

WHAT DOES THE SIN CLAIM

Islamic Apologists over the last few decades have made several claims about the Quran. They claim that the Quran is:

1. **Eternal.** They claim that the Quran that we have is a copy of the eternal tablet that is preserved in heaven 85 : 21 *This is also the truth that it is a glorious Qur'ân, 85 : 22 (Inscribed) in a Tablet well-guarded (against corruption, distortion and destruction).*
2. **Sent down.** They believe that it was sent down to Muhammad by the angel Jibreel between 610-632.
3. **Complete.** They believe that the revelation that Muhammad received was complete and that it was transmitted to his followers complete. They believe that the Quran that we have today is a complete copy of this revelation. Q10:15 and 18:27 claim that there has been no human intervention. 10 : 15 *When Our clear verses are recited to them, those who fear not the meeting with Us, nor do they cherish any hope (for the same,) say, 'Bring a Qur'ân other than this one or (at least) make some changes in it.' Say (to them), 'It is not for me to introduce changes in it of my own accord. I follow nothing but what is revealed to me. Truly if I disobey my Lord I fear the punishment of a great (dreadful) Day.'* 18 : 27 *And recite (to these people) what is revealed to you of the commandment of your Lord. There is none who can change His words, and you will find no refuge apart from Him.*
4. **Unchanged.** Muslims believe that there has been NO CHANGES to the Quran in its 1400 year history. Some even claim that there has been 'not one word..not one letter changed'. Q 15:9 claims that Allah will preserve it 15 : 9 *Verily, it was We, We Ourselves Who have revealed this Reminder (- the Qur'ân); and it is We Who are, most certainly, its Guardian.*

Claims by Modern Muslim Apologists.

'The Holy Quran is the only divinely revealed scripture in the history of mankind which has been preserved to the present time in its exact original form' (emphasis added)
(Suzanne Haneef, What Everyone should know about Islam and Muslims, 1979, p18-19)

'So well has it been preserved, both in memory and in writing, that the Arabic text we have today is identical to the text as it was revealed to the Prophet. Not even a single letter has yielded to corruption during the passage of the centuries' (emphasis added)
(Yusuf Ali, the Holy Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary)

'The Quran is one and no copy differing in even a diacritical point is met with..there are, and always have been contending sects, but the same Quran is in the possession of one and all.. A manuscript with the slightest variation in the the text is unknown' (emphasis added)
Ahmadiyya leader Maulvi Muhammad Ali, Muhammad and Christ (Lahore: The Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-ishaat-Islam, 1921, 7)

'We have a copy of the Quran dating from 790 in the British Museum. Folks that's 1300 years ago. And we can compare that with what we're reading today and we find them to be exactly identical...But what is important to notice is that throughout the ages of Muslim history, the Muslims have not quarrelled over what is the text of the Quran because the

text was known through memory work and through the written materials handed down right from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him). As I said, the two copies that were made 1400 years ago, one which is in Tashkent, Russia, for example has been demonstrated by Ahmad von Denffer in his book Ulum al-Quran to be an early copy from that time, and we find no difference from that copy to what we're reading today' (emphasis added)

Influential Canadian Muslim scholar and debater Dr Shabir Aly

'Uthman standardised the copies of the Quran and from his time up until our time there hasn't even been two copies of the Quran that are different, even one letter or one word... Quran is the most protected of all Scriptures and God has protected his Quran from any kind of alteration, deviation, miss-writing, because he says he is going to protect it...All Qurans, even to our time conform letter for letter, word for word with the Uthman Mushaf..to this day there is no different version of the Quran; there is but one Quran'
Dr Yasir Qadhi, American scholar and lecturer

Conclusion

These claims set a very high bar. They claim that the Quran has NO DIFFERENCES even down to the individual letters from the time of Uthman (AD652) to the present.

If therefore we find ANY DIFFERENCES, even ONE then their claims are falsified.

What happens if we find MANY DIFFERENCES?

The only logical conclusion is that the Quran is NOT DIVINELY PROTECTED. It is just another book created by men.

What do Medieval Muslim Scholars say

- As noted above, modern Muslims make some very substantial claims. It also appears that even if they acknowledge some variants, they state that these variants are unintentional errors, without significance and that they are not significant.
- For this reason, there has not been significant analysis of the available manuscripts by modern Muslim scholars. This is partly due to their presupposition of the Quran's perfect preservation. Therefore anything that challenges this is discarded.
- This can be seen by the following quote from modern scholar M.M.Al-Azami ***"But if any scrap of parchment falls into our inquisitive hands and, despite our best allowance for orthographic differences, fails to slip comfortably into the Uthmani skeleton, then we must cast it out as distorted and void"*** (The History of the Quranic text, 2003)
- Therefore it should be of no surprise that the great bulk of the textual analysis has been done by NON MUSLIMS.
- M. M Al-Azami (states that there were not more than 40 characters different between 6 of the 8 copies of the Uthmanic text that were sent to major Islamic centres. He also lists 12 variants between Uthman's personal copy and the copy kept at Medina ('History', 97-98)
- Medieval Muslim scholars openly acknowledge textual variants even between early copies of Uthmanic text
- Ibn Kaldun noted that the companions of Muhammad lacked writing skills and this caused problems in the text of the Quran

- So it appears that Medieval scholars did not make the claims that modern Muslims make
- It appears however that these scholars did not analyse the available manuscripts (Bergstrasser, Geschichte, 3:249)

VARIANTS IN THE MANUSCRIPTS

- There are many different types of variants in the manuscripts. The following analysis will look at what kinds of variants that are seen.
- The reference against which they are compared is the 1924 Cairo edition of the Hafs Text.
- They will be grouped into the following categories:
 - A. Variants involving vowels.
 - B. Variants involving names
 - C. Variants involving the consonantal skeleton itself.
 - D. Other aspects of the variants.

variants involving long vowels:

- Alif,
- Ya,
- Hamzah

Variants involving Proper names:

- Ibrahim
- Ismail
- Ishaq

Consonantal or Rasm Variants

- Single Added letter
- Multiple Added letters
- Different words used
- Missing words
- Transposition variants
- Conflation of phrases
- Added words or phrases

Diacritical Mark Variants

Other aspects:

- Variants Verse Divisions
- Physical Corrections to Manuscripts

What can we say about these variants?

- What do they mean?
- Were the Variants Intentional or Non-Intentional?

Long Vowel Variants

- Scholars have recognised that the use of the letters ‘Alif’ and ‘Ya’ were used differently in the early manuscripts than they are now [Mingana, “Syriac influence on the Style of the Quran]
- *‘The usage of these letters is much more variable than any of the other letters of the rasm. They are omitted added and at times interchanged’* [Small, ‘Textual Criticism and Quran Manuscripts’, 2011]
- In many manuscripts there is no Alif in the middle of a word, but there are others where it is used.
- Variants involving the use of the Dagger Alif or small Alif. They are detailed on p41-43 of Small cited above but can be summarised as follows.
 1. Dagger Alif in 1924 and No full Alif in manuscripts
 2. Dagger Alif in 1924 and full Alif in Manuscripts.
 3. No Alif in 1924 but full Alif in manuscripts.
 4. Dagger Alif only in 1924 but full Alif and Dagger Alif in some Manuscripts
 5. No Dagger Alif or full Alif in 1924 but Dagger Alif in Manuscripts.
- This shows that *‘what is believed to be the in the 1924 text as the Uthmanic text-form does not precisely match the earliest available manuscripts, and they and later manuscripts demonstrate a greater flexibility of usage than one might expect’* [Small, p41]
- Sometimes an ‘Alif Maqsura’ is used instead of the normal Alif in the 1924 edition. Scholars Wright and Thackston suggest that this is related to an Aramaic precedent. They are not the first to suggest that the Quran has an Aramaic origin [Small p43]. Small goes on to say that *‘these variants are examples of flexible orthography before the precise consonantal line was standardised. There is also the possibility that some of these are vestiges from a transition from Aramaic characters to Arabic letter forms’* [p44]
- There are also variants involving the letter ‘Ya’. It is sometimes omitted and sometimes inserted for an Alif,
- The letter ‘Hamza’ is completely absent from the earliest manuscripts. It first appears in the manuscript BL Or.12884 which is dated to the late 10th century. This by itself indicates and EVOLUTION in the text of the Arabic language. Therefore it should be of no surprise to see a corresponding EVOLUTION in the Quranic text.

Variants involving Proper Names

- Comparison of 1924 Edition with early manuscripts show different spellings of the name Ibrahim in Sura 14: 35. They also vary between the manuscripts.
- The fact that they occur often and in parts of the text where there are no other variants suggests that they are NOT simple errors
- The more likely explanation is that a single standardised spelling convention did not yet exist and the copyists were just preserving different spelling conventions. The fact that there WAS a standardised spelling at a later date is consistent with a process of EVOLUTION and EDITING.
- We also see variants in the name Ismail and Ishaq in Sura 14:39
- Small sums it up as follows: *‘Barr coined the phrase ‘zone of variable spelling’ for the situation where there are multiple apparently accepted variant spellings of the same word in a Hebrew Bible Manuscript. **It would seem that these Quranic names also represent some restricted but accepted zones of variable spelling in scribal practice in the earliest Quranic manuscripts at the times they were copied. The variations are found too frequently and consistently to be simple copyist mistakes,***

occurring often on the same page and sometimes on the same line” [p56, emphasis added]

Diacritical Mark Variants

- There are variants in diacritical marks because they took time to develop and there were different systems of diacritics in the first 200 years.
- Scribes in the eastern parts had different systems from those in the western parts as well as Hijaz and Yemen. (Leemhuis, ‘From Palm Leaves to the Internet’, 2006,p147)
- Some variants actually affect grammar:
 - A. 14:37 there is Ta instead of Tha. It changes the meaning from ‘fruit’ to ‘dates’
 - B. 14:41 there is Ta instead of ‘ya’. It changes the meaning from ‘the day when *you* reckon the account’ to ‘when *the* account is reckoned’
 - C. 14:38 the Topkapi has a ya rather than a nun. This changes the meaning from ‘You know what we conceal and what we reveal’ (1924 edition) to ‘you know what we conceal and what He revealed’ (Topkapi)
- It should be obvious to anyone that this is a variant that changes the entire meaning and could possibly change doctrine.
- *‘The presence of these kinds of variants points to the fact that scribes sometimes took it upon themselves to correct grammar that they thought was in some way deficient and to clarify ambiguities that were allowed by an unpointed text’* [Small, p74]

Consonantal or Rasm Variants

- Some variants involve addition of letters. Some of these added letters affect grammar.
- Adding letters making a new word eg BNF 370a at Q14:40 where ‘invocation’ becomes ‘the adopted son’
- Variants in conjunctions eg wa instead of fa
- Missing words. In BNF 340c at 14:37 there is a missing word although the meaning is not really affected.
- Added words and Phrases. This is seen most commonly in the palimpsest Manuscripts available, especially the Sana’a palimpsest. Asma Helali notes that the lower text of the Sana’a palimpsest does not match any known system of variants for any of the readings or recitation systems of the Quran.
- *‘The additional significance of the palimpsest can be seen in that these were not accidental omissions that were corrected by the original scribe but were texts with variants of major substance as part of the basic form of the text’* [Small, p83, emphasis added]
- *‘This is an indication that the literature as it stands is not a complete record of the variants once existing in the Quranic manuscript tradition; that the tradition at one time did indeed contain many more variants than are now extant in the period just prior to the inferior texts of the extant palimpsest and also very possibly in Islam’s first three centuries prior to Ibn Mujahid (d943/323). There is the definite possibility that these kinds of variants were much more common during the earliest part of the transmission of the Quran than was the case later on. Their disappearance from the later stages of the manuscript tradition is evidence that they represent an early stage in the editing and standardisation of the text’* [Small, p84, emphasis added]

Variations in Versification

- There is evidence of some form of ‘marker’ for different verses from the earliest versions. They usually consist of various clusters of dots or strokes.

- Some manuscripts have multiple systems due to a later scribe correcting the earlier inscription.
- Close examination of them shows that no two manuscripts have precisely parallel counting systems. There was also a great variety in the counting systems used, and Gerd Puin confirms that this was also the case in the early Sana'a manuscripts. (Gerd Puin, 'Observations on early Quran Manuscripts in Sana'a', 1996p 107-11)
- Small comments on this on p91 and notes that this variability is a 'variety **greater than the Islamic tradition recognises**'
- Some separators don't just separate sections of text but are also 'pause markers' in recitation. Therefore their placement **changes the way the text is recited**.
- This is significant because a common argument from SIN apologists is that oral tradition perfectly preserved the Quran before it was written down. Changes in recitation WILL CHANGE oral tradition, therefore the facts do not support this argument.
- In addition, this confirms what scholars like Arthur Jeffrey have proposed: that before the recitation systems were limited to 7 by Ibn Mujahid (d936) there were at least 50 different recitation systems in use (Arthur Jeffrey, 'Materials for the History of the Text of the Quran, 1937)

Physical Corrections to Manuscripts

- A number of scholars including Small, Fedeli and Daniel Brubaker have shown that the early Quranic manuscripts have actually been physically altered in a number of places.
- Fedeli found that manuscripts had been physically altered or corrected for several reasons:
 1. Corrections where the text was changed to make it confirm to what the scribe perceived to be a standard reading. These changes make the text match what was considered to be canonical by the 10th century
 2. Corrections where the orthography was 'updated' by adding missing diacritical marks or vowels.
 3. Corrections to address copyist mistakes

These can be summarised in the following table

Quran location	Manuscript	Change made	Reason
14:35:2	Topkapi	Hada' written over other letters	Conform text to standard reading
14:35:3	Meknes	Ala' added	Conform text to standard reading
14:37:1	Topkapi	Diacritics added	Designate a non-standard reading
14:37:4	BN333c	<i>Lam</i> ' corrected to 'ya'	Correct copyist mistake
14:37:5	BN328a	<i>Fa</i> corrected to <i>wa</i>	Designate a non-standard reading
14:37:6	Topkapi	Erasure	Correct copyist mistake
14:38:1	BN330a	Diacritics added	Conform text to standard reading
14:38:2	Topkapi	Diacritics added	Designate a non-standard reading
14:38:2	Meknes	Diacritics added	Conform text to standard reading
14:39:1	01-20.x	Al added to make al-Hamdu	Correct copyist mistake
14:39:1-2	BN370a	Major Erasure	Conform text to standard reading

Quran location	Manuscript	Change made	Reason
14:40:1	Istanbul	Alif added	Update orthography/conform text to standard reading
14:41:1	Istanbu	Alif added	Update orthography/conform text to standard reading

- *‘The overall number of corrections makes it possible that the great majority of the corrections in the Qurans were made with the dogmatic purpose in mind: the establish the standardised form of the consonantal text’* [Small, p101]

What these variants mean

- Looking at the variants several observations can be made:
 - D. There were fewer variants in the canonical readings than non canonical ones.
 - E. Variants were found in diacritical marks as well as rasm. Both of these sometimes affected meaning.
 - F. The variants would have affected the sound of the recitation and may have caused confusion to the listener.
 - There are variants that are clearly copyist errors. Examples include
 1. Added letters
 2. Misplaced diacritical marks. These generally occur among letters that are very similar and any reader familiar with the language would be able to determine which pronunciation was intended. Almost half of the these copyist errors involve misplaced diacritical marks
 3. In similar fashion, letters missing from words are easily identifiable as copyist errors
- ‘These small numbers of variants across so many manuscripts demonstrate the level of care which scribes used in this manuscript tradition. Copyist mistakes were found on the earliest manuscripts as well as later ones’* [Small, p67]
- Despite this, there were a number of variants and the most likely explanation was that they were designed to conform a text with much variation to a standard reading. We see that there were political factors and other factors other than accuracy of transmission behind Ibn Mujahid’ choice of seven readings [See section on Qiraat for more information]
 - We also see that the Islamic literature reports that that there were not only other Quran collections but that there are missing verses as well. Examples include:
 1. the phenomenon of the ‘companion codices’ ie those collected by Muhammad’s companions.
 2. Ibn Masud’s quran had 111 surahs vs Hafs 114. Ubay Ibn Ka’ab’s collection had 2 extra surahs
 3. There are claims that surah 9 was once 3 or 4 times longer than it is today
 - In addition to this we have John of Damascus and other sources speaking of the titles of surahs as separate books

What about intentionality

- Textual criticism of the New Testament has given scholars much experience in determining whether alterations to a manuscript were intentional or non-intentional. We can apply these lessons to the Quran.

- New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman notes that just because scribes intentionally altered a text does not mean that they were intentionally trying to alter teaching or doctrine

'In fact, however, there is scarce need to posit any kind of ulterior motive for this kind of scribal activity. It is enough to recognise that when scribes modified their texts, they did so in light of what they already believed their scriptures taught' [Bart D Ehrman, *the Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 1993, p279]

- Ehrman goes on to describe how sometimes they actually **did** alter the text based on their own interpretation.

'This is exactly what the scribes did: they occasionally altered the words in the text by putting them 'in other words'. To this extent, they were textual interpreters. At the same time, by physically altering the words, they did something quite different from other exegetes, and this difference is by no means to be minimised. Whereas all readers change a text when they construe it in their minds, the scribes actually changed the text on the page. As a result they created a new text, a new concatenation of words over which future interpreters would dispute, no longer having access to the words of the original text, the words produced by the author' [Corruption p 280]

Hobbs then compares textual criticism of the New Testament with that of the Classics.

"A problem in various types of textual criticism is posed by the extent to which we have materials. In beginning with classical textual criticism, I quickly learned that the big problem was that we have so little material; because of this, methods develop rather differently in classics than they do in the case of a sacred text in the West, where writing and copying became a major activity in the monasteries for nearly a millennium. For the New Testament, the fact that you have so much material poses problems, but in most of the classics you have so little material that it is often difficult to reconstruct the history of the text"

Keith Small then opines that the Quran's situation is more similar to the classics, in that one form of the text predominates from an early period that represents the majority of the extant manuscripts.

'Fedeli observes that Islamic records speak openly of various forms of the basic text that were in use during the first 3 Islamic centuries' [p134]

- When we compare Intentional vs non-intentional variants we see:
 - G. Unintentional variants make up <10% of the total variants
 - H. Some variants were to clarify a particular reading eg changing 'fruit' to 'dates' in 14:41
 - I. Most were added to update the orthography.
 - J. Some were made to support a particular doctrine eg Shi'ite scholars assert that words that were once part of the Quran were changed by Uthman to weaken their claims that Ali was the 'heir apparent'.
 - K. In the early manuscripts there was a kind of limited freedom in placing the diacritical marks in different places while the rasm remained unchanged. This freedom disappeared by the 10th century when the canonical readings were chosen.

- It is also well known that pressure from the religious and legal establishment was a factor reducing the influence and circulation of versions that were not viewed as canonical. A good example is the ruling by the jurist Malik Ibn Anas (d795) that stated that a ruler had a duty to prevent both the sale and recitation of the version attributed to Ibn Masud.
- This kind of decree is not acting to correct 'unintentional errors' or clarifying ambiguity. Rather, this is an example of a broader drive to conform the text to ONE standard consonantal reading.
- This explains the Palimpsests. Why would scribes have completely erased an entire manuscript of the 'eternal' and 'perfect' Quran? The only logical explanation was that there was a drive to conform all the available manuscripts to ONE standard reading and there were some manuscripts that were simply 'too far gone' to be conformed. The only alternative was to completely erase them and rewrite them with the 'standard' text.
- All of this points to an editing process that was not complete until the end of the 9th or 10th centuries. This process would have been at work in the copying of the Quran but in addition to this we see evidence in Islamic sources of a conscious desire to establish a fixed text that was authorised by political authority ie Uthman or Al-Hajjaj. This adds a further factor of standardisation onto the existing one of scribal corrections.

The Development of Quranic Arabic. **(Markus Gross: 'Early Islam')**

On overview of 'defective writing systems'

- Linguistic analysis suggest that the development of new writing systems 'de novo' is rare and most scripts are based on pre-existing earlier scripts. This usually goes in stages:
 - L. The first scripts were almost always pictographic eg hieroglyphics
 - M. Then we have syllabic scripts eg Japanese hiragana or consonantal scripts (Hebrew and Aramaic)
 - N. Finally vowels are added either as separate letters (Greek/Latin) or by dots/symbols (Hebrew/Aramaic/Arabic)
- The first generation of Quranic manuscripts had NO diacritical marks and NO vowels. Thus only about 12 letters or 'graphemes' can be accurately distinguished with confidence. Thus the same symbol could be the sound 'y', 'b', 't', 'th' or 'n'. Obviously this makes reading them with certainty next to impossible.
- Gross then analyses earlier scripts that were also defective in that they were consonantal only. This includes the Ugaritic cuneiform script, the Old Persian Cuneiform, Middle Persian scripts.
- He notes that in terms of 'progressiveness' of a writing system, Quranic Arabic was '*a huge step backwards..No other system in the area has or had a comparably small number of graphemes, and even in other eras and areas of the world it will be difficult to find anything even as remotely defective*' [p447]
- He then asks the obvious question of why the writers of the Quran would use such a defective script when more effective ones, especially Syro-Aramaic or even the Sabaic script of South Arabia/Yemen were available?

- One possible explanation is that the material used to make up the Quran originally was a Christian lectionary and functioned as was a kind of 'prompter' or 'notes in shorthand' for the preacher. Thus the preacher would ALREADY KNOW what the text referred to and having it in a form of 'shorthand' would not be a problem. This makes sense of the evidence.
- If however, the Quran was meant to be a text to be read and understood by the believers themselves, it does not make sense. In order to avoid confusion and falsification, transmitters of religious texts, by nature, tend towards clarity and DISAMBIGUATION rather than the kind vagueness we see in the Quran.
- It should be noted that the later manuscripts show evidence of substantial editing and additions [to be covered in another section]. This would suggest that while the Quran may not have been originally written for a wider audience in mind, it was used as such by later Arab rulers and because they recognised the inherent ambiguity and lack of clarity, they edited the text to correct this problem.
- Christophe Luxemberg hypothesises that the Quran was originally written in Syro-Aramaic and transposed to Arabic. He contends the following:
 - A. Quranic texts originally conceived in Syriac and then imperfectly rendered in Arabic by transposing word by word onto the corresponding Arabic form.
 - B. Because these words were written in a defective Arabic script, later generations could not understand them.
 - C. This led to misinterpretation. When one takes the text back to the original Syriac, it makes much more sense. He covers this in the 'Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Quran' [Considered in another section]

QURANIC ARABIC

Was Writing used in 7th Century Hijaz?

- The most authoritative studies of writing in Pre-Islamic Arabia were conducted by Michael McDonald and Peter Stein. They have concluded that literacy in 7th century Hijaz was quite rare, if not completely unknown. Therefore most of the Arab culture of this time was still primarily oral. [McDonald, *Ancient Arabia and the Written Word* 2010, p22]
- McDonald defines a literate society as one in which writing has become essential to its function especially in vital areas eg bureaucracy, commerce, religion. This contrasts with a non-literate society where writing is not so essential and where oral communication can perform the essential functions.
- McDonald studied not only Arabia but also other similar societies in other areas. He notes that with the exception of Yemen in the south and centres such as Dedan and Tayma in the northwest, most of Arabia remained non-literate. He explains this as follows: *'Nomadic life involves long periods of solitary idleness...anything that can help pass the time is welcome. Some people carved their tribal marks on the rocks; others carved drawings, often with great skill. Writing provided the perfect pastime and both men and women among the nomads seized it with great enthusiasm, covering the rocks of the Syro-Arabian deserts with scores of thousands of graffiti'* [McDonald, 2010 p15]
- He notes that the content of this graffiti includes personal names and issues concerned with nomadic life. There are no real 'texts' and most are in the Nabatean language.
- *'The choice of writing materials available to nomads in antiquity was generally limited to the rocks of the desert. Literacy was therefore of little practical use in these societies*

and would not have displaced speech and memory as the means of communication and record. Instead, writing seems to have been used almost entirely as a pastime for those doing long hours of enforced, usually solitary, idleness in the desert, such as guarding the herds while they pastured, or keeping watch for game or enemies” [McDonald, 2015, p8-9

- Angelika Neuwirth also acknowledges that *‘the technique of writing did not play a decisive part in the cultural life of pre-Islamic Arabia’* [Neuwirth, Arcane Knowledge communicated in the Quran 2020 p66]
- McDonald has confirmed that writing was effectively not used in 7th century Arabian peninsula
- Assman concludes that in a society that was fundamentally oral, *‘it was anything but normal for a society to write down its oral tradition’* [Assman, Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation 2011, p242]
- *‘By all indications, writing in late ancient Arabia was primarily a simple pastime, a sort of sudoku of the desert’* [Shoemaker, Creating the Quran, p143]
- When the issue of literacy in the Hijaz of the SIN is considered, one must also note that anyone involved in commerce or trade would NOT have used Arabic for this. It is much more likely that Greek or Aramaic would have been used. Therefore, even if all the evidence suggests that the Muhammad of the SIN did not actually exist, *even if he did*, he would have had to have learned Greek or Aramaic if he were to be successful trader and interact with the Jewish and Christian communities that were allegedly around.
- When we add this problem to the fact that even the Islamic traditions themselves talk about competing versions of the Quran after it was allegedly written down, this makes it HIGHLY UNLIKELY that the SIN account is correct.
- So what do we know for certain:
 - A. Literacy in Arabic only became common and widespread toward the END of the 7th century around the time of Abd al-Malik.
 - B. The Arabic of the Quran is more consistent with the Arabic that was used in areas North and West of the Hijaz, again in areas controlled by Abd al-Malik.
 - C. BOTH Islamic and Non-Islamic traditions confirm that Abd al-Malik played a key role in canonising and standardising the Quran, via Al-Hajjaj.
 - D. The first manuscripts begin to appear at the end of the 7th century-early 8th century, again during the reign of Abd al-Malik.

Conclusion

- We can come to the following conclusions:
 4. While writing did exist in 7th century Hijaz the culture was NOT a literate one. Writing was used as a pastime and not to record religious concepts.
 5. The language the 7th century Hijaz is NOT the language of the Quran. It uses language that is much more consistent with the Arabic of Syria and the Levant.
 6. Therefore it is HIGHLY UNLIKELY that the Quran was produced in the Hijaz
- *‘The Quran, therefore, only achieved its invariable, archetypal form sometime around the turn of the 8th century..The circumstances of extended oral transmission and the existence of rival versions of the Quran establish a very high likelihood that the memories of Muhammad’s teachings would have changed significantly during the period between his death and the establishment of their now canonical version’* [Shoemaker, p147]

Scholarly Analysis of Quranic Arabic

The Work of Ahmad Al-Jallad

- He builds on earlier work by MacDonald and analyses the relationship between the Arabic of the inscriptions and that to the Quran. He analysed the Safaitic inscriptions of Eastern Jordan, Southern Syria and North West Arabia. Note that these areas were heavily influenced by the Nabateans.
- By comparing the Quran with inscriptions from Dedan as well as Papyri from Damascus, he identifies a dialect that he calls 'Old Hijazi'. There are 3 distinguishing features of the dialect that Al-Jallad labelled as 'Old Hijazi':
 - E. A distinctive form of the relative pronoun
 - F. A distinctive form of the distal demonstrative
 - G. Adding the form 'an' to the infinitive eg 'an yaf' ala- (that he do) rather than 'he do' infinitive form eg 'to do' with
- Although he identifies the 'old Hijazi' dialect but he provides no convincing evidence that this dialect actually WAS the dialect used in the Hijaz. He simply ASSUMES that the Quran was produced in the Hijaz and therefore to call the dialect 'Old Hijazi' is CIRCULAR REASONING.
- Where do we find this dialect? NOT in the Hijaz but in the Levant ie southern Syria, Eastern Jordan and Northwest Arabia.
- If there are parallels between the Arabic of the Quran and these inscriptions then the mere fact that all of the inscriptions are from areas NORTHWEST of the Hijaz strongly suggests that the Quran came from this area. If these areas were those that were controlled by the Nabateans then this also strongly suggests that the Arabic of the Quran was influenced by the language of the Nabateans.
- Indeed 2 of the inscriptions are from DEDAN, which although technically in the Hijaz, which is well northwest of the Mecca. Dedan is named in the Bible and there are nearly 2000 inscriptions in this script available
- This strongly suggests that although Al-Jallad is correct in identifying the particular dialect of the Quran, he is not correct in simply assuming that it comes from the area of Mecca. In fact the evidence suggests that it more likely came from the the Northwest. This is in line with the Archaeological evidence for the Arab 'Holy City'. Remember that all of the archaeological evidence suggests that if there was an Arab 'Holy City' it was NOT at Mecca but some place far to the North and West.
- The fact that Al-Jallad finds the same Arabic in papyri found in Syria also supports the that the Quran originated from this area.
- Indeed earlier evidence has shown that the Quran only really comes together during and after the reign of Abd al-Malik. And WHERE did he rule from? DAMASCUS.
- We also know that the Umayyads employed locals in their administrations eg John of DAMASCUS and his father. They would have been fluent in the language that was in use there, whether it be a dialect of Arabic or even Aramaic.
- *'Nevertheless, in the end the only result that linguistic comparison of the Quran yields with any certainty is that the Quranic dialect conforms to a type of prestige Arabic that was in use in the Levant during the Umayyad period. This finding certainly is entirely consistent with what we have proposed..on the basis of historical sources: that the Quran as we have it now was produced in written form initially in Syro-Palestine and Mesopotamia after the conquests, and its final standardisation took place under an imperial directive from Abd al-Malik and Al-Hajjaj. " [Shoemaker, Creating the Quran, p139]*

- So, the data do NOT support Al-Jallad's Hijazi origin hypothesis. He appears to have come to this conclusion because he has superimposed the SIN on the evidence, rather than letting the evidence speak for itself.

Mark Durie [At the End of this document, Durie's article is reproduced in full]

- Other Scholars have looked at the same evidence and concluded that the dialect of the Quran most closely resembles the Arabic used in areas heavily influenced by the Nabateans. [Mark Durie, On the Origin of Quranic Arabic 2018, Al-Ghul, 2006]
- He identifies 2 puzzles.
 - A. that '*Muslim philologists were unable to identify any of the dialects known to them as the source of Quranic Arabic*' and..
 - B. That '*among the many thousands of pre-Quranic ancient Arabic inscriptions, spread over a vast region, there are so few inscriptions which could reflect a precursor to Quranic Arabic*'
- Durie's solution to both puzzles is that "*Quranic Arabic, as reflected in its Rasm, or consonantal skeleton, developed directly from the Arabic of the Nabateans*" who may have spoken Arabic in some circumstances but wrote in Aramaic, which was the Lingua Franca of the time.

[

Robert Kerr [Kerr's document reproduced in full at the end of this document]

- He analyses a number of Semitic languages to look at where the Arabic of the Quran came from. This includes the Sabaic script that was spoken in Yemen and would have been used in the Hijaz of the 7th century.
- He also notes that the Arabic of the Quran is much more like the Arabic of the Nabateans who lived in Jordan and Northern Arabia. It is not like the Sabaic Arabic.
- This is consistent with other evidence that suggests that the Quran was compiled. in NORTH Arabia, not around Mecca.

CONCLUSION

- So what do we know for certain:
 - A. Literacy in Arabic only became common and widespread toward the END of the 7th century around the time of Abd al-Malik.
 - B. The Arabic of the Quran is more consistent with the Arabic that was used in areas North and West of the Hijaz, again in areas controlled by Abd al-Malik.
 - C. BOTH Islamic and Non-Islamic traditions confirm that Abd al-Malik played a key role in canonising and standardising the Quran, via Al-Hajjaj.
 - D. The first manuscripts begin to appear at the end of the 7th century-early 8th century, again during the reign of Abd al-Malik.
- What does this mean?
 - A. This makes it highly unlikely that a document as complex as the Quran would have been written down in the 7th century Hijaz. The 'infrastructure' for it to be produced simply did not exist in that area.
 - B. It DID however exist in Syria and Jordan and it is much more likely that the Quran was originally produced much further north under Abd al-Malik.
 - C. It is much more likely that the Quran was produced in Syro-Palestine under the supervision of Abd al-Malik

Christoph Luxemberg “Relics of Syro-Aramaic Letters’ (Early Islam)

- Analysis of Quranic orthography suggests that at least parts of the Quran were originally written in Syro-Aramaic script. Although the Quran may have been the first book COMPOSED in Arabic, this does not mean that it was ORIGINALLY WRITTEN in Arabic script as we know it today.
- It is reasonable to presume that the initiators of the written Arabic script were educated people and it is also reasonable to presume that they received this education in a Syro-Aramaic speaking environment.
- Indeed studies of comparative linguistics tell us that is much more common for a culture to adopt and adapt an existing writing system than to create one from scratch.
- We see examples of this as follows:
 - D. The Turkic languages of the Soviet Union switched from Arabic to Latin and then to Cyrillic when they were taken over by the Soviets. After the fall of the Soviet Union, many switched back to Latin script.
 - E. Romanian texts were written in Cyrillic alphabet originally and many then switched to Latin script.
 - F. It is well established that the Japanese Kanji are originally based on Chinese characters which have been adapted and changed.
- This results in a process of adaptation where orthographical mistakes can be made and this can result in confusing readings.
- There is also a well-known tradition in Arabic Christian circles to write Arabic using the Syro-Aramaic script called Garshuni or Karshuni. This is especially used in liturgical books
- It is well-established that the Quran was written using material borrowed from many different sources. Indeed, many scholars believe that it was based on a pre-existing Christian lectionary. Such a text would have been written in Syro-Aramaic.
- Quranic Scholars such as Luxemberg are now re-examining Quranic passages that are not well understood, particularly the so-called ‘dark passages’ with this in mind.

QIRAAT VARIANTS.

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE VARIANT READINGS OF THE QURAN **(Dr Shady Hekmat Nasser, 2013)**

Muslim tradition says that the Quran was revealed in 7 Ahruf to Muhammad by Jibreel. Despite this, Muslim sources vary:

Al-Tabari (d923) wrote of 20 variant readings attributed to eponymous readers

Al-Zamakshari (d1144) rejected some of these readings and preferred others

‘For both scholars, it seems that the canonical readings were being stripped of their divine nature and the origin was not attributed to the prophet himself but the Quran readers and transmitters ie to their own selectivity in reading and understanding (ijtihad) of the Uthmanic consonantal outline supported by the context of the Quranic verse’ (p7)

Ibn Kaldun (d808) stated that the early Arabic script was underdeveloped when the companions wrote the prototypal copies and the imperfections in the script caused several discrepancies in the the Uthmanic copies. In fact, he called those who believed that the companions excelled in Arabic orthography ‘idiots’.

Despite Uthman's efforts to codify the text of the Quran and limit its variants, the different readings of the Quranic text, permitted by the nature of the defective rams, kept multiplying with time until Ibn Mujahid (d936) limited them under 7 eponymous readings' (p10)

Western Scholars varied in their opinions:

1. Wansborough believed that the traditions of the collections of Uthman and Abu Bakr come from the 9th century and that the Quran could not be dated earlier than the 9th century
2. Schwally rejected the traditions of Abu Bakr's collection but accepted those of Uthman.
3. Casanova believed that the Quran was codified under the reign of Abd al-Malik by Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf
4. Mingana believed that the Quran was not a complete book in the 7th century

There are no Quranic manuscripts or even fragments that can be regarded as contemporary to 'Muhammad'.

The Sab'at Ahruf (Seven Modes)

- Muslim scholars are divided on exactly what is meant by this term with al-Suyuti noting 35 different interpretations of this tradition. They are however unanimous in saying that this term does not refer to the 7 Qiraat canonised by Ibn Mujahid (d936). *'A great majority of the masses believe that the sab'at Ahruf are the 7 eponymous Readings. This is unfathomable ignorance'* (al-Suyuti 1/333, quoted by Nasser, p15)
- The term Ahruf is derived from the term 'harf' and since no one knows exactly what the word 'harf' means, an accurate translation of the term 'Ahruf' is not possible.
- The following traditions mention the sab'at Ahruf.
 5. Malik b Anas(d 796)
 6. Abu Dawud al Tayalisi (d820)
 7. Abd al-Razzaq al-San'ani (d827)
 8. Abu Ubayd al-Qasim b Sallam (d838)
 9. Ibn Abi Shaybah (d849)
 10. Al-Bukhari (d870)
- Nasser notes that early Islamic scholars went to great lengths to limit variant types of the Quran to 7 in order to prove the validity of this tradition.
- G. Al-Sijistani (d869) attributed the existence of Quranic variants to the differences in dialects of Arabic and that the dialects vary among each other in *'exactly 7 ways'*[p165]
- H. Ibn Qutayba (d889) *'stated that after much deliberation and reflection, he found the types of variant readings to be exactly, and conveniently, seven'* [p165]
- This is the reverse of how history normally works. Your list is 7 because the facts say it is 7; you do not limit a list to 7 merely to support a tradition that you want to believe is true.
- Shi'ites reject the Uthmanic codex and over the centuries have used the Qiraat variant readings to support their argument that the Quran had been falsified and altered. They

believe that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet in only one harf. *'Therefore the notion of the seven or ten canonical readings does not exist in Shi'ism'* (p33)

- Nasser concludes that the tradition of the Sab'at Ahruf *was in circulation probably by the last quarter of the first Islamic century [AD 697-722]. This indicates that the multiplicity of the Quranic readings, not long after the codification process by Uthman, still lacked official validation by the Prophet, thus giving way tot the promulgation of the sab'at Ahruf tradition.* (P34)
- **[NOTE; Nasser appears to accept the validity of the tradition of the Quran being codified by Uthman. He appears to accept the Islamic sources at face value regarding this. But, as we can see in other analysis, there is very little historical evidence to support this acceptance]**

Ibn Mujahid and the Canonisation of the 7 readings

- Ibn Mujahid was not the first to write about variant readings.
 - I. Al-Fadli lists 44 readings,
 - J. Ubayd al-Qasim b Sallam mentions 25 readers
 - K. Ismail al-Maliki (d895) collected 20 variant readings
- Ibn Attiya (d1147) writes about Abd al-Malik commissioning Al-Hajjaj b Yusuf to partition the Quran into sections and put dots on the consonants.

Al-Tabari

- Al Tabari (d923) collected >20 variant readings. He did not view them as being divine in origin but being the product of human selectivity in deciphering the Uthmanic consonantal skeleton.
- Indeed, he even dismisses the readings that came to be regarded as the 7 canonical readings. Specifically he regards Ibn Amir as 'repulsive and inarticulate' and that it contradicted the consensus of readers. He also dismisses Ibn Kathir for the same reasons.
- As far as al-Tabari was concerned there were readings that were correct, readings that were not correct and readings in between. When looking at what makes some readings better than others, the cause of the disparity in quality is HUMAN not divine.
- In simple terms, Al-Tabari did not try to canonise the readings. He simply compared them and tried to find the best fit based on the current rasm, and using Arabic grammar.
- This is highly significant as al-Tabari is regarded as the father of Tafsir ie commentary and Tarikh or Islamic history. Yet this scholar disregarded several 'canonical' readings of the Quran. ***How can this be if these readings were divinely inspired by Allah?***

Ibn Mujahid's readings

- Ibn Mujahid chose 7 readings for the Quran.
- The 7 readings were:
 1. Ibn Kathir from Mecca (d738)
 2. Nafi from Medina (d785)
 3. Ibn Amir from Damascus (d736)
 4. Abu Amr Ibn al-Ala from Basra (d770)

5. Asim from Kufa (d745)
6. Al-Kisai from Kufa (d804)
7. Hamzah from Kufa (d773)

- It should be noted that NONE of these men were alive when Muhammad supposedly received the 7 recitations from Jibreel. Despite this, Islamic scholars hold that they are all DIVINE in origin. *‘The seven and the ten readings are held to be of divine nature, ie they are all Quranic, including the individual variants that the readers agreed upon’*[p49]
- Ibn Mujahid gives no clear statement on the criteria behind his choices but he does give some general characteristics of a good reader:
 8. solid foundation in Arabic,
 9. knowledge of the variant readings,
 10. knowledge of Quranic tradition
 11. Critical understanding of the meaning of the verses
- Ibn Mujahid does not show a clear ‘isnad’ or line of transmission from the reader back to the Prophet Muhammad for his choices, apart from Ibn Kathir. Effectively he is saying the he does not need to demonstrate an unbroken chain of transmission back to the the Prophet to validate his choices. This is somewhat puzzling given the importance for Hadith in Islamic culture.
- It appears that Ibn Mujahid chose these readings because the people of Mecca, Medina, Basra, Damascus and Kufa had agreed and accepted these readings rather than because they allegedly went back to Muhammad.
- This is a somewhat circular argument because it says that the these readings were authentic because the people of these regions believed that they were authentic. **It also suggests that popularity rather than proven prophetic authenticity drove his decisions**

Ibn Mujahid’s Criteria examined.

- As we have seen, Ibn Mujahid did not specify exactly what his criteria for acceptance were. Later Muslim scholars have argued that a sound ‘Isnad’ or ‘Sunna’ were used. The problem with this is that he does not provide a clear Isnad and Sunna or practices varied from place to place.
- Ibn Mujahid appears to place far more value on IJMA or the consensus of agreement on whether a particular reading was acceptable to the majority of the community. This can be seen by the fact that although the reading of Ibn Shanabudh could be supported by clear Isnad, it is not included by Ibn Mujahid as by the 9th century, the majority of the Qurra community had agreed to abandon it.
- We also see that although Ibn Mujahid writes that Abu Ja’far was a very good reader and that his reading adhered to the Sunna, the dominant reading for the people of Medina was that of Nafi. For this reason, he selects Nafi. We see the same logic applied to the selection of readers from Mecca, Damascus and Basra.
- *‘Canvassing the majority and deciding on whom ‘a’ consensus is the strongest play the decisive role in Ibn Mujahid’s selection for the representative reader of an city’* [p55]
- So why were 3 readers chosen from Kufa? Ibn Mujahid also notes that by the middle of the 8th century, many Kufans were familiar with the Quran of Ibn Masud, which PREDATES UTHMAN according to Islamic tradition. The problem was that it was not

the dominant reading and was different from the 'ijma' or consensus, so he could not choose it.

- The other problem is that there was NO ONE DOMINANT reading in Kufa. Unlike Damascus, Mecca and Medina and Basra, there were many competing intellectual, theological and political factions in Kufa. This meant that the reading of Asim was popular with some but not others as was the reading of Hamzah. Finally Ibn Mujahid chooses BOTH of them as well as al-Kisa'i to ensure that there was at least ONE reading that the majority of Kufans could be happy with
- If all the variants are divinely inspired, there would be NO NEED to argue for and against certain readings being included: they are all divine and that is that. But this is not what Ibn Mujahid does. He does indeed argue for and against certain readings. *'This strategy is very different from the later approach to Qira'at, which considered all the Eponymous Readings including every single reading to be divine revelations recited by Jibril and acknowledged by the Prophet..Had Ibn Mujahid or the seven Eponymous Readers themselves believed that the variant readings were of divine nature, they would not have tried to argue for or against certain readings'* [p60]
- We see this illustrated when the later scholar Al-Jazari gives almost no reasons for including any of the variant readings as he has accepted that they are all DIVINE.
- Instead, Nasser proposes that Ibn Mujahid did not intend to present the variant readings as wahy (revelation) but instead proposed to examine them in the same way that Islamic legal scholars examine things and defend their position through reasoning and justification.
- These legal scholars argue by discussing, reasoning and criticising each other's arguments but there are NO ABSOLUTE PROOFS that any one position was accepted or rejected by the Prophet. So they attempt to determine Shariah law by looking at the Quran, traditions, ijma (consensus) and Qiyas (analogy) and in doing so they agree on some points and disagree on others.
- In the same way Ibn Mujahid and the Quranic scholars were trying to determine the 'Shariah of the Quran' through a similar process. Consequently they *'agreed on some readings and disagreed on others. Ibn Mujahid's role was to limit and enumerate these variant readings in his book, which aimed at including the most common and representative readings of this time'*
- It should be noted that after Ibn Mujahid, compilations with 8, 10 or more readings began to appear and later scholars, including Al-Jazari (d1331) criticised him for committing 'akhtala' ie an error. He says that Ibn Mujahid confused the masses into thinking that 7 readings were the 7 Ahruf, so that if someone heard a reading that was not one of the 7, they would dismiss it as inauthentic.
- Nasser provides a very good summary of the evolution of the views of Islamic scholars on the Quran over the first few centuries of Islam. ***'Early Muslim scholars did not look at the variant readings of the Quran as divine revelation. They attributed the Quranic variants to human origins; either to the reader's ijtihad in interpreting the consonantal outline of the Quran or simply to an error in transmission. This position changed drastically in the later periods, especially after the 11th century***

where the canonical readings started to be treated as divine revelation, ie every single variant readings in the seven and ten Eponymous Readings was revealed by God to Muhammad” [p77]

- ***‘Muslims today consider the seven and the ten readings to be Canonical and mutawatirah’ [p77]***

Tawatur of the Qira’at

- The term ‘Tawatur’ or ‘Mutawatur’ refers to something being handed down by some many separate chains of transmitters that collusion would have been impossible. For the Muslim it amounts to almost absolute certainty that the tradition is true and cannot be challenged.
- The consensus of early Muslim scholars agree that ‘Tawatur’ is part of the criterion for the Quran being of divine origin. This is again a somewhat circular argument as it says that we can trust the Quran as being absolutely true because it was transmitted faithfully, and that it was transmitted faithfully because it was of divine origin.
- These same scholars clearly differentiate between the Quran as it is written and the ‘7 readings’. Nasser notes that was no such consensus for the 7 readings being Mutawatur.
- Ibn Arabi (d1148) stated that adhering to one reading only while reciting any part of the Quran is not a prerequisite..The readings were chosen by seven readers and no Muslim is obliged to adhere to these readings because these seven readers are not infallible. He even suggests that the Qiraat lists of Abu Ubayd and Al-Tabari were superior to that of Ibn Mujahid [p107]
- He quotes Abu Shamah (d1297) *‘Recently some readers and blind followers (Muqallidun) started to promulgate the idea that the seven eponymous readings are entirely Mutawatirah, ie they are transmitted through Tawatur in every generation of transmitters and with every single individual who transmitted an eponymous reading. They also claimed that it is absolutely certain that these readings were entirely revealed by God’ [p100]*
- Thus we have a 13th century Islamic Scholar stating that the idea that these readings were of divine origin was a RECENT DEVELOPMENT.
- The 19th century scholar al-Shawkani states that there is no proof for the idea that the 7 or 10 readings are Mutawatur because they were only transmitted through single chains of transmission. This skepticism is consistent with that of previous scholars.
- **Indeed he noted that the early Muslim community did not unconditionally accept all of the readings. Indeed the readings of Hamzah, al-Kisai and Ibn Amir were disparaged, criticised and ridiculed by eminent scholars such as Hanbal, al-Sijistani, al-Zamakshari, al-Tabari [p111]**
- ***‘Distinguished Muslim scholars such as Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi, al-Zamakshiri, Ibn Atiyyah, Abu Hatim al-Sijistani, Makki al-Qaysi and several others held that the canonical readings were the result of ijtihad and interpretation of the readers themselves and not of divine nature’ [p112]***
- Nasser then summarises the dilemma as follows:

- A. The Quran whether the text of the Mushaf or the conceptual speech revealed to the prophet is Mutawatur. But the 7 readings are NOT mutawatur
- B. But you cannot read the Quran using your own ijthad or opinion so you need to read it using TRADITION, but NONE of the traditions of NONE of the readings can be supported as 'absolutely true'. So..
- C. How do you read the Quran?

- What about the Shiites?

- 12. Shia Muslims do not accept the canonical readings as Mutawatur and see no theological imperative to adopt any one particular reading. There is no clear barrier for them to use anomalous readings as they assist in interpretation and argumentation.
- 13. As a rule, Shia use the Hafs reading as it comes from Asim, whose Isnad supposedly goes back to Ali, from whom the Shia trace their theological lineage.

Nasser phrases the problem in a question that highlights the **obvious contradiction** **'In other words, the Quran is Mutawatur yet the readings are ahad, and there is no Quran without the official readings; how could a mutawatur text be recited using non-mutawatur readings?'** [p109]

In other words, one cannot read the Quran without the canonical readings; the Quran is coded, and one needs these canonical readings to decode it. In theory the Quran is Mutawatur ie it is absolute and it yields necessary and undisputed knowledge; however the means by which the Quran is decoded and read are not mutawatirah' [p111]

Conclusion

Nasser notes that analysis of scholarship yields the following points:

- There is consensus that the Quran is Mutawatur
- There is disagreement over the readings.
- D. Some see them as all Quranic in nature because God revealed them all but
- E. others see them as being the readers interpretation of the Quranic Rasm as the readings were all transmitted through single chains of transmission, which is NOT the criterion for Mutawatur.
- **In conclusion, the dominant and strongest opinion among the Muslim Scholars holds to the non-Tawatur of the canonical readings. Finally, the Tawatur of the Quran as a text poses the following complication: how could a mutawatur text be read and decoded through non-mutawatur means ie the canonical readings?'** [p116]

Transmission of the Readings: Readers and their Rawis

Overview

- As noted above, there is a fundamental problem with regarding the Quran as Mutawatur and yet relying on readings that have only one line of transmission. Muslims after Ibn Mujahid tried to solve this problem by finding other lines of transmission to support each reading.

- This is similar to the practice of obtaining multiple Hadith to support a tradition. The problem is that unlike the Hadith, which can accommodate variation, the Quran must be transmitted word for word. Unfortunately, the more traditions they sought, the more variants in the text they found.
- If all of the transmissions were to be considered, then verses would that were supposedly from ONE reader would need to be rendered in multiple ways. The problem with this should be obvious. ***‘The Quran, however, must be transmitted verbatim or it would not be ‘Quran’ anymore’*** [p124]
- Nasser summarises the problem very well ***‘Even the Hadiths transmitted through single chains of transmission were accepted and integrated into Fiqh rulings and Tafsir. But the case of the Quranic readings proved to be diametrically opposite; Muslim scholars sought a unified text with limited variants, but the more transmissions they obtained, the more variants they had to deal with. The preferred ultimate result would have have to find all the transmissions corroborating the exact same reading, but unfortunately this was not the case’*** [p128]
- So practically speaking we have the following:
 - A. There were 7 readings that were chosen by Ibn Mujahid based on consensus
 - B. We also note that not every reading attributed to a reader belongs to the eponymous reader. Each reader would have had several disciples who transmitted to their own students.
 - C. This process would not have been consistent and so there would have been a proliferation of variants.
 - D. This proliferation would need to be limited to control the readings to as few as possible. Just like Uthman’s standardisation and Ibn Mujahid’s decision to limit the readings to 7, this was done to limit the variants to a ‘controllable corpus’
- So how were these ‘transmitters’ or ‘rawi’s’ chosen?
 14. Their transmissions were compared to their peers and various students.
 15. A Rawi whose transmission disagreed with the majority of his colleagues was automatically disregarded and excluded.
 16. TWO main Rawis were chose to represent each of the eponymous readings. The rest of the transmitters, regardless of their trustworthiness or credibility were generally dropped. As noted by Nasser, *‘the notion of 2 canonical Rawis never existed during Ibn Mujahid’s time and it developed in the 11th century during Al-Dani’s time’*[p129]
 17. Note that consensus was the criterion, not whether the transmission was accurate or faithful. What if the majority were actually wrong?
- Therefore in summary the codification of the Quran up to this point was as follows:
 18. Uthman codified one ‘official version’. It should be noted that there were still variant versions of Ubay Ibn Kaab, Ibn Masud, Ali Ibn Abu Talib and Ibn Abbas
 19. Ibn Mujahid canonised the 7 readings
 20. The selection of 2 Rawi or transmitters for each reader
 21. Al Jazari added 3 more readings to make it 10

DISTRICT	READER	FIRST RAWI	SECOND RAWI	OTHER RAWIS (direct students)	TOTAL RAWIS (direct students)
Medina	Nafi (d785)	Warsh (d812)	Qalun (d835)	9 Full Quran 6 partial Quran	17
Mecca	Ibn Kathir (d738)	Al-Bazzi (d864)	Qunbul (d904)	3 Neither Al-Bazzi, nor Qunbul were direct students	3
Damascus	Ibn Amir (d736)	Hisham (d859)	Ibn Dhakwan (d856)	1 Neither Hisham nor Ibn Dhakwan were direct students	1
Basra	Abu Amir b al-Ala (d770)	Al-Duri (860)	Al-Susi (d874)	10 Neither Al-Duri nor Al-Susi were direct students	10
Kufa	Asim (d745)	Hafs (d796)	Shu'bah (d809)	10	12
Kufa	Hamzah (d773)	Khalaf (d844)	Khallad (d835)	2 Neither Khalaf nor Khallad were direct students	2
Kufa	Al-Kisai (d804)	Al-Duri (d860)	Al-Layth (d854)	2	4

- We see that for several readers, their transmitters were NOT from among their direct students. How then can we be really sure that what these 2nd or 3rd generation students were transmitting were indeed accurate representations of what the original reader taught?
- Ibn Mujahid had 49 DIRECT STUDENTS TO CHOOSE FROM. This leads to some obvious questions.
 - A. How can all be this be 'divinely inspired'?
 - B. The Quran is supposed to be the 'word for word' representation of an 'eternal tablet' in heaven. Which one of these 49 versions represents the eternal tablet?

Was Ibn Mujahid's list the only one?

- Ibn Galbun(d1008) also compiled a list of Rawis based on the seven readers. He reduced Nafi's direct Rawis to 3, Asim's to 3 and Abu Amr to 1.
- Thus there was a substantial reduction in immediate transmitters from Ibn Mujahid to Ibn Galbun. ***'One can deduce from the the considerable decline in the number of immediate transmitters that there was an essential need to limit the number of transmitters and subsequently their transmissions of variants'*** [p133]
- Al Dani (d1052-53) also had a Rawi list. He reduced Nafi's to 4, Asim to 4 and Abu Amir to 3.

- There were also many transmitters that had no 'Isnad' or chain of transmission. By the time we get to Al-Jazari (d1429) this number was 209.
- Thus, instead of increasing the number of transmitters between the Prophet and the Reader, as was the case with Hadith, Qiraat manuals actually decreased them.
- This is because scholars only had limited numbers of transmissions that could be supported by documentation.
- Given that Mutawatur requires MANY documented lines of transmission, later scholars trying to document as many immediate transmitters as possible, unfortunately, they were unable to provide Isnad documentation. This is partly because to memorise, recite and teach a particular reading took years of study and training. By the very nature of the process, this had the effect of limiting the number of possible readers or transmitters that could be assessed.
- The following table shows how many immediate transmitters that had Isnad documentation in each collection. The last column shows the number of immediate transmitters WITHOUT Isnad documentation recognised by Al-Jazari (d1429)

EPONYMOUS READERS	IBN MUJAHID (d936)	IBN GALDUN (d1008)	AL-DANI (d1052-53)	TRANSMITTERS WITHOUT ISNAD IN AL-JAZARI
Nafi	17	4	4	34
Ibn Kathir	3	3	3	30
Asim	12	3	4	23
Hamzah	2	1	1	56
Al-Kisai	4	4	5	21
Abu Amr	10	1	3	37
Ibn Amir	1	1	1	8

- We can see a fundamental problem for Muslim scholars regarding viewing the Qiraat as divinely inspired. ***'The modest numbers of the immediate transmitters of the eponymous readers seem to have posed a problem for Muslim scholars. Not only was there no consistency in the rang of numbers of the immediate transmitters, for example 17 for Nafi vs only one for Ibn Amir, but also the sum of these was mediocre. How could a transmission through 1 or 3 or 10 or even 17 transmitters be characterised as mutawatur? We are able now to realise how problematic the subject of Canonical readings through single(ahad) chains of transmission and not through Tawatur. These ahad chains are attested through the limited and mediocre numbers of immediate transmitters from the eponymous readers where authentication through corroboration with other immediate transmitters seemed to be practically impossible [p134]***

How Can we Authenticate the Canonical Readings and Rawis?

- One obvious question to ask is how can we validate the transmission of these Eponymous Readers if they are the only source of transmission?
- The only real way is to:
 - A. Examine the reader in terms of what was written about him by contemporary and later writers to confirm that he was diligent and trustworthy.

- B. Examine the transmissions of his students and compare them with that of the reader.
- C. Examine the transmissions of his students and compare them with each other.

- This would at least establish whether there was consistency in transmission. The problems with this approach are that:

22. Qiraat analysis did not really begin until 9th century and the earliest works eg (al-Dani) have been lost.

23. we don't have much biographical information on these immediate transmitters of the Readers. By the 11th century there was more information on the later transmitters

24. There are differing lists of transmitters eg Ibn Mujahid, Al-Dani and Galbun.

- This makes any analysis by its very nature IMPERFECT. Despite this, Nasser maps out in great detail the different transmitters between the Reader and the Compiler eg Ibn Mujahid, Al-Dani or Galbun. We can see the following:

D. Between Ibn Kathir and Ibn Mujahid there were 2 immediate students and 19 transmitters in total.

E. Between Ibn Kathir and Ibn Galbun there were 3 immediate transmitters and 20 transmitters in total.

F. Between Ibn Kathir and Al-Dani via Qunbul there 2 immediate transmitters and 27 transmitters in total.

G. Another list Between Ibn Kathir and Al-Dani via al-Bazzi shows 2 immediate transmitters and 38 transmitters in total

H. Between Nafi and Ibn Mujahid there are 15 immediate transmitters and 54 total transmitters

I. Between Nafi and Ibn GALDUN there are 4 immediate transmitters and 33 total transmitters.

J. Between Nafi and al-Dani through Ismail b Ja'far there are 2 immediate transmitters and 33 total transmitters

K. Between Nafi and al-Dani via Ishaq Mussabayi has 1 immediate transmitter and 26 total transmitters.

L. Between Nafi and al-Dani through Qalun there are total of 33 transmitters. Through Warsh there are 22 total transmitters.

M. Between Ibn Amir and Ibn Mujahid there is 1 immediate transmitter and 10 total transmitters.

N. Between Ibn Amir and Ibn GALDUN there is 1 immediate transmitter and 20 total transmitters.

O. Between Ibn Amir and al-Dani through Hisham there 50 total transmitters. Between Ibn Amir and al-Dani through Ibn Dakhwan there are 34 total transmitters.

P. Between Abu Amr and Ibn Mujahid there are 10 immediate transmitters and 41 total transmitters.

- At this point we must consider the following implications:

25. Each of these 'versions' represents a specific and DIFFERENT ARABIC QURAN.

26. Even if these lists contain some duplication eg with Al-Dani, each of his different lists may have some of the same names on them, we see 474 different ARABIC QURANS from just 4 of the readers.

27. Even if we restrict ourselves to JUST Ibn Mujahid's lists there are 124 versions available from 4 readers. That's an average of 31 different Arabic Qurans per reader.

- This is represented in a table below

	IBN MUJAHID	IBN GALDUN	AL DANI
Ibn Kathir	19	33	Through Al Bazzi 38 Through Qunbul 27 total 65
Nafi	54	33	Via Ismail b Ja'far 33 Via Ishaq Mussabayi 26 Via Qalun 33 Via Warsh 22 total 114
Ibn Amir	10	20	Via Hisham 50 Via Ibn Dhakwan 34 total 84
Abu Amr	41		
		86 for 3 readers	263 for 3 readers
Total versions available	124		

Conclusions: What we can determine from Nasser's analysis:

- The readings attributed to the 7 readers were not consistent with several different transmission lists circulating among the community. Once the 2 Rawi model was adopted the majority of these variant transmissions were dropped.
- There were no clear criteria for choosing the main transmitters or Rawis other than how many students each reader had.
- Those that had many students were more like to have Rawis selected from these students. Those that did not were more likely to have Rawis selected from the 2nd or 3rd generation of transmitters.
- There were single strand transmissions that resulted in variant readings
- By the time of Al-Shatabi, scholars accepted only 2 main transmissions of canonical Rawis.

“By the 12 century, not only the seven readings were considered canonical and divine but also the two renditions of each reading had become canonical and divine” [p161]

An Overview of the Variants found

Nasser analyses the variants found in the different readings. He examines the canonical 7 of Ibn Mujahid and also the canonical 10 of Al Jazari. He then organises them into different types according to the table below

VARIANT TYPE	EXPLANATION
Addition or Omission	The addition or omission of a particle , consonant, vowel etc

VARIANT TYPE	EXPLANATION
Equivalence	The consonants or vowels exhibited in the variants are equivalent and interchangeable. No variant originates from the other. Both exist at same time
Case endings	Discrepancies in case endings of variants
Internal vowels	Discrepancies in internal vowels of variants
Active & Passive forms	Interchanges between the active and passive forms of the verbs and the participles
Germination	The existence or absence of a shaddah (sign of emphasis) in the variants
Verb form changes	Changes in verb forms of the variants
Tanwin	Presence or absence of tanwin (nun added to end of nouns but not pronounced) in variants
Hamzah	Variation in Hamzah eg articulation, omission etc
Long vowels	Loss, gain or exchange between long vowels aa, ii, uu
Derivatives	Variants that exhibit different morphological patterns yet share the same root letters
Imperfect prefix conjugation	Discrepancies in the prefixes (ya, ta, nun) of the imperfect verb forms
Perfect suffix conjugation	Discrepancies in suffixes (tu, ta, it, at) of perfect verb forms
Alternation	Interchange of consonants between 2 root words resulting in 2 variants
Omission of vowels or consonants	Omission of vowels and loss of consonants due to phonetic phenomena
Pronoun discrepancy	Differences in subject, object, and possessive pronouns
Particles	Different particles preceding nouns and verbs
Ta Marbuta	Omission or changes in ta Marbuta
Definite article	The existence or absence of 'al' before nouns
Transposition	Two words exchange places in a sentence
Metathesis	Two letters or sounds change places within one word
Common root letter	One common root letter among variants
Assimilation	Two consonants or a vowel and consonant assimilate forming a germinated consonant
Amalgamation	Two different words on one variant are read as ONE single word in another variant
Tense alternation	Tense discrepancy between perfect, imperfect and future tenses
Pattern	Two variants have the same pattern in a word yet there are no common root letters.

Conclusion

- Muslim tradition holds that the Quran was revealed in 7 Ahruf, despite the fact that no one really knows what this word means. This tradition of the 7 Ahruf was in circulation by the end of the first Islamic century ie 721
- The variant readings multiplied exponentially until Ibn Mujahid, in the first quarter of the 4th Islamic century won acceptance for seven 'canonical' readings and forced the Muslim community through his political influence to abandon all other readings of the Quran
- Before this, scholars did not consider the variant readings to be 'divine' and absolute. Ibn Mujahid himself did not consider them absolute or divine. They were more like legal rulings reached by scholarly consensus. It is no surprise therefore that the main criterion was 'consensus' or ijma. This explains why he selected 3 from Kufa. While the other cities had a consensus for one reader, there was no clear consensus backing one reading in Kufa and therefore he chose 3 readings.
- After Ibn Mujahid the focus moved from whether or not there was 'consensus' or ijma to whether or not there was a sound chain of transmission or 'Isnad'.
- Muslim scholars after Ibn Mujahid claimed that the Quran was transmitted with absolute certainty ie Tawatur, however Nasser shows that for many of the readings, the conditions for Tawatur could not be met. Some had only a single strand of transmission.
- Despite this, scholars often invoked far fetched explanations to support and uphold this tradition of 'divine canonical readings', even when there was no evidence.
- Nasser notes that this is similar to the well known tradition among Sunni and Shia of a man reading the Quran before Ali b Ali Talib. He reads Sura 56:29 and refers to 'talh'. Ali is confused because he thinks it refers to a thorny tree but it is out of context to the preceding verses which talk about the objects in heaven. The man suggests that Ali change it and he says that he cannot change the Quran.
Rather than consider the possibility of a scribal error or alteration, Subsequent Muslim exegetes have invoked all kinds of explanations to explain this
'Far fetched interpretations, forged traditions, and creating new vocabulary entries in dictionaries were more feasible than accepting the fact that a simple scribal error or typo might have taken place during the copying of the masahif ' [p229]

ORAL AND WRITTEN TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION (Keith Small, 'Textual Criticism and Quran Manuscripts')

- The fact that there were many variants readings was known as far back as the 1930s by Arthur Jeffrey who found that at least 50 systems for reciting the Quran were still known after Ibn Mujahid's canonisation project in the 10th century. (Materials for the History of the text of the Quran, 1937)
- Some scholars claim that there were professional reciters who allegedly had pedigrees going back to Muhammad but this is not consistent with the approach taken by Ibn Mujahid. German scholar Otto Pretzl makes the following observation:
'Now it has become considerably clearer that the books on the unified canonical readings are not the outcome for surviving oral traditions, but conversely the oral tradition of later times is very heavily dependent on the sketchy literary tradition...It is extremely

characteristic that Ibn Mujahid of all people..in order to solve the dispute which already existed in his time, argued with quotations from literary sources and did not refer back to an oral tradition. If such a tradition was known to anyone, then it must be to him, the founder of the unified canonical reading" [quoted in Small, p146, emphasis added)

- We also see the defectiveness of the Arabic script permitted ambiguity that some used to their advantage. Specifically, textual variants were also sometimes **invented for exegetical reasons** and neither oral nor written transmission was able to prevent this phenomenon. (Andrew Rippin, "Quran 21:95: 'a ban is upon any town' p43-53)
- So, instead of a developed, standardised and regulated system of professional reciters, it appears that there was little regulation and therefore many different ways the 'unpointed' consonantal text could be recited. In effect, different people could put their dots and vowels in different places, giving different readings. Labib shows that over time 80 different oral transmissions of the Quran developed.
- While Ibn Mujahid's choices may have limited recitations to 7 and then 10, there were a further 8 versions for each of the 10 giving at least 80 versions by AD 936. (Labib As-said, *the recited Quran*, 1975, 127-30). Small comments that *'the 10 may have been a refining measure to stop the excesses of 40plus wrong recitations, but then they themselves developed into 80 precise recitations'* (p148)
-
- "The initial forms of the text were ambiguous to a degree that no one oral tradition was able to control. Instead, oral recitations were limited to the the unified consonantal text defined by scholarly decision, consensus and government encouragement to ten versions in the 10th century'
- Alfred Welch notes that not only would this have been very confusing, it would make it impossible to recover the original 'Uthmanic' text (Alfred Welch, *Al-Kuran*, 1960, 400-429). Indeed, when asked as to why he did not chose just ONE reading, Ibn Mujahid is said to have replied as follows: *'We need to engage ourselves in memorising what our imams have gone over more than we need to choose a variant for those after us to recite'* (Melchert, citing Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al Islam*, 24)
- So Ibn Mujahid was NOT relying only on oral tradition when he was 'sifting through' the >50 versions he had available. He used criteria that in his opinion eliminated 'improper' variants. He settled on 7 versions that could be traced back by reciter, NOT by written records.
- Note that he did NOT trace the text back to ONE canonical text revealed to Muhammad or even to one of his companions. In many respects, Ibn Mujahid's choices were something of a compromise.
- Ibn Mujahid never asserted that his chosen readings were pure and unchanged passed down from the Prophet. Instead he chose readings that would be accepted by large parts of the population and by the government.(Melchert, *Seven*, citing Ibn Mujahid)
- This was important because the climate of the time was particularly volatile because of the debate raging between the Orthodox Muslims and the Mutazilites who rejected the doctrine that the Quran was uncreated and co-eternal with God.

Which came first? The Chicken or the Egg?

- The SIN claims the following about the Quran:
 28. It was transmitted to Muhammad orally.He never wrote it down
 29. He transmitted to his companions and others orally.
 30. Only after his death was the Quran written down in any form.
 31. Only 30 years after his death was the 'one Quran' ie the Uthmanic version finalised.

- Therefore if the SIN is correct, we should see a clear progression: the oral should come first and THEN the written texts. But is that indeed what we see? Let's see what scholars claim.
- *'The Oral and written transmissions of the Quran were interrelated from the start but in the final analysis, the oral has consistently followed the lead of the written, as in an intricate and evolving dance trying to balance oral and written literary conventions. And as the written tradition increased in precision and sophistication and decreased in flexibility, so too did the oral tradition. After the initial standardisation of the written text, the oral tradition evolved from what the ambiguities in the Arabic script at each stage of its development would permit. Whether any of the oral versions of the earliest pedigrees do go back to Muhammad is impossible to document because of the lac of precise written records of those recitations'* (p150, emphasis added)
- Regarding the Qiraat, *'They are important to us here because they prove that there was no oral tradition stemming directly from the prophet strong enough to overcome all the uncertainties inherent in the writing system'* (Bellamy, 'Some proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran, JAOS, 113:562-573)
- *'We should have expected the Various Readings to be based on tradition; the commentators rather assume that they are based on consideration of the evidence..They were not, then, reproducing what they have learned from teachers, but doing their best to decipher a text'* (David S. Margoliuth, Textual variations in the Quran MW 15:334-44, 340)
- Fred Donner states that while there was an oral tradition early on, it was NOT a complete tradition that went back to the prophet for the entire text [Fred Donner, Quranic Furqan, JSS 52, 2:279-300,p296]
- Andrew Rippin states *"the current accepted text might be viewed as the product of reflection upon a primitive written text and not upon the parallel transmission of an oral text as the Muslim tradition has suggested...**it appears that there was a stage at which the written text of the Quran was analysed and determined as to its meaning and pronunciation on the basis of a skeleton consonantal text with no reference to a living oral tradition**'* [Andrew Rippin, The Quran and its Interpretive Tradition (Burlington, 2001)
- F. E. Peters compares the Quran with the Jewish Masoretic tradition and notes that Islam had no equivalent to the Masoretes who jealously guarded a textual tradition to avoid even slight variants.. Regarding variants in the Quranic text, he states that these *'certainly must have been with the early defective Arabic writing system that scarcely distinguished some consonants, much less the vowels'*. Given the deficiencies in the language and without 'zealots' like the Masoretes, it would be impossible to prevent variations in the text occurring [F E Peters, The Monotheists, 2003, p33]
- Thus these scholars all appear to be saying that the different oral recitations came from the ambiguity of the original rasm. **It was the text that came first**, NOT the oral tradition.

- This is consistent with the fact that the earliest accounts describing any process of oral transmission are from the great Hadith collections of the 9th and 10 centuries. We know that the earliest Arabic Quranic manuscripts are from the early 8th century, at least 100 years earlier. These manuscripts have no diacritical marks or vowels which made reading them virtually impossible. When these marks were later added, there was no standard form initially and this allowed the proliferation of many variant readings, resulting in the 50-80 different versions that confronted Ibn Mujahid in the 10th century.
- What do Muslim scholars say about this? They usually view the 7 or 10 readings as reliably going directly back to Muhammad. This is summed up by Al-Azami when he says that *'where more than one authoritative reading existed, the source of this multiplicity was traceable to the Prophet'*. Unfortunately, he is relying simply on memorised pedigrees of the reciters, not chains of transmission that guarantee the authenticity of the text itself. In effect, he is accepting the claims of those promoting these pedigrees at face value without any clear evidence that the pedigrees are reliable.
- Small also states correctly that Al Azami is *'not viewing the multiplicity of versions allowed in an oral milieu. Rather, he is **anachronistically asserting various versions containing a degree of precision only possible in a more developed later written literary milieu**'* [p150, emphasis added]
- Although Ibn Mujahid did not support his choices with Hadith, Al-Bukhari, vol 6, 513 lists a Hadith that was known at the time: *'Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "Gabriel recited the Quran to me in one way. Then I requested him (to read it in another way), and continued asking him to recite it in other ways, and he recited it in several ways til he ultimately recited it in 7 different ways'*
- Despite this Hadith, Ibn Mujahid does not cite it as his reason for selecting the readings he selected. Islamic scholar Von Denffer also confirms that the 7 readings chosen by Ibn Mujahid are NOT the same as the 7 modes attributed to Muhammad.
- He also notes that Islamic scholars cannot clearly agree on what is meant by the word 'Ahruf'. He notes that historically there have been >30 different interpretations including:
 1. The companion codices eg Ibn Masud, Ubay Ibn Kaab etc were the different modes
 2. They 7 Ahruf represent different dialects
 3. They 7 Ahruf represent different pronunciations of the same consonants
 4. The seven Ahruf are somehow 'contained' in the current standard version
- It appears that in choosing the 'canonical' readings, Islamic scholars were not simply repeating what had been decreed by Muhammad. Rather they were selecting rival readings and making them equally authoritative in order to resolve disputes. Welch describes a similar parallel in the selection of the 4 schools of Sunni jurisprudence where each of them was equally authoritative. [Alford Welch, al-Quran, 1960, p409]

Small offers the following explanation that makes more sense: *'since exact knowledge of the original recitation of the earliest edited version of the Quran had been lost among the **many versions that had arisen from the flexibility and ambiguity of the orthography of the Quran**, Ibn Mujahid chose what in his time were the readings that had the greatest change of being viewed as authoritative and authentic. **It was a pragmatic decision based on the best results the scholarship of that era could obtain**'* [p152, emphasis added]

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- Regarding our original question as to which came first, there is a rather simple solution to this question:
1. If the SIN is correct and oral tradition is reliable, **then there should not be any variants**. There should be only ONE version that has been passed down from Muhammad himself.
 2. But this is not the case-there are many variants. Why is this so? Because the rasm text was **written FIRST** in a defective manner with no marks or vowels.
 3. Scholars differ as to whether or not this rasm script can be attributed to Uthman as per the SIN. There is substantial evidence to suggest that it was Al-Hajjaj under the authority of Abd al-Malik that was responsible. Certainly he was the first Arab ruler powerful enough to achieve such a feat.
 4. When diacritical marks or vowels were later added, there was NO STANDARD FORM. This ambiguity allowed many different oral versions to be recited later. Whatever oral tradition was occurring was not strong enough to prevent the proliferation of the variant recitation systems.
 5. The consonantal text was also not precise enough to even allow the accurate transmission of ONE reading, much less limit the transmission of variable readings.
 6. Over the next 200 years there were dozens of competing versions forcing them to be limited to 7 by Ibn Mujahid. By this time the Arabic script had become more refined which allowed variability in the consonantal rasm to be limited.

CORRECTIONS IN QURANIC MANUSCRIPTS.

(Daniel Alan Brubaker, 2019)

- The earliest Quranic manuscripts have no diacritical marks and are written in style termed 'Hijazi' or 'Ma'il'
- They are dated using 3 main methods:
 - Q. Paleographic or based on the script styles
 - R. Codicologically. This looks at the type of writing material, the format of the page, numbering, verses and dividers, inks and colouring, margins and binding. Different aspects were in use at different times.
 - S. Radiocarbon dating. This is more controversial and can only really date the death of the animal. It also doesn't tell us if the parchment was used previously for a non-Quranic material, rubbed off and then overwritten with the Quran.
- Scholars have noted that there is indeed variation in the consonantal text of early Quranic manuscripts. The SIN tries to explain these by saying that the Quran was revealed in 7 Qiraat or dialects, but dialectal differences have nothing to do with consonantal variants. The dialects come from the vowels or diacritical marks, neither of which were present in the 7th century Arabic script.
- Shady Hekmat Nasser has shown that the readings were chosen by Ibn Mujahid in the 10th century based on political and practical reasons not based on whether there was strong evidence that they were traceable back to Muhammad.
- A further complication is the fact that some of the early manuscripts do not reflect a 'single reading' among these Qiraat, but appear to be a combination of different readings. This explains why Dr Tayyar Altikulac, the expert on the Topkapi manuscript to describe these codices in terms of rough percentages when it comes to their adherence to readings.

- Despite this “*many of the thousands corrections I have documented appear to have nothing to do with the readings attested in the secondary literatures. So, corrections must represent in at least some cases another phenomenon, such as perhaps a greater degree of perceived flexibility of the Quran text in its early centuries (the time of first production of these manuscripts) than is documented in the Qiraat literature*” [Brubaker, p9]
- The majority of the corrections result in the manuscript now conforming to the rasm of the 1924 Cairo Hafs text. ‘*This pattern is important and shows a general movement over time toward conformity, though not immediate complete conformity*’[Brubaker p10]
- The corrections can be classified into different types. They are listed below along with approximate percentages of total represented by each type
 1. Erasure and overwriting 30%
 2. Insertion 24%
 3. Overwriting without erasure 18%
 4. Covering 16%
 5. Simple erasure 10%
 6. Covering then overwritten 2%
- Why were the changes made? The most obvious reason is that a scribe simply made a mistake and then corrected it. This fits some of the variants but not all. Some of the variants show differing inks, writing styles, nib widths etc and were obviously the work of later scribes.
- Brubaker’s book has 20 examples of corrections in manuscripts. Below we will see a few of the best examples with photographs of the correction.

Topkapi

- This manuscript has been attributed to Uthman but scholars believe that it dates from mid 8th century. Renowned scholars Tayyer Altikulac and Ihsanoglu examined this manuscript and concluded the following
‘Judging from its illumination, the Topkapi Museum Mushaf dates neither from the period when the Mushafs of the Caliph Uthman were written nor from the time when copies based on these Mushafs were written. Since Mushafs of the early period took those attributed to the Caliph Uthman as a model, they do not have elements of illumination..this Mushaf..does not constitute a sample of the early period of Mushaf writing due to a number of characteristics..[it] most probably belongs to the Umayyad period’ [‘Al-Mushaf al-Sharif attributed to Uthman bin Affan’ (Istanbul, IRCICA, 2007) p10-13]
- Brubaker notes 25 corrections in the 408 folios of the Topkapi manuscripts. Below we can see 3 examples

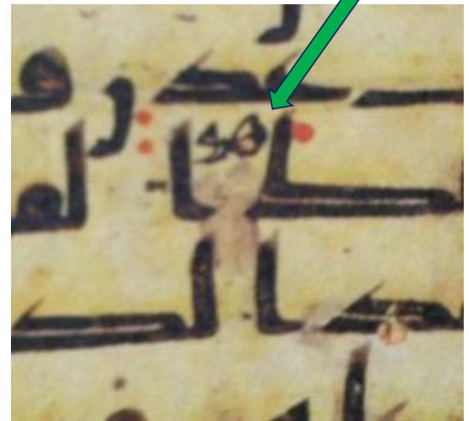
Insertions of ‘huwa’ 9:72

- Q9:72 has the word ‘huwa’ added in a different hand, nib and style and is therefore clearly an addition. It should be noted that the 1924 Cairo text has this word, so the net effect of the correction is to bring it into conformity with the 1924 text.
- The word means ‘that is’ and the effect of the addition is to turn ‘*Allah’s good pleasure is greater, the great triumph*’ to ‘*Allah’s good pleasure, **that is** the great triumph*’
- While the addition of the word does not dramatically alter the meaning, it does show that the assertion that the Quran has been PERFECTLY PRESERVED preserved with NO VARIATION AT ALL is false

(Topkapi mushaf al-sharif, fol. 122v. - Image reproduced by permission of IRCICA)

Surah 9:72

- 1924 = “*wa-riḍwānun min allāhu akbaru dhālika huwa l-fawzu l-‘aẓīm*”
- Translated: “and Allah’s good pleasure is greater, **that is** the great triumph.”
- The new word is ‘*huwa*’: هُوَ “**that (m.) is**” has been added to the text
- It doesn’t change the meaning very much
- It now conforms to the current 1924 ‘**Hafs**’ text
- Because هُوَ uses a different hand, nib and style, this suggests post-production at a much later date



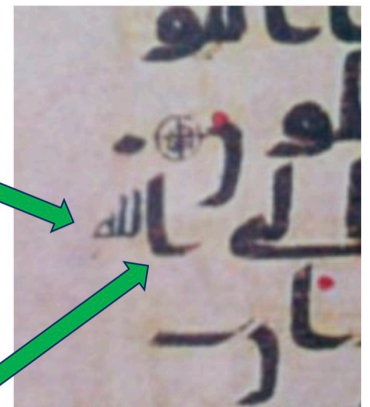
Insertion of Allah

- At Q66:8 we have the addition of the word ‘Allah’. This is quite significant as it shows that for whatever reason, the scribe forgot the most important name in all of Islam. Again the effect of this addition is to bring it into conformity with the 1924 edition. The photographs below show the original addition and where it is in the Cairo text.
- Again, the issue is not whether or not the addition makes major changes to doctrine, the issue is that it shows that SIN apologists who have argued that the Quran has been perfectly preserved ‘down the the letter’ are simply wrong.

(Topkapi codex, fol. 374v.)

Surah 66:8

- **#1**: This insertion of *lām-lām-he* (‘Allah’) occurs near the beginning of the verse, since originally, the first *allāh* of this verse was not present **#1**
- Original: “Oh you who believe! Turn to a sincere repentance”
- Current: “Oh you who believe! Turn **to Allah** with sincere repentance”
- **#2**: Notice the **original ‘alif after the ila** uses a **larger nib**, suggesting an error to the original text
- The **change** has been made with a **very small nib** and is probably a **modern** intervention **#2**
- It now conforms to the 1924 ‘**Hafs**’ text

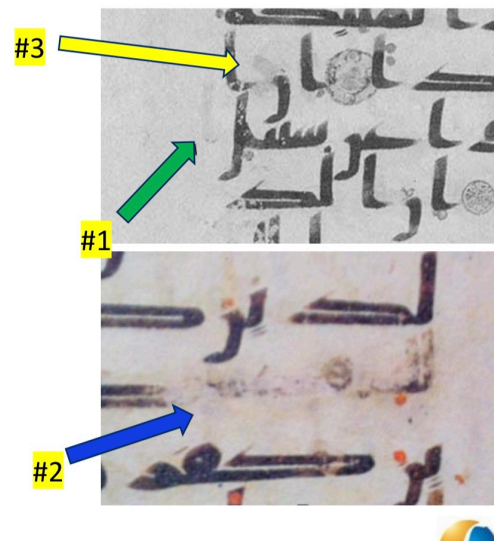


Sura 4:167 there is erasure leaving gaps

(Topkapi codex, fol. 65r)

Surah 4:167

- There has been an erasure of two (and possibly three) words
- #1: The first, an erasure of the first letter of Allah (Green arrow)
- #2: The second, on the next line, shows the shadow of what was first written, which was *allāhi qad* "Allah has already" (Blue arrow)
- Original: "Surely those who disbelieve and hinder from the way of Allah have strayed far into error"
- Current: "Surely those who disbelieve and hinder from the way have strayed far into error"
- This correction goes away from the 1924 'Hafs' text
- #3: Another erasure can be found on line 10 as well (Yellow arrow), but



Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus

- This is a composite manuscript with most of it being in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris but parts of it being in National Library of Russia (St Petersburg), the Vatican Library and the Nasser D. Khalil collection of Islamic art in London.
- Francois Deroche dates it to between 671 and 695 and does not believe that it is one of the copies attributed to Uthman.
- Altikulac dates it to a similar period but believes that it originates from Damascus.
- Below we can see examples of a number of corrections

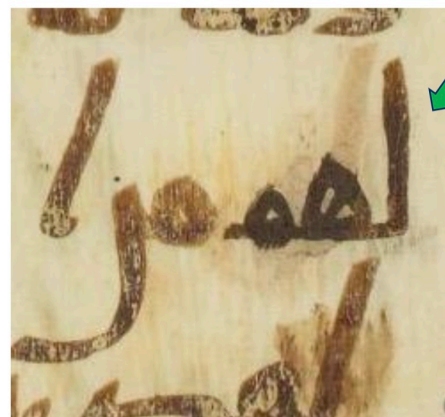
Sura 42:21 there are erasures

(BnF arabe 328, fol. 58v. - By permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Surah 42:21

The second of three instances of لهم **lahum** (for them) in this verse

- Original: *lām-he*, that is, the compound Arabic word *lahu* "to him"
- Original: "Or do they have associates who enacted for **him**"
- Current: replaced by *lām-he-mīm*, that is, *lahum* "for them (m.)"
- Current: "Or do they have associates who enacted for **them**"
- This now corresponds to the 1924 **Hafs** text

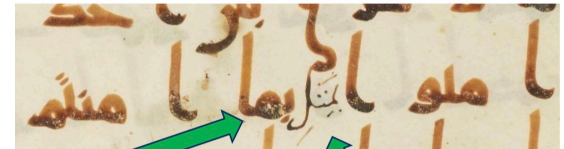


In Sura 2:137 there is insertion of 'bi mithli'

(BnF arabe 331, fol. iv.)

Surah 2:137

- #1: The word **مثل** *mithli* "as" was **omitted** when first written, and **then** was **added** at a later time, along with the preceding *bi*, using a completely different hand writing, and a much narrower nib
- Note that it **has vowels** and **diacritical marks**, suggesting that it was corrected in **modern** times
- #2: The **bi** which was first written was linked along with the letter *mā*, and has **not been erased**
- So, as it now stands, the portion reads امنوا ب**مثل** بما *amanū bi-mithli bi-mā*, which is an incorrect and **non-viable reading**
- Original: "If they believe in that which you have believed"
- Current: "If they believe similarly to that which you have believed"

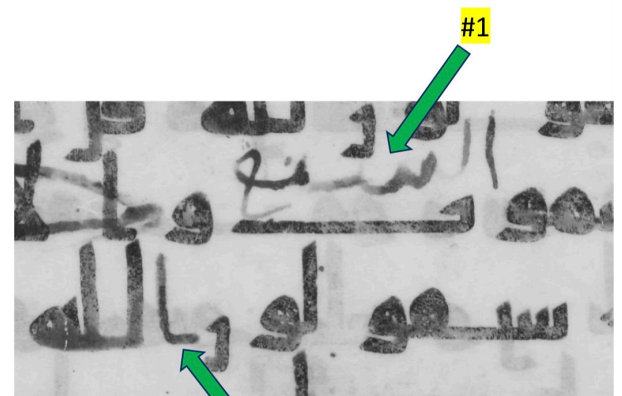


Sura 23:86-87 insertion of 'The Seven'

(BnF arabe 327, fol. ir.)

Surah 23:86-87

- #1: The words **السبع** *alsab'i* "the seven" were added by a later scribe in Sura 23:86
- It now reads, "Say: 'Who is the Lord of **the seven heavens** and the Lord of the Great Throne?'"
- This now agrees with the 1924 'Hafs' text
- #2: An insertion of the letter 'alif' in front of *lillāhi* "Allah's" was **added** in Sura 23:87
- Note that it was written with a narrower nib, proving it was added later by another scribe
- Yet, this 'alif' is not found with the 1924 'Hafs' text, suggesting that the correction goes against that text

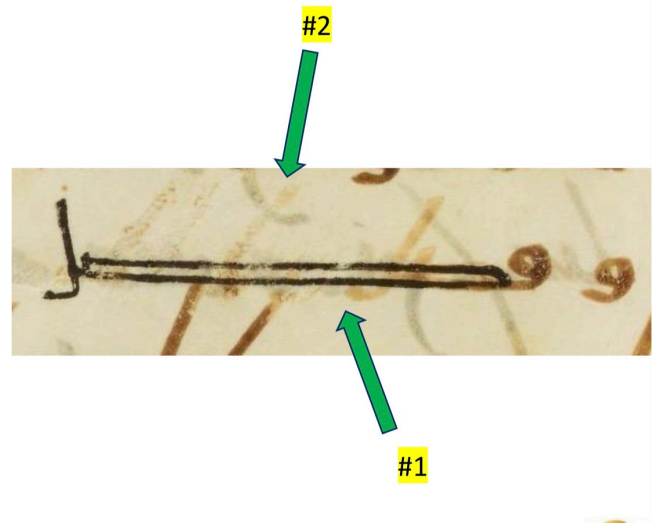


Sura 3:171 there is erasure overwritten

(BNF Arabe 328, fol.8r)

Surah 3:171

- #1: The *ḡad-lām* of فضل *faḡḡlin* “**bounty**” has been written over an erasure
- The corrector has used a different nib and ink than was used in the original; also the hand and angle of the script is different than the rest of the page
- #2: Erasure marks are clearly seen underneath, including some of the 5-11 original letters
- These include four upward-extending letters, the first of which is preceded by a short tooth letter
- This correction is clearly a much later intervention, and now conforms to the 1924 ‘Hafs’ text



The Fustat Umayyad Codex

- This is a manuscript that has been broken up into sections which are in separate libraries and museums. The name ‘Fustat Umayyad Codex’ was given to it by Francois Deroche.
- He believes that it is possibly the codex sent by Al-Hajjaj to Abd al-Aziz bin Marwan. This would date it to the end of the 7th to early 8th century.

In this manuscript we see multiple post production insertions of the word ‘Allah’

9 insertions of the word ‘Allah’

- These are **9 instances**, from a total of twelve Dan discovered, mostly in the Fustat Umayyad Codex
- Why would scribes forget the word for their god?
- Could this suggest flexibility in early manuscripts, then later made uniform?
- Note: 8 of the 9 examples don’t need the word Allah there, as it is already assumed
- Only the last one (in yellow) needs it
- All of them now conform to the 1924 ‘Hafs’ text

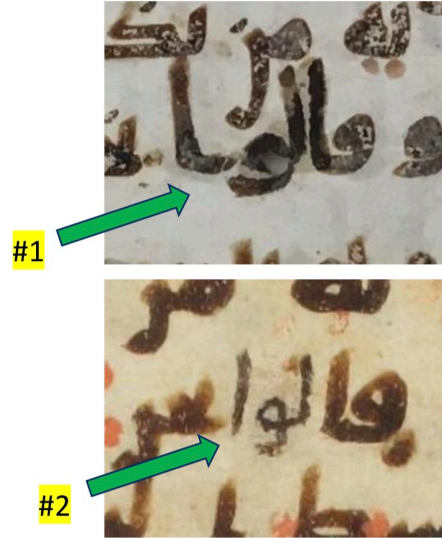


In Sura 34:35 we see an erasure overwritten from 'Qala' to 'Qalu'

(#1 = NLR Marcel 6; #2 = BNF Arabe 340, fol. 26r.)

Surah 34:35

- #1: In the first example, from the NLR **Marcel** manuscript, the final *lām* of قال *qāla* "he said" has been erased, and in its place *lām-wāw-alif* have been written. The result is the word قالوا *qālū* "they (m. pl.) said"
- Original: "And he said, 'We are more [than you] in wealth and in children'"
- Current: "And they said, 'We are more [than you] in wealth and in children'"
- It now conforms to the 1924 'Hafs' text
- #2: In the second example, from the BNF Petropolitanus manuscript, we find the exact same change, erasing قال *qāla* "he said", and replacing it with قالوا *qālū* "they (m. pl.) said"
- This also now conforms to the 1924 'Hafs' text



Sura 30:9 erasure with nothing replacing it

(National Library of Russia (NLR), St. Petersburg, folio 30v)

Surah 30:9

- An erasure, yet, with nothing to replace what was erased
- The erasure is **between**: عاقبة *āqibatu* "the fate" and الذين *alladhīna* "(of) those"
- The correction now aligns it with the 1924 'Hafs' text
- The size of the erasure suggests a word with **4-6 letters**
- It could have been: *kullu min* "all of" or *kathīran min* "most of"
- Or it could have been: *al-yahūd* "the Jews," or *al-nās* "the people"



The Cairo Mushaf

- This is a 'monumental' codex, so described because of its large size. It is housed in the Husayni Mosque in Cairo.
- The SIN states in Al-Bukhari, Vol 6 Hadith 510 that Uthman had copies of the Quran sent to 5 cities: Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra and Damascus. The custodians of this manuscript claim that it is one of the 5 Mushafs sent by Uthman before 656.
- Despite this other leading eading scholars, including Altikulac date it to late 8th or early 9th century. Indeed he says the following: *'The comparison we made between the Mushafs attributed to Caliph Uthman in 44 places concerning pronunciation, a superfluous or a missing letter and the structure of words leads us to thing that this Mushaf is not related to any of the Mushafs of Caliph Uthman... This Mushaf differs from the Medina Mushaf in 14 of the 44 places, from the Mecca Mushaf in 15 places and from the Kufa Mushaf in 7 places, from the Basra Mushaf in 9 places, and from the Damascus Mushaf in 28 places. As a result, although the Cairo Mushaf has common points with one or more than any one of these Mushafs in each of the 44 places, it is not exactly the same as any one of them'*

Below are 2 examples of corrections found in this manuscript.

Sura 2:191-193 has many coverings with no overwriting

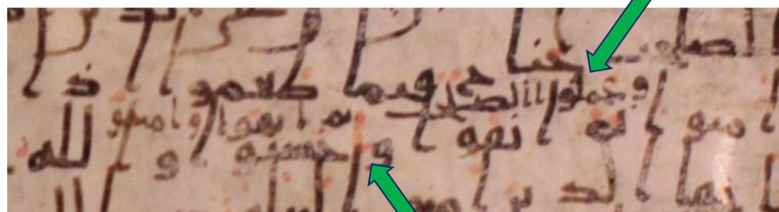
Sura 13 has coverings overwritten

Other variants

MS.67.2007.1, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha has multiple corrections in Sura 5:93

Surah 5:93

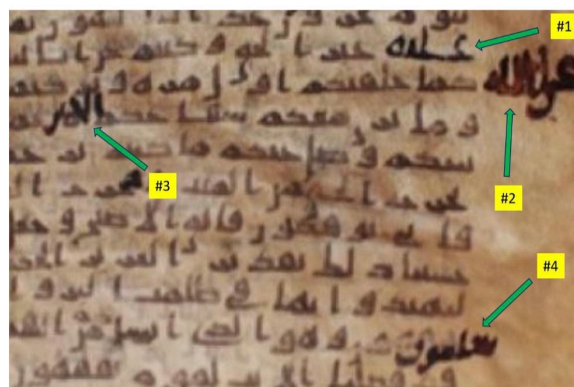
- #1: Inserted is the phrase *wa-‘amilū al-ṣāliḥāt thumma attaḡū wa āmilū*
- The insertion can be found at #1
- Except for the first *wa āmilū* the rest could be a **copyist error**, which then had to be **re-written into the text**, and above the line, at a later date
- #2: The initial ‘alif of احسنوا *aḥsanū* “do good (imperative, 3rd pl.)” was omitted when it was first written, and was **added later, but in red ink**
- This same red ink was also used for the diacritical dots added at a later date, proving that this ‘**alif** was added at this later date



MS.474.2003, fol 9v, MIA, Doha has corrections in Sura 6:91-97

Surah 6:91 – 6:97

- #1: The word عليه *alayhi* “against him” has been **written over** an erasure in Q6:93 following the words *bimā kuntum taḡūlūn* “for what you (pl.) used to say”, yet, *alayhi* is not in the 1924 Hafs text
- #2: *alā allāh* “about Allah” has been **written in the margin**, but oddly **without erasing** the *‘alayhi* that it is intended to supplant
- #3: The word الذين *alladhīna* “whom” has been **inserted** where it was **at first omitted**
- #4: The word يعلمون *ya‘lamūn* “they know” has been **written over** an **erasure**. The shadow of the **original** text can still be seen and appears to be “BHMWN”



All of these corrections bring the present text in line with the 1924 ‘Hafs’ text

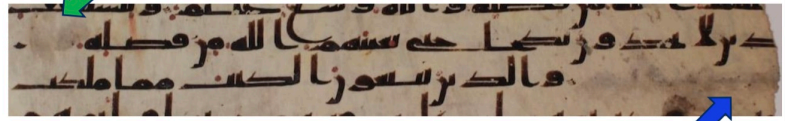


MS 2013.19.2, MIA, Doha has erasures with gaps Sura 24:33

(MIA, Doha, 2013.19.2, verso)

Surah 24:33

- There is an erasure at the end of one line (Green arrow), and the beginning of the next line (Blue arrow)
- It occurs after the word فضله *faḍlihi* "his grace", and before والذين *wa-alladhīna* "and those who"
- There is no way to know what was first written in the spaces erased
- The text now corresponds to the 1924 'Hafs' text

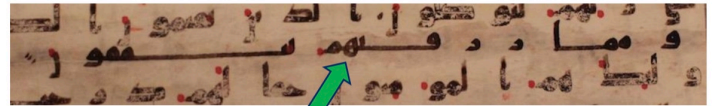


MS 2014.491, MIA, Doha has nearly whole line erased and overwritten at Sura 8:3

(MIA.2014.491, fol.7v.)

Surah 8:3

- Almost an entire line of text has been erased and then overwritten with the word "rizq" 'provision'
- We cannot know what the original phrase that was erased may have been
- Current: "*wa-mimma razaqnahum yunfiqun*", meaning: "And out of what we have provided them (m.) they (m.) spend"
- Notice that the initial 'alif' of the following verse is also added
- It now conforms to the 1924 'Hafs' text



CONCLUSIONS

- While a number of the variants can be explained by scribal errors, many of them cannot. It appears that most of the surviving manuscripts have been produced following a

campaign of standardisation consistent with that reported to have been done by Uthman but instead to bring it more in line with the Cairene text.

- The standardisation process was gradual happening over several centuries
- This is likely to be a form of taking what happened centuries later and redacting it back to Uthman.
- In contrast to the SIN which shows that transmission of the Quran was primarily oral for decades, the very existence of manuscripts with variants consistent with scribal errors confirms the existence of a written tradition as well.

The Language of the Koran

When we look at Late Antique Syro-Palestine and Arabia in the early seventh century, the time when Islam is said to have become a religion, an interesting yet complex mosaic...

By Robert M. Kerr

When we look at Late Antique Syro-Palestine and Arabia in the early seventh century, the time when Islam is said to have become a religion, an interesting yet complex mosaic of cultures and languages can be observed. Linguistically, various languages were spoken and written. Here we confront a common long-persisting misconception, namely that the Arabs were largely illiterate before Islam. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Roughly speaking, Arabia in Antiquity was divided into three geographical regions: Arabia Felix, Deserta and Petraea.



Distribution of Arabic alphabets

In the South-western corner (approximately modern Yemen), Arabia Felix, or “Happy Arabia,” various South Arabian Semitic languages were spoken, the most important of which is Sabaean, written in a Semitic script which split off from the Syro-Palestinian alphabetic tradition during the Bronze Age. Ancient Yemen was heavily involved in the spice and incense (later also the silk) trade from which it garnered considerable wealth.

To the North, in what is now more or less Saudi Arabia, was the Classical Arabia Deserta, or “Abandoned Arabia,” home to Mecca and Medina, a region sparsely inhabited by nomadic tribes and various oasis settlements, often caravanserais for the long-distance trade. The contemporary local languages are nowadays designated as Ancient North Arabian: they are

interrelated Semitic (oasis) dialects that, however, are not direct ancestors of Classical Arabic. Inscriptions in these languages or dialects are attested roughly from the sixth century BC to the sixth century AD throughout the region into the modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The writing culture of Arabia Deserta was borrowed from the South—i.e., they used variants of the Ancient (epigraphic) South Arabian script.

Further to the North, in the geographical area of Syro-Palestine (which includes the Egyptian Sinai, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and South-eastern Turkey and North-western Iraq) was Arabia Petraea, or the Provincia Arabia, the Roman border province whose capital was Petra. This region had been exposed to Greco-Roman culture for close to a millennium. The major written languages here were Greek and various Aramaic dialects, the most important of which was Syriac. Furthermore, much of the population of this region (unlike in Arabia Deserta) had converted to one form or another of Christianity (which was anything but an homogenous, monolithic entity). The important point that must be noted is that although in Arabia Petraea Aramaic and Greek texts are often attributed to the Nabateans, Palmyrinians and others who were actually neither Aramaean nor Greek, their names and occasional stray words in inscriptions show that they were ethnically Arab. We are dealing with a situation similar to that of medieval Western Europe in which Latin was the written language, while the spoken languages (vernaculars) were the precursors of the languages spoken today.

Briefly summarized, the Arabic language (especially with regard to the primary diagnostic feature, the definite article al-) and script of Arabia Petraea are the precursors of the classical Arabic script and language. Before Islam, texts in the Aramaic script are hardly attested south of the modern state of Jordan and then only in the extreme North-west corner of modern Saudi Arabia. In Arabia Felix and Deserta other scripts and languages were current. It is in Arabia Petraea that we find occasional Arabic texts in an Aramaic script and even Arabic written in Greek characters. A sixth/seventh century fragment of Psalm 78 found in the Umayyad “Mosque” at Damascus shows just how close this Arabic is to what would later morph into Classical Arabic (e.g., imala). The precursor to Classical Arabic was thus spoken in Syria, not in the Hijaz.

We now have two independent sources of *prima facie* contemporary evidence —aerial linguistics and script distribution—to show that the language of the Koran must be based on a Syro-Palestinian Arabo-Semitic dialect and that the script employed was not that used in Mecca and Medina of the period, but the one used in Arabia Petraea. If the Koran is actually a product of the Hijaz, then we would expect it to be in a different (Ancient North Arabian) Semitic language and written in a different script. That is not the case. The traditional account of the Koran’s origins is not supported by the evidence.

Comparative Table of Semitic Scripts

Phonemic inventory and graphemes

1	ا	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ	ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	ه	و	ي	
2	ʾ	b	t	t̪	ǧ	ħ	ħ	d	d̪	r	z	s	ʃ	ʂ	ʕ	ṭ	ṭ̪	ʕ	ʕ̰	f	q	k	m	n	h	y	w	ś	
3	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת	י	נ	מ	ל	ו	ה	א
4	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת	י	נ	מ	ל	ו	ה	א
5	አ	በ	ተ	ና	ሀ	ወ	ሰ	ረ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	ሪ	
6	𐩀	𐩁	𐩂	𐩃	𐩄	𐩅	𐩆	𐩇	𐩈	𐩉	𐩊	𐩋	𐩌	𐩍	𐩎	𐩏	𐩐	𐩑	𐩒	𐩓	𐩔	𐩕	𐩖	𐩗	𐩘	𐩙	𐩚	𐩛	
7	𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊	𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕	𐤖	𐤗	𐤘	𐤙	𐤚	𐤛	
8	𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊	𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕	𐤖	𐤗	𐤘	𐤙	𐤚	𐤛	

(+ 𐤀, 𐤁, 𐤂)

Key:

1. Classical Arabic
 2. Reconstructed phonemic inventory of proto-Semitic
 3. Aramaic (Syriac)
 4. Classical Hebrew (only for comparative purposes)
 5. Classical Ethiopic
 6. Ancient South Arabic (Sabaic)
 7. Ancient North Arabic (Thamudic; forms vary widely)
 8. Ugaritic (only for comparative purposes)
- Red** Phonemes lost in Aramaic, Arabic supplements the nearest phonetic equivalent with diacritic.
- Yellow** Merged form due to cursive writing
- Black** Phonemes no longer present.

The peculiar thing about the Arabic script we are familiar with today is its polyvalence—i.e., it needs diacritical dots (iʿjam) to distinguish between otherwise identical consonantal characters (rasm). For example, the Arabic glyph ب can be read as b (ب), t (ت), th (ث), n (ن) and medially as y (ي). Thus the Arabic script distinguishes eighteen glyphs that are made distinct by diacritics to render twenty-eight phonemes. A part this polyvalence is not phonetically conditioned; it is due to the cursive erosion of distinct forms (e.g., b, n, medial y). In other cases, it is due to the fact that a twenty-two letter Aramaic alphabet was later supplemented to render additional Arabic phonemes (i.e., sounds that Aramaic had lost, but which survived in Arabic) by adding a diacritical dot to the nearest phonetic approximant. This, along with borrowed Aramaic orthographic customs (such as the tāʾ marbūṭah to mark the feminine ending, the alif otiosum, etc.) shows unmistakably that Arabic writing evolved from a long tradition of writing Aramaic and can, therefore, only have occurred in a region where the Arabs had had a long exposure to Aramaic writing culture. The only place where this could have happened is Arabia Petraea. If the Koran were actually a product of Mecca and Medina, then (besides it being written in a different Semitic language) it

would have had been composed in the South Arabian script which unambiguously differentiates each of the twenty-eight phonemes of Arabic and which, by this time, had a twelve hundred year tradition in the Hijaz. That this ideally suited script was not used means that it was unknown to the writers of the Koran.

The fact that both the script and language of the Koran point to the Classical Arabia Petraea of Syro-Palestine, and not Arabia Deserta, is further supported by the fact that the Koran's vocabulary is largely borrowed from Aramaic, especially Syriac, the liturgical language of the local churches. Needless to say, the semantics of the technical religious vocabulary of the Koran, the spelling of the names of biblical figures, and the often subtle biblical allusions presuppose an intimate knowledge of biblical literature in its Syro-Aramiac tradition. Syro-Palestine was heavily Christianized by the seventh century. Although there is some evidence of Christianity and Judaism in "happy" and "deserted" Arabia during this period, it just does not appear to have the critical mass necessary to launch a new religion. Furthermore, the theological, doctrinal controversies that gave rise to the "heresies" that permeated Late Antique society were largely absent outside of the Roman Empire. Thus, all of the contemporary epigraphical, literary and linguistic evidence points to Islam being a product of Arabs living in Syro-Palestine.

This claim stands in stark contrast to the traditional narrative of a blitzkrieg from the Hijaz into Syro-Palestine. This event has vexed modern archaeologists. There is simply no archaeological support for a quick, violent and destructive invasion of Syro-Palestine as reported by traditional Islamic sources. Instead, excavations reveal a continuity of occupation and culture: the period in question is, archaeologically speaking, quite uneventful and conservative. The major cultural changes in ceramics and the like (such as the introduction of glazed wares) only occur in the eighth century. There is an uninterrupted settlement continuum through the Umayyad period (in which the mosaic as an art-form reached its peak) into Abbasid times. Even then the change is gradual rather than sudden. Where there was change, it consisted of a tendency towards smaller settlements in the countryside, which became favored over towns. Archaeologically speaking, then, an Arab or Muslim conquest of Syro-Palestine is invisible. And the reason for this was that the Arabs were already living in the region as evidenced by their language. In the end, archaeology, epigraphy and linguistics mitigate against a Hijazi origin of the Koran. The latter can only be a product of Hellenistic Syro-Palestine.

The Canonisation of the Quran

[The following is a detailed explanation of the 5 canonisations by Nasser. It includes both text and footnotes. On each page, the text is followed by footnotes in the square brackets ie [.]. The end of one page and the beginning of the next is noted by]

The Canonizations of the Qur'ān: Political decrees or community practices? (Shady H. Nasser)

After 'Uthmān's (r. 23-35/644-55) codification of the first muṣḥaf (codex), several measures were taken to limit the variant readings of the Qur'ān, which kept multiplying and spreading despite the caliph's attempt to suppress them. I argue in this article that the Qur'ān passed through multiple phases of canonization of which 'Uthmān's was only the first in a series of efforts over the centuries to systematize the Qur'ānic text.¹

Common to all these critical phases was the active support of a politico-religious authority that, directly or indirectly, enforced and propagated the canonization process, and in some cases persecuted those who opposed it. The second phase of canonization took place at the hands of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) through his selection of the seven eponymous Readings. The court endorsed Ibn Mujāhid's decision and reportedly tried those who opposed his "rigid" system. Ibn Mujāhid's work was further polished and refined by al-Dānī (d. 444/1053) and later al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1193) whose didactic poem *Ḥirz al-amānī* (or simply as *al-Shāṭibiyya*) became one of the foundational texts of the standard Qur'ānic recitation until the present day. The fourth stage of Canonization was the official endorsement of three additional eponymous Readings to the system of the Seven at the hands of Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), who urged repercussions for anyone who denied the validity and divine nature of the Ten eponymous Readings.² The 1923 Azhar edition of the Qur'ān marked the fifth canonization attempt of the text, which had, and still has, a huge impact on our perception of the..

[1 For a general breakdown of these phases, refer to: Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Second Canonization of the Qur'ān (324/936): Ibn Mujāhid and the Founding of the Seven Readings* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 5-9.

² Abū al-Khayr Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), *Munjid al-muqriʿin wa-murshid al-ṭālibīn*, ed. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al- 'Imrān (Mecca: Dār al-fawā'id, 1998), 171-5.

1]

..Qur'ān, in particular how we interact with the text through the lens of the version of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim. These five phases of canonization will be analysed within their historical framework to determine to what extent the chosen corpus of the system Readings was enforced through political and religious measures.

The Problem of tawātur

Classical sources often bespeak of the tension that pertains to the transmission of the Qur'ānic text. The key concept here is that of tawātur: the transmission of a report by a large group of people whose number and diverse identity/background preclude the possibility of agreement on error or the possibility of collusion or forgery. On the one hand, some kind of consensus was established concerning the tawātur³ of the text down to the minute subtleties of its recitation (tajwīd).⁴ This conception of tawātur ensured the integrity and absolute authority of the Qur'ān, for by definition, tawātur deems it impossible for a large group of people to collude on error and forgery in any generation of transmitters.⁵ The concept of tawātur al-Qur'ān is fundamental in the Islamic tradition, the absence of which would cast doubts on the integrity of the foundational scripture of

Islam. Simply put, *tawātur* imparts necessary knowledge (*‘ilm yaqīnī/ḍarūrī*) unlike reports transmitted through single or multiple chains of transmission (*āḥād*), which impart..

[3 A.J. Wensinck and W.F. Heinrichs, "Mutawātir," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill, Accessed 04 June 2020 available at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5664; G.H.A. Juynboll, "Tawātur," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill, Accessed 04 June 2020, available at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7448.

4 Abū al-Khayr Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), *al-Muqaddimah fī-mā yajib ‘alā qārī al-Qur’ān an ya‘lamah*, ed. Ayman Rushdī Suwayd (Jaddah: Dār Nūr al-maktabāt, 2006), 3; cf. Shady Hekmat Nasser, "(Q. 12:2) We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’ān: Praying behind the Lisper," *Islamic Law and Society* 23(2016): 27.

5 The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur’ān: The Problem of *tawātur* and the Emergence of *shawādh* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 65-78; Hüseyin Hansu, "Notes on the Term *Mutawātir* and its Reception in Ḥadīth Criticism," *Islamic Law and Society* 16(2009): 283-408; Bernard Weiss, "Knowledge of the Past: The Theory of *Tawātur* According to Ghazālī," *Studia Islamica* 61(1985): 81-105.]

...speculative knowledge (*‘ilm ḥannī*).⁶ This ontological problem lead some Muslim jurists and theologians to deem one who does not profess the *tawātur* and integrity of the Qur’ān to be an unbeliever (*kāfir*).⁷ Be that as it may, the concept of *tawātur al-Qur’ān* did not go unchallenged. There existed historical and disciplinary problems concerning the claims that the text of the Qur’ān was unanimously and collectively transmitted by the Muslim community, that the Qur’ān was—and still is—an unchanged text transmitted verbatim as the Prophet had taught it to his Companions, and that the Qur’ān we read today is a universal, self-evident truth that was known down to its minute particulars to the majority of the Companions, Successors and all later generations of Muslims—a self-evident truth as clear as one is certain that the sun will rise from the east and set in the west. Muslim scholars extensively discussed and rebutted many problematic aspects that could threaten the theory of *tawātur al-Qur’ān*, which eventually lead them to devise counter arguments that became “stock arguments” ubiquitously used, until today, in discussions and altercations related to the integrity of the Qur’ānic text.⁸ Those who challenged the historical validity of this conception of *tawātur* and/or the integrity of the Qur’ānic text were nonchalantly..

[6 See the works mentioned above in footnote no. 5 or any work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* under the chapters of *mutawātir* and *āḥād*, e.g. Abū ‘Abd al-Mu‘izz Muḥammad ‘Alī Ferkūs, *Al-Ināra sharḥ Kitāb al-ishāra fī ma‘rifat al-uṣūl* (Algeria: Dār al-mawqī‘, 2009), 203-8.

7 See examples of Ḥanafī jurists in Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Nujaym al-Miṣrī (d. 970/1563), *al-Baḥr al-rā‘iq sharḥ Kanz al-Daqa‘iq*, ed. Zakariyyā ‘Umayrāt, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1997), 1:545-6; of Mālikī jurists in Abū al-Walīd Sulaymān al-Bājī (d. 494/1101), *al-Muntaqā sharḥ Muwaṭṭa’ Mālik*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1999), 2:44-6; of Shāfi‘ī jurists in Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), *Nihāyat al-sūl fī sharḥ Minhāj al-uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad Bikhīt al-Muṭī (Jam‘iyyat nashr al-kutub al-‘arabiyya), 4 vols. (Cairo: ‘Ālam al-kutub, 1925), 3:232-6; for a modern, mainstream view see Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-‘irfān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Fawwāz Zamarlī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, 1995), 1:351-67.

8 See for example ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf al-‘uthmānī wa-awḥām al-mustashriqīn fī qirā‘āt al-Qur’ān al-karīm: dawāfī‘uhā wa-daf‘uhā* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1999), 63-80; ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī, *al-Qirā‘āt fī nazar al-mustashriqīn wa-l-mulḥidīn* (Medina: 1982, 1981), 111-23.]

..and readily called the people of innovation and misguidance (*ahl al-bida‘ wa-l-ahwā’*), whether Shī‘īs, Mu‘tazilīs, or even misguided Sunnīs.⁹

Tawātur al-Qurʾān was challenged on different fronts the most important of which are summarized as follows. The fact that early Muslims greatly disagreed on the recitation of the Qurʾān was reportedly the main reason behind ʿUthmān’s initiative to collect and codify the text. That ʿUthmān destroyed all existing codices and kept only his official copy/copies was a clear testimony that a “universal” copy of the Qurʾān unanimously known to and agreed upon by the Companions of the Prophet did not exist. Even after the official codification of the text, renowned Companions such as Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb, publicly objected to ʿUthmān’s version and withheld their own codices, which differed from the official copy in terms of sūra and verse order, textual variants, the omission of three chapters—al-Fātiḥa, al-Falaq, al-Ikhlāṣ (Q 1, 113, 114)— from Ibn Masʿūd’s codex, and the inclusion of two chapters—al-khalʿ and al-ḥafd—in Ubayy’s codex.¹⁰

Next was the problem of the textual abrogation in the Qurʾān (naskh al-tilāwa), according to which a significant majority of Muslim scholars, based on soundly transmitted accounts, acknowledged this type of abrogation in the tradition. In addition to the familiar type of naskh al-ḥukm wa-baqāʾ al-tilāwa (abrogation of the content/legal ruling without expunging the text),¹¹ two other types were acknowledged. The first was naskh al-ḥukm wa-l-tilāwa (abrogation of both the legal ruling/content and expunging the text),¹² and the second was naskh al-tilāwa wa baqāʾ al-ḥukm...

[9 Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), *al-Intiṣār li-l-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad ʿIṣām al-Quḍāt (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001), 1:71-96, 2:421-7, 513-67; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Munjid*, 175-88.

10 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Markaz al-dirāsāt al-qurʾāniyya, 7 vols. (Medina: Muḥammad al-malik Fahd li-ṭibāʿat al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf, 2005), nawʿ #19 “fī ʿadad suwarihi wa-āyātihi wa-kalimātihi wa-ḥurūfihi” 419-28; Abū Bakr Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/928), *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Sabḥān Wāʿiẓ, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-bashāʾir al-islāmiyya, 2002), 1:179-95, 238 ff.

11 John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic theories of abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 56-80; David S. Powers, “On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses,” *Arabica* XXIX, no. 3 (1982): 246-95.

12 The example on this type is the ten-suckling verse; *Sources of Islamic Law*, 43-55, 161.]

...expunging the text while the legal ruling remains at work).¹³ The fact that a definite list of what was abrogated and what was not—e.g. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb not knowing that the stoning verse was abrogated¹⁴—was another challenge to the idea that the “final version” of the Qurʾān was universally known in all its details to all the Companions of the Prophet. In addition to abrogation, several authenticated and widely transmitted traditions addressed scribal errors in the Qurʾān, grammatical mistakes, missing verses, and textual abnormalities, all of which reports were generally accepted but thoroughly discussed and “re-contextualized” by Muslim scholars.¹⁵ Another problematic matter often discussed in the tradition was the formula of the basmala as an opening verse in each chapter.

Disagreement on whether this phrase was part of the Qurʾān or not, was yet another challenge to the idea of tawātur and integrity of the Qurʾānic text. Was the basmala an independent Qurʾānic verse, or a verse in every chapter of the Qurʾān—except sūra 9, al-Tawba—or was it a verse from al-Fātiḥa only, or was it not part of the Qurʾān at all.¹⁶

While the disagreement on the basmala manifested itself legally where the four Sunnī schools adopted distinct opinions concerning its Qurʾānic status,¹⁷ the controversy was reflected as well in the seven canonical Readings of the Qurʾān where the eponymous Readers adopted different techniques in the inclusion or exclusion of the basmala as verse separator between two chapters. ʿĀṣim, al-Kisāʾī, Ibn Kathīr, and Nāfiʿ à Qālūn recited the basmala to separate the end of a chapter from the beginning of a new one,

whereas Ḥamza dropped the basmala altogether. As for Ibn ‘Āmir, Nāfi‘ à Warsh, and Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’, nothing was recorded concerning their...

13 The example on this type is the stoning verse; *ibid.*, 122-64.

14 Al-Suyūfī, *Itqān*, naw‘ #47 “fī nāsikhihi wa-mansūkhihi”, 1467-9.

15 Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 1:227-37; Suyūfī, *Itqān*, 1236-47.

16 Nasser, *Transmission*, 88-97.

17 *Wizārat al-awqāf wa-l-shu‘ūn al-islāmiyya*, *al-Mawsū‘a al-fiqhiyya*, 39 vols. (Kuwait: Dār al-ṣafwa, 1995), 8:83-

...practice of the basmala; thus, professional Qur’ān reciters tend to recite in both ways, namely, to include and exclude the basmala at the beginning of each chapter.¹⁸ The variant readings of the Qur’ān have also been amongst the “stock arguments” employed by the “people of innovation and heresy” in their push against the tawātur of the Qur’ān.¹⁹ The fact that there was/is no single, absolute, universal rendition of the Qur’ān, but rather various renditions many of which were developed at a later stage, and several of which were rejected by Muslim authorities for being “non-Qur’ānic”, is further attestation to the unfeasibility of the concept of tawātur al-Qur’ān. The Qur’ān does not and cannot exist without the tradition of the Qirā’āt, for it is the only means by which the Qur’ān may be read and recited. Out of an immense corpus of variant readings of the Qur’ānic text, ten canonical Readings²⁰ have survived to “almost” be considered the sole representative of the divine rendition of the Qur’ān.²¹ These variant readings are not “accidental” aspects of performance in recitation, which reflect dialectal features or recitational techniques, but they are rather an “essential” component of reading the Qur’ān. The canonical Readings are the Masoretic version of the Qur’ān, without which we have no other means of deciphering its consonantal outline (*rasm*). One cannot use their opinion and *ijtihād* to decipher the *rasm*, for reading the Qur’ān is *sunna*; it is a community practice, taught by the Prophet and continued to be preserved by the Muslim community until today.

The Islamic tradition maintains that the Qur’ān, as manifested in its seven and ten canonical Readings, has always been static, unchanged, and standardized since its inception. However, at...

[18 ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī, *al-Wāfī fī sharḥ al-Shāṭibiyya fī al-qirā’āt al-sab‘* (Jedda: Maktabat al-Sawādī li-l-tawzī‘, 1999), 45-8.

19 See for example the chapter on the non-believers and Qirā’āt in Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Sālim Bāzmūl, *al-Qirā’āt wa-atharuhā fī al-tafsīr wa-l-aḥkām*, 2 vols. (Riyad: Dār al-hijra, 1996), 1:311-13.

20 The seven Readings in addition to the Readings of Abū Ja‘far al-Madanī, Ya‘qūb al-Ḥaḍramī, and Khalaf al-‘Āshir. See below under the section of the fourth canonization.

21 I say “almost” to draw attention to several voices within the Islamic tradition, who opposed the notion of limiting the canonical Readings to seven or Ten. Moreover, there are still Qur’ān reciter today, e.g. Ḥasan Sa‘īd al-Sakandarī, who are certified to recite and teach according to the system of fourteen canonical Readings.]

... junctures in the history of the reception of the Qur’ānic text, one is able to see that the state and/or religious scholars empowered by the state often intervened to produce a standardized corpus of the Qur’ān, whether at the textual level in the case of the codices, or the oral/recitational level as in the case of the canonical Readings. In the following pages I will examine five major junctures in the history of the canonization of Qur’ān and show how the official and/or religious endorsement of a standardized corpus of the Qur’ānic text influenced the promulgation and normalization of that new standard.

The first canonization: ‘Uthmān’s codification

‘Uthmān’s collection and codification of the Qur’ān was probably one of the most momentous events in the early history of Islam. It has been discussed at length in primary sources and secondary scholarship²² so much so that there is no need here to reiterate and discuss it further. However, I will only highlight some important details that pertain to the discussion at hand, namely the state’s decision to take measures towards unifying and standardizing the text of the Qur’ān.

To start with, I will reiterate Nöldeke’s observation regarding the sheets of Ḥafṣa, ‘Umar’s daughter and the Prophet’s wife. After the “first” collection of the Qur’ān that was launched by Abū Bakr, instigated by ‘Umar, and administered by Zayd b. Thābit, the sheets of the first collection were kept with the first two Caliphs during their caliphate. After the death of ‘Umar, the sheets were bequeathed to his daughter Ḥafṣa, instead of being turned over to the head of state, the third Caliph ‘Uthmān; hence Nöldeke’s remark[about this first alleged collection being a private..

22 John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur’ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 117-59; Herald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur’ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam* 78: 1-34.]

...affair rather than a state matter.²³ There is no adequate “religious” justification as to why the most important document in the nascent Islamic state would be entrusted to ‘Umar’s daughter instead of the head of the state, ‘Uthmān, who had to ask her to temporarily hand over those sheets so that Zayd b. Thābit could copy and cross-reference them with the second collection he was undertaking.²⁴ Be that as it may, it must be noted here that both Abū Bakr/‘Umar’s first collection and ‘Uthmān’s second collection took place at the official level, where the heads of state enforced and promulgated an official copy that apparently differed from the other copies Muslims possessed and memorized at that time. Not only was the official ‘Uthmānic version declared to be the only valid Qur’ānic material, but also all the other codices were destroyed, including those owned by Companions well-known for their intimate association with the Qur’ān and its recitation. Indeed, the individuals whom ‘Uthmān assembled in the committee under the direction of Zayd b. Thābit were of hardly any historical significance in the life and career of the Prophet. Sa‘īd b. al-‘Āṣ (d. 53/673) was nine years old when the Prophet died²⁵, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥārith b. Hishām al-Makhzūmī (d. 43/664) who seemingly never met the Prophet and was less than ten years old when Muḥammad died,²⁶ and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr b. al-‘Awwām (d. 73/692), who was also around ten years old when the Prophet died, and whose historical importance in the formative period of Islam seemed to have eclipsed any mention of the event of his participation in Zayd’s committee, which was hardly mentioned in biographical dictionaries.²⁷ On the other hand, the senior...

[23 Theodor Nöldeke, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns: Die Geschichte des Qorāntexts*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), 2:19.

24 Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 1:195-6.

25 Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), *Al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Abū Ḥajar Zaghlūl, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1853), 3:98-9

26 Ibn Ḥajar put him in the second section of those whose names start with ‘ayn, a section designated to individuals who did not meet the Prophet or narrate anything from him; *ibid.*, 5:67-7.

27 See, for example, *ibid.*, 4:69-71; Abū ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), *Al-Istī‘āb fī ma‘rifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ‘Ādil Murshid (Amman: Dār al-‘ilām, 2002), 399-402; ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232-3), *Usd al-ghāba fī ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Awaḍ and ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1997), 3:241-5.]

...Companions who were more associated with the Qurʾān, such as Ibn Masʿūd, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Ubayy b. Kaʿb, and several others were noticeably missing from this crucial event. Whether or not the exclusion of these individuals was a politico-religious foreshadowing of the early internal conflicts among the Companions, the choice of Zayd b. Thābit and the emphasis that he was someone “above suspicion” (shābb ʿāqil lā nattahimuka)²⁸ might have been more of a conscious, political decision to codify the Qurʾān rather than a decision motivated by piety and thoughtful consideration towards the senior Companions of the Prophet. Even the sheets of Ḥafṣa—the first prototype and only original copy of the Qurʾān, and the only remaining relic of the efforts of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar—which survived ʿUthmān’s destruction of the old codices, shared the same fate years later. According to one account, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (r. 64-5/684-5) attempted to take the sheets from Ḥafṣa but she refused to relinquish them. It was only after she died, and immediately after her funeral that Marwān called for the sheets to be fetched and burned, to ensure that nothing in those sheets would ever contradict ʿUthmān’s version.²⁹

Ibn Masʿūd’s plea that he was more senior and more worthy than Zayd to oversee the codification committee fell on deaf ears. Furthermore, statements and comments made by early Companions, including ʿUthmān himself, to the effect that there were scribal errors and textual anomalies (lahn, akhtaʾū fī al-kitāb) in the collected text, never prompted a revision of the official text.³⁰ Nevertheless, some fifty years later al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714), governor of Iraq during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65-86/685-705), took it upon himself to reform some....

[²⁸ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, Maṣāḥif, 1:159, 66.

²⁹ Ibid., 1:202-3.

³⁰ See, for example, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib’s response to a man who suggested changing (Q. 56:29) “wa-ṭalḥin” into “wa- ṭal’in”, where ʿAlī, although favoring “wa-ṭal’in”, stated that the Qurʾān can no more be changed (inna al-Qurʾān lā yuhāj al-yawm wa-lā yuḥawwal); Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī, 26 vols. (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 22:309-10]

...aspects of the orthography of the ʿUthmānic codices.³¹ Regardless of the historicity of this event and the degree to which al-Ḥajjāj induced changes in the official codices, what matters here is that despite al-Ḥajjāj’s “ungodly” character that was often portrayed in the historical sources, as a statesperson he was empowered to initiate and enforce changes to the ʿUthmānic codex, as well as punish Kūfans who were still publicly reciting according to the muṣḥaf of Ibn Masʿūd.³² Nonetheless, despite ʿUthmān and al-Ḥajjāj’s efforts, a uniform reading of the Qurʾān could not be reached. Variant readings kept multiplying, professional readers of the Qurʾān began developing their own unique styles of recitation, non-ʿUthmānic variant readings that went back to the Companions were being revived, and even novel variants were emerging. Thus, it was necessary to limit these variations as a further step towards unifying the rendition of the Qurʾānic text, an endeavor undertaken by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936).

The second canonization: Ibn Mujāhid and the seven canonical Readings

During the 250 years between ʿUthmān’s codification of the Qurʾān and Ibn Mujāhid’s canonization of the seven Readings, variant readings of the Qurʾān were widely circulating in different forms and for different purposes. They were frequently used and discussed in works of exegesis, grammar, Ḥadīth and fiqh among other disciplines. In addition to individual variant readings transmitted through traditions, professional Qurʾān reciters were developing their own individual style and system-Reading. It is reported that before Ibn Mujāhid, there were compilations on twenty and twenty-five eponymous Readings,³³ not to mention the fifty...

[31 Omar Hamdan, "The Second Maṣāḥif Project: A Step Towards the Canonization of the Qur'anic Text," in *The Qur'ān in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 795-835; François Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 138-42.
 32 Abū 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 465/1071), *Al-Tamhīd li-mā fī al-Muwaṭṭa' min al-ma'ānī wa-l-asānīd*, ed. Sa'īd Aḥmad A'rāb, 26 vols. (Morocco: Wizārat al-awqāf wa-l-shu'ūn al-islāmiyya, 1967-1981), 8:298.
 33 Nasser, *Transmission*, 6.]

...eponymous Readings al-Hudhalī (d. 467/1072-3) collected in his *Qirā'āt* compendium.³⁴ Many scholars objected to Ibn Mujāhid's selection of the seven Readers, calling it an innovation (*bid'a*) that caused *fitna* (conflict, confusion) among Muslims, for he randomly and whimsically limited the eponymous Readings to only Seven and excluded many reliable Readers from his system.³⁵ While Ibn Mujāhid did not explicitly state his criteria for selecting those seven Readings, he believed that a valid Qur'anic Reading must agree with the consonantal outline of any of the five 'Uthmānic codices, conform to the proper rules of Arabic language, and enjoy some kind of a consensus in the region in which it was recited. Scholars before, after and during Ibn Mujāhid's time wrote similar manuals of *Qirā'āt* and included other systems of variant Readings, but none of these works gained the authority that Ibn Mujāhid's work achieved.

Ibn Mujāhid's cooperation with the vizier Ibn Muqla (d. 328/939) was an important driving force in publicly promulgating his *Qirā'āt* system and criteria for valid variant Readings. When his two contemporaries, Ibn Shanabūdh (d. 328/939) and Ibn Miqsam (d. 354-5/965-6) were teaching and advocating for other systems of variant readings that differed from the system Ibn Mujāhid considered as the one enjoying the consensus of the Muslim community, the two scholars were brought to the court of the vizier Ibn Muqla. Attended by several jurists and Ibn Mujāhid himself, the trial concluded by condemning both men and asking them to repent. The sources documented many reports to the effect that both men ostensibly repented but never stopped reciting...

[34 Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhalī (d. 465/1072-3), *al-Kāmil fī al-qirā'āt al-'ashr wa-l-arba'in al-zā'idā 'alayhā*, ed. Jamāl b. al-Sayyid b. Rifā' al-Shāyib (Cairo: Mu'assasat Samā, 2007), 9-17.

35 Refer to Nasser, *Transmission*, 35-64; Mustafa Shah, "The Early Arabic Grammarians' Contributions to the Collection and Authentication of Qur'anic Readings: the prelude to Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sab'a*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2004): 72-102; Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings," *Studia Islamica* 91(2000): 5-22; Shady Hekmat Nasser, "Revisiting Ibn Mujāhid's position on the seven canonical Readings: Ibn 'Āmir's problematic reading of "kun fa-yakūna", "*Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2015): 85-113.]

... circulating their system Readings.³⁶ Indeed, Ibn Shanabūdh was allegedly tortured and forced to retract his opinion concerning the anomalous readings he was advocating for.³⁷ Be that as it may, Ibn Mujāhid's system stood the test of time. Later compilations of *Qirā'āt* used his work as the prototype of how a *Qirā'āt* manual is authored, and his system of the variant Readings, with slight variations, continued to be the basis of the seven canonical Readings until today.

The third canonization: al-Dānī and al-Shāṭibī

After Ibn Mujāhid, books on different systems of Readings of the Qur'ān continued to emerge. In the eastern part of the Islamic world the manuals of *Qirā'āt* did not stop at seven Readings. Works on eight, nine, ten, and up to fourteen eponymous Readings were frequently authored.³⁸ More importantly, an eponymous, system-Reading was not a unified corpus without internal discrepancies. Different transmissions of the same eponymous Reading resulted in internal variations and discrepancies. The more

transmitters an eponymous Reading enjoyed the more internal variations and discrepancies it showcased. This “diversity” of transmissions created many problems on the level of standardizing the oral performance of the Qurʾān, for even though Ibn Mujāhid converged the variations into seven systems, the variations within each system multiplied and began to rapidly diverge. Things in the western part of the Islamic world were somehow different. As early as Abū al-Ṭayyib ʿAbd al-Munʿim Ibn Ghalbūn (d. 389/998), who had a direct influence on the later north African and Andalusian Qirāʾāt scholars, two transmitters were systematically selected to represent an eponymous Reading. A comparison of manuals of Qirāʾāt between the eastern and western parts of the Islamic world after the 4th/10th...

[36 Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, 25 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-risāla, 1985), 15:265, 16:106.

37 Nasser, *Second Canonization*, 141-3.

38 Nasser, *Transmission*, 64 n.116.]

...century showed that unlike the mashriq, a majority of works in the western parts adopted the system of the seven Readings and also systematically maintained two versions of each system (riwāya).³⁹ What further helped this conformity in the west, which slowly spread to the east, was Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī's (d. 444/1052-3) work, *al-Taysīr fī al-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ*, an abridged manual of Qirāʾāt designed to simplify the discipline for educational purposes.

Al-Dānī was not only a Qirāʾāt scholar, but he also commanded mastery over Ḥadīth and jurisprudence, both disciplines in which he authored several distinguished books. The political situation of al-Andalus in the 4th-5th/10th-11th centuries was marked by instability and chaos. The Umayyad Caliphate was disintegrating, the invading Berbers sacked Cordoba, al-Dānī's hometown, and the new political order of the taifa states (*mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*) was emerging. Dāniya (Denia) was one of those taifa states and it was ruled by the ʿĀmirid Abū al-Jaysh Mujāhid, who liked to “surrounded himself with scholars and was a distinguished commentator on the Qurʾān.”⁴⁰ Ibn Khladūn (d. 808/1406) credited Abū al-Jaysh Mujāhid with more than simply recruiting Qurʾān scholars to his court. He considered him to be a turning point in the history of Qirāʾāt in al-Andalus, a discipline to which he had great affinity to the extent of transforming Dāniya into a center of Qirāʾāt studies.⁴¹ Al-Dānī was then recruited to the court of Abū al-Jaysh and ultimately became the main authority of Qirāʾāt in the west, and eventually in the east as well. Moreover, al-Dānī gained the reputation of being a scholar of sound sunnī belief who adhered to the fundamentals and consensus of ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa. He was described...

[39 Shady Hekmat Nasser, "The Two-Rāwī Canon before and after al-Dānī (d. 444/1052-3): The Role of Abū ṭ-Ṭayyib Ibn Ghalbūn (d. 389/998) and the Qayrawān/Andalus School in Creating the Two-Rāwī Canon," *Oriens* 41, no. 1-2 (2013): 66 ff.

40 C.F. Seybold, "Dāniya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Accessed 05 June 2020, available at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1691.

41 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), *al-Muqaddima*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām al-Shaddādī, 5 vols. (*al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ: Bayt al-funūn wa-l-ʿulūm wa-l-ādāb*, 2005), 5:194-5.]

...as pious, virtuous, and an exemplary scholar of the Andalusians who adhered to traditional jurisprudence, sound Ḥadīth, and good Arabic while avoiding the rational sciences.⁴²

Al-Dānī wrote numerous books on Qirāʾāt but his *al-Taysīr*, although an abridged manual written for students, was the best known of his works. The formula of choosing two transmitters or narrations for each eponymous Reading became the common practice in

Qirā'āt works thereafter.⁴³ In addition to the patronage al-Dānī received from the ruler of Dāniya and his reputation as an adherent to sunna and sound doctrinal beliefs, his work al-Taysīr received further recognition when it was versified by al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1193) in the didactic poem Ḥirz al-Amānī (al-Shāṭibiyya), which became until today the cornerstone of transmitting, teaching, and rendering the seven canonical Readings of the Qur'ān.

Al-Shāṭibī was educated in Shāṭiba (Xàtiva), which witnessed a surge in intellectual life after the 5th/11th century. According to Manuela Marín, "the most illustrious son of Ṣ ḥ āṭiba was without doubt al-Kāsim b. Firruh al-Ṣ ḥ āṭibī" who left Shāṭiba after finishing his studies and settled in Egypt for the rest of his life.⁴⁴ In Egypt, he was recruited by the judge 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ibn al-Qāḍī al-Ashraf, best known as al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 596/1200), who served as a vizier for Saladin and was very close to him and his son al-Malik al-'Azīz 'Uthmān Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (r. 589-595/1193-1198).⁴⁵ Al-Shāṭibī was first stationed in the mosque of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ after which al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil appointed him in the madrasa he established in Cairo, al-madrasa al-fāḍiliyya, in which he lived and worked until he died.⁴⁶ Al-Shāṭibī's biography is a...

[42 Dhahabī, Siyar, 17:557, 18:77-83.

43 Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444/1052-3), al-Taysīr fī al-qirā'āt al-sab', ed. Otto Pretzl (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1984), 2-3.

44 Manuela Marín, "Ṣ ḥ āṭiba," Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Accessed 06 June 2020, available at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6864

45 Abū al-'Abbās Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994), 3:158-63.

46 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1249), Inbāḥ al-ruwāt 'alā anbāḥ al-nuḥāt, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-'arabī, 1986), 4:160.]

...hagiographical account filled with testimonies about his genius, piety, and saint-like career. He was described as having a phenomenal memory to the extent that people used to correct their personal copies of al-Bukhārī and Muslim based on his dictation from memory. Besides his profound knowledge of Ḥadīth, fiqh and Arabic sciences, he was well versed in dream interpretation.⁴⁷ Al-Shāṭibī was said to be one of God's signs and marvels of the world. Numerous accounts and incidents testified to his piety and upright character. He is credited with many karāmāt and people of his time venerated him like the Companions venerated the Prophet.⁴⁸

Al-Shāṭibī is considered the epitome of Qur'ānic recitation. His main contribution to the field of Qirā'āt, and particularly the standardization of the variant readings, lies in his innovative style in didactic poetry through which he put in verse three important works by al-Dānī. Nāzimat al-zuhr, a 297-line poem on the systems of verse numbering of the Qur'ān is the versified version of al-Dānī's Kitāb al-bayān fī 'add āy al-Qur'ān. 'Aqīlat atrāb al-qaṣā'id, a 298-line poem on the spelling rules of the Qur'ān is based on al-Dānī's al-Muqni' fī ma'rifat marsūm maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār. Finally, Ḥirz al-amānī wa-wajh al-tahanī (al-Shāṭibiyya), a 1173-line poem on the seven eponymous Readings of the Qur'ān is the adaptation of al-Dānī's Taysīr in verse form. Al-Shāṭibiyya is without doubt the most important didactic poem in Qirā'āt and probably the most widely used work of Qirā'āt since its composition. Ibn Khaldūn stated that after the publication of al-Shāṭibiyya, people were keen on memorizing it and teaching it throughout the lands of al-maghrib and Andalusia.⁴⁹ Indeed, both Ḥirz al-amānī (al-Shāṭibiyya)...

[47 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 643/1245), Faṭḥ al-waṣīd fī sharḥ al-qaṣīd, ed. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī al-Ṭāhirī, 2 vols. (Riyad: Maktabar al-rushd, 2002), 1:117, 2:6.

48 Jamāl al-qurrā' wa-kamāl al-iqrā', ed. 'Alī Ḥusayn al-Bawwāb (Mecca: Maktabat al-turāth, 1987), 119, 480-1; Abū al-Khayr Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), Ghāyat al-nihāya fī

ṭabaqāt al-qurrā', ed. Gotthelf Bergsträsser, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2006), 2:20-1.

49 Ibn Khaldūn, Muqaddima, 5:195.]

...major) and the ʿAqīla (al-Shāṭibiyya minor) became stable textbook manuals in different schools and madrasas, where it is common to read in the biographies of scholars that they studied, heard or memorized both works (al-shāṭibiyyatān) as part of their academic training.⁵⁰

Besides the poem's originality in comprehensively summarizing the complex differences among the variant readings and making them easier to memorize, al-Shāṭibiyya received a lot of publicity and official/religious endorsement since its completion and publication. Al-Shāṭibī himself declared that "anyone who reads this poem of mine, Allah will surely reward him, for I composed it for the sake of Allah."⁵¹ It was reported that when al-Shāṭibī finished Ḥirz al-amānī, he circumambulated the Ka'ba for 12,000 full cycles (84,000 times) invoking the aforementioned supplication. It was added that al-Shāṭibī saw the prophet in a dream and presented him with the poem. The Prophet blessed it and said: he who memorizes the poem will enter paradise. A certain al-Qurṭubī added: 'rather, he who dies while the poem is in his household will enter paradise.⁵² Others went as far as claiming that it is unfathomable that al-Shāṭibiyya could be written by someone who was not infallible (maṣūm). Ibn al-Jazarī concluded that it was unlikely during his time that any scholar or student would not own a copy of al-Shāṭibiyya.⁵³

The influence of both al-Taysīr and al-Shāṭibiyya was so pronounced that lay Muslims and scholars alike stopped consulting other manuals of Qirā'āt. People were gradually becoming...

[50 For random examples see Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnā'ūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā, 29 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 2000), 12:47; Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1428), al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi', 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 1:10, 77, 128. Cf. ʿAbd al-Hādī ʿAbd Allāh Ḥamītū, Zaʿīm al-madrasa al-athariyya fī al-qirā'āt wa-shaykh qurrā' al-maghrib wa-l-mashriq al-imām Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī (Riyad: Aḍwā' al-salaf, 2005), 63.

51 Sakhāwī, Faṭḥ al-waṣīd, 2:6.

52 These accounts are added as a postscript to the end of the manuscript of al-Minaḥ al-fikriyya by Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606) but do not belong to the manuscript.

Secondary scholarship on al-Shāṭibī often cites Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī for these statements, but so far I am not able to locate them in earlier sources; Mullā ʿAlī b. Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Qārī al-Harawī (d. 1014/1606), al-Minaḥ al-fikriyya sharḥ al-Muqaddima al-Jazariyya (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1948), 82-3; ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Ḍabbā', Mukhtaṣar bulūgh al-umniyya ʿalā matn lthāf al-bariyya bi-taḥrīrāt al-Shāṭibiyya, ed. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ʿAlī Samak (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya), 48-9; Ḥamītū, Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī, 92-3.

53 Ibn al-Jazarī, Ghāya, 2:22-3.]

...under the impression that the canonical readings were only those mentioned in these two manuals and that any other variant reading ought to be irregular (shādhḍha).⁵⁴ Al-Shāṭibiyya dominated the madrasa curricula in the Islamic world and until the present day it is one of the main textbooks of Qirā'āt taught in al-Azhar.⁵⁵ In Fez, a special awqāf department was designated in some madrasas solely dedicated to teaching al-Shāṭibiyya, which was one of the prestigious professorial chairs given to scholars (kursī al-Shāṭibiyya al-kubrā).⁵⁶ The fact that since its composition al-Shāṭibiyya garnered more than 130 extant commentaries testifies to its indelible effect on the perception of the Qur'ān and its oral performance through the seven eponymous Readings and their corresponding fourteen renditions (riwāya).

The fourth canonization: Ibn al-Jazarī

The trajectory in Qirā'āt so far tended to limit the variants into a manageable corpus, such as restricting the many codices to only one, selecting seven system-Readings out of at least fifty, and relying on only two transmitters for each eponymous Reading, which were often transmitted by tens of transmitters frequently disagreeing with one another. As noted previously, many scholars voiced their concerns about limiting the eponymous Readings to Seven, the transmitters (Rāwīs) to Two, and the corpus of the variant readings to select manuals such as al- Taysīr and al-Shāṭibiyya. As early as the 4th/10th century, the eponymous Readings of al-A'mash (d. 148-8/765-6), Ibn Muḥayṣin (d. 123/741), Abū Ja'far al-Madanī (d. 130/748), al-Ḥasan al- Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and many others have been incorporated into manuals of Qirā'āt, studied and transmitted by the Qur'ān community. However, it was only until Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) that....

[54 Ibn al-Jazarī, Munjid, 102-8; cf. Nasser, Second Canonization, 20.

55 Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, Maqālāt al-'allāma al-duktūr Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī: ṣafahāt fī al- turāth wa-l-tarājim wa-l-lugha wa-l-adab (Beirut: Dār al-bashā'ir al-islāmiyya, 2002), 94-5.

56 Such as 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Rāshidī and Ibrāhīm al-Lamṭī; Ḥamītū, Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī, 137-9.]

...the three eponymous Readings of Abū Ja'far al-Madanī, Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205/820–1), and Khalaf al-'Āshir (d. 229/843–4) entered the canon of the accepted variant readings and became widely disseminated among Muslims. Two main reasons were behind the success of this canonization process. First, Ibn al-Jazarī's active political life and connections with major jurists of the time played an important role in imposing his authority in the field, despite his corrupt character and legal and administrative misconduct.⁵⁷ He was the chief judge of the Shāfi'iyya in Damascus and in Shiraz, he held several high-profile teaching positions in several madrasas, and he personally approached high ranking politicians such as the Mamlūk prince Quṭlubak al-'Alā'ī Ustādār (d. 806/1403–4), the Ottoman sultan Bayezid (Bāyezīd) I (r. 791–804/1389–1402), and Tīmūr Lang (Tamerlane, d. 807/1405). Ibn al-Jazarī seemed to have had a close relationship with the chief judge of Damascus Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) with whom he exchanged correspondences concerning the nature of the variant readings and their legal/divine status. Ibn al-Jazarī was able to procure a fatwā from al-Subkī in which he acknowledged the tawātur of the ten canonical Readings—not only the Seven—making them a fundamental, necessary element of religion (ma'lūm min al-dīn bi-l-ḍarūra).⁵⁸ Additionally, Ibn al-Jazarī actively “advertised” his work on the ten eponymous Readings. He asked Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) to endorse al-Nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-'ashr and recommend it as the main textbook to be taught in Egypt.⁵⁹ The second reason behind Ibn al-Jazarī's success in popularizing the three additional eponymous Readings was pedagogical. Al-Nashr is a remarkable work on the variant readings of...

[57 Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi', 9:255-60; cf. Shady Hekmat Nasser, "Ibn al-Jazarī," Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition. Brill, Accessed 13 October 2018, available at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30840.

58 Ibn al-Jazarī, Munjid, 173-6; cf. Nasser, Transmission, 49.

59 Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi', 9:258-9.]

...the Qur'ān but it is complex and rich in information. In order to make it more accessible, Ibn al- Jazarī followed al-Shāṭibī's example and versified his own works. First, he composed al-Durra al-muḍiyya fī al-qirā'āt al-thalāth al-marḍiyya, in which he followed the same meter and rhyme of al-Shāṭibiyya and added the three eponymous Readings of Abū

Ja'far, Ya'qūb, and Kahalf. Next, he composed Ṭayyibat al-nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-'ashr, a 1014-line didactic poem on the rajaz meter, in which he transformed his complex work al-Nashr into simplified, accessible, easy-to-memorize verse. These two didactic poems, in addition to his 107-line poem on recitational techniques, al-Muqaddima al-Jazariyya fī al-tajwīd, became stable textbook manuals (mutūn) taught and memorized alongside al-Shāṭibiyya throughout the whole Muslim world. Today, the overwhelming majority of Qur'ān certification in tajwīd and Qirā'āt is conducted through al-Shāṭibiyya, al-Durra al-muḍiyya (al-'ashr al-ṣuḡhrā), and Ṭayyibat al-Nashr (al-'ashr al-kubrā), after a 1400-year journey of continuous and systematic systematization of the Qur'ānic text and its oral rendition.

Conclusion: The fifth canonization of al-Azhar's edition of 1923

Several printed editions of the Qur'ān appeared since the 16th century in Europe and the Muslim world⁶⁰ but most of them did not enjoy the wide acceptance and spread of the 1923 Egyptian edition (al-muṣḥaf al-amīrī) under the supervision of al-Azhar and the auspices of king Fuad I. This edition was printed based on the eponymous Reading of 'Āṣim through his transmitter Ḥafṣ (Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim), and since then millions of copies of this edition were in circulation throughout the Muslim world, and "it almost became" the only edition of the Qur'ān...

[60 Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, Rasm al-Muṣḥaf: dirāsa lughawiyya tārikhiyya (Baghdād: Jāmi'at Baghdād, 1982), 601-9; Régis Blachère, Introduction au Coran (Paris: Besson & Chantemerle, 1959), 133-5.]

...used and distributed among Muslims.⁶¹ In March 1959, Labīb al-Sa'īd, an Egyptian intellectual, professor at 'Ayn Shams university, and a connoisseur of Qirā'āt, proposed an oral codification project for the Qur'ān. He lamented the fact that most Muslims cannot recite the Qur'ān properly and that most Qur'ān reciters were only familiar with the rendition of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim. Al-Sa'īd suggested recording the Qur'ān according to all the canonical Readings and to directly put this project under the direction of the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Despite facing some financial and logistical difficulties, the project bore fruit in 1961 when the first complete audio recording of the Qur'ān (al-muṣḥaf al-murattal) was published. The recording was done by the chief Qur'ān reciter of the time (shaykh al-maqārī' al-miṣriyya) Maḥmūd Khalīl al-Ḥuṣārī and, yet again, it was according to Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim. In 1962 the project was scheduled to record the eponymous Reading of Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā'; however, al-Azhar intervened and prohibited any recording of the Qur'ān except that of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim in order to avoid confusion among Muslims concerning the differences between Qirā'āt. Despite several correspondences with al-Azhar, which in theory agreed that all the eponymous Readings are equal in their divine status, the project stumbled again without achieving its objectives.⁶²

In the last few decades, complete audio recordings of other eponymous Readings are slowly becoming more available and popular. Moreover, different printed versions of the Qur'ān based on eponymous Readings other than Ḥafṣ are also getting easier to find and acquire. Indeed, many institutions in the Muslim world are actively printing and recording the eponymous Readings of the Qur'ān according to different systems. Mujaḥma' al-malik Fahd in Saudi Arabia is currently distributing the Qur'ān printed according to the Readings of Shu'ba 'an 'Āṣim, Qālūn and Warsh 'an Nāfi', and al-Sūsī and al-Dūrī 'an Abī 'Amr b. al-'Alā'....

[61 Yūsuf al-Mir'ashlī, 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān al-kaṛīm (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2017), 158-9.

62 Labīb al-Sa'īd al-Jam' al-ṣawṭī li-l-Qur'ān al-kaṛīm (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, [n.d.]), 99-124.]

..Nevertheless, Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim is still by far the widely used rendition in the Muslim world, except for specific regions and countries that historically adopted different readings, such as Warsh ‘an Nāfi‘ in Morocco, Qālūn ‘an Nāfi‘ in Libya, and al-Dūrī ‘an Abī ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’ in Sudan and Nigeria.

Since the first codification of the Qur’ān by ‘Uthmān, there have always been many voices within the Islamic tradition criticizing the limitations and sometimes “capricious” decisions to canonize certain Readings and reject others. Ultimately, the power of retroactive consensus (ijmā‘) stamped out all these objections that did comprise at certain times a significant minority. However, as time passed, these voices became an insignificant minority that deviated from and did not conform to the “imagined” consensus of the Muslim community.⁶³ Most, if not all, canonization processes the Qur’ān underwent in the past 1400 years came hand in hand with the support of the state and the religious authorities working closely with it. Thus, it is important when we study the history of the transmission and reception of the Qur’ān to recognize the different strata at which it was systematized and draw the distinction between how the Qur’ān was/is practiced and circulated and how this practice and circulation change over time. The notion of the tawātur of the Qur’ān is a great theological concept when looked at retroactively; however, to claim that the Qur’ān, both textually and orally, has always been “statically” mutawātir since the time of the Prophet seems to be more of an article of faith for those “who believe in the Unseen”, rather than an argument supported by academic and historical data.

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63 On how the theory of abrogation was used to legitimize ‘Uthmān’s codex that abrogated all the other codices, and how the canonical Readings abrogated all the irregular and anomalous Readings, see Bāqillānī, Intiṣār, 300ff.

