



How the Qur'an Was Preserved During the Prophet's ﷺ Time: Mechanisms of Oral and Written Transmission

YOUSEF WAHB

YAQEEEN™
INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Shaykh Yousef Wahb is an Islamic Law Instructor at the University of Windsor's Faculty of Law and holds a Masters of Law LLM from the University of Windsor and a Bachelor in Islamic Studies from Al-Azhar University. Shaykh Yousef also serves as a co-founding board member of Green Ummah, founding board member of the University of Windsor Muslim Chaplaincy, and an Islamic Compliance Advisor at Beneficent. Currently, Sh. Yousef is completing his second Masters at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

***Disclaimer:** The views, opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in these papers and articles are strictly those of the authors. Furthermore, Yaqeen does not endorse any of the personal views of the authors on any platform. Our team is diverse on all fronts, allowing for constant, enriching dialogue that helps us produce high-quality research.*

Copyright © 2022. Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research

Introduction

Compared to all other scriptures, the Qur'an is the best preserved in both the hearts of Muslims and the written copies of the codex (*muṣḥaf*)—a manifestation of Allah's promise to protect Divine revelation from distortion:

Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its Guardian.¹

Allah's final revelation to humanity has many names, chief among them the "Qur'an" and the "Book" (*kitāb*). The word Qur'an is etymologically related to the word for "recitation," reflecting how the Divine word is recited by the tongue, while *kitāb* reflects how it is transcribed in writing. Allah Himself bestowing these names upon His speech indicates that it must be preserved through both oral and written methods. These methods are integral to the technical definition of the Qur'an as Allah's speech, authentically reported from the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم in conformity with the written ('Uthmānic) codex.²

Scholarship on the written compilation of the Qur'an typically focuses on the period after the death of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Special attention tends to be paid to Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān's final compilation, which standardized the criteria for what is Qur'an and what is not. This article, however, focuses on the preservation of the Qur'an, orally and textually, during the time of its first recipient and conveyor, Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. What follows serves as a sequel to three other articles on the preservation of the Qur'anic text and its readings (*qirā'āt*).³

¹ Qur'an 15:9.

² For a brief summary of the definition of the Qur'an, see Yousef Wahn, "An Introduction to 'Ulūm al-Qur'an: The Field of Qur'anic Studies," *Yaqeen*, April 2022, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/an-introduction-to-ulum-al-quran-the-field-of-quranic-studies>.

³ Ammar Khatib and Nazir Khan, "The Origins of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an," *Yaqeen*, August 2019, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-origins-of-the-variant-readings-of-the-Qur'an>; Ammar Khatib and Nazir Khan, "The 'Uthmānic Codex: Understanding how the Qur'an was Preserved," *Yaqeen*, June 2022, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-uthmanic-codex-understanding-how-the-quran-was-preserved>; Yousef Wahn, "Can the Qur'an be Recited in Different Ways? The Meaning and Wisdom of Qiraat," *Yaqeen*, April 2022, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/can-the-quran-be-recited-in-different-ways-the-meaning-and-wisdom-of-qiraat>

This article will examine the various ways the Prophet ﷺ and his companions disseminated the Qur'an within an oral culture and how the Prophet ﷺ organized, since the earliest days of his message, the transcription of the text in a widely unlettered culture. Hence, the article is divided into two main sections: the (1) oral and (2) written transmission of the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. While it acknowledges much of the modern English literature on the history of the Qur'an and draws on contemporary works of Arab-Muslim Qur'an scholars, this article primarily employs traditional arguments from the primary sources of Islamic literature.

The first part of this article, on the oral transmission of the Qur'an, describes: (I) how the Prophet ﷺ fulfilled his obligation of conveying Allah's message in full to this *ummah*; (II) sixteen Prophetic methods of disseminating the Qur'an across the community; (III) the early use of the term 'reciters' (*qurrā'*) and the number of *ḥuffāz* among the Prophet's companions; (IV) the first generation (*ṭabaqah*) of expert *qurrā'* who learned the Qur'an directly from the Prophet ﷺ, taught it to others, and are links in the chains of transmission (*isnād*) of the canonical *qirā'āt*; and (V) the second *ṭabaqah* of expert *qurrā'* who learned from the first and who are links in the *isnād* of the canonical [*qirā'āt*](#).

The second part of this article, on the written transmission of the Qur'an, covers (I) the literature on the Prophet's scribes and the writing of the Qur'an; (II) the Qur'an's scribes in the Meccan period; (III) the Qur'an's scribes in the Medinan period; (IV) the instant documentation of Qur'an upon its revelation; (V) the review of written copies of the Qur'an; and (VI) the companions' familiarity with and knowledge of orthography; (VII) the ordering of verses and the arrangement of the written and recited Qur'an.

Critical background: Early preservation of the Qur'an and Western scholarship

Orientalist scholars and later Western revisionists have advanced two main critiques of the authenticity of the Qur'anic text. The first is that only a few of the Prophet's ﷺ companions were able to memorize the entirety of the text by heart, assuming that he ﷺ never forgot any parts of the Qur'an before conveying them to others. Theodore Nöldeke (d. 1930), and his student and friend Friedrich Schwally (d. 1919), claimed that “[d]uring the first years of his [the Prophet’s] divine commission, when he hardly had any followers, he might have forgotten some of the revelations before outsiders learned of them.”⁴ Despite acknowledging that some companions, known as the “collectors” or “memorizers” of the Qur'an, “memorized considerable sections that they could repeat correctly,”⁵ Nöldeke and Schwally conclude that “it remains uncertain whether the individual ‘collectors’ really had memorized the entire revelation or only fairly large portions.”⁶

Such claims—that too few of the first Muslims memorized the Qur'an to guarantee its complete preservation—typically derive their support from: 1) philological interpretations of traditional terms describing “collectors” of the Qur'an, 2) divergent methodological approaches to authenticating historical reports, and 3) seemingly contradictory narrations about the number of memorizers, concession of *ahruf*, abrogated verses, and final review of the Qur'an between the Prophet ﷺ and Jibrīl. However, the incentives to memorize and orally preserve the Qur'an far outweighed the incentive to memorize pre-Islamic poetry, which was itself preserved in a highly accurate manner. The first part of this article, tracing these incentives and their associated transmission practices, will explore the oral reception of the Qur'an by the companions who committed its entirety to memory.

⁴ Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur'ān* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 36.

⁵ Nöldeke, Schwally, Bergsträßer, and Pretzl, *History of the Qur'ān*, 211.

⁶ Nöldeke, Schwally, Bergsträßer, and Pretzl, *History of the Qur'ān*, 214.

The second critique posits that the centrality of orality to Arab culture (and therefore the widespread illiteracy and limited textual documentation),⁷ as well as the dearth of extant Qur'anic writings dating to the early days of Islam, undermines our certainty that the Qur'an was written down during the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Despite conceding that the Prophet ﷺ sought to “establish a new document of revelation as well as its written fixation,” Nöldeke and Schwally asserted the lack of reliable data regarding “the particulars of procedure and the preservation and arrangement of the material.”⁸ Hence, they conclude that “it is doubtful that Muḥammad put down in writing all the revelations of the divine book from the start.”⁹

The plausibility of Qur'anic documentation during the time of the Prophet ﷺ was argued by such Western scholars as Carl Brockelmann (d. 1956) in his notable *History of the Arabic Written Tradition*.¹⁰ However, attempts to devalue the authenticity or question the accuracy of such accounts kept recurring. Régis Blachère (d. 1973) claimed that Qur'anic verses were recorded only after the Prophet's move to Medina, with writing limited to “important passages” as determined by the personal preferences of the companions and availability of writing materials.¹¹ Furthermore, attributing confusion to reports from the companions regarding the transcription of the Qur'an, John Burton (d. 2005) rushed to conclude “the failure of Muhammad to collect and edit the texts; and the suggestion of the incompleteness, potential or actual which might have been expected to follow.”¹²

It is implausible to deny that at least parts of the Qur'an were documented in written form during the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Nonetheless, as shown later in this article, the debate regarding whether the entire text was written down in his

⁷ Michael C. A. Macdonald, “Ancient Arabia and the Written Word,” in *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, ed. M. C. A. Macdonald (Oxford: Archaeopress: 2012), 21.

⁸ Nöldeke, Schwally, Bergsträßer, and Pretzl, *History of the Qur'an*, 209.

⁹ Nöldeke, Schwally, Bergsträßer, and Pretzl, *History of the Qur'an*, 36.

¹⁰ Carl Brockelmann, *Tārīkh al-adab al-'Arabī*, ed. 'Abdulḥalīm al-Najjār and Ramadān 'Abdultawwāb, 5th ed., 6 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977), 1:137–144, esp. 139.

¹¹ Régis Blachère, *Al-Qur'an: Nuzūluḥ, Tadwīnuḥ, Tarjamatuḥ wa Ta'thīruḥ*, trans. Ridā Sa'ādah, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1974), 28–29.

¹² John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 118.

lifetime exists among some Muslim and most non-Muslim scholars. In describing the collection process of the Qur'anic text, the companions always referenced several materials, such as palm stalks and thin white stones that had verses written on them. The lack of empirical evidence or clear indications that those materials collectively encompassed the entirety of the text does not negate that possibility. Such a possibility, in addition to other facts discussed below, prompted authoritative Muslim figures on the topic, such as Makkī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 437/1045), 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262), Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505) and al-Qaṣṭalānī (d. 923/1517), as well as many modern Muslim scholars, to argue that the entirety of the Qur'an was written down during the time of the Prophet ﷺ.

The influential scholarship of Nöldeke and Schwally inspired subsequent generations of academics who contributed plenty of works on the history of the Qur'an. Those academics include Gotthelf Bergssträsser (d. 1933), who adopted a semitic languages approach; Otto Pretzl (d. 1941), who focused on *qirā'āt*; John Wansbrough (d. 2002), who founded the revisionist approach; and John Burton, who questioned the evolution of the text in relation to the law. The cumulative works of these academics still dominate Western academic scholarship and educational curricula today. Their enduring influence is reflected in Burton's statement that since the publication of *Geschichte des Qorans* by Nöldeke and its revised edition by Schwally, "no new suggestions on the history of the Quran texts have been advanced."¹³

The overall critique of the oral and written history of the Qur'an extends beyond the time of the Prophet ﷺ to all stages of its compilation by his successors. Oddly, there is a clear insistence on depicting the traditional Islamic narrative as confused, inconsistent, and contradictory. Such scholarship continues to adopt an accusatory tone, as represented in Claude Gilliot's remark below:

...because the misadventures detailed about the transmission and codification of the Quran—as both orally delivered and transmitted in

¹³ Burton, *Collection of the Qur'an*, 117.

writing—are so great, the ancient Muslim narratives on these subjects offer no real clarity about what “‘Uthmānic codex” means. Secondly, even if Muslims believe that the Quran we have now is the “‘Uthmānic codex,” our analysis of Muslim narratives on the matter does not leave us with the same certainty.¹⁴

In a recurrent allegation that early Muslims themselves were confused,¹⁵ Burton finally concludes that the collection process of the Qur'an was a “product of a lengthy process of evolution, accretion, and ‘improvement.’”¹⁶

In *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī begins by tracing a clear pattern of misplaced arguments or preconceived notions among modern critics of the Qur'an's authenticity.¹⁷ Another prominent contemporary engagement with oriental and Western critiques of the Qur'an, extending far beyond historiographical criticism, is the late Egyptian philosopher 'Abdel Raḥmān Badawī's (d. 2002) *Défense de la vie du Prophète Muhammad contre ses Détracteurs*.¹⁸ This French work was later translated into Arabic.¹⁹ Throughout its 13 chapters, Badawī systematically dismantles various critiques of the Qur'an advanced between the 9th and 20th centuries. Most relevant to the scope of this article, Badawī dedicated the 10th chapter to discussing the chronological order of the Qur'an.²⁰ Contrasting the traditional Islamic arrangement of the Meccan and Medinan chapters (*sūrahs*) to five late attempts by 19th and 20th centuries orientalist, Badawī concludes that the Qur'an in its entirety was arranged in written form during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ.²¹

¹⁴ Claude Gilliot, “Creation of a Fixed Text,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006), 46.

¹⁵ Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, 229.

¹⁶ Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, 225.

¹⁷ Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al-A'zamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 3–13.

¹⁸ 'Abdel Raḥmān Badawī, *Défense de la vie du Prophète Muhammad contre ses Détracteurs* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983).

¹⁹ 'Abdel Raḥmān Badawī, *al-Difā' 'an al-Qur'an didda muntaqidih*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Madboulī al-Saghīr, n.d.). The Arabic translation, however, lacks accuracy in converting technical terms from French to Arabic and falls short in quoting the original Arabic sources Badawī cited on several occasions.

²⁰ Badawī, *al-Difā' 'an al-Qur'an didda muntaqidih*, 107–124.

²¹ Badawī, *al-Difā' 'an al-Qur'an didda muntaqidih*, 123–24.

Besides ongoing research on late antiquity and paleography, there seems to be a persistent neglect of traditional Islamic scholarship on such matters and inadequate analysis of its interpretations. The epistemic disparities between oriental or revisionist methodologies and those of Muslim scholars are often apparent, especially with regard to the authentication of historical facts or assessment of the certainty-value of Qur'anic transmission. Moreover, Muslim traditionalists of the past and the present are often accused of spiritual bias and theological commitment to the Qur'an's preservation as the word of God—accusations that dismiss rigorous contributions to the topic made by a multitude of Muslim scholars.

While this article is not primarily concerned with engaging such individual critiques, many of them will be addressed as it lays down the history, and analyzes the methods, of both the oral and written transmission of the Qur'an.

Part I: The oral transmission of the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet ﷺ

Oral transmission has been the primary method of preserving the Qur'anic text, prompted by many prophetic hadiths and accounts from early Muslim generations promising the ultimate reward for the bearers of the Qur'an. For example, the Prophet ﷺ was reported to have said, “If the Qur'an was [written] on a skin, then it [the skin] was thrown into the fire, it would not be burnt.”²² Al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/838), commenting on this hadith, said that the “skin” allegorically denotes the believer's heart that encompasses the Qur'an.²³ Hence, al-Aṣma'ī (d. 216/831) and other scholars deduced that memorizing the Qur'an protects a person from Hellfire.²⁴ Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) narrated that the Prophet's companion Abū Amāmah said, “Memorize the Qur'an, or recite the Qur'an, and do not be

²² Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, ed. Wahbī Ghawjī (Morocco: Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-Shū'un al-Islāmiyah, 1995), 1:244. The same hadith, as noted by the editor Ghawjī, is also narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Ya'lā, and al-Ṭabarānī.

²³ Ibn Sallām, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*.

²⁴ Ibn Qutaybah, *Taw'īl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad al-Najjār (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1966), 200.

deluded by these codices (*maṣāḥif*). Indeed, Allah does not torment a heart that encompasses the Qur'an with the Hellfire.” Ibn Qutaybah added, “The body is a locus of the Qur'an exactly like the skin.”²⁵ Even after ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān transcribed the Qur'an in a compiled codex, reciters from the companions, in their respective regions, continued to teach Muslims the Qur'an as they learned it from the Prophet ﷺ and in conformity with the written text of the newly officialized ‘Uthmānic codex.²⁶

Various disciplines—including the history of the Prophet's life (*sīrah*), hadith, and Qur'anic sciences (*‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān*)—analyze the concept of revelation (*wahy*) and its methods, settings, and circumstances in an extensive examination of the 23 years of the Prophet's life of revelation. The Prophet's reception (*talaqqī*) of the Qur'an was through directly listening to Jibrīl's recitation or immediately receiving *wahy* in his heart. Derivations of *talaqqī* are used in the Qur'an such as “And indeed, [O Muhammad], you receive the Qur'an from one Wise and Knowing,”²⁷ and “And you were not expecting that the Book would be conveyed to you, but [it is] a mercy from your Lord. So do not be an assistant to the disbelievers.”²⁸ *‘Ulūm al-Qur‘ān* dedicated topics and sub-disciplines to the different methods of *wahy* and *talaqqī*.²⁹ Before showcasing the several methods through which the Prophet ﷺ taught his companions the Qur'an, a portrayal of his human capacity to bear the Divine responsibility for conveying Allah's message is warranted.

²⁵ Ibn Qutaybah, *Taw‘īl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*.

²⁶ It is said that ‘Uthmān sent a reciter (*qārī*) with each copy to teach Muslims in their respective regions. This claim is common in some contemporary writings, such as Muhammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm wa gharā‘ib rasmīhi wa ḥukmih*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Halabī, 1953), 80; Muḥammad Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur‘ānī min Rasūl Allah ilā ummatih* (Tanta: Dār al-Sahābah, 2001), 194. The earliest account of this claim is cited by al-Ja‘barī (d. 732/1328) without an *isnād*; it states: “‘Uthmān instructed Zayd ibn Thābit to recite according to the Madīnan codex, he sent ‘Abdullah ibn al-Sā‘ib with the Makkī codex, Mughīrah ibn Abī Shihāb with the Syrian codex, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī with the Kūfan codex, and ‘Āmir ibn ‘Abd Qays with the Baṣran codex.”

²⁷ Qur'an 27:6.

²⁸ Qur'an 28:86.

²⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Hadīth, 2006), 1:142–66.

The Prophetic responsibility to convey the Divine Message

When the first piece of revelation was sent down to the Prophet ﷺ, he realized his challenging mission to preserve Allah's message, the Qur'an. Even though Allah promised to preserve it, the Prophet ﷺ was keen to retain and convey every letter of the Qur'an and was constantly concerned about his capacity to memorize it. Allah related this concern of the Prophet ﷺ in the Qur'an itself (75:16-19) and reassured him that the text—and even its meanings—would be preserved.³⁰ In relating the situation, Ibn 'Abbās noted that when the revelation came to the Prophet ﷺ, he would suffer a great deal of hardship and move his lips out of concern for its retention.

Allah said: “Move not your tongue concerning to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to give you the ability to recite it.” Ibn 'Abbās said: [This means] He will gather it in your heart, then you will recite it. “And when We have recited it to you, then follow the recitation.” Ibn 'Abbās said: [This means] So listen to it and remain silent. So when Jibrīl came to him, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ listened, and when he left, he would recite it as he had taught him.³¹

As human beings are forgetful by nature, Divine intervention was required: “We will make you recite and you will not forget except what Allah wills.”³² In commenting on this verse, al-Rāzī (d. 605/1210) said that it establishes the miracle of the Qur'an in two ways. First, the Prophet's ﷺ memorization of this long text, despite his being unlettered and without his engaging in prolonged study of it, is miraculous. Second, the *sūrah* in which the verse is mentioned is Meccan, yet it provided future prophecies that were later fulfilled.³³

But did the Prophet ﷺ ever forget something from the Qur'an? As a human, forgetfulness was possible for him ﷺ, but only in a circumstantial manner that would not compromise his memorization of the Qur'an. It was reported that he

³⁰ Qur'an 75:19.

³¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 448.

³² Qur'an 87:6–7.

³³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafūtiḥ al-Ghayb*, 1st ed., 32 vols. (N.p.: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 31:142.

ﷺ heard a man reciting the Qur'an at night and said, "May Allah bestow His Mercy on him as he has reminded me of such-and-such verses of such-and-such *sūrah*s which I was caused to forget."³⁴ Abū Bakr al-Ismā'īlī (d. 370/981) said,

Forgetting parts of the Qur'an by the Prophet ﷺ is of two types. One of them is forgetting something which he soon remembers. This type is related to his human nature and is indicated in his saying, "Verily I am a human being like you. I forget just as you forget." The second [type] is Allah lifting that part from his heart to abrogate its recitation. This [type] is the meaning of the exception in "We will make you recite and you will not forget except what Allah wills."

As for the first type, it is circumstantial and is gone quickly according to the evident meaning of, "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian." As for the second [type], it is included in Allah's saying, "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth [one] better than it or similar to it."³⁵

After quoting al-Ismā'īlī, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī added another categorization of the Prophet's forgetfulness based on the nature of the thing being forgotten. It is categorically possible if it is unrelated to his duty of conveying Allah's message. If what is forgotten is related to the conveyance of the message, forgetfulness may occur but under two conditions: 1) that he forgets something after he conveyed it; and 2) that he remembers it afterwards whether by himself or by someone else reminding him.³⁶ As for the time before his conveyance of a particular revelation, it is not possible for the Prophet ﷺ to forget it.³⁷

The Qur'an contains explicit censure of the Prophet ﷺ himself on multiple occasions, most notably in ensuring his full delivery of the message: "Announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you have not conveyed His message."³⁸ Establishing the theological understanding of

³⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5083.

³⁵ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb et al., 1st ed., 13 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1960), 9:86.

³⁶ Ibn Hajar mentioned two opinions regarding stipulating the immediate remembering; some said it must be immediate and others said it is not mandatory.

³⁷ Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:86.

³⁸ Qur'an 5:67.

prophethood, the necessary qualities of a prophet (such as truthfulness, honesty, conveyance of the message, and intelligence), and revelation are prerequisites for understanding and appreciating the undeniable preservation of the Qur'anic text. If Muhammad ﷺ was the true messenger of God, he must have been trusted and supported by Him to convey the entirety of the message. The Qur'an is truthful, not only due to its alignment with earlier prophecies but also the integrity of the one who conveyed it.

Nonetheless, is it empirically verifiable that the Prophet ﷺ memorized and delivered the entirety of the Qur'an to his companions? According to many scholars, the entire Qur'an initially descended (*al-nuzūl al-jumlī*) to the nearest heaven in the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) before it descended in intervals upon the Prophet (*al-nuzūl al-tafṣīlī*) over 23 Hijri years.³⁹ Despite God's promise to preserve the Prophet's memorization, the Prophet ﷺ did not merely rely on a miraculous implantation of the Qur'an in his heart. Rather, he used to constantly recite it and review the revelation with Jibrīl every Ramadan.⁴⁰ The annual review sessions were likely dedicated to what had been revealed that year,⁴¹ to refresh the Prophet's knowledge of the Qur'an and eliminate abrogated verses.⁴² Moreover, during the last year of his life, the Prophet ﷺ reviewed the Qur'an, likely in its entirety, with Jibrīl twice. The descriptions of these sessions indicate an interactive setting where one read while the other listened, and then they alternated. Potentially, then, the Prophet ﷺ reviewed it twice every year and four times in his last year.⁴³ The Prophet's ﷺ reading to Jibrīl is the foundational authority for the primary method of Qur'anic learning and transmission, oral delivery.⁴⁴

³⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:142.

⁴⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 4997–98, the chapter on “The Virtues of the Qur'an” (*kitāb faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*), the section on “Jibrīl used to review the Qur'an with the Prophet” (*bāb kāna Jibrīl ya'riḍ al-Qur'an 'alā al-Nabī*).

⁴¹ Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad ibn Abū Bakr al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt li funūn al-qirā'āt*, ed. Markaz al-Dirasat al-Qur'aniyah, 1st ed., 10 vols. (Saudi Arabia: Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-Shū'un al-Islāmiyah, 2012), 1:49.

⁴² Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:5.

⁴³ Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-kawtharī* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tawfiqiyyah, n.d.), 26.

⁴⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:291.

Part of the wisdom behind revealing the Qur'an in intervals was to ease its memorization for the Prophet ﷺ.⁴⁵ When the disbelievers criticized the Qur'an for not being revealed all at once, Allah explained the reason: "That We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have spaced it distinctly."⁴⁶ There are two possible exegetical interpretations of the phrase "We may strengthen your heart": either (i) to keep strengthening your heart in an ongoing fashion, and/or (ii) to ensure you memorize it so that your heart may remain calm.⁴⁷ Since memorization is dependent on human effort and humans are liable to be forgetful, the Prophet's memorization was a special gift from God, independent of effort and immune to circumstantial forgetting.⁴⁸ As the primary recipient of revelation, there was no possible way for human retention of the Qur'an except through the only human entrusted with its reception and delivery. Thus, the Prophet ﷺ was Divinely commanded to convey the Qur'an by reciting it to people.

Throughout the Qur'an, Allah frequently commanded the Prophet ﷺ to "recite" it to others:

And recite to them,⁴⁹

Say, "Come, I will recite to you what your Lord has prohibited to you,"⁵⁰

Thus have We sent you to a community before which other communities have passed on so you might recite to them that which We revealed to you,⁵¹

And it is a Qur'an which We have separated by intervals that you might recite it to the people over a prolonged period,⁵²

Say, "I have only been commanded to worship the Lord of this city, who made it sacred and to whom all things belong. And I am commanded to be of the Muslims. And [I have been commanded] to recite the Qur'an."⁵³

⁴⁵ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 2:8; al-Qastalānī, *Latā'if al-ishārāt*, 1:51.

⁴⁶ Qur'an 25:32.

⁴⁷ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī waḥyan wa rasman wa lughatan wa qirā'atan* (Istanbul: Dār al-Ghawthānī 2019), 48.

⁴⁸ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*.

⁴⁹ For example, Qur'an 5:27 and 7:175.

⁵⁰ Qur'an 6:151.

⁵¹ Qur'an 13:30.

⁵² Qur'an 17:106.

⁵³ Qur'an 27:92

Other verses commanded the Prophet ﷺ to recite without explicitly mentioning to whom: “Recite that which was revealed to you.”⁵⁴ In addition to these commands, multiple verses attributed the duty of reciting the Qur'an to the Prophet ﷺ in a declarative, instead of an imperative, sense: “Just as We have sent among you a messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our verses.”⁵⁵

Conveying the Qur'an through recitation subsumes certain contextual premises. First, the Prophet ﷺ did not read or write, nor did the majority of the initial recipients of his message. Therefore oral delivery, via accurate articulation and commitment to memory, served as the primary method of transmission. Second, the Prophet ﷺ encouraged written documentation and appointed official scribes. However, he maintained verbal delivery as the principal method even after much of the Qur'an had been written down.⁵⁶

Prophetic methods of teaching the Qur'an

The Prophet taught the Qur'an in two ways: 1) *iqrā'*: he recited it to a companion, who then recited the same part back in the same manner, and 2) *'ard*: the companion recited to the Prophet ﷺ what they previously learned from him to verify, review, and correct their recitation. *'Arḍ* has historically been the primary method of transmitting Qur'an. Although it is a shared method with other disciplines such as hadith transmission, the *'ard* of the Qur'an required unique conditions:

1. It must be from memory. Unlike the *'ard* of hadith, which does not stipulate memorization, the *'ard* of the Qur'an is from memory since its first teacher, the Prophet ﷺ, did not read nor write but only taught it via oral communication. We do not know of any companion who read to the Prophet ﷺ from a written copy of the Qur'an. Even if that were to have happened,

⁵⁴ Qur'an 10:71, 26:69, and 29:45.

⁵⁵ Qur'an 2:151.

⁵⁶ Wahb, “An Introduction to *‘Ulūm al-Qur'an.*”

the written copy would have only been used to render exact the oral articulation of the text.

2. It must be recited to another person (e.g., instructor). Reading alone, for instance, does not qualify as *'ard*, even by the literal meaning of the term.⁵⁷
3. It must follow general and specific rules of accuracy (*dabt*). General *dabt* involves precise pronunciation of the recited passage. Specific *dabt* involves pronouncing the recitation according to a specific reading style. The former is concerned with the delivery of the text, while the latter is focused on articulating certain renditions, providing a unique style of Qur'anic education.⁵⁸

The companions would stress the significance of a particular act of worship by comparing how the Prophet ﷺ taught it to how he taught the Qur'an. For instance, the Prophet ﷺ taught his companions to recite a prayer (*du'ā'*) against the Hellfire and otherworldly and afterlife trials “in the same way that he would teach them a *sūrah* of the Qur'an,”⁵⁹ just as he taught them the prayer for guidance (*istikhārah*) “as he would teach them a *sūrah* of the Qur'an.”⁶⁰ Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ taught them how to recite the prayer of *tashahhud*⁶¹ “as he would teach them a *sūrah* of the Qur'an.”⁶² The *tashahhud* was reported by tens of companions who were constantly teaching it to people with minor variations, all equally valid. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was reported to have taught it to people on the pulpit (*minbar*).⁶³ Consequently, jurists extensively discussed the exact words of the *tashahhud*, investigating every single word and phrase. The early community's care for transmitting and preserving the Qur'an was no less exacting.

The *sūrah* and hadith literature illustrate how the Prophet ﷺ applied the two methods of *iqrā'* and *'ard* in his pursuit of every opportunity to teach the Qur'an to

⁵⁷ *'Ard*, linguistically, is making something clear for others to know about it.

⁵⁸ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 18–19.

⁵⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 590.

⁶⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1166.

⁶¹ *Tashahhud* (lit. testimony or witness), also known as *al-taḥiyyāt* (lit. greetings or salutations), is a supplication recited in the middle or final sitting in prayer.

⁶² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 403.

⁶³ *Muwaṭṭa Mālik*, no. 203.

his companions. In the contemporary book *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī min rasūl Allāh ilā ummatih*, Muḥammad Jabal cataloged 14 different Prophetic styles of Qur'anic teaching spanning diverse settings and situations. The following section incorporates Jabal's list and complements it with additional data derived from several interdisciplinary works.

1- Reciting to companions upon revelation

Multiple hadiths relate scenarios where the Prophet ﷺ instantly conveyed the Qur'an to his companions as it was being revealed. As an individual companion witnessing the revelation descending upon the Prophet ﷺ, Zayd bin Thābit described the Prophet's instant recitation of, and his command to write, the verse, "Not equal are those believers who sit [at home] and those who strive in the way of Allah."⁶⁴ Other hadiths document the Prophet's recitation of verses or chapters, such as the *sūrahs* of al-Ṣaff, al-Jumu'ah, al-Mursalāt, and al-Kawthar, upon their revelation to groups of companions.

ʿAbdullāh ibn Salām narrated, "A group of us Companions of the Messenger of Allah sat talking, and we said: 'If we knew which deed was most beloved to Allah then we would do it.' So Allah, Most High, revealed Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allah, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. O you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do?" [*sūrah* of al-Ṣaff]. After narrating the story, the narrator, ibn Salām, recited the whole *sūrah* and said, "The Prophet ﷺ recited the [whole] *sūrah* to us until he completed it."⁶⁵

Abū Hurayrah described how he asked the Prophet ﷺ about some of the meanings of al-Jumu'ah immediately following its revelation and recitation by the Prophet ﷺ to a group of companions.⁶⁶ Regarding the revelation of al-Mursalāt,

⁶⁴ Qur'an 4:95; *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, no. 2507.

⁶⁵ *Sunan al-Dārimī* no. 2445; *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* no. 3309. In highlighting the significance of a short chain of transmission (*isnād ʿālī*) and providing an example of uniform pattern of transmission (*musalsal*), Ibn al-Jazarī mentioned that he narrates this hadith via only ten men in a uniform manner (every transmitter in the *isnād* recited the entire *sūrah* after narrating the hadith). Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-ʿashr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Ḍabbāʿ, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006), 1:194–95.

⁶⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4897.

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd reported that, “While we [a group of the Prophet’s companions] were in the company of the Prophet ﷺ in a cave at Minā, Sūrah al-Mursalāt was revealed and he recited it, and I heard it directly from his mouth as soon as he recited it.”⁶⁷ After taking a nap one day while among his companions, the Prophet ﷺ suddenly raised his head, smiling. Upon being asked about the reason for his smile, the Prophet ﷺ stated, “Just now this *sūrah* was revealed to me,” and recited Sūrah al-Kawthar to them.⁶⁸ In these ways, the companions were able to witness the Qur’an’s revelation firsthand, receive it through direct recital delivery, and instantly interact with the Divine message as it was revealed.

2- Reciting to those he was inviting to Islam

One of the *da‘wah* approaches that the Prophet ﷺ used to unlock people’s hearts, such as Abū Bakr’s, was to recite Qur’an to them. The Qur’an’s inimitable eloquence profoundly affected the Arabs, whose mastery of eloquence caused them to submit to its unprecedented style and transcendent nature. As one of the first people to embrace Islam, Abū Bakr invited five of his counterparts to meet the Prophet ﷺ and listen to the Qur’an: ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām, ‘Abdulrahmān ibn ‘Awf, Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and Ṭalḥah ibn ‘Ubaydillāh. Intriguingly, all five not only became Muslims but also were among the ten promised Paradise (*jannah*). The Prophet ﷺ also recited Qur’an upon inviting As‘ad ibn Zurārah, Dhakwān ibn ‘Abd Qays, Ṭufayl ibn ‘Amr al-Dūsī, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Khuwaylid ibn ‘Āmir, as well as the six Medinan supporters (*anṣār*) who met him in Mecca prior to the first pledge of al-‘Aqabah.⁶⁹

3- Teaching those who came to embrace Islam

The Prophet ﷺ taught Sūrah Yūsuf and Sūrah al-‘Alaq to Rāfi‘ ibn Rifā‘ah and Mu‘ādh ibn ‘Afrā’ when they came to him in Mecca to embrace Islam.⁷⁰ Another example is when a group of about 20 Abyssinian men came to Mecca after hearing

⁶⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1830.

⁶⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 400.

⁶⁹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 73–75.

⁷⁰ *Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*, no. 7241.

of the Prophet ﷺ to learn about Islam. Having had a conversation with the Prophet ﷺ, they embraced Islam and stayed in Mecca for three days. During that time, they learned much of the revealed Qur'an, eventually carrying it back to their country.⁷¹

The Prophet ﷺ also taught the Qur'an to people he met while immigrating to Medina, such as Buraydah ibn al-Huṣayb. The Prophet ﷺ taught him part of Sūrah Maryam immediately upon conversion. Later, Buraydah came to the Prophet ﷺ in Medina and the Prophet ﷺ asked him, "How much of the Qur'an do you know, O Buraydah?" He said, "O Messenger of Allah, you had taught me in al-Ghamīm that night when I met with you part of a *sūrah* in which [the story of] Maryam is mentioned." The Prophet ﷺ asked Ubayy ibn Ka'b to teach him the rest of the *sūrah*. Then, the Prophet ﷺ said to Buraydah, "O Buraydah, learn Sūrah al-Kahf with it [Sūrah Maryam] as it is a light for its companion on the Day of Judgment."⁷² Buraydah was not only a Qur'an teacher for his people but was also appointed as their *zakāh*-collector by the Prophet ﷺ,⁷³ reflecting a Prophetic practice of giving priority of position to people of the Qur'an. One other such example is 'Uthmān ibn al-'Ās, who embraced Islam when he came with a group from Thaḳīf to meet the Prophet ﷺ. 'Uthmān passionately sought every possible opportunity to learn the Qur'an from the Prophet ﷺ, who liked his dedication and appointed him the leader of his people even though he was one of their youngest.⁷⁴

It was reported that a man from Bahrain whose name was 'Abdullāh ibn al-Ashajj sent his nephew, 'Amr ibn 'Abd Qays, to Medina to inquire about the Prophet ﷺ and his message. Upon witnessing several signs of his Prophethood, 'Amr embraced Islam. The Prophet ﷺ then taught him Sūrahs al-Fātihah and al-'Alaq, and asked him to invite his uncle to Islam as well.⁷⁵ Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)

⁷¹ Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār lil-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Eṣām al-Quḍāh, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm; Amman: Dār al-Faḥ, 2001), 144.

⁷² Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 144–5.

⁷³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 145.

⁷⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 142.

⁷⁵ Muḥammad ibn Sa'd al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. 'Alī 'Umar, 11 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 8:125.

observed that a constant practice of the Prophet ﷺ was immediately directing every new Muslim to read and learn the Qur'an, and that he would not prioritize anything else over that.⁷⁶

4- Reciting to people gathered at the mosque

The Prophet ﷺ often recited the Qur'an publicly to large groups of people, especially congregants at the mosque. For example, 'Ā'ishah reported that, "When the verses of (*ribā*) [usury] were revealed, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited them in the mosque [to people]."⁷⁷ The Prophet ﷺ also set up a dedicated tent in his mosque for the visiting delegates of Thaḳīf to listen to the Qur'an and watch Muslims praying.

5- Reciting the newly revealed Qur'an during travel

Travel offered the Prophet ﷺ various opportunities to recite Qur'an. For example, as narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd, the beginning of Sūrah al-Faḥ was revealed to the Prophet ﷺ while returning to Medina from al-Ḥudaybiyyah. The Prophet ﷺ immediately shared the glad tidings with the companions by reciting the revealed verse, "We have given you a clear conquest."⁷⁸ In another narration, Mujammi' ibn Jāriyah related that the Prophet ﷺ waited for people to gather at a rest stop called Kurā' al-Ghamīm to recite the verse to them.⁷⁹ The third narration by 'Abdullāh ibn Mughaffal describes the Prophet's articulation (*tajwīd*) of certain letters and his pleasant voice: "I saw Allah's Messenger ﷺ on the day of the Conquest of Mecca on his she-camel, reciting Sūrah al-Faḥ in a vibrant quivering tone,"⁸⁰ meaning that he was prolonging the ending of verses with nunation such as

⁷⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 142.

⁷⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4542.

⁷⁸ Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād fī sīrat khayr al-'ibād*, ed. Fahīm Shaltūt et al., 12 vols. (Cairo: al-Majlis al-'Īlā lil-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1992), 5:98. Al-Ṣāliḥī attributed the report to al-Bukhārī (in his *al-Tārīkh*), Aḥmad, al-Bayhaqī, Abū Dawūd, al-Nasā'ī, and others.

⁷⁹ Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Umar al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, 1st ed. (Beirut: Mu'sassat al-Risālah, 2006).

⁸⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4281.

mubīnā, *mustaqīmā*, and *‘azīzā*.⁸¹ The last two narrations of the story describe how the Prophet ﷺ read clearly and out loud to people and in a performative style.⁸²

6- One-on-one teaching

Multiple companions explicitly mentioned that the Prophet ﷺ taught them individually. For example, Ibn Mas‘ūd said, “I have read more than 70 *sūrah*s to the Prophet.”⁸³ The Prophet ﷺ also asked him once, “Recite the Qur’an to me.” Ibn Mas‘ūd said, “Shall I recite it to you while it has been revealed to you?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “I like to hear it from others.”⁸⁴ Another example of the individual teaching relationships the Prophet ﷺ had with his companions is when he informed Ubayy ibn Kā‘b that “Allah has commanded me to recite the Qur’an to you. Ubayy asked, “Did Allah mention me to you by name?” and when the Prophet ﷺ answered affirmatively, tears fell from Ubayy’s eyes.⁸⁵

7- Reciting at gatherings

One day, while riding his mount on his way to visit a sick companion, the Prophet ﷺ passed by the head of hypocrites, ‘Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, sitting with a group of his people. The Prophet ﷺ got off his mount, greeted them, and sat for a short time reciting the Qur’an and making supplications (*du‘ā*).⁸⁶ The Prophet’s dedication to teaching Qur’an is exemplified by a report, narrated by Anas ibn Mālik, where he tied a rock to his stomach to silence his hunger while teaching the people of the bench (*ahl al-ṣuffah*),⁸⁷ a group of companions who lived in the Prophet’s ﷺ mosque’s portico (*ṣuffah*) as it was their only shelter.

⁸¹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 76.

⁸² Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 76.

⁸³ *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 5064.

⁸⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5049.

⁸⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4960.

⁸⁶ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, ed. Mustafā al-Saqqa et al., 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), 2:236–37.

⁸⁷ Abū Nu‘aym al-Aṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā*, 1st ed., 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr and Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1996), 1:342.

8- Reciting in prayer

As the regular imam of the community, the Prophet ﷺ would recite the Qur'an out loud in at least six *rak'ahs* on a daily basis (mandatory prayers) and an additional two *rak'ahs* on a weekly basis (*jumu'ah*), in addition to occasional prayers such as Eid, solar and lunar eclipse prayers (*kusūf* and *khusūf*), drought prayer (*istisqā'*), and recommended night prayer (*qiyām*). As known in Islamic law (*fiqh*), the basic minimum qualification of reading out loud as an imam is to enable those behind you to listen.

The companions were committed to the congregational prayer (*jamā'ah*) with the Prophet ﷺ and would not miss it except for serious emergencies. In many reports, they documented their hearing of the Qur'an from the Prophet ﷺ in prayer. Even occasionally, in prayers with subvocal recitation (*sirriyyah*),

The Prophet ﷺ in *Zuhr* prayers used to recite al-Fātiḥah along with two other *sūrahs* in the first two *rak'ahs*: a long one in the first *rak'ah* and a shorter *sūrah* in the second, and at times the verses were audible. In the 'Aṣr prayer, the Prophet ﷺ used to recite al-Fātiḥah and two more *sūrahs* in the first two *rak'ahs* and used to prolong the first *rak'ah*.

88

Hadith collections dedicated chapters to the Prophet's ﷺ recitation in prayer, identifying the *sūrahs* he would frequently recite in specific prayers. For example, in rebuking a man bragging about reciting a lengthy part of the Qur'an very quickly, Ibn Mas'ūd commented, "We heard the recitation of the Prophet ﷺ. I remember very well the recitation of those *sūrahs* which the Prophet ﷺ used to recite, and they were eighteen *sūrahs* from the *mufaṣṣal* [from al-Ḥujurāt, 49th chapter, to the end of the Qur'an, the 114th chapters],⁸⁹ and two *sūrahs* from the *sūrahs* that begin with *hā mīm*."⁹⁰ The regularity of the Prophet's recitation and the reception of several chapters of the Qur'an was affirmed by the grandfather of

⁸⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 759.

⁸⁹ Scholars disagree on the reason these chapters are called *al-mufaṣṣal* (lit. the detailed) and on where they begin in the Qur'an. There is a consensus, however, that they are the last chapters of the Qur'an, ending with Chapter 114, *al-Nās*. *Al-mufaṣṣal* are categorized into three: the long (*tiwāl*), the medium (*awṣāt*), and the short (*qiṣār*). Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:201.

⁹⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5043.

‘Amr ibn Shu‘ayb who stated, “There is no long or short *sūrah* of the *mufaṣṣal* except that I heard the Prophet ﷺ reciting it while leading people in obligatory prayers.”⁹¹ In addition to all *al-mufaṣṣal*, the Prophet ﷺ was also reported to have led prayers with several chapters including: al-Baqarah, Āl ‘Imrān, al-Nisā’, al-Mā’idah, al-An‘ām, al-A‘rāf, al-Tawbah, al-Mu‘minūn, al-Rūm, al-Sajdah, and Qāf.⁹²

9- Reciting in sermons

The Prophet’s sermons offered a platform for repeatedly reciting verses as well as broadcasting newly revealed ones. Umm Hishām bint Ḥārithah ibn al-Nu‘mān said that she memorized Sūrah Qāf from attending the Prophet’s ﷺ Friday sermons (*khuṭbahs*) for how often he would recite it.⁹³ When Allah revealed the verses of Sūrah al-Nūr declaring the innocence of ‘Ā’ishah from false accusations, the Prophet ﷺ delivered a speech in which he recited these verses.

10- Sending delegates to Muslim gatherings reciting newly revealed Qur’an

In the 9th year of the *hijrah*, after the Battle of Tabūk, the Prophet ﷺ wanted to perform pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) but did not feel comfortable doing so while the polytheistic practice of circumambulating the *Ka‘ba* naked was still ongoing. During that time, the first part of Sūrah al-Tawbah was revealed. The Prophet ﷺ sent the first 40 verses of the *sūrah* with Abū Bakr, whom he appointed as the leader of the *ḥajj* season, to be recited by ‘Alī to pilgrims. ‘Alī repeatedly recited the verses to every group of people he could reach. He would ride his mount and go to the areas where *ḥajj* rituals were being performed and read them until, as he described, his voice gave out.⁹⁴

⁹¹ *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, no. 814.

⁹² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:194–95 and 198.

⁹³ *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, no. 1100; *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 1411.

⁹⁴ Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-ahkām al-Qur’an*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Turkī, 24 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 2006), 10:93–94.

11- Companions teaching new Muslims

The Prophet ﷺ instructed his companions to teach the Qur'an to both individuals and groups. The Prophet ﷺ maintained this practice

in his city [Mecca], his abode of immigration [Medina], and the rest of the regions he conquered in which Islam prevailed. He did not leave a group somewhere or any community of this *ummah* without a Qur'an teacher dedicated to them exactly as he did not leave them without a person who would teach them the essentials and obligations of Islam, which they are not allowed to be ignorant of or slacken from learning.⁹⁵

Indeed, as narrated by 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, "the Prophet ﷺ would get busy [so] when an immigrant man came to him [to embrace Islam], the Prophet ﷺ would assign one of us to teach him Qur'an."⁹⁶ 'Ubādah was assigned a man whom he hosted and fed in his house.⁹⁷ Ubayy ibn Ka'b was assigned to Ashajj 'Abd al-Qays, who came from Bahrain to learn Qur'an and *fiqh* from the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ assigned Ubayy ibn Ka'b to the Ghāmid tribe's group who came to embrace Islam⁹⁸ and another companion to a group from the Khawlān tribe.⁹⁹

12- Companions teaching one another

This method is evident in many accounts of the companions' lives, some of which were mentioned in the aforementioned styles. Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrated that the Prophet ﷺ showed up to a group of Muslims in *al-ṣuffah* while a man was reciting the Qur'an to them, and the Prophet ﷺ made *du'ā'* for them.¹⁰⁰ Sahl ibn Sa'd al-Anṣārī narrated a similar situation where they were teaching each other the Qur'an. The Prophet ﷺ was pleased with them and stated, "All praise is to Allah. Allah's Book is one and it contains the red and the black. Read the Qur'an! Read before a time that will come when [some] people will straighten it as an arrow is straightened, which [their recitation] will not go beyond their throats,

⁹⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 142.

⁹⁶ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 22766.

⁹⁷ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 22665.

⁹⁸ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 6:589–99.

⁹⁹ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 6:505.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, 1:342.

seeking a reward for it in this world and not waiting for their reward in the next.”¹⁰¹ In multiple reported occasions, some with debatable *isnād*, the Prophet ﷺ also instructed his companions to teach their neighbors the Qur'an.¹⁰²

The companions who immigrated to Abyssinia used to read, review, and study the Qur'an together. The Qur'an was profoundly present in their interactions and debates with the Abyssinian Christians. When verse 3:64 was revealed, the Prophet ﷺ sent it to Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, who was one of the leaders of the Abyssinian Muslim residents and asked him to use it among the other verses he was using in his debates with the Christians.¹⁰³

13- Sending messengers to villages and regions to teach the Qur'an

After the first pledge of al-ʿAqabah took place in Mecca, the Prophet sent Muṣ'ab ibn ʿUmayr, who became known as the Qur'an teacher (*muqrī*), to Medina and commanded him to teach its people the Qur'an.¹⁰⁴ With the coordination of his Medinan host As'ad ibn Zurārah, Muṣ'ab used to go around the city visiting the houses of al-Anṣār, inviting them to Islam, and teaching them the Qur'an.¹⁰⁵ Later, ʿAbdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm was also sent to Medina to help Muṣ'ab in his mission.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the Qur'an conquered Medina two years before the Prophet's immigration to it.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ sent Mu'ādh ibn Jabal and Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī to Yemen, ʿAmr ibn Ḥazm to Najrān with Banū al-Ḥārith's group, and sent a companion to al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd Kulāl in Ḥimyar to recite to him and his brother Nu'aym Sūrah al-Bayyanah.¹⁰⁸ Mu'ādh ibn Jabal was also commanded by the Prophet ﷺ after the conquest of Mecca to stay there and teach people the Qur'an.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Sallām, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, 1:254.

¹⁰² ʿAbdullḥayy al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, ed. ʿAbdullāh al-Khālīdī, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, n.d.), 1:103–4.

¹⁰³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 143–144.

¹⁰⁴ ʿAbdulsalām Hārūn, *Tahdhīb sīrah Ibn Hishām*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Mu'ssasat al-Risālah, 1985), 103.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, 1:104–5.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, 1:112; al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 143.

¹⁰⁷ ʿĀ'isha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-I'jāz al-bayānī lil-Qur'ān wa masā'il ibn al-Azraq*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 42–43.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 6:490.

The Prophet often instructed his envoys and delegates to teach the Qur'an alongside the basics of Islam and its laws. In his *al-Tarātīb al-Idāriyyah*, 'Abdulḥayy al-Kittānī (d. 1382/1962) dedicated a whole section to “those whom the Prophet deployed to different areas to teach people the Qur'an and to make them understand the religion.”¹⁰⁹

14- Commanding military leaders to remain in newly conquered areas to teach new Muslims the Qur'an

In the 10th year of the *hijrah*, the Prophet ﷺ sent Khālīd ibn al-Walīd to Banū al-Ḥārith ibn Ka'b in Najrān and commanded him to invite them to Islam and, if they became Muslims, to stay among them to teach them Islam and the Qur'an. The mission succeeded, and the Prophet ﷺ asked him to return to Medina with a group of them to meet with him ﷺ. After he met with them, the Prophet ﷺ sent 'Amr ibn Ḥazm back with them to Najrān to continue teaching them.

15- Travellers to and from Medina teaching Muslim Bedouins

Due to the Prophet's ﷺ constant recitation and teaching of the Qur'an, its memorization spread among the population of Medina and other cities, and extended to include bedouins in the vast Arabian desert. Many of those groups' delegates who came to embrace Islam and learn the Qur'an from the Prophet ﷺ would teach Bedouins on their way back as documented, for example, in the story of 'Amr ibn Salāmah. 'Amr, whose actual companionship with the Prophet ﷺ is disputed ﷺ, became the most qualified imam of his people merely due to learning from such passing travelers. He said,

Travelers would pass by us on their way back from [meeting with] the Prophet ﷺ. We used to ask them to teach us the Qur'an. They informed us that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Let the one with the most [memorization of] Qur'an lead you in prayer.” So, I used to lead them

¹⁰⁹ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātīb al-idāriyyah*, 104–5.

[my people] and I was one of their youngest [but] the one with the most memorization of the Qur'an.¹¹⁰

The story reveals how people used to compete over memorizing the Qur'an and how 'Amr compared himself to the rest of his people who, despite their distance from the center of the Muslim community, were regularly learning and teaching the Qur'an.

16- Early models of Qur'an schools

The Prophet ﷺ encouraged Qur'an group learning both through his actions and words. As described by 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, the Prophet ﷺ used to gather the companions to recite the Qur'an and learn from him: "We used to read [a verse that requires] prostration [*sujūd al-tilāwah*] to the Prophet ﷺ so he would prostrate and so all of us would do so until we had no room to move."¹¹¹ The Prophet ﷺ also verbally encouraged individuals to collectively learn the Qur'an by stating, "A group does not gather in one of the houses of God Most High reciting the Qur'an and studying it together, except that tranquility descends upon them, mercy envelops them, the angels encompass them, and God mentions them to those in His presence."¹¹² The Prophet ﷺ praised the voices of a Yemeni group of companions, saying, "I know the voices of a group of Ash'arīs at night when they enter, and I know where they settled down because of their voices with the Qur'an at night, even if I did not see where they settled and when they settled during the day."¹¹³

Even before Meccan Muslims could publicly meet to learn the Qur'an, multiple places housed regular group recitation and instruction. Dār al-Arqam was the first, serving as a secret gathering place for Qur'anic learning from the Prophet ﷺ for three years. Abū Bakr also established a small mosque in his house's yard, where he would pray and recite the Qur'an out loud, beautify his voice as means of

¹¹⁰ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 146.

¹¹¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaimah*, no. 558.

¹¹² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2699.

¹¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4232.

da'wah, and cry and weep out of spiritual ecstasy. Many Meccan disbelievers, including women and children, used to gather around his house to listen to his recitation.¹¹⁴ His daughter and the Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah, documented this in her famous eloquent speech about the virtues of her father.¹¹⁵

After the number of Muslims grew to 40, and after 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb converted to Islam, the Prophet ﷺ transitioned from secret *da'wah* to publicly inviting people to Islam. The first mosque in Medina to host Qur'anic recitation was established by Rāfi' ibn Mālik al-Zuraqī before the immigration of the Prophet ﷺ.¹¹⁶ Rāfi' was one of the first six Medinan Muslims from al-Anṣār and was one of the 12 Medinans who famously pledged their belief in Islam to the Prophet ﷺ at al-'Aqabah. Rāfi' established a mosque and Qur'an school after learning *ayāt* from the Prophet ﷺ and taking some sheets that had verses written on them, as will be discussed later.

In documenting the organized teaching activities of Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr and 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm in Medina before and after the Prophet's move to it, some scholars mentioned the house of Makhramah ibn Nawfal. Known as the House of Reciters (*Dār al-Qurrā'*), it hosted ibn Umm Maktūm upon his move to Medina.¹¹⁷ Al-Kittānī relied on these reports in furnishing early historical proof for establishing Qur'an schools.¹¹⁸

One of the most important Qur'anic educational sites, where several companions learned how to recite the Qur'an and memorized many *sūrahs*, was *al-ṣuffah*. Given its proximity to the Prophet's mosque, the buzzing recitation of the people of *al-ṣuffah* always echoed there.¹¹⁹ *Al-ṣuffah* sheltered many companions who could

¹¹⁴ Al-Bāqillānī dedicated a chapter to the virtues of Abū Bakr in terms of his memorization and knowledge of the Quran. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 181–85.

¹¹⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 182.

¹¹⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 182. Ibn Ḥajar's quote from al-Zubair ibn Bakkār, reported in his *Akhbār al-Madīna*, is similar. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalanī, *al-Iṣābah fī tamyīz al-ṣahābah*, ed. 'Ādil 'Abd al-Mawjūd et al., 1st ed., 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), 2:370.

¹¹⁷ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, 1:112.

¹¹⁸ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, 1:112.

¹¹⁹ Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-kawtharī*, 24–25.

not afford housing. These companions' main occupation was learning and teaching the Qur'an as well as the practices of its lived example, the Prophet ﷺ.¹²⁰ *Al-ṣuffah* “was not only a welfare shelter but also a school for the Qur'an's memorization and for teaching its rulings. The Prophet ﷺ used to deploy many of them [the people of *al-ṣuffah*] to the [different] tribes to teach them the Qur'an and the *fiqh* of the religion.”¹²¹

According to al-Bāqillānī, the circumstances and the characteristics of *ahl al-ṣuffah* necessitated that they memorize all of what was revealed of the Qur'an during their stay in it.¹²² Among their special characteristics, the people of *al-ṣuffah* never wavered in their commitment to the Qur'an or support for Islam. Their worship and certainty that they deserved Allah's praise in the Qur'an kept increasing.¹²³ Al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) stated that group recitation of the Qur'an is recommended by virtue of clear evidence and the practice of the early and late generations of scholars.¹²⁴

After the death of the Prophet ﷺ, the companions continued this legacy of Qur'anic education, and their students numbered in the thousands. Ibn 'Umar narrated about his father, “I have seen the Commander of the Faithful (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb sitting on the pulpit (*minbar*) while the immigrants (*muhājirūn*) and the *anṣār* were surrounding him; he was teaching them the religion and the Qur'an as a teacher teaches children.”¹²⁵ Qur'an programs and schools for children, which we know today as *maktab* or *kuttāb* across diverse Muslim cultures, are fruits of 'Umar's numerous contributions to Qur'anic education. Al-Nafrāwī (d. 1126) said,

¹²⁰ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 151–52.

¹²¹ Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-kawtharī*, 24.

¹²² Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 152–3.

¹²³ For a detailed account of the characteristics of *ahl al-ṣuffā*, see al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā*, 1:337–47.

¹²⁴ Al-Nawawī, *al-Tibyān fī ādāb ḥamalāt al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥajjār, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1996), 101.

¹²⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 186.

The first to gather children in the *maktab* was 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He ordered 'Āmir ibn 'Abdullāh al-Khuzā'ī to commit to teaching them [Qur'an] and 'Umar assigned him a salary from the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*). Among those children were the unintelligent and the intelligent. 'Umar ordered 'Āmir to write for the unintelligent on his tablet (*lawḥ*) and only to teach the intelligent without writing. 'Umar also made sure that the children learned things prone to fade with time such as [their] lineage, ethnicity, and tribal association. The children asked 'Umar to reduce their *maktab* hours, so he ordered their teacher to sit [for teaching only] from after *fajr* prayer to forenoon and from *zuhr* prayer to 'aṣr prayer, and then the children rested for the day.¹²⁶

When 'Umar came back to Medina after being gone for a month during the conquest of Sham, people missed him, so they went to receive him [outside the city]; the children journeyed almost 40 kilometers away from Medina to receive him. They met 'Umar on Thursday, spent the night with him, and came back to Medina together on Friday.¹²⁷ Since they were exhausted from the trip, 'Umar gave them Thursday and Friday off. This weekend “became a sunnah until the Day of Judgment. 'Umar made *du'ā* for anyone who applies this custom [sunnah] to be given [all] good and for anyone who cancels it to be restricted in their provision.”

128

Many other companions were themselves expert Qur'an teachers. Abū al-Dardā' was the leading Qur'an teacher of the Damascus mosque with more than 1600 students. He used to divide his classes into groups of ten and appoint an assistant instructor (*'arrīf*) for each group.¹²⁹ Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī was appointed as the envoy of Basra where he also taught the Qur'an. Despite the difficulty of assuming such public office, Abū Mūsā was known for his daily Qur'an teaching, organization of classes and direct supervision of teaching assistants at the Basra mosque. He once gathered the most advanced reciters of his students and they

¹²⁶ Aḥmad ibn Sālim al-Nafrāwī, *al-Fawākih al-dawānī 'alā risālat ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī*, ed. 'Abdulwāriṭh 'Alī, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 1:50–51.

¹²⁷ Al-Nafrāwī, *al-Fawākih al-dawānī*, 51.

¹²⁸ Al-Nafrāwī, *al-Fawākih al-dawānī*, 51.

¹²⁹ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-qurrā' al-kibār 'alā al-ṭabaqāt wa-l-a'ṣār*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūṭ et al., 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1988), 1:20.

numbered 300.¹³⁰ The companions, however, did not neglect the importance of combining memorization with the practice of Qur'anic teachings. Ibn Mas'ūd spent 22 years in Kūfah teaching Qur'an and *fiqh* to numerous students. A famous revolution against the Umayyads was led by a group known as “the army of *qurrā*” comprising 4000 of Ibn Mas'ūd's students and their students.¹³¹

A diverse Qur'anic community

Memorization and recitation of the Qur'an were not limited to a specific class in society. Males, females, children, people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, persons with disabilities, and enslaved people, all learned and memorized the Qur'an. It is beyond the scope of this article to cover the biographies of the many companions from such backgrounds who were reciters and memorizers. Nonetheless, the following examples showcase how some of them were among the leading authorities of Qur'an during and after the time of the Prophet ﷺ.

When 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb stormed into his sister Fāṭimah's house to confront her regarding her acceptance of Islam, he found she and her husband learning Sūrah Ṭāhā from the freed slave (*mawlā*) Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt. The indescribable impact of Ṭāhā's recitation, and his sister's devotion to her faith, eventually inspired 'Umar's conversion to Islam.

Another former slave, Sālim ibn Ma'qil, had once served Abū Ḥuthayfah ibn 'Utbah. Abū Ḥuthayfah's wife, Thubaytah, eventually freed him. Abū Ḥuthayfah adopted him (prior to the abolition of adopting non-biological children) and Sālim became known as *mawlā* Abū Ḥuthayfah. Sālim was an expert *qārī* who taught several companions, including his former master, the Qur'an. As one of the early Muslims who migrated to Medina before the Prophet ﷺ, Sālim used to lead

¹³⁰ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*, 1:256–58.

¹³¹ Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-kawtharī*, 33.

them in prayer since he was the most expert in Qur'an. Among those who prayed behind Sālim were the likes of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.¹³²

While narrating the story of the false accusations against her, 'Ā'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, described herself saying, "I was a young girl and I did not know much of the Qur'an."¹³³ This statement implies that her knowledge of Qur'an was limited because of her young age and that adult women used to know much of it.¹³⁴ Indeed, the Prophet's ﷺ wives, such as 'Ā'ishah, Ḥaḥṣah, and Umm Salamah, did not only memorize much of the Qur'an but also witnessed the descent of the revelation in their houses. They saw how the Prophet ﷺ received the Qur'an from Jibrīl and how he taught it to people, and they followed his example in teaching it to women and men. In addition to being listed among the *qurrā'* from the companions, some of the Prophet's wives, especially 'Ā'ishah and Umm Salamah, were among the *qirā'āt* transmitters.¹³⁵ Several Hadith compilers reported some of the *qirā'āt* the Prophet recited through 'Ā'ishah and Umm Salamah.¹³⁶

One of the female memorizers of the Qur'an was Umm Waraqah bint 'Abdullāh ibn al-Ḥārith al-Anṣārī, who the Prophet ﷺ used to call the martyr (*shahīdah*). He used to visit her and ask his companions to join him saying, "Let's go visit the *shahīdah*." He approved of her having a person (*mu'adhdhin*) to raise the call to prayer (*adhān*) specifically for her at her house.¹³⁷ The Prophet's ﷺ prophecy came true when she was killed during the reign of 'Umar by one of her servants.¹³⁸

Hujaymah bint Ḥuyayy, known as Umm al-Dardā' and Abū al-Dardā''s wife, was one of the famous memorizers of the Qur'an. She was highly dedicated to learning

¹³² Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād et al., 7th ed., 25 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1990), 1:167–70.

¹³³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4141.

¹³⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 147.

¹³⁵ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr*, 1:6.

¹³⁶ See for example, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2931 and 2938.

¹³⁷ *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, no. 591; *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 27351.

¹³⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:224. Al-Suyūṭī said that he was the first to list Umm Waraqah among the memorizers of the Qur'an.

and teaching it and is reported to have said, “I love to read it [exactly] as it was revealed.”¹³⁹

Asmā' bint Yazīd ibn al-Sakan (or Umm 'Āmir al-Ashmaliyyah) was a famous reciter who had scribes write parts of the Qur'an for her. She participated in the compilation of the Qur'an during the time of Abū Bakr and shared her memorization with Zayd ibn Thābit, the head of the compilation committee, alongside a personal copy transcribed by Ubayy ibn Ka'b.¹⁴⁰ She was reported to have said, “I [learned how to] read 21 *sūrahs* before the Prophet ﷺ moved to us from Mecca.”¹⁴¹

During his lifetime, the Prophet ﷺ frequently instructed his companions to teach their children the Qur'an, many of whom memorized significant portions of it. For example, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās memorized all of *al-mufaṣṣal* when he was 13 years old. After the Prophet ﷺ moved to Medina, Zayd ibn Thābit was brought to him by people who told the Prophet ﷺ, “This is a young boy who has memorized from what Allah has sent down upon you 17 *sūrahs*.” The Prophet ﷺ was impressed and instructed him, “O Zayd, learn the writing style [or the language] of the Jews. Indeed, by Allah I do not trust them concerning my book [the Qur'an].” Within 15 days, at the ripe age of 11 years, Zayd had learned their language and began translating their messages to the Prophet ﷺ and writing his responses to them.¹⁴² Zayd's role in orally and textually preserving the Qur'an was exceptional, as will be discussed below.

The Prophet's sunnah of teaching children the Qur'an was earnestly adopted by his companions and their successors, who followed his exact style of reading in the manner we know today through the science of *tajwīd*.

The first generation [of this *ummah*] did not recite the Qur'an nor teach it to children except in [the style of proper] recitation

¹³⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 148.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 148.

¹⁴¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 148.

¹⁴² Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 149–50.

(*murattalan*) and articulation (*mujawwdan*). A child did not graduate from the *maktab* until he was fully skilled in reciting the Qur'an; the only thing missing for him was knowing the rules and terminologies that are called today the science of *tajwīd*. Moreover, they [the first generation] used to also teach their children in the *maktab* the obscure words of the Qur'an (*gharīb al-Qur'an*),¹⁴³ some of its morals and the Arab's poetry that contain them, a summary of the principles of creed and *fiqh* mentioned in the Qur'an, and some hadiths that described the Prophet's morals.¹⁴⁴

Hence, the child graduated the *maktab* sufficiently knowledgeable in language, hadith, poetry, creed, and *fiqh*. If such an amount were the only religious education he obtained, it would have sufficed him for all necessary worldly and religious matters.¹⁴⁵

The memorizers of Qur'an among the companions

The Qur'an's widespread dissemination across all classes of society in the early Muslim community did not undermine the accuracy of its oral transmission. Indeed, the Qur'an was constantly being mass recited and taught in the most correct wording and precise articulation. As noted earlier, the incentives to memorize, preserve, and teach the Qur'an superseded those of pre-Islamic poetry. In addition to uncountable stories illustrating the companions' dedication to memorizing, studying, and reciting the Qur'an in prayers day and night, the *sīrah* documents the names and biographies of tens of them who were given the titles of *qurrā'* or *ḥuffāz*.

The title *qurrā'* was commonly attributed to the *ḥuffāz* of the Qur'an revealed up to the time they were given the title. Later, the title *qurrā'* only referenced those who had memorized the Qur'an in its entirety. The term also acquired different designations across disciplines such as *qirā'āt* and *fiqh*. Contrary to the term's classical connotation in the morphological and Qur'anic literature as being related

¹⁴³ For the meaning of *gharīb al-Qur'an*, see Wahn, "An Introduction to 'Ulūm al-Qur'an."

¹⁴⁴ Muḥammad Ḥasnayn Makhlūf al-'Adawī, *Unwān al-bayān fī 'ulūm al-tibyān* (Cairo: Matbat al-Ma'āhid, 1925), 28–29.

¹⁴⁵ Al-'Adawī, *Unwān al-bayān*, 29.

to ‘reciters,’ a modern view of the term *qurrā'* contends that villagers (*ahl al-qurā'*) were confused with reciters, *qurrā'*, which the former exploited to gain political and social prestige.¹⁴⁶ It is unlikely that many Muslims fell into such a rudimentary error. Furthermore, even if this imposed distinction was historically and morphologically valid,¹⁴⁷ it “does not strictly undermine the historical existence of a concomitant class of readers.”¹⁴⁸ As shown below, the *qurrā'* title emerged as early as the fourth year after the *hijra*.

The *qurrā'* were at the forefront of successive battles and wars during the lifetime and after the death of the Prophet ﷺ, which raised concerns about the loss of the Qur'an's bearers. In 4/625, a few months after the martyrdom of 70 companions in the battle of Uḥud, about 80 other companions (known to be *qurrā'*) were deceitfully martyred in the two expeditions of al-Rajī' (a name of a well eight miles away from Asfan) and Bi'r Ma'ūnah (a name of well in Hijaz whose exact location is not well-identified). These 80 companions were sent by the Prophet ﷺ upon the request of some non-Muslim tribes to teach their people the Qur'an and the basics of Islam.

Al-Rajī' is a tragic story of a cunning plot by the 'Aḍal and Qārrah tribes, who killed eight of the Prophet's ten envoys and handed the other two to Quraysh who killed them in continuation of their revenge on Muslims. Before receiving the news about al-Rajī' 's group, the Prophet sent 70 companions to the Arab leader, Mālik ibn 'Āmir,¹⁴⁹ who had requested a group of *qurrā'* to teach his people. Mālik rejected the Prophet's ﷺ invitation to become Muslim but showed interest in learning more about Islam alongside his people. Despite the Prophet's ﷺ

¹⁴⁶ Mohammad Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Juynboll also held a similar view; however, he confined its relevance to a specific period of the early Islamic tradition. G. H. A. Juynboll, “The Qurrā' in Early Islamic History,” *Journal of the Economical and Social History of the Orient* 16, no. 2 (1973). Furthering his thesis, Juynboll authored two subsequent works on the topic of *qurrā'*: “The Position of Qur'an Recitation in Early Islam,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974), and “The Qur'an Reciter on the Battlefield and Concomitant Issues,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 125 (1975).

¹⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion on this presumed distinction, see Mustafa Shah, “The Quest for the Origins of the Qurrā' in the Classical Islamic Tradition,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005).

¹⁴⁸ Shah, “Quest for the Origins of the Qurrā',” 20.

¹⁴⁹ For the names and biographies of many of the Bi'r Ma'ūnah martyrs, see al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 6:97–100.

reluctance to dispatch his companions in large numbers to the Najd areas, which at the time hosted many of his enemies, he honored the protection (*jiwār*) promised by Mālik. Dishonorably, Mālik's nephew, 'Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, called upon some of his allies to kill the entire group while it was camped around Bi'r Ma'ūnah. Sixty-nine of them were killed; only one injured survivor was able to make it back to Medina, where he died a couple of years later. It is narrated that Allah had revealed a verse stating His pleasure with those companions, but the verse was later abrogated.¹⁵⁰ Many supernatural wonders (*karāmāt*) that these companions experienced before and after death are widely documented in the *sīrah* literature.

Bi'r Ma'ūnah's *qurrā'* were known for two distinct qualities: their knowledge of the Qur'an and their commitment to social services. Anas ibn Mālik said, "We used to call them the *qurrā'*. They used to cut wood during the day and pray all night."

¹⁵¹ Their occupation during the day was logging; they used to collect and store wood near the rooms of the Prophet's ﷺ wives and the *ṣuffah* for Muslims who were in need of it. They were reported to always be busy in the evenings with learning Qur'an and praying in groups. One narration affirms that "their families used to think that they were always at the Mosque, and the people of the *ṣuffah* always used to think they were with their families."¹⁵² Their passing grievously saddened the Prophet ﷺ. Anas said, "Never did I see the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in so much grief [at the loss of a] small army as I saw him in grief for those 70 men who were called *qurrā'* (and were killed) at Bi'r Ma'ūnah; and he invoked curses for a full month upon their murderers."¹⁵³

The Prophet's invocation, mentioned by Anas, was practiced in congregational prayers (known as *qunūt*). Distinct from other types of *qunūt*, this practice of the Prophet ﷺ legislated what is known in *fiqh* to be the *qunūt* of calamities (*qunūt al-nawāzil*) which Muslims practice until today when a calamity afflicts them. The Prophet's *qunūt*, which reflected his deep grief over the *qurrā'*, was not due to a

¹⁵⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3064.

¹⁵¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3064.

¹⁵² *Al-Ṣāliḥī*, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 6:92.

¹⁵³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 677.

lack of contentment with their passing. Rather, as al-Asnawī (d. 772/1370) points out, the Prophet ﷺ made *qunūt* focused on “averting the rebellion of [those] killers and requiting the calamity of Muslims by [asking for] successors for them because they were [a group of] the brave *qurrā'*.”¹⁵⁴

Identifying or recognizing companions based on their association with the Qur'an or certain parts of it was a common phenomenon that demonstrates the centrality of the Qur'an in the community's life. For example, some companions were called ‘the people of Sūrah al-Baqarah,’ which was, according to al-Bāqillānī, a metaphor for those who had memorized the whole Qur'an.¹⁵⁵ Al-Bāqillānī explained that since al-Baqarah is the longest and the most difficult *sūrah* to memorize, it was rare for the companions to start their memorization with it. Rather, they used to start with the short chapters from *al-mufaṣṣal* and would only memorize al-Baqarah after memorizing most of the other revealed parts of the Qur'an. This was the custom of the early immigrants, those who had a long companionship with the Prophet ﷺ, and those who embraced Islam later or at a young age.

The concern over losing the *qurrā'* in wars only increased with time. From the incidents of al-Rajī' and Bi'r Ma'ūnah to other major battles such as Ḥunayn, and even shortly after the death of the Prophet ﷺ in the Battle of al-Yamāmah where 40 *qurrā'* were martyred, the need to both orally and textually preserve the Qur'an became a critical communal obligation. However, the number of remaining *qurrā'* after al-Yamāmah likely exceeded the known total of 120 martyred. This can be inferred from 'Umar's fear that “if *qurrā'* continue to be killed in large numbers in other battles, a large portion of the Qur'an will be lost.”¹⁵⁶ 'Umar made this comment to Abū Bakr when advising him of the importance of textually compiling the Qur'an, after highlighting that “extensive killing” had already taken place. These deliberations resulted in the multistage process of compiling and transcribing the Qur'an. 'Umar's (and other companions') fear over the loss of

¹⁵⁴ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asnawī, *al-Muhimmāt fī sharḥ al-Rawḍah wal-Rāfi'ī*, ed. Aḥmad 'Alī, 1st ed., 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2009), 3:81.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 151.

¹⁵⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4986.

qurrā' did not betray a lack of conviction in the Divine promise to protect the Qur'an. They were simply following the Prophet's example of utilizing every means possible to preserve the text, recognizing that the heavenly promise would be manifested in their human efforts.

The number of memorizers (*ḥuffāz*) during the time of the Prophet ﷺ

Undoubtedly, there were many memorizers and bearers of the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Teaching Qur'an was regarded as such a sacred act of worship that the companions were discouraged from accepting compensation for teaching it, which resulted in juristic differences among the schools of law over the validity of being compensated for Qur'anic teaching. As shown above, various hadith reports, the *sīrah*, and the biographies of the Prophet's companions provide clear evidence for the wide oral transmission (*tawātur*) of the Qur'an.

A handful of seemingly contradictory hadiths list four, five, or six memorizers among the companions.¹⁵⁷ Some scholars reconcile the differing numbers by interpreting the reports as 1) a subjective preference for or comparison between certain groups of the companions, or 2) placing an emphasis on a particular level of mastery of the Qur'an. Other scholars consider the reports to be 3) inauthentic in terms of their *isnād* or meaning due to inadequacies in numbering or historical events, 4) contradicted by a large number of other reports stating the memorization of many companions, or 5) counteracted by the practical difficulty of encompassing the exact number of memorizers in such circumstances of ongoing revelation and mass education.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ For a review of many of these narrations and a treatment of reconciling them, see al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, 1:105-7.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, 1:105-7; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:219-24; al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 164-81; Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Māziri, *al-Mu'lim bi fawā'id Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad al-Nayfār, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Tunisia: Bayt al-Ḥikma, 1987), 3:262-65.

Putting together several reports compiled by, for instance, al-Bāqillānī in *al-Intiṣār*, al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, and al-Qaṣṭalānī in *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* establishes that 21 companions memorized the entire Qur'an during the life of the Prophet ﷺ. The number reaches 23 by including Mujammi', who is said to have memorized all of it except for two or three chapters,¹⁵⁹ and Abdulwāḥid, whose companionship with the Prophet is disputable.¹⁶⁰ This number excludes the companions who completed their memorization after the death of the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Qāsim ibn Sallām's list, as reported by al-Suyūṭī, includes 13 more companions who finished memorizing the Qur'an after the Prophet ﷺ passed.

Despite the companions numbering in the tens of thousands, why are there only a few of them documented as *ḥuffāz*? The *arḍ* of the entire Qur'an required close proximity to the Prophet ﷺ over a lengthy period, especially since the Qur'an was revealed over 23 years. Moreover, the gradualness of revelation may have prevented many companions from declaring that they themselves had memorized the entire text since they were uncertain about what would be revealed or abrogated from what they already had memorized, let alone testifying for the memorization of others. After describing these factors, al-Bāqillānī commented,

If that was necessarily the case, the number of the memorizers of all of what was revealed was not popularly known. It was not possible for them to know. Hence, it is not improbable that a number of the companions memorized [the entire] Qur'an during the time of the Prophet without declaring that about themselves and without others telling about them. The reason is that memorization cannot be widely known except after the Prophet's death, the cease of the revelation, and knowing the last revealed parts of the Qur'an, and that a *sūrah* has been fully completed, structured, and arranged with its verses [in the *muṣḥaf*].¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:222.

¹⁶⁰ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 89–90.

¹⁶¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 176–7.

It is also possible that many companions memorized the entire Qur'an but concealed that fact to avoid the boasting that nullifies God's reward.¹⁶² Multiple reports show the companions' wariness of publicly declaring their memorization of the Qur'an. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 101/728) was reported to have said, "We have witnessed people, one of whom has memorized the [entire] Qur'an without their neighbor knowing. And we have witnessed people for whom there is no deed they can perform in secret that will be publicized at all."¹⁶³ Those who declared their memorization may have done so for reasons they deemed beneficial for the community.

Companions would also generally refrain from describing a person as a memorizer of the Qur'an in case said person had mistakenly missed a verse or a word. Indeed, evidence suggests that they avoided bestowing such a title on anyone who did not memorize the whole Qur'an, its abrogated verses, and modes of recitation and *aḥruf*¹⁶⁴ through direct learning from the Prophet ﷺ. The companions also did not deem anyone a memorizer merely for committing the Qur'an to memory. Instead, memorizers also had to know the legal rulings of the Qur'an and abide by them. A man told Abū al-Dardā' once, "This son of mine has compiled (i.e., memorized) the Qur'an." Abū al-Dardā' said, "O Allah, I ask for your forgiveness! The one who compiled (i.e., memorized) the Qur'an is [only] the one who listens to it and obeys."¹⁶⁵ Thus, it is not surprising for the likes of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb to say, upon hearing 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir's beautiful voice as he recited Sūrah al-Tawbah, that it was as if he did not know it was revealed.¹⁶⁶ There is no chance that 'Umar did not know of the *sūrah*, especially since it was publicly recited during *ḥajj* and widely taught for its commandments and admonitions. His comment thus confirms that mere retention is not what defines a person of the Qur'an.

¹⁶² Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 177.

¹⁶³ Ibn al-Mubārak, *al-Zuhd*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A'zamī (India: Majlis Iḥyā' al-Ma'ārif, 1966), 45.

¹⁶⁴ For more details on the concept of *aḥruf*, see Yousef Wahb, "Can the Qur'an Be Recited in Different Ways? The Meaning and Wisdom of Qira'at," *Yaqaen*, April 13, 2022,

<https://yaqaeninstitute.org/read/paper/can-the-quran-be-recited-in-different-ways-the-meaning-and-wisdom-of-qiraat>

¹⁶⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 178. Ibn Ḥajar reported it in *al-Faḥḥ* and said that Aḥmad reported it in *al-Zuhd*. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalanī, *Faḥḥ al-Bārī*, 9:51.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 179.

A similarly high threshold is evident in the juristic interpretation of the Prophet's statement on who is the most qualified to lead prayers: "The person who is best versed in the recitation of the Book of Allah should lead the prayer."¹⁶⁷ Is the best in Qur'anic recitation someone who is an expert *qārī* or knowledgeable of law (*fiqh*)? In explaining the Shāfi'ī school's position of giving priority of leading prayers to a person of *fiqh*, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) said,

The apparent meaning of the hadith implies giving precedence to the best in Qur'anic recitation. However, al-Shāfi'ī interpreted the hadith and explained it in the truest manner, saying that it was common among the companions that the best in Qur'anic recitation is the best in *fiqh*. It was reported that they used to learn the Qur'an five verses in a row, and did not move beyond them [to new verses] until they learned what they contain [of rulings] and applied them. Hence, the *qurrā'* were jurists at that time.¹⁶⁸

Thus, out of reverence for God's Book and a stringently high standard for what counts as true memorization, the companions avoided proclaiming themselves or others memorizers or collectors of the Qur'an. Although this makes it challenging to identify the exact number of *ḥuffāz* from the companions, it also confirms that they were numerous.

The existing data illustrate the following points about the oral preservation of the Qur'anic text:¹⁶⁹

1. In addition to mass delivery, the entirety of the text was conveyed by the Prophet ﷺ to a group of his companions in his lifetime.
2. The large number of memorizers guaranteed the accuracy of transmission, with an available channel for review or correction embodied in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ.

¹⁶⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 673.

¹⁶⁸ 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī, *Nihāyat al-maṭlab fī dirāyat al-madhhab*, ed. 'Abd al-Azīm al-Dīb (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2007), 2:415–16.

¹⁶⁹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 90.

3. The number of *ḥuffāz* was sufficient to establish *tawātur*—sure knowledge (*‘ilm yaqīnī*) of its being true, according to the preponderant opinion that *tawātur* does not require a particular number of transmitters.¹⁷⁰ Rather, *tawātur* is established by the transmission of a group that unanimously reports something; the concordant transmission of its members renders the report's falsity highly unlikely.¹⁷¹ Those who stipulated a particular number of transmitters differed broadly over the actual number, ranging from four to more than a hundred.¹⁷² Regardless of the specific number, it is agreed that wide transmission must occur in every link in the chain. If a report lacks group transmission in even one link, it is not *mutawātir*. Hence, there is a well-established *tawātur* of the entire Qur'an by a sufficient number of companions. The widespread dissemination of the Qur'an and firm religious commitment to it by the first Muslim generation suggests that there could have been more *ḥuffāz* among the companions.
4. The application of the particulars of *tawātur* to the first recipients of the Qur'an should not neglect the role of mass transmission. Thousands of other companions memorized different portions of the Qur'an, collectively preserving a complete account of the entire text. The late scholar al-Kawtharī (d. 1952) said,

One habit of the companions was to teach the Qur'an piecemeal. They would teach one person chapters and teach another person other chapters so that each of them might bear their [distinct] portion of memorization to increase the number of memorizers in all possible means. Hence, some memorized the entire Qur'an, and others only memorized select chapters which were memorized by many others. Thus, the rest of the Qur'an was distributed over groups [of people]. [Additionally, among] those who were not memorizers ... one of them would always recognize if a reciter made a mistake [in recitation].

¹⁷⁰ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Nuzhat al-naẓar fī tawdīḥ nukhbat al-fikr fī muṣṭalaḥ ahl al-athar*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr (Karachi: al-Buṣhrā Publishers, 2011), 37; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ taqrīb al-Nawāwī*, ed. Naẓar al-Faryābī, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Kawthar, 1995), 1:627.

¹⁷¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Nuzhat al-naẓar*, 37.

¹⁷² Al-‘Asqalānī, *Nuzhat al-naẓar*, 37; al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī*, 1:627.

This was because of their significant recitation of, and continuous listening to, the Qur'an.¹⁷³

This collective transmission constitutes another layer of *tawātur* and represents a type of mass supervision over the delivery of the Qur'an that guarantees its protection against change or distortion.

All in all, even if only a few companions had memorized the Qur'an, as some may argue, it is not necessary for every single transmitter to have memorized and transmitted every part of the text. Rather, for large texts to achieve *tawātur* status, it is sufficient that a large number of transmitters collectively transmit their parts. Al-Māziri (d. 536/1141) analogized this argument to the transmission of the famous pre-Islamic ode of Imru' al-Qays, "Halt, you two companions, and let us weep" (*qifā nabki*). If 100 different men each memorized a verse of the poem, the poem would have still been considered *mutawātir*.¹⁷⁴ The inimitable composition of the Qur'an was enough incentive for the companions, irrespective of any religious motivations, to memorize it.

The first *Ṭabaqah* of *Qurrā'* (1st century)

The different generations (*ṭabaqāt*) of *qurrā'* from the time of the companions to later centuries are documented in multiple biographical works showcasing the uninterrupted chains of delivering and teaching the Qur'an. These works include *Ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'* by Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444/1053), *Ma'rifat al-qurrā' al-kibār 'alā al-ṭabaqāt wa-l-a'ṣār* by al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), and *Ghāyat al-nihāyah fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'* by Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429). Since al-Dānī's book is not in print today, al-Dhahabī's *Ma'rifat al-qurrā'* is considered one of the most notable works in the field. Ibn al-Jazarī stated in the introduction of his work that it encompassed the content of al-Dhahabī's and, thankfully, al-Dānī's works. Moreover, al-Dhahabī's *Ma'rifat al-qurrā'* drew the attention of scholars like Tāj al-Dīn ibn Maktūm (d. 749/1348), who supplemented it with 20 more biographies,

¹⁷³ Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-kawtharī*, 25.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Māziri, *al-Mu'lim*, 3:263.

and Najm al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Hāshimī (d. 885/1480), who rearranged it alphabetically.

In *Ma'rifat al-qurrā' al-kibār*, al-Dhahabī classified 18 generations from the time of the Prophet ﷺ to the 8th/14th century, with a total number of 734 *qurrā'*. Al-Dhahabī listed seven companions who received the Qur'an directly from the Prophet ﷺ as the first class and 12 of their students as the second class. This article will focus only on the first and the second *ṭabaqāt*.

The seven companions whom al-Dhahabī listed in the first *ṭabaqah* are:¹⁷⁵

1. 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (d. 35/656), one of the Prophet's ﷺ scribes of revelation and the Caliph after which the codex of the final compilation of the Qur'an was named (*muṣḥaf 'Uthmān*). 'Uthmān was known for his constant recitation of the Qur'an. He was reported to have recited the entire Qur'an in one *rak'ah* of the night prayer.¹⁷⁶
2. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), one of the Prophet's ﷺ scribes. He praised 'Uthmān's compilation of the Qur'an, and he was the teacher of Ibn 'Abbās in Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*). 'Alī taught one of the most famous *qurrā'* of the *tābi'ūn* Abū 'Abduraḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 74/693), who testified that 'Alī was the most expert Qur'an reciter.¹⁷⁷ Once the Prophet ﷺ died, 'Alī was occupied with compiling the Qur'an and arranging it chronologically in the order of its revelation, which is said to be the reason for his late pledge to Abū Bakr's appointment as a Caliph.
3. Ubayy ibn Ka'b (d. 35/656), described by the Prophet ﷺ as the most expert reciter of this *ummah*. The Prophet ﷺ once said that Allah commanded him to read to Ubayy. Ubayy was a member of 'Uthmān's committee that transcribed the Qur'an in its final style and order.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-qurrā'*, 1:24–42.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Bāqillānī dedicated a chapter to the virtues of 'Uthmān and his memorization and knowledge of the Quran. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 189–90.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Bāqillānī dedicated a chapter to the virtues of 'Alī and his memorization and knowledge of the Quran. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 191–93.

4. ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 32/560), about whom the Prophet ﷺ said, “I approve for my *ummah* whatever Ibn Umm ‘Abd [Ibn Mas‘ūd’s nickname] approves for them.”¹⁷⁸ He ﷺ also said, “Whoever would like to recite the Qur’an fresh as it was revealed, let him recite it according to the recitation of Ibn Umm ‘Abd.”¹⁷⁹ Among the Prophet’s companions, Ibn Mas‘ūd is considered the greatest contributor to the mass teaching of the Qur’an.¹⁸⁰
5. Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 45/665), one of the Prophet’s primary scribes and the head of both Abū Bakr’s and ‘Uthmān’s committees. In the battle of Tabūk, the Prophet ﷺ assigned him the flag of his tribe, Banū al-Najjār, and said to him, “Qur’an [always] leads.”¹⁸¹
6. Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (d. 44-52/664-72). The Prophet ﷺ, praising his beautiful voice, said, “This man has been given a *mizmār* [a melodic instrument] among the *mazāmīr* [plural of *mizmār*] of the family of Dāwūd, peace be upon him.”¹⁸²
7. Abū al-Dardā’ al-Anṣārī (d. 32/652) established the Qur’an’s teaching circles in Damascus’s mosque and led the dissemination of the Qur’an in the Syrian region.

Muḥammad Jabal supplemented al-Dhahabī’s first generation list with six other companions who fulfilled the conditions of ‘*arḍ* or *iqrā*’ to the Prophet ﷺ, teaching students, and being in the *isnād* of the ten canonical *qirā’āt*. Based on extrapolations from various biographical works, these six companions are:

1. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) explicitly stated that the Prophet ﷺ taught him the Qur’an. Several accounts evince ‘Umar’s memorization of the entire Qur’an. Multiple narrations document his leading of the prayers

¹⁷⁸ *Mustadrak al-Hākim*, no. 5387.

¹⁷⁹ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 138.

¹⁸⁰ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 93. Ibn al-Jazarī counted twelve of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s students, all of whom had taught the Qur’an. Abū al-Khayr ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā*, ed. Gotthelf Bergsträsser, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2006), 1:458.

¹⁸¹ *Mustadrak al-Hākim*, no. 421.

¹⁸² *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 1020.

with several long chapters of the Qur'an.¹⁸³ Ibn Mas'ūd testified to his memorization and said "He was the best reciter of the Qur'an among us."¹⁸⁴ 'Umar is in the *isnād* of six canonical *qirā'āt*¹⁸⁵ which confirms his direct reception from the Prophet ﷺ and his contributions as a Qur'an teacher. Moreover, 'Umar was known for revelation validating his views five times.¹⁸⁶ Some *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* works dedicated a sub-discipline to parts of the Qur'an that came to affirm what some of the companions expressed.¹⁸⁷ A sign of 'Umar's unique connection with the Qur'an is found in al-Suyūṭī's statement that this sub-discipline is founded on the Qur'an's agreements with 'Umar, to which scholars have dedicated independent books.¹⁸⁸

2. Wāthilah ibn al-Asqa' (d. 85/704), reported by his student Ibn 'Āmir (d. 118/736), the canonical *qārī*, to have read to the Prophet ﷺ.¹⁸⁹
3. Mu'ādh ibn Jabal (d. 18/639), one of four companions from whom the Prophet ﷺ instructed people to learn the Qur'an. He was sent to the Levant, alongside Abū al-Dardā', to teach people Qur'an. Ibn 'Āmir read to both of them.
4. Faḍālah ibn 'Ubayd (d. 53/672), reported to have read to the Prophet ﷺ. Ibn 'Āmir was also reported to hold Faḍālah's personal codex following Faḍālah's recitation.¹⁹⁰
5. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 74/), reported by Ibn al-Jazarī to have narrated different readings,¹⁹¹ which confirms his reading to the Prophet ﷺ. Ibn 'Umar is in the *isnād* of three canonical *qirā'āt*.¹⁹²

¹⁸³ Al-Bāqillānī dedicated a chapter to the virtues of 'Umar and his memorization and knowledge of the Qur'an. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 186.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 188.

¹⁸⁵ Ibn Kathīr, Abū 'Amr, Ḥamzah, Al-Kisā'ī, Ya'qūb, and Khalaf. Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 33–34.

¹⁸⁶ These are praying behind the Station (*maqām*) of Ibrahim, the veils for the mothers of the believers, reminding them that Allah may replace them with better wives for the Prophet, executing captives, and the completion of verse 23:14.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 124–26.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 124.

¹⁸⁹ 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā' wa-kamāl al-iqrā'*, ed. 'Alī Ḥusayn al-Bawwāb, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Mecca: Maktabat al-Turāth, 1987), 2:455.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā'*, 2:455.

¹⁹¹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya*, 1:437–38.

¹⁹² Nāfi', Abū 'Amr, and Ya'qūb.

6. Anas ibn Mālik (d. 91/533) was very close to the Prophet ﷺ and served as his servant for ten years. Ibn al-Jazarī said in his biography that “he transmitted the Qur'an from the Prophet ﷺ through hearing.” While hearing seems to be a lower level than *'ard*, it is considered a substitute for *'ard*, especially in this case since Anas, given his long companionship, is likely to have also done *'ard* to the Prophet.¹⁹³

Jabal added three more companions known to be knowledgeable of the Qur'an and likely to have also taught others: Abū Bakr, 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit (d. 34/655), and 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir (d. 58/678). Indeed, Abū Bakr is known to have led Muslims in prayer several times, often with long chapters that only skilled memorizers could recite in prayer.¹⁹⁴ Practicing his instruction that “the person who is best versed in the recitation of the Book of Allah, should lead the prayer,”¹⁹⁵ the Prophet ﷺ appointed Abū Bakr to lead the main congregation, comprising the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār*, when he was sick.¹⁹⁶ Being the best of the Prophet's companions, Abū Bakr was undoubtedly one of their best *qurrā'*.

The biographies of the abovementioned companions (the seven mentioned by al-Dhahabī and the six added by Jabal) illustrate common characteristics regarding their knowledge of the Qur'an. Specifically, they all:

- 1- Read directly to the Prophet ﷺ, as explicitly or implicitly mentioned in authentic reports.
- 2- Received the Qur'an orally, not in writing.
- 3- Memorized the entire Qur'an.
- 4- Taught a generation of companions and successors.
- 5- Come at the top of the *isnāds* of the ten canonical *qirā'āt*.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 42.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Bāqillānī dedicated a chapter to the virtues of Abū Bakr and his memorization and knowledge of the Qur'an. Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 182–85.

¹⁹⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 673.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 221–22.

¹⁹⁷ Wahb, “Can the Quran be Recited in Different Ways?”

Hence, employing the *tawātur* theory, “the Qur’an’s *isnād* was never interrupted nor subjected to solitary transmission (*āḥād*) since the time of the Prophet ﷺ.”¹⁹⁸

The second *Ṭabaqah* of *Qurrā'* (1st and early 2nd century)

Al-Dhahabī listed three companions and nine *tābi'ūn* who read to other companions of the Prophet ﷺ based on the criteria that: 1) each one of them recited the Qur'an to one or more companions of the first *ṭabaqah* (only the aforementioned list of seven companions compiled by al-Dhahabī), and 2) all 12 of the second *ṭabaqah* are links in the *isnāds* of the ten canonical *qirā'āt*.¹⁹⁹ Jabal complemented al-Dhahabī's list, following al-Dhahabī's criteria, with 14 other companions. Al-Dhahabī's list includes:

- 1- Abū Hurayrah (d. 57-8/676-7), a late convert to Islam (7th/628) who nonetheless was a *ṣuffah* resident who committed all his time to the Prophet ﷺ. He is widely known for his transmission of hadith and is reported to have read the Qur'an directly to the Prophet ﷺ.²⁰⁰ Abū Hurayrah read to Ubayy ibn Ka'b and taught 'Abduraḥmān al-'Araj, who was one of Nāfi's (d. 169/785) teachers (one of the ten canonical *qurrā'*). Abū Hurayrah taught Abū Ja'far (d. 130/747), who is also reported to have taught Abū 'Amr (d. 154/770). Both are from the ten *qurrā'*.
- 2- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/555), the most famous exegete among the companions, who read to Ubayy and Zayd. Ibn 'Abbās taught Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, Sulaymān ibn Qattah al-Baṣrī, 'Ikrimah ibn Khālid al-Makhzūmī, and Abū Ja'far. Out of the ten *qurrā'*, Ibn 'Abbās is in the *isnād* of the *qirā'āt* of Abū Ja'far, Nāfi', Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/737), and Abū 'Amr.
- 3- 'Abdullāh ibn al-Sā'ib (d. before 70/557) was a very young companion who learned from Ubayy and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He taught Mujāhid

¹⁹⁸ Wahb, “An Introduction to *‘Ulūm al-Qur'an*.”

¹⁹⁹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 60.

²⁰⁰ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 42.

- ibn Jabr and Ibn Kathīr. Ibn al-Sā'ib is in the *isnād* of Ibn Kathīr and Abū 'Amr.
- 4- Al-Mughīrah ibn Abī Shihāb al-Makhzūmī (d. 91/709), a *tābi'ī* who read to 'Uthmān and taught Ibn 'Āmir.
 - 5- Ḥiṭṭān ibn 'Abdullāh al-Raqāshī (d. after 70/557), a *tābi'ī* who read to Abū Mūsā al-Ashā'irī and taught al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, his link to the reading of Abū 'Amr.
 - 6- Al-Aswad ibn Yazīd al-Nakha'ī (d. 75/562), a *tābi'ī* who read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Yaḥyā al-Asadī and Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, among others. Al-Aswad is in the *isnād* of Hamzah and al-Kisā'ī.
 - 7- 'Alqamah ibn Qays al-Nakha'ī (d. 62/681) a *tābi'ī* who was born during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and learned from Ibn Mas'ūd who told him, “If the Prophet ﷺ had seen you, he would have been pleased with you.”²⁰¹ 'Alqamah taught Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, 'Ubayd ibn Naḍlah, and Yaḥyā ibn Waththāb. 'Alqamah is in the *isnād* of Hamzah (d. 156/722), al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/804), and Khalaf (d. 229/843).
 - 8- Abū 'Abdulrahmān al-Sulamī (d. after 70/557), a *tābi'ī* and a son of a companion who read to the most prominent *qurrā'* of the companions including 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubayy, and Zayd (to whom he read the Qur'an 13 times). Among his students were al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (the Prophet's grandsons), 'Āṣim (one of the ten *qurrā'*), 'Atā' ibn al-Sā'ib, Abū Ishāq al-Subay'ī. Ibn Mujāhid said, “The first to teach Kūfans the agreed upon reading that conforms to 'Uthmān's codex was Abū 'Abdulrahmān al-Sulamī.”²⁰² Al-Sulamī taught in Kūfah for 40 years until he died at the age of 90. Al-Sulamī is in the *isnād* of 'Āṣim, Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
 - 9- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Makhzūmī (d. after 70/557), a *tābi'ī* who read to Ubayy and taught Abū Ja'far, Shaybah ibn Naṣṣah, 'Abdulrahmān ibn Hurmuz, Muslim ibn Jundub, and Yazīd ibn Rumān—all of whom were among Nāfi's teachers. Ibn 'Ayyāsh is in the *isnād* of Abū Ja'far, Nāfi, and Abū 'Amr.

²⁰¹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 55.

²⁰² Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab'a fī al-qirā'āt*, ed. Shawqī Ḍayf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1979), 68.

- 10- Abū al-Rajā' al-'Uṭāridī (d. 105/723), a *tābi'ī* who became Muslim during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ but never saw him and died at the age of 127 or 130. Al-'Uṭāridī read to Abū Mūsā al-Asha'rī and Ibn 'Abbās and taught Abū al-Ashhab al-'Uṭāridī who taught Ya'qūb (one of the ten *qurrā'*).
- 11- Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī (d. 69/689), a *tābi'ī* who became Muslim during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ but never saw him. Al-Du'alī read to 'Uthmān, 'Alī, and taught his son Abū Ḥarb, Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur, and Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim. Al-Du'alī is in the *isnād* of Abū 'Amr and Hamzah.
- 12- Abū al-'Āliyah al-Riyāḥī (d. 90-6/708-14), a *tābi'ī* who became Muslim during the caliphate of Abū Bakr. Al-Riyāḥī read to 'Umar, Ubayy, Zayd, and Ibn 'Abbās. Ibn Abī Dāwūd said, "There is no one after the companions who is more knowledgeable of the Qur'an than him [al-Riyāḥī]."²⁰³ Al-Riyāḥī is in the *isnād* of Abū 'Amr, Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, Ya'qūb (d. 205/820), and Khalaf.

Following the same criteria of al-Dhahabī (reciting to one or more of the first *ṭabaqah* and being links in the *isnād* of the ten *qirā'āt*), Jabal added 14 *tābi'īn*. He attempted to rank their level of companionship (*ṣuḥbah*) with the companions by reference to their age groups (early versus young) and debatable companionship with the Prophet ﷺ himself. Below is Jabal's list in chronological order:

1. Masrūq ibn al-Ajda' (d. 63/682) who read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Ibn Waththāb. Masrūq is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
2. 'Amr ibn Shuraḥbīl al-Ḥamdānī (d. 63/682), who read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Abū Ishāq al-Sabī'ī. 'Amr is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
3. 'Ubaydah ibn 'Amr al-Salmānī (d. 72/691) who became Muslim during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ but never saw him. He read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī and others. Al-Salmānī is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.

²⁰³ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 58.

4. 'Āṣim ibn Ḍamrah al-Sakūnī (d. 74/693) who read to 'Alī and taught Abū Ishāq al-Sabī'ī. 'Āṣim is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
5. 'Ubayd ibn Naḍlah al-Khuzā'ī (d. 75/694), who read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Yaḥyā ibn Waththāb. He was the *muqrī* of Kūfah in his time and his companionship with the Prophet ﷺ, according to al-Dhahabī, is debatable (meaning it is possible that he met the Prophet ﷺ). Ubayd is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
6. Zayd ibn Wahb (d. after 80/699), who traveled to see the Prophet ﷺ but did not make it before his death. Zayd read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Sulaymān al-'Amash. Zayd is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
7. Umm al-Dardā' Hujaymah bint Ḥuyayy (d. after 80/699), who read to her husband Abū al-Dardā' and taught 'Aṭīyyah ibn Qays, Yūnus ibn Hubayrah, and Ibrāhīm ibn Abī 'Ablah (who read the Qur'an seven times to her). 'Aṭīyyah ibn Qays is one of her most prominent students—he became the leading *qārī* of Damascus after Ibn 'Āmir, and it was reported that people would correct their copies of the Qur'an according to his reading.
8. Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh (d. 82/701), who read to Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī as well as taught 'Āṣim and many others. He died at the age of 120. Zirr is in the *isnād* of 'Āṣim, Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, Ya'qūb, and Khalaf.
9. 'Abdulrahmān ibn Abī Laylā (d. 83/702), who read to 'Alī and taught his own son 'Īsā. Ibn Abī Laylā is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
10. Sa'd ibn Iyās (d. 96/714), who lived during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ but never met him. He read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught 'Āṣim and Yaḥyā ibn Waththāb. Sa'd is in the *isnād* of 'Āṣim, Hamzah, al-al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
11. 'Ubayd ibn Qays al-Kulābī, a *tābi'ī* (d. unknown) who read to Ibn Mas'ūd and taught Ibn Waththāb. 'Ubayd is in the *isnād* of Hamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf.
12. Ibn 'Āmir (d. 118/736), one of the ten *qurrā'* who read to multiple companions including Abū al-Dardā', Mu'ādh, Faḍālah, Wāthilah, Mu'āwiyyah, and, arguably, 'Uthmān.
13. Muḥammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), who read to Anas ibn Mālik and taught Nāfi' (one of the ten *qurrā'*).

A growing Qur'anic community: Communal responsibility towards the Qur'an

Knowledge and memorization of the Qur'an kept spreading among Muslims after the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Many companions memorized the Qur'an, and the number of Qur'an teachers and reciters multiplied during the reign of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb,²⁰⁴ who used to assign governmental funds to memorizers.²⁰⁵ Prayer was a significant mode of preserving the Qur'an, as reflected in the early Muslims' connection to prayer and dedication to perfecting its intimate communing with God through His words. Intriguingly, some companions and *tābi'ūn* were reported to have recited the entire Qur'an in one *rak'ah*, and some used to recite the entire Qur'an 60 times in Ramadan. Several reports and discussions exist in the tradition pertaining to the preferred routine of completion (*khatm*) of the Qur'an.²⁰⁶

One of the main causes of the Qur'an's increased dissemination in society was 'Umar's regulation of the Ramadan night supererogatory prayer (*tarāwīḥ*). 'Umar had appointed three *qurrā'*—Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'ādh ibn al-Ḥārith, and Tamīm al-Dārī—and scheduled their leading-prayer shifts based on the pace of their recitation. One of the narrations describing their recitations states that they used to recite *sūrah*s consisting of more than 100 verses (*mi'īn*) and that the companions would lean on their sticks to tolerate the length of the prayer. Sometimes the prayer would last till near dawn (*fajr*).²⁰⁷

'Umar maintained the organization and support of this practice and requested that the various Muslim regions under his rule adopt it in the 14th year after the *hijrah*²⁰⁸ 'Umar's practice of *tarāwīḥ* persisted and proliferated during the time of 'Uthmān and 'Alī, when the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an continued

²⁰⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 153.

²⁰⁵ Al-Kawtharī, *Maqālāt al-Kawtharī*, 33.

²⁰⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:303–5.

²⁰⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 155.

²⁰⁸ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 158.

to spread rapidly. Importantly, there is no documented claim from that era alleging that the Qur'an was altered, added to, or distorted in terms of its order or style of recitation in any way.²⁰⁹ *Tarāwīḥ* remains a method of memorizing and transmitting the Qur'an today.

For the following generations, memorizing the Qur'an was held to be a communal obligation (*fard kifāyah*). Due to multiple hadiths in which the Prophet ﷺ warned against forgetting what had been memorized from the Qur'an, some jurists held such forgetting to be a major sin (*kabīrah*). In support of this position, they cited the hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ said, “The sins of my *ummah* were shown to me. I did not see a sin greater than a *sūrah* or verse of the Qur'an given to a person who then forgot it.”²¹⁰ Despite its debatable authenticity, this hadith is understood by many jurists to establish the prohibition of forgetting the Qur'an. However, they disagreed extensively on the meaning of forgetting (e.g., complete loss of memory, inability to read from the *muṣḥaf*, neglect of its commands and prohibitions), valid excuses for forgetting (e.g., unintentional noncommitment to revising, occupation with other important studies or work to secure necessary lawful provision, mental issues), age-based accountability (differentiating between what was memorized at a young age versus adulthood), subjective memory strength and retention abilities, and the degree of sinning (major or minor) based on the intention and cause of forgetting.

For example, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 974/1566) divided (*nisyān*) into two categories: unintentional *nisyān* and intentional negligence (*isqāṭ*). He concluded his detailed *fatwā* on this issue by saying,

It is understood from what I have stated that the [exact] point of forgetting is the removal [of the memorized] from the memory capacity (*al-quwwah al-ḥāfidhah*) so that one no longer retains it by heart as they used to before... Being able to read from the *muṣḥaf* does not prevent the sin of forgetting because we are ritually obligated to memorize by heart. Hence, imams [of jurisprudence] explicitly stated that its

²⁰⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 158.

²¹⁰ *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, no. 461.

memorization is a communal obligation upon the *ummah*. Additionally, most of the companions did not [know how to] write, but they had it [the Qur'an] memorized by heart... *nisyān* in the meaning I explained [intentional negligence] is a major sin even if [it was of] one verse as they [earlier scholars] stated. Even if one forgets one letter to such an extent that it requires work and repetition [to be remembered], they are sinful. If it does not reach that level and one can remember once they are reminded, they are not remiss.²¹¹

In his treatment of the same issue, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī narrated that Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729) said, “They [the righteous forebears] used to despise the one who forgets the Qur'an and to speak harshly of him.”²¹²

Part II: Written transmission of the Qur'an during the time of the Prophet ﷺ

The illiteracy of Arab society at the time of the Prophet ﷺ is well-known. Less known is that despite this pervasive illiteracy, writing did exist among the Arabs: “Be wary of the opinion of those who say that the Arabs were not people of writing and pens.”²¹³

According to Ahmad al-Jallād, “[T]he abundance of written records in Arabia suggests that writing was widespread among both settled people and nomads... however, its function among both groups was quite different.”²¹⁴ Nonetheless, only select types of the Arab literature of the Ḥijāz, where the message of Islam commenced, were documented in written form before and during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Aside from writing for practical purposes such as letters, memoranda, treaties, and legal materials, “religious materials (with the eventual

²¹¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā al-fiqhiyyah al-kubrā*, 4 vols. (Cairo: ‘Abdulḥamīd Ḥanafī, 1938), 1:37.

²¹² Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:86.

²¹³ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf: Dirāsah lughawīyyah tārikhiyyah* (Amman: Dār Ammār: 2001), 17. Citing ‘Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī’s (d. 643/1245) manuscript of *al-Wasīlah ilā kashf al-‘Aqīla*, a commentary on al-Shāṭibī’s (d. 590/1194) didactic poem on *rasm al-muṣḥaf*.

²¹⁴ Ahmad al-Jallād, “The Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia: Context for the Qur'an,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad A. Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 116.

exception of the Qur'an), poetry and literary prose, genealogy, and historical traditions were transmitted orally” in the early Islamic centuries.²¹⁵ Poetry, prose, oration, and storytelling were the primary means of preserving the heritage of this part of the Arabian peninsula.

Writing was more common in the Arabian North and the South.²¹⁶ Ancient South Arabia, with its thousands of public transcriptions, “exemplifies a literate society,” yet that does not necessarily reflect a “widespread literacy among the general population.”²¹⁷ Compared to the Ḥijāz, where writing was not as common, even the venerated art of poetry “was not often put into writing in South Arabia.”²¹⁸ As for the development of the Arabic script, in the South the people of Yemen used to write in *al-Musnad* script,²¹⁹ while in the North, the Nabataeans adopted a writing style derived from the Aramaic prevalent in the Levant.²²⁰ The Ḥijāzī Arabs learned this style of writing centuries before Islam. It eventually developed into the Ḥijāzī script, the same one in which the Qur'an was written.²²¹

The Qur'an explicitly acknowledges that most Arabs were illiterate by describing them (*ummiyyīn*) as well as the Prophet ﷺ (*ummiyy*) as “unlettered” in 62:2 and 7:157-8. The word *ummiyyīn*, according to the majority of exegetes, refers to those who do not know how to read or write.²²² The Prophet ﷺ did not read or write, nor did many of the Arabs of his time. Nevertheless, consider the following verses:

It is for Us to collect it and to give you the ability to recite it.²²³

Indeed, this is in the former scrolls [scriptures].²²⁴

²¹⁵ Macdonald, “Ancient Arabia and the Written Word,” 21.

²¹⁶ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *ʿIlm al-kitābah al-ʿArabiyyah* (Amman: Dār ʿAmmār, 2004), 30–52.

²¹⁷ Al-Jallad, “Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia,” 116.

²¹⁸ Al-Jallad, “Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia,” 121.

²¹⁹ For a historical background of *al-musnad* script, see al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 29–34.

²²⁰ For more details on the development of the Arabic script, see al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 117–19.

²²¹ Al-Ḥamad, *ʿIlm al-kitābah al-ʿArabiyyah*.

²²² Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qurʾānī*, 71–72. Other interpretations held that *ummiyyīn* means all the Arabs, their “People of the Book.”

²²³ Qur'an 75:17.

²²⁴ Qur'an 87:18.

A Messenger from Allah reciting purified pages [scriptures].²²⁵

These verses of the Qur'an suggest the importance of preserving the Qur'an not just orally but in writing. Indeed, in arguing for the obligation to take all possible means of preserving the Qur'an, some scholars also cited the verse "This is the Book"²²⁶ and "His [Allah's] Book"²²⁷ as indications that Allah's revealed speech should be preserved by "writing it in sheets."²²⁸

Unsurprisingly, then, the textual preservation of the Qur'an was a duty established by the Prophet ﷺ himself. He commanded people to write it down and appointed, organized, and supervised his scribes of revelation. After the Prophet's death, this duty transformed into a *fard kifāyah* which his companions fulfilled. This organized scribal work came despite Arab society's widespread illiteracy and, as shown below, played a pivotal role in fulfilling Allah's promise to preserve the Qur'an.

Literature on writing the Qur'an and the scribes of the Prophet ﷺ

Two terms are commonly used in the various reports about the textual documentation of the Qur'an: collection (*jam'*) and compilation (*ta'liif*). Al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) dedicated in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* a separate section for each: "Section on the Collection of the Qur'an" (*bāb jam' al-Qur'ān*) and "Section on the Compilation of the Qur'an" (*bāb ta'liif al-Qur'ān*). In his commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī noted that *jam' al-Qur'ān* is a collection of its sheets in a particular style while *ta'liif al-Qur'ān* is arranging the verses of a *sūrah* or the order of the *sūrahs*.²²⁹ When sheets are bound together, they are known as a codex which, in the case of the Qur'an, is called a *muṣḥaf*. Parchment (a stiff, flat

²²⁵ Qur'an 98:2.

²²⁶ Qur'an 2:2.

²²⁷ Qur'an 2:285.

²²⁸ Al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, 1:98.

²²⁹ Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:11.

material made from the untanned skins of goats or sheep) was scarce during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Hence, he commanded his companions to write the Qur'an on other available materials such as palm leaf, stalk, and stump, as well as scapula bones, clay, the skin of animals, and certain kinds of rocks.²³⁰

Identifying the scribes of the Prophet ﷺ requires examination of a vast literature of books dedicated to the topic as well as the works of *sīrah*, *ṭabaqāt*, *shamā'il* (characteristics of the Prophet), and history. Books that document the names and biographies of the scribes of the Prophet ﷺ date back to as early as the 3rd/9th century, such as *Kitāb al-Kuttāb* by 'Amr ibn Shabbah (d. 262/877), which is no longer extant. Subsequent works include *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Mudiyy fī Kuttāb al-Nabyy* by Muḥammad ibn Ḥadīdah al-Anṣārī (d. 783/1381), the most extensive examination of the topic ever undertaken.²³¹ Al-Anṣārī had two primary foci: the scribes of the Prophet ﷺ and the messengers and letters he ﷺ deployed to the kings and rulers of his time. After beginning the list with the four Caliphs, al-Anṣārī listed the rest of the scribes alphabetically. Still, no work independently dedicated to the Qur'anic scribes of the Prophet ﷺ exists in our tradition—a gap that some contemporary Muslim scholars have attempted to fill.

Since the literature typically defines a scribe as someone who used to write anything for the Prophet ﷺ—not just Qur'an, but letters, legal documents, land deeds, and translations—scholars have disagreed on the number of Qur'anic scribes. Al-A'zamī observed that almost every scholar he reviewed added more names to the list compiled by his predecessor.²³² One exception, however, is 'Amr ibn Shabbah, who named 23 scribes, despite coming after al-Ya'qūbī (d. after 292/905), who listed only 13 scribes in his *Tārīkh*.

²³⁰ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 88–89.

²³¹ Muḥammad ibn Ḥadīdah al-Anṣārī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-mudī' fī kuttāb al-Nabyy al-Ummyy wa rusulih ilā mulūk al-ard min 'Arabyy wa 'ajamyy*, ed. Muḥammad 'Azīm al-Dīn, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1985).

²³² Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 1st ed. (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1974), 4.

The following scholars complemented al-A'zamī's list and provided different scribal counts based on their selected criteria: Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/965) listed 16 scribes in his *al-Tanbīh wal-Ishrāf*, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) listed 25 in *al-Istī'āb*, Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1167) listed 23 in *Tārīkh Dimashq*, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) listed 26 in his *Tafsīr*, al-Anṣārī listed 44 in *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Mudiyy*, al-'Irāqī (d. 806/1403) listed 42 in his didactic poem *al-Alfiyyah* on *sīrah*,²³³ Sibṭ ibn al-'Ajamī (d. 841/1438) listed 43 in his gloss on Qāḍī Iyāḍ's *al-Shifā*, Yaḥiā al-'Āmiriyy al-Ḥaraḍayy (d. 893/1487) listed 25 in *Bahjat al-Mahāfil*, and al-Shabrāmallisī (d. 1087/1676) listed 40 in his legal gloss on *al-Manhāj*.²³⁴

Based on a survey of such tremendous scholarship, as well as numerous works of literary professions (*inshā'*) and political treatises, most contemporary works put the number of scribes at over forty. 'Alī al-Dabbā' (d. 1380/1961), in *Samīr al-Ṭālibīn*, noted that the total number of the Prophet's scribes is 43 or 44, 14 of whom were specifically Qur'anic scribes.²³⁵ In his *Tārīkh al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf*, 'Abdufattāḥ al-Qāḍī (d. 1403/1982) stated, "The Prophet had 40 scribes before the revelation of the Qur'an came to completion."²³⁶ The Shia scholar Abū 'Abdullāh al-Zinjānī (d. 1359/1941) stated, in his *Tārīkh al-Qur'an*, that the Prophet ﷺ had 43 scribes, listing 29 known to have specifically written the Qur'an.²³⁷

More recently, al-A'zamī listed 48 scribes of the Prophet ﷺ in his *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, in which he treated their biographies.²³⁸ However, in *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, al-A'zamī stated that the Prophet ﷺ had a total of 65 scribes without specifying whether they transcribed the Qur'an or fulfilled other duties.²³⁹

²³³ Al-'Irāqī dedicated a chapter in his poem to the scribes of the Prophet. See Zain al-Dīn al-'Irāqī, *Nazm al-durar al-saniyyah fī al-siyar al-zakiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad ibn 'Alawī al-Mālikī, 1st ed. (Jeddah: Dar al-Minhaj, 2005), 123–5.

²³⁴ For a brief review of these counts, see 'Abduḥayy al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātib al-idāriyyah*, ed. 'Abdullāh al-Khālīdī, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam), 1:151–53; Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 4.

²³⁵ 'Alī al-Muḥammad al-Ḍabbā', *Samīr al-ṭālibīn fī rasm wa ḍabḥ al-Kitāb al-Mubīn*, 1st ed. (Cairo: 'Abduḥamīd Ḥanafī, 1938), 9–10. The book was reviewed and edited by the Grand Qārī of Egypt in his time, Muḥammad ibn Khalaf al-Ḥuseinī (d. 1939), who gave the approval for al-Ḍabbā's book to be taught.

²³⁶ 'Abdufattāḥ ibn 'Abduḡhanī al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jindī, 1951), 6.

²³⁷ Abū 'Abdullāh al-Zinjānī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah wal-Nashr, 1935), 20–21.

²³⁸ The total list of the names of the scribes are in Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 113–15.

²³⁹ Al-A'zamī, *History of the Qur'anic Text*, 68.

In one section of his *Wathaqat Naql al-Naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, Muḥammad Jabal attempted to differentiate between Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic scribes of Prophet ﷺ through inference, compiling a total of 29 companions. Ghānim al-Ḥamad, in *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, identified 43 as the overall number of the Prophet's scribes.²⁴⁰ In his more recent work *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, he briefly discussed seven of them when covering the stages of writing the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁴¹

An important contribution to this discussion is the four-volume work of another Shia scholar 'Alī al-Aḥmadī al-Mayānjī (d. 2000) titled *Makātīb al-Rasūl*. He divided the dictated writings of the Prophet ﷺ into two categories: writings that were especially dictated to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib comprising different aspects of his Prophetic knowledge, and writings of the Prophet's *da'wah* letters, letters to his envoys, treaties, feoffments, and others. In the latter section, he identified 255 dictated writings whose exact wordings are no longer extant and 229 others whose wordings have survived. He argued that the actual number of these writings exceeds the total numbers in both identified categories.²⁴² In support of this argument, he provided a list of 263 companions whom the Prophet ﷺ had appointed to executive positions;²⁴³ al-Mayānjī, however, acknowledged that not all reports regarding this number of companions are authentic.²⁴⁴

Despite the resourceful authorities referenced in his work, and because of a strong emphasis on the role of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in the life of the Prophet ﷺ and the preservation of the Islamic traditions, al-Mayānjī was unduly strict in counting the number of the scribes of the Qur'an. While he distinguished the scribes of the Qur'an in a dedicated section, he limited them to only six companions, not at all of whom were certainly Qur'anic scribes.²⁴⁵ In an odd insistence on proving

²⁴⁰ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf: Dirāsah lughawīyyah tārīkhiyyah* (Amman: Dār Ammār: 2001), 78.

²⁴¹ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālah al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 69–93.

²⁴² 'Alī al-Aḥmadī al-Mayānjī, *Makātīb al-Rasūl*, 1st ed., 4 vols. (Qom: Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1998), 1:7.

²⁴³ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 1:8–50.

²⁴⁴ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 1:50.

²⁴⁵ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 1:123–38.

discrepancies between different reports, al-Mayānjī excluded the names of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, al-Mughīrah, 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, Khāild ibn al-Walīd, and Mu'āwiyah.²⁴⁶ His arguments for some of these exclusions will be discussed below.

Finally, works on political theory and administrative law in the early Islamic era list those companions appointed to governmental or executive positions, including the scribes. Among the most extensive contemporary references on the Prophet's lifetime is 'Abdulḥayy al-Kittānī's two-volume book on the Prophet's governmental system, *al-Tarātīb al-Idāriyyah*. The third section of the first volume is dedicated to various topics related to the writing professions as organized by the Prophet ﷺ including his different types of dictated writings, his scribes, his style of dictation, his ways of addressing his correspondents, the structure of his official letters and statements, his translators, his spokespeople and poets, and his instructions to the scribes regarding the materials used and how to sign, date, stamp, and mail them.²⁴⁷ Moreover, Muhammad Hamiduallah's (d. 1422/2002) collection of the "political documents" written during the time of the Prophet ﷺ and his four succeeding Caliphs is a significant reference for early writings and the scribes of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁴⁸

The following sections on the scribes of the Qur'an will adopt Jabal's bipartite categorization based on the Meccan and Medinan periods of the life of the Prophet ﷺ.

Writing the Qur'an in the Meccan period

The revelation of the Qur'an in the Meccan period lasted for 13 years. Since it was longer than the Medinan period, the Meccan period witnessed the revelation of more Quranic chapters. Of 45 long or medium chapters (from al-Baqarah to al-Aḥqāf), 35 are Meccan. This quantity of revelation may have necessitated

²⁴⁶ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 116–23.

²⁴⁷ Al-Kittānī, *al-Tarātīb al-idāriyyah*, 1:149–208.

²⁴⁸ Muhammad Hamiduallah, *Majmū'at al-wathā'iq al-siyāsiyyah lil-'ahd al-Nabawī wa al-khilāfah al-rāshida*, 6th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Nafais, 1987).

textual transcription to protect it from potential losses or mistakes. The Prophet ﷺ paid early attention to the importance of preserving the revelation in writing and combating illiteracy among Muslims. He ﷺ was reported to have said, “record knowledge with writing.”²⁴⁹ Al-Azharī (d. 370/981) highlights the importance of written documentation, saying, “Writing [guarantees] more accuracy than the hearts of men.”²⁵⁰ Writing the Qur'an in an illiterate society affirms that such documentation did not stem from happenstance or merely reflect common cultural practice. Instead, it was a Divine inspiration and an intentional plan for the future of the new religion and its book.²⁵¹

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not write down anything from me, and he who wrote down anything from me except the Qur'an should efface that.”²⁵² This hadith indicates that some companions were already writing, or wanted to write down everything the Prophet ﷺ said. The Prophet ﷺ, though, wanted them to focus on the Qur'an's writing and even erase anything else they had written from him. Later, he permitted the companions to write down his hadith.²⁵³ The Prophet ﷺ must have issued this ban on non-Qur'anic writing as early as his companions started writing down what he was conveying to them, meaning in Mecca.²⁵⁴ His (initial) prohibition of non-Quranic writing established a distinction between human and Divine speech that protected the latter from distortion.²⁵⁵ This distinction in writing added another layer of protection to that offered by the unparalleled rhetorical style of the Qur'an.

Evidently, then, the prevalence of illiteracy in Meccan society did not negate the existence of writing and writers. By the advent of Islam, there were 17 scribes among the Quraysh.²⁵⁶ As known in the *sīrah*, the Quraysh wrote on a sheet

²⁴⁹ *Mustadrak al-Hākim*, no. 367.

²⁵⁰ Muḥammad al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughah*, ed. Muḥammad Mur'ib, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), 2:170.

²⁵¹ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 73.

²⁵² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 3004.

²⁵³ Al-'Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 1:208.

²⁵⁴ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 160.

²⁵⁵ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*.

²⁵⁶ Aḥmad ibn Yaḥiā al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (Beirut: Maktbat al-Hilāl, 1988), 453. Al-Balādhurī listed the names of the seventeen men.

documenting their official boycott of the Prophet ﷺ and Meccan Muslims. Multiple companions among the early Meccan Muslims were penmen, including Abū Bakr, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Sa'īd ibn Zayd and his wife Fāṭimah bint al-Khaṭṭāb, and Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt. The story of how 'Umar embraced Islam, highlighted above, relates that Sa'īd, his wife Fāṭimah, and Khabbāb were reading Qur'an from a sheet that had verses from Sūrah Tāhā and possibly also Sūrah al-Takwīr.²⁵⁷ There were likely multiple other sheets that contained written Qur'an.

The Prophet's scribes in the Meccan period

Scarcely does the existing literature explicitly identify anyone as a Meccan scribe of revelation. Moreover, the harsh conditions characteristic of the Meccan period of Islam possibly concealed many details regarding the transcription of the Qur'an during that time. However, *sīrah* works generally list the scribes who wrote everything the Prophet ﷺ dictated, including Qur'an, messages, correspondences, and other deeds and documents. It is possible to identify who among them were specifically Meccan scribes if they meet three criteria: a scribe of the Prophet (as long as this scribe's transcription was not specified for anything other than the Qur'an), an early Muslim, and a resident of Mecca. In applying these three conditions, four names rise to the top of the list:

1. Shuraḥbīl ibn Ḥasanah (d. 18/639), said to be “the first [companion] to write for the Prophet ﷺ.”²⁵⁸ His status as the first Prophetic scribe indicates he began writing before he migrated to Abyssinia, which in turn suggests that he wrote Qur'an, since the Prophet ﷺ did not correspond with anyone in writing during the pre-Abyssinian period.
259
2. Khālīd ibn Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 13/634), said to be the second person to embrace Islam after Abū Bakr. Khālīd was the first to write, “In the

²⁵⁷ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah*, 1:350–51.

²⁵⁸ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 12:398.

²⁵⁹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 161.

name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful” (*Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*).²⁶⁰

3. Ḥanzalah ibn al-Rabī‘ al-Tamīmī (d. 52/672), known as “The Scribe” (*al-kātib*) before Zayd ibn Thābit won that title.
4. ‘Abdullāh ibn S‘ad (d. 36-37). According to Al-‘Asqalānī, he was the first person from Quraysh to write the revelation for the Prophet ﷺ in Mecca.²⁶¹ ‘Abdullāh ibn S‘ad is known for the controversy surrounding his apostasy from Islam during the life of the Prophet ﷺ. He eventually revoked his apostasy, became Muslim again, and participated in multiple conquests before he died as a Muslim.²⁶²

Other companions who embraced Islam early and fulfilled general scribal duties for the Prophet ﷺ were:²⁶³

5. Abū Bakr
6. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb

Al-Mayānjī questioned whether Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were from among the Prophet’s scribes, despite multiple biographies affirming that they were. Al-Mayānjī also stated that Abū Bakr was unlettered, a claim for which he cited no evidence besides Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940) not listing him among the 17 men who knew how to write at the advent of Islam.²⁶⁴ Abu Bakr’s exclusion from Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s list is not sufficient evidence for al-Mayānjī’s claim, especially since Abu Bakr is reported to have written a peace treaty by the command of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁶⁵ Conflicting reports about the identity of this treaty’s scribe are reconciled by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) to mean that Abu Bakr shared the writing process with another companion, ‘Āmir ibn ‘Uqbah.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁰ Al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 12:393.

²⁶¹ Al-‘Asqalānī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 1:397.

²⁶² Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur‘ānī*, 162–64.

²⁶³ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur‘ānī*, 162. Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur‘ānī*, 74–76.

²⁶⁴ Al-Mayānjī, *Makātib al-Rasūl*, 104 and 117.

²⁶⁵ Al-A‘zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 30–31.

²⁶⁶ Al-A‘zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 30–31.

7. 'Uthmān, when the rebels attacked him and struck his hand with a sword, said, "By Allah, it is the first hand to transcribe the *mufaṣṣal*."²⁶⁷
8. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib
9. Ṭalḥah ibn 'Ubayd Allāh (d. 36/656)
10. Al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām (d. 36/656)
11. Al-Arḳam ibn Abī al-Arḳam (d. 55/675)
12. Ḥāṭib ibn 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wud (d. unknown)
13. 'Āmir ibn Fuhayrah (d. 4/625)
14. Abū Salamah ibn 'Abd al-Asad (d. 4/625)
15. Mu'ayyib al-Dūsī (d. 40/660)
16. Abān ibn Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ (d. 13/634). He was Khālid's brother (mentioned above).²⁶⁸

The Qur'an was transcribed concomitantly with its revelation. Several companions reported that the Prophet ﷺ would call on scribes when he received new revelation and instruct them to write and place it in its assigned chapter.²⁶⁹

Although not commonly reported in classical or contemporary *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* works, some of the Qur'an-inscribed sheets in Mecca were sent to Medina to support the ongoing dissemination of the Qur'an.²⁷⁰ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī reported from Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) that Rāfi' ibn Mālik al-Zuraqī was "the first to bring Sūrah Yūsuf to Medina."²⁷¹ Admittedly, this report does not explicitly mention whether the *sūrah* was received from the Prophet ﷺ orally or in writing. However, al-'Asqalānī reported another narration from al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870) that the Prophet ﷺ gave Rāfi', when they met during the

²⁶⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 189.

²⁶⁸ Ghānim al-Ḥamad listed him among the scribes in Mecca while Jabal listed him among those in Medina. Multiple accounts suggest that he was one of the writers in Mecca. It is also possible that he continued to write in the Medinan period.

²⁶⁹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3086.

²⁷⁰ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 76.

²⁷¹ Al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah*, 2:369–70.

pledge of al-‘Aqabah, what was revealed to him over the previous decade. Rāfi‘, in turn, took that from the Prophet ﷺ to Medina, where he gathered his people and started teaching them what he had brought from the Prophet ﷺ.²⁷² It is almost impossible that Rāfi‘ learned so much Qur’an orally at once, which indeed suggests that it was in writing.

It is important to note that Rāfi‘ was an educated person known as one of society’s “perfect people” (*al-kamalah*). According to Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/845), a “perfect person” (*kāmil*) in pre-Islamic times was one who wrote and was skilled in swimming and archery.²⁷³ There is no existing evidence of what eventually happened to Rāfi‘’s sheets. Possibly, they were among the sheets which Zayd ibn Thābit, and other scribes, used in reviewing their writings with the Prophet ﷺ.²⁷⁴ These sheets (derived from different parchment materials) were potentially kept in an easily movable container, as evidenced by Rāfi‘’s successful journey to Medina with a decade’s worth of revelation despite a dangerous climate of anti-Islamic hostility.²⁷⁵

Writing the Qur’an in the Medinan period

The Prophet’s ﷺ efforts to maintain written documentation of the Qur’an continued after his move to Medina. During the Meccan period, there was no need to write anything besides the Qur’an. However, the situation changed drastically after the immigration to Medina due to the complex needs of the new society. Accordingly, after victory in the Battle of Badr, the Prophet ﷺ issued a different kind of ransom for the captives lacking financial resources: teaching Medinan children how to write. Each captive was responsible for teaching ten children.²⁷⁶ Thus, illiteracy decreased among the Arabs after the spread of Islam amongst them. Consequently, the number of scribes increased, and their scribal duties diversified

²⁷² Al-‘Asqalanī, *al-Iṣābah*.

²⁷³ Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 3:622.

²⁷⁴ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 79.

²⁷⁵ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur’ānī*, 80.

²⁷⁶ *Musnad Ahmad*, no. 2216; Ḥāmid ibn Zanjawh, *al-Amwāl*, ed. Shākir Fayyāq, 1st ed., 3 vols. (Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Faiṣal lil-Buhūth wal-Dirasāt al-Islāmiyyah, 1986), 309–10.

to include a range of tasks that extended beyond transcribing the Qur'an to include other Prophetic statements and decisions.

Contrary to a common belief that registers (*diwāns*) were established after the death of the Prophet ﷺ, simple forms of *diwāns* were developed during his time and by his command ﷺ. The word *diwān*, in its early usage, references the place where a transcriber sits, a logbook, or a register.²⁷⁷ According to al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) in his administrative encyclopedia on the composition of chancery documents *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, the first chancery in Islam was established during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, as represented in his letters and correspondences.²⁷⁸ Although the official establishment of army and revenue registers is attributed to his successors, most popularly to Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, prototypical forms of such registers emerged in the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁷⁹

The existence of such *diwāns* can be inferred from several hadiths. Ḥudhayfah narrated that “the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘List the names of those people who have announced that they are Muslims.’ So, we listed 1,500 men.”²⁸⁰ This “listing” implies a practice of written record-keeping. Once, after the Prophet ﷺ stated that “it is not permissible for a man to be alone with a woman, and no lady should travel except with an unmarriageable kin (*maḥram*),” a man responded by saying, “O Allah’s Messenger! I have enlisted (*uktutibtu*) in the army for such-and-such battle, and my wife is proceeding for *hajj*.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Go and perform the *hajj* with your wife.”²⁸¹ Al-Bukhārī titled the section under which this hadith was reported using the word for someone “who was enlisted” (*uktutiba*), meaning enlisted in writing. Moreover, several companions were reported to have registered their alms dues and contributions (*amwāl al-ṣadaqāt*) for the Prophet ﷺ.

²⁷⁷ Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 11.

²⁷⁸ Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā'*, 14 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1922), 1:91.

²⁷⁹ Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*; Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 11–14.

²⁸⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3060.

²⁸¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3006.

Al-Mayānjī, based on a variety of sources, identified eight *diwāns* established by him ﷺ which are: 1) the *diwān* for transcribing the Qur'an, 2) the *diwān* for writing down the sunnah, 3) the *diwān* for treaties, pledges, peace agreements, and feoffments, 4) the *diwān* for claims, lawsuits, and financial disputes, 5) the *diwān* of the army, 6) the *diwān* for alms (*zakāh*), spoils, charities, and their recipients, 7) the *diwān* of chancery for correspondences with kings, tribes, deputies, and envoys, and 8) the *diwān* of delegates.²⁸²

The Prophet's scribes in the Medinan period

‘Uthmān, Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, and Zayd ibn Thābit were among the most critical scribes in the Medinan period, heavily influencing the process and the final stages of standardizing the Qur’anic text. Ubayy was the first to write the Qur’an for the Prophet ﷺ in Medina. If Ubayy was not available, Zayd ibn Thābit used to be assigned to write. ‘Uthmān testified for himself, as mentioned earlier, describing his hand as “the first hand to transcribe the *mufaṣṣal*.”²⁸³ Zayd, one of the *ansāri* children who learned from Badr’s captives, became the most important figure of Qur’anic transcription and compilation during and after the time of the Prophet ﷺ. The people of Medina knew him as “the scribe of revelation” (*kātib al-wahy*).²⁸⁴

Zayd ibn Thābit’s residential proximity to the Prophet ﷺ eased his commitment to writing the Qur’an, as “I was his [the Prophet’s] neighbor. When the revelation would come to him, he would call on me to write it down.”²⁸⁵ Zayd went on to describe how he would be there in all different situations with the Prophet ﷺ: “If he [the Prophet] mentions the hereafter, he mentions it with us. If he mentions life, he mentions it with us, and if he mentions food, he mentions it with us.”²⁸⁶

²⁸² Al-Mayānjī, *Makātib al-Rasūl*, 1:108–14.

²⁸³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Intiṣār*, 189.

²⁸⁴ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā’il al-ṣaḥābah*, ed. Waṣiyyullah ‘Abbās, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Mecca: Umm al-Qura University’s Markaz al-Baḥth al-‘Ilmī wa Ihyā al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1983), 1:390.

²⁸⁵ Abū Bakr ‘Abdullah ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, ed. Muḥib al-Dīn Wā’iz, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyah, 1995), 1:145. Al-‘Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:328–29.

²⁸⁶ Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, 1:145.

Qur'anic transcription took a more specialized form in Medina through Zayd's work who, given his proximity to the Prophet ﷺ, kept the writing tools (e.g., sheets, tablets, inkpot) ready at his house to be instantly available for the call of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁸⁷ Upon the revelation of Q. 4:99, the Prophet said, "Call Zayd for me and let him bring the board, the inkpot, and the scapula bone [or the scapula bone and the ink pot]."²⁸⁸ Zayd led the committee that compiled the Qur'an during the caliphate of Abū Bakr and the one that transcribed it during the caliphate of 'Uthmān.

In addition to these three companions, others who were known to write for the Prophet ﷺ in Medina without a specification of the content of writing were:²⁸⁹

1. 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah (d. 8/629)
2. Thābit ibn Qays (d. 12/633)
3. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abdillāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl (d. 12/633)
4. Khālid ibn al-Walīd (d. 21/642)
5. 'Abdullāh ibn al-Arqam (d. before 35/624). He was al-Arqam's son.
6. Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān (d. 36/656)
7. Ḥuayṭib ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā al-Qurashī (d. 54/673)
8. Sa'īd ibn al-'Aṣ (d. 59/678)
9. Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680)
10. Buraydah ibn al-Ḥuṣayb al-Aslamī (d. 63/682)

The instant documentation of revelation

As mentioned earlier, the instant transcription of newly revealed Qur'an was a common practice of the Prophet ﷺ with his scribes in both Mecca and Medina. 'Ā'ishah said, "I have seen the Prophet ﷺ resting his thigh against 'Uthmān while I was wiping the Prophet's ﷺ sweat from his forehead upon the revelation's descent on him. The Prophet ﷺ was saying, 'Write O 'Uthmān.'"²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 83.

²⁸⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4990.

²⁸⁹ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 165–66; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wal-rashād*, 12:383–441.

²⁹⁰ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 26125.

Zayd ibn Thābit described the Prophet's instant conveyance of verse 4:95 and his command to document it saying,

I was beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when the divinely-inspired calmness overtook him and the thigh of the Messenger ﷺ fell on my thigh. I did not find anything weightier than the thigh of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He then regained his composure and said "Write down." I wrote on a shoulder: {Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) and those who strive in the way of Allah}. When Ibn Umm Maktūm, who was blind, heard the virtue of the warriors, he stood up and said "O Messenger of Allah ﷺ! How is it for those believers who are unable to fight?"

When he finished his question, the divinely-inspired calmness overtook the Prophet again and his thigh fell on my thigh and I found its weight the second time as I found the first time. When he regained his composure, he said, {Other than those who have a (disabling hurt)}. Zayd said "Allah, the Exalted, revealed it alone and I appended it."²⁹¹

The immediate documentation of the revelation proves that whatever was dictated and written is the exact text of the Qur'an as Jibrīl revealed it with no room for personal suppositions or dependence on memory.

Moreover, the immediacy of documentation negates any possibility that the transcribed text was a result of the concession (*rukḥṣah*) of *aḥruf* permitting personal preferences of dialectical pronunciations. More importantly, the textual transcription done under the direct supervision of the Prophet ﷺ—executed by the most notable scribes and closest companions during the last period of revelation—was the primary source for Abū Bakr's compilation of the Qur'an. An early testimony was made by al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) that

writing down the Qur'an was not invented [after the time of the Prophet]. Rather, Abū Bakr [only] ordered to copy [what was written] from one place to another. Those were sheets found in the house of the Prophet ﷺ in which the Qur'an was transcribed. A collector

²⁹¹ *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, no. 2507.

compiled them and bound them with thread, so none would go missing.²⁹²

Abū Bakr's compilation process added another layer of verification, combining oral transmission with the transcribed sheets. Hence, any possible discrepancy in oral pronunciation was eliminated by the transcribed text in an ongoing process of standardizing the Qur'anic recitation. Abū Bakr's compiled Qur'an was the primary source for the final transcription of 'Uthmān's *mushaf*. This uniformity of transcription suggests that differences between the multiple copies of 'Uthmān's *mushaf* are limited only to what was directly conveyed by the Prophet ﷺ based on his reception from Jibrīl.²⁹³

Reviewing the written Qur'an

The aforementioned report of Zayd writing verse 4:95 also shows that the immediacy of transcription did not compromise review and verification. Zayd was reported, via a disputed chain of transmission, to have said, "I used to write the revelation for the Prophet while he dictated to me. When I finished [writing], he would tell me, 'Read [what you wrote]' so I read it. If something was missing, he would fix it."²⁹⁴ Hadith scholars cited this report to establish that reviewing a written text and comparing it with its source is mandatory, following the practice of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁹⁵

Drafts of letters were presented to the Prophet ﷺ by his scribes before being dispatched,²⁹⁶ a practice that was probably also applied to Qur'anic materials given their pivotal significance. Moreover, copying was known during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Some companions (like Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Bakr ibn Ḥazm, 'Urwah

²⁹² The quote is from his lost book *Fahm al-Sunan*, which many *'ulūm al-Qur'an* works cite. Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1984), 1:238.

²⁹³ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 168.

²⁹⁴ Jabal discussed its transmission citing multiple resources and suggested its authenticity. Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'anī*, 169n2.

²⁹⁵ Abū al-Khayr Muḥammad ibn 'Abdulrahmān al-Sakhāwī, *Fath al-mughīth bi-sharḥ Alfīyat al-ḥadīth*, ed. 'Abdulkarīm al-Khudair et al., 1st ed., 5 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Minhāj, 2005), 3:52.

²⁹⁶ Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 16–7.

ibn al-Zubayr, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Abū Bakr, and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb) kept personal copies they transcribed of different written dictations of the Prophet ﷺ. ²⁹⁷ Less than 25 years after the Prophet's death, a secretariat known as the House of Sheets (*bayt al-qarā'īs*) was established in Medina, near 'Uthmān's house. ²⁹⁸

Zayd narrated, “We were with, or around, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ compiling (*nu'allifu*) the Qur'an on scraps (*riqā'*).”²⁹⁹ This report shows that documentation was a group task, one that involved a process of compilation that encompassed writing, reviewing, and arranging verses and chapters. Additionally, the word “with” or “around” indicates that the Prophet ﷺ was always present among the memorizers and scribes during this process.³⁰⁰ Likely, he had certain places in which writers sat near him while writing to ensure accurate dictation. Ibn 'Abbās narrated that “a man would bring a sheet to the Prophet ﷺ, so a man would volunteer [seeking no compensation] to write down [the Qur'an], then another man takes a turn and writes down [the Qur'an] until the *muṣḥaf* is completed.”³⁰¹ Hence, writing the Qur'an was a voluntary task for which scribes gained no compensation. The materials on which the Qur'an was written were saved in the Prophet's house, Zayd's house, or other places such as the Prophet's mosque.³⁰²

It is highly probable that the entire Qur'an was transcribed during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, yet was scattered across different materials. A report attributed to Zayd says, “The Prophet ﷺ died, and the Qur'an was not compiled in a book. Rather, it was on palm leaf, stump, stalk, and branches.”³⁰³ In describing how he started the compilation process during the caliphate of Abū Bakr, Zayd said, “I started looking for the Qur'an and collecting it from [what was written on] palm stalks, thin white stones and also from the men who knew it by heart.”³⁰⁴ A lack of empirical evidence prompted many contemporary scholars and academics to

²⁹⁷ Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 17–18.

²⁹⁸ Al-A'zamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabyy*, 18.

²⁹⁹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3954.

³⁰⁰ Jabal, *Wathāqat naql al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 87–88.

³⁰¹ *Sunan al-Bayhaqī*, no. 11065.

³⁰² Al-Ḥamad, *Aṣālat al-naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 86.

³⁰³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥābah*, 1:390.

³⁰⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4986.

conclude that the Qur'an was not entirely written down during the lifetime of the Prophet. Thus, Yasin Dutton argues that

the picture of the Qur'an's 'collection' in written form after the death of the Prophet quite overtly refers to 'the hearts of men' as being one of the main sources of Qur'anic material (alongside palm-branches, stones, etc.). Indeed, given the limited surface area of these other materials, it would seem at least possible that, at the death of the Prophet, large portions of the Qur'an were still in 'the hearts of men' rather than being in a solid, written, form.³⁰⁵

While Dutton's suggestion that "large portions" of the Qur'an were not in "a solid" written form may seem empirically supported by the dearth of original written materials, the possibility that most, or even all, of the Qur'an was written down during the lifetime of the Prophet still stands. Indeed, everything that has been covered in this section—the organized scribal activities, the appointment of scribes, the encouragement of education through writing, the Divine command to preserve the text, and the authentically reported reliance on written materials transcribed during the time of the Prophet in the subsequent textual compilations of the Qur'an—plainly substantiate the thesis that the entire Qur'an was recorded before the Prophet's passing.

Furthermore, some contemporary scholars of Late Antiquity came to the conclusion that

the most probable theory seems to be that at the death of the proclaimer, the revelations received by this time had been fixed in writing, in the form of copies that had been established with his approval by some of his companions, although these forms were not submitted by the Prophet himself to a final redaction in the form of a codex.³⁰⁶

Indeed, many prominent classical authorities on the topic, such as Makkī ibn Abī Tālib, 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, al-Suyūfī and

³⁰⁵ Yasin Dutton, "The Form of the Qur'an: Historical Contours," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad A. Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 184–85.

³⁰⁶ Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, trans. Samuel Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143. Also see, Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam from the Aural to The Read*, trans. Shawkat M. Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 30.

al-Qaṣṭalānī, stated that the entirety of the Qur'an was transcribed during the time of the Prophet ﷺ.³⁰⁷

Among the more contemporary Qur'an scholars who held the position that the entire Qur'an was written down during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, yet on scattered materials, are Muḥammad ibn Khalaf al-Ḥuseinī (d. 1357/1939), 'Abdufattaḥ al-Qāḍī, 'Alī al-Dabbā', and Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī (d. 1400/1980).³⁰⁸ The reasons why the Prophet ﷺ did not order the compilation of these materials in one *muṣḥaf* are that 1) the companions were primarily concerned with the oral memorization of the Qur'an more than with its transcription, 2) the possibilities of revealing new Qur'an or abrogating some existing verses were continuously present during the Prophet's life, and 3) writing is meant to prevent forgetting or doubt over wording, which would not happen so long as the Prophet ﷺ, the trusted human source of the revelation, was present. The dispersion of the Qur'an's written pieces was a distinct difference between the "compilation of the Qur'an" during the time of the Prophet and the caliphates of Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān.³⁰⁹

Furthermore, the opinion that only parts of the Qur'an were written down during the time of the Prophet ﷺ does not negate the preservation of the entirety of the text. The continuance of oral transmission, as detailed in the first part of this article, and the rigorous process of compiling the Qur'an by the companions shortly after the death of the Prophet ﷺ compensated for any potential missing writings.

³⁰⁷ Makkī ibn Abī Tālib, *al-Ibāna 'an ma'ānī al-qirā'āt*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl Shalabī (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1960), 23; 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *Fawā'id fī mushkil al-Qur'ān* (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wal-Shū'un al-Islāmiyah, 1967), 27; Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:12; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:387; al-Qaṣṭalānī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, 1:95.

³⁰⁸ Muḥammad ibn Khalaf al-Ḥuseinī, *Khulāṣat al-nuṣūṣ al-jaliyyah fī nuzūl al-Qur'ān wa jam'ih wa ḥukm ittibā' rasm al-maṣāḥif al-'Uthmāniyyah* (Cairo: al-Matbaah al-Misriyah, 1931), 7; al-Dabbā', *Samīr al-tālibīn*, 10; al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf*, 11; al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 39.

³⁰⁹ Al-Qāḍī, *Tārīkh al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf*, 26–27.

Did the companions know orthography?

The prevalence of illiteracy and the unique transcription style of the companions in writing the *muṣḥaf* led some scholars, such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), to assert that the Arabic script until the time of the companions was not fully developed or standardized.³¹⁰ However, it is improbable that the companions, who established regular correspondences with kings and princes and documented their contracts, grants, and transactions, contravened rules of dictation and spelling.³¹¹ If Islam came while a limited number of people knew writing, the regular and diverse writing activities led by the Prophet ﷺ certainly signify a historic shift among the unlettered community.

In his discussion of this claim, al-Kurdī argues that the Kufic script, which was common during the time of the companions, was imported to the Hijaz from Iraq and originally belonged to the Himyaritic Yemeni script.³¹² However, this hypothesis has been disproven.³¹³ More recent research, which still struggles with the dearth of historical sources, has uncovered a more substantial relation between the Kufic and Nabatean scripts.³¹⁴ Some inscriptions from the companions' time are extant in Hijaz, especially in Mecca, Medina, and Taif, in different scripting styles.³¹⁵ Regardless of its exact origins, the Kufic script is certainly ancient—and it is unlikely that such an ancient script did not acquire its own orthographical rules, especially since other scripts that date thousands of years prior to the Himyaritic script, such as Phoenician, Assyrian, and Syriac, acquired their own rules.

Furthermore, the development of a discipline focused on the orthography of the Qur'an (*rasm muṣḥaf*)—investigating every style, script, font, and spelling variation—testifies to the intricacies contemplated by the companions. Different

³¹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1956), 1:757 and 791.

³¹¹ Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 116–120.

³¹² Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 11–1–9.

³¹³ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 24–26.

³¹⁴ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*, 36.

³¹⁵ Al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 119.

transcriptions reflecting different spelling rules or phonetic conventions were purposely conducted in accordance with the dialectical modes accommodated in the *rukhsah* of *ahruf*, to whose tracing and standardization the scholars have dedicated a massive body of scholarship.³¹⁶ Among multiple scholarly approaches to such differences is one that attributes them to mistakes made by the scribe—a possibility propounded by Ibn Qutaybah, Ibn Khaldūn, and arguably Ibn Kathīr.³¹⁷

The unique style of the *muṣḥaf*'s *rasm* prompted some of these scholars to draw a distinction between standard Arabic script and orthography and that of the 'Uthmānic codex. Ibn Khaldūn's sophisticated argument for the Arabic script's undeveloped character in uncivilized societies suggests an established writing style for scribes during the companions' time distinct from the one adopted in writing down the *muṣḥaf*.³¹⁸ This distinction, made by Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Qutaybah, and multiple contemporary researchers, neglects the fact that orthographic rules developed years later. Subjecting a phenomenon in the 'Uthmānic codex, which is written in different styles, to one orthographic rule is flawed.³¹⁹ Additionally, some of these different styles resulted from the companions' commitment to preserving the ancient figures or words while representing the unique phonetics employed in the Qur'an.³²⁰ Finally, traditional narrations suggesting scribal errors in the 'Uthmānic codex are rendered unauthentic or misconstrued.³²¹

The order of verses and the arrangement of the written and recited Qur'an

The placement of verses in their respective chapters was another critical responsibility of the Prophet's scribes since few chapters were revealed in their entirety at once. In addition to several short (*qiṣār*) chapters, a few relatively long

³¹⁶ For more on the history and development of the Arabic script, see al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-muṣḥaf*; Muhammad Ṭāhir al-Kurdī, *Tārīkh al-khaṭṭ al-'Arabī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Hilal, 1939); 'Abdulṣabūr Shāhīn, *Tārīkh al-Qur'ān*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Nahdat Masr, 2007), 103–15.

³¹⁷ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 172–86.

³¹⁸ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 175–76.

³¹⁹ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 169–70, 175–76.

³²⁰ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 175.

³²¹ Al-Ḥamad, *Rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, 177–86; Khatib and Khan, "The 'Uthmānic Codex."

chapters were revealed at once, such as al-An‘ām, al-Şaff, and al-Mursalāt.³²² The fact that the majority of the Qur'an was revealed in intervals necessitates that it was arranged sequentially with the time of revelation. The order of verses in the Qur'an, according to the majority of scholars, was mandated by Divine guidance and applied by the Prophet ﷺ (*tawqīfī*). This Divine arrangement is evidenced by the following facts:

First, as mentioned above, when he received new revelation, the Prophet ﷺ used to call on some of his scribes and instruct them to write and place it in its assigned chapter. Al-Qurṭubī and others attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās the report that after the last verse of the Qur'an was revealed, “And fear a Day when you will be returned to Allah,” Jibrīl asked the Prophet ﷺ to place it as verse number 281 in Sūrah al-Baqarah.³²³ ‘Uthmān ibn Abī al-‘Āş also narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Jibrīl [just] came to me and asked me to place this verse in this part of the *sūrah*, ‘Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.’”³²⁴ The Prophet’s adherence to Jibrīl’s instructions regarding the organization of the verses and chapters indicates that they are Divinely arranged.

The companions, in turn, abided by the arrangement of the Prophet ﷺ since they “would have never adopted an arrangement different from what they heard from the Prophet.”³²⁵ In commenting on Zayd’s statement, “We were with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ compiling the (*nu'allifu*) Qur'an on scraps,” al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) held the word *nu'allifu* to possibly mean “the compilation of scattered verses in their respective chapters.”³²⁶ ‘Uthmān mentioned that upon receiving intervals of long chapters, the Prophet ﷺ would call his scribes and say, “Place these verses in the chapter in which there is a mention of such and such.”³²⁷ The companions’ caution against addition or omission is reflected in their inclusion of

³²² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:132–33.

³²³ Qur'an 2:281.

³²⁴ Qur'an 16:90; *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 17459.

³²⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:195.

³²⁶ Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 1st ed., 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1984), 7:147.

³²⁷ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3086.

verses whose rulings are abrogated. When he was asked about why verse 2:240 was included despite the abrogation of its ruling on women's mourning waiting period for a year, 'Uthmān answered, "I do not change anything from its place."³²⁸

Second, multiple hadiths describe a group of verses or encourage their memorization or recitation in a particular sequence, such as the "opening verses" of a *sūrah* such as al-Kahf,³²⁹ or "the closing verses" of a *sūrah* such as al-Baqarah.

³³⁰ Third, the regular public reception of the Qur'an in prayer and through teaching by the companions adopted and affirmed the order of verses. The abovementioned eighth method, reciting in prayer, provides examples of several chapters the Prophet ﷺ recited in a verse order that the companions learned and preserved. Hence, Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795) was reported to have said, "The Qur'an was compiled based on the companions' oral reception of the recitation of the Prophet

ﷺ.³³¹
- عليه وسلم .

Fourth, scholarly literature on the particular arrangement and structure of the Qur'an examined the unique correlations between its consecutive verses and chapters. An example of such studies is the exegetical sub-discipline of the science of Qur'anic correlation (*'ilm al-munāsabah*). While some scholars dedicated independent works to discussing this discipline,³³² some exegetes applied its methodology in their exegeses (*tafsīr*), such as al-Rāzī, al-Suyūṭī, and al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480), who reflected this methodology in the title of his work, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar*. A more recent example of such methodology is Ibn 'Āshūr's (d. 1973) *tafsīr*. *'Ilm al-munāsabah* illustrates how the arrangement of verses was intentional; hence, the review of the transcribed Qur'an was necessary given the varying length of the periodical revelation. A case study on the longest chapter of the Qur'an, Sūrah al-Baqarah, was done by the late scholar Muḥammad

³²⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4530.

³²⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2216.

³³⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 806.

³³¹ Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni' fī ma'rifat marsūm maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, ed. Ḥātim al-Ḍāmin (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyyah, 2011), 122.

³³² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 2:272–85.

Dirāz (d. 1958), showcasing its structural unity and thematic cohesion despite addressing a wide range of subjects throughout its nine-year-long revelation.³³³

Finally, the names of the Qur'an's chapters were also held to be *tawqīfī* by many scholars. Several accounts relate numerous names of *sūrah*s from the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. Al-Suyūfī said, “The names of all the chapters are Divinely determined through hadiths and reports. If it was not for fear of prolixity, I would have stated that.”³³⁴ Hence, the definition of a “*sūrah*” is a reflection of a number of verses grouped by the Prophet ﷺ in one chapter with a specific name. This, however, does not contradict the fact that some chapters were given multiple names or descriptions by the companions and following generations. The question of whether a *sūrah* can acquire multiple names in addition to the Divinely assigned one is a matter of disagreement among scholars.³³⁵

Conclusion

The oral transmission of the Qur'an was the primary method the Prophet ﷺ adopted to preserve its text, following the Divine command of “recitation” and responding to the circumstances of the revelation's first recipients. In addition to immediately reciting the revelation to his companions, the Prophet ﷺ would recite it to disbelievers to present the miraculous message of Islam. He ﷺ would teach at mosques, during travel, and on a one-on-one basis to those coming to embrace Islam, to gatherings he came across, and in prayers and sermons. The Prophet ﷺ also instructed his companions to teach the Qur'an to each other as well as to new Muslims across different geographies and contexts. The Qur'an was taught and recited by travelers and in concentrated efforts in various places of worship, extending from centralized populations of Muslims to nomadic Bedouins. Millions of Muslims today across the globe, from all different age groups and ethnic or linguistic backgrounds, have the entire Qur'an memorized by heart.

³³³ Muḥammad ‘Abdullah Dirāz, *al-Naba al-‘aẓīm: Naẓarāt jadīdah fī al-Qur’ān*, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Dār Tayba lil-Nashr wal-Tawzī‘, 1997), 204–64.

³³⁴ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*.

³³⁵ Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*.

Throughout history and until today, Muslims remained committed to the oral culture of their text and maintained its verbal delivery with the most careful verification and articulation possible.

Ensuring the preservation of the Qur'an was a life-long process for the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his companions. Following Divine instructions and envisioning the future of his *ummah*, he organized scribal work among a select group of companions to contribute to the preservation process and to inspire the succeeding knowledge-based civilization they established. The Prophet's scribes and the written sheets of the Qur'an were the primary sources for the compilation of the Qur'an during the caliphate of Abū Bakr and its unified transcription during the caliphate of 'Uthmān. The Qur'an we have today, all 114 chapters, easily accessible in numerous print and digital forms, was fully and authentically preserved due to the oral and textual efforts of the first generation of our *ummah*. This article is an attempt to highlight but a fraction of that effort's depth, breadth, and ambition.