The project that resulted in this book was originally conceived within the scope of my participation in the Center for Advanced Study “Beyond the Canon,” a collaborative research group at the University of Regensburg, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinde, and it marks my primary contribution to this ongoing Collaborative Research Group. I am enormously grateful for having been invited to participate in this research group as well as for the considerable intellectual and financial support that it provided for my research. My thanks especially to Tobias Nicklas, for initially inviting me to be a part of this project, and also to the two other directors, Harald Buchinger and Andreas Merkt. Likewise, I thank Stephanie Hallinger, the center’s academic director, and also the center’s research assistants, Charlotte von Schelling and Marko Jovanovic, for all of their help with my research and stays in Regensburg in 2019 and then in 2021–22. All have become close friends and valued collaborators in the process, contributing valuable ideas and perspectives to my research during the last several years on a number of topics. My stay in Regensburg was initially planned for 2020–21, but it was delayed a year owing to a number of factors, not the least of which was the global coronavirus pandemic. I am delighted now at last to be in Regensburg, where, fittingly, I completed and submitted the final manuscript for this book.

In as much as the particular focus of the Regensburg Center for Advanced Study is the contours of the Christian canon during late antiquity, there is perhaps some need for explanation of why a book on the canonization of the Qur’an is nonetheless an essential part of this broader, collaborative research trajectory. Initially, I had conceived of this book along somewhat different lines. It was my intention to write a book that would be titled “Qur’an and Canon: The Contours of Scripture at the End of Antiquity.” The plan was to investigate the Qur’an’s emergence as a
new scriptural tradition in the late ancient Near East from a novel perspective, understanding the Qur’an as a late ancient biblical apocryphon that eventually became the scripture of a new religious tradition. By approaching the Qur’an as a late ancient biblical apocryphon of uncertain origin, whose scriptural destiny was not yet determined, it would be possible to study the Qur’an as a witness to the diversity and creativity of religious culture in the late ancient Near East. When viewed from such a perspective, the Qur’an offers a fascinating example of how an emergent religious community approached both the boundaries and the riches of scriptural culture in late antiquity. The idea was to consider how the Qur’an recognizes and embraces the authority of these antecedent scriptural collections while simultaneously reconfiguring and supplementing their contents. From this perspective, the Qur’an can challenge and inspire us to rethink the boundaries of the scriptural canon in late antiquity, as well as conceptualizations of scripture that were in circulation at this time.

For better or worse, that is not the book I have written. Perhaps I will write it someday soon, and I think it is a worthy project, perhaps for others to pursue as well. Nevertheless, as I set out to write, I was hoping that I could deal with the thorny issues surrounding the date of the Qur’an, its transmission, composition, and canonization, in only a couple of chapters at the end of the study. Almost immediately, as soon as I began to set pixel to page, I realized that this would not work. The whole process of the Qur’an’s production has been so underresearched from a critical perspective that there was simply no way to avoid beginning with this subject. Yet, as I began to write about this topic, it quickly became clear that it would take much more than just two chapters to set the terms for the historical-critical study of the Qur’an as part of the scriptural world of Near Eastern late antiquity. Indeed, it was not long before I realized that this was going to be the subject of the entire book, and it was going to be a long book at that. And so, rather than considering the Qur’an primarily as a witness to the rich world of late ancient apocryphicity, I have instead critically analyzed the process by which the Qur’an emerged from the scriptural surfeit of late antiquity, both canonical and noncanonical, to become the new canonical scripture of a new religion, Islam. It is a topic, I would venture to say without hesitation, which is essential for understanding the “heterotopias” of religious authority in late antiquity, as well as the production of scriptural traditions “beyond the canon” and the various canonical processes at work in this pivotal era.

I also owe significant gratitude to a number of other benefactors for their support of this project. Firstly, I would like to thank the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin–Madison for the support of a Robert M. Kingdon Fellowship, which, combined with a sabbatical, enabled me to focus on writing this book during 2020–21. Unfortunately, thanks to the coronavirus, I never made it to Madison, much to my disappointment. But I thank the institute’s director and staff, Steven Nadler, Ann Harris, and Elizabeth Nealy, for their
creativity and flexibility in making for a successful fellowship year despite a raging pandemic. I also thank the other scholars in residence in our unusual virtual community for the many insights I gained both from their own research presentations and their questions and comments regarding my own.

This project was also supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, which I was able to defer until 2021–22 so that I could hold it simultaneously with my senior fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in Regensburg. Other resources made it possible to take the year off from teaching on a research appointment, including support from a Presidential Fellowship in Humanistic Study from the University of Oregon and from the Ira E. Gaston Bequest at the University of Oregon through my appointment as Ira E. Gaston Fellow in Christian Studies for 2018–21. A Faculty Research Award from the University of Oregon for summer 2019 provided the opportunity to begin some of the initial work on this project. I am also grateful to the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Oregon for supporting me and allowing me to take this time to focus on research.

There are also many individuals to thank for their important contributions to this volume, and I fear that in attempting to name them all I will forget several friends and colleagues who helped me out along with way with a suggestion or the answer to a question. To anyone I may have inadvertently omitted, please accept my sincerest apologies. In the first place, however, I must thank Guillaume Dye, who has become perhaps my single most frequent collaborator and interlocutor, particularly when it comes to matters regarding formative Islam. Guillaume’s contributions to this study would be hard to overstate. He read every chapter after I had written it and came back with sage questions, comments, and advice: some he read even twice. We debated certain points at some length over email. Yet no less importantly, my thinking about this project began in earnest in fall of 2018, when Guillaume hosted me as an International Chair at the Centre interdisciplinaire d’Étude des Religions et de la Laïcité, Université Libre de Bruxelles. Our conversations during those months, which included Julien Decharneux, Robert Kerr, and Jan van Reeth, were formative for conceiving of this book. I should also add that this book’s primary inspiration came from one of Bart Ehrman’s amazing trade books, Jesus Before the Gospels, as any reader of both works likely will quickly recognize. Although Bart was one of my teachers, ironically, I only became aware of this book thanks to Guillaume.

I also thank my colleague in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Oregon, David Hollenberg, who read the first two chapters and came back to me with some excellent ideas regarding how they could be improved. Likewise, I thank Michael Pregill, who is a constant email “pen pal” on all sorts of topics, including early Islam: a number of the ideas in this book were run by Michael for his thoughts at one point or another. Fred Donner and Gabriel Reynolds also offered extremely helpful comments on the complete manuscript that helped me
to avoid a number of pitfalls while improving on many points. Last but not least I must thank my spouse, Melissa Aubin, who thought about many of the various issues related to this book, including especially the importance of memory and memory science. Others I must thank for various contributions of one sort or another include Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Sean Anthony, David Brakke, Éléonore Cellard, Rick Colby, Majid Daneshgar, Alba Fedeli, Reuven Firestone, Robert Gregg, Gerald Hawting, Morag Kersel, Anne Kreps, Andrew Marsham, Harry Munt, David Powers, Majied Robinson, Yorke Rowan, Jack Tannous, Tommaso Tesei, Mathieu Tillier, Dean Walton, and Philip Wood. No doubt I have forgotten some others as well, for which I apologize.

Early versions of some of the material that found its way into this book were presented in lectures at the following places: the Interdisciplinary Research Center on Late Antiquity, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville; the Religious World of Late Antiquity Section at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting; the Second Century Seminar in Fort Worth, Texas; and the Third Early Islamic Studies Seminar/Eleventh Nangeroni Meeting, Gazzada, Italy. I thank the organizers and the participants for these opportunities and also for their helpful questions and comments.

I also thank the editors and staff of the University of California Press for their help in preparing this book for publication. I thank Eric Schmidt especially, not only for encouraging the project but also for suggesting the possibility of pursuing Open Access in order to make the book more widely available. And that we have done. In this regard I am grateful to the University of California Press, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the University of Oregon, and the University of Regensburg Center for Advanced Studies “Beyond the Canon” for their contributions to meeting the costs to make Open Access possible. Likewise, at the University of California Press I wish to thank LeKeisha Hughes and Steven Jenkins for their help with preparing the manuscript and securing Open Access. My thanks also to Cindy Fulton and Gabriel Bartlett for their help in preparing the manuscript.

I should also note that in cases where an Arabic word or name has a clear form in English, we have decided to use this rather than transliterating the Arabic: Muhammad instead of Muḥammad; Qurʾan instead of Qurʿān; Hijaz instead of Ḥijāz; sura instead of sūra, and so on. In cases where there is no clear equivalent in English, we have transliterated the Arabic using the American Library Association and the Library of Congress standard, which is commonly used, and which yields forms that are generally easy to recognize and remember.

Finally, there are the Loncoske sisters, my aunts, to whom I wish to express a different sort of gratitude with this book’s dedication. My mother was blessed with an amazing set of six aunts on her father’s side, most of whom she grew up with in the same small town and most of whom I also knew well into adulthood. These great aunts were accomplished and inspiring women: Eunice, Agnes, Marie,
Vivian, Jean, and Sally. All were bold, creative, smart, clever, and kind, in very different ways. They were inspirational examples of the many amazing opportunities and adventures life had to offer in choosing to follow one path or another. But even more so I also want to thank especially my own aunts, my mother’s sisters, Susan and Linda, who are also amazing, for their love and for the profound impact that they have had on my life and its direction. I know that much of who I am today comes as a result of having them both in my life, for which I am enormously grateful. And of course, last but not least, I thank the most important and wonderful of the Loncoske sisters, my mom, Lois. I cannot express how lucky I am to have her for a mother.