Compilation of Quran and Correct ways of Quranic Interpretation

Introduction Section of

MAARIFUL QURAN

By

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This brief review about compilation of Quran and methods of Quranic interpretation is an excellent primer for all those who want to get a basic level understanding about this subject (also known as Usool at Tafsi).

Reading this small booklet will inshaAllah clarify many doubts and confusions that orientalists try to instil in Muslims.

If you like it, forward it to others as well so that we can all benefit each other and earn ourselves Sadaqa Jariyah, for our prophet said:

“If a human dies, then his good deeds stop except for three: a Sadaqa Jariah (continuous charity), a beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who prays for him.” – Sahih Muslim

Jazakallahu Khair.

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**Wahy and its true nature**

Since the Holy Qur'an was revealed to our beloved prophet Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم by means of Wahy (revelation), an understanding of some particulars about Wahy is imperative at the very outset.

**The need for Wahy**

Every Muslim knows that Allah Almighty has sent man into this world as a matter of test, and in return for his being obligated with certain duties, the whole universe has been placed at his service. For this reason man, once he is in the world, must do two things:

1. He should make the best use of this world, and of things created in it.

2. While using this world to his advantage, he should keep the injunctions of Allah Almighty in sight and do nothing that goes against His will and pleasure.

For these two functions man needs knowledge. Therefore, unless he knows the reality of this world, the properties of different things and the manner in which they can be put to use, he cannot use anything in this world to his advantage. Likewise, unless and until he knows the will of Allah Almighty as to what pleases Him and what displeases Him, it will be impossible for him to lead a life in line with the will of Allah Almighty.

So Allah Almighty, along with the creation of man, has created three things through which he could continue receiving knowledge of the above-mentioned matters of concern. These are:
1. Man's senses, that is, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the hands and the feet.

2. The reason.

3. The *Wahy*.

Consequently, man finds out many things through his senses, many others through reason, and the knowledge of things he cannot get through these two sources are bestowed upon him through *Wahy*.

The arrangement between these three sources of knowledge is such that each one has its limits, and a particular sphere of activity beyond which it does not work. In natural sequence, the knowledge of things man collects through his senses cannot be deduced through bland reason. For instance, you know by seeing a wall with your eyes that its colour is white. But, should you close your eyes and try to find out the colour of that wall on the sole strength of your reason, this will then be impossible. Similarly, the knowledge of things that comes through reason cannot be discovered by senses alone. For instance, you cannot find out as to who made that wall by simply seeing it with your eyes or touching it with your hands. Not at all, you rather need reason to arrive at that conclusion.

In short, reason gives no guidance as far as the five senses work efficiently, and when the five senses become helpless, reason starts functioning. But, even the guidance given by this reason is not unlimited. This too stops at a certain limit. Then there are things the knowledge of which can neither be acquired through senses nor through reason. For instance, to find out about this very wall, as to what manner of its use will please Allah Almighty and what manner of its use will displease Him, is possible neither through senses nor through reason. In order to give man the answer to such questions, the source that Allah Almighty has prescribed is what is known as *Wahy*. And the method it follows is that Allah Almighty selects one of His servants, ordains him as His messenger and to him He reveals His Word. This Word is *Wahy*.

This makes it clear that *Wahy* is the highest source of knowledge for man which offers to him the answer to questions about his life which cannot be solved by means of reason and senses, but, he still
has to have that knowledge. This further explains that reason and perception alone are not enough to show man the way. It is rather all the more necessary, almost inevitable, that the Divine *Wahy* be there for his guidance. Since *Wahy* is basically needed where reason does not work, it is, therefore, not necessary that everything communicated through *Wahy* be compulsively comprehended through reason. On the contrary, as reason is no help in finding out the colour of some object since that is the job of the senses, so is the knowledge of many religious beliefs, the gracious giving of which is the sole prerogative of *Wahy* and not of reason. Furthermore, trusting reason alone for their comprehension is not sound and correct.

To begin with, it is totally senseless to discuss the issue of *Wahy* with a person who, God forbid, does not accept the very existence of God. But, for a person who believes in the existence of Allah Almighty and has faith in His perfect power, it is not at all difficult to understand that *Wahy* is a rational need, that it is possible and that it is there for real. If you have faith in the fact that this universe has been created by an absolutely powerful entity, He is the One who has sent man down here to accomplish some particular mission, how then is it possible to imagine that He, after once having created man, would leave him off in total darkness, without ever telling him why did he come into this world, what his duties were, where was he destined to go and how could he realize the purpose of his life? How could a person, whose sanity is still there, send one of his servants on a certain trip under a designated mission without ever telling him the purpose of the trip while he is leaving, nor explaining it to him later on through some message as to why he has been sent out there and what duties he is supposed to carry out during the trip? When a man of ordinary reason cannot do something like this, how can something like this be imagined with respect to the most Holy Lord of the Universe under Whose ultimate wisdom this whole system of the universe is functioning? After all, how is it possible that the Being, that did create such a mind-boggling system composed of the moon, the sun, the sky, the earth, the stars and the planets, would remain unable to institute some arrangement of communication with His servants, through which human beings could be given guidance about the purpose of their lives? If there is *Īmān* or faith in the ultimate wisdom of Allah
Almighty, then admitting that He did not forsake His servants in the dark, will become all the more necessary; rather on the contrary, He has surely instituted some regular system for their guidance. And so, this very regular system of guidance is known as Wahy (Revelation) and Risālah (Prophethood).

This makes it crystal clear that Wahy is not only a religious belief but also a rational need the rejection of which amounts to a rejection of the ultimate wisdom of Allah Almighty.

The Modes of Descent

This sacred sequence of Wahy (revelation) and Risālah (prophethood) came to an end with the last of the prophets, Muḥammad al-Mustafā صلی الله علیه وسلم. Nevermore, shall Wahy descend upon any man, nor there is need for it. Wahy used to come to the Holy Prophet صلی الله علیه وسلم in several forms and modes. In a hadīth from Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah رضی الله عنیها says that Sayyidnā ʿAbī Ḥārith ibn Hishām رضی الله عنه once asked the Holy Prophet صلی الله علیه وسلم as to how did Wahy come to him. The Holy Prophet صلی الله علیه وسلم said that 'there are times when I hear something like the chiming of bells and this mode of Wahy is the hardest on me. After that, when this chime-sequence ends, that which has been said by the sound seems to have been committed to my memory. And there are times when the angel appears before me in the shape of a man.' (Sahīh al-Bukhārī, 2/1)

As regards the likening of the sound of Wahy to the sound of bells in the hadīth cited above, Shaykh Muhyy al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī has explained it by saying that, in the first place, the sound of Wahy is continuous like the sound of a bell which does not break off in between; and in the second place, when the bell rings continuously, it generally becomes difficult for the listener to determine the direction of its sound because its sound seems to be coming from all directions. And the Divine Word too carries with it the distinction that it has no one single direction, in fact, the sound gives the impression of being heard from all directions. A correct realization of this phenomenon is just not possible without auditory experience, however, in order to bring this happening closer to common comprehension, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has simply likened it to the sound of bells. (Fayd al-Bari, 19,20/1)
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With the descent of Wahy in this mode, the Holy Prophet ﷺ came under very heavy strain. Sayyidah ‘A’ishah رضي الله عنها says towards the end of this very hadith that she had seen the coming of Wahy to him during days of extreme winter. When the progression of Wahy ceased, his blessed forehead would have already become dripping-wet inspite of the chilly weather. In yet another narration, Sayyidah ‘A’ishah رضي الله عنها relates: When Wahy came to him, his breath would seem to stop, the radiant face would change -- turning pale like the branch of a date palm, the front teeth would shiver from cold and he would perspire so much that its drops would roll like pearls. (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

On occasions, so much intensity would be generated in this state of Wahy that the animal he would be riding at that time would sit down, wilting under his weight. Once, when he was resting his blessed head on the lap of Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضي الله عنه there started the descent of Wahy in that very posture. This released so much weight on Sayyidnā Zayd’s thigh that it seemed to break. (Zad al-Ma’ad, 1/18,19)

There were times when a low-volumed sound of this Wahy was sensed by others as well. Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضي الله عنه says: When Wahy came to him, a sound somewhat similar to the buzzing of honey-bees could be heard close to his most bright face. (Tabwib Musnad Ahmad, Kitab al-Sirah al-Nabaviyah, 20/212)

Under the second mode of Wahy, an angel would come to him in some human form and deliver Allah’s message. Generally, on such occasions, Sayyidnā Jibrā’il ﷺ عليه السلام used to come to him in the form of Sayyidnā Dihyah al-Kalbi رضي الله عنه. Certainly, at other times, he has come in other forms as well. In any case, this mode of the coming of Wahy when it was brought by Sayyidnā Jibrā’il ﷺ عليه السلام appearing in human form, was the easiest on the Holy Prophet ﷺ. (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

The third mode of the coming of Wahy used to be that Sayyidnā Jibrā’il ﷺ عليه السلام would appear as he was, without having taken on the shape of a man. But this has happened only thrice in his entire life-time. First of all, it was when the Holy Prophet صل الله عليه وسلم had himself wished to see him in his real form and shape. The second time, it was in the Mi’rāj (the Ascent to Heaven), and the third time it was at Ajyād in Makkah al-Mukarramah during the very early days of
prophethood. The first two happenings stand proved authentically, however, the last one suffers from weak chains of authority and is, therefore, doubtful. (Fath al-Bari, 1/18.19)

The fourth mode is distinguished by a direct, non-intermediary, two-way conversation with Allah Almighty. This honour was bestowed upon the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم only once, that is, in Mi‘raj, while awake. In addition to that, once it was in a dream as well that he was in a conversing situation with Allah Almighty.

Under the fifth mode of Wahy, it so happened that Sayyidnā Jibrā’il عليه السلام would, without appearing physically in any form whatsoever, let some words of the message fall into his heart. This is technically known as نبث في الرؤع (nafth fī al-ra‘ū: blowing into the heart) (Ibid).

The Chronology of the Revelation of the Qur‘ān

The noble Qur‘ān is, in fact, the Divine Word. It is, therefore, secure in the Preserved Tablet. The noble Qur‘ān says: بل مُوحَدَةٌ نَّعْظَمُهَا وقُرْآنٌ عَلِيمٌ (Rather, it is the glorious Qur‘ān in the Preserved Tablet). (85:21-22)

Then, from the Preserved Tablet, its descent took place twice. Once, the whole of it had been sent to al-Bayt al-‘Izzah, the most exalted House on the firmament of the world. The most exalted House (also known as al-Bayt al-Ma‘mūr) is a House facing Ka‘bah that exists in the firmament as the place of worship for angels. This descent took place on the Night of Qadr (rendered as the Night of Power in English). The second time it used to be revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم gradually as needed, having reached its completion in twenty three years. These two modalities of the Qur’anic revelations become clear through the style of the noble Qur‘ān itself. In addition to that, al-Nasā‘i, al-Baihaqī and al-Hākim and others have reported from Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه what can be summed up by saying that the first descention of the noble Qur‘ān to the firmament of the world took place all at once and the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was blessed with the second descention gradually. (al-Itqān, v. 1, p. 41)

Explaining the wisdom behind the first descention of the noble
Qur’ān on the firmament facing the world, Imam Abu Shamah has said that it aimed at demonstrating the exalted majesty of the noble Qur’ān, and at the same time, it was to tell the angels that this was the last Book of Allah which is ready for descention for the guidance of the people of the earth.

Shaykh al-Zurqānī makes yet another point when he says that this two-timed descention also aimed at stressing that this Book is beyond all doubts, and it stands preserved at two more places other than the blessed heart of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, that is, in the Preserved Tablet, and in the Exalted House. (Manahil al-'Irān, v.1, p. 39).

It is almost agreed by all the scholars that the second gradual descention which was on the heart of the Holy Prophet ﷺ began when his age was forty years. The beginning of this descention, as authentically reported, was in the Night of Qadr, and this was the date on which, some years later, the event of the Battle of Badr came to pass. However, nothing definite can be said about the exact date of Ramadān when this Night fell. There are some reports which identify that of the seventeenth Remadān, while others place it on the nineteenth, and still others which indicate the Night of the twenty-seventh. (Tafsir Ibn Jarir v. 10, p. 7)

The verses that came first

It is authentically said that the first verses to come to the Holy Prophet ﷺ were the verses from which Sūrah al-'Alaq begins. As in Sahih al-Bukhārī, Sayyidah ‘A’ishah رضي الله عنها while relating its background has said that the very first beginning of revelations to the Holy Prophet ﷺ actually was through true dreams. Following that, came his zeal to worship in seclusion. During this period, he would spend night after night in the Cave of Ĥira’ and stay in the state of I‘tikāf devoted to his ‘ibādah (worship) when one day, right there in that cave, there came an angel from Allah Almighty and the very first thing he said was َإِنِّي آتِيتكُمُ ِّ (Iqra': 'Read'). The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: َما أَنَا أَمْخَاطِبُ ِّ I am unable to read.' After that, relating the event himself, he said that 'the angel, hearing this answer of mine, caught hold of me and embraced me with such force that I had to go through unbearable strain.' Then he released me and said: َإِنِّي آتِيتكُمُ ِّ 'Read'. I said: 'I am unable to read.' Thereupon, he seized me the third time,
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gave a hard embrace and then released me. After that he said:

إِنَّا نَجْعِلُ لِلَّهِ مِنَ الْخَلْقِ ۖ أَقْرَأْ بِنَامِسِ رَبِّكَ الْأَكْرَمِ مِنْ عِلْمِ الْإِنسَانِ ۖ وَقُرْنِ ۖ وَإِنَّ الْإِنسَانَ مِثْلُ ۖ أَلْقِ فِي ۖ حَلَقٍ ۖ أَقْرَأْ ۖ وَقُرْنِ ۖ وَإِنَّ الْإِنسَانَ مِثْلُ ۖ أَلْقِ فِي ۖ حَلَقٍ

Recite with the Name of your Lord who created, created Man out of a blood-clot. Recite and Your Lord is Most Generous who taught by the Pen, taught Man what he did not know.

(96:1-3)

These were the first verses to be revealed to him. Thereafter, the coming of Waḥy stayed discontinued for three years. This period is known as the period of ḥatrah, that is, the period when Waḥy was discontinued for a short interval of time. Then, it was after three years that the same angel who had visited him in the Cave of Hirā’ became visible to him between the heaven and the earth. He read to him the verses of Sūrah al-Muddaththir. Thereafter, the sequence of Waḥy was reactivated.

The Makki and Madani Verses

While looking at the titles of the Surahs of the Holy Qur’ān, you may have noticed the entry, Makki (or Meccan, Makkan, Makkiyyah) with some Surāhs, and Madani (Medinan, Medinite, Madaniyyah) with some others. It is necessary to understand correctly what it means. In the terminology of the commentators, the ‘Makki ʿayah’ means a verse that was revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم earlier than he actually reached Madīnah by way of hijrah (emigration). Similarly, the ‘Madani ʿayah’ or the Madani verse means that it was revealed after he migrated to Madīnah. Some people take ‘Makki’ to mean that the verse concerned was revealed in the city of Makkah, and so the ‘Madani’ is supposed to have been revealed in Madīnah. This view is not correct because there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Makkah, yet are called Makki because they had already been revealed before hijrah. As such, the verses that were revealed in Minā, ‘Arāfah, or during the Journey of Ascent (Miʿrāj) are also called Makki. So much so, that the verses revealed during the journey of hijrah enroute Madīnah are also called Makki. Similarly, there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Madīnah, but they are Madani. For example, there were several journeys that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had to undertake while
going many hundred miles away from Madīnah, and the verses revealed at all those places are called Madānī anyway. So much so that the particular verses that were revealed on the occasion of the Conquest of Makkah or the military campaign of Hudaybiyyah in the city of Makkah proper or its environs are also called Madānī. Accordingly, the Qur'ānic verse:

\[ \text{Surely, Allah commands you to fulfil trust obligations towards those entitled to them. (4:58)} \]

is Madānī although it was revealed in Makkah al-Mukarramah. (al-Burhan, v. 1, p. 88, and Manahil al-'Irūf, v. 1, p. 88)

Then there are Sūrahs which are either totally Makki, or totally Madānī. For instance, Sūrah al-Muddaththir is wholly Makki and Sūrah 'Al-'Imran is wholly Madānī. But, on occasions, it has so happened that one or some Madānī verses find a place in the Sūrah which is wholly Makki. On other occasions, it has happened just the reverse. For instance, Sūrah al-'A'raf is Makki, but in it the verses from 8:38 to 8:48 are Madānī. Similarly, Sūrah al-Ḥajj is Madānī but four of its verses, that is, those from 2:142 to 2:145 are Makki.

This also makes it clear that the incidence of a Sūrah being Makki or Madānī is generally conditioned by the nature of the majority of its verses and so it happened frequently that the initial verses of a Sūrah which were revealed before Hijrah were regarded as Makki, although some of its verses may have been revealed later on following Hijrah. (Manahil al-'Irūf, v. 1, p. 192)

**Characteristics of Makki and Madanī Verses**

The scholars of Tafsir, after having made a thorough investigation into the Makki and Madanī Surahs, have come up with a set of characteristics that tell right off if a Sūrah is Makki or Madanī. Some of these characteristics are recognized as universal rules while others hold good most of the time. The universal rules are as follows:

1. Every Sūrah in which the word ٓؤُ (never) appears is Makki. This word has been used 33 times in 15 Sūrahs, and all these verses are in the last half of the noble Qur'ān.
2. Every Sūrah in which (according to the Hanafīyyah) there appears a verse of Sajdah is Makki.

3. Every Sūrah, with the exception of Sūrah al-Baqarah, in which the story of Ādam and Iblīs finds mention is Makki.

4. Every Sūrah in which a permission of jihād or a description of its injunctions has been given is Madani.

5. Every verse which mentions the hypocrites is Madani.

The following characteristics are general and mostly frequent, that is, sometimes the contrary may happen, but usually and mostly it follows the said pattern:

1. In Makki Sūras, generally, the form of address used is ﷺ أَبِي الْأَمْثَالِ (O people), and in Madani Sūras it is ﷺ أَبِي الْأَمْثَالِ أَمْثَالًا (O believers).

2. The Makki ’Ayat (Verses) and Sūras are generally short and brief while the Madani verses and chapters are long and detailed.

3. The Makki Sūras mostly consist of subjects such as, Oneness of Allah, Prophethood, affirmation of the Hereafter, the panorama of the Resurrection, words of comfort for the Holy Prophet ﷺ and events relating to the past communities, and in these, the number of injunctions and laws taken up is much less as compared with the Madani Sūras where family and social laws, injunctions of jihād and expositions of limits and duties appear frequently.

4. In Makki Sūras, most of the confrontation is against idolaters while in Madani Sūras it is against the people of the Book and the hypocrites.

5. The style of Makki Sūras is more majestic. It has profusion of metaphors, similies and allegories, and the vocabulary used is extensive. Contrary to this, the style of the Madani Sūras is comparatively simple.

This difference in the style of Makki and Madani Sūras initially owes its origin to a variety of conditions, circumstances and addressees. Muslims had to deal mostly with the idolaters of Arabia during their Makkan life. No Islamic state was born yet. Therefore,
during this period, more emphasis was laid on the correction of beliefs, reform of morals, logical refutation of the idolaters and the miraculous nature of the noble Qur’an. Contrary to this, an Islamic state had risen in the Holy city of Madinah. People were rushing into the fold of Islam, group after group. Idolatry stood refuted intellectually. The ideological confrontation was now wholly against the people of the Book. Therefore, greater attention was paid to education in injunctions, laws, limits and duties, and on the refutation of the people of the Book. The style adopted matched these objectives.

The Gradual Revelation of the Noble Qur’an

As said earlier, the noble Qur’an was not revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم suddenly and simultaneously. On the contrary, it was revealed, little by little, over a span of nearly twenty three years. At times, جبريل عليه السلام a small verse, or even with some unit of a verse. Then, there were times when several verses would be revealed at one time. The smallest portion of the Qur’an which was revealed as such is غياب أو لي الصغر (al-Nisā’: 4:94) which forms part of a long verse. On the other hand, the whole of سورة al-An’am was revealed at one time. (Ibn Kathir, v. 2, p. 122)

Rather than being revealed all at once, why was the Qur’an revealed little by little? The polytheists of Arabia had themselves put this question to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Allah Almighty has taken it upon Himself to answer the question in the following words:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ لَمْ نَحْرِي عَلَيْكَ جُمْهُرَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لَفَتَتْنَيْمُكَ مَمْرَأً وَ旅程ُكَ لَيْكَ بَعِينَهُ مَسْتَكْبِرُنَّ \n
The disbelievers said, "Why has the Qur’an not been sent down upon him all at once?" "(We did) like this, so that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and We have recited it very distinctly. They bring not to thee any similitude but that We bring thee the truth, and better in exposition" (25:32-33)

It is sufficient to understand a gist of the wisdom behind the gradual revelation of the Holy Qur’an as stated by Imam al-Rāzī in his explanation of this verse. He says:

1. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was ummiyy, that is, being unlettered, he did not read or write. So, had the entire Qur’an been
revealed at one time, it would have been difficult to remember and document. Contrary to this, Sayyidnā Musā عليه السلام knew reading and writing, therefore, the Torah was revealed to him at one single time.

2. If the entire Qurʾān had been revealed all at once, immediate compliance of all its injunctions would have become obligatory, and this would have gone against the wise graduation which has featured as a matter of concern in the Shari‘ah of our Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

3. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had to go through ever-new tortures inflicted by his people. That Jibrā‘l عليه السلام came, again and again, with the words of the noble Qurʾān, made his stand against these tortures bearable, and gave strength to his heart.

4. A large portion of the Qurʾān is devoted to answers given to people who posed questions, while some other portion refers to various particular events. Therefore, the revelation of those verses was appropriate at the time when those questions were asked, or those events came to pass. This increased the insight of Muslims and when the Qurʾān unfolded that which was unseen, its truth became all the more manifest. (al-Tafsir al-Kabir, v. 6, p. 336)

**Sabab al-nuzul: (Cause of revelation)**

The verses of the noble Qurʾān are of two kinds. In the first place, there are the verses that Allah Almighty revealed on His own. Their revelation was not caused by some particular event or a question asked by someone. In the second place, there are those verses which were revealed in answer to some question or with reference to some event. This could be termed as the background of these verses. This background is known, in the terminology of the commentators, as the 'sabab' of nuzūl ('cause' of revelation) or the 'shān' of nuzūl (the 'background' of revelation). For instance, take the verse in Sūrah al-Baqarah:


Do not marry female associators unless they come to believe, and a Muslim slave girl is better than a female associator, even though she is liked by you. (2:221)

This verse was revealed in the wake of a particular event. During
the days of Ignorance, Sayyidnā Marthad ibn Abī Marthad al-Ghanavī رضي الله عنه had a relationship with a woman, named 'Anaq. After embracing Islam, he migrated to Madīnah while that woman stayed behind in Makkah al-Mukarramah. There was an occasion when Sayyidnā Marthad visited Makkah al-Mukarramah on a certain business. 'Anaq came to him with an invitation to sin. Sayyidnā Marthad refused flatly and said: 'Now Islam has come between me and you, but should you so wish, I can marry you after clearing it with the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.' After returning to Madīnah, Sayyidnā Marthad sought his permission to marry the woman he said he liked. Thereupon, this verse was revealed, and it prohibited marriage with mushrik women. (Asbab al-Nuzul by al-Wahidi, p. 38)

This event is the 'shā'īn' or 'sabab' of nuzūl ('cause' or 'background' of revelation) behind the verse mentioned above. The background of revelation is, therefore, very important in the exegesis of the noble Qur'ān. There are many verses the meaning of which cannot be correctly understood unless the circumstances underlying their revelation become known.

The Seven Readings of the Holy Qur'ān

In order that the noble Qur'ān becomes easily recitable, Allah Almighty has blessed the Muslim community with special convenience by allowing it to read the words of the Qur'ān in more than one way. If there are situations when a person is unable to pronounce some words in one manner, he could recite it in another. It appears in a hadīth of Sahīh Muslim that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was once sitting by the pond of Banu Ghifār while Angel Jibrā‘īl came and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to ask your community to recite the Qur'ān following one method of reading.' He said: 'I seek from Allah His pardon and forgiveness. My people do not have the ability to do so.' Then, Angel Jibrā‘īl returned to him and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following two readings.' He said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then, Jibrā‘īl came the third time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following three readings.' Again he said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My
people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then he came the fourth time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'an following seven readings. So, whichever of these they follow to read the Qur'an, their recitation will be correct.' (Manahil al-'Irifān, v. 1, p. 33)

Accordingly, there is yet another hadīth where the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

ِرَّأَيْنَاهُ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ أُتْلَى عَلَى سَبْعَة ْأَخْرِجَ فَأَقُلُوا مَا مَاتَيْسَرَ مِنْهُ

This Qur'an has been revealed covering seven versions. So from out of these, recite in a way that is easy on you.

What is meant by 'Seven Versions' in this saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ? There are several scholarly positions in this connection but according to scholars who have conducted painstaking and exhaustive research on the subject, the weightier meaning of this expression is that the variations found in different readings of the Holy Qur'an are of seven types. These are as follows:

1. The difference in nouns: This includes the difference concerning singular, dual, plural, as well as, masculine and feminine. For instance, in one reading it is كَلَمَةُ رَبِّيُّ, while in another, كَلَمَةُ رَبِّيُّ.

2. The difference in verbs: That there be past in one reading, the present in another and the imperative in yet another. For instance, it is كُتِبْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا in one reading, while كُتِبْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا in another.

3. The difference in the placement of diacritical marks: That which shows variance in I'rab, which reflects variance in grammatical mode of a word and is demonstrated through desinential inflections, such as kasra, fatha, damma. For instance, reading لَا لِبْسَارُ كَابِتٌ as لَا لِبْسَارُ كَابِتٌ and دَوْلَةً عَرْشُ الْمَجِيِّلَةَ as دَوْلَةً عَرْشُ الْمَجِيِّلَةَ.

4. The difference caused by addition and deletion of words: That there be some word missing in one reading while it has been added on in another; for instance, the words تَفَسِّيِّرُ مِنْ هَذَا الْآتِمَرُ appear in one reading while the words تَفَسِّيِّرُ مِنْ هَذَا الْآتِمَرُ appear in another.

5. The difference of precedence and succession: That there is a word which precedes in one reading, while it succeeds in the other.
For instance، وَكَانَتْ سَكِيرَةٌ أَعْقِزٌ بِالْمُوَذِّبِ and ٌوَكَانَتْ سَكِيرَةٌ الْمُذِّبِ. and تَفْتَكِرُوُا and ٍفَتْنُكُوا، also ٌفَتْنُكُوا and ٍفَتْنُكُوا، and طَلَّعُ and ٌطَلَّعُ.

6. The difference caused by transposition: This happens when a word found in one reading is replaced by another word in another reading. For instance، ٌوَكَانَتْ سَكِيرَةٌ أَعْقِزٌ بِالْمُوَذِّبِ and ٌوَكَانَتْ سَكِيرَةٌ الْمُذِّبِ.

7. The difference caused by manners of reading: It includes variations in tafkhīm (velarization, making sound heavy)، tarqīq (making a letter sound soft)، imālah (inclination، bending the sound of a short vowel)، madd (prolongation)، qasr (to shorten)، hamz: hamzatation (providing a letter with hamzah)، izhār (clear pronunciation) and idghām (assimilation). It means that، by doing these، the actual word does not change but the mode of its pronunciation does change. For instance، the word، مُؤْسَسَة، is rendered as مُؤْسِسَة in one of the readings.

Anyhow، many readings were revealed incorporating these seven types of different renderings. This difference between them really made no difference in meaning. The latitude so given was aimed at making recitation easy.

In the beginning، people were not totally used to the style of the Qur'ān، therefore، many readings were permitted within the radius of these seven types. But، it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he would go through the entire revealed Qur'ān with Jibrā'īl during the month of Ramaḍān every year. The year he left this mortal world، that was the year he did so twice. This 'daur' or meticulous re-reading of the Qur'ān is called العرضة الأخيرة (last review). On this occasion، many readings were abrogated. Only readings retained were the ones which continue to stay preserved to this day with uninterrupted succession.

Sayyidnā ‘Uthman رضي الله عنه، during the period of his khilafah، arranged to have seven copies of the noble Qur'ān prepared in order to remove misgivings regarding the recitation of Qur'ān. He incorporated all readings in these seven copies by leaving the calligraphed verses of the noble Qur'ān without dots and desinences (the vowel-points) so that the text could be read in accordance with whichever reading one wished to follow from among the very readings cited. Thus most of the
readings merged into this script, and the readings that could not merge into the script were saved by him when he elected to have one copy written according to one reading, and another, in accordance with another reading. The community demonstrated such care and diligence in having the fondly-remembered readings collected in these copies that Qirā‘ah developed into a branch of knowledge in its own right, and there rose hundreds of scholars, reciters and memorizers of the Holy Qur’ān who spent their entire spans of life to keep it preserved and protected.

What actually happened was that when Sayyidnā ‘Uthman رضى الله عنه sent the seven copies of the noble Qur’ān to various areas, he had also sent particular reciters who could teach how to recite them. So, when these revered reciters reached their designated areas, they taught people to read the Qur’ān in accordance with their respective readings. These different readings spread out among people. At this stage, some people bequeathed their lives to memorize different readings, and in training others to continue the discipline. This is how the foundation of the 'science of readings' was laid and people from different parts of the Islamic world started turning to the masters of the discipline to achieve the highest of excellence in it. Some memorized only one reading, others did two or three or seven, or even more than that. In this connection, a standard rule was accepted as norm throughout the ummah and it was invariably followed everywhere. It stipulated that only such reading (qirā‘ah) will be accepted as being the Qur’ān which fulfils three conditions:

1. There is room for it in the script of ‘Uthmani’ copies of the Qur’ān.

2. It conforms to the grammar of the Arabic language.

3. It should have, provenly -- with sound authority, originated from the Holy Prophet صلی الله عليه وسلم, and be well-known among the masters of readings, that is, the Imāms of Qira’ah.

A reading which lacks even one of these three requirements cannot be considered as part of the Qur’ān. Thus a large number of readings continued to be reported in uninterrupted succession. Then, as a matter of convenience, it so happened that an Imām started giving
instructions in one, or some selected readings, and that particular reading became identified with his name. Then, scholars started writing books to collect these readings. So, Imam Abu ‘Ubayd Qasim ibn Sallam, Imam Abū Ḥātim Sijistānī, Qāṭī Ismā‘īl and Imām Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī were the first among those who compiled books in this field which included more than twenty readings. Then came the great scholar, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (died 324 Hijrah) who wrote a book in which he had included readings from seven qāris (reciters) only. This book of his became so popular that these readings from the seven qaris became much more famous as compared with those of other qaris. In fact, some people got used to thinking that these are the only sound readings coming in uninterrupted succession. Although, the truth of the matter is that ‘Allāmah ibn Mujāhid has collected these seven readings in one place just by chance. He never meant that readings other than these were wrong or unacceptable. This act of ‘Allāmah ibn Mujāhid created yet another misunderstanding when some people began to think that سبعة أحرف (seven versions) means just these seven readings which have been collected by ibn Mujāhid. Although, it has been explained earlier that these seven readings are simply a part of sound readings, otherwise every reading that fulfils the above-mentioned three conditions perfectly is sound, acceptable and included within the seven versions (Hurūf) in which the noble Qur`ān was revealed.

The Seven Qāris

Anyhow, the seven qāris who became most famous as a result of this act of ‘Allāmah ibn Mujāhid are:

1. ‘Abdullah ibn Kathīr al-Dārī (died 120 Hijrah). He was fortunate enough to have seen Sayyidnā Anas ibn Mālik, ‘Abdullāh ibn Zubayr and Abu Ayyūb al-Ansārī رضي الله عنهم from among the Companions. His reading became more famous in Makkah al-Mukarramah. Well-known among those who transmitted his rendition are Bazzī and Qambal, may Allah have mercy on them all.

2. Nafi’ ibn ‘Abd Al-Rahmān ibn Abī al-Nu‘aym (died 169 Hijrah). He had the benefit of learning from seventy successors to the Companions who were direct disciples of Sayyidnā ‘Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās and Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنهم. His reading became more famous in Madinah and among those who transmitted
his rendition, Abū Mūsā Qālūn (died 220 Hijrah) and Abu Sa‘īd Warsh (died 197 Hijrah) are better known.

3. ‘Abdullāh al-Hisbī, better known as Ibn ‘Āmir (died 118 Hijrah). He was fortunate to have seen Sayyidnā Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr and Wāthilah ibn Asqā’ī رضی الله عنهم from among the Companions. He had learnt the art of Qur’ānic reading from Mughīrah ibn Shīhāb al-Makhzūmī who was a disciple of Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضی الله عنه. His reading gained currency mostly in Syria, and more famous among those who transmitted his rendition are Hīshām and Dhakwān.

4. Abū ‘Amr Zabbān ibn al-‘Alā (died 154 Hijrah). He has reported his rendition from Sayyidnā Ibl ‘Abbās and ‘Ubayy ibn Ka‘b رضی الله عنهم through Mujāhid and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. His reading became fairly well-known in Basra. Abū ‘Umar al-Dawrī (died 246 Hijrah) and Abū Shu‘ayb al-Sūsī (died 261 Hijrah) are among the more famous transmitters of his rendition.

5. Hamzah ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt, ex-slave of ‘Ikramah ibn Rabī‘ al-Taymi (died 188 Hijrah). He is a disciple of Sulayman al-A‘mash, who was a disciple of Yahyā ibn Waththāb, who was a disciple of Zīr r ibn Ḥubaysh, and he had the benefit of learning from Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī and ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضی الله عنهم. Among his transmitters, Khalf ibn Hīshām (died 188 Hijrah) and Khallād ibn Khālid (died 220 Hijrah) are more famous.

6. ‘Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd al-Asadiyy (died 127 Hijrah). Through Zīr r ibn Ḥubaysh, he is a disciple of ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضی الله عنهم and through Abū ‘Abd al-Rahman Sulami and al-Asadiyy, he is a disciple of Sayyidnā ‘Alī رضی الله عنه. More famous among the transmitters of his rendition are Shu‘bah ibn ‘Ayyāsh (died 193 Hijrah) and Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (died 180 Hijrah). Generally, the recitation of the Holy Qur’ān these days is made following the rendition of this very Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān.

7. Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ḥamzah al-Kisā‘ī (died 189 Hijrah). Among his transmitters, Abū al-Ḥarith Marwāzī (died 240 Hijrah) and Abū ‘Umar al-Dawrī (who is also a transmitter of Abū ‘Amr) are better known. The readings of the later three became more common in Kūfah.
Introduction

As it has been submitted earlier that several other readings, other than these seven, are sound and have been reported in uninterrupted succession. However, when the misunderstanding that sound readings are limited to these seven started gaining currency, several scholars (for example, ‘Allāmah Shadhā‘ī and Abū Bakr ibn Mihrān) collected, instead of seven, ten readings in one book. Thereupon, the term, "Al-qirā‘āt al-‘ashraḥ," or "Ten Readings" became famous. In these ten readings, the readings by the following three were also included in addition to those of the seven mentioned above:

1. Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī (died 205 Hijrah). His rendition was famous mostly in Bāṣrah.

2. Khaļf ibn Hīshām (died 205 Hijrah) who is also a transmitter of the rendition of Hamzah. His rendition was common mostly in Kūfah.

3. Abū Ja‘far Yazīd ibn al-Qa‘qā’ (died 130 Hijrah). His rendition found wider currency in Madīnah al-Tayyibah.

4. Abū al-Faraj Shambūdī (died 388 Hijrah) who was a resident of Bāghdād.

Some scholars have counted Sulaymān al-A‘mash among the fourteen qāris in place of Shambūdī. Out of these, the first ten readings are credited with uninterrupted succession as vouched by sound authority.

Other than these are Shādhdh or rare (Manahīl al-‘Irīfān with reference to Munjīd al-Muqrī’īn by ibn al-Jazrī).

The Preservation of the Holy Qur‘ān

In the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ

Since the noble Qur‘ān was not revealed all at once, on the contrary, different verses from it used to have been revealed as and when appropriate, therefore, it was not possible from the very beginning to write and preserve it in a book form. So, during the initial stage of Islam, major emphasis was laid on memory as a means of preserving the noble Qur‘ān. When Waḥy used to come in the very beginning, the Holy Prophet ﷺ would tend to repeat its words instantly so that they would be memorized well enough. Thereupon, Allah Almighty directed him through the verses of Sūrah al-Qiyāmah
that he need not repeat words in a hurry immediately as Wahy came. Allah Almighty would Himself endow him with a memory that he will be unable to forget the words of the Wahy once its descention has been completed. So it was that the moment the Qur'anic verses would come to him, they would be committed to his memory the next moment. Thus the blessed chest of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, was the most protected vault of the noble Qur'ân, in which there was no chance of even some common mistake, editing or alteration. Moreover, as a matter of additional precaution, he used to recite the Qur'ân before angel Jibrîl ﷺ every year during the month of Ramadân; and the year he left this mortal world he completed a cumulative review of Qur'anic recitation (daur) twice with Jibrîl ﷺ (Sahih al-Bukhari with Fath al-Bari, p. 36, v. 9).

Again, as it was, he would not restrict his teaching of the Companions to just the meanings of the noble Qur'ân, but had them memorize its words as well. Then, the revered Companions were themselves so enamoured with the desire to learn and remember the noble Qur'ân that everyone of them was anxious to get ahead of the other. There were women who claimed no mahr (dower) from their husband except that they would teach the Qur'ân.

Hundreds of Companions, freeing themselves from all other concerns, had devoted their whole lives for this purpose. Not only did they memorize the Qur'ân but also went on repeating it within their nightly prayers. When someone migrated from Makkah al-Mukarramah and came to Madînâh al-Tayyibah, says Sayyidnâ ‘Ubâdah ibn Sâmît رضي الله عنه, the Holy Prophet ﷺ would entrust him to one of us Ansârs so that he could teach Qur'ân to the newcomer. The Mosque of the Prophet was so filled with voices generated by learners and teachers of the Qur'ân that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had to ask them to lower their voices so that mistakes are not made (Manahîl al-Irfan, 1/234).

So, within a fairly short time, there was on hand a large group of the noble Companions who had the glorious Qur'ân all committed flawlessly to their memory. Included in this group were, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, persons like Sayyidnâ Ṭâlîhah, Sayyidnâ Sa'd, Sayyidnâ Ibn Mas‘ûd, Sayyidnâ Ḥudhayfah ibn Yâmân, Sayyidnâ Sâлим Mowla abî Ḥudhayfah, Sayyidnâ Abû Hurayrah, Sayyidnâ ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar, Sayyidnâ ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbâs,

In short, memorization of the Qur‘ān was given more emphasis in early Islam as this was the only protected and trustworthy method given the conditions of that time. The reason is that the number of people who could read or write was very limited in those days. The means of publishing books, such as the printing press, etc., were not there. Therefore, in that situation, if writing was taken to be sufficient, it would have neither been possible to spread out the Qur‘ān on an extensive scale nor to protect it reliably. In its place, Allah Almighty had blessed the people of Arabia with a memory of such dimensions that thousands of poetic lines would normally rest in the memory of one person after another. Ordinary, run-of-the-mill villagers would remember by heart their genealogies and those of their families, and unbelievably enough - even those of their horses! Therefore, this power of memory was well utilized for the conservation and protection of the noble Qur‘ān and it was through it that the verses and chapters of the noble Qur‘ān reached all over into the far corners of Arabia.

The writing of Wahy

Besides having the Qur‘ān committed to memory, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made special arrangements to have the Qur‘ān committed to writing as well. Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضي الله عنه says: 'I used to write down the words of Wahy for him. When Wahy came to him he felt burning with heat and the drops of perspiration would start rolling down on his body like pearls. When this state would go away from him, I would present myself before him with a shoulder-bone or a piece (of something else). He would go on dictating and I would go on writing. When I would be finished with writing, the sheer weight of copying the Qur‘ān would give me the feeling that my leg is going to break and I would never be able to walk. In any case, when I would be finished with writing, he would say: 'Read'. I would read it back to him. If there was a shortcoming, he would have it corrected and then let it be known to people (Majma‘ al-Zawaid with reference to Tabrānī 1/156).
Besides Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه, there were many other Companions who carried out the duty of committing the Wahy to writing. Some of those who can be specially mentioned, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, are Sayyidnā 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Sayyidnā Zubayr ibn 'Awwām, Sayyidnā Mu‘āwiyah, Sayyidnā Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, Sayyidnā Khālid ibn al-Walid, Sayyidnā Thābit ibn al-Qays, Sayyidnā Abān ibn Sa‘īd and others (Fath al-Bari, 9/18).

Sayyidnā 'Uthman says that it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he, soon after the revelation of a certain portion of the Qur’ān, would pointedly instruct the scribe of the Wahy to write it in such Sūrah after such and such verse (for details see Fath al-Bari, 9/18 and Zad al-Ma‘ad 1/30).

Since paper was not available in Arabia during those days, therefore, these Qur’ānic verses were mostly written on stone slabs, parchments, date branches, bamboo units, tree leaves and animal bones. However, at times, paper pieces have also been used (Ibid., 9/11).

Thus, there existed, during the times of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, a copy of the noble Qur’ān which he had arranged to be committed to writing under his supervision. Although, it was not there as a formally prepared book, but it certainly was there in the form of various units of available writing materials. Along with it, it was also the practice of some revered Companions that they would make copies of the Qur’ānic verses and keep them for personal recollection. This practice was common since the very early period of Islam. Accordingly, much before Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضى الله عنه embraced Islam, his sister and brother-in-law had in their possession verses of the Qur’ān which they had written and kept in book form (Sirah ibn Hisham).

Preservation: In the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه

However, it was characteristic of all copies of the noble Qur’ān made during the days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that they were either written on different available writing surfaces, for instance, a verse would appear on parchment, another on tree leaf and yet another on a bone; or they were not complete copies. One Companion would have only a single Sūrah in his record while someone else would have five or ten Sūrahs and some others will have only a few verses. Then there were Companions having in their possession explanatory sentences as well along with the text of the verses.
On these grounds, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی الله عنه, during his tenure of Khilafah, thought it necessary to bring together all these scattered units of the Qur’ān and thus have them preserved. The motives and the methods behind this great achievement of his have been explained in detail by Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی الله عنه when he says: "One day, soon after the battle of Yamamah, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr sent a message calling me in. When I reached him, Sayyidnā ‘Umar was present there. Sayyidnā Abū Bakr said to me: ‘Umar has come just now and he tells me that a large group of Ḥuffāẓ (those who had committed the Qur’ān to memory) have met their death as martyrs in the battle of Yamāmah. If the Ḥuffāẓ of the noble Qur’ān continue to meet their shahadah (martyrdom) in this manner, I am afraid a large portion of the Qur’ān may just go extinct. So, in my view, you should begin the task of having the Qur’ān collected together under your order'. I said to ‘Umar: 'How can we do what the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself did not do?' ‘Umar replied: 'By God, this is for nothing but good.' After that, this is what ‘Umar continued telling me, until I too started seeing the truth, and now, my view was the same as ‘Umar's. After that Sayyidnā Abū Bakr told me: 'You are young, and intelligent. We have no doubts about you. You have been working as a scribe of Wāḥī as well under the supervision of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, so you search and collect the verses of the noble Qur’ān.'"

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit says: "By God, had these blessed people commanded me to haul some mountain, that would have been much less weightier than this duty of collecting the Qur’ān. I said to them: 'How are you doing something that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did not do?' Sayyidnā Abū Bakr said: 'By God, this is good, nothing but good.' After that, this is what Sayyidnā Abū Bakr kept saying to me again and again until Allah Almighty put my heart at rest for the same view that was the view of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. Consequently, I started searching for the Verses of the Qur’ān and it was from the branches of date palms, slabs of stones and hearts of people that I finally collected the noble Qur’ān." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'ān)

At this point while we are dealing with the process of the collection of the Qur’ān, we should have a clear perception of the method used by
Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضي الله عنه. As mentioned earlier, he was himself a Ḥafiz of the Qur'ān, therefore, he could have written down the whole Qur'ān from his memory. In addition to that, there were hundreds of Huffāz (memorizers of the Qur'ān: plural of Ḥafiz) present at that time; the noble Qur'ān could have still been written down by entrusting the duty to a selected group from out of them.

Also, the copies of the noble Qur'ān committed to writing during the times of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم could have been used by Sayyidnā Zayd to make his copy of the Qur'ān. But he, guided by his caution and concern, did not limit himself to any one of the many methods available. On the contrary, by using all these methods simultaneously, he did not allow any verse to be included in his master copy of the Qur'ān unless he received written and verbal testimonies proving its uninterrupted succession. In addition to that, the verses that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had arranged to be written under his supervision, were still preserved by the Companions. Sayyidnā Zayd collected them together so that the new copy be made from them. Consequently, a public proclamation was made to the effect that anyone possessing any number of written verses of the noble Qur'ān should bring them over to Sayyidnā Zayd. When a written verse was brought to him by someone, he used to verify its authenticity by the following four methods:

(1) To begin with, he tested its reliability against his own memory.

(2) Then, Sayyidnā 'Umar too was a Ḥafiz of Qur'ān, and as proved by reliable reports, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه had assigned him too to work with Sayyidnā Zayd on this project. When someone came with some verse, Sayyidnā Zayd and Sayyidnā 'Umar used to receive it jointly (Fath al-Bari with reference to ibn Abi Dawud).

(3) No written verse was accepted until such time that two trustworthy witnesses had testified to the fact that the particular verse was written in the presence of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم (al-Itqan, 1/10)

(4) After that, these verses in writing were collated with collections that different Companions had prepared for themselves (al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān, by Zarkashi, 1/238).

If this functional methodology behind the collection of the Qur'ān
during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی الله عنه is kept in mind, it would become perfectly simple to understand what Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thabit meant when he said: "I found the last verses of Sūrah al-Barā'ah beginning with: لَقَدْ جَاءَنَا رُسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ﴿1﴾ with Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضی الله عنه only. They were not found with anyone else except him."

This never means that no person other than Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضی الله عنه remembered these verses, or somebody else did not have these in the written form, or anyone other than him did not know of their being part of the Qur'ān. On the contrary, it means that these verses were not found with anyone from among those who were coming along with different verses written as dictated by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Otherwise, as far as the fact of these verses being part of the Qur'ān is concerned, everyone knew it in an uninterrupted succession. There were hundreds of Companions who remembered it as well. Moreover, these were available in writing with Companions who possessed complete collections of the Qur'ānic verses. But, among those written separately under the supervision of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, this verse was found only with Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضی الله عنه and not with anyone else (al-Burhan, 1/234-45).

So, in every way possible, it was with great caution and concern that Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی الله عنه, by collecting the Qur'ānic verses, wrote them out in an organized form on pages of paper (al-Itqan, 1/60).

But, each Surah was written in separate folios, therefore, this copy was composed of many folios. In the terminology of Qur'ānic Studies, this copy is called the "Umm" (literally, 'the mother', meaning 'the original') and it had the following features:

1. In this copy, the Qur'ānic verses were indeed arranged in accordance with the order identified by the Holy Prophet صلی الله علیه و سلم, but the Sūrahās were not so arranged, rather they were written separately (Ibid).

2. Incorporated in this copy were all seven Hurūf (versions) of the Qur'ān (which have been explained earlier). (Manhil al-Irfan, 1/246 and Tarikh al-Qur'ān by al-Kurdy, p. 28)
3. Collected here were all verses the recitation of which has not been abrogated.

4. The purpose of having this copy made in writing was to prepare an organized document with the collective endorsement of the whole ummah, so that, reference can be made to it when needed.

These folios committed to writing on the orders of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی الله عنه remained with him during his life-time. Then, they remained with Sayyidnā ʿUmar رضی الله عنه. After the martyrdom of Sayyidnā ʿUmar, they were transferred to the custody of Umm al-Muʿminīn Sayyidah Ḥafṣah رضی الله عنها. After the death of Sayyidah Ḥafṣah رضی الله عنها, Mārwan ibn al-Ḥakam had these burnt since the copies of Qurʿān ordered by Sayyidnā ʿUthmān رضی الله عنه were ready at that time, and a consensus of the ummah had already been reached to the effect that following these copies of the Qurʿān, in script and arrangement of Sūrahs, was obligatory. Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam thought it inadvisable to let any copy which was contrary to this script and arrangement remain in existence (Fath al-Bari, 9/16).

Preservation: In the period of Sayyidnā ʿUthmān رضی الله عنه

When Sayyidnā ʿUthmān رضی الله عنه became Khalīfah, Islam had grown out of Arabia reaching into the far-flung areas of Byzantium and Iran. As people from new areas embraced Islam, they would learn the noble Qurʿān from the Mujahīdīn of Islam or from the traders because of whom they had found the blessing of Islam. On the other side, you have already read that the noble Qurʿān was revealed incorporating seven versions with various readings, and different Sahābah (Companions) had learnt it from the Holy Prophet ﷺ in accordance with different readings, therefore, every Companion taught Qurʿān to his disciples in accordance with that particular reading which they had themselves learnt from the Holy Prophet صلی الله عليه وسلم. In this manner, this difference in readings reached far-out countries. Until such time that people knew that the noble Qurʿān has been revealed incorporating seven Ḥurūf (versions) no harm was done by this difference. However, when this difference reached those far-out countries, and the fact that the noble Qurʿān has been revealed incorporating different readings was not fully publicised there, disputes among people started showing up. Some people began to insist on their reading as correct and that of others as incorrect. On
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the one hand, these disputes posed the danger that people would fall into the grave error of declaring the readings of the noble Qur'ān which have followed in uninterrupted succession as incorrect. On the other hand, there was no such standard copy available throughout the Islamic world which could become the rallying authority for the entire ummah, except, of course, the copy committed to writing by Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضي الله عنه which was there in Madīnah. Since other copies were written individually, and in them, there was no provision to incorporate all the readings, therefore, the only reliable method to resolve these disputes was that copies which incorporate all valid readings be spread out all over the Islamic world, and then, by seeing them it could be decided as to which reading is correct and which, incorrect. Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضي الله عنه accomplished this very remarkable feat during the period of his Khilāfah.

Details of this feat, as given in hadīth narrations, inform us that Sayyidnā Hudhayfah ibn Yāmān رضي الله عنه was engaged in jiḥād on the Armenian-Azerbaijan front. There he noticed that differences were rising among people about readings of the noble Qur'ān. So, on his return to Madīnah, he went straight to Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضي الله عنه and once there, he pleaded: 'Yā Amīr al-Mu'minin! Before this Ummah falls a prey to differences in the Book of Allah like the Jews and Christians, you should do something about it.' Sayyidnā 'Uthmān asked: 'What is the matter?' In reply, Sayyidnā Hudhayfah said: 'I was on a jiḥād mission fighting on the Armenian front. There I saw people of Syria following the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b which would not be familiar to the people of 'Irāq, and the people of Iran follow the reading of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd which would not be familiar to the people of Syria. As a result of this, they are charging each other of being kāfirs.'

In fact, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضي الله عنه had himself sensed the danger much earlier. He was told that there were cases right there in Madīnah al-Tayyibah itself where a teacher of the noble Qur'ān would teach the text to his disciples in accordance with one reading, and another teacher would do so in accordance with another reading. In this way, when the disciples of different teachers came together, differences would crop up between them, and there were occasions when this difference would extend to teachers, and they too, would declare each other's reading to be incorrect. When Sayyidnā
Hudhayfah ibn Yamān too invited his attention to this danger, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān convened a meeting of some highly-regarded Companions and sought their advice. He said: 'I have been informed that there are people who say to each other things like - "my reading is better than yours" - and this could touch the extreme limits of kufr. So, what is your opinion in this connection?' The Companions themselves asked Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān: 'What are your own thoughts on this subject?' Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān said: 'I believe we should unite everyone on one Book so that we face no difference or division.' The Companions, approving of this opinion, supported Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān.

Consequently, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān gathered people together and delivered a sermon and in it he said: 'You who live so close to me in Madīnah, if you can falsify each other and differ with each other in respect of the readings of the noble Qur’ān, it is quite obvious that those who are far away from me will be indulging in falsification and disputation on a much larger scale. Therefore, let everyone get together and come up with a copy of the Qur’ān following which becomes obligatory for all.'

With this in view, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān sent a message to Sayyidah Ḥafṣah requesting her to let them have the blessed folios of the Qur’ānic text (prepared under the orders of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr which she had in her custody). He promised that these will be returned to her after copies have been made. Sayyidah Ḥafṣah sent these pages of the Qur’ān to Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān. He then formed a group of four Companions which was composed of Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit, Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn Zubayr, Sayyidnā Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ and Sayyidnā ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Hārith ibn Hishām. This group was entrusted with the duty of making several copies from the original copy of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr’s Qur’ānic folios and making sure that Sūrahs too are arranged in order. Out of these four Companions, Sayyidnā Zayd was an Ansāri, while the rest of the three were Qurayshis. Therefore, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān said to them: 'When you and Zayd differ in respect of any portion of the Qur’ān (that is, differ as to how a certain letter should be written) you write it in the language of the Quraysh because the noble Qur’ān has been revealed in their very language.'
Basically, this duty was entrusted to only four distinguished persons named above, but later on, other Companions were also attached to help them out. (Fath al-Bari, pp. 13-15, v. 9)

They performed the following functions in connection with the writing of the Qur‘ān:

1. In the copy prepared during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه, Sūrahs were not placed in sequence, rather each Sūrah was written separately. They wrote down all Sūrahs in their proper sequence in a single copy. (Mustadrak, 2/229)

2. The verses of the noble Qur‘ān were written in a way so that all readings backed by uninterrupted succession could be incorporated within their script. Therefore, no dots or desinential marks were placed on them so that the text could be recited in accordance with all readings that are supported by uninterrupted succession. For instance, they wrote نسِرها in order that it could be read both نِسرها and نسرها, because both readings are correct. (Manahil al- ‘Irfan, 1/253-254)

3. Upto this time, there existed only one single copy of the noble Qur‘ān - complete, authentically standard and collectively attested by the whole ummah. These distinguished persons prepared more than one copy of this newly organized Mushaf (copy of the Qur‘ān).

It is generally believed that Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضي الله عنه had accomplished the preparation of five copies, but Abū Hātim Sijistānī says that a total of seven copies were prepared. Out of these one was sent to Makkah al-Mukarramah, one to Syria, one to Yamān, one to Bahrain, one to Başrah and one to Kūfah, and one was preserved in Madīnah al-Tayyibah.

4. To accomplish the task cited above, these revered elders basically worked through the pages of the Qur‘ān which were written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه. But, along with it, as a matter of added precaution, they adopted exactly the same method that was employed during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه. Consequently, assorted copies of texts committed into writing during the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ which were preserved by different Companions were recalled once again, and it was, by yet another collation with these, that the new copies were prepared. This time, a separately written verse of Sūrah al-Ahzab, من اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ reads:
found with Sayyidnā Thābit al-Anṣārī رضى الله عنه only. As we have explained earlier, it does not mean that nobody else remembered this verse because Sayyidnā Zayd رضى الله عنه has himself said: 'While writing the copy of the Qur’ān, I could not find the particular verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb which I used to hear the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recite.' This shows very clearly that the verse under reference was something Sayyidnā Zayd and other Companions remembered very well. On the other hand, it also does not mean that this verse never existed in writing anywhere, because this verse was obviously there in the pages of the Qur’ān written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. Besides that, obviously enough, this verse was also included in the copies of the noble Qur’ān which were written and preserved by the Companions on their own. But, like it was in the days of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه, this time too, all those scattered documents, available with the Companions in writing, were collected together, therefore, Sayyidnā Zayd رضى الله عنه and others with him did not write down any verse into these copies of the Qur’ān until such time when they did find it in those written documentations as well. As such, the fact was that other verses were found written separately too with several Companions, but this verse from Sūrah al-Aḥzāb was not found written separately with anyone else except Sayyidnā Khudhaymah رضى الله عنه.

5. After having these several standard copies of the Qur’ān prepared, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه had all copies personally kept by different Companions burnt so that all copies of the Qur’ān become uniform in terms of the script, incorporation of accepted readings and the order of chapters, leaving no room for any difference between them.

The entire ummah acknowledged this achievement of Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه with admiration, and the Companions supported him in this venture. The only exception is that of Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضى الله عنه who was somewhat unhappy about it, something that cannot be taken up here in its proper perspective. Sayyidnā ‘Alī رضى الله عنه says:

"Say nothing about ‘Uthmān unless it be in his favour because, by God, whatever he did in connection with copies of the Qur’ān was done in the presence of all of us, and with our advice and counsel." (Fath al-Bari, 9/15)
Steps Taken to Facilitate Recitation

After the afore-mentioned achievement of Sayyidnā ʿUthmān ʿAbdullāh, the ummah reached a consensus on the rule that it is not permissible to write the text of the noble Qurʾān using any method other than the ʿUthmānī Script. Consequently, all copies of the Qurʾān were, later on, written in accordance with this method, and the Companions and their successors, may Allah be pleased with them all, by bringing forth repeatedly, reproductions of the standard ʿUthmānī copies of the Qurʾān, helped spread the noble Qurʾān on a vast scale.

But, the copies of the noble Qurʾān were still devoid of dots and vowel points or desinential marks which made it difficult for non-Arabs to recite them freely. As Islam spread out wide and deep in non-Arab countries, the need to add dots and vowel points became acute, in order that people may be able to recite them easily. Several steps were taken to achieve this purpose. Their brief history is as follows:

Inclusion of Dots

The practice of placing dots over or under letters was just not there among early Arabs, however, the readers were so used to this style that they had practically no difficulty in reading dot-less writing to the limit that they would easily distinguish between doubtful letters by referring to the context. Specially, there was no possibility of any doubt in the case of the noble Qurʾān because its preservation did not rest on writing, rather on the strength of memories, pursuant to which, Sayyidnā ʿUthmān ʿAbdullāh had assigned Qāris, accomplished reciters of the Qurʾān, along with its copies sent out to various parts of the Muslim world so that they could teach how to read it.

There are different reports as to who first placed dots on the copy of the noble Qurʾān. Some reports say that this feat was first accomplished by Ḥaḍrat Abū al-Awsad al-Duʿālī (al-Burhan, 1/250). Some say he did this under the instructions of Sayyidnā ʿAlī (Subh al-Aʿsha, 3/155). There are others who have said that Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān, the Governor of Kufah, asked him to do this. Then there is yet another report which credits Ḥajjaj ibn Yūsuf with this feat who did it with the help of Ḥasan al-Basrī, Yaḥya ibn Yaʿmur and Naṣr ibn ʿĀṣim al-Laythī, may Allah’s mercy be upon them all. (Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 1/63)
Marks for correct reading

In the beginning, like dots, the Qur'ān did not have any desinential marks either. Here too, reports are at variance as to who placed desinential marks first. Some say Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘ālī did it first while others claim that this was accomplished by Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf through Yaḥyā ibn Ya‘mur and Naṣr ibn ‘Aṣim al-Laythī. (Ibid)

Keeping in view all reports in this connection, it appears that desinential marks were first invented by Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘ālī, but they were not like what they are today. Instead, placed there for fathah was a dot (•) over the letter, for kasrah a dot (____) under the letter, for dammah a dot (____) in front of the letter; and there were two dots (___ or ___ or ___) for tanwīn or nunnation. It was only later that Khalīl ibn Ahmad innovated the signs of hamzah (glottal stop) and tashdīd (doubling). (Subh al-A‘sha, 3/160-161) After that, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf requested Yaḥyā ibn Ya‘mur, Naṣr ibn ‘Aṣim al-Laythī and Ḥa- san al-Bāṣrī, may Allah’s mercy be upon them all, to simultaneously place dots and desinential marks on the text of the noble Qur’ān. On this occasion, the present forms of desinential marks were chosen to replace dots as expression of case signs. The purpose was to avoid confusing them with dots intrinsically belonging to letters.

Aḥzāb or Manazil

It was the practice of Companions and their Successors that they would complete the recital of the entire Qur’ān once every week. For this purpose, they had identified fixed portions for their daily recitation which is known as ‘ḥizb’ or ‘manzil’. Thus the entire Qur’ān was divided over seven ‘aḥzāb’ (plural of ‘ḥizb’) ‘manāzil’ (plural of ‘manzil’).
(al-Burhan, 1/250)

Ajzā’ or Parts

Today, the Qur’ān is divided over thirty ‘ajzā’ (plural of ‘juz’) or parts. This division in parts has nothing to do with the meaning of the Qur’ān. In fact, this division in thirty equal parts has been made to serve as teaching aid for children as, it will be noticed, there are places where the designated part ends with an unfinished statement. It is difficult to say with certainty as to who brought about this division of
the Qur'an in thirty parts. Some people believe that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضي الله عنه had arranged to have these written in thirty different folio-units while their copies were being made, therefore, this division dates back to his time for sure. But, this humble writer was unable to find any proof of this position in the writings of earlier scholars. However, 'Allāmah Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashi has written that the thirty parts of the Qur'an have been known all along and they customarily appear in copies of the Qur'an used in schools. (al-Burhan, 1/250; Manahil al-'Irfa', 1/402)

**Akhmās and A'shār: The sets of Fives and Tens**

Another sign used in Qur'ānic copies of early centuries was that they would write the word, *khams* (خمس: five) or its abbreviation (خ) after every five verses (on the margin); and the word, 'Ashr (عشر: ten) or its abbreviation (ع) after every ten verses. The former kind of signs were called 'Akhmās' (a pentad or group of five) and the later, 'A'shār' (a decade or group of ten). Consequent to another difference among early scholars, these signs were considered permissible by some, and reprehensible or *makrūh* by others. Saying, with any degree of certainty, as to who was the first to place the signs, is difficult indeed. According to one view, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf was its inventor, while another view credits this to an order of 'Abbasi Khalīfah, al-Ma'mūn (al-Burhan, 1/251). But, these two views do not appear to be sound since the idea of *a'shār* seems to be there during the times of the Companions. For example, *Masruq* a well-known Tabi'i, says that with Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه the placement of 'A'shār' markings in the copy of the Qur'an was *makrūh*. (Musannaf ibn Abī Shaybah, 2/497).

**Rukū' or Section**

Moreover, the signs of *Akhmās* and A'shār were abandoned later on but, yet another sign which continues on even to this day is the sign of *rukū' or section. This has been determined in terms of the contents of the noble Qur'an whereby a sign of *rukū'* (the letter ؚ on the margin) is placed at the conclusion of a statement. Inspite of his efforts, this humble writer was unable to locate anything authentic which would tell us as to who originated the *rukū'* and in what period. However, this much is almost certain that the purpose of this sign is to identify an average portion of verses which could be recited in one raka'ah. It is called 'rukū' so that *rukū'* (bending position) could be made in *ṣalāh*.
after reaching this point. There are 540 rukūʾat in the whole Qurʿān. So, by reciting one rukūʿ in every rakaʿah of tarawih, it is possible to complete the recital of the entire Qurʿān on the night of the twenty-seventh (Fatawa 'Alamgiryah, Fasl al-Tarawih, 1/94).

**Rumūz al-Awqāf: Stop Signs**

Another useful step taken to facilitate recitation and phonetically correct pronunciation (tilawah and tajwid) was to provide signs with Qurʿānic sentences which could tell the nature of making a stop (breathing) there. These signs are known as the 'rumūz' (signs) or 'alāmāt (symbols) of awqāf (stops). Their purpose is to help a person who does not know Arabic to stop at the correct spot during his recitation, and thus, avoid causing a change in meaning by breaking his breath at the wrong spot. Most of these signs were first invented by 'Allamāh Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Tāyfūr Sajāwandi, may Allah's mercy be upon him (Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Asr, 1/225). Details about these signs are given below:

 jb : This letter Tāʾ is an abbreviated form of al-waqf al-mutlaq. It means that the statement stands completed at this point. Therefore, it is better to stop here.

 jī : This letter Jīm is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-jāʾiz and it means that it is permissible to stop here.

 ẓ : This letter Zāʾ is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-mujawwaz. It means that making a stop here is correct all right, but the better choice is not to make a stop here.

 sā : This letter Ṣād is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-murakhkhhas. It means that the statement has not yet been completed at this point but, because the sentence has become long, here is the place to breathe and stop rather than do it elsewhere (al-Miyan al-Fikriyyah, p. 63).

 ṭ : This letter Mīm is an abbreviation of al-waqf al-lāzim. It means if a stop is not made here an outrageous distortion in the meaning of the verse is possible. So, it is better to stop here. Some phoneticians of the Qurʿān have also called this al-waqf al-wājib or the obligatory stop. But this is not 'wājib' of fiqh which brings sin if abandoned. In fact, the purpose is to stress that making a stop here is the most preferable of all stops (al-Nashr, 1/231).

 lā : This letter Lā is an abbreviation of lā taqif. It means 'do not
stop here,' but it does not imply that making a stop here is impermissible, because there are certain places bearing this sign where making a stop brings no harm and making an initiation from the following word is also permissible. Therefore, the correct meaning of this sign is: If a stop is made here, it is better to go back and read over again. Initiation from the next word is not approved (al-Nashr, 1/233).

As far as the origin of these signs is concerned, it stands proved beyond doubt that they were invented by 'Allamāh Sajāwandī. In addition to these, there are some other signs as well that appear in the copies of the Qur'ān, for instance:

مع: This maʿ is an abbreviation of "muʿānaqaḥ". This symbol is inserted at a place where a single verse has two possible explanations. According to one explanation, the stop will be made at one given place, while according to another explanation, this will be at another place. So, a stop can be made at either one of the two places, but once a stop has been made at one place, it is not correct to stop at the other. For instance, take the verse دلِّلُ مَنْ تُنَزِّلُهُ مِنَ الْتَّوْرَاةِ وَمَنْ تَحْكُمُهُ مِنَ الْمَجَالِمِ. If a stop is made here at the tawrāt and should a stop be made at the tawrāt, then it is not correct to stop at the tawrāt and should a stop be made at the tawrāt, then it is not correct to stop at the tawrāt. However, if a stop is not made at both places, that will be correct. It is also known as 'al-muqābalah'. It was, first of all, pointed out by Imām Abū al-Fadl al-Rāzī (al-Nashr, 1/237 and al-Itqan, 1/88).

سكته: This is a symbol for saktah. It means one should stop here breaking the sound but not the breath. This is generally inserted at a place where assimilated reading is likely to cause an erroneous projection of meaning.

رننة: At this sign of waqfah, one must stop a little longer than saktah (pause). But, breath should not break here too.

ق: This letter qāf is an abbreviation of qīla 'alaihi l'waqf. It means that some phoneticans of the Qur'ān identify a stop here while others do not.

قين: This word is qīf which means 'stop' and it is inserted where the reader may possibly think that a stop was not correct there.

صل: This is an abbreviation of al-wāṣlu awlā which means 'it is better to recite in assimilated continuity'.
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صل : This is an abbreviation of qad yuṣalū, that is, some stop here, while others like to recite on in assimilated continuity.

وفت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم : This is marked at places where some hadith report proves that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم stopped here while reciting.

The printing of the Holy Qurʾān

Before the advent of the printing press, all copies of the Qurʾān were calligraphed by hand, and for this purpose, there always has been, in every age, a large group of calligraphers whose sole purpose in life was nothing else except the calligraphy of the Qurʾān. The amount of hard work put in by Muslims in writing the words of the Qurʾān in ever better styles, and the way they demonstrated their intense emotional involvement with this great Book has a long and interesting history of its own which would need a regular book. This is not the appropriate place to go in such details.

With the invention of the printing press, the noble Qurʾān was first printed at Hamburg in 1113 Hijrah, a copy of which is still present in Dār al-Kutub al-Misīyyah. After that, several orientalists arranged the publication of the copies of Qurʾān but they were not received with much approval in the Muslim world. After that, Mawlay ʿUthmān was the first person among Muslims who had one manuscript of the Qurʾān printed at St. Petersburg, a Russian city, in 1787 A.D. Similarly, another manuscript was printed in Qazān also. In 1828 A.D., the Qurʾān was printed by lithography on stone slabs in the Iranian city of Tehran. After that, printed copies of the Qurʾān became common throughout the world. (Tarikh al-Qurʾān by al-Kurdi, p. 186, and Ulum al-Qurʾān by Dr. Subhi Saleh; Urdu Translation by Ghulam Ahmad Hariri, p. 142)

An introduction to the science of Tafsīr

Now we can turn to the requisites of 'Ilm al-Tafsīr or Exegesis. The literal meaning of 'tafsīr' in the Arabic language is 'to open' or to explain, interpret or comment. Technically, the science of tafsīr is a branch of knowledge in which the meanings of the Qurʾān are explained and its injunctions and wisdoms are described openly and clearly (al-Burhan). Addressing the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the Glorious Qurʾān says:
We revealed the Qur'an to you so that you explain to the people what has been sent down to them (16:44).

Once again, the Qur'an says:

"لقد من الله على المؤمنين إذ بعث فيهم رسلًا من أنفسهم يتعلمون عليههم آياته وتركبهم وتعليمهم الكتب والحكمة"

Surely, Allah did a great favour to Muslims when He sent a Messenger to them from among them who would recite His verses before them and purify them and teach them the Book and the Wisdom (3:164).

Keeping this in view, it should be noted that the Holy Prophet ﷺ did not only teach the words of the Qur'an, but he also explained these in details. This is why, on some occasions, the revered Companions had to devote years together in learning a single Surah; details will, inshallah, appear later on.

Until such time that the Holy Prophet ﷺ graced this mortal world with his presence, seeking the explanation of any verse was not much of a problem. When the Companions faced any difficulty, they would turn to him and get a satisfying answer. But, later on after him, it became necessary that the tafsir of Qur'an be preserved as a permanent branch of knowledge so that, along with the words of the noble Qur'an, its correct meaning as well stands protected and conserved for the Muslim ummah, and heretics and deviationists find no room there for distortion of its meanings. So, with the grace and tawfiq of Allah Almighty, this ummah accomplished this wonderful mission with such efficiency that today we can say without any fear of doubt or rejection that not only are the words of this last Book of Allah protected but also stands protected even that correct tafsir and explanation which has reached us through the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his Companions who were ever-prepared to sacrifice their lives for him.

In what ways the Muslim ummah protected and preserved the 'ilm (science) of tafsir? What extreme hardships they faced in this pursuit? How many stages did this struggle had to go through? All this has a long and fascinating history which cannot be taken up in the present
context (for this, please see ‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān, a detailed work on this subject by this humble writer). The intention here is to state briefly as to what are the sources of Qur‘ānic exegesis and how these sources have been utilized in explaining the noble Qur‘ān by all those countless books on ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr available in every language. These sources are six in number:

The Sources of Tafsīr

1. The Glorious Qur‘ān

The first source of the knowledge of tafsīr is the Holy Qur‘ān itself. Accordingly, it happens very often that a certain point which is brief and requires explanation is invariably clarified by some other verse of the Qur‘ān itself. For instance, there appears that sentence of prayer in the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah: ‘إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّكَ لَشَهِيدٌ’ that is, 'Guide us in the straight path - the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace...' Now it is not clear here as to who are those whom Allah Almighty has blessed. But, in another verse, they have been identified very clearly where it is said:

قُلْهُوَ لَكُمْ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ اللَّهُ عَلَّمَهُمُ مِّنِ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْعَلَمَ وَالصَّارِفِينَ وَالشَّهْدَاءَ

So, these are the people whom Allah Almighty has blessed, being the prophets, their true followers, the martyrs (in the way of Allah) and the righteous. (4:69)

Therefore, when respected commentators explain some verse, they first check to see if a tafsīr of this verse is already there elsewhere in the noble Qur‘ān itself. If it is there, they elect to go by it as their first choice.

2. The Hadīth

The words and the deeds of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are called Hadīth, and as it has been stated earlier, Allah Almighty had sent him with the Qur‘ān solely for the purpose that he should explain to people, openly and explicitly, the correct meanings of the noble Qur‘ān. Consequently, he discharged this duty with grace and excellence both by his words and deeds. In fact his whole blessed life is, after all, a practical tafsīr of Qur‘ān. It is for this reason that
respected commentators, in order to understand the Qur'an, have laid the greatest emphasis on Ḥadīth as the second source, and it is in the light of ahadīth that they have determined the meanings of the Book of Allah. However, because all sorts of narrations - sound, weak, and fabricated - are included in Ḥadīth, therefore research-oriented commentators do not accept a narration as trustworthy until it withstands the principles used in the scrutiny of Ḥadīth narrations. Hence, finding a hadīth report somewhere, looking at it, and then employing it to determine a certain tafsīr is not correct, because that report could be weak, even contrary to other stronger reports. This is really a very delicate matter, and venturing therein is the exclusive prerogative of those who have spent their years in mastering these fields of knowledge.

3. The Reports from the Ṣaḥābah

The noble Ṣaḥābah (Companions), may Allah be pleased with them all, had received their education directly from the Holy Prophet ﷺ. In addition to that, they were personally present on the scene when Wahy came, and they had themselves witnessed all circumstances and backgrounds of the revelation of the Qur'an. Therefore, naturally, the recorded statements of these blessed souls are far more authentic and trustworthy in explaining the noble Qur'an; the later people cannot take that place. Hence, in the case of verses the explanation of which is not found in the Qur'an or Ḥadīth, statements recorded from the noble Companions are given the highest priority. Consequently, if there is a consensus of Companions on the explanation of a certain verse, the commentators follow just that, and explaining it in any way, other than that, is not permissible. By the way, if the statements of Companions differ in the interpretation (tafsīr) of a certain verse, then the commentators who come later examine them in the light of arguments and determine as to which interpretation or explanation can be given preference. In order to handle this situation, there is an important corpus of rules and regulations already codified under the sciences of Usūl al-Fiqh, Usūl al-Ḥadīth and Usūl al-Tafsīr a detailed discussion of which is not appropriate here.

4. The Reports from the Tābi'in or Successors

After Companions (Ṣaḥābah) come the Successors (Tābi'in). The later are those who have learnt the tafsīr of Qur'an from the
Companions. Therefore, their statements too have great importance in the science of *tafsir*, although there exists a difference among scholars whether or not the statements of the *tābi‘īn* are decisive evidences in *tafsir* (al-İtqan, 2/179) but their importance is something which cannot be denied.

5. The Arabic Language

Since the noble Qur‘ān was revealed in the Arabic language, therefore, in order to explain the Qur‘ān, it is necessary to have a complete mastery over the language. There are several verses of the noble Qur‘ān in the background of which there happen to be just no attending circumstances of revelations, or any juristic or scholastic question, therefore, in their *tafsīr* or explanation, the sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم or the statements of the *saḥābah* and *tābi‘īn* are not reported. For that reason, the only means through which these can be explained is that of the Arabic language, and it is on the basis of language alone that they are elucidated. Besides that, should there be some difference in the *tafsīr* of a certain verse, then, in that case too, the science of linguistics is used to run a test of veracity between varying opinions.

6. Deliberation and Deduction

The last source of *tafsīr* consists of deliberation and deduction. The subtleties and mysteries of the noble Qur‘ān are an ocean with no shore, no end. Therefore, the more a person, who has been blessed with insight into the Islamic sciences by Allah Almighty, deliberates in it, the more he discovers ever-new mysteries and subtleties. As a result of this, commentators do present the outcomes of their respective deliberations as well, but mysteries and subtleties so described are found acceptable only when they do not go against the five sources mentioned above. So, should a person, while explaining the Qur‘ān, come out with a subtle point or independent judgment which is contrary to the Qur‘ān and Sunnah, Consensus (*İjmā‘*), Language, or the statements of Companions and Successors, or stands in conflict with another principle of Shari‘ah, that will then have no credence. Some mystics رحمهم الله had started describing such mysteries and subtleties in *tafsīr*, but investigative scholars of the *umma* did not consider these trustworthy because the personal opinion of any
person against the basic principles of the Qur'ān, Sunnah and Shari'ah has obviously no weight. (al-Itqan, 2/184)

The rules relating to Israelite reports

Judaica or Isrā'iliyyāt are narratives which have reached us through Jews and Christians. It may be noted that early commentators used to write down all sorts of narrations which reached them from an identified source. Many of these narrations were straight Judaica. Therefore, it is equally necessary to know what they really are. The reality is that some noble Companions and their Successors first belonged to the religion of the people of the Book, later on when they became Muslims and learnt the Qur'ān, they came across several events relating to past communities in the Qur'ān and which they had also read in the books of their previous religion. Therefore, while referring to the events mentioned in the Qur'ān they would describe other details before Muslims which they had seen in the books of their old religion. These very details have entered into the books of tafsir under the name of 'Isrā'iliyyāt'. Ḥafīẓ ibn Kathīr, who is one of the authentic research scholars, has written that there are three kinds of 'Isrā'iliyyāt':

1. Narrations the truth of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, the drowning of Pharaoh and and the ascent of Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام onto Mount Tūr (Sinai).

2. Narrations the falsity of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, it appears in Judaic narrations that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had become (God forbid) an apostate in his later years. Its refutation is proved from the Qur'ān. It is said there: 'Rūmā kā fīrār Sūlāyman 'allāh 'alaihi wa sallāhu 'alayhi wa salām kāfūrūra! It was not Sulaymān who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels' (2:102). To cite yet another example, it finds mention in Judaic narrations that (God forbid) Sayyidnā Dawūd عليه السلام (David) committed adultery with the wife of his general (Uriah), or, having him killed through all sorts of contrivances, ended up marrying his wife. This too is a balatant lie, and taking such narrations to be false is imperative.

3. Narrations regarding which the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the Shari'ah are silent, such as the injunctions of Torah etc., are subjects about which silence is to be observed as taught by the Holy Prophet ﷺ.
'Neither confirm, nor falsify'. There is, however, a difference of opinion among scholars whether or not reporting such narrations is permissible. Ḥāfīz ibn Kathīr has given the decisive word by saying that reporting these is permissible all right but doing so is useless because they cannot be taken as authentic. (Muqaddamah Tafsīr ibn Kathīr)

**A misconception about the tafsīr of Qur'ān**

Hopefully, details given above have made it clear that the tafsīr (exegesis or interpretation) of the noble Qur'ān is an extremely delicate and difficult undertaking for which getting to know the Arabic language alone is not enough. In fact, it is necessary to have expertise in all related branches of knowledge. Therefore, scholars say that a mufassir or commentator of the Qur'ān must have vast and deep knowledge of the syntax, etymology, rhetoric, and literature of the Arabic language, as well as, that of prophetic Traditions, principles governing jurisprudence and exegesis, doctrinal articles of belief and scholastics. The reason is that one cannot arrive at correct conclusions while explaining the Qur'ān unless there be that adequacy in these fields of knowledge.

It is regretable that a dangerous epidemic has overtaken Muslims lately whereby many people have started taking the sole reading ability of Arabic sufficient for the tafsīr (interpretation) of the Qur'ān. As a result, anyone who gets to read ordinary Arabic starts passing out opinions in the domain of Qur'ānic exegesis. Rather, it has been noticed on occasions that people having just passable familiarity with the Arabic language, and who have yet to master their Arabic to perfection, take it upon themselves to engage in explaining the Qur'ān following their whims, even going to the limit of finding faults with classical commentators. Bad come to worse, there are some subtle tyrants who would, by simply reading the translation, imagine that they have become scholars of the Qur'ān, not even feeling shy of criticising commentators of great stature.

It should be understood very clearly that this is a highly dangerous pattern of behaviour which, in matters of religion, leads to fatal straying. As regards secular arts and sciences, everyone can claim to understand that should a person simply learn the English language and go on to study books of medical science, he would not be
acknowledged as a physician by any reasonable person anywhere in the world, and certainly not trustworthy enough to take care of somebody's life unless he has been educated and trained in a medical college. Therefore, having learnt English is not all one needs to become a doctor.

Similarly, should anyone knowing English hope to become an engineer just by reading through engineering books, it is clear that no sane person in this world would accept him as an engineer. The reason is that this technical expertise cannot be acquired simply by learning the English language. It would, rather, need a formal training in the discipline under the supervision and guidance of expert teachers. When these stringent requirements are inevitable in order to become a doctor or engineer, how can the learning of Arabic language alone become sufficient in matters relating to the Qur'an and Ḥadith? In every department of life, everyone knows and acts upon the principle that every art or science has its own particular method of learning and its own peculiar conditions. Unless these are fulfilled, the learner's opinion in given arts and sciences will not be considered trustworthy. If that is so, how can the Qur'ān and the Sunnah become so unclaimed a field of inquiry that there be no need to acquire any art or science in order to explain them, and anyone who so wishes starts passing out opinions in this matter?

Some people say that the Qur'ān has itself stated that: \( لَعَلَّكَنَّ مُحَدِّثًا الْقُرْآنُ \) 'And surely We have made the Qur'ān easy for the sake of good counsel.' And since the noble Qur'ān is a simple book, its explanation hardly needs much of a support from any art or science. But this argument is terribly fallacious, which is, in itself, based on lack of intellect and plenty of superficiality. The fact is that the verses of the Qur'ān are of two kinds. Firstly, there are the verses that offer general good counsel, relate lesson-oriented events and introduce subjects dealing with taking of warning and acting on sound advice. Examples of this are the mortality of the world, the accounts of Paradise and Hell, the discourses likely to create the fear of God and the concern for the Hereafter, and other very simple realities of life. Verses of this kind are undoubtedly easy and anyone who knows the Arabic language can benefit from their good counsel by understanding them.
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It is in relation to teachings of this kind that, in the verse cited above, it was said that 'We have made them easy'. Hence, the word للذکر (for the sake of good counsel) in the verse itself is pointing out towards this meaning.

Contrary to this, the other kind consists of verses which include injunctions, laws, articles of faith and intellectual subjects. Understanding verses of this kind as they should be rightfully understood and deducing and formulating injunctions and rulings from them cannot be done by just any person unless one has the insight and permeating reach into the Islamic areas of knowledge. This is why the noble Companions, whose mother-tongue was Arabic and they did not have to go anywhere to get trained into understanding Arabic, used to spend long periods of time in learning the Qur’ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. ‘Allamāh al-Suyūṭī has reported from Imām Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥman Sulami that the Companions, who formally learned the Qur’ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم such as Sayyidnā ʿUthmān ibn ‘Affān and ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas’ūd and others, have told us that, after having learnt ten verses of the Qur’ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, they would not proceed on to the next verses until such time that they had covered all that was intellectually and practically involved in the light of these verses. They used to say:

فَتَعَلَّمْنَا الْقُرْآنَ وَالعِلْمَ وَالْعَمَلِ جَمِيعًا

We have learnt the Qur’ān, knowledge and action all in one.

(al-İqtan 2/176)

Consequently, as reported in Muʿaṭṭa’ of Imām Mālik, Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه spent full eight years memorizing Sūrah al-Baqara alone and, as in the Musnad of Aḥmad, Sayyidnā Anas رضي الله عنه says that 'one of us who would learn Sūrah al-Baqara and Sūrah ‘al-İmrān had his status enormously raised among us.' (Ibid)

Worth noticing is the fact that these noble Companions whose mother-tongue was Arabic, who had the highest degree of expertise in poetry and letters and who would have no difficulty in having very long qaṣīdah poems perfectly committed to their memories with the least of effort, why would they need, just to memorize the Qur’ān and
understand its meanings, as long a time as eight years, and that too, for mastering one Sūrah? The only reason for this was that proficiency in the Arabic language was not enough to have a learning of the noble Qur’ān and areas of knowledge bearing on it. In order to do that, it was also necessary to seek the benefit of the teaching and the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Now this is so obvious that the noble Companions inspite of having an expertise in the Arabic language and notwithstanding their being direct witnesses to the revelation, still needed the process of going through formal education at the feet of the blessed master in order to become the ‘alims of the Qur’ān, how then, after all these hundreds of years following the revelation of the Qur’ān, just by cultivating an elementary familiarity with Arabic, or by simply looking at translations, can anyone claim to having become a commentator of the Qur’ān? What a monstrous audacity and what a tragic joke with knowledge and religion! People who opt for such audacity should remember well that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

من قال في القرآن يغير علم فليتبوا مقعده في النار

Whoever says anything about the Qur’ān without knowledge, then he should make his abode in Hell. (Abu Daw’ud, as in al-Itqan, 2/179)

And he has also said:

من تكلم في القرآن برأيه فأصاب فقد أخطأ

Whoever talks about the Qur’ān on the basis of his opinion, and even if says something true in it, still he made a mistake.

(Abu Daw’ud, Nasa’i)

**Famous Commentaries of the Qur’ān**

Countless commentaries of the Glorious Qur’ān have been written since the blessed period of the Prophethood. In fact, no other book of the world has been served as much as the noble Qur’ān. Introducing all these commentaries is not possible even in some detailed book, much less in a brief introduction such as this. But, what we wish to do here is to introduce very briefly the major commentaries that have served as particular sources of Ma‘āriful Qur’ān and which have been cited there time and again. Although, during the period the above commentary was being written, many commentaries and hundreds of books were constantly referred to, but here, the purpose is to limit the introduction to commentaries the references to which will appear
repeatedly.

Tafsīr ibn Jarīr

The real name of this Tafsīr is Jāmī‘ al-Bayān and it was compiled by ‘Allamāh Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (died 310 Hijrah). ‘Allamāh Tabarī is a highly rated commentator, muḥaddith (ḥadīth expert) and historian. It is said that he kept writing for forty years continuously and used to write forty pages every day (al-Bi‘ḍayah wa al-Nihayah, v. 11, p. 145). There are charges of being Shi‘ah against him, but researchers have refuted this charge and the truth of the matter is that he is a highly regarded scholar of the followers of the Sunnah, rather one of the Shi‘ite scholars.

Being in thirty volumes, his Tafsīr enjoys the status of a basic source for later commentaries. In his explanation of the verses, he quotes different scholars and then goes on to prove the position which, according to him, is weightier, of course, with arguments and proofs. It must, however, be admitted that narrations of all sorts, sound and weak, have found a place in his commentary. Because of this, not every narration presented by him can be relied upon. In reality, he was aiming through his commentary to collect and compile all narrations that could become available to him, so that this collected material could be put to use later on. Conceded is the fact that he has given the chain of reporters along with each narration so that whoever wishes to investigate into the chain of narrators could do so and decide for himself if the narrations are true or false.

Tafsīr ibn Kathir

Ḥāfīz ‘Imād al-dīn Abū al-Fidā‘ Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī al-Shafi‘ī (died 774 Hijrah), a distinguished research scholar of the eighth century, is the author of this commentary. It has been published in four volumes. Here emphasis has been laid on explanatory narrations. A special feature is his criticism as ḥadīth expert on different narrations, and from this point of view, this book holds a distinct place among all books of Tafsīr.

Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī

Its full name is Al-Jāmī‘ li-Ahkām al-Qur‘ān. It was written by the famous learned writer and research scholar of Andalusia (Spain), Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abī Bakr ibn Farah al-Qurṭubī
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(died 671 Hijrah). He was a follower of the Maliki school of fiqh and was known all over for his 'ibadah and piety. The fact is that the basic objective of this book was to deduce juristic injunctions and rulings from the Qur'an yet, while doing so, he has also provided the explanation of verses, research into difficult words, discussion of diacritical marks and elegance of style and composition, and related Traditions and Reports in his Tafsir, and quite ably so. This book is in twelve volumes and has been published repeatedly.

Al-Tafsir al-Kabir

This is the work of Imam Fakhr al-din al-Razi (died 606 Hijrah). Its real name is Mafatih al-Ghayb, but is popularly known as 'Tafsir Kabir'. Imam Razi is an imam of the theology of Islam, therefore, great emphasis has been laid in his Tafsir on rational and scholastic debates and on the refutation of false sects. But, the truth is that this Tafsir is, in its own way, a unique key to the Qur'an as well. Furthermore, the pleasing way in which the meanings of the Qur'an have been clarified and the mutual link of the Qur'anic verses established, is all too praise-worthy. Most likely, Imam Razi himself wrote down his Tafsir as far as Surah al-Fath. Onwards from there, he could not complete. So, the remaining part of the Tafsir, from Surah al-Fath to the end, was completed by Qadi Shihab al-Din ibn Khalil al-Khawli al-Dimashqi (died 639 Hijrah) or Shaykh Najm al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammed al-Qamuli (died 777 Hijrah). (Kashaf al-Zunun v. 2, p. 477)

Imam Razi has particularly emphasised scholastic debates and the refutation of false sects in accordance with the dictates of his time, and while doing so, his discussions have become too lengthy at several places, therefore, some people have made the following comment on his Tafsir: 'There is everything in this (book) except the Tafsir.' But this comment is a terrible injustice to Tafsir Kabir. That which is the truth has already been stated above, namely, that this Tafsir enjoys a high rating as far as the resolution of the meanings of the Qur'an is concerned. But, there are places where he has explained verses of the Qur'an while moving away from the consensus of the ummah, however, such places are very thinly spread out in this book that goes on to eight volumes.
Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ

This was written by ‘Allāmah Abū Hayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalūsī (died 754 Hijrah) who was a master of syntax and rhetoric in addition to other Islamic fields of learning. As a result of this, his own Tafsīr is soaked in syntax and rhetoric. He places special stress on investigating into the words of every verse, the difference in structures and on points of eloquence.

Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān by al-Jaṣṣāṣ

This was written by Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī (died 370 Hijrah) who occupies a distinguished place among Hanafi jurists. The deduction of juristic injunctions and rulings from the noble Qur’ān is the subject of this book. Instead of explaining verses in serial continuity, he has taken up the juristic details as called for by verses which consist of juristic injunctions. Several other books have also been written on this subject, but this book enjoys a prominent place among those.

Tafsīr al-Durr al-Manṭhūr

This was written by ‘Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (died 910 Hijrah). Its full name is ‘al-Durr al-Manṭhūr fī al-Tafsīr bi l’Maṭhūr.’ Here ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has tried to collect all narrations about the tafsīr of Qur‘ān he was able to find. Several ḥadīth scholars such as Hāfiz ibn Jarir, Imām Baghawi, Ibn Mardūwayh, Ibn Hibbān and Ibn Mājah and others had already worked in this area on their own. ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has assembled narrations presented by all of them in this book. But, rather than refer to complete chain of authorities along with narrations, he has found it sufficient to simply name the particular author who has presented that narration under his authority so that, if needed, one could go back to the work and investigate into the ultimate authority. Since his purpose was to put together a mass of narrations, as a result of which, all sorts of narrations, sound and weak, have found their way into his book. Hence, every narration allowed entry by him cannot be considered reliable without investigation into its authority. There are occasions when ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī does indicate with each narration the degree of its authority as well. But, as he is known to be fairly easy-going in respect of ḥadīth critique, it is still difficult to fully rely on that too.
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Al-Tafsīr al-Mażhari

This was written by Qādī Thanāullah Pānīpatī (died 1225 Hijrah). He has named this *Tafsīr* as 'Al-Tafsīr al-Mażhari' after the name of his spiritual master, Mirza Mazhar Jān-e-Jānān Dehlavi. This *Tafsīr* of his is very simple and clear, and extremely useful to locate brief explanations of Qur'ānic verses. Along with the elucidation of Qur'ānic words, he has also taken up related narrations in ample details, and in doing so, he has made an effort to accept narrations after much more scrutiny as compared with other commentaries.

Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī

The full name of this *Tafsīr* is 'Ruh al-Ma'ānī fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-‘Azīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathani' and it was written by 'Allāmah Maḥmud al-Ālūsī (died 1270 Hijrah), the famous scholar of the last period of Baghdad, and comprises of thirty volumes. He has made his best possible effort to make this Tafsīr comprehensive. There are exhaustive discussions on language, syntax, letters, style, and on jurisprudence, articles of faith, scholastics, philosophy, astronomy, mysticism and related narratives of Traditions. He has made an attempt to leave no intellectual aspect pertaining to a verse unexplained. In the case of *ḥadīth* narratives as well, the author of this work has been more cautious as compared to other commentators. From this angle, this is a very comprehensive commentary, and no future venture in connection with the Tafsir of the Qur'ān can now afford to ignore its help.

⭐⭐⭐
AL-FĀTIHAH
(The Opening)
This Sūrah is Makkān, and comprises of seven verses

The Merits and Peculiarities of the Sūrah
This Sūrah (Chapter) of the Holy Qur’ān possesses a number of merits peculiar to it. Firstly, the Holy Qur’ān begins with it; the prescribed prayer begins with it; and even in the order of revelation this is the first Surah which was revealed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ in its complete form. Some verses of the Sūrahs Iqra’ (al-‘Alaq), al-Muzzammil and al-Muddaththir had no doubt been revealed earlier, but the first Sūrah to be revealed in a complete form is no other than this. Certain Companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ have reported that this was the first Sūrah to be revealed. Most probably they had meant that no Sūrah had been revealed in a complete form before this. Perhaps that is why the Sūrah has been named as 'Fātihatul-Kitāb' (The Opening of the Book).

The other important peculiarity of the Sūrah is that it is, so to say, the quintessence of the Holy Qur’ān, and the rest of the Qur’ān is its elaboration. The Sūrah may thus be delineated for two reasons. Firstly, all that the Holy Qur’ān has to say is, in one way or another, related to either of the two themes, faith (‘Iḥān) and virtuous deeds (al-‘amal al-salih), and the basic principles of the two have been