71] However it was later perfected by Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022), the master calligrapher who continued Muqla's tradition. Muqla's system became one of the most popular styles for transcribing Arabic manuscripts in general, being favored for its legibility. The eleventh century Qur'an is one of the earliest dated manuscripts in this style.^[74]

This "new style" is defined by breaks and angular forms and by extreme contrasts between the thick and thin strokes. The script was initially used in administrative and legal documents, but then it replaced earlier Quranic scripts. It is possible that it was easier to read than the early 'Abbasid scripts, which differ greatly from current writing. Economic factors may also have played a part because while the "new style" was being introduced, paper was also beginning to spread throughout the Muslim world, and the decrease in the price of books triggered by the introduction of this new material seems to have led to an increase in its demand. The "new style" was the last script to spread throughout the Muslim world before the introduction of printing. It remained in use until the 13th century, at which point it was restricted to titles only.^{[4]:177}

Completeness

Islamic sources

Records from Islamic sources suggest that before Caliph Uthman's standardization, where variants were allegedly burned, the Qu'ran may have contained either 116 chapters (Ubayy Ibn Ka'ab's Codex) or 111 (Ibn Ma'sud's Codex)^[75]

Islamic View: Sunni and Shia

Muslims believe that Quran, as it is presented today, is complete and untouched, supported by their faith in quranic verses such as "We [i.e. Allah] have, without doubt, sent down the Reminder [i.e. the Quran]; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]" (Quran 15:9).

Due to the varying accounts and hadiths on the collection and canonization of the Quran, some scholars debate whether the 'Uthmanic text comprehends the entire body of material that was revealed to Muhammad, or if there has been material that is missing from the 'Uthmanic text. For example, some Sunni literature contains reports that suggest that some of the revelations had already been lost before the collection of the Quran initiated by Abu Bakr. In one version of a report at the time, 'Umar was once looking for the text of a specific verse of the Quran on stoning as a punishment for adultery, which he remembered. Later, he discovered that the only person who had any record of that verse had been killed in the battle of Yamama and as a result the verse was lost. Later, some of the Companions recalled that same verse, one person being 'A'isha, Muhammad's youngest wife. She is believed to have said that a sheet on which two verses, including the one on stoning, were under her bedding and that after Muhammad died, a domestic animal got into the room and gobbled up the sheet.^[76] Experts on hadith literature have rejected this hadith, as all routes of transmission either contain narrators charged with dishonesty in disclosing sources or simply conflict with the majority version of the report, which all have authentic routes of transmission but omit the part about the piece of paper being eaten.^{[77][78]}

Certain Shia scholars even state that Ali's predecessors willfully excluded all references to the right of Ali to be the next caliph after Muhammad died. Some Shi'is questioned the integrity of the Uthmani codex stating that two suras, "*al-Nurayn*" (The Two Lights) and "*al-Walayah*" (the Guardianship), which dealt with the virtues of Muhammad's family, were removed.^{[4]:89–90}

Al-Khoei addresses this issue and argues for the authenticity and completeness of the Quran on the basis that it was compiled during the lifetime of Muhammad. His argument is based on hadiths and on critically analyzing the situation during and after the life of Muhammad.

On the argument that verses of Ali's rule had been removed, Al-Khoei states that the collection of the Quran by Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman occurred significantly after the caliphate was decided and so if Ali's rule had been mentioned it would have been the strongest argument for him to be the first caliph. There would have been no need for the Muslims to gather to appoint someone. (Khu'i 158) The fact that the Companions did not mention anything [about the alteration], neither at the beginning of the caliphate nor after the caliphate had fallen to 'Ali is proof that alteration in this sense did not occur.^[79]

Another argument Al-Khoei brings up in favor of the Quran is that by the time 'Uthman became caliph, Islam had spread to such an extent that it was impossible for him, or even for anyone more powerful than him, to remove anything from the Quran. The value and importance of the Quran during this time protected it from being altered.^[79] In the oral culture at this time, people paid great attention to memorizing pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, it is hard to imagine that they did not pay

similar attention to the preservation of the Book of the Almighty, especially since they believed they would be rewarded in the hereafter for memorizing it. Uthman could have altered the text, but he would have been unable to remove the Quran from the hearts of the Muslims who had memorized it.^[80]

In addition, had Uthman changed the Quran, it would have served as the clearest argument for, and major justification of, his public assassination. His opponents would have brought this up against him, but there are no records of this. Al-Khoei also argues that if Uthman had altered the Quran, Ali would have restored it to its original state upon the death of Uthman, especially if verses of his rule had been removed. Instead Ali is seen promoting the Quran during his reign, which is evidence that there was no alteration.^[79]

Manuscripts

In the 20th century, the Sana'a manuscript was discovered. It has been dated to 632-671 AD. The manuscript has exactly the same verses and the same order of verses as the standard Qur'an.^[81] The order of the suras in the Sana'a codex is different from the order in the standard Qur'an.^[82] The manuscript contains some variants to the standard Qur'an, in terms of differences in words, sub-word elements and vowels.

See also

- Corpus Coranicum
- Early Quranic manuscripts
- Biblical narratives and the Quran
- Legends and the Quran
- Prophets of Islam
- Category:Quranic manuscripts
- Category:Quranic studies
- Quranic timeline
- Stories of The Prophets

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External links

- Read Quran Online (<http://www.read-quranonline.com>)
- Dated Muslim Texts From 1-72 AH / 622-691 AD: Documentary Evidence For Early Islam (<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/earlyislam.html>) Islamic Awareness
- Corpus Coranicum: comprehensive website on early Quran manuscripts by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (<http://www.corpuscoranicum.de/index/einleitung>)
- Several early Qur'ans: information, zoomable images (<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/sacredthemesonly.html>) British Library website
- History of the Quran (<http://tanzil.net/pub/ebooks/History-of-Quran.pdf>)

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