Introduction

The early copies of the Qur'an emerged as a possible object for scientific investigation towards the middle of the nineteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, a Danish scholar, Johann Christian Georg Adler had already examined a few Qur'anic manuscripts kept in the Royal Library in Copenhagen but concluded that there was little to be gained from their study.¹ Things had apparently changed substantially when the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres organised in 1858 a scholarly competition with the following subject matter: "faire l'histoire critique du texte du Coran".² The advice offered to the prospective candidates hinted at the early copies as a possible source of evidence. The acquisition in 1833 by the then Royal Library in Paris of the early Qur'anic fragments collected by Jean-Louis Asselin de Cherville from the 'Amr mosque in Fustat explains the suggestion of the committee of the Academy who formulated the subject matter. Its members, Ernest Renan, Joseph Reinaud, Armand-Pierre Caussin de Perceval and Jules Mohl, may also have been aware of the leaves, which were in the possession of Jean-Joseph Marcel, a member of the French expedition to Egypt who brought back with him a handsome sample of fragments taken from the same source.³ Three essays were sent to the Academy. One dealt handsomely with the peculiarities of the early Qur'anic manuscripts. Its author, Michele Amari, had actually been working on the Parisian collection.⁴ However, its contribution was eclipsed by that of Theodor Nöldeke, which was translated into German and became the standard work on the Qur'an: the *Geschichte des Qorâns* [*History of the Qur'an*].⁵ Nöldeke

1 J.C.G. Adler, *Descriptio codicum quorundam cuficorum partes Corani exhibentium in Bibliotheca regia hafniensi et ex iisdem de scriptura Arabum observationes novæ, Præmittitur disquisitio generalis de arte scribendi apud Arabes ex ipsis auctoribus arabicis adhuc ineditis sumta*, Altona, 1780, p. 27.

2 Séance du 26 [juin 1857], *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 1857, p. 139. See also F. Déroche, La genèse de la *Geschichte des Qorâns*, in *Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines*, F. Déroche ed. (forthcoming).

3 O. Vasilyeva, Oriental manuscripts in the National Library of Russia, *Manuscripta Orientalia* 2–2 (June 1996), p. 20; F. Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam. Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*, [Texts and studies on the Qur'an 5] Leiden-Boston, 2009, pp. 8–16.

4 M. Amari, *Bibliographie primitive du Coran*, ed. by H. Dérenbourg, in *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari*, i, Palermo, 1910, pp. 1–22.

5 T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorâns*, Göttingen, 1860. The work was later revised and expanded

had been able to look at early fragments, in Berlin and Gotha, but they were later than those in Paris and their peculiarities were minor in comparison with the standard text of the Qur'an. He therefore came to the conclusion already reached a century earlier by Adler.

In the second edition of the *Geschichte des Qorâns*, this view was qualified by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl who used the evidence gained from the earliest copies of the Qur'an in their presentation of the later history of the text.⁶ They actually started collecting photographs, which were long thought to have disappeared and are now part of the *Corpus coranicum* project led by the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.⁷ This effort, launched in the 1930s, did actually only bring limited results and the research in this field came to an almost complete halt for half a century. The debate started at the end of the 1970s by John Wansbrough's iconoclast views about the date at which the Qur'an was compiled as a text, brought about a keener interest for any kind of evidence of the Qur'anic text existence before the third (AH)/ninth (AD) century.⁸

What kind of argument supports earlier dates for manuscripts in general and Qur'anic copies in particular? In the Islamic tradition, the question was to some extent answered by the various copies, which were related to the third caliph, 'Uthmān. In addition to those which are known through sources to have been preserved in various places in pre-modern times and have sometimes drawn the scholarly interest they deserve,⁹ a few manuscripts are today said to be the caliph's own copy.¹⁰ The argument can be extended to other copies attributed

by Nöldeke's students, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl (*Geschichte des Qorâns*, 2nd edition, Leipzig, 1909–1938).

6 G. Bergsträsser and O. Pretzl, op. cit., 2nd edition, vol. 3, pp. 249–274.

7 See the *Corpus coranicum* website (<http://koran.bbaw.de/materialien/gotthelf-bergstraesser-archiv>).

8 J. Wansbrough, *Quranic studies, Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977 [London Oriental series, 31], pp. 43–52.

9 See for instance E. Quatremère, Sur le goût des livres chez les orientaux, *Journal Asiatique* série 3, vol. 6 (1838), pp. 41–45; J.M. Mouton, De quelques reliques conservées à Damas au Moyen Age, Stratégie politique et religiosité populaire sous les Bourides, *Annales islamologiques* 27 (1993), pp. 247–254; P. Buresi, Une relique almohade: l'utilisation du coran (attribué à 'Uthmān b. 'Affān [644–656]) de la grande mosquée de Cordoue, in *Lieux de cultes: aires votives, temples, églises, mosquées. IX^e colloque international sur l'histoire et l'archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord antique et médiévale. Tripoli, 19–25 février 2005*, Paris [Etudes d'Antiquités africaines], 2008, pp. 273–280.

10 Ş. al-Munajjid (*Dirāsāt fī tārikh al-khaṭṭ al-'arabī mundhu bidāyatihī ilā nihāyat al-'aṣr*

to other prominent figures of the same period, like ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib or his son, Ḥusayn. In some cases, the attribution relies on a colophon, but in other cases, we are just dealing with a word-of-mouth attribution—as with the copy in Tashkent for instance. One should add that it is not always clear whether these copies are a manuscript in the hand of the caliph—the copy ‘Uthmān is said to have been reading when he was killed—or one of the *maṣāḥif al-amṣār*, in other words the copies he sent to the main cities of his empire. Salah al-din al-Munajjid devoted a chapter of his *Dirāsāt* to the question and came to the conclusion that, in spite of their age, they were not linked to ‘Uthmān or any of the persons mentioned.¹¹ More recently, Tayyar Altıkulaç published a facsimile of three such copies, kept one in the Topkapı Sarayı Library,¹² the second one in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum¹³—also in Istanbul—and the third one in Cairo.¹⁴ Using the information found in the specialised treatises devoted to the *rasm ‘uthmāni*, he also concluded that the three copies could not be those of ‘Uthmān, even if the latter’s name appeared in the colophon of the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum copy—which is actually a gross forgery. As far as ‘Uthmān’s own copy is concerned, the question was actually answered at an early date by Mālīk b. Anas who, when asked about it, answered flatly that it had disappeared.¹⁵

Do we have extant copies contemporary with the reign of the caliph? This question is difficult to answer. The doubt which has been cast on the date of the Qur’an, for instance by John Wansbrough, may explain the caution with which some scholars viewed the possibility that manuscripts or fragments of the Qur’an of an early date might have survived. However, traditional Arabic sources insist on the fact that the Qur’an was transcribed before the middle of the first century of Islam. The accounts about the writing down of the Qur’an

al-umawī—Etudes de paléographie arabe, Beirut, 1972, pp. 50–60) listed a few of these manuscripts, but many more can be found (see in ch. 4 MS Dublin, CBL Is 1404 for instance).

11 Ibid.

12 *Al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf* (in Arabic). *Al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf attributed to ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affān (The copy at the Topkapı Palace Museum)*, ed. by Tayyar Altıkulaç, Istanbul, 1428/2007.

13 Hz. Osman’a nisbet edilen mushaf-ı şarīf. *Türk ve İslām Eserleri nüshası. Al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf al-mansūb ilā ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān* (in Arabic), ed. by Tayyar Altıkulaç, Istanbul, 2007.

14 *Al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf* (in Arabic). *Al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf attributed to ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affān (The copy at al-Mashhad al-Husayni in Cairo)*, ed. by Tayyar Altıkulaç, 2 vols., Istanbul, 1430/2009.

15 A. Jahdani, *Du fiqh à la codicologie. Quelques opinions de Malik (m. 179/796) sur le Coran-codex*, *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 56 (2006) [Actes de la conférence internationale sur les manuscrits du Coran (Bologne, 26–28 septembre 2002)], p. 274.

as the result of a decision taken by Abū Bakr, the first caliph, then by 'Uthmān, are well known.¹⁶ Harald Motzki, using text critical methods, was able to show that these reports were circulating by the extreme end of the seventh or early eighth century AD.¹⁷ According to him,

the two traditions which tell the history of the *muṣḥaf* and are widely adopted in Muslim scholarship were both brought into circulation by Ibn Shihāb [al-Zuhri] and can be dated to the first quarter of the 2nd century AH. The date of al-Zuhri's death [124/742] is the terminus post quem.¹⁸

He would go a step further and consider that al-Zuhri's informants can be considered as the first link and that the information can therefore be traced back to the last decades of the first (AH)/seventh (AD) century.¹⁹ On the other hand, Estelle Whelan collected from various Arabic sources indications about copyists who were transcribing the Qur'anic text by the end of the first century AH and used the epigraphic evidence of the Dome of the Rock to support the idea that the written Qur'an was circulating during the second half of the first century AH.²⁰

Arabic sources have also been used for the more general issue of the history of the Arabic script—with the idea of getting a tool for dating purposes. Early Western scholarship in this field tried to rely on traditional knowledge in order to build an Arabic palaeography. The idea that the Arabic sources had in store the key to this history was circulating at an early date and was formulated in a more formal way by Adler by the end of the eighteenth century.²¹ The sources were actually ripe with names of scripts, which seemed to provide a sound basis for a typology. The traditional way of looking at the scripts is of course in itself something very important as it suggests that local styles were closely involved in the diffusion of the text, as many scripts are named according to their place of origin, rather than to the period in which they were used. However, the texts did not provide any description which could help in the identification of actual scripts found on manuscripts—even in the case of the so called Kufic.

16 See F. Schwally, op. cit., 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1919, vol. II.

17 H. Motzki, "The collection of the Qur'ān, A reconsideration of Western views in light of recent methodological development", *Der Islam* 78 (2001), pp. 1–34.

18 Ibid., p. 29.

19 Ibid., p. 31.

20 E. Whelan, Evidence for the early codification of the Qur'an, *JAOS* 118 (1998), pp. 10–14.

21 J.G.C. Adler, op. cit., pp. 9–14.

In spite of the somewhat disappointing results of this approach, it provided a clue about the earliest scripts. As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy had found in the *Fihrist* of al-Nadīm a short account of the external appearance of the script of Mecca.²² Al-Nadīm's description has often been quoted, but in the context of a history of the Qur'anic manuscript during Umayyad times, it is an important piece of evidence:

The first Arabic scripts were the Meccan and after that the Medinan, then the Basran, then the Kufan. As regards the Mekkan and Medinan, there is in its [*sic*] *alifs* a turning to the right and an elevation of the vertical strokes; and in its [*sic*] form, there is a slight inclination.²³

The evolution of the interpretation of this text has already been recorded. Sketchy as it may be, it allows us to link a name with a specific style, even if it should be understood that some local differences had existed at that time. The history of the concept of *ḥijāzī* script is clear in this respect: the various authors took for granted that the script of Mecca and that of Medina were not so different from one another as to prevent subsuming both of them under the same name, derived from the region of the Arabian peninsula where both cities are located.²⁴ Actually, one can argue that the decision taken by Muhammad to have Meccan prisoners to redeem their freedom by teaching Medinan children how to write can be taken as an indication of the relative closeness of the scripts in question.²⁵ Two aspects are described: the general appearance (vertical extension of the ascenders and slanting) and a specificity of the *alif*.

The validity of the use of al-Nadīm's account as a basis for an identification of the early Qur'anic copies has been questioned in an unpublished paper by Estelle Whelan whose point has been taken up by Sheila Blair.²⁶ According to her, *ḥijāzī* is "a scholarly artefact based on a series of methodological missteps."²⁷ First, the characteristics of a single letter are insufficient to define a

22 A.I. Silvestre de Sacy, *Mémoire sur l'origine et les anciens monumens de la littérature parmi les Arabes, Mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 50, 1808, pp. 253–254.

23 Al-Nadīm, *K. al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, Tehran, 1971, p. 9.

24 See for instance F. Déroche, op. cit. (2009), pp. 109–117.

25 L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām* I, Milan, 1905, p. 496, § 80.

26 *Islamic calligraphy*, Edinburgh, 2006, p. 108.

27 Ibid. She also overlooks the fact that the four names are repeated in the following paragraph under the heading "Qur'anic scripts" (al-Nadīm, op. cit., p. 9).

script, second al-Nadīm is not dealing with Qur'anic scripts but with "the earliest Arabic writing in general."²⁸ On this last point, Whelan obviously missed a crucial comment by Adolf Grohmann who had already noted that it was "quite important to state that this style of writing (= *ḥijāzī*) is ... a secular script."²⁹ Moreover, she anachronistically retrojected the concept of Qur'anic scripts to the earliest period of Qur'anic manuscripts production in order to sustain her criticism. Actually, the study of the Umayyad period may help us in finding out the moment when the concept emerged. As for the first point, it is methodologically true that the description of a single letter cannot serve as a basis for a palaeographical typology but, as we have seen, al-Nadīm does not only describe the *alif*, he also hints at the general appearance of these scripts. One wonders nevertheless why the quest for methodological coherence underpinning Whelan's critic has not been extended to the whole field of Arabic palaeographical studies and led to the elimination of any traditional or tradition related name of a script which is not based on a full description in the sources. In most instances, the latter do not even contain the description of a single letter.

In principle, when trying to reconstruct the history of the transmission of the Qur'anic text in Umayyad times, we should find information in the manuscripts themselves. A later author, al-Dānī, saw an Umayyad copy of the Qur'an with a colophon indicating the name of the copyist and the date of the transcription.³⁰ However, with the exception of the spurious colophons, which were mentioned previously, no such direct evidence prior to the third/ninth century has survived, probably because the first and last folios of a manuscript, where information about the copy can be found, are the most exposed to wear and tear and the first to disappear. Actually, most of the manuscripts we shall be dealing with are in a fragmentary state and were preserved in geniza-like depots in mosques.³¹ The fragmentary state of the evidence at hand and the lack of any direct information as to the date of the copies are actually a major impediment in the study of the early material and have been used as an argument against its dating prior to the third/ninth century.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ A. Grohmann, The problem of dating early Qur'āns, *Der Islam* 33 (1958), pp. 221–222.

³⁰ Al-Dānī, *al-Muqni' fi ma'rifa marsūm maṣāḥifahl al-amṣār*, ed. M.A. Dahmān, Damas, n.d., p. 88.

³¹ J. Sadan, Genizah and genizah-like practices in Islamic and Jewish traditions. Customs concerning the disposal of worn-out Sacred Books in the Middle Ages, according to an Ottoman source, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43 (1986), pp. 37–58.

However, it seems nowadays possible to state that we do have more or less substantial parts of copies which can be dated to the Umayyad period through the combination of various approaches: palaeography, philology, art history and, when possible, C14 analysis of the parchment used for the transcription of the text. Some of the manuscripts which are part of the *ḥijāzī* corpus may even predate the Umayyad period,³² but there is for the moment little which can be argued in support of a very early date.

Palaeography and codicology are of course crucial in the study of the early copies of the Qur'an and play a major role in the study of the Umayyad *muṣḥafs* which, as we have seen, do not provide direct evidence about their age. Codicology may contribute in our understanding of the material, although its fragmentary state makes such basic issues as the dominant kind of gathering or the bindings completely inaccessible. The study of the scripts on the other hand can rely on the textual evidence provided by al-Nadīm's description of the script of Mecca as a starting point. The later part of the Umayyad period, with the development of formal scripts, is to some extent easier to analyse than the moment when the *ḥijāzī* style predominates. The accumulation of material during the last decades allows now for the constitution of series of documents sharing some characteristics and sometimes related between them. The comparison with inscriptions, especially those which were discovered in Saudi Arabia during the last decades, can also be fruitful.³³

The validity of palaeographic studies has however been questioned. Among the critics levelled against this approach, those expounded by Sheila Blair, largely based on Estelle Whelan's views, require some consideration. Although part of her point is linked with untenable hypotheses, they call for comments as they take a methodological stance and focus on problems similar to those we shall face when dealing with some of the Umayyad scripts. Criticising the typology of Abbasid styles proposed by the present writer, she first notes that "nowhere is it demonstrated that the criteria chosen reveal significant differences in scripts, not just variations of an individual hand."³⁴ She then points to the fact that the "lack of clarity in defining styles is clear from the high number enumerated, ... at least nineteen variants among the seventy examples ... with some manuscripts identified as a combination of styles."³⁵ Blair bases her

32 In the following pages, the adjective *ḥijāzī* will only be used, unless stated otherwise, in reference to the script, without any implication as far as the place of copy or the *qir'āt* are concerned.

33 A. George, *The rise of Islamic calligraphy*, London, 2010, pp. 28–30.

34 S. Blair, op. cit., 109.

35 Ibid., pp. 109–110.

comments on the catalogue of the N.D. Khalili collection of Islamic art, forgetting that it was an offshoot of the study of the Bibliothèque Nationale collection where 263 fragments were arranged under twenty-six headings,³⁶ corresponding to seven larger clusters. There are actually some disparities between the former, which are sometimes represented by one item only, and others with twenty³⁷ or even fifty-five items.³⁸ The repetition of the same style on so many copies, and with some minute differences from one example to the next, is in itself indicative of the fact that we are dealing with a style, not with the idiosyncrasies and the production of individual hands. The latter can be recognised in the slight variations between two manuscripts attributed to the same style. A survey of the various collections accessible showed that a few scripts, notably D I and D III, were represented throughout the whole spectrum of book production, from calligraphic masterpieces to crude renditions. The linguistic model of concentric circles helps understanding the various levels of realisation of a common repertory, from highly skilled calligraphers to hobbledehoy hands.³⁹ It therefore calls for categories for those fragments, which attempt to imitate the best examples with limited success.⁴⁰ The utilisation of this typology by other scholars points to the fact that it is at least partially valid in other contexts than the Egyptian material, which makes up the bulk of the Parisian collection.

The series are crucial for the typology and it is certainly a moot point whether some of the groups with few items, like C, should be partly reconsidered.⁴¹ Palaeography is a matter of patience and prudence. Many problems may

36 The book is mentioned in the bibliography, but is only globally quoted in n. 44, p. 154.

37 F. Déroche, *Les manuscrits du Coran: Aux origines de la calligraphie coranique* [Bibliothèque Nationale, Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, 2^e partie, Manuscrits musulmans, I/1], Paris, 1983, pp. 70–74.

38 Ibid., pp. 84–97.

39 G. Khan, *Arabic papyri. Selected material from the Khalili collection* [Studies in the Khalili collection, vol. I], Londres, 1992, p. 39.

40 'D commun', etc.

41 This is not considered as a problem by Blair who readily admits the validity of Whelan's "Group 2" with a single manuscript, Dublin, CBL MS 1404 (p. 135, n. 47). I questioned Whelan's choice of manuscripts, that is to say the first step of her research: she was obviously trying to produce a typology, but clearly never embarked on a survey of the material in order to build up a corpus, then to establish series. What she did had more to do with a "supermarket approach", taking items which were supposed to demonstrate her point without any wider investigation of the context. Whelan's sometimes naive remarks are precisely due to a limited experience with the early Qur'anic manuscripts (see for instance p. 124 or p. 132, n. 68). Answering my own critics about "Group 2", Blair contended

be solved once more material has become available for study and the palaeographer has to be careful not mishandling the material. The *ḥijāzī* is a case in point. When I first investigated these scripts, few *ḥijāzī* manuscripts were published or available. Instead of refraining from devising unsatisfactory sub-categories for the eight fragments in the Bibliothèque Nationale,⁴² I decided to submit them to the same typological approach as the rest of the material and failed to identify the highly individual aspect of these hands. Conversely, in 1983, I had to leave aside the script which will be discussed in chapter 3 among those I was unable to classify because I had no parallel. The comparatively high number of styles should not be seen as a problem: in the fourth/tenth century, al-Nadīm himself knew as many as sixteen styles of early Qur'anic scripts,⁴³ and a later calligrapher boasted that he had mastered seventy styles.⁴⁴ A last point: far from focusing only on a few shapes of letters, the method also takes into account a more global approach to these formal scripts. Blair strangely omits an important point: an analysis of the two largest groups, B II and D I, provided an insight into the “rules” governing each of them (script module, number of lines).⁴⁵ Recently, Alain George's deep insight into the proportions of these scripts has given a new dimension to the palaeographical investigation.⁴⁶

Blair fails to grasp an important point when she notes that “the method overlooks ... the changing form of the letters which can assume different shapes and heights depending on the other letters in a word.”⁴⁷ Her remark could apply to later hands, but in Abbasid times the scripts are composed scripts and their

that Whelan's wild speculations about the milieu in which she believed the copy was produced (which she terms “established provenance and representativeness of a broad juxtaposition”) fully justified this choice (ibid.).

42 The ninth fragment of this group is a later example which I suggested to identify as an archaising trend.

43 Al-Nadīm, op. cit., p. 9.

44 So says al-Rawandī in his *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr* (see D. Meneghini Corrales, Il capitolo sulla scrittura nel *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr* di Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Sulaymān al-Rāwandī, *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 33/3, Serie orientale 25, p. 231).

45 F. Déroche, A propos d'une série de manuscrits coraniques anciens, in *Les manuscrits du Moyen-Orient*, F. Déroche ed. [Varia Turcica VIII], Istanbul-Paris, 1989, pp. 101–111; id., The Qur'an of Amāḡūr, *Manuscripts of the Middle-East* 5 (1990–1991), pp. 59–66.

46 A. George, op. cit.; see also id., The geometry of the Qur'an of Amāḡūr: a preliminary study of proportion in early Islamic calligraphy, *Muqarnas* 20 (2003), pp. 1–15; id., The geometry of early Qur'anic manuscripts, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9–1 (2007), pp. 78–110.

47 S. Blair, op. cit., p. 110.

stability is remarkable as far as the shape and size of the letters is concerned.⁴⁸ In this respect, a direct experience with the material is crucial since the picture of a folio cannot convey this regularity over a whole manuscript. This stability can actually be approached from another (and not exclusive) point of view: George's recent researches have demonstrated that a grid governing the size of the letters maintained their dimensions in quite a constant way.⁴⁹

The issue of chronology is of course crucial in palaeography. According to Blair, this "methodology (i.e. palaeography) ... favours linear development over regional variation"⁵⁰ and strayed from a purely formal arrangement (my A to E groups) to the assumption of a chronological order. As a matter of fact, this is hardly the case. On palaeographic grounds, a *ḥijāzī* style, B Ia, was included in Group B because a diachronic continuity could be recognised in this case between the early period and the third/ninth century.⁵¹ On the other hand, I made it clear from the beginning that the styles were overlapping⁵² and that there were possibly "local schools" and "regional peculiarities".⁵³ As early as 1983, I wondered whether the script families were "a style used simultaneously by various workshops or conversely ... (had to be) attributed to a specific workshop or even to a sole scribe."⁵⁴ The study of the Umayyad *muṣḥaf* production actually faces similar problems as will become clear soon and the approach which had been used previously with the early Abbasid scripts will be applied to the formal scripts of the period. There remains no doubt that the comparison with inscriptions, especially those which were discovered in Saudi Arabia during the last decades, will also be fruitful.⁵⁵ Over the last thirty years,

48 With the exception of final *yā'*, and a few cases of "superposition" involving the *jīm/ḥā'*/*khā'* letter.

49 A. George, op. cit., pp. 55–74.

50 S. Blair, op. cit., p. 110. This critic is also present in Y. Dutton, An Umayyad fragment of the Qur'an and its dating, *Journal of Qur'anic studies* 9–2 (2007), p. 82.

51 F. Déroche, op. cit. (1983), p. 37 and pl. IX. However, I stressed that the script "should be considered a form of Hijazi" (F. Déroche, *The Abbasid tradition, Qur'āns of the 8th to the 10th centuries* [The Nasser D. Khalili collection of Islamic art, I], London, 1992, p. 35). For the same reason it would have been methodologically more advisable to include H IV into Group C.

52 F. Déroche, op. cit. (1983), p. 14.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 50.

55 A. George, op. cit., pp. 28–30. M.M. al-Azami, *The history of the Qur'anic text, from revelation to compilation. A comparative study with the Old and New Testaments*, Leicester, 2003, pp. 126–128 (notably fig. 9.13, dated 80/699–700 and 9.14, dated 84/703 taken from S. al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmīyya min Makka al-Mukarrama*, Riyadh, 1416/1995, pp. 26–29 and 160–161).

palaeography has helped to classify what was before “a largely indistinct mass”⁵⁶ and although many questions still remain unanswered, it will remain a fundamental tool in the study of the manuscripts of this period as well as from later ages. Far from arbitrarily cutting the material from its context, it allowed to organise and date it in order to understand its complex history—which had not been achieved before.

Philology can in its turn be of some help in organising the material: the evolution of Qur’anic orthography in Umayyad times contributes to a rough chronological distribution of the evidence.⁵⁷ In this case again, no steady development has to be expected since we know from sources like Mālik b. Anas that towards the middle of the second/eighth century some milieux were strongly in favour of the original orthography of the text.⁵⁸ Some *muṣḥafs* from late Umayyad times may therefore be closer in this respect to the *Codex Parisino-petropolitanus* than to strictly contemporary copies.

Art history contributes decisively to the dating of Umayyad manuscripts. Although Qur’anic manuscripts from the first three centuries of the hijra were until recently seldom integrated into art historical studies,⁵⁹ art historians started playing a crucial role in the field of manuscript studies since they took a decisive step. First Marilyn Jenkins,⁶⁰ then a little later Hans Caspar von Bothmer⁶¹ associated the epithet “Umayyad” with manuscripts, actually with a manuscript: the famous Qur’anic copy found in Sanaa (DaM Inv. 20.33–1) with its striking opening page with the depiction of two arched buildings. In principle, the study of the illumination found on a given manuscript allows one to relate it to other artistic contemporary productions and thus to suggest a date for it. Of course, many manuscripts are not illuminated, but they can in turn be related to others for their script, orthography, etc.

The contribution of C14 dating to the overall history of the handwritten transmission of the Qur’an in Umayyad times should not be neglected, but the results of such analysis need in the present writer’s opinion to be taken cautiously. The role of C14 dating has been increasing over the last years since it helped answering the problem of dating early copies on what seemed a more

56 A. George, op. cit., p. 19.

57 F. Déroche, op. cit. (1983), pp. 30–35.

58 A. Jahdani, op. cit., p. 273.

59 See for instance R. Ettinghausen, *Peinture arabe*, Geneva, 1962, pp. 167–170.

60 M. Jenkins, A vocabulary of Umayyad ornament, in *Maṣāḥif Ṣan’ā’*, Kuwait, 1985, pp. 19–23.

61 H.C. von Bothmer, Architekturbilder im Koran. Eine Prachthandschrift der Umayyadenzeit aus dem Yemen, *Pantheon* 45 (1987), pp. 4–20.

reliable basis than palaeography. Moreover, the reactivity of the tools used for the measurements has been increasing over the years and the calibration dataset has become more accurate.⁶² Conservators agree now more easily to allow for some parchment to be sampled in this process since the amount of raw material required for an analysis has been dramatically reduced. But one has to remain aware of the fact that the results are to be matched with other evidence. The analysis of dated parchment will certainly lead to a higher accuracy in the calibration process. For the moment, it underlines the limitations of this technique. The famous “Qur’an of the Nurse” is one of the best-documented manuscripts at hand. Its colophon and its deed of waqf allow us to know that the copy was completed in 410/1020.⁶³ An analysis performed on a piece of parchment taken from the manuscript helped to evaluate the accuracy of the measurements. A French laboratory determined the radiocarbon age of the parchment as BP 1130±30.⁶⁴ This result was then calibrated and gave a date range comprised between 871 and 986 AD, with a probability of 95 %. The most probable dates, arranged in decreasing order of probability were 937, 895 and 785 AD. The closest result, that is to say 937 AD, is separated by eighty-three years from the date provided by the colophon. If we use the upper limit of the date range, that is to say 986 AD, the difference still amounts to fifty-four years, that is to say half a century.

The results may also be closer to the data provided by the manuscripts themselves. Another copy, which bears a *waqfiyya* date of 295/907 has been dated by the same laboratory to BP 1205±30.⁶⁵ The calibrated radiocarbon age

62 Y. Dutton, op. cit., pp. 57–87. On the other hand, some results are disappointing when they suggest a wide time span for the production of the parchment (see for instance the dating of Saint Petersburg, IOS E 20, between 775 AD and 995 AD in E. Rezvan, On the dating of an “Uthmanic Qur’an” from Saint Petersburg, *Manuscripta Orientalia* 6–3 [September 2000], pp. 19–22).

63 M. al-Muqḍād al-Wartātānī, *al-burnus fi Bārīz ...* /Si Mohamed el Mokdad el Ouertatani, *Le burnous à Paris. Récit du voyage effectué en France et en Suisse*, Tunis, 1332/1914, p. 204 and fig. between p. 204 and 205; B. Roy, Un don de la gouvernante de Badis à la grande mosquée de Kairouan, *Bulletin archéologique du comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques*, 1921, pp. 123–126; B. Roy and P. Poinssot, *Inscriptions arabes de Kairouan*, [Publications de l’Institut des Hautes études de Tunis, II/1], Paris, 1950, pp. 27–32, n° 9 and fig. 7–8; M. al-Nayyāl, *Al-maktaba al-āthariyya bi-l-Qayrawān. ‘Arḍ—Dalīl*, Tunis, 1963, p. 14, n° 1, p. 19 and fig. pp. 15–16. An illustration of the “colophon” is also found in G. Marçais and L. Poinssot, *Objets kairouanais, IX^e au XIII^e siècle, Reliures verreries, cuivres et bronzes, bijoux*, t. I, Paris, 1948, pp. 310–311 and fig. 16.

64 Ref. Lyon-5354 (SacA-11954).

65 Ref. Lyon-5355 (SacA-11955).

yielded a time range from 716 to 891AD and the most probable dates, according to the laboratory were, once again in decreasing order of probability: 791, 806 and 780AD. The most probable result, 791AD, is 116 years earlier than the actual date of the *waqfiyya*, although it may be objected that the manuscript may have been transcribed slightly earlier. On the other hand, the upper value of the date range, that is to say 891AD, is very close—predating the *waqfiyya* by only sixteen years. The methods used seem however to be fairly accurate as far as the measurements are concerned. In order to evaluate on the one hand their reliability from a purely physical point of view and on the other to check the date of three controversial copies of the Qur'an, I took a sample from each of the three manuscripts, then divided each sample into two pieces and gave to two different laboratories a set of three pieces. The agreement between the two laboratories was obvious: the readings were very close to each other, 677 to 858AD against 676 to 869AD in the first case, 671 to 773AD against 650 to 764AD in the second and 684 to 867AD against 672 to 853AD in the third one. It should be added, and this is certainly one of the most beneficial results of this approach, that the three manuscripts were attributed to the early fifth/eleventh century on the basis of a *waqfiyya* associated with them. The results of the C14 analysis definitively discarded this option and the palaeographical attribution to the third/ninth century was confirmed. As a conclusion, and although recent publications seem overconfident in their reliance on the C14 method, the last word should stay with the philologist, the historian or the palaeographer.

This becomes especially clear when such measurements provide results which simply cannot be accepted. Two samples from the famous Sanaa palimpsest (Sanaa, DaM Inv. 01–27.1) were recently dated with this method.⁶⁶ According to the laboratory, one folio was produced between 543 and 643AD whereas the other one was made between 433 and 599AD.⁶⁷ Later dates would be easier to explain by a contamination. Here the problem may lie with the conditions (arid or semi-arid climate) under which the cattle, the hides of which were later turned into parchment, was raised.

The progress accomplished in the dating of the material and the understanding of the chronology of the period cannot hide the fact that the limits of the period remain an especially thorny issue, the more so because the time span is

66 An analysis of another folio of the manuscript has been performed in the USA, see B. Sadeghi and U. Bergmann, *The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'an of the Prophet, Arabica* 57 (2010), pp. 348–353. See ch. 2.

67 I owe the results to the kindness of Christian Robin whom I thank heartily.

comparatively short. The results of C14 analysis are quite valuable as a first indication of the age of the copies, but their accuracy is insufficient when it comes to arranging the material within a period which lasted less than a century. As we do not have material dated directly, it is impossible to be absolutely certain that, for instance, some of the manuscripts which I consider as late Umayyad were not actually produced during the first decade(s) of Abbasid rule: copyists and illuminators did not completely change their habits overnight although they may have adapted their production to the wishes of their patrons. There is no doubt that with more material published our understanding of the developments which marked the middle of the second/eighth century will gain in accuracy.

A geographical attribution of the material remains unfortunately beyond reach. Its inclusion in one of the four large deposits which helped preserving some of the early Qur'anic manuscripts up to the present does not entail that it was produced in the same place. The *qirā'āt*, as perceived from the division of the text into verses or through the vocalisation when it begins to be used, have been scrutinised in order to deduce the place of origin of the copies.⁶⁸ The conclusions of such investigations should be taken cautiously as we have no certainty that the *qirā'āt* of the Umayyad period were similar to those which we know. In addition, we do not know the geographical distribution of the various systems during the period under consideration. Clues which would allow the ascription to a place of at least some copies have yet to be discovered.

Why identify more precisely the early copies of the Qur'an? What can be learned from them? In the traditional Muslim view, only the recited text matters. When the al-Azhar specialists convened to produce a reliable edition of the Qur'an towards 1920, they never thought of looking for the earliest written witnesses, had they known how to identify them, but used in the course of their work the specialised literature on the *qirā'āt* or the orthography which developed in Muslim scholarly circles from the second/eighth century onwards.⁶⁹

First, these manuscripts are important for our knowledge of the state of the Qur'an at an early date. The evidence they provide about the early compilation of the text helps closing the debate which was opened by the "hyper-critical school" of thought. Second, as exemplified by the Sanaa palimpsest in the most dramatic way, they provide information about the Qur'anic revelations that

68 See for instance Y. Dutton, op. cit., pp. 81–82.

69 G. Bergsträsser, Plan eines Apparatus Criticus zum Koran, *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Abteilung* 1930, Heft 7, Munich, 1930, pp. 4–6.

have not been preserved by the Muslim tradition. Third, these manuscripts are our only source, imperfect as it may be, about the oral tradition which they partly reflect. Much work has still to be done in order to understand some peculiarities of the written text which may correspond to older oral renditions, but some specificities found in the early copies point in that direction. Fourth, in a very understandable way, although it may to some extent contradict the traditional point of view, the early manuscripts can provide clues about some readings or on the later orthography. Fifth, the dramatic change in the appearance of copies, which I hope to show, suggests that the perception and the role of these copies in Islamic culture and society underwent a deep transformation during the Umayyad period. They show the first attempts at producing manuscripts of the highest quality and set standards for the later development of the Islamic book. Finally, they provide us with a direct insight into the culture and the faith of the first Muslim communities. The history of the Qur'anic text may be the subject of a debate, although in my view it is reflected in its handwritten transmission. On the other hand and beyond any doubt, the *muṣṣḥaf*—that is to say the object in the shape of a book which contains the Revelation—has a history. The present book does not intend to answer all these points, which would require to have the material from this period published in a more systematic way. It aims however at providing new information and fresh insights into the history of the *muṣṣḥaf* during Umayyad times.

The period under consideration, extending from the end of the conflict between 'Alī and Mu'āwīya (41/660) and the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 132/750, was also a time of momentous change. The centre of the new empire was transferred to Syria and Damascus became its capital. With the advent of the caliphate of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam and the end of Ibn al-Zubayr's revolt in 73/692 began a period of particular importance, notably under the reigns of 'Abd al-Malik (from 65/685 to 86/705) and of his successor, al-Walid (from 86/705 to 96/715). The administration of the empire underwent radical transformations and a new image of the state emerged. A very significant step was taken when Arabic became the language—and the script—of the administration. The construction of impressive buildings, notably the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, demonstrates that the rulers were promoting Islam as the religion of the new state—as the Dome inscriptions also make clear. Various elements suggest that the administration became more efficient, notably in the collection of the taxes, and that the state had thus many more resources at its disposal than had been the case previously. As a result, Arabic as a language spread among conquered populations and Islam was propagated across the Empire.