ESF SCH EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

Corpus Coranicum
Exploring the Textual Beginnings of the Qur'an

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Berlin, Germany, 6-9 November 2005

Convened by:
Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Marx

Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik, Freie Universität Berlin

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1. Executive Summary

The convenors invited more than twenty outstanding specialists on the textual history of the Qur'an and three specialists on informational technology. Since the workshop had two focuses, (1) the textual history of the Qur'an, both in manuscript sources and in the sources of Muslim tradition and (2) information technology as a tool for the description and documentation of this material, beside a number of leading specialists in the field of the study of the early text, three specialist from the Netherlands in the field of information technology (specialized in computer processing of Arabic) participated. Speakers were invited from a number of European countries, as well as from Canada and the United States. Since the topic touches a core issue of Islamic studies, the convenors also invited Muslim scholars from the Middle East (Iran, Israel/Palestine, and Tunisia) leading in the field of Qur'anic studies. Since it is the convenors' conviction that studies in the field should also include Muslim researches, a number of Muslim scholars from Europe, America, and the Middle East were invited. It was the aim of the workshop to explore the question how to approach the question of the textual history of the Qur'an. This question includes first the full scope of material that can be seen as the object of study. Since the text of the Qur'an is accessible in its earliest stages through two types of source materials, on one hand extant manuscripts in European and Middle Eastern Archives, on the other, sources from within the Muslim scholarly tradition about textual variants (so called *qira'at*), both strands of transmission were discussed in the first two sections of the workshop. Because of the lack of complete studies in both fields, it was the task of each section to try to give a rough sketch about extant and accessible material and the ongoing research in the respective field.

Taking both wings or source corpora together, the question emerges in which way relevant material is to be described by using modern information technology, a question that was

discussed in section (3) "Information Technology and Qur'anic Studies". In this section a model to deal with the most crucial issues of textual history of the Qur'an was presented by three specialists from the Netherlands. Since the topic of the workshop concerned the question of historicity of the Qur'an, in the last section (4) "The Qur'anic Text and the Critical Method" the question of critical studies of the Qur'an was discussed. Since there is to date no critical edition or documentation of the Qur'an, the topics of this section included both critical traditions and scholarship on the Qur'an (in Muslim and Non-Muslim) scholarship, and the question about comparing the biblical model for critical studies to approaches concerning the Qur'an.

Chronological order of the presentations given at the workshop

Papers were delivered according to the following structure of the programme: (1) Manuscripts and Archives, (2) Oral features of the text and the development of orthography, (3) Information Technology and Qur'anic Studies, (4) The Qur'anic Text and the Critical Method. In the beginning Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Marx gave a short sketch of the programmatic agendas at stake in the workshop. Looking back to the state of the arts in the field of Qur'anic Studies, especially concerning textual history, they pointed to the efforts and achievements of German scholarship of the 19th and 20th century, thus giving a perspective on the project *Corpus Coranicum* that has been developed at the Freie Universität Berlin.

In section (1) Gerd-Rüdiger Puin (Saarbrücken) offered a reflection on the representation of a manuscript from codices discovered in Yemen in the 1970s, pointing to one of the most important materials for the textual history of the Qur'an. Puin also drew attention to the need for an adequate mode of computerized description of these materials. Sergio Noja-Noseda (Lesa, Italy) gave a short presentation of the work of the Fondazione Ferni Noja-Noseda, the leading publication project for facsimile editions of old Qur'anic manuscripts. Joshua Lingel (Los Angeles) gave a paper on the work of the Australian scholar Arthur Jeffery who was in close contact with two prominent German scholars in the field of Qur'anic Studies, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl. The work of Arthur Jeffery, in the field of foreign vocabulary and oral variant readings of the Qur'an is still waiting for being completed. Michael Marx (Berlin) gave an overview about the film archive of Qur'anic manuscripts that was collected by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl in the 1920s and 1930s. The Archive, containing more than 400 films can be seen as a solid fundament for a systematic study of the Qur'an's manuscript tradition. Omar Hamdan (Tel Aviv) gave a comparison in the field of Qur'anic orthography between the Cairo edition (1924) and three

early manuscripts, thus pointing to problems of understanding the writing tradition of the Qur'an properly. He also pointed to the fact that a study of the writing system (observed in different manuscripts) is in urgent need of being compared to the variant readings (transmitted in Muslim sources). About manuscripts kept in Iranian libraries, Morteza Kariminia (Qum/Tehran) presented a survey of Qur'an manuscripts in Iran written in Kufic script, stating that to his knowledge no manuscripts in Hijazi script are observed in Iranian libraries. A visit to the manuscript department of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and a discussion with Hars Kurio (Orientabteilung) offered the scholars an insight into important Qur'anic manuscripts kept in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

In section (2) Gerd-Rüdiger Puin gave a critical reflection how to describe relevant signs and letters mentioned in the earliest manuscripts of the Qur'an. It is of crucial importance to understand the pecularities of the oldest laysers of the writing system of Qur'anic manuscripts before developing a mode of its description. Jan Just Witkam (Leiden) gave a paper and a presentation of relevant audio material. Wax rolls of the beginning of the 20th centuries like those kept in Leiden are perhaps the oldest recorded evidence of audio date for the recitation of the text available today. In his presentation he also dealt with the legal opinions of Muslim authorities about recording recitations of the text. Omar Hamdan presented in his paper an outlook on newly discovered sources for the study of variant readings (*qira'at*) and stated that a huge number of relevant manuscripts is waiting for edition. By this lack of study, the picture of the scope of variant readings in Qur'anic scholarship remains still incomplete. Ahmad Pakatchi (Tehran) drew attention to the relationship between orthographic traditions in Early Arabic. Writing (as reflected in *rasm al-mushaf*) and older scripts of the Arabian peninsula like Nabatean. The study of this relationship can explain pecularities of Qur'anic orthography, as he showed in his presentation. Yasin Dutton (Edinburgh) presented the case of different variant readings transmitted within single Qur'an codices. The coexistence of different variant readings is typical for the textual tradition of the Qur'an, and can be observed being manifested in one codex by using special indicators. Daniel Birnstiel (Regensburg) offered a new approach to the text by pointing to the need for a corpus linguistic text grammar of the Qur'an, a mode of description that could help to solve many grammatical difficulties. Naila Silini (Sousse) gave in her presentation an example how the knowledge of variant readings of the Qur'an are crucial in many cases of exegesis.

In section (3) Thomas Milo and Ruud van Tol (both Amsterdam) presented a kind of prototype of a data base, that could be able to cope with relevant features for the study of the Qur'an. They could demonstrate how in modern mainstream computer technology crucial

features and pecularities of the Arabic script are almost impossible to deal with. It became clear through their presentation that computer technology can be of great use for philological research.

In section (4) Moncef Ben Abdeljelil (London) gave a paper on critical approaches to the text of the Qur'an of the Modern period. Islam Dayeh (Berlin) focused on the traditions of Muslim scholarship for the classical period and could show that many concepts of critical (as it is labelled in Western terminology) can be attested in Muslim scholarship. Dirk Hartwig (New York/Berlin) gave an overview of Scholarship on the Qur'an within the tradition of Jewish reform (19th and early 20th century), thus pointing to an important chapter of history of sciences for Qur'anic Studies in Europe. Keith Small (London) discussed a typology of textual variants referring a comparison between variant readings in the New Testament and the Qur'an. Andrew Rippin (Victoria) and Walid Saleh (Toronto) concluded this section by a general reflection on the question: "Can the model of Biblical studies be applied on the Qur'an?" Since scholarship on the Qur'an is still very young compared to the field of Biblical studies, the question emerges, if in the case of the Qur'an the same line of research is to be chosen. As it became clear in the discussion, under some aspects, e.g. in the field of manuscripts the tools applied for both texts do indeed look very similar, for the part of the oral tradition of the Qur'an a new approach has to be developed, since the transmission history includes an oral strand of transmission that is not attested for the early history of the New Testament or the Hebrew Bible.

2. Scientific Content of the Event

During the workshop papers were delivered according to the following structure (1) Manuscripts and Archives, (2) Oral features of the text and the development of orthography, (3) Information Technology and Qur'anic Studies, (4) The Qur'anic Text and the Critical Method. Following these four steps, first through sections (1) and (2) the state of the art and relevant research tools were discussed for the relevant source material for a study of the Qur'anic text. For the manuscript tradition, a history of the Qur'anic orthography can still be described as a desideratum. For the cataloguization of the oldest extant Qur'anic manuscripts in the world, no systematic study has been undertaken until today, especially a database of old manuscripts in Islamic countries seems to be needed. Many important manuscripts on variant readings (*qira'at*) have not been published until today. In the framework of the Corpus Coranicum project, a systematic study of these manuscripts could hopefully come true. For the rich material of variant readings transmitted in Muslim tradition, many editions of

treatises of Variant-Reading-Literature are still waiting to be published. At the same time, the study of the published material points to a link between features of Arabic orthography (e.g. ambiguity of its letters) and the scope of variant readings. Since to our knowledge today, both strands of textual tradition (oral and scriptural) can be attested for the earliest times, both lines of textual knowledge have to be documented. It seems likely that through the early centuries an interaction between written and oral tradition took place, at least some features and patterns of variant readings of the text are explainable by this kind of interaction, i.e. by the interaction between writing ambiguities and the effort undertaken by the scholar reading and reciting the text. Concerning information technology, it was a clear result of section (3) that a systematic study of the textual history does require information technology. Since the discussion in this field is still in the beginning, however there was no consensus for the proposal given during the workshop. It became also clear, that mainstream computer technology on the market is still in need for a lot of adjustments, before being capable with modes needed for an adequate documentation of the textual history of the Qur'an. For a critical approach in the field of Qur'anic Studies concerning the topic of textual history, attitudes in this field of research have to be taken into account. It became clear that a notion of critical study (beside of Western research of the last two centuries) can also be observed in Muslim tradition where generations of scholars dealt with textual variants, without necessarily using terminology of Western scholars (like in Biblical studies).

3. Assessment of the results and contribution to future research

For the results of the workshop three points are to be mentioned:

1) The textual history of the Qur'an can be approached scientifically by referring to material and sources presented and discussed during the workshop. For a systematic approach the particular pattern of transmission referring to oral and written sources has to be taken into account. The participants offered a fascinating overview of relevant material. The papers of the workshop are collected and will be published in a volume to appear in 2009: A. Avdovic, M. Marx, A. Neuwirth (eds.): *Ink and Gold – the Qur'an in its Textual Beginnings and Esthetic Receptions*.

2) Computer technology offers a reliable tool to describe the relevant linguistic data. Many needed features to describe and analyze Arabic and Manuscript-Arabic as it is observed in old codices of the Qur'an, are not available in main stream computer technology today. The database model presented during the workshop triggered important discussions for the question which approach should be chosen for the Berlin

group. [For the moment, in the framework of the Corpus Coranicum project at the Academy of Sciences, due to many reasons, a Unicode based research mode using SQL-database structures was chosen that can be fed by modified MS-Office applications.]

3) The workshop showed that there is a community of scholars that supports the approach for a study of the Qur'an chosen by the Berlin group. In the framework of the Corpus Coranicum project at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (established as a branch of the Academy), issues of the workshop were transferred into in institutionalized long term research project. In this context, it is important to mention that the workshop allowed to cross check so called Western approaches with approaches of Muslim tradition. According to the convenors' point of view (that was shared by most of the participants) research of the Qur'an should always include Muslim scholarship.

4. Final Programme

Monday 7 November 2005

9:30 Welcome of Etan Kohlberg (Jerusalem) member of the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

10:00 Angelika Neuwirth / Michael Marx: "The Berlin project Corpus Coranicum"

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

Section 1: Manuscripts and Archives

Chair: Andrew Rippin, Victoria

11:00 Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Saarbrücken: "Representing an early Sanaani manuscript (ms. 01-27.1) by using available computer technology"

11:30 Sergio Noja-Noseda, Lesa: "Laying the foundations of a study in the textual transmission: The project of the Fondazione Noja-Noseda"

12:00 Joshua Lingel, Los Angeles: "Arthur Jeffery's project for the study of the Qur'an"

12:30 Michael Marx, Berlin: "The Bergsträsser film archive of Qur'anic manuscripts"

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch break

Chair: Nicolai Sinai, Leipzig

15:00 Omar Hamdan Tel Aviv / Berlin: „Comparing the Cairo edition of the Qur'an to three early manuscripts" (in Arabic)

15:30 Morteza Kariminia: "The Kufic Qur'an Manuscripts in Iran: a Survey"

16:00 – 16:30 coffee break

17:00 visit to the manuscript department of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (10 minute walk from the hotel): meeting and discussion with Dr. Hars Kurio (Orientabteilung)

19:30 welcome reception and snacks at the house of Angelika Neuwirth (Drakestr. 62, Berlin Lichterfelde)

Tuesday 8 November 2005

Section 2: Oral features of the text and the development of orthography

Chair: Moncef Ben Abdeljelil, London

9:00 Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Saarbrücken: "How to transcribe Qur'an manuscripts?"

9:30 Jan Just Witkam, Leiden: "Written in Wax. Some early Islamic opinions about Qur'anic phonography"

10:00 Omar Hamdan, Tel Aviv / Berlin: "The development of Arabic orthography through newly discovered sources on variant readings (qira'at)" (in Arabic)

10:30 Ahmad Pakatchi, Tehran: "The orthographic traditions in Early Arabic. Writing as reflected in *rasm al-mushaf*"

11:00-11:30 coffee break

Chair: Walid Saleh, Toronto

11:30 Yasin Dutton, Edinburgh: "The hierarchy of variant readings within single Qur'an codices"

12:00 Daniel Birnstiel, Regensburg: "The Qur'an as a linguistic corpus: some observations on patterns considering demonstrative pronouns"

12:30 Naila Silini, Sousse: "The relevance of variant readings (qira'at) for the exegesis of Surat al-Baqara" (in Arabic)

13:00 Lunch break

Section 3: Information Technology and Qur'anic Studies

Chair: Daniel Birnstiel, Regensburg

14:30 Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Saarbrücken: "Synoptical representation of Sura 20 (Taha) as occurring in various manuscripts"

15:00-16:30 Thomas Milo, Amsterdam: "The data base as model of research: the case of Surat Taha", Ruud van Tol, Amsterdam: "Data base technology versus philology"; interactive demonstration "The dynamic text edition in the guise of a relational data base – a prototype using Sura Taha (testing the model of dynamic contrastive analysis)"

16:30 Moncef Ben Abdeljelil, London: "The critical study of the Qur'an in Modern Arabic discourse"

17:00 coffee break

Wednesday 9 November 2005

Section 4: The Qur'anic Text and the Critical Method

Chair: Michael Marx, Berlin

9:30 Islam Dayeh, Berlin: "Critical attitudes toward textual transmission in Classical Arabic scholarship"

10:00 Dirk Hartwig, New York/Berlin: "Written or oral tradition? - The Qur'an as a Late Antiquity document"

10:30 Keith Small, London: "A typology of textual variants: preliminary categories and observations from comparing New Testament and Qur'an manuscripts"

11:00 coffee break

12:00 Andrew Rippin, Victoria / Walid Saleh, Toronto: "Can the model of Biblical studies be applied on the Qur'an?"

12:30 Final Discussion

5. Final List of Participants

1) Daniel Birnstiel M.A., Martin-Greif-Str.3, 93051 Regensburg, Germany,
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2) Moncef Ben Abdeljelil, Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim
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4) Sasha Dehghani, c/o FU Berlin, Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik, Altensteinstr. 34,
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5) Prof. Dr. Yasin Dutton, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Edinburgh University, United
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6) Dr. Omar Hamdan, POBox 5054, Tira 44915, Israel, zzzzainal@yahoo.de

7) Dirk Hartwig M.A. c/o FU Berlin, Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik, Altensteinstr. 34,
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8) Morteza Kariminia, Dept. of Quranic Studies Encyclopaedia Islamica Foundation, POBox
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9) Georges Khalil M.A., Arbeitskreis Moderne und Islam Working Group Modernity and
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10) Prof. Dr. Etan Kohlberg, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Faculty of Humanities,
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11) Joshua Lingel M.A., Los Angeles Biblical Studies Department,13800 Biola Avenue, La
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14) Prof. Dr. Angelika Neuwirth, FU Berlin, Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik,
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15) Prof. Dr. Sergio Noja-Noseda, Villa Noseda, 28040 Lesa, Italy, vautour@azzurra.it

16) Prof. Dr. Ahmad Pakatchi, Imam Sadeq University, Tehran, Iran paketchy@isu.ac.ir

17) Dr. Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Universität des Saarlandes Saarbrücken, Postfach 151150, 66041
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18) Prof. Dr. Andrew Rippin, Faculty of Humanities, Clearihue Building Room C 305, University of Victoria, P.O. Box 3045, Victoria, B.C. V8W 3P4, Canada, arippin@uvic.ca

19) Prof. Dr. Walid Saleh, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civlizations, University of Toronto, 4 Bancroft Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S1C1, walid.saleh@utoronto.ca

20) Prof. Dr. Naila Silini, Faculté de Lettre et Sciences Humaines, Sousse, Tunisia silini.naila@topnet.tn

21) Keith Small M.A., 140 Headstone Lane Harrow Middlesex HA2 6JT, United Kingdom, keith.small2@btinternet.com

22) Mirijam Somers M.A., Ferdinand Bolstraat 54, 1072 LL Amsterdam NL, The Netherlands, c/o t.milo@chello.nl

23) Prof. Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 19, 14193 Berlin

24) Nicolai Sinai M.A., Steinstr. 37, 04275 Leipzig, Germany, nicolai_sinai@web.de

25) Ruud H.G. van Tol, Ruysdaelkade 21-1, 1072 AH Amsterdam, The Netherlands, rvtol@isolution.nl

26) Prof. Dr. Rainer Voigt, FU Berlin, Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik, Altensteinstr. 34, 14195 Berlin, Germany, voigtrai@zedat.fu-berlin.de

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6. Statistical Information

6.1. Repartition by country

Country	Number of Participants
Canada	2
Germany	10
Iran	3
Israel	2
Italy	1
The Netherlands	4
Tunisia	1
United Kingdom	3
USA	1

6.2 Repartition by nationality of the participants

Country	Number of Participants
Canada	1
Germany	8
Iran	4
Israel	2
Italy	1
Lebanon	1
The Netherlands	4
Tunisia	2
USA	2
United Kingdom	2

6.3 Repartition by gender

Male	Female
24	3

Total number of participants: 27 participants

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