The Oxford Handbook *of* QUR'ANIC STUDIES

- Offers a definitive collection of studies covering the full spectrum of contemporary international scholarship associated with the study of the Qur'an
- An indispensable resource for the academic study of the Qur'an, mapping milestones in the field
- Provides detailed reviews of key topics and concepts

Contributors

Muhammad Abdel Haleem, Kamal Abu-Deeb, Asma Afsaruddin, Anna Akasoy, Muntasir F. Al-Hamad, Ahmad Al-Jallad, Sulaiman bin Ali bin Ameir Al-Shueili, Herbert Berg, Sheila S. Blair, Stephen R. Burge, Massimo Campanini, Michel Cuypers, François Déroche, Yasin Dutton, Ayman A. El-Desouky, Jeffrey Einboden, Ziad Elmarsafy, Reuven Firestone, Geert Jan van Gelder, Sebastian Günther, John F. Healey, Valerie J. Hoffman, Tariq Jaffer, Jules Janssens, Maher Jarrar, Anthony H. Johns, Marianna Klar, Alexander Knysh, Bruce Lawrence, Oliver Leaman, Joseph E. Lowry, Ulrika Mårtensson, Mustansir Mir, Ebrahim Moosa, Robert Morrison, Harry Munt, Martin Nguyen, Johanna Pink, Ismail Poonawala, Efim A. Rezvan, Andrew Rippin, Sajjad Rizvi, Neal Robinson, Walid A. Saleh, Mustafa Shah, Nicolai Sinai, Stefan Sperl, Roberto Tottoli, Kees Versteegh, Stefan Wild, M. Brett Wilson, A. H. Mathias Zahniser

Shah &
Abdel Haleem

The Oxford Handbook *of* QUR'ANIC STUDIES

EDITED BY

MUSTAFA **SHAH**

MUHAMMAD **ABDEL HALEEM**

Traditionally revered as the literal word of God, the Qur'an serves as Islam's sacred book of revelation. Accordingly, its statements and pronouncements rest at the core of the beliefs and teachings that have inexorably defined expressions of the Islamic faith. Indeed, over the centuries, engaging with and poring over the contents of the Qur'an inspired an impressive range of traditional scholarship. Notwithstanding its religious pre-eminence, the Qur'an is also considered to be the matchless masterpiece of the Arabic language and its impact as a text can be discerned in all aspects of the Arabic literary tradition. Presenting contributions from leading experts in the field, *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* offers an authoritative collection of chapters that guide readers through the gamut of themes, subjects, and debates that have dominated the academic study of the Qur'an and its literary heritage. These range from chapters that explore the text's language, vocabulary, style, and structure, to detailed surveys of its contents, concepts, transmission, literary influence, historical significance, commentary tradition, and even the scholarship devoted to translations. With the aim of serving as an indispensable reference resource, the *Handbook* assesses the implications of research discourses and discussions shaping the study of the Qur'an today. There exists no single volume devoted to such a broad review of the scholarship on the Qur'an and its rich commentary tradition.

Mustafa Shah is Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Muhammad Abdel Haleem is Professor of Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
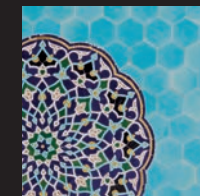
The Oxford Handbook *of* QUR'ANIC STUDIES

OXFORD

CHAPTER 13

....

THE CORPUS OF QURʾANIC READINGS (QIRĀʾĀT)

History, Synthesis, and Authentication

....

MUSTAFA SHAH

ACCORDING to traditional Islamic narratives, when the third caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (d. 35/656) appointed a committee to prepare a standardized version of the Qurʾan, the codices that were finally approved provided a skeletal outline (*rasm*) of the Qurʾanic text (Figure 13.1). Constellated around the skeletal trace of these codices, the *qirāʾāt* or variant readings constitute the wide range of vocalic and consonantal variants which were associated with the recitation of the sacred text. Over later historical periods, when transmitting the text of the Qurʾan, expert readers from garrison towns and cities formulated amalgamated selections and sets (*ikhtiyārāt*) of readings which preserved and systematized the various manifestations of the ways in which the text of the Qurʾan was vocalized and transmitted. A rich corpus of materials was amassed as a result of these processes of selection. Although classical Islamic sources maintain that over the centuries the *qirāʾāt* were preserved with remarkable fidelity by a combination of oral and written means, the question of their historical genesis, preservation, and synthesis has been widely debated in studies of the textual transmission of the Qurʾan and its codification. Examinations of the material of variant readings have also been critical to helping scholars understand key developments in early legal, exegetical, and linguistic discourses, underlining their value as a literary source.

Inspired by previous endeavours in the field, a catalogue of the most widely circulated readings listing the specific vocalization preferences of seven readers was compiled by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) in the distinctively titled *Kitāb al-Sabʿa* (the Book of Seven). In the text's insightful introduction it is explained that the book's vaunted aim was to provide

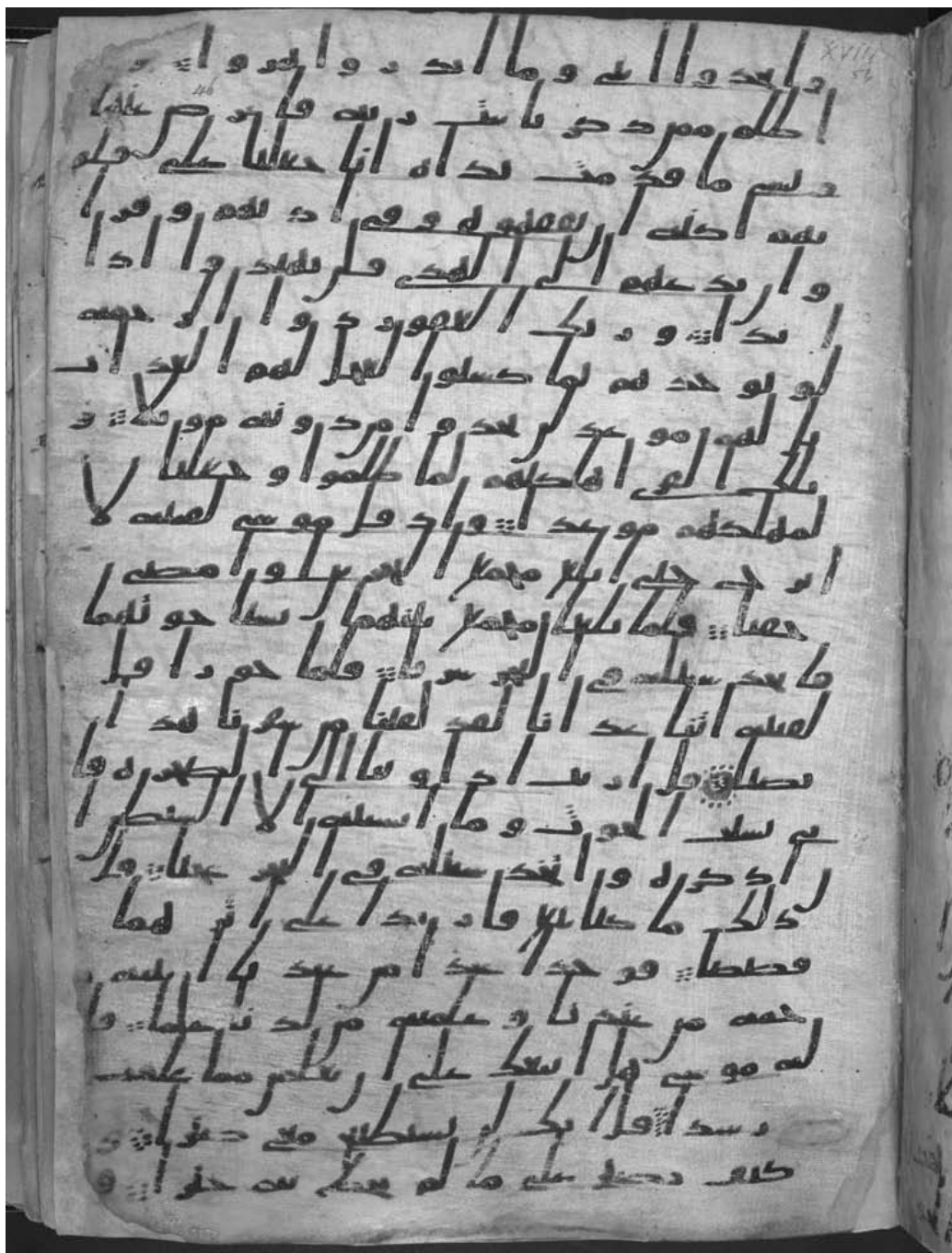**FIGURE 13.1** A folio from the British Library's oldest manuscript of the Qur'an, Or. 2165, featuring verses from Q. 18:57–68 (The Cave). The manuscript comprises 121 folios containing over two-thirds of the complete text. © British Library Board.

a register of readings (*qirāʾāt* or *ḥurūf*) which had acquired prominence in Ḥijāz, Iraq, and Syria (the Levant), citing their chief transmitters (Ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*, 45). With its impressive marshalling of the sources, works such as the *Kitāb al-Sabʿa* were effectively isolating instances of differences and points of agreement among readers, which were often confined to single lexical items within a verse of the Qurʾan. The implication is that there existed a consensus among readers regarding the vocalization of the remaining segments of lexical items in such verses. In later years scholars developed criteria for dividing variants into canonical and non-canonical categories. Generally, variations among canonical readings tend to be confined to vocalic and consonantal variants and include instances of differences over the use of suffixation, prefixation, and conjunctions. Non-canonical categories of variants included not only vocalic, consonantal, and orthographical peculiarities, but also featured evident departures from the standard skeletal text and acute forms of exegetical interpolation. The importance attached to the circumscription of subtle variations among *qirāʾāt* would appear to underpin the significance of the Qurʾan as a devotional text. The fact that a specific reading was classed as being canonical meant that it was valid for ritual use in acts of worship and formal recitation; despite this, even non-canonical *variae lectiones* were frequently adduced by scholars in their writings to illustrate legal, exegetical, and grammatical arguments and perspectives.

In the Islamic world today the most popular standard version of the text is vocalized and recited in accordance with the corpus of readings selected by ʿĀṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd (d. 127/745) and transmitted by Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (d. 180/796). It was used as the basis for the standard Egyptian edition of the Qurʾan which appeared in 1924. In North and West Africa the reading of Nāfiʿ ibn Abī al-Nuʿāym (d. 169/785) as transmitted by Warsh (d. 197/812) enjoys pre-eminence (Brockett 1988).[1] However, these readings constitute just two of the seven sets of readings collated in Ibn Mujāhid's book, intimating that the tradition of canonical readings was never viewed as being confined to one specific set of readings, but rather encompassed a distinctly larger corpus of materials. The other five canonical readings included the sets of reading transmitted on the authority of the Damascene Ibn ʿĀmir (d. 118/736); the Meccan Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738); the Basran Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ (d. c.154–6/770–2); and the two Kufans Ḥamza ibn Ḥabīb (d. 156/773 or 158/775) and al-Kisāʾī (d. 189/804). In the modern Islamic world traditional scholarship devoted to the study and transmission of the wider corpus of variants is still a revered endeavour. In the medieval context exegetes, jurists, and grammarians were fully aware of the extensive corpus of *qirāʾāt*, including non-canonical *lectiones*, coordinating the citation of these materials in their works. Among these scholars, the axiomatic view was that they embodied inimitable elements of the Qurʾan's literary countenance.

---

[1] Recounting the biography of Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ in his *Ghāyat al-nihāya*, Ibn al-Jazarī stated that during his lifetime (ninth/fifteenth century), Abū ʿAmr's corpus of readings was prevalent in al-Shām, al-Ḥijāz, Yemen, and Egypt. He recounts that Ibn ʿĀmir's readings were in widespread use in al-Shām until the fourth/tenth century. Abū ʿAmr's two famed narrators were al-Dūrī and al-Sūsī (Jeffery 1946).

Early Academic Scholarship: Analysis of the *Qirā'āt*

A distinctive phase in the study of the textual history of the Qur'an and the corpus of *qirā'āt* was inaugurated by the publication of Theodor Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorâns* (1860), which was revised and expanded by his student and friend Friedrich Schwally (1863–1919); editions of the text appeared in 1909 and 1919.[2] Supplements to the work were completed by Gotthelf Bergsträsser (1886–1933) during 1926 and 1929 and then by Otto Pretzl in (1893–1941), who published them all in his 1938 edition of the work. The 1860 and 1909 editions of the *Geschichte* included sections on the structural framework of the contents of the Qur'an; the significance of its collection; chronology; the question of biblical influences; traditional accounts of the synthesis of variants; orthography; the transmission of the text; and 'sectarian' criticisms of the 'Uthmānic collection (Schwally 1909: 234ff.).

The supplements of Bergsträsser and Pretzl brought the subject of variant readings and the classical scholarship on *qirā'āt* into even sharper focus. Underscoring their interest in variants, Bergsträsser and Pretzl had already published a number of critical editions of manuscripts and studies of readings. Bergsträsser had begun work on editing part of Ibn Jinnī's *Kitāb al-Muḥtasab* and Ibn Khālawayhi's *Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhdh al-Qur'ān*, both of which were composed in the fourth/tenth century and provided inventories of non-canonical variant readings (*qirā'āt shādhdha*) (Bergsträsser 1933b). He also edited the *Ghāyat al-nihāya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrā'*, a biographical survey of expert reciters of the Qur'an which straddles early and classical historical periods. It was compiled by Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429), who was the author of the seminal *al-Nashr fī'l-qirā'āt al-ʿashr*, a work which collated ten sets of readings and featured an expanded introduction teeming with information on variants and classical literature devoted to their study. In 1930 Pretzl published the *Kitāb al-Taysīr*, a short didactic treatise on the seven canonical readings selected by Ibn Mujāhid and in 1932 the *Kitāb al-Muqniʿ fī rasm al-maṣāḥif*, which presented records of orthographical features of the 'Uthmānic codices; both texts were composed by the Andalusian expert on readings Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī (d. 444/1053). Many of the earlier literary sources which preserve materials on readings, including exegetical works by grammarians, had yet to be discovered, let alone published. Earlier, Nöldeke had at his disposal manuscripts of the works of al-Dānī, Ibn al-Jazarī, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505); select exegetical texts such as the Qur'an commentaries of al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), and al-Bayḍāwī (d. *c.*719/1319); he also had access to various Qur'anic fragments held in Berlin (Nöldeke 1860: xi–xii). Among the subjects covered in the third part of the revised edition of the *Geschichte* were the orthography and synthesis of variant readings; key concepts and theories used in the

---

[2] Schwally died in 1919 having completed most of the work on the first two volumes of the revised *Geschichte*. See the Introduction to this edition for a discussion of the historical background of Nöldeke's work.

classification and transmission of *qirāʾāt*; non-canonical readings; a review of personal codices attributed to leading Companions; Qur'anic palimpsests; processes of canonization; systems of recitation in the medieval periods; genres associated with the study of *qirāʾāt*; and a summary of the state of research on manuscripts of the Qur'an. Steered by their philological expertise and training, Bergsträsser and Pretzl had aimed at developing an elaborately detailed overview of the extensive corpus of materials that they hoped would contribute to the development of an *'apparatus criticus'* and thereby assist the process of circumscribing crucial historical phases in the textual transmission of the Qur'an (Bergsträsser 1930).

Focusing on the early historical periods, Bergsträsser commenced his study of the corpus of *variae lectiones* with a discussion of the various anecdotes which mention the existence of linguistic inconsistencies and irregularities in the codices commissioned by ʿUthmān. One of these intimates that when the final copies of the edited codices were presented to the third caliph he stated: 'There are errors in these which the Arabs will put right' (al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī*, 2:293–4). Sensing that such dicta were intentionally designed to provide justification for the correction of errors in the official codices, Bergsträsser made the case that such prevailing attitudes led to the proliferation of variants as expert early readers readily adopted an untrammelled approach towards emendation based on the view that such errors did not impinge upon the quality of the original composition of the text, but were an indictment of those responsible for its transcription. His assessment presupposes that a considerable proportion of the body of *qirāʾāt* was generated following the imposition of the ʿUthmānic codices (Bergsträsser 1938: 2–4; and 104). Classical literary sources differ concerning the number of codices dispatched by ʿUthmān to key cities and garrison towns: some accounts mention that copies were sent to Kufa, Basra, Damascus, and Medina; other anecdotes record his dispatching seven codices (al-Dānī, *al-Muqniʿ*, 9; cf. Cook 2004; Hamdan 2010; Comerro 2012; Sinai 2014). In addition to the *imām muṣḥaf ʿUthmān* (the primary codex), the early literary sources regularly refer to the *maṣāḥif al-amṣār* (the metropolitan codices) and the class of personal codices identified with revered figures among the Companions (*maṣāḥif al-ṣaḥāba*) such as the codices of Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652) and Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. 29/649 or 35/656) (Beck 1947). Following a different ordering of chapters, these personal codices incorporated a wide range of vocalic and consonantal variants, exegetical glosses, orthographical variants, and often featured changes in the sequence of the word order of verses (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 29–30).

Recognizing the importance attached to transmission, Bergsträsser did accept that individual cities preserved and disseminated their local variants with remarkable acuity (Bergsträsser 1938: 8–9). He also held that linguistic considerations influenced the synthesis of readings, deducing that this led to an exponential growth of material which percolated through to supplement an already burgeoning body of variant readings (Bergsträsser 1938: 2–4). In his discussion of variants which he touched upon in his study of the exegetical tradition, it was Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921) who drew a correlation between the genesis of variants and the embryonic nature of the Arabic script (Goldziher 1920: 4–5). The early codices were transcribed in a *scriptio defectiva*: namely, the orthography lacked a fully developed system for the annotation of long or short vowels;

in addition, the use of diacritics to distinguish specific consonants was applied in a some-what erratic fashion (Blair 2006: 119). Goldziher too made the case that the exigencies of dogma led to the modification of the vocalization of a number of *variae lectiones*. Referring to the influence of exegetical factors in the growth of readings, he reasoned that the corpus of *qirāʾāt* was generated in the post-ʿUthmānic period (Goldziher 1920: 4–30).

Despite their relevance to discussions about variants, Bergsträsser did not address in detail the views of Karl Vollers, who, referring to specific remnants of non-canonical *qirāʾāt*, theorized that the dialect of the early Meccans was not consistent with the Arabs' formal literary diction in so far as it did not utilize a system of grammatical inflection; according to his thesis, the early grammarians assiduously worked at reconciling the language of the original revelations with the formal language (Vollers 1906). Vollers's theory was defended by Paul Kahle who questioned whether the classical Arabic diction was originally used for the recitation of the text (Kahle 1949). Kahle did go on to challenge some of the suppositions of Bergsträsser and Pretzl concerning the actual origin of *qirāʾāt*. In a more recent context Günter Lüling developed the thesis that the text of the Qur'an and its associated *variae lectiones* were formally superimposed onto an *urtext* which comprised pre-Islamic Christian strophic hymns. Luling's contention rested on the view that the original skeleton was reconfigured and animated by the addition of diacritical and related markings to ensure it supported the Arabic diction; within such a thesis, traditional *variae lectiones* were assumed to be spurious constructions and additions. Christoph Luxenberg, seemingly inspired by the work of Alphonse Mingana, who had referred to Syriac influences on the Qur'an, maintained that the underlying meaning of the lexical and syntactic structures of the Qur'an had to be sought in 'Syro-Aramaic', which he suggested was a branch of Aramaic used in the Near East. Referring to the unpointed and unvowelled script of the original text, and seemingly following the line of argument taken by Lüling, he too asserted that later variant read-ings were contrived by Islamic scholars as they adapted the original text through the calculated addition of diacritical markings (Luxenberg 2007: 22–32).

On the subject of the variants attributed to the Companions Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Bergsträsser emphasized that they provide only a glimpse of the vast store of non-canonical variants that existed in these early periods. For these reasons, he postu-lated that the ʿUthmānic recension was able to attain greater authority only once the lib-eral approach to the treatment of the text was gradually relinquished (Bergsträsser 1938: 103–5 and 149; cf. Beck 1939 and 1950). Maintaining that the existence of records and traces of the non-ʿUthmānic materials intimated that the process of the standardization of the text was a gradual one, Bergsträsser concluded that it was near completion when Ibn Mujāhid authored his famous *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*, a work in which the principle of sup-port for readings promulgated by the majority prevailed. In his estimation Ibn Mujāhid had successfully relegated the study and dissemination of isolate and independent vari-ants; and he was instrumental in insisting that readings which had high levels of trans-mission should be the focus of attention. Bergsträsser inferred that Ibn Mujāhid's project was the embodiment of 'a restrictive traditionalism' (Bergsträsser 1938: 138 and 152). On the historical importance of non-canonical variants, Bergsträsser contended that it was only later within the reading tradition that the term *shādhdh* evolved to connote

those readings which were considered non-canonical (Bergsträsser 1938:155; cf. Hamdan 2006a). Still, it should be noted that the study of these *shādhdh* materials was considered an integral element of classical *qirāʾāt* scholarship and an enthusiastic interest in them is to be found in classical grammatical texts; moreover, it is important to bear in mind distinctions regarding the import of this term in the context of *qirāʾāt* scholarship and its use as a *terminus technicus* in hadith literature. (Shah 2016: 307). Bergsträsser died in a tragic mountaineering accident in August 1933, before he could complete the final sections of his supplement to the *Geschichte*. The main parts of his supplement had already been published during 1926 and 1929, after which he spent some time poring over the wealth of sources he scrupulously assembled for the final sections. Relying upon notes and manuscript materials left by his colleague, Pretzl went on to finalize the work. Indeed, in the introduction to the 1938 edition of the *Geschichte* he alluded to his faithfully following the general contours of the scheme for the work which he had previously discussed with Bergsträsser, who had requested that he concentrate his efforts on examining variants in the manuscript sources. Among the *Geschichte*'s contributors, Pretzl was the only figure to witness the actual publication of the completed edition of the revised work; in 1941 he was killed in an aircraft crash during the course of the Second World War.[3]

Towards the Creation of an Archive

With the aim of creating an archive of materials for the study of the textual transmission of the Qurʾan, Bergsträsser and Pretzl had over the years been busily engaged in the task of collating various unpublished *qirāʾāt* manuscripts and copies of codices. Motivated by the appeal of acquiring early materials, they made excursions to the Middle East to photograph images of ancient Qurʾan manuscripts using the newly invented Leica camera. In their endeavours they were assisted by Helmut Ritter (1892–1971), who was previously the Chair of Oriental Languages at the University of Hamburg, but who had taken up a position in Istanbul in 1926 and was able to gain access to the vast collections of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts haphazardly dispersed across the various libraries in the capital and other cities. At the behest of Bergsträsser, the Bavarian Academy of Sciences set up a 'Korankommission' to support the task; in later years following the death of Bergsträsser, Pretzl set about organizing the Academy's archive of materials. Prior to his death, Bergsträsser had been preparing the aforementioned critical edition of Ibn Khālawayhi's *Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhdh al-Qurʾān*. Arthur Jeffery, an Australian philologist with an enthusiastic interest in the materials of *variae lectiones*, was already assisting with the Cairo end of the publication and had previously agreed with Bergsträsser to prepare for him an appendix which compared citations in Ibn Khālawayhi's text with materials found in other sources. Upon Bergsträsser's death, Jeffery was invited to write the

---

[3] Pretzl supervised Edmund Beck's dissertation on the *qirāʾāt* which are cited in Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*. Beck was the author of a number of seminal studies on *variae lectiones*.

foreword for the work in which he mentioned that it was decided to publish the work without his appendix, producing only the materials prepared by Bergsträsser. In fact, since 1926, Jeffery had also been closely collaborating with Bergsträsser and Pretzl on their archive project for which he was in the process of producing a critical edition of Ibn Abī Dāwūd's *Kitāb al-māṣāḥif*, a text published some years later in a volume entitled *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾan: The Old Codices* (Ibn Khālawayhi: *Mukhtaṣar*: foreword). In the text he included excerpts and passages citing Qurʾanic non-canonical variants attributed to the personal codices of the Companions; these he had 'gathered from the commentaries, lexica, *qirāʾāt* books and such sources' (Jeffery 1937: vii).

Commencing his edition of the *Kitāb al-māṣāḥif* by stating that it was offered to students as 'a contribution to the problem of the history of the Qurʾan text', Jeffery stated that eventually he hoped to be in a position to produce a critical edition of the Qurʾan. Jeffery had, like Bergsträsser and Pretzl before him, subscribed to the view that within traditional narratives, the historical significance of the non-canonical *variae lectiones* linked to pre-ʿUthmānic codices had been obscured for ideological reasons. He held that in the later Islamic tradition the study of non-canonical variants (*shādhdha* or *shawādh*) had gravitated towards becoming a restricted enterprise and was somewhat frowned upon and discouraged, although, in fact, the material continued to be engaged with and analysed across a range of classical contexts and discourses, including law, theology, exegesis, and grammar. Jeffery averred that works produced within the genre of *maṣāḥif* literature, such as Ibn Abī Dāwūd's book on codices, demonstrated that the text canonized by the caliph ʿUthmān 'was just one out of many rival texts'; indeed, much of Jeffery's work was dedicated to the discovery and reconstruction of this non-canonical archive and related pre-ʿUthmānic substrate texts (Jeffery 1937: 10). He went on to state that 'we have only such readings as were useful for purposes of *tafsīr* and were considered to be sufficiently near orthodoxy to be allowed to survive' (Jeffery 1937: 10). Connected to the archive project was Jeffery's publication on *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*. In the *Geschichte* Pretzl did point out that Jeffery had been working on the establishment of an *apparatus criticus* based on an overview of Ḥafṣ's version (Pretzl 1938: 273). In a 1946 lecture Jeffery himself explained that his aim was to produce a 'consonantal text in the Kufic script, based on the oldest MSS available to us, with a critically edited Ḥafṣ text facing it on the opposite pages and with a complete collection of all known variant readings given at the foot of the page' (Jeffery 1946).

In later studies Jeffery did elaborate upon what he believed to be the principal stages of the standardization of the text of the Qurʾan, observing that it was initially defined by the imposition of ʿUthmān's *textus receptus*, which was produced at a time when many non-ʿUthmānic texts were in circulation. Reflecting upon the proliferation of variants, Jeffery commented that although ʿUthmān had ordered the destruction of all codices which conflicted with his official version, the copy produced by him was 'a bare consonantal text, with no punctuation, no points to distinguish similar consonants, and no vowel or other orthographic signs', which led to 'considerable liberty of interpretation' (Jeffery 1948: 1). Jeffery explained that following the first attempts by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (ruled 65–86/685–705) and his governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 95/714) to settle 'some of these difficulties', eventually 'the tradition as to pointing the

ḥurūf, and as to the *qirāʾa*, or vowelling of them, naturally tended to crystallize under a succession of great teachers, whose systems would be transmitted by their pupils, until in 322 A.H., these traditions came to be fixed in the well-known Seven Systems by a decision of the Wazīrs Ibn Muqla (d. 328/940) and Ibn ʿĪsā (d. 335/946), acting under the guidance of the great savant Ibn Mujāhid' (Jeffery 1948: 1). He concluded that during these periods there had emerged a general consensus concerning the legal status of the liturgical validity of *variae lectiones* which prescribed three conditions for the acceptance of readings: they had to be consistent with the skeletal outline of the official codices; to conform with the diction of Arabic; and be supported by broad consensus (*ijmāʿ*). Although some of these criteria were applied much earlier within the tradition as evidenced by early grammatical commentaries such as al-Farrāʾ's *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, Jeffery's insistence is that the imposition of seven canonical readings by Ibn Mujāhid was prefigured by arguments about the legitimacy of *ikhtiyār*: namely, the regimented practice of synthesizing or amalgamating variant readings. The concept was flagged in Bergsträsser's supplement to the *Geschichte* in which it was noted that *ikhtiyār* was the process by which a reader, who principally adhered to a selection of *variae lectiones* acquired from an earlier authority, differed with him in a limited number of instances, favouring his own synthesis of the material (Bergsträsser 1938: 134). Yet for Jeffery, *ikhtiyār* inventively turned on the application of 'mental judgement on how the skeleton consonantal text should be pointed and vowelled for correct recitation'; and he high-lighted the trials of two famous readers Ibn Shanabūdh (d. 328/939) and Ibn Miqsam (d. 354/965), who separately adopted speculative techniques in the amalgamation of *lectiones* which brought them into conflict with the ruling authorities; both figures were compelled to disavow and retract such approaches, despite protesting that they were following the conventions of their reader peers (Shah 2004: 78–9). Jeffery felt that at stake was the validity of the continued practice of *ikhtiyār* by readers and that the industrious efforts of Ibn Mujāhid were designed to curb the resort to this procedure (Jeffery 1948: 2).

The work of Nöldeke, Bergsträsser, Pretzl, and Jeffery constitutes a milestone in the study of the corpus of *variae lectiones*. They introduced a whole range of manuscript sources and materials germane to their study, providing intriguing insights into the early and classical traditions of learning devoted to readings; moreover, the sections of the *Geschichte* dealing with the late medieval tradition of *qirāʾāt* and the fecund body of literature produced in these periods remain indispensable resources for the study of variants. Ultimately, their efforts laid the foundations for later endeavour in the field and the archive of materials initially created by Bergsträsser and Pretzl served as the inspiration for the 2007 Corpus Coranicum project supported by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities which has made use of their archival sources along with early Qurʾan manuscript materials collated from around the world. The fate of the original archive was the subject of much speculation as Otto Pretzl's student, Anton Spitaler, was seemingly vague about rumours that it was destroyed when the Bavarian Academy of Science was bombed towards the end of the Second World War in 1944, although even

Jeffery lamented in a 1946 lecture that the whole of the archive 'was destroyed by bomb action and by fire'. However, the archive had survived, and remained in the possession of Spitaler throughout his lifetime. Accounts of the loss and discovery of the archives, and even the events surrounding the deaths of Bergsträsser and Pretzl, have been sensationalized to imply that the archive contains materials which were likely to be considered controversial and thereby potentially destabilize normative views of the history of the text; the inference is that Spitaler deliberately concealed the existence of the archive. However, it has been pointed out that material entered into the databases of the Corpus Coranicum project from Bergsträsser's archive does not reveal a skeletal text which differs from the range of early Qur'anic manuscripts and fragments that are currently available to scholars; for this reason, it has even been claimed that a mythology has been allowed to develop concerning the content of the archive and the academic work conducted by the project team (Marx 2009).[4]

Interpreting the Significance of *Variae Lectiones*: Approaches and Perspectives

Distinctive turning points in the study of *variae lectiones* were marked by the work of John Wansbrough and John Burton who separately set out to expound upon the connection between *variae lectiones* and the historical consolidation of the Qur'an's status as a fixed text (*textus receptus*). Wansbrough argued that the Qur'an probably evolved as a stable text around the turn of the third/ninth century. Employing sophisticated arguments about the typology and style of early Islamic literary texts, and gauging attitudes towards the corpus of *variae lectiones* within these materials to underpin his arguments, he concluded that material from these early periods did not presuppose the existence of a standardized Qur'an. Wansbrough placed existing forms of exegesis within several categories: the focus on *variae lectiones* was identified as one of the elements of masoretic exegesis, which included lexical explanation and grammatical analysis; he reckoned that specific types of variants were the product of exegetical activity which was not attested before the third/ninth century. Nöldeke and Schwally suggested that the accomplishment of a fixed text was achieved in the short span of a generation from the time of the Prophet as specified by the traditional sources. Although Wansbrough did not dismiss the possibility that elements of Qur'anic canon may have existed prior to the periods when intense literary activity took place, he questioned the putative existence of an early 'Uthmānic recension of the text

---

[4] See the website: <https://corpuscoranicum.de>. It introduces early Qur'anic manuscripts and presents records of a wide range of recorded variants. Other relevant sites include <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/islamic/4>.

(Wansbrough 1977: 44–5 and 202f.). Wansbrough cited circumstantial evidence that he believed corroborated his arguments: firstly, he maintained that the study of codices and 'classical *maṣāḥif* literature (*variae lectiones*)' did not appear until the third/ninth century (Wansbrough 1977: 44–5). In this regard he was relying on Jeffery's provisional musings about the origins of classical works devoted to the study of codices and variants; however, it is important to bear in mind that such scholarship featured in the *maʿānī al-Qurʾān* genre of texts in which *variae lectiones* were grammatically analysed (Shah 2003a: 48 and 58; cf. Spitaler and Pretzl 1935). Secondly, he explained that Joseph Schacht's research had concluded that 'with very few exceptions, that Muslim jurisprudence was not derived from the contents of the Qurʾan'; and thirdly, he observed that references to the Qurʾan were conspicuously absent from a number of early theological treatises, all of which undermined the traditional narrative that a fixed text had been established (Wansbrough 1977: 44). He judged that it was 'impossible that canonization should have preceded, not succeeded, recognition of the authority of scripture within the Muslim community' (Wansbrough 1977: 202).

Referring to the vast corpus of *qirāʾāt* materials amassed by Bergsträsser, Pretzl, and especially Jeffery, Wansbrough commented that it 'could well be asked to what extent any of the variants, or variant codices (?), may be said to represent traditions genuinely independent of the ʿUthmānic recension' (Wansbrough 1977: 44–5). He reasoned that lexical differences among these so-called variants were 'infinitesimal' in countenance and were sanctioned by the prophetic tradition which spoke of the Qurʾan being revealed in seven aspects or modes (*aḥruf*), supposedly permitting readers ample latitude and choice in their synthesis and selection of *qirāʾāt*. Wansbrough pointed to the fact that 'a special category of variant codex, the metropolitan codices (*maṣāḥif al-amṣār*), do not display the 'differences either among themselves or from the ʿUthmānic recension which are alleged to have provoked the editorial measures attributed to the third caliph' (Wansbrough 1977: 45). When referring to the *maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, Wansbrough was nominally following Jeffery's designation of those early materials which 'had been digested into codices in the great Metropolitan centres of Madina, Mecca, Basra, Kufa and Damascus' and were superseded by the ʿUthmānic version of the canonized Medinan codex (Jeffery 1937: 8; Beck 1950). Wansbrough was convinced that the so-called regional codices, and indeed even Companion codices, were purely fictive constructions. He went on to comment that 'either the suppression of substantial deviations was so instantly and universally successful that no trace of serious opposition remained, or that the story was a fiction designed to serve another purpose' (Wansbrough 1977: 45). Wansbrough's work fostered a new range of approaches to the study of the Qurʾan and the early Islamic literary tradition, although the discovery and examination of early Qurʾanic manuscript evidence undermined one of its key claims concerning the belated timeline for the emergence of the Qurʾan as a fixed text (Déroche 2014: 14).

Adopting a series of equally sophisticated arguments, John Burton's study of the corpus of *variae lectiones* reached an entirely different set of conclusions about the standardization of the Qurʾan and the origin of these readings. Burton was particularly

interested in charting the relationship between the accounts of the collection of the Qur'an and their role in the elaboration of theoretical legal discourses. Burton was to argue that many unique forms of *qirāʾāt*, particularly those connected with twofold or concomitant readings which led to semantic shifts in the meaning of Qur'anic verses, were not the vestiges of a corpus of materials that expert readers had managed to preserve over the centuries with 'textual fidelity', but rather they revealed structural traces of the historical layers of arguments devised to defend legal doctrines by jurists in the early Islamic tradition. Although large numbers of canonical variants tend to be univocal, Burton was referring to verses such as Q. 5:6, which states 'Oh you who do believe, whenever you want to pray, then **wash** your faces and your hands up to the elbows; and **wipe** your heads; and (*"wipe" or "wash"*) your **feet** up to the ankles'. There existed two separate *lectiones* (or concomitant readings) of the term feet in the verse (*arjulikum* or *arjulakum*), one of which was adduced to support the practice of 'wiping' the feet when performing ritual ablution; while, the second was cited in support of 'washing' the feet (Nöldeke 1938: 3:141; Shah 2016: 307–10). Maintaining that classical scholars were seeking to place '*fiqh* views under the aegis of the Qur'an' by promoting changes to the text of the Qur'an, Burton estimated that such readings were generated to circumvent inconsistencies in the legal doctrines of the Qur'an (Burton 1977: 30–2). He explained that 'the Qur'an was flexible only within exiguous limits' so scholars were 'driven to seek the liberties they craved in varying vocalic data', allowing certain *qirāʾāt* to be manipulated to assume a counter-Sunna function (Burton 1977: 186; cf. Burton 1984). According to Burton, these complicated processes led to the resourceful inception of concomitant readings and interpretive glosses such as those which feature in the Companion codices of Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy. On the subject of the ʿUthmānic codices and the accounts of their collection, Burton held that the reports of the collection of the Qur'an represented 'a mass of confusions, contradictions, and inconsistencies', claiming that they were formulated through a 'lengthy process of evolution' (Burton 1977: 225). One of the core contentions of Burton's study was his assertion that Qur'anic manuscripts actually exhibit the ʿUthmānic text and if one were to remove the collection reports as 'never having occurred', then there is every indication that the final recension of the Qur'an was evidently the work of the Prophet (Burton 1977: 227).

In a review of the role that concomitant (or twofold) readings played in the synthesis of law, Mustafa Shah has suggested that the attestation of variants had a subordinate function within the matrix of classical legal discourses. He claimed that concomitant readings which supported semantic variances tended to be confined, noting that had 'these materials been the products of inter-*madhhab* polemics, one would have expected their production to have been exponentially more prolific' (Shah 2016: 308). Shah also highlighted the significance of the use of non-canonical readings (*qirāʾāt shādhdha*) within classical legal discussions, confirming their continued relevance as sources.

The point has been made that while it seems undeniable that 'the consonantal outline of the Qur'an (*rasm*) appears to have been preserved with almost complete certainty from the first/seventh century' the diacritical marks and (vocalic values) which 'accompany that outline owe something to human reason and ingenuity' in that readers were

not slavishly 'reproducing just what different Companions recited in the seventh century' (Melchert 2008: 82). However, the impression promoted by the imposing statements which feature in the introduction to Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sabʿa* intimates that cynosures of the reading tradition believed that they were faithfully adhering to established precedents (Sunna) in their synthesis of *qirāʾāt*. Similarly, classical grammatical and exegetical literature is replete with statements and assertions of loyalty to 'the Sunna' of recitation defined by the earliest generations of readers.

A text which has been hailed as being of 'major importance' for the history of the redaction of the Qurʾan' and even doctrinal developments in Shīʿī thought is the *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt*, a manuscript on *lectiones* attributed to Muḥammad al-Sayyārī (d. *c.* third/ninth century) (Kohlberg and Moezzi 2009: 23). It features a full-range of Qurʾanic variants, many of which are designed to promote 'an Imāmī message' (Kohlberg 2009: 41). Despite the convoluted history of the original manuscript, it is presented as one of the earliest surviving Imāmī Shīʿī literary texts devoted to *variae lectiones*, although it evinces more about the development of the concept of *taḥrīf*, the allegation by some Shīʿī groups that the Qurʾan was corrupted by the caliph ʿUthmān to suppress the rights of the imams, than it does about historical attitudes to the status of the ʿUthmānic codices (Kohlberg 2009: 46). If one were to place aside the polemical design of al-Sayyārī's text and the readings it includes which are of a sectarian countenance, one is left with a body of *qirāʾāt* which are typically consistent with the cluster of *variae lectiones* found in the traditional *qirāʾāt* literature; likewise, in their works prominent Shīʿī luminaries tended to defer to *variae lectiones* canonized in the traditional *qirāʾāt* sources (Kohlberg 2009: 27; Bar Asher 1993).

Qirāʾāt and the Relevance of Manuscript Evidence

Archival evidence is playing an increasingly important role in the study of the significance of the formation of *variae lectiones* in the early tradition. In his examination of the *Parisino-petropolitanus* codex, a codex probably emanating from the first two decades of Umayyad rule and discovered in the ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ mosque in Egypt, François Déroche maintained that while such texts are based on the ʿUthmānic consonantal outline, the fact that they originally had 'very few diacritics, no short vowels or orthoepic marks, simply could not have provided the solution which the caliph is said to have been seeking'. He proposes that ʿUthmān's efforts may have been conceived with the aim of providing a basic 'visual identity for the text he supported' (Déroche 2009: 178). Déroche argued that non-canonical variants which are present in the *Parisino petropolitanus*, and other contemporary fragments, appear to predate later compilations of variants by scholars in the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries (Déroche 2009: 176–8 cf. Déroche 2014: 31). These points were revisited in his later study of Umayyad

Qur'ans in which he concluded that there is 'no certainty that the *qirāʾāt* of the Umayyad period were similar to those which we know'. However, he does concede that even the *Parisino-petropolitanus codex*, which displays textual and divisional peculiarities, remains 'consistent with the ʿUthmānic *rasm*' (Déroche 2014: 14; 31, 37, and 136). This is also confirmed for one of the oldest Qur'an manuscripts in the British Library (Or. 2165; see Fig. 13.1), which was the subject of separate studies by Yasin Dutton and Intisar Rabb, who concluded that the manuscript exhibits a distinct measure of fluidity in its synthesis of variants and its division of verses (Rabb 2006).[5] Déroche had worked with the late Sergio Noja Noseda on this manuscript (Déroche and Noseda 2001). On the subject of the ʿUthmānic collection, Déroche cautioned that 'the possibility that some of the fragments date back to the decade that elapsed between the murder of ʿUthmān or even before—and the beginning of Umayyad rule can in no way be excluded, but we do not have strong arguments—material or textual—to attribute precisely to this period any of the manuscripts or fragments which are currently known to us' (Déroche 2014: 136). He was to conclude that evidence from the early Qur'anic manuscript tradition indicates that a flexibility governed approaches to the early transmission of the Qur'an (Déroche 2019).

Surveys of early archival sources do attach particular importance to the fact that early Qur'an manuscripts frequently preserve non-canonical variants which are not documented or acknowledged in the later traditional sources; this is also the case for the system of verse counts and divisions which differ from conventions adhered to and set out in later classical sources.[6] Notwithstanding the work of Spitaler, a comprehensive study of the system of verse counts and divisions remains a desideratum. Similar observations feature in the debates about the 'Ṣanʿāʾ' codex, a palimpsest consisting of a cache of folios which were first discovered among fragments in the roof of the Great Mosque of Sanaa in 1972, along with further materials later found in the mosque's library (Puin 1996: 109; cf. Déroche 2014). In their study of the material Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi confirmed the non-standard format of the *scriptio inferior*: namely, the underlying script which was erased to make way for the fresher canonical text (Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012: 9). They argued that the palimpsest, which they designated as Ṣanʿāʾ I, offered direct evidence of the historical reality of the existence of non-ʿUthmānic texts such as the Companion codices of Ibn Masʿūd, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb and indeed others (Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012: 19; cf. Puin 2008). They maintained that its unique constitution indicated that it was a 'distinct Companion codex'. The forms of variants in the codex include instances of 'additions, omissions, transpositions, and substitutions of entire words and sub-elements (morphemes)'. They observed that a large number of these variants involved 'suffixes, prefixes, prepositions and pronouns' and the ordering of the codex's chapters was closer to those of the codices of Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy, than it was to the ʿUthmānic text (Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012: 21 and 25).

---

[5] The manuscript Or. 2165 has been digitized: <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_2165>.

[6] An analysis of the recitation of the Qur'an and the traditionally applied conventions for the division of verses features in Spitaler (1935).

Arguments about the dating of the *scriptio inferior* do have a bearing upon discussions about the synthesis of *qirāʾāt* within the early tradition. Sadeghi and Goudarzi estimated that that the upper text was probably written sometime 'during the seventh or the first half of the eighth century AD', estimating that the *scriptio inferior* had its origins in the seventh century and not beyond that. Déroche cautiously proposed the view that Ṣanʿāʾ I 'was written during the second-half of the first/seventh century', suggesting that it was still in use at the end of that century. He concluded that the later tradition of *qirāʾāt* scholarship perhaps discarded or did not take into account the specific variants which it preserved (Déroche 2014: 54 and 137). Sadeghi and Goudarzi claimed that the survival of such a variant codex showed that the transcription of personal codices, including those ascribed to Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy, was permitted even in these later periods, although ultimately, they concluded that the attempts by ʿUthmān to establish a fixed text were 'fairly effective'.

In her examination of the material Asma Hilali cautioned against the reliance upon medieval theories about Qurʾanic variants to broach the interpretation of material in the Ṣanʿāʾ codex, positing that these materials were 'produced much later' and were not 'a faithful mirror of the early material' (Hilali 2014: 13; Hilali 2016: 21–2). In a study of folios from the Ṣanʿāʾ codex, Alba Fedeli questioned whether non-standard variants had a pre-ʿUthmānic provenance, speculating that it was only in the fourth/tenth century when Ibn Mujāhid promoted variants consistent with a 'fairly uniform consonantal text' (Fedeli 2012: 315). However, Fedeli's view appears to overlook not only the objective of Ibn Mujāhid's efforts, but also the fact that his selection of readings was determined by the regnant status of specific sets of *lectiones* already widely in circulation. Indeed, the readings preserved in Ibn Mujāhid's text can be traced to much earlier sources such as the *maʿānī al-Qurʾān* genre of writings which include texts composed by al-Farrāʾ, al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830) and Abū ʿUbayda (d. 209/824–5) (Shah 2003a and 2003b; Versteegh 1993). Certainly, the study of the archival material of early Qurʾanic manuscripts has progressed in recent years as evidenced by the publication of Éléonore Cellard's Codex Amrensis 1, which preserves four sets of fragments discovered within the ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ mosque in old Cairo (al-Fusṭāṭ) (Cellard 2018). It is evident that a profounder appreciation of the nature of *qirāʾāt* and attitudes to their synthesis within the early and classical tradition will be crucial to the efforts to unravel the significance of the manuscript data.

Separately, referring to the Egyptian edition of the Qurʾan, Déroche commented that 'When the al-Azhar specialists convened to produce a reliable edition of the Qurʾan towards 1920s, they never thought of looking for the earliest written witnesses, had they known to identify them, but used in the course of their work the specialized literature on the *qirāʾāt* or the orthography' (Déroche 2014: 14). It is important to bear in mind not only the purpose of the Cairo edition, but also the historical background to its production: the aim was to produce a copy which was based on the *lectio* of ʿĀṣim as transmitted by Ḥafṣ as preserved in the classical *qirāʾāt* literature and, in so doing, address the shortcomings of earlier attempts to produce a printed edition. The production of this edition did not represent an encroachment upon traditional scholarship germane to the transmission and teaching of the larger corpus of *qirāʾāt* which continued to thrive in

religious seminaries and institutions. Pretzl noted the remarkable thoroughness with which the Egyptian edition was produced, although he stated that it tentatively obscured the fact that a manifold body of *lectiones* was connected with the text of the Qur'an (Pretzl 1938: 273). Jeffery criticized the fact that the editors of the Egyptian version relied on late authorities for Ḥafṣ's recension and that they had 'not quite succeeded in producing a pure type of Ḥafṣ text', but he spoke of the version being 'better than anything else available, and very much superior to the Flügel text' (Jeffery 1946). The edition of the Qur'an published by Gustav Flügel in Leipzig appeared in 1834 and had hitherto been relied upon in academic circles.

Ibn Mujāhid and the Moves Towards the Standardization of Readings

The standardization of seven sets of *variae lectiones* is conventionally identified as being one of the grand accomplishments of Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sabᶜa*, an achievement repeatedly lauded in medieval biographical sources. Bergsträsser, Pretzl, and Jeffery all acknowledged the impact of his efforts and the importance of his legacy as did later scholars, although observations about the importance of his work were evidently informed by references to the text in later literary sources such as Ibn al-Jazarī's *al-Nashr*. Discussing Ibn Mujāhid's efforts in his essay on the Qur'an, Alford Welch maintained that he aimed to 'restrict the number of acceptable readings' by selecting seven well-known readers, even assuming, like Pretzl before him, that this was inspired by the Prophetic hadith which spoke of the Qur'an being revealed in seven *ḥurūf* or modes (*EI2* 408; Pretzl 1938: 3:184; cf. Watt 1970: 48). Curiously, classical sources record that Ibn Mujāhid was censured for basing his book on seven readings due to the fact this number could be confused with the aforementioned prophetic tradition which speaks of the Qur'an being revealed in seven modes (Shah 2004: 84). Other scholars also identified a paradigm of limitation inherent in Ibn Mujāhid's endeavour including Estelle Whelan who referred to Ibn Mujāhid's succeeding in 'reducing the number of acceptable readings to the seven that were predominant in the main Muslim centres of the time' (Whelan 1998: 1); Efim Rezvan pronounced that Ibn Mujāhid restricted not only the 'number of systems of variant vowellings of the text to seven', but he also proscribed 'the use of other variants (*al-ikhtiyār*)' (Rezvan 1998: 17). Despite the wealth of literary evidence from early grammatical texts, it has even been asserted that the 'set patterns of diacritics' and the 'precise vocalization of the short vowels' were not fixed until 'Ibn Mujāhid legitimized the Seven readings systems' (Small 2011: 183). Deliberating the historical significance of his work, Christopher Melchert argued that Ibn Mujāhid's promotion of seven readings presented a means to end 'the multiplication of readings, hence limiting the burden of Qur'anic scholarship' (Melchert 2000: 18). He signalled

that the establishment of seven readings did 'restrain growing complexity', commenting that 'their recognition, however halting and incomplete, did mark a widely observable turn in the tenth century towards limited agreement and manageability' (Melchert 2000: 18–19).

In his study of the *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*, Shah maintained that it was never the intention of Ibn Mujāhid to curb the traditionally based practice of *ikhtiyār*, provided it was regulated by the pursuit of authenticated precedents defined within the reading tradition. His assessment was that Ibn Mujāhid specifically inveighed against the hypothetical projection of *lectiones* based on grammatical analogues, which he deemed an egregious practice, but that the imposition of seven sets of readings was not the intended objective of his work; indeed, there were occasions where he even criticized readings included in his work. For these reasons, he held that Ibn Mujāhid had simply selected sets of readings which were already widely accepted as being authoritative within the reading tradition (Shah 2004: 78). Explaining the prominence of the *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*, Shah claimed that this can be attributed to the fact that the work was the subject of several popular grammatical proof texts composed by luminaries such as Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/928), Abū ʿAlī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987) and Ibn Khālawayhi (Shah 2004: 94). He also concluded that the forensic probing of linguistic variances among *lectiones* played an influential role in the development of grammatical discourses (Shah 2003a and 2003b).

More recently, Shady Nasser has weighed in with some enhanced arguments about approaches to variants in Ibn Mujāhid's era. He hypothesized that the latitude and flexibility which marked approaches to the adoption of legal rulings (*aḥkām*) were also a feature of approaches to the synthesis of variant readings. Nasser reasoned that Ibn Mujāhid, and indeed his peer, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), never considered these variants to be of 'divine and absolute value' (Nasser 2013: 77 and 230; cf. Nasser 2016). On the issue of transmission, Nasser held that over subsequent centuries the authentication of readings was broached through the lens of hadith scholarship which witnessed the theory of multiple transmission (or *tawātur*) being retrospectively invoked to substantiate their historical dissemination. He too accepted that a construct of restriction lies at the heart of Ibn Mujāhid's endeavour and he described him as being 'the first to forcefully canonize his collection' (Nasser 2013: 41). Nasser deplored the fact that the larger corpus of variant Qurʾanic readings is ominously overlooked in studies of the textual transmission of the Qurʾan.

In his copious supplements to the *Geschichte* Bergsträsser had remarked that the introduction to Ibn al-Jazarī's *al-Nashr fī'l-qirāʾāt al-ʿashr* was a prized source on account of the fact that its extended introduction preserved a profusion of references and quotations derived from earlier literature on *qirāʾāt* (Bergsträsser 1938: 116–17). A number of earlier works cited in *al-Nashr* have been published and they confirm that vigorous activity in the authorship of collections of readings continued before and after the composition of Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*. While many of these works were set around the consolidation of the seven canonical readings, others avidly supplemented them with additional documented *lectiones*. Although these compilations were often reiterating equivalent data about *qirāʾāt* preserved in earlier literary endeavours, their originality often turned on the imaginative presentation and organization of the data. Among them

are works such as *al-Irshād fiʾl-qirāʾāt ʿan al-aʾimma al-sabʿa* composed by Abūʾl-Ṭayyib Ibn Ghalbūn (d. 389/998) and *al-Tadhkira fiʾl-qirāʾāt al-thamān*, collated by his son Ṭāhir ibn Ghalbūn (d. 399/1008), which brought together eight readings, adding the *lectiones* of Yaʿqūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205/820) to the seven. The selection of al-Ḥaḍramī was not arbitrary but based on the unassailable fact that classical scholars considered his reading to be as equally valued as each of the seven. In the same periods Ibn Mihrān (d. 381/991) composed a work which collated ten sets of readings, *al-Mabsūṭ fiʾl-qirāʾāt al-ʿashr* and he put together two other collections: *al-Shāmil* and *al-Ghāya*. Similar trends persisted in the fifth/eleventh century: al-Dānī authored both the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fiʾl-qirāʾāt al-sabʿa al-mashhūra* and the brief didactic treatise *al-Taysīr*, which was edited by Pretzl. Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 437/1045), who had studied with Ibn Ghalbūn and his son, composed the *Kitāb al-Kashf ʿan wujūh al-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ*, which set out a detailed exposition of the seven readings, and the *Tabṣira*, which was intended to serve as a primer for students. Renowned for his expertise in readings and his avowed traditionalism, al-Ahwāzī (d. 446/1055) composed a commentary on 'the eight readings of the five cities', the *Kitāb al-Wajīz*; complementing this text was a separate work he compiled on non-canonical readings, entitled *Kitāb al-Iqnāʾ*. He was also the author of separate treatises which listed variants associated with one specific reader from the early tradition (Hamdan 2006). Underpinning the intense levels of interest in such materials, a number of other scholars authored collections which collated canonical and non-canonical materials. This was a feature of the *Kitāb al-Kāmil* of al-Hudhalī (d. 465/1072), a book which boasts of covering fifty *lectiones*, and indeed the *Kitāb al-Mubhij* authored by Sibṭ al-Khayyāṭ (d. 541/1146). Focusing on the grammatical analysis of anomalous readings, Abūʾl-Baqāʾ al-ʿUkbarī (d. 616/1219) wrote the commentary entitled *Iʿrāb al-qirāʾāt al-shawādhdh*. When al-Dimyāṭī (d. 1117/1705) presented his collection of fourteen readings, *Itḥāf fuḍalāʾ al-bashar*, in which he nominally added four readings to the ten, he was in essence engaged in the gleaning and reorganization of the prodigious body of materials that had already been preserved, authenticated, and classified in the earlier literature.

It is perhaps fitting to return to al-Dānī's *al-Taysīr*: it provided the template for a versified commentary composed by the Andalusian scholar al-Qāsim ibn Firruh al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1193), which appeared under the title *Ḥirz al-amānī wa-wajh al-tahānī*, and is referred to as the *Shāṭibiyya* in honour of its author (Pretzl 1938: 215–19). Numerous commentaries were composed on the *Shāṭibiyya*, consolidating its status as the coveted text for the teaching of the seven canonical readings in Qurʾanic seminaries across the Islamic world. Among its most celebrated commentaries are Abū Shāma al-Dimashqī's *Ibrāz al-maʿānī min ḥirz al-amānī* and al-Jaʿbarī's *Kanz al-maʿānī fī sharḥ ḥirz al-amānī*. Concerning the *Shāṭibiyya*, Ibn al-Jazarī spoke of the unparalleled esteem in which the work was held in the Islamic tradition; the *Geschichte* acknowledged the importance of both the *Taysīr* and the *Shāṭibiyya* (Nöldeke 1860: 342 and 358 Pretzl 1938: 222). However, although these treatises remain the principal texts for the teaching of readings in the Islamic world, they constitute only a small proportion of the profuse range of materials and scholarship the discipline of *qirāʾāt* preserved over the centuries.

Conclusions

The corpus of *qirāʾāt* together with the traditions of learning which are associated with the scrutiny of these materials offers a sophisticated, rich range of literary sources. Historically, the treatment of *qirāʾāt* has been broached through a pool of materials which provide only a partial context to the intricate processes of their history and synthesis. Building upon the foundations of the work by scholars such as Nöldeke, Bergsträsser, Pretzl, and Jeffery, and boosted by the availability of a broader range of critical editions of manuscripts on readings, including evidence from early Qurʾanic manuscripts, a circumspect examination of this larger body of sources will facilitate a profounder appreciation of their importance to understanding not only the history of the textual transmission of the Qurʾan, but also the subtle intricacies of classical *qirāʾāt* scholarship across the centuries.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Al-Ahwāzī, al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī. *al-Wajīz fī sharḥ qirāʾāt al-qirāʾa al-thamāniyya aʾimmat al-amṣār al-khamsa*. Ed. Durayd Ḥasan Aḥmad. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002.

Al-Dānī, Abū ʿAmr ʿUthmān ibn Saʿīd. *al-Muḥkam fī naqṭ al-maṣāḥif*. Ed. ʿIzzat Ḥasan. 2nd edn. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986.

Al-Dānī, Abū ʿAmr ʿUthmān ibn Saʿīd. *Kitāb al-Taysīr fī'l-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ*. Ed. Otto Pretzl. Istanbul: Matḥaʿat al-Dawla, 1930.

Al-Dānī, Abū ʿAmr ʿUthmān ibn Saʿīd. *Kitāb al-Muqniʿ fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār maʿa Kitāb al-Naqṭ*. Ed. Otto Pretzl. Istanbul: Matḥaʿat al-Dawla, 1932.

Al-Dimyāṭī, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. *Itḥāf fuḍālāʾ al-bashr bi'l-qirāʾāt al-arbaʿat ʿashar*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Tarhūnī. 2 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2009.

Al-Fārisī, al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad Abū ʿAlī. *al-Ḥujja fī ʿilal al-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ*. 2 vols. Ed. Shalabī, Nāṣif, Najjār & Najjāt. Cairo: al-Hayʾat al-Miṣriyya, 1983.

Al-Farrāʾ, Abū Zakariyyāʾ, Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād. *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*. 3 vols. Ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf Najātī and Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Najjār. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1955–72.

Ibn Ghalbūn, Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd al-Munʿim, *Al-Tadhkira fī'l-qirāʾāt al-thamān*. Ed. Saʿīd Ṣāliḥ Zaʿīma. Alexandria: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 2001.

Ibn al-Jazarī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *al-Nashr fī'l-qirāʾāt al-ʿashr*. 2 vols. Ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Ḍabbāʿ. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.

Ibn al-Jazarī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *Ghāyat al-nihāya fī ṭabaqāt al-qurrāʾ* 2 vols. Ed. Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1935.

Ibn Khālawayhi, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad. *al-Ḥujja fī'l-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ*. Ed. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl Sālim Makram. Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1971.

Ibn Khālawayhi, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad. *Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhdh al-Qurʾān min Kitāb al-Badīʿ*. Ed. Gotthelf Bergsträsser with an introduction by Arthur Jeffery. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Raḥmāniyya, 1934.

Ibn Jinnī, Abūʾl-Fatḥ ʿUthmān. *al-Muḥtasab fī tabyīn wujūh shawādhdh al-qirāʾāt waʾl-īḍāḥ ʿanhā*. Ed. ʿAlī al-Najdī Nāṣif, ʿAbd al-Ḥālīm al-Najjār, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī. 2 vols. Cairo: Lajnat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, AH 1387.

Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad. *al-Fihrist*. Ed. R. Tajaddud. 3rd edn. Beirut: Dār al-Masīra, 1988.

Ibn Mujāhid. *Kitāb al-Sabʿa fīʾl-qirāʾāt*. Ed. Shawqī Ḍayf. 2nd edn. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, *c*.1401/1980.

Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib. *Kitāb al-Kashf ʿan wujūh al-qirāʾāt al-sabʿ wa-ʿilalihā wa-ḥujajihā*. Ed. M. Ramaḍān. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1981.

Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Abū Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-Tabṣira fīʾl-qirāʾāt*. Ed. M. Ramaḍān. Kuwait: Manshūrāt Maʿhad al-Makhṭūṭāt al-ʿArabiyya, 1985.

al-Qasṭallānī, Shihāb al-Dīn. *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt li-funūn al-qirāʾāt*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn and ʿĀmir al-Sayyid ʿUthmān. Cairo: Lajnat Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1972.

al-ʿUkbarī, Abūʾl-Baqāʾ. *Iʿrāb al-qirāʾāt al-shawādhdh*. 2 vols. Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1996.

Secondary Sources

Bar-Asher, Meir. 'Variant Readings and Additions of the Imamī Shīʿite to the Qurʾan', *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 39–74.

Beck, Edmund. *Die Koranzitate bei Sībawaih*. Munich: 1939. (Diss. Published in 1959).

Beck, Edmund. 'Die Kodizesvarianten der Amsâr', *Orientalia* 16/3 (1947), 353–76.

Beck, Edmund. 'Studien zur Geschichte der kufischen Koranlesung in den beiden ersten Jahrhunderten', *Orientalia* 17/3 (1948), 326–55; 19/3 (1950), 328–50; 20/3 (1951), 316–28; 22/1 (1953), 59–78.

Bergsträsser, Gotthelf. 'Die Koranlesung des Ḥasan von Basra', *Islamica* 2 (1926), 11–57.

Bergsträsser, Gotthelf. 'Plan eines Apparatus Criticus zum Koran', *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-philologischen Klass der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 7 (1930), 3–11.

Bergsträsser, Gotthelf. 'Koranlesung in Kairo', *Der Islam* 20/1 (1932), 1–42; and *Der Islam* 21 (1933a), 110–40.

Bergsträsser, Gotthelf, *Nichtkanonische Koranlesarten im Muḥtasab des ibn Ginnī*. Munich: Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1933b.

Blair, Sheila. *Islamic Calligraphy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Brockett, Adrian. 'The Value of Ḥafṣ and Warsh Transmissions for the Textual History of the Qurʾān'. In: Andrew Rippin (eds.). *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, pp. 31–45. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Burton, John. *The Collection of the Qurʾān*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Burton, John. 'The Vowelling of Q. 65:1', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 29/2 (1984), 267–83.

Cellard, Éléonore. *Codex Amrensis 1*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Comerro, Viviane. *Les Traditions sur la constitution du muṣḥaf de ʿUthmān*. Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag; Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2012.

Cook, Michael. 'The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran', *Graeco-Arabica* 9–10 (2004), 89–104.

Déroche, François and Sergio Noja Noseda. *Le Manuscrit Or. 2165 (f.1 à 61) de la British Library*. Lesa and London: Fondazione Ferni Noja Noseda and British Library, 2001.

Déroche, François. *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam: le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.

Déroche, François. *Qurʾans of the Umayyads: A First Overview*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014.

Déroche, François. *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle: Essai sur la formation du texte coranique.* Paris: Le Seuil, 2019.

Dutton, Yasin. 'Some Notes on the British Library's "Oldest Qur'an Manuscript" (Or. 2165)', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6/1 (2004), 43–71.

Fedeli, Alba. 'Variants and Substantiated *qirā'āt*: A Few Notes Exploring their Fluidity in the Oldest Qur'ānic Manuscripts'. In: Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.). *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion*, 2:403–40. Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2012.

Goldziher, Ignaz. *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung.* Buchhandlung und Druckerei, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1920.

Hamdan, Omar. *Studien zur Kanonisierung des Korantextes: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's Beiträge zur Geschichte des Korans.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006a.

Hamdan, Omar. *Mufradat al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.* Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Ibrahīm al-Ahwāzī. ʿUmar Ḥamdan (ed.). Ammān: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1427/2006b.

Hamdan, Omar. 'The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A Step Towards the Canonization of the Qur'anic Text'. In: Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (eds.). *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, pp. 795–835. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010.

Hilali, Asma. 'Was the Ṣanʿāʾ Qur'an Palimpsest a Work in Progress?' In: David Hollenberg, Christoph Rauch, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.). *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition*, pp. 12–27. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Hilali, Asma. *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries A. H.* London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2016.

Jeffery, Arthur. *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an: The Old Codices.* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937.

Jeffery, Arthur. 'Textual History of the Qur'ān'. Lecture delivered in 1946 at the Middle East Society of Jerusalem.

Jeffery, Arthur. 'The Qur'ān Readings of Ibn Miqsam'. In: Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi (eds.). *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume.* 2 vols., pp. 1–38. Budapest: Globus, 1948–58.

Kahle, Paul. 'The Arabic Readers of the Koran', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8/2 (1949), 65–71.

Kohlberg, Etan and Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi. *Revelation and Falsification: The Kitāb al-qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī.* Critical Edition with an Introduction and Notes. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.

Lier Thomas. 'Hellmut Ritter in Istanbul 1926–1949', *Die Welt des Islams* 38/3 (1998), 334–85.

Luxenberg, Christoph. *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran.* Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007 (German original 2000).

Marx, Michael. 'The Lost Archive, the Myth of Philology, and the Study of the Qur'an'. Published online, 19/01/2009. Accessed May 2018 at <https://edoc.bbaw.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/799>.

Melchert, Christopher. 'Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings', *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000), 5–22.

Melchert, Christopher. 'The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10/2 (2008), 73–87.

Nasser, Shady. *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān: The Problem of* Tawātur *and the Emergence of* Shawādhdh. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013.

Nasser, Shady. 'The Two-Rāwī Canon Before and After ad-Dānī (d. 444/1052–3): The Role of Abū ṭ-Ṭayyib ibn Ghalbūn (d. 389/998) and the Qayrawān/Andalus School in Creating the Two Rāwī Canon', *Oriens* 41 (2013), 41–75.

Nasser, Shady. '(Q. 12:2) We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an: Praying behind the Lisper', *Islamic Law and Society* 23 (2016), 23–51.

Nöldeke, Theodor. *Geschichte des Qorâns* (Göttingen, 1860). Revised by Friedrich Schwally and supplemented by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl. Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909–38. See the translation: *The History of the Qur'ān*, Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser, and Otto Pretzl. Ed. and trans. Wolfgang H. Behn. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013.

Pretzl, Otto. 'Die Wissenschaft der Koranlesung', *Islamica* 6 (1934), 1–47; 230–46; and 290–331.

Puin, Gerd. 'Observations on Early Qur'an Manuscripts in Ṣanʿāʾ'. In: Stefan Wild (ed.). *The Qur'an as Text*, pp. 107–11. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996.

Puin, Elisabeth. 'Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿāʾ (DAM 01–27.1)'. In: M. Gross and K.-H. Ohlig (eds.). *Schlaglichter: Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, pp. 461–93. Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2008.

Rabb, Intisar. 'Non-Canonical Readings of the Qur'an: Recognition and Authenticity (The Ḥimṣī Reading)', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8/2 (2006), 84–127.

Rezvan, Efim. 'The Qur'an and its World: VI. Emergence of the Canon: The Struggle for Uniformity', *Manuscripta Orientalia* 4/2 (1998), 13–54.

Sadeghi, Behnam and Mohsen Goudarzi. 'Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān', *Der Islam* 87 (2012), 1–129.

Shah Mustafa. 'Exploring the Genesis of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought: Qur'anic Readers and Grammarians of the Kūfan Tradition' (Part I), *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5/1 (2003a), 47–78.

Shah, Mustafa. 'Exploring the Genesis of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought: Qur'anic Readers and Grammarians of the Baṣran Tradition' (Part II), *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5/2 (2003b), 1–47.

Shah, Mustafa. 'The Early Arabic Grammarians' Contributions to the Collection and Authentication of Qur'anic Readings: The Prelude to Ibn Mujāhid's *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6/1 (2004), 72–102.

Shah, Mustafa. 'The Case of *variae lectiones* in Classical Islamic Jurisprudence: Grammar and the Interpretation of Law', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (*Revue internationale de sémiotique juridique*) 29/2 (2016), 285–311.

Sinai, Nicolai. 'When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure?', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77 (2014), 273–92 (Part One) and 509–21 (Part Two).

Small, Keith. *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

Spitaler, Anton and Otto Pretzl. *Die Verszählung des Koran nach islamischer Überlieferung*. Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1935.

Versteegh, Kees. *Arabic Grammar and Qur'anic Exegesis in Early Islam*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993.

Vollers, Karl. *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im Alten Arabien*. Strasbourg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1906.

Wansbrough, John. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.