TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS:
DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

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RELEVANCE OF THE OLDEST QUR’ĀNIC MANUSCRIPTS
FOR THE READINGS MENTIONED BY COMMENTARIES.
A NOTE ON SŪRA “ṬĀ-HĀ”

An important aspect of Qur’ānic studies concerns the variant readings, the so-called qirā‘āt.

It is a general assumption that the variant readings survived only [1] in the works of Muslim exegetes and philologists, in the form of recorded quotations.

This opinion was acceptable at the beginning of the last century, when Arthur Jeffery complained about the lack of any direct manuscript evidence of qirā‘āt [2]. Nowadays the published facsimiles of manuscripts, the easy availability of microfilms and digital images [3], ever increasing access to and sharing of information, together with new findings in the last few years, all call for a comparative study of the text of the oldest Qur’ānic manuscripts, the so-called ḥijāzī or mā‘īl manuscripts [4], dating back to the beginning of Islam. The purpose of this comparative analysis should be to focus on investigation of variant readings (i.e. manuscript evidences) [5].

Despite the growing interest in the above-mentioned fragments, the opinion that the variant readings are only quotations is still common.

On the occasion of my attending the conference “Figures de Moïse. Approches textuelles et iconographiques”, I presented a poster [6]. The issue which the poster covered was a detailed analysis of the tradition of Mūsā, narrated in sūra “Ṭā-Hā” (20:9—98) [7], as transmitted in the oldest manuscripts.

“Has the Story of Mūsā Come to You?” [8] (fig. 1)
The Variant Readings of the Story of Mūsā in Qur’ānic Manuscripts. The Direct Tradition

My analysis focused on the variant readings found in the Qur’ānic manuscripts of the Mūsā story (20:9—98) in relation to the standard text. We have taken into account five Qur’ānic fragments [9] which I had the chance of analysing, that is the MSS from British Library, Or. 2165 (BL2165) [10]; Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, Ma VI 165 (UbT165) [11] (fig. 2); Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, 01-28.1 (DaM28) [12]; Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 7193 [13] and St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, E20 [14]. Only the first three of the above list contain the full text of sūra “Ṭā-Hā”.

In the above-mentioned parchments there were 100 variant readings of the Qur’ānic text:
- eight of them concern the orthography of hamza;
- ten are variations of the text (by means of adding or omission or replacing a word with another one);
- eighty-two can be explained by the writing of the long vowel ā (scriptio plena, scriptio defectiva or with yā’ in medial position). All of those eighty-two variants, however, do not make up an orthographic feature, as will be considered below.

We could verify several forms of variation (al-awnjūh fī al-ikhlīlāf), which could be grouped, for example, according to the framework of one of the Muslim exegetes [15] as follows (based on MS UbT165).

1. The variation of nouns in their singular, dual and plural forms, such as [16]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Aya</th>
<th>MS Fragment</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>حَثَانِيكَ</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15b</td>
<td>6 [17]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>حَيَارِيكَ</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16b</td>
<td>14 [18]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>بِعِنْدِكَ</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>17a</td>
<td>14 [19]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The variation of verbs in their conjugation and form, such as:

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