

The Historical Authority of the Mushaf: Codification, Transmission, and Legitimacy of the Qur'an

Anisatul Faizah¹, Kusnadi², Pathur Rahman³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia

Email: anisatulfaizah_25052250016@radenfatah.ac.id¹, kusnadi_uin@radenfatah.ac.id², pathurrahman_uin@radenfatah.ac.id³

Received: 15 Juni 2026

Revised: 25 Juni 2026

Accepted: 02 Juli 2026

Abstract:

This study examines the historical authority of the *Mushaf* through an analysis of the processes of codification, transmission, and legitimacy of the Qur'an within the early Muslim community. The research aims to explore how the Qur'anic text evolved from an orally transmitted revelation into an authoritative written corpus and how its authenticity and legitimacy were established and preserved across generations. Employing a qualitative historical approach, the study draws upon classical Islamic sources, including *ḥadīth* literature, works on *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, and early historical accounts, complemented by contemporary academic scholarship on Qur'anic studies. The findings indicate that the authority of the *Mushaf* was shaped through a complex interaction between oral and written modes of preservation. The codification efforts initiated during the caliphates of Abu Bakr and ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān played a pivotal role in standardizing the Qur'anic text and preventing textual divergence among expanding Muslim communities. Furthermore, the continuous transmission of the Qur'an through both memorization (*ḥifẓ*) and manuscript traditions reinforced its reliability and authenticity. The legitimacy of the *Mushaf* was not solely derived from political authority but was also sustained by broad communal consensus (*ijmāʿ*), scholarly verification, and the religious conviction that the Qur'an represents the preserved word of God. This study concludes that the historical authority of the *Mushaf* emerged from an integrated process of codification, transmission, and communal acceptance, which collectively ensured the preservation and legitimacy of the Qur'anic text throughout Islamic history. These findings contribute to contemporary discussions on the textual history, authenticity, and authority of the Qur'an within both Islamic and academic discourses.

Keywords: Mushaf, Qur'anic Codification, Qur'anic Transmission, Legitimacy, Textual Authority, Qur'anic Studies.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji otoritas historis Mushaf melalui analisis proses kodifikasi, transmisi, dan legitimasi Al-Qur'an di dalam komunitas Muslim awal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana teks Al-Qur'an berkembang dari

wahyu yang ditransmisikan secara lisan menjadi kumpulan teks tertulis yang otoritatif, serta bagaimana keaslian dan legitimasi teks tersebut ditetapkan dan dilestarikan dari generasi ke generasi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis kualitatif, studi ini mengacu pada sumber-sumber Islam klasik, termasuk literatur hadis, karya-karya tentang *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, dan catatan sejarah awal, yang dilengkapi dengan kajian akademis kontemporer tentang studi Al-Qur'an. Temuan-temuan menunjukkan bahwa otoritas Mushaf terbentuk melalui interaksi kompleks antara mode pelestarian lisan dan tertulis. Upaya kodifikasi yang dimulai pada masa kekhalifahan Abu Bakr dan 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān memainkan peran penting dalam menstandarkan teks Al-Qur'an dan mencegah perbedaan teks di antara komunitas Muslim yang terus berkembang. Selain itu, transmisi Al-Qur'an yang berkelanjutan melalui tradisi hafalan (*hifẓ*) dan manuskrip memperkuat keandalan dan keasliannya. Legitimasi Mushaf tidak semata-mata berasal dari otoritas politik, melainkan juga didukung oleh konsensus komunal yang luas (*ijmā'*), verifikasi para ulama, serta keyakinan keagamaan bahwa Al-Qur'an merupakan firman Allah yang terjaga keasliannya. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa otoritas historis Mushaf muncul dari proses terpadu kodifikasi, transmisi, dan penerimaan komunitas, yang secara kolektif memastikan pelestarian dan legitimasi teks Al-Qur'an sepanjang sejarah Islam. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada diskusi kontemporer mengenai sejarah teks, keaslian, dan otoritas Al-Qur'an dalam diskursus Islam dan akademis.

Kata Kunci: Mushaf, Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an, Penyaluran Al-Qur'an, Keabsahan, Otoritas Teks, Studi Al-Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the Word of Allah, the Exalted, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, through the angel Jibril as an eternal miracle and a guide for all of humanity. (Manurung, Saragih, and Hasibuan 2024) Theologically, the Qur'an is believed to have been preserved in its purity, as affirmed in Surah al-Hijr (15): 9. However, this theological belief does not negate the historical dimension of the Qur'an's transmission and codification, which took place gradually. Furthermore, the authority of the Qur'an as the normative text of Islam does not stem solely from its claim to be divine revelation; rather, it is reinforced and—from an academic perspective—actually tested through a historical process that can be empirically verified. (Sinaga and Setiawan 2024)

This issue serves as the starting point for this study: how was the authority of the Qur'an as a text formed and legitimized through a historical process? This question is important because, in contemporary academic discourse, the authority of a text cannot be established solely through theological arguments. It must be able to respond to the methodological challenges posed by historical and philological criticism. The historical approach situates revelation within the dynamics of space and time, with the aim of understanding the text contextually and proportionally, as well as uncovering the social, cultural, political, and intellectual contexts surrounding both the process of revelation and its codification.

Studies on the historical authority of the Mushaf encompass three crucial

and interrelated phases. First, the early transmission phase during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, which lasted for more than twenty years through a combination of memorization (al-hifz) and writing (al-kitabah), with the Prophet serving as the sole authority determining the validity of each text received. (Karimatul Ma'rifat 2025) Second, the phase of institutionalizing the text through codification during the reign of Caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and subsequent standardization by Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, which transformed the informal oral-written transmission tradition into an official, collectively recognized textual canon. Third, the issue of historical-philological criticism regarding the transmission of the Qur'an, namely the academic question of whether the existing text is consistent with the text revealed to the Prophet, and how manuscript evidence addresses this question. (Darmawan 2016)

This is where the academic gap that forms the context of this study lies. Western scholars employing historical and philological critical approaches—ranging from Theodor Nöldeke, who pioneered chronological studies of the Qur'an, to Alphonse Mingana, who questioned textual standardization, and John Wansbrough, who proposed the thesis that the canonization of the Qur'an did not occur until two centuries after the Prophet's death—have challenged the traditional narrative regarding the codification process. These claims, which apply the methods of biblical criticism to the study of the Qur'an, require a response that is not merely apologetic but rather grounded in historical, paleographic, and codicological data that is scientifically verifiable. (Ma'rifat 2025) Advances in the study of Qur'anic manuscripts over the past few decades have provided invaluable archaeological data to address these challenges. The Sana'a Manuscript discovered in Yemen in 1972, the Birmingham Manuscript, which was radiocarbon-dated in 2015 and found to date from between 568 and 645 CE, and various collections in the Topkapi Library in Istanbul and the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin all provide insight into the textual consistency of the Qur'an since the early centuries of Islam. Paleographic analysis of the Hijazi script used in these manuscripts reveals significant textual stability, while also raising academic questions about how the processes of oral and textual transmission occurred simultaneously. (Rahmayani 2018)

From the perspective of 'Ulum al-Qur'an, the process of collecting and codifying the Qur'an is an integral part of the science of Jam' al-Qur'an, which has been discussed in depth by classical scholars such as al-Zarqani in *Manahil al-'Irfan* and al-Suyuti in *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*. These classical studies laid the epistemological foundation for understanding the historical process of the mushaf's formation. However, in the face of contemporary academic challenges, these studies need to be integrated with archaeological data and more up-to-date manuscript research methodologies. (Mokhtar and Himmad 2024) Based on the

background outlined above, this article aims to systematically examine three main aspects: the early transmission of the Qur'an during the Prophet's time, the institutionalization of the text through Abu Bakr's codification and the Uthmanic standardization, and the response to Western historical-philological criticism using manuscript evidence and Islamic scholarly methodology. Through a critical and balanced historical approach, this study is expected to contribute to strengthening the academic understanding of the historical authority of the Qur'an.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study, titled "The Historical Authority of the Mushaf: Codification, Transmission, and Legitimization of the Qur'an," employs a qualitative approach using library research. This study aims to conduct an in-depth examination of the historical process of the Qur'an's codification, the mechanisms of the Qur'anic text's transmission from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to the period of official codification, as well as the construction of legitimacy that shapes the authority of the Mushaf within Islamic tradition. Research data were obtained from various relevant primary and secondary sources, such as books on the sciences of the Qur'an (ulum al-Qur'an), hadith, classical Islamic historical works, Qur'anic manuscripts, and contemporary academic literature discussing the history of the Qur'anic text. Primary sources include classical works that describe the process of collecting and compiling the Qur'an during the eras of Abu Bakr and Uthman ibn Affan, while secondary sources include books, journal articles, dissertations, and modern research findings related to the study of the mushaf and the history of the Qur'an.

Data collection was conducted through a documentary study by searching for, cataloging, and reviewing various sources of literature relevant to the research focus. The collected data were then analyzed using historical-critical analysis and content analysis. Historical-critical analysis was used to trace the chronology of events, the socio-political context, and the intellectual dynamics underlying the process of codification and transmission of the Qur'an. Meanwhile, content analysis was used to identify key concepts regarding the authority, legitimacy, and authenticity of the mushaf across the various sources examined. To ensure the validity of the data, the study employs source triangulation by comparing various historical accounts, historical documents, and the perspectives of both classical scholars and modern scholars. Through this method, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding will be gained of how the historical authority of the Qur'anic mushaf was formed, maintained, and legitimized within the development of the Islamic scholarly tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Early Transmission of the Qur'an During the Time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him

1. *The Tradition of Memorization and the Prophet's Role as the Sole Authority*

The early transmission of the Qur'an (jam' al-Qur'an) during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, took place through two main, complementary methods: memorization (*al-hifz*) and writing (*al-kitabah*). (Fithrotin 2022) Of the two, memorization is the most dominant primary method and a defining characteristic of the tradition of Qur'anic transmission in Islamic civilization. At the heart of this process – and what fundamentally distinguishes it from the traditions of transmitting other sacred texts – is the role of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the sole authority who validates every revealed text. Not a single verse could be accepted as part of the Qur'an without the Prophet's confirmation. Whenever a revelation came down, the Prophet immediately conveyed it to his companions, instructed them to memorize it, and determined the verse's placement within a specific surah based on Gabriel's guidance. This tawqifi authority over the order of the verses (*tartib al-ayat*) serves as an unparalleled quality control mechanism: there is no room for interpolation or modification without the Prophet's knowledge. (Romziana, Wilandari, and Aisih 2021)

There were a great many Companions known as huffaz (memorizers of the Qur'an) during the time of the Prophet. Al-Suyuti, in *al-Itqan*, lists the names of several Companions who recited the entire Qur'an in the presence of the Prophet, including Zaid bin Thabit, Ubay bin Ka'ab, Mu'adz bin Jabal, Abu Zaid al-Ansari, and Abdullah bin Mas'ud. The presence of so many huffaz was not merely a quantitative phenomenon but also served as a safeguard for the transmission of the text: the more memorizers there were, the smaller the chance of distortion, since each memorizer could correct the others. (Fuji Nur Iman 2020)

The tradition of memorizing the Qur'an was also reinforced by the practice of *mu'aradhah*, which involved periodic recitation and verification between the Prophet and Gabriel. Every year during the month of Ramadan, Gabriel would visit the Prophet to listen to and verify the recitation of the Qur'an that had been memorized. In the final year of the Prophet's life, the *mu'aradhah* was conducted twice as a sign of the revelation's completion. From a historical perspective, this practice constituted a highly systematic verification mechanism: it demonstrated that the transmission of the Qur'an was not passive or solely dependent on individual memory, but was periodically verified by the highest authority. Thus, the authority of the Qur'an at this stage was not based solely on its claim to be divine revelation, but was also historically constructed through a verification mechanism involving the Prophet's personal authority, a collective memorization system, and periodic audits. This was the first foundation of what later developed into the authority of the codified text. (Abi Abdillah 2023)

2. *The Composition of the Book of Revelation: Author, Medium, and Documentation System*

In addition to memorization, the writing of the Qur'an (al-kitabah) was also actively practiced during the Prophet's time. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, had a number of scribes of revelation (kuttāb al-wahy) whose duty was to record every verse that was revealed. Classical sources such as al-Zarqani in *Manāhil al-'Irfan* mention more than twenty names of scribes of revelation, including: Zaid bin Tsabit, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, Umar bin al-Khattab, Uthman bin Affan, Ali bin Abi Talib, Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan, Ubay bin Ka'ab, and Khalid bin al-Walid. The diversity of these scribes' backgrounds demonstrates that the written documentation of the Qur'an was not an individual project, but rather a collective effort involving prominent figures from various groups among the Companions. (Al Fiqri 2025) During the time of the Prophet, revelations were recorded using various available media: date palm fronds (*al-jarida*), bones (*al-izham*), flat stones (*al-likha'f*), animal skins (*al-riqaaq*), and coarse woven cloth (*al-aktaf*). This diversity of media, which reflects the material conditions of 7th-century Arab society – which had not yet discovered paper – is often cited by Western critics as evidence of the informal nature of the Qur'an's documentation. However, this argument overlooks one important fact: within the context of Arabia's oral culture, this diversity of media was actually a redundancy strategy – the more copies there were across various media, the safer the text was from the risk of loss. (Zaini and Mat Jusoh 2022)

An important aspect that requires further analysis is that, during the Prophet's lifetime, the Qur'an had not yet been compiled into a single, officially bound mushaf. This was not a shortcoming, but rather reflected an ongoing phase of transmission – revelation continued to be revealed until the end of the Prophet's life. Nevertheless, the systematic nature of the documentation is evidenced by the fact that the order of the verses within the surahs was determined based on the Prophet's instructions (*tawqifi*), not on the initiative of the scribes. This differs from the order of the surahs (*tartib al-suwar*), which has been a subject of debate among scholars regarding whether it is *tawqifi* or *ijtihadi*; this distinction has important implications for understanding the extent to which the Uthmanic mushaf is a product of prophetic authority or the consensus of the Companions. (Agus Pratama, Andi Miswar, and Halima Basri 2025)

3. Oral and Textual Relationships: Integrating Memorization and Writing

One unique aspect of the transmission of the Qur'an that is often overlooked in academic studies is the highly systematic complementary nature of the oral and written traditions. In the Western paradigm of textual criticism commonly applied to the study of Judeo-Christian scriptures, the written text tends to be viewed as the primary source, while the oral tradition is regarded as a secondary layer susceptible to distortion. This paradigm is not appropriate for

application to the Qur'an. (Mumtaz Ali 2022)

In Islamic tradition, memorization and writing serve as two mutually reinforcing systems of verification. Written texts function as reminders (*tadzkirah*) that aid memorization, while memorization serves as a standard that verifies the accuracy of written texts. One cannot claim the authenticity of a text based solely on the written record one possesses; one must prove that the text is consistent with the oral tradition received continuously from the Prophet. This is what later developed into the *isnad* (chain of transmission) system, in which the validity of a transmission is determined not only by the text itself, but also by the authenticity of the chain of narrators who transmitted it. (Hadi Saputra and Rahmad 2022) This integration has important analytical implications: any critique of textual variations in early Qur'an manuscripts must take into account that the written text is not the sole – or even the primary – medium of transmission. Variations in writing (such as differences in orthography or the absence of diacritics) do not necessarily indicate textual instability, since the correct reading is preserved by a living tradition of memorization and is continuously verified.

4. The State of the Qur'an After the Prophet's Death: Textual Variation and Historical Challenges

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) passed away in the year 11 AH/632 CE, the text of the Qur'an as a whole had been preserved through two main channels: the oral tradition passed down by thousands of Companions who were *hafiz*, and the written tradition disseminated across various media. However, this situation faced a serious historical challenge: there was not yet a single *mushaf* containing the entire Qur'an in a single, standardized, bound volume. The real historical challenge was not merely a matter of the physical fragmentation of the text. (Nur Aini Mendrofa et al. 2024) More critically, the Prophet's personal authority – which had long served as the sole standard of verification – was no longer present.

Who has the authority to decide whether a text fragment is truly part of the Qur'an? It was within this vacuum of authority that the Battle of Yamama in the 12th year of the Hijra became the primary catalyst: the loss of approximately seven hundred Qur'anic memorizers in that battle represented not merely a loss of personnel, but a loss of part of the oral verification system that had long served as the guardian of the text's authenticity. Thus, the urgency of post-Prophetic codification was not merely a practical-administrative matter, but an epistemological one: how to establish a new system of textual authority after the Prophet's personal authority was no longer present. The answer to this question was realized through Abu Bakr's codification project and, later, the Ottoman standardization.

The Institutionalization of Texts: Codification from Abu Bakr to Uthman

1. *Codification During the Reign of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq*

The first project to codify the Qur'an in Islamic history was initiated by Caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq at the suggestion of Umar ibn al-Khattab, shortly after the Battle of Yamama in 12 AH/633 CE. The war, fought against the apostates (riddah) led by Musailamah al-Kadzdab, resulted in a very high death toll among the qurra' (Qur'an reciters); it is estimated that around seven hundred reciters were killed in the battle. Abu Bakr's initial reluctance—he raised objections because the Prophet had never done such a thing—actually serves as historical evidence of a profound theological awareness: official codification was something new, an innovation (bid'ah) that required strong theological justification. The fact that Abu Bakr ultimately agreed to it demonstrates that the Companions possessed the capacity for institutional ijtihad when faced with an emergency situation that threatened the continuity of revelation. (Junaid 2022)

The appointment of Zaid bin Thabit as head of the codification team was based on three main considerations outlined in classical accounts: Zaid was the most trusted secretary of revelation; he was a huffaz who had attended the Prophet's final recitation; and he was known for his high intellectual integrity. In carrying out his duties, Zaid established a very strict verification methodology: he did not rely solely on his own memory, but required two witnesses to verbally confirm that a particular text was indeed part of the Qur'an and had been written in the presence of the Prophet. (Yusran 2025)

This "two-witness" standard warrants further analysis. It is not merely a formal procedure, but reflects a highly sophisticated epistemological principle: cross-verification between oral tradition (memorization) and written tradition (written records), witnessed by at least two people. This is far stricter than the standards typically applied in textual criticism of ancient Western manuscripts, where a philologist works alone based on the available texts. This fact is often overlooked in comparative studies of the transmission of religious texts. The final result of Zaid bin Thabit's work was a bound mushaf containing the entire text of the Qur'an, which was then entrusted to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, subsequently passed on to Umar bin al-Khattab, and after Umar's death, handed over to Hafsah bint Umar, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. This mushaf is known as the Mushaf of Abu Bakr or the Mushaf of Hafsah, and it became the primary reference for subsequent codification projects.

2. *Standardization During the Reign of Uthman ibn Affan*

The codification of the Qur'an during the reign of Uthman ibn Affan (d. 35 AH/656 CE) represented a phase that was qualitatively different from Abu Bakr's codification. While Abu Bakr's codification aimed to preserve the text from the threat of loss, Uthman's standardization sought to homogenize the text, which had

diverse versions across the increasingly expansive Islamic world. The immediate trigger was Hudhaifah ibn al-Yaman's report to Uthman regarding sharp differences in recitation (qira'at) among Muslim forces in Syria and Iraq—differences that had reached the point where they were accusing one another of apostasy.(Ilhamni 2019)

Uthman's response to this crisis demonstrated visionary leadership. He formed a codification committee led once again by Zaid bin Thabit, accompanied by three prominent figures from the Quraysh: Abdullah bin Zubair, Sa'id bin al-'Ash, and Abdurrahman bin al-Harith bin Hisham. The presence of these three Quraysh figures was not merely a formality; they served as representatives of a community with firsthand knowledge of the Quraysh dialect and standard recitation, which constituted the language of revelation. The Uthmanic codification committee worked using the Hafsah mushaf as its primary reference. One of the most important methodological decisions was that, in cases of disagreement, the resolution would follow the Quraysh dialect (lughah al-Quraysh), since the Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Quraysh. This decision carries very significant implications: it affirms that the Uthmanic mushaf is not a reconstruction from scratch, but rather a standardization based on an existing reference (the Hafsah mushaf) and reinforced by the memorization of the Companions who were still alive.(Lavinatus Sholikhah, Mardiaty, and Linda Rosyidah 2020)

The result of this committee's work was several copies of the standardized mushaf (al-masahif al-'uthmaniyyah), which were sent to the major administrative centers: Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra, Syria, and Yemen. Each copy was accompanied by a qari' who would teach the local community how to recite it. This step was highly strategic, as it recognized that standardizing the text alone was not enough; there had to be a living oral tradition that taught how to read the text correctly. Uthman's decision to burn other copies of the Quran circulating among the people remains the most historically controversial decision. From the perspective of Western textual criticism, this action is often interpreted as evidence of differing versions of the Qur'an, or even as a form of censorship aimed at concealing these differences. However, this interpretation is flawed because it assumes that the mushafs that were burned were substantially different versions of the Qur'an, whereas what actually occurred were differences in dialect and personal annotations that did not meet the standards of the official mushaf.(Rahmi 2019)

It should also be noted that the Uthmanic mushaf at that time was not yet equipped with diacritical marks (nuqat) and harakat to facilitate reading. These marks were added later by the generation of the Tabi'in: Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali pioneered the harakat system around the 50s AH, and Nasr bin 'Ashim and Yahya

bin Ya'mar developed the system of vowel marks. Critics often use this fact as an argument that the text of the Qur'an is unstable, but the opposite is true: the absence of diacritics is evidence of a very high level of trust in the oral memorization tradition, which was capable of determining the correct recitation without the aid of visual markers.

3. *The Historical Significance of the Uthmanic Mushaf*

From a historical perspective, the codification of the Uthmanic Mushaf is one of the greatest achievements of Islamic civilization. It not only succeeded in uniting Muslims around a single, standardized text of the Qur'an, but also laid the foundation for the continuity of the tradition of Qur'anic transmission over the next fourteen centuries. What gives the Uthmanic Mushaf its strong historical authority is the consensus of the Companions (ijma' al-sahabah) regarding it. Not a single senior Companion rejected the Uthmanic Mushaf on principle; even Abdullah bin Mas'ud, who was known to hold differing opinions on some matters, did not reject the content of the text but rather questioned the procedure. This consensus, reached by the generation that directly received revelation from the Prophet, is one of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of the Qur'anic text. (Junaid 2022)

Historical-Philological Criticism and the Response of the Islamic Scholarly Tradition

1. *Early Manuscripts of the Qur'an: Archaeological Evidence*

The study of Qur'an manuscripts is a field that has developed rapidly in recent decades and has yielded invaluable archaeological data. Understanding this data requires an understanding of the methodology used: radiocarbon dating measures the age of the material (parchment or papyrus), not the age of the text written on it. Therefore, radiocarbon dating provides a terminus post quem (an early limit on when the text might have been written), not a precise date of composition. Even with an understanding of these methodological limitations, manuscript data still provides highly significant information. (Rosmah, Sirajuddin, and Sudirman 2025)

The Sana'a Manuscript (Shan'a' 1 or DAM 01-27.1) is one of the most historically significant Qur'an manuscripts. Discovered in 1972 during renovations of the Great Mosque of Sana'a in Yemen, this manuscript is a palimpsest—a parchment rewritten over a previously existing text. The upper text is fully legible and corresponds exactly to the Uthmanic mushaf. The lower text, which is partially erased but still legible with modern technology, contains variations from the standard text, particularly in the order of the surahs. Radiocarbon dating indicates that the parchment dates from the first century of the Hijri calendar, making it one of the oldest surviving textual artifacts of the

Qur'an.(Khozinul Alim 2023)

From an academic perspective, the Sana'a Manuscript provides two pieces of information that appear to be paradoxical: on the one hand, it proves the existence of the Qur'anic text in the first century of the Hijri calendar (supporting the traditional Islamic narrative regarding its early transmission); on the other hand, variations in its underlying text have been cited by some Western scholars – such as Gerd Puin, who conducted a paleographic study of this manuscript – as an indication that the canonization of the text occurred later. However, this interpretation warrants critical scrutiny: the variations in the underlying text – which is a rewritten text (not the final text) – are actually consistent with the Islamic narrative regarding the diversity of personal mushafs that were later standardized by Uthman.(Putriani 2021) The Birmingham Manuscript is a more dramatic discovery from the perspective of the media and the public. Based on radiocarbon dating conducted by the Oxford Laboratory in 2015, the two parchment sheets – now housed at the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham – date to between 568 and 645 CE (between 56 years before the Hijra and the 25th year of the Hijri calendar). This manuscript is written in the Hijazi script and contains portions of Surah al-Kahfi, Surah Maryam, and Surah Taha. Research conducted by Alba Fedeli of the University of Birmingham shows that the text in this manuscript is very similar to the Qur'an in use today.(Fais, Jamil, and Sukendar 2022)

In addition to these two manuscripts, it is also worth mentioning the Topkapi Collection in Istanbul, which houses a mushaf traditionally attributed in Islamic tradition to Uthman ibn Affan – although this claim is academically debated – as well as the Chester Beatty Collection in Dublin, which contains fragments of Qur'anic manuscripts from the first and second centuries of the Hijri calendar. François Déroche, an expert in Islamic codicology from the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, has conducted a systematic study of these various manuscripts and concluded that the textual stability of the Qur'an since the first century of the Hijri calendar can be verified paleographically.

2. The Historical-Philological Critical Approach of Western Scholars

Textual criticism of the Qur'an by Western scholars must be understood in the context of its gradual development and diverse approaches, rather than as a monolithic bloc known as "Orientalism." There are at least three distinct traditions of approach that must be distinguished methodologically. The first tradition is classical historical philology, pioneered by Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930) through his work **Geschichte des Qorâns** (1860). Nöldeke conducted a chronological study of the verses of the Qur'an based on stylistic analysis and historical context, resulting in a Mecca-Medina classification that differed from the traditional

Islamic classification. His work was later expanded by Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser, and Otto Pretzl into a monumental four-volume work. This approach, although it yields some conclusions that differ from the Islamic tradition, essentially acknowledges that the text of the Qur'an dates from the early period of Islam. (Mauluddin 2024)

The second tradition is radical criticism, represented by Alphonse Mingana (1878–1937). Mingana, a Syriac manuscript scholar whose collection formed the basis of the Birmingham Manuscript, argued in a 1927 article that it was time to apply biblical-style textual criticism to the Qur'an. He claimed that the text of the Qur'an underwent significant modifications during the time of Hajjaj bin Yusuf (governor of Iraq, died 95 AH). Mingana's claim, which relies on sources whose validity is now questioned, constitutes a form of the parallelism fallacy: assuming that because the method of textual criticism has been successful for the Bible, it must yield similar findings when applied to the Qur'an. (Syariin and Jamaluddin 2021)

The third and most radical tradition is revisionist scholarship, pioneered by John Wansbrough (1928–2002) in his work **Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation** (1977). Wansbrough argued that the text of the Qur'an did not reach its final form until about two centuries after the Prophet's death, and that the narrative regarding the Uthmanic codification was a historical construct created later. This argument was subsequently supported by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in **Hagarism** (1977). However, Wansbrough's thesis has several fundamental methodological flaws. First, he relies on an argument ex silentio (from the absence of evidence): since there is no sufficient contemporary external evidence, he concludes that the Islamic narrative is unreliable. This is an invalid inference because the absence of evidence is not equivalent to evidence of absence. Second, his literary-critical methodology applied to the Qur'an yields conclusions that are not supported by independent historical evidence. Third, and most importantly, his theory cannot explain why Muslims across vast and politically diverse regions accepted the same text without significant historical resistance, if that text had been fabricated two centuries later. (Ma'rifah 2023)

3. Muslim Scholars' Response to Orientalist Criticism

Muslim scholars have provided comprehensive and systematic responses to the textual criticisms raised by Western scholars. These responses are not merely apologetic but are also methodological and grounded in solid historical evidence, and in some cases have been accepted by Western academics themselves. One of the most influential works is **The History of the Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation** (2003) by M. M. al-A'zami. Al-A'zami, a hadith scholar trained in the West, systematically demonstrates the methodological flaws in Wansbrough's

arguments. He demonstrates that the verification standards Wansbrough applied to Islamic sources are inconsistent with the standards he typically applies to other sources from the same period. Furthermore, al-A'zami documents more than fifty names of Companions known as scribes of revelation or memorizers of the Qur'an, showing that claims regarding the early transmission of the Qur'an are supported by evidence far stronger than that acknowledged by Wansbrough. (Masruchin, Sultan Dzaki, and Rahmat Gani 2025)

From the perspective of manuscript studies, François Déroche's research on the paleography of first-century Hijri Qur'an manuscripts reveals the existence of a highly consistent scribal tradition. This research indicates that Qur'an copyists in the first century of the Hijri era followed uniform orthographic conventions, which is a strong indicator of the existence of a standard text serving as a shared reference. This consistency cannot be explained if the Qur'anic text had not been standardized until the second or third century of the Hijri era, as claimed by Wansbrough. (M. Rama Haqiqi and Kartika Kadar Manik 2024) Keith E. Small, a Western scholar who conducted in-depth research on Qur'anic manuscripts in his work *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts* (2011), concluded that although there are variations in some early manuscripts, these variations do not indicate substantial textual instability. This conclusion from a non-Muslim scholar trained in the Western tradition of textual criticism is highly significant: it demonstrates that when consistent methodological standards are applied, the data from Qur'anic manuscripts support the narrative of textual stability dating back to the first century of the Hijri calendar. (Kurnia 2019)

Regarding the variations in recitation (qira'at) that are often cited as evidence of textual instability, it must be emphasized that the Islamic tradition itself explicitly acknowledges and classifies this diversity of qira'at. The concept of the qira'at sab' (seven recitations), formulated by Ibn Mujahid (d. 324 AH) in *Kitab al-Sab'ah*, constitutes an official acknowledgment that the Qur'an possesses a diversity of valid recitations within established boundaries. This is not a weakness, but rather a richness and proof of authenticity: a living text memorized by millions of people will naturally retain a variety of recitations dating back to the time of the Prophet, whereas a text fabricated later would tend to be more uniform. Thus, challenges from historical-philological criticism directed at the Qur'an, if addressed with solid historical and methodological arguments—rather than merely a defensive stance—actually further strengthen our understanding of just how rigorous the mechanisms of the Qur'an's transmission and codification were. The process of institutionalizing the text—supported by the consensus of the Companions, manuscript evidence, and the continuity of the memorization tradition—constitutes a solid foundation for the Qur'an's historical authority, which is scientifically accountable. (Muttaqin and Fambudi 2022)

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the transmission of the Qur'an since the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) occurred through a combination of memorization and writing that complemented each other, with the Prophet serving as the main authority in validating the revelations. This system created a strong verification mechanism, ensuring the authenticity of the text. Furthermore, the codification of the Qur'an during Abu Bakr's time and the standardization during Uthman's era were two important stages that guaranteed the preservation and uniformity of the Qur'anic text. Abu Bakr's codification aimed to secure the revelations from the risk of being lost, while Uthmanic standardization addressed reading differences across the increasingly vast Islamic territories and at the same time strengthened the unity of the community. Additionally, various early Qur'an manuscript discoveries and modern philological research show that the text has been stable since the first century Hijri. These findings reinforce the authenticity of the Uthmanic Mushaf and show that claims of a late Qur'an canonization are not supported by sufficient historical and archaeological evidence. Thus, the historical authority of the Qur'an can be scientifically accounted for.

REFERENCES

- Abi Abdillah, Imam Ahmad. 2023. "Hafalan Al-Qur'an Dengan Metode Mutqin Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Kualitas Hafalan Santri." *Taushiah: Jurnal Hukum, Pendidikan dan Kemasyarakatan*.
- Agus Pratama, Mulfian, Andi Miswar, and Halima Basri. 2025. "Sistematika Penulisan Al-Qur'an." *Jurnal Studi Ilmu Alquran dan Tafsir*.
- Darmawan, Agus. 2016. "Mengkritisi Orientalis Yang Meragukan Otentisitas Qur'an." *El-Banat : Jurnal Pemikiran dan Pendidikan Islam*.
- Fais, Nor Lutfi, Abdul Jamil, and Sukendar Sukendar. 2022. "Mushaf Blawong Gogodalem: Interpretasi Sejarah Melalui Pendekatan Kodikologi." *SUHUF*.
- Al Fiqri, Haikal. 2025. "Periodisasi Penulisan Al-Qur'an Masa Klasik Islam." *FIHROS: Jurnal Sejarah dan Budaya*.
- Fithrotin, Fithrotin. 2022. "Al Dakhil Shi'ah Wa Al-Khawarij (Infiltrasi Faham Syiah Dan Khawarij Dalam Tafsir Al Quran)." *Al-I'jaz : Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an, Falsafah dan Keislaman*.
- Fuji Nur Iman, Taufikkurrahman. 2020. "Tradisi Hafalan Al-Qur'an Di Yogyakarta Perspektif Sosiologi Pengetahuan (Kajian Living Qur'an)." *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah*.
- Hadi Saputra, Muhda, and Rahmad Rahmad. 2022. "Sistematika Siklus Penulisan Al-Qur'an." *Mushaf Journal: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran dan Hadis*.
- Ilhamni, Ilhamni. 2019. "Pembukuan Al-Qur'an Pada Masa Usman Bin Affan (644-656)." *Jurnal Ulunnuha*.
- Junaid, M. 2022. "Fenomena Pewahyuan Dan Pembukuan Al-Qur ' an Serta Asbabun Nuzul." *Al-Muaddib :Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Keislaman*.
- Karimatul Ma'rifat, Aulia. 2025. "Mrs Fenomena Influencer Muslim Dan Otoritas Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Di Era Digital." *JURNAL PUSAKA*.
- Khozinul Alim. 2023. "Studi Kodikologi Dan Tekstologi Manuskrip Mushaf

- Madura." *At-Tahfidz: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*.
- Kurnia, Impala. 2019. "Pandangan Ali Mustafa Yaqub Tentang Kritik Orientalis Terhadap Hadis." *Riwayah : Jurnal Studi Hadis*.
- Lavinatus Sholikhah, Mardiaty, and Linda Rosyidah. 2020. "Sejarah Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an Mushaf Uthmani." *Ta'wiluna: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an, Tafsir dan Pemikiran Islam*.
- M. Rama Haqiqi, and Kartika Kadar Manik. 2024. "Menelusuri Tuduhan Dan Kritik Orientalis Terhadap Nabi Muhammad, Al- Qur'an, Dan Hadis: Tinjauan Terhadap Pemikiran Theodor Noldeke." *Indonesian Society and Religion Research*.
- Ma'rifah, Srikandi. 2023. "Dinamika Produktivitas Karya Tafsir 'Nusantara': Studi Pemetaan Karya Tafsir Abad 17 Hingga 19." *El-Wasathy: Journal of Islamic Studies*.
- Ma'rifat, Aulia Karimatul. 2025. "Mrs Fenomena Influencer Muslim Dan Otoritas Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Di Era Digital: Kajian Atas Pergeseran Otoritas Keagamaan Di Media Sosial." *JURNAL PUSAKA: Media Kajian dan Pemikiran Islam*.
- Manurung, Purbatua, Abdul Hasan Saragih, and Pagar Hasibuan. 2024. "A Study of the Philosophy of Education and Analysis of the Principles of Implementing Education According to the Al-Qur'an." *Pharos Journal of Theology*.
- Masruchin, Masruchin, Sultan Dzaki, and Rahmat Gani. 2025. "Kontroversi Dan Kritik: Pandangan Orientalis Tentang Autentisitas Al-Qur'an." *Al-Shamela : Journal of Quranic and Hadith Studies*.
- Mauluddin, Moh. 2024. "Kontribusi Artificial Intellegence (AI) Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an : Peluang Dan Tantangan." *Madinah : Jurnal Studi Islam*.
- Mokhtar, Ahmad Baha' Bin, and Gumaa Ahmed Himmad. 2024. "Peran Sanad Dalam Menjaga Otoritas Dan Keaslian Qira'at Al-Qur'an." *Al-Tadabbur: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*.
- Mumtaz Ali, Zaky. 2022. "Penulisan Al-Qur'an Beraksara Latin Dan Problematika Penerapannya Di Indonesia." *Al Muhafidz: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*.
- Muttaqin, Muttaqin, and Moh Agung Fambudi. 2022. "Kritik Orientalis Dalam Aspek Ontologis Studi Al-Qur'an." *Al-Adabiya: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Keagamaan*.
- Nur Aini Mendrofa, Intan et al. 2024. "Penulisan Al Qur'an Dengan Rasm Ustmani." *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia*.
- Putriani, Rizki. 2021. "Manuskrip Al-Qur'an Di Kabupaten Sintang (Sebuah Deskripsi Awal Atas Manuskrip Al-Qur'an Koleksi Istana Al-Mukarramah Kabupaten Sintang)." *Mafatih*.
- Rahmayani, Tati. 2018. "Pergeseran Otoritas Agama Dalam Pembelajaran Al-Qur'an." *MAGHZA: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*.
- Rahmi, Yulia. 2019. "Penetapan Susunan Ayat, Surat Dan Rasm Al-Qur'an." *Jurnal Ulunnuha*.
- Romziana, Luthviah, Wilandari Wilandari, and Lum Atul Aisih. 2021. "Tradisi Muraja'ah Dalam Menjaga Hafalan Al-Qur'an Bagi Santri PPIQ Di Wilayah Az-Zainiyah Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo." *KACA (Karunia Cahaya Allah): Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin*.
- Rosmah, Sirajuddin, and Sudirman. 2025. "Early Islamic Economics: A Review of

- the Practices and Policies of the Prophet Muhammad and Khulafaurrasyidin." *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*.
- Sinaga, Devi Yusnila, and Hasrian Rudi Setiawan. 2024. "Program Pembelajaran Literasi Al-Qur'an Dalam Peningkatan Kualitas Bacaan Al-Qur'an Siswa Di SMP Muhammadiyah 57 Medan." *Risalah, Jurnal Pendidikan dan Studi Islam*.
- Syariin, A, and J Jamaluddin. 2021. "Manuscript of the Qur'an at the Great Mosque of Jamik Singaraja Bali: The Study of Al-Qur'an Philology." *AlifLam Journal of Islamic Studies and*
- Yusran. 2025. "Pemikiran Hukum Islam Pada Masa Khulafaur Rasyidin." *JIMU: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisipliner*.
- Zaini, Muhammad, and Nor Hafizah Bin Mat Jusoh. 2022. "Problematika Penulisan Al-Qur'an Dengan Rasm Usmani Pada Al-Qur'an Cetakan Indonesia Dan Malaysia." *TAFSE: Journal of Qur'anic Studies*.