

The Integrity of the Holy Qur'an*

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Abstract

Muslims unanimously agree that the Holy Qur'an is unaltered and undistorted. Theologians and experts in exegetical sciences have cited verses and narrations to reject any kind of possible omission from the Holy Qur'an. According to mainstream Shi'a scholars, Mufasssirun (commentators), jurists, and experts in Qur'anic exegetical sciences, the present Qur'an, with its order and structure, was written and documented during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (s). Some Sunni theologians, such as Khayyat Mu'tazili and Abu 'Ali al-Juba'i, have accused the Shi'a of believing in tahrif (distortion) of the Holy Qur'an. After the publication of Fasl al-Khitab by Muhaddith Nuri, and the rise of Takfiri Salafi propaganda against the Shi'a, this accusation entered a new phase. In many works, Shi'a scholars have criticized the book of Muhaddith Nuri. Hadith of Thaqalayn, narrations promising rewards for recitation of each sura, accountability of the present Qur'an in different theological and jurisprudential disputes, and the challenge to produce similar verses, are among the most substantial arguments for the fact that the Holy Qur'an is undistorted.

Keywords

integrity of the Holy Qur'an, textual consistency of the Holy Qur'an

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Lexicology and Terminology

Lexically, tahrif means displacement and distortion.¹ Tahrif in exegetical sciences refers mainly to possible later addition or omission of the holy text.² Nobody holds the opinion of addition to the Holy Qur'an and it is a consensual belief among Muslims³, therefore discussion about Tahrif and distortion of the Qur'an usually pertains to the possible omission.

Qur'an Based Arguments

The Ninth Verse of Sura al-Hijr

To reject any possible omission from Qur'anic text, theologians and mufasssirun have cited some verses of the Holy Qur'an. One of these verses is the ninth verse of Sura al-Hijr:

“Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it.”

According to mufasssirun (Qur'anic exegetical experts), the word “al-Zikr” (Reminder) in the verse refers to the Holy Qur'an⁴, and being so, Allah has stressed and promised full protection of the Qur'an against any addition or omission. Nearly all mufasssirun, from both schools of thought, including al-Tabrisi⁵ and Zamakhshari⁶, hold the same opinion in this regard.

Objection

The former argument has been rejected on the basis of the apparent circular reasoning; since the validity of this argument is dependent on the authenticity of the verse at hand, and by extension, the integrity of the Holy Qur'an. The reply to this objection, however, is that this argument is presented to convince Muslims who believe in a possible omission from the Qur'an. Since the discussion about the

¹ - *Lisan al-‘Arab* 9:43, *Majma’ al-Bahrayn* 5:36

² - *al-Bayan* 198

³ - *ibid* 200

⁴ - *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘Azim*, Ibn Kathir, 7:372, *Majma’ al-Bayan* 6:509

⁵ - *ibid*

⁶ - *al-Kashshaf ‘an haqa’iq ghawamid al-tanzil* 2:572



Qur'an's integrity in Muslim circles only refers to possible omission, not addition, the present verses of the Qur'an are believed to contain no false addition, and are thus authentic.⁷

The 41st and 42nd Verses of Sura Fussilat

In these verses, al-Batil (falsehood, state of being void), has been denied from the Qur'an.

”Indeed those who defy the Reminder when it comes to them. . . . Indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a [gradually] sent down [revelation] from One all-wise, all-laudable.”

As omission is an instance of al-Batil (being void), according to this verse, any omission has been denied from the Holy Qur'an. Even pro-tahrif individuals accept that the word “al-Batil” signifies any kind of unwanted change in the original version. Hence, it can be argued against them that, omission is clearly a change in the original text and, according to the verse, is rejected.⁸ Generally, mufasssirun hold similar views in this regard.

Narration-Based Arguments

In addition to Qur'anic verses, some narrations from the Holy Prophet (s) and the Ahlulbayt (a) have been cited to prove the integrity of the Holy Qur'an. For instance, there are narrations that say:

“Compare what has been narrated from us, with what is stated in the holy Qur'an, whatever of the narrations are inconsistent with the holy book, we haven't said it and it is a false report.”

It's been argued that: had not the present Qur'an been authentic and complete, presenting it as a criterion for reliable narrations would have been a false address from the Ahlulbayt (a)⁹; or as al-Muhaqqiq al-Thani puts: demanding Shi'as to refer to a different Qur'an rather than the present Qur'an, is to impose upon them an unbearable

⁷ - *al-Bayan* pp.209-210

⁸ - *Majma' al-Bayan* 9:24

⁹ - *al-Bayan* 261



obligation (taklif ma la yutaq) , so what is meant, and has been authenticated in these narrations of the Ahlulbayt (a), is the present Qur'an¹⁰.

Hadith of Thaqaalayn

One of the very important narrations for proving the Qur'an's integrity is the Hadith of Thaqaalayn. This Mutiwaṭir Hadith has been taken as refuting the alleged tahrif narrations. In this Hadith, the necessity of referring to the Qur'an and the Ahlulbayt (a) in every era is emphasized. Now if anyone believes in omissions from the Holy Qur'an, the Holy Qur'an is not authentic for such a person any longer, since it is possible for supposedly omitted parts to have a decisive role in understanding the surviving part. Therefore, such a person must decide whether to accept the mutawāṭir Hadith of Thaqaalayn, which authenticates the Holy Qur'an for every era, or to accept the alleged tahrif narrations.

Narrations Concerning Practical Laws

Some jurisprudential narrations have been taken as demonstrating the Qur'an's integrity. For example, there are narrations that indicate: In each prayer, it is obligatory to recite a complete sura after Sura al-Hamd¹¹. This ruling is consensual among Shi'a scholars¹². It's been argued against tahrif that, with probable textual omission from the Qur'an, this ruling remains impractical, as no one can be certain about instances of a complete sura. This ruling cannot be based on taqiyya because many Sunni jurisprudential schools do not obligate recitation of a complete sura after al-Hamd.¹³

Narrations Promising Rewards

There are many narrations from the Prophet (s) and the Ahlulbayt (a) that explain the merits of or promise certain rewards for recitation of

¹⁰ - *al-Furqan* 7:134, *al-Burhan 'ala 'adam tahrif al-Qur'an* pp.116-118

¹¹ - *Wasa'il al-Shi'a* 6:43-45

¹² - *al-Khilaf* 1:335

¹³ - *Tazkirat al-Fuqaha* 3:130



certain suras or the whole Qur'an¹⁴. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq explicitly denies tahrif from Shi'a beliefs. He regards the accusation of tahrif against the Shi'a as a "pure lie" and writes:

"There is a proof for what we have just said (regarding the Qur'an's integrity) in narrations that promise rewards for recitation of certain suras, and in narrations that allow the recitation of two suras in one rak'a of nafila prayer, and in narrations that promise rewards for the recitation of the whole Qur'an, and in the narration that disliked the recitation of the whole Qur'an over a night or less than three days."¹⁵

In all of these cases, the integrity of the Qur'an has been postulated by the Ahlulbayt (a); otherwise these are either unattainable rewards or impractical orders.

Decisive in Disputed Matters

In the narrations from the Ahlulbayt (a), the Qur'an is cited as an authoritative source, upon which disputes can be settled. For example, in a response to Mu'awiya, who claimed that a proportionate part of the Qur'an had perished, Imam al-Hasan (a) is reported to have said: "By Allah, this claim is a pure lie."¹⁶ Also, in opposition to misapplication of the Qur'an, Imam al-Baqir (a) emphasizes the textual consistency of the Holy Qur'an, however, the ruling party, according to the Imam, was misusing its application for social and political interests.¹⁷

Great Reception and Preservation by Muslims

Since the early days of Islam's emergence, the Qur'an met a great reception both by the Holy Prophet (s) himself and his companions. After being revealed by Jibra'il, each part of the Holy Qur'an was recited and dictated by the Prophet (s), and the writers of the Qur'an, especially the Commander of the Faithful (a), would write it down.

¹⁴ - *Thawab al-A'mal wa 'iqab al-Amal* pp.100-129

¹⁵ - *al-I'tiqadat* p84

¹⁶ - *al-Ihtijaj ala ahl al-lijaj* 2:288

¹⁷ - *Al-Kafi* 8:53



In addition to writing, shortly after its revelation, each verse was circulated among Muslims, and through this oral circulation, the collective memory of the Muslim community preserved unshakably every single verse of the Holy Qur'an.

Historical Reports

Sensitivity of Muslims to preserve the textual consistency of the Holy Qur'an is reflected in many historical reports. As an instance, when 'Uthman b. 'Affan wanted to omit one conjunction, namely the first “and” from this phrase of the Holy Qur'an: “And as for those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah's Way....”(9:34); then Ubbay b. Ka'b warned him that should Uthman not put the conjunction back, he (Ubbay) would take out his sword.¹⁸ In another case, this time regarding the recitation of the 100th verse of Sura al-Tawba, the second caliph wanted to change the case of the word: “al-ansar-i” from being majrur (roughly: dative) to nominative case, to be recited: “al-ansar-u”. In this way, al-Muhajirun would have been introduced by the Qur'an as leaders for al-Ansar. This, clearly, was in the interest of al-Muhajirun. Again a group of Muslims, including Ubbay b. Ka'b, protested against this move and said that the original recitation of the verse had been different than what Umar tried to pretend.¹⁹ Also, Umar believed there had been a verse in the original Qur'an in which the ruling of stoning was mentioned, but he hid this opinion from public, as he had the fear that Muslims would accuse him of addition to the Book of Allah.²⁰ It has been narrated from Ibn Zubayr that Uthman, in a response to this question: “why don't you omit verse 240 of Sura al-Baqara because the ruling in this verse has been abrogated by another verse”, said “I'll never change nor omit what is in the Qur'an.” Now it becomes clearer that all Muslims and companions were fully aware of the detailed conditions of preservation and even the slightest difference in the recitation of the Holy Qur'an would cause them to protest and

¹⁸ - *al-Dur al-Manthur fi tafsir al-ma'thur* 3:232

¹⁹ - *ibid* p.269

²⁰ - *al-Muwatta*, Malik b. Anas, vol.2, p.824.



stand against any possible change either in the text or the recitation of the Holy Qur'an.

Accusing Shi'as of the Belief in Tahrif ²¹

Perhaps, Khayyat al-Mu'tazili (d.300/913) was the first to attribute such a belief to the Shi'a²². The sophistry, however, is that he accuses the Shi'a of believing in additional tahrif; that is, the Shi'a believe the present Qur'an contains later additions and fabricated verses. But no Shi'a is reported to have such an opinion. According to an account by Sayyid b. Tawus, Abu Ali Jubayi (d.303/916), another Mu'tazilite theologian, labeled al-Rawafid with the belief in tahrif in its broadest sense; including omission, addition and change in the text of the Holy Qur'an. In Maqalat al-Islamiyyin, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari distinguishes between those Shi'as who believe in tahrif and those who do not. Qadi 'abd al-Jabbar holds the same opinion and writes: within Rawafid, Imamiyyah believe that Sura Al-'Ahzab had weighed a camel load (but now it is much less, thus they believe in omissions from the Qur'an). Contrarily and somewhat surprisingly, the historical report about Sura Al-'Ahzab has no Shi'a narrator at all, all its transmitters, including different chains of narration, were Sunnis. In another account, the difference between the Shi'a and al-Rawafid has been drawn by Baqilani (d. 403/1013) in Nukat al-Ansar. After positively attributing the belief of tahrif to al-Rawafid, Baqilani writes: most of the Shi'as, however, follow the Infallibles' word in rejecting tahrif and believing in the integrity of the Qur'an. Along the line of these accusations, Ibn Hazm (d.456/1064) writes in his book, al-Fisal: from the early days, Imamiyyah believed in changes in the Qur'an, that is: certain parts have been omitted or falsely added.²³

²¹ - *Sa'd al-Su'ud lilnufus* (Ibn Tawus) 422-532

²² - *al-Intisar* 37-38

²³ - *al-Fisal* 5:40



Shi'a Scholars' Stance

According to most Shi'a scholars, the Qur'an's commentators and jurists, the present Holy Qur'an was formed and consolidated, with the same order and sequence, during the life of the Holy Prophet (s). Some of the Shi'a scholars who hold this view are as follows:

Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Hay b. Ahmid al-Balkhi al-Khurasani (d.390/1000),

Abu Bakr al-Anbari (d.328/940),

Sharif al-Murtada (d.436/1045),

Hakim Jishumi (d.494/1101),

Maumud b. Hamza Kirmani (d. circa505/1112),

Fadl b. Hasan al-Tabrisi (d.548/1153),

Sayyid b. Tawus (b. 664/1266)²⁴,

Sayyid 'abd al-Husayn Sharf al-Din (d.1377/1958),

Ayatullah Borujerdi (d.1380/1961),

and Ayatullah Khui (d.1412/1992)²⁵.

Shi'a Scholars' Arguments for Authenticity of the Quran

Shi'a Muslim scholars have argued that: it is not rationally acceptable for the final Prophet (s) to neglect the formation of his miraculous book, which was to be the source for personal and social conducts within Islamic tradition²⁶. Some of these scholars, such as Ayatullah Khui, have regarded the reports about "the post-Prophet formation of the Qur'an" as unreliable and believe such reports were fabricated by different individuals with complex motivations. These scholars believe the present text and order of the Qur'an was, undoubtedly, given to it during the time of the Prophet (s). Whether accepted or not, there are historical evidences of textual collection and formal consolidation of the Holy Qur'an during the life of the Prophet (s), thus the myth of the "scattered Qur'an" during the life of the Prophet

²⁴ - *Sa'd al-Su'ud lilnufus* (Ibn Tawus) 422-532

²⁵ - *al-Bayan* 239

²⁶ - *Sa'd al-Su'ud lilnufus* (Ibn Tawus) 315



(s) is severely challenged and holds no ground to disprove the Qur'an's integrity.²⁷

Muhaddith al-Nuri

Lately, these accusations have soared as Muhaddith al-Nuri published his controversial work, *Fasl al-Khitab*. Shi'a scholars have protested against this book in many works. In an honest move and along with the stance made by major Shi'a scholars²⁸, some Sunni scholars too, have recognized the Shi'a's firm belief in the Qur'an's integrity.

Ayatullah Borujerdi

Ayatullah Borujerdi believes that by considering the circumstances of the Islamic society, having a proper picture of Islamic history and understanding Muslims' efforts to preserve the text of Qur'an, it is rationally impossible for anyone to believe in tahrif.²⁹

Imam Khomeini

Imam Khomeini rejects the idea of tahrif and argues: in addition to supportive evidences for Shi'a belief in the present Qur'an, had any of the supposedly omitted part of the Qur'anic text been in favor of the Shi'a, it must have been used and reported in the defensive debates of Imam 'Ali (a), lady Fatima al-Zahra (s), other Imams (a) or their true companions like: Salman, Miqdad and Abuzar.³⁰

Naming of the Imams in the Qur'an

According to pro-tahrif individuals, most textual omissions have taken place in the verses where, assumingly, the names of the Imams

²⁷ - *al-Bayan* 237

²⁸ - such as Ayatollah Ma'rifat in *al-Tamhid* and Ayatollah Ostadi in *Ashnayi ba Mufasssiran*.

²⁹ - *Nihayat al-Usul* (the lessons on Usul by Ayatollah Borujerdi, written down by Ayatollah Montaziri) p482.

³⁰ - *Anwar al-Hidaya* 245.



were explicitly stated. It has been claimed that their names had been mentioned in several parts of the original text, but later these phrases were omitted. Contrary to this, according to a sahih narration, al-Imam al-Sadiq (a) refuted the universality of such conception by citing verses where merely the generalities of practical laws were mentioned and the details were left to the sunna of the Prophet (s).³¹

Unintentional Tahrif

The idea of unintentional tahrif is associated mostly with the process of documentation and formation of the Holy Qur'an. According to this viewpoint, during the lifetime of the Prophet (s), the Qur'an was written on scattered pieces of paper, animal skins etc. and no certain type of order nor sequence existed. So the probability of accidental negligence of certain verses during the final documentation of the Qur'an remains high. Aside from the fact that the belief in post-Prophet formation of the Qur'an does not necessarily result in tahrif or omission from the Qur'an, furthermore, in recent studies and based on historical evidences and reports, researchers have been convinced of the formation of the Qur'an during the life of the Prophet (s). Upon the Prophet's lead and encouragement, every verse was written, documented and each chapter was decisively defined.³²

Criticizing the Arguments for the Distortion of the Holy Quran

On the opposing side, pro-tahrif individuals support their claim with certain narrations. The authenticity and demonstrability of these seemingly several narrations have been scrutinized and rejected by Shi'a scholars. According to Ayatullah Borujerdi, a large number of these narrations were narrated by Ahmid b. Muhammad Sayyari, whose narrations are to be rejected: for early rijal and hadith experts have explicitly stated the falsehood and deviation in his school of thought. Some other narrations indicate post-Prophet formation of the Qur'an, but after detailed textual and historical analyses, these narrations seem to be fabricated upon theological and political

³¹ - *al-Kafi* 1:286-288

³² - *Haqa'iq Hamma Hawl al-Qur'an al-Karim* p64, *al-Bayan* 273



motivations.³³ According to Mahdi Borujerdi, all of Fasl al-Khitab's narrations fit in twelve categories, which by analytic studies, show no relevance to the idea of tahrif, rather these narrations address the differences in recitation, interpretation and application of the verses of the Qur'an and with the existence of dishonest and fabricator narrators in the chains of transmission, the reliability of these narrations is highly questionable.³⁴

Explicit Narrations

There are narrations in Sunni and Shi'a collections that explicitly consider certain omissions from the Qur'an, but they are mostly rejected on the basis of their weak chain of transmission; the rest, however, include phrases about interpretation and commentary of the Qur'an, not its textual consistency.

The Narration in al-Kafi

Among such narrations, is a narration from al-Kafi³⁵, which indicates that the Qur'an had seventeen thousand verses (nearly triple its current size). This narration has been dually rejected and justified:

- According to his report, in Fayd al-Kashani's copy of al-Kafi, the number had been recorded: seven thousand³⁶, in this case, this narration is pointing to the numerousness of Qur'anic verses, not the exact number.
- According to Ibn Babiwayh³⁷, it probably refers to the non-Qur'anic revelation.
- In a grave matter like this, a single report cannot be trusted, especially a single narration that is in conflict with many other authentic narrations that prove the Qur'an's integrity and

³³ - *Nihayat al-Usul* 483

³⁴ - *al-Burhan ala 'adam tahrif al-Qur'an* 69-106 - *Sharh al-Kafi* by Mulla Salih Mazandarani 11:357, 2:223, 11:72

³⁵ - *al-Kafi* 2:634

³⁶ - *al-Wafi* 9:1780

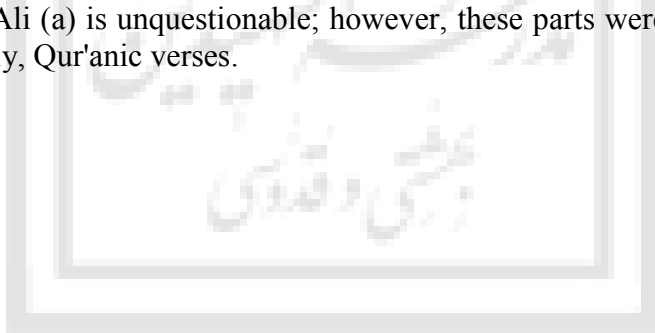
³⁷ - *I'tiqadat* 84-85



encourage the recitation of, and reliance upon, the present Qur'an.³⁸

Mushaf of Imam Ali (a) and the Idea of Tahrif

In recent years, some Sunni scholars tend to accuse the Shi'a of the belief in tahrif, by misreporting the accounts about Mushaf Imam Ali (a). However, from earliest days, Shi'a scholars have stated with great care and sensitivity, that the additional parts of the Mushaf of Imam Ali (a) are a kind of explanative revelation, not Qur'anic; therefore, they are more relevant to areas of interpretation, explanation, muhkam/mutishabih and historical coincidences. According to Shaykh al-Mufid³⁹, whatever record was in the Mushaf of Imam Ali (a), and is not in the present Qur'an, was merely the interpretation, true examples and applications of the present Qur'anic verses, not original parts of the miraculous Qur'an. According to Ayatullah Khui⁴⁰, the existence of additions in the Mushaf of Imam Ali (a) is unquestionable; however, these parts were not, most certainly, Qur'anic verses.



³⁸ - *Bihar al-anwar* 89:12

³⁹ - *Awa'il al-Maqalat* p81

⁴⁰ - *al-Bayan* 225



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