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Writing the Qur'ān Between the Lines: Marginal and Interlinear Notes in Selected Qur'ān Fragments from the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar

1 Introduction

Exploring selected fragments from the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar (MIA), this essay offers a snapshot of marginal and interlinear annotations in Qur'ān fragments dated to the seventh-ninth centuries.¹ It reflects on the methods that scribes deployed when annotating Qur'ān fragments, and explores the relationship between the marginal and interlinear annotations and the Qur'ān passages to which they refer. The information that such annotations convey about the context of transmission of the text are crucial in this research. This study aims to identify the types and functions of the corrections, additional material, and independent annotations in the Qur'ān fragments, while also highlighting the significance of materiality in the study of the Qur'ān and its transmission. This essay is part of a larger project focusing on the channels of transmission of the Qur'ān text outside the framework of a final work such as the Qur'ān codex.²

1 This paper has been written on the basis of my research stay in The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar (MIA). My work has been accomplished with the collaboration of Dr. Mounia Chekhab Boudayya, the Curator for North Africa and Iberia – Museum of Islamic Art – Doha. My research trip to MIA in May 2017 was possible thanks to the support of the *Institute of Ismaili Studies*, London, I thank Dr. Omar Ali de-Unzaga, the head of the department of research and publications at the *Institute of Ismaili Studies* for his encouragement. Finally, I thank David Hollenberg for correcting my English. This paper is the second of a series of contributions about the marginal and interlinear annotations in Qur'ān manuscripts; I have presented the first paper on this topic in the international symposium “Before the Printed Word: Texts, Scribes, and Transmission,” which took place at *The Institute of Ismaili Studies*, London, 12–13 October, 2017. That paper was about the marginal and interlinear annotations in the Qur'ān manuscripts kept in the Ismaili collection of the Library of the *Institute of Ismaili Studies*. I shared some of the results of my project in lectures and courses in the University of Hamburg, Germany, in April 2018 and in *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, Section des sciences religieuses, Paris, in Autumn 2018. I thank the colleagues and students who took part in my reflection.

2 The project includes the study of the Qur'ān fragments held in the Ismaili collection in the *Institute of Ismaili Studies* and in the collection of “The Laboratory of Conservation and Preservation of Manuscripts in Raqqāda”, Qayrawān, Tunisia.

2 Context and Methodological Reflections

My stay in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha was planned two years ago when I decided to study the marginal and interlinear notes in ancient Qurʾān manuscripts in the libraries of the Islamic world: Qayrawan, Raqqada (Tunisia) and Doha (Qatar). The project dovetails with my study of the transmission of religious texts in early and medieval Islam.³ My interest with marginal and interlinear annotations in ancient Qurʾān fragments originates in my work on the collections of Qurʾān fragments from *Dar al-Makhṭūʿat* Ṣanʿāʾ, the so called the “Sanaa palimpsest”.⁴ In that study, I demonstrated that marginal annotations are crucial to understanding the use of the text.⁵

A few methodological points are important before addressing the topic of marginal and interlinear annotations in Qurʾān fragments dated to the seventh-ninth centuries CE.⁶ By marginal and interlinear annotations, I mean the annotations written in the margins of the text and sometimes between the lines.⁷ These annotations are occasional and fragmentary; they refer to specific Qurʾān

³ Asma Hilali, “Compiler, exclure, cacher. Les traditions dites forgées dans l’Islam sunnite (VIe/ XIIe siècle),” *Revue de l’histoire des Religions* 2 (2011): 163–74; Asma Hilali, “Coran, hadith et textes intermédiaires. Le genre religieux aux débuts de l’islam,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint Joseph* 64 (2014): 29–44.

⁴ Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qurʾān in the Seventh Century AH* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017).

⁵ Asma Hilali, “Le palimpseste de Ṣanʿāʾ et la canonisation du Coran: Nouveaux éléments,” *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 21 (2010): 443–48; Asma Hilali, “Was the Ṣanʿāʾ Qurʾān Palimpsest a Work in Progress?,” in *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, David Hollenberg, and Christoph Rauch (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 12–27; Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest*, 39–40; cf. Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “Ṣanʿāʾ1 and the Origins of the Qurʾān,” *Der Islam* 87 (2012): 1–129 (here at p. 53, n. 157); Elisabeth Puin, “Ein früher Koran palimpsest aus Sanaa II (DAM 01-27.1). Teil II,” in *Vom Koran zum Islam*, ed. Markus Groß and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, *Schriften zur Frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran*, Band 4 (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2009): 523–681 (547). The reading instruction consists on the sentence “Do not say on the name of God” inserted before the beginning of a specific Qurʾān chapter (IX), a chapter that some traditional accounts consider as not being part of the Qurʾān corpus. See Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest*, 39–40.

⁶ For the dating of similar early *ḥijāzī* Qurʾān manuscripts, see for example, François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l’islam. Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus* (Leiden: Brill), 2009; Alba Fedeli, “Mingana and the Manuscript of Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, One Century Later,” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 11.3 (2005): 3–7; Alba Fedeli, “Early Qurʾānic Manuscripts, their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham” (PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2015); Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣanʿāʾ1 and the Origins of the Qurʾān.”

⁷ On the use of the margins in Arabic manuscripts, see Annie Vernay-Nouri, “Marges, gloses et décor dans une série de manuscrits arabo-islamiques,” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la*

passages and have various functions such as correcting⁸ the passage or inserting additional material such as Qurʾānic variants and readings.⁹ Thus, the marginal and interlinear annotations studied here are occasional and fragmentary. They are unlike the parallel systematic translation or commentary of the BnF Arabe 384 discussed by Déroche.¹⁰ The second methodological point focuses on the textual composition of the fragment. By textual composition, I mean the organization of the material within the writing space and the way it indicates the context of transmission of the manuscript. From the textual composition, I explore the following issues: What is the dynamic between the marginal or interlinear notes and the Qurʾān passage as a whole?¹¹ Who composed the annotations and how do they take into consideration the reader? What does the organization of the writing space tell us about the intended reader of the manuscript? Were the fragments copied in a didactic context? In other words, were they works in progress for which annotations served as an enterprise of rewriting?¹²

In short, this paper aims to offer some keys for reflection on the materiality of Qurʾānic manuscripts, namely, writing the Qurʾān between the lines, its technique, and its relevance; this facilitates understanding to which use the manu-

Méditerranée, special issue La tradition manuscrite en écriture arabe, ed. Geneviève Humbert, 99–100 (2002): 117–31.

8 For the corrections in the Qurʾān manuscripts, see, Adam Gacek, “Taxonomy of Scribal Errors and Corrections in Arabic Manuscripts,” in *Theoretical Approaches to the Transmission and Edition of Oriental Manuscripts: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Istanbul March 28-30, 2001*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer and Manfred Kropp (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2007): 217–36; Adam Gacek, “Technical Practices and Recommendations Recorded by Classical and Post-classical Arabic Scholars Concerning the Copying and Correction of Manuscripts,” in *Les Manuscrits du Moyen-Orient. essais de codicologie et de paléographie. Actes du colloque d’Istanbul*, ed. François Déroche (Istanbul and Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1989): 51–60; see more recently, Daniel Alan Brubaker, *Corrections in Early Qurʾān Manuscripts: Twenty Examples* (London: Think and Tell, 2019). On the corrections of the Qurʾān from a theoretical perspective, see Behnam Sadeghi, “Criteria for Emending the Text of the Qurʾān,” in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islam. Studies in honor of Hossein Modarressi*, ed. Michael Cook, Najam Haider, Intisar Rabb, and Asma Sayeed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 21–41.

9 Alba Fedeli, “Relevance of the Oldest Qurʾānic Manuscripts for the Readings Mentioned by Commentaries: A Note on Sura ‘Ṭā-Hā’,” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 15.1 (2009): 3–10.

10 Jozé Martinez Gazquez and François Déroche, “Lire et traduire le Coran au Moyen Âge. Les gloses latines du manuscrit arabe 384 de la BnF,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 154 (2010): 1021–40.

11 I dedicated an independent reflection to the issue of the fragment vs. the whole within the textual composition in Islamic religious literature in Asma Hilali and S.R. Burge, eds., *The Making of Religious Texts in Islam: The Fragment and the Whole* (Berlin: Gerlach, 2019).

12 I have investigate the hypothesis of a work in progress as the status of some manuscript such as the Ṣanāʾ palimpsest in Hilali, “Was the Ṣanāʾ Qurʾān Palimpsest a Work in Progress?,” 12–27.

script is dedicated. On the basis of my interest in the marginal and interlinear annotations in the Qur'ān fragments dated to the seventh-ninth centuries CE, this paper displays and discusses two samples from the collection of MIA that show samples of the phenomena in question.¹³ My research investigates the following points:

- a) I identify the Qur'ān passages for each fragment in order to discover whether there is a continuity in the text and then I conclude whether it is a continuous text. From this I suggest it is a Qur'ān fragment or Qur'ān fragment within another text.
- b) I identify the passages containing marginal or interlinear annotations.
- c) I study the writing in order to determine whether the scribe is him/herself the author of the marginal or interlinear annotation.
- d) I note the erasure and determine the category of erasure, *i.e.* palimpsesting or crossing out.
- e) Where possible, I decipher the marginal and interlinear annotations in order to confirm whether they are Qur'ānic text or other material such as an exegetical text, for example.
- f) I study the function of marginal and interlinear annotations vis-à-vis the text (completion, addition, comment, etc.).

3 Example Fragments from the MIA, Qatar

There are important examples of manuscripts with marginal and interlinear annotations in MIA. If we take into consideration manuscripts dated to the tenth century CE and even later, in addition to the examples studied in this paper, a few other cases contain interesting samples of interlinear material and marginal comments, including MS. MIA. 189, 474, 480, 227, 466, 718. Moreover, if we take into consideration rewriting on the basis of palimpsesting as a way of bypassing interlinear and marginal additions, we can find numerous examples, such as MIA. 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 504. In this paper, I limit my observations to two samples of manuscripts. In the first, I show an interlinear correction; in the second, I present an example of a marginal annotation with a reference-sign in the main body of the Qur'ān text referring to the margin.

¹³ Other samples of Qur'ān manuscripts dated to the seventh century CE from the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, and from other collections can be seen in Brubaker, *Corrections*.

The following analysis is not meant to be an exhaustive codicological description. It is rather, focused on the way in which the scribe – and sometimes the successive scribes – organized the Qurʾān text. Thus, the objectives are, as noted above, investigating the various uses of both texts: the original text and the annotations (for more on “layers” within Qurʾānic texts, see the essay from Fedeli [chapter 9] in the present volume; on marginal additions and other paratexts in Christian literature see the contributions from Batovici [chapter 2] and Allen [chapter 8]).

3.1 Example 1: MIA. 67. 2007. 1. Bifolio

Qurʾān parchment bifolio in *ḥijazī* script, dated to the seventh-eighth century CE. Length: 33, 6 cm/ Width: 24 cm.

This bifolio contains passages from chapter 5 of the Qurʾān, *al-Maʿida* (“The Feast”)¹⁴ from Q. 5: 88 to Q. 5: 107 (Fig. 1). An interlinear annotation occurs in the right folio between the lines fourteen and fifteen at the level of the verse Q. 5: 93. The annotation consists on the following sentence: {وَعَمَلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّقُوا وَأَمِنُوا} *wa ʿamilū al-ṣāliḥat tumma ittaqū wa āmanū* (“and do good deeds, then are mindful of God and believe”).¹⁵ According to the Standard Qurʾān, that is, the Cairo edition of the Qurʾān published in 1924, the verse as presented in MIA. 67. 2007.1 misses precisely the fragment quoted above; the annotation between lines fourteen and fifteen thus seems to be a correction, adding this missing clause. The interlinear annotation seems to have been added by the same scribe, the one who wrote the entire passage Q.5: 88–107 in the bifolio.¹⁶

The absence of suitable space in the margin might explain the choice of the scribe to insert the fragment between lines fourteen and fifteen. As for a reference-sign that might guide the reader to the correction, there is none. However, the way the correction is written shows that the writing starts at its initial place in the verse, that is, at the end of the verb {أَمِنُوا} *ʿāmanū* (“they believe”).¹⁷ As for the end of the correction, there is no reference-sign indicating it; the reader is expected go back somehow to reading line fifteen after the end of the inserted fragment. The

¹⁴ The English translation of the Qurʾān referred to is: M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾān: A new translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–2005).

¹⁵ Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾān: A New Translation*, 77.

¹⁶ See Brubaker, *Corrections*, 49.

¹⁷ This choice might explain the confusion between the *alif al-wiqāya* of the verb *ʿamilū* and the *hamza* of *ittaqū* in the line underneath. See the comment of Brubaker on the same *alif* in Brubaker, *Corrections*, 49.

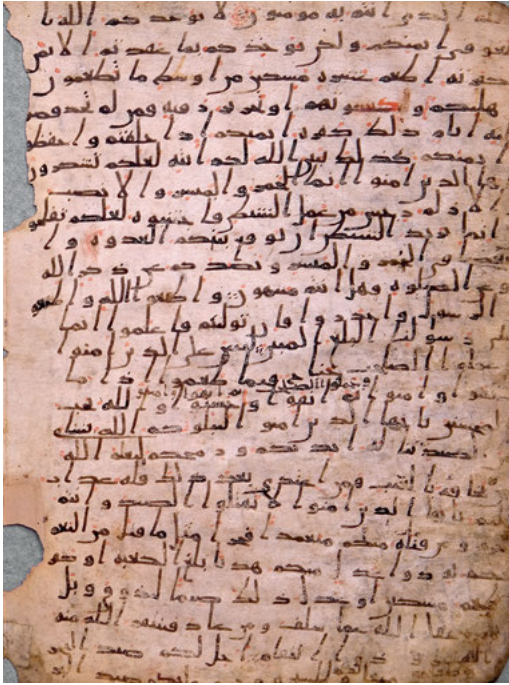


Fig. 1: Bifolio MIA. 67.2007.1. With kind permission of the museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar.

aim of the placement of the interlinear annotation is to designate the exact place of the correction; this indicates that the scribe has an available oral or written version of the “correct” version of the Qur’ān passage; the lack of clear indication of the way the reader should consider the interlinear annotation might suggest that the corrector is taking the note for his/her own usage.

3.2 Example 2: MIA. 2013.16. Folio 8v.

Folio 8v. from thirteen Qur’ān folios in Kūfic script, dated to the eighth-ninth century CE. Length: 16, 5 cm/ Width: 25,5 cm.

This folio contains passages from chapter 7, *al-A’raf* (“The Heights”) from Q.7: 73 to Q.7: 83. The marginal annotation occurs in verse Q.7: 77, line 8 of the folio 8v. (Fig. 2). However, the annotation barely appears as it is half damaged because of the disintegration of the parchment on the edges of the right margin. Nevertheless, we can decipher the following clause: {عن أمر} *an amr*, an incomplete sentence suggesting the action of misappropriation and the diversion from an order

and a commandment. This clause is part of the Qur'ānic verse written in line 8 but which is missing in the body of the text. The following passage is the transcription of the verse with the missing clause underlined: {وَعَفَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ} *wa 'aqrū al-nāqa wa'ataw 'an 'amr rabbihim* (“and then they hamstrung the camel. They defied their Lord’s commandment”).

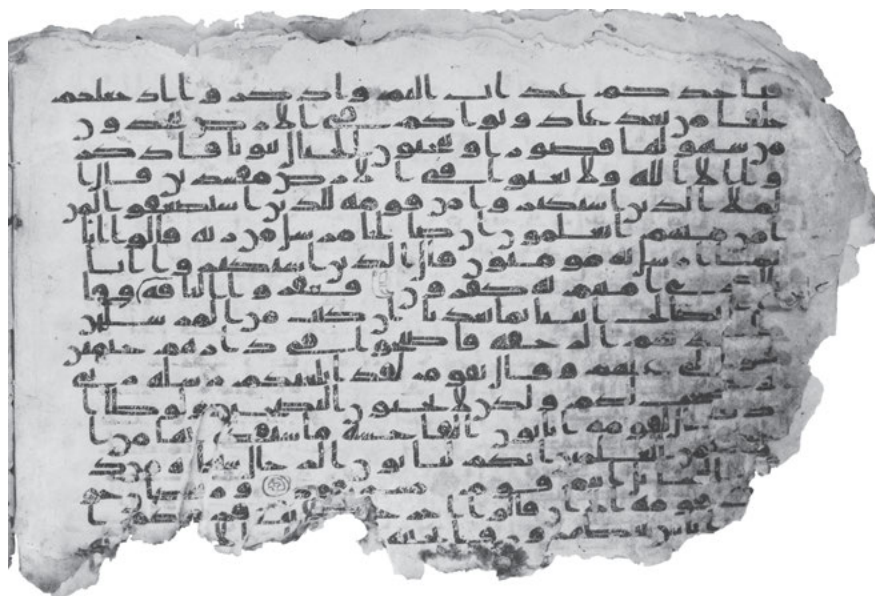


Fig. 2: MIA 2013.16. Folio 8.v. With kind permission of the museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar.

A scribe different from the one who wrote the main Qur'ān text in the thirteen leaves seems to have added the marginal annotation that apparently postdates considerably the original script given the darker ink of the writing and of the reference sign and given the different handwriting between the body of the text and the marginal clause. However, apart from the marginal annotation, what is striking in this example is the reference-sign that appears at the end of the word *al-nāqa* and which refers to the right margin of the folio where the marginal annotation is placed (Fig. 3). This suggests that the whole missing fragment from the verse was written in the margin before the damage of the parchment, *i.e.* {عَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ} *wa'ataw 'an 'amr rabbihim* (“They defied their Lord’s commandment”), a sentence from which only remains the few words we deciphered above, {عَنْ أَمْرِ} (“from the commandment”).

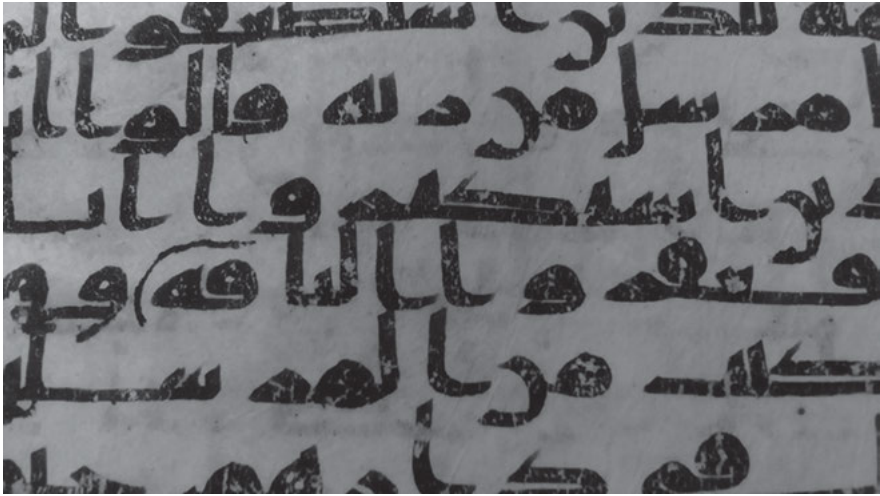


Fig. 3: *Detail of marginal reference sign. MIA 2013.16 Folio 8.v. With kind permission of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar.*

As is the case within the interlinear annotation studied in Example 1, the marginal annotation in Example 2 aims to correct the verse, and, more precisely, adds the sentence omitted in the verse by the original scribe. The reference-sign aims to catch the eye of the reader and direct him/her to the right margin of the folio. The technique of reporting to the margin in order to read the corrected version of the Qurʾān fragment seems to be executed in a random way. Despite the damage of the parchment in the margin, one can attest that the clause written in the margin is not clear and the space allowed in the margin does not seem sufficient. Moreover, there is enough space in the left margin which is closer to the mistake but which has not been used by the corrector. All the choices made by the corrector indicate that he/she is not inserting his/her correction in a careful way, i.e, a way that makes him/her sure the correction is considered by the reader. The organization of the few words we decipher in the right margin shows a superimposition of the letters and the absence of a linear and clear writing of the missing fragment or any technique that might guarantee a correct consideration of the inserted correction.

Similar to Example 1, the example of the marginal annotation underlines the absence of a clear technique of adding missing words and sentences. The method of the corrector shows his appropriation of the Qurʾān text and suggests that we are dealing with a copy that is destined to a restricted usage that is probably limited to the corrector's personal usage. Despite the absence of other corrections in the rest of the thirteen folios of the manuscript MIA 2013.16, there are a few

aspects that show incompleteness of the writing: for example, some versifications are missing in the Qurʾān text such in folio 8v. such as Q. 7:82. The versification is not reported in Spitaler's list of variations among the different schools of versification.¹⁸ However, we consider this as an additional sign that we are dealing with a copy of the Qurʾān text that has been submitted to an enterprise of correction that does not follow a clear method, nor is the correction based on a systematic technique.

4 Conclusion

This essay has outlined two examples of early Qurʾān manuscripts which highlight different methods of annotating the Qurʾānic text. The first example showed an interlinear fragment; the second showed the insertion of a marginal annotation. Both of these emendations seem to be inserted in a subjective and rather non-representative way and the objective of being readable does not prevail. It seems to be possible that this reflects a personal text that is not meant for other readers.

Various interpretations might explain such particular interventions. For example, the multiplicity of errors in private copies of the Qurʾān text might have motivated the owners of these Qurʾān manuscripts to limit their circulation to private spheres, while also explaining their submission to non-expert or non-professional corrector hands.¹⁹ Another explanation might be that, in the writing context in which these manuscripts emerged, scribes did not normally use the margins, and thus the need for a reference-sign to guide the reader to the marginal addition.

Unlike manuscripts dated to the historical period when the scholastic manuscript Islamic tradition is operative (tenth century CE and later), early manuscripts such as those discussed above show limited use of the margins as well as of the interlinear space. When such interventions are found in the Qurʾān manuscripts in the early period, these appear to be personal, subjective, and unsystematic. In this sense, these emendations were perhaps the first steps towards the

¹⁸ Anton Spitaler, *Die Verszählung des Koran nach islamischer Überlieferung* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1935), 37.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Puin considers that the important number of errors in the lower text of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest motivated the decision to scratch the parchment and to reuse it. See Elisabeth Puin, "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Sanaa II (DAM 01-27.1). Teil. III: 'Eine nicht-ʿuṭmānische Koran'," in *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion I: Von der Koranischen Bewegung zum Frühislam*, ed. Markus Groß and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, *Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran*, Band 5 (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2010): 233–305 (258).

scholastic transmission tradition which would later emerge. In other words, these early steps, graphically, set up a framework which would be developed further into forms such as the certificates of transmission (*samaʿ* pl. *samaʿat*), glosses, the commentaries, and the Qurʾānic variants and readings (*qiraʿat* pl. *qiraʿat*), and so on. Accordingly, investigating the techniques of annotating early Qurʾānic texts can help facilitate a reconstruction of the transmission of the Qurʾān in its earliest contexts.

To conclude: taking seriously the material forms of early Qurʾānic texts – and their annotations in particular – is a reminder that exploring the material dimensions of texts such as the Qurʾān is an important and necessary aspect of understanding sacred texts, their use, and their transmission.

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