Chapter Seven

Uthman’s Mushaf

During the reign of Uthman, selected by popular pledge (istid'ah) as the third caliph, Muslims engaged in jihad to the expanses of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the north. Hailing from various tribes and provinces, these fighting forces possessed sundry dialects and the Prophet, out of necessity, had taught them to recite the Qur’an in their own dialects, given the difficulty of having them abandon their native tongues so suddenly. But the resultant differences in pronunciation now began producing breaches and conflict within the community.

1. Disputes in Recitation and Uthman’s Response

Hudhaifa bin al-Yaman went to Uthman directly from the Azerbaijani and Armenian frontier where, having united forces from Iraq with others from Syria, he had observed regional differences over the pronunciation of the Qur’an – differences which had caused friction. “O caliph”, he advised, “take this umma [community] in hand before they differ about their Book like the Christians and Jews”.  

Such disagreements were not altogether new, for Umar had anticipated this danger during his caliphate. Having sent Ibn Mas`ud to Iraq, and discovered him teaching in the dialect of Hudhail 2 (as Ibn Mas`ud had originally learned it), Umar rebuked him:

The Qur’an was revealed in the dialect of Quraish (Qarya), so teach according to the dialect of Quraish and not that of Hudhail.

Ibn Hajar’s comments are valuable in this regard, “For a non-Arab Muslim who desires to read the Qur’an”, he says, “the most propitious

1 Al-Bukhari, Sahih, hadith no. 4987; Abu ‘Ubaid, Fad‘ilat, p. 282. There are many other reports concerning this problem.

2 One of the major tribes in the Arabian Peninsula at the time.

choice is to read according to the Qurašiḥ (قراسیح) dialect. That is indeed best for him [as all Arabic dialects for him will be of equal difficulty].

Hudayfah bin al-Yama'īn’s warning to the caliph came in 25 A.H., and that very year Uthmān resolved to end these disputes. Assembling the people, he explained the problem and sought their opinion on recital in different dialects, keeping in mind that some might claim superiority for a particular dialect based on their tribal affiliations. When asked for his own opinion he replied (as narrated by ‘Aṭīf bin Abī Tālib):

"I see that we bring the people on a single Mushaf [with a single dialect] so that there is neither division nor discord." We said, "Well have you proposed".

There are two narrations on how Uthmān proceeded with this task. In the first (which is the more famous) he made copies relying exclusively on the Ṣaba‘ī kept in Ḥafṣa’s custody, who was the Prophet’s widow. A less-known narration suggests that he first authorized the compilation of an independent Mushaf, using primary sources, before comparing this with the Ṣaba‘ī. Both versions concur that the Ṣaba‘ī of Ḥafṣa played a critical role in the development of Uthmān’s Mushaf.

2. Uthmān Prepares a Mushaf Directly from the Ṣaba‘ī

According to the first report Uthmān concluded his deliberations, retrieved the Ṣaba‘ī from Ḥafṣa, and arranged immediately for the scribbling of duplicate copies. Al-Bar‘a narrates,

So Uthmān sent Ḥafṣa a message stating, "Send us the Ṣaba‘ī so that we may make perfect copies and then return the Ṣaba‘ī back to you". Ḥafṣa sent it to Uthmān, who ordered Zaid bin Thābit, ‘Abdullāh bin as-Zubair, Ša‘id bin al-‘Āṣ and ‘Abdūr-Rahmān bin al-‘Ārith bin Ḥishām to make duplicate copies. He told the three Qurānī men, "Should you disagree with Zaid bin Thābit on any point regarding the Qurān, write it in the dialect of Qurašiḥ as the Qurān was

revealed in their tongue". Then did so, and when they had prepared several copies Uthmān returned the Ṣaba‘ī to Ḥafṣa ...

3. Uthmān Makes an Independent Copy of the Mushaf

i. Appointing a Committee of Twelve to Oversee the Task

The second account is somewhat more complex. Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110 A.H.) reports,

man Muhammad bin Surūr, ʿallā Thābit is the first name of the caliphs and the al-Qurašiḥ is among them (collect the Qurān).

Uthmān assembled a committee of twelve from both the Qurašiḥ and the Ṣaba‘ī, among them Ubayy bin Ka‘b and Zaid bin ‘Ikābil, to collect the Qurān.


ii. Arranging for an Autonomous Copy

Uthmān commissioned these twelve to manage this task by collecting and tabulating all the Qur’ānic parchments written in the Prophet’s presence. The great historian Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571 A.H.) reports in his History of Damascus:

7 Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bahir, xcxi11, hadith no. 4987; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, al-Muṣāfah, pp. 19-20; Abī ‘Ubayd, Fad’ilullāh, p. 282.
8 Ibn ‘Uذ, Tahāqīf, iii/2/62. Note that Ibn Sīrīn used the word ṣam (to collect).
9 Al-Mu’arrīj as-Sadūsī, Kitāb Ḥadīthīn min Naṣab Qurašiḥ, p. 35.
10 ibid, p. 42.
12 Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bahir, xcix.
14 A detailed study of one of the personal Mushafs (see pp. 170–72) reveals that these twelve were subdivided into more than one group, each engaged in dictation and working independently.
Uthmān delivered a sermon and said, “The people have diverged in their recitations, and I am determined that whoever holds any verses dictated by the Prophet himself must bring them to me”. So the people brought their verses, written on parchment and bones and leaves, and anyone contributing to this pile was first questioned by Uthmān. “Did you learn these verses [i.e. take this dictation] directly from the Prophet himself?” All contributors answered under oath, and all the collected material was individually labeled and then handed to Zaid bin Thābit.  

Mālik bin Abī ‘Amir relates,

I was among those upon whom the Muğḥaf was dictated [from the written sources], and if any controversies arose concerning a particular verse they would say, “Where is the writer [of this parchment]? Precisely how did the Prophet teach him this verse?” And they would resume scribbling, leaving that portion blank and sending for the man in question to clarify his writing.  

Thus an independent copy steadily emerged, with the twelve setting aside all uncertainties in spelling conventions so that ‘Uthmān might attend to them personally. Abū ‘Ubayd lists a few such cases. One uncertainty for example lay in the spelling of at-tahāt, whether to use an open ‘i’ (ʾaytah) or a closed one (ṣaytah). Hāni‘ al-Barbari, a client of ‘Uthmān, reports:  

عن هناك اليزيدي ممثل شهيد، فكانت عند عثمان: وهم يجهلون المصادر الأساسية.  

I was with ‘Uthmān when the committee was comparing the Muğḥaf. He sent me to Ubayy bin Ka‘b with a sheep’s shoulder bone containing three different words from different strata: a word each from 2:259, 30:30, and 86:17. So Ubayy called for his writing utensils and reviewed the spelling of these words.

---

16 A. Jeffery (ed.), Muqaddimah, p. 22. Labeling the material (e.g. with the name of the scribe) can also be deduced from Mālik’s statement in the next quotation.  
19 Qur‘ān 2:259.  
20 Qur‘ān 30:30.  
21 Qur‘ān 86:17.  
22 Abū ‘Ubayd, Pādā’il, pp. 286-87.  
23 Ibn Shabbā, Tārikh al-Madīna, pp. 990-91; Also as-Suyūṭī, al-Iṣārah, n.272, quoting Ibn Uthmān’s al-Maqāṣīf.  
24 One of the narrators is of very low repute (sālih: marākik). See Chapter 13 for details on the ranking of narrators.  
26 As-Suyūṭī, al-Iṣārah, n.272.
Gathering these narratives together gives us the following: 'Uthmān prepared an independent copy relying entirely on primary sources, which included the Companions' parchments along with additional material held by 'Āisha. 

iv. 'Uthmān Retrieves the Şuhuf from Ḥafsa for Verification

Ibn Shabba reports,

27 This can also be inferred from the following hadith in Şafih of al-Bukhārī:

قَالَ: أَوَّلَ الْقَيْمَةَ الرُّسُلُ أَنْ يَتْنَى أَنْ يَتْنَى لِلْحَيَاةِ الدَّيْنَ. وَأَيَّامَةَ مَا سَبَقَ مِنَ الْعَلَّمِ الْأَكْبَرِ.

وَقَالَ أَيَّامَةَ مَا سَبَقَ مِنَ الْعَلَّمِ الْأَكْبَرِ، أَنْ يَتْنَى لِلْحَيَاةِ الدَّيْنَ وَأَيَّامَةَ مَا سَبَقَ مِنَ الْعَلَّمِ الْأَكْبَرِ. وَأَيَّامَةَ مَا سَبَقَ مِنَ الْعَلَّمِ الْأَكْبَرِ.

Zaid bin Thabit reports that while compiling the Qurʾān during the reign of Abū Bakr, he could not locate two āyāt from the end of Sūrat al-Baqara till he found them with Abū Khuzayma al-Anṣārī, with no one else possessing a first-hand copy. The completed šuhufs were kept in Abū Bakr’s custody till he passed away... [al-Bukhārī, Šafih, hadith no. 4986].

Khaṭīb bin Zaid bin Thabit transmitted from his father, Zaid bin Thabit, “While we were copying the Mushājir I missed an āyāt [No. 23 from Sūrat al-ʾĀʾśā] which I used to hear the Prophet reciting. We sought it until we found it with Khuzayma bin Thabit al-Anṣārī, and then inserted it into the proper sura within the Mushājir.” [al-Bukhārī, Šafih, hadith no. 4988].

These two hadiths have caused confusion among some scholars, mainly due to the proximity of the two names. Note that the two are distinct: Khuzayma and Abū Khuzayma. Now if we read the hadiths carefully we see that Zaid used the word šuhuf for the collection during Abū Bakr’s reign, and the word Mushājir (pl. of Mushājir) for the work he did under ‘Uthmān’s supervision. Thus we may safely conclude that these are two different instances of compilation. (In the Šafih, hadith no. 4986 falls into the section concerning the Qurʾān’s collection during Abū Bakr’s time, and no. 4988 during ‘Uthmān’s.) If we consider the second compilation to be Zaid’s work on an independent copy of the Mushājir, then everything becomes clear. On the other hand, if we assume that Zaid was simply making a duplicate copy for ‘Uthmān based on Abū Bakr’s šuhuf, not an autonomous copy, then we must confront the awkward question of why Zaid was unable to locate verse No. 23 from Sūrat al-ʾĀʾśā—since all the verses should have been right in front of him. Of interest also is that Zaid uses the first person singular pronoun in the first narration and the plural we, indicating group activity, in the second. All of this strongly bolsters the view that the second compilation was indeed an independent endeavor.

So this time the independent copy was rechecked against the official šuhuf which resided with Ḥafsa.

One may wonder why Caliph ‘Uthmān took the trouble to compile an autonomous copy when the end product was to be compared with the šuhuf anyway. The likeliest reason is a symbolic one. A decade earlier thousands of Companions, engaged in the battles against apostasy in Yamāmā and elsewhere, were unable to participate in the šuhuf’s compilation. In drawing from a larger pool of written materials, ‘Uthmān’s independent copy provided these surviving Companions with an opportunity to partake of this momentous endeavor.

In the above account no inconsistencies were found between the šuhuf and the independent Mushājir, and from this two broad conclusions emerge: first, the Qurʾānic text was thoroughly stable from the earliest days and not (as some allege) fluid and volatile until the third century; and second, the methods involved in compilation during both reigns were meticulous and accurate.

4. The Sanctioning and Distribution of ‘Uthmān’s Mushāf

i. The Final Copy Read to the Companions

This definitive copy, once verified against the Sūrah, was

“read to the Companions in ‘Uthmān’s presence”.39 With the final recitation
over, he dispatched duplicate copies for distribution throughout the many
provinces of the Islamic state. His general injunction that people “write
down the Mushāf” indicates his encouragement to the Companions to
make duplicate copies for their own personal use.

ii. The Number of Certified Copies Made

How many copies did ‘Uthmān distribute? According to some reports,
four: Kūfah, Basra, and Syria, with the last one being kept in Madinah;
another account adds Makkah, Yemen and Bahrain. Ad-Dānī favors the
first report.40 Prof. S. Dāfī believes however that eight were made because
‘Uthmān retained one for himself.41 In support of this, we know that Khālid
bin Yāsā made a comparison between the Mushāf kept by ‘Uthmān and
the one prepared for Madinah.42 Al-Ya’qūbī, a Shi’ite historian, says that
‘Uthmān sent Mushāf to Kūfah, Basra, Madinah, Makkah, Egypt, Syria,
Bahrain, Yemen and al-Jazīrah, for a total of nine.43 Of all these localities
however there are five whose names are consistently cited by scholars:
Madinah, Makkah, Kūfah, Basra and Syria, and for each of these we know
the identity of the reciter to whom it was entrusted.44 The inclusion of a
sixth is likely as ‘Uthmān was reading his own personal copy when he was
assassinated,45 and so this number seems the most logical. There is also
evidence that during the process of preparing these copies, some people
scribed additional ones for their own personal use. A study of one of these
unofficial copies is given in pp. 170 - 72.

40 Ad-Dānī, al-Mughni’, p. 19; see also Ibn Kābiḥ (who favors seven), Faddā’il, vii:445.
42 See pp. 167 - 70.  
43 Al-Ya’qūbī, Tārīkh, ii:170.  
44 A. Al-Islām, Variant Readings of the Qur’ān: A Critical Study of their Historical and
Linguistic Origins, The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), London &
45 Al-Tamīdī wa al-Rajīn, pp. 138-39.

iii. ‘Uthmān Burns All Other Manuscripts

With the task complete, the ink on the final copy dry, and duplicate copies
dispatched, there was no need for the numerous fragments of the Qur’ān
circulating in people’s hands. So all such fragments were burned. Muḥammad
bin Sād asserts that the people were pleased with ‘Uthmān’s decision; at
the very least no one voiced any objections.46 Other reports confirm this
unanimous approval, including ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭalīb who says,

قَالَ عِلَيْنَ أَنَّا نَظَلَّا مَعَهُ مَا خَلَفَ النَّخَالِ إِلَّا عِنْ مَا نَحْنَ بِهِ جَمِيعًا.47
By Allah, he only did what he did with these fragments in clear view of
all of us all [i.e. and with our consent].

iv. ‘Uthmān Sends Reciters Along with Mushāf

No copy was sent forth without a qa’īr (or qa’īr reciter). These included ‘Abd b.
to Syria, Ṭāhir b. ‘Abd Qays to Baṣra and Abū‘Abdullāh-Raḥmān as-Sulami
to Kūfah. ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abdullāh al-Qādī says:

قَالَ عِلَيْنَ أَنَّا نَظَلَّا مَعَهُ مَا خَلَفَ النَّخَالِ إِلَّا عِنْ مَا نَحْنَ بِهِ جَمِيعًا.47
By Allah, he only did what he did with these fragments in clear view of
all of us all [i.e. and with our consent].

Each of these scholars recited to the people of his respective city in the
manner he had learned through authenticated, multiple channels going
back to the Prophet, insofar as these channels lay in complete agreement
with each other and fit the Mushāf’s consonantal skeleton. Any mode of
recitation arriving through a single channel (or containing verses
that had been abrogated during the Prophet’s lifetime) was discarded.
Dispaching reciters with the Mushāf meant limiting the possibilities
that were compatible with the consonantal script to only those that
enjoyed authenticated and multiple backing... Sending a scholar with
every Mushāf was, therefore, elucidating that proper recitation was
dependent on learning through direct contact with teachers whose
transmission chains reached to the Prophet, not simply a product of
script or spelling conventions.49

47 Ibn Abī Dāwūd, al-Māṣūbih, p. 22; see also pp. 12, 23.
49 The English rendering is not verbatim but is only meant to convey the narration’s gist.
Early copies of 'Uthmān’s Muḥāfāz were largely consonantal, frequently dropping vowels and containing no dots,\(^{40}\) much like the image below which is taken from a Muḥāfāz in the Ḥijāzi script.\(^{41}\)

\[\text{Image of early Muḥāfāz in Ḥijāzi script}\]

\footnotesize{Figure 7.1: Example of a very early Muḥāfāz in the Ḥijāzi script. Note the lack of skeletal dots. Courtesy of the National Archive Museum of Yemen.}

These copies could be read erroneously in many ways.\(^{42}\) In undertaking this second compilation, ‘Uthmān’s main purpose was to eliminate all occasion for disputes in recitation; sending a Muḥāfāz by itself, or with a reciter at liberty to devise any reading, was contrary to the unity ‘Uthmān sought to establish within the populace. The existence of total unity in the Qur’ānic texts throughout the world for fourteen centuries, between all countries and all divergent Muslim sects, is proof enough of ‘Uthmān’s unparalleled success in gathering all Muslims upon a single text.

\section*{v. ‘Uthmān’s Instructions with the Muḥāfāz He Sent}

1. ‘Uthmān decreed that all personal Muḥāfāz differing from his own should be burned, as failure to eliminate these would engender further strife. Anas b. Mālik reports,

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{43} For a detailed discussion on dots, see pp. 151 - 58.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{41} Some of the first official ‘Uthmān Muḥāfāz were most likely written in the Ḥijāzi script. There are a handful of Muḥāfāz attributed to ‘Uthmān worldwide (see pp. 347 - 50.). While the manuscripts themselves are mute on this point, such attributions may imply that they were actually copied from one of the Muḥāfāz dispatched by ‘Uthmān, either directly or via other intermediary copies.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{42} A common Orientalist allegation is that the ‘Uthmān Muḥāfāz, devoid as it was of dots, caused divergences in the readings of the Qur’ān. See Chapter 12 for a thorough analysis of this subject.}}

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{43} Ibn Abī Dāwūd, al-Maṣaḥif, pp. 19-20; see also al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, Bīb Jam‘i al-Qur‘ān, bābīn no. 4987; Ibn Kathīr, Faidat al-Qadīr, vii/642.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{44} Ibn Ḥārān, Fatūd bārī, iv/20.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{45} ibid., iv/21.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{46} Ibn Abī Dāwūd, al-Maṣaḥif, p. 25.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{47} Ibn Ḥārān, Fātūd bārī, iv/21.}}\\

\footnotesize{\text{\textsuperscript{48} Ibn Abī Dāwūd, al-Maṣaḥif, p. 35.}}

Dispatching to each Muslim province its own Muḥāfāz, he instructed them to burn all other copies which differed from his.

Anas’ statement represents only one possible scenario out of many. According to other narratives, ‘Uthmān ordained that all earlier copies were to be torn or burned.\(^{44}\) In another account, by erasing the ink, Abū Qilābā states, “‘Uthmān wrote to every center, ‘I... have erased what was in my possession, now erase what is in yours.’”\(^{45}\) Once, a delegation traveled from Iraq to Madinah and visited Ubayy’s son, informing him that they had journeyed with great hardship solely to see Ubayy’s Muḥāfāz. He replied that ‘Uthmān had taken it away. Perhaps thinking that he was simply reluctant, they repeated their request and he repeated his answer.\(^{46}\)

Ibn Ḥajar says that despite most reports incorporating the word at-tāhriq (burning), every possibility must be considered. The fate of each fragment rested with the individual possessing it: whether to erase, tear, or burn.\(^{47}\) I believe one more possibility exists. Some people may have chosen to compare their personal Muḥāfāz with ‘Uthmān’s and, where differences appeared, to amend them. ‘Abdul-Alā bī Ḥakam al-Kilābī’s statement bears this out:

\begin{quote}
Entering the house of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, I discovered him in the company of Uthūbfūn bin al-Yamān and ‘Abdullāh bin Mas‘īd on the top floor... They were gathered around a Muḥāfāz sent by ‘Uthmān, accompanied by an order to correct their own copies in accordance with his. Abū Mūsā told them, ‘Whatever you find in my Muḥāfāz that is additional to ‘Uthmān’s, do not remove it, and whatever you find missing, write it down.’”
\end{quote}

2. ‘Uthmān’s second injunction was not to recite against the script of the Muḥāfāz. The unanimous agreement to dispose of (or amend) all earlier copies made ‘Uthmān’s script and spelling the new standard; from then on every Muslim learning the Qur’ān had to conform with the ‘Uthmān text. Where a person’s previous schooling was at
odds with this text, he was not granted leave to recite or teach in that divergent manner. So what could such a person do? Attending an official reciter's circle was the simplest solution, to learn the Book in accordance with the conditions laid and thereby regain the privileges of teaching and recitation. Uthmān's unparalleled success in this regard is proof positive that his actions echoed the voice of the community.

With the work concluded and dispatched many Muslim scholars, including some very notable Companions, embarked on a word-by-word scrutiny of these Mushāf. In Chapter 11 we will cover their findings in depth. There is also convincing evidence that the process of preparing official copies was a team effort where some dictated and others scribed, and formate indeed. We have details regarding one such Mushāf penned by a member of Uthmān's committee of twelve. This too is discussed in Chapter 11. In fact it appears that Uthmān personally encouraged all individuals to pen their own private copies. A statement by Ibn Shabbāh supports this.

فأظهر الناس أن يكتبوا المصاطب

[Uthmān] ordered the people to make duplicate copies of the Mushāf.

5. Al-Ḥajjāj and His Contributions to the Mushāf

From Calif Al-Ḥajjāj we now turn out gaze to Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf ath-Thaqafī (d. 95 A.H.), governor of Iraq during the Umayyad Caliphate and a man of considerable notoriety. His unflinching, iron-fisted rule won him many unflattering remarks in the annals of Iraq's history. Ironically he also played a role in serving the Qur'ān, though even in this regard he had no shortage of enemies. Ibn Abī Dāwūd quotes 'Aʻīf b. Abī Jamila (60-146 A.H.), by way of 'Abīd b. Abī Ṣahyāb (d. 212 A.H.), alleging that Al-Ḥajjāj altered the Uthmān Mushāf in eleven places. Closer inspection reveals serious problems with this report. Firstly the narrative chain is grossly defective as 'Abīd is a narrator of very low repute whose statements are rejected. Al-ʻAfn Abī Jamila on the other hand, while claimed as trustworthy,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surah</th>
<th>Uthmān's Mushāf alteration</th>
<th>Al-Ḥajjāj's alleged alteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2:259</td>
<td>لم يسمح بالقراءة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5:48</td>
<td>شرح الله تبارك وتعالى</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10:22</td>
<td>وهو الذي يبين</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>من أزليكم فنبه</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>23:87 and 89</td>
<td>البيضاء</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>26:116</td>
<td>من التاجين</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>26:167</td>
<td>من الامراء</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>43:32</td>
<td>من السماء ما يبين معيقلا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>47:15</td>
<td>من السماء ما يبين معيقلا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>57:7</td>
<td>حكم الفائدة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>81:24</td>
<td>يبين</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

had Shiite tendencies as well as being anti-Umayyad. Mu'awiyah, the first Umayyad ruler, fought 'Aft on the pretext of 'Uthmān's blood. Al-Ḥajjāj, being one of the strongest towers in the Umayyad garrison, would have been a natural target for 'Aft. Any report issuing from the opposite camp must be approached with extreme caution. Secondly the scholarship of Ibn Abī Dāwūd was discredited during his own lifetime, even by his own father. Thirdly the Abbasids, successors to and bitter rivals of the Umayyad dynasty, were certain to exploit any such incident for political leverage had there been a hint of truth to this story. That we do find not this to be the case is most telling.

Whatever the truth, the following is the list of words Al-Ḥajjāj is accused of altering.


Ibn Ḥajar, Taqrib al-Ṭabarî, p. 433, entry no. 5215. Al-Ḥajjāj's supposed changes seem particularly implausible as they would harm the Umayyad cause.

A study of this table reveals that in most cases the differences are due to authenticated qira'at.57 Case nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 11 are valid variant readings (i.e. both the original and the alleged alteration). In the remaining cases only the reading shown in the rightmost column (al-Ḥajjāj’s alleged alteration) is the valid one as no one has mentioned the reading shown in the other column.58 Additionally the Muḥāfāz commissioned by Uthmān did not incorporate does,59 and even by al-Ḥajjāj’s era the use of does was by no means ubiquitous. There are several words in the above table whose skeletons cannot be easily told apart,60 so how then this allegation that they were modified when the does that would distinguish between them were absent? None of the alleged alterations bear any weight on the meanings of these verses, and the accusation itself (in light of the above) can be considered null and void.61 The following case, mentioned by Ibn Qutaiba, may provide the clue to an alternative interpretation.

Based on ʿĀẓim al-Jahdat’s report, al-Ḥajjāj appointed him, Najīya b. Rulaḥ and ʿAlī b. ʿAṣma’ to scrutinize Muḥāfāz with the aim of treating up any that deviated from the Muḥāfaz of Uthmān. The owner of any such Muḥāfaz was to be compensated sixty dirhams.62

A few such Muḥāfāz may have escaped destruction, being corrected instead by erasure of the ink and a fresh coating with the scribe’s pen. Some might have erroneously interpreted this act as al-Ḥajjāj’s attempt to alter the Qurʾān.

Following Uthmān’s lead, al-Ḥajjāj also distributed copies of the Qurʾān to various cities. ʿUbaydullāh b. ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUba states that the Muḥāfaz of Madīnah was kept in the Prophet’s Mosque and read from every morning,63 in the civil strife surrounding Uthmān’s assassination someone absconded with it. Muḥārīz b. Ṣabīḥ reports from his father (who was among al-Ḥajjāj’s

57 The science of proper recitation, see Chapters 11 and 12.
59 Refers to Chapters 9 and 10 for a discussion on possibly why ʿUthmān chose not to incorporate does.
60 Such as ʿאוק and ʿצוק.
61 It may be that he carried out the changes in his own personal copy, as was the case with ʿUbaydullāh b. Ziyād, who standardized the orthography (spelling) in his own copy (see pp. 146 - 47). Had al-Ḥajjāj made any changes to the actual ʿUthmānī Muḥāfaz, neither the Muslim community nor those in power would have kept silent.

guard(s) that al-Ḥajjāj commissioned several Muḥāfāz,64 and sent one of them to Madīnah. ʿUthmān’s family found this distasteful, but when they were asked to bring forth the original, that it may be recited from again, they declared that the Muḥāfaz had been destroyed (مَكَّرَةٌ) on the day of ʿUthmān’s assassination. Muḥārīz was informed that ʿUthmān’s master copy still survived in the possession of his grandson, Khalīl b. ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān, but we can assume that the Muḥāfaz sent by al-Ḥajjāj was adopted for public recitation in the Prophet’s Mosque, in lieu of the original. According to as-Sanḥīḥi, who quotes Ibn Zābala,

أرسل الحاج بن يوسف إلى أملاك الراية بإخضاف، فأرسل إلى المدينة يضعف كتبه إلى مسجد الرسول، وهو أول من أرسل يحضر إلى المقصورة

al-Ḥajjāj sent the Qurʾān to major cities, including a large one to Madīnah, and was the first to dispatch the Muḥāfaz to towns.

Ibn Shabba says,

And when [the Abbasid ruler] al-Mahdi became caliph he sent another Muḥāfaz to Madīnah, which is being read from even now. The Muḥāfaz of al-Ḥajjāj was removed and kept inside a box next to the pulpit.65

Al-Ḥajjāj’s role as regards the Qurʾān was not confined to commissioning further Muḥāfāz. Abū Muhammad al-Ḥimmānī reports that al-Ḥajjāj once called for a gathering of the ḥuffāz and those who recited the Holy Book professionally. Taking his seat among them, for he was of the former group, he asked them to count the number of characters in the Qurʾān. Once finished, they unanimously agreed on the round figure of 340,750 characters. His curiosity being far from expended, he then sought to discover at which character lay half of the Qurʾān, and the answer was found to be in sūra 18 verse 19, at the character ﺍ ل. Then he asked where each one seventh was in the Qurʾān, and the tally was: the first seventh in sūra 4 verse 55 at a (in ʿawza); the second in sūra 7 verse 147 at ِب (in qāf); the third in sūra 13 verse 35; the fourth in sūra 22 verse 34; the fifth in sūra 33 verse 36; the sixth in sūra 48 verse 6 and the final seventh in the remaining

64 He did this to accommodate the increase in the Muslim population which had occurred between ʿUthmān’s time and his own (over half a century), and which had inevitably resulted in an increased demand for Muḥāfāz. We have no account however as to their number or where they were dispatched to.
65 As-Sanḥīḥi, Waqīʿ al-Waqīʿ, 1668, as quoted by al-Munagghī, Études de Paléographie Arabe, Beirut, 1972, p. 46.
66 Ibn Shabba, Taʾrīkh al-Madīn, pp. 7-8.
part. His next aim was to uncover the location of each third and fourth of the Qur’an.⁶⁷ Al-Ḥimānī mentions that al-Ḥajjāj would follow-up the progress of the committee every night; the entire undertaking required four months.⁶⁸

Al-Munagghīd writes that he came across a Muṣḥaf in Topkapı Sarayi (Istanbul), No. 44, where the notes indicate that it was penned by Ḥudayj b. Mu‘āwiya b. Maslama al-Anṣārī for ‘Uqba b. Nafi’ al-Fihrist in the year 49 A.H. He casts doubt on the date, partly because of folio 3b which contains a statistical count of every letter of the alphabet within the entire Qur’an. Statistical analysis was too advanced a concern for Muslims of the first century A.H., he argues.⁶⁹ Given al-Ḥajjāj’s initiative in this regard, al-Munagghīd’s doubts seem ill-founded.

Our computer contains a plain-text copy of the Qur’an without diacritical marks; with the aid of a small program we counted 332,795 characters. Al-Ḥajjāj’s methodology is unknown to us: was añada considered a character? What about an alif that is read but not written (e.g. ala)? Despite lacking these particulars, the proximity of our computer figure with that obtained by al-Ḥajjāj’s committee well over thirteen centuries ago, indicates that those four intensive months of counting really did take place.

6. Muṣḥafs in the Marketplace

In the early days, according to Ibn Maṣ‘ūd, a person desiring a copy of the Muṣḥaf would simply approach this or that volunteer and request his assistance;⁷⁰ this is seconded by Abī bin Ḥusayn (d. 93 A.H.) who recounts that Muṣḥafs were not bought or sold, and that a man would fetch his own parchments to the pulpit and ask for volunteering scribes. A string of volunteers would then be engaged, one after another, till the task was complete.⁷¹ When Muḥīṯ once quarreled with Ibrahīm an-Nakha’ī that people needed Muṣḥafs to recite, Ibrahīm replied, “Buy the parchment and ink and have the help of volunteers”.⁷² But with the Muslim population swelling beyond the frontiers of the Arabian Peninsula, the rise in demand for copies of the Qur’an placed tremendous strain on volunteer scribes and triggered a new phenomenon: the paid copyist.

This new profession brought in its wake a theological dilemma, about the legitimacy of paying someone to serve the Word of Allāh. A person may only sell items that belong to him or her, many reasoned, so on what basis could the Qur’an be sold when it was not the property of an individual, but of the Creator? The majority of scholars disliked the idea of paid copying and of introducing Muṣḥafs as a marketplace commodity, among them Ibn Maṣ‘ūd (d. 32 A.H.), ‘Alqama (d. after 60 A.H.), Masrūq (d. 63 A.H.), Shurayh (d. 80 A.H.), Ibrahīm an-Nakha’ī (d. 96 A.H.), Abī Mīljāz (d. 106 A.H.) and others,⁷³ while Ibn al-Musayyib (d. after 90 A.H.) spoke staunchly against it.⁷⁴ There were others, however, who sought to temper their colleagues’ critique by pointing out that the payment was not for the Word of Allāh, rather for the ink, parchment and labor; taking the acute shortage of volunteers into account, such scholars as Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68 A.H.), Sa‘īd b. Jubaib (d. 95 A.H.) and Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 100 A.H.) did not find the sale or purchase of Muṣḥafs distasteful.⁷⁵ The same debate extended to the revision of Muṣḥafs and the amendment of any scribal mistakes therein which, initially the volunteer’s task, soon passed into the hands of the paid proofreader. Sa‘īd b. Jubaib, once offering a Muṣḥaf to Mūṣā al-Anṣāri, asserted that he had gone through, corrected the errors and that it was for sale.⁷⁶ Following their earlier argument Ibrahīm an-Nakha’ī and others disapproved of paying for revision, though Ibrahīm in particular altered his stance afterwards.⁷⁷

‘Anūr b. Mu‘ār (d. 118 A.H.) contends that it was the slaves who first initiated the business of selling Muṣḥafs.⁷⁸ Ibn ‘Abbās’s slave, for example, charged one hundred dirhams for copying the Qur’an.⁷⁹ The trade in Muṣḥafs appears to have originated during Mu‘āwiya’s reign, according to Abī Mīljāz, which places this just ahead of the middle of the first century A.H.⁸⁰ The growth of commerce soon brought about shops specializing in Muṣḥafs if they happened to pass by such a shop Ibn ‘Umar (d. 73 A.H.) and Sulaym b. ‘Abdullāh (d. 106 A.H.) would pronounce it “a dreadful trade”,⁸¹ while Abī al-‘Abīyā (d. 90 A.H.) wished punishment for those who put the Qur’an up for sale.⁸²

---

⁶⁸ ibid., p. 120.
⁶⁹ S. al-Munagghīd, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
⁷¹ ibid., p. 166.
⁷² ibid., p. 169.
⁷³ Ibn Abī Dīwūd, al-Muṣḥāf, pp. 160, 166, 169, 175; see also Ibn Abī Shabba, Maṣṣāf, vi,293.
⁷⁴ Ibn Abī Dīwūd, al-Muṣḥāf, p. 166.
⁷⁵ Ibn Abī Shabba, Maṣṣāf, vi,293; see also Ibn Abī Dīwūd, al-Muṣḥāf, p. 175.
⁷⁶ Ibn Abī Dīwūd, al-Muṣḥāf, pp. 175-76.
⁷⁷ ibid., pp. 157, 167, 169.
⁷⁸ ibid., p. 171.
⁷⁹ Al-Bukhārī, Khaqān Aflat al-Bīyād, p. 32.
⁸⁰ Ibn Abī Dīwūd, al-Muṣḥāf, p. 175.
⁸¹ ibid., pp. 159, 165; see also Ibn Abī Shabba, Maṣṣāf, vi,293.
A more altruistic trend was the public library. Muḥājīd (20–103 A.H.) reports that Ibn Abī Lailā (d. 83 A.H.) founded a library containing only the Holy Qur'ān, where people would gather for recitation. Abūdul-Hamām b. ‘Amr al-Jumāṭī established a different sort of library by the middle of the first century A.H., housing ḳirāṭāt (qāṣidāt) bookletson assorted subjects in addition to various games, and here people freely used the facilities for reading and amusement. Sources mention another library belonging to Khalīf b. Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya; there may have been others whose details are now lost to us.

7. Conclusion

The efficacy of ‘Uthmān’s endeavors is clear in at least two ways. First, no Muslim province remained but that it absorbed this Muḥāf into its bloodstream; and second, that a span of fourteen centuries has not been able to corrupt or dent the skeletal text of his Muḥāf. Truly a manifestation of the Holy Qur’ān’s miraculous nature; any other explanation fails. Later caliphs, perhaps seeking a foothold in the chronicles of posteriority, commissioned and dispatched further official copies, but nothing was ever sent forth which contradicted ‘Uthmān’s universal standard.

To this day there exist Muḥāfās attributed directly to ‘Uthmān. Though this appellation suggests that they are ‘Uthmān’s originals, the most likely scenario is that these were transcribed from the originals or from duplicated copies thereof. These include manuscripts in Topkapi Saray (Istanbul), in Cairo, in the India Office Library (London), and in Tashkent (known also as the Muḥāf of Samarqand). They are written on leather, not paper, and appear to be contemporaneous. Their skeletal texts agree with the authenticated qirāṭī and, therefore, with Muḥāfās from the first and subsequent centuries A.H. up to those used in our present day.

83 Ibn Sīdū, Tabaqāt, iv,75; see also Ibn Abī Dawūd, al-Masāʾūf, p. 151.
84 Al-Aṣḥāb, al-Aṣḥāb, iv,253.
85 Contrary to Khrenkov’s supposition (“Kitābdāt”, Encyclopedia of Islam, first edition, iv,1045), this library was probably founded after those of Ibn Abī Lailā and ‘Abūdul-Hamām b. ‘Amr al-Jumāṭī, and is therefore not the earliest of its kind.
86 M.M. al-ʿAzānī, Studies in Early Hadith Literature, pp. 16-17.
88 Though it remains one of the great written treasures of the world, the Samarqand Muḥāf is unfortunately no longer pristine. In 1905 the Russian Orientalist S. Pisareff, opting to publish a facsimile edition, personally re-inked the text in dulled folios and in the process committed unintentional errors (Jeffrey and Mandelsohn, “The Orthography of the Samarqand Qur'ān Codex”, Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 62, 1942, p. 176).