

The Preferences of al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805): Grammar and Meaning in a Canonical Reading of the Qur'an

Ramon Harvey¹

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Abstract The Qur'an has been transmitted as both a written text and an oral recital. This has led to the development of a reading tradition that permits numerous different vocalisations to be made upon the basic skeletal text of the established 'Uthmānī codex. Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) chose ten early readers whom he felt were most representative of this tradition and whose readings are treated as canonical up until this day. One of these, the Kufan linguist al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805) has been characterised in the literature as more focused on the grammar of the Qur'an than his reader peers. This article explores al-Kisā'ī's process of *ikhtiyār* (preference) when deciding between various possible readings. The sample for analysis consists of Kisā'ī's *tafarrudāt*, the approximately fifty cases in which his reading differs from the other nine readers. By comparing his reading with the comments of early scholars of Qur'anic linguistics, especially his near-contemporary al-Farrā' (d. 208/822), it is possible to construct a typology of the suspected principal reasons for al-Kisā'ī's *tafarrudāt*. Not only are many of these based on grammatical preferences, but they demonstrate a significant degree of consistency. Furthermore, analysis of a cluster of readings with implications for the interpretation of the *sharī'a* (divine law and moral code) provides evidence for a subtle exegetical dimension to al-Kisā'ī's work as a reader-grammarian.

Keywords Qur'an · Grammar · Qirā'āt · Ikhtiyār · Al-Kisā'ī · Exegesis

✉ Ramon Harvey
rh@cambridgemuslimcollege.org; rnharvey@hotmail.co.uk

¹ Cambridge Muslim College, 14 Saint Paul's Road, Cambridge CB1 2EZ, UK

1 Introduction

The Qur'an comprises both a written text and an oral tradition, a characteristic that it shares with the Jewish Torah. Arabic, like Hebrew, is a Semitic language and was initially written without vowel signs, allowing diverse readings, or recitations (*qirā'āt*) to co-exist with a single established text. It is usually understood that just such an undotted Arabic codex of the Qur'an was compiled under the third caliph, 'Uthmān, in approximately the year 30/650. Although the 'Uthmānī codex did not receive the support of the entire community immediately [27, pp. 283–284; 23, p. 414], over time Muslim scholars deemed it necessary to tie the recitation of the Qur'an to that which may be read upon its skeletal text.

Even with this restriction in place, dozens of readings proliferated in the early centuries of Islam, each one encompassing a range of acceptable oral variations. One scholar, al-Hudhalī (d. 465/1072-3), composed the book *Al-Kāmil fī qirā'āt al-khamsīn*, containing fifty different readings. Alongside the attempt to document this diverse oral tradition was an effort to form a canon of acceptable readings. The most famous of these canonisers, Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), in his seminal text *Kitāb al-sab'a*, chose seven readers that he felt best represented the main centres of recitation of his time, one from Mecca, Medina, Basra and the Levant, plus three from Kufa. A further three reciters were added in the influential list compiled by Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) making a total of ten canonical readings deemed to be the best of the dozens that were prevalent between the 2nd/8th and early 3rd/9th centuries.

The concern of Muslim scholars to control the corpus of acceptable readings has a number of dimensions. A restricted canon was practical for liturgical and didactic purposes, as well as being more theologically tidy. Islamic legal theorists later argued that only these readings were *mutawātir* (mass-transmitted), thus epistemologically certain and suitable for the word of God [20, pp. 79–88]. On the level of meaning too, the stakes were high. The ulema accepted that the variation of readings further expanded the plurality of exegetical views. Of these differences, a less numerous and somewhat more controversial category were able to affect the interpretation of the *sharī'a*, the divine law and moral code delivered through the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Perhaps the most famous case is found in Q. 5:6, the verse legislating *wuḍū'* (ritual ablution). Most read, '*wa-amsaḥū bi-ru'ūsikum wa-arjulakum* (wipe your heads and [wash] your feet)', the *naṣb* inflection of *arjulakum* governed by a previous instruction to wash. The canonical readers Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/737-8), Ḥamza (d. 156/722) and Abū 'Amr (d. 154/720) all read the *khafḍ* (*jarḥ*) inflection '*arjulikum* ([wipe] your feet)', which is governed by the command to wipe. Al-Farrā' quotes a report on the authority of the prominent Companion 'Alī (d. 40/660) in which he says, 'The Scripture was revealed with wiping and the Sunna is washing' [7, v. 1, p. 302].

The technical method by which these readings were able to proliferate was the practice of *ikhtiyār* (preference). Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (d. 444/1053) explains that this involved the reader choosing from the entire existing corpus of acceptable readings. According to his formulation, then, the vocal rendition of the Qur'an composed through this process, while technically distinct in its totality, would be exclusively

based on existing precedent [4, p. 35]. Unsurprisingly, grammarians preferred renditions in accord with their idea of the precepts of Arabic grammar. Mustafa Shah thus characterises the subset of grammarian-readers as selecting 'from a host of precedented readings, using parity with the model of *'arabiyya* as the principal criterion when expressing a preference for a reading' [25, p. 81]. Shah proposes that the trial of the reciter Ibn Miqṣam (d. 354/965), charged with unorthodox readings by none other than Ibn Mujāhid, is significant in part because it highlights that it was considered unacceptable by the 4th/10th century to allow grammatical considerations to transgress the limits of known earlier readings [25, p. 81].

This view has been challenged to an extent by Christopher Melchert who, while acknowledging the importance of tradition for early Qur'anic specialists, argues that the influence of human reasoning is the most natural explanation for the variation between readings. As he writes, 'One hundred percent is a rare number in human affairs, and I am strongly inclined to attribute the disputed readings in some measure to each of transmission and reason' [18, p. 79]. Furthermore, he adduces reports of readers in the early period, such as Ibn Muḥaysin (d. 123/740-1), allowing grammar to override precedent in their *ikhtiyār* [18, p. 81]. It should be noted that the literature suggests that these attempts were a rarity that faced considerable opposition due to their contravention of the consensus of readers [25, p. 83]. Melchert, in fact, agrees that the requirement for grammatical preference to be backed by a precedent (*athar*; pl. *āthār*) is part of the normative criteria for the selection of seven readers made by Ibn Mujāhid [18, pp. 80–81]. If this is the case, then it would not be that surprising for the ten readings considered canonical today, which include these seven, to be characterised by majority, or complete, adherence to known *āthār*, even if some of the dozens of excluded readings are not.

In this article, I will not attempt to settle the question of whether an existing precedent underlies each reader preference. Rather, I will seek to look more closely at the role that grammatical considerations play within the *ikhtiyār* of one of the ten readers, the Kufan Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ḥamza al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805). The choice to study the reading of al-Kisā'ī is based on this figure's grammatical credentials and the hypothesis that they significantly influence his *ikhtiyār*. As Shah comments, his is 'a focused regard for the phenomenon of language, incisively distinguishing his own approach from that of his reader peers. It is the inclination of a linguist and not a reader which resonates in his analysis of the Qur'anic text' [24, p. 57]. Al-Kisā'ī was a close contemporary of the famous Basran linguist Sībawayhi (d. 180/796), credited with authoring a seminal book in the development of Arabic grammar. There are even reports of the two meeting in Baṣra and debating points of grammar, with al-Kisā'ī apparently coming out on top [15, pp. 293–294]. The question of whether this aspect of al-Kisā'ī's training may have affected his preferences as a reader is made more acute by the habit of grammarians to place relatively slight importance on strong *isnāds* (chains of narration) for the *qirā'āt* they accept in the formulation of grammatical rules [2, p. 161].

My approach is to take a carefully selected sample of al-Kisā'ī's reading and to analyse to what extent his *ikhtiyār* is founded upon an appreciation of grammar, understood in a broad sense to include *i'rāb* (inflection), *ṣarf* (morphology) and related phenomena. In order to make my sample both manageable and meaningful, I

select only al-Kisā'ī's *tafarrudāt*, the instances in which he differs from all nine other canonical readings, excluding the pronounciative techniques of *imāla* and *ghunna*. Al-Dānī has previously analysed the seven canonical readings in this way to produce an unnumbered list of al-Kisā'ī's *tafarrudāt* from the other six [5, pp. 150–156]. My list, which is based on the ten readings, is obviously shorter due to al-Kisā'ī sometimes agreeing with one of the additional three. I have counted fifty-five *tafarrudāt* using the book entitled *Al-Qirā'āt al-'ashr al-mutawātira min ʿarīqay al-Shāṭibiyya wa al-Durra*. This text essentially puts the main information from two famous works about the ten readings accessibly on the margins of a standard Qur'anic *muṣḥaf* [3]. As will be discussed below, these variations are confirmed by a number of earlier sources. I argue that such a case study can illuminate what is distinctive about the relationship between grammar and preference in al-Kisā'ī's reading and provide the basis for reflection on the exegetical dimension to his work.

2 Sources

Although numerous works are attributed to al-Kisā'ī, mainly centred around Qur'anic and grammatical themes, only two have been published: *Mā tulḥanu fīhi al-'awwām*, said to be the earliest text discussing dialect Arabic, as well as *Mutashābihat al-qur'ān* [15, p. 79]. Neither of these are particularly relevant to this study. A recent text entitled *Ma'ānī al-qur'ān li-'Alī b. Ḥamza al-Kisā'ī* is an attempt to reconstruct his views based on a number of later sources. This is not as useful a reference as it might appear, as it does not consistently use the earliest primary sources, often relying on information from later classical *tafsīrs*. The earliest and best available source for the views of al-Kisā'ī is the 3rd/9th century *Ma'ānī al-qur'ān* by al-Farrā' (d. 208/822), a Kufan grammarian of the scholarly generation after him [24, p. 57]. Al-Farrā' is reported both as al-Kisā'ī's student and as sharing a teacher with him and al-Sībawayhi in Yūnus b. Ḥabīb (d. 182/798) [2, p. 176; 31, p. 171]. Other useful early works are *Kitāb al-sab'a* of Ibn Mujāhid, *Ma'ānī al-qur'ān wa-i'rābuhu* of al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923-4), *I'rāb al-qur'ān* of al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/949-50) and *Ma'ānī al-qirā'āt* of al-Azharī (d. 370/980-1).

However, in a few places, matters not dealt with by these authors are found in later texts, such as *Al-Nashr fi al-qirā'āt al-'ashr* of Ibn al-Jazarī and the eleven volume *Al-Durr al-maṣūn fi al-kitāb al-maknūn* of al-Ḥalabī (d. 756/1355), which is an encyclopaedic reference work. A similar interest in the grammatical analysis of the *qirā'a* of al-Kisā'ī can be found in the doctoral thesis of Bakīt 'Uthmān Jabāra entitled *Manhaj al-Kisā'ī fī al-istishhād bi-al-qirā'āt al-qur'āniyya*. This is a beneficial work, particularly for the attention paid to the life and writings of al-Kisā'ī. The author's organisation of his readings, however, is based around the Arabic grammatical categories of *raf'*, *nasb* and *jarr*, which results in quite a general schema. Furthermore, the individual points of analysis are not geared towards the problem of *ikhtiyār*.

3 Methodology

The methodology that I have followed is to construct an initial typology of the reported variations of al-Kisā'ī's reading based on categorisation of the type of word, or linguistic situation, affected. The four major categories are as follows:

1. Connection (*waṣl*) and pause (*waqf*);
2. Particles;
3. Verbs;
4. Nouns.

Each of these has a number of sub-categories, as shown in Table 1 below. By analysing each verse, I seek to determine the reason for the observed change. This leads to a four-fold grouping:

- A. Precedent (variants based solely on transmitted *āthār*);
- B. Dialect (variants based on Arabian tribal usage);
- C. Grammar (variants based primarily on a different grammatical analysis by al-Kisā'ī);
- D. Ease (variants that alter the reading of certain words to be easier to pronounce, based on a certain pattern).

One of the difficulties of this typological scheme comes from the interplay of precedent and grammatical preference in al-Kisā'ī's reading selection. As a precedent may not always be explicitly mentioned, the basis by which this is distinguished from the other three groups may be questioned. This problem is heightened by the different tendencies of the early sources. Of the two formative authors on Qur'anic *ma'ānī* that I found most useful, al-Farrā' and al-Azharī, it is the earlier figure who seems more keen to provide precedents for al-Kisā'ī's readings, both alongside, and instead of, grammatical analysis. Al-Azharī has a greater concern with making grammatical sense of readings, while often omitting reference to the early figures associated with them. Although al-Farrā' is a closer figure to al-Kisā'ī, I have not followed the principle of the *argumentum e silentio* that, if al-Farrā' knew of a grammatical reason for a reading, he necessarily would have mentioned it. Rather, I have classified a reading as based on considerations of grammar if it requires an alternative grammatically relevant vocalisation of the skeletal text and has an appreciable impact on meaning, even if an earlier precedent is also mentioned in the sources. Forced to make decisions of this kind, and with direct justification by al-Kisā'ī unavailable, the typology presented below is necessarily tentative and will tend to assimilate borderline case to the category of grammatical preference. Nonetheless, the analysis shall suggest numerous points of interest in understanding the way that he engages with questions of Qur'anic language and meaning.

Note that the following two sections are fairly technical and to be fully appreciated require knowledge of Arabic grammatical terminology and the Qur'an. Non-specialists may want to skip to the Conclusion at the end of the article before coming back to the analysis of key passages.

4 Typology

Table 1 Typology of al-Kisā'ī's 55 *tafarrudāt* from the other nine canonical readers

Type	Reason			
	A) Precedent	B) Dialect	C) Grammar	D) Ease
1. Connection (<i>waṣl</i>) and Pause (<i>waqf</i>)				
(1) <i>iḍāfa</i>				16:78; 24:61; 39:6; 53:32
(2) <i>tā'</i> as <i>hā'</i>			27:60; 38:3; 53:19	
2. Particles				
(1) <i>wāw</i>			5:45	
(2) <i>lām</i>			14:46	
(3) <i>inna</i> as <i>anna</i>			3:19; 44:49	
(4) <i>anna</i> as <i>inna</i>			3:171	
(5) <i>na'am</i>		7:44; 7:114; 26:42; 37:18		
3. Verbs				
(1) Medial Vowel	55:56; 55:74	10:61; 34:3;	20:81	
(2) Change of Subject	67:29		17:7; 17:102; 70:4	
(3) Change of Subject and Object			5:112	
(4) Omission of <i>shadda</i>	66:3	87:3	78:35	
(5) Omission of <i>hamza</i>				17:62; 25:43; 26:75; 26:205; 35:40; 45:23; 46:4; 46:10; 53:19; 53:33; 96:9; 96:11; 96:13
4. Nouns				
(1) Declination			11:68	
(2) Internal Vowel	51:44	6:136; 6:138	21:58; 83:26	
(3) Active Participle			4:25; 4:25; 4:25; 5:5; 5:5; 24: 4; 24:23	
Totals	5	9	24	17

5 Analysis

5.1 Connection (*waṣl*) and Pause (*waqf*)

5.1.1 *iḍāfa*

In four places, al-Kisā'ī reads *ummahatikum* (your mothers) as *immahatikum* when it is in the state of connection (*waṣl*), meaning it is pronounced continuously with the

preceding word. In Q. 16:78, 39:6 and 53:32, this is in the phrase *'butūni immahatikum* (your mothers' wombs)', while in Q. 24:61, it is in *'buyūti immahatikum* (your mothers' houses)' [11, v. 2, p. 248]. The early sources are reticent about the reason for this particular variation, but it seems likely that it is for the purpose of a more euphonic reading.

5.1.2 *tā' as hā'*

Al-Kisā'ī reads a *tā'* (note: not a *tā'* *marbūta*) with the sound of *hā'* in three places when pausing upon it (*waqf*). These are as follows: *dhāt* in Q. 27:60, *'hadā'iqā dhāta bahjatīn* (gardens of delight); *lāta* in Q. 38:3, *'lāta hīna manāṣ* (once it was too late to escape); and *al-lāt* in Q. 53:19, *'al-lāta wa-al-'uzzā* (al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā). Ibn al-Jazarī opines that all three of these instances are correctly attributed to al-Kisā'ī, however he notes some disagreement within the literature. For instance, the *Talkhīṣ al-'ibārāt* of Ibn Ballīma (d. 514/1120-1) only has Q. 38:3, which it mentions as specifically transmitted by al-Dūrī [11, v. 2, p. 132; 10, p. 143].

Al-Ḥalabī states that the reason for reading Q. 27:60 in this way is that the *tā'* is treated as *ta'nīth* (feminine) [8, v. 8, p. 631]. This is problematic insofar as al-Kisā'ī does not read *dhāt* in this way in the numerous other times it appears in the Qur'an. In his commentary on Q. 53:19, al-Ḥalabī reveals the principle on which he believes this variant reading is based, 'Whoever believes a *tā'* is from the original letters of a word affirms it when stopping, like the *tā'* of *bayt*. Whoever believes it is an addition, stops upon it with a *hā'*' [8, v. 10, p. 92]. However, he acknowledges there is no agreement amongst linguists that the *tā'* in *al-lāt* is an addition. A hint to a possible solution comes from al-Ḥalabī's commentary on Q. 38:3, in which he explains the *tā'* in *lāta* replaces the *sīn* of *laysa* [8, v. 9, p. 351]. Perhaps then, the view of the *Talkhīṣ* is correct and al-Kisā'ī only stopped on Q. 38:3 due to this *tā'* being added to the initial letters of the word. If this is the correct explanation, it would show that a consistent position of al-Kisā'ī on the morphology of words lies behind his variance in reading [14, pp. 221, 238]. In this case, as for all of his readings, a question mark still remains over whether he is selecting from, or moving beyond, an initial corpus of defined precedents.

5.2 Particles

5.2.1 *wāw*

In Q. 5:45, it is most plausible to understand al-Kisā'ī as reading the second instance of the particle *wāw* as *isti'nāf* (initiatory), rather than as *'atf* (conjunctory). This and other options are given by al-Zajjāj [35, v. 2, pp. 178–179]. Al-Kisā'ī's reading can thus be rendered as follows,

wa-katabnā 'alayhim fihā anna al-naḥsa bi-al-naḥsi wa-al-'aynu bi-al-'ayni wa-al-anḥu bi-al-anḥi wa-al-udhunu bi-al-udhuni wa-al-sinnu bi-al-sinni wa-

al-jurūhu qiṣāṣ (We prescribed for them in it [the Torah] a life for a life. And there is an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth and injury in kind.)

This is said to be the reading of Anas b. Mālik (d. 91-93/709-11) from the Prophet Muhammad [7, v. 1, p. 310]. Al-Azharī comments that after the *isti'nāf*, which he calls *ibtidā'*, the remaining *wāws* are for *'atf*, retaining the case of *raf'* [1, v. 1, p. 330]. The use of *wāw* to begin a new grammatical sentence in this way—with the name *isti'nāf*—is a recognised feature of the Kufan grammatical tradition. It is found in the *tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), for instance in Q. 57:27, '*wa-rahbāniyyatan ibtada'ūhā* (monasticism was something they invented)'. He precedes this with '*thumma ista'nafa al-kalām* (then He restarts the discourse...)' [13, v. 4, p. 246]. Kees Versteegh calls this Muqātil's 'most directly linguistic motive' for using the term *isti'nāf* and points out its usage in the texts of other Kufan authors, including al-Farrā' [30, p. 59, 65].

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/980-1), in his *Fuṣūl fī al-uṣūl*, gives a legal flavour to the use of *wāw* as *isti'nāf* by ascribing it to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), the famous Baghdad-based jurist, a student of the Kufan Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and contemporary of al-Kisā'ī, who he names 'an authority in linguistics (*hujja fī al-lughā*)' [16, v. 1, pp. 83–85]. Very interestingly, al-Jaṣṣāṣ states that the rulings to be found in al-Shaybānī's *Al-Jāmi' al-kabīr* in the chapter of *al-Aymān* (Oaths) are based upon this linguistic principle [14, v. 1, p. 84]. David Vishanoff has a useful brief discussion of this phenomenon in the context of the development of the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* [32, pp. 27–28].

5.2.2 *lām*

In the other canonical readings, a part of Q. 14:46 reads, '*wa-in kāna makruhum li-tazūla minhu al-jibālu* (...even if their plots were such as to make the mountains move)'. Al-Kisā'ī reads the *lām* of *ta'līl* (reason) as *ta'kīd* (emphasis), which changes the phrase to *la-tazūlu* and the meaning to '...even if their plots extended to the very moving of mountains' [1, v. 2, p. 65]. Though there is evidence in the sources that al-Kisā'ī had a precedent for this reading in Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/652–3) and 'Alī [7, v. 2, p. 79], I place it in the category of grammatical choice based on the shift in use of the particle.

5.2.3 *inna as anna*

Al-Kisā'ī changes the more common reading of Q. 3:19, which is the independent sentence '*inna al-dīn 'inda allāhi al-islām* (Indeed, religion in the sight of God is devotion)', to read *anna* instead of *inna*. Grammatically this becomes a continuation of the previous verse through connection to the preceding *annahu* [7, v. 1, pp. 199–200]. As a result, Q. 3:18 and the first part of Q. 3:19 can be rendered as follows,

shahida allāhu annahu lā ilāha illā huwa wa-al-malā'ikatu wa-uwlū al-'ilmi qā'iman bi-al-qisṭi lā ilāha illā huwa al-'azīzu al-ḥakīmu anna al-dīn 'inda allāhi al-islām (God bears witness that there is none worthy of worship save

He, and the angels do likewise, as do those possessing knowledge and standing for justice: there is none worthy of worship save He, the Mighty the Just. [He bears witness] that religion in the sight of God is devotion.)

This seems to be based on al-Kisā'ī's grammatical *ikhtiyār*, though there is the report that Ibn 'Abbās read Q. 3:18 with *innahu* and Q. 3:19 with *anna* [7, v. 1, p. 200]. This would make everything between the two particles parenthetical, providing a further alternative to the reading of al-Kisā'ī.

A second instance of the same variation is found in Q. 44:49. The other canonical readers recite, '*dhuq innaka anta al-'azīzu al-karīm* (Taste [the punishment, indeed you are mighty and noble]', which is most plausibly understood as an ironic censure. Al-Kisā'ī reads, '*dhuq annaka...* (Taste [the punishment] you who were [called] mighty and noble)', heightening the impact of the torture by comparison to the person's lost worldly glory. Al-Farrā', rather than giving a linguistic explanation, reports this reading was uttered by al-Ḥasan (d. 49/669–70) on the *minbar* [7, v. 3, p. 43]. However, both al-Azhārī and al-Naḥḥās stress the obvious grammatical basis of this selection [1, v. 2, p. 372; 21, p. 826].

5.2.4 *anna as inna*

In one instance, al-Kisā'ī chooses *inna* where the other canonical reciters read *anna*. This is in Q. 3:171, which is usually read as, '*yastabshirūna bi-ni'matin min allāhi wa-faḍlin wa-anna allāha lā yuḍī'u ajra al-mu'minīn* (They have glad tidings of blessing from God, bounty and that God does not allow the reward of the believers to be lost)'. Al-Kisā'ī's reading, '*...wa-inna allāha lā yuḍī'u ajra al-mu'minīn* (Indeed God does not allow the reward of the believers to be lost)', acts as a separate sentence, becoming a general comment rather than one of the several specific glad tidings. Al-Farrā' remarks that the *inna* in this case is *isti'nāf* and interestingly adduces evidence for this reading from Ibn Mas'ūd, who omits the *anna* entirely, reading, '*wa-allāhu lā yuḍī'u ajra al-mu'minīn* (God does not allow the reward of the believers to be lost)' [7, v. 1, p. 247].

5.2.5 *na'am*

In Q. 7:44, 7:114, 26:42 and 37:18 al-Kisā'ī reads *na'im* (yes) instead of *na'am* [21, p. 342], which al-Azhārī points out is a particle (*ḥarf li-al-mā'nā*) and hence can take no vowel upon its final letter [1, v. 1, p. 406]. Al-Ḥalabī mentions this is the dialect of Kināna and quotes al-Kisā'ī's report of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) saying to a group of people who used *na'am* in answering him, '*Na'am* is the camel, rather say, "*Na'im!*"' [8, v. 5, p. 326]. 'Umar's reference is to the word *na'am* (pl. *an'ām*, also the name of the sixth sura of the Qur'an). 'Umar's association with this dialect is slightly puzzling, as one would think that he would follow that of Quraysh. The word is not quoted by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in his list of words from Kināna within the Qur'an [28, v. 2, p. 418–419].

5.3 Verbs

5.3.1 Medial Vowel

In five verses, al-Kisā'ī uniquely varies his reading of medial vowels within verbs. This is one of the two most wide-ranging of all the chosen sub-categories along with 'Omission of *shadda*', as the reasons for its division can be divided into precedent, dialect and grammar. In Q. 55:56 and 55:74, al-Kisā'ī is reported as having been known to read '*lam yaṭmuthhunna* (they are untouched)', rather than *yaṭmithhunna*. There is debate amongst specialists in Qur'anic readings about whether or not he would only read this in the case of Q. 55:56. Al-Farrā' attributes this reading to the Companions of Ibn Mas'ūd and says that in this case al-Kisā'ī would alternate between the two vocalisations, in order to act on both precedents [7, v. 3, p. 119]. Al-Dānī attributes the variations to differences between al-Kisā'ī's two prominent narrators, Abū Ḥārith al-Layth (d. 240/854) and Abū 'Amr Hafṣ al-Dūrī (d. 246/860) [5, pp. 162–163]. Ibn al-Jazarī discusses the various views at length and mentions that while some say al-Kisā'ī only read it for Q. 55:56, most report that he exercised his *takhyīr* (choice) such that if he read the first with *ḍamma*, he would read the second with *kasra* and vice versa [11, v. 2, pp. 381–382].

In Q. 10:61 and 34:3, al-Kisā'ī reads *ya'zib* (escapes), rather than *ya'zub*. This is explained by al-Farrā' as a matter of dialect and he prefers al-Kisā'ī's reading [7, v. 2, p. 351]. Al-Naḥḥās adds that it is the recitation of Yaḥyā b. Waṭṭhāb (d. 103/721) and al-A'mash (d. 148/765) [21, p. 686]. Both of these figures are associated with the reading tradition of Kufa.

The final place in which al-Kisā'ī differs with respect to the medial vowels of verbs is in Q. 20:81. This is commonly rendered as follows,

kulū min ṭayyibāt mā razaqnākum wa-lā taṭḥaw fīhi fa-yaḥilla 'alaykum ghaḍabī wa-man yaḥlil 'alayhi ghaḍabī fa-qad hawā (Eat from the good things that We have provided you, but do not transgress therein, as then you are due My wrath. Whoever is due My wrath has indeed fallen).

Al-Kisā'ī reads '*fa-yaḥilla...wa-man yaḥlul* (for then My wrath will descend upon you. Whoever My wrath descends upon has indeed fallen)', thereby providing a different shade of meaning without stipulating a divine 'obligation'. Al-Farrā' prefers the former use of *kasra* on semantic grounds, in this case disagreeing with al-Kisā'ī who is apparently closer to Ibn Mas'ūd and his more emphatic reading of *yaḥullanna* [7, v. 2, p. 188].

5.3.2 Change of Subject

In four places, al-Kisā'ī varies the subject of a Qur'anic verb. In Q. 17:7, he reads '*li-nasū'a wujūhakum* (We disgraced your faces)', instead of '*li-yasū'ū wujūhakum* (they disgraced your faces)'. Al-Azharī argues that while both are permissible readings, the latter is linguistically preferable as it allows the third-person plural subject to be retained for the following conjoined (*ma'ūf*) phrase, '*wa-li-yadkhulū al-masjid* (and they entered the mosque)' [1, v. 2, pp. 87–88].

Q. 17:102 is part of a conversation between the Prophet Mūsā and Firawn. The other canonical readings have the following statement from Mūsā, '*qāla la-qad 'alimta mā anzala hā'ulā' illā rabbu al-samāwāti wa-al-arḍi baṣā'ir*' (He said, "You know very well that only the Lord of the heavens and the earth could send these [signs] as proofs"). Al-Farrā' reports that 'Alī was incensed at this reading and instead used to recite, '*'alimtu* (I know)', saying, 'By God, what the enemy of God knows, Mūsā knows!' [7, v. 2, p. 132]. Al-Kisā'ī's preference is for 'Alī's reading, however crucially I would suggest it is based on the same grammatical-cum-exegetical approach that he adopted, rather than simply following his precedent.

In Q. 70:4, al-Kisā'ī reads '*ya'ruju al-malā'ikatu wa-al-rūhu ilayhi...*' (The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him...), using the masculine form of the verb, rather than the feminine *ta'ruju*. This is said to be the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd, though al-A'mash is reported as sceptical on this point [7, v. 3, p. 184]. Al-Azharī does not attempt to adduce an *athar* for al-Kisā'ī's reading, but rather supplies grammatical analysis: *ya'ruju* is read because the verb precedes the plural, while *ta'ruju* considers the feminine form to be applied to the noun *al-malā'ika* [1, v. 3, p. 89].

In Q. 67:29, al-Kisā'ī reads '*fa-sa-ya lamūna man huwa fī ḍalālin mubīn*' (So they will know who is in clear error)', rather than '*fa-sa-ta lamūna...*' (So you will know...)' This is another precedent on the authority of 'Alī [7, v. 3, p. 172], of which al-Azharī gives the obvious grammatical implications [1, v. 3, p. 81]. It is a borderline case in terms of the typology, but has been left within the category of precedent due to the record of it as 'Alī's reading and there being only a minor shift in meaning by the change of person.

5.3.3 Change of Subject and Object

In a single place, al-Kisā'ī changes both the subject of a verb and its object. This is in Q. 5:112, which concerns the interaction between the Prophet 'Īsā and his disciples. The other readings of the Qur'an quote the disciples as saying, '*hal yastaḥī' rabbuka an yunazzila 'alaynā mā'idatan min al-samā'*' (Is your Lord able to send down upon us a feast from heaven?') Al-Kisā'ī reads, '*hal tastaḥī' rabbaka...*' (Are you able [to ask] your Lord...)' Al-Farrā' approves of this reading and references 'Alī, 'Ā'isha (d. 58/678) and Mu'ādh b. Jabal (d. 18/639) as having recited it [7, v. 1, p. 325]. Again, despite the mention of prior precedent, it seems credible that al-Kisā'ī makes his selection on the basis of the alternative grammatical reading and its theological implication, which is to remove an ostensible challenge to God's capabilities.

5.3.4 Omission of *shadda*

In three places, al-Kisā'ī is the only one of the ten readers to omit a *shadda* (doubled consonant) within a verb. In Q. 87:3, al-Kisā'ī recites *qadara* (he measured) rather than *qaddara*, though it is understood as having the same meaning. This is attributed to 'Alī via his student Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 73-74/692-93) [7, v. 3, p. 256]. Al-Azharī argues that it is a difference in dialect, which is a plausible explanation [1, v. 3, p. 139].

In Q. 66:3, he reads ‘*arafa* instead of ‘*arrafa* (he made known). This is attributed to al-Sulamī without mentioning ‘Alī and the meaning is said to be more severe, the Prophet reprimanding his wives, rather than merely informing of the revelation that he received [7, v. 3, p. 166; 1, v. 3, p. 76]. The relevant part of the verse can be read as follows,

When the Prophet told something in confidence to one of his wives and she then mentioned it [to another wife], God made this known to him. He reprimanded (‘*arafa*) on account of part of it and did not speak about the rest.

Finally, in Q. 78:35, al-Kisā’ī reads ‘*lā yasma ‘ūna fihā laghwan wa-lā kidhāban* (In it they do not hear vain speech, nor lies)’, rather than *kidhdhāban*. This appears to have a purely grammatical justification. Al-Farrā’ explains that the *shadda* is omitted, because *kidhāban* is not conditioned by the verb *yasma ‘ūna*, while in the similar Q. 78:28, ‘*wa-kadhhabū bi-āyātīnā kidhdhāban* (They utterly belied out signs)’, the *shadda* remains due to the word being conditioned by *kadhhabū* [7, v. 3, p. 229].

5.3.5 Omission of hamza

In eleven places, al-Kisā’ī does not pronounce the isolated *hamza* (one not resting upon any ligature in the written *mushaf*) of all past tense verbs on the pattern *ra’-’-yā’* when there is an *alif* of *istifhām* (enquiry) at the beginning. These cases, essentially variants on the phrase, ‘Do you see...?’ are as follows: *a-rayta* in Q. 25:43, 96:9, 96:11 and 96:13; *a-fa-rayta* in Q. 45:23; *a-raytaka* in Q. 17:62; *a-raytum* in Q. 35:40, 46:4 and 46:10; and *a-fa-raytum* in Q. 26:75, 26:205, 53:19 and 53:33.

Ibn al-Jazarī mentions this selection of al-Kisā’ī in the context of different opinions about what is permissible in terms of easing the reading of these words, something that other readers sought via different means [11, v. 1, p. 398]. It should be noted that this variation does not disagree with the ‘Uthmānī codex, as within it the *hamza* was not at first written, according to the dialect preferences of the Ḥijāz [22, pp. 32–33].

5.4 Nouns

5.4.1 Declination

In Q. 11:68, al-Kisā’ī reads ‘*alā bu ‘dan li-thamūdīn* (away with Thamūd!)’, with the word *thamūdīn* fully declinable, rather than *thamūda*, which is only partially declinable. Al-Ḥalabī explains this is due to him understanding the word as the name of a particular land, rather than a tribe. He quotes an obscure verse of poetry as evidence, ‘*da ‘at ummu ‘amrin amra sharrin ‘alimtuḥu bi-arḍi thamūdīn kullihā fa-ajābahā* (the mother of ‘Amr requested an evil matter, which I knew of, in all the Land of Thamūd, and he answered her)’ [8, v. 6, p. 351]. Al-Ḥalabī does not give a source for the verse and the editor of *Al-Durr al-maṣūn* comments that he has not come across it.

5.4.2 Internal Vowel

In five places, al-Kisā'ī reads an internal vowel within a noun differently from the other canonical reciters. In Q. 21:58, al-Kisā'ī reads the usual *judhādhan* (broken) as *jidhādhan* (pieces), rendering 'fa-ja'alahum *jidhādhan* (so he broke them into pieces)'. Al-Farrā' attributes this to the Kufan Yaḥyā b. Waththāb [7, v. 2, p. 206]. Al-Azharī explains *judhādhan* to be upon the pattern *fu'āl*, used for anything smashed, or otherwise destroyed, such as *ḥuṭām* (debris). Al-Kisā'ī's reading of *jidhādhan* is simply the plural form of *jadhīdh* (a piece) [1, v. 2, pp. 167–168]. Despite the existence of a named precedent, it seems a grammatical choice lies behind his *ikhṭiyār*, a preference for the morphology of the plural.

The phrase in Q. 51:44, 'fa-akhadhathum al-ṣā'iqā (so the blast took them)' is read as *al-ṣa'qa* without the *alif*, which was not originally written within the orthography of the *muṣḥaf*. This is said to be the reading of 'Umar and there is no suggestion of any grammatical preference [7, v. 3, p. 88]. Finally, in Q. 83:26, al-Kisā'ī reads 'khātamuhu *misk* (its seal is of musk)', which is understood to be a noun, rather than the usual verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) *khītāmuhu* (its sealing...) Although this is another borderline case, I argue that his decision to read the key term as a substantive is rooted in grammatical analysis, despite the support of the earlier precedent of al-Sulamī on the authority of 'Alī [7, v. 3, p. 248; 1, v. 3, p. 131].

The remaining two instances of the internal vowel changes of nouns are upon the same word, and are explained by reference to the use of a different Arabian dialect (*luḡha*). In Q. 6:136 and 6:138, 'bi-za' *mihim* (so they claim!)' is read by al-Kisā'ī as 'bi-*zu* *mihim*' [7, v. 1, p. 356]. This is said to be the dialect of Banū Asad rather than that of the Ḥijāz and read by Yaḥyā b. Waththāb and al-A'māsh. Banū Tamīm read *bi-zi* *mihim*, though al-Naḥḥās expresses disapproval for this [21, p. 327].

5.4.3 Active Participle

One of the most interesting of al-Kisā'ī's selections based upon his grammatical understanding is his reading of the active participle *muḥṣināt* (chaste women) instead of the passive participle *muḥṣanāt* throughout the Qur'an, with the exception of Q. 4:24 [12, p. 230]. The close connection between this selection and exegetical meaning justifies a detailed analysis of the seven places in which it occurs.

Taking al-Kisā'ī's reading as a point of departure, *muḥṣināt* can be understood to have a very precise meaning that the English word 'chaste' only approximates. It refers to women who actively guard their wombs (*aḥṣanat*) from the possibility of offspring with unknown paternity due to their chastity [33, p. 390]. In Q. 21:91 and 66:12, Maryam is called 'the one who guarded her chastity (*allatī aḥṣanat farjahā*)'. This guarding can either be by virtue of virginity, marriage, or having gone through the *'idda* (three menstrual cycles) after a previous marriage (or illicit sexual relationship, then repentance).

The masculine equivalent, *muḥṣinīn*, always read in the active voice, is used in Q. 4:24 and 5:5 to describe the state that men should be in when giving their dower. Watt argues that this obscure term refers to those who ensure their

paternity by contracting marriages in which they are the only husband, and are thus contrasted with those who enter into a polyandrous marriage, sharing a single wife (*musāfihīn*) and those who take mistresses (*muttakhidhī akhdān*) [33, pp. 390–392]. I suggest there is evidence to support Watt's thesis in the report of the Companion Ibn 'Umar (d. 73/692) that the Prophet Muhammad prohibited Muslims from *mut'a* (temporary marriage) in the year of the Battle of Khaybar, in which he adds, '*wa-mā kunna musāfihīn* (and we never practised polyandry)' [26, v. 2, p. 404]. The meaning would therefore be that although the Companions practised temporary marriage, they did not share each other's wives within their marriages.

Returning to *muḥsināt*, the two times that the term is used in Q. 5:5 encompasses all of these elements, as well as showing that the concept is not exclusively applied to Muslim women within the Qur'an,

Wa-al-muḥsinātu min al-mu'mināti wa-al-muḥsinātu min alladhīna ūtū al-kitāba min qablikum idhā ātaytumūhunna ujūrahunna muḥsinīna ghayra musāfihīna wa-lā muttakhidhī akhdān ([Lawful for you are] chaste, believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bride-gifts and marry them as chaste men, not having entered with them into a marriage shared with other men, nor taken them as mistresses.)

The term is used too in Q. 24:4, the verse laying down the penalty for the slander of chaste women known as *qadhf*, 'As for those who accuse chaste women (*al-muḥsināt*) of fornication, and then fail to provide four witnesses, strike them eighty times...' Here the term applies to the full range of unmarried, married and divorced women. It is also used in describing the otherworldly punishment for such slanderers in Q. 24:23, 'Those who accuse chaste (*al-muḥsināt*) but unwary believing women are rejected by God, in this life and the next.'

To get to the heart of why al-Kisā'ī reads this term in the active voice it is important to look at his exception to this pattern in Q. 4:24, as well as the final instances of his variation in Q. 4:25. The textual context of these verses is the list of prohibited marriages within *Sūrat al-Nisā'*, beginning in Q. 4:22–23. Q. 4:24 reads as follows,

wa-al-muḥṣanātu min al-nisā'i illā mā malakat aymānukum kitāba allāhi 'alaykum wa-uḥilla la-kum mā warā'a dhālikum an tabtaghū bi-amwālikum muḥsinīna ghayra musāfihīna fa-mā istamta'tum bihi minhunna fa ātūhunna ujūrahunna farīḍatan wa-lā junāha 'alaykum fī mā tarāḍaytum bihi min ba'di al-farīḍatin inna allāha kāna 'alīman ḥakīman ([Prohibited are] those made chaste from amongst the women, except your bondswomen: an ordinance of God upon you. What is beyond this is permissible for you, provided you seek marriage with your wealth as chaste men, not having entered with them into a marriage shared with other men. Whatever you seek to provide them with [or: whatever enjoyment you seek from them], pay them their dower as an obligation. There is no harm for you to come to a mutual agreement after meeting this obligation. Indeed, God is Knowing, Wise.)

There is considerable debate over the interpretation of this verse in classical and modern scholarship, particularly over how *al-muḥṣanāt* (those made chaste) relates to Q. 4:22–23 and whether the phrase beginning *fa-mā istamta 'tum bihi minhunna* refers to regular marriage, or *mut'a* [34, pp. 3–8, 16–17]. Joseph Wirtzum identifies al-Kisā'ī as one of a small number of scholars who solve the apparent prohibition of 'those made chaste', a category usually suitable for marriage, by distinguishing *al-muḥṣanāt* from *al-muḥṣināt* elsewhere in the Qur'an. They are 'those made chaste' through their entry into wedlock, rather than those who observe chastity in general [34, p. 6]. The other scholars mentioned are Meccans: the exegete Mujāhid (d. 100-4/718-22) and the canonical reciter Ibn Kathīr, who is disputed on this point and hence has not disqualified inclusion of this term according to my methodology.

It is possible that al-Kisā'ī is following the interpretation of early exegetes who mention that the term bondswomen (*mā malakat aymānukum*) here refers to war captives who may have been previously married, but for all intents and purposes were irrevocably separated from their former spouses [17, v. 3, p. 108]. In any case, al-Kisā'ī's choice of reading indicates that he understands the verb *aḥṣana* to mean to preserve one's chastity, while the passive *uḥṣina* means to be made chaste through marriage.

This usage can be tested with reference to Q. 4:25, which gives instruction to male believers about the conditions for marrying believing bondswomen, as mentioned in Q. 4:3 and 4:24. The verse, translated according to the reading of al-Kisā'ī, is as follows,

If any of you does not have the means to marry believing, chaste (*al-muḥṣināt*), [free] women, then marry one of your believing bondswomen. God knows best about your faith. You are from one another, so marry them with their family's consent and give them their dower according to what is recognised once they are chaste women, not those who marry more than one husband, nor those who take lovers. When they become chaste (*fa-idhā aḥṣanna*), if they then fornicate, their punishment (*'adhāb*) will be half that of chaste (*al-muḥṣināt*), [free] women. This is for those of you who fear that you will sin; it is better for you to practise self-restraint. God is most forgiving and merciful.

It can be observed that, despite the marriage being to a bondswoman, the normal customs of permission from the family and dower are to be maintained. According to the interpretation made of the key terms in this verse, the women must have become *muḥṣināt*. It is in the context of this process of having ensured the protection of their wombs that, if they fornicate, the punishment is fifty lashes rather than the one hundred deserved by free *muḥṣināt*. The underlying process in regard to such bondswomen, who were often captives of war, seems to be an encouragement to bring them into the expected norms of sexual morality in a gentle way. According to the apparent sense of al-Kisā'ī's reading, they would only be liable for mandatory punishment once they adopted the standard of *iḥṣān* and even then would only be given half the punishment of their free counterparts.

This concern for chastity is also found in Q. 24:33, which mentions, 'Do not force your bondswomen into prostitution, when they themselves wish to make

themselves chaste (*taḥaṣṣun*), in your quest for the short-term gains of this world, although, if they are forced, God will be forgiving and merciful [to them].’

Al-Ṭabarī recognises *aḥṣanna* and *uḥṣinna* as the two possible readings of the key verb in Q. 4:25 and the implication for the vocalisation of the nouns as *muḥṣināt*, or *muḥṣanāt* respectively. He states that these two readings are both correct and were widespread in the major centres of early Muslim activity [29, v. 6, p. 605]. In terms of meaning, he associates *aḥṣanna* with entering into Islam and *uḥṣinna* with entering into marriage as the respective means of chastity, interpretations that are based on numerous early reports. However, he spots the potential issue that these represent mutually exclusive interpretive positions and so argues vigorously that whichever state they refer to the bondswomen entering, the practical rule is the same. They are to be punished for fornication in each case, a ruling that he backs up with reference to the prophetic Sunna [29, v. 6, pp. 606–607]. He comments that even if the two meanings differ, one does not oppose the other [29, v. 6, p. 606].

These two interpretations of the term are dropped by al-Ṭabarī when dealing with the word *muḥṣanāt/muḥṣināt* in Q. 5:5, which refers to the permission to marry chaste believers, as well as chaste Scripturaries (Ahl al-Kitāb). It is clear that neither of the two traditional interpretations used for Q. 4:25 can be applied here: the women described are neither married, nor exclusively Muslim. Here al-Ṭabarī refers to the term as either meaning ‘freewomen’, or as chastity in general, not invoking the difference in *qirā’a* as significant [29, v. 8, pp. 139–145]. Notwithstanding this, the active-voice *muḥṣināt* is obviously the more appropriate term, yet of the canonical reciters it is only al-Kisā’ī who, by virtue of his grammatically based *ikhtiyār*, is consistent in applying it.

This consistency can be gauged by looking at the other readers who recite *aḥṣanna* in Q. 4:25. It seems to be mainly an Iraqī phenomenon, with Ḥamza, al-Kisā’ī, ‘Āṣim (d. 127/745) and the originally Basran al-A’mash representing the Kufan tradition; al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) the Basran; and Khalaf (d. 229/844) the Baghdadī [19, v. 2, p. 125]. Of these, it is only al-Kisā’ī who consistently reads *muḥṣināt*, except in Q. 4:24, as mentioned above.

Al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) reaches the same conclusion as al-Ṭabarī in affirming that the non-*muḥṣinal/muḥṣana* bondswoman should still be punished with fifty lashes if guilty of fornication. His method for doing this differs, however, and anticipates later authors in Ḥanafī legal theory. He introduces the hermeneutic principle that the mere fact that a rule is mentioned with a certain quality (in this case entering into marriage/Islam) does not prevent the rule occurring without it [17, v. 3, p. 127]. Thus he, in effect, rejects what is known in later parlance as *mafhūm mukhālafa* (divergent meaning), or, as it is known in Western jurisprudence, the *argumentum a contrario* [36, pp. 100–109].

It is obvious why these two giants of the early exegetical tradition are keen to argue that the two meanings, closely tied to the two possible readings, do not have practical implications in law. They want to limit, or entirely remove, different interpretations of the *sharī’a* rooted in the recited language of revelation itself, due to the theological implications such cases provide. This thread will be picked up in the conclusion below.

6 Conclusion

Within the analysed sample, nearly half the cases, 24 from 55, have been assessed as grounded in al-Kisā'ī's grammatical preference. If the 13 instances of *r-ʿy* verbs are counted as a single case, this would be 24 from 43, over half. The category of ease comes next with 17 instances, again disproportionately inflated by al-Kisā'ī's approach to *r-ʿy* verbs. Interestingly, dialect has been assessed as the reason for al-Kisā'ī's variance more often than purely precedent, 9 cases against 5. Grammar is also the most wide-ranging explanation, appearing in 12 of the 15 sub-categories within the typology. It is followed at quite some distance by precedent and dialect at 4 and ease at only 2.

It will be recalled that in the above section on methodology I considered a reading to be based on considerations of grammar 'if it requires an alternative grammatical vocalisation of the skeletal text and has an appreciable impact on meaning, even if an earlier precedent is also mentioned in the sources'. As far as conclusions drawn according to this rubric may be considered valid, the initial hypothesis that al-Kisā'ī's preferences as a reader are significantly informed by his role as a grammarian has been substantiated. However, I should again make clear that this is only in regard to the reconstruction of the *ikhtiyār* for his *tafarrudāt* from the other nine canonical reciters, not in determining whether or not they are chosen from a body of prior precedent. Despite the fact that I have found a reader precedent in only 8 of the 24 cases I have classified as based on grammatical preference, I am not warranted to conclude that the other readings are unsupported by earlier tradition. This is because it remains possible that there is an incomplete record of prior readings upon which al-Kisā'ī superimposed his grammatical analysis, thereby choosing between latent meanings within diversely transmitted materials. The alternative would be that, contrary to the received traditional discourse, al-Kisā'ī felt free to make his own vocalisation upon the skeletal text of the 'Uthmānī codex according to the canons of grammar of his day.

Both of these possibilities reflect deeper questions about the nature of the Qur'anic reading tradition. The former view, that *ikhtiyār* always took place on the basis of existing precedent, makes necessary a diverse corpus of readings going back to the earliest times of the Muslim community and may lead to affirming a position similar to the traditional notion that the Prophet taught the Qur'an in *sab'at aḥruf* (seven, or manifold, lectures) [9, p. 68; 6, pp. 22–26]. Under this model the 'Uthmānī codex acts as a filter for acceptable oral readings. The latter view, rather than seeing the phenomenon of variation as the fruit of an initially plural oral tradition, would conclude that the skeletal 'Uthmānī codex, once established, allowed a controlled variation of readings, making the written tradition the incubator of the diverse readings found in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries. A question that such a counter-narrative would have to address is why there is evidence of a range of non-canonical readings parallel to the 'Uthmānī codex, such as the Kufan tradition based on the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd [31, p. 82]; also, see my forthcoming article on this tradition.

Of the previous readers who are mentioned in connection to the selected sample of al-Kisā'ī, the most frequent names are that of 'Alī and Ibn Mas'ūd (sometimes too

their students). This is entirely to be expected of a reader chosen by Ibn Mujāhid as one of three to represent the reading of Kufa. Both figures spent a number of years in the garrison town, Ibn Mas'ūd from approximately 21/642, when sent by the Caliph 'Umar as a teacher, until just before his death in 32/652-3, and 'Alī, who made it the capital of his contested caliphate between 36/656 and 40/660.

Turning to the content of al-Kisā'ī's grammatically based *ikhtiyār*, it is clear from the typical patterns of his alternative readings that he is working with a fairly developed grammatical theory. We also have evidence for relevant grammatical analysis and an emerging technical vocabulary from his student al-Farrā'. For instance, al-Farrā' frequently refers to the basic vocabulary of *i'rāb* and uses *ista'nafa* to refer to reading *inna* instead of *anna* in Q. 3:171 [7, v. 1, p. 247]. In reference to Q. 78:28, he also writes '*kadhhabū yuqayyidu al-kidhdhāba bi-al-maṣdar* (*kadhhabū* conditions *kidhdhāba*, so it becomes a verbal noun)' [7, v. 3, p. 229] and distinguishes between *ism* (noun) and *maṣdar* (verbal noun) in the reading of Q. 83:26 [7, v. 3, p. 248]. Even if it is inconclusive whether or not al-Kisā'ī possessed all the technical terminology to articulate the reasons for his selections, the work of following generations of scholars strongly suggest his readings accord with recognised Arabic grammatical views.

A significant pattern that emerges from the analysis undertaken in this article is al-Kisā'ī's consistency within the sample of readings. For instance, he repeats his alternative pronunciation of words based on dialect variation, such as, *na'im* and *zu'mihim*, as well as those based on considerations of ease, such as *immahatikum* and the omission of the *hamza* in *r-'y* verbs. In a couple of places, al-Kisā'ī's consistency is more in question. The reading of *tā'* as *hā'* in three places seems to be problematic, though a solution was proposed above based on the report that he only did this for Q. 38:3. Also, the common view that he alternated his reading of *yaṭmuthhunna* and *yaṭmithhunna* in Q. 55:56 and 55:74 can be seen as going against this general trend, though the sources are not certain that he only read the variation in the former verse. The most striking example of al-Kisā'ī's consistency, however, is in his reading of *muḥṣanāt* in Q. 4:24, *aḥṣanna* in Q. 4:25 and *muḥṣināt* in seven other places. For reasons explained above, not only does he seem to grasp a linguistic coherence to this particular root missed by the other canonical readers, but his usage should also be appreciated on the level of scriptural meaning.

This case, in which al-Kisā'ī's choice of a reading on grammatical criteria goes beyond mere consistency and minor exegetical meaning to imply a different interpretation of the *sharī'a*, is perhaps the most fascinating result of this study of his *tafarrudāt*. Specifically, his reading of the cluster of verses mentioning *mūḥṣanāt* and *muḥṣināt* potentially implies that the non-*muḥṣina* bondswoman is not liable for mandatory punishment. Furthermore, al-Kisā'ī's *ikhtiyār* of these words points to a solution to the meaning of a number of difficult terms in the Qur'an that Watt thought were 'lost owing to centuries of reinterpretation to make them fit later Muslim practice' [33, p. 389]. The above analysis is indebted to some of Watt's crucial insights on these 'technical terms' concerning chastity, but suggests that scholars in the formative period with a particularly keen eye for the nuances of language were capable of fathoming their meaning. In fact, the analysis of influential exegesis from the early 4th/10th century provides a hint that a consistent

reading of the terms may have been sacrificed as part of a general tendency to limit the extent to which the interpretation of the *sharī'a* is affected by the divergences within the mainstream reading tradition.

Centuries later, the summator of the classical Sunnī tradition, al-Suyūṭī, devoted a small section to the concept of *bi-ikhtilāf al-qirā'āt yuḏharu al-ikhtilāf fi al-aḥkāim* (differences in rulings are made clear by the differences of readings) in his *Al-Itqān fi 'ulūm al-qur'ān*. He gives only a couple of brief examples, but asserts that in such cases of practical difference '*taṣīru al-qirā'ātān bi-manzilat āyatayn* (the two readings become equivalent to two verses)' [28, v. 1, p. 245]. He does not take this thought further to the potentially problematic conclusion that, when the meanings of two verses apparently conflict, the usual solution is to claim abrogation (*naskh*).

In sum, while the condition of adherence to the skeletal text of the 'Uthmānī codex greatly reduces the scope for divergent interpretations of the *sharī'a* to be based upon disparate canonical readings, such cases remain. It is anticipated that further close study of the transmission and interpretation of Qur'anic readings would, therefore, assist the effort to understand the development of the Islamic legal and exegetical traditions. For al-Kisā'ī, it seems that his variants in this vein are not mere by-products of his adherence to a particular lineage of readers, but reflect an active exegetical dimension to his preferences as well as a considerable role for grammatical analysis. Moreover, if one grants the notion of an initial polyphony of revelation, then in his *ikhtiyār* he can be compared to a musician, picking out a melody from its remembered notes, even at the risk of discordancy with his fellow players.

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