

The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity: A Critique of The Critique

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Aziz al-Azmeh's essay, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity. A critique of approaches to Arabic Sources*, Berlin, 2014 (hereafter, *The Critique*) is described by its author as the 'technical preface',¹ and the 'companion'² to the volume, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allah and His People*, Cambridge, 2015 (hereafter, *The Emergence*). This contribution reflects on the critique al-Azmeh addresses to the field of Islamic studies and on some examples he proposes for the study of the Arabic sources. However, by addressing *The Critique* our reflection can hardly avoid citing *The Emergence*. That is to say, this contribution discusses questions raised by the author but remain to some extent open in both volumes. At first glance, we discover the two 'companions' books as depending on each other in a way that *The Critique* appears as a rehabilitation of the contribution of the Arabic sources to reconstruct Islamic history, while *The Emergence* entertains a perpetual dialogue with the scholarship of the XIXth, XXth and XXIst centuries as well as with the material that allow the reconstruction of 'Paleo Islam' as the author sees it. Both volumes aim to give an insight into the scholarship about Islam as well as a new interpretation of the source material to study Islamic history. *The Critique* and *The Emergence* have been received in the field with a mixture of opinions.³ Little has been said

(1) Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity. A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources*, Berlin, 2014, (hereafter, *The Critique*), p. vii.

(2) al-Azmeh, *The Critique*, p. vii.

(3) *The Emergence* and *The Critique* have been subjects to reviews that vary from superficial to critical and discursive analysis. Most of the reviews take into account both books but most of them address *The Emergence*. Karim Samji, 'Method and Impasse: Critical Remarks on the Reconstruction of Formative Islam' in *Der Islam* 2016; 93(1), pp. 216-231; Steven C. Judd, *The Free Library*. S.v. The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People" Retrieved Oct 13 2018 from <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+Emergence+of+Islam+in+Late+Antiquity%3a+Allah+and+His+People.-a0460448085>; Peter Webb, *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 23 (2015), pp. 149-153; Abdullah Drury, Research common, Retrieved

about *The Critique*, due probably to its date of publication posterior to the one of *The Emergence*.⁴ The following development engages a discussion with two problems, al-Azmeh's approach to the Arabic literary sources and the question of The genre⁵ and, his 'model' for the Qur'ān composition.⁶ The first part of this paper is an overview of the author's assessment of the field under study, the second discusses the question of The genre, the third, the model for Qur'ān composition.

I- The influence of XIXth century scholarship or what has been said after Goldziher?

In *The Critique*, Azmeh firsts criticizes methods in Islamic studies of the last three decades. He claims that, sometimes, ideological factors motivate the approaches, and insists on the XIXth century color of many of the XXth centuries Islamic studies patterns. He writes that studies on the Qur'ān and related texts often apply Ignaz Goldziher's categories⁷; little has been added in the past century. The 'hyper-critical school'⁸ occupies major part of his critique. The author identifies two of the 'hyper-critical school's assumptions that have, in his view, major consequences on the field and obstruct somehow the academic discussion: the 'derivativeness' of Islam as a religion⁹

Oct 13 from: <<https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/9397/Emergence%20of%20Islam%20in%20Late%20Antiquity.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>
; Abraham Silo Wilar, *Indonesian Journal of Theology*, pp. 252- 254, Retrieved Oct 13 from: <https://journalteologi.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/07-ijt-3-2-reviewthe-emergence-of-islam-in-late-antiquity1.pdf>; Harry Munt, *The English Historical Review*, Volume 132, Issue 556, 1 June 2017, pp. 664–667. Retrieved Oct 13 from <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cex061>> ; Jonathan Berkey, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 121, Issue 2, 1 April 2016, pp. 522-524, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/121.2.522>>; G. R. Hawting, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Volume 17 Issue 1, pp.114-118, Retrieved Oct 13 from <<https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/jqs.2015.0181>> The last review has been published in 2014, before the publication of *The Critique* and addresses the methodological settings of the author on the basis of *The Emergence*; Anthony Street, <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/riit.12606>>

(4) G. R. Hawting, *Op.cit.*, p. 116.

(5) Al-Azmeh, *The Critique*, in particular, pp. 15-38.

(6) Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence*, pp. 431-438; see the fold-out diagram 'Model for the composition of the Paleo-Muslim Qur'ān' (hereafter, 'Model')

(7) al-Azmeh, *The Critique*, p. 2.

(8) Ibid, in particular, pp. 1-14.

(9) Ibid p. 7.

and the ‘unmanageability’ of the Arabic sources, perceived as exotic and ‘unfamiliar’.¹⁰ The same sources are submitted to the postulate of ‘historiographical inadequacy’.¹¹ The ‘derivativeness of Islam’ appears in the studies on the Islam as Jewish heresy to which one can add the studies of non-Islamic and non-Arabic origins of the Qu’an.¹² The ‘unmanageability of the Arabic sources’, refers to the claims of the skeptics that these sources cannot be dated with current evidence.¹³

In contrast to this skeptical morass, the author offers alternative approaches to the sources and a new concept, ‘Paleo-Islam’ that refers to al-Azmeh’s account of the various strands in late antiquity that would come to be Islam.¹⁴ ‘Paleo-Islam’ designates in al-Azmeh’s words: ‘an evolving repertoire of ritual, doctrinal and mythical possibilities; it was a regime of exploration, innovation, adaptation, adjustment and assimilation, specific to a time and place.’¹⁵ The periodization and account of ‘Paleo-Islam’ is certainly the most important contribution in both companion volumes.¹⁶ Al-Azmeh’s avoids the XIXth century concern with certainties, and seeks instead, in a ‘khaldunian’ way to determine ‘what is possible’ rather than ‘what really happened.’¹⁷ He organizes his critique according to the main problems raised by previous scholarship, among them, Arabic literature and its genres—sources.

II- The Arabic literary sources and the question of The Genre

Two literary characteristics of the Arabic sources motivate the ‘hypercritical approach’: the ‘orality’ of the material and its ‘subjectivity’.¹⁸ Al-Azmeh explores such genres as *ayyām*, *akhbār*, hadith, *qaṣaṣ* in order to demonstrate the strength of their claim to

(10) Ibid p. viii.

(11) Ibid p. 4.

(12) Ibid p.7.

(13) Ibid p. 4.

(14) Al-Azmeh dedicates two chapters in *The Emergence* to the development of the concept, Paleo-Islam 1: charismatic polity, pp. 358-428; Paleo-Islam 2: the Paleo-Muslim canon, pp. 431-488.

(15) *The Emergence*, p. 358.

(16) See the discussion of the period covered by the ‘paleo-Islam’ in Karim Samji, *op.cit.*, p. 218. About the label ‘Paleo-Islam’ Cf. G. R. Hawting, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

(17) Al-Azmeh, *The Critique*, p. ix.

(18) Ibid p.5.

historicity;¹⁹ in many cases, such claims are confirmed by references to documentary sources such as epigraphy. Further, he analyses multiple layers of textual composition and their actors such as the author, the compiler, the redactor, and the transmitter.²⁰ In continuation with the studies on the authorship and the historical accuracy of the Arabic sources²¹, he distinguishes between the ‘smallest literary units’²² that would sustain the study of the historical narratives²³ and the extra-historical elements perceived as ‘embellishments’ and identified as an additional layer of redaction.²⁴ Al-Azmeh depicts the transmitters as inventive, however, they are constrained ‘by a strong sense of verisimilitude’.²⁵

I shall not discuss the historicity of the Arabic sources and al-Azmeh’s responses to the ‘hyper-critical school’; rather, I attempt to limit my reflection on the author’s conception of The genre though both issues (historicity and genres) are, in the author’s argument, strongly related. Al-Azmeh describes the intersection between the various genres of the Arabic sources and announces that what he calls the Qur’ān and poetry and the ‘Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd antiquarianism’ should be considered as separate examples.²⁶ However, he pays particular attention to the pre-Islamic genre of *ayyām*, a particularly interesting example depicted as ‘underused’ as it is the case with the related genre of genealogy.²⁷ The *ayyām* originate in an early period;²⁸ and it is depicted as a historical genre despite being considered as ‘technically, not historical writing but rather epic in its nature.’²⁹ Building on previous studies on pre-Islamic material³⁰, *ayyām* is considered as a reservoir of texts from which derives or ‘emanates’³¹ ‘Paleo-Muslim material’.³² This made the author call for seeing *maghāzī* ‘as belonging generically to the

(19) Ibid p. 39-55.

(20) Ibid p. 57.

(21) Ibid p. 57, note 8.

(22) Ibid p. 57.

(23) Ibid

(24) Ibid

(25) Ibid p. 58, see the example of the Arabic Poetry, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

(26) Ibid p. 39.

(27) Ibid p. 51, note 62.

(28) Ibid p. 51, note 61.

(29) Ibid p. 52.

(30) Ibid p. 70, note, 11.

(31) Ibid p. 40.

(32) Ibid p. 40; pp. 59-60 ; p. 70.

ayyām genre'.³³ The derivation of *maghāzī* from *ayyām* highlights the fluctuating boundaries between the Arabic genres; it also clarifies some aspects of the intersection between them, a motive extensively studied in recent scholarship.³⁴ In order to illustrate the generic function of *ayyām*, al-Azmeh gives the example of Wahb Ibn Munabbih and his *maghāzī*³⁵ and adds that Ibn Munabbih's account derives from pre-Islamic *ayyām* material that has been 'Islamized' through the usage of the figure of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.³⁶ The derivation of *maghāzī* from *ayyām* is based on criteria of 'linguistic register'³⁷ and 'formal concordance'³⁸ although, al-Azmeh underlines that the field needs 'studies of the stylistic, syntactic and lexical development of historical narratives in their successive redactions, studies which would contribute appreciably to the chronologies of transmission and the chronological layers any given reports may contain by inference from the physical evidence of language change.'³⁹ The author does not develop further the 'formal concordance' between the two genres but insists on the presence of an air of memorialising reportage and memorandum⁴⁰ in the *maghāzī*, an aspect that serves his main argument of the historical plausibility of the 'Paleo-Muslim material'. He makes *ayyām* as referring to an 'elementary moment in historical composition, preceding the more formal redaction highlighted by attributed transmission' in the *maghāzī*.⁴¹

Al-Azmeh's picture of the evolving of the genres in Arabic sources would have been incomplete without his consideration of the social context of the *ayyām*'s delivery and circulation. In *The Emergence*⁴², he mentions the necessity to study the context of transmission of *ayyām* such as the context of the market and its actors '[...]oratory in these markets, a topic yet requiring basic research, [...]was also used for the conveyance of information and of lore, including the delivery of *ayyām*.'⁴³ Although the passage does not aim directly to develop the

(33) Ibid p. 59.

(34) For example, Asma Hilali, « Coran, hadith et textes intermédiaires. Le genre religieux aux débuts de l'islam », *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph*, 64, 2012, pp. 29-44.

(35) Al-Azmeh, *The Critique*, p. 60.

(36) Ibid pp. 59-60; p.70.

(37) Ibid p. 60.

(38) Ibid p. 71-72.

(39) Ibid p. 48.

(40) Ibid p. 71.

(41) Ibid p. 72.

(42) Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence*, p. 143-144.

(43) Ibid p. 144.

issue of derivation of *maghāzī* from *ayyām*, it offers the contextual framework of the author's projection of the transfer of material from one genre to another.

Al-Azmeh's representation of the sources-genres dynamic is heuristic for the studies on the transmission of early material; it sheds light on the growth of the genres and redefines the links between the issues of historicity and the genres-derivation. However, a fundamental question remains suspended, it concerns the mediums of the genres-derivation. Building on the hypothesis of al-Azmeh, the same mediums would preserve the 'linguistic register' of *ayyām* despite the textual transformation that occurs in any enterprise of transmission. Focusing on the dynamic relationship between oral and written performance rather than on the impact of the administrative support on the text, the author alludes to this specific issue in *The Emergence*: '...these poetic contests, often publicly judged as competitions in verbal dexterity, were important elements in creating a confluence of human elements together celebrating themselves in the form of what later became *al-ayyām*.'⁴⁴ In addition to the oral performances, the author mentions specific documents such as contracts and documents of various kinds of transactions that have the function of vehicles of poetry, names of tribes and infinite categories of information.⁴⁵ The reflection the author dedicates to the oratory contexts and the documents that serve for recording pre-Islamic material is most inspiring and call for including what might be called the 'intermediary genres' and 'genres-mediums' within the picture of transmission of texts in 'Paleo-Islam'; this brings to light unknown areas in the spectrum of literary genres of the Arabic sources. Beyond the argument of historicity that occupies most of the author's concern, his discussion of the sources-genres suggests a hierarchical organization of the literary genres in which the historical verisimilitude prevails. Although the author's response to the 'hyper-critical school' diverts sometimes the analysis into considering the historical writing as the main concern in the various genres of the Arabic sources, which is not always the case, the spectrum of sources-genres is most heuristic for the studies of the transmission of texts in 'Paleo-Islam'.

(44) Ibid

(45) Ibid p. 141-146.

III- Textual composition: the Qur'ān as example

The Qur'ān appears in both volumes as 'inextricably' connected to 'Paleo-Islam'⁴⁶ and al-Azmeh dedicates substantial discussions to the Qur'ān's composition.⁴⁷ In his representation of 'Paleo-Muslim' texts, the Qur'ān stands by itself within a sophisticated network of literary genres, material and critical apparatus. Parallel to the variety of genres and supports connected to the Qur'ān; the text is treated to a chronological evolution in which al-Azmeh considers both oral and written channels of transmission; he also examines the ways the text develops from fragmentariness to compilation.⁴⁸ The composition of the Qur'ān is depicted and represented graphically in the fold-out diagram entitled 'Model for the composition of the 'Paleo-Muslim Qur'ān' (hereafter, Model)⁴⁹. Al-Azmeh describes the model by writing 'Such a model is in itself hypothetical; it is constructed by inference from facts arising from the material-codicological and literary-structural-aspects of the Qur'ān, and from facts, types of events, and indices ascertainable from the Arabic literary sources; codicological and paleographic studies are a growth area of decisive importance here.'⁵⁰

On these bases, the author encompasses the history of the Qur'ān within three dimensions: (a) categories of medieval and modern scholarship such as 'Companion codices' and 'Qur'ānic variants and readings'⁵¹, (b) mediums of transmission derived from the Arabic sources such as '*ṣuḥuf*'⁵² (c) historical evidence, results of archeological research such as palimpsests and fragments. These patterns are developed extensively in *The Emergence* and occupy the whole chapter dedicated to 'The Paleo-Muslim canon'.⁵³ The author describes the progressive transformation of the Qur'ān text from its primary forms of oral 'enunciations' at the beginning of the revelation to its final forms of canonized book (*muṣḥaf*) that took multiple historical steps.⁵⁴ In-between these two historical turns, there are multiple intermediary

(46) Ibid p. 431.

(47) Ibid pp. 431-488; see 'Model'.

(48) Ibid p. 465-477.

(49) Ibid 'Model'.

(50) Ibid p. 449.

(51) Ibid, 'Model'. About the 'Companion codices', see *ibid.*, p. 453-454.

(52) Ibid, 'Model'. About *ṣaḥīfa* pl *ṣuḥuf*, see *ibid.*, p. 434; 448; 450; 453; 456-457; 464.

(53) Ibid pp. 438-488.

(54) Ibid p. 432-488.

historical moments that witness the expansion of the Qur'ān. Al-Azmeh often enumerates a perpetual enterprise of what we call the 'rewriting' of the text. Concretely, the 'rewriting' is assimilated to the 'collection', 'reiteration', 'emendation', etc undertaken by the actors of textual transmission; they echo the Qur'ān as 'a process of performative communication, persuasion and pressure, responding to developing circumstances, thereby bearing repetition, reiteration, inflection, self-abrogation and other forms of self-reflexivity, and manifold interpolation[...] [the Qur'ān] was not a neat collection of treatises on creation, law or revelation, or a body of connected pseudo-historical narratives.'⁵⁵ Here, al-Azmeh pays particular attention to the different forms of interventions in the text and insists on the multiple layers of transformation occurring within the text. The Qur'ān 'text-forms' vary continuously following the growth of the corpus and its canonization.

The model for the composition of the 'Paleo-Muslim' Qur'ān contains twenty frames dedicated to the different textual forms and organized according to a specific chronological order. The totality of the frames is submitted to a historical progression going from 610 c.e. to 705 c.e. and shared into three historical periods: The first, between 610-632, includes ten frames describing the progress of the text from the 'inspiration' in the form of 'verses and verse sequences' to some of the 'autograph forms' that al-Azmeh shares between '*Maṣāḥif*' Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa' and the 'Companion codices'.⁵⁶ The differences between the two 'autograph forms' is that the 'Companion codices' do not count among the 'household *ṣuḥuf* and *maṣāḥif*' while '*Maṣāḥif*' Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa' do.⁵⁷ The second historical period, between 632-653, counts two steps, the 'collation of the *Maṣāḥif*' and the 'skeletal morphemic Codex of 'Uthmān' deriving from it.⁵⁸ This historical period witnesses intersections between the first and the third one; among the in-between 'text-forms', al-Azmeh mentions the 'reported *ṣuḥuf*', an extension of the first period and, the 'Companion codices', a form that survives the first period, yet is perpetuated in the third one. The third period, between 653-705, is the last one and includes one main frame designating a 'Canonical text form' that al-Azmeh calls 'Editorial intervention, variants, orthographic reform'. The same frame is surrounded by

(55) Ibid p. 451.

(56) Ibid, 'Model'.

(57) Ibid

(58) Ibid

two others shared with the second period ('Companion codices') and with the first period ('Reiterations, declamations, ritual performances, dialectal and other inflections and emendations').

This schematic-historical overview of the Qur'ān's composition covers the most important 'text-forms' that have been studied so far by Qur'ān scholarship; they include oral and written transmission; compilations and fragmented material; official channels of transmission as well as marginal ones such as what the author calls 'non-canonical readings'. The same typology of 'text-forms' takes into consideration the use of Qur'ān in ritual performance and the infiltration of non-Qur'ānic material such as Biblicisms and para-Qur'ānic material in what the author calls 'secondary Qur'ānisation'.⁵⁹ The chronological succession of the 'text-forms' includes the 'textual variations and developments' and is graphically represented by a simple arrow⁶⁰ while the dynamic links between the historical periods or what the author calls 'feedback loops' are represented by the symbol of a double bold arrow.

Nevertheless, three registers appear in al-Azmeh's categories that coincide with his presentation of the material and the sources he used for the model of Qur'ān composition⁶¹ (a) historical/archeological evidence, (b) concepts issued from Islamic medieval and modern scholarship and (c) mediums of transmission. Our main example is related to the frame designating 'Autograph text forms' and more precisely the 'Companion codices' situated in two historical turns: at the first period (between 610-632) and between the second (632-653) and the third period (653-705). The 'Companion codices' is a concept that has a big importance in Qur'ān history and scholarship. Michael Cook⁶² and, more recently Behnam Sadeghi⁶³ attempted to prove the historicity of the 'Companion codices' using two different methods, manuscripts stemma and manuscript edition, though addressing the same issue: how to use the Qur'ān manuscripts to fill the gaps of Qur'ān history? However, little has been said in Qur'ān scholarship about the ways the 'companion codices' have been brought to our

(59) Ibid, 'Model', note 1.

(60) Ibid, 'Model', Key.

(61) See above p. 7.

(62) Michael Cook, 'The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran' in *Graeco-Arabica*, 9-10, 2004, pp. 89-104.

(63) Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The codex of a companion of the prophet and the Qur'ān of the prophet", *Arabica*, 57/4, 2010, pp. 343-436.

knowledge before their historical ‘discovery’ by the two scholars.⁶⁴ The ‘Companion codices’ have been transmitted in a variety of genres and their content circulated in hadith and various material and they have been recorded in form of lists of Qur’ānic variants and readings (*qirā’a* pl. *qirā’āt*; *ḥarf* pl. *aḥruf*).⁶⁵ A historical perspective that takes into consideration the growth of the sources-genres intersected within the history of the Qur’ān as promised by al-Azmeh would rather suggest that the ‘Companion codices’ or better to say, their respective ‘text-forms’ are present in the totality of the historical periods of the Qur’ān composition and does not concern only, be it historical or not, their ‘autograph text-form’ consisting in codices.⁶⁶ The notion of ‘autograph text forms’ referring to the ‘companion codices’ is built on the results of Qur’ān manuscripts scholarship whose function here is to fill the gaps of the medieval Islamic accounts most importantly hadith material.⁶⁷ Although in *The Emergence*, the author mentions the list-genre⁶⁸ and its importance in the progress of the redaction of the Qur’ān; this consideration does not affect his model of Qur’ān composition. In the frame ‘extant *ṣuḥuf*’ in the third historical period, other examples of Qur’ān manuscripts, BNF 328 and ‘The Sanaa leaves’, are superimposed with the category of *ṣaḥīfa* (pl. *ṣuḥuf*).⁶⁹ The discussion of the mns 01-27.1 *Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt*, *Ṣan‘ā’*, the only collection of leaves among the ‘Sanaa leaves’ on which we have serious studies, occupies an important space in the field. However, the leaves have been identified by Sadeghi as a surviving copy of a companion codex⁷⁰, the paleographical basis of his argument have been discussed and even refuted and the leaves have been considered recently as eventually fragmentary material emanating from a school exercise.⁷¹ However, the argument of the school exercise on one hand and the argument of the codex on the other hand, both deem these leaves outside the category of *ṣaḥīfa* if we take into consideration

(64) This argument is extensively developed in Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa palimpsest. The Transmission of the Qur’an in The First Centuries A.H.*, OUP, 2017, pp. 44-46.

(65) Frederick Leemhuis, ‘Readings of the Qur’ān’, *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 347-351; Viviane Comerro, *Les traditions sur la constitution du muṣḥaf de ‘Uthmān*, Beyrouth, pp.41-86.

(66) Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa palimpsest*, pp. 44-46.

(67) Viviane Comerro, *Les traditions*, pp. 44-86.

(68) Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence*, p. 450.

(69) Ibid, ‘Model’, footnote 4.

(70) Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, ‘*Ṣan‘ā’* 1 and the Origins of the Qur’ān’ *Der Islam*. 87 (1–2), 2012, pp. 1–129.

(71) Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa palimpsest*, pp. 34-70.

the specific meaning of the term as designating a ‘text-form’ that takes place somewhere in-between notes and publication.⁷² However, one could assign to the same leaves the status of *ṣahīfa* once its basic meaning is considered, i. e.: ‘text of documentary or contractual nature[...] or a written register in a very general sense (as in fragments of the Qur’ān circulating before the constitution of the canonical and other codices, the form clearly continuing to be in circulation thereafter)’.⁷³ The very meaning of *ṣahīfa* varies; its materiality and its status within the process of textual transmission modify its position in the model of the Qur’ān composition. Moreover, some differences between BNF 328 so called ‘Codex parisino-petropolitanus’, a complete codex⁷⁴ and the ‘Sanaa leaves’, fragmented material would prevent from considering both of them as belonging to the category of *ṣahīfa*. In other words, BNF 328 is more than a *ṣahīfa* and the mns 01.27-1 is less or something else than *ṣahīfa* because as it is stated above, it might indicate an ‘intermediary genre’ that is not mentioned among the Qur’ānic supports such as the support used for the school exercise and of which we have rare archeological evidence.

Similarly, to his discussion of the genres in the Arabic sources, al-Azmeh’s model of the Qur’ān composition calls for including additional ‘text-forms’ that could be assimilated to what we might call ‘intermediary genres’ and ‘transitional text-forms’. The reasons of the superimposition operated by al-Azmeh between the ‘Companion codices’ as part of the Qur’ān composition (under the form of lists of variants and readings) and the ‘Companion codices’ as part of the history of medieval and modern Qur’ān scholarship is that he treats at the same level, the one of the history of the Qur’ān composition, the three registers mentioned above: historical evidence, concepts and supports of writing. Although it takes place at the end of *The Emergence*, the model of Qur’ān composition does not take into consideration the nuanced concepts discussed in the volume neither the neat separation

(72) The ‘text-form’ here does not coincide with the authoritative status of the *ṣahīfa*. On the *ṣahīfa* pl. *ṣuhuf* and its various meanings according the context of its usage, see *The Emergence*, p. 434; 448; 450; 453; 456- ;464. The meanings are described by the author as: sheets; pre-canonical ‘text-forms’; text containing proto-Qur’ānic material, written support of ‘predecessor text-forms’, ‘records of Muhammadan pronouncements’, ‘individual collections’; *The Critique*, p. 88-89;

(73) Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence*, p. 464.

(74) François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l’islam. Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*, Leiden, 2009.

operated all over the two volumes between history and interpretation. Moreover, even if we accept the simplification of historical evolution to which any graphical representation is submitted, al-Azmeh's model focuses on the Qur'ān even if he suggests in a footnote that the inter-connection between Qur'ānic and para-Qur'ānic literature should be considered in the model for the composition of the 'Paleo-Muslim' Qur'ān.⁷⁵ Despite the innovative aspect of the Qur'ān model in *The Emergence*, the Qur'ān composition presented in the Model follows the ready-made paths of scholarship that is itself concerned in most of its directions by mirroring in a way or in another the Islamic traditional accounts. The 'Model for the composition of the 'Paleo-Muslim' Qur'ān' raises the question of how to 'navigate' in the history of the Qur'ān between the categories of medieval scholarship; those of modern scholarship and those related to the supports of transmission in order to describe a unique historical evolution? An additional question would be how to take into consideration the channels of Qur'ān transmission not mentioned directly by the Islamic sources and somehow avoided by Qur'ān scholarship such as what we called above 'the intermediary genres and supports'? Finally, how to study the history of the Qur'ān as a perpetually changing text without studying the history of its correlated concepts such as the Qur'ānic variants and readings and their text-referent or 'text-forms' following the terminology of al-Azmeh as themselves changing concepts and changing text-referent?

Al-Azmeh's discussion of The genre in the Arabic sources and his representation of the Qur'ān composition are strongly related in the 'companion' volumes and influenced by his response the 'hyper-critical' approach to the Arabic sources. Re-assessing the history of the Arabic sources and, in its core, the Qur'ān text is the Ariadne's thread in al-Azmeh's multi-layered, complex work; and despite the variety of the problems raised on both volumes, some of them remain suspended.

(75) *The Emergence*, 'Model', note, 1.