

DISSIMILATION OF \bar{E} TO \bar{A} IN THE QUR'ĀNIC CONSONANTAL TEXT

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Abstract

The *alifāt maqṣūrah* are kept strictly distinct in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text. Depending on whether the final root consonant is a $yā'$ or a $wāw$, they are spelled with ى and و , respectively. As these two characters behave distinctly in Qur'ānic rhyme, it is clear that they represent two distinct vowels in Qur'ānic Arabic, \bar{e} and \bar{a} , respectively. The current article shows that in a specific phonetic environment—namely, if y or \bar{i} stands in the vicinity of \bar{e} —it dissimilated towards \bar{a} . While representation of this dissimilation in the orthography of the Qur'ān has disappeared in modern print editions, careful examination across a large number of early Qur'ānic manuscripts reveals that this original dissimulatory practice was reflected regularly in these manuscripts, and therefore also in the ʿUthmānic archetype.

Introduction

In 2017, I published an article on the development of the triphthongs in Qur'ānic and Classical Arabic.¹ On the basis of rhyme, orthography, etymology, and reading traditions, I argued that the *alif maqṣūrah bi-ṣūrat al-yā'*, such as in the verb *هدى hadā*, was not a vowel \bar{a} , but rather an etymologically and phonetically distinct vowel \bar{e} in Qur'ānic Arabic as reflected in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text (QCT).² This can be deduced from the fact that

1. Marijn van Putten, “The Development of the Triphthongs in Quranic and Classical Arabic,” *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* 3 (2017): 47–74.

2. In my transcriptions of the QCT, I will use consonantal dotting, even though it was employed quite sparingly in early Qur'ānic manuscripts. It is often suggested that the original redaction of ʿUthmān's standard text had been completely without consonantal dotting and was just a bare consonantal skeleton, the *rasm*. Bursi has recently pointed out that there is rather little evidence for such a view. The very earliest manuscripts that we have all contain some amount of dotting—although it is indeed sometimes used sparingly. See Adam Bursi, “Connecting the Dots: Diacrit-

the letter in question exhibits orthographically distinct behavior and cannot rhyme with the *alif maqṣūrah bi-ṣūrat al-alif*. My claim stands in disagreement with Diem,³ who drew the opposite conclusion, arguing that the *yā'* was a purely pseudo-etymological sign for *ā*, and that it not only was pronounced as *ā* in the Qur'ān but that it had always been pronounced as such in Arabic. Table 1 below summarizes the orthographic distinction, with a reconstruction of the original pronunciation in Qur'ānic Arabic, along with its etymological origin following my previous conclusions.

Table 1: The etymological origin of the two forms of *alif maqṣūrah*.

QCT	Qur'ānic Arabic	Proto-Arabic	
هدى	/hadē/	< *hadaya	“he guided”
هديه	/hadē-h/	< *hadaya-hu	“he guided him”
دعا	/da'ā/	< *da'awa	“he called”
دعه or دعاه	/da'ā-h/	< *da'awa-hu	“he called him”
الهدى	/al-hudē/	< *al-hudayu	“the guidance”
هديه	/hudē-h/	< *hudayu-hu	“his guidance”
سنا	/sanā/	< *sanawu	“a flash of”
عصه or عصاه	/'aṣā-h/	< *'aṣawu-hu	“his staff”
مزجيه	/muzjēh/	< *muzjayatin	“of little value”

My 2017 article lacks a satisfactory solution for the spelling هداى “my guidance” (Q al-Baqarah 2:38; Q Ṭā Hā 20:123), which seemingly spells *ē* with an *alif*.⁴ Close examination of early qur'ānic manuscripts shows

ics, Scribal Culture, and the Qur'ān in the First/Seventh Century,” *JIQSA* 3 (2018): 111–157; François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam: Le Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 43–45. Whenever dots appear in early manuscripts, in the vast majority of cases the manuscripts agree with each other on the dotting, something we also observe in the high measure of agreement between the qur'ānic readings. For this reason, I believe it is justified in most cases to assert that we know what the intended dotting of any given word is. In this sense, my use of the QCT, which provides the most likely consonantal dotting, is distinct from the more broadly used term *rasm*. Differences in dotting, which occur occasionally among the canonical readers, do not affect the current study.

3. Werner Diem, “Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie I: Die Schreibung der Vokale,” *Orientalia* 48 (1979): 207–257.

4. Van Putten, “Triphthongs,” 61–62.

that this spelling is not unique to this word. There are several other cases where we find an *alif* (or a defective spelling with no representation of the *alif* at all, but where an *alif* is nonetheless clearly to be understood as present) while the Cairo Edition (henceforth CE) has the expected $y\bar{a}'$, for example, Q al-A'rāf 7:143 ترانى in the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus⁵ (henceforth CPP) for CE *tarā-nī* ترينى. If the use of *alif* and $y\bar{a}'$ in early qur'ānic manuscripts were completely unpredictable, it would be a strong argument in favor of Diem's hypothesis that these two signs represent one and the same sound.⁶ Indeed, such free variation has been a reason for Middle Arabists to suggest that the two *alifāt maqṣūrah* were not phonetically distinct.⁷ However, this paper will examine the cases where the spelling with *alif* occurs, and will show that these deviations are not the result of free variation. Instead, early qur'ānic manuscripts display a high measure of orthographical agreement with each another, and the appearance of one spelling over the other is strictly phonetically conditioned. This phonetic conditioning is best explained as the result of a regular conditioned sound change that has taken place in Qur'ānic Arabic.⁸

The Material

Across multiple manuscripts we find a consistent absence of the expected final $y\bar{a}'$ in stems with $y\bar{a}'$ as their third root consonant that end in *alif maqṣūrah* in several cases throughout the Qur'ān. In its place we find an *alif*

5. Déroche, *Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus*.

6. Diem, "Die Schreibung der Vokale," § 45.

7. Simon Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic: Based upon Papyri Datable to before 300 A.H./912 A.D.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 14–16; Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic: Based Mainly on the South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusCO, 1967), 81–83.

8. In a series of articles, I have argued that with careful examination of the orthography of the QCT, informed by rhyme, it is possible to derive information about the language of the Qur'ān independent of the later classicizing qur'ānic reading traditions. Besides Van Putten, "Triphthongs," see also idem, "The Feminine Ending -at as a Diptote in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text and Its Implications for Proto-Arabic and Proto-Semitic," *Arabica* 64 (2017): 695–705; idem, "Inferring the Phonetics of Qur'ānic Arabic from the Quranic Consonantal Text," *International Journal of Arabic Linguistics* 5 (2019): 1–19; Marijn van Putten and Phillip W. Stokes, "Case in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text," *WZKM* 108 (2018): 143–179; Marijn van Putten, "Hamzah in the Quranic Consonantal Text," *Orientalia* 87 (2018): 93–120. The current article is a continuation of this project. See now also Marijn van Putten, *Quranic Arabic: From Its Hijazi Origins to Its Classical Reading Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

or a defective spelling. The modern standard text, however, has corrected the *alif* spelling and has replaced it with a *yā'* in the majority of these cases. This is somewhat surprising, as the original spelling was closer to Classical Arabic orthography. Therefore, in this case the CE moves *away* from classical orthography towards a non-standard orthography. The absence of the *yā'* in these examples is so consistent across manuscripts that there can be little doubt that the *yā'*-less form is original, and should be assumed to have been part of the 'Uthmānic archetype.⁹ Early qur'ānic manuscripts have been accessed through the *Corpus Coranicum* website (www.corpus-coranicum.de) unless stated otherwise. A key to the abbreviations used for these manuscripts is provided at the end of this article.

The conditioning of the spelling is clear: whenever the first-person singular suffixes of the direct object *-nī* or of the possessive *-ya* follow the final *yā'* root letter, the vowel is written with *alif* or is not expressed in writing. Table 2 below provides the attestations in the manuscripts. "A" means that the form is written with an *alif* (e.g., اوصانى); "Ø" denotes a defective spelling (اوصنى); and "Y" denotes a spelling with a *yā'* (اوصينى). The leftmost column displays the location and spelling as attested in the CE.

Table 2: The spelling of words with *alif maqṣūrah* that have *yā'* as their third root consonant followed by *-nī* or *-ya*

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	Q	SU	S	Bb	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 6:80 هدين	A	A	Y		A			A	A			A		Y
Q 6:161 هدينى	Ø ¹⁰	Ø	A		A ¹¹		Ø	A				A		Y

9. It is clear from consistent agreement in the position and appearance of specific orthographic idiosyncrasies that all early qur'ānic manuscripts of the 'Uthmānic Text Type (which are all manuscripts found so far, except for the lower text of the San'ā' Palimpsest) go back to a single written archetype, which I call here the 'Uthmānic archetype. For a discussion, see Marijn van Putten, "The Grace of God' as Evidence for a Written Uthmanic Archetype: The Importance of Shared Orthographic Idiosyncrasies," *BSOAS* 82 (2019): 271–288; Nicolai Sinai, "When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part I," *BSOAS* 77 (2014): 273–292; idem, "When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part II," *BSOAS* 77 (2014): 509–521; idem, "Beyond the Cairo Edition: On the Study of Early Quranic Codices," *JAOS* 140 (2020): 189–204.

10. A later hand has added an *alif*.

11. Déroche read this as هدانى. Having checked the digitized photographs on the

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	Q	SU	S	Bb	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 39:57 هدیٰنی	A	A	Y									A		Y
Q 7:143 تریٰنی	A	A	A	A	A							A		A
Q 7:143 تریٰنی	A	A	A	A	A							A		A
Q 12:36 اریٰنی	A	A	A	A								A		A
Q 12:36 اریٰنی	A	A	A	A								A		A
Q 11:28 اتیٰنی	A	A	A	A		A			A			A	∅	A
Q 11:63 اتیٰنی		Y?	A	A				A	Y			A	∅	∅
Q 19:30 اتیٰنی		Y	A	A				A			A	A		Y
Q 27:36 اتین	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y						Y	Y		Y
Q 18:63 انسینیه	A ¹²	A ¹³										∅		∅
Q 19:31 اوصنی	A	Y	∅	∅				∅			A ¹⁴	∅		Y
Q 14:36 عصانی	A	∅	A	∅	∅	∅				Y		A	∅	∅
Q 2:38 هدای	∅		A					∅				A		A
Q 20:123 هدای	∅ ¹⁵	A	A	A			∅ ¹⁶	A			∅	A		A
Q 12:23 مٹوای	∅	∅	A	∅								∅		A

The fact that this use of *alif* or defective spelling is typical for words of this type *only* when they are followed by first-person object suffix *-nī* or possessive suffix *-ya* can be demonstrated by comparing the verbs *hadē*

Gallica website (gallica.bnf.fr), it is clear the reading هدانی is correct. See Déroche, *Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus*, ٨٠١.

12. Dot apparently on the wrong denticle: انسینه rather than انسنه.

13. Dot apparently on the wrong denticle: اسینه rather than انسنه.

14. A denticle appears to have been removed here.

15. Re-inked, *alif* was added.

16. *Alif* added later.

(“to lead”) in the perfect and *yarē* (“to see”) in the imperfect when they are followed by other object suffixes. In such cases, the vowel is spelled almost invariably with *yā*’ across all early qur’ānic manuscripts, as we can see in table 3 below.

Table 3: The spelling *hadē* and *yarē* followed by suffixes other than the object suffix *-nī* or possessive suffix *-ya*.

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	Q	SU	S	Ba	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 3:152 اربيكم	Y		Y		Y							Y		
Q 4:105 اربيك	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y				Y		Y
Q 6:74 اربيك	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		Y				Y		Y
Q 7:27 يربيكم	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y				Y		Y
Q 7:60 نريك	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y				Y		Y
Q 7:66 نريك	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y				Y		Y
Q 7:198 تريهم	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					Y		Y		Y
Q 9:127 يربيكم	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y						Y	Y	Y
Q 11:27 نريك	Y	Y	A	Y	Y	Y			Y			Y	Y	Y
Q 11:27 نريك	Y	Y	A	Y	Y				Y			A	Y	Y
Q 11:29 اربيكم	Y	Y	A	Y	Y				Y			Y	Y	Y
Q 11:84 اربيكم	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y	Y			Y	Y	Y
Q 11:91 نريك	Y	Y	Y	Y					Y			Y		Y
Q 12:30 نريها	Y	Y	Y	Y								Y		Y
Q 12:36 نريك	Y	Y	A	A								Y		Y
Q 12:78 نريك	A	Y	A	A								Y		Y

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	Q	SU	S	Ba	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 24:40 يريهَا		Y	Y	Y	Y						Y	Y		Y
Q 26:218 يريكْ	Y	Y		A	A						Y	Y		Y
Q 39:21 تريه	Y	Y	Y	Y								Y		Y
Q 42:45 تريهم	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y				Y	Y	Y
Q 46:23 اريكم	Y	Y	Y							Y		Y		Y
Q 48:29 تريهم	Y	Y	Y							Y		Y		Y
Q 57:20 تريه	Y	Y			A		Y ¹⁷			Y		Y	Y	Y
Q 70:7 نريه	Y	Y	Y		Y							Y		Y
Q 79:20 اريه	Y	Y										Y		Y
Q 2:185 هديكم	A	Y						Y		A		A		Y
Q 2:198 هديكم	A	Y										A		Y
Q 6:71 هدينا	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y				A		Y
Q 6:149 هديكم	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y				Y		Y
Q 7:43 هدينا	A	Y	∅	Y	∅			∅				A		Y
Q 7:43 هدينا	A	Y	∅	Y	∅			∅				A		Y
Q 9:115 هديهم	Y	Y	Y		Y							Y	Y	Y
Q 14:12 هدينا	Y	∅	Y	Y	Y					Y		Y		Y

17. A $yā'$ has been deleted and an *alif* added.

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	Q	SU	S	Ba	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 14:21 هدينا	A ¹⁸	∅	Y	Y	Y					Y		Y	Y ¹⁹	Y
Q 16:9 هديكم	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y		Y		Y		Y
Q 16:121 هديه	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y			Y		Y		Y
Q 22:37 هديكم	A	A	A	A					A		Y	Y		Y
Q 39:18 هديهم	A	Y	Y	A								A		Y
Q 49:17 هديكم	Y	Y	Y							Y		Y	Y	Y

The spelling of the two cases of *hadē-nā* in Q al-A‘rāf 7:43 seems to be attested more commonly with the *alif* or defective spelling. This is likewise the case for Q al-Ḥajj 22:37 *hadē-kum*. As both phrases are otherwise consistently spelled with *yā*’, it is difficult to decide what to make of this pattern.

Interpretation

What can be seen in the tables above is that it is indeed very typical for early qur’ānic manuscripts to lack the *alif maqṣūrah bi-ṣūrat al-yā*’ in final-*yā*’ roots when the nouns and verbs formed from such roots are followed by the first-person singular pronominal suffixes. This regular treatment needs an explanation. At first blush, it might be tempting to explain the absence of the expected spelling of *hudā-ya* and *mathwā-ya*, *هدى and *مئوى, to result from avoiding a sequence of two consecutive *yā*’s. But while the CE does indeed avoid the sequence of two *yā*’s in word-final position, such an orthographic principle is not operative in the QCT. Thus, in the CE *yuḥyī* and *yastaḥyī* are spelled يحيى and يستحى,²⁰ but this is an idiosyncrasy of the CE that cannot be reconstructed for the ‘Uthmānic archetype, as early qur’ānic manuscripts invariably write both *yā*’s. The spelling of the CE is based on the account of Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-Dānī (d. 444/1053),²¹

18. The *alif* appears to be a later addition.

19. Corrected, from هدا (without the suffix pronoun?) seemingly by the same hand and ductus as the text itself.

20. Diem, “Die Schreibung Der Vokale,” § 39.

21. Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī, *al-Muqni‘ fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār ma‘a kitāb al-naqṭ*, ed.

who says that such forms are only written with one $y\bar{a}$, but this seems to have no basis in actual manuscript evidence. Therefore, there is no obvious orthographic reason why words ending / \bar{e} -ya/ would be written with اى or just ى over the expected spelling with two $y\bar{a}$'s.²²

The use of *alif* is even more difficult to explain as the result of some hitherto unrecognized orthographic principle when it occurs before the suffix نى , where a principle of double $y\bar{a}$ ' avoidance cannot be invoked. The spelling is clearly conditioned, but this conditioning cannot easily be explained as an orthographic principle. Hence, it would rather seem that spellings of the type هدانى and هداى are best considered to represent a phonetic reality. Therefore, they were likely pronounced /hadā-nī/ and /hudā-y/ respectively. As this same / \bar{a} / does not regularly show up before other suffixes,²³ it seems that we are dealing with a phonetically conditioned dissimilatory sound shift which shifts \bar{e} to \bar{a} in the vicinity of \bar{i} or y . The archetypal spellings—such as Q Maryam 19:30 اتانى , Q al-Baqarah 2:38 هداى , and Q Maryam 19:31 اوصانى —must therefore be understood as representing /atā-nī/, /hudā-y/, and /awṣā-nī/, respectively.

An outstanding issue is the question of how the shortened form of the object pronoun $-n(i)$ plays into the dissimilation at hand.²⁴ Here the QCT gives two conflicting answers: for Q al-An'ām 6:80, the spelling هدان /hadā-n/ seems to suggest that the dissimilation is applied here too, whereas Q al-Naml 27:36 اتين /ātē-n/ predominantly has spellings in manuscripts that point to the dissimilation not applying. It seems possible that in this context the dissimilation may have been optional. As these are the only two cases, it is impossible to be more precise.

Muḥammad al-Sādiq Qamḥāwī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1978), 56.

22. See, for example, بىحى at Q 9:116, 10:56 (mistranscribed as بىحى), 40:68, 42:9, 44:8; نحى at Q 15:23, 50:43 in Éléonore Cellard, *Codex Amrensis 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); and بىحى at Q 3:156, 7:158, 9:116, 10:56, 23:80, 44:8 (mistranscribed as بىحى), 57:2; نحى at Q 15:23; بىسحى at Q 7:127 (mistranscribed as بىسحى), 28:4 in Déroche, *Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus*. A cursory look on the *Corpus Coranicum* website will convince the reader that this is the regular spelling in other manuscripts too.

23. See, for example, Q al-Nāzi'āt 79:27–32, 42–46; Q al-Shams 91. Both rhyme on $-\bar{e}-h\bar{a}$ and are consistently spelled بىها , e.g., $\text{ḍuḥ\bar{e}-h\bar{a}}$, $\text{tal\bar{e}-h\bar{a}}$. For a further discussion of this phonemic distinction evidenced by rhyme, see Van Putten, “Triphthongs,” 57–58.

24. The QCT shows fairly consistent shortening of word-final \bar{i} in pausal position; see Van Putten and Stokes, “Case in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text,” 156–158.

Final *-yayV Sequences

In light of the proposed dissimilation, we may reconsider the spelling of a sequence that is historically from *-yayV, such as الدنيا < **al-dunyayu* (“the world”), العليا < **al-‘ulyayu* (“the highest”) etc.²⁵ Words of this type are generally spelled with a final *alif*. Diem explains these spellings as an attempt to avoid a sequence of two word-final *yā*’s.²⁶ As has been pointed out above, the avoidance of two word-final *yā*’s in the Qur’ān is an artifact of the *rasm* of the CE, which was based on traditional *rasm* literature, rather than being grounded in ancient manuscripts. As such, this cannot be the solution. Rabin already suggested that this spelling was the result of a dissimilation of the original *-yē to -yā,²⁷ which would mean that the dissimilation proposed in the previous section is bidirectional: original *ē* becomes *ā* not only when followed by *ī* or *y* but also when preceded by *y*.

As I have observed previously,²⁸ with regard to the issue at hand the information provided by qur’ānic rhyme and by the orthography of the QCT diverges somewhat: الدنيا “the world” (Q 20:72, 53:29, 79:38 87:16), احيا “he gives life” (Q 53:44), and سقيها “her drinking” (Q 91:13) all stand in -*ē* (-*hā*) rhymes, which suggests that they were pronounced as something close to [ad-dunyē], [ʔaḥyē], and [suqyē-hā], respectively. With only six examples of this kind, it is difficult to decide what to make of this. The phenomenon may simply be a case of poetic license, or it may indicate that these verses stem from an earlier text in a dialect that lacked this dissimilation. Finally, it is possible that the sequence /yā/ had a vowel that was phonetically not quite identical to the /ā/ found in other cases but was rather a little closer to [æ̃], thus facilitating rhyme. Any explanation will remain *ad hoc*, but it is attractive to consider the orthographic practice found here to be part of the same dissimilation that we see when *ī* and *y* follow *ē*.

As I have pointed out, the verb *ḥayya* (“to live”) in the prefix conjugation is not infrequently spelled with a final *yā*.²⁹ In the CE, like in early qur’ānic manuscripts, the third-person masculine forms are always spelled as such. As shown in table 4, for the two cases of the first-person plural form, the

25. On the reconstruction of the feminine ending as *-ay-, see Marijn van Putten, “The Feminine Endings *-Ay and *-Āy in Semitic and Berber,” *BSOAS* 81 (2018): 205–225.

26. Diem, “Die Schreibung der Vokale,” § 46.

27. Chaim Rabin, *Ancient West-Arabian* (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1951), 115ff.

28. Van Putten, “Triphthongs.”

29. *Ibid.*, 59.

data is somewhat ambiguous. Q al-Mu'minūn 23:37 is usually spelled with $yā'$ (نحيى) but two fairly early manuscripts have the Classical Arabic spelling with *alif*. Meanwhile, Q al-Jāthiyah 45:24 has a majority spelling with *alif* (نحيا), but other manuscripts, generally considered to be earlier, spell it with $yā'$. It is difficult to reconstruct what spelling the 'Uthmānic archetype may have used.

Table 4: The spelling of prefix conjugation forms of *ḥayya*.

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	S	Bb	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 23:37 ونحيا	A	Y	Y	Y	Y				A	Y		A
Q 45:24 ونحيا	A	A	Y		Y			A		A	A	A
Q 8:42 يحيى	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y		Y	Y	Y
Q 20:74 يحيى	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		Y	Y		Y
Q 87:13 يحيى	Y	Y	Y							Y		Y

In the perfect third-person masculine of the causative verb *aḥyā*, the spelling in the CE is either with *alif* or defective. While occasional manuscripts have spellings with $yā'$, the overwhelming trend is towards the dissimilated spelling with *alif* or defective spellings (see table 5).

Table 5: The spelling of *aḥyā*.

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	S	Ba	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 5:32 احيا	Y		A	Y	Y					A		A
Q 2:164 فاحيا	A		A			A		A		A		A
Q 16:65 فاحيا	A	A	Y	A		Y				A		
Q 29:63 فاحيا		A	Y	A					A	A		A
Q 45:5 فاحيا	A	A	Y		Y					A	A	A

	W	SM	GK	BL	CPP	S	Ba	331	T	Top	CA1	CM
Q 53:44 واحيا	A	A	A					Y		Y		A
Q 5:32 احياها	∅		∅		∅					A		∅
Q 41:39 احياها	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅				A	Y	∅
Q 22:66 احياكم	A	∅	A	∅			∅		A	A		A
Q 2:28 فاحيكم			A			A				A		A
Q 2:243 احيهم	A		A					A		A		A

Though it is difficult to present an exact explanation for the asymmetry, it is clear that for Qur'ānic Arabic we should probably reconstruct the base stem as having *ḥayy/yaḥyē* without the *yē > yā* dissimilation, whereas the causative stem should be reconstructed as *aḥyā/yuḥyī* with the *yē > yā* dissimilation.

Traces of the Dissimilation in the Reading Traditions

The most common reading tradition today is that of ʿĀṣim in the transmission of Ḥafṣ, and this is the reading used by the CE. However, Warsh and Qālūn, the transmitters of Nāfiʿ, are still followed by millions in the Maghreb today. Besides ʿĀṣim and Nāfiʿ there are five more canonical readings with two canonical transmitters each.³⁰ While such readings are often ignored, they are just as much part of the accepted canon as Ḥafṣ is. The canonical reading traditions are in many ways dependent on the written form. After all, they all follow the same ʿUthmānic *rasm*, and thus derive much of their pronunciation from the written form of the text, rather than the other way around.

The fact that the orthographic variation between final *yāʾ* and *alif* is phonetically conditioned is already a strong indication that these spellings must reflect a linguistic reality in the language of the QCT. This leads us

30. Ḥamzah, al-Kisāʾī, Abū ʿAmr, Ibn ʿĀmir, and Ibn Kathīr. The earliest extant work on the reading traditions, that of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), described these seven readings and quickly came to be considered canonical. Three more readings, those

to wonder to what extent the qur'ānic reading traditions may preserve a memory of the dissimilation as found in early qur'ānic manuscripts. I shall now go on to argue that several of the reading traditions do indeed preserve an echo of the dissimilation reconstructed above.

There are three canonical reading traditions among the seven that consistently read the *alif maqṣūrah bi-ṣūrat al-yā'* with *imālah* and thereby distinguish it from the *alif maqṣūrah bi-ṣūrat al-alif*. The two Kufans, Ḥamzah and al-Kisā'ī,³¹ read nouns and verbs with a root final *yā'* with *imālah*, e.g., هدى *hadē* (“he led”), هديهم *hadē-hum* (“he led them”), الهدى *al-hudē* (“the guidance”), الموتى *al-mawtē* (“the dead”), but دعا *da'ā* (“he called”), سنا *sanā* (“flash”), عصاه *aṣā-hu* (“his stick”).³² Warsh, a transmitter of the Medinan reader Nāfi', follows much the same pattern, but pronounces the vowel in between the \bar{a} and the \bar{e} , i.e., \bar{x} (variously called *imālah bayna bayn*, *imālah bayn al-lafẓayn* or *taqlīl*).³³ As this distinction between \bar{e}/\bar{x} versus \bar{a} would not be predictable from an underlying form that had \bar{a} for both, we must conclude that in these reading traditions the distinction was fully phonemic. The distribution that we find in these reading traditions is, in fact, identical to the phonemic distinction that is reconstructible on the basis of the orthography and rhyme of the QCT.³⁴

Several exceptions to these rules are mentioned in al-Dānī's account of *imālah*.³⁵ Here we find that the absence of *imālah* in fact very often coincides with cases where the suffixes *-ya* or *-nī* follow (and thus where manuscripts generally do not write the *yā'*). Al-Kisā'ī in all these cases of *-nī/-ni/ya* has

of Abū Ja'far, Ya'qūb, and Khalaf, came to be accepted into the canon after the work of Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429); these are of little consequence to the discussion here, and will not be discussed further.

31. The Kufan reader Khalaf, among the ten, also a transmitter of Ḥamzah's reading, likewise has *imālah* in this position, but does not add any new information to the transmissions of Ḥamzah and al-Kisā'ī, so I do not include him in the discussion here.

32. Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, *al-Taysīr fī 'l-qirā'āt al-sab'*, ed. Otto Pretzl (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1984), 46.

33. This is the most commonly adhered to transmission of Warsh today, following the transmission path of al-Azraq, and presented as the only option by al-Dānī in his *Taysīr* (ibid., 47–48). But there is another option within the transmission path of al-Azraq, which only applies *imālah bayna bayn* when the word occurs at the end of a verse; see, for example, Abū 'l-Khayr b. al-Jazarī, *Nashr al-qirā'āt al-'ashr*, ed. Ayman Rushdi Suwayd (Beirut: Dār al-Ghawthānī, 2018), § 2017, § 2022. The eastern transmission path of al-Aṣbahānī from Warsh does not transmit *imālah* at all.

34. Van Putten, “Triphthongs.”

35. Al-Dānī, *al-Taysīr*, 48–49.

the *imālah* variant, but one of his transmitters, Abū 'l-Ḥārith, lacks *imālah* before *-ya* whereas his other transmitter, al-Dūrī, does not. Table 6 below provides the readings of the different forms. The leftmost column displays the QCT as it can be reconstructed for the 'Uthmānic archetype. While the correspondence is not perfect—presumably the result of not entirely complete transmission—it is clear that Ḥamzah's reading follows the dissimilation visible in the QCT quite closely.

Table 6: The recitation of *alif maqṣūrah bi-ṣūrat al-yā'* when followed by *-nī* or *-ya*.

QCT	Ḥamzah	Abū 'l-Ḥārith	Al-Dūrī	Warsh
هدان (Q 6:80)	<i>hadā-nī</i>	<i>hadē-nī</i>	<i>hadē-nī</i>	<i>hadā-nī</i>
هدانى (Q 6:161, 39:57)	<i>hadē-nī</i>	<i>hadē-nī</i>	<i>hadē-nī</i>	<i>hadā-nī</i>
عصانى (Q 14:36)	<i>'aṣā-nī</i>	<i>'aṣē-nī</i>	<i>'aṣē-nī</i>	<i>'aṣā-nī</i>
انسانيه (Q 18:63)	<i>ansā-nī-hi</i>	<i>ansē-nī-hi</i>	<i>ansē-nī-hi</i>	<i>ansā-nī-hi</i>
اتانى (Q 19:30)	<i>ātā-nī</i>	<i>ātē-niya</i>	<i>ātē-niya</i>	<i>ātā-niya</i>
اتين (Q 27:36) ³⁶	<i>ātā-nī</i>	<i>ātē-nī</i>	<i>ātē-nī</i>	<i>ātā-niya</i>
اتانى (Q 11:28.63)	<i>ātē-nī</i>	<i>ātē-nī</i>	<i>ātē-nī</i>	<i>ātā-nī</i>
اوصانى (Q 19:31)	<i>awṣā-nī</i>	<i>awṣē-nī</i>	<i>awṣē-nī</i>	<i>awṣā-nī</i>
مٹواى (Q 12:23)	<i>mathwā-ya</i>	<i>mathwā-ya</i>	<i>mathwē-ya</i>	<i>mathwā-ya</i>
هداى (Q 2:38, 20:123)	<i>hudā-ya</i>	<i>hudā-ya</i>	<i>hudē-ya</i>	<i>hudā-ya</i>

36. Note that while Ḥamzah reads this with *ā*, manuscript evidence actually seems to suggest that this verse is an exception to the dissimilation rule and is written with *yā'*.

Among the nouns and verbs that have the original $*-yayV$ sequence, we find once again that Ḥamzah follows the QCT (see table 7). Thus, the prefix conjugation of the base stem *ḥayya* (“to live”) has \bar{e} for all the readers with this type of *imālah*, including Ḥamzah (meaning that he reads *yahyē* and *nahyē*), whereas the causative *aḥyā* has \bar{a} . While three nouns (one of them extremely common, namely *al-dunyē*) are read with a final $-yē$, most other nouns lack the *imālah* in Ḥamzah’s reading, following the spelling in the QCT. Once again, while the match is not perfect, and in fact readings with $yē$ are overwhelmingly in the majority due to *al-dunyē* being read as such in all its 115 attestations, there is a clear relation between the $-yā$ sequence being read as $-yā$ rather than $-yē$ following the dissimilation as found in the QCT.

Table 7: The recitation of words with an historical $*-yayV$ sequence.

	Ḥamzah	Abū 'l-Ḥārith	Al-Dūrī	Warsh
فاحيا (Q 2:164, 16:65, 29:63, 45:5)	<i>fa-aḥyā</i>	<i>fa-aḥyē</i>	<i>fa-aḥyē</i>	<i>fa-aḥyā</i>
واحيا (Q 53:44)	<i>wa-aḥyē</i>	<i>wa-aḥyē</i>	<i>wa-aḥyē</i>	<i>wa-aḥyā</i>
احياكم (Q 22:66)	<i>aḥyā-kum</i>	<i>aḥyē-kum</i>	<i>aḥyē-kum</i>	<i>aḥyā-kum</i>
احياها (Q 5:32, 41:39)	<i>aḥyā-hā</i>	<i>aḥyē-hā</i>	<i>aḥyē-hā</i>	<i>aḥyā-hā</i>
خطيكم (Q 2:58, 29:12)	<i>khaṭāyā-kum</i>	<i>khaṭāyē-kum</i>	<i>khaṭāyē-kum</i>	<i>khaṭāyā-kum</i>
خطيهم (Q 29:12)	<i>khaṭāyā-hum</i>	<i>khaṭāyē-hum</i>	<i>khaṭāyē-hum</i>	<i>khaṭāyā-hum</i>
خطينا (Q 20:73, 26:51)	<i>khaṭāyā-nā</i>	<i>khaṭāyē-nā</i>	<i>khaṭāyē-nā</i>	<i>khaṭāyā-nā</i>
الريا (Q 12:43, 17:60, 37:105, 48:27)	<i>al-ru'yā</i>	<i>al-ru'yē</i>	<i>al-ru'yē</i>	<i>al-ru'yā</i>
رياك (Q 12:5)	<i>ru'yā-ka</i>	<i>ru'yā-ka</i>	<i>ru'yē-ka</i>	<i>ru'yā-ka</i>
ربي (Q 12:43, 100)	<i>ru'yā-ya</i>	<i>ru'yē-ya</i>	<i>ru'yē-ya</i>	<i>ru'yā-ya</i>

محيى (Q 6:162)	<i>maḥyā-ya</i>	<i>maḥyā-ya</i>	<i>maḥyē-ya</i>	<i>maḥyā-ya</i>
محيهم (Q 45:21)	<i>maḥyā-hum</i>	<i>maḥyē-hum</i>	<i>maḥyē-hum</i>	<i>maḥyā-hum</i>
الدنيا (<i>passim</i>)	<i>al-dunyē</i>	<i>al-dunyē</i>	<i>al-dunyē</i>	<i>al-dunyā</i>
العليا (Q 9:41)	<i>al-ʿulyē</i>	<i>al-ʿulyē</i>	<i>al-ʿulyē</i>	<i>al-ʿulyā</i>
الحوايا (Q 6:146)	<i>al-ḥawāyē</i>	<i>al-ḥawāyē</i>	<i>al-ḥawāyē</i>	<i>al-ḥawāyā</i>

Conclusion

In this article we have seen that, far from showing free alternation between the spellings with *yā*³ and *alif*, the QCT follows a strict structure in its spelling. As I have previously shown,³⁷ stems with *alif maqṣūrah* that have *yā*³ as the third root consonant spell the final vowel with *yā*³ for /ē/ and stems with *alif maqṣūrah* that have *wāw* as the third root consonant spell the final vowel with *alif* for /ā/. This is a phonemic distinction that is moreover maintained in the qurʾānic reading traditions of Ḥamzah, al-Kisāʾī, and Warsh ‘an Nāfi’. Early qurʾānic manuscripts reveal that there are two specific environments where the distinction between /ā/ and /ē/ is neutralized: first, when a suffix *-nī* or *-ya* follows, and secondly, when a *y* precedes. This can most easily be understood as a phonetic dissimilation, where /ē/ is regularly shifted to /ā/ in the vicinity of /i/ or /y/. The linguistic reality of this dissimilation is further reflected in the qurʾānic reading of Ḥamzah, which largely agrees in reading these vowels as /ā/ rather than /ē/ in these environments.

It is hoped that this article demonstrates the importance of not relying solely on the modern standard text for informing us about the linguistic facts of Qurʾānic Arabic. Early qurʾānic manuscripts may show consistent and significant deviations from the standard text, and further corroboration of the linguistic analysis may be provided by a careful examination of reading traditions other than the ubiquitous reading of Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim.

37. Van Putten, “Triphthongs.”

Abbreviations of Qur'ān Manuscripts

The manuscripts were accessed through the *Corpus Coranicum* website (www.corpuscoranicum.de) or, for the manuscripts held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), the Gallica website (gallica.bnf.fr). Information on these manuscripts is based on the *Corpus Coranicum* website unless explicitly stated otherwise. If other sources were used to access these manuscripts this has been stated as well.

W = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Wetzstein II 1913 + BnF Arabe 6087

216 folios; ¹⁴C: 662–765 2σ (95.4%); Kufic B.Ia.³⁸

SM = Gotthelf-Bergsträßer-Archiv, Saray Medina 1a (= Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi: M 1)

308 folios; late first/early second century; mixed (part Ḥijāzī III, part O.I, part close to Kufic B.Ib or Ḥijāzī).

GK = Cairo, al-Maktabah al-Markaziyyah li'l-Makhtūṭāt al-Islāmiyyah: Großer Korankodex

1087 folios; not before 700; Kufic B.Ib or B.II.

BL = British Library Or. 2165 + BnF Arabe 328e + Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyyah, Kuwait 1 LNS 19 CAab (bifolio)

128 folios; second half of the first/seventh century³⁹; Ḥijāzī II.⁴⁰ British Library folios were accessed through the British Library website.⁴¹

CPP = Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus⁴²

98 folios; c. third quarter of the first/seventh century;⁴³ Ḥijāzī I.⁴⁴

Q = Cairo, Dār al-Kutub MS 247 (= Ms. Qāf 47) + Staatsbibliothek, Berlin Ms. Or. Fol. 4313

36 folios; ¹⁴C: 606–652, 2σ (95.4%); unclassified (similar to Arabe 330g).

SU = Codex Ṣan'ā' I, upper text = San'ā', Dār al-Makhtūṭāt, DAM 01-27.01 + Ḥamdūn 2004⁴⁵ + auctioned folios Christie's 2008, Bonhams 2000, Sotheby's 1992, and Sotheby's 1993.

38. François Déroche, *Les manuscrits du Coran: Aux origines de la calligraphie coranique* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1983), 67, no. 16.

39. Yasin Dutton, "Some Notes on the British Library's 'Oldest Qur'an Manuscript' (Or. 2165)," *JQS* 6.1 (2004): 43–71.

40. Déroche, *Manuscrits du Coran*, 62, no. 7.

41. http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_2165.

42. Déroche, *Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus*.

43. *Ibid.*, 177.

44. Déroche, *Manuscrits du Coran*, 59, nos. 2, 3.

45. R. Gh. Ḥamdūn, "*al-Makhtūṭāt al-qur'āniyyah fī Ṣan'ā' mundhu al-qarn al-awwal al-hijrī wa-ḥifz al-Qur'ān al-karīm bi'l-ṣuṭūr*" (MA thesis, Al-Yemenia University, San'ā', 2004).

75 folios; ¹⁴C: 578–669 CE, 2σ (95.4%)/606–649, σ2 (95.4%) (Coranica); Ḥijāzī I. Photographs of the upper text of DAM 01-27.01 were accessed through the Islamic Awareness website.⁴⁶ Hilali has cast some doubts as to whether the folios of Ḥamdūn’s thesis belong to the San‘ā’ palimpsest.⁴⁷ From the gaps in the Ḥamdūn thesis, it is clear that the auctioned folios were taken from the manuscript before Ḥamdūn wrote the thesis. As Hilali does seem to accept that the auctioned folios belong to this manuscript,⁴⁸ it strikes me as overly critical to exclude or even suspend judgment as to whether the folios of Ḥamdūn’s thesis belong to the same manuscript. Cellard has now convincingly shown that both the lower and upper text of the San‘ā’ Palimpsest once formed complete *muṣḥafs*.⁴⁹ I do not discuss the lower text of the San‘ā’ Palimpsest in this paper as I am sufficiently convinced by the arguments that it represents a non-‘Uthmānic Text Type,⁵⁰ and therefore cannot be used in discussing the archetypal orthography of the ‘Uthmānic text.

S = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Kodex Samarkand (facsimile print)

353 folios; dated to about 700–850. A style similar to Kufic D.

Ba = Birmingham Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a + BnF Arabe 328c⁵¹

16 folios; ¹⁴C: 568–645 CE, 2σ (95.4%); Ḥijāzī I.⁵²

Bb = Birmingham Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572b

6 folios; before 750 (?); Ḥijāzī I.

331 = BnF Arabe 331 + Leiden, University Library Leiden Or. 14.545b + Or. 14.545c

58 folios; ¹⁴C: 652–763, 2σ (95.4%); Kufic B.Ia.⁵³

T = Tübingen, Universitätsbibliothek Ma VI 165

77 folios; ¹⁴C: 649–675, 2σ (95.4%); Kufic B.Ia.

Top = Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi H.S. 44/32⁵⁴

46. <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/soth.html>.

47. Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur’an in the First Centuries AH* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 15.

48. *Ibid.*, 18.

49. Éléonore Cellard, “The Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest: Materializing the Codices,” *JNES* 80 (2021): 1–30.

50. Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur’ān of the Prophet,” *Arabica* 57 (2010): 343–436; Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “Ṣan‘ā’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān,” *Der Islam* 87 (2011): 1–129; Sinai, “Beyond the Cairo Edition.”

51. The connection of these folios was identified by A. Fedeli, “Early Qur’ānic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham” (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2015).

52. Déroche, *Manuscrits du Coran*, 60, no. 4.

53. *Ibid.*, 67, no. 14.

54. Tayyar Altıkulaç, *Al-Muṣḥaf al-sharīf: Attributed to ‘Uthmān Bin ‘Affān (The*

408 folios; Umayyad era (661-750); Kufic C.I.

CA1 = Codex Amrensis 1⁵⁵

75 folios; late Ḥijāzī⁵⁶/Ḥijāzī I⁵⁷; first half second/eighth century?⁵⁸

Copy at The Topkapi Palace Museum) (Istanbul: Organization of the Islamic Conference Research Centre for Islamic History, 2007).

55. Cellard, *Codex Amrensis 1*.

56. *Ibid.*, 7.

57. Déroche, *Manuscripts du Coran*, 59, no. 1.

58. Cellard, *Codex Amrensis 1*, 15.