

Orientalist and Nonbeliever Criticism of the *Qirā'āt* of the Qur'an: Analysis and Response in the Book *Al-Qirā'āt fī Nazari al-Mustashriqīn wa al-Mulhīdīn*

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Abstract: This article offers a novel analytical examination of 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Qādī's methodological response to orientalist and nonbeliever critiques of Qur'anic *qirā'āt*, an area that previous studies have addressed only descriptively without engaging the epistemological structure underlying classical Muslim scholarship. Addressing this research gap, the study analyses al-Qādī's triadic criteria of *qirā'āt* authenticity conformity to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, linguistic coherence, and continuous transmission and demonstrates how these principles systematically counter key claims advanced by Goldziher, Jeffery, Nöldeke, Ibn Warraq, and Luxenberg. The findings reveal that orientalist critiques rest on manuscript-centric assumptions derived from Biblical textual criticism, whereas nonbeliever critiques rely on a priori skepticism toward oral transmission. By showing that canonical *qirā'āt* constitute a disciplined form of linguistic plurality rooted in prophetic instruction rather than textual instability, this study offers a clear methodological model for assessing modern critiques of Qur'anic textuality. The article contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by bridging *sanad*-based epistemology with current debates in manuscript research and by clarifying the conceptual categories often conflated in Western scholarship.

Keywords: Al-Qādī, Islamic Epistemology, Orientalist Criticism, *Qirā'āt*

Abstrak: Artikel ini menawarkan analisis baru terhadap respons metodologis 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Qādī' terhadap kritik orientalis dan ateis mengenai *qirā'āt* Al-Qur'an, suatu bidang yang sebelumnya hanya dibahas secara deskriptif tanpa mengeksplorasi struktur epistemologis yang mendasari kajian Islam klasik. Menanggapi celah tersebut, studi ini menganalisis kriteria triadik al-Qādī's mengenai keaslian *qirā'āt*, yaitu kesesuaian dengan *rasm* 'Utsmāni, koherensi linguistik, dan transmisi yang berkelanjutan, serta menunjukkan bagaimana prinsip-prinsip ini secara sistematis menanggapi klaim-klaim utama yang diajukan oleh Goldziher, Jeffery, Nöldeke, Ibn Warraq, and Luxenberg. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kritik orientalis didasarkan pada asumsi yang berpusat pada manuskrip yang berasal dari kritik teks Alkitab, sedangkan kritik ateis bergantung pada skeptisme a priori terhadap transmisi lisan. Dengan menunjukkan bahwa *qirā'āt* kanonik merupakan bentuk disiplin dari pluralitas linguistik yang berakar pada instruksi dibanding ketidakstabilan teks, studi ini menawarkan model metodologis yang jelas untuk mengevaluasi kritik modern terhadap teks Al-Qur'an. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada studi Al-Qur'an kontemporer dengan menjembatani epistemologi berbasis *sanad* dengan perdebatan terkini dalam penelitian manuskrip, serta dengan mengklarifikasi kategori konseptual yang sering disamakan dalam literatur Barat.

Kata Kunci: Al-Qādī, Epistemologi Islam, Kritik Orientalis, *Qirā'āt*

1. Introduction

The study of Qur'anic *qirā'āt* occupies a central position within the field of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', especially in discussions concerning the authority, authenticity, and transmission of the sacred text. While classical Muslim scholarship has developed a rigorous methodological framework for evaluating *qirā'āt* grounded in criteria of conformity to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, linguistic validity, and continuous *isnād*, modern academic discourse has revived debates about the stability of the Qur'anic text. Orientalist and nonbeliever writers have often approached *qirā'āt* through the lens of Biblical textual criticism, interpreting recitational variation as evidence of textual plurality or early instability (Rusydi, 2024).

These critiques have produced significant controversy, as they frequently overlook the centrality of oral transmission, which forms the backbone of Qur'anic preservation. Scholarship by Goldziher, Jeffery, and more recent neo-orientalists tends to prioritise manuscript variants while minimising the epistemic role of *mutawātir* recitation. Nonbeliever writers further extend this skepticism by framing *qirā'āt* as human alterations or remnants of pre-Islamic linguistic layers. Such approaches create an analytical gap between Western textual criticism and the traditional Islamic understanding of *qirā'āt* (Wahyudi, 2021).

Existing research has addressed aspects of orientalist criticism and Qur'anic textual studies; however, most works either summarise orientalist arguments or defend the authenticity of the Qur'an without examining the methodological sophistication of classical Muslim scholars. Few studies offer a focused, critical analysis of how Muslim scholars directly respond to these critiques using the internal epistemology of Islamic scholarship. This gap highlights the need to reexamine primary works that systematically confront orientalist and nonbeliever assumptions.

One of the most important contributions in this area is al-Qādī's *Al-Qirā'āt fī Nazari al-Mustashriqīn wa al-Mulhīdin*, which provides a comprehensive refutation of Western manuscript-centric analyses by reasserting the methodological foundations of *qirā'āt*. Al-Qādī not only critiques the epistemological assumptions of orientalist and nonbeliever approaches but also reconstructs the discourse through the lens of classical principles such as *isnād*, *mutawātir* transmission, and the theological framework of *al-āhruf al-sab'ah*. His work represents a crucial scholarly intervention that deserves closer analytical attention (Hakim & Pratama, 2022).

Therefore, this article aims to examine al-Qādī's methodological response to orientalist and nonbeliever critiques of *qirā'āt*, highlighting how his framework challenges the applicability of Western textual criticism to the Qur'anic tradition. By analysing his arguments and evidentiary strategies, this study demonstrates that *qirā'āt* variations far from indicating textual instability reflect a disciplined and divinely sanctioned recitational plurality. The findings contribute to contemporary Qur'anic studies by offering a more balanced understanding of how classical Muslim epistemology addresses modern critical perspectives.

2. The Concept of *Qirā'āt* and *Sab'atu Ahruf* in Islamic Tradition

The Concept of Qira'at

Etymologically, *qirā'āt* refers to modes of Qur'anic recitation derived from the verb *qara'a*, "to read." In the discipline of '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', *qirā'āt* denotes the authoritative ways of reading the Qur'an transmitted through reliable *isnād* and accepted by scholarly consensus. An authentic *qirā'ah* must meet three criteria: (1) conformity to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, (2) agreement with Arabic linguistic norms, and (3) transmission through a valid, continuous chain reaching the Prophet. These conditions show that *qirā'āt* are not arbitrary dialectal preferences, but regulated readings grounded in the prophetic tradition (Abdullah, 2006).

Historically, variations in *qirā'āt* emerged within the prophetic period as part of the divine concession of *al-āhruf al-sab'ah*, accommodating linguistic diversity among Arab tribes. The codification of the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* did not eliminate authentic variations, but preserved widely attested recitations within a unified script. Classical scholars such as Ibn Mujāhid later systematised these

transmissions, identifying the most rigorously authenticated readings that reached the level of *mutawātir*. Thus, *qirā'āt* represent a preserved oral-linguistic heritage rather than evidence of textual instability (Jamal & Putra, 2020).

In later scholarship, *qirā'āt* are commonly classified into three categories: *mutawātir* (widely transmitted and universally accepted), *mashhūr* or *āḥād* (well-known but not reaching *mutawātir* level), and *shādhdhah* (readings with valid linguistic structure but lacking sufficient transmission to be considered Qur'anic). Only the *mutawātir* readings constitute the Qur'an in its canonical form, while other variants function primarily as explanatory or interpretive traditions (McElwain, 2007).

Sab'atu Ahruf: Conceptual Clarification and Its Relevance to Qirā'āt Debates

The discussion on *sab'atu ahruf* is essential for understanding the nature of Qur'anic variation, yet this topic has often been misunderstood by both orientalist and nonbeliever critics. The seven *ahruf* refer to modes of recitation granted to the early Muslim community as a form of divine facilitation, addressing the linguistic diversity of Arab tribes. These *ahruf* were not independent "versions" of the Qur'an but variations within a unified revelation.

Classical scholars explained the concept from different perspectives. Some understood *ahruf* as seven dialectal patterns of major Arab tribes, while others viewed them as categories of linguistic variation, such as differences in case endings, synonyms, or phonological ease. Despite differing interpretations, scholars agree that *ahruf* represent divinely sanctioned flexibility in recitation rather than textual plurality (Adiah et al, 2022).

A critical distinction must be made between *ahruf* and *qirā'āt*. While *ahruf* refer to the original modes of revelation, *qirā'āt* are the canonical recitations transmitted through rigorously authenticated chains (*sanad*), aligned with the Uthmānic *rasm*. When Caliph 'Uthmān standardized the Qur'anic codex, he preserved the elements of the *ahruf* that could be accommodated by the script, forming the foundation for later canonical *qirā'āt*. Thus, *qirā'āt* are not equivalent to *ahruf*; they are a later, refined stage of authenticated transmission (Prayitna et al, 2024).

This distinction is crucial when responding to modern criticism. Orientalists often misinterpret *ahruf* as evidence of competing textual versions, while nonbeliever critics treat them as proof of instability in the Qur'anic text. By clarifying that *ahruf* relate to modes of recitation and not textual variants, these misunderstandings can be effectively addressed. The classical Islamic perspective emphasizes continuity, not divergence, in the transmission of revelation (Prayitna et al, 2024).

Aspect	<i>Sab'atu Ahruf</i>	<i>Qirā'āt</i>
Origin	Directly revealed to the Prophet as divine facilitation	Emerge through scholarly transmission after codification
Nature	Modes of recitation; linguistic flexibility	Canonical readings based on strict criteria (<i>rasm</i> , <i>lughah</i> , <i>sanad</i>)
Status	Part of revelation but later reduced during Uthmānic standardization	Fully preserved and recognized as authoritative
Relation to Text	Not tied to the written <i>rasm</i> ; purely oral modes	Must conform to Uthmānic <i>rasm</i>
Purpose	Ease of recitation for diverse Arab tribes	Preservation of authentic readings across generations

Common Missinterpretation	Treated as "seven versions" of the Qur'an	Mistaken as evidence of textual instability
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Table 1. Comparative Table: Difference Between *Sab'atu Ahruf* and *Qirā'āt*

3. Orientalist Critique of the *Qirā'āt*

Orientalist critiques of *qirā'āt*, as articulated in the works of Goldziher, Jeffery, and Nöldeke, originate from a *historical-critical* framework that conceptualises the diversity of Qur'anic readings as a historical product rather than an integral component of a divinely preserved revelation (Zaman, 2020). This approach is grounded in the assumption that religious texts typically undergo evolution, redaction, and political intervention. Consequently, the multiplicity of *qirā'āt* is interpreted as evidence of textual instability during the earliest period of Islam. By applying paradigms derived from Biblical textual criticism, orientalist scholarship tends to analyse the historical data of *qirā'āt* through lenses that are not fully compatible with the epistemological structure of the Islamic sciences (Wahyudi, 2021).

A clear methodological flaw appears in Arthur Jeffery's interpretation of the codices attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy ibn Ka'b, which he treats as "alternative versions" of the Qur'anic text. Jeffery assumes that every recorded difference among early Companions represents a competing textual tradition. This line of reasoning is problematic because it ignores the internal discipline of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, which classifies such differences into categories such as *tafsīr*, *talqīn* variants, or *qirā'āt shādhah*—none of which constitute canonical Qur'anic text. Jeffery also overlooks the three authoritative criteria that determine the validity of a *qirā'āt*: conformity to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, sound linguistic structure, and a rigorously authenticated *mutawātir* chain of transmission. By evaluating early materials without these epistemic controls, Jeffery misconstrues historical variations as indicators of textual fluidity rather than as components of a highly regulated system of verification (Jeffery, 1937).

A similar issue can be seen in Ignaz Goldziher's claim that the diversity of *qirā'āt* reflects oral improvisation and the unreliability of oral transmission. His critique is shaped by the assumption that oral traditions are inherently prone to distortion. However, the historical development of *qirā'āt* clearly demonstrates that oral transmission in Islam was preserved through strict mechanisms of *musyāfahah*, *talaqqī*, and documented *ijāzah*, all of which ensured precision across generations. Goldziher reduces *qirā'āt* to mere dialectal variation and fails to recognize its status as a codified scholarly discipline governed by *sanad*-based verification. This constitutes a methodological *category mistake*—applying the standards of Western manuscript criticism to a tradition whose authority rests primarily on controlled oral transmission (Raihan & syafieh, 2022).

Theodor Nöldeke, in his *Geschichte des Qorans*, likewise interprets the 'Uthmānic standardisation as a political act that suppressed competing textual traditions. His criticism is shaped by an analogy with the history of the Biblical canon, where codification often entailed the elimination of textual variants. Nöldeke fails to distinguish between the standardisation of *text* and that of *rasm* (orthography). Islamic tradition consistently maintains that the 'Uthmānic effort standardised writing conventions to prevent communal dispute, while the orally transmitted *qirā'āt*—preserved through *mutawātir* (highly qualified chains)—remained intact. By conflating these distinct concepts, Nöldeke interprets the historical process as "elimination of variants," whereas it was actually a process of *istifā'* (selective preservation) of readings that had already achieved consensus from the Prophet's time (Hamnah, 2022).

Taken together, orientalist approaches to *qirā'āt* exhibit three major methodological weaknesses (Masruroh & Syuhada, 2024): First, the application of Biblical textual criticism to a tradition grounded in controlled oral transmission; Second, the neglect of the role of *sanad* and the concept of *mutawātir* as the foundation of *qirā'āt* authority; and Third, the failure to differentiate among categories of *qirā'āt*, leading to the assumption that every recorded difference represents a textual conflict rather than part of an established hierarchy of validity within Islamic scholarship.

Thus, although orientalist studies offer alternative perspectives and contribute to the broader academic discourse, their critiques remain weak when evaluated through the methodological

principles of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. When viewed from within the epistemic framework of the Islamic tradition, it becomes evident that the diversity of *qirā'āt* does not imply textual instability. Instead, it reflects the divinely sanctioned linguistic breadth of the Qur'anic revelation as taught by the Prophet himself. For this reason, the authority of the *mutawātir qirā'āt* remains intact, while orientalist critiques largely stem from methodological divergence rather than from any historical deficiency in the Qur'an's transmission (Yusuf, 2012).

4. Nonbeliever Critique of *Qirā'āt*: Polemics and Deconstruction of the Text

Nonbeliever critiques of *qirā'āt* often emerge from an epistemological framework rooted in radical skepticism and a naturalist worldview that rejects the possibility of divine revelation. This foundational presupposition significantly shapes their interpretation of textual variation in the Qur'an. Rather than viewing *qirā'āt* as structured oral traditions transmitted through verified chains (*asānīd*) and governed by strict linguistic principles, nonbeliever critics typically assume that any variation in wording—or even orthography—signals textual instability. Consequently, their criticisms are less about the internal logic of *qirā'āt* and more about a priori rejection of sacred textuality. Figures such as Ibn Warraq, Christopher Luxenberg, and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin operate within a paradigm that treats the Qur'an not as a recited revelation but as a historical artifact subject to redaction, interpolation, and gradual evolution—analogous to religious scriptures in Western traditions. This starting assumption strongly influences their conclusions, often resulting in circular reasoning: the text is assumed to be human-made, therefore variations must prove human intervention (Mu'minin, 2020).

From an epistemological standpoint, nonbeliever critiques depend heavily on the premise that a divinely revealed text must be absolutely uniform and devoid of variation. This assumption does not take into account the linguistic and performative nature of the Qur'anic revelation, which was delivered orally and allowed for phonetic variation within the parameters of the *aḥruf sab'ah* (Hakim & Pratama, 2022). Critics such as Ibn Warraq point to differences like *arjulakum* vs. *arjulikum* in Qur'an 5:6 as evidence of inconsistency or corruption. However, this conclusion presupposes that divine revelation must conform to a textual, manuscript-based model of preservation. In contrast, the Islamic epistemic tradition situates the Qur'an primarily within the domain of oral transmission, where multiformity in pronunciation—provided it is anchored in *mutawātir* chains and conforms to Arabic grammar—is not only acceptable but part of the Prophet's own teaching. Thus, nonbeliever arguments rest on a textualist bias that does not correspond to the historical nature of the Qur'an's preservation.

A similar methodological issue appears in the work of Christopher Luxenberg, whose Syro-Aramaic hypothesis presumes that linguistic ambiguity or variation in *qirā'āt* must point to earlier, non-Arabic textual layers. Luxenberg's approach is grounded in philological hyper-skepticism, which assumes that the most obscure or least common reading is the original one and that the Islamic tradition either misread or intentionally altered it (Abdul Haris Akbar, 2015). This view ignores the epistemic authority of *isnād*-based transmission and instead elevates speculative linguistic reconstruction over the historical consensus of a continuous recitation tradition. His method effectively reverses the burden of proof: instead of demonstrating that the Qur'an contains Syro-Aramaic substrata, he interprets any difficult passage as confirmation of his hypothesis—an approach critics have described as "philological eisegesis."

The same epistemic bias appears in nonbeliever interpretations of 'Uthmānic standardization. Critics such as Richard Bell contend that the burning of non-standard codices indicates human intervention and textual reconstruction. This argument relies on the assumption—again drawn from Biblical textual history—that canonization must entail suppression of competing versions. Yet this comparison falters when viewed through the Islamic epistemological model. The 'Uthmānic codification was not an attempt to reconstruct the Qur'anic text but to unify orthographic conventions for a revelation already preserved through mass oral transmission (Schacht & Bell, 1954). Nonbeliever critiques overlook the fundamental distinction between *rasm* (writing conventions) and *matn* (the recited content), collapsing orthographic standardization into textual alteration. Their analysis

therefore depends on a manuscript-centric epistemology that does not align with a tradition whose textual authority rests on collective oral memory rather than codex multiplicity.

The strongest claims made by nonbeliever critics concern allegations of interpolation. Figures such as Puin, Wansbrough, and Schacht argue that differences in early manuscripts or *qirā'āt* reflect insertions introduced by later generations. Yet these claims often stem from an epistemology that presumes a linear evolutionary development of sacred texts. This assumption projects Western experiences of scriptural change onto the Qur'an without acknowledging the unique verification mechanisms of Islamic scholarship (Sani, 2023). The *San'ā'* manuscripts, for example, exhibit orthographic variation typical of early Arabic writing systems before the widespread use of dots and vowel marks. nonbeliever critics interpret these features as signs of textual alteration, whereas Islamic manuscript specialists recognize them as non-substantive scribal features that do not affect the recited wording preserved *mutawātir* (Rohmawati, 2022). Thus, the nonbeliever position frequently conflates orthographic diversity with textual instability, demonstrating a basic misunderstanding of how the Qur'an's oral and written traditions interact.

Overall, nonbeliever critiques of *qirā'āt* reveal several epistemological shortcomings. First, they assume that a divine revelation must exist in a single, invariant textual form, ignoring the oral-performative character of the Qur'an. Second, they impose a manuscript-based standard of authenticity that is incompatible with a tradition grounded in transmitted recitation. Third, their analyses often rely on speculative philology or evolutionary textual models without engaging the vast body of Islamic literature on *qirā'āt*, *ahruf*, and *sanad* methodology. When evaluated through the internal epistemology of Islamic scholarship—where *mutawātir* transmission, linguistic coherence, and prophetic precedent establish textual authority—the nonbeliever critique lacks coherence. Rather than undermining the Qur'an, the multiformity of *qirā'āt* functions as evidence of a tightly regulated oral tradition, preserved through generations with precision unmatched in other scriptural histories (Aida et al., 2022).

5. Al-Qādī's Methodological Response to Orientalist and Nonbeliever Criticism

'Abd al-Fattāh al-Qādī, in *Al-Qirā'āt fī Nazari al-Mustashriqīn wa al-Mulhīdīn*, constructs a systematic rebuttal to the primary claims advanced by orientalist and nonbeliever critics concerning the authenticity of *qirā'āt*. His response begins by reiterating the classical epistemological foundation of the discipline, namely that a valid *qirā'ah* must (1) conform to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, (2) align with Arabic linguistic norms, and (3) be transmitted through a continuous, reliable *isnād* reaching the Prophet. These criteria, according to al-Qādī, show that *qirā'āt* are not spontaneous dialectal variations but carefully regulated recitational modes rooted in prophetic instruction (Al-Qādī, 1402).

A major element in al-Qādī's response is his clarification of the purpose and nature of the 'Uthmānic codification. Contrary to orientalist claims that the 'Uthmānic project constituted an editorial intervention that suppressed competing versions of the Qur'an, al-Qādī asserts that the process was an act of *iṣṭifā'*, the selective preservation of widely attested recitations already known and practiced during the prophetic era. The *rasm* 'Uthmānī was designed not to eliminate diversity but to provide a unifying script capable of accommodating multiple *mutawātir* readings. Thus, the existence of variations within the 'Uthmānic orthographic framework serves as evidence of preservation rather than textual reconstruction (Amin, 2020). Al-Qādī underscores that what was excluded were readings lacking sufficient *isnād*, not readings representing legitimate prophetic instruction.

Furthermore, al-Qādī contextualizes the variation of *qirā'āt* within the broader framework of *al-ahruf al-sab'ah*. He explains that the Prophet taught the Qur'an in multiple linguistic modes as a form of divine concession (*rukhsah*) to facilitate comprehension among tribes with differing dialects. These modes were not competing texts but parallel recitational pathways anchored in the same revelatory content. The diversity found in canonical *qirā'āt* reflects the remnants of these divinely sanctioned modes, preserved through *mutawātir* transmission. By clarifying the relationship between *ahruf* and *qirā'āt*, al-Qādī rejects the assumption that variation indicates textual evolution; instead, it reflects a divinely guided flexibility integral to the Qur'an's early transmission (Hakim & Pratama, 2022).

A central critique al-Qādī levels against orientalist methodology is its privileging of manuscript comparison over oral transmission. He argues that applying a manuscript-centric model, derived from Biblical textual criticism, to the Qur'an leads to fundamental misreadings. Unlike Biblical traditions, which rely primarily on manuscript families, Qur'anic preservation depends on an unbroken chain of oral recitation supported by memorization and teacher-student transmission. As a result, variations in early manuscripts or private companion codices cannot be treated as evidence of alternative Qur'anic texts. For al-Qādī, the orientalist framework fails because it treats recitation as secondary and assumes that textual authority arises from written documents alone. By restoring the primacy of oral transmission, al-Qādī demonstrates that *qirā'āt* variations uphold, rather than undermine, the unity and integrity of the Qur'anic text.

Al-Qādī presents a systematic rebuttal to orientalist claims by demonstrating that their criticisms rely on misreadings of the Islamic transmission model. In contrast to Jeffery's assertion that variant codices represent competing Qur'anic texts, al-Qādī argues that such differences were exegetical annotations rather than alternate revelations. He states:

ما في مصاحف بعض الصحابة من زيادات أو اختلافات إنما هو تفسير أو بيان معنى الآية، ولم يثبت منها شيء على أنه قرآن،
ولم يقرأ به على عهد النبي

"Mā fī maṣāḥif ba'd al-ṣaḥābah min ziyyādāt aw ikhtilāfāt innamā huwa tafsīr aw bayān li-ma'nā al-āyah, wa lam yathbut minhā shay'un 'alā annahu Qur'ān, wa lam yuqra' bih 'alā ahd al-nabiy" (al-Qādī, 2008, p. 76).

This clarification directly undermines the orientalist claim of textual plurality in early Islam. Likewise, in response to the argument that 'Uthmān's codification was an act of suppressing alternative versions, al-Qādī emphasizes that it was an act of *iṣṭifā'*, not editorial reconstruction:

جمع عثمان ليس إنشاءً لنصٍّ جديد، بل هو جمعٌ لما تواتر واستقر في الصدور؛ فلو كان في الأمر تبديل أو تغيير لاعتراض عليه
الصحابة، وهم أهل القرآن وحملته

"Jam' 'Uthmān laysa inshā'an li-matn jadīd, bal huwa jam' li-mā tawātara wa istaqarra fī al-ṣudūr. Fa-law kāna fī al-'amr tabdīl aw tagyīr lā'taraḍa 'alaih al-ṣaḥābah" (p. 82).

The 'Uthmānic rasm, therefore, was intentionally designed to accommodate multiple *mutawātir* readings while eliminating only those lacking a valid *isnād*. Through these arguments, al-Qādī exposes the methodological flaw in orientalist textual criticism: its assumption that manuscript variants function analogously to Biblical textual families, disregarding the primacy of oral transmission in the Qur'anic tradition.

In addressing nonbeliever polemics that portray *qirā'āt* diversity as evidence of textual instability, al-Qādī grounds his response in the epistemological framework of *sanad*, Arabic linguistic rigor, and the 'Uthmānic script. He explains that variation does not indicate corruption but reflects the controlled flexibility permitted within the prophetic teaching of *ahruf*:

ال المسلمين لا يعذّبون اختلاف القراءات اضطراراً في النص، بل يعذّبونه من تمام الحفظ وصحة التلقي؛ إذ كل قراءة ثبتت سنداً ولغةً
ورسماً فهي قرآنٌ متبعٌ بتلاوته

"Al-muslimūn lā ya'uddūna ikhtilāf al-qirā'āt id̄tirāban fī al-naṣṣ, bal ya'uddūnahu min tamām al-hifz wa siḥḥat al-talāqqī..." (al-Qādī, 2008, p. 41).

This statement directly counters the nonbeliever assumption that a perfect revelation must exhibit only one uniform reading. Al-Qādī further argues that the nonbeliever critique collapses because it imposes a manuscript-centric model inappropriate for a tradition built upon continuous oral transmission validated by *ijāzah* and *mutawātir* or *sanad*-based verification. By demonstrating that every accepted *qirā'ah* must align simultaneously with *rasm*, *lughah*, and *sanad*, he exposes the epistemological inconsistency in nonbeliever skepticism, which ignores the multilayered safeguards of Islamic textual preservation. Thus, al-Qādī's framework not only dismantles the claim of textual evolution but also reaffirms the internal coherence of the Qur'anic transmission system.

Concrete Examples of Qirā'āt Variations and Linguistic Analysis

To demonstrate that differences among the *qirā'āt* do not generate theological, semantic, or legal contradictions, it is necessary to provide concrete examples supported by linguistic analysis. One of the most well-known variations appears in Q. al-Fātiḥah 4 between *mālikī* and *maliki*. The Ḥafṣ transmission reads *mālikī* (مالك), “Owner,” while Warsh reads *maliki* (ملک), “King.” Morphologically, the first form is an active participle emphasizing absolute possession, whereas the second is a descriptive noun denoting sovereign authority (Ibn Mujāhid, 1972). The variation does not produce conflicting meanings; instead, the two readings complement each other by presenting a fuller depiction of God's dominion over the Day of Judgment.

Another example can be seen in Q. al-Baqarah 2:180, where it can be found some *qirā'āt* read *waṣṣā* (وصى) and others read *awṣā* (أوصى). The variation lies in the verbal pattern (*taf'īl* versus *if'āl*), which affects the level of emphasis but not the underlying legal ruling (Ibn al-Jazarī, 2002). Classical scholars maintain that both forms remain within the semantic field of “making a bequest,” and therefore do not alter the juridical implications of the verse.

A further illustration appears in Q. al-Inshiqāq 84:22 between *yukadhdhibūn* (يُكذِّبونَ) and *yakdhibūn* (يُكذِّبُونَ). The first form denotes emphatic “denial” or “strong rejection,” while the second conveys the act of lying more generally (Ibn al-Jazarī, 2002). Despite the difference in intensity, both readings affirm the same core meaning: persistent rejection of the truth. This type of variation constitutes *tanawwu'* *bayānī*—a rhetorical enrichment that does not affect the essential message of the verse.

Similar patterns emerge in Q. al-Nisā' 4:34 between *nusyūzahunna* and *nunsyizuhunna*. The Ḥafṣ transmission uses the verbal noun *nusyūz*, describing the state of defiance, whereas the Hamzah reading uses the verb *nunsyizuhunna*, which depicts the procedural response to such a situation. These two perspectives, condition and action, are complementary rather than contradictory, and both remain consistent within the broader legal and ethical framework of the verse.

Finally, Q. al-Hujrāt 49:6 presents a notable variation between *fa-tabayyanū* (فَتَبَيَّنُوا) and *fa-tathabbatū* (فَتَتَبَيَّنُوا). Although the terms differ lexically—one emphasizing concrete verification and the other careful deliberation—both command the same norm: the verification of unconfirmed information (Ibn al-Jazarī, 2002). The semantic overlap reinforces a unified ethical message, namely the prohibition of acting on unreliable reports.

These examples collectively demonstrate that variations among the *qirā'āt* do not represent textual inconsistency, as alleged by some orientalist and nonbeliever critics. Rather, the differences operate within linguistically permissible boundaries that enrich the expressive range of Qur'anic Arabic while preserving doctrinal and legal coherence. Such linguistic analysis confirms that *qirā'āt* constitute *tanawwu'* *al-lafz*, a form of complementary variation that reflects the precision and depth of Qur'anic expression.

Codicological Evidence and Early Qur'anic Manuscripts

Since many orientalist critiques rely heavily on manuscript analysis, the absence of codicological discussion leaves the article incomplete. This subsection, therefore examines key early Qur'anic manuscripts, such as the Topkapi Mushaf, the Tashkent Mushaf, and the Şan'ā' palimpsests, and evaluates the extent to which orthographic variations affect (or do not affect) the integrity of the *mutawātir qirā'āt* (Puin, 2021).

Although these manuscripts present minor differences in rasm, such as the presence or absence of alif, early spellings of hamzah, or variations in *imlā'* conventions, none of these variations correspond to the differences found in the canonical *qirā'āt*. This is because the *qirā'āt* are preserved primarily through oral *riwāyah* supported by continuous, authenticated *isnād* rather than through manuscript copying practices.

By distinguishing clearly between orthographic variation (rasm) and recitational transmission (*riwāyah*), this subsection demonstrates that the codicological evidence does not undermine the stability of the canonical *qirā'āt*. Instead, it reinforces the Islamic scholarly position that the Qur'an was transmitted through a robust oral tradition, with manuscripts functioning as secondary witnesses rather than primary carriers of the text.

6. Analytical Review of al-Qādī's Methodology in *Al-Qirā'āt fī Nazari al-Mustashriqīn wa al-Mulhīdīn*

This study expands the discussion of 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Qādī's *Al-Qirā'āt fī Nazari al-Mustashriqīn wa al-Mulhīdīn* beyond a descriptive summary by presenting a more analytical reading of his methodology and argumentative structure. Al-Qādī does not merely list Orientalist and nonbeliever criticisms, but constructs a systematic framework grounded in three foundational criteria for validating Qur'anic readings:

لَا تُقْبَلُ القراءةُ إِلَّا إِذَا وَافَقَتِ الرسمَ العُثْمَانِيَّ، وَوَافَقَتْ وِجْهًا مِنْ وِجُوهِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ، وَصَحَّ سَنْدُهَا إِلَى النَّبِيِّ

"A *qirā'ah* is not accepted unless it conforms to the Uthmānic rasm, aligns with an established Arabic linguistic rule, and possesses a sound chain of transmission connected to the Prophet." (al-Qādī, 1402 H: 87)

These triadic principles form the core of al-Qādī's rebuttal to claims of textual instability. Unlike Western textual criticism, which begins from manuscript variation, al-Qādī anchors his defense in oral transmission (*isnād*), linguistic coherence, and canonical orthography. Al-Qādī also directly challenges Arthur Jeffery's assumption that the codices of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy represent alternative texts. He argues:

مَا وُجِدَ فِي بَعْضِ الْمَسَاحَفِ لَيْسَ مِنْ بَابِ التَّنَاقْضِ، وَإِنَّمَا هُوَ بَيَانٌ وَتَفْسِيرٌ

"What is found in certain codices is not contradiction, but clarification and exegetical explanation." (al-Qādī, 1402 H: 91)

This distinction between *tafsīrī* variants and *qirā'āt mustanadah* is central to his argument, yet often overlooked by Orientalist scholars. Furthermore, al-Qādī highlights methodological flaws in Goldziher's and Nöldeke's comparative approach, especially their misapplication of Biblical textual criticism to the Qur'anic tradition. He insists that *qirā'āt* are part of a divinely sanctioned linguistic plurality, not the result of textual corruption. As he states:

اختلاف القراءات رخصة من الله لتبسيير التعلم، وقد بلغ حد التواتر

"The differences in *qirā'at* are a divine concession to facilitate learning, and they have reached the level of *mutawātir* transmission." (al-Qādī, 1402 H: 35)

Analytically, the strength of al-Qādī's method lies in its coherent integration of: Epistemology of *sanad*, Philological precision, Historical understanding of codification, and Hermeneutical clarity, distinguishing *qirā'at* from *tafsīrī* variations. However, its limitation is that al-Qādī does not fully engage with the manuscript-based arguments that dominate modern Qur'anic studies, leaving a gap for further comparative work.

7. Methodological Comparison between Western Textual Criticism and Islamic *Qirā'at* Studies

A major methodological gap identified by the reviewers concerns the lack of a systematic comparison between the Western approach to textual criticism and the Islamic model of *sanad*-based transmission in the study of *qirā'at*. This addition clarifies the epistemological differences underlying both traditions and demonstrates why Orientalist and nonbeliever critiques often misread the nature of Qur'anic variant readings.

In Western textual criticism, especially the model developed through Biblical studies, the manuscript is treated as the primary or even sole authority for reconstructing a historical text. This results from an epistemological assumption that sacred texts evolve over time, accumulate scribal errors, and require reconstruction through philological tools. Consequently, manuscript discrepancies are viewed as direct evidence of textual instability (Puin, 2021).

In contrast, the Islamic tradition does not rely primarily on manuscripts to authenticate the Qur'an. Instead, it grounds authenticity in oral transmission supported by a continuous and rigorously verified chain of narrators (*isnād*). A reading is accepted only when it meets the triadic criteria of (1) conformity to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, (2) validity according to Arabic linguistic rules, and (3) an unbroken and sound transmission chain reaching the Prophet. Manuscripts serve as supporting evidence, not the basis of textual authority. Because of this foundational difference, Western scholars often misinterpret *qirā'at* as textual variants analogous to Biblical manuscript differences, whereas classical Muslim scholars consider them part of a divinely sanctioned spectrum of recitations.

To make these differences clearer and more systematic, the following table summarizes the contrasting methodologies:

Aspect	Western Textual Criticism	Islamic <i>Qirā'at</i> Methodology
Primary Authority	Manuscripts and physical codices	Oral transmission (<i>isnād</i>) and <i>mutawātir</i> recitation
Epistemological Assumption	Text evolves over time; reconstructable through philology	Text is preserved; authenticity proven through transmission chain
Goal Analysis	Reconstruct the earliest attainable text	Authenticate readings transmitted from the Prophet
Method Verification	Comparison of manuscripts, detecting scribal errors	Testing <i>sanad</i> , conformity to <i>rasm</i> , linguistic validity
Treatment Variants	Evidence of textual instability	Accepted variants are divinely sanctioned; non-canonical variants function as <i>tafsīr</i>

Role of Community	Scholarly individuals	by Communal consensus (<i>ijmā'</i>) and mass transmission
View of Oral Tradition	Secondary, often unreliable	Primary, authoritative, systematically regulated

Table 2. Comparison of Western Textual Criticism and Islamic *Qirā'āt* Methodology

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that Orientalist and nonbeliever criticisms of Qur'anic *qirā'āt* stem primarily from methodological assumptions that are incompatible with the epistemic structure of Islamic scholarship. Orientalist critiques rely on manuscript-based textual criticism and therefore misinterpret *qirā'āt* variation as evidence of textual plurality, while nonbeliever critiques rest on epistemological skepticism that dismisses the authority of *mutawātir*, the first level of oral transmission. Through a detailed analysis of al-Qādī's framework, this article demonstrates that the triadic criteria of *qirā'āt* authenticity conformity to the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, linguistic validity, and a sound transmission chain provide a coherent and historically grounded basis for evaluating these critiques. The study contributes to *qirā'āt* research by clarifying the distinction between regulated recitational plurality and textual instability, while also offering an analytical bridge between classical *sanad*-based methodology and contemporary manuscript studies. Future research may expand this discussion by integrating codicological data, examining additional early manuscripts, or comparing al-Qādī's approach with other classical scholars to deepen the interdisciplinary dialogue on Qur'anic textuality.

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