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tion the successful method of historical linguistic comparison that was used, for instance, to understand ancient Maya. In contrast, the discussion of languages in ancient Nubia is of particular interest, even if such a balancing act in terms of length and depth remains difficult to perfect. At the very least, in this volume there are several ideas for additional topics that should interest authors of future introductory texts.

After the previously discussed comparison with many other language groups of the world, the book continues with a discussion of the grammar, in which he refers to RILLY for a more detailed discussion, and a number of translations of existing texts followed by the illustrations of the objects on which they were found. Unfortunately, the book has neither a subject nor an author index, a curious omission for an introductory text. It also has no list of references, which are only found dispersed in the footnotes.

In conclusion, this work constitutes perhaps not the best introductory text available on Meroitic studies, though it is the only one for the German-speaking student. The text provides an idiosyncratic summary of existing research, perpetuating some pre-existing problematic ideas, not unexpected in a book incorporating material from dense literature written in multiple languages with authors from different academic disciplines. It is an easier read than TÖRÖK's seminal *The Kingdom of Kush* and RILLY's groundbreaking *La langue du royaume de Méroé*, but it does not do justice to the advancements of either author, as BREYER's point of view merely dilutes their arguments. BREYER was ambitious in his approach for an introduction but with new material to underscore his critique of existing work he might have had a more convincing result for those who share his fascination for this field of study.

ALEX DE VOOGT, New York

ANTOINE BORRUT (Hrsg.): *Écriture de l'histoire et processus de canonisation dans les premiers siècles de l'islam. Hommage à Alfred-Louis de Prémare.* Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence 2011. 317 S. (Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée 129.) ISBN 978-2-85399-768-3. € 50,–.

For several years now a trend in the publication policy of academic journals has been imposed on many editors: the issue of thematic volumes. Most of those who opt for this solution are in fact trying to cope with the growth of new, usually competing, journals appearing on the market. These thematic volumes may also be a response to the more demanding process libraries of academic institutions around the world now apply to their selection of journals. Thematic volumes can indeed be bought as monographs and help to improve the financial situation of the less competitive journals in our field. In this context, the *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* is certainly a pioneer, as for more than thirty years this journal has published several issues per year, each dedicated to a main theme under the guidance of a guest editor, usually French. Articles beyond the scope of the main theme are still accepted and published in a second part.

The present volume is dedicated to two central issues in the history of early Islam: the writing of history and the process of canonization. The guest editor, ANTOINE BORRUT, is a specialist of the Umayyad period and is certainly the most appropriate person to coordinate a volume dealing with these two issues. Another important element worth mentioning is the focus of the articles: they are part of a thematic volume dedicated to ALFRED-LOUIS DE PRÉMARE (1930–2006). DE PRÉMARE spent the final part of his academic career (from 1983 onwards) at the Université d'Aix-en-Provence. His publications dealing with the early Islamic period are mainly concerned with the topics at the center of the present volume and it is a

most welcome initiative to see the authors echoing some of his ideas. As BORRUT reminds the reader, the historian who works on the period corresponding to the foundation of Islam (including the decades that preceded the revelation of the Quran) up to the ninth century faces many problems with regard to the sources. A few decades ago, a harsh debate prevailed concerning the approach of the historian to the sources on these centuries: WANSBROUGH, CRONE, and COOK advocated discarding, for historical reasons, most of the material on the events pertaining to the beginning of Islam. These revisionist theses have now been reassessed by their authors (at least CRONE and COOK), but they have had an impact on the studies carried out on the early period of Islam. Indeed, they had a positive effect though: they compelled historians of Islam to re-evaluate the ways they wrote about the history of that period. The relationships between the historian and his sources have also evolved: new methods have been developed to gauge their value. For instance, WANSBROUGH's theory regarding the Quran has now been called into question by very challenging technical analyses of the oldest manuscripts which are now, thanks to these analyses, dateable to the third quarter of the seventh century. Documentary sources, neglected for a long time, are now drawing the interest of more and more scholars in the fields of papyrology, numismatics, and epigraphy. Historians of early Islam can thus approach their sources in a more confident manner and the publication of this collection of articles devoted to very concrete problems will undoubtedly have a positive effect on the level of pre-Umayyad and Umayyad studies.

This volume gathers together ten articles, most of which cover topics within the chronological limits imposed by the general theme (i.e., the first centuries); with the possible exception of the last article that concerns an author from the thirteenth century. The Quran is legitimately at the center of several of these articles. CLAUDE GILLIOT, in "Le Coran, production littéraire de l'Antiquité tardive ou Mahomet interprète dans le ‹ lectionnaire arabe › de La Mecque" (pp. 31–56), goes further in his analysis of some parts of the Quranic text in order to demonstrate that parts of it stem from other texts. In this study, he focuses more particularly on the interpretation (i.e., translation but also explanation) by Muḥammad of passages from other scriptures, mainly Q 16:103 and 41:44. GILLIOT establishes a link between these examples and practices known among the Jews (targum) and Christians (churches where Syriac was the liturgical language: Diatessaron and other lectionaries). GILLIOT builds on the idea that the Quranic text from the Meccan period is a liturgical text. In regard to the concept of self-referentiality, he demonstrates that Muḥammad played the role of an interpreter (i.e., someone who explains), or even a translator of these texts.

The issue of self-referentiality of the Quranic text is also at the basis of ANNE-SYLVIE BOISLIVEAU's article ("Canonisation du Coran ... par le Coran?", pp. 153–168); she takes as her point of departure the question of the canonization of the text. Stressing the fact that the Quran is one of the rare religious texts that presents itself as a scripture whose function is to guide the community but also makes, on many occasions, reference to itself, she notes that its canonization is the direct result of its authority as it is expressed in some passages. She posits that the formulation of this canonization is not the result, but the cause of its canonization. It is worth mentioning that her doctoral dissertation, on which this article is largely based, has been published in the meantime.[1]

In "Qur'ânicization of Religio-Political Discourse in the Umayyad Period" (pp. 79–92), FRED M. DONNER propounds the idea that it was during the Umayyad period that several institutions and procedures were renamed according to a terminology that originates in the Quran, and that this was done with the aim of legitimizing the state and the Umayyad

[1] *Le Coran par lui-même: vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel.* Leiden 2013.

caliphate. The institutions and procedures he examines are political leadership (shift from the title *amīr al-mu'minīn* to *khalīfa*), communal identity and boundaries (*mu'minūn* vs. *muslimūn*; *dār al-islām* vs. *dār al-ḥarb*), foreign warfare *(jihād)*, the judiciary (appearance of a new designation for the judge: *qāḍī*), the Islamic era/calendar (appearance of the term *hijra* in documents to identify the new era), the expansion of the community *(fatḥ)*, civil wars *(fitna)*, and frontier outposts *(ribāṭ)*. Here DONNER defends his theory about the Community of Believers (a community that was more open than that referred to in later Islam as the Community of Muslims) and he posits that this was the result of a process of focalization on the Prophet and the Quran which took place in the Umayyad period. Since the publication of this article, his book *Muḥammad and the Believers* has been published (Cambridge, MA; London 2010).

Three articles analyze the value of sources from the early Islamic period. FRÉDÉRIC IMBERT ("L'Islam des pierres: l'expression de la foi dans les graffiti arabes des premiers siècles", pp. 57–77) addresses the question of the inscriptions left by earlier peoples on rocks in the Arabian and Syrian deserts. Though most of these inscriptions are undated, we have clues based on the paleography of the Arabic handwriting. IMBERT stresses that the most ancient dated graffiti (23/643 and 24/644) do not contain any religious references or the names of their authors, but there are some others that feature religious formulae. He indicates that there were archaic formulations of the profession of faith prior to the one that became traditional and that these formulations portray a tribal and very materialist monotheism. Interestingly, he notes that the prophet Muḥammad is absent from the most ancient graffiti, though he emphasizes that historians should not draw hasty conclusions from this absence. While it is perhaps obvious for historians that the *argumentum ex silentio* must be used with caution, this reminder is still necessary. CHRISTIAN JULIEN ROBIN ("L'Église des Aksûmites à Ẓafâr (Yémen) a-t-elle été incendiée?", pp. 93–116) and ÉTIENNE DE LA VAISSIÈRE ("Historiens arabes et manuscrits d'Asie centrale: quelques recoupements", pp. 117–123) both concentrate on the value of contemporary and later sources, though they reach opposite conclusions. In the case of ROBIN, later handwritten sources invalidate an almost contemporary inscription and thus corroborate other texts inscribed a few months after the event; on the other hand, de LA VAISSIÈRE, who compares Muslim (al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-A'tham al-Kūfī), Soghdian, and Chinese sources on events related to the conquest of Central Asia demonstrates that sources from different sides corroborate each other.

The process of the construction of historical figures is investigated BY VIVIANE COMERRO, who explores the case of Ibn 'Abbās ("La Figure historique d'Ibn 'Abbās", pp. 125–137), and by GABRIEL MARTINEZ-GROS, who appraises how Ibn Ḥafṣūn came to be depicted as a bandit by two historians active in the nineteenth century: JOSÉ ANTONIO CONDE and REINHART DOZY. Both articles are excellent epistemiological inquiries that will be useful to any student who wants to specialize in the history of Islam.

The last two papers deal with the question of canonization in the field of *ḥadīth*. These are by JONATHAN A.C. BROWN, "The Canonization of Ibn Mâjah: Authencity vs. Utility in the Formation of the Sunnî Ḥadîth Canon" (pp. 169–181); and by JENS SCHEINER, "'When the class goes too long, the Devil takes part in it': *adab al-muḥaddith* according to Ibn aṣ-Ṣalâḥ ash-Shahrazûrî (d. 643/1245)" (pp. 183–200).

To sum up, the present volume is a major contribution to the field. It is a useful tool that should be part of any course devoted to historical criticism, as it focuses on the validity of sources, the criticism that is necessary to exploit those sources, and the modern debates that prevail in the field of the history of Islam.

FRÉDÉRIC BAUDEN, Liege