The Qur'án of Amāgūr

by F. Déroche*

A few years ago, during a first investigation into the collection of the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul, I discovered a few pages from one of the most important manuscripts for the study of the history of the Islamic book during the first centuries of the Hijra: the Qur'án of Amāgūr. The first appearance of this manuscript in the field of palaeographic studies dates back to the publication by B. Moritz of his article on ‘Arabia’ in the first edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam. On plate IV, there was a reproduction of a page of this very distinctive Qur'án, a fragment of which was kept in the then Khedival Library in Cairo. Like most early Qur'áns, it is written on parchment, in oblong format; it has only three lines to the page and, in the upper margin of each recto side, a note stating that Amāgūr made it a waqf (plate I). The page size is approximately 125 x 195 mm.

In the field of early Arabic palaeography, the main problem is that of establishing a chronology. For the time being, three main approaches are in use. One way is to establish a relation between the manuscript and the inscriptions on stone, metal, etc.; but the differences in the material create important variations in the script itself, and very little has been achieved so far through this method. Another way, which was already used by E. Schroeder, is to use the illuminations found in a manuscript for dating purposes. Art history makes finding dated elements in other fields possible, but it makes the manuscripts and the writing itself secondary items and the datings are always approximate. The third, and main approach is the search for dated manuscripts, the writing of which could then give an indication of time for all related scripts. The lack of dated manuscripts did not allow us to achieve any significant results until recently. But it is this lack which made the few dated manuscripts, like Amāgūr’s Qur'án, so important.

The collection which I have been investigating thoroughly during the past five years, that of the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi in Istanbul, is probably the most important collection of early Islamic manuscripts, at least by its size (about 210,000 folios). Thanks to the many dated documents I have found it may offer an important contribution to the history of Arabic script. The dated manuscripts are actually only parts of the original manuscripts. Being mostly Qur'áns, they were kept in a kind of geniza in the courtyard of the Great Mosque in Damascus, until a fire at the end of the 19th century made it necessary to remove them. Syria was then part of the Ottoman Empire. The collection was thus carried to Istanbul: the best manuscripts went to the Topkapı Library and the rest was sent to the Evkaf Museum — later Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi — where it has been kept under the name of Şam Evrakı, ‘the Syrian papers.’ This incredible amount of documents is currently under study and will enable us to form a clearer picture of early Islamic bookmaking.

In this respect, the Qur'án of Amāgūr provides a good example of the answers we may expect, but also of the difficulties which are awaiting us when we turn to those most venerable manuscripts. When the reproduction of this Qur'án was published by Moritz, it immediately provided a date, for Amāgūr was the name of the ‘Abbásid governor of Damascus between 256/870 and 264/818. It was in fact the oldest dated Qur'án known, since two of those listed by Moritz proved to be more recent than he thought (Bibliothèque Nationale 336 and Cairo 387). In any case, what we already knew was sufficient to ascertain (1) the palaeographic type of the script, and (2) its approximate position in the chronology. The new material discovered in Istanbul does not modify these two basic facts, but a more complete understanding of this particular manuscript can be obtained.

In all, 242 folios of the Qur'án have been discovered in the Istanbul collection, some of them with a full page illumination; more importantly, two of the waqfiyyas, one of which is complete, give us extremely interesting information about the manuscript. We now know that this manuscript was made a waqf during the year 262/875-876. One of the waqfiyyas is dated Sa'bân 262 / April 30-May 28. The other waqfiyya dates from Ramaḍān 262 / May 29-June 27. This is not surprising, since, as we have already seen, Amāgūr was governor of Damascus between 256 and 264. But the manuscript did not belong to a mosque in Damascus. As is stated in one of the two documents, the Qur'án was made a waqf in the city of Tyre (in modern Lebanon). The name of the mosque or of the religious foundation is not given. This is confirmed by a note on the verso side of a folio from the fourth ṣuz, where a later hand has written:

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Plate II. The Qur‘ān of Amāgūr. One of the waqfīyyas. This waqfīyya is dated Ša‘bān 262 (April 30 — May 28, 876). MS Istanbul, TIEM, ŠE 13768/1.
Amāgūr made it a waqf in the city of Tyre. Finally, we are also told that this Qurʾān was a thirty-volume set. This fact had not yet been clear because the size of the script, with three lines to the page, could just as easily create the impression that it was a sixty-volume set.

The dates given in the two waqfiyās show that almost two months elapsed between the redaction of the two texts. The older text is found at the beginning of the fourth guzʿ (starting at Qurʾān III, 91). The other one is located at the end of a volume ending with Qurʾān XX, 114, that is to say, a little before the place which is now indicated as the end of the sixteenth guzʿ in modern Qurʾān editions. Does this mean that more than a third of the Qurʾān was copied during this period? This is not to be ruled out, if we compare these data with those found in modern manuscripts (see for example the series in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Arabe 542; but for a different timing see Baybars’ Qurʾān, for which at least one year was needed). Nevertheless, we cannot be sure that a work of such calligraphy could be realised so quickly.

It is possible that another explanation should be found. In these two cases, the waqfiyya comes before or after an illuminated double-page, with one line of text in the middle of the illumination; if we look closely at the mīns of the waqfiyya and compare them with those of the text written in the centre of the illumination, we find the same ductus, very different from that used in the rest of the manuscript. The alifs, too, are markedly different with their upper shaft slightly bent to the left. We are thus led to think that the illuminator responsible for the text on the illuminated pages, was another man than the calligrapher in charge of the copying of the rest of the manuscript. As soon as he had finished his work, the illuminator copied the waqfiyya and gave the volume to the mosque (or whatever it was).

In the second document (the one dated Ramadan 262, which was fully preserved), it is stated that the manuscripts were fī ṣundūqayn. What were these two sundūqs? In other statements of about the same age, when a Qurʾān set was kept in a box, we are told that the volumes are in a tābiʿ (in the singular). What does the word sundūq mean here? What is the difference — if any — between a tābiʿ and a sundūq? Does this unusual choice of two boxes for the same set reflect the desire of better sheltering the volumes, which were already protected by bindings which looked like boxes, the sides of the closed book being hidden by a leather casing glued onto the inside of the lower board. Unfortunately, no fragment of this manuscript has come down to us complete with its binding.

The style of the script used for the copy of this manuscript, which I call D I (in accordance with the typology developed for the study of the Bibliothèque Nationale collection of ancient Qurʾānic manuscripts), is well attested in the 3rd/9th century. It is, for example, the style of the ‘Abd al-Munʿim Qurʾān, a manuscript with a waqfiyya dated Dū al-Qaʿda 298 / July 911. It is assuredly one of the most brilliant calligraphic styles developed during this period. Its main features are the alif with its crescent-shaped lower extremity and the nūn with a return pointing slightly upwards. As shown on the chart I, in a sample of 97 Qurʾān copies in D I style, the script is associated mainly (78.35%) with manuscripts with five to nine lines to the page where the height of a single line is rather important. Its average size is between almost 22 mm (for D I manuscripts with 5 lines to the page) to about 11 mm (for D I manuscripts with 9 lines to the page). By comparison, in a sample of 122 manuscripts written in B II style, 75% have 14 to 16 lines to the page, with an average size of the line of about 5 to 6 mm. How does the Qurʾān of Amāgūr fit these characteristics? The palaeography, as far as the shape of the letters is concerned, is clearly that of the D I family, with the use of masīq in some cases in order to fill the last page(s) of a guzʿ (plate III); but the line height is comparatively larger than usual D I script, being approximately 29 mm (though there are some manuscripts of the same family with lines which are 38 mm high). Anyway, the Qurʾān of Amāgūr shows a script at the upper limit of D I, which means that the script is that of a particularly carefully-made manuscript, especially when we remember that the three lines to the page format is rather uncommon.

On the other hand, the size of the page is similar to that of most of the oblong manuscripts of the time. We are led to think that the bi-folio size was indeed best adapted to the most economic use of the parchment. If we look at the two curves on chart II showing the comparative distribution of the page size of the B II and D I palaeographic families, where the size is given by adding up the height and the width of the page, we can see that the two peaks in each of the two clusters of manuscripts so widely different — palaeographically speaking — from each other are almost identical with a meagre 4 cm difference; Amāgūr’s Qurʾān is found within this double peak.

The quires cannot be precisely reconstructed, but we have a rather clear idea of what they were. In more than 90% of the parchment manuscripts of this period, the quires comprise ten folios; the hair side appears on the outside and the folios follow a sequence quite unlike that of western manuscripts. In fact, the flesh sides face the hair sides, except in the middle of the quire, where two flesh sides face each other, and between two quires, where two hair sides meet. The quires are usually made of a combination of bi-folios and isolated sheets; the last ones are as a rule inserted in a symmetrical way between the bi-folios (for example, folios 3 and 8 in a quire of ten). A number of 177 folios of the Qurʾān of Amāgūr could be identified as bi-folios — 11 being in fact...
Chart I. Comparative chart of B II and D I scripts. The size of the circles is related to the number of manuscripts in B II or D I script for a given number of lines/page (the number written in the circle or next to it is the number of manuscripts; when only one manuscript was found, no number is given next to the circle). The place of the centre of each circle corresponds to the average value of the height of the line, indicated on the abscissa. The parts projecting from the circle connect the extreme value of the height of the line.
Plate III. The Qur'ān of Amāgūr. Part of sūra VI, 104, in ǧuz' 7, with waqf-note awqafah Amāgūr overhead. MS Istanbul, TIEM, ŞE 3264.

Chart II. Comparative chart of the page size of B II and D I manuscripts.
broken bi-folios — and 32 as isolated sheets: 81.2% and 18.8%, respectively. On the basis of provisional results of a limited study of the Damascus collection, the quires most commonly found in manuscripts of this age are either of 5 bi-folios (23%) or 4 bi-folios and 2 isolated sheets (that is, 10 folios; 40%)24. In the latter case, the components are respectively 80 and 20% in a single quire. The figures we have given for the Qur'ān of Amāḡūr, if reliable for deducing a rule for the whole manuscript, mean that it was made in good part with quires of the second type. It thus seems that the artist or artists who conceived this Qur'ān, using the most readily available material (pages with roughly 300 mm height plus width, and quires of very ordinary composition), sought to show its lavishness in terms of writing. To sum up: the manuscript is very normal in terms of codicology, but quite unusual by its calligraphy.

The fragments which were discovered in Istanbul represent many of the aṯzāʾ: twelve of them are still totally lacking: numbers II, VI, VIII, IX, XII, XIV, XVIII to XXI, XXV and XXVI. The waqf is recorded in the upper margin of every recto; two formulations are used, either waqafaḥā Amāḡūr or awqafahā Amāḡūr. Does this mean that there were two Qur'āns in the thirty aṯzāʾ? This is a possible explanation. But with one quite understandable exception (that of a restoration), all the fragments from sūra II to VI (that is ġuzʾ I to VII) bear awqafahā; the remaining folios have waqafahā. I did not find any fragment from sūra III, for example, bearing in its upper margin the words waqafahā Amāḡūr. I would therefore prefer another explanation. Either the person responsible for these notes (in case he is not the calligrapher himself) changed the formulation after a few aṯzāʾ or, if it was the calligrapher who wrote the notes, we may have an indication that there were at least two copyists. Still, palaeographical analysis does not allow us to be more conclusive. In the upper margin of the two fragments remaining from the 24th ġuzʾ, waqafahā was even added in a more cursive script. An earlier discovery made in the Istanbul collection seems to be confirmed here25. I had noticed a few fragments with a very peculiar script, associated with a full page illumination dated 314/926-7. All these fragments come from two places, the beginning of the fifth ġuzʾ (sūra IV) and the 10th ġuzʾ (sūra IX, verse 93). It must have been an early repair of parts damaged for some reason. These folios have the waqafahā-note in their upper margins (even those from sūra IV, which should bear the awqafahā notes), but in a script more closely related to the new one.

Thus it seems that everything is in order with this manuscript. The few details which we have mentioned do not cast any shadow on the fact that the thirty aṯzāʾ were made a waqf in Tyre during the year 262/875-6. The illuminations will nevertheless show a more complicated picture. In this Qur'ān, the verse ends are not indicated; we only find a golden ḥāʾ at the end of every fifth verse and a circle (according to my typology: 2ʿʿAI20) with the name of the tens in golden letters for the tenth verse. The sūra headings are limited to the sūra name and the number of its verses, in golden letters. As a special indication of the beginning or the end of the volumes — corresponding to the ġuzʾ — I have found seven illuminated pages (excepting the one dated 314/926-7, corresponding to the early repair already mentioned27). Two of them are in their pristine state, that is, as a double-page. The other ones are reduced to the half of the original full illumination.

There is a very obvious difference between a group of five illuminations28 (plate IV) and two others29. The latter, which are incidentally the two double pages and also those with the waqfiyya, serve as a frame for one line of text; the ruling is made with ink. The other five illuminations are purely decorative and all have the same appearance, that of a rectangle, the length of which is twice its width. The outlines have been ruled beforehand with a dry point. The components of their decoration are closely related and quite apart from those of the two frames30. It is certain that the two series are the work of two different artists (or workshops). It might be a similar situation to the one we found for the two waqf formulations in the upper margins. But in one case, that of sūra XX, we encounter an illuminated frame closing a division of the Qur'ān at verse 114, and we have two illuminated pages occurring at the junction between verses 125 and 126 of the same sūra. We must then conclude that there were two sets of thirty aṯzāʾ. Unfortunately, a closer palaeographic examination of the fragments did not allow us to distinguish two decidedly different hands.

This manuscript — or, better, these manuscripts — provides us with a new group of dated illuminations, which will prove interesting in the study of this aspect of the art of the book. Stylistically speaking, these ornaments are not new, since a limited number of related illuminations has already been published. Still, owing to the fact that they are among the very few dated ones, their contribution to a better knowledge of the early Arabic art of the book cannot be easily dismissed. In addition to what we can learn about D I script, Amāḡūr's Qur'ān gives a good idea of the techniques developed by early Arabic bookmakers, who tried to find the best use of the skin for the rather difficult format of these oblong manuscripts. They managed to do this by inserting what were leftovers after cutting the parchment into the strips of roughly 400 x 130 mm, which once folded became oblong bi-folios.

The manuscript also provides us with new information on Middle Eastern libraries during this period. Amāḡūr's Qur'ān is not the only one in the Istanbul collection to have been transferred from Tyre to
It is not even the only one to have been transferred from another place to Damascus. I have also found manuscripts coming from Ramia, Asqalon and Jerusalem. In his Studies in the History of the Arabic Script, Salâh al-Din al-Munajjid mentions a place where al-Dahabi, in his history, says that the Atabek Tughtakin brought an ‘Utmânic Qur’an’ from Tiberias to Damascus. And this, says al-Munajjid, happened in the year 492/-99, the very time of the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. It is possible that there was more movement in that area at that time and that many Qur’anic manuscripts were taken away to safer places. Incidentally, it is possible that some manuscripts were also taken as far away as Egypt. There was a part of Amâlur’s Qur’an in Cairo, where Moritz saw it. and I can mention one manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, formerly in the mosque of ‘Amr, which originally was made a waqf in a masjid outside Tyre. This calls for prudence when dealing with early manuscripts. The place in the Islamic world where they were kept may be only one stage in a tumultuous story.

With the discovery of the two waqiyas and the two related illuminations, we may be certain that these volumes (that is to say, those of the two sets of which they were part) were given to a religious institution in Tyre. We can even be sure that they were made in 262/-876, maybe between April 30th and June 27th. But the question of their place of origin is not yet solved. And it leaves unanswered the question of the place where the remaining volumes of the second Qur’an of Amâlur were made a waqf.

Notes

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It should be noted that, owing to the state of the collection, it was impossible to get all the fragments of Amâlur’s Qur’an at the same time on the table. I saw its pages little by little as they were coming out. Some of my reconstructions are thus based on my notes and on the photographs I took during the five years I worked in Istanbul. Mrs. N. Tapan-Ölçer hopes to be able to reassemble the scattered pages in not to far a future.


3 See for example his paper: ‘What was the badi’ script?’, *Ars Islamica* IV, 1937, pp. 232-248.


5 B. Moritz, loc. cit. (n. 2).


7 To the folios found in Istanbul, one should add the fragment mentioned by D.S. Rice (op. cit., p. 2, n. 2): Cambridge University Library, ms Add. 11.116; another seems to be part of the collection of the King Faysal Center in Riyâd (see *Wahdat al-Fann al-Islâmi*, Riyâd, 1405/1985; No. 1: two folios with III, 55 and 57 visible on the plate; the name of Amâlur is wrongly transcribed: al-Mâgur).

8 $E_1$ 13.768/1, f° 1 v°.

9 $E_1$ 12.979/1, f° 3 v°.

10 $E_1$ 13.114/1, f° 1 v°.


12 F. Déroche, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 149 (fi al-tâhîl al-garbi) and p. 154 (fi tâhîl al-b...).


15 See for example MSS Chester Beatty 1421, Topkapî Sarayi EH 16 and TIEM 47; see also F. Déroche, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 147-149.


17 $E_1$ 3264, f° 1 v°.


19 For the oldest period, I have found few instances in Istanbul. Pages of a manuscript in the D Vc script appear from time to time in auctions: see for example Sotheby’s catalogue, sale of June 25, 1985, Geneva, lot 6; Sotheby’s catalogue, sale of May 22, 1986, lot 246; Sotheby’s catalogue, sale of November 20, 1986, lot 275, etc. . .

20 F. Déroche, *op. cit.* (n. 16), pp. 104-6, fig. 2a and Tableaux IV and V.

21 I follow on this point the method explained in C. Boz-

22 By isolated sheets I mean pages which are not the half of a bi-folio but are held within the quire with the help of a stub passing into the other half of the quire.

23 F. Déroche, op. cit. (n. 16), pp. 107-8 and Tableau VI.

24 Ibid.; the actual formula of the 4 bi-folios + 2 isolated sheets quires may vary, as shown in Tableau VI.

25 F. Déroche, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 152 and pl. III.

26 F. Déroche, op. cit. (n. 14), p. 29 and pl. XXIII.


28 $\$E$ 4, 964, 1025, 1372, 9488.

29 $\$E$ 13.768/1 and 12.979/1.

30 This will be discussed in a forthcoming contribution on the illuminations of the Istanbul collection.

31 See F. Déroche, op. cit. (n. 13): $\$E$ 23 also came from Tyre to Damascus.

32 These data, as well as all the dated documents, will be published separately.


34 Bibliothèque Nationale. Arabe 346a (see F. Déroche, op. cit. (n. 14), p. 86, n° 64.