

# The Preservation of the Original Teachings of Islam

*A slightly edited excerpt from Ch. 2 of "Introduction to Islam" by Muhammad Hamidullah*

There can be nothing in common between the true and the false and there can be no two things in the world which can be as opposed to each other as these. In the ordinary materialness of everyday life, the evils of falsehood are obvious and acknowledged by all. Of course in matters of eternal salvation, of beliefs, and of the original teachings of a religion, the evil that falsehood effectuates transcends all other evils.

44. An honest and reasonable man will not experience difficulty judging whether or not a certain teaching is just and acceptable. In matters of dogma, however, it often happens that one judges first the character of the teacher before knowing his precepts. Then, if the teacher is found trustworthy, one can more easily be persuaded to acknowledge one's own defects in understanding parts of the teacher's teachings, rather than rejecting all his words outright. Particularly when the teacher has died, the authenticity of the teacher's words and teachings becomes more essential in such cases.

45. All the important religions of the world are based on certain sacred books, which are often attributed to Divine revelations. It would be pathetic if by some misfortune, one were to lose the original text of the revelation. The substitute would never be in entire conformity with what is lost. The Brahmans, Buddhists, Jews, Parsis and Christians might compare the method employed to preserve the basic teachings of their respective religions with that of the Muslims. Who wrote their books? Who transmitted them from generation to generation? Was the transmission from the original texts or merely their translations? Were not fratricidal wars caused damage to the copies of the texts? Are there no internal contradictions or gaps to which references are found elsewhere? These are some of the questions that every honest seeker of truth must pose and demand satisfactory replies.

## Means of preservation

46. By the time the 'great religions' emerged, man had not only relied on his memory, but had also invented the art of writing to preserve his thoughts. Writing was more enduring than the individual memories of human beings who, after all, had a limited lifespan.

47. But neither of these two means [memory and writing] is infallible when taken separately. It is a matter of daily practice that when one writes something and then revises it, that one finds more or less inadvertent mistakes, omission of letters or even of words, repetition of statements, use of words other than those intended, grammatical mistakes, etc., not to speak of changes of opinion of the writer, who also corrects his style, his thoughts, his arguments, and sometimes rewrites an entire document. The same is true of the faculty of memory. Those who have the obligation or habitude to learn by heart some text and to recite it later (especially when it involves long passages), know that sometimes their memory will fail during the recitation: they jump over passages; mix up one with the other; or do not remember the sequence; sometimes the correct text remains subconscious and is recalled later either at sometime or at the jogging of the memory at the urging of someone else or after consulting the text in a written document.

48. The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad of blessed memory, employed both methods simultaneously, each helping the other and strengthening the integrity of the text and diminishing to the minimum the possibilities of error.

## Islamic teachings

49. The teachings of Islam are based primarily on what the Prophet Muhammad said or did. He himself dictated certain texts to his scribes, which we call the Qur'an, while others were compiled by his companions, mostly on their private initiative, and these we call the Hadith.

## History of the Qur'an

50. 'Qur'an' literally means 'reading' or 'recitation.' While dictating this to his disciples, the Prophet assured them that it was the Divine revelation that had come to him. He did not dictate the whole at one stretch – the revelations came to him in pieces, from time to time. As soon as he received one, he would communicate it to his disciples and ask them not only to learn it by heart, (in order to recite it during the service of worship) but also to write it down and to multiply the copies. On each

occasion, he indicated the precise place of the new revelation in the text of until-then-revealed Qur'an. His was not a chronological compilation. One cannot admire too much the precaution and care taken for accuracy, if one takes into consideration the standard of the culture of the Arabs in that time.

51. It is reasonable to believe that the earliest revelations received by the Prophet were not committed to writing immediately, for the simple reason that there were then no disciples or adherents. These early portions were neither long nor numerous. There was no risk that the Prophet would forget them, since he recited them often in his prayers and proselytising talks.

52. Some historical facts give us an idea of what happened. 'Umar is considered to be the fortieth person to embrace Islam. This refers to the year five of the Mission (eight before the *Hijrah*). Even at such an early date there existed written copies of certain chapters of the Qur'an, and as Ibn Hisham reports, it was due to the profound effects produced by the perusal of such a document that 'Umar embraced Islam. We do not know precisely the time that the practice of writing down the Qur'an began, but there is little doubt that during the remaining eighteen years of the life of the Prophet, the number of the Muslims increased and so did the copies of the sacred text increase day by day. The Prophet received the revelations in fragments. Therefore, it is natural that the revealed text should mention the problems of the day. It may be that one of his companions would die and the revelation would be to promulgate the law of inheritance. It could not be that the penal law regarding theft, murder, or drinking wine, for instance, should have been revealed at that moment. The revelations continued during the whole missionary life of Muhammad, thirteen years at Mecca and ten at Madinah. A revelation would sometimes consist of a whole chapter, short or long, and at other times of only a few verses.

53. The nature of the revelations necessitated that the Prophet should repeat them constantly to his companions and revise on a continual basis the form in which the collections of fragments had to take. It is authoritatively known that the Prophet recited every year, in the month of Ramadan, in the presence of the angel Gabriel, the portion of the Qur'an up til then revealed, and in the last year of his life, Gabriel asked him to recite the whole of it twice. The Prophet concluded thereupon that he was going soon to depart his life. Whatever the spiritual meaning of his angelic

aid to the Prophet, his companions attended these public recitations (called '*ardah*, and the celebrated last presentation: the '*ardah akheerah*) and corrected their private copies of the Qur'an. Thus the Prophet used to revise the verses and chapters, in the fasting month, and put them in their proper sequence. This was necessary because of the continuity of new revelations. Sometimes a whole chapter was revealed at a stretch, whereas at other times, fragments of the same chapter came continually, and this posed no problems. This was not the case if several chapters began to be revealed simultaneously in fragments (*sunwar dhawat al-'adad* of the historians). In this latter case, one had perforce to note them provisionally and separately on handy materials, such as shoulder blades, palm leaves, slate-like stones, pieces of hides, etc.; and as soon as a chapter was entirely revealed, the secretaries classified these notes (*nu'allif al-Qur'an*) under the personal supervision of the Prophet and made a true copy (cf. Tirmidhi, Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Kathir, etc.). It is also known that the Prophet, who was in the habit of celebrating an additional service of worship every night during the fasting month, would sometimes (even in congregation) recite the Qur'an from the beginning to the end, completing its entire recital in the course of the month. This service (*Tarawih*) continues to be observed with great devotion to this day.

54. When the Prophet breathed his last, a rebellion was afoot in certain parts of the country. In quelling it, several people fell who knew the Qur'an by heart. The caliph Abu-Bakr felt the urgency of codifying the Qur'an and that task was accomplished a few months after the death of the Prophet.

55. During the last years of his life, the Prophet used to employ Zaid ibn Thabit as his chief amanuensis for taking dictation of the newly received revelations. Abu-Bakr charged this same gentleman with the task of preparing a true copy of the entire text in book form. Then there were several *hafizes*<sup>1</sup> in Madinah and Zaid was one. He had also attended the '*ardah akheerah* referred to above. The caliph directed him to obtain two written copies of each portion of the text from among those which had been collated with the recitation of the Prophet himself, prior to its inclusion in the corpus. At the direction of the caliph, the people of Madinah brought Zaid copies of the various fragments of the Qur'an which they possessed. The sources declare authoritatively that only two verses were such as had a single documentary evidence and that the rest were supported by the production of numerous copies.

56. The true copy thus prepared was called the *Mus' haf* (bound leaves). It was kept in his own custody by the caliph Abu-Bakr, and after him by his successor 'Umar. Meanwhile, the study of the Qur'an was encouraged everywhere in the Muslim empire. Caliph 'Umar felt the need of sending authentic copies of the text to the provincial centres to avoid deviations; but it was left to his successor, 'Uthman, to bring the task to a head. One of his lieutenants, having returned from far away Armenia, reported that he had found conflicting copies of the Qur'an, and that there were sometimes even quarrels among the different teachers of the Book on this account. 'Uthman caused immediately the copy prepared for Abu-Bakr to be entrusted to a commission, presided over by the above-mentioned Zaid ibn Thabit, for preparing seven copies. He authorized them to revise the old spelling if that was necessary. When the task was completed, the caliph held a public reading of the new 'edition' before the experts present in the capital from among the companions of the Prophet. He then sent these copies to different centres of the vast Islamic world and ordered that thenceforward all copies must be based only on the authentic edition. He then ordered the destruction of copies which deviated in any way from the text which was officially established.

57. It is conceivable that the great military conquests of the early Muslims persuaded some hypocritical spirits to proclaim their outward conversion to Islam for material motives, and to try to do it harm in a clandestine manner. They could have fabricated versions of the Qur'an with interpolations. The crocodile tears shed at the order of the 'Uthman, regarding the destruction of unauthenticated copies of the Qur'an, could have only been by such hypocrites.

58. It is reported that the Prophet sometimes abrogated certain verses that had been communicated to the people previously, and this was done on the strength of new Divine revelations. There were companions who had learnt the first version but who were not aware of the later modifications, either due to death or residence outside Madinah. These persons might have left copies to posterity which, although authentic, were outdated. Again, some Muslims had the habit of asking the Prophet to explain certain terms employed in the holy text, and noting these explanations on the margins of their copies of the Qur'an, in order not to forget them. The copies made later, on the basis of these annotated texts, could sometimes have caused confusion in the matter of the text and the gloss. In spite of the order of the caliph 'Uthman to destroy the inexact texts, there existed in the

3rd and 4th centuries of the *Hijrah* enough matter to compile voluminous works on the "Variants in the Qur'an." These have come down to us, and a close study shows that these "variants" were either due to glosses or mistakes of deciphering the old Arabic writing (which neither possessed vowel signs nor distinguished between letters of close resemblance by means of points, as is done now.) Moreover, different dialects existed in different regions, and the Prophet had allowed the Muslims of these regions to recite in accordance with their dialects, and even to replace the words which were beyond their kith and kin by synonyms which they knew better. This was an emergent measure of grace and clemency. However, from the time of the caliph 'Uthman, public instruction had advanced enough that it was agreed upon that those concessions would no longer be tolerated lest the Divine text be affected and variants of reading take root.

59. The copies of the Qur'an, sent by 'Uthman to the provincial centres, gradually disappeared in the succeeding centuries. One of them is at present in the Topkapi Museum of Istanbul and another incomplete one is now in Tashkent. The Czarist government of Russia had published this latter with a facsimile reproduction, and we see that these copies are identical in text to those otherwise in use. The same is true of other extant MSS of the Qur'an, both complete and fragmentary, dating from the first century of the *Hijrah* onwards.

60. The habit of learning the text of the entire Qur'an by heart dates from the time of the Prophet himself. The caliphs and other heads of Muslim states have always encouraged this habit. A happy coincidence has further reinforced the integrity of the text. In fact, from the very beginning, Muslims have been accustomed to read a work in the presence of its author or one of his authorised pupils and obtain his permission of further transmission of the text established and corrected at the time of study and collation. Those who recited the Qur'an by heart or had simply read the written text acted in the same manner as well. The habit has continued down to our own day, with this remarkable feature: that every master would indicate in detail in the certificate given by him, that not only was the rendering of his pupil correct, but also that it was in conformity with that which this master had learned from his own master, and that this last had affirmed that he in turn had learnt it from his master, the chain leading back to the Prophet. The writer of these lines studied the Qur'an at Madinah with Shaikh al-Qurra, Hasan ash-Sha'ir, and the certificate he obtained, notes among other things, the

chain of masters and masters of masters, and in the final act how the master had studied simultaneously from 'Uthman, 'Ali, Ibn Mas'us, Ubaiy ibn Ka'b and Zaid ibn Thabit (all companions of the Prophet) and that all had taught exactly the same text. The number of *hafizes* are counted by hundreds of thousands in the world today, and millions of copies of the text are found in all parts of the globe. And what deserves to be noted is that there is absolutely no difference between the memories of these *hafizes* and the texts employed.

61. The original of the Qur'an was in Arabic, and the same text is still in use. Translations have been made in all the important languages of the world, which is more or less serviceable to those who do not know Arabic. It is to be remembered, however, that it is in the original Arabic language that the text has come down to us, and that there has been no need to retranslate it into Arabic from some later translation.

62. These are some of the remarkable features of the Qur'an, the holy book of the Muslims: (1) a text in the original language (2) a codification under the auspices of the Prophet himself (3) a continued preservation by the simultaneous double control of memory and writing in addition to the study under qualified teachers (4) and this by a large number of individuals in every generation, and the absence of any variants in the text.

### **Contents of the Qur'an**

63. As stated previously, Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God, revealed to His messenger Muhammad. This messenger is only an intermediary for the reception and communication of the revelations. His role is neither that of an author nor of a compiler. If the Prophet Muhammad sometimes ordered the suppression of certain verses, that was done merely on the basis of a new revelation coming to him from the Almighty.

64. God is transcendent and beyond all physical perception of man. It is through the medium of a celestial messenger, an angel, that God causes His will and His command to be revealed to His human messenger, for the sake of mankind. God is above all bounds of language. We may in explanation employ the metaphor that the prophets are lightbulbs, and revelation the electric current -- when the current contacts the lightbulb, the lightbulb provides light according to its voltage and colour. The mother-tongue of a prophet is the colour of the lightbulb, whereas the power of the lightbulb, (i.e., the current and other things) are

determined by God Himself. The human factor then, is just an instrument of transmission and only an intermediary.

64/a. The Qur'an is, according to Islam, the Word of God, and the Qur'an repeats again and again that the believer must recite it day and night, whenever he can. The mystics have explained quite well that man travels towards God by means and through the Word of God (the word of God being the main road) just like an electric current is the 'road for light' when the lamp is connected to a power supply. This is not empty verbosity. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad had strongly recommended that one should read the whole Qur'an once a week. This has led to its division into seven parts called *manzils*. Further, the Qur'an has 114 chapters, called *surats*, each of which has a number of verses, called *aayats*. In Arabic, *manzil* means a station after the day's journey; *surat* means a walled enclosure, a room; and the root *awa*, from which the word *aayat* is derived, means to go to bed. 'Station,' 'room,' 'bed' – these are the three elements of the journey of the traveller, spiritual or temporal. The traveller undertaking a long spiritual journey has to halt at a station after the day's journey, and requires a room and bed to take rest before a further journeying the next day in his continuous sojourn towards the Eternal and Limitless!

65. The Qur'an is addressed to all humanity, without distinction of race, region or time. Furthermore, it seeks to guide man in all walks of life – spiritual, temporal, individual and collective. It contains directions for the conduct of the head of a State, as well as a simple commoner, of the rich as well as of the poor, for peace as well as for war, for spiritual culture as for commerce and material well-being. The Qur'an seeks primarily to develop the personality of the individual – every being will be personally responsible to his Creator. With this purpose, the Qur'an not only gives commands, but also tries to convince. It appeals to man's reason as it relates stories, parables and metaphors. It describes the attributes of God, Who is one, Creator of all, Knower, Powerful, capable of resuscitating us after death and taking account of our worldly behaviour, Just, Merciful, etc. It contains also the mode of praising God, of pointing out which are the best prayers, what the duties of man are with regard to God, to his fellow-beings and to his own self. This last because we do not belong to ourselves but to God, who has deposited our self with us. The Qur'an speaks of the best rules relating to social life, commerce, marriage, inheritance, penal law, international law, and so on. But the Qur'an is not a book

in the ordinary sense – it is a collection of the Words of God, were revealed, during the course of twenty-three years, to His messenger sent among human beings. The Qur’an employs graphically the word “king” for God, and “slave” for man. When a king desires to communicate a message to His slave, He sends a messenger, and gives His instructions to his envoy. Therefore, there are certain things understood and implied; there are repetitions, and even changes of the forms of expression. Thus God speaks sometimes in the first person and sometimes in the third. He says “I” as well as “We” and “He”, but never “They”. It is a collection of revelations sent occasion by occasion (and this fact must be recalled to the beginner) and one should therefore read it again and again in order to be able to grasp the meaning better. It has directions for every person, every place and for all time.

66. The diction and style of the Qur’an are magnificent and appropriate to its Divine quality. Its recitation moves the spirit even for those who only listen to it without understanding it. In passing, the Qur’an (cf. 17/88, 11/13, 2/23, 10/38) has, by virtue of its claim of a Divine origin, challenged men and jinn to produce collectively even a few verses equal to those of the Qur’an. The challenge has remained unanswered to this day.

## The Hadith

67. The narrations on Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, are called *Hadith*, whether they concern what he said or did, or even simply tolerated among his disciples if they said or did something in his presence. This tacit approval implies the permissibility of the conduct in question of the public.

68. The Qur’an has reminded us dozens of times about the juridical importance of the Hadith: “...obey God and obey the messenger...” (4/59), “...what the messenger giveth you, take it; and whatever he forbiddeth, abstain from it...” (59/7), “nor doth he speak of his own desire; it is naught save a revelation that is revealed” (53/3-4), “And verily in the messenger of God ye have a good example for him who looketh unto God and the Last Day and remembereth God much” (33/21-22). Thus, whatever the Holy Messenger commanded, it was, in the eyes of the community, the will of his Divine sender. There were cases when the Prophet, not having received a revelation, had made a personal effort to formulate an opinion through common sense. If God did not approve it, a revelation would come

to correct him. This internal process of the formation of the *Hadith* came only *post eventum* to the knowledge of the community, and had no practical consequences. But the Hadith has another importance, as under:

69. The Qur’an is often succinct; it’s the practice of the Prophet for one to look for the method of application, details and necessary explanations. As an illustration, the Qur’an has said merely, “*Establish the service of worship*,” without giving the details of the manner in which it should be celebrated. The Prophet also did not describe everything merely with words. That is why one day he told the faithful: **Look at me, see how I worship, and follow me.**”

70. The importance of the *Hadith* was increased for the Muslims by the fact that the Prophet Muhammad not only taught, but also took the opportunity of putting his teachings into practice in all the important affairs of life. He lived for twenty-three years after his appointment as the messenger of God. He endowed his community with a religion which he scrupulously practised himself. He founded a state, which he administered as supreme head, maintaining internal peace and order; heading armies for external defence; judging and deciding the litigations of his subjects; punishing criminals, and legislating in all walks of life. He married and provided a model for family life. Another important fact is that he did not declare himself to be above the ordinary law, which he imposed upon others. Therefore his practices did not only involve private conduct, but a detailed interpretation and application of his teachings.

71. As a man, Muhammad was modest and careful in his actions. As a messenger of God, he took all necessary and possible steps for the communication as well as the preservation of the Divine message, the Qur’an. Had he taken the same steps for the preservation of his own sayings, he would have been considered by some to be egotistical. For that reason, the *Hadith* literature is quite different from that of the Qur’an.

## Official documents

72. There is a part of the *Hadith* in which its very nature required that it should be written down, namely, the official documents of the Prophet.

73. From a passage of the *Ta’rikh* of at-Tabari, it appears that when the Muslims of Mecca, persecuted by their compatriots, went to Abyssinia for refuge, the Prophet gave them a letter of recommendation

addressed to the Negus. There are some other documents likewise written by him before the *Hijrah*, but when he left his native town to settle in Madinah and found invested in himself the state authority, the number and subject matter of his letters increased from day to day.

74. Shortly after his arrival in Madinah, he succeeded in establishing there a city-state which was composed both of the Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants. He then endowed that state with a written constitution, wherein he mentioned, in a precise manner, the rights and duties of the head of the state and its subjects. He also laid down provisions regarding the functioning of this organisation. This document has come down to us. The Prophet also delineated, in writing, the frontiers of this city-state. About the same time, he ordered a written census of the entire Muslim population, and al-Bukhari says the returns showed 1,500 individual registries.

75. Moreover, there were treaties of alliance and of peace settled with many Arab tribes. Sometimes two copies of the treaty were prepared and each party kept one. Letters-patent were awarded which extended protection to submitting chieftains and confirmed their previous proprietary rights on land and water resources, etc. With the extension of the Islamic state, naturally there was a certain amount of correspondence with provincial governors for communicating new laws and other administrative dispositions, for revising certain judicial or administrative decisions emanating from private initiative of officials, for replying to questions set by these officials to the central government, and regarding taxes, etc.

76. There were also missionary letters sent to different sovereigns which invited them to embrace Islam. Some dispatches were to tribal chieftains in Arabia, emperors of Byzantium and Iran, the Negus of Abyssinia among others.

77. For every military expedition volunteers were raised and written lists were maintained. Captured booty was listed in detail to enable an equitable distribution among the members of the expeditionary force.

78. Also the liberation, as well as purchase and sale of slaves, seems to have been recorded by written documents. At least three such documents emanating from the Prophet himself have come down to us.

79. An interesting incident may be mentioned here. On

the day of the capture of Mecca in the year 8 H., the Prophet had made an important pronouncement which included certain legal provisions. At the demand of a Yemenite, the Prophet ordered that a written copy of his pronouncement should be prepared and handed over to the person Abu-Shah.

80. We may also mention a case of the translation of the Qur'an. The Prophet had prescribed that every Muslim should celebrate his worship in Arabic. Certain Persians embraced Islam and they did not want to put off prayer till the time they should have committed to memory the Arabic texts or chapters of the Qur'an. With the approval of the Prophet, Salman al-Farsi, a Muslim of Persian origin knowing Arabic, translated into Persian the first chapter of the Qur'an for the immediate above-mentioned requirements of the Persian converts. They employed it till they learned the Arabic text by heart. (Cf. *Mabsut* of Sarakhsi, 1,37; *Nihayah Hashiyat al-Hidayah* by Taj ash-Shari'ah ch. salaah.)

81. Works incorporating these kinds of documents at the time of the Prophet cover several hundreds of pages.

82. It may be observed that the Prophet was particularly interested in public instruction, and he used to say: "**God has sent me as a teacher** (*mu'allim*)."

On his arrival in Madinah, his first act was the construction of a mosque, where a part was reserved for school purposes. This was the famous *Suffah* which served as dormitory during the night and as lecture hall during the day for all those who wanted to profit by this facility. In the year 2 H., when the pagan army of Meccans was routed at Badr and a number of prisoners captured, the Prophet ordered that all those prisoners who knew how to read and write could pay their ransom by giving instruction to ten Muslim boys each (cf. Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Sa'd). The Qur'an (11/282) also ordained that commercial credit transactions could only be executed by written documents that were attested by two witnesses. These and other arrangements contributed to the rapid increase of literacy among Muslims. It is not surprising that the companions of the Prophet grew ever more interested in the preservation by writing of the pronouncements of their supreme guide. Like every new and sincere convert, their devotion and enthusiasm were great. A typical example is the following: 'Umar reports that on his arrival at Madinah, he became contractual brother of a local Muslim (at the time of the famous Fraternisation ordered by the Prophet rehabilitating the Meccan refugees) and both of them worked alternatively in a farm of date palms. When 'Umar worked, his companion

visited the Prophet and reported to ‘Umar in the evening all that he had seen or heard in the presence of the Prophet, and when his turn came, ‘Umar did the same. Thus both of them kept abreast of what was happening around the Prophet, e.g., the promulgation of new laws, learning the questions of politics and defence, and so on. As to the written compilation of the Hadith, during the lifetime of the Prophet, the following incidents will speak for themselves:

### Compilation of the time of the Prophet

83. At-Tirmidhi reports: One day an Ansarite (Madinan Muslim) complained to the Prophet that he had a weak memory and that he forgot quickly the Prophet’s instructive discourses. The Prophet replied: **Take the aid of thy right hand** (i.e., write it down).

84. A large number of sources (at-Tirmidhi, Abu-Dawud, etc.) narrate that ‘Abdallah ibn ‘Amar ibn al-‘As, a young Meccan, had the habit of writing all that the Prophet used to say. One day his comrades rebuked him, saying that the Prophet was a human being, he could sometimes be happy and satisfied, at other times annoyed or angry, and that it was not desirable that one should note indiscriminately all that he uttered. ‘Abdallah went to the Prophet and asked him if one could note all that he said. He replied, “Yes.” To be accurate, ‘Abdallah persisted: “Even when thou art happy and satisfied, even when thou art angry?” The Prophet said: “Of course, by God! Nothing that comes out of this mouth is ever a lie.” ‘Abdallah gave his compilation the name of *Sahifa Sadiqah* (the book of truth). For several generations it was taught and transmitted as an independent work; it was later incorporated into the larger collections of the Hadith compiled by Ibn Hanbal and others. Ad-Darimi and Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam reported: Once this same .Abdallah had his pupils around him and somebody asked: Which of the two cities will be captured by Muslims first, Rome or Constantinople? .Abdallah caused an old box to be brought to him, took a book out of it, and after having turned its pages for awhile, read as follows: “One day when *we* were sitting around the Prophet *to write down* what he was saying, someone asked him: Which of the two cities will be captured first, Rome or Constantinople? He replied: The city of the descendants of Heraclius.” This narration definitely proves that the companions of the Prophet were interested even during his lifetime in writing down his very words.

85. More important is the case of Anas. Anas was one

of the rare Madinans who could read and write when he was only ten years old, was presented, by his devoted parents, to the Prophet as his personal attendant. He did not quit the company of the Prophet till he died. Remaining night and day in his house, Anas had the opportunity of seeing the Prophet and hearing from him that which was not practicable for others. It is Anas who reports the saying of the Prophet: “**Capture science by means of writing.**” In later times, one of the pupils of Anas reports: “If we insisted (another version states ‘if we were numerous’) Anas would unroll sheets of documents and say: These are the sayings of the Prophet of which I have *noted and also read out to him* to correct any mistakes.” This important statement speaks not only about the compilation during the lifetime of the Prophet, but also of its collation and verification by the Prophet. The case is cited by numerous classical authorities, such as ar-Ramhurmuzi (d. about 360 H.), al-Hakim (d. 405), al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463), and these great traditionists cite earlier sources.

### Compilations of the time of the companions of the Prophet

86. It was natural that the interest in the biography of the Prophet should have increased after his death. His companions left, for the benefit of their children and relatives, accounts of what they knew of the Prophet. The new converts had a thirst for the sources of their religion. Death was diminishing daily the number of those who knew first hand the *Hadith* and this was an added incentive to those who survived to pay closer attention to the preservation of their memoirs. A large number of works were thus compiled on the sayings and doings of the Prophet, based on the narration of his companions, after the death of the master. Of course that refers to first-hand knowledge.

87. When the Prophet nominated .Amr ibn Hazm as governor of Yemen, he gave him written instructions regarding the administrative duties he was to perform..Amr preserved this document, and also procured copies of twenty-one other documents which emanated from the Prophet which were addressed to the tribes of Juhainah, Judham, Taiy, Thaqif, etc. He compiled them as a collection of official documents. This work has come down to us.

88. In the *Sahih* of Muslim, we read that Jabir ibn .Abdallah compiled an opusculum [small work] on the pilgrimage of Mecca in which he gave an account of the last pilgrimage of the Prophet which also included his

celebrated farewell address which was pronounced on the occasion. Several sources mention also a *Sahifah* of Jabir, which his pupils used to learn by heart. Probably it dealt with the general sayings and doings of the Prophet.

89. Two other companions of the Prophet, Samurah ibn Jundab and Sa'd ibn .Ubadah, are also reported to have compiled their memoirs for the benefit of their children. Ibn Hajar mentions them and adds that the work of Samurah was big and voluminous. Ibn 'Abbas, who was very young at the death of the Prophet, learnt many things from his elder comrades, and compiled with this material numerous works. The chroniclers state that when he died, he left a camel-load of writings. Ibn Mas'ud, one of the greatest jurists among the companions, had also compiled a book on *Hadith*, and later his son 'Abd ah-Rahman used to show that to his friends (cf. al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*, ch. Ibn Mas'ud).

90. Al-Bukhari narrates that 'Abdallah ibn Abi Awfa, Abu Bakrah and al-Mughirah ibn Shu'bah taught Hadith by correspondence: If anyone desired information about the Prophet, they would reply in writing. They even took the initiative of communicating, to officials and friends for instance, decisions of the Prophet which bore on the problems of the day.

91. The following report is more instructive and has been preserved by numerous sources (such as Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's *Jami' Bayan al-Ilm*): 'One day a pupil of Abu-Hurairah told him: Thou hadst told me such and such a thing. Abu-Hurairah, who was apparently in his old age with enfeebled memory, refused to believe the *Hadith*, yet when his pupil insisted that it was from him that he had learnt it, Abu-Hurairah replied: If thou hadst learnt it from me, it must be in my writings. He took him by his hand and conducted him to his house, showed him "many books on the *Hadith* of the Prophet," and at last he found the narration in question. Thereupon he exclaimed: I had told thee that if thou hadst learnt it from me, it must be found in my writings.' It should be noted that the story employs the expression "many books." Abu-Hurairah died in the year 59 H. To one of his pupils, Hammam ibn Munabbih, he dictated (or gave in writing) an opusculum of 138 traditions about the Prophet. This work, which dates from the first half of the first century of the *Hijrah*, has been preserved. It enables us to make a comparison with later compilations of the *Hadith* and to confirm the fact that the memoirs of the ancients on the *Hadith* have been preserved with great care for the benefit of posterity.

92. Adh-Dhahabi (*Tadhkirat al-Huffaz*) reports: The caliph Abu-Bakr compiled a work in which there were 500 traditions of the Prophet, and handed it over to his daughter .Aishah. The next morning, he took it back from her and destroyed it, saying: "I wrote what I understood. It is possible however that there might be certain things in it which did not correspond textually with what the Prophet had uttered." As for 'Umar, we learn on the authority of Ma'mar ibn Rashid that during his caliphate, 'Umar once consulted the companions of the Prophet on the subject of codifying the *Hadith*. Everybody seconded the idea. Yet 'Umar continued to hesitate and pray to God for a whole month for guidance and enlightenment. Ultimately he decided not to undertake the task, and said: "Former peoples neglected the Divine Books and concentrated only on the conduct of the prophets. I do not want to set up the possibility of confusion between the Divine Qur'an and the Prophet's *Hadith*." Latest research shows that formal reports testifying to the writing down of the *Hadith* concern not less than fifty companions of the Prophet. The details would be too long to elucidate here.

### **Interdiction on the writing down of Hadith**

93. The last two narrations regarding Abu-Bakr and 'Umar are important inasmuch as they explain the real implication of the tradition which says that the Prophet forbade to write down his sayings. If there really was a general interdiction, these two foremost companions of the Prophet would have not dared to even think of the compiling of the *Hadith*; and when they renounced the idea of recording the *Hadith*, they would not have invoked a reason other than the interdiction of the Prophet to silence those who remained in favour of the idea. As far as we know, the only narrators who are reported to have said that the Prophet had ordered not to write down anything other than the Qur'an are Abu-Sa'id al-Khudri, Zaid ibn Thabit, and Abu-Hurairah. Neither the context nor the occasion of this direction is known. One should note that Abu-Sa'id al-Khudri and Zaid ibn Thabit were among the younger companions of the Prophet -- in the year 5 H., they were scarcely 15 years old. However intelligent they might have been, it is comprehensible that the Prophet prohibited them in the early years after the *Hijrah* from noting down his talks. As to Abu-Hurairah, we have just seen that he had himself compiled "many books on the *Hadith*." He is known in history as a very pious man, puritan and rigid. And it is unthinkable that a man of his character would have violated an express prohibition of the Prophet if he

had not heard later from the Prophet himself of the lifting of that prohibition. Abu-Hurairah came from Yemen in the year 7 H. to embrace Islam. It is possible that in the first days after his conversion, the Prophet ordered him to write down nothing but the Qur'an; and later, when he had mastered the Qur'an and was able to distinguish between the Divine Book and the *Hadith*, the reason of the interdiction ceased to exist. An important fact is that Ibn 'Abbas is also reported to have said, as his personal opinion, without reference to the Prophet, that the *Hadith* should not be compiled in writing. Nevertheless, as we have seen above, through his prolific power of writing, he surpassed those companions of the Prophet who had consigned the *Hadith* in writing. The contradiction between the word and the deed of those who are nevertheless known for their piety and scrupulous observance of the directions of the Prophet confirms our supposition that the injunction against writing down of the *Hadith* had a certain context which has not been preserved to us in the narrations, and that it had a limited scope. We must therefore seek to reconcile between the two contradictory orders of the Prophet rather than reject them both.

94. Three possible explanations come to our mind: (1) The interdiction might have been individual, and concerned those who had newly learnt the art of writing, or those who had newly embraced Islam and were hardly able to distinguish between the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. The interdiction was waived in case of the proficiency later acquired. (Abu-Hurairah, for instance, came from Yemen, and it is probable that he mastered the *Musnad* of Himyarite script and not the so-called Arabic script prevalent in Mecca and from thence to Madinah.) (2) It might have aimed only at forbidding writing of the *Hadith* on the same sheets of paper which contained chapters of the Qur'an, in order to avoid all possible confusion between the text and the commentary. Abu-Sa'id al-Khudri alludes to it; and we possess the formal injunction of the caliph 'Umar against this particular way of writing *Hadith*. (3) It might have concerned some particular discourses of the Prophet, for instance, the occasion when he made prophecies regarding the future of Islam and its great spiritual and political conquests; the injunction being motivated by the desire that the belief in predestination may not lead certain people to abandon the spirit of endeavour.

95. Other explanations may be illustrated, but these will suffice for the present.

### In later centuries

96. In the beginning, the compilations of the *Hadith* were short and individual, every companion recording his own recollections. In the second generation, when students attended lectures of more than one master, it became possible to collect several memoirs in larger volumes, noting carefully the difference of the sources. A few generations later, all the memoirs of the companions of the Prophet were collected, and still later an attempt was made to classify these traditions according to subject matter and deduce juridical rules and other scientific usages. It was required to learn by heart every *Hadith*, as in the case of the Qur'an, and to aid the memory, one utilized the written texts. Learning from qualified and authorized teachers was also a condition *sine qua non*. This triple method of preservation and security was rigorously observed by some, and less so by others. Hence the relative importance of the different masters and their trustworthiness.

97. Not long after the Prophet, the reporters of the *Hadith* adopted the habit of mentioning not only the name of the Prophet as the ultimate source of the knowledge in question, but also the means, one after another, of obtaining that information. Al-Bukhari, for instance, would say: "My master Ibn Hanbal has said: I have heard my master 'Abd ar-Razzaq saying: My master Ma'mar Ibn Rashid told me: I heard my master Hammam ibn Munabbih tell me: My master Abu-Hurairah told me: I heard the Prophet saying" such and such a thing. For every single report of a few words upon the Prophet, there is such an exhaustive chain of references relating to successive authorities. In a single chain of the narrators, which we have just cited, we find reference made not only to the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari, but also the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal, the *Musannafof* 'Abd ar-Razzaq, the *Jami'* of Ma'mar, and the *Sahifah* of Hammam dictated to him by Abu-Hurairah, the companion of the Prophet. We find the reports of this chain in all these works (which luckily have all come down to us) in exactly the same words. In the presence of a succession of such authoritative sources, for instance it would be a foolish presumption and slanderous to suggest that al-Bukhari had invented the narration and attributed it to the Prophet or fabricated himself the chain of the narrators, or simply collected the folklore, the hearsay of his epoch, and attributed it to the Prophet.

### Conclusion

98. It is by this triple safeguard, viz. committing to

memory as well as preserving at the same time by writing and studying the same under qualified teachers (in which each method helps the other and makes the integrity of the reports triply sure) that the religious teachings of Islam have been preserved from the beginning down to our present day. This is true not only for the Qur'an, but also the *Hadith* which consists of the memoirs of the companions of the Prophet, and concern the sayings, doings and tacit approval by him of the conduct of his companions. It may be remembered that as a founder of religion too, the Prophet Muhammad had had immense success. In fact, in the year 10 H., he was able to address at 'Arafat (Mecca) a gathering of Muslims (numbering some 140,000) who had come for pilgrimage (without counting many others who had not come to Mecca that year). The biographers of the companions of the Prophet affirm that the number of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad who had reported at least one incident of the life of the Prophet exceeds 100,000. There are bound to be repetitions, but the very multiplicity of the sources recounting one and the same event does add to the trustworthiness of the report. We possess in all about 10,000 reports (eliminating the repetitions) of the *Hadith*, on the life of the Prophet of Islam, and these concern all aspects of his life including directions given by him to his disciples in spiritual as well as temporal matters.

1. Hafiz -- those who know the whole Qur'an by heart