

An Early Islamic Papyrus with *Sūrat al-Falaq*

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Abstract

In this paper a papyrus from the collection of the Austrian National Library, P.Vind.inv.A.P.266V, is published. It carries three Arabic texts; the current paper tackles the longest, Text A, which gives the text of Q. 113. However, it differs from the text of Q. 113 in the Cairo edition. The paper seeks to explain this diversion by postulating three possibilities. Firstly, it examines whether the different wording reflects a so far unknown Qur'anic reading. Then it considers the possibility that the text of Q. 113 was written here recklessly by someone who was practicing writing, or by a writer with limited writing skills. The third possibility is that the wording of this sura and the sequence of its verses were altered deliberately to give the text a new function as an amulet used in black magic. The study of the orthography and palaeography indicates that Text A was written around the end of the first or the beginning of the second century AH.

Keywords: Arabic papyri, Q. 113, magic, amulet, *al-mu'awwidhatān*.

Introduction

The papyrus published here belongs to the rich papyri collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna.* In the 19th and early 20th century, collectors and scholars purchased papyri and parchment in massive numbers in Egypt – especially from the Fayyum area – and sent them to major libraries in Europe, such as Berlin, Heidelberg and Vienna. The Arabic papyri among these mainly include economic and private texts, along with other less represented genres, such as religious documents.

The study of Qur'anic texts on papyri and parchment received limited attention in comparison with texts from other genres; since their texts are usually identical with the established editions of the Qur'an. This does not usually leave much material for investigation other than the orthography and palaeography that can shed light on the development of the Arabic script especially as applied to the writing of Qur'anic texts. However, the Qur'anic text under investigation here, P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v, offers more than that. It gives insights into some socio-religious aspects of usage of Qur'anic texts in daily life during the early Islamic period. The current paper provides a physical description of the text and discusses its contents and script.

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Physical description

- Material: Papyrus.
- Height: 15.0 cm, width: 12.5 cm.
- Text written at right angles to fibers.
- Patina: (see color wedge).
- Ink: Black.
- The top, right and left papyrus edges are intact. The bottom edge is torn away; this probably happened prior to the writing of the texts on recto and verso.
- Two writers.
- Language: Arabic.
- Kind: Qur'anic text, an unreadable text and a letter's greeting formula.
- Not published.

- The papyrus was folded, at least horizontally. On verso (frontside) three texts (labeled here 'A', 'B' and 'C') were written; on recto (backside) a letter. This letter was written earlier than the texts on verso, as can be deduced from their layout on the papyrus, which indicates a secondary, nonsystematic usage of the space. We obviously do not know in which context the texts on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v were written, but one should keep in mind that in a village, writing material was not always at hand and later texts were written on the backside of older documents. The same would apply to poorer clients in general (Bsees 2019: 122). The first and longest text, Text A, (**Figs. 1 and 2**) was written from the top of the papyrus. It represents the text of sura 113 of the Qur'an, *sūrat al-falaq* (see the discussion below). The second, Text B, (**Figs. 1 and 2**) began in the middle of line Four of the first text and consisted of a few words, with both texts written almost diagonally on the papyrus. The third text, Text C, (**Fig. 1**) was written on the other end of the papyrus, in an up-side-down direction to the previous two. It was written by a different hand, and probably later than the other two texts. Neither diacritic marks were used, nor were short vowels indicated in the texts. Because of its content, length and significance, in comparison with the other two texts, this paper will tackle Text A only on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v.

Text A



Figure 1: P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v.

The drawing

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 فلاعودت رب العلو من سرى الكلووم
 سرى المعار ١٢
 اد اوفت بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 انى بى العمر طالسار

Figure 2: Texts A and B on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v.

The layout

The verses of the sura are written directly after each other, without dividers; i.e. separating numbers, dots or even mere spaces. This alone is not necessarily an indication of an early date for the text but rather confirms its private character, which is further confirmed, as we saw, by its provisional layout. There are no drawings or any special signs on the papyrus.

The *basmala* was written at the beginning of the sura in a separate line. The *basmala* at the beginning of the suras is found as early as Ḥafṣa's (d. 41/661) copy of the Qur'an, according to Nöldeke (Graham 2001: 210). In letters, the *basmala* is attested as early as 55/675 (Potthast 2019: 44-5). A similar practice to Text A of P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v is attested in Q. 112, Q. 113 and Q. 114 on P.Utah.Ar.342 (Malczycki 2015: 238-9). By writing the *basmala* at the beginning of the sura in a separate line, the writers of the Qur'anic text might have been following the layout of the *kitāb* official documents (Kaplony 2018: 318). Kaplony (2018: 320) also assumes that the compilers of the Qur'an wrote the *basmala* at the beginning of each and every sura (with the exception of Q 9) to emphasize the autonomous character of the individual suras within the Qur'anic corpus.

Text A

Text A of P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v represents the text of Q. 113 (*sūrat al-falaq*), with deviations from the Cairo text of the Qur'an (Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim) issued by al-Azhar al-Sharif. (<https://www.islam101.com/quran/QTP/index.htm>) (Henceforth 'the Cairo text') is given, for comparison, below:

- 1- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- 2- قل أعوذ برب الفلق
- 3- من شر ما خلق
- 4- ومن شر غاسق إذا وقب
- 5- ومن شر النفتث في العقد
- 6- ومن شر حاسد إذا حسد

Translation of the Cairo text:

1. In the name of Allāh, the Gracious, the Merciful
2. Say: "I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak
3. From the evil of that which He created;
4. From the evil of the darkness when it is intense,
5. And from the evil of malignant witchcraft,
6. And from the evil of the envier when he envieth".

Text A of A.P.Vind.inv.266v reads:

- 1- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- 2- قل اعوذ برب الفلق من شر ما لخلق ومن
- 3- شر النعاب في [الع]قد ومن شر عاسق
- 4- اذا وقب.

The translation:

1. In the name of Allāh, the Gracious, the Merciful
2. Say: "I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak from the evil of that which He created; and from
3. the evil of malignant witchcraft and from the evil of darkness
4. when it is intense".

A comparison between both texts shows that the text of Q. 113 on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v deviates from the Cairo text in the following aspects:

1- A *lām* precedes *khalaq*, the last word of the second verse. I consider it redundant, i.e. a scribal error, since one cannot assign a plausible meaning to the combination *lām* + *khalaq*.

2- The word *naffāthāt* (pl. fem.) of the Cairo text appears here as *al-naffāth* (sg. m.). This also might be a scribal mistake, but it may be an intentional alteration of this verse, in order to direct its effect against a specific single male person.

3- The sequence of verses Three and Four is reversed.

4- The last verse, "and from the evil of the envier when he envieth" is not given.

The significance of these deviations from the Cairo text of Q. 113 will be elaborated upon later in this paper.

The function of Q. 113

Q. 113 relates above all to the evil spells used against one's physical state, against the healthy body, protecting it against that which could render one's psyche, soul, and serenity turbid. It is believed to save one from the psychic disturbances inserted in human mortals by Satan, whether through demons or through other evil humans (Khān 2001: 248). Together with Q. 114 (*sūrat al-nās*), Q. 113 makes the so-called *al-mu'awwidhatān*, "The Two [suras] of Taking Refuge". Several traditions of Prophet Muhammad mention that he recited both these suras and instructed others to recite them as a protection against evil, evil that he himself, according to one tradition, suffered from when he was bewitched by a Jew (and his daughters/sisters) (Cook 2000).

One of these traditions relates: 'Recite *qul huwa Allāh aḥad* [Q. 112] and *al-mu'awwidhatān* in the evening and in the morning trice; they will protect you against everything' (al-Būnī [1998]: 227, 240). They are thought to not be dispensable for any one, and they are especially effective against magic, the evil eye (Hamés 2007: 113; Bsees 2019: 133) and all other evils. According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), 'one needs to seek refuge through both these suras, more than one needs to breathe, to eat, to drink and to put on clothes' (1989: 11). They were used, along with Q. 1 (*al-fātiḥa*), for many centuries, as talismans, being written on pieces of paper and carried on one's person or enclosed in a specially shaped case for protection (Khān 2001: 248). This practice is well-attested in the papyri; where *al-mu'awwidhatān* – among other suras - are used as amulets. A good example for that is P.Bad.V143, an amulet, on which Q. 113 and Q. 114 along with Q. 1 and Q. 112 are written.

The amulet-character of Q. 113 is emphasised through its vocabulary. The text uses one non-core lexeme, *al-falaq*, and two *hapax legomena*, *ghāsiq* and *waqab*. The hearers/readers of the text were probably unfamiliar with these lexemes, or did not know their meanings at all; even the exegesis of the Qur'an do not agree upon their meanings

(Fatani 2010: 69-76; Rippin 1983: 315-9). Further contribution to a magical interpretation of the text comes from its phonology. According to Fatani (2011: 20), the phonological scale of Q. 113 is characterised by the “highly cacophonous and staccato rhythms of al-falaq, which appear to be produced by a profusion of fricatives (/f/, /kh/, /ʿ/, /gh/) and plosives (/q/, /b/, /d/) combined with a scarcity of nasals and glides”.

A significant confirmation of this amuletic character of Q. 113 (and Q. 114) is found in Ibn Masʿūd's statement that *al-muʿawwidhatān* are merely invocations the Prophet recited to take refuge from evil, and are not part of the Qurʾan. He, therefore, excluded them from his copy of the Qurʾan (Qurtubī 2006: 22/567)

Q. 113 is still used as an amulet in modern times, where *al-muʿawwidhatān*, especially Q. 113, is often used in daily life, as an amulet against the evil eye, by being written on cars or hung up in shops (O'Conner 2001: 180), recited when admiring a child (Lane 2005: 259) and by mothers consoling a crying baby (Abu Zayd 2001: 92). The amulets from Jarash/Jordan mainly belonging to the first half of the 20th century provide good examples of this (Mershen 1982: 3). In one, Q. 113 is used as an amulet against nightmares, in another against illness and in a third to ward off/keep away *umm al-ṣubyān*, a feminine demon that scares children at night or even kills them at birth (Mershen 1982: 182). Furthermore, traditional Bedouin healing practitioners of al-Naqab in Palestine recite and write *al-muʿawwidhatān* as part of their healing practices (Abu Rabia 1989: 4). Similar practices are attested in Tunisia (Rahal 2007: 116). It goes without saying that these magical practices have deep roots in the Orient, as can be seen from Nabataean trade with frankincense and myrrh among other goods for medical and magical purposes (Johnson 2020: 223-234).

Variant readings, mistakes or amuletic formulation?

This established, we come now back to the above-noted deviations in Text A of A.P.Vind.inv.266v from the Cairo text. These are certainly unexpected; overall, one expects Qurʾanic texts to be written with extreme caution in order to avoid mistakes as much as possible. This is confirmed, for example, by most documents we have of the small corpus of amulet texts on papyri with Qurʾanic citations, which show very few mistakes (Bsees 2019: 129).

How should one then explain deviations in Qurʾanic papyri from the Cairo text? According to Bsees (2019: 122), words in papyri that do not agree with the Qurʾanic text as we know it from the Seven Readings, must be considered either as writing mistakes due to insufficient or incorrect knowledge of the text or poor writing skills, or they represent variants of the Qurʾanic text. I would like to suggest a third explanation to such cases, by assuming that the text in question is an amulet, where the text was deliberately altered to fulfill a specific magical task. In the following, I will investigate all three possibilities.

Variant readings

Muslim scholars agree in the canonical readings on the reading of Q. 113, and give no *qirāʾāt* for it as far as the Uthmānic *rasm* is concerned (Ibn Khālawayhi 1979: 378; Ibn Wathīq 1988: 150). On the other hand, they mention the following (internal) variants for Q. 113 (for detailed information and references about the *qirāʾāt* of Q. 113 see al-Sharfi 2016: IV: 485-6):

- A variant reading to *khalaq* (verse Two) in the active voice, is a reading in the passive voice *khuliq* (Nasser 2012: 179).

- The following variants of *naffāthāt* (verse Three) are attested:
 - *nafithāt*
 - *nāfithāt*
 - *nufāthāt*
 - *nuffāthāt* (Nasser 2012: 179).

They all agree with *naffāthāt* of the Cairo text in their consonantal skeleton, and differ with it only in their vocalizations and in the gemination of the /f/. Yet, since Text A of A.P.Vind.inv.266v does not give the short vowels and the sign for gemination, *shadda*, we cannot verify if any of them (and the above-mentioned variant in verse Two) occur in our text. However, one should regard these variants as irrelevant to the current discussion, because none of them corresponds to *naffāth* of Text A of A.P.Vind.inv.266v.

- Since verse Five was dropped out in Text A of A.P.Vind.inv.266v, the variant vocalizations of *ḥāsīd* in this verse (Nasser 2012: 161-2) are irrelevant to our discussion.

The above discussion refers of course to the Uthmānic tradition. One could assume that other Qur'anic traditions, such as the one that came down to us in the lower text of the Ṣan'ā palimpsest, might have included variants to Q. 113. This hypothesis cannot be verified, however, since Q. 113 is not preserved in the Ṣan'ā palimpsest (Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012).

Based on the above, it is rather expected that Text A of A.P.Vind.inv.266v is identical with the text of Q. 113 given in the Cairo text. This is actually the case in most attestations of Q. 113 on papyri, making it very unlikely that the deviations in our text from the Cairo text are independent Qur'anic readings that we are uninformed of.

Writing mistakes

This short sura is one of the first Qur'anic texts a Muslim usually learns, in order to recite in his prayers and to use against the evil eye and other mischief (Abu Zayd 2001: 87). Muslims, young and old, learned and illiterate, Arabs and non-Arabs all together presumably know Q. 113 by heart. This reduces very much the possibility of making mistakes in writing this particular sura.

However, as unexpected as mistakes in Qur'anic texts might seem, a look at Qur'anic papyri show that this is not as uncommon as one might assume. On P.Bad.V146, verses from Q. 36 (*sūrat yāsīn*) are written with several mistakes. In P.DietrichTopkapi4, we have a case quite similar to Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v: Q. 1, *al-fātiḥa*, probably the most recited Qur'anic text, is written with several mistakes too. Further examples of mistakes in Qur'anic texts are attested in P.Utah.Ar.342. This papyrus carries Q. 112, Q. 113, Q. 114 and the first 13 verses of Q. 36 (Malczycki: 2015). In verse Two of Q. 113, *mā* before *khalaq* is missing (Malczycki 2015: 238), from Q. 114 verses Two and Three are missing, and *al-nās*, the last word in verse Five, is missing (Malczycki 2015: 239). In other papyri, the texts of Q. 19 (*sūrat maryam*) (Loebenstein 1980: no. 2) and Q. 51 (*sūrat al-dhāriyāt*) (Levi Della Vida 1947: 10 (no. 12)) were written with mistakes.

Texts with mistakes are taken in many cases to be writing practices of schoolchildren, or the result of ignorance and recklessness. Both Potthast (2019: 77) and Bsees (2019: 119) agree that in the first Islamic centuries, intensive knowledge of the Qur'an – or even of reading and writing – in the rural hinterlands of Egypt was relatively rare. Sometimes, the writers knew the Qur'anic text by heart, but had difficulties writing it down due to insufficient training in writing (Bsees 2019: 127, 128). In one case, the person making

mistakes in writing Qur'an texts was a part-time amulet writer not constantly surrounded by written copies of the Qur'an (Bsees 2019: 130).

Modern parallels might help shed more light on this. Mershen mentions that one of the prominent practitioners in her study, Umm Aḥmad, was illiterate/analphabetic until she took over the profession of writing amulets after the death of her husband (1982: 16). This might explain why in the amulets with Qur'anic texts that Mershen collected or had made for her in Jarash, mistakes are not uncommon; among them are two examples from Q. 113 itself: In Amulet 18, the word *sharr* in the third verse is missing (1982: 150), in Amulet 19, *naḥḥāthāt* in verse Four is misspelled: *naḥḥāt* (1982: 16).

On the other hand, one reason why a Qur'anic text such as Q. 113 could contain mistakes is recklessness of the writer. He might have assumed that the text will not be read, but just carried by its owner as an amulet (Bsees 2019: 115). The traces of folding on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v might reflect such a function. In a comparable case, Levi Della Vida, the editor of the text, written on a papyrus kept at the University Museum in Philadelphia, believed that the text was intended as a charm, and described its script as being 'ugly and careless,' noting that 'no diacritic signs or other marks are used' (Levi Della Vida 1981: no. 145, p. 168).

An amuletic formulation

Incompetence or recklessness in writing may explain the spelling mistakes in Text A on P. Vind.inv.A.P.266v, i.e. *lkhalāq* for *khalaq* in verse Two, and the dropping of the last verse of the sura. However, the script of this text reflects, on the other hand, a degree of proficiency, as the investigation of the orthography and palaeography confirms (s. below) that would at least exclude incompetence in writing as a reason for the mistakes. Furthermore, incompetence or recklessness can hardly explain the reversed positions of verses Three and Four. The argument put forward by Potthast (2019: 65-6) for writing verse 121 before verse 120 in Q. 9 (*sūrat al-tawbah*) as a result of uncertain remembering, might be true for Q. 9, which has 129 verses, but can hardly be made valid for our short sura.

One way to explain this unusual situation is to bear in mind that *al-mu'awwidhatān* can assume a role in magic, as demonstrated in ancient and modern daily practices, and is intensively discussed in the literature. For a recent and detailed study on this subject with an extensive bibliography, see Günther and Pielow 2019.

Al-Būnī (d. 662/1225), an authority on magic in the Qur'an, says in one instance ([1998]: 141): "Writing the letters *rā'* and *sīn* in a magical square, *wafq*, and writing *al-mu'awwidhatān* together with other Qur'anic verses around them and hanging them around the neck of an unmarried woman, would bring her a husband". Examples of this on papyri can be found in P.Bad.V143.7 and 8 and in P.Bad.V143.9–10. These are evidently instances of using Qur'anic texts in 'allowable magic' *al-siḥr al-ḥalāl*, in which Qur'anic texts are used along other religious texts to achieve a certain 'good' goal through magical powers. In such cases, the Qur'anic text is used as is, i.e. as it was transmitted down to us, as in the Cairo text, for example.

In other instances, Qur'anic verses were utilised in 'prohibited magic' *al-siḥr al-ḥarām* i.e. 'black magic'. One of the attested practices of this type of magic is to write Qur'an verses in a reversed order, the so-called *tankīs al-āyāt*. Muslim theologians took a firm stand against this practice, and considered it prohibited, *ḥarām* (al-Harawī 1995: I, 294) not only because the practice of 'black magic' in itself is not allowed, but also because the sequence of Qur'anic verses in Qur'an is believed to be *tawqīf*; i.e. decided by Prophet

Muhammad himself, and that Qur'anic verses should be recited and written accordingly (al-Ḥamad 2004: 98-9).

Since this practice takes place only in 'black magic', one would not expect to find reference to it in books dealing with magic in the Qur'an. However, several papyri with amuletic character testify to such a practice: In P.Bad.V151, an amulet written on papyrus, from 185-287/801-900, Q. 112 is written in reversed order; in P.Bad.V153, an amulet on paper from al-Ushmunayn, from 923/1517, the same sura is written three times in reversed order; and finally, on P.Bad.V158 an amulet on paper, from 287-493/900-1100, the texts of Q. 105 (*sūrat al-fīl*), Q. 112 and Q. 113 are written in reversed order. This seems to have been an issue of common practice. In modern times, this practice is still attested in 'black magic' in villages near Irbid (Dr Ziyād Ṭalāḥa, personal communication). This supports the assumption that the reversed order of verses Three and Four of Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v is a manifestation of the same practice.

Written upon request?

There are two features in the current text that might indicate that it was especially tailored to meet the needs of a specific recipient. In line Three (verse Five of the sura), the feminine plural form *naḥḥāthāt* was replaced by the masculine singular form *naḥḥāth*. If this was deliberate, we might see in it an alteration of the text presumably to act against a specific male person who might practice magic against the holder of the amulet by 'blowing' through knots. That practice was originally assigned by Q. 113 to women.

On the same line of reasoning, one should also question the absence of the last verse of the original text, i.e. the one meant to protect against "and from the evil of the envier when he envieth". Q. 113 mentions two kinds of evil that people can initiate: the blowing through knots and envy. The second was dropped in Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v. Was this because the amulet was specifically written to prevent only the harm done to its bearer by 'a blower in knots', and that 'envy' was not an issue of concern here?

If these two observations are correct, they could present further evidence that Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v was intended as an amulet.

Conclusion

The reason for the deviations from the Cairo text in Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v cannot be determined with certainty. If it were not for these, the text could simply be considered an example of a writing practice, not necessarily by a child or a beginner, since the style indicates a recognizable degree of competence. This assumption is supported by the fact that Text B proceeds without interruption immediately after Text A, although both are of different genres, which indicates that Text A might not have had an independent function on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v. This conclusion also agrees with the conclusion of Khan (1991-92: 57) that many Qur'an fragments in the collections were actually used for private study, which drove Bsees (2019: 116) to recommend not to classify a text as an amulet only because there are some Qur'an verses on it, unless there is a definite evidence that speaks for its amuletic character. The absence of drawings or magical signs usually accompanying amulets (Bsees 2019: 118) may confirm this impression.

The number and nature of the deviations in this very well known Qur'anic text are nevertheless remarkable. The reversed order of the verses, the dropping of the verse against envy and replacing the female blowers by a masculine blower compel one to consider the

possibility that these features are deliberate alterations in the text. Evidence from magical texts on papyri and classical sources support this understanding. However, since this type of magic is *ḥarām*, sources on allowable magic would unlikely give examples of such practice. This makes texts on papyri and parchment like Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v some of the very rare cases of this practice, and of the socio-religious behavior that lies behind it. I tend to consider this text as an amulet, although, I have to agree with Bsees (2019: 114) that the small number of published Arabic magical texts, makes final statements on their character nearly impossible.

The script

The script shows no archaic features or decorative elements. It is cursive and has a casual style, giving a good example for the “transmitting script” that puts more stress on the contents of the text instead on its form (Bsees 2019: 134). The writer did not extend the baselines towards the end of the lines. He also did not break the words at the end of the lines. The height of the tall letters, such as the *alif* in *ghāsiq* and the *lām* in *al-falaq* is not taken into consideration as shown by the narrow distance between the lines.

The orthography

Diacritics:

The writer did not use diacritic dots to distinguish similar letters from each other. This agrees with the practice of many Qur'an writers, who either wrote diacritic dots sporadically, or did not utilise them at all (Déroche 2014: 136). They are actually least expected in this very well known text.

In the photograph, there seems what could be diacritic dots, i.e. above the *alif* of *al-falaq*, above the *tā'* in *al-naḥfāth*, under the *dāl* in *al-ʿuqad*, or under the *bā'* letters of *waqab* at the end of Text A and of *bi-ism* of Text B. These are in fact traces of tear in the papyrus, as can be verified by examining its recto.

Hamza: Initial *hamza* is indicated in *ʿaʿūdḥ* and in *ʿidhā* by an *alif* in accordance with the Qur'anic orthography (al-Ḥamad 2004: 303). The text does not have instances of medial or final *hamza*.

Alif al-waṣl: is indicated in *Allāh*, *al-raḥmān*, *al-raḥīm*, *al-naḥfāth* and *al-ʿuqad* by an *alif* as well. In *al-falaq* it is absent. Qur'an writers occasionally indicated it by a red dot, above the *alif*, when preceded by a *fatha*, as in this case (al-Dānī 1994: 86-7).

Shadda: The doubling of the consonants is not indicated in the four instances it occurs in: *rabb* and *sharr* (three times).

Nunation: Is not indicated in *ghāsiq*, the only word it occurs in.

The long vowels:

Medial alif: The writers of the Qur'an did not follow a firm rule in writing the medial *ʿalif*, sometimes expressing it orthographically, and neglecting it in other cases (Ibn Wathīq 1988: 31; al-Ḥamad 2004: 253-4). Accordingly, it is written here in *ghāsiq* and in *al-naḥfāth*, as usually is the case in the *fāʿil* and *faʿʿāl* forms respectively (Diem 1979: 256), but not in *raḥmān*, in accordance with the Qur'anic orthography (Ibn Wathīq 1988: 32).

Medial wāw: Is written in *ʿaʿūdḥ*, in consistence with the Qur'anic orthography (al-Ḥamad 2004: 249).

Medial yāʾ: Written in *raḥīm*, in agreement with the Qur'anic orthography (Ibn Wathīq 1988: 34, 106; al-Ḥamad 2004: 238).

Final *alif*: Is attested in ' *idhā* in agreement with the Qur'anic writing (Ibn Wathīq 1988: 52).

The short vowels: Originally, these were not written in Qur'an manuscripts (Diem 1979: 225-6; Déroche 2014: 135-6). Later, they were usually indicated by colored dots (al-Dānī 1994: 19), which is a well-attested practice in the published Qur'anic texts on papyri and paper (Levi Della Vida 1947: nos. 18 and 33; 1981: nos. 130 and 136; Loebenstein 1980: no. 14). There are no traces on this papyrus of such marks.

As far as Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v is concerned, it is obvious that the writer followed rather accurately the orthographic rules of Qur'anic writing, based on his/her own knowledge of it, or merely by copying from a *Vorlage*. However, the 'mistakes' in the text (see above) indicate the likelihood of the first possibility.

The palaeography (Fig. 3)

Alif: The best-attested letter in the text with twelve examples. It is perpendicular, slanting to the left (for example *Allāh*, *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm*). It extends below the connecting stroke in *mā*, *naḥḥāth* and *ghāsiq* where it is connected to the preceding letters.

Bā': The initial *bā'* in *bi-ism* has a vertical tip connected horizontally to the following letter. That of *bi-rabb* has a left tip in level with the right one (this agrees also with the final form in *waqab*). The isolated form in *rabb* has a right tip, whereas the rest of the letter is flattened, without an upward curve on the left side.

Thā': The isolated *thā'* in *al-naḥḥāth* has a vertical right tip; the letter flattens on its left side lacking an upward curve on that side, as was the case with the *bā'* in *rabb*.

Hā': The oblique and the horizontal strokes in the initial position in *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm* form an acute angle.

Khā': The acute angle between the oblique and the horizontal strokes is maintained in the medial form of *lkhalāq*.

Dhāl: The vertical and horizontal lines in ' *a'ūdḥ* and in ' *idhā* meet forming an angular shape distinct from *rā'*.

Rā': The curvature of the letter is almost eliminated in the two instances of *sharr* (in line Two and in the second instance in line Three), but maintained in the first occurrence of this word in line Three, in *rabb*, in *al-raḥmān* and in *al-raḥīm* in line One. In *rabb* the letter ends with an upward tip.

Sīn/Shīn: The writer maintained the teeth of the letters in *bi-ism* and in *sharr* (three times).

' *Ayn/Ghayn*: The initial form of the letters is attested in ' *a'ūdḥ* and in *ghāsiq*, where their curvature is rather maintained. Medial ' *ayn* is attested in *al-'uqad*. It has a circular shape.

Fā': Only instances of medial *fā'* occur in the text. In *al-falaq*, it is round with a closed loop; in *al-naḥḥāth* it is rather angular.

Qāf: Initial *qāf* in *qul* has an open loop with a relatively long down stroke. The medial form in *al-'uqad* and in *waqab* is rather circular. The tails of the final *qāf* in *al-falaq*, *lkhalāq* and in *ghāsiq* descend resembling a crescent, similar to that of final *wāw* and *nūn*.

Lām: Is the second best-attested letter in the text with 11 examples. As with the *alif*, it is generally perpendicular, slightly slanting to the left. Connected to the left, as in *al-naḥḥāth* and *lkhalāq*, it slants to the right. In *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm* it connects to the following *rā'* with a thin ascending tip. The final *lām* in *qul* has a descending crescent-like line.

Mīm: Initial *mīm* is circular in two instances (second *min* in line Two, and *min* in line Three), but reduced in two other cases (first *min* in line Two and *mā* in the same line). Medial *mīm* in *al-raḥmān* and in *al-raḥīm* is circular, somewhat reduced with a closed loop. Final *mīm* in *bi-ism* and in *al-raḥīm* has a long descending tail that extends to the left.

Nūn: Medial *nūn* in *al-naḥfāth* has the form of a tip. Final *nūn* in *al-raḥmān* and in *min* (three times) has the form of a crescent, with the protrusion of the right tip maintained.

Hā': The only instance of a *hā'* in the text occurs in *Allāh*. This final shape is triangle.

Wāw: The letter is attested four times in the text, three times independently: *wa-min* (twice) and *waqab*, and once connected to the right in *'a'ūdḥ*. The loop of the letter is maintained in all cases; it ends with a descending tail towards left.

Yā': Medial *yā'* in *al-raḥīm* has a tip that results from its connection with the preceding *ḥā'*. The tail of the final *yā'* in *fī* extends to the right in a horizontal straight line.

The Date of Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v

Grohmann (1958) has convincingly argued for the difficulty of dating early Qur'ans. However, the above given palaeographical description shows that the script of Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v has parallels with the papyri of the first/seventh-eighth century, especially with the earlier official texts written towards the end of this century, with their best example being the papyri from the Qurra ibn Sharīk archive, dated to about 90/709 (Abū Ṣafiyyah 2004, for example: Pl. 1 (b), p. 327; Pl. 2 (c), p. 330, Pl. 3 (b), p. 334).

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Letter	Not connected	Connected to the right	Connected to the left	Connected to the right and to the left
'Alif	ا	ا		
Bā'	ب	ب	ب	
Tā'	ت			
Hā'			ح	
Hā'				ح
Dāl	د			
Rā'		ر		
Sīn		س	س	س
Šīn			ش	
ʿAin			ع	
Ġain			غ	
Fā'				ف
Qāf		ق	ق	ق
Lām		ل	ل	ل
Mīm		م	م	م
Nūn		ن		ن
Wāw	و	و		
Yā'		ي		ي

Figure 3: The script of Text A on P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v.

Sigla

P.Bad.V: *Griechische, koptische und arabische Texte zur Religion und religiösen Literatur in Ägyptens Spätzeit*, F. Bilabel und A. Grohmann eds. Heidelberg 1934.

P.DietrichTopkapi: Dietrich, A., (1958); Die arabischen Papyri des Topkapi Sarayi-Museums in Istanbul, *Der Islam*, vol. 33 37-50. Nos. 1-4.

PERF: J. von Karabacek, (1894); *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer: Führer durch die Ausstellung*, Vienna: A. Hölder.

P.Utah.Ar: Papyri kept at University of Utah.

Q + n: Number of a sura of the Qur'an.

بردية عربية مبكرة مكتوب عليها سورة الفلق

عمر عبد القادر الغول¹

ملخص

يُنشر في هذا البحث نصّ مكتوب على الوجه الأمامي للبردية P.Vind.inv.A.P.266v من مجموعة المكتبة الوطنية بفينا، وهو يتضمّن نصّ "سورة الفلق" على نحوٍ يخالف نصّها في النسخة المعتمدة من القرآن الكريم (نسخة الأزهر الشريف)؛ لذا يحاول البحث تحديد سبب ذلك، بوضع ثلاثة افتراضات: إمّا أن النصّ في هذه البردية يمثل قراءة قرآنية لم تكن معروفة لدينا، أو أنه تدريب على الكتابة، أو أنه كُتِبَ على نحوٍ مخالف للأصل؛ لأنه استُخدِمَ تميمةً في أعمال السحر. تلا هذه المناقشة وصف الإملاء في النصّ وحروفه على نحوٍ تفصيلي، ودلّ ذلك على أنّ النصّ يرجع، في الغالب، إلى نهاية القرن الأول الهجري أو بداية القرن الثاني الهجري.

الكلمات الدالة: البرديات العربية، سورة الفلق، المعوذتان، سحر، تميمة.

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