

al-Hajjaj, Kitab al-Masahif & Missionaries

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Last Modified: 16th September 1999

Assalamu-alaikum wa rahamtullahi wa barakatuhu:

The issue of changes in the Qur'ân which al-Hajjâj bin Yûsuf had made consists of Christian polemics and Islamic sources. The points concerning the [Christian polemics had already being dealt with](#). In this document we will deal with what is quoted in [Kitâb al-Maṣāḥif](#) of Ibn Abî Dâwûd concerning the changes which al-Hajjâj made in ʿUthmân's^(R) mushâf. [Kitâb al-Maṣāḥif](#) of Ibn Abî Dâwûd is available in [Materials For The History Of The Text Of The Qur'ân: The Old Codices](#), 1937, Arthur Jeffery, E J Brill, Leiden.

It is important to remember that:

- The isnad of the report is not verified yet.
- The reasons for changes of 11 letters in ʿUthmân's^(R) mushâf by al-Hajjâj are not clear. This is presumably either due to the mistakes made by the scribe(s) or preference of one Qirâ'a over the other. It seems that the changes involved a combination of correction of the errors of the scribes as well as preference of one Qirâ'a over the other.

Further research needs to be done along these lines. The report as well as the translation is given below.

باب (ما غير الحجاج في مصحف عثمان)

قال أبو بكر كان في كتاب أبي حدثنا رجل فسألت أبي من هو؟ فقال حدثنا عباد بن صهيب عن عوف بن أبي جميلة أن الحجاج بن يوسف غير في مصحف عثمان أحد عشر حرفاً، قال كانت في البقرة (س ٢ آ ٢٥٩) « لَمْ يَتَسَنَّ وَأَنْظُرٌ » فغيرها « لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ » بالهاء ، وكانت في المائدة (س ٤٨ آ ٥) « شَرِيْمَةٌ وَمِنْهَاجًا » فغيره « شِرْعَةٌ وَمِنْهَاجًا » ، وكانت في يونس (س ١٠ آ ٢٢) « هُوَ الَّذِي يُنْشِرُكُمْ » فغيره « يُسَيِّرُكُمْ » ، وكانت في يوسف (س ١٢ آ ٤٥) « أَنَا آتِيكُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ » فغيرها « أَنَا أَنْبِئُكُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ » ، وكانت في المؤمنين (س ٢٣ آ ٨٥ - ٨٩) « سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ » لله ثلاثون فجعل الآخرين « الله الله » ، وكان في الشعراء في قصة نوح (س ٢٦ آ ١١٦) « مِنْ الْمَخْرُجِينَ » وفي قصة لوط (١٦٧ آ) « مِنْ الْمَرْجُومِينَ » فغير قصة نوح « مِنْ الْمَرْجُومِينَ » وقصة لوط « مِنْ الْمَخْرُجِينَ » ، وكانت في الزخرف (س ٤٣ آ ٣٢) « نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعَانِيَهُمْ » فغيرها « مَعِيشَتَهُمْ » ، وكانت في الذين كفروا (س ٤٧ آ ١٥) « مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ يُسْنِ » فغيرها « مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنِ » ، وكانت في الحديد (س ٥٧ آ ٧) « فَأَلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَأَتَقُوا لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا » فغيرها « مِنْكُمْ وَأَتَقُوا » ، وكانت في إذا الشمس كورت (س ٨١ آ ٢٤) « وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِظَنِينٍ » فغيرها « بِضَنِينٍ » .

The translation of the report as follows:

Section: What al-Hajjâj Had Changed in 'Uthmân's Mushâf?

Abu Bakr said that it was there in the book of my father that a man told; I asked my father, "Who was that man?". He said, "Abbâd ibn Suhaib told us from Awf ibn Abî Jamîla that al-Hajjâj bin Yûsuf changed in 'Uthmân's mushâf 11 letters". He said in

al-Baqarah (2:259) lam yatasanna wanzur without ha to lam yatasannah with ha.

and in al-Ma'idah (5:48) sharî'atan wa minhâjan was changed to shir'atan wa minhâjan

and in Yûnus (10:22) huwal-ladhî yunash-shirukum was changed to yusay-yirukum

and in Yûsuf (12:45) 'anâ-âtîkum bita'wilihi was changed to 'anâ onabbio'kum bita'wilihi

and in Mu'minûn (23:85-89) sayaqûlûna lillâh....lillâh....lillâh he made the two last occurrences allâh....allâh

and in as-Shu'ara in the story of Nuh (26:116) it was minal mukhrajîna and in the story of Lut (26:167) it was minal marjumîna. It was changed in the story of Nuh to minal marjumîna and in the story of Lut to minal mukhrajîna

and in az-Zukhruf (43:32) it was nahnu qasamnâ baynahum mâ' ishahum and he changed it to ma'ishatahum

and in al-ladhîna kafarû (47:15) min mâ'inn ghayri yasin was changed to min mâ'inn ghayri âsin

and in al-Ĥadîd (57:7) he changed fal-ladhîna âmanu minkum wat-taqaw lahum 'ajrun kabîr to minkum wa anfaqu.

and in "When the Sun is folded up" (81:24) wa mâ huwa 'alal-ghaybi bidhanîn to bidanîn^[1]

The Nature Of Changes Which Al-Ĥajjâj Made

Interestingly enough this report does not provide any clue of the nature of changes that were made by al-Ĥajjâj in the mushâf of 'Uthmân^(R). An in-depth study shows that they are the differences in the Qirâ'at. A crash course on Qirâ'at can be obtained from [here](#).

So, we will deal with the changes which al-Ĥajjâj made one by one, *inshallah*.

Dr. 'Umar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân did research on this issue for his Ph.D thesis in University of Imâm Muḥammad Ibn Saud. His thesis was published as a book from Riyadh in two volumes. The book is called [Aarâ' al-Mustashriqîn Hawl al-Qur'ân al-Karîm wa Tafsîr: Dirâsah Wa Naqd](#) (The Views Of The Orientalists About The Holy Qur'ân & Its Interpretation: Study and Criticism).

After quoting the ḥadîth of Ibn Abî Dâwûd, Dr. Radwân mentions in his footnotes about the Qirâ'at which the changes are associated with.

al-Baqarah (2:259) **lam yatasanna wanzur** without *ha* to **lam yatasannah** with *ha*.^[2]

Comments: Both readings are among The Seven as it is mentioned by Ibn Zanjalah in *Hujjat al-Qirâ'at*, page 142/143, where he says that Hamzah and al-Kisâ'i read **lam yatasanna** without the letter *ha* in wasl (i.e., in case they didn't stop at the word **yatasanna** while reading) and the five other readings read **yatasannah** keeping the *ha* even when they didn't stop.^[3]

and in al-Ma'idah (5:48) **sharî'atan wa minhâjan** was changed to **shir'atan wa minhâjan**.^[4]

Comments: an-Nakh'î and Ibn Waththâb read with a *fathah* on the letter *shîn* (i.e. **shar'atan**) and the whole community of readers read **shir'atan** and I found nobody mentioning **sharî'atan**.^[5]

and in Yûnus (10:22) **huwal-ladhî yunash-shirukum** was changed to **yusay-yirukum**.^[6]

Comments: Both readings are among The Seven. They were mentioned by Ibn Zanjalah in his book *Hujjat al-Qirâ'at*, page 329, where he says that Ibn 'Aamir read **yunash-shirukum** and the other readers read **yusay-yirukum**.^[7]

and in Yûsuf (12:45) **'anâ-âtîkum bita'wilihi** was changed to **'anâ onabbio'kum bita'wilihi**.^[8]

Comments: al-Hasan read **'anâ-âtikom** with a long hamzah having a *fathah* followed by the letter *tâ* having a *kasrah* and a silent *yâ*. And in wasl (i.e., when not stopping on the word), Nâfî' and Abû Ja'far read **'anâ onabbio'kum** as it is mentioned by Ahmad 'Abdul Ghany ad-Domyâtî in his book *Ithâfu Fodalâ' ilbashar Fil Qirâ'at Ilarba'a 'Ashar*, page 265.^[9]

and in Mu'minûn (23:85-89) **sayaqûlûna lillâh....lillâh....lillâh** he made the two last occurrences **allâh....allâh**.^[10]

Comments: All these readings are among The Seven as mentioned by Ibn Zanjalah in [Hujjat al-Qirâ'at](#), page 490, where he says that Abû 'Aamir read **allâh...allâh** with an *alif* and the others read **lillâh...lillâh** and all readings agreed on the first occurrence (i.e., **lillâh**).^[11]

and in as-Shu'ara in the story of Nuh (26:116) it was **minal mukhrajîna** and in the story of Lut (26:167) it was **minal marjumîna**. It was changed in the story of Nuh to **minal marjumîna** and in the story of Lut to **minal mukhrajîna**^[12]

Comment: I didn't find anybody who mentioned what the author has said.^[13]

and in az-Zukhruf (43:32) it was **nahnu qasamnâ baynahum mâ'ishahum** and he changed it to **ma'ishatahum**^[14]

Comments: The reading of the community (jumhoor) of readers is **ma'ishatahum** in singular. al-'Amash and 'Abdullâh and Ibn 'Abbâs and Sufyân read **mâ'ishahum** in plural as mentioned by Abû Hayyân in [Al-Bahr al-Muhît](#), VIII - page 13.^[15]

and in al-ladhîna kafarû (47:15) **min mâ'inn ghayri yasin** was changed to **min mâ'inn ghayri âsin**^[16]

Comments: The Seven except Ibn Kathîr read **ghayri âsin** with a *madd* (a long vowel), as for the reading **yâsinin** it is *shâdh* and was mentioned by Abû Hayyân who reported it using the words it was said that Refer to [Hujjat al-Qirâ'at](#) in page 667 by Ibn Zanjalah and the interpretation of [Al-Bahr al-Muhît](#), VIII - page 79.^[17]

and in al-Ĥadîd (57:7) he changed **fal-ladhîna âmanu minkum wat-taqaw lahum 'ajrun kabîr** to **minkum wa anfaqu**.^[18]

Comment: I could not find the one who mentioned this reading.^[19]

and in "When the Sun is folded up" (81:24) **wa mâ huwa 'alal-ghaybi bidhanîn to bidanîn** ^[20]

Comment: Ibn Kathîr and Abû 'Amr and al-Kisâ'i and Rees and Ibn Mahrân from Rawh read with the letter *dhâ* and the others read with the letter *dâd*, and so it is in all the Codices (the books). Refer to [An-Nashr fil Qirâ'at il'ashr](#), II - page 398/399. ^[21]

Dr. Radwân went on to say:

These readings as I have just highlighted are among the correct ([Sahîh](#)), [Mutawâtir](#) and well established that we can read in any form it has been drawn into and among them are ones I could not verify which make us doubt about their being attributed to al-Hajjâj, especially because he was not isolated from the Ummah. Much more, in his time, no Muslim would let him change or replace anything traced back to the Prophet ^(ﷺ) whether it concerned Qur'ân or hadith.

All these arguments rebut the claims of the Orientalists. And the following points confirm the validity of my opinion:

- al-Hajjâj being loyal to 'Uthmân (or from his court) and since he wouldn't forgive those who let 'Uthmaan down on the day of ad-Daar (or the house), how could he question 'Uthmân and his codex and make changes in it.
- The codex of 'Uthmân was spread everywhere and its copies in the time of 'Uthmân were countless. How about their number in the Umayyads time? Undoubtedly, their number has increased. Moreover, al-Hajjâj was the mere governor of one county of the huge Islamic land. Supposing that he was able to change the copies of his county how could he reach the ones in the other districts while there were thousands of copies! Much more, history did not mention contradictions between the Codices of Iraq and the other Codices. It is well known that the Great Book is saved in the chests of Muslims as much as it is saved in written form. If al-Hajjâj managed to change the lines how could he reach what is inside the chests of thousands of Muslims?

- It is known as well that the Abbassid dynasty was established on the ruins of the Umayyads and that they changed many of the policies of Banî Umayyah in the administration of the lands. They didn't spare any effort in showing the negative aspects of Banî Umayyah and in getting close to the people by spreading justice and defending it. If the Abbassids had found any changes in the Holy Book, it would have been the greatest opportunity for them to show how misleading Banî Umayyah were and, thus, give their own rule some additional legitimacy.^[22]

Orientalists' And Missionaries' View

There is a rule of thumb which one must learn. Orientalists opine and missionaries misquote them as gospel truth. This will get clearer as we go a bit further. Let us begin where this issue involving al-Ḥajjāj started from. The issue was first polemicalised by ʿAbd al-Masīh al-Kindī in his apology and uttered by Emperor Leo. This was already [discussed and it was shown](#) that Leo's writing may be a later day forgery by a Christian polemicist and that al-Kindī's polemics lack factual basis. Let us now directly go to the quote in the book [The Qur'ân As Scripture](#) by Arthur Jeffery that relies on [Kitâb al-Maṣâhif](#) of Ibn Abî Dâwûd to say:

When we come to examine the accounts of the activity of al-Ḥajjâj in this matter, however, we discover to our own surprise that the evidence points strongly to the fact that his work was not confined to fixing more precisely the text of the Qur'ân by a set of points showing how it was to be read, but [he seems](#) to have made an entirely new recension of the Qur'ân, having copies of his new text sent to the great metropolitan centres and ordering the destruction of earlier copies in existence there, much as 'Uthman had done earlier. Moreover, this new text promulgated by [al-Ḥajjâj seems](#) to have undergone more or less extensive alterations.^[23]

Jeffery, in fact, proposed the **minor recension theory** by al-Ḥajjâj. This was also propogated by other Orientalists and missionaries as can be seen from the examples below. The Orientalists take care in wording the issue whereas missionaries are as usual driven by crusade mentality to prove the Qur'ân being a corrupted book.

In the book [Arabic Literature To The End Of The Ummayad Period](#) the author carefully states the issue of al-Ḥajjâj without throwing light on the 'variant readings'.

However, this seems to be only a partial explanation of what happened. On the other hand we have the tradition in Ibn Abi-Da'ud that al-Hajjâj was responsible for eleven changes in the consonantal text. **If this is so, he is responsible for a minor recension at least.** Against this we must set the evidence of early copies of the Qur'ân that have survived. These show that for some considerable amount of time the new system was used sparingly and mainly in connection with the variants.^[24]

John Gilchrist, a Christian missionary, who quotes both the references [Arabic Literature To The End Of The Ummayad Period](#) and [The Qur'ân As Scripture](#) as "Contemporary Books on the Qur'ân" does not even tell the whole story. In his book [Jam' al-Qur'ân: The Codification Of The Qur'ân Text](#), Jeffery's skepticism "he seems" or "al-Hajjâj seems" is quoted as reality.

The whole section continues to name each one of the amendments made by al-Hajjâj so that **the Qur'ân text as we have it today is not only the 'Uthmanic text but also a subsequent minor recension of it by the Iraqi governor.**^[25]

And obviously, there is no mention of the Christian polemic concerning al-Hajjâj. It is a frequent method employed by Christian missionaries to hide the information which goes against their viewpoint and make a selective argument.

Conclusion

To conclude the issue of al-Hajjâj and the changes he made in the Qur'ân:

- It is very obvious that there was no new recension after ʿUthmân united Muslims on the basis of single text. Muslims have agreed on this since the beginning. Al-Hajjâj's role is rather well documented in the literature dealing with ʿUlûm al-Qur'ân (Sciences of the Qur'ân). It has been shown above that the readings which he changed to are [mutawâtir](#). There is only the difference in the Qirâ'at. Muslims have accepted various Qirâ'at as authentic provided they satisfy some conditions. They are the following:
 - The first condition was that the recitation have an authentic chain of narration in which the chain of narrators was continuous, the narrators were all known to be righteous and they were all known to possess good memories. It was also required that the recitation be conveyed by a large number of narrators on each level of the chain of narration below the level of *Sahaabah* (the condition of *Tawaatur*). Narrations which had authentic chains but

lacked the condition of *Tawaatur* were accepted as explanations (*Tafseer*) of the *Sahaabah* but were not considered as methods of reciting the Qur'ân. As for the narrations which did not even have an authentic chain of narration, they were classified as *Baatil* (false) and rejected totally.

- The second condition was that the variations in recitations match known Arabic grammatical constructions. Unusual constructions could be verified by their existence in passages of pre-Islamic prose or poetry.
- The third condition required the recitation to coincide with the script of one of the copies of the Qur'ân distributed during the era of Caliph 'Uthman (RA). Hence differences which result from dot placement (i.e., *ta'lamoona* and *ya'lamoona*) are considered acceptable provided the other conditions are met. A recitation of a construction for which no evidence could be found would be classified *Shaadhdh*. This classification did not mean that all aspects of the recitation was considered *Shaadhdh*. It only meant that the unverified constructions were considered *Shaadhdh*.^[26]
- As pointed out earlier, how could al-Ḥajjāj, who was governor of Iraq, a small part of Muslim land, able to change the Qur'ânic text completely. The only changes he made was in 'Uthmân's *mushâf* **not** in any other text as far as the *hadîth* mentioned above suggests. The complete change of Qur'ân is not documented in the Islamic history at all. And above all how could he change what was committed in the memory of Muslims in the Islamic empire.

Acknowledgements

One of the authors (MSMS) would like to thank Brother Elias Karîm for scanning the image from the book *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif* of Ibn Abî Dâwûd. Thanks are also due to Brother Muḥammad an-Najjâr for bringing to the notice the book by Dr. 'Umar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân as well as discussing some of the Qur'ânic orthography, as well as *Al-Muntada al-Islamî*, Parson's Green, London (UK), for letting us borrow Dr. Radwân's book from their bookstore (which we ultimately bought!). May Allah reward all the brothers suitably for their efforts. He would also like to thank Brother Khalid from UAE for his useful comments.

The other author (MG) would like to thank all those who helped in preparing this document.

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[1] For [Kitâb al-Maṣâhif](#) see Arthur Jeffery's, [Materials For The History Of The Text Of The Qur'ân: The Old Codices](#), 1937, E J Brill, Leiden, pp. 117-118.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 117.

[3] Dr. ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, [Aarâ' al-Mustashriqîn Hawl al-Qur'ân al-Karîm wa Tafsîr: Dirâsah Wa Naqd](#), Volume I, 1992, Dâr Tîbah, Riyâdh, pp. 430.

[4] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117.

[5] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 430.

[6] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117.

[7] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 430.

[8] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117.

[9] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[10] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118.

[11] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[12] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118.

[13] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[14] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118.

[15] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[16] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118.

[17] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[18] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118.

[19] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[20] Arthur Jeffery, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 118.

[21] ʿUmar Ibn Ibrâhîm Radwân, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 431.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 430-431.

[23] Arthur Jeffery, [The Qur'ân As Scripture](#), 1952, Russell F Moore Company Inc., New York, pp. 99.

[24] A F L Beeston, T M Johnstone, R B Serjeant and G R Smith (Ed.), [Arabic Literature To The End Of The Ummayad Period](#), 1983, Cambridge University Press, pp. 243.

[25] John Gilchrist, [Jam' al-Qur'ân: The Codification Of The Qur'ân Text](#), 1989, MERCESA.

[26] Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, [Tafseer Soorah Al-Hujuraat](#), 1990, Tawheed Publications, Riyadh, pp. 32.