



The First Codex: Abu Bakr's Compilation of the Qur'an

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Introduction

How exactly did the Qur'an come to be preserved in writing? The Islamic tradition provides a considerably detailed narrative of the Qur'an's textual preservation. The Qur'an was written down by scribes during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ on various materials. It was the first caliph of Islam, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (rA, d. 13/634, r. 11-13/632-634) who compiled the earliest complete official codex of the Qur'an, according to the traditional narrative found in canonical hadith sources.¹ Despite this, for a variety of reasons, the compilation of Abū Bakr remains understudied as considerably greater academic attention has been paid to the codices assembled by the third caliph, 'Uthmān b. ibn 'Affān (rA, d. 35/656, r. 23-35/644-656). Yet, Abū Bakr's compilation was a major event in the history of the Qur'an's preservation. It brought together all the written fragments on which the Qur'an was previously written during the Prophet's lifetime in order to produce a single official unified compilation. The present article analyzes what the hadith literature and historical sources tell us about the nature of this compilation, the reasons and circumstances that led to it, the process by which it was compiled, and some of the scholarly differences of opinion concerning it. Through examining these narratives, a clear picture emerges as to the precision and meticulous detail with which the Qur'an has been preserved.

The initial challenge confronting researchers is that there is considerably more information available for the codices compiled by the third Muslim Caliph, 'Uthmān, in comparison to Abū Bakr's compilation. For the 'Uthmānic codices, a list has been recorded in the Islamic tradition of approximately forty total differences between the codices and this can be correlated precisely with the surviving material evidence in the form of Qur'anic manuscripts.² With respect to the compilation of Abū Bakr, there was only a single codex and no reports

¹ For an overview, see Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text, from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 77–86. Cf. Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 223–34.

² See for instance, Hythem Sidky, "On the Regionality of Qur'ānic Codices," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 5 (2020): 133–210; Ala Vahidnia, "Whence Come Qur'ān Manuscripts? Determining the Regional Provenance of Early Qur'ānic Codices," *Der Islam* 98, no. 2 (2021): 359–93.

concerning variant readings. There are no data that can be used to analyze manuscripts in relation to Abū Bakr's compilation. The task of a historian interested in Abū Bakr's compilation is therefore largely confined to analyzing the content of narrations recorded in the works of hadith, Qur'anic sciences, and Islamic history, as well as the discussions of Muslim scholars. Nonetheless, the historicity of Abū Bakr's compilation may also be argued for on the basis of considerations beyond these literary sources.

Given the Qur'an's centrality in the spreading and teaching of Islam, it would be highly improbable for Muslims to forgo having any official written copy of the Qur'an during the reigns of Abū Bakr (r. 11-13/632-634) and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (rA, d. 24/644, r. 13-24/634-644).³ Given that congregational night prayers in Ramadan became organized and regularly practiced under the reign of 'Umar, the presence of an authoritative written copy of the Qur'an could potentially be viewed as a prerequisite. Moreover, the efficiency with which the 'Uthmānic codices were produced with minimal variation and rapidly disseminated throughout the Muslim world is better accounted for if the companions were already familiar with the process of producing a codex, having undertaken the process during Abū Bakr's reign. That the 'Uthmānic codex was based upon, or verified with, Abū Bakr's codex would also boost its authority, one of many factors in its widespread acceptance. Taken collectively, the historical factors lend credence to the account presented in the Islamic literary sources concerning the historicity of Abū Bakr's compilation, as shall be detailed below.

In addition to the canonical hadith literature, there are quite a few additional historical sources at our disposal that mention Abū Bakr's compilation. These include Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838), Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845),⁴ al-Fasawī (d. 277/890),⁵ al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897),⁶ Baḥshal (d. 292/905),⁷ and Ibn

³ See for instance the argument of Gregor Schoeler in "The Codification of the Qur'an: A Comment on the Hypotheses of Burton and Wansbrough," in *The Qur'an in Context* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 779–94, 784–85.

⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Cairo: Maktabat Khānjī, 2001), 5:311. Note that other editions of the text are incomplete and do not include mention of the compilation of Abū Bakr.

⁵ Ya'qūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa wa al-tārīkh* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1974), 1:410.

⁶ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, ed. 'Abd al-Amīr Mihanna (Beirut: al-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt, 2010), 2:22.

⁷ Abū al-Ḥasan Aslam b. Sahl Baḥshal, *Tārīkh Wāsiṭ*, ed. Kurkīs 'Awwād (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1406 AH/1986), 251.

Abī Dāwūd (d.316/928),⁸ in addition to numerous authorities from later centuries. While individual historical reports must be treated with caution, elements that are attested across sources can be taken with greater confidence. These sources collectively provide details that corroborate and elaborate on the accounts found in the primary hadith literature. Harald Motzki has noted that most Western academics do not accept the historicity of Abū Bakr's compilation because of skepticism concerning the details of such accounts.⁹ However, on closer scrutiny many of these objections appear unfounded. Rather, a close reading of the Islamic sources alongside the elaborations provided by Muslim scholars allows one to reconstruct a coherent account that resolves the perceived discrepancies. These objections will be discussed under the circumstances preceding the compilation. Moreover, reports transmitted from Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) which provide a detailed account of Abū Bakr's compilation were shown by Motzki to reliably date back to the first Islamic century using an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis.¹⁰ He concludes that claims in Western scholarship that the compilation of Abū Bakr was a later fabrication can therefore be dismissed as untenable. Furthermore, a review of hadith reports on the subject demonstrates that, in addition to the famous account from Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī–‘Ubayd b. Sabbāq–Zayd b. Thābit, narrations on Abū Bakr's compilation have also been transmitted through independent chains, including Ibn Abī al-Zinād–Hishām b. ‘Urwah–‘Urwah b. al-Zubayr and al-Suddī–‘Abd Khayr–‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (rA), among others.¹¹ The contents of these accounts and reports will be analyzed below. Given the existence of mutually corroborating independent reliable chains of transmission for reports that describe Abū Bakr's compilation, as well as the ability to reconcile any perceived discrepancies between such reports, the historicity of Abū Bakr's compilation can be confidently established.

⁸ Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, ed. Abū Usāma Salīm al-Hilālī (Kuwait: Mu'asassat Gharās li-l-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2006), 139–54.

⁹ Harald Motzki, "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'an's Formation," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 62.

¹⁰ Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1–34. *Isnād-cum-matn* is a method of analysis that collects all the various iterations for a particular hadith as transmitted by each narrator in order to determine the history of its transmission.

¹¹ Akram ‘Abd Khalīfa al-Dalīmī, *Jam‘ al-Qur‘ān: Dirāsa taḥlīliyya li-marwiyyātihi* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2006), 129–74.

Reports indicating it was the first codex

A number of sources have compiled the narrations concerning the first compilation of the Qur'an under the supervision of Abū Bakr (rA).¹² However, there are also narrations that suggest other companions possessed personal codices of the Qur'an, which they wrote during the life of the Prophet ﷺ.¹³ This therefore requires some explanation.

The famous account by Zayd b. Thābit (rA, d. 45/665) related in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* describing his involvement in Abū Bakr's compilation indicates that Abū Bakr was taking on a task that had not been previously undertaken during the Prophet's time.¹⁴ In this narration, when the idea is suggested to him, Abū Bakr asks, "How can you do something that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ did not do?" If such a compilation had already been undertaken by other companions during the Prophet's life, then Abū Bakr's question would not make sense.¹⁵

It is also narrated from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (rA, d. 40/661, r. 35-40/656–661), "May God have mercy upon Abū Bakr. He was the first to gather the Qur'an between two covers (*huwa awwal man jama'a al-Qur'ān bayna al-lawḥayn*)."¹⁶ The authenticity of this report was deemed reliable by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) and Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), among others.¹⁷ A similar report records the statement from 'Alī as, "The greatest of people in terms of reward for their service to the complete codices (sing. *muṣḥaf*) is Abū Bakr, for he was the first to gather it between two

¹² See Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 153–69; Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni' fī ma'rifat marsūm maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār* (Riyadh: Dār al-Tadmurrīya, 2010), 134; Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī, *al-Ibānah 'an ma'anī al-qira'āt*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāh Ismā'īl Shalabī (Cairo: Dar Nahdat Misr, 1977), 157–61.

¹³ See for instance, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭāsān, *al-Maṣāḥif al-manṣuba li-l-ṣaḥāba wa-al-radd 'alā al-shubuhāt al-muthāra ḥawlahā* (Riyadh: Dār al-Tadmuriyya, 2016), 88–89.

¹⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb faḍl il al-Qur'an, bāb jam' al-Qur'an*, no. 4986.

¹⁵ One may counter that perhaps he was unaware of the personal copies other companions had, or perhaps he was aware of them and did not agree with them. However, the first possibility seems unlikely given that there is no reason for these copies to have been kept a secret. The second possibility also appears unlikely as one would expect that it would have generated some debate. These scenarios are speculative; however, the most probable scenario suggested by the description found in the hadith is that the first complete copy was indeed Abū Bakr's.

¹⁶ Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 140. Similar narrations from 140–43.

¹⁷ See Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 140. The editor, Salīm al-Hilālī, concurs with Ibn Ḥajar's and Ibn Kathīr's assessment. The report is transmitted by Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 127/745) from 'Abd Khayr b. Yazīd al-Hamadānī (d. 81/700) from 'Alī.

covers.”¹⁸ The early Islamic scholar al-Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/791) also said, “The first to compile the Qur'an was Abū Bakr and Zayd transcribed it. The people would come to Zayd b. Thābit and he would not write a single verse except with two witnesses.”¹⁹

There are some narrations, however, that state that the first to compile the Qur'an was other than Abū Bakr. One report states that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was the first to collect the Qur'an, immediately after the passing of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁰ Another report states that after the events of the Battle of al-Yamāma 11/632, 'Umar (rA) was the first to compile the Qur'an.²¹ Yet another report states that Sālim (rA, d. 12/633), the tribal client (*mawlā*) of Abū Ḥudhayfa (rA), was the first to compile the Qur'an.²² These reports do not possess reliable chains of transmission.²³ However, it is important to note that there were many companions, like Ibn Mas'ūd (rA, d. 32/652-53),²⁴ the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha (rA, d. 58/678),²⁵ and Ubayy b. Ka'b (rA, d. 21/642), who had personal codices in which they had written some of the Qur'anic chapters (sing. *sūrah*) they had learned during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ. Abū Shahbah, for instance, notes that even if the reports concerning 'Alī's compilation are taken as authentic, this would simply entail that he wrote a personal copy of the Qur'an (whether complete or partial), which does not carry the same reliability and authority as Abū Bakr's compilation which enjoyed unanimous consensus (*ijmā'*) and was compiled through an official and public process.²⁶ Moreover, if personal copies were written down during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, the sequence of chapters may have been chronological, unlike the 'Uthmānic order. They may also have included abrogated verses, in addition to

¹⁸ Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 141.

¹⁹ Reported in the no longer extant work by Ibn Ashtah (d. 360/971), *al-Maṣāḥif*, as cited by al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2008), 131.

²⁰ Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 161–62. See editor notes concerning the narration's inauthenticity.

²¹ Ibn Abī Dawūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 162. See editor notes concerning the narration's inauthenticity.

²² Reported in Ibn Ashtah, *al-Maṣāḥif*, as cited by al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 130. Note that al-Suyūṭī suggests this could mean Sālim was one of those who compiled the Qur'an under Abū Bakr, but this cannot be correct if Sālim died during the Battle of al-Yamāma, which was the event that motivated the compilation under Abū Bakr. See 'Alī al-Ja'farī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān al-karīm fī 'ahdi Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq* (Kuwait: Dār al-Zāhiriyya 2022), 23.

²³ Al-Ja'farī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, 17–28.

²⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb faḍā'il al-Qur'an, bāb ta'līf al-Qur'ān*, no. 4996.

²⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb faḍā'il al-Qur'an, bāb ta'līf al-Qur'ān*, no. 4993.

²⁶ Muḥammad Muḥammad Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal li-dirāsāt al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Riyadh: Dār al-Liwā' li-l-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1987), 273. Cf. Akram Dalīmī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, 174.

personal notes regarding abrogation as well as exegesis (*tafsīr*). Therefore, Abū Bakr's effort was a landmark event in preparing the first official copy of the Qur'an.

The circumstances preceding the compilation

Although the Qur'an had been written down by many scribes during the lifetime of the Prophet,²⁷ a complete compilation had not yet been assembled when he ﷺ passed away in 11 AH/632 CE. This has been stated by none other than the Prophet's chief scribe, Zayd b. Thābit (rA), who also played a central role in both Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān's compilations. Zayd said, "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) passed away and the Qur'an was not yet collected. It was written on palm branches, trunks, stalks, and leaves."²⁸ In other narrations, there is evidence that the compiling of verses within chapters did take place at the instruction of the Prophet ﷺ. Zayd said, "We were with the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) compiling the Qur'an from parchment."²⁹ Al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) commented, "This seems to mean that he intended by this the compilation of what was revealed from the book, the verses scattered in its chapters, and collecting them together based on instruction from the Prophet."³⁰ Gregor Schoeler notes that the narrations suggest that the majority of the Qur'an had already been compiled into sheets of parchment while it was likely the later revelations just before the Prophet ﷺ passed away that remained on scattered materials. Schoeler writes:

[T]he traditional reports about the state of the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet's death are not unbelievable if one assumes that part of it—perhaps the greater part of it—had already been written down on sheets of the same format and material, while another, and possibly smaller, part had not yet been committed to writing in this form. This latter part, perhaps consisting of the more recent revelations, may have been written on disparate materials and not yet been transferred to sheets of the same format.³¹

²⁷ See for instance, Muhammad Mustafa al-Azamī, *The Scribes of the Prophet* (London: Turath Publishing, 2020).

²⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Waṣī Allāh 'Abbās (Mecca: Mu'assasāt al-Risāla 1983), 1:390.

²⁹ Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, no. 114.

³⁰ Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (Cairo: Dar al-Rayyān, 1988), 7:147.

³¹ Schoeler, "Codification of the Qur'an," 782.

Muhammad Muṣṭafā al-Azami explains that the continuous nature of Divine revelation during the Prophetic period precluded transforming the loose fragments of writing into a single volume until after the Prophet ﷺ passed away. He writes:

Setting up a master volume might have proved challenging; any divine *naskh* (نسخ; abrogation) revealed subsequently, affecting the legal provisions or wordings of certain verses, would have required proper inclusion. And a loose page format greatly simplified the insertion of new verses and new suras, for the revelations did not cease until a short time before the Prophet's death. But with his death the [revelation] *wahy* ended forever: there would be no more verses, abrogations or rearrangements, so that the situation lent itself perfectly for the compilation of the Qur'an into a single unified volume.³²

When Abū Bakr assumed leadership of the fledgling Muslim state after the Prophet ﷺ passed away, he was immediately confronted with political turmoil in the form of secession, apostasy, multiple rebellions, and fierce battles. One of the most significant battles was the Battle of Yamāma, in which the Muslims fought against the self-proclaimed prophet Musaylima b. Ḥabīb (d. 11/632), or Musaylima the Liar. The early historian Khalīfa b. Khayyāt al-ʿUṣfurī (d. 240/854) records from Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib (d. 97/715) that the total number of Muslims martyred in the battle was 500, of which 30 or 50 were *ḥamalat al-Qurʾān* (lit. carriers of the Qur'an), a designation typically used for those who had memorized the Qur'an.³³ For more information on this designation, refer to the section on “the memorizers of the Qur'an among the companions” in [How the Qur'an was Preserved During the Prophet's Time](#). Note that Ibn Kathīr says instead that approximately 500 *reciters of the Qur'an* (*qurrāʾ*) were martyred that day,³⁴ which likely represents a conflation of the two numbers mentioned by Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib, unless Ibn Kathīr was using the term ‘reciter’ generically for every Muslim martyred. We find among those martyred in Yamāma none other than Sālim (rA), the tribal client (*mawlā*) of Abū Ḥudhayfa.³⁵ Sālim was a prolific teacher of the Qur'an, and one of

³² Al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 77.

³³ Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāt b. Abū Hubayra, *Tārīkh Khalīfa b. Khayyāt*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1985), 111.

³⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, ed. Abū Ishāq al-Ḥuwaynī (Cairo: Maktaba b. Taymiyya, 1416 AH/1995), 58.

³⁵ Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Riyadh: Dar ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2003), 9:496.

four individuals from whom the Prophet ﷺ specially instructed people to learn the Qur'an (the others were 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd (rA), Mu'adh b. Jabal (rA, d. 18/639), and Ubayy b. Ka'b (rA, d. 29/649)).³⁶ Moreover, Sālim used to lead the prayers for the earliest Muslim migrants to Medina from Mecca (*muhājirūn*) in a location close to Qubā'.³⁷

According to the report of Zayd b. Thābit, the martyrdom of many Qur'an reciters during the battle of Yamāma was the direct reason for the compilation of the Qur'an, as suggested by 'Umar to the caliph Abū Bakr. 'Umar said, "Indeed a large number of reciters (*qurrā'*) have been killed on the Day of Yamāma, and I fear that more reciters will be killed on other battlefields, whereby a large part of the Qur'an may be lost (*fayadhab kathīrun min al-Qur'ān*). Therefore, I am of the opinion that you should order that the Qur'an be compiled."³⁸ This narration appears to comport well with the aforementioned reports that the Qur'an was mostly transcribed on scattered fragments at the time, which adds to the weight and urgency of 'Umar's request. Although the entire Qur'an had been written in the Prophetic era,³⁹ the written fragments had not yet been formally compiled into an official codex. Since a large number of the Qur'an reciters had been martyred, 'Umar's concern was directly related to ensuring the textual preservation of the Qur'an. Hadith master and exegete, al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) comments, "They were afraid that some of it [i.e., the Qur'an] would be lost with the deaths of those who had memorized it, so they rushed to the 'Successor of Allah's Messenger'

³⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb manāqib al-Anṣār, bāb manāqib Mu'adh b. Jabal*, no. 3806.

³⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb al-ādḥān, bāb imāmat al-'abd wa al-mawlā*, no. 692.

³⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *kitāb faḍl 'il al-Qur'an, bāb jam' al-Qur'ān*, no. 4986.

³⁹ This is the conclusion that has been argued by many Muslim scholars and can be inferred from Zayd's report concerning the compilation process under Abū Bakr. The fact that he sought testimony for each verse from those who had written the verse in the presence of the Prophet indicates that all the verses had been transcribed. Yousef Wahb also observes: "the organized scribal activities, the appointment of scribes, the encouragement of education through writing, the Divine command to preserve the text, and the authentically reported reliance on written materials transcribed during the time of the Prophet in the subsequent textual compilations of the Qur'an—plainly substantiate the thesis that the entire Qur'an was recorded before the Prophet's passing." See Yousef Wahb, "How the Qur'an Was Preserved During the Prophet's Time: Mechanisms of Oral and Written Transmission," *Yaqeen*, December 5, 2022,

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/how-the-quran-was-preserved-during-the-prophets-time-mechanisms-of-oral-and-written-transmission>.

صلى الله عليه وسلم (i.e., Abū Bakr), and asked him to collect it. He agreed with their opinion, so he ordered its collection in one place.”⁴⁰ Ibn Kathīr writes similarly.⁴¹

One could ask why the companions would devote so much effort to preserving the Qur'an after Allah had promised to preserve it. Muslim scholars viewed the companions' efforts as an instrument of the Divine Will to fulfill the promise of the Qur'an's preservation. Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) wrote:

If it is asked: “Why were the Companions preoccupied with collecting the Qur'an in *ṣuḥuf* (parchment sheets), when Allah already promised to preserve it, given that one need not fear (losing) what Allah has preserved?”

The response is as follows: Their collection of the Qur'an was one of the means by which Allah preserved it. When He intended to preserve it, He appointed them for this purpose. Ibn al-Anbārī said: They wanted to facilitate learning the Qur'an for people and make it accessible through what they did, so that it would be easy for anyone who wanted to memorize it and read it when they saw it collected in a scroll. Even if they had not done what they did, it would not have been lost, as Allah guaranteed its preservation.⁴²

It is also worth noting that some scholars interpreted 'Umar's statement differently. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) offers an interpretation that suggests that the textual preservation of the Qur'an was not what 'Umar believed to be at stake. Al-Bāqillānī writes:

It is possible that what was meant by this is that they (i.e., those who were martyred) used to study the Qur'an extensively, recite it, and perform night prayers (*tahajjud*) with it. So, 'what would be lost from the Qur'an' from what they possessed is interpreted to mean that most of the Qur'an's study and recitation would be lost, along with the abandonment of its recitation in night prayers and supplication. And this is what was intended.⁴³

Al-Bāqillānī argued that since many senior companions were alive, there was no basis to fear that the Qur'an could be lost. However, if we examine 'Umar's

⁴⁰ Al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunna*, ed. Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh and Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt (Damascus: al-Maktab Islāmī, 1983), 4:521.

⁴¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 58.

⁴² Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Tafsīr al-basīṭ* (Riyadh: al-Īmām University, 1430H/2009), 12:547.

⁴³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār li-l-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001), 1:400.

statement closely, we note that 'Umar did not only reference the Battle of Yamāma but also expressed concern that future battles would result in similar casualties among the reciters of the Qur'an. Therefore, it remains entirely plausible that 'Umar would raise such a concern to ensure the textual preservation of the Qur'an.

A number of Western scholars, including Theodor Nöldeke, Richard Bell, and William Montgomery Watt, also raise some contentions against the idea that the martyrdom of Qur'anic reciters in Yamāma was a motivation for compiling the Qur'an.⁴⁴ They cite an argument from Leone Catani that the names of those who died in the battle of Yamāma largely included new Muslims and the number of those who knew the Qur'an by heart was too few to have been cause for alarm.⁴⁵ Certainly, this argument is readily reconcilable with al-Bāqillānī's interpretation of 'Umar's statement discussed above. A significant number of casualties of any Muslims could motivate the concern that there would be fewer adherents of Islam to devote themselves to the study of the Qur'an. Therefore, investing the community's efforts in collectively assembling a codex of the Qur'an would certainly reinvigorate study and recitation of the sacred text.

But aside from al-Bāqillānī's interpretation, it is not clear that Catani's argument undermines even the conventional interpretation of 'Umar's statement. We know that a Qur'anic teacher as prolific as Sālim (rA) was among the martyrs in the battle. His loss alone would have certainly impacted the companions at a time when Qur'an teachers were direly needed to educate the large numbers of tribes that had newly embraced Islam. Other Qur'an teachers who were martyred in the battle may simply not have been recorded by name. There is precedent for this in the massacre of the 'well of Ma'ūna' that took place in 4/625 during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, where seventy companions from the Medinan Helpers (*anṣār*) were martyred.⁴⁶ The companions martyred in the incident are left unnamed and are simply described as Qur'an reciters. Moreover, 'Umar's concern was realized

⁴⁴ Nöldeke et al., 229–30 and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1953), 39; cf. Richard Bell and William Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 41.

⁴⁵ Leone Catani, *Annali dell'Islam* (Milano: Hoepli, 1907), 2:713, 739–54.

⁴⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb al-maghāzī, bāb ghazwat al-Rajī' wa al-Ri'l wa al-Dhakwan wa Bi'r Ma'una*, no. 4090.

with the deaths of those who had memorized any significant portion of the Qur'an, not only those who had memorized the Qur'an in its entirety. Ibn Hajar for instance mentions that "it could mean that they had collectively memorized the Qur'an, not that every individual had memorized it in its entirety."⁴⁷

Secondly, Noldeke et al. argue that since the compilation involved gathering materials that had already been written down, there was no way that this could have been jeopardized by the death of any number of reciters of the Qur'an. However, this is overly simplistic. While it is true that the death of those who have memorized the Qur'an does not cause written copies of the Qur'an to vanish, it does increase the importance of those written copies for the continued memorization and teaching of the sacred text, and therefore requires that they be consolidated into a unified text. After all, the fragments on which the Qur'an was written could have been lost or damaged. On the basis of these considerations, there is consequently no reason to doubt the traditional narrative concerning the motivation of Abū Bakr's compilation.

Based on this narrative, the compilation of Abū Bakr can be plausibly dated to 12/633, between the Battle of Yamāma in 11/632 and prior to his death in 13/634.⁴⁸

The process and method of compiling the Qur'an

Zayd b. Thābit (rA) was chosen by Abū Bakr (rA) to lead the task of compiling the Qur'anic text. At the time when he was selected for this task, he would have been 22 years old, given that he was 11 years old at the time of the Prophet's migration.

⁴⁹ Abū Bakr himself gave the reasons for selecting Zayd when he said, "You are a wise young man (*shābun 'āqilun*), we have no aspersions against you (*lā*

⁴⁷ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī* (Riyadh: Dar al-Taybah, 2005), 11:167.

⁴⁸ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh Khalīfa b. Khayyāt*, 107, 121. On the date, see also Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣḥālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī waḥyan wa rasman wa lughatan wa qirā'atan* (Istanbul: Dār al-Ghawthānī, 2019), 99 and 'Alī al-Ja'farī, *Jam 'al-Qur'ān*, 31.

⁴⁹ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf: Dirāsah lughawīyya tārīkhīyya* (Baghdad: al-Lajnah al-Waṭanīyya, 1982), 112.

nattahimuk), and you used to write down the revelation for the Messenger of Allah.”⁵⁰ Ibn Ḥajar comments:

He mentioned four qualities about him which detailed his unique suitability for the task: being young so that he would have the energy for what was demanded of him, being intelligent so he would be more cognizant in his approach, being beyond reproach so that others could trust him, and having been a scribe of revelation, so he possessed the requisite experience. These qualities that he possessed could also be found in others but separately (rather than combined in one person).⁵¹

Although not explicitly mentioned by Abū Bakr, there are two other qualities that scholars have often added to Zayd's credentials. The first is that Zayd himself had memorized the entire Qur'an by heart, as mentioned by Abū Bakr b. al-Anbārī (d. 328/940).⁵² This is unsurprising given his role as the foremost scribe of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. A second credential that is often mentioned by scholars is that Zayd witnessed the “final review” (*al-ʿarḍa al-akhīra*) between the Prophet ﷺ and the Angel Jibrīl (as).⁵³ The Prophet ﷺ used to review the entire Qur'an annually with Jibrīl in the month of Ramadan and during the last year of his life, the Prophet ﷺ completed the review with Jibrīl twice.⁵⁴ Al-Baghawī states:

It is said that Zayd b. Thābit attended the final review in which it was clarified what was abrogated and what remained. Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī 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 reading (*qirāʾa*) of Zayd because he transcribed it for the Prophet ﷺ and recited it to him and witnessed *al-ʿarḍa al-akhīra*, and he taught its recitation to people until he passed away. That is why Abū Bakr and ʿUmar relied upon him in its compilation and ʿUthmān appointed him in charge of writing the *muṣḥafs*—may God be pleased with them all.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb faḍāʾil al-Qurʾan, bāb jamʿ al-Qurʾān*, no. 4986.

⁵¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:169.

⁵² Cited in Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Muʾassasāt al-Risāla, 2006), 1:88.

⁵³ ʿAlī al-Jaʿfarī, *Jamʿ al-Qurʾān al-Karīm fī ʾahdī Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq*, 35–36; al-Azami, *History of the Qurʾanic Text*, 79.

⁵⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, *kitāb al-manāqib, bāb ṣifāt al-nabī ﷺ*, no. 3554; see also *kitāb faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, bāb kāna Jibrīl ya ʾriḍu al-Qurʾān ʿalā al-nabī ﷺ*, no. 4998.

⁵⁵ Al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunna* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), 4:525–26.

Aside from the statement of al-Sulamī (d. 74/693), there are in fact no reports corroborating that Zayd attended the final review.⁵⁶ Qur'anic philologist, Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950), simply said that the reading of Zayd was the one confirmed in the final review.⁵⁷ Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) said, “And the final review is the *qirā'ah* of Zayd b. Thābit and others, and it is the one that the rightly-guided caliphs—Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī—instructed to be written in the *maṣāḥif*.”⁵⁸

On the other hand, we have reports from Ibn 'Abbās (rA) (d. 68/687) indicating that it was in fact 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd (rA) who attended the final review,⁵⁹ which he mentioned to explain why Ibn Mas'ūd's reading differed from the 'Uthmānic codex and the reading of Zayd. Al-Ṭāsān dismisses Ibn 'Abbās' report as inauthentic for several reasons. However, he suggests that, even if one were to assume the report was authentically transmitted, it was simply a confusion on the part of Ibn 'Abbās.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the relevance of the “final review” was never mentioned by the companions during the compilation process of Abū Bakr nor of 'Uthmān. Moreover, given that there is no definite and clear evidence to confirm the claim that Zayd attended the final review, mentioning it as a credential is speculative at best.

With respect to the process by which Zayd gathered the Qur'an, the evidence indicates that he undertook a stringent process that utilized both written materials in addition to memorization of the text. He said, “I gathered it from the bark of palm trees, thin white stones, and the men who knew it by heart.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion concerning the “final review,” refer to the following studies: Usāma al-Ḥayānī, “*al- 'Arḍa al-akhīra li-l-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-al-aḥādīth al-wārida fihā jam'an wa dirāsa*,” *al-Majallat Jāmi'at al-Amīr 'Abd al-Qādir*, no. 10; Muhammad Bāzmūl, “*al-Aḥādīth al-wārida fī al- 'arḍa al-akhīra*,” *Majallah Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurra li-l- 'Ulūm al-Sharī'a wa al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya* 62 (Sha'bān 1435): 83; Nāsir b. Sa'ūd al-Qithamī, “*al- 'Arḍa al-akhīra: Dalālatuhā wa atharuhā*,” *Majallat Ma'had al-Imām al-Shaṭībī li-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya* 15 (2013): 1–69.

⁵⁷ Al-Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh* (Riyadh: Dār al- 'Āsima, 2009), 2:407.

⁵⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al- 'Ilmiyya, 1987), 4:418.

⁵⁹ Imām Aḥmad, *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 3422. This was also mentioned by al-Ṭaḥāwī and al-Māturīdī.

⁶⁰ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭāsān, *Taḥqīq mawqif al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd min al-jam' al- 'Uthmānī* (Riyadh: Kursī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa 'Ulūmuh bi-Jāmi'at al-Malik Su'ūd, 1435 AH/2014), 58–67.

⁶¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, kitāb faḍā'il al-Qur'ān, bāb jam' al-Qur'ān*, no. 4986.

During the process of compiling the Qur'an, Zayd famously sought corroboration from two witnesses for each verse. As cited earlier, al-Layth b. Sa'd said, "The first to compile the Qur'an was Abū Bakr and Zayd transcribed it. The people would come to Zayd b. Thābit and he would not write a single verse except with two witnesses."⁶²

Zayd did not transcribe verses from memory despite the fact that he and other companions had memorized them. Nor did he simply transcribe the Qur'an from existing written copies. Rather, he followed a meticulous process to ensure that the transcription of every verse was backed by both direct written testimony and memory. 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 643/1245) 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.⁶³ This interpretation is favored by the majority of Muslim scholars.⁶⁴ Another interpretation mentioned by Ibn Hajar takes the "two witnesses" as meaning "memory" and "writing."⁶⁵ While it is certainly true that both memory and writing were involved, the evidence does suggest that the meaning of two witnesses was two individuals who had learned the verses directly from the Prophet ﷺ. This is particularly confirmed by the story of Abū Khuzayma (rA) discussed below. Thus, the compilation process for each verse in the Qur'an was backed by the combined attestation of written materials, memorization, and direct testimony.

The story of a missing verse

During the compilation of Abū Bakr (rA), while seeking two witnesses for each passage, Zayd b. Thābit (rA) came across a passage for which he found only one witness. Zayd reports, "Abū Bakr sent for me, so I collected the Qur'an until I found the last part of *Sūrah al-Tawba* (verses 9:128–129) with Abū Khuzayma

⁶² As cited by al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 131.

⁶³ See al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā' wa kamāl al-iqrā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1999), 302–3.

⁶⁴ See al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 80; Muḥammad Ḥasan Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī min Rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhī wa sallam ilā ummatihī* (Tanta: Dar al-Ṣaḥāba li-l-Turāth bi-Ṭanṭā, n.d.), 182; al-Juday', *Muqaddima asāsīyya fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayān, 2001), 97; Muṣṭafā al-Bughā and Muḥyī al-Dīn Mistū, *al-Wāḍiḥ fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* (Damascus: Dār al-Kalim al-Tayyib, 1998), 84; Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Quran al-Karīm* (Jeddah: al-Faṭḥ, 1946), 49; 'Alī al-Ja'farī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, 40.

⁶⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 11:171–73.

al-Anṣārī (d. 37/657) and did not find it with anybody else.”⁶⁶ This narration, found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, explicitly notes that this took place during the first compilation, and that the witness was Abū Khuzayma (rA). Again, one must clarify that this does not mean that Abū Khuzayma 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 Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.⁶⁷ The very reason they knew exactly which verse was missing was because they had memorized it.

Another narration, also from Zayd b. Thābit and related in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, mentions the same incident but with the name Khuzayma al-Anṣārī (rA):

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 Khuzayma al-Anṣārī two verses of *Sūrah al-Tawba* that I had not found with anybody else [he cites Qur'an 9:128–129].⁶⁸

Such a minor difference in the name (Abū Khuzayma vs Khuzayma) 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 Khuzayma.

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 Khuzayma b. 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.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb wa kāna 'arshuhū 'alā al-mā' wa huwa rabb al-'arsh al-aẓīm*, no. 7425.

⁶⁷ Abū Shāma, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 61; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:171–73; al-Bāqillānī, *Nukat al-intiṣār li-naql al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām (Alexandria: Munsha'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.

⁶⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4679.

⁶⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4049.

Notice that this narration does not explicitly mention whether this occurred during Abū Bakr's or 'Uthmān's compilation.⁷⁰ In another narration, Zayd states "I compiled the written materials into codices" (*nasakhtu al-ṣuḥuf fī al-maṣāḥif*), which implies it was during the 'Uthmānic project which involved multiple codices.⁷¹ In that narration he mentions verse 33:23 and Khuzayma b. Thābit al-Anṣārī (rA). There are other narrations of this incident in other sources that use either name for each incident.⁷² Al-Bāqillānī argues that these narrations may be dismissed as contradictory and conflicting with more reliable evidence, or may be reinterpreted in various ways.⁷³

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and others reconciled the narrations by stating that the first incident took place during the compilation of Abū Bakr,⁷⁴ and that it was the verse from *Sūrah al-Tawbah* that was found with Abū Khuzayma b. Aws b. Yazīd b. Aṣram. Meanwhile, the second incident took place during the compilation of 'Uthmān (rA) with the verse from *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, which was found with Dhū al-Shahādātayn Khuzayma b. Thābit al-Anṣārī, a different person from Abū Khuzayma.⁷⁵ Al-Azami 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.⁷⁶ Al-Jaʿfarī meanwhile suggests that it is not

⁷⁰ Ghanim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 118–19.

⁷¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2807.

⁷² Ibn Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:146, 148, 154, 203 (which mentions Khuzayma with 9:128 during Abū Bakr's compilation), 1:149 (which mentions Khuzayma with 33:23 during Abū Bakr's compilation), 1:198 (which mentions Khuzayma or Abū Khuzayma for 33:23), 2:221 (which mentions Khuzayma with 33:23 during 'Uthmān's compilation), and 2:225 (which mentions Khuzayma with 9:128 during 'Uthmān's compilation). See also Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān wa ma'ālimuhu wa adābuhu*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Khayyāṭī (Rabat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1995), 2:93, 96.

⁷³ Al-Bāqillānī, *Nukat al-intiṣār*, 331.

⁷⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:172. See also Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, 20:19.

⁷⁵ Abū Shāma, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 61; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:172; see also Ibn 'Āshir, *Fath al-Mannān al-marwī bi-mawrid al-zamān*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm Bū Ghazāla (Egypt: Dār Ibn al-Ḥafṣī 2016), 417–18.

⁷⁶ Al-Azami 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 *Sūrah 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,"

inconceivable that the written parchment of one verse may have gone missing during the time interval between the two compilations, which exceeded a decade.⁷⁷

On the other hand, scholars like Ibn Kathīr⁷⁸ and others⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰

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 both incidents are in fact one incident that involved 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 Meccan migrants (*Muhājirīn*) and the Medinan Helpers (*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 Khuzayma b. Thābit al-Anṣārī whose testimony the Prophet ﷺ had made 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 the *Muhājirīn* and the *Anṣār* and I did not find them with any of them except with Khuzayma b. Thābit al-Anṣārī whose testimony the Prophet ﷺ had endorsed. So I wrote them at the end of Barā'a [*Sūrah al-Tawbah*].⁸¹

indicating group activity, in the second. All of this strongly bolsters the view that the second compilation was indeed an independent endeavor." Al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 92.

⁷⁷ 'Alī al-Ja'farī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān fī 'ahd 'Uthmān* (Kuwait: Dar al-Zāhiriyya, 2022), 44–45.

⁷⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyya, 1416 AH/1996), 86.

⁷⁹ Burhān Ibrāhīm al-Ja'barī, *Jamīlat arbāb al-marāṣid fī sharḥ 'aḳīlat atrāb al-qaṣā'id*, ed. Muḥammad Ilyās Anwar (Amman: Arwiqa, 2017), 340. See also Ahmad Ali al-Imam, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an* (London: IIIT, 2006), 45.

⁸⁰ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql*, 185, 201–204.

⁸¹ Arthur Jeffery, ed., *Muqaddimatān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān: Wa-humā muqaddimāt Kitāb al-mabānī wa muqaddimāt Ibn 'Atiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 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>.

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 Khuzayma and Khuzayma) and their mention in different narrations using the very same phrasing indicates that they are both names referring to the same companion and that is Khuzayma b. Thābit al-Anṣārī.”⁸² 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 verses in question have been attested in the earliest manuscripts, and it is not reported that a single companion's codex omitted them.⁸³

There is of course a remarkable story behind the significance of Khuzayma b. Thābit being the witness for this verse. According to the narration in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regarded Khuzayma's testimony as equal to that of two witnesses,⁸⁴ 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 b. 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. Khuzayma b. Thābit testified on his behalf, whereupon the Prophet ﷺ asked him how he could testify when he hadn't been present. Khuzayma replied that “Because I believe in you [as a Prophet] and know that you do not speak except with that which is truth.”

⁸² Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 119.

⁸³ Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “*San'ā' 1* and the Origins of the Qur'an,” *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 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.”

⁸⁴ *Al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2807.

Thereupon, the Prophet ﷺ made the testimony of Khuzayma equal to that of two witnesses.⁸⁵ This was a Prophetic endorsement of the purity of Khuzayma's faith and character in hastening to testify to the truthfulness of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

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).

Differences between the compilations of Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān

Scholars have provided a number of explanations for why the codex of 'Uthmān (rA) differed from the compilation of Abū Bakr (rA).⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ The 'Uthmānic codex, meanwhile, was meant to unite the entire Muslim nation upon a single text to eliminate confusion caused by Muslims reciting variant readings of the Qur'an.⁹⁰ Eminent scholar and polymath, Imam al-Ṣuyūṭī (d. 911/1505), cited this explanation of the differences as follows:

Ibn al-Tīn and others have said: The difference between Abū Bakr's compilation and 'Uthmān's is that Abū Bakr compiled the Qur'an out of fear

⁸⁵ See *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 3607; *Al-Nasā'ī*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, no. 4647; Imām Aḥmad, *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 21883, along with al-Ḥākim, *Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*, no. 2188; al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, no. 20516; al-Ṭabarānī, *Mu'jam al-kabīr*, no. 3730.

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lam al-muwaqī'in* (Dammam: Dār ibn al-Jawzī, 2002), 3:368.

⁸⁷ *Al-Nasā'ī*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī al-musammā bi-l-mujtabā wa bi-hāmishih ḥāshiyat al-Sindī* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005), p. 1080, no. 4651.

⁸⁸ See also 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf* (Cairo: Maktabat Jindī, 1951), 27; al-Juday', *Muqaddimāt aṣāsīya*, 100–101.

⁸⁹ *Al-Dānī*, *al-Muqni'*, 137.

⁹⁰ Makkī, *al-Ibāna*, 62–64; 'Abd al-Qayyūm al-Sindī, *Jam' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm fī 'ahd al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn* (Medina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Tiba'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1421 AH), 380; Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ*, 105.

that parts of it might be lost with the loss of those who had memorized it, as it was not collected in one place. So, he gathered it into parchments, arranging the verses of its surahs as the Prophet ﷺ had directed.

‘Uthmān’s compilation, on the other hand, was due to the growing disagreement in the ways of recitation, to the extent that they recited it in their own dialects, given the diversity of dialects. This led some to mistake others’ readings. Fearing the exacerbation of this matter, ‘Uthmān transcribed those parchments into a single *muṣḥaf* (codex), arranging its surahs, and limited the dialects to the dialect of Quraysh. His argument was that it was revealed in their dialect, even though the recitation was broadened to dialects other than theirs initially to ease difficulty and hardship. He saw that the need for that had ended, and thus he restricted it to one dialect.⁹¹

Since the reason for the compilations differed, 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 the Qur’an according to the way they had been taught and according to the personal copies that they had in their possession.⁹² 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.

Some scholars also distinguish between the compilation of Abū Bakr and the ‘Uthmānic codex on the basis of the fact that the former is termed *ṣuḥuf* and the latter is termed *muṣḥaf*. These scholars understand the former term to refer to loose sheets of parchment and the latter term to refer to written sheets of parchment bound together between two covers, i.e., a codex.

It has been further suggested that Abū Bakr’s compilation was not arranged according to chapter sequence.⁹³ Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014), provides

⁹¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 133.

⁹² Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur’ān*, 49.

⁹³ See Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal*, 273.

an interesting comment in this regard after citing a hadith indicating that some compilation took place in the time of the Prophet ﷺ himself.⁹⁴ Al-Ḥākim writes:

The hadith provides clear evidence that the compilation of the Qur'an was not a single event. Some of it was compiled in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, then some of it was compiled in the presence of Abū Bakr as-Ṣiddīq. The third compilation, which involved arranging the surahs, occurred during the Caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Uthmān bin 'Affān, may Allah be pleased with them all.⁹⁵

This brief comment expresses the opinion that 'Uthmān's compilation involved arranging the surah sequence, and implies that Abū Bakr's compilation did not. Ibn 'Aṭīyya (d. 541/1147), an authoritative sunni exegete, is more explicit in stating that the compilation of Abū Bakr was "not arranged by surah sequence" (*ghayr murattab al-suwar*).⁹⁶ Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī (d. 665/1268) explains this with reference to the term *ṣuḥuf* used to describe Abū Bakr's compilation:

It appears that Abū Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, compiled one, two, or more surahs onto a sheet of parchment, depending on the length of the surah. Hence it is said that he compiled the Qur'an in *ṣuḥuf*,⁹⁷ and similar expressions that indicate plurality. Then 'Uthmān, may Allah be pleased with him, copied from those sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) into a *muṣḥaf* which included them together, arranging the surahs in their current order.⁹⁸

Ibn Ḥajar writes:

The difference between the *ṣuḥuf* and the *muṣḥaf* is that the *ṣuḥuf* are the separate parchment sheets on which the Qur'an was compiled during the era of Abū Bakr. They contained the surahs [chapters] separately, each surah arranged independently with its verses, but the surahs were not arranged

⁹⁴ The hadith is as follows: Zayd bin Thabit, may Allah be pleased with him, reported: We were with the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, compiling the Quran from fragments, when the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "Blessings upon Syria." We asked, "Why is that?" He said, "Because the angels of the Merciful are spreading their wings over them."

⁹⁵ Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qadir 'Aṭṭā (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990), 2:249.

⁹⁶ 'Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām 'Abd al-Shāfi Muḥammad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1422H/2001), 1:49.

⁹⁷ The word in the text is *muṣḥaf*, which appears to be in error since it is not plural, see al-Ṭāsān, *al-Masāḥif al-manṣuba*, 29.

⁹⁸ Abū Shāma, *al-Murshid al-wajīz ilā 'ulūm tata'allaq bil-Kitāb al-Aziz*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2003), 76.

sequentially. When they were copied and arranged in a sequence, they became a *muṣḥaf*.⁹⁹

On the other hand, Ghānim Qaddurī al-Ḥamad does not find the evidence sufficient to conclude that Abū Bakr's compilation lacked arrangement by surah sequence and he points to the existence of reports that mention that Abū Bakr compiled the Qur'an 'between two covers.'¹⁰⁰

There is also some discussion concerning the suitability of the term *jam'* (gathering or compilation) for the compilation of Abū Bakr versus the 'Uthmānic codex (see the discussion in "[How the Qur'an was Preserved During the Time of the Prophet.](#)") While listing the differences between Abū Bakr's compilation and 'Uthmān's codex, Ahmed al-'Abd al-Karīm writes, "The compilation by Abū Bakr was the closest to the conventional meaning of 'compilation' in the Arabic language, which implies bringing together what is scattered and connecting parts to each other."¹⁰¹ For those scholars who consider the 'Uthmānic codex to simply be a direct copy of the *ṣuḥuf* of Abū Bakr, 'Uthmān's project 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. However, the 'Uthmānic codex may be considered a compilation of a compilation, in that Abū Bakr's loose sheets of parchment (*ṣuḥuf*) were combined into a bounded codex. Indeed, the scholars of hadith listed narrations concerning the 'Uthmānic project under the title "the compilation (*jam'*) of the Qur'an," which indicates that they considered it to be part of the compilation process rather than a separate process.¹⁰² Moreover, as will be explained in a subsequent section, some scholars considered the 'Uthmānic codex to be an autonomously assembled text that was later checked against the *ṣuḥuf* of Abū Bakr; hence, it could also be appropriately termed a compilation per that view.

⁹⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, 11:177–178.

¹⁰⁰ Ghānim Qaddurī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 123.

¹⁰¹ Ahmed al-'Abd al-Karīm, "*Al-Farq bayna jam' Abī Bakr wa 'Uthmān*," 15.

¹⁰² Al-Ṭāsān, *al-Masāḥif*, 514.

The variant readings and Abū Bakr's compilation

The Islamic tradition recognizes a multiplicity of correct ways to recite the Qur'an which relates to the hadith that the Qur'an has been revealed according to seven *aḥruf* (ways of reciting, lit. 'letters,' sing. *ḥarf*).¹⁰³ The narrations discussed earlier do not provide any direct indications on whether Abū Bakr's compilation contained more than one reading; however, this was a topic on which Islamic scholars theorized. For instance, Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444/1053) replies to a question concerning why 'Uthmān (rA) compiled the Qur'an when it was already compiled in Abū Bakr's codex (*muṣḥaf*) beforehand:

If someone were to say, "Now that you have clarified what you were asked about in interpreting these two reports, then explain to us the reason that prompted 'Uthmān, may God be pleased with him, to compile the Qur'an in the *maṣāḥif*, although it was already compiled in the *muṣḥaf*, as you have narrated to us in the previous hadith of Zayid b. Thābit." I would respond that the reason for this is clear, based on the report and the opinion of some scholars. It is that Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with him, first compiled the Qur'an according to the seven *aḥruf* [i.e., recitations] that God, the Almighty, allowed the Ummah to recite and he did not specify a particular *ḥarf*. Thus, when it was 'Uthmān's time, and a disagreement arose between the people of Iraq and the people of Shām about the recitation, and Hudhayfa informed him of this, he, along with the companions in Madīnah, decided to unite the people on a single *ḥarf* of those *aḥruf*, and to drop the others. This would eliminate the differences and produce agreement.¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, al-Dānī prefaces this explanation by noting that it is the opinion of some scholars, indicating that there were perhaps differing views on this matter in his time as well. However, the view al-Dānī selected does seem to have become popular and we find his contemporary, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) echoing a similar view:

¹⁰³ For a more detailed discussion on the meaning of the seven *aḥruf*, refer to the discussion on the nature of the *aḥruf* in Ammar Khatib and Nazir Khan, "The Origins of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an," *Yaqeen*, August 2019, <https://yaqeeninstitute.ca/read/paper/the-origins-of-the-variant-readings-of-the-Qur'an>.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni*, 613.

As for Abū Bakr's compilation of the Qur'an, he was the first to gather it between two covers. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib also compiled the Qur'an after the death of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and during Abū Bakr's caliphate. All of this was in accordance with the seven *aḥruf*, unlike 'Uthmān's compilation based on a single *ḥarf*, the *ḥarf* of Zayd bin Thābit, which is what is in the hands of the people between the covers of the *muṣḥaf* today.¹⁰⁵

The hadith commentator, Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī (d. 855/1451), similarly wrote:

Abū Bakr's aim was to compile the Qur'an with all its *aḥruf* and ways in which it was revealed, which are based on the dialect of [the Meccan tribe of] Quraysh and others. 'Uthmān's aim, however, was to isolate the dialect of Quraysh from those other readings.¹⁰⁶

Other scholars who made similar statements concerning the inclusion of seven *aḥruf* in Abū Bakr's collection include al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1193),¹⁰⁷ al-Sakhāwī (d. 643/1245),¹⁰⁸ and al-Ja'barī (d. 732/1332).¹⁰⁹ Many contemporary scholars also endorsed the view that Abū Bakr's compilation contained the seven *aḥruf* while 'Uthmān's compilation did not.¹¹⁰ However, if this opinion were taken literally it would mean that Abū Bakr's compilation had to include the same verse or word written multiple times to accommodate all possible readings. Suffice it to say, this would be a convoluted process if logistically feasible at all. In his doctoral dissertation, the Egyptian Azhari scholar 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī (d. 2017) theorized that since Abū Bakr's compilation was not intended to reduce readings as the 'Uthmānic codex was, it is theoretically possible that it included multiple readings of the same verse, either above or below the word or in the margins.¹¹¹ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad on the other hand dismisses al-Faramāwī's suggestion along with the claim that Abū Bakr's compilation contained the seven *aḥruf*, due to

¹⁰⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 2:485.

¹⁰⁶ Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-Qārī* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), 18:281.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat atrāb al-qaṣā'id*, ed. Ayman Suwayyid (Jeddah: Dār Nūr al-Maktabāt, 2001), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Wasīlah ilā kashf al-'aqīla* (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Rushd, 2003), 63.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Ja'barī, *Jamīlat arbāb al-marāṣid*, 334.

¹¹⁰ See for instance al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, 48, 64; al-Ja'farī, *Jam' al-Qur'an fī 'ahd 'Uthmān*, 56; Abū Shahba, *al-Madkhal*, 273; Aḥmed al-'Abd al-Karīm, "al-Farq bayna jam' Abī Bakr wa 'Uthmān raḍīya Allāh 'anhumā li-l-Qur'an al-karīm: dirāsa waṣfiyya," *Majallat al-Jāmi'a al-'Irāqiyya* 2, no. 50 (n.d.): 11–20.

¹¹¹ 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf wa nuqtuhu*, 108.

the absence of any evidence that such a task was undertaken.¹¹² Nonetheless, even if Abū Bakr's compilation did not include multiple *aḥruf* 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. This is a plausible way of interpreting the scholarly comments that Abū Bakr's *muṣḥaf* contained the seven *aḥruf*; it did not contain them in their entirety, but rather incorporated combinations of readings from each of them.

The subsequent use and ultimate fate of the compilation

If we return to the narrations concerning the 'Uthmānic compilation, 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 (rA) requested Abū Bakr's compilation to be used in the process of transcribing the new codex. Recall that the manuscript of Abū Bakr (rA) 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 that 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.¹¹³ With Abū Bakr's passing, the compilation passed into the hands of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (rA), and then, after his passing, into the hands of his daughter Ḥafṣa bint 'Umar (rA, d. 45/665), the widow of the Prophet Muhammad

¹¹⁴ . صلى الله عليه وسلم

'Uthmān sent a message to Ḥafṣa 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." Ḥafṣa sent it to 'Uthmān. 'Uthmān then instructed Zayd b. Thābit, 'Abdullāh b. Al-Zubayr, Sa'īd b. Al-Āṣ and 'Abd

¹¹² Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 145. See also the discussion in Sālim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Athar rukḥṣat al-aḥruf al-sab'a fī tadwīn al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī* (London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 2018), 316–17.

¹¹³ Al-'Ubayd, *Jam' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 506–7.

¹¹⁴ Ibn 'Āshir, *Fath al-Mannān al-marwī bi-mawrid al-zamān*, 415.

al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥārith b. Hishām to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies.¹¹⁵

From this narration, one might be inclined to state, as many scholars did,¹¹⁶ that 'Uthmān's compilation was assembled by simply copying the manuscript compiled by Abū Bakr. However, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Azami argues that combining the 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*.¹¹⁷ The first narration that al-Azami cites in support of this narrative comes from Muṣ'ab b. 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 b. Thābit.¹¹⁸

The second narration al-Azami cites comes from Mālik b. Abī 'Āmir (one of the committee members and the grandfather of Imam Mālik b. 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,

¹¹⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4987.

¹¹⁶ Al-Ja'barī, *Jamīlat arbāb al-marāṣid*, 353.

¹¹⁷ Note that this was also mentioned as a possibility by Abū Shāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 76.

¹¹⁸ As translated by al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 90. One may note that al-Azami has taken some liberties in the translation and paraphrasing and the interested reader may consult the original text in Ibn Abū 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.

leaving that portion blank and sending for the man in question to clarify his transcription.¹¹⁹

These narrations indicate that the *muṣḥaf* of 'Uthmān was prepared autonomously and gathered through an independent process in addition to corroboration with the compilation of Abū Bakr. Another narration that highlights this is the report of Hānī al-Barbarī that Ubayy b. Ka'b (rA, d. 30/649) performed additional verification of certain words during the 'Uthmānic compilation.¹²⁰

One can further strengthen al-Azami's argument by noting that 'Uthmān's instructions to the committee on what to do if they differed concerning a verse only make sense if they were conducting an independent compilation process. If they were simply copying the text of Abū Bakr's compilation, then there would be no occasion for them to differ in the first place. There is also the testimony of one of the scribes of the 'Uthmānic codex, Kathīr b. Aflaḥ (d. 63/683).¹²¹ He stated that if the scribes differed over something during the process of writing the 'Uthmānic codex, they would delay writing it. The transmitter of this report, Muḥammad b. Sirīn (d. 110/729), hypothesized that it was because they would first examine who was closest to the time of the final review (i.e., in terms of when they had learned it from the Prophet ﷺ) so that they could write it according to that reading. This lends more weight to the view that the 'Uthmānic codex was not a simple transcription of the compilation of Abū Bakr.

Furthermore, narrations indicating that Zayd (rA) transcribed while Sa'īd dictated also suggest a process more involved than mere copying.¹²² Finally, we have an account which, in spite of its weaknesses, mentions that 'Uthmān requested Ḥaḍḥa's copy after the compilation by Zayd was completed, which was then reviewed and compared with the 'Uthmānic codex and confirmed to be in

¹¹⁹ As translated by al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 90. As in the previous narration, al-Azami takes some liberties in paraphrasing; cf. Ibn Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 206. The chain of transmission to Malik bin Abī 'Āmir is declared authentic by the editor, Salīm al-Hilālī.

¹²⁰ Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 2:102.

¹²¹ Ibn Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 213.

¹²² 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'ān according to one *ḥarf*. See al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, 61–62.

agreement.¹²³ As for those reports suggesting 'Uthmān asked Ḥafṣa for the manuscripts first, the wording of such reports provides only an abbreviated description. Perhaps, Ḥafṣa's copy was requested at the outset but primarily used in the final stage of producing the codices as a source of verification.

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-Azami 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-Yamāma 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.¹²⁴

If al-Azami'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 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. This relates to what was previously mentioned concerning the possibility that Abū Bakr's compilation included a combination of a greater number of readings from the seven *aḥruf*. Therefore, the advantage of

¹²³ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr 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-Baghdaḍī, *al-Faṣl li-l-waṣl al-mudraj fī al-naql* (Riyadh: Dār al-Hijra, 1997), 1:399.

¹²⁴ Al-Azami, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 93.

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.

Al-Jaʿbarī notes that the compilation passed from Abū Bakr to ʿUmar because Abū Bakr himself designated ʿUmar as his successor. On the other hand, ʿUmar 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 Ḥafṣa.¹²⁵

The compilation of Abū Bakr, which remained in the possession of Ḥafṣa, was not erased or burned by ʿUthmān. However, the compilation was later requested by Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (r. 65-66/684-685), who at that time was the governor of Medina before later becoming an Umayyad caliph. Ḥafṣa refused. However, when she passed away in 41 AH/665 CE, Marwān retrieved it and had it destroyed.¹²⁶ Marwān stated, “I only did that because whatever was in it was already written and preserved in the [ʿUthmānic] *muṣḥaf*. And I feared that time would pass and people would start to have misgivings about this [Ḥafṣa’s] *ṣuḥuf* or would say, “It contained something that has not been written.”¹²⁷

Conclusion

In the quest to understand the timeline of the Qur'an's textual preservation, the compilation efforts led by the first caliph Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (rA, r. 11-13/632-634) hold substantial significance, although they have been considerably understudied compared to the codices assembled by the third caliph, ʿUthmān (rA, r. 23-35/644-656). This article, through an in-depth exploration of Muslim literary sources and scholarly interpretations, has aimed to illuminate the process, purpose, and implications of Abū Bakr's contribution to the Qur'an's

¹²⁵ Al-Jaʿbarī, *Jamīlat arbāb*, 344. See also Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qurʾān*, 44; M. Mohar Ali, *The Qurʾan and the Orientalists* (Ipswich: Jamʿiyat ʾIḥyaaʾ Minḥaaj al-Sunnah, 2004), 237; ʿAlī al-Jaʿfarī, *Jamʿ al-Qurʾān*, 50.

¹²⁶ Abu ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-imān*, 2:98; Ibn Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 204, 212; Makkī al-Qaysī, *al-Ibānah*, 61; see also al-Judayʿ, *Muqaddimāt al-asāsīya*, 121–22. Reportedly, he requested it shortly after Ḥafṣa's funeral, just after they had finished burying her.

¹²⁷ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 212.

preservation. It argues that through analyzing the hadith and scholarly sources, a coherent picture emerges of how, when, and why Abū Bakr undertook this project. The compilation was meant to record the entirety of the Qur'an in writing to ensure that Qur'anic verses would not be lost with the death of those who had memorized them. Under Abū Bakr's stewardship, an official unified compilation was made through a rigorous process of verifying each verse through the combined attestation of written materials, memorization, and direct testimony. This picture illustrates the deliberate and meticulous effort undertaken by the companions in assembling the first codex of the Qur'an, thereby fulfilling the duty of preserving the words of Allah for generations to come.