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Transmission-Path Deviation (*Khurūj ‘an al-Ṭarīq*) and Recitational Choice (*Ikhtiyār*) in Ibn al-Jazarī’s *Qirā’āt* Methodology: A Theoretical and Applied Study

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Abstract

The discipline of Qur’ānic recitations is fundamentally governed by authenticated transmission, yet its scholarly tradition also recognizes a carefully regulated form of recitational selection known as *ikhtiyār*. This study examines the relationship between transmission-path deviation (*khurūj ‘an al-ṭarīq*) and recitational choice in the critical methodology of Imam Ibn al-Jazarī. It seeks to determine when departure from a designated transmission path constitutes a legitimate scholarly selection and when it should be regarded as an impermissible disruption of the transmitted tradition. Employing a descriptive, analytical, and inductive approach, the study first clarifies the technical meanings of *ṭarīq*, *riwāyah*, and *ikhtiyār* within *Qirā’āt* scholarship. It then analyzes selected examples from Ibn al-Jazarī’s *Al-Nashr fī al-Qirā’āt al-‘Ashr*, including cases in which he endorsed departures attributed to earlier authorities, particularly al-Dānī and al-Shāṭibī, as well as instances in which he preferred variants beyond the primary paths documented in his own transmission framework. The analysis demonstrates that deviation from a particular path does not necessarily constitute textual error or unauthorized recitation. When a selected variant is supported by an authenticated alternative chain, conforms to recognized recitational principles, and is explicitly distinguished from the primary path, it represents a legitimate exercise of *ikhtiyār*. The study therefore establishes a methodological distinction between unsupported path conflation and evidence-based scholarly selection. This distinction contributes to a more precise understanding of Ibn al-Jazarī’s critical method and clarifies how authoritative reciters reconciled fidelity to transmission with limited analytical choice.

Keywords: Qur'ānic recitations; Ibn al-Jazarī; *ikhtiyār*; *khurūj 'an al-ṭarīq*; transmission paths; *Al-Nashr fī al-Qirā'āt al-'Ashr*

1. INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah, Who sent down the Qur'an and preserved it through continuous generation-to-generation transmission until the end of time. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad, who taught his Companions the seven Ahruf (modes) of the Qur'an, and upon his family and Companions, the leaders of guidance and beacons of mankind.

Scholars have devoted utmost care to the Holy Qur'an since its revelation, surrounding its recitation, Tajwīd, performance, and exegesis with rigorous scholarly methodologies. A core dimension of this scholarship involves documenting, refining, and selecting specific variants of Qirā'āt (recitations) alongside their respective transmission paths (Ṭuruq) and chains of narration (Asānīd). This meticulous preservation directly reflects the divine promise in the Qur'an: "Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur'an and indeed, We will be its guardian" (Qur'an 15:9). As established by Imam Ibn al-Jazarī in *Al-Nashr*, the authenticity of the chain of transmission (Ṣiḥḥat al-Sanad) stands as a mandatory prerequisite for any acceptable recitation. This principle underscores that the science of Qirā'āt fundamentally relies upon direct oral transmission (Riwāyah and Talaqqī) from master scholars through unbroken chains reaching back to the ten canonical Imams, and through them to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Consequently, learning or transmitting this science solely from written texts, absent direct oral authorization from qualified teachers, is strictly impermissible.

Describing the obligations of a qualified reciter, Ibn al-Jazarī states:

"It is not permissible for a reciter to teach except that which he has personally heard or recited. If he has recited or heard variant letters, there is no disagreement regarding the permissibility of teaching the Glorious Qur'an through them, provided the aforementioned condition is met—that he retains them accurately in memory." (Ibn al-Jazarī, 1999, p. 52)

He further addresses textual reliance without oral transmission, asking:

"Is it lawful for a Muslim to recite based solely on what he finds in written scripts without oral transmission?" (Ibn al-Jazarī, 1999, p. 53)

Commenting on specific source texts, he notes:

"And this variant is what is documented in the paths of Al-Taysīr; it is inappropriate to recite from Al-Taysīr using anything other than it." (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 210)

These excerpts demonstrate Ibn al-Jazarī's strict insistence on respecting documented transmission paths (Ṭuruq) as an indispensable pillar of recitation instruction. Nevertheless, in numerous other instances throughout his scholarly works, Ibn al-Jazarī endorses scholars who departed from their primary documented paths in favor of an alternative methodological choice (Ikhtiyār), or explicitly departs from his own primary path while explaining his rationale. For instance, he writes:

- "This is the path found in Al-Taysīr, and his inclusion of another variant therein constitutes a departure from his path (Khurūj 'an Ṭarīqihī)" (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 315).
- "He definitively adopted this variant in Al-Taysīr, thereby deviating from his documented path within it" (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 84).
- Regarding the word (HAYTA) in Surah Yusuf, he remarks: "I say: For this reason, Al-Shāṭibī combined both performance variants for Hishām in his poem, thereby deviating from the primary path of his source text in pursuit of accuracy" (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 297).

To clarify this nuanced methodological dynamic, this study investigates: Deviation from the Transmission Path (Khurūj 'an al-Ṭarīq) and Its Relationship with Recitation Choice (Ikhtiyār) According to Imam Ibn al-Jazarī: Exposition and Exemplification.

Research Problem

This study addresses several key methodological questions:

- Does exercising Ikhtiyār (recitation choice) require strict conformity to a scholar's primary documented path, or is departing from it permissible under defined scholarly conditions?
- Should a variant selected by a scholar through path deviation (Khurūj 'an al-Ṭarīq) be accepted and utilized in performance?
- Is the widespread maxim—"Whoever departs from his documented path, his variant shall not be adopted"—methodologically absolute or conditionally qualified?

Significance of the Study

- The value of any scholarly inquiry is tied to its subject matter; Qirā'āt represents one of the most noble Islamic disciplines due to its direct connection to the Qur'anic text.
- The research directly examines the critical framework of Imam Muḥammad ibn al-Jazarī, the paramount authority in late Qirā'āt scholarship.
- Examining path deviation and its relationship to Ikhtiyār helps refine and standardize variant attribution across canonical chains.

Motivations for the Study

- Specialized academic interest in analytical Qirā'āt scholarship.
- Resolving ambiguity surrounding the concept of Ikhtiyār, specifically as applied by Ibn al-Jazarī.
- Defending the legitimate analytical choices of classic reciters against claims that Ikhtiyār constitutes unauthorized innovation.
- Demonstrating that rejecting Ikhtiyār logically undermines major canonical Imams who exercised it, including Warsh, Ḥafṣ, Al-Kisā'ī, Khalaf, Ibn Mujāhid, Al-Dānī, Al-Shāṭibī, and Ibn al-Jazarī.

2. SECTION 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Definition of Ṭuruq (Transmission Paths)

Linguistic Meaning: Ṭuruq is the plural of Ṭarīq (path or way). Ibn Fāris notes that the root (Ṭ-R-Q) denotes several underlying concepts, primary among which is a route that is traveled or traversed (Ibn Fāris, 1979, Vol. 3, p. 446). Al-Jawharī defines Ṭarīq as a pathway or road (Al-Jawharī, 1979, Vol. 4, p. 1512).

Terminological Meaning: Ibn al-Jazarī defines Ṭarīq in Qirā'āt as: "Whatever is attributed to narrators below the primary level of Riwāyah—no matter how far down the chain—is termed a Ṭarīq (path)" (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 3).

Accordingly, Ṭarīq refers to variants introduced at sub-narrator levels across canonical lines (Al-Dawsarī, 2008, p. 74; Al-Jarmi, 2001, p. 288), including:

- Sub-narrator paths: The ten sub-paths of Nāfi' (e.g., Al-Azraq and Al-Aṣbahānī from Warsh; Abū Nashīṭ and Al-Ḥulwānī from Qālūn).
- Classical author paths: The path of Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ibn Ghalbūn, or Abū 'Amr al-Dānī.
- Source manual paths: The path of Al-Taysīr, Al-Tabṣīrah, Jāmi' al-Bayān, or Al-Mubhij.
- Regional traditions: The Easterners (Mashāriqah) or Westerners (Maghāribah).

2.2 Definition of Ikhtiyār (Recitation Choice)

Linguistic Meaning: Derived from the root (Kh-Y-R), Ikhtiyār signifies selection, preference, and inclination toward a superior option (Ibn Fāris, 1979, Vol. 2, p. 232; Ibn Manẓūr, 1993, Vol. 4, p. 262).

Terminological Meaning: Al-Faḍlī defines Ikhtiyār as: "A reciter's deliberate selection of a specific variant from among his transmitted narrations based on scholarly investigation. For example, Nāfi' studied under seventy Successors; he adopted variants agreed upon by at least

two teachers and set aside isolated readings. The same methodology was employed by all canonical Imams" (Al-Faḍlī, 2009, p. 88).

In his poetic treatise *Al-Munbihiyyah*, Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī observes:

"And the scholars of Ikhtiyār for recitation variants... all chose from transmitted readings that were authentic through Prophetically established transmission." (Al-Dānī, 1999, p. 65)

Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib explains the mechanism of Ikhtiyār:

"Each of these leading reciters needed to select from what he had studied and leave aside other options. Nāfi‘ stated: 'I recited to seventy Successors; whatever two agreed upon, I adopted, and whatever a single teacher isolated, I set aside, until I compiled this reading.' Al-Kisā‘ī studied under Ḥamzah, yet differed from him in nearly three hundred letters because he also studied under others, selecting a distinct reading from his combined transmissions." (Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, n.d., p. 42)

Thus, Ikhtiyār functions on two distinct levels: (1) The analytical process of selecting a specific set of variants from authentic transmissions, and (2) The selected variant itself (e.g., "the Ikhtiyār of Warsh"). Crucially, Ikhtiyār represents selection among valid transmissions, never personal textual invention.

2.3 Methodological Relationship Between Ṭuruq and Ikhtiyār

The relationship between Ṭuruq (narrations) and Ikhtiyār (choice) is foundational and complementary. Strict adherence to transmitted narrations constitutes the default rule. However, a master reciter may exercise Ikhtiyār by departing from a primary teacher's specific path in a given verse, relying instead upon an authentic alternative narration transmitted through a secondary chain (Ibn al-Bādhish, 1983, p. 112).

Classical examples from Ibn al-Bādhish's *Al-Iqnā‘*:

- Warsh and Qālūn differing in specific positions from Nāfi‘.
- Ḥafṣ differing in Surah Al-Rūm (30:54) from ‘Āṣim by reciting (Ḍu‘f) with a Dammah (ضُغْف) based on an alternative transmission via Fuḍayl ibn Marzūq, while ‘Āṣim recited with Faṭḥah (ضَغْف) (Al-Dānī, 2015, p. 145; Ibn al-Bādhish, 1983, p. 118).
- Hishām exercising Ikhtiyār regarding specific Idghām (assimilation) variants rather than directly transmitting them from his primary teacher Ibn ‘Āmir (Ibn al-Bādhish, 1983, p. 120).

3. SECTION 2: APPLIED ANALYSIS IN AL-NASHR

3.1 Ibn al-Jazarī's Methodological Stance on Ikhtiyār

Imam Ibn al-Jazarī maintains a balanced methodology. He strictly enforces documented transmission paths to prevent mixing of chains (Tarkīb) or unverified reading. At the same time, he explicitly validates legitimate Ikhtiyār when supported by valid alternative chains.

For example, in discussing the Seek of Refuge (Isti‘ādhah), he distinguishes between paths and choices: "I recited it according to the Ikhtiyār of Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, and according to the Riwayah of Ḥafṣ through the path of Hubayrah" (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 248). Similarly, regarding the velarization (Taghlīz) of the letter Lām for Warsh, he notes: "This is the choice of Al-Dānī outside of Al-Taysīr" (Ibn al-Jazarī, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 112).

3.2 Textual Examples of Path Deviation (Khurūj 'an al-Ṭarīq)

A. Instances Where Ibn al-Jazarī Endorsed Other Scholars' Path Deviations:

- Recitation of (MAḤYĀYA) for Warsh: Warsh transmitted Sukūn (مَحْيَايَا) from Nāfi‘ orally, yet selected Fathah (مَحْيَايَا) as his personal Ikhtiyār due to linguistic strength.
- Ibn Mujāhid's Choice in (AL-NĀS): Ibn Mujāhid taught pure Fathah for (AL-NĀS) in the genitive case under Abū ‘Amr al-Baṣrī, departing from his primary path.
- Inter-Sura Transitions (Sakt vs. Waṣl): Al-Dānī selected Sakt for Abū ‘Amr al-Baṣrī as his preferred choice, despite his primary manual Al-Taysīr specifying Waṣl.
- Pausing of Ḥamzah on Separated Hamzah: Al-Shāṭibī included Naql for Ḥamzah when pausing on separated words, departing from Al-Dānī's documented path in Al-Taysīr.
- Hishām's Recitation of (HAYTA): Al-Shāṭibī included two performance variants for Hishām, departing from his source text to ensure accuracy.

B. Instances Where Ibn al-Jazarī Departed From His Own Primary Paths:

- Hishām's Vowelization in (YARḌAHU): Ibn al-Jazarī recorded Sukūn for Hishām in (YARḌAHU) despite it falling outside his primary documented chains.
- Selection of Prolongation Grades (Marātib al-Madd): In Al-Nashr, Ibn al-Jazarī evaluated complex historical opinions on Madd gradations and selected two primary practical levels.
- Imālah of (YĀ) in Surah Maryam for Al-Sūsī: While excluding Imālah for Al-Sūsī in Al-Nashr due to path constraints, Ibn al-Jazarī included it in his poetic treatise Ṭayyibat al-Nashr.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The science of Qirā’āt rests upon two complementary pillars: strict adherence to transmitted chains (Riwayah/Ṭuruq) and authoritative analytical selection (Ikhtiyār) among valid options.

- Methodological deviation from a primary path (Khurūj 'an al-Ṭarīq) is fully accepted by master scholars when supported by authentic alternative transmissions.
- The rigid rule—"If a variant departs from its documented path, it must be discarded"—is methodologically flawed unless the departure lacks authentic chain support altogether.
- Rejecting Ikhtiyār logically leads to invalidating major historical reciters—including Warsh, Ḥafṣ, Al-Kisā'ī, Al-Dānī, Al-Shāṭibī, and Ibn al-Jazarī—who routinely exercised analytical selection.
- Ibn al-Jazarī occasionally disallowed certain variants attributed to path deviation, but careful analysis reveals that his rejections were based on isolated narrations (Infirād) or weak chains rather than the act of Ikhtiyār itself.

Recommendations:

- Further scholarly research evaluating the impact of oral performance (Adā') on variant selection across classical recitation manuals.
- Encouraging comparative studies between Andalusian/Maghrebi selection methodologies and Mashriqi transmission systems.

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