The Islam Research Group

Who Wrote the Qur'an?

IV Variant and non-canonical Qur'ans

Multiple Qur'ans produced by anti-Islam polemicist, Dr Jay Smith, Speaker's Corner

Contents

Introduction

Arabic

Written Arabic consists of layers of script. The basic outline of the consonantal skeleton is called a **rasm**. Without additional markers many of the individual letters are ambiguous (so that, for example, a ٮ shape appearing within a word may represent the letters 'n', 'b', 't', 'th' or 'y'). In practice these letters can often be identified from their context.

قواعد الخط العربي

Consonantal rasm

With the addition of **i'jām** diacritical marks the identification of the letters making up the consonantal rasm is made clear, although the meaning of the word may often still be ambiguous because of the absence of indications of short vowels, the absence of a vowel, the doubling of a consonant and other features.

قواعد الخط العربي

Rasm + ijām

The identification of words, and consequently the content of the text, is only made unambiguous with the additional of further markers to represent the presence or absence of a short vowel, the doubling of a consonant, a glottal stop, and some other vocalisation instructions.

قَوَاعِدُ الْخَطِّ الْعَرَبِيِّ

Full text

Early Qur'anic manuscripts rarely contained more than the consonantal rasm, with additional diacritical marks added later, often in coloured ink:

إِنَّهُ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ

The rasm in a brown ink and later added diacritical marks in red ink [1]

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[1] Image tweeted by Marijn van Putten, 2/12/18

The popular-traditional Islamic narrative

The traditional Islamic account of the compilation of the Qur'an, as it is generally recounted, is as follows:

During Muhammad's lifetime	As the revelations were announced by Muhammad over a period of twenty years, they were initially memorised by his followers or recorded in an *ad hoc* manner upon any available writing surface that was available. Muhammad sometimes gave instructions as to the order in which revelations should be recited, but the revelations were not compiled into a single volume within Muhammad's lifetime.
	According to some hadith, differences in the recitation of the Qur'an (known as '*aḥruf*') were evident during Muhammad's lifetime, and these differences were explained as Muhammad and the angel Gabriel having delivered the Qur'an in seven different dialects to make it easy for Muhammad's followers to memorise. The earliest reference to the Qur'an's existence in seven '*aḥruf*', is a hadith in the **Al-Muwatta** of Malik bin Anas, which is the earliest collection of hadith, dated to shortly after the Abbasid revolution (ie 760s). According to the hadith, Umar had been unaware that the Qur'an had been announced in several dialects and had threatened a Hisham ibn Hakim for his incorrect recitation until he was informed by Muhammad of the seven '*aḥruf*'.[2].

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[2] *Per **The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qurʾān, The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhdh**.*

The hadith in question reads:

> 'Umar ibn al-Khattáb said: 'I heard Hisham ibn Hakim reciting Surat Al-Furqan during the lifetime of the Allah's Messenger, and I listened to his recitation and noticed that he recited in several different ways which Allah's Messenger had not taught me. I was about to jump over him during his prayer, but I controlled my temper, and when he had completed his prayer, I put his upper garment around his neck and seized him by it and said: "Who taught you this Surat which I heard you reciting?" He replied: "Allah's Messenger taught it to me". I said: "You have told a lie; for Allah's Messenger taught it to me in a different way from yours". So I dragged him to the Messenger of Allah and said: "I heard this person reciting Surat al-Furqan in a way which you haven't taught me!" Then the Messenger of Allah said: "Release him! Recite, O Hisham". Then he recited in the same way as I heard him reciting. Then Allah's Messenger said: "It was revealed in this way". Then he said: Recite O 'Umar. I then recited it as he had taught me. Allah's Messenger said: "It was revealed in this way. This Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways (ahruf), so recite of it whichever is easier for you."

> **Al Muwatta** 2/281-282.

The caliphate of Abu Bakr (632-634)	Following Muhammad's death in 632, and the deaths in battle shortly thereafter of some of those who had memorised the Qur'an in its entirety, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, required that Zayd ibn Thabit identify and preserve on a single set of parchments all of the Qur'an revelations that he could identify.
	Some hadith refer to Zayd compiling the Qur'an from verses inscribed upon '*parchments, thin white stones, scapula, the leaf-stalks of date palms and in the hearts of men*.' [3]
	One verse was said to have been remembered by only one person.
	Zayd's manuscript compilation of Qu'ran verses was entrusted to Hafsa, one of Muhammad's widows and the daughter of Umar.

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[3] The full text from **Sahih al-Bukhari**, (Vol 6, 201, 162):

'*Narrated Zaid bin Thabit Al-Ansari, one of the scribes of the Revelation:*

Abu Bakr sent for me after the casualties among the warriors (of the battle) of Yamama. 'Umar was present with Abu Bakr who said:

> '*Umar has come to me and said, the People have suffered heavy casualties on the day of (the battle of) Yamama, and I am afraid that there will be some casualties among the Qurra (those who know the Qur'an by heart) at other places, whereby a large part of the Qur'an may be lost, unless you collect it. And I am of the opinion that you should collect the Qur'an.'*

Abu Bakr added, 'I said to 'Umar: 'How can I do something which Allah's Apostle has not done?'

'Umar said (to me) 'By Allah, it is a good thing'. So 'Umar kept on pressing trying to persuade me to accept his proposal, till Allah opened my bosom for it and I had the same opinion as 'Umar'.

(Zaid bin Thabit added:) 'Umar was sitting with him (Abu Bakr) and was not speaking. Abu Bakr said (to me), 'You are a wise young man and we do not suspect you (of telling lies or of forgetfulness); and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Apostle. Therefore, look for the Qur'an and collect it (in one manuscript)'. By Allah, if he (Abu Bakr) had ordered me to shift one of the mountains (from its place) it would not have been harder for me than what he had ordered me concerning the collection of the Qur'an. I said to both of them, 'How dare you do a thing which the Prophet has not done?' Abu Bakr said, 'By Allah, it is a good thing. So I kept on arguing with him about it till Allah opened my bosom for that which He had opened the bosoms of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. So I started locating the Quranic material and collecting it from parchments, scapula, leafstalks of date palms and from the memories of men (who knew it by heart). I found with Khuzaima two verses of Suraat-at-Tauba which I had not found with anybody else (and they were): [**{9.128}**]

The manuscript on which the Qur'an was collected, remained with Abu Bakr till Allah took him unto Him, and then with 'Umar till Allah took him unto Him, and finally it remained with Hafsa, 'Umar's daughter.'

The caliphate of Uthman (644-656)	The third caliph, Uthman (644-656), is said to have convened a committee, led by Zayd, tasked with arranging the Quranic material that had previously been assembled into a single corpus. The arrangement of surahs that supposedly resulted from this committee's work, i.e. the Qur'an as it is read today, is consequently often referred to as the '***Uthmanic recension'***. When this definitive canon had been settled upon, Uthman is said to have ordered the creation of a number of bound copies, one of which he sent to '*every Muslim province*', after which, in order to ensure uniformity, Uthman is reported as having ordered that all unofficial Qur'an manuscripts to be burnt.

These regional codices only recorded the consonantal rasm of the Qur'an. |
| **The canonisation of the quirā'āt (tenth century)** | By the ninth century Muslim scholars were commenting upon variations in readings from the Qur'anic text – occasionally involving variations to the rasm, but mostly relating to the allocation of short vowels. It would seem that even by this relatively early stage the original Uthmanic codex and all the first generation copies of it had been lost, although since early Qur'an manuscripts generally only contained the rasm, even had the original canon been available, its existence would not have resolved the issue of the intended allocation of vowels.

In the tenth century, one Abu Bakr ibn Mujāhid approved seven approved 'readers' of the Qur'an, each of whom are said to have lived in the late eight and early ninth centuries,[4] and two textual transmissions from the students of each of these readers (*qirā'āt*) |

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[4] The seven 'readers' and fourteen 'transmitters':

Nafi` (Medina, d. 785), transmitted by **Warsh** and **Qalun**

Ibn Kathir (Mecca, d. 737), transmitted by **al-Bazzi** and **Qunbul**

Abu `Amr al-`Ala' (Damascus, d. 770), transmitted by **al-Duri** and **al-Suri**

Ibn `Amir (Basra; d. 736), transmitted by **Hisham** and **ibn Dhakwan**

Hamzah (Kufa; d. 772), transmitted by **Khalaf** and **Khallad**

al-Qisa'i (Kufa, d. 804) transmitted by **al-Duri** and **Abu'l Harith**

Abu Bakr `Asim (Kufa, d. 778) transmitted by **Hafs** and **Ibn Ayyash**

The Cairo Edition, 1924 In 1924, a committee of experts at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, produced a Qur'an that is gaining acceptance across the Islamic world as the authoritative Qur'an, based in large part upon the Asim reading transmitted by Hafs, which had also been the preferred version of the Ottoman Empire.

Ahruf and qirā'āt

The coincidence that there were said to have been seven modes of reciting the Qur'an in the time of the Muhammad (the seven *ahruf*) and seven readings approved by ibn Mujāhid (the *qirā'āt*) led to the assumption by many Muslims that ibn Mujahid's seven approved readers had in fact preserved the seven '*ahruf* - though not necessarily as one ahruf preserved in each *qirā'āt*. On this understanding, the Qur'an is understood as a multi-layered text with different words intended to be represented by the single rasm.

In his introduction to **Bridges' Translation of the Ten Qira'at of the Noble Qur'an**, Fadel Somian gives several examples, to demonstrate how this is believed, including **{49.6}** :

> *'O you who have attained faith, if an ungodly person brings you any news, investigate (the matter) lest you harm a people out of ignorance …'*

This is how [**{49.6}**] *is recited by the majority of reciters … However, Hamza, Al-Kesai and Khalaf recite ('fatabayyanū') as fatathabbatū because of the differences in the number and placements of dots on three of the letters of the word.*

This is translated as:

> *O you who have attained faith, if an ungodly person brings you any news, ascertain (the truth) lest you harm a people out of ignorance …'*

The presence of these two versions adds great depth to the meaning. In the first case the text emphasizes the importance of not taking action regarding a certain matter, except after a thorough investigation of the matter. The question that comes to mind is whether one can start taking some preliminary action, whilst a lengthy investigation of the matter takes its course. This is where the other mode of recitation lends insight as it states that one must wait till fully ascertaining the truth before taking action.'

The incoherence of the traditional Islamic narrative

Even without any extraneous evidence, the elements of the traditional Islamic narrative can be readily seen to be inconsistent with one another.

1. If the Qur'an had been announced by Muhammad in seven different dialects, it is impossible to see how this highly salient, if improbable, fact might have escaped Umar's notice, so that he needed to be informed of it when he heard an unfamiliar recitation, .

2. If, at the time of the Qur'an's organisation into a single canon, Muslims were available who had memorised the Qur'an, it makes no sense that Zayd ibn Thabit would have been particularly intimidated by the task of compiling the Qur'an, nor that he should have had to collate it from a diverse range of haphazard writing materials.

3. If Zayd had compiled a written Qur'an manuscript for Abu Bakr, there is no satisfactory explanation why he should have had to produce a second manuscript for Uthman two decades later.

4. The proposition that Uthman had compiled the first ordered Qur'an manuscript is impossible to reconcile with the account of him burning existing Qur'an manuscripts. Moreover:

    i. if only the consonantal rasm of the Qur'an was recorded in early manuscripts, but the *ahruf* affected only the pronunciation (that would only have been reflected in diacritical marks) the existence of different *ahruf* would not have caused any pre-Uthmanic manuscripts to be inconsistent Uthmanic recension, and would not have been affected by it, and

    ii. If Muhammad had in fact announced the Qur'an in seven dialects, Uthman's destruction of six of these would have involved him sabotaging the revelation of Muhamad (and in his mind, God).

5. Finally, the suggestion that the seven 'readings' of Ibn Mujihad preserved the seven ahruf referred to by Anas bin Malik (either one each or between them read together) is not consistent with the fact each of his authorised readings was approved in two different transmitted versions, and also that later, a further three readings, each again with two transmitters, came to be recognised as legitimate, bringing the total number of approved *quirā'āt* up to twenty and depriving the *ahruf* to *quirā'āt* assumption of its tidiness.

Reports of controversies and defects concerning the Qur'an compilation

The Islamic sources contain numerous references to lost verses, that had been announced by Muhammad but not included in the canonical Qur'an for various reasons:

1. **Reports of missing text**

   A number of later recorded hadith report that verses were missing from the final canonical Qur'an:

   - Abu Bakr is said to have been persuaded by Umar bin Khattab to have preserved the Qur'an after Umar bin Kathab had asked about a verse of the Qur'an only to discover that the only person who knew had been killed at the battle of Yamama.[5]

   - A claim that several verses of the Qur'an were lost in such a way was made by Abd al Razzak.[6]

   - **Surah 9**

     The sixteenth century scholar, Abū al-Faḍl al-Suyuti (1445-1505) recorded in *Al-itqan Fi 'ulumal-Qur'an (The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an)*, a tradition that **Surah 9** (128 verses) was originally equal to the length of **Surah 2** (the longest surah in the Qur'an with 286 verses).

   - **Surah 33**

     Ahmad bin Hanbal, the ultra-conservative ninth century jurist recorded in his collection of hadith, that Ubayy ibn Ka'b, one of the Qur'an's early reciters, said that **Surah 33** had once been as long as **Surah 2** (the longest surah in the Qur'an) and contained '*the verse on stoning*'.[7]

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[5] *Per*:

> **Kitab Musahif** of Abdallah of Ibn Abu Dawud (below),
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> **Al-itqan Fi 'ulumal-Qur'an (The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an)**, Al-Suyuti, thirteenth century, vol. 1, p. 204,
>
> **Kanz al-Ummal Fee Sunan al-Aqwal wa al-Af'al (The Treasures of the Doers of Good Deeds)**, a medieval collection of hadith by Abd al-Malik al-Hindi, Vol. 2, p. 574.

[6] **Kanz al-Ummal Fee Sunan al-Aqwal wa al-Af'al**, vol 2 p. 574

[7] **Musnad** of Ahmad bin Hanbal

- **The '*surah of the two valleys*'**

  Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, a companion of Muhammad, is said to have claimed a surah which resembled **Surah 9** '*in length and severity*' was forgotten and lost.[8]

- *Sheepgate'* [9]

  Most notoriously, a hadith recorded in both the **Musnad** of Ahmad bin Hanbal and in Sunan Ibn Majah records the 'stoning verse' and the verse on 'breastfeeding an adult ten times' was eaten by a tame sheep whilst Muhammad lay dying:

  > *It was narrated that 'Aishah said: The Verse of stoning and of breastfeeding an adult ten times was revealed, and the paper was with me under my pillow. When the Messenger of Allah died, we were preoccupied with his death, and a tame sheep came in and ate it.*"[10]

- Abdullah bin 'Umar reportedly said: '*Let none of you say, 'I have got the whole of the Qur'an.' How does he know what all of it is? Much of the Qur'an is gone. Let him say instead, 'I have got what has surv*ived.'[11]

Narrated 'Aasim ibn Bahdalah, from Zirr, who said:

Ubayy ibn Ka'b said to me: How long is Surah al-Ahzab when you read it? Or how many verses do you think it is? I said to him: Seventy-three verses. He said: Only? There was a time when it was as long as Soorat al-Baqarah, and we read in it: "The old man and the old woman, if they commit zina, then stone them both, a punishment from Allah, and Allah is Almighty, Most Wise.'

[8] **Sahih Muslim** 5.2286:

'A*bu Harb b. Abu al-Aswad reported on the authority of his father that Abu Musa al-Ash'ari sent for the reciters of Basra. They came to him and they were three hundred in number. They recited the Qur'an and he said: You are the best among the inhabitants of Basra, for you are the reciters among them. So continue to recite it. (But bear in mind) that your reciting for a long time may not harden your hearts as were hardened the hearts of those before you. We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) Bara'at. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it:" If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust." And we used so recite a surah which resembled one of the surahs of Musabbihat, and I have forgotten it, but remember (this much) out of it:" Oh people who believe, why do you say that which you do not practise" (lxi 2.) and" that is recorded in your necks as a witness (against you) and you would be asked about it on the Day of Resurrection" (xvii. 13).*

[9] A pun coined by David Wood: *The Sheepgate Conspiracy How Muhammad's Wives Changed the Quran*, Youtube, 21.5.2020

[10] **Musnad** of Ahmad bin Hanbal Vol 6., p 269; **Sunan ibn Majah** Book 9, 1944.

[11] **Al-itqan Fi 'ulumal-Qur'an**, vol. 2, p. 25:

2. Five disputed surahs

In *Two 'Lost' Surahs of the Qur'an: Surat al-Khal and Surat al-Hafd, Between textual and rituals canon (1st - 3rd / 7th – 9th) centuries*, Sean W. Anthony discusses five disputed surahs that were the subject of controversy including the first and final two surahs of the current canon (**Surahs 1** and **113-114**)

Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 643), whose manuscript is said to have once prevailed in Syria, did not contain these three surahs.

ʿ**Abd Allāh b. Masʿūd** (d. ca.652-54) is said to have included these three in his Qur'an manuscript, that seems to have prevailed in Kūfa, and also contains two further surahs that do not appear in the canonical Qur'an, called *al-Khalʿ* ('*Casting-off'*) and *al-Ḥafd* **('Hastening'),** (Anthony reconstructs these very short surahs from the available sources).

3. Reported animosity between Abdallāh ibn Masʿūd and Zayd bin Thabit

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, who was among the four companions of Muhammad whom Muhammad is said to urged the community to learn the Qur'an from is said to have been scathing of Zayd's editing of the Qur'an canon and to have disparaged Zayd personally describing him as '*from the loins of a disbeliever'*, and boasting: '*I read the Qur'an while this Zayd was still a boy with two locks of hair, playing among the Jewish children in the (Jewish school)'*.[12]

He was even said to have urged Muslims in Iraq to conceal their Qur'an manuscripts in order to preserve what he saw as the true message of God from Thabit's innovations.

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[12] See *Zayd b. Thabit, 'A Jew with two sidelocks' Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia*, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1997, Michael Lecker

The missing basmala from Surah 9

The numbered verses of each surah of the canonical Qur'an, other than for **Surahs 1** and **9** are preceded by an introductory invocation of God called the basmala: '*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*' ('*Bismillah al-Raḥmāni al-Raḥīm*'). **Surah 1** also commences with the words of the basmala but in this surah the words appear as the first numbered verse, rather than an unnumbered prelude.

The basmala does not appear in **Surah 9**, which commences without any clearly introductory verses. Three possible explanations for the absence of this invocation from **Surah 9** present themselves:

1. the addition of the basmala may have been added to each surah by Muhammad as the final act confirming its completion: since **Surah 9** is generally deemed by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to have been the last surah to have been announced, it may have been incomplete at Muhammad's death, and so never received the basmala from him;

2. the early part of the surah may have been lost, an explanation consistent with the tradition concerning **Surah 9** recorded by al-Suyuti above,

3. since **Surah 8** and **Surah 9** are largely concerned with military engagements (**Surah 8** normally understood as relating to Muhammad's conflicts with the Meccans, **Surah 9** with his military campaigns after the fall of Mecca), the two may have been originally intended to form a single surah, which would have been the longest surah in the Qur'an. A hadith recorded by Abu Dawood (father of Abdullah ibn Dawood, author of the *Kitab Musahif*) supports this view, recounting that Uthman was uncertain whether or not **Surah 9** was a continuation of **Surah 8**, so ordered that it be placed immediately after **Surah 8** with no basmala.[13]

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[13] *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Book 3, Number 0785:

> '*Uthman said: When the verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him), he called someone to write them down for him and said to him: Put this verse in the surah in which such and such has been mentioned; and when one or two verses were revealed, he used to say similarly (regarding them).*
>
> *(Surah) al-Anfal (*Surah 8*) is the first surah that was revealed at Medina, and (Surah) al-Bara'ah (*Surah 9*) was revealed last in the Qur'an, and its contents were similar to those of al-Anfal. I, therefore, thought that it was a part of al-Anfal. Hence I put them in the category of as-sab'u at-tiwal (the seven lengthy surahs), and I did not write 'In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful' between them.*'

As noted in ***Who Wrote the Qur'an 3 The Structure of the Qur'an*** the basmala resembles in its form the common Christian invocation of God prior to the substantive part of a prayer: '*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*' and **Surah 1** follows the same structure as the Lord's Prayer. Moreover, the surahs of the Qur'an are generally arranged in order of declining length, so the presence of one of the Qur'an's shortest surahs as its first surah is anomalous.

It seems highly likely that the basmala and **Surah 1** were both added to the substantive compilation of Qur'anic material as framing texts during the canonisation process, in conscious imitation of Christian liturgy. This conclusion also helps to provide a possible context for Ubayy ibn Kaʿb's exclusion of **Surah 1** from his manuscript (there is no record that Ubayy excluded the basmala, but since, other than for **Surah 1**, the introductory basmalas were not numbered verses, he may have found this to be a more acceptable addition to the manuscript. Anas bin Malik is said not to have regarded the bismillah as part of the Qur'an).

If this thesis is correct it would rule out the first proposed reason offered above for the absence of the basmala from Surah 9. It would also make it unlikely that the second proposed reason was the correct one, for if the early part of a surah was lost (or removed) this would not have been a reason to avoid saying the basmala before what remained, and indeed would only have drawn attention to the problem.

Consequence it is suggested that the third reason, that **Surahs 8** and **9** were intended to form one continuous surah - is the most likely one to be correct.

The *ahruf*

In *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qurʾān, The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhdh*, Shady Nasser makes an observation concerning the account of Umar having the *ahruf* explained to him by Muhammad. This story exists in several later versions in addition to the earliest, recorded in Malik bin Anas's *Al-Muwatta*, cited above. Nasser notes, however, that in each instance of the story, even where the proposed second transmitter of the account (ie the person who is said to have heard the account from Umar and to have passed it on) varies, the third and fourth transmitters of the account are said to have been Urwa ibn al-Zubayr and Ibn Shihab al-Zuhrī.

Isnad of the seven aruf hadith (per Al-Muwatta)

Umar

↓

Abdal Raḥhmān bin Abdin al-Qāri

↓

Urwa bin al-Zubayr

↓

Ibn Shihab al-Zuhrī

↓

Malik bin Anas.

According to Islamic tradition, Urwa was the brother of Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr who had led a rebellion against the Umayyad dynasty from 680-691, and he and Urwa are both cited as amongst the primary sources for the biographies of Muhammad written by Ibn Ishaq and Mam'ar al-Rashid, upon which all other biographies of Muhammad rely. The defeat of al-Zubayr's rebellion appears to have been of significance in persuading the Umayyad rulers to adopt a public endorsement of Islam, since it is immediately following the collapse of that the name '*Muhammad*' appears for the first time on Umayyad coinage and that passages from the Qur'an are inscribed upon the Dome of the Rock ambulatory mosaic[14].   Dan Gibson has also proposed a plausible – it is suggested the most plausible – explanation for the founding of Mecca, connected with al-Zubayr's rebellion.

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[14] *Who Wrote the Qur'an VII Coins & VIII Masjid al-Al-Haram*

Nasser notes that **The Kitab Musahif of Abdallah of Ibn Abu Dawud**, to be referred to below, refers to Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr having his own non-Uthmanic codex, and suggests:

> It is probable that the muṣḥaf (manuscript) of 'Abd Allāh bin al-Zubayr (being the Caliph in al-Madinah for ten years before his reign was put to an end at the hands of al-Hajjaj and Abd al-Malik b. Marwān) became the muṣḥaf of the al-Zubayr family.
>
> Thus the tradition of the sab'at [seven] aḥruf might have originated with Zuhra bin al-Zubayr as a result of the differences found between the Uthmanic and Zubayri codices.
>
> This does not necessitate forgery upon Urwah's behalf: rather it indicates an interest on his part to propagate the sab'at aḥruf tradition and perhaps to vindicate the codex and reading of his older brother, 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr.

The *Kitab Musahif* of Abdallah Ibn Abu Dawud

In ***The Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an, The Old Codices***,[15] Arthur Jeffrey writes '*in the fourth Islamic century there were three books written on the question of the Old Codices. containing accounts of non-canonical Qur'an manuscripts. Each is called the **Kitab al-Masahif** (the Book of the Manuscripts*'). They were written by:

- ▪ Ibn al-Anbāri

- ▪ Ibn Ashta (a pupil of Mujahid)

- ▪ Abd'allah bin Suleiman bin al-Ashath Abu Bakr bin Abi Dawud as-Sijistani

Only one of these books survives, that of Abdallah ibn Abi Dawud[16]. Abdallah's father, Abu Dawud (817-889) was the author of one of the six major collections of hadith.

Abdallah Ibn Abu Dawud's ***Kitab al-Masahif*** lists fifteen manuscripts which he attributes to:

- **Ibn Ma'sud** (said by Ibn Ishaq to be an early follower of Muhammad)
- **Ubai bin Ka'b** (said by Ibn Ishaq to have been an ansar – a Medinan who pledged loyalty to Muhammad at Aqaba)
- **Ali**, (Muhammad's first cousin and son in law)
- **Ibn 'Abbas**, (a further cousin of Muhammad, son of Muhammad's uncle, Abbas)
- **Abu Musa** (said to be a Meccan companion of Muhammad, from Yemen)
- **Hafsa** (a wife of Muhammad and the daughter of the second 'caliph' Umar)
- **Anas bin Malik**, (a child at the time of the Hijrah, said to have been the last living companion of Muhammad)
- **Umar**, the second caliph
- **Zaid bin Thabit** (compiler of the canonical Qur'an)
- **Ibn al-Zubair**
- **Ibn Amr**
- **Aisha**
- **Salim**
- **Umm Salama**
- **Ubaid bin Umair**

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[15] 1937

[16] Jeffrey reports this as existing in three copies: one at the Zāhiriya Library in Damascus, another at the Egyptian state library and a third in Jeffrey's own possession.

The actual variants that Abdallah Abu Dawud lists are many: over a hundred differences between the manuscript of ibn Masud and the canonical Qur'an in relation to **Surah 2** alone. These have yet to be published in English translation but none have been widely publicised as involving a significant change in the meaning of the Qur'an. Many variants are common to several non-canonical manuscripts.

The most significant difference is that **Ibn Masud** omits **Surahs 1** and **113**, **114** referred to above

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The *Sana'a Palimpsest*

The only known early Qur'an manuscript not to follow the canonical archetype is the lower text of the San'aa Palimpsest (**DAM 1 – 27 – 1**). This is one of 926 Qur'an manuscripts identified from 12,000 Qur'an manuscript fragments discovered in 1972, in the eaves of a mosque undergoing renovation in Sana'a, Yemen. As reported in *Who Wrote the Qur'an I, Manuscripts*, the parchment upon which this was written has been radiocarbon dated with 95.4% accuracy to **578-669** making it one of the earliest known Qur'an manuscripts (with the second earliest latest possible date of creation).

DAM 01-27.01 is a palimpsest, meaning that an original text has been washed or scraped off and overwritten by a different text. Consequently, given the apparent antiquity of the parchment, by far the greatest interest in the manuscript lies in the original text. With the passage of time this is becoming once again visible to the naked eye, but it can only be clearly read by careful viewing of the manuscript in ultraviolet light or X-ray. Even the upper writing is generally thought by experts to have been written in the eight century.
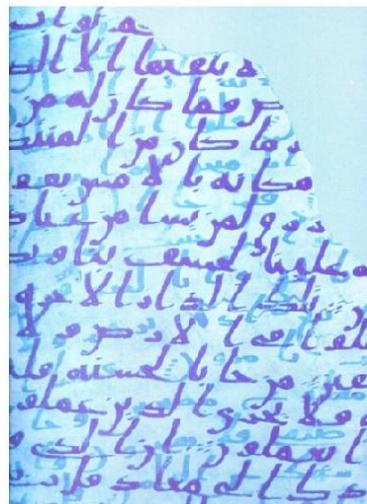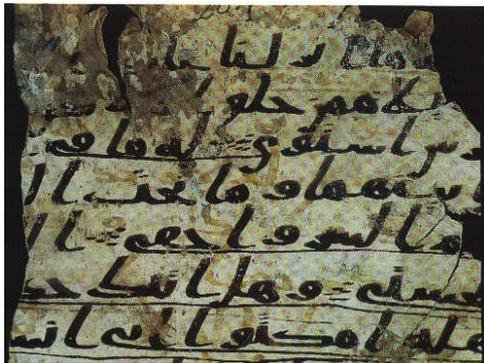
The *Sana'a palimpsest* in natural and ultraviolet light

Sana'a variants

Analysis of the lower text is incomplete. The manuscript mostly remains in two locations in Yemen and has only been partially studied.[17] No work is currently ongoing on these manuscripts in their present location, negotiations to resume work no doubt complicated by the ongoing Yemen civil war. The text has, however, been the subject of a 2012 article ***Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān*** by Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, and a book ***The Sanaa Palimpsest, The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH*** (2017) by Asma Hilali

To the extent that the lower text has been analysed, it follows closely the canonical Qur'an, subject to the following types of variations.

- In some instances, completely different words are used to those that appear in the canonical Qur'an. Generally, these do not appear to significantly affect the meaning of the text, so they include changes in grammar (which in the Qur'an is often imprecise) or changed pronouns (without changing the noun referred to). Some words are replaced with words conveying similar meanings. For example:[18]

    - in **{2.88}** '*unbelief*' becomes '*wrongdoing*',

    - in **{9.18}** '*those who are guided*' becomes '*those who prosper*',

    - and in **{9.73}** the word '*fire*' is used in place of '*Jahannam*' i.e. '*Hell*').

- The lower text occasionally adds words to the canonical text, again without significantly changing the text's meaning, for example in **{9.16}**, '*in God's path*' is added to the words '*Those of you who strive.*'

- One whole verse, **{9.14}**, is missing.

- The basmala, that is absent from **Surah 9** in the canonical text, is included in the Sana'a lower text but followed by a reading instruction: '*Do not say 'In the name of God'.*

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[17] Different leaves are said to have been separately examined by Gerd and Elizabeth Puin, Benham Sadeghi (see ***II Stylometric analysis of the Qur'an*** following) and Asma Hilali (*per Variant Readings: The Birmingham Qur'an in the Context of Debate on Islamic Origins*, Gabriel Said Reynolds, TLS 7.8.2015).

[18] Cited in ***Beyond the Cairo Edition: On the Study of Early Quranic Codices***, 2020, Nicolai Sinai

Mohsen Goudarzi has pointed to '*clear evidence*'[19] of a correlation between some of the Sana'a lower text variations from the canonical text and variations recorded by Ibn Abu Dawud in his **Kitab al-Masahif**. In a series of twitter posts on 18th June 2020, he provided seven examples:

- '***Example 1*** ({**33:51**}): *the Uthmanic text has 'ātaytahunna', but the lower text has 'ūtīna', which is reported for Ibn Masʿūd.*'

- '***Example 2*** ({**19.19**}): *the Uthmanic text has 'li-ahaba', but the lower text seems to have 'li-nahaba' (reported for Abū ʿAmr) or perhaps 'li-yahaba' (attributed to other readers and Companions*)'

- '***Example 3*** ({**8.2**}): *the Uthmanic text has 'wajilat', but the lower text most likely has 'fariqat' (reported for Ibn Masʿūd).*'

- '***Example 4*** ({**24.27**}): *the ʿUthmanic text has 'ḥattā tastaʾnisū wa-tusallimū ʿalā ahlihā', but the lower text seems to have 'ḥattā tusallimū ʿalā ahlihī wa-tasta'dhinū' (similar to a number of reported variants).*'

- '***Example 5*** ({**37.56**}): *theʿUthmanic text has 'la-turdīn', but the lower text seems to have 'la-tughwīn' (reported for Ibn Masʿūd*'

- '***Example 6*** ({**2.217**}): *the ʿUthmanic text has 'qitālin fīhi', but the lower text seems to have 'wa-ʿan qitālin fīhi' (reported for a number of authorities).*'

- '***Example 7*** ({**2.98**}): *This verse refers to the angel Michael, represented as (مكڡل) in the ʿUthmanic rasm and rendered in different ways (Mīkāl, Mīkāʾīl, Mīkāʾal, etc.). But the lower text seems to have (مكڡل), which matches the reading Mikayl (attributed to Ibn Muḥayṣin).*'

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[19] Twitter posts, @MohsenGT, 18.6.20

The *qirā'āt* variants

Given the geographical extent of the Arab realm that had come to adopt the Qur'an as its foundational religious text, and the fact that the early Qur'an manuscripts contained only the continental rasm, it is unsurprising that as the years passed by, there should arise a number of different ways of 'reading in' the vowels and other diacritical marks that are necessary to vocalise the text and render it meaningful.

Sufyan al-Thawri's eighth century *Tafsir* refers to the author being aware of sixty-seven variant readings.[20]

The differences between the fourteen *qirā'āt* readings from the seven approved readers approved by Ibn Mujāhid tend, as with the non-canonical codices, to be relatively minor and tend not to significantly affect the meaning of the Qur'an. A number of examples are given in **The Different Arabic versions of the Qur'an** by Samuel Green.

	Abu Bakr `Asim (Kufa) transmitted by **Hafs** (the basis of the Cairo edition)	**Nafi`** (Medina) transmitted by **Warsh**
{1.3/4}	*'Owner of the day'*	*'King of the day'*
{2.8/9}	*'They deceive'*	*'They seek to deceive'*
{2.57/58}	*'We give mercy'*	*'He gives mercy'*
{2.212/214}	*'So that they said'*	*'Until they said'*
{2.132}	*'And Ibrahim enjoined (wawassaa) on his sons'*	*'And Ibrahim instructed/made (wa'awsaa) his sons'*
{2.140}	*'You (plural) say'*	*'They say'*
{2.259}	*'We shall raise up…'*	*'We shall revive…'*
{3.80/81}	*'I gave you'*	*'We gave you'*
{3.133}	*'And hasten to'*	*'Hasten to'*
{4.151/2}	*'I gave them'*	*'We gave them'*
{21.4}	*'He said: 'My Lord knows…'*	*'Say, 'My Lord knows…'*
{28.48}	*'Two works of magic'*	*'Two magicians'*
{57.23/24}	*'Allah he (is) the self sufficient'*	*'Allah, the self sufficient'*
{66.12}	*'Her Lord and his books'*	*'Her Lord and his Book'*
{91.15}	*'and for him is no fear'*	*'Therefore, for him is no fear'*

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[20] **Readings of the Qur'an**, Frederik Leemhuis, **Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an**

The author is aware of only one *qirā'āt* difference that results in a significant change of the relevant verse's meaning:

{**2.219**}   *'They ask you about wine and gambling.*

Say 'There is

'much' (*per* Hamza and Kisai) /
'grave' (*per the other five quirā'āt*)]

sin in them and some benefits for people but the sin in them
is greater is greater than their benefit'

Here the difference between '*much sin*' and '*grave sin*' may be the difference between the verse warning against alcohol consumption and gambling or imposing an absolute prohibition upon them.

In ***Ibn Mujahid and the establishment of seven Qur'anic Readings***[21] (2000) Christopher Melchert makes two important observations concerning the selection of seven *qirā'āt* by Ibn Mujāhid:

- Ibn Mujāhid selected his approved 'readers' according to purported chains of transmission connecting them back to the companions of Muhammad. In this, the proves was similar to that Muslims used to verify hadith. However, of the seven readers, three did not feature in any of the chains of transmissions appearing in the six major collections of hadith, whilst the then, leader of the traditionalist movement, Ahmad bin Hanbal (780-855), appears to have been '*half-hearted*' in his analysis of Qur'anic variations. In short, Melchert concludes, the study of the Qur'an and the collection of ahadith telling the life of Muhammad, whilst they developed in a similar way appear to have been separate disciplines carried out by discreet groups of people.

- Ibn Mujāhid's motivation in 'canonising the seven readers, appears to have been to limit the number of variant Qur'an readings in circulation. Merchert states that he is unaware of any claim attributed to Ibn Mujāhid that any one of his seven approved *qirā'āt* readers constituted a preserved integral reading of the original Qur'an meaning, and certainly not any claim that multiple readings might each be 'correct' in reliance of the story of the seven *ahruf* (a theory that was implicitly rejected by al-Tabari later in the 10th century and expressly rejected by al-Suyuti in the 16th). That such a notion only arose later, as can be seen from the fact that as

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[21] ***Studia Isalmica*** 2000

late as the eleventh century, **Abd al-Qasim al-Hundhali** (eleventh century) documented fifty[22] readings still in circulation in his time.

Conclusion

1. **None of the accounts of lost and incorrectly recorded verses is sufficiently contemporaneous or authoritative that it could be relied upon as evidence that verses were in fact lost or incorrectly recorded as the account asserts, but the fact that these accounts exist is itself evidence that within the early Qur'anic community, the issue of the compilation of the Qur'an was far more fractious and controversial than the popular narrative, which is in several respects self-contradictory, would have it.**

2. **The Sana'a palimpsest, on the other hand, appears to provide physical corroboration for at least some of the accounts of non-canonical codices recorded by Abdallah Ibn Abu Dawud in his *Kitab al-Masahif*.**

In *Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and the Origins of the Qurʾān*, Sadeghi and Goudarzi make an important observation upon the canonical archetype Qur'an from which all ancient Qur'ans were indirectly copied (which they refer to as the Uthmanic text) compared with Ibn Masud's accounts of non-canonical texts in the ***Kitab al-Masahif***.

> *'The literary sources provide fairly systematic information about the codex of Ibn Masʿūd, allowing one to compare it with [the Sana'a Palimpsest lower text] and the Uthmānic text types. It emerges that where the texts of Ibn Masʿūd and ʿUthmān disagree, usually the ʿUthmānic version is in the majority: that is, the ʿUthmānic text agrees with one of the others against the third. This is compatible with two scenarios.*
>
>> *First, the Uthmānic text may be a hybrid formed on the basis of a number of Companion codices (and, conceivably, partial codices and free-standing copies of sūras) in which preference was usually given to the majority reading. This hybridity thesis happens to fit some early Muslim reports about the formation of the text.*
>
>> *Second, the ʿUthmānic Qurʾān could have been a self-contained, existing codex like those of Ibn Masʿūd and [the Sana'a Palimpsest lower text], the three text types being distinct descendants of a common source, the Prophetic prototype. In this scenario, the fact that*

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[22] ***Al-Kāmil fī al-Qirāʾāt al ʿAsh wa-l Arbaīn al Zaaʾidah ʿalayhā***

the Uthmānic text is usually in the majority suggests that it is overall a better reproduction of the common source.

Of these two scenarios, the former, that is to say that the canonical Qur'an represents the result of a process of compromise between rival codices, is supported by two circumstances:

    i.   That of the five disputed surah's discussed by Sean Anthony in ***Two 'Lost' Surahs of the Qur'an: Surat al-Khal and Surat al-Hafd, Between textual and rituals canon (1ˢᵗ - 3ʳᵈ / 7th – 9th) centuries***, three were included in the final canon and two rejected,

    ii.   That in the issue of whether **Surah 9** was part of the same body of text as **Surah 8**, **Surah 9** was included as a discrete surah, but immediately following **Surah 8**.

The Sana'a manuscript lower text may be presumed to predate the canonical Qur'an, since it was washed out and replaced by the latter text. Since the lower text contains the basmala, it would appear to be the case that the Sana'a lower text was part of a complete Qur'an, and if the final canonical text was a compromise between various different Qur'ans, the surah order and presence of the bismala was already fixed and was not, generally a matter of dispute. This raises the question of how any dispute over the rasm text of the Qur'an might have so quickly arisen. It is certain that the writing of the Qur'an was not complete prior to 628[23] but a canonical manuscript parchment has been dated to no later than 645.[24] These dates permit at most seventeen years from the final announcement of a Qur'an verse to the establishment of the so-called Uthmanic canon. In all likelihood this period would have been very much shorter. This hardly appears to have been sufficient time for a single ur-Qur'an to have been copied sufficient times to have spawned numerous variants by scribal errors, and then been lost, requiring a subsequence process of harmonisation between the variant copies.

3. **It is likely that all or most of the Quranic variants contained in the old codices date back to the lifetime of the Qur'an announcer himself, who may have announced verses differently on different occasions, or whose words may have been incorrectly recorded, and not corrected. An authoritative figure, probably the Qur'an announcer himself, appears to have settled much of the structure of the Qur'an at an early stage, but this person appears not to have completed the process of ensuring a single canonical text by the time of their death, requiring a proves of harmonisation between the different versions of individual surahs circulating at that time.**

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[23] ***Who Wrote the Qur'an II Themes and Sources***

[24] ***Who Wrote the Qur'an I Manuscripts***