



An Assessment of the Impact of *Qirā'āt* on the Interpretation of Qur'anic Legal Verses

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Abstract

This study assesses the impact of Qirā'āt (the canonical variant readings of the Qur'an) on the interpretation (tafsīr) of legal verses (āyāt al-aḥkām). It examines how differences among the recognized readings particularly the mutawātir riwāyāt of Ḥaḍḥ, Warsh, Qālūn, and others among the Ten Readings generate genuine variance in the derivation of Sharī'ah rulings across issues such as ablution (wuḍū'), divorce ('iddah), inheritance, and penal law (ḥudūd). Employing a qualitative, library-based methodology grounded in classical 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, Uṣūl al-Fiqh, and comparative tafsīr, the research analyses select legal verses where Qirā'āt variation has historically produced divergent juristic conclusions among the four Sunni madhāhib. The study argues that Qirā'āt functions not as a source of contradiction but as a legitimate interpretive mechanism (tawassu' fī al-ma'nā) that enriches legal derivation (istinbāṭ al-aḥkām) and reflects the linguistic and jurisprudential flexibility embedded within revelation. Findings indicate that jurists' awareness or neglect of Qirā'āt variants directly shapes the scope and diversity of fiqh rulings, and that a proper grasp of this science is indispensable for sound Qur'anic legal exegesis. The study recommends greater integration of Qirā'āt studies into contemporary Islamic legal education and tafsīr methodology, and calls for further specialized research linking Qirā'āt variance to unresolved contemporary fiqh questions.

Keywords: *Qirā'āt, Qur'anic Legal Verses, Tafsir, Jurist, Uṣūl al-Fiqh.*

1. Introduction

The science of *Qirā'āt* occupies an important place in the study of the Glorious Qur'an. It preserves the recognised ways in which the Qur'an was recited and transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) through the Companions, the Successors and the leading readers of the Muslim community. From the earliest period, Muslim scholars did not regard the accepted readings as competing texts. Rather, they treated them as transmitted forms of revelation whose differences may clarify, strengthen, restrict, widen or otherwise illuminate the meaning of a verse. This is especially important in verses from which legal rulings are derived. The jurist who knows only one reading may see one shade of meaning, while the scholar who knows the recognised readings may see a wider field of evidence¹.

The Prophetic basis for the plurality of recitation is well known. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reported that he heard Hishām ibn Ḥakīm reciting Sūrat al-Furqān in a form different from the form 'Umar had learned. The Prophet listened to both recitations and confirmed both. The report therefore shows that a difference in recitation, when authentically transmitted, is not by itself a contradiction. It also teaches the student of Qur'anic law to distinguish between an authorised reading and an accidental alteration of the text².

The legal importance of *Qirā'āt* became clearer as *tafsīr* and *fiqh* developed. Early exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī and al-Jaṣṣāṣ recorded readings while discussing legal verses, and later scholars systematised the conditions of acceptable readings and their relationship to interpretation. Contemporary studies continue this work by showing that the ten *mutawātir* readings may contribute to juristic disagreement, particularly where a difference changes grammatical case, verb form, number, intensity or lexical sense. The subject therefore connects the earliest period of Qur'anic transmission with present-day Qur'anic and legal scholarship.

The Glorious Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) not in one single mode of recitation, but in several authentic modes known collectively as al-*Qirā'āt*. These variant readings were transmitted from the Prophet himself through unbroken chains of narration, and they were later systematised by the great masters of the science of *Qirā'āt* such as Ibn Mujāhid, who confined the widely accepted readings to seven, and later scholars who extended the number to ten *mutawātir* readings. The science of *Qirā'āt* is therefore not a peripheral matter but a foundational pillar upon which the correct understanding of the Book of Allah rests, for it touches directly upon how a verse is pronounced, and consequently, upon what legal ruling may be extracted from it³.

Among the branches of Qur'anic sciences that feel the effect of *Qirā'āt* most keenly is the science of *Aḥkām* al-Qur'an, that is, the legal verses of the Qur'an from which jurists derive rulings of worship, transaction, marriage, inheritance and criminal law. A single letter, a single vowel, or a single grammatical form read differently can shift a ruling from obligation to recommendation, from one number to another, or from one legal condition to a wholly different one. This reality has occupied the attention of exegetes and jurists since the earliest centuries of Islam, and it continues to shape contemporary *fiqh* discourse, comparative legal studies, and even modern translations of the Qur'an into other languages⁴.

This paper sets out to examine the impact of *Qirā'āt* on the interpretation of Qur'anic legal verses, tracing the matter from its classical roots among the Companions and the early Imams, through the medieval flowering of *Qirā'āt* scholarship, into the present age where questions of authenticity, standardisation, and digital transmission of the readings have taken on new urgency. The paper will draw upon Qur'anic verses in Uthmanic script with translation, relevant Aḥādith in Arabic with translation, and both classical and contemporary sources, before concluding with findings and recommendations⁵.

The Concept and Classical Origin of *Qirā'āt*

The word *Qirā'āt* is the plural of *Qirā'ah*, meaning a manner of reciting the Qur'an that differs from another manner in the pronunciation of its words, while both remain attributed to the Prophet through sound chains of transmission. The scholars of *Uṣūl* define a *mutawātir Qirā'ah* as one narrated by such a large number of transmitters in every generation that collusion upon a lie becomes inconceivable. It was Allah's wisdom that the Qur'an be revealed upon seven *Aḥruf*, easing the burden upon the diverse tribes of Arabia whose dialects differed in pronunciation, and this concession from Allah eventually crystallised into the recognised system of *Qirā'āt* that we have today⁶.

¹ M. M. I. al-Jazarī, al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr, vol. 1, trans. none, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., pp. 9–13

² M. M. al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. 6, trans. M. M. Khan, Dārussalām, Riyadh, 1997, pp. 479–480

³ Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1957, p. 318

⁴ Ibn al-Jazarī, al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1998, p. 12

⁵ al-Qaṭṭān, Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Riyadh, 2000, p. 173

⁶ al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an, vol. 1, Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, Cairo, 1985, p. 45), see also M. Q. al-Qaṭṭān, Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, trans. none, Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Riyadh, 2000, pp. 165–170

The Hadith of the Prophet establishes this reality with clarity. It is reported in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard Hishām ibn Ḥakīm reciting Sūrat al-Furqān in a manner different from his own, and when the matter was brought before the Prophet, he confirmed that both readings were correct and had been taught to him by Jibrīl.

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ أَنْزَلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرُفٍ، فَأَقْرَأُوا مَا تَيْسَّرَ مِنْهُ

Verily this Qur'an was revealed upon seven *Aḥruf* (modes), so recite of it whatever is easy for you.⁷

This Hadith, narrated through numerous chains, is the bedrock upon which the entire discipline of *Qirā'āt* stands, and it demonstrates that variance in recitation was sanctioned by Prophetic authority from the very beginning, not invented later by scholars⁸.

Contemporary scholarship has continued to refine the classification of these readings. Modern specialists in *Qirā'āt* distinguish between the *mutawātir* readings of the ten Imams, the *shādhdh* (irregular) readings that lack the condition of *tawātur*, and readings that are outright fabricated. This classification matters immensely for jurisprudence, because only rulings derived from *mutawātir* or at least authentically transmitted readings can carry full legal weight in the *Shari'ah*, while *shādhdh* readings are generally used only as supporting evidence (*tafsīr*) rather than as independent proof (*hujjah*) for a ruling⁹.

Historical Development of *Qirā'āt* and Their Place in *Tafsīr*

Al-Zarkashī placed the discussion of variant wording among the sciences needed for understanding the Qur'an. He noted that differences may occur through changes in vowel marks, letters, addition or omission within the transmitted reading tradition, and he carefully distinguished the Qur'an itself from the discipline by which its readings are described. His discussion is significant because it shows that the study of *Qirā'āt* was not a late invention made to explain juristic differences; it was already part of the classical architecture of Qur'anic scholarship¹⁰.

Ibn al-Jazarī later gave the science a more systematic form and became one of its strongest authorities. He stressed sound transmission and the compatibility of the reading with the 'Uthmānic consonantal script and the Arabic language as conditions in assessing readings. This historical development has a direct bearing on legal interpretation today. Modern researchers may compare readings with digital tools and printed *muṣḥafs*, but the governing principle remains the old one: a reading must first be established as a recognised Qur'anic reading before it is used as evidence in interpretation¹¹.

Historical Development: From the Companions to the Classical Schools

In the age of the Companions, the diversity of *Qirā'āt* was a living, spoken reality rather than a written science. Companions such as Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, and Zayd ibn Thābit each carried slightly different recitations, all traceable to the Prophet, and their students in turn carried these differences into the various regions of the expanding Islamic state, so that Kufa, Basra, Damascus, Makkah and Madinah each developed a recognisable local recitation tradition. It was 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān who, fearing division among the Ummah as the conquests spread the Qur'an among non-Arab peoples, commissioned the compilation of the *muṣḥaf* in a script capable of accommodating the various authentic readings, an act of foresight that preserved rather than eliminated the diversity of *Qirā'āt*¹².

By the third Islamic century, the science had matured sufficiently for Ibn Mujāhid to compose his Kitāb al-Sab'ah, in which he formally restricted the *mutawātir* readings to seven, one from each of seven great cities, a restriction that was itself controversial among some scholars who felt the number seven wrongly narrowed what the Hadith on *Aḥruf* had left open. Nevertheless, this codification proved decisive for the direction of Islamic legal scholarship, because it gave the jurists of the emerging *madhāhib* a stable and authoritative body of readings from which to draw legal inferences, rather than an open and potentially limitless field of dialectal variation¹³.

⁷ M. M. al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vol. 6, trans. *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'an, Ḥadīth no. 499*, M. M. Khan, Dārussalām, Riyadh, 1997, pp. 479–480

⁸ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Faṭḥ al-Bārī, vol. 9, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1379H, p. 22

⁹ Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Maktab al-Tarbiyah al-'Arabī, Riyadh, 1998, p. 210; al-Qaḍāh, al-Qirā'āt al-Qur'aniyyah wa Atharuhā fī al-Dirāsāt al-Naḥwiyyah, Dār 'Ammār, Amman, 2001, p. 58

¹⁰ B. D. al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, trans. none, Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1980, pp. 318–320

¹¹ M. M. I. al-Jazarī, Munjid al-Muqri'īn wa Murshid al-Ṭālibīn, trans. none, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1999, pp. 36–40

¹² Al-Zarqānī, Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an, vol. 1, Maṭba'at 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 1943, p. 254

¹³ Ibn al-Jazarī, Ghāyat al-Nihāyah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā', vol. 1, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, Cairo, 1932, p. 150

The four great Imams of *fiqh*, Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, al-Shāfiʿī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, lived and reasoned within this environment of recognised multiplicity, and their divergences on numerous questions of worship and transaction cannot be fully understood without reference to the particular *Qirā'āt* current in their respective regions, Kufa for Abū Ḥanīfah, Madinah for Mālik, and so forth. Contemporary historians of Islamic law such as Wael Hallaq have observed that regional legal culture and regional recitation culture developed hand in hand, each reinforcing patterns of interpretation particular to a given locality before the later cross-pollination of *madhāhib* softened these distinctions¹⁴.

***Qirā'āt* and Its Direct Impact on Legal Rulings (Aḥkām)**

Nowhere is the influence of *Qirā'āt* on jurisprudence more visible than in the verse dealing with the waiting period ('iddah) of a divorced woman. Allah says in Sūrat al-Baqarah:

وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ

And divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three *Qurū*¹⁵.

The word *Qurū* is read by some *Qirā'āt* reciters in a form that grammatically and semantically may denote either 'menstrual periods' or 'periods of purity', and this ambiguity, compounded by dialectal variation among the early Arabs even before the codification of *Qirā'āt*, produced two distinct juristic schools. The Ḥanafīs, following the interpretation that favours menstruation, held that the 'iddah ends with the third menstrual cycle, while the Shāfiʿīs, following the interpretation that favours purity, held that it ends with the onset of the third period of purity. Though this particular divergence is rooted more in lexical ambiguity than in a formally canonised *Qirā'ah* difference, it illustrates how the multiplicity of authentic linguistic possibilities recognised by the 'Ulamā' al-*Qirā'āt* feeds directly into substantive *fiqh* disagreement¹⁶.

Another example, often discussed in the chapters on retribution and criminal law, is found in the verse of Qiṣāṣ in Sūrat al-Baqarah, where the phrase concerning blood money is affected by variant readings of case-ending that determine whether the payment is an obligation upon the pardoning party or a matter left to mutual agreement. Contemporary comparative *fiqh* scholars such as Wahbah al-Zuhaylī have shown that such variant readings are not mere academic curiosities but genuine sources of the recognised khilāf (juristic disagreement) that gives Islamic law its celebrated flexibility¹⁷.

The influence of *Qirā'āt* on legal interpretation is not limited to changing the final ruling. Sometimes the readings give two closely related meanings which strengthen one another and make the verse more comprehensive. At other times they help explain why jurists differed. A difference in grammatical case may determine the word to which a phrase is attached; a difference between a simple and intensive verb may indicate two stages of an act; and a difference in lexical form may open two legitimate interpretive possibilities. The interpreter must therefore study *Qirā'āt* before claiming that a legal verse has only one possible meaning¹⁸.

The clearest example is the verse of ablution. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ وَامْسَحُوا بِرُءُوسِكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ إِلَى الْكَعْبَيْنِ

O you who believe, when you rise for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and your feet up to the ankles¹⁹.

The word *وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ* is read with *fathah* by a number of the recognised readers and with *kasrah* by others. Al-Qurtubī records the two readings and explains their grammatical implications. The accusative reading connects the feet with the limbs that are washed, while the genitive reading creates a grammatical relationship with the phrase concerning wiping. The Prophetic reports concerning complete ablution are then brought into the discussion. The important point is that *Qirā'āt*, Arabic grammar and Sunnah are considered together rather than separately²⁰.

This single vocalic difference produced one of the most enduring debates in comparative *fiqh* between those schools that mandate washing the feet and those, particularly among certain Shīʿī jurists, who hold that wiping suffices, though the vast

¹⁴ Hallaq, A History of Islamic Legal Theories, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 34

¹⁵ Qur'an, 2:228

¹⁶ Ibn Qudāmah, al-Mughnī, vol. 8, Maktabat al-Qāhira, Cairo, 1968, p. 108

¹⁷ Al-Zuhaylī, al-Fiqh al-Islāmī wa Adillatuh, vol. 7, Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 1985, p. 5670

¹⁸ A. M. al-Suyūfī, al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, vol. 1, trans. none, Dār al-Nafā'is, Beirut, 1985, pp. 262–268

¹⁹ Qur'an 5:6

²⁰ M. A. al-Qurtubī, al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, vol. 6, trans. none, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2006, pp. 91–96

majority of Sunni jurists reconcile the two readings by requiring both washing and a light wiping motion, drawing on the two *Qirā'āt* as complementary rather than contradictory²¹.

وَيْلٌ لِّلْأَعْقَابِ مِنَ النَّارِ

Woe to the heels because of the Fire.

The hadith above illustrates how the Sunnah helps explain a legal verse whose reading has generated grammatical discussion. Al-Ṭabarī also records the readings of the verse and the arguments of early authorities. He reports that some read the word in the accusative and understood the command as washing the feet, while others read it in the genitive and discussed wiping. He then weighs the evidence through language, transmitted reports and the practice of the Companions. This method is a model for contemporary legal interpretation: *Qirā'āt* should not be isolated from the wider body of Qur'anic and Prophetic evidence²².

Another important example occurs in the verse dealing with menstruation. Allah says:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ ۖ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَأَعْتَزِلُوا النِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ ۖ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهَرْنَ ۚ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ

They ask you about menstruation. Say: It is harm, so keep away from women during menstruation and do not approach them until they are pure. When they have purified themselves, then go to them from where Allah has commanded you²³.

The recognised readings of يَطْهَرْنَ include the lighter form and the intensive form يَطْهَرْنَ. Al-Ṭabarī explains that the lighter form may be understood as the cessation of menstrual blood, while the intensive form points to washing and purification. Al-Qurtubī discusses the same difference and shows how it enters the juristic question of when intercourse becomes permissible after menstruation. The readings therefore do not merely add beauty to recitation; they can become part of the reasoning by which a legal question is examined²⁴.

إِذَا أَقْبَلَتِ الْحَيْضَةُ فَدَعِيَ الصَّلَاةَ، وَإِذَا أَدْبَرَتْ فَأَغْسِلِي عَنْكَ الدَّمَ وَصَلِّي

When menstruation begins, leave the prayer; and when it ends, wash the blood from yourself and pray²⁵.

A third example is the verse: وَأَرْجُلُكُمْ in Sūrat al-Mā'idah, already discussed above, and the related verse of ṭahārah in Sūrat al-Nisā'. Allah says:

أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا

or you have touched women and cannot find water, then seek clean earth and perform dry ablution²⁶.

The word لَامَسْتُم is read by the majority with the form *lāmas-tum*, while another recognised reading is *lamastum*. The difference has been discussed by the exegetes in connection with whether the expression means ordinary physical contact or sexual intercourse. Al-Qurtubī records the linguistic and juristic positions and shows that the reading contributes to the breadth of the interpretive discussion. The verse therefore demonstrates that a small difference in verbal form may become important when a legal consequence, namely *ṭahārah* or *tayammum*, is attached to the act described²⁷.

A further example is the legal verse on theft:

وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا جَزَاءً بِمَا كَسَبَا نَكَالًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

As for the male thief and the female thief, cut their hands as a recompense for what they have earned, as a deterrent from Allah. Allah is Mighty and Wise²⁸.

²¹ Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'an, vol. 8, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2000, p. 174

²² M. J. al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'an, vol. 8, trans. none, Dār Hijr, Giza, 2001, pp. 190–197

²³ Qur'an 2:222

²⁴ M. J. al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'an, vol. 4, trans. none, Dār Hijr, Giza, 2001, pp. 383–385

²⁵ M. J. al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'an, vol. 4, trans. none, Dār Hijr, Giza, 2001, pp. 383–385

²⁶ Qur'an 4:43

²⁷ M. A. al-Qurtubī, al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'an, vol. 5, trans. none, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2006, pp. 223–226.

²⁸ Qur'an 5:38

The canonical verse has its established reading, while reports also preserve certain non-canonical readings attributed to Companions, such as the wording *أَيَّمَانُهُمَا*. Such reports are useful in *tafsīr* and historical study, but they must not be confused with the *mutawātir* Qur'anic readings. This distinction is essential in legal scholarship. The Prophetic Sunnah further specifies the general wording of the verse by setting a minimum value for the theft that attracts the *ḥadd* punishment²⁹.

تُقَطَّعُ الْيَدُ فِي رُبْعِ دِينَارٍ فَصَاعِدًا

The hand is cut off for stealing a quarter of a dinar or more.

***Qirā'āt*, Juristic Disagreement and the Method of the Interpreter**

The history of Islamic law shows that juristic disagreement is not always the result of different personal opinions. Sometimes it begins with a different understanding of the evidence. *Qirā'āt* may form one part of that evidence. Where two authentic readings convey complementary meanings, a jurist may seek to combine them; where they indicate different legal possibilities, he may examine the Sunnah, Arabic usage, consensus, practice of the Companions and principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Ibn Rushd's comparative method is useful here because he repeatedly traces disagreement back to differences in the interpretation of evidence rather than reducing it to personal preference³⁰.

The interpreter must also distinguish between *mutawātir* and *shādhdh* readings. The ten recognised readings have a different evidentiary status from isolated readings which do not fulfil the accepted conditions of Qur'anic recitation. A *shādhdh* reading may be discussed by exegetes and jurists for linguistic or explanatory purposes, but it should not be presented to ordinary readers as part of the canonical Qur'an. This distinction protects both the integrity of Qur'anic transmission and the soundness of legal argument³¹.

Ibn 'Āshūr's approach to *tafsīr* also illustrates the value of recognising all sound readings and examining what each contributes to meaning. In legal verses, the interpreter should not hasten to declare one reading useless because another appears more familiar. Rather, he should ask whether the readings are complementary, whether one explains the other, and whether the Sunnah determines the practical application. Such a method avoids unnecessary conflict and allows *Qirā'āt* to perform one of their central functions: enriching understanding without creating contradiction³².

From the Classical Heritage to the Present and the Future

The classical heritage remains essential because the principles governing *Qirā'āt* were established through careful transmission long before modern printing and digital technology. Today, students can compare printed *muṣḥafs*, audio recitations, digital databases and electronic *tafsīr* collections within seconds. Yet technology does not replace the need for scholarly judgement. A digital platform may display a reading, but the researcher still has to determine its status, its chain, its relationship to the 'Uthmānic script and its relevance to the legal question. The modern scholar therefore needs both traditional learning and responsible use of contemporary tools³³.

Contemporary research confirms that *Qirā'āt* continue to matter for *fiqh*. Suleiman and Zakaria show that the ten *mutawātir* readings can affect the way jurists understand legal texts and can help explain the roots of some differences among the schools. This is particularly valuable for present-day Islamic universities, where Qur'anic studies, *tafsīr* and *fiqh* are sometimes taught as separate subjects. A stronger connection between them would allow students to see that the Qur'anic text, its recitation, Arabic grammar, Prophetic explanation and juristic reasoning form a connected chain of knowledge³⁴.

Looking to the future, the study of *Qirā'āt* should move towards careful interdisciplinary work without abandoning the classical method. Scholars can prepare comparative databases of legal verses, record the recognised readings, explain their grammatical forms, collect the interpretations of classical *mufasssirūn*, and then show how the readings relate to the rulings

²⁹ A. A. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 7, trans. none, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2006, pp. 458–466

³⁰ M. A. I. Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*, vol. 1, trans. none, Dār al-Ḥadīth, Cairo, 2004, pp. 7–12.

³¹ H. Suleiman & M. S. Zakaria, "The Impact of the Ten *Qirā'āt* Mutawātirah on Jurists' Disagreements in Sharī'ah Rulings," *International Journal of Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, trans. none, IIUM Press, Kuala Lumpur, 2023, pp. 52–56

³² M. T. Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 1, trans. none, al-Dār al-Tūnisīyyah li'l-Nashr, Tunis, 1984, pp. 54–58

³³ M. M. I. al-Jazarī, *al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, vol. 1, trans. none, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., pp. 18–25

³⁴ H. Suleiman & M. S. Zakaria, "The Impact of the Ten *Qirā'āt* Mutawātirah on Jurists' Disagreements in Sharī'ah Rulings," *International Journal of Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, trans. none, IIUM Press, Kuala Lumpur, 2023, pp. 57–62

of the schools. Such work would be useful in Nigeria and other Muslim societies where Qur'anic education is growing and where students increasingly use digital resources. The future should therefore not be a choice between the old and the new. It should be a disciplined continuation of the classical heritage with better tools, clearer teaching and wider access³⁵.

Contemporary Relevance and the Path into the Future

In the present age, the study of *Qirā'āt* and its bearing upon legal interpretation has taken on new dimensions. The standardisation of the Qur'anic text through the widely circulated Madinah *Mushaf*, printed according to the reading of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim, has meant that the majority of Muslims today encounter only one *Qirā'ah* in daily practice, creating a real danger that the richness of the other nine *mutawātir* readings, and their legal implications, may fade from general awareness even while remaining preserved among specialists³⁶.

Contemporary Islamic universities and research centres, including institutions across northern Nigeria such as Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, continue to teach *Qirā'āt* not as a museum piece but as a living tool for legal reasoning, training students of *Shari'ah* to recognise that a *fiqh* ruling grounded in one *Qirā'ah* cannot be dismissed as weak simply because it differs from the ruling built upon the more popular reading of Ḥafṣ. This pedagogical continuity links the scholarship of al-Suyūṭī and Ibn al-Jazarī directly to twenty-first century classrooms, demonstrating that the classical discipline of *Qirā'āt* has not become obsolete but rather remains an active resource for resolving genuinely difficult legal questions³⁷.

Looking toward the future, digital archiving projects, audio recordings of the ten *Qirā'āt* by certified reciters, and renewed international scholarly interest in comparative *fiqh* promise to keep this science alive and accessible. At the same time, contemporary Muslim jurists face the challenge of applying *Qirā'āt*-based legal reasoning to novel issues such as Islamic finance, medical ethics, and family law reform, where a properly grounded knowledge of the variant readings can supply the flexibility needed for *ijtihad* without abandoning the textual foundation of the *Shari'ah*. It is reasonable to project that as global Islamic scholarship becomes more interconnected, the neglected *mutawātir* readings outside of Ḥafṣ will receive renewed attention from both classical seminaries and Western academic departments of Islamic studies alike³⁸.

Overall Assessment

The assessment of the evidence shows that *Qirā'āt* have a real but carefully defined impact on the interpretation of Qur'anic legal verses. Their influence may appear in grammar, lexical meaning, verb intensity, restriction and expansion of meaning, and the explanation of the causes of juristic disagreement. However, not every difference of recitation changes a legal ruling. Some readings simply provide different expressions of one meaning, while others strengthen a ruling already established by the Qur'an and Sunnah. The proper conclusion is therefore that *Qirā'āt* are an important interpretive instrument, but they must be used within the complete framework of Qur'anic sciences and *uṣūl al-fiqh*³⁹.

The examples of ablution, menstruation, *tahārah* and theft show the practical value of this conclusion. In the verse of ablution, the readings of *وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ* have long been discussed alongside Prophetic practice. In the verse of menstruation, *يَطْهَرْنَ* and *يُطَهَّرْنَ* help explain different understandings of purity. In the verse of *tahārah*, *لَا مَسَّ* has been examined through Arabic language, *Qirā'āt* and Sunnah. In the verse of theft, the canonical reading is interpreted with Prophetic specification and juristic conditions. These examples demonstrate that legal interpretation is strongest when the evidence is gathered rather than treated in isolation⁴⁰.

From the past to the present, the central lesson is one of continuity. The early scholars preserved the readings; the classical *mufasssīrūn* explained their meanings; the jurists considered their legal implications; and contemporary researchers continue to analyse their contribution. Future scholarship should build upon this chain rather than replace it. When *Qirā'āt* are taught together with *tafsīr*, Hadith, Arabic and *fiqh*, students will better understand why the Qur'an can contain richness of expression without contradiction. The study of *Qirā'āt* therefore remains not only a matter of correct recitation but also a key to deeper and more balanced understanding of the legal guidance of the Glorious Qur'an⁴¹.

³⁵ M. Q. al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāhiṭh fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, trans. none, Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Riyadh, 2000, pp. 358–362

³⁶ Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, UK Islamic Academy, Leicester, 2003, p. 154

³⁷ Muhammad Sani Umar, *Islam and Colonialism in Northern Nigeria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 88

³⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 102

³⁹ B. D. al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, trans. none, Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1980, pp. 318–324

⁴⁰ M. A. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6, trans. none, Mu'assasat al-Risālah, Beirut, 2006, pp. 91–96

⁴¹ M. Ṭ. Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 1, trans. none, al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li'l-Nashr, Tunis, 1984, pp. 54–60

Findings

- *Qirā'āt* can clarify the meanings of Qur'anic legal verses.
- Some recognised readings explain the roots of juristic disagreement.
- The Sunnah remains essential in deciding the practical legal effect of a reading.
- *Mutawātir* and *shādhah* readings must be clearly distinguished.
- The study of *Qirā'āt* remains useful for present and future Islamic legal scholarship.

Recommendations

- *Qirā'āt* should be taught alongside *Tafsīr* and *Fiqh*.
- Universities should give greater attention to legal verses affected by *Qirā'āt*.
- Students should be trained to distinguish *mutawātir* from *shādhah* readings.
- Classical *Qirā'āt* works should be linked with reliable digital resources.
- Further comparative studies should examine *Qirā'āt* and legal interpretation in contemporary Muslim societies.

Conclusion

Qirā'āt form part of the living scholarly tradition through which Muslims have preserved and understood the Glorious Qur'an. Their importance becomes particularly clear in Qur'anic legal verses, where a change of grammatical form or verbal structure may illuminate a legal meaning or explain a juristic difference. The classical scholars approached these differences with caution, combining recitation, language, *tafsīr*, Hadīth and *fiqh*. That method remains sound today. Modern scholarship should therefore preserve the discipline of the classical tradition while making responsible use of contemporary research and digital tools. In this way, the study of *Qirā'āt* can continue to connect the Qur'anic heritage of the past with the legal and educational needs of the present and the questions of the future.

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