

MARCIN GRODZKI
(University of Warsaw, Poland)
ORCID: 0000-0002-6744-1332

Between the lines of the Ḥafṣ and Warṣ readings of the Qur'an. The Qur'an as a literary testimony to its meanings

Abstract

The paper exemplifies chosen textual variants extant in Qur'an versions in the Islamic world, focusing on printed readings according to Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim and Warṣ 'an Nāfi', against the historical background of Ibn Muğāhid's *qirā'āt* reform (10th century C.E.). The studied issue is part of and sheds light on a broader problem – the quest after elaborating a critical text edition of the Qur'anic text based on the oldest and best manuscripts. The preliminary conclusion is that neither Ibn Muğāhid nor the oldest, surviving works by Muslim scholars devoted to the Qur'anic *qirā'āt* did actually record the factual state of the oral tradition from the 7th century, but that the variants of the oral tradition as codified in the 10th century have their origin only in the late written tradition (probably also only from the 10th century, possibly not much older).

Keywords: Qur'an, Qur'anic studies, Ibn Mujahid, *qirā'āt*, Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim, Warṣ 'an Nāfi', early Islam, Qur'anic History, recitation styles, text criticism



The paper attempts to preliminarily exemplify textual variants between the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim and Warš ‘an Nāfi’ readings of the Qur’an in terms of their potential usefulness and insightfulness for reconstructing some earlier stages of the Qur’an’s redaction.¹ The studied issue is part of and sheds light on a broader problem – the quest for elaborating a critical text edition of the Qur’anic text based on the oldest and best manuscripts as well as on other literary sources referring to the Qur’an.² The variant Qur’anic readings (referred to in Arabic as *qirā’āt* and *riwāyāt*) after Ibn Muğāhid’s reform is a term designating in the Muslim Sunni tradition initially seven, then ten, fourteen and even more canonical text types of the holy book of Islam, all derived from the family of the ‘Uṭmānic recension. As all these readings initiate from the same line of transmission, minor variations between them are usually limited to the length of articulation, accentuation, inter-word consonantal assimilation, pausal forms, notation and pronunciation of the hamza. The heterogeneity of recitation values is a derivative of text variants systematized in the first half of 10th century CE (as attested primarily in the peripheral Qur’anic literature, but also in chosen Qur’anic manuscripts): consonant variants (rasm, diacritics), vowel variants (diacritics), orthography and graphic notations (including hamza, deflection / *imāla*).³

Till today, out of the multitude of these systems in the Muslim world, only two recitation versions have generally survived in print, of which by far the most popular is the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim⁴ reading (stereotypically recognized by both Muslims and non-Muslims as the ‘standard’ universal version of the Qur’an) followed by the Warš ‘an Nāfi’⁵ reading (also known in its parallel transmission by Qālūn ‘an Nāfi’) which is printed regionally. Ḥafṣ sealed its primacy among other readings in the 16th century, when the Ottoman Empire adopted its text type as normative. Consequently, other versions remained in use only on the outskirts of the Ottoman Empire and beyond its borders (e.g. in North-West Africa). Based on the Ḥafṣ reading, a commission of Muslim scholars called up by the Egyptian king Fuad in the late–1910s and early–1920s worked out the ‘standard’ text of the Qur’an (by simplifying and systematizing some of the spelling features, the rasm, vocalization, pausal forms, archaisms, sura titles), which serves, mostly due to its

¹ The field of Qur’anic studies uses for this purpose also many other sources which are not necessarily referred to in this paper, e.g. other ‘Uṭmānic and non-‘Uṭmānic readings, consonantal, vowel and orthographic text variants.

² The debate on the Qur’anic textual origins goes on. See e.g.: Nicolai Sinai, ‘When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part I’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77/2 (2014), pp. 273–292; Nicolai Sinai, ‘When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part II’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77/3 (2014), pp. 509–521.

³ Frederik Leemhuis, ‘Readings of the Qur’ān’, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe, Leiden–Boston 2004, vol. 4, pp. 353–363.

⁴ I.e. ‘Āṣim Ibn Abī an-Nağūd (d. 745) from Kufa, represented by two *rāwīs*: Abū ‘Amr Ḥafṣ Ibn Sulaymān Ibn al-Muğīra (d. 796) known as Ḥafṣ, and Abū Bakr Šu’ba Ibn ‘Ayyāš Ibn Sālim (d. 809).

⁵ I.e. Nāfi’ Ibn ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān (d. 785) from Medina, represented by two *rāwīs*: ‘Uṭmān Ibn Sa’īd Ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Quṭbī better known as Warš (d. 812), and Abū Mūsā ‘Īsā Ibn Mīnā az-Zarqī better known as Qālūn (d. 835). Warš was supposedly Egyptian, he studied recitation in Medina from Nāfi’, and then returned to Egypt.

typographical values, as the basis of the modern printed editions.⁶ The Cairo text recension, later followed by its reprints by the Saudi authorities (the Medinese recension), alike the readings centuries earlier, was not based on actual text variants attested in oldest or best Qur'anic manuscripts (nor sorted by any other collating features), but on the consensus of Muslim scholars guided by a series of criteria adopted by them (which is discussed below). Gotthelf Bergsträßer,⁷ German scholar of the Qur'an of the interwar period, lamented that this popularizing intervention by the Egyptian commission became yet another stumbling block to researchers seeking to work out a critical edition of the Qur'an.⁸

At the same time, the eponymous reading of the Medinese Nāfi' has survived in modern print in North-West and West Africa (however, in Libya, parts of Tunisia and Algeria, it is the Qālūn 'an Nāfi' reading rather than the Warš 'an Nāfi' one), but also in the Sudanese Darfur and among the Zaydiyya in Yemen (where this system could have been transmitted not so much by Warš, but by Qālūn).⁹ The popularity of the Warš reading in West Africa was owed to the Maliki school of law (it was the preferred reading of imam Mālik Ibn Anas). The Nāfi's Medinese system was also once the most popular textual version of the Muslim Al-Andalus, in the transmission of Warš (by adopting the Nāfi' version the Andalusian Umayyads aimed at cutting themselves off from their rival Abbasids based in Iraq, where the reading of Abū 'Amr Ibn al-'Alā' (d. 770) was dominant).¹⁰ In Egypt, the Warš 'an Nāfi' reading remained popular until the 16th century (among other readings, including the above mentioned Abū 'Amr).

The several dozen differences between the Ḥaḥṣ and Warš readings are mainly slight divergences in vowel diacritics, hamza orthography and deflection, less often also differences in the Arabic rasm (i.e. consonantal skeleton). The vast majority of them hardly translate into any meaning or exegetical quality. An example of the first category (a different vocalization that may be of certain significance to the substance or meaning of the text) are the last two verses of sura 85:

⁶ Gotthelf Bergsträßer, 'Koranlesung in Kairo', *Der Islam* 20/1 (1932), pp. 1–42; Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, 'Quellen, Orthographie und Transkription moderner Drucke des Qur'an', in: *Vom Koran zum Islam. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran*, eds. Markus Groß, Karl-Heinz Ohlig, Berlin 2009, pp. 606–641. The second edition of the Cairo muṣḥaf (in movable type printing), revised by a commission of Al-Azhar and the Egyptian National Library, saw daylight in 1952. Its text was rewritten calligraphically by 'Uṣmān Tāha and is being reprinted till today by the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an in Medina. Neither of the two text types, the Cairo revised edition and the Medinese Saudi one, although both claiming to correspond to the rasm of the 'Uṣmānic codex, is a critical edition of the Qur'an.

⁷ Bergsträßer was collecting source materials for the critical edition of the Qur'an.

⁸ Bergsträßer, 'Koranlesung in Kairo', p. 5.

⁹ Adrian Brockett, 'The value of the Ḥaḥṣ and Warsh transmissions for the textual history of the Qur'an', in: *Approaches to The History of Interpretation of The Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin, Oxford 1988, p. 31; Leemhuis, 'Readings of the Qur'an', p. 360.

¹⁰ Shady H. Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an. The Problem of Tawātūr and the Emergence of Shawādh*, Leiden–Boston 2013, p. 106. According to Nasser, at the early stages of standardization of the *qirā'āt* the Nāfi' reading in the transmission of Warš was not prominent (results of Nasser's analysis coincide with the statements of Ibn al-'Arabī).

In the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim version we read (as translated by Ali Quli Qarai¹¹):

21. *Bal huwa qur’ānun mağīdun* (It is indeed a glorious Qur’ān)
 22. *Fī lawḥin maḥfūzin.* (in a **preserved tablet**)
 بل هو قرآنٌ مجيدٌ في لوحٍ محفوظٍ

Whereas the Warš version reads¹²:

21. *Bal huwa qur’ānun mağīdun* (It is indeed a glorious Qur’ān)
 22. *Fī lawḥin maḥfūzun.* (**preserved in a tablet**)
 بل هو قرآنٌ مجيدٌ في لوحٍ محفوظٍ

A different grammatical case in the last Arabic word of verse 22 may lead to a reflection on the origins of the Muslim ‘Preserved Tablet’ doctrine on which the full text of the Qur’ān is stored in heavens (the Heavenly Qur’ān, lit. the Mother of the Book).¹³ Did the doctrine arise out of this Qur’anic passage, or was it the other way round – the doctrine influenced the choice of this specific textual variant?

Regarding the rasm variants of the Ḥafṣ and Warš readings, one can also reflect on possible broader implications of the differences in the following verse (Q 2:184):¹⁴

The Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim version reads:

184. (...) *wa-‘alā al-allaḏīna yuḥiqūnahu fidyatun ṭa‘āmu miskīnin* (...)
 (Those who find it straining, shall be liable to atonement by feeding **a needy person**)
 وعلى الذين يطيقونه فديةً طعام مسكينٍ

Whereas the Warš version reads:

184. (...) *wa-‘alā al-allaḏīna yuḥiqūnahu fidyatu ṭa‘āmi masākīna* (...)
 (Those who find it straining, shall be liable to atonement by feeding **needy persons**)
 وعلى الذين يطيقونه فديةً طعام مساكينٍ

As reported by Ibn al-Ġazarī (d. 1429) in his *An-Našr fī-al-qirā’āt al-‘ašr*,¹⁵ the construct state variant with the plural *masākīna* as its last element was promoted by three (of the main ten) canonical readers: apart from the Medinese Nāfi’, it was also the reading of the Damascene Ibn ‘Āmir¹⁶ and another Medinese Abū Ġa’far (d. 747)).¹⁷

¹¹ All Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim passages are Ali Quli Qarai translations as in: Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur’an and the Bible. Text and Commentary*, New Haven and London 2018.

¹² Arabic text as in: *The Noble Qur’ān as Transmitted by Warsh*, Dimašq–Bayrūt 1998.

¹³ The Qur’anic *Umm al-Kitāb*, as in Q 3:7, 13:39, 43:4.

¹⁴ The entire verse goes as follows: “184. That for known days. But should one of you be sick or on a journey, let it be a [similar] number of other days. Those who find it straining, shall be liable to atonement by feeding a needy person. Should anyone do good of his own accord, that is better for him, and to fast is better for you, should you know.”

¹⁵ Muḥammad Ibn al-Ġazarī, *An-Našr fī-al-qirā’āt al-‘ašr*, Bayrūt (no date), vol. 2, p. 226.

¹⁶ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Āmir (d. 736).

¹⁷ Abū Ġa’far Yazīd al-Qa’qā’ al-Maḥzūmī (d. 747).

This text variant may yield divergent legal interpretations (in *fiqh*) when measuring the size of compensation (single or plural) for a broken fast, which is the main topic referred to in the adjacent verses. Interesting from an Orientalist's perspective is here the fact that Muslim commentators often ignored the very rasm of this textual variant, focusing rather straight on its possible interpretations as a legal regulation: should one needy person be fed for each a day of an interruption in fasting (such as taught e.g. by Abū 'Abd Allāh aš-Šāfi'ī (d. 820) in *Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*¹⁸), or rather shall it be considered that the interruption broke the fast as a whole and, thus, it demands a more severe penance (the Maliki law school prescribes here either a two-month consecutive fast or securing food for sixty poor people¹⁹). Moreover, it should be noted that apart from this variant, this verse also includes other textual variants (non-canonical²⁰) with relevance for its exegesis. The respected classical Sunni *Tafsīr al-Ġalālayn* doesn't even mention that there is an alternative plural form, noting only that there exists a reading with an *iḍāfa* (*fīdyatu*).²¹ Al-Farrā' (d. 822) in his *Ma'ānī Al-Qur'ān* doesn't mention any variants for this verse.²²

Other textual variants between the Ḥaḥṣ and Warš readings do not make any considerable difference to the message of the text, and even when we find such a difference, it limits itself rather to the immediate context, if at all. A good example of this is the consonantal variant of the verse Q 2:132, which does not introduce a semantic difference (however, one can of course possibly study the functional nuances resulting from the distinct thematic structure of the verb):

The Ḥaḥṣ 'an 'Āṣim version reads:

132. (...) *wa-waṣṣà bihā Ibrāhīmu* (...)
(Abraham enjoined this [creed] upon...)
ووصى بها إبراهيم

Whereas the Warš version reads (which yields no change in the English translations):

¹⁸ Abū 'Abd Allāh aš-Šāfi'ī, *Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī an-Nīsābūrī, Bayrūt (no date), pp. 120-121.

¹⁹ By analogy with the Qur'anic fasting prescribed for a temporary dismissal of one's wife (*ḡihār*) – cf. Q 58:3-4. Mālik Ibn Anas, *Al-Muwaṭṭa'*, Bayrūt 1985, p. 296.

²⁰ These companion reading variants of this Qur'anic verse include: *yuṭawwaqūnahu* (Ibn 'Abbas, 'Ā'īša, 'Alī, 'Ātā' Ibn Abī Rabāh, Muġāhid, 'Ikrima, Sa'īd Ibn Ġubayr) vs. *lā yuṭīqūnahu* (Ḥaḥṣa Bint 'Umar) vs. *yuṭīqūnahu* (in the Ḥaḥṣ and Warš readings) (Jeffery notes also other anonymous variants: *yataṭawwaqūnahu* and *yuṭayyarūnahu*), *Ayyāmun ma'dūdātun* (Ibn Mas'ūd) vs. *Ayyāmun ma'dūdātīn* (Ḥaḥṣ, Warš), *uḥrā* (Ibn Mas'ūd) vs. *uḥara mutataḡābi'ātin* (Ubayy Ibn Ka'b) vs. *uḥara* (Ḥaḥṣ, Warš), *tatawwa'a bi-ḡayrin* (Ibn Mas'ūd) vs. *tatawwa'a ḡayran* (Ḥaḥṣ, Warš), *wa-aṣ-ṣiyāmu* (Ubayy Ibn Ka'b) vs. *wa-an taṣūmu* (Ḥaḥṣ, Warš). Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān. The Old Codices*, Leiden 1937, pp. 29, 120, 182, 214, 232, 246, 269, 277, 285.

²¹ Ġalāl ad-Dīn al-Maḡallī, Ġalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Ġalālayn al-Muyassar*, ed. Faḥr ad-Dīn Qabāwa, a Bayrūt 2003, vol 1, p. 28.

²² Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf an-Naġāfī, Al-Qāhira, (no date), vol. 1. p. 112.

132. (...) *wa-awṣā bihā Ibrāhīmu* (...)
 (Abraham enjoined this [creed] upon ...)
 وَأَوْصَىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ

As in the above example, in addition to the Medinese reading of Warš, we find the same variant *wa-awṣā* with two other reciters (Ibn ‘Āmir and Abū Ġa‘far). Al-Farrā’ passes over this difference limiting himself to one short sentence that both variants are correct and commonly recited.²³ Aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 923) in *Ġāmi‘ al-bayān*, after two pages of his comments on the *wa-waṣṣā bihā Ibrāhīmu* passage, mentions at the end in one concise sentence that a group of reciters reads *wa-awṣā* which actually means the same (without listing the names of the readers nor pointing to the graphic difference).²⁴ The Andalusian Abū ‘Amr ad-Dānī (d. 1053) in his *Al-Muqni‘ fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, when mentioning this variant among dozens of others, indicates on the authority of Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 838) that this passage was copied from ‘Uṭmān’s *muṣḥaf* differently into the Medinese recension (*wa-awṣā*) and the Iraqi recensions (*wa-waṣṣā*).²⁵ He devotes a whole chapter to Qur’ānic passages copied from ‘Uṭmān’s *muṣḥaf* to *maṣāḥif al-amṣār* with certain ‘additions or deficiencies’²⁶. The *Tafsīr Al-Ġalālayn* succinctly notes that “There is also the *wa-awṣā* reading”.²⁷

It is also worth noting that differences between Ḥaḥṣ and Warš are often smaller than between the orthographic variants within the printed Qur’ans of the Ḥaḥṣ reading itself.²⁸ Not rarely the Qur’ans published commonly today with an official imprimatur of Arab and/or Muslim countries have divergent orthographic variants, although all stemming from the Ḥaḥṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading. Suffice it to compare the above mentioned ‘standard’

²³ Ibidem, p. 80.

²⁴ Muḥammad Ibn Ġarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh at-Turkī, Al-Qāhira 2001, vol. 2, pp. 582–584.

²⁵ Abū ‘Amr Ibn ‘Uṭmān ad-Dānī, *Al-Muqni‘ fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Qamḥāwī, Al-Qāhira (no date), p. 112. Ad-Dānī underlines that the written tradition has always been the same as the oral one, both in terms of the chain of transmitters and in terms of the actual recitation practice.

²⁶ Ibidem, pp. 106–125.

²⁷ Al-Maḥallī, as-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr*, p. 20.

²⁸ Still another issue, not discussed in this paper, would be relatively significant differences between text variants from the remaining five out of seven Ibn Muḡāhid’s readings. These would include e.g. Q 13:43 (*wa man ‘indahu ‘ilm al-kitāb [and he who possesses knowledge of the Book] versus wa min ‘indihī ‘ilm al-kitāb [and from Him comes knowledge of the Book]*) and Q 5:6 (*iḏā qumtum ilā aṣ-ṣalāti fa-iḡsilū wuḡūhakum wa-aydikum ilā al-marāfiqi wa-imsahū bi-ru’ūsikum wa-arḡulakum ilā al-ka’bayni* [When you stand up for a prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and wash your feet up to the ankles] versus *iḏā qumtum ilā aṣ-ṣalāti fa-iḡsilū wuḡūhakum wa-aydikum ilā al-marāfiqi wa-imsahū bi-ru’ūsikum wa-arḡulikum ilā al-ka’bayni* [When you stand up for a prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe a part of your heads and your feet up to the ankles]). In general, the different grammatical case (accusative or genitive) yields a divergence in prayer observances between Sunnis and Shi’is (the Shi’i *fiqh* allows for merely wiping the feet, but not necessarily washing them). It must be added that Shi’is don’t consider the seven Ibn Muḡāhid’s readings as *mutawātira* (i.e. one cannot claim that they are actually fixed as the Islamic prophet would want them). Cf. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥūṭī, *Al-Bayān fī tafsīr Al-Qur’ān*, Tehrān 1981, pp. 123–125; see also: Christopher Melchert, ‘The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another’, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 10/2 (2008), pp. 73–87.

Egyptian / Saudi text type with the Ottoman 'standard' text type from the late 19th century (still printed in today's Turkey) in terms of the dagger alif orthography: paradoxically the first text type stayed with the defective system (except for a few personal names), whereas the latter (more modern in this regard) notes the plene alifs,²⁹ for example in the 1st sura (*Al-Fātiḥa*):

maliki yawmi ad-dīn (transliteration with a dagger alif over the *mīm* letter in *maliki*)³⁰

مَلِكْ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

vs.

*māliki yawmi ad-dīn*³¹ (written with a plene alif)

مالِكْ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

and:

ihdinā aṣ-ṣirāṭa al-mustaqīma (transliteration with a dagger alif over the *rā'* letter in *aṣ-ṣirāṭa*)

اهدنا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

vs.

ihdinā aṣ-ṣirāṭa al-mustaqīma (written with a plene alif)

اهدنا الصرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

To systematize the differences between Ḥaḥṣ and Warš, it must first be stated that there is no consequence in the use of diacritics between these readings. The two main categories that can be distinguished include the dividing hamza (*hamzat al-qaṭ'*) and deflection (*imāla*). As for the hamza, Warš generally notes the glottal stop much less frequently than Ḥaḥṣ. However, there are instances when Warš has the *hamzat al-qaṭ'*, where Ḥaḥṣ has instead the letter *wāw* or *yā'*. As for deflection, both from *alif* towards *yā'* and from *hamza* towards its vowel, and at some word endings, it is noted by the use of a large red dot in manuscripts,³² Also in the Warš version, some consonantal signs have been noted differently (e.g. the diacritics of *qāf* and *fā'*).³³

Apparently, the marginal differences in textual variants (consonantal, vowel, orthographic) have not translated over the centuries into larger, fundamental exegetical or legal differences. Muslim theologians did not attach importance to minor differences in textual variants, as long as they did not imply changes in their functional meaning and

²⁹ Puin, 'Quellen, Orthographie und Transkription', p. 608.

³⁰ E.g. as in the Lebanese modern print (with 'Utmān Tāha's calligraphy): *Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Bayrūt (no date). I omit other vocalization and recitation signs.

³¹ *Uthmanic Qur'an*, Istanbul 1993. I omit other vocalization and recitation signs.

³² Brockett, 'The value of the Ḥaḥṣ and Warsh transmissions for the textual history of the Qur'ān', p. 33.

³³ Two dots above the letter for *qāf*, one dot above the letter for *fā'* (a similar system was used in the Dome of the Rock inscription with the difference that in that inscription *fā'* had a dot above the letter, whereas *qāf* had a macron below). Leemhuis, 'Readings of the Qur'ān', p. 361.

as long as they met the theological requirements. Usually, the first and most important of such requirements was the compliance of the reading with one of the codices of the five leading cities of the caliphate (the cities which, according to the Muslim tradition, received a copy of the ‘standard’ ‘Uṭmānic recension): Medina and Mecca in the Hijaz, Damascus in Syria, Al-Kufa and Al-Basra in Iraq (the so-called *maṣāḥif al-amṣār*).³⁴ The codifier of the seven Sunni canonical readings Ibn Muğāhid (d. 936), although he does not explicitly articulate criteria for his choice of seven in his *Kitāb as-sab‘a fī al-qirā’āt*, was obviously guided by the principles of the credibility of the *isnād* (authoritative transmission) and the universal recognition by the community of believers, including scholars (broad authentication).³⁵ Another important criterion of Ibn Muğāhid was the accord of the reading with the rules of the Arabic grammar.³⁶ It should be noted that among these requirements there were no criteria related to the analysis or collation of the oldest or best manuscripts (in general, manuscripts did not play a major role in Islam in the past, even less than today), nor was Ibn Muğāhid (living in the 10th century) able to reach directly to sources of the oral tradition (which already by that time – three centuries after the rise of Islam – could not have been considered primary sources in this regard).³⁷

It is worth emphasizing that the above-mentioned criterion of compliance of the rasm with the ‘Uṭmānic recension was understood in a quite liberal way in the 10th century – several dozen instances of variances in the consonant transmission were allowed between the seven canonical readings (and later the ten and fourteen). Out of the fifty textual variants mentioned by Ibn Abī Dāwūd as-Siğistānī (d. 929) in his *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, Ibn Muğāhid rejected only four while working on his standardization.³⁸ A few centuries later, when the number of canonical readings has grown to several dozens, Ibn al-Ġazarī as the first criterion (supporting the authoritative opinions of Abū ‘Amr ad-Dānī, Makkī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 1045) and others) for the canonicity of readings mentioned the compliance with the rules of Arabic, the compliance with the text of the ‘Uṭmānic *muṣḥaf* (which, due to the lack of a critical edition of the Qur’an, should be understood also today as a version

³⁴ This belief or knowledge of the five main orthodox copies of the Qur’an (*maṣāḥif al-amṣār*) was common among Muslims in the 9th century CE. S. Nasser, op. cit., pp. 52–61.

³⁵ Ibn Muğāhid, *Kitāb as-sab‘a fī al-sirā’āt*, ed. Šawqī Dayf, Al-Qāhira 1972. Ibn Muğāhid rejects all readings incompliant with the ‘Uṭmānic text type, including the companion codex by Ibn Mas‘ūd, according to which, as he himself admitted, the Qur’an was recited by most Kufans in the past. Leemhuis, ‘Readings of the Qur’an’, p. 356.

³⁶ In a broader context illustrating Ibn Muğāhid’s approach to work on the canon of *qirā’āt* (as well as the attitude of other people towards this issue), we can quote the following tradition mentioned by the historian Aḍ-Ḍahabī (d. 1348): “‘Abd Al-Wāḥid Ibn Abī Hāšim said that a man once asked Ibn Muğāhid: Why do you not elaborate your own reading so that others can recite it after you? [Ibn Muğāhid] replied: We need to make efforts to memorize the readings of our imams rather than compile our own readings”. Moreover, Ibn Muğāhid advised not to choose one’s favorite readings (out of the orthodox seven), but to stick to the one recited by the local imam (unless it’s non-canonical). Šams ad-Dīn aḍ-Ḍahabī ad-Dimašqī, *Ta’rīḥ al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mašāhīr wa-al-a’lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd as-Salām Tadmurī, Bayrūt 1992, vol. 33, p. 146.

³⁷ Cf. Christopher Melchert, ‘Ibn Muğāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur’anic Readings’, *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000), pp. 5–22.

³⁸ Leemhuis, ‘Readings of the Qur’an’, p. 356.

of the popular consensus of the faithful – *iğmā'*) and the authoritative transmission (*isnād*).³⁹ Text versions meeting only the first and the last criterion (e.g. variants from the Ibn Mas'ūd codex) were considered by some scholars to be acceptable in prayer, but not in recitation (Ibn al-Ğazarī himself writes that there is no scholarly agreement on this). Discussing orthographic variations etc., as it is done in modern text criticism, was not a point of concern by Muslim exegetes by then. Throughout centuries they were treating text variants rather only as graphic variants. And since in most cases the meaning of the message was not affected, the graphics weren't noteworthy, neither for exegetical purposes nor any others. For Muslim scholars, the Qur'an was not as much a literary document or a literary testimony, as a written manifestation of God's living spirit. Aṭ-Ṭabarī, known for enumerating all available explanations and interpretations for Qur'anic verses, conciliatorily believed that multiple readings are equally important, as long as they do not imply a change in the commonly accepted meaning of a given Qur'anic passage.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the context of the companion readings of the Qur'an, As-Suyūṭī in *Al-Itqān* paraphrases the words of Abu 'Ubayd (from *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*)⁴¹ indicating that “*the aim of the non-canonical readings is to interpret the canonical ones and explain their meanings*”.⁴²

For centuries, the existence of text variants has been the object of interest of Muslim scholars primarily for exegetical reasons, and not for criticism of the literary text, hence there was no urgent need to reach for the oldest manuscripts. This should by no means be understood as an exclusive characteristic of the Muslim tradition, but such appears to have been the general approach to orality and literacy in the distant past.⁴³ When in the 10th century Ibn Muğāhid established (or systematized) the norms for the orthodoxy of the Qur'anic text, what remained from the transmission of the oral tradition were only written, long, and not always coherent lists of transmitters of this tradition (the isnads). Apart from them Ibn Muğāhid was also primarily guided by pragmatism – by the written tradition (i.e. the rasm of the 'Uṭmānic recension as of the 10th century C.E.) and the broad authentication (of various textual variants). On the other hand, for scholars of the Oriental studies, the variants have always constituted, above all, guidelines in their quest to reconstruct the history of the Qur'anic text as a literary and historical document.⁴⁴

³⁹ M. Al-Ğazarī, *An-Našr fī al-qirā'āt al-'ašr*, pp. 9 ff.

⁴⁰ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Ğāmi' al-bayān*.

⁴¹ Abu 'Ubayd Al-Harawī, *Kitāb faḍā'il Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Marwān al-'Aṭiyya, Dimašq-Bayrūt (no date), p. 326.

⁴² „*Al-maqṣad min al-qirā'a aš-šādḍa tafsīr al-qirā'a al-mašhūra wa-tabyīn ma'ānīhā (...)*”. Ğalāl ad-Dīn As-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muṣṭafa Šayḥ Muṣṭafa, Mu'assat ar-Risala Našīrūn, Bayrūt 2008, p. 175.

⁴³ Cf. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and literacy the technologizing of the word*, London–New York 1982; cf. in the Qur'anic context: Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, Lanham 2011 (especially pp. 141–155).

⁴⁴ See e.g.: *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx, Leiden–Boston 2011. Also on the divergent cultural approaches to text-critical studies on the Qur'an, with oral and written traditions in the background, see more recently: Marcin Grodzki, 'Reaching back to the Qur'an's literary (pre-)history. Source text for the critical edition wanted', in:

So far, a general look at the relics of textual variants from the readings of Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim, Warṣ ‘an Nāfi‘, as well as other canonical readings, and also the results of modern, more detailed analyses of the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim recension itself,⁴⁵ seem to confirm Otto Pretzel’s hypothesis from nearly a century ago, that the oldest, surviving works by Muslim scholars devoted to the standardized canonical readings do not record the actual state of the oral tradition from the 7th century, but that the variants of the oral tradition as codified in the 10th century have their origin only in the late written tradition (probably also only from the 10th century, possibly not much older).⁴⁶ However, at this stage, we can neither rule out the hypothesis once put forward by Adrian Brockett (although I do not find it justified) who argued that differences between Ḥafṣ and Warṣ come from even earlier, pre-exegetical times of both the written and oral transmission, and therefore they may have some significance for the textual history of the Qur’an, preceding the unified version of the caliph ‘Uṭmān.⁴⁷

References

- Abdel Haleem, Muhammad, ‘Qur’anic Orthography. The Written Representation Of the Recited Text Of The Qur’an’, *Islamic Quarterly* 38/3 (1994), pp. 171–192.
- Bergsträßer, Gotthelf, ‘Koranlesung in Kairo’, *Der Islam* 20/1 (1932), pp. 1–42.
- Brockett, Adrian, ‘The value of the Ḥafṣ and Warsh transmissions for the textual history of the Qur’an’, in: *Approaches to The History of Interpretation of The Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, pp. 31–45.
- Aḍ-Ḍahabī, Šams ad-Dīn, *Ta’rīḥ al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mašāhīr wa-al-a’lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd as-Salām Tadmūrī, Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, Bayrūt 1992.
- Ad-Dānī, Abū ‘Amr Ibn ‘Uṭmān, *Al-Muqni fī rasm mašāḥif al-amṣār*, ed. Muḥammad al-Qamḥāwī, Maktabat al-Kuliyyāt al-Azhariyya, Al-Qāhira (n. d.).
- Al-Farrā’, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā, *Ma‘ānī Al-Qur’an*, ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf an-Nağātī, Dār al-Miṣriyya li-at-Ta’alīf wa-at-Tarğama, Al-Qāhira (no date).
- Grodzki, Marcin, ‘Reaching back to the Qur’an’s literary (pre-)history. Source text for the critical edition wanted’, in: *Oriental Languages and Civilizations*, eds. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, Marek Piela, Tomasz Majtczak, Jagiellonian University Press, Cracow 2020, pp. 265–274.
- Al-Harawī, Abū ‘Ubayd, *Kitāb fadā’il Al-Qur’an*, ed. Marwān al-‘Aṭiyya, Dār Ibn Kaṭīr, Dimašq–Bayrūt (n. d.).
- Al-Ḥū’ī, Abū al-Qāsim, *Al-Bayān fī tafsiṛ Al-Qur’an*, Anwār al-Hudā, Tehrān 1981.
- Ibn al-Ġazārī, Muḥammad, *An-Našr fī al-qirā’āt al-ašr*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Bayrūt (no date).
- Ibn Anas, Mālik, *Al-Muwatta’*, Dār Iḥyā’ at-Turāṭ al-‘Arabī, Bayrūt 1985.
- Ibn Muğāhid, *Kitāb as-sab’a fī al-qirā’āt*, ed. Šawqī Ḍayf, Dār al-Ma‘ārif bi-Miṣr, Al-Qāhira 1972.

Oriental Languages and Civilizations, eds. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, Marek Piela, Tomasz Majtczak, Cracow 2020, pp. 265–274.

⁴⁵ E.g. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur’an Manuscripts*.

⁴⁶ Otto Pretzl, *Die Fortführung des Apparatus Criticus zum Koran*, “Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften”, Heft 5, München 1934, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁷ The ‘Uṭmānic readings (as sorted out by Ibn Muğāhid) are most likely not of exegetical origin, or at least did not arise out of a crucial exegetical dispute. They are therefore of the utmost value for the textual history of the Qur’an. Brockett, ‘The value of the Ḥafṣ and Warsh transmissions for the textual history of the Qur’an’, p. 43.

- Al-Imam Ahmad Ali Muhammad, *Variant Readings Of The Quran. A Critical Study Of Their Historical And Linguistic Origins*, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon (Virginia, USA) 1998.
- Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān. The Old Codices*, Brill, Leiden 1937.
- Leemhuis, Frederik, *Readings of the Qur'ān*, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe, Brill, Leiden–Boston 2004, vol. 4, pp. 353–363.
- Al-Mahallī, Ġalāl ad-Dīn, As-Suyūṭī Ġalāl ad-Dīn, *Tafsīr Al-Ġalālayn al-muyassar*, ed. Fahr ad-Dīn Qabāwa, Maktabat Lubnān Nāšīrūn, Bayrūt 2003.
- Melchert, Christian, 'Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings', *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000), pp. 5–22.
- Melchert, Christopher, 'The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10/2 (2008), pp. 73–87.
- Nasser, Shady H., *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān. The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhdh*, Brill, Leiden–Boston 2013.
- Ong, Walter J., *Orality and literacy the technologizing of the word*, Routledge, London–New York 1982.
- Pretzl, Otto, *Die Fortführung des Apparatus Criticus zum Koran*, "Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften", Heft 5, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, München 1934.
- Puin, Gerd-Rüdiger, 'Quellen, Orthographie und Transkription moderner Drucke des Qur'ān', in: *Vom Koran zum Islam. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran*, eds. Markus Groß, Karl-Heinz Ohlig, Verlag Hans Schiler, Berlin 2009, pp. 606–641.
- Reynolds, Gabriel S., *The Qur'an and the Bible. Text and Commentary*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2018.
- Aš-Šāfi'ī, Abū 'Abd Allāh, *Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī an-Nisābūrī, Dār Ihyā' al-'Ulūm, Bayrūt (n. d.).
- Sinai, Nicolai, 'When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part I', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77/2 (2014), pp. 273–292.
- Sinai, Nicolai, 'When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part II', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77/3 (2014), pp. 509–521.
- Small, Keith E., *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2011.
- As-Suyūṭī, Ġalāl ad-Dīn, *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muṣṭafa Šayḥ Muṣṭafa, Mu'assat ar-Risāla Nāšīrūn, Bayrūt 2008.
- Aṭ-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad Ibn Ġarīr, *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy Al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh at-Turkī, Ḥiġr li-aṭ-Ṭibā'a wa-an-Našr wa-at-Tawzī' wa-al-I'lān, Al-Qāhira 2001.
- Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Dār Ibn Kaṭīr, Bayrūt (n. d.).
- The Noble Qur'ān as Transmitted by Warsh*, Dār Ibn Kaṭīr, Dimašq-Bayrūt 1998.
- Uthmanic Qur'an*, Istanbul 1993.