

The Emergence of Islam-I

HISTORY OF THE QURAN

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Emergence of Islam

Lecture: 1

History of the Qur'an

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Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, was born on February 9, 1908, in the state of Hyderabad Deccan in the Indian subcontinent. He was the youngest of 3 brothers and 5 sisters.

In Hyderabad, Dr. Hamidullah was educated at Darul-Uloom secondary school, Nizam College and Osmania University from where he obtained his MA and LLB degree in International Law. From 1933-35 he studied at several universities in Europe and obtained a doctorate from Bonn University in Germany. In 1936, he obtained a degree from the Sorbonne University, France. From 1936-46 he served on the faculty of Osmania University teaching International Law.

In 1946, he was appointed as member of the delegation sent by the Nizam of Hyderabad at the League of the Nations. After the 1948 invasion of Hyderabad by the Indian army, Hamidullah chose to live in exile in France. In 1948, he founded the Hyderabad Liberation Society to get Hyderabad recognized as an independent state. He decided to stay as a stateless person as long as the question of Hyderabad was still open in the United Nations.

In 1985, he was awarded the Hilal-e-Imtiaz, the highest civilian award of Pakistan that includes a substantial monetary amount. He donated the award money to Islamic Research Academy, Islamabad.

He stayed in France till 1996, when he was forced to move to the USA because of illness. The professor never married. During the last few years of his life, he was being taken care of by the grand daughter of his brother, sister Sadida who left her job to devote herself to his care.

Professor Hamidullah's scholarship is unparalleled in the last century. He was fluent in 22 languages including Urdu, Arabic, French, English, etc. He learned Thai at the age of 84. He translated the Qur'an in French and many other languages. He also translated a number of other important Islamic books in many European languages. He gave lectures in various universities around the world, some of which have been published. His works on Islamic science, history and culture number more than 250. His books have been translated in many languages.

Some of his most famous books include:

- 1) "Introduction to Islam",
- 2) "Muhammad Rasulullah",
- 3) "The Battlefields of Prophet Muhammad",
- 4) "The Muslim Conduct of State", and
- 5) "The First Written Constitution."

One of his great contributions to the hadith literature was the discovery of Sahifa Hammam bin Munabbah, the earliest hadith manuscript still extant today. Two copies of it were discovered; one in a Damascus library

and the other in a library in Berlin. Dr. Hamidullah published it after carefully comparing the two manuscripts.

He wrote several researched treatise on the early life of Muslims. Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah was well known for the great quality and high caliber of his research in Islamic Law and history. He was recognized as one of the most authoritative scholars in Islamic International Law and Islamic Constitutional law. At its initial stages, he was invited by the government of Pakistan to help draft the constitution of Pakistan.

This great scholar led a life of simplicity, patience and humility. He passed away in his sleep on December 17, 2002 at the age of 95 in Jacksonville, Florida.



The Earlier Prophets and their Books

There is a tradition in the Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"From Adam to me Allah sent a hundred and twenty-four thousand Prophets of whom three hundred and fifteen were entrusted with a Book."

The names of all these Prophets to whom scriptures were revealed are not mentioned either in the Qur'an or in the *Hadith*. It is not possible for us therefore, to provide details about them. We come across a few references to the books revealed to Adam, the first Prophet. Unfortunately, however, we are not aware of the language in which they were revealed nor do we have any idea of their contents.

Adam's son, **Shith** (peace be upon him) was also a Prophet. A few scriptures, it is suggested in some accounts, were revealed to him. But they, too, are not extant. Parts of a book attributed to **Idris** (peace be upon him), one of the earliest Prophets, have been found only recently. A few scrolls have been discovered in some caves near the Dead Sea in Palestine. A scripture among these scrolls is attributed to **Enoch** (in Arabic, *Akhndkh*) who is none else than **Prophet Idris** (peace be upon him). Recently a Jew[ish] translation of this book into English [has] been published. Even though there is no definitive and irrefutable proof, yet the research date so far suggests that this book could be called the scripture of

the most ancient Prophet. The book contains a prophecy about the last Prophet which is also incorporated in the "Letters of Jehovah" in the New Testament.

After Idris (peace be upon him) we come across a few allusions to Noah. There is a small sect called Sabacans in Iraq. Sabacan's have a religion of their own. They claim to be followers of Noah and his religion. According to them they once possessed Noah's entire Book which is now extinct and they are left with no more than four or five lines which deal with morality. Noah is followed by another Prophet whose book is mentioned in the Qur'an. He was Abraham (peace be upon him). Twice the Qur'an refers to "The Books of Abraham and Moses" (53:36-37 and 87:19). The contents of Abraham's Book [is] not found in the Jewish and Christian literature, but [has] been briefly mentioned in the Qur'an.



Non-Quranic Prophets

Besides these Prophets there are other individuals who have not been accorded the status of a Prophet in clear terms in scriptures, still the possibility that they were Prophets cannot be dismissed altogether. One of them is Zoaster. The Psrsi's acclaim him as their Prophet, and it is possible because the Qur'an mentions Magians (22:17) whose religion is based on Avesta, a book revealed to Zoaster.

If we were to compare the teachings of Avesta, as known to us, with those of the Qur'an, we shall have some idea of the intrinsic superiority of the latter. Avesta was written in the contemporary language called Zand. After the conquest of Iran, the language of the new rulers gained currency and the old tongue became archaic with the result that except for a few specialists, no-one remained familiar with Zand. That is why the scholars of Zoroastrianism summarized, and wrote commentaries on Avesta in the new language called Pazand. Only about one-tenth of this version of Avesta is available to us, the rest has disappeared. It comprises some details about prayers and a few commandments.

In any case, an ancient religious book is known to us as Avesta, even though it has not come down to us in its entirety. The Avesta, among other things, contains the following statement of Zoaster: “I have not perfected the religion. Another Prophet will come after me and he will perfect this religion; his name will be 'Mercy for the entire universe.’”

This reminds one of the Quranic verses in which Muhammad (peace be upon him) has been so-called (see Qur'an 21:107). In India, too, some religious scripture[s], are to be found. Hindus believe them to be revealed by God. Among these holy books are the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Upanishads* and others. It is difficult to determine whether they were all revealed to a single Prophet. It is possible that they were revealed to various Prophets (provided they were Prophets). In these books too, particularly the *Puranas*, we come across a few interesting allusions. *Purana* is the same word [that] is still used in Urdu in the sense of ancient. In the Qur'an, we come across a significant reference; “**And lo, it is in the Scriptures of the men of old.**” (26:196). There are ten *Puranas*. In one of them it is mentioned that in the final epoch a man will be born in a desert. His mother's name will be “Reliable” (*Aminah?*) and his father's name will be the “slave of God” (*Abd Allah?*). He will be obliged to move north from his country and settle there. He will then conquer his own country with the help of ten thousand men several-fold. In the battle, his chariot will be drawn by camels and they will be so swift that they will soar to the skies.

From these statements in the *Puranas*, it is possible to infer that they refer to the coming of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him).

In addition to these ancient books, there are others with which Muslims are quite familiar, i.e. the *Torah*, the *Zabūr* (*Psalms*) and the *Evangel*. The Book revealed to Moses (peace be upon him) is generally referred to as the *Torah*, but in fact the *Torah* is only part of the Book revealed to him. The word *Torah* means law. The Jews attribute five books to Moses. The first is called the “*Book of Genesis*”, the second is

“*Exodus*”, which deals with the exodus from Egypt; the third is “*Law*”; the fourth is called “*Numbers*”, because Moses had ordered a census of [the] Jews based on their distribution into various tribes; and the fifth is called “*Deuteronomy*”, which means retelling of old accounts, their updating and elaboration.



The History of the Earlier Scriptures

In the beginning, the fifth book was not extant among the Jews. It was six hundred years after Moses, and during the time of war, that a man brought a book to the then Jewish ruler and said that he had found it in a cave. He did not know what it was exactly, but the book contained some religious commandments. The king sent the manuscript to a Prophetess of his time. The Jews had women Prophets (at least they make a claim to that effect). Huldah, a Prophetess according to the Jewish tradition, remarked that the manuscript was indeed a book of Moses (peace be upon him). Six hundred years after his death, the book began to be attributed to Moses. It was called '*Deuteronomy*'. because it contains a summary of some of the commandments of the earlier four books with the addition of a few more. In any case, the sum total the five books is that the Jews conquered part of Palestine during the time of the Prophets who came after Moses and established their rule there.

A little later Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Iraq, invaded Palestine. Since his religion was different from that of the Jews, he not only conquered their country but proceeded to destroy the religion of his enemy. He collected all [the] manuscripts of the Torah and set fire to them. Not a single copy survived. According to Jewish historians, a hundred years after this event, one of their Prophets called Esra (he was probably 'Uzayr) claimed that he remembered the Torah by heart. He dictated the book from memory. Some time after the revival of the Torah

in this manner the Romans invaded Palestine under the command of Antiochus who repeated the performance of Nebuchadnezzar and set fire to the Jewish scriptures which were thus destroyed for the second time.

A little later another Roman ruler sent an expedition under the command of Titus who set fire for the third time to all available Jewish scriptures in Palestine. What we have now by the name of Torah is only a part of the Old Testament in which five books are attributed to Moses (peace be upon him). These books are the revived remnants of the original which was burnt three or four times. How and by whom they were revived is not known.

The reader of these books is confronted with two problems. [Occasionally] he comes across portions which are obviously later accretions; at other times he feels that a link is missing and a statement remains incomplete. The additions are of such a nature as [to] bring out a clear contradiction. [The] books attributed to Moses contain events which occurred after his death. In Deuteronomy, for example, the last chapter deals with the illness, death and burial of Moses (peace be upon him) it, in addition to other subsequent events. Obviously, this portion is a later addition. Every reader can see such contradictions for himself.

There must be many more which are not so obvious. One also misses quite a few things in the narrative. For example, one comes across, at least twenty times, phrases to the effect "you will find details about this commandment in such and such a chapter." One of the chapters referred to is called the "*Battles of God*," another is entitled "*The Book of Sincere and Pious People*." These chapters are simply not there. They do not exist. This is what happened to the Torah which has emerged from the

vicissitudes of history and is available to us in translation in most of the languages of the modern world.

Muslims usually mention [the] Psalms or the Zabūr after the Torah. Zabūr is also considered an independent scripture like the Torah and the Bible. But the Psalms attributed to David in the Old Testament comprise poems of praise of God and do not contain any new commandments. The Muslims' concept of a Prophet is that he brings a new law but there is no new commandment in the Psalms. However, like other ancient books (from that of Idris to Avesta), the Psalms also contain a prophecy about the coming of the last Prophet. Besides, it repeats the same story as the Torah - which shows how things were added to or omitted from it for one reason or the other.



The Four Gospels

Muslims generally believe that the *Injil* (**Evangel, Gospel**) was an independent book which was revealed to Jesus (peace be upon him). But the scripture, which has reached us through Christian sources, comprises not one but four Gospels viz. those of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Every Gospel is attributed to a different individual. And these four books do not complete the *Injil*. According to Christian historians, there were more than seventy Gospels. Most of them were discarded as being of dubious nature and only four were considered reliable.

On reading them, however, one discovers that they are biographies of Jesus and not the revealed word of God to a Prophet. Four persons in succession wrote biographies of Jesus and each called it a Gospel. The Arabic word *Injil* means 'good tidings.' The reason why the word was used as a title is found in the life history of Jesus as given in the book. Jesus would generally repair to a village and proclaim to its people, “*I give you good tidings that the Kingdom of God is at hand.*” This is probably why the book was given this name. If it was revealed to Jesus, he did not dictate it to anyone and the book does not, therefore, exist in the world today.

The Gospels, which are now extant, owe their existence to many an author who wrote biographies of Jesus Christ in different periods of history. Every author gave them the title of **Gospel**. Of these, the Church

considered four as reliable and rejected the rest. Nobody knows by whom, when, and how the four Gospels were selected, nor are we aware of the criteria which was used in their selection. Voltaire, the famous French historian, has suggested that the Church once thought that from the seventy odd gospels whose contents were contradictory, only the reliable ones should be selected. The method employed for such a selection was that all the Gospels were placed on a table near the altar in the Church. The table was then shaken. The books which fell down were considered unreliable and those that remained on the table, despite the shake-up were acclaimed as authentic. This is Voltaire's statement. It is difficult for us to explain the basis on which he made it. It is obvious, however, that the Christians reject this statement and consider its author a liar and a scoundrel. In any case, time is [the] consensus on the conclusion [of] this book, if one was ever dictated by Jesus, does not exist in the world today. What we have by the name of *Injil* is only a collection of biographies. We can call it the "Life of Jesus", like the biographies of the Prophet (peace be upon him) written by Muslim scholars.

Sometimes one wonders why Jesus (peace be upon him) did not dictate the commandments revealed to him. Perhaps the reason is that he knew the fate that had overtaken the Torah [that was] revealed to Moses (peace be upon him), his predecessor. The[ir] enemies invaded the country and desecrated the[ir] book. Time and [time] again they set it on fire and destroyed it. Jesus, fearing a similar fate, might have thought it prudent to rely on the memory of his pious followers who, he thought would pass on the message in any case, to the next generation. This is perhaps the reason why he desisted from preserving the Divine revelation in the form of a written book.

God is possessed of eternal knowledge. He cannot possibly give one command to Adam (for example, worship One True God alone) and another, completely contradictory [to] the first, to a later Prophet. It is possible, however, that one Prophet is given a set of commandments, and another who follows, is given the same commandment with a few additions. Had the books revealed to Adam retained intact, there would presumably have been no need for God to send new books, for the original one would remain valid. But we have seen in this brief study that none of the books revealed to ancient Prophets has reached us in its entirety. That is why God willed [that] the book containing all the commandments should be made available to man and that its authenticity should be preserved for all times to come. Such a book is the Qur'an.



The Preservation Of The Qur'an

Now we shall examine how the Qur'an has reached us intact. In the first place, I should say a few words about its language -- Arabic. Why was Arabic chosen as the language of the Book revealed to the last Prophet (peace be upon him)? It is an established fact [that] languages gradually change. Look at Urdu, for example. It is with great difficulty that we are able to understand a book written in Urdu some five hundred years ago. This is true of all languages of the world. In English, Chaucer, who lived some five or six hundred years ago, can be understood today by only a few learned scholars. This is also true of all other old and new languages. They change and slowly become archaic.

Had God's last message been revealed in a language subject to similar change, it would have become necessary for Him to give us yet another book in the twentieth century so that we could understand it. Like other books of yore, this one, too would have become incomprehensible. If any language in the world is exempt from the law of change, it is Arabic. It is a verifiable fact that the Arabic that we hear on radio or read in the press today is the same as that of the days of the Prophet (peace be upon him) i.e. in the language of the Qur'an and the Hadith. There is no difference between the two by way of meaning of words, grammar, spelling or pronunciation. Had the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) been amidst us today and were I to speak to him in the contemporary Arabic idiom, he would be able to understand every word of my submission. Were the

Prophet (peace be upon him) to respond to me, I would be able fully to understand every word of his speech. There is no difference between the two languages -- the Arabic of today and the Arabic of yesterday. From this we conclude that the Book revealed to the last Prophet (peace be upon him) had to be in a language that was not subject to change. That is why the choice fell on Arabic.

In addition to other characteristics such as eloquence, fluency, melody, etc., Arabic has a quality which we can all witness for ourselves. And that is the unchangeable character of the Arabic language. For this we should be grateful to the Arabs who have not adopted different dialects as their language. Their language of literature and education is the same today as was current in the days of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

To mention another noteworthy feature, the Qur'an was not revealed in one piece. The Jews believe that God gave all the Tablets to Moses (peace be upon him) at one time. The Qur'an, on the contrary, was revealed gradually over a period of twenty-three years. It is the sum total of the revelation which came down in parts. It started in December 609, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) had retired the Cave of Hira. It was there that Gabriel appeared with the Divine command. The message was truly effective. The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not know how to read and write. The first command given to an unlettered person was to "read", and then followed the verse in praise of the pen. Why was the pen praised after the command to read? Simply because it is through the pen that God discloses to man that which he knows not. (See the Qur'an 96:1-5).

In other words, [the] pen alone is the repository of human civilization and culture. It exists in order to preserve the past knowledge. Those who follow, add to it. This is the secret of the evolution of human civilization, and this is the reason why man is superior to other animals. A crow still makes the same nest as he did two million years ago. It has not made any progress. But man has reached the moon. His progress has been so spectacular that today he seems to hold sway over the universe.

All this progress has been possible because the experience and knowledge of the past was preserved and man continued to add his own experience to the vast store of knowledge from which he benefits constantly. And all this is owing to the pen. The Qur'an has beautifully referred to this phenomenon: "Who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not" (96: 4-5).

When the first five verses of this chapter *al-'Alaq* were revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the cave, he returned home and told his wife Khadijah about the incident. He was scared and apprehensive. Khadijah reassured him that God would not waste him away. Her cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, was familiar with such spiritual phenomena as angels, revelation, and the like. She suggested that they discuss the event the with him coming day to seek his advice. Meanwhile Khadijah who did not know much about these things was confident that Satan would never be able to deceive her husband. According to one tradition, she took the Prophet (peace be upon him) to Waraqah ibn Nawfal the next morning.

Another tradition suggests that the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned the matter to his close confidant and companion, Abu Bakr, and requested him to arrange a meeting with Waraqah. A Christian by

religion, Waraqah ibn Nawfal was very old at the time, and had lost his eyesight. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) saw him and narrated the incident, Waraqah burst forth without any hesitation: "O Muhammad! If what you have just narrated is correct, your *namus* resembles that of Moses (peace be upon him)." The word '*namus*' is used for honour in Urdu. Obviously this is not the sense of Waraqah's statement. Some commentators suggest that the word means "reliable" or "trustworthy." This too is not applicable to the context. Some scholars have suggested that *namus* was the name given to Gabriel. But even this meaning is not relevant. In Islamic literature, Gabriel is referred to as the Trustworthy Soul, *al-Rah al-Amin* (26:193). I think that *namus*, originally an alien word, was Arabicised. It is the Greek word *Nomos*. In the Greek language, the Torah is called *Nomos* i.e. Law. In other words, Waraqah ibn Nawfal stated that what he had heard from the Prophet (peace be upon him) resembled the Torah of Moses and this meaning seems to be most relevant and reasonable.

The oldest reference to the publication and propagation of the Qur'an is found in Ibn Ishaq's book *al-Maghazi*. The book had been lost to posterity, but parts of it have been recovered recently and have been published by the Government of Morocco. It contains a brief [and] extremely interesting tradition covering a line and a half. We do not know why Ibn Hisham inadvertently missed this statement in his biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The statement is as follows:

“Whenever the text of the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) he would first of all recite it in the assembly of men. Later on he would repeat the same text in the special assembly of women.”

This is an important event in the history of Islam. It establishes that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was as much concerned with the education of women as he was with the instruction of men. This is the oldest available reference to the propagation of the Qur'an. What happened after this is difficult to determine. From the very beginning of the Prophet's career we come across something unfamiliar i.e. the writing down of the Qur'an and possibly committing it to memory. On the occasion of the first revelation, namely the first five verses of *al-'Alaq*, Gabriel imparted two lessons to the Prophet (peace be upon him). First, he taught him how to purify the body before beginning prayers. He instructed him about the details of ablution and purification after answering the call of nature. Second, he taught him how to perform the prayer. Gabriel assumed the position of the Imam and the Prophet (peace be upon him) assumed the role of a follower standing behind him, watching every movement and following his various postures during the prayer i.e. standing, bending and prostrating himself. It is obvious that verses of the Qur'an are recited during prayers. Therefore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) must have asked his followers during the very early period to memorize the Qur'an and repeat the verses constantly in the daily prayers.

Committing the Qur'an to memory and writing it down started right from the beginning. It takes some time to memorize a new text, but the exercise becomes easier if it is written. In other words, committing the Qur'an to memory and writing it down began simultaneously. Muslim historians state that whenever a revelation was received, the Prophet (peace be upon him) summoned one of his literate Companions and dictated the text to him. Immediately after dictation, he would ask the

scribe to read out what he had taken down. The idea was to ensure perfect accuracy.



Compilation Of The Qur'an

This, then, was the beginning of the compilation of the Qur'an. It was the custom of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that immediately after dictating, he would ask his Companions to memorize the text, and repeat it daily during the two prayers - at that time only two prayers were ordained. It was only after the Ascension that five prayers became obligatory and people began to repeat do verses of the Qur'an five times during then daily prayers. A practical benefit that accrued from this was that a man with a weak memory, who was likely to forget the verses reciting them only twice, would preserve them in his memory, reciting them five times a day.

Indeed it was the Prophet (peace be upon him) who, for the first time, ordered the memorizing, together with the writing, of the scripture, i.e. the Qur'an. Before him, we do not come across a similar example in the entire history of the chain of the Prophets. He took care of even a more serious problem. Suppose for a moment that we have a manuscript which, for some reason had some textual mistakes. Our memorized version [then,] would also carry the same errors. How, then, do we set about to correct the mistakes? The Prophet (peace be upon him) attended to this problem also. He ordered that every Muslim should learn the Qur'an from a reliable teacher. And who could be more reliable than the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself?

Every Muslim was asked, therefore, to learn to read the Qur'an from the Prophet (peace be upon him). If he had a manuscript, he was required

to read from it in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him). When he had certified that the manuscript was correct it was [then] committed to memory. When the number of Muslims increased, it was obviously not possible for one person to teach all the people. The Prophet (peace be upon him), therefore, directed a few Companions, in whose knowledge of the subject he had full confidence, to help him in his task.

This was a group of teachers whose ability to impart the requisite knowledge was personally certified by the Prophet (peace be upon him). This process continues unabated. If someone learns to read the Qur'an from a teacher, the diploma that he gets after the completion of his studies contains the following certificate from the teacher. "I have taught so and so, the reading of those words of the Holy Qur'an in accordance with the rules of its recitation followed faithfully by my own teacher who assured me that his teacher had also taught him in the same way." The last link in the chain is the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself and the rules set by him are still followed in the world of Islam.

Except for the Islamic tradition, no nation in the world has ever devised such principles for the preservation of their religious book. Principles of compilation of the Holy Qur'an were evolved during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). But this is not all. Another requirement had to be fulfilled from the very beginning. Before I dilate on it, let me tell you something about the manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an.

It was probably the fifth year of prophethood when 'Umar embraced Islam. At that time he was known to be a mortal enemy of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He left his house one day fully determined to assassinate him. On the way, he came across one of his relatives who had

secretly embraced Islam. He asked 'Umar where was he going fully armed [like that]. Since he was a relative, 'Umar took him into [his] confidence and disclosed that he was going (God forbid) to finish [kill] Muhammad (peace be upon him) who, he said, had created confusion in the ranks of the community. The relative warned that before plunging his tribe into a war with Banu Hashim 'Umar should go back home and deal with his own sister Fatimah and her husband who had already embraced Islam. "Before setting out to reform the world", said the relative, "you better start with your house!" 'Umar was taken completely by surprise. He went straight to the house of his sister. Near the door he heard a voice as if someone was singing or reciting something melodiously. He knocked violently at the door. The harsh exchange he had with his sister and brother-in-law is well known. In brief, 'Umar prevailed upon them to show him the text they were reading. They asked him to take a bath 'Umar complied. They then produced the text they were reading. This comprised a few verses of the Qur'an. 'Umar was overwhelmed as he read them. He [then] embraced Islam [upon hearing the verses].

I mention this incident to suggest that at least a few chapters from the Qur'an were already preserved in writing as early as the fifth year of prophethood, and this was well before [the] migration to Madinah. After this we come across another manuscript. This incident probably relates to the second Covenant of 'Aqabah. A few people came from Madinah and embraced Islam at the hands of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Of these, historians have explicitly written about a member of the tribe of Banu Zurayq, to whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave a complete copy of the Qur'an revealed until then. The Companion, after returning to Madinah, used to recite it in a loud voice to his tribesmen in the local

mosque. This is the second reference to the compilation of the Qur'an in the form of a manuscript, which has been narrated in detail by historians.



Compilation Of The Qur'an In The Prophet's Time

The first step taken by the Prophet (peace be upon him) for the preservation of the Qur'an was the order that the Qur'an should be learned from an authorized teacher; the second was to preserve it in writing so that one could refresh one's memory in case one forgot; and the third was to commit the Qur'an to memory. A difficulty arose in carrying out the three directives in that the entire Qur'an, as we have already pointed out, was not revealed at one time. It was revealed gradually over a period of twenty-three years. And the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not compile it mechanically in the chronological order of revelation. It was compiled under the direction of revelation and Prophetic wisdom. The first five verses of the *surah al-'Alaq* are the first in order of revelation, but they appear in the ninety-sixth chapter (the total number of the Quranic chapters being 114). The chapters which appear in the beginning of the Qur'an were revealed in Madinah after the Migration. In other words, the Qur'an was not compiled in chronological order but followed another pattern.

A few difficulties could arise on this score. For example, a chapter which is revealed [one] day is assigned a particular place by the Prophet (peace be upon him). Another is revealed the next day and the Prophet (peace be upon him) direct[ed] that it should be written before or after a particular chapter.

It was necessary, therefore, to conduct periodic checks on th[at] account. We come across instances of correction and revision of personal manuscripts after the Migration. There is a tradition that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to repeat aloud the whole Qur'an, (i.e. revealed till that year), during the month of Ramadan. The Companions who could read and write would bring along their personal manuscripts and would compare them with the recited version of the Prophet (peace be upon him) so that they could correct the mistakes in the text, if any, and check the proper order of the chapters. This practice was called '*ardah*', which means 'presentation.' Historians (Imam Bukhari, for example), have clearly recorded that in the last year of his life, a few months before his death, the Prophet (peace be upon him) read out the complete text of the Qur'an twice during the month of Ramadan. He declared that his end was approaching and that he had been directed by Gabriel to recite the Qur'an twice so that people could correct mistakes of writing, if any. This is how the last Divine message given to the last Prophet (peace be upon him) was preserved for posterity. This is how Providence provided us with the authentic text of the Holy Qur'an.



Compilation Of The Qur'an During Abu Bakr's Regime

At the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him), few realized the need of compiling the Qur'an. Whatever the people had of it was deeply revered and recited during prayers. But an incident took place which led not only the government but also the people to pay immediate attention to the compilation of the Qur'an. There did not exist at that time an official copy of the Qur'an and perhaps no single person possessed the complete written text. The incident in question took place after the demise of the Prophet (peace be upon him). What happened was that a few people in the country turned apostate and Musaylimah, the Liar, not only became an apostate but declared himself to be the new Prophet. Since he was [the] head of a powerful tribe, many people offered support to him. Abu Bakr waged a war on him. The number of Muslims w[ere] much less than that of the enemy and the battle took place in the enemy territory at Yamamah, in the suburbs of what is now the city of Riyadh (popularly, Riyadh). Many Muslims were martyred in this battle. Some of those who fell were considered [to be] the best among those who had memorized the Holy Qur'an. The Muslims of Madinah were happy to receive the news that Muslims had won the battle, but they were also sad to hear that some of the most highly respected Companions who had committed the Qur'an to memory had been martyred.

'Umar realized that those who had memorized the Qur'an would slowly depart from the world either owing to natural death or martyrdom

in future battles. It was imperative for the government, therefore, to devise a system to preserve the Qur'an for posterity or else it would meet the same fate which befell the scriptures of the Prophets of yore. He invited the attention of Caliph Abu Bakr to the fact that many a Companion who had committed the Qur'an to memory were among the six thousand Muslims who had been martyred during the battle of Yamamah. Abu Bakr's reply to 'Umar was characteristic of a devout follower of the Prophet: "O 'Umar"! he said, "how can I undertake a work which was not done by the Prophet?" 'Umar argued his case until both agreed to abide by the verdict of a third person. They named Zayd ibn Thabit as a mediator. He was a scribe of the Prophetic revelation. He too adopted Abu Bakr's line of argument "How can we do what the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not do?" The discussion was resumed. 'Umar asked Zayd: "What is the harm in writing?" Zayd's reply, a recorded in a tradition, was, "I do not see any harm either."

It was an emotional approach to argue that one could not do what the Prophet (peace be upon him) had not done but, on the other hand, there was nothing to prevent them from undertaking the assignment. Zayd is reported to have said that when Abu Bakr ordered him to start the work, he felt it would be far easier to carry the Mount of Uhud on his head than to shoulder the burden of compiling the Holy Qur'an.

With the beat of drum it was widely announced in the city of Madinah that everyone in possession of any part of the Holy Qur'an in writing, recited in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) at the "presentation" ('ardah), or corrected after comparison with it, or read before the Prophet (peace be upon him), should produce it before the

Commission whose head was Zayd ibn Thabit and whose members comprised a number of Companions including 'Umar. The Commission was directed to collect the authorized text of the Holy Qur'an. Its terms of reference stipulated that an *ayah* (verse) occurring at least twice in the manuscripts submitted to it, should be accepted for the record, or else it should be rejected.

It was in this manner that the task of the compilation of the Qur'an, under the supervision of Zayd ibn Thabit, a scribe of the Prophetic revelation, was completed during the tenure of Abu Bakr. At least twenty or twenty-five Companions, who had committed the Qur'an to memory, were alive at the time of the Prophet's death. Some of them were from the *Ansar* (Local Residents; Helpers) while the rest were *Muhajirun* (Emigrants). They remembered the entire Qur'an by heart. One of them, Umm Waraqah, was a woman. The head of the Commission, Zayd ibn Thabit, was himself one of those who remembered the Holy Qur'an by heart. Therefore, whatever he agreed to include in the compilation was done in the sure belief and knowledge that he too had preserved the entire text in his own memory.

Here a pertinent point of detail should be mentioned. When a person presented his manuscript to the commission, 'Umar would ask him to declare on oath that the manuscript he was submitting was the same as was corrected in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The manuscript was accepted only after such an oath was taken.

When the whole Qur'an had been thus written down, Zayd ibn Thabit, according his own statement, read it from beginning to end. He found one verse missing. This verse he said, was present in his memory but was

absent from all the written manuscripts. He went round the city in search of this verse. He went to every house, first in the quarter of the Emigrants and that in that of the focal Residents. None of the Emigrants had this particular verse in writing. Among the Local Residents, he at last came across a person who had a manuscript which contained this verse. It had been read out in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him); but according to the instructions of Abu Bakr, a verse could be accepted only if it was presented at least in two manuscripts. But the verse in question was found only in one. Strange indeed are the ways of God. The owner of the manuscript turned out to be the one to whom the Prophet (peace be upon him), being pleased with some performance of his, had once said that his evidence was to be considered equal to that of two men. Nature had perhaps anticipated the emergency facing Zayd ibn Thabit. He accepted the verse from the man. According to Zayd he read the Qur'an again and discovered that yet another verse was missing.

It is possible that this tradition relates to the same incident and the narrators might have had their own differences about the verse. These verses have been described in detail and we are fully aware of their context. Suppose, however, for a moment that we decide to exclude them today from the Holy Qur'an. In doing so we will not be rejecting any fundamental statement. Verses with similar meaning are available in other parts of the Qur'an. But nevertheless meticulous care was exercised to ensure a perfectly correct compilation and collection of the Quranic verses. A parallel to this punctilious performance is not to be found in the case of any other scripture in the history of the world.



Compilation After Abu Bakr's Regime

When the compilation of the Holy Qur'an was completed during the regime of Abu Bakr, the manuscript, according to historians, was presented to him. It remained with him until his death. It then went to his successor 'Umar. After the martyrdom of 'Umar, the manuscript passed into the custody of his daughter Hafsah, the widow of the prophet (peace be upon him). All of the Prophet's spouses were not educated. Some knew how to read, some knew both writing and reading, while others were illiterate. Hafsah, the daughter of 'Umar, was one of the few women of her time who knew both reading and writing. 'Uthman, the successor of 'Umar, presumably because of the personality and prestige of Hafsah, did not consider it appropriate to withdraw the manuscript from her custody. He was himself one of those who had committed the Qur'an to memory. He had his own copy and did not need to acquire the one with Hafsah. But an event took place which made it necessary for the Caliph to resume its custody.

'Umar's regime saw a phase of quick conquests. Many opportunists who were, in reality, hypocrites (*munifiqun*) began to masquerade as Muslims to seek material gains. They wanted to subvert Islam from within. The Qur'an, too, became the victim of their intrigues. Maybe these intrigues were of no consequence, but an incident did create a grave situation. During 'Uthman's regime, an expedition was sent to Armenia. Qastalani, a commentator of the Sahih of Bukhari records that while this

force was stationed close to Erzerum, the recitation of some verses during a prayer led to a quarrel between the imam and his followers. Some of the followers took an exception to the manner in which he recited the verses. One held that his teacher in Iraq, such and such Companion of the Prophet, had taught him to read it differently. Another countered by saying that his teacher in Syria such and such Companion, had taught him to recite it in another way. Both stuck to their versions. The dispute nearly led to an armed conflict but the sagacity of the army commander helped avert an ugly situation.

When the army returned to Madinah, its commander, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamin, instead of going to his own house, went straight to the Caliph and briefed him about the details of the event and its implication; One of the qualities of 'Uthman was that he was a man [who was] of [a] decisive nature, and had the capacity to have his decisions implemented. He decided at once to redress the situation. A messenger was dispatched to Hafsah with a request that the manuscript which was prepared during Abu Bakr's regime and was in her custody, should be lent to him; and an assurance was given that it would be returned to her. On receiving the manuscript, 'Uthman entrusted it once again to the old scribe of the Qur'an, Zayd ibn Thabit, with the request that its copies should be prepared, compared and corrected for spelling mistakes.

The Holy Qur'an is the first document in the Arabic language. It is possible that in the initial stages the Arabic script had certain inadequacies and shortcomings. 'Uthman, therefore, issued a directive to carry out necessary reforms in the script in the interest of evolving a uniform system of pronunciation. He pointed out regional disparities on this score. The

tribes of Najd pronounced a word in one way, while the people of Madinah pronounced the same word in a different way. 'Uthman ordered that in the event of a difference in the pronunciation of a certain word, the pronunciation of the people of Makkah should be followed. Zayd ibn Thabit carried out the order and prepared copies of the entire manuscript with the help of a few assistants. 'Uthman also directed that in the event of a difference of opinion on any issue during the copying of the manuscript, the matter should be referred to him.

Unfortunately we do not possess information about the words whose pronunciation led to the quarrel in the army stationed near Erzerum. Perhaps the basis of the dispute was the difference in various dialects which are spoken in different accents. For example, in the Qur'an, we come across a word '*tabut*.' It means 'box.' In the dialect of Madinah it was pronounced as '*tabuh*,' with an '*h*' at the end, while the people of Makkah pronounce it with a '*t*' at the end. The members of the Commission could not reach a consensus on this issue. The matter was referred to 'Uthman who ruled that the word should be written with an '*r*.'



‘Uthman’s Role In The Compilation Of The Qur’an

This is perhaps not a matter of much significance, but we mention it to bring out the nature of ‘Uthman's contribution to the compilation of the Holy Qur’an. All that happened during his regime was that copies of the Holy Qur’an were prepared, and orthography or spellings were corrected at places. The sound of words was not changed, but the writing of the sound registered some difference. Four, or, according to another account, seven copies were prepared. To meet the high standard of intellectual integrity obtaining at the time, 'Uthman ordered that all the seven copies should be read aloud, one by one, from beginning to end in the Prophet's Mosque so that not a shadow of doubt remained in the mind of anyone that he had introduced any change in the Qur’an.

When all the manuscripts were read out in this manner and everyone was satisfied that they were correct, 'Uthman dispatched a copy each to different provincial capitals of his vast empire with instructions that in [the] future, copies should be made only from the official text. If anyone had a copy with a different text, it was required to be destroyed. One does not know exactly how far this directive was carried out. It was practically impossible that the police should go to every house in the three continents of the empire and compare copies of the Qur’an found in the houses with the official text and destroy those found [that were] different from the authentic version. We do not come across any event of this kind in history.

All the copies of the Holy Qur'an which have come down to us from the first century of the *Hijra* are the same as the four or seven copies sent to different capitals by 'Uthman. Some of them are still extant. The Tashqand (popularly, Tashkent) Museum has one. How did it reach there? This copy was first found in Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads. When Tamerlane conquered Damascus, the most precious treasure he came by in the loot was 'Uthman's personal copy of the Holy Qur'an. He brought it to Samarqand, his own capital, and preserved it there. The copy remained there until the Russians conquered the city in the nineteenth century. The famous copy of the Qur'an was shifted by the Russian commander-in-chief to St. Petersburg.

Russian historians suggest that it was sold by the ruler of Samarqand to the Russian commander. The idea is to establish that the Russians had not stolen but had bought the copy. In any case, it remained in St. Petersburg until the end of the First World War. When the Communists came to power, many who did not wish to live under the new regime, immigrated to different countries. One of them was General Ali Akbar Topchi Bashi who went to Paris. I had an opportunity to meet him. He told me this story:

“I was present in St. Petersburg as a senior officer of the army when the Tsar was killed. I sent a commando force to take over the royal palace and seek out 'Uthman's personal copy of the Qur'an from the royal library. As an army general I went to the railway station and demanded an engine from the station master. I placed the Qur'an in the engine compartment and ordered the engine driver to take it with an army escort to Turkestan as quickly as possible. Thus the copy reached its destination. A few hours

later, the Communist army commanders got wind of the incident. They sent another engine with an escort to chase the one I had dispatched. But they missed it. Thus the copy reached Tashqand.”

When the Communists took over Tashqand, they did not transfer the copy in question to Leningrad with the result that it is still there in Tashqand. During the days of the Tsars, fifty copies, based on the photo of the manuscript, were printed. I know about a few of them. One is in America; another in England. I saw a copy in Kabul. Another copy is in Cairo. I have its microfilm. Another manuscript is preserved in [the] Topkapi Museum of Istanbul. It is attributed to 'Uthman. I have seen it myself. The page bearing the verse: “**But God will suffice you . . .**” (11:137) has red spots on it. It is said that it is the blood of 'Uthman who was martyred while he was reading the Qur'an. The third manuscript is in the India Office Library. I have its photocopy. It bears official seals and a statement that it is 'Uthman's own copy of the Qur'an. There is no difference in the script or the size of all these manuscripts. It seems they are contemporaneous. They are written on skins, not on paper. It is possible that these manuscripts are 'Uthman's own and it is also possible that they belong to the same period or were written a little later than 'Uthman's own copy of the Qur'an. In any case, it is a matter of pride and satisfaction for all of us that there is not the slightest difference between these copies and the text of the Qur'an in use today.

'Uthman is known as the Jami al-Qur'an. This does not mean that he collected the Qur'an. Muslim historians interpret the title to mean that he brought the Muslims around to a uniform reading of the Qur'an. To save Muslims from the differences of pronunciation, he selected the Makkan

pronunciation. 'Uthman held that it was no longer necessary [for the Prophet's permission to read it according to the pronunciation of any of the dialects because the standard dialect of Makkah had been introduced all over the world of Islam. Thus 'Uthman was instrumental in creating a common language and gathering all Muslims around an absolutely uniform reading on the Qur'an. May God bless his soul!



Authenticity Of The Quranic Text

Some time back, the Christian clergy of Germany thought of collating the ancient manuscripts of the Bible. As the original Bible in Aramaic (the language of Jews) is extinct, the oldest available Bible is in Greek. It is from Greek that the Bible has been translated into all other languages of the world. The Greek manuscripts, they thought, should be collected and compared with each other. Thus all the Greek manuscripts of the Bible in the world, whether complete or incomplete, were collected. The report published after this global exercise stated: "Some two hundred thousand contradictory narrations have been found." And then there is a sentence: "Of these one-eighth are of an important nature." This is the story of the Bible.

After the publication of the report, some people probably felt jealous of the Qur'an in the University of Munich. An Institute for Quranic Research was set up. The idea was to collect all the oldest available copies of the Holy Qur'an, in original or photocopies. The process of collection lasted for three generations. When I was at the University of Paris in 1933, the third Director of the Institute. Mr. Pretzl, came to Paris to get photocopies of all the ancient manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an available in the Public Library of Paris. The professor told me personally at that time (1933) that the Institute had 43,000 photocopies of the Holy Qur'an and that the work of collation was proceeding apace. During the Second World War, a bomb hit the building of the Institute destroying the edifice, the

library and the staff. An interim report published shortly before the beginning of the Second World War stated, *inter alia*, that the work of collation of the Quranic manuscripts had not yet been completed. But the result of the examination conducted until then suggested that while some mistakes of calligraphy had been detected in the manuscripts, not a single discrepancy in the text had been discovered. A calligraphic a typographical error found in one manuscript does not recur in another. Suppose, for example, that in a manuscript of the Qur'an one word is missing from the text. This mistake will remain confined only to that very manuscript, the rest will have the complete text. The omission is the result of a oversight on the part of the scribe who has inadvertently missed a word. Should there be a difference in narration, it will be found in many manuscripts. This is not so in the case of the Qur'an.

All the events narrated so far categorically prove the Divine claim in the Qur'an: "**Verily it is We Who revealed the Remembrance and verily We are its guardians...**" (15:9).



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: How would you explain the Abbreviated Letters found in the Qur'an?

Answer: In certain places in the Qur'an, there are no words but only letters e.g. *Alif Lam Mim*, *Ha Mim*, etc. The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not explain the significance of these letters. Had he done so, there would have been no difference of opinion on this issue.

Now the matter has come at such a pass that at least 60 or 70 opinions are available. This has been going on for 1400 years and the process has not come to an end. Even today fresh viewpoints are being put forth. I was at the University of Paris in 1933. One day a Christian class-fellow told me that the Muslims had not been able yet to understand letters which cannot be joined to those coming next to them. He was an expert as music. He suggested that the Abbreviated Letters referred to tunes and rhythms of music. In brief, people have been trying and will continue to try to unravel the mystery of the abbreviated letters.

All that I can say is that I know nothing in this field except a Tradition which provides a clue. Some Jews came to see the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked him how long his religion would endure. The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "*Alif Lam Mim*." The Jews said: "Thank God your religion will last seventy-one years and will then perish." The Prophet (peace be upon him) said *Alif Lam Mim Ra* had also been revealed to him. The Jews calculated *Alif Lam Ra* was equal to 231 years while *Alif Lam Mim Ra* was equal to 271. Then the Prophet referred to other letters having

been revealed to him e.g. *Ha Mim*, *'Ayn Sin Qaf* etc. This went on until the Jews quit in desperation.

It is possible that the Prophet's reply was aimed at confounding them. But the reply certainly refers to the numerical value of [the] letters. As you know, in [the] Arabic alphabet *alif* = 1, *ba* = 2, *jim* = 3 and *dat* = 4. The Arabic alphabet has twenty-eight letters. One can perfectly write up to 1000 with these letters. To avoid the possibility of [a] misunderstanding arising because of the use of a figure, a letter of the alphabet can be used instead. Both can also be used at the same time. I understand this is [the] standard practice in Sanskrit. But Sanskrit has far more than twenty-eight letters of the alphabet, and one can write up to one trillion.

Question: You said something to the effect that no harm would be done if a verse was omitted from the Holy Qur'an for there are others carrying the same meaning. Why was this statement considered necessary?

Answer: All I said was that there was nothing fundamental in the two verses which were stated to have been unavailable in a written form to Zayd ibn Thabit. Their omission would not, by any chance, adversely affect the meaning of the Holy Qur'an. For example, had there been only one verse stating that there is no God except Allah, there was a possibility that its omission would damage the correct position of Islam. What I meant to say was that there was no such issue of substance involved in the two verses in question. Take for example the following verse:

“Surely, a Messenger has come unto you from among yourselves; grievous to him is that you shall fall into trouble; He is ardently desirous of your welfare; And to the believers He is Compassionate, Merciful. But if they turn away, say, Allah is sufficient for me. There is no God but He. In Him do I put my trust, and He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne.” (9:128-129).

It is stated here that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is extremely considerate to his people. It is obvious that this is an expression of praise for the Prophet, but its omission would not by any chance gravely damage the teachings of Islam. I certainly did not suggest that there was a possibility of omitting a verse from the Holy Qur'an. I would state, however, that some of the verses of the Qur'an are repetitive. Suppose one of them is omitted. It is obvious that such an omission would not detract from the teachings of the Qur'an. For example the expression: “Which, then, of the favours of your Lord will you deny?” (55:14) occurs many times in *surah al-Rahman*. If it is omitted in one or two places the teachings of the Qur'an would not be affected. It is not suggested that the change is probable or suitable. All I wanted to say is that the verse which Zayd ibn Thabit had to seek so assiduously did not contain anything fundamental whose omission would adversely affect the teachings of Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has been praised in this verse. He has also been praised in other verses. This is all I wanted to say.

Question: Please explain the word *Farqalit* (*Pericletos*, *Paracletos*)?

Answer: You are probably aware that it is a Greek word which means a *guide* or a *director*. Muslims generally believe that the word has the

same meaning as *Ahmad*, that is, the one who has been much praised. This idea gained currency among Muslims probably because the oldest biographer of the Prophet, Ibn Ishaq, has stated that the Prophet's name is mentioned in [the] ancient scriptures. The word also occurs in the Bible and it means *Ahmad*. I think it is quite possible that Jesus Christ prophesied the advent of Ahmad. The Qur'an also confirms this: "... give glad tidings of a Messenger who will come after me, his name is Ahmad" (61:6).

There are two Greek words with a slight difference in meaning i.e. *Pericletos* and *Paracletos*. The former means praise incarnate (*Ahmad*), while the latter means a *guide* or a *director*. If Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) foretold the advent of the last Prophet who would be a guide, or prophesied the coming of a Messenger who would be praise incarnate, it means the same thing. Jesus was merely saying that he had not completed the faith and that a Prophet who would follow him would do so. There is no contradiction in the two contentions. This is borne out by some other statements in the Bible. At one place Jesus (peace be upon him) states, for example, that he had to leave the world soon and that it was necessary to do so for only in that event the Father in Heaven would send a man who would fully explain things that Jesus had not yet touched upon. There were many problems which Jesus wanted to explain, but the people did not have patience. "A man will therefore come". He prophesied, "Who will explain my position again to you and will remain with you until the end of time." In other places in the Bible similar sentiments reinforcing the same idea find expression.

Question: How does one reconcile various statements, which are sometimes mutually contradictory, concerning the circumstances in the context of which the different verses of the Qur'an were revealed?

Answer: One can only say that the general rules applicable to resolving a difference of opinion in the case of a tradition would also apply here. We shall first examine whether one or the other tradition is correctly reported. Whose narrators were more reliable? This is the formula for resolving an differences of opinion in the case of traditions and the same rule will apply to this case. I think differences surrounding the circumstances of a revelation are not really important. Suppose for example that a narrator states that the first surah revealed was al-Baqarah. Another narrator does not agree and suggests that another chapter was revealed instead. This difference of opinion, in my view, does not carry much weight. It only reflects the state of the Companion's knowledge. He narrates what he recollects.

Question: Who was Umm Waraqah? Was she the only lady who committed the Holy Qur'an to memory or are Umm Salamah and 'A'ishah also included in this category?

Answer: Umm Waraqah was an Ansar lady who had embraced Islam in its very early phase. It is recorded that she offered her services for the Battle of Badr to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and requested him to take her along as she wanted to fight the enemy. There is another aspect which can present some practical and academic problems. It is stated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) appointed her leader or imam of a

mosque in her locality and that men prayed behind her. The mu'adhdhin, who calls the faithful to prayer, was a man. It is obvious that he too prayed behind the Imam. This account occurs in the Sunan of Abu Da'ud and the Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

Here the question arises whether a woman can be made an Imam. One can perhaps speculate that the tradition in question relates to the early period of Islam and that the Prophet (peace be upon him) possibly cancelled it later. But on the contrary it [was] proved that Umm Waraqah was alive during the regime of 'Umar and continued to discharge her duties. We shall, therefore, have to give some serious thought to the question. It becomes necessary sometimes to make an exception to a rule. The Prophet (peace be upon him) must have made the exceptional appointment in exceptional circumstances.

From my personal experience I can relate an incident. A few years ago an Afghan girl student came to Paris. A Dutch class - fellow fell in love with her. He was so infatuated that he gave up his religion and embraced Islam. Both got married. The next day she came to tell me that her husband had become a Muslim and wanted to do what the faith prescribed, but the problem was that he did not know how to say his prayers. "He insists," she said, "that I should lead the prayers and teach him how to conduct himself. Can he follow me in prayers?" asked the girl. A common maulawi, if asked, would reply in the negative. But I recalled the case of Umm Waraqah and advised that as an exceptional case she should agree to lead the prayers. I also suggested that her husband should quickly memorize the verses considered necessary for prayers, and he should then lead the prayers and the wife should follow him. In other words, it was in

exceptional circumstances that the Prophet (peace be upon him) made the exceptional choice. Anticipating an exigency in the future, the Prophet (peace be upon him) provided a precedent.

As regards the question whether women other than Umm Waraqah had also committed the Holy Qur'an to memory, I am afraid I do not know. I have not come across any tradition suggesting that 'A'ishah or Umm Salamah also fall in this category. They certainly remembered a few Surahs, and it is possible they remembered many, but I have not yet come across a clear statement mentioning that they had in fact committed the Holy Qur'an to memory.



The **Emergence of Islam** is an attempt to present, in clear and simple English, the contents of a series of twelve lectures delivered by Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah in March 1980 at Islamia University, Bahawalpur. The lectures, which were delivered without even the help of notes, are the result of a life-long study of, and reflections on, the early period of Islam by one of the best-known Muslim scholars of our time. In these lectures the learned author attempts to highlight the basic thrust of Islamic teachings and to outline the formative period of Islam's intellectual and institutional history. Drawing upon his vast reservoir of knowledge, Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah attempts to explain, in a manner that would make even a lay audience appreciate, the genesis and growth of Islamic thought, society and state, and of the institutions which were developed to translate Islamic norms into terms of practice.

Delivered in an easy-to-understand Urdu, and a style that is inimitably simple, informal and lucid, the lectures are strikingly free of academic jargon and pedantry. The author successfully attempts to convey a synthetic picture of Islam as it unfolded itself in the early period of its history - as a religion, as a community, as a state, as an intellectual tradition, and as a set of institutions which evolved under Islamic inspiration. Luckily, the lectures, which had a large audience who found the presentations very illuminating, were tape-recorded. This made it possible to have them transcribed and subsequently to publish them, presumably without the least editing, under the title *Khutbat-i Bahawalpur* ("Bahawalpur Lectures"). A slightly revised edition of the Lectures was published in 1985 by the Islamic Research Institute. Since then, the Lectures have gone into several prints. The interest they generated and the appreciation they evoked are an index of the esteem in which Dr. Hamidullah's scholarship is held, especially in the South Asian Sub-continent.