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Mapping the Evolution of Qur'anic Codification from the Prophetic Era to the Uthmanic Mushaf

*Pemetaan Evolusi Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an dari Masa Nabi hingga
Utsman bin Affan*

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Abstract

The codification of the Qur'ān represents a fundamental process in preserving the authenticity of divine revelation throughout the formative period of the Muslim community. This study aims to analyse the evolution of Qur'ānic codification from the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad to the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān by examining changes in its objectives, mechanisms, and functions across successive phases. The study employed a qualitative library research approach using content analysis of scholarly literature on the history of Qur'ānic codification. The findings demonstrate that Qur'ānic codification evolved through three interconnected phases: preservation during the Prophetic period, institutional compilation under Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, and textual standardization under 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. Each phase emerged in response to distinct historical circumstances while maintaining the authenticity of the revealed text. This study contributes an analytical framework that systematically maps the evolution of Qur'ānic codification, offering a more comprehensive perspective than conventional chronological accounts.

Keywords: Qur'ānic Codification; Preservation; Textual Standardization; Islamic History; 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān

Abstrak

Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an merupakan proses fundamental dalam menjaga autentisitas wahyu yang berkembang mengikuti dinamika masyarakat Islam awal. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis evolusi kodifikasi Al-Qur'an sejak masa Nabi Muḥammad hingga pemerintahan 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān berdasarkan perubahan tujuan, mekanisme, dan fungsinya pada setiap fase. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis *library research* melalui analisis isi terhadap berbagai literatur yang membahas sejarah kodifikasi Al-Qur'an. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kodifikasi Al-Qur'an berlangsung melalui tiga fase yang saling berkesinambungan, yaitu preservasi pada masa Nabi, pengumpulan terinstitusionalisasi pada masa Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, dan standarisasi tekstual pada masa 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. Setiap fase lahir sebagai respons terhadap kebutuhan historis yang berbeda tanpa mengubah substansi wahyu. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menawarkan kerangka analitis yang memetakan evolusi kodifikasi Al-Qur'an secara sistematis sehingga memberikan perspektif yang lebih komprehensif dibandingkan pendekatan kronologis semata.

Kata Kunci: Kodifikasi Al-Qur'an; Preservasi; Standarisasi Tekstual; Sejarah Islam; 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān



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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān is the primary source of Islamic teachings and is believed by Muslims to have been preserved in its authentic form since its revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad.¹ This preservation is not only understood as a theological doctrine but is also reflected in the historical processes through which the revelation was transmitted and safeguarded. During the Prophetic period, the Qur'ān was preserved through the complementary practices of memorization by the Companions, written documentation by the *kuttāb al-wahy*, and direct verification by the Prophet himself.² Together, these mechanisms established the foundational framework for the transmission of the Qur'ān, which was subsequently maintained by later generations. Accordingly, Qur'ānic codification should not be understood merely as the collection of written manuscripts but rather as an integral component of a broader preservation system that evolved progressively to ensure the continuity and authenticity of the revealed text within the expanding Muslim community.

The development of the Muslim community following the death of the Prophet introduced new challenges to the preservation of the Qur'ān. The deaths of numerous *ḥuffāz* during the Battle of Yamāmah, together with the rapid territorial expansion of the Islamic state under the Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn, created the need for a more systematic approach to safeguarding the integrity and consistency of Qur'ānic transmission.³ These circumstances gave rise to two major initiatives: the compilation of the Qur'ān during the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and the standardization of the *muṣṣḥaf* under 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.⁴ Neither initiative represented an alteration of the revealed text; rather, both constituted adaptive responses to the social, political, and administrative transformations experienced by the early Muslim community. Consequently, understanding Qur'ānic codification requires an approach that extends beyond chronological description to examine the changing objectives, mechanisms, and functions that characterized each stage of its historical development.

Within the discipline of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, Qur'ānic codification is generally understood as a continuous process linking the preservation of revelation during the lifetime of the Prophet with its compilation and subsequent standardization under the Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn.⁵ Nevertheless, each of these phases possessed distinct historical contexts, objectives, and methodological characteristics. These differences indicate that Qur'ānic codification should be viewed as a dynamic and evolutionary process rather than as a single historical event. An evolutionary perspective is therefore essential because it explains the continuity and transformation connecting each phase, allowing every codification policy to be understood as part of an integrated preservation system. Such an approach also provides a clearer understanding of how

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- 1 Ismail Albayrak, "Revisiting the Meaning of the Divine Preservation of the Qur'an: With Special References to Verse 15:9," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (November 4, 2022): 1064, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111064>.
 - 2 Burhan Djamaluddin et al., "Cultural and Linguistic Dimensions in the Formation of Qur'anic Orthography: A Study of Rasm Variation in Early Muṣṣḥafs," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah* 22, no. 2 (December 18, 2025): 374–89, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v22i2.30210>.
 - 3 Ammar Ammar and Yeti Dahliana, "Tadwīn Al-Qur'ān: Analisis Historis Kodifikasi di Era Khulafā' Al-Rāsyidīn," *Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Akademik* 2, no. 5 (September 25, 2025): 406–14, <https://doi.org/10.61722/jmia.v2i5.6630>.
 - 4 Abdul Jabar et al., "Kanonisasi Tujuh Bacaan Al-Quran: Ibn Mujahid, Otoritas Keilmuan, Dan Rekonfigurasi Epistemologis Qiraat," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Rausban Fikir* 15, no. 1 (June 24, 2026): 49–62, <https://doi.org/10.24090/xajagr67>.
 - 5 Abdullah Saeed, "Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'ān: Context and Interpretation," in *Contemporary Muslim Qur'anic Hermeneutics* (BRILL, 2026), 1–56, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004750692_002.

the changing needs of the Muslim community influenced the development of preservation strategies while maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the Qur'ānic revelation.

Studies on Qur'ānic codification have been conducted from various scholarly perspectives. Existing research has demonstrated that the compilation of the Qur'ān emerged primarily as a response to the need to preserve the revelation following the death of the Prophet, with particular emphasis on the initiative undertaken during the caliphate of Abū Bakr.⁶ Other studies have argued that the standardization implemented under 'Uthmān was intended to unify Qur'ānic recitation across the expanding Islamic territories amid increasing linguistic diversity among Muslim communities.⁷ Meanwhile, several investigations have concentrated on the historical narrative, textual transmission, or the authenticity of the *muṣḥaf*, treating Qur'ānic codification principally as a sequence of chronological events.⁸ However, relatively few studies have attempted to map the evolution of Qur'ānic codification by examining the transformation of its objectives, functions, and mechanisms across successive historical phases. As a result, the conceptual relationship between preservation, compilation, and standardization has yet to be fully articulated within a unified analytical framework.

Against this background, the present study aims to analyse the evolution of Qur'ānic codification from the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad to the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān by mapping the changing objectives, mechanisms, principal actors, and functions associated with each stage of its development. Unlike previous studies that have largely presented codification as a chronological historical account, this study proposes an analytical framework that conceptualizes Qur'ānic codification as an evolutionary process consisting of three interconnected phases: preservation, institutional compilation, and textual standardization. By adopting this perspective, the study seeks to provide a more systematic understanding of the historical development of Qur'ānic codification while contributing to the field of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān through a framework that highlights the continuity and adaptive transformation of preservation strategies throughout the formative period of Islamic history.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research to examine the evolution of Qur'ānic codification from the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad to the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.⁹ The data sources consisted of scholarly literature relevant to the study of Qur'ānic codification, including classical works such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *al-Burbān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, and *al-Muqni*, as well as modern academic works, including Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī's *The History of the Qur'ānic Text*, studies by Harald Motzki, Arthur Jeffery, Muṣṭafā Muslim, and other scholarly publications addressing the transmission and codification of the Qur'ān. The selected sources were purposively chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives, the scholarly authority

6 Abdulla Galadari, "Inspiration and Revelation of the Qur'an and Its Relation to the Bible," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (November 21, 2021): 1023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12111023>.

7 Muchammad Fariz Maulana Akbar, Dody S Truna, and Rifki Rosyad, "Post-Uthmanic Qur'anic Re-Canonization: A Historical Reconstruction of the Second Maṣāḥif Project during the Abbasid–Mamluk Era," *Focus* 6, no. 2 (2025): 165–90, <https://journal.unpar.ac.id/index.php/focus/article/view/9533>.

8 Ihwan Agustono and Ali Mahfuz Munawar, "From Oral Tradition to Written Text: Neuwirth's Insights on the Spoken Aspects of the Qur'an," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 9, no. 2 (August 31, 2025): 344–59, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v9i2.11741>; Asma Hilali, "The Qur'ān before the Book - History and Concepts of Qur'ānic Variants (Qirā'āt)," 38 *مجلة كلية الشريعة و الدراسات الإسلامية*, no. 2 (January 2021): 233–45, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2021.0275>.

9 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2008).

of the authors, and their contribution to understanding the historical development of Qur'ānic codification.

The data were analyzed using content analysis through four sequential stages: identification, classification, comparison, and synthesis.¹⁰ During the identification stage, information concerning the historical background, objectives, mechanisms, key actors, and outcomes of Qur'ānic codification was extracted from each source. The identified data were subsequently classified according to their historical period and systematically compared to identify patterns of continuity, change, and functional development across different phases of codification. Finally, the findings were synthesized into an analytical framework that maps the evolution of Qur'ānic codification according to changes in its objectives, mechanisms, and functions from the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad to the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. This analytical approach enabled the study to move beyond a purely descriptive historical account by providing a systematic interpretation of the evolutionary development of Qur'ānic codification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Evolution of Qur'ānic Codification during the Prophetic Period

Discussions on the codification of the Qur'ān (*jam' al-Qur'ān*) cannot be separated from the Prophetic period, which marked the earliest stage in the development of a systematic framework for preserving the revelation. Although the Qur'ān had not yet been compiled into a single *muṣḥaf* during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad, various mechanisms for safeguarding its authenticity had already been implemented from the very beginning of the revelation process. Mannā' Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, in *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, argues that the preservation of the Qur'ān during the Prophetic period relied on two complementary approaches: memorization (*ḥifẓ*) and written documentation (*kitābah*).¹¹ A similar view is presented by Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, who identifies the Prophetic era as the primary foundation for Qur'ānic preservation before it developed into the compilation of the *muṣḥaf* under the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*.¹² Consequently, the evolution of Qur'ānic codification should be understood as a gradual process that began with the first revelation rather than as a policy introduced only after the Prophet's death.

The process began whenever revelation was conveyed to the Prophet Muḥammad through the Angel Jibrīl. Upon receiving revelation, the Prophet immediately transmitted the verses to his Companions so that they could memorize and implement them in their daily lives. Muḥammad Abū Shuhbah explains that this transmission was not merely an act of religious instruction but also constituted an essential mechanism for preserving the Qur'ān, as every revealed passage became known to the Muslim community from the moment of its revelation.¹³ In practice, the Prophet taught the Qur'ān gradually according to the sequence of revelation, enabling his Companions to comprehend and memorize each passage accurately. This pattern demonstrates that the preservation of the Qur'ān evolved simultaneously with the revelation itself rather than commencing only after the completion of revelation. Accordingly, the Prophetic period represents the first stage in the evolution of Qur'ānic codification.

One of the defining characteristics of this phase was the strong tradition of oral transmission through *talaqqī* and *murāja'ah*. The Companions learned the Qur'ān directly from the Prophet

10 James W Drisko and Tina Maschi, *Content Analysis* (Oxford university press, 2016).

11 Mannā' Khalīl Al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2000).

12 Ṣubḥī Al-Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li-al-Malāyīn, 2005).

13 Muḥammad Abū Shuhbah, *Al-Madkhal Li-Dirāsāt Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Sunnah, 2003).

and repeatedly recited it until their pronunciation and memorization were fully accurate. This process was reinforced through *mu'aradab*, the annual review of the Qur'ān between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Angel Jibrīl during the month of Ramaḍān. According to Mannā' Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān, *mu'aradab* functioned as a comprehensive verification process for all revelations received throughout the year. Furthermore, many Companions became renowned as *ḥuffāz*, including Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, Zayd ibn Thābit, and Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, allowing the memorization of the Qur'ān to spread collectively across the Muslim community. Consequently, memorization was not merely an individual religious practice but an organized system for safeguarding the revealed text.

Alongside oral transmission, the Prophet also established a systematic practice of written documentation through the *kuttāb al-wahy* (scribes of revelation). Al-Zarkashī, in *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, explains that whenever revelation descended, the Prophet instructed the scribes to record it on the writing materials available at the time, including palm stalks, animal skins, thin stones, camel shoulder blades, and parchment (*riqā'*).¹⁴ Among these scribes, Zayd ibn Thābit became one of the most prominent figures due to his close involvement in recording the revelation. Al-Suyūṭī, in *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, further notes that the Prophet not only ordered the writing of each revealed verse but also specified its exact position within the corresponding *sūrah*.¹⁵ This evidence demonstrates that an organized system of written documentation had already been established during the Prophetic period rather than emerging only after the Prophet's death.

The accuracy of the Qur'ān during the Prophetic era was further ensured through a verification mechanism that integrated memorization with written documentation. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī argues that these two preservation methods complemented one another, allowing any potential error in one medium to be corrected through the other.¹⁶ The memorization maintained by the *ḥuffāz* served as a control over the manuscripts prepared by the *kuttāb al-wahy*, while the written records reinforced the accuracy of oral transmission across the Muslim community. More importantly, every stage of this process remained under the direct supervision of the Prophet Muḥammad as the recipient of divine revelation. Consequently, the ultimate authority for verification rested not with individual scribes or memorizers but with the Prophet himself. This multilayered verification system subsequently became the essential foundation for the compilation of the Qur'ān during the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the evolution of Qur'ānic codification during the Prophetic period was not directed toward producing a single compiled *muṣḥaf*, but rather toward establishing a comprehensive system for preserving divine revelation. Nicolai Sinai observes that the integration of oral transmission and written documentation constituted one of the defining characteristics of the Qur'ān's earliest transmission history, although he approaches the subject from a historical-critical perspective.¹⁷ Within the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, however, this integrated preservation system is regarded as compelling evidence that the authenticity of the Qur'ān had already been safeguarded from the very beginning of revelation. Therefore, the compilation of the *muṣḥaf* under Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and its subsequent standardization during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān should be understood as the

14 Badr al-Dīn Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1957).

15 Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004).

16 Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al-A'ẓamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003).

17 Nicolai Sinai, *Inner-Qur'anic Chronology, The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

continuation and refinement of an established preservation framework rather than as entirely new initiatives. In this sense, the Prophetic period represents the foundational stage in the evolution of Qur'ānic codification that shaped all subsequent developments.

The Evolution of Qur'ānic Codification during the Period of the Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn

The passing of the Prophet Muḥammad marked a significant turning point in the system of Qur'ānic preservation. During the Prophetic period, the authority to verify revealed passages rested exclusively with the Prophet himself, ensuring that any issues concerning the recitation, arrangement, or recording of the revelation could be resolved directly under his supervision. Following his death, however, this responsibility shifted to the community of Companions who had memorized, transmitted, and documented the revelation. This transition introduced new challenges, as the preservation of the Qur'ān no longer relied upon a single authoritative figure but upon the collective integrity of the Companions. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī argues that these changing circumstances required a more systematic framework for preserving the Qur'ān as the Muslim community continued to expand.¹⁸ The urgency of this need became particularly evident after the Battle of Yamāmah, during which a considerable number of *ḥuffūz* were killed. According to Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zurqānī, this event did not threaten the authenticity of the Qur'ān itself; rather, it accelerated the transformation of its preservation system into a more organized institutional framework.¹⁹ Thus, the codification initiated under Abū Bakr emerged primarily as a response to changing historical circumstances rather than as a response to any alteration in the substance of revelation.

The proposal to compile the Qur'ān was first advanced by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb to Caliph Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq after witnessing the heavy loss of *ḥuffūz* during the Battle of Yamāmah. As narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Abū Bakr initially hesitated to approve the proposal because he feared undertaking an action that had not been explicitly carried out by the Prophet Muḥammad.²⁰ Following extensive deliberation with 'Umar, however, he became convinced that compiling the Qur'ān represented an effort to safeguard the welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) of the Muslim community rather than an innovation in religious practice. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, in *Fath al-Bārī*, interprets Abū Bakr's decision as an application of the principle of *maṣlaḥah mursalah*, aimed at ensuring the continuity of Qur'ānic transmission without compromising the integrity of revelation.²¹ This interpretation demonstrates that the compilation of the Qur'ān constituted an administrative policy rooted in the preservation principles established during the Prophetic period. Consequently, the evolution that occurred under Abū Bakr concerned the governance and management of the revealed text rather than any modification of its content.

The responsibility for implementing the *jam' al-Qur'ān* was entrusted to Zayd ibn Thābit, one of the Prophet's *kuttāb al-wahy*, who was widely recognized for his scholarly competence, precision, and direct involvement in recording revelation during the Prophet's lifetime. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī maintains that the appointment of Zayd reflected a deliberate effort to preserve methodological continuity between the Prophetic period and the caliphate of

18 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2000).

19 Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm Al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil Al-'Irḥān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995).

20 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002).

21 Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath Al-Bārī Bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, vol. 13 (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2000).

Abū Bakr.²² In carrying out this task, Zayd did not rely solely upon the memorization of the Companions but also collected written records of revelation produced during the Prophet's lifetime and subjected them to a rigorous verification process based on reliable testimony. Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī characterizes this procedure as a multilayered system of authentication that integrated both oral and written evidence.²³ From a different perspective, Arthur Jeffery regarded the compilation process as a significant stage in the textual history of the Qur'ān. This interpretation, however, was challenged by al-A'ẓamī, who argued that the compilation did not create a new text but merely consolidated revelations that had already been authenticated during the Prophet's lifetime.²⁴ The dialogue between these perspectives suggests that the evolution of Qur'ānic codification is more appropriately understood as the institutionalization of an existing preservation system rather than the reconstruction of the Qur'ānic text.

The characteristics of Qur'ānic codification during the caliphate of Abū Bakr reveal a significant functional development compared with the Prophetic period. During the lifetime of the Prophet, preservation primarily focused on the transmission of revelation through memorization, oral recitation, and written documentation accompanying the ongoing process of revelation. Under Abū Bakr, however, this preservation framework evolved into the systematic compilation of all authenticated revelatory materials within a single collection of *ṣuḥuf*. Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Aẓīm al-Zurqānī, in *Manābil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, explains that the objective of this compilation was neither to reorganize the Qur'ān nor to establish a new textual version, but rather to consolidate dispersed written records that had already been verified during the Prophetic period.²⁵ Likewise, Muṣṭafā Muslim describes this initiative as a form of *institutional preservation*, representing a transition from individual modes of preservation toward a more structured and collective documentary system.²⁶ Accordingly, the caliphate of Abū Bakr represents the first major stage in the evolution of Qur'ānic codification, marking the transition from the preservation framework established during the Prophetic period to institutional compilation, which subsequently laid the foundation for the process of textual standardization under 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.

Table 1. Evolution of Qur'ānic Codification from the Prophetic Period to the Caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān

Dimension	Prophetic Period	Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq	'Uthmān ibn 'Affān
Historical context	Progressive revelation	Battle of Yamāmah and the loss of numerous <i>ḥuffāẓ</i>	Expansion of Islamic territories and diversity of <i>qirā'āt</i>
Primary objective	Preservation of revelation	Compilation of authenticated revelation (<i>jam' al-Qur'ān</i>)	Standardization of the <i>muṣḥaf</i>
Main authority	Prophet Muḥammad	Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and Zayd ibn Thābit	'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and the codification committee

22 Al-A'ẓamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*.

23 Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*.

24 Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937).

25 Al-Zurqānī, *Manābil Al-'Irfān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*.

26 Muṣṭafā Muslim, *Mabāḥiṭh Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2005).

Verification mechanism	Direct supervision by the Prophet	Cross-verification through written documents and oral testimony	Verification based on the master <i>ṣuḥuf</i> and Qurashī orthography
Primary output	Recorded revelation	The compiled <i>ṣuḥuf</i>	The standardized <i>Muṣḥaf Uthmānī</i>
Evolutionary contribution	Foundational preservation	Institutional compilation	Textual standardization

Source: Synthesized by the author (2026)

As summarized in Table 1, the evolution of Qur’ānic codification reflects a gradual transformation in both its objectives and mechanisms. The Prophetic period established the foundational framework for preserving revelation through the integration of memorization, written documentation, and direct prophetic supervision. The caliphate of Abū Bakr subsequently transformed this framework into an institutional process of compilation, while the caliphate of ‘Uthmān further developed it into a standardized textual system capable of supporting the transmission of the Qur’ān throughout an increasingly diverse Muslim community. This evolutionary framework provides the analytical basis for understanding the policies implemented during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān.

The development of Qur’ānic codification reached its most mature administrative stage during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. Whereas the compilation undertaken under Abū Bakr primarily aimed to preserve the entirety of the revealed materials within a unified collection of *ṣuḥuf*, the principal challenge during ‘Uthmān’s reign concerned maintaining textual uniformity across the rapidly expanding Islamic world. As Islam spread throughout Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Persia, and other newly incorporated regions, Muslims from diverse linguistic and tribal backgrounds encountered variations in pronunciation and the practice of *qirā’at*. Ibn Abī Dāwūd, in *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, narrates that the report of Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān concerning disputes over Qur’ānic recitation among Muslim soldiers became the immediate catalyst for initiating the standardization project.²⁷ Likewise, Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī explains that ‘Uthmān’s policy was intended to preserve the unity of the Muslim community by establishing an authoritative textual reference rather than by altering the content of the Qur’ān.²⁸ These historical circumstances demonstrate that the evolution of codification had entered a new phase in which the preservation of communal unity became inseparable from the preservation of textual consistency.

To implement this policy, ‘Uthmān appointed a committee headed by Zayd ibn Thābit together with ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, Sa’īd ibn al-‘Āṣ, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām. Makki ibn Abī Ṭālib explains that the committee adopted the *ṣuḥuf* compiled during the caliphate of Abū Bakr as the master exemplar, thereby preserving methodological continuity between the earlier compilation and the subsequent process of standardization.²⁹ According to Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, whenever differences arose concerning orthographic representation, the committee was instructed to write according to the dialect of Quraysh because the Qur’ān had originally been revealed in that linguistic form.³⁰ Rather than producing a revised version of the

27 Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Kitāb Al-Maṣāḥif* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyyah, 2002).

28 Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, *Al-Muqni’ Fī Rasm Maṣāḥif Al-Amṣār* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1997).

29 Makki ibn Abī Ṭālib, *Al-Ibānah ‘an Ma’āni Al-Qirā’at* (Cairo: Dār Nahḍah Miṣr, 1985).

30 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*.

Qur'ān, this procedure established a uniform written representation of a revelation whose authenticity had already been verified. Consequently, the policy of 'Uthmān should be understood not as a new stage of textual formation but as the methodological refinement of the preservation system inherited from the Prophet and institutionally consolidated during the caliphate of Abū Bakr.

Following the completion of the transcription process, official copies of the *Muṣḥaf* 'Uthmānī were distributed to the principal administrative centres of the Islamic state, while personal codices that might generate confusion in public transmission were no longer recognized as official textual references. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī argues that this policy sought to establish a single authoritative textual reference without abolishing the authentic traditions of *qirā'at* transmitted through reliable chains of narration.³¹ From a different perspective, Arthur Jeffery interpreted the standardization project as an important phase in the textual history of the Qur'ān,³² whereas Harald Motzki regarded it primarily as the consolidation of an already existing textual tradition rather than the creation of a new text.³³ These differing interpretations reveal that scholarly debate centres on explaining the historical process of codification rather than questioning the authenticity of the Qur'ānic revelation itself. In the context of the present study, al-A'ẓamī's interpretation offers a more convincing explanation because it is more consistent with the documented continuity of verification procedures extending from the lifetime of the Prophet to the caliphate of 'Uthmān.

Taken together, these successive developments demonstrate that the codification of the Qur'ān was neither a single historical event nor an isolated administrative decision. Rather, it constituted an evolutionary process in which each phase responded to the changing social and political circumstances of the early Muslim community while preserving the integrity of the revealed text. The Prophetic period established the foundational framework of preservation through the integration of *ḥifẓ*, *kitābah*, and direct prophetic verification. The caliphate of Abū Bakr transformed this foundation into an institutional system of compilation (*jam' al-Qur'ān*), whereas the caliphate of 'Uthmān completed the process by establishing a standardized *muṣḥaf* capable of ensuring textual consistency across an expanding Islamic civilization. Accordingly, the evolution of Qur'ānic codification should be understood not as a modification of revelation but as the progressive refinement of preservation strategies. On this basis, the present study proposes a three-stage model of Qur'ānic codification consisting of preservation, institutional compilation, and textual standardization, each representing a distinct yet interconnected phase in safeguarding the authenticity and continuity of the Qur'ān throughout Islamic history.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the codification of the Qur'ān was not a singular historical event but an evolutionary process that developed in response to the changing needs of the early Muslim community while preserving the authenticity of divine revelation. The findings indicate that the evolution of Qur'ānic codification can be understood through three interconnected phases: preservation during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad, institutional compilation under the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, and textual standardization during the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. Each phase emerged from distinct historical circumstances and fulfilled different functions, yet all shared the common objective of safeguarding the continuity and

31 Al-A'ẓamī, *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*.

32 Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices*.

33 Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam* 78, no. 1 (2001): 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam.2001.78.1.1>.

integrity of the Qur'ān. Accordingly, the evolution of codification did not involve modifications to the revealed text itself but reflected the progressive refinement of preservation strategies in response to social, administrative, and political developments within the expanding Muslim community.

This study contributes to the literature by proposing an evolutionary framework that integrates the major stages of Qur'ānic codification into a coherent analytical model, thereby moving beyond purely chronological or descriptive accounts commonly found in previous discussions. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on classical textual sources and selected modern scholarship without undertaking manuscript-based or philological analysis of early Qur'ānic codices. Future research may extend this framework by incorporating manuscript studies, codicological evidence, and comparative analyses of early *muṣḥaf* traditions to further examine the relationship between historical preservation practices and the transmission of the Qur'ānic text across different regions and periods.

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