

THE PRESERVATION OF THE QUR'AN

An examination of the common claims
made about the Qur'an

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Engaging
with
Islam

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Introduction

When Christians and Muslims talk about God the question of the preservation of the Bible and Qur'an often comes up. Christians are regularly told that the Bible, and its message, have been corrupted and that only the Qur'an is perfectly preserved. Here is what some Islamic leaders say:

The text of the Qur'an is entirely reliable. It has been as it is, unaltered, unedited, not tampered with in any way, since the time of its revelation. (M. Fethullah Gulen, *Questions this Modern Age Puts to Islam*, London: Truestar, 1993, p.58)

(The Qur'an) was memorised by Mohammed and then dictated to his companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114 chapters (suras) have ever been changed over the centuries. (*Understanding Islam and the Muslims*, The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils Inc. (pamphlet) Nov. 1991)

No other book in the world can match the Qur'an ... The astonishing fact about this book of ALLAH is that it has remained unchanged, even to a dot, over the last fourteen hundred years. ... No variation of text can be found in it. You can check this for yourself by listening to the recitation of Muslims from different parts of the world. (*Basic Principles of Islam*, Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan Charitable Humanitarian Foundation, 1996, p. 4)

Unlike earlier scriptures the Qur'an has been preserved unchanged in its original Arabic text since the time of revelation, as God had promised within it. History witnessed the fulfilment of that promise, for the Book of God remains to date exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet and recited by him. Immediately memorized and recorded by large numbers of his companions, it was passed on in exactly the same form by thousands of Muslims generation after generation up until the present day. ... There is only one version of the Qur'an; the same revealed words continue to be read, recited and memorized in their original Arabic language by Muslims throughout the world. (Saheeh International, *Clear Your Doubts About Islam: 50 Answers to Common Questions*, Saudi Arabia: Dar Abul-Qasim, 2008, pp. 28-29)

The Qur'an is the only scripture which has been preserved in its exact original form, in its entire content, as it was revealed to the Prophet fourteen centuries ago, not a word added or removed. This is a historical fact beyond dispute. God Himself has assured us of its preservation (Qur'an chapter 15, verse 9). Thus, there has been only one version of the Qur'an all across the world all through the ages, right from the time of the Prophet. (Al-Ahsa Islamic Center, *Before you start reading the Qur'an...*, Hofus, no date, p. 4)

In summary, Islamic leaders make the following claims about the Qur'an:

- Muhammad perfectly memorized the Qur'an.
- He simply dictated the Qur'an to his followers who memorised it and wrote it down with no editing. Muhammad examined and approved what was written.
- There has only ever been one version of the Qur'an.
- All Qur'ans are identical with no variants.
- The Qur'an is perfectly preserved.
- These claims are proved by history.
- The Qur'an is superior to other scriptures in its preservation, and hence in its message about God.

These are the common claims Muslim leaders make about the Qur'an. Are these claims true? For the rest of this booklet we will examine these claims and consult the Hadith, Islamic scholars, and compare modern Arabic Qur'ans.

Glossary and Conventions

Qur'an - The main Islamic holy book. When it is quoted the translators name follows the Qur'anic reference.

Surah/Surah - A chapter of the Qur'an.

Hadith - A short account of Muhammad's life or the life of one of his companions. The collections of hadith used in this booklet are *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and *Sunan Abu Dawud*.

Chapter 1: Did Muhammad perfectly memorise the Qur'an?

No, and the Hadith and Qur'an are very clear about this.

Narrated Aisha: The Prophet heard a man reciting the Qur'an in the mosque and said, "May Allah bestow His Mercy on him, as he has reminded me of such-and-such verses of such a Surah." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 556; also *Sahih Muslim*: bk. 4, no. 1720)

Narrated Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: ... (Muhammad said) I am only a human being and I forget just as you do; so when I forget, remind me ... (*Sunan Abu Dawud*: bk. 3, no. 1015; also *Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 1, bk. 8, no. 394)

We will make you recite, [O Muhammad], and you will not forget, except what Allah should will ... (Qur'an 87:6-7, Saheed International)

We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it ... (Qur'an 2:106, Saheed International)

These verses from the Qur'an and Hadith are all referring to how Muhammad forgot the Qur'an, therefore Muslim leaders are exaggerating when they say Muhammad memorised the Qur'an perfectly.

Chapter 2: Did Muhammad simply recite the Qur'an with no editing?

Again the answer is no. The Hadith is very clear that sometimes Muhammad would say a verse and then say it again with an edited version.

Narrated Al-Bara: There was revealed:

“Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) and those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah.” (Qur'an 4.95)

The Prophet said, "Call Zaid for me and let him bring the (writing) board, the inkpot and the scapula bone (the pen) ..." Then he said, "Write: 'Not equal are those Believers who sit...'", and at that time 'Amr bin Um Maktum, the blind man was sitting behind the Prophet. He said, "O Allah's Apostle! What is your order for me (as regards the above verse) as I am a blind man?" So, instead of the above verse, the following verse was revealed:

“Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) except those who are disabled and those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah.”
(Qur'an 4.95)

(*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 512; also *Sahih Muslim*: bk. 20, no. 4676-4677)

Here we see an earlier version of verse 4:95 being edited to now include "except those who are disabled". This type of change happened so often to the Qur'an that the Meccans used it as a reason to reject Muhammad.

And when We exchange a verse in the place of another verse - and God knows very well what he is sending down - they (the Meccans) say (to Muhammad), "You are simply inventing this". (Qur'an 16:101)

Therefore, when Muslim leaders say the Qur'an was simply recited by Muhammad and then written down they are wrong. Islamic history shows that sometimes verses were fluid and edited to a final form.

Chapter 3: Did Muhammad only have one version of the Qur'an?

Again the answer is no. The Hadith records that Muhammad taught different versions of the Qur'an to his companions.

Narrated Umar bin Al-Khattab: I heard Hisham bin Hakim reciting Surat Al-Furqan during the lifetime of Allah's Apostle and I listened to his recitation and noticed that he recited in several different ways which Allah's Apostle had not taught me. I was about to jump over him during his prayer, but I controlled my temper and when he had completed his prayer, I put his upper garment around his neck and seized him by it and said, "Who taught you this Surat which I heard you reciting?" He replied, "Allah's Apostle taught it to me". I said, "You have told a lie, for Allah's Apostle taught it to me in a different way from yours". So I dragged him to Allah's Apostle and said, "I heard this person reciting Surat Al-Furqan in a way which you haven't taught me!" On that Allah's Apostle said, "Release him (Umar) recite, O Hisham!" Then he recited in the same way I heard him reciting. Then Allah's Apostle said, "It was revealed in this way", and added, "Recite, O Umar", I recited it as he had taught me. Allah's Apostle then said, "It was revealed in this way. This Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways, so recite of it whichever is easier for you." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 514)

Umar bin Al-Khattab and Hisham bin Hakim were from the same tribe, therefore, this difference was not a matter of dialect.

Narrated Ibn Mas'ud: I heard a person reciting a (Quranic) verse in a certain way, and I had heard the Prophet reciting the same verse in a different way. So I took him to the Prophet and informed him of that but I noticed the sign of disapproval on his face, and then he said, "Both of you are correct, so don't differ, for the nations before you differed, so they were destroyed." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 4, bk. 56, no. 682)

These hadiths show the companions of Muhammad learned the Qur'an in different ways from Muhammad. Therefore, Muslim leaders are wrong when they say there is only one version of the Qur'an. From the very beginning there were several versions.

Chapter 4: How did Muhammad preserve of the Qur'an?

The Qur'an did not start as one complete finished book. Instead the contents of the Qur'an grew gradually as Muhammad recited different verses and suras in response to different situations in his life. This happened over a 23 year period. As we saw in the two previous chapters, Muhammad preserved these words by teaching them to others and on some occasions having them written down. In particular there were certain men who Muhammad commissioned to be teachers of the Qur'an.

Narrated Masruq: ... I heard the Prophet saying, "Take (learn) the Qur'an from four (men): `Abdullah bin Masud, Salim, Mu'adh and Ubai bin Ka'b." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 521)

Therefore Muhammad preserved the Qur'an by teaching it himself, authorising certain men as teachers of the Qur'an, and having some of it written down. These words of the Qur'an were then used in Islamic worship and prayer.

Chapter 5: Was the Qur'an collected into one book under Muhammad's supervision?

No. The following hadith shows that before Muhammad died he had *not* collect the words of the Qur'an into one authorised book, nor had he commanded this to be done. It was his companions who decided to do this. They gathered together material from various sources and made their own collections.

Narrated Zaid bin Thabit: ... "Therefore I (Umar) suggest, you (Abu Bakr) order that the Qur'an be collected." I said to 'Umar, "How can you do something which Allah's Apostle did not do?" ... Abu Bakr kept on urging me (Zaid) to accept his idea until Allah opened my chest for what He had opened the chests of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. So I started looking for the Qur'an and collecting it from (what was written on) palmed 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, bk. 61, no. 509)

And Muhammad's companions had to discuss among themselves what parts to include in their collections of the Qur'an.

Ibn Abbas reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: "If there were for the son of Adam a valley full of riches, he would long to possess another one like it, and the son of Adam does not feel satisfied but with dust." And "Allah returns to him who returns (to him)." Ibn Abbas said: I do not know whether it is from the Qur'an or not; and in the narration transmitted by Zuhair it was said: I do not know whether it is from the Qur'an, and he made no mention of Ibn Abbas. (*Sahih Muslim*: bk. 5, no. 2285)

Therefore Muhammad did not supervise the collection of the words of the Qur'an into one book, nor did he command that this ever be done. It was his companions who made collections of the Qur'an by gathering together various sources from different people. They discussed among themselves what material was authentic and combined these parts to make their collections.

Chapter 6: How many collections of the Qur'an were made by the companions of Muhammad?

We do not know the exact number of collections that were made, but we do know that these collections were not just for personal use because, as we saw in chapter 4, Muhammad commissioned these certain companions to *publicly* teach the Qur'an, and this is precisely what they did. These companions used their collections to teach their students, and entire regions, the Qur'an. We also know that these collections were not identical.

Narrated Ibrahim: The companions of 'Abdullah (bin Mas'ud) came to Abu Darda', (and before they arrived at his home), he looked for them and found them. Then he asked them: "Who among you can recite (Qur'an) as 'Abdullah recites it?" They replied, "All of us." He asked, "Who among you knows it by heart?" They pointed at 'Alqama. Then he asked Alqama. "How did you hear 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud reciting Surat Al-Lail (The Night)?" Alqama recited:

"By the male and the female." (Qur'an 92:3)

Abu Darda said, "I testify that I heard the Prophet reciting it likewise, but these people want me to recite it:

"And by Him Who created male and female." (Qur'an 92:3)

But by Allah, I will not follow them." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 60, no. 468; also *Sahih Muslim*: bk. 4, no. 1799-1802)

This hadith shows two groups of Muslims arguing over a verse in the Qur'an. One group had learned the Qur'an from Abdullah ibn Mas'ud while the other group from another companion of Muhammad. As you can see the difference was not a matter of dialect but of words and meaning. We see this again with Ubayy ibn Ka'b. His version of sura 33:6 had the following extra underlined words:

The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and he is a father of them and his wives are their mothers. ... (Qur'an 33:6, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, 4th ed., Brentwood, Md., U.S.A.: Amana Corp., 1989, footnote 3674)

These extra words make an enormous difference: Should Muslims consider Muhammad their father or not? It depends which companion you learn the Qur'an from.

Narrated Ibn Abbas: Umar said, "Ubayy was the best of us in the recitation (of the Qur'an) yet we leave (out) some of what he recites". Ubayy says, "I have taken it from the mouth of Allah's Apostle and will not leave for anything whatever". ... (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 527)

Just as several of the disciples of Jesus recorded the Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) so too several of Muhammad's companions recorded the Qur'an. In the early years of Islam there were synoptic Qur'ans.

These different Qur'ans were a subject of study for early Islamic scholars. The Arabic librarian, Ibn Abi Ya'qub al-Nadim, made a famous catalogue of all the books in Arabic in the year 375 A.H./987 A.D. He records seven books under the following heading which dealt with this topic.

Books Composed about Discrepancies of the [Qur'anic] Manuscripts

1. "The Discrepancies between the Manuscripts of the People of al-Madinah, al-Kufah, and al-Basrah" according to al-Kisa'i.
2. Book of Khalaf, "Discrepancies of the Manuscripts".
3. "Discrepancies of the People of al-Kufah, al-Basrah, and Syria concerning the Manuscripts", by al-Farra.
4. "Discrepancies between the Manuscripts" by Abu Da'ud al-Sijistani.
5. Book of al-Mada'ini about the discrepancies between the manuscripts and the compiling of the Qur'an.
6. "Discrepancies between the Manuscripts of Syria, al-Hijaz, and al-Iraq", by Ibn `Amir al-Yahsubi.
7. Book of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman al-Isbahani about discrepancies of the manuscripts. (Al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim - A Tenth Century survey of Muslim Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, p. 79)

Al-Nadim also notes the following:

(C)oncerning the arrangement of the Qur'an in the manuscript of Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, Al-Fadl ibn Shadhan said, "I found in a manuscript of `Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud the surahs of the Qur'an in accordance with the following (different) sequence ... These are one hundred and ten surahs." (Al-Nadim, p. 53)

One of our reliable friends has informed us, saying that the composition of the surahs according to the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b is in a village called Qariyat al-Ansar, two parasangs from al-Basrah, where in his home Muhammad ibn Abd al-Malik al-Ansari showed us a Qur'anic manuscript, saying, "This is the copy of Ubayy which we have, handed down from our fathers." I looked into it and ascertained the headings of the surahs, the endings of the revelations, and the numbers of verses. ... one hundred and sixteen surahs. (Al-Nadim, pp. 58-61)

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud's version of the Qur'an did not have surahs 1, 113 or 114, that is, there were no du'a prayers. Ubayy ibn Ka'b's Qur'an is reported to have the following two extra surahs:

Surah 115 al-Khal: O Allah, we seek your help and ask your forgiveness, and we praise you and we don't disbelieve in you. We separate from and leave who sins against you.

Surah 116 al-Hafd: O Allah we worship you and to you we pray and prostrate and to you we run and hasten to serve you. We hope for your mercy and fear your punishment. Your punishment will surely reach the disbelievers. (Ahmed von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1985, p. 48)

In summary, these synoptic Qur'ans had the following differences:

- Different numbers of surahs (chapters).
- Surahs were arranged differently.
- Different words for the same verse.

Some remnants of these different early Qur'ans have recently been discovered in Sana'a, Yemen.

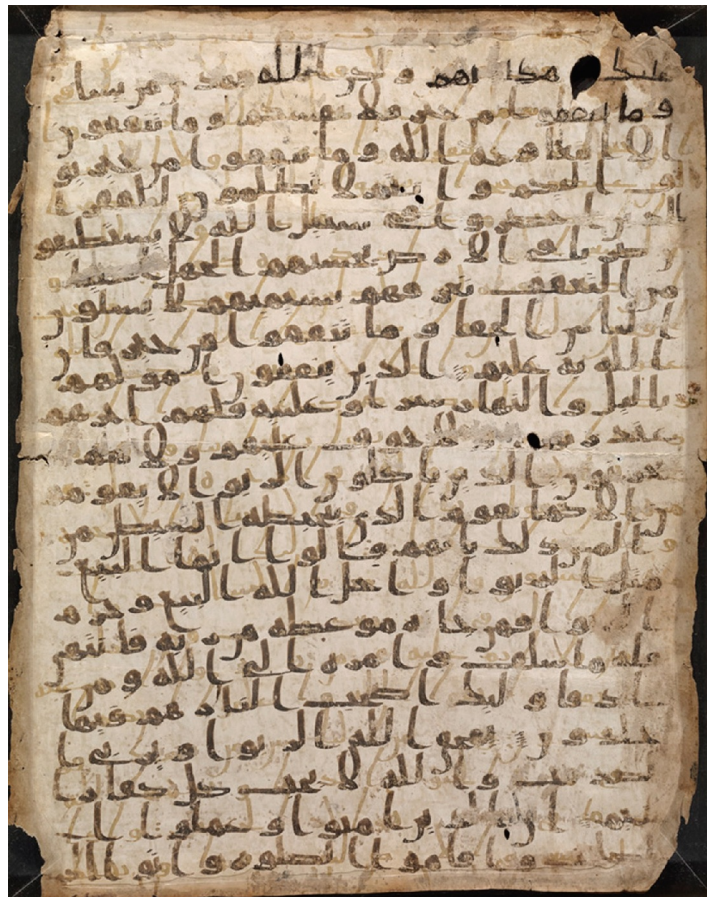
The San'ani specimens are, however, not only proofs of their existence, but allow for the hypothesis that even more arrangements were in use which differed from the official sequence as well as from those reported to go back to Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy. In one case, the end of Surah 26 is followed by the beginning of Surah 37 (on the same page, of course!), which corresponds exactly with the leap reported about Ibn Mas'ud's arrangement. (Gerd-R Puin, "Observations on the Early Qur'an Manuscripts in San'a'", in *The*

Qur'an as Text, ed. Stefan Wild, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 111)

The main significance of the San'a 1 (Standford 07) manuscript is that its lower text does not belong to this Uthmanic textual tradition.

In this sense, it is “non-Uthmanic.” It belongs to some other textual tradition which is designated here as C-1. (Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'an of the Prophet", *Arabica* 57, 2010, p. 344)

Therefore, early in Islam's history there were many synoptic Qur'ans. These Qur'ans were the collections of various companions of Muhammad. Some of them were the Qur'ans of those who Muhammad had commissioned to teach the Qur'an. These were not simply for the personal use of the companion but were used to teach entire regions. They were similar yet differed in the number of suras, the sura order, and the wording of verses.



The Standford 07 manuscript with the original lower text still visible.

Chapter 7: What happened to these early different Qur'ans?

These early synoptic Qur'ans were not preserved because the differences between them led to arguments within the early Muslim community.

"The Syrians," we are told, "contended with the `Iraqis, the former following the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka`b, the latter that of `Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud, each accusing the other of unbelief." (Labib as-Said, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version*, tr. B. Weis, et al., Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1975, p. 23)

The third caliph, Uthman, solved this political problem by choosing one of these collections to be the standard version for the entire Muslim community. He had the other collections destroyed.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: Hudhaifa bin Al-Yaman came to Uthman at the time when the people (Muslims) of Syria and the people of Iraq were waging war to conquer Armenia and Azarbaijan. Hudhaifa was afraid of their (the Muslims of Syria 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 (Quran) 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 bin Thabit, 'Abdullah bin Az-Zubair, Said bin Al-As and 'AbdurRahman 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 Quraish, 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, bk. 61, no. 510)

Uthman's innovation was to make one Qur'an for the entire Muslim world. He was not trying to preserve these differences but remove them, and this is how there came to be one Qur'an: The other versions made by the companions of Muhammad were destroyed. Even though Muhammad

had commissioned several of these companions to teach the Qur'an, Uthman only kept one collection and destroyed the rest. A simple comparison would be if the early Christians destroyed the Gospel according to Mark, Luke, and John, and just kept Matthew. This may have made things simpler, but Christianity is richer for having preserved all these different testimonies; and Islam is poorer for having destroyed these other testimonies to the Qur'an. The result is that today we have only one testimony to what Muhammad recited. The testimony of these other collections has almost totally been destroyed.

Chapter 8: Did all of the companions of the Muhammad agree with Uthman's actions?

No, in particular Abdullah ibn Mas'ud objected to Uthman's actions. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was personally commissioned by Muhammad to teach the Qur'an:

Narrated Masruq: ... I heard the Prophet saying, "Take (learn) the Qur'an from four (men): `Abdullah bin Masud, Salim, Mu'adh and Ubai bin Ka'b." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 521)

He even recited the Qur'an to Muhammad.

Narrated Abdullah bin Masud: The Prophet said to me, "Recite (the) Quran to me." I said to him. "Shall I recite (it) to you while it has been revealed to you?" He said, "I like to hear it from another person." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 576)

That is, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was authorised by Muhammad to teach the Qur'an to others. However, Uthman did not consult Abdullah ibn Mas'ud when he made his version of the Qur'an, and Abdullah was angry about this, and also angry that Uthman wanted him to hand over his collection of the Qur'an to be destroyed. Abdullah maintained that his collection was just as valid, if not more so, than any other collection. As a result Abdullah told his students to hide their Qur'ans from Uthman.

'Abdullah (b. Mas'ud) reported that he said to his companions to conceal their copies of the Qur'an and further said: He who conceals anything he shall have to bring that which he had concealed on the Day of Judgment, and then said: After whose mode of recitation do you command me to recite? I in fact recited before Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) more than seventy chapters of the Qur'an and the Companions of Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) know it that I have better understanding of the Book of Allah (than they do), and if I were to know that someone had better understanding than I, I would have gone to him. Shaqiq said: 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*: bk. 31, no. 6022; also *Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 61, no. 522)

Az-Zuhri also narrated that Abdullah Ibn Mas'oud became upset because he was not chosen to copy the Qur'an. He said, "Oh you Muslims, how can I not be chosen ..." Ibn Mas'oud also said, "Oh people of Iraq! Hide your Qurans in your homes (from Uthman)." (*Sunan Al-Tirmithi*, Dar Al-Kotob Al-ilmiyah, 2008, vol. 4, no. 3105, p. 134; also Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*, vol. 2 p. 444)

Therefore not all the companions of Muhammad agreed with Uthman's innovation, but Uthman was able to enforce his decision and eventually all the companions had to accept this. These companions now had to read the Qur'an from Uthman's text. Had Uthman not enforced his version of the Qur'an, other collections of the Qur'an could have remained until today.

Chapter 9: Is the Uthmanic Qur'an complete?

Again the answer is no. There is ample evidence throughout the Hadith of authentic Qur'anic material not included in Uthman's Qur'an.

... We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Sura) Bara'at (sura 9). 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*: bk. 5, no. 2286)

... 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, bk. 82, no. 817)

This sura about the son of Adam, and the verse about stoning for adultery, are not in the Uthmanic Qur'an, which is the modern Qur'an. Therefore those who compiled the Uthmanic Qur'an made choices about what to include and what to exclude; they did not include everything.

Chapter 10: Are all the ancient Uthmanic Qur'an manuscripts identical to the modern Qur'an?

No.

See answering-islam.org/PQ/A1.htm#AppendA for a comprehensive comparison between the the Samarkand manuscript and the modern Qur'an.



And www.qurantext.org for a comparison with the San'a manuscripts.



Chapter 11: Are all Arabic Qur’ans used in the world today identical?

Again no. When Uthman made his Qur’an the Arabic script did not include the vowel markings or the dots used to distinguish between certain letters. This ambiguity allowed words to be formed (vocalised or read) in different ways, and today there are different versions of the Uthmanic Qur’an which have the words formed differently.

There are ten such different Qur’ans accepted today. The two main versions (qira’at) are the Qur’an according to Imam Hafs (the most common) and the Qur’an according to Imam Warsh (North Africa). Here are two examples of their differences.

The Qur’an According to Imam Hafs	The Qur’an According to Imam Warsh
<div style="font-size: 2em; font-family: serif; margin-bottom: 5px;">تَقُولُونَ</div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> taquluna </div> <p>... you (plural) say ... 2:140</p>	<div style="font-size: 2em; font-family: serif; margin-bottom: 5px;">يَقُولُونَ</div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> yaquluna </div> <p>... they say ...</p>
<p>There are different letters at the beginning of these words. This difference changes the meaning from “you” to “they”.</p>	

The Qur’an According to Imam Hafs	The Qur’an According to Imam Warsh
<div style="font-size: 2em; font-family: serif; margin-bottom: 5px;">قَالَ</div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> qaala </div> <p>He (Muhammad) said, “My lord knows ...” 21:4</p>	<div style="font-size: 2em; font-family: serif; margin-bottom: 5px;">قُلْ</div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> qul </div> <p>Say: My lord knows ...</p>
<p>The difference here changes the subject of the verb. In the Hafs Qur’an the subject is Muhammad but in the Warsh Qur’an the subject is God. This occurs again in 21:112.</p>	

There are approximately 1354 small differences between these two Qur’ans. But there is another difference between them - the Basmalah.

The Basmalah is the phrase, "In the Name of Allah, the Ever-Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy". Both the Hafs and Warsh Qur'ans have the Basmalah printed at the start of every sura except sura 9, however, in the Hafs Qur'an it is part of the revelation of each sura while in the Warsh Qur'an it is not.

The scholars who claim that the *basmalah* at the beginning of the *soorahs* is a verse of the Qur'aan, (include) Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee (d. 204 A.H.) (and) Imaam Ahmad (d. 241) ... However, those that do not hold the *basmalah* at the beginning of the *soorahs* to be a part of the Qur'aan (include) Imaam Maalik (d. 179) (and) Aboo Haneefah (d. 150 A.H.) ... (T)he *qira'aat* (the Readers) themselves differ over whether the *basmalah* was a verse in *Soorah* al-Faatihah and the other *soorahs*. Among the *Qaarees* (the Readers), Ibn Katheer, 'Aasim and al-Kisaa'ee were the only ones who considered it to be a verse at the beginning of each *soorah*, whereas the others did not. (Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan*, pp. 157-158)

The Basmalah appears 113 times at the start of the surahs and has 4 words which means there are 452 extra words in the Qur'an according to Imam Hafs than the Qur'an of according to Imam Warsh.

Therefore all Qur'ans used in the world today are not identical. There are ten accepted versions (*qira'at*) with small differences between them.

For more information answering-islam.org/Green/seven.htm



Chapter 12: Are all the variants of the Qur'an authentic?

No. Some of the variants may be authentic but not all of them.

We saw in chapter 3 that Muhammad allowed the Qur'an to be recited in different ways. Some of these differences may well have survived and now be present in the variants that exist between the ten accepted versions (qira'at) of the Qur'an, but there are more variants than those found between the ten accepted versions.

Some variants arose simply from the fact that the early Arabic script was vague and could be read in different ways as Ahmed Von Denffer explains:

When more and more Muslims of non-Arab origin and also many ignorant Arabs studied the Qur'an, faulty pronunciation and wrong readings began to increase. It is related that at the time of Du'ali (d. 69H/638) someone in Basra read the following aya (verse) from the Qur'an in a faulty way, which changed the meaning completely:

That God and his apostle dissolve obligations with the pagans (9:3)

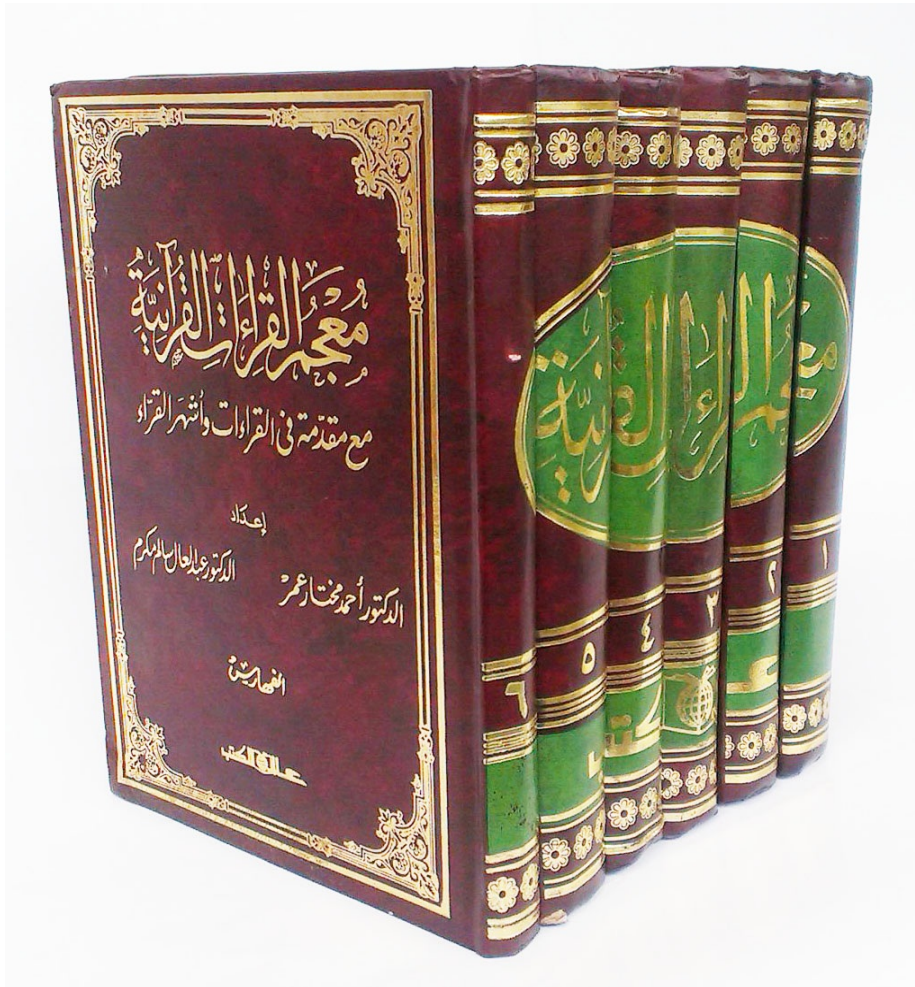
That God dissolves obligations with the pagans and the apostle.

This mistake occurred through wrongly reading *rasulih* in place of *rasuluhu*, which could not be distinguished from the written text, because there were no signs or accents indicating the correct pronunciation. Unless someone had memorised the correct version he could out of ignorance easily commit such a mistake. (Ahmad von Denffer, *Ulum Al-Qur'an*, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1994, p. 58)

Therefore, some variants are considered authentic but other variants are rejected.

The picture on the next page shows a six volume encyclopedia set which records all known variants. It is entitled: *Mu'jam al-qiraa'at al-Quraaneeyah, ma'a maqaddimah fee qiraa'at wa ashhar al-qurraa* (The Encyclopedia of the Quranic Readings with an Introduction to Readings and Famous Readers). It shows that almost every verse in the

Qur'an has several variants associated with it.



The Encyclopedia of the Quranic Readings with an Introduction to Readings and Famous Readers

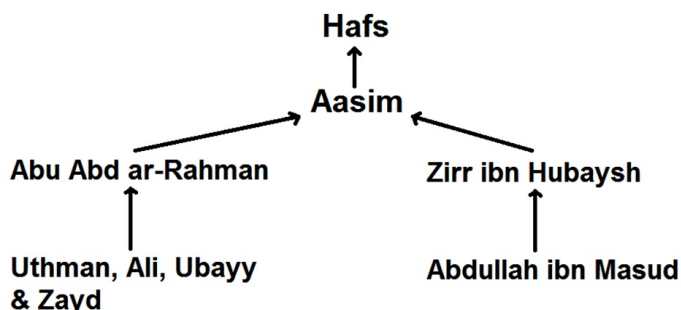
Not all of these variants are accepted as authentic. Islamic scholars judge the variants in the same way they judge the Hadith: Some are accepted, some rejected. Therefore, Muhammad may have allowed *some* variation in the Qur'an but this does not justify *all* of the thousands of variants that exist and that Islamic scholars have to judge for authenticity.

Chapter 13: Does a chain of narration for the modern Qur'an guarantee it is authentic?

No, because the chain of narration (isnad) for the modern Qur'an is not reliable.

Like the Hadiths, each of the different Qur'ans has a chain of narration to prove its authenticity. The chain is meant to show who it was who originally heard this exact way of reciting the Qur'an from Muhammad, and then passed it on to their students. The diagram to the right is the chain of narration for the most common Qur'an, the Hafs Qur'an.

THE ISNAD FOR THE HAFS VERSION OF THE QUR'AN



www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Qiraat/hafs.html#4

What this chain claims is that Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b learned the Uthman collection of the Qur'an from Muhammad and passed *this* version on to their students. There are two reasons why this chain and its claim can be doubted.

Firstly, as we saw in chapters 3, 6, 7 and 8, Islamic history shows that Abdullah and Ubayy learned different versions of the Qur'an from Muhammad, made different collections of the Qur'an compared to Uthman, taught different versions of the Qur'an to their students, and that neither of their collections were preserved when Uthman made his collection the standard version for all Muslims.

We cannot say that Abdullah learned multiple versions of the Qur'an and passed these on to his students because if this was the case then his students would not have argued about them (chap. 6). Therefore the inclusion of Abdullah and Ubayy in the chain of narration for the entire Uthman Qur'an casts doubts over the authenticity of this chain, and thus this chain of narration is no guarantee for the authenticity of this Qur'an.

The most we can say about Abdullah and Ubayy is that after Uthman enforced his collection of the Qur'an these two men now had to recite the Qur'an according to Uthman's collection and not their own. Therefore it

is possible for there to be chains of narration which include Abdullah and Ubayy, but these chains only represent the readings (qira'at) of Abdullah and Ubayy that were *compatible* with Uthman's Qur'an, or learned from it, and not the entire readings and collections of Abdullah and Ubayy.

The second reason to doubt this chain of narration is because, as we saw in chapter 5, Muhammad did not make a collection of the Qur'an himself and thus he never passed it on in one finished form. Instead, his companions made their own collections by gathering material from many different sources.

Narrated Zaid bin Thabit: ... I started looking for the Qur'an and collecting it from (what was written on) palmed 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, bk. 61, no. 509)

That is, the Qur'an is made up of different parts gathered together, and it is each of these different parts that should have its own separate chain of narration. There cannot be a single chain for the entire Qur'an because Muhammad never passed it on this way. But Islamic scholars do not give chains of narration for these individual parts, instead they give a chain/s for the *whole* Qur'an. Therefore, since no chain can be applied to the whole it means any chain claiming to do so is to be doubted.

Chapter 14: The 1924 Egyptian Standard Edition of the Qur'an

The most commonly used Qur'an in the world today is called the 1924 Egyptian standard edition. This is based on the Hafs version, and even this edition has had several revisions.

Minor adjustments were subsequently made to this text in following editions, one published later in 1924 and another in 1936. (Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an in its Historical Context*, London: Routledge, 2008, p. 2)

Conclusion

When Christians and Muslims talk about God the question of the preservation of the Bible and Qur'an often comes up. Christians are regularly told that there is only one Qur'an, that all Qur'ans are absolutely identical, that it was memorised perfectly by Muhammad and his followers, it has never been changed or edited but simply passed down to us today, and because of this the Qur'an is superior to the Bible and its message. However, we have now considered the evidence and found that these claims are either false or exaggerations.

We have seen that Muhammad forgot verses of the Qur'an, edited verses into their final form, allowed several versions of the Qur'an, and never made an authorised version himself. His companions made their own collections and these were different from each other. Uthman enforced one version of the Qur'an and destroyed the other collections. Even today there are different Arabic versions of the Qur'an used around the world with many variants between them.

Therefore do not be deceived by the false and exaggerated claims made about the Qur'an by Islamic leaders, and do not let them turn you away from the Bible.

Why not read some of the Bible yourself? I recommend that you start with a book from the Bible called *Matthew*. A good English translation is available here.

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/matthew/>



