Non-Canonical Readings of the Qur'ān: Recognition & Authenticity

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Non-Canonical Readings of the Qur’an: Recognition and Authenticity (The Ḫimṣī Reading)*

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1. Introduction

The existence of an old Qur’an manuscript that does not conform to any canonical reading will understandably raise several questions about the history of the Qur’an and the canonisation of its readings: What describes the landscape of Qur’anic readings (qirāʾāt) before canonisation, said to have been initiated by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) three centuries after Islam’s advent? By what criteria did some readings fall within the canon and some without? How and why did non-canonical readings persist?

The British Library’s ‘oldest Qur’an manuscript’, is just such a nonconforming copy of the Qur’an that can inform enquiries into the Qur’anic canon in a few respects. First, as a Qur’an copy that originates quite early (1st/7th or 2nd/8th century), it provides a direct look at variant readings circulating before canonisation. Upon analysing the manuscript, the major technical finding of this article is that it belongs not to the canonical Damascene tradition – as has been argued – but to that of Ḫimṣ, about 100 miles north, with some later Damascene additions.

Second, though fragmented, the manuscript is sufficiently extensive to permit a detailed analysis of its textual content, verse divisions, and orthographical style in a way that sheds light on this Qur’an’s provenance and production. Evidence that several scribes worked on this Qur’an in more than one location, across time, indicates how complex and lengthy the endeavor of copying a Qur’an could be. In this case, the copying process resulted in a hybrid reading that arguably is notable for the extent to which its hybridity apparently went unnoticed or unchallenged. Its modest profile may have been the natural result of the small scale of differences between readings, or it may reflect a deliberate hybrid that raised no eyebrows because it did not offend the gatekeepers of the canon.

Finally, the manuscript’s early provenance can provide insight into the early history of Qur’anic transmission and the formation of the canon of Qur’anic readings. When evaluated against works on the qirāʾāt tradition and its systematiseurs, the manuscript contains clues for a clearer view of the pre-canonical landscape of readings, and
indeed of the nature of the canon itself. In particular, the manuscript presents two intriguing features: it follows a tradition that appears to be non-canonical, yet authentic; and its variants are minute, yet sufficient to serve as diagnostics for identifying the reading tradition it follows. As I attempt to demonstrate below, the dividing line between canonicity and authenticity fell around the contours of authentic transmission and recognition. The early scholars of readings set forth criteria for delineating the authentic from the inauthentic, a main component of which involved placing a high premium on a reading’s origin and transmission (isnād). Thus, a reading could be authentic, but nevertheless non-canonical if it had a proper isnād but lacked some other criterion for canonicity, including popular recognition of the authenticity of its isnād. In addition, the variations in readings were so trifling that they might appear to be of no moment except to highbrow grammarians who enjoyed quibbling over minutiae. Yet, the variants were important because they implicated much larger questions of authenticity and canonicity. Early Qur’ān scholars sought to identify and authenticate even the minutest variant out of concern for a devotional economy of certainty. They were faithful to the notion that the Qur’ān was of divine origin. As Islam’s central text for matters of devotion and law, it bound the community of Muslims and connected them to prophetic revelation. For such a text, uninterrupted certainty, in their view, was required. This could be accomplished through assessing the transmission of each variant and its relative weight of authority in the community of Qur’ān scholars and at large. Their attempts to do so found expression in the canonisation of certain Qur’ānic readings.3

An analysis of the manuscript and a review of the canonical and non-canonical collections of readings before and after Ibn Mujāhid together with a look at the criteria for authenticity upon which he relied can help elucidate the nature of qirā’āt canonisation. It can also suggest reasons why certain readings, like the one before us, fell outside of the canon, and thereby fill in the backdrop for assessing where to place the Ḥimṣī reading in the overall history of the Qur’ānic text.

Before discussing each of these areas, it must be emphasised that I am not the first to examine this old Qur’ān in detail. It was edited by François Déroche and Sergio Noseda, and Yasin Dutton has analysed the manuscript as well.4 Dutton concluded that the manuscript’s text aligns with Ibn ʿĀmir’s (d. 118/736) Damascene reading, tentatively observed that the verse-endings bear resemblance to – though they are not identical with – known patterns from Ḥimṣ, and commented that the placement of symbols after every tenth verse does not appear to accord with any known system. He also concluded that the manuscript likely originated in the 1st/7th century (perhaps between 30/650–1 and 85/704) and that a single scribe produced its skeletal text.

Upon a second look, and with the help of sources for non-canonical readings in general and the Ḥimṣī reading in particular, these observations should be modified. First, this Qur’ān copy can be designated as definitively Ḥimṣī in both its ‘skeletal
text’ (the Qur’anic text absent diacritical marks) and verse-endings. In addition, certain features of the text support an early dating, but other features – including the placement of the tenth-verse symbols – suggest the later addition of symbols according to the Damascene tradition by not one but several scribes or readers.

Before detailing the unique features of this manuscript through a close examination of its text, the next section briefly outlines the readings literature and sources for the Himṣī reading to show how each can be used as diagnostic tools. After section 2, readers interested in a general sketch of the qirāʿāt tradition and the place the Himṣī reading occupies within its canon should skip section 3, which is highly technical, and move directly to section 4.

2. Readings Literature

There is evidence in the ‘text of the Qur’an itself as well as in hadīth [that] indicates that the Prophet compiled a written scripture for Islam during his own life-time’, which he edited and completed before his death.5 There is also evidence that some of Muḥammad’s contemporaries and successors compiled their own collections, which did not always reflect the prophetic one in its final form.6 Apparently, disputes erupted over the correct version until ʿUthmān ordered the collection of an official rescension around 30/650–1.7 He reportedly distributed copies to the major cities of the early empire, and ordered all other codices destroyed.8 However, reading variants continued to proliferate. Some carried over from the non-ʿUthmānic codices, but more commonly, the variants were based on the ʿUthmānic recension alone, the study of which forms the bulk of the qirāʿāt literature. This suits our purposes, because a comparison of our manuscript to records of early codices reveal that ours – like all other extant copies of the Qur’an of which we are currently aware – definitively hails from the ʿUthmānic recension.9 The qirāʿāt literature describes two main features of ʿUthmānic variants that distinguish one reading from another: (a) differences in orthography or pronunciation, and (b) differences in verse divisions that result in varied verse counts for each sura.

a) Orthography and Pronunciation

The recitation of the skeletal text varies by reader. The variations are small and infrequent enough that they do not change the meaning or flow of the text, but regular and systematic enough that they can serve as diagnostic tools for identifying which reading a particular manuscript follows. An example of a ‘major’ variant is as follows: most readings record Q. 7:75 as containing the word qāla, the Syrian reading alone adds a wāw to give wa-qāla.10 A manuscript that displays this and other Syrian variants can thus be matched to the Syrian tradition. The works on canonical readings record 38 such major orthographical variations.11
‘Minor’ variants include differences in diacritics (letter-points and vowels), spelling (involving hamazār and long vowels), and pronunciation (e.g. elongation of certain vowels and assimilation of certain consonants). Where diacritics indicate how a certain word is pronounced (e.g. two dots beneath a letter form to make a َّ rather than two dots above to make a ُّ), a Qur’an copy may match known variants in pronunciation amongst the different readers. However, diacritics are only a marginally useful diagnostic for early copies of the Qur’an, because copyists reportedly omitted letter-pointing and vowelling from Qur’ans even when they included them elsewhere. Likewise, differences in spelling are of limited diagnostic use because spelling conventions were not standardised until the 3rd/9th century or later. Moreover, the qirā’āt literature does not systematically categorise spelling according to reader or region, nor does spelling dictate how a reading is pronounced. These two oddities make it impossible to use spelling as a gauge for identifying readings in the written Qur’an.

b) Differences in Verse-divisions

The placement of verse divisions is the second major diagnostic tool for assessing variant readings. The qirā’āt literature records the places that each reader considered the end of an aya (ruvūṣ al-ʾāy or fāwāsīl) along with the total number of ayas that each reader counted for each sura. There are disputed verse-endings in almost every sura and corresponding differences over the total verse count for many suras. Compared to a much smaller number of major orthographical variants, the large amount of variants in this area makes them a better gauge for assessing the variant reading tradition of this manuscript.

Orthography and the Himṣī Reading

There is no readily available list of Himṣī orthographical variants. The canonical collections describe differences amongst readers from major geographical locations, but the only Syrian to make Ibn Mujāhid and his successors’ lists is Ibn ʾĀmir from Damascus. To find evidence of the Himṣī reading, we must look elsewhere. Unfortunately, non-canonical variants are ‘scattered all over Arabic literature and infrequently turn up in the most unexpected quarters. An absolutely complete collection of them, therefore, would involve the superhuman task of combing through the whole range of Arabic literature.’

Fortunately though, several exegetical works and readings compilations methodically preserve non-canonical readings, making them useful sources for the content of the Himṣī reading. Perhaps most telling among the works of exegesis are those that preceded Ibn Mujāhid’s work. One of the most useful registers of early non-canonical readings is al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) Tafsīr jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwil al-Qurʾān. Also useful are the maʿānī al-Qurʾān commentaries by the grammarians al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), al-Akhfash (d. 210/825–6), al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) and al-
Nahḥās (d. 338/950); the iʿrāb al-Qurʾān works by some of the same authors (namely, al-Nahḥās and al-Zajjāj); and similar works such as Abū ʿUbayda’s (d. 210/825–6) Majāz al-Qurʾān and Ibn Qutayba’s (d. 276/889) Taʿwil mushkhil al-Qurʾān. Some post-Ibn Mujāhid commentaries continue to list non-canonical readings as well, such as al-Zamakhshārī’s (d. 538/1144) Tafsīr al-kashshāf and Abū Hayyān al-Andalusī’s (d. 745/1344) al-Bahr al-muḥīṭ. In addition, there are several qirāʾāt compilations both before and after Ibn Mujāhid that go beyond his list, as detailed below. Finally, two important compilations of non-canonical readings that have survived are Ibn Khālawayhi’s (d. 370/980) Qirāʾat al-shadhdha and Ibn Jinnī’s (d. 392/1002) Muḥtasib.

Verse Divisions and the Ḥimsī Reading

The canonical registers for verse divisions are more helpful for offering clues about the Ḥimsī reading, but not enough to allow us to determine its precise contours. Al-Dānī, for example, lists some of the Ḥimsī variants in his Bayān, but his list is not comprehensive. A more extensive account of the Ḥimsī system of verse divisions is found in an unpublished work by Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Ḥasan ibn Ahmad al-ʿĀṭṭār al-Hamadhānī (d. 569/1173–4): Mubhij al-asrār fī maʿrīfāt ikhtilāf al-ʿadad waʾl-akhmās waʾl-aʾšār waʾl-nihāyāt al-tāj waʾl ikhtīsār. Housed at the Vatican, this manuscript was listed by Anton Spitaler in summary form along with a note that the few references to Ḥimsī readings he had come across suggested that there ‘seems to exist another at least partially independent and aberrant transmission’. The Mubhij is a work on the differences between ten prominent readers, and as we will see, indeed presents the Ḥimsī reading as a fully independent transmission. It comprises five chapters and two appendices, which recount the history of revelation, the value of knowing the verse counts, and lists of scholars of the variant traditions along with the variations they followed. The final chapter contains the information on the placement of verse-endings according to ten readers. Al-ʿĀṭṭār’s presentation and treatment of the verse-endings parallel works by al-Dānī and Ibn al-Jazārī (d. 833/1439) in all but one important respect: the ten readers whom al-ʿĀṭṭār covers do not match the canonical lists. Not only does he include the most-cited reader of Ḥimsī – Abū Ḥaywa (d. 203/818–9) – but there is evidence to suggest that he centres his data on Abū Ḥaywa and the Ḥimsī reading. When introducing the ten readers, al-ʿĀṭṭār singles out Abū Ḥaywa to adduce a lengthy list of his impressive credentials and pedigree of his chain of transmission. In addition, as discussed below, al-ʿĀṭṭār presents the Syrian reading as the default – unlike other scholars who default to the Kufan reading. Finally, while other sources certainly mention the Ḥimsī reading, al-ʿĀṭṭār provides the most comprehensive and detailed account of that reading and of its ‘founder’, Abū Ḥaywa. By providing details on Abū Ḥaywa and his reading, al-ʿĀṭṭār adds to the spectrum of non-canonical references, which better allows us to evaluate our Qurʾān copy against both canonical and non-canonical sources.
3. Analysis of MS Or. 2165

Overview

I begin by analysing the variants in orthography and verse divisions and then offer a stylistic analysis of the text. To avoid overlap with Dutton’s very lucid study, only a brief summary of variants is presented, and otherwise the reader is referred to his identification of readings. I focus instead on areas that he does not cover and/or to which the sources for non-canonical readings contribute new information. For example, in the orthographical analysis, I identify two major variants in the manuscript that neither Dutton nor the canonical works treat, and discuss some of the minor orthographical variants as well. In the verse-count analysis, I concentrate on the symbols that mark divisions between individual āyas and groups of āyas – again presenting only a summary where Dutton has already analysed this material in detail. The stylistic analysis at the end aims at uncovering information on the making of the manuscript.

Orthographical Analysis

a) Major Consonantal Variants

Seven of the 38 major canonical orthographical variants fall within the published portions of the manuscript, and at least two in unpublished portions. Notably, the manuscript contains an additional two major variants that have no canonical referent. The variants are as follows:

1) The uniquely Syrian omission of wāw from [wa-]mā kunnā li-nahtadiya at Q. 7:43 (f. 1a.3).26

2) The uniquely Syrian inclusion of wāw to yield wa-qāla at Q. 7:75 (f. 2a.22).27

3) The uniquely Syrian omission of a nūn from anjaynākum to yield anjākum at Q. 7:141 (f. 4b.10).28

4) The Syrian, Medinan and Basran transposition of the sīn/shīn and yāʾ/nūn in yusayyirukum to yield yunshirukum (or yanzhurukum) at Q. 10:22 (f. 15b.2).29

5) The Syrian, Medinan and Basran transposition of the sīn/shīn and yāʾ/nūn in yusayyirukum to yield yunshirukum (or yanzhurukum) at Q. 10:22 (f. 15b.2).29

6) The Syrian, Medinan and Basran transposition of the sīn/shīn and yāʾ/nūn in yusayyirukum to yield yunshirukum (or yanzhurukum) at Q. 10:22 (f. 15b.2).29

7) The Syrian and Hijāzī use of the dual instead of feminine pronoun suffix in khayran minhā to yield khayran minhumā at Q. 18:36 (f. 44b.22).30

6) The Syrian and others’ (all except Meccan Ibn Kathīr) reading of mā makkannī fihi rabbī at Q. 18:95 (f. 47a.20); Ibn Kathīr reads this as makkānanī, with two nūns.31

7) The Syrian and others’ (all except the Meccans) reading of a-wa-lam yara’lladhinā kaftarū at Q. 21:30 (f. 55b.13); the Meccans read this without the interposed wāw.32
Dutton has identified an additional two of these major orthographical variants from portions of the manuscript that are not included in the facsimile.

8) The Syrian (Ibn ʿĀmir) and Medinan use of fāʾ instead of wāw in wa-tawakkal to give fa-tawakkal at Q. 26:217 (f. 77a.7).33

9) The Syrian (Ibn ʿĀmir), Medinan and Kufan addition of a masculine pronoun direct-object suffix in wa-fīhā ṣūrat al-anfus at Q. 43:71 rather than the other readers’ tashtahīl-anfus.34

The two non-canonical variants are:

10) The manuscript drops the nūn and doubles the zāʾ in li-nanẓūra to yield li-nazzūra at Q. 10:14 (f. 15a.10). This has been attributed to the Syrian reader Ibn ʿĀmir and his successor, Yahyā ibn al-Ḥarīth (d. 145/762).35

11) The addition of a definite article in li-nabī at Q. 8:67 (f. 9b.3) to yield liʾl-nabī. This has been attributed to Abū Haywa and Abūʾl-Dardāʾ (d. 32/652), both of whom were Syrian readers.36

The manuscript aligns with a Syrian reading in all eleven cases,37 and five are unique to Syria alone. These observations are enough to unequivocally match the manuscript to a Syrian reading, but probably are not enough to reveal precisely where in Syria. Dutton equates the Syrian reading with that of Ibn ʿĀmir in Damascus, as he was the ‘Imām of Shām’ in the late 1st/7th and early 2nd/8th centuries.38 But such shorthand here would be premature. One reason for this is that the sources present a terminological ambiguity, in that ‘Shām’ may refer to Damascus, Greater Syria or even Hims. Related to this terminological problem is an issue of timing. Qirāʾūt scholars writing about canonical readers often interchange geographical location with leading readers such that Syria is used interchangeably with Ibn ʿĀmir, Mecca with Ibn Kathīr, Medina with Nāfiʿ, and so on. All of these leading readers died in the 2nd/8th or 3rd/9th century, whereas our manuscript could be as early as the first.39 This practice of interchanging city for leading reader occurs in the works on non-canonical readings as well. Abū Ḥaywa, for instance, in the Mubhij, is used interchangeably with the Ḥimsī reading, though he died in 203 AH and follows several generations of Ḥimsī readers. Hence, labelling this manuscript’s Syrian reading as either that of Ibn ʿĀmir or Abū Ḥaywa would be anachronistic; in this analysis, references to the readings of those two figures must be taken to represent earlier Damascene or Ḥimsī readings, respectively.

Finally, the non-canonical variants identified above suggest an additional, compelling reason for not attributing our manuscript to Ibn ʿĀmir too quickly. Both variants clearly indicate that the manuscript may have originated in either Damascus or Ḥims, and one belongs to either a Ḥimsī reader or to Ibn ʿĀmir’s Damascene teacher and predecessor but not to Ibn ʿĀmir. At the very least, the non-canonical
variants suggest that our manuscript’s reading was known in Syria – or perhaps to Yemeni readers with connections to Syria – and continued in Ḥimṣ even if it was dropped in Damascus.\textsuperscript{40} At most, these variants provide the strongest evidence in the orthographical data that we may not locate our manuscript in Damascus after all. As we will see (below in the ‘Verse Count Analysis’ section), the variants in verse-endings support this conclusion and furthermore, show that the manuscript in fact originates in Ḥimṣ.

\textit{b) Diacritical Variants}

Dutton has identified and accounted for 22 letter-pointing variants that occur in the manuscript, and concludes that they support the attribution to Ibn ʿĀmir.\textsuperscript{41} But again, other variants for which Dutton does not account complicate the simple attribution of this codex to a Damascene reading.\textsuperscript{42} For instance, the manuscript sometimes changes the verbal pronoun twice in a way that maintains verb agreement and indicates a deliberate variant:

1) In Q. 22:5 (f. 18b.15–16), two passive verbs that begin with the third person singular ʼā’ are made into active verbs that begin with the first person plural nūn, i.e. yutawaff is rendered natawaffa and yuradd is rendered narudd. This does not match any known variant.

2) Two instances occur at Q. 7:190–1 (f. 7a.14) in which the initial letter is a second person tā’ rather than a third person yā’ as in the standard. The first variant renders the standard yushrikūn as tushrikūn and the second renders a-yushrikūn as a-tushrikūn. The only variant recorded for this is that of the Kufan reader al-Sulamı.\textsuperscript{43}

While Kufan influence cannot be ruled out absolutely at this stage, strong indications that this manuscript represents a Syrian reading – specifically Ḥimṣi – point to the possibility that these changes represent unattested variants in the Ḥimṣi reading.

\textit{c) Minor Spelling Variants}

There are several instances of minor spelling variants, but it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from them. In addition to the tenuous connection between readings and spelling noted above, spelling variants do not lead us to a particular reading because they typically involve weak letters – such as long vowels and hamazāt – the writing of which does not dictate pronunciation. Here, for example, there a several instances in which weak letters have been dropped,\textsuperscript{44} added,\textsuperscript{45} and used for alternate spellings.\textsuperscript{46} Because of the disconnect between spelling, pronunciation and reader, none are definitively attributable to Ibn ʿĀmir, Abū Ḥaywa, or any other reader.

\textbf{Verse-count Analysis}

In addition to marking single-verse divisions, scribes who produced this manuscript inserted sura headings to indicate the title of the sura along with the sura’s total verse
and they placed special, colored symbols after every tenth aya (‘rosettes’), every hundredth aya (which appears as a hāʾ above the place of a one-verse symbol, typically taking the place of a rubbed-out rosette) and after every seventh of the entire Qurʾan. In this section, I consider these divisions by first listing the total verse count provided in the sura headings; then comparing that count to the actual number of ayas in each sura, which I calculate by examining the individual verse-endings; and finally, examining and comparing the divisions after every tenth aya, hundredth aya and seventh of the Qurʾan.

1. Sūrat al-ʾArf = Q. 7:42–206

The sura heading is missing from the manuscript. The single disputed verse-division that falls within the fragment (at Q. 7:137 (‘alā banī Isrāʾīl)) accords with Kufa, Basra and Syria. With two exceptions, the rosettes appear regularly at ten-verse intervals from Q. 7:51 until the end of the sura and are consistently one aya later than the Kufan system and in step with the Damascene system. The exceptions are the 100-verse symbols that replace the rosettes at Q. 7:101 and Q. 7:201, also one verse later than the Kufan system. The placement of the rosettes and 100-verse symbols suggest Basran and Syrian counts.

After verse Q. 7:167 (MS Q. 7:170) is a mark that reads ‘al-subʾ al-thānī khams miʾa wa-sabʾin wa-[arbaʾ ...] (the second seventh: 574). While most canonical sources record 576 ayas in this seventh of the Qurʾan (based on a standard Kufan count), al-ʿAṭṭāʾr notes that the second seventh contains only 574 ayas, ending at Q. 7:170. Indeed, Kufan Q. 7:167 turns out to be Syrian Q. 7:170 and, because Syrians drop two verse-endings between the second and third sevenths (the second starting at Q. 4:56), there are only 574 ayas between them – as the manuscript says. Al-ʿAṭṭāʾr’s note is telling: that he presents the Syrian reading as the default, unlike other scholars who default to the Kufan reading, offers further evidence (alongside his lengthy recitation of Abū Ḥaywaʾ’s credentials) that al-ʿAṭṭāʾr’s work centred on the Ḥimṣī reading.

2. Sūrat al-Anfāl = Q. 8:1–75

This sura heading notes that the sura contains 77 ayas, which matches the Syrian system only. As for the three disputed ayas, the manuscript matches the Basran and Syrian readings at Q. 8:36, all but the Kufan reading at Q. 8:42, and all but the Basran reading at Q. 8:64. The actual verse count yields only 76 ayas (one short of the amount promised in the sura heading) when the individual verse-endings are counted. But the verse count comes up one short only because a modification has been made: the verse symbol after Q. 8:1 (in kuntum muʾminīn) has been rubbed out and the alif of the next aya moved over to replace it. Clearly, this was done by a different (later?) scribe because a close examination reveals that the original writing had enough space for a single-verse mark; there is a large darkened spot surrounding
the alif; the alif stem does not lean to the right as it does elsewhere; and it is considerably thinner and written in a different type of dark brown ink that has not become broken and faded like the ink in the rest of the manuscript. It is unclear who was responsible for the modification at Q. 8:1: it does not follow the Syrian system, as omitting a verse-ending after Q. 8:1 makes the sura fall one aya short of the 77 ayas mentioned in the sura heading. Nor does it follow the Kufan total verse count of 75. It does match the Hijâzî and Basran count of 76, but nothing else in the text or symbols point to these readings. In sum, these clues again point to what may be an unattested Syrian reading and/or a later collation by a scribe following a non-Syrian reading; it also indicates that multiple scribes worked on the manuscript.

3. Sūrat al-Tawba = 9:1–95

According to the sura heading, there are 130 ayas, matching every system except that of Kufa. Although the sura cuts off at Q. 9:95, if we assume that the verse divisions continue incrementally from that point (as there are no disputed verse-endings after Q. 9:70), the sura would end at Q. 9:130, which is consistent with the sura heading’s stated verse count. This sura contains no basmala, a feature unique to it. There are four disputed verse-endings – three of which al-Danî records, and a fourth that al-Aṭṭār and al-Mutawalli record as unique to the ˘ıimssı reading: Q. 9:36. The manuscript matches the two disputed verse-endings that follow both Damascene and Himşî readings (amongst others, at Q. 9:3 and Q. 9:70) and it follows the uniquely ˘ıimssı reading at Q. 9:36. In the one instance where the Damascene reading is unique (adding a verse-ending in Q. 9:39 (after aliman)), the manuscript is blurred. However, there is no indication of an additional verse-ending there: reading one would place the total verse count at 131 ayas, which does not agree with any variant system. Together, these observations further support the notion that the manuscript follows a Himşî, and not a Damascene, reading.

4. Sūrat Yûnus = Q. 10:9–109

The sura heading is cut off and the sources list only three disputed verse-endings in two ayas. In one aya, Q. 10:22, the manuscript accords with a reading shared by Himşîs and others (placing the verse-ending at min al-shâkirin) and diverges from the uniquely Damascene reading (placing an ending at lahu’l-dîn). The other disputed verse-ending (no verse-ending after fi’l-sudûr in Q. 10:57) is shared by Damascus and Himş. In addition, the manuscript lacks a mark for a verse-ending at Q. 10:96 (là yu’minûn), but the omission is probably mistaken, as not counting this aya places the total verse count at 108, which does not accord with any variant system. The symbols here present several peculiarities. An inexplicable and irregularly drawn rosette appears at Q. 10:15, but rosettes skip Q. 10:10 and Q. 10:20. Thereafter, rosettes align regularly with the Kufan (also Damascene) ten-verse intervals from Q. 10:30 on. At Q. 10:101, a 100-verse marker (red hâ’) appears over
the final rosette, as it did at Q. 7:100 and Q. 7:200, but with the addition of the word ‘mi‘a’ immediately before the hā°. As Dutton points out, there also seems to be one final rosette at Q. 10:110, although it is somewhat unclear due to water damage. This would indicate the Syrian total verse count of 110, but leave the oddities at Q. 10:96 and misplaced rosettes unaccounted for. The missing sura heading offers no clues, and all we glean from the oddly placed symbols is further evidence that the scribes who inserted the symbols did not count individual ayas, but probably placed marks according to a separate text. Together, the verse-endings and rosettes suggest a Syrian provenance that aligns more closely to the Ḥimṣī reading than the Damascene one.

5. Sūrat Hūd = Q. 11:1–123\(^54\)

This sura heading records 122 ayas, which accords with the Damascene and early Medinan systems, but which, according to al-\(^5\)Aṭṭār, diverges from the Ḥimṣī total verse count of 123.\(^55\) Only 121 verses are marked by single-verse symbols, but the fact that 121 accords with no system and the disputed verse divisions (or omissions) are all accounted for otherwise, suggests that there are two erroneously omitted verse-symbols. When corrected for those two, the total verse count is 123, matching the Ḥimṣī system. There are seven disputed verse-endings, and according to al-\(^5\)Aṭṭār, three are Ḥimṣī and counter-Damascene:

i) Q. 11:54 (mimmā tushrikūn). The manuscript counts a verse-ending here, which accords with the Ḥimṣī and Kufan systems only.\(^56\)

ii) Q. 11:74 (fī qawmi Lūṭ). The manuscript omits a verse-ending here, which matches the Ḥimṣī and Basran systems.\(^57\)

iii) Q. 11:86 (in kuntum mu‘minīn). The manuscript counts a verse-ending here, which matches the Ḥimṣī and Ḥijāzī systems.\(^58\)

The uniquely Ḥimṣī matches in individual verse counts offer further evidence that this Qur’an copy follows the Ḥimṣī reading. Moreover, the net effect of the Ḥimṣī individual verse counts is to add one aya to the Damascene total of 122 (by omitting a count where the Damascenes count it and by including two where Damascenes do not) for a Ḥimṣī total verse count of 123. This divergence may signal that the systems usually, but not always, share total verse counts, and here is an example of a difference.

6. Sūrat Yūsuf = Q. 12:1–111\(^59\)

The total verse count contained in the sura heading is 111 according to all the readers, and there are no disputed ayas recorded in the sources. No deviations occur within the manuscript.

The sura heading is illegible, but Syrians agree that the total verse count is 47 ayas. Of the six disputed ayas, al-ʿAṭṭār records one that is unique to Ḥimṣ, which al-Dānī does not record: Q. 13:17 (placing a verse-ending after waʾl-bāṭil), and the manuscript matches the Ḥimṣī reading. At Q. 13:16 (waʾl-baṣīr), only Damascenes count an aya, and the manuscript does not. Again, this points to a Ḥimṣī and non-Damascene internal verse division. By contrast, the ten-verse rosettes line up to Damascene multiples of ten, again suggesting that a Damascene scribe placed the rosettes through collation.

8. Sūrat Ibrāhīm = Q. 14:1–52

The sura heading lists 55 ayas, which accords with the Damascene reading and diverges from the Ḥimṣī one (which al-ʿAṭṭār and al-Mutawalli list as 54). Of the seven disputed verse-endings, al-ʿAṭṭār tells us that there is a Ḥimṣī and non-Damascene omission at Q. 14:19 (bi-khalqin jaḍīd), which the manuscript follows. He also tells us that there is a shared Damascene and Ḥimṣī verse count at Q. 14:42 (ʿammā yaʾmaluʾ-ẓālimūn), which also matches the manuscript. The manuscript diverges from non-Syrian variants in all other cases. Here again, the ten-verse rosettes align to the Damascene reading, and the omission at Q. 14:19 places the total verse count at the Ḥimṣī count of 54 – bolstering the evidence that the text is Ḥimṣī while the sura heading and other symbols are Damascene.

Another seventh marker appears at Q. 14:22 (MS Q. 14:25), which reads ‘al-subʿ al-thāliṯ sitt miʿa wa-sabʿ… (the third seventh: 6[0]7). Again, sources on the Kufan reading place the sevenths at Q. 14:22 and al-ʿAṭṭār gives the placement of this seventh at Q. 14:25. Again, the manuscript aligns with al-ʿAṭṭār’s undoubtedly Syrian reference.


The sura heading lists 99 ayas, which matches all the reading traditions. The verse-endings are similarly undisputed. The only deviation in the manuscript comes at Q. 15:97 (bi-mā yaqūlūn), which is missing a verse symbol. Because it corresponds with no tradition, and because indeed, there is no dispute over the verse-endings, this seems to be another scribal error.

10. Sūrat al-Nahl = Q. 16:1–128

The sources agree that this sura has 128 ayas, and the sura heading reflects that. There are no disputed verse-endings.

11. Sūrat al-Isrāʾ = Q. 17:1–111

The sura heading is partially obscured, making the total verse count impossible to read. The sources record only one disputed verse-ending, where the Kufans place a
verse-ending at Q. 17:107 (li’il-adhqān sujjadan), which does not match the manuscript. The manuscript contains an additional three variants that are unattested and that again point either to an unknown modifier, as at Q. 8:1, or a careless scribe. They are as follows: There is a verse-ending after Q. 17:2 (li-bānā Isrā’īl); four words later in the same verse (wakīlan), there is a smudge that suggests someone has erased and perhaps shifted a verse symbol where it normally appears; and there is a distinct smudge after Q. 17:90, which indicates erasure. After Q. 17:90, the ten verse rosettes – which had been regularly placed as expected – move one aya forward, suggesting again that a ten-verse rosette marker collated rather than counted individual ayas when placing rosettes, or if he did count individually, there is a missing symbol after Q. 17:89, which has run off the page. This sura does not yield any information relevant to attributing the reading tradition followed here.

12. Sūrat al-Kahf = Q. 18:1–110

The sura heading notes 106 ayas, which accords with the Syrian system. For each of the eleven disputed verse-endings, the manuscript follows the Syrian reading (shared between Damascus and Ḥims). There also appears to be a verse-ending in the middle of Q. 18:18 (at bi’l-waṣīd), which is not counted by any tradition, and the second rosette appears one aya too early, while the next rosette appears where expected. This means that the verse-ending at Q. 18:18 was either a scribal error, the placement of which should be ignored (as a collating rosette marker has done), or it is an unattested verse-ending.


The sura heading notes 98 verses, which matches the Syrian, Basran and early Medinan systems, and notes also that there is a sajda within the sura. Of the three disputed verse-endings, there are no uniquely Syrian divisions, but the manuscript diverges from the uniquely Kufan and Ḥijāzī variants. It contains one anomaly: a missing verse symbol after Q. 19:70 (ṣiliyyan). This appears to be a scribal error for three reasons: (1) considering the missing symbol to be a deliberate omission places the 70-verse rosette at Q. 7:69 – one aya too early for the shared Syrian system; (2) a deliberate omission places the total verse count at 97, which does not accord with any system; and (3) this omission does not match any reading.


This sura has the most disputed ayas, the most instances of uniquely Ḥimṣī variants attested in the Mubhij and other sources, and the most anomalies in the manuscript that do not match any attested reading. The sura heading notes that there are 140 ayas (not 104 as appears in the facsimile), which matches the Damascene system only, according to al-ʿAtṭār. The internal verse division follows the Ḥimṣī system – corresponding to the three places unique to the Ḥimṣī reading as well as the three
places where the Ḥimṣī and Damascene readers agree, but diverging from the two places where the Damascene reading is unique.

Three unattested verse-endings that the manuscript matches are as follows:

i) Q. 20:25 (lī ṣadrī) (f. 51a, 12): There is a missing verse symbol, accompanied by a properly-placed ten-verse rosette at Q. 20:32 (Syrian Q. 20:30).

ii) Q. 20:40 (min al-ghamm) (f. 51a, 24): There is an additional verse symbol, which has been placed inside a ten-verse rosette (Syrian Q. 20:40).

iii) Q. 20:124 (‘an dhikrī) (f. 54a, 13). There is an additional verse symbol followed by a properly placed ten-verse rosette at Q. 20:126 (Syrian Q. 20:130).

The rosettes generally fall where a Damascene collator would place them. The inexplicable deviations in individual verse-endings notwithstanding, the matches to attested verse divisions and the rosette placement add to the evidence that the manuscript’s text is Ḥimṣī and its other symbols Damascene.

15. Sūrat al-Anbiyā’ = Q. 21:1–112

The sura heading lists 111 ayas, which matches all but the Kufan reading. The manuscript matches the non-Kufan verse count. There is only one disputed aya – at Q. 21:66 (wa-lā yadurrūkum), which is counted by the Kufans but, as in the manuscript, omitted by Syrians, Basrans and Ḥijāzīs.


The sura heading notes 74 ayas (not 78 as appears in the facsimile transcription and which is the total Kufan verse count), which matches the Syrian system only.81 There are five disputed verse-endings, one of which is unique to Syria: Q. 22:42. The manuscript accords with this isolated Syrian variant and more generally, follows the shared Syrian counts with one exception: the manuscript is missing a symbol at Q. 22:45 (mashīd). This omission seems to be another scribal error as it does not match any recorded variant.

Stylistic Analysis: Orthography and Symbols

The final component of the manuscript analysis concerns the style of the script and textual layout, which can help date the text and provide information about its production – how many scribes were involved, where they were located, and what readings they are most likely to have followed.

a) Scripts and Dating

A number of the manuscript’s features reflect a ‘Ḥijāzī’ script – an early script thought to have originated in the Ḥijāz. To help identify and date early Qur’ānic scripts like the type used in this manuscript, scholars have grouped them on the basis
of several key letter shapes by which the Ḥijāzī script may be identified: a sloping alif, with or without a foot-serif; a medial ‘ayn/ghayn with a boxy, constrained shape; a final mīm with a short tail; a final nūn (or sīn/shēn, ẓād/dād) with a semicircular curved tail that resembles an elongated rāʾ; a distinctive medial hāʾ, and a relatively thick pen stroke;83 there are distinctive forms for dāl/dhāl and tāʾ/zāʾ and a reverted yāʾ (in which the tail curves around to the right and extends several letters backward) that appear in early dated Arabic papyri;84 and in overall appearance, words are ‘freely divided between lines’, there are ‘uneven side margins, particularly on the left’, and no line rulings.85 The manuscript matches these descriptions in every respect; its script is unmistakably Ḥijāzī.

A Ḥijāzī script designation allows us to date the manuscript to the early period, perhaps as early as the 1st/7th century.86 Ḥijāzī script was used in the 1st/7th century in all kinds of written works – from Qur’ans on vellum to letters and administrative records on papyri.87 After the 1st/7th century, that script declined as Arabic writing developed into other forms, but it did not disappear altogether and could have been used particularly for Qur’anic texts in the 2nd/8th century.88 This manuscript is no doubt early, and based on its features that match other dated first-century texts in a comparative review, it may well date back to the 1st/7th century, and definitely goes back to the early 2nd/8th at least.

b) Symbols: Scribes and their Geographical Affiliations

Symbols for the single verse-endings are either a pair of three vertical dashes or a circle of dashes.89 Interestingly, the first type switches rather abruptly to the second type at f. 3b and ends just as abruptly at f. 8a; this change accompanies a change in handwriting, by which we can identify two scribes.90 The alignment of handwriting style with verse symbol type indicates that the scribe who wrote the skeletal text also placed the single-verse symbols.

Likewise, two rosette types indicate two different scribes. The usual rosette is a large red circle surrounded by an outer circle of varying numbers of dots.91 A second type adds an inner circle of varying numbers of dots (appearing from ff. 9b–15a).92 The two rosette types and evidence of later additions suggest at least two rosette markers different from the two scribes who penned the skeletal text. The rosette placements seem to follow a Damascene rather than Ḥimsī system, the oddly placed rosettes seem to be either mistaken or reflective of an unattested reading drawn from a second text.

The 100-verse hāʾ, which appears in the manuscript eight times, is typically marked by the letter hāʾ over a single verse count.93 Modifications to rosettes or single-verse symbols at the hāʾs insertion points suggest that the 100-verse marker was the same as neither the single-verse marker nor the rosette marker.94 Throughout the text, the hāʾs also appear to have been written differently, implying that at least two different scribes placed them.95
Finally, both seventh symbols in the manuscript – at Q. 7:167 (MS Q. 7:170) and at Q. 14:22 (MS Q. 14:25) – are clearly later additions.\(^96\) This indicates that the scribes who wrote the skeletal text did not place the seventh symbols.

Taken together, these features offer four bits of information that help draw conclusions about how many scribes contributed to the making of this copy of the Qur’an and what reading tradition(s) they followed.

- At least two different scribes worked on the skeletal text of this manuscript, rather than only one as Dutton supposes,\(^97\) and the same hand that penned the script penned the single-verse symbols. These scribes who penned the skeletal text and the single-verse symbols must have been Ḥimṣī as the orthographical variants suggest a Ḥimṣī reading and the verse-endings confirm it.
- The scribe who modified the skeletal text at Q. 8:1 came after the scribes who initially penned it, but how long after and from what geographical location is unknown.
- The scribe who penned the sura headings was Damascene. In the few places where Damascenes and Ḥimṣīs disagree on a sura’s total verse count, the headings in the manuscript match the Damascene reading. There is nothing in the style of the sura headings to suggest that more than one scribe wrote them. The only oddity is that the scribe did not finish the job (they are largely missing from the unpublished portions of the manuscript). The sura headings were no doubt penned after the skeletal text was written, indicating that the manuscript traveled to Damascus after it originated in Ḥimṣ.
- At least two scribes placed the ten-verse rosettes, two placed 100-verse symbols different from the rosette markers, and at least one placed the seventh symbol – inserted after the skeletal text was penned. All of these scribes followed a Syrian reading, which is generally Damascene. It is not clear whether there was overlap between the scribes who placed the rosettes or 100-verse symbols and those who placed the sura-headings, seventh symbols, or modifications to the skeletal text. Assuming overlap requires a minimum of four scribes who inserted additional marks, and assuming no overlap leaves a minimum of seven.

Adding the number of possible later scribes (four to seven) to the two original Ḥimṣī scribes means that anywhere from six to nine scribes, at minimum, contributed to the making of this manuscript. As the analysis of the orthography and verse divisions show, the original scribes certainly followed the Ḥimṣī reading tradition, while the other symbols were placed by scribes according to the Damascene system.

The foregoing analysis offers internal evidence that the pre-canonical landscape of readings was neither uniform nor insular. Not only did readers travel between cities and readings, but manuscripts did as well. On this basis, we can conclude that our
manuscript (or the one from which ours was copied) is an example of a non-canonical reading that was later subjected to revisions or additions from a canonical reading. Two major questions remain about the existence of such Qur’ans and the persistence (or lack thereof) of non-canonical reading traditions like that of Ḥimṣ: what was the status of the Ḥimṣī tradition before canonisation of the qirāʾāt, and how did canonisation affect it? One might expect that canonisation would have stymied the use of non-canonical readings from an earlier period, and that the non-canonical Ḥimṣī reading would have disappeared. Yet, as al-ʿAtīr and others show, sources for the Ḥimṣī reading remain.

4. Placing the Ḥimṣī Reading in Context

Canonisation: Criteria and Consensus

After ʿUthmān’s compilation and before the formation of a qirāʾāt canon, readings proliferated, but not with ‘untrammeled freedom’.98 Canonisation was a process, consisting of gradual articulations of more and more consensus-criteria for the acceptability of a reading. With ʿUthmān’s compilation came the beginnings of the first of four criteria for valid Qur’anic readings: conformity with the orthography of his codex. According to al-Ṭabarī, ʿUthmān standardised the written text and ordered all divergent copies destroyed in attempts to preserve not only the integrity of the text, but also the integrity of the early community.99 He reports that Muslim troops from various regions converged on a battlefield in Armenia and accused each other of unbelief when they heard differences in each others’ Qur’anic recitation; this motivated ʿUthmān’s standardisation.100

The spread of ʿUthmān’s standardised codex did not obliterate all differences, as the persistence of regional variants shows. But it did reduce the differences, early scholars argued, to the minor inflections within the subset of seven readings (aḥruf) reportedly sanctioned by the Prophet. In discussing variant readings, Qur’an scholars typically flag the hadith in which ʿUmar heard the companion Hishām ibn Ḥakīm reciting the Qurʾān differently from how ʿUmar had heard it from the Prophet, at which point he dragged Hishām before the Prophet in complaint. The Prophet instructed Hishām to recite, and then affirmed, ‘this is how it was revealed’. The Prophet then instructed ʿUmar to recite, and likewise affirmed, ‘this is how it was revealed’, adding that ‘the Qurʾān was revealed according to seven aḥruf’, all of them acceptable.101 This hadith, in multiple versions, reflects the ‘aḥruf doctrine’, through which Qurʾān scholars explain the acceptability of diverse readings. There is, for example, Abū ʿUbayd (d. 224/839), a luminary of Qurʾān readings whose work, Kitāb al-qirāʾāt, is said to be one the earliest collections.102 In his book Fadāʾil al-Qurʾān, he precedes a discussion of the qirāʾāt with a presentation of the aḥruf doctrine, and subsequent scholars follow suit.103 These scholars differed over whether ʿUthmān’s codex encompassed the full range of the seven aḥruf, some
contending that it did not, others insisting that it did. Regardless, they all agreed in principle that the ‘Uthmānic codex fell squarely within the bounds of the aḥruf doctrine. The unstated corollary – as articulated later – was that the authenticity of readings rested on the ground that they were compiled and transmitted through knowledgeable and trustworthy readers.

The importance of trustworthy transmissions of Qur’an readings was implicit in the practices of some of the early scholars even before discussions of the aḥruf doctrine. In the 1st/7th and 2nd/8th centuries, leading readers and their students set about recording individual readings. Their notebooks reflected syntheses of the variants they learned from multiple readers, according to methodologies that each had devised for preferring one variant over another. For example, Nāfiʿ (d. 169/785) is said to have learned from 70 Successors, and announced that he adopted only the variants upon which two or more of them agreed. Al-Kisāʾī learned from Ḥamza (d. 156/772), but, adopting another method for variant-preference, differed from his teacher in 300 places where he preferred the readings of other scholars. Thus, pre-canonical readings were often hybrids or amalgams drawn from two or more transmissions.

These early writings on qirāʿāt developed with increased contacts between readers and with state patronage, and the genre of qirāʿāt literature blossomed. Books of individualised readings gave way to collections of multiple readings, which sometimes detailed differences between just two readers but often recorded as many readings as each author-reader had encountered or studied. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. late 4th/10th century) provides a list of works collecting readings whose authors go as far back as the Kufan reader Abān ibn Ṭaghlīb (d. 141/758). Other lists include works by Hārūn ibn Mūsā (d. ca 170/786 or before 200/816) and Yaʿqūb al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 205/820). There is evidence that Muhammad ibn ʿUmar al-Waqīḍī (d. 207/822) composed such a work, transmitted by Muḥammad ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845). And of course we have Abū ʿUbayd’s collection in his Fadāʾīl as well as his lost Kitāb al-qirāʿāt, which, by Ibn al-Jazari’s count, listed 25 readings. There is also the well-known reader al-Dūrī (d. 246/860), who is said to have read and recorded works according to multiple readings; ʿAbd ibn Ṭubayr ibn Muḥammad al-Kūfī (d. 258/872), who is said to have written a book on five readers; Qādī Ismāʿīl ibn Ishāq al-Mālikī (d. 282/895), who collected 20 readers in his book (including Ibn Mujahid’s seven); and al-Ṭabarī, who recorded 25 readers in his Tafsīr. The list goes on, with books ranging from collections of two readings all the way up to 50. Many of the readers were skilled grammarians, and they contributed significantly to the qirāʿāt corpus in other veins as well. As mentioned above, grammarians and litterateurs referenced qirāʿāt variants in works of grammar and phonology, poetry and literature, maʿānī al-Qurʾān and similar exegetical works, as well as iʿrāb al-Qurʾān and ihtijāj works. For the most part, grammarians paid deference to the
boundaries set by the traditionist readers’ isnād-orientation. Indeed, if they were to respect the practice of citing earlier precedent for their readings, their ‘focus … was confined to venting rational explication through the veneer of linguistic justification and evaluation’. Even within those bounds, they managed to make notable contributions to the corpus. As mentioned, they provided a useful register for and explanations of qirā‘āt, along with other sources for non-canonical readings that otherwise may have been lost or obscured over time. Grammarians also provided a look into the genesis of individual readings (ikhtiyār), and thereby, a lens into the criteria by which readings were deemed acceptable, and eventually, canonised.

Each grammarian had his own methodology for according a certain reading preference. For al-Akhfash, it was an amalgam of factors, in which grammatical soundness was subordinated to agreement with ʿUthmānic orthography. His general concern with readings was to adduce proofs that would strengthen his linguistic method of exegesis, but in citing variants, he carefully rejected readings that diverged from the written formula, particularly where they might be considered grammatically unsound. Here, we see affirmation of the notion that ʿUthmānic orthographical agreement was an indispensable criterion for a reading’s validity, here with no special weight given to the value of transmission.

Soon after though, Ibn Mujāhid’s contemporary, the grammarian al-Nahḥās, deliberately emphasised the primacy of transmission over grammatical or linguistic soundness. To be sure, he exhibited a philologist’s concern for grammatical correctness. With respect to some variants that appear in our manuscript, for example, al-Nahḥās presents and explains the grammatical soundness of both the Syrian reading ( yanshurukum) and the majority reading (yusayyirukum) in Q. 10:22, but notes his preference for the majority’s version because it better accords with the semantic usage of words of the same import in other verses. In contrast, he notes his preference for the Syrian reading (khayran minhumā) over the majority reading (khayran minhā) in Q. 18:36, arguing that a dual pronoun is more appropriate for referring to two gardens. Even so, he criticised Abū ʿUbayd’s definitive Kitāb al-qirā‘āt, upon which he drew heavily, for his methodology of reading preferences. Al-Nahḥās’s objection was that Abū ʿUbayd seemed at times to subject the Qur’ān to the analogical reasoning of grammatical standards (maqāyīṣ) rather than ‘collective transmission’. In this way, the implicit importance of trustworthy transmission was eventually made explicit as tradition-conscious scholars challenged tradition-flouting grammarians; and Ibn Mujāhid loomed large in that endeavour.

Like al-Nahḥās, Ibn Mujāhid was a traditionist-minded scholar who took issue with the extent to which grammarians-cum-readers diverged from the authentically transmitted readings in favor of grammatical correctness. Writing in late 3rd/9th century Baghdad, he was concerned that some amateur readers would pass along faulty readings due to mistakes made from their poor grasp of Arabic and superficial
understanding of the text. He was even more concerned about grammarians who knew the grammatical rules full well but ignored the primacy of the transmitted nature of readings. Painting a portrait of these two types of problematic readers, Ibn Mujahid explains that one type is the person:  

who recites what he has heard from [his teacher] with no [other] ability other than to recite what he has learned – without knowledge of sound grammatical constructions (i’râb) or anything else. It will not be long before such a person who memorises [the Qur’an] (hâlfz) will forget over time. Sound grammatical constructions will be lost due to the extent of resemblance [of one phrase or construction to another] and the abundance of [different vowels] in a single verse, because he has no knowledge base of Arabic grammar (‘Arabiyya) nor can he recognise the meanings to which [the grammatical constructions] refer. Rather, he only relies upon his own memory (hifz) and [recollection of] what he heard (samâ’). [Such a] reader may forget, his recollection failing him, the variants (âruf) [becoming] confusing him [to the point that] he recites with grammatically unsound constructions (lahn), unawares. Meanwhile, the confusion causes him to attribute [the erroneous] reading to someone else, absolving himself [from responsibility or blame]. Conceivably, [such a scenario] could befall [even] a trustworthy person.

For Ibn Mujahid, the mistake in those cases is an honest one, but one that cautions against mere rote repetition of the Qur’an without attention to the soundness of a reading’s grammar and meanings, which may aid accuracy in transmission. He goes on to explain that:  

there are others who recite the Qur’an correctly [grammatically], recognise the meanings, and know the dialects (lughât), but have no knowledge of readings and the differences between narrators and transmissions [of readings]. It may be that [their] acumen in proper grammatical construction pushes [them] to recite a variant (harf) that is valid according to Arabic grammar [but] that no predecessor has recited. [Such people] would thereby become innovator[s] (mubtadi’) [as to the Qur’ân text].

Here, Ibn Mujahid dispenses a considerable amount of censure, and he aims to set the record straight. He devotes the rest of his preface to explaining the importance of qirâ’ât transmission to the exclusion of theoretical speculation, repeating the maxim that ‘qirâ’a is sunna’. The Prophet instructed his followers to read the Qur’an as he recited it to them, he explains, and the true Qur’an scholars have done just that. In this way, authentic readings have passed from generation to generation. In short,
in light of tradition’s emphasis on transmission, intentionally flouting that principle in favor of grammar was, for Ibn Mujāhid, quite unacceptable.

Ibn Mujāhid was joined by other traditionist scholars in efforts to counter tradition-flouting grammarians and other faulty readers. His book of seven readings was designed to identify the most prominent authentic readings in the major cities of the empire. He chose to list the seven most well-known readers from five major cities, along with two well-known students for each reader, and concentrated on listing a detailed chain of transmission for each. In addition, he helped prosecute grammarians who insisted on propounding isnād-less readings, which was another way of making public (and enforceable) the traditionist criteria for acceptable readings. The two famous cases are those of Ibn Shannabūd – who was tried for teaching readings that diverged from the ʿUthmānic codex, and Ibn Miqsam – who was tried for promulgating readings that accorded with the ʿUthmānic codex but that were not based on transmitted readings. The implication was that conformity with the ʿUthmānic codex was a must and after that, isnād was paramount. Ibn Mujāhid’s attention to Arabic grammar in his preface reflected the third criterion that he subordinated to the boundaries set by the first two.

Ibn Mujāhid was not the first to circumscribe readings according to these three criteria, nor was he the last. Over a century before him, Hārūn ibn Mūsā is said to have been the first to have authored a work that limited the lists of readings to those he could authenticate through tracing the asnād for each. Yaʿqūb al-Ḥadramī followed suit. And some other pre-Ibn Mujāhid collections were similarly discerning, such as that of Abū ʿUbayd Aḥmad ibn Jubayr ibn Muḥammad al-Kūfī, who also limited his collection to the most prominent reader from each of the five major cities. These types of collections continued after Ibn Mujāhid, who, as we will see, did not by any means have the last word on acceptable readings.

Canonicity: An Additional Requirement of Widespread Recognition

Notwithstanding the canonical status that Ibn Mujāhid’s list of seven readings came to enjoy (as the numerous commentaries on his work by subsequent qirāʾāt scholars attest), his somewhat arbitrary choice of seven was later criticised, the criteria for authenticity clarified, and the number of canonical readings supplemented accordingly. The criticism centred on the ambiguity created by Ibn Mujāhid’s choice of the number seven for his collection, which is the same number featured in the ahruf doctrine. Scholars remarked that Ibn Mujāhid should have picked any number but seven for his list in order to lessen the chances that the lay person would conflate his seven readings with the seven of the ahruf doctrine. Doing so also would have minimised the extent to which later scholars who simply preferred Ibn Mujāhid’s list were able to exploit the confused conflation of qirāʾāt with ahruf to assert that Ibn Mujāhid’s list had the authority of exclusive legitimacy.
Addressing this confusion, Ibn al-Jazarī clarified the criteria for authenticity of Qur’anic readings by reiterating the three required elements for authenticity upon which qirā‘āt scholars had agreed, and by noting a possible fourth. The first three are by now familiar: A reading had to conform to ʿUthmānic orthography, reflect proper Arabic grammatical rules, and rely on an authentic chain of transmission. According to Ibn al-Jazarī, ‘any reading with [these three elements] is authentic or valid (qirā‘a ṣaḥīḥa)’ and comes ‘from the seven aḥruf’ whether it stems from the seven, ten or otherwise accepted readers (al-a’imma al-maqbūlīn) – from his time or afterward. Conversely, if any one of these elements is missing from a reading, it is to be regarded as ‘weak (daʿīfa), anomalous (shādhdaḥa) or invalid (bāṭila)’. Ibn al-Jazarī noted that some scholars also stipulate a fourth element connected to the third: wide-spread transmission (tawāṭur). For reasons laid out below, this fourth element is more properly labelled ‘popular recognition’, and as it turns out, it proved extremely important to the formation of the canon.

Ibn al-Jazarī’s formulation performed two tasks in differentiating between canonical and non-canonical readings. First, it shed light on the sense in which Ibn Mujāhid’s project was to be taken. His was not an attempt to create a closed canon or to finalise a grammatically-correct, vowelled redaction of the Qur’an to prevent distortions or grammatically unsound recitations that might accompany Islam’s spread to non-Arabic-speaking lands. By the 4th/10th century, any such concerns would have been a lost cause. Nor are there indications that he wanted ‘to achieve absolute uniformity’, or that he needed to ‘ameliorate if not bring to an end the rivalry among scholars, each of whom claimed to possess the one correct reading’. On the contrary, the readers’ wide subscription to the seven aḥruf doctrine in their collections demonstrated a certain comfort with, and accommodation of, a diversity of readings.

Instead, Ibn Mujāhid was one of many who sought to bring order and clarity to what a reader with a traditionist worldview would have seen as untidy additions from speculative grammarians. It should be noted that his and other readers’ approaches did not place them outside of the traditionist milieu of the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries simply because their main concern went beyond the individual chains of authority of the type found amongst scholars devoted to transmitting ḥadīths for legal purposes. Rather, their objection to grammarians who proliferated variants with little regard for tradition as transmission was behind their appeal to heightened standards for authenticity along with an orientation, in the context of Qur’an transmission, toward the principle of widespread transmission and popular recognition. As such, Ibn Mujāhid’s selection centred on authentic readings that were widespread and popularly recognised during his time, and perhaps, accessible to him from Baghdad. He did not claim comprehensiveness or exclusivity, conceding that individuals might validly adopt one of the readings that had not made his list of seven, so long as those readings were supported by a reliable chain of transmission;
yet he did not include them in his list because they lacked widespread recognition during this time.\textsuperscript{141}

To be sure, Ibn Mujāhid’s collection became authoritative during his own lifetime, given his scholarly acumen, student network, and considerable government-backing. Claims to exclusivity came later, and the canonisation of his named seven readings was incidental and subsequent to his project. His contribution laid in his powerful championing of criteria for authentic readings in the face of tradition-flouting grammarians – criteria which his predecessors had long-since formulated. Read in this light, the criticisms levied against Ibn Mujāhid were not so much about his project as they were about its subsequent reception and treatment amongst some later scholars who viewed it as a comprehensive endeavor to create a closed canon.

Second, Ibn al-Jazarī’s later explanation of the criteria for valid readings described how and why several readings beyond Ibn Mujāhid’s seven could be considered canonical, and why certain other readings fell outside the canon. As scholars continued to list and authenticate readers after Ibn Mujāhid, just a generation later, they collectively came to recognise an additional three readers who also met the three (or four) criteria for authenticity and thereby assumed canonical status.\textsuperscript{142} The additions raise the notion that canonicity really did have a fourth criterion that had a lower threshold of diffusion than ‘wide-spread transmission’ (\textit{tawātur}), namely widespread or popular recognition (\textit{shuhra}). The reader-authenticating collections subsequent to Ibn Mujāhid, in their recognition of an additional three canonical readers, were succeeded by collections that identified an additional four, who then assumed a quasi-canonical status. They were quasi-canonical because the absence of the \textit{tawātur} label from the 4\textsuperscript{th}/10\textsuperscript{th} century era of codification meant that these four could not be unqualifiedly grouped with the other ten; but because they otherwise met the criteria for authenticity, they were afforded virtually the same status as the other ten.\textsuperscript{143} Interestingly, and notwithstanding their near-inclusion in the canon proper, the missing feature of \textit{tawātur} technically placed the additional four readings in the category of \textit{shādẖdẖ}, the term commonly used to refer to non-canonical readings.

In fact, \textit{shādẖdẖ} is a multi-tiered category said to encompass every reading that does not meet the readers’ criteria for canonicity.\textsuperscript{144} Canonicity is not to be confused with authenticity, given the number of non-canonical readings considered authentic and even quasi-canonical. Apparently, readings in the 2\textsuperscript{nd}/8\textsuperscript{th} century and before were only called \textit{shādẖdẖa} if they lacked a strong \textit{īsmāā} that signaled their transmission according to some preceding authority; the connotation of non-canonical – i.e. outside the canonical lists of seven or ten – necessarily arose later.\textsuperscript{145} Later, Ibn al-Jazarī observed that if Ibn Mujāhid’s seven are \textit{mutawāṯir} by consensus, the same must be the case for the additional three, who were students of the original seven, extending from the earlier leading readers’ downward transmission chains.\textsuperscript{146} Still
later, al-Bannā’ noted that the additional four are shādhdh only in that they lack consensus for the tawātur label but were nevertheless perfectly acceptable because of the well-known recognition and strength of their isnāds.\textsuperscript{147} In highlighting the absence of consensus on tawātur and stressing the recognition of the strength of the four readings amongst his contemporaries and forebears, al-Bannā’ lends support to the notion that the fourth criterion for canonicity was not really tawātur, but rather recognition of it.

The Ḥimṣī Reading Again

With this understanding of the non-canonical, how might we place the Ḥimṣī reading to which our manuscript belongs in context? Inasmuch as it falls outside of the canonical lists, the Ḥimṣī reading is, by definition, non-canonical (shādhdh). But whether that fact alone makes it inauthentic or invalid depends on how the reading squares with the four criteria for authenticity. As our analysis of this Ḥimṣī text demonstrates, the first element is met: it accords with the “Uthmānic orthography. To determine fully whether the manuscript meets the second element of grammatical soundness requires details on pronunciation that do not show up in the orthographical variants. But its general agreement with the canonical Damascene reading in places where orthography and diacritics do reveal aspects of pronunciation suggest that it does. As for the third element of an authentic isnād, there is evidence that the qirā’āt scholars considered it authentic, especially through Abū Ḥaywa’s chain of transmission.\textsuperscript{148} Specifically, per the fourth element, there are even indications that the Ḥimṣī reading enjoyed at least some measure of popular and scholarly recognition.\textsuperscript{149} Specifically, in addition to references in the works of some grammarians and compilers of non-canonical collections, references to Abū Ḥaywa and his predecessors in other sources demonstrate that the Ḥimṣī reading was a recognised, independent reading.\textsuperscript{150} Abū’l-Barhasam(?), Abū Ḥaywa’s teacher and immediate predecessor as the ‘Imām of Ḥimṣ is said to have been one of the most renowned non-canonical readers, and Makkī al-Qaysī (d. 437/1045) mentions Abū Ḥaywa as one of the well-known non-canonical readers.\textsuperscript{151} There are also frequent references to Abū Ḥaywa, in the tafṣīr of al-Zamakhshārī and Abū Hayyān, which were useful in explaining many of the features of this manuscript.\textsuperscript{152} And the references persist in other tafṣīr as well.\textsuperscript{153}

Be that as it may, these references may speak to some recognition of the Ḥimṣī reading and may even be said to point to its authenticity, but they do not reveal whether or for how long the Ḥimṣī tradition advanced in a sound, unbroken chain. It might be interesting to speculate on why the reading fell into relative obscurity in that it never made it into the canonical or quasi-canonical lists. But any definitive assessment of the scope of recognition of the Ḥimṣī reading likely would require a detailed investigation into its post-Ibn Mujāhid transmission and the actual use or recognition of the readings. We can say with certainty though that the Ḥimṣī reading...
persisted as an authentic reading sufficiently well-known that it was preserved in readings literature across the centuries. Added to the above list of 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th century grammarians and readers, and 4th/10th through 6th/12th century exegetes, are, for example, al-‘Atţār’s 
*Mubhij* in the 9th/15th century and al-Mutawalli’s *Taḥqīq* in the last century.

5. Conclusion

This analysis of an old Qurʾān manuscript in light of canonical as well as non-canonical sources for readings has revealed three features that illuminate other important aspects of the qirāʾāt tradition in general. Consider them in reverse order. First, the manuscript’s Ḥijāzī script points to an early date, serving as evidence that the manuscript goes back to the 1st/7th century. This insight serves as just one point of departure for drawing conclusions about the pre-Ibn Mujāhid qirāʾāt landscape – i.e. evaluation of the reading variants and stylistic elements of early Qurʾānic manuscripts. Second, the placement, style and in some instances, content of the symbols within the manuscript suggest the contributions of later Damascene scribes – six to nine or more. This piece of information offers some insight into the production of such early manuscripts, and again, about the landscape of Qurʾānic readings before Ibn Mujāhid. Moreover, the presence of multiple readings in one manuscript suggests some fluidity in qirāʾāt circles, at least in Syria. Third, the text follows the non-canonical tradition of the Ḥimṣī reading. An initial review of the text points to a reading that aligns with the ʿUthmānī codex and seems close to the Damascene reading, but contains enough divergences from the Damascene or other canonical readings to prompt further investigation.154 Investigation into the differences reveals features of the Ḥimṣī reading, which in turn give occasion to explore sources for that reading. Sources for Ḥimṣī variants in wording are preserved in works of grammar, literature and *tafsīr*, and al-ʿAtţār has preserved a detailed record of Ḥimṣī variants in verse divisions. From these works, we know, for example, that this manuscript follows Ḥimṣī readings and diverges from Damascene ones in several places (e.g. at Q. 9:36; Q. 10:22; Q. 11:54, 74 and 86; Q. 13:17; Q. 14:55; and the total verse count of 123 in *Sūrat Ḥūd*).

More generally, the clues provided by the manuscript’s non-canonical features offers evidence about the early landscape of qirāʾāt, serving as physical evidence of the type of readings that existed prior to Ibn Mujāhid. The persistence of sources on those readings in the *tafsīr* and qirāʾāt literature raises questions about the nature of Ibn Mujāhid’s project as applied to that early landscape and for the landscape of qirāʾāt after his death. Ibn Mujāhid no doubt aimed to rein in inauthentic readings, defined as those that lacked appropriate attention to transmission and other criteria for authenticity. That scholars have exhibited uncertainty regarding the reasons for and methods by which he went about this project has resulted in doubt over its effects vis-à-vis canonisation. The strongest explanation of his project as traditionist-
oriented emerges not only from his stated goals (in the introduction to his book) and actions (participation in two trials), but also the presence and persistence of qirā‘āt like that of Ḥimṣ, which later sources treat as neither canonical nor inauthentic. In other words, Ibn Mujāḥid sought not to limit and exclude all but his list of seven readings; he aimed to announce and apply criteria for distinguishing acceptable from truly unacceptable readings, in response to the increase in potentially questionable readings. By applying three (or four) measures of authenticity, he and his intellectual successors placed heavy emphasis on a reading’s transmission – in terms of both isnād-soundness and popular recognition.

The fourth element of popular recognition is perhaps more significant and more enigmatic than scholars like Ibn al-Jazarī intimate. For example, we know the Ḥimṣī reading met the three explicit criteria for authenticity, but nevertheless fell short of Ibn Mujāḥid and subsequent scholars’ canonical lists. This must be because it failed to meet fully the criterion of popular recognition, which begs the question: Just what was the nature of that element (or its absence) in this case? Was it the popularity of the isnād or the popularity of the reading that helped canonise a text, or were those two sides of the same coin? Perhaps there were problems with the Ḥimṣī chain subsequent to Abū Ḥaywa or perhaps his reading was simply never quite popular enough on the ground. These are lingering questions that go to more fully understanding the formation and continuity of the qirā‘āt canon.

Overall, this study has illustrated how analysing an early Qur’anic manuscript against the full spectrum of qirā‘āt literature – canonical and non-canonical – can help better map the history of Qur’anic transmission. This study applies directly to two cities within Syria, and can be repeated with respect to other manuscripts that may hail from other areas. Recent work has uncovered a number of early manuscripts, but there have been few detailed studies of them and it is unclear whether or how the manuscripts match any of the variant reading systems, what geographical identity attaches to those readings, and what status those readings hold within the qirā‘āt canon. Detailed studies of these manuscripts, when combined with external evidence from related Hadīth and qirā‘ār literature, and taken together, will add solid facts to the corpus of data necessary for better understanding the textual history of the Qur’an, along with the origin and meaning of its variants. Here, I have attempted to examine a nonconforming Qur’an in a way that sheds light on the process of canonisation and the meaning of canonicity for variant readings, for which transmission largely determined their recognition and authenticity.

NOTES

∗ This project began in 2004 as a collaborative effort with Elias Muhanna and Naseem Surhio to situate an old Qur’an manuscript from the British Library, which was made available to Princeton in facsimile form. Certain features of the text raised questions about the manuscript’s provenance, and those that did not seem to conform to the canonical systems of
variant readings prompted a search for information on readings that fell outside of the canon. In the midst of this project, Yasin Dutton published his evaluation of the manuscript’s technical aspects. His findings largely mirrored our own, making publication of our findings no longer necessary, except that he left open the question of the manuscript’s non-canonical aspects. I thus pursued those aspects with an eye toward addressing the historical context of such anomalous readings. In 2005, I participated in the School of Oriental and African Studies’ biennial Qur’an conference, entitled ‘The Qur’an: Text, Interpretation and Translation’, where I had the opportunity to discuss some of my ideas with scholars working in the field. While in London, I also visited the British Library, and was able to view the unpublished portion of the manuscript on microfiche. Soon after, I received a manuscript on the Himṣi reading from the Vatican, which allowed me to supplement the technical data with some final pieces of information necessary to complete this article. I owe many thanks to Michael Cook, who procured the Qur’an manuscript for Princeton’s library and first brought it to my attention; he also provided helpful comments on several drafts of this paper. My deep thanks go to Hossein Modarressi, who offered many insightful comments, corrections, and also read through more than one draft. I am also grateful to Mohamed Zakariya for helping me to work through some of the symbols in the text and teaching me about calligraphy; Elias for sharing his technical data for Suras 17–21; Naseem for doing the same for Suras 8 and 11–16 as well as for helping to track down the main source for the Himṣi reading; Mustafa Shah for providing excellent suggestions for improvement; and the following people for reading earlier drafts and/or providing valuable comments on the overall project: Yasin Dutton, Beatrice Gruendler, Behnam Sadeki, and the SOAS conference’s organisers and participants. Of course, I am entirely responsible for any errors.

1 There has been some debate about whether ‘canon’ can be applied in the Islamic context in general and the Qur’anic context in particular. See, e.g., A. Al-Azmeh, ‘The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism’ in A. Van Der Kooij and K. Van der Toorn, (eds), Canonization and Decanonization (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), pp. 173–228, esp. pp. 193–205. Azmeh notes that multiple variant Qur’anic readings were reduced to seven in the 4th/10th century and ‘eventually recognized as canonical on the basis of appeal to consensus by Ibn Mujâhid’ (p. 195). But he adds that ‘the history of Qur’anic composition is [still] obscure’, the canonisation of the readings is ‘neither properly charted nor understood’, and the ‘absence of a proper study of canonization’ calls us to ‘concentrate on the properly historical and structural matter of canonicity’ which is ‘related more immediately to the authority maintaining and interpreting the canon, and not the raw canon’ (p. 198). For a fuller study of canonisation and canonicity as applied to Islamic texts, with focus on the main Sunnî Ḥadîth collections, see Jonathan Brown, The Canonization of al-Bukhârî and Muslim (Leiden: E.J. Brill, forthcoming), esp. ch. 2, pp. 20–46.

2 This is the label that the British Library’s catalog gives to MS Or. 2165. The first 61 folios of British Library MS Or. 2165 have been made available through a facsimile copy published by François Déroche and Sergio Noja Noseda in 2001. François Déroche and Sergio Noja Noseda (eds), Sources de la transmission manuscrits du texte coranique. I. Les manuscrits de style hiğāzî, Vol. II, Tome I. Le manuscrit Or. 2165 (f. 1 à 61) de la British Library (2 Vols. Leda: Fondazione Ferni Noja Noseda, and London: British Library, 2001). At the British Library, the full manuscript was only available to me briefly on microfiche. I refer to a few features of the additional folios, but mostly exclude them from my analysis. Hence, in this article ‘manuscript’ or ‘MS’ refers to the available facsimile portion. In addition, unless otherwise specified, references to variants and verses are to the ‘standard’ printed edition that first appeared in Egypt in 1924 and which most copies of the Qur’an outside of Africa now follow. The standard editions follow the canonical Kufan reader ʿĀṣim’s reading of the Uthmânic codex through his pupil Ḥafs.


8 Scholars differ over how many copies ‘Uthmān had made and distributed. A common account mentions that the number was four, five, or seven (see al-Suyūṭī, al-Iṣṭiqlāl, vol. 1, p. 167, noting that the popular understanding is five – no doubt referring to the original plus four copies). Most sources say that four copies went to four towns – Basra, Kufa, Syria (Shām) and Medina. The version that says there were seven copies adds Yemen and Bahrain to the foregoing cities, and the two versions recording five or seven as the number say that ‘Uthmān made four or six copies and kept the original (al-imām) for himself. See, e.g., Abū Ṭālāb al-Murādīn (d. 444/1053), Kitāb al-muqni fi rasm maṣāḥif al-ansaḥ, ed. Otto Pretzl (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, and Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1932), p. 9. In his investigation into two versions of the story (four towns or six), Michael Cook concludes, on the basis of external historical evidence as well as internal textual evidence, that Qurʾānic variants reflect genuine
transmissions from an archetype that must have been distributed to four, not six, cities. M. Cook, ‘The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran’, *Graeco-Arabica* (2004), pp. 89–104.

9 For a sample of works referencing other early Qur’ans, see below, n. 155.

10 See below, n. 27, and accompanying discussion.


14 This is not to say that no such connection can be made. Some of the *qirā‘āt* literature describes different modes of pronunciation that may have resulted in different spellings, and other sources on the development of the Arabic script describe spelling conventions by region. For example, Ibn Qutayba does so in his *Ta‘wil mushkil al-Qur‘ān*, ed. al-Sayyid Ahmad Šaghr, 2nd edn (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1973) as does Ibn Jinnī in his *Muhtasib* (see below, n. 20); both list regional differences in pronunciation of *spoken* dialects that influenced local readings of the Qur’an. Similarly Ṣibawayhi’s (d. 177/793) *Kitāb* and Mubarrad’s (285/898) *Muqtaḍab* contain phonological definitions. See Ṣibawayhi, *Kitāb*, ed. Muḥammad Kāzīm al-Bakkā‘ī (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla; and Amman: Dār al-Bashir, 2004) (and for a useful organisation of the Qur’anic variants contained therein, see Adrian Brockett, *‘Qur‘ān Readings in Ṣibawayhi’s School of Abbasid Studies 2* (1988), pp. 129–206); Mubarrad, *Muqtaḍab*, ed. Hasan Ḥamad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1999). Using such sources, one could perhaps categorise the conventions of spelling and pronunciation by region and then match them up to the regional styles of reading to determine whether there is any connection between the two.

15 For example, in our manuscript, there is an additional final *yā‘* in *tastāḥyī* at Q. 7:127 (f. 4a.6) to render *tastāḥyī*, as well as in *yuḥyī* at Q. 7:158 (f. 5b.13) and at Q. 10:56 (f. 17a.7) to render *yuḥyī*. This additional *yā‘* reflects a spelling convention whereby a final *yā‘* is added when preceded by a *kasra* as in these instances (al-Dānī, *Muqni‘*, p. 30). But the addition or omission of a *yā‘* in such places does not determine how the reading is pronounced. Readers seem to differ little over whether the final vowel of these two words is vocalised as a long *yā‘*: it is, whether written or not. Accordingly, a small ‘diacritical’ *yā‘* follows the word in the printed Qur’an, in which the text has been printed without the written *yā‘* to signal that it is pronounced nevertheless. This ‘diacritical’ *yā‘* also appears in printings of the Warsh and Qālūn readings from Nāfi‘ and the Iraqi readings of al-Dānī from al-Kisā‘ī and Abū ‘Amr. See, e.g., the Moroccan printing of Warsh’s reading, *al-Qur‘ān al-kārīm bi-riwāyat Warsh*
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( Morocco: King of Morocco, 1996); the Libyan printing of Qālūn’s reading (Libya: Government of Libya, 2004); and the compact disc with the Iraqi readings, Min al-qiṣrāʾāt al-sabʾ: mabādī’ wa-qawā’id al-tajwīd (Damascus: Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1999), discs 2–3.

16 The first three books we have on the subject are: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), Kitāb ʾidāh al-waʿf waʾl-ibtidāʾ fī kitāb Allāh, ed. Muḥyi’-l-Dīn Ramadān (Damascus: al-Maṭba’a al-Ta’awuniyya, 1971); Abū Ja’far Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Nahhās, Kitāb al-qaṭ’ waʾl-tīnāfī, ed. Ahmad Khattāb al-ʿUmar (Baghdad: al-Jumhūriyya al-ʿIrāqiyya, Wizārat al-Aqwāf, 1979); al-Dānī, al-Muktafā fīʾl-waʿf waʾl-ibtidāʾ, ed. Jāyūd Zaydān Mukhlīf (Baghdad: Iḥyāʾ al-Tūrāth al-ʾIslāmī, 1983). Al-Dānī explains that his list is a compilation of information from the exegetes, the books of readers and grammarians, and hadiths that inform where the Prophet and readers paused in reading (al-Muktafā, pp. 100–1), and his work is said to be a comprehensive compilation of the earlier works, for which it became the main source of information on verse-endings (see the editor’s introduction to al-Muktafā, p. 50). Al-Dānī’s al-Bayān fī ʿadd āy al-Qurʿān, ed. Ghānim Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, n.d.) includes information from al-Muktafā, omitting its explanatory comments, listing the verse-endings (jawāṣīl) rather than all the places of pauses in reading, and adding information as to the total verse count by reader.


18 Abū ʿUbayda’s Maṣẓāz is one of the earliest preserved works in this area, and several scholars writing tafāṣṣīr and maʿānī works are said to have relied on it, e.g. Ibn Qutayba in his Mushkil and Gharīb; al-Ṭabarī in his Taṣfīr; al-Zajjāj in his Maʿānī al-Qurʾān; Abū Bakr al-Sijistānī (d. 330/941–2) in his Taṣfīr gharīb al-Qurʾān; al-Nahhās in his Maʿānī; al-Azhārī (d. 370/980–1) in his Taḥdhib al-lughā; Abū ʿAli al-Fārisī (d. 377/987) in his ḥujja works. See Fuat Sezgin’s introduction to Abū ʿUbayda, Maṣẓāz al-Qurʾān, ed. Muḥammad Fuʿād Sezgin, 1st edn (Egypt: Muḥammad Sāmī ʿAmmān al-Ḵānjī, 1954), p. 17.

In transliteration, scholars have used both spellings, e.g. H. Modarressi, Mu
Beirut: Dnubal e.g. Ibn al-Nad whether the first word is active or passive (e.g. Khayr al-D Mubhij Koranlesarten im 14:2 (2002), p. 37; G. Bergsträsser, 'Nichtkanonische
Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shi’ite Literature (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003),
is unavailable.

pointed out to me that this title may be corrupted, as
This manuscript; in Anton Spitaler, Die Verszählung des Koran (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1935), p. 6 (citing Otto Pretzl, 'Die Wissenschaft Wissenschaften Philosophisch-historische Abteilung 2 (1933), pp. 5–77, p. 33. If the title is Muhtasib, this accords with what can be read as the claim of the book’s title that the book ‘investigates’ the arguments in favor of the non-canonical readings. If it is Muhtasib, this works well with Ibn Jinni’s attempt in the book to express his belief that each of the readings were ‘deemed’ valid (liturgically) in God’s view. I have chosen to use the former.

21 Vatican MS 1456 (composed in 843/1439–40, according to the colophon (f. 34b), which is not long after Ibn al-Jazari was teaching and writing in the same area). So the title appears in this manuscript; in Anton Spitaler, Die Verszählung des Koran (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1935), p. 6 (citing Otto Pretzl, ‘Die Wissenschaft der Koranlesung’, Islamica VI (1934), p. 241); and in Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur (5 vols, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), Supplement I, p. 724. It has been pointed out to me that this title may be corrupted, as bahja has little to do with sīr, and as there is no other known manuscript with that combination in its title. See, e.g., al-Fihrist al-Shāmīl (3 vols, Amman: al-Mu’assasa, 1987), vol. 1 (listing only one entry for ‘mubhij’; al-Mubhij fi’l-qirā’āt al-thamān by Șīb al-Khayyat ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Ali ibn Ḥamad (d. 541/1146–7)). Carl Brockelmann lists only one other copy of this text in Berlin (Geschichte, Supplement I, p. 724), but that manuscript has moved to a private collection and is unavailable.
22 Spitaler, *Die Verszählung*, p. 46. Aside from the *Mubhij*, Spitaler references another four sources that contain information about the Himsi reading, but notes that none of them are complete. Spitaler, *Die Verszählung*, pp. 4–9, pp. 21–2. Those sources are, in addition to al-Dâni’s *Bayân*, Ibrâhîm ibn ‘Umar al-Ja’barî (d. 732/1333), *Rawdat al-ţarîf fî rasm al-maşâḥif* (rather than *Rawdat al-ţarîf fî’l-rasm* as in Spitaler); Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn ‘Abd Allâh al-Ďarî al-Mutawalli, *Tahqiq al-bayân fî ‘add ây al-Qur’ân* (rather than ‘addad as in Spitaler); and Muhammad ibn ‘Afî ibn Khalaf al-Husaynî al-Ďaddâd (d. 1357/1939), *Sa’âdat al-dârayn fî bayân* (wa-‘add) ây mu’jiz al-thaqalayn. Dâni’s work is of course available; the last work has been published, but was unavailable to me; the only manuscript available to me was al-Mutawalli’s *Tahqiq* (Princeton MS C0723.205) (incomplete, but covering the sections contained in our copy of the Qur’an). It is interesting that al-Mutawalli – a prominent Egyptian Azhar Qur’an scholar – transmits the Himsi reading until so late (he died in 1895) and that our manuscript of his work seems to have been copied by a Syrian scribe (see the colophon, naming the scribe as Muhammad al-Shâmî al-Qahwî). On al-Mutawalli, see al-Ziriklî, *al-A’lâm*, vol. 6, pp. 246–7 (noting that he was also known as *shaykh al-qurrâ*); ‘Umar Ridâh Kahhâla, *Mu’jam al-mu’allifîn* (15 vols, Damascus: al-Maktaba al-‘Arabiyya, 1947–61), vol. 8, p. 281 (listing some of his works on the fourteen readings).

23 A comparison between al-‘Âţtâr’s list and the canonical list shows that although the locations are largely the same (Medina, Mecca, Syria, Basra and Kufa), al-‘Âţtâr’s list of readers only matches the canonical one in three places: Natî (Medina), Ibn ‘Âmir (Syria) and ‘Âsim (Kufa); and al-‘Âţtâr divides Syria into Damascus and Himsh.

24 Al-‘Âţtâr maintains that Abû Haywa received his transmission from ‘over 70 Companions’. Al-‘Âţtâr, *Mubhij*, f. 7a.

25 Abû Haywa’s full name is Shurâyih ibn Yazid al-Ďaḍrâmî al-Himsî; he was the ‘Imâm of Hims’ during his lifetime and had his own reading (wa-lahu ikhtiyâr fî’l-qirâ’a) (Ibn al-Jazârî, *Nashr*, vol. 1, p. 325). For the history of readings in Hims before Abû Haywa, see ‘Atwân, *al-Qirâ’ât*, pp. 61–186, and especially p. 93 (showing that all earlier readings in the region converged at Abû Haywa).


Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ al-qarīb*, vol. 3, p. 291). However he lists no references and this appears to be incorrect.

31 ‘Umar and Makram, *Mu‘jam*, vol. 4, p. 95. Al-Nahhās records that, in addition to Ibn Kathīr, the Meccan Mujāhīd also read the word without assimilating the nūn (al-Nahhās, *Frāb*, vol. 2, p. 473). See also Ibn Khālawayhi, *Ḥujuja*, p. 137 (noting the permissibility of both readings, without attributions).


36 See ‘Umar and Makram, *Mu‘jam*, vol. 2, p. 462. Abū‘l-Dardā‘ is said to have begun reading the Qur’an during the lifetime of Muhammad in his native Medina, then assumed a judgeship in Damascus, where he taught Qur’ānic reading at the Damascus Mosque. Ibn Āmīr is said to have succeeded him as the head teacher and reader there. See al-Dhahabī, *Ma‘rifat al-qurra‘*, vol. 1, p. 40.

37 Note that Dutton mentions an additional ‘major’ variant: on the rendering of the name *Ibrāhīm*, which Ibn Āmīr pronounces as *Ibrāhīm*. According to Dutton, the Syrian codex adopts the latter spelling 33 times out of a total of 69 occurrences in the Qur’an, and our manuscript contains six Syrian spellings and four ‘ordinary’ spellings (Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 45). I do not count these spelling differences here, because I restrict major orthographical variants to consonant differences that do not involve weak letters such as the *alif* or yāʾ in Ibrāhīm.


39 Chronologically, the last of the canonical seven, ten and fourteen readers were al-Kisā‘ī (d. 189/805), Khalaf (d. 229/843) and Yahya al-Yazīdī (d. 202/817–18), respectively.

40 There is nothing to suggest that Abū Haywa’s chain of transmission relates back to Abū‘l-Dardā‘ directly. Rather, the *ṭabaqāt* works trace Abū Haywa’s chain ultimately back to Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal (d. 18/639), who died soon after Abū‘l-Dardā‘. Ātwa名义 points to substantial contacts between the inhabitants of Damascus and Himṣ during the early period, particularly amongst Qur’ānic readers, who he says had something of a rivalry between cities (see Ātwa名义, *al-Qirā‘āt*, pp. 13–15, p. 92). As he notes, Himṣ had been an important frontier town during the period of conquests, Damascus became the seat of power once the Umayyads gained power in 40/660, and the power seat shifted again when the Ābāṣids assumed power in
There is an additional alif maqsûra (an extra tooth) in bi-ayâtinâ and bi-ayâthi throughout; additional alif mamdûda after the lâm in ‘allâm at Q. 9:78 (f. 14a.12), in la-in at Q. 10:22 (f. 15b.5), and in jamnâ in various places, e.g. at Q. 9:72 (ff. 13b.24 and 13b.23) and Q. 22:56 (f. 61a.16), but not in several other cases, e.g. at Q. 22:14 (f. 59a.10) and Q. 22:23 (f. 59b.6); an additional medial hamza seat (an extra tooth) at Q. 8:29 (f. 8b.10) (sayyî‘ätikum) (which accords with Ḥamza’s reading, see ʿAbd al-Latîf al-Khaṭīb, Muʾjam al-qirā‘āt (11 vols, Damascus: Dâr Sa’d al-Dîn, 2002), vol. 3, p. 284); an additional final yâ’ to render kîdûnî at Q. 7:195 (f. 7a.21) (consistent with Ibn ʿAmîr’s reading, among others, see al-Khaṭīb, Muʾjam, vol. 3, p. 343), tâstahyî at Q. 7:127 (f. 4a.6), and yûhîy at Q. 7:158 (f. 5b.13) and at Q. 10:56 (f. 17a.7) among other places; and an additional alif after the sîn of sayyî‘a at Q. 7:95 (f. 3a.12). These generally follow no known variants.

For example, alif maqsûra becomes alif mamdûda in sukârâ at Q. 22:2 (f.58b.7 and 58b.8) and in the two instances of tarânî at Q. 7:143 (f. 4b.17 and 4b.18), but not in the instances of
form of this word elsewhere, e.g., at Q. 7:198 (f. 7a.25) \(\text{ṭarāhūm};\) \(\text{alīf} \ 	ext{maṣṣūra} \) in \(\text{bī-liqāʾ}^{*}\) at Q. 10:45 (f. 16b.11); and the final \(\text{tāʾ}^{*} \ 	ext{ṭawīla} \) becomes a final \(\text{ḥāʾ}^{*} \) or \(\text{tāʾ}^{*} \ 	ext{marbūţa} \) in \(\text{kalimat(u rabbika)}^{*} \) at Q. 7:137 (f. 4b.4). In addition, there is a spelling anomaly in the word \(\text{ṣhayāʾ}^{*}\) when it is non-accusative. The word is often spelled as expected – \(\text{ṣhin-yāʾ}^{*}\) with no stand-alone \(\text{ḥamza} \) at the end, but also appears frequently with an \(\text{alīf} \) between the \(\text{ṣhin} \) and the \(\text{yāʾ}^{*}.\)

47 Al-‘Aṭṭār, Mubhij, f. 9b; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 155; al-Mutawallī, Taḥqīq, f. 9b; Spitaler, Die Verszählung, p. 37. Cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 50. There are five disputed verse-endings, only one of which falls in this fragment of the manuscript: Q. 7:137.

48 A final symbol is inexplicable. After the last aya, Q. 7:206, a rosette surrounds the one-verse symbol. This cannot have been intended as a ten-verse rosette, since the 100-verse \(\text{ḥāʾ}^{*} \) is clearly marked just five ayas before. It probably is not a symbol to indicate the \(\text{sajadāt} \) at the end of this aya either, since such symbols have not been placed elsewhere in suras containing clearly marked just five ayas before. It probably is not a symbol to indicate the \(\text{sajda} \) at the end, but also appears frequently with an \(\text{alīf} \) between the \(\text{ṣhin} \) and the \(\text{yāʾ}^{*}.\)

49 The \(\text{rāʾ}^{*} \) and the \(\text{bāʾ}^{*} \) are unreadable, but the bottom of the \(\text{wāw} \) is somewhat readable and the tail of the \(\text{‘ayn} \) – spaced two letters from the \(\text{wāw} \) bottom – is unmistakable.

50 Al-‘Aṭṭār mentions that ‘some of the early verse-counting readers (\(\text{ba’d al-‘āddīn min al-qurrāʾ al-awwalīn}^{*}\) place the second seventh at Q. 7:170 (al-‘Aṭṭār, Mubhij, ff. 26b–27a). For the Kufan count, see Ibn Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb al-maṣāḥif, p. 127.


55 Al-‘Aṭṭār, Mubhij, f. 10b. But see al-Mutawallī (listing only a Syrian variant), Taḥqīq, f. 12b; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 165 (same); Spitaler, Die Verszählung, p. 39 (listing only a Damascene variant).

56 Spitaler only lists the Iraqi system here. Spitaler, Die Verszählung, p. 40. Al-‘Aṭṭār lists this as a Ḥimṣī verse-ending, and says that it accords with just Kufa (rather than Spitaler’s Iraq – which includes Basra as well) (al-‘Aṭṭār, Mubhij, f. 10b). Al-Dānī and al-Mutawallī make no mention of this variant.

57 Al-‘Aṭṭār, Mubhij, f. 10b; Spitaler, Die Verszählung, p. 40. Al-Dānī and al-Mutawallī do not record this variant.

58 Al-‘Aṭṭār, Mubhij, f. 10b; Spitaler, Die Verszählung, p. 40. Al-Mutawallī does record this variant.

60 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 11a; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 169; al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, f. 13a; Spitaler, 
Q. 13:5, 16 (two places), 17, 18, and 23. Al-Dānī does not record a variant for Q. 13:17. For 
that ending, see al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 11a; al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, f. 13a; Spitaler, 
_Die Verszählung_, pp. 40–1.

61 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, ff. 11a–11b; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 171; al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, f. 13b; 
ayas: Q. 14:1, 5, 9, 19, 24, 33 and 42.

62 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 11a; Spitaler, _Die Verszählung_, p. 42. al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, f. 13a, 
records only a ‘Shāmi’ total verse count of 55 and a Ḥimṣī total verse count of 54. Al-Dānī 
does not list data on the Ḥimṣī reading.

63 Note that Spitaler, _Die Verszählung_, p. 42, lists this as another exclusive Ḥimṣī variant. 
Al-Dānī and al-Mutawallī simply mention Syria, as does al-ʿATTĀR.

64 The very end of the line is obscured.

65 See Ibn Abī Dāwūd, _Kitāb al-masāḥif_, p. 127 (listing the third seventh after ‘alay … in 
wa-mā kāna liya ‘alaykum min sulṭān, which is Kufan Q. 14:22); al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 26a.

66 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 11b; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 173. al-Mutawallī and Spitaler do not include 
this sura. Cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 57. There are no disputed ayas.

Spitaler does not include this sura. Cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 57. There are no disputed ayas.

68 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 12a (called Sūrat Banī Isrāʿīl); al-Dānī, 177, al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, 
f. 15a; Spitaler, _Die Versählung_, p. 42. Cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 57–8. There is one disputed 

69 Dutton offers an alternative explanation: that the rosette at Q. 17:89 rather than at Q. 17:90 
was overlooked (presumably, by a ten-verse rosette marker counting individual ayas) when 
the rosettes were added. See Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 58.

70 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, f. 12a; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 179, al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, ff. 13a–15b; 

71 The heading reads Sūrat al-Kahf wa-hiya miʿa wa-sitt … (f. 43a, 7), though the letter after 
the tāʾ from the broken sīta is obscured enough that one could imagine it reading sab of 
sabʾa as well. All the other sura headings align to the Damascene system, and there is no 
reason to suppose that this one alone diverges from that pattern.


73 Al-ʿATTĀR, Mubhij, ff. 12a–12b; al-Dānī, Bayān, p. 181; al-Mutawallī, Ṭaḥqīq, ff. 15b–16a; 
Spitaler, _Die Verszählung_, p. 43. Cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 59. There are three disputed ayas: 
Q. 19:1, 41 and 75.

74 Spitaler, _Die Verszählung_, p. 43. Al-ʿATTĀR records that the Iraqis agree on the total verse 
count as 98 (Mubhij, f. 12a).

75 The place of sajdā comes at Q. 19:58 (idhā tutlū ʿalayhim āyātūl-rahmānī kharrū 
suǧjadan wa-bukiyyā) (f. 49b, 9); but as in other such places – e.g. Q. 17:107–9 (f. 43a,2), 
there is no sajdā symbol to mark the place.

76 It is possible that the symbol simply has been cut off at the edge of the page, but this is 
unlikely, as the space remaining on the page after šilīyyan seems large enough for a symbol. 
Déroche and Noseda also list this verse-ending as missing rather than obscured, though 
Dutton (‘Notes’, p. 59) does not discuss the absence of this symbol.
77 Al-‘Attār, Mubhij, f. 12b (listing 23 disputed ayas); al-Dānī, Bayān, pp. 183–4 (listing 21 disputed ayas); al-Mutawallī, Taḥqīq, ff. 17a–17a (listing 21 disputed ayas); Spitaler, Die Verszählung, pp. 44–7 (listing 23 disputed ayas). Cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 60–2 (listing 24 disputed ayas). At the largest count, there are 24 disputed ayas: Q. 20:1–1, 33, 34, 39 (two places), 40 (three places), 41, 47, 77, 78, 86 (two places), 87, 88 (two places), 89, 92, 95, 106, 123, 124, and 131. Al-‘Attār’s list is one short of Dutton’s because he does not include Q. 20:95 (yā Sāmīriyy), which is not counted in the Ḥimṣī reading, except for in records of two minority Ḥimṣī schools. See Spitaler, Die Verszählung, p. 45; cf. Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 60. Al-Dānī does not include any of the uniquely Ḥimṣī variations, and al-Mutawallī includes some but not all of them.

78 Al-‘Attār records that the Ḥimṣī reading has 138 ayas (al-‘Attār, Mubhij, f. 12b). Al-Mutawallī, Taḥqīq, f. 16a, also records this uniquely Ḥimṣī total verse count, but al-Dānī and Spitaler do not.


81 Note that al-‘Attār mentions that 74 is the total verse count for Syria; but al-Mutawallī lists 74 for ‘Shām’ and 75 for Ḥimṣī. This is confusing, because, according to al-Mutawallī, ‘Shām’ means Syria as I have been using it, i.e. a shared Damascene and Ḥimṣī reading. See al-Mutawallī, Taḥqīq, f. 6b (fa-in wāfaqahumā (i.e. Ibn ʿĀmir and Yahyā) Abū Haywa fa-[qilal]-Shāmi). Moreover, al-Mutawallī’s list of internal verse counts show no Damascene-Ḥimṣī divergence. Perhaps his mention of the total verse count differences refers to a minority Ḥimṣī variant that is not considered by al-‘Attār and that in any case does not apply to our manuscript.

82 This section takes only a portion of the manuscript as a sample for the detailed examination of stylistic features. It covers ff. 1–19a (Q. 7:42–9:95, Q. 10:9–109) and ff. 58–61 (Q. 22:1–82). This section takes only a portion of the manuscript as a sample for the detailed examination of stylistic features. It covers ff. 1–19a (Q. 7:42–9:95, Q. 10:9–109) and ff. 58–61 (Q. 22:1–82).


84 On the yā’, see Grohmann, ‘The Problem of Dating’. He concludes that the early Qur’ān manuscript, MS P, Michaëldidès 32, dates to the 1st/7th century. Whelan also makes note of this type of yā’ (Whelan, ‘Some Early Qur’ān Manuscripts’, p. 116). Other than in a few places, e.g. Q. 7:104 (f. 3b.4), where Mūsā appears without one, this manuscript uses the reverted yā’, e.g. at Q. 10:83 (f. 18a.7) (where Mūsā appears with one). On the dā’il/dhāl, jā’/zā’, see Grohmann, ‘The Problem of Dating’, pp. 225–6 (comparing his manuscript to one that appears in Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer: Führer durch die Ausstellung (Wien: Selbst Verlag der Sammlung, Alfred Hölder, 1894)). Comparisons of some letters that appear in Grohmann’s analysis of MS Paris 328a (which he mentions in his detailed treatment) and in our manuscript, show that letters in the three manuscripts are stylistically similar.


86 Dutton contends that the manuscript appeared to be a large undertaking that would have required patronage. He reasons that, because it follows a Syrian system, the patronage was
probably from a Syrian government, which would mean that it would have had to be during the period when the Umayyad caliphate was in Syria (40/660–132/750) and probably before Walid (reg. 86/705–96/715) – who reportedly patronised Qur’ans in the Kufic script. For him, the manuscript may date to the period between 30/650 (after the ‘Uthmānic compilation, as it is an ‘Uthmānic codex) and 85/704 (before the reign of Walid’s Kufic-patronage) (Dutton, ‘Notes’, p. 65–6). Cf. Grohmann, ‘The Problem of Dating’, p. 222 (dating this manuscript to the 1st/7th century). This is quite plausible, but three features of the manuscript raise questions about this patronage scenario. The manuscript’s reading tradition is eclectically Syrian, i.e. produced over a period of time and a stretch of space that started in Hims (or with a scribe who followed that reading) perhaps in the first century and ended in Damascus (or with scribes who followed that reading) perhaps within decades thereafter. In addition, the manuscript is unfinished (many of the folios not included in the facsimile are missing the later illumination). Finally, if the Hijāzī script continued to be used in Qur’anic beyond the 1st/7th century, and if local governors could also patronise Qur’anic production, this manuscript easily could have post-dated Walid. See, e.g., ‘Atwān, al-Qirā‘āt, pp. 13–30 (his account of Qur’anic education and patronage under the Umayyads). All of this notwithstanding, Dutton’s dating is just as plausible as these other scenarios.


89 Note that the manuscript shows places in which the scribe apparently forgot to leave enough space for placing the one-verse symbols when he went back over the text to do so. I suppose this to have been the process given all the other evidence suggesting that the same scribe who wrote the text placed the one-verse symbols, and that there are places where one-verse symbol has been squeezed in between ayas. One such instance appears in this section – similar to the instance at Q. 18:18 discussed above (a single column of six strokes). This time, instead of Scribe A’s usual two columns of three vertical strokes, there is just one column of four strokes. It does not make sense that Scribe A intended to drop that verse-symbol, since to do so at that and other such points in the manuscript would depart from any known system,
including that of Hims. For other examples of ‘squeezed in’ verse-ending symbols, see Q. 14:5 (f. 30a.10), Q. 13:35 (f. 29b.10), Q. 18:25 (f. 44a.17), Q. 18:26 (f. 44a.21), Q. 18:66 (f. 46a.22), Q. 19:54 (f. 49b.2), Q. 19:68 (f. 50a.2), Q. 20:17 (f. 51.5). Grohman, Arabic Papyri, pp. 83–4, mentions that these dots appeared in the form of short dashes in early Qur’ans.

90 The first scribe (A) includes no right foot-serif on his alif; the second scribe (B) does. Scribe A’s lām-alif is somewhat angular at the bottom, with a relatively narrow gap between the two stems; Scribe B’s is formed with a loop at the bottom and has a wide gap between its two stems. Scribe A’s initial jīm/hāʾ/khāʾ is formed with a straight diagonal stroke above the line connected to the right of a vertical line extending left; Scribe B’s diagonal stroke has a slight concave curve. The tail of Scribe A’s nūn/sād/dād/sin/shin is a downward curve with a ‘tuck’ to the left and uniform line-thickness. Scribe B stops a bit short on the tuck, and turns the pen for a taper.

91 Each rosette is red, except at Q. 7:121, where it is brown with a faded reddish tinge. The number of dots vary, depending on the amount of space available – from seven to nine dots, as in Q. 7:131 and Q. 7:141, to as many as twelve, as in Q. 7:71, Q. 8:10, Q. 10:44. (A ‘rosette’ consisting of a red circle surrounding the one-verse symbol and a series of dots in turn surrounding it).

92 Dots inside: Q. 7:81–161 (but note that Q. 7:121 is illegible); Q. 8:40–60 (perhaps); Q. 8:70–9:89; and not Q. 10:15 and Q. 10:30 (which are the oddly placed symbols, discussed above); and nowhere after. The solid circle of the problematic rosette at Q. 10:15 (f. 15a) is unusually thick as if traced over more than once, as is the one that follows it at Q. 10:30 (f. 16a). Perhaps these were later additions to fill lacunae – one mistaken (Q. 10:15 instead of Q. 10:20) and the other correct (Q. 10:30). Indeed, some rosettes (e.g. throughout ff. 43a–b) are missing altogether.

93 Q. 7:101 (f. 3b), 201 (f. 7b); Q. 10:101 (f. 18b); Q. 11:101 (f. 23a); Q. 16:100 (f. 37a); Q. 17:101 (f. 42b); Q. 18:104 (f. 47b); Q. 20:98 (f. 53a). At Q. 12:100 (f. 27a), the bottom left corner of the folio is cropped and badly blurred. An additional mark can be made out above the last word of the verse (al-ḥakīm). Though it is very blurred, this presumably was the 100-verse symbol. At Q. 21:101 (f. 58a), the only other hundredth verse in the facsimile, there is no distinguishing mark other than a one-verse symbol at this point.

94 For example, at Q. 7:101 the dots of the circular single-verse count are oddly connected in brown ink, as if they were the start of a brown rosette (like the brown hāʾ above) that did not receive its surrounding dots. The ten-verse rosette at Q. 7:201 has clearly been erased and the 100-verse hāʾ placed atop the one-verse symbol. At Q. 10:101, no attempt has been made to erase the ten-verse rosette, perhaps because it is so intertwined with the surrounding letters (nūn of the preceding verse, ʾā of the following verse, and the stems of the lām-alif from the verse below) that doing so would compromise the text. Thus, only in this instance does the ten-verse rosette appear along with the 100-verse hāʾ. The presence of the rosette may explain the additional note ‘miʿa’ (the only instance of this) to ensure that a reader does not mistakenly interpret this point as merely a ten-verse symbol. Q. 11:101 and Q. 17:101 are accompanied by hāʾ over one or two (three?) (see f. 23a and f. 42b) large red dots placed in the text where a one-verse symbol would have been. Only the hāʾs at Q. 18:104 and Q. 20:98 display no modifications of the one-verse count.

95 For example, Q. 7:101 (brown), 201 (fading, brownish red) and Q. 20:98 (brown) appear similar to one another as does Q. 17:101 to Q. 18:104. As suggested above, the placement of 100-verse symbols indicates that the copyist who placed them was Syrian, and inserted them through collation with a Damascene text.

96 The first is written in a brown ink that is smoother and more faded than that of the text. No space was left to accommodate this mark, leaving the words interspersed through the text.
Although it appears to be a script similar to that of the text, the letters are much thinner and they do not have the characteristic leaning of the Hijāzī script. The second appears similar in style to the first, but is written in green ink.


99 Al-Ṭabarî, Taṣfîr, vol. 1, pp. 27–8. See also Modarressi, ‘Early Debates’, p. 14 (noting that the Qur’an’s text was established well before ‘Uthmān’s compilation, and that debates over its integrity arose in the 3rd/9th century as a result of sectarian and political conflicts).

100 Al-Ṭabarî, Taṣfîr, vol. 1, p. 28 (recounting the story that Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān returned from the battle in Armenia (in 30/650), requesting ‘Uthmān to compile a standard version of the text to quell the disputes he observed at battle); cf. al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, vol. 1, pp. 164–5 (noting other versions of the story and triggering-events for the compilation).


103 See Abū ‘Ubayd, Faḍā’il, pp. 200–3 (listing twelve versions). For others, see, for example, al-Ṭabarî, Taṣfîr, pp. 11–20 (recounting 38 versions of the aḥruf ḥadith in the introduction to his taṣfîr); al-Dānī, Muqni’, Introduction; Ibn al-Jazari, Nashr, vol. 1, p. 35.

104 See Abū ‘Ubayd, Faḍā’il, p. 203 (equating aḥruf with Arabic dialects (lughāt), of which the ‘Uthmānic codex incorporated just one); Ibn Qutayba, Ta’wil mushkil al-Qur’ān, p. 42 (implicitly agreeing, by identifying aḥruf in the pre-‘Uthmānic codices); al-Ṭabarî, Taṣfîr, pp. 20–4, pp. 28–9 (same, adding that the single text accommodated multiple readings, which should not be equated with the other six aḥruf no longer extant); Makkī, al-Ibāna, pp. 21–4, pp. 53–8 (that the ‘Uthmānic codex is most likely a single horf, but may include more). See also al-Dānī’s introduction to Muqni’ (that the ‘Uthmānic codex was the singularly revealed Qur’anic skeletal text, which accommodated multiple readings); Ibn al-Jazari, Nashr, vol. 1, p. 15 (that ‘any reading with [these three elements] is authentic (qirā’ā sahiha), and ‘is one of the seven aḥruf (al-aḥruf al-sab’a)’). For a lengthy discussion of the debates, see Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), al-Intisâr li-naql al-Qur’ān (Alexandria, Egypt: Munshāt al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.), pp. 68–9, pp. 116–23.


106 Makkī, al-Ibāna, p. 38.

107 Makkī, al-Ibāna, p. 38.

108 For more on the history of patronage for the Qur’ān during the Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid reigns, see ‘Aṭwān, al-Qirā’āt, pp. 13–30 (noting, in part, that Caliph ‘Abd al-Mālik ibn Marwān in Damascus is said to have first commanded people to memorise the Qur’ān and inaugurated a continuing system of Umayyad and ‘Abbāsid patronage for Qur’ānic studies).

109 For more on Abān, see Modarressi, Tradition and Survival, pp. 111–12 (noting that Abān ibn Taghlib – though a student of ‘Aṣim – had an independent reading; and that he should not
be confused with Abūn ibn Yazīd ibn Aḥmad al-Brāṭī al-Ṣṭārī, who was a grammarian, a
younger contemporary of Abīn ibn Tahgīlīb, and a fellow student of and transmitter from
Ṣālim. Other readers on Ibn al-Nadīm’s list of independent readings include Abū ṣ-ʿAmīr (d.
159/775) (one of the canonical seven), Khalīl ibn Ḥishām (d. 229/843–4) (one of the
canonical fourteen), Ibn Qutayba and the grammarian Thaqīlab (d. 291/904). Ibn al-Nadīm also
references readers who documented differences between two independent readings. See
Fihrist, p. 55, and the text accompanying the headings for individually listed readers.

p. 644, respectively. For more on these two figures, see Mustafa Shah, ‘Exploring the Genesis
of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought: Qur’anic Readers and Grammarians of the Kufan

111 Ibn Mujāhid notes that he verified aspects of Nāfiʾs reading from Ibn Saʿd’s recension of
p. 38.


113 See Ibn al-Jazarī, Nasḥr, vol. 1, p. 34.


115 Their contribution has been pointedly detailed by Mustafa Shah in his article, ‘Early


117 For instance, Ibn Khālawayhi’s Mukhtasar and Ibn Jinnī’s Muhtasib.

118 For descriptions of the ikhtiyār methodologies adopted by several grammarians and
examples of instances in which Ibn Mujāhid drew upon the grammarians’ records for his

119 See the editor’s introduction to al-Akhfash, Maʿānī, ed. Fārīz Fāris, 2nd edn (n.p., 1981),
pp. 82–7 (listing the other reasons as analogical reasoning to Arabic grammar, rhetorical
eloquence, congruity with other verses, and ‘Uthmānic orthography).

120 See al-Akhfash, Maʿānī, p. 62 (wa-dhālika khilāf al-kitāb). The editor notes that kitāb
here refers to ‘Uthmānic orthography (al-rasm al-Qurʿānī).


p. 166; vol. 4, p. 365; vol. 1, p. 373).


125 See Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-sabʿa, pp. 47–52 (collecting sources saying that qirāʿāt are a
sunna; note that incidentally one of the transmissions is through Abū Ḥaywā, see Ibn Mujāhid,
Kitāb al-sabʿa, p. 50); Ibn al-Jazarī, Nasḥr, vol. 1, p. 13 (stipulating that readings have a valid
chain of transmission (sanad) and be transmitted between upright, precise readers (ʿadl,
dābīt); al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, vol. 2, p. 204 (expaining the sense in which qirāʿāt are a sunna).

126 Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-sabʿa, p. 45.


128 Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-sabʿa, p. 49.

129 The students of each canonical reader (qārīʾ, to whom is attributed a qirāʿa) are labelled
according to their proximity to the leading reader. The first generation consists of ʿruwāt, who
transmit riwāyāt (sing. riwāya); then came those (also called ṭuruq) who transmit ṭujūḥ
(sing. ṭujh), then ṭuruq (sing. ṭartq). Ṭuruq describes readings four levels removed from the
leading reader and however far down the chain goes. Individual syntheses between multiple readers that therefore cannot be placed in a chain are called ikhtiyār. See Ibn Jinnī, Muḥtasib, p. 102.

130 Ibn al-Jazārī, Nashr, vol. 1, p. 21, p. 35. For a more complete account of these two trials and the issues at stake, see Shah, ‘Early Arabic Grammarians’, pp. 78–89.

131 See above, n. 110.

132 Ibn al-Jazārī, Nashr, vol. 1, p. 34.

133 There is an additional, unfortunate terminological confusion even among reading scholars, who interchange girāʿāt and hurāf as well as hurāf and ahruf. The latter two terms share the singular form, ḥarf; the referent of which is a disputed notion in the context of the ahruf doctrine and which some scholars use to refer to a distinguishing feature of a particular reading in the context of girāʿāt catalogs. See Ibn Sinān al-Khaṭāfī, Sirr al-faṣāḥa (Cairo: Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣabīḥ, 1969), p. 15; see also Ibn Mujāhid’s use of ḥarf and hurāf to mean variant(s) (above nn. 126–7 and accompanying text). The link between hurāf and ahruf seems to have been made as a way of justifying different readings as representing those mentioned as ahruf in the hadith of seven ahruf. See, e.g., Makki, al-Ibānā, pp. 66–7 (that Ibn Mujāhid chose the number seven, in part, to accord with the number of hurāf (as ahruf) that were revealed according to the hadith of the ahruf doctrine).

134 See Ibn al-Jazārī, Nashr, vol. 1, p. 36. For instance, according to Ibn al-Jazārī, Abūʾl-ʿAbbās Ahmad ibn ʿAmmār al-Mahdawi (of the early 5th/11th century) reported that some later scholars adopted (dhahaba ilayhi) Ibn Mujāhid’s list of seven as a complete compilation of authentic readings, and then made adherence to them like an absolute obligation (fard maḥtūm) on lay people (ʿammat al-nās), such that they accused readers and readings that diverged from it of unbelief. He says that, because the masses knew no better than to conflate Ibn Mujāhid’s seven with the seven ahruf, it would have been better if Ibn Mujāhid had chosen to limit his list to less or more than seven to avoid confusion (shubha). In a similar vein, Makki registered his objection to conflating the seven ahruf with Ibn Mujāhid’s seven, and insisted emphatically that any reading was one of the seven ahruf and was therefore valid, so long as it had a valid isnād, agreed with the ʿUthmānic orthography, and was grammatically sound. Makki, al-Ibānā, pp. 66–7.


139 For a different point of view, see Christopher Melchert, ‘Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qurʾānic Readings’, Studia Islamica 91 (2000), pp. 5–22, p. 18, who argues that the Qurʾān scholars and their methods were not closely related to the Hadīth scholars and theirs, in terms of an isnād-orientation. See also Welch, art. ‘al-Kurʾān’ (cited in Melchert, ‘Ibn Mujāhid’, p. 18). Perhaps this argument is in reference to readers who postdated those mentioned by Ibn Mujāhid, for Qurʾān scholars – as demonstrated in part by Ibn Mujāhid in his work – were certainly isnād-oriented. For each reader on his list of the main seven, Ibn Mujāhid records a chain of transmission that leads back to one or more Companions, and he mentions two prominent students to whom they transmitted their readings (see Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-sāb’a, pp. 53–101). It is only after establishing the sound isnād credentials that he and other scholars discussed readers in terms of wide-spread
transmission as a basis for viewing them as canonical. For similar treatments of the principal canonical works beyond the seven, see below, n. 142. For more on the emphasis in their views on isnād vis-à-vis qirāʿāt (as a transmission-oriented sunna), see above, n. 125 and accompanying text.


141 Ibn Mujāhid, Kitāb al-sabʿa’, p. 49, says: ‘A person may prefer (yastaḥṣin) a non-canonical (šādhdh) reading for himself, such that he reads according to the variants (min al-hurāf) that have been transmitted from one [or some] of the earlier [readers] individually (ʿan baʿd al-ʿawā’il munfaʿīdatan); but these [readings nevertheless] are not included in the canonical [agreed-upon] readings’.


144 See also Ibn Jinnī, Muḥtasib, p. 102 (that whatever falls outside of Ibn Mujāhid’s seven – which are considered to be authentic by consensus – is shādhdh). The term has been used in multiple ways, and can refer to readings that are anomalous in Arabic usage or on the margins of proper grammatical usage (shādhdh fiʾl-qiyās waʾl-istiʿmāl), such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s reading in the first sura of ʿal-ḥamdū lillāḥ’ or the Bedouins’ recitation of ʿal-ḥamdū l-llāḥ’ (Ibn Jinnī, Muḥtasib, p. 111).

145 For an account of the history of the term shādhdh, and the list of categories it encompasses with respect to Qurʾān readings, see ʿAwān, al-Qirāʿāt, pp. 6–7.


147 Al-Bannāʿ, Ithāf, p. 72.


149 Ibn al-Jazārī mentions Abū Haywa (as Shurayh ibn Yazīd al-Ḥadrāmī, a Syrian reader) as the last in his list of major readers by city (Ibn al-Jazārī, Nashr, pp. 14–15).

150 For instance, the grammarian al-Akhfash mentions Abū Haywa (see, e.g., al-Akhfash, Maʿāni, p. 67), as does Ibn Jinnī in his defense of non-canonical readings (see, e.g., Ibn Jinnī, Muḥtasib, vol. 2, p. 293).

151 On Abū Haywa’s teacher (for which the proper vocalisation may be Abūʿl-Barahsim, followed by Dutton (personal communication), and is the spelling of a surname that I have come across once), see the observations made by ʿUmar and Makram, editors of Muʿjam, vol. 1, p. 118 (that he was ashar asmāʾ qurrāʾ al-shawādhdh min ahl al-mudun). See also Makkī, al-Ībānī, p. 91.

152 For instance, in the discussion of Q. 8:67 (liʿl-nabī instead of li-nabī), al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf, vol. 4, p. 29, attributes the reading to Abū Haywa as well as Abūʿl-Dardāʾ and Abū Hayyān, Tafsīr, vol. 8, p. 159, does the same.
153 See, e.g., the *tafāsir* of al-Qurṭubī and al-Shawkānī. As previously mentioned, these *tafāsir*, however, draw from the earlier works and contribute nothing new.

154 Rezvan has remarked on this as well, saying that ‘manuscripts can serve as a fine example of the standardization of the text that the community had achieved by the end of the eighth century’ (Rezvan, ‘On the Dating of an ‘Uthmānic Qurʾān from St. Petersburg’, *Manuscripta Orientalia* 6:3 (2000), pp. 19–22).