



The Sanaa Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH (Qur'anic Studies Series)

By Asma Hilali

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This volume provides a new annotated edition of the two layers of the 'Sanaa palimpsest', one of the oldest Qur'an manuscripts yet discovered, together with a critical introduction that offers new hypotheses concerning the transmission of the Qur'an during the first centuries of Islam. The palimpsest contains two superimposed Qur'anic texts within two layers of writing, on thirty-eight leaves of parchment collectively numbered MS 01-27.1 in the Dar al-Makhtutat (lit. 'the House of Manuscripts') in Sanaa, Yemen. The palimpsest's lower text, which has been dated to the first century of Islam (seventh century CE), was subsequently erased and the parchment was later reused for writing another Qur'anic text, which remains visible in natural light. This upper text is thought to date from the second century of Islam (eighth century CE). The two layers were imaged in 2007 by a French-Italian mission.

Both Qur'anic texts are fragmented and present aspects of work in progress. In its lower layer, the manuscript offers the oldest witness of a reading instruction in a Qur'an text and perhaps even in any Arabic text. Such peculiarities offer rare evidence as to how the Qur'an was transmitted, taught and written down in the first centuries of Islam. In this book, Asma Hilali presents an annotated edition of the texts, together with a critical introduction. These contextualise the volume within the field of Qur'an manuscript studies, and engage with the historical and institutional contexts of transmission of the Qur'anic passages. The volume also makes systematic reference to previous studies and partial editions of the same manuscript.

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Review

"Both parts of this volume, the edition and the introduction, are equally impressive, displaying as comfortable and sure a hand with the technicalities of codicology as with scrutiny and assessment of the Sanaa palimpsest as an historical object. Hilali's technical as well as analytical judgements are sober and acutely insightful. They disallow the intrusion of anachronistic considerations and the inflection of judgement by unnecessary yet all-too-common theological or doctrinal assumptions. Instead, the author's interpretation and choices display a keen sense for clues, and open avenues towards reconstructing one more element in the jigsaw puzzle that is the interconnected histories of Qur'anic enunciation, composition, reiteration, redaction, and early circulation."--Aziz al-Azmeh, University Professor, Department of History, Central European University, Budapest

"Dr Hilali's anticipated publication on the Sanaa palimpsest provides fresh material for the further study of this fascinating document and offers new hypotheses about its origins. I have no doubt that the field of Qur'anic studies will greatly benefit from her insightful study."--François Déroche, Professor of the History of the Qur'an (Text and Transmission), Collège de France

About the Author

Asma Hilali is a Research Associate in the Department of Academic Research and Publications at The Institute of Ismaili Studies. She gained her PhD from l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris. Dr Hilali has worked in various research centres in Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Her main interest is related to the transmission of religious literature in early and mediaeval Islam, and the issues of how religious texts were used and what impact this use had on their forms and contents.

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