

An Explanation for Omitting and Writing *Alif* in Some Words of the Qur'an Based on the Ancient Manuscripts

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ABSTRACT:

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Examining the orthography of the Qur'an shows that the letter *alif* was omitted in some words, while it was not omitted in similar words. Scholars have offered various reasons for eliminating *alif* since the early centuries. Some of them regarded the way of writing the Qur'an as sacred or proposed ideological explanations for it. However, studying these justifications shows that they are not subject to scientific linguistic rules and are mostly personal opinions because based on the ancient manuscripts of the Qur'an, we can find many contradictions for the proposed reasons, which show that they are not general and true in many cases.

Using the reasons presented in the books of Qur'anic sciences and some interpretations of the Qur'an and comparing them with the orthography in the manuscripts, this study shows that the orthography of the Qur'an, especially in the case of writing *alif*, is a linguistic and scribal phenomenon subjected by some factors that developed the Arabic script in its early stages.

KEYWORDS: orthography of the Qur'an, *rasm al-Qur'an*, omitting *alif*, manuscripts of the Qur'an.

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1. Introduction

Deleting or adding the letter *alif* is one of the issues that are shrouded in ambiguity and is not subject to a steady rule despite the attempts of scholars to find rules and explanations for it. There are also contradictory interpretations of the phenomenon of deletion and addition of *alif*. Discussing these issues in light of the ancient manuscripts of the Qur'an, inscriptions, and rational arguments can open our way to solve the problem (Ibn Wathīq, 2009).

Blachere (1974) said that the writing style used by scribes in writing the Qur'an was still primitive. He also indicated that the reproduction of the five basic Qur'ans existing in Islamic capitals raised a serious issue. Writing did not eliminate the need to memorize the text, thus the phonetic and morphological differences that appeared in the local dialects continued. The written text guided readers to avoid changing words, omissions, and confusion, but it was not enough to make the readers' pronunciation complete. This fact was due to the lack of characters in the Arabic script.

However, it seems that the previous statement and the claim that the style of the orthography was still primitive is not accurate, because the writing style that was found in the old manuscripts of the Qur'an represents an advanced and mature style of writing and its regulations. It was characterized by intelligence in embodying some phonetic issues by adding or deleting some letters, while the script and its rules remained constant. Regulation is a matter related to the need of the social system, and there was no urgent need to develop these systems unnecessarily although it cannot be claimed that the written system had reached the level of perfection.

Some scholars represented doctrinal explanations of written or verbal phenomena. For instance, al-Zarkashī (1957, 1:389) said every *alif* in a word has a meaning that has a specificity in existence. Explanations like this are not evidenced by proof, neither in terms of the ancient inscriptions nor in terms of the manuscripts of the ancient Qur'ans that we have. Therefore, they are just personal opinions without evidence and reasoning.

The study of the phenomena of writing *alif* in the light of the ancient Qur'anic manuscripts by knowing their ages and the time of their writing is very important to meet the explanations given by specialists in the books of the Qur'anic sciences and interpretations, especially since some of these manuscripts were written in the early days of Islam in the first century AH, such as the Tübingen manuscript, which is one of the ancient manuscripts. Expert analysis of three samples of the manuscript parchment concluded that

it was more than 95 percent likely to have originated in the period 649-675 CE, that is, 20 to 40 years after the death of Prophet Muḥammad (University of Tübingen, 2014). The manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque in Cairo, the manuscript of Samarkand, and the manuscript of Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum are important to explore basic issues in the areas of the origins of some words and orthography of the Qur'an (*rasm al-Qur'ān*) as well.

There are various studies dealing with the Qur'anic pronunciation or orthography in the ancient Qur'ans that have taken an important part of the researchers' concerns. There is no doubt that writing systems have developed over time. Those manuscripts are good examples and fertile materials for studying these issues by following the sober and purposeful scientific method without following ideological precedences or flimsy suspicions.

The purpose of this study is to explore the linguistic defects that allow the addition and deletion of *alif* and try to study some inscriptions to understand these linguistic phenomena. The research based on ancient Qur'anic manuscripts is an attempt to justify linguistic phenomena in the light of comparing them to reach explanations for the phenomenon of writing *alif* in the ancient Qur'ans. The research raises the following fundamental questions.

Is writing *alif* or omitting it subject to a single writing system? Is it possible to discuss explanations of the phenomena of writing *alif* in the Qur'an in the light of ancient manuscripts? The last question is whether it is possible to subject heritage issues that were considered taboo in their discussion to scientific debate in the light of the documents of ancient manuscripts, which is an application of the cognitive approach to issues of heritage.

The researcher followed the method of comparing and examining the manuscripts and then evaluating them with the explanations given by the late scholars to justify adding or omitting *alif*.

2. *Omitting alif in pre-Islamic inscriptions*

Tracing pre-Islamic inscriptions shows us that writing or omitting *alif* preceded the religious texts, so all the explanations based on religious interpretive foundations remain subject to discussion and uncertainty.

The Namara inscription is a 4th-century inscription which is the epitaph of a deceased Arab king of the Lakhmids, Imru' al-Qays ibn 'Amr, the king of al-Manādhirah in al-Hira before Islam. The date of his death has been set

to the year 328 CE. It is understood from the study of the Namara inscription, according to some specialists, the clear development from the Thamudic, Lihyanite, and Safaitic to Arabic (Muhammad 2015: 9). The original inscription is preserved by the Louvre Museum in Paris, and its translation is as follows (Figure 1).

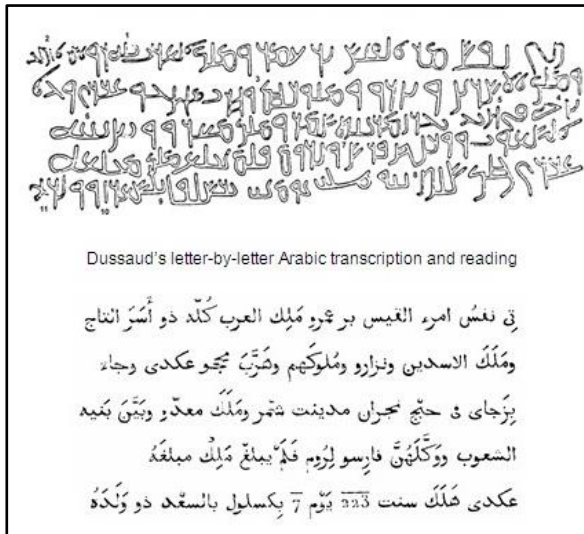


Figure 1. The picture of Namara inscription with Dussaud's reading (Sabulhab, 2012)

This is a picture of the inscription with Dussaud’s reading, which is the first published translation of the inscription in 1907 (Muhammad 2015: 9). Zāzā (1990 137) said that the word *kulluh* in the first line was a substitute for *kulluhum* or *kulluhā*. The question here is whether the scribe forgot to write the letter *mīm* or whether this word was pronounced as *kulluhā* and there was no need to write the letter *alif* in it because it was the letter of *madd*.

Another inscription that has great value among historians and researchers is the Harran inscription, which was found in Jabal al-Arab (Jabal al-Druze) in Syria in the nineteenth century (Figure 2).

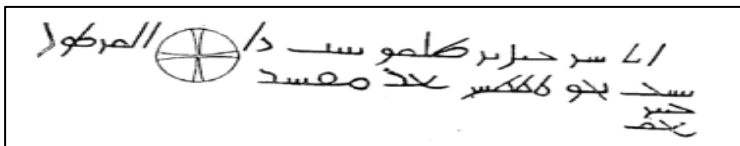


Figure 2. Harran inscription (Muhammad, 2015, 95)

The inscription was read as “I, Sharahīl, son of Zālimu built this

martyrium in the year 463 after the destruction of Khaybar by a year¹ (Muhammad 2015: 95). We note that the first word in this inscription *ana*, and the word *dhā* were written with *alif*; so, this indicates that *alif* represented a letter from their spoken and written letters. We also note that the last word in the third line is *bi’am*² which is read with *alif bi’am*,³ but it has been omitted from it. It seems that *alif* was similar to *fathah*, so they stopped writing it as if it was *fathah*, as it is well-known in Arab dialects and local languages, otherwise there is no reason why they did not write it, even though they wrote it in another word.

The next inscription to be discussed is the Usays inscription, which was found in 1962/63 in Jabal Usays, a hundred kilometers southeast of Damascus (Figure 3). The Usays inscription is the most important Arabic historical inscription of the sixth century and the second most important of all pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions as a historical document (Shahid 2015: 117).

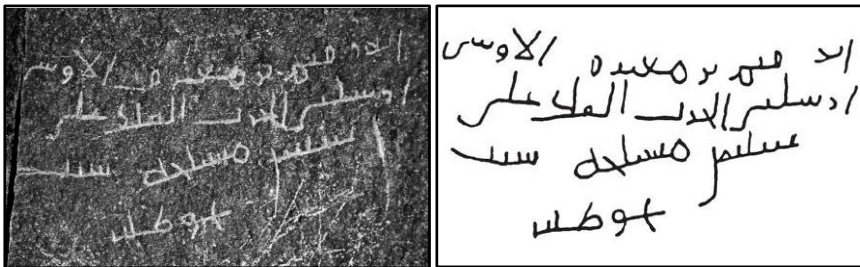


Figure.3 The Usays inscription (Macdonald, 2010)

The inscription was read as follows: Ibrāhīm ibn Mughīra al-Awsī arsalanī al-Ḥārith al-malik ‘alā Sulaymān msylht sanat 423 (Shahid 2015: 118).⁴

As seen in the picture, *alif* was omitted in the word Ibrāhīm, al-Ḥārith, and Sulaymān. Therefore, there is no difference between names with Arabic and non-Arabic origins in deleting *alif*, because *alif* has been omitted in all of them in this inscription.

1 . أنا شرحيل بن ظلمو بنيت ذا المرطول 463 بعد مفسد خبير بعام.

2 . بعم

3 . بعام

4. It should be noted that this inscription has been read in other ways as well (see Macdonald, 2010: 141-143).

3. Omitting *alif* in the manuscripts of the *Qur'an* and its explanations

In this section, we examine positions that scholars have mentioned for omitting *alif* and their justifications.

- *Alif* has been deleted after *bā* in *bism*, if it is added to the word “Allāh” (Figure 4).

Al-Zarkashī (1957 2:23-24) said omitting the letter *alif* in *bism Allāh* refers to the supremacy of Allah over all names and its uniqueness. Allah includes all names, and for this reason, unlike other names of God, it is only applied to God. Some scholars have said that removing the letter *alif* in *bism Allāh* is for the sake of brevity and frequent use, and it has two conditions: That the word *ism* is added to “Allāh” and the letter *bā* comes before *ism*. For this reason, in the phrase *bism rabbik*¹ (Qur’an 96:1), *alif* was not removed.



Figure 4. Manuscript of Rampur Raza Library (attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib), Q. 1:1

Al-Zarkashī (1957, 2: 22) claimed that omitting *alif* in the *bism* is for esoteric issues, which are understandable for people of esoteric knowledge. Here, one can ask whether the linguistic phenomenon can be justified by an esoteric explanation and whether this is accepted in the scientific method.

Al-Baghdādī (1994 1:16) narrated that when *alif* in *bism Allāh* was removed, its length was added to *bā* to show the length of the removed *alif*. In addition, it was said that *bā* was made long because they wanted to start God’s book with a big letter. In addition, writing *alif* in *bism* in the verse (Qur’an 56:74)² unlike other places is due to lack of use.

All these reasons are rejected according to the old manuscripts. Lengthening the *bā* line is not always found in the ancient Qur’an; for example, in Qur’an 18:1, there is no extension for *bā* line in the Tübingen manuscript and Samarkand manuscript (Figure 5).

1- بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ
2- فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ (الواقعة/74)



Figure 5. a) Tübingen manuscript, Q.18:1, (Altikulac, 2007b); b) Facsimile printing of the Samarkand Codex, Q.18:1, (Marx, n.d.)

- Alif was deleted after the letter wāw and fā in the verb *sa'ala*, such as *fas'alū*¹ (Q. 21:7) and *was'al*² (Q. 12:82).



Figure 6. a) Tübingen manuscript, Q. 21:7, (Altikulac, 2007b); b) The Sanaa manuscript, Q.12:82, (Altikulac, 2007a); c) The manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque, Q.12:82, (Altikulac, 2009)

As you can see, in these manuscripts (figure 6), even the position of *hamzah* has been removed, while in the Tübingen manuscript, *hamzah* is present. It seems that *hamzah* was written in *fas'alū* at a later time, because the color of the ink is different and *hamzah* was written in black ink.

- Alif has been deleted after interrogative *hamzah*, if it is *maksūr*, such as *aṣṭafā* (Q. 37:153)³ whose origin is *a'isṭafā* and *attakhadhtum* (Q. 2:80)⁴ whose origin is *a'ittakhadhtum* (Figure7).

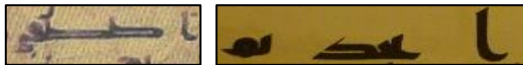


Figure 7. a) The Sanaa manuscript, Q. 37:153, (Altikulac, 2007a); b) Facsimile printing of the Samarkand Codex, Q.2:80, (Marx, n.d.)

- Alif was removed after *lām* in the word Allah.

The omission is justified in such a way that it does not resemble the word *al-lāt* (Q. 53:19) (al-Tha'ālibī, 1997, 1:159), but this reasoning is not correct, because the word *al-lāt* was written without *alif* in the Sanaa manuscript (Figure 8). In addition, other reasons have been mentioned for this deletion, such as ease (al-Tha'ālibī, 1997, 1:159), or frequent usage (Ibn Juzayy, 1995, 1:48).

1 - فسئلوا

2 - وسئل

3- أَصْطَفَى الْبَيْتَاتِ عَلَى الْبَيْتِينَ (الصافات/ 153)

4 - أتخذتم



Figure 8. The Sanaa manuscript, Q. 53:19, (Altikulac, 2007a)

- *Alif* was omitted in the word *al-Qur'ān* in two verses (Q. 12:2; 43:3)¹, in which they are synonymous with *al-kitāb*.

Al-Zarkashī said that *alif* has a meaning in every word; omitting it indicates attention to the divine and spiritual aspect, and writing it refers to worldly and lower affairs. So except in a few special cases, the word *al-Qur'ān* is written with *alif* and *al-kitāb* is written without *alif*. Because *al-Qur'ān* is the details of the wise verses of *al-kitāb* (Q. 41:3)², it is closer to us in terms of understanding than *al-kitāb*. In both cases where *al-Qur'ān* appears without *alif*, it is because *al-Qur'ān* is synonymous with *al-kitāb* and the reference of the pronoun *hu* of the verbs *ja' alnāhu* and *anzalnāhu* to *al-kitāb* (Q. 12:2; 43:3) in both verses shows this issue (al-Zarkashī, 1957, 2: 22).



Figure 9. The manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque Q. 12:2 and 43:3, (Altikulac, 2009)

This criterion mentioned by al-Zarkashī is not consistent with the ancient inscriptions. In the manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque, we found that *alif* was omitted in both places (figure 9), however in the Sanaa manuscript, *alif* was written (figure 10). In fact, this explanation needs to be reconsidered, because the manuscripts of the ancient Qur'an are reliable documents that do not support this explanation.



Figure 10. The Sanaa manuscript, Q. 43:3, (Altikulac, 2007a)

- The word *kitāb* appears without *alif* everywhere in the Qur'an except in four places (Q. 13:38;³ 15:4;⁴ 18:27;⁵ 27:1⁶) where the word *kitāb*

1 - الر تِلْكَ ءَايَاتِ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ * إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (يوسف/1-2)
 وَ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ * إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (الزخرف/2-3)
 2 - كِتَابٌ فَضَّلْتَ آيَاتِهِ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (فصلت/38)
 3 - لِكُلِّ أَجَلٍ كِتَابٌ (الرعد/38)
 4 - وَ مَا أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَرْنٍ إِلَّا وَ لَهَا كِتَابٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (الحجر/4)
 5 - وَ آتَى مَا أَوْحَى إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابٍ رَبِّكَ (الكهف/27)
 6 - طس تِلْكَ ءَايَاتِ الْقُرْءَانِ وَ كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ (النمل/1)

appears with a characteristic that makes it different from the general *kitāb*.

For example, in (Q. 13:38) the word *kitāb* refers to the book of ages, which is different from the general *kitāb* that is added to Allah (al-Zarkashī, 1957, 2: 23-24). However, in the Sanaa manuscript, *kitāb* was written without *alif*.

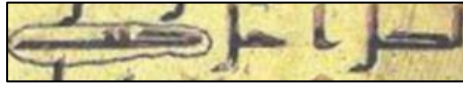


Figure 11. The Sanaa manuscript, Q. 13:38, (Altikulac, 2007a)

In addition, in (Q. 27:1) and (Q. 15:1)¹, although the word *kitāb* appears in similar sentences, it is written with *alif* in one place and without *alif* in another place. Here the question arises, what is the difference between *kitāb* in these two places. It is interesting that in the manuscript of Sanaa, contrary to what al-Zarkashī said, in both places *kitāb* is written without *alif*.



Figure 12. The Sanaa manuscript, Q. 15:1 and 27:1, (Altikulac, 2007a)

- *Alif* was deleted in non-Arabic proper nouns such as Ibrāhīm², Ismā‘īl³ (Q. 2:125), Ishāq (Q. 2:133) and Luqmān⁴ (Q. 31:12).

Al-Zarkashī (1957, 2:24) said that the reason for deleting *alif* from names of non-Arabic origin, such as Ibrāhīm, is due to redundant meaning that is not apparent in Arabic language, because non-Arabic words in relation to Arabic words are somehow hidden, so *alif* is omitted from them. Thus, al-Zarkashī's theory, which many followed, is based on the distinction between Arabic and non-Arabic words. If the word has an Arabic origin, the letter *alif* is written, and if the word is of non-Arabic origin, the letter *alif* is deleted. Likewise, Ibn al-Bannā' (1990, 69) said that this issue has been agreed among scholars. However, the Qur’an manuscripts do not support this theory. The names such as Sulaymān, Šālih and Mālik are of Arabic origin, but the letter *alif* has been omitted in them (table 1).

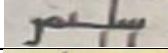

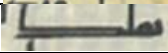
1 - الر تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ وَ قُرْءَانٍ مُبِينٍ (الحجر/1)

2- ابراهيم

3- اسمعيل

4- لقمن

Table 1. Arabic names written without *alif*

	Address of the verse	Written		Pronounced		al-Hussein Mosque Manuscript (Altikulac, 2009)
1	Q. 2:102	Sulayman	سليمن	Sulaymān	سليمان	
2	Q. 11:89	Ṣaliḥ	صلح	Ṣāliḥ	صالح	
3	Q. 43:77	Yamalīk	يملك	yā mālik	يا مالك	

Therefore the rule that al-Zarkashī and Ibn al-Bannā' claimed that it had been agreed upon, does not conform to what is found in ancient manuscripts. When this rule does not apply, he resort to another theory, which is the frequent use, and make it a reason to delete the letter *alif*. He also said that non-Arabic names that contrary to his theory, were written with *alif* such as Ṭālūt¹ (Q. 2:247), Jālūt² (Q. 2:249), ya'jūj³ and Ma'jūj⁴ (Q. 18:94), are also because they were rarely used. However, we have noticed that there is no evidence for all these sayings, and the ancient manuscripts contradict all of them.

■ *Alif* was deleted in the name Mīkāl⁵ (Q. 2:98).

Al-Rajraji (n.d. 1: 487) said that although the letter *alif* is not omitted in non-Arabic names with little use, there is a consensus that *alif* was removed in the case of Mīkāl. However, scholars differed about the reason for the removal. Some said it is because Mīkāl is a word that was read differently in diverse readings. Nāfi' recited it with *hamzah* and without *yā* as Mīkā'⁶. Ḥaḥṣ and Abū 'Amr recited it without *hamzah* and *yā* as Mīkāl⁷. Four other readings of the seven readings recited with *hamzah* and *yā* as Mīkā'īl⁸ (Ibn Mujāhid, 1979, 166-167). There are also two other readings, one of which read it with two *yā* as Mīkāyīl⁹ and the other with a *yā* and without *alif* as Mīkīl¹⁰ that seems to be supported by the manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque and Samarkand (figure 13). Therefore, due to the several variations of this

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- 1 - طالوت
 2 - جالوت
 3 - يأجوج
 4 - مأجوج
 5 - ميكل
 6 - ميكنل
 7 - ميگل
 8 - ميكنيل
 9 - ميكنيل
 10 - ميكييل

word, the letter *alif* has been removed.



Figure 13. a) The manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque, Q. 2:98, (Altikulac, 2009); b) Facsimile printing of the Samarkand Codex, Q. 2:98, (Marx, n.d.)

On the other hand, some said that because of the number of letters in this word, *alif* has been removed. Others believe that *alif* was removed due to the combination of this word, which is made from two words *mīkā* meant servant and *īl* meant God, so *Mīkā* is equivalent to Abdullah.

- Al-Ṭalamankī said that the word *al-rīyāḥ* in the Qur’an was always written without the letter *alif*, except in one case (Q. 30:46) where all scholars agree that it should be written with *alif* (Radman, 2019, 118).

In table 2, the mentions of the word *al-rīyāḥ* in the verses are given and compared with the way they were written in Sanaa and al-Hussein Mosque manuscripts.














Table 2. The word *al-rīyāḥ* in the Sanaa manuscript (Altikulac, 2007a) and al-Hussein Mosque manuscript (Altikulac, 2009)

	Addr ess	Verse	Sanaa Manuscript	al-Hussein Mosque Manuscript
1	2:164	و تَصْرِيفِ الرِّيحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَ الْأَرْضِ	Unclear	
2	7:57	وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ		
3	15:22	وَأَرْسَلْنَا الرِّيحَ لَوَاقِحَ		
4	18:45	فَأَصْبَحَ هَشِيمًا تَذْرُوهُ الرِّيحُ		
5	25:48	وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ		
6	27:63	وَمَنْ يُرْسِلِ الرِّيحَ	Unclear	
7	30:46	وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ يُرْسِلَ الرِّيحَ مُبَشِّرَاتٍ		
8	30:48	اللَّهُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيحَ		
9	35:9	وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ		
10	45:5	و تَصْرِيفِ الرِّيحِ		

However, in (Q. 30:46) contrary to what was claimed that all the scholars agreed on, we can see that in Sanaa and al-Hussein Mosque manuscripts, the word *al-rīyāḥ* was written without *alif*. Another contradiction is in the verse (Q. 15:22) that in al-Hussein Mosque manuscript, *al-rīyāḥ* was written with *alif*, but the script was different in terms of writing the letter *rā*. It differs from the rest of the *al-rīyāḥ* in terms of shape, as well as the presence of red ink in the calligraphy, which indicates that it was either blurred and written at a later time, or for a specific reason it was re-written with the letter *alif*.

- The letter *alif* was removed in some words such as what is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Omission of *alif* in some words based on Manuscript of Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum (Altikulac, 2007c)

	Words	Verses	Manuscript of Turkish & Islamic Arts Museum		Words	Verses	Manuscript of Turkish & Islamic Arts Museum
1	لكن	2:225		8	هذا	3:62	
2	لكن	2:243		9	هذان	20:63	
3	يرب	25:20		10	أيه	24:31	
4	يقوم	11:51		11	فيم	4:97	
5	يحسرتا	6:31		12	عم	78:1	
6	هؤلاء	3:119		13	بم	27:35	
7	هأنتم	3:119					

- In the names *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, *alif* was omitted in the first and written in the second, even though they are both non-Arabic names, so this cannot be the cause for deletion of *alif* (figure 14).



Figure 14. a) The al-Hussein Mosque Manuscript, Q.2:102, (Altikulac, 2009); b) Facsimile printing of the Samarkand Codex, Q.2:102, (Marx, n.d.)

In addition, the frequency of use is not the reason as well, because these two names were used to the same extent. Therefore, the phonetic explanation remains the closest to acceptance. *Alif* came in *Hārūt* after the letter *hā*. It is

like the *alif* in *hādhā*¹ omitted because it is pronounced with facilitation, which is the pronunciation of *alif* near *fathah*. As for Mārūt, *alif* was written after the letter *mīm* just like *al-mā'ūn* (Q. 107:7)², although *alif* was omitted after the letter *mīm* in *al-mākirin* in Q. 3:54³ (Figure 15).



Figure 15. The manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque, Q. 107:7 & 3:54, (Altikulac, 2009)

What is the difference between these words that the letter *alif* has been removed in some and not in others? It seems that the scribe was afraid of confusion in Mārūt with another word, so he wrote *alif*, but he was not afraid of confusion in *al-mākirīn*, so omitted *alif*, although there is no difference in the pronunciation of Mārūt, *al-mā'ūn* or *al-mākirīn* and all of them are pronounced with facilitation.

Thus, when *alif* was written, it is to indicate a warning so that the word does not mix with another, and that has nothing to do with another issue. *Alif* is not a letter from the alphabet, but rather is a vowel that evolved from *fathah*. The way we pronounce it now differs from the Arabic pronunciation of it before, as there was no *alif* but a *fathah*. *Alif* was a sign of *hamzah* at the beginning of the speech, and it was a sign not to confuse the words with each other. Writing this sign caused confusion until scholars removed *hamzah* and found a difference in the number of letters. Anyone who counts *alif* and *hamzah* together in the number of letters makes 29 letters, and if *hamzah* is removed, he makes 28 letters.

The inscriptions and old manuscripts of the Qur'an confirm our statements, remove the ambiguity, and eliminate the difference. One of the clear examples to prove this claim is the way of writing *alif* in the word *ātaynā* (Q. 4:63)⁴, where it was written with two *alif* in the manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque (Figure 16).



Figure 16. The manuscript of al-Hussein Mosque, Q. 4:63, (Altikulac, 2009)

Pay attention to the way of writing the first hamzah (ا), which has a

1 - هذا

2 - وَ يَمْتَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ (الماعون/7)

3- والله خير المكربين (آل عمران/54)

4 - وءاتينا داود زبوراً (النساء/63)

different slope from the sign of the second *hamzah* (ا) that came immediately after it. This is to show the extension of the sound by pronouncing the *hamzah* or to facilitate it for proper articulation.

Ibn Jani (1993, 19 & 57) said that *fathah* is a part of *alif*, *kasrah* is a part of *yā* and *dammah* is a part of *wāw*. The previous scholars of syntax used to call *fathah* as small *alif*, *kasrah* as small *yā* and *dammah* as small *wāw*. According to lexicographers, the original letters of the alphabet are twenty-nine letters, the beginning of which is *alif* and the last is *yā*, except for Abū al-‘Abbās, who counted it as twenty-eight letters. He considered the first of it as *bā*, removed the letter *alif* from its beginning, and said *alif* is the same as *hamzah*, which does not have a fixed shape, so I did not include it among the letters whose shapes are fixed.

Ibn Jinni did not accept this opinion, although he admitted that *alif* is a voiceless letter in the alphabet and cannot be pronounced in the beginning, so they placed a *lām* before it. This means that *alif* cannot be pronounced with *ḥarakāt* (Arabic diacritics), and if it wants to be pronounced so, it will turn to the closest letter to it, which is *hamzah*. This intolerance of *ḥarakāt* is another evidence against Ibn Jani not in his favor.

Sībawayh (1988, 4:176-177) said, *alif* is one of the letters of *madd* (prolongation) and *līn* (softness), which are voiceless, and their articulation points are wider than other letters. When it is stopped on them, the lips, throat and tongue are not affected like other letters, and the sound extends until it stops at the position of *hamzah*. Al-Khalīl said that this is the reason why the Arabs put an *alif* after *wāw* in verbs such as *zalamū*¹ and *ramū*². He also said that some Arabs pronounce the word *rajulan*³ with *hamzah* as *rajula*⁴ because the letter *alif* is close to *hamzah*.

Ibn al-Sikkīt (1987, 132) gave the name of *alif* to *hamzah*, and Ibn Fārīs (1997, 64) called *hamzah* name of *alif* as it came in his book al-Ṣāḥibī. As it seems, the linguists did not distinguish between the *hamzah* and the *alif*, but rather confused them at all, and they meant the *hamzah* as mentioned above.

4. Conclusion

The scholars have offered various explanations for eliminating *alif* in some words of the Qur’an since the early centuries. Some said that the

1 - ظلموا

2 - رموا

3 - رجالاً

4 - رجلاً

Arabic script was primitive and the lack of letters in it caused the written text to be insufficient for the correct pronunciation of the Qur'an. Another opinion is based on the ideological explanation that the orthography of the Qur'an is sacred in such a way that removing the letter *alif* represents the spiritual and divine aspect and writing it refers to the worldly and material aspect of the word. Some have paid attention to the origin of the names and believe that *alif* was omitted in non-Arabic names and written in Arabic names, while there are many contradictory examples to these claims. Therefore, some have turned to the explanation that *alif* was removed due to frequent use of the word or ease of pronunciation. However, as numerous examples of pre-Islamic inscriptions and manuscripts of the Qur'an show, none of these reasons can be recognized as a general criterion that is correct in all cases.

By tracing the positions of omitting and writing *alif*, become clear to us that it was not treated as a letter like the rest of letters, but rather a sign used for purposes of distinction and fear of confusion. They did not write it everywhere, and did not pronounce it as we pronounce it now. The sound of *alif* was tending towards *fathah* that the way it was pronounced changed due to the mixing of Arabs with non-Arabs societies, because their language tended to amplify this sound. In addition, some scholars gave in lexicons the name of *alif* to *hamzah*, which made this confusion in use and ambiguity between the sound of *alif* and the letter *hamzah*. What we presented, was an attempt to remove the ambiguity and confusion in the knowledge of orthography of the Qur'an relying on the ancient manuscripts, which were discovered in the twentieth century.

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