An important aspect of Qur’anic studies concerns the variant readings, the so-called qirāʾāt. It is a general assumption that the variant readings survived only [1] in the works of Muslim exegetes and philologers, in the form of recorded quotations. This opinion was acceptable at the beginning of the last century, when Arthur Jeffery complained about the lack of any direct manuscript evidence of qirāʾāt [2]. Nowadays, the published facsimiles of manuscripts, the easy availability of microfilms and digital images [3], ever increasing access to and sharing of information, together with new findings in the last few years, all call for a comparative study of the text of the oldest Qur’anic manuscripts, the so-called bāji-m or māʾil manuscripts [4], dating back to the beginning of Islam. The purpose of this comparative analysis should be to focus on investigation of variant readings (i.e. manuscript evidences) [5].

Despite the growing interest in the above-mentioned fragments, the opinion that the variant readings are only quotations is still common.

On the occasion of my attending the conference “Figures de Moïse. Approches textuelles et iconographiques”, I presented a poster [6]. The issue which the poster covered was a detailed analysis of the tradition of Musa, narrated in sûra “Ta-Ha” (20:5–98) [7], as transmitted in the oldest manuscripts.

My analysis focused on the variant readings found in the Qur’anic manuscripts of the Musa story (20:5–98) in relation to the standard text. We have taken into account five Qur’anic fragments [9] which I had the chance of analysing, that is the MSS from British Library, Or. 2165 (BL2165) [10]; Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, Ma VI 165 (UBT165) [11] (fig. 2); Dār al-Makhzūm, 01-28.1 (DaM28) [12]; Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 7193 [13] and St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, E20 [14]. Only the first three of the above list contain the full text of sûra “Ta-Ha”.

In the above-mentioned parchments there were 100 variant readings of the Qur’anic text:

- eight of them concern the orthography of humaza;
- ten are variations of the text (by means of adding or omission or replacing a word with another one);
- eight-two can be according to the writing of the long vowel ā (scriptio plena, scriptio defectiva or with ŏ in medial position). All of those eighty-two variants, however, do not make up an orthographic feature, as will be considered below.

We could verify several forms of variation (af-arjūf fi al-khālif), which could be grouped, for example, according to the framework of one of the Muslim exegetes [15] as follows (based on MS UBT165):

1. The variation of nouns in their singular, dual and plural forms, such as [16]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Af</th>
<th>MS Fragment</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>كتاب</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15b</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>كتاب</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16b</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>كتاب</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>17a</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The variation of verbs in their conjugation and form, such as:
The Variants of the MSS Mentioned by the Muslim Tradition. The Indirect Tradition

First of all, I have to stress that most of the variants are just orthographic variants.

In my analysis I could find a series of variant readings in the manuscripts, which have been quoted as qiṣṣa ʿār by Muslim exegetes or philologists as well. In the fragments eight variants out of a hundred have been handed down in the Muslim tradition, that is, by indirect tradition, namely:

The Qiraʾ ʿār Mentioned by Commentaries and Verified in Fragmentary Manuscripts [34]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Qurʾanic Word</th>
<th>Variant Reading of MSS</th>
<th>MS Call No.</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Abū ʿAmr</td>
<td>UBT'165 15a 12</td>
<td>Abū ʿAmr</td>
<td>UBT'165 15a 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>DaMz78 5b 7a</td>
<td>DaMz78 5b 7a</td>
<td>DaMz78 5b 7a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>DaMz7up 8a 9</td>
<td>DaMz7up 8a 9</td>
<td>DaMz7up 8a 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>BL'265 50a 23</td>
<td>BL'265 50a 23</td>
<td>BL'265 50a 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Hiṣba</td>
<td>Hiṣba</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>DaMz7 50b 11</td>
<td>DaMz7 50b 11</td>
<td>DaMz7 50b 11</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>DaMz7up 9a 5</td>
<td>DaMz7up 9a 5</td>
<td>DaMz7up 9a 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>BL'265 52a 3</td>
<td>BL'265 52a 3</td>
<td>BL'265 52a 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>DaMz7up 9a 14</td>
<td>DaMz7up 9a 14</td>
<td>DaMz7up 9a 14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>BL'265 52b 5</td>
<td>BL'265 52b 5</td>
<td>BL'265 52b 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>BL'265 52b 5</td>
<td>BL'265 52b 5</td>
<td>BL'265 52b 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td>Abū Ḥaywa, Abūn, Ibn Ṣaḥḥāb, imām al-Shāfiʿī</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in the earlier issue of Manuscripta Orientalia [31] I have already had occasion to stress this particular topic with the reference to another fragment, I focus my study on amendments.

In the analysed fragments, the corrections mostly concern alif, which has been added or erased by copyists without regularity [32].

Addition to the usual added alif, I would like to underline the relevance of the word variation by means of alif or yāʾ, as in the name of the holy valley (20:12) or in the verbal form bāṭina. The latter has been amended by means of a different reading in the manuscript of Smal (DaMz7up, fol. 9a, line 5) in conformity with the standard text. In the same manuscript (fol. 8a, line 11) we come across a yāʾ erased and replaced by alif (bāṭina) in 8a, line 11, to standardize the word in all manuscripts [33].

The amendments of lapsus calami and variables could indicate a purpose of standardisation in achieving absolute uniformity. The number of the occurrences of a mistake/variation substantiates the definition and identification of a reading lexicon.

Consequently it is necessary to take into consideration another topic in the analysis: the variations quoted by the tradition.

The variant of the word māṣāt stands out from the others. In as many as three manuscripts [36] the name of the holy valley in the long story of Mūsā [37] is recorded as māṣāt, while only the most recent manuscript (DaMz7up, fol. 50a, line 8) [38] bears the standardised word māṣāt in all the fragments as well. In two fragments, Tübingen [39] (fig. 5), and DaMz7up, the different reading has been amended, and in fact it is still easy to read the erased alif.

In his eleven-volume work Mu'amal al-qiraʾāt [40], Abū al-Latif al-Khāqānī collected all the quotations of the Muslim tradition of the variant reading māṣāt, on the authority of the qiraʾī of ʿIbād b. Ṭabarqānī (d. 149/766) [41] and DaMz7up (d. 105/723) or 106/724. The qiraʾī is reported in the following sources:

- ʿIbād al-qiraʾāt wa-l-sabwa wa-l-lāhā-ha wa-l-husayn b. Ahmad b. Khalīlāwān (d. 603/1207) [42];
- al-Muhāmmad al-wazīr fi tafsīr al-kīthāb al-qiraʾāt by Abū al-Qasim b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Muqaddas b. Ṭabari (d. 540/1147) [43];
- al-Bāḥr al-muḥāfiz by Abū Ḥayyān al-Muqaddas b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Muqaddas b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Muqaddas (d. 745/1344) [44];
- al-Dār al-maṣnaʿ fi līm al-kīthāb al-maṣnaʿ by al-Sāmīrī al-Ḥalabī (d. 756/1355) [45].

On the other hand, Arthur Jeffery, in his work "Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān. The Old Codices" [46] suggested the variant māṣāt following the qiraʾī of Ibn al-Maʿālim (d. 105/723-4), stating "though some he said read "māṣāt" as al-Ḥasan and al-Ṭalabī ʿalām". Up to now we had no direct evidence regarding the qiraʾī of māṣāt. The sources (e. g. mudsar) quoting the above-mentioned reading are attributed to scholars, grammarians, philologists and exegetes who lived between the sixth and the eighth centuries of hijra, while the "readers" (e. g. qiraʾī) lived between the first and second centuries of hijra. Furthermore, we have to add to the above chronological issues the verified reading māṣāt in the fragments dating back to the beginning of Islam (first and second century of hijra) [47].

With reference to the words of Ibn Mujīlī in his work "Kīthāb al-sabwa al-qiraʾāt", we could consider a qiraʾī, attested by parchment leaves, as a sign of comprehension and comparison in the understanding of the story of Mūsā?
Concluding Remarks

People disagreed on the reading of *qirā‘a‘* as well as they disagreed on regulations. The vestiges of the variants have been reported on the authority of the Companions and the Followers, for the comprehension and the compassion of the Muslims.

Ibn Mujīrīt (245—324 / 859—936) [48]

The manuscripts’ evidence are often the vestiges of a compilation and redaction of the written form of the revelation, above all with reference to the orthography of the Arabic writing and its reform [49]. Most of the variants have little effect on the meaning of the words; they “do not seem to have any relevance, neither for religious discussions, nor for legal ones” [50].

The next question is: can we take into account a variant recorded by direct tradition (i.e. manuscript evidence) in order to decide on either of the comments provided by the Muslim exegetes and philologists?

An interesting example is the disputed meaning of the word *tawwā*, term *non elucidé* and *enigmatique* [51], normally considered as simply being a proper name of the holy valley (20:12).

Moses! I am your Lord. Take off your shoes: you are in the sacred valley of Tawk.

This enigmatic term has been included by Bellamy among his emendations, in order to explain one of the most curious textual problems in the Qur’ān [52].

In their commentaries Muslim exegetes often suggested several explanations for the word *tawwā* [53].

How could we interpret the reading traced on parchments? It would be absurd to explain the found variant “*tawwā‘*” as a scribal error owing to a complete lack of a standard rule in the orthography of Arabic writing. It is inconceivable that we should justify the three occurrences [54] as a *lapsus colami* resulting from carelessness.

In his Qur’ānic commentary “al-Durr al-ma‘ṣūn fī ‘ilm al-khitāb al-ma‘ṣūn”, al-Samarīn al-Ḥalabī [55] interpreted the reading *tuy‘*, as meaning *‘awā‘il*. He explained it, i.e. “Go!”:

‘...wa‘rā ‘ayn wa‘rā mā sīsī *al-tawwā‘* al-‘awā‘il.*

Thus we can read 20:12:

Moses! I am your Lord. Take off your shoes: you are in the sacred valley, traversing it / traverse it!

The same meaning is reported in the commentary of Ṭabari [56], in his attempt to systemize the different opinions regarding the word *tawwā*:

*...wa‘l-layli ulla‘rūm bi-n-nādī al-mu‘ā‘īsī wa‘l-layli abnā‘ār bi-n-nādī al-mu‘ā‘īsī,*

and


Thus, I would like to stress a point which deserves further attention: the variant reading “*tawwā‘*” found in the manuscripts confirm the reading on the authority of ‘Īsā b. ‘Umar and Daḥbūlī and elucidate an obscure word in the story of Mūsā.

Nevertheless the rigour of logic would suggest pointing out a difference. The vestige of the word “*tawwā‘*” only explains that at the time of the so-called *ḥijārī* or *mā‘l* transcriptions (i.e. first to second centuries of the hijrah) the accepted reading was the *qirā‘a‘* handed down on the authority of ‘Īsā b. ‘Umar and Daḥbūlī.

The reading — either quoted *qirā‘a‘* or manuscript evidence — cannot explain the reason why the word *tawwā* became obscure and above all the reason why the verbal form “*traverse it!*” “traversing it” became a proper name, i.e. the name of the holy valley [58].

The puzzle of *tawwā* lies precisely in this ambiguity.

Finally, I would like to thank warmly the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen with all its team for their kindness and the authorisation to publish some images of the manuscript Ma VI 165.

Notes


3. I would like to thank warmly the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen with all its team for their kindness and the authorisation to publish some images of the manuscript Ma VI 165.

47. As regards the manuscript dating, see: Derecho, Catalogue, pp. 59–1. Furthermore see: Khan, Arabic Papyri, pp. 27–39 regarding the resembling features of the script of the so called ḥijār manuscripts and the script of the papyri dating back to the first centuries of hijra.
49. See: Robin, op. cit., pp. 319–64, as regards the reform of the Arabic orthography.
51. In her work about the deciphered Qurʾān, Jacqueline Chabbi has described the term as “non elucidé” (see: J. Chabbi, Le Coran déchiffré. Figures bibliques en Arabe (Paris, 2008), pp. 240–2).
53. It has described “The Search for Twali” delivered at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Berlin, March 2004) Andrew Rippin has in view detailed all the traditional Muslim exegesis, such as the exegetical approach of Qurṭub, Tahtâ, Qâshâni and Fakhâr al-Dîn al-Râzî. The article in the given literature is forthcoming: “The search for Twali: observations on exegetical methodology past and present”.
54. Precisely the manuscripts British Library Or. 2165 (fol. 58b, line 23), Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen Ms VI 163 (fol. 15a, line 15) and Dîr al-Mukhtârî 05.27.7. (scriptio superior (fol. 8a, line 9).
58. On this point I would like to underline the study of Bellamy. The scholar has supposed that wâlî could be a “translation of the exegetical definition of Gilgâl” (Bellamy, “TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE KorAN”, pp. 2–3). Actually the conjectured palaeogram could explain why the word wâlî became obscure and unaccountable. It would be interesting to read the article that my master had written before his tragic death (as far as I know the article is being printed: “Is the enigmatic name of the valley of Twali (XX, 12) a copy of Horev?!”). I would like to stress — according to Bellamy — that “neither Mt. Horeb nor Gilgâl appears in the Koran”, see ibid., p. 3.
59. See: Versteegh, op. cit., pp. 79–84.

**Illustrations**

Fig. 1. The Qurʾān. Parchment, 19.5–15.3 cm, 77 folios. 5th century (?). Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen, Mag V 165, folio 15a. Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen.

Fig. 2. The same MS, folios 14b–15a. Depicted here is the end of 19th sūra “Maryam” and the beginning of 20th sūra “Tb-Hîb”. On folio 15a (line 15) there is the word wâlî. Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen.

Fig. 3. The same MS, folio 15a, line 15. Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen.

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Front cover:
Plate 1. Sacrifice at a home altar of ancestors before a wedding ceremony. Watercolour on pith, 33 × 21 cm, China, 19th century. MAE RAS, No. 311-1-12 (76). Photo by S. Shapiro. Courtesy of the Museum.

Back cover:
years of exile in the ice and dirty states of New England, the intellectual frigidity and provincialism, the horrible weather and nocturnal light, the evil personal isolation gradually tore apart what was left of my life, yearly trips to St. Petersburg became my only link to authentic culture and human warmth. I stayed often at Karen's apartment on Orbell Street, and as he inclined on his chaise longue we had long and intricate conversations about Russian and Armenian literature and politics. Roundabout midnight Karen would rouce me from my reading: James Jan, K'entres? “Dear James, will you have supper?” and we'd sit down in the tiny kitchen for a snack and a glass of vodka. Karen was thin as a rail. I write these lines in a bed in Jerusalem, Israel, where I am recovering very slowly from a terrible motorcycle crash. Gradually I am restoring the muscles of my shattered body but when the poor thing was first released from its casts and bandages and stared in horror at its matchstick proportions it reminded me of Karen's skeletal limbs. He used to look up from his meals and tell me he had the zapasniy appetit blozhnik, "the reserve appetite of a Leningrad blockade survivor".

Karen was not just a warm friend, not just a captivating scholar, not just a fascinating Russian Armenian intellectual. He was also the center of a large circle of friends that began in Petersburg and radiated outward across the planet. His goodness warmed more people than he knew. That warm heart has ceased to beat here on earth, and this is a colder place for it. Karen believed always in the essential affinities of Jews and Armenians. After all, he grew up in the Soviet Union, not the Middle East. He was entirely free of the anti-Semitic, hyper-nationalist virus that has disfigured Armenian life and scholarship in recent years; and despite his vulnerable stature and imposing credentials, the yellow press in Erivan attacked him. His friendship with foreigners was a mark against him. "Jannes", he used to tell me, "Our enemies have everything on their side... except the truth". Karen visited Israel and liked this country. In the last couple of years he was far too weak to travel; so my hope of his visiting the home here I hope to have will be one more item for the days of the coming of the Messiah, I guess.

Dear Karen, may the earth, as Russians say, rest as lightly as a feather over your earthly remains. And for all of us left behind, slobyan govor — "slain by grief" — God grant us strength to live out our lives in the light of his bright memory and he granted the consolations of being reunited with his enfranchised soul in the regions of the truth beyond space and time.

Barukh Dayyan ha'Emet. Blessed is the one true Judge.

James Russell

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Notes to Contributors

Manuscripts must be written in English.
Manuscripts must be clearly typewritten with numbered pages, double linespacing and wide margins throughout. The title should be as brief and informative as possible. The institute at which the work has been done should be indicated at the head of each paper. Authors are requested to include their e-mail addresses.

Submissions

Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Efim A. Reznov, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, 3 Universitetskaya nab., 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia, e-mail: reznov@kunstkamera.ru.