

NON-MUSLIM WRITERS ABOUT THE HOLY QURAN

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SIR WILLIAM MUIR ON COMPILATION OF THE HOLY QURAN

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

"Surely, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, and we will, most surely, safeguard it." (Al Hijr 15:10).

According to the Wikipedia, Sir William Muir (April 27, 1819 – July 11, 1905) was a Scottish Orientalist. He was born at Glasgow and educated at Kilmarnock Academy, at Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities, and at Haileybury College. In 1837 he entered the Bengal Civil Service. He served as secretary to the governor of the North-West Provinces, and as a member of the Agra revenue board, and during the Mutiny he was in charge of the intelligence department there. In 1865 he was made foreign secretary to the Indian Government. In 1867 he was knighted, and in 1868 he became lieutenant-governor of the North-West Provinces. In 1874 he was appointed financial member of the Council, and retired in 1876, when he became a member of the Council of India in London. He had always taken an interest in educational matters, and it was chiefly through his exertions that the central college at Allahabad, known as Muir College, was built and endowed. Muir College later became a part of the Allahabad University. In 1885 he was elected principal of Edinburgh University in succession to Sir Alexander Grant, and held the post till 1903, when he retired.

It should be remembered that Sir William Muir a proud Christian, as well as a missionary who is not very friendly poised towards the Prophet of Islam or the Holy Quran. Nevertheless, he left a detailed and mostly fair account of the compilation of the Holy Quran. Probably, little did he realize that he unknowingly has also become an important witness to the truth of one of the prophecies of the Holy Quran, "Surely, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, and we will, most surely, safeguard it." (Al Hijr 15:10).

This detailed description is from the Appendix of his book *Life of Mahomet from original sources*, 1878 edition.

The text of Muir is reproduced with complete honesty and precision, with a few exclusions, as mentioned. The footnotes are excluded and few of his negative assertions have been removed and the places indicated. Modern spellings of proper nouns have been substituted for ease of reading and the issues not relevant to the present discussion have been omitted. These places of omissions have also been indicated. He wrote:

"The divine revelation was the corner-stone of Islam. The recital of a passage from it formed an essential part of daily prayer public and private; and its perusal and repetition were enforced as a duty and a privilege fraught with religious merit. This is the universal voice of early tradition, and may be gathered also from the revelation itself. The Quran was accordingly committed to memory more or less by every adherent of Islam, and the extent to which it could be recited was one of the chief distinctions of nobility in the early Muslim empire. The custom of Arabia favored the task. Passionately fond of poetry, yet possessed of but limited means and skill in committing to writing the effusions of their bards, the Arabs had long been habituated to imprint these, as well as the tradition of genealogical and other tribal events, on the living tablets of their hearts. The recollective faculty was thus cultivated to the highest pitch; and it was applied, with all the ardor of an awakened spirit, to the Quran. Such was the tenacity of their memory, and so great their power of application, that several of Muhammad's followers, according to early tradition, could, during his life-time, repeat with scrupulous accuracy the entire revelation.

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However retentive the Arab memory, we should still have regarded with distrust a transcript made entirely from that source. But there is good reason for believing that many fragmentary copies, embracing amongst them the whole Quran, or nearly the whole, were made by Muhammad's followers during his life. Writing was without doubt generally known at Makkah long before Muhammad assumed the prophetic office. Many of his followers are expressly mentioned as employed by the Prophet at Madinah in writing his letters or dispatches Some of the poorer Makkah captives taken at Badr were offered their release on condition that they would teach a certain number of the ignorant citizens of Madinah to

write. And although the people of Madinah were not so generally educated as those of Makkah, yet many are distinctly noticed as having been able to write before Islam. The ability thus existing, it may be safely inferred that the verses which were so indefatigably committed to memory, would be likewise committed carefully to writing.

We also know that when a tribe first joined Islam, Muhammad was in the habit of deputizing one or more of his followers to teach them the Quran and the requirements of the faith. We are frequently informed that they carried written instructions with them on the latter point, and they would naturally provide themselves also with transcripts of the more important parts of the Revelation, especially those upon which the ceremonies of Islam were founded, and such as were usually recited at the public prayers. Besides the reference in the Quran to its own existence in a written form, we have express mention made in the authentic traditions of Umar's conversion, of a copy of the 20th Sura being used by his sister's family for social and private devotional reading. This refers to a period preceding, by three or four years, the emigration to Madinah. If transcripts of the revelations were made, and in common use, at that early time when the followers of Islam were few and oppressed, it is certain that they must have multiplied exceedingly when the Prophet came to power, and his Book formed the law of the greater part of Arabia.

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Such was the condition of the text of the Quran during Muhammad's life-time, and such it remained for about a year after his death, imprinted upon the hearts of his people, and fragmentary transcripts increasing daily. The two sources would correspond closely with each other; for the Quran, even while the Prophet was yet alive, was regarded with a superstitious awe as containing the very words of God; so that any variations would be reconciled by a direct reference to Muhammad himself, and after his death to the originals where they existed, or copies from the same, and to the memory of the Prophet's confidential friends and amanuenses.

It was not till the overthrow of Moseilama, when a great carnage took place amongst the Muslims at Yemama, and large numbers of the best reciters of the Quran were slain. that a misgiving arose in Umar's mind as to the uncertainty which would be experienced regarding the text, when all

those who had received it from the original source, and thence stored it in their memories, should have passed away. 'I fear,' said he, addressing the Caliph Abu Bakr, 'that slaughter may again wax hot amongst the reciters of the Quran, in other fields of battle; and that much may be lost therefrom. Now, therefore, my advice is, that you should give speedy orders for the collection of the Quran.' Abu Bakr agreed, and thus made known his wishes to Zaid ibn Thabit, a citizen of Madinah, and the Prophet's chief amanuensis: 'You art a young man, and wise; against whom no one amongst us can cast an imputation; and you were wont to write down the inspired revelations of the Prophet of the Lord. Wherefore now search out the Quran, and bring it together.' So new and unexpected was the enterprise that Zaid at first shrank from it, and doubted the propriety, or even lawfulness, of attempting that which Muhammad had neither himself done nor commanded to be done. At last he yielded to the joint entreaties of Abu Bakr and Umar, and seeking out the fragments of the Quran from every quarter, 'gathered it together, from date-leaves, and tablets of white stone, and from the breasts of men.' By the labors of Zaid, these scattered and confused materials were reduced to the order and sequence in which we now find them, and in which it is said that Zaid used to repeat the Quran in the presence of Muhammad. The original copy prepared by Zaid was probably kept by Abu Bakr during the short remainder of his reign. It then came into the possession of Umar who committed it to the custody of his daughter Haphsa, the Prophet's widow. The compilation of Zaid, as embodied in this exemplar, continued during Umar's ten years Caliphate to be the standard and authoritative text.

But variety of expression either prevailed in the previous transcripts and modes of recitation, or soon crept into the copies which were made from Zaid's edition. Mussulmans were scandalized. The Quran sent down from heaven was ONE, but where was now its unity? Hodzeifa, who had warred both in Armenia and Adzerbaijan and had observed the different readings of the Syrians and of the men of Iraq, alarmed at the number and extent of the variations, warned Uthman to interpose, and 'stop the people, before they should differ regarding their Scripture, as did the Jews and Christians.' The Caliph was persuaded, and to remedy the evil had recourse again to Zaid, with whom he associated a syndicate of three Quraish. The original copy of the first edition was obtained from Haphsa's depository, the various readings were sought out from the different provinces, and a careful recession of the whole set on foot. In case of difference between Zaid and his coadjutors, the voice of the latter, as

conclusive of the Quraishite idiom, was to preponderate; and the new collation was thus assimilated exclusively to the Makkan dialect, in which the Prophet had given utterance to his inspiration. Transcripts were multiplied and forwarded to the chief cities in the empire, and the previously existing copies were all, by the Caliph's command, committed to the flames. The old original was returned to Haphsa's custody.

The recension of Uthman had been handed down to us unaltered. So carefully, indeed, has it been preserved, that there are no variations of importance -- we might almost say no variations at all -- among the innumerable copies of the Quran scattered throughout the vast bounds of the empire of Islam. Contending and embittered factions, taking their rise in the murder of Uthman himself within a quarter of a century from the death of Muhammad, have ever since rent the Muhammadan world. Yet but ONE QURAN has been current amongst them; and the consentaneous use by them all in every age up to the present day of the same Scripture, is an irrefutable proof that we have now before us the very text prepared by command of the unfortunate Caliph. **There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text.** The various readings are wonderfully few in number, and are chiefly confined to differences in the vowel points and diacritical signs. But these marks were invented at a later date. They did not exist at all in the early copies, and can hardly be said to affect the text of Uthman.

Since, then, we possess the undoubted text of Uthman's recension, it remains to be inquired whether that text was an honest reproduction of Zaid's edition, with the simple reconciliation of unimportant variations. **There is the fullest ground for believing that it was so.** No early or trustworthy traditions throw suspicion upon Uthman of tampering with the Quran in order to support his own claims. The Sheeahs of later times, indeed, pretend that Uthman left out certain Suras or passages which favored Ali. But this is incredible. He could not possibly have done so without being observed at the time; and it cannot be imagined that Ali and his followers (not to mention the whole body of the Mussulmans who fondly regarded the Quran as the word of God) would have permitted such a proceeding.

In support of this position the following arguments may be adduced. First: When Uthman's edition was prepared, no open breach had taken place

between the Omeiyads and the Alyites. The unity of Islam was still complete and unthreatened. Ali's pretensions were as yet undeveloped. No sufficient object can, therefore, be assigned for the perpetration by Uthman of an offense which Muslims regard as one of the blackest dye.

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Third: At the time of the recension, there were still multitudes alive who had the Quran, as originally delivered, by heart; and of the supposed passages favoring Ali -- had any ever existed -- there would have been numerous transcripts in the hands of his family and followers. Both of these sources must have proved an effectual check upon any attempt at suppression. Fourth: The party of Ali shortly after assumed an independent attitude, and he himself succeeded to the Caliphate. Is it conceivable that either Ali, or his party, when thus arrived at power, would have tolerated a mutilated Quran -- mutilated expressly to destroy his claims? Yet we find that they used the same Quran as their opponents, and raised no shadow of an objection against it. The insurgents are indeed said to have made it one of their complaints against Uthman that he had caused a new edition to be made, and had committed the old copies of the sacred volume to the flames; but these proceedings were objected to simply as unauthorized and sacrilegious. No hint was dropped of alteration or omission. Such a supposition, palpably absurd at the time, is altogether an after-thought of the modern Sheeas.

We may then safely conclude that Uthman's recension was, what it professed to be, namely, the reproduction of Abu Bakr's edition, with a more perfect conformity to the dialect of Makkah, and possibly a more uniform arrangement of the component parts -- but still a faithful reproduction. The most important question yet remains, viz., Whether Zaid's collection was itself an authentic and complete collection of Muhammad's Revelations. The following considerations warrant the belief that it was authentic and in the main as complete as at the time was possible.

First -- We have no reason to doubt that Abu Bakr was a sincere follower of Muhammad, and an earnest believer in the divine origin of the Quran. His faithful attachment to the Prophet's person, conspicuous for the last twenty years of his life, and his simple, consistent and unambitious deportment as Caliph, admit no other supposition. Firmly believing the

revelations of his friend to be the revelations of God himself, his first object would be to secure a pure and complete transcript of them. A similar argument applies with almost equal force to Umar and the other agents in the revision. The great mass of Mussulmans were undoubtedly sincere in their belief. From the scribes themselves, employed in the compilation, down to the humblest Believer who brought his little store of writing on stones or palm-leaves, all would be influenced by the same earnest desire to reproduce the very words which their Prophet had declared as his message from the Lord. And a similar guarantee existed in the feelings of the people at large, in whose soul no principle was more deeply rooted than an awful reverence for the supposed word of God. The Quran itself contains frequent denunciations against those who should presume to 'fabricate anything in the name of the Lord,' or conceal any part of that which He had revealed. Such an action, represented as the very worst description of crime, we cannot believe that the first Muslims, in the early ardor of their faith and love, would have dared to contemplate.

Second -- The compilation was made within two years of Muhammad's death. We have seen that several of his followers had the entire revelation by heart; that every Muslim treasured up more or less some portions in his memory; and that there were official Reciters of it, for public worship and tuition, in all countries to which Islam extended. These formed a living link between the Revelation fresh from Muhammad's lips, and the edition of it by Zaid. Thus the people were not only sincere and fervent in wishing for a faithful copy of the Quran: they were also in possession of ample means for realizing their desire, and for testing the accuracy and completeness of the volume placed in their hands by Abu Bakr.

Third -- A still greater security would be obtained from the fragmentary transcripts which existed in Muhammad's life-time, and which must have greatly multiplied before the Quran was compiled. These were in the possession, probably, of all who could read. And as we know that the compilation of Abu Bakr came into immediate and unquestioned use, it is reasonable to conclude that it embraced and corresponded with every extant fragment; and therefore, by common consent, superseded them. We hear of no fragments, sentences, or word intentionally omitted by the compilers, nor of any that differed from the received edition. Had any such been discoverable, they would undoubtedly have been preserved

and noticed in those traditional repositories which treasured up the minutest and most trivial acts and sayings of the Prophet.

Fourth -- The contents and the arrangement of the Quran speak forcibly for its authenticity. All the fragments that could be obtained have, with artless simplicity, been joined together. The patchwork bears no marks of a designing genius or molding hand. It testifies to the faith and reverence of the compilers, and proves that they dared no more than simply collect the sacred fragments and place them in juxtaposition.

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Again the frailties of Muhammad, supposed to have been noticed by the Deity, all with evident faithfulness entered in the Quran.

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If the text of Abu Bakr's Quran was pure and universally received, how come it to be so soon corrupted, and to require, in consequence of its variations, an extensive recension? Tradition does not afford sufficient light to determine the cause of these discrepancies. They may have been owing to the various readings in the older fragmentary transcripts, which remained in the possession of the people; they may have originated in the diverse dialects of Arabia, and the different modes of pronunciation and orthography; or they may have sprung up naturally in the already vast domains of Islam, before strict uniformity was officially enforced. It is sufficient for us to know that in Uthman's revision recourse was had to original exemplar of the first compilation, and that **there is otherwise every security, internal and external, that we possess a text the same as that which Muhammad himself gave forth and used.**

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The conclusion, which we may now with confidence draw, is that the editions of Zaid and of Uthman were not only faithful, but, so far as the materials went, complete; and that whatever omissions there may have been, were not on the part of the compilers intentional. ... We may upon the strongest presumption affirm that every verse in the Quran is the genuine and unaltered composition of Muhammad himself, and conclude with at least a close approximation to the **verdict of Von Hammer: That**

we hold the Quran to be as surely Muhammad's word as the Muslims hold it to be word of God."

As the Christians do not believe the Holy Quran to be the word of God, the best testimony that they can offer, for preservation of the text of the Holy Quran is that it is precisely and surely the word of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{saw}. As soon as they accept it to be word of God they are no longer Christians but become Muslims.

The very fact that no other versions of the Holy Quran exist is an overwhelming evidence of its divine protection. Such a privilege is not enjoyed by any other scripture. **When we compare the process of compilation of the Holy Quran with the compilation and selection of the Holy Bible the truth becomes glaringly self-evident.**

DR. MAURICE BUCAILLE

"If we now examine the teachings of Muslim exegetes, we shall see that they present the Quran in quite a different manner. About fourteen centuries ago at a meditation retreat near Makkah, Muhammad received the first message through the Archangel Gabriel. After a long period of silence, the first message was followed by successive revelations spanning a period of some twenty years. They were not only transcribed while the Prophet was still alive, but also recited by heart by his early followers and later by the many believers who had gathered around him. After his death (i.e. 632 A.D.), the various elements were brought together in a book, henceforth known as The Quran. It contains the Word of God to the exclusion of any human addition. The manuscripts we possess from the first century of Islam authenticate today's text."

"Islam has its equivalent of the Gospels in the Hadiths. These are the collected sayings of Muhammad and the story of his deeds. The Gospels are nothing other than this for Jesus. The first collections of Hadiths were written decades after the death of Muhammad, just as the Gospels were written decades after Jesus. In both cases they bear human witness to events in the past."

Dr. Maurice Bucaille, a French surgeon, who was raised as a Christian. In the introduction to his book, *The Bible the Quran and Science*, he wrote:

“It was in a totally objective spirit, and without any preconceived ideas that I examined the Quranic revelation. I was looking for the degree of compatibility between the Quranic text and the data of modern science. I knew from translations that the Quran often made allusion to all sorts of natural phenomena, but I only had a summary knowledge. It was only when I examined the text very closely in Arabic that I kept a list of them, at the end of which I had to acknowledge the evidence in front of me: **the Quran did not contain a single statement that was assailable from a modern scientific point of view.**”

After an extensive review of what the Quran had to say about the issues pertaining to science, which included many scientifically-verified facts of that period, Maurice Bucaille concluded in the "General Conclusions" section of his book, "The Bible the Quran and Science":

“In view of the state of knowledge in Muhammad's day, it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Quran which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is, moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Quran as the expression of a Revelation, but also to award it a very special place on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides and the presence in it of scientific statements which, when studied today, appear as a challenge to human explanation.”

The whole text of this book is available online.

BOSWELL SMITH:

He writes in Muhammad and Islam:

"I boldly assert that one day the loftiest of human philosophies and the most veracious principles of Christianity will confess and bear witness that the Quran is the Word of God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

An unlettered and unlearned prophet was chosen by God to bring the Quran to mankind, a book that has in the course of history produced thousands of other books and treatises, brought libraries into being and filled them with books, and placed before mankind laws and philosophies and educational intellectual and ideological systems.

He arose in an environment where there was no trace of learning and civilization. In the whole of Madinah there were only eleven people who knew how to read and write, and in all the branches of the Quraysh, in Makkah and its environs, not more than seventeen people were literate.

The teachings of the Quran, which mentions knowledge and the pen in its opening verses, brought about a tremendous transformation. Islam proclaimed study to be a religious duty, and made the black ink of the scribe and the scholar to be superior to the red blood of the martyr.

Thanks to the teachings of the Quran and its emphasis on the cultivation of knowledge, countless scholars made their appearance and wrote innumerable books. Different scientific disciplines were derived from the Quran and spread across the world by Muslim thinkers. The world was illumined with the light of the Quran and the culture of Islam."

RVC BODLEY

He writes in his biography of the prophet Muhammad:

"Mohammed's upbringing, his background, his early pursuits have been discussed in these pages. None of these, however, presages the author of a code of laws, of religion, of morality; of a collection of old legends and stories; of a book of prayer, and the whole thing in this lilting, resonant Arabic. Perhaps it was all divine inspiration.

Mohammed used to say that there were greater miracles in nature than any which could be wrought outside of it and that the Koran was a miracle in itself. Perhaps he was right." ¹

At another place he writes:

"This book, known as the Koran, is available today as it was first written under Mohammed's supervision. For although the thoughts were scrawled at odd moments on pieces of parchment, on palm leaves, on bones and scraps of leather, the original chapters and verses were preserved. Neither was this done, as in the cases of the Old and New Testaments, centuries, or even decades, after the death of the author. Abu Bakr, Mohammed's immediate successor, had all the fragments of the Quranic 'manuscript' collected, transcribed, and bound. This copy was committed to the care of Hafsa, one of Mohammed's widows.

In 646 after Christ, fourteen years after Mohammed's death, Uthman, the third caliph, a friend and contemporary of Mohammed, had all unauthorized versions of the Koran, which enthusiastic disciples had compiled from memory, destroyed. **Only Hafsa's master copy was retained. From this, all subsequent editions were made.** Nothing has been added or subtracted since." ²

SIR THOMAS CARLYLE

The Holy Prophet Muhammad may peace be upon him was unlettered. The Holy Quran says: And you did not recite any Book before the Quran, nor did you write one with your right hand; in that case the critics would have had cause to doubt.³ This fact is certainly supported by the non-Muslim historians. The famous British Historian Sir Thomas Carlyle writes, "One other circumstance we must not forget: that he had no school-learning; of the thing we call school-learning none at all. The art of writing was but just introduced into Arabia; it seems to be the true opinion that Muhammad never could write! Life in the Desert, with its experiences, was all his education. What of this infinite Universe he, from his dim place, with his own eyes and thoughts, could take in, so much and no more of it was he to know. Curious, if we will reflect on it, this of having no books. Except by what he could see for himself, or hear of by uncertain rumor of speech in the obscure Arabian Desert, he could know nothing. The wisdom that had been before him or at a distance from him in the world, was in a manner as good as not there for him. Of the great brother souls, flame-beacons through so many lands and times, no one directly communicates with this great soul. He is alone there, deep down in the bosom of the Wilderness; has to grow up so, -- alone with Nature and his own Thoughts".⁴

BERNARD SHAW

Bernard Shaw who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925, said, "I have always held the religion of Muhammad in highest esteem because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capability to the changing phases of existence which can make it appeal to every age. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad, that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today."

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

To communicate the beauty of the Holy Quran to the non-believers let me quote from the experience of German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. He said, "As often as we approach the Quran, it always proves repulsive anew; gradually, however, it attracts, it astonishes, and, in the end forces admiration."⁵

As the Non-Muslim readers give up their preconceived notions and begin to understand the book better, they may certainly relive Goethe's experience. A French surgeon Maurice Bucaille certainly did. After an extensive review of what the Quran had to say about the issues pertaining to science, he concluded, "In view of the state of knowledge in Muhammad's day, it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Quran which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is, moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Quran as the expression of a Revelation, but also to award it a very special place on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides."

¹ RVC Bodley. The Messenger. Double Day and Company Inc, 1946. Page 244-245.

² RVC Bodley. The Messenger. Double Day and Company Inc, 1946. Page 2.

³ Al Ankabut 29:49

⁴ Sir Thomas Carlyle; Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship, page 287. Everyman's Library, New York 1965.

⁵ RVC Bodley. The Messenger. Double Day and Company Inc, 1946. Page 237.