From its beginnings the Qur'an was first and foremost an oral text. When the prophet Muhammad received a revelation, he spoke or recited the revealed text. It is not clear how long these original, spoken units of revelation were, or whether their length was variant or invariant. The relation between these spoken units and qur'anic suras is also unknown. According to the Islamic tradition, however, the revelation of the different suras followed a chronology of roughly shorter to longer. The earlier ones were rather short and they tended to become longer as Muhammad’s mission and prophetic preaching continued.

**CODIFICATION AND RECITATION**

In addition to being memorised and transmitted orally, these revealed texts were written down during the life of Muhammad, a process that probably began at an early stage. At least, that is what reports about the collection of the Qur’an after the Prophet’s death relate. The commission under Zayd b. Thabit (d. 52/652–3), which provided the edition of the qur’anic text that subsequently became known as the ‘Uthmanic codex, based its work on oral material, and on all kinds of written material, such as texts on scraps of wood, palm leaves, bark and bones. Zayd himself is said to have been ordered by Muhammad to record verses of the Qur’an on the shoulder blade of a camel immediately after a revelation. An older Companion of Muhammad, ‘Abdullah b. Mas‘ud, is reported to have said that he had already written down seventy suras from the mouth of the Prophet when Zayd was still playing with other little boys.

Although the reports about the collection of the Qur’an are conflicting, it appears that soon after the death of Muhammad one or more mashafs or codices of the Qur’an existed. These were manuscript books of which the individual leaves were collected between two boards. Although some old
manuscript scrolls of the Qur'an – originally from the Umayyad mosque of Damascus but now housed in Istanbul – are known, it is chiefly in the conventional book form that the written text of the Qur'an was recorded and propagated. Only in modern times has the written text of the Qur'an become available in new formats like the CD-ROM and various online versions.

From the beginning of its codification, the oral tradition about how the Qur'an was to be recited played an important part. This may have been for theological reasons, but also for compelling practical reasons. The old Arabic script did not notate vowels and it distinguished only eighteen different characters, whereas the full alphabet has twenty-eight consonants. It should be borne in mind that this limitation applies to all the early graphic representations of the text of the Qur'an, the 'Uthmanic redaction, as well as alternative redactions, like Ibn Mas'ud's. In general, this would not have been a serious problem as long as a written text was used as a kind of aide-memoire to reproduce the contents of a text, be it a message or a poem. In the case of the Qur'an, however, this became a problem, because its text was not only meant to be read for its contents, its meaning, but also to be accurately reproduced in liturgical recitation. That mandate was complicated by the fact that there was not only one common form of Arabic in which the Qur'an could be read and recited. Although precise knowledge of the elevated style of Arabic in the early period of Islam is unclear; it is certain that there were different accents and pronunciations. A case in point is the word for a written copy of the Qur'an. The pronunciations mushaf, mishaf and mas'hab are all recorded.

Exactly what the earliest copies of the Qur'an looked like is hard to say, because there is no agreement among specialist scholars about the dating of early Qur'an manuscripts. A fairly large number of early manuscript fragments, many of them quite extensive, are known. There have been many attempts to date these, mainly on the basis of palaeographical evidence or with respect to the development of their decoration. Thus a few qur'anic manuscripts have been attributed to some specialists to the seventh century, but as yet no extant manuscript has been unequivocally dated to a period before the ninth century on the basis of firm external evidence. Such external evidence would provide a powerful argument in the controversy that exists in Western scholarship about when the codification of the Qur'an took place, whether this was at the beginning of Islamic history, as postulated by the traditional view, or about two centuries later, according to John Wansbrough's hypothesis.

E A R L Y  Q U R ' A N  M A N U S C R I P T S

The past decades have witnessed ever-increasing work on the earliest manuscripts of the Qur'an and there is an emerging consensus on a rough, relative chronology of these first qur'anic manuscripts. The significant quantity of early qur'anic fragments that were discovered in 1973 in a cache of manuscripts under the roof of the Great Mosque of Sana'a in Yemen has certainly furthered the art-historical analysis. An important feature, the transitions between suras, is regarded as perhaps a more convincing marker of their antiquity than palaeographic arguments. These transitions evolved from rather simple markings of sura endings to ever more elaborate and colourful headings, which included the names of the suras and other data such as the number of verses. Also different types of codices could be distinguished, with their own peculiarities of script, sura headings, verse markings, etc. Of two such groups that were identified by Estelle Whelan, it appears that a rather large, vertical format without features such as sura titles, liturgical and verse-group markings, can be associated with the earlier strata of qur'anic manuscripts.

The style or styles of the script used for these early manuscripts seems to have been or to have become more or less specific for manuscripts of the Qur'an and appears to be different both from the more cursive styles that are known from early papyri and from the lapidary ones that were used in most inscriptions incised in stone. In this early qur'anic style of writing, additional signs were introduced to distinguish characters that were used for more than one consonant. Little dashes or dots were added above or under the letters to identify them. The system that is found in the early qur'anic manuscripts is basically the same as the one still in use, except for the treatment of the two letters fa' and qa', which have the same initial and medial form. For some time three methods existed: (1) one dash above for the fa' and two for the qa'; (2) one dash underneath for the fa' and one above for the qa'; and (3) one dash above for the fa' and one underneath for the qa'. The first method has become the standard for eastern styles of Arabic and for its printed forms. The second became the norm in the Arab west and can still be found in lithographed editions of the Qur'an in use in the Maghrib.

The third method did not survive and probably was followed for only a short time, possibly in the Hijaz and Yemen. It is, however, significant because it was also used in the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The mosaic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, which consist
mainly of Qur’anic quotations, quite clearly imitate a style of writing that is very close to the style we know from early Qur’anic manuscripts. Where ُfā’ and ɡif are punctuated, they have their dashes exactly according to this third method. This external evidence leads to the conclusion that early Qur’anic manuscripts with the same method of punctuation date roughly from the same short period, i.e., from around 692 CE when the Dome of the Rock was built.

To date, I am aware of only four manuscripts in which this method is adopted. They are preserved in Istanbul (Saray, Medini 131), Ṣan’a’ (Dar al-Makhṭṭat, Inv. No. 01–29–244), St Petersburg (Inv. No. E 205) and Vienna (Fig. 5; Cod. Míst. 917). Two of these manuscripts are fairly long; of the Viennese codex 104 leaves are extant, and of the St Petersburg one, 81 leaves. As all early Qur’anic manuscripts appear to do, these two manuscripts also represent the ‘Uthmanic redaction. This suggests that the ‘Uthmanic redaction already enjoyed a degree of acceptance at that early period. The redaction of Ibn Masʿūd, which had probably been a rival of the ‘Uthmanic redaction only in Iraq, disappeared after Ibn Mujahīd’s proposal at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century that only seven ways of reciting the Qur’an were to be accepted. As far as is known, no manuscript containing Ibn Masʿūd’s redaction has been preserved, although there are some early manuscripts—for example, some among those discovered in the Great Mosque of Ṣan’a’—that partially agree with the different order of the surahs that Ibn Masʿūd’s codex is reputed to have had.

In addition to signs that distinguish letters used for more than one consonant, vowel signs were also introduced. Initially, coloured dots were employed to indicate َ, ََ, and ُ, respectively, by putting the dot above, under or after the consonant with which they were to be pronounced. It is not clear whether the introduction of these vowel signs happened at about the same time as the distinction of consonants. There are manuscripts without vowel signs, but with consonant punctuation, but the opposite is also true. Interestingly, in quite a few early manuscripts different possible readings are indicated by dots of different colour. Most of these alternative readings appear to conform to readings that were later acknowledged as readings fit for recitation, but readings which later became known as shadīd, ‘solitary, isolated’, i.e., not validated by a sufficient number of authoritative transmission chains, also appear. Besides vowel signs, stilts were added, usually in red, to make up for a consonantal skeleton that did not denote a long َ as well as signs to indicate the pronunciation of a glottal stop where the Meccan pronunciation would not have had one, but

where they were required according to a more normative pronunciation of Arabic.

Reading Traditions

In the beginning of the tenth century, readings which were based on the ‘Uthmanic redaction finally eclipsed the alternative redaction of Ibn Masʿūd. This was largely due to the activities of Ibn Mujahid (344–385/954–996) whose view on the admissibility of variant readings was endorsed by the ‘Abbasid authorities. An opponent of Ibn Mujahid, Ibn Shanabradi, who in public worship had confidently recited readings of Ibn Masʿūd and other early reciters that were not in accordance with the ‘Uthmanic redaction, was brought to trial and punished with flogging, whereupon he recanted his defence of the non-Uthmanic readings. From then on the codified text in the form of the ‘Uthmanic redaction was de facto the primary text and the only one admissible for reciting the Qur’an. In other words, the written text of the Qur’an became more than an aide-mémoire for its recitation; it became the official score for the performance of its recitation. This did not mean that only one way of reciting the Qur’an was accepted. Ibn Mujahid approved of several systems of reciting the Qur’an that were based on the ‘Uthmanic text. These seven systems of reading were allowed in recitation because Ibn Mujahid considered them authoritatively transmitted and broadly authenticated. At the same time, he took care to identify these seven reading systems with the transmitted readings of famous readers who had lived in the second Islamic century and who were associated with the places that had received the first five copies of the ‘Uthmanic codex: from Medina, Naﬁ’ b. ‘Abd al-Rahman (d. 159/875); from Mecca, ‘Abdallāh b. Kathīr (d. 160/775); from Kufa, ‘Abd al-Rahman (d. 162/809); from Basra, ‘Abd al-Rahman (d. 163/874); and from Damascus, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amir (d. 168/880).

In the course of time, three additional systems of reading also became widely accepted because they too were considered to satisfy Ibn Mujahid’s criteria. Less widely accepted, but still enjoying some authority are another four systems, each of which, however, could be viewed as a subset of one of the other ten. These systems of reciting the Qur’an became known as the ‘readings of the seven’, of the ‘three after the seven’ and the ‘four after the ten’. The knowledge of the other ways of reading the Qur’an did not disappear. They were not allowed in recitation of the Qur’an, but they survived
in specialists’ works, especially when these readings had a bearing on the meaning of the text of the Qur’an. Ibn Mujahid himself is reported to have composed a large work about these so-called alifkhud readings, but it has not survived.

After Ibn Mujahid’s intervention, a copy of the Qur’an would normally render one of the accepted readings. Increasingly, copies of the Qur’an were produced with complete punctuation and full vocalisation. Additional signs were created to record the chosen reading as precisely as possible and to prescribe how it should be recited. Besides vowel signs, a whole range of signs was developed to indicate doubling of consonants, nasal pronunciation of case endings, prolonged pronunciation of vowels and where it was permissible to pause in reciting, where it was not and where it was obligatory. The development of signs to indicate peculiarities of the recitation actually continues today. For example, a recent edition of the Qur’an published in Syria indicates vowels subject to prolongation by printing the letters in different colours. Other specifics of Qur’an reciting, such as words where the vowel a should be pronounced more like an e, were not, however, indicated by signs. Although copies of the Qur’an increasingly acquired the characteristics of a full musical score, the oral tradition remained important for teaching the finer points of recitation.

Not much can be said with certainty about the actual utilisation of the different readings and whether most of them had anything more than theoretical significance. At first, most readings appear to have been favoured by the regions where they originated, and more is known about some regions than others. In north-west Africa, Hamza’s reading was supplanted by Nashi’s which was also the favoured reading in Muslim Spain. Nowadays, the most widespread reading in west and north Africa, except Egypt, is Warsh’s transmission of Nashi. In Libya and in parts of Tunisia and Algeria, Qalim’s transmission of Nashi also has some following. In Egypt the reading of Nashi according to Warsh’s transmission was equally well spread until about the sixteenth century, but also the reading of Abi ‘Amr was not unknown. For example, the famous Qur’an commentary al-jahadiyya by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 864/1459) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) follows this reading. The reading of Abi ‘Amr is said to have been dominant in the Hijaz, Syria and Yemen from the eleventh century when it superseded Ibn ‘Amir’s until it, in turn, was superseded by Hafs on the authority of Aṣim. Yet Ibn ‘Amir’s reading is still reported to be followed in some parts of Yemen. Nowadays one of the Abu ‘Amr readings appears to be used in parts of west Africa, Sudan, Somalia and Haḍramawt. Specific data are not really known, however, because almost no research has been done to establish the distribution in time and space of the different readings that can be found in the enormous mass of historical Qur’an manuscripts of a known origin.

A preliminary investigation of a group of manuscript fragments found in the ruins of Dāwar an Anis suggests that the historical situation was not so clear that sweeping statements about readings favoured by certain regions can be sustained. This little town about 60 kilometres south of Ṣan’ā was destroyed in the earthquake of 1893 and the manuscripts were found in the ruined mosque. The manuscripts all appear to be late, probably from later than the sixteenth century. Among them, three have the reading of Nashi, one Ḥamza’s, one ‘Aṣim’s and one is perhaps a mixture of two readings.

Some not yet published leaves of a Qur’an manuscript that were found during emergency excavations in the little town of al-Qasr in the Dakhla oasis in the western desert of Egypt show an interesting, and apparently eclectic, reading. In a number of cases, this manuscript—which generally follows Abi ‘Amr—adopts a Meccan reading for the pronunciation of the hamza or glottal stop. This manuscript was probably in use before or during the nineteenth century.

The great unifying change came in the sixteenth century with the hegemony of the Ottoman empire which had adopted the transmission of Hafs from ‘Aṣim’s reading. In the course of time this reading became the most widespread and has remained so. Only at the fringes of the Ottoman empire or beyond it, as in north-west Africa, have other readings remained in use.

**The Qur’an in Everyday Life**

**Printing**

For a long time after printing had become the normal form of book production in Europe, the Islamic world continued to produce handwritten copies of books. Printing in Arabic had begun in Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century and the first Qur’an was printed in Venice in 1537 CE, although apparently this was not a great success. In 1694 Abraham Hinczchelmann in Hamburg published a complete edition of the Qur’an in Arabic. Later, Russian editions appeared in 1834 the first edition of Gustav Flügel’s Qur’an was published; a text used by Western scholars until well into the twentieth century.

In the Islamic world religious motives played their part in the initial aversion to printing, but social motives were probably at least as important. The industrial production of books by manual copying continued to
employ a large number of people. In the late fifteenth century the Ottoman sultan forbade Muslims to print texts in Arabic. This prohibition lasted until 1726 when an official press was established. The printing of Qur’ans in the Ottoman empire, however, began only in the second half of the nineteenth century both in Egypt and Istanbul. At about the same time Qur’ans were also printed in India. Some of the early Muslim editions of the Qur’an were done with movable type, but most were lithographed. Often they were accompanied by the commentary of al-Baytawi (d. prob. 716/1316–17) or that known as al-Jalahayn. The advantage of these lithographed editions was not only that they had the look and feel of manuscripts, but also that all the special recitational signs that had been developed could be included. Apart from the fact that the Flügel Qur’an did not reproduce the readings dominant in the Ottoman empire, for Muslims its major deficit was the lack of the special signs that had been developed for the Qur’an text, such as those for nasalisation and pauses.

The Egyptian government edition of the Qur’an, which was typeset in Cairo and printed in Gizeh in 1923 and which followed the dominant Ottoman reading of Ḥafṣ’s transmission of ‘Āṣim, greatly advanced the spread of this reading, even after the fall of the empire. This text, which was typeset from a movable typeface for which a number of special signs were developed, adhered to both the written and the oral tradition and could rightly be acclaimed as a scholarly achievement, a fact that was acknowledged by some of the leading non-Muslim, European Qur’an scholars, such as Gottlieb Bergsträsser. Until the present day, this text has been reprinted and copied numerous times in the whole Islamic world and nearly everywhere it has more or less eclipsed other readings. The only exception is north-west Africa, where the Nafi‘ reading, available in printed form according to both of its transmissions, has been embedded strongly enough to resist being supplanted.

**Sound media**

Today, of course, the oral tradition is surviving in a totally different way, because it can be captured on a sound-recording medium. This started in the 1920s with recordings of Qur’an recitation on gramophone records. The first complete recording of the Qur’an in the muqaddim, or formal, recitation style according to both the Ḥafṣ transmission of ‘Āṣim and the Warsh transmission of Nafi‘ was executed in the 1960s by the Egyptian shaykh of Qur’an readers Maḥmud Khalil al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1986). Since then, numerous recitations of the Qur’an have become available, especially on audiocassettes and compact discs. By far the majority of these recordings follow the reading of the Ḥafṣ transmission of ‘Āṣim, but recitations according to the readings of both transmissions of Nafi‘ and of both transmissions of Abū Ḍabbār also exist. In addition to their transmission on general radio and television stations, Qur’an recitations are also broadcast on special radio stations, like the Egyptian Idris al-Qur’an al-karim, which started in 1964. And now there is, of course, the Internet which offers an enormous number of sites dealing with things Islamic and Qur’anic. Many sites offer a searchable text of the Qur’an, various translations, recitations in different styles (and from a growing number of reciters) and even courses on how to recite. This contemporary development is reviving the diversity of what is essentially an oral tradition.

**Epigraphy**

Apart from its manifestation as a recited text, the Qur’an in its written form figured largely in Muslim society from a very early time and it still does. Many copies of the holy text were produced in a remarkable variety of formats. Paper and parchment were used in this production but other materials as well. Passages from the Qur’an of varying lengths were also written or inscribed on a variety of media. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is probably the earliest example of a religious building with extensive quotations from the Qur’an and, interestingly, it clearly shows that the inscription is the monumental imitation of an early Qur’anic script. As such, it set an example for many Islamic buildings and monuments. Somewhat later, between 977/706 and 971/710, the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina was reconstructed and provided with a long Qur’anic inscription, possibly containing the whole text of the Qur’an. In the history of Islam all kinds of buildings, religious or otherwise, have been adorned with Qur’anic quotations, usually in a script that derives from a book script, be it the angular Kufic or the cursive styles like naskhi or thuluth.

**Amulets and talismanic uses**

The text of the Qur’an was also considered to have potent magical qualities. Especially the two last suras, known as al-mu’awwidhatan, ‘the two suras of taking refuge’, have, since the time of the Prophet, been used as incantations and protective formulas to avert evil influences or bad luck. Although they may be pronounced aloud in appropriate situations, like other formulas they were (and still are) ordinarily written on pieces of paper to be worn as amulets. Such amulets could even take the form of
complete garments, e.g., for warriors to wear below their armour for superior protection. A special characteristic of this use of written text from the Qur’an is that these apotropaic texts are often written with unconnected letters.

TRANSLATIONS OF THE QUR’ÂN

The Qur’an is an Arabic text and from a very early period the question was asked: How should the Qur’an, God’s revelation in Arabic to the ‘seal of the prophets’, be made known to those who did not understand it? In the early days of Islam some Arab Muslims held the opinion that this most recent version of God’s revelation was addressed only to them, the Arabs. They did not mean that non-Arabs need not take notice of God’s message. Rather, these groups were to observe the uncorrupted version of the revelations that had been directed to them. Of course, this view was based on the Qur’an itself, on passages like Q 14:4: ‘We have sent no messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he might make all clear to them.’ Q 5:44–5, as part of one of the last suras to be revealed, appeared to suggest the same; it could be taken to mean that Jews and Christians had to adhere to the uncorrupted Torah and Gospel, respectively.

If they just did that, they could, according to some early authorities, even be called Muslims. This view is expressed in two traditions which go back to Mujahid (d. 104/722) and which are mentioned in al-Tabari’s (d. 310/923) commentary on Q 5:66, where the Qur’an says about the People of the Book: ‘Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct.’ In interpreting the expression ‘people who are moderate’ these two traditions state: ‘these are the Muslims of the People of the Book’. One of the two traditions defines them as those who say that Jesus is God’s servant and his spirit and who do not claim that he is God or the son of God.

Nevertheless, the idea that the message of God that was given to Muhammad was intended for the whole of humankind became generally accepted. Many Qur’anic passages were considered to have a universal scope, especially passages like Q 7:158: ‘Say [O Muḥammad]: “O humankind, I am the messenger of God to you all”’ and Q 14:52: ‘This is a message to be delivered to humankind.’

Once at the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, however, this kind of exegesis was not entirely self-evident as is demonstrated by its discussion in the important theological compendium of the great Mu’tazilite thinker ‘Abd

al-Jabbar al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025). He felt it necessary to restate against the view that if Muhammad had been sent to all humanity, he should have addressed them all in their own languages.15

Qur’an translations within the Islamic world

The question, however, remained. How should non-Arabs become acquainted with the message of the Qur’an? There are two reasons why a wholly satisfactory solution was not found. In the first place, the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur’an was, from an early period, coupled with a belief in the singular qualities of Arabic. The Qur’an was thought to demonstrate and employ all the superior peculiarities of the Arabic language and thus it could not be rendered into another language, as the Gospel had been rendered from Syriac into Ethiopic and Latin, and as the Torah and the Psalms had been rendered into Arabic. An accurate rendering was thought to be impossible because it was believed that non-Arabic languages did not have at their disposal such extensive possibilities for the use of figurative language.16

In the second place, the Arabic word for ‘translation’ (tarjama) apparently meant a literal translation. If one were able to make a literal translation of the Qur’an, a translation that manifested all the subtleties of the original Arabic text, then the miracle of the Qur’an would be equalled. This was impossible because the Qur’an declares, for instance in Q 17:88: ‘Say: “If humans and jinn banded together to produce the like of this Qur’an, they would never produce its like, even though they backed one another.”’ It could not be done and thus it should not be done.

Of course, practical solutions were found and over the centuries many translations of the Qur’an have been made by both Muslims and non-Muslims. If a translation could be considered a kind of commentary, ‘an exegesis’ in another language that was not intended to replicate the original text, but was only to aid understanding, then it was permitted.

The whole discussion about the admissibility of translating the Qur’an flared up again in the second decade of the twentieth century, because the Turkish leader Atatürk wanted to nationalize Islam in Turkey. Nationalization in this respect meant ‘turbanification’; the text of the ritual prayer, the şatir, had to be pronounced in Turkish and translations of the Qur’an in Turkish were to replace the original text. The challenge was taken up mainly by Egyptian Muslim leaders and old arguments were dug up and repeated but with different emphases. The classical position was asserted by Muḥammad al-Zuqaqī (d. 1122/1710). In the 1943 edition of his handbook
for students at al-Azhar, a long section is devoted to the problem. He concluded that a translation of the Qur'an in the sense of a rendering of all its meanings and intentions is impossible and should not be attempted. In his view it does not matter whether it claims to be a literal or an explanatory translation. A translator may not aspire to produce the equivalent of the Qur'an in another language, but only the equivalent of a tafsir of the Qur'an in another language. As such it is not a translation of the Qur'an, but a translation of a tafsir of the Qur'an and that is acceptable because it is not meant to be a substitution for the original text.

Al-Zurqānī was reacting to the more inflexible view taken by Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā (d. 1935) in the Tafsir al-Manāir. In connection with Q 7:158 Rashid Riḍā had stated that the language of Islam should be Arabic and that, accordingly, the Turkish government must decide that the Qur'an is untranslatable. The message of Islam could and might be rendered in another language for missionary purposes, but at the same time, Arabic should be compulsory in all schools of the Muslims in order to reinstate the unity of Islam. For Muhammad Rashid Riḍā, translation meant only a literal translation, which he considered always to be wrong because it was impossible and thus forbidden. He did not consider a 'translation pertaining to meaning' (tajwid mu'ānā) to be forbidden.

In the end, the view of authoritative scholars like Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Ma‘ārījī (d. 1945) and Muḥammad Shaltūt (d. 1963), both of whom had been Shaykh al-‘Azhar, won the day. They considered it unrealistic to expect that the vast majority of Muslims had to learn Arabic in order to understand the Qur'an and thus acknowledged the appropriateness of translations of the Qur'an. Although a translation of the Qur'an is not the Qur'an and cannot be the Qur'an, this did not mean, as Muḥammad Shaltūt stated, 'that the translation of the Qur'an, in the sense of an enunciation into a language other than Arabic of its meanings and of the morals and guidance that it contains, should be forbidden. On the contrary, it could, in our view, perhaps even be a necessary means to spread the dogmas, the morals and the precepts that it contains.'

The present view of mainstream Islam appears to be in agreement with these principles. At most, we find that in non-Arabic Muslim countries there is a tendency to be somewhat less strict about the rule that the Arabic text should be printed alongside the translation. There seems to be no disagreement, however, about the rule that a translation can never be a source of legislation. Finally, only the Ḥanafīs allow the text of the Fāṭiḥa, the first sura of the Qur'an, to be recited in a language other than Arabic.

Non-Muslim translations of the Qur'an

If Muslim translators have been concerned about rendering the message of the Qur'an for those who do not master Arabic, the concern of non-Muslim translators of the Qur'an has been different. The first Latin translation was commissioned by Peter the Venerable in the twelfth century and a number of early west European translations seem to be derived from it. They all appear to serve the purpose of facilitating its refutation. Later on, and especially after the publication of the Dutch scholar Adrian Reland's famous book, De Religione Mohammedica, in 1705, other motives came into play. From that time on, according to the German scholar Rudi Paret who published his own translation of the Qur'an in 1962, serious European scholars aimed at 'tracing back the individual Qur'anic utterances of Muhammad to specific historical situations and from these to understand them in their entire liveliness and actuality.' In this vein most European Arabists have studied and translated the Qur'an in order to reconstruct the genesis and development of the religious concepts of what Paret called 'the astonishing and, at the same time, the respect- and awe-commanding phenomenon of a religious genius.' It is from that perspective that the translations of scholars like Bell, Blache, Kramers and Paret should be viewed.

Scholars in the European philological tradition generally set great store by the philological insights of the Muslim commentaries, but attached much less value to later dogmatic developments. Thus, many of these translations fail to convey what, in the minds and hearts of Muslims, the Qur'an means as holy scripture. It is nevertheless interesting that in the later European Arabist tradition someone like the great August Fischer felt bound to remark in 1937 that it had been wrong not to take the 'indigenous Qur'an commentaries' sufficiently into account. He believed that European scholarship could not dispense with them, notwithstanding their shortcomings. Even more interesting is his view that 'one will never be able to understand the Qur'an in all its details with certainty,' a view that could have come from the mouth of al-Zurqānī, even if the reasons why this should be so were certainly not the same for both.

Notes

2. E. Welch, 'Writing the word of God: Some early Qur'an manuscripts and their milieux', Ars Orientalis 20 (1990), 113–47.


’Writing the word of God: Some early Qur’ān manuscripts and their milieus’, *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990), 113–47.


Internet sites about Qur’ānic matters

www.islamic-awareness.org/Qur’ān/
www.islamicfinder.org/quran/quran.php?lang=english
text.

virginia.edu/Qur’ān.html.

www.islamcity.com/nosque/quran/
www.kitabballah.com/
www.qur'an.org
www.qur'an.uk
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