

## Imam Ibn al-Jazarī<sup>1</sup>

His full name is Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf al-ʿUmarī al-Dimashqī.<sup>2</sup> His nickname [*laqab*] is Shams al-Dīn and he had two patronyms [*kunyatān*]: Abū al-Khayr and Abū Muḥammad; the first is more widely used. He is commonly known simply as Ibn al-Jazarī. The ascription ‘*jazarī*’ derives from the Arabic word ‘*jazīrah*’ which means ‘a peninsula’. Most experts are of the view that it refers to *Jazīrah Ibn ʿUmar*, a town in Turkistan.<sup>3</sup> The eponymous Ibn ʿUmar is ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, a man from Mosul in Iraq. Some have suggested that it signifies *Jazīrah ibn al-Khattāb al-Taʿlabī*, a port city in Armenia.<sup>4</sup>

The father of Ibn al-Jazarī – a merchant by trade – spent forty years yearning for a child but to no avail. At the well of *Zamzam* whilst performing *Hajj* he supplicated that Allah grant him a son. His prayer was answered and in the year 751 AH on a Saturday night, the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month of *Ramadān*, just after the completion of the nightly *Tarāwīḥ ṣalāh*-prayers, Ibn al-Jazarī was born.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn al-Jazarī's father, himself a devout Muslim, revered the Islāmic sciences and had a special inclination to the study of the Qurʾān. He therefore presented his son to his personal Sheikh, the renowned Ḥasan al-Sarūjī, at a tender age to begin his instruction in the Qurʾānic sciences. In this way father and son are recorded in the annals of history as contemporaries, having been students of the same master.

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<sup>1</sup> This biography is an extract of what I have written in my work *Isnād al-Jazarī al-Imām*. Refer to it for more details.

<sup>2</sup> This is how his name appears in *Ghāyah al-Nihāyah*, *al-Dawʿ al-Lāmiʿ*, *al-Badr al-Tālīʿ*, *al-Uns al-Jalīl* and the appendix of *Ṭabaqāt al-Huffāth*. In *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* and *al-Shaqāʾiq al-Nuʿmānī* however, his name appears with an additional Muḥammad as follows: Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf.

<sup>3</sup> This was first stated by Abū Bakr, the son of Ibn al-Jazarī, and all later scholars simply reiterate his statement.

<sup>4</sup> *Muʿjam al-Buldān* Vol. 3 pg.57

<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-Jazarī himself mentions this date in *Ghāyah al-Nihāyah*. In *al-Uns al-Jalīl* his birth-date is given as Saturday, 17 *Ramadān*.

Ibn al-Jazarī successfully memorized the entire Qur`ān at the early age of 13 and a year later, in 765 AH, was selected to lead the community in *ṣalāh*. He soon followed this singular feat with an initiation into the study of the various *qirā`āt* [Qur`ānic readings] at the hands of the master reciters [*qurrā`*] of the Levant.<sup>6</sup> Notables amongst his many teachers from Levant include Ibn al-Sallār, Aḥmad al-Taḥḥān and Aḥmad ibn Rajab. The study and rendering of the entire seven readings [*sab`ah qirā`āt*] was conducted under the tutelage of such masters as Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamawī and Abū al-Ma`ālī ibn al-Labbān which he completed in the year 768 AH.

In the same year, he journeyed to *Hijāz* [now part of Saudi Arabia] for *Hajj* where he again studied the seven readings, this time as directed in *al-Kāfi* of Ibn al-Shurayḥ and *al-Taysīr* of Abū `Amr al-Dānī under the Imām of Medina, Muḥammad ibn `Abd Allāh.

On his return to Damascus he made preparations to study in Spain by Sheikh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Andalūsī but was discouraged by his father. Instead, in 769 AH, he journeyed to Egypt where, under the tutelage of Ibn al-Ṣā`igh and Ibn al-Baghdādī, he learned to combine the seven variant readings as indicated in *al-`Unwān*, *al-Taysīr* and *al-Shāṭibiyah*. He also read the twelve readings [*qirā`āt*] to Abū Bakr ibn al-Jundī according to many variant *turuq*. In the course of his reading to Ibn al-Jundī he reached the Qurānic verse in *Sūrah Nahl*

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾

at which point Ibn al-Jundī passed away. Ibn al-Jazarī was therefore unable to complete his reading to Ibn al-Jundī but had fortunately previously acquired *ijāzah* [permission] from him. The remainder he completed by Ibn al-Ṣā`igh and Ibn al-Baghdādī.

He returned to Damascus for a short period until a desire to visit Egypt once again caused him to depart for Cairo in 771 AH. He resumed his studies with Ibn al-Ṣā`igh but now added the readings

<sup>6</sup> Once the vast *Shām* [Greater Syria], now subdivided into the 4 countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and [Lesser] Syria.

[*qirā'āt*] mentioned in *al-Mustanīr*, *al-Tadhkirah*, *al-Irshād* of Abū al-'Izz, *al-Irshād* of 'Abd al-Mun'im ibn Ghalbūn and *al-Tajrīd*. He also managed to continue his renderings to Ibn al-Baghdādī, this time according to the *qirā'āt* of Ibn Muḥaysin, al-A'mash, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and others in conformity with the relative works already studied by Ibn al-Sā'igh.

His studies now started extending beyond the field of *qirā'āt* and he became well-versed in the other various Islāmic fields of *tafsīr* [Qur`ānic exegesis], *ḥadīth* [prophetic traditions], *fiqh* [Islāmic positive law], *uṣūl* [legal theory], *tawḥīd* [Islamic creed], *balāghah* [Arabic rhetoric], *ṣarf* [etymology of the Arabic language] and so forth. As a follower of the *Shāfi'ī* School of Law, he studied *fiqh* by 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Asnawī and *Uṣūl*, *Ma'ānī* and *al-Bayān* by *Ḍiyā'* al-Dīn amongst others. He also journeyed to Alexandria where he studied by the students of Ibn 'Abd al-Salām and Ibn Naṣr.

On returning to Damascus he read combining the seven readings to al-Qādī Aḥmad al-Kafrī. However, in 778 AH, he soon returned to Egypt for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time where, in Alexandria, he read the *qirā'āt* detailed in *al-I'lān* to 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Qarawī. He now journeyed back to Damascus as an expert in numerous sciences particularly that of *qirā'āt*, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. His expertise in *qirā'āt* gained him the title of *Imām al-Muqri'in* [Grandmaster of the *Qirā'ah* Teaching Fraternity]. His right to pass *fatāwā* [religious legal verdicts] was also now sanctioned by Ibn Kathīr (774 AH), *Ḍiyā'* al-Dīn (778 AH) and *Sheikh al-Islām* al-Bulqīnī (785 AH).

In Damascus he acquired the post of *qirā'ah* teacher in *Jāmi' al-Umawī* [The Umayyad University], eventually succeeding his teacher, Ibn Sallār, as the *Sheikh al-Qurrā'* [Grandmaster of Qur`ānic Reciters] after the latter's demise. Here he also established a school for the teaching of the Qurān and its many sciences.

Desiring to spread his knowledge far and wide, he now traveled to Rome where, in 798 AH, the Sultan Bā Yazīd accorded him the honour and respect he deserved. This allowed him to teach *qirā'āt*, *'ulūm al-*

*Qur`ān*, *ḥadīth* and other sciences for seven years to a wide audience, proving beneficial to a great multitude.

After the demise of Bā Yazīd, Taymūr Lang took Ibn al-Jazarī to Samarqand. At his arrival a huge feast was prepared by Taymūr who seated all the scholars to his right and all his senior advisors to his left. Scholars were seated in decreasing order of rank with Ibn al-Jazarī before al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī. When Taymūr was asked as to the reason for placing another before the learned and respected al-Jurjānī, he replied that it was only natural that one more learned in the Qur`ān and Sunnah should assume the closer position.<sup>7</sup>

In 807 AH he traveled to various lands such as *Khurāsān*, *Harāh* and *Yazd*. He remained in *Asfahān* for some months until *Ramadān* 808 AH when he departed for *Shīrāz*. Upon arrival in *Shīrāz*, he was forced by the Sultan to assume the position of *Qādī* [magistrate]. It would be fourteen years later in 821 AH before he left *Shīrāz*. In the interim he founded a local school for the study of the Qur`ānic sciences which was attended by a great many students.

Accompanied by Tāhir ibn `Azīz, a student from *Shīrāz*, he continued his travels to Iraq and, in Baṣrah, he initiated a circle of learning. It attracted many students who flocked to him from near and far. Ibn `Azīz personally completed the rendition of the entire Qur`ān in the ten readings [*qirā`āt*] to the satisfaction of the master. He was later to attempt a second rendition but was not fated to complete it.

In the following year, another student Mu`īn al-Dīn ibn `Abd Allāh, the magistrate of *Qazārūn*, journeyed with Ibn al-Jazarī to Medina. The route chosen took them past the town of *Unayzah* in Nejd just beyond which they were divested of all their belongings by highway robbers. Unable to continue the journey due to lack of funds they returned to *Unayzah* where Ibn al-Jazarī authored the famous *al-Durrah al-Muḍīyyah*. Towards the end of this masterwork Ibn al-Jazarī hints at the circumstances of its composition. During this setback Mu`īn al-Dīn took the opportunity to start a rendition of the Qur`ān according to the

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<sup>7</sup> *Al-Badr al-Tāli`*, vol. 2, pg 134.

reading [*qirā'ah*] of Abū Ja'far. It was to be completed in Medina where the Imam of the *Haram* also read to Ibn al-Jazarī. For some months he remained in Mecca and Medina where he conducted various classes. He also performed *hajj* in this period. Following this he returned to Iraq where he continued his teaching for some years before returning to the two Holy Cities for *hajj* in 826 AH.

He then left for Egypt where he met his son whom he had not seen for 20 years. The following *hajj* season saw him return to *Makkah* and then to Yemen via sea. The Yemenites by then already possessed copies of his *al-Hisn al-Hasin* which they had commenced studying. He remained with them until the next *hajj*, whereupon he journeyed to Egypt where he spent some months. In 829 AH the desire to continue his propagation and teaching took him back to Damascus and then on to *Shirāz*.

This was to be his final journey and he passed away in 833 AH on the 5<sup>th</sup> of *Rabi' al-Awwal*, a Friday. His funeral procession attracted a great multitude who vied to have the honor to carry his bier. His body was laid to rest in the school which he had personally erected in *Shirāz*.

#### POSITIONS HELD

- Teacher at *Jāmi' al-Umawī* in Damascus. He assumed this position after receiving *ijāzah* by his teachers, Ibn al-Labbān and Ibn Sallār.
- *Sheikh al-Qurrā'* at *Turbah Umm al-Sālih* which was founded by al-Sālih Ismā'il ibn al-Malik al-Ādil al-Ayyūbī (648 AH). The position of *Sheikh al-Qurrā'* at this institute could only be assumed by the most learned *qārī* in the city and in 782 AH when his teacher, Ibn al-Sallār, passed away it was given to Ibn al-Jazarī.
- *Sheikh al-Qurrā'* and *Shaykh al-Nuhāt* at *Madrassah al-Ādiliyyah*.
- *Sheikh of Dār al-Qurān*, which he personally founded, in Damascus.
- Teacher at *Madrassah al-Sālihiyyah al-Qudsiyyah*.
- *Qādī* [judge] of *Shirāz*. This position he assumed under duress.
- *Sheikh* of a school, which he personally founded, for the teaching of the *Qurānic* sciences in *Shirāz*. According to numerous reports, he lies buried in this very school.
- *Sheikh* of *Dār al-Hadīth al-Ashrafiyyah*.
- Teacher at *Madrassah al-Ātābikiyyah*.

- Lecturer at *Jāmi' al-Tawbah* in Damascus.
- *Qādī* in *Shām* [Levant].

### HIS CHILDREN

Offspring mentioned by *Ibn al-Jazarī* himself in *Ghāyah al-Nihāyah* include:

- Muḥammad, Abū al-Faḥ. Born in 777 AH and died in 813 AH. By the age of 8, he had memorized the *Qur`ān*, the *Shāṭibiyah* and the *Rā'iyah*. He then started reading the ten *qirā'āt* to his father. He accompanied his father on one of his journeys to Egypt and read to Abū al-Faḥ Muḥammad al-`Asqalānī. This he followed by combining the seven readings under the tutelage of Aḥmad ibn Baybaras. He studied various books dealing with *qirā'ah* and sat in many *ḥadīth* classes conducted by numerous scholars all over Damascus. His personal predilection and therefore primary preoccupation was in the fields of *Fiqh*, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, *Qirā'āt* and *Ḥadīth*. He eventually succeeded his father as a teacher in Damascus.

- Muḥammad, Abū al-Khayr. Born in 789, he studied and received *ijāzah* by numerous scholars. He also accompanied his father on one of his journeys to Egypt and studied the *Shāṭibiyah* and other works on *Qirā'āt* by the local scholars [*shuyūkh*]. Afterwards he returned to Damascus to study *Ḥadīth* by its masters. Later when his father moved to Rome, he joined him to acquire the sciences of the *Qurān*. In 803 AH his father initiated his instruction in the methodology of ten *qirā'āt* combination, which he completed in 809 AH.

- Aḥmad, Abū Bakr. Born in 780 AH, he started his studies at an early age, completing the memorization of the *Qurān* when he was ten and leading the community in *ṣalāh* at eleven. He had also memorized the *Shāṭibiyah*, the *Rā'iyah* and the *Tayyibah*. Furthermore, he also journeyed to Egypt with his father and studied under *Ibn al-`Asqalānī*. He attended the *Shāṭibiyah* and *Unwān* classes conducted by *Ibn al-`Asqalānī*, who eventually gave him *ijāzah* in both. On a second trip to Egypt, he studied the ten *qirā'āt* and the *Shāṭibiyah* by *Ibrāhīm al-Shāmī*. His study of the ten *qirā'āt* was completed under the tutelage of his father, who also taught him many of his own works. His study by his father continued in Rome where the former became the personal instructor to the children of the Sultan. When his father was taken to Samarqand by *Taymūr Lang*, they were separated for 20 years but met

by accident in 828 AH on *ḥajj*. He then journeyed with his father to Damascus, where after the latter's demise he assumed many of his teaching positions. He authored numerous commentaries [*shurūḥ*] on his father's works including the *Tayyibah* and the *Muqaddimah*.

- ʿAlī. He is mentioned twice in the *Ghāyah*. According to his father's personal account, he studied under Muḥammad ibn Salamah al-Misrī and Aḥmad al-Suwaydī.

- Salmā. She started memorizing the *Qurān*, the *Muqaddimah* and the *Tayyibah* at the age of 13. At her completion of the memorization of the *Qurān* in 832 AH, she recited it from memory in its entirety to her father while incorporating the ten readings. She apparently excelled in other fields as well such as Arabic language, in general, and Arabic poetry and writing, in particular.

Other children include:

- Ismāʿīl, Abū al-Baqāʾ.

- Ishāq, Abū al-Faḍl.

- Fāṭimah.

- ʿĀyshah.

It is said that all his children completed the memorization of the *Qurān* and all were excellent *qurrāʾ*.<sup>8</sup>

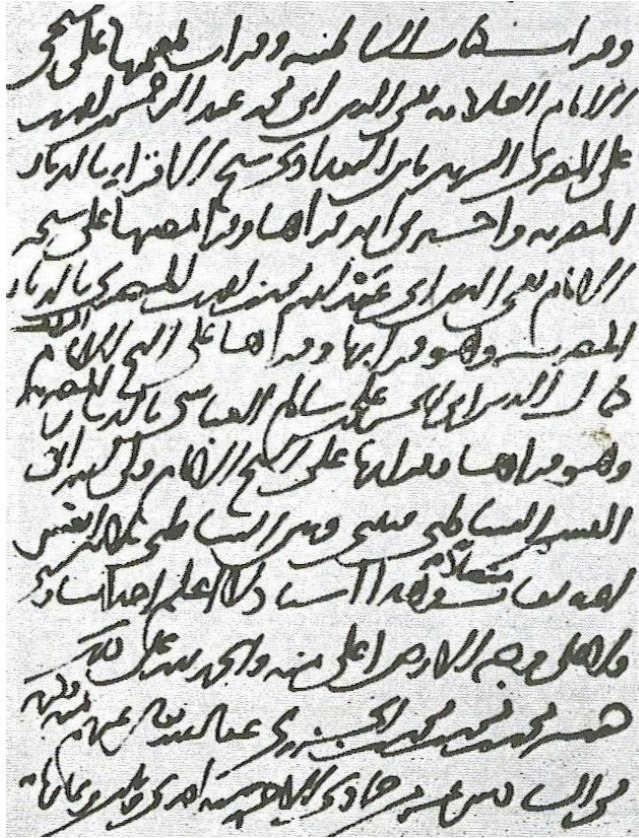
#### SOME OF IBN AL-JAZARĪ'S LISTED WORKS

- *Taḥbīr al-Taysīr*
- *Taqrīb al-Nashr fī al-Qirāʾāt al-ʿAshr*
- *Al-Tamhīd fī ʿIlm al-Tajwīd*
- *Al-Ḥisn al-Ḥasīn min Kalām Sayyid al-Mursalīn*
- *Al-Durrah al-Muḍiyyah fī Qirāʾāt al-Aʿimmah al-Thalāthah al-Mardīyyah*
- *Tayyibah al-Nashr fī al-Qirāʾāt al-ʿAshr*
- *Ghāyah al-Nihāyah fī Asmāʾ Rijāl al-Qirāʾāt*
- *Al-Muqaddimah al-Jazariyyah / Al-Muqaddimah fī Mā ʿalā Qāriʾ al-Qurʾān an Yaʿlamah*
- *Munjid al-Muqriʾīn wa Murshid al-Tālibīn*
- *Al-Nashr fī al-Qirāʾāt al-ʿAshr*

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<sup>8</sup> *Miftāḥ al-Saʿādah*.

SAMPLE OF  
IBN JAZARĪ'S HANDWRITING



A FEW OF IBN AL-JAZARĪ'S TEACHERS

- Abū al-Ma'ālī ibn al-Labbān
- Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Salāsī
- Ibn al-Baghdādī
- Ibn al-Jundī
- Ibn al-Sā'igh