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Andalusi Scholars on Qur'ānic Readings in the Islamic East: The Case of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī (538–590 H/1143–1194 CE)

In the 6th/12th century, the discipline of Qur'ānic sciences and Qur'ānic textual variants or readings (*qirā'āt*) attracted a large number of Andalusī scholars (*qurrā'*) who taught in prestigious educational institutions (*madrāsas*) in both Damascus and Cairo. Medieval biographical dictionaries devoted to Andalusī scholars clearly show the predominance of the discipline of Qur'ānic readings both in their training and in their teaching activities, while Eastern scholars seem to have devoted more attention to *ḥadīth* transmission.¹

The oldest mention of the teaching of Qur'ānic readings in al-Andalus dates back to the 4th/10th century, with the presence of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Anṭākī (d. 377 H/987 CE) in Córdoba from 352 H/963 CE onwards, invited by the Umayyad caliph al-Ḥakam II al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh to train the inhabitants of al-Andalus in the science of the *qirā'āt*. Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403 H/1013 CE) tells us that he was the best in this field and that no one equaled him in his time. Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444 H/1053 CE) learned Qur'ānic readings from one of his students, 'Ubayd Allāh b. Salama.² Despite this relatively late occurrence in the Andalusī religious context, the study of Qur'ānic readings grew exponentially between the 4th/10th century and the 6th/12th century, the latter century having the largest number of specialists in this domain, as testified by Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658 H/1260 CE) in his bio-bibliographical dictionary (Fig. 1).³ Thus, in just over a century, owing to a substantial number of Andalusī scholars receiving their training not only in al-

1 Zanon 1998, 556 (data taken from al-Dhahabī's *Ma'rifa*) and 560 (from al-Dhahabī's *Tadhkira*).

2 Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta'rikh* (2008), 1: 411.

3 Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila* (1995). In his statistical study of the Andalusī '*ulamā'*' based on Ibn al-Abbār's dictionary, Urvoy 1998 concludes that the 6th/12th century saw the greatest number of *qirā'āt* scholars, at the expense of the number of jurists. See Urvoy 1978. Jesús Zanon, in turn, has noted an increasing preference during this period for Qur'ānic studies; indeed, 25% of the works written under the Almoravids are dedicated to this genre, which includes *qirā'āt*. He also notes a decline of interest in the study of *fiqh* in the same period. See Zanon 1998.

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Andalus but also in the East, the local *‘ulamā’* were able to produce a synthesis of knowledge related to the sacred text, the best example being that of Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, although he was not alone.⁴ The presence of specialists in Qur’ānic readings coming from al-Andalus and the Maghrib who settled in the East, at a time when their Eastern co-religionists mainly concentrated on *ḥadīth* disciplines, certainly had a great influence on the transmission of this local production of knowledge to the rest of the Islamic world.

Fig. 1: The specialists in the Qur’ān and its readings, according to Ibn al-Abbār (number/date of death H) (source: Azgal)

One particular specialist stands out: Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī (d. 590 H/1194 CE), from Shāṭiba (Játiva) near Valencia. Having settled in Cairo, he had a significant impact on the science of *qirā’āt* and their transmission. His didactic poem combining the seven variant readings of the Qur’ān – *Ḥirz al-amānī wa-wajh al-tahānī fī al-qirā’āt al-sab‘*, better known as *al-Shāṭibiyya* or *al-Lāmiyya* – has been used

⁴ On al-Dānī and *qirā’āt* in al-Andalus, see A’rāb 1990; Rodríguez Mañas 1990; Puente 2011; Vizcaíno/Fakhri al-Wasif 2012; Padillo Saoud 2017; Penelas, “al-Dānī”, *EP*.

as a reference manual for teaching variant Qur'ānic readings through to the present. Our study of this author and his work will begin with the emigration of Andalusī *qurrā'* towards the East in the 6th/12th century.

1 *Riḥla* as a way of transmitting knowledge

The study of how the intellectual production of the Muslim West impacted the Muslim East must necessarily deal with the scholarly practice of travelling in search of knowledge, commonly known as the *riḥla*. While there are numerous studies on this practice,⁵ little attention has been paid to the category of the *qurrā'*, the scholars who specialized in variant Qur'ānic readings, and who played a decisive role in the transmission and canonization of their discipline. Contrary to the jurists, for whom different positions and offices were available and who played an important social function, the *qurrā'* had a lower profile in society.

As with other specialist fields, from the 4th/10th century to the 5th/11th century a great many students who would eventually become *qurrā'* embarked on educational journeys to the East. Foremost among them were Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437 H/1045 CE), Abū al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAmmār al-Mahdawī (d. 438 H/1046 CE), and the aforementioned Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī. Many of them, after studying in the East, returned to al-Andalus, where they were able to transmit what they had learned.⁶

The main destinations for these Maghribi travellers were Alexandria and Cairo, given their strategic geographical locations on the pilgrimage route to Mecca, as well as the presence of scholars specialized in the science of *qirā'āt*. The importance of Egypt in the spread of Qur'ānic readings in the Maghrib began early on. The reading of Nāfi' (d. 169 H/785 CE), from Medina, was initially adopted after the Islamic conquest of al-Andalus by the Andalusī Abū Muḥammad al-Ghāzī b. Qays (d. 199 H/814 CE).⁷ The same reading, through the *riwāya* of Egyptian scholar Warsh, was introduced in al-Andalus during the rule of the emir al-Ḥakam b. Hishām (r. 180–206 H/796–822 CE) by Abū ʿAbd Allāh

⁵ On the *riḥla* in general see Touati 2000. On the *riḥla* of the Andalusis and Maghribis see Pouzet 1975; Arié 1986; Ávila 2002; Dejugnat 2010.

⁶ Al-Dānī, Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib and al-Mahdawī trained with a number of highly respected scholars in Kairouan and Egypt.

⁷ Al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt al-naḥwiyyīn* (1984), 254; and Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 3.

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī, who had studied with Warsh in person.⁸ The Nāfi‘-Warsh reading has prevailed in the Maghrib until today, especially after having been supported by the influential Cordoban scholar Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ (d. 287 H/900 CE).⁹

From the 6th/12th century onwards, Egypt became the residence of an extensive Andalusī community of migrants who settled there to teach. In this century, a major turning point should be noted. In previous centuries the Andalusīs who travelled to the East in search of knowledge typically met renowned *qurrā’* in every region they visited during their *riḥla*. Now, however, they began to almost exclusively join the circles of Western scholars who had already settled in the East. Thus, on his arrival in Alexandria, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Zawzanālī (d. 536 H/1141 CE) studied the Qur’ānic variant readings with the Sicilian Abū al-Qāsim Ibn al-Faḥḥām (d. 516 H/1122 CE),¹⁰ and Ibn al-Fanakī (d. 597 H/1201 CE) joined the circle of the Cordoban Yaḥyā b. Sa‘dūn (d. 567 H/1171 CE) on reaching Mosul.¹¹ This raises the question of the existence of networks of Maghribī *qurrā’* in the Mashriq, a phenomenon that has been proven in the case of Ṣūfis from al-Andalus who settled in the East.¹²

These ‘travelling *qurrā’*’ not only acquired knowledge, but also took the opportunity to transmit the readings and works they had studied in al-Andalus. In this light, the *riḥla* takes on a new dimension, as it was in fact a journey that involved an actual exchange of knowledge. Thus, ‘Alī b. Khalaf (d. 550 H/1155 CE) from Valencia took advantage of his pilgrimage to Mecca to transmit there *al-*

⁸ PUA, id. 9744.

⁹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 3: 241. The sources often attribute to Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ (d. 287 H/900 CE) the introduction of the variant reading of Warsh in al-Andalus, according to a quotation from al-Dānī in *Ghāyat al-nihāya*: “since his time the Andalusīs adopted the reading of Warsh and abandoned al-Ghāzī’s variant”, and current researchers have followed this; see Puente 2011 and Ḥmittū 2003. However, al-Zubaydī and Ibn al-Faraḍī attribute its introduction to a certain Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh, who was the direct disciple of Warsh and the preceptor of the children of the emir al-Ḥakam b. Hishām (al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt al-naḥwiyyīn* [1984], 270; Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta’rikh* [2008], 2: 11). Therefore, al-Andalus became familiar with the Warsh reading of the Qur’ān even before the time of Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ al-Qurṭubī.

¹⁰ Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī, *al-Dhayl* (2012), 1: 740. See PUA, id. 2038.

¹¹ Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila* (1995), 1: 81. See PUA, id. 1385 (Ibn al-Fanakī) and id. 11535 (Ibn Sa‘dūn).

¹² Motia Zouihl has defended this argument in his PhD thesis, *Le pouvoir et les soufis en Syrie et en Égypte sous Nūr al-Dīn, Saladin et les premiers Ayyoubides de 549/1154 à 596/1200* (Paris, 2017).

Taysir, by Abū 'Amr al-Dānī.¹³ The Cordoban Abū al-Ḥasan b. Ḥanīn (d. 569 H/1173 CE), known for his many journeys to the East and the many *shuyūkh* from whom he learned Qur'ānic readings, stayed nine months in Jerusalem teaching the Qur'ān and its readings before returning to the West.¹⁴ These and other examples prove that the distribution of knowledge ran in both directions, and denote the maturity that the science of *qirā'āt* had reached al-Andalus, such that the transmission of knowledge no longer flowed exclusively from East to West.

The reputation of Andalusi *qurrā'* became such that, in order to attract them to stay, they were offered positions as *muqri'* (teacher of the Qur'ān and its readings) in large mosques or religious institutions. They were even offered to lead the *tarāwīḥ* prayers during the holy month of Ramaḍān. This is how the Cordoban Ibn Sa'dūn (d. 567 H/1171 CE) received the title of *shaykh al-qurrā'*¹⁵ in Mosul, the Sicilian Abū al-Qāsim Ibn al-Faḥḥām (d. 516 H/1122 CE) was nominated *shaykh al-qurrā'* of Alexandria, and Ibn al-Fanakī (d. 597 H/1200 CE) led the *tarāwīḥ* Ramaḍān prayers at the Great Mosque of Mecca, as recorded by Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 H/1217 CE),¹⁶ and, later on, at the Kallāsa mosque in Damascus as well. According to Ibn al-Abbār, the people of Damascus came out in large numbers to listen to his recitation.¹⁷

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin) even chose an Andalusi from Málaga, Abū al-Ḥasan b. Jamīl al-Ma'āfirī (d. 605 H/1208 CE),¹⁸ as the first *imām* to lead the prayer at the Great Mosque of the Dome of the Rock after the re-conquest of Jerusalem. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's secretary, 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣbahānī, commented:

The sultan chose for the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock an *imām* who had the best recitation among all reciters, the most beautiful and melodious voice; he was the most renowned for his religiosity and the most knowledgeable in the seven – even the ten – readings of Qur'ān...¹⁹

13 Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 479. See PUA, id. 6455.

14 Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila* (1995), 3: 210. See PUA, id. 6306.

15 This is the highest title for a Qur'ān reader, as it indicates that he is the reader of reference in a city or region.

16 The famous traveller Ibn Jubayr writes about him: "Five *imāms* took turns performing these *tarāwīḥ* before the Maqām: ... The third was our companion Abū Ja'far b. 'Alī al-Fanakī al-Qurṭubī, whose Qur'ān recitation rendered even the inanimate objects so humble as to feel pity" (Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla* [1995], 173, translation mine).

17 Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila* (1995), 1: 81.

18 See PUA, id. 6675.

19 Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī, *al-Dhayl* (2012), 3: 265–266.

In the 6th/12th century, the science of *qirā'āt* was at its peak in al-Andalus, while it seemed to have been neglected in the East in favor of the transmission of the *sunna*. The *qurrā'* who travelled or emigrated from the Maghrib found in the East an environment that was particularly suitable for teaching, with the establishment and flourishing of the *madrasa* system, a teaching institution that had emerged in Khorasan,²⁰ whereas similar institutions only emerged in the western Islamic world as late as the 7th/13th century or the 8th/14th century.²¹ Educational classes in al-Andalus took place mostly in mosques. Thus, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqarī (d. 1041 H/1631 CE) quotes Ibn Sa'īd al-Andalusī (d. 675 H/1276 CE) as saying, “The population of al-Andalus did not have any *madrasa* to study at, but they received all kinds of education in the mosque, provided by a salaried teacher”.²² Teaching within mosques maintained a strong link with the socio-political context, whereas *madrasas*, many of which were private institutions, benefitted from greater freedom. This certainly encouraged many *qurrā'* to accept the positions that they were being offered in the East.

It is in this context that *qirā'āt* specialist Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī (d. 590 H/1194 CE) left al-Andalus in 572 H/1176 CE under the guise of performing the *ḥajj*, in order to settle permanently in Egypt.

2 Abū al-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī

2.1 In al-Andalus

Abū al-Qāsim b. Firruh al-Shāṭibī²³ was born in 538 H/1144 CE in Játiva, in al-Andalus. He began to specialize in the field of Qur'ānic readings in his hometown under the guidance of 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Nafzī. According to an *ijāza*

²⁰ Sourdel 1977, 165–184, and Makdisi 1981.

²¹ The first *madrasas* appeared in the Islamic West in 650 H/1252 CE under the Ḥafṣid dynasty in Ifrīqiya, in 684 H/1285 CE in Fez under the Marinids, and only in 750 H/1349 CE in Granada under the Naṣrids.

²² Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* (1968), 1: 220.

²³ He is known in the sources under two *kunyas*: Abū Muḥammad and Abū al-Qāsim. See al-Qasṭallānī, *al-Faṭḥ* (2000); Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'* (1993), 2: 2216–2217; al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-qurrā'* (1995), 1110–1115; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 20–22; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara* (1967), 1: 496–497; Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila* (1995), 1: 73–74. See also Marín 2004.

kept in a manuscript in Medina,²⁴ we know that he completed his education with al-Nafzī in Rabi' II 555/April 1160. He then moved to Valencia, which had become the most important teaching center for Qur'ān readings in the Andalusī Levant (*Sharq al-Andalus*). This was especially true after the renowned follower of al-Dānī, Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. Najāḥ (d. 496 H/1103 CE), settled there, establishing a center of learning within the Great Mosque of Valencia. There al-Shāṭibī completed his study of the seven readings of the Qur'ān, and studied *ḥadīth* sciences and Arabic language under Ibn Hudhayl (d. 564 H/1168 CE), Abū Dāwūd's son-in-law and student. He then returned to Játiva, where he started teaching and transmitting the *qirā'āt*, and was offered the responsibility of preaching (*khiṭāba*) despite his young age. The offer came, however, after Valencia had fallen under Almohad control in 567 H/1172 CE, following the death of Muḥammad b. Mardanīsh, the Emir of the Levant. Under the pretext of performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, he refused the position and left al-Andalus in order to avoid officially pledging his allegiance to the Almohads. We are informed of this thanks to Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī (d. 665 H/1268 CE), who recorded this explanation as to why al-Shāṭibī undertook his journey and settled in the East. The rest of the sources simply mention a *riḥla* to perform the *ḥajj* at face value. Abū Shāma received this information from his teacher 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 643 H/1245 CE), who was also a student of al-Shāṭibī:

He was appointed to preach at the Great Mosque, but he refused on the pretext of the pilgrimage to Mecca because the preacher would not be free to preach as he wished. On the contrary, he would be ordered to preach on topics, according to him, contrary to God's requirements.²⁵

2.2 In Egypt

Al-Shāṭibī arrived in Egypt in 572 H/1176 CE under circumstances about which we have little information. The Fāṭimids had already been driven out of power and the region had submitted once again to the 'Abbāsids under the governance of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.²⁶

²⁴ Ms 46/*qirā'āt* housed at King 'Abd al-'Azīz Public Library in Medina (Saudi Arabia), 'Ārif Ḥikmat collection.

²⁵ Abū Shāma, *al-Dhayl* (2002), 6–7.

²⁶ The Friday *khuṭba* that had been said in the name of the Fāṭimid caliph al-'Āḍid, was, starting in the year 567 H/1172 CE, proclaimed in the name of the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Mustaḍī 'bi-Amr Allāh.

Al-Shāṭibī first attended the classes of the renowned traditionist al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Silāfi (d. 576 H/1180 CE) in Alexandria before going to Cairo, attracted by the prosperity and dynamism of the intellectual and religious life of the city. In Egypt Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn built up a large network of *madrasas* on which he would permanently rely in order to eliminate any trace of Shi'ism and to strengthen Sunni Islam. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn even offered Maghribi students the possibility of studying within the Mālikī school in *madrasas* and *zāwiyas*.²⁷ Al-Shāṭibī first taught at the 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ mosque in Fustat, before being spotted by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's celebrated vizier al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil,²⁸ who gave him the responsibility of teaching in Cairo at the Fāḍiliyya *madrasa* when it opened its doors in 580 H/1184 CE.²⁹ He also allocated him a private apartment within the school, as well as a house outside for his family.

It appears that at this point al-Shāṭibī's success had at last been secured. He devoted his time exclusively to teaching and transmitting Qur'ānic readings through his didactic poem *Ḥirz al-amānī*, which brought him great fame. Egypt's central position between the Islamic East and West enabled al-Shāṭibī to welcome and train students from different regions, from North Africa, Egypt, or even Syria and Iraq (Fig. 2). In the *ṭabaqāt* books, I have identified thirty-one of al-Shāṭibī's students, many of whom went on to earn important positions in their hometowns,³⁰ including *shaykh al-qurrā'*, which was considered the highest title that a specialist on Qur'ānic readings could claim. Of his students, this distinction was awarded to Muḥammad b. Yūsuf in Baghdad, 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī in Damascus, Ibn Shujā' (d. 661 H/1262 CE) in Egypt³¹ and Abū al-ʿAbbās al-ʿAzafi in Ceuta (d. 633 H/1236 CE).³² Some other students attained strategic positions for the diffusion of variants, like 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Balansī (d. 634 H/1236 CE),³³ reader

²⁷ The first Egyptian *madrasa*, al-Nāṣiriyya, was opened in Cairo in 566 H/1170 CE by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. The construction of the Qamḥiyya *madrasa* dedicated to Mālikī scholars opened the same year, followed by twenty other *madrasas* founded under the rule of the Ayyūbids in Egypt. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (2002), 4: 454–455.

²⁸ Abū 'Alī 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. 'Alī al-Baysānī, better known as al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 596 H/1200 CE), was Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's vizier and the director of his chancery. He seems to have played a very important role in the reception and integration of the Andalusi migrants in Egypt.

²⁹ He devoted a large central room for *iqrā'*, i.e. the transmission of the Qur'ān and *qirā'āt*. For a description the Fāḍiliyya *madrasa*, see Eche 1967, 249–255; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (2002), 4: 462–463.

³⁰ The main sources for these findings are al-Dhahabī, *Ma'rifat al-qurrā'* (1995) and Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006).

³¹ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 1: 482.

³² See PUA, id. 1645.

³³ See PUA, id. 6334.

and *imām* of the Great Mosque of Valencia, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saraqusṭī (d. 598 H/1201 CE), judge of Fez,³⁴ Ibn al-Khashshāb, reader and *imām* of *al-Jāmi' al-'atīq* in Cairo,³⁵ and 'Īsā b. Makkī (d. 649 H/1251 CE), *imām* of *al-Jāmi' al-Ḥakamī*, also in Cairo (Table 1).³⁶

Fig. 2: Origins of al-Shāṭibī's students

Tab. 1: Posts held by some of al-Shāṭibī's students

<i>Shaykh al-qurrā'</i>	<i>Imām and khaṭīb of al-Jāmi' al-kabīr</i>	<i>Qāḍī</i>
Muḥammad b. Yūsuf (Baghdad)	'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Balansī (Valencia)	Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saraqusṭī (Fez)
'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (Damascus)	Ibn al-Khashshāb (<i>al-Jāmi' al-'atīq</i> , Cairo)	
Ibn Shujā' (Egypt)	'Īsā b. Makkī (<i>al-Jāmi' al-Ḥakamī</i> , Cairo)	

³⁴ See PUA, id. 9328.

³⁵ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 256.

³⁶ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 1: 541–542.

*Shaykh al-qurrā'**Imām and khaṭīb of al-Jāmi'* *Qāḍī*
*al-kabīr*Abū al-'Abbās al-Azafī
(Ceuta)

All these elements, added to the upward social mobility that al-Shāṭibī experienced in Cairo, most certainly contributed to his success and to the spread of his work on a large scale. We should nevertheless explore more deeply the socio-cultural and political context in which he evolved, by looking more specifically at how holiness was attached to al-Shāṭibī and his poem. The historiographical sources, including the biographical work that al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 923 H/1517 CE) devoted to al-Shāṭibī in the 9th/15th century, describe him as a *walī*, a saint without sin endowed with many divine gifts (*karāmāt*) that led to miraculous deeds.³⁷ Before al-Qaṣṭallānī, Abū Shāma, the historian from 7th/13th-century Damascus, had already composed various verses comparing al-Shāṭibī and his students to the Prophet and his companions.³⁸ Al-Shāṭibī was ultimately buried in the *turba* that al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil had originally built for himself at Cairo's al-Qarāfa al-Ṣuḡhrā cemetery. As attested by Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833 H/1429 CE), a visitation ritual was established among believers, and more specifically among Qur'ānic reading specialists, more than two centuries after al-Shāṭibī's death.³⁹ In 1802, Emir Yūsuf Katkhudāh added an epitaph during the construction of a small adjacent mosque, which includes the traditional recommendation for visitors to pray for the Sultan, the Pasha and the Emir. The last line is devoted to the saint (*walī*) al-Shāṭibī: "Come in and visit this saint. Whoever is afflicted by an evil shall come out healed" (Fig. 3).

³⁷ Al-Qaṣṭallānī, *al-Faṭḥ* (2000), 51–57.

³⁸ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 20–22; Abū Shāma, *al-Dhayl* (2002), 6–7.

³⁹ Ibn al-Jazarī records having visited the tomb several times with his students and recited there the poem *Ḥirz al-amānī*. See Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 20–22.

Fig. 3: The epitaph affixed in 1802 by Emir Yūsuf Katkhudāh at the entrance to al-Shāṭibī's tomb in Cairo

The healing powers attributed to al-Shāṭibī's tomb were also assigned to his famous poem, and we might infer that the many stories surrounding its writing were at the origin of these beliefs. In one account, al-Shāṭibī first completed the seven circumambulations around the Ka'ba with the manuscript in his hands before presenting it to his students, making it blessed and sacred.⁴⁰ Other sources report that al-Shāṭibī threw his poem into the sea, praying God to save it from the waters only if it could bring good to the Muslim community. The sea then rejected the manuscript, which his students received as a divine gift. His students were also reported to have pronounced words such as “whoever learns *al-Shāṭibiyya* will enter Paradise” and even “whoever has *al-Shāṭibiyya* in his abode will enter paradise”.⁴¹ The first of these two sayings is also attributed to the prophet Muḥammad himself, according to a tradition whereby al-Shāṭibī saw him in a dream after he had finished writing the poem. He stood up, greeted him and offered him the manuscript of the *Ḥirz*. The Prophet took it from him and declared, “It is blessed. He who memorizes it will enter paradise!” This tradition can also

⁴⁰ There is reason to doubt that al-Shāṭibī ever performed the *hajj* in the first place. Indeed, no reliable source mentions it explicitly except al-Qaṣṭallānī in *al-Faṭḥ al-mawāhibī*.

⁴¹ For all these traditions and stories see al-Qaṣṭallānī, *al-Faṭḥ* (2000), 51–57; Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 20–22.

be read in the margin of folio 21r of the manuscript “Arabic supplement 143” of Yale University Library’s Beinecke Collection (Fig. 4). Luxurious copies that were probably not used for learning but rather kept at home for their *baraka* confirm this prophylactic role assigned to them and the text they contained. A deeper study of the manuscript production of this text would help us to better understand the uses and functions of these didactic poems and the role they played in transmitting Qur’ānic variants.

Fig. 4: The inscription “He who memorizes *al-Shāṭibiyya* enters paradise”, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, MS Arabic suppl. 143, fol. 21r

3 *Al-Shāṭibiyya*: a 'bestselling' teaching handbook for Qur'ānic readings

Beyond the attribution of holiness to the author and his poem, the way the work itself was composed is another reason behind its success. As with other biographers, Ibn Khallikān, in the notice he devotes to al-Shāṭibī, first defines him as the author of *Ḥirz al-amānī*, later better known as *al-Shāṭibiyya*. It is this didactic poem that eventually became a 'bestseller' among *qirā'āt* teaching handbooks, so much so that it actually worked to strengthen the legitimacy of the seven readings of the Qur'ān in the versions chosen by al-Shāṭibī. The Iraqi Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 H/935 CE) had represented a turning point in the discipline by being the first to compile seven readings of the Qur'ān,⁴² but his attempt partly failed as much larger works by other scholars continued to circulate and be taught until the advent of *al-Shāṭibiyya*. We might mention by way of example *al-Kāmil fī al-qirā'āt*, a work in which its author, Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhālī (d. 465 H/1072 CE), compiled all the reading variants he encountered during his journey from North Africa through the East to Transoxiana. He reached a total of 50 readings based on 1,459 versions (*ṭarīq* and *rāwī*) collected from nearly 365 *shuyūkh*.⁴³ The *qirā'āt* books that had initially helped to compile the variants received from different *qurrā'* masters progressively acquired the role of restricting the number of authorized variants. It was actually *al-Shāṭibiyya* that would impose the seven readings of the Qur'ān in the variants selected by al-Shāṭibī himself. His didactic poem achieved great success, serving as the essential manual for teaching *qirā'āt* to this day, thereby eliminating the variants contained in other treatises that Muslim tradition today considers as non-canonical, including some of those originally reported by Ibn Mujāhid.

⁴² Muslim scholars refer to Ibn Mujāhid as *musabbi' al-sab'* (the 'Septuplist' as translated by Shady Nasser 2013). He selected seven eponymous readers from five different cities and he compiled their readings in his book *Kitāb al-Sab'a fī al-qirā'āt*. His selection became a standard since he launched a great tradition of seven-reading compilations which gradually led to the disappearance of the many other variant readings that were then in circulation. On the role of Ibn Mujāhid in the transmission of the Qur'ānic readings, see Melchert 2000 and Nasser 2013, 35–78. I do not agree with these scholars that the canonization of the seven readings is to be attributed only to Ibn Mujāhid, given that his book is not considered authoritative to transmit the seven readings, and what is more, some textual variants compiled in his book are considered today *shādhdh* or irregular and non-canonical.

⁴³ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāyat al-nihāya* (2006), 2: 345. Abū al-Qāsim al-Hudhālī's *al-Kāmil fī al-qirā'āt* is considered to be one of the most extensive books on *qirā'āt*.

As a 1,173-verse didactic poem intended for memorization, it placed oral tradition back at the core of the transmission of the Qur'ānic readings, while paradoxically constituting the source of a very significant written production extending across the entire geography of the Muslim world, such that there is hardly a major library today whose manuscript collection does not hold several copies (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Manuscripts of *al-Shāṭibiyya* according to the HATA database⁴⁴

Despite its central place in the transmission of Qur'ānic variants, *al-Shāṭibiyya* has yet to be properly studied in depth. According to German Orientalist T. Nöldeke, it is “the most famous *qirā'āt* book, as well as the one most widely learned by heart throughout the ages across the Muslim world”. Still, he was nev-

⁴⁴ HATA (*Historia de los Autores y Transmisores Andalusíes*) is a database of works written and transmitted in al-Andalus from the 8th century CE to the 15th century CE that is coordinated by Maribel Fierro (ILC-CCHS, CSIC).

ertheless very critical towards this poem, which he also characterized as “an insane work written in a barbaric, artificial and incomprehensible language that confirms the darkness of *qirā'āt* science”,⁴⁵ and did not feel that it deserved further study. And already in the 7th/13th century, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626 H/1229 CE) argued that “his [al-Shāṭibī's] poems are complicated, written in an enigmatic style that is nearly incomprehensible”.⁴⁶ These two testimonies reveal many scholars' contempt for this book throughout the ages, despite its paramount importance for a complete understanding of the history of the Qur'ān's transmission and reading variants.

One exception to this rule is Angelika Neuwirth, who highlighted the poem's ingenious methodology.⁴⁷ Its methodology is indeed ingenious, involving mental tree structures with an important mnemonic role that merit further study in order to better understand how they function. In fact, to my knowledge there have been few if any serious studies of the development of memory ability in the Arab world, while the subject has long been researched in the case of medieval Latin and Greek texts.⁴⁸

The subject of mnemonic devices can be illustrated by al-Shāṭibī's reliance on *rumūz*, letter-symbols integrated into the text that refer to certain readers or groups of readers. Their use made it possible to considerably shorten the academic content of the book. By contrast, a poem from the previous century in the same discipline, al-Dānī's *Munabbihā*, contains nearly 2,600 verses. However, al-Shāṭibī was not the first to use the *rumūz* technique in a manual of Qur'ānic readings. Indeed, Ibn Khālawayh (d. 370 H/980-1 CE) had used it two centuries before in Iraq, as testified by his book *al-Badī'*, of which a *codex unicus* is to be found at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin.⁴⁹

As far as we know, al-Shāṭibī was, however, the first one to use the *abjad* system for this purpose.⁵⁰ This is a technique that is usually used in divinatory sciences and astrology, where each letter corresponds to a numerical value. Al-Shāṭibī's use of this technique is much more developed than the one used by Ibn Khālawayh, who employed letters as abbreviations, taking the first letter of the

45 Nöldeke 1860, 338.

46 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'* (1993), 2: 2216.

47 Neuwirth, “al-Shāṭibī”, *EP*; Neuwirth 1986. See also Ḥimittü 2005; Sobieroj 2016, 96–97.

48 Yates 1984; Carruthers 1998; Carruthers 2008; Rossi 2006.

49 Chester Beatty MS 3051 can be consulted online at https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/object/Ar_3051/14/. See Arberry 1955, 21.

50 As al-Shāṭibī was from al-Andalus, he naturally used the Maghribi system of *abjad*, which is noticeably different from that of the Mashriq.

reader's name in order to report the reading variant.⁵¹ Arabic manuscript 6921 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France presents on the second leaf a table of concordances of the *rumūz* of the *Shāṭibiyya*, containing 35 symbols, whereas the system of Ibn Khālawayh has only seven.⁵² Al-Shāṭibi assigned a letter-symbol (*ramz fardī*) for each of the seven readings (*qirā'a*), so that the *alif* corresponded to the Medina reading reported by Nāfi', then another letter-symbol for each version of that reading (*al-riwāya*), for example the *jīm* for the Egyptian version of the Medina reading reported by Warsh. He also assigned to groups of readers a letter or a group of letters (*ramz jamā'i*); the readings of Hejaz were thus represented by *ḥirmī* (for *ḥaram al-makkī wa-l-madani*)⁵³ and those of Iraq by the letter *ghayn*.⁵⁴

Let's take an example drawn directly from the poem *al-Shāṭibiyya* in order to understand better the use of these *rumūz*. I propose to examine the hundredth verse of the poem, using the Yale University Library's manuscript (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: The hundredth verse of *al-Shāṭibiyya*, about the *basmala*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, MS Arabic suppl. 143, fol. 29v

The verse reads, “The *basmala* [the opening formula of the *sūras* in the Qur’ān] is a *sunna* [tradition] reported by men of science”. While the surface meaning of the

⁵¹ On the use of *abjad* as letter-symbols (*ramz*), see Weil/Collin, “Abjad”, *EP*; Rosenthal 1947, 35–36.

⁵² MS BnF arabe 6921 can be consulted online at gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10030201s.

⁵³ *Ḥirmī* is the *ramz* of the Ḥijāzī readers (the readers of the *ḥaramayn*), which corresponds to the reading of the Medinese Nāfi' (d. 169 H/785 CE) and that of the Meccan Ibn Kathīr (d. 120 H/738 CE).

⁵⁴ The letter *ghayn* corresponds to the Iraqī readers, who are the Baṣran Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’ (d. 154 H/770 CE) and ‘Āshim b. Abī al-Najjūd (d. 128 H/745 CE), and the Kūfan ‘Alī al-Kisā’ī (d. 189 H/804 CE) and Ḥamza al-Zayyāt (d. 156 H/773 CE).

verse is quite straightforward, the *rumūz*, highlighted in red by the copyist, open up a second meaning linked to the science of *qirā'āt*, which, unpacked, would be as follows: “The *basmala* was transmitted by Qālūn (*bā'*), al-Kisā'i (*rā'*), 'Āṣim (*nūn*) and Ibn Kathīr (*dāl*) with a chain of transmitters going back to the Prophet” (Fig. 7). The whole poem is built on these two levels of reading, which requires specialized training in order to understand the underlying meaning of the *qaṣīda*.

While this specificity made it possible to shorten the scientific content of the work considerably, and also made it easier to commit to memory, it was at the same time the origin of a very profuse literature of commentaries (*shurūḥ*), numbering as many as 118 according to the sources.⁵⁵ By the same token, these commentaries undoubtedly contributed greatly to the dissemination of the *Shāṭibiyya*,⁵⁶ to such an extent that after al-Shāṭibī, the literature on Qur'ānic variants would largely center on commentaries to *Ḥirz al-amānī*, thus leaving little room for original compositions.

4 Conclusion

Moving forward, a systematic study of the didactic poem *al-Shāṭibiyya*, and a comparison with contemporary Eastern works, would help to shed light on its major role in the transmission of this branch of knowledge and in the standardization of Qur'ānic readings. Likewise, the study of the large production of handwritten copies of this manual would clarify its uses and functions, and help improve our knowledge how the Qur'ān and its *qirā'āt* were taught in the Middle Ages, as well as how the Andalusī *qirā'āt* school eventually prevailed throughout the Muslim world.

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⁵⁵ Ḥimittū 2005.

⁵⁶ The most important ones used in this study are Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī's *Ibrāz al-ma'ānī min Ḥirz al-amānī* (1891), and al-Sakhāwī's *Fath al-waṣīd fī sharḥ al-qaṣīd* (2005).

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