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ABSTRACT

Al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) is remembered in the historical sources for his role as the tyrannical Umayyad governor of Iraq. However, he also played an important part in ʿAbd al-Malik’s effort to standardize the Qurʾān, which complicated his historical portrayal. This paper examines how Syrian scholars, beginning with Ibn ʿAsākir, confronted al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ’s simultaneous villainy and religious significance as part of their efforts to claim the codification of the Qurʾānic text as an Umayyad achievement.

MOTS-CLÉS

AL-ḤAḠḠĀḠ B. YŪSUF ET LE CORAN OMEYYADE DANS L’HISTORIOGRAPHIE SYRIENNE

Les sources historiques évoquent al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ b. Yūsuf (m. 95/714) en tant que tyran gouverneur omeyyade de l’Iraq. Cependant, il a également joué un rôle important dans les efforts de ʿAbd al-Malik pour standardiser le Coran, ce qui complique la manière dont est brossé son portrait historique. Cet article examine comment les savants syriens, à commencer par Ibn ʿAsākir, firent face tant à la mauvaise réputation d’al-Ḥaḡḡāḡ qu’à son importance sur le plan religieux, dans le cadre de leurs efforts pour revendiquer la codification du texte coranique comme réalisation omeyyade.

MOTS-CLÉS

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat
Al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) is a crucial and complicated figure in the history of early Islam. He was instrumental in consolidating ʿAbd al-Malik’s control over both the Ḥiǧāz and Iraq and in neutralizing the threat posed by assorted Ḥārīḍīte rebels. He also played a significant role in articulating and enforcing the caliph’s religious vision, possibly even in standardizing the Qurʾān itself. Simultaneously, however, he is also remembered as a brutal, ruthless tyrant who went so far as to abuse esteemed Companions of the Prophet. His conduct was so egregious that some of the pious debated whether or not al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ was spending eternity in Hell.

My own interest in al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ is a byproduct of my earlier research on his successor and protégé, Ḥālid al-Qasrī (d. 126/743). Unlike al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, Ḥālid has been the subject of significant historiographical discussion. In particular, Stefan Leder argues that the standard tale of Ḥālid’s downfall, preserved principally by al-Ṭabarī but also by others, contains dramatic elements akin to a “novel” [1]. In my work on the Syrian historian Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), I found an alternative version of Ḥālid’s story. His demise was still a morality tale, but the themes and details were different and painted Ḥālid in a better light. Significantly, Ibn ʿAsākir’s version of Ḥālid’s tragedy was adopted by later Syrian historians as well, suggesting an alternative, Syria-centric historiography [2]. At the time, I took a cursory look at how Ibn ʿAsākir treated other Umayyad governors of the East, namely al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ and Ziyād b. Abīhi (d. 53/673), to sense whether his biography of Ḥālid was an anomaly or part of a larger revisionist project to rehabilitate Umayyad administrators of Iraq.

I was intrigued to find evidence of a pattern of interpretation that might suggest an alternative Syrian memory of these pivotal figures. In general, Syrian sources treated these Umayyad loyalists less harshly than did the Iraqi-authored chronicles. They placed less emphasis on military aspects of the eastward expansion and on the legendary cruelty with which these governors dispensed their duties. The Syrian sources, sometimes subtly sometimes not, tried to reclaim these leaders as Syrian elites and emphasized their connections to Damascus and their personal qualities, especially their appreciation for poetry and adab in general, as well as their acts of generosity.

Because of the combination of his notorious image and his role in preserving the Qurʾān, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ presented a special challenge for later historians. The standard historical chronicles, written largely in ʿAbbāsid Iraq and heavily influenced by al-Ṭabarī, tend to emphasize al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s stringent demands for loyalty and his vindictive treatment of those who defied or even questioned him. This is not surprising, given that Umayyad viceroys in Iraq are typically treated unkindly in ʿAbbāsid historiography. What makes al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s case distinct from other Umayyad governors is the role he played in ʿAbd al-Malik’s religious reforms, including his efforts to standardize readings of the Qurʾān. It is not my intention to explore in depth the nature of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s involvement in establishing, or at least preserving, the Qurʾān codex. Accounts of his contributions range from adding i rāb to reordering verses and suras to altering the consonantal structure (rasm) of the text itself [3]. Most accounts of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s role at the very least indicate an effort to purge non-Umāniq readings and some suggest an Umayyad bias behind this effort. For present purposes, clarifying exactly what al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ did to the text of the Qurʾān is less important than the simple recognition that he did something to it and that his intervention was remembered as being significant.

To evaluate Syrian memories of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s Qurʾān project, whatever it may have been, I will begin with a general discussion of the distinctions between Syrian and Iraqi historiography. I will then turn to al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s portrayal in Syrian sources, paying special attention to how these sources, explicitly and implicitly, address his role in preserving or standardizing the Qurʾān. Finally, I will turn to the Umayyad context of these memories, specifically addressing how these accounts connected al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ to ʿUṯmān, the progenitor of the Syrian dynasty and the original codifier of the Qurʾān. Syrian historiography, such as it is, developed relatively late and did not serve as a direct response to or refutation of earlier ʿAbbāsid/Iraqi historical works. The grand narrative of early Islamic history

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was crafted by Iraqis during the `Abbāsid era, utilizing the Chronicle format, the most influential manifestation of which lies in al-Tabari’s (d. 310/923) Ta riṣ. The earlier work of Ḥallūf b. Ḥayyāt (d. 240/854-5), which some purport to have a less anti-Umayyad bias, does not offer the same compelling, flowing narrative found in al-Tabari’s opus[4]. Al-Tabari’s work became the model and often the principal source for later Chronicles. Modern scholarship on the early Islamic period has been built largely on the foundations laid by al-Tabari[5]. While some efforts have been made to disrupt this narrative and appeal to a broader array of sources, al-Tabari’s vision of early Islamic history and of the Umayyad period remains the default position. Consequently, characters like al-Haǧǧāǧ and the other Umayyad governors contending with unruly Kufans are not presented in a positive light.

The earliest extant Syrian historical work remains Abū Zurʿa’s (d. 281/895) Ta riṣ. Unfortunately, it includes very little about al-Haǧǧāǧ. Abū Zurʿa’s records his death date in two locations and mentions him passing to note that the long-lived Companion Suwayd b. Gafala (d. 80/699) survived until the days of al-Haǧǧāǧ[6]. He also notes that ‘Abd al-Malik sent al-Haǧǧāǧ to fight Ibn al-Zubayr and mentions his execution of Māḥān Abū Šāliḥ al-Ḥanafī without offering details[7]. Other sources suggest that Abū Šāliḥ’s punishment may have been related to Ibn al-As’at’s rebellion in 83/702[8]. Aside from this, Abū Zurʿa’s offers no interpretation of al-Haǧǧāǧ’s actions and no judgement of his character. Nor does he mention any connection between al-Haǧǧāǧ and the preservation of the Qurʾān. This is not surprising, given that government officials are largely invisible and the other Umayyad governors contending with unruly Kufans are not presented in a positive light.

Arguably, the beginning of a truly Syrian historiography comes much later with the completion of Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 571/1176) Ta riṣ maḏdiṯ Dimāqs in the 6th/12th century. Unlike al-Tabari and his emulators, Ibn ‘Asākir did not produce a Chronicle, but rather a massive collection of biographies of prominent Syrians. His intent was to reclaim Syria’s place in Islamic history and to emphasize the contributions Syrians had made. Significantly, his criteria for determining whom to include was flexible, allowing him to claim important figures as Syrians even if their ties to Syria were tenuous. Later Syrian scholars modeled their works on Ibn ‘Asākir and relied heavily on him as a source, though sometimes without attribution.

The corpus of Syrian works to be discussed here includes Ibn al-‘Adīm’s (d. 660/1262) Buqayt al-talab fī ta riṣ Ḥalab, al-Mizzi’s (d. 742/1342) Taḥdīb al-kamāl, al-Dahabi’s (d. 748/1348) Ta riṣ al-Islām and Siyar a lām al-nubalā, Ṣāfādī’s (d. 764/1363) Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt, and Ibn Ḥaṭīr’s (d. 774/1374) al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī al-ta riṣ. To an extent, the biographical format precludes a tidy narrative of events, allows for contradictions, and affects the content and themes attached to personalities and events. Hence, the Syrian historiographical tradition does not offer an obvious, direct rebuttal to the Iraqi narrative, but rather a sometimes subtle reinterpretation of individual characters in a different literary format.

Ibn ‘Asākir’s 89-page biography of al-Haǧǧāǧ provides the basic framework for Syrian memories of the Iraqi viceroy[9]. What is perhaps most striking about Ibn ‘Asākir’s biography of al-Haǧǧāǧ is his extensive effort to claim al-Haǧǧāǧ as a Syrian at all. It is generally agreed that al-Haǧǧāǧ was a native of Taʾif, that he served as governor of the Hijāz, then spent 20 years as governor of Iraq, based first in Kūfa and then in Wāsit, the city he founded[10]. Whatever time he spent in Syria must have been limited. Ibn ‘Asākir uses two strategies to claim al-Haǧǧāǧ for Syria. First, at the beginning of his entry, he notes that al-Haǧǧāǧ visited ‘Abd al-Malik in Damascus[11]. This is a fairly standard technique by which Ibn ‘Asākir justifies including non-Syrians in his work. For instance, visits to Damascus provide the only Syrian connection to allow inclusion of a number of the Prophet’s Companions, including Ibn Masʿūd, who will be discussed later. Ibn ‘Asākir employs a second, less common method to include al-Haǧǧāǧ as well. He notes that al-Haǧǧāǧ owned a number of houses in Damascus. He even notes the

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[9] Ibn ‘Asākir 1995, XII, p. 113-202. It should be noted that there is an inexplicable lacuna in the printed edition of the text. Pages 124, 126, and 128 are missing, but have somehow been replaced with the same numbered pages from volume III, which is Ibn ‘Asākir’s biography of the Prophet. I have not determined if the missing pages were inserted elsewhere in the 80-volume work. Nor can I offer a theory about how this shuffling of pages occurred. Nor have I been able to consult the manuscript itself for clarification.
specific location of one, which was “the house with the prayer room (zāwiya) near the qaṣr of Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. [12]”. This level of specificity is unusual. It is unclear whether or not this specific location would have meant something to Ibn ʿAsākir’s contemporary readers. However, it represents a concerted effort to root al-Haqqāq firmly in Damascus, to the point of including his exact address. It is important to note that Ibn ʿAsākir could easily have ignored al-Haqqāq’s tenuous connections to Damascus and excluded him from the Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimashq entirely. Instead, Ibn ʿAsākir opted to claim al-Haqqāq as a Damascene and to tie his legacy to Syria. The fact that he devoted nearly 90 pages to al-Haqqāq underscores his importance in Ibn ʿAsākir’s eyes.

It is not surprising, then, that Ibn ʿAsākir offers a less tyrannical image of al-Haqqāq than that found in earlier, Iraqi sources. I will forego a line-by-line summary and analysis of Ibn ʿAsākir’s entry and instead focus on his broader themes, providing occasional examples and contrasts to the traditional image of al-Haqqāq. In general, his activities as governor of the East receive limited attention while his religious merits garner more emphasis. Incidentally, this is consistent with Ibn ʿAsākir’s treatment of other Iraqi viceroys.

Ibn ʿAsākir includes a number of al-Haqqāq’s sermons as governor, starting with his infamous ḥuṭba upon his arrival in Kufa, complete with references to heads ripe for the plucking and other threats [13]. Little context is offered, however, and the military campaigns that followed are omitted. Instead, Ibn ʿAsākir continues with reports of other sermons al-Haqqāq gave. The sermon he offered after the battle against Ibn al-Ašʿaṯ al-Ẓuhr at Dayr al-Ǧamāḡim is followed by a series of reports in which Ibn ʿAwn and al-ʿAsmaʾi offer explanations of al-Haqqāq’s sermon, focused largely on lexical details [14]. Next, Ibn ʿAsākir includes another sermon, this one given after al-Haqqāq heard an improper takbir in the souq [15]. This series of sermons and scholarly interpretations of them shifts the focus away from al-Haqqāq’s repression of Ibn al-Ašʿaṯ al-Ẓuhr’s rebellion, arguably one of his more notorious deeds, and instead highlights his religious knowledge and erudition.

More detail is provided regarding his campaigns against the Ḥawārīj and Ibn al-Zubayr. The Ḥawārīj were objects of universal scorn whose ill-treatment required no justification [16]. Regarding Ibn al-Zubayr, Ibn ʿAsākir offers al-Haqqāq’s explanation for his fall, again in a sermon, in which he compares his defeat at Mecca to Adam’s expulsion from paradise [17]. He also includes an account of al-Haqqāq being cursed by Ibn al-Zubayr’s mother, but follows this with another report claiming that her insult was aimed at al-Muḥtār instead, effectively neutralizing the first report’s insult [18]. More cleverly, Ibn ʿAsākir also includes a description of al-Haqqāq’s attack on Mecca, which he characterizes as a pilgrimage in which al-Haqqāq circumambulated Ibn al-Zubayr rather than the Kaʿbā [19].

Al-Haqqāq’s brutality toward his foes is not ignored, but is not emphasized either. Ibn ʿAsākir mentions some of al-Haqqāq’s many executions and notes how many he allegedly killed and imprisoned [20]. However, he offsets these reports with stories in which al-Haqqāq showed mercy to his foes [21]. This is consistent with Ibn ʿAsākir’s approach to rehabilitating other Umayyad figures, such as Hālīd al-Qāsīrī, by coupling acknowledgment of tyrannical behavior with stories of kindness and appreciation for poetry and eloquence from those accused [22].

Ibn ʿAsākir also emphasizes a consistent set of religious themes in his account of al-Haqqāq. The sermons included typically focus on, or at least allude to, predestinarian doctrine [23]. For instance, the sermons that mention Ibn al-Zubayr ascribe his demise to fate [24]. Al-Haqqāq also consistently demands obedience to the caliph and, by extension, to himself. In one sermon that is repeated in several variations, al-Haqqāq asserts that, on the caliph’s authority, he can order congregants to use a particular door to the mosque and kill those who use another and that he can even order Rabīʿa and Muḍar to be divided if he wishes [25]. After encountering al-Walīd b. Ἁβd al-Malik drinking nabīd at breakfast, al-Haqqāq proclaims it halāl because of the caliph’s action [26]. Even one of al-Haqqāq’s most controversial actions,
locking the famous Companion Anas b. Mālik in irons. He condemns Anas for joining ‘Ali, then Ibn al-Zubayr, then Ibn al-Aṣ’āt. However, when ‘Abd al-Malik orders Anas freed, al-Haǧǧāǧ promptly complies, again underscoring his absolute loyalty [27].

Ibn ‘Asākir concludes his biography of al-Haǧǧāǧ with a series of discussions among scholars about al-Haǧǧāǧ’s ultimate fate. Some of these reports describe his relative poverty at his death, others describe his repentance during his final illness, and some enumerate how many he killed and imprisoned. Scholars debate whether or not he was a kāfir, whether he had been sent to hell for his sins, and so on [28]. These reports clearly use al-Haǧǧāǧ as a venue for later theological musings about kāfirs, sinning Muslims, punishment in the grave and other issues. These obvious efforts to appropriate the anecdote in which he preaches about proper obedience to the caliph. He promptly complies, again underscoring his absolute loyalty.

Anecdotes that relate directly or indirectly to al-Haǧǧāǧ’s role in standardizing the Qur’ān are interwoven into Ibn ‘Asākir’s account. In general terms, al-Haǧǧāǧ is frequently praised for his eloquence and his intelligence [30]. His obsession with proper grammar and precision are also noted. In addition to the anecdote in which he preaches about proper takbir after hearing errors in the souq, other stories also focus on grammar, sometimes specifically in a Qur’ānic context [31]. For instance, Ibn ‘Asākir offers several alternative versions of al-Haǧǧāǧ’s decision to banish the scribe Yahyā b. Ya’mar to Khurasan. In al-Tabari’s well-known version, Yahyā is dispatched to Khurasan after pointing out one of al-Haǧǧāǧ’s specific grammatical errors [32]. Ibn ‘Asākir includes three versions of the dispute. One focuses on an unspecified grammatical point. A second deals specifically with Q 9:24 and whether it should be read as aḥabba or aḥabbu [33]. In the third, Yahyā refutes al-Haǧǧāǧ’s rejection of al-Husayn’s descent from the Prophet based on his maternal lineage by quoting a Qur’ānic reference to Jesus and Mary [34]. In each of these examples, knowledge of grammar and the Qur’ān are central and al-Haǧǧāǧ’s unhappiness with Yahyā’s response leads to his punishment.

Ibn ‘Asākir also includes more specific references to al-Haǧǧāǧ’s Qur’ānic mastery, including praise for his beautiful recitations and his love of the Qur’ān, a story of al-Haǧǧāǧ freeing a prisoner who recited from the Qur’ān, and an account of Abū Muhammad al-Himānī learning the divisions of the Qur’ān after four months of sessions with al-Haǧǧāǧ [35]. While Ibn ‘Asākir does not offer extensive details about al-Haǧǧāǧ’s efforts to standardize Qur’ānic readings, he makes clear that the focus of his attention is on suppressing Ibn Mas‘ūd’s recension. Al-Haǧǧāǧ labels Ibn Mas‘ūd as the leader of the munāfīqūn and threatens those who recite Ibn Mas‘ūd’s version with death [36]. To justify his edicts, al-Haǧǧāǧ makes specific reference to Q 64: 16, which demands that believers listen and obey. Some versions of the sermon in which he dictates which mosque door to use also assert his right to impose his reading of the Qur’ān [37]. The exact nature of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading is not clarified, although there are hints that al-Haǧǧāǧ’s concerns focus on grammar and proper i’rāb, as well as divisions of the text. While details are unfortunately lacking, it is clear that al-Haǧǧāǧ rejects Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading emphatically, even angrily.

A perusal of Ibn ‘Asākir’s lengthy biography of Ibn Mas‘ūd offers context for al-Haǧǧāǧ’s contempt for the noted Companion. Ibn Mas‘ūd’s connection to Damascus was exceptionally tenuous and is based only on an allusion to a visit at some point [38]. However, because Ibn Mas‘ūd was a Companion, Ibn ‘Asākir found this to be a sufficient pretext to include a lengthy, 144-page biography of him in his Ta’riḥ madinat Dimashq [39]. The biography consists mainly of accounts of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s encounters with Muhammad and the resulting hadīt reports. Naturally, many variants and alternative isnāds for most accounts are included, contributing to the entry’s length. A fair number of these reports deal specifically with the Qur’ān and

[27] Ibn ‘Asākir, XII, p. 171-74.
[30] Ibn ‘Asākir, XII, p. 117, for example.
[31] Ibn ‘Asākir, XII, p. 139.
[33] Q 9: 24: Masākinu tardawnahā aḥabba (ahabbu) ilaykum min allāhi.
[34] Ibn ‘Asākir, XII, p. 151-52. Yahyā cites Q 6: 84-5.
[37] Ibn ‘Asākir, XII, p. 160, 162.
[38] Ibn ‘Asākir, XXXIII, p. 52.
emphasize the fact that Ibn Masʿūd was the first to recite publicly in Mecca and that he received praise from the Prophet himself for his recitations [40]. The fact that he recited 70 suras is also mentioned repeatedly, as is his assignment to teach the Qurʾān to the Kufans [41]. With these reports, Ibn ‘Asākir establishes Ibn Masʿūd as a respected Companion with special expertise in the Qurʾān, which is consistent with how Ibn Masʿūd is remembered in most sources.

For our purposes, the most interesting and significant portion of the biography addresses Ibn Masʿūd’s rift with ʿUṯmān. Other sources acknowledge a rift but, as Vadet notes in the EI article on Ibn Masʿūd, the circumstances of their conflict are elusive [42]. For Ibn ‘Asākir, there is no mystery about the cause of their estrangement. In a long series of reports, he connects the enmity between the caliph and Ibn Masʿūd to ‘Uṯmān’s masāḥif project [43]. In these reports, Ibn Masʿūd claims that he is the most knowledgeable about the Qurʾān and objects vehemently to ‘Uṯmān’s reliance on Zayd b. Tābit for his project. Ibn Masʿūd claims that Zayd’s readings include errors and argues that there is no need for the project because he already has a perfect muṣḥaf. He also casts aspersions on Zayd as a Jew and a Sabian.

In general, Ibn ‘Asākir’s approach to al-Haḡgaḡ does not ignore accusations of cruelty and tyranny, but softens them by juxtaposing them with stories of mercy and kindness. He emphasizes that al-Haḡgaḡ, despite his origins in the Hijāz, was a Syrian with ties to Damascus, praising Syrians while condemning the Iraqi Kufans [47]. He also focuses on al-Haḡgaḡ’s commitment to absolute caliphal authority coupled with predestinarian theology. Ibn ‘Asākir’s treatment of al-Haḡgaḡ’s project to ‘Uṯman, the progenitor of the Umayyad dynasty, at least in Syrian memory. This is not Ibn ‘Asākir’s only effort to link the two. Early in his entry on al-Haḡgaḡ, Ibn ‘Asākir includes a reported sermon in which al-Haḡgaḡ’s lamentations about death and the tomb bring his audience to tears. This is immediately followed by a report, provided on the authority of Abd al-Malik and Marwān, in which ‘Uṯmān similarly brought a congregation to tears sermonizing on the tomb [46]. We will revisit the significance of this connection to ‘Uṯmān later.

In constructing this alternative vision of al-Haḡgaḡ, Ibn ‘Asākir relies on a variety of sometimes obscure sources, few of whom were Syrian. While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine Ibn ‘Asākir’s isnāds in detail, it is worth noting that al-Haḡgaḡ’s condemnations of Ibn Masʿūd and his assertion that he could decree which door of the mosque worshippers use (and by extension, which version of the Qurʾān they recite) were preserved by Kufans associated with the qurraʾ. Versions of these reports begin with either ‘Āṣim b. Bahdila (d. 128/746) or al-Aʾmaš b. Mihrán (d. 148/765), both of whom were noted Qurʾān reciters [48]. They then filter through Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāṣ (d. 193/809), another noted leader of the qurraʾ [49].
Some versions then pass via the Kufan qarār Muḥammad b. Yazid al-Raḍāʾī (d. 248/862), or the Kufan muhaddīṭ Wāṣil b. ‘Abd al-Aʿlā (d. 244/858). Unfortunately, the intervening links between these Kufan sources and Ibn ‘Asākir in Syria are rather obscure. The nature, origins, and identity of the loose collection of figures known as the qurrāʾ has been the subject of much debate and there remains a possibility that they were not Qurʾān reciters at all. By Ibn ‘Asākir’s time, however, it appears that they were generally recognized as such. It is notable that the stories of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ and the Qurʾān were at least initially passed down by Kufans whom Ibn ‘Asākir would have remembered as Qurʾān authorities [50].

Ibn ‘Asākir’s interpretation of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ clearly differs from the image of the opaque tyrant presented in al-Ṭabarī and other chronicles. An examination of how later Syrian scholars portrayed al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ illustrates that, to some extent, Ibn ‘Asākir provided the foundation for an alternative Syrian historiography of his governorship and his Qurʾān project. However, this revisionism did not entirely erase unsavory memories of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ and it is evident that later Syrian authors struggled to reconcile these divergent images.

Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/1262) modeled his Buġyat al-ṭalab on Ibn ‘Asākir’s work and relied on the Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq as a major source. This holds true for his lengthy biography of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, though with notable exceptions [51]. He includes many of the anecdotes that appear in Ibn ‘Asākir, although he arranges them somewhat differently. He quotes Ibn ‘Asākir’s discussion of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s houses in Damascus, thus establishing his Syrian ties. He also includes a variety of reports praising his knowledge and love for the Qurʾān [52]. While Ibn al-ʿAdīm cites a great deal of material from Ibn ‘Asākir (occasionally through intermediary sources), he also omits much. These omissions are noteworthy. For instance, Ibn al-ʿAdīm includes none of the material about Ibn Masʿūd’s house in his entry. Nor does he repeat many of the sermons al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ gave, excluding in particular the sermon asserting al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s authority to dictate which mosque door and which Qurʾān reading can be used. Ibn al-ʿAdīm also includes more material about al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s battles with the Ḥawārīn than Ibn ‘Asākir does. Despite relying heavily on Ibn ‘Asākir, Ibn al-ʿAdīm offers a less positive image of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ and deemphasizes his Qurʾān project.

Al-Mizzi’s (d. 742/1342) approach to the problem of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ is radically different and somewhat surprising. Al-Mizzi typically follows Ibn ‘Asākir closely, often simply condensing Ibn ‘Asākir’s entries (usually without citation), a topic that merits its own study. In the case of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, however, he deviates from this pattern by excluding him altogether. Al-Mizzi’s focus tends to be more narrowly religious than Ibn ‘Asākir’s and he occasionally omits purely political figures who did not make religious contributions. However, he does include al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s protégé and successor, Ḥālid al-Qasrī, who was arguably much less religiously influential than al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ [53]. Neither was a significant hadīṯ transmitter, though both do appear as characters in Companion hadīths in the major collections, with al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ appearing more frequently [54]. Al-Mizzi’s choice is the opposite of that of Ibn ‘Asākir. Rather than claiming al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ as a Syrian and rehabilitating him, al-Mizzi opts to ignore him altogether.

Al-Dahabi (d. 748/1348) includes entries on al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ in both his Taʾrīḫ and his Siyar, however they differ dramatically. In the Taʾrīḫ, he largely follows Ibn ‘Asākir’s precedent [55]. At 13 pages, his entry is much shorter than Ibn ‘Asākir’s, but it includes most of the same anecdotes in the same order. Its brevity stems from al-Dahabi’s exclusion of many of Ibn ‘Asākir’s repetitions and his abbreviation of ʾinsād. Like Ibn ‘Asākir, he begins by describing al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s houses in Damascus. [56] He includes similar stories of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s sermon in response to a defective takbīr as well as his argument with Yahyā b. Yaʿmar over vocalization of the Qurʾān [57]. Al-Dahabi’s version of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s sermon demanding obedience, in which he dictates which mosque door to use, adds a demand to use i ʿāb and specific prohibition of Ibn Masʿūd’s recension. More condemnations of Ibn Masʿūd’s follow, though with fewer details than Ibn ‘Asākir provides [58]. Like Ibn ‘Asākir, he concludes with a discussion of whether or not al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ is in hell. Curiously, al-Dahabi adds a concluding remark claiming that he has an additional collection of strange stories about al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ that he cannot verify [59]. Such remarks always tantalize and disappoint.

[54] For instance, al-Buhārī includes several accounts of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ discussions with Ibn ʿUmar about pilgrimage rituals. Buḥārī, number 966, 967, 1660, 1663. Ḥālid appears only in a single report in Abū Dāʾūd regarding weights and measures. Abū Dāʾūd, number 3275.
[56] Al-Dahabi, Taʾrīḫ, III (81-100 AH), p. 316.
[58] Al-Dahabi, Taʾrīḫ, III (81-100 AH), p. 320.
While al-Ḍahabi’s Taʾrīḥ presents a predictable retelling of Ibn ’Asākir’s narrative of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ with few deviations, his Siyar offers a different and more perplexing account. His entry on al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ is quite short, barely half a page in length [60]. It begins by acknowledging al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s eloquence and knowledge of the Qur’ān. The tone then changes dramatically. He calls al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ a tyrant, an oppressor, a fraud, and a shedder of blood. He criticizes him for his attack on the Ka’ba and his humiliation of the Ḥiǧāzīs. He rounds out his evaluation, saying that al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s merits are submerged in the sea of his faults. Finally, and most puzzlingly, al-Ḍahabi asserts that he has addressed al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s many evil deeds in his Taʾrīḥ. Of course, his entry on al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ in the Taʾrīḥ includes no such catalogue of misdeeds and is instead at least somewhat apologetic regarding al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ. While it is possible that these misdeeds are recounted in other parts of the Taʾrīḥ, perhaps in biographies of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s victims, the contrast between the two works is jarring. Two details stand out, however. First, even in his screed in the Siyar, al-Ḍahabi acknowledges al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s excellence regarding the Qur’ān. Second, in both works, al-Ḍahabi mentions additional material about al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ that he excluded. What he omitted and why he did so remain open to speculation. His contradictory entries on al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ underscore the dilemma he created for later scholars, thanks to his simultaneous religious significance and condemnable behavior.

Al-Ḍahabi’s student al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) generally follows his mentor’s Taʾrīḥ rather than his Siyar. There are, however, some notable differences in emphasis and detail in al-Ṣafadī’s short, 8-page entry [61]. Familiar material is included, such as acknowledgement of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s eloquence, descriptions of his sermon about the mosque doors, and enumeration of his victims and prisoners [62]. Speculations about his ultimate fate are interspersed, though none specifically condemn him to hell [63]. Al-Ṣafadī also includes more detail about his final illness and his deathbed repentance and emphasizes his loyalty to the Banū Marwān, explicitly using the term ṭabāʾat allāh, which other sources avoided [64]. He also describes al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s Qurʾān project more explicitly, relying on a report from Abū Ahmad al-ʿAsākir that does not appear in earlier Syrian sources. He states that, in response to variant readings that deviated from the ṭūmānī mushaf, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ ordered scribes to include vowels and spaces in the text, which met initial resistance [65]. No mention is made of Ibn Masʿūd. Al-Ṣafadī also uses different means to identify al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ as a Syrian. He does not mention al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s houses in Damascus, though al-Ṣafadī seldom includes this type of detail in his entries. Instead, he ties al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ to Syria with several anecdotes. In one, he is referred to as the “sayyid ahl al-Šām.” In another, the focus is culinary. The entry notes that al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ only ate Syrian food and refused Iraqi cuisine, and that he once had his cook beaten for bringing the wrong variety [66].

In this short, condensed version of earlier biographies, al-Ṣafadī manages to clarify the nature of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s Qurʾān project while finding new ways to assert his Syrian identity and downplaying his tyrannical behavior.

Finally, Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1374) also largely follows Ibn Ṭāwḥih’s Bigdīya wa-l-nihāya [67]. Most of the same anecdotes are included with little variation, including those connecting al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ to Damascus. In many cases, Ibn Kaṭīr explicitly cites Ibn Ṭāwḥih as his source, a courtesy some of the other Syrian writers forego. Military campaigns in the East that were omitted by Ibn Ṭāwḥih’s Siyar are at least mentioned here [68]. Ibn Kaṭīr’s discussion of al-Ḥaağğa’s Qurʾān project is slightly different from that of Ibn Ṭāwḥih, however. He focuses on al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s antipathy for Ibn Masʿūd’s reading and includes his declaration that Ibn Masʿūd is the head of the munāfīqūn. He then inserts accounts of the Prophet’s praise for Ibn Masʿūd, which appear to be taken from Ibn Ṭāwḥih’s biography of the Companion. Next, he adds accusations that al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ lied about Ibn Masʿūd, following these with the explanation that such accusations were made because al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ was an “Uṯmānī Umayyad” (ʾuṭmānī umawī), a partisan of the Umayyads. Ibn Kaṭīr also links questions about al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ being a kāfir to his alleged preference for the Umayyad caliphs over the Prophet. [69] Ibn Kaṭīr does not rely entirely on Ibn Ṭāwḥih, but notably adds reports and assessments from legal scholars, particularly al-Ṣafī Ḥanbali and Ibn Ḥanbal. After presenting sometimes contradictory accounts of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s actions and character, Ibn Kaṭīr often concludes with allāhu a’lam, the scholarly cry of surrender in the face of evidentiary dilemmas. Ibn Kaṭīr appears to be trying to
follow the Syrian tradition regarding al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ while also confronting additional, often contrasting material from non-Syrian, non-historical sources.

Syrian historiography on al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ offers a subtle and evolving image of the Umayyad viceroy and his role in codifying the Qurʾānic text. In general, Syrian sources offer a contrast to their Iraqi counterparts. Most striking is the virtual absence of citations of al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ by his acolytes and later scholars, was not merely

In a broader historical sense, the close association between ‘Uṯmān, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, and the Qurʾān creates an ongoing dilemma for Muslim historians and religious scholars. Arguably, aside from the Prophet himself, these two men were most responsible for the
Qurʾān’s current form. Both campaigned effectively to impose uniformity on the text and to suppress variant readings that might have undermined the unity of the faith and the integrity of the revelation. Critics such as Ibn Masʿūd may have protested their textual interventions, but to no avail. Overall, they were surprisingly successful. While variant readings continued to be discussed in tafsīr, no alternative Qurʾān has endured and the ‘Uṯmānic text remains the standard.

This accomplishment is tarnished by the two men themselves. Both ‘Uṯmān and al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ were remembered as sinners and tyrants in many later historical sources. Hence, the sanctity of the Qurʾān is tied to extraordinary, at times controversial efforts by deeply flawed men. Efforts at rehabilitation could not entirely erase their failings. In ‘Uṯmān’s case, many have fallen back on the perhaps dubious explanation that his caliphate had six good years and six bad years, with the hopeful but oft unspoken assumption that he codified the Qurʾān during the good years. Later Sunnis could perhaps dismiss criticism of ‘Uṯmān as ‘Alid propaganda evading a discussion of his merits or lack thereof. For al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ, the task is actually more difficult. His reign in Iraq made him a villain in ‘Abbāsid historiography and a representative of the worst of the Umayyads’ failings in a locale that was essential for the success of the ‘Abbāsid revolution. The fact that there was actually debate amongst reputable religious scholars about whether or not he was an apostate spending eternity in hell made his role in preserving the Qurʾān particularly uncomfortable. Iraqi historians largely tried to avoid this conundrum by ignoring or erasing al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ’s Qurʾān project, whatever it may have been. Syrian scholars, beginning with Ibn ʿAsākir, mostly chose a different route, rehabilitating him as much as possible and connecting him to ‘Uṯmān as part of a larger project to claim the preservation of the sacred text as a Syrian, Umayyad accomplishment.
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