114932 - Ancient copies of the Quran

the question

How much efforts should muslim put in to preserve the old copies of Quran? This certainly requires resources and expertise in preservation. There are many old copies of Quran in various libraries and homes but they are all dusted and in bad condition. How one should act in this situation where there is a desire to save such Mushaaf?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Respecting and taking care of Mus-hafs (copies of the Quran) is part of venerating the symbols of Allah and the word of Allah which He revealed as guidance to mankind. This is a duty upon all Muslims, who should make whatever efforts they can to achieve that.

How great these efforts should be differs according to the need to preserve ancient Mushafs. Copies of the Mus-haf may be few and the people may need all that they have, or these old copies may still be in good condition and people can still read them, or it may be possible to send them to some poor Muslim countries where the people still copy the Quran by hand because they are so poor, and other cases which dictate keeping these old copies and taking proper care of them.

If there are no such cases where it is necessary to preserve old copies, then there is nothing wrong with disposing of them in respectful ways which achieve the desired purpose. The scholars have mentioned three ways of doing that:

1-

Burning, i.e., burning old copies of the Mus-haf in a careful and respectable manner, in a clean and safe place, whilst ensuring that the words are consumed by the fire and the pages are changed.

The scholars based this view on what ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) did with the Mus-hafs that differed from what the Sahaabah were unanimously agreed upon. Al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) narrated (hadeeth no. 4987) from Anas ibn Maalik that ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan (may Allah be pleased with him) ordered Zayd ibn Thaabit, ‘Abd-Allah ibn al-Zubayr, Sa’eed ibn al-‘Aas and ‘Abd al-Rahmaan ibn al-Haarith ibn Hishaam to make copies of the Mus-hafs. ‘Uthmaan said to the three Qurashi men: If you differ with Zayd ibn Thaabit concerning anything of the Quran , then write it in the dialect of Quraysh, for it was revealed in their tongue. They did that, then when they had copied the pages in Mus-hafs, ‘Uthmaan returned the pages to Hafsah, and he sent to each country one of the Mus-hafs that they had copied, and he ordered that all other copies of the Quran on pages or in books be burned.

Ibn Battaal (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This hadeeth shows that it is permissible to burn books which contain the name of Allah, and that this is a kind of respect to them and protects them from being trampled underfoot. ‘Abd al-Razzaaq narrated via Tawoos that he used to burn letters that contained the Basmalah when he had collected a good number of them, and ‘Urwah did the same, but Ibraaheem regarded that as makrooh. End quote.

Fath al-Baari (9/20).

Al-Khateeb al-Sharbeeni al-Shaafa’i (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It is makrooh to burn wood into which words of Qur'aan have been carved, unless the aim is to protect the Quran , in which case it is not makrooh, as may be understood from the words of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salaam. It is in this way that we may interpret ‘Uthmaan’s burning of the Mus-hafs. End quote.

Mughni al-Muhtaaj (1/152).

2-

Burying, for which a place that is clean and safe from tampering should be chosen. A deep hole

should be dug in which it is thought most likely that the buried copies will disappear for a long time.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to old Mus-hafs, which have worn out and are now in such a condition that they cannot be used for reading from, they should be buried in a place where they will be safe, just as the body of a believer is honoured by being buried in a place where it will be safe. End quote.

Majmoo' al-Fataawa (12/599)

Al-Bahooti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If a Mus-haf becomes worn out, it should be buried. Ahmad narrated that Abu'l-Jawza' had a Mus-haf that wore out, so he dug a hole for it in his mosque and buried it. In al-Bukhaari it is narrated that the Sahaabah burned [Mus-hafs] after making copies of them. Ibn al-Jawzi said: That is out of respect for it and in order to protect it. al-Qaadi said that Abu Bakr ibn Abi Dawood narrated with his isnaad from Talhah ibn Musarrif that he said: 'Uthmaan buried the Mushafs between the [Prophet's] grave and the minbar, and he narrated with his isnaad from Tawoos that he did not see anything wrong with burning books. He said: Water and fire are creations of Allah. End quote.

Kashshaaf al-Qinaa' (1/137).

It says in Fatawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah (4/140):

If the pages of the Mus-haf wear out and become tattered from being read from a great deal, or they become unfit to be used, or they found mistakes in it because of careless mistakes in writing or printing, and it is not possible to correct it, it is permissible to bury it without burning it, and it is permissible to burn it and then bury it in a place far away from dirt or where people walk, so as to protect it against mishandling, and so as to protect the Quran against any tampering or distortion or confusion due to propagating of Mus-hafs in which there are mistakes in writing or printing. End quote.

3-

Shredding. This may be the easiest way nowadays. There are machines into which one inserts papers and they shred them into tiny pieces, so that they are no longer regarded as words of the Quran or even legible letters. This is clean and safe and does not involve a lot of effort, as is the case with burning or burying.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

No one among the Muslims doubts that the Muslim must respect and venerate the Holy Quran and prevent it from being exposed to mishandling. These worn out pages of the Mus-haf which cannot be used for reading may then be dealt with in one of two ways:

(i) They may be buried in a clean, pure place where they will not be subject to mishandling in the future, to the best of one’s knowledge.

(ii) They may be burned. Burning them is permissible and there is nothing wrong with it. When the Quran was consolidated in the dialect of Quraysh at the time of ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him), the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) burned all other copies. This indicates that it is permissible to burn the Mus-haf that can no longer be made use of.

But I think that if it is burned then it must be done thoroughly until there is nothing left but ashes, because when printed material is burned, some letters may still be visible after burning, so it is necessary to do it thoroughly until it has turned to ashes.

If it is shredded, this is a third way, but it is difficult, because shredding must be done to all the words and letters, and this is difficult unless one has a machine that can shred it very finely so that no shape of a letter is left. This is a third way, and it is permissible. End quote.

Fatawa Noor ‘ala al-Darb (tape 32/side B)

See also: al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah (2/123).

And Allah knows best.