

JAM' AL-QUR'AN:

THE CODIFICATION OF THE QUR'AN TEXT

by John Gilchrist

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INTRODUCTION

For many centuries Muslims have been taught to believe that the Qur'an has been preserved in its original Arabic text right from the time of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, down to this very day absolutely intact without changes, deletions or additions of any kind and with no variance in reading. At the same time they have also been taught that this suggested textual perfection of the book proves that the Qur'an must be the Word of God. No one but Allah, it is claimed, could have preserved the text so well. This sentiment has become so strongly established in the Muslim world that one will rarely find a Muslim scholar making a critical analysis of the early transmission of the text of the Qur'an and, when such analyses do appear, they are predictably unwelcome.

What happens, however, when an objective assessment is made of the facts available to us in respect of the original compilation of the Qur'an? When sentiment is gently put aside in favour of a rational evaluation of the evidences a very different conclusion must be reached. As this book will show, in the only records available to us from within the heritage of Islam itself, the Qur'an once contained a number of verses and, at times, whole passages that are no longer part of its text, in addition to an astonishingly large number of different readings in the earliest collections of the book made before the Caliph Uthman summarily consigned all but one of the manuscripts then in existence to the flames and destroyed them.

During 1981, in response to a Muslim publication challenging the divine authenticity of the Bible, I published a booklet titled *The Textual History of the Qur'an and the Bible*. Whereas the bulk of the material in this publication was devoted to a refutation of the arguments brought against the Bible, a portion of it was given to an assessment of the textual history of the Qur'an to show that the transmission of the Qur'an text was no more accurate than that of the Bible. During 1986 two articles appeared in *Al-Balaagh*, a local Muslim newspaper, in response to this booklet: one written by Dr. Kaukab Siddique, an American-based Muslim scholar, and the other by the South African Muslim scholar Abdus Samad Abdul Kader. I will refer in more detail to these articles shortly.

In 1984, after more detailed research into the original compilation of the Qur'an, I published another booklet titled *Evidences for the Collection of the Qur'an*. This also solicited a Muslim response in the form of a booklet published in 1987 by the Mujlisul-Ulama of South Africa. Unfortunately the author does not name himself in this publication but I have been informed that it was written by Maulana Desai of Port Elizabeth and will refer to it as his work.

This book is being written basically as a restatement of the evidences considered in my earlier publications and my conclusions therefrom, together with an assessment of the three responses from the Muslims already referred to and a refutation of their arguments. One of the difficulties faced by an author in a situation like this is the sensitiveness surrounding the subject from the Muslim side. The popular Muslim sentiment that the divine origin of the Qur'an is proved by its absolutely perfect transmission leads, perforce, to the fear that if it can be proved that the Qur'an was not so transmitted, then its supposed divine origin must immediately fall to the ground. As a result Muslim writers cannot come to this subject in a spirit of objectivity or purely factual enquiry. There is a determination, *a priori*, to prove the popular sentiment: the hypothesis that the text of the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved. Emotions accordingly run high and it is not surprising, therefore, to find all three writers unable to regard me in a scholarly manner or treat my writings purely at a factual level.

Dr. Kaukab Siddique, right at the beginning of his article which he titles *Quran is NOT Allah's Word says Christian lay preacher* (*Al Balaagh*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Feb./March 1986), launches into a rhetorical assault by charging: "Mr. Gilchrist tries to bring down the mighty edifice of the Qur'an by using a polemic which is pitifully inadequate to the task. The method he uses shows the poverty of his arsenal, and the brazenness of his assault shows that he is banking for survival on the possibility of a total lack

of knowledge among the Muslims", while the editor of the magazine, in a heading to the article, describes me as "an avowed enemy of Islam" who "hopes to dynamite the structure of Islam".

Mr. Abdus Samad Abdul Kader's article, in the very next issue of the same magazine, was titled *How the Qur'an was Compiled (Al-Balaagh, Vol. 11, No. 2, May/June 1986)*. At the end of the article he describes writers such as myself as "frenetic foes of the Qur'an" who are motivated solely by "jealousy, envy, enmity and venom".

Maulana Desai, in the Ulama publication titled *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, likewise deems it necessary to revile me and supplement his arguments with much rhetorical material and numerous vilifications. He claims I have "set out to denigrate the authenticity of the Qur'aan Majeed" instead of adopting a more balanced approach which would have stated simply that I had ventured to assess the facts about the Qur'an's compilation. He goes on to speak of my "baseless assumptions", says in one place "Gilchrist will curse himself", and elsewhere charges that I suffer from "colossal ignorance" and "bigotted thinking".

Such emotional outbursts betray the Muslims' fear of a purely historical study of the Qur'an's compilation lest it should disprove the supposition that it was both perfectly collected and preserved. In this book I will confine myself purely to a study of the extent to which the text of the Qur'an has been accurately and/or completely transcribed. The study is purely an assessment of the facts. The issue of the alleged divine origin of the Qur'an must be determined by a study of its teaching and contents, it cannot be resolved through an analysis of the manner in which the text was originally transmitted. Here the question is purely one of analysing the extent to which the Qur'an was accurately transcribed. If Muslim writers such as those I have mentioned feel that such a study simultaneously undermines their conviction that the Qur'an is the Word of God (Desai often accuses me of seeking "to refute the authenticity of the Qur'aan Shareef"), the problem is theirs for supposing that a perfect compilation and transmission of the book would prove its divine origin. I find no need to vilify these authors in terms such as they use against me as I am free to assess this subject unemotionally and do not have a hypothesis or presupposition to maintain. Furthermore I also have no doubt that, if a book never was the Word of God in the first place, no amount of proof that it had been perfectly transcribed would make it the Word of God.

That these authors are all trying to prove a supposition is obvious from a study of their approach. Each one treats the compilation of the Qur'an very differently from the others - Siddique and Desai bluntly contradict each other on numerous occasions - and yet each endeavours to come to the same conclusion, namely the Qur'an's supposed textual perfection. Such an anomaly can only be explained in one way - each one is determined to end where he began, that is, the preconceived hypothesis above-mentioned. It will be useful to record briefly the approach each author takes.

1. *Dr. Kaukab Siddique*. Siddique takes the traditional Muslim approach. "One Text - No Variants", a heading of one section in his article, tells it all. The assumption is that there has always been only one text of the Qur'an and that nothing has ever been added to it or omitted from it, and that there have never been any variant readings of any of its verses.

The writer has to explain the evidences in the Hadith records - the only early historical records of any kind in the heritage of Islam describing how the Qur'an was compiled - which show that the Caliph Uthman ordered all the Qur'an manuscripts of his day other than the one in Hafsa's possession to be burnt because there were differences in the reading of the Qur'an in the various provinces. Siddique claims that the differences were purely in the recitation of the text - an argument used by many Muslims at this point. In this book we shall see how inadequate and unconvincing this argument is. Very little is said by Siddique, however, of those records showing that the Qur'an, as it is today, is somewhat incomplete.

2. *Abdus Samad Abdul Kader*. Abdul Kader is one of those Muslim scholars who prefers to gloss over the awkward evidences in the Hadith as if they simply did not exist. There is no mention of them in his article. Instead he seeks to prove that the Qur'an itself gives sufficient testimony to its own compilation and the perfection thereof. I will give separate attention to this argument at the end of the main section of this book as it does not much affect the general study.

3. *Maulana Desai*. Desai, despite his emotional outbursts against me personally, nevertheless freely admits the authenticity of virtually all the facts I have recorded. He acknowledges that there were indeed textual differences in the early codices of the Qur'an and that a number of passages once forming part of the Qur'an are no longer there. In respect of the different readings he leans exclusively on one hadith which records Muhammad as saying that the Qur'an originally came from Allah in seven different forms and he claims that all these variants, therefore, were actually authorised by Allah and make up the seven different readings. He has no difficulty in conceding that Uthman eliminated authentic copies of the Qur'an and justifies his action as in the interests of obtaining uniformity in reading. This line of reasoning exposes itself to serious considerations as we shall see.

In respect of the missing passages, Desai acknowledges their existence but claims they were lawfully abrogated by Allah and correctly no longer form part of the Qur'an text. I have little doubt that this argument will be unpalatable to apologists like Siddique and Abdul Kader, as will his admission of the existence of variant readings, yet here I find myself inclined to commend the maulana as the only one of the three authors who has the sincerity to admit the authenticity of the records in the Hadith narrating how the Qur'an was originally compiled. While I do not find his arguments convincing, as I will show, I do find his frank admissions of the facts most refreshing.

This book closes with a brief study of the earliest manuscripts of the Qur'an which have survived to the present day. One of the purposes of this study is to determine whether any of the Qur'ans copied out by Uthman after the destruction of the other codices still exists. Throughout this book photographs of early Qur'an manuscripts have been included and I have sought only to include those of the greatest antiquity, mostly those which survive from the second century of Islam before a refined form of Kufic script came into general use among Qur'anic calligraphers and duly became the standard form until replaced by the Naskhi script.

I trust that this book will be a contribution towards a genuine assessment of the early compilation of the Qur'an from a study of the evidences at hand. I make no apology for the extent to which it discounts the popular Muslim sentiments I have mentioned and, in the hope that it will not occasion responses of an emotional nature such as those which came out in reply to my earlier publications, let me say once again that my purpose is solely to arrive at a proper and accurate factual conclusion regarding the Qur'an's historical compilation and that I am not an "avowed enemy of Islam" possessed with a frenzied desire to denigrate the Qur'an or disprove its textual authenticity by any means as some Muslim writers choose to assume.

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

This book is dependent on a variety of works and it would appear appropriate to categorise them according to their particular relevance to the subject at hand, whether primary or secondary, and whether historical or of contemporary origin. Apart from the Qur'an itself, which gives some evidence as to the manner in which it was being assembled during the lifetime of Muhammad, the immediate historical sources for the collection of its text thereafter are found in the early *Sirat* and Hadith literature. Thereafter other works from later periods, compiled by prominent Muslim historians, give further perspectives on the compilation of the Qur'an text. The sources consulted are:

1. Sirat Literature.

The very earliest works recording details of the Qur'an's compilation are found in the following three biographies which are known as the *Sirat* literature:

Muhammad ibn Ishaq. *Sirat Rasul Allah*. (translated into English by A. Guillaume), Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pakistan. 1978 (1955).

Muhammad ibn Sa'd. *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*. (translated into English by S. Moinul Haq), 2 volumes, Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, Pakistan. 1972.

Muhammad ibn Umar al-Waqidi. *Kitab al-Maghazi*. 3 volumes, Oxford University Press, London, England. 1966.

2. Hadith Literature.

The second collection of traditions and historical records of Muhammad's life and the compilation of the Qur'an is known as the *Hadith* literature, and among Muslim historians these are regarded as the most reliable and second only to the Qur'an in authority. The following works have been consulted:

Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari. *Sahih al-Bukhari*. (translated by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan), 9 volumes, Kazi Publications, Chicago, United States of America. 1979 (1976).

Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj. *Sahih Muslim*. (translated by Abdul Hamid Siddique), 4 volumes, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, Pakistan. 1972.

Sulaiman Abu Dawud. *Sunan Abu Dawud*. (translated from Kitab as-Sunan by Prof. Ahmad Hasan), 3 volumes, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, Pakistan. 1984.

Abu Isa Muhammad at-Tirmithi. *Al-Jami as-Sahih*. (edited by A.M. Sakir), 5 volumes, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d. (Cairo, 1938).

Malik ibn Anas. *Muwatta Imam Malik*. (translated from Kitab al-Muwatta by Prof. Muhammad Rahimuddin), Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, Pakistan. 1980.

Abu Bakr Ahmad al-Baihaqi. *As-Sunan al-Kubra*. 10 volumes, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d. (Hyderabad, 1926-1936).

3. Tafsir Literature.

In the period succeeding the above-mentioned initial records a number of *Tafsir* works, being commentaries on the Qur'an, were written by prominent Muslim historians. The most famous was the

Jami al-Bayan fii Tafsir al Qur'aan by Abu Jafar Muhammad at-Tabari. It is referred to only through references obtained from modern works.

Although at-Tabari's work was intended to be predominantly an exegesis of the Qur'an, there is much material dealing with the early compilation of the text itself. Many of the other commentaries did the same.

Two further records directly consulted in the preparation of this book which are not in the Tafsir mould but which deal considerably with the collection of the Qur'an text are:

Abdallah ibn Sulaiman ibn al-Ash'ath Abu Bakr ibn Abi Dawud. *Kitab al-Masahif*. E.J. Brill, Leiden, Holland. 1937.

Jalaluddin al-Khudairi ash-Shafi'i as-Suyuti. *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*. Biblio Verlag, Osnabrueck, Germany. 1980. (Reprint of the Calcutta edition of 1852-1854). 2 volumes.

The only manuscript of Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif* known to have survived now lies in the Zahiriya Library at Damascus. From this two further manuscripts were copied from one of which Arthur Jeffery was able to reprint the full text in his *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an* (see infra) and it is this text which is referred to in this book.

4. Contemporary Books on the Qur'an.

A number of modern writings have given attention to the collection of the Qur'an of which the following deal exclusively, or at least considerably, with the subject at hand:

Beeston, A.F.L. & others. *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England. 1983.

Burton, J. *The Collection of the Qur'an*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England. 1977.

Jeffery, A. *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*. AMS Press, New York, United States of America. 1975. (E.J. Brill, 1937).

Jeffery, A. *The Qur'an as Scripture*. Books for Libraries, New York, USA. 1980 (1952).

Nöldeke, T. *Geschichte des Qorans*. Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Germany. 1981 (1909).

Von Denffer, A. *'Ulum al-Qur'an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*. The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, England. 1983.

Watt, W.M. *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, Scotland. 1970.

The *Geschichte des Qorans* was originally published in three volumes and it is only the second and third volumes which are relevant to the actual collection of the Qur'an text. The second volume, titled *Die Sammlung des Qorans* and written by Noeldeke and Schwally, deals with the collection itself while the third volume, titled *Die Geschichte des Korantexts*, written by Bergstrasser and Pretzl, deals with the written text of the Qur'an and its variant readings. Both volumes consider at some length the famous codices of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b which were destroyed by order of the Caliph Uthman because they varied considerably with the text which he standardised as the textus receptus of the Qur'an which is that which has come down through the history of Islam to the present day.

5. Articles on the Compilation of the Qur'an.

The following articles have also been consulted from *The Muslim World*, published by the Hartford Seminary Foundation in the United States of America. The references here are all to the reprint volumes done by the Kraus Reprint Corporation, New York, in 1966. The articles dealing with the compilation of the Qur'an and the early Qur'an manuscripts are:

Caetani, L. *Uthman and the Recension of the Koran*. Volume 5, p.380. (1915).

Jeffery, A. *Abu Ubaid on Verses Missing from the Qur'an*. Volume 28, p.61. (1938).

Jeffery, A. *Progress in the Study of the Qur'an Text*. Volume 25. p.4. (1935).

Margoliouth, D.S. *Textual Variations of the Koran*. Volume 15, p.334. (1925).

Mendelsohn, I. *The Columbia University Copy of the Samarqand Kufic Qur'an*. Volume 30, p.375. (1940).

Mingana, A. *The Transmission of the Koran*. Volume 7, p.223. (1917).

In addition to these works reference will constantly be made to the following works published in South Africa and which are referred to in the Introduction:

Abdul Kader, A.S. *How the Quran was Compiled*. Al-Balaagh, Vol. 11, No.2, Johannesburg, South Africa, May/June 1986.

Desai, Maulana. *The Quraan Unimpeachable*. Mujlisul Ulama of South Africa, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. May 1987.

Siddique, Dr. Kaukab. *Quran is NOT Allah's Word says Christian Lay Preacher*. Al-Balaagh, Vol. 11, No. 1, Johannesburg, South Africa. February/March 1986.

THE INITIAL COLLECTION OF THE QUR'AN TEXT

1. THE QUR'AN'S DEVELOPMENT DURING MUHAMMAD'S LIFETIME.

A study of the compilation of the Qur'an text must begin with the character of the book itself as it was handed down by Muhammad to his companions during his lifetime. It was not delivered or, as Muslims believe, revealed all at once. It came piecemeal over a period of twenty-three years from the time when Muhammad began to preach in Mecca in 610 AD until his death at Medina in 632 AD. The Qur'an itself declares that Allah said to Muhammad: "We have rehearsed it to you in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually" (*Surah 25.32*).

Furthermore no chronological record of the sequence of passages was kept by Muhammad himself or his companions so that, as each of these began to be collected into an actual *surah* (a "chapter"), no thought was given as to theme, order of deliverance or chronological sequence. It is acknowledged by all Muslim writers that most of the surahs, especially the longer ones, are composite texts containing various passages not necessarily linked to each other in the sequence in which they were given. As time went on Muhammad used to say "Put this passage in the surah in which so-and-so is mentioned", or "Put it in such-and-such a place" (as -Suyuti, *Al Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.141). Thus passages were added to compilations of other passages already collected together until each of these became a distinct surah. There is evidence that a number of these surahs already had their recognised titles during Muhammad's lifetime, as from the following hadith:

The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) (in fact) said: Anyone who recites the two verses at the end of Surah al-Baqara at night, they would suffice for him. ... Abu Darda reported that Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) said: If anyone learns by heart the first ten verses of the Surah al-Kahf, he will be protected from the Dajal. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.386).

At the same time, however, there is also reason to believe that there were other surahs to which titles were not necessarily given by Muhammad, for example *Suratul-Ikhlās* (Surah 112), for although Muhammad spoke at some length about it and said its four verses were the equal of one-third of the whole Qur'an, he did not mention it by name (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.387).

As the Qur'an developed Muhammad's immediate companions took portions of it down in writing and also committed its passages to memory. It appears that the memorisation of the text was the foremost method of recording its contents as the very word *al-Qur'an* means "the Recitation" and, from the very first word delivered to Muhammad when he is said to have had his initial vision of the angel *Jibriil* on Mount Hira, namely *Iqra* - "Recite!" (Surah 96.1), we can see that the verbal recitation of its passages was very highly esteemed and consistently practised. Nevertheless it is to actual written records of its text that the Qur'an itself bears witness in the following verse:

It is in honoured scripts (*suhufin mukarramatin*), exalted, purified, by the hands of scribes noble and pious. *Surah 80.13-16*.

There is evidence, further, that even during Muhammad's early days in Mecca portions of the Qur'an as then delivered were being reduced to writing. When Umar was still a pagan he one day struck his sister in her house in Mecca when he heard her reading a portion of the Qur'an. Upon seeing blood on her cheek, however, he relented and said "Give me this sheet which I heard you reading just now so

that I may see just what it is which Muhammad has brought" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.156) and, on reading the portion of Surah 20 which she had been reading, he became a Muslim.

It nonetheless appears that right up to the end of Muhammad's life the practice of memorisation predominated over the reduction of the Qur'an to writing and was regarded as more important. In the Hadith records we read that the angel Jibril is said to have checked the recitation of the Qur'an every Ramadan with Muhammad and, in his final year, checked it with him twice:

Fatima said: "The Prophet (saw) told me secretly, 'Gabriel used to recite the Qur'an to me and I to him once a year, but this year he recited the whole Qur'an with me twice. I don't think but that my death is approaching.'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.485).

Some of Muhammad's closest companions devoted themselves to learning the text of the Qur'an off by heart. These included the *ansari* Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Muadh ibn Jabal, Zaid ibn Thabit, Abu Zaid and Abu ad-Darda (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, pp. 488-489). In addition to these Mujammi ibn Jariyah is said to have collected all but a few surahs while Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, one of the muhajirun who had been with Muhammad from the beginning of his mission in Mecca, had secured more than ninety of the one hundred and fourteen surahs by himself, learning the remaining surahs from Mujammi (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p.457).

Regarding the written materials there are no records as to exactly how much of the Qur'an was reduced to writing during the lifetime of Muhammad. There is certainly no evidence to suggest that anyone had actually compiled the whole text of the Qur'an into a single manuscript, whether directly under Muhammad's express authority or otherwise, and from the information we have about the collection of the Qur'an after his death (which we shall shortly consider), we must rather conclude that the Qur'an had never been codified or reduced to writing in a single text.

Muhammad died suddenly in 632 AD after a short illness and, with his death, the Qur'an automatically became complete. There could be no further revelations once its chosen recipient had departed. While he lived, however, there was always the possibility that new passages could be added and it hardly seemed appropriate, therefore, to contemplate codifying the text into one harmonious whole. Thus it is not surprising to find that the book was widely scattered in the memories of men and on various different materials in writing at the time of Muhammad's decease.

Furthermore we shall see that the Qur'an itself makes allowance for the abrogation of its texts by Allah and, during Muhammad's lifetime, the possibility of further abrogations (in addition to a number of verses which had already been withdrawn) would likewise preclude the contemplation of a single text.

Still further, there appear to have been only a few disputes among the *sahaba* (Muhammad's "companions", i.e., his immediate followers) about the text of the Qur'an while Muhammad lived, unlike those which arose soon after his demise. All these factors explain the absence of an official codified text at the time of his death. The possible abrogation of existing passages, and the probable addition of further *ayat* (the Qur'an nowhere declares its own completeness or that no further revelations could be expected) prevented any attempt to achieve the result desired very soon thereafter by his closest companions. It also appears that new Qur'anic passages were coming with increasing frequency to Muhammad just before that fateful day, making the collection of the Qur'an into a single text at any time all the more improbable.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: Allah sent down his Divine Inspiration to His Apostle (saw) continuously and abundantly during the period preceding his death till He took him unto Him. That was the period of the greatest part of revelation, and Allah's Apostle (saw) died after that. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.474).

At the end of the first phase of the Qur'an, therefore, we find that its contents were widely distributed in the memories of men and were written down piecemeal on various materials, but that no single text had been prescribed or codified for the Muslim community. As-Suyuti states that the Qur'an, as sent down from Allah in separate stages, had been completely written down and carefully preserved, but that it had not been assembled into one single location during the lifetime of Muhammad (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.96). All of it was said to have been available in principle - Muhammad's companions had absorbed it to one extent or another in their memories and it had been written down on separate materials - while the final order of the various verses and chapters is also presumed to have been defined by Muhammad while he was still alive.

2. THE FIRST COLLECTION OF THE QUR'AN UNDER ABU BAKR.

If Muhammad had in fact bequeathed a complete, codified text of the Qur'an as is claimed by some Muslim writers (e.g. Abdul Kader - cf. Chapter 6), there would have been no need for a collection or recension of the text after his death. Yet, once the primary recipient of the Qur'an had passed away, it was only logical that a collection should be made of the whole Qur'an into a single text.

The widely accepted traditional account of the initial compilation of the Qur'an ascribes the work to Zaid ibn Thabit, one of the four companions of Muhammad said to have known the text in its entirety. As we shall see, there is abundant evidence that other companions also began to transcribe their own codices of the Qur'an independently of Zaid shortly after Muhammad's death, but the most significant undertaking was that of Zaid as it was done under the authority of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, and it is to this compilation that the Hadith literature gives the most attention. It also became the standard text of the Qur'an during the caliphate of Uthman.

Upon Muhammad's death a number of tribes in the outer parts of the Arabian peninsula reneged from the faith they had recently adopted, whereupon Abu Bakr sent a large number of the early Muslims to subdue the revolt forcibly. This resulted in the Battle of Yamama and a number of Muhammad's close companions, who had received the Qur'an directly from him, were killed. What followed is described in this well-known hadith:

Narrated Zaid bin Thabit: Abu Bakr as-Siddiq sent for me when the people of Yamama had been killed. Then Abu Bakr said (to me): "You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Apostle (saw). So you should search for (the fragmentary scripts of) the Qur'an and collect it (in one book)". By Allah! If they had ordered me to shift one of the mountains, it would not have been heavier for me than this ordering me to collect the Qur'an. Then I said to Abu Bakr, "How will you do something which Allah's Apostle (saw) did not do?" Abu Bakr replied "By Allah, it is a good project". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.477).

Zaid eventually expressed approval of the idea in principle after Umar and Abu Bakr had both pressed the need upon him and agreed to set about collecting the text of the Qur'an into one book. One thing is quite clear from the narrative - the collection of the Qur'an is said quite expressly to have been something which *Allah's Apostle did not do*.

Zaid's hesitation about the task, partly occasioned by Muhammad's own disinterest in codifying the text into a single unit and partly by the enormity of it, shows that it was not going to be an easy undertaking. If he was a perfect *hafiz* of the Qur'an and knew the whole text off by heart, nothing excepted, and if a number of the other companions were also endowed with such outstanding powers of memorisation, the collection would have been quite simple. He needed only to write it down out of his own memory and have the others check it. Desai and others claim that all the *huffaz* of the Qur'an among Muhammad's companions all knew the Qur'an in its entirety to perfection, to the last word and

letter, and Desai himself goes so far as to suggest that the power of thus retaining the Qur'an in the memory of those who learnt it by heart was no less than supernaturally acquired:

The faculty of memory which was divinely bestowed to the Arabs, was so profound that they were able to memorize thousands of verses of poetry with relative ease. Thorough use was thus made of the faculty of memory in the preservation of the Qur'aan. (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.25).

He goes on to describe the memorising of the Qur'an as "this divine agency of Hifz" (p.26). If we are to take this assumption to its logical conclusion, we must conclude that the collection of the Qur'an would have been the easiest of tasks. If Zaid and the other *qurra* (memorisers) each knew, by divine assistance and purpose, the whole Qur'an to the last letter without any error or omission - this is the Muslim hypothesis - we would hardly have found him responding to the appeal to collect the Qur'an as he did. Instead of immediately turning to his memory alone he made an extensive search for the text from a variety of sources:

So I started looking for the Qur'an and collecting it from (what was written on) palm-leaf stalks, thin white stones, and also from the men who knew it by heart, till I found the last verse of Surat at-Tauba (repentance) with Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.478).

We saw earlier that the Qur'an, at the death of Muhammad, was scattered in the memories of men and on various written materials. It was to these that the young companion of Muhammad duly turned when preparing to codify the text into a single book. The two primary materials, amongst the others mentioned, were *ar-riqa'a* - "the parchments" - and *sudur ar-rijal* - "the breasts of men" (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.137). He looked not only to human memory but also to written materials, consulting as many of the latter as he could find no matter what their origin (i.e., white stones, etc.). It was to many companions that he turned and to all kinds of material upon which fragments of the Qur'an had been written.

His was not the action of a man believing he had been divinely endowed with an infallible memory upon which he could exclusively rely but rather of a careful scribe who was going to collect the Qur'an from all the possible sources where it was known to be, from scraps, fragments and portions. This was the action of a man conscious of the wide dispersal of the text who would assemble as much of it as he could to produce as complete and authentic a text as was humanly possible.

The earliest traditions of Islam make it quite clear that the search was widespread, though one finds later writers claiming that all the written materials Zaid is said to have relied on - the shoulder-blades of animals, parchments, pieces of leather, etc. - were all found stored in Muhammad's own household and that they were bound together to ensure their preservation. Al-Harith al-Muhasabi, in his book *Kitab Fahm as-Sunan*, said that Muhammad used to order that the Qur'an be transcribed and that, whereas it was indeed in different materials, when Abu Bakr ordered it to be collected into one text, these materials "were found in the house of the messenger of Allah (saw) in which the Qur'an was spread out" (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.137). They were thereafter gathered together and bound so that nothing could be lost.

The earliest records of Hadith literature, however, make it quite plain that Zaid conducted a wide search for the parchments and other materials upon which portions of the Qur'an had been inscribed. Desai also argues for a more limited field of research on the part of Zaid to collect the Qur'an, stating that Zaid was the only companion to be with Muhammad on the last occasion when Jibril went over the Qur'an with him (*The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.18) and that he only looked for those pieces of leather and other materials already mentioned upon which the Qur'an had been written under "the direct supervision of Rasulullah (saw)" (p.27). He states that although there were other texts of the

Qur'an available, these had not been written down under Muhammad's supervision but by his companions relying on their memories. No evidences or documentation of any kind is given by Desai to show his sources for all these claims, in particular to prove that they are based on the earliest records available. In fact we have already seen that, in respect of Muhammad's last recitation of the Qur'an with Jibril, the fact that it was recited twice by him was a secret divulged only to his daughter Fatima (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.485). This would hardly have been a secret if Zaid had been present on that occasion.

Likewise the earliest records of the collection of the Qur'an under Abu Bakr make no distinction between portions of the Qur'an written directly under Muhammad's supervision and those that were not, nor do they suggest that Zaid relied on the former alone. As we in due course shall see, this is a relatively modern interpretation of the research done by him to maintain the hypothesis that the Qur'an was perfectly compiled, but one without foundation in the earliest records.

There are traditions that show that, upon receiving a portion of the Qur'an, Muhammad would command his scribes (of whom Zaid was one) to write it down (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.481), but there is nothing in the very earliest works to support the idea that the whole Qur'an, as written under Muhammad's supervision, was already assembled in his own home.

There are a number of traditions in the *Kitab al-Masahif* of Ibn Abi Dawud which suggest that Abu Bakr was the first to undertake an actual codification of the text, each of which reads very similarly to the others and follows this form:

It is reported ... from Ali who said: "May the mercy of Allah be upon Abu Bakr, the foremost of men to be rewarded with the collection of the manuscripts, for he was the first to collect (the text) between (two) covers". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.5).

Even here, however, we find clear evidence that there were others who preceded him in collecting the Qur'an texts into a single written codex:

It is reported ... from Ibn Buraidah who said: "The first of those to collect the Qur'an into a mushaf (codex) was Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifah". (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.135).

This Salim is one of only four men whom Muhammad recommended from whom the Qur'an should be learnt (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p.96) and he was one of the *qurra* (reciters) killed at the Battle of Yamama. As it was only after this battle that Abu Bakr set out to collect the Qur'an into a single text as well, it goes without saying that Salim's codification of the text must have preceded his through Zaid ibn Thabit.

3. PERSPECTIVES ON THE INITIAL COLLECTION OF THE QUR'AN.

At this stage we have a clear trend emerging. Official tradition focuses on the collection of the Qur'an by Abu Bakr as the first, foremost and, at times, only compilation of the text made upon Muhammad's death. Later writers have endeavoured to strengthen this view by suggesting that Zaid was the only man qualified for the task, that the whole Qur'an, no matter in what form, was found in Muhammad's apartments, and that it was to written portions inscribed under Muhammad's supervision alone that the redactor turned to compile his codex. Contemporary Muslim opinion goes even further to claim that the Qur'an, as thus compiled, is an exact record with not so much as a dot, letter or word added or lost - of the script as it was delivered to Muhammad.

On the other hand an objective analysis of the initial collection of the Qur'an, based on a rational assessment of the evidences without regard to sentiment or presupposition, can only go so far as to

conclude that the text as compiled by Zaid, which later became the model for Uthman's standardised text, was simply the final product of an honest attempt to collect the Qur'an insofar as the redactor was able to do so from a wide variety of materials and sources upon which he was obliged to rely.

It is the very character of these sources that we should at this stage assess and reconsider. Zaid relied on the memories of men and various written materials. No matter how much those early companions sought to memorise the text perfectly, human memory is a fallible source, and, to the extent that a book the length of the Qur'an had been committed to memory, we should expect to find a number of variant readings in the text. As we shall shortly see, this anticipation proves to be well-founded.

The reliance on a host of portions of the Qur'an scattered among a number of companions must also lead to certain logical expectations. There exists a clear possibility that portions of the text may have been lost - the loose distribution of the whole text in many fragments and portions as opposed to a carefully maintained single text is adequate ground to make such an assumption and, as we shall see, the expectation again proves to be well-founded when the evidences are considered and assessed.

A typical example worth quoting at this point is found in the following hadith which plainly states that portions of the Qur'an were irretrievably lost in the Battle of Yamama when many of the companions of Muhammad who had memorised the text had perished:

Many (of the passages) of the Qur'an that were sent down were known by those who died on the day of Yamama ... but they were not known (by those who) survived them, nor were they written down, nor had Abu Bakr, Umar or Uthman (by that time) collected the Qur'an, nor were they found with even one (person) after them. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.23).

The negative impact of this passage can hardly be missed: *lam ya'alam* - "not known", *lam yuktab* - "not written down", *lam yuwjad* - "not found", a threefold emphasis on the fact that these portions of the Qur'an which had gone down with the *qurra* who had died at Yamama had been lost forever and could not be recovered.

The very fact of such a wide distribution of the Qur'an texts, however, appears to negate the possibility that anyone could have added anything to the text after Muhammad's death. Not being collected into a single text but spread among many companions, there exists a strong possibility that some of the text may have been lost, but at the same time there appears to be no such possibility that it could have been interpolated in any way. The retention of so much of the Qur'an in the memories of Muhammad's companions is a sure guarantee that no one could have added to it in any way and gained acceptance for his innovations.

Lastly, in considering the sources, we should not be surprised to find that other codices of the Qur'an text were being compiled in addition to that being executed by Zaid. Once again we look to the evidence that a number of companions had an extensive knowledge of the Qur'an and it is only to be expected that these would soon seek to preserve, in single codices, what was at that time still fresh in their memories and loosely transcribed on a selection of different materials. Once again we shall find our expectations fulfilled and will discover that the evidences strongly support the conclusions one would draw naturally about the compilation of a book such as the Qur'an rather than the hypothesis that the book was divinely preserved, to the last dot and letter, without loss or variation.

The possibility that part of the text may have been lost is strengthened by evidences in the Hadith literature which show that even Muhammad himself occasionally forgot portions of the Qur'an. One of these traditions reads as follows and is taken from one of the earliest works of Hadith:

Aishah said: A man got up (for prayer) at night, he read the Qur'an and raised his voice in reading. When morning came, the Apostle of Allah (saw) said: May Allah have mercy on so-

and-so! Last night he reminded me a number of verses I was about to forget. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 3, p.1114).

The translator has a footnote to this tradition, stating that Muhammad had not forgotten these verses of his own accord but had been made to forget them by Allah as a teaching for the Muslims. Whatever the purpose or cause, it is quite clear that Muhammad had occasion to forget passages that had been, as he proclaimed, revealed to him. The suggestion that Muhammad's oversight of such texts was not of his own doing but brought about through Allah's decree is based on the following text of the Qur'an:

None of our revelations (*ayat*) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten (*nunsihaa*) but We substitute something similar or better. Knowest thou not that Allah has power over all things?
Surah 2.106

The word *ayat* is the word consistently used in the Qur'an for its own texts and the word *nunsihaa* comes from the root word *nasiya* which, wherever it appears in the Qur'an (as it does some forty-five times in its various forms), always carries the meaning "to forget".

Let us conclude this section. Zaid, quite obviously one of the companions of Muhammad who had an outstanding knowledge of the Qur'an, set about collecting its text so as to produce as genuine and authentic a codex as he possibly could. His integrity in this undertaking is not to be questioned and we may accordingly deduce from all the evidences he consulted that the single Qur'an text he finally presented to Abu Bakr was a basically authentic record of the verses and suras as they were preserved in the memories of the reciters and in writing upon various materials.

The evidences, however, do not support the modern hypothesis that the Qur'an, as it is today, is an exact replica of the original, nothing lost or varied. There is no evidence of any interpolation in the text and such a suggestion (occasionally made by Western writers) can be easily discounted, but there are ample evidences to indicate that the Qur'an was incomplete when it was transcribed into a single text (as we have already seen) and that many of its passages and verses were transmitted in different forms. In the course of this book we shall give more detailed consideration to these evidences and their implications.

4. THE MISSING VERSES FOUND WITH ABU KHUZAIMAH.

Before closing our study on the collection of the Qur'an during the caliphate of Abu Bakr it is important to study the brief mention made by Zaid of the two verses which he said he found only with Abu Khuzaimah al-Ansari. The full text of the hadith on this subject reads as follows:

I found the last verse of Surat at-Tauba (Repentance) with Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him. The verse is: 'Verily there has come to you an Apostle from amongst yourselves. It grieves him that you should receive any injury or difficulty ... (till the end of Bara'a)'. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.478).

Insofar as the text speaks for itself without further enquiry, we can see quite plainly that, in his search for the Qur'an, Zaid was dependent on one source alone for the last two verses of Surat at-Tauba. At face value this evidence suggests that no one else knew these verses and that, had they not been found with Abu Khuzaimah, they would have been omitted from the Qur'an text. The incident suggests immediately that, far from there being numerous *huffaz* who knew the whole Qur'an off by heart to the last letter, it was, in fact, so widely spread that some passages were only known to a few of the companions - in this case, only one.

This *ex facie* interpretation of the narrative naturally undermines the popular sentiment among Muslims of later generations that the Qur'an was preserved intact because its contents were all known

perfectly by all the *sahaba* of Muhammad who had undertaken to memorise it. A more convenient explanation for the hadith had to be found and we find it expressed in the following quotation from Desai's booklet:

The meaning of the above statement of Hadhrat Zaid should now be very clear that among those who had written the verses under the direct command and supervision of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam), Khuzaimah was the only person from whom he (Zaid) found the last two verses of Surah Baraa-ah written. (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.20).

Although the hadith as recorded by al-Bukhari makes no mention of this, Desai claims that the statement that Abu Khuzaima alone had the last two verses of Surat at-Tauba (Bara'a) means that he was in fact the only one who had them *in writing under Muhammad's direct supervision*. He goes on to say:

It was known beyond the slightest shadow of doubt that these two verses were part of the Qur'aan. Hundreds of Sahaabah knew the verses from memory. Furthermore, those Sahaabah who had in their possession the complete recording of the Qur'aan in writing also had these particular verses in their written records. But, as far as having written them under the direct supervision of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) was concerned, only Abu Khuzaimah (radhiallahu anhu) had these verses. (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.21).

The maulana gives no evidences whatsoever in support of these statements. Nowhere in the earliest records of the Hadith literature is there any suggestion that hundreds of Muhammad's companions knew these verses and that others had them in writing, and that what Zaid intended to say was that Abu Khuzaima alone had them in writing directly from Muhammad. Desai's omission of any documentation for his statement is, in the circumstances, most significant.

Siddique, in his article in *Al-Balaagh* (p.2), also claims that when Zaid said "I could not find a verse" he actually meant he could not find it in writing. As said before, there is nothing in the hadith text itself to yield such an interpretation. From what source, then, do these learned authors obtain this view? It is derived from the following extract which is taken from the *Fath al-Baari fii Sharh al-Bukhari* of Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Asqalani ibn Hajar, the translation appearing in Burton's *The Collection of the Qur'an* on pages 127 and 128:

It does not follow from Zaid's saying that he had failed to find the *aya* from *surat al Tawba* in the possession of anyone else, that at that time it was not *mutawatira* among those who had learnt their Qur'an from the Companions, but had not heard it direct from the Prophet. What Zaid was seeking was the evidence of those who had their Qur'an texts direct from the Prophet. ... The correct interpretation of Zaid's remark that he had failed to find the *aya* with anyone else is that he had failed to find it in writing, not that he had failed to find those who bore it in their memories. (*Fath al-Baari*, Vol. 9, p.12).

The source from which Desai and Siddique derive their opinions is not from the earliest records of the compilation of the Qur'an but a much later commentary on the Sahih al-Bukhari done by the famous Muslim author al-Asqalani ibn Hajar who was born in 773 A.H. (1372 A.D.) and died in 852 A.H. The earliest source for the interpretation that Zaid was looking for the verses only in authorised written sources thus dates no less than eight centuries after Muhammad's death by which time, as is the case to this day, it had become fashionable to hold the view that the Qur'an had been widely known to perfection by all the companions of Muhammad who had memorised it. It is, therefore, a convenient interpretation read into the text of the hadith to sustain a more recent supposition. There is nothing in the text of the hadith itself, however, to support this interpretation. The extract continues with some very interesting comments:

Besides, it is probable that when Zaid found it with Abu Khuzaima the other companions recalled having heard it. Zaid himself certainly recalled that he had heard it. (*Fath al-Baari*, op.cit.).

While Desai boldly states that it was known "beyond the slightest shadow of doubt" that the last two verses of Surat at-Tauba were part of the Qur'an and that they were known by "hundreds of Sahaabah" in their memories and by others who had recorded them in writing, his source only goes so far as to suggest that it is "probable" that when Zaid produced them from Abu Khuzaima, the other companions recalled having heard them. A cautious suggestion that the others may have recalled having heard the verses has been transformed by Desai into a bold declaration that they were known by hundreds of them without the aid of recollection "beyond the slightest shadow of doubt".

THE UTHMANIC RECENSION OF THE QUR'AN

1. DID ABU BAKR'S CODEX HAVE OFFICIAL STATUS?

What, ultimately, was the status of the Qur'an text codified by Zaid ibn Thabit for Abu Bakr? Was it merely a private text assembled for the convenience of the Caliph or was it intended to be an official recension for the growing Muslim community? To answer these questions one has to enquire into what happened to this manuscript after it had been compiled and the information furnished to us reads as follows:

Then the complete manuscripts (copy) of the Qur'an remained with Abu Bakr till he died, then with Umar, till the end of his life, and then with Hafsa, the daughter of Umar (ra). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.478).

Each one of the three possessors of this codex was a person of considerable prominence. Abu Bakr and Umar were Muhammad's immediate successors, the first and second caliphs of the Muslim world respectively. Hafsa, likewise, was a leading figure, being specifically described in the *Kitab al-Masahif* of Ibn Abi Dawud as both *bint Umar* (the daughter of Umar, p.7) and *zauj an-nabi* (the wife of the Prophet, p.85). The codex was, therefore, certainly retained as the official copy of the first two Muslim rulers and was thereafter committed to an obviously distinctive caretaker of the text. It is another question, however, whether this copy became the official standardised collection of the Qur'an for the whole Muslim community.

Any collection made for Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam, must nonetheless have had some special status especially as its nominated compiler Zaid ibn Thabit was widely regarded as one of the foremost authorities on the Qur'an text. His effort to compile as authentic a record as he could of the original Qur'an as it was handed down by Muhammad can only be highly commended and the overall authenticity of the resultant codex cannot be seriously challenged. It can fairly be concluded that Zaid's text was one of great importance and its retention in official custody during the caliphates respectively of Abu Bakr and Umar testify to its key significance during the time of the Qur'an's initial codification. There can be little doubt, however, that this codex was at no time publicised during those first two caliphates or declared to be the official text for the whole Muslim world. Desai argues that there was no need to "standardize and promulgate this collection as the only official text" at that time as the Qur'an was, according to him, still perfectly retained in the memories of the huffaz among the companions of Muhammad who remained alive (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.31). We have already seen that claims for the perfect knowledge of the Qur'an in the memories of the sahaba are based on assumptions and we cannot accept that Abu Bakr's codex was not given any public impact after its compilation because there was no need for this while Muhammad's companions still had it in their memories. It was precisely because Abu Bakr and Umar perceived the need for a carefully codified written text of the Qur'an as against reliance on the memories of men alone that it was put together in the first place.

It is more likely that Abu Bakr and Umar recognised that there were other masters of the text of the Qur'an, such as Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'adh ibn Jabal and others we have already mentioned alongside Zaid ibn Thabit, who were authorities of equal standing with him and who were qualified to produce authentic codices of the Qur'an in written form.

The manuscript compiled by Zaid, highly prized as it was, nevertheless was not regarded with any greater authority than the others once these began to be put together and it was for this reason, therefore, that Zaid's codex was not publicly imposed on the whole community as the officially sanctioned text of the Qur'an.

Zaid's text was, in fact, virtually concealed after its compilation. Upon the death of Umar it passed into the private keeping of Hafsa, very much a recluse after Muhammad's death. Far from being given official publicity, it was virtually set aside and given no publicity at all. Desai suggests that it was "guarded" during those years "for future use" when the *qurra* among Muhammad's companions had finally passed away (*The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.31), but there is nothing in the earliest records to suggest that Zaid's text was compiled purely through foresight as to future conditions. Rather it was a perceived immediate need for a single written text that occasioned its compilation.

At the time of its codification Zaid knew that his text could not be regarded as an absolutely perfect record as some passages were acknowledged as having been lost and the redactor himself overlooked at least two verses until he was reminded of them by Abu Khuzaima. If Zaid and Abu Bakr were persuaded that his text was unquestionably authentic to the last word and letter, it would almost certainly have been given immediate public prominence.

On the other hand, if Zaid knew that it was only relatively authentic and no more accurate than the many other codices simultaneously being compiled by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and others, we can understand why it quickly disappeared into relative obscurity. By the time Uthman became caliph, although the other codices were gaining prominence in the various provinces, this codex had in fact receded into the private custody of one of the widows of the Prophet of Islam who simply kept it indefinitely in her personal care. It may have been compiled under official supervision, but it was never regarded as the actual official and solely authentic text of the Qur'an. It had become just one of many codices of equal authority that had been put together at roughly the same time.

2. UTHMAN'S ORDER TO BURN THE OTHER CODICES.

About nineteen years after the death of Muhammad, when Uthman had succeeded Abu Bakr and Umar as the third Caliph of Islam, a major new development took place in the standardising of the Qur'an text. The Muslim general Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman led an expedition into northern Syria, drawing his troops partly from Syria and partly from Iraq. It was not long before disputes arose between them as to the correct reading of the Qur'an. They had come from Damascus and Hems, from Kufa and Basra, and in each centre the local Muslims had their own codex of the Qur'an. The codex of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud became the standard text for the Muslims at Kufa in Iraq while the codex of Ubayy ibn Ka'b became revered in Syria. Hudhayfah was disturbed at this and, after consulting Salid ibn al-As, he reported the matter to Uthman. What followed is described in the following hadith:

Hudhaifa was afraid of their (the people of Sha'm and Iraq) differences in the recitation of the Qur'an, so he said to Uthman, 'O Chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (Qur'an) as Jews and the Christians did before'. So Uthman sent a message to Hafsa, saying, 'Send us the manuscripts of the Qur'an so that we may compile the Qur'anic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you'. Hafsa sent it to Uthman. Uthman then ordered Zaid ibn Thabit, Abdullah bin az-Zubair, Sa'id bin al-As, and Abdur-Rahman bin Harith bin Hisham to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. Uthman said to the three Quraishi men, 'In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thabit on any point in the Qur'an, then write it in the dialect of the Quraish as the Qur'an was revealed in their tongue'. They did so, and when they had written many copies, Uthman returned the original manuscripts to Hafsa. Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.479).

For the first time in the official works of the Hadith literature we read of other codices that were being compiled, in addition to the one done by Zaid for Abu Bakr, and that these were widely accepted and well-known, certainly far more so than the codex of Zaid which by this time was in the private possession of Hafsa. While some of those texts consisted only of a selection of portions, it is clearly stated that others were complete codices of the whole Qur'an.

What was the motive for Uthman's order that these other codices should be destroyed and that the codex of Zaid alone should be preserved and copied out to be sent in replacement of the other texts to the various provinces? Was it because there were serious errors in these texts and that Zaid's alone could be considered a perfect redaction of the original text? There is nothing in the original records to suggest that this was the motive. The following tradition gives a more balanced picture of the circumstances and causes which prompted Uthman's action and why he chose Zaid's codex as the basis on which the Qur'an text was to be standardised for the Muslim community. Ali is reported to have said of Uthman:

By Allah, he did not act or do anything in respect of the manuscripts (*masahif*) except in full consultation with us, for he said, 'What is your opinion in this matter of *qira'at* (reading)? It has been reported to me that some are saying 'My reading is superior to your reading'. That is a perversion of the truth. We asked him, 'What is your view (on this)?' He answered, 'My view is that we should unite the people on a single text (*mushaf waahid*), then there will be no further division or disagreement'. We replied, 'What a wonderful idea!' Someone from the gathering there asked, 'Whose is the purest (Arabic) among the people and whose reading (is the best)?' They said the purest (Arabic) among the people was that of Sa'id ibn al-'As and the (best) reader among them was Zaid ibn Thabit. He (Uthman) said, 'Let the one write and the other dictate'. Thereafter they performed their task and he united the people on a (single) text. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.22).

The motive is twice stated in this extract to simply be the desire to bring consensus among the Muslims on the basis of a single Qur'an text. It was not to destroy the other manuscripts because they were considered unreliable but rather to prevent future dissension among the inhabitants of the different provinces. Desai, who agrees that these other codices were authentic texts of the Qur'an, states that they were destroyed purely to obtain uniformity in the text. He reasons that Zaid's codex was the "official" text and that the others were unofficially transcribed, but does not regard the variant readings in them as evidence of corruption of the text but rather as illustrative of the fact that, according to a hadith text, the Qur'an was revealed in seven different ways (cf. chapter 5). He says:

The simplest and safest way to ensure the prevalence of the standardized copy was to eliminate all other copies. (Desai, *op.cit.*, p.33).

It was this objective alone - the "prevalence of a standardized copy", the unity of the Muslims on the basis of a single text - that motivated Uthman's action. After all, this was the reason why Hudhayfah had approached him the first place. "It was Hudhayfah who impressed upon Uthman (ra) the need to assemble the texts into a single text" (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.35), Thus Desai adds that "The gathering and elimination of all other copies besides the standardized text was merely to ensure uniformity" (*op.cit.*, p.33). Just as Abu Bakr, at the time of the first recension of the Qur'an, had sought to obtain a complete record of the text from all the diverse sources whence it could be obtained, so now Uthman sought to standardise the text as against the varying codices that were gaining authority in the different centres.

Why, then, did he choose Zaid's codex as the basis for this purpose? The tradition quoted above once again underlines the authority that Zaid enjoyed in respect of the text of the Qur'an and the overall authenticity of his codex could not be disputed, It was also done, as we have seen, under official supervision but cannot be regarded as having become the official text, the other codices having been

"compiled unofficially" (Desai, op.cit., p.32). Its almost immediate concealment from public view and the lack of publicity given to it are proofs that it was never intended to be regarded as the standard text of the Qur'an.

Unlike the codices which were gaining fame and widespread acceptance in the provinces, Zaid's text was conveniently close at hand and, not being known among the Muslims in those provinces, it was not regarded as a rival text. The standardising of a Medinan text at the seat of Uthman's government also enabled him to suppress the popularity and authority of other reciters in areas where Uthman's rule had become unpopular because he was placing members of his own family, the descendants of Umayyā who had opposed Muhammad for many years, in positions of authority over and above many more well-known companions who had been faithful to him throughout his mission. Zaid's text was, therefore, not chosen because it was believed to be superior to the others but because it conveniently suited Uthman's purposes in standardising the text of the Qur'an.

Uthman called for this text and it became promptly transformed from a private text shielded for many years in almost complete public obscurity into the official codex of the Qur'an for the whole Muslim community. It was Uthman who standardised Zaid's codex as the official text and gave it widespread prominence, not Abu Bakr. While Zaid was clearly one of the foremost authorities on the Qur'an his text as compiled under Abu Bakr cannot be regarded as having been more authentic than the others. The "official" supervision of its compilation was only that of the elected successor to Muhammad. Had it been the Prophet of Islam himself who had authorised and supervised the codification of the text, it could well have laid claim to being the official text of the Qur'an, but it was only the product of a well-meaning successor compiled by but one of the most approved authorities on the text. (We are not dealing here with a compilation ordered and supervised by the Prophet of Islam with a divine guarantee of its absolutely perfect preservation but rather with an honest attempt by a young man, ultimately at his own discretion as to what should be included or excluded, and that only under the eye of a subsequent leader, to produce as accurate a text as he possibly could).

Once again it must be borne in mind that, once compiled, Abu Bakr did not impose it upon the Muslim community as Uthman later did, so it cannot be regarded as having become the official codex of the Qur'an before Uthman's time as Desai and others wish to believe.

Uthman's action was drastic, to say the least. Not one of the other codices was exempted from the order that they be destroyed. It can only be assumed that the differences in reading between the various texts was so vast that the Caliph saw no alternative to an order for the standardising of one of the texts and the annihilation of the rest. The fact that none of the other texts was spared shows that none of the codices, Zaid's included, agreed with any of the others in its entirety. There must have been serious textual variants between the texts to warrant such action. One cannot assume that Zaid's text, hidden from public view, just happened to be the perfect text and that, wherever it differed from the others, they must have been in error. Such a convenient shielding of this codex from the disputes about the reading of the Qur'an is unacceptable when the matter is considered objectively.

Zaid's text was simply one of a number of codices done by the companions of Muhammad after his death and shared in the variant readings found between them all. In its favour is the consideration that it had been compiled under Abu Bakr by one of the foremost authorities of the Qur'an. Its preference also depended, however, on the fact that, not being widely known, it had been sheltered from the disputes surrounding the others and it was, of course, conveniently close at hand.

Furthermore, it was not an official text as we have seen but a compilation done by just one man, Zaid ibn Thabit, in the same way as those of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and the others had been compiled. It was not the authorised text of Muhammad himself but simply one form of it among many then in existence and uncorroborated in every single point by the others in circulation. It was compiled under the

discretion of only one man and came to official prominence purely because Uthman chose it as the appropriate one to represent the single codex he wanted to establish for the whole Muslim community.

Modern Muslim writers who make bold claims for the absolute perfection of the Qur'an text as it stands today are aware that evidences of a host of different readings in the earliest manuscripts will make such claims sound hollow indeed, so they argue that the differences were not in the texts themselves but only in the pronunciation of the Qur'an as it was recited.

Siddique states this argument in the following way: "Usman was not standardising one out of several texts. There never was more than one text. 'Usman was standardizing the recitation of the Qur'an and making sure that it would remain in the dialect of the Quraish in which it was originally revealed. He was concerned at points of difference in intonation between Iraqi and Syrian troops in the Islamic army" (*Al-Balaagh*, op.cit., p.2). The claim is that, if there were any differences in reading, they were only in pronunciation, in "the recitation" and "intonation" of the text. This argument is based entirely on faulty premises. Pronunciation, recitation and intonation relate only to a *verbal* recital of the text and such differences would never have appeared in the *written* texts. Yet it was the destruction of these written texts that Uthman ordered.

We need to consider further that, in the earliest days of the codification of the Qur'an in writing, there were no vowel points in the texts. Thus differences in recitation would never have appeared in the written codices. Why, then, did Uthman burn them? There can only be one conclusion the differences must have existed in the texts themselves and, in the following three chapters, we shall see just how extensive those differences were. Uthman *was* standardising one text at the expense of the others and it was not little niceties in the finer points of recitation that occasioned his extreme action against the other codices but the prevalence of a vast number of variant readings in the text itself.

Muslims need to consider and ponder Uthman's action seriously. The Qur'an was believed to be the revealed Word of God and the codices then in existence were written out by the very closest companions of Muhammad himself. What value would be placed on those Qur'an manuscripts if they were still in existence today? These were hand-written codices carefully copied out, some as complete records of the whole Qur'an text, by the most prominent of Muhammad's companions who were regarded as authorities on the text. It was these codices that Uthman eliminated. *Uthman burnt and destroyed complete manuscripts of the whole Qur'an copied out by Muhammad's immediate companions.*

If there had not been serious differences between them, why would he thus have destroyed such cherished copies of what all Muslims believe to be the revealed Word of God? One cannot understand the casualness with which modern Muslim writers justify his action especially if, as Siddique claims, there had never been any differences in the texts. What would Muslims think if anyone had a ceremony today such as Uthman had then, and consigned a number of Qur'ans to the flames, especially if these were cherished hand-written texts of great antiquity? Uthman *burnt* such Qur'an texts and destroyed them. Only one explanation can account for this - there must have been so many serious variant readings between the texts themselves that the Caliph saw only one solution - the establishment of one of these as the official text for the whole Muslim community and the elimination of the others.

While Siddique emphatically declares "One Text, No Variants" and states that "there was never more than one text" (this clause is in bold letters in his article), Desai contradicts him by admitting that there were differences in the earliest texts, such differences including "textual variation" (op.cit., p.22), and by acknowledging that other codices were not necessarily identical to the one compiled by Zaid (p.23). Desai, however, also seeks to maintain the hypothesis that the Qur'an is word-perfect to this day, so he argues that all the variants that existed were part of the divinely authorised seven different readings of

the Qur'an and states that, as these readings were not known to all the Muslims, Uthman wisely decided to destroy the evidences in the interests of obtaining a single text. He says:

Hadhrat Uthmaan's measure of eliminating all other authorized and true versions of the Qur'aan Majeed was necessitated by the disputes which arose in the conquered territories - disputes among new Muslims ignorant of the other forms of authorized Qira'at. Since a particular Ustaad imparted only a specific Qira'at, they remained unaware of the other authorized versions. . . . Scrutinizing each and every copy would have proven too laborious and difficult a task. The simplest and safest way to ensure the prevalence of the standardized copy was to eliminate all other copies. (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.32,33).

So it became expedient to eliminate six authorised forms of Qira'at and retain just one and, although the most meticulous effort must have gone into writing and completing the other codices of the Qur'an, the reading of these texts would have been too much like hard work for the Caliph. One can only marvel at the manner in which such Muslims can unemotionally reason favourably about the wholesale destruction of what are said to have been authentic codices of the book they cherish so dearly. It would be interesting to see what the maulana's reaction would be if someone today ordered a similar destruction of such highly-prized hand-written texts of the Qur'an for such expedient reasons as he gives in these quotes, or if someone decided to make a film of the events surrounding Uthman's decree.

The order to consign all but one of the Qur'ans in existence to the flames at such a crucial time cannot be explained away so lightly. Muslim writers are not seriously assessing the gravity of Uthman's decree. As we shall see, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud reacted very strongly to Uthman's order and we are also informed that when Uthman enquired into the grievances among the Muslims who were rising in opposition to him, one of their complaints against him was his destruction of the other Qur'an codices, that he had "obliterated the Book of Allah" (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.36). They significantly did not just say it was the *masahif* (manuscripts), the usual word used for the Qur'an codices compiled before Uthman's decree, but the *kitabullah*, the "Scripture of Allah", to emphasise their severe antagonism to his wanton extermination of such important manuscripts of the Qur'an.

In the coming chapters we shall see just how extensive the variant readings were and how strongly the texts of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zaid ibn Thabit, Abu Musa and others differed from each other. Let us here, however, briefly consider certain important developments in the standardising of Zaid's text as the preferred text of the Qur'an.

3. THE REVISION OF ZAID'S CODEX OF THE QUR'AN.

One would think, in the light of the bold claims that Zaid's text was always absolutely perfect, that even if it could not have been written out originally without a wide search for its contents, its reproduction at this stage would have been a simple matter of copying it out just as it stood. Yet we find even here further evidence that it was not previously looked on with any special favour or regarded as the official text of the Qur'an, for Uthman immediately ordered that a recension of his codex take place and that it be corrected where necessary. The record of what duly transpired reads as follows:

Narrated Anas (ra): 'Uthman called Zaid bin Thabit, Abdullah bin az-Zubair, Sa'id bin Al-'As and 'Abdur-Rahman bin Al-Harith bin Hisham, and then they wrote the manuscripts (of the Qur'an). 'Uthman said to the three Quraishi persons, "If you differ with Zaid bin Thabit on any point of the Qur'an, then write it in the language of Quraish, as the Qur'an was revealed in their language". So they acted accordingly. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.4, p.466).

We have already seen that Sa'id ibn al-As was regarded as an expert in the Arabic language and he and the other two redactors were chosen because they came from the Quraysh tribe of Mecca from which Muhammad too had come, whereas Zaid was from Medina. Uthman wanted the standardised Qur'an to be preserved in the Quraysh dialect in which Muhammad had originally delivered it. Accordingly, if these three found themselves differing with Zaid's text at any point, it was to be corrected and rewritten in the original dialect. Once again we cannot possibly be dealing purely with fine points of recitation or pronunciation, for any differences here would not have been reflected in the written text. Uthman clearly had actual amendments to the written text in mind when he summoned the four redactors together.

There is even evidence that Uthman went further than just requiring a committee of four to oversee the recension of Zaid's codex in that he became involved in a general consultation with a number of other prominent Muslims in Medina on the recension of the Qur'an and a more general revision may well have taken place (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.139).

Not only this but we find yet again that Zaid was to recall yet another verse that had been missing from the text. The record of this incident reads:

Zaid said 'I missed a verse from al-Ahzab (Surah 33) when we transcribed the *mushaf* (the written text of the Qur'an under Uthman's supervision). I used to hear the messenger of Allah (saw) reciting it. We searched for it and found it with Khuzaimah ibn Thabit al-Ansari: "From among the believers are men who are faithful in their covenant with Allah" (33.23). So we inserted it in the (relevant) surah in the text. (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.138).

A similar record of the omission of what is now Surah 33.23 from the recension done under Uthman is recorded in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Vol. 6, p.479). At first sight the story is very similar to the omission of the last two verses of Surat Bara'a in the compilation of the Qur'an text done by Zaid for Abu Bakr. A recension was done, a short passage was found to be omitted, and it was discovered with Khuzaima ibn Thabit. Added to this, as we have seen (page 35), is the hadith that traces the omission of the last two verses of Surat Bara'a (9. 127-128) to the time of Uthman's reign. Siddique, in consequence, states that the story of the missing verse from Surat al-Ahzab really refers to the verses from Surat Bara'a and that the hadith about these verses has a better authority than the tradition about the other verse (*Al-Balaagh*, op.cit., p.2).

It is not possible at this time in history to make any conclusive deductions in this respect, save and except to say that it does appear to be strange that it was only nineteen years after Muhammad's death that Zaid suddenly remembered, for the first time, another verse that was missing from the Qur'an and coincidentally found it with the same companion as the other two verses. We also saw that it was Khuzaimah himself who at that time brought the redactor's attention to the omission of the two verses from Surat Bara'a and, if yet another text was also omitted and known to him alone, it needs to be explained why he remained silent about it.

Desai, however, accepts the authority of the hadith at face value and explains the phenomenon by suggesting that Surah 33.23 was indeed included in Zaid's original codex but was overlooked when the copying of the texts took place under Uthman's recension and says, once again, that it was well known to "the numerous other Huffaaz" (*The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.38). This argument just cannot stand the test of critical analysis.

The *mushaf* from which Zaid and his assistants copied the manuscripts was not destroyed along with the other codices but was returned to Hafsa after the work was complete, so if the relevant verse had been included in it, there would hardly have been any need for a search for it till it was found with Khuzaima. Likewise one cannot believe that, if it was included in the original codex, it suddenly became overlooked every time a copy was made for one of the provinces. To the extent that the hadith

reflects a true development in the text of the Qur'an, Desai's argument about the meaning of its omission in the transcribed copies is quite simply untenable and does not hold water.

At face value the hadith can only mean that it was only after Zaid's second recension of the Qur'an text that he recalled the verse for the first time - a not too improbable occurrence if he had not been required to give detailed and exact attention to the actual authenticity of the text of the Qur'an in the years between his completion of the codex for Abu Bakr and Uthman's order for a second redaction.

Siddique argues, on the face value of the hadith, that it once again means that Zaid could not find it in writing with anyone else, implying that it was well-known in the memories of the *sahaba*. He argues against the translation of the hadith as we have given it in Zaid's words, namely "I missed a verse from al-Ahzab.." and says this is "slightly inaccurate" and that it should read "I could not find a verse.." (op.cit., p.2). In other words, Zaid did not entirely overlook the verse but, being well aware of it, merely struggled to find it in writing. The key word here in the hadith is *faqada* which means "to have lost, to be deprived of, to have mislaid", and is used in the context of the bereavement of someone who is deceased. Clearly therefore it means, in the context of this hadith, not that Zaid was trying to find a text in writing that was already well-known to everybody, but rather that he was seeking to recover a verse which had indeed been lost entirely from the text and could only be found with Khuzaima.

To the extent that this tradition is historically true it shows that even Zaid's original attempt to produce a codex as complete as it could be was not entirely successful and it was only after the other manuscripts had been copied out that the relevant verse was hastily included. More and more the arguments for a perfect Qur'an, nothing added or lost with no variants in the text, become untenable and are shown to be the fruits of pious sentiment alone.

4. THE QUR'AN TEXT AS STANDARDISED BY UTHMAN.

Uthman succeeded in his immediate objective, namely to impose a single text of the Qur'an on the Muslim world with the simultaneous destruction of all the other codices in existence. To the extent that the Muslim world today indeed has a single text of its revered scripture, it cannot be said that this text is a precise record of the Qur'an as Muhammad delivered it or that its claim to be inerrant was unchallenged by others which were brought to codification at the same time. It was not Allah who arranged the text exactly in the form in which it has come down but rather the young man Zaid and that only to the best of his ability and according to his own discretion, nor was it Muhammad who codified it for the Muslim *ummah* (community) but Uthman ibn Affan, and that only after a complete revision had taken place with the simultaneous destruction of the other codices which differed from it and which, nevertheless, were compiled by other companions of Muhammad whose knowledge of the Qur'an was in no degree inferior to that of Zaid ibn Thabit.

Even after the final recension of the Qur'an during Uthman's reign disputes still came to the fore in respect of the authenticity of the text. A very good example concerns a variant reading of Surah 2.238 which, in the Qur'an as standardised by Uthman, that is, the Qur'an as it stands today, reads: "Maintain your prayers, particularly the middle prayer (*as-salaatil wustaa*), and stand before Allah in devoutness". The variant reading of this Verse is given in this hadith:

Abu Yunus, freedman of Aishah, Mother of Believers, reported: Aishah ordered me to transcribe the Holy Qur'an and asked me to let her know when I should arrive at the verse *Hafidhuu alaas-salaati waas-salaatiil-wustaa wa quumuu lillaahi qaanitiin* (2.238). When I arrived at the verse I informed her and she ordered: Write it in this way, *Hafidhuu alaas-salaati waas-salaatiil-wustaa wa salaatiil 'asri wa quumuu lillaahi qaanitiin*. She added that she had heard it so from the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him). (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.64).

THE CODICES OF IBN MAS'UD AND UBAYY IBN KA'B

1. ABDULLAH IBN MAS'UD: AN AUTHORITY ON THE QUR'AN TEXT.

No study of the early transmission of the Qur'an would be complete without an analysis of the contribution of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, one of the most prominent of Muhammad's companions. He was one of his earliest disciples and we are told that he was "the first man to speak the Qur'an loudly in Mecca after the apostle" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.141). Throughout Muhammad's twelve years of mission at Mecca and until his death at Medina some ten years later Ibn Mas'ud applied himself very diligently to learning the Qur'an by heart. There is much evidence to show that he was regarded by Muhammad himself as one of the foremost authorities on the Qur'an, if not the foremost, as appears from the following hadith:

Narrated Masruq: Abdullah bin Mas'ud was mentioned before Abdullah bin Amr who said, "That is a man I still love, as I heard the Prophet (saw) saying, 'Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four: from Abdullah bin Mas'ud - he started with him - Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, Mu'adh bin Jabal and Ubai bin Ka'b". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p.96)

The same tradition in the other great work of hadith also specifically mentions that Muhammad "started from him" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, p.1312), showing that he was deliberately mentioned first, indicating that Muhammad regarded him as the foremost authority on the Qur'an. Among others mentioned is Ubayy ibn Ka'b who, as we have already seen, also compiled a separate codex of the Qur'an before it was destroyed by Uthman.

It is significant to find no mention of Zaid ibn Thabit in this list which shows quite conclusively that Muhammad regarded Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b as far better read in the Qur'an than him. In another hadith we find further evidence of Ibn Mas'ud's prominence in respect of his knowledge of the Qur'an:

Narrated Abdullah (bin Mas'ud) (ra): By Allah other than Whom none has the right to be worshipped! There is no Sura revealed in Allah's Book but I know at what place it was revealed; and there is no verse revealed in Allah's Book but I know about whom it was revealed. And if I know that there is somebody who knows Allah's Book better than I, and he is at a place that camels can reach, I would go to him. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.488).

In a similar tradition we read that he added to this that he had recited more than seventy surahs of the Qur'an in Muhammad's presence, alleging that all Muhammad's companions were aware that no one knew the Qur'an better than he did, to which Shaqiq, sitting by, added "I sat in the company of the Companions of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) but I did not hear anyone having rejected that (that is, his recitation) or finding fault with it" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, p.1312).

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud obviously had an exceptional knowledge of the Qur'an and, as Muhammad himself singled him out as the first person to whom anyone should go who wished to learn the Qur'an, we must accept that any codex compiled by him would have as much claim to accuracy and completeness as any other. That he was one of the companions who did in fact collect the Qur'an apart from Zaid ibn Thabit cannot be disputed. Ibn Abi Dawud devotes no less than nineteen pages of his work on the compilation of the Qur'an manuscripts to the variant readings found between his text and that of Zaid which was ultimately the one standardised by Uthman (*Kitab al-Masahif*, pp. 54-73).

Having become a Muslim before even Umar, the second Caliph of Islam, Ibn Mas'ud had been on the hijrahs to both Abyssinia and Medina and was one of the highly regarded *muhajirun* who had followed Muhammad from Mecca. He participated in both the Battles of Badr and Uhud and his close association with the Prophet of Islam and prestige in the knowledge of the Qur'an resulted in his codex of the Qur'an being accepted as the standard text of the Muslims at Kufa before the recension done by Uthman. His reaction to Uthman's order that all codices of the Qur'an other than Zaid's should be burnt is most informative.

2. IBN MAS'UD'S REACTION TO UTHMAN'S DECREE.

When Uthman sent out the order that all codices of the Qur'an other than the codex of Zaid ibn Thabit should be destroyed, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud refused to hand over his copy. Desai openly speaks of "Hadhrat Ibn Mas'ud's initial refusal to hand over the compilation" (*The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.44), but Siddique, in his article, prefers to leave the impression that no such objection from the distinguished companion of Muhammad ever took place, saying instead, "There is no indication that he ever objected to the 'text of Hafsah' during the entire Caliphate of Umar" (*Al-Balaagh*, op.cit., p.1). But why should he have raised any objection to Zaid's codex at that time? His own codex had become well-established at Kufa while Zaid's had receded into relative obscurity, simply being retained by the Caliph without any attempt whatsoever to establish it as the standard text for the Muslim community.

It was only when this codex suddenly came into prominence and was decreed to be the official text during Uthman's reign that Ibn Mas'ud found his codex being threatened. He immediately refused to hand it over for destruction and we are told by Ibn al-Athir in his *Kamil* (III, 86-87) that when the copy of Zaid's text arrived for promulgation at Kufa as the standard text, the majority of Muslims there still adhered to Ibn Mas'ud's text. It must be quite obvious to any objective scholar that, just as Zaid had copied out a codex for Abu Bakr, so Ibn Mas'ud simultaneously compiled a similar codex and, given the latter's exceptional knowledge of the Qur'an, his text must be considered to be as accurate and reliable as that of Zaid. The two codices were of probable equal authority and reliability.

Because there are a wealth of evidences of differences between the two, however, and as it was Zaid's text that became the standardised text after Uthman's recension and the only one used to this day in the Muslim world, it is intriguing to find Muslim writers trying to play down and minimise the importance of Ibn Mas'ud's codex.

Desai claims that "his copy contained notes explanations as well. His copy was for his personal use, not for the use of the Ummah at large" (op.cit., p.45). No evidence is given for this claim. One of the great deficiencies in Desai's booklet is the almost total lack of documentation in respect of the factual allegations the author makes. Virtually nowhere do we find a reference to the traditional chapter and verse. The reader is expected to presume that the facts he alleges are well-founded. Desai leaves no room in his booklet for references by which a student can check whether the contents are factually reliable.

In fact it is well known that Ibn Mas'ud's codex, far from being for his personal use only, was widely used in the region where he was based and, just as Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex became the standard text Syria before Uthman's recension, so Ibn Mas'ud's likewise became the standard text for the Muslim *ummah* in and around Kufa in Iraq (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab*, p. 13).

Ahmad Von Denffer likewise attempts to minimise the importance of the other codices, saying of Ubayy ibn Ka'b's codex that "it was a *mushaf* for his own personal use, in other words, his private notebook" and goes on to say of all the other codices that these "personal notebooks became obsolete and were destroyed" (*Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.49). It is virtually impossible to understand how whole manuscripts of the Qur'an, carefully transcribed and widely used in the various provinces, can be

reduced to the status of "personal notebooks", least of all how such codices could have become "obsolete" at any time.

Muslim writers resort to such strange reasonings solely because they are determined to maintain the declared textual perfection of the Qur'an as it stands today to the last dot and letter. As this text is only a revision and reproduction of the codex of just one man, Zaid ibn Thabit, they have to circumvent the fact that other equally authoritative codices of single companions existed and that all of them, Zaid's included, differed in many key respects. Thus the text of Zaid has become elevated to "official" status right from the time of its compilation, the other texts have been downgraded to the status of "personal notebooks", and the argument runs that they were destroyed because they differed from one another without any consideration for the fact that Zaid's own codex likewise differed from each of them in turn.

There are solid evidences to show why Abdullah ibn Mas'ud at first refused to hand over his codex for destruction. While Desai claims that it was only because he attached sentimental value to his compilation (p.45) and Siddique states that there was no difference between his text and Zaid's, we find, in fact, that it was precisely because the great companion of Muhammad considered his own text to be superior to and more authentic than Zaid's that he was angered at Uthman's decree. Before Hudhayfah had ever gone to Uthman to call upon him to standardise a single text of the Qur'an, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud had some sharp words with him and reacted to his proposal that the different readings in the various provinces should be suppressed.

Hudhaifah said "It is said by the people of Kufa, 'the reading of Abdullah (ibn Mas'ud)', and it is said by the people of Basra, 'the reading of Abu Musa'. By Allah! If I come to the Commander of the Faithful (Uthman), I will demand that they be drowned". Abdullah said to him, "Do so, and by Allah you will also be drowned, but not in water". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.13).

Hudhaifah went on to say, "O Abdullah ibn Qais, you were sent to the people of Basra as their governor (amir) and teacher and they have submitted to your rules, your idioms and your reading". He continued, "O Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, you were sent to the people of Kufa as their teacher who have also submitted to your rules, idioms and reading". Abdullah said to him, "In that case I have not led them astray. There is no verse in the Book of Allah that I do not know where it was revealed and why it was revealed, and if I knew anyone more learned in the Book of Allah and I could be conveyed there, I would set out to him". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.14).

Modern writers such as Siddique and others maintain that the only differences between the recitations of the text and the reading of each companion (*qira'at*) were in pronunciations and dialectal expressions, yet it is once again obvious that what Hudhayfah had in mind was the elimination of the actual written codices being used by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and the others - you cannot drown a verbal recitation - and it was this proposal which so angered Ibn Mas'ud and which proves that the differences in reading were in the texts themselves. In other traditions we find clear evidences that he regarded Zaid's knowledge of the Qur'an, and therefore his written codex of the text, as inferior to his. After all, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud had become a Muslim at Mecca before Zaid was even born and he had enjoyed years of direct acquaintance with Muhammad while the early portions of the Qur'an were being delivered before Zaid ever accepted Islam.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said, "I recited from the messenger of Allah (saw) seventy surahs which I had perfected before Zaid ibn Thabit had embraced Islam". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.17).

"I acquired directly from the messenger of Allah (saw) seventy surahs when Zaid was still a childish youth - must I now forsake what I acquired directly from the messenger of Allah?" (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.15).

In another source we find that, when Uthman's order came for the destruction of the other codices and the uniform reading of the Qur'an according to Zaid's codex alone, Ibn Mas'ud gave a *khutba* (sermon) in Kufa and declared:

"The people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the Qur'an. I like it better to read according to the recitation of him (Prophet) whom I love more than that of Zayd Ibn Thabit. By Him besides Whom there is no god! I learnt more than seventy surahs from the lips of the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, while Zayd Ibn Thabit was a youth, having two locks and playing with the youth". (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p.444).

In the light of all these traditions, which can hardly be discounted, the evasive explanations of modern Muslim writers cannot be accepted. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud clearly resisted Uthman's order, not because of sentiment as Desai suggests, but clearly because he sincerely believed that his text of the Qur'an, gained firsthand from Muhammad himself, *was more authentic than the text of Zaid*. This conclusion cannot seriously be resisted by a sincere student of the history of the Qur'an text and its initial compilation.

It is also quite clear that the differences in reading were not confined to forms of dialect in pronunciation but in the actual contents of the text itself. An examination of some of these textual differences will show just how extensive those variant readings really were.

3. THE VARIANT READINGS IN IBN MAS'UD'S CODEX.

One of the anomalies recorded in respect of Ibn Mas'ud's text is that it is said to have omitted the *Suratul-Fatihah*, the opening surah, and the *mu'awwithatayni*, the two short surahs with which the Qur'an ends (Surahs 113 and 114). The form of these surahs has some significance - the first is purely in the form of a prayer to Allah and the last two are "charm" surahs, being recommended incantations of refuge with Allah which Muslims should recite as protection against sinister forces and practices. One tradition states that Ubayy ibn Ka'b was at one time challenged with the suggestion that Ibn Mas'ud had made certain negative statements about these surahs and he replied that he had asked Muhammad about them and was informed that they were a part of the revelation of the Qur'an and should be recited as such (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.472).

The possibility that Ibn Mas'ud may have denied that these three surahs were a part of the Qur'an vexed early Muslim historians. The well-known Iranian philosopher and historian Fakhruddin ar-Razi, who wrote a commentary on the Qur'an titled *Mafatih al-Ghayb* ("The Keys of the Unseen") and who lived in the sixth century of Islam (1149-1209 AD) gave some attention to this problem and sought to prove that the allegations were unfounded.

Imam Fakhruddin said that the reports in some of the ancient books that Ibn Mas'ud denied that *Suratul-Fatihah* and the *Mu'awwithatayni* are part of the Qur'an are embarrassing in their implications... But the Qadi Abu Bakr said "It is not soundly reported from him that they are not part of the Qur'an and there is no record of such a statement from him. He omitted them from his manuscript as he did not approve of their being written. This does not mean he denied they were part of the Qur'an. In his view the Sunnah was that nothing should be inscribed in the text (*mushaf*) unless so commanded by the Prophet (saw) ... and he had not heard that it had been so commanded". (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.186).

Another Muslim historian, an-Nawawi, in his commentary on the *Muhaththab* said that the Fatiha and the two "charm" surahs were unanimously regarded by the Muslims as part of the Qur'an and that what had been said about Ibn Mas'ud was false and unjustified (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.187). The famous dogmatic Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm likewise rejected the suggestion that Ibn Mas'ud had omitted these surahs from his codex:

Ibn Hazm said in the *Muhalla*, "This is a lie attributed to Ibn Mas'ud. Only the reading of Asim from Zirr is authentic and in that are both the *Fatiha* and *Mu'awwithatayni*". (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.187).

The record goes on to say that Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani however, in his commentary on the Sahih of al-Bukhari (his famous *Fath al-Baari*), accepted these reports as sound, quoting authorities who stated that Ibn Mas'ud would not include the two "charm" surahs in his manuscript as Muhammad had, to his knowledge, only commanded that they be used as incantations against evil forces. He regarded the *isnad* (the chain of transmitters) for this record as totally sound and attempted to harmonise the conflicting records instead, suggesting that Ibn Mas'ud accepted the Fatiha and "charm" surahs as genuinely revealed but was reluctant to inscribe them in his written text.

As Uthman ordered all the codices of the Qur'an other than Zaid's to be destroyed and as Ibn Mas'ud was eventually compelled to hand his over for elimination, it cannot be determined whether the three relevant surahs were actually included in his codex or not. If they were omitted, the reason is either that he was unaware that Muhammad had expressly stated that they were part of the Qur'an text (as alleged by Ubayy) or, less probably, that Ibn Mas'ud had actually determined that they were not part of the actual *kitabullah*, the Book of Allah, and that the other companions had assumed they were because they had come to Muhammad in the same form as the other surahs of the Qur'an.

When we come to the rest of the Qur'an, however, we find that there were numerous differences of reading between the texts of Zaid and Ibn Mas'ud. As mentioned already the records in Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif* fill up no less than nineteen pages and, from all the sources available, one can trace no less than 101 variants in the Suratul-Baqarah alone. We shall mention just a few of the differences here in illustration of the nature of the variations between the texts.

1. Surah 2.275 begins with the words *Allathiina yaakuluunar-ribaa laa yaquumuuna* - "those who devour usury will not stand". Ibn Mas'ud's text had the same introduction but after the last word there was added the expression *yawmal qiyaamati*, that is, they would not be able to stand on the "Day of Resurrection". The variant is mentioned in Abu Ubaid's *Kitab Fadha'il al-Qur'an* (cf. Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 3.63; Jeffery, *Materials*, p.31). The variant was also recorded in the codex of Talha ibn Musarrif, a secondary codex dependent on Ibn Mas'ud's text, Taiha likewise being based at Kufa in Iraq where Ibn Mas'ud was based as governor and where his codex was widely followed (Jeffery, p.343).
2. Surah 5.91, in the standard text, contains the exhortation *fasiyaamu thalaathati ayyaamin'* - "fast for three days". Ibn Mas'ud's text had, after the last word, the adjective *mutataabi'atin*, meaning three "successive" days. The variant derives from at-Tabari (7.19.11 - cf. Nöldeke, 3.66; Jeffery, p.40) and was also mentioned by Abu Ubaid. This variant reading was, significantly, found in Ubayy ibn Ka'b's text as well (Jeffery, p.129) and in the texts of Ibn Abbas (p.199) and Ibn Mas'ud's pupil Ar-Rabi ibn Khuthaim (p.289).
3. Surah 6.153 begins *Wa anna haathaa siraatii* - "Verily this is my path". Ibn Mas'ud's text read *Wa haathaa siraatu rabbakum* - "This is the path of Your Lord". The variant derives again from at-Tabari (8.60.16 - cf. Nöldeke 3.66; Jeffery, p.42). Ubayy ibn Ka'b had the same reading, except that for *rabbakum* his text read *rabbika* (Jeffery, p.131). The secondary codex of Al-A'mash, mentioned by Ibn Abi Dawud in his *Kitab al-Masahif* (p.91), also began with the variant *wa haathaa* as in the texts

of Ibn Mds'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b (Jeffery, p.318). Ibn Abi Dawud also adds a further variant, suggesting that Ibn Mas'ud read the word *siraat* with the Arabic letter sin rather than the standard sad (*Kitab al-Masahif*, p.61).

4. Surah 33.6 contains the following statement about the relationship between Muhammad's wives and the believers: *wa azwaajuhuu ummahaatuhuu* - "and his wives are their mothers". Ibn-Mas'ud's text added the words *wa huwa abuu laahum* - "and he is their father". The variant was also recorded by at-Tabari (21.70.8 - cf. Nöldeke 3.71; Jeffery p.75). This variant was likewise recorded in the codices of Ubayy ibn Ka'b (Jeffery, p.156) as well as those of Ibn Abbas (p.204), Ikrima (p.273) and Mujahid ibn Jabr (p.282), except that in these three cases the statement that Muhammad is the father of the believers precedes that which makes his wives their mothers. In the codex of Ar-Rabi ibn Khuthaim, however, where the variant also occurs, it is placed in the same position in the text as in the codices of Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy (p.298). The considerable number of references for this variant reading argue strongly for its possible authenticity over and against its omission in the codex of Zaid ibn Thabit.

These four examples are of texts where the variant consisted of the inclusion of extra words or clauses not found in Zaid's codex and, in each case, the variant is supported by inclusion in other codices, notably those included in Ubayy's text. The majority of variants, however, relate to consonantal variants in individual words or different forms of these words. In some cases whole words were omitted, such as in Surah 112.1 where Ibn Mas'ud omitted the word *qul* - "say" as did Ubayy ibn Ka'b (*Fihrist* S.26 Z.26 - cf. Nöldeke 3.77; Jeffery, pp. 113 and 180).

In other cases the variant related to the form of a word which also slightly altered its meaning, as in Surah 3.127 where Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy both read *wa saabiquu* ("be ahead") for *wa saari'uu* ("be quick") in the standard text (cf. Nöldeke, 3.64; Jeffery, pp. 34 and 125).

In yet other cases one single word might be added not affecting the sense of the text, as in Surah 6.16 where once again both Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy recorded the same variant, namely *yusrifillaahu* - "averted by Allah" - for the standard *yusraf* - "averted" (recorded from Maki's *Kitab al-Kasf*, cf. Nöldeke, 3.66; Jeffery, pp. 40 and 129).

These are but a small selection of the hundreds of variant readings between the texts of Ibn Mas'ud and Zaid giving a rough idea of the kind of differences that existed between their codices. They do serve, however, to show that these differences in their readings were not purely dialectal or confined to the pronunciation of the text as is conveniently suggested by writers like Siddique who are bound to the popular dogma "one text, no variants", but rather radically affected the contents of the text itself. The extent of the variant readings between all the codices in existence at the time of Uthman before he singled out that of Zaid to be the preferred text at the expense of the others is so great - they fill up no less than three hundred and fifty pages of Jeffery's *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an* - that one can understand why the others were ordered to be destroyed.

Far from the Qur'an being universally accepted in a standard form there were, on the contrary, vast differences in the texts distributed in the various provinces. Uthman's action brought about the standardisation of a single text for the whole Muslim world - it was not a perpetuation of an already existing unity - and Zaid's codex, which from the evidences we have considered had no greater claim to authenticity than Ibn Mas'ud's, was simply arbitrarily chosen as the standard text because it was close at hand in Medina, had been compiled under official supervision, and had not become the accepted or rival text of any one province like some of the others before Uthman's decree. Before closing this chapter let us give some attention to the other great compiler of the Qur'an, Ubayy ibn Ka'b.

4. UBAYY IBN KA'B - MASTER OF THE QUR'AN RECITERS.

Among the authorities on the Qur'an other than Abdullah ibn Mas'ud the most well known was Ubayy ibn Ka'b. There are two very interesting hadith relating to his prominence as an expert on the Qur'an text, the first reading as follows:

Affan ibn Muslim informed us ... on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, he on the authority of the Prophet, may Allah bless him; he said: The best reader (of the Qur'an) among my people is Ubayyi ibn Ka'b. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p.441).

In consequence he became known as *Sayyidul-Qurra* - "the Master of the Readers". Umar himself, the second Caliph of Islam, confirmed that he was in fact the best of all the Muslims in the recitation of the Qur'an (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.489). The second hadith in this respect reads as follows:

Anas b. Malik reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said to Ubayy b. Ka'b: I have been commanded to recite to you the Sura (al-Bayyinah), which opens with these words *Lam yakunal-lathinna kafaruu*. He said: Has he mentioned to you my name? He said: Yes, thereupon he shed tears of joy. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, p.1313).

We are not informed as to why Muhammad considered himself especially obliged to commit parts of the Qur'an to Ubayy but these two traditions do serve to show how highly regarded he was as an authority on the Qur'an. Nonetheless his codex also contained a vast number of readings which varied from Zaid's text and, as we have already seen, these readings often agreed with Ibn Mas'ud's text instead. The addition of the word *mutataabi'atin* in Surah 5.91, which we have already seen was recorded by at-Tabari as part of the codex of Ibn Mas'ud, was independently attributed to Ubayy as well (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.53). His order of Surahs, in some ways similar to Zaid's, was nonetheless different at many points (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.150).

Some examples of instances where he agreed with Ibn Mas'ud and differed in turn from Zaid (there were in fact a very large number which could be mentioned) are the following:

1. For the standard reading *wa yush-hidullaaha* in Surah 2.204 he read *wa yastash-hidullaaha* (cf. Nöldeke 3.83; Jeffery, p.120).
2. He omitted the words *in khiftum* from Surah 4.101 (cf. Nöldeke 3.85; Jeffery, p.127).
3. He read *mutathab-thibiina* for *muthabthabiina* in Surah 4.143 (cf. Jeffery, p.127).

There are a number of cases where whole clauses differed in his text. In Surah 5.48, where the standard text reads *wa katabnaa 'alayhim fiiha* - "and We inscribed therein for them (the Jews)" - the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b was *wa anzalallaahu alaa banii Isra'iila fiiha* - "and Allah sent down therein to the Children of Israel" (cf. Nöldeke 3.85; Jeffery, p.128).

From Abu Ubaid we find that, whereas Surah 17.16 in the standard text reads *amarnaa mutrafihaa fafasaqqu*, Ubayy read this clause *ba'athnaa akaabira mujri-miihaa fdmakaruu* (cf. Nöldeke 3.88; Jeffery, p.140).

One can go on and on to show how vastly Ubayy's text, like Ibn Mas'ud's and all the others, is said to have differed from Zaid's text which ultimately became standardised as the official reading of the Qur'an, but these examples serve once again to show that the variant readings were in the contents of the text itself and not just in niceties of pronunciation and recitation as many modern Muslim writers choose to assume.

There is a very interesting record of a whole verse which was found in Ubayy's text and which is not found today in Zaid's text which we shall consider in the next chapter. We cannot close on Ubayy, however, without giving some consideration to two extra surahs which we are told belonged to his codex. We are informed that, whereas Ibn Mas'ud omitted the two "charm" surahs from his codex, Ubayy included two extra surahs, *al-Hafd* (the Haste) and *al-Khal'* (the Separation) (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.152-153). The narrative continues by stating that Abu Ubaid said:

"Written in the text of Ubayy ibn Ka'b were the *Fatihah-kitab* (the Opening Surah) and the *Mu'awwi-thatayni* (the Charm Surahs) and *Allahumma innaa nasta'iinka* (the opening words of Suratul-Khal' meaning 'O Allah, we seek your help') and *Allahumma ayyaaka na'budu* (the opening words of Suratul-Hafd meaning 'O Allah, we worship you')". (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.153).

Suyuti goes on to give the full text of these two surahs, stating that they were also found in the codex of Ibn Abbas following the reading of both Ubayy and Abu Musa who also recorded them (*Al-Itqan*, p.154). Both surahs are similar to the Suratul-Fatihah, containing prayers to God for forgiveness and declarations of faith, praise, service and trust in his mercy. We are told that these are the supplications which Muhammad occasionally offered at his morning prayers after recitation of other surahs, being described as "the preserved *suratal-quunut* (chapters of humble obedience toward God) in the surahs respectively titled *al-Khal'* and *al-Hafd*" (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.527).

It is intriguing to consider that, in their likeness to the Suratul-Fatihah (which extends to their length also - the Fatihah has seven verses while the other two have been set out in three and six verses respectively - cf. Nöldeke, *Geschichte* 2.35), they were regarded as of equal authority from different stand-points by Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy respectively. The former had none of them in his codex, the latter all three! It seems that Muhammad himself used them interchangeably and that some of his companions were uncertain whether they should be recorded as part of the written *kitabullah*, especially as each one constitutes a prayer of supplication in the words of the believers and worshippers in contrast to the rest of the Qur'an where Allah is always made to be the speaker.

We have, in this chapter, given some consideration to the codices of the two most prominent authorities on the Qur'an to show how considerably they differed from the codex of Zaid ibn Thabit and how uncertain much of the Qur'an text was when it was first compiled after the death of Muhammad. We could also go on to consider the numerous other codices that are recorded as having been transcribed before Uthman's decree that they should be burnt, but let it suffice to say that in each of these as well there were large numbers of variant readings which have been preserved. (Uthman was able to blot out the written codices in which they were recorded, he was unable to erase them from the memories of those who had recorded them).

In fact one should not speak so much of the readings in Zaid's text as the "standard" readings and of the others as "variant" readings as though the latter were the exception. The truth is that, between all the codices that existed in the early days of Islam ibn Mas'ud's, Zaid's, Ubayy's, Abu Musa's, etc. there were a wealth of differences and Zaid's readings qualify just as readily as the others do. In his case his *qira'at* became *standardised* as the only readings allowable in the Muslim world and copies of his codex were distributed to replace the others in popular use purely to establish a uniform reading of the Qur'an text.

The Qur'an as it has come down through the centuries is not the single text without any variants that has been divinely preserved without so much as a dispute regarding even one letter as Muslim writers conveniently choose to believe. Rather it is simply but one form of it as it existed during the first two decades after Muhammad's death, the compilation of but one man, Zaid ibn Thabit, and commissioned for the Muslim world as the only text to be accepted, not by divine decree, but by the arbitrary discretion of yet another single individual, Uthman ibn Affan.

The popular sentiment of the Muslims that the Qur'an has, right from the beginning, been preserved without the slightest variation in a single text would carry weight if it could be shown that this was the only text accepted by the whole Muslim community from the time of Muhammad himself.

The records of the Qur'an's compilation in the heritage of Islam, however, show convincingly that there were a whole number of different codices in vogue during the first generation after Muhammad's demise and that these all varied considerably from one another. The adoption of a single text came only twenty years after his death and only through the unilateral choice of one of the varying codices as the standard text at the expense of the others. The universally accepted text of the Qur'an in the Muslim world is not so much the *mushaf* of Muhammad but rather the *mushaf* of Zaid ibn Thabit, and its unchallenged authority today has come about, not through divine decree or preservation, but by the imposition of one man acting on his own initiative against the many other codices of equal authority which he summarily consigned to the flames.

THE MISSING PASSAGES OF THE QUR'AN

1. THE MUSHAF: AN INCOMPLETE RECORD OF THE QUR'AN TEXT.

We have already seen that on the Day of Yamama not long after Muhammad's death texts of the Qur'an that were said to have been known only to those who perished in the battle were irretrievably lost. We also find many other instances in the historical record of the Qur'an text where individual verses and, at times, lengthy portions are said to have been omitted from it. There is, in fact, a virtually unanimous opinion among the early historians that the Qur'an, as it stands, is incomplete. Abdullah ibn Umar, in the earliest days of Islam, was quite emphatic about this:

It is reported from Ismail ibn Ibrahim from Ayyub from Naafi from Ibn Umar who said: "Let none of you say 'I have acquired the whole of the Qur'an'. How does he know what all of it is when much of the Qur'an has disappeared? Rather let him say 'I have acquired what has survived.'" (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.524).

There are a number of examples that could be quoted but we shall confine ourselves to perhaps the most well-known of these to prove the point. A typical case relates to a verse which is said to have read:

The religion with Allah is al-Hanifiyyah (the Upright Way) rather than that of the Jews or the Christians, and those who do good will not go unrewarded. (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.525).

According to at-Tirmithi in his *Kitab al-Tafsir*, one of the sections of his *Jami'*, his collection of hadith records which rates as one of the six major works of authentic tradition literature in Islam alongside the Sahihs of al-Bukhari and Muslim and the three *sunan* works of Abu Dawud, an-Nasai and Ibn Maja, this verse at one time formed part of *Suratul-Bayyinah* (Surah 98) in the Qur'an (Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 1.242). This is quite possible as it fits well into the context of the short surah which contains, in other verses, some of the words appearing in the missing text, such as *diin* (religion, v.5), *'aml* (to do, v.7), and *hunafa* (upright, v.4), and also contrasts the way of Allah with the beliefs of the Jews and the Christians.

It is also significant to note here that, whereas the standard text of Surah 3.19 today reads *innadiina 'indallaahil-Islam* - "the religion before Allah is al-Islam (i.e. the Submission)", Ibn Mas'ud read in place of al-Islam the title *al-Hanifiyyah*, i.e. "the Upright Way" (Jeffery, *Materials*, p.32), thus coinciding with the text said to have been part of Surah 98 by at-Tirmithi. At the beginning of Muhammad's mission there were a number of people in Arabia who disclaimed the worship of idols and called themselves *hunafa*, specifically meaning those who follow the upright way and who scorn the false creeds surrounding them.

It may well be that Muhammad first chose this same title *al-Hanfiyyah* to describe his own faith but, as his religion took on its own unique identity, he substituted *al-Islam* for it and called believers Muslims, signifying that they were not only followers of the right way but, at the same time, submitters to Allah who reveals that way and commands obedience to it. This would account for the lapse of the earlier title in the Qur'an and the omission of the verse we have been considering from its text.

We have evidence of a whole section of the Qur'an that is now said to be missing in the *as-sunan al-Kubra* of al-Baihaqi, an extensive collection of hadith records not regarded as authentic as the six major works we have mentioned but nonetheless of great interest and importance. Ubayy ibn Ka'b is said to have recalled a time when *Suratul-Ahzab* (the thirty-third Surah) once was the same length as *Suratul-Baqarah* (the second Surah), which means it must have had at least two hundred verses not found in its text today (Al-Baihaqi, *As-Sunan al-Kubra*, Vol. 8, p.211). Significantly this missing section is said to have contained the verses commanding the death sentence for adulterers, which we shall shortly consider.

There are further evidences of whole surahs said to be missing from the Qur'an as it is today. Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, one of the early authorities on the Qur'an text and a companion of Muhammad, is reported to have said to the reciters of Basra:

We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) *Bara'at*. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it: "If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.501).

The one verse he said he could recall is one of the well-known texts said to be missing from the Qur'an and we shall give separate attention to it shortly. Abu Musa went on to say:

We used to recite a surah similar to one of the *Musabbihaat*, and I no longer remember it, but this much I have indeed preserved: 'O you who truly believe, why do you preach that which you do not practise?' (and) 'that is inscribed on your necks as a witness and you will be examined about it on the Day of Resurrection'. (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.526).

The tradition as here quoted follows the record of it in the *Sahih Muslim* where it is recorded after the statement about the surah resembling the ninth surah and containing the verse about the son of Adam (Vol. 2, p.501). The *Musabbihaat* are those surahs of the Qur'an (numbers 57, 59, 61, 62 and 64) which begin with the words *Sabbaha* (or *yusabbihu*) *lillaahi maa fiis-samaawati wal-ardh* - "Let everything praise Allah that is in the heavens and the earth" (cf. Nöldeke, 1.245).

The words of the first verse mentioned by Abu Musa are exactly the same as those found in Surah 61.2 while the second text is very similar to Surah 17.13 ("We have fastened every man's fate on his neck and on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring out an inscription which he will see spread out") which would explain why he particularly recalled these two verses.

Those Muslims who claim that the Qur'an is exactly the same today as it was when first delivered by Muhammad, nothing varied, added or omitted, have to reckon with such evidences that much is indeed missing from the standardised text. Some take the convenient and easy way out and simply declare such records to be fabricated, but others, more inclined to take them seriously, have another answer to the problem. They say such passages have been abrogated and that such abrogation was decreed by Allah himself during Muhammad's own lifetime while the Qur'an was still being completed. Let us give some attention to this claim.

2. AL-NASKH WA AL-MANSUKH: THE DOCTRINE OF ABROGATION.

This is a doctrine which is spurned by many Muslims who believe it reflects most unfavourably on the supposed textual perfection of the Qur'an, but one that is generally accepted by the more conservative Muslims and orthodox maulanas such as Desai. The doctrine is based fairly and squarely on the teaching of the Qur'an itself, in particular the following verse:

None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that God hath power over all things? *Surah 2.106*

In the early days of Islam this text was taken to mean that parts of the Qur'an could become *mansukh* (abrogated) while other fresh revelations, the *naskh* texts, were sent down to replace them. Both the great commentators al-Baidawi and Zamakshari taught emphatically that the abrogated verses should no longer be recited and that any laws based on them were to be regarded as annulled. It was generally believed that the abrogated verses were deleted from the Qur'an by *Jibril* (the angel said to have transmitted the Qur'an to Muhammad - Surah 2.98), though in many cases both the original text and the one abrogating its dicta are said to have been retained and are still part of the Qur'an text.

The relevant verse plainly states that Allah does indeed abrogate some of his *ayat* ("revelations"), a word often used for the text of the Qur'an itself as in Surah 3.7 where it is said that some of the *ayat* of the Scripture (*al-Kitab*) sent down to Muhammad are basic and whose meaning is obvious whereas others are allegorical (cf. also Surah 11.1). There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Qur'an does teach an abrogation of the *ayat* of Allah and, as this very word is used in the book for its own texts, the interpretation that it was actual verses of the Qur'an that were abrogated cannot be challenged on the grounds of exegetical fairness or probability. The word *ayat* is a very common Qur'anic word usually meaning the "signs" of Allah (that is, his supernatural or other portents for mankind), but it is quite obvious that it cannot be these that are said to have been abrogated. The text can only refer to revelations of scripture, it cannot refer to historical signs once these have occurred as a warning to the nations. Muslim scholars are well aware of this and the only question then is, which scriptures are in fact being spoken of here?

Thus those modern Muslim scholars who deny that any of the verses of the Qur'an have been abrogated teach instead that this text refers to the revelations of Allah to the Jews and Christians beforehand. This interpretation is unacceptable as the Qur'an nowhere specifically uses the word *ayat* to describe the texts of the *Tawraat* (the Law, the Scripture of the Jews, said to have been given to them by Moses) and the *Injil* (the Gospel, the Scripture of the Christians, said to have been given to them by Jesus), nor does it suggest that these previous scriptures were ever abrogated.

On the contrary the Qur'an claims to be a scripture *musadiqallimaa bayna yadayhi* - "confirming what went before it" (Surah 3.3), namely the *Tawraat* and the *Injil* which are specifically mentioned in the next clause. The Qur'an thus is said not to be the means of abrogating the previous revelations but rather the very opposite, namely of establishing them. Elsewhere the Jews are expressly commanded to judge by what is written in their scripture rather than come to Muhammad for judgment (Surah 5.43) and the Christians are commanded to do likewise (Surah 5.47). In addition both the Jews and the Christians are called upon to stand fast by the *Tawraat* and the *Injil* respectively and all that their Lord had revealed to them. (Surah 5.68).

The abrogation of which the Qur'an speaks, therefore, cannot refer to the previous scriptures and can only refer to the texts of the Qur'an itself, the interpretation universally placed on the verse in the earliest days of Islam. The problem for modern Muslim writers is that the Qur'an claims to proceed from a "preserved tablet" (*lawhim-mahfuudh* - Surah 85.22) and the question obviously arises - if parts of the Qur'an have been abrogated and eliminated, were they on the original heavenly tablet or not? If they were, then the Qur'an today is not an exact replica of the text on that tablet for they could not have been removed from it, the Qur'an being regarded as Allah's eternal speech. If they were not on the tablet, however, how did they come to be delivered to Muhammad as part of the text? We are right back at the original popular sentiment that the Qur'an has been preserved perfectly to the last dot and letter by Allah himself, nothing varied, added, omitted or, in consequence, "abrogated". To maintain this popular hypothesis modern Muslim writers thus have to resort to a clearly unacceptable interpretation of Surah 2.106, one which cannot be derived *ex facie* from the text, in preference over

the obvious and more reasonable interpretation of the early historians of Islam, namely that parts of the Qur'an text itself have been abrogated.

The doctrine is unpalatable to thinking Muslims for other reasons, for example it represents Allah as a divine author who revokes his earlier announcements as though he had cause to change his mind or had, in time, discovered a better course of action. Nonetheless the text must be taken to mean what it was originally intended to mean, not what modern Muslim writers would like to force it to mean according to their own inclinations.

There are other passages in the Qur'an which clearly support the obvious interpretation, such as the following text:

When We substitute one revelation for another - and God knows best what He reveals (in stages), - they say, "Thou art but a forger": but most of them understand not. *Surah 16.101*

This verse quite clearly refers to the substitution and elimination of texts of the Qur'an itself for it does not say that Allah replaces one *kitab* (the Tawraat or the Injil, for example) with another, but rather that he substitutes one *ayah* for another *ayah* and, as we have seen, in the Qur'an this refers to the verses of the book itself and not to the previous revelations. It was in fact this very claim, that Allah himself had replaced some of the earlier texts of the Qur'an, that made Muhammad's opponents accuse him of being a forger, for this appeared to be a very convenient manner of explaining away earlier texts which Muhammad had by that time forgotten or replaced.

Having established that the Qur'an does teach that Allah did, in fact, abrogate and cancel earlier passages revealed to Muhammad, one would think that acceptance of this principle would suffice to prove that the Qur'an, as it is today, is incomplete. That, in fact, is just how modern Muslim writers see it and so they reject the doctrine of abrogation. Certainly the Qur'an cannot be regarded as an exact replica of all that was delivered to Muhammad, nor can it be claimed that nothing has been lost or omitted. Yet we find Desai using this very doctrine of abrogation as an argument for the perfection of the Qur'an text! He says:

Abrogation of verses by Allah Ta'ala during the time of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) while the incidence of Wahi (Revelation) was in progress is a fact well-known to all. ... Once a verse has been abrogated on the authority of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam), it cannot be included in the Qur'aanic text any longer. (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, pp.48,49).

The argument goes that the missing passages of the Qur'an referred to in the hadith literature cannot be adduced as evidence that the Qur'an is incomplete or imperfect. It is summarily assumed that every text of the Qur'an that could not be traced at the time of its compilation, or which was omitted for some other reason, must have duly been abrogated by Allah. Therefore nothing is actually "missing" from the text - whatever has been omitted has been expunged by divine decree so that what remains is an exact record of what Allah intended to survive. We find that even Umar, troubled by Ubayy ibn Ka'b's excellent knowledge of the Qur'an, when confronted with texts known to the companion but not to the Caliph, likewise claimed that they must have been abrogated:

Narrated Ibn Abbas: Umar said "Ubayy was the best of us in the recitation (of the Qur'an) yet we leave some of what he recites". Ubayy says, "I have taken it from the mouth of Allah's Apostle (saw) and will not leave it for anything whatever". But Allah said: None of Our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten but We substitute something better or similar (2.106). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.489).

Quite obviously Ubayy was convinced that he should not forego anything he had learnt directly from Muhammad himself and the only recourse of those unfamiliar with the verses he was reciting was to regard them as passages that Allah must have abrogated.

We do have one clear case where a verse not found in the Qur'an today is, in the hadith literature, indeed said to have been abrogated. While Muhammad was based in Medina some of the tribes resident near the city and who professed allegiance to him requested assistance against their enemies. Muhammad accordingly despatched seventy of the *ansar* who, when they reached Bi'r Ma'una (the well of Ma'una) were duly massacred by members of the tribes they had been sent down to assist. Anas ibn Malik said:

We used to read a verse of the Qur'an revealed in their connection, but later the verse was cancelled. It was: "convey to our people on our behalf the information that we have met our Lord, and He is pleased with us, and has made us pleased". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p.288).

The word used for "cancelled" in this hadith is *rufa'a* which, in its original form *rafa'a*, means "to take away, remove, abolish or eliminate". It is thus clearly taught in this text that a verse, clearly said to have been part of the Qur'an itself, was later abrogated. The text was widely recorded and amongst the sources for it we find Ibn Sa'd, at-Tabari, al-Waqidi and Muslim (Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 1.246). Elsewhere we read that the relevant text was "sent down in a Qur'an verse until it was withdrawn" (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.527), another clear proof that the verse was originally a part of the Qur'an text. The difficulty here, and with all the other passages of the Qur'an reported in the hadith literature as now omitted from the text, is that one cannot find a reason why it should have been "abrogated" or what "better or similar" verse duly came in its place.

The Qur'an plainly states, in both Surahs 2.106 and 16.101, that Allah *substitutes* such a "better or similar" verse for the original text. Thus we are told in one place of the Qur'an that intoxicating wine has both good and bad effects (Surah 2.219) and that Muslims should not come to their prayers in a state of intoxication (Surah 4.43). Later, however, the consumption of wine was forbidden altogether (Surah 5.93-94) and the latter verses are said to have been substituted for the former verses (which nevertheless remain in the Qur'an text). This is a reasonable and consistent example of what we would expect to find when the Qur'an says that not one of Allah's revelations are abrogated without something else coming in its place.

The hadith quoted about the mutual pleasure of Allah and those slain at Bi'r Ma'una, however, does not tell us what came in place of the verse said to have been withdrawn. The same goes for all the other passages we have mentioned - what came in their place? What was the *naskh* that took the place of the *mansukh*?

It is far more reasonable to conclude that most of the various passages said to have been omitted from the Qur'an were either overlooked, or not known to all the companions, or quite simply forgotten (such as the passage said by Abu Musa to have contained the verse about the insatiable greed of man - cf. *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.501). Desai's attempt to blanket every passage said to have been omitted from the Qur'an under the cover of the doctrine of divine abrogation appears to be an expedient means of explaining away the imperfections in the original collection of the Qur'an and the ultimate incompleteness of the text. Let us conclude with a consideration of two famous passages said to have been part of the Qur'an but eventually omitted from it.

3. THE MISSING VERSE ON THE INSATIABLE GREED OF MAN.

We have already quoted from the *Sahih Muslim* the verse about the greed of the son of Adam who, even if he were to be given two valleys full of riches would covet yet a third and nothing would satisfy him. This tradition, to the effect that this passage once formed a part of the Qur'an text, is so widely

reported that it must be authentic in its basic details. As-Suyuti's selection of some of the other hadith records quoting this text shows just how extensive the authorities for it were, one of which reads:

Abu Waqid al-Laithii said, "When the messenger of Allah (saw) received the revelation we would come to him and he would teach us what had been revealed. (I came) to him and he said 'It was suddenly communicated to me one day: Verily Allah says, We sent down wealth to maintain prayer and deeds of charity, and if the son of Adam had a valley he would leave it in search for another like it and, if he got another like it, he would press on for a third, and nothing would satisfy the stomach of the son of Adam but dust, yet Allah is relenting towards those who relent.'" (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.525).

This record is followed by a similar tradition, where Ubayy ibn Ka'b is said to be the original transmitter, giving the verse in much the same words, except that the companion expressly stated that Muhammad had quoted this verse as part of the Qur'an (*al-Qur'an* in the text) which he had been commanded to recite to them. Following this is the tradition of Abu Musa, similar to the record of it in the *Sahih Muslim*, which states that the verse was from a surah resembling *Suratul-Bara'ah* in length, except that in this case Abu Musa is not said to have forgotten it but rather that it had subsequently been withdrawn (*thumma rafa'at* - "then it was taken away"), the verse on the greed of the son of Adam alone being preserved (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.525).

It is also said by some authorities that the verse was read by Ubayy ibn Ka'b just after Surah 10.25 in his codex (Jeffery, *Materials*, p.135) while other records state that it was also reported by Anas ibn Malik, Ibn Abbas, Ibn Zubair and others (Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 1.234) but with none of these being sure, as Ubayy most certainly was, whether it was part of the Qur'an text or not (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.500). The tradition was, thus, *mutawatir*, a well-attested hadith confirmed by a number of companions whose authority could not be questioned or challenged.

This verse is expressly said to have been a part of the Qur'an text that was revealed to Muhammad in the two records of the hadith deriving from Abu Waqid and Ubayy ibn Ka'b and, in the narrative of Abu Musa recorded in as-Suyuti's selection, it is stated to have been one of the Qur'an verses, indeed a portion of a whole surah, that was abrogated. It is also acknowledged as such in the works of commentators on the Qur'an such as Abu Ubaid in his *Fadhail al-Qur'an* and Muhammad ibn Hazm in his *Kitab al-Nasikh wa'l Mansukh*, both authors stating that it was a valid text of the Qur'an before it was withdrawn. It is thus one of many passages which, although Allah is said to have caused it to be forgotten upon its retraction, remained in the memories of the companions and has duly been preserved as one of the missing verses of the Qur'an.

4. UMAR AND THE VERSES OF STONING FOR ADULTERY.

One of the most well-known passages said in hadith records to be missing from the Qur'an relates to the so-called "stoning verses" wherein Muhammad is said to have been commanded to stone to death married people who commit adultery. The records all state that the second Caliph of Islam, Umar, once brought the existence of these missing verses to the attention of the Muslim public during one of his sermons from the minbar (the pulpit) of the mosque in Medina. Umar is reported as narrating the matter as follows:

Allah sent Muhammad (saw) with the Truth and revealed the Holy Book to him, and among what Allah revealed, was the Verse of the Rajam (the stoning of married persons, male and female, who commit adultery) and we did recite this Verse and understood and memorized it. Allah's Apostle (saw) did carry out the punishment of stoning and so did we after him. I am afraid that after a long time has passed, somebody will say, 'By Allah, we do not find the Verse of the Rajam in Allah's Book', and thus they will go astray by leaving an obligation which Allah has revealed. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, p.539).

In the Qur'an as it stands today the only punishment prescribed for adulterers is a hundred stripes (Surah 24.2), no distinction being made between the married or unmarried state of each of the parties involved. Umar, however, clearly stated that Allah had originally revealed a passage prescribing *rajam* (stoning to death) for adulterers. From the original Arabic text of the narrative in the Sahih of Bukhari as quoted above it can be seen quite clearly that Umar was convinced that this passage was originally a part of the Qur'an text. The key words are *wa anzala alayhil-kitaaba fakaana mimmaa anzalallaahu aayaatur-rajm*, meaning literally, "And He sent down to him the Scripture (viz. the Qur'an), and part of what Allah sent down (therein) was the verse of stoning".

In another record of this incident we find that Umar added: "Verily stoning in the book of God is a penalty laid on married men and women who commit adultery, if proof stands or pregnancy is clear or confession is made" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.684). Both the records of the tradition in the Sahih of Bukhari and the Sirat of Ibn Ishaq add that Umar mentioned another missing verse which was once part of the *kitabullah* (viz. the Qur'an) which the earliest of Muhammad's companions used to recite, namely "O people! Do not claim to be the offspring of other than your fathers, as it is disbelief on your part to claim to be the offspring of other than your real father." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, p.540).

In both narratives there is a prologue where we find Umar cautioning against any attempt to deny what he was saying, warning that those who could not accept what he was about to disclose were not thereby entitled to tell lies about him (that is, to say that he did not disclose it). He obviously was very serious about what he was doing and anticipated an adverse reaction from those Muslims of a later generation who were not aware of the missing verses which clearly contradicted the injunction in Surah 24.2, or that Muhammad had in fact stoned adulterers to death. That he did so is clear from the following hadith:

Ibn Shihab reported that a man in the time of the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) acknowledged having committed adultery and confessed it four times. The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) then ordered and he was stoned. " (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.350).

There are numerous other records of instances similar to this one where Muhammad had adulterers stoned to death. What was, in fact, the "Verse of Stoning"? It is mentioned in the following tradition:

Zirr ibn Hubaish reported: "Ubayy ibn Ka'b said to me, 'What is the extent of Suratul-Ahzab?' I said, 'Seventy, or seventy-three verses'. He said, 'Yet it used to be equal to Suratul-Baqarah and in it we recited the verse of stoning'. I said, 'And what is the verse of stoning'? He replied, 'The fornicators among the married men (*ash-shaikh*) and married women (*ash-shaikhah*), stone them as an exemplary punishment from Allah, and Allah is Mighty and Wise.'" (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.524).

Whereas the Qur'an makes no distinction in Surah 24.2 between the married or unmarried state of those who are guilty of fornication (it simply calls them *az-zaaniyatu waz-zaanii* - "the female and male fornicators"), the text as given in the above tradition only states that married men and women who are caught in adultery should be stoned (the actual meaning of the word is "old" or "adult" men and women, implying married persons).

This has led to much discussion in Muslim writings about the meaning of the verse. The general understanding among Muslim scholars of earlier generations was that any portion of the Qur'an totally abrogated by Allah was also caused to be entirely forgotten (on the strength of Surah 2.106: *nansakh ... aw nunsihaa naati* - "abrogate ... or cause to be forgotten", the two being taken together as an entity). So when a verse was found to be retained in the memory of a companion as distinguished as Umar, it was assumed that, whereas the text may indeed have been withdrawn from the Qur'an, teaching and prescription found in it nevertheless binding as part of the *sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam. The dilemma was generally resolved by presuming that the Qur'anic command to impose one

hundred stripes on fornicators applied only to unmarried persons, whereas married persons guilty of actual adultery were to be stoned according to the *sunnah*. Numerous other solutions to the issue have been proposed and the subject has been exhaustively treated in the various works of historical Islamic literature.

We are not here concerned with the theological or legal implications of the doctrine of abrogation, however, but only with the actual compilation of the Qur'an text itself. The question here is, was this verse once a part of the Qur'an text or not and, if it was, why is it now omitted from its pages? From the traditions quoted thus far we can see that it was clearly regarded by Umar as part of the original Qur'an text, yet in another tradition we read that Umar had some hesitancy about it:

Zaid ibn Thabit and Sa'id ibn al-As were writing out the *mushaf* (the written codex of the Qur'an) and when they came to this verse Zaid said, "I heard the messenger of Allah (saw) say: 'The adult men and women who commit adultery, stone them as a punishment'". Umar said, "When it was revealed I went to the Prophet (saw) and said, 'Shall I write it?', but he seemed very reluctant". (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.528).

This hadith, however, irrespective of its *isnad* (its chain of transmitters), has some obvious contradictions in its content (its *matn*). It places Umar with Zaid and Sa'id ibn al-As at the time when the Qur'an was being copied out by the latter two men together and, as this is known to have occurred at Uthman's instigation long after Umar's death, Umar could hardly have so discoursed with them. In any event most of the other hadith records make it quite plain that Umar had no doubt that the stoning verse was originally part of the Qur'an text and it was for this reason that he was so serious about its retention.

It was occasionally argued that the hadith records of the existence of the stoning verse all attribute its origin to just one man, Umar, thus making it dependent on *khobar al-wahid*, the report of only one witness, and therefore unreliable. The prominence of that one witness, however, just could not be summarily ignored. It was no less a personality than Umar ibn al-Khattab, one of Muhammad's earliest and most well-known companions, who reported the existence of the verse which he claimed he received directly from Muhammad himself and, when such a report was given during his reign as Caliph over the whole Muslim community, it could not be disregarded or considered lightly.

Nonetheless modern Muslim writers, determined to discount even the slightest possibility that anything originally revealed as part of the Qur'an text has now been omitted therefrom for whatever reason, seek to reject the claim that the stoning verse was ever part of the Qur'an. Siddique, for example, unable to simply brush the records aside, claims that Umar made a mistake! In the context of his comments on the stoning verse he says, "As for 'Umar (ra) we know that he was a great *mujtahid*, but he also made mistakes which are documented in the hadith" (*Al-Balaagh*, op,cit., p.2). On what grounds does a twentieth-century Muslim writer accuse the great Caliph of Islam, Umar ibn al-Khattab, of making a mistake about something he experienced directly during Muhammad's own lifetime? On no other ground than that Umar's disclosure undermines the popular Muslim sentiment that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved with nothing varied or omitted.

SAB'AT-I-AHRUF: THE SEVEN DIFFERENT READINGS

1. THE SAB'AT-I-AHRUF IN THE HADITH LITERATURE.

While writers like Siddique seek to gloss over the wealth of evidence in the early historical records of Islam showing how the Qur'an was eventually standardised against a background of variant readings, missing passages and texts which had been lost altogether, others like Desai duly acknowledge the evidences and admit the many differences that existed in the earliest manuscripts and codices. On the other hand we find Desai, for example, nonetheless determined to maintain the popular hypothesis that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved and is intact to the last dot and letter. We have already seen how he overcomes the difficulty with the passages said to be missing from the Qur'an - he conveniently declares them all to have been abrogated by Allah during Muhammad's lifetime. How does he evade the implications of the numerous variant readings in the earliest texts and codices? He claims that they resulted not from uncertainty about the text or partial confusion about the actual wording of each passage but rather that each and every variant was in fact part of the original Qur'an text as delivered by Allah to Muhammad! He says that "the 'differences' in the recitals of various people were all official, authorized and divine forms which were taught by Rasulullah (saw) to the Sahaabah who in turn imparted their knowledge of Qira'at to their students" (*The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p. 13) and goes on to quote the following statement of Muhammad in support of his interpretation:

The Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways, so recite of it that which is easier for you. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p.510).

The statement concludes a tradition which informs us that Umar one day heard Hisham ibn Hakim reciting *Suratul-Furqan* in a way very different to that which he, Umar, had learned it. Umar struggled to control himself and intended to spring upon him but, when Hisham had finished, Umar confronted him and accused him of being a liar when he stated that he had learned it so directly from Muhammad himself. When they came before the Prophet of Islam he confirmed the readings of both companions, adding the above statement that the Qur'an had been revealed *alaa sab'ati ahruf* - "in seven readings". A similar tradition stating that the Qur'an originally came in seven different forms reads as follows:

Ibn Abbas reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Gabriel taught me to recite in one style. I replied to him and kept asking him to give more (styles), till he reached seven modes (of recitation). Ibn Shihab said: It has reached me that these seven styles are essentially one, not differing about what is permitted and what is forbidden. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.390).

We are further informed that Ubayy ibn Ka'b recalled an occasion where Muhammad reported that *Jibril* had come to him one day and told him Allah had commanded that the Qur'an be recited in only one dialect, to which Muhammad replied that his people were not capable of doing this. After much going back and forth the angel finally decreed that Allah had allowed the Muslims to recite the Qur'an in seven different ways and that each recital would be correct (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p.391).

Further than these records there is no evidence in the Hadith literature as to what these seven different readings were. The narrative in the *Sahih* of Al-Bukhari, also recorded in Vol. 6, p.481, does not tell us how Hisham's recital of *Suratul-Furqan* differed from Umar's, nor whether the differences were purely dialectal as is suggested in the traditions from the *Sahih* of Imam Muslim.

There are no other records in the earliest works of Hadith and Sirat literature to give any indication as to what the seven different readings actually were or what form they took. Were there ultimately seven different forms in which the whole Qur'an could be recited? Or was it purely a question of different dialects in which the text could be recited? There is nothing in the earliest records giving any idea of what the *sab'at-i-ahruf* were or what form they took other than the clear indications in the traditions quoted from the Sahih of Muslim that they were confined to dialectal variants. No more is said than that the Qur'an had actually been revealed in seven different ways in which it could be recited.

In the *As-Sunanul-Kubra* of Abu Dawud we find the compiler recording up to forty variant readings of the Qur'an under the heading *Kitab al-Huruf wa-al Qira'at* ("The Book of Dialects and Readings"). We shall mention some of them later in this chapter, but here let it suffice to say that in each one of the readings he quotes, only one variant is mentioned and in each case it is purely a variation of dialect or pronunciation that is involved. There is no suggestion that these variant readings were authorised as part of the original text or that they formed part of the seven different readings but, if they did, they were confined to dialectal variants alone.

As a result of the paucity of evidence as to exactly what the *sab'at-i-ahruf* originally were a host of different explanations of the relevant hadith have been suggested. Some say that as the Arab tribes had divergent dialects the Qur'an came in seven different forms for their convenience while others say that the seven different readings were distinct forms conveyed to the centres of Islam by approved readers in the second century after Islam. Thus Abu 'Amr is said to have taken one of the readings to Basrah, Ibn Amir took one to Damascus, Asim and two others took theirs to Kufa, Ibn Kathir took one to Mecca and Nafi retained one in Medina (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, note 3365, Vol. 3, p,1113). What they were in each case is anyone's guess. There are numerous other explanations which we need not consider here. From what we have already considered it is quite clear that nothing certain can be said about the seven different readings except that they were confined to differences in dialect and pronunciation alone.

Desai constantly talks about "all the authorized 'variant readings'" which were "revealed and part of the Qur'an" and, as said already, he simply catalogues all the different readings of the Qur'an that can be found in the earliest records as part of the *sab'at-i-ahruf* and as therefore divinely sanctioned. The key difficulty here, however, which Desai conveniently overlooks, is that those records show that the differences between Zaid ibn Thabit's codex and those of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and others relate not only to dialectal variants but also to *real variations of the text itself*. We have quoted numerous examples in this book of words, clauses and even whole verses that were said to have differed radically between the different codices.

It has been amply proved already that these differences were not purely dialectal but at times related to the basic content of the Qur'an text itself. It must be said again that if all these differences had been purely in the pronunciation of the text according to the various dialects of the Arab tribes, they would not have appeared in the written text, especially when we remember that those early codices had only consonants and did not include the relevant vowel points upon which the different dialects invariably turned.

Uthman would never have ordered the wholesale destruction of all the codices other than Zaid's if the differences of reading were only in the verbal expression of the text. There are, as we have seen, many different explanations of the *sab'at-i-ahruf*, yet it is invariably claimed that these related solely (or almost exclusively) to dialectal variants. If we accept this interpretation we must at the same time conclude that these seven different readings have nothing or very little to do with the extensive textual variants which existed between the codices of Ibn Mas'ud, Zaid, Ubayy, Abu Musa and others before Uthman ordered the destruction of all but one of them. While Desai endeavours to give divine sanction and authority to all the variant readings that existed at that time, whether textual or dialectal, by claiming that they were all part of the *sab'at-i-ahruf*, the unanimous opinion of the early Muslim

scholars was that these seven readings consisted solely of dialectal differences and the learned maulana has no justification for seeking to apply them to those instances where there were real distinctions in the actual text of the Qur'an in the various codices.

We are clearly dealing with two different types of "variant" reading. On the one hand we have the substantial differences between the early codices which covered the addition of whole clauses such as *wa salaatil'asr* in Surah 2.238, the inclusion of expressions such as *yawmal-qiyamati* in Surah 2.275 in Ibn Mas'ud's codex, the extra clause *wa huwa abuu lahum* in Surah 33.6 in the codices of Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Ibn Abbas and others as well as the numerous other actual textual variations we have mentioned.

On the other hand we have finer points of distinction in pronunciation and dialect which were not nearly as distinct in the written text as the other variants. It is only to these variants that the *sab'at-i-ahruf* can be applied if, as is generally held, the seven different readings related only to dialectal variants.

We know that Uthman was concerned about both serious textual differences and dialectal variants. To eliminate the former he simply chose Zaid's text in preference to the others which he ordered to be destroyed. To remove the latter we know that he was not satisfied that Zaid's text itself adequately represented the Quraysh dialect and he therefore ordered Sa'id ibn al-As and two others from the Quraysh to amend Zaid's text where necessary. The following impression of Uthman's action is very informative:

He transcribed the texts (*suhuf*) into a single codex (*mushaf waahid*), he arranged the suras, and he restricted the dialect to the vernacular (*lugaat*) of the Quraysh on the plea that it (the Qur'an) had been sent down in their tongue. (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.140).

Uthman was thus concerned not only to standardise the Qur'an into a single text *but also* to establish the Quraysh dialect as the standard medium of expression at the same time. He achieved the first objective by burning the other codices, the second by employing three of the Quraysh to revise the dialect of Zaid's codex insofar as it affected the written text (which effect could only have been negligible as most of the dialectal variants would have been reflected solely in the use of vowel points which were not at that stage included in the transcribed text).

The *sab'at-i-ahruf* were regarded as affecting only the second concern, that is, dialectal variants. The *ahruf* (readings) referred to were, therefore, only those affecting the different *lugaat* (dialects) of the Arab tribes. There is no suggestion anywhere in those early records that the traditions which stated that the Qur'an had been revealed in seven different readings had anything to do with the large number of substantial variant readings in the actual text that were found in the codices of Zaid-ibn-Thabit, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and the others written out before Uthman's action to standardise the text. Thus the *sab'at-i-ahruf* had nothing to do with Uthman's first concern, namely the authorisation of a single written text at the expense of the others, and indeed there would have been no need to burn them if the differences had been purely dialectal as the seven different readings were said to be.

Thus Desai is wide of the mark when he tries to explain away all the textual differences that were found in the early codices as being part of the divinely authorised seven readings. These related solely to different dialects and the maulana errs when he tries to make them cover the real textual distinctions we have mentioned in this book and in the booklet which he set out to refute. It may suit his cause considerably to claim that all those variant readings in the different codices were divinely authorised as part of the *sab'at-i-ahruf*, but, to reach this conclusion, he has had to blur the distinctions between the two types of variant reading we have considered - textual and dialectal - with the seven different readings applying only to the latter.

It is clear that the hypothesis that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved to the last dot and letter cannot be sustained in the light of the many textual differences that existed in the early codices. Desai could find no way of getting around this difficulty other than to take hold of just one hadith record - the statement of Muhammad about the *sab'at-i-ahruf* - and apply it to those differences against the clear indications that these readings were confined to dialectal variants alone.

2. THE PERIOD OF IKHTIYAR: THE "CHOICE" OF READINGS.

We have shown that there were two different types of variant reading at the time of Uthman's recension, both of which the Caliph sought to eliminate as part of the accepted text of the Qur'an. It is intriguing to discover that he succeeded in almost totally eliminating the first type - the substantial differences in the text of the Qur'an itself that were found in the various codices - but did not succeed in eliminating the second type, namely the variations in dialect and pronunciation that were widespread among the early Muslims and which continued to be read as part of the Qur'an text. This was chiefly because the codices which Uthman sent out to the various provinces had no diacritical points or vowel marks but represented only the consonantal text of the Qur'an. Unlike our alphabet which has vowels and consonants, the Arabic alphabet only has consonants and in the early days the alphabet was limited to only seventeen letters so that one consonant could reflect one of two or more letters. It was only in the later generations that vowel marks above and below the letters were introduced to give an exact representation of the vocal text and diacritical points were then also added above and below the relevant consonants to achieve the same result.

It was because the dialectal variants were reflected primarily in the vowelings of the Qur'an text that Uthman's official manuscripts, written in consonantal form alone, were unable to bring about a uniform reading of the text in the single Quraysh dialect. Thus we find that in spite of his recension variant readings of the text continued to remain widespread among the Muslims but were generally confined to differences in dialect alone. Throughout the first three centuries of Islam there was a period of *ikhtiyar*, a time of "choice" when Muslims were considered free to recite the Qur'an in whichever dialect they chose on the strength of the hadith text which stated that Muhammad had taught the Qur'an had been revealed in seven different ways in which it could be recited.

During this period until the year 322 A.H. (934 A.D.), all the scholars of the Qur'an taught that these dialectal variations constituted the *sab'at-i-ahruf* of which Muhammad spoke. Thus the "seven readings" became confined to variations in dialect and pronunciation alone and were not considered to be applicable to the very real differences that occurred in the earliest days of the development of the Qur'an text, many of which we have mentioned in this book and which Uthman sought to eliminate in the interests of establishing a single text.

We do have sound evidences, however, to show that, even after Uthman's recension was complete, his text was still considered to be imperfect over and above the fact that it was largely a reproduction of Zaid ibn Thabit's original compilation. During the caliphate of Abd al-Malik in the first century of Islam the governor of Iraq, al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, took steps to correct Uthman's text. He is said to have made [eleven direct changes to the Qur'an text](#) as it stood in its consonantal form, all of which are reflected in the Qur'an as it stands today.

Under the heading *Baab: Ma Ghaira al-Hajjaaj fii Mushaf Uthman* ("Chapter: What was Altered by al-Hajjaj in the Uthmanic Text") Ibn Abi Dawud lists these specific amendments and his narrative setting them out begins as follows:

Altogether al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf made eleven modifications in the reading of the Uthmanic text. ... In al-Baqarah (Surah 2.259) it originally read *Lam yatasanna waandhur*, but it was altered to *Lam yatasannah* ... In al-Ma'ida (Surah 5.48) it read *Shari ya'atan wa minhaajaan* but it was altered to *shir 'atawwa minhaajaan*. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.117).

The whole section continues to name each one of the amendments made by al-Hajjaj so that the Qur'an text as we have it today is not only the Uthmanic text but also a subsequent minor recension of it by the Iraqi governor. It is interesting to find that one of the alterations mentioned by Ibn Abi Dawud was originally the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b as well. Surah 12.45 is said to have originally read *anaa aatiikum* but was amended to read *anaa unabbi'ukum* and we are informed that the former reading, as originally read in the Uthmanic text, was also the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b and al-Hasan (Jeffery, *Materials*, p.138). It is probable that Zaid and Ubayy agreed on the original reading but that it was widely acknowledged by the other companions after Uthman's recension that this was a variant reading and that the correct reading was that which al-Hajjaj eventually put in its place.

In addition to these eleven changes to the Qur'an text there are evidences that a few further variant readings in the actual consonantal outline of the Qur'an still remained. All but two of these related to a single letter alone but in Surah 9.100 we find that the word *min* ("from") was read between the words *tajrii tahtihaa*, and in Surah 56.24 the pronoun *huwa* was known to be added as an extra word. Desai, in recording some of the variant readings of the Qur'an in his booklet (p.15), acknowledges the first variant mentioned here and also points out that other variants took the form of different word placements, diacritical points, attenuations and tenses. All these, however, relate to variants still known to have been freely recognised after the recension by Uthman. Throughout his booklet, however, there is no mention of any of the substantial variants that existed in the actual text of the Qur'an which led to the other codices being destroyed.

In this book and in my booklet *Evidences for the Collection of the Qur'an* which Desai set out to refute I have given a wealth of examples of such variant readings which went far beyond the question of dialects and pronunciation. The issue here was not one of different forms of *qira'at* (reading) but of the actual content of the text itself. Expressions were found in some codices that were omitted in others (such as *yawmal-qiyaamati* in Surah 2.275), single words were likewise confined to some codices and were not found in all of them (such as *mutataabi'aatin* in Surah 5.91) while whole clauses only appeared in some of the texts (such as *wa huwa abuu laahum* in Surah 33.6).

It is hard to tell at times which variant readings Desai is in fact admitting in his booklet. He makes no specific mention of these substantial differences and all the variants he does refer to can be categorised in the *sab'at-i-ahruf*, the dialectal variants which survived Uthman's recension.

In my previous booklet, however, I recorded a number of the major textual variants that existed in the other codices before they were destroyed and Desai took no issue with any of them. His admission of the existence of the variant readings has to be taken against the background of his express purpose to respond solely to my booklet and it must therefore be presumed that he was acknowledging the authenticity of the early textual variants. In his response, however, he deals only with the second class of variants, the *sab'at-i-ahruf*, and conveniently glosses over the others. He then uses this second class alone to support his contention that all the variant readings of the Qur'an were divinely authorised and it appears that he was fully aware that he could not expressly acknowledge the authenticity of the substantial textual variants without at the same time conceding that the Qur'an had not been perfectly preserved to the last dot and letter. It became convenient, therefore, to blur the distinction between the two and make an overall admission about the variant readings of the Qur'an while citing only the dialectal differences in support of his defence that the Qur'an had been revealed in seven divinely authorised forms. One cannot help feeling that the learned maulana is guilty of a degree of casuistry in his argument.

In closing let us consider some of the variants recorded by Abu Dawud in his *Kitab al-Huruf wa al-Qira'at*, all of which relate to dialectal distinctions alone and do not affect the consonantal record of the written text. They thus all form part of the second type of variant reading and can be regarded as part of the *sab'at-i-ahruf* of which Muhammad spoke. We shall mention just three of these readings that the compiler records to illustrate the point:

Shahr b. Hawshab said: I asked Umm Salamah: How did the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) read this verse: "For his conduct is unrighteous" (*innaha 'amalun ghairu salih*)? She replied: He read it: "He acted unrighteously" (*innaha 'amila ghaira salih*). (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 3, p.1116).

Ibn al-Mussayab said: The Prophet (may peace be upon him), Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman used to read "*maliki yawmi'l-din*" (master of the Day of Judgement). The first to read *maliki yawmi'l-diin* was Marwan. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 3, p.1119).

Shaqiq said: Ibn Mas'ud read the verse: "Now come, thou" (*haita laka*). Then Shaqiq said: We read it, "*hi'tu laka*" (I am prepared for thee). Ibn Mas'ud said: I read it as I have been taught, it is dearer to me. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 3, p.1120).

In each case the variant is found solely in the vowelling of the text and would not have been reflected in the consonantal text transcribed by Uthman as the standard form of the Qur'an for the whole Muslim community. This explains why so many of these dialectal variants survived Uthman's recension while the substantial textual variants were duly eliminated from the actual recitation of the Qur'an text. Let us press on to the time when the period of *ikhthiyar*, the time of "free choice", closed and the *sab'at-i-ahruf*, the seven readings of the Qur'an, were defined more exactly. Thereafter we shall close with a brief analysis of the actual character of these readings.

3. IBN MUJAHID'S FINAL DEFINITION OF THE SEVEN AHRUF.

It was not until the fourth century of Islam that an attempt was made to actually define the seven different readings. As said earlier there is nothing in the earliest works of Sirat and Hadith literature giving any indication as to what these readings actually were except for a statement attributed to Muhammad that they were all a part of the Qur'an as revealed by Allah. By the fourth century after Muhammad's death, therefore, the decision as to what these seven readings were was at the discretion of whoever sought to determine and define them.

In 322 A.H, the well-known authority on the Qur'an at Baghdad, Ibn Mujahid, took it upon himself to resolve this issue. He had considerable influence with Ibn Isa and Ibn Muqlah, two of the wazirs in the Abbasid government of the day (the equivalent of a cabinet minister in a contemporary regime), and through them he managed to establish an official limitation on the permissible readings of the Qur'an. He wrote a book titled *Al-Qira'at as-Sab'ah* ("The Seven Readings") based on the hadith which stated that there were seven divinely authorised *ahruf* of the Qur'an and he established seven of the current readings as canonical and declared the others in use to be *shadhdh* ("isolated", that is, non-canonical).

The seven readings established have already been mentioned in this book, namely those of Nafi (Medina), Ibn Kathir (Mecca), Ibn Amir (Damascus), Abu Amr (Basra), Asim, Hamzah and al-Kisai (Kufa). In each case there were certain recognised transmitters who had executed a recension (*riwayah*) of their own of each reading and two of these, namely those of Warsh (who revised the reading of Nafi) and Hafs (who revised that of Asim), eventually gained the ascendancy as the others generally fell into disuse and were no longer read in the major parts of the Muslim world.

Ibn Mujahid's determination to canonise only seven of the readings then in circulation at the expense of the others was upheld by the Abbasid judiciary of his day. Very soon after his action a scholar named Ibn Miqsam was publicly forced to renounce the widely-held opinion that any reading of the basic consonantal outline that was in accordance with Arabic grammar and made common sense was acceptable. This decision virtually validated the seven sets of readings chosen by Ibn Mujahid as the only officially acceptable qira'at. Not long after this another scholar, Ibn Shannabudh, was forced in a similar way to retract the view that it was permissible to use the readings of Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn

Ka'b (meaning only those variants confined to dialectal differences which were attributed to them and not the substantial variants which Uthman had eliminated from the recitation of the Qur'an).

Over the centuries most of the seven canonical readings also fell into disuse until only those of Nafi and Hafs became widely used in practice. Warsh's *riwayah* of Nafi's reading has long been used in the *Maghrib* (the western part of Africa under Islam's rule, namely Morocco, Algeria, etc.), mainly because it was closely associated with the Maliki school of law, but it is the *riwayah* of Hafs that has gradually gained almost universal currency in the Muslim world, especially since the printing of the Qur'an came into vogue. Virtually all the lithographed editions of the Qur'an that have been printed in the last two centuries have followed the reading of Asim through Hafs. The fully vocalised printed editions of the Qur'an that are in the possession of millions of Muslims in the world today reflect the reading of Hafs and in time this version is likely to become the sole reading in use in the whole world of Islam.

The period of *ikhthiyar* closed with Ibn Mujahid. He did to the vocalised reading of the Qur'an what Uthman had done to the consonantal text. Just as the latter had standardised a single text for the whole Muslim community by destroying the other codices that existed, so Ibn Mujahid established seven fixed canonical readings by outlawing all the others that were in current use. Just as the text standardised by Uthman cannot be regarded as a perfect reproduction of the Qur'an exactly as it was delivered by Muhammad because it did no more than establish the codex of just one man, Zaid ibn Thabit, at the Caliph's personal discretion, so the seven readings canonised by Ibn Mujahid cannot be accepted as an exact reflection of the *sab'at-i-ahruf* spoken of by Muhammad, once again precisely because they were simply the readings of later reciters arbitrarily chosen by the redactor at his own personal discretion.

4. REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIFICATION OF THE QUR'AN TEXT.

Thusfar we have dealt with the seven different readings as they were treated during the first centuries of Islam. The time has come, however, to consider this subject from a more critical perspective. Can we summarily accept that all the variant readings of the Qur'an, even if we consider only the dialectal variants and not the substantial textual differences, can be regarded as divinely authorised simply on the basis of the statement attributed to Muhammad that the Qur'an came originally with seven different readings? We know what those readings eventually became: three centuries after Muhammad's death Ibn Mujahid at his own discretion simply chose seven of the many different readings that prevailed at his time and declared them to be the divinely authorised readings. No objective scholar of the Qur'an text can accept such a unilateral and arbitrary approach as even remotely authoritative, however, and Ibn Mujahid's action can only be regarded as an ambitious attempt to make the different readings of the Qur'an in his day fit the concept of seven original readings. The action by this fourth-century redactor is something of a red herring across the path of the real issues in respect of this subject.

The key question is: what actually were those seven different readings at the time of Muhammad? What were they originally supposed to have been? We have virtually given the answer already: no one can possibly say. Nothing more is indicated in the earliest hadith records mentioning these readings than that they were generally confined to variations in dialect and rarely affected the actual consonantal text.

We have on the one hand a tradition about seven different readings, on the other a vast number of examples of actual variant readings which cannot be made relevant to the tradition in any definite way. Desai claims that Uthman eliminated six of the readings and retained just one in the interests of standardising a single text of the Qur'an. On whose authority he reduced the Qur'an to just one of seven different forms in which it was said to have been revealed Desai does not say, but to circumvent the obvious conclusion that six of the divine forms of the Qur'an have thereby been lost and eliminated

he claims that the variant readings were nonetheless at the same time separately preserved. He says in his booklet:

A separate compilation for each form of recitation not contained by the official and standard Rasmul Khat was ordered by Hadhrat Uthmaan (ra). (Desai, *The Quraan Unimpeachable*, p.36).

As usual no documentation in support of this allegation is given and the maulana's readers are, it appears, once again obliged to simply accept what he says without further enquiry. He tells us nothing of these so-called separate compilations nor does he give the source for his claim that Uthman ordered that they be put together. Such an action on the part of the Caliph can only be considered grossly improbable in the light of the fact that it was his express purpose to *entirely eliminate* the variant readings that existed in the interests of maintaining a single text.

The whole argument of the maulana, however, can be shown to be extremely fragile from another consideration. If, as he claims, the other six readings were so carefully retained, what were they? Can Desai transcribe for us today seven different Qur'an texts fully vocalised, showing all the variant readings that existed at the time of Uthman's recension which were said to have been divinely authorised and duly set them out in seven different forms? Even if he could, we would yet have to ask on what authority he would expect us to accept that his proposed seven different forms of the Qur'an as thus defined were in fact precisely what Muhammad was speaking about.

A study of the earliest readings, both dialectal and substantial, will soon show that such an undertaking is an impossible task. These readings are sometimes said to have come from one companion, sometimes from another, at times from a number together. No indication of the actual division of all these variants into seven distinct forms is even hinted at in the earliest records. It is quite impossible to authoritatively define what those seven different readings were supposed to have been.

Thus the hadith records about the *sab'at-i-ahruf* are really quite meaningless. They cannot, without a considerable degree of speculation and pure guesswork, be applied to the variant readings of the Qur'an that have been preserved through the centuries. The figure "seven" has, thus, no relevance at all to what we are considering. All that has happened is that we have, alongside the single text of the Qur'an in consonantal form that was standardised by Uthman, a vast number of passages that are said to have been lost, a host of variant readings of specific texts, together with finer distinctions in the vowelling of the text. These evidences strongly contradict the popular sentiment that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved to the last dot and letter, nothing lost, varied or amended.

The vague statement about seven different revealed forms of the Qur'an has become a convenient blanket to cover all the readings that are known to have existed so as to give them divine authorisation. This is the whole theme of Desai's booklet - every variant that can be produced is summarily declared to have been divinely revealed as one of the seven readings even though the maulana could not possibly hope to define exactly what the seven readings were supposed to have been, to which one of the seven each respective reading belongs, least of all produce any evidences to substantiate such a definition and say on what authority he draws his conclusions. The tradition about the *sab'at-i-ahruf* has become an expedient licence to claim divine authority for any variant that can be produced - thus the maulana maintains the popular sentiment, the hypothesis that nothing of the Qur'an has been lost or varied by anything other than divine decree.

A very good example of the confusion caused in subsequent generations about the supposed seven different readings and the total inability of the early Muslim scholars to categorise the variant readings that were all at hand into seven distinct forms is clear from the following quote:

Abu al-Khair ibn al-Jazari, in the first book that he published, said "Every reading in accordance with Arabic, even if only remotely, and in accordance with one of the Uthmanic codices, and even if only probable but with an acceptable chain of authorities, is an authentic reading which may not be disregarded, nor may it be denied, but it belongs to *al-ahruful-sab'at* (the seven readings) in which the Qur'an was sent down, and it is obligatory upon the people to accept it, irrespective of whether it is from the seven Imams, or from the ten, or yet other approved imams, but when it is not fully supported by these three (conditions), it is to be rejected as *dha'ifah* (weak) or *shaathah* (isolated) or *baatilah* (false), whether it derives from the seven or from one who is older than them. (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.176).

This statement shows how impossible it was to define the seven different readings in terms of the recital of the Qur'an as it was actually being read in its different forms in the Muslim community and how the two could not plausibly be related to each other in any way whatsoever. Any good reading was automatically considered to be one of the seven authorised readings, not because it could be proved to belong to one of them, but because it became acceptable through *other* considerations - its *isnad*, its consistency with the single Uthmanic consonantal text, and its compliance with proper Arabic grammar.

Other Muslim writers like Siddique have an easier way of getting around the problem. They simply declare that such variants never affected the written text of the Qur'an at all, notwithstanding the clear evidences to the contrary in the exhaustive summaries of the evidences for the compilation of the Qur'an in the *Itqan* of as-Suyuti and the *Kitab al-Masahif* of Ibn Abi Dawud, both of which Siddique alludes to briefly with complete approval in his article.

There is a further thrust in Desai's argument that proves defective upon closer analysis. His reasoning that Uthman's "measure of eliminating all other authorized and true versions of the Qur'aan Majeed" (p.32) meant that only one form of *qira'at* was standardised to ensure uniformity at the expense of the other six goes against the whole character of what Uthman actually did. The maulana seems to overlook the fact that Uthman only standardised *the consonantal text* of the Qur'an and, in sending out manuscripts which did not have diacritical points or vowel marks, he hardly affected the dialectal variants of the text that were said to have made up the *sab'at-i-ahruf* (cf. the traditions quoted earlier on the seven readings in the *Sahih* of Muslim). Thus there came the period of *ikhtiyar* when the Qur'an was freely recited in numerous different dialects until Ibn Mujahid arbitrarily chose seven of them at his own discretion to represent the readings of which Muhammad had spoken.

Uthman never had it in mind to eliminate six divinely authorised readings in the interests of standardising one of them for the purposes of uniformity as the maulana claims. He believed all along that there never was nor should have been more than one single text of the Qur'an and he viewed the evidences that the Qur'an was beginning to be divided up into all sorts of different readings with alarm, fearing that if this continued the original text might be lost altogether. He thus took the drastic step of ordering the *destruction* of all but one of the codices to outlaw variant readings of the Qur'an precisely because he considered such a practice to be an *unauthorised* deviation from the original text.

Desai constantly claims that Uthman's purpose was to establish one of the seven different forms of *qira'at* at the expense of the others but, as said already, he is missing the point. Uthman's action had very little to do with *qira'at*, in fact it centred primarily on *masahif* which were restricted to representations of the consonantal text of the Qur'an alone. The vast number of distinctions in *qira'at* that would have been reflected solely in vowel points thus escaped his action completely. Uthman only standardised the consonantal text of the Qur'an - its basic form - and the *sab'at-i-ahruf* were always regarded by the early scholars of Islam to have thus *survived* his action and for three centuries the Qur'an was officially recited in all sorts of different dialects. In fact all that Ibn Mujahid did thereafter was to standardise seven of these as officially acceptable and they too continued to survive as part of the authorised *qira'at*. Thus what was eliminated by Uthman was only the class of variant readings

that affected the actual written text of the Qur'an and not its many forms of *qira'at* that would have been reflected solely in different vowel points.

The *sab'at-i-ahruf*, in conclusion, cannot be considered in any way relevant to the wealth of variant readings that have come down alongside the Qur'an in the heritage of Islam. There is nothing in the records of these variants or the different forms of dialect that actually existed that can be related to seven specific forms of reading as stated in the relevant tradition. Writers like Desai merely seek to force an identification between the two so as to give divine sanction to all the variants known to have existed, but no objective scholar of the history of the Qur'an text can possibly find a direct connection between the two. In the next chapter we shall give our own impressions on the real causes of the variant readings and missing passages of the Qur'an.

THE COMPILATION OF THE QUR'AN IN PERSPECTIVE

1. THE QUR'AN'S TESTIMONY TO ITS OWN COMPILATION.

Notwithstanding the efforts of writers like Desai and Siddique to maintain the hypothesis of the Qur'an's perfect compilation it must surely be obvious from all that we have considered that the Qur'an went through a number of stages during which actions were taken to limit the variations in the written text and in its verbal recitation to establish, as far as each intervener could, a single text for the whole Muslim community. A *mushaf waahid* was the goal of the redactors, it was not their possession by divine preserve. The Hadith records testify consistently to the imperfection of the Qur'an text and what has come down through the ages to a single text can only be regarded as relatively authentic.

Some Muslim scholars are well aware that it is impossible to maintain the popular sentiment against the records in the Sirat, Hadith and Tafsir literature which testify quite unambiguously to the contrary. The shortcomings and inadequacies of the writings of apologists like Desai and Siddique are all too obvious. So these scholars take another line. By rejecting the Hadith records, they maintain that the Qur'an itself testifies to its own compilation and that this testimony is sufficient to prove that the Qur'an text, as it now stands, is absolutely authentic.

This is the theme of the article by Abdus Samad Abdul Kader titled *How the Quran was Compiled* referred to in the Introduction and it seems appropriate, in summing up our study of this subject, to begin with a review of his argument and the verses he quotes from the Qur'an to support it.

Right from the start Abdul Kader expresses the notion that indirectly underlies all Muslim studies on this subject. It is the assumption that, if the Qur'an was the Word of God revealed to Muhammad, then it must have been preserved to perfection throughout the ages since its deliverance. The fear is that, if it can be proved that the Qur'an has in any way been amended, or that passages have been lost, or that there is some confusion as to exactly what the original readings were, then the Qur'an's divine origin and authenticity in consequence must fall to the ground and be discounted. We have already seen that this is the motivating consideration behind Desai's booklet and Siddique's article and it explains why their approach to the subject is so sensitive, subjective and, at times, highly irrational. Abdul Kader expresses the conviction directly when he says in his article:

It was necessary that the Scripture that was to be for all mankind and for all times, should be complete, perfect and change-proof. An incomplete scripture, and one that men changed from time to time, cannot be a guide to mankind. ... A Scripture that is meant for the whole of mankind ... has to be protected from being interpolated and changed by human hands. (*Al-Balaagh*, Vol. 11 No.2, p.1).

In these statements the author gives sufficient proof that the doctrine of the Qur'an's perfect preservation arises not from a scholarly study of the history of the text but from a popular sentiment that is imposed upon it, a presupposition that has to be maintained at all costs. "It was *necessary*", he says, to preserve the text; such a scripture "*should* be complete, perfect"; it "*has* to be protected from being interpolated". This is the language of presupposition, it is the spirit of hypothesis, it indicates that, before the scholar has even come to a study of his subject, he has already decided long in advance what his findings and conclusion will be. No matter what directions the evidences may lead, the matter is predetermined. It is hardly necessary to say that such an approach is subjective in the extreme and will not yield a balanced or accurate perspective.

The Muslim approach to this whole subject is hard to understand for, if a book never was the Word of God in the first place, no amount of proof that it has been absolutely and perfectly preserved will make it the Word of God. Conversely, if a book was indeed the Word of God at the time when it was first inscribed, the later existence of a few suspect passages and variant readings which do not affect the overall content of the text would not negate its original divine authenticity. Nevertheless, having thus briefly considered the emotional Muslim approach to the subject, let us return to it at a purely factual / interpretational level so that we may conclude with a balanced perspective on what the history of the Qur'an text really was and the extent to which the text, as it stands today, can be regarded as authentic.

Abdul Kader quotes the following verse in proof of his contention that the Qur'an testifies to its own completion and attendant perfection:

Completed is the Word of thy Sustainer, in truth and in justice; there is naught that may change his Words. *Surah 6.116*

Even a superficial study of the text will show that the completion spoken of is not the Qur'an as a book but rather the extent of the words of God in truth and justice. Arberry translates this verse "Perfect are the words of thy Lord in truthfulness and justice" and Yusuf Ali gives the same application: "The Word of thy Lord doth find its fulfilment in truth and in justice". The key word here is *tammam*, meaning "to be fulfilled", and it is clear that the subject of the perfection spoken of is the truth and justice of God's words and not the text of the Qur'an as a book. The word appears yet again in Surah 11.119 where it is said "the Word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled (*tammam*): 'I will fill Hell with jinns and men all together'". The context makes it quite clear that we are dealing with a fulfilment of God's words and not of the completion of a text.

As the Qur'an was still in the process of compilation at the time when this verse (Surah 6.116) became a part of its text it is hard to see in any event how it can testify to the Qur'an's supposed perfect compilation. The book was very much incomplete at this point and it is well-nigh *impossible* to see how this text can be manipulated to prove that the Qur'an was eventually perfectly compiled and preserved to the last dot and letter.

Although Abdul Kader concedes that the Qur'an was being delivered piecemeal over a number of years and is aware that there were many loose parchments and other materials upon which it was being inscribed, to draw the conclusion that the Qur'an was, in fact, perfectly preserved in a single text he argues that the following text testifies to a collection of these parchments into a single book:

And (by) a Book inscribed, on fine parchment, unrolled. *Surah 52.2-3*.

The text, like the other one quoted, is very general in its description and it requires no small amount of imagination to make it testify to the perfection of the Qur'an text. Yet, when it is studied in its context, it will be seen that the *kitab* (translated by Abdul Kader "a Book") spoken of is not the Qur'an at all but one of the five signs of the coming Day of Judgment. The whole context reads:

By the Mount (*at-Tuur*), by a Decree (*Kitaabin*) inscribed in a scroll unfolded, by the much-frequented House (*al-Bait*), by the Canopy (*as-saqf*) raised high, and by the Ocean (*al-Bahr*) filled with swell, verily the Doom of your Lord will come to Pass. *Surah 52.1-7*.

Once again we see that the passage has nothing to do with the actual compilation of the text of the Qur'an at all and it soon becomes very obvious that Abdul Kader is devoid of evidences for the perfection of the Qur'an in the Hadith records and, in consequence, finds himself constrained to force texts of the Qur'an to yield meanings never intended by the author of the book to provide the required proofs. He concludes by claiming that the Qur'an, in the following verse, actually testifies to a "master copy" of its text that was being preserved:

That this is indeed a Noble Qur'an, in a Book preserved. *Surah 56.77-78*.

What is the original Arabic word in this text which Abdul Kader translates as "preserved"? It is *maknuun* which comes from the root word *kanna*, meaning "to hide". From this word come the following words used in the Qur'an: *aknaan*, meaning "a refuge" or hiding-place in the mountains (Surah 16.81); *akkinah*, meaning "veils" or coverings upon men's hearts (Surah 6.25, etc.); and *akanna*, meaning "to hide" something in the heart (Surah 2.235). Thus the clear underlying meaning of any form of this word is to conceal or to hide, and Arberry translates Surah 56.78 as "a hidden Book". It would appear that what the Qur'an is really saying of itself is that it is "a concealed scripture" without explaining what this means. In any event it once again is very hard to see how this can be distorted into a testimony to the Qur'an's textual perfection and completion at the end of Muhammad's life. We again have a general and rather vague statement taken right out of context to support a cherished hypothesis.

Ultimately it is the gradual compilation of the Qur'an during Muhammad's lifetime that is the strongest argument against any evidence in the Qur'an (were any to exist) regarding its own completion and perfection. Surah 56.78 and Surah 80.13-16, which is also quoted by Abdul Kader and says no more than that the Qur'an texts were being written on *suhuf* (parchments) by pious scribes, both come from the very early Meccan period. This was at the time when the Qur'an text was only just beginning to take shape and there is no way that such passages can be adduced in support of the Qur'an's ultimate supposed textual completion and perfection. We find it strange that it should be argued that a book which throughout Muhammad's final years was still being supplemented by additional passages and texts can, in the middle of its course, suddenly testify to its own exactness and completeness!

As long as Muhammad lived there was always a possibility that further passages might be added to the text and the Qur'an nowhere draws the curtain upon itself. There is no verse in the Qur'an stating that the text had been completed and that no further passages could be expected. As we saw early in this book, more was being added to the Qur'an just before Muhammad's death than at any other time during his mission. It was the death of Muhammad that fixed the extent of the Qur'an text, it was this event alone that brought the compilation of the book to a sudden conclusion. Throughout Muhammad's life the Qur'an continued to expand and we must therefore conclude that the Qur'an cannot possibly testify to its own completeness or the extent of the preservation of its text.

There is only one place in the Qur'an where the word *jama'ah* (to compile or collect together) is used in connection with the text of the book itself, namely in Surah 75.17 where Allah is quoted as saying "It is for Us to collect it and to recite it". It is surprising that Abdul Kader overlooked this verse altogether in his article as it is the closest the Qur'an comes to saying anything significant about its own compilation. Nonetheless it makes Allah speak of collecting the Qur'an before it is recited from heaven to Muhammad, so it too cannot be adduced as evidence for the collection of the text after the time of its deliverance.

It is our opinion that none of the texts quoted by Abdul Kader even remotely testify to the supposed textual perfection and completion of the Qur'an as compiled by his companions at the end of his life. As said already, a book that at all times during its composition was still being supplemented by fresh material cannot possibly give evidence as to the completeness of the final product.

Abdul Kader's whole argument centres on the compilation of the Qur'an during the lifetime of Muhammad and understandably so, for the Qur'an could not testify historically in advance to the course of the text after Muhammad's death. Yet it is precisely this restriction to his lifetime that renders the Qur'an an incompetent witness to the state of the text at the time of its completion. That completion only came upon the death of Muhammad and it is to independent historical records of the text thereafter that we must turn for the evidences we require, namely the series of Hadith records we have already considered.

2. A "MASTER COPY OF THE QUR'AN" IN THE MASJID AN-NABI?

In sharp contrast to the records we have been studying throughout this book on the development and collection of the Qur'an text we find Abdul Kader declaring that a "Master copy of the Qur'an" was kept by Muhammad and that all other texts of the Qur'an in written form were copied from this original text. He says:

The Master Copy of the collection of the portions of the Quran was kept under special care in a safe in the Masjid-e-Nabawee (Mosque of the Prophet) in Madeenah. It had a special place near the column called *astawaanah mus-hif* (the column of the Master Copy). This Master Copy was called the Imam (leader) or Umm (source). (*Al-Balaagh*, Vol. 11, No.2, p.2).

He goes on to allege that the copies made from this master copy were transcribed "under the personal supervision of the Prophet". These are all allegations of fact and yet the writer, like Desai, gives no documentation or authority for his claims. The Qur'an itself nowhere states that a perfect copy of its text was being kept in a safe in the *masjid an-nabi* of Medina near a column named after it, so Abdul Kader must have obtained this information from another source, but he neglects to substantiate his statements with disclosures of his sources and his claims therefore cannot be tested or critically analysed.

We have seen already that materials upon which the Qur'an was being written were being kept in Muhammad's house at Medina (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.137) but there are express statements in the same compilation of early records of the Qur'an text which make it plain that the Qur'an had not been brought together into a single location during Muhammad's lifetime, whether in his own home or anywhere else (as-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.96). Abdul Kader's statements are set right against the evidences furnished in the Hadith records and other historical sources we have mentioned and, as his claims have no factual basis in the Qur'an, it would be most interesting to know where he obtains his information. His silence on these sources would appear to us to be most significant.

All that he has shown is that, if the Hadith records of the compilation of the Qur'an text are not accepted, there is really no other source to consult. The Qur'an furnishes virtually no useful information at all about its own codification and collection into a single text and, in fact, when one considers the nature of the Qur'an itself, one finds that it is a most improbable witness to the completeness or otherwise of its text.

There is no chronological sequence of any kind in the Qur'an. The surahs have generally been arranged from the longest to the shortest so that the earliest passages appear at the end of the book and the later passages at the beginning. There is nothing of historical foundation in the Qur'an in that no event recorded in the book is ever dated and no regard is paid to any kind of historical sequence in the book.

If the Qur'an does not serve as a good history book, then nor does it offer much of geographical value either. Only one place is mentioned by name in the Qur'an - Mecca in Surah 3.96 (where it is named *Bakkah*) - and nothing else is given any sort of location in the book. No one reading the Qur'an alone could place any event it records at any point in history or give a specific geographical placement to any locality it mentions or otherwise speaks about.

Many of the longer surahs are made up of passages dating from both Muhammad's mission at Mecca and at Medina and within these composite surahs we find the subject of the text varying from legal restriction to prophetic narratives, from ethical teaching to praises to God, etc., coupled with numerous catch-phrases. More often than not the different subjects of the longer surahs have no connection with each other at all.

The Qur'an is, in these respects, a quite disjointed book. As it stands today it is a collection of fragmentary texts and passages compiled into an unharmonious whole without respect to sequence or theme. It is hardly the kind of book that can offer useful testimony to its own textual accuracy or completion. It has no definite beginning or conclusion and there is no way that a study of the Qur'an text alone can assist one to determine whether it has been completely preserved, nor is there anything in the book to prove that nothing has been omitted from its pages or modified in the process of compilation.

It is only in the Hadith records that we find any evidence as to how the Qur'an really was originally compiled. The science of the study of the Hadith literature has often centred on the reliability or otherwise of the Hadith texts and some Muslim scholars have rejected the Hadith records of the Qur'an's compilation as unreliable because it was well-known that, in the early days of Islam, some Hadith material was fabricated and was handed down alongside material that was authentic.

Such inauthentic hadith records were usually related to opposing schools of law or political issues. The rivalry between the Umayyads and the Abbasids resulted in many records being fabricated to favour the one or the other and as the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) of Islam developed, so traditions were invented to provide authority for different maxims of law. Many of these can be recognised as fabrications merely through a cursory study of their contents, but to determine the reliability of the rest of the Hadith literature various means were applied to each specific tradition. How sound was its *isnad* (its chain of transmitters)? How many independent records of the same tradition existed - was it an isolated (*ahad*) record, a generally accepted text (*mashur*), or was it widely attested (*mutawatir*)? Then again, after a consideration of these issues, could it be classed as *sahih* (genuine), *hasan* (*fair*) or *da'if* (weak), or should it be discounted entirely as *mardud* (to be rejected)?

This science of classification has rarely been applied to the traditions setting out how the Qur'an was compiled. The earliest records of the collection of the Qur'an were generally taken at face value as this subject was not one which spawned any motivation for fabrication, although John Burton argues to the contrary in his book *The Collection of the Qur'an*, suggesting that many of the verses said to be missing from the Qur'an were invented after Muhammad's death to give support and authority to the legal maxims of those who made them up. He applies the same argument to some of the recorded variant readings of the Qur'an. None of the three writers who wrote articles in reply to my earlier notes on the compilation of the Qur'an text, however, raised such a possibility, nor did they make any attempt to define which traditions could be accepted and which should be rejected.

There is no standard by which those early records can really be distinguished. Any scholar seeking to separate them into those which can be approved and those which cannot will have to rely almost exclusively on his own initiative and his findings will have to be purely subjective and speculative.

One cannot dispense with some of the Hadith records on this subject without eventually doing away with them all as they give an overall impression of how the Qur'an was codified into a single text and, as we shall see in the last section of this chapter, they are far more consistent in giving a general picture of what actually occurred than some scholars are willing to admit. The fact is that, without these records, there is no evidence as to how the Qur'an was compiled. If they are to be rejected, then nothing authoritative whatsoever can be said about the manner in which the Qur'an was compiled into what it is today. The record of the codification of the Qur'an text as found in the early Sirat, Hadith and Tafsir literature is the only historical source in Islam to consult - without it there is only a void and nothing authoritative really can be said. No other thesis about the original collection of the Qur'an can be documented or grounded in historical evidences. Let us press on in closing to a review of the history of the text as we have thusfar set it out.

3. A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN TEXT.

We are left with a sharp contrast between sentiment and reality in Islam on the subject of the authenticity of the Qur'an text. Popular sentiment opts for the claim that the Qur'an text has been perfectly preserved by divine authority without so much as an alteration in the text of any kind whatsoever. Reality, however, testifies to a far more mundane and predictable history of the text with much evidence as to passages that are now missing from the Qur'an, substantial variant readings that existed in the earliest codices, and other variants in dialect which have survived more than one attempt to establish a universally accepted single text. Yet another typical testimony to the loss of portions of the Qur'an in the early days can be mentioned here.

In his short section on the codex of Abdullah ibn Umar, in speaking of differences in reading between Abdullah and the other companions of Muhammad, Ibn Abi Dawud quotes Abu Bakr ibn Ayyash as saying:

Many of the companions of the Prophet of Allah (saw) had their own reading of the Qur'an, but they died and their readings disappeared soon afterwards. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.83).

What sort of evidence would have been required to substantiate the Muslim hypothesis of a perfect text? Firstly, there would most certainly have had to be a complete silence in the Hadith records regarding missing passages, variant readings and the like. The historical sources of Islam apart from the Qur'an itself would have had to support the theory of an absolutely perfect text instead of contradicting this theory as consistently as they do. We would have required sound evidence that the Qur'an was carefully inscribed in a single text during Muhammad's lifetime and that this text had survived his death and been carefully looked after as the sole authority from which other copies alone could be made. This is very much what Abdul Kader alleges as the actual history of the text but his claim is directly contrary to the evidences which show that it was only after Muhammad's death that any attempt was made to collect the Qur'an into a single text.

As pointed out already, Abdul Kader furnishes no proofs, evidences or documentation for his theory and it appears that the wish has become father to the thought. He rejects the Hadith not because they are unreliable but because he finds them *unacceptable* in that they solidly undermine the theory he cherishes so much. Instead, being aware of the sort of evidences that would have been required, he summarily sets forth the ideal as historical fact without offering any source material that can be checked or critically reviewed.

A very different history of the text of the Qur'an would have had to be recorded than the one that the heritage of Islam has preserved for us to support the case for a text absolutely free of alteration, omission or variation. We would have required very strong evidences that only one text of the Qur'an ever came down through those early years of Muslim history and these evidences would have had to show quite convincingly that the whole text, verse for verse, is precisely the same today as it was then. There would also have had to be no evidences to show that other codices, differing from the standard text, had ever existed. Such is the kind of proof we would require to entertain seriously the claim that the Qur'an text had been preserved to perfection without variations of any kind. Our study shows that such proof and the evidences required therefor quite simply do not exist.

The evidences that do exist for the history of the Qur'an text on the contrary ruin the claim for the Qur'an's textual perfection and relegate such a claim to the realms of popular sentiment and wishful thinking. These evidences, in their broad outline, give us a very reasonable picture of the development of the text and, in fact, allowing for the unusual nature of the Qur'an as a book, yield very much the kind of history that we would have been inclined to expect. Instead of a case for divine preservation we find a very mundane and predictable course.

The Qur'an was compiled piecemeal, was not compiled in a single book during Muhammad's lifetime, was recited by many companions and was read at the time by Muslims with varying Arabic dialects. The course of the text thereafter down to the present day is largely what one would have expected and is generally consistent with itself, most certainly in its broad outline.

After Muhammad's death passages of the Qur'an were lost irretrievably when a number of reciters died at the Battle of Yamama. This incident together with the Qur'an's automatic completion as a book once its mediator had passed away inspired a number of companions to compile their own codices of the text. These were basically consistent with each other in their general content but a large number of variant readings, many seriously affecting the text, existed in all the manuscripts and no two codices were entirely the same. In addition the text was being recited in varying dialects in the different provinces of the Muslim world.

During the reign of Uthman a deliberate attempt was made to standardise the Qur'an and impose a single text upon the whole community. The codex of Zaid was chosen for this purpose because it was close at hand and, having been kept in virtual seclusion for many years, had not attracted publicity as one of the varying texts as those of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b had done. The other codices were summarily destroyed and Zaid's text became the *textus receptus* for the whole Islamic world as a result.

Numerous records were retained, however, showing that key passages were missing from this text. It also had to be reviewed and amended to meet the Caliph's standard for a single approved text. After Uthman's death, however, al-Hajjaj, the governor at Kufa, made eleven distinct amendments and corrections to the text.

As the early codices were only written in consonantal form, however, the varying dialects survived largely unaffected by Uthman's action and it was only three centuries later that a scholar, Ibn Mujahid, managed to limit these to seven distinctly defined readings in accordance with a tradition which stated that the Qur'an originally came in seven different readings although the tradition itself made no attempt to define these readings.

Over the succeeding centuries the Qur'an continued to be read in seven different forms until five of them largely fell into disuse. Eventually only those of Hafs and Marsh survived and, with the introduction of a printed Qur'an, the text of Hafs began to take almost universal prominence.

The Qur'an text as it is read and printed throughout the Muslim world today is only Zaid's version of it, duly corrected where necessary, later amended by al-Hajjaj, and read according to one of seven approved different readings. This is the reality - a far cry from the popular sentiment which argues for a single text right from the time of Muhammad himself. The reality, however, based on all the evidences available, shows that the single text as it stands today was only arrived at through an extended process of amendments, recensions, eliminations and an imposed standardisation of a preferred text at the initiative of a subsequent caliph and not by prophetic direction or divine decree.

The Qur'an is an authentic text to the extent that it largely retains the material initially delivered by Muhammad. No evidence of any addition to the text exists and, in respect of the vast number of variant readings and missing passages that have been recorded, there does not appear to be anything actually affecting or contradicting the basic content of the book. In this respect one can freely assume a relative authenticity of the text in the sense that it adequately retains the gist and content of what was originally there. On the contrary there is no basis in history, facts or the evidences for the development of the text to support the cherished hypothesis that the Qur'an has been preserved absolutely intact to the last dot and letter.

THE EARLY SURVIVING QUR'AN MANUSCRIPTS

1. THE INITIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE WRITTEN TEXT.

When the Qur'an was first reduced to writing there was no attempt to distinguish the consonants in the text which used the same symbol, nor were there any vowel points to identify the correct pronunciation of each word. Only the basic seventeen consonantal letters were used and, as we have seen, this gave rise to a number of variant readings which Uthman's decree to standardise a single text could not obviate or suppress. Some marks were used to indicate verse endings but apart from these no other qualifying marks were used.

It was generally assumed, as it is today, that the Arabic language is so familiar to those who speak it as their mother tongue that the vowelling of the text is not necessary. Most Arabic books to this day are written in consonantal form only. The widespread use of variant readings in the early days of the Qur'an's transmission, however, resulted in an attempt to define the correct reading or, where appropriate, the reader's preference, in the written text. The introduction of red and other coloured dots followed together with short strokes to identify specific consonants or vowel points in the text and to distinguish the reading in each case from a variant known to exist. Only a very limited information is available to determine precisely how the early written text developed but, as the major portions of those initial texts were left unmarked, it appears that the dots and strokes that were introduced were included specifically to distinguish particular readings. In some quarters this practice was disapproved of as a dangerous innovation but it gradually gained widespread acceptance especially when al-Hajjaj became governor of Iraq.

In time the strokes came to indicate the vowel points and the dots the diacritical marks distinguishing respective consonants. This system was gradually applied to the whole text so that eventually all the vowel points were specifically included in the text and every relevant consonant was given its particular diacritical mark. Today, almost without exception, all printed copies of the Qur'an are fully vocalised.

At the same time long vowels were also distinguished where appropriate from short vowels by the use of the three weak letters (*alif*, *wa* and *ya*) which were otherwise considered to be actual consonants and not vowels. These modifications all helped to define the actual text of the Qur'an more accurately, a practice of obvious suitability in the light of the fact that the written Arabic text is as phonetic as it could possibly be. Also introduced in time was the marking of the *hamzah*, the unusual letter like a small *'ain*.

These developments, however, only partly assist one in determining the likely origin of any particular manuscript. The vast majority of the early manuscripts make no mention either of their date of writing or their place of origin. As a result it is impossible to accurately date any of the earliest texts surviving or to determine which is the oldest Qur'an in existence. Nothing certain can be said about them, whether they have been preserved intact as whole codices or only in fragmentary form.

The use of a colophon at the end of a Qur'an, widely used in later centuries, was not considered appropriate in the early days. Qur'ans of later centuries concluded with a disclosure of the name of the calligrapher in each case and usually with the date and place of origin. What complicates matters here is that some colophons are known to have been forged in the earlier texts so that an accurate identification of age and place of origin becomes even more improbable.

The development of the text in respect of the use of diacritical and vowel points is not entirely helpful in this respect either. On the one hand texts originally written without these points are known to have been supplemented with them at a later date while other texts were expressly written out without such points in later centuries as a sign of the calligrapher's or owner's mastery in his knowledge of the Qur'an and the lack of any need in his case to employ marks of identification to specifically record the whole text.

A good example of this is the superb Qur'an manuscript written in gold script upon blue vellum which survives almost intact from Kairouan in Tunisia where it was originally inscribed in the late ninth or early tenth century (nearly three hundred years after the time of Muhammad). By this time the use of diacritical and vowel points was widespread yet this manuscript is almost entirely devoid of them both. It has been suggested that the omission of such distinguishing points in the text (they are so few in number that they distinguish only two letters) is the result of the original scribe's intention to design his script for beauty rather than legibility as this Qur'an was intended to be presented to the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun for the tomb of his father, Harun ar-Rashid, at Mashad in what is now Iran. For some reason the completed codex never left Tunis and the bulk of it is preserved in the National Library of Tunisia in the city (a number of leaves having been removed from it which are now in other public libraries and private collections).

There were numerous other codices, however, often very simple in design, which also omitted the distinguishing points even though their use was almost commonplace by the time they were written. Once again nothing certain can be said in such cases and it cannot automatically be presumed that a text is of great antiquity simply because it is confined to the basic consonants without any diacritical or vowel marks.

The best clue to a manuscript's probable origin, if it is of obvious antiquity, is its script. A number of different scripts were used in the earliest days of the Qur'an's transmission and these went through various stages of development. As a result they assist one far more than the other factors we have mentioned to determine the likely origin of each of the early Qur'an manuscripts that survive to this day.

Prior to the advent of Islam the only proper script known to exist was the *Jazm* script. It had a very formal and angular character, using an equal proportion in respect of its letters, and it became the standard from which the other famous early scripts developed. No Qur'an texts or fragments in this script are known with any certainty to exist though there are some very early texts which cannot be defined accurately in respect of the script employed.

Apart from some fragments of obvious early origin which cannot be reliably dated, it appears that none of the early Qur'an manuscripts surviving, whether in whole codices or sizeable fragments, can be dated earlier than the late eighth century (about one hundred years after Muhammad's death). Virtually all the relevant texts surviving were written in a developed form of Kufic script or in one of the other scripts known to have developed some time after the early codification of the Qur'an text. None of them can be reliably dated earlier than the second half of the second century of the Islamic era. We shall proceed to analyse some of these scripts.

2. KUFIC, MASHQ, AND THE OTHER EARLY QUR'ANIC SCRIPTS.

Shortly after the death of Muhammad a number of written codices of the Qur'an appeared until Uthman ordered the destruction of all but one and further ordered that copies be made of this codex to be sent to the various provinces. From this text further copies were made and the written manuscripts began to increase in number.

Three different forms of script developed in the Hijaz, particularly in the cities of Mecca and Medina. One of these was the *al-Ma'il* script, unique in the early days in that the letters were vertically inscribed and were written at a slight angle. The very word *al-Ma'il* means "the slanting" script. The upright character of this script gave rise to the use of a vertical format for each codex in the form that most books are published today. This script survived for about two centuries before falling into disuse and all manuscripts bearing its form are of obvious antiquity. A sign of its early origin is the fact that it employed no vowel marks or diacritical points and also had no verse counts or chapter headings. Only a very few examples of Qur'anic script in *al-Ma'il* survive, the most well-known being a manuscript occasionally placed on public display in the British Museum in London.

The second early script originating from Medina was the *Mashq*, the "extended" style which continued to be used for many centuries and which went through a process of development and improvement. Unlike the *al-Ma'il*, the *Mashq* was horizontal in form and can be distinguished by its somewhat cursive and leisurely style. Gradually the developed *Mashq* script came to closely resemble the Kufic script, yet it always retained its particular characteristic, namely a balanced dispersal of its words and letters in varying degrees of density. It was supplemented by coloured diacritical points and vowel marks in the same way that the more predominant Kufic script was in later years.

A script which also derives from the Hijaz is the *Naskh*, the "inscriptional" script. This took some time to come into vogue but, when it did, it largely displaced the Kufic script and became the standard for most Qur'ans from the eleventh century onwards and is the script used in virtually all printed Qur'ans today. A very good example of a complete Qur'an text in *Naskh* which is hardly different to contemporary Qur'ans is the manuscript done by Ibn al-Bawwab at Baghdad in 1001 AD which is now in the Chester Beatty Library at Dublin in Ireland. It differs slightly from the *Naskh* script of most Mamluk Qur'ans and has a more oriental character.

The script that most concerns any student of the earliest Qur'an manuscripts is the *Kufic* script, properly known as *al-Khatt al-Kufi*. Its title does not hint at any particular characteristic form of its script as the others from the Hijaz do but indicates its place of origin. It derives from Kufa in Iraq where Ibn Mas'ud's codex had been highly prized until Uthman ordered its destruction. It was only after this event that the Qur'an text as we know it came to be written in Kufic script in this region and it took some time to become predominant but, when it did, it attained a pre-eminence for three centuries as the approved script of the Qur'an until it was largely displaced by the *Naskh* script. It reached its perfection during the late eighth century (up to one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death) and thereafter it became widely used throughout the Muslim world.

Like the *Mashq* script it employs a largely horizontal, extended style and as a result most of the codices compiled in Kufic were oblong in format. Its letters are more rigid and austere in character than the *Mashq* script, however. Large numbers of manuscripts and single leaves of Qur'an texts in Kufic survive from various centres, most of which date from the late eighth century to the early eleventh century. Here too the text became supplemented with vowel marks and coloured diacritical points in time. No Kufic Qur'ans are known to have been written in Mecca and Medina in the very early days when the *al-Ma'il* and *Mashq* scripts were most regularly used and none of the surviving early Kufic texts are attributed by modern scholars to this region. In any event even the rare complete Kufic Qur'ans that have survived lack proper colophons giving the time and place of the transcribing of the text and the name of its calligrapher so that it is virtually impossible to date or locate them with any degree of certainty.

The history of the written text of the Qur'an would tend to suggest, as a general principle, that all manuscripts in the *al-Ma'il* or *Mashq* scripts derive from the Hijaz, usually the second century of Islam, with the exception of the developed *Mashq* texts which would be of a later date and more widespread origin. Surviving Kufic Qur'ans can generally be dated from the late eighth century depending on the extent of development in the character of the script in each case, and it is grossly

improbable that any of these were written in Mecca or Medina before the beginning of the ninth century.

3. A STUDY OF THE TOPKAPI AND SAMARQAND CODICES.

The question, in closing, which arises is whether any of the original Qur'ans transcribed by Uthman survives to this day. We have already seen that the codex of the Qur'an said to have been the *mushaf* of Hafsah was destroyed by Marwan ibn al-Hakam after her death (p.58). Although this would appear to have been an independent codex of her own as distinct from Zaid's codex which came into her possession after her father's death, there is clear evidence to suggest that it was in fact the very codex of Zaid from which the others were transcribed. The record linking this codex with that destroyed by Marwan begins as follows:

These are the leaves (*as-suhuf*) making up the collection of the Qur'an which were with Abu Bakr while he was alive until he returned to Allah, then they were with Umar until he returned to Allah, then they were with Hafsah, the daughter of Umar. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.21).

It is quite clear that it is Zaid's codex which is being spoken of, yet we read very soon afterwards that it was this particular manuscript which came into the possession of Marwan after the funeral of Hafsah, having been sent to him by Abdullah ibn Umar (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.21; cf. also, p.24) and which must therefore be the codex said to have been destroyed by him immediately thereafter. If so, then there can be no doubt that the original codex of Zaid has been irretrievably lost. What then of the codices made directly from this codex at Uthman's instigation?

As virtually all the earliest Qur'an codices and fragments cannot be dated earlier than about one hundred and fifty years after the time of Muhammad it would seem most improbable that portions of the Qur'an copied out at Uthman's direction should have survived, least of all whole codices or substantial sections thereof. Nevertheless Muslim writers often claim that Uthmanic manuscripts still exist. We have seen that the Muslim dogma that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved by divine decree is based not on evidences or facts but purely on popular sentiment, so it should not surprise a student of the early text of the Qur'an to find that this sentiment is often buttressed by claims that proof of the perfection of the text can be found in actual Uthmanic codices still in existence.

There are many references in modern Muslim writings to Qur'ans said to have belonged to Uthman, Ali or the grandsons of Muhammad which are said to have survived to this day. One cannot help wondering whether in such cases the wish is not perhaps father to the thought. Professor Bergstrasser, one of the contributors to Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorans*, recorded up to twenty references to claims made in different parts of the Muslim world to possess not only one of the copies ordered by Uthman but even the actual codex of the Caliph himself, in each case with attendant claims that the pages which he was reading when he was murdered are to this day discoloured by his blood. We shall give two direct examples of such claims made even today for different Qur'ans towards the end of this chapter.

In the Apology of the famous Christian scholar Abdul-Masih al-Kindi, who wrote a defence of Christianity against Islam during the time of the Abbasid Empire, we find it said that of the copies made under Uthman's supervision, the one sent to Mecca was destroyed by fire while those commissioned for Medina and Kufa were lost irretrievably. Only the copy destined for Damascus was said to have survived, it being preserved at Malatja at the time (Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 3.6). There are some conflicting claims about the ultimate fate of this copy but it is generally agreed that it, too, is now lost.

All the references one finds in Muslim records to the destiny of those early codices are sketchy, incomplete and often contradictory. Some suggest that the Damascus manuscript is in fact the famous codex of Samarqand while others say that this codex originally came to the city from Fez in Morocco. There hardly appears to be anything like the kind of record of transmission that an objective scholar would require to give serious consideration to the claim that any of the surviving Qur'an manuscripts is Uthmanic in origin.

In moderate Muslim writings today, however, we find as a rule that only two of the surviving early manuscripts of the Qur'an are said to be the actual *mushaf* of Uthman or one of the copies prepared under his official supervision. The one is the Samarqand codex and the other is an old Qur'an manuscript kept on public display in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul which I had the privilege of seeing during a visit to Turkey in 1981. Let us briefly consider these two manuscripts.

We shall begin with the Samarqand codex. This manuscript is said to be preserved today in the Soviet State Library at Tashkent in Uzbekistan in southern Russia. It is said to have first come to Samarqand about 1485 AD and to have remained there until 1868. Thereafter it was removed to St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) and in 1905 fifty facsimile editions were prepared by one Dr. Pissaref at the instigation of Czar Nicholas II under the title *Coran Coufique de Samarqand*, each copy being sent to a distinguished recipient. In 1917 the original manuscript is said to have been taken to Tashkent where it now remains. A further limited edition was published by Dr. Hamidullah in the United Kingdom in 1981 from which the photographs in this book have been taken.

The manuscript is considerably incomplete. It only begins in the middle of verse 7 of Suratul-Baqarah (the second surah) and from there on numerous pages are missing. In some cases only two or three leaves have been removed, in others over a hundred are omitted. The last part of the Qur'an text from Surah 43.10 onwards is altogether missing from the manuscript. Many of the pages that have survived are also somewhat mutilated and much of the text has been lost.

Nonetheless a study of what remains tells us something about the manuscript. It is of obvious antiquity, being devoid of any kind of vocalisation (a point specially made in Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 3.262) although in a few cases a diacritical stroke has been added to a relevant letter. It is perhaps the apparent antiquity of the manuscript that has led to the convenient claim that it is an Uthmanic original. Nevertheless it is precisely the appearance of the script itself that would seem to negate such a claim. It is clearly written in *Kufic* script and, as we have seen, it is asking too much of an objective scholar to believe that a Qur'an manuscript written at Medina as early as the caliphate of Uthman could ever have been written in this script. Medinan Qur'ans were written in the *al-Ma'il* and *Mashq* scripts for many decades before the Kufic script became the common denominator of all the early texts throughout the Muslim world and, in any event, Kufic only came into regular use at Kufa and elsewhere in the Iraqi province in the generations following Uthman's demise.

Furthermore the actual inscription of the text in the Samarqand codex is very irregular. Some pages are very neatly and uniformly copied out whereas others are distinctly untidy and imbalanced. Then again, whereas the text in most pages has been fairly smoothly spread out, on some pages it has been severely cramped and condensed. At times the Arabic letter *kaf* has been written out uniformly with the rest of the text, at other times it has been considerably extended and is the dominant letter in the text. As a result many pages of this manuscript differ so extensively from one another that one cannot help wondering whether we do not have a composite text on our hands, compiled from portions of different manuscripts.

Although the text is virtually devoid of supplementary vocalisation it does occasionally employ artistic illumination between the surahs, usually a coloured band of rows of squares, and at times accompanied by varying medallions which would tend to indicate that it dates from the late eighth

century. It may well be one of the oldest manuscripts of the Qur'an surviving to this day, but there appears to be no good reason to believe that it is an Uthmanic original.

In an article written in a Russian Journal in 1891 the author, A. Shebunin, gives particular attention to the medallions which appear in various colours at the end of each group of approximately ten verses. Within these medallions a kufic number is written indicating the number of verses that have passed since the beginning of the relevant Surah. These medallions, usually being flower figures, were composed in four colours, red, green, blue and orange. One hundred and fifty-one such figures feature in the remnant of the text. Shebunin finishes his article with the conclusion that the manuscript dates from the second century of Islam and, being inscribed in Kufic script, most probably derives from Iraq. The partial illumination of the text would almost certainly compel one to give the codex a second-century origin - it is grossly unlikely that such embellishments would have accompanied the Uthmanic manuscripts sent out to the various provinces.

The other manuscript said to be one of the Uthmanic codices is the one on display in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. Once again it requires only a sight of the text to discount this possibility as we are again faced with a *Kufic* manuscript. Then again, like the Samarqand codex, it is written on parchment and is also largely devoid of vocalisation, both of which suggest that it, too, is one of the very earliest manuscripts of the Qur'an to survive, but those who claim that it dates back as far as Uthman himself must explain the obvious anachronism in the use of a Kufic script.

This manuscript is also supplemented with ornamental medallions, indicating a later age, with occasional ornamentation between the surahs as well. One only needs to compare it with the Samarqand codex to realise that they most certainly cannot both be Uthmanic originals. The Istanbul codex has eighteen lines to the page whereas the Samarqand codex has between eight and twelve; the Istanbul codex is inscribed throughout in a very formal manner, the words and lines always being very uniformly written out, while the text of the Samarqand codex is often haphazard and considerably distorted. One cannot believe that both these manuscripts were copied out by the same scribes. (As pointed out already, it is hard to believe that even the Samarqand codex alone was not written out by a number of different scribes).

An objective, factual study of the evidences shows that neither of these codices can seriously be regarded as Uthmanic, yet one finds that Muslim sentiment is so strong at this point that *both* of them are said to have been not only Uthmanic originals but even the actual Qur'an which Uthman was reading when he was murdered! A photograph of a page from the Samarqand codex appears as a frontispiece in a book titled *Muhammad in the Quraan* published in Pakistan by an author who only gives his initials (S.M.A.) and, underneath the photograph, a caption appears clearly identifying it as the *Samarqand* text now preserved in the Soviet State Library and alleging that "This is the same Quraan which was in the hand of the Caliph when he was murdered by the rebels and his blood is still visible on the passage 'Fasa Yakhfihum (*sic*) Ullah-o-Wa huwasamiul-Alim' (Surah 2.137)".

In a recent edition of the Ramadan Annual published by The Muslim Digest in Durban, South Africa, however, a photograph appears of the *Topkapi* Codex in Istanbul, correctly identifying it as such, but alleging that it belonged to Uthman with the comment "This Qur'an, written on deerskin, was being read by the Caliph when he was assassinated and the bloodstain marks are still seen on the pages of this copy of the Qur'an to this day" (Vol. 39, Nos. 9 & 10, p.107).

It is most intriguing to find that both the manuscripts are not only attributed to Uthman but are alleged to be the very codex in his own possession which he was said to have been reading when he was assassinated. Of course each one has verifiable bloodstains of the Caliph himself to prove the point!

It is contradictory statements like these, where the same fame is claimed for each of these codices, that expose the Muslim approach to this subject as one based not on a cautious historical research

dependent on available evidences but on popular sentiment and wishful thinking. It would suit the Muslim world to possess an Uthmanic original, it would be convenient to have a codex of the earliest possible origin to verify the proposed textual perfection of the Qur'an, and so any manuscript of the Qur'an surviving that can be shown to be of a relatively early age is automatically claimed to be the one desired! It hardly matters that the same claim is made for more than one codex, or that in each case internal evidence (particularly the Kufic script) must lead an honest enquirer to presume on a much later date.

The Samarqand and Topkapi codices are obviously two of the oldest sizeable manuscripts of the Qur'an surviving but their origin cannot be taken back earlier than the second century of Islam. It must be concluded that no such manuscripts of an earlier date have survived. The oldest manuscripts of the Qur'an still in existence date from not earlier than about one hundred years after Muhammad's death.