

Examination of the Arrangement of the Quran

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ABSTRACT

The Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad piece by piece over a period of 23 years. Examination of the time the Quran was gathered into a single collection, as discussed in this study, is an important issue in the history of the Quran. The logical, historical, narrative and Quranic evidence set forth in the present article demonstrates that the Quran was gathered in the age of the Prophet Muhammad under his supervision into a single organised collection.

KEYWORDS: Collection of the Quran, the time of the Prophet Muhammad, chapters, verses.

1. INTRODUCTION

A wide range of subjects are researched in Quranic sciences, including the history of the Quran, which covers such topics as the manner of revelation, different methods of recitation (*qirā'āt*), and the collection and arrangement of the Quran as a singular text. Quranic researchers have shown particular regard for the collection of the Quran. Numerous questions in this area entice researchers to direct their inquiries to this matter. Some of these are as follows: How and when was the Quran, with its scattered verses and timeless design, collected into a single volume with a specific beginning and ending? Did the Prophet Muhammad undertake this task himself? Did he commission and supervise the endeavour? Did his successors and the caliphs carry out this charge?

The present study takes a descriptive-analytical approach to answer the question, 'In what period were the verses of the Quran gathered into a single collection?'

2. Collection of the Quran in the Period of Prophet Muhammad

Examination of Islamic sources reveals evidence indicating that the Quran was gathered in the age of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. The following paragraphs examine the most significant evidence and reasons.

2.1. Prudence and Interest

The Quran is the timeless miracle of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and the slightest flaw or deviation in this book would destroy the foundations of Islam. Therefore, among all sacred things in Islam, God has emphatically guaranteed to protect the Quran.^[1]

Considering that the Quran is the source of strength for Prophet Muhammad's invitation and comprehends God's statutes, it would have been imprudent and contrary to the interests of Islam had the Prophet of Islam not collected the Quran into a single book. Such negligence cannot even be attributed to a common Muslim, let alone Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, who was God's messenger to the people.^[2]

Considering Prophet Muhammad's command about writing down the revelation as well as his statement, 'Preserve knowledge by writing it down',^[3] is it possible that the Prophet of Islam was remiss in writing down and collecting the Quran? With the special circumstances in the Arabian Peninsula, the possibility of loss of the Quran, and the Quran's indication that some Jews distorted their own divine book, how could it be possible for the Prophet of Islam to be lax about putting the Quran in writing until Zayd ibn Thābit is forced to gather the Quran from people's memories?^[4]

Any person that knows about the Prophet of Islam's wisdom and his recommendations about the Quran as well as his foresight and circumspection about his umma would surely acknowledge that it would be impossible for the Prophet of Islam to leave the Quran scattered in such a manner.^[5]

2.2. Fundamentality of the Quran in Islam

Historians have underlined that the Prophet Muhammad had scribes to record treaties, the amount of dates produced by palm trees, and loans. The Prophet had even ordered them to document the names of every person that had accepted Islam prior to the *Hudaybiyyah* peace treaty. In addition, the Muslims had army scribes for recording issues related to war and the names of the people chosen to go to battle. Is it logical for the Prophet of Islam to attach importance to these tasks, but to disregard documentation of the Quran, which is the basis of Islam and a pillar of the religion? Was recording loaned funds more important than writing down the Quran? Such disregard would not occur for a common individual, and certainly not for the Prophet of Islam who was a

sagacious person.^[6] The Prophet of Islam and his companions exerted extraordinary efforts to record the Quran. Can it be said that such efforts would be worthwhile without consideration for organisation, arrangement, and comprehensive documentation of this divine book? Can one commit one's very life to the revelation, considering it the greatest divine blessing, but disregard its documentation? How can one believe that the Prophet of Islam, who took great efforts to teach and record the Quran, was remiss in collecting it into a single volume? He was the one who conveyed the Quran to the people as the heart and pillar of human civilisation until the Day of Judgement; how could he remain dismissive of its future?^[7]

Collection and spread of the Quran among Muslims was one of the most important duties for Muslims in the early Islamic period since the Quran was the Prophet Muhammad's greatest miracle and considered the most important validation for his prophet hood. In addition, the Quran is the basis of Islam and the main source for the religion's commandments.^[8]

2.3. Compilers of the Quran

Historians have recorded the names of some companions of the Prophet Muhammad who gathered the Quran during the lifetime of the Prophet. Some traditions are cited hereunder that name some who compiled the Quran in the Prophet's period.

A. Qatādah quoted:

I asked Anas ibn Mālik, 'How many people gathered the Quran in the time of the Prophet of Islam?' Anas replied, 'four persons, all of whom were among the Anṣār: Ubay ibn Ka'b, Ma'ādh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thābit, and Abū Zayd.'^[9]

B. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr has quoted:

I gathered the Quran and recited it every night until the Prophet of Islam heard about it and said, 'Recite the entire Quran every month.'^[10]

C. Muḥammad ibn Ka'b Qurazī has quoted:

Five persons of the Anṣār named Ma'ādh ibn Jabal, 'Ibādah ibn Šāmit, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Abū al-Dardā', and Abū Ayyūb Anṣārī gathered the Quran in the time of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.^[11]

D. Shi'bī has narrated:

Six persons recorded the Quran in the Prophet's period. These include Ubay ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thābit, Ma'ādh ibn Jabal, Abū al-Dardā', Sa'd ibn 'Ubayd, and Abū Zayd.^[12]

There are discrepancies in these narrations about the names of the recorders of the Quran. These narrations, however, show that collection of the Quran was an issue in the time of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. There is no doubt that collection of the Quran in this context contrasts with the scattered state of the verses. Quranic verses were revealed separately, and the companions of the Prophet endeavoured to obtain what was revealed and append the new verses to previous ones. These people gathered the Quranic verses in the time of the Prophet of Islam, such that on the passing of the Prophet of Islam, the entire Quran had already been gathered and recorded. It is impossible to believe that such a great undertaking would not have been instructed by the Prophet of Islam. Considering the Prophet of Islam and his companions' exceptional regard for memorisation and recording of the Quran, it is certain that the sequence of the verses and chapters of the Quran were made known by the Prophet.

It is wrong to say that in these narrations the term 'collect' (*jam*) refers to a part of the Quran not the entirety. The context makes it clear that the entire Quran is intended since collection of part of the Quran does not warrant such acclaim.^[13]

Rāfi'ī construes 'collection of the Quran' in the aforementioned narrations to mean documentation of the entire Quran. He claims that there is consensus that 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, Ma'ādh ibn Jabal, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thābit, and 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd wrote down the entire Quran during the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam, and that their manuscripts served as sources for the Qurans that were later written.^[14]

On the theory that 'collection of the Quran' in the cited narrations refers to memorisation, Khū'ī states that the claim is invalid since, first, there is no reason or proof for such a claim and, second, if collection of the Quran referred to memorisation, how is it that this endeavour was said to be performed by only four or six individuals whereas there were innumerable memorisers of the Quran during the time of the Prophet of Islam; in fact, too many to be listed. Therefore, collection of the Quran in these narrations refers to documented collection rather than cerebral.^[15]

2.4. Transcription of the Quran and Order of Verses and Chapters

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, appointed those who knew how to write to transcribe the revelation. Those who had deficiencies in this area, he encouraged. Whenever a verse was revealed, he would summon one or more scribes to record the revelation. Historians have listed these scribes, and according to researchers, their numbers surpassed 40.^[16]

The Prophet of Islam closely supervised the work of the scribes of the Quran. This is evidenced by numerous narrations stating that after pronouncing the revelation, the Prophet would ask the scribe to read what he had written and if there were mistakes, the Prophet would correct them.^[17]

The final word on the order of the verses and their placement in chapters, as seen in currently available Qurans, is that the Prophet of Islam detailed the order as revealed by God. Due to the decisive evidence, there is no room for other viewpoints in this regard. According to traditions, whenever Gabriel came to the Prophet of Islam with a verse, he would specify its place in its chapter. Next, the Prophet of Islam would recite the verse(s) for his companions and instruct the scribes of the Quran to write the revelation in its place.

There is prolific narrative evidence stating that the order of verses in the Quran was predetermined by God. Some of these traditions are included below.

A. *Uthmān has narrated:*

When a verse was revealed to Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, he would summon a scribe and say, 'Place these verses in the chapter that states such and such.'^[18]

B. *Uthmān ibn Abī al-ʿAs has stated:*

I was sitting in the presence of the Prophet of Islam when he suddenly gazed above, then he looked down and said, 'Gabriel came to me and stated that the verse "Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded." must be placed in this part of the chapter.'^[19]

C. *Ibn ʿAbbās has reported:*

When the verse, 'And fear a Day when you will be returned to Allah. Then every soul will be compensated for what it earned, and they will not be treated unjustly'^[20] was revealed, Gabriel stated, 'God instructed this verse to be placed after verse 280 of chapter Baqarah.'^[21]

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, recited many chapters of the Quran with the extant order of verses in prayers and sermons. In other words, in addition to determining the order of verses immediately after revelation, he would observe this order in practice as well.^[22]

According to Zarkashī, the order of verses in each chapter and the placement of '*bism Allāh*' at the beginning of each chapter are doubtless predetermined.^[23]

In addition to this preordainment, the naming of the chapters was also performed by the Prophet of Islam.^[24]

Both Shias and Sunnis have cited many traditions about the rewards of reciting chapters of the Quran. This is indicative of the arrangement of verses into specific chapters and the naming of chapters by the Prophet of Islam. The sequence of chapters in the Quran was also determined by the Prophet of Islam.^[25]

Many traditions corroborate this view. Some such traditions are as follows.

A. *Hudhayfah Thaqafti has stated:*

I asked a companion of the Prophet of Islam, 'How do you break down the Quran into *hizbs*?' He answered, 'Three chapters, five chapters, seven chapters, nine chapters, eleven chapters, thirteen chapters, and section *Mufaṣṣal* begins with chapter Qāf to the end of the Quran.'^[26]

These 'three chapters, five chapters, seven chapters...' refer to the three first chapters of the Quran, the next five chapters, the seven chapters after that and so forth. For example, the three chapters of Baqarah, Āl 'Imrān, and Nisā' make up the first *hizb* or section and the five chapters of Mā'idah, An'ām, A'rāf, Anfāl, and Barā'at compose the second section.^[27]

B. *Ubay ibn Ka'b has narrated:*

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, summoned me and said, 'Gabriel instructed me to offer you greetings and recite Quran for you.' I said, 'May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! Inform me of the rewards and value of the Quran.' The Prophet of Islam discussed the rewards of reciting the chapters of the Quran in order beginning with chapter Fātiḥah and ending with chapter Nās.^[28]

Just as Prophet Muhammad was assigned to communicate the verses and chapters of the Quran, he was also required to make known their order. It is impossible for him to have been neglectful about his prophetic appointment. Thus, whoever knew the verses and chapters of the Quran by heart, also knew the order of the Quran as stated by the Prophet of Islam. One of the aspects of the Quranic miracle is its arrangement and style. Therefore, this aspect of the miracle must have also been carried out by God, not His creations.^[29]

Reason dictates that the style of the eternal miracle of the Prophet of Islam, which also includes its order, must not be left to the companions of the Prophet of Islam since they differed in taste and understanding, and much controversy would ensue from delegation of such an undertaking to them.^[30]

Therefore, considering the transcription of the Quran in the time of the Prophet of Islam, and the preordination of the organisation of verses and chapters, the Quran was compiled into a single book in the time of the Prophet of Islam and under his supervision.

2.5. The Quran as the Standard for Validation of Hadith

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, stated about evaluation of hadith:

Whenever you hear a hadith, compare it against the Book of God and my tradition. If it is in line with the Book of God and my tradition, accept it, but if it contradicts them then set it aside.^[31]

Therefore, a collection existed in the form of a book that was known to the companions.

2.6. 'Umar's Statement at the time of the Passing of the Prophet of Islam

Prior to his passing, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, stated, 'Bring a pen and an inkwell that I may write something down so you do not fall astray after I die.' 'Umar replied, 'The Book of God suffices us.'

This would necessitate that the Book of God was preserved in a single known collection that the Muslims could refer to otherwise it would not be right to consider it sufficient.^[32]

'Umar's statement makes it clear that the Quran was a written, ordered and specific compilation that was popularly known as 'the Book' among the companions of the Prophet of Islam so that when 'Umar said, 'The Book of God suffices us' no one protested about the identity or contents of the Book.^[33]

2.7. Recitation of the Quran

Many traditions affirm that the Quran was recited in the time of the Prophet of Islam. A number of these are presented below.

A. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, instructed 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn 'Āṣ to recite the entire Quran every seven or three days.^[34]

B. The Prophet of Islam instructed Sa'd ibn Mundhar to recite the Quran in three stages. Sa'd carried out this recommendation until his demise.^[35]

C. The Prophet of Islam directed Qays ibn Abī Ṣa'ṣa'ah to recite the Quran in fifteen stages.^[36]

D. After Ibn 'Abbās recited the entire Quran in the presence of Ubay ibn Ka'b, Ubay said to him, 'Recite chapter Ḥamd and five verses of chapter Baqarah. When I recited the entire Quran for the Prophet of Islam, he instructed me thus.'

These narrations discuss recitation of the entire Quran. What does this mean? Does it not imply that a specific collection existed with a beginning and end?

Numerous Companions of the Prophet of Islam, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd and Ubay ibn Ka'b recited the Quran in the presence of the Prophet on more than one occasion. This is indicative of the fact that the Quran existed as an organised collection in the age of the Prophet of Islam.^[37]

2.8. Quranic Evidence

Various Quranic verses indicate the fact that the Quran was written in an organised manner during the time of the Prophet of Islam. Some of these verses are cited hereunder.

A. *The Quran states:*

Or do they say, 'He invented it?' Say, 'Then bring ten chapters like it that have been invented and call upon [for assistance] whomever you can besides Allah, if you should be truthful.'^[38]

Clearly when Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, challenges the polytheists to bring ten chapters like the Quran while chapter Ḥūd was revealed in Mecca (about nine years after the Prophet of Islam's appointment and four years prior to the Hijra), presumably the Quran was written down in a single collection and available to the polytheists for the Quran to challenge them to bring ten chapters like the Quran with the assistance of any other people they could find. This collection, which included 3400 verses by that time, must have been fully available to the polytheists for such a challenge to be valid. They had to understand what they were challenged to do. The standard must be clear for the validity of a challenge to present something equivalent. Without doubt, if they did not know all the verses and the entirety of the message, it would be a challenge to do something indefinite and thus unfounded. Therefore, it can be said that at least from the eighth and ninth years after the Prophet of Islam's appointment, even prior to the Hijra, the Quran existed as a compilation.^[39]

B. *The Quran states:*

Do not move your tongue with it (during revelation) to make haste with it, surely on Us (rests) the collecting and the reciting of it.^[40]

These verses of chapter Qiyāmat demonstrate that the Prophet of Islam was worried that a word, letter, or message in the revelation would be lost. Hence, he would hasten to recite the verses and have them written down by the scribes for it to become an incontrovertible and immutable text.

These verses also suggest that the Prophet of Islam would undertake systematised transcription of Quranic verses immediately after their revelation, even when the verses were directly addressing him about receiving and comprehending revelation. In every case, he would recite such verses exactly as they were revealed by God along with other verses that he recited to the people, and he would instruct the scribes to write them down. These verses also indicate that the Prophet of Islam followed this methodology from the very beginning of his appointment as evidenced by the fact that chapter Qiyāmat was one of the first chapters to be revealed in Mecca.^[41]

These verses demonstrate that collection of the Quran in a single volume was carried out under the guidance of divine revelation. According to the verses cited above, collection and arrangement of the Quran was the work of God in the same manner as its revelation was. Therefore, the Quran itself does not only affirm that it is the word of God, but also that its arrangement and collection was also the work of God.^[42]

C. *The Quran states:*

And they say, '(These are) legends of the former peoples which he has written down, and they are dictated to him morning and afternoon.'^[43]

The Quran was always the most important issue of contention between Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and the polytheists of Mecca. They completely knew about the verses of the Quran and were aware of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad. The polytheists remained up to date about the verses of the Quran so they could be informed about the promotion of the religion by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers.

The polytheists said, '(These are) legends of the former peoples which he has written down, and they are dictated to him morning and afternoon.' Therefore, it is a fact that there were compiled texts about which the polytheists could say that the Prophet Muhammad dictated them based on the legends of the ancients.^[44]

The object of this verse is not to cite an excessive claim by the Arabs regarding the use of the Prophet of Islam's time. Rather, it aims at reporting the fact that the verses and chapters of the Quran were transcribed as they were revealed and then were recited to the people from organised texts. This prompted the polytheists to claim that what the Prophet of Islam called the Quran had been copied off of books and myths of the ancients.^[45]

D. *The Quran states:*

And when We substitute a verse in place of a verse - and Allah is most knowing of what He sends down - they say, 'You, [O Muhammad], are but an inventor [of lies].' But most of them do not know. Say, [O Muhammad], 'The Pure Spirit has brought it down from your Lord in truth to make firm those who believe and as guidance and good tidings to the Muslims.'^[46]

In one case, the Prophet of Islam was instructed to alter the place of a verse. The polytheists used this as a pretext to claim that the Prophet of Islam repositioned verses and allowed him to make alterations to the Quran. Some new Muslims in Mecca were misled and shaken by these claims. Such an event could only occur if part of the Quran had been collected as a single text and recited for some time before the Prophet of Islam was instructed by God to reposition the verse.

Additionally, in order for the polytheists to realise this change, a least a part of the Quran had to have existed in an organised manner and must have been recited for the people many times. Manuscripts must have been available to the people and to the polytheists so that the smallest change could attract attention.^[47]

These verses were revealed around the seventh year after the Prophet Muhammad's appointment. Prior to this, over half of the Quran had already been revealed. Therefore, it is clear that the Quran was being written and organised as early as this.^[48]

3. Conclusion

The logical, historical, narrative and Quranic evidence discussed in this treatise shows that the Quran was gathered during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad under his supervision in a single organised collection. Since the Quran is the foundation of Islam and includes statutes legislated by God, reason cannot accept that the Prophet Muhammad was remiss about collection and tantalisation of the Quran. In fact, the Prophet of Islam put great efforts into transcription of Quranic verses and had selected scribes from among the Muslims that knew how to write. He would also encourage those who were weak in this area to improve their literacy. The Quran was obviously transcribed using a specific sequence of verses and chapters in a single collection.

ENDNOTES

[1]. *Quran*, 15:9; Abū 'Alī Faḍl ibn Ḥasan Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assisah al-'Alamī li-al-Maṭbū'āt, 1994), vol. 6, p. 509; Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Shaykh Āghā Buzurg Tihrānī and Aḥmad Qaṣīr 'Āmilī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1982), vol. 6, p. 320; Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2000), vol. 19, p. 123; Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm Tha'labī Nishābūrī, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-

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- [5]. Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsawī, *Ajwabah Masā’il Jar Allāh* (Qum: Al-Majma’ al-‘Ālamī li-Ahl al-Bayt, 1995), p. 29.
- [6]. Ja’far Murtaḍā ‘Amulī, *Ḥaqā’iq Hāmāh Ḥawl al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Qum: Mu’assisah al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1989), p. 81-82.
- [7]. Maḥmūd Rāmyār, *Tārīkh-i Qur’ān* (Tehran: Intishārāt Amīr Kabīr, 2001), p. 294-295; Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥujjaī, *Pizhūhishī dar Tārīkh-i Qur’ān-i Karīm* (Tehran: Daftar Nashr Farhang Islāmī, 2005), p. 223-224.
- [8]. Muḥammad Sulṭān al-Wā’izīn Shīrāzī, *Ṣad Maqālah Sulṭānī Rāhnāmā-yi Yahūd wa Naṣārā wa Muslimīn dar Ma’rifat Tawrāt wa Injīl wa Qur’ān Majīd* (Tehran: Kitāb Furūshī Islāmīyyah, 1978), p. 258.
- [9]. Muḥammad ibn Ismā’īl Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1986), vol. 6, p. 587; Muḥammad ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādr, 1985), vol. 2, p. 356. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār al-Jāmi’ah li-Durar Akhbār al-‘Immāh al-Aḥbār* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2000), vol. 89, p. 77; Badr al-Dīn Zarkishī, *Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1955), vol. 1, p. 241; Abū Dawūd Ṭayālīsī, *Mustanad al-Ṭayālīsī* (Hyderabad: Dār al-Tawfīq, 1903), p. 270.
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- [13]. ‘Alī Kamālī Dizfūlī, *Shinākht-i Qur’ān* (Tehran: Fajr, 1995), p. 109.
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