

The Dominance of the Ḥafṣ *Qirā'at*: Its Impact on Qur'anic Recitation Across the Islamic World

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ABSTRACT

The Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim qirā'a, one of the seven canonical readings in Islamic tradition, remains the most widely used recitation across the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and North Africa. This study examines the historical, political, and cultural factors behind its dominance and the implications for religious practice and Islamic education globally. Using a descriptive-analytical method based on literature review, the study finds that the spread of Ḥafṣ was reinforced by the codification of the Mushaf al-Madīnah in the twentieth century, which became the official standard in many Muslim-majority countries, supported by institutions and favored for its clarity of pronunciation. By contrast, other qirā'āt such as Warsh 'an Nāfi' have survived in parts of North Africa but have not achieved comparable reach. The findings show that the prominence of Ḥafṣ stems not only from textual features but also from publishing politics and educational policies. This study contributes a fresh perspective by highlighting the link between mushaf standardization and the marginalization of other qirā'āt, thereby underscoring the importance of preserving recitational diversity as part of Islam's intellectual heritage and as a resource for fostering intra-madhab tolerance.

ABSTRAK

Qirā'at Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim merupakan salah satu dari tujuh qirā'at yang diakui dalam tradisi Islam klasik. Bacaan ini hingga kini menjadi yang paling luas digunakan di dunia Islam, khususnya di Timur Tengah, Asia Selatan, Asia Tenggara, dan Afrika Utara. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji faktor-faktor historis, politis, dan kultural yang melatarbelakangi dominasi qirā'at Ḥafṣ serta implikasinya terhadap praktik keagamaan dan pendidikan Islam global. Dengan metode deskriptif-analitis melalui kajian literatur, penelitian menemukan bahwa popularitas qirā'at Ḥafṣ diperkuat oleh kodifikasi cetakan Mushaf al-Madīnah pada abad ke-20 yang dijadikan standar resmi di banyak negara Muslim, disertai dukungan institusional dan kemudahan pelafalan. Secara komparatif, qirā'at lain seperti Warsh 'an Nāfi' tetap bertahan di sebagian Afrika Utara, namun tidak memperoleh penyebaran global seperti Ḥafṣ. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa dominasi qirā'at Ḥafṣ bukan hanya disebabkan faktor tekstual, melainkan juga politik penerbitan dan kebijakan pendidikan. Kajian ini menambahkan perspektif baru dengan menyoroti relasi antara standarisasi mushaf dan marginalisasi qirā'at lain, sehingga membuka ruang refleksi mengenai pentingnya menjaga keberagaman bacaan al-Qur'an sebagai warisan intelektual Islam sekaligus sarana memperkuat toleransi intra-madzhab.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The history of Qur'anic recitation demonstrates both the preservation of revelation and the adaptability of the text to linguistic diversity. Early transmission relied on memorization and limited written materials, but more crucially, it was reinforced by systematic review between the Prophet Muhammad and the angel Jibril.¹ While this process safeguarded the Qur'an's integrity, its broader significance lies in how the text was recited, taught, and standardized across different communities. The multiplicity of dialects among Arab tribes necessitated variation in recitation, forming the basis of the *qirā'āt* tradition.² Rather than being a mere concession to local speech, these variants reveal how the Qur'an was embedded within the linguistic and social realities of early Islam.³

Over the following centuries, the *qirā'āt* became institutionalized through rigorous transmission (*sanad*) and scholarly codification. The canonical seven (later expanded to ten) were not innovations of individual scholars but the product of criteria such as linguistic validity, continuity of transmission, and conformity with the 'Uthmānic codex. Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sab'ah* was pivotal in systematizing these recitations, ensuring their recognition as authentic.⁴ Yet, while the historical record acknowledges multiple valid *qirā'āt*, the trajectory of Islamic practice shows that only a few have remained in widespread use.⁵

Among them, the transmission of Ḥafṣ from 'Āṣim achieved near-universal dominance. Contemporary estimates suggest that over 90% of Muslims worldwide recite according to Ḥafṣ, with Warsh and a handful of others surviving in specific regions such as North and West Africa.⁶ This predominance is not simply a natural outcome of transmission but is closely tied to institutional and political decisions particularly the role of the Mushaf al-Madīnah project in Saudi Arabia, whose mass printings cemented Ḥafṣ as the global standard.⁷ Furthermore, the use of Ḥafṣ in international Qur'anic competitions, Islamic educational curricula, and modern media has reinforced perceptions of it as the "default" recitation, sometimes at the expense of awareness of other valid *qirā'āt*.⁸

Despite its dominance, scholarship has yet to fully interrogate the sociopolitical, cultural, and theological implications of Ḥafṣ standardization. Existing studies often focus on the historical authenticity of the *qirā'āt* or their philological variations, while relatively few explore how one mode of recitation came to shape Muslim identity and practice globally.⁹ This research therefore seeks to address that gap by examining the historical roots, institutional mechanisms, and cultural effects of the spread of Ḥafṣ. In doing so, it highlights how the study of *qirā'āt* is not merely a technical field of phonetics and transmission, but a window into questions of authority, unity, and diversity within the Muslim ummah.

¹ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1955), 1:34–36.

² Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah, 1974), 1:162.

³ Shady Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān: The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādh* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 55–58.

⁴ Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sab'ah Fī al-Qirā'āt*, ed. Shawkī Ḍayf (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1980), 12–15.

⁵ Taufik Adnan Amal, *Rekonstruksi Sejarah al-Quran* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Alvabet, 2013), 215–218.

⁶ Yasir Qadhi, "An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an," AlMaghrib Institute Lecture Series, 2011; see also Amal, *Rekonstruksi Sejarah al-Qur'an*, 222.

⁷ Saud al-Sarhān, *The Politics of the Saudi Mushaf: Printing, Standardization, and Global Circulation* (Riyadh: King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, 2018), 33–38.

⁸ William Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 45.

⁹ Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an*, 102–106.

B. METHODS

This study applies a qualitative historical-analytical approach, supported by limited ethnographic validation. The core design is library research, drawing on classical tafsīr, works on *qirā'āt*, and recent scholarship, analyzed through descriptive-critical methods.¹⁰ To complement the textual analysis, supplementary field observations and informal interviews were conducted (March–May 2025) in several Islamic schools and Qur'an recitation centers in East Java, with informants selected among teachers, students, and administrators.¹¹ The combination of textual and contextual inquiry allows the study to critically examine both the historical roots and the lived practice of the Ḥafṣ *qirā'ah*, clarifying the institutional and cultural mechanisms that underpin its global¹² dominance.¹³

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Concept of *Qirā'āt* Science

Etymologically, *qirā'āt* is the plural of *qirā'ah*, derived from the verb *qara'a* (to read/recite), which also carries the sense of “gathering” or “collecting.” In the Qur'anic context, this reflects the act of uniting variant articulations within the framework of one revelation. In Islamic scholarship, definitions of *qirā'āt* vary. Manna' Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān describes it as a system of Qur'anic pronunciation attributed to a specific imam, distinct from others in articulation and transmission.¹⁴ Al-Zarkashī defines it as variation in the revealed text, covering orthography and phonetics, including *takhfīf* (lightening) and *taṭqīl* (intensifying).¹⁵ Al-Zarqānī emphasizes that each *qirā'ah* represents a legitimate mode of pronunciation selected by an imam and supported by reliable chains of transmission.¹⁶

From these definitions, three key points emerge: (1) *qirā'āt* are *tauqīfī*, i.e., divinely sanctioned and transmitted from the Prophet through continuous chains (*sanad*); (2) a *qirā'ah* may have one or more versions, reflecting differences among transmitters (*rāwī*) and subsequent transmitters (*ṭarīq*); and (3) the discipline aims to preserve correct Qur'anic pronunciation while accommodating linguistic diversity in early Islam.¹⁷

Terminologically, scholars distinguish between *qirā'ah* (the reading of a canonical imam, e.g., 'Āṣim al-Kūfī), *riwāyah* (a transmitter's version, e.g., Ḥafṣ from 'Āṣim), *ṭarīq* (a later transmission path), and *wajh* (a specific recitational option). This technical system reflects not only philological concerns but also the social and political consolidation of Qur'anic authority across diverse Muslim communities.

The science of *qirā'āt* (*ilm al-qirā'āt*), as Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) defines, studies these recitational modes through authenticated chains.¹⁸ Historically, works like Ibn Mujāhid's

¹⁰ Manna' Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1973), 177–182.

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 24–26.

¹² Muḥammad ibn al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr Fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Ḍabbā' (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1932), 1:45.

¹³ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Recitations of the Qur'ān: Their Variety and Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 89–91.

¹⁴ al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, 146–148.

¹⁵ Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 1:318.

¹⁶ Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 1:330–333.

¹⁷ Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'*, 19–23.

¹⁸ al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr Fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, 1:7.

Kitāb al-Sab'ah institutionalized the canonical seven readings, ensuring uniformity while simultaneously legitimizing diversity. This codification was not merely linguistic but also a response to the socio-political need for religious unity under competing centers of power in the early Islamic period.¹⁹

2. Biography of Imam Ḥaḥḥ

Imam Ḥaḥḥ ibn Sulaymān ibn al-Mughīrah al-Asadī al-Bazzāz al-Ghādirī al-Kūfī,²⁰ known by his *kunyah* Abū 'Umar, was a highly influential scholar in the field of *qirā'āt* and Qur'anic sciences.²¹ Some sources refer to his father as Abū Dāwūd, which is actually the *kunyah* of Sulaymān, thus there is no discrepancy in naming. He was also known by the name Ḥufays.²² Born and raised in Kūfah in 90 AH, Imam Ḥaḥḥ later traveled to Baghdad and settled in Suwaiqah Nasr²³ before eventually moving to Mecca, where he spent a significant period²⁴ teaching the Qur'an.²⁵

In terms of transmission (*sanad*), although both Imam Ḥaḥḥ and Shu'bah ibn 'Ayyāsh received their *qirā'ah* from the same teacher, 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd, their chains of narration differed. Shu'bah's transmission traces back to 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, while Ḥaḥḥ's transmission connects to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.²⁶ This distinction is confirmed in a narration where Imam Ḥaḥḥ told his teacher 'Āṣim that his recitation differed from Shu'bah's, and 'Āṣim explained that he had received two distinct transmissions: one from Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and another from Zirr ibn Hubaysh from 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd.²⁷ Imam Ḥaḥḥ also stated that his entire recitation matched that of 'Āṣim, except for one verse in Sūrah al-Rūm (30:54):

¹⁹ Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujahid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings," *Studia Islamica*, *Studia Islamica*, no. 91 (2000): 5–22.

²⁰ The name *al-Asadī* attached to Imam Ḥaḥḥ indicates that he belonged to the Asad tribe, as explained in *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl* by Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī. The title *al-Kūfī* refers to his birthplace, Kūfah, one of the prominent cities in Iraq. Further details on this can be found in *al-Lubāb fī Tahdhīb al-Ansāb* by 'Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Athīr. Meanwhile, *al-Bazzāz* is derived from the word *bazz*, meaning clothing. This title was used to denote someone who worked as a cloth merchant, indicating that Imam Ḥaḥḥ, in addition to being a scholar of *qirā'āt*, also engaged in trade. The name *al-Ghādirī* is attributed to Ghādirah ibn Mālik ibn Tha'labah ibn Dūdān ibn Asad ibn Khuzaymah, as documented in *Tārīkh al-Baghdād* by Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī.

²¹ Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥatīm Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Rāzī, *Al-Jarḥ Wa al-Ta'dīl* (Bairut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1952), 3:173.

²² Abū Muḥammad ibn 'Addī al-Jurjānī, *Al-Kāmil Fī al-Ḍu'afā' al-Rijāl*, ed. 'Ādil Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 3:268.

²³ Suwaiqah Nasr is a district located east of Baghdad, named after Nasr ibn Mālik al-Khuzza'i. A detailed description of this area can be found in *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 3, by Shihāb al-Dīn Abū 'Abdillāh Ya'qūt ibn 'Abdullāh al-Ḥamawī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 2008), 228. Further explanation is also provided in Muḥammad ibn Ḥibbān ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥibbān Abū Ḥatīm al-Tamīmī al-Bustī al-Sijistānī, *Al-Majrūḥīn Min al-Muḥaddithīn Wa al-Ḍu'afā' Wa al-Matrūkīn*, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'y, 1396), 1:225.

²⁴ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymāz al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kubār 'alā al-Ṭabaqāt Wa al-A'sār* (Bairut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1997), 1:287.

²⁵ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymāz al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām Wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr Wa al-A'lām* (Bairut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1993), 11:87.

²⁶ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah al-Nihāyah Fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'* (Kairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1351), 1:230.

²⁷ al-Jazarī, 1:230.

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً

Allah is the One who created you from weakness, then made strength after weakness, then made weakness and old age after strength.

In this verse, Ḥaḥṣ recited the word *ḍa'f* with a *ḍammah*,²⁸ while 'Āṣim pronounced it with a *fathah*.²⁹ According to Ibn al-Jazarī, there are approximately 520 differences between the *qirā'ah* of Imam Ḥaḥṣ and that of Imam Shu'bah.

As a renowned scholar of *qirā'āt*, Imam Ḥaḥṣ received high praise from many scholars for his contributions to Qur'anic transmission. Al-Munāwī noted that he repeatedly studied the Qur'an with Imam 'Āṣim, making him the most precise in recitation.³⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī also stated that Imam Ḥaḥṣ had superior memorization compared to Shu'bah and was the most accurate in articulating the letters taught by 'Āṣim.

Abū Hishām al-Rifā'ī affirmed that Imam Ḥaḥṣ was the student who best understood 'Āṣim's *qirā'ah*, even surpassing Shu'bah in precision (*dabt al-ḥurūf*).³¹ A similar view was expressed by Yahyā ibn Ma'īn, who declared that the most authentic transmission from 'Āṣim was through Ḥaḥṣ.³² He added that although both Ḥaḥṣ and Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh were primary transmitters of 'Āṣim's *qirā'ah*, Ḥaḥṣ's narration was superior. Al-Dhahabī also described Imam Ḥaḥṣ as a trustworthy (*thiqqah*) reciter of Kūfah³³ with exceptional accuracy in transmission (*thabāt*).³⁴ This high regard for Imam Ḥaḥṣ does not diminish the credibility of Imam Shu'bah but rather highlights the intensity of Ḥaḥṣ's direct learning from 'Āṣim.³⁵

In addition to his expertise in *qirā'āt*, Imam Ḥaḥṣ was also known as a transmitter of *ḥadīth*. However, his credibility in this field received mixed evaluations from scholars. Some, such as Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāḥ al-Kūfī (d. 196 AH) and Sa'd ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-'Awfī,³⁶ considered him trustworthy (*thiqqah*)³⁷ and knowledgeable in *ḥadīth*.³⁸ Nevertheless, the majority of *ḥadīth* scholars, including 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī, al-Dāraqutnī, al-Tirmidhī, al-'Uqaylī, and Abū Zur'ah, rejected his narrations, classifying them as weak (*ḍa'īf*). Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH) also stated in one report that Imam Ḥaḥṣ's narrations were abandoned by *ḥadīth* scholars, although in other reports, he acknowledged Ḥaḥṣ as a pious scholar. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj similarly noted that his narrations were disregarded by

²⁸ Zayn al-Dīn Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr* (Egypt: Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah, 1356), 3:476.

²⁹ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Qādī, *Tārīkh al-Qurrā' al-'Asharah* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turāth, 2006), 41.

³⁰ Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād* (Bairut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 9:64.

³¹ Abū 'Amr 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dānī, *Al-Taysīr Fī al-Qirā'āt al-Sab'* (Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Andalus li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2015), 1:6.

³² al-Jurjānī, *Al-Kāmil Fī al-Ḍu'afā' al-Rijāl*, 3:268.

³³ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymaz al-Dhahabī, *Al-'Ibar Fī Khabar Man Ghabar*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sa'īd Basyūnī (Bairut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 213.

³⁴ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymaz al-Dhahabī, *Al-Kāshif Fī Ma'rifat Man Lahu Riwayah Fī al-Kutub al-Sittah*, ed. Muḥammad 'Awwāmah (Jeddah: Dār al-Qiblah li al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmiyyah, 1992), 1:341.

³⁵ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl bin Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī Bi al-Wafayāt* (Bairut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2000), 13:62.

³⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī bin Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-Qurrā' Wa Kamāl al-Iqrā'*, ed. Marwān al-'Aṭiyyah (Dār al-Ma'mūn li al-Turāth, 1997), 561.

³⁷ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymaz al-Dhahabī, *Al-Mughnī Fī al-Ḍu'afā'*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Iṭr (Qaṭar: Idārat Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 2009), 1:179.

³⁸ Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl Fī Asmā' al-Rijāl* (Bairut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1980), 7:12.

ḥadīth authorities. Abū Ḥātim and al-Nasā'ī even claimed that his narrations were not documented in writing. Ibn Ḥibbān criticized his transmission, stating that he often reversed chains of narration and elevated *mursal* reports to *marfū'* status.³⁹

The negative assessments of Imam Ḥafṣ's reliability in *ḥadīth* transmission stem from statements by scholars such as Shu'bah ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Wāsitī and Ayyūb ibn al-Mutawakkil. Shu'bah reported that Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān borrowed a book from him and failed to return it, and also borrowed books from others which he lost. These claims were cited by other scholars, including Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd al-Qaṭṭān, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī, Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn, 'Amr ibn al-Fallās, and others.⁴⁰ However, the Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān mentioned by Shu'bah was not Ḥafṣ al-Asadī, but rather Ḥafṣ al-Minqarī. This clarification is supported by Ibn Sa'd, who quoted Shu'bah stating that Ḥafṣ al-Minqarī possessed several books used by his brother-in-law, Ash'ath ibn 'Abd al-Malik, to resolve issues faced by al-Ḥasan. Additionally, Ḥafṣ al-Minqarī was known as the most knowledgeable transmitter of al-Ḥasan's narrations.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the biography of Imam Ḥafṣ should not be understood merely as a descriptive account of his strengths in *qirā'āt* and weaknesses in *ḥadīth*. These divergent evaluations must be situated within a broader historiographical and methodological framework. The trust placed in Ḥafṣ by *qirā'āt* scholars can be explained by their disciplinary emphasis on the continuity of transmission chains, phonetic precision, and the authority of direct instruction from a master teacher, namely 'Āṣim.⁴² By contrast, the rejection of his reports by most *ḥadīth* scholars reflects a different standard of verification that prioritized consistency of narration across transmitters⁴³ and textual reliability.⁴⁴ Thus, Ḥafṣ's identity as a Qur'ān reciter both intersected with and contradicted his reputation as a *ḥadīth* transmitter, illustrating the disciplinary boundaries in classical Islamic scholarship and underscoring the need for critical analysis in assessing the scholarly authority of such figures.⁴⁵

3. Teaching Method of Ḥafṣ Qirā'ah

During the period of revelation, the Qur'an was primarily transmitted through oral tradition, with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) directly instructing his companions using the method of *talaqqī* or *mushāfahah* (face-to-face transmission). The companions promptly memorized the verses and recorded them on diverse materials such as bones, leather, stones, and palm stalks, strictly following the Prophet's guidance.⁴⁶

In the early period, Qur'anic preservation relied on a dual process: memorization served as the primary safeguard, while written records acted as supplementary aids.⁴⁷ Transmission of recitation was conducted in a tiered manner, beginning with the Prophet, continuing

³⁹ al-Sijistānī, *Al-Majrūhīn Min al-Muḥaddithīn Wa al-Ḍu'afā' Wa al-Matrūkīn*, 1:55.

⁴⁰ Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad, "Ḥafṣ Bin Sulaymān Al-Asadī Rāwī Qirā'ah 'Āṣim Baina al-Jarḥ Wa al-Ta'dīl," in *Bḥāth Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* ('Ammān: Dār 'Ammār li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2006), 94.

⁴¹ al-Ḥamad, 97.

⁴² al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr Fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, 1:150.

⁴³ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymaz al-Dhahab, *Mizān Al-Itidāl Fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Bairut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1963), 1:558.

⁴⁴ uḥammad bin Ḥibbān bin Aḥmad Abū Ḥātim al-Tamīmī al-Bustī, *Kitāb Al-Majrūhīn Min al-Muḥaddithīn*, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Bairut: Dār al-Fikr, 1976), 1:256.

⁴⁵ Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 84–87.

⁴⁶ al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 1:99.

⁴⁷ M.M. al-A'zamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 71.

through the companions, followed by the *tābi'īn*, the *tābi' al-tābi'īn*, and later generations of scholars. This uninterrupted chain of transmission (*sanad*) ensured the accuracy and authenticity of the Qur'an, effectively protecting it from distortion.⁴⁸ The method of *mushāfahah* thus represents a distinctive hallmark of Qur'anic instruction, setting it apart from the transmission of other sacred texts. Consequently, self-taught Qur'anic study is discouraged; proper learning must be obtained from a qualified teacher whose *sanad* traces back to the Prophet.⁴⁹

The *qirā'ah* of Imam 'Āṣim as transmitted by Ḥafṣ has become the dominant recitation among Muslims worldwide, due not only to its structured teaching methodology but also to its institutional consolidation in later centuries.⁵⁰ Within the framework of the *qirā'āt sab'ah* (seven canonical readings) and the *qirā'āt 'asharah* (ten readings), mastery of Ḥafṣ's transmission is typically required before studying other *qirā'āt*.⁵¹ As a widely recognized (*mashhūrah*) *qirā'ah*, the transmission of Ḥafṣ incorporates multiple *ṭarīq* (paths) and *wujūh* (variants), particularly in certain verses, thereby distinguishing it at the level of transmission routes.⁵² Fundamentally, Imam 'Āṣim taught his students including both Imam Ḥafṣ and Imam Shu'bah through *mushāfahah*, a method faithfully maintained by Imam Ḥafṣ in his own instruction. However, minor differences in recitation appeared in subsequent levels of transmission.⁵³

More critically, the teaching method of Ḥafṣ should not be understood merely as a technical mode of instruction but also as part of the broader historical and intellectual landscape. Its dominance cannot be separated from the intersection of religious pedagogy, political patronage, and scholarly debates about authenticity and authority in Qur'anic transmission.⁵⁴ A sharper interpretive perspective therefore highlights that the wide acceptance of Ḥafṣ's *qirā'ah* reflects not only its methodological precision but also its integration into institutional and cultural structures that shaped the trajectory of Islamic scholarship.

4. Distinctive Features of the Ḥafṣ Qirā'ah

a. Limited Use of *Imālah*

The Ḥafṣ transmission rarely applies *imālah* (the inclination of vowel sounds), with the exception of the word *majrāhā* in Sūrah Hūd (11:41):⁵⁵

وَقَالَ أَزْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And [Nūh] said, "Embark therein: in the name of Allah it will sail and anchor. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.

This contrasts with other *qirā'āt*—such as those transmitted by Shu'bah, Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī, Abū 'Amr, and Warsh—which exhibit a comparatively higher frequency of *imālah*. The

⁴⁸ al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr Fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, 1:8–9.

⁴⁹ al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-Qurrā' al-Kubār 'alā al-Ṭabaqāt Wa al-A'sār*, 1:49.

⁵⁰ Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'*, 145–147.

⁵¹ Mujāhid, *Kitāb Al-Sab'ah Fī al-Qirā'āt*, 56–58.

⁵² al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah al-Nihāyah Fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, 1:233.

⁵³ 'Abd al-Ra'ūf bin Tāj al-'Ārifīn bin 'Alī al-Munāwī, *Al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah* (Bairut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999), 2:31.

⁵⁴ Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 92–94.

⁵⁵ Ahmad Sarwat, *Qira'at Ashim Riwayat Hafsh* (Jakarta: Rumah Fiqih Publishing, n.d.), 18.

recurrent application of *imālah* in these traditions reflects distinct phonological tendencies that set them apart from the Ḥafṣ transmission. Such variations not only demonstrate the diversity of recitational practices within the Islamic scholarly heritage but also provide valuable insights into the historical and linguistic dynamics that shaped Qur'anic pronunciation across different regions and schools of recitation.

b. Absence of *Ṣilah Mīm Jamā'*

Ḥafṣ does not apply *ṣilah mīm jamā'* (the linking of the plural mim with a vowel), unlike Qālūn and Warsh. This feature requires careful attention, as it is not marked explicitly in the *muṣḥaf*.

c. Moderate Length in *Mad Muttaṣil* and *Mad Munfaṣil*

In the recitation of *mad muttaṣil* and *mad munfaṣil*, Ḥafṣ particularly through the ṭarīq of al-Shāṭibiyyah does not elongate the vowels excessively. This differs from Warsh and Ḥamzah, whose recitations extend up to six *ḥarakāt* and require longer breath control.

d. Pronunciation of *Hamzah*

Ḥafṣ recites the *hamzah* with *taḥqīq* a firm and emphatic articulation (*shiddah*) that produces a stronger sound compared to other *qirā'āt*. Reciters like Nāfi' (Warsh and Qālūn), Abū 'Amr (al-Dūrī and al-Sūsī), and Ibn Kathīr (al-Bazzī and Qunbul) tend to soften the *hamzah*, especially when two *hamzahs* occur together. Ḥafṣ employs *tashīl baina baina* (a middle-ground softening) only once, in Sūrah Fuṣṣilat (41:44):

أَعْجَبِيَّ وَعَرَبِيَّ

A non-Arabic (recitation) for an Arab (messenger)?⁵⁶

e. *Isymām* (Lip Rounding)

Ḥafṣ applies *isymām* a subtle rounding of the lips resembling the pronunciation of the vowel "u" only once, in the word *lā ta'mannā* in Sūrah Yūsuf (12:11):

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَصْحُونَ

They said, 'O our father, why do you not trust us with Yūsuf, while indeed we are sincere in our advice to him?'⁵⁷

Ḥafṣ applies *isymām*—a subtle rounding of the lips resembling the vowel 'u'—only once, in the word *lā ta'mannā* in Sūrat Yūsuf (12:11). This phonetic feature, however, is absent in the recitation of Abū Ja'far, reflecting the diversity of articulation techniques across the canonical *qirā'āt*. Its omission within Abū Ja'far's tradition illustrates the distinctive methodological orientation of his transmission and underscores the plurality of oral practices that contributed to the preservation of Qur'anic recitation.

⁵⁶ Sarwat, 690.

⁵⁷ Sarwat, 318.

f. *Mad Shilah Qaṣīrah*

The Ḥafṣ transmission includes *mad shilah qaṣīrah* (short vowel extension) only once, in Sūrah al-Furqān (25:69):

يُضْعَفُ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَيُخْلَدُ فِيهِ مُهَانًا

The punishment will be doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein in disgrace.

This differs from Ibn Kathīr's recitation, which frequently employs *ṣilah hā' kināyah*.⁵⁸ The recurrent use of this feature in Ibn Kathīr's tradition highlights a distinct phonological orientation and situates his recitation within a broader spectrum of variation among the canonical *qirā'āt*. Such a difference not only reflects the regional linguistic patterns that shaped the oral transmission of Qur'anic recitation but also underscores the richness of stylistic diversity that has been preserved within the Islamic scholarly heritage

5. Factors Influencing the Popularity of Imam Ḥafṣ's Qur'anic Recitation

The Ḥafṣ transmission has proven its authenticity through a reliable and continuous chain of narration (*sanad*) that remains intact to this day. It has received widespread support from scholars of *qirā'āt* throughout history. In fact, the globally standardized printed *muṣḥaf* follows the rules of Imam Ḥafṣ via the *ṭarīq* of al-Shāṭibīyyah.⁵⁹ Classical works record its reliable chains of narration and sustained scholarly endorsement, while modern processes of standardization (printing, pedagogy, curricula) consolidated its reach.⁶⁰

a. Internal Factors

1) Authentic chain of transmission (*sanad*)

The prominence of Ḥafṣ rests fundamentally on its continuous and well-attested *sanad*: Ḥafṣ ← 'Āṣim ← early transmitters traced back to the Companions. Classical *qirā'āt* manuals document these links and discuss their reliability, which allows scholars to treat Ḥafṣ as a *tauqīfī* (transmitted)⁶¹ reading rather than an individual *ijtihād*.⁶²

2) Fit with mainstream recitational practice

Scholars have argued that 'Āṣim's reading (as transmitted by Ḥafṣ) accords well with dominant phonetic norms of major early Islamic learning centers; this made it pedagogically convenient and readily adoptable across regions. In short, its phonological profile facilitated teaching and memorization in key Arabic-speaking communities.⁶³

⁵⁸ Ahmad Sarwat, *Qira'at 'Āṣim: Telaah Sejarah Dan Karakteristik Bacaan Imam 'Āṣim* (Jakarta: Rumah Fiqih Publishing, n.d.), 227.

⁵⁹ Ahmad Yusam Thobroni and Isnur Azizah Rohmani, "The Influnece of Qiro'at Hafsh in the Islamic World," *Risālah Jurnal Pendidikan dan Studi Islam* 8, no. 2 (August 2022): 751–64, <https://doi.org/10.31943/jurnalrisalah.v8i2.254>.

⁶⁰ Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur?*, 15–18.

⁶¹ Mujāhid, *Kitāb Al-Sab'ah Fī al-Qirā'āt*, 51–55.

⁶² al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr Fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*, 1:82–84.

⁶³ Abrahamov, *Recitations of the Qur'ān: Their Variety and Origins*, 102–108.

3) Reputation and method of 'Āṣim

Assessments of 'Āṣim in the biographical and *qirā'āt* literature emphasize his careful transmission and exactitude in pronunciation qualities that enhanced the perceived reliability of the Ḥafṣ line. Classical adjudicators treated such personal competence as evidence that a given reading could be transmitted⁶⁴ without corruption.⁶⁵

4) Scholarly canonization and the role of Ibn Mujāhid

Ibn Mujāhid's formulation of the *qirā'āt sab'ah* and the subsequent pedagogical poetry (e.g., the *Shāṭibiyyah* tradition) institutionalized certain recitations. By foregrounding 'Āṣim and making his readings central to the canonical corpus, Ibn Mujāhid and later transmitters created scholarly momentum that advantaged Ḥafṣ.⁶⁶

5) Endorsements and authorities.

Classical authorities biographers and *qirā'āt* specialists often singled out Ḥafṣ (and 'Āṣim) for praise, and some traditionary reports attribute high regard from major jurists and hadith scholars. Such reputational endorsements, even when reported unevenly, contribute to a reading's acceptance⁶⁷ by students and institutions.⁶⁸

While internal factors explain much of Ḥafṣ's acceptability, its global dominance was amplified by later institutional developments: standardized *muṣḥaf* printings, curricular choices in *madāris*, and media (recordings, radio). These external mechanisms converted scholarly preference into practical uniformity. Modern studies show that printing and educational policy play decisive roles in turning.

b. External Factors

As with the internal factors discussed above, the section on external factors requires further elaboration and deeper analysis, since it constitutes the core of explaining how the Ḥafṣ transmission achieved global predominance.⁶⁹

1) Influence of the Ottoman Empire

Some *qirā'āt* scholars argue that the Ottoman Empire (circa 922 AH / 1516 CE) played a decisive role in consolidating the Ḥafṣ transmission by exercising political authority. When printing the *muṣḥaf*, the Ottomans selected the Ḥafṣ reading and disseminated it throughout their territories.⁷⁰ However, Ghanim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamd challenges this view, noting that Ḥafṣ had already spread widely before Ottoman adoption. He cites Abū Ḥayyān's *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, which records the presence of both Warsh and Ḥafṣ in Andalusia and Iraq. He also refers to the 12th-century scholar Muḥammad al-Mar'ashī (Sajāqlī Zādah), who wrote: "The standard

⁶⁴ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymaz al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām Al-Nubalā'*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt (Bairut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1985), 5:257–260.

⁶⁵ al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah Al-Nihāyah Fī Ṭabaqāt al-Qurrā'*, 1:270.

⁶⁶ Melchert, "Ibn Mujahid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings," 43–49.

⁶⁷ al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat Al-Qurrā' al-Kubār 'alā al-Ṭabaqāt Wa al-A'sār*, 1:155–160.

⁶⁸ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 93–95.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ahmad von Denffer, *Ulūm Al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'ān* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), 162.

⁷⁰ Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (Birmingham: Al-Hidayah, 1999), 162.

recitation in our land, Turkey, is 'Āṣim via Ḥafṣ."⁷¹ The evidence suggests that the Ḥafṣ transmission was already widespread, though Ottoman policy of standardized printing significantly amplified its global reach.

2) Natural and scholarly factors

According to Ahsin Sakho, the popularity of Ḥafṣ can also be explained by natural diffusion and scholarly accessibility.⁷² The recitation spread organically, much like Islamic legal schools (madhāhib), while its technical simplicity made it especially appealing to non-Arabic speakers. For example, it involves limited *imālah* (only in *majrāhā*, Qur'ān 11:41), no *ṣilah mīm jamā'*, and moderate elongation in *mad muttaşil* and *mad munfaşil* in contrast to Warsh or Ḥamzah, which require more advanced control of breath.

3) Political context of Ḥafṣ's spread

The 'Āṣim transmission developed in Kūfah, Iraq, a political stronghold of the supporters of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Its genealogical chain traces back to 'Alī, linking the recitation to Shi'a political identity, while Baghdad the Abbasid capital and intellectual hub served as a center where Ḥafṣ himself taught. This environment facilitated scholarly uptake and spread of the recitation.⁷³

4) Connection between *qirā'āt* and legal schools

The relationship between *qirā'āt* and fiqh is illustrated by regional examples: Warsh flourished in North Africa alongside the Mālikī school, while the co-presence of Imām Mālik and Imām Nāfi' in Madinah strengthened that link. Similarly, Ḥafṣ was reinforced in Mecca, where Imām al-Shāfi'ī studied, which helped embed the recitation in Shāfi'ī circles. In the Indonesian archipelago, the Ḥafṣ transmission came through scholars such as Kiai Munawir Krapyak, connected to Shāfi'ī authorities like Shaykh Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī.⁷⁴

5) Role of qāri's, teachers, imams, and media

Qur'ān reciters, teachers, and imams have been crucial to sustaining and transmitting Ḥafṣ. Modern media radio, television, cassette recordings exponentially increased its popularity. The first complete audio recording of the Qur'ān, by Shaykh Maḥmūd Khalīl al-Ḥuṣārī, initiated by Labīb Sa'īd under the title *al-Muṣḥaf al-Murattal*, was in Ḥafṣ via al-Shāṭibiyyah.⁷⁵ The clarity of Ḥuṣārī's recitation combined with broadcasting technology made Ḥafṣ the audible standard across much of the Muslim world.

6) Impact of printed muṣḥaf editions

Printed Qur'āns also contributed to the consolidation of Ḥafṣ. Ghanim al-Ḥamd notes that a Hamburg muṣḥaf (1106 AH / 1694 CE) employed the Ḥafṣ recitation with complete diacritics, facilitating accessibility.⁷⁶ Orientalists like Blachère even predicted: "In the future,

⁷¹ Ghanim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamd, *Rasm Al-Muṣḥaf Wa-Ḥifẓ al-Qur'ān* (Baghdad: Dār al-Shu'ūn, 1982), 141–142.

⁷² Ahsin Sakho Muhammad, *Qirā'āt Sab'ah: Sejarah Dan Perkembangannya* (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2003), 55–56.

⁷³ Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'*, 96.

⁷⁴ Muhammad, *Qirā'āt Sab'ah: Sejarah Dan Perkembangannya*, 61.

⁷⁵ al-A'zamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*, 327–328.

⁷⁶ al-Ḥamd, *Rasm Al-Muṣḥaf Wa-Ḥifẓ al-Qur'ān*, 149.

Muslims will know no Qur'anic recitation except that of Ḥaḥḥ from 'Āḥim."⁷⁷ Such assessments underscore how institutional print culture cemented Ḥaḥḥ as the global norm.

Table 1. Key Factors Behind Ḥaḥḥ Qirā'ah Popularity

Category	Factor	Impact
Internal	Authentic <i>sanad</i> , scholarly endorsement, personal integrity of 'Āḥim	Legitimizes the recitation and builds trust among scholars and students
External	Ottoman policy, media, printed <i>muḥḥaf</i> , political centers	Facilitates global standardization and mass adoption
Scholarly Utility	Simplicity, ease of pronunciation, minimal technical complexity	Makes it accessible for non-Arabic speakers and easier to teach
Cultural Connection	Link to <i>fiqh</i> schools and regional traditions (e.g., Shāfi'ī in Indonesia)	Strengthens its integration into religious education and practice

The acceptance and widespread use of 'Āḥim's recitation can be explained through four interrelated dimensions. Internally, the authenticity of its *sanad*, combined with consistent scholarly endorsement and the personal integrity of 'Āḥim, has conferred legitimacy and trust among both scholars and students. Externally, factors such as Ottoman policy, the proliferation of printed *muḥḥafs*, the role of political centers, and later the influence of mass media have significantly facilitated its standardization and diffusion on a global scale. From a scholarly utility perspective, the relative simplicity of the recitation, its ease of pronunciation, and its limited technical complexity render it highly accessible, particularly for non-Arabic speakers, while simultaneously ensuring pedagogical efficiency. Finally, the cultural connection of this recitation to established *fiqh* schools and regional traditions most notably its alignment with the Shāfi'ī school in Southeast Asia has anchored its integration into religious education and communal practice.

D. CONCLUSION

The Ḥaḥḥ Qur'anic recitation has achieved global predominance through the interplay of internal and external dynamics. Internally, the credibility of its chain of transmission (*sanad*), the pedagogical clarity of its rules, and Imam Ḥaḥḥ's presence in major centers of Islamic learning such as Kūfah, Baghdad, and Mecca facilitated both scholarly recognition and popular accessibility. Externally, institutional forces including Ottoman adoption of Ḥaḥḥ in printed *muḥḥaf* editions, later reinforced by Egyptian and Saudi print cultures played a decisive role in consolidating its authority. The role of media, technology, and iconic qāri's further extended its reach in the modern era. While the simplicity of its rules and its strong *sanad* explain why scholars and students favored Ḥaḥḥ, its dominance cannot be understood apart from political and institutional processes of canonization. The alignment of recitation, authority, and pedagogy created a historical trajectory in which Ḥaḥḥ became the default recitation across much of the Muslim world. At the same time, the persistence of other *qirā'āt* such as Warsh in North Africa or al-Dūrī in parts of Africa and Yemen reminds us that diversity remains embedded in the Qur'anic tradition. Thus, the significance of the Ḥaḥḥ transmission lies not only in its authenticity and accessibility but also in what its dominance reveals about the negotiation of textual authority, the role of political power in shaping

⁷⁷ Régis Blachère, *Introduction Au Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947), 89.

religious practice, and the dynamic interplay between diversity and standardization in the history of *qirā'āt*.

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