The Bible in Arabic: Digital Resources and Future Challenges

Abstract: The aim of this article is to discuss the current state of Arabic Bible studies from a Digital Humanist perspective. It presents an overview of the current existing digital resources, such as digital manuscript collections, and underlines the importance of developing digital projects for the study of Arabic versions of the Bible with a focus on the New Testament. It will also shed light on future challenges and the urgent needs of the scientific field in order to harness the full potential of digital scholarship.

Keywords: Arabic versions; New Testament manuscripts; Digital Humanities; Collaborative; Digital edition; Open access

1 Introduction

The impact of digitization on Humanities research is enormous and is effecting changes in every discipline. In this issue, Garrick Allen and Claire Clivaz underline the impact of Digital Humanities in the field of New Testament studies, the Greek New Testament, and its manuscripts in particular. Many digital efforts have been centred on textual criticism and the critical editing of the Greek New Testament: “For about two decades, the digitization of manuscripts and the exploration of new editorial possibilities have fostered new trends in NT research and sparked lively reflections and conversations among [New Testament textual criticism] scholars.”1 Given these developments, can the same be observed regarding the study of the New Testament in Arabic or the study of the Arabic Bible in general?

The Arabic tradition is not a well-known topic in Biblical studies. Despite the variety of translations, the high number of manuscripts,2 and the interesting transmission history of the Bible in Arabic, very little research has been conducted in this field. While there was a certain amount of scholarly interest in 17–18th centuries,3 Western research rapidly turned away from Arabic versions of the Bible. New Testament scholarly disinterest in this respect is particularly striking. However, a rising interest in the Arabic versions began a decade ago with a remarkably high number of new projects and publications appearing. A notable hallmark with respect to New Testament studies was the 2012 publication of Hikmat Kashouh’s thesis in the

1 Clivaz, “The Impact of Digital Research”, 4. See also Allen, “Digital Tools.”
2 For the New Testament, there are more than 200 manuscripts of the gospels and more than 190 manuscripts of the Pauline Epistles.
3 Vollandt, “Some Historiographical Remarks.”
Former research in the field suffered from the way in which Arabic versions were approached as being not “useful” for the reconstruction of the original Greek texts. The concept of “original text” and its reconstruction methods have now been questioned for decades; the possibilities offered by digital technologies play an important role in this respect. In the digital age, manuscripts have increasingly become the focal point and critical editions are no longer the main reference. This reorientation applies not only to Greek witnesses, but it also contributes to the development of the study of New Testament versions, Arabic included.

The question then arises: will this impulse lead to concrete digital projects and research? It should soon become apparent that we are in a nascent stage. In addition, the current situation can be felt as ambivalent. It is probably clear to all scholars involved in the study of the Arabic Bible that Digital Humanities can help from many perspectives but the emergence of new methods and tools that require important training might also seem unfair. It is an extra effort added to those already required to work in the Arabic Bible field: It is worth mentioning here the informational work that is necessary to obtain recognition within Biblical Studies and more generally funding; or the difficulty to acquire the various required competences. This summary of Samir Khalil Samir remains in many respects valid:

The situation is particularly difficult, since there is practically no chair of Christian Arabic studies. There is similarly almost no specialized institute in this field, nor a journal, nor a regular bibliography, etc. Everyone is obliged to work on their own, doing the best they can.

The tensions that appear at the confluence of marginal fields and Digital Humanities have been discussed by Caroline T. Schroeder, who argues that Digital Humanities should be considered as a new cultural capital:

Understanding Digital Humanities advances as cultural capital exposes the tension many scholars engaged in – or even just interested in – digital or computational work experience. Many of us feel compelled to “catch up” with our peers in English Departments while also feeling powerless to do so.

To be aware of Digital Humanities as cultural capital and thus the inequalities it may produce does not mean that we should not try. Firstly, it is by being part of the Digital Humanities landscape that even marginal fields can help to define what Digital Humanities should be. Schroeder shows that Coptic documents question some of the TEI-XML standards; she also advocates for the acknowledgment of editing and encoding work as a core Digital Humanities practice, an aspect that is particularly true for the study of the Arabic Bible, which is still exploring its enormous textual diversity. This willingness to see the study of the Arabic Bible as a “Digital Humanities critical participant” has motivated the present article as well as the author’s own projects (see section 4.1).

Secondly, seeing Digital Humanities as a form of cultural capital helps to develop strategies. As Schroeder explains, “We need to cultivate privileged allies (cross-disciplinary collaborations, inter-institutional collaborations), and to recognize our own power within the academy.” Here one could also add the

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4 Kashouh, The Arabic Versions of the Gospels.
5 Schulthess, Les manuscrits arabes des lettres de Paul, 15–68. Schulthess, “Les manuscrits du Nouveau Testament, le monde arabe et le digital.”
6 See Schulthess, Les manuscrits arabes des lettres de Paul, 37–41; Gibson et al., “The Bible in Arabic.”
7 Clivaz and Hamidovic, “Critical Editions in the Digital Age.”
8 E.g. philological competences. Studying one Arabic version often requires the mastering of two or three other languages. Zaki explains, regarding the Pauline letters in Arabic, that “These versions are either new translations made from Greek, Syriac, Coptic, or Latin Vorlagen, or reworkings of an existing Arabic version through either collation against another Vorlage or against another Arabic version. The final result of such collations is a text profoundly different from the original(s), with its own history of transmission into several recensions” (Zaki, “The Textual History of the Arabic Pauline Epistles,” 392).
9 Samir, “L’avenir des études arabes chrétiennes,” 25. My translation.
10 Schroeder, “The Digital Humanities as Cultural Capital,” 37.
11 Ibid., 45.
importance of openness that goes along with collaboration. Clivaz argues that “research communities in Humanities who will maintain a focussed approach at the methodological level but openness at the point of publication have great potential to produce new knowledge and discoveries.”12

Openness should not only apply at the point of publication; it is also important to support open research that includes open source and open data alongside open access. Collaboration and openness are at the core of a constructive digital research and particular attention will be paid to these aspects in what follows.

2 Networks and collaborations

Something that may seem obvious to us in the digitized world of today is the importance of scholarly networks facilitated by the internet. Scholarly networking is an important aspect of research and its value has increased dramatically via email exchanges and the internet. Already in 1996, this evolution was compared to “the invention of the printing press in its impact upon research and education” in the prospective book Computer Networking and Scholarly Communication in the Twenty-First-Century.13 Networking is also intrinsically related to the beginnings of the Digital Humanities, which started as more of a community than a discipline (it is arguably still the former rather than the latter). Susan Hockey highlighted in her “History of the Humanities computing” the importance of the Humanist:

Networking, at least for electronic mail, was previously confined to groups of computer scientists and research institutes. By the mid-1980s, facilities for sending and receiving electronic mail across international boundaries were provided by most academic computing services...At the ICCH conference in Columbia, South Carolina, in spring 1987 a group of people mostly working in support roles in humanities computing got together and agreed that they needed to find a way of keeping in touch on a regular basis...Humanist has become something of a model for electronic discussion lists...Humanist has become central to the maintenance and development of a community and it has made a significant contribution to the definition of humanities computing.14

In case of the New Testament in Arabic, it is important to mention the existence of the NASCAS network. NASCAS (North American Society for Christian Arabic Studies) is defined as: “an e-mail discussion group, committed to promoting the study of Arabic-speaking Christian communities, their literature, and their history. Contributions in English or French are welcome. All discussions are academic, non-confessional, and non-political.”

Started in 2009 by Alexander Treiger,15 this Google group is still very active. As in other scholarly lists, it is used for information exchanges regarding future events, current research, references, locations of manuscripts, etc. In the case of NASCAS, the involvement and the accessibility of many recognized scholars, such as Samir Khalil Samir, is particularly notable. In addition to knowledge sharing, this direct academic contact between scholars is valuable especially for young researchers or new people in the field.

One may imagine that such networks are instrumental in the creation and development of collaborative research, which is unusual in Humanities disciplines and an important Digital Humanities topic. In 2007, Christine L. Borgman harshly stated that “the humanities are at the opposite extreme from the sciences, where ‘collective cognition’ is valued. They have the lowest rates of coauthorship and collaboration of the disciplines, with the higher rates of collaboration occurring in digital projects. E-Research is expected to promote collaboration in the humanities, due to the size of projects and the range of expertise required.”16

Can increased collaboration be observed in the Arabic Bible field since Borgman’s 2007 statement? In response to this question, the collaborative aspects of existing digital projects are highlighted in Section 4 below. While it did not necessarily start from a digital perspective, it is worth mentioning here the Biblia

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12 Clivaz, “Internet Networks and Academic Research,” 159.
13 Harrison and Stephen, Computer Networking and Scholarly, xi.
14 Hockey, “The History of Humanities Computing.”
15 https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/nascas/jTtblj4y4lM; NASCAS also has a website: http://www.christianarabic.org/, which is no longer updated. All links were last accessed 31 March 2019.
16 Borgman, Scholarship in the Digital Age, 219–20, cited by Fitzpatrick, Planned Obsolescence, 24.
Arabica project (2012–2018). This research project started at the Freie Universität Berlin and Tel Aviv University. In 2015 the German base of the project moved to Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. The objectives were “to close scholarly lacunae and provide an infrastructure for a dynamic and fast-developing field.” It is clear that the partners of Biblia Arabica did excellent work in bringing scholars together and establishing a productive dynamic between them, notably by organising several international meetings on the Arabic Bible and panels at SBL and EABS dedicated to this topic. At the beginning of 2019 the Biblia Arabica project became a consortium for scholars interested in the Arabic Bible: “It will continue as an international platform for research in the field, providing an infrastructure and an umbrella for independent research projects.”

The bibliographical tool the Biblia Arabica team has developed as a collaborative project will be presented in detail in Section 4.2. The blog that welcomes academic contributions is another notable feature. Finally, with respect to co-authorship, it is also worth pointing out that a recent publication of the Biblia Arabica collaborators has five (co)authors. Multiple authorship is a common practice in many of the natural and social sciences, which may extend to the Humanities due to the redefinition of authorship in a digitized environment.

3 Access to sources and research

3.1 Manuscripts

One important step is access to primary sources, manuscripts, through scanned microfilms or preferably born-digital images. This is particularly important for the study of the Arabic Bible because of its nascent stage. In fact, only a few versions are edited and most researchers have to work directly with manuscripts. Access to manuscripts is also crucial for the development of digital research: “Content-based digital resources produced for humanities scholars generally start with a period of digitization of primary source material.” The digitization of interesting manuscripts for the study of the Arabic Bible often depends on libraries’ policies. In her article, Schroeder underlines that digitization processes tend to reproduce research inclinations: “Although the internet and digitization have been heralded as means of widening and democratizing access to information, digitization efforts – like research in the academy in general – replicate the pre-digital centrality of the Western canon in a new digital canon.”

While it is not the aim of this article to list all the digital collections containing Arabic manuscripts of the Bible, I mention the main collections and point toward the online availability of some well-known and interesting New Testament manuscripts. A large number of manuscripts can be found in European libraries, which include the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, the Vatican Libraries in Rome, the British Library in London, and many others.

17 Vollandt, “Biblia Arabica Becomes a Consortium.”
18 Ibid.
19 https://biblia-arabica.com/category/blog/.
20 Gibson et al., “The Bible in Arabic.”
21 As predicted by Fitzpatrick: “To some extent, all of the texts published in networked environments will become multi-author, by virtue of their interpenetration with the writings of others; our task will be, first, to acknowledge the ways that our work has always been collaborative, relying upon texts that precede and follow, and second, to understand the collective not as the elimination of the individual, but rather as composed of individuals.” Fitzpatrick, Planned Obsolescence, 24.
22 Terras, “Digitization and Digital Resources in the Humanities,” 56.
23 Schroeder, “The Digital Humanities as Cultural Capital,” 27.
In *Gallica*, the Bibliothèque national’s digital library, it is possible to consult at least 55 Arabic manuscripts that are related to the Bible. It is, for example, possible to consult colour photographs of Paris BnF arabe 6725, that contain fragments of the New Testament from the 9th century.

![Image](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n)

**Figure 1.** Paris BnF arabe 6725 folio 9v Beginning of Philemon © Bibliothèque nationale de France

For Paris BnF grec supplément 911, an 11th century Greek-Arabic codex of the Gospel of Luke, Gallica offers only images of the microfilms.

Another important digital library is *DigiVatLib*, a Vatican Library project that aims to digitize the entire Library’s collection of manuscripts. The project is of great importance for the Arabic Bible as many important manuscripts are stored at the Vatican Library. Available online are images of manuscripts such as Vat. Ar. 13, a fragmentary codex containing parts of the Gospels and the Pauline letters, its oldest folios dating back at least to the 9th century; Vat. Copt. 9, a bilingual Coptic-Arabic Gospel manuscript (ca. 1204 CE); Vat. Ar. 12900, which contains a Latin-Arabic bi-folio of Galatians that may date back to the 9th century.

In terms of clerical collections, St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai is the most important. The Library of Congress has now made its microfilm collections, captured by Kenneth W. Clark during his 1949 expedition, available online. Among these manuscripts, one can find for example Sin. Ar. 72 (Gospels, copied in 897) and Sin. Ar. 151 (Praxapostolos, 9th–10th century). The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) is collaborating with the Early Manuscripts Electronic Library (EMEL) on a promising digitization project. It was announced that a UCLA library grant “will fund key aspects of the Sinai Library Digitization Project to create digital copies of some 1,100 rare and unique Syriac and Arabic manuscripts dating from the fourth to the 17th centuries...the UCLA Library will host the images online on behalf of the monastery.”

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24 Results with “Bible” as subject and “Arabe” as language. It is necessary to stress that searches on Arabic manuscripts of the Bible cannot be restricted to “Arabic.” Many polyglot manuscripts exist in Greek, Syriac, Coptic, or Latin collections. In addition, manuscripts written in garshuni (Arabic language using the Syriac alphabet) are generally listed in Syriac catalogues.

25 https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n.

26 https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b110040650.

27 https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.ar.13.

28 https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.copt.9.

29 https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.12900.

30 https://www.loc.gov/collections/manuscripts-in-st-catherines-monastery-mount-sinai.

31 http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/ucla-library-to-offer-digital-images-of-rare-ancient-manuscripts-in-egypt. See also https://nypost.com/2019/04/17/ancient-christian-manuscripts-digitized-at-mount-sinai-monastery. *Biblia Arabica* might collaborate on the cataloguing: https://biblia-arabica.com/news/biblia-arabica-team-meets-with-partners-in-atlens-to-discuss-cataloguing-of-mt-sinai-manuscripts/.
In another collaboration with EMEL, there is also the Sinai Palimpsests Project, funded by Arcadia, which aims to make Sinai palimpsests readable using spectral imaging and to offer an online digital library of the palimpsests featuring high-quality digital images. Images of seventy-four palimpsests with extensive metadata are accessible online, among them important manuscripts for the Arabic Bible such as Sin. Ar. NF 8 and Sin. Ar. NF 28. The project has selected experts for the scholarly side according to their language(s) of expertise and editions are in preparation. It is stated that the participating scholars have the first right of refusal to prepare editions of palimpsests that they have worked on.

The work done by the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) also has great potential: the organisation identifies manuscript collections around the world that need photographic preservation. One of its missions is “digitally preserving rare and endangered manuscripts.” HMML has an important Eastern Christian collection including Arabic manuscripts. A search for Arabic Bibles in the Virtual reading room returns more than 250 records. Consultation of the images requires a free registration.

The Committee for the Promulgation of Ancient Religious Texts at the Brigham Young University should also be mentioned here. This organisation provides digitized microfilms of Christian Oriental manuscripts including collections of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, the Coptic Museum and the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Cairo, St. Mark’s Monastery in Jerusalem, and the St. Thomas Catholic Church in Mosul. Additionally and important for the Cairo Genizah and other Jewish collections are the Cambridge Digital Library and the Friedberg Project.

### 3.2 Books and journals

Access to publications is another important challenge when it comes to studying the Arabic Bible. During the XI International Congress of Christian Arabic Studies in Rome, Samir advocated for a “bibliothèque digitale du patrimoine chrétien,” encouraging the creation of a platform for existing literature. Such an initiative would make Christian Arabic works accessible to scholars limited to under-resourced libraries, particularly in the Middle East. This proposed initiative touches upon the issue of open access. Two series have recently started, published by Brill, are of importance for the Arabic Bible: Biblia Arabica and Arabic Christianity Texts and Studies. However, these series are unfortunately not in open access.

The tension that appears between openness and validation or authority has been discussed by many. In many respects, scholars depend on publishers. Ziyad Marar notes that “early career authors need to build their reputations and thereby their claims to authority; publishers have a crucial role to play in this process.” In the case of the Arabic Bible, it is not that the authors are necessarily “early career authors” – even if the number of young scholars involved in positive – but that the field itself is “in its infancy.” This situation, therefore, creates a need for Academic validation, leaving little room for negotiations with publishers. Thus, it may be worth finding intermediate solutions, as argued in Section 5.

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32 http://sinaipalimpsests.org/about-project.
33 http://hmml.org/about/.
34 https://www.vhmml.org/readingRoom/.
35 https://cpart.mi.byu.edu/home/manuscripts/.
36 https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/genizah/1.
37 https://fjms.genizah.org/; Gibson et al., “The Bible in Arabic.”
38 Samir, “Situation actuelle de la recherche dans le domaine arabe chrétien: Projets communs souhaitables,” presentation at the International Conference of Christian Arabic Studies, Rome, 2016.
39 https://brill.com/view/serial/BIAR; https://brill.com/view/serial/ACTS.
40 My own PhD thesis was published in open access thanks to a Swiss National Science Foundation publication grant; Schultess, Les manuscrits arabes des lettres de Paul.
41 See e.g. Eve, Open Access and the Humanities.
42 Marar, “Creating Scholarly Knowledge in the Digital Age,” 83.
43 Griffith, The Bible in Arabic, 1.
4 Digital projects

4.1 Tarsian and HumaReC

*Tarsian* and *HumaReC* are two projects that included scholarly editions of parts of New Testament Arabic manuscripts embedded in a manuscript viewer. *Tarsian* was developed within the framework of my doctoral research. Following the new Swiss National Science Foundation policy in favour of open access, it was decided to add a digital edition of the First Letter to the Corinthians in Vat. Ar. 13 to the project. Encoded in TEI-XML, the Arabic text is supported by a French translation and enhanced features developed on the basis of open source software created by EVT. This version was published between February and July 2016. The encoded files are available under a CC BY-ND 3.0 license.

*HumaReC* is in many respects a continuation of this first project and it focuses on the changes in the publication of digital research. The project’s open access platform includes a manuscript viewer, a research blog, and a “web book.” The object of study is Marciana Gr. Z. 11 (379), a codex that contains the Acts, the Catholic Letters, and the Pauline Letters in Greek, Latin, and Arabic. *HumaReC* focuses on the proto-Pauline Letters. *HumaReC* is not per se a collaborative project; however, the principle of continuous publishing that was developed during the project allows for incorporation further material at any time, whether from the editorial board or from users of the platform. As for the *Tarsian* project, the manuscript viewer was created with the help of the EVT software. The text in Greek, Latin, and Arabic is encoded in TEI-XML and is available under the CC BY 4.0 license.

4.2 The online Bibliography of the Arabic Bible

The *Biblia Arabica* project in Munich launched an online tool in November 2018. The *Bibliography of the Arabic Bible: A Classified and Annotated History of Scholarship* is intended to be a comprehensive, classified, and searchable reference tool for secondary literature:

> Each bibliographic item has an entry displaying a full reference, summary of the content, manuscripts mentioned, a digital identifier (Uniform Resource Identifier or URI), and links to open-access online versions of the item where available. Items have been classified by the biblical books, translators, communities that used the translations, and subjects to which they refer… While this bibliography is not a space for hosting digital facsimiles, it will provide a hub linking users to the growing multitude of resources already available online.

The *Biblia Arabica* bibliography is remarkable in many aspects. From the beginning this project was collaborative and it still encourages users to become contributors. The fact that it is based on Zotero makes it easy to share one’s bibliographic collection. It is also exemplary with regard to its openness:

> The *Biblia Arabica* bibliography module is a customizable software framework for displaying bibliographic records on the web in an open-access, searchable interface. Records are created and maintained in Zotero, a widespread and easy-to-use
open-source bibliography manager, and exported to TEI-XML. The data is compliant with linked-open data standards and may be easily exchanged with or linked to other projects that use either Zotero or TEI formats...The Biblia Arabica bibliography module is open-source software (CC-BY-3.0 license) and is freely accessible on Github.52

The fact that each entry is tagged (notably with the shelf-mark[s] of the manuscripts it mentions) is especially powerful in the Biblia Arabica Bibliography.

4.3 PAVONe

PAVONe – Platform of the Arabic Versions of the New Testament is a Digital Humanities Center project at the University of Balamand.53 It is an online database that aims to include explicit and implicit verses of the Gospels: “Over time, this corpus will include the transcribed texts, citations and allusions of the Arabic translations of the Gospels. In addition to this digital corpus, the project provides a set of tools to enable and facilitate the study of the text.”

The database contains a manuscripts section, a lectionary section, and a citation section. Finally, the search section allows for the searching of a specific verse or word in the database regardless of the source type. The PAVONe project is exciting and it has great potential: the important place of the lectionaries and the liturgical structure (as used by the Greek Orthodox church) is very promising.54

For now, PAVONe focuses on the Arabic text of the Gospels. This limitation will surely evolve according to new collaborations that the project might foster in the future. Furthermore, the database could only benefit from a more collaborative vision: it may be useful to advise the users as to how transcriptions that they may have completed in their own research could be integrated into the database. Furthermore, it would also be useful to have access to the data files, since the use of the database can be laborious.

5 Perspectives

The need for better orientation within a large amount of manuscripts is still one of the priorities in research. The Biblia Arabica team has announced that they are working on a “clavis” for Arabic Bible manuscripts.

As a prerequisite to any penetrating study of a particular biblical book in Arabic, modern scholars need to begin with the cumbersome and time-consuming task of sifting through the manuscript material, which demands a fair amount of detective work and archival skill. It is for that reason that the Munich team of the Biblia Arabica project is currently developing a union catalogue of Arabic Bible manuscripts. Such a clavis of all surviving textual testimonies should allow scholars easy navigation through the corpus and encourage them to take into consideration the full range of evidence.55

Currently it is unknown whether the clavis is going to be digital. One can only hope that after having followed high standards in term of openness and collaboration for digital bibliographies, the team will continue to contribute positively to the encounter between Arabic Bible study and the Digital Humanities.

It would also be helpful if existing projects on manuscripts were linked together, projects concerning the Arabic Bible like the future clavis and the PAVONe database, but also broader projects regarding the New Testament. The New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room lists several multilingual manuscripts containing Arabic;56 their bibliographies should include a link to the Biblia Arabica bibliography.

52 https://github.com/biblia-arabica/arabic-bible-bibliography/blob/master/documentation/BiAr_Manual.pdf.
53 http://pavone.uob-dh.org.
54 Many manuscripts contain indications of the day of the week when a passage should be read. Kashouh states, “Since every church (e.g. Melkite, Coptic) has a different ecclesiological calendar, examining these liturgical signs and rubrics can significantly inform us about the ecclesiological milieu of the manuscript or group of manuscripts...There are significant liturgical variants from one manuscript to another even within the same family. Some scribes kept the same Arabic text of their exemplar but adapted a different liturgical calendar.” Kashouh, The Arabic Versions of the Gospels, 8.
55 Gibson et al., “The Bible in Arabic.”
56 http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste.
Another important task today is the extension of the Arabic Bible’s digital corpus. A digital corpus does not necessarily mean a concrete website or tool but rather the existence of a critical mass of machine-readable sources. A digital corpus is a prerequisite for unlocking the full potential of editing work done by many scholars and for the use of computational tools. As a basic example, one need only imagine the great assistance that could be provided by a concordance based on the existing edited manuscripts. The creation of a digital corpus is a common effort. I contributed modestly to the corpus with the online editions of *Tarsian* and *Humarec*. The *PAVONe* project is about to become an important actor, hopefully also moving toward open data. Furthermore, it is desirable that edited manuscripts in books and journals become digitally accessible. In fact, we find in many of the recent publications parts of manuscripts that are transcribed. Even if it is unrealistic to hope for completely open research at this point in time, it would be productive to find a middle course that makes these transcriptions available. Scholars should be encouraged to make transcriptions available even if the rest of the publication is not in open access. Ideally, the transcriptions should be in a machine-readable format – even unstructured, plain text documents would be helpful. This would be an efficient and simple way of connecting all actors in the building of a collaborative and open digital corpus and an effective step towards a digital scholarship for the Arabic Bible.

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