*Stať / Article*

# Uṣūl al-Qirā'āt: A Brief Overview of the Science of Qur'ān Recitations and Its Formation from the Position of Traditional Qirā'āt Literature

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## Abstract

The study deals with the oral transmission of Qur'ān recitations representing a particular area of Qur'ān studies, called *ʿilm al-qirā'āt*. It still receives rather marginal attention in Western research, while some Orientalists view the Qur'ān as a mere historical literary work. At the same time, Muslim scholars emphasize the great importance of studying the recitation and its oral tradition. The first closer conclusions regarding the historical study of various ways of Qur'ān recitation were presented by Shady Hekmat Nasser, whose examination represents a valuable contribution to Western Qur'ān research. However, some of his conclusions (e.g., concerning the origin of seven *aḥruf*) are supported by weak narrations, which are not accepted by Islamic practice and do not participate in the formation of the majority Muslim tradition. Therefore, the present study examines what the tradition has to say about itself, and thus the authenticity of my sources does not need to be addressed. The main contribution of this article is to present a comprehensive view of the formation of the science of Qur'ān recitations from the position of traditional *qirā'āt* literature with regard to classical Sunni sources and to provide a clear picture of how today's Qur'ān students can master it. It has been found that recitation is perceived as the original way of communicating God's message and all accepted recitations as an integral part of Revelation. Their rules are preserved in several methodological poems, which are intended to be memorized by Qur'ān experts just like the Qur'ān itself.

## Keywords

Qur'ān recitations, transmission of Qur'ān, way of recitation, Ibn Mujāhid, al-Shāṭibī, Ibn al-Jazarī, Ayman Suwaid

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## Introduction

Despite long-term scholarship in the field of Qur'ān sciences conducted by pioneers of western research such as Gustav Weil (1808–1889), Theodor Nőldeke (1836–1930), Gotthelf Bergsträsser (1886–1933), Otto Pretzl (1893–1941), or Arthur Jeffery (1892–1959) and their followers, consensus is being sought on the most basic issues to this day. No critical edition of textual and

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orthographic variants of the Qur'ān text has been yet introduced as well as we know only little about the ritual-recitation dimension of the Qur'ān. The oral tradition that has always existed alongside the written one, has also received much less attention, although it is no less important to our understanding of the Islamic legacy. In recent years, however, significant steps have been taken again with ambitions to uncover some of the still unanswered questions concerning the important document of the Islamic world; the establishment of the Corpus Coranicum project in 2007 is certainly a good example of current efforts.

The Qur'ān has long been a research area for both Muslim and Western scholars, who have formed into two rather separate and often conflicting research traditions that can only hardly accept conclusions of the others, especially when scientists are limited by the lack of available original sources. Moreover, Western approach is often accused of lacking empathy for the Islamic religion and disinterest in the impact of its findings on Islamic audiences. Orientalists, however, should be prepared to face the reactions of Muslims to their conclusions and at the same time free themselves from the desire for the absolute objectivity, as pointed out by Said's Orientalism. Muslims, on the other hand, are criticized for tendency to follow their religious truths and reluctance to examine the Qur'ān's claim about its absolute truthfulness. Certainly, it is needed and desirable to overcome the mutual antagonism when examining the Qur'ān, a possible area of understanding between the Muslim world and its surroundings, which indeed does not mean giving up already established study techniques.

As already indicated, the first available written material can be dated to several decades after the rise of Islam, which is a major methodological problem for the study of traditional Islamic historiography from its very beginning. That is why it is hard to deny that Western scholarship is quite sceptical about the traditional Muslim sources, whether about the origin, history or collection of the Qur'ān. An excellent example of such an approach is presented by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Crone, Cook 1977) where both authors fundamentally questioned the historical sources of the beginnings of Islam and decided to study Islam without Arabic sources. The roots of sceptical approach date back to the 19th century to Ignaz Goldziher, whose two-volume *Mohammedanishe Studien* (Goldziher 1889–1890) immediately began to give direction to Western research. His conclusions on the establishment of the text of the Qur'ān long after Muḥammad's death in 11AH/32AD were further elaborated by later scholars John Wansbrough (1977, 1978) or Joseph Schacht (1983). Therefore, we are not required to treat every traditional narrative source as equally authoritative, however, we would be foolish to ignore the mainstream sources as the *Kitāb al-sabᶜa* of Ibn Mujāhid, and other classical and well-received *qirā'āt* literature such as those of Ibn al-Jazarī or al-Shāṭibī, which form the basic frame of reference for this science.

Too often is the Qur'ān seen as a mere written document, unrelated to any oral performance. In her research about the art of reciting the Qur'ān, Kristina Nelson (Nelson 2001) found that the Qur'ān is generally perceived as a recited word that is meant to be heard and seeks an audience of listeners. In fact, the field of Qur'ān recitations represents a fascinating scientific discipline of extraordinary depth, still having countless students all around the world. To this day, believing Muslims approach the Qur'ān with unprecedented respect and focus on the most correct pronunciation of every single letter bearing in mind the Muḥammad's words "the best among you is he who learns the Qur'ān and teaches it". The science of Qur'ān recitations, what is called *ᶜilm al-qirā'āt*, is traditionally believed to be one of the oldest Islamic sciences, due to its having accompanied the central religious text of Islam from the beginning of its revelation. It is considered first Islamic knowledge learnt by Muḥammad and his companions in the first quarter of the 7$^{th}$ century AD in the west of the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn al-Jazarī, the distinguished authority on Qur'ān recitations living at the turn of the 14$^{th}$ and 15$^{th}$ centuries AD, defined it as "*a science*

*of knowing the ways of pronouncing the words of the Qur'ān along with the differences by tracing them back to a transmitter*" (Ibn al-Jazarī 1350AH/ 1931AD: 3). While the vast majority of Muslims are familiar with the recitation of ᶜĀṣim ibn Abī Najūd (d.127AH/744AD) according to his transmitter Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān al-Bazzāz (d.180AH/796AD), commonly known as *Ḥafṣ ᶜan ᶜĀṣim*, there are some other ways of recitation that continue to be recited in particular areas of the Islamic world. In fact, the professional reciters of the Qur'ān should be experts in altogether seven or even three more different ways of recitation that are named after the most respected early reciters known for their teaching in that way. These different ways of recitation utilise various rules regarding specific pronunciation of words (*uṣūl*), in addition to various vowelisation and swapping of letters (*farsh*). In this context, we can divide the Qur'ān words into two types: those that are recited in only one way (*muttafiq ᶜalayh*) representing the most of the Qur'ān, and those that can be recited in different ways (*mukhtalif fīh*) that are the essence of different Qur'ān recitations (al-Ḍabbāᶜ 1427AH/2006AD: 242).

The very development of the science of Qur'ān recitations has already been documented by Shady Hekmat Nasser (Nasser 2013, 2020), who focused mainly on the authenticity of specific recitations, concluding that he doubted their origin in Muḥammad's mouth. In disagreement with the prominent orientalist Theodor Nőldeke and despite numerous massively transmitted narrations (*mutawātir lafẓī*), Nasser further rejected the origin of the seven *aḥruf* narrative and tried to prove that it was fabricated in response to the numerous mistakes in recitation made by the early community. The aim of this study is not to prove or refute the authenticity of Qur'ān recitations, nor is it intended to comment on the authenticity of the Qur'ān as whole. It does not follow such approaches that perceive the Qur'ān as a historical and "finished" book, nor does it approach Qur'ān with the "know the enemy" mentality, which had a long tradition in the West and presented a number of methods and approaches that did not become a solid basis for further research. Based on traditional *qirā'āt* literature, the aim of the study is to examine how Muslims themselves argue their tradition concerning the diversity of Qur'ān recitations, that is, how traditional sources refer to the period of eight centuries of formation of this science. The study will assist in better understanding of the respect and reverence that the Qur'ān enjoys in the minds and hearts of its devoted followers.

## Qur'ān recitations in Muḥammad's time

### The nature of the linguistic environment and the dialectical aspect of Qur'ān recitations

Muslims regard the Qur'ān as the greatest miracle of Muḥammad, a proof of his prophethood and the completion of a series of divine messages that started to be sent to Adam and ended with Muḥammad. According to Islamic tradition, the Qur'ān was verbally revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to Muḥammad[1] that he may become one of those who warn (*li takūna min al-mundhirīn*; Al-Qur'ān al-karīm 1439AH/2018AD: 26/194) in the language of the Arabs living on the Arabian Peninsula in the 7$^{th}$ century. In the Sacred Scripture of Muslims, we find that the Qur'ān was revealed in clear Arabic language (*bi lisānin ᶜarabīyin mubīn*; Al-Qur'ān al-karīm 1439AH/2018AD: 26/195). However, already at that time, the language was categorized into several dialects (*lahajāt* or *lughāt*). The early Muslim community was comprised of many tribes of all backgrounds, sharing some common elements that gave shape to the Arabic language in general. In any case, differences in local dialects were clearly evident and Muslim scholars strove to precisely define specifics each of them. For example, people of the Asad tribe were used to

[1] According to the tradition, the revelation of the Qur'ān began over fourteen hundred years ago in the cave of Ḥirā' when the Angel Gabriel came to Muḥammad and commanded him to recite.

pronounce *kasra* in the first syllable of the Present tense verbs (*taltala*) and would read *ti*ᶜ*lamūna* or *tiswaddu wujūh* instead of *ta*ᶜ*lamūna* and *taswaddu wujūh*. The people of the Hudhayl tribe used to change the letter *ḥá* to ᶜ*ayn* (*faḥfaḥa*) during speech and would read ᶜ*attā* ᶜ*īn* instead of *ḥattā ḥīn* (Ḥammūda 1948AD: 8). The Tamīmī tribe used to pronounce *hamza* in speech and the Quraysh did not; thus, it would be possible to hear both *yu'minūna* or *ya'tūna* and *yūminūna* or *yātūna*. Some tribes pronounced *alif* openly. For others, it was easier to shift its pronunciation a little (*imāla ṣughrā*), or more (*imāla kubrā*); it would be possible to hear Mūsā, ᶜÍsā and Yaḥyā, but also Mūsɛ, ᶜÍsɛ and Yaḥyɛ and even Mūsē, ᶜÍsē and Yaḥyē in Muḥammad's time (Ibn al-Jazarī 2016AD: 76). Someone pronounced *kāfir* and someone else *kēfir* (Ibn Mujāhid 1432AH/2011AD: 146). Some tribes also used to connect *mīm* of the plural form and say: *innahumū dhahabū* or *ghayri 'l-maghḍūbi* ᶜ*alayhimū* instead of *innahum dhahabū* or *ghayri 'l-maghḍūbi* ᶜ*alayhim* (Jinnī 1415AH/1994AD: 1/43–44; al-Dānī 1426AH/2005D: 157–158). Thus, each dialect was characterised by some specifics that were easier for its speakers to pronounce. There are presumptions that it would probably have been difficult for all members of the Arab tribes to recite the text of the Qur'ān in a way in which they were not used to speak. It is traditionally said that for some of them, it would simply have been impossible to abandon their linguistic habits, especially in the case of older individuals who, moreover, could neither read nor write. Therefore, it is clear that for the society of that time, orality was more common than writing and the diversity of recitations is by no means perceived as the result of unfixed text.

## The origin of Qur'ān recitations

In the light of the above, it is traditionally narrated that Muḥammad said:

> Jibrīl recited the Qur'ān to me in one *ḥarf* [pl. *aḥruf*]. Then I requested him [to read it in another *ḥarf*] and continued asking him to recite it in a different *aḥruf*, until he ultimately recited it in seven *aḥruf*.

In another narration,

> Muḥammad said: 'O Jibrīl! I have been sent to an illiterate nation among whom are the elderly woman, the old man, the young boy and the girl, and the man who cannot read a book at all.' He said: 'O Muḥammad! Indeed the Qur'ān was revealed in seven *aḥruf*' (i.e. seven different but no more specified variants of reciting; al-Qāḍī 1420AH/1999AD: 5).

Muslim scholars analysed the concept of the seven *aḥruf* and greatly differed as to whether these seven should be interpreted literally or metaphorically[2] and what these groups actually means. The main reason is presented so that Muḥammad never spoke about its exact significance, nor did his companions question him. It is also possible that the companions were aware of their exact meaning. Although there is considerable discussion in the *qirā'āt* literature, probably no scholar doubts that the seven *aḥruf* were the source for the large number of recitations Muḥammad taught at the time, a small number of which have survived to this day (Bin al-Jawzī 1408 AH/1987AD: 247).[3]

However, Muslim literature points out that, of course, not every dialectical aspect could be included. Those that would undesirably change the meaning of the words were omitted. The example of such practice should be found in the Qays tribe, whose people used to pronounce *shīn*

[2]Due to the tendency of Arabs to use some numbers to denote large or small quantities.

[3]In fact, the matter is a controversial one, because some Muslim jurists believe that there is no recitation today, unless it is based on the only *ḥarf* which was chosen by the Caliph ᶜUthmān during the Qur'ān codification.

instead of *kāf* (*kashkasha*) in the second person feminine singular, and another example by the people of the Tamīmī tribe, who changed the letter *jīm* to *yā*.[4] These changes are examples of those that are not heard in any recitation.

Muḥammad's well-versed companions (*qurrā'* or *muqri'ūn*) were ordered to recite and to continue to teach[5] such recitations which they had learned directly from Muḥammad and which naturally were not unified. The following narration illustrates the situation. ᶜUmar narrated:

> I heard Hishām ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām reciting sūra al-Furqān during the lifetime of God's Messenger. I listened to his recitation and noticed that he recited in several different ways which the Prophet had not taught me. I was about to jump over him during his prayer, but I was able to contain myself, and when he had completed his prayer, I put his upper garment around his neck and seized him by it and said, 'Who taught you this sūra which I heard you reciting?' He replied, 'The Prophet taught it to me.' I said, 'You are wrong, for the Prophet has taught it to me in a different way from yours.' I took him to God's Messenger and said 'O messenger of God, I heard this individual reciting sūra al-Furqān in a way that you did not teach me, and you have taught me sūra al-Furqān.' The Prophet said, 'O Hishām, recite!' So he recited in the same way as I heard him recite it before. To that, God's Messenger said, 'It was revealed to be recited in this way.' Then God's Messenger said, 'Recite, O ᶜUmar!' So I recited it as he had taught me. God's Messenger then said, 'It was revealed to be recited in this way.' God's messenger added, 'This Qur'ān has been revealed to be recited in seven different *aḥruf*, so recite it whichever way is easier for you' (al-Anṣārī 2009AD: 3–4).

Another recorded event which demonstrates the fact of multiple recitations is that a man came to the companion ᶜAbdullāh ibn Masᶜūd, who belonged to the Hudhayl tribe, pronouncing *imāla*. A man recited to him *Ṭā hā*, the beginning of the 20th sūra of the Qur'ān, and Ibn Masᶜūd corrected his recitation, saying *Ṭε hε*. This situation was repeated once more, when the man finally asked: "*O Abū ᶜAbdurraḥmān, was not Muḥammad commanded to press his feet firmly (ṭa') to the ground?*"[6] And Ibn Masᶜūd replied: "*Ṭε hε! This is how the Messenger taught me*" (al-Azharī 1431AH/2010AD: 289; Abū Zarca 1418AH/1997AD: 316).

## Semantic aspect of recitations

Muslim tradition speaks of another important aspect of the recitations that lies in the possibility to recite some Qur'ān words in different ways, but this has nothing to do with dialect diversity, nor facilitation to the Islamic community. It talks about a semantic diversity (*qirā'āt al-maᶜānī*) and, according to Muslim scholars, it is only based on God's intention; the word *malik* from the 1st sūra al-Fātiḥa serves as an obligatory example of such diversity because, in another recitation, it exists as *mālik*. This is not considered to be a dialect difference, but rather a common diversity in meaning. While *malik* is a Sovereign or a Ruler, *mālik* means Owner. According to

[4] To this day, we may hear this practice among people living in the east of the Arabian Peninsula.

[5] Muḥammad sent some of his companions to teach the Qur'ān to different tribes and thus, different recitations were transmitted. The sending of prominent reciters together with a copy of the text also points to the irreplaceable role of the teacher. Nevertheless, the history of Qur'ān recitation is full of misunderstandings that have occured simply by reading the Qur'ān. One of the mentioned incident in this context is the erroneous recitation of one of the seven reciters, Ḥamza, who read the beginning of the 2nd sūra as *alif lām mīm * dhālika al-kitābu lā zayta fīh* while his father told him to get up from the Book and start studying from the mouths of the Qur'ān experts (al-Khaṭīb 1422AH/2002AD: 1/27).

[6] It is said that Muḥammad was used to pray at night and sometimes even stood on his one leg for fatigue. In fact, the interpretation arising from these two consonants is broad and semantically diverse.

the Qur'ān exegetes, God will be the Ruler and Owner of everything on the Day of Judgement (al-Barīdī 1426AH/2005AD: 212). Another example may be the verse by which it is also possible to demonstrate the way of writing copies of the Qur'ān in the time of Caliph ᶜUthmān's reign. As for *khamr* (wine) and *maysir* (gambling), there is a verse in sūra al-Baqara, a part of which can be read *qul fīhimā ithmun kabīr* (Say: In them is great sin), but also *qul fīhimā ithmun kathīr* (Say: In them is a lot of sin). These words *kabīr* and *kathīr*, if written in Arabic without dots, look the same and were allowed to be read in either way (al-Ḥafyān 1423AH/2002AD: 279).

The Qur'ān is therefore perceived as a unified text with acceptable multiformity in its recitation. Today, however, it is difficult to understand exactly what have these recitation variants manifested at the time of the Prophet, what and when he used specific recitations on which occasion and what was the exact difference between them. All we know is the supposed meaning of some preserved recitations and their connection with famous reciters.

## The first steps in establishing the science of Qur'ān recitations after Muḥammad's death

After Muḥammad's death in 11AH/632AD, the community faced the question of how to proceed. The period witnessed a large number of Qur'ān transmitters, often with great differences between their recitations.[7] Naturally, accuracy was fading and there was a need among people to choose (*ikhtiyār*) and to limit authentic recitations to a certain number (*taḥdīd*), and to provide a clear platform for their study. Makkī bin Abī Ṭālib wrote about it:

> There were many transmitters in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH [...] there were big differences and people liked to know a certain number of recitations that agreed with the ᶜUthmanic codex. They wanted to facilitate their studies and their recitations to be right (al-Qaysī 1424AH/2007AD: 86).

Some scholars began to highlight concrete imāms known for their credibility (*thiqa*), fulfilling or upholding trust (*amāna*), piety (*ḥusn al-dīn*) and perfect knowledge (*kamāl al-ᶜilm*) and started to study and prefer their way of recitation (al-Qaysī 1424AH/2007AD: 86-87).

### Role of Ibn Mujāhid and the basics of the establishment of seven Qur'ān recitations

By the 10th century AD, the growing diversity of recitations forced a highly renowned figure in the branch of Qur'ān recitations, Ibn Mujāhid al-Tamīmī al-Baghdādī (245-324AH/860-936AD), commonly known as Ibn Mujāhid, to establish number of authentic recitations. Abū ᶜAmr al-Dānī said about him: "*Ibn Mujāhid surpassed all his peers with his knowledge and understanding* [...]" (al-Dhahabī 1432AH/2015AD: 15/273). Ibn al-Athīr said: "*He was a leader in knowledge of Qur'ān recitations in his time*" (al-Athīr 1426AH/2009AD: 1192). Although Ibn Mujāhid was far from the only scholar of Qur'ān recitations of the time, his personality enjoys unprecedented respect in *qirā'āt* literature. It deals in detail with his personal life and work that became later matter of public controversy and had further implications for the scientific community.

Ibn Mujāhid had in his famous publication *Kitāb al-sabᶜa fī al-qirā'āt* (The Book of Seven Readings) effectively selected seven sets of recitations (see Table 1), associated with seven renowned and prolific reciters, who were famous for their perfect knowledge of a certain way or ways of Qur'ān recitation.

[7] We must also take into consideration the concept of verses of abrogation (*nāsikh wa mansūkh*) that not everyone must have known about.

*Table 1. Seven recitations contained in the methodological poem* al-Shāṭibīya *and* al-Ṭayyiba

| | The reciter (*qāri'*) / the recitation (*qirā'a*) | Teaching area (*miṣr*) | Muḥammad's companion known for teaching this way of recitation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Nāfiᶜ | Medina | Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb |
| 2. | Ibn Kathīr | Mecca | Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, Zayd ibn Thābit |
| 3. | Abū ᶜAmr | Baṣra | Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, Zayd ibn Thābit |
| 4. | Ibn ᶜĀmir | Shām (historical Syrian lands) | ᶜUthmān ibn ᶜAffān, Abū al-Dardā' |
| 5. | ᶜĀṣim | Kūfa | ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ibn Masᶜūd, ᶜUthmān, Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, Zayd ibn Thābit |
| 6. | Ḥamza | Kūfa | ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ibn Masᶜūd |
| 7. | ᶜAlī al-Kisā'ī | Kūfa | ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ibn Masᶜūd |

These recitations were acquired by him from their distinguished narrators among hundreds of significant reciters of the Islamic world, from the time of the followers (*tābiᶜūn*) until the beginning of the 10th century AD and justified it in the following words:

> People are different in Qur'ān recitation just as there are *fuqahā'* (lawyers) of different opinions on some branches of sharīᶜa (Ibn Mujāhid 1432AH/2011AD: 45).

In his *Kitāb al-sabᶜa*, which was a tour de force in the field of Qur'ān recitations and immediately became the prototype of all subsequent works on recitations, Ibn Mujāhid continued:

> These seven [reciters] are inhabitants of Ḥijāz, Iraq and Shām; they took over recitations from the generation of companions and followers and the mentioned provinces generally agreed upon their recitations as well as other cities that are close to the provinces (Ibn Mujāhid 1432AH/2011AD: 87).

Thus, the reciters were selected according to the main centres of learning of early Islamic times to which the third Caliph ᶜUthmān sent first copies of the Qur'ān (*al-maṣāḥif al-ᶜuthmānīya*) with excellent teachers.

*Table 2. Seven reciters and their prominent narrators*

| | The reciter (*qāri'*) / the recitation (*qirā'a*) | His first narrator (*rāwī*) / the narration (*riwāya*) | His second narrator (*rāwī*) / the narration (*riwāya*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Nāfiᶜ (d. 169 AH / 786 AD) | Qālūn (d. 220 AH / 835 AD) | Warsh (d. 197 AH / 813 AD) |
| 2. | Ibn Kathīr (d. 120 AH / 738 AD) | al-Bazzī (d. 205 AH / 821 AD) | Qumbul (d. 191 AH / 807 AD) |
| 3. | Abū ᶜAmr ibn ᶜAlā' al-Māzinī (d. 154 AH / 771 AD) | al-Dūrī (d. 246 AH / 860 AD) | al-Sūsī (d. 261 AH / 875 AD) |
| 4. | ᶜAbdullāh Ibn ᶜĀmir (d. 118 AH / | Hishām (d. 245 AH / 859 AD) | Ibn Dhakwān (d. 242 AH / 857 AD) |
| 5. | ᶜĀṣim (d. 127 AH / 745 AD) | Shuᶜba (d. 193 AH / 809 AD) | Ḥafṣ (d. 180 AH / 796 AD) |
| 6. | ᶜAlī ibn Ḥamza al-Kisā'ī (d. 189 AH / 805 AD) | al-Layth (d. 240 AH / 855 AD) | al-Dūrī (d. 246 AH / 860 AD) |
| 7. | Ḥamza ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt (d. 156 AH / 773 AD) | Khalaf (d. 229 AH / 844 AD) | Khallād (d. 220 AH / 835 AD) |

The question remains why he explicitly chose these recitations and not others and why he chose three representatives from Kūfa, while the other provinces have only one. Although he does not elaborate on his choice, it is likely that as a Baghdad resident he was most familiar with the local Iraqi tradition.

Each of these seven reciters had large number of students, among whom Ibn Mujāhid chose two main narrators (*rāwīyān* or *ṣāḥibān*; see Table 2).

Ibn Mujāhid was not the first to mention a certain number of recitations. According to Ibn al-Jazarī, the first to write about this matter was Abū ᶜUbayd a-Qāsim ibn Salām (d. 224AH/839AD), who gathered in his publication 25 recitations (Ibn al-Jazarī 1430AH/2009AD: 1/33–34; al-Bannā 1407AH/1987AD: 1/33). Other authors are for example Abū Ishāq Ismāᶜīl ibn Ishāq al-Qāḍī (d. 282 AH/895 AD), a teacher of Ibn Mujāhid, who gathered 20 recitations before him or Ibn Ghalbūn (d. 389AH/999AD) who gathered 8 recitations in his *Tadhkira*. The difference between these publications and Ibn Mujāhid's one is not entirely clear, but it seems that Ibn Mujāhid's way of presentation was for some reason better accepted by Muslim scholars and the public than the others. His exact number of seven was apparently chosen at random, although some sources traditionally refer to the divine guidance and connection to the special position of this number in the minds of Muslims.[8] Nevertheless, Ibn Mujāhid's work became a reference for authorship and a source of knowledge for reciters. Subsequent generations worked just to expand and supplement its information, because Ibn Mujāhid was unable to cover all the different aspects (*wujūh al-khilāf*) on his own.

The concept of recitations, according to Ibn Mujāhid, was based on three conditions which were agreed and accepted by scholars of that time (*ijmā'*). They were:

– existence of an authentic chain of transmitters (*thubūt al-naql*)

– linguistic accuracy and consistency with Arabic grammar (*muwāfaqa al-lugha al-ᶜarabīya*)

– conformity to the consonantal skeleton of the ᶜUtmānic codex (*muwāfaqa rasm al-maṣāḥif al-ᶜuthmānīya*)

Ibn al-Jazarī later wrote:

> Every recitation that corresponds to the Arabic language and to one of *al-maṣāḥif*[9] *al-ᶜuthmānīya* and its chain is correct is then the right recitation [*qirā'a ṣaḥīḥa*] and is not possible to be excluded. It belongs to the seven *aḥruf* in which the Qur'ān was sent and the people are obliged to accept it (Ibn al-Jazarī 1430AH/2009AD: 1/9).

Thus, the acceptance of the recitations did not stop at the seven recitations of Ibn Mujāhid, but other recitations could be accepted if they complied with the rules mentioned above.

## The division of the chain of transmitters

As we can see, the science of Qur'ān recitations strongly refers to the concept of a chain of transmitters (which is sometimes referred to as *isnād* or *sanad*, sometimes as *silsila*), which shows us the whole chain in detail, name by name, teacher by teacher (see Table 3).

[8] It generally refers to the seven heavens, seven times walking around the Kaᶜba (*tawāf*) or seven verses in the 1st sūra of the Qur'ān.

[9] *Muṣḥaf*, pl. *maṣāḥif*, is an expression for a collection of sheets of the Qur'ān.

*Table 3. An example of the chain of transmitters of the Qur'ān teacher Ayman Suwaid, one of the most respected authorities today*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Ayman Rushdī Suwaid | Born 1953 AD |
| 28. | ᶜAbdulᶜazīz ᶜUyūnussūd | D. 1399 AH / 1978 AD |
| 27. | M. Saᶜīd al-Rifāᶜī al-Ḥulwānī | D. 1363 AH / 1944 AD |
| 26. | Aḥmad ibn M. al-Rifāᶜī al-Ḥulwānī | D. 1307 AH / 1890 AD |
| 25. | Aḥmad ibn Ramaḍān al-Marzūqī | D. 1262 AH / 1846 AD |
| 24. | Ibrāhīm ibn Badawī ibn A. al-ᶜUbaydī | D. 1237 AH / 1822 AD |
| 23. | ᶜAbdurraḥmān al-Ujhūrī | D. 1198 AH / 1784 AD |
| 22. | Aḥmad ibn Rajab al-Baqarī | D. 1189 AH / 1775 AD |
| 21. | Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-Baqarī | D. 1111 AH / 1699 AD |
| 20. | ᶜAbdurraḥmān ibn Shaḥādha al-Yamanī | D. 1050 AH / 1640 AD |
| 19. | ᶜAlī ibn M. ibn Ghānim al-Maqdīsī | D. 1004 AH / 1596 AD |
| 18. | M. ibn Ibrāhīm al-Samadīsī | D. 932 AH / 1526 AD |
| 17. | Aḥmad ibn Asad al-Umyūṭī | D. 872 AH / 1467 AD |
| 16. | Muḥammad ibn M. ibn M. al-Jazarī | D. 833 AH / 1430 AD |
| 15. | ᶜAbdurraḥmān ibn A. al-Baghdādī | D. 781 AH / 1379 AD |
| 14. | Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ṣā'igh | D. 725 AH / 1325 AD |
| 13. | ᶜAlī ibn Shujāᶜ al-ᶜAbbāsī | D. 661 AH / 1263 AD |
| 11. | Al-Qāsim ibn Fīrruh al-Shāṭibī | D. 590 AH / 1194 AD |
| 11. | ᶜAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Hudhayl | D. 564 AH / 1169 AD |
| 10. | Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn Najāḥ | D. 496 AH / 1103 AD |
| 9. | Abū ᶜAmr ᶜUthmān ibn Saᶜīd al-Dānī | D. 444 AH / 1152 AD |
| 8. | Ṭāhir ibn ᶜAbdulmunᶜim ibn Ghalbūn | D. 399 AH / 1009 AD |
| 7. | ᶜAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Hāshimī | D. 368 AH / 978 AD |
| 6. | Aḥmad ibn Sahl al-Ushnānī | D. 307 AH / 919 AD |
| 5. | ᶜUbayd ibn al-Ṣabāḥ al-Nahshalī | D. 235 AH / 849 AD |
| 4. | Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān al-Bazzāz | D. 180 AH / 796 AD |
| 3. | ᶜĀṣim ibn Abī Najūd | D. 127 AH / 745 AD |
| 2. | ᶜAbdullāh ibn Ḥabīb al-Sulamī | D. 74 AH / 693 AD |
| 1. | Zayd ibn Thābit | D. 45 AH / 666 AD |
| | Muḥammad | D. 11 AH / 632 AD |
| | The angel Jibrīl | |
| | God | |

It is also possible to mention it briefly as, for example, *Ḥafs ᶜan ᶜĀṣim ᶜan ṭarīq al-Shāṭibīya*, which informs us about the origin of the recitation and in which publication we find its exact chain of transmitters.

Within the chain, four basic links are referred to:

1) *Qāri'* (The reciter) is most often one of the seven, three or four more reciters (*al-qurrā' al-sabᶜa*, *al-qurrā' al-ᶜashara* or *qurrā' al-qirā'āt al-shādhdha*) whose names refer to the name of the recitation; therefore, we could read that so and so is the recitation of Náfiᶜ (*qirā'at Náfiᶜ*) or the recitation of Ibn Kathīr (*qirā'at Ibn Kathīr*).

2) *Rāwī* (The Narrator) is the one who narrated one or more of these recitations directly or indirectly from a reciter. This information is usually communicated as *qirā'at Ḥafṣ ᶜan ᶜĀṣim*, i.e. the recitation of ᶜĀṣim via the narration (*riwāya*) of Ḥafṣ.

3) *Ṣāḥib ṭarīqa* is the one who transmitted from the narrator and is known as the one who took over a mode. The various modes are further subdivided into primary and secondary modes (*ṭuruq aṣlīya* and *ṭuruq farᶜīya*) and according to Ibn al-Jazarī, each narrator has four primary *aṣḥāb* (sg. *ṣāḥib*). An example could be *riwāyat Warsh ᶜan Nāfiᶜ min ṭarīq al-Azraq* which means the recitation of Nāfiᶜ via the narration of Warsh via the mode of al-Azraq.

4) *Wajh* (The Aspect) is another article in the transmission of recitation, but the differences between *wajh* and *ṭarīqa* is already very subtle and are described in detail in *al-Qaṣīda al-Shāṭibīya* mentioned below.

### Further development by Abū ᶜAmr al-Dānī

Subsequently, Islamic tradition highlights another classical scholar in the field of recitations, Abū ᶜAmr al-Dānī (371–444 AH/981–1053AD), who further elaborated on Ibn Mujāhid's work in *Kitāb al-taysīr fī al-qirā'āt al-sabᶜ* (Book of the Easy Method for Learning the Seven Recitations), and also *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān fī al-qirā'āt al-sabᶜ al-mashhūra* (Complete Clarification of the Famous Seven Recitations), until it received more precise form in the following centuries.

## The final steps in establishing the science of Qur'ān recitations

However, the crucial role in the field of Qur'ān recitations is attributed to the two outstanding figures – Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Fīrruh ibn Aḥmad al-Shāṭibī (539–590AH/1144–1194AD) from Andalusia, and later Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī ibn Yūsuf al-Jazarī[10] (751–829AH/1350–1425AD) from Damascus. Both authors enjoy great respect in *qirā'āt* literature until now and are described as those who dedicated their entire lives to learning and teaching the recitations and wrote extensively about it in works of great value. They are responsible for an amazingly vast and in-depth scholarship of this science and made an everlasting impact on the later history. They both carefully surveyed the previous works on the subject and further redefined many unclear questions.

### The contribution by al-Shāṭibī and his poem, al-Shāṭibīya[11]

Al-Shāṭibī's contribution seems to be particularly in supplementing al-Dānī's work on seven recitations, *al-Taysīr*, and its transformation into a methodological poem *Ḥirz al-amānī wa wajh al-tahānī fī al-qirā'āt al-sabᶜ* (The Guardian of Hopes and the Object of Felicitation in Seven Recitations), also called after its author *al-Qaṣīda al-Shāṭibīya* or simply *al-Shāṭibīya*. Here again, fidelity of oral tradition and careful memorization of this poem were reckoned with. It contains detailed rules for seven recitations and remains, together with the further mentioned poem *al-Durra*, the primary source of knowledge for students of recitations to this day. The difference between *al-Taysīr* and *al-Shāṭibīya* is first of all in versification of all the recitation rules of *al-Taysīr* into 1173 verses of the methodological poem, easy to remember. Al-Shāṭibī wrote:

[10] Al-Suyūtī regarded him as the ultimate authority on Qur'ān recitations. His name refers to the connection with *Jazīrat ibn ᶜUmar* located in Anatolia, near to Mosul.
[11] The poem is also known in Arabic as *Lāmīya* for frequent use of the letter *lām*.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Wa fī yusrihā al-taysīru rumtu ikhtiṣārah* | *Fa-ajnat bi-ᶜawni Allāhi minhu mu'ammalā* |
| I intended the condensation of the Taysīr by simplifying it | And (this poem) harvested its fruits, with the help of Allāh from the Taysīr (al-Shāṭibī 1431AH/ 2010AD: 6) |

Moreover, he added some other important chapters (*ziyādāt al-qaṣīd*) on the articulation of Arabic letters (*makhārij al-ḥurūf*) and the modes of its demonstration (*ṣifāt al-ḥurūf*) while some he chose to skip. Al-Shāṭibī also started to use letter codes or word codes (*rumūz al-qurrā'*), instead of the names of reciters or their transmitters, again for reasons of simplification.[12] Therefore, the added value of the work is highly appreciated.

Muslim tradition speaks that at that moment the poem *al-Shāṭibīya* was introduced to students of recitations, they started to study, memorise and recite according to it. It gained acclaim across Muslim countries due to its simplification of the study of the seven recitations. According to Ibn al-Jazarī,

> no other book dedicated to recitations became as famous or achieved such acceptance among Muslims as al-Shāṭibīya and it probably happened – Allāh knows best – because of imām ᶜIlmuddīn al-Sachāwī's first interpretation of al-Shāṭibīya called Fatḥ al-waṣīd (Ibn al-Jazarī 1427AH/2006AD: 3/570).

Furthermore, he appealed to all students of recitations to have a copy of this brilliant poem and indeed, it is probable that even today no other book of recitations is studied and memorised by Muslims as much as this one.

## Ibn al-Jazarī and the completion of the ten minor recitations (*al-qirā'āt al-ᶜashr al-ṣughrā*)

The above-mentioned steps resulted in a misinterpretation by the public that these seven recitations documented in *al-Shāṭibīya* correspond in fact to the seven aḥruf mentioned in Muḥammad's narration and only these seven are authentic. Perhaps all later Muslim authors have pointed out that this assumption is wrong. In addition, an excellent scholar, Ibn al-Jazarī, vehemently rejected this statement and introduced another three valid recitations in his work *Taḥbīr al-taysīr fī al-qirā'āt al-ᶜashr* (Decorating a Simplification of Ten Recitations), which is complementary to the seven recitations found in *al-Shāṭibīya* (see Table 4).

*Table 4. Three more recitations contained in the methodological poem* al-Durra *and* al-Ṭayyiba

| | The reciter (*qāri'*) / the recitation (qirā'a) | Teaching area (*miṣr*) | Prophet's companion known for teaching this way of recitation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | Abū Jaᶜfar | Medina | Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, Zayd ibn Thābit |
| 9. | Yaᶜqūb al-Ḥaḍramī | Baṣra | Information not found |
| 10. | Khalaf al-Bazzār | Kūfa | Ubayy ibn Kaᶜb, Zayd ibn Thābit |

[12] For example to ᶜĀṣim, Ḥamza and al-Kisā'ī is referred as to *kūfīyūn* while they come originally from Kūfa.

These recitations have traditionally also two main narrators (see Table 5).

*Table 5. Three more reciters and their prominent narrators*

| | The reciter (*qāri'*) / the recitation (qirā'a) | His first narrator (*rāwī*) / the narration (*riwāya*) | His second narrator (*rāwī*) / the narration (*riwāya*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | Abū Ja$^{c}$far (d. 130 AH / 748 AD) | $^{c}$Īsā ibn Wardān (d. 160 AH / 777 AD) | Sulaymān ibn Jammāz (d. 170 AH / 787 AD) |
| 9. | Ya$^{c}$qūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205 AH / 821 AD) | Ruways (d. 238 AH / 853 AD) | Rūḥ ibn $^{c}$Abdulmu'min (d. 235 AH / 850 AD) |
| 10. | Khalaf al-Bazzār (d. 229 AH / 844 AD) | Isḥāq al-Warāq (d. 229 AH / 844 AD) | Idrīs al-Ḥaddād (d. 292 AH / 905 AD) |

For simplification, Ibn al Jazarī also composed a poem on these recitations, bearing the title *al-Durra al-muḍī'a fī l-qirā'āt al-thalāth al-marḍīya* (A Shining Gem of Three Satisfying Recitations, shortly *al-Durra*), as if wanting to point out their relevance by this name.

These ten recitations, i.e. the seven mentioned in *al-Shāṭibīya*, together with another three mentioned in *al-Durra* combined, are generally known together as the ten minor recitations (*al-qirā'āt al-$^{c}$ashr al-ṣughrā*) and represent the first step in embracing today's science of Qur'ān recitations (al-Jarmī 1422AH/2001AD: 219–220). This means that after memorizing the entire Qur'ān in one way, the student, under the guidance of the teacher, approaches the study of these two poems and studies the rules of all other ways of possible recitation of the Qur'ān. In vast majority of cases, the student learns these poems by heart and is able to argue in detail about the ten-way recitation method he uses.

In recent years, Ayman Suwaid has primarily contributed to the promotion of this scientific discipline among the broad and international audience through a regular program *Kayfa naqra' al-Qur'ān* (How to recite the Qur'ān) and *al-Itqān li tilāwat al-Qur'ān* (Proficiency in reciting the Qur'ān) on the *Iqra* TV Channel. In addition to explaining the rules, Suwaid accepts callers from around the world to evaluate their recitation and answer their supplementary questions.

## The *al-Ṭayyiba* Poem and completion of the ten major recitations (*al-qirā'āt al-$^{c}$ashr al-kubrā*)

Ibn Jazarī's later work *al-Nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-$^{c}$ashr* (The Spreading of Ten Recitations) includes the information documented in 37 previous works of recitations, including *al-Shāṭibīya* and *al-Durra*. It is considered a real encyclopaedia and magnum opus of Qur'ān recitations that was not and probably can no longer be surpassed. Even this work was then converted into a poem for better memorising and got the name *Ṭayyiba al-nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-$^{c}$ashr* (The Good Spreading of Ten Recitations, shortly *al-Ṭayyiba*). This work is exceptional in that it covers many more ways of transmission (about a thousand) than *al-Shāṭibīya*, and the information about the surviving ten recitations is thus much more detailed. The ten major recitations (*al-qirā'āt al-$^{c}$ashr al-kubrā*) are contained in the poem, *al-Ṭayyiba*, and its study is considered the final step in mastering the Qur'ān recitations (al-Jarmī 1422AH/2001AD: 220).

## The importance of other non-canonical recitations

In addition to the seven and three other recitations, there are some others that were commonly recited in Muḥammad's time, however, after the establishment of three conditions of correct recitation (*qirā'a ṣaḥīḥa*) and the restriction by the $^{c}$Uthmānic codex, their recitation became for-

bidden. These yet highly valued recitations are generally called irregular (*al-qirā'āt al-shawādhdh* or *al-qirā'āt al-shādhdha*) and their position is for Muslim scholars equal to an individual-to-individual narration (*ḥadīth āḥād*).[13] Although their chains of transmitters are not considered strong enough and *mutawātir*, they still remain an important source of Qur'ān exegesis (al-Jarmī 1422AH/2001AD: 220).

Interestingly, modern authors notice that people sometimes approach them with distrust due to their designation as *shādhdha* and the negative connotations of the word in Arabic language. However, this only means that it is not possible to recite them actively during any prayer or during the regular recitation of the Qur'ān (*khatmat al-Qur'ān* or *wird*).

Ibn al-Jazarī mentioned the difference between correct and irregular recitation in *al-Ṭayyiba* as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fa-kullu mā wāfaqa wajha naḥwi* | *wa kāna li-al-rasmi iḥtimālan yaḥwī* |
| All what corresponds to some aspect of a grammar | and contains conformity with the codex barely |
| *Wa ṣaḥḥa isnādan huwa al-Qur'ān* | *fa-hādhihi al-thalāthatu al-arkān* |
| And its chain of transmitters is correct [that] is Qur'ān | And these are [its] three pillars |
| *Wa ḥaythumā yakhtallu ruknun athbati* | *shudhūdhahu law annahu fi 's-sab$^{c}$ati* |
| Wherever the pillar is insufficient [that] proves | its irregulness even if it originated in seven (recitations; al-Jazarī 1420AH/2000AD: 7) |

This specific category of recitations concerns many Muḥammad's companions or their followers, such as Ibn Mas$^{c}$ūd or Ibn Zubayr. It is traditionally referred to the recitation of Ibn Mas$^{c}$ūd and his recitation *fa-mḍū ilā dhikr Allāh* instead of *fa-s$^{c}$aū ilā dhikr Allāh* commonly known and used today. It is often referred to that his recitation was correct in Muḥammad's time, but its status changed after the rules were established (al-Qurṭubī 1427AH/2006AD: 20/466).

Thus, irregular recitations are not the subject of study by those who strive to actively master Qur'ān recitations, and therefore they do not receive so much attention in any *qirā'āt* literature. However, the most famous of the irregular recitations are four, each of which has again two narrators (see Table 6).

*Table 6. Four recitations out of ten*

| | The reciter (*qāri'*) / the recitation (qirā'a) | His first narrator (*rāwī*) / the narration (*riwāya*) | His second narrator (*rāwī*) / the narration (*riwāya*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 11. | al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 AH / 728 AD) | al-Balkhī (d. 190 AH / 806 AD) | al-Dūrī (d. 246 AH / 860 AD) |
| 12. | Ibn Muḥaysin (d. 123 AH / 741 AD) | al-Bazzī (d. 250 AH / 864 AD) | Ibn Shanabūdh (d. 328 AH / 940 AD) |
| 13. | al-A$^{c}$mash (d. 148 AH / 765 AD) | al-Muṭṭawwi$^{c}$ī (d. 371 AH / 982 AD) | al-Shanabūdhī (d. 388 AH / 998 AD) |
| 14. | al-Yazīdī (d. 202 AH / 818 AD) | Sulaymān ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 235 AH / 850 AD) | Aḥmad ibn Faraḥ (d. 303 AH / 916 AD) |

[13] During the period before $^{c}$Uthmān's compilation of the *muṣḥaf*, some of these recitations were considered common.

## Muslim attitude to differences in Qur'ān recitation

The fact of the existence of different recitations, which according to classical exegesis never contradict each other, but complement, enrich or confirm each other, is one of the reasons why Muslims elevate the Qur'ān to a heavenly position above human works. Each of the permitted recitations represents a unique way of expression and a new area of meanings and evidence that cannot be found in another, often due to the displacement of a single vowel. The value of these recitations can be further demonstrated by specific examples of some Muslim commentaries.

### Qur'ān 7/127

Al-Ṭabarī describes two possibilities of reciting the word *ālihataka* from a verse *wa qāla mala'u min qawmi fir$^{c}$awna atadharu mūsā wa qawmahu li-yufsidū fi 'l-arḍi wa yadharaka wa ālihataka*, which can be also recited as *ilāhataka*. While the ten reciters and al-A$^{c}$mash and al-Yazīdī recited *ālihataka*, al-Ḥasan and al-Muḥysin recited *iláhataka*. According to the first option Pharaoh chose for his nation idols to worship in order to bring their worship closer to himself while he said I am your Lord and Lord of these idols. The second recitation means a) we will leave you and the sun god Ra (Re); b) we will leave you and your people to worship you as a god (al-Ṭabarī 1426AH/2006AD: 13/38). Likewise, al-Qurṭubī explains on half page that according to the irregular recitation, the word *ilāha* can be interpreted as *$^{c}$ibāda* (worship) and concludes that both recitations were commonly heard (al-Qurṭubī 1421AH/2001AD: 2/224). Both authors used this variant of recitation to interpret the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) with conclusion that *ilāh* or *Allāh* means the One who is worshiped (*ma$^{c}$būd*).

### Qur'an 12/24 and 19/51

Considerable space is devoted to words *innahu min $^{c}$ibādinā al-mukhlaṣīn* or *innahu kāna mukhlaṣan wa kāna rasūlan nabīyā*, while others recited *mukhliṣīn* and *mukhliṣan*. Al-Tha$^{c}$ālabī explains that *mukhliṣīn* are those who sincerely worship God and *mukhlaṣīn* are those whom God has chosen among all and protected them from evil, both of which were common to hear (al-Tha$^{c}$labī 1424AH/2004AD: 3/367-8). Al-Qurṭubī as well as al-Baghawī said that *mukhlaṣīn* are those whom God chose as the bearers of his Message. $^{c}$Āṣim, Ḥamza, al-Kisā'ī and Khalaf recited *mukhlaṣan* and al-A$^{c}$mash agreed. The rest of the ten reciters and Ibn Muḥayṣin, al-Yazīdī and al-Ḥasan recited *mukhliṣan* (al-Ṭabarī 1426AH/2006AD: 16/49–50). The recitation of *mukhlisīn* is known from Ibn Katīr, Abū $^{c}$Amr, Ibn $^{c}$Āmir and Ya$^{c}$qūb throughout the Qur'ān, and al-Yazīdī, al-Ḥasan and Ibn Muḥayṣin recited *mukhlaṣīn* and al-A$^{c}$mash agreed.

### Qur'ān 9/128

Muslims consider Muḥammad to be the best of all God's creatures, and some exegetes refer to this quality even by words *laqad jā'akum rasūlun min anfusikum*. Al-Qurṭubī again deals with different interpretations and mentions that all thirteen reciters recited *anfusikum* while Ibn Muḥayṣin recited *anfasikum*. Al-Qurṭubī explains that this word is derived from *al-nafása* which means valuableness or preciousness and Ibn Muḥayṣin's recitation refers to the best qualities of Muḥammad among all his people (al-Qurṭubī 1441AH/2019AD: 4/187). Al-Suyūṭī also indicated: "*In this way* [*anfasikum*] *recited God's Messenger – God bless him and grant him peace, and $^{c}$Ā'isha and Fāṭima – may God be pleased with them, i.e. the most respected*" (*a$^{c}$ẓamikum qadrā*; al-Suyūṭī 1433AH/2013AD: 70).

### Qur'ān 5/112

The difference in *idh qāla al-ḥawārīyūna yā ᶜīsa 'bna maryama hal yastaṭīᶜ rabbuka an yunazzila ᶜalaynā mā'idatan mina 's-samā'* and other variant of recitation *hal tastaṭīᶜ rabbaka* is also a place of emphasis on different recitation and drew more comment from excellent exegetes. Al-Nīsābūrī states that the first recitation means when the disciples asked: O Jesus, son of Mary, would your Lord be willing to send down to us a table...? Whereas al-Kisā'ī's variant *hal tastaṭīᶜ rabbaka* means: Are you able, Jesus, son of Mary, to ask your Lord to send down to us a table...? (al-Nīsābūrī 1415AH/1994AD: 2/245) Al-Ṭabarī long explains the connotations of both theological subtleties, however, he does not perceive either variant as a doubt over God's ability as it may seem at first glance (al-Ṭabarī 1433AH/2013AD: 5/131).

Such Qur'ān comments can be found in classical Islamic exegesis and in this way the exegetes respond to the vocal diversity of Qur'ān recitations. Vocal differences (which can be sometimes traced in accordance with the graphic ones) affect the immediate context of the verse to varying degrees. One of the differences presented (Qur'ān 7/127) is used within the study of divine Oneness and its influence is considered relatively large within Islamic theology. This case serves also as a good example of the high value of knowledge of these recitations for Islamic exegetes. Generally, it is believed that these recitations exist by God's predestination, contribute to the explanation of God's message, and in each of them God's sign is to be seen.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to introduce the science of Qur'ān recitations with emphasis on its oral transmission as it is presented in traditional *qirā'āt* literature, which has influenced generations of Qur'ān students around the world. According to traditional accounts, the oral tradition played a momentous role in the early days of Islam, while the written text – though important – seems to be understood as a supportive tool or a "mnemonic device" for Muslims who knew to read to memorize the whole Revelation by heart. Muḥammad in his time, described the Qur'ān as a Book that cannot be washed away by water. These words strengthened the accent on orality of the Qur'ān and reflected its role and profound meaning for Muslims in the Middle Ages, but even today. In fact, it seems that Muslims do not actually need to have the text of their Scripture written, because every generation of Muslims gives birth to new *ḥuffāẓ*, the guardians of the Qur'ān with their memory and heart. Put it simply, the written text does not have to be considered the original message.

Over the centuries after Muḥammad's death, a science called *ᶜilm al-qir'ā'āt* was developed by Muslim scholars, whose goal was to document the authentic recitations of the Qur'ān taught by Muḥammad to the first Muslims. Many classical works, often multi-volume, have been written by these scholars drawing attention to the need for study primarily from the mouths of Qur'ān experts, not directly from the Book. For this reason, a strong dependence on the chain of transmitters has also developed. This chain has to be complete, contain reliable transmitters and be historically possible, while some prominent transmitters, especially Ibn al-Jazarī, al-Shāṭibī, al-Dānī, and more recently Ayman Suwaid and his wife Riḥāb al-Shaqaqī, have added to the credibility of these chains.

The intriguing journey started in the 7$^{th}$ century when Muḥammad began to teach his companions to recite the Qur'ān in one single way. When he realized its difficult pronunciation for the people of Arab tribes, he kept asking God until He "sent" the Qur'ān in seven different *aḥruf*. There are numerous, but insufficient reports of the nature of these *aḥruf*. The futile search for a clear explanation was also demonstrated by Ibn al-Jazarī, one of the most respected scholars of Qur'ān recitations ever, who at the end of his life did not have an accurate idea of their true na-

ture. However, the seven *aḥruf* are recognized as the source of an unknown number of recitations Muḥammad taught at the time.

In the next stage and throughout the first century after Muḥammad's death, the existence of large number of recitations that circulated between companions and followers is documented. This burgeoning diversity of Qur'ān recitations caused worry to many scholars and compelled them to compile publications devoted to the authenticity of existing recitations and the careful study of its chains of transmitters. Their publishing efforts in the early beginnings of the Islamic mission demonstrate a strong determination to preserve recitations in the most original form possible for future generations.

Great attention is paid in the traditional legacy to Ibn Mujāhid, who is mentioned to have undertaken this task with considerable enthusiasm and compiled information about seven recitations in his famous publication *Kitāb al-sabᶜa*. At the same time, Ibn Mujāhid is portrayed as the one who intended to preserve at least a certain number of authentic recitations while others have, with God's will, fallen into oblivion. However, his choice of exactly seven recitations caused confusion and resulted in a misunderstanding that these seven recitations were the seven *aḥruf* mentioned in Muḥammad's narration. Later publications, led by the publications of Ibn al-Jazarī, strongly refute this erroneous assumption among the Muslim public.

The investigation further shows that in the following period, numerous texts with recitation rules based on the work of Ibn Mujāhid have been written. Many of them were written in a poetry form that again challenged students of Qur'ān recitations to memorize it. *Al-Shāṭibīya* poem is still recognized as an excellent and fundamental work on the rules of Qur'ān recitations and represents the second book to memorize immediately after the memorization of the Qur'ān.

Probably due to the mentioned misunderstanding, Ibn al-Jazarī decided to publish detailed information about the other three preserved recitations in his famous poem *al-Durra*, which is together with the seven recitations in *al-Shāṭibīya* considered first step in a comprehensive study of Qur'ān recitations, called al-*qirā'āt al-ᶜashr al-ṣughrā* (the ten minor recitations).

The final step in establishment the science of Qur'ān recitations happened in the 15$^{th}$ century AD by an introduction of the ten major recitations (*al-qirā'āt al-ᶜashr al-kubrā*) by Ibn al-Jazarī again through the third important poem, *al-Ṭayyiba*. Proficiency in the rules contained in *al-Ṭayyiba* is considered the ultimate mastery of knowledge of Qur'ān recitations.

Muslim scholarship usually notes that recitations out of ten mentioned do not meet the strict conditions for accepting them as correct. Their active recitation is already forbidden, however, these too are considered an indispensable part of Qur'ān exegesis. For Muslims, they mean a new dimension of the Message and a new assurance of the miraculousness of God's book. Nevertheless, these hidden meanings require a thorough acquaintance with this science and a deeper examination of the exegesis of the Qur'ān. As if precious pearls should remain hidden forever for some, while for others they should gradually be revealed in all their beauty.

As indicated, the science of Qur'ān recitation has a long tradition, during which the Qur'ān has been and still is being orally transmitted through countless transmitters, esteemed teachers (men and women) entrusted with knowledge and having the ability to pass it on the others. Muslims take this tradition with humility, reverence and dignity without any attempt to question it. Every transmitter is seen as a prominent authority representing part of living chain of specific recitation and connecting through it his name with God. Their mastery requires, in addition to memorizing long methodological poems, infinite faith in their divine origin and infinite faith in the divine protection of the still-living tradition of their recitation.

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