Chapter Fourteen

The So-Called Muṣḥaf of Ibn Masʿūd

As mentioned earlier, Arthur Jeffery examined 170 volumes to compile a list of variant readings which take up roughly 300 pages in printed form, covering the so-called personal Muṣḥaf of nearly thirty scholars. Of this total he reserves 88 pages for the variations allegedly coming from Ibn Masʿūd’s Muṣḥaf alone, with another 65 pages for Ubayy’s Muṣḥaf, dividing the remainder (140 pages) between the other twenty-eight. The disproportionately high variance rate attributed to Ibn Masʿūd makes his Muṣḥaf worthy of closer inspection; some of the claims raised by Jeffery against it are:

- That it differs from the ‘Uthmānī Muṣḥaf in its sūra arrangement,
- And in its text,
- And that it omits three sūras.

He levies all these charges even though no one, including his sources, has ever witnessed a copy bearing all these alleged variances. In truth none of his references even mentions a ‘Muṣḥaf of Ibn Masʿūd’; instead they use the word qiraʿa (lit. read) in the context of “Ibn Masʿūd recited such-and-such verse in this way”. A cursory glance at his sources yields two objections straightaway. First, because they never state that Ibn Masʿūd was reading from a written copy we can just as easily assume that he was overheard reciting from memory, and how can we confidently deduce that the erroneous readings were not due to a memory slip? Second (and this is a point I made earlier), the vast majority of Jeffery’s references contain no sinsād whatsoever, making them inadmissible because they offer nothing but empty gossip.

Comparing a Muṣḥaf attributed to any scholar with ‘Uthmān’s Muṣḥaf is utterly meaningless unless we can show that both are of equal status, proving the authenticity of the former to the same degree of certainty that we have for the latter. The contents of a Muṣḥaf, just like a hadīth or qiraʿa, can be reported in such a way that scholars find it:

1. Authentic with absolute certainty, or
2. Doubtful, or
3. Absolutely false (whether due to inadvertent or deliberate errors).
Suppose that many well-known students of Ibn Mas'ūd (such as al-
Aswad, Mārūq, ash-Shāhiūnī, Abū Wālī al-Hamadānī, Al-Qaṣāsī, Zayr
and others) report a statement unanimously; in this case their attribution
of this statement to Ibn Mas'ūd is considered valid and admissible. If
the overwhelming majority are agreed while only one two well-known students
report to the contrary, then the minority account is termed 'doubtful'.
And should this minority group contain only weak or unknown pupils,
contradicting the consensus of those who are renowned, then this falls into
the third category of absolute falsehood.

In the course of collating manuscripts 'equal status' becomes a vital
concept. If we uncover a document penned in the original author's hand,
then the scholarly value of duplicate copies belonging to his most famous
students (let alone a mysterious student) plummets to nil. To do otherwise
and confer equal value to both the original and the duplicate, is completely
unscientific. With this in mind let us approach Jeffery's allegations.

1. First Point: The Arrangement of Ibn Mas'ūd's Musḥaf

While none of Ibn Mas'ūd's peers mentions a Musḥaf of his bearing a different
sūra arrangement, quite a few such Musḥafs seem to have sprung up after his
death. An-Nadīm quotes al-Faḍl b. Shāhīn, 'I found the sūra arrangement
in Ibn Mas'ūd's Musḥaf as follows: al-Baqara, an-Nūr, Al-Imām .... [i.e.
no al-Fāṭiḥa].' Following this with his own commentary, an-Nadīm says
that he has personally seen numerous Musḥafs ascribed to Ibn Mas'ūd but
has been unable to find any two in agreement with each other, adding that
he has also come across one copied during the second century of Hijra
which includes Sūra al-Fāṭiḥa. But because al-Faḍl b. Shāhīn is reckoned
a leading authority on this subject, an-Nadīm decides to quote him rather
than accentuate his own observations. An-Nadīm's commentary proves that
those who claim a discrepancy in Ibn Mas'ūd's Musḥaf cannot, with even the
minutest degree of certainty, state what the actual arrangement was.

A significant number of famous students studied Shari'ā (Islamic law
and jurisprudence) under Ibn Mas'ūd and transmitted the Qur'ān from
him. Regarding his Musḥaf we find two conflicting reports: in one the
arrangement of sūras is different from ours, while in the other it is exactly
identical. The former report fails to arrive at any collective agreement about
the sequence of sūras however, and is greatly overshadowed by the sureness

of the latter. Clearly this more concrete version is the one that warrants our
consideration. Al-Qurān recounts seeing the Musḥaf used by Ibn Mas'ūd,
Ubayy and Zaid b. Thabit, and finding among them no differences.

By consensus, professional reciters follow the vocal inflections of any of
the seven most distinguished reciters (qāṭī): 'Uthmān, 'Ali, Zaid b. Thabit,
Ubayy, Abū Qūḥās al-Ash'arī, Abū ad-Dardā' and Ibn Mas'ūd. Transmission
chains for these recitations continue unbroken back to the Prophet, and the
sūra arrangement in each is identical to that of the existing Qur'ān. We
must also recall that, even if we were to give any credence to the aberrant
accounts, differences in sūra arrangement do not affect the contents of the
Qur'ān in any way.

Having memorized most of the Book directly from the Prophet, Ibn
Mas'ūd was critical and furious for being excluded from the committee which
prepared the 'Uthmānī Musḥaf, resorting to some harsh remarks which the
Companions found distasteful. Afterwards, his anger spent, he may have
expressed remorse for his hasty comments and rearranged the sūras in his
Musḥaf to reflect the 'Uthmānī sequence. This might be the origin of both
reports, that his sequence was similar and dissimilar to 'Uthmān's, though
the truth is best known to Allah. The divergent nature of the many 'Musḥafs
of Ibn Mas'ūd' that materialized after his death, with no two in agreement,
shows that the wholesale ascription of these to him is erroneous, and the
scholars who did so neglected to examine their sources well. Sadly the less
scrupulous among antique dealers found it profitable, for the weight of a few
silver pieces, to add fake Musḥafs of Ibn Mas'ūd or Ubayy to their wares.

2. Second Point: The Text Differed from the 'Uthmānī Musḥaf

I asserted above the need for some kind of certitude about Ibn Mas'ūd's
Musḥaf. While researching variant readings, Abū Hayyān an-Nahwī noticed
that most of the reports were channeled through Shi'ite sources; Sunni scholars
on the other hand stated that Ibn Mas'ūd's readings were in line with the rest of the Muslim umma. What has trickled through to us
via isolated sources cannot supersede what is known with certainty. In pages
57-73 of Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif (edited by Jeffery), under the chapter of 'Musḥaf
of 'Abdullah b. Mas'ūd', we find a horde of variants all stemming from

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1 This has been discussed earlier, see pp. 87 - 89.
2 An-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, p. 29.
3 ibid, p. 29.
4 A. Jeffery (ed.), Musqaddmatan, p. 47.
5 See pp. 77 - 78.
A’mash (d. 148 H). Not only does al-A’mash fail to furnish any references for this—hardly surprising given his proclivity for saddis (blinding) the source of information—he is moreover accused of Shi’ite tendencies.

Many other examples lend further support to al-Nahwiy’s inference of a Shi’ite connection. In his book Jeffery attributes the following reading to Ubayy and Ibn Mas’ud (there is no reference):

And the foremost to believe in the Prophet, peace be upon him, are ‘Ali and his descendents whom Allah has chosen from among his Companions, appointing them viceroys over all others. They are the winners who shall inherit the Gardens, residing therein forever.

While in the Qur’an it is: (“And the foremost will be [those who in life were] the foremost in faith and good deeds; they will be the one drawn closest to Allah.”). Such a glowing tribute to ‘Ali’s descendents undoubtedly served the Shi’ite cause.

Embarking on any research requires a solid footing, whereas here we discover ourselves drowning in a sea of hearsay that carries almost no transmission chains and that fails to provide any coherent view of what Ibn Mas’ud’s Mushaf might have been. Under the circumstances Jeffery’s approach and findings, we can see, are fundamentally flawed.

3. Third Point: Three Suras were Omitted

The first and the last two suras (Sura al-Fatiha, al-Falaq and an-Nas) were, according to some accounts, absent from the Mushaf of Ibn Mas’ud. The whole case seems dubious. Jeffery begins his book with the alleged variants from Sura al-Fatiha: instead of لَا تَذَٰقَنَ كَأَنَّكُمْ لَا تَذَٰقَنَ (you have never tasted) he argues that this sura was never present, so then where exactly did he get his variants? The reader may recall al-Nadhim’s earlier comment, that he happened upon a Mushaf attributed to Ibn Mas’ud which contained Sura al-Fatiha. Bear in mind also that al-Fatiha is unquestionably the most recited sura in the Qur’an, an integral part of every rak’a (سُرَى) within each prayer. In the audible prayers alone it echoes from mosques six times a day and eight times on Fridays. Any claims of a variant recitation for al-Fatiha cannot be taken seriously, based on pure logic and the sheer repetition of this sura on every Muslim ear and tongue since the time of the Prophet.

Anyone with a penchant for copying certain suras and not others is free to do so. Even the scribbling of extra information in the margins is permitted, so long as it is kept separate from the holy text. Such occurrences cannot be taken as an argument against the Qur’an’s integrity. That the ‘Uthmání Mushaf contains the undated or later words of Allah as sectioned into 114 surahs, is the firm belief of the Muslim ummae, anyone echoing this view is an outcast. Had Ibn Mas’ud denied these three suras their rightful status then his fate would have been different.

Al-Baqillaní arrives at a comprehensive and highly compelling argument against these reports. He observes that anyone denying a particular sura as part of the Qur’an is either an apostate or a fake (مُهَيِّرٌ المُهَيِّرَة, a dissolute person who flouts his sins), and so one of the two must apply to Ibn Mas’ud if the accounts are indeed true. In several hadith the Prophet praised him and lauded his piety however, which is inconceivable had he harbored such deviance. Ibn Mas’ud’s peers were also under obligation, if they knew anything sacrilegious about his beliefs, to expose him as a deviant or apostate because failure to do so would lead to their own censure. But his contemporaries praised his scholarship unanimously without a single dissenting voice. In al-Baqillaní’s mind this can only mean one of two possibilities: either Ibn Mas’ud never denied the rightful status of any sura,

8 For details see al-Muziri, Tabahib, xi:87-92.
9 A. Jeffery, Materials, p. 97.
10 Qur’an 56:10-11.
11 Until recently Shi’ite theologians had tended to cast doubt on aspects of the Qur’an, for the simple reason that the Qur’an was first collected by Abi Bakr, then copied and distributed by ‘Uthmán and not ‘Ali. The strange thing is that ‘Ali himself stuck to the same Mushaf, i.e. the Mushaf of ‘Uthmán, and never brought forth a new edition. Recently however a new and healthier trend has been emerging. A few years ago in a conference in Tehran, Iran, Shi’ite authorities announced that they did not possess any Mushaf besides that of ‘Uthmán, and that it is pure and free of any corruption. As a matter of fact one does not find a Mushaf printed in Iran, or manuscripts of the Qur’an in Najaf, Qom, Mashhad etc., which differ from the common Mushaf found in any other part of the world.
12 As-Suyúti, al-Ijára, ii:220-21. These are suras no. 1, 113 and 114 respectively.
13 A. Jeffery, Materials, p. 25.
14 Today nearly half a million people participate in the tarawih (تَراوِح) prayers in Makkah during the month of Ramadan (and in some nights, especially the 27th, in excess of one million). [See the Saudi daily, Ar-Riyadh, 1 Jan 2000.] Only the best among the haflahs are chosen to lead this massive congregation. With modern technology we can instantaneously watch these proceedings, and we find that if even the most renowned haflah commits an error, the people behind him correct him immediately. A congregation will never allow an error to pass uncorrected, irrespective of the imam’s reputation or greatness. This gives us a measure of the community’s sensitivity towards the Book of Allah.
or that his scholarly peers and all who knew him are guilty of covering up his blasphemy and deserve denunciation en masse.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{i. Analysis of the Contents of Ibn Mas'ud's Muṣḥaf}

Reports concerning the omission of these suras can be listed as follows (the transmission chain precedes each narration).

1. `Aṣīm - Zīr (one of Ibn Mas'ud's students) - Ibn Mas'ud: a narration claiming that he did not write two suras (nos. 113 and 114) in his Muṣḥaf.\textsuperscript{16}

2. Al-A'mash - Abū Isḥāq - `Abdūr-Raḥmān b. Yazīd: Ibn Mas'ud erased the muṣawwaratāin (المسووهراتان) suras 113 and 114 from his Muṣḥaf (plural) and said that they were not part of the Qur'ān.\textsuperscript{17}

3. Ibn `Uyayna - `Abdāl and `Aṣīm - Zīr: "I told Ubayy, 'Your brother erases Suras 113 and 114 from the Muṣḥaf," to which he did not object." Asked whether the reference was to Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn `Uyayna replied in the affirmative and added that the two suras were not in his Muṣḥaf because he believed them to be invocations of divine protection, used by the Prophet on his grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Ibn Mas'ud remained adamant of his opinion, while others were sure about them and kept them in the Qur'ān.\textsuperscript{18}

So in the second and third report Ibn Mas'ud was deleting suras that had somehow found their way into his Muṣḥaf; why then had he penned them down in the first place? It makes no sense. If we suppose that the Muṣḥaf had been scribed for him and initially contained the two concluding suras, then they must necessarily have been an integral part of the Muṣḥaf which was then in circulation. Had he any doubts about the two suras, it was his duty to verify this issue with the scholars of Madīnah and elsewhere. In one fatwā (go: legislative ruling) he declared that a man marrying a woman but divorcing her prior to any consumption was free to then wed her mother. Visiting Madīnah and discussing the matter further, he discovered that he had erred and rescinded the fatwā; his first errand upon returning to Kūfah was to visit the person who had solicited his opinion and tell him of his mistake. Such was his attitude in the academic sphere, and how much more pressing are issues touching the Qur'ān. All reasonable evidence indicates that the whole episode is spurious, and indeed early scholars such as an-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥazm denounced these reports as lies fathered upon Ibn Mas'ud.\textsuperscript{19}

Ibn Hajar, among the muḥaddithūn's leading scholars, objects to this conclusion. Since Ibn Ḥanbal, Bazzār, at-Ṭabarānī and others quoted this incident with authentic transmission chains, he reasons that the allegations cannot be discarded. To do otherwise is to negate a genuine hadīth without any relevant support. Attempting to harmonize between the disparate reports, Ibn Hajar resorts to Ibn aṣ-Shābīḥ's interpretation: at the time of his first remarks Ibn Mas'ud was hesitant about their status, but as they were unquestionably part of the Qur'ān in the umma's belief, his doubts dissipated and he came to believe likewise.\textsuperscript{20}

This is the staunchest argument I have come across in support of these accusations. To dissect this further I will rely on the muḥaddithūn's methodology to show the error of Ibn Hajar's stance.

\textit{ii. Ibn Mas'ud's Beliefs}

Earlier I stressed that al-Ṭābi'īya, the seven most oft-repeated verses in mosques and houses since the Prophet's time, could not by any stretch of logic have been denied by Ibn Mas'ud. That leaves us with suras 113 and 114. In the third account we find that Ubayy, on hearing that he had omitted the concluding suras, made no attempt to rebuff him. What does this imply? Either that he agreed with him, or disagreed but held back due to indifference. Given that Ubayy's Muṣḥaf included both suras we cannot affirm the former; similarly we must reject the latter because apathy is tantamount to saying that people are free to choose whichever morally of the Qur'ān they find appealing. No one can champion this attitude and still remain Muslim. Therefore the report of Ubayy's silence is plainly false.\textsuperscript{21}

Next we turn to Ibn aṣ-Shābīḥ's harmonization. Many Companions such as Fāṭima, A'isha, Abū Hurayra, Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ud, report that the Prophet used to recite the Qur'ān with Archangel Jibril annually during Ramadān, doing so twice in the year of his death. In that final year Ibn Mas'ud was a participant. He also twice recited the Book to the Prophet, who extolled him with the words fāqīh al-adhārā (faqih adhara: 'You have done well'). Based on this incident Ibn 'Abbās considers Ibn Mas'ud's readings to

\textsuperscript{15} Al-Biqālillāh, al-Inājār, pp. 190-91.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibn Ḥanbal, Maṣūṣ, v.129, hadīth nos. 21224-25.
\textsuperscript{17} ibid, v.129-130, hadīth no. 21226.
\textsuperscript{18} ibid, v.130, hadīth no. 21227.
\textsuperscript{19} As-Suyūṭī, al-Iṣḥāq, i.221.
\textsuperscript{20} See as-Suyūṭī, al-Iṣḥāq, i.221-22. In translating this Buxton was dishonest. Compare the original text with the latter's rendering in The Collection of the Qur'ān, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977, pp. 223-24.
\textsuperscript{21} See the paragraph about al-Biqālillāh, pp. 234 - 35.
be definitive.²² Such accolades demonstrate that the Qur'ān was engraved in his memory with full certainty. His pupils, distinguished names such as `Alāma, al-Awād, Masriq, as-Sulami, Abū Wāil, ash-Shaibānī, al-Hamadānī and Zūr, transmitted the Qur'ān from him in its 114 sūras entirety. One of Zūr's students, 'Alībīn, is alone in reporting this abnormal account even though he himself taught all 114 sūras on Ibn Mas‘ūd's authority.²³

One of Ibn Ḥajar's works, a small treatise on hadith named Muṣāharat al-Nāṣir, tells us that if a trustworthy narrator (say a grade B scholar) goes against another narrator of higher standing (a grade A scholar), or that if we have more scholars (all of the same grade) supporting one version of the story over the other, then the lower narration is branded as shādīh (882; aberrant). In the above report what we have is a lone statement swimming against a tidal wave of thousands, so this must be treated as bāṭil (883; false).²⁴ This is based on the muṣhaddahshīn's own methodology, and though Ibn Ḥajar cites the rule in his book it seems that he had a mental lapse and forgot about it in this instance, as even the greatest minds are prone to do. One may argue that building a case against a shādīh or bāṭil report requires the presence of two conflicting statements, while what we have here is a single account regarding the erasure of sūras 113 and 114, with nothing to the contrary. The reason is simple: in a normal situation only abnormality gets reported. For example, no one publicizes that the blood gushing in our veins is red, as this is something we take for granted, but to have blue blood (the horseshoe crab) is out of the ordinary and so gains a measure of publicity. By the same token, we cannot reproach Ibn Mas‘ūd's students for failing to tell us whether their teacher believed in 114 sūras, since that is the norm. Only those who believe in less, or more, become news.

These comments about Ibn Mas‘ūd's Muṣāhif can be similarly employed for Ubayy bin Ka'b, or anyone else for that matter.

4. When Can Any Writing be Accepted as Part of the Qur'ān?

Ḥammād b. Salama reported that Ubayy's Muṣāhif contained two extra sūras, called al-Haljūf and al-Khuṣa.²⁵ This narrative is completely spurious because of a major chain defect, an unaccounted-for gap of at least two to three generations between Ubayy's death (c. 30 A.H.) and Ḥammād's (d. 167 A.H.) scholarly activity. Besides this, we must remember that a note written in a book does not make it part of the book. But let us accept that a few extra lines were scribbled inside Ubayy's Muṣāhif for argument's sake.

Would these lines ascend to the position of Qur'ān? Certainly not. The completed 'Uthmān Muṣāhif, disseminated with instructors who taught after the manner of relevant authorities, forms the basis for establishing whether any given text is Qur'ān—not the unsubstantiated squiggles of a manuscript for which we have no pedigree.

1. Principles for Determining Whether a Verse Belongs to the Qur'ān

The following three principles must be fulfilled before the manner of recitation for any verse can be accepted as Qur'ān:

- The qira‘at must be narrated not from a single authority but through a multitude, enough in fact to extinguish the risk of mistakes seeping through, going back to the Prophet and thereby advocating recitational authenticity and certainty. This is the concept of cawā‘ir discussed earlier.²⁶
- The text of the recitation must conform to the 'Uthmānī Muṣāhif.
- The pronunciation must agree with proper Arabic grammar.

All authoritative works on qira‘at (cawā‘ir), such as Ibn Mujāhid's Kitāb as-Saḥaḥa fī al-Qira‘āt, generally name a lone reciter from every center of Islamic activity followed by two or three of his students. Such sparse listings appear to contradict the very first principle: how can citing one reciter and two pupils from Bajrā, for example, prove that this qira‘at was transmitted through a multitude? In clarifying this issue the reader is asked to review "Certificates of Reading" from the previous chapter.²⁷ Prof. Rosbon and Ishaq Khān, supplying the transmission lineage for Sannāt Ibn Mājah through Ibn Qudāmā, arrive at a mere handful of names, whereas by tracing the reading certificates we find over four hundred and fifty pupils. And that is only in one manuscript; additional copies from the same chain might yield a far greater tally. Similarly the citing of two or three students is purely representational and is meant to conserve the author's time and parchment, leaving it up to the interested scholar to scour the reading notes for full details.

A fundamental difference separates the Qur'ān from the Prophet's sunna in the case of transmission through a single authority. A lone scholar

²² For details see Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, hadith nos. 2494, 3001, 3012, 3422, 3425, 3469, 3539 and 3845. Of particular note are pp. 3001 and 3422.
²³ As-Suyūṭī, al-Injīl, i.221.
²⁴ Ibn Ḥajar, Muṣāharat al-Nāṣir, pp. 36-37.
²⁶ See pp. 90 - 91.
²⁷ See pp. 222 - 27.
memorizing a hadith may, when teaching from memory, find it necessary to substitute a synonym if the exact word escapes his mind. With no one else transmitting this hadith, his inaccuracy may pass undetected. Contrast this with the Qur'an. During the three audible daily prayers, Friday prayers, tawâwh and 'id prayers, the imam recites loudly with the backing of his entire congregation. If no one in the congregation objects then his recitation has everyone's consent—hundreds, thousands, or perhaps even hundreds of thousands of worshipers. If but objections are voiced in the course of prayer and the imam insists on a reading contrary to 'Uthmân's Mus'haf, he will be removed instantly from his post. No inaccuracies in qir'ât can pass undetected, and whatever crosses the boundaries of the acceptable is rooted out. This well-defined boundary is one of the great safeguards of the Qur'an.28

When the time came for 'Uthmân to compile the Qur'an (and the same is true of Abî Bakr), Companions were requested to bring forth only those parchments which they had copied in the Prophet's presence, along with personal testimony.29 These documents were thus first-hand accounts consisting of both oral and written source in tandem. No parchment could compete in value (i.e. share 'equal status') unless it too enjoyed similar credentials.30 Though Caliph 'Uthmân's name has become associated with the Mus'haf, the compilation was in every respect a community effort, built on the concordant multiple (mawqûf) accounts of first-hand evidence and the innate certainty therein. The nature of this group effort precluded that the Companions as a whole should agree on something false. Any solitary parchments whose consonantal text differed recurrently from what the Companions were proferring through tawâwh channels therefore became an isolated report (mawqû'ah): abhâd).31 Such variants, though they may at a later

date be attributed to a Companion, could not attain the level of certainty inherent in the concordant testimonies.32 By preparing multiple master copies of the Mus'haf, 'Zaid ibn Thâabit was able to accommodate authentic recitations agreed upon through tawâwh as their consonantal texts differed from each other in only a handful of letters here and there. These were the multiple readings for certain words, originating back to the Prophet, which we have earlier discussed.33 Conversely, isolated reports were by definition incompatible with the tawâwh recitations and so were no longer supported by the Mus'haf's orthography.34

'Uthmân's Mus'haf, disseminated to all sites of ongoing textual dispute, was pivotal in quelling dissension between Arabs and in standardizing the text for non-Arabs, just as certain dialectic and abruf concessions had, in an earlier time, been vital in teaching the first generation of illiterate Muslims who were unaccustomed to literary dialects. If any researcher now brings forth a parchment with wording that is significantly different from 'Uthmân's Mus'haf, one whose consonantal backbone does not settle into the Mus'haf's text, it cannot be accepted as Qur'an. This is because it cannot share 'equal status' with the Mus'haf, which was compiled from first-hand documents backed by personal testimony. One is of known pedigree and the other is a complete unknown. As the Companions have all passed away, no parchment can ever share equal value with the Mus'haf as we have no way of assessing if the differences are due to a careless scribe, faulty transmission chains that do not reach back to the Prophet, outdated text that does not reflect the final sequence of revealed or abrogated verses, dialectic or abruf concessions that have long since been revoked, or a combination of the above. We do not know if the scribe ever saw the Prophet, let alone wrote it in his presence. It may be pre-'Uthmânic or post-'Uthmânic or a counterfeit or a fake, but it embodies none of the certainties of the 'Uthmânic text and therefore cannot be regarded as Qur'an. Similarly if any manuscript comes to light listing variants that are contrary to the 'Uthmânic orthography, this cannot be counted as Qur'an because such a narrative, by opposing the

28 Once again I refer to al-Ma¿îd al-Harîm in Makkah where, on Friday the 16th and again on Friday the 23rd of Ramadan (1420 a.H.), an estimated 1.6 million worshipers congregated for Friday prayers. I personally attended the former, and watched the latter on television. Among such a massive congregation are countless thousands of brutes from every imaginable corner of the globe, along with several other thousands who follow the imam by looking into a Mus'haf during the azkar prayers. Any error or lapse of memory, and the imam is promptly and audibly corrected by the numerous hundreds in his vicinity. Conversely, by remaining silent the entire congregation affirms its acceptance of the imam's qir'ât, so that his recitation is symbolically backed by the strength of one million worshipers. One can only imagine how emphatic the response will be if an imam insists on a qir'ât that is unacceptable to the masses.

29 See sections 6.1.iii and 7.3.ii.

30 Refer back to section 6.1.ii.


32 Such variant accounts not only fail the test of certainty, they even contradict each other as we have seen regarding Ibn Mas'âd's Mus'haf in this chapter. Refer also to A. Al-Imam, Variant Readings of the Qur'an: A Critical Study of their Historical and Linguistic Origins, IIT, London & Washington, 2006, pp. 50-57.

33 Refer back to Chapters 11 and 12.

34 If they did exist early on, such reports may have stemmed from dialectic concessions or usage of some of the seven abruf, and it is very likely that these had already been rescinded during the Prophet's final recitations with his毕尔, which constituted the final revealed version of the Qur'an text [Al-Imam, op. cit., pp. 42-43]. In this case fragments still containing evidence of these concessions were outdated and no longer sound.
Companions' consensus, by definition becomes an isolated account regardless of the hadith's quality. The limit of what is allowable within the Qur'anic text is dependent entirely on conscientious multitudinous testimony and this can never be superseded by an aberrant or isolated report.

Here it is worth recalling that towards the end of the Qur'anic text, the Prophet's narrative frequently display orthographic abnormalities depending on the scribe's discretion—see pp. 144 - 50 and also the recently published facsimile of Qur'anic fragments in France.31 In the latter we find یب written as یب. Conceivably the same may be true of the Yemeni fragments. Differences on this level pose no confusion; we must treat the issue exactly the same as color vs. centre, since orthographic divergence is an integral thread of every language.32 If, similarly, there is a consonantal character missing due to scribal error then it will be accepted as a piece of the Qur'ān with such. The published French facsimile provides at least one good example, where the scribe inadvertently dropped the letter ﺪل and penned ٍع ﺪل ٍع. But if the scrap of parchment, despite our best allowance for orthographic differences or chance errors, fails to slip comfortably into the 'Uthmānī skeleton, then we must cast it away as distorted and void.

ii. Examples of Scholars Punished for Violating these Principles

- Ibn Shabīb (d. 328 A.H./939 C.E.), one of the greatest scholars of his day in the field of qiyāṣa, resolved to ignore the 'Uthmānī text in reciting the Qur'ān. Because the reading was proven correct through different transmission channels and conforming with the rules of Arabic grammar, he claimed that it retained validity even if it differed from 'Uthmān’s Muṣḥaf. But to trial, he was asked to repent and finally received ten lashes as punishment.33

An-Nadim quotes Ibn Shabīb’s letter of confession:34

فوكل: ياقل محمد بن أحمد بن أربا دك أفا واد هلا له في مصحف عثمان من عثمان للجميع عليكم، والذ ذا أصلب رسول الله عليه السلام فوالله بن

32 To this we can append certain differences in the pronunciation of the consonantal text. Just as 'bridge' is read 'bijj', so in the Qur'ān we see 'mīnkād', but read 'mimba'd, and this in no way constitutes a deviation from 'Uthmān's Muṣḥaf.
33 Déroche and Noeske, op. cit., p. 126.
34 Al-Jazari, Tahāqīf al-Qurūn, ii:33-35.
35 An-Nadim, al-Fihrist, p. 35.
American bombs fell on this Institute, and all was destroyed, director, personnel, library and all... But this much is proved – that there are no variants in the Qur’an in copies dating from the first to the present century.43

Jeffery acknowledges this fact bleakly, lamenting that, “Practically all the early Codices and fragments that have so far been carefully examined, show the same or similar text, such variants as occur being almost always explainable as scribal errors”.44 Bergsträsser also reached a similar conclusion.45 Jeffery insists though that this text type “would seem not to have been fixed till the third Islamic century”,46 “[and so] it is curious that no examples of any other type of text have survived among all the fragments that have so far been examined”.47 The answer to his quandary is so obvious that he seems not to see the forest for all the trees. Plainly put, the ‘Uthmānic writ is the only text type, the only consensus. Anything else that may be dug up from time to time, as I stated above, will not rise above the level of petty hearsay.

But the bombs that fell on that April night in 1944 did not destroy the archive. The building was demolished and word was spread that the collection was indeed wiped out as well, but in secret the cache of photos survived under the care of the library’s former curator. Only in 2008, five years after the curator’s death, was this widely publicized.48 These photos, now in the custody of Angelika Neuwirth, professor of Arabic at Berlin’s Freie Universität, are to lay the groundwork for a computer database of variants. The old project has been reborn into the digital age; the European Science Foundation is sponsoring its workshops and state funding from German agencies has already been secured for 18 years.49 The project’s research director rejoices that the result could be the first ‘critical edition’ of the Qur’an. “An attempt,” writes a Wall Street Journal correspondent, “to divine what the original text looked like and to explore overlaps with

43 M. Hamidullah, “The Practicability of Islam in This World”, Islamic Cultural F - rum, Tokyo, Japan, April 1977, p. 15; see also A. Jeffery, Material, Preface, p. 1.
46 One must emphatically ask what proof there is that the Qur’an was fixed in the third Islamic century, so this is a mere slogan with no body of evidence to back it.
47 ibid, p. 191.
49 ibid. See also the proceedings of the “European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop: Corpus Coranicum – Exploring the Textual Beginnings of the Qur’an”, Berlin, Germany, 6-9 Nov. 2005.

the Bible and other Christian and Jewish literature”.50 It is as though the journey of a thousand miles has been one gigantic circle.

Muslims face a choice, of either languishing at the feet of an Orientalist ideology which shifts its footing as needed to suit the aim of the moment, or of treading firmly along the path pioneered by the early muhaddithin. What is the outcome if we apply the muhaddithin’s criteria to the study of the Bible? Just ponder this next example, which illustrates the brittleness of biblical studies. In the Dictionary of the Bible, under the article ‘Jesus Christ’, we read, “The only witness of the burial [of Christ] were two women...”. Then under ‘The Resurrection’, “There are many difficulties connected with this subject, and the narratives, which are disappointingly meager, also contain certain irreconcilable discrepancies; but the historian who follows the most exacting rule imposed by his scientific discipline finds the testimony sufficient to assure the facts”.51

We can only assume that these ‘facts’ supersede others and do not require any corroboration. What if we employ the Methodist methodology? What can we say about the story of Christ’s burial? First, who are the authors of the gospel accounts? They are all anonymous, which instantly invalidates the story. Second, who conveyed the story of these two women to the author? Unknown. Third, what transmission details do we have? None. The entire story may as well be fabricated.

The search for Qur’anic variances continues unabated, and Brill is contributing through the production of the Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān (in four volumes) within a few years. Among its advisory board are such notables as M. Arkoun and Naq Aba Zaid, declared heretics in Muslim countries and Islamic circles everywhere, in addition to Jewish and Christian scholars.

I have already referred to biblical scholarship repeated in passing, and to its overarching desire to inject the Qur’an with the same doubts and unrotten conundrums that suffuse the Old and New Testaments. Now I must take a more active approach and delve into the histories of the Scriptural texts themselves, and not solely for comparative purposes. Every scholar and critic is the product of a specific environment, and Orientalists—whether Christian, Jewish or atheist—are hatched from a Judeo-Christian milieu which necessarily fuses their view on all matters Islamic. It encourages them to forcibly transmute Islamic studies into a foreign mold by using terminology which is primarily employed for the Bible; Blachère for example uses the term ‘vulgate’ when referring to ‘Uthman’s Mushaf in his Introduction au Coran, and Jeffery describes the Qur’an as a Masoretic text, a term generally
connected with the Hebrew OT. Stripping away all Qur’anic terminology, Wansbrough speaks instead of Haggadic exegesis, Halakhic exegesis, and Deutungshelditigkeiten.52 Everyone also refers to the canonization of the Qur’an, and the codices of Ibn Mas‘ūd. The vast majority of Muslims live in total ignorance of this jargon. While the hypotheses of Jeffery, Goldziher and others have been dealt with and dismissed, we have yet to fully gauge the motives behind such efforts. A sketch of early Judeo-Christian history, coupled with the histories of the Old and New Testaments, will facilitate a more thorough awareness of these scholars’ mindset and lead to a detailed consideration of Western objectives regarding the Qur’an.

52 J. Wansbrough, Qur’anic Studies: Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation, Oxford Univ. Press, 1977, Table of Contents.