2 Creation of a fixed text

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In the Islamic representation, the Qurʾān is the scripture containing the revelations 'recited' by Muḥammad and preserved in a fixed, written form. The majority view among Muslim authorities is that *qurʾān*, an Arabic verbal noun, comes from *qaraʾa*, 'to recite', 'to declaim', 'to read aloud'. Some Western scholars, however, think that it is derived from the Syriac *qeryānā* (reading, scripture, lectionary). That the origin of the word is not Arabic seems to be confirmed by the interpretation given by an ancient exegete of Jewish origin, Abū ʿUbayda (d. 209/824–5), who understands what could have been the first revelation delivered by Muḥammad: *iqraʾ bi-smi rabbika* (Q 96:1; which the majority of the exegetes understand as 'Read/recite: in the name of your lord'), as 'Proclaim/Call upon the name of your lord' (cf. Hebrew: *qra bshem adonai*; Syriac: *qrā b-shem māryā*).

THE STATUS OF THE QURʾĀN DURING MUḤAMMAD'S LIFETIME

The Qurʾān and Muḥammad's prophetic experience are very closely linked. Often the text responds explicitly to Muḥammad's historical situation and even sometimes to his domestic problems. The Muslim theological position is that God is the speaker throughout the Qurʾān, Muḥammad the recipient, and the angel Gabriel the intermediary agent of the qurʾānic revelations. But in what seem to be the oldest parts of the Qurʾān, the speaker and the sources of revelation are not mentioned (Q 91:1–10); in some passages there is no indication referring to a deity as a source of the message (Q 103:1–3) and in others Muḥammad seems to be the speaker (Q 81:15–21). In the earliest passages where Muḥammad's God is mentioned, he is spoken of in the third person, usually as 'my lord' or 'your lord' (Q 43:64; 96:1–8, etc.). According to some verses, Muḥammad himself had the vision of God (Q 53:11; 81:23). In the earliest passages that indicate the source of their revelation, God is the speaker (Q 73:5; 87:6). A number of late Meccan and

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Medinan passages present God as reciting the verses, the Qurʾān and the book (*kitāb*) to Muḥammad (e.g., Q 2:252; 3:108; 45:6).

But at the same period some passages have the effect of raising God from the action of direct revelation (Q 42:51–2); rather the revelation is 'brought down' by 'the true spirit' (26:192–3), or by 'the spirit of holiness' (Q 16:102). Because in an early Medinan verse (Q 2:97) the agent of revelation is said (for the first and only time) to be the angel Gabriel, Muslim exegetes have identified, on this basis and on that of traditions attributed to Muḥammad, the 'spirit' in the earlier passages as Gabriel.[1]

Different chronologies of the sūras and of passages of the Qurʾān have been proposed by Muslim and Western scholars but both groups use the classification of Meccan and Medinan periods.[2] The different chronologies of Western scholarship are based on the style, vocabulary and content of the sūras and passages: first or early Meccan period, second or middle Meccan period, third or late Meccan period. As for the Medinan revelations, their chronological order is determined by the subject matter which reflects Muḥammad's growing political power and the development of events in Medina.

There is a general consensus that either Q 96:1–5 or 74:1–7 represents the first proclamation of verses uttered by Muḥammad. As would be expected, the final passages were sought among Medinan sūras; for Muslim scholars these are Q 5, 9 or 110. Some pointed to other verses of the same period. It is probable that for a period, perhaps for years, Muḥammad and the first Muslims retained the passages delivered to him only in their memories. It also seems, however, that over time much of the Qurʾān was written down in some form during his lifetime.

But the problems involved in this matter are of great complexity. The later apologists of Islam, who were challenged by Christians and others to credit Muḥammad with a miracle that could authenticate his claim to prophethood, asserted that the Qurʾān itself was a miracle.[3] One of the points they made was that Muḥammad could neither read nor write. Not all Western scholars agree with this assessment.[4] Mecca was in regular communication with regions where writing was commonly used, particularly with the town of al-Ḥīra, and it is said that Meccans had learned writing from al-Ḥīra and al-Anbār. Companions, informants or close relations of Muḥammad, like Waraqa b. Nawfal, the cousin of his first wife, Khadīja, could read and/or write. For instance, the secretary of Muḥammad, Zayd b. Thābit, had been a pupil in the Jewish school of Medina.

Both memory and writing have been the modes of conservation of the revelations delivered by Muḥammad. After Muḥammad went to Medina,

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his employment of secretaries is attested. Among the names which are mentioned in this office are: 'Uthmān, Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), Ubayy b. Kaʿb, (the Jew) Zayd b. Thābit and ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Sarḥ. The problem is that these revelations were not always invariant. After having been revealed, some of them were 'raised', that is 'suppressed' or 'abrogated' (by God, according to Muslim reports), probably as a consequence of the evolution of Muḥammad's ideas and needs. So it is difficult to speak of a 'fixed text' during his lifetime.

The fact that the Qurʾān contains words which are not of Arabic origin provides an indication that Jewish and Christian scriptures, the latter probably in Syriac, were known in both Mecca and Medina. Some of the technical terms found in connection with the word *qurʾān* (itself of non-Arabic origin) do not derive from Arabic. Among these are *āya* (sign, miracle, verse), related to Hebrew *ōth* and Syriac *āthā* (sign), and *sūra* (chapter of the Qurʾān), which seems to be derived from the Syriac *sūrṭā*. All these matters and others argue for the pre-history of the Qurʾān – what I have elsewhere called 'the reconstruction of the Qurʾān uphill' – which can be deduced from a critical reading of the Muslim reports themselves.

Another problem is that of the language and style of the Qurʾān. In the qurʾānic text, collocation of the term '*qurʾān*' with the adjective '*arabī* ('Arabic', Q 12:2; 20:113; 39:28, etc.) as well as other elements, such as the doctrine of the 'inimitability' of the Qurʾān involving a special interpretation of the 'challenge verses' (Q 2:23; 10:38; 11:13, etc.),[5] have led to the Islamic conceptualisation of a *lingua sacra*.[6] Briefly put, this is the belief that Arabic is the best of tongues and that the Arabic of the Qurʾān is flawless and unmatchable. It seems that when the Quraysh heard some utterances of Muḥammad delivered as Qurʾān, they were not particularly impressed. Some of them accused him of using human informants before delivering his 'divine' message. The answer of the Qurʾān was: 'And we know that they say: Only a man teaches him. The speech (*lisān*) of whom they falsely hint is outlandish, and this is clear (*mubīn*) Arabic speech' (Q 16:103). But this usual translation is misleading, because *mubīn* is the active participle of a causative-factitive, meaning 'making clear'. It was interpreted, however, by the Islamic theologians and philologists as 'clear Arabic', and, by extension, 'pure' and 'best', 'the best of all languages', that of the Quraysh, Muḥammad's tribe. This then led to mythical narratives about the superiority of Arabic,[7] all in support of the idea that the Arabic of the Qurʾān is an exalted language, a *lingua sacra*.

Some Western scholars have drawn attention to the importance of the Aramaic or Syriac substratum in the formation of the Qurʾān,[8] and recently

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notice has been taken of the relation of some passages of the Qurʾān to the Diatessaron of Tatian.[9] This has given new impulse to the study of the possible informants of Muḥammad and to investigation of peculiarities and oddities in the language and style of the Qurʾān.[10]

THE COLLECTIONS, REDACTION AND TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE QURʾĀN AFTER THE DEATH OF MUḤAMMAD

The collection(s) of the Qurʾān

The consensus of the Islamic tradition asserts that the Qurʾān was not collected during the life of the Prophet, although it is said that copies of various sūras were available during his lifetime. According to a widespread report with many variants, at the time of Muḥammad's death, the Qurʾān was written only upon leafless palm-branches and stumps of palm-branches, or other material support such as the shoulder-blades of camels, ribs of animals, white or flat stones, pieces of cloth or of skin, or papyrus, or wooden boards, etc. Numerous narratives relate that the text was collected from these materials as well as 'from the hearts of men'.[11] But the scenario faces at least two problems: one of them has to do with terminology, the other with the collection of the text.

For classical Muslim scholars, the Arabic verb *jamaʿa*, a term commonly found in these narratives, means not only to collect, but also to know by heart or 'to remember the whole of the Qurʾān'. For example, it is said that 'Six persons memorised (*jamaʿa*) the Qurʾān during the life of the messenger of God: Ubayy b. Kaʿb, Abū l-Dardāʾ, Zayd b. Thābit, Saʿd b. ʿUbayd and Abū Zayd', but occasionally some names on the list are different, people do not know with certainty who Abū Zayd really was, and the name of the sixth one has been forgotten!

The Baghdādī Muʿtazilī Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (al-Kaʿbī, d. 319/931) noted a contradiction between this report and another one: 'Nobody has collected (or memorised, *jamaʿa*) the Qurʾān during the life of the Prophet.' So great was the embarrassment of the Muslim scholars in the face of such traditions that the Ashʿarī theologian al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) was compelled to distinguish among seven meanings of the verb *jamaʿa* in order to remove the ambiguity and find a solution that could accord with the thesis of the collection of the Qurʾān by Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān.[12]

These two names signal the collection stories to be found in traditional Muslim sources. Two collections are usually mentioned, sometimes three.

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A 'first' collection is said to have taken place under the reign of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–4). 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (who was to succeed him as caliph in 13/634) became anxious when many of the reciters/readers of the Qur'ān were killed during the Battle of Yamāma in 12/633. Fearing that large portions of it would be irretrievably lost, he counselled Abū Bakr to make a collection of the text. At first Abū Bakr hesitated to do something that had not been done under the authority of Muḥammad. But in the end he accepted this responsibility and commissioned Zayd b. Thābit, who had been one of the secretaries of Muḥammad in Medina. The latter then proceeded to collect the Qur'ān from the materials mentioned above and he wrote it on sheets. He gave these to Abū Bakr; after the latter's death they passed to 'Umar, and on 'Umar's death to his daughter Ḥafṣa, one of the widows of Muḥammad.

Another collection occurred some twenty years later, during the caliphate of 'Uthmān, when dissensions among followers of other 'collections' induced the caliph to make an official collection of the Qur'ān. We are told, among other things, that during expeditions against Armenia and Azerbaijan, disputes concerning the reading of the Qur'ān arose among the troops, and the general Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān laid the matter before the caliph and urged him to take steps to put an end to the differences. After having taken counsel with senior Companions of Muḥammad, ʿUthmān commissioned the Medinan Zayd b. Thābit to collect the Qur'ān, associating with him three members of noble Meccan families: ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr, Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Thābit. Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ was regarded as an expert in the Arabic language; he and the two other Meccan redactors were chosen because they belonged to the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, which was the tribe of Muḥammad. ʿUthmān borrowed from Ḥafṣa the copy made under the direction of Abū Bakr, and on its basis requested that a standard codex be written out in the 'pure' dialect of Quraysh. He wanted the standardised Qur'ān to be preserved in the Quraysh dialect in which it was supposed to have been delivered to Muḥammad. According to some reports, if these three Meccan collaborators were to differ with Zayd's reading or choice at any point, the disputed passage had to be corrected and rewritten in the 'original' dialect.

ʿUthmān ordered that the other codices should be burned or destroyed and that the 'codex of Zayd' ("Uthmānic codex') alone should be preserved (in Medina) and copies made to be sent to each of the main centres of the empire: Mecca, Baṣra, Kūfa and Damascus. The order of 'Uthmān was executed everywhere, save in Kūfa where the great Companion of Muḥammad, 'Abdallāh b. Masʿūd and his partisans, refused it.

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The problem for later scholars was to assure Muslims that there was an absolute continuity between what had been delivered to Muḥammad and this ''Uthmānic codex'. The expression ''Uthmānic codex' or 'codex of ʿUthmān' that is being used here can be considered a convention, for two reasons. First of all, because the misadventures detailed about the transmission and codification of the Qurʾān – as both orally delivered and transmitted in writing – are so great, the ancient Muslim narratives on these subjects offer no real clarity about what ''Uthmānic codex' means. Secondly, even if Muslims believe that the Qurʾān we have now is the ''Uthmānic codex', our analysis of Muslim narratives on the matter does not leave us with the same certainty.[13]

Some Muslim scholars, like al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014), suggest that the Qurʾān was collected three times. The first time was by Muḥammad, basing this interpretation on the report of Zayd b. Thābit that stated, 'We used to compose (*nuʾallif*) the Qurʾān from the leaves . . .', in the following way: 'Muḥammad used to say that this verse should be put in this sūra.' The second time was under Abū Bakr, but not in a definitive codex. The third time was under ʿUthmān in a 'definitive single' codex.

Occasionally other collections of the Qurʾān are also mentioned, for instance that of Sālim, an emancipated slave of the Companion Abū Ḥudhayfa, who was 'the first one to collect the Qurʾān in a codex', that is (in Arabic) a *muṣḥaf*, a word he had learnt from the Ethiopians. Eventually, also ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's son-in-law and the fourth caliph, is sometimes credited with having collected it.

The codices of the Companions and the variant readings

ʿUthmān's effort to obtain uniformity in the qurʾānic texts may, on the whole, have been successful, but in practice other readings were by no means forgotten. Most of the larger qurʾānic commentaries, such as those of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923),[14] Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) and Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī (d. 745/1344), refer to such 'non-canonical' readings, and a great number of special books were written on that subject. The presumption is that at an early period Companions or other Muslims began to write down as much as they could of the Qurʾān, but in a society where people were accustomed to the dominance of oral tradition some of them feared that these codices might be 'incomplete'. It is perhaps the reason why the phrase used by some Companions, 'to collect the Qurʾān', was interpreted by various commentators as 'to memorise the Qurʾān'.

On the basis of the *Book of the codices* of Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/929), which he edited, and on other sources Arthur Jeffery has

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distinguished between two categories of codices: fifteen 'primary codices' of the Companions and thirteen 'secondary codices' attributed to Muslims of the second generation. In the course of time, however, some of the written collections pertaining to the 'primary codices' secured special authority in various centres of the Islamic world: that of one of the close Companions of Muḥammad, ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd (d. 33/653) in Kūfa, that of Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 18/639, or 29/649) in Syria, and that of Abū Mūsā l-Ashʿarī (d. 42/662 or later) in Baṣra. There exist no copies of these early codices, either primary or secondary, but some of their features and variants are known through later sources like qurʾānic commentaries, as noted above, and special works. The codex of Ibn Masʿūd seems to have been different from that of ʿUthmān in several points: it did not include the first sūra, and appears to have contained many 'synonymic variants', etc. The codex of Ubayy seems to have been less important. Its best-known peculiarity is that it contained two short sūras which are not in the codex of ʿUthmān, nor in that of Ibn Masʿūd.

The process of the establishment of a canonical text did not end with the supposed ʿUthmānic codex. First, the copies of the ʿUthmānic model-codex (*al-imām*) that were sent to the metropolitan centres of Islam appear not to have been identical.[15] Some of them may have contained mistakes, as the following tradition suggests: 'When the codices were written, they were submitted to ʿUthmān, who noted several incorrect words (or passages), and he said: "Do not change them, the Arabs will change them", in other versions, "They will change them with their tongues", or "The Arabs will pronounce them correctly".'

There was also another big problem, the deficiencies of the Arabic script. In the first century and even later, Arabic was written in a *scriptio defectiva*, i.e., without vowels or diacritical points, these last permitting the suppression of the ambiguity of most Arabic consonants (of the twenty-eight consonants of the Arabic alphabet, only six are not ambiguous). So, for example, there was one shape to express *b, t, th,* and in the beginning and middle of words *n, y* (or *ī*); then *d* and *dh* (interdental spirant); emphatic *t* and emphatic *z*; ʿ(laryngeal fricative) and *gh* (uvular *r*, or *r* of the Parisians); *f* and *q* (glottal occlusive). Additionally, the short vowels were not marked, nor were the long ones consistently indicated. Although the reader who was familiar with the language would, in most cases, have no difficulty ascertaining which pronunciation was intended, there were so many words which permitted quite different vocalisations that instances of dubious pronunciation were not infrequent. There was also a permissible variance in grammatical forms which had not, as yet, been greatly restricted.

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It is hardly possible that the *scriptio plena* would have been introduced all at once by the grammarian Abū l-Aswad al-Du'alī (d. 69/688), as is sometimes suggested. But it is possible that the impetus came from scholars of Baṣra with a method apparently copied from that used in Syriac texts: dots or strokes were used to mark readings. Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) is generally credited with having improved the orthography of ʿUthmān's codex during the reign of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705), probably during the period of al-Ḥajjāj's governorship of Iraq (75–95/694–714). The process probably continued to evolve even after the time of al-Ḥajjāj, considering the range of issues that had to be dealt with: distinguishing between consonants with a similar shape, marking of long vowels, marking of short vowels, as well as certain other matters, such as the doubling of consonants, etc.

The evidence of early copies of the Qur'ān that have survived, such as the Arabic manuscript 328 (a) (Fig. 2) of the National Library in Paris (end of the seventh century CE; in which a space was left between the sūras but the titles do not appear), or the manuscript Or. 2165 (Fig. 3) of the British Library (probably second/eighth century; in which the titles of the sūras were added later with a deliberately different calligraphic style),[16] show that for some considerable time the new system was used sparingly and mainly in connection with variants.

Chronologically, several periods can be distinguished in the acceptance of the qur'ānic readings/variants, as discussed below.[17]

Before the general acceptance of the ʿUthmānic codex

The introduction of the ʿUthmānic ductus, with unmarked consonantal structure, does not seem to have had an immediate and decisive effect on the limitation of variant readings. On the whole, it appears that in the second/eighth century *variae lectiones* with a different ductus, especially from Ibn Masʿūd's codex, were still freely discussed and were called *qirā'āt* (readings), and sometimes *ḥurūf* (manners of speaking/writing). Both words were apparently used interchangeably for ʿUthmānic and non-ʿUthmānic readings, as F. Leemhuis has shown in his study of the qur'ānic commentaries of the Kūfans Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) and al-Farrā' (d. 207/822), and the Yemeni ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827).[18] Particularly the treatment by al-Farrā' of the variant readings from Ibn Masʿūd shows that in his time they could be discussed in equal terms with the ʿUthmānic text. The guiding principle was that these readings should be well known, either from a codex or from a well-established tradition. Another criterion for accepting a variant reading was that it should be in accordance with the rules of the Arabic language.

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The ʿUthmānic codex itself still left room for different readings. As seen above, the codices of Medina, Mecca, Damascus, Kūfa and Baṣra are said to have presented slight differences in some places. At this time, however, the discussion of which was the primary text, the codified or the recited, also played a major role in the evolution of the history of the gradual acceptance of the ʿUthmānic codex as the exclusive authority.

This appears in a different treatment of the *variae lectiones* in the works identically entitled *The good significations of the Qurʾān* (*Maʿānī l-Qurʾān*) by al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830) and by al-Farrāʾ. The latter, reflecting the grammatical tradition of Kūfa (home to Ibn Masʿūd's codex!) treats more *variae lectiones* that presuppose a different shape or ductus than the former. Unlike al-Farrāʾ, al-Akhfash's criterion is that such readings, which must be in good Arabic, should also be in accordance with the ʿUthmānic codex to be accepted.

After the general acceptance of the ʿUthmānic codex

Two generations later, the principle expressed by the traditionist, theologian and literary figure Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), was the following: 'All of them [qurʾānic readings] which are in accordance with our codex [i.e., the ʿUthmānic codex], not departing from its writing, we are allowed to use in the recitation.' It should be noted that this period is characterised by a codification in nearly all fields: grammar, poetry, literature, criteria for accepting the prophetic traditions, exegesis, jurisprudence, theology, etc. A shift towards the consolidation, standardisation and canonisation of concepts and doctrines was manifest. The same Ibn Qutayba, for instance, wrote a book entitled *On poetry and poets*, in the introduction to which he stipulated the rules of the Arabic poem (*qaṣīda*), another one on *The interpretation of the differences in ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions) and a third on the *Interpretation of difficult qurʾānic passages*, codifying in both of these latter works the principles of interpretation for their respective subject fields. This evolution corresponds politically with the 'imperial period' (Fr. *moment impérial*).

At the end of the third/ninth century, for the exegete al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) the criterion for accepting a reading was whether it was in accordance with the codices of the five cities to which copies of the ʿUthmānic codex, i.e., their consonantal ductus, had been sent.[19] Of course, he also has other criteria: linguistic, 'sound transmission', reading accepted by the 'majority' of the great readers, etc., but the definitive criterion is that of accordance with the ductus of the 'codices of the Muslims'.

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This evolution corresponds to a time in which only readings based on the ʿUthmānic codex were accepted for liturgical use, a development illustrated by the activities of a traditionist (specialist in the transmission of the traditions of the Prophet and of the first generations of Muslims) and qurʾānic reader Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936). A reader of Baghdād, Ibn Shanabūdh (d. 328/939), who in public worship had recited readings of Ibn Masʿūd, Ubayy and others, was brought to trial and flogged in 323/935 for reciting qurʾānic words or passages 'in irregular readings at variance with the consensus'. Clearly, there was a shift in the meaning of *qirāʾa* (reading) from 'manner of reciting the Qurʾān' to 'manner of reciting the established written text in accordance with the ʿUthmānic ductus of the Qurʾān'. Another Baghdādī reader, also a traditionist and grammarian, Ibn Miqsam (d. 354/965), is credited with three versions of a book on the seven readings. Like Ibn Mujāhid, he seems to have accepted the principle of limiting variants. But unlike him, he advocated complete freedom to vowel the received consonantal ductus in any fashion consistent with Kūfan grammar. This was seen as 'submitting the Qurʾān to grammar'. At the instigation of Ibn Mujāhid, he was tried before judges and witnesses (notaries), and made to recant on threat of chastisement.[20]

Before Ibn Mujāhid, others had tried to 'restrain' (this is the interpretation of most Orientalists nowadays) the number of accepted reading 'systems' – as, for example, did Aḥmad b. Jubayr al-Kūfī (d. 258/871) who had composed a book on five acceptable readings, one for each city to which ʿUthmān had remanded a codex. This is the reason why some modern scholars see the enterprise of Ibn Mujāhid less as an attempt to arrest the proliferation of readings, than as a struggle against too much independence for the grammarians who were expected to limit themselves to materials 'which had enjoyed a high level of recognition and successive transmission (*tawātur*)'.[21]

In any event, Ibn Mujāhid's work had an enormous influence, and in the course of time a general consensus emerged that recognised the recensions of two transmitters of each of the seven readings as authoritative. Medina: (1) Nāfiʿ (d. 169/785), in the transmissions of Warsh (d. 197/813) and Qālūn (d. 220/835). Mecca: (2) Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738), in the transmissions of al-Bazzī (d. 250/864) and Qunbul (d. 291/904). Damascus: (3) Ibn ʿĀmir (d. 118/736), in the transmissions of Hishām b. ʿAmmār (d. 245/859) and Ibn Dhakwān (Abū ʿAmr, d. 242/857). Baṣra: (4) Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ (d. 154/771), in the transmissions of al-Dūrī (Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar, d. 246/860) and al-Sūsī (Ṣāliḥ b. Ziyād, d. 261/874). Kūfa, with three authorities: (5) ʿĀṣim (d. end 127 or early 128/745) in the transmissions of Ḥafṣ b. Sulaymān (d. 180/796) and

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Ibn ʿAyyāsh (d. 193/809); (6) Ḥamza b. Ḥabīb (d. 156/773 or 158/775), in the transmissions of Khalaf (b. Hishām al-Bazzār, d. 229/844) and Khallād (d. 220/835); (7) al-Kisāʾī (d. 189/805), in the transmissions of al-Dūrī and Abū l-Ḥārith al-Layth (d. 240/854). The reason why Ibn Mujāhid chose seven readers is not clear. It may be because they met the criterion of broad authentication. But it is also possible that this number suggested that these were the 'seven *aḥruf*' (manners of reciting?) in which, according to a tradition attributed to Muḥammad,[22] the Qurʾān is said to have been revealed. This equivalency, however, was never universally accepted by the Muslim scholars.

Muslim scholars found that other famous readers met the same criterion of acceptance. Three became known as 'the three after the seven', and books were composed on the 'ten readers', for instance that by the grammarian of Nishapur, Ibn Mihrān (Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn, d. 381/991), who wrote three books on the ten readings: *The outmost*, *The comprehensive* and *The extensive* (a commentary on *The comprehensive*). The most frequently cited nowadays is *The unfolding on the ten readings* of Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) which can be found on the curricular syllabi of most Islamic faculties, along with its commentaries. These three readings, also with two transmitters each, are the readings of: (8) Abū Jaʿfar Yazīd b. al-Qaʿqāʿ (d. 130/747, Medina), (9) Yaʿqūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205/821, Baṣra) and (10) Khalāf (the same as Ḥamza's first transmitter; Kūfa).

Further developments on this topic produced three kinds of readings distinguished by the Andalusian grammarian and reader Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437/1045):

(1) The readings which are 'recited nowadays in which three characteristics are united': (a) transmission from Muḥammad according to reliable authorities; (b) accordance with the Arabic in which the Qurʾān was revealed; (c) conformity with the ductus of the codex. Readings which join these three features are accepted and their reciting is allowed.
(2) Those which meet the two first criteria, but lack the third. They are acceptable, but cannot be used in recitation, although a minority held the view that it was permissible to recite them in the prayer.
(3) Those which lack either one or both of the two first criteria. They are unacceptable, even if they are in accordance with the ductus of the codex.

From this evolution in the formulation of criteria, it became clear for certain Islamic scholars that conformity with the ʿUthmānic ductus was in itself sufficient for a consensus on the acceptability of readings, and this

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made room for the acceptance of yet other readings, i.e., 'the four after the ten', or the system of the fourteen readings. Its adherents based their judgements on the opinions of Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī and Ibn al-Jazarī, but the majority of the authorities considered these four readings to be anomalous (*shādhdha*). These four readers are (also with two transmitters each, who are not given here): (11) Ibn Muḥayṣin (d. 123/740, Mecca), (12) al-Yazīdī (Yaḥyā, d. 202/817, Baṣra), (13) al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728, Baṣra), (14) al-Aʿmash (Sulaymān b. Mihrān, d. 148/765, Kūfa).[23]

For the Muslim scholars, the variants which are not accepted in the recitation and in the prayer can be used in exegesis, i.e., to make some interpretations of the text clearer. In order to achieve some theoretical clarity on the question of variant readings, the following categorisation has been proposed recently: (1) 'the small variation' (various readings of the same ductus); and (2) 'the great variation' (variations of the ductus, i.e., non-'Uthmānic' codex), on the one hand; and (3) 'a greater variation' (an Arabic/Aramaic transliteration of the ductus; in some cases a quasi-palimpsest[24]), on the other hand.[25]

With the passing of time, and because of a pressure for uniformity and/or because of political evolutions, the majority of the different transmissions of variants dropped into disuse for the recitation. Only some remain, e.g.: al-Dūrī's transmission of Abū ʿAmr's reading (Sudan), Warsh's transmission of the reading of Nāfiʿ (now confined to the Maghrib or some African regions under the influence of the Mālikī school of law), and Ḥafṣ' transmission of ʿĀṣim's reading. This latter has been the basis of the standard Egyptian text of the Qurʾān, first published in 1923, which greatly advantaged the spread of this reading. But the study of all the other readings is still pursued in special studies on grammar and on the Qurʾān, and dedicated works and commentaries devoted, in particular, to the seven, but also to the ten or fourteen readings, are part of the curricula of many faculties of Islamic law and theology. Two dictionaries of the qurʾānic readings which are taken from the numerous special books on readings and from the qurʾānic commentaries have been recently published.[26]

QUESTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

No critical edition of the Qurʾān which could be a basis for its scholarly reconstruction has ever been produced. Two types of reconstruction of this text or 'lectionary' (*qurʾān*) are conceivable: deductive and inductive. The deductive reconstruction would resemble the German project led by G. Bergsträsser (d. 1933) and O. Pretzl (d. 1941). After some initial hesitations, they decided that the ʿUthmānic codex should be the basis of such a

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critical edition but only the consonantal skeleton of that codex. But since this codex had been edited in Cairo in 1923 (with the points on or under the ambiguous consonants and with the vocalisation), Bergsträsser finally thought that such a new edition was no longer necessary, and that it would be sufficient to establish an *apparatus criticus* (based on the Islamic literature on variant readings, and in accordance with the ʿUthmānic consonantal ductus) for the Cairo edition. After the death of O. Pretzl, however, this project was never realised.

At the same time, the American scholar Arthur Jeffery had another project. For him, the task of preparing a critical edition of the Qurʾān was twofold: 'First that of presenting some form of tradition as for the text itself, and secondly that of collecting and arranging all the information scattered over the whole domain of Arabic literature, concerning the variant readings both canonical and uncanonical.'[27] Jeffery published the variant readings he had collected in his *Materials for the history of the text of the Qurʾān*. He also began to collaborate with the German project, but this enterprise, as mentioned above, did not result in a critical edition of the Qurʾān. Although it has been stated that the material collected by the two German scholars (*c.* 15,000 photographs of ancient manuscripts[28] of the Qurʾān and material on variant readings) perished in the bomb attacks on Munich in the last months of World War II, it is also possible that it still exists somewhere in Munich or more probably in Berlin.[29]

As for the inductive reconstruction, many Islamic traditions on the history of the Qurʾān have been interpreted by some Western scholars as hints of a 'concealed' history of the text before and during the revelations delivered to Muḥammad. Examples are the reports on the informants of Muḥammad to whom the Qurʾān alludes (Q 25:4–5; 16:103). The possibility should not be excluded that whole sections of the Meccan Qurʾān could contain elements originally established by, or within, a group of 'God-seekers' who possessed either biblical or post-biblical or other information.[30] This possibility was reinforced recently by the study of Christoph Luxenberg on the Syro-Aramaic reading of the Qurʾān and by the article of Jan van Reeth, both mentioned above. On this basis, the hypothesis has been expressed recently that the Qurʾān could be partly the product of a group.[31]

Notes

1. A. T. Welch, 'al–Ḳurʾān', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., 11 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1979–2002), vol. V, p. 403.
2. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, ed. F. Schwally, G. Bergsträsser and O. Pretzl, 3 vols. in 1 (repr. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1970), vol. I, pp. 58–261; R. Blachère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1947), pp. 240–63; Welch, 'al–Ḳurʾān', pp. 414–17.

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3. Cl. Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en islam: L'exégèse coranique de Ṭabarī* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1990), pp. 73–110; R. C. Martin, 'Inimitability', in J. D. McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001–6), vol. II, pp. 526–36.
4. W. M. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, rev. and enl. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), p. 30.
5. J. Wansbrough, *Quranic studies: Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 79–82.
6. Wansbrough, *Quranic studies*, pp. 85–118.
7. Cl. Gilliot and P. Larcher, 'Language and style of the Qur'ān', in McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. III, pp. 118–21.
8. A. Mingana, 'Syriac influence on the style of the Ḳur'ān', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927), 77–98, repr. in Ibn Warraq (pseud.), *What the Koran really says: Language, text and commentary* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), pp. 171–92; Ch. Luxenberg (pseud.), *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000 (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2004²)).
9. J. M. F. van Reeth, 'L'évangile du prophète', in D. De Smet et al. (eds.), al–Kitāb: *La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam, Actes du Symposium international tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 mai au 1 juin 2002* (Leuven: Belgian Society of Oriental Studies, 2004), pp. 155–74.
10. See the seminal study of Th. Nöldeke, 'Zur Sprache des Korans', in Th. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1910), pp. 1–30; Fr. trans. G.-H. Bousquet, *Remarques critiques sur le style et la syntaxe du Coran* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1953).
11. Abū Bakr b. Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, ed. A. Jeffery, *Materials for the history of the text of the Qur'ān: The Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif of Ibn Abī Dāwūd together with a collection of the variant readings from the codices of Ibn Masʿūd, etc.* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), pp. 7–9; Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. II, pp. 12–15; Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p. 40.
12. Claude Gilliot, 'Collecte ou mémorisation du Coran: Essai d'analyse d'un vocabulaire ambigu', forthcoming in *Journal asiatique*.
13. Cl. Gilliot, 'Le Coran, fruit d'un travail collectif?', in De Smet et al. (eds.), al-Kitāb: *La sacralité du texte*, pp. 199–209, 222–3.
14. On the treatment of variant readings by al–Ṭabarī, see Gilliot, *Exégèse*, pp. 135–64.
15. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. III, pp. 6–19.
16. F. Déroche and S. Noja Noseda, *Sources de la transmission du texte coranique*, 2 vols. (Lesa: Fondazione Ferni Noja Noseda, 1998–2001).
17. F. Leemhuis, 'Readings of the Qur'ān', in McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. IV, pp. 353–63.
18. Ibid., pp. 354–5, and F. Leemhuis 'Ursprünge des Koran als Textus Receptus', in S. Wild and H. Schild (eds.), *Akten des 27. Deutschen Orientalistentages (Bonn – 28. September bis 2. Oktober 1998): Norm und Abweichung* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2001), pp. 301–8.
19. Gilliot, *Exégèse*, pp. 135–48.
20. Ch. Melchert, 'Ibn Mujāhid and the establishment of seven qur'ānic readings', *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000), 20.

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21. M. Shah, 'The early Arabic grammarians' contributions to the collection and authentication of qur'ānic readings: The prelude to Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sab'a*', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6 (2004), 94.
22. Gilliot, *Exégèse*, pp. 111–33.
23. For the list of the readers and their transmitters, see Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, vol. III, pp. 186–9; Leemhuis, 'Readings', pp. 359–60.
24. Cl. Gilliot, 'L'embarras d'un exégète musulman face à un palimpseste: Māturīdī et la sourate de l'Abondance (*al-Kawthar*, sourate 108), avec une note savante sur le commentaire coranique d'Ibn al-Naqīb', in R. Arnzen and J. Thielmann (eds.), *Words, texts and concepts crossing the Mediterranean sea: Studies in the sources, contents and influences of Islamic civilization and Arabic philosophy and science, dedicated to Gerhard Endress on his sixty-fifth birthday* (Leuven-Paris-Dudly, MA: Peeters, 2004), pp. 33–69 (on the basis of Ch. Luxenberg, but also of two ancient Muslim exegetes).
25. Gilliot and Larcher, 'Language and style', p. 131.
26. For list and editions (*c.* 60), see Cl. Gilliot, 'Une reconstruction critique du Coran ou comment en finir avec les merveilles de la lampe d'Aladin?', forthcoming in M. Kropp (ed.), *Results of contemporary research on the Qur'ān: The question of a historico-critical text* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 2006), § 12.
27. A. Jeffery, 'Progress in the study of the Qur'ān text', *Muslim World* 25 (1935), 11.
28. On the manuscripts of the Qur'ān, see F. Déroche, 'Manuscripts of the Qur'ān', in McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. III, pp. 255–73, and Déroche and Noja Noseda, *Sources de la transmission*.
29. G. Lüling, *A challenge to Islam for reformation: The rediscovery and reliable reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003), p. xxi n. 4.
30. Cl. Gilliot, 'Informants', in McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. II, p. 517.
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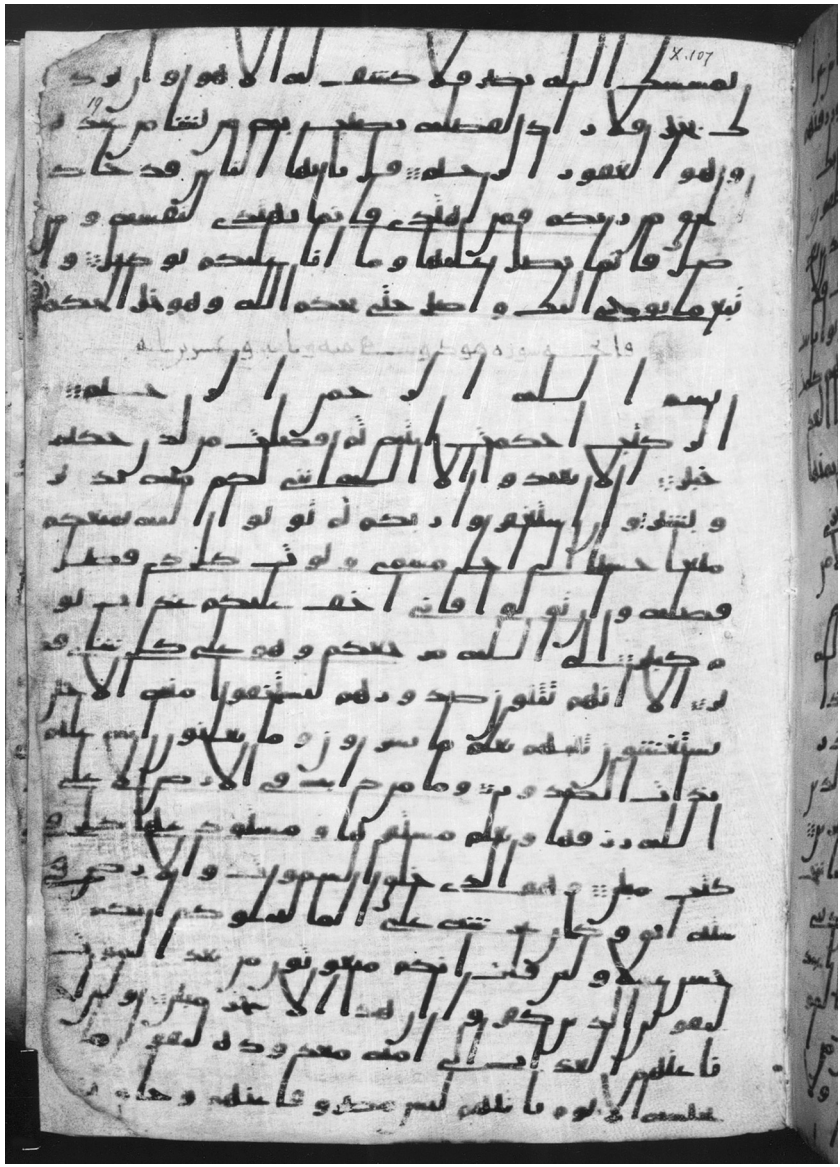


Fig. 3 Folio from an eighth-century Qur'ān manuscript, to which the sūra titles were added later in a deliberately different calligraphic style. Depicted here is the end of Q 10 (Sūrat Yūnus, 'Jonah') and the beginning of Q 11 (Sūrat Hūd) (BL MS Or. 2165, fol. 19a). Courtesy of the British Library, London

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