

Article

The 'Uthmanic Rasm as Revisory Standard: Script, Reading, and Grammar in Early Qur'anic Standardization

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Abstract

This article revises the debate on the 'Uthmanic orthography (al-rasm al-'Uthmani) by distinguishing two questions: (a) origin – what relation did the 'Uthmanic codices bear to the seven aḥruf in which the Qur'an was revealed; and (b) effect – which criterion governs when script (rasm), reading (qira'a), and grammar conflict. Drawing on classical rasm and qira'at literature (al-Dani, Makki b. Abi Talib, Ibn al-Jazari, Abu Shama) and early grammatical criticism, and situating the argument against modern codicological research, we argue that the 'Uthmanic compilation is best understood as revisory (tanqihī) rather than purely documentary (tawthiqī): it retained what the undotted, unvocalized skeleton could accommodate and thereby functioned as a negative filter for readings, not as a complete record of all permitted modes. We reinterpret early claims of abrogation (naskh) as abandonment (tark) and distinguish bareness (tajarrud) from deliberate stripping (tajrid) of dots and vowels. A systematic comparison of Ibn 'Amir's reading of Q 6:137 and the cases of Ibn Shanabudh (d. 328/939) and Ibn Miqṣam (d. 354/965) clarifies the rule we defend: transmission establishes Qur'an-ness; rasm constrains it after 'Uthman; Arabic permissibility alone does not create it. We operationalize these insights in a teachable module for Qur'anic and linguistic studies.

Keywords: *Uthmanic rasm, seven aḥruf, qira'at, Arabic grammar, tajrid, Ibn Shanabudh, Ibn Miqṣam*

Introduction

The 'Uthmanic orthography (al-rasm al-'Uthmani) occupies an uneasy intersection of three disciplines: the history of the mushaf, the science of variant readings ('ilm al-qira'at), and Arabic grammar (nahw). Early scholars produced powerful justifications (tawjih, ta'lil, takhrij) for individual readings, but they left two foundational questions under-theorized. This article reformulates those questions, proposes testable answers, and shows how the answers can be taught.

Research Questions and Thesis

We distinguish structure from function. By structure we mean the relation of the rasm to readings and grammar. By function we mean the pedagogical and research uses of that relation. Two structural questions organize the inquiry:

RQ1 (origin): Did the codices produced under 'Uthman (r. 23–35/644–656) aim to encompass all seven aḥruf in which the Qur'an was revealed, only what the script could accommodate, or a single ḥarf selected to the exclusion of others?

RQ2 (effect): When rasm, sound transmission, and grammatical rule conflict, which governs the judgment that a reading is Qur'anic?

Our thesis is twofold. First, the 'Uthmanic compilation is better described as revisory (tanqihī) than as purely documentary (tawthiqī): prompted by disputes over recitation, unlike the Abu Bakr collection prompted by fear of loss after Yamama, it retained what the

consonantal skeleton (sawad) could accommodate and thereby became a standard against which recitations were measured. Second, the valid post-'Uthmanic rule is: (a) sound transmission is necessary, (b) conformity to the 'Uthmanic skeleton—explicitly or potentially—is necessary, and (c) conformity to some valid Arabic usage is necessary, but (c) alone is not sufficient and cannot override (a) and (b). Transmission establishes; rasm filters; grammar permits but does not create Qur'an-ness (cf. Ibn al-Jazari, 1981).

Method and Corpus

This is a conceptual-historical study with applied aims, not a new manuscript collation. The primary corpus comprises (a) reports on the two collections in al-Bukhari (n.d.) and Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif* (as cited in classical literature); (b) rasm theory in al-Dani (1991a, 1991b) and al-Shatibi's *'Aqila*; (c) readings theory in Makki b. Abi Talib (2011), Abu Shama (1995), and Ibn al-Jazari (1981, 1997); and (d) grammatical debate in Ibn Khalawayh (1991), al-Zamakhshari (1997), Ibn Jinni (1960), and Ibn Malik (1998). We situate classical claims against modern codicology—notably Déroche (2014) on Umayyad Qur'ans, Dutton (2012) on orality, literacy, and the seven-aḥruf hadith, and work on the Sana'a palimpsest (Hilali, 2017; Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012; Sinai, 2020)—to mark where literary reports require manuscript control. Verse citations give the standard Cairo/Medina text first, then variants labeled as reported anomalous (shadhdh) readings. The limit of the study is explicit: because the semantic referent of the seven aḥruf remains uncertain (al-Suyuti [1974] counted 40 opinions), conclusions about 'Uthmanic intent are conclusions about the early discourse and its institutional effects, not definitive claims about revelation itself.

The Question of Origin: Rasm and the Seven Aḥruf

Islamic tradition links facilitation (taysir) to the hadith that the Qur'an was revealed in seven aḥruf (al-Bukhari, n.d., hadith nos. 2287, 4706; Muslim, hadith no. 818). Scholars agree that recitation according to these aḥruf was valid and that they concern wording, not merely meaning. Beyond this, certainty is unavailable: opinions rest on ijtihad (al-Suyuti, 1974). This creates the familiar usuli problem noted by al-Juwayni (1996): no obligation prior to knowledge of it. How, then, can practice be evaluated against seven modes whose extension is unknown? Early debate therefore migrated to the 'Uthmanic *masahif*: did the committee encompass all seven, only what the rasm could bear, or one ḥarf?

Three classical answers to RQ1 structured all later discussion. The first held that the 'Uthmanic *mushaf* encompassed all seven aḥruf, appealing to the Companions' consensus and to 'Uthman's piety: nothing revealed as concession could be allowed to perish. The second held that it retained only what the skeleton could accommodate, so that readings requiring different skeletons were left aside by permission, not by loss. The third held that 'Uthman selected a single ḥarf and bound writing to it. Each view had distinguished supporters, and each paid a price. The first must explain observable regional differences among codices catalogued in rasm works; if all seven were fully preserved in every copy, why send different copies to Sham, Kufa, and Basra? The third must explain why the undotted skeleton so evidently supports more than one reading, and why the three-condition rule continued to validate multiple readings after standardization. The second, which we defend, best fits both the differentiated codices and the continued plurality: the *mushaf* preserved a bounded polyvalence. Dutton (2012) gives this a sociolinguistic grounding: the seven-aḥruf hadith marks a primarily oral dispensation for dialectal and lexical ease, while the written codex necessarily fixed one graphic dimension and left the

rest to memory and teaching. On this view, 'Uthman did not cancel facilitation; he institutionalized part of it.

Documentary Versus Revisory Compilation

We propose an analytic distinction. A documentary compilation aims at comprehensive preservation after loss; a revisory compilation aims at dispute resolution by standardization. The Abu Bakr collection is portrayed as the former, after the deaths of reciters at Yamama. The 'Uthmanic project is portrayed as the latter, after Hudhayfa's warning about disputes between Syrian and Iraqi reciters (al-Bukhari, n.d.; Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*).

Three considerations favor the revisory reading. First, context differs, so method should differ: collection versus review. Second, the classical three-condition rule for a sound reading—sound chain, agreement with the 'Uthmanic skeleton, and Arabic usage (Ibn al-Jazari, 1981)—is unintelligible unless the mushaf functions as a filter: what agrees with all codices is accepted if transmitted and Arabic; what agrees with some is assigned to those codices (e.g., Syrian *shuraka'ihim* with *ya'*); what contradicts all is judged *shadhdh*. Third, regional codices do differ orthographically in ways catalogued in *rasm* literature (al-Dani, 1991b), consistent with sending differentiated master copies to Kufa, Basra, Sham, Mecca, and Medina while retaining Medina as imam (see Dutton, 2012; Déroche, 2014, for codicological context).

This revisory thesis does not blame 'Uthman for loss. Following al-Tabari (2001), al-Mahdawi (as cited in Abu Shama, 1995), and Ibn al-Jazari (1997), we frame the act as imamic discretion (*siyasa*) for communal welfare: a permitted latitude—'So recite what is easy of it' (Q 73:20)—was restricted when unrestricted exercise produced *takfir* over recitation. Jurists recognize the principle: a permissible act leading to harm may be regulated.

Naskh Reinterpreted as Tark

Two classical defenses of 'Uthman fail in technical terms. The claim that Companion consensus abrogated non-accommodated modes is impossible as legal abrogation after the Prophet's death. The claim that Zayd b. Thabit's presence at the final review (*al-'arda al-akhira*) sorted abrogated from retained readings conflates chronology with authorization and, as often repeated, resembles contrivance (*talfiq*) more than reconciliation (*tawfiq*).

Close reading shows early authors meant abandonment, not technical *naskh*. Makki b. Abi Talib (2011) wrote that practice according to readings contradicting the mushaf script 'lapsed, so it is as though abrogated by consensus upon the script,' adding that abrogation of the Qur'an by consensus is disputed. Al-Baghawi (as cited in Abu Shama, 1995) likewise placed contradicting readings 'in the status of what has been abrogated and lifted.' Both use *naskh* loosely for *tark*. Similarly, the view that excluded modes were dispensations for specific individuals (*qadaya al-a'yan*) lacks evidence. The facilitation reading suffices without these strained devices.

Al-Baqillani (1999), often cited for the defence of the Qur'an against alteration charges, is relevant here for a different reason: he insists that mass-transmitted preservation is compatible with regulated recitation. That is, the community can faithfully preserve the revelation while its leader regulates which permitted forms are publicly recited to prevent strife. This separates fidelity from unrestricted license—a distinction our revisory model requires. By contrast, projecting later canonization (Ibn Mujahid's Seven, Ibn al-Jazari's Ten)

back onto 'Uthman confuses two standardizations: the graphic standardization of the 30s/650s and the reading standardization of the 4th/10th century. Keeping them distinct avoids the common error of asking whether 'Uthman 'chose' Hafs or Warsh; he fixed skeletons within which such later selections would operate.

Tajrid Versus Tajarrud: Were Dots Deliberately Omitted?

Master codices lacked systematic letter-dotting (naqt) and vocalization (shakl). Al-Shatibi versified the stripping view:

fa-jarraduhu kama yahwa kitābatahu / mā fihi shaklun wa-lā naqtun fa-yaḥtajirā –
 'So they stripped it bare, writing it as he wished: no vowel sign nor dot within it, lest it be confined' (al-Shatibi, 1957, verse 35).

Al-Dani (1991a) preserves Ibn Mas'ud's 'Strip the Qur'an bare (jarridu al-Qur'an),' later read as prohibiting dotting lest letters be augmented. Historically, however, systematic i'rab-dotting is associated with Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 67/686) at Ziyad b. Abih's request, and consonant-distinguishing i'jam-dotting with his students Nasr b. 'Asim (d. 89/708) and Yahya b. Ya'mar (d. 129/746; al-Dani, 1991a). If i'jam postdates 'Uthman, intentional stripping is anachronistic. We therefore distinguish tajrid (deliberate stripping) from tajarrud (original bareness): the sawad in itself permitted multiple dottings and vocalizations insofar as graphic similarity allowed. The appeal by some to al-Qalqashandi (1922) on pre-Islamic dotting and to scattered Arabian inscriptions does not establish systematic Qur'anic dotting in 30/650 (cf. Habbu, 1995). Pending specialist study of securely dated first-century Hijazi and Umayyad inscriptions and Qur'anic fragments (Déroche, 2014; Hilali, 2017), tajarrud remains the more parsimonious hypothesis. The effect is the same for readers – polyvalence – but the historical mechanism differs, and only manuscript evidence can decide it.

Two further observations strengthen tajarrud without overstating it. First, early Qur'anic fragments in Hijazi and early Umayyad hands studied by Déroche (2014) show increasing but still unsystematic use of diacritics through the first century, consistent with gradual introduction rather than removal. The Sana'a palimpsest (Hilali, 2017; Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012) likewise shows a lower text with variants that still fall largely within consonantal possibilities debated in later literature, suggesting that early fluidity was graphic and oral before it was fully theorized as rasm versus dabt. Second, the literary prohibition of dotting reported from the salaf – fear that dots would lead to additions (al-Dani, 1991a) – reads more naturally as anxiety about a new practice than as memory of an original stripping order for which no contemporary administrative trace survives. We therefore retain tajrid as a theological-literary motif that expressed reverence for the masters' authority, while treating tajarrud as the better historical hypothesis. Crucially, both agree on the functional outcome for later readers: an undotted, unvocalized authority text that must be paired with oral teaching. That pairing is why rasm alone never suffices to produce a reading, a point Ibn Miqsam neglected.

Table 1

Model	Trigger	Aim	Relation to variants
Abu Bakr collection	Deaths at Yamama; fear of loss	Comprehensive preservation (tawthiq)	Collect all established material

'Uthmanic standardization	Recitation disputes; accusations of error	Dispute closure by standard (tanqih)	Retain what skeleton can bear; filter the rest
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The Question of Effect: Rasm, Transmission, and Grammar

Reciters required conformity to Arabic without demanding the most eloquent usage (afṣaḥiyya); any valid usage, agreed upon or disputed, sufficed if transmission was sound (Ibn al-Jazari, 1981; cf. Makki's stricter requirement of strength). Grammarians, by contrast, sometimes required rejection of transmitted readings violating rules, on the ground that even precise transmitters err. Hence the transmission-based criterion (al-miqyas al-riwa'i) versus the rule-based criterion (al-miqyas al-qa'idi). The root cannot become branch: grammar derived substantially from the Qur'an cannot govern it unilaterally (Abu Shama, 1995).

Modern textual work clarifies why the reciters' three conditions took the form they did. If the graphic standard was fixed while oral plurality continued, a rule was needed that honored both without allowing either to expand indefinitely. Requiring a sound chain blocked invention; requiring rasm agreement blocked Companion readings whose skeletons the masters had set aside; requiring Arabic blocked solecism. The order matters: transmission first, then script, then language. Makki's additional demand of strength (qawwa) in Arabic would have raised the bar further, but the majority settled for permissibility (wajh), even disputed, precisely to protect transmitted rarities like Ibn 'Amir's separation. This hierarchy is our answer to RQ2, and the cases below test its edges.

Test Case: Q 6:137 and Ibn 'Amir

The standard reading is:

wa-kadhaliḳa zuyyina li-kathirin mina al-mushrikin qatlu awladihim shuraka'uḥum – 'And thus the killing of their children has been made fair-seeming to many polytheists by their partners' (Q 6:137).

Ibn 'Amir al-Shami (d. 118/736) is reported to have read qatlu awladahum shuraka'ihim, annexing qatlu to shuraka'ihim while separating annexed and genitive by the object awladahum. Ibn Khalawayh (1991) called separation by non-adverbial ugly and rare and advised another reading. Al-Tabari (2001) and Ibn 'Atiyya rejected it; al-Zamakhshari (1997) called it clumsy even as poetic license, let alone in inimitable prose, attributing Ibn 'Amir's choice to seeing shuraka'ihim written with ya' in some (Syrian) codices.

Two points matter. First, critics presuppose ikhtiyar (selection following the codex), unlike reciters who presuppose talaqqi (reception). Second, defenders – Kufans and Ibn Malik (1998), who made this reading his 'mainstay' ('umdati qira'atu Ibn 'Amir) – cite poetic parallels for separation by a direct object and the Syrian rasm. Under our rule, the reading stands if its chain is sound and its Arabic has precedent, however rare, because rasm (Syrian ya') accommodates it. Rarity does not equal ungrammaticality; the mushaf plus transmission outweigh Basran analogy here.

The Limits Tested: Ibn Shanabudh and Ibn Miqsam

Ibn Mujahid's (d. 324/936) canonization of seven readings provoked two contemporaries. Ibn Shanabudh held transmission plus Arabic suffices without rasm; Ibn Miqsam held rasm

plus Arabic suffices without a sound chain (Ibn al-Jazari, 1932; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 1996; Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992). Ibn Mujahid compelled retractions – under coercion, by most accounts – after which Ibn Shanabudh withdrew and Ibn Miqsam resumed teaching whatever Arabic permits with the mushaf (Yaqut al-Hamawi, 1993; al-Qifti, 1955). Their works survive mostly in catalogues (Ibn al-Nadim, 1971; see al-Madi, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, for titles).

We argue both extensions should be rejected, for opposite reasons, and the contrast is instructive. Ibn Shanabudh generally relied on transmission – often Companion readings judged shadhdh (Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy, Ibn 'Abbas, 'Ali) – but departed from the skeleton by addition or omission, frequently amounting to explanatory interpolation (*idraj*). Ibn Miqsam, by contrast, generally respected the skeleton but generated readings by *ijtihad* on *dabt* (vocalization and patterning) without transmission. Tables 2 and 3 summarize representative examples discussed in *qira'at* literature (Ibn Khalawayh, 2007; Ibn Jinni, 1960; al-'Ukbari, 1980). Standard text is given first to avoid confusion.

Table 2

Standard (Cairo) text	Reported reading (shadhdh)	Rasm relation	Transmission	Illustrative issue
Q 3:104 wa-ltakun minkum ummatun ... (Let there be among you a community ...)	yu'minuna bi-llah ... wa-yasta'inuna llaha 'ala ma asabahum (believing ... and seeking God's help ...)	Violates skeleton (addition)	Weak / Companion parallels claimed; below tawatur	Idraj as exegesis
Q 18:79 wa-kana wara'ahum malikun ya'khudhu kulla safinatin ghasban	... kulla safinatin salihatin ghasban (... every sound ship ...)	Addition of adjective	Reported via shadhdh chains	Explanatory gloss
Q 34:14 ... ma labithu fi al-'adhabi al-muhin	... ma labithu hawlan fi al-'adhabi al-muhin (... a year ...)	Addition	Shadhdh chains	Specification of duration

Table 3

Standard text	Reported <i>ijtihad</i> reading	Rasm relation	Arabic argument	Assessment
Q 12:80 khalasū najiyyan (withdrew apart)	khalasū nujabā'a (withdrew as noble ones)	Compatible (<i>dabt</i> /pattern change)	najaba → najib/nujaba' by analogy	Arabic possible; no chain → not Qur'anic
Q 28:15 fa-staghathahu ... (so he called for help)	fa-sta'anahu ... (so he sought his help)	Compatible	isti'ana vs. istighatha; explanatory	Exegesis, not recitation
Q 38:5 'ajab (wondrous) / 'ujab	'ujjab (most astonishing, fu'al pattern)	Compatible	fa'il/fu'al pairs: karim/kurram; wadi'/wuḍḍā' (Ibn Jinni, 1960)	Morphology valid; validity still needs transmission
Q 48:25 law tazayyalū (had they been separated)	law tazayyalū (tafa'ul for tafa'ul)	Compatible	Pattern intensification	Semantic nuance without authority

Q 40:37 fa-aṭṭali'a (so that I may look, subjunctive)	fa-aṭṭali'u (and I look, indicative); fā' causal→conjunctive	Compatible	Particle reanalysis	Grammar illustrates polyvalence; not proof of reading
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The upshot supports our filter rule. Ibn Shanabudh fails condition (b): even with plausible chains and Arabic sense, contradiction of all codices renders a reading shadhdh after 'Uthman. Ibn Miqsam fails condition (a): even when rasm-compatible and Arabic-strong, unprecedented vocalizations without sound transmission are interpretation or linguistic illustration, not Qur'an. That Ibn Miqsam often finds support among recognized authorities for individual forms does not validate his method; isolated parallels do not constitute tawatur, shuhra, or istifada.

Biographical context sharpens the contrast. Ibn Shanabudh, a respected transmitter who had studied with Qunbul and others, reportedly possessed sound material but refused the rasm condition; Ibn Miqsam, a jurist-grammarians of the Shafi'i tradition, reportedly possessed method but relaxed the chain condition (Ibn al-Jazari, 1932; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 1996). Ibn Mujahid's intervention – backed by vizierial authority under Ibn Muqla – was as much institutional as intellectual: fixing Seven as teachable canon to end mosque disputes that echoed the very disputes 'Uthman had faced. The flogging and retraction narratives should therefore be read with source criticism: our sources are largely pro-canonization. Even so, the conceptual lesson stands. Ibn Shanabudh's reliance on Companion parallels shows that transmission without graphic discipline proliferates mushafs in effect; Ibn Miqsam's dabt ijtiḥad shows that graphic-plus-linguistic possibility without transmission proliferates Qur'ans in principle. Canon needed both brakes. Our Tables 2 and 3 are meant to let students feel both failures concretely: in Table 2 the Arabic often makes excellent exegetical sense – salihan explains which ships, hawlan specifies duration – which is exactly why idraj is tempting; in Table 3 the morphology is often impeccable – nujabā', 'ujjāb, tuwwāl – which is exactly why linguistic possibility seduces. Validity and sense must be judged separately.

This history also explains the genre of ihtijaj/tawjih: once validity was distinguished from justification, scholars could still show how shadhdh forms work in Arabic (Ibn Jinni, 1960; Ibn Khalawayh, 1991) without declaring them Qur'anic. We propose reorienting current research from validity policing (mas'alat al-'amal) to understanding (mas'alat al-tafahhum): complete the missing links, make takhrij teachable, and use early ta'lil to improve learning across Qur'anic and linguistic sciences.

Functional Implications: From Structure to Teaching

Function follows structure. If rasm filters but does not fully determine readings, and grammar illustrates but does not legislate them, then teaching rasm-qira'a-nahw together trains judgment (malaka) rather than rote conformity. We operationalize this as a 3-week MA module suitable for shari'a, Qur'anic studies, and Arabic linguistics programs (Table 4). Each unit pairs one structural problem with one hands-on exercise in tawjih.

Table 4

Week	Problem	Text	Exercise	Outcome
1	Revisory standard	Hudhayfa report; regional variants	Collate Dani (1991b) variants	Student explains why rasm is negative filter

		(e.g., Q 6:137 Syrian ya')	for one verse; map to regions	
2	Tajarrud & polyvalence	Unpointed sawad; Q 12:80, 38:5	Revocalize skeleton within Arabic patterns; check precondition (chain)	Student distinguishes possible Arabic from valid Qur'an
3	Transmission vs. rule	Ibn 'Amir vs. Basrans; Ibn Shanabudh vs. Ibn Miqsam	Write 300-word tawjih for one sound and one shadhdh reading	Student produces ihtijaj without conflating validity and justification

Assessment is a short portfolio: (a) a collation sheet, (b) a revocalization with explicit verdict (Qur'anic / Arabic-only / invalid), and (c) a reflective note on how facilitation (taysir) and communal welfare (maslaha) justify regulation without implying defect in revelation. This makes the article's historical claims directly usable and testable in the classroom.

Conclusion

We conclude that (1) the source of rasm problems is its post-'Uthmanic function as arbiter of aḥruf-related plurality; (2) the 'Uthmanic enterprise is best modeled as revisory standardization retaining what an undotted, unvocalized skeleton could bear; (3) bareness (tajarrud), not proven deliberate stripping (tajrid), best fits current evidence, subject to manuscript control; (4) polyvalence of that skeleton grounds legitimate multiplicity in recitation, grammar, and semantics; (5) the reciter-grammarian dispute reveals the relativity of validity criteria and the need for our three-condition rule; and (6) teaching rasm with readings and grammar cultivates transferable proficiency for Qur'anic understanding. These conclusions remain revisable: definitive history of the two collections and of early dotting awaits fuller integration of literary reports with dated manuscripts and inscriptions.

Recommendations for Research

First, integrate rasm into university curricula as a research-linked module of the kind in Table 4, not as orthographic drill. Second, recover linguists' contributions to readings—especially the lost corpora of Ibn Shanabudh and Ibn Miqsam—through catalogue-based manuscript survey and systematic collation of their mufradat in usul and farsh. Third, encourage problem-driven histories of the mushaf that combine rasm literature with Umayyad codicology and epigraphy. Fourth, train Qur'anic-studies researchers in humanities methods—textual criticism, historical sociolinguistics, and pedagogy of malaka—so that tawjih again serves understanding.

Position Within Current Scholarship

This revision also clarifies where the article stands between two literatures that rarely speak to each other. Classical rasm and qira'at scholarship offers unmatched granularity on variants and their justifications but often treats the 'Uthmanic moment apologetically, as if acknowledging selection implied deficiency. Modern revisionist and codicological scholarship offers material control—hands, inks, palimpsests, inscriptions—but sometimes brackets the Islamic legal and pedagogical reasoning that made the standard workable for fourteen centuries. Our filter model is an attempt at mediation: it accepts the classical claim

that the community preserved the Qur'an faithfully while accepting the codicological observation that every standardization selects. Selection is not corruption; it is what standards do. By naming the standard's logic – retain what the bare skeleton can bear, teach the rest orally, judge later claims against both – we make classical theory testable against manuscripts without reducing it to antiquarianism.

That mediation has a concrete payoff for the seven-*aḥruf* debate. If Dutton (2012) is right that the *ḥadīth* primarily marks oral facilitation for a diverse early community, then asking which single graphic form 'contains' all seven mistakes the category: a skeleton does not contain pronunciations the way a box contains objects; it permits them to varying degrees while prompting memory. Regional distribution of controlled differences – the Syrian *yā'* in Q 6:137 being the textbook case – is then not a failure to copy identically but evidence of designing for distributed permission. Future work should test this systematically by collating Dani's (1991b) regional notices against published Umayyad fragments (Déroche, 2014) verse by verse, rather than by general appeal to 'accommodation.' We outline that collation as priority research below, but its logic already supports the revisory reading over both maximalist (all seven in every copy) and minimalist (one *ḥarf* only) alternatives.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Four limits must be stated. First, we rely on edited literary sources, not first-hand collation of fragments or inscriptions; paleographic and radiocarbon debates are therefore reported, not adjudicated. Second, our regional-codex claims rest on *rasm* literature's notices, which themselves harmonize diverse reports; a full stemma of codices requires manuscript-by-manuscript verification beyond our scope. Third, our biographical reconstruction of Ibn Shanabudh and Ibn Miqsam depends on late, often hostile sources (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 1996); we mitigate this by focusing on method-types rather than personal motives, but archival discovery could revise details. Fourth, our pedagogical module is proposed, not yet evaluated; learning gains in *malaka* require classroom trials with pre- and post-assessments of *tawjīh* quality.

These limits define an agenda. (1) Verse-level collation: build an open dataset linking Dani's regional variants, the Sana'a lower-text variants (Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012; Hilali, 2017), and Umayyad fragment readings for a sample (e.g., Q 6, 12, 18, 34, 38, 40, 48) to quantify what 'what the skeleton could bear' meant in practice. (2) Dotting chronology: with epigraphists, catalogue securely dated first-century Arabic inscriptions and Qur'anic leaves for presence, placement, and system of dots, to move *tajarrud* from parsimonious hypothesis to dated sequence. (3) Reception history: trace how Ibn Mujahid's Seven and Ibn al-Jazari's conditions reshaped *rasm*'s authority from filter to proof-text across commentaries. (4) Pedagogy: pilot Table 4's module in two parallel MA cohorts, scoring portfolios blind for distinction among Arabic-possible, transmitted, and Qur'anic, and publish the rubric. Each project is sized for a dissertation or funded collaboration, giving junior researchers entry points without requiring them to resolve the *aḥruf* referent first.

Finally, the study models how Qur'anic sciences can engage modern humanities methods without surrendering their normativity. Textual criticism supplies the question – what did the earliest skeletons permit – while *uṣūl* supplies the question – what should a later community recite as Qur'an. Historical sociolinguistics explains why oral facilitation preceded graphic fixation, and pedagogy research explains how tacit *malaka* becomes explicit rubric. Keeping these questions distinct prevents two common errors: treating a

sound chain as proof of graphic originality, and treating graphic antiquity as proof of recitational validity. Our three-condition rule, tables of test cases, and portfolio tasks are designed to keep that separation visible on every page and in every class.

In short, once rasm is understood as a revisory filter operating on a originally bare skeleton, the celebrated multiplicity of readings ceases to look like indecision and appears as designed boundedness: many licit recitations, one graphic discipline, and a clear procedure for judging new claims. That is the structural insight whose classroom use—collating, revocalizing under constraint, and justifying verdicts—forms researchers who can both revere the mushaf and reason about it.

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