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Variant Qur'anic Readings Before and After Ibn Mujāhid

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Abstract: Ibn Mujāhid (d. Baghdad, 324/936) famously surveyed variant qur'anic readings (*qirā'āt*) from seven earlier specialists. Did he speak for a gathering consensus or was his just another idiosyncratic treatment of the problem (but unusually influential)? Comparison with earlier treatments of the readings by the grammarians and philologists al-Farrā', al-Akhfash, Quṭrub, Abū 'Ubayd, Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (in quotation), and Ibn Qutaybah in the ninth century shows some evidence of a growing preference for accepting a defined set of readings but little agreement as to whose readings would qualify. Comparisons with the treatments of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Zajjāj, and al-Naḥḥās in the tenth century mainly shows continuity with the diverse views of the ninth. Al-Ṭabarī is distinguished by a strong emphasis on consensus to determine whether a reading is acceptable or not. Ibn Mujāhid's chief innovation seems to be that he accepted almost every reading of his chosen seven, whereas previous students of the readings had expressly preferred some readings to others. Ibn al-Nadīm seems to be the earliest writer to interpret Ibn Mujāhid's choice of seven as excluding other readings.

Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Mūsā b. Mujāhid (d. Baghdad, 324/936) famously surveyed variant qur'anic readings (*qirā'āt*) from seven earlier specialists.¹ He probably did not mean his to be an exclusive list of acceptable readings, but it was being so treated before the end of the century. The present study assesses how far scholarly opinion had moved in his time toward an exclusive canon. It is common wisdom that three principles came to predominate across the ninth century in assessing the legitimacy of any qur'anic reading: that it should be congruent with the 'Uthmānic

¹ Major studies include Nasser, *The Second Canonization of the Qur'ān*; idem, *Transmission*, 42–61; Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur'anic Readings"; and above all Nöldeke et al., *History*, esp. 505–44. As in other studies, "seven" will henceforth be capitalized when it refers to the seven readers identified by Ibn Mujāhid whose variants came to be universally recognized as orthodox.

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rasm (consonantal outline),² conform to Arabic grammar, and have become traditional. But how strictly each of these was observed and especially which readings had the strongest claims to being traditional evidently varied from expert to expert, in ways we should specify.

Ibn Mujāhid

In the Later Middle Ages, half a dozen books were identified as the principal studies of the variant readings.

- Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839?), 25 readers;
- Aḥmad b. Jubayr al-Kūfī (Kufan, transferred to Antioch, d. 258/871–72), 5 readers;
- Ismā‘īl b. Ishāq al-Jahḍamī (d. Baghdad, 282/896), 20 leaders (*imāms*);
- Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. Baghdad, 310/923), 20-odd readers;
- Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dājūnī (d. 324/935), 8 readers;
- Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid al-Tamīmī.³

Muḥammad b. Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990?) presents a very different list of twenty scholars and their books on the readings (mostly called simply *Kitāb al-Qirā’āt*), including only two names from the later list: Abū ‘Ubayd and Ibn Mujāhid.⁴ None of the books on either list is extant except for Ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab’ah*, on the later list. (The books that Ibn al-Nadīm ascribes to Ibn Mujāhid are *al-Qirā’āt al-kabīr* and *al-ṣaghīr*.)

Two of the lost books require further comment, namely those of Abū ‘Ubayd and Abū Ḥatīm Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869?). They have not disappeared without a trace, for the later Egyptian grammarian Abū Ja’far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950) continually quotes them as choosing or rejecting various readings (*ikhtāra*, *ankara*, or *radda*), and a part of Abū ‘Ubayd’s intro-

² The sources for the present study use *khaṭṭ al-muṣḥaf*, *al-kitāb*, or *al-sawād* for the ‘Uthmānic consonantal outline (and “consonantal outline” is imprecise inasmuch as the *rasm* includes some long vowels), but *rasm* seems to be conventional in recent scholarship so it is what I use. “Codex” will henceforth stand for *muṣḥaf* in the sources, meaning a written copy of the Qur’an, here more specifically one of the copies promulgated by ‘Uthmān or carefully copied after one of them.

³ Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Naṣhṣ fi l-qirā’āt al-‘ashr*, 1:33–34, cited by Gilliot, *Langue et théologie en islam*, 135. The same list also presented by al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (2 vols., Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr and Dār al-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyyah, 1414/1993), 1:230–31 (*naw’* 20).

⁴ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:91–92. So in the section of qur’anic readings; three more in the section of traditionist-jurisprudents (*fuqahā’ al-muḥaddithīn*), 2:88, 107, 114.

duction appears to survive in quotation from a yet later Egyptian, 'Alam al-Dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. Damascus, 643/1245). Abū Ḥātim's book enjoyed unusual prestige for a time. Yāqūt reports someone's saying that the Basrans prided themselves over all other people of the world on account of three books: *Kitāb al-Naḥw* by Sibawayh, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* by al-Jāḥiẓ, and Abū Ḥātim's book on the readings. Ibn al-Nadīm does not tell us whether Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī's book paid attention to any particular number of readings, but Kātib Çelebī apparently calls it *al-Ghāyah*, dealing with 11 readings.⁵ If any book established the genre to which belongs Ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab'ah* (that is, first *isnāds* between the author and his chosen readers, then a consideration of general principles as to certain matters of pronunciation such as glottal stops and full or shortened pronunciation of final *yā'*, finally a procession through the Qur'an in canonical order), it was very likely one of these. Ibn Mujāhid's salient departure from the pattern would be that he seldom expresses a preference for one reading over another.

Since the leading question here is how closely Ibn Mujāhid represented a consensus in his time as to acceptable and unacceptable readings, it seems sensible to review his position at the start. In his influential *Kitāb al-Sab'ah*, he famously reviews the variant readings of seven eighth-century specialists:

- Nāfi' b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. Medina, 169/785–86?);
- 'Abd Allāh b. Kathīr (d. Mecca, 120/737–38);
- 'Āṣim b. Abī l-Najūd (d. Kufa, 127/745?);
- Ḥamzah b. Ḥabīb (Kufan, d. Ḥulwān, 156/772–73?);
- 'Alī b. Ḥamzah al-Kisā'ī (Kufan, d. Ranbūyah, 189/804–5?);
- Abū 'Amr Zabbān b. al-'Alā' (Basran, d. Kufa, 154/770–71?);
- 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir (d. Damascus, 118/736).⁶

“It was never Ibn Mujāhid's intention that a reader could not go beyond his selection of seven readings,” says Mustafa Shah.⁷ This reading of his intention is presumably based on Ibn Mujāhid's making no assertion in *Kitāb al-Sab'ah* that only the readings of his seven are legitimate. It also agrees with his writing large and small general books on the readings in addition to *al-Sab'ah*.⁸ More weakly, it may also agree with his rejecting a few of the readings of his seven.⁹

⁵ Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī's book also appears at Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:168; Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 3:1406; and Kātib Çelebī, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 2:1189. On them see *EF*, s.vv. “Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī” and “Abū 'Ubayd” (Reinhard Weipert).

⁶ Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*.

⁷ Shah, “The Early Arabic Grammarians,” 78.

⁸ Cf. Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 2:521, where *K. al-Sab'ah*, not named by Ibn al-Nadīm, is listed among Ibn Mujāhid's works in addition to *al-Qirā'at al-kabīr* and *al-ṣaghīr*.

⁹ See the editor's collection at Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 26–33.

It would be much easier to assess the importance of Ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab'ah*, if we could compare the works of Aḥmad b. Jubayr, Ismā'īl b. Iṣḥāq, and others specifically on the readings. Some assessments have been advanced nonetheless. According to Gotthelf Bergsträßer and Otto Pretzl,

Ibn Mujāhid's ... crucial innovation, the great break with the past, consists not so much of setting in motion the canonization of the Seven Readings. Rather, it was evidently he who finally replaced the study of individual variant readings in the science of the variants with the study of complete readings as taught in the schools of the Koran.¹⁰

More recently, Mustafa Shah has proposed that a major purpose of Ibn Mujāhid's was to wrest authority over the readings away from grammarians.¹¹

Congruence with the 'Uthmānic *rasm* almost went without saying by the tenth century, although Ibn Mujāhid sometimes struggles to maintain it; for example, at Q 21 Anbiyā' 88, where the *rasm* looks ungrammatical unless one sounds an extra *nūn*, as indeed most readers did.¹² The paramount theme of Ibn Mujāhid's introduction is rather that one should follow precedents. "One may often be called by one's discernment in providing vowels to recite a version that is possible in Arabic but never recited by those who have passed, thus becoming an innovator." He goes on to relate *ḥadīth* reports in favor of sticking to transmitted versions, including one from a Companion and four from Followers stating, "Qur'anic recitation is a *sunnah*"; that is, a normative precedent.¹³

Shady Hekmat Nasser detects a major innovation.

The concept of *sunnah* is important here. By utilizing it Ibn Mujāhid moves the Qirā'āt discipline away from the domain of Ḥadīth and draws it closer to the domain of *fiqh*. As legal rulings vary from one region to another according to the specific *sunnah* established there, Qur'anic Readings might also vary from one place to another according to the *sunnah* established in that region in terms of how the people were uniquely taught to recite the Qur'an.¹⁴

This shift I find difficult to see. The obvious way in which Ibn Mujāhid moves the discipline not away from *ḥadīth* but toward it is his stress on transmission to justify readings. As for stress on regions, that is as characteristic of works on *ḥadīth* in Ibn Mujāhid's time and before. For example, the early biographical dictionary of

¹⁰ Nöldeke et al., *History*, 500.

¹¹ Shah, "Early Arabic grammarians," esp. 77–78.

¹² Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 430. Other examples, admittedly minor, cited by Nöldeke et al., *History*, 468–70.

¹³ Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 46–52.

¹⁴ Nasser, *Transmission*, 52.

Muḥammad b. Sa'd (d. 230/845) is organized geographically, while biographical dictionaries arranged alphabetically, such as Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), *al-Tārikh*, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad al-Rāzī (d. 327/938), *al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, identify most of their subjects geographically and continually say things like "His *ḥadīth* is among the Basrans." As for jurisprudence, however, whereas regional traditions were evidently strong in the writings of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) and before, they had largely disappeared from the juridical literature of Ibn Mujāhid's time, superseded by loyalty to individuals such as Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān b. Thābit, Mālik b. Anas, and al-Shāfi'ī himself. If Ibn Mujāhid effected any shift toward the style of jurisprudence, it had nothing to do with regionalism; rather, it had in common deference toward select past authorities almost never to be charged with error.¹⁵

Linguistic approaches of the ninth century

For the readings as they were regarded in the century leading up to Ibn Mujāhid, what we have to work with is mostly commentaries on the Qur'an, especially a series placing special emphasis on linguistic issues, mainly grammar and obscure words. Ibn al-Nadīm devotes a section to books on *ma'ānī l-Qur'ān wa-mushkiluhu wa-majāzuh*, literally "the meanings of the Qur'an, its difficult words, and its figures of speech."¹⁶ Most of the 26 books he names are not extant. However, examination of several that do survive shows that, in common, they go through the Qur'an in canonical order, commenting mainly on vocabulary and grammar, going light on legal and historical questions.¹⁷

Until now, the one of them that has attracted the most attention from modern students of the variant readings is Yaḥyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā' (Kufan, d. 207/822–23), *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān*. The *Ma'ānī* was the main source for a series of articles by Edmund Beck.¹⁸ In the first and most general, he observes that the supreme authority for a reading was that it be widely known.¹⁹ However, al-Farrā' would also accept a dialectal variant despite never having heard it from a reader.²⁰ He would reject

15 A shift developed by Lucas, "Abu Bakr Ibn al-Mundhir."

16 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:90.

17 They have been notably surveyed by Shah, "The Early Arabic Grammarians"; see also Baalbaki, "Treatment."

18 Beck, "Arabiyya," and idem, "Studien zur Geschichte der kufischen Koranlesung."

19 Beck, "Arabiyya," 223. On al-Farrā', see *EP*, s. v. "al-Farrā'" (Reinhard Weipert).

20 Beck, "Arabiyya," 186–87. Cf. Farrā', *Ma'ānī*, 2:78, 3:164, *ad Q Ibrāhīm* 14: 35 (*wa-ajnbni* instead of *wa-jnubni*), Ṭalāq 65:6 (*min wajdikum* instead of *wujdikum*).

readings contrary to the writing of the ‘Uthmānic *rasm*, called *al-kitāb*.²¹ But he would also reject a reading not confirmed by extra-qur’anic usage.²² His concern for precedents apparently leads him to rank readers, the earlier the greater authority, as in expressly preferring Mujāhid b. Jabr (Meccan, d. 104/722–23?) and ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 68/687–88?) to ‘Aṣim and Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A‘mash (Kufan, d. 148/765?).²³

From Kinga Dévényi we have more on al-Farrā’.²⁴ Here is her count of how often different readers are named:

- ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652–53?), 411 times;
- al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), 141;
- ‘Aṣim, 141;
- Ibn ‘Abbās, 129;
- al-A‘mash, 115;
- *aṣḥāb ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd*,²⁵ 98;
- Ubayy b. Ka‘b (d. 32/652–53?), 92;
- Yaḥyā b. Waththāb (Kufan, d. 103/721–22), 75;
- Ḥamzah, 71;
- Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥabīb al-Sulamī (Kufan, d. 74/693–94?), 53;
- Mujāhid, 53;
- ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), 42;
- al-Kisā’ī, 27;
- Abū Ja‘far Yazīd b. al-Qa‘qā’ (Medinese, d. 130/747–48?), 25.

Al-Farrā’'s teacher al-Kisā’ī would come in second if al-Farrā’ always gave him express credit for quoted variants known from elsewhere to be his.²⁶ Dévényi's figures confirm Beck's assertion that ‘Aṣim was the leading Kufan authority for al-Farrā’, also his stress on the Kufan Qur’an readers’ reconciling their loyalty to Ibn Mas‘ūd with accepting the ‘Uthmānic *rasm*; that is, going with the *rasm* where

21 E.g., where *qinwān* must be in the nominative, since the accusative, although it would make sense, would go against the *kitāb* (meaning the *rasm*): Farrā’, *Ma‘ānī*, 1:347, *ad Q An‘ām* 6:99.

22 Examples remarked by Baalbaki, “Treatment,” 24–28.

23 Beck, “Arabiyya,” 217. Cf. Farrā’, *Ma‘ānī*, 2:412, *ad Q Ṣād* 38:84.

24 Dévényi, “Al-Farrā’ and al-Kisā’ī.”

25 Beck devoted an article to this set as they are referred to by al-Farrā’: “Studien,” 22 (1953): 59–78. He could not determine exactly who they were, but he might have noticed the list in Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 6:5 = *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 6:10. Lists published since consistently name the same half-dozen: ‘Alqamah, al-Aswad, Masrūq, ‘Amr b. Shuraḥbīl, ‘Abīdah al-Salmānī, and al-Ḥārith b. Qays al-Ju‘fī, mostly Kufan *mukhaḍram*s notable as worshippers. See Wakī b. al-Jarrāḥ, *Zuhd*, 521; ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī, *Ṭal*, 42–43; al-Fasawī, 2:553; Abū Zur‘ah, *Tārīkh*, 1:651.

26 Dévényi, “Al-Farrā’,” 160–61.

it contradicts Ibn Mas'ūd's reading but sticking to his interpretation where, as in the assignment of dots and vowels, the *rasm* allows it.²⁷ (After Dévényi, it seems to me a reasonable assumption that frequency of citation is an index of importance to the citer, approximate but significant. There seems to be weak confirmation from within the tradition in the complaint that al-Ṭabarī slighted Ibn 'Āmir, whose reading he almost never cites—more on this below. I have seen no alternative proposed index of significance.) Al-Farrā' is very aware of regional traditions; for example, contrasting the reading of “the people of the Hijaz” with that of “the general (*al-āmmah*),” evidently meaning the Kufans.²⁸ He only rarely refers to the Syrian tradition of qur'anic recitation, as at Q Raḥmān 55:12: “If a reader were to read *wa-l-ḥabba dhā l-'aṣf*, it would be permissible ... This is in the codices of the people of Syria ..., although we have never heard anyone reading it.”²⁹

Sa'īd b. Mas'adah al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. Baghdad, 215/830–31?) was a contemporary to al-Farrā' who likewise wrote a commentary that has now been published.³⁰ He seems much less interested than al-Farrā' in variant readings, also more inclined to characterize readings geographically and to report dialectal variants. These are the readers he mentions in connection with qur'anic readings (that is, not as commentators, philologists, or grammarians):

- Ibn Mas'ūd, 11;
- al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 5;
- 'Īsā b. 'Umar (Basran, d. 149/766–67), 3;
- al-A'mash, 2;
- 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Ishāq (Basran, d. 117/735–36), 2;
- Ubayy, 1;
- Mujāhid, 1.

As with al-Farrā', Ibn Mas'ūd comes first and al-Ḥasan second, but the numbers are small, so it may be only by accident that, for example, al-A'mash represents Kufa alone. Al-Akhfash clearly has a notion of majority readings but will not rule one out if it seems grammatically strong. Of Q Baqarah 2:41, for example, he reports that the general read *fa-ttaqūni* with suppression of the *yā'*. “Some do read *yā'* when not

²⁷ Beck, “Arabiyya,” 224; idem, “Studien,” 17:327–40. Continuing Kufan loyalty to Ibn Mas'ūd's reading has recently been demonstrated by Bakrī, “*T'tibār*,” and Shahpasand and Malekabad, “Ibn Mas'ūd's Reading.”

²⁸ Farrā', *Ma'āni*, 2:36, *ad* Q Yūsuf 12:10. The meaning of *al-āmmah* varies from one author to another.

²⁹ Farrā', *Ma'āni*, 3:114. *Al-ḥabba dhā l-'aṣf* is the reading of Ibn 'Āmir alone, according to Ibn Mihrān, *Mabsūt*, 423. This peculiarity of the Damascene codex, *dhā* as opposed to *dhū*, is confirmed by Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:160.

³⁰ Akhfash, *Ma'āni*. On him see *EP*, s. v. “al-Akhfash” (Reinhard Weipert).

pausing, which is an excellent variant (*lughah*).³¹ Conversely, he is intolerant of a reading that seems poor Arabic: on al-Aʿmash's reading of Q Ibrāhīm 14:22 with *maṣrikihiyyi* instead of *-iyya*, he comments "this is a solecism (*lahn*) – we have not heard it from any of the Arabs or grammarians."³²

We have a substantial part of another linguistic commentary from Qutrub b. al-Mustanīr (d. Baghdad, 226/840–41?).³³ The extant text runs only to Q Ṭāhā 20, a little over halfway through, but Qutrub begins his treatment of each chapter with a relatively lengthy review of variant readings, followed by reviews of difficult vocabulary and grammar, so he actually names more variant readings than other early commentators. As the editor observes, he has three criteria for an acceptable reading: to have precedents, to make sense linguistically, and to agree with the ʿUthmānic *rasm*.³⁴ A typical example of his approach comes at Q Yūnus 10:11, where he first quotes the reading of *al-ʿāmmah* with the verb in the passive, then the reading of Ibn Abī Ishāq and Ibn ʿĀmir in the active, finally the reading of Ibn Masʿūd in the active but disagreeing with the ʿUthmānic *rasm*, called *al-kitāb*.³⁵ Ibn Masʿūd's reading is no longer acceptable for recitation but helps justify the minority reading with the active. At Q 10:16, he rejects a reading of al-Ḥasan's (*lā wajh lahā* and *marghūb ʿanhā*) purely on linguistic grounds.³⁶

Here are the readers Qutrub cites (allowing one citation per verse and not counting exegetical, philological, or grammatical comments), going down to ten:

- Abū ʿAmr, 538 times;
- al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 430;
- Ḥumayd b. Qays al-Aʿraj (Meccan, d. 130/747–48?), 150;
- Abū Jaʿfar, 141;
- Nāfiʿ, 114;
- al-Aʿmash, 104;
- Shaybah b. Niṣāḥ (Medinese, d. 130/747–48?), 95;
- ʿĀṣim, 85;
- Ibn ʿAbbās, 59;
- Ibn Masʿūd, 50;

31 Akhfash, *Maʿānī*, 1:78–9.

32 Akhfash, *Maʿānī*, 1:407. Al-Farrāʾ ascribes this reading also to Yahyā b. Waththāb but likewise considers it a mistake: *Maʿānī*, 2:7. Al-Dānī includes it among the Seven as Ḥamzah's reading with a comment that Abū ʿAmr permitted it (he being a significant philologist, along with al-Kisāʿī): *Taysīr*, 109. Ibn Mujāhid reports a second version of Ḥamzah's reading: *Sabʿah*, 362.

33 Qutrub, *Maʿānī*. On him see *EP*, s. v. "Qutrub" (G. Troupeau).

34 Qutrub, *Maʿānī*, 1:223–24 (introduction).

35 Qutrub, *Maʿānī*, 2:919.

36 Qutrub, *Maʿānī*, 2:922. Al-Farrāʾ is hesitant to reject it: *Maʿānī*, 1:459. Discussed by Bergsträsser, "Die Koranlesung," at 35.

- Mujāhid, 45;
- Ibn Abī Ishāq, 35;
- Ubayy, 28;
- Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, 23;
- Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥayṣin (d. Mecca, 123/740–41?), 21;
- 'Āṣim b. al-'Ajjāj al-Jahdarī (Basran, d. 128/745–46?), 15;
- Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar (Basran, d. ca. 120/737–38?), 11;
- Zayd b. Thābit (d. 48/668–69?), 10.

As the editor observes, there is a strong tendency to emphasize Basran readings.³⁷ Al-A'mash comes somewhat ahead of 'Āṣim, here, as representative of Kufa. Of the Seven, Ibn 'Āmir is cited only twice, Ḥamzah once, and al-Kisā'ī not at all (the last from professional envy?). There is some uncertainty over al-A'raj. Occasionally (and about equally often), Quṭrub ascribes a reading to "Ḥumayd al-A'raj" or "'Abd al-Raḥmān al-A'raj," much more often simply to "al-A'raj." I have assigned unspecific citations to the former, supposing that Quṭrub wanted someone to represent the Meccan tradition. Medina is well represented by Abū Ja'far, Shaybah, and Nāfi', continually named together.³⁸

Although we lack his book *al-Qirā'āt* specifically on the readings, the qadi and littérateur Abū 'Ubayd does review the problem of variant readings in a section of his more general *Faḍā'il al-Qur'an*, which is extant. He strongly endorses congruity with the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, again called *al-kitāb*, also sticking to tradition. Of the readers before him, he says,

They did not pay attention to doctrines of Arabic (*madhāhib al-'arabiyyah*) concerning them (variants) when that went against the writing of the codex, even if the Arabic should be clearer than what was written. They thought that following the letters of the codices and memorizing them were like standing *sunan* (normative precedents) that it is impermissible for anyone to transgress.³⁹

From a list he provides of his sources for different readings, these seem to be the principal authoritative readers for Abū 'Ubayd:

- Ibn 'Āmir;
- 'Āṣim;

³⁷ Quṭrub, *Ma'āni*, 1:220 (introduction).

³⁸ On Ḥumayd b. Qays al-A'raj, see al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat*, 1:97–98, and Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat*, 1:265. On 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Hurmuz al-A'raj (Medinese, d. 119/737–38?), see Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat*, 1:77–78, and Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah*, 1:381.

³⁹ Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:193–94 (*bāb 'arḍ al-qurrā' li-l-Qur'an*). Similar to a quotation from a lost work cited by Shah, "Early Arabic Grammarians," 106.

- Mujāhid;
- Ibn Abī Ishāq;
- Abū Ja'far;
- Abū 'Amr;
- al-A'mash;
- Ḥamzah.⁴⁰

So far as I have noticed, this is the earliest identification of a group of preferred readers, albeit implicit and including only eight, not the 25 or more that Abū 'Ubayd reportedly treated in his separate book on the readings. The Follower generation is here being left behind, compared with its prominence in the lists from al-Farrā' and al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ.

Something similar emerges from examining quotations of Abū 'Ubayd in the later grammatical commentary of al-Naḥḥās, *Irāb al-Qur'ān*.⁴¹ Some quotations are linguistic, but al-Naḥḥās often lists those who read a particular way, then says it was chosen by Abū 'Ubayd or, occasionally, rejected. For example,

The rest of the readers, Abū 'Amr, Abū Ja'far, al-A'mash, 'Āṣim, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisā'i read *wa-yawma yuḥsharu a'dā'u llāh* with the doer not named. This is the choice of Abū 'Ubayd, who rejected the reading of Nāfi', saying that after it is *fa-hum yūza'ūn*, not *naza'uhum*, so *yuḥsharu* is more likely.⁴²

It seems a safe inference that the readers named were among the 25 Abū 'Ubayd covered in *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt*. There are traces of the old permissiveness toward unprecedented readings. For example, Abū 'Ubayd permitted *nazzā'atan* at Q Ma'ārij 70:16 although he said no one had read it so.⁴³ He even praised Ubayy's reading of Q Takwīr 81:8, *idhā l-maw'ūdatu sa'alat*, for being clearer (*abyan*).⁴⁴ For the most part, however, his chosen readings look forward to later opinion.

Here are those whose readings Abū 'Ubayd chose, as quoted by al-Naḥḥās, down to five times or more:

⁴⁰ Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:190–93 (*bāb 'arḍ al-qurrā' li-l-Qur'ān*).

⁴¹ Al-Naḥḥās, *Irāb al-Qur'ān*. I cite page numbers after a reprint divided into five volumes, probably easier to find: n.p., 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1405/1985. It has also been reprinted with scanty notes by 'Abd al-Mun'im Khalīl (5 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1421/2001), and ed. Khālid al-'Alami (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1429/2008), with no notes or indexes.

⁴² Naḥḥās, *Irāb*, 4:55, *ad Q Fuṣṣilat* 41:19.

⁴³ Naḥḥās, *Irāb*, 5:30; also Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 5:221. The reading of Ḥafṣ < 'Āṣim alone among the Ten. An Iraqi doctoral dissertation attempts to reconstruct Abū 'Ubayd's systematic preferences: Dulaymi, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt*.

⁴⁴ Naḥḥās, *Irāb*, 5:158.

- Abū 'Amr, 23 times;
- al-Kisā'i, 18;
- the Kufans, 17;
- Ḥamzah, 15;
- 'Āṣim, 11;
- al-A'mash, 9;
- the Medinese, 7;
- al-Ḥasan, 6;
- Ibn Kathīr, 6;
- the Basrans, 5;
- Abū Ja'far, 5.

These, then, are those whose readings Abū 'Ubayd is clearly said to have rejected, again down to five times or more:

- Abū 'Amr, 15;
- 'Āṣim, 12;
- the Medinese, 10;
- Abū Ja'far, 9;
- Nāfi', 7;
- Shaybah, 7;
- al-Ḥasan, 5.

A preference for Kufan readings is confirmed, but 'Āṣim is less pre-eminent than for al-Farrā'.⁴⁵ Al-Naḥḥās expresses disagreement with Abū 'Ubayd from time to time over his grammatical explanations, which fits his own preference for the Basran tradition.

Better than counting readers named in al-Naḥḥās's quotations, however, is an apparent excerpt from the introduction to *Kitāb al-Qirā'at* preserved by 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī. After listing the names of Companions notable for reciting the Qur'an, then Followers arranged by metropolis, Abū 'Ubayd points out the leading reciters from each metropolis, sometimes repeating names from the previous lists of Followers.

Among the readers of Medina were Abū Ja'far ..., Shaybah b. Niṣāḥ ..., and Nāfi' b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Nu'aym. The oldest of these three was Abū Ja'far ..., then after him Shaybah ..., then the third of them Nāfi' b. Abī Nu'aym. The reading of the people of Medina became his. They have held onto it until today.

45 Cf. Dulaymī's assertion that Abū 'Ubayd inclined toward Kufan readings in his choices but not particularly toward the readings of his teacher al-Kisā'i: *Kitāb al-Qirā'at*, 69.

Among the readers of Mecca were 'Abd Allāh b. Kathīr; Ḥumayd b. Qays called al-A'raj, and Muḥammad b. Muḥayṣin. The earliest of these three was Ibn Kathīr. The reading of the people of Mecca became his.

Among the readers of Kufa were Yaḥyā b. Waththāb, 'Āṣim b. Abī l-Najūd, and al-A'mash. The oldest of them and the highest was Yaḥyā ... 'Āṣim followed him ... Then there was al-A'mash. He was the pre-eminent imam of Kufa in his time, to the point that Ṭalḥah b. Muṣarrif recited before him despite being older than al-A'mash. Those three were the imams of Kufa in reading. Then there followed them Ḥamzah b. Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt as a fourth. The greater part of the people of Kufa went for his reading without his being the unanimous choice. Among those who followed Ḥamzah in his reading was Sulaym b. 'Īsā. Among those who differed with him was Abū Bakr b. 'Ayyāsh, who followed 'Āṣim ... As for al-Kisā'i, he exercised choice as to readings, taking over some of Ḥamzah's reading.

Among the readers of the people of Basra were 'Abd Allāh b. Abi Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī, Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā', and 'Īsā b. 'Umar al-Thaqaḥī. The earliest of the three was Ibn Abī Ishāq ... 'Īsā b. 'Umar knew grammar but his choice of reading according to the ways of Arabic departed from the reading of the general, which the people found repugnant ... What the people of Basra went for as to qur'anic recitation, the one they took as their imam, was Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā'. There was a fourth, 'Āṣim al-Jahdarī, but there was not so much reading after him as there was after those (other) three.

Among the readers of the people of Syria were 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir al-Yaḥṣubī, Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥārith al-Dhimārī,⁴⁶ and a third who was named to me in Damascus but whose name I forget. The oldest of them was 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir ... Those are the readers of the metropoleis after the Followers.⁴⁷

Abū 'Ubayd makes some attempt to name three readers per center but feels compelled to go over that for Basra, even more for Kufa, whereas he barely gets to two for Damascus. It is striking that the predominant readers are all among the Seven, although al-A'mash comes close to eclipsing 'Āṣim. There are altogether twenty names in this passage. If *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* surveyed 25, the extra five (or six to nine, if any or all of Ṭalḥah b. Muṣarrif, Sulaym b. 'Īsā, Abū Bakr b. 'Ayyāsh, and Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥārith al-Dhimārī did not make the grade) were presumably drawn from the other, previously-named Followers (it is hard to imagine that Abū 'Ubayd excluded al-Ḥasan and Mujāhid, notably); also, possibly, the Companions Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, and Ubayy, whose readings are occasionally the ones Abū 'Ubayd chose, according to al-Naḥḥās.

⁴⁶ Abū 'Amr Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥārith al-Dhimārī (Damascene, d. 145/762–63), on whom see Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah*, 2:367–68.

⁴⁷ Dulaḳmī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt*, 311–15; Sakhāwī, *Jamāl*, 2:424–31 = ed. al-'Aṭīyyah and Kharābah, 502–9. A third edition from 'Abd al-Ḥaqq 'Abd al-Dāyīm Sayf al-Qāḍī, covers only the first half of the book. Abū 'Ubayd's list of pre-eminent readers also referred to by Nöldeke, et al., *History*, 507n.

To generalize about these grammarians and philologists of the early ninth century, it is possible to say that they highly respected the principle of congruence with the 'Uthmānic *rasm*. As to the relative weight of grammar and extra-qur'anic usage, there is some variation. Al-Farrā' notably stresses Arab speech, with which a proposed reading should agree, and preference for early readers over later. By contrast, Qūṭrub largely relies on later figures. Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) identifies twelve generations of traditionists in the Six Books.⁴⁸ Of the fifteen readers Qūṭrub cites most often, one (Āṣim al-Jaḥdarī) would never be cited in the Six Books and so went unclassified, but half of the rest are in the fifth generation (those who doubtfully met any Companions) or later. Abū 'Ubayd hints at a set of eight authoritative readers in *Fadā'il al-Qur'an*, a majority of them in the fifth generation or later; the same for the twenty he lists in the introduction to *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt*.

From the later ninth century, we have the testimony of the littérateur 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim b. Qutaybah (d. Baghdad, 276/889?). Although his book *al-Qirā'āt* specifically on the readings is not extant, we do have available his book *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'an*, which defends the Qur'an against charges of being unintelligible, self-contradictory, and otherwise defective.⁴⁹ Mustafa Shah has rightly cited a passage in which he allows the Companions, the Followers, and some of the eminent specialists after them to propose new interpretations of the 'Uthmānic *rasm*. "We may not go beyond it, as it is for them to interpret it, not for us."⁵⁰ The inviolability of the 'Uthmānic *rasm* seems to have been established a century before, and earlier commentators had suggested that earlier readers were wiser than later, but no earlier commentator we know of had so expressly disallowed new readings based on it.

In a section on allegedly poor Arabic in the Qur'an, Ibn Qutaybah rejects on linguistic grounds two readings from al-Ḥasan, two from Ḥamzah, and one each from Ibn Muḥaysin, Ibrāhīm b. Yazīd al-Nakha'ī (Kufan, d. 96/714), Yaḥyā b. Waththāb, al-A'mash, and Nāfi'. He also complains of the generally poor readings of "a man," evidently Ḥamzah, who advocated readings that others had renounced, readings with only weak or improbable justification, exaggerated pronunciation, and readings admittedly not fit for recitation at the ritual prayer.⁵¹ He seems far away,

⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Taqrīb*, 1:5–6. There have also been chronological schemes designed especially to sort readers, as from al-Dhahabī in *Ma'rifat al-qurrā'*. I prefer Ibn Ḥajar's scheme for having more gradations.

⁴⁹ Ibn Qutaybah refers to a separate work on *wujūh al-qirā'āt*, explanations of the readings, at *Ta'wīl*, 64. Ibn al-Nadīm lists more simply *K. al-Qirā'āt: Fihrist*, 1:92.

⁵⁰ Shah, "Early Arabic Grammarians," 84, citing Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl*, 42 (my translation).

⁵¹ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl*, 59–63.

then, from having in mind any exclusive set of orthodox readings. Neither (looking forward to Ibn Mujāhid's case for his seven), despite Ibn Qutaybah's reputation for being close to the traditionalist party of his time, does he show any concern for chains of transmission.

Al-Ṭabarī

Al-Ṭabarī was an older contemporary to Ibn Mujāhid, a major figure in the fields of history and jurisprudence as well as qur'anic commentary. Early in his qur'anic commentary, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, he says,

Some recite *maliki yawmi l-dīn*, some of them recite *māliki yawmi l-dīn*, and some recite *mālika yawmi l-dīn* with the *kāf* in the accusative. We have expatiated on those from whom each reading was related in *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* and remarked our own choice of reading and the reason our chosen readings are sound. We have therefore disliked to repeat that in this place. What we intend in this book of ours is to make clear the reasons for interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, not the reasons for the readings.⁵²

As observed above, the book he refers to specifically on the readings is not extant. However, enough variant readings do come up in the commentary to give us some idea of how close he was to Ibn Mujāhid's idea of a set of trustworthy readers. The editor of Ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab'ah*, numbered the variants discussed (apart from issues of *imālah*, prolongation of vowels, and so on), which apparently come to 1271 altogether. The editor of Ibn Mihrān, *al-Mabsūṭ fī l-qirā'āt al-'ashr*, similarly numbered the variants discussed, coming to 1417 altogether. By my count, al-Ṭabarī brings up variant readings in connection with around 740 verses, 50 to 60 percent of the verses that come up in these two specialized books on the readings. This is a substantial number, even if there must have been wider coverage and much more detail in al-Ṭabarī's specialized book.

From the 1980s, Zayd Mahārish's doctoral dissertation was the first major study of al-Ṭabarī's treatment of the readings in his commentary.⁵³ By Mahārish's count, al-Ṭabarī names his personal preference (*indī*) between two readings conceded to be equally acceptable 127 times. He names the closest reading to what is correct (*awlā l-qirā'atayn*) 137 times. Fifty-six times he does not permit another reading. Sixty-eight times he says another reading is impermissible, mostly on account of opposing consensus, weakness in its *isnād*, or contravening the *rasm*. He concludes that

⁵² Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 1:149–50, *ad* Q Fātiḥah 1:4.

⁵³ Mahārish, *Manhaj*.

two readings are equally good, so that one may read either, 236 times.⁵⁴ Mahārish also reviews examples of the different criteria al-Ṭabarī uses to choose among readings and a series of scholars before and after him who likewise stressed consensus. His analyses of al-Ṭabarī's reasoning seem sensible, but he is somewhat hindered by a dogmatic commitment to the acceptability of the Seven, Ten, or even Fourteen readings, described as *mutawātir*. He feels compelled to defend al-Ṭabarī's rejection of some of them and fails to observe that al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Mujāhid never refer to preferred variants as *mutawātir*.⁵⁵

The variants ignored by al-Ṭabarī in the *Jāmi'* are usually such as do not change the meaning; e.g., whether to prefer *ruḥ* or *ru'ub* at Q Āl 'Imrān 3:151, *ḥarijan* or *ḥarajan* at Q An'ām 6:125.⁵⁶ But there are many such alternatives he does take up; e.g., whether to prefer *karh* or *kurh* at Q 2:216, *ḥazan* or *ḥuzn* at Q Qaṣaṣ 28:8.⁵⁷ He seldom treats issues of pronunciation such as *idghām* (exception at Q Kahf 18:19) or prolonged pronunciation of *yā'* in continuous and paused recitation (exception at Q Naml 27:36).⁵⁸ Variant readings are the province of *qara'ah*, with rare exceptions at Q 3:81, where he identifies the grammarians of Basra and Kufa as the ones who disagree over the reading (al-Ṭabarī sides with the Basrans), and 20:53, where the qualified interpreters (*ahl al-ta'wīl*) are the ones who have disagreed.⁵⁹ More typical of his approach is to overrule some Basran grammarians in favor of the consensus of the readers at Q Yāsīn 36:19.⁶⁰

He usually groups readings geographically without naming names; for example, asserting that most of the readers of Medina read *fī muqāmin amin* at Q Dukhān 44:51 with *ḍammah*, most of the readers of the two metropoleis (*miṣrayn*), Kufa and Basra, *fī maqām* with *fathah*.⁶¹ He usually names the different regions in the order Medina, Mecca, Basra, and Kufa, hinting at an order of preference. Syria (or Damascus, *al-Shām*) is named much less often, and its place in the sequence of regions is

54 Mahārish, *Manhaj*, 203–5, 209–10, 239.

55 See esp. Mahārish, *Manhaj*, 239–40. Shady Hekmat Nasser wrestles with the problematic application of *tawātur* to the Qur'an, especially in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, in *Transmission*, chap. 3. It was originally a Mu'tazili concept, mentioned by al-Shāfi'i but not brought into theoretical *ḥadīth* literature until al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), for which see Brown, *Hadīth*, 104–5. Its meaning and utility in jurisprudence, although not its historiography, are reviewed by Weiss, "Knowledge of the Past."

56 Cf. 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 2:74, 317. Other examples of ignored variants pointed out by Mahārish, *Manhaj*, 183–84.

57 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 3:646, 18:162. Cf. 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 1:166, 5:7.

58 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 15:211–12, 18:57–58.

59 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 5:537–38, 16:84–85. Another exception (*ad* Q Maryam 19:74) pointed out by Stewart, "Consensus," 159.

60 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 19:418–19.

61 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 21:63. Cf. 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 6:143.

inconsistent. Al-Ṭabarī generally offers no *isnāds* for variant readings except when they come from Companions; for example, where Ibn ‘Abbās’s gloss of a word is followed by Ibn Mas‘ūd’s reading with this word substituted (Q Qalam 68:51).⁶²

Al-Ṭabarī shows limited interest in discrepancies among the regional codices.⁶³ Abū ‘Ubayd apparently provides the earliest list we have of discrepancies among the codices dispatched by ‘Uthmān to Damascus, Basra, and Kufa, besides one kept at Medina. He states that there are twelve peculiarities to the way the Hijazis read (he does not actually refer to a single ‘Uthmānic codex), but al-Ṭabarī remarks only six of them, at Q Mā'idah 5:53, 54, 40:26, Zukhruf 43:71, Ḥadid 57:24, and Shams 91:15.⁶⁴ Abū ‘Ubayd states that there are 22 peculiarities to the way the Syrians read, but al-Ṭabarī remarks only three of them, at Q 3:184, Nisā' 4:66, and 40:26.⁶⁵ And Abū ‘Ubayd states there are five discrepancies between the way the Basrans and Kufans read, of which al-Ṭabarī remarks not one.⁶⁶

Al-Ṭabarī does remark some of these disagreements without relating them to discrepant codices. For example, Abū ‘Ubayd reports that at Q 21:4, the Kufans have *qāla rabbī ya'lamu l-qawl* with *alif* as a report, whereas the Basrans have *qul rabbī ya'lamu l-qawl* as a command without *alif*. Al-Ṭabarī comments that most of the readers of Medina and Basra and some of the Kufans read *qul rabbī*, whereas some of the readers of Mecca and most of the readers of Kufa read *qāla rabbī*. In his opinion, the (correct) position to take is that the two variants have both been read by the readers of the metropoleis and agree in meaning, so whichever one recites, one hits the mark.⁶⁷ Majority and minority readings in each region, remarked here and throughout the commentary, suggest considerable interregional communication and borrowing. Therefore, variant codices evidently exercised no complete control over local readings, tending to justify al-Ṭabarī’s neglect.⁶⁸

Other examples show that the codices have much less authority than other indications. As almost everywhere in al-Ṭabarī’s commentary, consensus is ultimately what makes a reading legitimate, not ancient manuscripts. Grammar has substantial weight. Abū ‘Ubayd says that the Kufans have *qul kam labithum fi l-arḍ* as a command without *alif* at Q Mu'minūn 23:112, whereas the Basrans have *qāla*

62 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 23:203–4.

63 The principal studies of the discrepant regional codices are Nöldeke, et al., *History*, 392–402, then Cook, “Stemma.” Additionally, see now Sidky, “Regionality,” and Vahidnia, “Whence Come Qur’ān Manuscripts?”

64 Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:156–57; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 8:515–17, 526, 20:309, 647, 22:423–24, 453.

65 Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:158–61; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 6:287, 7:208, 20:309.

66 Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:161–62.

67 Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:161; Ṭabarī *Jāmi'*, 16:224–25.

68 Cf. Nasser, reviewing discrepant references to codices and proposing the explanation that regions had no single master copies: *Second Canonization*, 152–63.

kam labithtum fī l-arḍ with *alif* as a report.⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī comments that most of the readers of Medina and Basra and some of the people of Kufa read that as a report, *qāla kam labithtum*, whereas most of the readers of the people of Kufa read it as a command. The more likely correct reading is *qāla*, for a command should be *qūlū* (to agree with the plural verb to come).⁷⁰ He makes no mention of different Kufan and Basran codices, but grammar is evidently sufficient to overrule a majority reading in one region and a minority in two others. Usually, however, grammar justifies two equally acceptable readings. It cannot justify a new reading, as at Q Ma'ārij 70:15–16, where al-Ṭabarī points out the possibility of an accusative but rules it out on the ground that no one ever read it so.⁷¹

Another example: Abū 'Ubayd says the Syrians alone read *awlādahum* and *shurakā'ihim* at Q 6:137.⁷² According to al-Ṭabarī, the readers of the Hijaz and Iraq read *wa-kadhālika zayyana li-kathīrin mina l-mushrikīna qatla awlādihim shurakā'uhum*, whereas some of the readers of Syria read *wa-kadhālika zuyyina li-kathīrin mina l-mushrikīna qatlu awlādahum shurakā'ihim*. Al-Ṭabarī declares that he will not permit any reading but the first on account of the consensus of the readers with support from the qualified interpreters, although he also goes on to explain how the alternative can make good Arabic.⁷³ Here, as normally, the ultimate authority is the consensus of the readers. Indeed (as with other Sunni commentators before and after al-Ṭabarī), the authority of the codices rests not, among other possibilities, on the authority of the caliph 'Uthmān who promulgated them but rather on the consensus of the readers.

Occasionally, al-Ṭabarī will demand congruence with the 'Uthmānic *rasm* but not alone. At Q 10:71, al-Ṭabarī says that the readers of the metropoleis read *wa-shurakā'ukum* in the accusative and *fa-ajmī'ū*. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī reportedly read *fa-ajmī'ū* but *shurakā'ukum* in the nominative. What is correct is the accusative, since it is in the codex with no *wāw* and because of the consensus for reading it so, which may not be opposed by someone liable to error and neglect.⁷⁴ At Q Nūr 24:22, al-Ṭabarī says that most of the readers of the metropoleis read *wa-lā ya'tali* (Form VIII) except for Abū Ja'far and Zayd b. Aslam (Medinese, d. 136/753?), who reportedly read *wa-lā yata'alla* (Form V). In his opinion, *ya'tali* must be correct for agreeing with the writing of the codex. However, he also mentions in its favor the great majority of readers (*jamā'at al-qara'ah*).⁷⁵

69 Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:161–62.

70 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 17:129–31. Against three of the Seven.

71 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 23:261. Against Ḥafṣ < 'Āṣim. Other examples remarked by Stewart, "Consensus," 165–66.

72 Abū 'Ubayd, *Faḍā'il*, 2:159.

73 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 9:576–77.

74 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 12:232.

75 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 17:223.

At one point, al-Ṭabarī appears to have different information about the codices. Al-Ṭabarī says that most of the readers of the Hijaz, Iraq, and Syria read *sa-yaqūlūna li-llāh* at Q 23:87 except for Abū ‘Amr, who read *sa-yaqūlūna llāh*, following the script of the codex. “So it is in the codices of the metropoleis except for that of the people of Basra.” They are close in meaning and so both correct, although al-Ṭabarī himself prefers the reading without *alif*, since the codices of the metropoleis other than that of the people of Basra agree on it.⁷⁶ Mahārish cites this example to illustrate al-Ṭabarī’s deference to the writing of the codices.⁷⁷ The oddity is that Abū ‘Ubayd identifies *Allāh* with *alif* as a Damascene peculiarity, not Basran.⁷⁸ Twice al-Ṭabarī refers to “our codices, of the people of the Mashriq,” whose readings he prefers at Q 5:53 and 54.⁷⁹ His listing Hijazi readings first may show loyalty to the Shāfi‘i tradition out of which he developed his own jurisprudence, but he wrote his books in Baghdad in the middle of Iraq.

Grammar has come up in one example already. Al-Ṭabarī most often adduces grammar and philology for the sake of interpreting verses but also regularly to help decide between readings. At Q A’rāf 7:26, for example, al-Ṭabarī says that most of the Meccan, Kufan, and Basran readers read *wa-libāsu l-taqwā dhālika khayr* with *libās* in the nominative, whereas most of the readers of Medina read *libāsa l-taqwā* with the accusative, likewise some of the Kufan readers. In al-Ṭabarī’s opinion, the grammatical explanation in favor of the nominative is more likely correct.⁸⁰ At Q Ḥijr 15:56, al-Ṭabarī says most of the readers of Medina and Kufa read *wa-man yaqnaṭu* except for al-A’mash and al-Kisā‘ī, who read *yaqniṭu*. Al-Kisā‘ī read *min ba’di mā qanaṭu* at Q Shūrā 42:28, although al-A’mash *qaniṭu*, Abū ‘Amr the same as al-Kisā‘ī. The most likely to be correct is *qanaṭu* at Q 42:28 and *yaqniṭu* at Q 15:56. He reviews the grammar of *fathah* and *kasrah* in relation to pharyngeal and non-pharyngeal consonants and concludes that *fathah* is unknown in the speech of the Arabs. Thus he discredits the majority reading in both Medina and Kufa.⁸¹

Al-Ṭabarī continually invokes *hujjat al-qara’ah*, apparently a set of readers whose consensus may not be opposed.⁸² He apparently refers to a similar group in the extant sections of his book on disagreements among the jurists, usually

76 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’*, 17:98–99.

77 Mahārish, *Manhaj*, 324–26.

78 Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā’il*, 2:160; likewise according to al-Dānī, *Muqni’*, 599. Sidky classifies it as a Basran and Kufan variant: “On the Regionality,” 141.

79 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’*, 8:515–17, 526. Confirmed as Medinese peculiarities by Abū ‘Ubayd, *Faḍā’il*, 2:156.

80 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’*, 10:128–30. Against three of the Seven.

81 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’*, 14:85–86. Against five of the Seven.

82 Pointed out by Gilliot, *Langue*, 143–45, plausibly analysed and related to al-Ṭabarī’s jurisprudence by Stewart, “Consensus.”

saying *ajma'ū* (as opposed to *ikhtalafū ft ...* to introduce a survey of disagreements) but also often *ajma'at al-ḥujjah*.⁸³ Devin Stewart suggests that this *ḥujjah* comprises the eight jurists most often cited by name: Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Amr al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/773–74?), Sufyān b. Sa'īd al-Thawrī (d. 161/778?), al-Shāfi'ī, Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān b. Thābit (d. 150/767), Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm (d. 182/798), Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/804–5), and Abū Thawr Ibrāhīm b. Khālīd (d. 240/854). No one, he later observes, has listed the readers who constituted the *ḥujjah* in the Qur'an commentary.⁸⁴

Here are the readers most often cited by al-Ṭabarī (not counting citations of them as philologists or commentators):

- al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 48;
- Abū Ja'far, 46;
- Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā', 42;
- 'Āṣim, 38;
- Ibn 'Abbās, 36;
- Ibn Mas'ūd, 28;
- Mujāhid, 20;
- al-Kisā'ī, 17;
- Nāfi', 17;
- al-A'mash, 16;
- Ubayy b. Ka'b, 15;
- Ḥumayd al-A'raj, 12;
- Qatādah b. Dī'āmah (Basran, d. 117/735–36?), 13;
- Ḥamzah, 10;
- Ibn Kathīr, 10;
- 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Ishāq, 10.

The most authoritative readers for al-Ṭabarī are definitely not the Seven. The last of them, Ibn 'Āmir, is named just three times, less often than Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (Khurasani, d. 102/720–21?), Ibn Muḥayṣin, 'Ikrimah (Medinese, d. 107/725–26?),⁸⁵ Sa'īd b. Jubayr (Kufan, d. 95/714?), and Abū Rajā' 'Imrān b. Taym al-'Uṭāridī (Basran, d. 105/723–24). Twice, at Q 18:28 and 23:14, Ibn 'Āmir's reading is overruled by appeal to consensus; once, at Q Nūr 24:36, his reading is the less likely correct.⁸⁶

⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Hādihā mā tahtawī*, and idem, *Das konstantinopler Fragment*.

⁸⁴ Stewart, "Consensus," 143, 157.

⁸⁵ On 'Ikrimah, Berber client to Ibn 'Abbās, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 7:263–73. His proper *nasab* is unreported.

⁸⁶ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 15:236–37, 17:21, 319–20.

Al-Ṭabarī's disregard for Ibn 'Āmir was remarked long ago. His own questioning of Ibn 'Āmir's sources, presumably from *Kitāb al-Qirā'at*, is quoted by 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī.⁸⁷ Al-Qāsim b. Firruḥ al-Shāṭibī (d. Cairo, 590/1194) cautioned against heeding Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's aspersion of him. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Jazarī (d. Shiraz, 833/1429) says no one rejected Ibn 'Āmir's reading till Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī after AH 300, which is considered one of his failings.⁸⁸ (Actually, Syrian readings seem to have been little heeded in the linguistic literature on the Qur'an for a century before him, too.) But al-Ṭabarī periodically invokes consensus to overrule the rest of Ibn Mujāhid's Seven as well; e.g., against Nāfi' at Q 23:67, Ibn Kathīr at Q 23:9, 'Āṣim at Q Ikhlaṣ 112:1, Ḥamzah at Q Ṭāriq 86:4, al-Kisā'i at Q Naba' 78:28, and Abū 'Amr at Q 23:92.⁸⁹

Stewart has suggested that consensus, for al-Ṭabarī, will overrule two but not three.⁹⁰ Such a rule may work as to juridical disagreements, but it does not in the Qur'an commentary as to variant readings. Al-Ṭabarī expressly invokes consensus to disallow the reading of Abū l-'Āliyah,⁹¹ Abū Rajā' al-Uṭaridī, al-A'raj, "and a number of others" at Q 10:24; the reading of Abū Rajā', 'Awf (presumably Abū l-Aḥwaṣ b. Mālik, Kufan, d. late 7th/early 8th cent.), and al-A'raj at Q 12:30; the reading of Muḥammad b. Sirīn (Basran, d. 110/729), Qatādah, and Qays b. 'Ubād (Basran, d. after 80/699–700) at Q 15:41; the reading of Mujāhid, al-Ḥasan, and Ibn Muḥayṣin at Q Banī Isrā'īl 17:13; the reading of Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 'Ikrimah, and Mujāhid at Q 18:102; the reading of Abū Rajā', al-Ḥasan, and Abū Ja'far at Q 44:27; the reading of 'Āṣim al-Jahdarī, Abū Ja'far, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī at Q Najm 53:11, even if, he concedes, the soundness of their reading is undeniable; the reading of Abū 'Amr, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, and al-Ḥasan at Q Ḥaṣhr 59:2; and the reading of al-Kisā'i, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, and Qatādah at Q Ṭahrīm 66:3.⁹²

Admittedly, this list of trios whose advocacy was insufficient to justify a minority reading is heavy on Followers, possibly indicating that they are not part of *al-hujjah*. Al-Ṭabarī lists an extraordinary number of readers at Q Burūj 85:22. Among the

87 Sakhāwī, *Jamāl*, ed. Bawwāb, 2:432–33 = ed. 'Aṭīyyah and Kharābah, 512.

88 Mahārish, *Manhaj*, 249; Ibn al-Jazarī, *al-Naṣh*, 2:264. Disregard for Ibn 'Āmir also remarked by Gilliot, *Langue*, 137–38. Al-Sakhāwī also quotes Ibn Mujāhid's leading disciple Abū Ṭāhir b. Abī Hāshim (d. 349/960). Ibn Mujāhid had doubts about how Ibn 'Āmir had learnt his reading; Ibn Abī Hāshim himself thought al-A'mash was more worthy than he of inclusion among the Seven and would have included him but for the duty to follow precedent: *Jamāl*, ed. Bawwāb, 2:435 = ed. 'Aṭīyyah and Kharābah, 515.

89 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 17:83–86, 13, 24:730, 290–91, 42–43, 17:103, respectively.

90 Stewart, "Consensus," 163–64.

91 A prominent Basran Follower; but his name is very uncertain, for which see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 12:143.

92 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 12:153, 13:119, 14:69–71, 521–23, 15:422, 21:39–40, 22:26–27, 502–3, 23:91–92.

readers of the Hijaz, he says, Abū Ja'far and Ibn Kathīr, among the readers of Kufa 'Āṣim, al-A'mash, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisā'ī, and among the Basrans Abū 'Amr read *mahfūz* in the genitive. Among the Meccans Ibn Muḥaysin and among the Medinese Nāfi' read *mahfūz* in the nominative. What is correct in his opinion is that both readings are well-known, so whichever one recites, one hits the mark.⁹³ A few of these nine are Followers, but six are among Ibn Mujāhid's seven leading readers and all fall among the fourteen identified by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Dimyāṭī (d. 1117/1705).⁹⁴

That these nine have a special, elevated status may show up indirectly in a certain reluctance to connect them with rejected readings. For example, al-Ṭabarī sides with the jurists in favor of *yaṭṭaharna* at Q 2:222. This is to side with Abū Bakr < 'Āṣim, al-Kisā'ī, and Khalaf among the Ten, according to Ibn Mihrān, against the majority who read *yaṭhurna*.⁹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī invokes consensus against Abū 'Amr's reading *'alimi l-ghayb* with the genitive at Q 23:92. This is to overrule not only Abū 'Amr but also Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Āmir, and Ḥafṣ < 'Āṣim.⁹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī invokes consensus against 'Āṣim's reading *wa-la-yubadilannahum* without doubling at Q 24:55, although it is also the reading of Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Muḥaysin, and others.⁹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī says most of the readers except for Abū Ja'far read *fa-lā tadhhab nafsuka* at Q Fāṭir 35:8, he preferring *tudhhib*. This is to overrule also al-A'mash and Ibn Muḥaysin, among others.⁹⁸ And whereas he usually describes variant readings by where a majority or minority read them, he very often names readers such as the leading three after al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Abū Ja'far, Abū 'Amr, and 'Āṣim, as exceptions, advocating aberrant variants. One might infer that they are just the readers he regrets to disagree with.

To sum up, al-Ṭabarī strongly favors sticking to widely heard readings, rejecting rare ones. He never implies that one should stick to any one set of readings. On the contrary, he freely picks and chooses for himself and implies that others may, too, often as he finds that whichever of two variants one chooses to recite, one hits the mark. He does not strongly uphold congruity with the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, not from lack of respect but evidently because by his time that was a dead issue, made irrelevant by consensus. Although he often falls back on grammatical explanations to decide the most probable meaning of a verse, he only occasionally allows

93 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 24:286–87.

94 Dimyāṭī, *Ithāf*.

95 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 3:731–32; Ibn Mihrān, *Mabsūt*, 146.

96 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 17:103; Ibn Mihrān, *Mabsūt*, 314. Admittedly, where Ḥafṣ and Abū Bakr diverge in their accounts of 'Āṣim's reading, al-Ṭabarī consistently recognizes only the latter.

97 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 17:346–47; 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 4:268.

98 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 19:35; 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 5:176.

grammar to rule out a well-known reading, never to justify an unprecedented reading. Finally, although I cannot claim it as more than a vague impression, nine readers, mostly Followers of the Followers, seem to enjoy special authority. They exclude Ibn ʿAmir from Ibn Mujāhid’s seven (probably also from Aḥmad b. Jubayr’s five), Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī (Basran, d. 205/821) and Khalaf b. Hishām (Baghdadi, d. 229/844) from Ibn Mihrān’s ten, but they do suggest a turn at the beginning of the tenth century toward simplification and manageability. What separates Ibn Mujāhid from al-Ṭabarī is not, then, the idea of a limited number of authoritative readers; rather, it is Ibn Mujāhid’s primary stress on transmission as opposed to al-Ṭabarī’s on consensus.

Al-Māturīdī

The commentary of Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. Samarqand, 333/944–45) is now available for comparison with al-Ṭabarī’s.⁹⁹ He shows only occasional interest in variant readings. He attributes some to named Companions (notably almost sixty from Ḥaḍḥah’s codex, where ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Dāwūd Sulaymān names only one¹⁰⁰), but only a few to named Followers and almost none to named successors to the Followers. (Anonymity apparently agrees with Ḥanafī tradition in Central Asia. The same goes for exegetical comments, usually attributed to *baʿḍuhum*.) Al-Kisāʾī is named often but overwhelmingly as a philologist, not advocating some variant reading.

Most of the variants al-Māturīdī cites anonymously were supported by some of the Ibn Mujāhid’s seven and Ibn Mihrān’s ten, but many were not. For example, al-Māturīdī says of Q 2:213 that some read *yaḥkuma*, others *taḥkuma*. The latter reading is attributed elsewhere only to Mujāhid.¹⁰¹ At Q 4:31, he reviews the alternative readings *kabāʾir* and *kabīran*. The latter reading, which apparently contradicts the ʿUthmānic *rasm*, is attributed elsewhere only to Ibn ʿAbbās and Saʿīd b. Jubayr.¹⁰² He is unconcerned to exclude aberrant variants (except perhaps such as he considers beneath notice). His significance for a comparison with Ibn Mujāhid is to show that a very different approach to the Qurʾan, little concerned with variant readings, less still with focusing attention on a restricted, well-attested subset, was alive in his time in the East.

⁹⁹ Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*. See review essay by Uddin.

¹⁰⁰ Jeffery, ed., *Materials*, 85–87.

¹⁰¹ Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*, 2:11; ʿUmar and Mukram, *Muʿjam*, 1:163.

¹⁰² Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*, 3:187; ʿUmar and Mukram, *Muʿjam*, 2:127.

Linguistic approaches of the early tenth century

Contemporary with al-Ṭabarī, in the linguistic commentary tradition, is the Baghdadī Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923–24?), whose *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān* has now been published. Al-Zajjāj comments on most but not all verses in canonical order. He very often mentions alternative readings but usually introduces them with the passive voice. Grammarians Sībawayh, al-Akhfash, al-Khalīl, al-Farrā', Abū 'Ubaydah, and Abū l-'Abbās Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad are more frequently cited than any of the Seven. He seldom refers to geographical tendencies.¹⁰³

Unlike al-Ṭabarī, al-Zajjāj allows grammarians to overrule readers, as where he prefers Sībawayh's reading to Abū 'Amr's at Q 2:54 and to Ḥamzah's at Q 35:43, although there he blames whoever attributed this variant to Abū 'Amr, who must have been careless of grammar as Abū 'Amr would not have been.¹⁰⁴ He periodically forbids going against the codex, meaning the 'Uthmānic *rasm*.¹⁰⁵ However, he sometimes seems to relax his rule. Of Q 18:38, *lākinna huwa llāhu rabbī*, he says,

What is excellent and expressive is that which is in the codex of Ubayy b. Ka'b. We have not mentioned it among these readings on account of its disagreeing with the codex. It is *lākin ana huwa llāhu rabbī*, which is the underlying form (*aṣl*) ... I do not repudiate reciting this, since omission may often happen in the Book with regard to *yā's* and glottal stops.¹⁰⁶

He says that Q Faṭḥ 48:16 is read both *yuslimūn* and *yuslimū*, apparently allowing a choice between 'Uthmān's codex and Ubayy's.¹⁰⁷

Al-Zajjāj says repeatedly that recitation is a *sunnah* and unprecedented readings are to be avoided. For example, he says that *ṣīrati llāh* is read in the genitive at Q 42:53 in apposition to *ṣīratin mustaqīm* in the previous verse, also possibly in the nominative and accusative. "However," he says, "I do not know anyone who has read either of them, so it is not to be read with either one, for recitation is a *sunnah* not to be contradicted, even if what is read is grammatically permissible."¹⁰⁸ Yet

¹⁰³ On him see *EP*, s. v. "al-Zadjdjādī" (C. H. M. Versteegh).

¹⁰⁴ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 1:136, 4:275–76. Ibn Mujāhid (*Sab'ah*, 154–55) and Ibn Mihrān (*Mabsūṭ*, 129) report discrepant accounts of Abū 'Amr's reading. The two *rāwīs* assigned to Abū 'Amr by al-Dānī were split (*Taysīr*, 63).

¹⁰⁵ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 1:327 (Q 2:246), 366 (Q 2:283), 373 (Q 3:1), 4:279 (Q 36:8), 429 (Q 44:57), 5:171 (Q Jumu'ah 62:9), 211 (Q 68:51), 261–62 (Q Insān 76:21), 267 (Q Mursalāt 77:15), 356 (Q Qārī'ah 101:10–11), 361 (Q Humazah 104:1).

¹⁰⁶ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 3:287.

¹⁰⁷ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 5:24. Cf. Jeffrey, *Materials*, 165, also reporting the attribution of *yuslimū* to Ibn Mas'ūd, and 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 6:206, also attributing *yuslimū* to Zayd b. 'Alī.

¹⁰⁸ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 4:404.

here also he apparently allows exceptions. He says that *naṣīri* is the unanimous choice at Q 2:120 but *naṣīru* permissible, as he goes on to explain grammatically.¹⁰⁹ He acknowledges that the majority reading of Q Luqmān 31:31 is *bi-ni'mati llāh* but adds the possibilities *nī'imāt*, *na'māt*, and *nī'amāt*, none of which was endorsed by any named readers elsewhere.¹¹⁰ As here, al-Zajjāj sometimes refers to the superiority of majority readings but elsewhere sometimes justifies a minority reading and never rules out a Follower reading as al-Ṭabarī will. At Q Tawbah 9:66, for example, he says, “The reading is *in na'fu*.” The alternative readings *in yu'fa* and *in ya'fu* are excellent, “but I do not know anyone well-known who so read it.” Yet *na'fu* was the reading of 'Āṣim alone, whereas *yu'fa* was the choice of the rest of the Seven and Ten.¹¹¹

Al-Zajjāj plainly conceived of a set of well-known and therefore authoritative readers, once declaring, “The Qur'an is not to be recited except as it has been recited by the readers from whom it is unanimously agreed that one may learn.”¹¹² He seems inconsistent as to whom this set comprises, though. Going down to four citations, here are those whom al-Zajjāj cites as readers:

- Abū 'Amr, 22;
- 'Āṣim, 11;
- al-Ḥasan, 11;
- 'Īsā b. 'Umar, 7;
- Ibn 'Abbās, 6;
- Ḥamzah, 5;
- Nāfi', 5;
- al-A'mash, 4;
- Ibn Mas'ūd, 4.

Among Ibn Mujāhid's seven, Ibn Kathīr and Ibn 'Āmir are omitted, al-Kisā'ī cited just twice. That is not because al-Zajjāj prefers earlier authorities: although there are two Companions in the above group, there is only one mid-level Follower, the other six being all of the fifth or higher generation. Altogether, al-Zajjāj confirms that the Seven enjoyed no universal recognition in the early tenth century, perhaps more surprisingly that the tradition of grammatical independence was still fairly strong.

¹⁰⁹ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 1:202. Cf. 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 1:109.

¹¹⁰ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 4:200–201. Cf. 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 5:92–93. A helpfully detailed referee report points out that Ibn Khālawayh attributes a plural form (*n*māt*) to al-A'raj and al-Awzā'ī: Ibn Khālawayh *Mukhtaṣar*, 117. Al-Farrā' also says that some read a sound feminine plural at this point (no names), although he considers it dubious Arabic: *Ma'ānī*, 2:329–30.

¹¹¹ Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 2:459; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 316; Ibn Mīhrān, *Mabsūṭ*, 228.

¹¹² Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī*, 1:151 (*ad* Q 2:69).

When Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Miqṣam (Baghdadi, d. 354/965?) was put on trial in 322/934 for reciting new readings, consistent with the *rasm* and justified grammatically but unprecedented, he named in his defense three philologists of a century before who had exercised the same freedom. That was permissible for them, said a student of Ibn Mujāhid's whose record provides most of what we know of the trial, but not for those in the present time.¹¹³ Al-Zajjāj was not suitable for Ibn Miqṣam to cite but he does apparently show that proposing new readings had not quite been dead and buried for a century.

Also from the early tenth century we have most of al-Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī l-Qur'an*.¹¹⁴ Like earlier linguistic commentators, al-Naḥḥās comments on most but not all verses in canonical order. In this work, he seems less interested than al-Zajjāj in variant readings. He does favor ancient authorities. For example, he cites Ibn 'Abbās in favor of *ilam* at Q 2:259, the reading of Ḥamzah and al-Kisā'ī according to Ibn Mujāhid.¹¹⁵ He cites 'Umar and Ibn 'Abbās as reading *ḍayqan* without doubling at Q 6:125, the reading of Ibn Kathīr among the Seven.¹¹⁶ He cites Ibn 'Abbās and Sa'īd b. Jubayr in favor of *yaqūlu* at Q 7:173, the reading of Abū 'Amr.¹¹⁷ He cites Ḥudhayfah b. al-Yamān (d. 36/656–57) at Q 17:33 in favor of *tusraf*, the reading of Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'ī, and Ibn 'Āmir.¹¹⁸ Many more examples could be cited. He seems to regularly prefer earlier authorities in support of minority readings. He says that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib reportedly read *'alimtu* at Q 17:102. The readers all agreed on *'alimta* except al-Kisā'ī, he says, who read *'alimtu*. If correctly transmitted from 'Alī, that would be preferable, but the *isnād* for it has an anonymous link at the Follower level. Contrast al-Ṭabarī, who straightforwardly rules out 'Alī's reading on the basis of consensus.¹¹⁹

Often, al-Naḥḥās cites early authorities in favor of readings completely abandoned by later specialists. The default reading at Q 6:100 is *khalāqahum*, but al-Naḥḥās says that Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar read *khalqahum*. Al-Ṭabarī had also mentioned this alternative but expressly rejected it by appeal to consensus.¹²⁰ At Q 7:149, al-Naḥḥās says that *suqīṭa* is also read *saqāṭa*. Some modern scholars have found only one advocate of this alternative, the Yemeni Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Sumayfa' (*fl.*

113 Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 2:611. See also Nöldeke, et al., *History*, 475–76.

114 On him see *EP*, s. v. "al-Naḥḥās" (Reinhard Weipert). The extant text covers Q 1–19, 21–48, about four-fifths of the whole.

115 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 1:282; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 189.

116 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 2:486; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 268.

117 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 3:103; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 298.

118 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 4:150; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 380.

119 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 4:201; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 15:106. *'Alimtu* also attributed to al-A'mash and Zayd b. 'Alī according to 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 3:340–41.

120 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 2:465; Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 9:454. 'Umar and Mukram report no other attribution than to Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar: *Mu'jam*, 2:302.

early 2nd/8th cent.?), of dubious reputation.¹²¹ At Q 15:15, he says that the well-known reading of Mujāhid and al-Ḥasan is *sukirat* (no doubling), with *sakirat* another possibility mentioned by al-Farrā'. Just one of the Seven (Ibn Kathīr) read *sukirat*, and *sakirat* is attributed only to Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Zuhrī (Medinese, d. 124/742?) and Abū Ḥaywah Shurayḥ b. Yazīd (Homsī, d. 203/818), both seldom cited in the literature of readings.¹²² At Q 16:62, he cites al-Ḥasan, Mujāhid, and Sa'īd b. Jubayr for the reading *mufraṭūn* (so all of the Seven but Nāfi'), then Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās for *mufriṭūn*, Abū Ja'far and Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (Kufan, d. 127/744–45) for *mufarriṭūn*.¹²³ The default reading at Q 25:1 is *'abdihi*, but al-Naḥḥās mentions that 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (Companion, d. 73/693) read *'ibādihi*, not known to have been advocated by anyone else.¹²⁴ Support from early readers seems to be a much stronger principle for him than for al-Ṭabarī, consensus correspondingly weaker.

Al-Naḥḥās refers directly to al-Ṭabarī and the Egyptian Ḥanafī jurist al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933) as teachers. Sometimes, like al-Ṭabarī, he lets interpretation of the text dictate which is the better reading. Al-Naḥḥās says some read *malikayn* (two kings) as opposed to *malakayn* (two angels) at Q 7:20, but Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' rejected this, saying there had been no king before Adam, hence no possibility of two kings. (This is from the story of Satan's tempting Adam and Eve, "saying, 'Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree lest you become angels or become immortals'" – Jones translation.) Compare al-Ṭabarī, who offers *isnāds* for reports that Ibn 'Abbās and Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr (Yamamī, d. 132/749–50?) read *malikayn* but says he does not permit any reading but that of the readers of the metropoleis, *malakayn*. "As we have already explained, what is widespread (*mustafīd*) among the readers of Islam by way of readings, that is what is correct and impermissible to disagree with."¹²⁵ At Q 9:17, Ibn 'Abbās read *kāna li-l-mushrikīna an ya'murū masjida llāh*; likewise Abū 'Amr (not to mention, among the Seven, Ibn Kathīr). However, says al-Naḥḥās, the plural *masājid* is closer the mark (*aṣwab*), since it comprehends both possible explanations, mainly all mosques and the sacred one (of Mecca). Al-Ṭabarī notes the two readings but expresses no preference.¹²⁶

Al-Naḥḥās will consider rejecting a reading on account of grammar. At Q 27:66, for example, he says that Ibn Muḥayṣin read *bal āddaraka* (with the interrogative

121 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 3:81; Umar and Mukram, *Muḥjam*, 2:404. On him see Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah*, 2:161–62, also Muḥammad, "Al-Ṭawāhir"

122 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 4:14; Farrā', *Ma'ānī*, 2:86; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'a*, 366; Ibn Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 70–71; Umar and Mukram, *Muḥjam*, 3:252.

123 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 4:79–80; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 374; Umar and Mukram, *Muḥjam* 23:286.

124 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 5:7; Umar and Mukram, *Muḥjam*, 4:273.

125 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 3:191; Ṭabarī, *Jāmī*, 10:107–8.

126 Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 3:191; Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 313; Ṭabarī, *Jāmī*, 11:375–76.

particle *a*; rather than *bali ddāraka*). Abū 'Amr rejected this, saying that *bal* could not come except before an affirmation. Al-Naḥḥās defends it, though, on the ground of an implied affirmation.¹²⁷ At Q 38:1, he explains that *ṣād* (the detached letter for which the chapter is named) may be read with *fathḥah* to avoid two *sukūns* in a row. *Ṣādin* is solecistic according to most grammarians, although Ibn Abī Ishāq (its only known advocate) is among the greatest grammarians. But Sībawayh permitted it as an implicit oath.¹²⁸ As he will not dismiss readings in favor of later consensus, so it is uncertain that he insists on agreement with the 'Uthmānic *rasm*. The default reading of Q 6:112 is *shayāṭīna l-insi wa-l-jinn*, but al-A'mash read *shayāṭīna l-jinni wa-l-ins*. Al-Naḥḥās comments merely that this means the same.¹²⁹ He quotes Ibn Mas'ūd's reading *fa-'azzaznā bi-l-thālith* at Q 36:14. Rather than rejecting it for going against the 'Uthmānic *rasm* (adding *al-*), he observes that the qualified commentators (*ahl al-tafsīr*) are against him, saying this does not clarify (*laysa bi-l-bayyin*).¹³⁰

Al-Naḥḥās' commentary shows clearly that no set of seven or ten legitimate readings was yet universally recognized. For example, al-A'mash, Abū Ja'far, Ibn Waththāb, al-A'raj, and Ḥamzah are cited as advocating an alternative reading at Q 2:229.¹³¹ In all six volumes, here are readers cited for one or another variant, going down to six citations:

- Ibn 'Abbās, 48;
- Ibn Mas'ūd, 47;
- al-Ḥasan, 37;
- Mujāhid, 24;
- Ubayy b. Ka'b, 19;
- al-A'mash, 18;
- Sa'īd b. Jubayr, 14;
- Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā', 14;
- Abū Ja'far Yazīd b. Qa'qā', 13;
- al-A'raj, 12;
- 'Āṣim al-Jahdārī, 12;
- al-Kisā'ī, 11;
- 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 9;

¹²⁷ Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 5:146. Al-Ṭabarī approves of Abū 'Amr's rejection of Ibn Muḥayṣin's reading: *Jāmi'*, 18:108. Al-Naḥḥās ignores the other prevalent reading, *bal adraka*, attributed to Ibn Kathīr, Abū 'Amr, Abū Ja'far, Ya'qūb, and by some accounts 'Āṣim: Ibn Mihrān, *Mabsūṭ*, 334. For yet other readings, see 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 4:365–66.

¹²⁸ Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 6:74–75; 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 5:253.

¹²⁹ Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 2:476; al-A'mash the only known advocate of this variation according to 'Umar and Mukram, *Mu'jam*, 2:312.

¹³⁰ Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 5:484.

¹³¹ Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī*, 1:201.

- ʿĪsā b. ʿUmar, 9;
- Ibn Abī Ishāq, 9;
- Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, 8;
- Abū Rajāʾ, 7;
- Yaḥyā b. Yaʿmar, 7;
- Ṭalḥah b. Muṣarrif (Kufan, d. 112/730–31?), 7;
- al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 6.

Of the Seven, Nāfiʿ is cited not at all, Ibn Kathīr three times, ʿĀṣim four times, Ḥamzah twice, al-Kisāʿī eleven times (but also often as a philologist), Abū ʿAmr fourteen times, Ibn ʿĀmir once. Confirming the impression of preference for older readers, the median here is the third generation, of middle Followers. Al-Naḥḥās’s commentary seems strong evidence that no idea had universally prevailed of a small group of readers whose choices alone were legitimate possibilities. It is weaker evidence (with the commentary of al-Zajjāj) that the grammatical tradition was still open to plausible readings not widely recited, as Ibn Miqsam thought.

We are fortunate in having a second commentary as well from al-Naḥḥās, *Irāb al-Qurʾān*. Occasional cross-references show that it was written after the *Maʿānī*. He names considerably more readers here than in the earlier work. He is willing to reject a reading on grammatical grounds, such as what Abū ʿUbayd relates of Ibn ʿĀmir and the Syrians at Q 6:137, *kadhālika zuyyina*: “not permissible in either speech or poetry.”¹³² He had taken no notice in the *Maʿānī* (while al-Ṭabarī had defended it grammatically but ruled it out by consensus).¹³³ However, he also quotes Qutrub’s grammatical condemnation of al-Aʿmash’s reading of Q 14:22 with two differences: he attributes that reading to both Yaḥyā b. Waṭṭhāb and Ḥamzah in addition to al-Aʿmash and his final argument against it sounds more like what al-Ṭabarī might have said: “This has become a consensus ... It is not meet for the Book of God (glorious and mighty is he) to be interpreted aberrantly (*alā l-shudhūd*).”¹³⁴

My impression is still of predominant tolerance for alternative readings. For example, al-Naḥḥās says there are six attested readings of Q 7:57 and a seventh that is permissible. The people of Mecca and Medina and Abū ʿAmr read *nushuran*; al-Ḥasan and Qatādah read *nushran*; al-Aʿmash, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisāʿī read *nashran*; ʿĀṣim read *bushran*, although *bashran* has also been related of him, which makes five; Muḥammad al-Yamānī (unidentified by me) read *bushrā*; the seventh is

¹³² Naḥḥās, *Irāb*, 2:98.

¹³³ Naḥḥās, *Maʿānī*, 2:495; Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, 9:576–77. See also ʿUmar and Mukram, *Muʿjam*, 2:321–22, and Mahārish, *Manhaj* 271–75.

¹³⁴ Naḥḥās, *Irāb*, 2:368–69. Al-Ṭabarī’s own discussion of Q 14:22 takes no notice of alternative readings: *Jāmiʿ*, 13:628–34.

bushurā. “We explained their meanings in our book *al-Maʿānī*,” he concludes.¹³⁵ The same possibilities are discussed there, to be sure, but with the striking difference of having no names attached to any of them.¹³⁶ It is as if al-Naḥḥās had heard in the meantime of a new fashion of writing about variant readings.

Here are the readers most often cited according to the index:

- al-Kisāʿī, 460 times;
- Ibn ʿAbbās, 412;
- Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, 335;
- al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 296;
- ʿAṣim, 216;
- Mujāhid, 216;
- al-Aʿmash, 209;
- Abū Jaʿfar Yazīd b. Qaʿqāʾ, 187;
- Ḥamzah, 185;
- Ibn Masʿūd, 157;
- Nāfiʿ, 113;
- Ibn Kathīr, 86;
- ʿĪsā b. ʿUmar, 77;
- Saʿīd b. Jubayr, 75;
- Ibn Abī Ishāq, 62;
- ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Aʿraj, 59;
- Ubayy, 58;
- Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, 54;
- ʿAṣim al-Jahdārī, 52;
- Shaybah, 51;
- Ibn ʿĀmir, 44.

Many of these citations are for other than alternative readings, especially from the first four on the list, such as philological comments from al-Kisāʿī and glosses from Ibn ʿAbbās. I also suspect significant confusion (on the part of whoever drew up the index) between ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Aʿraj and Ḥumayd. The median has shifted slightly, to the fourth generation of late Followers. Altogether, however, the list strikingly shows that, while al-Naḥḥās still had no concept of Seven or Ten, the prestige of the Seven had considerably risen from when he wrote the *Maʿānī* to when he wrote the *ʿIrāb*.

¹³⁵ Naḥḥās, *ʿIrāb*, 2:133, supposing that the editor’s pointing of *nashran* is correct, his description *bi-ḍamm al-nūn wa-iskān al-shīn* inadvertent dittography. Cf. ʿUmar and Mukram, *Muʿjam*, 2:372–73, listing eight possibilities.

¹³⁶ Naḥḥās, *Maʿānī*, 3:44–45.

The later tenth century

The situation is very different in the later tenth century. Ibn al-Nadīm, writing in 377/987–88, mentions three books on the seven readings by Ibn Mujāhid's younger contemporary Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Naqqāsh (d. 351/962).¹³⁷ He mentions a book on eight readings by 'Alī b. Murrah al-Naqqāsh (date unknown), called *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt al-thamāniyah*, in which, says Ibn al-Nadīm, "he added to the seven Khalaf b. Hishām al-Bazzār."¹³⁸ More strikingly still, he dedicates a section to "the Seven Readers," listing precisely Ibn Mujāhid's seven, although not in exactly the same order as in Ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab'ah*. (He also lists the one to six main transmitters from each of the Seven. This includes both of the famous *rāwīs* identified by al-Dānī from 'Aṣim and al-Kisā'i, one of them from Nāfi', but neither of al-Dānī's two from any of the rest.¹³⁹) Equally striking, he dedicates a long section to those who advocated aberrant readings (*asmā' qurrā' al-shawādhdh*). It omits the names of Companions and most middle Followers (e.g., al-Ḥasan and Mujāhid), but it does include, among the readers most often cited by al-Naḥḥās, just listed, al-A'mash, Abū Ja'far, 'Aṣim al-Jaḥdarī, 'Isā b. 'Umar, and Ibn Abī Ishāq.¹⁴⁰ The grammarian Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002) laments that most people in his time count as aberrant any reading outside Ibn Mujāhid's seven (and respectable any reading within them).¹⁴¹

Other books of the later tenth century stress the Seven as well, although without asserting exclusivity. Two of the best known are by al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad b. Khālawayh (d. 370/980–81?) and Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Fārisī (d. 377/987).¹⁴² Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī dedicates his survey at the beginning to the Būyad sultan 'Aḍud al-Dawlah (r. 364–72/975–83).¹⁴³ This hints at official favor for the Seven as reports from the time of Ibn Mujāhid do not.¹⁴⁴ But Ibn Khālawayh was associated with the Ḥamdānids in Aleppo, so other forces were at work besides. (My guess is that specialists in the readings importantly favored a restricted corpus that was difficult but not impossible to master.)

137 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:87–88. See on him al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 2:602–7.

138 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:99–100.

139 Shady Hekmat Nasser investigates the establishment of a canon of transmissions from the Seven in the Maghrib in "The Two-*rāwī* Canon."

140 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:78–80.

141 Ibn Jinnī, *al-Muḥtasab* (ed. Nāṣif, al-Najjār, and Shalabī), 1:32; = (ed. 'Aṭā), 1:102–3.

142 Ibn Khālawayh, *Ḥujjah*; Fārisī, *Ḥujjah*. On them see *EF*, s.vv. "Ibn Khālawayh" (Monique Bernards), and "al-Fārisī, Abū 'Alī" (Reinhard Weipert).

143 Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī, *Ḥujjah*, 1:5–6.

144 Contrary to much of the secondary literature on the readings. See for example Nasser, "The Canonizations," 94.

Some of the old patterns survive. For example, although both Ibn Khālawayh's and Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī's books are called *al-Hujjah* and offer justifications of readings, it has been observed that Ibn Khālawayh's more heavily stresses transmission, Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī's grammar.¹⁴⁵ The travel writer Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maqdisī (fl. 375/985) says there are presently in use four Hijazi readings, those of Nāfi', Ibn Kathīr, Shaybah, and Abū Ja'far; four Iraqī readings, of 'Āṣim, Ḥamzah, al-Kisā'i, and Abū 'Amr; one Syrian reading, of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir; finally four special readings, of Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī, the choices of Abū 'Ubayd and Abū Ḥātim, and the reading of al-A'mash. (By "special readings," my guess is that he meant readings seldom heard but prized by experts.) "Most of the imams hold that they are all correct."¹⁴⁶

The tradition continued of writing surveys of the readings of more than seven. Other books that survive from the later tenth century are Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Azharī (d. Herat, 370/980), *Ma'ānī l-qirā'āt*, and Abū l-Ḥasan Ṭāhir b. Ghalbūn (d. Old Cairo, 399/1009), *al-Tadhkirah fi l-qirā'āt*, going through the readings of eight, and Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mihrān (d. Nishapur, 381/991–92), *al-Ghāyah* and *al-Mabsūt*, on the readings of ten.¹⁴⁷ (I observe that respect for Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī's readings appears to be a tenth-century innovation in consideration of his minor presence in extant ninth-century commentaries, also the early tenth-century commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zajjāj, and al-Naḥḥās. Attention to Ḥafṣ < 'Āṣim, still ignored by al-Ṭabarī, likewise appears to be something of a tenth-century innovation.) Al-Azharī's continues the tradition of linguistic commentaries. It often presents alternative readings anonymously and will sometimes conclude "so read whichever you wish," indicating that readers are not expected to stick to any one previous specialist's system (weakening Bergsträsser and Pretzl's assessment of Ibn Mujāhid's principal importance). It sometimes rejects readings for disagreeing with Arabic usage; for example, expressly against Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī at Q 24:11, Ibn Kathīr at 24:31, and Ibn 'Āmir at 34:14.¹⁴⁸ And there was a split between East and West. Writing in Cordova, Makki b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437/1045) observes that while Ibn Mujāhid was the first to limit himself to seven readings before AH 300 or around then, "the readings of Ya'qūb al-Ḥaḍramī, 'Āṣim al-Jahdarī, Abū Ja'far, and

145 Editor's introduction to Ibn Khālawayh, *Hujjah*, 31.

146 Maqdisī, *Descriptio*, 39.

147 Al-Azharī, *Ma'ānī l-qirā'āt*; on him, see *EF*, s. v. "al-Azharī, Abū Maṣ'ūr" (Tilman Seidenstickerm); Abū l-Ḥasan Ṭāhir b. Ghalbūn, *Tadhkirah*; on him, see Dhahabī, *Ma'rifah*, 1:369–70, and Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah*, 1:339; Ibn Mihrān, *Ghāyah*; on him, see Dhahabī, *Ma'rifah*, 1:347–49, and Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyah*, 1:49–50.

148 Azharī, *Ma'ānī*, 2:203, 206, 290. Elsewhere, he rejects readings without naming names; e.g., the reading of Abū Bakr < 'Āṣim, Ibn 'Āmir, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisā'i, to judge by *Ma'ānī*, 1:366 (*ad* Q 6:76) together with Ibn Mujāhid, *Sab'ah*, 260.

Shaybah have not been abandoned; likewise the choices of Abū Ḥātim and Abū ‘Ubayd, among others, in the metropoleis of the East.¹⁴⁹ Not even in the Maghrib, then, did there prevail an exclusive canon of seven readings as late as the eleventh century. Scholarly interest in different sets of readings to Early Modern times has been measured by books in Ḥājī Khalifah Kātib Çelebî (d. 1067/1657), *Kashf al-zunūn*, whose titles indicate a treatment of some particular number of readings: of 155 altogether, almost half treat the Seven, a little over a quarter the Ten, the rest other numbers from one to fifty.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

One theme of this survey is a certain divergence between grammatical and philological approaches to the variant readings, on the one hand, and more legal- or *ḥadīth*-minded approaches on the other. Al-Ṭabarī heavily stresses consensus, meaning large majorities, in close agreement with his jurisprudence, where Ibn Mujāhid stresses secure transmission across generations. Their assessments sometimes conflict, but they have in common giving priority to precedents among recognized experts in the readings. By contrast, their philologist contemporaries al-Zajjāj and al-Naḥḥās retain some of the older openness to new interpretations of the ‘Uthmānic *rasm* conforming to accepted grammar and good usage even without strong precedents in the reading tradition.

Any strong distinction between legal and linguistic approaches faces two major difficulties. One is our lack of access to specialized books on the readings from before Ibn Mujāhid such as nearly all of those listed by Ibn al-Nadīm and all of the five listed by Ibn al-Jazarī and Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).¹⁵¹ We have some idea from extant examples what rules of inclusion and exclusion governed the *ma‘ānī l-Qur‘ān* genre in the earlier ninth century, whereas we must guess what rules governed the *qirā‘āt al-Qur‘ān* genre before Ibn Mujāhid’s entry. The other difficulty is the tendency of writers to borrow from one another, blurring genre lines. For example, al-Ṭabarī the jurist piles up grammatical and philological criteria to evaluate interpretations and readings, while al-Naḥḥās the grammarian refers to al-Ṭaḥāwī and al-Ṭabarī as teachers. The most I would propose with confidence is first that the order of topics in Ibn Mujāhid, *al-Sab‘ah*, follows an established convention, very likely originated by Abū ‘Ubayd.

149 Makki, *Ibānah*, 48–49.

150 *EQ*, s. v. “Reciters”, by Christopher Melchert and Asma Afsaruddin.

151 See n. 3.

Secondly, by contrast, Ibn Mujāhid departs from convention in seldom evaluating any readings of his chosen seven.

It is heuristically useful to identify historical stages, although historians tend to find predominant continuity rather than change. No doubt Ibn Mujāhid's identification of seven well-known readings was important, since precisely those Seven would turn out to be the most widely accepted for a thousand years. However, what my survey of literature on the readings before and after Ibn Mujāhid shows mainly, I think, is change that was gradual and uneven. What the state enforced at the trials of Ibn Miqṣam and Ibn Shannabūdh was not a recent innovation, Ibn Mujāhid's identification of seven authoritative readings. Rather, the state enforced a fairly longstanding consensus against coming up with new readings on the sole basis of grammar and reason in the one case, against reciting non-Ūthmānic Companion readings in the other. The commentaries of al-Zajjāj and al-Nahḥās show that grammarians contemporary to Ibn Mujāhid were still pointing out new interpretations of the *rasm* but that the time for reciting them in public had evidently passed in favor of sticking to precedents and even of renouncing some older precedents. Perhaps Ibn al-Nadīm's exclusive endorsement of Ibn Mujāhid's seven is a better marker of an historic shift in favor of limiting diversity. However, he did not speak for everyone at that.

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