

## **An Investigation into the Earliest Historical Evidence on the Alleged Shia Forgery of *Surahs Nurayn* and *Wilayat***

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### **Abstract**

The two apocryphal Surahs Nurayn and Wilayah are composed of a number of verses borrowed from the Qur'anic canon and integrated in with phrases dealing with Imam ÝAli's exclusive right to the succession Prophet Muhammad and his distinctive virtues. There are only two such alleged surahs, which were contrived at the hands of anonymous authors in eleventh century AH (sixteenth century CE) India. There is no evidence that would point to their existence prior to this period. As such, the claims that there are more than two apocryphal surahs and that Shias believe that these were actually part of the original Qur'anic canon that were excised when Uthman, the Third Caliph, attempted to produce a unified Qur'anic codex and that they are preserved in the Qur'anic manuscript transcribed by Imam ÝAli are false and unfounded.

**Keywords:** Surah Nurayn, Surah Wilayah, Qur'anic canon, Uthmani Manuscript, Immunity from distortion, Orientalists

### **1. Introduction**

It is not out of the ordinary that adherents of different denominations should accuse other denominations of erroneous beliefs. There is a long history of sectarian incriminations and recriminations between the Shia and the Sunni faiths within the historical framework of Islam. A common accusation leveled against the Shia faith is that it endorses the false view that the Qur'an is distorted and that a number of verses or chapters have been omitted from the original revelations of God to Prophet Muhammad. One of the more recent claims in this connection is that Shias have forged two chapters that they contend was omitted from the original Qur'an – Surahs Nurayn and Wilayah.

Finding the issue of the two apocryphal surahs significant, European orientalist took it up as a worthwhile subject of study. Noldeke quotes Surah Nurayn, in forty-three verses, from *DabistanMadhahib* (Noldeke, 2004). Goldziher dwells on this topic more extensively. The gist of his comments in this regard may be summarized as follows.

The Shia fail to supply concrete instances of verses that they claim to have been omitted from certain chapters of the Qur'an. Instead, they point to chapters that are entirely excised from the Uthmani Manuscript. Those who were in charge of compiling the Uthmani Manuscript removed, according to the Shia viewpoint, these chapters on account of their containing verses that explicitly specify the distinctive virtues of Ali.

Goldziher continues to explain that the first general publication of a surah reputed by the Shias to have been excised from the original Qur'anic canon came about through the endeavors of Garcinde Tassy and MirzaKazimBec. Their findings were published in *Journal Asiatique*, 1842. Thereafter, the Bankipore Library of India announced the discovery of a manuscript of the Qur'an that included two additional surahs by the names of 'Nurayn,' with forty-one verses, and 'Wilayat,' with seven verses, both of which deal mainly with love of and loyalty to Ali and his successors. Clair Tisdall has translated all of these reputedly excised surahs into English (Goldziher, 1992).

An additional observation that Goldziher makes is that the apocryphal chapter published by Garcinde Tassy and MirzaKazimBec is prevalent in Shia corpora, noting that it differs from the two additional chapters contained in the manuscript found by the Bankipore Library and translated by Tisdall. What is very perplexing from an academic point of view is Goldziher's claim that the Shia believe that these two chapters were deliberately excised from the Uthmani Manuscript on account of expressing the distinctive virtues of Ali. He fails to provide any evidence to substantiate this claim.

The significance of considering the validity of the claim about the two apocryphal Qur'anic chapters Nurayn and Wilayat lies mainly in its relevance to the topic of the credibility and integrity of the Qur'an. To entertain the idea that two chapters may have been omitted from the Qur'an gives credence to the possibility that the Qur'an is distorted and so is not a divinely-guarded scripture, as all Muslims unanimously believe. Another aspect that bears on the significance of a study into the authenticity of these two apocryphal chapters is the fact that some Wahhabis and Salafis appeal to the remarks made by the prominent orientalists in this relation to attack the Shia faith for disregarding the universal Islamic belief that the Qur'an is not distorted and thus defiling its sacred integrity (al-Qaffari, 1997; Mal Allah, 1998; Ilahi Zahir, 1994; al-Salus, 1996). This in turn leads to greater sectarian tension, giving rise to Shia-Sunni hatred. Another consequence of this false allegation against the Shia is that some radical Salafis, such as Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, contend that Shias have two Qur'ans: there is the standard Qur'an, which they pretend to venerate so as to be accepted by other Muslims, and there is the peculiar Shia version of the Qur'an, which contains the false chapter regarding the virtues of Ali and which they hide from other Muslims (al-Khatib, 1999).

In what follows, I will consider the following four questions in pursuance of the topic of the article:

1. What sources did Garcin de Tassy and MirzaKazimBec rely on?
2. Is the surah Garcin de Tassy and MirzaKazimBec refer to a third surah distinct from Surahs Nurayn and Wilayat?
3. Does Clair Tisdall – who according to Goldziher has compiled and translated all the Qur'anic passages that Shias claim to have been omitted from the original Qur'anic canon – mention any other fragment other than Surahs Nurayn and Wilayat?
4. And finally, what is the earliest source in which the two surahs in question are mentioned?

## **2. An Examination of the Sources of Surahs Nurayn and Wilayat**

This whole issue of reputedly excised chapters was introduced to Western orientalist scholars when Garcin de Tassy first published Surah Nurayn – with forty-two verses – in 1842 in an article in *Journal Asiatique* (De Tassy, 1842). A year later, MirzaAlexanderKazemBec published the same surah in the same journal but with forty-three verses, and the translation he offered was more accurate than the one supplied by Garcin de Tassy (Kazem Bec, 1843). On comparison, the two seem to be from the same

source, as they are almost entirely identical, with the exception of a slight difference in verse 17. This shows that KazemBecused the same source as de Tassy – namely, *DabistanMadhahib*.

The first appearance of Surah Wilayatin Western scholarly circles seems to have been in the article Clair Tisdall wrote in January of 1913 for the journal *The Muslim World* (Tisdall, 1913). In addition to mentioning Surah Nurayn, which he describes as having 42 verses, he reports the existence of a Surah Wilayat that encompasses seven verses. Concerning the source of these surahs he remarks that they are contained in a handwritten manuscript of the Qur'an obtained in Bankipore, India, dating back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century CE.

The only description that Tisdall can offer regarding this obscure manuscript of the Qur'an is that it was found in Bankipore, Indian, in January, 1912. According to the curator of Bankipore Library, this manuscript was purchased twenty years before from one Nawwab, from an unknown nationality, in Lucknow, India, and its age is estimated at most at two to three hundred years. He adds that this manuscript seems to be alone in including these two apocryphal surahs in addition to the canonic surahs accepted by all Muslims and that the Shias do not endorse this manuscript (Tisdall, 1913).

Furthermore, Tisdall compares the version of Surah Nurayn that he presents with that put forth by Canon Sell and notes that they are different in many instances. He acknowledges KazemBec's article in *Journal Asiaticque* as the source from which he relates Surah Nurayn, deeming it to be superior to the alternative version used by Canon Sell. Interestingly, he requests from his readers to come forth with any possible manuscript of the Qur'an that they may know as containing material not included in the standard version of the Qur'an (Tisdall, 1913).

Based on the information Tisdall provides, the two surahs in question date, at the earliest, to the sixteenth century, and the differences Tisdall points to between the version he prefers to that presented by Canon Sell are only natural differences that occur between original manuscripts. Thus we may legitimately infer that the primary source of Surah Nurayn is none other than *DabistanMadhahib*, authored in the eleventh century AH (sixteenth century CE). Considering the date of origination of the obscure manuscript of the Qur'an that Tisdall claims to contain this apocryphal surah, we are justified to surmise that it derived the surah from the said text. As such, there is no evidence to support the existence of a source for Surah Nurayn predating the authorship of *DabistanMadhahib*. Surah Nurayn, likewise, appears exclusively in the aforementioned manuscript of the Qur'an, which dates to no earlier than the sixteenth century CE. Whether we search through the first 'Four Books' (*al-kutub al-arba'ah*) or the later 'Four Books' constituting the main body of the Shia religious corpus, in the more sectarian-oriented texts where such material is more likely to appear (the works of, among others, SulaymibnQays al-Hilali and Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibnSayyar), the books dealing with Shia beliefs that were written prior to the eleventh century AH, or those texts produced in defense of Shia doctrine (al-Saduq, 1992; al-Sharif al-Murtaza, 1990; al-Tusi, 1981; al-Tabrisi, 1985; Ibn Tawus, 1943; Hilli, 1989; Bayazi 'Amili, 1964; al-Shushtari, 1998), one fails to come across any mention of these two apocryphal surahs. Thus, it is necessary that we turn to an assessment of *DabistanMadhahib*.

### 3. *DabistanMazahib* and Surah Nurayn

The author of *DabistanMadhahib* is unknown. In his research on this book, Rizazadeh Malik concludes that the author must have been alive *circa* 1025-1069 AH (1616-1658 CE). Putting forth a number of arguments demonstrating that it is wrong to identify the author as Muhammad MohsinFaniKishmiri (Keykhusrow, 1983), Rizazadeh Malik points to certain indications as evidence that the author is none other than the Zoroastrian priest, KeykhusrowIsfandyar, son of AzarKayvan. *DabistanMadhahib* was introduced to a wider readership when it was translated into English. It was thereafter printed in its original Farsi owing mainly to the endeavors of William Billy, Great Britain's ambassador to India at the time, and this coincided with the consolidation of the East India Company.

Under the heading 'On the Twelver Faith' (*dardkikrmadhhabithna'ashariyyah*), the author states that he writes mainly what he has heard from Mulla Muhammad Ma'Ysum, Muhammad Mu'minTuni, and Mulla Ibrahim, who resided in Lahore in 1053 AH (1643 CE) (Keykhusrow, 1983).

The author then continues by enumerating a number of Shia doctrines. Concerning Surah Nurayn and its ascription to the Shia faith, he remarks:

Some [Shias] are of the opinion that in burning the manuscripts Y'Uthman removed a number of the chapters of the Qur'an that bore on the virtues of Ali and the merits of his progeny, and one of these [reputedly removed chapters] is this [i.e., Surah Nurayn] (Keykhusrow, 1983).

He then brings the entire text of the surah, spanning 42 verses. The author, however, fails to specify what sources he relies on in attributing this questionable surah to 'Some Shias.'

#### 4. IbnShahrAshub and Surah Wilayat

It was explained in the above that pursuing the historical sources of the two apocryphal Surahs Nurayn and Wilayat leads us to no earlier than the eleventh century AH (sixteenth century CE). There is, however, in this connection a phrase by MuhaddithNuri (d. 1320 AH/1902 CE) that compels us to expand our investigation. In his *Fasl al-Khitab*, MuhaddithNuri relates Surah Nurayn from *DabistanMadhahib* but identifies it as Surah Wilayat (al-Nuri, 1881). He then makes the following observation:

From what the author of the book *DabistanMadhahibs* says it appears that he relates this surah from Shia texts, yet I have not found any trace of it any Shia text, except that it is narrated that in his *al-Mathalib* IbnShahrAshubMazandarani claims that the adversaries [i.e., the Sunnis] have omitted Surah Wilayat from the Qur'an, and that may be a reference to this Surah Wilayat (al-Nuri, 1881).

IbnShahrAshub's death was in 558 AH (1163 CE). Is it possible that he may have been aware of these two surahs, giving credibility to the theory that the Shia actually believe that these two surahs were excised from the original Qur'anic canon? On examination, we are obliged to conclude that the answer to this question is negative. The dubious attribution to IbnShahrAshub's *al-Mathalib* is in fact erroneous. That MuhaddithNuri states 'it is narrated' shows that he himself did not refer to an original copy of the book, relying only on what others quoted from it.

The author of the present article has read two distinct handwritten manuscripts of *al-Mathalib*, which is yet to be put to print. I also enlisted the help of a number of college students to read these two manuscripts more meticulously to ensure I had not missed anything. There is, in fact, no mention of Surah Wilayat to be found in *al-Mathalib*. Furthermore, IbnShahrAshub refuses to mince words in expressing his view concerning the inviolability of the Qur'an; he explicitly states that the Qur'an is impervious to distortion. Following in the footsteps of such eminent predecessors as Sharif Murtaza (1990), he affirms the view that the Qur'an was compiled in its present form in a single volume during the lifetime of the Prophet. In his *Mutashabih al-Qur'an waMukhtalifuh*, IbnShahrAshub reiterates his opinion very clearly as to the immunity of the Qur'an from alteration (Ibn Shahr Ashub, 1989).

As such, it is safe to say that IbnShahrAshub makes no such reference to the possibility that surahs may have been omitted from the original Qur'anic canon. But if so, whence the erroneous attribution? Who is responsible for the narration MuhaddithNuri alludes to in ascribing this view to IbnShahrAshub? The culprit is none other than Abu al-Ma'Yali Mahmud Alusi (d. 1270 AH/1854 CE), the author of *Ruh al-Ma'Yani*, in whose introduction he writes, 'IbnShahrAshubMazandarani states in his *al-Mathalib* that Surah Wilayat was removed from the Qur'an' (Alusi, 1996). And there is no doubt that Nuri draws on Alusi in his *Fasl al-Khitab*, for in one passage he writes, 'In the sixth point of the introduction to his Qur'anic commentary, Mahmud Alusi writes....' (al-Nuri, 1881).

#### 5. Tadhkirah al-A'immah as Another Source for Surah Wilayat

Another source in which Surah Wilayat is mentioned is *Tadhkirah al-A'immah*. A comparison between the Surah Wilayat narrated in this text and that which Clair Tisdall relates shows that they are one and the same. Muhammad BaqirMajlisi is the name identified as the author of this text (al-Majlisi, 1981).

As such, this book is credited to Ýallamah Majlisi, and so he is deemed as adopting the view that Surahs Nurayn and Wilayat were excised from the original Qur'anic canon (al-Khatib, 1999). This, however, is an utterly false ascription. A simple glance at the first few pages of the book suffices to prove that the author of the text in question is a Sufi, and the style of composition employed therein differs drastically from that of Ýallamah Majlisi (al-Amin, 1982). In addition, the biographies and bibliographies enumerating Ýallamah Majlisi's works make no reference to a text of this name (al-Amin, 1982; Agha Buzurg Tihrani, 1924; Afandi al-Isfahani, 1980). This fact is further reinforced by MuhaddithNuri, who in his biography of Ýallamah Majlisi asserts that this book is not by the latter (al-Nuri, 1996). Concerning the provenance of this work, Agha BuzurgTihrani explains,

The ascription of this book to Majlisi is an error resulting from the resemblance of the names of the author and his father to those of Ýallamah Majlisi and his father (Agha Buzurg Tihrani, 1924).

The same opinion is also expressed by the author of *Rayhanah al-Adab* (Mudarris, 1990).

## 6. Conclusion

As I have sufficiently chronicled in the above, there is no evidence of Surahs Nurayn and Wilayat prior to the eleventh century AH (sixteenth century CE). The only source that mentions Surah Nurayn is *DabistanMadhahib*. Assuming that the author is honest in his claim that he has actually heard from some Shias that this surah was omitted from the original Qur'anic canon, his sources are anonymous, and thus their testimony lacks any credibility. MuhaddithNuri derives his account of Surah Nurayn from *DabistanMadhahib*, which is the only source for his reference to this surah in *Fasl al-Khitab*.

The account of Surah Wilayat is similarly lacking in credibility. According to the testimony of a number of orientalist, it is contained in a manuscript of the Qur'an dating back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century CE. There is, of course, no way to verify this testimony, as the manuscript in question is no where to be sought. Another source, equally unimpressive in credibility, is *Tadhkirah al-A'immah*, whose author is Muhammad Baqir Lahiji (and not Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, popularly known as Ýallamah Majlisi, as some have erroneously assumed). This text makes no mention of any sources in relation to this apocryphal surah. In most likelihood, it is derived either from the aforementioned Qur'anic manuscript or from simply word-of-mouth, which, we may assume, the author inserted in his book without any investigation into its credibility. The author informs us that he made a trip to India, and he must have encountered the account of these two surahs on this trip.

As such, that some orientalist – and in turn certain radical Salafis – cite these two apocryphal surahs to substantiate the unfounded claim that Shias believe that certain surahs were excised from the original Qur'anic canon goes against the spirit of scholarly integrity. Such a tenuous case is scarcely capable of proving anything, much less a matter of doctrine that could be used as a persuasive excuse in the hands extremists, who are bent on assailing the Shia faith.

## 7. Table of Key Transliterated Terms

Term Appearing in Text	Original Term	Term with Diacritics
Surah Nurayn	سوره نورین	Sùrah NÙrayn
Surah Wilayat	سوره ولایت	Sùrah WilÁyat
<i>DabistanMadhahib</i>	دبستان مذاهب	<i>DabistÁnMadhÁhib</i>
Muhaddith Nuri	محدث نوری	MuĤaddith NÙrĤ
Ýallamah Majlisi	علامه مجلسی	AllÁmah MajlisĤ
<i>Fasl al-Khitab</i>	فصل الخطاب	<i>FaÒl al-KhiÒÁb</i>
Alusi	ألوسی	ÀIÙSĤ
Ibn Shahr Ashub	ابن شهر آشوب	Ibn Shahr ÀshÙb
<i>MushafÝAli</i>	مصحف علی	<i>MuÒlafÝAlĤ</i>

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