

Dmitry Frolov. Medieval Muslim Discussions about the Order of *Sūras* and Their Relevance for the Study of the Composition of the Qur'ān (2000)¹.

1. We live at the age when the mankind is coming to the understanding that the confrontation has no future and that it has – sooner or later – to give way to the cooperation as the basic principle of human coexistence. This cooperation – if it is fruitful – presupposes that no one has to give up one's identity as a price for it. It has to be a manifestation of the idea of “unity in variety” if I can use in this context the phrase coined up by the late Professor Grunebaum whose life and works are an example of the fruitful cross-cultural contacts.

2. In the field of the humanities it means that time “to gather stones” has come. We are to study carefully and re-evaluate all knowledge that has been accumulated by scholars of different cultures, religions, epochs, etc. at its own value in order to make it our common legacy which can help us to define future perspectives. As the saying goes, “it takes all kinds to make the world”. The theme of the present congress – “Oriental and Asian Studies in the Era of Globalization: Heritage and Modernity - Opportunities and Challenges” – is very up to date and very much in tune with the present change of paradigm in Islamic studies.

Professor Stefan Wild in his introduction to the materials of the Bonn symposium (1993) points out to “a definite and irrevocable shift of attention in the last decades” attested in the Qur'ānic studies. It is the shift from the **prehistory** of the Qur'ānic text (the quest for Jewish, Christian, Manichean, and other parallels and influences and the study of the genesis of the Qur'ānic text and its redaction) to “the Qur'ān as a textual corpus *redardless of its scriptural history*”, or the text

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which “shaped and shapes the religious convictions of Muslims and is, moreover, the central cultural text in many Islamic cultures”. This shift has two implications. First, the Qur’ān has come to be seen as a literary document with its own structure, composition and style. Second, the history of the interpretation of the Qur’ān, the history of its reception, the history of its aesthetic role, in short, all that shows what the Qur’ān meant for the generations of Muslims, is becoming an important new focus of Qur’ānic research.²

Once again we see Ignaz Goldziher having started about a century ago with his *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (1920, on the basis of the lectures delivered in 1913) what has become now a major trend of research. In the introduction to materials of another symposium in the Qur’ānic studies, Andrew Rippin mentions that “little attempt has been made in scholarly circles towards updating, expanding, and ultimately replacing the now dated, although still stimulating, insights of Goldziher” in the past decades and stresses the necessity of a new survey of the history of Muslim exegesis and Muslim Qur’ānic studies. Rippin says: “it is precisely through the exegetical works that we can establish a history of reader reaction to the Qur’ān and arrive at a meaningful construct and analysis of the Qur’ān, doubly meaningful, it would seem. Because we have arrived at an intellectually satisfactory result and at the same time actually studying what Muslims themselves have understood the Qur’ān to mean”.³

3. There is a kind of parallelism between the development of medieval Muslim Qur’ānic studies and that of modern European scholarship. Both began with the interest to the historical and linguistic aspects of the Scripture, and only later they shifted to the study of its literary and stylistic aspects. In the studies of

² See Wild's position in more detail in: *The Qur’ān as Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), VII-XI.

³ See *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 1-4.

the Qur'ānic style medieval Muslim scholars – as well as modern European orientalist – first concentrated their attention on the features manifested on the elementary level – tropes, rhetorical figures, imagery, rhyme and rhythm – most of which can be studied within the range of an individual verse. The interest to the higher levels of the scriptural style, namely, the composition of individual sūras, or – more rarely – blocks or groups of sūras, or – even more rarely – the composition of the Qur'ān as a whole, developed much later.

It seems that two things might have blocked or lessened the interest in the composition of the Qur'ān in the European studies. First, the way in which the Qur'ānic text was revealed, namely, by small portions delivered at different times and different occasions, or *mufarraḡan* as Muslim scholars say. Second, the way in which the written Qur'ānic text was compiled, namely, the sūras being mostly composed of fragments delivered at different times and originally without any connection between them, and the sūras in the *muṣṣḡaf* seemingly being arranged in the order based on the purely formal principle, that of diminishing length. Both factors directed the interest of scholars towards the study of a fragment rather than the whole.

As a result, modern scholarship only comparatively recently started to deal with the problem of the composition and style of the Qur'ānic text as a multi-dimensional and complex problem. Suffice it to name Angelica Neuwirth and Mustansir Mir as most recent examples of this new approach.

4. Roughly speaking we can discern two stages in the formation of the ideas about the composition of the Qur'ān in medieval scholarship:

First, “pre-history” of the relevant disciplines (mid-8th - 10th centuries). It covers the process of the accumulation of traditions which formed the material basis of future theoretical discussion of the Qur'ān during the so called period of “written fixation” (*al-tadwīn*) as well as the emergence of the three disciplines

which produced the framework for the generation of certain ideas relevant to the problem under discussion. They are the science of the virtues of the Qur'ān (*'ilm faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*), the science of the written codices (*'ilm al-maṣāḥif*), and the science of the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*'ilm i'jāz al-Qur'ān*).

Second, “history” of the two related disciplines, the science of the order of sūras (*'ilm tartīb al-suwar*) and the science of correspondence or harmony (*'ilm al-tanāsub* or *al-munāsabāt*), which deals directly with the topic (11th-15th centuries).

5. Let us touch upon the first stage in brief. First comes the science of *faḍā'il*. According to such authorities as Suyūṭī and Zarkashī, the list of the major authors on this subject are:

1 - Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/838), *qāri'* and *muḥaddith*, teacher of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Bukhārī, the first to compose a book on the virtues of the Qur'ān, which is the only one published (Beirut, 1991), the first to give (in this book) a survey of the Qur'ānic sciences.

2 - Ibn al-Ḍurays (d. 294/906), *muḥaddith*.

3 - Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 297/909), *muḥaddith* and authority in Qur'ānic sciences.

4 - Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), an author of *Sunan*, one of the six canonical collections of *ḥadīth*.

We can add to this list two other authors of canonical collections of *ḥadīth* who have special sections on *faḍā'il*:

5 - Bukhārī (d. 256/870).

6 - Tirmidhī (d. 279/892).

Also we can include in this list a son of Abū Dāwud, another sheikh of the six:

7 - Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī known as Ibn Abī Dāwud (d. 316/929).

It is evident from this list that this discipline of the Qur'ānic studies is in fact a branch of the *ḥadīth* literature. This conclusion is confirmed if we look at the content of Abū 'Ubayd's book, which is in fact a thematically arranged collection of traditions traced back (or attributed) to the Prophet and his companions. The traditions gathered by Abū 'Ubayd are repeatedly quoted in books of later authors who write on the order of sūras. This collection sets up a structure of the discipline in question. It has two sections:

1 - virtues of the Scripture as a whole;

2 - virtues of the groups of sūras, individual sūras, and even isolate āyāts.

The first section - among other things - helped to uproot in the consciousness of the Muslim community the conviction that the Qur'ānic text is not simply a collection of sūras and āyāts, but a unity which is more than mere sum of its constituents. Without this idea it would have been impossible to get interested in the composition of the text as a vehicle to convey its message.

The second section accumulated the traditional material which showed that there are blocks of sūras placed in succession, not only individual sūras, which are elements in the structure of the Qur'ān. This idea proved very fruitful in later studies of the composition of the Scripture.

Incidentally it was Abū 'Ubayd who first draw attention to the well-known *ḥadīth* which eventually was understood as an indication made by Muḥammad himself in respect to the overall compositional plan of the Qur'ān (to be discussed below):

“I was given the Seven Long sūras instead of the Torah, the sūras of hundred verses (*al-mi'ūn*) instead of the Gospel, the Repeated Ones (*al-mathānī*) instead of Psalms, and I was given the short sūras (*al-mufaṣṣal*) as a special favour”.⁴

The second discipline, or the science of the written codices represents a branch of the Qur'ānic sciences, a kind of an appendix to the science of Qur'ānic readings (*'ilm al-qirā'āt*). It is a careful selection and purposeful arrangement of the *ḥadīth* material in order to depict the process of the written fixation and codification of Qur'ānic text. The number of authors who wrote on the subject was not large. The earliest of them mentioned in the *Fihrist* belong to mid-ninth century C.E. but the three main authors mentioned both by Arthur Jeffery who published the sole survivor of this group of treatises and by Suyūṭī in his *Itqān* are:

1 - The above-mentioned Ibn Abī Dāwud (d. 316/929), whose book was published by Jeffery.

2 - Ibn al-Anbārī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim (d.327/940), an authority in the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, philology and grammar.

3 - Ibn Ashta al-Iṣbahānī (d. 360/971), a pupil of Ibn Mujāhid, who had codified the seven canonical readings of the Qur'ān, an authority in non-canonical readings.

This discipline accumulated facts about the early codices prior to the 'Uthmānic *vulgata* which clearly showed that various codices had different arrangement of sūras in them. It also selected numerous traditions which showed that even during the compilation of the 'Uthmānic codex the compilers were hesitant as to the order of sūras, or that Muḥammad himself occasionally grouped sūras not in the order adopted in the 'Uthmānic codex.

⁴ See Abū 'Ubayd: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, 1991, 120.

All this objectively led to the question about the origin of the order of sūras which was to become one of the crucial problems of the future discipline dealing with the composition of the Qur'ān.

Of the two disciplines already mentioned the latter got much more attention among the European scholars than the first one. By the contrast, the former was considered by Muslim scholars much more important as it was directly related to the tasks of the Qur'ānic exegesis. It became a custom among the Muslim *mufasssirūn* to mention the virtues of any sūra or a group of sūras in the beginning of the commentary to it (or them).⁵

Unlike these two disciplines the third one, the science of the inimitability of the Qur'ān was generated in the realm of the rational Muslim theology, namely the Mu'tazilite thought, not of in the realm of the sciences of the Scripture and Tradition. Its origins are related most often with names of the Mu'tazilite teacher al-Nazzām (d. 231/845) and his pupil al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) but none of their writings on the subject has come down to us, as well as the treatise of another Mu'tazilite theologian, Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī (d. 307/919).

The most famous authors mentioned in the *Itqān* whose treatises has been preserved and published are:

1 - Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998), *faqīh* and *muḥaddith*.

2 – 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), Mu'tazilite theologian, grammarian and authority in *tafsīr*.

3 - Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), a major theologian of the Ash'arite school.

⁵ As is often mentioned, only Zamakhsharī gave the virtues of a sūra at the end of the commentary to it, not in the beginning.

4 – ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 481/1078), philologist and grammarian, the creator of the Arabic rhetorical theory.

Two ideas, elaborated by the theory of inimitability, proved important for the study of the composition of the Qur’ān. First, the belief that the Qur’ān is a miracle as a whole in all its parts and aspects. This implicitly meant that the composition of an individual sūra or block of sūras, or the whole text is also part of its inimitability. Second, the notion of *naẓm* which proved the instrument of the analysis of the structure of the text on all its levels, from the combination of *ḥarfs* to the composition of the codex.

The list of the names which we compiled during the discussion of the “pre-historical” stage actually coincides with that of the most quoted authors in later works specially devoted to the problem of the composition of the Qur’ān.

6. Now the second, “historical” stage. The two relevant disciplines of this stage are, so to say, extensions of the disciplines of the previous stage. More specifically, the science of the order of sūras is a product of the development of the science of the written codices, and the science of *tanāsub* is a kind of extension of the science of inimitability. They got ripe approximately at the same time, the 13th-14th century C.E. The number of major authors is very narrow and practically identical in both cases.

For the science of the order of sūras they are:

1 - Ibn al-Zubayr al-Garnāṭī (627/1230-708/1308), an Andalusian authority in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, a Māliki lawyer, historian and grammarian. His treatise *al-Burhān fī tartīb suwar al-Qur’ān* has recently been published (Rabat, 1990).

2 - Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (745/1344-794/1393), an Egyptian authority in Qur’ānic sciences and *ḥadīth*, a Shāfi‘i lawyer. His treatise *al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* is also published (Beirut, 1988).

3 - Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (849/1445-911/1505), whose book *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* is well known and has been published more than once.

For the science of *tanāsub* this list comprises:

1 - Ibn al-Zubayr, the same treatise.

2 - Zarkashī, the same treatise.

3 - Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Biqā'ī (809/1406-885/1480), historian and adīb, an authority in the Qur'ān and tafsīr, lived in Syria and Egypt. His main treatise on the subject is *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa 'l-suwar* also known as *Munāsabāt al-Biqā'ī*. It has recently been published (Beirut, 1995).

4 - Suyūṭī, the same *Itqān* plus a special treatise *Tanāsuq al-durar fī tanāsub al-suwar* or *Asrār tartīb al-suwar* published in Cairo, 1978.

Most of these scholars are well known in the history of the Qur'ānic sciences.

Two things can be inferred from these data. First, the emergence of the twin disciplines are the product of the synthesis of the sciences of tradition and kalām. This synthesis represented – among others – by the above books by Zarkashī and Suyūṭī was one of the factors which helped to bring the Muslim Qur'ānic sciences to completion. Second, it happened in al-Andalus and Egypt, which became two main centers of Arabic culture at the end of the classical period after Iraq and Syria had lost their priority.

7. The two main questions raised and studied by the twin sciences are:

First, what was the origin of the order of sūras in the 'Uthmān codex, and whether it was of the revelational (*tawqīfī*) origin, like the order of verses within a sūra, or it was the product of the human rational (*ijtihādī*) effort?

Second, whether there is an accord in meaning between the adjacent sūras as well as a significant symbolic plan in the composition of the canonized ‘Uthmānic codex which is believed to be an embodiment of the divine prototype?

Combined together the two questions represent one main problem, that of the composition of the Qur’ān, taken in two aspects: historical and structural.

8. The Historical Aspect:

The earliest author, Ibn al-Zubayr of Granada, states that there are two basically different answers to the first question: that of *ijtihād* and that of *tawqīf*, and discusses them at length, thus making the conceptual framework for all the subsequent discussions of the problem.

He traces the first position, that of *ijtihād*, back to the founder of the Māliki legal school, Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795). Being a Mālikite himself, Ibn al-Zubayr naturally accepts this point of view, which he attributes also to Bāqillānī, as always mentioned by the scholars, in one of the two views, expressly stated by him. The somewhat uncertain position of Bāqillānī actually makes Mālik the only straightforward proponent of this hypothesis though we can also add the philologist and lexicographer Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004) on the basis of the testimony of Suyūṭī.

Of the two figures mentioned by Ibn al-Zubayr in support of the *ijtihād* view the figure of Mālik raises some doubts. First, the problem itself began the focus of interest much later. Second, I did not manage to find any of the relevant *ḥadīths* so much discussed later in connection with this problem in his *Muwatta’*. It would be safer to suggest that it was the common position of the Māliki school, originated somewhere between the 11th and the 13th centuries and attributed – in the fashion of those days – to its founder.

From the fact that Ibn al-Zubayr does not mention any names of proponents of the *tawqīf* view we can deduce that with the exception of the Mālikites and some

individual figures among the rational theologians and philologists, the majority of the community, at least the Sunni community, represented by *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn* of the three remaining legal schools, held this view. It is well-known that medieval scholars while enumerating several points of view on a given subject usually do not mention the proponents of the view which they consider to be the position of the majority (*ijmā'*). At the same time, individual positions which deviate from the *ijmā'* are always mentioned together with the names of those who hold them.

We can also surmise that the *tawqīf* view was part of traditional beliefs emerged earlier than the other hypothesis. In any case, its proponents mentioned by either by Zarkashī or Suyūṭī or both belong to the 10th century, for instance, the above Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 327/940) or Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950).

The defensive tone of Ibn al-Zubayr's argumentation also shows that the position of the Mālikite school was considered by their opponents from the Mashriq a challenge, which bordered on heresy. His technique of bridging the gap between the two opposite views became the integral part of the exposition of the problem by the later authors. It includes four steps:

First, having mentioned both positions Ibn al-Zubayr states that both parties have their reasons to believe themselves right and none of these positions undermines the *īmān* and leads to heresy.

Second, he attributes to Mālik the view that even if the order of sūras was set up by the Companions and not by the Prophet himself, the former acted on the basis of what they heard or saw from Muḥammad as the Companions always followed what had been expressly said or implied by him. In other words, the opposition between the two views is more verbal, than real.

Third, he repeatedly stresses that whichever view is accepted the scholar has to remember that the order of the codex is based on the harmony (*tanāsub*) and

meaningful correspondence between the adjacent sūras and in the order of sūras as a whole and that this *tanāsub* is an aspect of the Qur'ān's inimitability. Thus the scholar turns out to be the first to tie the problems of *tartīb* and *tanāsub* into the integrated theory of the composition of the Qur'ān.

Fourth, he quotes the opinion of Ibn 'Aṭīyya of Granada who suggested that the order of many sūras has been pointed out by the Prophet, namely, the groups of the Seven Long, the *Ḥawāmīm*, the *Mufaṣṣal*, but to define the order of the rest has been left to the *umma*. This intermediary position locked in the chain of argumentation. As a result, what has previously been the opposition of the two opinions turned out as a continuum of views slightly different from each other and being in fact nothing more than just verbal variations which in any case does not touch upon the validity of faith.

Ibn al-Zubayr so masterfully turned the situation upside down that the resulting picture proved very convincing and has been repeated ever since even by the scholars who did not share his point of view. The scholars of high standing, like Zarkashī and Suyūṭī, copied the slightest features of his style. Otherwise it would have been hard to explain why both of them mentioned the two basic views in the order set up by Ibn al-Zubayr and then changed the order of exposition and started from the second view, not the first.

9. The structural aspect:

The most interesting for our theme is the argumentation used by the opponents to support their respective views. Time is not enough to discuss at length these arguments and all the implications which can be drawn from them for the study of the Muslim views on the composition of the Qur'ān. So I confine myself to several observations. A more detailed study of them I plan to publish soon.

First, the texts we studied definitely show that the scholars believed that there was a compositional plan of the text as a whole and that this plan was a manifestation of the relation of the Scripture of Islam with the previous scriptures. The starting point of the reflection in this direction was the famous *ḥadīth* quoted above:

“I was given the Seven Long sūras instead of the Torah, the sūras of hundred verses (*al-mi'ūn*) instead of the Gospel, the Repeated Ones (*al-mathānī*) instead of Psalms, and I was given the short sūras (*al-mufaṣṣal*) as a special favour”.

Two points interested scholars most of all:

First, the exact reference of the term *mathānī* which the majority understood as referring to the *Fātiḥa* but in the framework of the discussion of the composition of the Qur'ān it was treated as denoting a group of sūras between the *mi'ūn* and the *mufaṣṣal*.

Second, the exact borderlines between the groups, especially the dividing line between the first three groups taken together and the group of the *mufaṣṣal*. While the borderlines between the second and the third groups are discussed mostly in general terms without giving exact data, the situation with the *sab' ṭiwāl* and the *mufaṣṣal* is quite different. There is a lot of discussion about the seventh element of the group of the Seven Long.⁶ As for the *mufaṣṣal*, both Zarkashī and Suyūṭī quote 12 different views as to what sūra is the first in this group, the most popular being the view that the group begins with the sūra “Qāf” (no. 50).

Four observations can be made in respect to this *ḥadīth* and its interpretation as the indication of the existing overall compositional plan of the Qur'ān.

⁶ See my publication: Dmitry Frolov. The Problem of the «Seven Long» Sūras. – Studies in Arabic and Islam. Proceedings of the 19th Congress, UEA, Halle 1998. Leuven: Peeters, 2002, c. 193-203.

First, the four groups mentioned roughly correspond to four periods of revelation known in the European Qur'ānic studies, though I never came across any reference to it in the special literature.

Second, there is a direct indication that the main dividing line was between what was considered as having no parallels in the Bible and what was understood as being a parallel to the Biblical texts. This dividing line approximately corresponds to the dividing line between the early Meccan sūras which reflect little if any Biblical influence, and late Meccan and Medinan sūras which are flooded with Biblical images, stories, allusions.

Third, if we look more closely at the sequence of main themes of the first three groups: the Law, the stories of the Prophets and the eschatology and ethics, we see in it a close parallel to the compositional plan of both the Hebrew Bible – the Torah (the Pentateuch), the Early Prophets, the Late Prophets and Wisdom literature – and the New Testament – the Four Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles and the Revelation of St. John.

Four, it can also be inferred from the tradition and its discussion that the compositional plan of the Qur'ān as reflected in its canonical version is understood as a kind of intertwining of the plans of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. As a result the most perfect and all-embracing Scripture, destined to substitute the previous ones, was created. Elsewhere (Halle, 1998) I had an opportunity to show that the composition of the first four sūras (or five, if we also include the *Fātiḥa*), was understood as based on exactly the same principle, the superimposition of the plan of the Gospel on the plan of the Pentateuch.⁷

Second, the idea about the existing of the overall compositional plan of the Qur'ān seems to be of a rather late origin. Earlier is the notion of the existing of the compositional nuclei represented by groups of sūras placed in succession. The most

⁷ See my article quoted above.

often discussed among them are the Seven Long sūras, which are considered to be the opening block of the Qur'ān parallel to those of the Hebrew Bible (the Pentateuch) and the New Testament (the Four Gospels) and the eschatological (mostly) block of the Seven *Ḥawāmīm* (nos. 40-46), which was considered to be the heart, or center (*lubb*) of the Qur'ān. It seems that to round off the composition we need a final block of the seven sūras. So I was very glad to find out that Suyūṭī in the *Itqān* quoted al-Rāghib al-Iṣbahānī (d. 1108), a companion of Ghazālī and an authority in the Qur'ānic studies, who said in his *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān* that the term *al-mufaṣṣal* covers the last seven sūras of the *muṣḥaf*.

If we turn to the data, however insecure, we possess of the structure of the early codices, namely that of Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/653), Ubayy (d. 21/642), and 'Alī (d. 40/661), we can discern in them the confirmation of the existence of these blocks at the very early stage (maybe as a first step to the compilation of the Qur'ān). We also get somewhat bewildering information about the number and the order of the sūras in them.

The Seven Long form the compact group in the codices of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy with the 10th sūra as the seventh element though the order is different: 2,4,3,7,6,5,10 (Ibn Mas'ūd) and 2,4,3,6,7,5,10 (Ubayy). If we turn to the Ya'qūbī's version of the composition of 'Alī's codex (most definitely forged, but maybe reflecting some early prototype) where the sūras are divided in the seven groups, we see a similar picture. Each group begins with a sūra of the group of the Seven Long and this means that they also form a sequence of a sort (a kind of a compositional acrostic), the seventh element being, as in the 'Uthmān's codex, not the 10th sūra, but the block of the 8th + the 9th sūras.

We can make – with near certainty – four observations. First, the group of the Seven Long was a real building block for the compilation of the Qur'ān. Second, judging by the data of the Traditions, the very term, the Seven Long, was known

already at the time of the Prophet. Third, neither the elements nor the order of them were known with certainty even to the Companions closest to Muḥammad. Fourth, as I showed earlier (Halle, 1998) the order closest to the principle of decreasing length is that of Ibn Mas‘ūd, whose codex looks the most archaic of all.

The group of the seven *Ḥawāṣim* is a compact block not only in the ‘Uthmānic codex, but also in the codex of Ibn Mas‘ūd. Only the order there is different (40, 43, 41, 42, 46, 45, 44) being once again very close to the realisation of the principle of decreasing length (40, 42, 43, 41, 46, 45, 44). In the codex of ‘Alī (Ya‘qūbī’s version) the elements of the group once again distributed between the seven groups, one in each, the order being 41, 44, 42, 43, 40, 45, 46. Only in the codex of Ubayy this group is not treated as a compact block at all. The reason for this fact might be the fact that both versions of the order of sūras in this codex (that of Ibn al-Nadīm and Suyūṭī) are most deficient in the middle part.

The last seven sūras of the Qur’ān give the following result. In the codex of Ibn Mas‘ūd, from which the sūras 113-114 were missing, the rest five form the compact final block (110, 108, 109, 111, 112), in the version of Suyūṭī followed by the no. 94. In the codex of Ubayy all the seven also form a compact block and the order is that of the ‘Uthmān codex, though there are one or two insertions in the middle of the group: Ibn al-Nadīm – 108, [97], 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114; Suyūṭī – 108, [97], 109, 110, 111, [106], 112, 113, 114.

It turns out that these groups were real building blocks in the compilation of the Qur’ān but the number and the order of elements in them were in the beginning not fixed. Later, in the process of the elaboration of the final canonical version both aspects were fixed. The number of elements in each group was understood as corresponding to the number of seven which has special symbolic significance in relation to the Qur’ān. The reasons for establishing the final order of elements latter are not exactly clear at the present moment, but they are anything but an attempt to

comply with the principle of decreasing length. Were it so, the version of Ibn Mas‘ūd would have been in the two cases the most preferable. By the way, the principle of decreasing length, so popular with the European scholars, in the sources studied is mentioned only once and, so to say, in passing.

Third, all the authors give much attention to the paired sūras grouped according to some kind of formal or meaningful affinity between them which – and not individual sūras – are understood to be the building blocks in the composition of the Qur’ān. They are the blocks 1-2, 2-3, 8-9, 65-66, 81-82, 93-94, 105-106, 113-114 and others. Ibn al-Zubayr in the conclusion of his exposition of the teaching about the composition of the Qur’ān specially states, that many – but not all – sūras are thus paired in the structure of the text.

10. In this presentation I only managed to cover several aspects of the theory about the composition of the Qur’ān which had not been so far the object of much attention from the part of European scholars. The study of the disciplines dealing with *tartīb* and *tanāsub* only begins, and if I managed to draw the attention of my colleagues to their importance, I would consider the task of this presentation fulfilled.