**Al-Nasikh wa al-Mansukh**

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The revelations from Allah as found in the Qur'an touch on a variety of subjects, among them beliefs, history, tales of the prophets, day of judgement, Paradise and Hell, and many others. Particularly important are the ahkam (legal rulings), because they prescribe the manner of legal relationships between people, as Allah wishes them to be observed.

While the basic message of Islam remains always the same, the legal rulings have varied throughout the ages, and many prophets before Muhammad brought particular codes of law (shari'a) for their respective communities.

The Arabic words 'nasikh' and 'mansukh' are both derived from the same root word 'nasakha' which carries meanings such as 'to abolish, to replace, to withdraw, to abrogate'.

The word nasikh (an active participle) means 'the abrogating', while mansukh (passive) means 'the abrogated'. In technical language these terms refer to certain parts of the Qur'anic revelation, which have been 'abrogated' by others. Naturally the abrogated passage is the one called 'mansukh' while the abrogating one is called 'nasikh'.

The Qur'an on Naskh

The principle of naskh (abrogation) is referred to in the Qur'an itself and is not a later historical development:

'None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause it to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: knowest thou that God has power over all things?' (2: 106).[Some however say that this refers to the revelations before the Qur’an, which have now been substituted by the Qur’an itself. See Mawdudi. The Meaning of the Qur’an, Lahore, 1967, Vol. I, p.102. note 109.]

How it came about

When the message of Islam was presented to the Arabs as something new, and different from their way of life, it was introduced in stages. The Qur'an brought important changes gradually, to allow the people to adjust to the new prescriptions.

*Example:*

There are three verses in the Qur'an concerning the drinking of wine. Wine drinking was very widespread in pre-Islamic times and, although a social evil, highly esteemed. The three verses which finally led to the prohibition of intoxicating substances were revealed in stages (4: 43, 2: 219; 5: 93-4).

Why it is important

Knowledge of al-nasikh wa al-mansukh is important because it concerns the correct and exact application of the laws of Allah. It is specifically concerned with legal revelations:

* It is one of the important pre-conditions for explanation (tafsir) of the Qur'an.
* It is one of the important pre-conditions for understanding and application of the Islamic law (hukm, shari'a).
* It sheds light on the historical development of the Islamic legal code.
* It helps to understand the immediate meaning of the ayat concerned.

Tafsir (explanation of the Qur'an) or legal ruling is not acceptable from a person who does not have such knowledge.

How do we know it?

As in the field of asbab al-nuzul, the information about al-nasikh wa al-mansukh cannot be accepted upon mere personal opinion, guesswork or hearsay, but must be based on reliable reports, according to the ulum al-hadith, and should go back to the Prophet and his Companions.

The report must also clearly state which part of the revelation is nasikh and which is mansukh.

Some scholars say that there are three ways of knowing about al-nasikh wa al-mansukh:

* Report from the Prophet or Companions.
* Ijma' (consensus of the umma upon what is nasikh and what mansukh).
* Knowledge about which part of the Qur'an preceded another part in the history of revelation. [Qattan, op.cit., p. 199]

Example:

Narrated Mujahid (regarding the verse):

Those of you who die and leave wives behind, they (their wives) shall await (as regards their marriage) for four months and ten days (2: 234).

The widow, according to this verse, was to spend this period of waiting with her husband's family, so Allah revealed: Those of you who die and leave wives (i.e. widows) should bequeath for their wives, a year's maintenance and residence without turning them out, but if they leave (their residence) there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves, provided it is honourable (i.e. Lawful marriage) (2: 240).

So Allah entitled the widow to be bequeathed extra maintenance for seven months and 20 nights and that is the completion of one year. If she wished, she could stay (in her husband's home) according to the will, and she could leave it if she wished, as Allah says: Without turning them out, but if they leave (the residence) there is no blame on you.

So the idea (i.e. four months and ten days) is obligatory for her.

'Ata' said: Ibn 'Abbas said: This verse i.e. the statement of Allah ... without turning one out ... cancelled the obligation of staying for the waiting period in her late husband's house, and she can complete this period wherever she likes.

'Ata' said: If she wished, she could complete her 'idda by staying in her late husband's residence according to the will or leave it according to Allah's statement:

'There is no blame on you for what they do with themselves.'

'Ata' added: Later the regulations of inheritance came and abrogated the order of the dwelling of the widow (in her dead husband's house) so she could complete the 'idda wherever she likes. And it was no longer necessary to provide her with a residence.

Ibn Abbas said: This verse abrogated her (i.e. the widow's) dwelling in her dead husband's house and she could complete the 'idda (i.e. four months and ten days) (wherever she liked, as Allah's statement says: ...'without turning them out ...' [Bukhari, VI, No. 54.]

This report explains clearly which part of the revelation is nasikh and which is mansukh. Mujahid was one of the well-known tab'iun and Ibn 'Abbas was a Companion of the Prophet.

What is Abrogated?

According to some scholars the Qur'an abrogates only the Qur'an. They base their view on suras 2: 106 and 16: 101. According to them the Qur'an does not abrogate the sunna nor does the sunna abrogate the Qur'an. This is, in particular, the view held by Shafi'i. [For details see Kitab al-risala, Cairo, n.d., pp.30-73; English translation by M. Khadduri, op.cit., pp. 12345; for a brief summary of Ash-Shafi'i's views see also Seeman, K., Ash-Shafi'is Risala, Lahore, 1961, pp.53-85.]

Others are of the opinion that the Qur'an may abrogate the Qur'an as well as the sunna. They base their view on Sura 53: 34.

There is also the view that there are four classes of naskh:

* Qur'an abrogates Qur'an.
* Qur'an abrogates *sunna*.
* *Sunna* abrogates Qur'an.
* *Sunna* abrogates *sunna*. [Qattan, op.cit, pp. 201-2.]

In this discussion, we shall only consider the abrogation in the Qur'an, and leave aside the abrogation in the *sunna*.

**Three Kinds of Naskh in the Qur'an**[Ibn Salama, al-nasikh wa al-mansukh, Cairo, 1966, p.5.]

The scholars have divided abrogation into three kinds:

* Abrogation of the recited (verse) together with the legal ruling.
* Abrogation of the legal ruling without the recited (verse).
* Abrogation of the recited (verse) without the legal ruling.

Examples:

For abrogation of the recited (verse) together with its legal ruling:

'A'isha (Allah be pleased with her) reported that it had been revealed in the Holy Qur'an that ten clear sucklings make the marriage unlawful, then it was abrogated (and substituted) by five sucklings and Allah's apostle (may peace be upon him) died and it was before that time (found) in the Holy Qur'an (and recited by the Muslims). [34 Muslim, II, No. 3421.]

For abrogation of a legal ruling without the recited (verse):

'O Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou has paid their dowers; and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to thee; and daughters of thy paternal uncles and aunts and daughters of thy maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Makka) with thee; and any believing woman who dedicates her soul to the Prophet if the Prophet wishes to wed her; - this only for thee and not for the believers (at large);We know what we have appointed for them as to their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess; - in order that there should be no difficulty for thee and God is oft-forgiving, most merciful' (33: 50).

'It is not lawful for thee (to marry more) women after this, nor to change them for (other) wives, even though their beauty attract thee, except any thy right hand should possess (as handmaidens); and God doth watch over all things' (33: 52).

This is one of the few very clear examples of naskh, though only concerning the Prophet specifically, since for Muslims in general the number of wives has been restricted to four. (Sura 4:3).

For abrogation of the recited (verse) without the legal ruling:

'Abdullah bin 'Abbas reported that 'Umar bin Khattab sat on the pulpit of Allah's messenger (may peace be upon him) and said: Verily Allah sent Muhammad (may peace be upon him) with truth and he sent down the book upon him, and the verse of stoning was included in what was sent down to him. We recited it, retained it in our memory and understood it. Allah's messenger (may peace be upon him) awarded the punishment of stoning to death (to the married adulterer and adulteress) and after him, we also awarded the punishment of stoning. I am afraid that with the lapse of time, the people (may forget it) and may say: We do not find the punishment of stoning in the book of Allah, and thus go astray by abandoning this duty prescribed by Allah. Stoning is a duty laid down in Allah's book for married men and women who commit adultery when proof is established, or if there is pregnancy or a confession. [Muslim, III, No. 4194; Bukhari, VIII, No. 816.]

The punishment of stoning for adultery by married people has been retained in the sunna, while it is not included in the Qur'an .

The Abrogated Verses

There are, according to Ibn Salama, [Op cit., see pp.6-8 for the names of these suras.] a well-known author on the subject:

* 43 *suras* with neither *nasikh* or *mansukh*.
* 6 *suras* with *nasikh* but no *mansukh*.
* 40 *suras* with *mansukh* but no *nasikh*.
* 25 *suras* with both *nasikh* and *mansukh*.

According to Suyuti's Itqan there are 21 instances in the Qur'an, where a revelation has been abrogated by another.

He also indicates that there is a difference of opinion about some of these: e.g. 4: 8, 24: 58, etc. [Itqan, II, pp.20-3; Kamal, op.cit., pp.101-9 also gives Suyuti's complete list.]

Some scholars have attempted to reduce the number of abrogations in the Qur'an even further, by explaining the relationships between the verses in some special ways, e.g. by pointing out that no legal abrogation is involved, or that for certain reasons the naskh is not genuine

Shah Waliullah (d. 1759) the great Muslim scholar from India only retained the following 5 out of Suyuti's 21 cases as genuine:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Mansukh* 2: 180 | *nasikh* 4: 11, 12 |
| *Mansukh* 2:240 | *nasikh* 2: 234. |
| *Mansukh* 8:65 | *nasikh* 8: 62. |
| *Mansukh* 30:50 | *nasikh* 33: 52. |
| *Mansukh* 58: 12 | *nasikh* 58: 13. |

Example:

A case listed by Suyuti, which has no direct legal implication is the following:

Narrated Ibn 'Abbas: When the verse: 'If there are 20 amongst you, patient and persevering, they will overcome two hundred', was revealed, it became hard on the Muslims, when it became compulsory that one Muslim ought not to flee before 10 (non-Muslims) so Allah lightened the order by revealing: 'but now Allah has lightened your (task) for He knows that there is weakness in you. But (even so) if there are 100 amongst you who are patient and persevering, they will overcome 200 (non-Muslims)' (8: 66).

So when Allah reduced the number of enemies that Muslims should withstand, their patience and perseverence against the enemy decreased as much as their task was lightened for them. [Bukhari, VI, No.176.]

Still others hold that there are no genuine (sahih) reports available on this issue, going back to the Prophet, while those going back to the Companions contradict each other. [Ali, M.M.: The Religion of Islam, Lahore, 1936, p.32. It may be pointed out that Ali's treatment of the subject is not very thorough. Of the three examp1es he cites in support of his opinion ('in most cases, where a report is traceable to one Companion who held a certain verse to have been abrogated, there is another report traceable to another Companion, through the fact that the verse was not abrogated' - p. 33) two are definitely not in his favour, while the third can be easily explained. His first case concerns Sura 2:180 (inheritance). It has certainly been superseded by other verses, e.g. 4:7-9 and that is probably all that is meant, when saying it is mansukh Ali's second case, '2:184, is considered by Ibn 'Umar as having been abrogated while Ibn 'Abbas says it was not' . See below, where I have quoted this very hadith from Ibn 'Abbas (Bukhari, VI, No.32) where Ibn 'Abbas himself explains why he does not hold it as abrogated. The third case is, like the first one, definitely not in support of Ali: '2: 240 was abrogated according to Ibn Zubair, while Mujahid says it was not'. This is wrong, see Sahih Bukhari, VI, Nos. 53 and 54, where both Ibn Zubair and Mujahid hold the verse to be abrogated. Furthermore both Ibn Zubair and Mujahid are tabi'un, and not Companions (sahaba).]

Therefore to them the issue of nasikh wa al mansukh is perhaps not of great importance. However, it is clear from the Qur'an itself, (e.g. in the case of inheritance, 2: 180; 4: 7-9, etc.) that abrogation occurred occasionally. Hence it is wrong to completely ignore the subject.

Abrogation and Specification

There is of course a difference between abrogation and specification. By the latter is meant that one revelation explains in more detail or according to specific circumstances how another revelation should be understood.

Example:

Sura 2:183 says 'O you who believe, fasting is prescribed to you ...'

Narrated 'Ata' that he heard Ibn 'Abbas reciting the Divine verse 'for those who can do it is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent' (2:184).

Ibn 'Abbas said 'This verse is not abrogated but it is meant for old men and old women who have no strength to fast, so they should feed one poor person for each day of fasting (instead of fasting). [Bukhari, VI, No. 32.]

It is quite clear that the second verse (2:184) does not abrogate the rule of fasting from the first verse (2:183) but explains that in a specific case, that of feeble old people, there is a way of making up for the loss of fast.

In the same way the verses concerning intoxicating drinks can be understood as specifications rather than abrogations (see 4:43;2:219;5:93-4).

Summary

The Qur'an, in 2:106, refers to the concept of naskh. However, there is a difference of opinion about the extent to which al-nasikh wa-al mansukh does in fact occur in the text of the Qur'an. The information concerning al-nasikh wa-al mansukh must be treated with great caution as, for all reports concerning the text of the Qur'an, two independent witnesses are required. Many of the examples which the scholars have drawn upon to illustrate this question (and I have quoted them for the same purpose) are based on one witness only. 'A'isha alone reported that 10 or 5 sucklings had been part of the Qur'anic recitation, and only 'Umar reported that the 'verse of stoning' had been included in the Qur'anic text. These legal rulings are not included in the Qur'an precisely because they were not considered reliable, being based on one witness only. Similarly, other examples about naskh, based on the words of Ibn 'Abbas or Mujahid alone, are to be judged by the same measure.

However, as mentioned there remain a small number of verses which, as far as can be ascertained from the internal evidence of the Qur'an, have been superseded by other verses in the Qur'an.