

Revelation and Compilation of the Holy Quran

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

Verily, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, and most surely We will be its Guardian, (Al-Hijr, 15:10)

The Holy Quran is a living miracle. It is a true testimony to a living God and a true testimony for the teachings contained in it. The topic of the Holy Quran and aspects related to it are vast. In this discussion we will limit it to how the Holy Quran reached us. This can be categorized into the following major subjects:

- Revelation of the Holy Quran through Hazrat Muhammad (SAW)
- Narration and capturing of the revealed verses during the life of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW)
- Compilation of Mus'haf during the Khilafat of Hazrat Abu-Bakar (RA)
- Mass publication of the Holy Quran during the Khilfat of Hazrat Usman (RA)
- The devotion towards the Holy Quran and the desire for memorization

The Holy Quran is the Word of Allah

The Holy Quran was revealed to Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) in a period that spanned about 23 years. During this time the Holy Quran that we recite today was revealed in bits and pieces and in an order not as we see today. This leads into some important clarifications to be made right away.

- We know that all the sayings of the Holy Prophet (SAW) are called Hadith
- We know that the Holy Quran was revealed to Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) alone and what was captured was through the lips of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW)
- Thus, there is a distinction between what are the verses of the Holy Quran and what are the verses of the Hadith and the Holy Prophet (SAW) would make sure that it was captured accordingly
- There are some Hadith that were a result of revelations but again are not part of the Holy Quran

The Holy Quran is a vast book with vast amount of subject matter, knowledge and information. When we study the Holy Quran we find it captured into verses that combine into chapters that combine into sections and so forth. However, the Holy Quran was not revealed in this order. This is important to understand because if looked closely, it points to another miracle of the Holy Quran that is the precise order of a vast book was managed by Allah alone. Even writing this essay, we had to manage that our subject stays coherent and flows nicely. Imagine that if we had to manage this flow in a book, and then a book the size of the Holy Quran and to see that this was managed 1500 years ago by people with limited writing ability and limited resources.

The first verse that was revealed to Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) at age 40 in the cave of Hira was:

إِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝

Proclaim in the name of thy Lord Who created (Al-Alaq, 96:2)

There is some difference of opinion as to which is the last revealed verse of the Holy Quran. Some believe that the last verse revealed to Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) was at the time of his last Hajj:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ
عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ۝

This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favor upon you and have chosen for you Islam as religion (Al-Maidah, 5:4)

The other opinion is that the last revealed verse was:

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ
تُوْفَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا
يُظْلَمُونَ ۝

And be afraid of the Day when you shall be brought back to Allah. Then every person shall be paid what he earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. (Al-Baqarah 2:281)

And the last complete chapter revealed was also at the time of his last Hajj but before the aforementioned verse:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ ۝
وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ
أَفْوَاجًا ۝
فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ
تَوَّابًا ۝

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

When there comes God's victory, and conquest. And you see the people entering God's religion in multitudes. Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. He is the Acceptor of Repentance.(Al-Nasr, 110-1-3)

Please note that the first verse is not even the first verse of the given chapter and neither of the last verses as believed to be are not even the last verses of the respective chapters. Yet when we read these chapters there is a flow of subject matter that without the historic knowledge of when these verses were revealed, it will not be apparent as to what was the order of their respective revelation.

Furthermore, the study of this order of revelation leads to awe into the all knowing of Allah; because the order of revelation is based on the needs of the people at that time. As we see in what is revealed in the chapters revealed in Mecca versus those revealed in Medina. But when we ponder over how the Holy Quran is compiled and the order that we recite today, it is precisely serving the needs of the one who is already in the fold of Islam. This is yet, another miracle of this living book.

So while the first verse had to be an introduction to Allah, for the Holy Quran as a book, the beginning chapter had to be Al-Fatiha, a glorious preface to a glorious book.

Compilation of the Holy Quran during the life of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW)

It is very important to understand that the Holy Quran in its current form was established during the life of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW). The Holy Prophet (SAW) had established a team of narrators that he would direct when a new verse was revealed. These narrators would memorize the given verse but most importantly write it down.

Diverse materials were used for inscription:

- Parchment,
- Leather,
- Wooden tablets,
- Camels' scapula,
- Soft stone, etc.

On each occasion, Prophet Muhammad indicated the precise place of the new revelation in the text of till-then-revealed Qur'an. Whenever a passage of the Qur'an was revealed to him, he not only dictated it to one of his amanuenses, but also ordered him at the end to read out what he had taken down, in order to be able to correct if a mistake was committed by the scribe.

During the last years of his life, the Prophet used to employ several amanuenses for taking the dictation of the newly received revelation. Among them one can mention:

Ibn Mas'ud,
Ubayy ibn Ka'b, and
Ali ibn Talib.

The chief of those amanuenses was Zaid ibn Thabit, an early Muslim and one of the Prophet's close Companions.

Thus we see that the Holy Quran slowly took shape over a period of 23 years. Verses were revealed based on the needs of the current time and commandments established based on how Allah needed to shape the newly emerging Muslim society. So we see a clear distinction between the verses revealed in Mecca (known as Meccan verses) which relate more to the moral needs of the time, to those revealed in Madina (Medinian verses) which have a lot of laws for the society like inheritance etc. Nonetheless, the final compilation of the Holy Quran keeps all these verses and chapters in an order that make sense for the book and how the book of Allah should be organized.

The nature of the revelation necessitated that the Prophet ^(SAW) should recite the verses of the Qur'an constantly to his Companions and check continually that the sequence and the contents of the fragments were correct. It is authoritatively known that the Prophet ^(SAW) recited every year in the month of Ramadan, in the presence of the Archangel Gabriel, the portion of the Qur'an till then revealed, and that in the last year of his life, Gabriel asked him to recite the whole of it twice. The Prophet ^(SAW) concluded thereupon that he was soon going to depart his life. The Prophet's ^(SAW) Companions used to attend these public recitations (called ardan) and corrected their private copies of the Qur'an. The chief amanuenses, Zaid ibn Thabit ^(RA), were present at this final bringing-together of the texts.

It is also known that the Prophet ^(SAW) was in the habit of celebrating an additional service of worship during the fasting month of Ramadan. Every night, sometimes even in congregation, portions of the Qur'an were recited during special prayers (called Taraweeh) that were held after the night prayer (Isha prayer). In the Taraweeh prayers the whole of Qur'an was recited from the beginning to end in the course of the month. This service continues to be observed with great devotion to this our day

In conclusion, we see that great measures were taken by Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) during his life under the Divine guidance to ensure proper compilation, memorization and pronunciation of the Holy Quran and a large party of Hafizoon (those who memorize Holy Quran) had been created in his lifetime.

Compilation of Mus'haf during the Khilafat of Hazrat Abu-Bakar (RA)

After the death of the Holy Prophet (SAW), some of the Arabs revolted against the rule of the Caliph in Medina, some refused to pay Zakat, and some renegades Islam. In quelling these rebellions, several of the Sahaba (RA) who knew the whole of the Qur'an by heart died. The Caliph Abu-Bakar (RA) felt the urgency of codifying the Qur'an, and acting on a suggestion from Hazrat Omar (RA), Abu-Bakar (RA) asked Zaid ibn Thabit (RA) to prepare a fair copy of the entire text of the Qur'an in the form of a book. The Caliph instructed Zaid to consult all the information he could assemble at Medina: the witness of the "Hafizoon", and the copies of the Qur'an written on various materials belonging to private individuals, all with the object of avoiding possible errors in transcription.

This compilation took place under the leadership of Zaid ibn Thabit (RA) and each stage of compilation was validated by a minimum of two Hafizoon so as not to propagate any errors.

The fair copy of the Qur'an thus prepared was called the Mus'haf (literally bound leaves). This copy remained in the custody of Abu-Bakar (RA) until his death, and then went into the custody of his successor Omar (RA). Omar later gave this copy to his daughter Hafsa (RA), the Prophet's (SAW) widow

Again, this needs to be validated and understood that while the whole of the Holy Quran existed in printed form in the life of the Holy Prophet (SAW) the copies were widely distributed amongst his companions. Hazrat Abu-Bakar (RA) took the initiative of combining them into a single book. Often those who want to raise questions regarding the authenticity of the Holy Quran raise objections on this compilation. What they fail to take into account is that a large party of Hafizoon existed at this time and that the Holy Quran was regularly recited in prayers and in the Taraweeh prayers during Ramadan. If any fallacies existed in the compilation done by Hazrat Abu-Bakar (RA), surely there be a mention in the history and moreover measures taken by the Muslims of the time to correct it.

Mass Publication of the Holy Quran during the Khilfat of Hazrat Usman (RA)

During the Khilafat-e-Rashida, Islam expanded rapidly in Arabia. As Islam was spreading rapidly into the different parts of the world, and into regions where the native tongue of the newly converted Muslims was not Arabic, the second Caliph, Omar (RA), felt the need of sending authentic copies of the text of Qur'an to the provincial centers, to avoid deviations. However, Omar (RA) died before he could start this task, and it was left to the third Caliph, Usman (RA), to accomplish it. This was alarming to Hazrat Usman (RA) on two levels:

The Holy Quran was only vastly available at that time through the Hafiz and their teachings to others

The newly converted Muslims outside of Arabia were reciting many verses incorrectly, and different versions of the Holy Quran were resulting because of this

This required intervention that again could only come from a Khalifa of Allah. This Khalifa saw the inherent dangers in this progression and quickly took steps to evade this from getting out of hands. Usman ^(RA) caused immediately the Mus'haf prepared for Abu-Bakr ^(RA) to be entrusted to a commission, presided over by Zaid ibn Thabit ^(RA), for preparing seven copies of the Mus'haf, and he authorized them to revise the old spelling if necessary. When the task was completed, the Caliph ordered a public hearing of the new edition before the experts present in Medina, from the Companions of the Prophet ^(SAW), and then sent these copies of the Mus'haf to the different centers of the vast Islamic world. These original copies of the Mus'haf are known as the "Uthmani Mus'hafs." The Caliph Uthman ^(RA) further gave an order to destroy all versions or copies of the Qur'an in circulation that deviate in any way from the text thus officially established.

Thus a possible disaster was averted. Once again we should refer to the verse we quoted in the beginning. When Allah himself has guaranteed the safekeeping of this book then Allah guides his people in doing so as well, and who else to use for such task than one of His own chosen Khalifa.

Devotion towards the Holy Quran and its memorization

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلٍ
حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

We have made it a Book to be oft read in clear, eloquent language that you may understand. And, surely, it is safe with US in the Mother of the Book, exalted and full of wisdom (Al-Zukhruf, 43:4-5)

Being the Word of Allah has many ways of making itself known. A major one is the devotions of the Muslims all over the world in the regular recitation of the Holy Quran and most importantly the effort undertaken in memorizing the entire Quran. Arabic is not the native tongue of a majority of the Muslims, yet, as the children are being brought up in a Muslim household, a great emphasis is placed on the learning of the recitation of the Holy Quran. It is considered a major milestone in every Muslim child's life to finish the recitation of the entire Quran and have her Aameen done.

All over the Muslim world there are learning centers dedicated to teaching the memorization of the Holy Quran, and children as young as 7 to 8 years have memorized the entire Quran. This is also in great part because of the verse we just recited. Allah revealed the

Holy Quran in a very poetic form that leads itself very easy to memorization. Allah further says in His Book:

فَأَنمَّا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لِتُبَشِّرَ بِهِ الْمُتَّقِينَ
وَتُنذِرَ بِهِ قَوْمًا لَّدَا ۝

We made it easy in your tongue, in order to deliver good news to the righteous, and to warn with it a hostile people (Al-Maryam, 19:97)

This trend is so widely spread that today if someone sets out to eliminate all printed copies of the Holy Quran from the world; there will be no threat to the Holy Quran itself. No other book revealed or otherwise can make this claim.

Conclusion

It is known now that two copies of the original Mus'hafs sent by Uthman ^(RA) to the provincial centers of the Muslim world are still in existence; one of them in the Topkapi Museum of Istanbul, and another in Tashkent. In addition to these copies there exist many manuscripts of the Qur'an, complete and fragmentary, dating from the first century of the Hijrah onwards. The millions copies of Qur'an in circulation amongst the Muslims these days are exact copies of the original Uthmani Mus'haf. The only differences are in the spelling of some words and the way they are written, which in no way change the meanings of the verses. This stands as a clear attestation to the authenticity of the Holy Qur'an and its preservation for more than 1400 years since its revelation to Prophet Muhammad ^(SAW).

The Qur'an is the only Holy Script that survived without changes, additions, or deletions. There are many circumstances and factors that collaborated in preserving the original text of Qur'an which were not enjoyed by other Holy Scripts (the Old Testament or the New Testament). These factors are summarized in the following:

The Qur'an was preserved in a written form during the life of the Prophet ^(SAW). Although Prophet Muhammad did not know how to read or write, however, he had several amanuenses who were entrusted with the inscription of the revelations.

The whole text of the Qur'an was memorized by heart by many of the Companions of the Prophet ^(SAW). This formed an additional means to guarantee the correctness of the written text of the Qur'an.

Prophet Muhammad ^(SAW) used to review the till-then-revealed verses of Qur'an with Archangel Gabriel every year in a process called "ardan". In the last year of his life, the Prophet reviewed the whole text of the Qur'an twice. The Companions of the Prophets also reviewed the Qur'an they were memorizing and what they have in written form with the Prophet.

The Qur'an was compiled in a single book (Mus'haf) a few months after the death of the Prophet (SAW). The correctness of the text of this Mus'haf was reviewed and attested by the "Hafizoon" from the Companions of the Prophet (SAW). When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) died he left behind a strong Islamic State in Arabia with thousands of devout companions and followers. Those Muslims are the ones who carried Islam to different parts of the world, and in less than ten years from the death of the Prophet (SAW) were able to conquer both the Roman and Persian Empires. Devout followers usually preserve the teachings of their leader after his death, and protect it from any changes or corruption.

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and in the dialect of Kuraish, the tribe that was living in Mecca; this dialect was the most widely used among Arabs. Arabic is a highly stable language that, for the last 1400 years, has not suffered any changes in vocabulary, grammar, spelling, or pronunciation. The stability of the Arabic language is definitely an important factor in preserving the teachings of Islam. It is fair to say here that the Qur'an and the Arabic language have positive mutual effects on each other. The fact that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic made Arabic the language of Islam that all Muslim ought to learn and use in reciting Qur'an and studying the different sciences related to the religion of Islam