



الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ



*Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds;*

## *Quran English Translation & Commentary*

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### *Appendix I*

#### **The Abbreviated Letters**

##### **(Al Muqattaat)**

Certain Surahs have certain initials prefixed to them, which are called the "Abbreviated Letters."

A number of conjectures have been made as to their meaning. Opinions are divided as to the exact meaning of each particular letter or combination of letters, and it is agreed that only Allah knows their exact meaning. (R).

Their presence is not inconsistent with the character of the Quran as a "plain book." The book of nature is also a plain book, but how few can fully understand it? Everyone can get out of the Quran plain guidance for his life according to his capacity for

spiritual understanding. As his capacity grows, so will his understanding grow. The whole Book is a record for all time. It must necessarily contain truths that only gradually unfold themselves to humanity.

This is not mystery of the same class as "mysteries" by which we are asked to believe against the dictates of reason. If we are asked to believe that one is three and three is one, we can give no intelligible meaning to the words. If we are asked to believe that certain initials have meaning which will be understood in the fullness of time or of spiritual development, we are asked to draw upon faith, but we are not asked to do any violence to our reason.

I shall try to discuss some of the probable meanings of any particular abbreviated letter or set of abbreviated letters on the first occasion on which it appears in the Quran. But it may be desirable here to take a general view of the facts of their occurrence to help us in appreciating the various views which are held about them.

There are 29 letters in the Arabic alphabet (counting hamzah and alif as two letters), and there are 29 Surahs which have abbreviated letters prefixed to them. One of these Surahs (Surah 42) has two sets of abbreviated letters, but we need not count this Surah twice. If we take the half of the alphabet, omitting the fraction, we get 14, and this is the number of letters which actually occur in the Muqatta'at.

The 14 letters, which occur in various combinations, are:

Alif	ا	Qaf	ق
Ha	ح	Kaf	ك
Ra	ر	Lam	ل
Sin	س	Mim	م
Sad	ص	Nun	ن
Ta	ط	Ha	ه
Ayn	ع	Ya	ي

The science of phonetics tells us that our vocal sounds arise from the expulsion of the air from the lungs, and the sounds are determined by the way in which the breath passes through the

various organs of speech, e.g., the throat (guttural), or the various positions of the tongue to the middle or front of the palate or to the teeth, or the play of the lips. Everyone of these kinds of sounds is represented in these letters.

Let us now examine the combinations.

Three of these letters occur alone prefixed each to only one Surah. The letters and Surahs are:

Surah 38	Sad	ص
Surah 50	Qaf	ق
Surah 68	Nun	ن

The combinations of two letters occur in ten Surahs as shown below. Three of them occur only once each, but the fourth Ha Mim (حم) occurs in seven consecutive Surahs.

Surah 20	Ta Ha	طه
Surah 27	Ta Sin	طس
Surah 36	Ya Sin	يس
Surah 40-46	HA Mim	حم

Note that Surah 42 has a double combination of abbreviated letters, one of two followed by one of three. See under combinations of five.

There are three combinations of three letters each, occurring as follows in 13 Surahs:

Surah 2, 3, 29, 30, 31, 32	Alif Lam Mim	الم
Surah 10, 11, 12, 14, 15	Alif Lam Ra	المر
Surah 26, 28	Ta Sin Mim	طسم

Combinations of four letters occur twice, each only once.

Surah 7	Alif Lam Mim Sad	المص
Surah 13*	Alif Lam Mim Ra	المر

\*Note that the three preceding and the two following Surahs have the triple letters Alif, Lam, Mim, Ra.

Finally there remain the combinations of five letters, each of which occurs once only, as follows:

Surah 19	Kaf Ha Ya Ayn Sad	كهيعص
Surah 42	Ha Mim – Ayn Sin Qaf	حم عسق

In Surah 42, the Ha Mim (حم) and 'Ayn Sin Qaf (عسق) are put in separate verses. From that point of view they may be considered two separate combinations. The first combination has already been listed under the group of two-letter combinations.

This arithmetical analysis brings certain facts into prominence. I do not know how far they have a bearing on the inner meaning of the Maqatta'at.

The combinations of abbreviated letters that run in a series in consecutive Surahs is noticeable. For example,

- Ha Mim (حم) occurs in seven consecutive Surahs from 40 to 46.
- the combination Alif, Lam Ra (الر) occurs in six consecutive Surahs, 10 to 15,

but in one of them (Surah 13) is modified to Alif Lam Mim Ra (الم) connecting it with the Alif Lam Mim (الم) series.

The Alif Lam Mim (الم) series covers six Surahs. It begins with Surah 2 and Surah 3 which are practically the beginning of the Quran, and ends with the four consecutive Surahs, 29 to 32.

I call Surah 2 and Surah 3 practically the beginning of the Quran, because Surah 1 is considered a general introduction to the Quran, and the first Sipara or Juz is commonly known as Alif Lam Mim (الم) the first verse of Surah 2. The combination Ta Sin Mim (طسم) is prefixed to Surah 26 and Surah 28, but the

intervening Surah 27 has the combination Ta Sin (طس) which may be considered a syncopated form, or the three-letter combination Ta Sin Mim (طسم) may be considered an extended form of Ta Sin (طس).

Again the question arises; does the Mim (م) in Alif Lam Mim (الم) and Ha Mim (حم), Ta Sin Mim (طسم) stand for the same significance, or does it mean a different thing in each case?

We may generalize and say that

- there are three series of six,
- and one series of three,
- and the others occur all singly.

We should logically look for a common factor in the Surahs bearing the same initials, and this factor should be different for Surahs bearing other initials.

In all cases where the abbreviated letters occur, there is some mention of the Quran or the Book.

The *Itqan* makes an exception in the case of three Surahs;

- Al Ankabut (Surah 29),
- Al Rum (Surah 30), and
- Nun (Surah 68).

But a close perusal will show that these Surahs are no exceptions.

- In 29:27 we have a reference to the Book remaining in the family of Abraham, and later on we have a whole Section, devoted to the Book, with special reference to the continuity of revelation in the previous Books and the Quran (29:45-51).
- In 30:58 there is express mention of the Quran, and the whole argument of the Surah leads up to the intimate

relation between Allah's "Sign" in nature (30:20-27) and His revelation in the Quran.

- In Surah 68:1, the very first verse begins the theme from the Pen as the instrument of writing, exhorts Mustafa to stand forth boldly to proclaim the Message, and ends (68:52) with the declaration that it is a Message for all the worlds. (R).

These are general considerations, which I have thought it most convenient to present in the form of an Appendix.

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