

Relics of Syro-Aramaic Letters in Early Qur'ānic Codices of the *ḥiǧāzī* and *kūfī* Style

Christoph Luxenberg

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1. Introductory Remarks

The present essay builds upon one first published in the volume *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, where I discussed a text from the current Cairo edition of the Qur'ān.¹ There I argued that it is clear that there exists at least one faulty transcription into the younger Arabic writing system, from a Qur'ānic *Vorlage* written (earlier) in Syriac script (not in Syriac language). In this essay I explained the basis for the confusion regarding the similarly-formed Syriac letters ܐ / *L* and ܥ / *'ayn*, which resulted in the latter's being incorrectly transcribed as an Arabic ܐ / *L*. I will briefly summarize my findings here.

The ܐ / *L* in the Arabic word لَبَدَا / *LBDA* (S. 72:19) incorrectly represents the Syriac letter ܥ / *'ayn*; this mistake resulted in the reading *libadan*, which makes no sense in its context, instead of ܥܒܕܐ / *'ibādan* (which should actually be *'ābidē* < original *'ābidayn* > *'ābidēn* > *'ābidīn*), which corresponds to the Syro-Aramaic ܥܒܕܐ / *'ābdē* (< *'ābdayn* > *'ābdēn* > *'ābdīn*). The doubts expressed by Western scholars as to the real meaning of this expression in their translation bring into relief the possibility of a faulty transcription. This is evident from the following context of Surah 72:18–20:

وَأَنَّ الْمَسْجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا

وَأَنَّهُ لَمَّا قَامَ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ يَدْعُوهُ كَادُوا يَكْفُرُونَ عَلَيْهِ لَبَدًا

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَدْعُوا رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِهِ أَحَدًا

Paret: (18) And, “The cultic places (*masāʿid*) are (exclusively) there for God. Consequently, do not call upon anyone (else) besides God!” (19) And, “When the servant of God (n.: “i.e., Muhammad”) raised himself up in order to call upon him (n.: or, “to pray to him”), they would have nearly crushed him (for blatant meddling?) (? *Kādū yakūnūna ‘alaihi libadan*)” (n.: “The meaning of this verse is very unclear.”). (20) Say: “I will call upon my Lord (alone) (n.: or, “I will pray to my Lord alone”), and I will associate no one with him.”²

Blachère: (18) The [sacred] mosque is for Allah. Therefore do not pray to any person besides Allah! (n. 18: “*The [sacred] mosque: cf. Q 9:17*”) (19) When the Servant of Allah got up, praying, [the infidels] failed to be against him in masses (?). (n. 19: *The Servant of God* = Muhammad; concerning *Kādū yakūnūna ‘alay-hi libadā* (var. *lubada* and *lubbāda*), “the infidels, etc.,” the subject is uncertain – the commentators say that they are the *jinn*, but this is hardly probable.) (20) Say: “I will not pray to anyone but my Lord, and I will not associate anyone with Him.”³

Bell: (18) And that, the places of worship belong to Allah; so along with Allah call not ye upon anyone; (19) And that, when a servant of Allah stood calling upon Him, they were upon him almost in swarms. (n. 3: The meaning is uncertain. The “servant of Allah” is usually taken to be Muhammad, and “they” to refer to jinn, which is possible if angels now speak.) (20) Say: “I call simply upon my Lord, and I associate not with Him any one.”⁴

My philological analysis of Q 72:18–20, three verses which hang together in terms of their meaning, resulted in the following interpretation:

(The Jinn, the invisible beings, spirits, claim:)

18. And that worship (belongs) to God (alone), and so you should call upon no other besides God;
19. And that, when the servant of God was resurrected and called (once again) upon him (that is, “worshiped him”), they (the people) would nearly have worshiped him (as God);
20. (Upon which, when the Servant of God was defending himself,) he said (NB: *not* “say!”), ‘No! I call upon my Lord, and I associate no other with him!’”

The original discovery of individual Syro-Aramaic letters in the Qurʾān is not due to any particular Qurʾānic manuscripts; rather, it resulted step-by-step from the contextualized philological analyses of the canonical Qurʾānic text using the method presented in my study *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*.⁵ The manuscript material that has since come to light has contributed to the clarification of the sources of the mistakes in transcribing from the older Syriac into the younger Arabic writing system, and also to the recognition of

an especially striking Syriac letter, which I will discuss at the end of this essay. Methodologically speaking, this has resulted in an expansion of the methods used up to this time, which consisted primarily of seven parts. In the past scholars have typically seen the main problem in the Qur'ānic text as the lack of diacritical points in the early Qur'ānic manuscripts (even though the actual problem is of a philological nature, in which the diacritical points play only a subordinate role); henceforth, however, research methods in Qur'ānic textual analysis must take into consideration the possibility of confusion regarding a group of Syro-Aramaic letters. In what follows I will discuss these letters and the new Qur'ānic readings that result from their confusion, in the cases of words that were mis-written and mis-read.

My research thus far has shown that several letters from the Syriac alphabet have led to mis-transcriptions or mis-readings, because they are formed similarly either to one another or to Arabic letters:

- 1) There are not a few cases of mis-transcription due to confusion regarding the identically shaped Syriac *serṭā* / *serṭō* letters ܫ / *d* and ܫ / *r*, the only letters in the Syriac alphabet that are distinguished by means of a point placed above or below the letters. It must have been inexperienced copyists who were the causes of mis-transcriptions of these letters, not only into the Arabic ڍ / *d* (or ڍ / *d̄*) and ڍ / *r* (or ڍ / *z*), but even into an Arabic ڍ / *w*, due to the similarity of its basic form to the two Syriac letters.]
- 2) Less common is confusion regarding the two similarly-formed Syriac letters ܠ / *l* and ܠ / *'ayn*; the latter was sometimes transcribed as an Arabic ܠ / *l*, while the former was transcribed as an Arabic ܠ / *'ayn* less often (due to its more distinct form).
- 3) The confusion that appears most often by far concerns the final forms of the Arabic letters ܢ / *n* and ܢ / *γ* / *ī* or *ā*. That such exchanges took place within the Arabic writing system, due to similarities between the hand-written final forms of these letters, has already been proposed, but below I will provide the graphic proof for this conjecture by means of the early *hijāzī* and *kūfī* fragments of the Qur'ān, in that the confusion actually goes back to unchanged (and therefore faithful) transcriptions of the Syriac final ܢ / ܢ / *n*. This identification is the discovery that gives us concrete proof that the Qur'ānic *Vorlage* was originally, at least partially, composed in the Syriac script (a phenomenon known as "Garshuni" or "Karshuni").
- 4) Finally, a few cases have been found thus far in which a Syriac ܫ / *s* was falsely transcribed as an Arabic ܫ / *h*, due to the similarities between the two letters. This will be shown in a later study.

2. Concrete Examples

2.1 The Mis-transcription of the Syriac ܐܢ / ʿayn as an Arabic ل / l

The example I explained at the beginning of this essay concerns such a mis-transcription in the canonical Qurʾānic text. The present section contains further examples of this phenomenon; in all cases I have underlined the falsely transcribed ل / l.

Example 2: Surah 104:1

ويل لكل همزه لمزّه

Paret, 517, translates this text as follows, indicating his dependence upon the Qurʾānic commentators: “Woe to every taunter and grumbler.”⁶

Introductory comments

The Cairo edition reads: *waylun li-kulli humazatin lumazatin*. Several emendations are required here. First, the introductory vowel *u* in the last two words (*humaza* and *lumaza*) is arbitrary and has no grammatical justification. The Arab readers of the Qurʾān did not recognize that these two forms represent a Syro-Aramaic *nomen agentis* that came into Arabic as a *faʿāl* and must have been familiar to the Arab grammarians. Consequently, it must have been inexperienced readers who read here *hu* and *lu* instead of *ha* and *la*. Second, in the *faʿāl* form the middle consonant is doubled, and the vowel that immediately follows is to be pronounced as a long *ā*. Third, the Arab readers apparently did not recognize that the final *h* indicates the Aramaic *status emphaticus* masculine ending with *ā*, which has nothing to do with the Arabic feminine ending or with a mark of intensification, as *Lisān* (V:407) explains. The two diacritical marks above the final *h* are therefore false, as is the inflection to *in*, because the Aramaic final *h* (= *ā*) is uninflectable. Because the entirety of Surah 104 is based on a rhyme with the *a*-sound, verse 1 should be read (without final vowels) thus: *wayl la-kull* (not *li-kull*) *hammāza lammāza*.

Philological Analysis

The word ويل / *wayl* is a combination of the interjection وي / *way* (< Syro-Aramaic ܘܝ / *wāy*) (“woe!”) and the preposition ل / *la* (< a reduction from على / *ʿalā* by the disappearance of the introductory syllable ʿa), which takes the dative case. This preposition was added enclitically to the exclamatory particle وي / *way* (“woe!”) to form the substantive ويل / *wayl* (similar to the folk etymologically explained construction of مال / *māl* as ما / *mā* + ل / *l* = “what

belongs to [someone]” = “property, assets”). The latter etymology was accepted upto now by Arabists. But meanwhile, the author has recognised it as “folk” etymology, in so far as the Arabs understood by this word مال / *māl*, according to the *Lisān*, in the first instance, their possessions in the form of camels, which makes it clear that the word مال / *māl* is an abbreviation of the word (ḥi)māl (beast of burden) or (ḡi)māl (camels).

Before personal suffixes وي / *way*, with the following preposition لا / *la-*, appears sometimes proclitically as an exclamatory particle, as in ويلكم / *way-lakum* (“woe to you” [S. 20:61]) (= Syro-Aramaic و لکم / *wāy l-kōn*), and sometimes substantively (placed before and after), as in ولكم الويل / *wa-lakum al-wayl* (lit.: “To you the woe” [S. 21:18]).

2.2 Concerning the Mis-Transcription of the ل / ِ in ليمزه (traditional reading: lumazatin)

The Arabic ل / *l* here is a mis-transcription of a Syriac ܠܥܝܢ / *‘ayn*. The original form in the Syriac script was ܠܥܡܙܐ, which corresponds to the Arabic عمزه / *‘ammāza*. The ع / *‘ayn*, if it is viewed with a diacritical point, results in the Arabic reading غمزه / *ḡammāza*.

Lexically, the verbal root لمز / *lamaza* cannot be shown to be in use in any Arabic dialect. Everything that appears in the lexica can be traced back to this Qur’ānic mis-transcription and actually belongs under the root غمز / *ḡamaza*. *Lisān* (V:406b) does not note that لمز / *lamaza* actually concerns a falsely-transcribed غمز / *ḡamaza* (without a diacritical point); about لمز / *lamaza* it simply says الإشارة بالعين وأصله الإشارة بالعين (“originally this meant winking, or make a sign with an eye”). This note simply reproduces the definition *Lisān* (V:388b) gives concerning غمز / *ḡamaza*: الإشارة بالعين والحاجب والجفن (*al-ḡamz* = “to give a sign with the eye, the eyebrow, and the eyelid”).

Because there is no verb لمز / *lamaza* in Arabic, the Arab lexicographers and commentators on the Qur’ān attempted to speculate on some meaning for the word from the Qur’ānic context. So, for example, in *Ṭabarī* (XXX:291ff.) and in *Lisān* (V:406b f.), a *lumaza* (= *lammāza*) is one who “disdains” or “slanders” someone else.

However, the Qur’ān makes the actual meaning of the term quite clear for us by self-reference, provided that the mis-reading I suggest in a different place is correctly transcribed and read. The Qur’ānic commentators would not have noticed this, because they did not see the connection between the two texts. Surah 83:29–30 reads:

ان الذين اجرموا كانوا من الذين امنوا يضحكون

واذا مروا بهم يتغامزون

traditional reading: 'inna llaḏīna 'aḡramū kānū mina llaḏīna 'āmanū yaḏḥakūna wa-'iḏā marrū bihim yataḡāmazūna

Paret (?): The sinners make fun of the faithful (in this world) / and when they pass by them, they wink at one another (in a mocking way).

Pickthall: 29. Lo! the guilty used to laugh at those who believed, 30. And wink one to another when they passed them.

Paret (504) did not catch this last nuance, for he translated the text

. . . they wink at one another (in a strained way/ verkniffen) (*yataḡāmazūna*).

Indeed, winking can have a variety of motivations. However, the Qur'ānic context makes the mocking intention of the verb (“to laugh, make fun of”) in v. 29 quite clear. For this reason, the Qur'ān intends the *nomen agentis* غمزہ / *ḡammāza* to mean “one who mocks.” In the context of Q 104, this meaning would describe someone who makes fun of the after-life and sees his happiness in the prosperity he enjoys in the present life, and thus someone to whom the punishments of hell are promised. This leitmotif—the unbelievers who mock in this life, and the faithful who laugh in the after-life—appears multiple times in the Qur'ān with such synonymous expressions as سخر / *saḥira* (“to mock”), ضحك / *ḏahika* (“to laugh”), استهزأ / *istahza'a* (“to make fun of”), لعب / *la'iba* (“to amuse oneself, enjoy oneself”), etc.

Concerning the allophone همزه / *hammāza*, which appears in Q 104:1 before the word we have just been considering (and whose mis-reading *humaza* was chosen for the name of the Surah), *Lisān* (V:425b) makes the root همز / *hamaza* synonymous with غمز / *ḡamaza*. It also (426a) lists the present participle هامز / *hāmiz* alongside the *nomen agentis* همّاز / *hammāz* and همزة / *humaza* (= *hammāza*); these forms it explains as الغيّاب / *al-ḡayyāb* (“the slanderer”). With this information, همزه / *hammāza* would be understood as an intensifying expression that is parallel to غمزہ / *ḡammāz* (which is possible according to Mandaean i.e., eastern vernacular Aramaic phonetics). The traditional understanding recognizes the possibility that the root همزه / *hamaza* may actually be a phonetic variant of همس / *hamasa*, which *Lisān* (V:426b) connects with the devil, who makes suggestions in the hearts of human beings. According to Mannā (176a), however, the Syro-Aramaic root همس / *hmas* means, among other things (def. 4), شك ارتاب / *šakka, irtāba* (“to doubt, entertain suspicion”). Because the Qur'ān puts “doubt” together with “unbelievers”—e.g., in Q 34:21, where God allows humans to be tested by the devil, to learn who believes in the after-life, and who doubts—then همزه / *hammāza* = همسه / *hammāsa* (“one who doubts”) would fit well with غمزہ / *ḡammāza* (“one who mocks”), as one who doubts the after-life and therefore

makes fun of it. In the eschatological context of Q 104, this is why such a person is threatened with the punishments of hell.

As a result of the corresponding Syro-Aramaic morphology and orthography, the traditional reading of Q 104:1 (*waylun li-kulli humazatin lumazatin*) should be adjusted to read *wayl(un) l(a)-kull(i) hammāza ġammāza*. The traditional understanding of this text—“Woe to every taunter and grumbler!”—should be amended semantically and syntactically as follows:

“Woe to every mocking doubter!”

These first two examples derive from Meccan Surahs. I will now present three further examples from Medinan Surahs that exhibit the same mis-transcription.

Example 3: Surah 49:11

و لا تَلْمِزُوا انفسكم ولا تتابزوا باللقب

Pickthall: Neither defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames.

Paret (431) translates this text thus:

And do not criticize (each other), and do not give each other derogatory names!” (“Und bekrittelt euch nicht (gegenseitig) und gebt euch keine Schimpfnamen!”)

This section of the Medinan text begins with a warning to the faithful not to make fun of one another (لا يسخر قوم من قوم / *lā yashar qawmun min qawm*); the verselet in question follows thereafter. The clarity of the former statement makes obvious the synonymous meaning of the latter, which contains the mis-transcribed verb تَلْمِزُوا / *wa-lā talmizū*. As was the case above, Ṭabarī (XXVI:131) speculates as to the meaning of this expression that was unknown to him, giving it the sense of “to slander.” Here again we see that the medial ل / *l* in تَلْمِزُوا (*taḷmizū*) is a mis-transcription of the Syriac ܠ / *ayn* (without a diacritical point). If we replace the ل / *l* with an Arabic medial ‘ayn (with a diacritical point), we have the reading تَعْمِزُوا انفسكم / *wa-lā taġmizū anfusakum* (“and do not wink at one another [mockingly, with the eyes] = do not mock one another”).

The reconstructed verb عَمَز / *ġamaza* (“to wink”) is widely current in Arabic, but the verb-form that follows, ولا تتابزوا / *wa-lā ta(ta)-nābazū*, is not. Consequently, Ṭabarī (XXVI:132) thought it was a denominative form based on an assumed substantive نَبَز / *nabz*, whose plural would be انباز / *anbāz*; he also assumed that it was a synonym of the word that follows, لقب / *laqab* (“epithet, nickname”), which is an authentic Arabic word with the identically-constructed plural ألقاب / *alqāb*. *Lisān* (V:413a) also accepted this linguistically

unfounded explanation, apparently without question, and following him, Hans Wehr (*Arabisches Wörterbuch*). As a result, Wehr explained this questionable expression as “to give an insulting or derogatory name;” he defined the assumed substantive *nabaz/ anbāz* as “nickname.” It was from a similar understanding that Paret (431-2) neglected to translate the unfamiliar verb and paraphrased the expression thus:

. . .and do not give each other derogatory names.

In this case the Syro-Aramaic language can bring us closer to a solution to the problem. Mannā (427a) defines the root *nbaz* as a dialectical form of *nbaz* / *nbaz* (435b). But actually, the root *nbaz* is, from the point of view of phonetical historical evolution, the original form. One also finds there (435b) under (3) the Arabic parallels *شاجر خصم* / *ḥāṣama, šājara* (“to argue, bicker”). If we place this Syro-Aramaic meaning at the foundation of our reading, then the second portion of the Qur’ānic sentence, *ولا تتابزوا باللقب* / *wa-lā ta(ta)-nābazū bi-l-alqāb*, would (literally) mean, “do not argue amongst yourselves with (pejorative) nicknames;” the sense would be literally: “do not pelt each other with (pejorative) nicknames.” The latter translation actually lies closer to the original Syro-Aramaic meaning than “to argue”; on closer examination, the Syro-Aramaic root *nbaz* turns out to be the etymological correspondence to the Arabic *nabaḍa* (“to cast out, toss, throw away”). As a result, the speculation that the Arabic letter *z* / *z* is a mis-transcription of the Syriac *ḏ* / *d*, which is only distinguished from *r* / *r* by a diacritical point, lends credence to the *lectio difficilior*. If we transfer the letter as an Arabic *ḏ* / *d* (with the additional point above: *ḏ* / *ḍ*), this Arabic correction results in the following reading: *ولا تتابذوا باللقب* / *wa-lā ta(ta)-nābaḍū bi-l-alqāb* (“and do not pelt each other with (pejorative) nicknames”). This reading is even more plausible because the root *nabaza* is unknown in Arabic, while the root *nabaḍa* is rather common and appears in the Qur’an twelve times. With this new reading, the number grows to thirteen.

As a result of this orthographic and semantic review, and over against the translation of Paret quoted above, the section of Q 49:11 under consideration should now be translated thus:

. . .and do not wink (mockingly, with the eyes) at one another (i.e., do not mock one another), and do not pelt each other with (pejorative) nicknames.

Example 4: Surah 9:58

ومنهم من يلْمِزُك في الصدقت

فان اعطوا منها رضوا وان لم يعطوا منها اذا هم يسخطو

Pickthall: And of them is he who defameth thee in the matter of the alms. If they are given thereof they are content, and if they are not given thereof, behold! they are enraged.

Paret (157) translates this text thus:

And among you there are some who criticize you because of your alms-giving (*ṣadaqāt*). When they then (?) receive some of this, they are satisfied, but when they do not receive any, they are immediately upset.

The context of this passage excludes the possibility of understanding the falsely-transcribed term as above, so that يلمزك / (traditional reading:) *yalmizuka* would be يغمزك / *yaḡmizuka* (“to wink mockingly with the eyes”). “To criticize,” as Paret translates the term, also makes little sense, for a supplicant can only hope to receive alms from some kind of corresponding behavior. Ṭabarī (X:156) defends the opinion in this context that this expression is intended to mean “to seek (to receive something)” or “to request;” consequently, the “winking” mentioned here can have meant only a gesture of solicitation (perhaps with an outstretched hand) whose goal was to dispose the addressee favorably toward the speaker. This meaning is confirmed by *Lisān* (V:388b), under غمز / *ḡamaza*. According to Ibn al-Aṭīr, الغمز / *al-ḡamz* (“winking”), like الرمز / *ar-ramz* (“sign”), should be understood in a few hadith (*ḥadīth*) to mean “a sign with the eye, the eyebrow, and the hand” (فسر (الغمز في بعض الأحاديث بالإشارة كالرمز بالعين والحا جب واليد).

Consequently, this verse can be understood as follows:

Among you there are some who (making a friendly request) wink at you regarding alms (i.e., “turn to you with a gesture of solicitation”). If something is granted to these, they are satisfied; if something is not granted to them, they become indignant.

Example 5: Surah 9:79

الذين يلمزون المطوعين من المؤمنين في الصدقات و الذين لا يجدون
الا جهدهم فيسخررون منهم سخر الله منهم ولهم عذاب اليم

Pickthall: Those who point at such of the believers as give the alms willingly and such as can find naught to give but their endeavours, and deride them Allah (Himself) derideth them. Theirs will be a painful doom.

Paret (159) translates the text thus:

Those (grumblers) who (on the one hand) criticize those believers who are ready to give voluntary services (and donations) because of the gifts of alms (*ṣadaqāt*) (given by them over and above their duty) [note 86: Or: “Those (grumblers) who, on the one hand, criticize those believers who are ready to give voluntary services as they give alms”] and who (on the other hand) (criticize) those who (from a lack of means) can produce nothing but their zeal (?) [note 87: Or: “. . .who can bring anything (at all) only with great difficulty” (? *allaḏīna lā yajidūna illā juhdaḥum*)] and scoff at them—God will also scoff at them someday (when they come to the judgment), and they can expect a painful punishment.

This complex translation by Paret indicates clearly that the Qur’ānic sentence is difficult to understand on lexical, phraseological, and syntactic grounds.

Philological Analysis

First, orthographically, we should reconstruct the falsely-transcribed word يلمزون / *yalmizūn*, as يغمزون / *yaḡmizūn*, in accordance with our discussion above. Semantically, the accompanying, synonymous verb سخر / *saḥira* makes the derogatory intention of this instance of “winking” so clear that one can acceptably translate the word that literally means “to wink” as “to mock.”

Example 6: Mis-Transcription of the Syriac Δ / l̄ as an Arabic ع / ‘ayn

Second, as luck would have it, in the same verse (Surah 9: 79) just after our falsely-transcribed Arabic ل / *l* (from the Syro-Aramaic ܠ / *ayn*, in يلمون / *yalmizūn* = يغمزون / *yaḡmizūn*), a word appears that presents the opposite phenomenon, namely, that a Syro-Aramaic Δ / *l* is transcribed as an Arabic ع / *‘ayn*. Because we recognize this mis-transcription, we can reconstruct the falsely-transcribed word المطوعين / (traditional reading:) *al-muṭṭawwi‘īna* as المطولين / *al-muṭṭawwilīn*.

Philological and Lexical Rationale

The Arabic verbal root طوع > طاع / *ṭawa‘a* > *ṭā‘a* has the basic meaning of “to obey, comply.” The fifth verbal stem تطوع / *taṭawwa‘a* is understood in modern Arabic in the sense of “to volunteer for military service.” This idea corresponds to the explanation given in *Lisān* (VIII:243b) for المطوعة / *al-muṭṭawwi‘a*: الذين يتطوعون بالجهاد / *al-laḏīna yataṭawwa‘ūna bi-l-ḡihād* (“they are those who voluntarily fight in the (holy) war”). *Lisān* (VIII:243b) explains the verbal noun تطوع / *taṭawwu‘* as follows: ما تبرّع به

من ذات نفسه مما لا يلزمه فرضه (“it is that which one does voluntarily [actually *tabarra‘a* means “. . .an action by which one distinguishes oneself”- [cf. Arabic, *bāri‘* = brilliant, illustrious]), what is not imposed upon one as a duty.” In reality, however, تطوع / *taṭawwa‘a* means “to behave obediently, to comply obediently with a duty.”

The meaning of “to volunteer for military service” has taken hold in modern literary Arabic, but the basis of this expression as a “voluntary offering” has remained foreign to spoken usage. This is true even if one wants to understand the Qur’ānic expression من تطوع خيرا / *man taṭawwa‘a ḥayran* (S. 2:158, 184) as Paret translated it (23, 26): “when someone does a good deed voluntarily.” In the Qur’ānic context, however, the fifth reflexive stem تطوع / *taṭawwa‘a* seems to have the meaning of the tenth reflexive stem استطاع / *istaṭā‘a* (“can, to be able, to be capable”), and this is the meaning of the synonymous verb اطاق / *aṭāqa* in Q 2:184: وعلى الذين يطيقونه فدية طعام مسكين (“...and those who are able to do so (should make) a (corresponding) gift of food to a poor person.” The addendum that follows then reads: فمن تطوع خيرا فهو خير له (“and who is able to do more [i.e., “still more”], this will be for that person's benefit); Paret translated the clause, “...and if someone does a good work voluntarily, that is better for that person.”

If this explanation eliminates the reading المطوعين / *al-muṭṭawwi‘in* as meaning “the voluntary (donors),” because the word “donors” is missing, then the next step is to examine whether the reading المطولين / *al-muṭṭawwilin* gives this meaning.

The Arabic verbal root طال > طال / *ṭawala* > *ṭāla* is easy to understand on its own; it has a foundational meaning of “to be long.” However, three Qur’ānic texts lead one to decide on a meaning that semantically has nothing to do with this fundamental Arabic definition. These texts are:

- 1) S. 4:25: concerning the wedding-gift mentioned in the introductory sentence و من لم يبسطع منكم طولا / *wa man lam yibṣuṭa‘ minkum ṭawla* (traditional reading: *ṭawl*; but actually *ṭūl*, meaning “length” in Arabic) more or less correctly from its context: “whoever among you is not able to produce a (wedding-)gift”;
- 2) S. 9:86: again, Ṭabarī (X:207) used the context to correctly understand the expression اولوا الطول (traditional reading: *‘ulū ṭ-tawli*) as meaning “the wealthy, the affluent.”
- 3) S. 40:3: once again, Ṭabarī (XXIV:41) correctly understood from its context the divine attribute ذي الطول / *ḏī ṭ-ṭawli* / *ḏī ṭ-ṭūli* in the list الطول غافر الذنب وقابل التوب شديد العقاب ذي الطول (“he who forgives sins, who accepts contrition, who punishes harshly and possesses abundant mercy”); Paret (388) translates this text indecisively: “and (also) possesses sufficient means (*ḏī ṭawli*) (to help the faithful?).”

Clearly, then, the common Arabic word طول (*ṭūl*) should not be interpreted based on its foundational meaning (“length”) in these Qur’ānic texts. For this reason, the early Arabic readers devised a fictive reading for the *rasm* (*ṭawl* instead of *ṭūl*), in order to justify an uncommon understanding in each text's context.

In reality, in this case we are encountering a phenomenon which is not terribly rare in the Qurʾān, namely, a lexical “loan-translation,” or calque, from Syro-Aramaic. As a result, according to our reliable methods, we must simply translate the word back into Syro-Aramaic in order to ascertain the corresponding semantic meaning. To this end, we have two verbal roots from which to choose:

- 1) ܐܪܟ / *erak* (“to be long”); and
- 2) ܦܫܬ / *pšat* (“to stretch, stretch out, reach out”).

Mannā provides Arabic meanings that speak to the terms’ semantics. For the first, on 40a, it gives

سبغ / *ṭāla*, *sabaḡa* (< Syro-Aramaic ܫܒܥ / *šbaʿ*) (“to be long, abundant”); under ܐܪܟ / *awrek*, it gives أطل / *aṭāla* (“to make long, elongate”), and in connection with ܦܫܬ / *ṭaybūtā* (“grace”), it gives اسبغ نعمة / *asbaḡa niʿma* (“to show gracious action richly”).

For the second, on 618b, it gives

نشر / *basata*, *našara* (“to stretch out, extend, elongate”); the third entry here is أعطى / *qaddama*, *aʿṭā* (“to grant, to give”).

The semantics of these two synonymous verbs suffices to explain the Qurʾānic expression طول / *ṭūl* (in Arabic, “length”) with the meaning “richly gracious action, riches, wealth, gift, present” as a lexical calque from the corresponding Syro-Aramaic expression.⁸

Even if this meaning for طول / *ṭūl* had not become accepted in modern Arabic, *Lisān* testifies that the Arabic expression was still in use in the ninth century (presumably in Mesopotamia) with the Syro-Aramaic semantics that I have indicated; this testimony takes the form of the *Ḥadīṭe* that are cited there. *Lisān* (XI:414) points to two of the three Qurʾānic texts mentioned above (SS. 4:25; 40:3) and explains الطول / *aṭ-ṭūl* (which it mis-reads as *aṭ-ṭawl*) with the following expressions: القدرة / *al-qudra* (“power, wealth”), الغنى / *al-ḡinā* (“riches”), الفضل / *al-faḍl* (“gracious action, benefaction”). It offers an idiomatic expression in which the last of these is a synonym to طول / *ṭūl*, which can also mean المن / *al-mann* (“favor, benefaction, gift”). In addition, it clarifies the fifth verbal stem تطول / *ta-ṭawwala* with the meaning امتنّ / *imtanna* (< Syro-Aramaic ܡܢܢ / *mnā*) (“to make/do a benefaction, gracious action, favor; to grant something graciously; to give as a gift”). As illustrations of this meaning, then, the text offers the following *ḥadīṭe* (with the verb تطول / *ta-ṭawwala*): تطاول عليهم الرب بفضله أي تطول (“The Lord showed his grace to them”); قال لأزواجه أولكنّ لحوفا بي أطولكنّ يدا (“He said to his wives, “The first one of you who are closest to me is that one that has the “longest hand”); and أراد أمكنّ يدا بالعتاء (“With this statement he meant those who reach farthest with the hand in giving”), with the commentary وكانت زينب تعمل بيدها وتتصدق (“at that time Zaynab made it a habit to give from the work of her own hands”).

Concerning the nominal form *تَطَوَّلَ* / *a-ṭawwul* (“donation”), the text attributes to Abū Maṣṣūr the following statement: *عند العرب محمود يوضع والتطوّل: موضع المحاسن* (“*at-taṭawwul* [= ‘donation’] is highly respected by Arabs and is considered a praiseworthy deed”). There are still more explanations in *Lisān* (XI:414) that testify to the earlier Arabic use of *تَطَوَّلَ* / *taṭawwul* in the sense of “donation.”

Even if this semantic content, foreign to the understanding in modern Arabic, may point back less to the “spoken usage of the Arabs” than to a calque from Syro-Aramaic, still the fifth verbal stem, *تَطَوَّلَ* / *ta-ṭawwala*, attested multiple times in *Lisān*, substantiates the derivation of a masculine singular active participle *متَطَوَّلٌ* (*mu-ta-ṭawwil* [“the one granting, the giver”]), whose plural form, in the reconstructed written text *المطولين*, turns out in the Qur’ān to be a *hapax legomenon* that is to be read (as transmitted in the Qur’ān) with a “haplological syllabic ellipse” (from *المتطولين* / *al-mu-ta-ṭawwilin*) as *al-mu-ṭṭawwilin* (corresponding to the Syro-Aramaic [or Garshuni] *ܡܬܬܘܘܘܘܠܝܢ* = the Arabic *المطولين*). In addition, analysis of the *hijāzī* Qur’ānic manuscript BNF 328a shows that there as well (f. 41b, l. 14) the *ع* / ‘*ayn* in the written text *المطوعين* / *al-muṭṭawwi‘in* had already been mis-transcribed, which shows that this manuscript too is secondary.

The analysis of this unique Qur’ānic expression has given two primary results:

- 1) this text represents the first discovery of a mis-transcription in the Qur’ān of a Syro-Aramaic *ṭ / l* as an Arabic *ع* / ‘*ayn*; and
- 2) the discovery of the mis-transcription would not have been possible without the assistance of philology.

The method I have used in this section has shown that one could only have come to a conclusive result by means of a combination of two linguistic components, namely, a) the Qur’ānic-Arabic and historico-linguistic usage of the expression in question, and b) also the semantics of the Syro-Aramaic expression to which it corresponds lexically. I will employ the same degree of empirical exactness in depicting other Arabic mis-transcriptions from a Qur’ānic *Vorlage* composed in the Syro-Aramaic script (“Garshuni/Karshuni”).

Phraseologically, Paret’s footnote 87 (mentioned above) points up the sentence that is difficult to understand and that he places in parentheses: “(? *alladīna lā yajidūna illā ḡuhdahum*).” Such an emphasis is quite appropriate, for the idiomatic expression *وجد جهدا* (*waḡada ḡuhdan*, lit. “to find an effort”) is not to be found in any Arabic dictionary and yet is a word-for-word representation of the Syro-Aramaic idiomatic expressions *ܡܫܐ ܗܝܠܐ* (*mšā ḡaylā*) and *ܡܫܐ ܗܝܠܐ* (*eškaḡ ḡaylā*), which literally mean “to have power” = “to have the power available” = “can, be able, be in a position to do

something.” In the latter of the two Syro-Aramaic formulations, the word *ܐܫܟܚܗ* / *eškaḥ* has two meanings:

- 1) “can, be able” and
- 2) “find.”

The Qur’ān represents the latter of these two by using the Arabic word *وجد* / *wajada* (“to find”) rather than *استطاع* / *istaṭā’a* (“can”). In another text the Qur’ān reproduces the same Syro-Aramaic expression by means of the Arabic *استطاع حيلة* / *istaṭā’a ḥaylā* (mis-read as *حيلة* / *ḥīlatan*); the text in question is Q 4:98: *لا يستطيعون حيلة* / *lā yastaṭī’ūna ḥīlatan* (literally understood in Arabic as “to have no cunning,” when the Syro-Aramaic means “to have no power” = “not to be in a position to do something”). As a result, sometimes *وجد* / *wajada* (“to find”) should be understood in the Qur’ān as a semantic mistranslation from the Syro-Aramaic *ܐܫܟܚܗ* / *eškaḥ* (2nd definition: “to be able, to be in a position”) in the Arabic sense of *استطاع* / *istaṭā’a* (“can, to be in a position”), e.g., in Q 58:4, where *فمن لم يجد* / *fa-man lam yajid* (lit., “who does not find”) is rightly clarified in the following clause with the Arabic *فمن لم يستطع* / *fa-man lam yastaṭī’* (“who is not a position to...”). This explanation makes clear the usage of *وجد* / *wajada* (“to find”) as a calque from the Syro-Aramaic *ܐܫܟܚܗ* / *eškaḥ* (“can, is able”) when the context would suggest the Arabic *استطاع* / *istaṭā’a* (cf. also Surahs 2:196; 4:92; 4:121; 5:89; 18:53; 24:33; 58:4, 12). Current written Arabic uses the expression *جهدا* / *jahada juhdan* (“to do his best, to do what is most possible, to act to the best of his abilities”) to correspond to the Qur’ānic expression *وجد جهدا* / *wajada juhdan*, itself borrowed from Syro-Aramaic.

Syntactically, Paret relates the second *الذين* / *alladīna* (“those who, they”) to the first one, a demonstrative pronoun that indicates the subject of the clause; he does not see that the second introduces a relative clause that relates to the “faithful” who were mentioned later in the first clause.

After this wide-ranging philological analysis, the afore-mentioned verse from Q 9:79 should be understood thus, in terms of its semantics, phrasing, and syntax: “Those who mock the donors among the faithful because of (their) gifts of alms, in which they (perform this service) only according to what lies in their possession, but they (nonetheless)⁹ mock them—God will mock these people and (cause) them (to take part in) a severe punishment.”

Example 7: Surah 17:78

اقم الصلوة لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ

وَقِرَانَ الْفَجْرِ إِنْ قَرَانَ الْفَجْرَ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا

Pickthall: Establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn. Lo! (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn is ever witnessed.

Paret (234): Perform the prayer (*ṣalāt*) when the sun bends (toward the horizon), until the night darkens! And the recitation of the early morning (*wa-qur'āna l-fajri*)! People should (generally) be present for this (? *inna qur'āna l-fajri kāna mahšūdan*).

First, the word in question here is دلوك (traditional reading: *dulūk*). In that it relates to the sun, Paret attempts to come closer to an understanding by saying, “when the sun bends (toward the horizon).” Although some of the authorities cited in Ṭabarī (XV:134ff.) understand the term to refer to the “setting of the sun” (Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, et al.), Ṭabarī decides in favor of the majority of interpreters, who see in this phrase the meaning “noon-time.” In Paret’s commentary (p. 305), he suggests rightly that the expression originally referred “quite generally to the time of the evening prayer”; however, this suggestion only becomes certain when one replaces the falsely-transcribed Arabic ل / *l* with the original Syro-Aramaic ܠ / *ayn*. Read in the Syro-Aramaic Garshuni/Karshuni ܠܘܟ (= Arabic دعوك / *du‘ūk*), the Syro-Aramaic verbal root ܠܟܝܢ / *d’ek* bears the following meaning according to Mannā (155b): 1) طفى / *tafi’a* (“to extinguish”); 4) غاب. غرب / *gaba, ḡaruba* (“to disappear”). Consequently, the Qur’anic *hapax legomenon* دعوك / *du‘ūk*, understood as a Syro-Aramaic loan-word, clearly means “the setting of the sun.”

Second, the Arabic passive participle مشهودا / *mašhūdā* should not be understood in the Arabic sense of “to be present.” Rather, it should read in the Syro-Aramaic sense of “commanded, prescribed” (cf. Mannā, 480a, under ܐܫܗܕ / *ashed*: 3) حذر. نبه. / *nabbaha, ḥaddara*). In the same source, the nominal form ܫܗܕܘܬܐ / *sāhdūtā* which derives therefrom bears the meaning (3) وصية. ناموس. شريعة. / *šarī’a, nāmūs, waṣīya* (“rule, law, command”).

Third, and syntactically, the Arabic conjunction و / *wa-* before وقران / *wa-qur’ān* begins a new, nominal protasis, whose apodosis is introduced by the intensifying conjunction ان / *inna*.

The Qur’anic verse cited above, therefore, should be understood semantically and syntactically thus: “Perform the prayer from the setting of the sun until dusk. However, (concerning) the Qur’anic recitation at dawn, this is commanded!”

3. Graphic Analysis of the Early Qur'ānic Codices in the *ḥiǧāzī* and *kūfī* Traditions (BNF 328a, British Library Or. 2165, Samarqand, San'ā')

The first edition of the book *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran* (Berlin, 2000) bears on its cover a reproduction of folio 3b of the Qur'ānic manuscript BNF 328a. In line 14 of this folio, the name "John" appears (second word from the right, from Q 3:39) with the expression *ygnn* following (without the prefixed preposition *bi-*). This expression is re-written in the Cairo edition of the Qur'ān as *یحیی* and read as *Yahyā*. With this reading, the originally *retroflex* ending (that is, one that bends sharply back against the grain of the writing), used in early Arabic script as a variant alongside the final-*ی* which is current today, was replaced by that final-*ی*, with the result that the original graphic text was lost.

3.1 The Graphemic Meaning, Overlooked until Now, of the Arabic Retroflex Final-*ی* (ﻯ)

Qur'ānic scholars up to the present day have known that both forms of the final-*ی* are attested without distinction in the Qur'ānic manuscripts (as *ī* and *ā*). Indeed, both forms can appear with the same word seemingly at random.¹⁰ Consequently, there is no cause at all for the least suggestion that these two final forms could represent distinct phonemes. However, the Arabic reading *یحیی* / *Yahyā*, which diverges from the Syro-Aramaic *ܝܘܗܢܢܐ* / *Yohannān* (or *Yuhannān*), forces such a suggestion upon us, not least because there is no trace of this name whatsoever in the early Arabic literature or in the pre-Islamic period.¹¹

Alphonse Mingana was the first to point attention to a mis-reading by the Arabic *Qurrā'*, but in this he began from the graphic text current today (حی, , read as *یحیی*), whose final-*ی* could also be interpreted as the modern final-*ن*. In this connection he says,

I believe, with Margoliouth (*Moslem World*, 1925, p. 343), that the name (*Yahya*) is almost certainly the Syriac *Yohannan*. In the early and undotted Kur'āns the word stood as *حی*, which could be read *Yohanna*, *Yohannan*, or *Yahya*, and the Muslim *kurrā'* who knew no other language besides Arabic adopted the erroneous form *Yahya*. I am absolutely unable to agree with Lidzbarski (*Johannesbuch*, ii., 73: cf. also Nöldeke in *Z. A.*, xxx, 158 sq.) that this curious name is an old Arabic one.¹²

We can conclude from these comments that, for Mingana, who critically considered the original *rasm* from the standpoint of the final-*ی* that has one form and is standard in the current Cairo edition, the unpointed *ی* could actually be read as a secondary final-*ā* or final-*n* (ن).

Although he was familiar with the earlier Qur'ānic manuscripts, Mingana apparently did not realize the difference between the final-ى that is current today and the retroflex one (ى) often used in the earlier Qur'ānic codices. But if we recognize that the Arabic retroflex final-ى (ى) (*ī/ā*) should not be formally distinguished from the Syro-Aramaic final-ى (-*n*) (at least in terms of the manuscripts), and if we proceed from this recognition, then the spelling (*rasm*) ى cannot bear the alternative readings *Yaḥyā* or *Yohannā* (with final-ā). The Arabic reflexive final-ى (=ى) in this spelling, read as the Syro-Aramaic final-ى (-*n*) (ى = ىحنن), gives a clear pointer to the Syro-Aramaic reading ى / *Yohannān*. This verbal name was rightly perceived to be an imperfect form, which accounts for the Qur'ān's failure to reproduce the *mater lectionis* ܐ / (*o*) of the Syriac spelling. In such a form, the vowel of the first open syllable is realized in Arabic as a short vowel, analogous to the prefix of the third person of Arabic imperfect of the expanded verbal stems II-IV.¹³ This example corresponds to the transcription of Syro-Aramaic loan-words, in which the *mater lectionis* was regularly left out in favor of the short *u* of the Qur'ān.¹⁴

If this discovery is correct—if the Arabic retroflex final-ى (ى) appears as a representation of the Syro-Aramaic grapheme for a final-*Nūn* not only in the name *Yohannān* as an exceptional case—then further examples from the Qur'ān will likely prove its accuracy. In what follows I will provide the proof from further spellings that have been mis-read by scholars up to now.

3.2 Exhibit A: ىس (س)

This expression, usually written in the Paris manuscript BNF 328a with the retroflex final-ى (i.e., ىس, read as either *šā'ī* or *šā'y*) has been considered as an archaic spelling of the Arabic word ىس / *šay'*, current today with the meaning of “thing, object, something.” In this understanding of the spelling ىس, scholars have taken the middle *Alif* (ا) as a possible “*Hamza* carrier” which should actually follow the ى (Diem, see below). Because in the case of ىس, however, a final *Hamza* is written according to modern orthographic rules without a “carrier,” the medial *Alif* (ا) has simply been left out of the Cairo editions as superfluous or false and replaced with the final, carrier-less *Hamza*. Consequently, the modern spelling ىس has been recognized once and for all by the editors of the Cairo edition as an orthographic correction of the presumably archaic form ىس; as a further result, it has been accepted by Qur'ānic scholars in both East and West with no questions asked.

In his article “Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie, II: Die Schreibung der Konsonanten” [Studies on the Early History of Arabic Orthography, II: The Orthography of Consonants] (*Orientalia* 49 [1980] 67–106), W. Diem attempted to explain this supposedly

archaic form on a historical basis. Included in his comments were the following:

§127 (l. 7): With regard to شاي, we must note that this spelling must have been more common than its one Qur'anic occurrence (S. 18:23: لَشَائِيْ) suggests. According to a report in ad-Dānī (n. 92: *Muqni'* 45 above; cf. also *GdQ* III 49, n. 4), Ibn Mas'ūd's text contained merely شاي. Also, Lewis's palimpsests reflect the simpler form شاي in all locations but one (n. 93: cf. *GdQ* III 56 above). This form also appears in the codex of Samarqand (n. 94: cf. Jeffery-Mendelson: "Samarqand Qur'ān Codex," 187, etc.), and it is still present in early Islamic witnesses (cf. n. 95). As far as phonetics is concerned, there can be no further doubt that the spellings شاي and شى were intended to represent an phonetic form *šayy* < *šay'*...

§128: My analyses allow me to conclude that the spellings ... شاي corresponded to the pronunciation ... *šayy* As a result, we may dispose of a reason for writing the word with alif; according to the Hijāzi pronunciation of the words. It appears that the older forms ... *šay'* ... contained a *hamza* that must have been written with an *alif* in the early orthography. The spelling *شيا ... is thus to be admitted as the oldest one, but in the Qur'ān this spelling appears as ... شاي. Nonetheless, we cannot exclude a historical connection between these two spellings. So, each time in the Qur'ānic text that an *alif* that has no longer a phonetical function it is combined with the letters *yā'* / *wāw* in representation of the current pronunciation, the order *alif-yā'* / *alif-wāw* is preserved, ... in other words, the *alif* is kept, and it always appears behind the *yā'* or *wāw*, never in front of it [i.e., . . .] The spelling... *شيا ... contradicted this order *alif-yā'* by writing the letters with the order *yā'-alif*, but otherwise scribes would have understood them in exactly the same way, since here as well an *alif* was nonfunctional, and the *yā'* expressed the sound in question. In other words one can imagine that the scribes, without knowledge of the etymology (indeed, knowledge that they could not have had at all), might have changed the letter-combination *yā'-alif* of the spellings ... شيا* into the normal order alif-yā', resulting in the attested forms ... شاي ... (cf. n. 98: ... Rabin: *Ancient West-Arabian*, 140, regards شاي as the result of an orthographic analogy...). In such a case as this, one becomes seriously aware of the total absence of *hijāzi*-Arabian witnesses for the long period of time from the latest Nabataean-*hijāzi* inscriptions and graffiti to the appearance of the Qur'ānic corpus.

In the attempt to solve this orthographic riddle, there is in fact an explanation that is less complicated than these rambling and ultimately fruitless speculations, if one simply reads the Arabic retroflex final-ى as the Syro-Aramaic final-*Nūn* (ن). According to this reconstruction, the spelling ساء should be read neither as *ša'ī* (or *šāy*) nor *šayy* < *šay'*, but rather as شان (*šān* / *ša'n*). Therefore, God has على كل شأن over every affair [according to current

Arabic, but according to Syro-Aramaic]footnote: every situation, every circumstance, rather than على كل شيء قدير, over every thing and every object (cf. e.g., in BNF 328a, Surah 2:282, 284 (f. 1b, ll. 7, 14); Surah 3:5, 26, 28, 29, 92, 128, 154 (2x), 165, 189 (f. 2a, l. 6; f. 3a, ll. 6, 11, 15; f. 4a, l. 16; f. 6a, l. 1; f. 7a, ll. 12, 14; f. 7b, last line; f. 9a, l. 10); Surah 4:4, 32, 33, 59, 85, 86, 113, 126, 176 (f. 10a, l. 5; f. 12a, l. 21; f. 12b, l. 2; f. 14a, l. 4; f. 15b, ll. 5, 7; f. 17a, l. 21; f. 18a., l. 4; f. 20b, l. 12); Surah 5:17, 19 (f. 22a, ll. 9, 16); etc.

Naturally, a full synopsis of the orthography of the oldest extant Qur'anic manuscripts would shine more light on the original structure of the language of the Qur'an. In the meantime, in the next few pages, I shall present testimonies to the alternating full and defective forms of س and س (šā'n / šān) as they appear in the (admittedly fragmentary) manuscripts that are available to us:

- 1) BNF 328a (written in a calligraphed script of the *hiḡāzī* tradition, consisting of ca. one-quarter of the Cairo edition of the Qur'an);
- 2) Samarqand (written in the *kūfī* tradition, consisting of ca. one-half of the Cairo edition); and
- 3) Sanaa (written in the simple *hiḡāzī* tradition, excluding the final folios which were a later addition, and containing more than one-fourth of the Cairo edition).

1) BNF 328a

- a) BNF 328a has the full form with the retroflex final-س (س) in the following 52 Qur'anic verses (the verse-numbering follows the Cairo edition):

SS. 2:282, 284; 3:5, 26, 28, 29, 92, 128, 154 (2x), 165, 189; 4:4, 32, 33, 59, 85, 86, 113, 126, 176; 5:19; 6:38, 44, 52 (2x), 69, 80, 91, 93, 99, 101 (2x), 102, 111, 148; 7:145 (2x), 156, 185; 9:115; 12:111; 13:8, 14, 16; 14:18, 38; 15:19, 21; 35:18.

- b) BNF 328 has the full form with the Arabic final-س (س) in the following three verses: Surahs 5:17; 6:102 (2nd occurrence); 14:21.

A comparison of the orthography of the شان found in BNF 328a in Q 5:17 (fol. 22a, l. 9—with the *hiḡāzī* final-س moved down and bent to the left: س) and in Q 5:19 (fol. 22a, l. 16—with the retroflex final-س: س) shows that the later copyist no longer understood the originally graphic distinction between the Syro-Aramaic final-*Nūn* (س) and the Arabic retroflex final-س in all three of the above-mentioned locations. This phenomenon becomes especially clear in the case of the two different and alternating forms that appear in Q 6:102:

ذَلِكُمُ اللّٰهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَا اِلٰهَ اِلَّا هُوَ خَلَقَ كُلَّ سَآءٍ وَّ هُوَ عَلٰى كُلِّ سَآءٍ وَّكِيْلٌ

In the latter case (سآءِ), the Sanaa codex (fol. 16a, penultimate line) has سآء (šān / ša'n), and in the former (سآء) it has the defective form سآء (šān); further, Samarqand has the defective form سآء in both places. This does not necessarily mean that the copyist of BNF 328a undertook this change on his own; he could have copied it equally well (and faithfully!) from an earlier document. This possibility raises the question of the dating of this Qur'ānic manuscript, which surface evidence suggests can not belong to the first generation of Qur'ānic texts transmitted in writing. The criteria that are necessary for an earlier dating will dictate a rejection of this manuscript in favor of those that do not exhibit an alteration such as this one.

- c) BNF 328a has the defective form with the Arabic final-ى (سى) in the following two verses: Surahs 6:154; 7:89.

It is clear that, in both of these textual locations, we have a faulty interpretation of the Syro-Aramaic final-*Nūn* (ܢ) that was altered into an Arabic final-ى by a later hand; we can conclude this in both cases based on the Samarqand manuscript (fol. 327, l. 9, and fol. 377, l. 4), where the same word in both of these cases concludes with the retroflex final-ى, that is, with the Syro-Aramaic final-*Nūn* (ܢ). In addition, both contexts (6:154: وتفضيلا لكل شيء; 7:89: وسع ربنا كل شيء علما) suggest that the reading سآء / šān ("situation") makes more sense than شيء / šay' ("thing"), because the Arabic word شأن (šān) has a more wide-ranging set of meanings than شيء (šay').

Conclusion

If we assume in these latter two cases an originally defective spelling شأن (šān / ša'n), and then use the texts from the Samarqand manuscript to show that the full form [*scriptio plena*] سآء in the three cases from BNF 328a is actually a later re-writing of an original form سآء (šān), then the result is that BNF 328a has 55 occurrences of the full form شأن (šān / ša'n) and 2 occurrences of the defective form [*scriptio defectiva*] شآء (šān), so that we should read شأن (šān / ša'n) in all 57 cases. All 57 of these cases have been altered to شيء (šay') in the Cairo edition, mainly through improper intrusions into the original structure of the text.

This conclusion leads to two further findings:

- the Syro-Aramaic final-*Nūn* in this current Arabic word, was not recognized as such by later Arab copyists and was instead considered to be an Arabic retroflex final-*Yā'*; and
- Such confusion regarding these two elementary Arabic words, as well as the number of their occurrences, contradicts the traditional

Islamic thesis of an oral transmission of the Qur'ānic text that was unbroken from its very beginnings.

2) The Samarqand Codex (in *kūfī* ductus)

- a) The Samarqand codex, written in the *kūfī* style, has the full form (سآ) (*ša'n / šān*) with the retroflex final-آ (ى = ن) in the following twelve verses: Surahs 4:32; 6:38, 91, 93; 11:57, 101; 16:35, 75, 89; 18:23, 70; 20:50. The Qur'ānic text from the Cairo edition that was cited by W. Diem (18:23: لَشَأَىءِ) is thus explained by means of the corresponding spelling in the Samarqand codex with the retroflex final-آ and spoken as a final-ن (سآ [li-ša'n / li-šān]).
- b) In one location (S. 15:21) the Samarqand codex has the full form and an Arabic final-ى. As I have explained above, in this location BNF 328a also has the full form, but with the retroflex final-آ (سآ / *šān*). Once again, this evidence suggests an incorrect alteration made by a later hand. As a result, the Samarqand cannot belong to the first generation of the Qur'ānic manuscripts.
- c) The Samarqand codex has the defective form (سآ / *šān*) in the following 56 verses: Surahs 2:113 (2x), 148, 231, 259, 282, 284; 3:128, 165, 189; 4:33, 86, 113, 126; 5:97, 117, 120; 6:44, 52 (2x), 69, 80, 99, 101 (2x), 102 (2x), 111, 148, 154, 159, 164; 7:89; 11:72; 15:19; 16:35, 40, 48, 76, 77; 17:12, 44; 18:45, 54, 76, 84; 20:98; 27:16; 36:12, 15, 83; 38:5, 6; 40:7; 41:21; 42:36.
- d) In one location (S. 5:94) the Samarqand codex has the defective form (سى) with an Arabic final-ى. This text is absent in both BNF 328a and the Sanaa manuscript, and so there is no basis of comparison here. In the context لِيَلُونَكُمْ اللهُ بِشَىءٍ مِنَ الصَّيْدِ (God wants to test you about something regarding the hunt, that you undergo a specific test), it is permissible to read the *rasm* as بشيء (bi-šay'). The Arabic final-ى, then, is correct in this location and makes especially clear the distinction between the retroflex final-آ that in most often to be read in instances of this word as the Syro-Aramaic grapheme *Nūn*.

Conclusion

In contrast to the situation in BNF 328a, the Samarqand codex's usage of the defective form (سآ / *šān*), with 56 textual locations (plus one correct location for شىء / *šay'*), clearly dominates that of the full form (سآ = *ša'n / šān*), with 12 locations (and additionally the incorrect spelling سآى).

3) *The Sanaa manuscript (which has not yet been given a more specific name)*

- a) The Sanaa manuscript has the full form (سَاء) (*ša'n / šān*) with the retroflex final-ع (ع = ن) in the following 24 verses: SS 2:155, 178; 5:68, 97, 117; 6:17, 19, 52 (2nd occurrence), 91, 93, 102 (2nd occurrence); 8:72; 16:75, 76, 77, 89; 51:42, 49; 57:29; 58:6; 66:8; 67:1, 9; 72:28.
- b) In one other location with the full form (S. 8:60), the expected retroflex final-ع has been replaced by an Arabic final-ي. The Sanaa manuscript itself shows that this alteration has been made by a later, incompetent hand, in that a parallel location in the same codex (S. 34:39) has the final-ع (although it is written in the defective script سَاء / *šān*).
- c) In the Sanaa manuscript, the full form سَاء (*ša'n / šān*) with its 24 (or 25) locations is outnumbered by the defective form سَاء (*šān*), which is present in the following 55 locations: Surahs 2:20, 29, 106, 109, 113 (2x), 148; 5:120; 6:38, 44, 52, 69, 80, 99, 101 (2x), 102, 111, 148; 8:41 (2x), 75; 13:8, 14, 16; 14:18, 21, 38; 20:98; 21:30, 81; 22:17; 23:88; 33:54, 55; 34:16, 21, 39, 47; 35:1, 18, 44; 36:12, 15, 83; 38:5, 6; 48:21, 26; 50:2; 57:2, 3; 65:12; 67:19; 80:18.
- d) The second occurrence of ساءى in Q 65:12 is written with the current Arabic final-ي. This spelling is also a case of a later mis-interpretation of the prior final-ع (سَاء / *šān*), as the context of the verse demonstrates, a context which produces the following reading:

لتعلموا ان الله على كل شيء قدير
وان الله قد احاط بكل شيء علما

. . . so that you (plural) know that God has power over every circumstance, and that God knows about every circumstance.

The latter spelling shows once again that this manuscript (or at least the folio in question) does not belong to the early generation of Qur'anic manuscripts.

- e) There are certain folios that are apparently less ancient than the original manuscript and were incorporated into the codex at a later date; these contain the following eight locations that have the current final-ي (ساءى): Surahs 15:19, 21; 16:35 (2x), 40, 48; 20:50; 49:16. In some of these cases, the reading ساءى (*šay'*) is justified, in the sense of "thing, object" (S. 15:19, 21) or in the Syro-Aramaic sense of "someone" (S. 16:35 [2x]); in the other cases, it is clear that ساءن (=شان) (*šān / ša'n*) is intended.

Summary

It is now clear that, in the early Qur'ānic manuscripts of both the *ḥiḡāzī* and *kūfī* styles, the Arabic final-ى appears in both forms that I have described and with the same graphemic meaning. The new information that this analysis has produced is that the Arabic retroflex final-ى also appears in the early Qur'ānic manuscripts, sometimes representing the Syro-Aramaic grapheme for a final-*Nūn*. Accordingly, the following should be kept in mind:

- 1) Following the results drawn from the three manuscripts in question, the full form سـ (with a medial *Alif* and a retroflex final-*Nūn*) should consistently be read as شان (šān / ša'n).
- 2) The defective form سـ (with the retroflex final-ى) can mean two different things:
 - a) In a majority of cases, a comparison with parallel textual locations and/or an analysis of the corresponding context give the reading شان (šān / ša'n). One example occurs in the Samarqand manuscript (ff. 454-55), in Q 16:75, where one finds one occurrence of the full form سـ (=شان) in the text لا يقدر على شيء, while the following sentence (in the following verse [76]) contains the defective script سـ (=شن) in precisely the same context and with the same meaning.
 - b) But the reading شيء (šay') can also emerge from the context; I will discuss this topic more in what follows.
 - c) In cases where the accusative ending is present, it is more difficult to distinguish between the readings شيا (šayya' = šay'a') ("something") and شنا (šāna' = ša'na') ("issue, affair"); this spelling appears 77 times in the Qur'ān, in all cases in the defective form. In cases where the sense of the term does not clearly emerge from the context, parallel texts can be consulted to arrive at the correct understanding. In favor of the reading شيا (šayya' = šay'a') ("something," in the sense of "someone," and following the Syro-Aramaic مدم / meddem, which, according to Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum*, can mean both *aliquid* ["something"] and also *quidem* ["someone"]), we find the usage أشرك بالله شيا ("to associate something i.e. anyone with God") (cf. Surahs 4:36; 6:151; 22:26; 24:55; 40:74 - لم نكن ندعوا من قبل شيا - "Formerly we worshiped nothing [else]"; 60:12). The Qur'ān confirms the Syro-Aramaic meaning of شيء, in the sense of أحد ("someone"), with the usage أشرك بالله أحدا "to associate someone, another [being] with God") in the following parallel texts: Surahs 18:38, 42, 110; 72:2; 72:18 - فلا تدعوا مع الله أحدا "You should not invoke anyone else besides God" (as a parallel to the aforementioned Q 40:74); and 72:20. A. Mingana, in his *Syriac Influence*, 92, has already and correctly pointed scholars' attention to this meaning of شيء in Q

60:11: وان فاتكم شيء من ازواجكم الى الكفار “And if any of your wives escape from you to the unbelievers....” Two readings from the Samarqand codex’s text of Q 16:35 (ff. 440-41) are interesting in this regard: there is one instance of the defective script سـ in the context $\text{ما عبدنا من دونه من شيء}$ (“we would not have worshiped anyone else besides him”), which should be read as شيء (“thing,” in the sense of “someone”) as indicated above; but there is also one instance of سـ = شان (in the sense of “issue, affair”): $\text{ولا حرمانا من دونه من شيء}$: (“nor would we have declared any affair or circumstance as forbidden without him”).

In the Cairo edition, the reading شيء (*šay*) appears 202 times, and that of شيا 77 times, while the reading شان (*šān / ša’n*) only three times, along with one occurrence of شانهم. In this last case, the orthography of Q 10:61 agrees with that of BNF 328a, f. 48a, l. 8 (with the *hiğāzī* final-ن). From this we can conclude that the Cairo edition’s شيء (*šay*) is usually false, even though this does not affect the sense of the texts in question. This is also true for the texts in which the Sanaa codex regularly has شيء (without the medial *alif*) with the retroflex final-ى (سـ), as for example in Surahs 2:20, 29, 106, 109, 113 (2x) (Sanaa, f. 1b, ll. 2–25; f. 4b, ll. 21, 27; f. 5a, ll. 5–6); in these cases the defective form سـ (= شان) (*šān / ša’n*) is to be accepted. The example of Q 2:113 makes this conclusion clear. There the text partially repeats itself:

وقالت اليهود ليست النصرى على شيء

وقالت النصرى ليست اليهود على شيء

(Cairo edition)

Pickthall: And the Jews say the Christians’ follow nothing (true), and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true);

Given the context, Paret (18) has paraphrased this passage quite appropriately:

The Jews say, “The Christians dispense with the foundation (in their religious opinions).” And the Christians say, “The Jews dispense with the foundation (in their religious opinions).”

But one only comes to this understanding if one reads the term in question not as شيء but rather as شان (*ša’n*; in Qur’ānic Arabic, actually *šān*), following the Syro-Aramaic expression ܫܒܢܐ (*šarbā*) that corresponds to it lexically and semantically. Mannā (819a) gives Arabic equivalents for this term as (3) أمر. شأن (“matter, affair”) and (4) سبب. علة (“reason, cause”); the *Thesaurus* (II:4323) offers us the following evidentiary examples:

the former two forms were written with the retroflex final-ى, their reading is secured by means of the unambiguous parallel locations, especially the opposition of الحى (*al-ḥayy*: “the living”) and الميت (*al-mayyit*: “the dead”). As a result, we can exclude a different interpretation of the retroflex final-ى in this example. But how, then, are we to explain the presence of the medial *alif* in the two written forms in Q 6:95?

One possible explanation would be that the copyist (or an earlier scribe), influenced by the familiar (to him) Syro-Aramaic pronunciation of the identically-sounding ܡܪ (>حي), whose short *a*-vowel was spoken long (*ḥāy*) according to west Syrian tradition (as in most single-syllable words¹⁵), brought this long *ā* with the medial *Alif* into Arabic. In the Qur’ānic orthography with which scholars are familiar, we have not yet observed the *Alif* as a letter representing the short-*a* vowel. However, we see this function in the scribal traditions of the Mandaeans who lived in southern Mesopotamia. Nöldeke explained in his Mandaean grammar this use of the medial *Alif* as a *mater lectionis* for both short and long *a*:

ⲛ represents medial- and final *a* and *ā*: ⲙⲗⲕⲁ = ⲙⲗⲕⲁ (*malkā*); ⲙⲁⲛ = ⲙⲁⲛ (*mān*)
 . . . Similarly, ⲙⲗⲁⲓ stands for ⲙⲗⲁⲓ ⲙⲗⲁⲓ (*m-ḥayyē*) (“to bring to life, to make alive”).¹⁶

The latter example, the active participle of ܡܪ / *ḥyā* (=حي), corresponds exactly with our Qur’ānic text, which concerns the use of the medial *Alif* as a letter representing a vowel. However, because in west Syrian pronunciation the doubling of the *y* is eliminated by the compensatory lengthening of the preceding *ā* (resulting in the form *m-ḥāyē*), the latter pronunciation (*al-ḥāy*) could be meant by the medial *Alif* of the Qur’ānic spelling الحى. But the Mandaean spelling probably indicates the phonetically secondary long *ā*, while the Syriac form, with the same pronunciation, was written defectively. The Qur’ān generally follows this orthography, so that in the repeated form found in BNF 328a’s text of Q 6:95 (الحى / *al-ḥāy*), we see an exceptional instance of the full form, which certainly reproduces the Syro-Aramaic pronunciation (and most likely also that of the Mandaeans) and follows Mandaean orthography.

One also finds such a medial *Alif*—as an indicator of a short *a*—occasionally in Syriac, as Nöldeke noted in his *Syrische Grammatik*:

Additionally, one often finds ⲛ as an apparently superfluous letter—where it should not appear at all—in words like ⲙⲁⲣⲁⲛ for ⲙⲁⲣⲁⲛ (*ma-ssāb* / *ma-ssāb*, “to take/receive”), etc.¹⁷

What Nöldeke surmised concerning the use of the medial *Alif* as representing a vowel, that it was “apparently superfluous” in comparison with “normal” Syriac orthography, probably in reality went back to an earlier Mesopotamian

scribal tradition overlooked until now. Rudolf Meyer's comments in his *Hebräische Grammatik* are illuminating:

Linear vocalization in Hebrew developed quite remarkably in the Hellenistic period, probably under influence from both Aramaic and Greek. People still restricted themselves at this time to the traditional letters *aleph*, *he*, *waw*, and *yod*; however, they also put forth considerable effort in establishing more exactly their phonetic values, and they used the letters to represent not only long, but also short vowels. Because the text of Holy Scripture had not yet been normatively established, this new form of vocalization, which remained as optional as before, infiltrated the Hebrew Bible text in some places quite strongly; this new principle asserted itself even in those places that tended to vary only occasionally from the earlier, sparing usage of letters representing vowels. As a result, we have the following situation in the second century CE: *Aleph* usually represents *a*, less often *e* in medial and final positions in a word; [the letter] *he* indicates the final, long vowels \bar{a} and \bar{e} , but no longer \bar{o} ; *waw* stands for *o* and *u*; and *yod* represents *i* and *e* in both medial and final positions. When *aleph*, *waw*, and *yod* are used in medial position, they can indicate either long or short vowel sounds.¹⁸

The following observations concerning Qur'anic orthography result from Meyer's comments:

- 1) We must revise the conclusion that has been accepted until now, namely, that the use of *Alif* as a *mater lectionis* for a medial long \bar{a} sound was a later and genuinely Arabic development.¹⁹

The fluctuation in the early Qur'anic manuscripts' practice of writing a medial *Alif* for a long \bar{a} , as indicated in *GdQ* I:31f., is confirmed by Meyer's testimony concerning the optional usage of the same in the Hebrew of the second century CE; Meyer rightly traced this back to earlier Aramaic influence. In fact, Segert confirmed this theory in his *Altaramäische Grammatik* [Old Aramaic Grammar]. In chapter 2.4.4 ("Vowel-Letters in Medial Position"), section 3 ("The Use of *Alef* for Long \bar{a} "), he explains:

This usage of \aleph for long \bar{a} in medial position, so widespread in later Aramaic texts, actually goes back to a Persian pattern. However, examples of this practice were already present in the archaic inscriptions from Ja'udi in the eighth century BCE, e.g., \aleph P 5.²⁰ The reader will also find interesting chapter 2.4.7 ("The Use of Vowel-Letters in Medial Position in Imperial Aramaic and Biblical Aramaic") (p. 65).

This is an important observation [*Feststellung*] for future Qur'anic research. The idea of a later reform of Qur'anic orthography, as part of which the *Alif*

began to be used for a medial long *ā*, has been generally accepted by scholars including the present author²¹: concerning the Arabic orthography that is still current today, we must modify this thesis to say that this written practice was imposed upon it at a later time.²² Concerning Qur'ānic orthography, however, we must accept that this written practice existed from the very beginning, even if it was irregular; the early Qur'ānic manuscripts that are available to us illustrate this thesis in their vacillations on the matter. The problem is even more difficult for later additions of the *Alif* by incompetent copyists, additions that led to mis-readings; close text-critical analyses of Qur'ānic texts are required to detect these mis-readings.

- 2) We have not observed the use of *Alif* in the Qur'ān as a *mater lectionis* for short *a* (as was common practice in Mandaean) in the manuscript material that has been available to us thus far, even though the Cairo edition does have a few examples of this phenomenon.

It is doubtful, therefore, that the spelling الحاي with a medial *Alif* offers a first witness thereunto, because as I have shown above, this *Alif* can represent the West Syriac (or Mandaean) pronunciation that uses a long *ā* (*al-hāy*). If الحاي were a first proof of the use of the medial *Alif* for short *a*, then the entire explanation of the spelling شان as ش as شان (šān / ša'n) that I have offered here would be invalid, and one would not be able seriously to object to the reading of the text as šay (or šay'), as is common today. The reading of the spelling يحن as يحن (Yohannān) instead of يحيى (Yaḥyā) would then hardly be convincing as the only witness for the reading of the retroflex Arabic final-*y* as the Syriac final-*n*; in such a situation, it would not be convincing to bring forward further examples from the Qur'ān as confirmation of this orthography. The following texts, however, are intended to provide just this confirmation.

3.3 Exhibit B (S. 10:53): ا وربّي (*'ēn wa-rabbī*)

The particle that introduces this text is written in the Cairo edition with the final-*ī* that is normal in current Arabic, and it is read as إي (*'ī*); in BNF 328a (f. 47b, l. 16), however, it is written with the retroflex final-ع (ع) and corresponds to the defective Syro-Aramaic spelling ܥܝ = ܥܝܢ (*'ēn* or *'īn*: “yes!”). In fact, this expression, widespread in the current Arabic dialects as a general Aramaic substrate, has lost its final-*n* and is thus spoken as *'ē* or *'ī*; for the Qur'ān, however, this vulgar Arabic pronunciation is not to be admitted. This conclusion is even more obvious because this Aramaic particle appears multiple times in the Qur'ān in both the defective and full forms (ع or ع = *'ēn*); the present author has already brought attention to the 61 occurrences in the Cairo edition of the Qur'ān of the spelling لين (*l-ēn*) (a combination of the defective form of the Aramaic particle ܠܝܢ [*lā*] and the full form of the

survived into later classical Arabic, albeit as a heretofore unrecognized relic of Aramaic.

Another such relic is present in the expressions ليس (*laysa*, but actually *lays*) and ليت (*layta*, actually *layt*), which both reproduce variants of the same Aramaic expression in Arabic script. In Arabic, however, these have become independent semantically and thus bear two different meanings. In the first case, ليس (*laysa*) (“not to be”) is the combination of the defectively-written, prefixed Aramaic particle ܠ- (= ܠܐ) (*lā*), here with the meaning “not,” and the Aramaic particle of existence ܘܢ (*ys / īs / yš / īš*), meaning “to be.” In this form the Arabic sibilant س (*s*) goes back to the Aramaic ܣ (*š*), which was originally aspirated, so that the Arabic ليس (*laysa*) is nothing other than a dialectical variant of the Aramaic ܠܐܢ (*lān*) in combination with the expression of existence ܘܢܐ (*īn*), whose spirantization again points to an original separation between these two components at an earlier stage of the language.

The Arabic ليت (*layta*) points to a more recent Aramaic development, however; this form corresponds precisely, both in form and phonetics, to the Syro-Aramaic ܠܡܬ (*layt*), insofar as Syro-Aramaic did not aspirate after a diphthong. But if the two forms were morphologically identical, they were different semantically. In the Syro-Aramaic form ܠܡܬ (*layt*), the prefixed ܠ (*lā*) indicated a negation (“not to be”), but in the Arabic form ليت (*layta*) it meant a wish (“that it would be”). I will explain لآت (traditionally read *lāta*: Q 38:3) in another publication.

3.5 Exhibit C: هَيَّيْ / يَهَيَّيْ

The Cairo edition reads these spellings, which appear in verses 10 and 16 of Surah 18, as *hayyi*’ and *yu-hayyi*’. I should note at the outset of this section the following:

- a) originally, the Qur’ānic ى never had the function of a “Hamza-carrier”;
- b) Qur’ānic orthography prohibits a و and ي that immediately follow one another (cf. here, e.g., Q 2:28, where the Cairo edition—conforming to modern orthography—reads يَحْيِيكُمْ, while the Sanaa codex we have considered [f. 1b, l. 23] has يَحْيِكُمْ quite clearly; this means that the spellings هَيَّيْ and يَهَيَّيْ are mis-readings).

Our foundational knowledge about Qur’ānic orthography is sufficient to accept the thesis that in these examples the originally retroflex final-ى (ـِ / -n) was later interpreted as a final-ي (y). The original orthographic tradition leads necessarily to the acknowledgement that we should read here a final-ن; in other words, instead of هَيَّيْ / *hayyi*’ and يَهَيَّيْ / *yu-hayyi*’, we should read هَيِّنْ / *hayyin* and يَهَيِّنْ / *yu-hayyin* (“to lighten, relieve”). In order to prove this reading, it would be desirable (but not absolutely necessary) to have texts from the early Qur’ānic manuscripts; in their absence, parallel texts and other criteria from the Qur’ān itself should suffice for this purpose. First, then, we

should note that the verb هَيَّا never appears anywhere else in the Qur'ān in order to communicate the meaning “to prepare;” rather, the Qur'ān regularly (twenty times) uses the verbal root أَعَدَّ. Second, we can confirm our supposed reading from parallel texts, when we provide the context of Q 18:10, 16 (according to the Cairo edition):

ربنا اتنا من لدنك رحمة وهيء لنا من أمرنا رشدا

ينشر لكم ربكم من رحمته ويهيء لكم من أمركم مرفقا

Pickthall (18:10): Our Lord! Give us mercy from Thy presence and shape for us right conduct in our plight.

(18:16): Your Lord will spread for you of His mercy and will prepare for you a pillow in your plight.

Paret (238) translates these two verselets thus:

(18:10) Lord, give us mercy from you, and prepare (*rašadan*) a correct path for us in our affairs.

(18:16) Then your Lord will grant you (something) from his mercy and provide relief (*yuhaiyi lakum min amrikum mirfaqan*) for you in your affairs.

A parallel text from Q 20:26 shows that the verb in question should be read هَيَّن (*hayyin*) and not هَيَّى (*hayyi*); there we find the synonym يَسِّر / *yassara* (= هَيَّن [“to lighten, relieve”]) immediately in connection with أمر / *amr* (“affair”). There the text reads:

رب اشرح لي صدري / ويسر لي أمري

Pickthall: My Lord! Relieve my mind. And ease my task for me.

Paret (255) has it thus:

Lord, widen my chest (26) and make it easy for me. (Actually, “make my affair [what concerns me] easy for me.)

In conclusion, we should not hesitate to mention another criterion that will confirm our reading, namely, that the verbal root هَيَّن / *hayyana* appears twice as an adjective in the “Mary” Surah (S. 19:9, 21): هو علي هَيِّن / *huwa alayya hayyin* (“this is easy for me”). With these two new readings, there is now a total of four texts. Consequently, the two verses from Surah 18 should be read thus:

ربنا اتنا من لدنك رحمة وهيئن لنا من أمرنا رشدا

بِنشِرْ لَكُمْ رَبِّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَهَيِّئْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرْفَقًا

As a result, they should be understood thus:

(18:10) O our Lord, grant us mercy from you, and make the correct path easier for us in the things that concern us (lit., “with regard to our affair”).

(18:16) Thus will your Lord give you from his grace²⁹ and make what you must undergo³⁰ easier for you in your affairs (that is, in what concerns you).

(That is, *God will help you through his grace to endure with patience the test that is before you.*)

The early Qur’ānic fragments that we have considered in this essay do not have these verses. However, one would expect that other manuscript materials would attest the retroflex written form of the final-*ay* in the expressions هَيِّئْ (=هَيِّنْ) and يَهَيِّئْ (=يَهَيِّنْ). A facsimile of the British Library’s codex Or. 2165 (ff. 1-61) has recently become available and shows that the manuscript has a final-*Alif* in both locations: at 18:10 (f. 43a, l. 21) it reads و هَيَّا, and at 18:16 (f. 43b, l. 9) it has وَيَهَيَّا. According to east Aramaic-Babylonian orthography, the final-*Alif* can represent a final-*Nūn* (which has nothing to do with the Arabic phenomenon of “Nunation”), as is the case in the Qur’ān with the spellings of the “energetic” وليكونا (*wa-la-yakūnan*) in Q 12:32 and also of لَنَسْفَعَا (*la-nasfa’an*) in Q 96:15. In the future, I will demonstrate other examples from the Qur’ān and also explain the reasons for this defective form of a final-*Nūn* that is foreign to Arabic orthography.

According to the Koranic context, the form مَرْفَقًا – *mrfq* should be read as the the Syriac *meṗraq* (with metathesis), the infinitive of the Syro-Aramaic verb *p-r-q* – “to save.” Accordingly, the verse quoted above is to be understood as follows:

18:16 “Thus will your Lord give you from his grace and will liberate you from your plight.”

3.6 Revision of the Spellings هَيِّئْ and يَهَيِّئْ on Comparison with the Spellings وَيَهَيَّا, و هَيَّا

The spellings وَيَهَيَّا (a Syro-Aramaic imperative: *bring about*) and و هَيَّا (a Syro-Aramaic conjunctive: *may he bring about*) reproduce the Syro-Aramaic orthography of the verb *hwā* (to be) in the second stem form *hawwī* (lit.: *to cause to be = to create, to bring about something*). This observation makes clear that the spellings هَيِّئْ and يَهَيِّئْ are just a variant writing of the same Syro-Aramaic verb which are both to be pronounced as *hayyē* which is an alternative form of *hawwē* (*bring about*) (cf. the words *Hawwā* [Eve] and Arabic *hayya* [serpent]). This explains that the Arabic adjective / adverb هَيِّنْ (*hayyin*) is derived from this Syro-Aramaic verb with an Aramaic suffix (*ān* /

nā) whose original emphatic form was **hawī-nā* > *hwī-nā* which resulted in the contracted Arabic form *hayyin* (in some contemporary Arabic dialects still pronounced *hwayyin* > *hayyin*). This adverb means in modern Arabic “easy,” but the original Syro-Aramaic meaning is: “feasible.” This observation renders the primary conjecture of the author as to the Syro-Aramaic final nun in the Koranic spelling هَي (هين=) and هَي (هين=) invalid.

4. Conclusion

With this provisional analysis of Qur’anic orthography, one has provided the first empirical proof of a Qur’anic *Vorlage* originally written in Syro-Aramaic script. As unexpected as this discovery may be at first glance, it will only surprise those who previously had an incorrect conception of the cultural, linguistic, and religio-historical environment in which the Qur’an appeared. Even if the Qur’an was the first book written in the Arabic *language*, this does not necessarily mean that it was composed in the Arabic *alphabet* so well known today. Further, if those who initiated the written and literary form of Arabic had training in the practice of writing, then it stands to reason that they would have acquired this training before the appearance of the Qur’an and in the world of Syro-Aramaic culture.

It is obvious that the Syro-Aramaic script belonged to this Syro-Aramaic culture. Also, many instances in the history of cultures can be named in which a newly-emerging culture took over the writing system of an older one, before it developed its own under its own circumstances. The situation of the Qur’an is no exception; the copyists of the Qur’an were in all probability either Syro-Aramaic or Arabs trained in Syro-Aramaic.

The tradition, according to which Arabic was written in Syro-Aramaic script, was a Christian Syrian one and still exists today in the liturgical books of the churches of the Near East that use the Syro-Aramaic language. This Syro-Aramaic/Arabic script goes by the name of “Garshuni” or “Karshuni,” that is to say, Arabic language written in Syriac script. An extensive Christian-Arabic literature, mostly consisting of theological texts, was written in this script; many such manuscripts exist in the manuscript stocks of the European libraries (among other places). The results of the foregoing analysis make it clear that the *Ur*-Qur’an was written in this script; more wide-ranging studies in the future will strengthen this partial result.

However, it has also become clear that probably all of the Qur’anic manuscripts known to us and written in the Arabic script are secondary. This result suggests again that the Qur’anic text, although written in the Syro-Aramaic script, was redacted at a historical point earlier than the manuscripts we possess. It will be no easy task for the historians of culture and religion to

define more closely the time in which the (according to Islamic tradition) earlier Meccan and later Medinan Surahs came to be.

There is a rumor at present, that there is a Qurʾān written in Garshuni script preserved in the University al-Azhar in Cairo (or in another Arabic library). This would not be surprising despite the Islamic tradition that the caliph Uthman had destroyed the Qurʾānic *Vorlage* belonging to Ḥafṣa, the widow of Muhammad, after the canonical version was established. One can certainly imagine that this *Vorlage* was written in Garshuni; this possibility would also explain the cautious respect that Muslims traditionally display to the Syro-Aramaic language (called السريانية [*as-suryāniya*] in Arabic).

It was not possible in this short essay to consider all the letters in the current edition of the Qurʾān that were falsely-transcribed from the Syro-Aramaic script. A more complete presentation remains for a future publication.

Notes

- 1 Christoph Luxenberg, “Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem,” in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, eds., *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam* (Berlin, 2005), 124–147; translated as *The Hidden Origins of Islam* (Amherst, NY, 2010) 125–151; see especially the section entitled “Verwechslung syro-aramäischer Buchstaben,” pp. 134ff; (English edition: “Confusion of Syro-Aramaic letters,” p.134ff).
- 2 Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Übersetzung*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, and Mainz, 1982), p. 486. The original German is as follows: “(18) Und: ‘Die Kultstätten sind (ausschließlich für Gott da. Daher ruft neben Gott niemand (anders) an!’ (19) Und: ‘Als der Diener Gottes [Anm.: d.h. Mohammed] sich aufstellte, um ihm anzurufen [Anm.: Oder: zu ihm to beten], hätten sie ihn (vor lauter Zudringlichkeit?) beinahe erdrückt (? Kādû yakûnûna ‘alaihi libadan)’ [Anm.: Die Deutung des Verses ist ganz unsicher.] (20) Sag: Meinen Herrn (allein) rufe ich an [Anm.: Oder: Ich bete allein zu meinem Herrn] und geselle ihm niemand bei.”
- 3 Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris, 1947), 620. The original French is as follows: “(18) La Mosquée [sacrée] est à Allah. Ne priez donc personne à côté d’Allah! (n.: “La mosquée [sacrée]. V. sourate IX, 17.”) (19) Quand le Serviteur d’Allah s’est levé, priant, [les Infidèles] ont failli être contre lui des masses (?). (n.: “Le serviteur d’Allah = Mahomet. // Kādû yakûnûna ‘alay-hi libadâ (var. lubada and lubbâda), ‘les Infidèles etc.’ Le sujet est incertain. Les commt. disent que c’est djinns, mais c’est peu probable.”) (20) Dis: ‘Je ne prie que mon Seigneur et ne Lui associe personne.”
- 4 Richard Bell, *The Qurʾān: Translated with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1937–39).
- 5 1st ed., Berlin, 2000; 2nd ed., Berlin 2004; 3rd ed., Berlin 2006.
- 6 The original German reads: “Wehe jedem Stichler und Nörgler.”
- 7 It is well-known that the Arabic words خَيْر / ḥayr (“something good; better; something better”) and شَر / šarr (“something bad; worse; something worse”) are

used substantively and elatively. Classical Arabic grammar explains the latter usage as “diptotic,” and a final Alif is to be eliminated in the accusative along with this construction; this rule, however, does not apply for the Qur’ān. In my study *Die syro-aramaischen Lesart des Koran* (1st ed., 2000: pp. 166ff., n. 211; 2nd ed., 2004: pp. 199ff., n. 242; 3rd ed., 2006: pp. 298ff., n. 248), I have pointed to a similar situation at Q 18:71, where the spelling امرأ was mis-read as *imran*, because the Arabic readers were not able to recognize an elative because of the final Alif; the text should have been read as *amarra*.

- 8 By a calque from Syro-Aramaic, the Qur’ān uses another Arabic synonym, مد / madda (“to stretch, reach out”) in the sense of “to give.” This word is understood in contemporary Arabic as meaning “to furnish, support.” This understanding arises from the following Qur’ānic texts: Surahs 3:124, 125; 17:6, 20; 23:55; 26:132, 133; 27:36; 52:22. To reproduce in modern Arabic the Qur’ānic expression from Q 74:12, مالا ممدودا / *malan mamdūdā* (literally, “elongated property,” that is, “sizeable, extensive property”), one would say أموالا طائلة / *amwālan ṭā’ila* (literally, “property that is stretched long, wide-ranging, extensive”). Note that this expression in turn connects back with the Qur’ānic expression طول / *ṭul* (literally, “length” = “property” = “richly, abundantly”).
- 9 The Arabic conjunction فـ / fa (< the Old Aramaic פ, פפ / pā = fa), which normally expresses a result or conclusion in declarative sentences, should be understood in this context as adversative.
- 10 Cf., e.g., BNF 328a, f. 3a, l. 14: ويعلم ما فى السموت وما فى الارض, where the first فى concludes with the form current today, and the second with the retroflex final-ى (فـ). We see the same phenomenon, but in the opposite order, in the same MS., f. 12b, ll. 2-3: الرجال قومون على النساء بما فضل الله بعضهم على بعض.
- 11 Cf. for the former, A. Jeffrey, *Foreign Vocabulary* (Baroda, 1938), pp. 290ff; for the latter, see Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1926), p. 151).
- 12 *Syriac Influence*, 84.
- 13 One also sees this phenomenon in that, in current Christian street-Arabic, the open and unstressed first syllable *yu* has completely disappeared; the result is that the name, with its final-Nūn also absent because the final syllable is unstressed, is simply حنا / *Ḥannā*.
- 14 Cf. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart*, 1st ed., 193, n. 228; 2nd ed., 226, n. 260; 3rd ed., 227, n. 267.
- 15 E.g., ا: a) *man* (= Arabic مَنْ / *man* [“who”]), spoken as *mān*; b) *men* (= Arabic مِنْ / *min* [“from”]), spoken as *mēn*; etc. In his *Syrische Grammatik* [Syriac Grammar] (2nd ed., Leipzig, 1898; reprint: Darmstadt, 1977), Nöldeke did not explicitly discuss this characteristic of the Western Syrians; the only mention of the phenomenon came in the explanation of حلا (*kull* / *kūl* = Arabic كل *kull* / “entirety, everything”) (§48, third paragraph): “Can it be long: *kōl*?”
- 16 Theodor Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik* [Mandaean Grammar] (Halle an der Saale, 1875; reprint: Darmstadt, 1964), §3.1, final lines; and §9, l. 5. Nöldeke places the Mandaean texts he discusses between the years 650 and 900 CE, but some may reach as far back as the Sassanid period (cf. his “Einleitung,” p. xxii).

- 17 Nöldeke, *Syrische Grammatik*, §35, l. 4.
- 18 Rudolf Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik*, vol. 1, Einleitung, Schrift- und Lautlehre, 3rd rev. ed. (Berlin, 1966), 50. After the text I have quoted, Meyer provides examples from the Dead Sea Scrolls text 1QIsaa, a vulgar text written ca. 100 BCE.
- 19 A. Spitaler, “Die Schreibung des Typus صلوة im Koran,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 56 (1960), 215, n. 8: “The use of alif to indicate an ā in the middle of a word is a purely Arabic development. Cf. also J. Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen* I, 47: ‘Its transcription by means of ʾ is an Arabic phenomenon – quite a bit later, for the inscription of en-Nemāra was unaware of it.’ At the time when the Qur’ānic text was written down, this development was by no means closed off, cf. the presentation in GdK III:31f. In a few cases, as is well known, the defective writing of ā has endured into the present day.”
- 20 S. Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, 4th ed. (Leipzig, 1990), p. 64.
- 21 Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart*, 1st ed. (Berlin, 2000), p. 16.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2004), 3rd ed. (Berlin, 2006), 31ff.
- 23 Luxenberg, *Ibid.*, 1st ed., 288, 15.2, n. 204; 2nd ed., 323, n. 337; 3rd ed., 324, n. 345.
- 24 Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, p. 232 (ch. 5.5.6.1.4.f.), p. 358 (cf. 6.5.3.3.2.a). The latter was originally an exclamatory particle that, from the perspective of historical linguistics, took on a variety of nuances. Depending on the context, the combination *lā-hên* can mean “not this” or – understanding the proclitic *lā-* as an intensifier – “now if.”
- 25 Cf. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart*, 1st ed., p. 288, 15.2.
- 26 E.g., in Syrian dialects, before verbs to express various kinds of emotional agitation, including elation, defiance, frustration, etc., e.g., لفرجيه (la-[a]farǧih): “I’ll show him!”
- 27 This construction may correspond to Syro-Aramaic usage. The *Thesaurus* (II:1809) considers the particle ل (lā) before certain (if rare) oath-formulae as a negation (“formula est negandi cum iurejurando”), although the examples I provide here confirm its intensifying function as an oath-particle: ل هئيه (lā ḥayyē-h d-šanyūtā-k): “by your life, O madman!” and ل هئيه و هئيه (lā ḥayyay-kōn w-lā ḥayya-w[hi]): “by your lives, and by his life!” Mannā (364b) also begins from a conception of a negative oath (المنفي للقسم), despite the two parallel examples it cites (entirely under the influence of the لا, understood as Arabic). Naturally, depending on the context, it is possible that a negation is in view.
- 28 Paret’s original German is “Nein doch! Ich schwöre...”; Blachère’s French is “Non! J’en jure....”
- 29 The Arabic نشر (našara) represents the Syro-Aramaic حط (pšat), for which Mannā (618b) gives under (3) the Arabic قَدَّمْ أَعْطَى (qaddama, a’ṭā / “to give, to grant”).
- 30 Ṭabarī (XV:208f.) explains مرفق (mirfaq / marfiq) laconically as ما تر تفقون به من شيء (and seems to mean “that through which kindness is given to you”). Paret translates this phrase as “to provide relief” (clearly following *Lisān* [X:118b], where it reads: المرفق والمرفق: ما استعين به [ar-rifq, al-mirfaq, al-marfiq, al-marfaq: “that which one uses as an aid”]); Blachère has it as “a softening” (un adoucissement); and Bell reads “a kindly arrangement,” both of which represent the current Arabic meaning of رفق (rifq) as “kindness.” Mannā (751a) explains the identically-sounding Syro-Aramaic root رهم (rpāq), which may be the source of

the Arabic term (with a small shift of meaning), with the Arabic terms رفق. حلم. صبر (rafaqa, ḥaluma, laṭafa, ṣabara / “to be mild, kind, friendly, patient”); it defines the nominal form رفاقة (rḫāqā) even more precisely with صبر عظيم. احتمال (iḥtimāl, ṣabrun‘azīm / “forbearance, great patience”). The Thesaurus, however, relates this substantive to the name “Rebecca” (cf. II:3966, under رفاقة [“Rebecca”]: “nom. uxoris Isaaci, ... Ap. lexx. valet patientia magna, الصبر الشديد (m-saybrānūtā saġgītā), صبر شديد (ṣabrun ṣadīd [“great patience”]). We should not therefore exclude the possibility that this expression was current in east Syrian as a denominative; the explanation in Mannā also speaks for this possibility. At any rate, this understanding lies closer to the Qur’ānic context than the quests for meaning in modern Arabic that have occurred up to now. Moreover, the Qur’ānic nominal form مرفقا (mirfaqa) corresponds to the Syro-Aramaic infinitive مرفقم (me-rpaq) with the *m*-prefix (a verbal noun, named in Arabic مصدر ميمي / maṣdar mīmī; cf. Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik*, §174; Nöldeke, *Syrische Grammatik*, §126).