The Canonizations of the Qurʾān:

Political decrees or community practices?

(Shady H. Nasser)

After ʿUthmān's (r. 23-35/644-55) codification of the first *muṣḥaf* (codex), several measures were taken to limit the variant readings of the Qurʾān, which kept multiplying and spreading despite the caliph's attempt to suppress them. I argue in this article that the Qurʾān passed through multiple phases of canonization of which ʿUthmān's was only the first in a series of efforts over the centuries to systematize the Qurʾānic text.[1] Common to all these critical phases was the active support of a politico-religious authority that, directly or indirectly, enforced and propagated the canonization process, and in some cases persecuted those who opposed it. The second phase of canonization took place at the hands of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) through his selection of the seven eponymous Readings. The court endorsed Ibn Mujāhid's decision and reportedly tried those who opposed his "rigid" system. Ibn Mujāhid's work was further polished and refined by al-Dānī (d. 444/1053) and later al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1193) whose didactic poem *Ḥirz al-amānī* (or simply as *al-Shāṭibiyya*) became one of the foundational texts of the standard Qurʾānic recitation until the present day. The fourth stage of Canonization was the official endorsement of three additional eponymous Readings to the system of the Seven at the hands of Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), who urged repercussions for anyone who denied the validity and divine nature of the Ten eponymous Readings.[2] The 1923 Azhar edition of the Qurʾān marked the fifth canonization attempt of the text, which had, and still has, a huge impact on our perception of the

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

[2] Abū al-Khayr Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), *Munjid al-muqriʾīn wa-murshid al-ṭālibīn*, ed. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-ʿImrān (Mecca: Dār al-fawāʾid, 1998), 171-5.

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

The Problem of *tawātur*

Classical sources often bespeak of the tension that pertains to the transmission of the Qurʾānic text. The key concept here is that of *tawātur*: the transmission of a report by a large group of people whose number and diverse identity/background preclude the possibility of agreement on error or the possibility of collusion on forgery. On the one hand, some kind of consensus was established concerning the *tawātur*[3] of the text down to the minute subtleties of its recitation (*tajwīd*).[4] This conception of *tawātur* ensured the integrity and absolute authority of the Qurʾān, for by definition, *tawātur* deems it impossible for a large group of people to collude on error and forgery in any generation of transmitters.[5] The concept of *tawātur al-Qurʾān* is fundamental in the Islamic tradition, the absence of which would cast doubts on the integrity of the foundational scripture of Islam. Simply put, *tawātur* imparts necessary knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīnī/ḍarūrī*) unlike reports transmitted through single or multiple chains of transmission (*āḥād*), which impart

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

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

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

speculative knowledge (*ʿilm ẓannī*).[6] This ontological problem lead some Muslim jurists and theologians to deem one who does not profess the *tawātur* and integrity of the Qurʾān to be an unbeliever (*kāfir*).[7]

Be that as it may, the concept of *tawātur al-Qurʾān* did not go unchallenged. There existed historical and disciplinary problems concerning the claims that the text of the Qurʾān was unanimously and collectively transmitted by the Muslim community, that the Qurʾān was—and still is—an unchanged text transmitted verbatim as the Prophet had taught it to his Companions, and that the Qurʾān we read today is a universal, self-evident truth that was known down to its minute particulars to the majority of the Companions, Successors and all later generations of Muslims—a self-evident truth as clear as one is certain that the sun will rise from the east and set in the west. Muslim scholars extensively discussed and rebutted many problematic aspects that could threaten the theory of *tawātur al-Qurʾān*, which eventually lead them to devise counter arguments that became "stock arguments" ubiquitously used, until today, in discussions and altercations related to the integrity of the Qurʾānic text.[8] Those who challenged the historical validity of this conception of *tawātur* and/or the integrity of the Qurʾānic text were nonchalantly

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[6] See the works mentioned above in footnote no. 5 or any work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* under the chapters of *mutawātir* and *āḥād*, e.g. Abū ʿAbd al-Muʿizz Muḥammad ʿAlī Ferkūs, *Al-Ināra sharḥ Kitāb al-ishāra fī maʿrifat al-uṣūl* (Algeria: Dār al-mawqiʿ, 2009), 203-8.

[7] See examples of Ḥanafī jurists in Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Nujaym al-Miṣrī (d. 970/1563), *al-Baḥr al-rāʾiq sharḥ Kanz al-Daqāʾiq*, ed. Zakariyyā ʿUmayrāt, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), 1:545-6; of Mālikī jurists in Abū al-Walīd Sulaymān al-Bājī (d. 494/1101), *al-Muntaqā sharḥ Muwaṭṭaʾ Mālik*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999), 2:44-6; of Shāfiʿī jurists in Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), *Nihāyat al-sūl fī sharḥ Minhāj al-uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad Bikhīt al-Muṭīʿī (Jamʿiyyat nashr al-kutub al-ʿarabiyya), 4 vols. (Cairo: ʿĀlam al-kutub, 1925), 3:232-6; for a modern, mainstream view see Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Fawwāz Zamarlī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1995), 1:351-67.

[8] See for example ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf al-ʿuthmānī wa-awhām al-mustashriqīn fī qirāʾāt al-Qurʾān al-karīm: dawāfiʿuhā wa-dafʿuhā* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1999), 63-80; ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī, *al-Qirāʾāt fī naẓar al-mustashriqīn wa-l-mulḥidīn* (Medina: 1982, 1981), 111-23.

and readily called the people of innovation and misguidance (*ahl al-bidaʿ wa-l-ahwāʾ*), whether Shīʿīs, Muʿtazilīs, or even misguided Sunnīs.[9]

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

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

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[9] Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), *al-Intiṣār li-l-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad ʿIṣām al-Quḍāt (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2001), 1:71-96, 2:421-7, 513-67; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Munjid*, 175-88.
[10] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Markaz al-dirāsāt al-qurʾāniyya, 7 vols. (Medina: Mujammaʿ al-malik Fahd li-ṭibāʿat al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf, 2005), *nawʿ* #19 "*fī ʿadad suwarihi wa-āyātihi wa-kalimātihi wa-ḥurūfihi*" 419-28; Abū Bakr Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/928), *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Sabḥān Wāʿiẓ, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-bashāʾir al-islāmiyya, 2002), 1:179-95, 238 ff.
[11] John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic theories of abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 56-80; David S. Powers, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," *Arabica* XXIX, no. 3 (1982): 246-95.
[12] The example on this type is the ten-suckling verse; *Sources of Islamic Law*, 43-55, 161.

(expunging the text while the legal ruling remains at work).[13] The fact that a definite list of what was abrogated and what was not—e.g. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb not knowing that the stoning verse was abrogated[14]—was another challenge to the idea that the "final version" of the Qurʾān was universally known in all its details to all the Companions of the Prophet. In addition to abrogation, several authenticated and widely transmitted traditions addressed scribal errors in the Qurʾān, grammatical mistakes, missing verses, and textual abnormalities, all of which reports were generally accepted but thoroughly discussed and "re-contextualized" by Muslim scholars.[15]

Another problematic matter often discussed in the tradition was the formula of the *basmala* as an opening verse in each chapter. Disagreement on whether this phrase was part of the Qurʾān or not, was yet another challenge to the idea of *tawātur* and integrity of the Qurʾānic text. Was the *basmala* an independent Qurʾānic verse, or a verse in every chapter of the Qurʾān—except *sūra* 9, *al-Tawba*—or was it a verse from *al-Fātiḥā* only, or was it not part of the Qurʾān at all.[16] While the disagreement on the *basmala* manifested itself legally where the four Sunnī schools adopted distinct opinions concerning its Qurʾānic status,[17] the controversy was reflected as well in the seven canonical Readings of the Qurʾān where the eponymous Readers adopted different techniques in the inclusion or exclusion of the *basmala* as verse separator between two chapters. ʿĀṣim, al-Kisāʾī, Ibn Kathīr, and Nāfiʿ → Qālūn recited the *basmala* to separate the end of a chapter from the beginning of a new one, whereas Ḥamza dropped the *basmala* altogether. As for Ibn ʿĀmir, Nāfiʿ → Warsh, and Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, nothing was recorded concerning their

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[13] The example on this type is the stoning verse; ibid., 122-64.
[14] Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān, nawʿ* #47 "*fī nāsikhihi wa-mansūkhihi*", 1467-9.
[15] Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 1:227-37; Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1236-47.
[16] Nasser, *Transmission*, 88-97.
[17] Wizārat al-awqāf wa-l-shuʾūn al-islāmiyya, *al-Mawsūʿa al-fiqhiyya*, 39 vols. (Kuwait: Dār al-ṣafwa, 1995), 8:83-5.

practice of the *basmala*; thus, professional Qurʾān reciters tend to recite in both ways, namely, to include and exclude the *basmala* at the beginning of each chapter.[18]

The variant readings of the Qurʾān have also been amongst the "stock arguments" employed by the "people of innovation and heresy" in their push against the *tawātur* of the Qurʾān.[19] The fact that there was/is no single, absolute, universal rendition of the Qurʾān, but rather various renditions many of which were developed at a later stage, and several of which were rejected by Muslim authorities for being "non-Qurʾānic", is further attestation to the unfeasibility of the concept of *tawātur al-Qurʾān*. The Qurʾān does not and cannot exist without the tradition of the *Qirāʾāt*, for it is the only means by which the Qurʾān may be read and recited. Out of an immense corpus of variant readings of the Qurʾānic text, ten canonical Readings[20] have survived to "almost" be considered the sole representative of the divine rendition of the Qurʾān.[21] These variant readings are not "accidental" aspects of performance in recitation, which reflect dialectal features or recitational techniques, but they are rather an "essential" component of reading the Qurʾān. The canonical Readings are the Masoretic version of the Qurʾān, without which we have no other means of deciphering its consonantal outline (*rasm*). One cannot use their opinion and *ijtihād* to decipher the *rasm*, for reading the Qurʾān is *sunna*; it is a *community practice*, taught by the Prophet and continued to be preserved by the Muslim community until today.

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

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[18] ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Qāḍī, *al-Wāfī fī sharḥ al-Shāṭibiyya fī al-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ* (Jedda: Maktabat al-Sawādī li-l-tawzīʿ, 1999), 45-8.

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

[20] The seven Readings in addition to the Readings of Abū Jaʿfar al-Madanī, Yaʿqūb al-Ḥaḍramī, and Khalaf al-ʿĀshir. See below under the section of the fourth canonization.

[21] I say "almost" to draw attention to several voices within the Islamic tradition, who opposed the notion of limiting the canonical Readings to seven or Ten. Moreover, there are still Qurʾān reciter today, e.g. Ḥasan Saʿīd al-Sakandarī, who are certified to recite and teach according to the system of fourteen canonical Readings.

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

The first canonization: ʿUthmān's codification

ʿUthmān's collection and codification of the Qurʾān was probably one of the most momentous events in the early history of Islam. It has been discussed at length in primary sources and secondary scholarship[22] so much so that there is no need here to reiterate and discuss it further. However, I will only highlight some important details that pertain to the discussion at hand, namely the state's decision to take measures towards unifying and standardizing the text of the Qurʾān.

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

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

affair rather than a state matter.[23] There is no adequate "religious" justification as to why the most important document in the nascent Islamic state would be entrusted to ʿUmar's daughter instead of the head of the state, ʿUthmān, who had to ask her to temporarily hand over those sheets so that Zayd b. Thābit could copy and cross-reference them with the second collection he was undertaking.[24] Be that as it may, it must be noted here that both Abū Bakr/ʿUmar's first collection and ʿUthmān's second collection took place at the official level, where the heads of state enforced and promulgated an official copy that apparently differed from the other copies Muslims possessed and memorized at that time. Not only was the official ʿUthmānic version declared to be the only valid Qurʾānic material, but also all the other codices were destroyed, including those owned by Companions well-known for their intimate association with the Qurʾān and its recitation. Indeed, the individuals whom ʿUthmān assembled in the committee under the direction of Zayd b. Thābit were of hardly any historical significance in the life and career of the Prophet. Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 53/673) was nine years old when the Prophet died[25], ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥārith b. Hishām al-Makhzūmī (d. 43/664) who seemingly never met the Prophet and was less than ten years old when Muḥammad died,[26] and ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām (d. 73/692), who was also around ten years old when the Prophet died, and whose historical importance in the formative period of Islam seemed to have eclipsed any mention of the event of his participation in Zayd's committee, which was hardly mentioned in biographical dictionaries.[27] On the other hand, the senior

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

[24] Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 1:195-6.

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

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

[27] See, for example, ibid., 4:69-71; Abū ʿUmar Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), *Al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ʿĀdil Murshid (Amman: Dār al-iʿlām, 2002), 399-402; ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232-3), *Usd al-ghāba fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿAwaḍ and ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), 3:241-5.

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

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

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[28] Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 1:159, 66.
[29] Ibid., 1:202-3.
[30] See, for example, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's response to a man who suggested changing (Q. 56:29) "*wa-ṭalḥin*" into "*wa-ṭalʿin*", where ʿAlī, although favoring "*wa-ṭalʿin*", stated that the Qurʾān can no more be changed (*inna al-Qurʾān lā yuhāj al-yawm wa-lā yuḥawwal*); Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī, 26 vols. (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 22:309-10.

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

The second canonization: Ibn Mujāhid and the seven canonical Readings

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

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[31] Omar Hamdan, "The Second Maṣāḥif Project: A Step Towards the Canonization of the Qur'anic Text," in *The Qurʾān in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 795-835; François Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 138-42.

[32] Abū ʿUmar Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 465/1071), *Al-Tamhīd li-mā fī al-Muwaṭṭaʾ min al-maʿānī wa-l-asānīd*, ed. Saʿīd Aḥmad Aʿrāb, 26 vols. (Morocco: Wizārat al-awqāf wa-l-shuʾūn al-islāmiyya, 1967-1981), 8:298.

[33] Nasser, *Transmission*, 6.

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

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

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[34] Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhalī (d. 465/1072-3), *al-Kāmil fī al-qirāʾāt al-ʿashr wa-l-arbaʿīn al-zāʾida ʿalayhā*, ed. Jamāl b. al-Sayyid b. Rifāʿī al-Shāyib (Cairo: Muʾassasat Samā, 2007), 9-17.
[35] Refer to Nasser, *Transmission*, 35-64; Mustafa Shah, "The Early Arabic Grammarians' Contributions to the Collection and Authentication of Qurʾanic Readings: the prelude to Ibn Mujāhid's Kitāb al-Sabʿa," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2004): 72-102; Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qurʾanic Readings," *Studia Islamica* 91(2000): 5-22; Shady Hekmat Nasser, "Revisiting Ibn Mujāhid's position on the seven canonical Readings: Ibn ʿĀmir's problematic reading of "*kun fa-yakūna*"," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2015): 85–113.

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

The third canonization: al-Dānī and al-Shāṭibī

After Ibn Mujāhid, books on different systems of Readings of the Qurʾān continued to emerge. In the eastern part of the Islamic world the manuals of *Qirāʾāt* did not stop at seven Readings. Works on eight, nine, ten, and up to fourteen eponymous Readings were frequently authored.[38] More importantly, an eponymous, system-Reading was not a unified corpus without internal discrepancies. Different transmissions of the same eponymous Reading resulted in internal variations and discrepancies. The more transmitters an eponymous Reading enjoyed the more internal variations and discrepancies it showcased. This "diversity" of transmissions created many problems on the level of standardizing the oral performance of the Qurʾān, for even though Ibn Mujāhid converged the variations into seven systems, the variations within each system multiplied and began to rapidly diverge. Things in the western part of the Islamic world were somehow different. As early as Abū al-Ṭayyib ʿAbd al-Munʿim Ibn Ghalbūn (d. 389/998), who had a direct influence on the later north African and Andalusian *Qirāʾāt* scholars, two transmitters were systematically selected to represent an eponymous Reading. A comparison of manuals of *Qirāʾāt* between the eastern and western parts of the Islamic world after the 4th/10th

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[36] Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, 25 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-risāla, 1985), 15:265, 16:106.
[37] Nasser, *Second Canonization*, 141-3.
[38] Nasser, *Transmission*, 64 n.116.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Al-Dānī wrote numerous books on *Qirāʾāt* but his *al-Taysīr*, although an abridged manual written for students, was the best known of his works. The formula of choosing two transmitters or narrations for each eponymous Reading became the common practice in *Qirāʾāt* works thereafter.[43] In addition to the patronage al-Dānī received from the ruler of Dāniya and his reputation as an adherent to *sunna* and sound doctrinal beliefs, his work *al-Taysīr* received further recognition when it was versified by al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1193) in the didactic poem *Ḥirz al-Amānī* (*al-Shāṭibiyya*), which became until today the cornerstone of transmitting, teaching, and rendering the seven canonical Readings of the Qurʾān.

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

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[42] Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 17:557, 18:77-83.

[43] Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī (d. 444/1052-3), *al-Taysīr fī al-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ*, ed. Otto Pretzl (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1984), 2-3.

[44] Manuela Marín, "S̲h̲āṭiba," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Accessed 06 June 2020, availabe at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6864

[45] Abū al-ʿAbbās Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994), 3:158-63.

[46] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1249), *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-ʿarabī, 1986), 4:160.

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

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

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[47] ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 643/1245), *Fatḥ al-waṣīd fī sharḥ al-qaṣīd*, ed. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī al-Ṭāhirī, 2 vols. (Riyad: Maktabar al-rushd, 2002), 1:117, 2:6.
[48] *Jamāl al-qurrāʾ wa-kamāl al-iqrāʾ*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥusayn al-Bawwāb (Mecca: Maktabat al-turāth, 1987), 119, 480-1; Abū al-Khayr Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), *Ghāyat al-nihāya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrāʾ*, ed. Gotthelf Bergsträsser, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2006), 2:20-1.
[49] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 5:195.

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

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

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

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[50] For random examples see Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnāʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā, 29 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, 2000), 12:47; Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1428), *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 1:10, 77, 128. Cf. ʿAbd al-Hādī ʿAbd Allāh Ḥamītū, *Zaʿīm al-madrasa al-athariyya fī al-qirāʾāt wa-shaykh qurrāʾ al-maghrib wa-l-mashriq al-imām Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī* (Riyad: Aḍwāʾ al-salaf, 2005), 63.

[51] Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ al-waṣīd*, 2:6.

[52] These accounts are added as a postscript to the end of the manuscript of *al-Minaḥ al-fikriyya* by Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1606) but do not belong to the manuscript. Secondary scholarship on al-Shāṭibī often cites Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī for these statements, but so far I am not able to locate them in earlier sources; Mullā ʿAlī b. Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Qārī al-Harawī (d. 1014/1606), *al-Minaḥ al-fikriyya sharḥ al-Muqaddima al-Jazariyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1948), 82-3; ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Ḍabbāʿ, *Mukhtaṣar bulūgh al-umniya ʿalā matn Itḥāf al-bariyya bi-taḥrīrāt al-Shāṭibiyya*, ed. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ʿAlī Samak (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya), 48-9; Ḥamītū, *Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī*, 92-3.

[53] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāya*, 2:22-3.

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

The fourth canonization: Ibn al-Jazarī

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

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[54] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Munjid*, 102-8; cf. Nasser, *Second Canonization*, 20.
[55] Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, *Maqālāt al-ʿallāma al-duktūr Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī: ṣafaḥāt fī al-turāth wa-l-tarājim wa-l-lugha wa-l-adab* (Beirut: Dār al-bashāʾir al-islāmiyya, 2002), 94-5.
[56] Such as ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā al-Rāshidī and Ibrāhīm al-Lamṭī; Ḥamītū, *Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī*, 137-9.

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

The second reason behind Ibn al-Jazarī's success in popularizing the three additional eponymous Readings was pedagogical. *Al-Nashr* is a remarkable work on the variant readings of

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[57] Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, 9:255-60; cf. Shady Hekmat Nasser, "Ibn al-Jazarī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*. Brill, Accessed 13 October 2018, availabe at http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30840.
[58] Ibn al-Jazarī, *Munjid*, 173-6; cf. Nasser, *Transmission*, 49.
[59] Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, 9:258-9.

the Qurʾān but it is complex and rich in information. In order to make it more accessible, Ibn al-Jazarī followed al-Shāṭibī's example and versified his own works. First, he composed *al-Durra al-muḍiyya fī al-qirāʾāt al-thalāth al-marḍiyya*, in which he followed the same meter and rhyme of *al-Shāṭibiyya* and added the three eponymous Readings of Abū Jaʿfar, Yaʿqūb, and Kahalf. Next, he composed *Ṭayyibat al-nashr fī al-qirāʾāt al-ʿashr*, a 1014-line didactic poem on the *rajaz* meter, in which he transformed his complex work *al-Nashr* into simplified, accessible, easy-to-memorize verse. These two didactic poems, in addition to his 107-line poem on recitational techniques, *al-Muqaddima al-Jazariyya fī al-tajwīd*, became stable textbook manuals (*mutūn*) taught and memorized alongside *al-Shāṭibiyya* throughout the whole Muslim world. Today, the overwhelming majority of Qurʾān certification in *tajwīd* and *Qirāʾāt* is conducted through *al-Shāṭibiyya*, *al-Durra al-muḍiyya* (*al-ʿashr al-ṣughrā*), and *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr* (*al-ʿashr al-kubrā*), after a 1400-year journey of continuous and systematic systematization of the Qurʾānic text and its oral rendition.

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

Several printed editions of the Qurʾān appeared since the 16th century in Europe and the Muslim world[60] but most of them did not enjoy the wide acceptance and spread of the 1923 Egyptian edition (*al-muṣḥaf al-amīrī*) under the supervision of al-Azhar and the auspices of king Fuad I. This edition was printed based on the eponymous Reading of ʿĀṣim through his transmitter Ḥafṣ (Ḥafṣ *ʿan* ʿĀṣim), and since then millions of copies of this edition were in circulation throughout the Muslim world, and "it almost became" the only edition of the Qurʾān

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

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

In the last few decades, complete audio recordings of other eponymous Readings are slowly becoming more available and popular. Moreover, different printed versions of the Qurʾān based on eponymous Readings other than Ḥafṣ are also getting easier to find and acquire. Indeed, many institutions in the Muslim world are actively printing and recording the eponymous Readings of the Qurʾān according to different systems. *Mujammaʿ al-malik Fahd* in Saudi Arabia is currently distributing the Qurʾān printed according to the Readings of Shuʿba *ʿan* ʿĀṣim, Qālūn and Warsh *ʿan* Nāfiʿ, and al-Sūsī and al-Dūrī *ʿan* Abī ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ.

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[61] Yūsuf al-Mirʿashlī, *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2017), 158-9.
[62] Labīb al-Saʿīd *al-Jamʿ al-ṣawṭī li-l-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, [n.d.]), 99-124.

Nevertheless, Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim is still by far the widely used rendition in the Muslim world, except for specific regions and countries that historically adopted different readings, such as Warsh ʿan Nāfiʿ in Morocco, Qālūn ʿan Nāfiʿ in Libya, and al-Dūrī ʿan Abī ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ in Sudan and Nigeria.

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

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[63] On how the theory of abrogation was used to legitimize ʿUthmān's codex that abrogated all the other codices, and how the canonical Readings abrogated all the irregular and anomalous Readings, see Bāqillānī, *Intiṣār*, 300ff.

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