A.PERG.2: A NON PALIMPSEST AND THE CORRECTIONS IN QUR'ÂNIC MANUSCRIPTS

Present situation and unanswered questions

A Perg. 2 is a parchment kept at the Österreichische National Bibliothek [1] and it was described by H. Loebenstein in her catalogue [2]. It is a Qur'anic fragment containing a portion of sura al-Qasas, namely [3]:

- on hair side, 28:61—75, written by hand A;
- on flesh side, in the upper part 28:75—9, written by hand B;
- and in the bottom of the page 28:75—7, written by hand A.

Loebenstein notes that the upper part of the flesh side is a palimpsest. The "alte Schrift" of the palimpsest is visible to the naked eye on the right margin of the page, at lines 3, 4, 8 and 9. On the basis of the remains of the scriptio inferior, feeble signs of the words, she assumes that this was the same as the handwriting A. In the opinion of Loebenstein, the fragment of the supposed scriptio inferior is the continuation of the text on the hair side, 28:75 (Table 1).

The peculiarity of this parchment is the reutilization only of the upper part of the page, I mean that from this point of view the existing situation is:

- hand A: 28:61—75;
- hand A: 28:75—9 (we have to note that A continues exactly the text of the hair side);
- hand A: 28:75—7 (we suppose that the lacuna in the bottom of the page contains 28:75—9).

and, after the reutilization of the parchment:

- hand A: 28:61—75;
- hand B: 28:75—9 (we have to note that B writes دیس 75 from the beginning);
- hand A: 28:75—7 (79).

Given the above, the unanswered question put by Loebenstein is the reason why copyist A wrote twice the same text and copyist B wrote it again, for the third time. She suggests two explanations: 28:75—9 was written by copyist A with some errors, so it was written again correctly and then the defective text was rubbed out or washed and overwritten.

An alternative hypothesis could be that copyist A wrote 28:75—9 and, after a pause of his job, he started again writing twice the same text by mistake. Therewith copyist B overwrote the same part of the sura.

Although all of the above explanations are simply unanswered questions put by Loebenstein, scholars have taken these hypothesis for granted [4].

Is A.Perg.2 really a palimpsest?

- Only the upper half of the flesh side has been erased and subsequently re-written.
- The supposed scriptio inferior is visible only on the right margin of the page, while on the rest of the page there is no trace of the old writing.
- The same text has been written three times.

Qur'anic manuscripts and corrections

Written transmission of texts necessarily implies mistakes, if nothing else, due to errant human nature. In the knowledge transmission of the hadith-literature, for example, we can notice that a standard typology of manuscript corrections took shape early.

As to what concerns Qur'anic text, because it was a Holy Book, whose careful copying would attract many blessings for the believer, copies made of its textus receptus, i.e. the 'Uthmānic text, largely excluded the possibility of corruption [6].
However human mistakes are unavoidable and so does a scribe hand [7], even if he is writing a copy of Qur'anic text.

Mistakes, and above all their corrections, are very common, even in the Qur'anic text, as it appears in some of the most ancient manuscripts.

There are two kinds of corrections added to the text. On one hand, we can find corrections due to different variants with textual significance, be they canonical readings or pre-‘ulūmīnīc (non canonical) variants [8]. On the other hand, corrections can be related to copyists’ mistakes, be they due to the orthography of the Arabic writing and its reform [9] or corrections to a perhaps minor kind of mistake, scribal lapsus calami [10].

A classical example of corrections due to the orthographic reform is the tendency to spell long d with muta‘alqatīn ‘alif.

The tradition of the two thousand ‘alif added by the governor of Iraq, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyād, is reported by Ibn Abī Dāwūd in his Kitāb al-Maṣūḥah[11]. Even if two thousand letters are a remarkable quantity [12], the added ‘alif present in the manuscripts are indeed a great number. We can find them in the Qur‘an of ‘Ukhṣān, kept in the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences [13], where missing ‘alifs were added in red ink during the first stage of the text’s revision [14]. In the papyrus of Leiden [15] there seems to be a particular mix-up to correct the lack of the ‘alif[16].

These early manuscripts are full of corrections [17], not only added words, but also rubbed out words. A funny example is in a manuscript of Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin [18] where we can read qālīn (5:14) without ṣadd, scriptio defeciva, and few lines below, in the same folio [19] (3b), we can read qālīn (5:17) with ṣadd, scriptio plena [20]. But the first qālīn was corrected and an ṣadd was added (fig. 1), on the contrary the second qālīn too was corrected and the ‘alif was rubbed out (fig. 7)[21]. This is a sign of a complete lack of a standard rule [22].

In the manuscripts that I could study, which will be published in the next volume [23] of the ‘Arabi project [24], I have come across corrections in the parchment kept in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (A.6959) [25], as on the verso, line 4, the alif al-naṣūḥa in ṣūrā-r-rxw4 (68:41) [26] was later added. A whole part of an ḍuro (10:109) is added in black ink at the end of the sūrat in the parochial kept in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [27].

In the manuscript of Berlin we found some missing words later added, such as ʿl-lah (4:139) at line 3, fol. 1a; ʿl-lah (4:175) at line 7, fol. 2a; al-kitāb fi ʿṣāma yā wāla al-yathūr (5:60) at lines 6–7, fol. 2b; ṣaʿīla al-lahā (5:84) at line 13, fol. 3b; allāhu (1:7) [8] (5:49) at line 18, fol. 5b; ni-sūh yuṣurīn (6:62) at line 12, fol. 6a[29].

In the same manuscript we come across some letters rubbed out or added: in yā-r-rabū (4:144), fol. 1a, l. 1) the ‘alif was rubbed out; in ʿl-lah (5:5), fol. 2b, l. 1) the alif was erased; in w-ṣūrā-r-ṣūr (5:8), fol. 3a, l. 9–10) the first waw and the second one were rubbed out and the word was corrected in the standard text ṣūrūhū; in sīrāj-āt (5:16), fol. 3b, l. 13) the ya‘ to spell the long ā[30] was later erased; in al-ṣūrā-ṣūr (5:31), fol. 4b, l. 5) the alif was later added; in gawād (5:33), fol. 4b, l. 10) the final waw-‘alif was added; in maghālāt (5:64, fol. 6a, l. 9) the final lām and tā‘ marbūṭa were later corrected; in yā-r-rabū (5:72), fol. 7a, l. 10) the first ya‘ was later added; in wa-rābī (5:72), fol. 7a, l. 11) the waw was rubbed out and the word was corrected as in the standard text rābī; in yuṣūl (5:73), fol. 7a, l. 14) the alif al-naṣūḥa was rubbed out and a nun was added, so the word was corrected as in the standard text yuṣūl.

It is possible to put forward the hypothesis about the corrections in A. Perg. 2 by a series of evidences as follows: the remains of the supposed “ḥadith Script” are only on the right margin of the page, namely at line 3 we can read ʿl-lah al-qadd, at line 4, n. 24, at line 6 ‘n-, ‘s-, at line 8 ‘l-, at line 9 .

At line 3 fābāghā as 28:76 would suggest that the scriptio inferior coincides with the scriptio superior of hand B. Other traces, meaningless remains of old words, are difficult to read. Consequently, only on the basis of fābāghā and of the sameness between the two handwritings we can suppose that the text of the earlier script on the flesh side is the continuation of the text on the hair side, i.e., 28:61—75.

In the following paragraphs we try to cast new light on some details of the handwriting B.

At line 2, the parchment is damaged before ʿalāykhīn, just next to fābāghā.

At line 4, the scribe wrote ḫāṣa instead of the Vulgate nāṣūhā (28:77). In the margin we can observe sīr, exactly the correction of the scribe.
the corrections in the right margin and finally rewrote the same text correctly on the second half of the page (Table 2).

Before closing our discussion about manuscript corrections, it is relevant to draw your attention also to another detail of our parchment corrections: corrections of character shape. The shape and moreover its corrections may provide us with information about the manuscript. At line 8 on the flesh side the shape of 'ayn in 'an annāqabihān was later corrected, as the shape written the first time looks like Syriac writing and the shape added above the main line is the more rounded form preponderant in Arabic (fig. 3) [31]. At the same line, the accented 'alif of annāqabihān was amended with an added ventricle (fig. 3). The former shape is similar to the half-circle of the dalāl in Syriac writing, without the vertical stroke [32]. The corrected types — in a dark ink, different from the one used by hand A — and the characteristic shape of the 'alif [33], such as the one at line 5 in the word kamāt (fig. 4) or at line 9 in the word al-danāyī (fig. 5), revealed the shape of the Syriac writing.

The hypothesis of Syriac origin [34] for the written transmission of texts. In fact the Arabs hired non-Muslim copyists from Syria to write the Qur'ān, because of their great technical experience [35]. This overlap seems to be perfectly emphasized in parchment A.Perg. 2, which I suppose to be a writing exercise [36] by two scribes, an experienced one and an unpractised one, the writing of the latter reveals the likelihood of its Syriac origin [37]. As regards this Syriac origin, it would seem to be interesting a little detail that I have noticed in the photograph of a parchment kept in the Library of the University of Chicago [38]. On the recto, at line 12, the rāʾ in ēība (16; 102) is written with two diacritical points (fig. 6), one above the line and the other below, revealing a confusion between the opposition dalāl (with a diacritical point below) vs. rāʾ (with a diacritical point above) in the Syriac writing and the opposition rāʾ vs. zāʾ (with a diacritical above) in the Arabic writing.

A great philologist said that regarding the most syllable and enigmatic passage in Virgil we have to write no more, unless a small and simple suggestion clears up a mystery. It is unlikely to say that the parchment A.Perg.2 is famous and debated, but surely a little shift in the point of view may give an answer to some open questions.

Addenda

Table 2

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<th>Hair side</th>
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<td>Hand A</td>
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<td>TIME I</td>
<td>TIME I</td>
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<tr>
<td>28:75—9</td>
<td>28:75—9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hand A</td>
<td>Hand A</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIME III</td>
<td>TIME III</td>
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<td>28:75—7(79)</td>
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Table 1

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<td>TIME I</td>
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<td>28:75—9</td>
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<td>Hand A</td>
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<td>TIME II</td>
<td>TIME III</td>
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<td>28:75—7(79)</td>
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Notes

1. I am very grateful to the Director of the Papyrologische, Hermann Harrauer, who let me study the parchment in Vienna with warm hospitality and great kindness. I am grateful to Dr. Harald Fuchsauer for giving me the permission to insert some photos of details of the parchment. A.Perg. 2. The facsimile of the parchment will be published in the volume VI of Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique, see p. 23 and 24.


3. With regard to what H. Loubenstein wrote in her Catalogue, I would like to add the contents of the vertical side strip of the parchment. Remaining on the basis of the remains of the damaged page on flesh side (lines 1—9, 11, 14—7), it would seem to be conjectured as follows: the text, 26:115—45, namely the end of aya 116 and the beginning of aya 117 at line 2: [al-maṣṣaṣtān] 'allātī; part of aya 118 at line 3: maʾū nān [al-mmān]; part of aya 120 at line 4: [nāḍēh] da lī; aya 122 at line 5: rabba; the end of aya 126 at line 7: 'uw[ū]-f[ī]n[ī]; the end of aya 127 at line 8: [lā]-da lī[nū]; aya 129 at line 9: lā a[l]-lā[n]; aya 133 at line 11: al-ʿa[n]-mīn; aya 139 at line 14: fa-ṣāli[ṣath;] the beginning of aya 140 at line 15: [lā]tūna rabba; aya 142 at line 16: li-lā-[ū]-m; the end of aya 144 at line 17: [lā]lah wa-ṣā[ḥ]ībīn. The remains of the strip of parchment on the hair side are difficult to read and the only possible conjecture is at line 5: mān followed by an aya divider and -ay, as in the end of aya 177 (26) and the beginning of aya 178.

We can suppose that the parchment was a bifolium, part of an specimens (see: F. Deroche, Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe (Paris 2000), pp. 71—91), containing between 26:115—28:75, assuming that the order of the sūras was the same as the standard text.

4. A.Perg.2 is considered an example of palimpsest due to the need to correct one's own mistakes, see Deroche, "Les emplets du parchemin dans les manuscrits islamiques. Quelques remarques liminaires", The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts, ed. by F. Dutton (London 1995), pp. 17—47 and idem, Manuel de codicologie, pp. 49—50.

5. "Des les diction de l'islam, des ces manuscrits réalisés par plusieurs copistes ne manquent pas. Les fragments de deux très anciens copies de la deuxième moitié du VIIe siècle, Paris, BNF arabe 382a et 38a", DaM Iz 1:25, 1/2, on copied the premier par trois moins, le second par deux" (ibid., pp. 211—2).

The copyists could share the work: see R. Ravas, "The Qurʾān and its world. VI. Emergence of the canon: the struggles for uniformity", Manuscripta Orientalia, IV/1 (1998), pp. 24 ("the surviving fragment reveals the hands of two copyists — handwriting A and B — who shared the work evenly. The first copied the first half of the text, the other — the second"). Otherwise the copyists could alternate in their work: see manuscript BNF arabe 382a, Deroche, Catalogue des manuscrits arabs du Musée de l'Arménie, Paris, 1986, pp. 51—60.


See the analysis of the orthography in A. Jeffrey and I. Meekosh, "The orthography of the manuscripts of the Qurʾān codex", Journal of the American Oriental Society, LXIII/3 (1942), pp. 175—95 and the frequent remarks such as "and in any case would be a scribal error without textual significance" (p. 183), or "this is probably merely a scribal error, if not due to a mistake on a paper patch in the folio" (Ibid.) or "there is no known variant here, so this possibly is to be taken as a mistake" (p. 184) and also "it must be merely a scribal error" (p. 185) and "the words are omitted by the scribe, obviously by error, thinking that he had already written them" (Ibid.)

8. As to what concerns corrections due to different variants of Qurʾān, we can find many in Sam Fogg's palimpsest (Catalogue 27, Islamic Calligraphy, London 2003, pp. 6—11), see my lecture "Pro-ottoman variants in manuscripts", 25th Deutscher Orientalistentag, "Barrien-Passagen", 20—24 September 2004 (Halle, forthcoming) and my contribution in Die dunklen Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam, ed. by K. H. Ohlig and G. R. Puit (forthcoming). The palimpsest will be published in Sources of the transmission manuscrite du texte coranique, VI.

9. C. J. Robin, La réforme de l'écriture arabe, à l'époque du califat médiéval (forthcoming). Furthermore, an example of this kind of corrections is in the manuscript kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, Codex 318a, see Y. Dutton, "An Early Majhaf' According to the Reading of Ibn 'Abd illah", Journal of Qurʾānic Studies, III/1 (2001), pp. 72—4.
10. See also, as to what concerns the orthography of early Arabic papyri and paper (and inscription), some examples of scribal lapses, diacritics, hypoglyphs, etc. in S. Hopkins, Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic. Based upon Papyri Datable to before A.H. 1/130 (Oxford, 1964), pp. 69—1.


13. The intriguing story of this manuscript (F 20) that was bought by I. Iu. Kirschevskij is narrated by E. Rezvan, The Qurʾān of Ibn Abi ʿAmir (1904), pp. 17—8 and idem, "The Qurʾān and its world. VI. Emergence of the canon," p. 23.


16. Ibid., p. 315.


18. Msgr.fol. 4313 (f. 1—7), see W. Alhwarth, Die Handschriften-vereinigung der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin, Vorzeichnungen der Arabischen Handschriften, (Berlin, 1887), pp. 116—1; R. Selimbah, "Arabische Handschriften, materialien zur arabischen literaturgeschichte," in (Wiesbaden, 1976). I am grateful to Dr. Hertmat-Ottow Feiselt for giving me the permission to insert some photos of this manuscript. It will be published in a future fragment of the manuscript manuscript of the text coranique, Vol. III. Msgr.fol. 4313 (f. 1—7) is part of the same codex as the facsimile, plate 44, in B. Moritz, Arabische Paläographie. A collection of Arabic Texts from the First Century of the Hijra till the Year 1000 (Cairo, 1965).

19. It is not so unusual to come across the same word written in two different ways in the same page, see Al-Azami, op. cit., p. 132.

20. As regards forms of verba mediae informae, see Hopkin, op. cit., p. 83 and the interesting remark to long and short forms that may even occur together in the same text.

21. At line 7, an alf was added and we can see the remains of the former ligature of alf with alif. At line 13 there are the signs of the form alf.

22. The manuscripts present различные отографie which paraètre erratique and contradictions" because of "Embarass of the scribes:" see Robin, op. cit.

23. Sources of the transmission manuscrit de texte coranique, V1, containing fragments of manuscripts scattered among various libraries.

24. The aim of the Amari Project is to publish the facsimiles of all the earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾānic text, and to put them at every scholar’s disposal. The first volume of the Sources of the transmission manuscrit de texte coranique is “Les manuscrits de style folkl,” Le manuscrit arabe 326(e) de la Bibliothèque nationale de France” (Leu, 1998) and the second one is “Les manuscrits de style liturgique,” Le manuscrit arabe 21655 (f. 1 à 61) de la Bibliothèque de la Legio (Leu, 2001). See: Noja, “Note euristiche su manoscritti coranici del Medioevo,” Rendiconti dell’Istituto Lombardo, Accademia di Scienze e Lettere, CXXXVII/1 (2004), pp. 33—38 and Déroche, “Les manuscrits du Coran en caractères hégizi. Position du problème et éléments préliminaires pour une enquête,” Quaternes (1996).

25. See the Catalogue, G. Abbott, The Ross of the North Arabic Script and its Kur’anic Development, with a Full Description of the Kor’An Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute (Chicago, 1939), pp. 60 and plates VIII—XII.

26. The standard text is qur’ani, without the who. The tradition does not report the different spelling: see Ab al-ʾĀlim Muhammad al-Sharḥ, al-Qurʾān (Arab text: 1402—519852—5) (see the review in Nosedah, “AIQON,” LVIII/1—2, (1998), pp. 289—91) N. Abbot noted the difference and reported to have found no concordant on this, but she did not mention the former spelling sh-k and the added alf.

27. Vat.Az.1685.) See the Catalogue, G. Levi Della Vida, Frammenti coranici in caritate cufico, nella Biblioteca Vaticana (Città del Vaticano, 1947), pp. 1—2 and plate I. The page following this one is in the Collection of New Foundation, see F. Déroche, The "Abûl-Thâbit Tradition: Qurʾān" of the 6th to the 10th centuries AD (The N. D. Khalili collection of Islamic art, by Julian Raby, 1) (London, 1992), p. 32 and plate I. Both fragments will be published in Sources de la transmission manuscrit de texte coranique, V1.

28. We can presume that the former text was māʿanayalay-lā, and later the word alf was added. Two words were re-written in the space of one word.

29. We have to note that the folio marked as f. 6a is not the verso, but the recto.

30. The long ā may be written with yāʾ in final position (alf maqṣūra), but in middle position: see R. Blachère, Introduction au Coran (Paris, 1947), p. 91. Robin, op. cit.; see the fragment sold at Bonhams in 2000 (Fockel, "Pho-othematic variants in manuscripts"); the facsimile of the parchment will be published in Sources de la transmission manuscrit de texte coranique, V1 and many other examples in the same manuscript of Berlin. C. J. Robin says that "d’un point de vue chronologique, toutes les graphies avec α seem to me in a most remendant incontestable à la période où l’āf n’était pas encore utilisé, c’est-à-dire avant 49°.”

31. I would like to stress the interesting observation about the use of the alf in G. R. Puin, "Observations on early Qurʾān," p. 109: “On the other hand, does κ-ι-δ-ια-t-l-a-diath imply that the second letter Yūd should not be pronounced at all?”

My conjecture is that the yāʾ was spell the long ā, but in middle position or in final position, is due to the influence of the astern writing, where for the astern text was also derived from the Pahlavi script, where this sign was used for ʾā at all the end of word (already in the biblical sabracoções inscription). However, as early as in Persian Middle Inscriptions from the third century AD, ʾā was used to represent the final syllable of foreign names (K. Hoffmann, "Aravisten Language I. The Astern Script," Encyclopædia Iranica, pp. 47—51). About the long ā in the astern writing, see Noseda, "Zum lyricum zu Pahlavi: the contribution of the Sassanid Iran to the beginning of the Arabic writing," Die dunkeln Anliegen, Neur Forschungen, ed. by K. R. Dölling and G. R. Puin.

I l l u s t r a t i o n s

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Fig. 6. Codex.14.549b. Leiden University Library, Legatum Wernessis, n. 1. 12.
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