

Notes from Shady Hekmat Nasser's book Transmission of the variant readings of the Quran

Early Muslim scholar point of view

Early Muslim scholars did not look at the variant readings of Quran as the **divine revelation**. Earlier Qurra community stipulated several conditions to establish **validity** of a Quranic reading. These conditions can be summarized as follows.

- a) Reading must agree with the consonantal outline of the Uthmanic codices
- b) The reading must exhibit eloquent Arabic grammar & syntax
- c) The reading must have been taught by the elder qurra who must have been taught the Quran directly from the Successors
- d) Reading must enjoy the **consensus** of the qurra community

Was tawatur al-Qirat a condition for early scholars? Was there any Tawatur?

- a) The term tawatur al-Qirat came much later than Ibn Mujahid (324/936)
- b) **Expression of Tawatur al-Qiraat** appeared neither with Ibn Mujahid nor with al-Tabari (310/923)
- c) The isnads of all the eponymous Readers down to the Prophet (PBUH) are single chain of transmission (ahad, naql al-wahid an al-wahid), where the **condition of tawatur cannot be established with such isnads**.
- d) The seven/ten Readers and their two main Rawais were all **deemed weak (daif) and careless in their transmission of Hadeeth**. This is evident in almost any Hadith biographical dictionary (rijal). For example, the entry on Asim is trustworthy in the Quran; however, he is mediocre in Hadith. He is honest (saduq) yet oblivious (yahim). Yahya al-Qattan said that Asim is horrible at memorization, and al-Nasai agreed with him.
- e) A good isnad was important **BUT IJMA** was far more superior for establishing a valid Reading.
- f) Condition of sound transmission replaced vital role of **IJMA later**
- g) There is very limited and poor documentation of the chains of transmissions of the canonical Readings (suggestive of isnad/Tawatur was not as important as Ijma)
- h) **Basmalah's** Quranicity become a matter of **Ijtihad**, where it could not have been determined absolutely or decisively by **tawatur or Ijma**.
- i) Number of immediate transmitters of the eponymous Readers dropped substantially between Ibn Mujahid and Ibn Ghalbun (399/1008). One can deduce from the considerable decline that there was an essential **need to limit the transmitters** and subsequently **their transmission of variants**
- j) According to al-Shawkani (1250/1834), people have claimed that each one of the seven and ten Readings is mutawatirah. However, there has **not been one single proof** of such a claim because all these Readings were transmitted through **single ahad transmission**.
- k) The usulis and the Qiraat scholars after Ibn Mujahid were the ones responsible for moving the Qiraat discipline from the realm of legal rulings and Sunnah into the realm of Hadith. This shift caused a change in the criteria for accepting a valid Quraanic reading; the element of ijma – a fiqh element – which had the

utmost importance during and prior to Ibn Mujahid's time, was virtually dropped and replaced by the element of the sound chain of transmission – a Hadith element.

- l) What became later on canonical or “mutwatir” are transmissions carried through multiple strands that created partial common links mainly responsible for disseminating the eponymous Reading to as many students as possible, whereas the transmissions through SSTs deviated from the transmission of the majority and gradually entered the shawadhdh realm, regardless of the three conditions of rasm, arabiyyah and isnad.

Additional notes/observations

- a) Al-Tabari (310/923) objected many readings which **became divine and canonical few years after** his death and canonized by Ibn Mujahid (324/936)
- b) What was considered shawadhdh at one point **became “canonical”** at a later stage.
- c) Notion of two canonical Rawis never existed during Ibn Mujahid's time and that it developed in the 5th/11th century.
- d) Ibn Mujahid **did not** intend to present the variant readings as **wahy** (revelations), unlike how later Qirat scholars have presumed
- e) Ibn al-Arabi (543/1148) states that Ibn Mujahid used his **political influence** to drop Yaqub and add al-Kisai. When Ummayyads controlled Muslim Spain they wanted to distinguish themselves from Abbasid; deciding to adhere to the **customs and traditions of al-Madinah**, the Ummayyads adopted the Reading of Nafi ← Warsh. Conversely, the Reading of Nafi ← Qulun was taught in Iraq and became more dominant than Nafi ← Warsh.
- f) Both the Quran and early Arabic poetry show the same types of variants yet in different proportions
- g) Muslims **today** consider the seven and ten Readings to be **canonical and mutwatirah**