



The Written and the Read

When and why the qirāʾat differ from the codex of their city

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah, our Sustainer, who loves us, protects us, and answers our *duʿā*'s by continuing to allow us to serve the Qurʾān. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon the beloved Prophet, his family, and his companions, whose sacrifices can never be enumerated or repaid.

Alḥamdulillāh, Allah has blessed me to teach the science of *rasm*, Qurʾānic Orthography, for a few years. One of our class exercises requires students to compare the details of *rasm* they are learning with a *qirāʾāt muṣṣḥaf*. This allows the students to see the connection between the canonical recitations of the Qurʾān and *rasm*. While completing this exercise, students found instances where the *qirāʾah* did not agree with the *rasm* of the codex of its city. This would often cause a lot of confusion for students. Although we addressed it in class, I felt that a written resource would be helpful for both my students and other teachers who may encounter the same question in their classrooms. Because this resource assumes that the reader is either a teacher or student of the science of *rasm*, I have refrained from giving lengthy definitions of terms and concepts.

I pray that Allah makes this resource beneficial to all those who come across it and uses it to strengthen our understanding of the meticulous transmission of every aspect of His majestic Book. *Āmīn*.

‘Uthmānī Codices

The science of *rasm* and its details are derived from the reports and observations that we have received from the six ‘Uthmānī codices. All six codices were written in Madīnah by designated *ṣaḥābah* رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ under the supervision of Zaid ibn Thābit رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ during the *khilāfah* of ‘Uthmān رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. They were then sent to the major city centers of the Muslim world at the time, Makkah, Baṣrah, Kūfah, and Damascus. Two codices remained in Madīnah, one for the people of Madīnah to copy their *maṣāḥif* from, and one for ‘Uthmān’s رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ personal use.

One of the key features of the ‘Uthmānī codices was their incorporation of the canonical readings of the Qur’ān. They did so in two ways. Firstly, the *ṣaḥābah* رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ wrote the codices without vowel markings or dots for letters. This allowed one skeletal outline to incorporate multiple readings. For example, the skeletal outline كسر can be read as *kabīr* or *kathīr*. However, there were some readings that could not be incorporated within one skeletal structure. The *ṣaḥābah* رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ preserved these differences by spreading them across the codices. Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-A‘zamī writes that by using this method, the *ṣaḥābah* رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ treated each reading as equal. If one was written in the text, and the other for example, in the margin, it would suggest that the one written in the body of the text was preferred, while the one in the margin was less preferred.¹

¹ Al-A‘zamī, *History of the Qur’ānic Text*, 170.

The Qurṛā' and Their Cities

As the science of *qirā'āt* is connected to the science of *rasm*, it is almost impossible to teach *rasm* without discussing the *qirā'āt*. Like the codices, the *qirā'āt*, or canonical recitations of the Qur'ān, are also associated with the major Muslim city centers of their time. These are the cities in which these *qurrā'* lived and taught. The table below displays the names of the *qurrā'*, their dates of passing, and their city.

City	Qurṛā'
Madīnah	Imam Nāfi' (d. 169 AH) and Abū Ja'far (d. 130 AH)
Makkah	Imam Ibn Kathīr (d. 120 AH)
Baṣrah	Abū 'Amr (d. 154 AH) and Ya'qūb (d. 205 AH)
Damascus/Shām	Ibn 'Āmir (d. 129 AH)
Kūfah	Imam 'Āṣim (d. 127 AH), Ḥamzah (d. 156 AH), al-Kisā'i (d. 189 AH), and Khalaf al-'Āshir (d. 229 AH)

When we look at the information presented above, we can see that each major city that received a codex, also has one or more *qirā'ah* attached to it. This can easily lead students to assume that every *qirā'ah* will always match the writing of the codex of its city. This is also seemingly supported by the fact that one of the requirements for a *qirā'ah* to be valid is that it must match the 'Uthmānī *rasm*.²

Why the Qurṛā' Sometimes Differ from Their Codex

Before we discuss why the *qurrā'* may differ from the codex of their city, we must first understand why it is permissible for them to do so. It is a

² Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Naṣh*, l. 14-15.

requirement that a *qirā'ah* must match *rasm* 'Uthmānī. *Rasm* 'Uthmānī refers to all six codices, not to the specific codex of the city in which the *qārī* lived and taught. Therefore, if the *qirā'ah* matches **one** of the 'Uthmānī codices, it is considered as being in accordance with *rasm* 'Uthmānī.

To understand why the *qurrā'* may differ from their codex, we must consider the way in which the *qirā'āt* were transmitted. There were *ṣaḥābah* ﷺ present in the city centers to which the 'Uthmānī codices were sent before the arrival of the codex and the reciter assigned to it. For example, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd ؓ was present in Kūfah before 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī ؓ arrived with the Kufī codex. The *qurrā'* did not have to stop transmitting what they had learned through unbroken chains of transmission back to the Prophet ﷺ just because it did not match the particular codex that was sent to their city. Rather, as Imam Abū 'Amr ؓ explained, he continued to transmit what he had received as he saw that his transmission was in accordance with the codex of Madīnah, even though it was not in accordance with the codex of Baṣrah.³

Another question that arises is how could the *qurrā'* know that although their *qirā'ah* differed from their city's codex, it agreed with another codex? The answer to this is that the populations of these city centers were not static. Rather, while some of the *qurrā'* traveled

³ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni'*, 188; Thānwī, *Īdāḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 101, 179-180. See number 5 in the table on page 8 for the word which Imam Abū 'Amr reads according to the Madanī codex.

themselves, such as Imam Abū ‘Amr ؓ,⁴ others would have been exposed to the codices of the other cities through the *maṣāḥif* of the people visiting from there. This is one of the explanations that Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Makkī ؓ has given for why there are slight differences within a city’s *maṣāḥif*. Essentially, how could the *maṣāḥif* of Baṣrah differ if they were all copied from the same codex? Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Makkī ؓ explains that it could be due to *maṣāḥif* available in Baṣrah that were copied from the codices of other cities. The scholars of *rasm*, however, would consider all the *maṣāḥif* present in Baṣrah as Baṣrī *maṣāḥif*, and record it as a *khulf* or difference in *rasm* within the *maṣāḥif* of Baṣrah.⁵

Another detail that strengthens the point above is that the codices arrived in the city-centers by 35 AH, the year of passing of ‘Uthmān ؓ. If we look at the dates of death of the *qurrā’* as shared in a table earlier, we realize that, at the very least, close to 85 years or more had passed since the codices had been sent to the major city centers at the time. It is impossible that people did not travel between Makkah, Madīnah, Baṣrah, Kūfah, and Damascus for almost a century. Therefore, the *qurrā’* very likely had access to the writing of the codices of other cities, either by the *maṣāḥif* that came to their city, or through their own travels.

When we understand the definition of *rasm* ‘Uthmānī and the various amounts of exposure that the *qurrā’* had to the codices of other cities, we can understand how it is possible for a *qirā’ah* to disagree with the

⁴ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-Nihāyah*, 2:68.

⁵ Al-Makkī, *Afḍal al-Durar*, 9-10.

rasm of the codex of its city while agreeing with one of the other codices.

Where the Qurṛā' Differ from Their Codex

I was curious as to how many total places there are where the *qurṛā'* differ from the codex of their city. To compile the list below, I relied on the verses in *ʿAqīlat Atrāb al-Qaṣāʾid fī Asnā al-Maqāṣid* by Imam al-Shāṭibī ﷺ that discuss the differences between the codices.⁶ Within these lines, there are two types of differences. Those that have to do with *ḥadhf* of *alif*, writing a *sīn* as a *ṣād*, etc. These do not need to be considered here, as *ḥadhf*, *ithbāt*, *ibdāl*, *maqṭūʿ* and *mawṣūl* are not considered differences that prevent a *qirāʾah* from being assumed from the skeletal structure of the *qirāʾah* that is written.⁷ An example of this is *maliki yawm al-dīn* in Sūrah al-Fātiḥah. Although this word is written without an *alif* in the *rasm* of the Qurʾān, it does not prevent this word from being read as *māliki*, as *alif* is a commonly omitted letter. Another example is the word بِالْعُدُوِّ. This word is always written with a *wāw* after the *dāl* in the Qurʾān, according to the *qirāʾah* of Imam Ibn ʿĀmir ﷺ.⁸ However, because *alif* can be written as a *wāw* in *rasm*, and there are other examples of this,⁹ the writing of *alif* as a *wāw* is not seen as preventing the *qirāʾah* which reads this word with an *alif*.

⁶ These are lines 46-128.

⁷ Pānīpatī, *ʿInāyāte Raḥmānī*, 1:29.

⁸ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 65.

⁹ See Yacoob, *Sacred Spellings*, 208-212 for examples of other words in which *alif* is written as a *wāw*.

Instead, I specifically focused on those differences where the skeletal structure of one or more codices does not allow the other *qirā'ah* to be assumed. I counted a total of **thirty-seven** such differences. I then checked these instances against *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr* to see if one or more of the *qurrā'* differ with their codex. The list below is only of those places where a *qārī* differs from his codex. It is **not** a list of differences between the 'Uthmānī codices. I have also mentioned which codex the *qārī's* reading agrees with.

	Qur'ānic Word	Rasm	Qirā'āt that Differ
1.	يُسَيِّرُكُمْ (10:22)	This word is written as يَنْشُرُكُمْ in the Shāmī codex. ¹⁰	Imam Abū Ja'far ¹¹ reads this word as يَنْشُرُكُمْ according to the <i>rasm</i> of the Shāmī codex instead of the Madanī codex.
2.	عَمَلَتْهُ (36:35)	This word is written without a <i>hā'</i> after the <i>tā'</i> in the Kūfī codex. It is written with a <i>hā'</i> in the other codices. ¹²	Imam Ḥafṣ ¹³ reads this word with a <i>hā'</i> in accordance with the other codices and contrary to the Kūfī codex.

¹⁰ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 78.

¹¹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr*, l. 680.

¹² Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 105.

¹³ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr*, l. 874.

3.	تَأْمُرُونِي (39:64)	This word is written with two <i>nūns</i> in the Shāmī codex. ¹⁴	Imam Ibn Dhakwān ¹⁵ has two options, he may read it with one or two <i>nūns</i> . The option for reading it with one <i>nūn</i> is contrary to the Shāmī codex, but in accordance with the other codices.
4.	أَوْ أَنْ يُظْهِرَ (40:26)	This word is written with a <i>hamzah</i> and a <i>wāw</i> in the Kūfī codex, and without a <i>hamzah</i> and just a <i>wāw</i> , as وَأَنْ يُظْهِرَ, in the remaining codices. ¹⁶	Imam Ya‘qūb ¹⁷ reads this word in accordance with the Kūfī codex, instead of the Baṣrī codex.
5.	يَعْبَادِ لَا (43:68)	This word is written with a <i>yā’</i> after the <i>dāl</i> in the Shāmī and Madanī codices. It is written without the <i>yā’</i> in the remaining codices.	Imam Shu‘bah, Imam Abū ‘Amr and Imam Ruwais (with <i>khulf</i>) read this word with a <i>yā’</i> according to the Madanī and Shāmī codex, and not like the codex of their respective cities (Kūfah and Baṣrah).

¹⁴ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 106.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr*, l. 895.

¹⁶ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 108.

¹⁷ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr*, l. 897.

6.	نَشْتَهِيهِ (43:71)	This word is written with a <i>hā'</i> after the <i>yā'</i> in the Shāmī and Madanī codices. It is written without the <i>hā'</i> in the remaining codices as نَشْتَهِي in the remaining codices. ¹⁸	Imam Ḥafṣ ¹⁹ reads this word with a <i>hā'</i> at the end in accordance with the Shāmī and Madanī codices and contrary to the Kūfī codex.
7.	وَلَوْوَا (35:33)	This word is written with the <i>alif</i> after the second <i>wāw</i> in the Madanī and Kūfī codices. It is written without an <i>alif</i> after the <i>wāw</i> in the Baṣrī codex and <i>muṣḥaf al-imām</i> . ²⁰	Three of the four Kūfī Imams, Ḥamzah, al-Kisāʾī, and Khalaf , ²¹ read this word with <i>kasratāin</i> on the <i>wāw</i> instead of <i>fathatāin</i> even though there is an <i>alif</i> written in the Kūfī codex after the <i>wāw</i> .

Analyzing the table above, we can see that out of **thirty-seven** instances where one skeletal structure of a word cannot incorporate two *qirāʾāt*, there are **only seven** places where one or more of the *qurrāʾ* differ with their codex.

The table above also demonstrates that the following *qurrāʾ* are always in agreement with their codex. These are: **Imams Nāfiʿ, Ibn Kathīr, and Hishām**. Out of those that differ, only **Imam Ḥafṣ and Imam Ruwais** have

¹⁸ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 111.

¹⁹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr*, l. 911.

²⁰ Al-Shāṭibī, *Aqīlat Atrāb*, l. 125-128.

²¹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ṭayyibat al-Nashr*, l. 794.

two instances in which they disagree with the Kūfī codex. All the other Imams only differ once from the codex of their city. Whenever the *qurrā'* differ from their codex, they always agree with one of the other codices, and therefore, their *qirā'ah* is still in accordance with *rasm* ʿUthmānī.

Conclusion

Through the discussion above, we learned that a *qirā'ah* only needs to match one of the ʿUthmānī codices to be valid. Secondly, we also saw that there are very few places where a *qirā'ah* differs with the codex of its city. Therefore, we can conclude that in general, a *qirā'ah* agrees with the *rasm* of the codex of its city. This is because one or two exceptions to a rule do not render a principle inapplicable.

I ask Allah to forgive me for the mistakes I have made in writing on this topic, and I ask Him to accept this meager effort from me and make it a proof for me on the day I stand before Him. *Āmīn*.

اللهم صل على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم

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