



Recited Ink: Written Representations of the Oral Aspects of the Qur'ān

Place: Naples, Università l'Orientale di Napoli

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The word Qur'ān primarily indicates recitation. Despite this, when we think about the Sacred Book of Islam, we picture a manuscript or a printed copy. In the last century, recordings and “study Qur'āns” have in a certain way standardized the process of learning and the performance of *qirā'a*. Orthoepic signs, often colorized, are a common presence in *muṣḥafs* printed for recitation schools. What we know less about is how these signs developed and how they were used before the 20th century.

Scholarly inquiry has been focused primarily on Qur'ānic script, its forms across time and vagaries. Another approach, more anthropological, has privileged the oral dimension of the Qur'ān, mainly based on recordings and fieldwork. The latter can provide information about the last century, leaving outside the largest part of *qirā'āt* tradition. We certainly have books such as *al-Muqaddima al-Jazariyya* or the works of al-Dānī (444/1053) that offer a formalized vision on how the sacred book should be recited. This normative dimension is only partially telling of how the Qur'ān was actually recited.

Lacking any form of recording prior to late 19th century we must turn to manuscripts to have an idea of which were the modalities of recitation of the Qur'ān before the Industrial Revolution.

Muṣḥafs provide plenty of information about this aspect, both embedded in the text or in the peri-text (margins, but also before and after the text itself). How this form of notation developed and if it was in a certain way regulated (regionally or globally) is something that still awaits to be explored.

Methodology

Considering the novelty of this approach, the meeting will be structured as a workshop, where case studies and research in their beginning stages will be discussed.

Papers may cover any area of Islamic world, although they must focus on a specific case study (being a collection, a scribe, a specific region in a certain span of time). We also encourage research focused on recorded recitations that are related to manuscript sources and may illuminate aspects of the written traces of recitation.

They may also refer to any historical period, from early Islam to the first half of 19th century. For ethnographic research based on recordings and fieldwork, the time span should be intended as related to the traditions and the manuscript they refer to.

Proposed research lines

Manuscripts

This line of inquiry is focused solely on the manifestations of the recitation in the Qur'ānic manuscripts. These may be focused on two main aspects. The first is the presence and function of orthoepic signs and features (pauses, signs of prolongation and pronunciation, *imāla*) both embedded in the text (e.g., the use of different colors) and written around it. When did they first appear? How have they been codified? Are they consistent in defined manuscripts with recitation traditions?

The second aspect is constituted by variations in the script that could imply a different recitation. This includes both the variant readings recorded in the manuscripts and scribal vagaries. Are these variations related to orthoepic signs? Do they correspond to specific recitation traditions?

Texts

Qur'ānic manuscripts present a specific peritextual life. Marginalia that deal with alternative readings or proper way of reciting the text are a first source of information that can integrate the strictly codicological ones. They may also challenge the written text, highlighting what are considered mistakes by the reader. Can these annotations be contextualized and linked to reading and reciting traditions and habits? Do they represent parallel traditions?

The peritext includes also what is written before or after the Qur'ān. Texts about recitation, providing indications about diverse *qirā'āt* or modulation of recitation can be another source of information, that may be integrated with the marginalia, or studied separately. In this latter case they can be also analyzed as a textual tradition, linked to *muṣḥafs* or not. This aspect may be also extended to multilingual copies of the Qur'ān, where indications about recitation can be provided in separate text in Arabic or other languages.

Orality

Cantillation of the Qur'ānic text is, of course, oral. Contemporary teaching and practice are based on localized traditions of transmission, that can be traced back to periods before the popularization of LP disks.

This research line aims at bridging codicological and ethnographic approaches to a practice that is primarily transmitted vocally. Both written and oral modalities of preservation of the Qur'ān are linked to specific lines of transmissions of *tajwīd* and *qirā'a* rules. Is there a correspondence between manuscript and oral text belonging to the same context? Are manuscripts still relevant to teaching the Qur'ān in specific contexts?

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Language: English, French, Arabic

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Those willing to participate should submit an abstract (title, 300 words abstract and a short bio) to michele.petrone@unior.it by the **30th of September 2023**. For foreign researchers coming from outside the European Union the preparation of a Passport or Visa is required.



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