

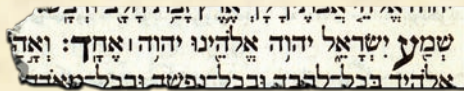


Syriac evangelium in Estrangelo script from the 5th century AD, annunciation of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Luke (Berlin State Library Ms. Phillips 1388)

of Medina's population. The Ethiopian church had its own written language Ge'ez, from which derives, for example, the Qur'anic word for "apostle". Middle Persian was used for Zoroastrian and Manichaean writings. On the Arabian Peninsula, an independent tradition of Arabic poetry had evolved that expressed the secular heroic ideals

of Bedouin society, which stood in sharp contrast to religious ideals.

For historical-critical research, it is indispensable to keep in mind the linguistic and religious complexity of the Qur'an's milieu of origin – not in order to polemically deny the Qur'an its originality, but rather to demonstrate how its theological and literary profile emerged from a strong interaction with its Late Antique milieu. The project *Corpus Coranicum*, based at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, will contribute to this by compiling a database of parallel texts and through a historical commentary on the Qur'an itself.



Deuteronomy 6,4 (Shema Israel): „Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one!“

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CORPUS CORANICUM

TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION AND HISTORICAL
CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE QUR'AN



ON THE HISTORY OF A HOLY TEXT

According to Islamic understanding, the Qur'an assembles the messages received through divine inspiration by the prophet Muhammad. For almost 23 years, between 610 and Muhammad's death in 632 AD, the prophet preached in Arabic to a growing number of disciples. Records say that his companions started writing down his words during his lifetime. A final compilation dates back to 650 AD and is attributed to Caliph Uthman. His version had to eclipse several rival collections like that of the prophet's companion Abdallah ibn Mas'ud. The surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an are not arranged according to chronological order but roughly according to length, passing from longer to shorter ones.

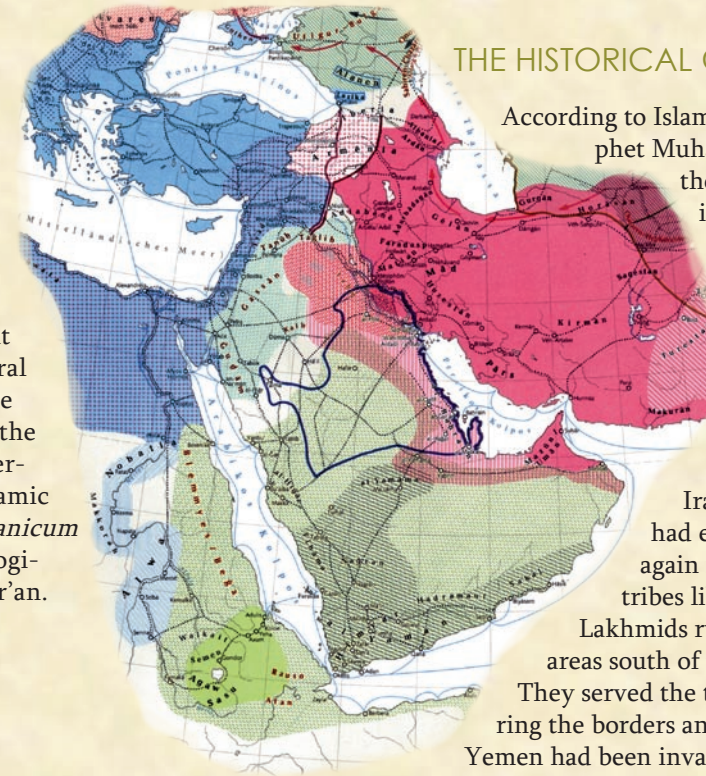
RECITATION AND PRAYER

In the early Arabic writing system, one character could represent a whole series of sounds. There was no systematic use of diacritic marks for the differentiation of letters. This led to the development of various reading traditions, some of which are still alive today. During the prophet's lifetime, the recitation of the Qur'an

was probably already the centre of the early congregation's prayer ritual. Until today, an elaborate

musical recitation is the heart of the Friday prayer liturgy.

In order to give a more detailed picture of the Qur'an's textual history, the project *Corpus Coranicum* of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities aims at documenting the written and oral ways of its transmission over the centuries, which involves both the oldest manuscripts and the different reading traditions of the Islamic world. In this way, *Corpus Coranicum* lays the foundation for a philologically sound approach to the Qur'an.



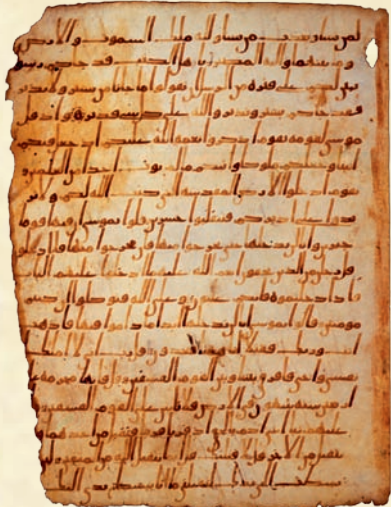
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to Islamic tradition, the prophet Muhammad promulgated the Qur'anic revelations in the West Arabian towns of Mekka (610-622 AD) and Medina (622-632 AD). The Qur'an thus came into being in the border region of the two empires Byzantium and Sasanian Iran, whose antagonism had escalated to open war again in 604 AD. Arabian tribes like the Ghassanids and Lakhmids ruled over the desert areas south of the imperial borders. They served the two empires by securing the borders and also in proxy wars. Yemen had been invaded by the Christian kingdom of Axum at the beginning of the 6th century AD before it was conquered by the Persian dynasty of the Sasanids in 575 AD.

Arabia between Byzantium, Persia, and Ethiopia on the eve of the Islamic polity (TAVO, B VI 7)

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

From a linguistic and religious perspective, the historical milieu of the Qur'an is extraordinarily heterogeneous. The Council of Chalcedon, which had adopted the dogma of Christ's human and divine nature in 451 AD, provoked the emergence of an autonomous Monophysite church on Byzantine territory. Similar to the Dyophysite church's writings in the Sasanid Empire, its writings were composed in the Aramaic dialect of Edessa, whereas the Imperial Byzantine church continued to use Greek. Aramaic, which accounts for a large number of religious terms in the Qur'an, was also used by, Rabbinic Judaism which was the religion of a part



Page from an early codex of the Qur'an (before 750 A.D.) in defective writing in Hijazi script (Berlin State Library Ms. or. fol. 4313 fol. 4a)