

THE MULTILINGUAL HISTORICAL KORAN is a research project initiated by and led by the NORWEGIAN INSTITUTE OF PHILOLOGY (PHI). Its main venue is currently a series of research seminars hosted by the MF CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF RELIGION (MF CASR) in Oslo, Norway.

During the seminar we will read the Koranic text in its original language and in the earliest known translations to Greek (870 AD), Persian (10th century), Turkic (11th century) and Latin (11th century).

We study the text both as a historical document in the Late Antique Near Eastern context, and as a religious document in its subsequent history as a foundational text for the religion of Islam. The long-term aim of the project is to present a complete multilingual historical edition of the Koranic text with translations and commentary, published at: www.qoran.xyz.

The Koran – in more technical publications also written *Quran* or *Qurʾān* – is a religious text from the Late Antique Middle East, written in a special variety of the Arabic branch of the Semitic languages, the so-called *Arabiyya*. Since the 7th century AD it has come to be regarded as the “holy book” of the religion of Islam. The text is known from a small number of manuscripts dated to the 7th and 8th centuries AD, and from a large number of manuscripts dated to later centuries. It is also, crucially, preserved in a particularly resilient oral tradition, a tradition which arguably is as ancient as the manuscript tradition, and in some respects probably older.

The Koran is a famous book. It is also a controversial book – an object of high reverence by some, and outright hate by others. For the organisers of this seminar, the Koran is first and foremost an ancient text and a valuable document from an extremely interesting historical period. Both the historical context of the Koranic text itself, and the later impact of the text as a holy text for a community of believers, is a truly fascinating story and a story which ought to be common knowledge amongst believers and non-believers alike – no less so in this divisive day and age.

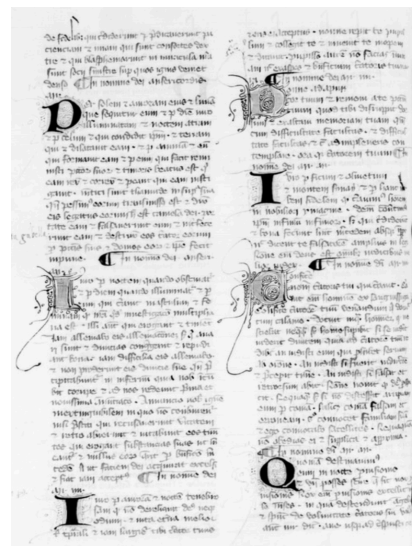
Our aim is to study the text both as a historical document in its Late Antique Near Eastern context, and as a religious document in its subsequent history, when the Koran became a foundational text for the religion of Islam. There are three long-term aims of the project:

1. To present a complete multilingual historical edition of the Koranic text with the most ancient translations into Greek, Persian, Turkic and Latin, published at: www.qoran.xyz.
1. To investigate the nature of the Koranic religion in a Late Antique Near Eastern context.
1. To gain new insights into the linguistic status of the Koranic language, the *Arabiyya*, and its position vis-à-vis other Semitic languages (like Hebrew, Aramaic, Ancient South Arabian and Ancient North Arabian) and other “Arabic languages” (or “Arabic dialects”).

The *Qoran.xyz* edition will contain a critically established text based on chosen early manuscripts, so as to give a fairly good idea of the so-called *rasm* tradition (the earliest non-diacritical texts). We will include important variant readings from the early Islamic exegetical literature (*tafsīr* and specialised works on *qirāʾāt*, etc.), and we will produce a philological commentary which will include a critical evaluation of modern scholarly research on the Koranic text, meaning and history.

We are currently preparing a digital environment for the multilingual historical edition. During our research seminars, we read the Koranic text according to the relatively well established chronological order (starting with “early Meccan suras”, etc.), using mainly these texts, which will constitute the core of the edition:

- Koranic standard *textus receptus* (with minor variants), a.k.a. the 1924 Cairo Edition or the 1984 King Fahd Edition.
- Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi 44/32. A copy of the Qurʾān attributed to ʿUthmān and kept in the Topkapı Saray Library. The manuscript is undated, but is without any doubt a copy of the 8th century AD and is related to the “Umayyad tradition”.
- Fragments of the **Byzantine Greek** translation (before 870 AD).
- 4. Two or three of the earliest **Persian** translations (976 AD and 10th century).
- 5. The earliest interlinear **Turkic** translations (11th century).
- 6. The two earliest **Latin** translations (1143 and 1210).



The palaeographic study of the Koran is important, but it is by now quite well established that the textual variants are few and often inconsequential for the semantic interpretation of the text. The variants are interesting, and it is crucial for any serious study of the Koran to take them into consideration, but such variants in the reception cannot be the only focus of an approach to the text.

Our primary goal with the historical edition of the original text is to investigate the linguistic and semantic status of the Koran as a Late Antique text. Our edition will also include several representative modern translations, as well as a literal translation with a running commentary in which also the educated general reader should find much of interest.

The early reception of the Koran is interesting for a host of different reasons. As philologists, we try to use historical texts to explain the past and gain a more comprehensive understanding of historical dynamics. A multilingual edition of the Koran – including the very earliest translations to Greek, Persian, Turkic and Latin – will be an indispensable resource for researchers and others who want to understand both the development of Islamic literature and religion, and the different ways in which outsiders, even enemies, approached Islamic religion and culture through reading, translating and reacting to the Koran.

More information about the project can be found at www.philology.no/qoran.