

TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS:
DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

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RELEVANCE OF THE OLDEST QUR'ĀNIC MANUSCRIPTS
FOR THE READINGS MENTIONED BY COMMENTARIES.
A NOTE ON SŪRA “ṬĀ-HĀ”

An important aspect of Qur'ānic studies concerns the variant readings, the so-called *qirā'āt*.

It is a general assumption that the variant readings survived only [1] in the works of Muslim exegetes and philologists, 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 *qirā'āt* [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'ānic

manuscripts, the so-called *ḥijāzī* or *mā'il* 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 Mūsa, narrated in *sūra* “Ṭā-Hā” (20:9—98) [7], as transmitted in the oldest manuscripts.

“Has the Story of Mūsa Come to You?” [8] (fig. 1)

The Variant Readings of the Story of Mūsa in Qur'ānic Manuscripts. The Direct Tradition

My analysis focused on the variant readings found in the Qur'ānic manuscripts of the Mūsa story (20:9—98) in relation to the standard text. We have taken into account five Qur'ānic 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-Makḥṭūṭāt, 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 *sūra* “Ṭā-Hā”.

In the above-mentioned parchments there were 100 variant readings of the Qur'ānic text:

- eight of them concern the orthography of *hamza*;
- ten are variations of the text (by means of adding or omission or replacing a word with another one);
- eighty-two can be explained by the writing of the long vowel *ā* (*scriptio plena*, *scriptio defectiva* or with *yā'* 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 (*al-awjuh fī al-ikhṭilāf*), 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]:

Word	Āya	MS Fragment	Folio	Line
جَنَاحِكَ	22		15b	6 [17]
حِبَالُهُمْ	66		16b	14 [18]
يَعْبَادِي	77		17a	14 [19]

2. The variation of verbs in their conjugation and form, such as: