Both Muṣḥafs, the one at BL (Or 2165) and that at BNE (Arabe 328a), tally in all but one place with the Muṣḥaf of Shām (Syria). Arabic 328a will, however, be in complete accord with the Muṣḥaf of Shām if we consider مَرَكَمْهُ to represent مَرْكَمْهُ, a case we argued earlier. This is on par with the conclusion of Y. Dutton who showed that both manuscripts are written in the qirā‘at (recitation style) of Ibn Ṭārib (d. 118 A.H./736 C.E.),76 which according to Ibn al-Jazari was the reading used by the people of Syria up until the beginning of the sixth century A.H.77

6. Conclusion

As soon as Caliph 'Uthmān dispatched his official Muṣḥafs to different fronts, scholars painstakingly went through each of them and tabulated the differences in their texts. These amounted to forty-four places in the Qurʾān, a divergence of forty-five characters in a corpus nine thousand lines long. These stemmed from multiple readings, each emanating from the Prophet and so equally authoritative, none affecting the meaning or outcome of the verse involved. To grapple with multiple readings it is due, Zaid bin Thabit consigned them to different copies rather than having to demote one or the other to secondary status. An unintended but furtive consequence of this act was that, all these centuries later, we can use the orthographic layout that is unique to each of the master copies to conclude whether any given Muṣḥaf is directly descended from one of these official Muṣḥafs. The details presented here reveal that the Muṣḥafs popularly ascribed to Caliph 'Uthmān are not truly 'Uthmānī, as none of them tallies perfectly with a master copy from beginning to end. But there are some that come intriguingly close. More heartening still is that every Muṣḥaf we have examined abides by one of the two multiple readings for each of the forty-four positions, a demarcation of what was acceptable in the earliest era of Islam beyond which these famous Muṣḥafs of the first and second centuries A.H., and indeed those printed in our own time, have never presumed to cross.

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Chapter Twelve

Causes of Variant Readings

One of the gatesways for an Orientalist assault on the Qurʾān is distortion of the text itself. In my estimate there are over 250,000 copies of the Qurʾān in manuscript form, complete or partial, from the first century of Hijra onwards. Errors are classified in academic circles into the dual categories of deliberate and unintentional, and in this vast collection of manuscripts it is a certainty that many copyists must have committed unintentional errors. Scholars who deal with this subject know very well what fatigue or a momentary lapse of concentration can engender, as discussed at length in the following works: (1) Ernst Würthwein, The Text of the Old Testament, 2nd edition revised and enlarged, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995; (2) Bart D. Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, Oxford Univ. Press, 1993; and (3) Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, 3rd enlarged edition, Oxford Univ. Press, 1992.

The first of these relates to the OT and the others to the NT. All three meticulously categorize mistakes of this nature with terms like transposition, haplography, and diacritography, occasionally probing into the very mind of the now-deceased scribe to show what distraction must have flashed through his mind as he committed his silly mistake thousands of years ago.1 But this same treatment is not afforded the Qurʾān, and in fact many errors—obvious scribal blunders resulting from exhaustion—are treated as genuine variants, as evidence of corruption in the Muslim Holy Book.

True that it is difficult to ascertain whether an error is intentional or deliberate, let us therefore tackle the two possibilities together, as the end result in both is textual corruption.

As we have seen, the ‘Uthmānī Muṣḥaf was thoroughly dodless. Goldziher alleges that this dodlessness, both skeletal and diacritical, provoked divergences in the readings of the Qurʾān. Thus a skeleton such as لَمْ يَأْتِكَ بَالْفَلَس, can possess several possible readings such as لَمْ يَأْتِكَ بَالْفَلْس. These mean, respectively: elephant, he was killed, it was said, to kiss, front portion of the body and before.2 In this chapter I aim to negate the idea that dodless Arabic

1 Refer to pp. 280 - 81 and pp. 320 - 23.
2 For a discussion on when such a text, lacking dots, can cause corruption and when it is harmless, refer to section 3 of this chapter.
paleography resulted in any sort of corruption, distortion, or tampering within the Qur'an.

1. The Qirâ'at is Sunna

Knowledge of correct qira'at (the science of proper recitation) comes from the Prophet himself, a sunna which dictates the manner of reciting each verse. Aspects of this are intrinsically linked with the Qur'anic revelations; the text was revealed verbally, and by pronouncing it verbally the Prophet simultaneously provided both text and pronunciation to his community. Neither can be divorced from the other.

'Umar and Hishâm bin 'Abd al-Mas'ûd once differed in reading a verse from Sûra al-Fâtiha. 'Umar, having learned this passage directly from the Prophet, asked Hishâm who had taught him. He too replied, "The Prophet." A similar incident occurred with Ubayy bin Ka'b. None of these Companions were innovating so much as a syllable: all minutiæ of recitation had been inherited from the Prophet.

We also find a grammarian who declared that reciting certain words in this or that fashion was grammatically preferable in his opinion, through alteration of diacritical marks which bore no weight on the meanings. Yet scholars held steadfast to the manner of recitation that arrived through authoritative channels, rejecting his stance and insisting that qira'at is a sunna which no one has the authority to change.

We must note that people were not casually purchasing Mughaf from the local bazaar, having finished their morning shopping at the greengrocers or fishmongers, and taking them home to memorize stanzas by themselves. Verbal schooling from an authorized instructor was required, generally at the rate of five verses a day. Such was the pace as late as the first quarter of the 2nd century A.H. when Abû Bakr b. 'Ayyâd (d. 193 A.H.) went to learn the Qur'an from Ibn Abi an-Najîd (d. 127 A.H.) in his youth. The point is that no reading emanated from a vacuum or some innovator's personal guesswork; where more than one authoritative reading existed, the source of this multiplicity was traceable to the Prophet. During the life of the Companions a book appeared on the subject of multiple readings, envisaged on a small scale. With time larger works evolved, comparing the recitation of famous scholars from different centers and culminating in the work of Ibn Mujâhid.

2. The Need for Multiple Readings: Simplifying Recitation for Unaccustomed Masses

The unity of dialect which the Prophet had been accustomed to in Makhâsh vanished with his arrival in Madînah. Islam’s spread over the Arabian expanses meant the incorporation of new tribes with new dialects, and for some of them the purity of the Quraish vernacular proved difficult. In his Saâba, Muslims quote the following badhâth:

Ubayy bin Ka'b reported that the Prophet was near the locality of Banû Ghalîf when Jibrîl came to him and said, "Allâh has commanded you to recite the Qur'an to your people in one dialect." To this he said, "I ask Allâh's pardon and forgiveness. My people are not capable of this." He then appeared for the second time and said, "Allâh has commanded that you should recite the Qur'an to your people in two dialects." The Prophet replied, "I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allâh, my people would not be able to do so." Jibrîl came for the third time and said, "Allâh has commanded you to recite the Qur'an to your people in three dialects," and again he responded, "I ask pardon and forgiveness from Allâh. My people would not be able to do this." He then came to him for the fourth time and stated, "Allâh has permitted you to recite the Qur'an to your people in seven dialects, and in whichever dialect they recite, they will be correct."
Ubayy bin Ka'b also reported,

"I have been sent to a nation of illiterates, among them is the elder with his walking stick, the aged woman and the young". Jibril replied, "So command them to recite the Qur'an in seven aqra' (dialects)".

Over twenty Companions have narrated hadiths confirming that the Qur'an was revealed in seven dialects (نحوه سبع). To this we can add that forty scholarly opinions exist as to the meaning of aqra'. Some of these opinions are very far fetched, but most agree that the main objective was to facilitate the Qur'an's recitation for those who were unaccustomed to the Qurashi dialect. Such a concession was granted through the grace of Allah.

Earlier we saw how these variant dialects resulted in disputes in a few decades later, prompting Uthman to prepare a Mus'haf in the Qurashi dialect. The end tally for all multiple readings found in the skeletons of all disheveled Mus'hafs did not exceed forty-five characters, and all accompanying recitors were obligated to follow this skeletal text and to reveal which authority they had learned their recitations from. Zaid b. Thabit, so central to the collection of the Qur'an, stated that, "القرآن مكتوب في السبع (The qira'at is a sunna that is strictly adhered to)". These are details which we covered in previous chapters.

The term 'variants' is one that I dislike using in such cases because a variant arises, by definition, from uncertainty. If the original author pens a sentence one way, and the sentence is then corrupted due to scribal errors, then we have introduced a principle of uncertainty: a subsequent editor who is unable to distinguish the correct wording from the incorrect will place what he believes to be the correct version in the text, whilst citing the others in margins. Such is the variant reading. But the Qur'an's case differs distinctly because the Prophet Muhammad, Allah's sole viceroy for the receipt and diffusion of uṣūf, himself taught specific verses in multiple ways. There is no principle of doubt here, no fog or confusion, and the word 'variant' fails to convey this. Multiple is a far more accurate description.

and so in that spirit I refer to them in this work as multiple readings. One reason behind this phenomenon was the divergence of accents in Arabia and the need to accommodate them in the short term, as discussed above. A second reason may have been to better illuminate the various shades of meaning within a particular verse by supplying two wordings, each one being sanctioned by Allah. A well-known example of this is in Sūrat al-Fātihan, where the fourth verse can be recited as mālik (Owner) or mālik (King) of the Day of Judgment. Both wordings were taught by the Prophet and therefore constitute multiple, rather than variant, readings.

Not surprisingly, Orientalist scholars have rejected the Muslim explanation and sought to cement theories of their own. As a natural extension to his efforts towards a critical edition of the Qur'an, meant to highlight variations, Arthur Jeffery agreed in 1926 to collaborate with Prof. Bengtner in preparing an archive of materials from which it would some day be possible to write a history of the development of the Qur'anic text. In his quest he examined roughly 170 volumes—some from reliable, but most from unreliable, sources. His collection of variants takes up some 300 pages in printed form, covering the personal Mus'hafs of approximately thirty scholars. In this chapter I will limit myself to critical examination of this aspect of Jeffery's efforts, his work on variants. Other aspects will be tackled later.

3. Main Cause of Multiple Readings (Variants): the Orientalist View

According to Jeffery, the lack of dots in 'Uthman's Mus'haf meant that the reciter was at liberty to supply his own markings, in accordance with the context and meaning of the ayah as he perceived it. If he came across a dotless word which could be read: "الجبل أو نجاة", or he had a choice of characters, using whichever dots and marks were necessary to conform the verse to his understanding of it. Prior to Jeffery's time, Goldziher and others also asserted that the use of the early dotless script had engendered variations. To bolster his claim, Goldziher provided a few potential examples and divided them into two parts.15

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10 Ibn Hanbal, Mānaḍ, v1:32, hadith no. 21242.
11 See al-Suyūṭī, al-luqūm, i:131-141.
12 As-Suyūṭī, al-luqūm, i:211.
15 'Abdul-Halim Najjar, Madhhab as-Safir al-Islām, Cairo, 1955, pp. 9-16. This is an Arabic translation of Goldziher's work.
1. Variations due to lack of skeletal dots. Three examples will suffice:
   a. "وما كنتم تابعين" can be read "وما كنت".
   b. "إذا فرحت في سبيل الله" can be read "إذا فرحت في سبيل لله".
   c. "وهو الذي يرسل الرجاء" can be read "وهو الذي يرسل الرجاء فتى".

2. Variations due to lack of diacritical markings.

For those unfamiliar with the history of qira'at such examples may seem valid. But all theories must be tested before they can be deemed viable, and the study of Islam is unfortunately littered with ones that have been drafted and pressed into service without the benefit of testing. So let us evaluate this premise.

Jeffery and Goldziher completely ignore the tradition of oral scholarship, the mandate that only through qualified instructors can knowledge be gained. A great many Qur'anic phrases contextually allow the inclusion of more than one set of dots and diacritical marks, but in the lion's share of cases, scholars recite them in just one way. Where variations arise (and this is rare) the skeleton of both readings remains faithful to the 'Uthmāni Muḥāfāz, and each group can justify its reading based on a chain of authority extending back to the Prophet. With this we can easily dismiss the notion of each reciter whimsically supplying his own dots and marks. Had there been even a semblance of fact in this theory, consider then the number of reciters and the thousands of skeletons that can be read in four or five ways; would not the list of variants run into hundreds of thousands or perhaps millions? In the Muḥāfāz's entirety Ibn Muḥājir (d. 324 A.H.) counted roughly one thousand multiple readings only. To compare theory with reality is to demonstrate the fallacy of this hypothesis.

A few concrete examples will help to cement my point.

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10 Qur'an 7:48. This is a false example, see Ibn Muḥājir, Kitaḥ as-Sab'a, pp. 281-2.
17 Qur'an 4:94.
18 Qur'an 7:57.
19 The Muḥāfāz community at large did not trouble itself with ismādh when memorizing the Qur'an, because this was impractical and unnecessary for the layman given the Qur'an's ubiquitous presence in every home and on every tongue. Professional reciters and scholars did follow ismādh however, as they were guardians entrusted with making sure that the text reaching the public was accurate and free of corruptions. Even I, writing in the 15th century A.H./21st century C.E. can provide an ismādh for the recitation of the Qur'an.
20 Scholars examining 'Uthmān's official copies noticed differences in roughly forty characters; these were based on divergences in the skeleton itself. Ibn Muḥājir's one thousand multiple readings are due to the varying placement of dots and marks on this skeletal backbone, in addition to the skeletal differences outlined in Chapter 11.
so many instances in fact, that they cease to be coincidence and overwhelm Jeffery and Goldziher’s theories. Let us ask in incorporating does into a dotless text, when does a textual error cause corruption and become harmful? When we do not have the means for distinguishing what is correct from what is not, then this is cause for alarm. Suppose that we have two manuscripts, each bearing one of the following: حکیمیا، "He kissed the woman, then ran away", and قدرتیا، "He killed the woman, then ran away". Now in the absence of a context with which to extract a clue, deciding which is right becomes impossible; clearly we have a textual problem confronting us. Assume next that we have ten manuscripts with different transmission chains, nine of them containing: حکیمیا، "He kissed the woman, then ran away", while the tenth states: قدرتیا، "Woman’s elephant than he ran away". Besides being absurd, this sentence is contrary to the other nine manuscripts that unanimously agree on a sensible meaning, so that discarding the ‘elephant’ reading becomes the only sensible answer. The same holds true for Qur’anic manuscripts. If we select one hundred Musa’ibs, originating from numerous locales and each bearing a different handwriting and a different date, and if all but one in this entire collection completely agree — moreover, if the aberrant one makes no sense — then any rational person will attribute the aberrancy to a scribal error.

Jeffery accuses Muslims of tampering with their Book.

When we come to the Qur’an, we find that our early manuscripts are invariably without points or vowel signs, and are in Kufic script very different from the script used in our modern copies. The modernizing of the script and the orthography, and supplying the text with points and vowel signs, were not true, well intentioned, but they did involve a tampering with the text. That precisely is our problem.22

He commits a blunder by claiming that the earliest known Musa’ibs were in the Kufic script, for in fact they were in the slanted Hijazi form as reproduced in Figure 7.1.23 Moreover he considers the Kufic very different from what is used in modern times, and deems this updating of script at a form of tampering. Suppose I scribble an entire article by hand and send it off to the publisher, should I then hold him guilty of tampering when I see my article splashed out in Helvetica or Times New Roman? Had Arabic

been a dead language, such as Hieroglyphic, and had the Qur’an been lost for several hundred years, as was the Torah, then textual tampering may have reared its head, for we would then be attempting to decipher a long lost book in an unreadable script, imposing our guesswork throughout. In reality though the Kufic hand remains readable to this day, and the oral nature of the Qur’an’s transmission remains instilled in Muslims, making it abundantly clear that Jeffery has no case for his hue and cry.24

4. Secondary Cause of Multiple Readings (Variants)

In collecting research material, Jeffery has employed the Orientalists’ methodology while rejecting the Muslim technique of critically evaluating tālûd.25 He describes his criteria:

And those of the analytic camp, their method is to collect all opinions, speculations, conjectures, and inclinations so to conclude through scrutiny and discovery which of it agrees with the place, time and the conditions at the time taking into consideration the text irrespective of the narration chain. To establish the text of the Torah and the Bible in a way similar to that of establishing the text of Homer’s poetry or the letters of Aristotle, the philosopher.26

Certainly we cannot relieve the past, but we can recall parts of it through the witness system and its valuations. It is thoroughly dishonest, in dealing with witnesses, to place the testimony of a trustworthy and accurate person at the same level as that of a known liar. Such is the Muslim scholar’s point of view. Yet Jeffery’s methodology gives credence to the claims of liars over honest tongues;27 so long as their purpose was served, he and his colleagues accepted all variant material allegedly ascribed to Ibn Mas‘ûd or anyone else, regardless of how unknown or unreliable the source, while downplaying the wealth of well-known readings.

23 The Kufic script achieved prominence shortly afterwards, towards the middle of the first century A.H. Refer to the Kufic inscription in Figures 9.15-9.18 (dated respectively 40, 55, 80 and 94 A.H.).
24 Most Orientalists believe in the OT as Scripture, despite the Hebrew script having been altered twice and the dialectical books not being supplied to the esonantal text till the 10th Century C.E., a span of 25 centuries. Surely this massive gulf had an irreparable impact on the Hebrew text used today. [See pp. 275 - 92.]
25 The chain of witnesses who were involved in transmitting the event. Refer to the next chapter.
26 See Arthur Jeffery (ed.), al-Maqâṣîf, Introduction (in Arabic), p. 4.27
27 This is akin to someone who owns a house for generations and possesses all the neces-
sary deeds and proofs to back his claim, who then chances upon a miserable stranger ap-
pearing from nowhere and claiming the house as his. Employing Jeffery’s methodology we
must accept the stranger’s claim and evict the current tenants because the stranger’s
story is aberrant, sensationalistic, and contrary to what everyone else is saying.
He argues that aside from the lack of dots (which I have responded to), variances also surfaced because some reciters utilized texts predating 'Uthmān’s Muṣḥaf, texts that occasionally differed from the ‘Uthmānī skeleton and were not destroyed despite the caliph’s orders. But this claim is brandished without any supporting evidence. His collection of variants from Ibn Mas‘ūd’s Muṣḥaf, for example, is void from the start because none of his references even cites a ‘Muṣḥaf of Ibn Mas‘ūd’. Most of his evidence simply states that Ibn Mas‘ūd recited this verse in that way with no proof or chains of narration; it is nothing more than gossip, pure hearsay, and to elevate it from its low character and use it as an argument against well-proven recitations, is to refuse the distinction between a narrator’s honesty and falsehood.

Jeffrey’s allegations extend beyond Ibn Mas‘ūd however, so here I will briefly tackle an aberrant report which states that Caliph ‘Alī read a verse in contradiction to the ‘Uthmānī Muṣḥaf. The reading is: ٌمُحَّبَّةٌ نَّصِيرِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ ۡمُحَّبَّةٌ (adding two extra words in verse 103:1). The author of al-‘Ubaidīyyah28 denounces this report as false on three counts:

a. ‘Aṣim b. Abī an-Najād, one of the most prominent students of as-Sulami, who in turn was ‘Alī’s most respected student, relates that ‘Alī read this verse exactly as given in the ‘Uthmānī Muṣḥaf.

b. ‘Alī ascended to the caliphate after ‘Uthmān’s assassination. Had he believed his predecessor to be guilty of omitting certain words, surely it was his obligation to rectify the error. Else he would have been accused of betraying his faith.

c. ‘Uthmān’s efforts enjoyed the backing consensus of the entire Muslim community; ‘Alī himself said that no one voiced any objections, and were he displeased he would certainly have been vociferous.29

This scene alone, of the Prophet’s Companions in their thousands eyeing the bonfire as old Qur’ānic fragments were tossed in, is a powerful testimony that they all attested to the purity of the Muṣḥaf’s text. No additions, subtractions, or corruptions. Anyone who rejects this view and brings forth something new, claiming it as a pre-‘Uthmānī text favored by this or that Companion, is slandering the very faith of these individuals. Even Ibn Abī Dawūd, author of al-Majah, and the purveyor of many variant qur’āns which clash with the ‘Uthmānī text, categorically denies their value as Qur’ān. “We do not submit that anyone should recite the Qur’ān except what is in ‘Uthmān’s Mushaf,” he writes. “If anyone recites in his prayer against this Mushaf, I will order him to re-do his prayer.”30

The formative stages of the OT and NT occurred in epochs of great volatility, the political realties throwing the two texts into complete disarray. In seeking to replicate these vices in the Qur’ānic text, Western scholars view all Muslim evidence with a jaundiced eye whilst the OT and NT are given the benefit of the doubt whenever possible. While misgivings on the authenticity of his variant material linger in Jeffrey’s mind, he nevertheless fills his book with them.

Some of the variants seem linguistically impossible… Some give one the impression of being the inventions of later philologists… The great majority, however, merit consideration as genuine survivals from the pre-‘Uthmānī stage of the text, though only after they have passed the most searching criticism of modern scholarship… shall we be free to use them in the attempted reconstruction of the history of the text?31

This merit, and Jeffrey’s “searching criticism of modern scholarship”, are sadly nothing more than slogans flaunted about with little or no meaning.

5. Altering a Word for its Synonym During Recitation

Goldzweig, Blachère and others uphold that in early Muslim society, changing a word in the Qur’ān for its synonym was perfectly tolerable.32 Their basis for this claim is two-pronged:

• At-Tabarî reports through ‘Umar that the Prophet said, “O ‘Umar, all of the Qur’ān is correct (i.e. it remains valid even if you inadvertently skip some verses), unless you mistakenly slip from a verse espousing Allah’s mercy for one that pronounces His wrath, and vice versa”.

• This badīh has proven itself a fertile ground for active imaginations, for those insisting that synonyms could be used freely so long as the


36 Recently I re-read the cover jacket of Juynboll’s work, Muslim Tradition, whose cover picture is taken from the oldest dated Arabic manuscript on record written on paper (as opposed to papyrus). The note reads (emphasis added): “This manuscript was allegedly copied in 252 A.H./866 A.D.” How often can we see such cynicism in Orientalist dealings with the OT and NT?


6. Conclusion

Having examined Jeffery and Goldzider’s hypotheses, and considered the appropriate evidence, we have no recourse but to cast their theories aside. The variations they predict are nowhere to be found, in countless instances where a skeleton can contextually admit more than one set of dots and markings; the rare cases of authoritative divergence in *qira’at* by their very nature harbor no impact on the meaning of the text.41 Goldzider himself acknowledged this,42 as did Margoliouth:

In numerous cases the ambiguity of the script which lead to a variant reading was of little consequence.43

In their eagerness to prove textual corruption on a par with the OT and NT, Orientalists discount the religious-political condition of the newly born Muslim state, and how it differed from the turmoil of the Judeo-Christian communities in their infancy. The disparity could not be more striking. A child of well-established lineage is being compared with one abandoned before an orphanage, and the irony is that in determining the parentage of this known child, the procedure for the abandoned one is being insisted on. I have endeavored to show the gaping flaws in Orientalist logic but I suspect that these observations will be brushed-off by that camp. To snub a body of work which does not sit well with one’s own motives and research, rather than to contend with it scientifically, is always the simplest path.44 Here I simply seek to point out the fallacy of their approaches, but I am well aware that these dues of refutation must end somewhere as otherwise Muslim scholars will be kept busy in an endless war of words.

41 A far cry from many of the biblical variations found in manuscripts, such as John 1:18 (“I am only One, God” and “the only begotten Son”), which contain a world of difference. And according to P.W. Comfort, the literal translation is “a unique God” [Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the New Testament, Baker Books, 1990, p. 105]. For details see the discussion on manuscript r75 (Bedmer Papyrus XIV-XV) in pp. 320-21.


44 Much of my early work, such as Studies in Early Hadith Literature, my criticism of Goldzider, and On Schacht’s Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence (a work devoted to refuting Schacht), are serious academic works which have been generally ignored in Western academic circles because the findings therein are judged ‘unsupportable’. Often the best a traditional Muslim work achieves is to be cited for further reading at the end, branded in a separate category under the umbrella of ‘Islamic Perspective’. [See for example John Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadith*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1994, p. 200].
As for the pious Muslim there can be no question that Allah, vowing repeatedly to preserve His Book, would never have nominated a 'defective' language or script to carry the burden of His final revelations. In its literary vigor, depth of expression, poeticism, and orthographic and paleographic capacity, Arabic was sufficiently advanced that Allah blessed it as His choice from among all others. And from then it was the privilege of the Muslim masses to continue reciting it in the original, and to incorporate markings so that non-Arabs may also recite the original with ease.

Long have I alluded to the Islamic methodology and its pivotal role in preserving the qur'ān and the sunna of the Prophet throughout the centuries. Examining this methodology in detail is the aim of my next chapter.

Chapter Thirteen

The Muslim Educational Methodology

The Jewish and Christian Scriptures suffered at the hands of the very people who were entrusted with its stalwart defense. Whereas in previous chapters our aim was to acquire familiarity with Muslim conduct towards both the Qur'ān and sunna, due appreciation of these endeavors might perhaps not come about until they are thrown into the sharpest relief through comparison with the biblical Scriptures. A detailed discussion of the Muslim educational methodology becomes indispensable in this regard—a unique science, unsurpassable even now, which was instrumental in the faithful preservation of the Qur'ān and sunna in compliance with the Divine Will:

\[24\]: “We have, without doubt, sent down the message; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption].”

Because the Qur'ān explicitly affirms that the Scriptures were corrupted from within, the Muslim community felt a pressing need to safeguard the Qur'ān from all dubious influences. Throughout Islamic history the kuffār, committing the Book fully to heart and numbering in their millions, from adolescents to the elderly, served as one cornerstone of this safeguard; this alone was more than the Torah and Gospels ever enjoyed, but the precautions did not end there. To write a book using a false name is tremendously easy; in the literary world the use of pen names is commonplace. Similarly, it is possible to tamper with someone else’s work then republish it under the original author’s name. How can such mischievous doings be prevented? In seeking

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1 This chapter is highly specialized; its main purpose is to illustrate how Muslim scholars devised a unique system for transmission of knowledge, which proved vital in both evaluating the accuracy of the information as well as safeguarding it from internal and external corruptions. This is, in fact, a very brief discussion, and anyone with further interest in this topic is advised to refer to my forthcoming book, Islamic Studies: What Methodology? Inevitably there are other readers who will find this chapter taxing, and may indeed choose to skip to this chapter’s conclusion, as it will not hinder their understanding of subsequent chapters (though it may hinder their full appreciation of them).