THE STATUS OF QIRA’ĀT SHĀZZAH: BEYOND TEXTUAL CORRUPTION

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Abstract: A very important entryway of Orientalists’ assault on the Qur’ānic text, is of Qira’āt Shāzzah, which have been presented by the western scholars as a list of Qur’ānic variant readings, invented and fabricated by some Muslim leading scholars of Qur’ānic sciences. In this respect, they attributes these variants to Ibn Muqlah, Ibn Shanabudh and Ibn Miqsam etc., while taking plea of some spurious sources and provide evidence to allure that there were many conflicting readings of the Qurān in circulation, destroying the Muslim myth and lie that the Qurān is a perfectly compiled divine book. According to Orientalists, the study clearly shows that the Qurān underwent textual corruption via additions, omissions and conflicting variant readings, casting doubt on its integrity. However, Muslim point of view explicitly denounces these assumptions and provides a scientific system of its transmissions, classifications for the reliability and authenticity of variants into Mutawātira and Shāzzah. This paper has been specifically focused the case studies of those Muslim figures who have been declared as source of irregularity and corruption in the Qur’ānic text by the Orientalists. The facts have also been collected presenting their retrieval from untrustworthy readings in this regard.

Key Words: Variant Readings, Qur’ānic Text, Orientalism, Textual Criticism.

For the Orientalists, the most significant issue after the codices of companions is of Qira’āt Shāzza in criticizing the textual status of the Qurān. Orientalists give extraordinary place to these unauthentic readings. They blame that there was a huge capacity of errors in the codices of Sahābas which were needed to be corrected, but this process could not

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performed and consequently various additions and deletions orally known gradually as Shāz Qira‘āt.
Particularly Goldziher and Jeffery have quoted several examples of these recitals and have drawn self-conceived inferences from them.¹ In these pages it is not possible to present all those examples and expose the reality about them. For this task a whole book will be required.² Also we feel that this would be unnecessary. However, we wish to mention some fundamental facts about the rare recitals, and we do hope that with these in view the readers will understand the rejection of the false assumptions of these Orientalists that they have made on the basis of rare recitals.

Qira‘āt Shāzah: Meaning and Dimensions

Qira‘āt Shāzah have been defined under a certain criteria which consists of three major tenets that must insure to be fulfilled before its acceptance as Qur’ānic text:

1. The qira‘at must be reported through multitude reliable channels and reaches back to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and it must be containing the status of “al-Khabr al-Mashbūr”.
2. Its text must be written as it has been inscribed in Uthmānic Maṣāḥif according to the rules and principles of ‘Uthmānic Orthography.
3. The recitation and its pronunciation must be in accordance with the rules of Arabic grammar and morphology.

The above mentioned criterion is a standard to examine the veracity of Qur’ānic text. If only one tenet of the above three is lacking in any recitation, it would not be regarded as Qur’ān rather known as a Shāz Qira‘āt. It should be remembered that this criteria has always been in application since the very reign of Holy Prophet (PBUH), however, its formal articulation started in the beginning of third century when Abū ‘Ubaid al-Qāsim bin Sallām (d. 224 A.H.)

"وَانَمَا نَرِى الْقَرَائَةَ عَرْضُوا الْقَرَائَةَ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ فِي هَذَا فَمَا أَعْلَنَّ بِمَعْنَا مُخَافَةُ أَنْ يُزِيِّنَ بِزِادَةٍ أَوْ نَقْصَانٍ، وَلِهذَا تَرُكُوا سَائِرَ الْقَرَائَاتِ الَّتِي تَخَالفُ الكِتَابَ"³

After discussing the criteria of Abū ‘Ubaid al-Qāsim bin Sallām (d. 224 A.H.), Ibn Mujāhid (d.324 A.H.) has stated it in his book in a detailed way, he explains:
Ibn Khālawayh (d.370 A.H.) has also mentioned the criteria identical to that of Ibn Mujāhid. Makkī bin Abī Ṭālib al-Qāisi (d. 437 A.H.) has declared this criterion as fundamental principle in accepting any Qira‘at as Qur‘ān, he writes:

It is evident that all the Muslims have their consensus and united on their understanding that only such recitals of the Qur‘ān are reliable that fulfill three conditions, namely:

1. The particular recital can be incorporated in ‘Uthmānī script.
2. It should conform to the rules of Arabic grammar.
3. It must have proof of authentic uninterrupted transmission from the Holy Prophet (PBUH), or at least it must be popular among the scholars of Recitals.

Any recital lacking even one of these three conditions is termed as “Rare Recital” and no one in entire Ummah took it as reliable. A close look on “Rare Recitals” reveals that one or more of the following defects are present in them.

1. Sometimes that recital is totally innovated, just as the recitals of Abul Faḍl Muḥammad bin Ja‘far Khuzā‘i that he has attributed to Abū Ḥanīfah. Dar Qutnī and all other scholars have exposed them and declared that they are all innovated.
2. Sometimes they have very weak precedents, just as thee recitals of Ibn al-Samīfa and Abu al-samā‘ or many of those
recitals which Abū Dawūd has attributed to different Companions and their followers in his *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*.\(^{11}\)

3. Sometimes the precedent is correct but in fact it is not the recital of the Qur’ān, but a companion or his follower added one or more words during ordinary discourse as an explanation to some word of the Qur’ān. Since the Qur’ān in its entire substance was uninterrupted and thousands of Ḥuffāẓ were present in every period of time, there was no danger of actual addition in the original text due to the addition of explanatory words.\(^{12}\) Hence, such explanations were not considered objectionable. For example, it is reported that Sa‘ād bin Waqṣ read وَلَهُ أَخ او أَخَتَ مَن أَمَّ (in this the underlined words were an explanatory addition. Similarly, it is reported that Sayyidinā ‘Uthmān (R.A) read a verse like this.

ولكن مَن كم اَّم يَدْعُون يَلَى الْخَبَرِ وَيَدْعُون يَعْلَمُون يَنْبُجُون عِنْ المَنْكَر

In this the underlined phrase is indeed exegetic addition, because it if has been part of the Qur’ān in his recital, it must have been present in the transcriptions compiled by him. But this phrase does not occur in any of his seven transcriptions.\(^{13}\)

Abū ‘Ubaid al-Qāism bin Sallām (d.224 A.H.) has expressed the benefits of rare recitals in the explanation and commentary of the Qur’ān. His comments are as followed:

فَهَذَهُ الْحَرْفَ وَالْعَضَاتُ لَهَا كَثِيرَةٌ، فَقَدْ صَارَتْ مُفَسِّرَةً لِلْقُرْآنَ، فَوَقَدْ كَانَ يُروِيْنَغْنَ عن بعض التابعين في التفسير فيستحسن ذلك\(^{14}\)

These sorts of readings have been abundantly used in Ṭafsīr literature and these have also been reported by Ṭabi‘īn while making explanation to the Qur’ānic verses. There are many such examples found in Rare Recitals.

4. Sometimes it happened that certain recitals were abrogated in the last days of the Prophet’s life but the Companion who had already memorized it remained unaware of this fact, hence he continued to recite it as he had learnt.\(^{15}\) Because the other Companions knew that this had been abrogated they
did not recite it nor did they consider it to be a correct recital any more.

5. It appears from some of the Rare Recitals that probably some followers of Companions made a mistake in the recitation of the Qur’ān quite unintentionally (as sometimes happens even with eminent Ḥuffāẓ) and a listener reported it as he had heard.¹⁶

Whatever Rare Recitals or the Qur’ān have been reported mostly come under one of the above five situations. Obviously, no question arises for accepting these recitals as reliable. Consequently, the Ummah never relied on them in any age. That is why these recitals could not even become popular, noting to say of their being uninterrupted. Hence the inferences drawn by the Orientalists on the basis of Rare Recitals that differences exist in the text of the Qur’ān, is such an unfounded and absurd idea that it deserves no consideration at all from scientific and research point of view.¹⁷

It is worthwhile to mention that most commonly Orientalists looks busy in pursuing these sort of various readings particularly. In this respect, they applaud the work of Ibn Shanbudh (d. 328 A.H. /939 C.E.) and Ibn Miqsam (d. 354 A.H. /965 C.E.) who were barred to recite prohibited readings. Making detailed discussions on such readings, Orientalists declared once again that the scholars of Qira‘āt selected these readings on the base of their linguistic taste not on the Isnād and transmission. In this continuation, a great importance has been given to those Muslim scholars who have described Shaz Qira‘āt.¹⁸ A brief introduction to these Muslim Scholars is given below:

Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316 A.H.)

The author of Kitāb al-Masāḥif,¹⁹ named ‘Abdullah bin Sulaimān bin al-Ash‘ath Al-Sijistānī Al-Azdi (d. 316 A.H). In this book various codices of companions of the Prophet have been presented. This is the only book that has reached to us and no other book is available on this particular topic. It is significant to mention that the reports and transmissions of this book are not continuous (Muttašil) and there is a huge number of Da‘īf narrations found in this book.²⁰ Moreover, father of Ibn Abī Dāwūd has witnessed against him as liar (Kadhāb).²¹ This affects the authenticity of this book in the popular Muslim academic circles. The major contents of this book are
Qira’ät, Collection of Qur’ān, order of Suras and verses, differences of Mašāḥif of Ẓahāba, Rasm al-‘Uthmāni and other. However, the following two debates considered to be very important.

1. Differences of in the Rasm of Mašāḥif which were sent to various cities after copying from Mushaf Imam.22

2. Differences in text of Mašāḥif of Ẓahāba and Tabi’in.23

In the above mentioned two chapters most of those Shaz recitations have been discussed that are apposing to the Uthmanic peculiar orthography.

Arthur Jeffery applauds and appreciates this book. In the modern age, Arthur Jeffery has been appeared as a predecessor of establishing new objections on the text of the Qur’ān. He in his famous book “Material for the History of the Text of the Qur’ān” mostly relied upon this book and deduced thousands of divergences in the textual history of the Qur’ān. He has also endeavoured his utmost to portray Ibn Abi Dāwūd as a great Muḥaddith. However, Jeffery describes the status of Ibn Abi Dāwūd in the eye of his father:

There are a number of traditions going back to him that are not pleasing to orthodoxy and so there was put into circulation the legend that his father had branded him as a liar, and therefore no attention is to be paid to material that is dependent on his authority. This, of course, is tendential, and the biographers usually regard him as trustworthy (ثقة), the Mughnī even nothing that his father’s branding him as a liar was over something other than Ḥadith.24

If we accept, for instance, his reported transmissions true, even than these traditions, infect, were concerning to the period before the region of Uthmanic compilation of codices.

Ibn Al-Anbārī (d. 328 A.H.)

Muhammad bin Abi al-Qāsim bin Muhammad bin al-Anbārī (d. 328 A.H) wrote a book titled “Kitāb al-Mašāḥif” with a detailed discussion on the history of Qur’ān, variant readings and Mašāḥif of Ẓahāba.25 This book is not available; however, its references are seen in other ancient literature. For example, Suyūṭī (d. 911 A.H) has incorporated some references of it in his Al-ītqan fi Uloom al-Qur’ān and in Al-durr al-Manthur. Jeffery has praised this book in a much exaggerated way.26 However, it has been scholarly
observed that this book contain inconsistent reporters and unreliable Isnads. 27

**Ibn Shanbūdh (d.328 A.H.)**

Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Ayyūb bin al-Ṣalt Ibn Shanbūdh a very eminent scholar of Qira‘āt in fourth century. 28 He ignored to follow the recitation mode of the Qur’ān according to the wholly agreed upon ‘Uthmānic text. He developed a theory that if a recitation style is correct by the principles of Arabic grammar and reported through reliable channels, it is to be accepted and retained the validity as true Qur’ānic recitation despite if it not follows the orthographical style of Uthman’s Masahif. He also used to claim to have his āt reports by ‘Abd Allah Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ubai Ibn Ka‘b (May Allah be pleased with both of them). 29 Some examples of Shaz recitations that have been attributed to him are as under:

The scholars like Ibn al-Anbārī (d.328 A.H.) and others wrote books to refute his theory. But he insisted to propagate these recitations publically and hence the matter acceded towards a contention among the Muslim. Ibn Mujāhid (d.324 A.H) 35 proceeded this matter to the ruler of that time who delegated the responsibility of the solution of this probe to his minister known as Muḥammad Ibn Muqlah 36. Ibn Shanbūdh was arrested in 323 A.H. and presented before a board of learned Ulema of Baghdad. 37 The most revered scholars and Qurra’ like Mufti Abūbakar al-Abhārī 38, ‘Umar b. Muḥammad b. Yousuf al-Qaḍī and Imām Ibn Mujāhid in this board. 39

Mufti Taqi ‘Usmani comprehensively explains the entire matter of those Muslim Qurra’ who were involved in reciting disagreed recitations, He comments:

... As for the story of Ibn Miqsam and Ibn Shambuz, the scholars had not criticized them why they considered recitals other than these seven as correct. But the reason was, that three conditions must be fulfilled before calling a recitation as correct (a) that it must be compatible with the ‘Uthmān
Transcription, (b) that it must correspond to the rules of Arabic grammar (c), that its uninterrupted transmission from the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) must be authentically proved, and that it be popularly known to the Imams of Qira’at. Any recital that fulfills these conditions shall be acceptable whether it is included in the Seven recitals or not, and if even a single condition is not met, it well be not reliable even though it may be included in the Seven recitals or not, and if even a single condition is not met, it well be not reliable even though it may be included in these seven recitals. But Ibn Miqsam and Ibn Shambuz had violated this established rule. Ibn Miqsam held that only the first two conditions were sufficient for the “Recital” to be correct. A recital would therefore be acceptable if it is in accordance with the ‘Uthmani Transcription and happens to correspond to Arabic grammar, even if it is lacking in a proper line of transmission. As against this, Ibn Shambuz stated that a “Recital” reported through uninterrupted authentic narrations shall be acceptable even if it does not conform to the “Uthmani Script”. On this basis all the scholars refuted them collectively and ultimately both of them came round to the opinion of the majority.40

Notes and References

1 Goldziher, Maḏāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī, Arabic translation rendered by Dr. ‘Abdul Halim al-Najjār, P. 6.; and Arthur Jeffery, Materials for the History of the text of the Qur’ān, Leiden 1936

2 ‘Abdul Ḥalim al-Najjār has provided marginal notes in his translation of Maḏāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī by Goldziher.

3 Faḍā’il al-Qur‘ān, p. 217.

4 Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-Sab‘ah fi al-Qirā‘at, p. 19


6 Al-Qaisi, Al-Ibānah ‘an Ma‘ānī al-Qirā‘āt, p. 51.


8 Zarkashī, Al-Burḥān, Vol. 1, p 479
9 Al-Nashr Vol. 1, p 9. As Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī (d.911 A.H.) has written about Ibn al-Jazrī that he is the first who spoke in the best way among all scholars "واحسن من تكلم في هذا النوع امام القراء في زمان شيخ شيوخنا أبو الخبر الجزري" see Al-İtqān Vol. 1, p 210.
11 Ibid., Vol. 1, p16.
14 Mushkil-ul-Āthār at Ṭahāvī, Vol.4, pp 196-202
16 See for more details; Mufti Muḥammad Taqi Usmani, An Approach to the Qur‘ānic Sciences, pp249-251.
17 Ibn Nadim has presented a list of famous describers of Shāz Qira‘āt at various cities; see Al-Fahrist, pp 30-33.
19 Dr. Muhammad Akram Chaudhry, Orientalism on Variant Readings of Qur‘ān...The Case of Arthur Jeffery, American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 1995, p180
21 Kitab al-Masāhib, Vol:1, p.241
22 Ibid, Vol:1,p.279
23 Materials, pp.12-13
25 Jeffery, Materials, p.11.
26 M. A.Chaudhry, Orientalism on Variant Readings of Qur‘ān...The Case of Arthur Jeffery, p180
29 Ibn Al-Nadim, *Al-Fabrist*, p.48


31 Al-Qari’ah, 101: 5.

32 Lahab, 111:1

33 Al-Lail, 92: 3.

34 Al-Anfal, 08:73.


36 Abû ‘Ali Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. al-Hasan b. Muqlah, better known as Ibn Muqlah, was born in Baghdad in A.H. 272. (Ibn Khallikân, *Wafayatu’l-‘A’yân*, ed. Wustenfeld, No. 708). He is best known to fame as the inventor of a style of writing called *Naskhi*, derived it is said from the stately and ornate *Kûfî* script, which originated in Kûfah in the time of the early *khalifahs*, and which it supplanted by reason of its being more cursive... *Ibn al’-Athîr* (viii, 260) contributes one more, that he had three servitors specially attached to his person, while the Haft Iqlim states that he thrice copied the Qur’ân, and attributes to him the invention of the *Khatt-i thulth*, or *naskhi* in large hand, from the *Kûfî*. See A. H. Harley, *Ibn Muqlah*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1924), p.229


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