
No, a Woman Did Not “Edit the Qur’an”: Towards a Methodologically Coherent Approach to a Tradition Portraying a Woman and Written Quranic Materials*

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Some traditions found in classical Muslim sources that variously depict the quranic text’s oral and written transmission and canonization portray female figures as involved in these processes. This suggests that in the academic study of such traditions, gender should be utilized as an analytical category. However, a recent feminist study treats them as historical reports. This article makes several propositions as to what a coherent methodological approach to such traditions entails. Then, using a tradition in which Ḥafṣa bt. ‘Umar (d. ca. 665 CE) is directed by her father to verify the “correct” rendering of a quranic verse as a case study, it shows why this cannot be read as straightforwardly historical, and demonstrates the potential of gender-focused analyses for the critical study of such traditions.

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IN THE YEAR 405 *hijrī* (1015 CE), the ‘*ulūm al-Qurʾān*’ chapter¹ from the *Jāmiʿ*, which is a compendium of traditions said to have been compiled by a well-known jurist from Cairo, ‘Abdallāh ibn Wahb (d. 197/812), was read out on two separate occasions at a learning circle of Muslim scholars in al-Qayrawān, in present-day Tunisia. As it has come down to us, this chapter contains about 287 traditions. Among these is a rare ḥadīth that presents an early Muslim female figure, Ḥafṣa bint ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. ca. 45 AH/665 CE), acting at the instigation of her father in order to obtain written as well as oral verification of the “correct” recitation of a quranic verse from Muḥammad. Ḥafṣa was a daughter of ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13-23/634-44), the second of the caliphs to lead the community after Muḥammad’s death, as well as one of Muḥammad’s wives.

How should this ḥadīth (henceforth, “the written verification tradition”) be understood? Can it be read as a historical account that moreover indicates that a woman played a key role in the pre-canonical shaping of the quranic text? A recent article written from a feminist perspective by Ruqayya Khan approaches it in this way, and furthermore interprets the written verification tradition as a key piece of evidence that Ḥafṣa may have “edited the Qurʾān” (Khan 2014).

A recurrent theme visible in some types of feminist scholarship on a number of different religious traditions has been a concern with unearthing “foremothers.” These tend to be women in a religious community’s past who reportedly played leadership roles, or otherwise exercised influence due to factors such as their patronage of male clergy, mystical experiences, or authorship of texts. Khan’s article is for the most part an example of this type of approach. However, she indicates that her study’s intended impact is significantly broader than might typically be expected for a project of this type. Khan expresses the hope that the claims and hypotheses she advances about Ḥafṣa’s role in the prehistory of the Qurʾān will help the field of quranic studies to move beyond what she describes as its androcentric tendencies and to take gender seriously as an analytical category (Khan 2014, 209–11).

For gender to be approached as an analytical category by those who study traditions that purport to describe how the quranic text was orally transmitted, written down, and finally canonized would be a highly desirable eventuality in my view; it would moreover constitute a noteworthy methodological development. But is this likely to take place if feminist

¹Literally, “sciences of the Qurʾān.” This classical Muslim genre of writing deals with a number of different aspects of the Qurʾān, such as its compilation, recitational variants, abrogating and abrogated verses, and ritual use.

work in quranic studies is based on reading traditions that associate Hafṣa and a few other early Muslim women with written quranic materials as though they are historical accounts of “what really happened,” with a focus on putative traces of female agency? This article begins with a discussion of methodology, which includes a series of propositions as to the characteristics of a coherent approach that employs gender as an analytical category to traditions of this type. Taking Khan’s interpretation of the written verification tradition as a case study, I examine the serious difficulties that can result from reading such traditions as historical accounts through the lens of a broader concern with reclaiming female agency.² Then, I present a methodologically coherent reading of the written verification tradition, based on the propositions outlined earlier. As will be demonstrated, the written verification tradition does not indicate that a woman “edited the Qur’ān.” Rather, it is an example of a ḥadīth utilizing gendered rhetoric to negotiate a controversy relating to an issue of textual authority. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the contribution that employing gender as an analytical category can make to a critical reading of available textual sources for the early history of the quranic text.

TOWARDS A METHODOLOGICALLY COHERENT APPROACH TO TRADITIONS DEPICTING WOMEN AND WRITTEN QURANIC MATERIALS

Historical-critical scholarship in quranic studies has rarely made use of feminist methodologies, and particularly not in work on the early history of the quranic text, as Khan correctly points out (2014, 177). This is perhaps to be expected in a methodologically conservative discipline whose practitioners have good reason to be wary of any approach that could be suspected of being rooted in theological, political, or anachronistic social concerns. But as understandable as reluctance to employ any methodology focusing on gender in scholarship on the Qur’ān’s early history may be, it is arguably a loss to the field. When history is written in ways that do not interrogate the gendered dynamics of the source materials used, then it risks uncritically reproducing the ideological-theological constructs that they contain. Feminist approaches to history at their best

²While the written verification tradition is utilized as a central piece of evidence for Khan’s suggestion that Hafṣa “edited the Qur’ān,” her argument also employs a number of other hadiths from several different types of sources, including biographical works. For reasons of focus as well as space, this article does not examine most of these other hadiths. However, in my view, the methodological difficulties involved in Khan’s reading of the written verification tradition generally extend to her approach to these other hadiths as well.

are fundamentally critical, and examine the larger social, political, and economic factors that have shaped (and continue to shape) constructions of the past as gendered in particular ways. Feminist research in quranic studies can and should build upon already-existing best practices found in scholarship on gender in early Christian studies (e.g., Kraemer 2011; Haines-Eitzen 2012), as well as in medieval and early modern Muslim history (e.g., Spellberg 1994; El Cheikh 2015; Najmabadi 2005), while avoiding the pitfall of constructing new feminist myths in the guise of history (Meisami 2006).

I take for granted the existence of a multiplicity of possible feminist approaches to historical questions, as well as a diversity of aims and intended audiences for such studies. However, my purpose here is to discuss feminist approaches to the pre- and early history of the quranic text that are (1) historical rather than theological, (2) designed to examine the past on its own terms and with all of its complexities, (3) methodologically coherent, and (4) likely to contribute constructively to the critical academic study of the Qurʾān. I propose that any feminist methodology of this type would be based on the following premises:

- (1) Until a broader scholarly consensus regarding the ongoing debates within the field of quranic studies about the early history of the quranic text (Sinai 2014) emerges, it is probably premature to attempt to definitively link traditions associating early Muslim female figures with written quranic materials to historical events that reportedly took place in the first/seventh century. Any such links should only be made with extreme caution.
- (2) When utilizing any classical work, and especially one that is conventionally dated to the first few centuries of Muslim history, it must be asked who authored it, when its contents achieved a fixed form, whether it circulated in multiple recensions, and what can be known about its history of redaction and transmission (Schoeler 2004).
- (3) In view of the historical questions regarding the provenance and transmission of ḥadīths, no tradition can be simply presumed to go back to Muḥammad or his early followers. Existing methods of dating ḥadīths (e.g., Juynboll 2007; Motzki 2005; Sadeghi 2010) should be used whenever possible.
- (4) Utilizing traditions as potential sources for reconstructing historical events, or in order to examine how an event that is said to have taken place in the past later came to be memorialized, are significantly different undertakings and should be approached as such.

- (5) In view of the scholarship calling attention to the ways that individual ḥadīths have undergone literary shaping (Günther 1998, 2000), and raising important questions about their relationship to historical “truth” even in the minds of their early transmitters and compilers (Brown 2009), no tradition can be approached as though it provides raw, unmediated historical data. Any literary *topoi* that a ḥadīth may contain need to be identified and their implications for how it is to be read evaluated.
- (6) An important part of any effort to assess the “meaning(s)” that any ḥadīth has been held to have and how these may have shifted through time is to read it within the literary context(s) of the source(s) through which it has come down to us. This is particularly the case with rare and obscure ḥadīths.³
- (7) When utilizing gender as an analytical category, it is insufficient to single out female characters in a tradition or classical source for a gender-focused reading, while ignoring any other figures that might be depicted in the same text. Rather, all characters should be critically analyzed as gendered figures (Najmabadi 2005).

READING FOR HISTORICAL DATA AND EVIDENCE OF WOMEN’S AGENCY: A CASE STUDY

The *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* chapter of the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Wahb* within which the written verification tradition appears has come down to us in one manuscript, Qairawān no. 224, which is housed in al-Maktaba al-‘Atīqa in al-Qayrawān, Tunisia. Miklos Muranyi prepared a critical edition of this work, published in Wiesbaden (Ibn Wahb 1992). This edition contains photographs of each page of the manuscript in addition to the printed transcription, enabling the reader to verify the accuracy of the latter; therefore, this edition should be used in any detailed scholarly study of traditions found in this work. Another edition (also edited by Muranyi) was published in Beirut (Ibn Wahb 2003).

The written verification tradition is quite obscure, and prior to the publication of Khan’s article it had received virtually no attention. The main exception, aside from a few short comments by Muranyi,⁴ is a brief discussion of it in my doctoral thesis, which examines it as a literary

³Points two through five reflect mainstream practices in academic scholarship that approach ḥadīths as potential historical sources. In point six, I further develop these practices, extending and adapting them to the particular issues involved in attempting to make historical sense of rare and obscure ḥadīths. For this point’s application to the written verification tradition, see below.

⁴For more on these, see below.

portrayal and takes no position as to its possible relationship to historical events (Geissinger 2008). The following translation of the written verification tradition is my own, using the 1992 edition:

He said, and Ibn Lahī‘a informed me on the authority of Abū l-Aswad, (who) said, “I saw (written in) ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex, ‘The People of the Book and the idolaters, professing Judaism and Christianity and Zoroastrianism—and certainly the (true) religion is monotheism surrendering (to God), contrary to polytheism—will not cease to be disunited until the clear evidence comes to them.’”

Abū l-Aswad said (that) ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr said, “People differed regarding the recitation of *Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book*. . . (Q 98:1),⁵ so ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb went to visit Ḥaḥṣa, (bringing) with (him a piece of) tanned skin. He said (to her), ‘If the Messenger of God comes to you, ask him to teach you *Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book*. . . , and tell him to write it for you on this (piece of) tanned skin.’ She did (this). He (Muḥammad) wrote it for her, and it was in accord with the majority reading (*fa-hiya ‘alā qirā’ati l-‘amma*).” (Ibn Wahb 1992: fol. 13a, lines 14–21)⁶

In her article, Khan ignores the first half of this tradition, but provides a translation of the second half, citing the 2003 edition. While in the main her translation differs little from mine, it diverges at a crucial point, when she mistranslates the last sentence as “This reading became public and widespread (*‘amma*)” (Khan 2014, 191).

It would seem that this mistranslation came about in part because Khan used only the 2003 edition of the work. This edition renders the last sentence in the written verification tradition as “*fa-hiya qirā’atu l-‘amma*” (Ibn Wahb 2003, 62), although the “*‘alā*” (“in accord with”) is clearly visible in the photographic reproductions of the manuscript (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 13a). The footnotes provided for this tradition in the 2003 edition do not provide any clue as to why the “*‘alā*” is absent, which suggests that this may be a printer’s error. Nevertheless, “*fa-hiya qirā’atu l-‘amma*” is best translated in this context as “and it was [in accord with] the majority

⁵All translations from the Qur’an are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem 2011.

⁶“Qāla wa-akhbaranī Ibn Lahī‘a ‘an Abī l-Aswad qāla: ra’aytu muṣḥaf ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd, ‘lam yakun ahl al-kitāb wa-l-mushrikīn dhāt al-yahūdīyya wa-l-naṣrānīyya wa-l-majūsīyya wa inna l-dīn al-ḥanīfiyya al-muslima ghayr al-mushrika lam yakūnū muftariqīn ḥattā ta’ṭiyahumu l-bayyina.’ Wa qāla Abū l-Aswad wa qāla ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr: inna l-nās akhtalafū fī qirā’a lam yakun illadhīna kafarū min ahli l-kitāb, fa-dakhala ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ‘alā Ḥaḥṣa bi-adīm fa-qāla: idhā dakhala ‘alayki Rasūl Allāh sall Allāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallam fa-s’alīhi yu’allimuki lam yakun illadhīna kafarū min ahli l-kitāb. Wa qūli la-hu yaktubu-hā la-ki fī hādihā l-adīm. Fa-fa’alat fa-kataba-hā la-hā fa-hiya ‘alā qirā’ati l-‘amma.”

reading.” There is no grammatical or contextual reason to understand this in any other way. The word *‘amma* here is a technical term, meaning the manner of reading of the majority of Qur’ān reciters (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 482–84). It should be further noted that this is an anachronism; neither the concept of majority readings nor this term existed when Muḥammad was alive.⁷ This raises the question of when this tradition (at least, in the form that we now have it) was put into circulation—in the late second/eighth or early third/ninth centuries?⁸ However, Khan’s concern with unearthing evidence of Ḥafṣa’s exercise of agency “in the process of how the Qur’ān came to be formed as a text” (Khan 2014, 209) appears to have played a role in directing her attention to the features of this ḥadīth that might give the impression of having relevance to that quest, and away from its seemingly less salient aspects.

This mistranslation coupled with a search for traces of Ḥafṣa’s agency and authority is the lens through which Khan interprets the second half of the written verification tradition. She asserts that in this tradition

Ḥafṣa is clearly portrayed as being conversant with reciting, reading, writing, and even editing Qur’ānic material. Muḥammad is shown instructing Ḥafṣa in the Qur’ān as well as writing Qur’ānic verses for her. Evidently, her father ‘Umar regarded her as an authority on the oral and written Qur’ān, because he seeks her out when it came to sort out competing recitations of Qur’ānic verses. [...] ‘Umar is shown as asking Ḥafṣa to edit the Qur’ān on the basis of Muḥammad ‘teaching’ her the correct recitation and writing of the said verse. It is also noteworthy that Ḥafṣa’s edited version of the verse is then presumably orally disseminated, and it is described as becoming the community’s common and prevailing reading. Moreover, it is revealing that Ḥafṣa is shown functioning as a significant “go-between” in the relation involving the prophet and ‘Umar—a “go-between” role that unfolds as part of the communication process concerning Qur’ānic materials. Importantly, this account provides a glimpse into a plausible context for the emergence of what [Angelika] Neuwirth has termed the ‘still-fluid pre-canonical text’ of the Qur’ān.” (Khan 2014, 191–92)

Unfortunately, there is a pronounced gap between this interpretation and the actual wording of the tradition. It is difficult to see why Khan asserts that “‘Umar is shown as asking Ḥafṣa to edit the Qur’ān on the basis

⁷I would like to thank Shady Hekmat Nasser for informing me about the meaning of this term, as well as the fact that it is an anachronism.

⁸The grammarian Sibawayh (d. ca. 180/796) uses this term, as do al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822) and Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 223 or 4/838), a specialist in quranic readings (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 474, n. 23, 482, n. 80, 484; al-Farrā’ 2003, II, 12, 16).

of Muḥammad ‘teaching’ her the correct recitation and writing of the said verse” (Khan 2014, 191–92), when in this tradition, Ḥafṣa is instructed by ‘Umar to ask the prophet to teach her this verse *and* to tell him to write it for her (. . . *fa-sʾalihī yuʿallimu-ki lam yakun illadhīna kafarū min ahli l-kitāb wa qūli la-hu yaktubu-hā la-ki. . .*”), and we are told that she did this, and he wrote it for her (*fa-faʿalat fa-kataba-hā la-hā*). These two actions—teaching her how to recite it correctly, and writing it out for her—are specified separately in the written verification tradition; there is no suggestion that Muḥammad taught her how to write it. Nor is ‘Umar directing Ḥafṣa to “edit” the text anywhere in this tradition. If one were to presume that any editing is depicted here, then it is being carried out by Muḥammad himself, as he is the one who is said to have correctly written out the verse. Ḥafṣa is not represented here as writing anything, nor as doing anything with the writing that she obtains from him.

It appears that Khan’s claim that this tradition portrays Ḥafṣa reading, writing, and editing results in part from her interpretation of the written verification tradition in light of a few ḥadīths that do present her as able to read and/or write (e.g., Khan 2014, 192; Geissinger 2015, 252). But no attempt has been made thus far to date or critically examine any of these ḥadīths, and their historical veracity cannot simply be presumed.

Whether the written verification tradition in and of itself can be said to impute any authority to Ḥafṣa is unclear at best. It foregrounds ‘Umar’s concern about differences of opinion regarding the “correct” recitation of the opening verse of Sūra 98—“Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book. . .”—by means of a few well-known *topoi*. That he instructs his daughter Ḥafṣa to obtain the “correct” rendition of this verse or sūra, orally as well as in writing from the hand of Muḥammad himself, can be described as a particularly pointed depiction of ‘Umar’s strong desire to put a stop to communal debates about its exact wording. This is a *topos*; a number of ḥadīths attribute to ‘Umar a zealous concern with reining in variations in quranic recitation, during Muḥammad’s lifetime as well as later, presumably after he had become caliph.⁹

But this tradition neither states nor suggests that Ḥafṣa herself had previously been aware of this controversy about the recitation of the opening verse of S. 98, much less that ‘Umar regarded her as “an authority on the oral and written Qurʾān.” Rather, the initiative in this anecdote all seems to come from ‘Umar, who, in accordance with another *topos*, is

⁹In a well-known ḥadīth ‘Umar objects to a man’s recitation of S. 25 that differs from his own, so he takes him to Muḥammad. The latter declares that both men’s readings are correct, for the Qurʾān was revealed in seven different *ahruf*, or modes (al-Bukhārī 1979: VI, 482–83). For the transmission history of this ḥadīth, see Nasser 2013, 25, 29. For an example of ‘Umar policing variant recitations after Muḥammad’s death, see below.

portrayed as being more aware of and concerned about this debate than even Muḥammad himself.¹⁰ When the second half of the written verification tradition is read in concert with the first, it becomes clear that it is ‘Umar’s religious authority, constructed over against that of ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ud (d. 32/652–53), which is the focus here. Khan’s decision to ignore the first half of the written verification tradition unfortunately set the stage for an interpretation of it that fails to consider the implications of its reference to Ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex for how the role that it attributes to Ḥafṣa is best understood.

The written verification tradition does not indicate what subsequently happened to this written verse. It does not tell us whether she conveyed it to ‘Umar, nor if she recited its now-authoritatively verified rendition to him. Finally, how ‘Urwa (d. 92–101/711–20) is supposed to have learned of this incident is unclear. If it had occurred, it would have taken place before his birth; his name does not appear among those who are said to have transmitted from Ḥafṣa (al-Mizzī 1992, XXXV, 154). Nevertheless, Khan utilizes her interpretation of the written verification tradition as a key piece of evidence in favor of her hypothesis that Ḥafṣa played a central role in the development of the quranic text.

As is well known, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) recounts two traditions in the chapter on the merits of the Qur’ān in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*¹¹ about the compilation of Muḥammad’s revelations in written form. According to the first of these, its collection was undertaken at ‘Umar’s instigation, during the reign of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–34). The second collection tradition presents the definitive compilation of the text as having occurred during the reign of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 24–35/664–56), who wanted to unify the community around a single recension (al-Bukhārī 1979, VI, 477–80). Some scholars have hypothesized that while the collection under ‘Uthmān did take place, the tradition about the compilation during Abū Bakr’s reign was a later fiction intended to augment the authority of ‘Uthmān’s recension; this is said to have occurred because ‘Uthmān was a rather controversial figure in some circles (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 231). Adapting this hypothesis, Khan conjectures that in fact the tradition about the collection under Abū Bakr may have been fabricated “to suppress and marginalize agency attributed to Ḥafṣa as an editor and/or scribe of quranic writings. She further speculates that measures were taken to obscure her role in the history of the quranic text because Ḥafṣa was not only a woman, but likely a controversial figure, as

¹⁰For other examples of this *topos*, see Hakim 2006, 209–18; Geissinger 2015, 217–20.

¹¹For other versions of these traditions, some of which appear in sources that are arguably earlier, see Motzki 2001.

she had once been divorced by Muḥammad (Khan 2014, 206). But for such a hypothesis to be seriously entertained, more than circumstantial evidence would have to be provided.¹²

Khan’s search for examples of Hafṣa’s agency and authority has shaped her interpretation of the written verification tradition, and this focus raises several complex theoretical issues. Among these are the question of what exactly is being sought; the manifold historical problems involved in trying to recover traces of an early Muslim woman’s agency from traditions that were apparently transmitted orally over at least several generations before being written down; and the methodological ramifications of such a quest. The case study just discussed illustrates the central role that the research questions one asks can play in shaping results. Focusing on putative instances of female agency in ancient texts that do not address this issue in any contemporary sense can all too easily lend itself to the decontextualization of the “examples” one finds, their anachronistic recontextualization within our own fields of reference, and finally, to the construction of new myths.

TOWARDS A METHODOLOGICALLY COHERENT APPROACH TO THE WRITTEN VERIFICATION TRADITION

Returning to the question of what a methodologically coherent approach to the written verification tradition that utilizes gender as an analytical category would look like, let us begin by considering the question of its probable age and historicity. The colophon of Qairawān no. 224 states that the text as a whole was read aloud at two learning sessions in the year 405/1015, and that it was transmitted by ‘Abdallāh ibn Masrūr (d. 346/958) from ‘Iysā [ibn Miskīn] (d. 295/907), on the authority of Saḥnūn (d. 240/854). All of these men were North African scholars, and in the case of the latter two, jurists.¹³

¹²This theory about the impact of Hafṣa’s divorce (reportedly revoked by Muhammad on divine command) fails to adequately account for several factors: (1) classical biographies of Muḥammad’s followers suggest that divorce was fairly common at that time and seldom stigmatizing, even for elite women; (2) some ḥadīths about Hafṣa’s divorce and its revocation focus on the implications for ‘Umar’s religious status, which suggests that this may well have played a key role in shaping at least some retellings of this incident—and reminds us that they cannot be read as transcripts of historical events; (3) the notion that being female and having a controversial reputation was enough to have one’s contributions erased leaves one wondering how ‘Ā’isha bint Abī Bakr (d. 58/678) came to be memorialized by Sunnis as a major source of religious knowledge, including of a number of variant quranic readings quoted in some classical Qurʾān commentaries (Spellberg 1994; Geissinger 2011, 2015).

¹³For Ibn Masrūr, see al-Dhahabī 1998, 352–53, years 341–50 AH; for Ibn Miskīn, see al-Dhahabī 1998, 222–23, years 291–300 AH.

Questions have been raised about the age of the contents of Qairawān no. 224, with some arguing that it most probably dates to the late third/ninth century (Rippin 1995, 323; Berg 2000, 87). To the extent that one has confidence in the historical veracity of the manuscript's self-attribution to Ibn Wahb, it is possible to surmise that the text dates back to the late second/eighth century in some form. However, this would not rule out the possibility that redaction or unintentional alteration of the text might have occurred in the intervening century.

As I have not thus far been able to locate the written verification tradition (or any other versions of it) in any other text, it is not possible at this time to attempt to determine when it was first put into circulation through an analysis of multiple *isnāds*, or chains of transmission (e.g., Juynboll 2007; Motzki 2005). One can, however, critically examine the *isnād* as well as the body (*matn*) of this ḥadīth for clues.

As we have seen above, the written verification tradition recounts that Abū l-Aswad (d. 131/748)—who reportedly spent his early life in Medina in the household of ʿUrwa,¹⁴ but subsequently settled in Egypt, where he transmitted ḥadīth and ʿUrwa's book on the prophet's military expeditions¹⁵—sees a variant version of Q 98:1 written in a codex. This rendition of the verse, which departs noticeably from that found in Qurʾāns today, is said to have been written in a codex that had belonged to Ibn Masʿūd, a Meccan memorialized as an early convert who had extensive knowledge of Muḥammad's revelations (al-Bukhārī 1979, VI, 486–88). Abū l-Aswad is said here to have told Ibn Lahīʿa (d. 174/790–91), an Egyptian jurist and ḥadīth scholar from whom Ibn Wahb reportedly learned and transmitted,¹⁶ about what he had seen in this codex.

Moreover, Abū l-Aswad—who is positioned in the written verification tradition as the figure who connects what may have “originally” been two separate traditions—is also credited here with recounting an incident pertaining to this very quranic verse, on the authority of ʿUrwa. He relates that during Muḥammad's lifetime, the way to recite Q 98:1 was disputed. ʿUmar, seeking to decisively address this situation, intervenes. He visits his daughter Ḥafṣa, and tells her to ask Muḥammad to teach her the recitation of this verse, and also to ask him to write it for her. She does as ʿUmar directs her. The prophet writes it, and it is “in accord with the majority reading.”

¹⁴ʿUrwa [ibn al-Zubayr] is memorialized as a transmitter of biographical materials about Muḥammad and a prolific source of ḥadīths, as well as a jurist; see al-Dhahabī 1998, 424–29, years 81–100 AH.

¹⁵Abū l-Aswad Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Nawfal; see al-Dhahabī 1998, 530–31, years 121–40 AH.

¹⁶ʿAbdallah ibn Lahīʿa; see al-Dhahabī 1998, 217–25, years 171–80 AH.

Thus, while the written verification tradition depicts Ḥafṣa verifying the “correct” rendition of Q 98:1 at ‘Umar’s behest, this portrayal is framed as an anecdote that was told and retold at several different times and in at least two different geographical regions in order to stake out a position in an ongoing debate: which quranic readings can be deemed acceptable for general use, particularly in ritual. Such framing suggests that the form of the entire tradition (at least, as we now have it) was decisively shaped by this controversy, if it did not originate with it.

While this ḥadīth’s portrayal of Muḥammad writing is unusual, several other traditions that present him reading or writing also exist, and a few quranic verses could also suggest some degree of literacy (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 9–12; Günther 2002, 7–9, 26 n. 127). However, that the written verification tradition depicts Muḥammad writing the first verse of Sūra 98 in order to put an end to differences of opinion as to its correct reading is perhaps too convenient a “resolution” to the debate when one considers the fact that the second verse of this sūra—which reads, “a messenger from God, reading out purified scrolls”—could be understood as presenting Muḥammad as at least partially literate.¹⁷ This is another indication that even the ostensibly “earliest” part of the written verification tradition is unlikely to be an unmediated reflection of a historical incident.

Given these considerations, the written verification tradition cannot be taken at face value or presumed to describe the actual nature of Ḥafṣa’s reported involvement in the precanonical history of the quranic text. What, then, is it about, and how should it be read? In what follows, it will be demonstrated that when this ḥadīth is read within its larger textual context—that is, the *‘ulūm al-Qurʾān* chapter of the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Waḥb*—and gender is employed as an analytical category in its interpretation, it illuminates the roles played by gendered rhetoric within this text. Moreover, as we will see, the “meaning” that this ḥadīth might be thought to have has shifted through time.

The main elements that make up the written verification tradition as we now have it are (1) Abū l-Aswad sees a version of Q 98:1 in a codex, (2) disagreements about the recitation of Q 98:1 occur while Muḥammad is alive, (3) ‘Umar takes the lead in order to establish its “correct” rendering, and (4) Ḥafṣa, complying with her father’s instructions to her, asks

¹⁷Medieval exegeses of Q 98:2 often take up the question of how Muḥammad could be described as reading in this verse, when he is believed to have been illiterate (for an overview of this doctrinal issue, see Günther 2002). One interpretation that came to be fairly standard is that the verse does not mean that he read from a written text, but that he recited it from memory (e.g., al-Wāḥidī 2009, XXIV, 210; I would like to thank Walid Saleh for this source). Al-Wāḥidī died in 468/1076; significantly, however, some earlier exegetes, such as Muqātil (d. 150/767) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) do not seem to regard this question verse as theologically problematic, as they do not discuss it.

Muḥammad to teach her the verse and to write it down as well. In what follows, these elements will be more closely examined.

Ibn Masʿūd's Codex

A number of sources conventionally regarded as early present Ibn Masʿūd as the possessor of his own codex, which is said to have differed in some significant ways from the ʿUthmānic recension (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 238–44). In a collection tradition, Ibn Masʿūd strenuously objects to the command to surrender his codex so that it can be destroyed, an order that ʿUthmān is said to have given so that the edition he had promulgated would be universally accepted (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 5b, lines 11–15). Another tradition has Ibn Masʿūd scornfully refusing to adopt this recension, averring that he had already learned 70 sūras while Zayd ibn Thābit, the person who had famously overseen its preparation, “was still in the loins of an unbeliever” (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 6a, lines 18–21). It is probable that traditions such as these were “originally” meant to suggest that Ibn Masʿūd's codex had a stronger claim to completeness and accuracy than ʿUthmān's recension. They likely reflect local preference in the Iraqi city of Kūfa for that codex (Schnizer 2006, 166–67), which apparently continued to some extent into the second/eighth century (Nasser 2013, 56–57). However, in the *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* chapter in the *Jāmiʿ*, such traditions seem to be intended to polemically depict it as an anti-codex, whose ghostly existence paradoxically underscores the authority of ʿUthmān's recension.

Nonetheless, this chapter at times depicts Ibn Masʿūd's codex and his reported recitational practices in seemingly neutral or even positive ways. One tradition cites a variant rendering of a word that is said to have been found in his codex, with no suggestion that this raises any problematic issue (1992, fol. 11b, lines 6–9). Ibn Masʿūd's reputed practices and instructions regarding the ritual prostration (*sajda*) when certain verses are recited are noted (e.g., 1992, fol. 20b, lines 16–17). A couple of traditions even present him and ʿUmar in agreement that the *iʿrāb* (case endings) ought to be written in codices (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 8b, lines 9–12). Another tradition relates that when two men came to Ibn Masʿūd differing over how to recite a verse, he sided with the man who followed ʿUmar's recitation (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 11b, lines 9–16).

Still, some other traditions associate Ibn Masʿūd with recitational practices that appear to have been permitted at one time, but later were deemed unacceptable. One such tradition allows departure from the consonantal skeleton of ʿUthmān's recension. It recounts that Ibn Masʿūd instructed a non-Arab who could not properly pronounce a word to instead

recite it using a synonym that he found easier to say, so that the meaning of the verse would not be affected by this mispronunciation.¹⁸ Two traditions credit Ibn Masʿūd with the view that when there is doubt as to whether a verb should be read in the masculine or feminine form, one adopts the former—“If you differ regarding the (letters) *yāʾ* or *tāʾ* in the Qurʾān, then make the Qurʾān masculine (*fa-dhakkirū l-Qurʾān*), for surely the Qurʾān is masculine (*mudhakkar*)” (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 9b, lines 14–15). These latter traditions presuppose either that codices without markings to differentiate between letters with the same or similar shapes are in use, or that reciters are not necessarily bound by such markings.¹⁹ The notion that the grammatical masculine is the Qurʾān’s default plays upon its self-described status as a reminder (*dhikr*, e.g. Q 15:9),²⁰ while implying that the text is fundamentally masculine in some sense—and polemically associating reciters’ (and in particular, Ibn Masʿūd’s) discretionary freedom to make such recitational determinations about verbal forms with (free) masculinity.

Disagreements about the Recitation/Writing of Q 98:1

While the written verification tradition states that there was debate about the “correct” reading of this verse during Muḥammad’s lifetime,²¹ it implies that this was resolved while he was still alive, and portrays the way that it was reportedly written in Ibn Masʿūd’s codex as a mere anomaly. However, this represents a significant (and also polemical) oversimplification of what some other sources present as a more complex situation. Miklos Muranyi calls attention to the existence of traditions recounting variant versions of S. 98, which are said to have been recited by Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. ca. 22/642), as well as ḥadīths recounting that Muḥammad had been divinely instructed to recite this particular sūra to Ubayy. Significantly, Ubayy is associated in classical sources with variant versions of Q 98:1 as well as of Sūra 98 (Ibn Wahb 1992, 36).

As someone who was memorialized as having had detailed and expert knowledge of Muḥammad’s revelations (al-Bukhārī 1979, VI, 486–89), the audience/reader might well presume that Ubayy would know the “correct” recitation of S. 98 better than most. Yet some of the versions of it attributed to him diverge markedly from the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of

¹⁸It should be noted that the next tradition relates that when Mālik bin Anas (d. 179/796) was asked about this practice, he allowed it (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 11b, lines 17–23 to fol. 12, line 1).

¹⁹For the use (or more often, non-use) of such markings in an early Qurʾān manuscript, see Déroche 2014, 20–21.

²⁰The words “*mudhakkar*” and “*dhikr*” share the same root (dh-k-r).

²¹That is, at some point after the *hijra* in 622 CE, during the Medinan half of his career.

the ‘Uthmānic recension. While the historicity of such versions is very dubious (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 189–95, 248), Ubayy’s representation in traditions of this type constitutes an interesting parallel to Ibn Mas‘ūd. Interestingly, both of these men are portrayed as very knowledgeable about the recitation of Muḥammad’s revelations, and Ubayy is likewise said to have had his own codex, which differed in some noteworthy ways from ‘Uthman’s recension (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 244–46). Both are also said to have continued to recite versions of some quranic verses that diverged from those held to be “correct” by many of their contemporaries and to have claimed the authority to do so because they had learned to recite Muḥammad’s revelations directly from him. Moreover, this stance put both men in conflict with caliphal authority; a number of traditions portray ‘Umar attempting to police Ubayy’s recitations (al-Bukhārī 1979, VI, 489; Al-Suyūṭī 2002, VIII, 586–87). Nonetheless, both Ubayy and Ibn Mas‘ūd became oft-cited authorities in quranic exegesis as to how various verses should be recited. This is the case even for S. 98: classical interpretations of this sūra frequently quote variant recitations attributed to one or both men—though these do not differ quite so flagrantly from the consonantal skeleton of the ‘Uthmānic recension as the example referred to above—for their exegetical value.²² Thus, both men are represented as having had an ambivalent and rather paradoxical relationship to the recension of the Qur’ān promulgated by ‘Uthmān.

The written verification tradition states that in Ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex, Q 98:1, was written as follows:

The People of the Book and the idolaters, professing Judaism and Christianity and Zoroastrianism—and certainly the [true] religion is monotheism surrendering [to God], contrary to polytheism—will not cease to be disunited until the clear evidence comes to them (*lam yakun ahl al-kitāb wa-l-mushrikīna dhāt al-yahūdiyya wa-l-naṣrāniyya wa-l-majūsiyya wa inna l-dīn al-ḥanīfiyya l-muslima ghayr al-mushrika lam yakūnū muftariqīna ḥattā ta’tiyahumu l-bayyina*).

²²For example, al-Māturīdī’s (d. 333/944) Qur’ān commentary states that Ubayy recited Q 98:1 as “*mā kāna lladhīna ashraḳū min ahl al-kitāb wa-l-mushrikīn. . .*” (Those who associate [i.e., others with God] among the People of the Book and the polytheists were not. . .), while Ibn Mas‘ūd is said to have recited it as “*lam yakun al-mushrikūn wa ahlu l-kitāb munafakkīn. . .*” (The polytheists and the People of the Book were not about to cease. . .”) (2005, XVII, 284; see also al-Farrā’ 2003, III, 290; Ibn Khalawayh 2012, 356). Al-Tha’labī (d. 427/1035) states that this reading attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd was found in his codex, and ascribes a recitation to Ubayy that differs somewhat in wording from that found in al-Māturīdī (al-Tha’labī 2004, VI, 515).

The verse as it appears in most Qurʾāns today (following the reading of Ḥafṣ)²³ reads:

Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters were not about to cease until clear evidence comes to them (*lam yakun illadhīna kafarū min ahli l-kitābi wa-l-mushrikīna munfakkīna hattā taʿtiyahumu l-bayyina*).

The wording said to have been found in Ibn Masʿūd’s codex is elaborative and exegetical. It evidently responds to several interpretive debates about an already-existing version of the verse, naming the religious communities that are included in the quranic expression, “People of the Book,” and “clarifying” the meaning of “those who disbelieve among . . . the idolaters” so that clear boundaries are drawn between monotheism and paganism.²⁴ Several of the words used—*yahūdiyya* (Judaism), *naṣrāniyya* (Christianity), *ḥanīfiyya*—are non-quranic (Nöldeke et al. 2013, 195), as is *majūsiyya* (Zoroastrianism). This latter word strongly suggests that this rendering of the verse reflects concerns that arose after the Arabs had conquered territories with significant Zoroastrian populations, that is, after about 23/644. Also, by seemingly substituting the word *muftariqīn* (disunited) for *munfakkīn*, the codex of Ibn Masʿūd is presented as resolving debates about the meaning of the latter word here (“cease” or “divided”?).²⁵ Such concerns are evident in a number of exegetical works (e.g., Muqātil 2003, III, 504; al-Farrāʾ 2003, III, 290; al-Ṭabarī 2003, XXIV, 551–52; al-Māturidī 2005, XVII, 283–85).

ʿUmar Intervenes

In the *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* chapter in the *Jāmiʿ Ibn Wahb*, an important component of ʿUmar’s image is his reported involvement in the collection of Muḥammad’s revelations, which reportedly had not been systematically or authoritatively compiled during the latter’s lifetime. In part, this appears to be a Sunnī assertion of his religious merits and authority in the face of Shīʿī denial of these (e.g., Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 5a, lines 7–9). However, the larger concern seems to be to construct ʿUmar’s image as a bulwark against disorder and communal disintegration, here symbolized

²³For other canonical recitations of this verse, see al-Khatīb 2002, X, 523–24.

²⁴The use of the word *ḥanīfiyya* (monotheism) takes up a word in verse 5 of this sūra, *ḥunafāʾ* (pl. of “*ḥanīf*,” meaning monotheist). Elsewhere, the Qurʾān describes Abraham as a *ḥanīf*, meaning a pre-Islamic monotheist who was neither a Jew nor a Christian; e.g., Q 2:135; 3:67.

²⁵This word choice attributed to Ibn Masʿūd’s codex (*muftariqīn*, “disunited”) also echoes Q 98:4—“Those who were given the Scripture became divided (*tafarraqa*) only after they were sent clear evidence.”

by the threat of the loss of the scripture or conflict regarding it—a characterization of ‘Umar that Ibn Mas‘ūd himself freely affirms in one tradition (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 11b, lines 9–16).

This ‘*ulūm al-Qur‘ān*’ chapter contains four collection traditions, which differ in a number of details. Nonetheless, they all variously present ‘Umar as having played an active and often also central role in the process of collecting Muḥammad’s revelations:

Collection tradition 1²⁶

He (i.e., Ibn Wahb) said: And the first to [collect the *qur‘ān*²⁷]. . . by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and that was when Companions of the Messenger of God were killed. . . [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq said to ‘Umar, “So, who will write it?” He replied, ‘Zayd ibn Thābit; he (is) intelligent . . . the Messenger of God.” And Zayd wrote it. The people used to come to Zayd ibn Thābit . . . a verse except with an upright witness. The end of Sūrat al-Barā‘a (S. 9) was not found except with Khuzayma ibn Thābit, so he said . . . “Write them, for surely the Messenger of God made his witness equivalent to the witness of two men,” and they were written.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb came with the Stoning Verse,²⁸ but they did not write it, because he was alone (i.e., without another witness).

When they were finished with that codex (*muṣḥaf*), it was with Abū Bakr, then after that with ‘Umar, then after ‘Umar with Ḥafṣa, wife of the Prophet—until Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān came to ‘Uthmān and said, “Commander of the Faithful, I have heard people differing about the *qur‘ān*. One man says (to another), “The mode of recitation that I recite in accordance with is better than your mode of recitation.”

So, ‘Uthmān sent (a message) to Ḥafṣa, that she send it to him.

She replied, “If you return it to me.”

He said, “Yes.”

²⁶While this tradition appears to have been cobbled together from what were “originally” three different traditions, a discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this article. Here, it will be read as a literary whole. Words in square brackets are my translations of Muranyi’s reconstructions of the text. Portions where damage to the manuscript resulted in text being illegible or missing are indicated with dots.

²⁷I use the term *qur‘ān* here to mean Muḥammad’s revelations in recited or written form prior to their official compilation as a written text that was canonized (“Qur‘ān”).

²⁸This supposed quranic verse (which is not found in Qur‘āns today) is said to have specified that the penalty for adultery is stoning; see Nöldeke et al. 2013, 199–201.

He (i.e., Ibn Wahb) said: And he (i.e., ʿUthmān) copied codices (*maṣāḥif*) from them (i.e., the quranic writings kept by Ḥafṣa) and sent these to the far regions (of the empire). He ordered that they send him what was with them of them (i.e., other quranic writings), and instructed that they be burned.

He (ʿUthmān) said, “Whoever keeps back any part of those (writings) for himself, then they are (as) stolen goods (*ghulūl*)!”

Ibn Masʿūd responded, “I heard (the contents of) this codex of mine from the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him! God says, ‘... anyone who does so (i.e. dishonestly takes something from the battle gains) will carry it with him on the Day of Resurrection’ (Q 3:161)—so I will steal it (*aghulluhu*) until I meet God with it on the Day of Resurrection!”

He (i.e., Ibn Wahb) said: When the *qurʾān* was collected, he (ʿUthmān?) appointed Zayd ibn Thābit and Ubayy ibn Kaʿb; they both wrote out the Qurʾān, and he put with those two men Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ, to insert the case endings. Ubayy ibn Kaʿb said, “*Al-tābūh*,”²⁹ and Saʿīd said, “It is certainly “*al-tābūt*,” and ʿUthmān said, “Write it as Saʿīd says—*al-tābūt*.” And they wrote *al-tābūt*.³⁰ (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 5b, lines 1–18)

Collection tradition 2

Ibn Abī l-Zinād—Hishām ibn ʿUrwa—his father (ʿUrwa): After the killing of many reciters of the revelation (*qurra*), Abū Bakr feared that the *qurʾān* would disappear. He told ʿUmar and Zayd ibn Thābit [to sit at the door of the mosque, and whoever comes] to them with two witnesses to any part of the Book [of God, then] write it (down). (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 5b, lines 18–21 to fol. 6a, lines 1–2)

Collection tradition 3

ʿUmar [ibn Ṭalḥa]—Muḥammad ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAlqama—Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥāṭib, [he said that ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wanted] to collect the *qurʾān*, and he stood among the people and said, “Whoever learned anything of the *qurʾān* from the Messenger of God, let him come to us with it.” And they used to write that on leaves of parchment (*suhuf*), flat stones, and palm stalks. They did not used to accept from

²⁹Variouly meaning the Ark of the Covenant (Q 2:248), or a container (Q 20:39).

³⁰I would like to thank Walid Saleh for his assistance in translating this tradition.

anyone anything until two witnesses had testified to it. Then ‘Umar was killed, before that was collected.

So, ‘Uthmān carried it out, and he said, “Whoever has with him anything from the Book of God, let him come to us with it.” They did not used to accept anything of that until two witnesses had testified to it.

He said: Khuzayma ibn Thābit came, and he said, “I see that you have left out two verses from the Book of God; you did not write them.” They answered, “And what are they?” He responded, “I learned from the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him: ‘A messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering distresses him; he is deeply concerned for you, and full of kindness and mercy towards the believers. . .’ (Q 9:128) to the end of the sūra.” ‘Uthmān said, “And I bear witness that they are from God. Where do you think that we should put them?” He replied, “Use them to conclude the last of what descended of the *qurʿān*,” and they put them at the end of al-Barāʿa (i.e. S. 9). (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 6a, lines 2–12)

Collection tradition 4

Mālik—Ibn Shihāb—Sālim and Khārija, that Abū Bakr al-Siddīq collected the *qurʿān* on papyrus (*qarātīs*), and he asked Zayd [ibn Thābit] to take care of that. He refused, until he asked ‘U[mar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb] to help him against him. These writings (*kutub*) were with Abū Bakr until he died, then with ‘Umar until [he died, then] with Hafṣa wife of the Prophet. ‘Uthmān sent (a message to her), and she refused to give them to him, until she had made him promise that he would return them to her. Then she sent them to him, and ‘Uthmān copied them into codices (*maṣāḥif*). Then, he returned them to her. They remained with her, until Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam sent (for them), and he took them and burned them. (Ibn Wahb 1992, fol. 6a, lines 23–24 to fol. 6b, lines 1–5)

In these four collection traditions, ‘Umar is depicted in different roles, which place him in varying relationships to caliphal authority and its role in the collection process. He is portrayed as Abū Bakr’s advisor, as well as the one who oversees the logistical aspects of the compilation of the text. In the first and fourth collection traditions, ‘Umar appears to play a somewhat more dominant role in the process than the caliph, urging that the revelations be collected and proposing that Zayd be made the scribe (in the first tradition), and even (in the fourth tradition) pressuring Zayd to comply with Abū Bakr’s request. In the second collection tradition, however, ‘Umar is presented in a subordinate position, acting as Abū Bakr directs him by collecting the verses or passages that people bring, after

ensuring that each has two witnesses. As caliph himself, 'Umar is portrayed in the third collection tradition as having initiated the compilation during his reign; however, this process is cut short by his assassination. In collection traditions one and four, when he is caliph, 'Umar acts as the guardian of the written quranic materials that had been compiled during Abū Bakr's reign. Moreover, in all of the collection traditions except the second, his involvement in the *qur'ān's* collection functions to smooth the way for 'Uthman to promulgate his recension. 'Umar, then, is consistently associated with actions that assert or reinforce caliphal authority over the compilation of the *qur'ān*. He also embodies a construction of (free) masculinity that is subordinate to an idealized political, social, and religious order presided over by a caliph, rather than defying or remaining independent of it.³¹

A closely related theme is 'Umar acting in order to bring hierarchically structured order to an ambiguous situation. When many of Muḥammad's followers who knew his revelations begin to be killed in battle (in the first and second collection traditions), 'Umar responds by taking action to ensure that these are written down so that they will not be lost. In collection traditions two and three, he ensures that before anyone's recollections are incorporated into the written collection they are duly verified by witnesses.

Hafṣa and Written Quranic Materials

In contrast to Ibn Mas'ūd and her father, Ḥafṣa is presented as a rather shadowy figure in the chapter on the Qur'an in the *Jāmi' Ibn Wahb*. She appears in only three traditions: the first and fourth collection traditions and the written verification tradition.

In the first and fourth collection traditions, through her guardianship of the quranic materials compiled under Abū Bakr, Ḥafṣa is textually positioned as extending the trajectory of the various roles attributed to her father past the date of his death and on into the reign of his successor. Nonetheless, there is no mention of her in the second and third collection traditions; evidently, this role imputed to her is not deemed textually indispensable. In collection traditions one and four, Ḥafṣa safeguards the written quranic materials left in her custody by 'Umar. These traditions

³¹A well-known ḥadīth that outlines this idealized order recounts that Muḥammad said: "Each of you is a shepherd, and accountable for his flock. The leader (*imām*) over the people is a shepherd, and accountable for his flock. The man is a shepherd over his household, and accountable for them. The woman is a shepherd over her husband's property. The slave is a shepherd over the property of his master and accountable for it. Surely, each of you is a shepherd, and accountable" ('Abd al-Razzāq 1972, XI, 319; similarly: al-Bukhārī 1979, VII, 98).

emphasize the care that she reportedly took to forestall the possibility that they might be lost if she lent them to ʿUthmān. He, having explicitly promised to return them to her, is presumably now obligated to ensure that she receives them back in their entirety.

The fourth collection tradition is not primarily concerned with the details of how the *qurʾān* came to be written down; rather, its focus is on accounting for what happens to these written quranic materials at key points of transition: What happened to them after Abū Bakr died? Where were they once ʿUmar was assassinated? How did ʿUthmān obtain them in order to copy them? This tradition presents these writings as perpetually in the custody of a responsible person. Ḥafṣa’s refusal to hand them over to even the caliph himself until he had promised to return them seems to be intended to emphasize just how diligently she safeguarded these materials. This point is further underlined by her careful keeping of them until the governor Marwān sent for them. As Marwān is said to have burned them, then the community is left with only the ʿUthmānic recension. Seemingly, no alternative remained that could rival its claim to authenticity.

Nonetheless, the first collection tradition admits that in fact, ʿUthmān’s recension did have a rival—the codex of Ibn Masʿūd. According to this tradition, once ʿUthmān had copies made of the quranic writings that he had borrowed from Ḥafṣa, and these copies had been sent to several cities in the empire, he issued orders that all other quranic writings be burned. That ʿUthmān regarded this measure as essential is emphatically conveyed in his reported statement that anyone who retains any such writings is like someone in possession of goods that they had stolen from the spoils taken in war.

The first collection tradition does not indicate what finally happened to the quranic writings that had been in Ḥafṣa’s keeping. Did ʿUthmān return them to her, as he had promised to do? That this tradition even provides a purported quotation of her words when she insisted that they be given back to her—“If you return it to me (*ʿalā an tarudduhu ilayya*)”—before she agrees to send them to him suggests that he might have done so, but this is left unclear. If he returned them, did she then send them back to him to be destroyed? What might she have thought of ʿUthmān’s order that quranic writings other than the recension that he had just issued be burned? The audience/reader is not given any indication. But Ḥafṣa’s textual silence (which contrasts rather pointedly with her earlier words stipulating that the quranic materials be returned) seems intended to imply that she agrees—in contrast to Ibn Masʿūd, who voices his opposition.

Ibn Masʿūd, ʿUmar, and Ḥafṣa: Community, Canon, and Gendered Rhetoric

Ibn Masʿūd’s reported response to ʿUthmān’s order begins with an affirmation of the authenticity of this codex: “I heard (the contents of) this codex of mine from the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him!” This assertion is a declaration of its legitimacy, but one standing in dramatic contrast to how this collection tradition portrays the origins and development of ʿUthmān’s recension. Ibn Masʿūd’s codex is presented as one man’s direct transmission from the prophet. While it is unclear who recorded it in writing, there is no suggestion that more than one scribe was involved. It would seem that the writing of this codex merely stemmed from Ibn Masʿūd’s personal wish to possess his own copy.

By comparison, the story that the first collection tradition tells as to how ʿUthmān’s official edition finally came into being contains a noteworthy number of twists and turns, as it passes through various stages under a succession of three caliphs, who delegate various tasks associated with it to others, including the writing of the text. It is not compiled on the basis of the recollections of one person, but of many, with each part duly confirmed by two witnesses. In the first collection tradition even Khuzayma’s individual attestation to two verses is presented as equivalent to the testimony of two men, and the stoning verse, although it is brought by none other than ʿUmar, fails to be included in the text because it lacks a second witness. Thus, its collection is depicted in terms more akin to a community undertaking, albeit under the direction of the reigning caliphs. This putative communal dimension—which is variously constructed and affirmed in all four of these collection traditions—is presented as a key characteristic of the authoritative text that unites the community.

If this were believed to be the case, then it would follow that anyone whose actions threaten communal unanimity over one recension could be perceived as betraying the community. This explains the insulting implication of ʿUthmān’s reported statement that any person who withholds quranic writings and does not give them over to be destroyed is like someone wrongfully in possession of goods stolen from spoils gained in a raid or battle. Anyone who commits theft of this type has cheated his fellow warriors of what God has given them of the spoil of their enemies (*al-Ṭabarī* 2003, VI, 193) and thus has taken what belongs to God and his prophet, and also to the warriors of the community, as it would have been typically divided among them. This was by definition usually a male transgression. It was much less likely for a female to be in the position to help herself to spoils than to be taken as spoil herself, and as a result quite

possibly subjected to men's sexual violence. Theft of this kind was deemed a shameful deed unworthy of a free male warrior.³²

The evident contrast in the first collection tradition between the actions variously attributed to Ḥafṣa and to Ibn Mas'ūd rhetorically reinforces the gendered dimensions of its equation of withholding quranic writings with conduct unworthy of a free man. Ḥafṣa initially refuses to lend the written quranic materials in her custody to 'Uthmān, but does so after he agrees to return them to her; nor does she seemingly object to 'Uthmān's order for the destruction of all quranic writings aside from his recension. Her careful guardianship of the written quranic materials thus exists in tandem with her recognition and acceptance of the caliph's authority over the community and its scripture. Not coincidentally, this mirrors the religiously approved social position of a free elite woman also presented elsewhere in the *Jāmi' Ibn Wahb*: while she has some degree of autonomous action within her own sphere of responsibilities, she must also submit to male familial authority.³³

In deferring to 'Uthmān, Ḥafṣa is thus cast in an idealized free female position of limited authority set within a broader framework of subordination. Yet this tradition presents such deference as appropriate for all regardless of gender in order to unify the community around one recension. By contrast, Ibn Mas'ūd's free masculine independence leads in this tradition to his association with the unmanly deed of stealing from the spoils. The linking of such theft to his retention of his codex appears to lie in the potential of both acts to divide and destabilize the community, perhaps even imperiling its "rightful" imperial position.

Yet Ibn Mas'ūd's response in this tradition is far from deferential. Seizing upon 'Uthmān's gendered accusation, he quotes a quranic verse that discusses theft from the spoils—" . . . anyone who does so will carry it with him on the Day of Resurrection. . ." (Q 3: 161), and sarcastically retorts, ". . . so I will steal it (*aghulluhu*) until I meet God with it on the Day of Resurrection!" An image of shame, of a man who deceives his fellows by stealing from the spoils and then has to face God with the evidence of his guilt in hand, is thus transformed into one of defiance as well as of vindication. If the man who holds onto his codex can be equated with a thief from the spoils, then the verse states that he will be resurrected with what he stole. Ibn Mas'ūd is saying that on the Day of Resurrection, he will

³²"Stay away from misappropriating spoils, for (in) it is shame (*'ār*), ignominy, and (hell) fire" (Ibn al-Mundhir 2002, II, 474). A noticeable number of hadiths about such misappropriation feature male slaves; the references to the classical exegeses of Q 3: 161 below provide some examples.

³³A particularly vivid example is an interpretation given for Q 4:34 (Ibn Wahb 1993, fol. 7b, lines 4–8). Depictions of women and religious writings that are in some ways analogous are also found in some late antique Christian texts (e.g., Haines-Eitzen 2012, 39–52).

come with his codex as his witness—and by implication, that his determination to hold onto it in the face of ‘Uthmān’s pressure will be justified.

For a third/ninth century audience, reader, or transmitter, the accumulated layers of exegesis of Q 3: 161 would also likely play a role in their understanding of what Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reported response connoted. According to one interpretation, this verse was revealed when an item from the spoils went missing following the Battle of Badr, and Muḥammad was accused of having taken it. Other interpretations variously state that some tribal allies feared that they would not receive a share when Muḥammad divided the spoils, or that some of his followers had taken something from the spoils without permission (al-Ṭabarī 2003, VI, 194–97; al-Tha‘labī 2004, II, 178–79). Yet another view is that the verse forbids a prophet to conceal the revelations he receives due to fear of his followers or hope that he will benefit from so doing (Ibn al-Mundhir 2002, II, 471–72; al-Tha‘labī 2004, II, 179).³⁴ Is Ibn Mas‘ūd then to be understood as the one who is like a man who steals from the spoils, or is it others in the community who are? Could perhaps ‘Uthmān’s demand that Ibn Mas‘ūd surrender his codex (which the latter claimed to have heard from Muḥammad himself) be regarded as amounting to theft, or even to suppression of the “true” revelation?

The first collection tradition seems to imply that Ibn Mas‘ūd’s defiance led nowhere. Not he, but ‘Uthmān is given the last word, when he is quoted directing the scribes of his recension how to spell a word. It was the latter text that would prevail. Ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex, representing one man’s written transmission of Muḥammad’s revelations, would in the end survive in the ghostly form of purported quotations in works such as the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Wahb* (and many others), where it would sometimes be polemically contrasted with ‘Uthmān’s recension but typically would be utilized for exegetical purposes in order to interpret the latter.

* * *

As we have seen, the written verification tradition features some of the same elements that variously appear in the four collection traditions, particularly in the first of the latter: Ibn Mas‘ūd’s problematic codex, ‘Umar’s active roles in securing the survival and/or accurate transmission of Muḥammad’s revelations, and finally, the extension of these roles imputed to ‘Umar through the medium of Ḥafṣa. These themes are applied

³⁴Theological considerations, such as debates as to whether prophets sin or err, evidently played an important role in shaping this exegetical discourse. Among the interpretations that al-Māturīdī gives (and the one that he prefers) is the view that the verse means that no prophet ever misappropriated spoils (2005, II, 460).

in the written verification tradition to a specific question, the “correct” recitation or writing of Q 98:1.

The well-known (and polemically charged) claims and counter-claims about the wording of Q 98:1 evoke complex questions about religious authority, political authority, and the relationship of these to the boundaries of the canon. While the first collection tradition seems to imply that Ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex quickly became irrelevant after ‘Uthmān had issued his recension, this appears to be an oversimplification. Muranyi calls attention to some indications that it may have still been in circulation in the third/ninth century (*Ibn Wahb* 1992, 16–17).

Whether or not such a codex (or codices copied from it) might “actually” go back to Ibn Mas‘ūd is far less relevant here than the implications of the claims of some people at that time that it did for the recitations of the Qur‘ān that continued to be in use. Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), the author of a well-known book on the seven readings of the Qur‘ān, proclaimed that a consensus existed regarding acceptable readings and made use of state power to bring recalcitrant reciters in line. As a result, readings attributed to various followers of Muḥammad that departed from the ‘Uthmānic recension’s consonantal skeleton were no longer to be recited or taught (*Nasser* 2013, 36). A reciter, Ibn Shannābudh (d. 328/939), was famously put on trial in 323/935, flogged, and compelled to renounce his practice of reciting the Qur‘ān according to variant readings attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ubayy and others (*Melchert* 2000, 20).

The written verification tradition takes a notorious instance of ambiguity in the boundaries of the canon—an anomalous reading said to have been found in Ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex—and neatly resolves it by asserting that it was not communally preserved and transmitted and so cannot claim to have come from the prophet. The contents of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s codex rests on the witness and transmission of only one man, and this tradition emphasizes its distance from the “correct” reading by presenting it as at variance with what was recited and, for good measure, written out by Muḥammad himself. That this is portrayed as having been made evident through Ḥafṣa’s actions underlines two points: First, only the ‘Uthmānic recension³⁵ is authoritative for the community, and second, it is submission (here represented as free female/feminine) to caliphal authority over the text that befits reciters, not Ibn Mas‘ūd’s defiance, despite the association of the latter with an iteration of free masculinity.

³⁵The reference to Ḥafṣa plus a “correct” rendition of a quranic verse which goes back to Muḥammad himself evokes the traditions about the collection of the ‘Uthmānic recension discussed above that mention her.

CONCLUSION

The written verification tradition does not depict a woman “editing the Qurʾān.” Rather, the immediate focus of this tradition is on ‘Umar’s religious authority, constructed over against Ibn Mas‘ūd and his codex. An examination of the gendered dimensions of its presentation of textual authority within the *‘ulūm al-Qurʾān* chapter in the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Wahb* demonstrates that what is at stake in this tradition is the authority of the ‘Uthmānic recension. This tradition would likely have been heard/read in the third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries as pertaining to contemporaneous efforts to suppress irregular recitations.

Several problems significantly complicate the use of the written verification tradition as a historical source. At present, the date this ḥadīth was put into circulation is uncertain. It contains an anachronism, as well as some well-known *topoi*—‘Umar intervening to restore order (with his desire to take action contrasting with the prophet’s seeming diffidence); ‘Umar’s concern with the survival and “accurate” transmission of the *qurʾān*; ‘Umar’s suspicion of recitational variants—which are based on and affirm particular theological-sectarian views. Among these are Sunnī beliefs about ‘Umar’s superlative religious merits and legitimacy as a caliph as well as the necessity of being part of the community (*jamā‘a*), which is divinely guided such that it does not agree upon error. Also, this ḥadīth’s usage of themes found in the collection traditions, including the theme of Hafṣa acting as an extension of her father’s efforts to ensure the “correct” transmission of the text, strongly suggests that it may well be derivative of such traditions rather than independent of them. This tradition cannot be read as a more or less direct reflection of a historical incident that occurred during Muḥammad’s lifetime.

What the written verification tradition does tell us is that well after Hafṣa’s passing—more than a century later, possibly two—certain actions are ascribed to her in order to address a contemporary controversy. Research that examines how, why, and by whom certain depictions that associate early Muslim female figures with written quranic materials are constructed and taken up constitutes a promising frontier, which could shed light on some aspects of the formative and medieval reception histories of the Qurʾān.

Reading the written verification tradition utilizing gender as an analytical category as demonstrated above is a historically responsible as well as a methodologically coherent approach. It represents an attempt to understand a premodern text on its own terms, and is therefore designed to minimize the tendency to take individual ḥadīths or passages out of context or to retroject contemporary concerns onto sources from the past

(insofar as it is ever possible to avoid this). This approach also highlights several features of this ḥadīth as well as of the *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* chapter in the *Jāmi‘ Ibn Wahb* that so far have received little or no attention from historians. Examining not only Ḥafṣa, but also ‘Umar and Ibn Mas‘ūd as gendered figures, as well as the gendered rhetoric in the traditions examined above about codices, the ‘Uthmānic recension, and Qur’ān recitation helps to illuminate a hitherto neglected dimension as to how these texts “work”—and also underscores the perils of taking them at face value. The written verification tradition is only one of a number of traditions that associate an early Muslim woman with written quranic materials. Analyses of them that focus on their gendered rhetoric appear likely to facilitate a more historically contextualized and nuanced reading of them that takes into account analogous images in the religious literatures of earlier and other contemporaneous religious communities, and also has the potential to contribute constructively to research on the Qur’ān’s early history.

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