Déroche François,
Qur'ans of the Umayyads. A First Overview.

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Qur'an of the Umayyads. A First Overview presents evidence that further enables the reconstruction of the history of the Qur'ān; an endeavour that François Déroche has engaged in for a number of years. The primary source material that he uses comprises a sample of old fragments of Qur'ānic manuscripts the author dates to the Umayyad period. Déroche's aim in this book is to present a reconstruction of the history of the transcription of the Qur'ān in Umayyad times (r. 41–132/661–750). As with any project of this type, there are necessary methodological questions concerning the chronology adopted in the approach and with the tools of dating: palaeography, art history, and radio-carbon dating.

In his introduction, François Déroche describes the current research on the early copies of the Qur'ānic text, and considers the French and the German initiatives at the end of the 18th century, as well as Wansbrough's work at the end of the 1970s, as the "iconoclastic turn" in Qur'ānic Studies. As for the dating of the Qur'ān manuscripts, the author calls for caution with the radio-carbon-14 dating and considers the canonized Qur'ānic readings (*qirā'āt*) and their systematization by the authors of the 10th century to be insufficient for identifying the geographical distribution of the Qur'ān manuscripts. He argues that various reasons lie behind the need to historically date the Qur'ānic text. The author observes the lack of interest of the Muslims in the subject and raises the necessity to evaluate the debate of the hyper-critical school. Another reason concerns the fact that the old Qur'ān manuscripts reflect the oral tradition and could contradict the traditional point of view about the history of the Qur'ān. He states that the Umayyad period witnessed a transformation in Qur'ān manuscripts, and this therefore justifies the need to date old Qur'ān manuscripts. The last two reasons are given as the motivation behind the reconstruction of the history of the Qur'ān: the study of the culture and faith of Muslims communities and the necessity to show that the *muṣḥaf* has a history.

The author dedicates the first chapter, *Transcribing the Qur'*ān *in Early Umayyad Times: The Codex Parisino-petropolitanus, to the MS Arabe 328 in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. The chapter developed out of Déroche's research published in *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam. Le codex Parision-petropolitanus*, Leiden, 2009. He begins by providing a codicological description of the Codex Parisino-petropolitanus, which leads him to conclude that it might have been the work of a team of scribes. He provides details about the differences in the spacing between the words, the handwriting, the verse ending techniques, the diacritization and the uneven use of the long vowels. These suggest the personal approaches of different copyists. An important conclusion drawn by the author is that the non-canonical Qur'ānic variants in the manuscript are either corrected errors or uncorrected Qur'ānic variants. Another significant conclusion that Déroche draws is related to the fact that the manuscript reflects works of scholars pre-dating the 2nd/8th century and 3nd/9th century. He concludes that there is a certain fluidity in the manuscript tradition as the scribes would try to improve the defective orthography by the non-systematic and incomplete readjustment of the text. In his presentation of the results of the dating, the author shows great caution towards both the Muslim sources and modern Qur'ānic Studies.

In the second chapter, *The Written Transmission of the Qur'an in Ḥijāzī Script. A General Appraisal*, the author explores a sample of Qur'ān manuscripts featuring the same variety of script, *ḥiǧāzī*, considered by the author as, "for the moment", the firmest basis in the identification of the earliest copies of Qur'ān. He shows that there is a tradition that imposes control on the copyist's apparent freedom. In term of canonicity, the Codex Parisino-petropolitanus is consistent with the ʿUthmanic *rasm* since the differences in orthography and the lack of diacritical marks do not impair the possibility of reading it according to the canon. Déroche compares the samples of manuscripts with that of the Parisino-petropolitanus and shows the codicological and palaeographical differences and the various techniques of verse division. There is unanimity among the Qur'ān manuscripts concerning the choice of a single column of text and a non-unanimity concerning the elongation of some of the horizontal components of the script.

In the third chapter, *The Transformation of the Muṣḥaf*, Déroche states that two elements are relevant in the history of the Qur'ān as a book during the Umayyad period: the book illuminations and the Arabic script. He provides a codicological and palaeographical description of the content of the Umayyad codex of Damascus and the Fusṭāṭ codex, and concludes that the uneven character of the script in both codices is the result of a team of scribes. The author establishes that a style different to the *ḥiǧāzī* script, namely, the scripto plena, is "gaining ground". The illuminations differentiate the Damascus and

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Fusṭāṭ manuscripts from the Parisino-petropolitanus and London manuscripts. After a comparison with features of Umayyad art, the author argues that a new concept of the Qur'ān as a book implies the inclusion of illuminations. About this change, the author attests it "is meaningful as it reveals the aspirations of a more sophisticated community – at least in some circles – well aware of their cultural environment". He hypothesises that the Christian and Jewish illuminators influenced this aspect of the Qur'ān book.

The fourth chapter, *Imperial 'scriptoria'* contains a description of the Dublin manuscript Is 1404 and a hypothesis about its complete form, in addition to a survey of the writing and the orthography. The "scripto plena" is commonly found in specific words in the manuscript. The author establishes a comparison with other manuscripts in terms of content, dating and codicological and palaeographical aspects. He also very briefly refers to a series of manuscripts, particularly the fragments from Ṣanʿā'. Déroche concludes that more work is needed in order to ascribe specific fragments of Qur'ān manuscripts to the manuscripts of the Umayyad period or to the beginning of Abbasid rule, he states that "a clear division between the Umayyad period and the beginnings of Abbasid rule proves particularly difficult as far as manuscript production is concerned".

This book satisfies the expectations of the title, particularly its subtitle: *A First Overview.* As for the history of the Qur'ān based on old Qur'ān manuscripts, the position of the author prudently combines both the acceptance of the 'official' history of the Qur'ān disseminated in the ancient Islamic sources and sometimes confirmed by the study of Qur'ān manuscripts with caution towards the lack of available evidence about the individual ownership of manuscripts. There are occasions where Déroche provides brief answers to some crucial questions which he raised in his *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de* l'*islam*, such as the role played by the orality in the manuscript, and the interactions between the recitation process and the writing process of the same manuscript. The book offers some new results about old Qur'ān manuscripts, and helpfully provides new material and new images of Qur'ān manuscripts dated to the Umayyad period.

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