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Marwān ibn al-Hakam and the Task of Destroying Abū Bakr's Codex of the Qur'an: A Critical Study and Evaluation

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Abstract

This modest study aims to examine the personality of Marwan ibn al-Hakam and to highlight his role in the history of the compilation of the Holy Qur'an within the historical circumstances he experienced and the personal attributes he possessed. It focuses on his connection to the fate of the Bakri sheets that were in the possession of Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her), analyzes his motives for destroying those sheets, and evaluates the impact of that action on the history of preserving the Qur'anic text.

The study concludes that the personality of Marwan ibn al-Hakam, before being viewed from the perspective of undertaking the destruction of the Companions' sheets, should be placed within influential historical, political, and religious contexts. It also

concludes that what he undertook did not affect the Qur'anic text; rather, it completed the process of preservation and closed the doors to doubt and suspicion. Moreover, his action in this regard did not fall outside the official framework of the process, as he acted as a representative of the Islamic state under its Umayyad authority during his governorship of Medina, completing the preservation process within its official context, away from individual or personal considerations.

Keywords: Marwan ibn al-Hakam; Hafsa; the Holy Qur'an; the Bakri sheets; destruction.

Introduction

The task of preserving the Holy Qur'an after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was among the most important and most

critical tasks. It was undertaken by the first caliph, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), as an official figure representing the Islamic state. He compiled the Qur'an in its entirety into sheets in order to protect it from loss and forgetfulness after the reciters were heavily killed in the Battle of al Yamama. This process constituted the first stage in the history of the compilation and preservation of the Holy Qur'an.

This mission was then continued by preserving those sheets with his successor, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, and later with his daughter, the Mother of the Believers Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with them both). Subsequently, the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (may Allah be pleased with him), unified the codices by relying on the Bakri original that was in Hafsa's possession, producing a comprehensive muṣḥaf in which the verses and surahs were arranged according to a script attributed to him and known as the 'Uthmanic script. He disseminated it to all regions and burned what differed from it, except for the sheets that were with Hafsa, which he returned to her in fulfillment of his pledge to do so. This was known as the second compilation of the Holy Qur'an and represented the second stage in the history of the process.

The importance of that original remained significant, as it continued to be kept in the Household of the Prophet with Hafsa until Marwan ibn al-Hakam came, in his capacity as an Umayyad governor of Medina, to complete

the mission by destroying that original after the death of Hafsa during the caliphate of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan. This action undertaken by Marwan, despite its importance, has not received sufficient scholarly attention nor been adequately highlighted, despite the significant questions it raises and the curiosity it provokes. Who was Marwan to assume such a dangerous task? How did Marwan do what 'Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) did not do, nor what the senior Companions hastened to undertake? What was the value of those sheets after 'Uthman had copied from them the 'Uthmanic muṣḥaf? What danger would they pose to the preservation of the Holy Qur'an and to the unity of the ummah had they remained and been made accessible to the general public? What was the reaction of the Companions, and what was the official position of the state regarding his action? Finally, what is the value of what Marwan did? This modest study aims to answer all these questions by relying on the inductive method, through which all relevant reports are collected and traced across various types of sources, then studied and analyzed after comparing them in order to evaluate the positions involved. It also relies on the descriptive method to describe the original that constitutes the focus of this study namely, the sheets destroyed by Marwan—as well as to study the personality of Marwan and reveal aspects of it that explain his boldness in undertaking this task.

1. Marwan ibn al-Hakam: His Personality, Offices, and Activities

1.1. His Lineage, Birth, and Whether He Was a Companion

He is Marwan ibn al-Hakam ibn Abi al-‘As ibn Umayya ibn ‘Abd Shams ibn Abd Manaf ibn Qusayy (al Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, vol. 7, p. 39). There is disagreement regarding the date of his birth, which in turn affects the question of whether he is considered a Companion. Ibn Sa‘d stated that he was born in the third year after the Hijra, meaning that the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed away when Marwan was eight years old (al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, vol. 7, p. 39). Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, however, mentioned several reports: one stating that he was born during the lifetime of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the second year after the Hijra; another that he was born on the day of Uhud, that is, in the third year; and a third that he was born on the day of al-Khandaq (al-Istī‘āb fī Ma‘rifat al-Aṣḥāb, vol. 3, p. 387). Ibn Manda added another report to these, stating that the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed away when Marwan was two years old (al-Mustakhraj min Kutub al-Nās li-l-Tadhkira wa-l-Mustatraf min Aḥwāl al-Rijāl li-l-Ma‘rifā, vol. 1, p. 37).

There is also disagreement regarding his place of birth: some stated that he was born in Mecca, while others said that he was born in al-Ṭā’if (al-Istī‘āb fī Ma‘rifat al-Aṣḥāb, vol. 3, p. 387). What matters in all of this, however, is

answering the question of whether Marwan is counted among the Companions.

Although Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr included him in his biographical dictionary of the Companions, he reported in his entry on him a narration attributed to Mālik ibn Anas stating that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) passed away when Marwan was eight years old or thereabouts, and that he did not see him because he had been taken to al-Ṭā’if as a child who had not yet reached understanding. This was because the Messenger of Allah had exiled his father, al Hakam ibn Abi al-‘As, to al-Ṭā’if, where he remained until Uthman ibn ‘Affan assumed the caliphate and brought him back; thus, he and his son came to Medina during his caliphate (vol. 3, p. 387). In a report from al-Wāqidī, Marwan is said to have seen the Prophet (peace be upon him) but did not retain anything from him (al-Bājī [d. 474 AH], vol. 2, p. 731). Ibn Ḥajar held that Marwan’s Companionship is not established and that he belongs to the second generation (Ibn Ḥajar al Asqalanī [d. 852 AH], p. 525), that is, the generation of the Ṭābi‘ūn. This was also the opinion of Abu Zur‘a al-Dimashqī (Ibn Asakir, vol. 57, p. 234).

This supports the sense of astonishment at his undertaking a task related to the preservation of the Book of Allah Almighty at a time filled with senior Companions.

1.2. His Closeness to ‘Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) and His Acquisition of Experience

Marwan lived from an early age a life full of experiences and events, and he was always close to centers of decision-making or participating in them. He advanced through positions until he reached the highest authority, namely the caliphate. After Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) allowed al-Hakam ibn Abi al As to enter Medina and settle there with his family, he appointed Marwan ibn al-Hakam his cousin as his scribe. This was a position of great importance, as it granted him access to important decisions in the caliphal state and placed him at the center of decision-making. Moreover, it surrounded him with the senior Companions and brought him into close contact with them, which gave his person significance among scholars of hadith and transmission.

The matter did not stop there; rather, the caliph also bestowed wealth upon him after drawing him close, to the extent that he granted him one-fifth of the spoils from the conquest of Ifriqiya. In all of this, ‘Uthman interpreted his actions as maintaining ties of kinship (Ibn Saad [d. 230 AH], vol. 7, p. 40). It appears that Marwan exploited this closeness and trust from ‘Uthman in the worst way, aspiring to be part of decision making and coming to manage affairs from behind him. This caused people to resent the caliph for bringing him close and obeying him, and they believed that much of what was attributed to Uthman was not ordered by him but rather originated from Marwan’s

own opinion (Ibn Saad [d. 230 AH], vol. 7, p. 40).

Marwan and his conduct in administering the affairs of the state were among the major causes of the turmoil (fitna). People had grown resentful of Uthman because of what he did with Marwan in drawing him close. Marwan would incite him against his Companions and against the people, convey to him what they were saying about him and how they were threatening him, and show him that by doing so he was seeking closeness to him. ‘Uthman was a generous, modest, and upright man; he would believe him in some of that and reject him in other matters, and he would even dispute with Marwan in the presence of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), restraining and reproaching him. When the turmoil raised its head and Uthman was besieged in his house and it was stormed, Marwan fought fiercely in his defense until he sustained severe injuries (Ibn Saad [d. 230 AH], vol. 7, pp. 40–41).

1.3. Marwan and the Events of the Fitna

After the killing of ‘Uthman, Marwan participated in the Battle of al-Jamal alongside ‘A’isha, Talha, and al-Zubayr, against ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with them all), demanding retribution for ‘Uthman. When they were defeated, Marwan sought security from ‘Ali, who granted him protection. He pledged allegiance to Ali as caliph and then withdrew to Medina, where he remained until Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufyan assumed the

caliphate in the Year of Unity (Ibn Saad [d. 230 AH], vol. 7, p. 42).

1.4. Marwan during the Caliphate of the Sufyanid Branch of the Umayyad Caliphs

Here began a new chapter in Marwan's professional life and a new experience in assuming responsibility for people's affairs and administering provincial matters. Ibn Qutayba mentioned that Marwan was appointed by Abd Allah ibn Amir over a district of Ardashir Khurra, then appointed over Bahrain before the caliphate of Mu'awiya (al-Maarif, p. 356). Muawiya later appointed him governor of Medina in the year 42 AH, and he remained in that post until the year 48 AH, when he dismissed him and appointed Sa'id ibn al-'As instead. He then reappointed him governor in the year 54 AH, before dismissing him definitively in the year 57 AH (Ibn Khayyat [d. 240 AH], pp. 208, 222, 224). Thus, the total duration of his governorship of Medina amounted to approximately nine years. Here it may be said that during his governorship of Medina, Marwan acquired extensive experience in administering a city of such importance. It was home to senior Companions and the Mothers of the Believers, and it was the center of authority where the caliph was endorsed before the pledge of allegiance was concluded in the other regions. It was also where allegiance was given to the crown prince, at least during this early period of Umayyad history. Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan took the pledge of allegiance for his son Yazid

as heir apparent from the senior Companions present in Medina. Moreover, Medina possessed immense religious value as the city of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), the site of the second of the two sacred sanctuaries, and the first stop for pilgrims arriving from the north, such as the Levant, Iraq, and other regions. In addition, it held no less significant scholarly value, as it was considered a major center of learning where the first school of Prophetic hadith and the first school of Qur'anic exegesis emerged, headed by the learned Companion 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him). Marwan ibn al-Hakam's presence in this environment, along with his connection to the capital Damascus and his awareness of caliphal affairs and those of the various provinces, made him a highly significant figure at this stage and qualified him to later become caliph of the Muslims.

When Yazid ibn Mu'awiya assumed the caliphate, the people of Medina rebelled during the events of al-Harra in the year 63 AH. They expelled the Umayyads from Medina and drove them out to the Levant, among them Marwan ibn al-Hakam and his family. On their way to the Levant, they encountered the Syrian army sent by Yazid against the people of Medina. Marwan returned with them, supported them, and provided them with assistance. Yazid appreciated this and drew him close when he returned to the Levant, and Marwan remained there until Yazid died in the

year 64 AH (Ibn Sa'd [d. 230 AH], vol. 7, p. 43).

1.5. Marwan as Caliph of the Muslims

After the death of Mu'awiya ibn Yazid and the end of his caliphate, which lasted only three months in the year 64 AH, the Umayyads chose Marwan ibn al-Hakam to be caliph of the Muslims. The people of the Levant pledged allegiance to him, and the caliphate was formally concluded for him in the middle of Dhu al-Qa'da in the year 64 AH. However, matters did not settle for him due to the rise of 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca, who also received pledges of allegiance in several regions, resulting in alternating warfare between them (Ibn Sa'd [d. 230 AH], vol. 7, p. 43).

Marwan's caliphate lasted only ten months, as he died at the beginning of Ramadan in the year 65 AH, at the age of sixty-three—though it is also said sixty-eight, and it is said sixty-four (Ibn 'Abd al-Barr [d. 463 AH], vol. 3, p. 1389). Nothing of note occurred during his caliphate other than his war against Ibn al-Zubayr.

1.6. His Transmission of Hadith

Marwan lived during the earliest generation of the Companions and held positions that enabled him to interact with many of them. He accompanied 'Uthman ibn 'Affan for a long period, lived in Medina, served as its governor, and supervised the pilgrimage seasons throughout his governorship of the Hijaz.

Thus, he possessed conditions for hadith transmission that were not available to many others. Despite the criticisms directed at him regarding his political and administrative conduct and the mistakes he committed, this did not undermine his reliability in hadith transmission. He was not accused of lying, error, or poor retention, and the scholars of hadith regarded him as trustworthy in narration. 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, a contemporary of his, said: "Marwan was not accused in hadith" (Ibn 'Abd al-Barr [d. 463 AH], vol. 3, p. 1390).

Al-Bukhari narrated eleven hadiths from him in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, including the hadith of al-Hudaybiyya in conjunction with al-Miswar ibn Makhrama. He narrated from 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and Zayd ibn Thabit. His narrations were also recorded by Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah (al-Maqdisi [d. 600 AH], vol. 1, p. 440). The scholars of hadith also mentioned that he narrated from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Busra bint Safwan, and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Aswad ibn 'Abd Yaghuth (al-Kalabadhi [d. 398 AH], vol. 2, p. 716). Those who narrated from him included Sahl ibn Sa'd, his son 'Abd al-Malik, 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Utba, Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib, Abu Bakr ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Harith, and Mujahid (al-Maqdisi [d. 600 AH], vol. 1, p. 440).

1.7. His Characteristics and Merits

Marwan possessed many commendable qualities that were recorded for him in numerous biographical works. He also had several praiseworthy merits that reflect a distinguished, courageous personality, keenly observant of the limits set by God—contrary to the image presented by some historical writings that criticized the men of the Umayyad family in general, focusing on their shortcomings rather than their virtues and merits. Al-Dhahabi said of him: “He was possessed of chivalry, courage, cunning, and shrewdness; red-faced, short in stature, broad-shouldered, thin-necked, with a large head and beard. He was nicknamed *Khīṭ Bāṭil*. Al-Shafi‘i said: When they were defeated on the Day of al-Jamal, ‘Ali asked about Marwan and said: ‘A close kinship binds me to him, and despite that he is a leader among the youth of Quraysh.’ Qabisa ibn Jabir said: I said to Mu‘awiya, ‘Whom do you see as most suitable for authority after you?’ He mentioned some men, then said: ‘As for the reciter, the jurist, strict in upholding God’s limits—Marwan.’ Ahmad said: ‘Marwan used to follow closely the judicial practice of ‘Umar’” (Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala’, vol. 3, p. 477).

It was reported from Malik ibn Anas that Marwan ibn al-Hakam once reflected and said: I have recited the Book of God for forty years, then I found myself involved in what I am involved in of bloodshed and these affairs (Abd al-Razzaq [d. 211 AH], vol. 4, p. 40). Al-Mada’ini reported from his shaykhs: “Marwan

was among the notable men of Quraysh. He was among the most proficient reciters of the Qur’an, and he used to say: ‘I have never violated the Qur’an,’ meaning that I have never committed immoral acts or major sins” (al-Baladhuri [d. 279 AH], 1996, vol. 6, p. 256). Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufyan described him as a reciter of the Book of God, knowledgeable in the religion of God, and strict in upholding the limits of God (Abu Zur‘a al Dimashqi [d. 281 AH], p. 593).

1.8. His Boldness in Doing What Others Among the Companions Did Not Do

Marwan was marked by great boldness, undertaking actions that none before him, despite being superior to him in virtue and knowledge had undertaken. The sources have preserved several reports that demonstrate this, which we will present here in order to understand his boldness in destroying the sheets of Abu Bakr and to place this act within the context of his actions and personality.

1. Removing a Stone Placed by the Prophet at the Grave of the First of the Muhajirun to Die in Medina

‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un (may Allah be pleased with him) was the first of the Muhajirun to die in Medina. They said: “O Messenger of Allah, where shall we bury him? He said: In al-Baqi The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) prepared his grave, and a stone remained from the stones of the niche. The Messenger of Allah carried it and placed it at his feet. When Marwan ibn al-Hakam became governor of

Medina, he passed by that stone and ordered it to be thrown away, saying: By Allah, there shall not be a stone by which the grave of ‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un is recognized. The Umayyads came to him and said: “What a bad thing you have done! You removed a stone placed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) and threw it away—how badly you acted! Order it to be returned.” He said: By Allah, once I have thrown it away, it shall not be returned” (Ibn Shabba [d. 262 AH], p. 101).

2. Setting the Boundaries of the Sacred Precinct of Mecca

Marwan ibn al-Hakam consulted Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufyan regarding what to do, as some of the landmarks of the Sacred Precinct had become unclear to the people. Mu‘awiya wrote to him instructing him to order Karz ibn ‘Alqama—who had lived a long life—to indicate to them the landmarks of the Haram. He did so. Ibn Sa‘d said: “It has remained thus until this day (al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, vol. 6, p. 282).

3. His Attempt to Move the Prophetic Pulpit and Increase Its Steps

Mu‘awiya intended to move the pulpit of the Prophet (peace be upon him) from Medina to Damascus and sent instructions to Marwan ibn al-Hakam, who was governor of Medina, to carry this out. The reports mention that the sun was eclipsed and Medina darkened until the stars became visible, whereupon Marwan refrained from doing so and said: “The Commander of the Faithful only ordered me to

raise it.” He then summoned a carpenter, added six steps at its base, and covered it with a velvet cloth, making it nine steps in total. No one before or after him increased it. He said: “I only increased it when the people became numerous” (al-‘Askari [d. ca. 395 AH], p. 229; al-‘Amiri [d. 893 AH], vol. 1, p. 388).

4. Advancing the Eid Sermon Before the Prayer, Sitting During It, and Bringing Out the Pulpit

Many reports mention the innovations introduced by Marwan ibn al-Hakam on the day of Eid, which no one before him had done. ‘Abd al-Razzaq reported in his *Muṣannaf* that: “The first to bring out the pulpit was Marwan. A man said to him: ‘You brought out the pulpit when it was not brought out before; you began with the sermon before the prayer, which was not done before; and you sat during the sermon, which was not done.’ He replied: ‘That practice has been abandoned’” (Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi [d. 654 AH], vol. 1, p. 27; Malik ibn Anas [d. 179 AH], vol. 1, p. 246; ‘Abd al-Razzaq, vol. 4, pp. 16–19).

Malik ibn Anas also reported that Marwan was once accompanied by Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri before delivering the Eid sermon, and that Abu Sa‘id forbade him from doing so, but Marwan did not heed his opinion and said to him: “What was practiced there has been abandoned, O Abu Sa‘id” (Malik ibn Anas [d. 179 AH], vol. 1, p. 246).

5. His Increase in the Legal Measure (al-Madd)

Al-Majishun mentioned that Marwan ibn al-Hakam was the first to increase the measure (al-madd) after the Prophet (peace be upon him) (Kitab al-Hajj, p. 182). The reports do not assist us in knowing the reason for this increase. However, al-Marjani in the eighth century AH considered Marwan's measure among the legal measures specific to expenditures, stating that it amounted to one and one-third of the Prophet's measure, and it was also said to be one and one-quarter (al-Marjani [d. after 770 AH], vol. 1, p. 221). Meanwhile, the author of the *Muṣannaf* stated that Marwan's measure was three times that of the Prophet (peace be upon him) (Abd al-Razzaq, 2013, vol. 4, p. 40).

Thus, we have examined the personality of Marwan, his eventful life, and his actions and positions that clarify his contribution to preserving the Qur'an from distortion and falsification. Other actions that no one before him had undertaken were also mentioned, in preparation for moving on to the second figure with whom Marwan dealt and from whom he sought to obtain the sheets but who refused to hand them over namely, the Mother of the Believers Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her).

2. Hafsa bint 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both), Her Entry into the Prophetic Household, and the Fate of the Sheets Entrusted to Her

2.1. Her Lineage and the Prophet's Marriage to Her

She is the Mother of the Believers Hafsa bint 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl ibn 'Abd al-'Uzza. Her mother was Zaynab bint Maz'un, the sister of 'Uthman ibn Maz'un. She was born five years before the Prophetic mission, at the time when Quraysh rebuilt the Ka'ba (Ibn Sa'd [d. 230 AH], vol. 10, p. 80). She embraced Islam in Mecca and married Khunays ibn Hudhafa. She was married to him and migrated with him to Medina, where he died after the Hijra, following the Prophet's return from Badr. After she completed her waiting period, the Prophet (peace be upon him) proposed to her and married her in Sha'ban of the third year after the Hijra (Ibn Sa'd [d. 230 AH], vol. 10, p. 82; Ibn Abi Khaythama [d. 279 AH], vol. 2, p. 5). The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) later divorced her, but Gabriel came to him and said: "Indeed, Allah commands you to take Hafsa back, for she is one who fasts often and stands in prayer" (Abu Nu'aym al-Asbahani [d. 430 AH], vol. 6, p. 3213).

2.2. The Date of Her Death

We focus on this point and discuss it in detail because Marwan ibn al-Hakam destroyed the sheets on the very day of her burial, as we shall see. Reports concerning the date of her death are highly contradictory and differ significantly, which is surprising: how could the early narrators and historians be unaware of the date of death of the Mother of the Believers Hafsa, given her status?

Al-Waqidi, as reported by Ibn Sa'd, stated that she died in Sha'ban of the year 45 AH, during the caliphate of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, at the age of sixty (al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, vol. 10, p. 85). This was also mentioned by al-Zubayr ibn Bakkar through another chain in his book *al-Muntaqā min Kitāb Azwāj al-Nabī* (p. 40), and it was likewise mentioned and preferred by al-Baladhuri (*Jumal min Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, vol. 2, p. 60). Ibn Hibban stated that she died in Medina during the caliphate of 'Uthman, without specifying a date (*al-Thiqāt*, vol. 3, p. 98). Ibn Zabr (d. 379 AH) mentioned that some said she died in the year 27 AH (*Tārīkh Mawlid al-'Ulamā' wa-Wafayātihim*, vol. 1, p. 112), a view followed by Ibn Manda (d. 395 AH), who added another report specifying the year 28 AH (*Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*, p. 948). Ibn Abi Khaythama stated that her death occurred at the beginning of the pledge of allegiance to Mu'awiya, in Jumada al-Ula of the year 41 AH (al-Kalabadhi [d. 398 AH], vol. 2, p. 840).

Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani (d. 430 AH) said that she died in the year of the Ifriqiya campaign. The campaign of Ifriqiya occurred three times: the first in the year 34 AH, the second in the year 40 AH, and the third in the year 50 AH (*Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*, vol. 6, p. 3213). Abu Zur'a al-Dimashqi reported this narration from Malik ibn Anas and favored the view that her death occurred in the year 50 AH, adding the phrase: "during Marwan's governorship of Medina" (*Tārīkh Abī Zur'a al-Dimashqī*, p. 290). However, this appears inaccurate, since

in the year 50 AH Marwan was not governor of Medina, as previously noted; Mu'awiya had dismissed him from that post in the year 48 AH and reappointed him in the year 54 AH (Ibn Khayyat [d. 240 AH], pp. 208, 222, 224).

In light of all these conflicting reports, we incline toward dating her death to the year 45 AH, because all reports agree that Marwan ibn al-Hakam was the one who led the funeral prayer over her while he was governor of Medina. The reports even provide details about her funeral and how Marwan participated in carrying her bier from the house of Ibn Hazm to the house of Shu'ba toward al-Baqi' (al-Zubayr ibn Bakkar [d. 256 AH], p. 40; Ibn Sa'd [d. 230 AH], vol. 10, p. 84; al-Kalabadhi [d. 398 AH], vol. 2, p. 840). This supports our conclusion, in addition to the fact that this year was preferred by al-Baladhuri and mentioned by al-Zubayr ibn Bakkar in his specialized work on the reports of the Mothers of the Believers, as well as by al-Waqidi.

2.3. Her Transmission of Hadith

The Mother of the Believers Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her) transmitted hadith from the Prophet (peace be upon him), like the other Mothers of the Believers, though she did not narrate as extensively as 'A'isha and Umm Salama. Al-Bukhari and Muslim included sixty hadiths narrated by her in their Ṣaḥīḥs. Those who narrated from her include her brother 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, al-Muttalib ibn Abi Wada'a ibn Ṣubayra, 'Abd Allah ibn Safwan, and Shatir ibn Shakal (al-

Maqdisi [d. 600 AH], vol. 3, p. 53), which gave her a presence among the Companions who transmitted hadith (al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya, 2002, vol. 2, p. 234).

2.4. The Fate of the Qur'an in Her Care

Most historical reports that discussed the compilation of the Qur'an into sheets during the caliphate of Abu Bakr and their transfer to his successor 'Umar ibn al-Khattab state that 'Umar, shortly before his death, entrusted them to his daughter Hafsa (Ibn Wahb [d. 197 AH], vol. 3, p. 31; Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim [d. 224 AH], p. 283; Bahshal [d. 292 AH], p. 252; Ibn Abi Dawud [d. 316 AH], p. 57). However, these sources are completely silent regarding the reason for this choice and give no indication as to why he did not entrust them to his successor, as Abu Bakr had done. Most classical studies have attempted to provide explanations for this choice, including the following:

- She was the wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and a Mother of the Believers; she was trustworthy and her integrity was not questioned by anyone. She also narrated many hadiths from the Prophet (peace be upon him), as mentioned above.
- Hafsa grew up in a devout environment with her father, her mother, and her brother 'Abd Allah, and she associated with the senior Companions. She was a righteous woman, devoted to fasting and night prayer, abundant in worship, as attested by Gabriel (peace be upon him) on behalf of God Almighty when he

commanded the Prophet to take her back after he had decided to divorce her.

- Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her) was literate and learned writing at the hands of al-Shifa' bint 'Abd Allah al-'Adawiyya, as indicated by a hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) (Ibn Hanbal [d. 241 AH], vol. 45, p. 46) and by what al-Baladhuri mentioned in *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (p. 454).
- Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her) was counted among the people of the Qur'an among the Companions—that is, among those from whom Qur'anic readings were transmitted—as considered by al-Qasim ibn Sallam at the beginning of his book *al-Qirā'āt*, as cited by Abu Shama (*al-Murshid al-Wajīz ilā 'Ulūm Tata'allaq bi-l-Kitāb al-'Azīz*, p. 43).
- Contemporary feminist studies approach the issue of the preservation of the muṣḥaf with Hafsa as an entry point for analyzing women's presence and roles in the formation of the text and religious authority, rather than as a purely juristic problem (Geissinger, 2025).
- Some researchers in gender studies view the story of the “Sheets of Hafsa” as evidence that women were active agents in preserving the foundational text (the Qur'an), and that a male-dominated historical memory marginalized this role or reduced it to a label such as “guardian of the Qur'an” (Khan, 2014).
- The incident of preserving the muṣḥaf with Hafsa is used in some literature as a case demonstrating that women were not merely recipients of rulings, but were also at the heart

of the process of transmitting the text and materially regulating it (the sheets), which opens the door to greater scholarly recognition of the role of female hadith transmitters and Qur'an reciters throughout history (Namsha, 2018).

- However, if we look at the context in which the matter took place—namely, 'Umar's bequest that the manuscripts be placed with Ḥafṣa, and the historical circumstances with all their implications, including 'Umar's being fatally wounded and not appointing a successor after him—it became inevitable that this trust—what a trust it was, equaling the weight of the caliphate itself—be transferred to a party qualified to preserve it. If we return to Ḥafṣa (may God be pleased with her), we find that she represented a household of the Prophethood itself and the very niche of Islam. She was the closest to 'Umar by kinship, being his daughter, and he knew best her character, piety, and ability to bear this responsibility. Thus, 'Umar wished that she have a share in the reward for preserving the manuscripts of the Qur'ān.
- On the other hand, if we search for someone suitable for this task at that time who possessed qualifications superior to those of Ḥafṣa, we find none. On the contrary, entrusting these manuscripts to any other man might have been construed as an endorsement of the caliphate and a cause for discord and disagreement. Ḥafṣa was a neutral party; entrusting her with the manuscripts did not invite political

interpretation, nor did anyone object to it—and this is indeed what occurred. The reports do not convey any objection, resentment, denunciation, or demand by anyone for the manuscripts.

3. The Form of the Manuscripts Received by Ḥafṣa

The form of the manuscripts that the Mother of the Believers Ḥafṣa (may God be pleased with her) received from her father 'Umar (may God be pleased with him) raises a problem that many studies addressing the compilation of the Qur'ān have not dealt with, as it in turn opens further questions. By tracing scattered textual reports, we find that when Zayd b. Thābit (may God be pleased with him) was assigned by Abū Bakr to compile the muṣḥaf, he collected its sūras and verses from palm stalks, parchments, stones, shoulder blades, palm fibers, and the memories of men (al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), p. 1907, vol. 4; Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241 AH), p. 390, vol. 1). He then recorded them in sheets or manuscripts (Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316 AH), p. 57).

In a report from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, he said: "The person with the greatest reward regarding the muṣḥafs is Abū Bakr, for he was the first to collect [the Qur'ān] between two covers" (Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316 AH), p. 49). Al-Harawī, in his account of Zayd's compilation of the muṣḥaf, stated: "Zayd used to carefully track what had been written of it in its proper places and combine it into the manuscripts, and he would not include in those manuscripts except

what he found written as it had been revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and dictated by him to those who wrote it” (al-Harawī (d. 370 AH), p. 170, vol. 2).

In a report found in al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr*—which he introduced with a tentative expression (“it was said”) before its chain—it specifies the nature of the materials upon which Zayd wrote the Qur’ān in the first compilation and adds a second stage before the caliphate of ‘Uthmān, namely, ‘Umar’s copying of the Qur’ān into manuscripts prior to handing them over to Ḥafṣa. Al-Ṭabarī says: “It was said: Aḥmad b. ‘Abdah al-Ḍabbī narrated to us; ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Muḥammad al-Darāwardī narrated to us; from ‘Umārah b. Ghaziyyah; from Ibn Shihāb; from Khārijah b. Zayd b. Thābit; from his father Zayd ... He said: Abū Bakr ordered me to write it on pieces of leather, fragments of shoulder blades, and palm stalks. When Abū Bakr died and ‘Umar became [caliph], he wrote that into a single manuscript, which remained with him. When he died, the manuscript was with Ḥafṣa, the wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him)” (*Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, p. 59, vol. 1).

If the outcome of Zayd’s work was manuscripts containing all the verses of the Qur’ān arranged within their sūras, though the sūras themselves were not arranged—this being what is termed the first compilation of the Qur’ān during the caliphate of Abū Bakr—and if Abū Bakr kept them and then passed them to ‘Umar before his death after

appointing him caliph, then, if we rely on al-Ṭabarī’s report, what ‘Umar copied into manuscripts would constitute the second compilation of the Qur’ān. Nevertheless, this report is not mentioned by many reliable sources such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* by Ibn Abī Dāwūd, among others. What is important here is that what ‘Umar also bequeathed to his daughter Ḥafṣa, the Mother of the Believers, after becoming certain of his impending death, were manuscripts in which the Qur’ān had been fully compiled.

This brings us back to the original materials upon which Zayd b. Thābit wrote the manuscripts in the first compilation—namely, what was written on palm stalks, fibers, parchments, stones, and leather. What became of them? The sources are silent on this matter. We are thus faced with two possibilities. The first is that Zayd destroyed them after copying what they contained, leaving no trace of them. This raises another question: how did he destroy them? The method of destruction later ordered by ‘Uthmān—burning what was written of the Qur’ān other than his muṣḥaf—caused considerable controversy and gave rise to many reports. Had Zayd done the same, the issue would likewise have arisen; yet the sources mention nothing of the sort. The second possibility is that Zayd would receive the original material, copy what was in it, and then return it to its owner. Thus, these originals would not have been gathered in one place,

which may explain the absence of reports tracing their fate.

4. ‘Uthmān’s Request for the Manuscripts from Ḥafṣa

- When ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (may God be pleased with him) decided to unite the community around a single muṣḥaf in order to avert اختلاف in recitations and division within the community concerning its Book, it was necessary for him to begin where his predecessor Abū Bakr had left off—namely, by relying on the manuscripts in which the Qur’ān had been fully compiled and which were in the possession of the Mother of the Believers Ḥafṣa. He therefore sent to her requesting them (al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), p. 1908, vol. 4).
- Some reports mention that Ḥafṣa initially refused to send them to him and did not do so until he gave her a pledge to return them after copying what they contained (Ibn Wahb (d. 197 AH), p. 31, vol. 3). The reports do not provide an explanation for Ḥafṣa’s insistence on retaining these originals after the caliph had requested them. The reports concerning the compilation indicate that the date of ‘Uthmān’s compilation of the Qur’ān was around the end of the year 24 AH and the beginning of 25 AH, during the Muslim conquest of Armenia and Azerbaijan—since the reason prompting ‘Uthmān to compile the muṣḥaf was the disagreement that arose in Qur’ānic recitation among Iraqis, Syrians, and others during this campaign. This corresponds to the beginning

of the second or third year of his caliphate (al-Ja‘farī, 2022, p. 39). This removes the possibility that the reason was the outbreak of fitna or people’s disagreement with ‘Uthmān, for his compilation of the muṣḥaf occurred at the beginning of his caliphate, when unity prevailed and the state was in a condition of full stability.

There thus remains only the explanation that the Mother of the Believers Ḥafṣa’s keenness to retain those manuscripts stemmed from her commitment to safeguarding the trust entrusted to her by her father, the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar. Here, the soundness of ‘Umar’s judgment in leaving this weighty trust with Ḥafṣa, and her worthiness of it, becomes clearly evident.

On the other hand, the narratives and reports do not inform us of the manner in which Ḥafṣa sent the manuscripts to ‘Uthmān, nor who carried and transported them. What is certain is that Ḥafṣa did not neglect the matter of verifying and ensuring the trust would reach ‘Uthmān safely, because this was an extremely important and delicate task. According to the principles of transmission, the Qur’ān had to be carried by a group of upright men (‘udūl), and it is not unlikely that the committee ‘Uthmān had formed and tasked with copying the Qur’ān was the same one that undertook this transfer. This committee consisted of four men: Zayd b. Thābit, ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, Sa‘īd b. al-‘Āṣ, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-

Ḥārith b. Hishām (al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), p. 1908, vol. 4).

5. The Fate of the Manuscripts after Copying into ‘Uthmān’s Muṣḥaf

‘Uthmān (may God be pleased with him) fulfilled the promise he had made to Ḥafṣa (may God be pleased with her) and returned the manuscripts to her once they had been copied, as reported by Anas b. Mālīk: “...and when they had copied the manuscripts into the muṣḥafs, ‘Uthmān returned the manuscripts to Ḥafṣa” (al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), p. 1908, vol. 4). Although neither this report nor any other specifies how long the manuscripts remained with ‘Uthmān, the important point is that they returned once again to the household of the Prophet, where they would receive the highest level of preservation.

The question arises, however: what value did these manuscripts have after their contents had been copied into ‘Uthmān’s muṣḥaf? To assess their significance at this stage, it is necessary to address another important issue: the differences between these manuscripts and ‘Uthmān’s muṣḥaf. Dr. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-‘Abd al-Karīm, in his article “The Difference Between the Compilations of Abū Bakr and ‘Uthmān (may God be pleased with them) of the Qur’ān—A Descriptive Study,” enumerates nine differences between the two compilations:

1. The difference in origin and substance.
2. The difference in motivation behind the compilation.

3. The larger number of letters in Abū Bakr’s compilation compared to ‘Uthmān’s.
4. Differences in the order of the Qur’ānic text.
5. Differences in the copies and their numbers.
6. Differences in the sources of compilation.
7. Differences in the scribes and the form of writing.
8. Differences in the orthography (rasm).
9. Differences in the obligation regarding recitation and writing. (Aḥmad, 2021, p. 12)

From these differences, we can gauge the importance of Abū Bakr’s manuscripts even after their contents had been copied: they still constituted a source for any new extraction or compilation of the Qur’ān. While ‘Uthmān’s work—through the committee of copyists, the unification of the text, its mandatory recitation, and its distribution to the provinces—was accepted unanimously by the Companions of his time, there was no guarantee that this would remain the case for later generations. This is exactly what Marwān b. al-Ḥakam understood and expressed, as we shall see. Hence, these original manuscripts remained a potential source of concern and possibly a trigger for discord regarding the muṣḥaf.

6. Marwān’s Request for the Manuscripts from Ḥafṣa

Marwān b. al-Ḥakam was one of the most active figures during ‘Uthmān’s caliphate, close to his council, and knowledgeable of the affairs of the caliphate and state administration. He undoubtedly witnessed the process of writing the Qur’ān and copying it

into the muṣḥafs sent to the provinces. He was also aware of ‘Uthmān’s decision to destroy all other manuscripts containing portions of the Qur’ān, leaving only the muṣḥafs and the manuscripts sent to him by Ḥafṣa.

Moreover, Marwān was among the most learned in Qur’ānic knowledge in his time. Al-Madā’inī reports from his teachers: “Marwān was among the men of Quraysh and among the most learned in the Qur’ān” (al-Balādhurī (d. 279 AH), p. 256, vol. 6). He was also praised by Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān as “...the reciter of God’s Book, the jurist in God’s religion, and strict in the limits of God, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam” (Abū Zur‘ah al-Dimashqī (d. 281 AH), p. 593).

Thus, he carried the responsibility of preserving the Qur’ān and protecting ‘Uthmān’s muṣḥaf. After ‘Uthmān was killed and the resulting turmoil ended with the Year of Unity, Marwān regained authority by being appointed governor of Medina by Mu‘āwiya, as we have seen. He then sent a request to Ḥafṣa for the manuscripts in order to destroy them, as several reports mention (Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim (d. 224 AH), p. 285; Ibn Shabbah (d. 262 AH), p. 1003, vol. 3; Baḥshal (d. 292 AH), p. 253; Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316 AH), p. 93; Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354 AH), p. 432, vol. 7).

However, Ḥafṣa refused to hand them over, despite Marwān being the governor of Medina appointed by Mu‘āwiya. This stance opens another avenue for understanding the relationship between the Companions and

official authority in the early phase of the Islamic and Umayyad states, particularly regarding religious matters and the Qur’ān itself. To analyze Ḥafṣa’s position, we recall her response when ‘Uthmān requested the manuscripts: initially she also refused and only handed them over after he gave her a pledge to return them. Marwān, by contrast, requested them in order to destroy them. Hence, Ḥafṣa’s commitment to preserving the trust of these manuscripts was consistent; at this stage, her vigilance was likely motivated by the desire to safeguard the heritage entrusted to her by ‘Umar. Meanwhile, Marwān regarded these original manuscripts as a potential threat to ‘Uthmān’s project of unifying the muṣḥafs. Both acted diligently, each with the same ultimate goal of preserving the Qur’ān.

7. Marwān’s Request for the Manuscripts from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar and Their Destruction

Al-Zuhri reported that Sālim b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar informed him:

“When Ḥafṣa passed away and we returned from her burial, Marwān sent a request (‘azīmah) to ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar to send him those manuscripts. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar sent them, and Marwān commanded that they be dispersed.”

(al-Ṭabarānī, d. 360 AH, p. 235, vol. 4)

Other reports state that Marwān burned them (Ibn Wahb, d. 197 AH, p. 31, vol. 3; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, d. 316 AH, p. 57), while yet other reports indicate he tore them apart (Ibn

Shabbah, d. 262 AH, p. 1003, vol. 3; Baḥshal, d. 292 AH, p. 252). Some narratives even mention that he erased or washed them (al-Zubayr b. Bakr, d. 256 AH, p. 40; Ibn Shabbah, d. 262 AH, p. 1003). It is reasonable to reconcile these reports by suggesting that he first washed and erased them, then tore them, and finally burned them—a sequence emphasizing thoroughness in honoring, erasing, and destroying the manuscripts (al-Zurqānī, n.d., p. 402, vol. 1).

These accounts show that Marwān requested the manuscripts directly from the senior member of the family, the virtuous and knowledgeable Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, Ḥaḥṣa’s brother, immediately after her burial. He did not hesitate in requesting them; in fact, he did so with insistence and determination. This urgency ensured that these copies did not leave the hands of authority. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar responded promptly, without objection or delay, even though he certainly knew their intended destruction—he was aware of Marwān’s prior request to Ḥaḥṣa and her refusal to hand them over. The question arises: why did ‘Abd Allāh comply?

To analyze this, we first consider Marwān’s action and his insistence on destroying the manuscripts. It is difficult to believe that he acted solely on his own initiative, especially as the governor of Medina, the stronghold of the Companions and the arbiters of authority. He likely consulted the Companions beforehand, either seeking their advice or following their

recommendation. Reports suggest that Marwān did not act without consulting the Companions. Ibn Sa’d narrates:

“During his governorship of Medina, Marwān would gather the Companions of the Messenger of God, consult them, and act according to what they agreed upon.” (al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr, p. 47, vol. 7)

Moreover, Ibn Rushd al-Jadd notes that Marwān consulted the Companions regarding this specific incident:

“When it became known that the ‘Uthmānic muṣḥaf contained the entire Qur’ān with nothing added or omitted—according to God’s statement: *‘Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed, We will be its Guardian’* [al-Ḥijr 15:9]—Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, after consultation with the scholars of his time, decided to burn the gathered Qur’anic manuscripts that had been compiled during Abū Bakr’s time, as they did not encompass the entire Qur’ān.” (Ibn Rushd, d. 520 AH, p. 39, vol. 17)

The compliance of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar in sending the manuscripts, fully aware of their fate, constitutes a clear acknowledgment and agreement on the necessity of destroying them. Furthermore, no other Companions expressed objection or questioned the intentions—neither the virtuous Companions nor the Mothers of the Believers, such as ‘Ā’isha, nor the official authorities like Caliph Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān. It is also possible that Mu‘āwiya was informed of the action prior to its execution.

Marwān justified his action by stating:

“I did this because their content had already been written and copied into the muṣḥafs. I feared that if they remained in the hands of the people for too long, doubt might arise regarding the muṣḥaf, and people might say that it once contained something not written in it.”

(Ibn Abī Dāwūd, d. 316 AH, p. 102; al-Ṭabarānī, d. 360 AH, p. 235, vol. 4)

Ibn Kathīr comments:

“Marwān’s reasoning in this matter was the same as that of ‘Uthmān.”
(Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm, p. 32, vol. 1)

This indicates a continuation of ‘Uthmān’s approach.

8. Assessment of Marwān’s Action in Destroying the Manuscripts

Evaluating Marwān’s act, we can say that it represents the final stage in the process of compiling the Noble Muṣḥaf. Its significance is no less than the preceding stages, but rather complements them. Through Marwān’s actions, God’s promise of preserving His Book was fulfilled.

Had those original manuscripts survived, divergent opinions and doubts about the text would have arisen, particularly as doctrinal differences emerged and groups with varying beliefs appeared within the Muslim community. If the manuscripts had been accessible, individuals could have produced their own muṣḥafs, arranged the chapters as they wished, and perpetuated discrepancies

over time. Furthermore, had these originals fallen into the hands of Islam’s enemies, such as the Jews or Crusaders, they could have used them to create versions conforming to their interests, undermining the religion and fostering division.

Despite the absence of these original manuscripts today, some Orientalists continue to search for artifacts from that period that did not reach ‘Uthmān, aiming to cast doubt on the Qur’ān as it exists. By destroying them, Marwān permanently closed a dangerous avenue, the benefits of which are still reaped to this day.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Marwan ibn al-Hakam was a figure who witnessed pivotal events in the early Islamic state and was an integral part of them. His historical context shaped him through his political, religious, and administrative experiences. Therefore, his character cannot be viewed solely through the lens of the incident of destroying the original Qur’anic manuscripts, but must be analyzed within the broader historical context, including the political and religious circumstances. This context encompassed the compilation of the Qur’anic text, the major civil strife (the First Fitna), the challenges of consolidating Umayyad rule, and the use of historical reports in sectarian disputes.

The study of the narratives regarding the early Qur’anic manuscripts, through examination of

their chains of transmission and texts, revealed that some reports can be interpreted as part of the effort to unify the Qur'anic text and prevent disputes, while other reports were exploited to portray Marwan in a negative light, aiming to criticize the Umayyad experience as a whole. The study concludes that Marwan's action in destroying these manuscripts does not fall outside the broader framework of his bold character, which undertook actions that even the most capable companions might have hesitated to perform. Furthermore, his destruction of the manuscripts did not compromise the integrity of the Qur'anic text, given the multiple channels through which it was preserved and transmitted in the community, and the authenticity of the Uthmanic codex, which was transmitted mutawatir (widely and reliably) through the companions. Marwan's actions also fell within the official framework of Qur'anic preservation, as he acted in his capacity as governor and representative of the Umayyad state. This demonstrates that the Qur'an was preserved through both communal transmission and institutionalized official procedures, beginning with Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, passing through Umar ibn al-Khattab, Hafsa, and Uthman ibn Affan, and culminating with Marwan ibn al-Hakam.

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