THE POLITICS OF *QIRĀʾĀT*: STATE POWER AND THE CANONIZATION OF QURʾANIC RECITATION IN EARLY ISLAM

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Abstract

The study of *qirāʾāt* in Islam has traditionally centered on linguistic and phonetic dimensions. However, it also intersects significantly with the dynamics of political authority and canon formation in Islamic history. Using a historical-analytical approach, this study examines the role of political power in the codification and standardization of *qirāʾāt*, focusing on critical episodes such as the compilation of the *muṣḥaf* under Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, administrative interventions during the Umayyad dynasty, and the canonization of the seven *qirāʾāt* by Ibn Mujāhid, later expanded to ten by Ibn al-Jazarī. Drawing on classical Islamic sources and contemporary academic literature, the study demonstrates that *qirāʾāt* orthodoxy was shaped not only by scholarly consensus, but also by strategic political interventions in response to socio-political imperatives. By exploring the intersection of religion, power, and the construction of Qurʾanic recitational authority, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how the political construction of religious orthodoxy and the canonization of sacred texts in Islam.

Abstrak

Kajian tentang *qirā'āt* dalam Islam secara tradisional berfokus pada dimensi linguistik dan fonetik. Namun demikian, kajian ini juga beririsan erat dengan dinamika otoritas politik dan proses kanonisasi dalam sejarah Islam. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis-analitis, studi ini menelaah peran kekuasaan politik dalam kodifikasi dan standardisasi *qirā'āt*, dengan menyoroti beberapa episode penting seperti penghimpunan mushaf pada masa Khalifah 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, intervensi administratif selama dinasti Umayyah, serta proses kanonisasi tujuh *qirā'āt* oleh Ibn Mujāhid yang kemudian diperluas menjadi sepuluh oleh Ibn al-Jazarī. Berdasarkan sumber-sumber klasik Islam dan literatur akademik kontemporer, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa ortodoksi *qirā'āt* tidak semata dibentuk melalui konsensus keilmuan, tetapi juga melalui intervensi strategis kekuasaan politik dalam merespons tuntutan sosial-politik. Dengan mengeksplorasi keterkaitan antara agama, kekuasaan, dan konstruksi otoritas dalam pelafalan al-Qur'an, riset ini menawarkan wawasan baru tentang konstruksi politik terhadap ortodoksi keagamaan dan proses kanonisasi teks suci dalam Islam.

Kata Kunci: *qirā'āt, otoritas politik, kanonisasi, kodifikasi mushaf, ortodoksi.*

Introduction

Despite its foundational role in Islamic tradition, the canonization of *qirā'āt*, the variant modes of Qur'anic recitation, has rarely been critically examined through the lens of political history and institutional power. While prior scholarship has made significant strides in philological and textual analysis, it often treats the formation of canonical readings as a neutral or purely scholarly process, neglecting the socio-political dynamics that shape religious orthodoxy. The Qur'an functions not only as a divinely revealed text but also as a living oral and liturgical tradition embedded within the legal, theological, and communal fabric of Islam.[1] One of its most distinctive features is the existence of multiple canonical recitations, each transmitted through rigorously authenticated chains of narration (*sanad*) and validated over centuries by scholarly consensus.[2]

Classical Islamic discourse frequently frames this diversity as a manifestation of divine wisdom and linguistic plurality. Yet beneath this theological ideal lies a historically contingent process shaped by political authority, institutional intervention,

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[1]Sha'bān Muḥammad Ismā'īl, *Al-Qirā'āt: Aḥkāmuhā wa Maṣdaruhā* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2001), 116.

[2]Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sab'ah fī al-Qirā'āt* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 14.

and struggles for religious legitimacy. This process is evident as early as the standardization of the *muṣḥaf* under Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and continues through the administrative and educational efforts of Umayyad and Abbasid officials such as al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf.[3] These state-sponsored efforts not only institutionalized select recitational variants but also actively marginalized competing readings, thereby shaping the contours of the evolving Qur'anic canon. Far from being a passive outcome of scholarly consensus, the standardization of *qirā'āt* unfolded amid complex negotiations of authority, identity, and orthodoxy.

This study offers a diachronic and historically grounded analysis of the political dimensions underlying the canonization of *qirā'āt*, tracing its trajectory from the era of the Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn through the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, culminating in the pivotal contributions of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH/936 CE), who codified the seven canonical readings, and Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 AH/1429 CE), who later expanded the canon to ten. Departing from studies that isolate these figures from their political and institutional contexts, this research situates the evolution of *qirā'āt* within broader transformations in Islamic governance, theological discourse, and the consolidation of state-backed religious authority. Afrida Arinal Muna's study on Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sab'ah*, for instance, provides a valuable political reading of the text but remains largely confined to a single textual moment, without fully accounting for the diachronic or institutional dynamics of canon formation. This research addresses that gap by offering a longitudinal analysis that connects the standardization of qirā'āt to evolving state-sponsored projects of religious consolidation across successive Islamic regimes.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative framework that combines historiographical reconstruction with critical-analytical tools to explore how political power intersected with the codification and legitimation of Qur'anic recitations. Primary sources include foundational works such as Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sab'ah fī al-Qirā'āt* and Ibn al-Jazarī's, *Al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, alongside historical chronicles and biographical dictionaries that shed light on the political context of their production. Secondary sources include contemporary scholarship that addresses the intersection of textual canonization, institutional authority, and religious orthodoxy.

By tracing the evolution of *qirā'āt* from the *'Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* to later canonical developments, this study offers both a historical reconstruction and a critical assessment of the theological, political, and institutional forces that shaped Qur'anic recitation as we know it today. In doing so, it contributes to the broader field of Islamic studies by illuminating the socio-political processes underpinning orthodoxy and canon formation.

Conceptual Foundations and Historical Genealogy of *Qirā'āt* in Early Islam

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[3]Omar Hamdan, "The Second Maṣāhif Project: A Step Towards The Canonization Of The Qur'ānic Text," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 800. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004176881.i-864.205.

The term *qirā'āt* is the plural form of *qirā'ah*, derived from the Arabic root ق-ر-أ, the same root as *Qur'ān* and *qirā'ah*. Etymologically, it conveys two core meanings: *al-jam'u wa al-ḍammu* (gathering and compiling) and *al-tilāwah* (recitation).[4] In the terminology of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, scholars have offered diverse definitions of this term. Ibn al-Jazarī, for instance, defines *qirā'āt* as the science that investigates the various modes of Qur'anic recitation transmitted through authenticated chains of narration. He emphasizes that *qirā'āt* is not merely a matter of dialectical variation or orthographic discrepancy, but rather a distinct scholarly discipline aimed at preserving the authenticity of the Qur'anic recitation through verified transmission. Ibn al-Jazarī also strongly refutes the notion that these variants were introduced by scholars after the Prophet Muhammad's era, insisting instead that they rest upon solid *sanad* that trace back to the Prophet Muhammad.[5]

During the period of revelation, the Prophet Muhammad actively recited the Qur'anic verses he received from the Angel Jibrīl to his Companions, who memorized them with extraordinary precision. This oral transmission, meticulously preserved through memorization, served as the primary method of preserving the Qur'an, with written documentation functioning merely as a secondary support.[6] Among the Companions designated as scribes of revelation were Abū Bakar al-Ṣiddīq, 'Umar ibn Khattāb, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, Mu'awiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, and Zayd ibn Thābit.[7] Notably, before the Prophet Muhammad's death, Zayd ibn Thābit had already compiled a written collection of the Qur'anic recitation directly as received from the Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, the transmission of *qirā'āt* in the early Muslim community was grounded in two principal methods: oral memorization as the foundation, and written records as a supplementary tool.[8]

Diversity in pronunciation among Arab tribes had already existed prior to Islam, due to the ethnic and dialectical variety across the Arabian Peninsula.[9] Recognizing this reality, the Prophet Muhammad prayed that the Qur'an be revealed in more than one dialect. This supplication was answered through the revelation acknowledging the allowance of recitation in seven modes (*sab'atu aḥruf*), as recorded in the *ḥadīth* narrated by Ubay ibn Ka'b.[10] The Prophet Muhammad himself taught

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[4]Abī al-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyyā, *Mu'jam Maqȳis al-Lughah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1994), 884.

[5]Ibn al-Jazarī, *Munjid al-Muqri'in wa Murshid al-Ṭālibīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1980), 3.

[6]Ibn al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr fī Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 6.

[7]Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.

[8]Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, *Nuzūl al-Qur'ān 'ala Sab'ah Aḥruf* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1991), 124.

[9]'Abd al-Mun'im al-Namr, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 1983), 127; Muhim Nailul Ulya, et al., "An Analysis of the Sanad Transmission by K.H. Muhammad Arwani (1905 – 1994) and His Role in the Dissemination of Qiraat Sab'ah Knowledge in Indonesia," *QOF: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 7, no. 2 (2023): 248, https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v7i2.1400.

[10]According to a narration from Ubayy ibn Ka'b, he reported: عَنْ أُبَيِّ بْنِ كَعْبٍ قَالَ لَقِيَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ جِبْرِيلَ فَقَالَ يَا جِبْرِيلُ إِنِّي بُعِثْتُ إِلَى أُمَّةٍ أُمِّيِّينَ مِنْهُمُ الْعَجُوزُ وَالشَّيْخُ الْكَبِيرُ وَالْغُلَامُ وَالْجَارِيَةُ وَالرَّجُلُ الَّذِي لَمْ يَقْرَأْ كِتَابًا قَطُّ قَالَ يَا

these different recitational modes to his Companions, tailoring them to their respective dialects. As a result, some Companions learned one variant of recitation, others two, and some even more.[11] At times, these differences led to disputes, such as the well-known incident between 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb and Hishām ibn Ḥakīm during the recitation of Surah al-Furqan. The Prophet Muhammad ultimately affirmed both recitations, clarifying that the variation in *qirā'at* was a divinely sanctioned ease granted to the Muslim community in their engagement with the Qur'an.[12]

Compilation of the Qur'an and Documentation of *Qirā'at* during the Caliphate of Abū Bakar al-Ṣiddīq

Following the Prophet Muhammad's. passing, the need to compile the Qur'an into a single manuscript became increasingly urgent, especially after the loss of seventy Qur'anic memorizers (*ḥuffāẓ*) in the Battle of Yamāmah. Upon the recommendation of 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb, Abū Bakr assigned Zayd ibn Thābit to collect the Qur'anic verses based on existing written fragments held by the Companions and the oral recitation verified during the Prophet Muhammad's. final review (*al-'arḍah al-akhirah*) with the Angel Jibrīl a.s.[13] The resulting compilation, known as the *ṣuḥuf*, was preserved by Ḥafṣah binti 'Umar and served as the primary source for subsequent standardizations.

Despite this compilation, the Companions continued to recite the Qur'an according to the various *qirā'at* they had directly received from the Prophet Muhammad These differences did not provoke conflict, as the Companions understood that such variation was divinely sanctioned to facilitate ease in learning and recitation, not the result of personal interpretation. These variants were transmitted to different regions and became the regional norms. For instance, the recitation of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd was predominant in Kufa, that of Ubay ibn Ka'b in Syam, and that of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī in Basrah.

Unification of the *Rasm* and Standardization of *Qirā'at* during the Caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān

During the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, the growing divergence in Qur'anic recitations across Muslim territories posed a serious threat to communal unity. The conflict among troops from Syria and Iraq over Qur'anic recitation, witnessed firsthand by Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, prompted 'Uthmān to initiate a

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مُحَمَّد إِنَّ الْقُرْءَانَ أُنْزِلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرُفٍ" Abī 'Isā Muḥammad ibn 'Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmīdhī*, Vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), 194.

[11]Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Aẓim al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1995), 377.

[12]'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr Abī al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jazarī, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifah al-Ṣaḥābah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah: 1995), 372.

[13]'Abd al-Fattāḥ ibn 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Qāḍī, *Tarikh al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf* (Cairo: Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, n.d.), 55.

second codification.[14] He commissioned a committee led by Zayd ibn Thābit, with members including Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥārith, and 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr. 'Uthmān instructed that in the event of disagreement in orthography, reference should be made to the Quraysh dialect, as the Qur'an was initially revealed in that dialect.

This initiative resulted in the production of the *'Uthmānic Muṣḥaf*, copies of which were sent to major Islamic centers along with expert reciters to teach the approved reading. These included Zayd ibn Thābit in Medina, 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Sāib in Mecca, al-Mughīrah ibn Shihāb in Syam, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī in Kufa, and Āmir ibn 'Abd al-Qays in Basrah. This codex incorporated only those readings that had been verified before the Prophet Muhammad and excluded abrogated variants or solitary reports (*āḥād*).[15] However, like the earlier *ṣuḥuf*, the *'Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* was written without diacritical marks or vowel signs, thereby preserving the possibility of multiple legitimate readings inherited from the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

The absence of dots and vowel markings allowed for more than one reading in certain words, so long as these remained within the grammatical rules of Arabic and did not alter the core meaning. For instance, the word سِلْمٌ in Surah al-Baqarah [2]:208 can be recited as *salmi* (سَلْم) or *silmi* (سِلْم).[16] In some cases, scribes even documented multiple readings to accommodate such variation, although this was not always feasible. A notable example appears in Surah al-Baqarah [2]:132, where the word وَوَصَّى can be read as *wa waṣṣā* (وَوَصَّى) or *wa awṣā* (وَأَوْصَى).[17] This reflects an early recognition that the differences among the *sab'atu aḥruf* were to be preserved in the written text. Consequently, such variation was never considered a textual alteration but rather a manifestation of divine facilitation in revelation transmission, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad himself. Importantly, the *'Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* distributed across the Muslim world continued to accommodate aspects of the *sab'atu aḥruf*. For example, in Surah al-Taubah [9]:100, the mushaf sent to Mecca includes the word min (مِنْ), while other regional copies do not.[18] Similarly, in Sūrat al-Baqarah [2]:132, the mushafs of Syam and Medina preserve the reading *wa waṣṣā* (وَوَصَّى), whereas other codices record *wa awṣā* (وَأَوْصَى).[19]

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[14]Muhammad Abdul Malik, "History of the Qira'at Asim School History of Hafs in the Archipelago: Critical Historical Review," *Alif Lam: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 3, no. 2 (July, 2022); 23, https://doi.org/10.51700/aliflam.v3i1.431.

[15]Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, 256-257.

[16]It is recited as salmi *salmi* (سَلْم) according to the *qirā'āt* Nāfi', Ibn Kathīr, and al-Kisā'ī and alternatively as *silmi* (سِلْم) in the recitations of other prominent imams. Sayyid Lashīn Abū al-Farah and Khālid ibn Muḥammad al-'Ilmī, *Taqrib al-Ma'ānī fī Sharḥ Hirz al-Amānī fī al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'i* (Medina: Dār al-Zamān, n.d.), 196.

[17]Likewise, the phrase *wa waṣṣā* (وَوَصَّى) is found in the *qirā'āt* Nāfi' and Ibn 'Āmir, while other canonical readings render it as *wa awṣā* (وَأَوْصَى). Ibid., 191.

[18]The relevant verse reads as follows: وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّتٍ تَجْرِيْ تَحْتَهَا الْأَنْهُرُ. Abū 'Umar Ḥafṣ ibn 'Umar al-Dūrī, *Al-Qirā'āt al-Wāridah fī al-Sunnah* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2006), 44.

[19]Al-Qāḍī, *Tarikh al-Muṣḥaf*, 62-63.

To ensure consistency, 'Uthmān ordered the destruction of all unofficial personal codices to prevent confusion and sectarianism. His standardization became the foundation upon which all subsequent recitation practices were built.[20] Most scholars of *qirā'āt*, as well as jurists and theologians, agree that the '*Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* preserved the principle of *sab'atu aḥruf*, as mentioned in Prophet Muhammadic traditions. This standardization not only prevented schism but also guaranteed that all preserved variants were those authenticated by the Prophet Muhammad. However, orientalists such as Ignaz Goldziher have argued that the absence of diacritical marks in the '*Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* contributed to the emergence of the *qirā'āt*. While the codex was established as the authoritative written standard, the oral transmission of recitations continued independently. This policy was not rigidly enforced, thus allowing the preservation and transmission of earlier recitational traditions.[21]

Although the '*Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* was established as the standard version of the Qur'an, the transmission of *qirā'āt* continued orally. The policy of using this codex as the primary reference for recitation was not enforced rigidly, thereby leaving space for the continued practice of earlier *qirā'āt* traditions. A new phase in the development of *qirā'āt* thus began, wherein scholars not only adhered to readings conforming to the '*Uthmānic Muṣḥaf* but also traced and transmitted variant readings attributed to the Companions. In certain instances, personal codices survived, giving rise to *qirā'āt* that did not align with the 'Uthmānī standard.[22] Some of these private codices contained readings that had been *mansūkh* (abrogated) before the Prophet Muhammad's death, for example, the phrase فَاسْعَوْا إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ in Surah al-Jumu'ah [62]:9 was earlier recited as فَامْضُوا إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ.[23] Other codices included explanatory interpolations of a *tafsīrī* nature, such as the phrase إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى in Surah al-Nisa' [4]:24, which was found in the codex of Ubay ibn Ka'b.[24] Nevertheless, these alternative codices hold academic and historical value in the field of *qirā'āt*, reflecting the dynamic nature of this tradition, not only as an element of devotional practice but also as a subject of critical inquiry in Qur'anic studies.

Canonization and Authorization of *Qirā'āt* in the Development of *Qirā'āt* Studies

In the second century AH, the science of *qirā'āt* entered a significant phase of codification and standardization. The *tābi'ūn* played a central role in transmitting variant readings to subsequent generations, which catalyzed the compilation of

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[20]Nur Sakiinah Ab Aziz, "Application of the Requirements in Qiraat Mutawatirah as a Method in Determining the Validity of Data in Islamic-Based Research Methodology," *AJOCS: Asian Journal of Civilizational Studies* 2, no. 3 (November, 2022); 44, http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v10-i12/8216.

[21]Ignaz Goldziher, *Al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Trans. 'Ali Ḥasan 'Abd al-Qādir, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Cairo: Maktabah al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, 1955), 4.

[22]Ismā'īl, *Al-Qirā'āt: Aḥkāmuhā*, 116.

[23]Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, Vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987), 60.

[24]The relevant verse reads as follows: فَمَا اسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ (إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى) فَآتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً. Al-Qāḍī, *Tarikh al-Muṣḥaf*, 69.

documented records on existing variations. One of the pioneering figures in the codification of *qirā'āt* was Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (154-224 AH/774-838 CE), who authored *Al-Qirā'āt*, a monumental work comprising 25 *qirā'āt*, including the readings of the seven leading imams that would later become foundational within this discipline. His work marked a crucial milestone in the formal development of *'ilm al-qirā'āt* as a distinct subfield of Qur'anic studies.[25]

Efforts to document *qirā'āt* continued with increasing rigor, producing more systematic treatises that organized and classified the variant readings. Aḥmad ibn Jubayr al-Kūfi (d. 258 AH/871 CE) compiled *Qirā'āt al-Khamsah*, which documented five principal readings. Meanwhile, Ismā'īl ibn Ishāq al-Mālikī (d. 282 AH/895 CE) recorded 20 *qirā'āt*, including the seven canonical readings. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH/922 CE), in his exegesis *Al-Jāmi'*, also documented approximately 20 readings, while Abū Bakr al-Dājūnī (d. 324 AH/935 CE) focused his study specifically on the reading of Abū Ja'far, one of the ten *qirā'āt* imams.[26] These scholarly efforts indicate the vast scope and diversity of *qirā'āt* that flourished prior to the eventual narrowing and formalization of accepted readings.

Codification reached its apex with the seminal work of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH/935 CE), *Kitāb al-Sab'ah fī al-Qirā'āt*, which officially established the seven canonical *qirā'āt* as the standard for Qur'anic recitation (*qirā'āt sab'ah*). This selection did not reject other readings outright but was based on the widespread popularity of these seven in the Islamic centers of learning. According to Ibn Jinnī, these readings were the most well-known across the Muslim world at a time when interest in the study of *qirā'āt* was declining, thus necessitating a standard to preserve the authenticity of transmission. Ibn Mujāhid's decision received wide endorsement from both religious scholars and the 'Abbāsid state, which viewed a unified recitational standard as essential to preventing sectarian disputes.

The seven *qirā'āt* canonized by Ibn Mujāhid were: (1) Nāfi' al-Madanī (d. 169 AH/785 CE), (2) Ibn Kathīr al-Makkī (d. 120 AH/737 CE), (3) Abū 'Amr al-Baṣrī (d. 154 AH/770 CE), (4) Ibn 'Āmir al-Shāmī (d. 118 AH/736 CE), (5) 'Āṣim al-Kūfī (d. 127 AH/744 CE), (6) Ḥamzah al-Kūfī (d. 188 H/803 CE), and (7) al-Kisā'ī al-Kūfī (d. 189 AH/804 CE). However, this limitation was not entirely novel, as efforts to unify Qur'anic recitation had begun during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.Ibn Mujāhid's approach, however, was more assertive and included penalties for reciting the Qur'an using readings outside the *sab'ah*. Some jurists even issued fatwas declaring that anyone persisting in non-canonical readings must repent, refusal would result in punitive action. A notable example of this policy's strict enforcement was the trial of Ibn Shanabūdh, a proponent of the *qirā'āt arba'a 'ashrah*, who was prosecuted for publicly reciting a *shādhdhah* (irregular) reading during a sermon.[27] These

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[25]Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, 416.
[26]Al-Dūrī, *Al-Qirā'āt al-Wāridah*, 45-46.
[27]Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sab'ah*, 14.

developments reveal that the authorization of *qirā'āt* was not solely an academic matter but was deeply intertwined with socio-political considerations in the Islamic polity.

Standardization of *qirā'āt* progressed further in subsequent periods. While Ibn Muja.hid's *Al-Sab'ah* still cited multiple transmitters (*rāwī*) for each of the seven imams, a new simplification was introduced in the 5th century AH by the Andalusian scholar Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH/1052 CE). In his work *Al-Taysīr*, al-Dānī selected two primary transmitters for each imam: (1) Qālūn (d. 220 AH) and Warsh (d. 197 AH) for Nāfi', (2) Qunbul (d. 291 AH) and al-Bazzī (d. 250 AH) for Ibn Kathīr, (3) Al-Dūrī (d. 246 AH) and al-Sūsī (d. 261 H) for Abū 'Amr, (4) Hishām (d. 245 H) and Ibn Dhakwān (d. 242 AH) for Ibn 'Āmir, (5) Shu'bah (d. 193 AH) and Ḥafṣ (d. 180 AH) for 'Āṣim, (6) Khalaf (d. 229 AH) and Khallād (d. 220 AH) for Ḥamzah, and (7) Abū al-Ḥārith (d. 240 AH) and al-Dūrī al-Kisā'ī (d. 246 AH) for al-Kisā'ī.[28]

This simplification facilitated easier memorization and broader dissemination of the *qirā'āt* tradition in a more systematic fashion. Al-Dānī's method garnered considerable attention from later *qirā'āt* scholars, particularly al-Shāṭibī (d. 590 AH/1193 CE), who composed *Ḥirz al-Amānī wa Wajh al-Tahānī*, more widely known as *Al-Shāṭibiyyah*, a didactic poem (*naẓm*) of 1,171 verses summarizing the *qirā'āt sab'ah*. This work became a foundational reference for *qirā'āt* scholarship across the Islamic world and has been the subject of more than fifty commentaries. The dominance of the *qirā'āt sab'ah* was further bolstered by the sustained support of both religious scholars and political authorities who promoted and institutionalized their use.

Despite the canonization of the seven *qirā'āt sab'ah*, scholarly engagement with additional readings continued to flourish. Abū Bakar ibn Mahrān (d. 381 AH/991 CE), in his *Kitāb al-Ghāyah fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, introduced the concept of ten canonical readings (*qirā'āt 'ashrah*), which was later reinforced by Ibn al-Jazarī in *Al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*. Ibn al-Jazarī affirmed the legitimacy of these ten readings, comprising the original seven plus those transmitted by Abū Ja'far al-Madanī, Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī, and Khalaf al-Bazzār, by asserting their sound chains of transmission and their validity as bases for Qur'anic recitation.[29]

Some scholars categorized any reading outside the ten as *qirā'āt shādhdhah*. Thus, the standardization initiated by Ibn Mujāhid and continued by his successors aimed not only at preserving the authenticity of recitation but also at establishing *qirā'āt* as a distinct and systematic discipline within Qur'anic studies. While the canonization process led to the formalization of certain readings, academic exploration of non-canonical *qirā'āt* has persisted to ensure the documentation and critical evaluation of early recitational diversity.

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[28]Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, *Al-Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (n.p.: Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 2000), 182-184.

[29]Al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr fī Qirā'āt*, 59-61.

The Hierarchy of *Qirā'āt* and Its Implications for Qur'anic Authority

The classification of *qirā'āt* within Islamic scholarship is not merely a technical endeavor but a reflection of how authority is constructed and negotiated in the transmission of the Qur'an. The methodological evaluation of each reading, based on linguistic coherence, textual conformity, and transmission integrity, serves to delineate the boundaries of what is deemed canonical. This hierarchy is essential not only for determining liturgical legitimacy but also for exegetical and juridical applications, as different levels of authority bear different interpretative consequences.

Classification Based on the Quality of Transmission

a. *Qirā'āt Ṣaḥīḥ (Authentic Readings)*

These readings fulfill three fundamental criteria and are accepted as part of the Qur'anic text:

(1) Conformity to the Rules of Arabic Grammar

Authenticity requires alignment with Arabic linguistic norms, especially those of the Quraysh dialect. Since the Qur'an was first revealed among the Quraysh, their dialect was regarded as the most eloquent and widely intelligible. Deviations from normative grammar could be assessed and, when necessary, justified through pre-Islamic poetry.[30] Ibn Mujāhid selected reciters whose readings adhered to Qurayshite norms, for instance, preferring التابوت over التابوة, aligning with the Quraysh dialect.[31]

(2) Conformity with the *Rasm* of the '*Uthmānic Muṣḥaf*

The acceptance of a *qirā'āt* also hinges upon its conformity with the *rasm* of the '*Uthmānic Muṣḥaf*, which was officially standardized during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affan. Although this codex does not encompass the full range of *qirā'āt*, it remains the principal textual reference for the reading and writing of the Qur'an. The '*Uthmānīc rasm* is characterized by distinctive orthographic features that differ from conventional phonetic representations,[32] yet it functions as a unifying standard that accommodates the variations encompassed within the framework of the *sab'atu aḥruf*, thus mitigating potential disputes.[33] The codification undertaken by 'Uthmān was not an isolated endeavor but rather a continuation of earlier initiatives, grounded in a transmission chain that can be reliably traced back to the Prophet Muhammad.[34]

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[30]Labīb Sa'īd, *Al-Jam' al-Ṣawt al-Awwal li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, n.d.), 72.

[31]Al-Qāḍī, *Tarikh al-Muṣḥaf*, 53.

[32]James A. Bellamy, "Textual Criticism of the Koran," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 121, No. 1 (March, 2001), 1. https://doi.org/10.2307/606724

[33]Ahmad 'Ali al-Imam, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an: A Critical Study of Their Historical and Linguistic Origins* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998), 74.

[34]Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 233.

(3) Validity of the Transmission Chain[35]

The third criterion pertains to the integrity of the transmission chain, which must be continuous and uninterrupted up to the Prophet Muhammad This condition necessitates a direct pedagogical link between the transmitter (*rāwī*) and the person from whom the reading is transmitted (*al-'alāqah baina al-rāwī wa al-marwī 'anh*), alongside the moral uprightness (*'adālah*) precision (*ḍabṭ*) of the transmitters. Ibn Mujāhid underscored the necessity for a *qāri'* to possess a profound understanding of grammatical inflection (*i'rāb*), *qirā'āt*, semantic implications, and the ability to evaluate contentious readings. His selection of the seven canonical imams of *qirā'āt* reflects a meticulous effort to establish a robust and authoritative framework.[36]

These foundational criteria were initially articulated by al-Makki ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 347 AH/958 CE) and were later systematically codified by Ibn al-Jazarī.[37] A *qirā'āt* that meets all three criteria, sound sanad, conformity with Arabic linguistic principles, and alignment with the *'Uthmānic rasm*, is classified as *qirā'āt ṣaḥīḥ*. Readings of this kind, including the *qirā'āt sab'ah* and *'ashrah*, are considered to fall within the paradigm of the *sab'atu aḥruf* revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. They are universally accepted and must be regarded as integral parts of the Qur'anic text.

b. *Qirā'āt Ḍa'īf* (Weak Readings)

Qirā'āt that fall into this category fail to meet one or more of the three aforementioned criteria. These readings may derive from solitary reports (*āḥād*) or exhibit discrepancies with the *'Uthmānic rasm*. As such, *qirā'āt ḍa'īfah* are not deemed suitable for liturgical use and are not recognized as part of the authoritative Qur'anic corpus.[38]

Classification Based on the Quantity of Transmitters

Similar to *ḥadīth* studies, *qirā'āt* are also categorized based on the quantity and reliability of their transmitters. Though scholarly opinions vary, the hierarchy is generally as follows:[39]

a. *Qirā'āt Mutawātir* (Mass-Transmitted Readings)

These are readings transmitted through numerous independent chains of narration that are continuous and extend back to the Prophet Muhammad, with

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[35]Muhammad Irham, "Implikasi Perbedaan Qiraat terhadap Penafsiran Alquran," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur an dan Tafsir* 5, no. 1 (June, 2020); 55, https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v5i1.8563.

[36]Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sab'ah*, 45.

[37]Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibah al-Nashr fī Qirā'āt al-'Ashr* (Medina: Maktabah Dār al-Hudā, 2000), 32.

[38]Al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr fī Qirā'āt*, 14.

[39]Al-Suyūṭi, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 77, Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *Al-Tibyān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1980), 232.

a number of transmitters sufficient to eliminate any reasonable doubt regarding fabrication or error. Such *qirā'āt* carry the highest degree of authority and are unanimously accepted as constitutive of the Qur'an. A prime example includes the *qirā'āt sab'ah* associated with the seven canonical imams.

b. *Qirā'āt Masyhūr* (Well-Known Readings)

These are readings that, although not reaching the level of *mutawātir*, are nonetheless transmitted through multiple authentic chains, adhere to the principles of Arabic grammar, and conform to the *'Uthmānic rasm*. While not as prevalent as *mutawātir* readings, they are still considered valid within the scholarly discipline of *qirā'āt*. This category includes the three additional *qirā'āt* that complete the *qirā'āt 'ashrah*. Notably, Ibn al-Jazarī later argued that the *qirā'āt 'ashrah* had attained the status of *mutawātir*, and in his treatise *al-Nashr*, he formalized this position by articulating rigorous criteria for validating a *qirā'āt*.

c. *Qirā'āt Āḥād* (Solitary Readings)

These are readings transmitted via reliable but limited chains that do not meet the threshold of *mashhūr*, in some instances, conflict with either the *'Uthmānic rasm* or Arabic grammatical conventions. Such readings are typically unfamiliar to the general public and are studied primarily by specialists in the field. An example is the reading of Abī Bakrah in surah al-Rahman [55]:76, مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَى رَفَارِفٍ خُضْرٍ وَعَبَاقَرِى حِسَانٍ, which inserts an *alif* into رفارف and عباقري, diverging from the standard reading: مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَى رَفْرَفٍ خُضْرٍ وَعَبْقَرِي حِسَانٍ.

d. *Qirā'āt Shādhdhah* (Irregular Readings)

These readings are classified as irregular due to the absence of an authentic sanad. As such, they cannot be relied upon in the recitation of the Qur'an. They often deviate from the norms established by the *mutawātir* and *mashhūr* readings. A typical example is the variant reading of surah al-Fatihah [1]:4, مَلَكَ يَومِ الدِّينِ, which differs from the standard مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ.

e. *Qirā'āt Mawḍū'* (Fabricated Readings)

These are readings falsely attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and are considered inauthentic. They often originate from spurious reconstructions that lack any legitimate basis in the tradition of verified transmission. An illustrative case is the variant in surah al-Baqarah [2]:164, وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهِ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمٍ, where اللَّهِ is pronounced with a kasrah, in contrast to the standard and authoritative reading: وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمٍ.

f. *Qirā'āt Mudraj* (Interpolated Readings)

These are readings that incorporate interpolations, additional words not originally part of the Qur'anic text, inserted as exegetical clarifications. An example appears in the reading attributed to 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr in surah Ali 'Imran [3]:104: وَلَتَكُن مِّنكُم أُمَّةٍ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَ ونَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ

وَيَسْتَعِينُونَ بِاللَّهِ عَلَى مَا, where the phrase وَيَسْتَعِينُونَ بِاللَّهِ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَهُمْ, وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ أَصَابَهُمْ is an interpretative addition and not part of the canonical text.[40]

This multilayered classification of qirā'āt illustrates the epistemological rigor with which Muslim scholars preserved the Qur'an's textual integrity. Recognizing the varying degrees of authority assigned to different readings is essential for advanced Qur'anic exegesis and legal hermeneutics, where interpretive and normative outcomes often hinge on the legitimacy of specific *qirā'āt*.

The Political Dynamics in the Development of *Qirā'āt*

These early political entanglements in the development of qirā'āt continue to cast a long shadow over contemporary Islamic thought and institutions. In many Muslim-majority societies, the state's historical role in endorsing specific canonical readings has shaped modern religious education systems, with official curricula, especially in madrasahs and Qur'anic institutes, privileging particular *qirā'āt* while marginalizing others. The dominance of the Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim reading, for instance, owes as much to historical processes of standardization under political regimes as it does to philological merit, a reality often overlooked in discussions of Qur'anic authority. In contemporary legal discourses, reliance on a singular *qirā'a* can constrain interpretive plurality and foreclose alternative juristic reasoning rooted in variant readings. Moreover, the institutional preference for one recitational tradition over others can reinforce certain ideological stances and centralize religious authority, often aligning it with state power. Thus, the politics of *qirā'āt* is not merely a relic of the past but remains embedded in the epistemic, legal, and pedagogical structures of contemporary Islam.

The Politics of *Qirā'āt* Unification during the Rashidun Caliphate

One of the most consequential episodes in the early Islamic period was the unification of the *rasm* and the standardization of Qur'anic recitation during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. This initiative, while religious in its overt aim, also reflected underlying political imperatives within the emerging Islamic polity. Prior to 'Uthmān's reign, the Qur'an had already been compiled during the caliphate of Abū Bakr at the instigation of 'Umar ibn Khattāb and executed by Zayd ibn Thābit. The resultant collection was entrusted to Abū Bakr, then passed to 'Umar, and finally preserved by his daughter Ḥafṣah, one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives.

According to the German orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), the fact that this codex was kept in Ḥafṣah's custody rather than in a formal state archive suggests that the initial compilation was more of a personal initiative than a state-

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[40]Khairunnas Jamal and Afriadi Putra, *Pengantar Ilmu Qira'at* (Yogyakarta: Kalimedia, 2020), 8-10.

sanctioned effort.[41] In other words, this early collection did not seek to impose a singular, authoritative version of the text upon the Muslim ummah. However, the situation evolved considerably under Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. As the Islamic empire expanded, divergences in Qur'anic recitation emerged, particularly among military contingents, prompting fears of sectarian strife. Reports from Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān regarding the discord caused by these variant *qirā'āt* on the battlefield underscored the urgency of textual standardization.

In response, 'Uthmān commissioned a codification committee led by Zayd ibn Thābit to produce a standardized version of the Qur'an, known later as the *'Uthmānic Muṣḥaf.* The committee was tasked with reproducing and disseminating uniform copies of the Qur'an and ensuring consistency in recitation. However, the composition of this committee drew significant criticism, as it excluded senior Companions who had been intimately involved in the Qur'an's initial transmission, such as 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd, and Ubay ibn Ka'b. Instead, the committee was composed of individuals who had not played major roles during the period of revelation. For example, Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 43 AH/664 CE) was approximately nine years old at the Prophet Muhammad's death, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith (d. 43 AH/664 CE) likely never met the Prophet Muhammad, and 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73 AH/692 CE) was still a child at the time.[42] Notably, all three committee members had familial ties to 'Uthmān: Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ was married to Umm 'Amr bint 'Uthmān, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith to Maryam bint 'Uthmān, and 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr to 'Ā'ishah bint 'Uthmān.[43] These connections raise the possibility that political considerations influenced their appointments.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of 'Uthmān's codification effort was his directive to destroy all existing non-standardized codices. This decision not only erased the personal codices of several Companions but also signaled the state's assertion of control over the authoritative form of the Qur'anic text. For instance, the *muṣḥaf* of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, widely used in Kufa, was eliminated, despite his reputation as one of the foremost Qur'anic reciters with close ties to the Prophet Muhammad.[44] Similarly, the *ṣuḥuf* preserved by Ḥafṣah, the last known relic of the first compilation, was destroyed by Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, then governor of Medina, following her death. He justified this act by claiming that its continued existence could cast doubt on the standardized version endorsed by 'Uthmān.[45]

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[41]Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur'ān*, Trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

[42]Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Al-Iṣāba fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1853), 98-99; Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Canonizations of the Qur'an* (London: Routledge, 2022), 10.

[43]Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-Zamān fī Tawārīkh al-A'yān* (Damascus: Dār al-Risālah al-'Alamīyyah, 2013), 122; Ibid., 10.

[44]Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān*, 261.

[45]Muḥammad al-Bilī, *Ikhtilāf baina al-Qirā'āt* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988), 65-66.

Political Interventions in *Qirā'at* during the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid Eras

Efforts to standardize the Qur'an continued under the Umayyad dynasty, particularly during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65-86 AH/685-705 CE). A central figure in this process was al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the governor of Iraq, renowned for his uncompromising policies in consolidating both political and religious authority. In addition to suppressing the use of Ibn Masʿūd's *muṣḥaf*, al-Ḥajjāj oversaw revisions of the orthographic conventions used in the *ʿUthmānic Muṣḥaf* to correct scribal errors and promote textual uniformity. Historical sources such as Hamzah al-Iṣfahānī and Abū Aḥmad al-'Askarī report that al-Ḥajjāj instructed scribes to distinguish similar-looking letters through diacritical marks. Meanwhile, Ibn 'Aṭiyyah attributes this initiative to 'Abd al-Malik, with al-Ḥajjāj implementing the final phase, indicating that this was not an individual decision but part of official Umayyad policy to regulate the transmission of the Qur'an. Thus, al-Ḥajjāj's reforms were deeply intertwined with the political objectives of Umayyad governance, which sought to assert legitimacy through authoritative control of religious texts.[46]

These codification efforts, beginning with 'Uthmān's standardization and continuing through al-Ḥajjāj's reforms, underscore the fact that the development of *qirā'āt* cannot be divorced from political motivations. While these state-driven initiatives were ostensibly aimed at achieving unity among Muslims, they also served to consolidate political power. Despite such standardization efforts, however, diverse *qirā'āt* continued to proliferate. This persistence eventually prompted the formal canonization of select readings in later periods, most notably through the work of Ibn Mujāhid.

Roughly 250 years after 'Uthmān's codification, variant *qirā'at* remained widespread, transmitted orally among professional reciters and documented within exegetical, grammatical, hadith, and legal traditions.[47] Before Ibn Mujāhid's intervention, compendia of *qirā'at* recorded dozens of readings attributed to various authorities, as previously discussed. Indeed, al-Hudhalī (d. 467 AH/1074 CE) catalogued more than fifty variant readings in his *Majmūʿ al-Qirā'āt*.[48] Within this context, Ibn Mujāhid emerged as a pivotal figure in the canonization of *qirā'āt*. He famously limited the recognized readings to seven, an act that drew considerable opposition. Numerous scholars deemed the restriction arbitrary and labeled it an innovation (*bid'ah*) that sowed confusion among the community, given that many excluded readings possessed robust chains of transmission.[49]

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[46]Hamdan, "The Second Maṣāhif, 800.

[47]Mustopa, "*Qira'at* Diversity in Islamic Family Law Verses: Implications for Indonesian Marriage Law," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 8. no. 2 (July, 2024): 1261, http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.23513.

[48]Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhalī, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr wa al-Arba'īn al-Zā'idah 'Alayhā* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Samā, 2007), 9-17.

[49]Shady Hekmat Nasser, "Revisiting Ibn Mujāhid's Position on the Seven Canonical Readings: Ibn 'Āmir's Problematic Reading of *kun fa-yakūna*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 1 (March, 2015): 85-113, http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2015.0180.

Nonetheless, Ibn Mujāhid's canonization succeeded in part due to political patronage. He enjoyed close ties with high-ranking officials in the 'Abbāsid court, including the viziers Ibn Muqlah[50] and Ibn 'Isā, who actively supported the dissemination of his system. This backing granted his codification a level of institutional legitimacy unmatched by alternative schemes.[51] However, controversies persisted, particularly with figures like Ibn Shanabūdh and Ibn Miqsām al-'Aṭṭār, who defended non-canonical readings that contradicted the *'Uthmānic Muṣḥaf.*[52] These disputes culminated in formal trials, in which Ibn Mujāhid and several jurists testified, leading to guilty verdicts and coerced retractions. Some sources indicate that although these dissenting scholars outwardly repented, they continued to teach their preferred *qirā'āt* in secret. In the case of Ibn Shanabūdh, it was even reported that he was subjected to physical torture until he renounced his endorsement of *qirā'āt shādhdhah.*[53] Despite these controversies, Ibn Mujāhid's canon of seven *qirā'āt* endured and ultimately became the standard framework in Islamic tradition. His success illustrates that the codification of *qirā'āt* was driven not only by scholarly criteria but also by the broader socio-political and religious contexts of the period in which they were institutionalized.

The Interplay of Religious and Political Authority in the Canonization of *Qirā'āt*

Following the codification of the qirā'āt by Ibn Mujāhid, the discipline continued to develop, reaching its zenith during the era of Ibn al-Jazarī. In his extensive scholarship, Ibn al-Jazarī successfully institutionalized the *qirā'āt 'ashrah* as a legitimate standard for Qur'anic recitation, incorporating three additional *qirā'āt* beyond the seven previously established, as detailed in earlier discussions. His success was not solely the result of scholarly acumen and academic authority; rather, it was also shaped by political influence and a robust intellectual network. Through innovative pedagogical approaches, Ibn al-Jazarī not only secured the legitimacy of *qirā'āt 'ashrah* but also ensured its continued transmission within Islamic tradition.

The canonization of the *qirā'āt 'ashrah* was deeply interwoven with Ibn al-Jazarī's active engagement in political spheres and his strategic alliances with religious jurists and ruling elites. He was not merely a distinguished *qārī'* and *muḥaddith* but also held significant institutional and governmental roles, including appointments as Chief Judge (*Qāḍī* al-Quḍāt) of the Shāfi'i school in both Damascus and Shiraz, two of

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[50]Muhammad Rikza Muqtada, "The Controversy over the Authority of Āsim bin Bahdalah Al-Kufi in Qira'at Studies and Hadith Studies during the Abbasid Dynasty," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 24, no. 2 (July, 2023): 398, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v24i2.4366.

[51]Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sab'ah*, 15.

[52]Ṣabarī al-Ashwah, *I'jāz al-Qirā'āt al-Qur'āniyah* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1988), 64; Faridatus Sa'adah, "The Development of *Qirā'āt* in Indonesia: The Tradition of Memorization of *Qirā'āt Sab'ah* from the Masters Having Sanads," *Ṣuḥuf: Jurnal Pengkajian al-Qur'an dan Budaya* 12, no. 2 (December, 2019): 207, https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v12i2.418.

[53]Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Second Canonization of the Qur'ān (324/936): Ibn Mujāhid and the Founding of the Seven Readings* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 141-143.

the principal intellectual centers of his time. These prestigious positions bolstered his authority in the field of *qirā'āt* and facilitated the broader acceptance of the ten readings across the Islamic world.

His political relationships further strengthened his influence. Ibn al-Jazarī enjoyed close ties with high-ranking figures such as the Mamluk prince Qulūbak al-'Alā'ī Ustādār, the Ottoman Sultan Bāyezīd I, and Timur (Tamerlane), the founder of the Timurid dynasty.[54] His rapport with Timur, in particular, enabled the dissemination of the *qirā'āt 'ashrah* throughout Central Asia. These political alliances not only enhanced his scholarly legitimacy but also allowed the systematized readings he championed to gain acceptance in a wide range of Islamic communities.

Beyond political support, Ibn al-Jazarī also relied on endorsements from prominent scholars to reinforce the legitimacy of the *qirā'āt 'ashrah*. A notable fatwa by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, a prominent jurist in Damascus, affirmed that the ten readings possessed valid *tawātur*, elevating them to the status of *ma'lūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra*, knowledge considered indispensable and axiomatic to the Islamic faith.[55] Additionally, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, one of the leading hadith authorities of the time, supported Ibn al-Jazarī's works and facilitated their inclusion in the educational curriculum of Egypt. His magnum opus, *Al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, was widely recognized as an encyclopedic reference on *qirā'āt* and was disseminated through extensive academic networks. This reflects Ibn al-Jazarī's deliberate strategy to institutionalize the ten *qirā'āt* as the scholarly standard throughout the Muslim world.

Ibn al-Jazarī's achievements were not solely grounded in political or theological legitimacy; his contributions also included sophisticated pedagogical strategies. Aware of the complexities that could hinder the study of *qirā'āt*, he followed the example of al-Shāṭibī by composing *naẓm* to facilitate memorization and comprehension. One of his most celebrated works, *Al-Durra al-Muḍiyya fī al-Qirā'āt al-Ṭalāt al-Marḍiyya*, employed the same metrical and rhyming pattern as *Al-Shāṭibiyyah*, aiding students in memorizing the three additional *qirā'āt* that complemented the seven previously codified. Furthermore, his poem *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, spanning 1,014 verses, served as a concise and systematic poetic summary of *Al-Nashr*. He also authored *Al-Muqaddimah al-Jazariyyah fī al-Tajwīd*, a foundational 107-verse poem on tajwīd that remains a cornerstone in contemporary Qur'anic education. These pedagogical innovations played a crucial role in disseminating the science of *qirā'āt* and bolstered the authority of the *qirā'āt 'ashrah* as a universally accepted standard within Islamic scholarship.

The political dynamics influencing the development of *qirā'āt* did not conclude with the era of Ibn Mujāhid but continued to evolve into the period of Ibn al-Jazarī. His success in canonizing the ten *qirā'āt* was shaped by a confluence of factors: his integration into political structures, endorsements from leading scholars, and his

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[54]Nasser, *The Canonizations of the Qur'an*, 21.
[55]Al-Jazarī, *Munjid al-Muqri'in*, 173.

pedagogical creativity. Through strategic engagement with rulers and jurists, he secured institutional recognition for his codification efforts. This legitimacy was further reinforced by authoritative *fatāwā* and the widespread adoption of his works within Islamic educational systems. His use of naẓm to simplify the transmission of this complex discipline ensured that the *qirā'āt 'ashrah* could be taught and learned broadly and effectively. Ibn al-Jazarī's intellectual legacy continues to endure in Islamic tradition, upheld by three principal texts still used as standards in *qirā'āt* certification: *Al-Shāṭibiyya* (*qirā'āt sab'ah*), *Al-Durra al-Muḍiyya* (*qirā'āt 'ashrah al-ṣughrā*), and *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr* (*qirā'āt 'ashrah al-kubrā*).[56] In this regard, Ibn al-Jazarī not only fortified the transmission system of *qirā'āt* but also ensured its longevity as a core element of Islamic scholarship.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the evolution of *qirā'āt* was shaped not only by linguistic and philological considerations but also by the political dynamics of Islamic history. The initial codification of the muṣḥaf by 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān marked the beginning of a larger effort to standardize Qur'anic recitation, which was subsequently reinforced by the interventions of the Umayyad and 'Abbāsid regimes in promoting particular readings. The canonization efforts of Ibn Mujāhid and Ibn al-Jazarī further underscore the intricate nexus between political power and religious authority in legitimizing the readings that would come to be accepted across the Muslim world.

Hence, this study affirms that the canonization of *qirā'āt* was not a purely textual or scholarly enterprise, but rather a process deeply enmeshed in political agendas and religious legitimization strategies. The findings contribute to the broader field of Qur'anic and *qirā'āt* studies by highlighting the interplay between religion, political authority, and the formation of sacred textual orthodoxy in Islam. It is hoped that this research will pave the way for further inquiries into how political and religious institutions shape the transmission and authentication of Islamic scripture.

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[56] Nasser, *The Canonizations of the Qur'an*, 22.

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