Revelation of Qur'an in Seven Ahuruf (Letters): A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract:** According to a Mutawatir Hadith of the Noble Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) it was established Glorious Qur'an revealed with seven letters. There are various opinions of scholars about the meaning of these letters, this paper discussing the opinion and categorized them based on their strength of evidence into three namely; opinion which have no basis whatsoever and opinions which have some apparent basis but a weak opinions, and opinion that has relevance going with majority scholars of Qur'anic science. It is highlighted the relationship between the seven letters and seven Qira'at and them clarify those misunderstood it and finally discuss its wisdom in relation to proper recitation of Glorious Qur'an.

**Keywords:** Revelation, Qur'an, Seven Ahuruf, Qira'at and critical analysis.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Qur'an was revealed in seven ahruf. The proof for this is found in many narrations from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), so much so that it reaches the level of mutwaaatir.

As Jalaal ad-Deen as-Suyuty lists twenty-one companions who narrated that the Qur'an was revealed in seven ahruf. Some of these narrations are as follows:

1. Ibn 'Abbaas reported that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, "Jibreel recited the Qur'an to me in one harf, and I recited it back to him, but I requested him to increase (the number of harf) and he continued to increase it for me, until we stopped at seven ahruf." Ibn Shihaab az-Zuhree (d. 124 A.H.), one of the narrators of the hadeeth, said, "It has reached me that these seven ahruf are essentially one (in meaning), they do not differ about what is permitted or forbidden." 

2. 'Ubay ibn Ka'ab reported that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was once on the outskirts of Madeenah (near the tribe of Banoo Ghifaar) when Jibreel came to him and said, 'Allah has commanded that you recite the Qur'aa to your people in one harf." The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) replied, "I ask Allah's pardon and forgiveness! My people are not capable of doing this!" Jibreel then came again and said, "Allah has commanded you to recite the Qur'an to your people in two ahruf." The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) again replied, "I ask Allah's pardon and forgiveness! My people are not capable of doing this!" Jibreel then came a third time and said, "Allah has commanded you to recite the Qur'an to your people in three ahruf." The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) replied for a third time, "I ask Allah's pardon and forgiveness! My people are not capable of doing this!" At last, Jibreel came for the fourth time, and said, "Allah has commanded you to recite the Qur'an to your people in seven ahruf, and in whichever harf they recite, they would be right."

3. 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab narrated, "I was sitting in the masjid when I heard Hishaam ibn Hakeem recite Soorah al-Furqaan. I was almost about to jump on him in his prayer, but I waited until he finished, and then grabbed him

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by his garment and asked him, 'Who taught you to recite in such a manner?' He responded, 'It was the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) himself!' I responded, 'You are mistaken, for indeed I learnt this soorah from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and it was different from your recitation!' Therefore, I dragged him to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and complained to him that Hishaam had recited Soorah al-Furqaan in a manner different from what he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) had taught me. At this, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) told me to let go of Hishaam, and asked him to recite Soorah al-Furqaan. Hishaam recited the Soorah in the same way I had heard him before. When he finished, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'It was revealed this way.' He then asked me to recite the same soorah. When I finished, he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'It was (also) revealed this way. Indeed, the Qur'an has been revealed in seven different ahruf; so recite whichever one is easy for you.

4. In a story similar to 'Umar's, 'Ubay ibn Ka'ab also heard two people reciting the Qur'an in a manner different from what he had learnt. After some discussion, both parties went to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and recited the same portion to him. He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) approved of both parties' recitations. At this point, 'Ubay narrates, "...there occurred in my mind a sort of denial and doubt that did not exist even in the time of faahiliyyah (before Islaam)! When the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) saw how I was affected, he struck my chest, whereupon I started sweating, and felt as though I were looking at Allah in fear! Then the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'O 'Ubay! A message was sent to me to recite the Qur'an in one harf, but I requested (Allah) to make things easy on my nation. A second message came that I should recite the Qur'an in two ahruf, but I again made the same request. I was then ordered to recite the Qur'aari in seven ahruf.' 

5. 'Ubay ibn Ka'ab narrates that once the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) met Jibreel, and said, 'O Jibreel! I have been sent to an illiterate nation. Among them are old and young men and women, and those who have never read any writing!' Jibreel answered him, 'O Muhammad, the Qur'an has been revealed in seven ahruf; but these narrations will suffice for the present discussion.

6. There are many other hadith that confirm that the Qur'an was revealed in seven ahruf, but these narrations will suffice for the present discussion.

7. What is meant by the Ahruf of the Qur'an?

Before discussing the answer to this question, it would be useful to mention some points that can be inferred from the above narrations:

1. The different ahruf are all directly from Allah, and not from the Companions. In all the narrations where the Companions differed from each other, it was clear that each one had been taught directly from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), who was inspired by Allah. This is why the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said to each one of the ahruf recited by 'Umar and Hishaam, "It was revealed this way."

2. The reason the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) requested the number of ahruf to be increased was to make the memorisation and recitation of the Qur'an easier for his Ummah. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) prayed to increase the ah_ruf because in his ummahwere "... old and young men and women, and those who have never read any writing." Therefore, the limitations of the Qur'an being in only one harf have been removed by Allah as a blessing for this Ummah.-

3. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) used to teach the different ahruf to different Companions, depending on the condition and situation of that Companion. It can be assumed that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) chose the particular harf to recite to a Companion depending on which one would be the easiest for that particular Companion to memorise, since the purpose of the ahruf was to simplify recitation and memorisation. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) did not teach all the ahruf to all the Companions, for 'Umar and Hishaam did not know about the existence of the different ahruf. Also, the cause for 'Ubay's doubts was the fact that he was unaware of these ah_ruf, and the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) had to pray to Allah to remove his doubts.

4. The differences between these ahruf were not so great as to prevent recognition of what was being recited. In other words, even though Hishaam was reciting the Qur'an in a different haifthan 'Umar, 'Umar could still recognised that Hishaam was reciting Soorah al-Furqaan, thus showing that the ahruf were not radically different from each other. Also, the narration of Ibn Shihhaab shows that the basic meaning of all these ahufwas the same.

2 Narrated by Muslim
3 Narrated by Tirmidhee
5. Each one of these ahruf is complete in and of itself. The proof for this is the statement of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) "...so whichever one of them they recite, they are correct." This is not to say that the ahruf do not complement one another in meaning, but rather that the recitation of the Qur’an in one harfis sufficient.

6. The number of ahruf is exactly seven — not more, not less. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) asked Jibreel to increase the number of ah’ruf until Jibreel reached seven ahruf therefore interpretations to the effect that ‘seven’ indicates an unspecified plurality (this was the opinion of Qaadee ‘lyaad (d. 504 A.H.)) are false.

However, one narration intheMusnad ofImaam Ahmad states that the Qur’an was revealed in three ah_ruf, and yet another narration states that it was revealed in ten ahruf: Some scholars have tried to explain the first narrations as meaning that, in the Makkkan stage, the Qur’an was revealed in three ahruf, whereas in the Madeenan stage, Allah increased this to seven ahruf. Other scholars have given different interpretations to reconcile these hadith. However, there is no need to resort to such explanations, since both of these narrations are weak. Therefore, the Qur’an was revealed in exactly seven ahruf.

7. The revelation of the Qur’an in seven ahruf started in Madeenah, after the hijrah. In one of the narrations, the phrase, "...while the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was on the outskirts of Madeenah," indicates that this occurred after the hijrah.

8. A last benefit that can be inferred from these hadeeth (although this is not relevant to the ahruf) is the concern shown by the Companions in the preservation of the correct recitation of the Qur’an. In all the cases quoted above, the Companions were not content with listening to recitations that were different from theirs - despite the fact that these recitations were said to have been learnt from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) - until they had taken the matter to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) himself.

As for what is meant by these seven ahruf, there is a great deal of difference on this issue. Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.) recorded thirty-five opinions on this issue, and as-Suyootee listed over forty. Ibn Sa’idan (d. 231 A.H.), a famous grammarian and reciter of the Qur’an, even declared that the true meaning of the ahruf was known only to Allah, and thus to attempt to investigate into this issue was futile! On the other hand, Imaam of the giraat after the era of the salaf, said, “I have sought to discover the meanings of these hadeeth (about the ahruf), and have pondered over them, and contemplated this topic for over thirty years, until Allah opened my mind to that which is the correct answer in this matter, Inshaa Allah!”

The reason that such a great difference of opinion exists concerning the exact meaning of the ahruf is due to the fact that there does not exist any explicit narration from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), or the salaf, concerning the exact nature of the ahruf; these various opinions are merely the conclusions of later scholars, based upon their examination of the evidences and their personal reasoning (ijtihad).

Therefore, it should be understood from the outset that to arrive at one specific conclusion, and claim with certainty that it alone is correct and all else is wrong, is pure folly. What is desired, however, is to narrow down the various opinions and eliminate as many as possible based upon the evidences.

All of these opinions can be divided into three broad categories, which are discussed in the following sections.

A. THOSE OPINIONS WHICH HAVE NO BASIS WHATSOEVER:
In this category do not fall those opinions which do not have any hadeeth to support them, nor do they make logical sense. Some of these are:

- Seven different categories of texts. For example: constrained and unconstrained, general and specific, literal and metaphoric, nasik and mansukh. Other categories include those given by grammarians and linguists, specifying different verb forms.
- An esoteric interpretation by certain Soof groups, claiming that there are seven levels of knowledge, or seven degrees of meanings to each verse.
- Seven different branches of knowledge, such as tawheed, sharee’ah, etc.
- All these opinions contradict the purpose of the ahruf, namely to make the recitation of the Qur’an easier for the Ummah. Also, there is no proof for these opinions, and they contradict common sense.

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4 Cf. Itr. Pps. 78-80
5 Cf. al-Alhaanace. da
6 Itr. p. 10
7 Cf. al-Hamad, pps. 133-144; az-Zargaanee, v.1 pps. 137-191; Itr, 122-190.
B. Those Opinions which have some Apparent Basis, but are weak Opinions

In this category are the following opinions:

- These *ahruf* are seven different ways to pronounce the words, without actually changing the letters. However, this opinion contradicts the variations in words that occurs in the qiraaat.
- The *ahruf* are seven types of verses in the Qur’an: apparent, command, recommendation, specific, particular, general and parable. There is a weak hadeeth to support this.
- Similar to the above, and also based on a weak hadeeth, the different types are: commands and prohibitions, promises and occurrences, *Halal* and *haraaam*, clear and ambiguous.
- The seven *ahruf* are the same as the seven qiraaat. This is contradicted historically, as there are more than seven qiraaat, and the collection and codification of the qiraaat occurred four centuries after the Prophet’s death. None of the major scholars of Islam held this view, as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 A.H.) said, “There is no difference of opinion among the scholars that the seven alahruf are not the same as the seven famous qiraaat.”
- Unfortunately, most of the Muslim masses understand the hadeeth of the *ahruf* to refer to the qiraaat.

C. Those Opinions Which Have Strong Evidence

These opinions are the ones that are worthy of serious inspection, as they have strong evidence historically and from the meanings of the ahaadeeth. There are three opinions in this category.

- The seven *ahruf* refer to the seven dialects (lughaat) of the Arabs prevalent at the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). Each of these dialects belongs to a tribe among the Arabs, namely, the Quraysh, Hudhayl, Tameem, Hawaazin, Thaqeef, Kinaanah and Yemen (other scholars gave the names of other tribes). Thus, under this opinion, various verses would be pronounced according to the pronunciation of that particular tribe, and words from one dialect would be replaced by other words used by that particular tribe. Some scholars say that these seven dialects are spread throughout the Qur’an, meaning that part of the Qur’an is in the dialect of Quraysh, other parts are in the dialect of Hudhayl, and so forth. Others say that the entire Qur’an is recited in each of these dialects, thus forming the seven *ahruf*.

- This was the opinion of Aboo ‘Ubayd al-Qaasim ibn Sallaam (d. 224 A.H.), al-Bayhaqee (d. 458 A.H.), Ibn ‘Attiyah (d. 541 A.H.) and others.

- 2) The seven *ahruf* denote seven ways of recitation (lahajaat) such that words are replaced by their synonyms. In other words, the seven ahruf the exact same meanings but different wordings.

- This was the opinion of Imaam at-Tabaree (d. 311 A.H.), at-Tahawee (d. 321 A.H.), Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463 A.H.) and others8 An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur’an.

- 3) The seven *ahruf* refer to seven different ways that the verse can be changed. In other words, whenever a difference is found between these *ahruf*, this type of difference will fall into one of the following seven categories:11

  - Change in wording. For example, in 101:5, (كالصوف المنفوش) is changed to (كالعهن المنفوش), both of which mean the same thing.
  - Differences in wordings or letters such that they conform to the vowelless, dotless script of Uthmaan. For example, (فَتَبِينَ) in 49:6, just by changing the dots. Also, in Soorah al-Faatihah, (ملك) is changed to (ملك) without any change in the script of Uthmaan.
  - Change in word order. For example, in 2:195, (وقتَلَوا واقتَلَلو) is changed to (وقتَلَوْا واقتَلُوْا).
  - Addition or subtraction of a letter or word. For example, in 57:24, fa innaAllaha hoowa al-ghamyul hameed is recited without the pronoun, fa inaaAllah al-ghamayn hameed.
  - The form of the word structure is changed. This change could be from plural to singular or dual (or other variations), or from feminine to masculine. For example, in 23:8, the plural (أماناتهم) is changed to the singular (أماناتهم).

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8 For a discussion of the weakness in the above to hadeeth, see Itr, p. 138
9 See the next chapter for further details on the qira’aat.
10 Zarzur, p. 186
11 All of these variations, except for the first, are found in the present – dy qira’aat
12 The manuscript of Uthman did not have dots or diacritical marks to distinguish between certain letters and vowel.
Differences in inflection points. For example, 2:125, 33:66 (الله غني وملؤاهم سموه) is read in the command and (الله غني وملؤاهم). Differences in pronunciation. For example, lessening the effect of certain hamzahs (called tas-heel) or pronouncing certain alifs andyaas differently (called imaalah).

This was the opinion of Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.), al-Baaqillaani (d. 403 A.H.), Makkee ibn Abee Taahb (d. 437 A.H.), ar-Raazee (d. 606 A.H.), Ibn al-Jazaree (d.832 A.H.), and others. Some of them give different categories, but their general thesis is the same.

Among these three opinions, the third one seems to have the least weight. Despite the fact that it classifies the differences in the ahruf into ingenious categories, it does not explain the essence of what the ahruf are. In other words, When Hishaam was reciting a different liarf from 'Umar, he was probably differing with 'Umar in more than one of these seven categories. Therefore, the third definition does not really answer the question as to the meaning of the ahruf.

The first two opinions, on the other hand, have very strong evidences to support them. It seems - and Allah knows best - that both of these opinions have an element of truth in them, and there does not exist any grounds for rejecting either of them.

Therefore, it is concluded that the seven ahruf represent variations based upon, but not limited to, the most fluent Arab tribes of that time. These variations occurred in words, letters, and pronunciations, such that all these variations made it easier for the Companions to memorise the Qur'an. These variations did not always reach seven different ways of recitation for each verse, but whenever such variations existed, the different ways of recitation never exceeded seven.

IV. Are the Ahruf in Existence Today?

A very crucial question that arises is whether these seven ahruf are still present today. Of course, this question in essence depends upon how one defines the ahruf. For example, az-Zarqaneey strongly argues that all the ahj-uf 'have been preserved, but this goes back to his definition that the ahruf represent seven ways that the verse can be changed (opinion (3) above). Thus, since these variations are still present in today's qiraaat, he argues that all seven ahruf have been preserved. The present discussion will, of course, utilise the definition that was concluded upon in the previous section.

The scholars of Islaam are divided into three opinions with regards to this issue.

The first group of scholars, composed of at-Tabaree (d. 310 A.H.), at-Tahawee (d. 321A.H.), Ibn Hibbaan (d. 354 A.H.) and those who follow them, argue that only one haif is in existence today. At-Tabaree holds that the recitation of the Qur'an in seven ahruf was a concession given to the Companions at the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), but when 'Uthmaan officially compiled the Qur'an, he specifically ordered the committee assigned to write the mus-haf to preserve only one harf. He writes, "The only recitation that the Muslims have today is the one harf that their pious Imaam (Uthmaan) chose for them, leaving the remaining six." He is alluding to the statement of Uthmaan to the committee that wrote the mus-haf, "… if you differ in (the spelling) of a word, then write it in the script of the Quaysh". This, according to at-Tabaree and those who follow his opinion, shows that 'Uthmaan preserved only one harf.

In response to the question, "How could 'Uthmaan and the Companions purposely have left out the other six ahjif?" at-Tabaree answers:

The seven ahruf were revealed by Allaali during the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to facilitate the memorisation of the Qur'an, since the dialects of the Arabs were many. This facilitation (i.e., the ahruf) was not necessary to pre-serve, and eventually there was no need of it. In fact, it became the cause of dissension amongst the Muslims, as those people new to Islaam began to go
over the differences in the recitation of the Qur’an. Therefore, Allah inspired\(^{19}\) Uthmaan to discard the other six ahruf \(\textit{and} \) collect the Qur’an in one harf, so that the ummah would be united in its recitation. The Companions agreed to this action of his, and the agreement of the Companions is that Zayd was aware of the portions of the Qur’an preserved by him, and that they would not discard any knowledge that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) had given them.

The second group of scholars holds that all of the ah_ruf are in existence today, and the mus-haf of Uthmaan was written to preserve all seven ahruf. This was the opinion of Aboo Bakr al-Baqiillaaani (d. 403 A.H.), and a small group of scholars. They claim that the Companions would never abandon a recitation that they used to recite during the lifetime of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), and it is because of this concern of theirs that detailed information exists about every topic of Islaam, so much so that the Muslims even know how many white hairs the Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) beard contained!\(^{20}\) Therefore, it cannot be said that the Companions purposely left out six ahruf \textit{and} preserved only one of them in the mus-haf of Uthmaan without bringing forth some strong, unequivocal proof. Al-Qaaree writes,

The third group of scholars is composed of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 724 A.H.), ash-Shaatibee (d. 790 A.H.), ar-Raazee (d. 606 A.H.), Ibn Katheer (d. 774 A.H.), Ibn al-Jazaree (d. 832 A.H.) and others. They argue that Uthmaan preserved the ah_ruf to the extent that the script of his mus-haf allowed him to do so. Thus, these scholars hold that a portion of the seven ahruf are preserved.

The question then arises: On what basis did Uthmaan decide which portions of the ahruf to preserve? The answer to this is twofold: First, Zayd ibn Thabit was in charge of the collection of the mus-haf. Zayd had been present when the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) recited the whole Qur’an for the last time, only months before his death.\(^{21}\) It can be assumed, then, that Zayd was aware of the portions of the ahruf that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) recited, and he must have chosen those to the exclusion of the others. Secondly, the Companions unanimously agreed to discard all readings that conflicted with the mus-haf of Uthmaan. Obviously, they would eliminate only that which they knew was not a part of the Qur’an, and their consensus is binding on the ummah.

Ibn al-Jazaree (d. 832 A.H.) writes,\(^{22}\)

The majority of the scholars of the salaf and the later generations are of the opinion that the Uthmaanic mus-hafs contains of the seven ahruf only that which its script allows. (What is preserved) are the recitations that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) recited to Jibreel (during the last year of his life). The present mus-haf contains all this reading, and not a single letter from it is missing.\(^{23}\)

The third opinion (i.e., that a portion of the seven ahruf have been preserved) seems to be the strongest one, for the following reasons:

1) The Companions were meticulous in preserving the knowledge that they received from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). They understood their responsibility in transferring this vast knowledge to the ummah. It is because of this concern of theirs that detailed information exists about every topic of Islaam, so much so that the Muslims even know how many white hairs the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) beard contained!\(^{24}\) Therefore, it cannot be said that the Companions purposely left out six ahruf and preserved only one of them in the mus-haf of Uthmaan without bringing forth some strong, unequivocal proof. Al-Qaaree writes,

This opinion (that the Companions leh out six ahruf) is strange, and extremely weak, for it claims that a part of the Qur’an was removed by consensus of the Companions, since each of the ahruf is part of the Qur’an. Therefore, how could Uthmaan, or any of the Companions for that matter, or rather all the Companions, discard something from the Qur’an without a clear proof from the Creator? Even if we say that the Companions were given the concession of choosing one harf to recite in, as at-Tabaree (d. 310 A.H.) claims, and they were not accountable for all seven ahruf since it was a concession from Allah, we say: This concession was given so that

\(^{19}\) The Arabic is ilhaam, which is the type of inspiration that is given to pious people, and is not the wahiyy that is given to the prophets. The mother of Moosaa received this type of inspiration when she was commanded by Allah to let Moosaa adrift in the river. Refer to Chapter 3 for more details.

\(^{21}\) Actually, the Prophet (5H) recited the whole Qur’an twice to Jibreel, and heard it from him twice. Some scholars held the view that these recitations of the Qur’an occurred in different ahruf. See Itr, pp. 263-73.

\(^{22}\) Ibid, p. 31, with changes.

\(^{23}\) Anas ibn Maalik stated, ”I could not count more that fourteen white hairs in the Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) beard and hair.” Reported by at-Tirmidhee in his Shamaadil, #31.
they could choose to recite the Qur’an in any one of these seven alimif, whichever was the easiest for him. There was no concession, however, in preserving these alimif, rather they were responsible for preserving all of them...25

2) The ‘Uthmaanic mus−h−afs, as was mentioned earlier, were devoid of dots and vowel points. Since this knowledge was available to the Arabs at that time,26 it seems likely that the mus−hafs was purposely written without these dots or inflection points so that it would encompass different readings, and hence the different ahruf. Also, as was mentioned in the relevant chapter, the script of the ‘Uthmaanic mus’usfwaS written with specific rules in mind, apparently in order to accommodate the various recitations, and this shows that the mus−h−afs was written with the intent to preserve more than one barf.

3) If, as at-Tabaree holds, only one harfwas has been preserved, from where then do the differences in the ten qiraaat originate from? All scholars are unanimous that these ten qiraaat originated from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) himself; therefore it seems apparent that the qiraaat have some integral relationship with the alimif (as shall be discussed in the next chapter). Concerning this issue, Imaam at-Tabaree is forced to contradict his stance, as Makkee ibn Abee Taahb (d. 437 A.H.) pointed out:

At-Tabaree concedes to the fact that the various qiraaat that conform to the mus−h−af of ‘Uthmaan are a part of the seven alimif, and this is what we also believe. However, he also claims... that the mus−h−af (‘Uthmaan) has only preserved one harf, to the exclusion of the other six. These two positions are contradictory...”27

4) The different mus−hafs that ‘Uthmaan ordered to be written were not identical to each other, for in a number of places, the addition or deletion of a word or letter occurred in some of the mus−hafs”.28 This change is reflected in the various qiraaat in existence today, for within the ten qiraaat, there exist word changes and word additions that could not have originated from the same mus−haf. It seems apparent this was done with a goal in mind, and the strongest conclusion seems to be that, by these differences in the mus−hafs, ‘Uthmaan had intended to preserve the differences in the ahruf.

These same four arguments, however, cannot be used for the second opinion (that all of the ahruf were actually preserved), because of the fact that certain variations that the Companions used to recite as part of the Qur’an are now no longer a part of the Qur’an (as will be explained in the chapters of nasty and qiraaat). These variant readings can be explained as having been a part of the seven alimif before the final reading of the Qur’an by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to Jibreel. This reading, which took place before Zayd ibn Thaaabit, cancelled the ahruf that ‘Uthmaan did not preserve.”29 Imaam al-Qistillaaane (d. 923 A.H.) said, “In this (last) recitation of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to Jibreel, there were two benefits: First, to strengthen and preserve the Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) memorisation of the Qur’an, and, second, to affirm those verses that were not abrogated and to indicate which verses were”.30

V. The Wisdom in the Various Ahruf

Obviously, it cannot be said for certain the exact wisdom behind any Divine act, for the Creator’s knowledge is infinite. However, the scholars of Islaam have said that the revelation of the Qur’an in seven ahruf had the following benefits:31

1) To facilitate the memorisation of the Qur’an. This is the only benefit that is explicitly narrated in the hadeeth. The Arabs did not all speak Arabic in the same way; each tribe and location had slight variations and peculiarities unique to it. If the Qur’an had only been revealed in one harf, it would have been difficult for the many different Arab tribes to memorise the Qur’an properly. However, since the Qur’an was revealed in seven ahruf this greatly eased its memorisation. This was of primary importance in its preservation and propagation.

2) To prove the miraculous nature of the Qur’an. For despite all of these differences, the meanings of the ahi{i^ufdid not contradict one another, but rather were complementary.

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25 al-Qaaree, p. 71.
26 Although there is a strong difference of opinion over this. See al-Hamad, p.151, where he tries to prove that this knowledge did not exist until the Muslims invented it.
27 al-Hamad, p. 140.
28 See Ch. 8, ‘The Compilation of the Qur’an; for further details and examples.
29 Ibn al-Jazaree, p. 31.
30 Uwais, p. 8.
31

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3) To prove the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), for despite the fact that he was illiterate, the revelation of the Qur’an occurred in different tribal dialects and different words, all of which consisted of the most fluent and eloquent speech of his time.

4) To honour the ummah of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), and show its superiority over all other nations. No other nation had been given its book in such a manner, in varying ahruf, to ease the process of preservation. Thus, the revelation of the Qur’an showed the unique status that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and his ummah, occupied over other nations. In one hadeeth, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) remarked, “The earlier books would be revealed from one door (of heaven), in one ahruf, but the Qur’an was revealed from seven doors (of Heaven), in seven ahruf.”

CONCLUSION:

The Glorious Qur’an was revealed to Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as a unique and long last miracle. It is meant to give or recite as a matter of religious obligation. Not just only reading for reading sake but reading with melodious voice, following the rules and regulations guiding its recitation, to ponder over its meaning and to adhere strictly to its teachings is enjoined by Allah and His Prophet. Listening to Qur'an earns both the reciters and the listeners' rewards from Allah.

The Qureysh; despite their eloquence, during their days of ignorance heard the Qur'an remarked that it is real word of Allah which is beyond imagination of any creature. It is right to point out here that if the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم), kept the Qur'an within himself unread, both man and jinn would not have access to it.

REFERENCE:

1. Al-suyudi, al-haqan fi lulum al-quran, Cairo Dar alfikr
2. Narrated by Muslim
3. Narrated by Tirmidhee
4. Cf. Itr. Pgs. 78-80
5. Cf. al-Alhaance. da
6. Itr, p. 10
7. Cf. al-Hamad, pps. 133-144; az-Zarqaanee, v.1 pps. 137-191; Itr, 122-190.
8. For a discussion of the weakness in the above to hadeeth, see Itr, p. 138
9. See the next chapter for further details on the qira’aat.
10. Zarzur, p. 186
11. All of these variations, except for the first, are found in the present – dy qira’aat
12. The manuscript of Uthman did not have dots or diacritical marks to distinguish between certain letters and vowel.
13. See chapter 8, on “The collection of the Qur’an”
14. See Itr, pps. 168-177.
15. cf. al-Qaaree’, p. 79, and al-Hamad’s conclusion, p. 144, which is very similar to this one.
16. Az-Zarqaanee, v. 1, p. 170-172.
17. al-Hamad, p. 147.
18. See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the collection of the Qur’an.
19. Ubaydaat, p. 162.
20. The Arabic is ilhaam, which is the type of inspiration that is given to pious people, and is not the wahy that is given to the prophets. The mother of Moosaa received this type of inspiration when she was commanded by Allah to let Moosaa adrift in the river. Refer to Chapter 3 for more details.
21. Actually, the Prophet (5H) recited the whole Qur’an twice to Jibreel, and heard it from him twice. Some scholars held the view that these recitations of the Qur’an occurred in different ahruf. See Itr, pp. 263-73.
22. Ibn al-Jazaree, an-Nashr, v. 1, p. 31, with changes.
23. Anas ibn Maalik stated, “I could not count more that fourteen white hairs in the Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) beard and hair.” Reported by at-Tirmidhee in his Shamadil, #31.
24. al-Qaaree, p. 71.
25. Although there is a strong difference of opinion over this. See al-Hamad, p.151, where he tries to prove that this knowledge did not exist until the Muslims invented it.
26. al-Hamad, p. 140.
27. See Ch. 8, ‘The Compilation of the Qur’an,’ for further details and examples.
28. Ibn al-Jazaree, p. 31.
29. Uwais, p. 8.
30. Reported by al-Haakim, see as-Saheehah # 5870.

32 Reported by al-Haakim, see as-Saheehah # 5870.