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Traces of Bilingualism/Multilingualism in Qur'ānic Arabic

My aim in this paper is to collect and organize some of the data (most of them well-known, but not always placed in the right perspective) about traces, or evidence, of phenomena related to bilingualism or multilingualism in Qur'ānic Arabic[1]. These are, roughly, phenomena of interference. Except for reasons of religious dogma ("the pure Arabic of the Qur'ān", a meaningless formula from a linguistic and historical point of view), there is no reason to dismiss *prima facie* the idea that the audience – and even more the author(s) – of the Qur'ān, were to some extant bilingual or multilingual (as was a good part of the Near East at the time[2]), and especially had some command of (notably) Syriac or another Aramaic dialect such as Christian or Jewish Palestinian Aramaic[3]. Such languages were indeed well-known in "Syro-Arabia" (a rather vague label, but it might aptly refer to the area – from the North of the Arabian peninsula to Syria-Palestine – where the Qur'ān came into existence[4]), and the life of Arab Christians in Late Antiquity was marked by a kind of diglossia: Arabic for daily life, Syriac/Aramaic or Greek for liturgy (but Syriac/Aramaic also worked as a *lingua franca*). Such a diglossia was obviously not limited to Arab Christians,

[1] This topic got more attention these last years, with the publication of Christoph Luxenberg's *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran. A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007), originally in German, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2004, 1st ed. 2000). The way this book has been received in the academic world seems to me unsatisfactory. Luxenberg's work has sometimes been enthusiastically praised, but also fiercely dismissed, quite often on dogmatic grounds (for a good review of the book, see Daniel King, "A Christian Qur'ān? A Study in the Syriac Background to the language of the Qur'ān as presented in the work of Christoph Luxenberg", *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 3 (2009), 44-71; see also my brief remarks in Guillaume Dye, "Le Coran et son contexte. Remarques sur un ouvrage récent", *Oriens Christianus* 95 (2011), 263-267). Clearly, Luxenberg's method is often faulty, especially because of its disregard of any historical and literary context and, too frequently, its arbitrary use of linguistic evidence. However, Luxenberg offers many suggestions and emendations which should be examined case by case. Some of them are hasty, speculative, or unconvincing, but there are *also* very interesting and valuable insights (several examples given here owe him much). So the question should rather be: what can be extracted from the mass (and mess) of Luxenberg's analyses, and be solid ground for a critical examination of the nature of Qur'ānic Arabic?

[2] On bilingualism/multilingualism in Ancient societies, and especially the Near East, see for example *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Word*, ed. James N. Adams, Mark Janse, and Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[3] For the Aramaic-speaking Christian communities of Sinai, Palestine or Trans-Jordan, Christian Palestinian Aramaic was the dominant language in local churches; for Syria and Mesopotamia, it was rather Syriac. For reasons of convenience, my examples will be mainly related to Syriac, which is better documented – but the corpus of Christian and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic undoubtedly deserves further study. There are also traces of other languages in Qur'ānic Arabic, but most of my examples will concern Aramaic

[4] For some thoughts about the profiles and localisations of the so-called "editors" of the Qur'ān, see Guillaume Dye, "Réflexions méthodologiques sur l'analyse rhétorique du Coran", in *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l'islam*, ed. Daniel de Smet & Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, forthcoming).

but it is a decisive element for the understanding of many aspects of the Qur'ān. Moreover, Syriac was the language of religious exhortation in many Eastern Churches, and it was the language of many religious writings, such as sung rhymed homilies (*madrāšē*), recited rhymed homilies (*memrē*), or religious dialogic poems (*soḡiyāṯā*) – all literary genres which have their close counterparts in the Qur'ān[5].

"Bilingualism" refers to the fact that the speakers, or some speakers, of a given language, have a command (total or partial, active or passive – in this case, one speaks of "receptive bilingualism") of another language, generally used in the same area, or in a neighboring one. This is not the same phenomenon as the existence, in any given language, of words and syntactical structures, calqued or borrowed from another language. Speaking of bilingualism in this last case would go too far, since a language used in a monolingual context can exhibit linguistic features acquired *in the past* by contact with another language. Nevertheless, when I refer here to traces of bilingualism, I both mean some particular structures of the language involved (which should be explained by phenomena of language contact and interference), and the linguistic capabilities of some of its speakers.

Examination of external linguistic influence on Qur'ānic Arabic has often focused on *foreign vocabulary* (namely, in most of the cases, loanwords[6]) and, occasionally, on the *use of parallel formulas*. However, a loanword can have been borrowed *before* the Qur'ān. It is not inevitably a sign of bilingualism or language contact at the time when the Qur'ān was composed (even if it sometimes may be). For example, most of the names of Biblical characters are attested in pre-Islamic inscriptions (Arabic or Nabatean)[7], and the numerous Aramaic loanwords in Arabic are evidence for the deep penetration of Aramaic culture in the pre-Islamic Arabian sphere[8].

Concerning the use of parallel formulas (and the significance of the Syriac background), let's quote Sydney Griffith: "the more deeply one is familiar with the works of the major writers of the classical period, especially the composers of liturgically significant, homiletic texts such as those written by Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306–73), Narsai of Edessa and Nisibis

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[5] About the homiletic features of the Qur'ān, and especially its relations to the Syriac homiletic tradition, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), 232-253. About Q 19 as an Arabic *soḡiṯā*, see Manfred Kropp, « Résumé du cours 2007-08 (Chaire Européenne) », *Annuaire du Collège de France. Résumé des cours et travaux*, 108[e] année (2008), 791-793; Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués : aux sources de quelques péricopes coraniques (*Q* 19 : 16-33)", in *Partage du sacré : transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles,* ed. Isabelle Dépret & Guillaume Dye (Bruxelles-Fernelmont: EME, 2012), 64.

[6] See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938). Alphonse Mingana's seminal paper "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927), 77-98, focuses also on loanwords. It studies proper names (81-85), religious terms (85-87), and common words (87-90). There are a few remarks on orthography (90-91), and more on historical references (94-98) – a topic which oversteps the linguistic question of style. On the other hand, the section on *constructions of sentences* (91-93) provides only four examples (two of them, incidentally, dealing more with vocabulary than with syntax).

[7] For a brief overview, see Guillaume Dye & Manfred Kropp, "Le nom de Jésus (ʿĪsā) dans le Coran, et quelques autres noms bibliques : remarques sur l'onomastique coranique", in *Figures bibliques en islam*, ed. Guillaume Dye & Fabien Nobilio (Bruxelles-Fernelmont: EME, 2011), 175-176, 179-180.

[8] See the classical study of Siegmund Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden: Brill, 1886). About the inscriptions of pre-Islamic Arabia (except South Arabia), which comprise a good deal of "mixed texts" (Safaeo-Arabic, Nabateo-Arabic, Arameo-Arabic...), see e.g. Michael C. A. MacDonald, "Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia", *Arabian archeology and epigraphy* 11 (2000), 28-79.

(c. 399–502), or Jacob of Serugh (c. 451–521), the more one hears echoes of many of their standard themes and characteristic turns of phrase at various points in the discourse of the Arabic Qur'ān"[9]. Similar turns of phrases are surely evidence of the bilingualism or multilingualism of the *author(s)* of the Qur'ān (and they should be understood as such). That they are evidence of a certain degree of bilingualism of the intended audience(s) is less assured, even if possible at times.

Before going to the heart of the matter, I would like to provide a few examples (among many) of similar phraseology between, on one side, the Qur'ān, and on the other side, Jewish or Christian liturgical and theological formulas. These examples do not always tell much about the linguistic profile of the Qur'ānic audience(s), but they may highlight the historical context, the sources, and the meaning of some Qur'ānic verses (in a nutshell, they are good evidence of Qur'ānic intertextuality).

Similar phraseology (in liturgical or theological context)

I won't provide here any detailed argumentation, since these examples are supposed to be well known and have been studied by other scholars.

Q 1:2: *rabb al-ʿālamīn*[10]

Rabb al-ʿālamīn is a calque of Jewish and Syriac liturgical formulas (Hebrew *rabūn ha-ʿolāmīm*, Syriac *le-ʿolam ʿolemīn*). The initial meaning of Hebrew/Aramaic/Syriac *ʿolam* is temporal ("age, generation") but Aramaic and Syriac add also a spatial meaning ("world, universe"). This word is also attested in Palmyrenian and Nabatean inscriptions (for example, the Nabateo-Arabic inscription JSNab 17, dated AD 267, found in Hegra, where one reads Nabatean *mry ʿlm'* (**marī ʿālamā*), "Lord of the World", which is, incidentally, the epithet of the god Beʿel Šemīn in Palmyrenian). Moreover, the plural *ʿolamīn* can also mean "men, human people" (same meaning of *al-ʿālamīn* in some Arabic sources (e.g. in a poem by Labīd (d. *circa* 661), see Abū ʿUbayda, *Maǧāz al-Qur'ān*, I, 22)). So one may wonder if *rabb al-ʿālamīn* means "Lord of the World(s)" or "Lord of men".

Q 2:255: *allāhu lā 'ilāha 'illā huwa l-ḥayyu l-qayyūm*[11]

The formula "the Living, the Subsisting One" (*al-ḥayy al-qayyūm*) appears three times in the Qur'ān (Q 2:255; 3:2; 20:111). It is a calque of an Aramaic formula (an echo of Ps 121(120):4) found in the Aramaic *Book of Daniel* and also in the Palestinian *Targum of Ps-Jonathan* (Tg. Ps-

[9] Sydney Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān. The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition", in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008), 109.

[10] Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam. Entre écriture et histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 437-438, n. 156; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 208-209.

[11] Alfred-Louis de Prémare, « Les textes musulmans dans leur environnement », *Arabica* 47-3 (2000), 405-406. Most Qur'ānic translations are taken (sometimes with slight modifications) from A. J. Droge, *The Qur'ān. A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield, Bristol: Equinox, 2013).

Jon. on Gen 16:6-16 and 24:62, "The Living and the Subsisting One, who sees and is not seen"). Compare

> Q 2:255: *allāhu lā 'ilāha 'illā huwa l-ḥayyu l-qayyūm*, "God, no God except Him, the Living, the Subsisting One"
>
> *Dan* 6:27: *dī huwa êlāhā ḥayyā w qayyām le 'alēmīn*, "this is He the God, Living and Subsisting forever"

The Qur'ānic sentence is an almost *verbatim* translation of the verse in *Daniel*. It is followed by another almost *verbatim* translation – of Ps 121(120):4:

> Q 2:255: *lā ta'ẖuḏuhū sinatun wa-lā nawmun lahū*, "Slumber does not overtake Him, nor sleep" (construction *per merismum*, very common in Semitic languages, which means: "He is definitely never subject to sleep"),
>
> Ps 121(120):4: "He who keeps Israel will neither slumb nor sleep (*lō yanūm wəlō yîšān*)".

The Throne verse is thus partly made up of two *almost literal translations* of Biblical verses.

> Q 5:73: *la-qad kafara llaḏīna qālū 'inna llāha ṯāliṯu ṯalāṯa*[tin][12]

"They have disbelieved, those who say that God is third of three" (or, better: "those who say that God is one of three"). The context shows that the question at stake is the divinity of Jesus. But where does this formula – *ṯāliṯu ṯalāṯatin* – come from? Maybe the only idea that Jesus is one person in the Trinity is a sufficient explanation. Yet Sydney Griffith has suggested that we may have here a calque of Syriac *ṯlīṯāyā*, which means "third, threefold, triple", and is often used in Trinitarian contexts, for example *ṯlīṯāy qnōmē*, "triple of hypostases/persons, three-personed", or even better, *ṯlīṯāyā d-Alāhā*, "God's own treble one" (referring to Christ, also called *ṯlīṯāyā*, "the trebled one"). In this case, a more accurate translation would be "They have disbelieved, those who say that God is threefold".

> Q 96:1: *'iqra' bi-smi rabbika*[13]

One should understand here, not « Read/Recite [you, Muḥammad] in the name of your Lord" (as is generally understood), but "Proclaim/Praise the name of your Lord". Compare Hebrew *qrā ḇ-šem Yahwē* and parallel formulas (Ps 105(104):1; 116:13, 17) and Syriac *qrā ḇ-šem māryā*. There are good reasons to see here a calque of such expressions. Other Qur'ānic formulas have a similar meaning: *sabbiḥ bi-smi rabbika* (Q 56:74; 59:52), *sabbiḥi sma rabbika* (Q 87:1), *'uḏkur isma rabbika* (Q 73:8; 76:25). From a grammatical point of view, the *bā'* in *bi-smi rabbika* is a *bā' zā'ida* (therefore, *'iqra' bi-smi rabbika = 'iqra' 'isma rabbika*). I consider the

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[12] Sydney Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'ān': Who were those who said 'Allāh is third of three' according to *al-Mā'ida* 73?", in *A Word fitly spoken. Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān, presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, ed. Meir M. Bar-Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa and Bruno Chiesa (Jerusalem: The Ben-Zvi Institute for the History of Jewish Communities in the East, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007), 100-108 [83-110].

[13] Among many references: Uri Rubin, "*Iqra' bi-smi rabbika...!* Some Notes on the Interpretation of *sūrat al-'alaq* (vs. 1-5)", *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1993), 213-230.

translation of this verse as a kind of *shibboleth* – a good way to spot historico-critical translations and "traditional" ones.

I turn now to some of the linguistic phenomena which display the kind of interference which is often met in bilingual/multilingual contexts. All the examples, of course, may not have the same weight (and I provide here only a brief selection). I leave aside the fields of phonology and orthography, which deserve a whole paper on their own.

Use of foreign words

Using foreign words is not the same as using loanwords. Of course, a loanword begins its life as a foreign word; with time, it is integrated into the lexicon of the new language. In other words, the use of a loanword is obviously *not* a case of code-switching, whereas the use of a foreign word is. However, sometimes, the border between loanwords and foreign words is not easy to draw. For example, what should we say about *ǧibt*?

> Q 4:51: *'a-lam tara 'ilā llaḏīna ūtū naṣīban mina l-kitābi yu'minūna bi-l-ǧibti wa-l-ṭāġūti* ("Didn't you see those who have been given a portion of the Book? They believe in *al-ǧibt and al-ṭāġūt*".)

Al-ǧibt (a Qur'ānic hapax) comes from Geez *gəbt* (*amaləktä gəbt*, "the new and foreign gods"), but contrary to *ṭāġūt*, it never really entered Arabic language – as far as I know, it has no plural in Arabic. About *ṭāġūt*, we certainly have an arabization either of Ethiopian *ṭā'ot* (same sense as *gəbt*, namely "new, alien gods, idols") or Western (Jewish) Palestinian Aramaic, *ṭā'ūṯā* ("idol"), with the attraction from the root *ṭ-ġ-y* ("to oppress, to be a tyrant")[14]. It is then probably a kind of post-Qur'ānic misinterpretation (or reinterpretation) of a foreign/loanwoard.

The most famous example of a foreign word may be:

> Q 112:1: *qul huwa llāhu 'aḥad*

Here *aḥad* seems ungrammatical. Compare Q 112:2: *allāhu l-ṣamad*, where the epithet is definite. *Aḥad* is also peculiar for semantic reasons: it means "anyone" ("no one, nobody", in negative clauses, see Q 112:4), and the meaning "one, unique" normally occurs with *wāḥid* (see *ilāh wāḥid*: Q 4:171; 5:73; 12:39, or *Allāh waḥdahū*: Q 7:70). Variant readings of Q 112:1 even have *allāhu l-wāḥid*, and this would fit Qur'ānic rhyme perfectly[15]. A straightforward explanation is to read the Hebrew proper name *e(ḥ)ḥād*: see Deut 6:4 and the *Shema' Israel* (*šəma' Yisrā'ēl, Yahweh elohē-nū Yahweh e(ḥ)ḥād*), which could indeed be behind this verse. Such a reading would solve problems of syntactical structure and semantic meaning at once. This explanation is not new, but it has recently been revived by Angelika Neuwirth

[14] Manfred Kropp, "Beyond Single Words. *Mā'ida – Shayṭān - jibt* and *ṭāġūt*. Mechanisms of Transmission into the Ethiopic (Gə'əz) Bible and the Qur'ānic Text", in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, 208-210.

[15] In Middle Arabic (a dubious category, but in this paper I refer above all to the corpus of Early Christian Palestinian Arabic, a kind of Arabic which is chronologically, geographically, and thematically very close to Qur'ānic Arabic), the differences between *aḥad* and *wāḥid* have become blurred. See Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic bases mainly on South Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, Fasc. 2 (Louvain: Peeters, CSCO Subsidia 28, 1967), 375-376 (§ 255). The Qur'ānic uses of these words, however, do not display such a blurring.

and Manfred Kropp[16] – and when such different and opposite scholars agree, maybe this means that there is a true insight lurking behind.

There are similar cases elsewhere in the Qur'ān. Some imply a different punctuation of the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*). Two promising examples of this kind have been suggested by Manfred Kropp[17]. Here is another one:

> Q 38:3: *kam 'ahlaknā min qablihim min qarnin fa-nādaw wa-lāta ḥīna manāṣ*^{in} ("How many a generation We have destroyed before them! They called out, but there was no time for escape".)

To say the least, *lāta* (another Qur'ānic hapax) is quite hard to explain inside Arabic. It is sensible to see here Syriac *layt*, "there isn't", the *alif* of *lāta* being a later addition (this is consonant with the orthography of ancient manuscripts)[18].

Lehnprägung (loan shifting), *Lehnbedeutung* (loan extension)

Lehnbedeutung usually refers to the idea that an existing native word or loanword gets the semantic value of a cognate foreign term. This is not a replacement, but an extension of the original meaning of the word. It is generally the result of *close language contact*. Sadly, this phenomenon is often overlooked in the studies of the language of the Qur'ān. Here is one interesting example[19]:

> Q 20:33-34: *kay nusabbiḥaka kaṯīra*^{n} */ wa-naḏkuraka kaṯīra*^{n}

Translators understand *kaṯīr* as a usual Arabic word and translate accordingly: "so that we may glorify You *much* and remember You *much*". Bell and Droge translate by "often". Such translations are awkward at best. However, if *kaṯīr* is understood in relation to a phenomenon of *Lehnbedeutung*, and in relation to the Syriac homonym root *k-t-r* (which refers to quantity *of time*, not quantity in general), then we have a much more convincing understanding of the passage: "so that we may glorify You *constantly* and remember You *constantly*", or "so that *we persevere* in glorifying You and remembering You", or even better, "so that *we don't cease* to glorify You and remember You". No wonder if the Syriac root belongs to the lexicon of *paraenesis*, and especially refers to perseverance in praying (a significant topic in the Qur'ān, usually expressed with the (Arabic) word *ṣabr*: see e.g. Q 2:45,

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[16] Angelika Neuwirth, *Zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2nd ed., 2007), 26; Manfred Kropp, "Tripartite, but anti-Trinitarian formulas in the Qur'ānic Corpus, possibly pre-Qur'ānic", in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011), 250-251.

[17] One concerns Q 72:3 (a parallel to Q 112), and a new punctuation of *ǧadd*, read as an Aramaic word, *ḥad* ("one, the one"), inside a tripartite anti-polytheistic and anti-Trinitarian formula. See Manfred Kropp, "Tripartite, but anti-Trinitarian formulas in the Qur'ānic Corpus, possibly pre-Qur'ānic", 259-261. The other concerns Q 85:4 and the word *al-uḫdūd*, which has no convincing explanation inside Arabic. It seems plausible to suppose something like the Aramaic **gdodā* (not attested, but belonging to a root which means "to rise" (about smoke, or flames), which could give *ugdūd*, to be understood as a "rising flame". Q 85:5 (*an-nāri ḏāti l-waqūd*, "a fire full of fuel") is then convincingly seen as a gloss of a foreign expression. See Manfred Kropp, "Résumé du cours 2007-08 (Chaire Européenne) », 786-787.

[18] Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān", 93. As Ahmad al-Jallad pointed me out, it is certainly the right place to remind that *laysa* has no internal explanation in Arabic either. It is most certainly an Aramaic loan, which must have entered Arabic at first through a dialect which did not have interdentals.

[19] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 295.

153; 7:126; 103:3). The Pauline motto, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17) was taken seriously indeed by the Desert Fathers[20] and, of course, in the Syriac piety, which lies behind much of Qur'ānic piety[21]. Perseverance in praying was thus called *ku(t)tārā* in Syriac – a word we find also as *kawṯar* in the Qur'ān (Q 108:1)[22]. What is so significant here with *kaṯīr* is that we don't have a borrowing, but a common Arabic word whose meaning has been extended, or specified, *in a given context,* by the meaning of the cognate Syriac root.

Another example:

> Q 25:18: *qālū subḥānaka mā kāna yanbaġī lanā 'an nattaḫiḏa min dūnika min 'awliyā'a wa-lākin matta'tahum wa-ābā'ahum ḥattā nasū l-ḏikra wa-kānū qawman būra*^{n} ("They will say: Glory to You! It was not fitting for us to take any allies other than You, but You gave them and their fathers enjoyment (of life), until they forgot the Reminder and became *qawman būran*".)
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> Q 48:12: *bal ẓanantum 'an lan yanqaliba l-rasūlu wa-l-mu'minūna 'ilā 'ahlīhim 'abadan wa-zuyyina ḏālika fī qulūbikum wa-ẓanantum ẓanna l-saw'i wa-kuntum qawman būra*^{n} ("No! You thought that the messenger and the believers would never return to their families, and that was made to appear enticing in your hearts, and thought evil thoughts, and became *qawman būran*".)

What is the meaning of *qawm būr* here? Droge translates "ruined people" (note the way *kānū/kuntum* is translated: "became", not "were"). Other translators suggest "a people in perdition" (Muhammad Habib Shakir), "a people (worthless and) lost" (Yusuf Ali), "become lost folk" (Pickthall), "became a lost people" (Mohsin Khan). These translations seem to understand *wa-kānū qawman būran* and *wa-kuntum qawman būran* as a consequence of the preceding words. Besides, early commentators of the Qur'ān identified the meaning of *būr* with that of *fāsid* ("corrupted"), saying that this is the meaning of this word in the language of a specific tribe, the Azd of 'Umān, whereas in the common speech of the Arabs, *būr* means "nothing" (*lā šay'*)[23].

Clearly there is a problem here – the commentators and translators are uneasy and try to guess or enlarge the meaning of *būr* in relation to its immediate context. Now it seems to me that all makes better sense if *wa-kānū qawman būran* and *wa-kuntum qawman būran* are understood as *explanations* of the behaviour of the people involved (it fits more the rhetoric of the verses), and if the meaning of *būr* is identified with the meaning of Syriac *bur*, "stupid, ignorant"[24], according (once again) to a phenomenon of *Lehnbedeutung*. In other

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[20] One example, among many: "Flee vain glory and pray without ceasing. Sing psalms before and after sleeping and learn by heart the precepts of the Scriptures" (Athanasius, *Life of Anthony*, in *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, SC 400, 1994), 55.3. On this topic, see e.g. John Wortley, "Prayer and the Desert Fathers", in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourié (Piscataway NJ: The Gorgias Press, 2012), 109-129.

[21] Tor Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, trans. Jules Roches (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1955), 130-161.

[22] See Martin Baasten's paper in this volume, refining and emending Luxenberg's insights (*The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 292-298).

[23] Referring to dialectical uses is a cheap way to multiply the possible meanings of a word, or rather to find (or guess) a meaning which would suit the context better. From a strictly linguistic point of view, such an appeal to dialects, even if it can be justified in some cases, should be considered with the highest suspicion.

[24] Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān", 93.

words, what the Qur'ān tells us is: look at how these people behaved, and look how stupid and ignorant they had to be to behave in such a way. Accordingly, *wa-kānū qawman būran* and *wa-kuntum qawman būran* should be translated: "Indeed, they were ignorant people", "Indeed, you were ignorant people".

Let's look now at a further example:

> Q 30:15: *fa-'ammā llaḏīna 'āmanū wa-'amilū l-ṣāliḥāti fa-hum fī rawḍatin yuḥbarūn*[a] ("As for those who have believed and done righteous deeds, they will be made happy in a meadow".)
>
> Q 43:70: *'udḫulū l-ǧannata 'antum wa-'azwāǧukum tuḥbarūn*[a] ("Enter the Garden, you and your wives, you will be made happy!")

Translators understand the passive form of *ḥabara* as "to be made happy, to be delighted". This sounds a bit strange. Moreover, there is the Hebrew or Aramaic *ḥbar*, "congregate together, be together with, join", and it gives a better meaning in this context[25]. Let's consider those verses:

> Q 30:14: *wa-yawma taqūmu l-sā'atu yawma'iḏin yatafarraqūn*[a] ("On the Day when the Hour strikes, on that Day they [the unbelievers] will be separated".)
>
> Q 43:67: *al-'aḫillā'u yawma'iḏin ba'ḍuhum li-ba'ḍin 'aduwwun 'illā l-muttaqīn*[a] ("Friends of that Day – some of them will be enemies to others, except for those who guard (themselves)".)

The rhetoric is clear: the unbelievers will be enemies to each other (and separated from each other and from God), whereas the believers will be brought together – with other believers, or with their wives[26]. This is exactly what the Ethpa'el of the root means in Syriac (*eṯḥabbar,* "to be intimate, be a companion"). Here we have an Arabic word (an Arabic verb), inflected according to the rules of Arabic – but the most plausible meaning is the meaning of (the Ethpa'el of) the cognate root in Syriac and, more generally, Aramaic (it is not an isolated nor unheard-of phenomenon, in the Qur'ān or elsewhere[27]). I may add that such a meaning of the root *ḥ-b-r* is attested in various kinds of Aramaic (Nabatean, Aramaic of the Early Targumim, Palestinian Targumic Aramaic, Palmyrenian), and that there is at least one

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[25] Michael Schub, "The Buddha comes to China", *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik* 29 (1995), 77-78; Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 253, n. 306.

[26] The idea of "bringing together", one way or another, is quite common in the eschatological pericopes of the Qur'ān: see e.g. Q 56:7-16, 49-50, 88-91.

[27] In the Qur'ān: see Q 4:171 and *lā taġlū fī dīnikum* ("do not go too far in your religion"). It should be read instead *lā ta'lū fī dīnikum*, and understood according to Syriac *a 'li ḇ-ḏīnā*, "to err in one's judgment, to make a mistake". Luxenberg ("Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem", in *Die dunklen Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Enstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig & Gerd-Rüdiger Puin (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2005), 136-137) is certainly right here. Elsewhere: see the Nabateo-Arabic inscription JSNab 18 (roughly contemporary to JSNab 17, and written next to it), whose third and fourth lines read: *dkyr bny' hn'w w 'ḥbr{w}- / h d{y} bn{w} qbrw 'm k'b{w}* ("May the builders Hn'w and his companions, who built the tomb of the mother of K'bw, be remembered"). Here we have *'ḥbr{w}h*, "his companions", according the semantics of the Aramaic root, but morphologically, it is an Arabic broken plural. On this inscription, see Laïla Nehmé, "A glimpse of the development of the Nabataean Script into Arabic based on old and new epigraphic material", in *The development of Arabic as a written language* (Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies), ed. Michael C. A. MacDonald (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 69-70.

example of such a use in a similar *eschatological* context in Late Jewish Literary Aramaic, namely Tg1Chr 4:18 ("who *joined* Israel to their father in heaven")[28].

Here is another interesting example:

> Q 60:11: *wa-'in fātakum šay'un min 'azwāğikum ilā l-kuffāri...* ("If any of your wives escape from you to the unbelievers...")

Arabic *šay'* is normally supposed to refer to an inanimate being but *not* to a human being. However, its Syriac equivalent, *meddem*, can also refer to a human being[29]. It seems then that *šay'* follows here the use of its closest Syriac equivalent. However, it would be hasty to conclude that this is an example of a clear influence from Syriac. Indeed, *šī*, in many modern dialects of Arabic – and *not only* those with an Aramaic substrate, like Syrian Arabic –, can refer to an inanimate as well to an animate being. So we might suppose, either that there have been some independent similar innovations among the various Arabic dialects or, rather, that *šay'* was already used with this wider meaning in "Old neo-Arabic dialects" (viz., the Arabic dialects spoken in the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent before the Arab conquests).

The existence of such phenomena should make us open to another possibility – which I won't study here –, namely, the *semantic calques,* a phenomenon akin to a translation technique, or a "mental translation", where words in the source language are assigned equivalents in the target language on the basis of their most common meaning, while the word in the target language is also used to translate the other meanings of its equivalent in the source language[30].

Syntactical Structures

Interference, however, is not limited to the meaning of isolated nouns or verbs. It also concerns syntactical structures.

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[28] More references on the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project*, available online (http://cal.huc.edu).

[29] Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān", 92.

[30] The most famous and striking example is Syriac *šubḥā* ("glory"), used to translate Greek δόξα when it has this meaning, but also when δόξα means "opinion" (see Daniel King, "A Christian Qur'ān?", 53, n. 28). A possible candidate in the Qur'ān is Arabic *faṣṣala vs.* Syriac *praš/parreš*. The Syriac root means "to separate, to select", but also "to explain, to interpret" – a meaning which suits perfectly the Arabic root *f-ṣ-l* in most of its Qur'ānic contexts. Parallel semantic developments between Syriac and Arabic, however, are not excluded, and are even a plausible explanation. Another example, with interesting theological consequences, could be Arabic *yassara*, possible calque of Syriac *paššeq*, "to make easy or easier" but also "to explain, to annotate" and "to translate". Luxenberg (*The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 123-124) has some interesting suggestions, even if I am not sure that the calque follows the meaning "to translate" and not "to explain". Here again, further analyses are needed. A promising example (since parallel semantic developments, in this case, are implausible) is Arabic *naqama vs.* Syriac *tḇa'* (Q 85:8). See Manfred Kropp, "Résumé du cours 2007-08 (Chaire Européenne) », 787-788.

My favorite example pertains to the syntax of *kull* (a quite complicated topic[31]), with the syriacism *min kulli + singular indefinite noun*, which means "all kinds of" – see Syriac *men kol*, "any sort of":

Q 31:10: *wa-batta fīhā min kulli dābbatin* (= Q 2:164) ("and [God] scattered on it all kinds of animals")

Q 17:89: *wa-laqad ṣarrafnā li-l-nāsi fī hāḏā l-qur'āni min kulli maṯalin* (=Q 18:54; 30:58; 39:27) ("We have displayed all sorts of parables (examples) for men in this predication")

There is another interesting, but far more complicated, case. Let's look at these two passages:

Q 3:52: *qāla man 'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi qāla l-ḥawāriyyūna naḥnu 'anṣāru llāhi* ("He [Jesus] said: Who will be my *'anṣār 'ilā llāh*? The disciples said: We will be the helpers of God")

Q 61:14: *qāla 'īsā bnu maryama li-l-ḥawāriyyīna man 'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi qāla l-ḥawāriyyūna naḥnu 'anṣāru llāhi* ("Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples: Who will be my *'anṣār 'ilā llāh*? The disciples said: We will be the helpers of God")

The syntax of *'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi* is awkward (why such a use of *ilā*?) and the commentators generally understand "my helpers [in the path] of God" (Droge translates quite literally, "my helpers to God"). Yet the answer of the disciples does not follow the construction of the question. They only answer: we are, or we'll be, the helpers of God. If the question was supposed to be understood as it usually is, we should read the following answer: *naḥnu 'anṣāruka 'ilā llāh*, "we are your helpers [in the path] of God".

The underlying meaning of the question, addressed to the disciples, is certainly: who are my helpers and *therefore* the helpers of God? The sequel of Q 61:14 confirms this interpretation: "One contingent of the Sons of Israel believed [these are the helpers of God, also Jesus' helpers], and (another) contingent disbelieved [the Jews]. So We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they were the ones who prevailed". A pun with *naṣāra*, "Christians", is not excluded. We might translate *'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi* by "my helpers of God" – an expression which sounds a bit awkward, like in Arabic.

A structure **'anṣārī (A)llāh* is not possible in Arabic, and a literal translation of the underlying meaning of the question would be quite long, whereas the Qur'ān clearly aims at concision in this context. However, it seems possible to see here a kind of calque of a well-known structure expressing membership in some neighboring Semitic languages, namely:

Noun 1- pronominal suffix 3rd pers. + particle-Noun 2

This is indeed the hypothesis of Manfred Kropp, who compares *'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi* to a structure in Geez, with the particle *lä* ("to, toward, for, to the advantage of, with regard to,

[31] There is a recent paper on this topic by Thomas Bauer ("The Relevance of Early Arabic Poetry for Qur'anic Studies Including Observations on Kull and on Q 22:27, 26:225, and 52:31", in *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 699-732. This study provides some interesting parallels with pre-Islamic poetry, but it is marred by useless polemics against Luxenberg – whereas Syriac lurks sometimes behind the Qur'ānic syntax of *kull.*

according to")[32]. For example: *ardə'ət-u lä-ʔgzi'abəḥeri*: literally, "helper-his to God = God's helper", *bet-u lä-nəgus*: "the king's house".

The passage from *lä* to *ilā* is maybe not the most natural one (*la* was more expected as a dival preposition), but it is not impossible. But there is a significant difference: as far as I know, the Semitic structure I referred to works with 3rd pers. There is thus a Qur'ānic innovation with *'anṣār-ī* (1st pers.).

There are, however, similar constructions in Levantine Arabic dialects with Aramaic substrates, for example: *bēt-o la-Yūsef*, "Joseph's house"[33]. And this is not surprising, since there is the same structure in Aramaic: *bayteh d-X* (exactly as in Geez, except that the particle here is the demonstrative *d-*). For example: Syriac *bayteh d-Šem'ūn*, "Peter's house" (literally, "his house, that of Peter"). A plural suffix is also possible: *Allāh-hūn d-kristyānē*, "the God of the Christians".

In some cases, *bayteh d-X* and *bayta d-X* are used interchangeably. However, *bayteh d-X* has some specific uses. For example, it is *never* used when the second member describes the first (*ḥaṣā d-maškā*, "loincloth (made) of skin", but not **ḥaṣeh d-maškā*). *Bayteh d-X* is used only when "the referent of the first member belongs in some way to the second"[34]. So *bayteh d-X* is regular when the first member refers to parts of the body, or members of the family, and it is frequent too when the second member is a known individual.

If one understands *'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi* as a syntactical invention based on a preexisting Semitic (foreign) structure, then we get what I believe is the intended meaning: "my helpers and God's helpers". Of course, *'anṣārī 'ilā llāhi* might be a spontaneous syntactical invention, without any influence from neighboring languages, but an influence from Geez or Aramaic seems to me more plausible.

Another significant example concerns the formula *Ibrāhīm ḥanīfan* (Abraham the *ḥanīf*).

> Q 4:125: *wa-man 'aḥsanu dīnan mimman 'aslama waǧhahū li-llāhi wa-huwa muḥsinun wa-ttaba'a millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan wa-ttaḫaḏa llāhu 'ibrāhīma ḫalīla*[n] ("Who is better in religion than one who submits his face to God, and follow the creed of Abraham the *hanif*? God took Abraham as a friend".)

There is a similar construction of *Ibrāhīm ḥanīfan* elsewhere (Q 2:135; 6:161). Most of the time, translators (rightly) understand *ḥanīf* as an epithet, and not as an accusative of state. Such an understanding is confirmed by the following verse:

> Q 3:95: *qul ṣadaqa llāhu fa-ttabi'ū millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan* ("Say: God has spoken the truth, so follow (plural) the creed of Abraham the *hanif*").

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[32] Manfred Kropp, "Äthiopische Arabesken im Koran. Afroasiatische Perlen auf Band gereiht, einzeln oder zu Paaren, diffus verteilt oder an Glanzpunkten konzentriert", in *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, ed. Markus Groß & Karl-Heinz Ohlig (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2008), 403-405.

[33] Manfred Kropp, "Äthiopische Arabesken im Koran. Afroasiatische Perlen auf Band gereiht, einzeln oder zu Paaren, diffus verteilt oder an Glanzpunkten konzentriert", 405, n. 26.

[34] Jan Joosten, *The Syriac language of the Peshitta and old Syriac versions of Matthew: syntactic structure, inner-Syriac developments and translation technique* (Kinderhook: Brill, 1996), 50.

If *ḥanīfan* is an accusative of state, then it should be in the plural. On the other hand, if it is an epithet, it should have the definite article *al-*. Here Luxenberg's explanation – one should not read *ḥanīfan*, an indefinite accusative, but *ḥanīfā*, the final *-ā* being the mark of the emphatic case in Syriac – is certainly insightful[35]. *Ibrāhīm ḥanīfā*, or maybe rather *millata Ibrāhīm ḥanīfā*, appears as a fixed formula calqued on Syriac. Syriac *mellṯā*, "word, covenant", stays behind Arabic *milla*; moreover, Arabic *ḥanīf* comes in all probability from Syriac *ḥanpā*, which is normally a pejorative world ("pagan, idolater") – but not always! Indeed, in the *Pəšīṭṭā*, it translates also sometimes Greek ἐθνικός (Mt 6:7; 10:5; 18:17; 1 Co 5:1 ; 10:20; 12:2), or Ἕλλην (Mk 7:26; Jn 7:35; Ac 18:4; 18:17). In short: Abraham is a *Gentile*, not bounded by the Jewish Law, but at the same time, he is not an idolater (*mušrik*).

Are there other cases of the mark of the Syriac emphatic case later understood as an Arabic indefinite accusative? According to Luxenberg, yes:

> Q 6:161: *qul 'innanī hadānī rabbī 'ilā ṣirāṭin mustaqīmin dīnan qiyaman millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan* ("Surely my Lord has guided me to a straight path, a right religion, the creed of Abraham the hanif".)

As Nöldeke himself acknowledged[36], this construction is very strange. Since *dīnan qiyaman millata...* can't be accusative of state, it should be in the genitive, following *ilā*, like *ṣirāṭin mustaqīm*. Luxenberg explains the Arabic ending of *dīn(an)*, *qiyam(an)*, and so on, as a rendering of Syriac's emphatic state (*-ā*), which can't be inflected[37]. This is an interesting explanation, but certainly a bit hazardous (and it implies more than the use of a fixed formula like *Ibrāhīm ḥanīfā*). Anyway, the matter is complex (grammarians might appeal to various devices, often far-fetched, to solve the problem), so I won't go into details here.

Let's note, however, that in Middle Arabic, nouns governed by prepositions may terminate in *-an*[38]; moreover, "in nouns governed by prepositions there is a tendency to put the more remote members in the 'accusative'"[39]. So what looks like incorrect Classical Arabic (a category maybe as unclear as Middle Arabic) rather looks like, let's say, "correct" or usual Middle Arabic[40].

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[35] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 55-57; Devin J. Stewart, "Notes on Medieval and Modern Emendations of the Qur'ān", in *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context,* 238-240.

[36] Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1910), 11.

[37] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 53-54.

[38] Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic bases mainly on South Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, Fasc. 2, 342 (§ 226.5). For example: *fa-lammā ra'ā Yasū' ilā ǧumu'an kaṯīratin ma'ahu* [Mt 8:18], "when Jesus saw great multitudes around him".

[39] Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic bases mainly on South Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, Fasc. 2, 342-343 (§ 226.6). For example: *'alā minbarin munīfin muta'āliyan*, "on a throne high and lifted up".

[40] Luxenberg's motto is that we often have in the Qur'ān, not incorrect Arabic, but correct Syro-Aramaic (*The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 53), which is another point. There is, of course, a vexing question: what does *tanwīn alif* represent in Middle Arabic texts, and in such Qur'ānic verses – living usage (related or not to inference with Aramaic), or pseudo-corrections? A detailed examination of this topic exceeds by far the limits of this paper (but see Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic. A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic* (2nd ed., Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1981), 167-212). If one follows Luxenberg about Q 6:161, it would be natural to translate: "Surely my Lord has guided me to a straight path, *the* right religion, the creed of Abraham the hanif" (I do as if *dīn* and *milla* should be translated as "religion" and "creed", which is probably not the case, but this is not the point here).

This reference to Middle Arabic makes an apt transition to my next point.

Q 7:160: *wa-qaṭṭa'nāhumu ṯnatay 'ašrata 'asbāṭan* ("We divided them into twelve tribes").

According to the rules of Classical Arabic, one would except *sibṭan*. This is indeed an exception in the Qur'ān – the agreement with numerals is almost always regular. See for example, *in the same verse*:

fa-nbağasat minhu ṯnatā 'ašrata 'aynan ("and there gushed forth from it twelve springs").

A second exception is:

Q 18:25: *wa-labiṯū fī kahfihim ṯalāṯa mi'atin sinīna wa-zdādū tis'a*^{n} ("They remainded in their cave for three hundred years and (some) add nine (more)").

Another example of irregular agreement, but not with numbers:

Q 2:31: *wa-'allama 'ādama l-asmā'a kullahā ṯumma 'araḍahum 'alā l-malā'ikati* ("And He taught Adam the names of all of them, then He showed them [the beings] to the angels.")

According to the rules of Classical Arabic, one should read *'araḍahā* – as we read *kullahā* a few words before. The agreement in *'araḍahum*, "He showed them (the beings, the animals)", on the other hand, would not be surprising in Middle Arabic[41] (nor in some pre-Qur'ānic inscriptions). The cases of irregular agreement in number, gender or case (from the point of view of the grammar of Classical Arabic) are indeed not exceptional in the Qur'ān (see e.g. Q 2:177; 4:162; 5:69; 11:69, 72; 20:63; 75:14). These considerations bring us to a new and more general point, which is partly related to bilingualism, namely, the nature of Qur'ānic Arabic.

More general thoughts

Scholars have noticed the many peculiarities of Qur'ānic style and grammar, and even the possible linguistic errors[42]. In fact, there may be three different phenomena.

First: linguistic errors. What I mean is that there are some irregularities – especially concerning *i'rāb* – in the Qur'ān. In several cases, the best explanation is to suppose a

[41] Joshua Blau, *Handbook of Early Middle Arabic* (Jerusalem: Max Schloessinger Memorial Foundation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002), 45 (§ 80); *ibid.*, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic bases mainly on South Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, Fasc. 2, 278 (§ 177.2): "as a rule, the more remote a word referring to a collective noun be from the noun, the more likely it is to stand in the plural".

[42] About linguistic errors, see John Burton, "Linguistic Errors in the Qur'ān", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38-2 (1988), 181-196. About grammar and style, see e.g. Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 23-30, Rafael Talmon, "Grammar and the Qur'ān", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, volume 2 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2002), 345-369, Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, "Language and Style of the Qur'ān", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, volume 3 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 109-135, and also Karl Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strasbourg: Tübner, 1906), especially 175-185. Marginal remark about the history of Qur'ānic studies in the 20th Century: it is very surprising (and depressing) to realize how some of the most insightful contributions of the early 20th Century – for example Vollers' book, Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde* (Paris: Geuthner, 1911-1924, 3 vol.), or Henri Lammens, "Qoran et tradition : comment fut composée la vie de Mahomet", *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 1 (1910), 25-61 –, and also of the 19th Century (Aloys Sprenger still remains a mine of insights), have so easily been dismissed (often with quite weak arguments) or simply ignored by many scholars. The situation in the late 20th Century was not really better.

mistake at some point in the *transmission* of the text[43]. The early Arabic script is extremely ambiguous, and there are some good arguments suggesting that the language represented by the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of the Qur'ān had no *i'rāb*[44]. Thus, such errors are certainly "post-qur'ānic" (posterior to the writing of the *rasm*), and were made by the scribes who added dots and vowels to the consonantal skeleton[45]. In other words, it does not seem necessary to suppose *pseudo-corrections* (especially hypercorrections) at the level of the *composition* of the text.

Second: grammatical specificities (here again, I leave out here phonology and orthography, including, therefore, the famous question of the *hamza*). The Arabic of the Qur'ān is certainly not identical with Classical Arabic (which I take more as a socio-linguistic label than as a strictly historical one), and some aspects of its grammar which strike us as a bit strange may simply reveal linguistic usage, not always congruent with the later standardization of Classical Arabic grammar (even if Qur'ānic Arabic, as we know it, is partly the result of the standardization of the language represented by the *rasm*), in some part of the Arabic-speaking world, at a particular time. Some instances of this phenomenon are occasionally called, rightly or wrongly, "*ḥiǧāzisms*"[46].

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[43] Other explanations are also possible sometimes, see below. There may also be other kinds of transmission mistakes, like errors in the adding of the diacritical dots and vowels, which are placed correctly most of the time, but not always. In other words: there was no oral tradition, at least not a sound and uninterrupted one, which could guarantee the perfect transmission of the text. See Manfred Kropp, « Résumé du cours 2007-08 (Chaire Européenne) », 787, whose methodological reflections I share without reservation.

[44] Here I side with Karl Vollers, and his stress on *Volkssprache*. Several works by Pierre Larcher ("Arabe préislamique, arabe coranique, arabe classique : un continuum ?", in *Die dunklen Anfänge*, 248-265; "Qu'est-ce que l'arabe du Coran ? Réflexions d'un linguiste", *Cahiers de linguistique de l'INALCO* 5 (2003-2005 [volume number year], published in 2008), *Linguistique arabe*, ed. Georgine Ayoub & Jérôme Lentin, 27-47) give additional arguments for not "classicizing" Qur'ānic Arabic. Indeed, it is not Qur'ānic Arabic which influenced the grammar of Classical Arabic (as is so often claimed): it is rather the reverse, as Pierre Larcher aptly wrote me in a personal message (email, 23/01/2014): "C'est la grammaire arabe qui a influencé la langue du Coran, en la classicisant [GD: I would add, *en la standardisant*] au-delà de ce que le *rasm* autorise". Another incidental remark: it is sometimes thought that Nöldeke had a decisive, or at least strong argument, against Vollers, with the absence of non-*i'rāb* traces in the transmission of the Qur'ān (Talmon, "Grammar and the Qur'ān", 359). I am not convinced, for several reasons. First, there are certainly traces of neo-Arabic in the Qur'ān. Second, even in the complete absence of such traces, this argument would work only if the transmission of the Qur'ān, as we know it, had begun very early. This supposes, roughly, that the Qur'ān was ready at the time of Muḥammad's death, and that it was well-known enough to be transmitted on a large scale – and it is surely sensible to doubt these two points. Third, there is evidence of readings of the Qur'ān without case endings. See Paul E. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959²), 141-149, 345-346; *id.*, "The Arabic Readers of the Koran", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8-2 (1949), 65-71; and Jonathan Owens, "*Idġām al-Kabīr* and history of the Arabic language", in *"Sprich doch mit deinen Knechten Aramäisch, wir verstehen es!" 60 Beiträge zur Semitistik für Otto Jastrow zum 60. Geburstag*, ed. Werner Arnold & Hartmut Bobzin (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 503-520.

[45] Among the few examples studied by Burton, see e.g. Q 2:177: *wa-l-mūfūna bi-'ahdihim iḏā 'āhadū wa-l-ṣābirīna fī l-ba'sā'i wa-l-ḍarrā'i* ("and those who uphold their contract when they have made one, and those who are patient under violence and hardship"). *Al-mūfūn* is in the nominative and *al-ṣābirīn* is not, whereas both words are coordinated by *wa*. However, sometimes, such anomalies could indicate, not a grammatical error, but an interpolation. See my commentary about Q 9:31 and *wa-l-masīḥa* in *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary: A Collaborative Analysis of 50 Select Passages*, ed. Mehdi Azaiez, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Tommaso Tesei, and Hamza Zafer, forthcoming.

[46] Two examples, related to the grammar of negation: *mā* as a nominal negator (Q 12:31: *mā hāḏā bašaran*, "this is not a man"); *'in* as a negative particle (Q 11:51: *'in 'aǧriya 'illā 'alā llaḏī faṭaranī*, "my reward is not due except on the One who created me").

We should also remember that Qur'ānic Arabic may not necessarily be as *homogeneous* as generally assumed – and this should be no surprise. Qur'ānic Arabic, of course, is the Arabic of the Qur'ān – a tautology, which should not hide, however, two significant points. First, there is a probable hiatus between the language represented by the *rasm* (closer, at least in part, to the vernacular), and the language represented by the *qirā'āt*, which display the influence of the poetic language. Moreover, the Qur'ān, strictly speaking, is not a book, but a *corpus*, namely, the gathering of relatively independent texts, which belong to various literary genres and are, in several ways, somewhat heterogeneous (for example, the style and vocabulary – see the numerous *hapax legomena* – of the many "oracular suras" at the end of the Qur'ānic corpus are quite different from those of the other parts of the Qur'ān; more generally, the literary and stylistic quality is uneven). And since I mentioned Sprenger earlier, it is probably the right place to quote him: "Im Qoran kommen ungefähr 1700 Wurzeln vor, und es gibt schwerlich ein Buch von selben Umfange [GD: even more since the Qur'ān is very repetitive] in irgend einer Sprache, welches eine so grosse Zahl verschiedener Wörter enthält; das kommt daher, dass Moḥammad die Sucht hatte, nach ungewöhnlichen Ausdrücken zu haschen. Viele hat er selbst gemacht, viele hat er von verwendten Sprachen entlehnt"[47].

Muḥammad's lexical creativity is a possible explanation at times, but the idea of a collective work, spread over time (more than usually thought), with various layers, seems the most natural and straightforward account. Of course, evidence from epigraphy, as well as from linguistic reconstructions of "old neo-Arabic", might be of some interest here.

Third: stylistic peculiarities. Here, the idiosyncrasies lie in the common use of this kind of Arabic, and therefore in the linguistic habits and tastes of the audience, but *also*, if not more, in the stylistic, rhetorical and linguistic choices of the author(s) of the Qur'ān. For example, the Qur'ān is quite fond of *anacolutha*. Moreover, it goes without saying that the constraints of the *saǧ'*, and the importance of pause and rhyme, explain many aspects of the text – but not all.

The frontiers between these phenomena are not always easy to draw (but a blurred frontier does not mean no frontier at all)[48]. Yet I would like to ask the following question: concerning the grammatical and stylistic peculiarities of Qur'ānic Arabic, what can be explained with the parameters of interference and language contact? Indeed, behind such peculiarities may lurk sometimes phenomena of interference with other languages.

This is a huge topic which deserves much more than a single paper. Of course, interference is only *one* of the possible explanations: it is not supposed to explain

[47] "Review of *Mohammad nach Talmud und Midrasch*, nach J. Gastfreund", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 28 (1875), 656-657.

[48] One example, with a famous verse. Q 20:63 reads, according to the majority (four) of the seven canonical *qirā'āt*: *'inna hāḏāni la-sāḥirāni* ("there are two magicians"). From the point of view of the Classical Arabic grammar, this is simply incorrect: we should have an accusative, *hāḏayni*, and not a nominative, following *'inna* (Abū 'Amr's reading corrects accordingly). How should we interpret this anomaly? Does it reflect a living usage where there are no more cases, at least in the dual? Is this a rhetorical and stylistic effect highlighting an internal rhyme *hāḏāni/sāḥirāni*? Or does it pertain to a "linguistic error", to be understood either from an historical viewpoint (as evidence of an evolution under way) or a socio-linguistic one (pseudo-correction)? See Pierre Larcher, "Arabe préislamique, arabe coranique, arabe classique : un continuum ?", 257.

everything, and at times, several competing explanations are more or less plausible. So I have more questions than answers (as so often with the Qur'ān). Let us look at a few examples.

1) There are many cases (around 600) in the Qur'ān where the subject precedes its verbal predicate. This order is quite unusual in Arabic. It is much more common in Biblical Hebrew (the "*casus pendens*", or *yiḥūd*) or in Aramaic, where the order of the words displays more freedom. Should we explain this massive use of *topicalisation*[49] by rhetorical and stylistic reasons, as evidence for phenomena of interference (in living usage), or as a will to mimic the style of Jewish or Christian religious works (in Hebrew or Syriac)?

2) In the same vein, the Qur'ān sometimes employs impersonal verb constructions. For example:

> Q 27:17: *wa-ḥušira li-sulaymāna ǧunūduhū mina l-ǧinni* ("Solomon gathered his armies of jinns" – literally, "his armies of jinns were gathered for Solomon").

This is quite unusual in Arabic (but not completely unheard-of). On the other hand, such constructions are not rare in Aramaic, in the *Pəšiṭṭā* or by the Syriac Fathers[50]. Could the ideas of style imitation or interference be good explanations?

3) In a suggestive paper[51], Yehudit Dror has highlighted a specific function of the particle *bal* in the Qur'ān. This particle has usually three functions. It can rectify or amend a previous statement (e.g. Q 3:169); after an affirmative proposition, or a command, it can denote turning away, or digressing, from the previous statement (e.g. Q 2:259); it can also denote turning from one intention or topic to another one (e.g. Q 23:62-63).

Dror suggests that in five Qur'ānic verses (Q 2:116; 4:49; 13:31; 34:27; 38:2), *bal* is not used in any of these ways, but rather as an emphasis particle. Therefore, it should be translated as "only" (Q 4:49; 34:27), or "indeed" (Q 2:116; 38:2)[52]. I am not really convinced by the first two examples, where "but" seems a good translation. But there is at least one example where Dror is clearly right:

> Q 38:1-2: *ṣ (ṣād) wa-l-qur'āni ḏī l-ḏikr*^{i} */ bali lladīna kafarū fī 'izzatin wa-šiqāq*^{in} ("(ṣād) By the predication with the reminder / Indeed, those who disbelieve are in false pride and defiance".)

This emphatic usage of *bal* is similar to the cognate particle *aval* in Biblical Hebrew, which means "but", but has also an assertive use ("verily", see for example 1K 1:43). In her abstract, Dror says that "the idea that the particle *bal* in the Qur'ān has also an emphatic

[49] On this topic, see Yehudit Dror, "Topicalisation in the Qur'ān: A Study of *'ištiġāl*", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung.* 65-1 (2012), 55–70.
[50] See the examples given in Theodor Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. James A. Chrichton (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), 199-202 (§ 254).
[51] "Some Notes about the Functions of the Particle *bal* in the Qur'ān", *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 49 (2012), 176-183.
[52] Q 13:31 can fall in either category.

usage came from the Biblical Hebrew, in which the particle *aval* which is parallel to the Arabic particle *bal* has also this usage"[53]. It is hard to tell if she only means that the examination of the uses of *aval* gave her insights for her analysis of *bal*, or if she claims that the use of Qur'ānic *bal* is sometimes influenced, or even deliberately modeled, on Biblical Hebrew. This last claim seems to me doubtful, or at least unprovable. The meaning of such particles fluctuates – much depends on contexts. Just one example, outside Arabic: Syriac *gēr* has normally the meanings of Greek γάρ, "so, then, therefore...", but sometimes it should be translated by "but"[54]. In short, the move from adversative to assertive/emphatic use can go both ways. And, as Beck noticed, "Man weiß von den alten Sprachen her, welche Schwierigkeiten das genaue Erfassen des Sinnes kleiner Partikeln bereiten kann"[55]... One should mention here Nabatean *bly*, with an assertive meaning, "indeed, verily", as well as Arabic *balā* (same sense). Therefore, we probably have a case of parallel development.

4) I would like to conclude with a very interesting phenomenon, namely the Qur'ānic use of the particle *wa* as start of an apodosis. Luxenberg devotes a good deal of pages to this question[56], and his insights should be pursued further.

There are several examples of such a use (Q 12:15; 18:47-48; 37:103-104; 85:6-7 – the list does not claim to be exhaustive). Here are two simple and salient ones.

Q 12:15: *fa-lammā ḏahabū bihī wa-'aǧma'ū 'an yaǧ'alūhu fī ġayābati l-ǧubbi wa-'awḥaynā 'ilayhi* ("When they had taken him [Joseph] away, and agreed to put him in the bottom of the well, We inspired him").

Protasis: *fa-lammā ḏahabū bihī wa-'aǧma'ū 'an yaǧ'alūhu fī ġayābati l-ǧubbi*
Apodosis: *wa-'awḥaynā 'ilayhi*

Q 37:103-104: *fa-lammā 'aslamā wa-tallahū li-l-ǧabīn*^{i} */ wa-nādaynāhu 'an yā-'ibrāhīm*^{u} ("When they both submitted, and he had laid him face dow, / We called out to him: 'Abraham!'")[57]

Protasis: *fa-lammā 'aslamā wa-tallahū li-l-ǧabīn*^{i}
Apodosis: *wa-nādaynāhu 'an yā-'ibrāhīm*^{u}

The particle *wa* is not required by Arabic syntax. It might even sound strange: it often drives translators into misunderstandings because they don't recognize a protasis/apodosis structure, or because they don't understand when the apodosis begins (the two cases shown here are easy, but Q 18:47-48 is another matter). How should we explain this use of *wa*?

In Biblical Hebrew, this particle is very often used at the start of apodoses. In the *Pəšiṭṭā*, most of the time, it is not translated – no surprise, since Syriac syntax does not normally

[53] Yehudit Dror, "Some Notes about the Functions of the Particle *bal* in the Qur'ān", 176.
[54] Edmund Beck, "Grammatisch-syntaktische Studien zur Sprache Ephräms des Syrers", *Oriens Christianus* 68 (1984), 9-12.
[55] "Grammatisch-syntaktische Studien zur Sprache Ephräms des Syrers", 1.
[56] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 153-157, 166-213.
[57] I follow here the usual understanding of v. 103, but the meaning of some terms, especially *'aslamā*, is not so clear – the root *s-l-m* being a good candidate for an analysis in terms of loanshifting from Aramaic. Such questions, however, are besides my point here.

require it. Yet, sometimes, it is also translated. One may say that these are cases of Hebraisms in the *Pəšiṭṭā*, but as we'll soon see, things are a bit more complicated.

In what is certainly the most comprehensive review of Luxenberg's book, Daniel King has dismissed Luxenberg's ideas on this topic: "Nöldeke has made quite clear elsewhere (*Grammar* §339) that ܐ does not mark apodoses in Syriac except in rare cases of Hebraisms in the Peshitta – it was not carried over thence into Syriac literature and to find such a construction here in Arabic is indeed a great leap of the imagination, and is certainly not proven by any evidence Luxenberg adduces"[58].

Maybe Luxenberg did not add enough evidence, but such a dismissal is unduly dogmatic. First, at least in some Qur'ānic verses, reading *wa* as only indicating the beginning of an apodosis (and so leaving it untranslated) makes much sense. Second, there is evidence of such a use in Aramaic and Syriac – and also in Arabic.

In fact, Nöldeke's claim should be qualified. It seems that Syriac *wē* is more used in popular writings (note the socio-linguistic factor!), as Nöldeke himself acknowledges: "In volkstümlichen Schriften scheint dies ܐ gern zu stehen"[59]. The *waw* of apodosis is also not unheard of in other Aramaic dialects, for example Egyptian Aramaic[60]. Moreover, we have significant examples of *wē* as a starting word in apodoses in the major Syriac writer, namely Ephraem, whose style is a remarkable mix of high sophistication and, at the same time, popular and accessible expression. The topic has been aptly studied by Edmund Beck[61], so it is not necessary to be too long here.

I need only to highlight a few points. Of course, Ephraem *often* does *not* use *wē* at the beginning of apodoses (as expected, since it does not belong to the regular construction), but *sometimes*, he uses it (there are tens of examples). Moreover, apodoses beginning by *wē* appear in all kinds of literary genres – in hymns as well as in prose. In a few cases, *wē* is used to provide the right number of syllables between two periods, but most of the time, its use is not constrained by metrical or syllabic reasons. In other words, *wē* is then certainly used for rhetorical or stylistic reasons[62].

I did not check how far this grammatical construction is widespread in Syriac literature, but Ephraem's works were largely known, and his *Hymns* were sung by all cantors and monks of Syriac culture in the Late Antique Near East. Therefore, they were certainly well-known in the scribal *milieu* responsible for at least a part of the composition of the Qur'ān.

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[58] Daniel King, "A Christian Qur'ān?", 55.

[59] "Review of *Kalila und Dimna*. Syrisch und Deutsch von Friedrich Schultheß", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 65 (1911), 579, n. 2 (Nöldeke provides a few examples).

[60] Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 327 (§ 84r).

[61] Edmund Beck, "Grammatisch-syntaktische Studien zur Sprache Ephräms des Syrers", 16-25.

[62] Which reasons exactly is besides my point here: *anacoluthon*, congruence with popular language, rhythm of the sentence? Maybe one of the uses of ܐ in the *Pəšiṭṭā* version of the Psalms should be mentioned here: whereas the Hebrew Psalter normally juxtaposes the two stichs of a verse, the *Pəšiṭṭā* Psalter often uses ܐ to coordinate them. See Ignacio Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms. A Study of Psalms 90-150 in the Peshitta* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 38.

Moreover, if such a use of *wa* is extremely unusual in Classical Arabic, it is not rare at all in Middle Arabic. Blau provides many examples[63], which don't pertain only to the introduction of a conditional clause. There are, indeed, instances of *anacoluthon*; there are also cases where *wa* calks the particle καί used in a Greek *Vorlage*; sometimes, such a use of *wa* marks a nuance like suddenness[64]. And this is not true only of Middle Arabic. Let's consider the two lines in Arabic (lines 4-5) in the famous bilingual inscription (Nabatean-Arabic) of 'Ayn 'Abada (usually dated between 88 and 125 a. C.). I follow the reconstruction of Manfred Kropp[65]:

fa-kun hunā yubġinā l-mawtu wa-lā abġāh(ū) ("Be it then that death claims us, He will not allow this claim!")

fa-kun hunā adāda ǧurḥ(un) wa-lā yudidnā ("Be it then that a wound festers, He will not let us be eaten by worms!")

We read, in these two lines (which are an incantation, and display a highly formal speech, which is however *not* poetry – it is rather similar to the style of a soothsayer), a *wa* which introduces the *apodosis*, but should be left untranslated.

In short: there are several Qur'ānic verses where is used a "*wa apodosis*", a syntactical construction which is exceptionally rare in Classical Arabic, but present in various stages of Arabic, before and after the Qur'ān. Even if the 'Ayn 'Abada inscription features a bilingual context, and if the examples in Middle Arabic given above come from a (translation) corpus mostly written by bilingual speakers, it would be too hasty to conclude that the *wa apodosis* is a kind of syntactical loan from Aramaic: it is not so easy to recognize the "real borrowings" between Aramaic and vernacular Arabic, since what looks like as an "aramaism" in Arabic may often be understood as a parallel development[66]. On the other hand, it would also be hasty to exclude a loan, given the antiquity and depth of the contacts between Aramaic and Arabic.

When Luxenberg writes that *wa apodosis* constructions "should be understood (...) syntactically on the basis of a sentence construction that is also attested in part in the Syro-Aramaic translation of the Bible under the influence of Biblical Hebrew"[67], he is right, in a way – this is without a doubt how some Qur'ānic verses should be understood and translated. However, it is far-fetched to look for close or direct influences from Biblical Hebrew, or from the few Hebraisms of the *Pəšiṭṭā*.

The explanation is more straightforward. Indeed, since it is rather implausible that the Qur'ān itself had any *direct* influence on Early (Christian) Middle Arabic, and since the

[63] Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic bases mainly on South Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, Fasc. 2, 450-454 (§ 346). For example: *kullu-man lā ya'malu l-birr wa-annahu laysa min Allāh* (1 Jn 3:10): "whosoever does not do righteousness, is not of God".

[64] For example: *wa-fīhā kuntu qāyim fī ṣallātī wa-haḏā l-raǧul Ǧibrīl 'atānī* (Dan 9:21): "and while I was standing in prayer, that man Gabriel came to me" (Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic bases mainly on South Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*, Fasc. 2, 453 (§ 346.6)).

[65] See his paper in this volume.

[66] Francisco del Río Sánchez, "Influences of Aramaic on dialectal Arabic", in *Archaism and Innovation in the Semitic Languages. Selected Papers*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala & Wilfred G. E. Watson (Cordoba : CNERU – DTR, Oriens Academic, 2013), 129.

[67] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 157.

corpus of Middle Arabic referred to above is attested later than the Qur'ān, we should suppose that the affinities (not limited, as we saw, to this use of *wa*) between Qur'ānic Arabic (by which I mean, first and foremost, the language represented by the *rasm*) and Middle Arabic have deeper roots – and the most natural explanation is that they reflect aspects of some kind(s) or register(s) of Arabic, as spoken roughly (with variants) in Syria, Palestine, Jordan and the north of the Arabian Peninsula, in Late Antiquity (before and after the conquests).

Which kinds and registers is another matter[68]. Let us, however, highlight a significant point, which could be a good beginning for further analyses. With the *wa apodosis*, we have an instance of *linguistic variation*, namely a case when a linguistic item has alternate realizations which are linguistically, or grammatically, equivalent. In Classical Arabic, it is normally excluded to begin an apodosis by *wa* – it is seen as a *deviation* from the norm, whereas in Qur'ānic Arabic and in Middle Arabic (and in other kinds of Arabic too), it is perfectly possible, but not mandatory. The choice of one variant form instead of another can depend on many factors, and is not necessarily deliberate. Without further precise information about the author(s) of the text, it is therefore futile to suggest a precise explanation. All we can say is that such choices are related to the verbal and phraseological repertoire of the author (not necessarily limited to Arabic), his stylistic taste, his spiritual and homiletic background and intentions, and also the constraints of pragmatic communication with an audience.

The careful reader has certainly noticed two things. First: with the formula "linguistic variation", we enter the field of *sociolinguistics*, or rather *historical sociolinguistics* (since we are dealing with written texts). Many traditional studies of Qur'ānic Arabic, albeit insightful, are very descriptive and formal, and pass over silence the social function(s) of Qur'ānic Arabic in the context and life of the communities which used it. The problem, of course, is that the more we go back in time, the less we know about such functions – and the main jeopardy would be to retroject on the situation of the 7th Century what we know about later times. Yet we need a more *realistic* view of Qur'ānic Arabic, and we won't get it if we study it out of its social context[69].

Second: I have regretted the absence of precise information about the author(s) of the text. This is not only because I think we know only very few things about Muḥammad's life. It is also because there are, to my mind, good reasons to dismiss the idea that the Qur'ān is simply a record of Muḥammad's *ipsissima verba*, or the work of his only circle of scribes,

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[68] Alan Jones has compared the Qur'ānic register to those of the *ḫaṭīb*, the *kāhin*, and the *qaṣṣ*, hence putting the Qur'ān between the register of poetry and that of the dialects. See e.g. Alan Jones, "The Oral and the Written: some thoughts about the Qur'ānic text", *The Arabist. Budapest Studies in Arabic* 17 (1996), 57-66. As far as one wants to highlight the relations between the Qur'ān and Early Arabic literature, this seems to me a very sensible approach.

[69] Several interesting studies, examining Biblical, Classical or Qumran Hebrew with the tools of historical sociolinguistics, have been published these last years. They could be a good source of inspiration. See the pioneering studies of William M. Schniedewind, "Qumran Hebrew as an Antilanguage", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999), 235-252, *id.*, "Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew", *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5 (2004-2005), Article 6. Online: http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_36.pdf. Recent and useful synthesis in Dong-Hyuk Kim, *Early Biblical Hebrew, Late Biblical Hebrew, and Linguistic Variability. A Sociolinguistic Evaluation of the Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), especially chapter 3.

whose profile does not match enough the profile of the redactors of many suras[70]. In other words, we should acknowledge the role of scribes, or professional clerics – for some, working after Muḥammad's death –, in the *composition* and transmission of the Qur'ān, and not only in a so-called "collection" (their work, of course, did not come out of nothing, and could be based, in part, on preexisting prophetical *logia* and liturgical texts).

Since we know much less about the historical background of the Qur'ān than is generally thought, at least by traditionally-minded scholars (for example, I don't see any convincing reason to stick to the Meccan/Medinan chronology[71]), then we should proceed the other way around – namely, we should aptly describe the nature of the texts under scrutiny and then draw the profile of their authors. The topic is too large for this paper, but we can already notice some key points.

From a literary point of view, we *should* talk of Qur'ānic Psalms, as well as Qur'ānic *madrāšē*, *memrē*, and *soḡiyāthā*[72]. I don't mean that the texts I am inclined to call Qur'ānic Psalms, *madrāšē*, and so on, are a servile borrowing of Syriac literary traditions – far from that: they are adapted, not without creativity, to the context of Arabic language and literature (e.g. Syriac verse is based on syllabic count, contrary to Arabic poetry and Arabic *sağ*ʿ). But – and this is crucial –, they share compositional features with their Syriac/Aramaic homologs, they draw from them a good part of their verbal, phraseological and thematic repertoire, and, also, they play a similar role: they are suited for narrative or *paraenetic* compositions, and they are used in homiletic or liturgical settings. Indeed, a good number of Qur'ānic pericopes look like Arabic ingenious patchworks of Biblical and para-Biblical texts, designed to comment passages or aspects of the Scripture, whereas others look like Arabic translations of liturgical formulas.

This is not unexpected if we have in mind some Late Antique religious practices, namely the well-known fact that Christian Churches followed the Jewish custom of reading publicly the Scriptures, according to the lectionary principle. In other words, people did not read the whole of the Scripture to the assembly, but lectionaries (Syriac *qəryānā,* "reading of Scripture in Divine Service", etymon of Arabic *qur'ān*), containing selected passages of the Scripture, to be read in the community. Therefore, many of the texts which constitute the Qur'ān should not be seen (at least if we are interested in their original *Sitz im Leben*) as *substitutes* for the (Jewish or Christian) Scripture, but rather as a (putatively divinely inspired) *commentary* of Scripture[73]. And since this Scripture was *not* in Arabic, we understand better the role of the Qur'ān, and we also understand better why it insists so

[70] For some references and arguments, see Guillaume Dye, "Réflexions méthodologiques sur l'analyse rhétorique du Coran", particularly the concluding section ; *id.*, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués : aux sources de quelques péricopes coraniques (Q 19 : 16-33)", 112-113.

[71] See Guillaume Dye, "Le Coran et son contexte", 256-259.

[72] See note 5 above concerning *madrāšē*, *memrē*, and *soḡiyāthā*. Concerning Qur'ānic Psalms, one could mention Q 55 with its characteristic refrain, or Q 96, which owes so much to Psalms 49 and 95 (see Michel Cuypers, « L'analyse rhétorique face à la critique historique de J. Wansbrough et G. Lüling », in *The Coming of the Comforter*, especially 363-365). Concerning the *Fātiḥa* as shaped by the patterns of responsorial, antiphonal or alternative-singing psalms, see Guillaume Dye, "Réflexions méthodologiques sur l'analyse rhétorique du Coran".

[73] See e.g Jan M. F. Van Reeth, "Le Coran et ses scribes", in *Les scribes et la transmission du savoir*, ed. Christian Cannuyer, Antoon Schoors & René Lebrun, *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 19 (2006), 67-82.

much on Arabic (Q 12:2; 13:37; 14:41; 16:103; 26:195; 39:28; 41:3, 44; 42:7; 43:3; 46:12): stressing that there is an Arabic *qur'ān* supposes that there might be non-Arabic *scriptures*.

These reflections, and all the examples studied above, suggest that we are dealing with a language, or sociolect (*i.e.* Qur'ānic Arabic), which was spoken and used in a multilingual context (with all the consequences of such a situation), where Aramaic was a prevalent language (*a fortiori* in religious matters). Even more: the people behind the compositions of such Qur'ānic Psalms, *madrāšē*, and so on (see for example suras 3, 5, 18, 19, 96...), were certainly scribes with a high literacy in Arabic *and* Aramaic[74]. And since, as we saw, we have in Qur'ānic Arabic many phenomena related to bilingualism, interference, and language contact (and there are many more, *a fortiori* if we allow changes in the punctuation of the *rasm*), that is to say, loanwords, *Lehnprägung*, *Lehnbedeutung*, semantic calques, uses of foreign words (namely, *insertions*), influence of foreign syntactical structures (*congruent lexicalization*)[75] – in other words, *code-switching* and *code-mixing* –, then it seems that studying such aspects of the Qur'ān with the tools of *translation technique* may be very promising[76].

[74] Just one reminder: the source of Q 18:83-102 is a *written* Syriac text, the *Alexander Legend*, composed in 629-630. See Kevin van Bladel, "The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān 18:83-102", in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, 175-203; Tommaso Tesei, "The pericope on Ḏū l-Qarnay in sūrat al-Kahf", forthcoming.

[75] There is still the last aspect of bilingual situations, namely *alternance* (shift from one language to the other). There is no alternance in the Qur'ān, but there is certainly some behind the original *Sitz im Leben* of some of its parts, as argued above. However, there may be a trace of alternance in the so-called "mysterious letters" at the beginning of some suras. It has been suggesting that these were abbreviations of Syriac liturgical formulas, and it is a sensible hypothesis. See Christoph Luxenberg, "Die syrische Liturgie und die 'geheimnisvollen Buchstaben' im Koran. Eine liturgievergleichende Studie", in *Schlaglichter*, 411-456.

[76] I would like to express my gratitude to various friends and colleagues who read and commented a first draft of this paper, namely Ahmad al-Jallad, Emilio Gonzalez Ferrin, Edouard-Marie Gallez, Pierre Larcher, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Carlos Segovia, Esma Tengour, and Tommaso Tesei. As usual, my greatest debt is to Manfred Kropp. I am of course responsible for any mistakes which have remained in the text.