

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Religious Measures of Uthman

Recension of the Holy Quran

To Uthman belongs the honor of undertaking the measure of the recension of the Holy Quran, and uniting the Muslim community on a standard text of the Holy Quran for all times.

The Holy Quran was revealed to the Holy Prophet in parts extending over a period of twenty-three years. Whenever the Holy Prophet received a revelation, he would dictate it to some person who would record it on some piece of leather, date skin or even bones and stones. The principal scribe of the Holy Prophet was Zaid b Thabit. Uthman also served as the scribe occasionally. Many companions committed the Holy Quran to heart and Uthman was one of them.

Many Huffuz (those who had learnt the Holy Quran by heart) died in the battle of Yamama during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. It was felt that it was necessary that the Holy Quran should be compiled in a book form for the guidance of the people. A compilation was thus prepared, and it was called Mashaf. In the time of the caliphate of Abu Bakr this compilation was kept in the custody of Ayesha. In the time of the caliphate of Umar this compilation was kept in the custody of Hafsa, daughter of Umar, and a wife of the Holy Prophet. In the time of Uthman, Hudhaifa who had been to different parts of the Muslim dominions came to Madina, and reported that the people of different regions had different readings of the Holy Quran. The people of Homs held that their reading of the Holy Quran was correct as they had learnt it from Miqdad an eminent companion. The men of Basra held that their reading was correct as they had learnt it from Abu Musa Ashiari. In Kufa, the people claimed superiority for their reading as they had learnt it from Abdullah bin Masud an authority on the subject. There were thus divergent readings of the Holy Quran. It was stressed that unless some attempt was made to unify the text, that was likely to be a cause of split among the people.

The question was considered by the Majlis-i-Shura, and it was decided that an authoritative standardized text should be compiled and no divergence should be permitted from the standard text. Uthman appointed a Committee comprising: Zaid b Thabit, Abdullah b Zubair, Saeed b Al 'Aas , and Abdur Rahman b Al Harith. This Committee was commissioned to prepare an authorized text. Copies of the Holy Quran in use in various parts of the dominions were collected and compared with the copy in the custody of Hafsa which had been compiled in the time of Abu Bakr. The Committee worked hard. All the discrepancies were reconciled, and an authorized standard edition was prepared. Uthman checked the compilation himself and finally approved it. Copies of this edition were prepared and supplied to all parts of the dominions. All previous copies in use in the various parts of the Muslim dominions were collected and burnt.

This was a measure of great importance and significance, and thereby Uthman did a great service to the cause of Islam. The books revealed to all previous prophets had been corrupted by the followers of the respective prophets. But for the measure undertaken by Uthman, the same fate would have befallen the Holy Quran. Uthman deserves the gratitude of the Muslims by this single service in preserving the Holy Quran in its original form free from any corruption. It is surprising that some of the critics of Uthman made this measure a matter of criticism against Uthman. They urged that the burning of the copies of the Holy Quran with a view to introducing a uniform text was a sacrilege. This criticism is entirely misconceived. The burning of the unauthorized texts could by no stretch of imagination be called a sacrilege. It was on the other hand a most pious act inasmuch as it united the Muslim community on an authoritative and standard text for all times

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