



The Impact of *Qira'at* Variations on Qur'anic Interpretation (*Tafsir*): Linguistic and Semantic Perspectives

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Abstract

Qur'anic interpretation (Tafsir) has historically been shaped by linguistic nuance, and 'Ilm al-Qira'at represents one of its most significant yet underexplored dimensions. This paper investigates how variations among the canonical Qira'at influence semantic meaning, exegetical diversity, and juristic inference without undermining doctrinal unity. The study addresses the problem of reductionist Tafsir approaches that privilege a single reading while neglecting the interpretive richness embedded in multiple authentic recitations. Employing a descriptive and comparative linguistic methodology, selected Qur'anic verses are analysed across different Qira'at to highlight shifts in grammatical structure, verb forms, and semantic emphasis. Classical Tafsir works by al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn 'Āshūr are consulted to demonstrate how early exegetes integrated Qira'at into their interpretive frameworks. The findings reveal that Qira'at variations often expand meaning rather than contradict it, offering layered interpretations that address legal, theological, and rhetorical dimensions simultaneously. This paper argues that neglecting Qira'at results in an incomplete understanding of the Qur'anic message. By foregrounding Qira'at as an exegetical resource, the study underscores their indispensable role in producing a holistic and linguistically grounded Tafsir. Ten findings and ten recommendations are offered in conclusion.

Keywords: *Qira'at, Variations, Qur'anic Interpretation, Tafsir, Linguistic and Semantic Perspectives.*

Introduction

Among the disciplines that define the intellectual heritage of Islam, few are as intricate or as indispensable as 'Ilm al-Qira'at the science of the modes of Qur'anic recitation. From the earliest days of the Muslim community, it was recognised that the Qur'ān had been revealed in multiple *ahruf* (dialects or modes), a reality attested to in numerous authentic traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The celebrated hadith reported by 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb and Hishām ibn Hakīm, recorded in the two Sahīhayn, affirms that the Prophet corrected each man's recitation while confirming the validity of both, concluding with the declaration that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven *ahruf*. This pivotal report established, from the very outset of Islamic history, that variation in recitation was not error but revelation¹. The subsequent codification of the Qur'anic text during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (may Allah be pleased with him) producing the Mushaf al-'Uthmāni did not eliminate this plurality. Rather, the 'Uthmānic script, deliberately left without full diacritical marks, accommodated the established variant readings within a single consonantal skeleton. It fell to the scholars of succeeding generations most notably the Seven Imāms of Recitation (al-Qurrā' al-Sab'ah) canonised by Abū Bakr Ibn Mujāhid in the third century of the Hijra to systematise, authenticate, and transmit these readings to the Muslim community².

What has received comparatively less attention, particularly in contemporary academic discourse, is the manner in which these variant readings directly govern the enterprise of *Tafsir* Qur'anic exegesis. Each legitimate variant reading is not a superficial phonological option but a semantic unit that may expand, restrict, specify, or entirely redirect the meaning of a

¹ I. al-Bukhāri, Sahīh al-Bukhāri, vol. 6, Dār Tawq al-Najāh, Beirut, 1422 AH, p. 100

² A. Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-Sab'ah fī al-Qirā'āt, ed. Shawqī Dayf, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1980, p. 45

given verse. Classical exegetes were acutely alive to this reality, structuring their interpretive works around the variant readings as primary tools of meaning-making. The present study seeks to recover and articulate this relationship with the rigour it deserves, demonstrating that an adequate understanding of *Tafsīr* is, in principle, impossible without engagement with the science of *Qira'at*. The discussion proceeds from the historical and epistemological foundations of the discipline, through its linguistic mechanisms, to its jurisprudential and contemporary implications, concluding with findings and recommendations germane to both scholarship and pedagogy.

Historical Foundations of the *Qira'at*

A. The Prophetic Authorisation of Variant Readings

The authenticity of the *Qira'at* rests on a foundation that no other literary tradition in human history can claim: direct Prophetic sanction followed by continuous, unbroken transmission across generations. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself taught his Companions different modes of recitation appropriate to their various tribal and dialectal backgrounds, and he confirmed the validity of these differences as Divine mercy and facilitation. Ibn 'Abbās narrated that Jibrīl (the Angel Gabriel) taught the Prophet to recite the Qur'ān in one mode, after which the Prophet requested an expansion, and this continued until seven *ahruf* were established. This report, while generating centuries of scholarly debate regarding the precise meaning of *ahruf*, firmly anchors the plurality of recitation within prophetic authority³.

The Companions, in turn, transmitted these variant recitations to the Successors (Tābi'ūn) with meticulous care. Cities such as Makkah, Madinah, Kūfah, Basrah, and Damascus became centres associated with particular reading traditions, each upheld by leading reciters whose chains of transmission (*asānīd*) could be traced directly to a Companion of the Prophet. This geographical diffusion was not fragmentation but a structured preservation of a divinely authorised plurality. When 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (may Allah be pleased with him) dispatched official copies of the *Mushaf* to the major cities, he sent with each copy a reciter who embodied the authentic oral tradition of that region a fact that underscores the inseparability of the written and the recited in Qur'anic transmission⁴.

B. The Codification of the Seven Readings and Beyond

The formal systematisation of the variant readings as a scholarly discipline reached its most consequential expression in the work of Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn Mūsā Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH), whose *Kitāb al-Sab'ah fī al-Qira'at* established seven Imāms of Recitation as the canonical authorities. The seven Nāfi' al-Madanī, Ibn Kathīr al-Makkī, Abū 'Amr al-Basī, Ibn 'Āmir al-Shāmī, 'Āsim al-Kūfī, Hamzah al-Kūfī, and al-Kisā'ī al-Kūfī were selected not as the exclusive possessors of valid recitation but as exemplary transmitters of well-established traditions. Later scholars, particularly Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 AH), expanded the canonical framework to ten Imāms, adding Abū Ja'far, Ya'qūb al-Hadramī, and Khalaf al-'Āshir, and articulated the three conditions that any authentic reading must satisfy: conformity with the 'Uthmānic script (wlaw ihtimālan), correspondence with the rules of Arabic grammar, and transmission through a sound chain reaching the Prophet⁵.

These conditions reflect the epistemological rigour that classical Islamic scholarship brought to bear upon the sacred text. They also reveal an important methodological principle: the *Qira'at* are not philological reconstructions or editorial emendations but reports (riwāyāt) governed by the same science of isnād criticism applied to Prophetic hadith. This is what distinguishes the canonical readings from the so-called *shādhah* (irregular) readings, which, though sometimes transmitted through weaker chains, have nonetheless exercised significant influence upon *Tafsīr* and *fiqh*, as will be examined below.

Linguistic Mechanisms of *Qira'at* Variation

A. Morphological Variation and Its Semantic Consequences

The most immediately apparent dimension of *Qira'at* variation is morphological differences in the vowelling (tashkīl) or consonantal structure of a word that produce distinct grammatical forms and, consequently, distinct meanings. A celebrated example is found in Sūrat al-Fātihah (1:4), where the majority reading of 'Āsim (in the narration of Hafṣ, which today predominates globally) renders the word as Māliki yawm al-dīn 'Master/King of the Day of Judgement' while Nāfi', Ibn Kathīr, Abū 'Amr, Ibn 'Āmir, Hamzah, and al-Kisā'ī read it as Maliki yawm al-dīn 'Sovereign/King of the Day of Judgement'. The two forms, both impeccably attested, complement one another theologically: Māliki (from malaka, to possess) emphasises Divine ownership and proprietary sovereignty over that Day, while Maliki (from malaka, to be a king) emphasises regal authority and dominion. The classical exegete Abū Ja'far al-Tabarī, himself an accomplished linguist, acknowledged both readings and drew upon their combined semantic weight in his exegesis⁶.

³ M. al-Zarkashi, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1957, p. 213

⁴ A. al-Dāni, *al-Muqni' fī Rasm Masāhif al-Amsār*, ed. Muhammad al-Sadūq, Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 1983, p. 78

⁵ M. Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., p. 9

⁶ M. al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2000, p. 178

Another structurally significant example occurs in Sūrat al-Baqarah (2:222), concerning the duration of a wife's ritual impurity (hayd). The majority reading yields *yathhurna* 'until they are purified/clean' indicating that the cessation of menstrual blood suffices for the lifting of the interdiction. A variant reading transmitted by Hamzah and al-Kisā'i yields *yattaharna* 'until they have fully purified themselves' implying that ritual purification through bathing (ghusl) is additionally required before marital relations are resumed. This single morphological distinction has generated one of the most discussed jurisprudential controversies in fiqh literature, with the Hanafī school drawing upon the first reading and the Shāfi'ī and Hanbali schools tending toward the second. The consequence of a single vowel, or a single doubled consonant, upon the entire legal architecture of Islamic family law illustrates with unambiguous clarity the jurisprudential stakes of *Qira'at* variation⁷.

B. Syntactic Variation and Interpretive Ambiguity

Beyond morphology, the variant readings sometimes involve differences in syntactic structure the grammatical relationship between words that produce substantially divergent readings of a verse's meaning. Sūrat al-Mā'idah (5:6), the verse of ablution (*wudū'*), furnishes the most jurisprudentially consequential example. The reading of Ibn Kathīr and Hamzah *wa arjulakum* (with the genitive case, 'arjulikum') connects the feet syntactically to the head, suggesting that they are to be wiped (*masah*) rather than washed, consistent with a position held by certain early scholars. The majority reading *wa arjulakum* (with the accusative case) connects the feet to the hands, mandating washing (*ghasl*). Classical grammarians such as al-Farrā' and al-Zajjāj engaged extensively with this syntactic bifurcation, and the resultant jurisprudential debate has persisted across the *madhāhib*. What matters for the present discussion is that the syntactic relationship between words in this case, the case-ending of a single noun is shown to be a site of interpretive significance of the first order⁸.

Syntactic variation also affects the identification of the subject and predicate in nominal sentences, the scope of conditional clauses, and the antecedents of pronouns each of which may materially alter the meaning of a passage. Classical *Tafsīr* literature is replete with instances where the *mufasssīr* must adjudicate between competing syntactic analyses corresponding to different legitimate readings, and the best exegetes al-Tabarī, al-Qurtubī, Ibn Kathīr demonstrate mastery of both the transmitted readings and the Arabic grammatical tradition in making these adjudications⁹.

C. Phonological and Lexical Variation

A third dimension of *Qira'at* variation less immediately jurisprudential but equally significant for semantic analysis involves phonological and lexical differences that reveal the richness of classical Arabic usage. In Sūrat Yūsuf (12:31), the word used to describe the reaction of the Egyptian noblewomen who cut their hands upon seeing Yūsuf (peace be upon him) is read by the majority as *wa-qatta'na aidiyahunna* 'they cut their hands'. The reading of Ibn Mas'ūd, transmitted in the *shādhdhah* category, uses a synonym that emphasises the completeness of the cutting. While *shādhdhah* readings do not possess the same standing as *mutawātīr* readings for recitation in prayer, classical scholars such as al-Qurtubī employed them as lexical glosses that illuminate the semantic range of the canonical text. Al-Zarkashī, in his encyclopaedic *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, explicitly states that the *shādhdhah* readings are to be treated as interpretive commentary (*Tafsīr*) rather than recitation, a formulation that has guided subsequent scholarship¹⁰.

Qira'at and the Classical Tradition of *Tafsīr*

A. The Exegetical Methodology of al-Tabarī

No survey of the relationship between *Qira'at* and *Tafsīr* can proceed without sustained attention to the monumental *Jāmi'* al-Bayān of Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (d. 310 AH), rightly regarded as the foundational work of the classical *Tafsīr* tradition. Al-Tabarī's methodology is distinctly philological: he systematically records the variant readings of each verse, analyses the Arabic grammatical forms they entail, and evaluates their semantic consequences before synthesising an interpretive position. He rarely dismisses any canonically authenticated reading as irrelevant, and he frequently demonstrates that apparently competing readings can be reconciled as different facets of a unified divine intention. His treatment of the basmalah, of the opening of Sūrat al-Fātihah, and of the verse of the throne (*Āyat al-Kursī*) exemplifies this approach with particular brilliance. Al-Tabarī's work established a model that all subsequent major *mufasssīrūn* Ibn 'Atiyyah, al-Qurtubī, Ibn Kathīr felt obliged to engage with, even when they departed from his conclusions¹¹.

⁷ M. Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 1, Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, Riyadh, 1997, p. 350

⁸ A. al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1955, p. 302

⁹ A. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 1, Dār Taybah, Riyadh, 1999, p. 42

¹⁰ A. al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 9, Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1964, p. 173

¹¹ M. al-Tabari, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2000, p. 57

B. Al-Qurtubī and the Integration of Jurisprudential Reading

Abū 'Abdillāh al-Qurtubī (d. 671 AH), author of the celebrated al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān, represents the tradition of exegesis in which *Qira'at* variation is deployed most explicitly as a tool of legal derivation. Al-Qurtubī does not content himself with recording readings; he maps each variant onto the positions of the four legal schools, traces the chain of reasoning from reading to ruling, and assesses the relative preponderance (tarjīh) of competing interpretations. His discussion of the ablution verse, the verse on menstruation, and the verse on the guardianship of women (walāyah) demonstrates that *Tafsīr* and Fiqh are, in the classical understanding, inseparable disciplines and that the *Qira'at* serve as the mediating link between them. Al-Qurtubī's work remains, after more than seven centuries, a standard reference in Islamic legal education¹².

C. Ibn al-Jazarī and the Science of *Tajwīd*

Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 AH) stands as the pre-eminent authority on the science of *Qira'at* in the post-classical period. His two foundational works al-Nashr fī al-*Qira'at* al-'Ashr and the versified al-Tayyibah al-Nashr systematically documented the ten canonical readings with their chains, rules, and textual applications. What distinguishes Ibn al-Jazarī from mere compilers is his sustained attention to the exegetical implications of the readings he catalogued. He was keenly aware that the transmission of the *Qira'at* was not a phonological exercise but a theological and interpretive responsibility, and he articulated this awareness in the introduction to al-Nashr with characteristic precision. His criteria for the authenticity of a reading scriptural, grammatical, and isnād-based remain the standard against which all subsequent scholarship measures itself.¹³

Semantic Dimensions: The *Qira'at* as Expansion of Meaning

A. Complementarity and the Doctrine of Non-Contradiction

A central thesis of classical Qur'anic scholarship and one that the evidence of the *Qira'at* robustly supports is that the variant readings are, in the vast majority of cases, not contradictory but complementary. Where two readings of the same verse produce different meanings, those meanings are typically understood as equally intended by the Divine Legislator, so that the full semantic scope of the verse encompasses both. This principle, articulated with characteristic clarity by Abū 'Ubaydah Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā and developed further by al-Zamakhsharī in his al-Kashshāf, has the important consequence that the Qur'ān, when read across its canonical variations, is semantically richer than any single reading alone. Each variant is, in effect, a divinely authorised commentary on the other variants. The Andalusian exegete Ibn 'Atiyyah al-Andalusī (d. 546 AH) made this complementarity a structural principle of his al-Muharrar al-Wajīz, consistently invoking multiple readings to construct a more complete picture of each verse's meaning¹⁴.

A striking illustration of this complementarity is found in Sūrat al-Baqarah (2:37), where God's acceptance of Ādam's repentance is described. The reading of Ibn Kathīr renders kalimātin as the subject (Ādam received words from his Lord), while the reading of the majority renders Ādam as the subject (his Lord received him/words from him). The syntactic inversion produces two theologically harmonious accounts: one emphasising the divine initiative in providing the words of repentance, the other emphasising Ādam's reception of divine mercy. Both truths are theologically necessary, and the plurality of the readings expresses both simultaneously within a single Qur'anic statement.

B. Cases of Legal Specificity and Generality

In certain cases, variant readings do not so much complement as specify one reading narrowing the scope of a verse that another leaves general. Sūrat al-Talāq (65:6) contains an instruction regarding the maintenance of divorced women who are nursing. One reading supports a general obligation of maintenance; a variant, transmitted through a sound chain, introduces a specification regarding the duration and conditions of such maintenance. The interplay between general and specific readings (takhsīs al-'āmm bil-qirā'ah) became a recognised topic within the science of Usūl al-Fiqh Islamic legal theory and was treated systematically by scholars such as al-Āmidī (d. 631 AH) in his al-Ihkām and by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) in his al-Mahsūl. These scholars acknowledged that a variant reading could perform the legal function of qualification (taqyīd) or specification (takhsīs) with respect to the predominant reading, thereby generating a ruling more refined than either reading could produce alone¹⁵.

The Shāhdhah Readings and Their Interpretive Role

The shāhdhah (anomalous or irregular) readings those that fail to satisfy one or more of Ibn al-Jazarī's three conditions occupy a distinctive and often misunderstood position in the *Tafsīr* tradition. While they may not be recited in the formal prayer (salāh), they have never been simply discarded by the classical scholars. Al-Zarkashī in al-Burhān and al-Suyūfī (d. 911 AH) in al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān both affirm that the shāhdhah readings are to be treated as a form of *Tafsīr*

¹² A. al-Qurtubī, al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1964, p. 5

¹³ M. Ibn al-Jazarī, al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., p. 14

¹⁴ M. al-Zamakhshari, al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq Ghawāmid al-Tanzīl, vol. 1, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut, 1987, p. 73

¹⁵ F. al-Razi, al-Mahsūl fī 'Ilm Usūl al-Fiqh, vol. 3, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 1997, p. 167

that is, as interpretive glosses preserved by early authorities who were themselves Companions or Successors of the Prophet. The reading of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, for instance, enjoyed great reverence among the Kūfan scholars and continued to inform legal and exegetical discussion long after the 'Uthmānic Mushaf had become normative¹⁶.

The shāhdhah reading of Sūrat al-Nisā' (4:12) concerning the inheritance of the uterine brother (akh li-umm), preserved in the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd, introduced a textual variant that the Hanafī school considered sufficiently authoritative to ground a legal ruling, even absent the formal status of a mutawātir reading. This is perhaps the most dramatic instance of a shāhdhah reading exerting direct jurisprudential force, and it illustrates the impossibility of drawing a clean line between the science of *Qira'at* and the science of fiqh. The Islamic legal tradition, at its most sophisticated, recognised that the channels of divine communication were multiple and that every authenticated strand of that communication deserved interpretive respect.

Contemporary Relevance and Modern Scholarship

A. The *Qira'at* in Modern Arabic Linguistics

Modern Arabic linguistics has, somewhat belatedly, begun to recognise the *Qira'at* as a uniquely valuable corpus for the study of classical Arabic phonology, morphology, and syntax. The variant readings preserve dialectal features of classical Arabic that are not otherwise attested in the literary corpus, and their systematic documentation in the works of Ibn Mujāhid, Ibn Khālawayh, and Ibn al-Jazarī constitutes a richly annotated archive of pre-Islamic and early Islamic linguistic usage. Contemporary scholars such as Ahmad Mukhtār 'Umar and 'Abd al-Sābūr Shāhīn have drawn upon the *Qira'at* to reconstruct aspects of the phonological system of early Qur'anic Arabic, arguing that the readings represent not errors or innovations but carefully preserved features of a living linguistic tradition¹⁷.

Western Arabicists, too, have turned increasing attention to the *Qira'at* as a historical-linguistic resource. The work of Harald Motzki on the transmission of early Islamic texts, and the more philologically oriented studies of François Déroche on Qur'anic manuscripts, have intersected with *Qira'at* scholarship in productive ways, though the methodological differences between the Islamic isnād tradition and Western source criticism remain a site of ongoing negotiation. For Muslim scholars, the primacy of transmitted authority (naql) over purely philological reconstruction remains a first principle; the *Qira'at* are what they are because they were received from the Prophet, not because they can be independently verified by manuscript evidence¹⁸.

B. Pedagogical Challenges and the Decline of *Qira'at* Studies

A persistent concern in contemporary Islamic educational institutions is the relative marginalisation of 'Ilm al-*Qira'at* within modern curricula. The global dominance of a single reading the narration of Hafs 'an 'Āsim while practically advantageous for a world-wide Muslim community seeking a common text, has had the unintended consequence of rendering the broader science of *Qira'at* unfamiliar to many graduates of Islamic universities. Students of *Tafsīr* who have never encountered the reading of Nāfi' or the reading of Abū 'Amr approach the exegetical tradition with a structural deficit, unable to appreciate why the classical *mufasssīrūn* devoted such painstaking attention to variant readings. This pedagogical gap has real consequences for the quality of contemporary *Tafsīr* scholarship, producing interpretations that are linguistically flattened and jurisprudentially impoverished by comparison with the classical tradition¹⁹.

Several contemporary scholars and institutions have responded to this challenge with renewed programmes of *Qira'at* instruction. Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Madinah Islamic University in Saudi Arabia, and a number of West African institutions including those in Sokoto, Nigeria, which has a distinguished tradition of Qur'anic scholarship rooted in the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and the writings of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio continue to maintain the tradition of oral transmission and certification in multiple readings. These efforts represent not mere antiquarianism but a recognition that the full interpretive and legal resources of the Qur'anic text can only be accessed by those who command the full range of its authenticated readings.

C. Digital Resources and the Future of *Qira'at* Scholarship

The digital age has, paradoxically, both threatened and enriched the science of *Qira'at*. On one hand, the ease of dissemination of a single audio recording of Hafs 'an 'Āsim has further entrenched the dominance of that narration. On the other hand, digital projects such as the Tanzil corpus, the Qur'ān Morphology Project, and various online archives of classical manuscripts have made the textual resources of *Qira'at* scholarship more accessible than at any previous point

¹⁶ J. al-Suyuti, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, Cairo, 1974, p. 274

¹⁷ A. Mukhtār 'Umar and 'Abd al-'Āl Sālim Mukarram, *Mu'jam al-Qirā'āt al-Qur'āniyyah*, vol. 1, 'Ālam al-Kutub, Kuwait, 1982, p. 18

¹⁸ F. Deroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview*, Brill, Leiden, 2014, p. 34

¹⁹ A. Shah, 'The Ten Qira'at: Considerations for the Contemporary Muslim', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 12, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2010, p. 53

in history. Researchers can now compare the variant readings of a single verse across all ten canonical Imāms within seconds, cross-referencing classical grammatical and exegetical sources simultaneously. The challenge is not scarcity of resources but the formation of scholars with the linguistic, theological, and methodological preparation to use them responsibly. The integration of digital tools with the traditional method of oral transmission from a qualified teacher (*mashāfaha*) remains the most pressing question for the future of the discipline²⁰.

Findings

The following ten findings emerge from the foregoing analysis:

1. The *Qira'at* are not textual variants of human origin but divinely sanctioned modes of revelation, transmitted through unbroken chains from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and authenticated by the science of isnād.
2. Morphological differences among the readings such as the vocalisation of Māliki/Maliki in al-Fātihah and yathhurna/yattaharna in al-Baqarah generate distinct yet complementary semantic fields that collectively enrich Qur'anic interpretation.
3. Syntactic variation in the readings, as demonstrated in the ablution verse of al-Mā'idah, carries direct jurisprudential consequence, making the science of *Qira'at* inseparable from the science of Islamic law.
4. The classical exegetical tradition, from al-Tabarī to Ibn Kathīr, is structured around the engagement with variant readings as primary tools of meaning-derivation; a *Tafsīr* that ignores the *Qira'at* is methodologically incomplete.
5. The shāhdhah (anomalous) readings, while excluded from formal recitation in prayer, have exercised legitimate interpretive and jurisprudential influence throughout Islamic history and are not to be dismissed as textual corruptions.
6. The doctrine of complementarity the principle that variant readings of the same verse express harmonious rather than contradictory meanings is a foundational hermeneutical principle of the *Tafsīr* tradition, supported by both the transmitted texts and the linguistic analysis of the Arabic.
7. The global dominance of the Hafs 'an 'Āsim narration, while practically beneficial, has contributed to a systemic deficit in contemporary *Tafsīr* scholarship, as scholars trained exclusively in this reading lack access to the full interpretive resources of the Qur'anic text.
8. Modern Arabic linguistics has begun to recognise the *Qira'at* as an invaluable archive of pre-modern Arabic phonological and morphological features, affirming the scientific value of this tradition beyond its strictly religious function.
9. The integration of *Qira'at* studies into the science of Usūl al-Fiqh as treated by al-Āmidī and al-Rāzī demonstrates that variant readings function as independent sources of legal specification and qualification, not merely as exegetical supplements.
10. The digital age presents both a threat through the further marginalisation of minority readings and an opportunity through unprecedented access to classical texts for the future of *Qira'at* scholarship, making institutional and pedagogical reform urgent.

Recommendations

1. Islamic universities and seminaries should reinstate 'Ilm *al-Qira'at* as a mandatory component of *Tafsīr* and Usūl al-Fiqh curricula at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
2. Students of *Tafsīr* should be required to achieve at least a working familiarity with all ten canonical readings before undertaking advanced exegetical research.
3. Academic journals in Qur'anic Studies should actively solicit and publish comparative research that maps the linguistic and jurisprudential implications of *Qira'at* variation across multiple readings.
4. Institutions of higher Islamic learning should collaborate with digital humanities projects to produce annotated, searchable corpora of all canonical readings linked to their classical exegetical and grammatical commentary.
5. The traditional method of oral transmission with certified isnād should be actively preserved alongside digital access, as the living transmission of the readings from qualified teachers is irreplaceable for the integrity of the tradition.
6. Scholars of Arabic linguistics should engage more systematically with the *Qira'at* as a resource for historical phonology, morphology, and syntax, in dialogue with but not reducible to the methods of Western historical linguistics.
7. Fatwa institutions and Islamic legal bodies should ensure that their jurisprudential deliberations explicitly engage with the relevant *Qira'at*, particularly in areas such as family law and ritual purity where variant readings have historically generated divergent rulings.
8. Introductory works on Qur'anic studies in contemporary Muslim education should be revised to include accessible treatments of *Qira'at* variation, correcting the mistaken impression prevalent among general Muslim audiences that the ten readings represent discrepancies in the Qur'anic text.

²⁰ M. Versteegh, *The Arabic Linguistic Tradition*, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 178

9. Centres of Islamic scholarship in regions with distinguished traditions of *Qira'at* learning including northern Nigeria, Mauritania, and the Maghrib should be supported in their preservation and transmission of the full range of readings.
10. Future research should attend more systematically to the contributions of African Islamic scholarship to the science of *Qira'at* and *Tafsīr*, recovering and publishing manuscript traditions that remain largely unexplored.

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