

Early Qur'ānic Scrolls from the Qubbat al-khazna and their links with the Christian Manuscript Tradition of Greek-Byzantine Scrolls

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Abstract. This contribution aims to reconsider some early Qur'ānic parchment scrolls once stored in Damascus *Qubbat al-khazna* and currently preserved in Istanbul – at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts. Their peculiar book form, apart from vague hypothesis, never received a convincing explanation. However, the production of Greek-Byzantine liturgical scrolls in Damascus up to the tenth century offers a meaningful precedent that sheds light on the provenance and the origin of these scrolls. Codicological techniques, bilingual – Greek-Arabic – witnesses and oral performances are some of the elements that link the Christian and Islamic scrolls production in the Syrian area.

Keywords. Scrolls, Qur'āns, Greek-Byzantine scrolls, Syria, Qubbat al-khazna

The aim of this paper is to reconsider some early Qur'ānic parchment scrolls once stored in the Damascene *Qubbat al-khazna* and now in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul. They were first published in the mid-1960s by Solange Ory,¹ who, in describing the forty three scrolls, has the merit of having attracted attention to these unusual Qur'ānic manuscripts. In this paper I will

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¹ See S. Ory, 'Un nouveau type de *mushaf*: Les Corans en rouleaux conservés à Istanbul', *Revue des Études Islamiques* 33 (1965), 87–149. For a recent contribution on one of these scrolls (ŞE 4141) focused on its text and script, see E. Gözeler, 'ŞE 4141 Rulo: Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesinde *Kūfī* Bir Kur'an Elyazması', *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 63, 1 (2022), 1–32.

consider the oldest of the parchment scrolls.² Back in 1965 Ory made only general hypotheses as to the origins and the distinctive book form of these Qur'ānic texts:

At first sight the existence of Qur'āns copied on parchment scrolls is not surprising. It is well known that early Arabic documents were written on folded sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) and the use of the codex was introduced under al-Saffāḥ by Khālīd b. Barmak. On the other hand, Arabs were aware of the use of vellum rolls used to record the Torah. However, given the lack of any scholarly reference, one has to conclude that, if such scrolls ever existed, they have not come down to us.³

The examples that Ory cites – lost Arabic documents in the form of scrolls and Hebrew Torah rolls – do not fully match the text type and book form of the Qur'ānic scrolls in question. In the first case, when speaking of rolled/folded documents, it is the documentary nature of the scrolls that makes the link with the Qur'ānic scrolls – containing the sacred book of Islam – unconvincing.⁴ In the second case, Ory does indeed refer to a religious text, the Torah of the Jewish tradition, but the Torah book form – a roll – is fundamentally different to the Damascene early Qur'ānic scrolls.

² The scrolls on vellum presented by Ory correspond to numbers 1–35. Numbers 36–43 on Ory's list are more recent texts on paper, smaller in size, and made for a slightly different purpose, most likely as amulets or for protection. On these more recent items, see *infra* and T. Nünlist, *Schutz und Andacht im Islam: Dokumente in Rollenform aus dem 14.–19. Jh.* (Leiden-Boston, 2020). On Islamic talismans in scroll form, see also Y. F. Alasaleh, "'Licit Magic': The Touch and Sight of Islamic Talismanic Rolls", PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2014. On some Qur'ānic scrolls sold at auction, see *The Qur'an and Calligraphy: A Selection of Fine Manuscript Material – Bernard Quaritch, Catalogue 1213* (London, 1995), 127–8: nos. 30–1. On Christian amulets containing excerpts of the Old and New Testament, see J. E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt: Text, Typology, and Theory* (Tübingen, 2014). On textual amulets in scroll form in the Middle Ages, see D. C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*, Magic in History (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2006). In a webinar at *Silsila: Center for Material Histories – Arts and Sciences – NYU* (April 27th 2022), I suggested that that western textual amulets started to be produced as a custom imported from East to West at the time of Crusades. I take here the occasion to thank warmly Finbarr Barry Flood for the stimulating invitation to contribute to the series of online seminars at *Silsila*. In a near future, I am going to study few more unpublished block-printed Arabic amulets and to publish an enlarged and modified version of the text of my communication. On scrolls with talismanic power in the Christian tradition, see M. A. Edsall, 'Arma Christi Rolls or Textual Amulets?', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 9/2 (Winter 2014), 178–205 and figures 1–3.

³ 'A première vue l'existence de Corans copiés sur des rouleaux de parchemin ne surprend pas. On sait que les documents arabes du premier siècle étaient écrits sur des feuilles enroulées (*ṣuḥuf*) et que l'usage du codex aurait été introduit sous al-Saffāḥ par Khālīd b. Barmak. D'autre part, l'emploi des rouleaux de parchemin pour conserver de la Torah était bien connu des Arabes. Mais le fait n'étant signalé par aucun spécialiste, il faut en conclure que ce rouleaux – *s'ils ont jamais existé* [my emphasis] – ont disparu avant de parvenir jusqu'à nous', Ory, 'Un nouveau type de *muṣḥaf*', 88.

⁴ A hypothesis has been put forward of a link between the documentary and the liturgical spheres regarding Greek-Byzantine scrolls; see *infra*. However, the introduction of scrolls in the Greek-Byzantine liturgy preceded the adoption of scrolls for Qur'ānic texts. Their close links from a textual and a performative use perspective will be raised in the present paper.

Since Ory's article, almost no research has been carried out into the origin(s), use(s) and meaning(s) of these Qur'ānic scrolls and their place in the history of Islamic manuscript production. The lack of any convincing surviving examples leads us to ask the following questions: Is it possible to connect the production of the *maṣāḥif* in scroll form to the production of other religious (liturgical/devotional) texts in the same book form? Is it possible to make a sound chrono-geographical and socio-cultural link between these scrolls and the Qur'ānic scrolls? Is it possible to detect some common production techniques between these scrolls and the Qur'ānic scrolls that might attest to a codicological link between them?

The production of Greek-Byzantine Christian manuscripts from Damascus and the *Bilād al-Shām* offer useful *comparanda* to the early Qur'ānic scrolls, with regard to both book form and text typology. It seems plausible to link early Qur'ānic scrolls – only attested in Islamic book production by the *Qubbat al-khazna* material – to Christian book production in Greek – and in Greek and Arabic – from Damascus and the *Bilād al-Shām* area between the eighth and the tenth century AD.⁵ This is done by taking into account the geographical and chronological coordinates along which the Greek-Byzantine production of hymnographic scrolls develops, the codicological connections – the materiality and function of these scrolls – as well as the linguistic and cultural identity of the artisans working for the Umayyads⁶ and the scribes employed in the Umayyad administration.⁷ Indeed, Middle Eastern religious scrolls were fashionable manuscript products at that time and were also imitated in other Mediterranean regions.⁸

⁵ On the one hand we should bear in mind the 'primarily Damascene' character of the material – see F. Déroche, 'In the Beginning: Early Qur'ans from Damascus', in M. Farhad and S. Rettig (eds), *The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts* (Washington, DC, 2016), 61–75, at 64, especially for the Qur'ānic fragments stored in the *Qubbat al-khazna*, and thus for these scrolls too. On the other hand, the production period of both the Greek and Greek-Arabic hymnographic scrolls and of the Qur'ānic scrolls dating back to the late Umayyad–early Abbasid period (second quarter of the eighth–tenth century) should also be considered; on these latter, see Ory, 'Un nouveau type de *maṣḥaf*', 89.

⁶ On the production of Umayyad Qur'ān manuscripts by non-Muslim artisans or by newly converted Muslim artisans who had a technical and artistic background rooted in other cultural and religious traditions, see F. Déroche, 'Colonnes, vases et rinceaux. Sur quelques enluminures d'époques omeyyade', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 148/1 (2004), 227–64, at 263.

⁷ As also noted by Nünlist, *Schutz und Andacht*, 6, no. 30.

⁸ See *infra* the case of the scroll fragment *Messanensis Gr. 177*. In a future study, I will analyse the relationship between scroll and codex book forms in the Christian and Islamic traditions and discuss the iconographic tradition of the scrolls. On the depiction of bishops and episcopal authors holding scrolls, rather than closed codices containing the Gospels, in Byzantine churches in the post-iconoclastic period and the liturgical changes in the same period, see S. E. J. Gerstel, 'Liturgical Scroll in the Byzantine Sanctuary', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 35 (1994), 195–204. As for the Christian-Arabic manuscript tradition, I will limit myself here to pointing out that scrolls are shown, for instance, in the hands of the prophets illustrated in the manuscript Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Diez A, containing the *Kitāb al-Jawhar al-muḍī li-l-sittat 'ashar al-nabī*, for

SCROLLS: A LONG TRADITION

The scroll/roll book-form has a long tradition in the production of manuscripts. Although the history of manuscript books, after the passage from scrolls/rolls to codex, mainly focuses on the latter,⁹ scrolls/rolls were ubiquitous during the European Middle Ages/Islamic Middle period.¹⁰ Indeed, scrolls/rolls had been in use from ancient times in many regions, being attested in Pharaonic Egypt and Ethiopia as well as in Medieval Europe.¹¹

It is useful to spell out the difference between scroll (Lat. *rotulus/rotuli*) and roll (Lat. *volumen/volumina*): both typologies entail a 'folding movement', but the folding/unfolding movement goes from top to bottom (↓) in scrolls, whereas in rolls it goes horizontally (←/→).¹² The book-form of the Jewish sacred text, the Torah, belongs to the second category. In the Islamic manuscript tradition *voluminal*/rolls are not attested.¹³ Scrolls, on the other hand, had – in different areas and at different epochs – the most diverse uses: they were used to record, for instance, royal and university accounts (in England and Italy respectively)¹⁴ and for genealogies and obituaries, although there are also music scrolls and illuminated scrolls, as well as those devoted to medicine and magic.¹⁵

In the Islamic manuscript tradition, scrolls were used for different purposes and the scroll book form is attested in connection with various texts, both sacred

example at f. 77r; see L. Cheiko, *Kitāb al-makhtūṭāt al-ʿarabiyya li-katabat al-naṣrāniyya* (Beirut 1924), 243.

⁹ The main reference here is the classic C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London, 1983).

¹⁰ For an extensive bibliography on Classical scrolls, see online: <https://medievalscrolls.com/bibliography/> (last accessed June 2021). For Arabic and Islamic scrolls, see *infra*.

¹¹ For instance, medieval manuscript production in Southern Italy includes scrolls in Greek and in Latin, particularly from the Beneventan area; see A. Jacob, 'Rouleaux grecs et latins dans l'Italie méridionale', in *Recherches de codicologie comparée: La composition du codex au Moyen Âge, en Orient et en Occident* (Paris, 1998) 69–97. On the Latin scrolls produced in the Beneventan area, known as *Exultet* scrolls, see G. Cavallo, 'La genesi dei rotoli liturgici beneventani alla luce del fenomeno storico-librario in Occidente e in Oriente', in *Miscellanea in memoria di Giorgio Cencetti* (Torino, 1973), 213–29 and G. Cavallo (ed.), *Exultet: Rotoli liturgici del medioevo meridionale* (Roma, 1994). On the Greek scrolls, such as the *Messanensis Gr. 177*, see *infra*. For medieval western scrolls, see M. Maniaci, 'Rotoli medievali greci e latini (e non solo): tipologie, funzioni, prospettive di ricerca', *La Bibliofilia* 120.3 (2018), 353–76.

¹² See A. Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers*, (Leiden and Boston, 2009), 218–9; 224–5. I note that scrolls – with a vertical reading – are sometimes called rolls in the literature, probably owing to the similarity between the Latin and English words (*rotulus, i/roll-s*). On the essentially different forms of scrolls and rolls, see L. W. Daly, 'Rotulus Beratinus, a Greek Liturgy Roll', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 13/1 (Spring 1972), 109–17, at 111.

¹³ See Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 226.

¹⁴ On the *rotuli* on which the payments to Sapienza university professors were recorded in fifteenth to seventeenth-century Rome (documenting the beginnings of the teaching of Oriental languages), see C. Frova, *Gli inizi dell'insegnamento delle lingue orientali*, in L. Capo and M. R. Di Simone (eds), *Storia della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia de 'La Sapienza'* (Roma, 2000), 55–69.

¹⁵ On the use of the scroll book form for amulets in the Christian, Jewish, Coptic and Arabic manuscript traditions, see Skemer, *Binding Words*, 29.

and profane. We can mention, for instance: religious scrolls (Qur'āns); literary scrolls – the only known example is the so-called *ṣahīfa* of 'Abd Allāh b. Lahī'a (d. 790), dating back to the ninth century, now in Heidelberg¹⁶; magical scrolls (amulets)¹⁷ and devotional scrolls (prayers),¹⁸ pilgrimage certificates – belonging to the religious/devotional and, to some extent, the legal spheres¹⁹ – and, last but not least, calendars.²⁰ However, despite the fact that all these scrolls have the same book form, they are not *ipso facto* linked to a comparable context of production, which would imply, for instance, the use of similar techniques.²¹ Moreover, these

¹⁶ See R.-G. Khoury, *'Abd Allah ibn Lahī'a (97–174/715–790): Juge et grand maître de l'école égyptienne avec édition critique de l'unique rouleau de papyrus conservé à Heidelberg* (Wiesbaden, 1986); M.-G. Guesdon, *Ṣahīfat 'Abd Allah ibn Lahī'a (rouleau d'Ibn Lahī'a)*, in M.-G. Guesdon and A. Vernay-Nouri (eds), *L'art du livre arabe: Du manuscrit au livre d'artiste* (Paris, 2001), 35, no. 12.

¹⁷ Textual amulets evidence a blend, in varying proportions, of magical characters or scripts, prayers, pious formulas and quotations from the Qur'ān. They can be handwritten or block-printed – the latter dating from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. Several instances of block-printed amulets in roll form are illustrated in K. R. Schaefer, *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Leiden and Boston, 2006). On an unpublished block-printed amulet in scroll form in the British Library, see A. D'Ottone Rambach, *Three Unpublished block-prints in the British Library*, forthcoming. For a discussion on the spread of printed amulets – notwithstanding the technique adopted, whether using woodcuts or movable type – in the East and in the West, see Skemer, *Binding Words*, 222–33.

¹⁸ The latter type – the devotional scrolls – can be positioned somewhere between religious and magical scrolls as they sometimes contain the complete text of the Qur'ān. Prayer scrolls containing the Qur'anic text in micrography, prayers and pious formulas are attested from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries; see Nünlist, *Schutz und Andacht*.

¹⁹ Interestingly, these scrolls represent a different type of document in scroll form in the *Qubbat al-khazna* find to the Greek-Byzantine hymnographic scrolls and the Qur'anic scrolls. The pilgrimage certificate scrolls date back to more recent times, being attested since the Ayyubid epoch (1171–1260); see J. Sourdel, 'Un modèle exceptionnel parmi les certificats de pèlerinage ayyoubides', *Manuscripta Orientalia* 9/3 (2003), 63–8; D. Sourdel and J. Sourdel-Thomine, *Certificats de pèlerinage d'époque ayyoubide: Contribution à l'histoire de l'idéologie de l'Islam au temps des croisades* (Paris, 2006). On an illustrated pilgrimage scroll produced in Iraq and authenticating the 'umra by proxy of a descendant of the Prophet in 1433, see M. Chekhab-Abudaya, A. Couvrat Desvergnès and D. J. Roxburgh, 'Sayyid Yusuf's 1433 Pilgrimage Scroll (*Ziyārāt-nāma*) in the Collection of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha', *Muqarnas* 33 (2016), 345–407; M. Chekhab-Abudaya, 'Umra Certificate', in B. D. Boehm and M. Holcomb (eds), *Jerusalem, 1000–1400: Every People Under Heaven* (New York, 2016), 53–54. For an early nineteenth-century hand-painted Shi'ī pilgrimage scroll, see U. Marzolph and M. Renaud, 'An Illustrated Shi'ī Pilgrimage Scroll in the Collections of the Royal Asiatic Society', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, (2021), 1–25.

²⁰ See Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 225. The affirmation that 'No text of any part of the New Testament is known to be written on the recto of a roll' – Roberts and Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex*, 40 – now seems outdated; see G. Smith, 'The Willoughby Papyrus: A New Fragment of John 1:49–2:1 (P134) and an Unidentified Christian Text', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137/4 (Winter 2018), 935–58, at 949. Nevertheless, Greek rolls have only recently attracted the attention of researchers; see G. Nocchi Macedo, 'The Parchment Roll: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of the Greek Book' in P. Davoli and N. Pellè (eds), *Polymatheia. Studi classici offerti a Mario Capasso* (Lecce, 2018), 319–42.

²¹ On the lack of a link between Greek scrolls and Latin scrolls produced in Medieval Southern Italy, see *infra*.

scrolls also had various functions – thus reflecting the different cultural and religious spheres in which they were used.

This paper focuses on a specific category of scrolls, that is, scrolls with religious (liturgical, devotional) and magical (apotropaic, protective) functions in the early centuries of Islam. This choice thus limits the present research to a (somewhat) specific textual group not only chronologically, but also, to a certain extent, geographically. Furthermore, it allows us to highlight the connections between sacred and magical scrolls and their respective spheres. These are liminal, yet distinct, even though it is sometimes possible to determine overlapping practices, interconnected rituals and a common material culture. Indeed, scrolls can be considered a further item, in addition to ostrich eggs and peacock feathers, that attest to shared cultural practices, functioning, as Nile Green stresses ‘overwhelmingly within the material realm of religious practice’.²²

AHL AL-KITĀB: BETWEEN MANUSCRIPT TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

In the Jewish tradition both the vertical and horizontal forms of rolls and scrolls were in use: the Torah had, and still has, the roll form,²³ whilst the Dead Sea and Qumran texts were written on scrolls. Moreover, apart from these religious scrolls, the Jewish tradition also attests magic scrolls.²⁴ In the Christian manuscript tradition, Greek-Byzantine scrolls for liturgical use are attested from the sixth century, the so-called *Rotulus Beratinus* being the oldest example.²⁵ As for their form, scholars have explained it in various ways. Some consider that the scroll form is linked to the documentary

²² See N. Green, ‘Ostrich Eggs and Peacock Feathers: Sacred Objects as Cultural Exchange between Christianity and Islam’, *Al-Masāq* 18 (2006), 27–78, at 65.

²³ Although liturgical Torah scrolls are also attested, see E. Tov, ‘Textual Criticism of Hebrew Scripture-Like Texts’, in J. Zsengellér (ed.), *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms, or Techniques? A Lost Dialogue with Geza Vermes* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 183–202, at 186–7.

²⁴ For an example in an Italian library, see G. Lacerenza, ‘I manoscritti ebraici dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei’, *Materia Giudaica* 8/1 (2003), 155–75, at 160–2. For other examples of similar rolls from North Africa now found in the Jewish Museum of New York, see I. M. Casanowicz, ‘Jewish Amulets in the United States National Museum’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 36 (1916), 154–67 and I. M. Casanowicz, ‘Two Jewish Amulets in the United States National Museum’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 37 (1917), 43–56.

²⁵ On the *Rotulus Beratinus*, see S. Benz, *Der Rotulus von Ravenna: Nach Seiner Herkunft Und Seiner Bedeutung Für Die Liturgiegeschichte Kritisch Untersucht* – vol. 45: *Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen Und Forschungen*, (Münster, 1967). For the use of scrolls in the Greek East for Christian texts, see M. Stroppa, ‘L’uso di rotuli per testi Cristiani di carattere letterario’, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 59 (2014), 347–58. For a Latin parallel, one can mention the so-called Ravenna scroll: it contains prayers, is 3.60 m long and 19 cm wide, and dates back to the early eighth century. This scroll, now in Lugano, Archives of Princeps Pius, appears to imitate Greek scrolls, which in turn date back to as early as the seventh century; see Daly, ‘*Rotulus Beratinus*’.

tradition and draw a correspondence between the prayers in the liturgy and civil petitions²⁶.

If we consider both the early Qur'ānic scrolls and the Qur'ān codices with a horizontal format, that became widespread from the eighth century representing a 'desire...to distinguish the Islamic from the Jewish and Christian traditions' using rolls and codices – respectively – in vertical form for their sacred scriptures,²⁷ it is clear that earlier manuscript traditions had a very strong influence on the production of Islamic manuscripts. Jewish and Christian manuscript products were the most immediate models to adopt and adapt in early Islamic Qur'ānic production. In the first centuries of the Hijra, such production was a part of establishing, and shaping, an identity – and the identity of Muslims as followers of a (then) new religion and political reality. This was accomplished through books, as well as through items pertaining to material culture.²⁸

This search for distinctiveness with regard to the book form of the Islamic sacred text seems understandable during the first three centuries of

²⁶ See L. W. Daly, 'Rotuli: Liturgy Rolls and Formal Documents', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 14/3 (Autumn 1973), 333–8, at 333–4.

²⁷ Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 219. Gacek uses the word 'rolls', however. Often, especially in the codicological texts linked to Arabic and Oriental handwritten materials, the two words, roll and scrolls, are used interchangeably, despite the fact that they refer to different things.

²⁸ I am reminded of the early Islamic numismatic production of both glass coin weights and coins. Glass weights had a long tradition in both the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, although they originated as Arabic-Islamic objects in Syria in the seventh century following the ponderal reform of 'Abd al-Malik; see A. D'Ottone Rambach, 'Arabic Glasses (coin weights, jetons, and vessel stamps) from Umayyad Syria', in T. Goodwin (ed.), *Coinage and History in the Seventh Century Near East 5* (London, 2017), 175–95, at 184. As for coins, the first attempts to create Arab-Islamic gold coinage resulted in issues that were based, both iconographically and textually, on Byzantine *solidi*. These early issues reinterpreted the figurative and political elements of the *solidus* of Heraclius (r. 610–641), but were not mere imitations. In fact, the pattern of images and text upon which they were based was suitably amended so that the differences between the new coinage and the original model were clear; see M. Bates, 'Byzantine Coinage and Its Imitations, Arab Coinage and Its Imitations: Arab-Byzantine Coinage', *ARAM* 6/1–2 (1994), 381–403, at 381. On 'Abd al-Malik's experiments with coin design in Syria, see also S. Heidemann, 'The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and its Religion on Coin Imagery', in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai and M. Marx (eds), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 149–95, at 171–2. We might also mention architecture: the use of columns and capitals from churches, including those bearing Christian symbols, in various parts of ancient mosques in Damascus and in San'ā', is significant in this respect. Moreover, as pointed out by Arnaldo Marcone, the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem shows 'Abd al-Malik's 'claim of building a *Muslim Byzantine society* (my emphasis) shaped and led by the Muslim, incorporating the heritage of the Byzantine subjects', A. Marcone, 'Late Antiquity: Then and Now', in H. T. Lopes, I. Gomes de Almeida and M. de Fátima Rosa (eds), *Antiquity and its Reception: Modern Expressions of the Past* (London, 2020), 13–23, at 19. On the Judaeo-Christian 'continuum' of practices, beliefs and identities, that was shared by the early Islamic audience, see F. del Río Sánchez, *Living on Blurred Frontiers: Jewish Devotees of Jesus and Christian Observers of the Law in Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia (5th–10th Centuries)* (Cordova, 2021), 20–2.

Islam, since most of the population was still non-Muslim.²⁹ Studies devoted to analysing the process of conversion in the Middle Period, all point to the tenth–twelfth centuries as the moment of change in the religious orientation of the population.³⁰ This religious demographic change was accompanied by linguistic change: bilingual and digraphic Christian lectionaries – witnessing the passage from Greek to Arabic in the liturgical context – are attested from the end of the tenth century (995–6) until the end of the twelfth century, and were already written exclusively in Arabic by 1203.³¹

GREEK-BYZANTINE SCROLLS AND ARABIC SCROLLS IN THE QUBBAT AL-KHAZNA

It seems safe to say that Syria was the region where both the oldest Qur'ān manuscripts in scroll form and the most recent scrolls containing Qur'ānic excerpts were produced.³² The oldest have been attributed, on palaeographical grounds, to the first centuries of Islam (eighth–early tenth century), while the most recent items date back to the 1970s.³³ The chronology, origin and textual typology of the

²⁹ See M. Guidetti, 'Bisanzio dopo Bisanzio: le chiese bizantine nel medioevo arabo-musulmano', *Porphyra* 4/10 (December 2007), 29–53, at 45; R. S. Humphreys, 'Christian Communities in Early Islamic Syria and Northern Jazira: The Dynamics of Adaptation', in J. Haldon (ed.), *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates* (Farnham and Burlington, 2010), 45–56.

³⁰ For studies on conversion to Islam based on onomastic changes, see R.W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA, 1979, reprint: Cambridge, MA, 2013).

³¹ See A. D'Ottone Rambach and F. Potenza, 'Un lezionario greco-arabo e i suoi disiecta membra fra Londra, S. Pietroburgo e Cambridge', *Nea Rome* 17 (2020), 99–153 and plates 1–8, at 104–6.

³² In a time frame of some fourteen centuries (eighth–twentieth centuries), other regions besides Syria – such as Khurasan, Iraq, Iran and Turkey – and other crafting processes for recording text apart from writing by hand – namely block-printing – attest to the spread of this durable, yet relatively rare, book form in Islamic lands. Regarding block-printed Qur'ānic scrolls, I have noted in a previous publication the significance of the earliest known block-printed Qur'ān, a tenth century fragment now in Vienna in the Austrian National Library, Chartae Arabicae 12150; see A. D'Ottone Rambach, 'Unpublished exemplars of block-printed Arabic amulets from the *Qubbat al-khazna*', in A. D'Ottone Rambach, K. Hirschler and R. Vollandt (eds), *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents* (Beirut, 2020), 409–38, at 425. Due to its fragmentary state, it is not possible to know the extent of the Qur'ānic text it originally contained, but even at the end of the nineteenth century Joseph von Karabacek considered the fragment not an amulet but a Qur'ānic text. Nünlist, who made a detailed study of Qur'ānic amulets produced in scroll form between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, wonders when the production of these scrolls started. As he says, it is difficult to imagine a new production without a precedent; see Nünlist, *Schutz und Andacht*, 6–7, no. 30. Referring to the parchment Qur'ānic scrolls studied by Ory, Nünlist seems to suggest an implicit connection between the two.

³³ See Nünlist, *Schutz und Andacht*, 663. However, as far as more recent items are concerned, in a corpus of 120 exemplars dating from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries recently compiled by Nünlist – see Nünlist, *Schutz und Andacht*, 6–9 – Syria is absent from the list of places where he was able to find Arabic scrolls. Nünlist's list includes: Canada, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Ireland, Italy (*sic!* for the Vatican City), Kuwait, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA. For Italy, an almost unknown Arabic scroll in the Riccardiana Library in

ancient Qurʾānic scrolls, as well as the techniques employed in their production, can be linked to the production of Greek and Greek-Arabic hymnographic scrolls. As for the area of production, the ‘*primarily Damascene*’ nature of the material, including the Qurʾānic scrolls stored in the *Qubbat al-khazna*,³⁴ is in line with that of an important ancient, yet little known, Greek-Arabic scroll: the Vatican City scroll, Vatican Library, *Vaticanus graecus* 2282, which was produced in Damascus.³⁵ However, this is not the only example of liturgical Byzantine scrolls. Other such scrolls, in Greek, were kept in the very same *Qubbat al-khazna* and those too are linked to the *Bilād al-Shām* area.³⁶ The period of production of both the Greek and Greek-Arabic hymnographic scrolls – that is, the eighth–tenth century – as well as that of the Qurʾānic scrolls, which corresponds to between the late Umayyad and the early Abbasid period (eighth–ninth century), is another commonality with the distinctive production of this book form in the Syrian area.

Regarding the type of texts recorded, we can say that both the Greek-Christian and the Arabic-Islamic scrolls generally contain religious texts intended for oral

Florence is worth mentioning; see *Inventario e stima della Libreria Riccardi – Manoscritti e edizioni del secolo XV* (Firenze 1810), 5 and G. Bartoletti, ‘I manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze’, *La Bibliofilia* 113/2 (May-August 2011), 233–48, at 239–40. This scroll can be viewed online at the following site: <http://teca.riccardiana.firenze.sbn.it/index.php/it/?view=show&myId=a3729c24-6b28-4174-b715-edc767aff3d6> (last accessed December 2021). As for Syria, I would like to mention here that at least one such item was once exhibited (2003) in a showcase of the Syrian National Museum (*al-Mathaf al-watani*) in Damascus. This roll (Ar. *lifāfa/āt* and also *lafāʿif*) is probably one of the two rolls described in the 1930 *Dalīl al-mukhtasar* of the Syrian National Museum, both written in small *naskh* (*bi-khatt naskhī daqīq*) by the copyist ‘Abd al-ʿAlī b. mawlānā Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz; see J. al-Ḥasanī, *al-Ḥukūma al-Sūriyya, Dār al-athār bi-Dimashq: Dalīl mukhtasar* (Dimashq, 1930), 114, ‘*ayn* 261 and ‘*ayn* 262.

³⁴ On the *Qubbat al-khazna* and an account of its manuscript materials, see D’Ottone Rambach, Hirschler and Vollandt (eds.), *The Damascus Fragments*.

³⁵ See F. D’Aiuto, ‘La “scrittura mista” maiuscolo-minuscola d’area mediorientale’, in C. Brockmann, D. Deckers, D. Harlfinger and S. Valente (eds), *Griechisch-byzantinische Handschriftenforschung: Traditionen, Entwicklungen, neue Wege* (Berlin-Boston, 2020) vol. 1, 145–69 and figures 1–5, at 160. The Vatican scroll has attracted the attention of Byzantinists and although there are a fair amount of studies devoted to it, they largely concentrate on its liturgical content. See G. Cuming, ‘The Litanies in the Liturgy of St James’, *Ecclesia Orans* 3/2 (1986), 175–80; J. Nasrallah, ‘La liturgie des Patriarcats melchites de 969 à 1300’, *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987), 156–81; R. F. Tafts, ‘The Precommunion Elevation of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 62/1 (1996), 15–52, at 24; R. F. Tafts, ‘Byzantine Communion Rites II: Later Formulas and Rubrics in the Ritual of Clergy Communion’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 67 (2001) 275–352, at 300, 305, 311 and 346. Conversely, the Vat.gr. 2282 was overlooked by Arabists until now, and its Arabic text has received only scant attention. For the languages of the liturgy in Syria, see C. Cannuyer, ‘Langues usuelles et liturgiques des Melkites au XIII^e s.’, *Oriens Christianus* 70 (1986), 110–17, at 114; C. Korolewsky, *Histoire des Patriarcats Melkites (Alexandrie, Antioche, Jérusalem) depuis le schisme monophysite du sixième siècle jusqu’à nos jours*, 2 vols (Rome, 1911), vol. 2, 14 and 139. I will discuss the Vat.gr. 2282 Arabic text in detail in a forthcoming article in the Proceedings of the international congress: *La Syrie omeyyade, un contexte pour le Coran?/Umayyad Syria: A Context for the Qurʾan?* (2–4 June 2021, Strasbourg/online).

³⁶ See F. D’Aiuto and D. Bucca, *Some Greek hymnographic fragments from Damascus: Script types and texts*, in D’Ottone Rambach, Hirschler and Vollandt (eds.), *The Damascus Fragments*, 291–320, at 299.

performance: hymns in Greek – with instructions for the officiant in Arabic as in the Vat.gr. 2282 – and the Qur'ān in Arabic.³⁷ As for the Arabic scrolls, Ory has discussed the text of the Qur'ānic *maṣāḥif* – identifying the *suras* contained in each exemplar – and has described their script.³⁸

From both a technical and a functional point of view, the scrolls have various features in common independent of the language (Greek, Greek-Arabic or Arabic) and the text type (Christian hymns or the Qur'ān). These include: the same writing material (parchment); the same techniques used to link the various *kollemata*, sewn together with varying degrees of finesse;³⁹ the ruling vertical lines defining the width of the column of script;⁴⁰ writing on both sides of the scroll (opisthography)⁴¹ and their use for oral performances (in the liturgy for the

³⁷ It is useful to mention here that: ‘the origin of the word Qur'ān is to be found in the Syriac *q'ryānā* (a liturgical reading)’, D. A. Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001), 16. Madigan also briskly dismisses the issue of the book form in a Christian context, considering the increasing use of the codex form in the liturgy as a given fact: ‘As the codex superseded the scroll as the characteristically Christian form of preserving scripture, so the form of the mark of Christ's power and authority also changed to reflect the codex used in the liturgy’, Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 7. On illustrated scrolls destined for oral performance produced in pre-Islamic Central Asia, see F. Grenet, ‘Between Written Texts, Oral Performances and Mural Paintings: Illustrated Scrolls in Pre-Islamic Central Asia’, in J. Rubanovich (ed.), *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World: Patterns of Interactions across the Centuries* (Leiden and Boston, 2015) 422–45. On the spread of the codex form, see B. Harnett, ‘The Diffusion of the Codex’, *Classical Antiquity* 36/2 (2017), 183–235. Scrolls containing ‘Telling scriptures’ for oral performances, including verses to be sung, are still used in China for the worship of local deities; see R. Berezkin, ‘*Baojuan* (Precious Scrolls) and Festivals in the Temples of Local Gods in Changshu, Jiangsu, Mǐn-sū ch'ū-I’, *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre & Folklore* 206 (2019), 115–75. The connection between the original oral performance of religious texts and the sc/roll book form might merit further research. Since liturgical practices had an influence on religious architecture, see V. Ruggeri, ‘La barriera presbiteriale e il *templon* bizantino: Ambivalenze semantiche fra liturgia, architettura e scultura’, *Bizantinistica* s. II, 10 (2008), 28–9; it does not seem unlikely that they also had an effect on manuscript book production – at least at an early stage, that is, when the practice – or the performance – of the texts had more influence on the book form than when other cultural or identitarian issues grew in importance.

³⁸ Since I did not have direct access to the material in Istanbul, Ory's work is taken as the reference for the contents and the script of the Qur'ānic scrolls.

³⁹ See Ory, ‘Un nouveau type de *muṣḥaf*’, 97 and 102; D'Aiuto, ‘La ‘scrittura mista’, 162. Other techniques for joining the parchment sheets in Greek scrolls are known: the 15 sheets of the Joshua Roll – possibly written in Constantinople by the scribe Basileios *kalligraphos* and dating back to the second half of the tenth century – were, for instance, ‘originally glued together’, J. Lowden, *Illustrated Octateuch Manuscripts: A Byzantine Phenomenon*, in P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (eds), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, D.C., 2010), 107–52, at 131. On another technique for joining the vellum sheets by using strips of parchment that follows the tradition of the Latin *Exultet* scrolls and is attested in Greek-Byzantine scrolls, see M. Maniaci and G. Orofino, ‘Les “Rouleaux d'Exultet” du Mont Cassin (techniques de fabrication, caractéristiques matérielles, décoration, rapports avec les rouleaux grecs)’, *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* 43 (2012), 71–82, at 78.

⁴⁰ Judging from the picture available online, Damascus Documents Photo Gallery by Dick Osseman at pbase.com (last accessed January 2022), it is possible to see at least one fairly neat vertical line on a Qur'ānic scroll.

⁴¹ In the Greek scrolls the text on the *verso*, which goes in the opposite direction to that on the *recto*, can be the continuation of the text on the *recto*, a different contemporary text or in some cases a later text; see Maniaci Orofino, ‘Les “Rouleaux d'Exultet”’, 78. Considering the description provided

Greek-Byzantine hymns and in pious recitation in the case of the Qur'āns). All these considerable factors, which appear in coeval scrolls produced in the Middle Eastern area, connect the Greek-Byzantine and Arabic scrolls in a consistent way, while the lack of any such common factors refutes any link between Greek-Byzantine and Beneventan Latin scrolls.⁴²

Moreover, scrolls by their very nature represent a neutral book form since the sense of reading/scrolling is vertical, no matter what the language of the text is. Conversely, both codices and rolls are revelatory in how they open up the meaning of the text they convey, and therefore the linguistic sphere to which they pertain. This is a point that should not be glossed over when referring to a period in which Islam was still developing its own Qur'ānic book production and thus experimenting with book forms. The written traditions – and religious scriptures – of other cultures were assessed in the context of its own religious and linguistic needs and identity.

There is no complete Qur'ānic codex for the first centuries of Islam.⁴³ Therefore, the Qur'ānic scrolls from Umayyad times, once stored in the

by S. Ory and the available images of the scrolls in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul, these events are also attested by Qur'ānic scrolls. These can have the Qur'ānic text on both sides, or record another, later text on the *verso*. It seems important to stress, however, 'the systematic refusal of opisthography' ('le refus systématique de l'opisthographie') in the *Exultet* scrolls, Maniaci and Orofino, 'Les "Rouleaux d'Exultet"', 78.

⁴² 'Comme il l'a été plusieurs fois souligné, les différences substantielles de contenu et fonction rendent peu probable, et en tout cas indémontrable, la filiation directe des rouleaux bénéventins d'hypothétiques prototypes byzantins locaux. [...] Que l'on admette ou pas l'impossibilité d'établir si les rouleaux latins sont des 'accommodations to eastern practice or remnants of earlier customs', reste le fait qu'ils présentent dès leur parution, des caractères matériels et décoratifs tout à fait étrangers à la tradition grecque', Maniaci and Orofino 'Les "Rouleaux d'Exultet"', 78. The lack of any connection between the Latin and the Islamic tradition has also been stressed by A. Fedeli, 'The Qur'ānic Text from Manuscript to Digital Form: Metalinguistic Markup of Scribes and Editors', in B. A. Anderson (ed.), *From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), 213–45, at 220–1.

⁴³ Only *excerpta* of early Qur'ānic manuscripts are available, as in the case of the lower text of the San'ā' palimpsest and of the other two known Qur'ānic palimpsests: the Mingana and Lewis palimpsest, and the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 328. For a discussion on the fragmented state of the text and of the leaves on which the San'ā' palimpsest is recorded, see A. Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH* (London 2017), 66–7. François Déroche, in turn, observed that 'Most of the Qur'an material that has come down to us from the period before AD 1000 is in the form of fragments which often consist of no more than a single folio or part of a single folio', F. Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition* (London, 1992), 12. We only have some isolated fragments of the Qur'ānic text on papyri; see N. Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Qur'ānic Development* (Chicago, 1939); R.-G. Khoury, 'Papyruskunde', in Wolf Dietrich Fischer (ed.), *Grundriß der Arabischen Philologie. Band I: Sprachwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden, 1982), 251–70, at 260; A. Fedeli, 'Isolated Qur'ānic Fragments: The Case of the three Papyri from the Mingana Collection', in A. Hilali and S. R. Burge (eds), *Fragmentation and Compilation: The Making of Religious Texts in Islam* (Berlin, 2019), 174–98. Often, Qur'ānic quotations on early papyri are linked to the production of amulets, see U. Bsees, 'Qur'ān Quotations in Arabic Papyrus Amulets', in A. Kaplony and M. Marx (eds), *Qur'ān Quotations on Papyrus Documents, 7th-10th Centuries, Documenta Coranica, 2* (Leiden, 2019), 112–38. I am grateful to Lucian Reinfandt (Vienna) for the references regarding Arabic papyri.

Damascene *Qubba* and now in Istanbul, are some of the first examples – even if defective at the beginning or at the end for material reasons – of a copy of the entire Qur'ānic text and one its earliest book form.

Many Greek-Byzantine scrolls, some found in the very same deposit as where the Qur'ānic scrolls were found – the Damascene *Qubba* – were generally produced in Damascus itself or in the *Bilād al-Shām* area. Other Greek-Byzantine scrolls were kept, or produced, in the Sinai area.⁴⁴ The period of production of the Greek-Byzantine scrolls lasted from the early eighth to the tenth century and corresponds fairly well to the period of production of the Qur'āns in form of scrolls, or at least to the earliest examples of this specific type of *muṣḥaf*. From a palaeographic point of view, all the Greek-Byzantine scrolls are precious examples of the so-called 'mixed script' (*scrittura mista*), a type of script first described in detail by Lidia Perria in 1984 and recently reconsidered in the light of an increased number of *specimina* by Francesco D'Aiuto.⁴⁵ The Greek type of script used in the Byzantine scrolls is not a factor that should be underestimated either: if one considers the backgrounds of the functionaries working in the Umayyad chancery – we need only think of John of Damascus (d. 749 AD)⁴⁶ – many with a previous Greek graphic education, it is not surprising to find the mixed-script in the Syrian scrolls, a script exclusively employed as book-hand linked to the chancery, yet never attested in documents.

It is useful to list the Greek-Byzantine scrolls produced in the Middle Eastern area – with chronological references where possible – in order to assess the material evidence that constitute the premises for Qur'ānic scroll production:⁴⁷

1. (*) Sankt-Peterburg, Rossijskaja Nacional'naja Biblioteka, gr. 41; in parchment, palimpsest. Early eighth century. Cut from a portion of roll

⁴⁴ Some of these scrolls were part of the *νεα ερημιατα* (New Finds) in St Catherine; see D'Aiuto, 'La "scrittura mista" maiuscolo-minuscola'.

⁴⁵ See D'Aiuto, 'La "scrittura mista" maiuscolo-minuscola'.

⁴⁶ See S. H. Griffith, 'John of Damascus and the Church in Syria in the Umayyad Era: The Intellectual and Cultural Milieu', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 11/2 (2011), 207–37. Other cases of powerful Christian families serving as administrators in the Umayyad bureaucracy in Damascus are known: 'They continued to think and write in Greek and enjoyed continuing access to the caliphal court', F. R. Trombley, 'Some Greek and Bilingual Arab-Byzantine Bronze Coins of Damascus and Hims-Emesa: Some New Examples of Iconography and Palaeography, with Reference to Some Byzantine Issues of the Late 6th and 7th Centuries', in B. Callegher and A. D'Ottone (eds), *The 3rd Simone Assemani Symposium on Islamic Coins* (Trieste, 2012), 58–76. For interactions between scripts – namely Hebrew and Arabic scripts – in the Christian-Arabic production, see A. D'Ottone Rambach, 'Sharing the Written Space: Contact and Interaction Between Arabic and Other Cultures/Scripts', in A. Borrut, M. Ceballos and A. M. Vacca (eds), *Navigating Language in the Early Islamic World: Multilingualism, Arabicization, and Language Change in the First Centuries of Islam* (Turnhout 2022), 439–69.

⁴⁷ The following entries are selected from the list given in D'Aiuto, 'La "scrittura mista" maiuscolo-minuscola', 161–9. Other scrolls, not in mixed script, might possibly be added to this list.

- written on both sides, mm. 175'137–154. Greek *scriptio inferior*: hymnographic texts or liturgical texts. Ex-Tischendorf collection and originally from St Catherine on Mount Sinai.
2. (*) olim Dimashq, Qubbat al-khazna, no. 23<c> (Violet), in parchment. Scroll or codex (unclear), dimensions unknown. 25 lines of script. Text not decipherable. Mixed script and, for the headings, an ogival straight capital (*maiuscola ogivale dritta*).
 3. (*) olim Dimashq, Qubbat al-khazna, nos. 71+72 (Violet), in parchment (?). Scroll written on both sides; dimensions unknown. Liturgy of St James. Text written in Palestinian ogival bent script (*maiuscola ogivale inclinata*) and marginalia and interlinear notes in 'mixed-script'.
 4. (*) olim Dimashq, Qubbat al-khazna, nos. 75<a> +76 (Violet), in parchment (?). Scroll written on both sides; dimensions unknown. Psalm 90 on both sides. It possibly had an apotropaic significance or was used for private devotion.
 5. (*) olim Dimashq, Qubbat al-khazna, nos. 166<a>+167<a>+168<a>+169<a> (Violet), in parchment (?). Scroll written on both sides; dimensions unknown. Hymnographic texts.
 6. Princeton, The University Library, Medieval and Renaissance Library, Garrett 24, ff. 81+84, Greek *scriptio inferior*; in parchment, palimpsest. Bifolium cut from a portion of scroll written on both sides; mm. 150'120 ca. Text: Sunday canons.
 7. Sīnā, Movḥ tḥs Ḥγίας Αἰκατερίνης, NE gr. ΜΓ 81: in parchment, palimpsest. Scroll written on both sides, mm. 510'115. Prayers in preparation for communion; verses (tropes) on *Dormitio Virginis*.
 8. Sīnā, Movḥ tḥs Ḥγίας Αἰκατερίνης, NE gr. ΜΓ 82: in parchment. Scroll, mm. 170'130. Prayers for Easter Vigil.
 9. Sīnā, Movḥ tḥs Ḥγίας Αἰκατερίνης, NE gr. ΜΓ 83: in parchment. Scroll, mm. 2715+195+570+330+250'137–135. Hymns.
 10. Sīnā, Movḥ tḥs Ḥγίας Αἰκατερίνης, NE gr. ΜΓ 84: in parchment. Scroll written on both sides, mm. 782 + 350 + 165 + 170'120–115. Liturgy for Saint Myron and the *Dormitio Virginis*.
 11. Sīnā, Movḥ tḥs Ḥγίας Αἰκατερίνης, NE gr. ΜΓ 88: in parchment. Scroll, mm. 1030 + 1100 + 1600'120. Hymnographic texts.
 12. Sīnā, Movḥ tḥs Ḥγίας Αἰκατερίνης, NE gr. ΜΓ 91: in parchment. Scroll (possibly written on both sides), mm. 3520'142–146. Hymns.
 13. Vatican City, Vatican Library, Vat.gr. 2282, mm 12059'173 (mutilated), in parchment, lacking the end. Bilingual Greek-Arabic liturgical scroll containing the liturgy of St James. Damascus, ninth-early tenth century, mixed-script together with a Palestinian bent-script, a straight ogival capital script (*maiuscola ogivale dritta*) and a small-size bent ogival script like the script for the headings in red ink.

In addition to these examples, I would also like to mention the model of the *Messanensis Gr. 177*, perhaps in scroll form and dating back to 979–983.⁴⁸ The case of the *Messanensis Gr. 177*, a fragment of parchment scroll produced in Southern Italy between the end of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century,⁴⁹ provides us with interesting proof of the influence of the Middle Eastern production of liturgical scrolls in other geographical areas.

Considering the Middle Eastern Greek-Byzantine production of liturgical scrolls in mixed script,⁵⁰ it is possible to discern that it spread in a two-fold manner: Qur'ānic scrolls produced in the same Middle Eastern area represented both continuity, as far as the book form is concerned, and adaptation as regards the language and the religious content: Arabic instead of Greek and Islamic Scripture instead of Christian hymns. In turn, Southern-Italian liturgical scrolls, such as the *Messanensis Gr. 177*, attest to continuity in terms of language and religious content, having a Christian text in Greek, and innovation/adaptation in terms of both book form – the scroll – and script.⁵¹

These adjustments concerning book form, script, language and contents do not affect the use of the text(s) and their oral performance: both the hymns in Greek and the Qur'ān in Arabic were recited in a religious context whether that was part of the liturgy in a church or the prayers in a mosque. From the perspective of social history we can thus add to what has been observed concerning the history of colour and the history of manuscript production: books are the product of a given society which defines their forms and uses. Pre-existing book forms, linked to different social, linguistic and religious contexts, can be either accepted and used for similar ends in a given society (as in the case of the Greek-Byzantine and Qur'ānic scrolls), modified (as in the case of the oblong Qur'ānic codices) or consciously rejected (as in the case of the Torah roll book model in the Islamic context).

FINAL REMARKS

Considering the substantial production of Greek-Byzantine scrolls from the early eighth to the tenth century that can be localised in the Syrian area or in Damascus itself, the link between Christian hymnographic scrolls and Qur'ānic scrolls from the *Qubba*, starts to become more apparent. The presence in the very same *Qubba* deposit of parchment scrolls in Greek – liturgical and devotional scrolls – and in

⁴⁸ See A. Jacob, 'La date, la patrie et le modèle d'un rouleau italo-grec (*Messanensis Gr. 177*)', *Helikon* 22–7 (1982–7), 109–25, at 123.

⁴⁹ See Jacob, 'La date, la patrie et le modèle', 114.

⁵⁰ For the areas of this production, see D'Aiuto 2020, 160.

⁵¹ The Greek style in *asso di picche* in a liturgical scroll, as in the *Messanensis Gr. 177*, is considered a *unicum*; see Jacob, 'La date, la patrie et le modèle', 113. One might wonder if the choice of a script, such as the *asso di picche* style, which mixes cursive and non-cursive letter forms, might have been linked to the script of the model, perhaps partially written in 'mixed script'. For the characteristics of this script, see *supra*.

Arabic – Qurʾānic and devotional scrolls – as well as the production in Damascus of bilingual and di-graphic scrolls, such as the Vat.gr. 2282, seem to indicate clear links. The broad artistic/artisanal context of Syria in the early Umayyad period suggests that there was no formal separation between religious communities (Christians/Muslims) and/or that newly converted Muslims – with a background in the Greek-Byzantine tradition – were relatively numerous.⁵² These scrolls have the same geographical area of production – Damascus and the *Bilād al-Shām*, the same period of production – early eighth-tenth century, and perhaps were written with the same instrument – a left-cut pen, judging from the lozenge-like ‘point’ in a Greek specimen and from the execution of thick and thin traits both in Greek and in Arabic.

The Greek-Byzantine scrolls present us with a close means of comparison and offer a precedent for both the book form (the scroll), the text (of a religious nature) and the use (devotional/liturgical) for the Qurʾānic scrolls now in Istanbul. The time and geographical frame – Syria between the eighth and the tenth centuries – provide further evidence of a link with the production of the scrolls. These would have been fashionable in that period, particularly in Damascus and in the *Bilād al-Shām* in Umayyad and early Abbasid times.

Too often Umayyad Syria is overshadowed by other regions and contexts such as Egypt and the Hijaz. For once, cultural interreligious links regarding book production (the Qurʾān in scroll form – an otherwise unattested, phenomenon in the history of the Islamic book) allow us to put the focus on Syria. Above and beyond the link between liturgical-devotional Greek-Byzantine scrolls and early Qurʾānic scrolls, I would finally like to stress the importance of always maintaining a comprehensive view of the material – both Muslim and non-Muslim – from the *Qubbat al-khazna*. Only a complete view, not just limited to the material directly pertinent to our own field of interest, allows for a better understanding of the religious, cultural and textual context in a multilingual and multicultural Syria. This broader approach also seems to be helpful in providing a more nuanced history of the Islamic book production, notably of early Qurʾānic texts in scroll form.

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⁵² It is important to mention here what has been observed regarding New Testament rolls and the continuity between religious communities and book production: ‘Given that the earliest Jesus followers belonged to a renewal movement *within* Judaism, they likely adopted the Jewish practice of copying their own sacred text onto rolls’, Smith, ‘The Willoughby Papyrus’, 952. For another case of cultural mimesis between different religious groups – namely Christians and Muslims – in the context of manuscript book production in copying sacred text, see A. D’Ottone Rambach, ‘The Blue Koran: A Contribution to the Debate on Its Origin and Date’, *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 8 (2017), 127–43.