Twitter Thread by Marijn "i before j" van Putten

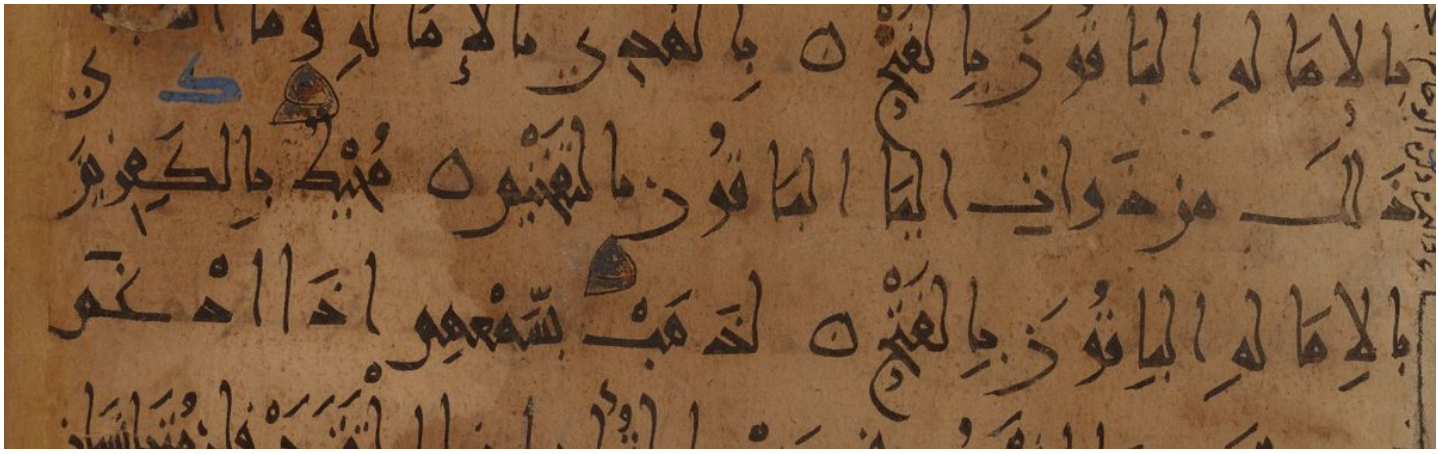


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One of the great mysteries of the Quranic reading traditions are their many phonetic irregularities, that seem to have no purpose except to show off some grammatical oddity. One of these is the ■im■lah of al-k■f■r■na. Ibn ■■lawayh in his ■u■■ah has an interesting discussion. ■



The plural of 'disbelievers', besides the now popular kuff■r, is also k■fir■na in the Quran. In the genitive and accusative this becomes k■fir■na. Some readers read this (and ONLY this) as k■fir■na.
This is the reading of: ■Ab■ ■Amr, al-D■r■ ← al-Kis■■■ and Ruways ← Ya■q■b.



In his al-■u■■ah f■ l-Qir■■■t al-Sab■, Ibn ■■lawayh sets out to rationalize and explain the practices of the seven readers canonized by his teacher, Ibn Muj■hid. He also discusses al-K■fir■na. Let's translate and give commentary along the way.

قوله تعالى : « والله محيطٌ بالكافرين »[1]. يقرأ بإمالة (الكافرين) وبتفخيمها في موضع النصب والجر . **فالحجة** لمن أمال : أنه لما اجتمع في الكلمة أربع كسرات ، كسرة الفاء والراء والياء ، والراء يقوم مقام كسرتين جذبن الألف لسكونها بقوّتهن فأَمَلْنَها

فإن قيل : فيلزم على هذا الأصل أن يميل « الشاكرين[2] » و « الجبّارين »[3] ، فقل : لا يلزمه ذلك لثلاث علل : إحداهن : الإدغام الذي فيهما وهو فرع ،والإمالة فرع، ولا يجمع بين فرعين في اسم . والأخرى : أن هذين الاسمين قليلا الدَّوْر في القرآن ، ولم يكثرا ككثرة « الكافرين » فترك إمالتهما . والثالثة : أنّ الشين والجيم والياء يخرجن من وسط اللسان بينه وبين وسط الحَنك ، فلما كانتا مجاورتين للياء كرهوا الإمالة فيهما كما كرهوا في الياء .

"As for the saying of the almighty 'wa-■■■hu mu■■■un bi-l-k■fir■na'", al-k■fir■na is read with ■im■lah or without ■im■lah whenever it is in the accusative or genitive.

So the explanation is that it is because of the meeting of four kasras within a single word"

"It is the kasrah of the f■■, r■■ and y■■ -- and the r■■ can carry two kasras, so they pull the ■alif, because it is quiscentent, by their strength, so they cause ■im■lah to apply to it".

So lots to unpack here. Where on earth is he getting four kasrahs from?!

Anyone keeping normal count, would arrive at two kasrahs. That of the f■■ and that of the r■■. But Ibn ■■lawayh is counting two on the r■■ one more after the y■■. This 'double counting of the r■■' has precedent, S■bawayh in fact does something very similar.

S■bawayh observes that with ■im■lah triggered by a following i, this is blocked when there is an adjacent emphatic consonant (■, ■, ■, ■) or uvulars (q, ■, ■), e.g. ■■■ifun never undergoes ■im■lah. He however notices this blocking effect is lifted if /r/ precedes i.

Thus while you cannot say ■■■if, you CAN say ■■riq. He explains this as being because the r■■ counts as a 'doubled' consonant, and thus carries twice as many kasrahs, essentially (/■■ririq/ > [■■ririq]). Ibn ■alawayh repurposes this argument to explain al-k■fir■na.

It is worth noting that S■bawayh never uses this argument. To him even al-k■fir■na and k■fir are perfectly acceptable applications of im■lah.

But this only puts us at three kasrahs /al-k■firíriyna/, not four!

The last one is an interesting trick. He interprets long ■ not as /iy/ with a y■■ that doesn't carry a vowel, but as /iyi/. I am not aware of any grammarian that supports such an analysis. It seems to be an innovation of Ibn ■alawayh designed to explain this reading idiosyncrasy

However, he is not yet out of the woods. And he realizes this himself. He continues: "If one were to say: it is necessary on this bases to also apply ■im■lah to aš-š■kir■na and al-■abb■r■na then say: no that is not necessary, and the reasons for it are threefold:"

"The first of them is the assimilation that is in these two, words. This is a practical use, and ■im■lah is also a practical use, and two practical uses do not join in a single word."

Ibn ■■lawayh is referring here to the assimilation of the definite article and ...

and I think the meeting of two b■■s in al-■abb■r■n which 'assimilation' so a single b■■with a šaddah.

This explanation however *only* explains these two words, and many other words that would also qualify for the ■im■lah are simply ignored.

For example š■kir■na (Q7:17) also occurs without the definite article, and thus without the assimilation. But one may also include al-m■kir■na (Q8:30), and ■■šir■na (Q7:111). The reasoning is thus ad hoc and not altogher convincing. He continues with the second reason:

"The next reason is that these two words are infrequent in number in the Quran, and not as frequent as the word al-k■fir■na, so their ■im■lah is removed."

This argument is, at least, factually correct. al-K■fir■na is much more common than any other word of this shape.

This concept of higher frequency causing certain forms to behave irregularly is deeply ingrained in Arabic grammatical thought. It is also an intuition frequently shared by non-linguist speakers that it may explain irregularities of certain words.

It is true that frequent words are more likely to be irregular than infrequent words. But the reason is *not* that they are more likely to undergo change. It is that they are *less* likely to undergo change. You may forget irregularities that you never would in frequent ones.

For example, English still has an ancient s~r alternation in "was" but "were", but has lost it in "lose" and "lost" (compare Dutch verliezen, verloren) (you can still see a trace of it in forlorn". "to be" is one of the most common verbs there is, so kept the irregularity.

This is not really obviously an example of an irregularity that was kept around since ancient times, while it was deleted elsewhere. Rather al-K■fir■na seems to be an irregular innovation.

Finally, we can move onto the third argument:

"And the third is that the š■n, ■■m and y■■ are all pronounce with the middle of the tongue and the middle of the palate. When there are two consonant pronounced at the place of articulation of the y■■, they hate to applying ■im■lah to it just like the hate it in the y■■."

Once again, this argument exclusively explains the two example words that Ibn ■■lawayh himself picked. Had he picked al-m■kir■na, this same argument would simply not have worked. It is therefore ad hoc, and doesn't solve the problems with his initial explanation.

We therefore don't come to any deeper understanding from Ibn ■■lawayh's work as to why it is specifically this word that undergoes ■lm■lah among some of the Quranic reading traditions. But the discussion is interesting because it *tries* to find an explanation for this behaviour

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