

Al-Baqillani's Critique to Rafidite Syi'ites' on the Seven Variant Reading of The Qur'an

Much Hasan Darajat*
University of Malaya, Malaysia
Email: sans_dar@yahoo.com

Mohd. Fauzi Hamat*
University of Malaya, Malaysia
Email: mfhamat@um.edu.my

Wan Adli Wan Ramli*
University of Malaya, Malaysia
Email: wanadli@um.edu.my

Abstract

This article aims to delineate al-Baqillani's response to the Rafidite Syi'ites' claim on the invalidity of the variant readings of the Qur'an. As an Asy'arite, al-Baqillani was able to disprove their claims dealing with the status of the variant readings of the Qur'an in the history of Islamic civilization. His arguments are also relevant to reject orientalist's notion who are in line with those Syi'ites on the related topic. This issue has close relationship with the process of the compilation of the Qur'an and the validity of the *Mushaf of Utsman*, since the Syi'ites rejected it and promoting their own version as claimed by their authoritative figures. The authors conclude that al-Baqillani's defence on the matter provides number of evidence that the existing of the Qur'an is the one which was collected by Utsman ibn Affan. Al-Baqillani was also able to disprove the views that the variant readings of the Qur'an are merely *ijtihad* and metaphorical statements. He clarified that the variant readings are valid and has been practiced by a number of companions and approved by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. His views on this issue were also supported by other scholars like al-Qurtubi and al-Zarqani. In this research, the approach that has been applied is textual analysis, using descriptive and analytical methods

* Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Jalan Universiti, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Phone: (+6017) 2862522.

to investigate and analyze primary sources related to the pertinent topic. It also adopts the historical method to scrutinize several events on the subject within the context of the history of Islam.

Keywords: Rafidite Syi'ites', Asy'arite, al-Baqillani, al-Qirâ'ah al-Sab'ah, Qur'an Compilation

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan respons al-Baqillani terhadap klaim dari Syiah Rafidah berkenaan dengan ketidakvalidan *al-Qirâ'ât al-Sab'ah*. Sebagai seorang pengikut al-Asy'ari, al-Baqillani mampu menggugurkan klaim mereka tentang masalah tersebut yang ada dalam sejarah peradaban Islam. Selain itu, argumentasinya juga relevan untuk menolak pendapat para orientalis yang berpandangan sama dengan orang-orang Syiah Rafidah. Masalah ini juga memiliki keterkaitan dengan proses pengumpulan al-Qur'an dan keabsahan Mushaf Utsmani, karena orang-orang Syiah menolak dan mempromosikan al-Qur'an versi yang mereka miliki sebagaimana yang diklaim oleh para tokoh otoritatif Syiah. Melalui penelitian ini, penulis berkesimpulan bahwa al-Baqillani mampu membuktikan bahwa al-Qur'an yang ada saat ini adalah mushaf yang dikumpulkan oleh Khalifah Utsman ibn Affan. Beliau berjasa mengodifikasikannya dan menjadi pegangan bagi umat Islam. Selain itu, al-Baqillani juga mampu merespons pendapat bahwa *al-Qirâ'ât al-Sab'ah* adalah hasil ijtihad dan bersifat metafora saja. Ia menjelaskan bahwa *al-Qirâ'ât al-Sab'ah* adalah benar dan telah dipraktikkan oleh banyak Sahabat dan mendapatkan pengesahan langsung dari Rasulullah SAW. Pandangan al-Baqillani juga didukung para ilmuwan Muslim lain seperti al-Qurtubi al-Zarqani. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menerapkan metode analisis teks dan deskriptif-analisis untuk menyelidiki rujukan utama berkenaan dengan tema tersebut. Selain itu, peneliti juga menggunakan metode sejarah untuk menguji beberapa peristiwa yang ada dalam konteks sejarah Islam.

Kata Kunci: Syiah Rafidhah, al-Asy'ari, al-Baqillani, al-Qirâ'ah al-Sab'ah, Kompilasi al-Qur'an

Introduction

The discourse on the seven variant readings of the Qur'an is very crucial. It is one of the pivotal principle problems in the history of the Qur'an discussed by a number of theologians (*mutakallimûn*) as well as commentators (*mufasssirûn*). Their discourse on this topic has also dealt with the issue of the compilation of the Qur'an done by Utsman ibn Affân. During his caliphate, he was able to compile the Qur'an in the form of the codex (*muşḥaf*) sent to different places together with their readers (*qurrâ'*). The variant readings of the Qur'an were reality in the history of Islamic civilization. However, this fact was falsified by the Rafidite Syi'ites who regarded that this was merely an endeavor (*al-ijtihâd*) of the readers (*qurrâ'*) which even did not exist in the history of Islam. Hence, a such claim caused a number of responses promoted by earlier Sunnite theologians including al-Imam al-Baqillani (403 A.H./1013 C.E.), a Sunnite Asy'arite theologian, who developed principal foundations of the Asy'arite theological school of thoughts. Before we discuss further we would like to present the Rafidite Syi'ites' perspective regarding their version of of the Qur'an.

Syi'ites' Version of the Qur'an

Based on the early Rafidite Syi'ites sources, they proposed their own form of the Qur'an. This *muşḥaf* was collected and compiled from a private collection of the *muşḥaf* of the Prophet's daughter, Fatimah, and Ali ibn Abi Thalib. However, those *muşḥaf* were not available until now, for that *muşḥaf* would be revealed to Muslim people after the Day of Judgment by Imam Mahdi al-Muntazar, the last *Imâm* of the Twelver Syi'ites.

In *al-Kâfi*, al-Kulaini reported several specified narrations on the title of three different leafs; *Jafrâh*, *Jâmi'ah*, and *Muşḥaf* Fatimah. According to his report, the *Jafrâh* is the parchment or container made of skin comprising the knowledge of prophets and commissioners, and knowledge of the Israelite scholars.¹ While the *Jâmi'ah* is a paper with

¹ Al-Mazandarani in his *Syarḥ Uşûl al-Kâfi* elucidated the details of *al-jafr*. He mentioned that it consists of 28 volumes. Each volume has 20 pages, every page has 28 lines. Every line comprises 28 verses, and every verse has 4 letters. Those letters consist of different elements. The first is about the number of parts, the second is about the number of page, the third is about the the number of line, and the last is about the number of verse.

seventy yards long of the Prophet's hand. It comprises instruction of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to Ali which was written by hand. It also consists of all lawful and unlawful problems, and all things needed by human beings including the law of criminality. In another place, as reported by the author, *Muṣḥaf* of Fatimah consisted of the verses revealed by the Angel Jibril to her and was written by 'Ali ibn Abi Thalib. As al-Kulaini stated below:

"Jibril would come to provide her solace because of the death of her father. Jibril would comfort her soul. Jibril would inform her about her father and his place and of the future events and about what will happen to her children. At the same time Ali would write all of them down and thus is *Muṣḥaf* of Fatimah (a.s).²

The early Syi'ites also affirmed that the *Muṣḥaf* of Ali was the only perfect version of the Qur'an. During his life, Ali ibn Abi Thalib was guided by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and entrusted certain messages. It is argued through the authority of Abu Dhar, he said that when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) passed away, Ali the son of Ibn Abi Talib collected the Qur'an. He then went to the people of Anshar and Muhajirin and showed them his collection of the Qur'an telling that his attempt in doing so was a message (*waṣiyyah*) from the Prophet (peace be upon him). When Abu Bakr opened it, he found the humiliation of those people due to their mistake in compiling the Qur'an. Then, Umar admitted that some verses were left out from that *muṣḥaf*, one of which was the dishonoring of the Anshar and Muhajirin. Regarding this matter, Umar further told Zaid to inform Khalid ibn Walid to kill Ali. This plan failed to be employed. Furthermore, when Umar became the caliph, he also asked Ali to give his *muṣḥaf* to combine with the Qur'an collected by Abu Bakr. However, Ali refused to do so as he argued that his collection was only touched by those who were purified (*muṭṭahharûn*) and authorized agents (*awsiyâ'*) of his offsprings. His perfect *muṣḥaf* would be revealed later on with the resurrection of Ali's descendants.³ In other words, this report signifies that the *Muṣḥaf* of Ali was believed to be the only true

The term of '*al-jafir*' was derived from the twentieth verse of the twenty seventh line of the sixteenth page of the third part. See in his *Syarḥ Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islâmiyyah, N.Y.), 386.

² Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, Trans. Muhammad Sarwar, Chapter 40, No. 5, (Beirut: Dâr al-Murtadha, 2005), 350.

³ Abu Mansur Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Abi Thalib al-Tabarsi, *Kitâb al-Ihtijâj*, Vol. 1, (N.P: Intisyârât al-Syarîf al-Ridâ, 1960), 205-208.

version of the Qur'an.

Historically speaking, this version of the Qur'an has also been described by a Syi'ite historian. In terms of its form, al-Ya'qubi, stated that Ali had compiled the Qur'an and showed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This *muṣḥaf* is divided into seven parts; the first is al-Baqarah, Yusuf, al-Ankabut, al-Rum, Luqman, al-Sajadah, al-Dhariyat, al-Dahr, al-Nazi'at, al-Takwir, al-Infithar, al-Insyiqaq, al-A'la, and al-Bayyinah. It consisting of 886 verses and 16 chapters. This is called al-Baqarah chapter. The second part is Ali Imran, Hud, al-Hajj, al-Hijr, al-Ahzab, al-Dukhan, al-Rahman, al-Haqqah, al-Ma'arij, 'Abasa, al-Syams, al-Dhuha, al-Qadr, al-Zalzalah, al-Humazah, al-Fil, and al-Quraisy. This is called by Ali Imran part, which consists of 886 verses and 15 chapters. The third part is al-Nisa, al-Nahl, al-Mu'minun, Yasin, al-Syura, al-Waqi'ah, al-Mulk, al-Muddatsir, al-Ma'un, al-Lahab, al-Ikhlās, al-'Ashr, al-Qari'ah, al-Buruj, al-Zaitun, and al-Naml. This is called al-Nisa' part, which comprises 886 verses and 17 chapters. The fourth part is al-Ma'idah, Yunus, Maryam, al-Qashash, al-Syu'ara, al-Zukhruf, al-Hujurat, Qaf, al-Qamar, al-Mumtahanah, al-Thariq, al-Balad, al-Insyirah, al-'Adiyat, al-Kawtsar, and al-Kafirun. This is called al-Ma'idah part, which consists of 886 verses and 15 chapters. The fifth part is al-An'am, al-Isra', al-Anbiya, al-Furqan, al-Mu'min, al-Mujâdilah, al-Hasyr, al-Jum'ah, al-Munâfiqûn, al-Qalam, Nuh, al-Jin, al-Mursalat, al-Dhuha, and al-Takatsur. This is called al-An'am part, which consisting of 886 verses and 16 chapters. The sixth part is al-A'raf, Ibrahim, al-Kahf, al-Nûr, Shad, al-Zumar, al-Jatsiyah, Muhammad, al-Hadid, al-Muzammil, al-Qiyamah, al-Naba', al-Ghasiyah, al-Fajr, al-Lail, and al-Nashr. This is called al-A'raf part. This consists of 886 verses and 16 chapters. The seventh part comprises al-Anfal, al-Taubah, Thaha, Fathir, al-Shaffat, al-Ahqaf, al-Fath, al-Thur, al-Najm, al-Shaf, al-Taghabun, al-Thalaq, al-Muthaffifin, al-Falaq, and al-Nass. This is called al-Anfal part, and consists of 886 verses and 16 chapters. This version of the Qur'an, however, is recorded in details by the Syi'ite historian.⁴ This leads to the probability that this form might be unknown to the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

⁴ This *muṣḥaf* consists of seven parts with its own arrangement. See in Ahmad ibn Abi Ya'qub ibn Ja'far ibn Wahb al-Ya'qubi, *Tarikh*, Vol. 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 152-154.

Seven Variant Readings in the Syi'ites' Perspective

The Rafidite Syi'ites had different perspective toward the seven variant readings of the Qur'an from the Sunnites. They viewed this notion was only believed by the Sunnites based on number of *ḥadīths* of the Prophet (peace be upon him) narrated by narrators (*ruwāt*) as well as by some *imāms* (*qurrā'*). According to the Syi'ites sources, the seven variant readings were only endeavour (*ijtihād*) of the readers (*qurrā'*), which were not necessarily valid.⁵ Therefore, those sources might be doubted and even rejected by the Syi'ites.

According to an authoritative Syi'ite *muḥaddiths*, al-Kulaini (d. 329 A.H./941 C. E.), the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) was only one. There is no other version descended to him, and different understandings merely appeared because of its narrators, as he stated in his narration:

عن زرارة عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام قال: إن القرآن واحد نزل من عند واحد ولكن الاختلاف يجيء من قبل الرواة.

"It was narrated by Zurara from Abu Ja'far, he said: 'Verily, the Qur'an is one, it was revealed by One to one single (Prophet), yet, its difference only on account of different transmitters'."⁶

According to al-Mazandarani,⁷ this *ḥadīth* shows that the Qur'an was revealed in one reading (*qirā'ah wāḥidah*) to the people of Quraisy. The Qur'an was in the Quraisy language. This was in accordance with chapter Ibrahim: 4 of the Qur'an.⁸ However, the narrators of this *ḥadīth* disputed in which language the Qur'an was revealed. The above report has relationship with the following *ḥadīth* that was also mentioned by al-Kulaini:

عن الفضيل بن يسار قال: قلت لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام: إن الناس يقولون: إن القرآن نزل على سبعة أحرف، فقال: كذبوا أعداء الله و لكنه نزل على حرف واحد من عند الواحد.

⁵ Abd al-Rasul al-Ghifari, *al-Qirā'at wa al-Aḥrūf al-Sab'ah*, (Qum: Markaz al-Muṣṭafā al-Ālamī li al-Tarjamah wa al-Nasyr, 2012), 43.

⁶ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Chapter on "The Book Nawādir", No. 12, 2: 824; al-Syaikh al-Saduq, *A Shi'ite Creed*, Trans. Asaf. A. A. Fyze, (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1982), 79.

⁷ Al-Mazandarani, *Syarḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, 11: 65.

⁸ Sheikh Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsir Ar-Rahman: Interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an*, (Putrajaya: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2007), 437.

"From al-Fudhail ibn Yasar said: I said to Abi 'Abdillah: Verily, men say: indeed, the Qur'an descending on the seven words. He said: The enemy of God lied, yet, it descended on one word for one (Prophet)."⁹

Al-Mazandarani insisted that the above *ḥadīths* has related meaning. The Qur'an was revealed in seven different dialects of the Arab people: Quraisy, Hudhail, Hawazan, Yaman, Qais, Dabbah, and Tay al-Rabbab. Since there was difficulty in pronouncing the Qur'an in one particular dialect, those readings aimed to ease the Arabs to recite the Qur'an based on their dialects. Furthermore, al-Mazandarani also explained the meaning of '*Sab'ah Aḥruf*'. He based his understanding on those two stated *ḥadīths*. To him, there were no seven variant readings of the Qur'an. The difference merely occurred in their transmitters. Therefore, the recitation of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) was the original one.¹⁰

Further understanding of the concept of the seven variant readings from the Syi'ites' perspective is that they believed that this notion in metaphorical (*majâzî*). Al-Syarif al-Murtadha maintained that the meaning of the Seven Words (*Sab'ah Aḥruf*) is that every verse of the Qur'an has its internal and external meanings. This illustrates that those verses of the Qur'an signify clear and hidden substances. Those verses could be referred to as *al-mutasyâbihât* and *al-muḥkamât* verses.¹¹ Based on some narrations, the meaning of the Seven Words (*al-Aḥruf al-Sab'ah*) could also mean seven kinds; command (*amr*), prohibition (*nahyn*), promise (*wa'd*), threat (*wa'id*), dispute (*ikhtilâf*), story (*qisâs*), and parables (*amtsâl*).¹² This information elucidates that the term '*aḥruf*' denotes to their parts and divisions. However, in analyzing of these terms, we do not limit to the literal meaning of the word '*aḥruf*' which means 'words'. It also has allegorical interpretation that indicates wider understanding. The above meaning could be related to the word

⁹ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, Chapter on "The Book of Nawâdir", No. 13, 2: 824.

¹⁰ The meaning of seven words (*sab'ah aḥruf*) could also be understood as differences amongst Arab people in terms of their dialects. They rejected to be united in one specific dialect. This did not continue until their number of people as well as their books increased, then they could unite their community as well as their dialect. See al-Mazandarani, *Syarḥ Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, 11: 67-68.

¹¹ Al-Syarif al-Murtadha, *al-Majazât al-Nabawiyah*, Ed. Mahmud Musthafa, (Egypt: Muṣṭafâ al-Bâb al-Ḥalabî wa Awlâduh, 1937), No. 28, 49.

¹² This report was quoted by al-Ghifari in his *al-Qirâ'ât wa al-Aḥrûf al-Sab'ah*, 227. Further discussion on this aspect will be elaborated in al-Baqillani's defense on the seven variant readings in the following pages.

“*ahruf*” based on the context of the discussion.¹³

Furthermore, the Syi’ites maintained that the seven variant readings are not necessarily valid. This due to this matter was product of the *qârî*’s endeavour (*ijtihâd*). The *qârî*’ attempted to investigate the valid and accurate readings. There were many disputes amongst the *qurrâ*’ (readers). Moreover, the sources of the seven variant readings were also narrated differently amid the narrators. Even though some sources were considered valid information (*mutawâtir*), yet their contents are doubted. It is evidenced by the fact that al-Suyuti, as al-Ghifari argued, elucidated various sources of the *ḥadîts* stating differences in the meaning of the seven variant readings.¹⁴ Even if there were agreement upon the variant readings, they could not convince those people who maintained the opposite ideas of the variant readings.¹⁵ Besides that, al-Khu’i, a contemporary Syi’ite scholar, argued that the variant readings (*al-qirâ’ât*) was not really narrated in the *ḥadîts* since those evidence are too general or not specific. Based on his analysis, the dispute among the narrators was because the Utsmani *Muṣḥaf* spread out amongst them were without any diacritical signs while all readings should be based on the *muṣḥaf*. Moreover, in terms of their personality, all narrators of the *ḥadîts* which explained the variant readings of the Qur’an were not trusted (*tsiqah*). Their arguments in proving their stance were weak. Further reason to reject this idea is that since those reports did not refer to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), their transmissions were also unknown in the domain of *ḥadîts* literature and their narrators also disputed among themselves. Therefore, the seven variant readings of the Qur’an should be rejected.¹⁶

The rejection of the seven variant readings also comes from the orientalist.¹⁷ They studied the history of the Qur’an and its process of early compilation. Noldeke, a German scholar, in his study asserted that the Qur’an is a book comprising unorganized words and several different variant readings, hence, it is precisely not divine. By virtue of this claim, he attempted to rearrange the structure of the Qur’an in

¹³ See his discussion on the differences of this issue. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Itqân fî Ulûm al-Qur’ân*, Vol. 1, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, N.Y.), 46-47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 77-84.

¹⁵ ‘Abd al-Rasul al-Ghifari, *al-Qirâ’ât...*, 43.

¹⁶ Al-Khu’i, *al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân*, (N.P.: Anwâr al-Hudâ, 1981), 165-166.

¹⁷ Theodor Noldeke, *Sketches From Eastern History*, Trans. John Sutherland Black, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 27; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for The History of the Text of the Qur’an: The Old Codices*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937), ix.

a chronological order.¹⁸ Another orientalist who also tried to criticise the variant readings of the Qur'an is Goldziher. Following Noldeke's step, he said in his study of the Qur'an, one factor which causes the different variant readings is the dotless script at the beginning of its compilation.¹⁹ His notion was cemented too by an other orientalist, Arthur Jeffery. He claimed that the main problem of different readings is because of lack of dots in the Utsmani *Muṣḥaf*. Therefore, everybody has his right to read based on his own understanding following the context of the verses.²⁰ In all, those orientalists seemed to promote the main problem of the variant readings of the Qur'an due to the lack of the diacritical form of the scripts.

Thus, it is the Rafidite Syi'ites and orientalists's views on the seven variant readings of the Qur'an. Even they live in different time, yet they maintained the similar principle in rejecting the status of the variant readings based on their own arguments. However, their point of views are far different from the Sunnite's perspectives which will be further delineated below.

Al-Baqillani's Response to the Rafidite Syi'ites' Notion

The claim of the Rafidite Syi'ites on the invalidity of the seven variant readings of the Qur'an has become a serious problem in the history of the Qur'an. It was reality approved by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), hence, many scholars are involved to defend the matter. One of the significant Asy'arite figures, Abu Bakr ibn Thayyib al-Baqillani (d. 403 A.H./1013 C.E.), was also engaged in this polemic. Through his works,²¹ he tried to counter the invalid claims of the Rafidite Syi'ites regarding the matter. In addition, his arguments are also relevant to address the Orientalists' claim concerning the related issue of variant readings of the Qur'an. Here, our figure tried to clarify the position and status of the Codex (*Muṣḥaf*) of Utsman as well as the issue of the seven variant readings of the Qur'an. These are parts of the mainstream of Islamic theological principle doctrines

¹⁸ Abdullah Saed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 107.

¹⁹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhâhib al-Tafsîr al-Islâmî*, Trans. 'Abd al-Halim Najjar, (Beirut: Dâr Iqrâ', 1985), 8-9.

²⁰ Arthur Jeffery, *Materials...*, X.

²¹ Abu Bakr ibn Thayyib al-Baqillani, *Al-Instiṣâr li al-Qur'ân*, Vol. 1 and 2, (Beirut: Dâr Ibn Ḥazm, 2001); *Al-Taqrîb wa al-Irsyâd*, Vol. 1 and 2, Ed. 'Abd al-Hamid ibn Ali Abu Zunaid, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risâlah, 1998).

in the Sunnites' perspective. To know further his counter arguments, we will deal with them in the following discussion.

The Qur'an and its Compilation

The Qur'an is the primary source of the religion of Islam. It was revealed in *mutawâtir*²² transmission through various paths.²³ Based on a number of reliable (*mutawâtir*) *hadîths*, the process of compilation and standardization of the Qur'an had started since the Prophet's period until the third caliph, Utsman ibn Affan. The Prophet (peace be upon him) instructed several scribes of the revelation to write all the verses of the Qur'an revealed to him, which was followed too by other companions. They wrote the verses on different materials; leaves, pieces of cloth, leather, paper, and the bone of donkey and sheep.²⁴ Until the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) passed away these writings scattered amid the companions in Madinah. When Abu Bakr became the first caliph, he instructed Zaid ibn Tsabit to compile the verses of the Qur'an from those scattered versions. One of the procedures in delivering information about the verses was that he should come with two witnesses. Having finished this codification, the *muṣḥaf* was preserved in Abu Bakr's house. After he passed away, the *muṣḥaf* was passed to Umar ibn al-Khattab, his successor in the caliphate. Finally, the *muṣḥaf* was kept by Hafsa, Umar's daughter. The process of standardization of reading of the Qur'an was employed by the third Caliph Utsman ibn Affan. In this attempt, he instructed a number of *muṣḥaf* to be written which would be sent to several places; Syam, Kufa, Basra, Makkah, and Madinah together with their readers (*qurrâ*).²⁵ It was aimed to standardize the accurate readings of the Qur'an and avoid errors. All these readings were already approved by the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself during his life.²⁶ Thus, the mainstream of Sunni Muslims

²² *Mutawâtir* means report of many narrators whose consensus upon a lie is impossible. See M. Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 57.

²³ Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî*, Ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Baqi, (Egypt: Dâr Ibn Ḥazm, 2010), Chapter: "The Book of Revelation", No. 1, 8-10.

²⁴ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Itqân...*, 1: 60; Thamem Ushama, *Issues in the Study of the Qur'an*, (Kuala Lumpur: Ilmiah Publisher, 2002), 163.

²⁵ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*, (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 94.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

regarding the Qur'an and its process of compilation and standarization.

Al-Baqillani placed the process of compilation of the Utsmani *muṣḥaf* in the *mutawâtir* category since it was reported by a number of narrators in different periods. The *mutawâtir* account is narrated by so many people which makes it impossible for them to lie. This fact conducted by a number of narrators in different periods who memorized this narration. According to al-Baqillani, some people might scrutinize the validity of those *ḥadîts* whether they are *mutawâtir* or not. Having examined both sides, he affirmed these narrations are believed to be accurate and valid. Therefore, the Utsmani *muṣḥaf* was authentic.²⁷

In response to the version of the Syi'ites' claim on the *muṣḥaf* of Ali, al-Baqillani maintained that his *muṣḥaf* was not different from the *muṣḥaf* collected by some companions. The *muṣḥaf* of Ali also comprising the same verses as others. This was evidenced by the report of Ibn Syihab which was mentioned by al-Baqillani in *Manâqib al-Aimma*:

... ابن شهاب قال: شهدت عليا رضي الله عنه يقول على المنبر: و الله ما عندى كتاب نقرأه عليكم، إلا كتاب الله عز و جل، و هذه الصحيفة. صحيفة معلقة بسيفه (أخذتها من رسول صلى الله عليه وسلم فيها فرائض الصدقة معلقة بسيفه له.

Ibn Syihab said: "I witnessed Ali, said on the pulpit: By the name of Allah, I have no book which I read to you only the book of God, the Almighty, and this *ṣaḥîfah*, which hung on his sword. I took it from the Prophet (peace be upon him) in which explaining the *farâ'id al-ṣadaqah*, I put it on my sword."²⁸

As stated in some sources Ali has his own *muṣḥaf*. This was his personal collection which he had compiled right after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him).²⁹ His *muṣḥaf* was arranged based on the reason of revelation (*asbâb al-nuzûl*) which had not been verified and agreed upon by a number of companions.³⁰ This *muṣḥaf* was totally

²⁷ Abu Bakr ibn Thayyib al-Baqillani, *Al-Instiṣâr...*, 1: 101.

²⁸ Abu Bakr ibn Thayyib al-Baqillani, *Manâqib al-Aimmah al-Arba'ah*, Ed. Samira Farhat, (Beirut: Dâr al-Muntakhab al-'Arabî, 2002), 645.

²⁹ Abu Bakr 'Abd Allah Sulayman ibn al-Asy'ath al-Sijistani, *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Basyâir al-Islâmiyyah, 2002), 290; Manna' al-Qattan, *Mabâḥith fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, (Egypt: Maktabah Wahbah, 2007), 123.

³⁰ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Itqân...*, 1: 63-64.

different from the Syi'ites claim that the *Muṣḥaf* of Ali comprises some missing verses left out by Utsman in his compilation³¹ as well as from the Syi'ite historian.³²

Furthermore, al-Baqillani defended the perfect compilation of the *muṣḥaf* employed by Utsman. He criticized the Syi'ites' view on principle that only their *imâms* possessed the complete verses of the Qur'an. They believed that the companions intentionally hid some verses revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and lied about their account.³³ It is proven by the fact of the report by al-Kulaini³⁴ as stated below:

From Jabir who had said that he heard Abu Ja'far said: "No one of people claimed to have collected the whole of the Qur'an (in a book form) as it was revealed. If anyone would come up with such a claim, he is liar. No one collected this Holy Book and memorized as Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High revealed it except Ali ibn Abi Thalib and the Imams after him."

The aforementioned report, according to al-Baqillani was exaggerated, because the authenticity of the above narrative is essentially untrue. This information was only produced by the Syi'ites to claim that their version of the Qur'an was the only valid *muṣḥaf* while other *muṣḥafs* belonging to their opponents were not authentic. This is absolutely invalid belief of this group.³⁵ Furthermore, the Syi'ites used to refer their doctrines to Ja'far al-Shadiq, one of the Twelve *Imâms*. Many reports transmitted by a number of narrators referred to him. For instance, issues of the Qur'an, including the *Muṣḥaf* of Ali as well as the other eleven *imâms*.³⁶ In this matter, however, al-Shadiq himself believed that the Qur'an –which referring to the *Muṣḥaf* of Utsman- is complete and authentic. But, some prominent Syi'ite figures relied their reports on his statement, saying that he maintained different thing from what he said. However, this was forgery to him that they continuously transmitted from one generation to the next

³¹ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, Chapter. 97, No. 6, 2: 825; Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Nu'man ibn al-Mu'allim al-Mufîd, *al-Masâ'il al-Sarawiyyah*, Ed. Saib 'Abd al-Hamid, al-Mu'tamar al-Alamî Li alfiâh al-Syaikh al-Mufîd, 1992, 81.

³² Al-Ya'qubi, *Târîkh*, 1: 152-154.

³³ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣar...*, 1: 112.

³⁴ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, Chapter. 92, No. 1, 1: 165.

³⁵ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣar...*, 1: 112.

³⁶ Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Al-Imâm al-Ṣadiq: Ḥayâtuh wa 'Aṣruhu wa Arâuhuh wa Fiqhuhuh*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr al-Arabî, N.Y.), 323-324.

generation.³⁷ Al-Shadiq himself had different principle from the Syi'ites with regard to the companions of the Prophet (peace upon him). He was much influenced by his father, al-Baqir, who highly respected Abu Bakr, Umar, and Utsman. According to him, those who slandered upon them have violated the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him).³⁸ Therefore, we can infer from the aforementioned evidence that the Syi'ites attempted to invalidate the Utsmani *Muṣḥaf* which was believed by the Sunnite. Their attempt was supported by false and baseless arguments. As a result, it was no wonder that al-Baqillani strongly criticized the validity of their sources.

In another place, al-Baqillani further rejected the Syi'ite's claim that the Utsmani *Muṣḥaf* is incomplete due to the additional verses available in the *Muṣḥaf* of Ali.³⁹ It is proven by the fact that during the process of its compilation, Utsman instructed to burn all personal collection of the *muṣḥaf* of the Qur'an, and commanded the Muslims to solely rely on his *muṣḥaf*. By such endeavour, as allegedly told by a Syi'ite historian, al-Ya'qubi, Utsman had hidden agenda with such order.⁴⁰ Al-Baqillani viewed this notion as false. He strongly believed Utsman's instruction was aimed to preserve the Qur'an and its standard of readings. He further argued that the claim of the missing verses of the Qur'an, as believed by the Syi'ites, was also the consequence of the imperfectness of the teachings of Islam.⁴¹ This is, however, in contradictory to the verse of the Qur'an regarding the completeness of the *syar'ah*.⁴² Al-Baqillani stated: "Perhaps, if the Qur'an has extra verses from what has been revealed (to the Prophet), there will be more duties, which are not only fasting, prayer, and *ḥajj*."⁴³

Through this obvious argument, we can analyse that if we follow the Syi'ites' argument, then it could be possible that the teachings of Islam are more than what we have now. The lost verses might also be sources of Islamic jurisprudence which are not solely limited to these obligatory acts; prayer (*ṣalâh*), fasting (*ṣaum*), and giving alms (*zakât*). This, nevertheless denies the verse in al-Maidah regarding the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 331.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

³⁹ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Chapter on "Ṣaḥīfah, Jafr, and Jamī'a", No. 6, 1: 171.

⁴⁰ Al-Ya'qubi, *Târîkh*, 1: 196-198.

⁴¹ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣâr...*, 1: 106.

⁴² Al-Maidah: 3: This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed my favour to you, and I have chosen Islam to be your faith.

⁴³ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣâr...*, 1: 106.

perfection of Islamic laws.⁴⁴

In addition, al-Baqillani also supported the authenticity of the Utsmani *Muṣḥaf* from the claim of missing verses dealing with the merit of the Twelve *Imâms*.⁴⁵ According to the Syi'ites belief, those twelve infallible *imâms* reside in the very central position.⁴⁶ The people have no right to invalidate any information except by involving the infallible *imâm* (*al-imâm al-ma'sûm*). The *imâms* are required to decide on everything including claiming the authenticity of the Qur'an⁴⁷ even if their personalities are weak. In responding to such claim, al-Baqillani asserted that the infallible *imâms* are common people who possibly make mistakes. They have not been guaranteed that their intellects is always right rather than erroneous. They are not infallible persons who might lie and forget. Moreover, their existence being the *imâm* (*leader*) is also not because of appointment. The category of the *imâm* is the one who is knowledgeable, having the ability to lead, and those who have good personal integrity. The *imâm* was chosen as *imâm* because he is reliable to perform justice and truth in the community. If the *imâm* is selected from among the ignorant people, he would not be able to employ his leadership properly.⁴⁸ On the contrary, he would tend to suppress his people. Another argument to reject the Syi'ites' claim of the extra verses of the Qur'an is that it was intentionally done by the Syi'ites. A contemporary scholar, Ibrahim 'Iwad, has meticulously investigated this fact. According to his analysis, he argued the extra verses comprising both chapters, *al-Nûrain* and *al-Wilâyah*, are impossible to be part of the Qur'an. Linguistically speaking, the structure of those chapters is far different from the structure of the Qur'an. The deviated style of those chapters appears within their structures while the chapters of the Qur'an have different organization. In addition, 'Iwad also deeply analyzed the chain of transmission and the source of those chapters. With this sort of investigation, he finally concluded that those chapters should be excluded from the Qur'an.⁴⁹ Therefore, from the aforesaid argument we can conclude that the Syi'ites' stance regarding the inauthenticity of the Qur'an related to the

⁴⁴ Al-Ma'idah: 3.

⁴⁵ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣâr...*, 1:110-112.

⁴⁶ Ibrahim 'Iwad, *Ṣurat al-Nûrain allatî Yuz'amû Farîq min al-Syi'ah Annahâ min al-Qur'ân al-Karîm*, (Egypt: Dâr al-Zahra al-Syarq, N.Y.); W. St. Clair Tisdall, *Muslim World*, "Shi'ah Additions to the Qur'ân", Vol. 3 (1913), 227-241.

⁴⁷ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfî*, Chapter on "The Collection of the Qur'ân", No. 1, 1: 165.

⁴⁸ Al-Baqillani, *Manâqib...*, 283-284; Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr...*, 1: 106.

⁴⁹ Ibrahim 'Iwad, *Ṣurat al-Nûrain...*, 50.

lost verses regarding the twelve infallible *imâms* and two additional chapters were untrue and ahistoric.

In conclusion, the foregoing discussion gives us obvious proofs of the validity of the Qur'an. These facts definitely reject their claims which are baseless and invalid. Those accusations are exaggeratedly formulated within their sources, which become their framework of thinking, including in the problem of the seven variant readings of the Qur'an.

Al-Baqillani's Stance on the Seven Variant Readings of the Qur'an

The seven variant readings is one of the intellectual heritages in the history of Islamic civilization. They are continually learned by Muslims since the Prophet's time until today. According to Sunnite sources, the *hadîts* that elucidate the seven variant readings are valid based on *mutawâtir* information. This was narrated by a number of narrators in every stage, that had no doubts regarding its authenticity.⁵⁰ However, the Syi'ites negated the *hadîts* on the seven variant readings. They disapproved all reports on such matter notably information narrated by the Sunnites.⁵¹ They further opined that it did not exist in the history of Qur'anic revelation, since the Qur'an was only revealed in one reading coming down from that period to this time. In other aspects concerning the seven variant readings, a number of orientalist were also involved in research on this matter.⁵² However, all those matters were contradictory to the mainstream Sunnite perspective. This group had different principles on viewing the variant readings of the Qur'an and its causes, as represented by the Asy'arite figure, al-Baqillani.

Al-Baqillani, as a defender of Sunnite's views, rejected the claim of the Syi'ites. His arguments were also revelant to reply Noldeke's notion regarding the invalidity of the variant readings. The Syi'tes who accused that the *hadîts* of the seven variant readings were forgeries done by its narrators. They relied this doctrine on several accounts as reported by al-Kulaini and al-Sayyari from al-Fudhail ibn Yasar said: "I

⁵⁰ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqân...*, 1: 77-85.

⁵¹ Thamem Ushama, *Issues...*, 261; al-Khu'i, *al-Bayân...*, 240-248; Ja'far Murtadha al-Amili, *Ḥaqâiq 'Âmmah ḥawla al-Qur'ân*, (N.P.: al-Markaz al-Islâmî li al-Dirâsât, 2010), 150-154; Muhammad Husain Ali al-Saghir, *Târîkh al-Qur'ân*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Muarrikh al-Arabî, 1999), 95-120.

⁵² Theodor Noldeke, *The Sketches...*, 27; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials...*, ix-x.

said to Abi 'Abdillah: 'Verily, men say: indeed, the Qur'an descending on the seven words.' He said: 'The enemy of God lied, yet, it descended on one word for one (Prophet)'."⁵³

This information continued for later scholars in contemporary times. Conversely, al-Baqillani maintained that the variant readings of the Qur'an were real and transmitted in the *mutawâtir* category.⁵⁴ This was evidenced by the fact that many reliable *ḥadîths* elucidated this matter which was narrated by a number of companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), one of which are mentioned below:

"He said that Jibril came to him (the Prophet peace be upon him) and said, 'Allah has commanded you to recite to your people the Qur'an in one *ḥarf*. Upon this he said, 'I ask for Allah's pardon and forgiveness. My people are not capable of doing it'."⁵⁵

Historically speaking, the seven variant readings occurred along with the Prophet's deliverance of the verses of the Qur'an to the companions.⁵⁶ He taught them verses not only in one single reading, but following the process of learning, he also recited them on the variant reading of those verses. As a matter of fact, Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab has ever brought Hisyam before the Prophet (peace be upon him) to clarify his recitation since he heard different reading recited by Hisyam.⁵⁷ Hence, by analyzing these aforementioned facts, we can

⁵³ Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, Chapter on "The Book of Nawâdir", No. 13, 2: 824; Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad Muhammad ibn al-Sayyari, *Kitâb al-Qir'ât aw al-Tanzîl wa al-Tahrîf*, Ed. Etan Kohlberg, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009), 6-7.

⁵⁴ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣâr...*, 2: 338-340.

⁵⁵ Abu al-Husain Muslim al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1993), Chapter on "The Seven Variant Readings", No. 861, 1: 362.

⁵⁶ Al-Baqillani, *Al-Intiṣâr...*, 2: 339.

⁵⁷ Bukhari reported on the authority of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab who said: "I heard Hisham reciting Surah al-Furqan during the lifetime of the Prophet and I listened to his recitation noticed that he recited it in different ways (dialecets or tunes) which Allah's Apostle had not taught me. So I was on the point of attacking him in *ṣalâh*; but I waited till he finished his prayer and then I seized him by the collar and said: Who you this *surah*, which I have heard you reciting? He replied: The Prophet taught it to me. I said: you telling a lie. By Allah, Allah's Apostle taught me (in different way) this very *surah*, which I have heard you reciting. So, I took him to Allah's Apostle and said: O the Apostle of Allah; verily, I heard this person reciting *surah al-Furqan* in a way (sound or mode) that you did not teach me, and you have taught me *Surah al-Furqan*. The Prophet said: O Hisham, recite! So he recited in the same way as I heard him recite before. On that, the Prophet said: It was revealed to recite in this way. Then the Prophet said: Now you recite Umar, and I recited it as the Prophet has taught me. Then the Prophet said: It was sent down like that. Then the Prophet added: Verily the Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways,

conclude that the variant readings of the Qur'an are valid and true, even though the Syi'ites and Orientalists claimed otherwise. However, some other Syi'ites scholars however agreed that the variant readings (*qirâât*) of the Qur'an also exist and should be learnt like a commentator al-Tabarsi. In this stance he did not deny it. He further asserted that we can practise them in our recitation.⁵⁸ Therefore, we conclude from the these facts that the origin of the seven variants reading were originally approved by the Prophet (peace be upon him) and validly transmitted by the companions to the later period.

In other places, al-Baqillani defended the variant readings of the Qur'an against the principle of Syi'ism which asserted that those variant readings were only the *ijtihâd* of the readers (*qurrâ'*). Such belief was by virtue of the fact that the Qur'an was actually revealed in one reading, and the divergence merely on account of the different transmitters as maintained by the Syi'ites.⁵⁹ So the status of the *hadîths* of the variant readings is questioned. Nevertheless, al-Baqillani rejected this notion. He argued alternatively that the *hadîths* on the variant readings are basically *mutawâtir*.⁶⁰ This report is narrated by a large number of people who impossibly consented upon a lie. Thus, in the variant readings of the Qur'an there were a number of companions involved in transmitting this account like Umar ibn al-Khattab, Utsman ibn Affan, Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn Abbas, Abu Hurayra, Abu Bakr, Abu Jahm, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Abu Talhah al-Anshari, Ubay ibn Ka'ab, Zaid ibn Arqam, Samra ibn Jundub, Salman ibn Surat, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Auf, Amr ibn Abi Salma, Amr ibn al-Ash, Muadh ibn al-Jabal, Hisyam ibn Hakim, Anas ibn Malik, Huzaiifa and Umm Ayyub (the wife of Abu Ayyub al-Anshari).⁶¹ As a matter of fact, those companions impossibly agreed upon errors and forgeries. There are number of people who narrated from different paths.⁶² They finally referred to

so recite of it what is easier to you." See in al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî*, Trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Lahore: Kazi Publication, 1986), No. 561, 6: 482.

⁵⁸ Abu Ali al-Fadl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayân*, Vol. 1, (N.C.: Dâr al-'Ulûm, 2005), 10-11.

⁵⁹ It was narrated by Zurara from Abu Ja'far, he said: verily, the Qur'an is one, it was revealed by One to one single (Prophet), yet, its difference only on account of different transmitters." See in Al-Kulaini, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, 824; Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad Muhammad ibn al-Sayyari, *Kitâb al-Qirâ'ât...*, 6-7.

⁶⁰ Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr*, 2: 353-361.

⁶¹ Muhammad 'Abd al-Azim al-Zarqani, *Manâhil al-Irfân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1988), 1: 139.

⁶² Abu al-Husain Muslim al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*, Chapter on "The Seven Variant Readings", No. 270-274, 1: 360-362.

the Prophet (peace be upon him). Furthermore, it is to be noted too that those companions were considered trustworthy and reliable men by *ḥadīths* scholars. Their characters have been testified by Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him)⁶³ and they have been guaranteed to go to paradise.⁶⁴ Hence, this information is valid and reliable to prove the seven variant readings of the Qur'an.

Al-Baqillani's argument also relevant to respond al-Syarif al-Murtadha's notion who considered that the variant readings of the Qur'an are merely metaphorical statements (*majâzî*). These signify clear and hidden meanings referring to the concept of *muḥkamât* (clear) and *mutasyâbihât* (ambiguous) verses.⁶⁵ Through his argument, we can analyze that matter. In this respect, he referred to a number of *mutawâtir ḥadīths* regarding the process of revelation of the Qur'an during the prophet Muhammad's life. These *ḥadīths* clearly stated that the Qur'an was revealed in the seven different words. As in reality, the companions have practiced such readings in their recitation of the Qur'an exemplified by Umar ibn al-Khattab and Ubay ibn Ka'ab. Moreover, a number of scholars agreed upon this variant readings, even though they differed in the meaning of the term 'Seven Words' (*Sab'ah Aḥruf*).⁶⁶ However, these differences did not mean to reject information of these facts told by the Prophet (peace be upon him) on the different variant readings of the Qur'an.⁶⁷ This is a fact in the history of the Islamic civilization.

In addition, al-Baqillani's argument also disproved al-Murtadha's notion that the variant readings of the Qur'an may signify the concept of of *al-muḥkam* (the clear) and *al-mutasyâbih* (the ambiguous). Al-Baqillani defended his idea that the variant readings of the Qur'an do not refer to those concepts as evidenced by the fact that the statement in the *ḥadīths* is that the *ḥarf* of Utsman is different from the the *ḥarf* of 'Abdullah ibn Ubay. The same thing to the *ḥarf* of Ubay was also different from the *ḥarf* of Zayd. Hence, it seems from this fact that their

⁶³ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith...*, 78-79.

⁶⁴ Abu 'Isa Muhammad ibn 'Isa ibn Surah, *Sunan al-Tirmidhî*, Ed. Kamal Yusuf al-Hut, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, N.Y.), Chapter on "The Merit of 'Abd al-Raḥmân ibn 'Auf", No. 3748, 5: 606.

⁶⁵ Al-Syarif al-Murtadha, *al-Majazât al-Nabawiyyah*, Ed. Mahmud Mustafa, (Egypt: Mustafâ al-Bâb al-Halabî wa Awlâduh, 1937), No. 28, 49.

⁶⁶ Al-Suyuti, *al-Itqân...*, 1: 46-47.

⁶⁷ Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr*, 1: 339.

differences merely in the method of readings (*wajh* or *ṭarîq*).⁶⁸

Al-Baqillani further argued that the variant readings were a means through which Allah bestowed upon His mankind blessings for reciting the Qur'an. This is very crucial, due to the fact that humans have different tongues, speeches, and ethnicities. By virtue of the variant readings, people would be helped to read and pronounce the Qur'an correctly. Conversely, as al-Baqillani argued, if the Qur'an was merely revealed in one reading, people would have serious problems to recite the Qur'an. They would be illiterate, since they find difficulties in uttering the verses. However, such case would weaken the Muslims in learning their main foundation in religion. During the earlier period of Islamic history, people faced a number of different challenges from the Quraisy people whose their Arabic rethorics as well as poetry were highly proven in terms of their quality.⁶⁹ Hence, to articulate the correct sentence and precise word, someone should be fluent (*fasîh*), otherwise, they would make in several mistakes by mispronouncing some words during their recitation. As a result, the verses of the Qur'an would lose their meanings. The aforementioned argument seems delineating the blessing of Allah, the Almighty, bestowed upon human beings by revealing the different readings of the Qur'an.

In addition, al-Suyuti, in supporting the variant readings of the Qur'an, opined that the differences in the readings of the Qur'an were aimed to ease the Muslims and to multiply the rewards from Allah, the Almighty for those who seriously attempt to recite the Qur'an following the readers (*qurrâ'*) as well as other disciplines in reciting the Qur'an. By virtue of these endeavour, the readers are able to conclude and infer the meanings of the verses and produce laws (*aḥkâm*). They could also protect the authenticity of the Qur'an from alteration and addition done by erroneous readers.⁷⁰ Moreover, the argument for the variant readings of the Qur'an could also be analyzed from the dispute between Umar and Hisyam regarding their reading during their prayer. Umar was well known amongst the companions as very stern in accepting the Qur'an from anyone. Those who utter the Qur'an should come with two witnesses to testify his reading. This case delineates valuable lesson (*ḥikmah*) that any difference in the recitation of the Qur'an does not mean to generally reject all variant readings revealed

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 378.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2: 348-350.

⁷⁰ Al-Suyuti, *al-Itqân...*, 1: 84.

by the Angel Jibril to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Yet, it is the medium from Allah, the Almighty, to facilitate upon human beings in order to understand His messages.⁷¹ This sort of defense towards the seven variant readings is also stated by a number of scholars before and after al-Baqillani's period.⁷²

Several experts on the Qur'an also defended the principle of the variant readings of the Qur'an. Its sources are valid and *mutawâtir*. Ibn Mujahid (d. 324 A.H./936 C.E.), one of the earliest scholars in *qirâ'ât*, stressed the requirement that the readers of the Qur'an should follow the earlier scholars. It is evidenced by the fact that Ali ibn Abi Thalib said that the Prophet (peace be upon him) instructed us to read the Qur'an based on what we have learnt from earlier scholars.⁷³ This was reflected in what has occurred in the history of Islam when the *mushaf* sent to Madinah, Makkah, Kufa, Basra, and Syiria were taught by the authoritative earlier readers of the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and proceeded to be transmitted to the pious followers.⁷⁴ Abu Ubayd al-Qasim (d. 224 A.H./838 C.E.) also cemented Ibn Mujahid's account with a slightly different text. In this respect, he elucidated that he viewed a number of readers (*qurrâ'*) reciting their reading to some experts of the Qur'an in order to protect the Qur'an from both addition and deduction.⁷⁵ Hence, they left all unreliable variant readings. To follow the recitation of earlier readers (*qurrâ'*) is compulsory since no one can speculate with his own reading.⁷⁶ Moreover, al-Razi (d. 606 A.H./1290 C.E.), an Asy'arite theologian after al-Baqillani (d. 403 A.H./1013 C.E.), asserted too that the reading of the Qur'an should be based on the *mutawâtir* report. Allah, the Almighty, has chosen from His servants to become the readers (*qurrâ'*) whose role is to preserve and select the variant readings. Those trustworthy readings are reliable accounts that should be practiced by a reader while the untrustworthy ones were *aḥad* reports which must be ignored.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr*, 2:350.

⁷² Ibn Mujahid, *Kitâb al-Sab'ah fî al-Qirâ'ât*, Ed. Syauqi Daif, (Egypt: Dâr al-Ma'ârif, 1972); Abu Ubayd al-Qasim, *Faḍâil al-Qur'ân*, Ed. Marwan al-'Atiyya, (Damascus: Dâr Ibn Katsîr, N.Y.); Muhammad Fakh al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsîr al-Râzî*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1981), 1; Abu Bakr al-Qurtubi, *al-Jâmi' li Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, Ed. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Turki, (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risalah, 2006).

⁷³ Ibn Mujahid, *Kitâb al-Sab'ah fî al-Qirâ'ât*, 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁵ Abu Ubayd al-Qasim, *Faḍâil al-Qur'ân*, 359.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 378.

⁷⁷ Fakh al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsîr al-Râzî*, 1: 70-71.

Hence, the above arguments are also relevant to answer the claim of orientalist represented by Goldziher and Jeffery,⁷⁸ who stated the main cause for the different variant readings were the dotless scripts in the earlier compilation of the Qur'an where every reader can read based on the context. However, those orientalist ignored the very significant tradition of Islam which is the 'isnâd system' (oral transmission) through which the Qur'an was narrated by a number of authoritative readers. This was common practice during the period of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the companions who used to sit together in one circle (*ḥalaqah*). They listened to the Prophet's *ḥadîths* and narrated to others who were unable to join that meeting.⁷⁹ According to al-Baqillani, the seven variant readings of the Qur'an had appeared in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It was known by a number of companions. The Prophet read verses which were easy to help them in learning the Qur'an. He himself did not decide to which meaning the seven word as stated in his *ḥadîths*.⁸⁰ Hence, this information was in the *mutawâtir* category narrated by a number of authoritative narrators in different periods. The *mutawâtir* account is narrated by so many people that it was impossible for them to lie.⁸¹ The above claim as Goldziher stated that the main cause for the different variant readings were the dotless scripts in the earlier compilation of the Qur'an is invalid. Many Arabic sources report that Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 69 A.H./688 C.E.) was the one who initiated the systematization of the study of the Arabic language through its grammatical structure, including its diacritical forms, under the instruction of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Thalib,⁸² after he heard several people read the Qur'an incorrectly.

Moreover, some contemporary scholars also supported the earlier stance on the validity of the seven variant readings of the Qur'an. They rejected the claim of the Syi'ites that the variant readings were merely individual judgment (*ijtihâd*) of the reciters (*qurrâ'*).⁸³ This rejection absolutely cemented al-Baqillani's stance regarding his

⁷⁸ Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhâhib al-Tafsîr al-Islâmî*, 8-9; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials...*, ix-x.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith...*, 46.

⁸⁰ Abu al-Husain Muslim al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*, Chapter On "The Seven Variant Readings", No. 861, 1: 274 and 362.

⁸¹ Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr*, 1: 336.

⁸² Abu al-Faraj Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *The Fihrist ibn Nadim*, Ed. Bayard Dodge, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 88.

⁸³ Muhammad 'Abd al-Azîm al-Zarqani, *Manâhil al-'Irfaq...*, 1: 168; Thamem Ushama, *Issues...*, 254-258.

defense of the variant readings. According to al-Zarqani, the notion that the variant readings were solely individual judgment (*ijtihad*) of the reciters (*qurrâ'*) was baseless. It is by reason of the fact that those readings were still available in the Utsmani Muṣḥaf. Number of jurists (*fuqahâ*), reciters (*qurrâ'*), and theologians (*mutakallimûn*) agreed upon this fact. Consequently, this also allows us to believe that the companions consented upon the standardization of Utsman ibn Affan in which he rewrote his *muṣḥaf* from Abu Bakr's collection that comprised of the seven variant readings. In this respect, the Utsmani Muṣḥaf also consisted of the same content taught by the Angel Jibril to the Prophet (peace be upon him).⁸⁴ Hence, it seems from the aforementioned evidence, we can conclude the claim that the variant readings of the Qur'an which were only the endeavour of the readers (*qurrâ'*) is an invalid argument.

Al-Baqillani also preponderated his stance on the meaning of the seven variant readings. A Number of scholars differed in understanding the term *Sab'ah Aḥruf* which has close meaning related to its context. The word *ḥarf* linguistically has different meanings; "extremity, sharp edge, border, edge, rim, brink, verge, dialect, word, and mode."⁸⁵ Yet, the term *Sab'ah Aḥruf* in the context of the *ḥadîts* of the seven variant readings could be inferred in different understandings. Some said it concerns command (*amr*), prohibition (*nahyn*), information (*khabar*) and seeking of information (*istikhbâr*). Some people maintained that it comprises seven aspects of the name of Allah (*asmâ Allâh*). Other held it is permissible/*ḥalâl* (thing), prohibited/*ḥarâm* (thing), command, prohibition, advice, story, and character. Some people believed in other meaning of this term which denotes different languages. The last notion is that some believed it deals with seven aspects of variant readings. Al-Baqillani tended to choose the last one. He elucidated that *Sab'ah Aḥruf* (seven aspects) indicates seven differences in the readings; difference in word order (e.g., *وجاءت سكرة الموت بالحق\وجاء سكرة الحق بالموت*), difference in reading the addition and omission of the word (e.g., *وما عملت أيديهم\وما عملته أيديهم*), difference in reading the words formed by different words as well as meaning (e.g., *وطلع منضود\و طلع منضود*), difference in reading the words which alter their meaning and do not change their consonantal outline

⁸⁴ Muhammad 'Abd al-Azim al-Zarqani, *Manâhil al-'Irfan...*, 1: 168.

⁸⁵ E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society, 1984), 1: 550.

(e.g., شَشْرُهَآ\شَشْرُهَآ), difference in reading the words which change their consonantal outline not their meaning (e.g., بِالْبَحْلِ\بِالْبَحْلِ), difference in reading the words as well as meaning (كَالضُّوْفِ\كَالْعُهْنِ), difference in desinential inflection (*i'râb*) and vocalization of the word (e.g., بَعْدَ\بَعْدُ). This view was also quoted by al-Qurtubi in his *al-Jâmi'* in elucidating the seven aspects (*wujûh*) of variant readings. In this work, he seemed agreed upon al-Baqillani's notion regarding this matter, and even praised him as one of the authoritative earlier experts of this field.⁸⁶ Hence, through the analysis of the foregoing facts, we can conclude that the seven variant readings of the Qur'an most probably mean the seven aspects of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, al-Baqillani also criticized all the above meanings of *Sab'ah Aḥruf* except one, which is the means seven aspects (*sab'ah wujûh*). It is evidenced by the fact that the statement in the *ḥadîths* of Umar obviously stated: 'فاقرؤوا كيف شئتم و اقرؤوا منه ما تيسر' (so recite of it what is easier to you). The *ḥadîths* of Umar as well other accounts regarding the variant readings do not clearly deal with various matters, and neither gives any choices like the word *ḥarâm* instead of *ḥalâl*, information (*khâbar*) instead of seeking of information (*istikhbâr*), promise (*wa'd*) instead of threat (*wa'id*), parable (*tasybîh*) instead of hope (*al-tamannî*), advice, story, and character.⁸⁷ This rejection also addressed the Syi'ites' notion on the meaning of *Sab'ah Aḥruf*⁸⁸ as they believed its meaning refers to seven dialects. Therefore, al-Baqillani stressed that the term *Sab'ah Aḥruf* indicates the different aspects of the process of the descending of the Qur'an as mentioned above.⁸⁹ From the foregoing evidence, we conclude that the Qur'an is authentic. It was narrated by trustworthy companions in *mutawâtir* category. Those people were reliable persons who also transmitted the seven variant readings that are continuously preserved to the present time.

⁸⁶ Al-Qurtubi, *al-Jâmi'...*, 1: 77-80.

⁸⁷ Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr*, 2: 380.

⁸⁸ The Syi'ites interpreted the meaning of *sab'ah aḥruf* in *majazî* way, which based their interpretation on the internal and external meaning. See previous page their views on "The Variant Readings of the Qur'an".

⁸⁹ Al-Baqillani, *al-Intiṣâr*, 2: 376.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it appears descriptive delineation on the early Rafidite Syi'ites' views on the variant readings of the Qur'an and its response by an Asy'arite, al-Baqillani. The Syi'ites believed that the seven variant readings merely the product of the narrators of the *hadîts*, as stated by their authoritative scholars. This view was in line with some orientalist's notion. Furthermore, they also promoted their own version of the Qur'an referring to the narration of Ali ibn Abi Thalib. Through this *muşhaf* they did not deal with any variant readings of the Qur'an.

Here, al-Baqillani has argumentatively responded their claim to the related matter and rejected their notion which was contradictory to the reality of the history. The *muşhaf* of the Qur'an has been codified by Caliph Utsman ibn Affan. Its readings were also practiced by a number of companions and approved by the Prophet Muhammad himself, peace be upon him. Therefore, we can conclude that the seven variant readings of the Qur'an is valid. All their claims in the Sunnites mainstream theological discourse are considered innovations and deceptions.[]

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