135752 - False reports than attribute some linguistic errors to the Holy Qur’an

the question

I came across these reports regarding the compilation of the Mus-haf of ‘Uthmaan: It was narrated that after reviewing the first copy of the Qur’an. ‘Uthmaan said: I see some linguistic errors in it, but the Arabs will recite it in the correct manner, because it was revealed in their language. Then after that it was said that Ibn al-Khateeb, who mentioned the above report in his book al-Furqaan, mentioned another report from ‘Aa’ishah, according to which one of the wives of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: There are three linguistic errors in the Qur’an, such as when Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):
“They said: Verily! these are two magicians [inna haadhaani la saahiraan]. Their object is to drive you out from your land…”
[Taa-Haa 20:63]
“Surely, those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah, in His Messenger Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and all that was revealed to him from Allah), those who are the Jews and the Sabians [wa’s-saabi’oona] and the Christians, - whosoever believed in Allah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve”
[al-Maa’idah 5:69]
“But those among them who are well-grounded in knowledge, and the believers, believe in what has been sent down to you (Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) and what was sent down before you, and those who perform As-Salaah (Iqaamat-as-Salaah) wa’l-muqeemeena as-salaata wa’l-mu’toona az-zakaata wa’l-mu’minoona Billaah…], and give Zakaah and believe in Allah and in the Last Day, it is they to whom We shall give a great reward”
[an-Nisa’ 4:162].
I read a refutation of the specious arguments in the book Qiraa’aat al-Qur’an, by Ahmad ‘Ali al-Imam, but I think that this argument was fabricated by some Christian missionaries. I would like you to shed some light on whether these reports are sound or not.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

When answering this question, we cannot hide our extreme astonishment that this specious argument was accepted by some researchers and educated people. In fact we cannot hide our astonishment at how anyone could let this specious argument confuse him in the first place, not only because the Muslims should accept the infallibility of the Qur'an because Allah promised to preserve it, but also because we see that this specious argument has no sound rational or logical basis.

We may sum up our refutation of this argument in the following points:

I.

We should realise that the rules of grammar are only based on the styles of expression that have been transmitted to us from the eras that are regarded as authoritative, and there is no difference of opinion among linguists concerning the fact that the era of Prophethood is one of the authoritative eras. Any word narrated soundly to us (from that era) constitutes a valid linguistic proof; rather it is valid to be accepted as forming a foundation for some rule of Arabic grammar.

II.

To clarify that further, we may say: is it valid for a researcher to quote some lines of verse from Imru'ul-Qays that the scholars narrated from him, and there is no doubt concerning its narration, then think that there is some grammatical or linguistic error in his view, and thus conclude that Imru'ul-Qays made some grammatical errors in his poetry?!

Is that not undermining the foundation on which the rules of grammar are based, and demolishing this entire branch of knowledge itself? So how about if some ignorant person concluded that there is a linguistic or grammatical mistake in the Holy Qur'an, when the noble Sahaabah and Taabi'een transmitted the Qur'an during the authoritative era and during the time when everyone spoke

correct Arabic (fus-ha), and in fact the scholars, grammarians and people of eloquence recited the Qur'an and transmitted it, without anyone among them raising any objection, with a few exceptions with regard to some modes of recitation that did not reach some grammarians via chains of transmission that reached the level of tawaatur.

Is it not the case that this ignorant person is more deserving of criticism and being described as mistaken than the pure Arabs, on whose speech the rules of the language are based?

III.

If we reflect upon the verses in which they think there was a mistake, we will realise that they are in fact in harmony with some known grammatical rules, and that his thinking that there is a mistake in those verses is very far-fetched.

As-Suyooti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The scholars of Arabic language spoke about these verses, and they found an explanation for their grammatical structure.

As for the verse (interpretation of the meaning), "Verily! these are two magicians [inna haadhaani la saahiraan]" [Taa-Haa 20:56], there are several explanations:

1. It is in accordance with a dialect in which the dual form always appears with the alif [i.e., -aani rather than –ayni] in all three cases [nominative (subject), accusative (object) and genitive (possessive)]. This is the well-known dialect of Kinaanah and, it was said, of Banu'l-Haarith.

2. The subject of inna (translated here as Verily), which is omitted, is in the accusative [in accordance with grammatical rules], so the sentence is subject and predicate, the predicate of inna.

3. What is meant by inna is kadhaalika (moreover). The word saahiraan (two magicians) is the predicate of a hidden [or omitted] subject [and therefore appears in the nominative form, in accordance with the rules of Arabic grammar]. The implied meaning is: they are indeed two

magicians.

4. What is meant by inna in this instance is “Yes”.

5. The first syllable of the word haadhaani [these two] is a pronoun, and the words “dhaani la saahiraan” are the subject and predicate of inna. But we have explained above that this is not possible, because inna is written on its own and the syllable haa- is connected to the rest of its word, therefore the way it is written in the Mus-haf does not allow this interpretation.

I – that is, as-Suyooti – say: It seems to me that there is another possible explanation, which is that the reason why the alif is used here is so as to make the word saahiraan rhyme with the word yureedaan (they [dual form] want). A similar example is seen in the words “and I have come to you from Saba' (Sheba) with true news [min sabaa’in bi nabaa’in]” [an-Naml 27:22].

With regard to the words “and those who perform As-Salaah (Iqaamat-as-Salaah) wa’l-muqeemeena as-salaata” [an-Nisa’ 4:162], there are also several explanations for it:

1. It is disconnected from the context, as if it is saying: And I praise… – because that is more eloquent.

2. It is connected to the phrase “believe in what has been sent down to you” that is, and they believe in those who perform as-Salaah [the prayer], namely the Prophets or, it was said, the angels. It was said that what is meant is that they believe in the religion of those who perform the prayer, so what is meant thereby is the Muslims.

3. It is connected to the word “before”, that is, before you and before those who perform the prayer.

4. It is connected to the pronoun “you” in the phrase “before you”.

5. It is connected to the pronoun “you” in the phrase “to you”.

6. It is connected to the pronoun “them” in the phrase “among them”.

These possibilities were narrated by Abu’l-Baqa’.

With regard to the words “and the Sabians [wa’s-saabi’oona]” [al-Maa’idah 5:69], there are also several interpretations:

1. It is a subject of which the predicate is omitted; in other words, and the Sabians are also like that.

2. It is connected to the particle inna and the word which follows it (alladheena – those who), which together form the subject, and it is the predicate, therefore it appears in the nominative [in accordance with the rules of Arabic grammar].

3. It is connected to the subject of the verb haadu, which means to be Jewish (“those who are the Jews”).

4. Inna here means Yes. So the words “those who believe” and what comes after that are nominative, and the words “and the Sabians [wa’s-saabi’oona]” are connected to that.

5. It is like using the plural form when referring to the singular.

These explanations were narrated from Abu’l-Baqa’.

End quote from al-Itqaan fi ‘Uloom al-Qur’an (1247-1249), ed by Markaz ad-Diraasaat al-Qur’aniyyah.

We realise that explaining these grammatical possibilities may take a long time, and many readers may not understand them because of their subtlety, but we have quoted them here so that the ignorant ones who try to undermine the Holy Qur’an will realise the extent of their ignorance of Arabic grammar and language, and thus they may know their limits and not go beyond the dictates of sound reasoning.

IV.

With regard to the reports narrated from some of the Sahaabah and Taabi‘een about this topic,

there are many such reports, which were compiled by al-Haafiz as-Suyooti in his book al-Itqaan fi ‘Uloom al-Qur’an (p. 1236-1257), where he discuss them in detail. We will limit it here to discussing the hadiths mentioned in the question, which were narrated from ‘Aa’ishah and ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with them) concerning this matter.

The first report was narrated from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

It was narrated by Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah from his father, who said:

I asked ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) about the grammatical mistakes in the Qur’an: “Surely, those who believe, those who are the Jews and the Sabians [wa’s-saabi’oona]” [al-Maa’idah 5:69]; “and those who perform As-Salaah (Iqaamat-as-Salaah) wa muqeemeena as-salaata wa’l-mu’toona az-zakaata” [an-Nisa’ 4:162]; and “Verily! these are two magicians [inna haadhaani la saahiraan]” [Taa-Haa 20:63]. She said: O son of my sister, these are the mistakes of the scribes; they made a mistake when writing.

This report was narrated from Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah by two of the Kufi narrators:

1. Abu Mu‘aawiyah ad-Dareer

It was narrated by Sa‘eed ibn Mansoor in as-Sunan (4/1507, no. 769) with this wording. It was also narrated by Abu ‘Ubayd in Fadaa’il al-Qur’an (p. 229, no. 556) and via him by Abu ‘Amr ad-Daani in al-Muqni‘ (p. 119). It was narrated by Ibn Jareer at-Tabari in Jaami‘ al-Bayaan (9/359) and Ibn Abi Dawood in al-Masaahif (p. 43).

2. ‘Ali ibn Mas-har al-Kufi

As was narrated by ‘Umar ibn Shubbah with his isnaad in Tareekh al-Madinah (3/1013-1014).

Such a report that has such an isnaad is not sound. The problem with it is that the critics spoke ill of the reports narrated by Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah himself when he was in Iraq. Even though he was a trustworthy scholar, and in principle what he narrated is to be taken as sound and acceptable, he made a few mistakes that the scholars could notice by examining the text of the hadith and

researching other corroborating reports and similar reports. Because in the text of this report there is something that is clearly odd, and there is no corroborating report narrated via any other chain of narrators, we can say that there is a mistake in it.

Imam adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

When he – i.e., Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah – came to Iraq at the end of his life, he taught a great deal of knowledge, but there were a few hadiths that he reported (during that teaching) that were not sound. Such a thing could happen to Maalik, Shu‘bah, Wakee‘ and other trustworthy and prominent scholars.

End quote from Mizaan al-I‘tidaal (4/301). See the annotation of Sunan Sa‘eed ibn Mansoor by Dr. Sa‘d al-Humayd (2/659). See also the commentary by Dr Sa‘d al-Humayd (may Allah preserve him) on this report in his annotation of Sunan Sa‘eed ibn Mansoor (4/507-514).

If someone were to ask: How could al-Bukhaari (may Allah have mercy on him) and Muslim, in their Saheehs, narrate hadiths from Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah from the Iraqis, and narrate from Abu Mu‘aawiyah, yet here you are rejecting them, even though as-Suyooti classed this report as saheeh in al-Itqaan (p. 1236) and said that it meets the conditions of the two shaykhs (al-Bukhaari and Muslim)? The answer to that is that we are rejecting this report here because the text is obviously odd. It is unlikely that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) had not heard these verses with this grammatical structure from the lips of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and thought that the mistakes had occurred at the hands of the scribes of the Holy Qur’an.

If the critics find something definitely odd in a text, they examine the isnaad, looking for some subtle problem with it because of which this problem occurred in the text. Here the problem is that it is a hadith from Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah when he was in Iraq.

The second report is narrated from ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan (may Allah be pleased with him).

It was narrated from him by a number of narrators:

1. ‘Ikrimah the freed slave of Ibn ‘Abbaas.

He said: When the Mus-hafs had been written, they were shown to ‘Uthmaan and he found in them some grammatical mistakes, but he said: Do not change them, for the Arabs will change them – or will read them correctly. If the scribe had been from Thaqeef and the one who dictated it had been from Hudhayl, these mistakes would not have occurred.

Narrated by Abu ‘Ubayd in Fadaa’il al-Qur’an (2/103, no. 562); Ibn Abi Dawood in al-Masaahif (1/235, no. 110). They attributed it to as-Suyooti in al-Itqaan (p. 1239); to Ibn al-Anbaari in ar-Radd ‘ala man khaalafa Mus-haf ‘Uthmaan; and to Ibn Ashtah in al-Masaahif – the latter are two lost books. This is a da‘eef (weak) report, because the narration of ‘Ikrimah from ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan is mursal, as is his narration from Abu Bakr, ‘Ali ibn Abi Taalib and the wives of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). See: Jaami‘ at-Tahseel (p. 239). Abu ‘Amr ad-Daani clearly stated in al-Muqni‘ (p. 115) that there is an interruption of the chain of narration between ‘Ikrimah and ‘Uthmaan. Moreover, ‘Ikrimah is referred to by Ibn Abi Dawood in al-Masaahif as at-Taa’i and not as the freed slave of Ibn ‘Abbaas, and we have not come across his biography.

2. Yahya ibn Ya‘mur

He said: It was narrated by Ibn Abi Dawood in al-Masaahif (1/233) and Ibn Ashtah in al-Masaahif, as as-Suyooti mentioned in al-Itqaan (p. 1240). This is also a mursal report, because it does not seem from the biography of Yahya ibn Ya‘mur that he was a contemporary of ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan (may Allah be pleased with him). See his biography in Tahdheeb at-Tahdheeb (11/305). al-Bukhaari deemed it to be munqati‘ in at-Tareekh al-Kabeer (5/170). Moreover, there is some confusion about the isnaad, as sometimes it is narrated from Yahya ibn Ya‘mur from ‘Abdullah ibn Futaybah or ibn Abi Futaymah, and sometimes it is the other way round, so it is narrated from Ibn Futaymah from Yahya ibn Ya‘mur, as in Tareekh al-Madinah (3/1013). Qataadah sometimes narrates from Nasr ibn ‘Aasim from Yahya, and sometimes he narrates from Yahya directly, without mentioning Nasr; or there may be two other narrators between him and Yahya, as in the place referred to above in Tareekh al-Madinah. Al-Baaqillaani pointed out these differences in al-Intisaar li’l-Qur’an (2/136-137).

3. ‘Abd al-A‘la ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Aamir

It was narrated by Ibn al-Anbaari in ar-Radd ‘ala man khaalafa Mus-haf ‘Uthmaan, as was mentioned by as-Suyooti in al-Itqaan (p. 1240). The biography of ‘Abd al-A‘la is in Tahdheeb at-Tahdheeb (87/6). In the book there is nothing to suggest that any of the scholars regarded him as a sound narrator.

4. Qataadah

It was narrated by Ibn Abi Dawood in al-Masaahif. This version says: When ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) was given the Mus-haf to check it, he said: There are mistakes in it, but the Arabs will recite it correctly. There is some ambiguity in its chain of narration about one of the narrators, because it says: our companions told us.

From the above it may be understood that the isnaads of this report are not sound, and weakness of the isnaad leads to doubt concerning the texts of the report and regarding the source of those texts.

V.

The scholars discussed the way these reports should be understood, as we will highlight here in brief, then follow that with lengthy quotations from the scholars for anyone who wants this benefit.

1. The fact that all the Mus-hafs that the Sahaabah had agreed on the way these verses were written, and that all the Muslims agreed on their recitation, generation after generation, proves that there was no grammatical mistake on the part of the scribe. Rather this is how it was heard from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

2. The fact that the Sahaabah and Taabi‘een were very keen and devoted a great deal of effort to transmitting the Holy Qur’an, and indeed to transmitting details of the Prophet’s Sunnah and serving this religion, offering their souls and their wealth, means that it is not possible for mistakes to have been made by the scribes who wrote down the Holy Qur’an, then for no one after them to have corrected them until the present day.

3. It is not possible that ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) could issue orders that copies of the Qur’an be made and distributed to many regions, so as to put an end to disputes between reciters, then leave these mistakes caused the scribes in the Mus-hafs, and not issue orders that they be corrected. Believing that is contrary to sound reasoning.

4. It is possible to interpret ‘Uthmaan’s words, when he referred to mistakes, as referring to mistakes in recitation because the way some words are written may be unclear to some people, at some times. Therefore he reassured the people by saying that the Arabs’ understanding of the language would make them correct anyone who made a mistake in reciting the words of the Qur’an. This is how Abu ‘Amr ad-Daani interpreted this report.

5. It is also possible to interpret the words of ‘Aa’ishah as meaning that she thought that if other modes of recitation had been chosen (to write the Mus-haf in accordance therewith), that were in accordance with the rules of the Arabic language with which ordinary people were familiar, that would have been better. So her regarding what is written as wrong means that it was different from the recitation that is known and common among the Arabs.

Ibn Jareer at-Tabari (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

In the recitation of Ubayy ibn Ka‘b it says: “wa’l-muqeemeena as-salaata (and those who perform As-Salaah (Iqaamat-as-Salaah))” [an-Nisa’ 4:162]. That is how it was written in his Mus-haf, as some have narrated. If that was a mistake by the scribes, then what must have been the case is that this should have meant that all the other Mus-hafs, apart from our Mus-haf, must have the same mistake, in a manner contrary to what is in our Mus-haf. The fact that our Mus-haf is the same as the Mus-haf of Ubayy proves that what is in our Mus-haf in that regard is correct and is not wrong. Moreover, if that was a mistake in writing, the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), from whom it was learned, would not have taught the Muslims to recite in an incorrect manner, and they would have recited it correctly and would have taught the ummah the correct way of reciting it. The fact that the Muslims transmitted the recitation of these verses in the way they are written is the strongest evidence that what is written is sound and correct, and that there is no mistake on the part of the scribe.

End quote from Jaami‘ al-Bayaan (9/397). See also: al-Kashshaaf by az-Zamakhshari (1/590).

Abu ‘Amr ad-Daani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If someone were to ask: What do you say about the report that they narrated from Yahya ibn Ya‘mur and ‘Ikrimah the freed slave of Ibn ‘Abbaas from ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him), that when copies were made of the Qur’an, they were shown to him and he found some grammatical mistakes in them, but he said: Leave it, for the Arabs will be able to recite it correctly – and this indicates that there were some mistakes in the writing?

I say: This report, in our view, cannot be raised to the level of constituting proof, and it is not valid to quote it as evidence, on two counts:

Firstly: in addition to the flaws in its isnaad and the problems with its wording, it is also mursal, because Ibn Ya‘mur and ‘Ikrimah did not hear anything from ‘Uthmaan and did not see him.

Also, the apparent meaning of the wording cannot have been said by ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him), because this report implies criticism of him, and how could that criticism be valid when he is known to have attained a high level of religious leadership, a high status of service to Islam, great sincerity towards the ummah and great efforts to do that which is in the best interests of the Muslims? It is not possible that he could have compiled the Mus-haf with the help of other righteous Sahaabah, so as to put an end to differences concerning the Qur’an among them, then despite that leave in it grammatical mistakes so that someone else (after he was gone) would have to take on the task of changing it, who would no doubt not be able to reach his calibre or level of knowledge. This is something that no one could accept (because it does not make sense), and it is not permissible for anyone to believe it.

If he were to ask:

How can you understand the report if it was soundly narrated from ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him)?

I say:

The way we may understand it is that what ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) meant by the grammatical mistakes mentioned is mistakes in recitation, not in the way it was written, because in many places in the Qur’an, if the words were to be recited as they were written, that would give the opposite meaning and would change the wording. Do you not see the verses in which it says: “la adhbahannahu (I will surely …slaughter him)” [an-Naml 27:21], “min naba’ il-mursaleen (the information (news) about the Messengers)” [al-An‘aam 6:34], and other examples in which an additional alif, yaa or waw appears in the way it is written. Anyone who recites these words who is not familiar with how they are usually written will add to the pronunciation something that is not part of it, so he will have made a mistake that is clear to anyone who hears him, even though the way it is written is valid and was common. So when he realised that, ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) said that whoever is not familiar with the way of writing (some particular words) and does not have knowledge of that among those who come after him, will learn that from the Arabs, because the Qur’an was revealed in their language, so they will teach him the correct recitation, and will explain to him the validity of the way in which it is written. This is how it is to be understood in my view. And Allah knows best.

If it is said: what is meant by the words of ‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) at the end of this report, “If the scribe had been from Thaqeef and the one who dictated it had been from Hudhayl, these mistakes would not have occurred”?

I say: What it means is that it would not be written in that way, because Quraysh and others who took charge of writing the Mus-hafs from people other than Quraysh used to write these words in this manner, and this way of writing these words was common among them, but Thaqeef and Hudhayl, despite their good command of Arabic, did not use this way of writing these words. Therefore if they – and not the Muhaajiroon and Ansaar – had been in charge of writing the Mus-hafs, they would have written all these words as they are pronounced, not on the basis of their meaning, because that was the usual practice among them and was common. This is how we may understand the comment of ‘Uthmaan in my view, if it is proven and anyone can prove it. And Allah is the source of strength.

If it is said: Then what is the meaning of the report that you also narrated from Hishaam ibn ‘Urwah, from his father, that he asked ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) about grammatical mistakes in the Qur’an, about the verses, “Verily! these are two magicians [inna haadhaani la saahiraan]” [Taa-Haa 20:63], “and those who perform As-Salaah (Iqaamat-as-Salaah) wa’l muqeemeena as-salaata wa’l-mu’toona az-zakaata wa’l-mu’minoona Billaah…], and give Zakaah” [an-Nisa’ 4:162] and “Surely, those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah, in His Messenger Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and all that was revealed to him from Allah), those who are the Jews and the Sabians [wa’s-saabi’oona]” [al-Maa’idah 5:69], and she said: O son of my brother, this is the work of the scribes; they made mistakes in writing?

I say:

Its meaning is clear: ‘Urwah did not ask ‘Aa’ishah about the written letters that may be added for a reason or taken away for a reason, so as to make things clear (when adding) or to make writing easier (when taking away). Rather he was asking her about the modes of recitation in which words may differ, which may lead to different meanings, according to the dialects in which Allah permitted His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his ummah to recite the Qur’an, and to adhere to whichever mode of recitation they wanted, so as to make things easy for them. If this is the case, then there is no room for mistakes, error, confusion and slips, for these dialects are widely known and clear in the Arabic language. If this is the case, then she was not referring to the meaning of what is written and it has nothing to do with that at all. Rather ‘Urwah called that a mistake, and ‘Aa’ishah called the way it is written a mistake, but they did not literally mean it was a mistake; rather it was by way of exaggeration, because that was contrary to their way and was not something that they would have chosen themselves. That was more appropriate in their view and was what was more common in their view, although not in a definitive way, because of what we explained above about that being valid and common in the language, and it being common usage in the Arabic language. Furthermore there was consensus that these words were to be recited as such and not as they (‘Aa’ishah and ‘Urwah) thought they should be, except for the odd view of Abu ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ala’, who thought that it was to be recited inna haadhayni in this particular instances. [This refers to “Verily! these are two magicians [inna haadhaani la

saahiraan]” [Taa-Haa 20:63]]. This is how we should understand this report. But we cannot be certain that the Mother of the Believers (may Allah be pleased with her), despite her high status and prominence, and her vast knowledge of Islam and the language of her people, would accuse the Companions of making grammatical mistakes and accuse the scribes of making errors, when she was of such a high level of eloquence and knowledge of Arabic, as was well known and no one would ignore or deny it. That is not appropriate and cannot be true. Some of our scholars interpreted the words of the Mother of the Believers, They made a mistake in writing, as meaning that they made a mistake by not choosing what is more proper of the seven modes of recitation with which the people were familiar, not that what they wrote was a mistake and was not valid, because what is not valid is to be rejected by all. no matter how long a time has elapsed since the error was made and no matter how widespread it has become. Some interpreted the word lahn, translated here as grammatical error, as referring to recitation and dialect, such as when ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Ubayy is the best reciter among you, even though we overlook some of his lahn – i.e., his way of recitation and dialect. This is clear. And Allah is the source of strength. End quote from al-Muqni‘ (118-119).

As-Suyooti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

These reports are very problematic.

How can it be thought of the Companions, first of all, that they made grammatical mistakes when speaking, let alone when reciting Qur’an, when they were the most eloquent of people in Arabic!

Secondly, how can it be thought that they made grammatical mistakes in the Qur’an which they learned from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) as it was revealed, and they memorised it and were very precise with regard to it?

Thirdly, how could it be thought of them that they would all make the same mistake and write it in a mistaken way?

Moreover, how can it be thought that they would not notice that and correct it?

Then how can it be thought that ‘Uthmaan would forbid them to correct the mistake?

Then how could it be thought that the recitation of the Qur’an would continue on the basis of that mistake, when the Qur’an was transmitted via tawaatur, one generation after another?

This is impossible on the basis of rational thinking and Islamic teachings and on the basis of how things are.

The scholars responded to that on three counts:

1. That was not soundly narrated from ‘Uthmaan. Its isnaad is weak (da‘eef), flawed (mudtarib) and interrupted (munqati‘). Moreover, ‘Uthmaan intended to make the Mus-haf the reference point to be followed, so how could he see in it grammatical mistakes and leave them for the Arabs to correct them when they recited it. If those who were charged with collecting the Mus-haf and putting it together in one book, who were the best of people, did not correct it, then how could others do that?!

Moreover, ‘Uthmaan did not only make one copy of the Qur’an; rather he made many copies. So if it is said that there were grammatical mistakes in all of them, it is very far-fetched to suggest that the same mistake would be repeated in all of them, or if the mistake happened in some of them, then this is an acknowledgement that some were correct. But none of the reports said that this mistake was in one Mus-haf and not another. The Mus-hafs never differed, except in cases where there is an alternative mode of recitation, and that is not a grammatical error.

2. If we assume that the report is sound, then it is to be interpreted as referring to the signs or symbols showing where something is omitted, such as the long alif in words such as al-kitaab (the book), as-saabiroon (the patient ones) and so on.

3. It may be interpreted as referring to words where the way in which they are pronounced is different from the way in which they are written. For example, they wrote “la adhbahannahu (I will surely …slaughter him)” [an-Naml 27:21], with an alif after the laam, and “bi aydin (With power)” [adh-Dhaariyaat 51:47] with two yaas. If these words to be recited as they are written, that would

be a grammatical mistake.

This response and the previous one were given by Ibn Ashtah in Kitaab al-Masaahif.

Ibn al-Anbaari said in ar-Radd ‘ala man khaalafa Mus-haf ‘Uthmaan, concerning the hadiths narrated from ‘Uthmaan about that:

They do not constitute proof, because their isnaads are interrupted and are not intact. No man of common sense and reasoning could accept that ‘Uthmaan – who was the caliph of the ummah and the leader of the people of his time – could unite them in accepting the Mus-haf which was the main reference, then realise that there were mistakes in it and mistakes in the way in which it was written, then not correct them. No, by Allah, no one who is fair minded and possesses understanding could think such a thing. He could not believe that he would leave the mistake in the books of the people after him to correct it, when the people who would come after him would have no choice but to refer to it and go by it. Whoever claims that when ‘Uthmaan said, “I see mistakes in it,” he mean, I see mistakes in the way it is written, then if we recite it correctly the mistake in writing will not matter in the sense of distorting the words and going against grammatical rules, is mistaken, because the way it is written is the way it is to be recited and pronounced. So whoever makes a mistake in writing will make a mistake in what he utters. ‘Uthmaan would never have delayed correcting a mistake concerning the words of the Qur’an, whether in the way they are written or the way they are pronounced. It is well-known that ‘Uthmaan was constantly in contact with the Qur’an, and was skilled in reciting it in accordance with the way it was written in the copies of the Qur’an that were sent to the various regions. He (as-Suyooti) supported that with what Abu ‘Ubayd narrated. He said: ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn Mahdi told us, from ‘Abdullah ibn Mubaarak: Abu Waa’il, an old man from Yemen, told us, from Haani’ al-Barbari, the freed slave of ‘Uthmaan, who said: I was with ‘Uthmaan when they were presenting the Mus-hafs to him. He sent me to Ubayy ibn Ka‘b with the shoulder blade of a sheep, on which was written, “lam yatasanna” and “laa tabdeelah lil-khalq” and “fa amhil al-kaafireen”. He called for an ink pot and erased one of the two laams (in the word “lil khalq”) and wrote “li khalq-illah (“in the creation of Allah” – referring to the verse “No change let there be in Khalq¬illâh (i.e. the

religion of Allâh)” [ar-Room 30:30]). He erased the word fa amhil and wrote “fa mahhil” (“so give respite” referring to the verse“So give respite to the disbelievers” [at-Taariq 86:17]). And he wrote lam yatasannah (“they show no change”, referring to the verse “they show no change” [al-Baqarah 2:259]); he added the letter haa’ to it.

Ibn al-Anbaari said: How can it be claimed that he saw some mistakes and let them pass, when he was checking what was written and disputes between scribes were referred to him so that he could judge on the basis of truth, and he would compel them to write what is correct and make it final?

This is also supported by what Ibn Ashtah narrated in al-Masaahif. He said: al-Hasan ibn ‘Uthmaan told us: ar-Rabee‘ ibn Badr informed us, from Siwaar ibn Shubayb, who said: I asked Ibn az-Zubayr about the Mus-hafs and he said: A man went to ‘Umar and said: O Ameer al-Mu’mineen, the people are arguing about the Qur’an. ‘Umar thought of collecting the Qur’an and making it according to one recitation, but then he was fatally stabbed. During the caliphate of ‘Uthmaan, that man stood up and spoke to him about the issue, and ‘Uthmaan collected and made copies of the Mus-hafs. Then he sent me to ‘Aa’ishah, and I brought the pages and showed them to her so that she could correct them, then he ordered that all other copies be destroyed. This indicates that they checked it and verified it, and they did not leave anything that needed to be corrected but they corrected it.

Then Ibn Ashtah said: Muhammad ibn Ya‘qoob informed us: Abu Dawood Sulaymaan ibn al-Ash‘ath informed us: Ahmad ibn Mas‘adah informed us: Ismaa‘eel informed us: al-Haarith ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman told me, from ‘Abd al-A‘la ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Aamir who said: When the writing of the Mus-haf was finished, it was brought to ‘Uthmaan and he looked at it, then he said: You have done well. I see something but we will be able to correct it according to our dialect.

There is no problem with this report, and it explains the meaning of what appears above. It is as if it was shown to him immediately after the writing of it was finished, and he saw something in it that was written differently from the way Quraysh would pronounce it, as happened with the word taaboot [which may be written with taa’ marbootah or taa’ maftoohah], so he promised to correct

it according to the dialect of Quraysh. Then he fulfilled that promise when he examined it and verified it, and he did not leave anything (that needed to be corrected but he corrected it). Perhaps the one who narrated those reports quoted above distorted what he heard and did not remember it precisely as ‘Uthmaan had said it, which resulted in this confusion. This is the best answer that could be given for this problem, to Allah be praise.

So none of these responses is sound with regard to the hadith of ‘Aa’ishah.

With regard to the response that classes it as da‘eef (weak), that is to be rejected because its isnaad is saheeh (sound) as you see.

As for the response which speaks of signs or symbols showing where something is omitted, ‘Urwah’s question about the words mentioned does not fit that discussion.

Ibn Ashtah said – and Ibn Jabbaarah followed him in Sharh ar-Raa’iyyah, that what is meant by her saying, They made a mistake means: in choosing that which was more appropriate of the seven modes of recitation, according to which all people could recite. It does not mean that the way they wrote it is wrong and is not permissible. He said: The evidence for that is that whatever is not permissible is to be rejected by all, regardless of the passage of time since that mistake was made.

He said: With regard to the view of Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr about it being a lahn on the part of the scribe, perhaps what he meant by lahn is recitation and dialect, meaning that this is the dialect of the one who wrote it and the way he recited it, and there is another way to recite it .

Then he narrated from Ibraaheem an-Nakha‘i that he said: “inna hadhaani la saahiraan” [Taa-Haa 20:63] and “inna hadhayni la saahiraan” are the same. Perhaps they wrote alif instead of yaa, and in “wa’s-saabi’oona” [al-Maa’idah 5:69] they wrote waw instead of yaa’.

Ibn Ashtah said:

That is, it is akin to replacing a letter when writing it with another letter, as in the words salaah, zakaah and hayaat [which in the Qur’an are written with a waw although they are pronounced as if

they are written with a long alif].

And I say: This answer could be fine if it was recited with a yaa', but the way it is written is different. As recitation is done according to the way it is written, there is no comparison between the two.

End quote from al-Itqaan fi 'Uloom al-Qur'an (p. 1241-1247).

See also: Majmoo' al-Fataawa by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (15/252-255)

And Allah knows best.