



The Uthmanic Codex: Understanding How the Qur'an was Preserved

AMMAR KHATIB

NAZIR KHAN

YAQEEN™
INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Sh. Ammar Khatib is a scholar of the Qur’anic sciences and a specialist in Arabic linguistics. He has written many treatises on matters related to *qirā’āt* and the Qur’anic text, and has collaborated closely with Dr. Ghanim Qaddūrī al-Hamad, one of the foremost specialists in Qur’anic studies in the Muslim world. He is a volunteer Imam in Winnipeg and consultant for the Manitoba Islamic Association Fiqh Committee.

Dr. Nazir Khan is the Director of Research Strategy at Yaqeen Institute and the President of Yaqeen Canada. He is a scholar of the Qur’anic sciences with certification (*ijāzah*) in all ten readings of the Qur’an through both major and minor routes of transmission, and has also received other certifications (*ijāzāt*) in Qur’anic studies (‘*Ulūm al-Qur’an*’), Hadith, and Islamic theology (‘*aqīdah*’). He is also a medical doctor and clinical neuroscientist, volunteer Imam, and consultant for the Manitoba Islamic Association Fiqh Committee.

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Introduction

The history of the preservation of the Qur’an has been studied and written about by Muslim scholars in extensive detail. It is a scripture that is intimately familiar to the heart and tongues of countless believers, memorized word-for-word by Muslims across the globe and continuously recited in daily prayer. The Qur’an is the Divine speech of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through the angel Jibrīl (Gabriel), and its preservation has been assured by Allah Most Exalted Himself. Allah says, “Verily, We have revealed the Qur’an and We will surely protect it.”¹ This is in contrast to previous scriptures revealed by Allah, such as the *Tawrāt* and *Injīl*, whose preservation was entrusted to the People of the Book:² “To them was entrusted the protection of Allah’s Book.”³ The timeless preservation of the Qur’an has even been regarded by many scholars as one facet of its miraculous nature.⁴

It is important for Muslims to understand precisely what is meant by the *preservation* of the Qur’an. The Qur’an was preserved through both mass memorization and written recording.⁵ The written preservation of the Qur’an occurred in stages, the final stage of which was commissioned by the third caliph, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (d. 35 AH/656 CE). Through a process unlike any other in human history, the words and verses of the Qur’an populated the pages of manuscripts around the world with the same clarity with which they were etched in the hearts and minds of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

It is that process that the present article aims to explain, providing an overview of the history behind the ‘Uthmānic codex and how it was compiled. The discussion will draw upon primary sources in the Islamic tradition (including historical works and Hadith literature) along with analysis of classical and contemporary Muslim

¹ Qur’an 15:9.

² This was mentioned by the early scholar of *tafsīr* al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faḍl al-Bajalī (d. 282 AH) as reported in al-Nasafī, *al-Taysīr fī al-Tafsīr*, ed. Mahir Adīb Habbūsh (Istanbul: Dar al-Lubāb, 2019), 400.

³ Qur’an 5:44. The task of preserving the scriptures entrusted to the people of the Book was not successfully fulfilled and those scriptures became subject to corruption. See Ibn Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), 546.

⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1420 AH), 19:123–24.

⁵ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-qira’āt al-‘ashar*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Dabba’ (Beirut: DKI, n.d.), 1:6.

scholarship on this topic. It will also evaluate a number of theses that have emerged in Western academia with respect to the history of the Qur'anic text including research related to Qur'anic manuscripts.

The present article is the sequel to the authors' previous article discussing [the variant readings of the Qur'an](#) that existed during the time of the Prophet's companions. To briefly recap the context provided there: during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Qur'an was revealed piecemeal over a period of 23 years. As reported by numerous companions, the Prophet ﷺ himself reviewed the Qur'an annually with angel Jibrīl (Gabriel) every Ramadan, and twice during the final year of his life.⁶ Whenever Allah revealed verses of the Qur'an, the Prophet ﷺ would recite them aloud to the companions who would memorize them, and he would summon scribes to write the verses down. A total of 65 companions reportedly served as scribes.⁷ The evidence indicates a large number of companions had memorized the Qur'an in its entirety during the Prophet's lifetime or shortly after.⁸ The Qur'an's description of itself as both recitation and book alludes to its own oral and textual preservation.⁹ Although all of the Qur'an was written down during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ (according to the strongest view), the written fragments were not gathered into an official unified compilation,¹⁰ although some individual companions had written personal codices.¹¹

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in 11 AH/632 CE and under the caliphate of Abū Bakr (d. 13 AH), the first official compilation of the Qur'an

⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, kitāb faḍā'il al-Qur'ān, bāb kāna Jibrīl ya'riḍ al-Qur'an 'alā al-Nabī*, nos. 4997–98. Note also the role this played in consolidating the Prophet's memorization of the Qur'an, as discussed in Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī waḥyan wa rasman wa lughatan wa qirā'atan* (Istanbul: Dār al-Ghawthānī 2019), 45–46.

⁷ Muhammad Muṣṭafā Al-A'zamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 68.

⁸ Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'irfān* (Egypt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1943), 1:242. Memorization was not only done by men but also women as well. See Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal li-dirāsāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Riyadh: Dār al-Liwā' lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 1987), 266.

⁹ Al-Ṭayyār, *al-Muḥarrar fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Jeddah: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Ma'lūmāt al-Qur'ānīyah bi-Ma'had al-Imām al-Shātibī, 2008), 147; al-Juday', *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayān, 2001), 93.

¹⁰ Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Jeddah: al-Fath, 1946), 39; Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 90.

¹¹ See, for instance, the discussion about the personal compilation of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal*, 273.

was undertaken in the year 12 AH.¹² Abū Bakr was persuaded by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 AH) who emphasized the importance of compiling the Qur’an after a large number of its reciters were martyred during the Battle of al-Yamāmah.¹³ Zayd ibn Thābit was appointed to the task by Abū Bakr, and he compiled the Qur’an “from date-palm tree bark, parchment, thin white stones, and the hearts of men.”¹⁴ Imam Layth ibn Sa’d (d. 175 AH) said, “The first to compile the Qur’an was Abū Bakr and Zayd transcribed it. The people would come to Zayd ibn Thābit and he would not write a single verse except with two witnesses.”¹⁵ Zayd did not transcribe verses from memory despite the fact that he and other companions had them memorized. Nor did he simply transcribe the Qur’an from existing written copies. Rather, he followed a meticulous process ensuring that the memory and writing of every verse was backed by direct testimony. Al-Sakhāwī (d. 643 AH) explained that the requirement for ‘two witnesses’ meant two people who possessed it in writing and could testify to having written down the verse from the Prophet ﷺ precisely as they had learned it.¹⁶ Thus, the compilation process for

¹² Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif* (Kuwait: Mu’asassah Gharās li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 2006), 153–69; Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni’ fī ma’rifah marsūm maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār* (Riyadh: Dār al-Tadmurrīyah, 2010), 134; Makkī, *al-Ibānah ‘an ma’anī al-qira’āt* (N.p.: Dar Nahdah Misr, n.d.), 157–61. On the date, see Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 99.

¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 4986. ‘Umar said, “I am afraid that more heavy casualties may take place among the *qurrā’* on other battlefields, whereby a large part of the Qur’an may be lost.” One of those who was martyred during the battle of Yamāmah was the noble companion Sālim (the client [*mawlā*] of Abū Ḥudhayfah), who was one of the four famous companions from whom the Prophet had instructed people to learn the Qur’an and who used to lead the *muhājirīn* (Muslim migrants from Makkah) in prayer in Madīnah prior to the Prophet’s emigration to Madīnah. Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 95.

¹⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 7191. On the qualities for which Abū Bakr selected Zayd, see Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 98. Additionally, it should be noted that the vast majority of Qur’anic writings would have been in Medina, as companions did not travel with written copies of the Qur’an to war out of fear they could be seized by their enemies, as indicated by the Prophet’s prohibition in this regard. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1869b.

¹⁵ Reported in the no longer extant work by Ibn Ashtah (d. 360 AH), *al-Masahif*, as cited by al-Suyutī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2008), 131. See also the narrations in Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, 1:139–43, which mention that Abū Bakr was the first to compile the Qur’an.

¹⁶ See al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā wa kamāl al-iqrā’* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqafīyah, 1999), 302–3. Ibn Ḥajar also mentions the interpretation of “memory” and “writing” constituting the “two witnesses.” See his detailed discussion on the narration in *Fath al-Bārī* (Riyadh: Dar al-Taybah, 2005), 11:171–73. The interpretation of two witnesses having written it from the Prophet ﷺ is supported by the majority of scholars. See also Al-A‘zamī, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 80; Muḥammad Ḥasan Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī min Rasūl Allah sallal Allahu ‘alayhī wa salam ilā ummatihī* (Tanta: Dar al-Ṣaḥābah li-Turāth bi-Tantā, n.d.), 182; al-Juday‘, *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 97; Muṣṭafā Bughā and Muḥyī al-Dīn Mistū, *al-Wāḍiḥ fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Damascus: Dar al-Kalim al-Tayyib, 1998), 84; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Quran al-Karīm*, 49.

each verse in the Qur’an was backed by the combined attestation of written materials, memorization, and direct testimony.

While scribes had written the verses of the Qur’an on different materials during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, they had not been compiled into a single text.¹⁷ Indeed, it would not have made sense to do this during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, when verses were still being revealed and added to various chapters while other verses were abrogated, and the predominantly unlettered community of Muslims could rely on direct oral transmission from the Prophet ﷺ himself.¹⁸ It was only after the revelation had ceased that such a task was necessary. The result of Abū Bakr’s project was that the written text of the Qur’an was gathered into a single compilation; this process took less than a year (between the Battle of al-Yamāmah in 12 AH and Abū Bakr’s death in 13 AH).¹⁹ The Qur’an was written on **parchment**,²⁰ a material derived from the untanned skins of goats, sheeps, and calves cut into sheets. Written sheets of parchment bound together are termed a **codex**, the ancestor of the modern book. Similarly, the Arabic word *muṣḥaf* (pl. *maṣāḥif*) linguistically refers to a text that consists of written pages between two covers, and has come to refer exclusively to written copies of the Qur’an.²¹

The circumstances that led to the ‘Uthmānic codex

The early Muslim community witnessed a rapid expansion of the Islamic empire through a dazzling series of victories against the existing superpowers of the world, the Byzantine and Persian empires. During the reign of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and subsequently ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, the Islamic empire came to extend from Northern Africa to Central Asia to the frontiers of the Indian subcontinent. The

¹⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 1:164. See also Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf: Dirāsah lughawīyah tārikhiyah* (Baghdad: al-Lajnah al-Waṭanīyah, 1982), 99.

¹⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:168. See also al-Ṭayyār, *al-Muḥarrar fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 152; Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal*, 269.

¹⁹ On the use of the term *ṣuḥuf* to describe the compilation, see Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 97.

²⁰ Al-A‘zamī, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 74; Adam Gacek, “Manuscripts and the Qur’an,” in *The Qur’an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2006), 385.

²¹ ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Awad Ṣāliḥ, *al-Miṭḥaf fī rasm al-muṣḥaf* (Tanta: Dar al-Sahabah li-Turath bi-Ṭanṭā, 2006), 8; ‘Alī bin Sulaymān al-‘Ubayd, *Jam‘ al-Qur’ān al-Karīm ḥifdhan wa kitābah* (Medina: Majma Malik Fahd li-Tiba’ah al-Mushaf al-Sharif, 1421 AH), 509.

vast numbers of new Muslims were in need of those who could teach them the Qur’an. To this end, the companions appointed individuals well versed in the recitation of the Qur’an to travel to distant lands to teach it.

Many senior companions themselves left Madīnah and took up residence in distant cities to serve as teachers, including ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd in Kūfah, Abū Mūsa al-Ash‘arī in Baṣra, Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal in Palestine, Abū al-Dardā’ in Damascus, and ‘Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit in Ḥumṣ, while Zayd ibn Thābit and Ubayy ibn Ka‘b remained in Madīnah.²² Numerous students in these cities learned the recitations of the Qur’an from these senior companions. Muslims in these distant lands copied manuscripts of the Qur’an based on the codices and readings of companions who resided among them, as scholars like Ibn ‘Aṭṭīyah (d. 541 AH) mention.²³ However, the [multiplicity of Qur’anic readings](#) taught by different companions soon became a source of confusion.²⁴ While the companions understood that the Qur’an had been revealed according to seven *ahruf* and therefore could be recited with a certain degree of variation permitted by the Prophet ﷺ himself, this concept was unfamiliar to new Muslims in the newly conquered lands of Islam.²⁵ Naturally, disputes arose whereby some rejected and repudiated the readings of others. The illustrious companion Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān (d. 36 AH) raised this concern to ‘Uthmān.

Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān came to ‘Uthmān at the time when the people of Shām and the people of ‘Irāq were waging war to conquer Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Ḥudhayfah was afraid of their [the people of Shām and ‘Irāq] differences in the recitation of the Qur’an, so he said to ‘Uthmān, “O chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book [Qur’an] as Jews and the Christians did before.”

²² Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 4:101, 2:307–8; Ibn Jarīr At-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh at-Ṭabarī* (N.p.: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, 1967), 4:69; al-Udfuwī, *al-Istighnā’ fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Lubnā bint Khālid ibn Muḥammad al-Arfaj (master’s thesis, Umm al-Qura University, 2016), 264.

²³ He writes, “There spread during that time manuscripts that were written from the companions like the *muṣḥaf* of Ibn Mas‘ūd, and what was written from the companions of Syria, and the *muṣḥaf* of Ubayy and others, and these contained differences to the extent of the seven *ahruf* upon which the Qur’an was revealed.” Ibn ‘Aṭṭīyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1423 AH), 26.

²⁴ Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Ibānah ‘an ma‘anī al-qira’āt* (N.p.: Dar Nahdah Misr, n.d.), 62.

²⁵ Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-irfān*, 1:256.

So 'Uthmān sent a message to Ḥafṣah saying, "Send us the manuscripts of the Qur'an so that we may compile the Qur'anic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you." Ḥafṣah sent it to 'Uthmān.

'Uthmān then ordered Zayd ibn Thābit, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣ and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. 'Uthmān said to the three Qurayshī men, "In case you disagree with Zayd ibn Thābit on any point in the Qur'an, then write it in the dialect of Quraysh, the Qur'an was revealed in their tongue."

They did so, and when they had written many copies, 'Uthmān returned the original manuscripts to Ḥafṣah.

'Uthmān sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.²⁶

This report and others indicate that, as Muslims from various regions joined the military campaigns in Armenia and Azerbaijan, those who had learned the Qur'an from different companions disputed with one another over their divergent recitations.²⁷ This narrative from Ḥudhayfah provides an important insight into why the codex of 'Uthmān differed from the compilation of Abū Bakr.²⁸

First, the reasons for undertaking the projects differed. The compilation of Abū Bakr was meant to record the Qur'an in its entirety to ensure that verses of the Qur'an would not be lost with the death of those who had memorized them.²⁹ The 'Uthmānic codex, meanwhile, was meant to unite the entire Muslim nation upon a single text to eliminate confusion caused by Muslims reciting different variant readings of the Qur'an.³⁰ Therefore, the use of the compilations differed as well. During the time of Abū Bakr, the compilation was simply kept in safekeeping while Muslims continued to read according to the way they had been taught and

²⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4987. In another narration, it is mentioned that Ḥudhayfah encountered them differing over the verse 2:196, some reciting it with a word substitution, as *wa atimmu al-ḥajj wa-l- 'umrah li-l-bayt*. See Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 167.

²⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī tārikh* (Beirut: DKI, 1987), 3:8.

²⁸ See also 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Qāḍī, *Tārikh al-muṣṣhaf al-sharīf* (Cairo: Maktaba Jundi, 1951), 27; al-Juday', *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 100–101.

²⁹ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 137.

³⁰ Makkī, *al-Ibānah*, 62–64; 'Abd al-Qayyūm al-Sindhī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm fī 'ahd al-khulafā al-rāshidīn* (Madinah: Majma Malik Fahd li-Tiba'ah al-Mushaf al-Sharīf, 1421 AH), 380; Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 105.

according to the personal copies of the Qur’an that they had in their possession.³¹ Adhering to the ‘Uthmānic codex, however, was compulsory, and copies were sent to major cities in the Islamic empire. Any written copies of the Qur’an that did not conform to the ‘Uthmānic codex were burned or corrected. These are the fundamental differences between the two compilations.³²

In his description of the ‘Uthmānic compilation, al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH) explains that in seeking to unify the Muslims upon a single text, ‘Uthmān compiled the Qur’an according to one *ḥarf* (mode of reading) to reduce differences (this point will be discussed in greater detail later). Al-Baghawī writes:

Then the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to recite the Qur’an after him according to the seven *aḥruf* that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ taught them to recite by the permission of Allah. This continued until there were (disputes over) differences between the reciters in the time of ‘Uthmān and the matter became grave and people from the different regions wrote to ‘Uthmān, beseeching him by Allah to unite people before the situation deteriorated. Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān came to ‘Uthmān from the battle in Armenia and advised him concerning that. So ‘Uthmān gathered the *Muhājirīn* and *Anṣār* and consulted them on the matter of compiling the Qur’an in codices according to one mode of reading (*ḥarf*) in order to diminish the differences and unite people. They agreed with his opinion and encouraged him to do it and deemed it to be the most cautious course of action with respect to the Qur’an. Thus, ‘Uthmān then requested Ḥafṣah to send him the *ṣuḥuf* (written copy compiled during Abū Bakr’s era) in order to transcribe the *maṣāḥif* (written codices). She sent it to him and so he instructed Zayd ibn Thābit and the three Qurayshī committee members and they transcribed from it the codices and he sent them to the different regions.

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Similarly, ‘Uthmān’s goal of unifying the people is also evident in other narrations. In *Akḥbār al-Madīnah*, ‘Umar ibn Shabbah (d. 262 AH) narrated that ‘Uthmān said to the companions and the people of Madīnah, “It has reached me that some of you

³¹ Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 49.

³² Some scholars also claim that the compilation of Abū Bakr was called *ṣuḥuf* because it did not contain the *sūrahs* arranged sequentially; however, Ghānim Qadurī al-Ḥamad notes there is no evidence to support such an assertion. *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 123.

³³ Al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, ed. Shu’ayb al-Arna’ūt and Muhammad Zuhayr Shāwīsh (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, n.d.), 4:523.

say that my reading is better than your reading, and this almost constitutes disbelief. And if you differ today, those after you will differ even more.” The people asked, “What is your opinion?” ‘Uthmān replied, “That I should gather the people upon one *muṣḥaf* so that there be no division (*furqah*) nor disagreement (*ikhtilāf*).” The people replied, “Excellent is your opinion.”³⁴ This is also taken by some scholars as an indication that the idea of compiling a standard *muṣḥaf* for the community was one that ‘Uthmān had contemplated even prior to the news brought by Ḥudhayfah about the disputes amongst Muslims on the frontiers, which simply further highlighted the need that ‘Uthmān had foreseen.³⁵

From the foregoing discussion, a clear picture emerges of the context and circumstances that motivated the compilation of the ‘Uthmānic codex. As for when this took place, we know from early historical sources that ‘Uthmān’s reign was during 23–35 AH, the military campaign in Armenia likely took place in 24–25 AH,³⁶ and Ḥudhayfah was appointed there in 24 AH,³⁷ following which he returned to Madinah and advised ‘Uthmān regarding compiling the *muṣḥaf*. This places the likely date of the ‘Uthmānic compilation around 25 AH (645 CE). This is supported by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH), who argues against other historians and scholars who favored the later date of 30 AH (such as Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn al-Jazarī). Ibn Ḥajar adduces as supporting evidence a report from ‘Uthmān wherein he admonished the people in a sermon, saying, “O People, it has only been thirteen [or fifteen] years since your Prophet ﷺ and you are disputing concerning the Qur’an!”³⁸ On the basis of these evidences, many contemporary researchers have also agreed with Ibn Ḥajar’s assessment.³⁹ Omar Hamdan suggests that the ‘Uthmānic compilation project likely took place in stages, the first in 25 AH involving the actual compilation process and sending

³⁴ Ibn Shabba, *Akhbār al-Madīnah* (N.p.: Dar al-Alyan, 1990), 3:212.

³⁵ Ibn Ḥajar indicates this as mentioned by ‘Alī Dhuryān al-Ja‘farī, *Jam‘ al-Qur’ān fī ‘ahd ‘Uthmān* (Kuwait: Dar al-Dhahiriyyah, 2022), 30.

³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, 4.

³⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (Beirut: DKI, 2014), 287.

³⁸ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 208, 209. Report #82 mentions 13 years and report #83 mentions 15 years. Note that the Prophet ﷺ passed away in 11 AH.

³⁹ Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullāh Ibrahim al-Ḥasānīn, “*Ṣanī‘ ‘Uthmān bi-l-aḥruf al-sab‘a ‘inda jam‘ al-Qur’an wa ‘alāqatuhū bi-l-‘ardah al-akhīrah*,” *Majallah al-Ulūm al-Shar‘iyyah* 14, no. 4 (February 2021): 2700; see also Al-Azami, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 88.

maṣāḥif specifically to Iraq and Syria as they were the regions involved in the disputes reported by Ḥudhayfah, while the second stage occurred in 30 AH and involved sending *maṣāḥif* to several other Muslim lands (e.g., Makkah, Bahrain, Yemen) that were not involved in the campaign in Armenia and Azerbaijan.⁴⁰ While the suggestion of different stages is plausible in and of itself, one must take note of considerations from stemmatics (discussed below) in describing which *maṣāḥif* were sent in each stage.

The process and method of compiling the ‘Uthmānic codex

A. The committee members

The task of assembling the ‘Uthmānic codex was a major undertaking for which the Caliph ‘Uthmān appointed a committee; having multiple members ensured a greater familiarity with multiple readings.⁴¹

‘Uthmān called Zayd ibn Thābit, ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr,⁴² Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Ās and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, and then they wrote the manuscripts of the Qur’an in several codices (*maṣāḥif*). ‘Uthmān said to the three Qurayshī men, “If you differ with Zayd ibn Thābit on any point of the Qur’an, then write it in the dialect (*lisān*) of Quraysh, as the Qur’an was revealed in their language.” So they acted accordingly.⁴³

From this report, we note that the core group of the committee comprised Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 45 AH), who was from the *Anṣār* (Madīnan Muslims), and three Muslims from the Quraysh. This report also raises the important question of what it means for the Qur’an to have been written according to, and revealed in, the dialect of Quraysh; how we reconcile this with the hadith of the Qur’an being revealed

⁴⁰ Omar Hamdan, “*Mashru‘ al-maṣāḥif al-‘Uthmāniyah qirā’ah jadīdah fī taḥdīd tārikhihī wa ‘adad nuskhihī*,” in *al-Qur’ān al-Karīm min al-tanzīl ila al-tadwīn* (London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 2018) 39, 50–51.

⁴¹ Nāṣir al-Qithāmī, *al-Rasm al-‘Uthmānī wa atharuhū fī riwāyāt al-qirā’āt* (N.p., 1916).

⁴² ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73 AH) was the son of two of the most illustrious companions of the Prophet—Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām and Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr—and was known for his eloquence. He later revolted against Umayyad rule and established his caliphate in Makkah, where he ruled for nine years before he was killed by al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafī.

⁴³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3506.

according to seven *ahruf*, and whether the ‘Uthmānic codex included more than one *harf*. All of this will be discussed below.

Zayd ibn Thābit was a natural choice to lead the committee, having been the pre-eminent scribe of the Prophet ﷺ.⁴⁴ Moreover, he had memorized the entire Qur’an during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and was the one responsible for compiling it under Abū Bakr.⁴⁵ Some scholars mention that Zayd was selected in part because he attended the final review with the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH) states:

It is said that Zayd ibn Thābit attended the final review in which it was clarified what was abrogated and what remained. Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 74 AH) said, “Zayd recited the Qur’an twice to the Prophet ﷺ during the year in which he passed away, and this recitation is called the *qirā’ah* of Zayd because he transcribed it for the Prophet ﷺ and recited it to him and witnessed *al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah* (the final review), and he taught its recitation to people until he passed away. That is why Abū Bakr and ‘Umar relied upon him in its compilation and ‘Uthmān appointed him in charge of writing the *maṣāḥif*—may Allah be pleased with them all.”⁴⁶

As noted in our previous article, there is some conflicting evidence concerning the matter of a specific companion attending the final review.⁴⁷ Moreover, when Abū Bakr mentioned the qualities of Zayd when selecting him for the first compilation, he did not make any mention of the final review.⁴⁸ It suffices to state that Zayd had

⁴⁴ A group entered the presence of Zaid ibn Thabit and said to him: “Relate to us the traditions of Allah’s Messenger ﷺ.” He said: “What shall I relate to you? I was his neighbor, so when the revelation descended upon him, he notified me and I recorded it in writing for him.” Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:145; also al-Tirmidhī, *Shamā’il al-Nabī*, no. 342, <https://sunnah.com/shamail:342>.

⁴⁵ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 615.

⁴⁶ Al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunnah* (Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islami, 1983), 4:525–26.

⁴⁷ There is one narration in which Ibn ‘Abbās stated that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd attended the final review with the Prophet ﷺ (*Musnad Ahmad*, no. 3422). Al-Tāsān argues that this conflicts with another narration from Ibn ‘Abbās, which acknowledges the reading of ‘Uthmān to be according to the final review. He also argues that it conflicts with the statements of Samurah ibn Jundub and Ibn Sirīn (d. 110 AH), which imply that the ‘Uthmānic reading is based on the final review. See Al-Tāsān, *Tahqīq mawqif al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd min al-jam‘ al-‘Uthmānī* (Riyadh: Maktabah Malik Fahd, 1435 AH), 59–67.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion concerning the significance of the “final review,” refer to the following studies: Osama Alhaiyani, “*al-‘Arḍah al-akhīrah lil-Qur’ān al-Karīm wa-al-aḥādīth al-wāridah fīhā jam‘an wa dirāsah*,” *al-Majallah al-Ulūm al-Islamiyyah*, no. 10; Muhammad Bāzmūl, “*al-Aḥādīth al-wāridah fī al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah*,” *Majallah Jāmi‘ah Umm al-Qurra li-‘Ulūm al-Sharī‘ah wa al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah*, issue 62 (Sha‘bān 1435), 83; Nāsir ibn Sa‘ūd al-Qithamī, “*al-‘Arḍah al-akhīrah: Dalālatuha wa atharuhā*,” *Majallah Ma‘had al-Imām al-Shaṭībī li-Dirasah al-Qur’āniyyah*, no. 15 (2013).

not only memorized the entire Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, but would regularly transcribe it and recite it to him up until he passed away. Given his experience, expertise and knowledge, Zayd's credentials were well-established among the companions.

Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) explains that the significance of having Qurayshī members on the committee was to ensure that the written codex conformed to the dialect of the Quraysh.⁴⁹ The members of the committee were all young at the time of the 'Uthmānic compilation in 25 AH. Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 45 AH) was 36 years old,⁵⁰ 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73 AH) and Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 58 AH) were both 24 years old, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām (d. 43 AH) was 23 years old.⁵¹ Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 59 AH) had returned from the frontiers along with Hudhayfah and was likely also familiar with the nature of the disputes causing confusion amongst the Muslims. He was also known for his proficiency in the Arabic language. One report notes:

'Uthmān asked, "Who is the best scribe (*man aḡtab al-nās*)?" The people replied, "The scribe of the Prophet ﷺ, Zayd ibn Thābit." He asked, "So who has the best Arabic (*fa ayyu-nāsi a'rab*)?" They replied, "Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ." 'Uthmān said, "Let Sa'īd dictate and Zayd transcribe."⁵²

A report traced back to Muḥammad ibn Sirīn (d. 110 AH) mentions that 'Uthmān gathered a total of 12 men.⁵³ This indicates that in addition to the four core committee members, there were eight others who perhaps joined the committee later,⁵⁴ or possibly played a secondary role in reviewing the manuscript compiled by the core members and transcribing additional copies of the *muṣḥaf*.⁵⁵ The names

⁴⁹ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni'*, 614. He stated: "It was so that nothing in the Qur'an would be written (*marsūm*) according to other than their dialect."

⁵⁰ He was 11 years old at the time of the Prophetic migration. See Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 112.

⁵¹ Calculated from their age at the time of hijrah or the Prophet's passing as mentioned in al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 115.

⁵² Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq* (N.p.: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 39:243; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:211; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:178. See also al-Ḥasanīn, "Ṣanī' Uthmān," 2700, Fahd al-Rūmī, *Dirasāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Riyadh: Markaz Tafṣīr li al-Dirasāt al-Qur'āniyya, 2005), 92. In another narration, Ubayy ibn Ka'b dictated, Zayd transcribed, and Sa'īd reviewed. See Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 5:312.

⁵³ Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:213; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 3:466. See also al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 89.

⁵⁴ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 116; Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 205.

⁵⁵ Al-'Ubayd, *Jam' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 516–517; 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf wa nuṭqihī* (Mecca: Maktabat al-Makkiyah, 2004), 111.

of these additional members can be adduced from multiple other narrations scattered across disparate sources. These included six more companions (Ubayy ibn Ka‘b (d. 30 AH), ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73 AH), Anas ibn Mālīk (d. 93 AH), ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68 AH), ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d. 63 AH), Abū al-Dardā’ (d. 32 AH)) and two *tābi‘īn* (Mālīk ibn Abī ‘Āmir—the grandfather of Imam Mālīk—and Kathīr ibn Aflah).⁵⁶

It should be noted that Ubayy ibn Ka‘b’s inclusion is subject to some debate.⁵⁷ Imam al-Dhahabī cites narrations suggesting that Ubayy passed away during the reign of ‘Umar in 19 AH or 22 AH. However, Ibn Sirīn’s report mentions Ubayy by name, and this is supported by another more detailed account on the authority of Hānī al-Barbarī, the *mawlā* of ‘Uthmān, which states that ‘Uthmān sent Hānī to Ubayy with some words from three verses, the spelling of which Ubayy revised.⁵⁸ Thus, evidence supports the view of al-Wāqidī who said, “And we have heard those who said that [Ubayy] died in the year 30 AH during the *khilāfah* of ‘Uthmān, and that is the most well established opinion in our view, and that is consistent with ‘Uthmān instructing him to compile the *muṣḥaf*.”⁵⁹

The formation of the committee thus ensured that the compilation process occurred based on direct learning from the Prophet ﷺ as attested by memorization, in addition to scribal experience and native eloquence in the Arabic language.

B. Did the ‘Uthmānic text encompass the variant readings?

We now return to one of the most important questions that Muslim scholars have discussed concerning the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*: did it include the variant readings of the seven *aḥruf*? Recall that during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Qur’an was recited in different ways which the companions had learned from the Prophet ﷺ. Ibn ‘Abbās narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Jibrīl recited the

⁵⁶ Al-Ja‘farī, *Jam‘ al-Qur’ān fī ‘ahd ‘Uthmān*, 32; al-Ḥasanīn, “*Ṣanī‘ Uthmān*,” 2702–5. These authors gather the various narrations attempting to enumerate the individuals, with some differences in their lists, the former including Anas ibn Malik al-Qushayri and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar, instead of Abū Dardā’ and Sa‘d ibn Nu‘mān. For a similar list with minor differences, see also al-A‘zamī, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 89.

⁵⁷ Al-Hamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 117.

⁵⁸ Al-Ja‘farī, *Jam‘*, 33–34; Hamdan, “*Mashru‘ al-maṣāḥif al-‘Uthmāniyah*,” 46–47.

⁵⁹ Cited in Dhahabi, *Siyar a‘lām an-nubalā* (N.p.: Dar al-Hadith, 2006), 3:242.

Qur'an to me in one *ḥarf*. Then I requested him [to read it in another *ḥarf*] and continued asking him to recite in other *ahruf* until he ultimately recited it in seven *ahruf*.”⁶⁰ In another narration, the Prophet ﷺ says, “‘O Jibrīl! I have been sent to an illiterate nation among whom are the elderly woman, the old man, the boy and the girl, and the man who cannot read a book at all.’ He said: ‘O Muhammad! Indeed the Qur'an was revealed in seven *ahruf* (i.e., seven different ways of reciting).’”⁶¹

Does the 'Uthmānic codex encompass the seven *ahruf*? There are several factors to consider when answering this question. The first concerns the meaning of the seven *ahruf*, a topic discussed in [The Origin of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an](#). One must keep in mind that the scholars mentioned below did not share the same definition of what constitutes the *ahruf*. Nonetheless, most of their views coalesce around a similar notion: the *ahruf* entail different ways of reciting the Qur'an. Related to the same topic is the question of what it means for the text to encompass these different ways of varying.⁶² As well, there is also the question of the meaning of the *ahruf* being a *rukḥṣah* (concession) and its implications. Finally, there is the fact that the text of the 'Uthmānic codex was written with the Arabic letters lacking in consonantal dotting (*naqṭ al-i jām*) and with a complete absence of vowelization markings (*naqṭ al-i rāb*).⁶³ As a result, a variety of readings can be accommodated

⁶⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, no. 4991. The hadith of seven *ahruf* are cited in no fewer than four books within *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

⁶¹ *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2944.

⁶² A detailed elaboration of this point is beyond the scope of this article. However, a brief explanation is as follows. If one adopts the opinion that the seven *ahruf* refer to different categories of ways in which readings may differ, then for instance, one category may be *al-naqṣ wa-l-ziyāda* (omission or addition). Then, does the Uthmānic text encompass this *ḥarf* if it only has one example of this category, or does it require inclusion of all readings associated with this category in order to be considered to have encompassed this *ḥarf*? Those who adopt this interpretation of *ahruf* must demonstrate that all of these categories can be found in the Uthmānic text, but not necessarily all the readings that are subsumed by these categories.

⁶³ This point is subject to further discussion. See Ammar Khatib, *Simple Illustrated Guide to the History of Arabic Dotting for Beginners* (self-pub., 2020), 7. A number of scholars including Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) and Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī (d. 454 AH) stated that the text was deliberately written without dotting or vowelization to accommodate other readings, a view that was subsequently adopted by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) and Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 AH). However, Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad is of the view that the companions simply adopted the writing convention of their time, and that consonantal dotting was absent because it was invented later. See Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Ulūm al-Qur'an bayna al-maṣādir wal-maṣāḥif* (Riyadh: Tafsir Centre for Qur'anic Studies, 2018), 68–69 and *Murāja'ah 'adad min al-Nazariyyāt al-muta'alliqah bi-rasm al-muṣḥaf fi daw' 'ilm al-khuṭūṭ al-qadīmah*, International Conference for the development of Quranic studies (February 16, 2013), 44–45. Al-A'zamī on the other hand notes several examples from early Arabic paleography predating the 'Uthmānic codex that did indeed have consonantal dotting (*History*, 136–39). One may also note that al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH) reports the

by the consonantal skeleton of the text.⁶⁴ The question is therefore whether the readings accommodated by the consonantal skeleton of the 'Uthmānic codices include only one *ḥarf* or some (or all) of the variation of the seven *aḥruf*.

The first opinion is that the 'Uthmānic codex was compiled according to only one *ḥarf*. This opinion was held by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH),⁶⁵ Abū Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 310 AH),⁶⁶ al-Naḥḥās (d. 338 AH),⁶⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH),⁶⁸ al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH),⁶⁹ al-Abyārī (d. 616 AH),⁷⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH),⁷¹ Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH),⁷² and many other scholars.⁷³ The principal evidence cited by many scholars in support of this view is 'Uthmān's aforementioned statement to the committee: "If you differ with Zayd ibn Thābit on any point of the

presence of dotting in the *muṣḥaf* of Ibn Mas'ūd in 49:6. Al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1983), 3:71. The ubiquitous presence of some consonantal dotting in early Qur'anic manuscripts has also led to the hypothesis that they have always been a feature of the Qur'anic script since the beginning, and that sparse dotting was present in the 'Uthmānic codices according to the customary scribal practices at the time. See Adam Bursi, "Connecting the Dots: Diacritics, Scribal Culture, and the Qur'ān in the First/Seventh Century," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 3 (2018), 149.

⁶⁴ Scholars further divided readings which conform to the text into those that explicitly conform to the text (*al-muwāfaqah al-muḥaqqaqah*), those that implicitly conform to the text (*al-muwāfaqah al-muḥtamalah*), and those that have a trivial nonconformity to the text (*al-mukhālafah al-yasīrah/al-mughṭafarah*), like a single-letter pronunciation. An example of the first category would be reciting *maliki* in 1:4 while an example of the second category would be reciting *māliki* in 1:4, since the text is written without an *alif* (ملك). An example of the third category is reciting *al-ṣirāt* as *al-sirāt* (with a م) as recited by Qunbul 'an Ibn Kathīr and Ruways 'an Ya'qūb, among others. See Ibn al-Jazārī, *al-Nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-'ashar*, 1:12–13. See also Shādī bin Aḥmad Tawfīq al-Mulḥim, "Mā lā yaḥṭamiluhu rasm al-muṣḥaf min al-qirā'āt al-'ashar," *Majjālā Tibyān lil-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah*, no. 25 (1438 AH), 386–90; 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ḥarbī, *Tawjīh mushkil al-qirā'āt al-'ashriyyah al-farshiyyah lughatan wa tafsīran wa i'rabān* (master's thesis, Umm al-Qurrā University, 1417 AH), 26.

⁶⁵ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 1:59–60.

⁶⁶ Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt, 16 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1994), 8:125. He states that once people became accustomed to learning the Quran, the license for reading with other *aḥruf* disappeared and the Qur'an went back to being read with one *ḥarf* only. Cf. Ammār Khaṭīb, *Taḥrīr madhhab al-Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī fī ma'na al-aḥruf al-sab'a* (Markaz al-Tafsīr li-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah, May 22, 2021), <https://tafsir.net/article/5351/thryr-mdhbb-al-imam-at-thawy-fy-m-na-al-ahrf-as-sb-h>.

⁶⁷ al-Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh* (Riyadh: Dar al-Asimah, 2009), 2:405. "Fa-arāda 'Uthmān an yakhtār min al-sab'ah ḥarfan wāhid wa huwa afṣaḥuhā."

⁶⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār* (Damascus: Dar Qutaibah, 1993), 8:45.

⁶⁹ Al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, 4:523, quoted earlier in the article.

⁷⁰ 'Alī ibn Isma'īl al-Abyārī, *al-Taḥqīq wa-al-bayān fī sharḥ al-burhān fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmīyah, 2013), 2:792.

⁷¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatāwā* (Mansoura: Dar El-Wafaa, 2005), 13:214.

⁷² Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Turuq al-ḥukmīyah fī al-siyāsah al-shar'iyyah* (Mecca: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, 1428 AH), 1:47–48; Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lām al-muwaqqi'īn* (Dammam: Dār ibn al-Jawzī, 2002), 5:65.

⁷³ See also Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1995), 158; al-Kurdī, *al-Karīm*, 52, 64; and Bashār 'Awād Ma'rūf, *Anzār fī ḥadīth "inna hadhā al-Qur'āna unzila 'alā sab'atī aḥruf,"* in *al-Qur'ān al-Karīm min al-tanzīl ila al-tadwīn* (London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 2018), 289–92.

Qur’an, then write it in the dialect (*lisān*) of Quraysh, as the Qur’an was revealed in their language.” Initially, reciting according to seven *aḥruf* was a concession intended to make it easy for the unlettered Arab tribes to learn the Qur’an. However, after Islam spread to distant lands, the additional readings became a source of confusion and hence were no longer required.⁷⁴ Moreover, as discussed earlier, the primary motivation for the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* itself was the fact that Muslims were disputing concerning the different readings. This was the very concern brought forth by Ḥudhayfah. It follows that the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* would aim to gather people upon one reading to reduce the confusion.

The second opinion is the opposite: that the ‘Uthmānic codex contains all seven *aḥruf*, and not a single *ḥarf* is left out. This opinion was most famously espoused by Qaḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 AH),⁷⁵ but was also held by Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH),⁷⁶ Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH),⁷⁷ and ‘Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 643 AH).⁷⁸ The underlying logic is rather straightforward—how could ‘Uthmān or any companion decide of their own accord to leave out of the Qur’an something that Allah had revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ? Al-Bāqillānī argues that the ‘Uthmānic codex only left out those readings that had been abrogated, or readings that included commentary alongside the Qur’anic verses, or readings that were incorrectly attributed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which he believes were the real source of dispute that Ḥudhayfah encountered between the Muslims of Syria and Iraq. The modern-era Azharī scholar Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Azīm

⁷⁴ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 1:59–60. Note that scholars did discuss the potential value of some of these reported non-‘Uthmānic variants in exegesis and jurisprudential rulings.

⁷⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār lil-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2001), 1:60, 364–65.

⁷⁶ Al-Dānī writes, “[And we believe] that the commander of the believers, ‘Uthmān, and those who were present from among all of the companions established all of these *aḥruf* in the *maṣāḥif* and they informed of its authenticity and correctness, and allowed people the choice [regarding the different readings] as the Prophet ﷺ had done. And from amongst these *aḥruf* is the *ḥarf* of Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, the *ḥarf* of Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd, and the *ḥarf* of Zayd ibn Thābit. And ‘Uthmān and the community only dispensed with those *ḥurūf* and *qirā’āt* that were false (*bāṭilah*) neither known nor established but rather transmitted from the Prophet ﷺ in the manner of *ahādīth*, which is not permissible as a method to establish Qur’an.” Al-Dānī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān fī al-qirā’āt al-sab‘ah al-mashūrah* (Tanta, Egypt: Dar al-Sahabah li-Turath bi-Ṭantā, 2012), 67. Note that al-Dānī elsewhere mentions the view that ‘Uthmān gathered the people upon one *ḥarf* and left out the remaining *aḥruf*; however, he precedes this by mentioning this explanation “according to the statement of some scholars” (*‘alā qawl ba‘ḍ al-‘ulamā’*) and follows it by mentioning the view that only inauthentic readings were left out. See al-Dānī, *al-Muqni’*, 613.

⁷⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fī al-milal wa-l-ahwā’ wa-l-niḥal* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanji, n.d.), 2:65.

⁷⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā wa kamāl al-igṛā’* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyyah, 1999), 2:573–74.

al-Zarqānī (d. 1367 AH/1948 CE) and other scholars held this view as well.⁷⁹ The contemporary researcher al-Ḥasānīn follows al-Bāqillānī in this conclusion and argues that there is no evidence that the dispensation of the seven *aḥruf* was limited to a specific time period, nor is there any evidence that ‘Uthmān and his committee dispensed with the other *aḥruf*.⁸⁰ Similarly, ‘Abd al-Qayyūm al-Sindhī argues that the very existence of different *qirā’āt* today necessitates that the variation of the *aḥruf* remains.⁸¹ After all, if the variation found in the seven *aḥruf* had been completely eliminated, then where did all the variation in the different *qirā’āt* come from? Moreover, why did the ‘Uthmānic *maṣāḥif* contain minor differences (discussed below) if it was only compiled according to one *ḥarf*?

If we pause to evaluate these two opinions, we may note that both have some merits. The first opinion fits the historical context that led to the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, while the second opinion connects the *qirā’āt* to the *aḥruf* and explains how variation in recitation remained within the Muslim *ummah*. As for al-Bāqillānī’s and Ibn Ḥazm’s objection that the companions could not leave out readings that were revealed, the authentic narrations and historical evidence indicate that this is precisely what they did, and this was sufficiently explained by Al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭaḥawī by noting that the companions understood that reciting according to the seven *aḥruf* was a concession and not an obligation.⁸² We have numerous authentic variant readings from the Prophet’s companions that are not found in the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* and there is no evidence to suggest that they were abrogated.⁸³ Much to the contrary, many companions continued to recite those readings after the passing of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. If the ‘Uthmānic

⁷⁹ Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-irfān*, 1:169; ‘Abd al-Fattāh al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf*, 30–32; Abū Nūr Aḥmad al-Za‘bī, *al-Maṣāḥif al-‘Uthmāniyah wa ṣilatihā bil-aḥruf al-sab‘ah* (Kuwait: Dar al-Bayan, 2003), 18, 52.

⁸⁰ Al-Ḥasānīn, “*Sanī‘ Uthmān*,” 2720–22.

⁸¹ ‘Abd al-Qayyūm al-Sindhī places himself in the third group (see below); however, his view is actually concordant with the second group since he states that all the valid (authentic non-abrogated) readings from the seven *aḥruf* are contained in the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, which is exactly what the second group states. Al-Sindhī, *Safahāt fī ‘ulūm al-qirā’āt* (Mecca: al-Maktabah al-Imdadiyah, 1415 AH), 125.

⁸² See also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 113.

⁸³ For instance, when ‘Alqamah ibn Qays (d. 62 AH) traveled to Greater Syria, he met the companion Abū al-Dardā’, and the latter asked ‘Alqamah about how Ibn Mas‘ūd recited *Sūrah al-Layl*. ‘Alqamah responded that Ibn Mas‘ūd recited verse 3 as “*wa-al-dhakari wa-al-unthā*” (and by the male and the female) instead of “*wa mā khalaqa al-dhakara wa-al-unthā*” (and by **that which created** the male and the female), whereupon Abū al-Dardā’ testified that he had learned the verse in the same way from the Prophet ﷺ. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3742.

muṣḥaf included **all** the variant readings of the seven *aḥruf* then why would those readings be excluded? This demonstrates that the second position is not accurate.

There is an obvious middle ground between these two positions which leads to the third opinion, often described as the majority position,⁸⁴ that the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* contains **some** of the variation of the seven *aḥruf*. The *qirā’āt* that are recited until today reflect the variation which remained from the seven *aḥruf*.⁸⁵ Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 AH) writes:

As for whether ‘Uthmānic codices encompass all the seven *aḥruf* then this is a major topic... the position taken by the majority of the scholars from the earlier and later generations and the Imams of the Muslims is that these codices encompass that which the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) can accommodate from the seven *aḥruf*.⁸⁶

Elsewhere, Ibn al-Jazarī writes that the ten widely transmitted *qirā’āt* recited throughout the Muslim world are part of the seven *aḥruf*.⁸⁷ Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852 AH) explained that what remained after the ‘Uthmānic compilation were the differences from the other *aḥruf* that could still be accommodated by the skeletal text of the ‘Uthmānic codices—so what remained, in other words, were “some of the differences of the *aḥruf*, not all of them.”⁸⁸ Ibn Ḥajar cites Abū al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Ammār al-Mahdawī (d. 440 AH) who states, “The most correct position which is upheld by the experts is that what is recited now are some of [the differences] of the seven *ḥurūf* which were permitted to be recited and not all of them.”⁸⁹ The remnants of the *aḥruf* are thus found amongst the various *qirā’āt* recited today,

⁸⁴ Al-Ja‘farī, *al-Asās fī ‘ilm al-qira’āt* (Amman: Arwiqa, 2015), 166; Rawān Nāṣir al-Anṣārī, “‘Alaqaṭ al-jam‘ al-‘Uthmānī bil-aḥruf al-sab‘a,” *Majallah Kulliyat al-Sharī‘ah wal-Qānūn, Jāmi‘at al-Azhar* 32, no. 1 (2020): 654–81.

⁸⁵ Al-Ra‘īnī (d. 476 AH), *al-Kāfī fī al-qira’āt al-saba‘* (Beirut: DKI, 2000), 15.

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1:31.

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Munjid al-muqri’īn*, 54.

⁸⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṭaybah, 2005), 11:195–96. He further explains that this was a reason for the textual variants between ‘Uthmānic codices, to increase the number of readings that could be accommodated. See also Ahmad Ali Imam, *The Variant Readings of the Quran: A Critical Study of their Historical And Linguistic Origins*, 66–67.

⁸⁹ Abū al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Ammār al-Mahdawī, *Sharḥ al-hidāyah* (Riyadh: Maktabah Rushd, 1995), 5.

while those *aḥruf* that did not conform to the 'Uthmānic codex were abandoned.⁹⁰ Al-Mahdawī also states:

Verily these *qirā'āt* that we recite constitute a portion of the seven *aḥruf*, upon which the Qur'an was revealed, which are still practiced because they conform to the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* that the *ummah* had consensus upon. And the remainder of the *ḥurūf* were abandoned due to their differing from the written script of the *muṣḥaf*. This is because it is not obligatory upon us to recite with all the seven *ḥurūf* in which the Qur'an was revealed and because the Prophet ﷺ permitted for us to recite some of them to the exclusion of others based on the Divine statement, "Recite that which is easy from it" (Qur'an 73:20).⁹¹

This middle position effectively reconciles the preceding first and second opinions. On one hand, the reason for the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was to reduce the differing and disputes amongst the Muslims by gathering them upon a standard text agreed upon by the companions of the Prophet ﷺ.⁹² It brought about unity and solidarity in the *ummah*. Therefore, the first group of scholars are largely correct in that 'Uthmān sought to gather the Muslims upon a text that was *primarily* based upon one *ḥarf*. However, what needs to be noted is that some reading variations remained (from the seven *aḥruf*) that could still be recited because they conformed to the 'Uthmānic text,⁹³ and these continued to be recited in certain regions of the Muslim world, becoming associated with the names of famous reciters to become the eponymous *qirā'āt* that we know today.

The most precise characterization of this complexity is found in the writings of Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 437 AH):

⁹⁰ As demonstrated by the view of Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, there is no conflict between the view that the committee of 'Uthmān compiled the Qur'an according to one *ḥarf* and the view that some of the other *aḥruf* remained because even if the committee may have primarily had one of the various readings in mind when they transcribed the codex, that does not change the fact that other readings could still be accommodated by the skeletal text. See also Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 152.

⁹¹ Quoted in Abū Shāmāh, *al-Murshid al-wajīz ilā 'ulūm tata'allaq bil-Kitāb al-Aziz* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2003), 114. See also Muhammad ibn Luṭfī al-Sabbagh, *Lamahāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut: Maktabah Islami 1990), 172–173. Note that this statement is mistakenly attributed to Abū Shāmāh himself in some sources; cf. al-Ja'farī, *al-Asās fī 'ilm al-qirā'āt*, 167 and Muḥammad Aḥmad Mufliḥ al-Quḍāh, Aḥmad Khālīd Shukrī, and Muḥammad Khālīd Maṣṣūr, *Kitāb Muqaddimāt fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Amman: Dar Amman, 2001), 41.

⁹² 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf wa nuṭqihī*, 147.

⁹³ Fahd al-Rūmī, *Dirasāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 95; Imam, *Variant Readings of the Quran*, 66–67.

Those readings were no longer in practice which differed from the script of the (‘Uthmānic) *muṣḥaf* from the seven *aḥruf* in which the Qur’an was revealed, based upon the unanimous consensus on the script of the *muṣḥaf*. Thus, the *muṣḥaf* was written based on one *ḥarf*, and its script accommodates more than one *ḥarf* as it was void of dotting and vowels.⁹⁴

Christopher Melchert explains this view by stating that the consonantal skeleton is written with one *ḥarf* in mind, but the diacritical and vowelization marks preserve elements of the other six *aḥruf* as well.⁹⁵ The contemporary Qur’anic scholar Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad notes that there is no contradiction between stating that the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was written according to one *ḥarf* but that it accommodates more than one *ḥarf*, and cites the above quote by Makkī.⁹⁶ The written text was naturally dictated and transcribed with one reading in mind, despite the script being able to accommodate more than one reading.⁹⁷ Thus, it reduced the differences but did not eliminate them altogether. Essentially, “it unified the script without unifying the pronunciation.”⁹⁸ Therefore, the middle position is best seen as a clarification of the first view with a more accurate characterization.

There is a subtlety that appears to have escaped the attention of many contemporary researchers on the topic of whether the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* includes the seven *aḥruf*. While some include themselves in the third category (that the ‘Uthmānic text accommodates some of the variation of the seven *aḥruf*), their views actually align more closely with the second category since they believe that whatever was left out of the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was not a valid reading since it was

⁹⁴ See Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Ibānah ‘an ma‘ānī al-qirā’āt* (Cairo: Dār Nahdah Misr, 1977), 34. This quote is of interest because it demonstrates that while opinions on this subject are conventionally divided into three groups—those who say all *aḥruf* are preserved (e.g., al-Bāqillānī), those who say only one is preserved (e.g., al-Ṭabarī), and those who say the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was deliberately written (free of vocalization and diacritics) to accommodate more than one *ḥarf* (Ibn al-Jazarī)—Makkī fell into a fourth category, suggesting that although the *muṣḥaf* was deliberately written according to one *ḥarf*, the script still accommodated other readings. See also Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Hidāyah ilā bulūgh al-nihāyah* (Sharjah: University of Sharjah, 2008), 4:2911–12.

⁹⁵ Melchert writes, “According to Makki ibn Abi Talib, ‘Uthmān probably had in mind just one pronunciation (*lafẓ*), but since his copy contained no points or indications of case endings, the people of the different centers continued to use their traditional readings so far as they did not contradict ‘Uthmān’s consonantal outline. By this account, the consonantal outline familiar today preserves one of the seven *aḥruf* whereas the diacritics and vowel signs sometimes preserve elements of the other six *aḥruf* as well.” Christopher Melchert, “The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008): 84.

⁹⁶ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān bayna al-maṣādir wal-maṣāḥif*, 217.

⁹⁷ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 147; al-Firmāwī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf wa nuṭqihī*, 151.

⁹⁸ Sālim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Athar rukhṣah al-aḥruf*, 321.

either not an authentic reading or was abrogated by the final review of the Prophet ﷺ with Zayd, or was Qur’an commentary.⁹⁹ This doctrine that the Prophet’s final review (*al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah*) abrogated other readings (*aḥruf*) is something that one finds commonly mentioned by scholars on the subject. However, other scholars argue that this claim lacks any definitive proof, which is a requirement to substantiate a claim of abrogation. Yaḥyā Aḥmad Jalāl and Halā Nāyif al-Mashāqbeh contend that the former view is based on the unsubstantiated assumption that leaving out some authentic revealed readings (*qirā’āt*) would somehow undermine the preservation of the Qur’an. However, this is not how many classical scholars of Islam understood the matter. Confronted with the reality that there are authentic readings from the companions absent from the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, rather than engaging in conjecture regarding abrogation, it is far simpler to conclude that these are merely readings that go back to the concession of the seven *aḥruf* and hence were not included in the ‘Uthmānic codex.¹⁰⁰ This has been discussed in detail in the preceding article, [The Origin of the Variant Readings of the Qur’an](#) (see section entitled, “How do we view the variants reported from companions?”).

The most accurate position on this matter, then, is that the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* (and by consequence the widely-accepted *qirā’āt*) contained some of the variation found in the seven *aḥruf*, but not all of it. Indeed, it excluded those variant readings that entailed addition, subtraction, or substitution to the consonantal skeleton of the script (the *rasm*). On the other hand, those variant readings remained which related to pronunciation, alternate vowelization, and minor consonantal shifts that could be accommodated by the ‘Uthmānic script, and it is from these that the *qirā’āt* emerged, tracing back to readings the companions learned from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

⁹⁹ ‘Abd al-Fattāh al-Qāḍī for instance aligns with the “majority” view that the ‘Uthmānic *maṣāḥif* contained the seven *aḥruf* insofar as they are accommodated by the *rasm* of one of the regional codices; however, he argues that no valid reading was left out, and that whatever was included was established in *al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah*. Hence, his view is in accordance with the second view mentioned above. Al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf*, 30. See also ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Qābah, *al-Qirā’āt al-Qur’āniyyah: Tārīkhuhā, thubūtuhā, ḥujjiyyatuhā, wa aḥkāmuhā* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1999), 150.

¹⁰⁰ Yaḥyā Aḥmad Jalāl and Halā Nayef al-Mashaqbeh, “*Arā al-‘ulamā’ fī al-qirā’āt alātī lam tashmiluhā al-maṣāḥif al-‘Uthmāniyyah*,” *Islamic University of Gaza Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2020): 244–62.

C. Write in the dialect of Quraysh

‘Uthmān instructed the committee, “If you differ with Zayd ibn Thābit on any point of the Qur’an, then write it in the dialect (*lisān*) of Quraysh, as the Qur’an was revealed in their language.” This has been used by many scholars as evidence that the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was written according to one *ḥarf*. Two questions arise from this statement.

The first question: given the hadith of the seven *aḥruf*, wasn’t the Qur’an revealed in multiple dialects and not just that of Quraysh? With respect to this question, some scholars add two important qualifiers to ‘Uthmān’s statement: first, that the Qur’an was *initially* revealed according to the dialect of the Quraysh,¹⁰¹ according to one *ḥarf*, before permission was subsequently granted for it to be recited according to more than one *ḥarf*,¹⁰² and second, that the Qur’an contains many words that belong to Arabic dialects besides that of the Quraysh, meaning that *most* of it was revealed according to the dialect of the Quraysh.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 156. Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad himself, however, is of the opinion that the Qur’an was revealed exclusively in the dialect of the Quraysh. See below.

¹⁰² Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 142–43 and *al-Ajwibah al-‘ilmiyah ‘alā as-‘ilah multaqa ahl al-tafsīr* (Amman: Dar Ammar, 2005), 15–16. ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn notes that since Hishām bin Ḥakīm (with whom ‘Umar differed in recitation) accepted Islam after the conquest of Makkah, the permission to recite in seven *aḥruf* likely occurred in the ninth year of hijrah. Shāhīn, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān* (N.p.: Nahdet Misr, 2007), 80–81. For a discussion on the difference of opinion on when the permission to recite in seven *aḥruf* was given, refer to al-Ja‘farī, *al-Asās*, 42–46. He cites three views from three contemporary Qur’anic scholars: (1) permission was given in Makkah from the beginning, held by Muhammad Sālim al-Muḥaysin; (2) permission was given in Medina, held by Sha‘bān Muḥammad Isma‘īl (along with many classical scholars); and (3) the seven *aḥruf* were revealed in Makkah but permission to use them was given in Madīnah, held by Sayyid Rizq Ṭawīl. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Qābah also notes a difference of opinion among scholars concerning whether the other readings were also revealed or were simply permitted, the latter being implied by Abū Shāmāh (d. 665 AH) and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qastallānī (d. 923 AH). See Qābah, *al-Qirā’āt al-Qur’āniyyah*, 47–49.

¹⁰³ Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī, *Umdat al-qarī* (Beirut: DKI, 2001), 20:20; Abu Shāmāh, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 89–90; al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 282–287. See for instance the examples in the Qur’an discussed in Imam, *Variant Readings of the Quran*, 99. On the other hand, Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad is of the opinion that all of the words of the Qur’an are to be considered in the Qurayshī dialect since those words found in other dialects may have also been shared by the Qurayshī dialect. Hence, he supports Ibn Qutaybah’s (d. 276 AH) opinion that the Qur’an was revealed exclusively in the dialect of the Quraysh, and recitation in the other dialects was based on the concession provided by the Prophet ﷺ. Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 161–62; *Abḥāth fī al-‘Arabiyyah al-fuṣḥā* (Amman: Dar ‘Ammār, 2005), 77; *al-Ajwibah al-‘ilmiyah*, 11. See also Qābah, *al-Qirā’āt al-Qur’āniyyah*, 47–49.

The second question: what did ‘Uthmān mean when he ordered that the Qur’an be written in the dialect of the Quraysh?¹⁰⁴ Al-Ja‘farī argues that in cases where ‘Uthmān’s committee differed over the writing of words, ‘Uthmān instructed them to *write* it (*uktubūhū*) according to the Qurayshī dialect, but he did not mandate that they only *recite* the Qur’an according to that dialect, thus leaving the potential for people to still recite according to other variant readings in those instances where the script accommodates different readings.¹⁰⁵

To use a simple example cited by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr,¹⁰⁶ the Quraysh (and other Hījāzī dialects) tended not to pronounce the glottal stop (*hamzah* ء) in many words.¹⁰⁷ Thus for example, the word *mu’min* (believer) can be pronounced with a long vowel *mūmin* (as it is still recited according to most Madīnan and Baṣran reciters);¹⁰⁸ meanwhile, the dialect of Tamīm was known for its use of the *hamzah* and is reflected in the readings of the Kūfan and Syrian reciters.¹⁰⁹ The Arabic script *مومن* has been recited in both ways (with most modern day *maṣāḥif* printed according to Ḥafs ‘an Āṣim, adding the diacritical *hamzah* accordingly—مؤمن). Both readings have been authentically transmitted by the companions from whom the reciters learned, and consequently this represents an example of variance from the seven *aḥruf* that can still be recited due to its conformity with the script of the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*. In some instances, the spelling between different readings differed as in

¹⁰⁴ Some scholars are of the opinion that “writing in the language of the Quraysh” meant in terms of spelling and not in terms of dialect and pronunciation, e.g., ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf*, 32–34; ‘Alī al-‘Ubayd, *Jam‘ al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, 520. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī dismisses this suggestion, noting that (1) there was no difference in spelling convention between Makkah and Madīnah and (2) the three Qurayshī youth had grown up and learnt writing in Madīnah. *Rasm al-muṣḥaf wa nuṭqihī*, 149. See also Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad’s comments, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 149n56. One may also add that the narration in which ‘Umar reproaches ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd for not teaching the Qur’an in the dialect of the Quraysh also makes it abundantly clear that this is not referring merely to spelling.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ja‘farī, *Jam‘ al-Qur’ān*, 46–48.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd* (London: Mu’assasat al-Furqan, 2017), 5:590.

¹⁰⁷ Khalaf ibn Hishām (d. 229 AH) said, “The Quraysh do not pronounce *hamzah*, pronouncing the *hamzah* is not from their dialect. Indeed, the reciters (*qurrā*) only pronounced it according to the other Arab dialects aside from Quraysh.” See Abu Bakr ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328 AH), *Īdāḥ al-waqf wal-ibtidā’ fī kitāb Allāh ‘azza wa jal* (Damascus: Majma al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah, 1971), 392. See also Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *al-Ajwibah al-‘ilmiyyah ‘alā as’ilah multaqa ahl al-tafsīr* (Amman: Dar Ammar, 2005), 10; Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣḥal al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 158–59.

¹⁰⁸ It is pronounced this way according to Warsh from Nāfi‘ (both Azraq and Asbahānī’s transmission) and according to Abu Ja‘far and Sūsī from Abū ‘Amr al-Baṣrī.

¹⁰⁹ See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1414 AH), 1:22. The Kufan reciter al-Kisā’ī landed in some controversy when he led prayer in the Prophet’s *masjid* while pronouncing the *hamzah*, which was evidently not what the locals were accustomed to. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 5:189.

the case of the word *al-tābūt* التابوت in Qur’an 2:248, which can be spelled and pronounced *al-tābūh* التابوه as it was by Zayd. ‘Uthmān, however, preferred the first spelling and pronunciation because it accorded with the Qurayshī dialect.¹¹⁰ The actions of ‘Uthmān and his committee in selecting a preferred reading from among various valid readings can be used as proof and precedent for the practice of *ikhtiyār* (selection) which was later practiced by the famous reciters.¹¹¹

Moreover, ‘Uthmān had precedence from other companions in this regard. When ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd was teaching the Qur’an according to his native dialect of Hudhayl to people in Kūfah, ‘Umar sent him a letter asking him to teach in the dialect of Quraysh, and not in Hudhayl, for the Qur’an was revealed in the dialect of Quraysh.¹¹² Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH) notes that ‘Umar’s instruction can be understood as *ikhtiyār*, not as suggesting that Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading was impermissible.¹¹³ Rather, ‘Umar was simply favoring the Qurayshī reading as preferable due to it being the original reading in which the Qur’an was recited, and the reading which was native to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself.¹¹⁴ As Abū Shāmah notes, the effort required for non-Arabs to learn the Qur’an in Arabic is equivalent between dialects, hence it was preferable for non-Arabs to learn according to the dialect of Quraysh.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ *Jami’ at-Tirmidhī*, no. 3104. See also Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, 8:130.

¹¹¹ An example would be the committee’s selection of “*wa mā khalaqa al-dhakara wa-l-unthā*” instead of “*wa-l-dhakari wa-l-unthā*,” the latter being the reading of Ibn Mas‘ūd and Abū al-Dardā’ for 91:3. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3742. Amīn ibn Idrīs ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Fallātah, *al-Ikhtiyār ‘inda al-qurrā’* (Riyadh: King Saud University, 1436 AH), 149. See also Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Abḥāth fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Amman: Dar Ammar, 2006), 35–71 on the topic of *ikhtiyār*.

¹¹² Ibn Shabbah, *Tārīkh al-Madīnah*, 2:711.

¹¹³ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd limā fī al-muwattā min al-ma’ānī wa al-asānīd* (Morocco: Wizarat ‘Umūm al-Awqāf wa al-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1387 AH/1967), 8:279. See also al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur’an al-Karīm*, 59.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:163; Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *al-Ajwibah al-ilmiyah*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Abu Shāmah, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 102.

D. The method of producing the ‘Uthmānic codex

If we return to the narrations concerning the ‘Uthmānic compilation,¹¹⁶ we may note multiple indications that the process consisted of not only transcription and dictation but several stages of review and verification. The narration in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* makes clear that ‘Uthmān requested the compilation of Abū Bakr to use in the process of transcribing the new codex. Recall that the manuscript of Abū Bakr had been verified through an extremely meticulous process, not simply relying on the companions who had memorized the Qur’an in its entirety, but also ensuring each verse had two witnesses who had written it down in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ in a manner that matched the way the companions had memorized it.¹¹⁷ With Abū Bakr’s passing, the compilation passed into the hands of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and then, after his passing, into the hands of his daughter Ḥaḥṣah bint ‘Umar, the widow of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.¹¹⁸

‘Uthmān sent a message to Ḥaḥṣah saying, “Send us the manuscripts of the Qur’an so that we may copy the Qur’anic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you.” Ḥaḥṣah sent it to ‘Uthmān. ‘Uthmān then instructed Zayd ibn Thābit, ‘Abdullāh ibn Al-Zubayr, Sa‘īd ibn Al-‘Āṣ and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies.¹¹⁹

From this narration, one might be inclined to state, as many scholars did,¹²⁰ that ‘Uthmān’s compilation was assembled by simply copying the manuscript compiled by Abū Bakr. However, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A‘ẓamī argues that combining the

¹¹⁶ A brief comment may be made concerning the appropriateness of the term *jam‘* (gathering or compilation) for the process of producing the ‘Uthmānic codex. For those scholars who consider the ‘Uthmānic codex to simply be a direct copy of the *ṣuḥuf* of Abū Bakr, the project of ‘Uthmān did not involve gathering or compiling any textual materials; it was rather a gathering or unifying of *people* upon a single text, and thus may be more appropriately called a project of standardization. Other scholars, as explained in this section, did consider this to be an autonomously assembled text that was later checked against the *ṣuḥuf* of Abū Bakr; hence, it would be appropriately termed a compilation per that view.

¹¹⁷ Al-‘Ubayd, *Jam‘ al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*, 506–7.

¹¹⁸ Ibn ‘Āshir, *Fath al-Mannān al-marwī bi-mawrid al-ẓamān*, 415. He cites Burhān al-Dīn al-Ja‘barī, who notes that the compilation passed from Abū Bakr to ‘Umar because Abū Bakr himself designated ‘Umar as his successor. On the other hand, ‘Umar did not designate a successor but appointed a committee to consult (*shūrā*) and decide on the successor, and therefore the compilation was inherited from him by Ḥaḥṣah. See also al-Ja‘barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid fī sharḥ ‘aqlah atrab al-qasā’id* (Amman: Arwiqah, 2017), 344; Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur‘ān*, 44; M. Mohar Ali, *The Qur’an and the Orientalists* (Ipswich: Jam‘iyat ‘Ihyāa’ Minhaaj al-Sunnah, 2004), 237.

¹¹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4987.

¹²⁰ Al-Ja‘barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid*, 353.

above account with other narrations paints a more complete picture in which ‘Uthmān’s compilation was assembled independently of Abū Bakr’s compilation, which was only used during the verification process *after* ‘Uthmān’s committee had finished transcribing the *muṣḥaf*.¹²¹ The first narration that al-A‘zamī cites in support of this narrative comes from Muṣ‘ab ibn Sa‘d:

‘Uthmān delivered a sermon and said, “The people have diverged in their recitations, and I am determined that whoever holds any verses dictated by the Prophet ﷺ himself must bring them to me.” So the people brought their verses, written on parchment and bones and leaves, and anyone contributing to this pile was first questioned by ‘Uthmān, “Did you learn these verses [i.e., take this dictation] directly from the Prophet ﷺ himself?” All contributors answered under oath, and all the collected material was individually labeled and then handed to Zayd ibn Thābit.¹²²

The second narration al-A‘zamī cites comes from Mālik ibn Abī ‘Āmir (one of the committee members and the grandfather of Imam Mālik ibn Anas), who states:

I was among those upon whom the *muṣḥaf* was dictated [from the written sources], and if any controversies arose concerning a particular verse they would say, “Where is the scribe [of this parchment]? Precisely how did the Prophet ﷺ teach him this verse?” And they would resume scribing, leaving that portion blank and sending for the man in question to clarify his scribing.¹²³

These narrations indicate that the *muṣḥaf* of ‘Uthmān was prepared autonomously and gathered through an independent process before with the compilation of Abū Bakr. One can further strengthen al-A‘zamī’s argument by noting that ‘Uthmān’s instructions to the committee on what to do if they differ concerning a verse only make sense if they were conducting an independent compilation process. If they

¹²¹ Note that this was also mentioned as a possibility by Abū Shāmah al-Maqdisī (d. 665 AH), *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 76.

¹²² As translated by al-A‘zamī, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 90. One may note that al-A‘zamī has taken some liberties in the translation and paraphrasing and the interested reader may consult the original text in Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 210. The chain of transmission is declared authentic by the editor, Salīm al-Hilālī, and was also declared authentic by Ibn Kathīr. Note that Muhammad Ḥasan Jabal, following al-Bayhaqī, discounts this narration as evidence on the grounds that Muṣ‘ab did not hear directly from ‘Uthmān and that the compilation process had already taken place during the time of Abu Bakr. See Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 197–99.

¹²³ As translated by al-A‘zamī, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 90. As in the previous narration, al-A‘zamī takes some liberties in paraphrasing, cf. Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 206. The chain of transmission to Malik bin Abī ‘Āmir is declared authentic by the editor, Salīm al-Hilālī.

were simply copying the text of Abū Bakr's compilation, then there would be no occasion for them to differ in the first place. Moreover, the narrations indicating that Zayd transcribed while Sa'īd dictated also suggest a process more involved than mere copying.¹²⁴ Finally, we have an account which, in spite of its weaknesses, mentions that 'Uthmān requested Ḥafṣah's copy after the compilation by Zayd was completed, which was then reviewed and compared with the 'Uthmānic codex and confirmed to be in agreement.¹²⁵

The question that emerges is why 'Uthmān would undertake this exhaustive process when he could have readily copied the manuscripts already compiled by Abū Bakr. Al-A'ẓamī offers the following reasoning:

One may wonder why Caliph 'Uthmān took the trouble to compile an autonomous copy when the end product was to be compared with the [compilation of Abū Bakr] anyway. The likeliest reason is a symbolic one. A decade earlier thousands of Companions, engaged in the battles against apostasy in al-Yamamah and elsewhere, were unable to participate in the Ṣuḥuf's compilation. In drawing from a larger pool of written materials, 'Uthmān's independent copy provided these surviving Companions with an opportunity to partake of this momentous endeavor.

In the above account no inconsistencies were found between the [compilation of Abū Bakr] and the independent *muṣḥaf* and from this two broad conclusions emerge: first, the Qur'anic text was thoroughly stable from the earliest days and not (as some allege) fluid and volatile until the third century; and second, the methods involved in compilation during both reigns were meticulous and accurate.¹²⁶

If al-A'ẓamī's conclusion is correct, one must note that rather than merely having a 'symbolic' reason for conducting an independent compilation, 'Uthmān also had a very practical and tangible reason: reducing differences in the *ummah*'s readings entailed elimination of some of the variant readings from the seven *aḥruf*. Since the

¹²⁴ Some scholars also point out that the narrations do not mention a committee assisting Zayd in the time of Abū Bakr, while he was assisted by a committee in the time of 'Uthmān in order to assist in writing the Qur'an according to one *ḥarf*. See al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, 61–62.

¹²⁵ Ibn Jarīr, *Tafṣīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1:56. Note that parts of this account contain interpolations mixing between the collection at the time of Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān; however, the point of evidence is the detail at the very end of the account which mentions the final review of 'Uthmān's codex using Abū Bakr's compilation. See also Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Faṣl li al-waṣl al-mudraj fi al-naql* (Riyadh: Dar al-Hijrah, 1997), 1:399.

¹²⁶ Al-A'ẓamī, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 93.

goal of Abū Bakr’s compilation was simply to preserve the text of the Qur’an, arbitrating between variant readings and different dialects was never a stated goal or component of the process. It is possible that Abū Bakr’s compilation included a mix between a greater number of readings from different dialects and other types of variants from the seven *ahruf*.¹²⁷ Therefore, the advantage of repeating the collection process and independently reviewing every verse from written sources in addition to memory afforded the committee the opportunity to affirm with the highest degree of confidence and certainty that the reading they selected for the writing of the *muṣḥaf* was the reading taught and recited by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself.

The story of a missing verse

At this juncture, it is useful to clarify a set of narrations which have been the source of some confusion concerning the detection of a “missing” verse during the compilation process. During the compilation of Abū Bakr, while seeking two witnesses for each passage, Zayd ibn Thābit came across a passage for which he found only one witness. Zayd reports, “Abū Bakr sent for me, so I collected the Qur’an till I found the last part of *Sūrah al-Tawbah* (verses 9:128–129) with Abū Khuzaymah Al-Anṣārī and did not find it with anybody else.”¹²⁸ This narration, found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, explicitly notes that this took place during the first compilation, and that the witness was Abū Khuzaymah. Again, one must clarify that this does not mean that Abū Khuzaymah was the only one who knew this verse, as all the companions who had memorized the Qur’an knew it. However, they were seeking a witness who had documented the verse in the presence of the

¹²⁷ Many scholars claimed that Abū Bakr’s compilation contained the seven *ahruf* while ‘Uthmān’s compilation did not. See, for instance, al-Ja‘barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid*, 334; al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur’an al-Karīm*, 48, 64; al-Ja‘farī, *Jam’*, 56. In his doctoral dissertation, the Egyptian Azhari scholar ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī (d. 2017 CE) theorized that since Abū Bakr’s compilation was not intended to reduce readings as the ‘Uthmānic codex was, it is theoretically possible that it even included multiple readings of the same verse, either above or below the word or on the margins. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf wa nuṭqihī*, 108. Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad dismisses this suggestion, along with the claim that Abū Bakr’s compilation contained the seven *ahruf*, due to the absence of evidence to confirm these suggestions. *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 145. See also the discussion in Sālim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Athar rukḥṣah al-ahruf fī tadwīn al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī* (London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 2018), 316–17. Nonetheless, even if Abu Bakr’s compilation did not include multiple *ahruf* for the same passage, it remains a possibility that it contained some passages according to one *ḥarf* and other passages according to another since fixation of one reading was not an express goal of the compilation.

¹²⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7425.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.¹²⁹ The very reason they knew exactly which verse was missing was because they had memorized it.

Another narration, also from Zayd ibn Thābit and related in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, mentions the same incident but with the name Khuzaymah al-Anṣārī:

So I started locating Qur'anic material and collecting it from parchments, scapulae, leaf-stalks of date palms, and from the memories of men (who knew it by heart). I found with Khuzaymah al-Anṣārī two verses of *Sūrah al-Tawbah* which I had not found with anybody else [he cites Qur'an 9:128–129].¹³⁰

Such a minor difference in the name (Abū Khuzaymah vs Khuzaymah) would typically not raise any questions, except that we have a third narration, also in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, about an identical incident involving a different verse with Khuzaymah.

When we wrote the Holy Qur'an, I missed one of the verses of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* which I used to hear Allah's Messenger ﷺ reciting. Then we searched for it and found it with Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī. The verse was "Among the Believers are men who have been true to their Covenant with Allah, Of them, some have fulfilled Their obligations to Allah [i.e., they have been killed in Allah's cause], And some of them are [still] waiting" (33:23) So we wrote this in its place in the Qur'an.¹³¹

Notice that this narration does not explicitly mention whether this occurred during Abū Bakr's or 'Uthmān's compilation.¹³² There are other narrations of this incident in other sources that use either name for each incident.¹³³ Al-Bāqillānī argues that these narrations may be dismissed as contradictory and conflicting with more

¹²⁹ Abū Shāmah, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 61; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:171–73; al-Bāqillānī, *Nukat al-intiṣār* (Alexandria: Mansha'at al-Ma'ārif, 1971), 333. See also al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā'*, 307 for the alternate explanation that Zayd was looking for others who had a copy of the verse to confirm the different possible readings of the verse.

¹³⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4679.

¹³¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4049.

¹³² Ghanim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 118–19.

¹³³ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:146, 148, 154, 203 (which mentions Khuzaymah with 9:128 during Abū Bakr's compilation), 1:149 (which mentions Khuzaymah with 33:23 during Abū Bakr's compilation), 1:198 (which mentions Khuzaymah or Abū Khuzaymah for 33:23), 2:221 (which mentions Khuzaymah with 33:23 during 'Uthmān's compilation), and 2:225 (which mentions Khuzaymah with 9:128 during 'Uthmān's compilation). See also Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān wa ma'ālimuhu wa adābuhu*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Khayyātī (Rabat: Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs, 1995), 2:93, 96.

reliable evidence, or may be reinterpreted in various ways.¹³⁴ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852 AH) and others reconciled the narrations by stating that the first incident took place during the compilation of Abū Bakr,¹³⁵ and that it was the verse of *Sūrah al-Tawbah* that was found with Abū Khuzaymah. Meanwhile, the second incident took place during the compilation of 'Uthmān with the verse of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, which was found with Dhū al-Shahādātayn Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī, a different person from Abū Khuzaymah ibn Aws ibn Yazīd ibn Aṣram.¹³⁶ Al-A'ẓamī uses this as evidence for his argument that 'Uthmān repeated the process of summoning witnesses for each verse, otherwise there is no reason they would not be able to find the verse from *al-Aḥzāb* if the compilation of Abū Bakr was in front of them.¹³⁷ Al-Ja'farī suggests it is not inconceivable that the written parchment of one verse may have gone missing during the time interval between the two compilations, which exceeded a decade.¹³⁸

On the other hand, we have scholars like Ibn Kathīr (d. 773 AH)¹³⁹ and others¹⁴⁰ who held that both incidents happened during the time of Abū Bakr. While Muḥammad Ḥasan Jabal agrees with Ibn Ḥajar's analysis that the incidents described by Zayd refer to two different people, he also concurs with Ibn Kathīr's opinion that both occurred during the compilation of Abū Bakr.¹⁴¹

Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad adduces additional evidence suggesting that the incident of the lost verse happened only during the time of Abū Bakr, but also that

¹³⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *Nukat al-intiṣār*, 331.

¹³⁵ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:172. See also Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, 20:19.

¹³⁶ Abū Shāmah, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 61; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:172; see also Ibn ʿĀshir, *Fath al-Mannān al-marwī bi-mawrid al-ẓamān*, 418.

¹³⁷ Al-A'ẓamī writes, "These two have caused confusion among some scholars, mainly due to the proximity of the two names. Note that the two are distinct: Khuzaima and Abu Khuzaima. Now if we read the hadiths carefully we see that Zaid used the word *ṣuḥuf* for the collection during Abū Bakr's reign, and the word *muṣḥaf* or *maṣāḥif* (pl. of *muṣḥaf*) for the work he did under 'Uthmān's supervision. Thus we may safely conclude that these are two different instances of compilation... If we consider the second compilation to be Zaid's work on an independent copy of the *muṣḥaf* then everything becomes clear. On the other hand, if we assume that Zaid was simply making a duplicate copy for 'Uthmān based on Abū Bakr's, not an autonomous copy, then we must confront the awkward question of why Zaid was unable to locate verse no. 23 from *Sūra al-Aḥzāb* since all the verses should have been right in front of him. Of interest also is that Zaid uses the first person singular pronoun in the first narration and the plural 'we,' indicating group activity, in the second. All of this strongly bolsters the view that the second compilation was indeed an independent endeavor." Al-A'ẓamī, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 92.

¹³⁸ Al-Ja'farī, *Jam'*, 44–45.

¹³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 1416 AH), 86.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Ja'barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid*, 340. See also Imam, *Variant Readings of the Quran*, 45.

¹⁴¹ Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 185, 201–204.

both incidents are in fact one incident that happened with the same person. He cites the following narration from the introduction to *Kitāb al-Mabānī*, in which Zayd describes the compilation during the time of Abū Bakr:

I completed one review and I noticed I was missing this verse [33:23] so I asked the *Muhājirīn* and the *Anṣār* and I did not find it [in written form] with any of them, although I knew the verse and the Prophet ﷺ had dictated it to me, however I disliked to establish it until someone else testified alongside me. And then I obtained it from Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī whom the Prophet ﷺ had made his witness equal to that of two witnesses. So I wrote the verse and then I conducted another review. And I found that I was missing two verses although I knew them [9:127–128]. So I inquired about them from *Muhājirīn* and the *Anṣār* and I did not find them with any of them except with Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī whom the Prophet ﷺ had endorsed his witness. So I wrote them at the end of Barā’a [*Sūrah al-Tawbah*].¹⁴²

Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad states that this account alleviates some of the confusion found in other sources. He also notes that “the similarity between the two names (i.e., Abū Khuzaymah and Khuzaymah) and their mention in different narrations using the very same phrasing indicates that they are both names referring to the very same companion and that is Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī.”¹⁴³ This is the simplest and easiest explanation for what would otherwise seem to be a rather striking coincidence of the exact same circumstances involving two different individuals with almost identical names. Nonetheless, other ways of reconciling the narrations, such as that of Ibn Ḥajar, were also accepted by many scholars. Finally, it should be mentioned that the verse(s) in question have been attested in the earliest manuscripts, and it is not reported that a single companion codex omitted them.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Arthur Jeffery, ed., *Muqaddimāt fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān: Wa-humā muqaddimāt Kitāb al-mabānī wa-muqaddimāt Ibn ‘Atīyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1954), 20–22. On the identity of the author, see Aron Zysow, “Two Unrecognized Karrāmī Texts,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 4 (1988): 577–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/603146>.

¹⁴³ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 119.

¹⁴⁴ Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “*San’ ā’ 1* and the Origins of the Qur’ān,” *Der Islam* 87, nos. 1–2 (2012): 23. They write: “There are some traditions about ‘Uthmān’s team finding the last two verses of sūra 9 with a man named Khuzayma, or Abū Khuzayma, or Ibn Khuzayma. C-1 [(*San’ ā’* undertext)] has these verses in the expected place. Since they are also found in the ‘Uthmānic Qur’an, and since it is not reported that any Companion

There is of course a remarkable story behind the significance of Khuzaymah ibn Thābit being the witness for this verse. According to the narration in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regarded Khuzaymah’s witness as equal to that of two witnesses,¹⁴⁵ earning him the title of *Dhū al-Shahādatayn* (Possessor of Dual Testimony). The story behind this begins with the Prophet ﷺ purchasing a horse from a bedouin (in other narrations identified as Sawā’a ibn al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāribī). After agreeing upon the price and the purchase, the Prophet ﷺ asked the bedouin to accompany him to retrieve the payment. While on their way, people saw the horse and, unaware that it had already been sold, started bargaining with the bedouin for it. The bedouin took advantage of the situation and told the Prophet ﷺ, “If you want this horse, then buy it [by bidding higher], otherwise, I will sell it.” The Prophet ﷺ asked, “Have I not already purchased it from you?” The bedouin asked the Prophet ﷺ to produce a witness. Khuzaymah ibn Thābit testified on his behalf, whereupon the Prophet ﷺ asked him how he could testify when he wasn’t present. Khuzaymah replied that “Because I believe in you (as a Prophet) and know that you do not speak except with that which is truth.” Thereupon, the Prophet ﷺ made the testimony of Khuzaymah equal to that of two witnesses.¹⁴⁶ This was a Prophetic endorsement of the purity of Khuzaymah’s faith and character in hastening to testify to the truthfulness of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.¹⁴⁷ And it is said that the Prophet ﷺ still chose to return the horse to the bedouin, undoubtedly as a gesture of kindness, integrity, and generosity.¹⁴⁸

This narration underscores the Divine will behind the miraculous turn of events that caused the one person about whom the Prophet ﷺ had made this declaration to be the same person with whom Zayd found the written copy of the ‘missing’ verse(s).

codex was without them, these verses must have belonged to the prototype from which the C-1 and ‘Uthmānic text types emerged. Therefore, one should not read too much into the report.”

¹⁴⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2807.

¹⁴⁶ See *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 3607; *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 4647; *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 21883, along with *Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*, no. 2188; *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, no. 20516; al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu’jam al-kabīr*, no. 3730.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim, *I’lam al-muwaqī’in*, 3:368.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Sindhī, *Sunan al-Nasā’ī al-musammā bi-l-mujtabā wa bi-hāmishihī ḥāshiya al-sindhī* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005), p. 1080, no. 4651.

The order of the *sūrahs*

Since the time of ‘Uthmān until today, the 114 chapters of the Qur’an have always been written in *maṣāḥif* in the same sequence, beginning with *al-Fātiḥah* and ending with *al-Nās*.¹⁴⁹ Was this order mandated by Divine guidance and taught by the Prophet ﷺ himself (referred to as *tawqīfī*), or did the companions deduce it themselves through their own inference (*ijtihād*)? This is a well-known difference of opinion debated in classical and contemporary works of Qur’anic studies. The first view, attributed to many scholars, is that the present order of the *sūrahs* is based on Divine instruction.¹⁵⁰ Abū Ja‘far al-Naḥḥās (d. 338 AH) states, “The order of the *sūrahs* is from Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, without any involvement of anyone else.”¹⁵¹ The evidence cited in support of this position includes the fact that the companions of the Prophet ﷺ unanimously agreed upon this order of the chapters.¹⁵² Moreover, the Prophet ﷺ recited the Qur’an every year to Jibrīl, which logically requires that it was recited in a particular order. Abū Bakr ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328 AH) states, “Jibrīl would teach the Prophet ﷺ the location of each verse and *sūrah*, so the order of the *sūrahs* is akin to the order of verses and letters, all of it being from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.”¹⁵³ Al-Baghawī writes, “It is established that the work of the companions was to assemble the Qur’an into one compilation, not to determine its sequence, for verily the Qur’an is written in *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz* according to its sequence in our *maṣāḥif*.”¹⁵⁴ It has also been narrated from Aws ibn Hudhayfah al-Thaqafī (d. 59 AH) that he asked the companions how they used to divide the Qur’an when they completed its recitation and they replied, “Into three *sūrahs*, then five, seven, nine, 11, 13, and then the

¹⁴⁹ In fact, Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad argues that there is no evidence to suggest that Abū Bakr’s compilation was not also written with the *sūrahs* arranged in sequence. *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 123.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 87; Ṭaha ‘Ābidīn Ṭaha, “*Tartīb suwar al-Qur’an al-Karīm: Dirāsah taḥlīlīyah li-aqwāl al-‘ulama’*,” *Majallah Buhuth al-Dirasat al-Qur’aniyyah* 9 (2010): 32, <https://jqr.complex.gov.sa/?p=416>.

¹⁵¹ Al-Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh wal-mansūkh*, 2:400. Some scholars including al-Kirmānī and al-Ṭībī stated that the Qur’an is written in the same sequence as it is found in the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūdh*). See Fahd al-Rūmī, *Dirāsāt fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 119.

¹⁵² Muhammad Ali Hasan, *al-Manār fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān ma’a madkhal fī uṣūl al-tafsīr wa maṣādirih* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risalah, 2000), 168.

¹⁵³ Cited in al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, 1957), 1:260.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, 4:522.

mufaṣṣal sūrahs.”¹⁵⁵ This totals 48 chapters before the *mufaṣṣal* chapters, which start either with *al-Ḥujurāt* (chapter 49) or *Qāf* (chapter 50). This indicates that there was a fixed order to the chapters known to the companions in the time of the Prophet ﷺ.¹⁵⁶

The second opinion is that the sequence of the *sūrahs* was based on the *ijtihād* of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (d. 741 AH) writes, “The sequence of the *sūrahs* according to their present arrangement is based on the action of ‘Uthmān and Zayd ibn Thābit and those who wrote the *mushāf* with them. And it has been said that it is based on the action of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, however that is weak and refuted by the relevant narrations.”¹⁵⁷ Commenting on a narration in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* where the Prophet ﷺ recited *Sūrah al-Nisā’* prior to *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ writes, “This is an evidence for those who say that the sequence of *sūrahs* is based on the *ijtihād* of the Muslims when they wrote the *mushāf* and was not defined by the Prophet ﷺ but rather he left it to the *ummah* after him, and this is the opinion of the majority of scholars,¹⁵⁸ and the opinion of Imam Mālik and the preferred view of al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī.”¹⁵⁹ Of course, this narration is not decisive evidence as most scholars do not regard it obligatory to recite the *sūrahs* in prayer in order. Furthermore, it should be noted that Imam Mālik did state that the companions made their decision based on what they heard from the Prophet ﷺ, which seems to bring the two opinions closer together.¹⁶⁰

Some scholars, like Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, held that some of the *sūrahs* were arranged according to *ijtihād* but not all of them.¹⁶¹ The first and foremost evidence used to support this opinion is the fact that it is reported that some of the companions’

¹⁵⁵ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1393; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 1345; *Musnad Abū Dāwūd*, no. 1108. Yahya ibn Ma‘īn approved of its chain of transmission.

¹⁵⁶ Fahd al-Rūmī, *Dirasāt fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 120. There are numerous narrations that also mention the *sūrahs* of the Qur’an according to the familiar chapter order found in the ‘Uthmānic codex. Al-Ṭayyār, *al-Muḥarrar fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 199.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Juzayy, *al-Tashīl li ‘ulūm al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dar al-Arqam, 1416 AH), 1:13.

¹⁵⁸ Notice that he attributes the *ijtihādī* opinion to the majority, in contrast to those who attribute the *tawqīfī* opinion to the majority.

¹⁵⁹ Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Ikmāl al-mu‘allim* (Egypt: Dar al-Wafa, 1998), 3:137.

¹⁶⁰ Ṭaha, “*Tartīb suwar al-Qur’an al-Karīm*,” 41.

¹⁶¹ Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 27. Muhammad Hasan Jabal supports this view. Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 234.

codices had the *sūrahs* arranged according to a different order. However, these were not official public codices but rather personal compilations comprising *sūrahs* these companions learned from the Prophet ﷺ.¹⁶² Ibn Baṭṭāl notes also that these companion codices were compiled before the revelation of the Qur'an was concluded and its *sūrah* sequence was finalized.¹⁶³

Another critically important piece of evidence for those who suggest that the chapter sequence was, at least in part, based on the *ijtihād* of the companions, is a narration whose authenticity is disputed in which Ibn 'Abbās asked 'Uthmān why he placed *Sūrah al-Tawbah* after *Sūrah al-Anfāl* in the Qur'an without writing the *basmalah* between them, and 'Uthmān replied that it was not clear whether they were part of the same chapter and the Prophet ﷺ passed away before clarifying the matter.¹⁶⁴ This narration led scholars like al-Ṣuyūṭī, al-Bayhaqī, and Ibn al-ʿArabī to consider these two *sūrahs* to be the exception, while all the remaining *sūrahs* in the Qur'an were ordered based on the sequence learned from the Prophet

ﷺ.¹⁶⁵

However, this narration has been subjected to extensive critique from the perspective of both the chain of transmission (*isnād*) and the content (*matn*). This hadith is only narrated by 'Awf ibn Abī Jamīlah (d. 146 AH)¹⁶⁶ from Yazīd

¹⁶² Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Muḥaḍarāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 73; al-Tayyār, *al-Muḥarar fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 203.

¹⁶³ Ibn Baṭṭāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Maktaba Rushd, 2003), 10:239.

¹⁶⁴ Yazīd al-Fārisī narrated that Ibn 'Abbās said that he asked 'Uthmān, "Why did you place al-Anfāl, one of the *mathānī*, alongside al-Barā'ah, one the *mi'in*, and you did not write the *basmalah* between them, and you placed them with the seven long (*tuwal*) chapters? What was your reasoning for that?"

'Uthmān said, "During the time of the Prophet, chapters with numerous verses would be revealed and so whenever something was revealed, he would summon one of the scribes and instruct them, 'Place these verses in the *sūrah* which mentions this or that.' And when a single verse was revealed he would say, 'Place this verse in the *sūrah* which mentions this or that.' Al-Anfāl was one of the first *sūrahs* revealed in Madīnah, and al-Barā'ah was one of the final portions of the Qur'an revealed, and their stories were similar so I thought that it was part of it [i.e., that they belonged to the same chapter]. Then the Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed away before this was clarified, so it is for this reason that I placed them together and did not write the *basmalah* between them and placed them with the long *sūrahs*." *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3086; *Musnad Aḥmad*, nos. 399 and 499.

¹⁶⁵ Ṭaha, "Tartīb suwar al-Qur'an al-Karīm," 47.

¹⁶⁶ He was declared reliable by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak noted that he was both Shi'ī and Qadarī and Yahya ibn Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān stated that 'Awf reportedly called Ibn Mas'ūd a liar. Hence, his sectarianism was not negligible. See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā*.

al-Fārisī.¹⁶⁷ The religious beliefs of 'Awf have been described as Qadarī¹⁶⁸ and Shi'ī,¹⁶⁹ which introduces the potential for sectarian bias in narrations related to 'Uthmān's role in the preservation of the Qur'an.¹⁷⁰ More importantly, Yazīd al-Fārisī is listed as a weak narrator by Imam al-Bukhārī himself.¹⁷¹ On the basis of the problems in the chain of transmission and the content of the narration, it was rejected as baseless by the hadith scholar Aḥmad Shākir, although this view has been contested by 'Abdullāh Juday' who views the narration to be authentic.¹⁷² With respect to the content of the narration, it states that the Prophet ﷺ passed away without clarifying this matter, and yet al-Tawbah was revealed 15 months before he passed away which renders this unlikely, particularly given the constant teaching and daily ritual recitation of the Qur'an. Moreover, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib gives us a different explanation for the absence of the *basmalah* at the beginning of al-Tawbah: this is how the *sūrah* was revealed since the *basmalah* is a declaration of mercy, while the opening of *al-Tawbah* is a declaration of war.¹⁷³ A final piece of evidence comes from manuscript research. The Ṣan'ā' palimpsest lower text (discussed in detail below), which likely predates the 'Uthmānic codification, also places *Sūrah al-Tawbah* after *Sūrah al-Anfāl* without a *basmalah* in between, thus making it unlikely that this was a new decision of the 'Uthmānic committee.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ He was believed to be the same person as Yazīd ibn Hurmuz by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Abd al-Rahman ibn Mahdi, and Ibn Hibban, while Yahya ibn Ma'īn, Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān, and Abu Ḥatim believed them to be two separate individuals. If he is the same person as Yazīd ibn Hurmuz, then he is an unreliable transmitter, and if he is a different person, then he is an unknown transmitter. See Taha, "*Tartīb suwar al-Qur'an al-Karīm*," 61; also Salīm al-Hilālī's comments in the footnotes on Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 221–22.

¹⁶⁸ The *qadarīyyah* were a theological trend that denied divine decree and fate, and instead emphasized absolute human free will. The Mu'tazilah was a theological school that famously adopted this position.

¹⁶⁹ Shi'ism is the largest non-Sunni sect and initially split from Sunnism due to opposition to the rule of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān.

¹⁷⁰ Hadith scholars permit narrations from other sectarian groups in those matters that do not relate to their innovations, so as to remove the potential for sectarian bias. This has been explained by Abū Ishāq al-Jūzajānī (d. 259 AH) in *Aḥwāl al-Rijāl* (Beirut: Dar Mu'assasat al-Risalah, n.d.), 32.

¹⁷¹ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Ḍu'afā al-ṣaghīr* (Taif: Maktabah Ibn 'Abbās, 2005), 142. Cf. Taha, "*Tartīb suwar al-Qur'an al-Karīm*," 57–58.

¹⁷² Juday', *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 124–27.

¹⁷³ *Mustadrak al-Hakim*, no. 3673. See also al-Ṭayyār, *al-Muḥarrar fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 201–202, and the comments of the editor (Salīm al-Hilālī) in Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 230 endorsing the view of al-Qurṭubī and al-Qushayrī that this is how the *sūrah* was revealed.

¹⁷⁴ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "*Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān*," 26.

Of course, all Muslim scholars agree that the order of the *sūrahs* in the Qur'an since the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* is binding and obligatory to follow.¹⁷⁵ Imam Rabī'ah (d. 136 AH) was asked why the Qur'an begins with the Madīnan chapters *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān* when the Makkan revelations preceded them. He replied, "They were placed at the beginning because the Qur'an was arranged according to knowledge possessed by those who compiled it and those who were with them, and they had unanimous consensus upon that knowledge, so this [the ordering of the *sūrahs*] is a final matter that cannot be questioned."¹⁷⁶ Indeed, that the sequence of *sūrahs* in the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was unanimously followed by the early Muslim community, with people completely abandoning the alternative arrangements of various companions' personal codices, arguably indicates widespread agreement on the singular authority of the sequence of the 'Uthmānic codex. This would not have been the case if the ordering of the chapters was a matter of opinion.¹⁷⁷

The position that the current sequence of chapters in the *muṣḥaf* has been Divinely determined appears to be the strongest view on the strength of all the evidence discussed.¹⁷⁸ Also relevant to this discussion is the wealth of scholarly literature surrounding the intricate connections (*tanāsub*) between adjoining *sūrahs* as well as the thematic structure (*naẓm*) and continuity of the Qur'an from one chapter to the next.¹⁷⁹ The former includes not only *tafsīr* literature but entire works devoted to the topic such as *al-Burhān fī tanāsub suwar al-Qur'ān* by Ibn al-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī (d. 708 AH), *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-ayāt wal-suwar* by al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH), *Tanāsuq al-durar fī tanāsub al-suwar* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), and *Jawāhir al-bayān fī tanāsub suwar al-Qur'ān* by 'Abdullāh Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī (d. 1413 AH). The vast multitude of intertextual connections uncovered by such astute insights is seen by many scholars as effectively settling the debate on this matter.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, 96. Al-Kurdī himself affirms the validity of both views without favoring one over the other.

¹⁷⁶ Ibn Shabba, *Tārīkh al-Madīnah*, 1016–17.

¹⁷⁷ Yusuf al-'Ilyawī, "*Qaḍāya fī ihkām al-naẓm al-Qur'ānī*," *Majallah al-'Ulūm al-'Arabiyyah*, 285. Against this, one might counter that the lack of objection stemmed merely from a desire to have a standardized text; however, the absence of any debate whatsoever renders this argument less persuasive.

¹⁷⁸ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 110.

¹⁷⁹ See Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islāhī's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* (N.p.: American Trust Publications, 1986).

Why did 'Uthmān burn other copies of the Qur'an?

When the compilation of the 'Uthmānic codex was complete, 'Uthmān sent an official copy to each of a number of major cities within the Muslim world and instructed that other unofficial copies of the Qur'an be burned.

'Uthmān sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.¹⁸⁰

When presented without context, particularly by the unlearned, this act of burning takes on almost dark undertones, as though it somehow undermines the preservation of the Qur'anic text. However, for those familiar with all the facts analyzed in the preceding discussions, 'Uthmān's instruction is entirely expected and was in fact an integral part of the history of the preservation of the Qur'anic text. The whole point of the 'Uthmānic project was to unify the Muslim *ummah* on one *muṣḥaf* that would eliminate confusion caused by the proliferation of different *aḥruf* taught by various companions in different lands.¹⁸¹ Had 'Uthmān *not* undertaken the burning of copies of the Qur'an which differed from the official copies, and thus not eliminated a source of the disputes, the entire exercise would have been futile. There also would have remained the possibility of individual Muslims reciting from copies that contained scribal errors or contained the commentary of companions alongside verses of the Qur'an.¹⁸² Given that it would be quite unfeasible to check and correct each and every personal codex to eliminate the possibility of error, the logical solution was to simply eliminate those codices that had not been copied from the 'Uthmānic archetypes.

Perhaps this episode generates such confusion because book burning incidents in Western history are typically seen as a manifestation of condemnation or desecration. For instance, after renouncing Arianism and converting to Catholicism, the Visigothic King Reccared I (d. 601 CE) ordered all Arian books to be collected and burned. However, in the Islamic tradition, one of the respectful ways to dispose of any text containing verses of the Qur'an is in fact through

¹⁸⁰ *Saḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 4987.

¹⁸¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 77.

¹⁸² Al-Ja'barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid*, 354.

burning it. Ibn Baṭṭāl writes, “And ‘Uthmān’s instruction to burn the manuscripts and copies of the Qur’an after his compilation demonstrates that it is permissible to burn books that contain the names of Allah [or Qur’anic verses] and that is a form of respect towards it and protection from it being stepped upon or discarded on the ground.”¹⁸³ Some copies of the Qur’an in the time of ‘Uthmān were eliminated in other ways including erasing¹⁸⁴ or tearing.

Moreover, the historical evidence indicates that elimination was not the only outcome for other copies. Muḥammad Ḥasan Jabal and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A‘ẓamī both note that another possible outcome was that manuscripts could be reviewed and corrected according to the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*.¹⁸⁵ They cite a narration from ‘Abd al-A‘lā al-Kilābī that mentions that he visited the home of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, who was with Ḥudhayfah and ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd, and there was a copy of the Qur’an that ‘Uthmān had sent along with the instruction to correct their own copies accordingly (*wa amarahum an yuqīmū maṣāḥifahum ‘alayh*).¹⁸⁶

The compilation of Abū Bakr which remained in the possession of Ḥafṣah was not erased or burned by ‘Uthmān. However, the compilation was later requested by Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam (at that time the governor of Madīnah). Ḥafṣah refused. However, when she passed away in 41 AH/665 CE, Marwān retrieved it and had it destroyed.¹⁸⁷ Marwān stated, “I only did that because whatever was in it was already written and preserved in the [‘Uthmānic] *muṣḥaf*. And I feared that time would pass and people would start to have misgivings about this [Ḥafṣah’s] *ṣuḥuf* or would say, “It contained something that has not been written.”¹⁸⁸

The result of the ‘Uthmānic codification is that Muslims of all provinces began adhering to a single agreed-upon text in their recitation of the Qur’an, abandoning

¹⁸³ Ibn Baṭṭāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Maktabah Rushd, 2003), 10:226.

¹⁸⁴ In the account of his involvement in the compilation, Mālik ibn Abī ‘Āmir (the grandfather of Imam Malik) states that ‘Uthmān wrote to the people of the various provinces: “I have completed such and such a task and have erased what was in my possession, so erase what is in yours.” Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 205–6.

¹⁸⁵ Al-A‘ẓamī, *History of the Qur’anic Text*, 97 and Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 229. Jabal also cites the narrations that speak of manuscripts being gathered and buried near the minbar of the Prophet’s Mosque in Madīnah. Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 231; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 244.

¹⁸⁶ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 246.

¹⁸⁷ Abu ‘Ubayd, *Kitāb al-imān*, 2:98; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 204, 212; Makkī, *al-Ibānah*, 61; see also al-Juday‘, *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 121–22. Reportedly, he requested it shortly after Ḥafṣah’s funeral (*janāzah*), just after they had finished burying her.

¹⁸⁸ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 212.

those readings that did not conform to it.¹⁸⁹ Oddly, Shady Hekmat Nasser refers to the codification process undertaken by ‘Uthmān as a “failure” because it “was not able to produce a single unified Reading of the Qur’an.”¹⁹⁰ However, as previously discussed, there is no evidence that ‘Uthmān mandated for Muslims to recite in only one *qirā’ah*.¹⁹¹ Rather, Muslims were allowed to continue to recite the way they had been taught so long as their readings conformed to the authorized text. While it is true that differences remained in the *qirā’āt*, there was now a common reference point to ensure that readings were sound. So long as a person was reciting according to the way they had learned from the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, and the reading conformed to the codex, their reading was to be considered valid. This removed the problem of Muslims rejecting the validity of other Muslims’ readings.

Nasser’s assessment could not be any further from reality; the very fact that every non-‘Uthmānic copy of the Qur’an on the face of the earth vanished with scarcely a trace¹⁹² is the greatest testament to the success of the ‘Uthmānic project. Shortly after the ‘Uthmānic project in 25 AH, Muslims everywhere around the world were reciting the exact same text,¹⁹³ and this has continued up until the present, more than 14 centuries later. The reality of the matter is that the ‘Uthmānic project is an astonishingly successful act the likes of which human history has rarely witnessed.

¹⁸⁹ Makkī, *al-Ibānah*, 65.

¹⁹⁰ Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur’ān: The Problem of Tawatur and the Emergence of Shawadhdh* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 229. The incorrectness of this claim has been discussed by Zakareeya Bakhsh, *Misconceptions about the Qur’an and Qirā’āt: A Critical Analysis of Shady Nasser’s views* (master’s thesis, IOU, July 2021), 39–45.

¹⁹¹ There is a narration in Ibn Abī Dāwūd’s *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif* that states that a group of protestors from Egypt arrived in Madīnah with a litany of complaints, including that ‘Uthmān had erased copies of the Qur’an, to which he replied, “Recite in any *ḥarf* you wish.” In their respective editions of the text, Salīm al-Hilālī and Muḥib al-Dīn Wa‘iz point out that this narration is disconnected and that this particular statement appears to contradict the objective to unify the Muslims upon one text. However, if this statement is correct, another possible interpretation is that ‘Uthmān allowed Muslims to recite in any *ḥarf* so long as it did not contradict the text of the ‘Uthmānic codex. For al-Hilālī’s comments, see Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 239 and for Muḥib al-Dīn, see Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, (Beirut: Dar al-Basha’ir al-Islamiya, 2002), 244–45.

¹⁹² One possible “trace” of a non-‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* is the undertext of the San‘ā palimpsest discussed below.

¹⁹³ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss some of the political factors involved and the role of al-Ḥajjāj in eliminating manuscripts that disagreed with the ‘Uthmānic codex, for instance. However, as Nicolai Sinai notes, al-Ḥajjāj’s role was regional at most, and therefore the empire-wide acceptance of the ‘Uthmānic codex ultimately came about from widespread uncoerced grassroots approval “from the bottom up” in tandem with official measures. See Nicolai Sinai, “When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part I,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no. 2 (2014): 285.

Al-A‘ẓamī concludes:

The unanimous agreement to dispose of (or amend) all earlier copies made ‘Uthmān’s script and spelling the new standard; from then on every Muslim learning the Qur’an had to conform with the ‘Uthmāni text. Where a person’s previous schooling was at odds with this text, he was not granted leave to recite or teach in that divergent manner. So what could such a person do? Attending an official reciter’s circle was the simplest solution, to learn the Book in accordance with the conditions laid and thereby regain the privileges of teaching and recitation. ‘Uthmān’s unparalleled success in this regard is proof positive that his actions echoed the voice of the community.¹⁹⁴

Thus, ‘Uthmān’s instruction to burn or amend Qur’anic manuscripts that differed from the official codices reflected the community’s agreement upon the ‘Uthmānic codex. Rather than undermining the text’s preservation, this historical event decisively secured it.

The position of the companions towards the ‘Uthmānic codex

The success of the ‘Uthmānic project was amplified by the widespread approval of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said, “Do not speak of ‘Uthmān except with what is good, for I swear by Allah that he did not do what he did with the *maṣāḥif* except with complete approval from the rest of us.”¹⁹⁵ In another report he said, “May Allah have mercy on ‘Uthmān! Were I in charge, I would have done as he did.”¹⁹⁶ Muṣ‘ab ibn Sa‘d (d. 103 AH), the son of Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, said, “I was present among the people when ‘Uthmān burned the other *maṣāḥif* and they were pleased with his action, and no one opposed it.”¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the unanimous consensus (*ijmā‘*) of the Prophetic companions upon the ‘Uthmānic codex renders it as indubitable and incontestable as any other fundamental component of the religion. Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321 AH) comments:

¹⁹⁴ Al-A‘ẓamī, *History*, 97.

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 207.

¹⁹⁶ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 208.

¹⁹⁷ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 170. ‘Abdullāh Juday‘ classified it as authentic, *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 120.

Zayd ibn Thābit, the Prophet’s scribe, wrote the codex for ‘Uthmān and the companions of the Prophet ﷺ agreed upon that, thus it became *ijmā’* (unanimous consensus). And transmission by consensus is a decisive proof (*ḥujjah*) the likes through which Islam has been transmitted to us such that we are able to learn its teachings and such that we learn the number of prayers and the like.¹⁹⁸

Essentially, what al-Ṭaḥāwī is stating is that everything we know about Islam was transmitted to us through the very same community that came to collective agreement upon the ‘Uthmānic codex. Epistemologically, this is the greatest proof of the veracity of the text. This generation is the same one that learned the Qur’an directly from the Prophet ﷺ and transmitted to us all of the teachings of our faith. Their collective agreement is therefore unassailable and binding.

Nonetheless, there are a number of narrations that require clarification due to mentioning displeasure or disagreement on the part of ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 32 AH). These narrations have been examined and analyzed in great detail by a number of scholars.¹⁹⁹ The credentials of Ibn Mas‘ūd with respect to knowledge and recitation of the Qur’an are well known. Ibn Mas‘ūd was the first Muslim to ever recite the Qur’an in public. His recitation of the Qur’an was praised by the Prophet ﷺ himself for being “as fresh as how it was revealed.”²⁰⁰ And he is one of the four from whom the Prophet ﷺ told others to learn the Qur’an.²⁰¹ This being the case, what was the reason for his opposition and what exactly was he opposed to?

¹⁹⁸ Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Mushkil al-āthār (Tuhfat al-akhyar)*, 8:159.

¹⁹⁹ See for instance al-Ṭāsān, *Tahqīq mawqif al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd min al-jam‘ al-‘Uthmānī* (Riyadh: Maktabah Malik Fahd, 1435 AH); al-Ja‘farī, *al-‘Adl wal-iḥsān fī taḥrīr i‘tirāḍāt ibn Mas‘ūd ‘alā muṣḥaf ‘Uthmān: Dirāsah taḥlīliyyah naqdiyyah* (Kuwait: Dar al-Zāhiriyyah lil-Nashr wa-Tawzī‘, 2022). For a critical analysis and overview see Ammar Khatib, *Qirā‘ah taqwīmiyyah lil-qawl bi-ruju‘ abn Mas‘ūd ‘an mawqifihi min al-jam‘ al-‘Uthmānī wa muwāfiqatihi al-jamā‘ah*, Markaz al-Tafsīr li-Dirāsāt al-Qur’āniyyah, February 16, 2022, <https://tafsir.net/article/5407/qra-at-tqwmyt-llqwl-brjuw-abn-ms-wd-an-mwqfh-mn-al-jm-al-thmany-wmwafqt-h-al-jma-h>.

²⁰⁰ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 138.

²⁰¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 4999.

In his work *al-Maṣāḥif*, Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316 AH) devoted a chapter to the subject, entitling it, “The displeasure of Ibn Mas‘ūd towards that,” meaning the ‘Uthmānic project.²⁰² Careful review of the narrations in question demonstrates that Ibn Mas‘ūd’s displeasure was on two counts: (1) he was excluded from the committee that compiled the ‘Uthmānic codex and (2) he did not wish to give up his personal *muṣḥaf* to be destroyed nor to abandon the reading to which he was most accustomed.²⁰³

As for the **first reason**, Ibn Mas‘ūd felt unfairly excluded from the codification process itself. He was certainly one of the most learned companions of the Prophet ﷺ with respect to the Qur’an, and so he was incensed at the fact that the project was overseen instead by Zayd ibn Thābit, almost 20 years his junior. In addition, ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd was from the *Muhājirīn*, those who migrated with the Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Madīnah, having experienced persecution in Makkah and having sacrificed everything out of their commitment to Islam. Meanwhile Zayd ibn Thābit was a Madīnan Muslim; i.e., of the *Anṣār*. Being upset about the matter, Ibn Mas‘ūd made some uncharacteristically harsh statements. Al-Zuhrī (d. 124 AH) reports that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd disliked Zayd ibn Thābit copying the *maṣāḥif*, and he said, “O Muslims! [How is it that] I am removed from recording the *muṣḥaf* and it is overseen by a man, by Allah, when I accepted Islam he was but in the loins of a disbelieving man”—referring to Zayd ibn Thābit.²⁰⁴

The companions of the Prophet ﷺ were human beings and experienced human emotions. Abū Bakr Al-Anbārī (d. 328 AH) was of the opinion that Ibn Mas‘ūd said this in a moment of anger and later recanted his statement after his anger subsided. Al-Anbārī writes:

The objection made by ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd arose in a state of anger and it is not to be acted upon nor taken from him. There is no doubt that once his anger passed, he was satisfied with the excellence of the decision of

²⁰² Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 172.

²⁰³ See also Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal*, 286; Taqī ‘Uthmāni, *Approach to the Qur’anic Sciences* (Karachi: Darul Isha’at, 2000), 156.

²⁰⁴ *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3104. Al-Zuhrī reports that many of the senior companions disliked what Ibn Mas‘ūd had said.

‘Uthmān and the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and concurred with their agreement and abandoned his opposition to them.²⁰⁵

Moreover, as al-Anbārī also notes,²⁰⁶ the virtue for which Zayd was selected was that he had memorized the entirety of the Qur’an during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, while Ibn Mas‘ūd learned seventy some *sūrah*s from the Prophet ﷺ and the remainder after the Prophet ﷺ passed away. As mentioned earlier, Zayd ibn Thābit had also undertaken the compilation during the time of Abū Bakr and therefore his expertise and experience was well-established. That, along with his availability and young age, qualified him to lead the ‘Uthmānic project.²⁰⁷ Abū al-‘Abbās al-Qurṭubī (d. 656 AH) also points out that the ‘Uthmānic committee was tasked with writing the Qur’an according to the dialect of Quraysh, while Ibn Mas‘ūd was from Hudhayl and was known to recite in the dialect of Hudhayl.²⁰⁸ Another important factor was simply logistical; as al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH) pointed out, Ibn Mas‘ūd was in Kūfah, not Madīnah, when ‘Uthmān undertook the codification process.²⁰⁹ It would have not been ideal to delay the entire project for Ibn Mas‘ūd to travel to Madīnah, particularly when the matter had already resulted in conflict, as identified by Ḥudhayfah.

As for the **second reason** for Ibn Mas‘ūd’s opposition, it was not because he objected to the reading of the ‘Uthmānic codex itself but rather because he wished to continue reciting according to his own reading, and he did not wish to surrender his *muṣḥaf* to be destroyed. As Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH) astutely observed:

No one disagreed in this matter except ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd. He refused to discard the reading that he possessed which differed from the ‘Uthmānic codices. He said, “O People of Iraq! O People of Kūfah! Conceal the

²⁰⁵ Cited in Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH), *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assasāt al-Risālah, 2006), 1:88.

²⁰⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 1:88.

²⁰⁷ It is interesting to note that there are no reported statements of criticism from Ibn Mas‘ūd concerning Zayd’s appointment by Abū Bakr. This would support the view that the second reason for Ibn Mas‘ūd’s opposition (the imposition of the ‘Uthmānic reading upon him and the request to eliminate his *muṣḥaf*) was in fact the stronger reason for his opposition.

²⁰⁸ Abu al-‘Abbās al-Qurṭubī (d. 656 AH), *al-Mufhim limā ashkala min Talkhīs Kitāb Muslim* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathīr, 1996), 6:374.

²⁰⁹ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā* (Beirut: Mu’assasāt al-Risalah, 1982), 1:488.

maṣāḥif which you have in your possession and withhold them. For verily Allah states, ‘And whoever withholds anything will come forth with what he has withheld on the Day of Judgment.’²¹⁰ So meet Allah with the *maṣāḥif*.”

²¹¹ So consider carefully Ibn Mas‘ūd’s words because he did not disagree with compiling the ‘Uthmānic codex but rather he disagreed concerning another matter.²¹²

What al-Shāṭibī has noted is that Ibn Mas‘ūd never expressed disapproval of the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*’s compilation, nor did he deny the authenticity of the reading upon which it was compiled. In fact, we do not have a single statement from him criticizing a reading that is found in the ‘Uthmānic codex. Instead, what appears to be the case is that Ibn Mas‘ūd did not wish to surrender his personal copy of the Qur’an to be burnt. He did not wish to abandon those readings that could not be accommodated by the ‘Uthmānic text, as he had learned them from the Prophet ﷺ and taught them for decades. In other words, Ibn Mas‘ūd refused the obligation to adhere to the ‘Uthmānic text, but did not otherwise deny the validity of the compilation or its reading. In support of this view, one may note that Ibn Mas‘ūd stated, “Whose *qirā’ah* is it that you command me to recite? Verily, I recited directly to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ more than 70 chapters of the Qur’an and the companions of Allah’s Messenger certainly know that I am the most knowledgeable of them when it comes to the Book of Allah. And if I knew of anyone more knowledgeable than me, I would travel to him.”²¹³ Another point of

²¹⁰ Qur’an 3:161.

²¹¹ *Jami’ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3104.

²¹² Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Iṭīṣām* (Beirut: DKI, 2016), 360.

²¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2462. In another narration, Ibn Mas‘ūd stated, “How can you command me to recite according to the *qirā’ah* of Zayd after I learned seventy some *sūrah*s from the mouth of Allah’s Messenger while Zayd had two braids, playing among other boys?” *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, nos. 5063–64. Another narration states, “while Zayd was a Jew with two braids” (Ibn Shabbha, *Tārīkh al-Madīnah*, 3:1008); however, this is incorrect as Zayd grew up as a Muslim. See Safwan ‘Adnān Dāwūdī, *Zayd ibn Thābit: Kātib al-waḥy wa jāmi’ al-Qur’ān* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1999), 26 and al-Hilālī’s comments in Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 185. Michael Lecker considers the description an allusion to sidelocks (Hebrew: *payot*) customary for Jewish boys, and considers Zayd to have been brought up by learning to read and write at a Jewish school after the death of his father in the battle of Bu‘āth; however, Lecker draws upon a number of unreliable and sectarian sources. Michael Lecker, “Zayd B. Thābit, ‘A Jew with Two Sidelocks’: Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56, no. 4 (1997): 259–73.

evidence is that Ibn Mas‘ūd never expressed disagreement with Abū Bakr’s compilation since it was never imposed upon him.²¹⁴

Furthermore, one may note that many scholars were of the view that Ibn Mas‘ūd later recanted his position. Ibn Abī Dāwūd himself alludes to this by titling a chapter, “Ibn Mas‘ūd’s [subsequent] approval of ‘Uthmān’s compiling the *maṣāḥif*,” in which he includes a conciliatory narration from Ibn Mas‘ūd affirming the validity of readings according to the seven *aḥruf*.²¹⁵ The historian Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571 AH) said, “It was narrated that Ibn Mas‘ūd later agreed and adhered to and approved of ‘Uthmān’s decision and revised his previous position.”²¹⁶ Al-Dhahabī (d. 748 AH) said: “It was reported that Ibn Mas‘ūd agreed and followed ‘Uthmān.”²¹⁷ In *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH) said it was reported that Ibn Mas‘ūd recanted.²¹⁸ However, if one adopts the view of al-Shāṭibī, then since Ibn Mas‘ūd never objected to the correctness of the ‘Uthmānic codex in the first place, there was nothing to recant. It is also possible that Ibn Mas‘ūd was not initially pleased with the obligation of adhering to a codex that didn’t favor his reading, but after his anger passed, he recognized the importance of the ‘Uthmānic project.

Ibn Mas‘ūd’s massive influence in Kūfah slowed the transition to the ‘Uthmānic codex. The early scholar al-A‘mash (d. 148 AH) is reported to have said, “I reached Kūfah, and the reading of Zayd was not with them except as the reading of ‘Abdullāh is with you today: no one recited it except for one or two people.”²¹⁹ Other companions expressed some hesitation in changing their reading as well. When ‘Alqamah ibn Qayṣ (d. 62 AH) traveled to Greater Syria, he met the companion Abū al-Dardā’, and the latter asked ‘Alqamah about how Ibn Mas‘ūd

²¹⁴ Muhammad Bāzmūl, “*al-Aḥādīth al-wāridah fī al-‘arḍ al-akhīrah*,” *Majallah Jāmi‘ah Umm al-Qurra li-‘Ulūm al-Sharī‘ah wa al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyah* 62 (Sha‘bān, 1435), 83.

²¹⁵ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 189–94.

²¹⁶ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 33:140.

²¹⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā* (Beirut: Mu‘assasāt al-Risalah, 1982), 1:488.

²¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, 68. Note, however, that later, Ibn Kathīr points out that the particular narration cited by Ibn Abī Dāwūd is insufficient as evidence that Ibn Mas‘ūd changed his position. Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, 83.

²¹⁹ Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-sab‘ah fī al-qirā’āt*, 67. See also Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 623; and Ramon Harvey, “The Legal Epistemology of Qur’anic Variants: The Readings of Ibn Mas‘ūd in Kufan Fiqh and the Ḥanafī Madhhab,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017): 72–101, 20, endnote 8.

recited *Sūrah al-Layl*. 'Alqamah responded that Ibn Mas'ūd recited verse 3 as “*wal-dhakari wal-unthā*” (and by the male and the female) instead of “*wa mā khalaqa al-dhakara wal-unthā*” (and by that which created the male and the female), whereupon Abū al-Dardā' testified that he had learned the verse in the same way from the Prophet ﷺ. People tried their best to convince him to change his reading.²²⁰ Yet, he did not wish to do so.²²¹ Understandably, the way the Prophet ﷺ had taught him to recite the verse was something dear to him that he did not want to forsake. At the same time, Abū al-Dardā' did not approve of the staunch opposition shown by Ibn Mas'ūd, saying, “We used to consider 'Abdullāh [Ibn Mas'ūd] to be soft-hearted, so why would he behave impulsively with the rulers?”²²² Another companion, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, sought to compromise. When the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* was sent to him, he said, “Whatever you find additional in my *muṣḥaf*, do not remove it, and whatever is missing, then write it.”²²³

From the foregoing discussion it should be evident that none of these reports undermine the unanimous consensus of the companions upon the authenticity and correctness of the 'Uthmānic codex. Instead, it shows us that a few companions wished to continue reading as they had before and, quite understandably, did not wish to forsake the readings they had learned directly from the Prophet ﷺ.

Due to the success of the 'Uthmānic codex, all other readings eventually became practically extinct.²²⁴ They would continue to exist only as scattered narrations in the literary sources of the Islamic tradition, in the knowledge of specialists in *qirā'āt*, and in some manuscript sources (see discussion on the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest below).

²²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 3761.

²²¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 824a; *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2939.

²²² Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 188. One may also note that Abū al-Dardā' was from the *Anṣār*, hence he did not share the same experience as 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd.

²²³ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 246.

²²⁴ In the time of al-Ḥajjāj, three persons were ordered to search for and destroy any *muṣḥaf* that differed from the 'Uthmānic codex: 'Āṣim al-Jahdarī, Nājiya bin Rumḥ, and 'Alī ibn Aṣma'. They were to compensate the owner with sixty dirhams. See Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: DKI, n.d.), 37. One of the *maṣāḥif* that appears to have escaped this fate is that of al-Ḥārith bin Suwayd al-Taymī, one of the companions of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd that was buried during the days of al-Ḥajjāj and that al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH) later relied upon to make several observations about the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd. Al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, 3:68.

The regional codices and their differences

The committee of ‘Uthmān did not transcribe only one codex. Rather, several copies were made and these were distributed to different lands within the Islamic empire. Anas ibn Mālīk narrated, “When they had copied the manuscripts, ‘Uthmān sent one *muṣḥaf* from those *maṣāḥif* that they had copied to every province.”²²⁵ This was directly related to the goal behind the entire project—to unify the Muslim *ummah* on one *muṣḥaf* in order to eliminate the disputes that had emerged between Muslims reciting according to different *aḥruf*. The success of the project was therefore contingent upon all Muslims following the official copies of the ‘Uthmānic text sent to them.

A. The number of regional codices and their destinations

How many official codices were written and to which regions were they sent? The minimum number agreed upon by scholars is four; one remained in Madīnah while the rest were sent to Basra, Kūfah, and Shām (Greater Syria.)²²⁶ Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) writes, “The majority of scholars are of the view that when ‘Uthmān wrote the *muṣḥaf*, he made four copies and sent one to each region, so he sent one to Kūfah, one to Basra, one to Shām, and kept one with him.”²²⁷ A number of scholars, including al-Ja‘barī (d. 732 AH) and Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 AH) also distinguished between the original codex that ‘Uthmān kept for himself and the copy that ‘Uthmān made for Madīnah.²²⁸ Other regions are mentioned by Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (d. 255 AH), “When ‘Uthmān compiled the Qur’an and wrote the *maṣāḥif*, he transcribed seven codices. And he sent one to Makkah, one to Shām, one to Yemen, one to Bahrain, one to Basra, one to Kūfah, and he kept one

²²⁵ *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3104.

²²⁶ Unlike the other codices identified by city, the Syrian codex is usually identified by the region as simply the codex of *Shām*. However, there are some reports, such as that of Abū Ḥātim that identify the city as Ḥims, where al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad was stationed. Cf. Omar Hamdan, “*Mashru‘ al-maṣāḥif al-‘Uthmāniyah*,” 57. Hythem Sidky supports this by citing evidence from the Ḥimsī reading tradition as well as corroborative manuscript evidence and a supporting account recorded by Sayf ibn ‘Umar al-Tamīmī (d. 108 AH). See Sidky, “On the Regionality of Qur’ānic Codices,” 171–74.

²²⁷ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni‘*, 162–63.

²²⁸ Al-Ja‘barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid*, 1:369; Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr* (N.p.: Matbah Tijariya al-Kubra, n.d.), 1:7.

in Madīnah.²²⁹ Ibn Kathīr (d. 773 AH) also states the same but substitutes Egypt for Bahrain.²³⁰ Seven is the number supported by Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib as well.²³¹ Ibn al-Jazarī himself prefers the opinion of eight, taking the seven mentioned by Abū Ḥātim and adding 'Uthmān's personal codex.²³² Al-Ya'qūbī (d. 292 AH) does not include the personal codex but mentions all the aforementioned regions and adds *al-Jazīrah*,²³³ for a total of nine.²³⁴ These accounts may be reconciled by suggesting that the codices were dispatched in stages.²³⁵ The initial copies dispatched were indeed four including Basra, Kūfah, and Shām alongside the one kept in Madīnah, and these regions were prioritized because they were the regions where Muslims had specifically experienced conflict over their differing readings, as Ḥudhayfah had told 'Uthmān. Subsequently, the other Muslim lands mentioned acquired their own official copies.

Note that some later sources mention that 'Uthmān sent a reciter with each *muṣḥaf*. Al-Ja'barī (d. 732 AH) cites an account without an *isnād* which states: “'Uthmān instructed Zayd ibn Thābit to recite according to the Madīnan codex, he sent 'Abdullāh ibn al-Sā'ib with the Makkī codex, Mughīrah ibn Abī Shihāb with the Syrian codex, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī with the Kūfan codex, and 'Āmir ibn 'Abd Qays with the Basran codex.”²³⁶ However, this report is not found in earlier extant sources and it is not necessary to assume that this took place as there were already eminent companions of the Prophet ﷺ in each of those cities teaching the Qur'an.

²²⁹ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 245.

²³⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wal-nihāyah* (Cairo: Dar Hijr, 2003), 10:394.

²³¹ Makkī, *al-Ibānah*, 65.

²³² Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1:7.

²³³ This term used to refer to the region of Upper Mesopotamia, the northernmost region between the Tigris and the Euphrates, including Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, and Turkey.

²³⁴ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Najaf: Manshurat al-Maktabah al-Haydariyah, 1964), 2:160. The nine include the four agreed upon locations (Kufa, Basra, Sham, and Madinah) and then five additional locations (Makkah, Yemen, Bahrain, Egypt, and al-Jazīrah).

²³⁵ Jabal, *Wathāqah naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 222–23.

²³⁶ Al-Ja'barī, *Jamīlah arbāb al-marāṣid*, 370. According to the editor, the Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377 AH) cited by al-Ja'barī may be, however Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad considers it to be Abū 'Alī al-Ahwāzī (d. 446 AH). Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī wa juhūdhu fi al-igrah wa ta'līm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (conference paper, Amman, Jordan, 1427 AH), 36. See also al-Marghānī, *Dalīl al-ḥayrān 'alā mawrid al-dhamān* (Kuwait: Markaz al-Qirā'āt, 2011), 44–45.

B. The degree of similarity between the regional codices

How carefully and precisely did the scribes produce these regional codices? The answer is that manuscript evidence has proven that the copying process was *extremely precise*. We can see this with respect to spelling conventions (orthography). Sometimes the same word is spelled differently in different places in the Qur’an, and in some cases those orthographic idiosyncrasies are replicated across manuscripts. The contemporary researcher Marijn van Putten conducted an evaluation of the spelling of the word *ni‘mat* (blessing) in the Qur’an.²³⁷ This word occurs 23 times in the Qur’an and is sometimes spelled نعمة and sometimes نعمت, a variation that is commonly encountered with other feminine nouns as well (e.g., رحمة/رحمت, كلمة/كلمت, etc.). One would expect such trivial spelling variations to exhibit no pattern, and yet examining 14 early Qur’anic manuscripts (predominantly from the first or second century *hijrī*), Van Putten demonstrated that there is remarkable consistency and agreement between manuscripts across نعمت/نعمة spellings. Thus, for example, 3:103, 5:11, 14:28, 14:34, etc. are always spelled نعمت in all the manuscripts, while 2:211, 5:7, 14:6, 16:18, etc. are always spelled نعمة. Van Putten writes:

Such orthographic idiosyncrasies allow us to show that the Qur’anic manuscripts go back to a single written archetype from which all of these documents were copied. If two manuscripts do not descend from copies of a single archetype, we would not expect the same spelling to occur in the exact same location time and time again. However, this is exactly what we find: highly idiosyncratic spellings occur again and again in the same spelling in the exact same location across all early Qur’anic manuscripts. Such variation can only be the result of precise written transmission.²³⁸

Thus, these ‘Uthmānic codices must have been produced through a very high fidelity process with meticulous review to allow for such patterns to be replicated in the subsequent generations of *maṣāḥif*. We have reports from the earliest Muslim

²³⁷ Marijn van Putten, “‘The Grace of God’ as Evidence for a Written Uthmanic Archetype: The Importance of Shared Orthographic Idiosyncrasies,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82 (2019): 271–88.

²³⁸ Van Putten, “The Grace of God,” 274–75. He further writes, “There is only one possible explanation for the strong agreement across the many different Quran manuscripts with the two possible spellings of *ni‘mat*: there must have been a single written archetype from which all Quranic manuscripts of the Uthmanic text type are descended” (279).

community that take the spelling conventions in the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* to be authoritative. Imam Mālik (d. 179 AH) was asked whether it was acceptable for people to write the *maṣāḥif* according to the spelling conventions of their time, and replied that they should write it according to the original spelling.²³⁹ Some scholars clarified this by noting that there is flexibility allowed in orthographic conventions on certain matters (such as soft vowels) but not others.²⁴⁰

Note that one must be careful to distinguish between two different but related questions. The first is whether it is required to adhere to the *rasm* (orthography) of the ‘Uthmānic text. The second is whether the *rasm* is *tawqīfī* (based on Prophetic instruction) or *isṭilāḥī* (based on the customary spelling practices and orthographic conventions adopted by the Prophet’s companions). Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad notes that confusion between these two matters resulted in the claim that the *rasm* ‘Uthmānī is *tawqīfī*.²⁴¹ We do encounter this view mentioned by scholars as early as Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī (d. 454 AH).²⁴² Nonetheless, the stronger view is that the *rasm* was *isṭilāḥī*; i.e., that the companions merely adopted the spelling practices to which they were accustomed, and this accounts for some degree of variation.²⁴³

If the *rasm* is *isṭilāḥī*, is it still a requirement to follow it? On the one hand, the majority of scholars said that following the *rasm* remains an obligation. On the other hand, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 AH) argued that following the *rasm* of the ‘Uthmānic codex is not a requirement.²⁴⁴ Some scholars sought to adopt a middle position, stating that while it is not binding upon all people to follow the *rasm*, scholars of Islam should nevertheless endeavor to study and preserve knowledge of the ‘Uthmānic *rasm*.²⁴⁵ Indeed, we do find Qur’anic manuscripts that did not adopt the *rasm* of the ‘Uthmānic codex, such as the *muṣḥaf* of Ibn

²³⁹ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*’, 165. Al-Dānī comments that there is no difference of opinion upon this matter, discussed further below.

²⁴⁰ Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī, *Ma’ānī al-aḥruf al-sab’ah* (N.p.: Dār al-Nawādir, 2011), 466.

²⁴¹ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān al-Karīm bayna al-maṣādir wal-maṣāḥif*, 24 and *al-Muyassar fī ‘ilm rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 47. He observes that ‘Abd al-Azīz al-Ḍabbāgh (d. 1132 AH) appears to be one of the first to argue that the *rasm* is *tawqīfī*. See also ‘Abd al-Qayyūm al-Sindhī, *Jam’ al-Qur’ān*, 393–94.

²⁴² Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī, *Ma’ānī al-aḥruf al-sab’ah*, 467.

²⁴³ Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, 98–100; Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dar El Ilm Lilmalayin, 1977), 277; al-Juday’, *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 151; al-Ṭayyār, *al-Muḥarrar*, 223; Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *al-Muyassar fī ‘ilm rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 49.

²⁴⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Instiṣār*, 548–49.

²⁴⁵ Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dar Turath, 1945), 1:379–80; Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith*, 280.

al-Bawwāb (d. 413 AH) written in 391 AH, among others.²⁴⁶ However, the strongest position is the majority position: adhering to the *rasm* is an obligation due to the consensus of the companions upon it and the intimate connection between the *rasm* and the permitted reading traditions (*qirā'āt*).

C. The degree of difference between the regional codices

Notwithstanding the incredible degree of consistency between copies, we also know that, in very particular locations, the regional 'Uthmānic codices were not completely identical. The regional codices contained a small number of very slight differences that Muslim scholars devoted themselves to studying and enumerating. Some of these differences consisted of variations in spelling convention with no difference in pronunciation (e.g., الصراط or الصرط), while others related to different readings that existed among the companions of the Prophet ﷺ due to the different *ahruf*. Narrations listing these differences were compiled by the famous reciters themselves, including *Kitāb ikhtilāf maṣāḥif al-Shām wal-Hijāz wal-'Irāq* by Ibn 'Āmir (d. 118 AH), *Kitāb ikhtilāf maṣāḥif ahl al-Madīnah wa ahl al-Kūfah wa ahl al-Baṣrah* by al-Kisā'ī (d. 189 AH), *Kitāb Ikhtilāf al-Maṣāḥif* by Khalaf ibn Hishām al-Bazzār (d. 229 AH). Another work entitled *Kitāb ikhtilāf ahl al-Kūfah wal-Baṣrah wal-Shām fī al-maṣāḥif* was compiled by the grammarian al-Farrā' (d. 207 AH). While the aforementioned works are no longer extant, the data concerning the variants has been detailed in extant works including Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām's (d. 224 AH) *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, Ibn Abī Dāwūd's (d. 316 AH) *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, Abū Bakr al-Anbārī's (d. 328 AH) *Marsūm al-khaṭṭ*, Abū al-'Abbās al-Mahdawī's (d. 440 AH) *Hijā' maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, Abū 'Amr al-Dānī's (d. 444 AH) *al-Muqni'*, and al-Andarābī's (d. 470 AH) *al-Īdāḥ fī al-qirā'āt*.²⁴⁷ As shall be discussed below, these works contain explicit statements affirming that these variants are all valid Qur'anic readings authentically transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In other words, they already existed as Qur'anic readings prior to the transcription of the codices.

²⁴⁶ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm bayna al-maṣādir wal-maṣāḥif*, 32.

²⁴⁷ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 693–94 and *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān bayna al-maṣādir wal-maṣāḥif*, 20–21. See Al-Dani, *al-Muqni'*, 571.

For the four codices unanimously agreed to be 'Uthmānic, al-Dānī lists a total of 36 points of difference,²⁴⁸ an astronomically small quantity in a text exceeding 320,000 letters.²⁴⁹ This fraction is a hundredth of a percent (0.01%), which means the regional codices are 99.99% identical. The companions of the Prophet ﷺ and the early reciters of the Qur'an were fully aware of these differences. Abū 'Ubayd reports that the differences between the Syrian codex and the 'Irāqī codex were enumerated by the companion Abū al-Dardā' (d. 35 AH) himself.²⁵⁰ Abū 'Ubayd points out that the differences between the regional codices almost all amount to single-letter differences, such as an additional و (for example, و يقول in 5:53 in the Kūfan and Basran codices versus يقول in the Madīnan and Syrian codices), or the presence of an ا (for example, او ان in 40:26 in the Kūfan and Basran codices versus و ان in the Madīnan and Syrian codices). Aside from such single-letter differences, the only other difference among the four codices is the two-letter word هو in 57:24 (فإن الله هو الغني الحميد) in the Kūfan and Basran codices, which is not present in the Madīnan and Syrian codices.²⁵¹ After enumerating these differences, Abū 'Ubayd states, "And as for all of these variants, then as I informed you, it is not permissible for anyone to deny or reject any of them, for they are all considered by us to be the Divine speech of Allah, and as such, the prayer of one who recites them is sound."

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These differences are not simply a matter of historical interest, as Muslims have continued to recite all of them in the form of the *qirā'āt*. Thus, 5:53 is recited without the و by the Madīnan reciters (Nāfi' and Abū Ja'far), Makkan reciter (Ibn Kathīr), and Syrian reciter (Ibn 'Āmir) as per their codices, while it is recited with the و by the Basran reciters (Abū 'Amr and Ya'qūb) and Kūfan reciters (Ḥamzah, 'Āṣim, al-Kisā'ī, Khalaf) as per the Basran and Kūfan codices.²⁵³ That the variants

²⁴⁸ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 571–602; Cook, "Stemma of the Regional Codices," 91.

²⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: DKI, 1419 AH), 1:15.

²⁵⁰ Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 2:158.

²⁵¹ Al-Dānī also mentions the Makkan variant of an additional من in 9:100.

²⁵² Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 162.

²⁵³ It is important to note that in some select instances, reciters will read according to a codex other than their own region. For instance, Ḥafṣ recites 43:71 and 36:35 with an additional • although it is omitted in the Kufan codex. This relates to the practice of *ikhtiyār*, selecting a preferred reading from a number of readings that one has learned from one's teacher. Moreover, the Basran reciter Abū 'Amr was asked why he recited عيادي with ا ي in 43:68 when the Basran codex did not have one, and he replied that he followed the *maṣāḥif* of Medina in this regard. Al-Dānī cites this and numerous other examples in order to emphasize the mistake of those who simply look at the readings

mentioned in the codices are also present in the *qirā’āt* confirms that these differences are attested in oral transmission from the Prophet ﷺ himself, a topic analyzed in greater detail below.

D. Why did the regional codices differ?

If the goal of the ‘Uthmānic compilation was to unify the *ummah* upon one *muṣḥaf* and to eliminate the confusion and conflict surrounding reading with different *aḥruf*, then why would ‘Uthmān and his committee include a small number of differences in the regional codices? And what was the origin of these differences? Muslim scholars have clarified that these variants related to authentically transmitted readings of the Qur’an from the Prophet ﷺ. We have already noted Abū ‘Ubayd’s statement that all these variants are *kalām Allāh* (Divine speech). Likewise, Abū Bakr al-Udfuwī (d. 388 AH) and Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 437 AH) mention that scholars affirmed that the variants between the regional codices belong to the differences of the seven *aḥruf*, and that the companions “relied on each reading (*ḥarf*) they heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recite in two ways, so in some codices they wrote one way and in other codices they wrote another, so that both ways would be available to the Muslims.”²⁵⁴ Therefore, all the regional variants are authentic readings from the Prophet ﷺ.²⁵⁵ Ibn Idrīs (d. c. 400 AH) writes concerning the isolated variant of the Syrian codex which omits the initial و in 2:116:

And both readings are correct, and this [variant] was not a result of negligence from the companions (may Allah be pleased with them) as some ignoramuses may presume. But rather they wrote both ways deliberately because Allah revealed the verse both ways, so they wrote it with a *waw* in some of the codices and omitted it from the other, in order to serve as

of various regional reciters and presume that those are the same variants found in their regional codices. Al-Dānī, 602–4.

²⁵⁴ Al-Udfuwī, *al-Istighnā’ fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 282; Makkī, *al-Hidāyah ilā bulūgh al-nihāyah*, 4:3133.

²⁵⁵ Indeed, in a society based on an oral culture as opposed to a written culture, it is much more reasonable to consider the reciters of the Qur’an and the scribes to have been resorting to an existing oral precedent, rather than dispensing with orality in favor of following alleged scribal errors.

notification [of those two readings]. And this explanation applies to every case of addition or omission of letters in the codices.²⁵⁶

The author of *Kitāb al-Mabānī* (approx. 425 AH) writes:

And the evidence that these variants between the codices were written correctly and with certainty, deliberately and intentionally, and to preserve both readings for the Muslims which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited on two different occasions at different times, and that those instances of addition, subtraction, or substitution in the text are not due to forgetfulness (*sahw*) of the transmitter nor omission by a negligent scribe, [the evidence] is that the readings are all sound and eloquent, and each variant is corroborated [in its linguistic acceptability] by decisive proof from the truth for its preponderance.²⁵⁷

The author then proceeds to cite various linguistic explanations for the suitability of both readings in the case of the variants.²⁵⁸ Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) also states that this was deliberately done by the committee of ‘Uthmān in order to accommodate certain variants. Al-Dānī writes:

If a questioner were to ask concerning the reason that led to the variants comprising additional letters in the script of the *maṣāḥif*, I say: the reason for that according to us is as follows: When ‘Uthmān compiled the Qur’an in the *maṣāḥif*, he wrote them according to one script based upon the dialect of the Quraysh, leaving out anything else that was not authentic or established, out of consideration for the *ummah* and caution for the people of this religion. And it was clear to him that these different readings [i.e., the variants between the ‘Uthmānic codices] are from Allah and were revealed as such, and were heard from the Prophet ﷺ as such. He knew that collecting them together in one codex would not be possible except by repeating the same word twice, and evidently, to write it in that manner would entail confusing and altering the written script. So he distributed them between the codices, so these additional letters are present in some and

²⁵⁶ Ibn Idrīs, *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī ma‘ānī qirā’āt ahl al-amṣār* (Riyadh: Maktaba Rushd, 2010), 71–72.

²⁵⁷ Jeffery, *Muqaddimatān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 121–22. See also Imam, *Variant Readings of the Quran*, 87.

²⁵⁸ A number of scholars have drawn attention to the subtleties of *balāghah* (rhetorical eloquence) related to some of the variants of the regional codices. For instance, in 91:15, the verse can mean “And He (God) feared not the outcome” of destroying the sinful nation of Thamūd or it can mean “And he feared not the outcome,” referring to the one who killed the camel of Ṣāliḥ. The Madīnan/Syrian reading accords with the first, while the Kūfan/Başran accords with the second. See Al-Farrā, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*, 3:270.

omitted in others so that the *ummah* could preserve them as they were revealed by Allah, and as they were heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, so this is the reason why they are written differently between the codices.²⁵⁹

In his comments in 2:285, al-Sakhāwī (d. 643 AH) also explains the spelling difference between manuscripts as a way of deliberately accommodating both readings.²⁶⁰

Note that some scholars opined that the motivation to include these particular readings within the text was because they were already being recited by Muslims in different regions, based on authentic oral transmission of the companions from the Prophet ﷺ, and could be easily accommodated with only slight modification. Abū Bakr al-Udfuwī (d. 388 AH) considers it possible that the scribes included these particular variants because they were already being taught to Muslims by the companions who lived in these regions.²⁶¹ Al-Mahdawī (d. 440 AH) affirms the same view. He indicates that these variants (1) were divinely revealed and (2) corresponded to the oral transmissions already prevalent within each Muslim community. He writes, “And these variants were affirmed in the manuscripts that were written and distributed to the various Muslim provinces by ‘Uthmān, along with the early Muslim community who agreed with him, due to their knowledge that they belong to that upon which the Qur’an was revealed. So they were affirmed so that every community could recite according to their transmission.”²⁶²

Similarly, Al-Zarqānī explains that in general, the *muṣḥaf* was written without vowelization and diacritical marks to accommodate multiple readings, and where multiple readings could not be accommodated by the skeletal text, they were deliberately placed in different codices.²⁶³ He further argues that the underlying

²⁵⁹ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*’, 605. See also al-Ja‘farī, *Jam‘ al-Qur’ān*, 50.

²⁶⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Wasīlah ilā kashf al-‘āqilah* (Riyadh: Maktabah Rushd, 2003), 113.

²⁶¹ Al-Udfuwī, *al-Istighnā’ fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 259.

²⁶² Al-Mahdawī, *Hijā’ maṣāḥif al-amṣār* (Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2010), 102–3. Another statement in support of all the regional variants being divinely revealed is from Ṣadr al-Dīn Muhammad al-Shīrāzī (d. 776 AH) in his work *Kashf al-asrār fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār*: “And these letters are all affirmed and were all transcribed in the codices from the exemplar which ‘Uthmān wrote, then they were sent to all the regions, and they are all the speech of Allah Most High.” Al-Shīrāzī, *Kashf al-asrār* (Cairo: Dār ‘Ibad al-Raḥmān, 2011), 105. Cf. Sālim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Athar rukhsat al-aḥrūf*, 326.

²⁶³ Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-‘irfān*, 1:258.

logic of placing different readings in different codices is to present them as equally valid; any other option, such as placing one reading in the margins and the other in the text, would be suboptimal because it creates the impression of a preferred reading.²⁶⁴

On the other hand, Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad doubts that this was done with the specific goal of accommodating additional readings; rather, the goal of the committee was to write the Qur'an according to one *ḥarf* (i.e., one reading). However, in some cases due to the prevalence of two readings that were extremely similar, both equally well-established from the Prophet ﷺ, they were regarded as equivalent and basically taken as belonging to the same *ḥarf*.²⁶⁵ Likewise, Al-A'zamī writes:

...these variations are inconsequential to the meaning of each verse and bear no alteration to the semantics whatsoever. But they cannot be attributed to carelessness. Zayd ibn Thābit, in each case finding both readings to be authentic and of equal status, retained them in different copies. The inclusion of both side by side would only have wrought confusion; alternatively, placing one of them in the margin would imply a lesser degree of authenticity. By placing them in different copies he accommodated them on equal terms. The modern approach to textual criticism requires that, when variations arise between two manuscripts of equal status, the editor cites one of the two in the core text while the deviations are consigned to footnotes. This method is unjust however, as it demotes the value of the second copy. Zayd's scheme is much the fairer; by preparing multiple copies he sidesteps any implications that this or that reading is superior, giving each variant its just due.²⁶⁶

In summary, then, Muslim scholars agree upon the authenticity of these variants between the regional codices, but they differ on the reason or motivation for their inclusion. Some scholars consider these variants a deliberate attempt to accommodate all or part of the variation of the *aḥruf* (relating to the earlier difference of opinion on that topic), while others consider these to be cases where readings were equally well established, which precluded giving priority to one over

²⁶⁴ Al-Zarqanī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān*, 1:259. See also Nūr al-Dīn ʿIṭr, *Kitāb ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿah Sabbah, 1993), 175; ʿAbd al-Qayyūm Sindhī, *Jamʿ al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, 389.

²⁶⁵ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 705.

²⁶⁶ Al-A'zamī, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 99.

the other. One might imagine a third scenario in which such miniscule differences emerged during the transcription process because the reciter recalled another authentic *qirā’ah* which differed from the one used in the manuscript being copied. Thus, an existing oral precedent influenced the scribe during the writing process to include a slightly different reading (oral interference). The companions would not consider a small number of such slight differences to undermine the goal of unifying the Muslims (provided that they were all authentically established from the Prophet ﷺ), and hence during verification and review of the regional codices, both readings would be accepted. This will be evaluated in further detail below.

E. The regional codices and stemmatics

Examination of the data provided by Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) concerning the differences between the regional codices of Syria, Madīnah, Kūfah and Baṣrah reveals that they form what is essentially a perfect stemma, or family tree showing the relationship between the codices. This observation was initially made by the German orientalist Theodor Nöldeke, and later updated and refined by the historian Michael Cook.²⁶⁷ *Stemmatics* analyzes variants of a text in order to determine which text was the ‘parent’ from which another copy was made. In order to understand the argument, let us first provide some basic examples to illustrate the general concept underlying the application of stemmatics. Assume that we find three copies of a book, which have small variations in the following sentence:

Book 1: “There was a gray car outside the house.”

Book 2: “There was a gray cat outside the house.”

Book 3: “There was a gray cat outside the house chasing a mouse.”

In this example, Books 2 and 3 agree on a cat outside, while Book 1 says it was a car. We know that Book 3 must have been copied from Book 2, but it would not have been copied from Book 1.

²⁶⁷ Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 399; Michael Cook, “The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran,” *Graeco Arabica* 9–10 (2004): 89–104.

To further elucidate the matter, consider the similarities and differences between the following squares, imagining that each represents a codex (“S” for Syrian, “M” for Madīnan, “B” for Basran, and “K” for Kūfan).

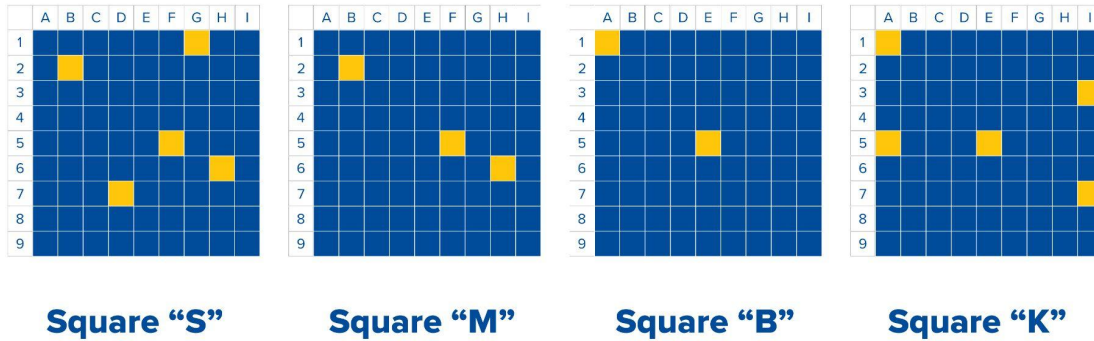


Figure 1: Squares with variants forming a stemma.

Imagine that you were told that one of these squares was the original, and every time it was copied a few squares were changed from blue to yellow, or from yellow to blue. How would you determine which square was the original? Notice that the squares only differ with respect to the position of yellow squares, the coordinates of which are identified by the row numbers and column letters. Notice furthermore that S has two isolated variants shared by none of the others (G1 and D7) and K has three isolated variants shared by none of the others (I3, I7, and A5), while M and B have no isolated variants. Every yellow square on M is also present in S, and every yellow square in B is also present in K, while B and K share no common yellow squares with S and M. In other words, S never agrees with B and K against M, B never agrees with S against M or M against K, and K never agrees with M or S against B.

This is, in some loose sense, analogous to what Cook observes with the regional codices:

- Syrian *muṣḥaf*: 16 places where it is different from all the other three *maṣāḥif*, and 13 places where it agrees with the Madanī *muṣḥaf* against the Basran and Kūfan *muṣḥaf*. It never agrees with the Basran and Kūfan *maṣāḥif* against the Madanī *muṣḥaf*.

- Madanī *muṣḥaf*: No isolated readings (i.e., readings that are not found in any of the other *maṣāḥif*). It has only 13 places where it agrees with the Syrian *muṣḥaf* against the Basran and Kūfan *maṣāḥif*.
- Basran *muṣḥaf*: Never agrees with the Syrian *muṣḥaf* against the Madanī *muṣḥaf*. One isolated reading (23:85–89) is present which is not found in any other *muṣḥaf*. Cook agrees with a narration describing this as a later addition after the time of 'Uthmān since it doesn't fit the stemmas.²⁶⁸
- Kūfan *muṣḥaf*: six isolated readings that are not found in any other *muṣḥaf*. Otherwise, it always agrees with the Basran *muṣḥaf* against the Madanī and Syrian *maṣāḥif*.

Based on these differences, Cook argues that we can reconstruct the relationships between the *maṣāḥif*, knowing that the Syrian *muṣḥaf* is more closely related to the Madanī *muṣḥaf* than to the Basran and Kūfan *maṣāḥif*, which means the Syrian *muṣḥaf* was copied from the Madanī *muṣḥaf* or vice versa. Similarly, the Madanī *muṣḥaf* is more closely related to the Basran *muṣḥaf* than it is to the Kūfan *muṣḥaf*, because the Kūfan *muṣḥaf* has six places that are isolated readings. So therefore the Basran *muṣḥaf* is between the Madanī *muṣḥaf* and the Kūfan *muṣḥaf*.

Based on this argument, Cook presents four possible stemmas:

²⁶⁸ See also Hythem Sidky, "On the Regionality of Qur'ānic Codices," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 5 (2020): 175. The report from Abū 'Ubayd states that two *alifs* were added by Naṣr b 'Āṣim al-Laythi (d. 89 AH) such that the verses in question read سيقولون الله instead of سيقولون الله. This would be an example of bringing the codex in line with the existing reading in Baṣra, as this reading is transmitted in the *qirā'āt* of Abū al-Jawzā'a (d. 82 AH), Sa'īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95 AH), Abū al-Mutawakkil 'Alī ibn Dāwūd (d. 102 AH), Yaḥyā ibn Wathāb (d. 103 AH), Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 AH), Abū 'Amr al-Baṣrī (d. 154 AH), Abū al-Ashhab al-'Atṭārī (d. 162 AH), Abū Muḥammad al-Yazīdī (d. 202 AH), and Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205 AH). See 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt* (Damascus: Dar Sa'd al-Dīn, 2002), 6:200–201; Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 2:329; Ibn Khalawayh, *al-Hujjah*, 258; al-Anbārī, *Marsūm al-khaṭṭ*, ed. Imtiyaz Ali (New Delhi: al-Ma'had al-Hindī li-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 1982), 22.

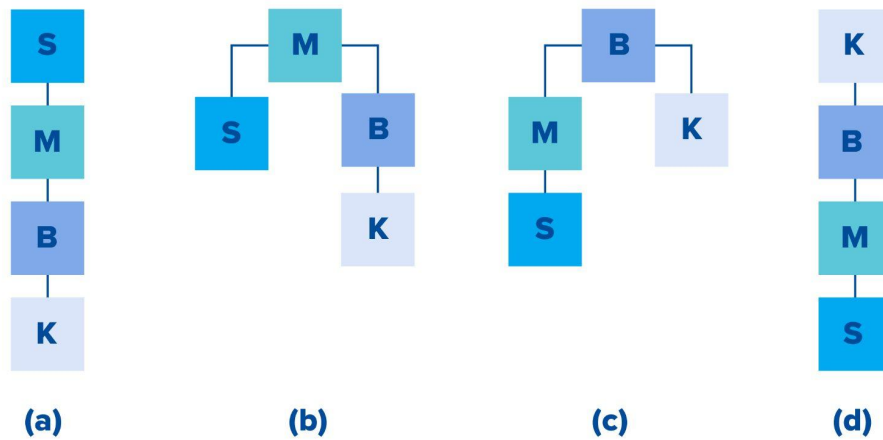


Figure 2: Possible stemmas according to Michael Cook

Let us consider the merit of Cook's argument from stemmatics. Does it provide convincing evidence that one codex must have been copied from another codex? The answer is affirmative, since otherwise the fact that they form a perfect stemma becomes a sheer coincidence (or an elaborate ruse). Had the codices been written independently of one another and 'Uthmān told the committee to put certain specific variants in the Syrian codex, and certain specific variants in the Madīnan codex, and so on for the Basran and Kūfan codices, then one would expect each codex to have its own isolated variants (*mufradāt*) or to share some variants with each of the other codices.²⁶⁹ There would be some cases where the Basran and Syrian codices agree against the Madīnan, or cases where the Kūfan and Madīnan agree against the Basran. Rather than forming a stemma, the picture would look something like this:

²⁶⁹ This allows one to exclude, for example, the scenario proposed by Salwa al-Hārithī (University of Tā'if) that the reason for the regional variants is because the 'Uthmānic regional codices were modified by the reciters of the region to accommodate existing readings. Had this been the case, it would be impossible for the codices to produce a stemma, and instead each region would demonstrate some isolated variants. Salwa bint Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Hārithī, "Tafrīq al-qirā'āt 'alā maṣāḥif al-amṣār bayna al-ḥaqīqah wa al-muqarar min aqwāl al-a'immaḥ," *Majalla Kulliyā al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya wal-'Arabiyya lil-Banāt bi-Damānhour* 2, no. 4 (2019): 351, 369.

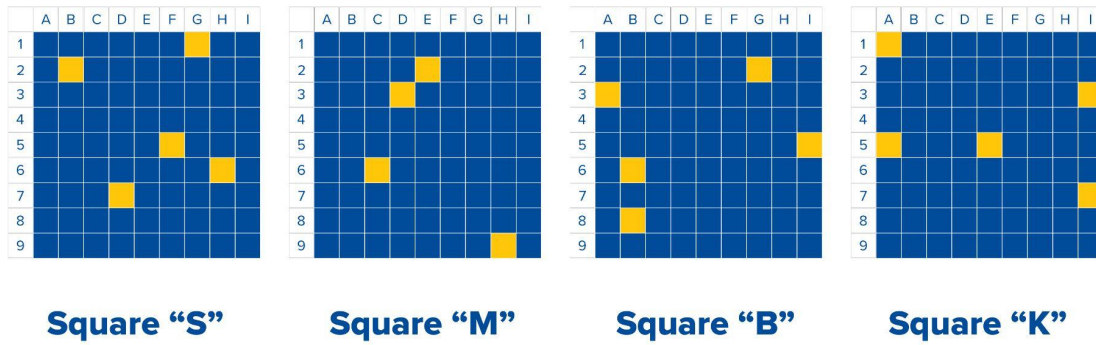


Figure 3: Squares with variants exhibiting no possible stemma.

However, where Cook errs in the matter is his claim that the existence of a stemma rules out the possibility of invention (i.e., the possibility that these variants were deliberately introduced into the codices).²⁷⁰ This is imprecise. The existence of a stemma rules out the possibility of *synchronous* invention, where codices are being written simultaneously and variants are being dispersed between them during the writing process. However, it does not exclude the possibility of *sequential* invention, where one codex is copied from another, one at a time, and during the copying process the scribe is deliberately instructed²⁷¹ to make a few specific changes to the original at particular places in order to accommodate other readings. In the course of synchronous invention, there would be no generation of a stemma while in the course of sequential invention, it is impossible for the copying process *not* to produce a stemma. Note that a detailed evaluation of various hypothetical scenarios will be provided in the subsequent section including a refutation of the allegation of scribal errors.

The subject of stemmatics and the regional codices was recently revisited by Hythem Sidky, who extended the analysis to examine over fifty Qur’anic manuscripts for the very same regional variants reported in literary sources.

²⁷⁰ Cook writes, “Third, the single most striking feature of the variants reported for the foursome is the lack of any serious indication of contamination between their texts. This must count against any suggestion that the variants were invented. For to fabricate a set of variants free of the appearance of contamination, the early Muslim scholars would have needed some kind of operational understanding of the mechanics of textual transmission—the logic of stemmas and contamination. We know that their successors, the authors of our sources, did not possess this; indeed, it was not to be found in any scholarly culture until the last few centuries. We can accordingly infer that we have to do with genuine transmissions from an archetype.” Cook, “Stemma of the Regional Codices,” 103–4.

²⁷¹ The fact that the scribe is not simply copying what is in front of him is indicated in the literary sources by the aforementioned narrations confirming that one person was designated to recite (e.g., Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ) and one person was designated to write (e.g., Zayd ibn Thābit).

Likewise, analytical studies of the regional variants in smaller subsets of existing Qur’anic manuscripts have also been performed by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al-A‘zamī,²⁷² Ala Vahidnia,²⁷³ and Mohammad Said Mitwally Ibrahim Alrahawan.²⁷⁴ Many of these manuscripts have been dated to the earliest period of Islamic history. The results of these recent studies are remarkable. The very same textual variants reported in the Islamic literary sources are found distributed in the manuscripts according to the very same patterns. The manuscript evidence thus confirms the historicity of the ‘Uthmānic codices and the accuracy of the traditional Islamic sources in documenting regional variants.²⁷⁵

For instance, the Codex Parisino-petropolitanus (CPP) demonstrates agreement with the variants reported for the Syrian codex.²⁷⁶ CPP dates to the first century *hijrī* and was recovered from the Mosque of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ in Fustat, Egypt.²⁷⁷ Today, most of the codex is located in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (national library of France), in Paris. The manuscript is written in *hijāzī* script.

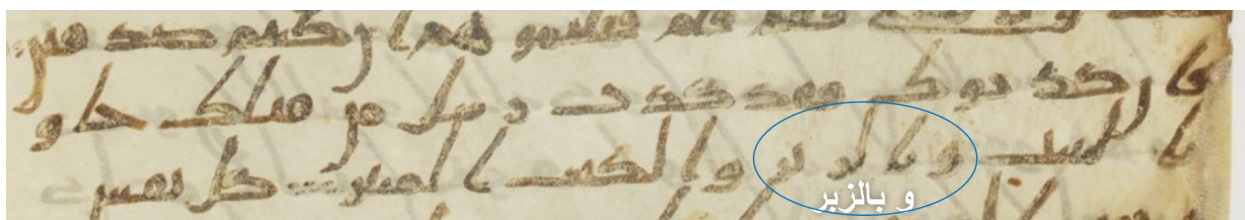


Figure 4. CPP (Arabe 328a) showing verse 3:184 written according to the Syrian ‘Uthmānic codex with *wa bi-zubur* as opposed to *wa al-zubur*. This is also exactly how the word is recited according to the *qirā’ah* of the Syrian

²⁷² Al-A‘zamī analyzed the five extant Qur’anic manuscripts commonly attributed to ‘Uthmān. This chapter is not found in the original edition of his work but appears in chapter 11 of the expanded 2020 edition published posthumously. Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (London: Turath Publishing, 2020), Kindle.

²⁷³ Ala Vahidnia, “Whence Come Qur’ān Manuscripts? Determining the Regional Provenance of Early Qur’ānic Codices,” *Der Islam* 98, no. 2 (2021): 359–93.

²⁷⁴ Mohammad Said Mitwally Ibrahim Alrahawan, “Correlating Some Early Hijāzī and Kūfan Qur’ān Fragments to their Ancestral ‘Uthmānī Codices,” *al-Burhān: Journal of Qur’ān and Sunnah Studies* 5, no. 2 (2021): 1–47.

²⁷⁵ Sidky, “On the Regionality of Qur’ānic Codices,” 166, 183–84.

²⁷⁶ Yasin Dutton, “An Early Muṣḥaf According to the Reading of Ibn ‘Āmir,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 2 (2001): 71–89.

²⁷⁷ François Déroche, *Qur’ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17, 30.

reader Ibn ‘Āmir. Image from Bibliothèque nationale de France, annotation added.²⁷⁸

The famous *muṣḥaf* known as the “Qur’an of ‘Uthmān” in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (also known as the Samarqand codex), demonstrates concordance with the regional variants for the codex that ‘Uthmān sent to Kufa. This manuscript dates to the late second century *hijrī*, i.e., roughly one century after the ‘Uthmānic project. It was previously located in St. Petersburg, Russia, and in 1905 a facsimile copy was produced by S. Pisarev.²⁷⁹ It is written in *kūfīc* script.

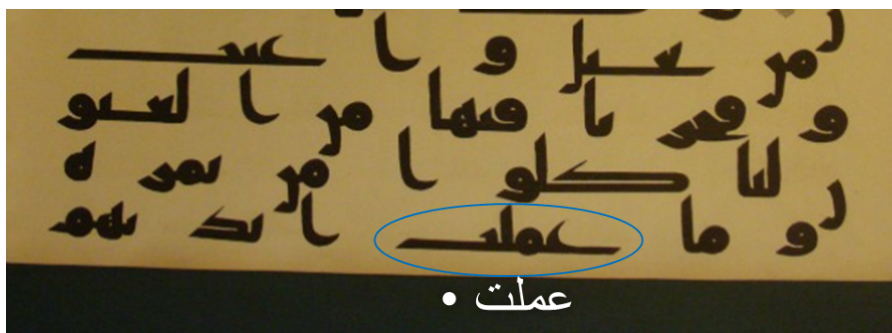


Figure 5. Pisarev facsimile from the Samarqand codex showing verse 36:35 written as *‘amilat* (عملت) instead of *‘amilat-hu* (عملته). This is also exactly

²⁷⁸ Al-Qur’ān (manuscript), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Arabe 328, 11/10/2010, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8415207g/f24.item#>.

²⁷⁹ This manuscript has a rather dramatic backstory attributed to it. Al-A‘zamī writes, “According to Prof. Hamidullah the Muṣḥaf was originally housed in Damascus; it caught the eye of Tamerlane after he sacked the city and was removed to Samarqand, where it was kept in the Ak Medrese next to the Khwāja Aḥrār as-Samarqandī Masjid. In 1868 the Russians overran Samarqand and moved the Muṣḥaf to the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg, where it remained for nearly fifty years. With the Bolshevik advance at the end of the First World War, General Ali Akbar Topchi Bashi, who did not savor the thought of living under Communist rule, decided to safeguard the precious Muṣḥaf before fleeing to Paris. He dispatched a commando force to seize control of the royal palace and seek out the Muṣḥaf from the royal library. He then hurried to the railway station and, given his rank as an army general, demanded an engine from the station master. Placing the Qur’ān in the engine compartment with an army escort, he ordered the engine driver to push onwards to Turkistan as quickly as possible. A few hours later the Communist army commanders received intelligence of what had happened. They sent another engine with an escort to chase the one carrying the Muṣḥaf, but failed to catch up with it. In this way the manuscript reached Tashkent and the Communist authorities chose not to clamor for its return. It was stored in the Museum of History until 1989, when it was handed to the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan.” Muhammad Mustafa Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (London: Turath Publishing, 2020), Kindle.

how the word is recited by the Kūfan reciters Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī, Khalaf, and Shu'bah's transmission of 'Āṣim.²⁸⁰ Image from *CorpusCoranicum*.²⁸¹

By similar analysis of regional variants, one may note for instance the Madīnan regional variants in the famous Topkapi Qur'an located in the Topkapi Palace museum in Istanbul, Turkey.²⁸²

F. The allegation of scribal errors

With respect to the allegation that the 'Uthmānic codices contained scribal errors, there are two separate issues that need to be addressed: (1) the claim that variants between the regional codices are scribal errors; and (2) the claim that certain narrations from the companions indicate that there are scribal errors.

Typically in textual criticism, when textual variants are encountered in a manuscript tradition, the general assumption is that the original reading has been corrupted.²⁸³ However, there are a number of clear reasons why this assumption cannot be lazily applied to the textual variants of the 'Uthmānic regional codices. First, it ignores the existence of the *qirā'āt*, the established reading traditions. The historical evidence inarguably establishes that different ways of reciting the Qur'an

²⁸⁰ 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 7:484. Note that this is one of the aforementioned cases of *ikhtiyār* where the Kufan transmitter Ḥafs recites this verse in the same manner as the Baṣran, Syrian, and Ḥijāzī readers. It is in fact reported that Ḥafs asked 'Āṣim why Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh (Shu'bah) differed from him in recitation. 'Āṣim explained that he taught Ḥafs according to the reading of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, while he taught Shu'bah according to the reading of Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh from 'Abdullah Ibn Mas'ūd. Thus, it is not unexpected to note cases where Ḥafs diverges from the Kufans to agree with the Hijazis. See Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah al-nihāyah fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'* (Beirut: DKI, 2006), 1:230.

²⁸¹ Michael Marx (in collaboration with Tobias J. Jocham, Jens Sauer, and Tolou Khademalsharieh), "Berlin, Staatsbibliothek: Faksimiledruck des Samarkand-Kodex, Sankt Petersburg 1905," in *Manuscripta Coranica*, ed. Michael Marx (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften), <https://corpuscoranicum.de/handschriften/index/sure/36/vers/35?handschrift=141>.

²⁸² In some verses, edits were later made to match the Iraqi codices. See Vahidnia, "Whence Come Qur'ān Manuscripts?," 386–87.

²⁸³ Emanuel Tov highlights a number of limitations of certain principles of textual criticism before commenting, "The upshot of this analysis, then, is that to some extent textual evaluation cannot be bound by any fixed rules. It is an art in the full sense of the word, a faculty which can be developed, guided by intuition based on wide experience. It is the art of defining the problems and finding arguments for and against the originality of readings." He then explains that the primary task of the textual critic is to find the contextually most appropriate reading before noting that "this procedure is as subjective as subjective can be. Common sense is the main guide, although abstract rules are often also helpful. In modern times, scholars are often reluctant to admit the subjective nature of textual evaluation, so that an attempt is often made, conscious or unconscious, to create a level of artificial objectivity by the frequent application of abstract rules." Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 309–10.

preceded the existence of the ‘Uthmānic codex. If a textual variant could have already existed in the reading traditions, then its inclusion in the ‘Uthmānic codex cannot be automatically attributed to scribal error. The codices were not produced exclusively through a copying process without any oral interference. We are informed in the literary sources that during the transcription process, one person would be designated to dictate and recite, while the other person would transcribe. For instance, ‘Uthmān said, “Let Sa‘īd dictate and Zayd transcribe.”²⁸⁴ If the scribe was only reading a text in front of him, there would be no role for the reciter. On the other hand, if the reciter was the only one reading the text and the scribe was writing exclusively based on what he heard from the reciter, then we would not obtain the pattern of orthographic idiosyncrasies discussed earlier which point to a single textual archetype from which other copies descend. The synchrony of oral transmission alongside textual transmission created a highly effective filtering mechanism whereby a textual variant could only be transmitted if it conformed to a pre-existing oral reading.

Secondly, the maximum number of isolated variants is approximately 15,²⁸⁵ which is found in the Syrian codex. If these were assumed to be transcription errors during the process of copying the Madīnan codex, this quantity is astronomically smaller than expected, and the remaining codices have even fewer variants. By way of comparison, in the text of the four gospels (roughly similar in length to the Qur’an),²⁸⁶ the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus contain 3036 textual variants, including entire omitted phrases and verses.²⁸⁷ If we ignore omissions of

²⁸⁴ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq* (N.p.: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 39:243; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:211; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:178. While one may contend that we do not know that dictation was involved in the transcription process of all regional codices, the narrations we have available certainly indicate that this was the norm, and we have no evidence indicating otherwise. Moreover, the narration of Abān ibn ‘Uthmān concerning 4:162 states that the scribe asked what to write and then simply followed the instructions given to him. The editors of al-Tha‘labī’s *tafsīr* write, “And it is clear from the context of the narration of Abān that he did not state the scribe erred but rather that the scribe merely wrote what was told to him, and this is proof that what is relied upon is *talaqqī* (direct learning) and *riwāyah* (oral transmission).” Refer to editor footnotes in al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wal-Bayān*, ed. Ṣalāh Ba‘uthmān, Ḥasan al-Ghazālī, Zayd Mahārish, and Amīn Bāshah (Jeddah: Dar al-Tafsīr, 2015), 11:79–80. See also Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 240.

²⁸⁵ There are 15 textual variants isolated to the Syrian codex according to Sidky’s list of variants with multiple attestations in traditional literature. According to the list provided by al-Dānī and analyzed by Cook, there are 16 variants, which has no impact on the above argument.

²⁸⁶ The four gospels contain approximately 65,000 words, while the Qur’an contains roughly 77,000 words. The precise word count depends on how one counts particles and connected and disconnected words in the *rasm*.

²⁸⁷ Herman C. Hoskier, *Codex B and its Allies* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1914), B.

words, phrases and verses in the Codex Sinaiticus and pretend for a moment that it predominantly has single-letter textual variants like the Syrian codex, then we still end up with the astoundingly discrepant rate of one variant per 21 words in the gospels, and one variant per 5100 words in the Qur’an. The only scientifically plausible account is to judge the underlying mechanism generating textual variants in either scenario to be categorically different; for the Codex Sinaiticus the mechanism includes scribal errors and for the ‘Uthmānic codices it is the reading traditions.

Furthermore, examining the variants of the ‘Uthmānic regional codices demonstrates that the variants are not randomly distributed through the codex. Of the 15 variants in the Syrian codex, seven are located exclusively in *Sūrah al-An‘ām* and *Sūrah al-A‘rāf*. This requires us to assume extremely high fidelity copying throughout vast swathes of the Qur’an with sudden inexplicable sporadic lapses, including during the transcription phase as well as subsequent review and verification.²⁸⁸ Either way, it is far simpler to conclude that these were specific instances where oral readings influenced the inclusion of specific textual variants during the transcription process. This is particularly true if we accept evidence from the tradition concerning the deliberate inclusion of the *alif* in 23:87 and 23:89, which confirms that the early Muslim community was concerned about such minutiae with respect to correspondence between reading traditions and manuscripts.²⁸⁹ As such, we should consider minute alterations similar to 23:87 and 23:89 to be the result of scribes including existing oral readings rather than errors.

In the narration concerning the process of writing the ‘Uthmānic codex we are informed about one word in the entire Qur’an on which the committee differed. Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124 AH) reported, “They differed on that occasion concerning whether to write *Al-Tābūt* (التابوت) or *Aa-Tābuh* (التابوه). The Quraysh said

²⁸⁸ The very low number of variants necessitates an intensive review process that would result in corrections. However, if there are corrections, then they must have been made before the next manuscript was copied, otherwise it would disrupt the stemma. For example, M is copied from S, and B is copied from M. But before B is copied from M, M is corrected. B will therefore demonstrate some variants in S that are not shared by M, thus disrupting the stemma. That such an intensive immediate review process would pass over at least some of the exact same regional variants more than once strongly suggests that they would only be passed over because they conformed to existing reading traditions.

²⁸⁹ See Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 583–84. Al-Dānī contends that this could only have been done by ‘Uthmān’s committee based on authentic transmission from the Prophet ﷺ.

‘*Al-Tābūt*’ while Zayd said ‘*Al-Tābūh*.’ Their disagreement was brought to ‘Uthmān, so he said, ‘Write it as *Al-Tābūt*, for it was revealed in the tongue of the Quraysh.’”²⁹⁰ Interestingly, among the textual variants of the regional codices we note that for 5:54, the Syrian and Madīnan codices have the unassimilated Qurayshī form of the word (يرتد), which matches 2:217, while the Kūfan and Basran codices have the assimilated form as per the Tamīmī dialect (يرتد).²⁹¹ Given that these are precisely the types of dialectical variations for which the committee was responsible to seek ‘Uthmān’s approval, it is more rational to presume the deliberate inclusion of a known variant from the reading traditions than the committee overlooking the same exact word twice (either during writing the Syrian and Madīnan codices or during writing the Kūfan and Basran codices) in 5:54 but never in 2:217.

Thirdly, the nature of the textual variants encountered in the regional codices strongly argues in favor of these variants representing pre-existing oral readings. Absent from the ‘Uthmānic codices are any typical instances of transcription errors like parablepsis secondary to homoeoteleuton, haplography, or dittography.²⁹² All of the textual variants of the regional codices result in syntactically and semantically viable readings. In cases where there is a perceptible impact on the meaning, both readings bring about mutually complementary and linguistically sound interpretations. What fortuitous circumstances would bring about the massively improbable coincidence of a scribal error adding or omitting a م in the one location where it is semantically appropriate to have both readings based on different preceding passages?²⁹³

²⁹⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3104.

²⁹¹ On the Tamīmī dialect’s assimilation in the Qur’ān, see al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 1:285.

²⁹² *Homoeoteleuton* refers to the occurrence of two lines with similar endings, which can facilitate the error of *parablepsis*, where the scribe’s eye skips a line. Sentences ending with the same word can give rise to errors of *haplography*, where one sentence or verse is omitted. When the scribe’s eye picks up the same word or phrase twice, the resultant error is aptly named *dittography*. See Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 253–54. Sadeghi and Gourdzai note an instance of parablepsis in the Ṣan‘ā’ palimpsest lower text in 9:85. Sadeghi and Gourdzai, “*Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān*,” 23.

²⁹³ In 18:36, the man with two gardens states that if he were to die, Allah would give him something even better than his garden(s). The Madīnan and Syrian codex have the dual pronoun (منهما—i.e., better “than both of them”) while the Kufan and Basran have the singular pronoun (منها—i.e., better “than it”). The preceding verse refers to the garden in the singular (“he entered his garden,” 18:35) while two verses earlier mentions the gardens in dual. Thus, both

Fourthly, the reception of the 'Uthmānic codices was overwhelmingly successful and quickly became the basis upon which all *qirā'āt* were recited and other *maṣāḥif* were transcribed. As previously mentioned, the early Muslim community was aware of these textual variants, and indeed catalogued them extensively as evidenced by the numerous early works and narrations on the subject. By all accounts, the Prophet's companions and their succeeding generations had no qualms reciting and teaching the Qur'an according to these codices with regional variants. Not a single narration records hesitation over reciting a letter determined to be a textual variant. None of these sources declare these particular variants between the regional codices to be the result of scribal errors in Qur'anic manuscripts, even though they did discuss the concept of scribal errors extensively, as we shall observe in the next section.

Abū Bakr al-Udfuwī (d. 388 AH) is one of the early scholars to repudiate the notion that the regional variants could be the result of scribal errors. Al-Udfuwī writes:

The understanding of occurrences of addition or subtraction in the *maṣāḥif* is that they are written according to the reading of those companions sent to each of the provinces. And what indicates this is that the *Qurrā'* (famous reciters) attribute their readings to the senior companion of their region. And these variants, in their addition or omission, were recited during the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. And were that not the case, they could not be written in some codices and omitted from others. And it is not possible to imagine that they could be errors from the scribe, for verily Allah has preserved it (i.e., the Qur'an). And the proof of that is that when 'Alī began his reign as the caliph, he did not change anything from it but rather endorsed the action of 'Uthmān. And they used to dislike even dotting the *maṣāḥif* out of fear of adding to it. So how could they add letters (or variants) and have such additions approved... [al-Udfuwī then gives examples illustrating the early Muslims' abundant caution in adding any markings of any kind, including chapter markings, verse markings, and consonantal diacritical markings.] So it is not possible with such caution that

readings perfectly correspond to different points within the preceding passage. See Abū Manṣūr al-Azharī (d. 370 AH), *Ma'ānī al-qirā'āt* (Riyadh: Markaz al-Buḥūth fī Kulīyat al-Ādab, 1991), 2:109–10.

these letters could arise except via explicit proof (*naṣṣ*) or knowledge, and they could not occur by the error (*wahm*) of scribes.²⁹⁴

One may observe that al-Udfuwī mentions both the first and fourth points of consideration identified above. That is, he mentions the existence of established reading traditions with these regional variants, and he mentions the community’s reception of these variants, particularly the example of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Moreover, he contrasts the reception of these regional variants with the early Muslim community’s reticent attitude towards even the most trivial manipulations of the text.

Fifthly, one may address the question of purpose. Why include only a small number of seemingly trivial variants? There are a number of historically plausible scenarios that would explain the small number of textual variants that we see. Not all of these scenarios require that the matter had been discussed and deliberated upon by ‘Uthmān and the committee prior to the initiation of the compilation project. The stated goal of the project was to reduce the differing and conflict over readings taking place among Muslims by uniting them upon one *muṣḥaf*. It is plausible that during the transcription process, the participation of different members from the extended committee of 12 members would have influenced the decision about the inclusion of a minute number of variants in some codices as opposed to others—a decision which would have ultimately been reviewed and approved by ‘Uthmān prior to sending out the codices. One aspect of the extensive review and verification process of very minor changes is highlighted in the report of Hānī al-Barbarī. He reports:

I was with ‘Uthmān when the committee was reviewing the *maṣāḥif*. So he sent me to Ubayy ibn Ka‘b with the scapula of a sheep upon which was written (لم يتسن)²⁹⁵ and (لا تبديل للخلق)²⁹⁶ and (فأمهل الكافرين).²⁹⁷ So Ubayy asked for something with which to write and revised the spellings, such that he

²⁹⁴ Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Hidāyah ilā bulūgh al-nihāyah*, 3131–32. Note that Makkī’s quotation of al-Udfuwī is slightly paraphrased and appears to have been collected from a few separate comments when compared with the original in *al-Istighnā’*.

²⁹⁵ Qur’an 2:259.

²⁹⁶ Qur’an 30:30.

²⁹⁷ Qur’an 86:17.

wrote (لَمْ) removing one of the two ل, and he wrote (فمهل), and he wrote (لم) adding a ه. ²⁹⁸

The above examples of single-letter changes were carefully considered and discussed, and these particular examples do not show up as textual variants among the regional codices. However, in the above example, the role of Ubayy ibn Ka'b is limited to correcting some spellings on specifically requested words. Given that the people of Syria were more familiar with the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, it is not unlikely that 'Uthmān would ensure that the Syrian codex received additional participation from Ubayy ibn Ka'b. ²⁹⁹

Recall that scholars like al-Udfuwī and al-Mahdawī suggested that the regional variants were intended to accommodate readings of a particular region. Recall also that some scholars suggested that the 'Uthmānic committee initially included only four core members before expanding to include a total of 12 members. This also makes sense of the differing narrations concerning Ṣa'īd ibn al-ʿĀṣ dictating versus Ubayy ibn Ka'b dictating and Ṣa'īd reviewing. ³⁰⁰ The involvement of companions like Anas ibn Mālīk and Ubayy ibn Ka'b in the Madīnan codex, and particularly Ubayy ibn Ka'b in the Syrian codex, suggests a plausible scenario for the minor variation encountered in the regional codices.

The sixth point, though somewhat technical, appears to empirically exclude the possibility of attributing the regional variants to scribal error. It draws upon the previous discussion of stemmatics and combines it with a consideration related to the *mutashābihāt* (passages in the Qur'an that resemble one another). Notice first that several of the textual variants appear to recapitulate passages found elsewhere in the Qur'an. Thus, the Syrian/Madīnan variant for 5:54 matches 2:217, the Syrian/Madīnan/Basran variant for 46:15 matches 29:8, the Kūfan/Basran 57:24 matches 60:6, the Madīnan/Basran/Kūfan 40:21 matches 35:44 and 30:9, the Syrian 8:67 matches 9:113 while Madīnan/Basran/Kūfan 8:67 matches 3:161, the Syrian 6:32 matches 12:109 and 16:30, the Syrian 3:184 matches 35:25, the

²⁹⁸ Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 102.

²⁹⁹ In the narration of Hudhayfah mentioning the conflict over readings between the people of Iraq and Syria, he mentions that the former were reciting according to Ibn Mas'ūd while the latter were reciting according to Ubayy ibn Ka'b. See Ibn Shabba, *Tarīkh al-Madīna*, 3:993 and al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 1:55.

³⁰⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 5:312.

Kūfan/Basran 43:71 matches 41:31, the Syrian 7:141 matches 14:6 while the Madīnan/Basran/Kūfan 7:141 matches 2:50 and 20:80, and the Syrian/Madīnan/Basran 6:63 matches 10:22. This predilection of textual variants for *mutashābihāt* verses appears to have gone unnoticed in prior studies of these variants. Yet, it can be no accident that *mutashābihāt* passages are so highly represented among the textual variants.

What follows is an argument by way of *reductio ad absurdum*. Those who consider these to be scribal errors would have to concede that they are not instances of misreading the text being copied but rather a case of memory interference known as *assimilation of parallels* which would arise from recollection of a similar passage.³⁰¹ But on that assumption, the error would dissolve the original difference between the two passages. Thus, if the Qur'an originally contains a passage that says A1 and another similar passage that says A2, a memory-based error would result in two passages that say A1 or two passages that say A2. Overall, memory-based errors homogenize differences between *mutashābihāt* passages, resulting in fewer and fewer differences. Projecting backwards, the direction of heterogeneity allows one to identify the original text. We may exclude those examples for which both regional variants match other Qur'anic passages, since it is not possible to identify directionality in such cases. Memory-based errors should accumulate as one descends from parent to child in the stemma. The direction of increasing homogeneity should also be the direction of transcription within the stemma. Yet, this leads to conflicting directions violating the stemma (see diagram), demonstrating that these regional variants cannot be attributed to error.

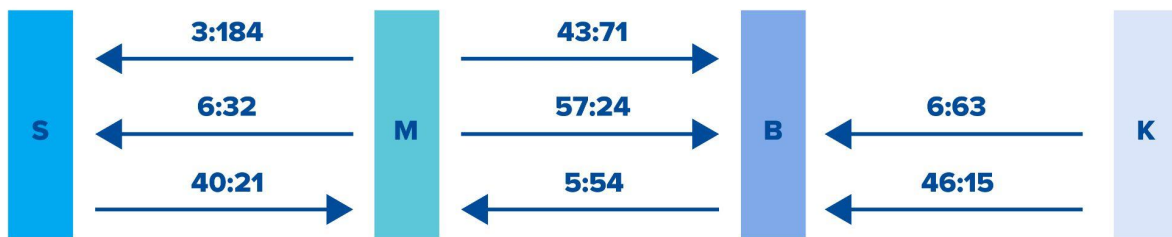


Figure 6. The presumed directionality of copying from parent codex to descendent codex based on the variants arising through the process of

³⁰¹ Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 257; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 307.

assimilation of parallels.³⁰² Given that the inferred directions are mutually contradictory and that these contradict the relationships deduced from stemmatics, it can be reasonably concluded that the regional variants were deliberately included to conform to an existing reading transmitted from the Prophet ﷺ by a companion and thus do not represent errors.

In other words, on the claim of scribal errors, either the existence of the *stemma* becomes a massive coincidence or the predilection of regional variants for *mutashābihāt* becomes a massive coincidence. Notice of course that the Qur’an contains multitudes of *mutashābihāt* which feature no variants in the regional codices, including some which are quite extensive (e.g., 2:57–59 and 7:160–162). These would be the passages most ‘vulnerable’ to assimilation of parallels, and yet they are free of textual variants. On the other hand, the *mutashābihāt* which feature textual variants are comparatively much easier to sort out and generally the least confusing to *huffāz* (those who have memorized the Qur’an). All of this lends further credence to the argument that these regional variants are deliberate inclusions of pre-existing reading traditions and nothing in the ‘Uthmānic codices is attributable to scribal error.

Misconstrued narrations suggesting scribal error

We may now turn our attention to a particular set of narrations recorded in the Islamic tradition which appear to attribute scribal errors to the ‘Uthmānic codex. Scholars have analyzed these narrations with respect to their authenticity as well as their potential implications and interpretations.

The first matter of concern is a statement of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān himself. A number of narrations state that when the ‘Uthmānic codex was complete, he examined it and said, “You have done an excellent and outstanding job. I see that it contains some anomalies (*lahn*), however the Arabs will recite it in the correct manner.”³⁰³

³⁰² Note that we have only included unequivocal matches and not included cases where the degree of similarity is likely insufficient to constitute an assimilation of parallels or the similarity between multiple passages precludes any unambiguous assumptions of directionality.

³⁰³ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 231–36. See also Ibn Shabba, *Tarīkh al-Madīna*, 1013. Note that al-Zajjāj claimed that Abū ‘Amr al-Baṣrī’s justification for reading 20:63 in the accusative was the presence of scribal errors, citing this narration. Al-Zajjāj, *Kitāb ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān wa i‘rābihi li-Zajjāj* (Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, 1988), 3:362;

First, it should be noted that the chains of transmission for this narration are disconnected and consequently it was deemed inauthentic by many scholars.³⁰⁴ Abū Bakr ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328 AH) writes:

The narrations from 'Uthmān concerning that cannot be used as evidence because they are disconnected and do not trace back to him. And logically it is not possible that 'Uthmān, the leader of the Muslim *ummah* and the ruler of the people and their role model, would unify the people upon the *muṣḥaf* that will serve as the exemplar, and after noticing that there are discrepancies or mistakes in the script he would choose not to correct them.³⁰⁵

Al-Anbārī continues by pointing out that this conflicts with the narration of Hānī al-Barbarī, mentioned above, which shows that 'Uthmān went to the trouble of sending specific words to Ubayy ibn Ka'b to ascertain their precise spellings. Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib simply points out that the companions of the Prophet ﷺ agreed on the authenticity of what is between the two covers of the *muṣḥaf*, and it is impossible that they would have agreed upon error.³⁰⁶ Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH), like al-Anbārī, notes that this narration is not authentic and that its apparent meaning negates the possibility that 'Uthmān could have said it. 'Uthmān and the noble companions completed an exhaustive and extensive project to compile the *muṣḥaf*. To simply just leave mistakes in the text after that would render the entire project pointless. He concludes that it is not possible for anyone to say this nor

see also al-Azhārī, *Ma'ānī al-qirā'āt*, 3:149. However, both readings of 20:63 accord with known dialects and are authentically transmitted. The common reading (in the nominative) accords with the dialect of Banū Hārith bin Ka'b, Khath'am, Zabīd, Kinānah, and other tribes, which used the same dual form with the ^l for nominative, accusative, and genitive tenses. Cf. Al-Wāḥidī, *Tafsīr al-wasīṭ*, 3:211; Ibn Khālawayh, *al-Hujjah*, 242. Al-Qurṭubī states that Abū 'Amr's reading agrees with the *i'rāb* and differs from the *muṣḥaf*. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 14:89. Some contemporary scholars have argued the *rasm* of the 'Uthmānic text can be interpreted to accommodate both. See al-Ḥarbī, *Tawjīh mushkil al-qirā'āt*, 337; Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal*, 380; al-Mulḥim, *Mā lā yaḥtamiluhu rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 427. However, based on knowledge of Qur'anic orthography, this would more accurately be considered *al-mukhālafah al-mughṭafarah* (see footnote 61 above).

³⁰⁴ None of the reported transmitters of these reports ('Abd al-A'lā, Qatādah, Yaḥyā bin Ya'mur, 'Ikrimah) met or heard from 'Uthmān directly. See Jamāl Abū Ḥassan, "Dirāsah mā rawa 'an 'Uthmān fī sha'n laḥn al-Qur'ān," *Majallah al-Zarqā lil-Buḥūth wal-Dirāsāt* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2005): 43–86. See also al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, 77–80.

³⁰⁵ From a no longer extant work entitled *al-Radd 'alā man khālaf muṣḥaf 'Uthmān*, cited in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 391.

³⁰⁶ Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *al-Hidāyah ilā bulūgh al-nihāyah*, 7:4663.

permissible for anyone to believe it.³⁰⁷ Similar arguments were presented by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH).³⁰⁸

Moreover, scholars pointed out that even if one were to accept the narration as authentic, the word *lahn* does not necessarily mean “mistake.” It can also refer to dialectical differences,³⁰⁹ among a variety of other meanings.³¹⁰ Abū al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Munādī (d. 336 AH) was of the opinion that *lahn* refers to spelling variants in the *rasm* where the spelling appears slightly different from the expected pronunciation, which should not be an issue since the recitation of the Qur'an is taught orally.³¹¹ Al-Dānī (d. 444 AH) himself provided a similar interpretation and offered examples of Qur'anic words that are written with an extra *alif* (لأذبحنه), *waw* (سأوريكم), or *yā* (نبأى). It is possible for the uninitiated to mispronounce such words if they have not learned from a teacher how to recite the Qur'an, again underscoring the importance of the oral transmission.³¹² There are much more striking examples in English such as words like *neighbor*, *queue*, *knife*, *laughter*, and *asthma*, where the pronunciation differs considerably from what would be expected given the spelling. This being the case, the interpretation of the statement of 'Uthmān poses no challenges.

³⁰⁷ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 605–6.

³⁰⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah writes, “And this report is baseless (*bāṭil*) and not authentic due to numerous reasons. First, the companions would race to forbid the least evil, so how could they affirm mistakes in the Qur'an while it would entail no burden upon them to remove them? Secondly, the Arabs used to despise linguistic errors and view them to be utterly abhorrent, so why would they not abhor leaving them in the *mushaf*? Thirdly, the claim that the Arabs would correct them in their speech is not sound since the noble *mushaf* is read by both Arabs and non-Arabs. Fourthly, it is established in the authentic hadith that Zayd ibn Thābit wanted to write al-Tābūt with the letter hā (هـ) according to the dialect of the Anṣār and he was prevented from doing that and the matter was raised to 'Uthmān and he asked them to write it with the letter tā (ت) according to the dialect of the Quraysh.” This quotation is cited from Ibn Taymiyyah by Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī (d. 761 AH) and is not found in any of the extant works by Ibn Taymiyyah. See Ibn Hishām, *Sharḥ Shudhūr al-Dhahab fī ma'rifah kalām al-'arab* (Beirut: Dar Ihya Turath al-Arab 2001), 33–34.

³⁰⁹ 'Umar said, “Ubayy was the best of us in recitation, yet we leave some of his dialect (*lahn*).” *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 5005.

³¹⁰ Jawād 'Alī, *Kitāb al-mufaṣṣal fī tārīkh al-'Arab qabl al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2001), 17:14.

³¹¹ Cited in Abu 'Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muḥkam fī naqṭ al-maṣāḥif* (Damascus: Maṭbū'āt Mudīriya Ihya Turāth al-Qadīm, 1960), 185.

³¹² Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 607. Al-Mahdawī (d. 440 AH) provides the same interpretation, *Hijā' maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, 66. Note also another narration in which 'Uthmān is reported to have said that if the one dictating was from the tribe of Hudhayl and the scribe was from Thaḳīf, these examples would not have occurred, perhaps because they did not use the same spelling conventions and relied on more phonemic orthography. See Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 237.

A few statements regarding scribal errors have also been related from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, which have been studied in detail by many scholars.³¹³ The most famous of these statements concerns the word despair (يَيْأَسُ) in verse 13:31.³¹⁴ “The scribe wrote it that way while he was sleepy.”³¹⁵ With respect to the authenticity of this statement, the discussion revolves around the transmitter Jarīr ibn Ḥāzim, who sometimes erred in what he relayed from memory.³¹⁶ Abū 'Ubayd recorded the narration of Ibn 'Abbās without including this statement, instead including only the part of the narration stating that Ibn 'Abbās read it differently.³¹⁷ Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal appears to have accepted the authenticity of the narration,³¹⁸ while it was rejected by others.³¹⁹ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852 AH), however, was not convinced of the report's inauthenticity, and he stated that it was more appropriate to find a suitable interpretation for the report.³²⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) explained that some of the early Muslims denied certain readings with which they were unfamiliar, mentioning 13:31 as an example. He then states, “And this is a mistake known through unanimous consensus and mass (*mutawātir*) transmission. In spite of that, due to the fact that such a reading had not been established for them by mass transmission, they did not disbelieve [by denying it] even though it would constitute disbelief for someone for whom proof of its mass transmission

³¹³ Mansour Hamad Eidi, “*al-Riwayāt al-wāridah ʿan ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās radiyallahu ʿanhu alati tūham al-ṭaʿan fī al-rasm al-muṣḥaf*,” *Majalla al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya* 29, no. 1 (2017/1438 AH): 151–84; Nūr Makkāwī, *Mazāʾim akḥṭāʾ al-kātib fī al-Qurʾān: ʿAr wa naqḍ* (Cairo: Al-Azhar University, 2015); ʿAbdullāh Ramaḍān Mūsā, *Mawṭhuḥiyyah naql al-Qurʾān min ʿahd rasūl Allah ṣalla Allahu ʿalayhi wa sallam ila al-yawm* (Cairo: Dār al-Nūrāniyyah lil-Turāth wal-Buḥūth al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2016).

³¹⁴ The phrase from the verse in question is, “Has not despair (*yayʾas* يَيْأَسُ) taken those who believe concerning the fact that had Allah willed, He would guide all of humanity?” Ibn ʿAbbās used to recite this verse as follows, “Has it not become clear (*yatabayyan* يَتَبَيَّنُ) to those who believe that had Allah willed, He would guide all of humanity?”

³¹⁵ Reported by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī; ʿAbd ibn Ḥumayd as cited by Ibn Ḥajar in *Fath al-Bārī*, 10:255; Abu Bakr al-Anbārī as cited by al-Suyūfī. See also Aḥmad al-ʿUmrānī, *Mawsūʾah madrasah Makkah fī al-tafsīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2011), 9:907, no. 4014.

³¹⁶ Mūsā, *Mawṭhuḥiyyah naql al-Qurʾān*, 154.

³¹⁷ Abū ʿUbayd, *Faḍāʾil*, 2:123.

³¹⁸ ʿAbdullāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Masāʾil al-Imām Aḥmad: Riwayāh Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1400 AH), 101. Cf. Eidi's mention of other possibilities, “*al-Riwayāt al-wāridah ʿan ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās*,” 157.

³¹⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2009), 13:541. See also the list of reasons for rejecting it provided by Nūr Makkāwī, *Mazāʾim*, 33–35.

³²⁰ Ibn Ḥajar describes those who rejected this narration, like al-Zamakhsharī, as being unfamiliar with the discipline of evaluation of hadith narrators (*ʿilm al-rijāl*). He states: “However, rejecting that which is transmitted after its authentication is not from the characteristics of the people of expertise (*ahl al-taḥṣīl*). So let one examine its interpretation for that which is suitable.” Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 10:256. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb agrees with his assessment, *al-Muʿjam*, 4:427. Cf. Eidi, “*al-Riwayāt al-wāridah ʿan ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās*,” 158.

has been established.”³²¹ In other words, it was only during that initial period in Islamic history, before the widespread recognition of certain readings authentically transmitted from the Prophet ﷺ, that some people could be excused for not knowing them. This is similar to how certain Islamic rulings were not known to a select few companions, but later became widely transmitted.³²²

Note that Ibn 'Abbās's reading of this verse was also shared by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, 'Ikrimah, Mujāhid, Ibn Abī Mulaykah, 'Alī ibn Badīmah, Shahr ibn Ḥawshab, and others.³²³ This establishes that the reading with which Ibn 'Abbās was most familiar was also widespread. The companions lived in an era where people commonly wrote their own personal copies of the Qur'an, and so the companions would regularly encounter and correct instances of human error in recitation *and* in writing. The use of the word *yay'as* was likely unfamiliar to some of them since it has been described as belonging to, among others, the dialect of Hawāzin, as mentioned by al-Qāsim ibn Ma'an (d. 175 AH).³²⁴ There is no difficulty in affirming that Ibn 'Abbās, due to his unfamiliarity with this reading of 13:31, assumed it was only found in a copy in which the scribe had erred.³²⁵ Once it became clear to him that this was a reading taught by the Prophet ﷺ, he accepted it. This is evident from the fact that Ibn 'Abbās himself explained the word *yay'as* found in the 'Uthmānic codex to mean *ya'lam* (knowledge), as reported in an authentic transmission through the *tafsīr* of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah.³²⁶ These same principles can be used to account for other narrations from Ibn 'Abbās

³²¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatāwa*, 12:264 (original print pagination 12:493).

³²² For instance, Ibn 'Abbās's views concerning *ribā al-faql* (interest) and *zawaj al-mut'ah* (temporary marriage), which he subsequently retracted. See Muhammad Samī'ī Sayyid 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Infirādāt ibn 'Abbās 'an jamhūr al-ṣaḥābah fī al-aḥkām al-fiqhiyyah* (Ajman: Maktabah al-Furqan, 2000), 291–309.

³²³ See for instance, Ibn 'Aṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 1041; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 10:255. Cf. al-'Umrānī, *Mawsū'ah*, 4:426; 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam*, 4:422.

³²⁴ Ibn 'Aṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 1040; Ibn 'Ādil, *al-Lubāb fī 'ulūm al-Kitāb* (Beirut: DKI, 1998), 11:307. Note that al-Qāsim is the great grandson of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd.

³²⁵ 'Abdullāh Ramaḍān Mūsā provides a similar explanation for a different narration, *Mawthuqīyyah naql al-Qur'ān*, 182. However, he doesn't consider it likely for this narration as 'Ikrimah learned from Ibn 'Abbās when the latter was in Baṣra (35–40 AH), at least a decade after the 'Uthmānic codex project. See *Mawthuqīyyah naql al-Qur'ān*, 155–56. Against this, however, one may consider how long it took some people to grow accustomed to readings they were unfamiliar with, based on the narration of al-A'mash about the prevalence of the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd in Kufāh during his time.

³²⁶ Rāshid 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Rajjāl, *Tafsīr ibn 'Abbās al-musammā ṣaḥīfa 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥa 'an Ibn 'Abbās fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1991), 300.

³²⁷ or other companions that seem to imply disagreement with the reading found in the ‘Uthmānic codex.

For instance, ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr asked ‘Ā’ishah about three verses—4:162, 5:69 and 20:63—which each contain a word in an unexpected grammatical tense, to which she replied, “O my nephew, this is the doing of the scribes who erred in the transcription.”³²⁸ However, scholars of *tafsīr* noted that all of these examples have grammatical explanations in their support, either because they are justified by the dialect of other tribes or because the syntax of the verse supports a reading that justifies the shift in grammatical tense from that which is expected to that which is observed. Thus, the statement of ‘Ā’ishah is either inauthentic,³²⁹ misunderstood,³³⁰ or relates to a personal misjudgment due to lack of familiarity with the reading found in the ‘Uthmānic codex.

Abū Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 375 AH) was one of those who rejected such narrations because they imply a logical impossibility, namely that the companions of the Prophet ﷺ would be aware of such errors in the ‘Uthmānic codex and simply not bother to make any corrections. He wrote:

And some ignoramuses (*juhhāl*) state this is an error from the scribe when he wrote the exemplar codex [he then mentions their citation of the aforementioned statements of ‘Uthmān and ‘Ā’ishah]. However, scholars

³²⁷ Other narrations from Ibn ‘Abbās attributing errors to the scribe are found in his comments on 24:27 (he read *tasta’ dhinu* instead of *tasta’ nisū*) and 21:48 (he read it without the *waw* before *ḍiyā*). See Sa‘īd ibn Manṣūr (d. 227H), *Sunan Sa‘īd ibn Manṣūr* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ālukah, 2012), 6:295, 6:411. See also Mūsā, who rejects their authenticity, *Mawthuqīyyah naql al-Qur’ān*, 173–81. Another narration from Ibn ‘Abbās objects to the word *qaḍā* in 17:23, stating that it is *waṣā* but that the scribe accidentally connected the *waw* with the *ṣād* making the undotted word resemble *qaḍā*. See Sa‘īd ibn Manṣūr, *Sunan Sa‘īd ibn Manṣūr*, 6:105. However, this narration is not authentic. Cf. Mūsā, *Mawthuqīyyah naql al-Qur’ān*, 162–69; Eidi, “*al-Riwayāt al-wāridah ‘an ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās*,” 164–65.

³²⁸ Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, 2:103; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 242; Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni’*, 610–13.

³²⁹ For arguments against its authenticity, see Mūsā, *Mawthuqīyyah naql al-Qur’ān*, 109–14, Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 125, Mansour Hamad Eidi, “*al-Āthār al-wāridah ‘an ‘Ā’ishah bint al-Ṣiddīq raḍīyaAllahu ‘anhumā allatī tūham al-ṭa’an fī rasm al-muṣḥaf*,” *Majjala Tibyan lil-Dirāsāt al-Qur’āniyyah*, no. 34, (1440 AH/2019 CE): 30–42. Eidi prefers Ibn Hajar’s approach of finding a suitable interpretation for such statements rather than attempting to dismiss them.

³³⁰ Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, for instance, argues that ‘Ā’ishah meant that this was not the dialect with which they were most familiar nor their preferred reading, and therefore her use of the term “error” is not literal. He also notes that some scholars (we may recognize this as Ibn ‘Ashta) consider her statement to mean the scribe erred in the choice of which reading to include, not that the reading itself was erroneous. Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni’*, 610–11. The problems with the latter interpretation have been appropriately identified by Eidi, “*al-Āthār al-wāridah ‘an ‘Ā’ishah*,” 43.

consider this to be farfetched and the narrations are not established from 'Uthmān nor from 'Ā'ishah, may Allah be pleased with them both, because the companions of the Messenger ﷺ were the protectors of the religion and the role models in law and rulings, so it is inconceivable that they would leave in the book of Allah errors that others would correct.³³¹

Similar arguments have been made by Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj (d. 311 AH)³³² and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH),³³³ with the latter pointing out that only someone unfamiliar with the works of Arabic grammar and their schools of thought could accept the proposition that these are scribal errors.

In commenting on verse 4:162, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī persuasively demonstrated the impossibility of ascribing a scribal error to the reading found in the 'Uthmānic codex by observing that the reading found in the codex of Ubayy is identical to that found in the 'Uthmānic codex.³³⁴ He comments, “So had that been a scribal error, it would necessitate that all the others codices should read differently than ours in which the scribe erred. And the fact that our *muṣḥaf* and the *muṣḥaf* of Ubayy agree on that [reading] demonstrates that what is found in our *muṣḥaf* is correct and not an error.” Note that this is an early example of a type of ‘proto-stemmatic’ consideration, the likes of which modern historians utilize to construct an archetype of a text and identify the original manuscript or reading. Al-Ṭabarī then continues with an additional historical argument: “Furthermore, had that been a scribal error, the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, from whom the Qur'an is taken, would not have continued to teach Muslims according to an error, but rather would have corrected it with their tongues (i.e., recitation) and would have instructed the *ummah* according to the correct reading. And in the very fact that Muslims have unanimously transmitted that reading exactly as it is written in the ['Uthmānic] codex is the clearest evidence of its veracity and correctness.”³³⁵

³³¹ Abū Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-'ulūm* (Beirut: DKI, 1993), 1:404. On the other hand, Ibn Qutaybah al-Daynūrī (d. 276 AH) appears to have considered the presence of such scribal errors in the 'Uthmānic codex to be as unproblematic as their presence in any other codex, yet he neglects to consider that Muslims would endeavor to correct any errors. Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Dar al-Turath, 1973), 56–57. See also Muḥammad Bakr Isma'īl, *Dirāsāt fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dar al-Manār, 1991), 132; Eidi, “*al-Āthār al-wāridah 'an 'Ā'ishah*,” 45.

³³² Al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa i'rābihi* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1988), 2:131.

³³³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 6:271.

³³⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 7:680. See also Imam, *Variant Readings of the Quran*, 158.

³³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 7:680. See also Imam, *Variant Readings of the Quran*, 158.

Based on the foregoing considerations, the strongest position is that this statement from ‘Ā’ishah simply indicates an instance where a companion was unfamiliar with the reading found in the ‘Uthmānic codex, just like the statements from Ibn ‘Abbās discussed earlier. Mansour Hamad Eidi notes that this should not be surprising, as it is only logical that certain *qirā’āt* would be unfamiliar to some companions. It is difficult for a person today to master and remember the various *qirā’āt*, let alone for a person in the earliest period of Islamic history when writing was less common and individuals had their own personal codices. This is precisely what illustrates the immeasurable benefit brought about by the ‘Uthmānic codex.³³⁶ It unified all Muslims across the *ummah* upon the same text and provided them all with a clear reference point for the recitation of the Qur’an.

The Ṣan‘ā’ palimpsest

Earlier we discussed how Qur’anic manuscripts corroborate very precise details mentioned in the Islamic traditional sources, such as the regional variants distributed in manuscripts in the same patterns described by the traditions. Perhaps one of the most fascinating case studies in the correlation between traditional sources and manuscripts is the Ṣan‘ā’ palimpsest. A palimpsest is a manuscript where the original writing (termed the lower text) was erased (by scraping or washing) and written over (the upper text). The residue of the ink from the erased text, however, induces a subtle color change in the parchment.³³⁷ With careful examination and with the aid of ultraviolet light, the writing of the lower text can be identified.

In 1973, during the restoration of the roof of the Ṣan‘ā’ mosque in Yemen, a storage area between the roof and ceiling was found containing thousands of ancient documents, including the Ṣan‘ā’ palimpsest.³³⁸ This palimpsest represents a very early manuscript, radiocarbon-dated to before 51 AH/671 CE with 99% probability and before 41 AH/661 CE with 95% probability.³³⁹ In other words, this

³³⁶ Eidi, “*al-Āthār al-wāridah ‘an ‘Ā’ishah*,” 52.

³³⁷ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “*Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān*,” 6.

³³⁸ Éléonore Cellard, “The Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest: Materializing the Codices,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 80, no. 1 (2021): 1–30.

³³⁹ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “*Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān*,” 8.

manuscript dates very closely to the time of the 'Uthmānic compilation (25 AH/645 CE). The Ṣan'ā' palimpsest lower text was a copy of the Qur'an that was erased and written over, and the time interval between the lower and upper text is very short (approximately 10–50 years).³⁴⁰ The upper text is consistent with the 'Uthmānic codex. The lower text likewise is consistent with the 'Uthmānic codex in the content of its verses and their sequences; it does not contain any verses absent from the 'Uthmānic codex nor does it feature verses in an order contrary to the 'Uthmānic codex. However, the lower text has some important differences with respect to chapter order and variant readings. In these differences, the lower text demonstrates an incredible degree of consistency with what Islamic traditional sources have described for the personal codices of companions like 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b.³⁴¹

With respect to chapter order for instance, the lower text of the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest has *Sūrah Yūnus* after *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, *Sūrah al-Kahf* after *Sūrah Yūsuf*, *Sūrah al-Jumu'ah* after *Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn*, and *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah* after *Sūrah al-Insān*, identical to the sequences reported for Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b.³⁴² With respect to variant readings, there are numerous parallels as well. For instance, in 19:23, Ubayy ibn Ka'b is reported to have read *falammā ajā'ahā* instead of *fa-ajā'ahā*; we find the lower text here is consistent with the reading of Ubayy.³⁴³ In 20:128, Ibn Mas'ūd recited *a-wa-lam yahdī* instead of *a-fa-lam yahdī*; we find the lower text is consistent with the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd.³⁴⁴ In 63:10, Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy reportedly read *fa-ataṣaddaqa* instead of *fa-aṣ-ṣaddaqa*; the lower text is consistent with their reading.³⁴⁵ These readings are designated as *shādhah* (anomalous) readings by Muslim scholars since they differ from the 'Uthmānic

³⁴⁰ Cellard, "The Ṣan'ā' Palimpsest," 3.

³⁴¹ Another theory concerning the lower text, advanced by Asma Hilali, is that the lower text was a copy written by a student for training purposes. See Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Sami Ameri combines both theories: "The inferior text of the palimpsest is a training copy of a codex that goes back to a Companion." Sami Ameri, *Hunting for the Word of God* (Minneapolis: Thoughts of Light Publishing, 2013), 166. He subsequently notes evidence in support of its textual variants belonging either to nonstandard readings from companion codices or examples of error on the part of the scribe in training.

³⁴² Cellard, "Ṣan'ā' Palimpsest," 27; Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," 25.

³⁴³ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," 117.

³⁴⁴ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," 119.

³⁴⁵ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," 121.

codex and are no longer recited. A discussion of such *shādhah* readings has already been provided in our [previous article](#).

In all of its differences, the lower text exhibits precisely the same kind of minor variant readings that Islamic sources state existed in the early period of Islam under the license of reciting the Qur’an according to seven *ahruf*. There were many valid ways of reciting the Qur’an which differed in the small ways described in the traditions and witnessed in the manuscripts. When ‘Uthmān compiled the *muṣḥaf*, it was not necessary for him to include every reading. This is the reason we find some non-‘Uthmānic readings in the Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest.³⁴⁶ This shows that certain readings were widespread and remained popular shortly after the standardization of the text until they eventually became extinct.

Prior to the ‘Uthmānic codex, there was no standardization, and Muslims recited according to the reading they had been taught. After the ‘Uthmānic compilation, readers had to adhere precisely to the ‘Uthmānic codex, and earlier manuscripts were erased and re-written or otherwise destroyed. Previously, certain orientalist and revisionist Western scholars such as John Wansbrough claimed that the companion codices were fictions conjured up by Muslims, or that the traditional Muslim narrative concerning the ‘Uthmānic codex was wrong.³⁴⁷ The arrival of such manuscript evidence confirming even the most minute details of the Islamic traditions surrounding the ‘Uthmānic compilation and the companion codices has conclusively falsified such claims.

Conclusion

At a time when Muslims were small in number and intensely persecuted in Makkah, and the future of Islam seemed uncertain, Allah revealed *Sūrah al-Ḥijr* containing therein a promise: “Verily, We have revealed the Qur’an and We will surely protect it” (Qur’an 15:9). The Prophet ﷺ used to hasten to repeat the

³⁴⁶ Sami al-Ameri states, “The palimpsest affirms the credibility of what was narrated about the codices of the Companions.” Al-Ameri, *Hunting for the Word of God*, 170. Sadeghi and Goudarzi state, “Ṣan‘ā’ 1 constitutes direct documentary evidence for the reality of the non-‘Uthmānic text types that are usually referred to as ‘Companion codices.’” Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “*Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān*,” 19.

³⁴⁷ Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “*Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān*,” 3, 19.

words of revelation lest they be forgotten, but Allah assured him, “It is certainly upon Us to enable its gathering and its recitation” (Qur'an 75:17).³⁴⁸

By any human calculation, this promise of preservation would have seemed impossible to fulfill at the time. This was especially the case when numerous readings proliferated in Madīnah, a development necessitated by the diversity of Arabic dialects as well as differences in linguistic capabilities and literacy within the early Muslim community. The more one ponders the incredible diversity of readings at that time and the geographical span of the early Muslim empire, the more it becomes incredible to fathom how the entire *ummah* came to be united upon a single text of the Qur'an, which Muslims have continued to recite in every age and every region. All of this took place in an era that preceded the printing press, computers, and the internet.³⁴⁹

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) points out that the phenomenon of the Qur'an's preservation is unparalleled. Every other ancient scripture has been subject to some degree of textual alteration and corruption. In spite of its foes who would spare no effort to attempt to undermine it, the Qur'an has stood the test of time, which serves as one of “the greatest miracles.” Moreover, this Divine promise constitutes a prophecy concerning the unseen, which is yet another miracle, and one that had already stood the test of time for six centuries when al-Rāzī made his remarks.³⁵⁰ Today, after 14 centuries, the Divine promise remains fulfilled and even more vividly attested.

The accumulation of manuscript evidence corroborating precise details preserved in the literary sources of the Islamic tradition has further testified to a fact Muslims have always known, that the promise of Allah has been fulfilled. As Abū Shāmah

³⁴⁸ See al-Tayyār, *Mawsū'ah al-tafsīr bil-ma'thūr* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2017), 22:470–71.

³⁴⁹ In the era of the printing press, the preservation of a written text is something taken for granted. Moreover, with the advent of digital technologies, a single text can be instantly copied, transferred, and downloaded thousands of times in an instant. Today, the disappearance of a widely disseminated text seems to be a physical impossibility. Interestingly enough, this is what Islamic eschatology indicates. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said, “Something will come and take the Qur'an one night and not one verse will be left, either in the *muṣḥaf* or in the heart of any person, but it will be taken away.” *Sunan al-Dārimī*, no. 3209; *Mu'jam al-Ṭabarānī*, no. 8698. This being the case, the disappearance of the Qur'an will be an event as miraculous as its preservation, yet at the very same time a frightening loss of opportunity to know God's divine speech. One should therefore not take the Qur'an for granted but rather endeavor to learn, recite, and practice its message. See also Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 3:198.

³⁵⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dar Ihya Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420 AH), 19:123.

al-Maqdisī (d. 665 AH) comments, the *muṣḥaf* contains precisely what was revealed by Allah, taught by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and written by the companions.³⁵¹ The preservation of the Qur’an is a historical and lived reality, experienced by every Muslim who continues to recite the exact same text today that was assembled by the companions of the Prophet under the supervision of the Caliph ‘Uthmān, as it was recited to them by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and as it was revealed through the Angel Jibrīl by Allah, Glorified and Exalted.

³⁵¹ Abū Shāmah, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 112.