The Qur'an

The Qur'an (Arab. al-qur'ān = “the recitation”) contains the messages that were revealed to Muhammad by God through the Archangel Gabriel in successive phases of his life and which he proclaimed to his followers in the course of his prophetic mission between 610 and 632. According to the Muslim view, the Arabic text of the Qur'an is an exact copy of the original book of revelation, which has its place with God and which was passed down to the Prophet Muhammad (cf. Qur'an 3:7, 13:39, 43:2–4, 56:77–80, 85:20–21).

The Qur'an is held by Muslims to be God’s final and definitive revelation, replacing the Bible of the Jews and Christians. The Bible is also for Muslims a book of divine revelation (Christians and Jews are described as “People of the Book”), but they hold that where it differs from the Qur'an it has been corrupted in the course of history.

Muhammad’s revelations were not originally committed to writing. According to tradition, Muhammad could neither read nor write, and this fact is regarded as proof that the messages were given to him directly by the Archangel Gabriel. Some of his followers, however, attempted to record at least some of his words on whatever materials were available, parchments, pieces of wood, palm-leaves, leather, silk, bones, etc.

After the move from Mecca to Medina (622), Muhammad commissioned scribes to write down his messages. According to tradition, the original edition of the Qur'an was produced under Caliph Umar (634–644); it was the basis for all later versions of the Qur'an. Only under the third Caliph Uthman (644–56), however, did the text take final form as the standard text in use until today.

The Qur'an is roughly the same size as the New Testament. It is divided into 114 chapters (surahs) of different length. For recitation during the fasting month Ramadan, it is divided into 30 roughly equal portions, one portion for each day. The surahs are divided into some 6348 verses (ayat). Nevertheless, the Qur'an as a whole is regarded by Muslims as constituting a single connected revelation.

With the exception of the initial surah (fatiha = “opening”), which consists of a short prayer, the surahs are roughly ordered according to their length: surah 2 being the longest, the last surahs the shortest. The longer surahs belong as a rule to the later period of Muhammad’s mission. Thus the youngest surahs tend to be at the beginning, the oldest and shortest at the end. Every surah has a heading, which consists of the following elements:

1. The title, which may be any prominent term contained in the surah, e.g. “Women”, “The Cow” etc., and which need not express the actual content of the chapter.
2. The prayer formula (basmala): “In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful”.
3. An indication that the surah was revealed either in Mecca or in Medina.
4. An indication of the number of verses.
5. Occasionally, indications of passages where the tradition is in doubt.
Surah 1
“The Opening” (al-Fatiha) at Mecca, 7 verses:
[1:1] In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.
[1:2] Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe,
[1:3] the Gracious, the Merciful,
[1:5] You we worship; You we ask for help.
[1:6] Guide us in the right path:
[1:7] the path of those whom You blessed; not of those who have deserved wrath,
nor of those who go astray.