



An Appraisal of 'Ilm al-Qira'at as a Tool for Preserving the Textual Integrity of the Qur'an

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Abstract

The preservation of the Qur'an stands at the heart of Islamic scholarship, and 'Ilm al-Qira'at plays a central role in this process. While modern discussions sometimes portray variant readings as textual inconsistencies, classical Muslim scholarship treats the canonical Qira'at as a divinely sanctioned mechanism for safeguarding the Qur'anic text. This paper examines the role of 'Ilm al-Qira'at in preserving the textual integrity, authenticity, stability, and oral transmission of the Qur'an from the Prophetic period to the codification of the seven and ten canonical readings. Using a qualitative and historical-analytical methodology, the paper draws on classical sources such as Ibn al-Jazarī's *al-Nashr* and al-Dānī's works on transmission chains (*isnād*). The paper argues that Qira'at function not as textual variants in the critical sense, but as complementary recitational forms transmitted through mass narration (*tawātur*). It further demonstrates how strict conditions governing acceptance conformity with Arabic grammar, the Uthmānic script, and consistency with Arabic linguistic norms ensure textual integrity, and sound transmission, ensure textual stability rather than fragmentation. The paper contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by clarifying misconceptions surrounding Qira'at and offers a balanced response to both orientalist critiques and modern reductionist readings, reaffirming their foundational role in the preservation of the Qur'an as both a written and recited revelation. Ten findings and ten recommendations are offered in conclusion, with a view to strengthening this tradition in the modern era.

Keywords: 'Ilm al-Qira'at, Qur'anic Recitation, Textual Integrity, Tawatur, Rasm al-Mushaf, Qur'anic Preservation, Islamic Sciences.

Introduction

Among the sciences that the Muslim scholarly tradition has bequeathed to posterity, few are as precise, as demanding, or as consequential as 'Ilm al-Qira'at the science of the variant readings of the Qur'an. To appreciate its significance is to understand something fundamental about the nature of the Qur'an itself: that it was not merely revealed as a written text to be copied from one manuscript to another, but was transmitted, above all, as a living oral recitation, mouth to ear, teacher to student, in an unbroken chain stretching back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and through him, to the Angel Jibril, and to Allah, the Lord of all creation¹.

The question of how the Qur'an has been preserved across fourteen centuries, through the rise and fall of empires, across vast linguistic and cultural divides, and into an age of unprecedented technological transformation, is one that touches the very heart of Islamic faith and scholarship. The answer, in no small measure, lies in this science. 'Ilm al-Qira'at is the discipline that defines, authenticates, and transmits the precise manner in which each word, each letter, and each vowel of the Qur'an is to be pronounced a discipline built upon the twin foundations of continuous oral transmission (*tawatur*) and consonance with the Arabic linguistic norm².

The present paper undertakes an appraisal of this science as a tool for preserving the textual integrity of the Qur'an. It traces the historical emergence of the discipline, examines the theological foundations upon which it rests, analyses the classical methodology by which readings were authenticated and transmitted, and reflects upon the enduring relevance of

¹ M. Ibn al-Jazari, *al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., p. 9

² A. al-Dani, *al-Taysir fi al-Qira'at al-Sab'*, ed. O. Pretzl, Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1984, p. 4

the science in the contemporary world. The treatment moves, as it must, from past to present, and gestures toward the future, in the conviction that a tradition so carefully constructed over so many centuries has lessons yet to offer to those who come after.

Historical Origins and Early Transmission

The roots of *'Ilm al-Qira'at* lie in the very moment of Qur'anic revelation itself. The Prophet (peace be upon him) received the Qur'an from the Angel Jibril over a period of approximately twenty-three years, and he transmitted it to his Companions through direct oral instruction. The well-attested hadith in which the Prophet said that the Qur'an was revealed in seven *ahruf* (modes or dialects) is the starting point for understanding the legitimate plurality of recitations within a unified textual canon. Scholars have debated the precise meaning of *ahruf* with great sophistication, but the consensus of the classical authorities is that the seven canonical readings do not represent textual variants in the sense of contradictions or errors, but rather authorised phonological and morphological flexibilities reflecting the linguistic breadth of the Arabic tongue at the time of revelation³.

During the lifetime of the Prophet, the Companions received the Qur'an by direct oral transmission and memorised it in its entirety or in large portions. After his passing, the first caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), prompted by the heavy losses among the *huffaz* (memorisers) at the Battle of Yamamah, commissioned Zayd ibn Thabit to compile the Qur'an into a single written codex. This act of compilation was primarily an act of preservation, not of standardisation of recitation. The *rasm* the skeletal written outline was retained, but the oral tradition continued to flow in its several authorised channels⁴.

It was during the caliphate of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) that the decisive act of textual consolidation occurred. Alarmed by the disputes among Muslims in the far-flung territories of the expanding empire over the correct pronunciation of the Qur'an, 'Uthman ordered the preparation of several master copies (*masahif*) from the authoritative compilation of Abu Bakr, and these were dispatched to the major centres of the Muslim world, with an instruction that all other written copies be destroyed. The 'Uthmanic *mushaf* thus became the universal orthographic reference for the Muslim community. Yet, crucially, this act did not suppress the authorised oral readings; rather, it channelled them. The *rasm* of the 'Uthmanic codex was deliberately unvocalised, allowing the canonical oral readings to continue to be transmitted alongside it⁵.

The Codification of *'Ilm al-Qira'at*: The Classical Imams

The formal codification of *'Ilm al-Qira'at* as a systematic science began in earnest in the second and third centuries of the Hijri calendar, as Muslim scholars turned their prodigious intellectual energies to the organisation and authentication of the oral tradition. The pivotal figure in the early codification of the seven canonical readings is Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Musa ibn al-'Abbas Ibn Mujahid of Baghdad (d. 324 AH/936 CE), whose celebrated work *Kitab al-Sab'ah fi al-Qira'at* established the seven imams of recitation as the normative reference for the Muslim community. Ibn Mujahid's selection of seven readers Nafi' of Medina, Ibn Kathir of Mecca, Abu 'Amr of Basra, Ibn 'Amir of Damascus, 'Asim of Kufa, Hamzah of Kufa, and al-Kisa'i of Kufa — was not arbitrary but reflected the centres of Qur'anic learning in the major cities of the early Islamic world⁶.

Two scholars above all others shaped the mature science of *'Ilm al-Qira'at* as it has been received by subsequent generations. The first is Abu 'Amr 'Uthman ibn Sa'id al-Dani (d. 444 AH/1053 CE), whose *al-Taysir fi al-Qira'at al-Sab'* remains among the most important primary texts of the discipline. Al-Dani was a scholar of extraordinary range and precision, and his methodological contribution lay in establishing rigorous criteria for the authentication of readings: every valid reading must rest upon a sound chain of transmission (*sanad*), must conform to the *rasm* of the 'Uthmanic *mushaf*, and must be consistent with the norms of the Arabic language. These three criteria which later scholars would articulate as the 'three conditions' (*al-arkan al-thalathah*) became the cornerstone of the science⁷.

The second titan of the discipline is Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Jazari (d. 833 AH/1429 CE), whose *al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr* extended the canonical readings from seven to ten by adding the readings of Abu Ja'far, Ya'qub, and Khalaf, and whose *al-Tayyibah al-Nashr* is a celebrated didactic poem summarising the science in over one thousand verses. Ibn al-Jazari's contribution was to provide the tradition with its most comprehensive and authoritative systematic framework, one that has remained the definitive reference for students and scholars of *Qira'at* to this day. He famously declared, in a statement that has become a *locus classicus* of the discipline, that a reading which satisfies the three conditions of authentic transmission, consonance with the 'Uthmanic *rasm*, and

³ M. Ibn al-Jazari, *al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., pp. 26–32

⁴ M. al-Zarqani, *Manahil al-'Irfan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1988, p. 205

⁵ J. Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 140–159

⁶ A. Ibn Mujahid, *Kitab al-Sab'ah fi al-Qira'at*, ed. Sh. Dif, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1972, pp. 45–70

⁷ A. al-Dani, *al-Taysir fi al-Qira'at al-Sab'*, ed. O. Pretzl, Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1984, pp. 10–15

accordance with Arabic grammar, is a valid Qur'anic reading, regardless of whether it is among the seven, the ten, or beyond⁸.

The Theological Foundations of *'Ilm al-Qira'at*

The theological grounding of *'Ilm al-Qira'at* rests upon the Qur'anic promise of divine preservation found in Surah al-Hijr (15:9): 'Indeed, it is We who sent down the Reminder, and indeed, it is We who are its Guardians.' Muslim scholars have consistently understood this verse as an absolute divine guarantee that the Qur'an would be protected in its precise wording and its authorised recitation from every form of corruption or falsification. *'Ilm al-Qira'at* is thus not merely a human scholarly achievement; it is, in the theological vision of Islamic scholarship, the instrument through which divine providence has operated to fulfil this eternal promise⁹.

The concept of *tawatur* mass, uninterrupted transmission through so many independent chains that the possibility of collective error or fabrication is excluded is the epistemological foundation upon which the authority of the canonical reading's rests. The classical scholars insisted that only those readings transmitted by *tawatur* carry the full authority of Qur'anic text, while readings transmitted through solitary chains (*ahad*) or weak transmission are to be treated as scholarly commentary or legal reference but not as Qur'anic recitation in the strict sense. This insistence on *tawatur* as the criterion of authenticity is what fundamentally distinguishes *'Ilm al-Qira'at* from other text-critical traditions, and it is what has enabled the Qur'an to be transmitted with a degree of fidelity unmatched by any other ancient text known to the history of human civilisation¹⁰.

The plurality of canonical readings, far from being a source of theological anxiety, has been celebrated by Muslim scholars as a manifestation of the Qur'an's inexhaustible richness and its mercy toward the diverse peoples of the umma. Al-Zarkashi observed that the variant readings frequently illuminate dimensions of meaning that a single reading alone could not exhaust, and that in this sense the readings stand in a relationship of mutual illumination and complementarity. Al-Suyuti similarly remarked that the diversity of readings is a form of divine munificence (*tawsi'ah*) upon the community, each reading carrying its own freight of guidance and wisdom¹¹.

'Ilm al-Qira'at and Arabic Linguistics

The relationship between *'Ilm al-Qira'at* and the Arabic linguistic sciences is one of the most intellectually fertile dimensions of this discipline. The canonical readings have served, across the centuries, as the highest court of appeal for questions of Arabic morphology, syntax, phonology, and lexicography. Classical grammarians of the stature of Sibawayhi, al-Farra', and Ibn Jinni drew extensively upon Qur'anic readings to establish or confirm linguistic rules, and it was a cardinal principle of the classical grammatical tradition that no reading transmitted by continuous authentic chains could be rejected on grounds of grammatical irregularity alone.

Indeed, if a reading conflicted with the prevailing grammatical norm, the responsibility lay with the grammarian to revise the norm, not with the reading to be discarded¹².

The science of phonetics (*tajwid*), which is closely allied with *'Ilm al-Qira'at*, represents a remarkable early achievement in the systematic description of the Arabic sound system. The classical scholars of *Qira'at* developed an extraordinarily precise vocabulary for describing the articulation points (*makharij al-huruf*), the phonological qualities (*sifat al-huruf*), and the rules of assimilation, lengthening, and pausing that govern the correct recitation of the Qur'anic text. This body of knowledge constitutes, in effect, a complete phonological grammar of Qur'anic Arabic, and it has played an indispensable role in preserving the precise sound of the sacred text across time and across linguistic communities whose native tongues are entirely unrelated to Arabic¹³.

The variant readings also illuminate points of Qur'anic exegesis in ways that a single reading alone could never achieve. The science has thus served as an indispensable auxiliary to tafsir. When the same word is read by one imam with a *fathah* and by another with a *kasrah*, or when one tradition reads a verb in the active voice and another in the passive, the exegete is furnished with a richer, more multidimensional interpretation of the divine word. Ibn Kathir al-Mufasssir, al-Tabari, and later al-Qurtubi all drew systematically upon the variant readings in their commentaries, and it is no exaggeration to say that a tafsir that ignores *'Ilm al-Qira'at* is an incomplete tafsir¹⁴.

⁸ M. Ibn al-Jazari, *al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., pp. 9–15

⁹ M. al-Zarkashi, *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1972, pp. 318–322

¹⁰ S.M. al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 2005, pp. 270–275

¹¹ M. al-Zarkashi, *al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1972, pp. 340–345

¹² I. Ibn Jinni, *al-Khasais*, Vol. 1, ed. M.A. al-Najjar, al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, Cairo, n.d., pp. 390–395

¹³ M. Makki ibn Abi Talib al-Qaysi, *al-Ri'ayah li-Tajwid al-Tilawah*, ed. A.H. Farhat, Dar al-Manara, Jeddah, 1996, pp. 55–80

¹⁴ M. al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, Dar al-Hijr, Cairo, 2001, pp. 60–68

Transmission Across the Centuries: Chains of Authority and the Isnad System

The *isnad* system the practice of transmitting knowledge through personally authenticated chains of teacher and student is, in the field of Qur'anic recitation, carried to a degree of rigour that surpasses even its application in the science of *hadith*. Every authorised reciter in the classical tradition possessed what scholars call a *sanad muttasil* an unbroken chain of transmission reaching back, through named and authenticated teachers, to the Prophet himself. This is not a theoretical claim but a practical reality: a student who wished to be authorised to teach a particular reading was required to recite the entire Qur'an before a qualified sheikh, to receive his correction and instruction, and to be granted an *ijazah* a formal certificate of authorisation that recorded the complete chain of his transmission. The *ijazah* system thus functions as a living document of the history of Qur'anic transmission, and it continues to be practised with the same rigour today as it was in the age of Ibn Mujahid¹⁵.

The *tabaqat* literature the biographical dictionaries of Qur'anic reciters represent a further dimension of the tradition's commitment to authenticated transmission. Ibn al-Jazari's *Ghayat al-Nihayah fi Tabaqat al-Qurra'* records the biographies of some four thousand reciters, from the Companions of the Prophet to the scholars of his own era, providing an unparalleled documentary record of the transmission of the Qur'anic reading tradition across seven centuries. This tradition of biographical documentation serves not only as a scholarly archive but as a form of collective accountability: the community of reciters is a community whose genealogy is transparent, recorded, and verifiable¹⁶.

The geographical spread of the canonical readings across the Islamic world further reinforces the argument for their authenticity. The reading of Hafs 'an 'Asim, which is today the most widely used reading across the Muslim world, was transmitted from Kufa and spread eastward and westward through independent channels. The reading of Warsh 'an Nafi', dominant in North and West Africa, was transmitted from Medina through Egypt. The reading of Qalun 'an Nafi' is prevalent in Libya and parts of Tunisia. The fact that these readings, transmitted through entirely independent chains across geographically distant communities, agree in the overwhelming majority of their text and differ only in those precise points where the classical tradition records their variation, is itself a form of collective corroboration that provides strong evidence for the authenticity of the tradition¹⁷.

The 'Uthmanic Rasm and Its Relationship to the Readings

The relationship between the written text of the 'Uthmanic *mushaf* and the oral tradition of recitation is one of the most subtle and theologically significant aspects of *'Ilm al-Qira'at*. The 'Uthmanic *rasm* was written without full vocalisation marks (*tashkil*) and, in many cases, without the diacritical dots (*nuqat*) that distinguish certain Arabic letters from one another. This was not a deficiency of the early scribal tradition but a deliberate and providential accommodation: the unvocalised consonantal outline of the 'Uthmanic text is broad enough to encompass, without contradiction, all of the canonical oral readings. The written text and the oral transmission are thus not in competition but in a relationship of mutual support: the *rasm* provides the authoritative consonantal skeleton, and the oral tradition clothes that skeleton with the full living reality of Qur'anic recitation¹⁸.

The diacritical marks that were subsequently added to the 'Uthmanic *mushaf* first the vowel points attributed to Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali and later the orthographic refinements of al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi represent an important chapter in the history of written Qur'anic preservation. Yet classical scholars consistently maintained that these marks were aids to recitation, not substitutes for the oral tradition. The true custodian of the Qur'an remained, as it had always been, the living chain of authorised reciters. Al-Dani explicitly stated that the *rasm* is subordinate to the oral transmission: where there is a divergence between what the script appears to suggest and what the authenticated oral tradition prescribes, the oral tradition takes precedence¹⁹.

'Ilm al-Qira'at in the Modern Era

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have brought both new challenges and new opportunities for the science of *'Ilm al-Qira'at*. On the one hand, the forces of globalisation, urbanisation, and the decline of traditional patterns of Islamic scholarship have created pressures upon the institutions the *halaqat*, the *ribat*, the *dar al-qurra'* through which this science has historically been transmitted. In many parts of the Muslim world, the number of scholars holding

¹⁵ M. Ibn al-Jazari, *Ghayat al-Nihayah fi Tabaqat al-Qurra'*, Vol. 1, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, Cairo, n.d., pp. 1–10

¹⁶ M. Ibn al-Jazari, *Ghayat al-Nihayah fi Tabaqat al-Qurra'*, Vol. 1, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, Cairo, n.d., pp. 3–7

¹⁷ A. von Denffer, *'Ulum al-Qur'an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 1983, pp. 113–125

¹⁸ A. al-Dani, *al-Muqni' fi Rasm Masahif al-Amsar*, ed. M.A. Dahman, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, n.d., pp. 5–20

¹⁹ A. al-Dani, *al-Muqni' fi Rasm Masahif al-Amsar*, ed. M.A. Dahman, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, n.d., pp. 8–12

authenticated chains of transmission in all ten canonical readings has declined, and the informal networks through which the science was reproduced across generations face challenges from modernisation and educational standardisation²⁰.

On the other hand, technology has opened remarkable new possibilities for the documentation, dissemination, and preservation of the Qur'anic recitation tradition. The audio recording of master reciters, the digitalisation of classical texts of *'Ilm al-Qira'at*, the creation of online ijazah programmes, and the development of mobile applications that teach the rules of tajwid have all contributed to an unprecedented broadening of access to this knowledge. Millions of Muslims across the world who would never have had the opportunity to sit at the feet of a qualified sheikh can now hear the authentic recitation of the Qur'an in multiple canonical readings at the touch of a screen. The challenge for contemporary scholars is to ensure that technology serves as a supplement to, and not a replacement for, the essential human relationship of teacher and student upon which the integrity of the tradition has always depended²¹.

Academic scholarship has also brought a fresh and, on the whole, productive engagement with *'Ilm al-Qira'at* from outside the traditional Islamic scholarly framework. Western scholars such as Theodor Noldeke, Arthur Jeffery, and more recently Francois Deroche and Keith Small have engaged with the manuscript tradition of the Qur'an and with the question of its textual transmission. While their methods and conclusions have not always been received sympathetically within the Muslim scholarly community, their work has in many respects served to confirm the antiquity and stability of the Qur'anic text, and has highlighted the extraordinary degree to which the 'Uthmanic *rasm* is attested across the earliest surviving manuscripts²².

Contemporary Muslim scholars have responded to the challenges of the modern era with both vigour and sophistication. Institutions such as the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an in Medina and al-Azhar University in Cairo have played crucial roles in the standardisation and dissemination of authorised Qur'anic recitation, while scholars such as 'Abd al-Fattah al-Qadi and Ahmad Mustafa al-Mar'ashli have produced important modern treatments of the classical science. The emergence of dedicated doctoral programmes in *'Ilm al-Qira'at* at Islamic universities across the Muslim world represents a further encouraging sign of the science's continuing vitality²³.

The Comparative Significance of *'Ilm al-Qira'at*

Any informed appreciation of *'Ilm al-Qira'at* must set it against the broader background of the history of sacred texts and their transmission in other traditions. The textual history of the Hebrew Bible, compiled and edited across many centuries, presents a picture of considerable textual diversity, with the Dead Sea Scrolls having revealed a plurality of textual traditions far exceeding what the later Masoretic text would suggest. The New Testament, similarly, exists in thousands of manuscripts exhibiting substantial variation, and the science of New Testament textual criticism is entirely devoted to the task of reconstructing, as far as possible, an original text from this multiplicity of variants. By contrast, the Qur'an, as attested by the earliest surviving manuscripts from Sanaa, from Topkapi, from Birmingham presents a textual stability that is, in the judgment of even non-Muslim textual historians, remarkable²⁴.

This stability is not accidental. It is the direct fruit of the twin traditions of meticulous written preservation and authenticated oral transmission that *'Ilm al-Qira'at* represents. The canonical readings, far from introducing textual uncertainty, actually reduce it: because the boundaries of authorised variation are precisely defined by the classical science, any deviation from those boundaries is immediately identifiable as an error or an innovation. The science thus functions simultaneously as a record of legitimate diversity and as a bulwark against illegitimate alteration a combination that no purely manuscript-based tradition of textual preservation has achieved with comparable success²⁵.

Findings

1. *'Ilm al-Qira'at* is an independent and indispensable Qur'anic science whose function is to authenticate, systematise, and transmit the authorised recitations of the sacred text across generations.
2. The seven and subsequently ten canonical readings are all firmly grounded in mass uninterrupted transmission (*tawatur*) from the Prophet, and their diversity represents authorised plurality rather than textual contradiction.
3. The three conditions of al-Dani and Ibn al-Jazari authentic chain of transmission, consonance with the 'Uthmanic *rasm*, and conformity with Arabic linguistic norms constitute a rigorous and effective methodology for distinguishing valid readings from spurious ones.

²⁰ F. Robinson, *Separating Delight from Instruction: The Moral Dimensions of Early Islamic Education*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 145–152

²¹ I. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 2000, pp. 230–245

²² K. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2011, pp. 1–30

²³ A.F. al-Qadi, *al-Wafi fi Sharh al-Shatibiyyah*, Dar al-Sahaba, Tanta, 1999, pp. 3–18

²⁴ K. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2011, pp. 45–88

²⁵ M. Mohar Ali, *The Qur'an and the Orientalists*, Jam'iyat Ihyaa' Minhaaj Al-Sunnah, Suffolk, 2004, pp. 200–215

4. The 'Uthmanic *mushaf* and the oral recitation tradition are complementary and mutually reinforcing custodians of the Qur'anic text; neither alone constitutes the totality of its preservation.
5. The *ijazah* system and the *isnad*-based chain of transmission have functioned as a uniquely effective mechanism for ensuring the continuity and authenticity of the Qur'anic recitation tradition across fourteen centuries.
6. The variant canonical readings serve as an invaluable auxiliary to Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and Arabic linguistics, illuminating dimensions of meaning and linguistic usage that a single reading alone cannot exhaust.
7. The science of *tajwid*, as an integral component of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*', constitutes a systematic and precise phonological grammar of Qur'anic Arabic that has preserved the precise sound of the sacred text across vast linguistic and geographical distances.
8. Comparative textual history confirms that the Qur'an's stability of transmission, as attested by the earliest surviving manuscripts, is unparalleled among the world's sacred texts, and this stability is directly attributable to the methodological rigour of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*'.
9. The modern era presents both significant challenges including the decline of traditional transmission institutions and remarkable new opportunities including digital documentation and global online dissemination for the science of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*'.
10. Despite the pressures of modernity, the science remains a living tradition: authenticated chains of transmission in the ten canonical readings continue to be maintained through the *ijazah* system in institutions across the Muslim world.

Recommendations

1. Islamic universities and governments across the Muslim world should establish and adequately fund dedicated faculties and centres for '*Ilm al-Qira'at*', to ensure the institutional continuity of the science at the highest levels of scholarship.
2. The *ijazah* system of authenticated transmission must be preserved as the non-negotiable core of training in '*Ilm al-Qira'at*'; no digital tool or recorded audio should be accepted as a substitute for the personal teacher-student relationship.
3. Comprehensive digital archives of the classical texts of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*' including the works of al-Dani, Ibn al-Jazari, Ibn Mujahid, and al-Shatabi should be created, made freely accessible, and maintained by international scholarly consortia.
4. Audio and video recordings of authorised masters in all ten canonical readings should be systematically collected, authenticated, and preserved as irreplaceable components of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Muslim *umma*.
5. Curricula in Islamic schools and universities should reintegrate '*Ilm al-Qira'at*' as a core discipline, rather than a peripheral elective, alongside *tafsir*, *hadith*, and *fiqh*.
6. Interdisciplinary dialogue between scholars of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*' and specialists in Arabic linguistics, phonetics, and computational text analysis should be actively promoted, to enrich both traditions and to strengthen the academic standing of Qur'anic studies globally.
7. Western academic institutions that engage with Qur'anic textual criticism should be encouraged to acquire genuine familiarity with the classical methodology of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*', so that their scholarship may be informed by, rather than ignorant of, the tradition's own rigorous criteria of authenticity.
8. Muslim scholars working in the field of '*Ilm al-Qira'at*' should produce high-quality works in major international languages including English, French, and Turkish to make the science accessible to the global Muslim community and to a broader academic audience.
9. Governments and private foundations in Muslim-majority countries should fund scholarships enabling talented students from all parts of the *umma* to travel to the established centres of Qur'anic recitation Medina, Cairo, Fez, Kano to receive training in the canonical readings under authorised masters.
10. Research into the connections between '*Ilm al-Qira'at*' and early Qur'anic manuscripts particularly the rapidly expanding corpus of digitised early manuscripts should be actively supported, as this research promises to provide further objective confirmation of the antiquity and integrity of the canonical reading tradition.

Conclusion

Ilm al-Qira'at stands as one of the most remarkable achievements of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Rooted in the oral transmission of the Prophet himself, developed with extraordinary rigour by scholars of the second, third, and fourth Islamic centuries, systematised into a comprehensive science by the towering figure of Ibn al-Jazari, and carried forward to the present day through an unbroken chain of authenticated reciters, the science has proved itself across fourteen centuries to be the most effective instrument ever devised for the preservation of a sacred text. It is a science in which the oral and the written, the theological and the linguistic, the ancient and the contemporary, are woven into an indissoluble whole.

As the Muslim world navigates the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century, the imperative to sustain, strengthen, and share this tradition has never been more pressing. The Qur'an is not merely a historical document; it is, for well over a billion people, the living word of the Almighty, the foundation of their faith, the source of their guidance,

and the object of their deepest love. *'Ilm al-Qira'at* is the science that has kept that word alive, pure, and intact across the centuries. It is the duty of every generation to receive it with gratitude, to transmit it with care, and to bequeath it, undiminished, to those who come after.

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