

same Qur'ānic passage as known in the early time of Islam. There are many interpretations of the prophetic expression “seven *aḥruf*”^{27, 28}. Whatever its exact meaning, it includes, as witnessed by other authentic sayings of the Prophet and the readings as found in the codices of the Companions, differences in the form, the pronunciation, the order, or the existence of word(s) in some passages.

No reading can be accepted as legitimate today unless it satisfies three cumulative conditions:

1. The reading has to reach us through authentic chains of narrators.
2. The reading has to coincide with the script of one of the copies of the Qur'ān distributed by the third Caliph 'Uthmān.
3. The reading has to be compatible with accepted grammatical Arabic constructions.²⁹

There is no way to compare these readings with those of the New Testament as known in its manuscripts, because all the canonical readings of the Qur'ān have come to us directly from the lips of the prophet of Islam by an overwhelming number of people, starting with his contemporaries, who memorized each and every verse revealed. Compare this with the readings of the New Testament books that were written later on. The Qur'ānic readings known by the prophet of Islam were transmitted by him to his followers, while, in the case of the New Testament, the differences between the readings were not known to the authors.

The Manuscripts in the Islamic Seal

The history of the Qur'ān is known to us from the time of its revelation to the present day. The details of its transmission are clear, with no vagueness. It is known, not hidden, and detailed, not outlined. There is no need to rely on the testimony of the manuscripts. It is a situation drastically different than that of the New Testament which solely based on manuscripts.

Islamically, in application of the classical rules of the Qur'ān and of the science of *ḥadīth* (the recorded sayings and deeds of the Prophet), Muslims do not consider manuscripts as an acceptable evidence for proving the

27 The Arabic word *aḥruf* is the plural of *ḥarf*, which means literally a letter or a word.

28 See the different interpretation of the prophetic term, Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan*, UK: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999, pp.174-79

29 See Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, ed. Muhammad Ali al-Ḍabbā', Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyyah, [n.d.], 1/9

originality of the holy texts. Manuscripts written by unknown people, in unknown circumstances, cannot make the case for an unaltered text or its originality, by itself.

In the science of *ḥadīth*, “a reference to the knowledge taken from a written source without audition, licensing or transference”³⁰, or *wijādah*, is not accepted as an authentic way of narration by the majority of Muslim scholars. The minority who do accept it state that it can be approved only when special conditions obtain. Almost none of these conditions can be met as regards New Testament manuscripts.

Methodologically, any holy text surviving only through manuscripts written by anonymous scribes cannot be taken seriously enough to impose the authority of its words and message, because it cannot prove its originality. Thus, the New Testament fails soundly, in the first stage of the process of authenticating the Word of God, because it is founded on frail bases.

The manuscripts of the New Testament fail to give us the *certitude* we need regarding the sought after Word of God, but, still, they can provide information which can help in tracing the historical journey of the text.

The Testimony of the Extant Manuscripts

Scholars have different opinions about the number of copies made by ‘Uthmān. Most of them agree that there were four or five, although some have said that the number was larger than that.³¹ Muslims preserved some of these copies for varying periods of time before their disappearance, which shows that the written text of the Qur’ān was the same as the text memorized by so many in the first centuries of the Islamic Nation. An original copy that had a text different from the circulating text would surely have given rise to problems and conflicts, and that clearly, never occurred.

Following is evidence by witnesses of the preservation of these copies:

A- The Original Preserved Copies

Unlike the original manuscripts of the books of the New Testament, the original manuscripts of the Qur’an were widespread and accessible to people in the earliest time of Islam. It was a special privilege that reinforced the feeling of certitude in that living nation.

30 ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūri, *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth: Kitāb Ma’rifat Anwā’ ‘Ilm al-Ḥadīth*, tr. Eerik Dickinson, UK: Garnet & Ithaca Press, 2006, p.125

31 See al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, Beirut: Mo’assasat al-Risāla, 2008, p.134

It is true that the Islamic nation did not feel the need to depend on these original manuscripts to ensure the authenticity of the text in their copies, because copying these originals was done from the very outset under the supervision of the head of the state and scholars throughout the Islamic territory.

Here are some historical testimonies of the history of some of the originals.³²

Al-Muṣḥaf al-Imām: This *muṣḥaf* is the copy that ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān kept for himself. It was maintained until the beginning of the third century of the Hegira, 9th century A.D. Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 A.H. -1052 A.D.) narrated that Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Baghdādī (d. 222 A.H. -837 A.D.) said that: “It was taken to me from some prince’s treasure and I saw [‘Uthmān] blood on it.”³³

Muṣḥaf of al-Shām: The famous scholar *Ibn Kathīr* (774 A.H.- 1372 A.D.) said, “And concerning the original ‘Utmānic copies of the Qur’ān, the most famous of them is the one in *al-Shām*³⁴ in a corner in Damascus Mosque, towards the east where the Imam leads the prayer, in the place inspired by the remembrance of God Almighty. In the past it used to be in the city of Tiberia. Then it was moved to Damascus around 518 Hegira [1124 A.D.]. I did see it, and found it to be a great, glorious book with beautiful clear hand written dark ink on parchment which seems to be from camel skin.”³⁵

Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 A.H.-1217 A.D.) had also seen it in the Damascus mosque. He said, “In the eastern corner next to the new spot where the Imam leads the prayer, a big closet has in it one of the *muṣḥaf* of ‘Uthmān may Allah be pleased with him. This is the *muṣḥaf* that ‘Uthmān had sent to the *al-Shām*. Every day the closet is opened after prayer, and people come to it in order to touch or kiss it for blessings, it is usually too crowded near it.”³⁶

32 Some Muslims claim, erroneously, that the Tashkent *muṣḥaf* is one of the originals made by ‘Uthmān’s team. Actually carbon-dating and palaeographic studies suggest a date in the second century of the Hegira. (See F. Déroche, “Manuscripts Of The Qur’an,” in J. D. McAuliffe, ed. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2003, 3/261)

33 Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, *Almuḥḥafī fī Rasm Maṣāḥif al-Amṣār*, Cairo: Maktabāt al-Kulliyat al-Azharyyah, [n.d], pp.23-4

34 The area that includes what is called today Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and some parts of the territories that surrounds them.

35 Ibn Kathīr, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, ed. Abū Ishāq Alḥuwayni, Cairo: Maktabat b. Taimiyyah, 1416 A.H., p.89

36 Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. William Wright, revised by de Goeje, M.J., Leiden:

Ibn Faḍl al-‘Amrī, in the eighth century of the Hegira- fourteenth century A.D., said when describing the Mosque of Damascus, “In its left side, there is the ‘Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*.”³⁷

Al-Harawī (d. 611 A.H.- 1214 A.D.) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Tajībī (d. 697 A.H.-1297 A.D.), saw it and described it too.³⁸

Muṣḥaf of Mecca: Information about the *muṣḥaf* of Mecca is given by different witnesses; Ibn Jubayr saw it in Mecca when he visited the city in 578 A.H. - 1182 A.D. Abū al-Qāsim al-Tajībī saw it too in Mecca at the end of 696 A.H. -1297 A.D. Al-Samhūdy who died in 911 A.H. - 1505 A.D mentioned it in his book *Wafā’ al-Wafā’*.³⁹

B- The Wealth of Early Manuscripts

Copying the *muṣḥaf* was a religious duty that the nation of Islam took seriously from the outset. The desire for copies of the Qur’an wherever Muslims lived spawned a noble business that flourished in the big cities⁴⁰ and was under the strict supervision of scholars who inaugurated, from the earliest centuries, a distinct discipline within the Qur’ān studies called “the science of the writing of the *muṣḥaf* “*‘ilm rasm al-muṣḥaf*”. Many scholars from the first century and the beginning of the second were considered as authorities in that science. In *al-Madīnāh*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. hurmuz al-A‘raj (d.117? 119? A.H.) and Nāfi‘ (d. 169 A.H.). In *al-Baṣrah*, ‘Aṣim al-Jaḥdarī (d. 128 A.H.) and Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’ (d. 153 A.H.). In al-Kūfah, Ḥamzah al-Zaiyyāt (d. 156 A.H.) and al-Kasā’ī (d. 189 A.H.), In *al-Shām*, Ibn ‘Āmir (d. 118 A.H.) and Yaḥyia al-Dhmārī (d.145 A.H.).⁴¹ Moreover, we are aware of at least eleven books written in the second century of the Hegira solely on that science.⁴² There was no *obscure zone* in the history of the transmission of the *muṣḥaf*; it is a long chain with connected rings.

Brill ,1907, p.268

37 Ibn Faḍl al-‘Amrī, *Masālik al-Abṣār*, 1:195 (Quoted by Abū ‘abd Allāh al-Zinjāny, *Tarikh al-Qur’ān*, Beirut: Mu’assasat al-A‘lamī, 1969, p.67)

38 See Saḥar al-Sayyid ‘abd al-‘azīz Sālim, *Aḍwā’ on ‘Alā Muṣḥaf ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān wa Riḥlatihi Sharḡan wa Gharban* (Lights on the *Muṣḥaf* of ‘Uthmān and Its Journey to the East and the West), Alexandria: Shabāb al-Jami‘, [n.d], p.129

39 Ibid., pp.128-29

40 Estelle Whelan, “Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur’ān,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1998), pp.10-4

41 See Ghānim Qaddūrī Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf: dirāsah luḡhawīyyah tārīkhiyyah*, Baghdād, al-‘Irāq: al-Lajnah al-Waṭaniyyah lil-Iḥtifāl bi-Maṭla‘ al-Qarn al-Khāmis ‘Ashar al-Hijrī, 1982, pp.164-67

42 See the titles of the books in ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍl, *Qirā’at ibn Kathīr wa Atharuha fī al-Dirāsāt*