The Qurʾān has been the topic of scholarly discussion and debate since the beginning of the Islamic period and until today. Critical scholarship on the Qurʾān, as with the critical study of the Bible, began in earnest in the nineteenth century CE, and continues to be active and lively. In recent decades, a particularly vigorous debate has swirled around the date and manner of the Qurʾānic composition, as well as the nature of the codification process. Compared to this (and other) debates, there has been surprisingly little discussion of the language of the Qurʾān. Most scholars have accepted variations on the same narrative, namely that the Qurʾān was composed in a language similar – if not identical – to the language of the pre-Islamic qaṣīdah poems, described by the early grammarians of Arabic, attested to by the reading traditions (qirāʾāt), and typically considered (more or less) identical to textbook Classical Arabic (al-fuṣḥā). The consonantal base of the Qurʾān (often called the ‘Qurʾānic Consonantal Text’, or QCT for short; Arabic rasm), insofar as it differed from the reading traditions (and Classical Arabic), has been considered an inaccurate guide to the original language, the result of pausal spelling practices and a general mismatch between the language the script was developed to represent and the language of the Qurʾān.

The primary challenge to that assumption was put forward in 1906 by Karl Vollers, who argued that the language of the Qurʾān was originally the dialect of Mecca, which Vollers believed lacked the salient features which distinguish Classical Arabic from the modern dialects, such as nominal case inflection (iʿrāb), as well

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1 Theodor Nöldeke, Neue Beiträge Zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1910); GdQ; Joshua Blau, “The Beginnings of the Arabic Diglossia: A Study of the Origins of Neo-arabic,” Afroasiatic Linguistics 4 (1977): 175–202; Chaim Rabin, “The Beginnings of Classical Arabic,” SIs 4 (1955): 19–37; Michael Zwettler, The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications (Columbus, OH.: The Ohio State University Press, 1978); Kees Versteegh, Pidginization and Creolization: The Case of Arabic (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984); Kees Versteegh, The Arabic Language, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). These scholars have, however, differed over whether the poetic language was close, or even identical, to the spoken language of most Arabic speakers in the pre-Islamic period (Blau; Versteegh), or rather part of a distinct poetic and performative register that transcended the spoken vernacular (Zwettler). Nevertheless, there is an underlying assumption even among those who consider the poems to reflect a supra-tribal koiné that the salient features of the language, including nominal case and verbal mood inflection, were living among most Arabic speakers before Islam.
as *tanwîn*). According to Vollers, the language of the Qurʾān was eventually classicized, and features such as nominal case and verbal mood endings were imposed on it. And, since the Qurʾānic text attests (some) case inflection, as well as modal distinctions in the prefix conjugation (*muḍāriʿ*), the Qurʾānic text itself must have likewise been classicized. Vollers’ argument drew a rebuttal by Theodor Nöldeke, who argued that the absence of any tradition of reciting the Qurʾān without case was unfathomable if indeed the original language of the Qurʾān had lacked the feature. With one exception (Paul Kahle), subsequent scholars have followed Nöldeke, and continued to assume an equivalence between the language of the Qurʾān and poetry.

This assumption has continued to reign despite quite a lot having changed in the intervening century since Nöldeke’s rebuttal to Vollers’ bold claims. Undoubtedly the most significant changes have come in the field of pre- and early Islamic epigraphy and philology. Previously, the vast majority of the evidence concerning Arabic’s pre-Islamic history consisted of the *qaṣīdahs*, which though attributed to pre-Islamic poets were nevertheless only attested in Islamic-era manuscripts. However, the pioneering work of Ahmad Al-Jallad and others has brought to light thousands of examples of pre- and early Islamic Arabic, not only from the southern Levant, but also the Hijaz and other parts of Arabia. It is therefore in many ways past time for a re-examination of the language and orthography of the Qurʾān, one that takes these developments into account. As Marijn van Putten shows, however, in his new monograph, *Quranic Arabic: From Its Hijazi Origins to Its Classical Reading Tradi-

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2 Karl Vollers, Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1906).
tions, while such data and material does indeed provide new and important context for understanding the Qurʾān, the narrative is belied by the sources upon which it has been traditionally founded, namely the grammarians and reading traditions.

Van Putten – whose work on aspects of the language and textual history of the Qurʾān positions him well to undertake this daunting task⁵ – poses two questions at the beginning of the book: “What is the language of the Quran?” and perhaps more importantly, “How do we know?” (1). The main argument Van Putten pursues in the book is remarkably straightforward: The Qurʾān was first composed in the local dialect of Hijazi Arabic, the features of the QCT accurately attest to and reflect this dialect, and the reading traditions reflect later, intentional efforts to recite the Qurʾān in ways that comport with a different performative tradition, more closely related to the one behind the qaṣīdah. In this way, he partially vindicates Vollers: the language of the QCT was essentially the dialect of the Hijāz and was classicized subsequently. However, he differs with Vollers, arguing that the dialect of the Hijāz reflected in the Qurʾān was not similar to the modern dialects in the ways Vollers suspected (e.g., it was not completely devoid of nominal case or verbal mood inflection), and that the QCT was established quite early and was therefore not classicized.

While this is the argument of the book, in order to answer the second question – how do we know? – Van Putten begins where the conversation had heretofore ended, namely with the assumption that the language of the Qurʾān is equivalent to the ‘arabiyyah described by the grammarians. Van Putten addresses first the nature of the ‘arabiyyah, through discussions of the grammatical treatments in Sībawayh (d. c. 796 CE) and al-Farrāʾ (d. 822 CE), before turning to the classical reading traditions. Only after examining these two corpora – and arguing that they do not provide an answer to the central question – does he move to an analysis of the features attested in the QCT.

Van Putten’s monograph is an instant classic; it is one of the most significant contributions to the fields of Qurʾānic Studies, as well as the nature of early Islamic

Arabic, in recent decades. The book is methodologically sound, intuitively organized, richly documented, and rigorously argued. Van Putten draws on an incredible array of primary and secondary sources, combining close readings of early Arabic grammarians with evidence from recently discovered inscriptions from the pre-Islamic period, to nuance and contextualize the Qur’ānic data in ways that have not heretofore been explored.

The book is divided into eight chapters, followed by two appendices. In what follows, I summarize the main arguments and findings of each chapter, followed by some comments and reflections on the significance and impact of the monograph for advancing our understanding of the linguistic landscape of the early Islamic period.

Chapter 1, the introduction, presents an overview and synopsis of the status quaestionis regarding the nature of the language of the Qurʾān. As noted above, most scholars over the last century have followed Nöldeke’s arguments against Vollers’ thesis, believing that the language of the Qurʾān was equivalent to the language of the pre-Islamic qaṣīdahs. Such an argument, Van Putten emphasizes, has never been fully demonstrated, only assumed. This sets up a recurrent theme of the book (though one Van Putten does not explicitly state), which is that the traditional narrative, while ostensibly holding the language of the Qurʾān in higher regard – reflecting the culturally prestigious ʿarabiyyah – in fact gives short shrift both to the QCT, as well as to the work of the early grammarians, who went to great lengths to document a great deal of variation and, especially in the case of al-Farrāʿ, to connect linguistic features with tribal dialects. By imposing Classical Arabic norms onto the QCT, “the Quran has never been allowed to tell its own story” (pg. 12). The book attempts to do just that.

Before moving on, however, Van Putten devotes a sub-section (§ 1.2) to the topic of the ʿUthmānic Text (UT) and the Qurʾānic Consonantal Text (QCT). As noted above, most scholars who held that the language of the Qurʾān was identical to that of the poetry were aware of the significant differences between the indications of the orthography of the QCT and the linguistic system present in the poetry. Scholars have, therefore, been quite skeptical of the value of the QCT for interpreting Qurʾānic Arabic. Van Putten highlights the tremendous advances in the study of the Ur-text of the ʿUthmānic Text (UT), the creation of which he argues can be confidently dated to the early decades of the Islamic period. Further, early manuscripts reveal instances where the orthography of the Cairo Edition has been classicized.

The stage is thus set: scholars have yet to actually demonstrate that the language of the ʿarabiyyah is a linguistic unity, or that the languages of the Qurʾān and the poetry, for example, are linguistically identical. If the answer to the question of the nature of Qurʾānic Arabic as equivalent with the ʿarabiyyah is thus to remain the accepted narrative, we must first identify what the ʿarabiyyah is.

The central aim of Chapter 2 (“What is the ʿarabiyyah?”) is thus to investigate the earliest sources of the ʿarabiyyah – which are the grammarians Sibawayh and
al-Farrāʿ – in search of a definition. No doubt the grammarians commented upon the Qurʾān, in addition to the poetry, along with other data, but that “does not necessarily prove that the language of the Quran and the language of the poetry are identical” (19). So, what is the ʿarabiyyah?

The chapter considers a number of features, mostly phonological but a few morphological, for which the grammarians document a great deal of mutually exclusive variants. For example, the grammarians document numerous differences in the form and assimilatory patterns of the third person pronominal suffixes (§2.2.1), such as the lack of assimilation in the Hijāz (i. e., kitāb-i-hū “his [gen] book” rather than kitāb-i-hī “idem” outside of the Hijāz), as well as the presence of long forms, in which, depending on the dialect, either both vowels assimilate (e. g., kitāb-i-himī) or only the first (e. g., kitāb-i-himū). Another intriguing example, which highlights the importance of comparative Semitic evidence for interpreting historical forms in Arabic, is the case of the extra vowels in early Arabic (§2.2.2). Van Putten shows that, in addition to the ʿimālah most familiar to Arabists – in which a (long or short) /a/ is fronted under the influence of /i/ (e. g., *kilāb > kilēb, “dogs”) – the grammarians also document phonemic vowels /ē/ and /ō/, the former the result of the collapse of historical diphthongs and triphthongs (e. g., *ramaya > ramē, “he threw”, vs. *daʿawa > daʿā, “he summoned”), the latter the result of the change *-awat > *ōt in a minority of roots (e. g., *ṣalawat > ṣalōt, “prayer, blessing”). These differences are not, however, maintained in every variety; indeed, in some both *aya and *awa collapse to -ā, and this is of course the pattern which becomes normative in later Classical Arabic. One of the novel – and most significant – aspects of the analysis in this chapter is the demonstration that these changes can be accounted for via regular historical linguistic laws and principles.

Van Putten notes throughout the chapter (and following ones) that, while in some cases the grammarians offer their opinions on the relative aesthetic preference of one or another form, in most cases they do not, and simply accept each as acceptable Arabic. In that case, Van Putten then asks “Where is Classical Arabic?” (§2.3), which, as he has already shown, is not in fact codified by the grammarians. In fact, Van Putten shows that the features that centuries later became normative in the Classical Arabic tradition are not always the ones preferred by the grammarians (e. g., Sībawayh prefers a long vowel on the 3ms suffix after a consonant, e. g., min-hū instead of min-hu, “from him/it,” the latter of which became the standard).

A word about terminology is perhaps due here. On pages 3–4, Van Putten, while discussing previous scholarship and noting the different ways in which scholars have talked about concepts such as “Classical Arabic,” the “ʿarabiyyah,” and even “Quranic Arabic,” offers his own definitions. By ʿarabiyyah, he refers to all of the linguistic variation that the grammarians felt the need to comment on; by “Classical Arabic” he means the sub-set of ʿarabiyyah forms that subsequently became norma-
tive; and by “Quranic Arabic” he means the variety of Arabic in which the Qurʾān was originally composed. While he consistently applies the term “Quranic Arabic” in this manner throughout the text, he occasionally uses the other two terms in ways not in keeping with these definitions. For example, in Chapter 2, he states that “The Quran, and to some extent its reading traditions, therefore naturally feed into the definition of Classical Arabic – that which the grammarians felt the need to comment upon…” (19). In some cases, I interpret the use of one term over the other as influenced by previous scholarly discussions. This appears to be the case in Chapter 4, where Van Putten notes that “In Classical Arabic prose and poetry alike ḏāka and ḏālika co-occur, and its absence in the Quran is in fact striking, and a clear deviation from the Classical Arabic norms” (103). Based on Chapter 1, this would be true by definition; however, the quote comes in a discussion of claims made by Chaim Rabin, who often refers to the language of poetry as Classical Arabic (as noted in the book on p. 3). While this can in some cases cause some slight confusion, the overall argument usually makes clear what is meant in each context, and they thus do not present a major impediment to comprehension.

The discussion in this chapter (Chapter 2) is perhaps the most important for Van Putten’s argument. The major question is whether the variants we find in the ʿarabiyyah – that is, documented by the grammarians – reflect the same set of historical linguistic developments, or instead reflect multiple, mutually exclusive ones. If the former, then despite perhaps some superficial variation, the ʿarabiyyah could still plausibly be conceived of as a linguistic unity. Van Putten argues convincingly, however, that the variants the grammarians describe reflect different, mutually exclusive diachronic developments. Thus, one cannot explain what the language of the Qurʾān is by appealing to the ʿarabiyyah; it was not linguistically one thing!

In Chapter 3 (“Classical Arabic and the Reading Traditions”), Van Putten turns to the reading traditions: if one cannot simply appeal to the ʿarabiyyah to answer the question of what Qurʾānic Arabic is, perhaps the reading traditions will place us on firmer ground. Van Putten once again refutes such a notion. He demonstrates that the readings do not reflect different dialects, nor even internally consistent linguistic patterns, but rather contain “a collection of different dialectal features” (96). For example, he adduces numerous cases in which readings lack regular sound changes, but are rather pattern based on some other grammatical criteria. One such case is Yaʿqūb’s blocking of vowel harmony in third person dual and plural pronouns when followed by -ṭ and -ṭay (but not -ṭi). Another is the case of Ḥamzah, who lacks harmony following -ṭay in the words ḫalay-hum, laday-hum, and ḥalay-hum, but in all other cases of the combination harmonizes the pronoun, e.g., jannatay-him. These cannot be considered regular outcomes of natural language change, and, as Van Putten proposes, more likely reflect intentionally artificial choices made by readers with a highly developed sense of grammatical categorization and aesthet-
ics. Finally, Van Putten notes that, despite these artificial bundles of features, where the readers agree with each other, and where the grammarians assign features to different regions or tribes, it is usually the Hijāzī form that is the unanimous choice, even when that feature is contrary to what later becomes the norm in Classical Arabic (§ 3.5, 80).

Having established both that the ʿarabiyyah was too linguistically diverse to answer the question, and that the reading traditions are both diverse and often purposefully artificial, we are left with only the QCT as the sole remaining source for determining the nature of the language of the Qurʾān. The next two chapters are therefore dedicated to an examination of salient features attested in the QCT; Chapter 4 is dedicated to what can be said about the morphology based on deductions from the QCT, whereas Chapter 5 is concerned with the phonology of the QCT. These chapters are not exhaustive discussions of the topic; rather, they are focused especially on features that the grammarians both document and assign to either a Hijāzī or non-Hijāzī group (Appendix 1 provides a fuller description of these and other features, and is intended as a sort of primer on the phonology and morphology of the QCT). Van Putten further incorporates evidence from the epigraphic record to inform and buttress the assignments where relevant. In both cases, the vast majority of the forms attested is Hijāzī.

These chapters are relatively straightforward compared with the preceding ones. Van Putten shows that the features of the QCT are, with very few exceptions, regular and fully explicable as reflecting a single underlying dialect. This fact all but slams the door shut on the “Poetic Koiné” theory. These chapters demonstrate both that an analysis of the language of the QCT produces sensible results, and lines up with what the grammarians report for the Hijāz. At this point, then, although the grammarians remark upon much (but not all; see § 4.15 and § 5.13) of what is found in the QCT, since they remark on many others features not found therein, one could only conclude that the dialect of the Hijāz, attested in the QCT, was considered part of the ʿarabiyyah.

At this point, the reader might still wonder whether a stark contrast between the ʿarabiyyah on the one hand, and the language of the Qurʾān on the other, is warranted. After all, most of the features from Chapters 4 and 5 have been shown to occur in the grammarians’ discussions, which is by definition part of the ʿarabiyyah. In Chapters 6 and 7, however, Van Putten argues that the original language of the Qurʾān – as attested to by the QCT – was substantially different from the ʿarabiyyah. He suggests two major distinctions which set the former apart from the latter:

6 He actually proposes a third distinction, namely a phonemic distinction between the sounds underlying alif maqṣūrah (that is, spelled <Y> and realized /ē/) and alif mamdūdah (realized /ā/). However, Van Putten does not dedicate a chapter to this feature due to the fact that (unlike the other two) it is a
i. The presence of the *hamzah* in the ‘arabiyyah vs. its near-total absence in the Qur’ān

ii. The full system of *iʿrāb/tanwīn* in the ‘arabiyyah vs. a substantially reduced system in the Qur’ān

If true, then despite certain phonological and morphological features from the Qur’ān also receiving acknowledgement by the grammarians, the language of the QCT would nevertheless differ in salient ways from the ‘arabiyyah tradition.

The primary argument Nöldeke (and others) has relied on to refute claims that the Qur’ān was originally composed in a variety substantially different from the ‘arabiyyah was the absence of qur’ānic reading traditions, or any memory of that original linguistic situation, which completely lack the *hamzah*, or which lack full nominal case and verbal mood inflection. Surely, they have argued, had the Qur’ān not been revealed in a variety that, e. g., possessed nominal case inflection, or had the *hamzah*, this could not have escaped recollection and comment completely. In Chapter 6, Van Putten looks at evidence from the application (or lack thereof) of the *hamzah* by the different readers. In Chapter 7, he offers evidence from the nominal case system as read by the readers.

Chapter 6 treats the *hamzah*, which Chapter 5 argues has been lost in all environments save one (word-final -āʾ). Van Putten adduces two categories of evidence from the reading traditions that support its original absence and subsequent imposition:

i. pseudo-correct *hamzahs*, where *hamzah* is inserted in places where etymologically it did not belong, and

ii. dropping of *hamzah* where it would be expected.

The former is much less common than the latter, a point which Van Putten notes is in line with the grammatical tradition, which held that inserting it where it did not belong was considered a mistake, whereas optional dropping was not (168). Examples of pseudo-correct *hamzah* include: *diyāʾ > dīʿāʾ* Ibn Kathir at Q 28:71; *muṣadah > muʾṣadah* (Ḥafṣ ’an ‘Āṣim, ’Abū ’Amr, and Ḥamzah at Q 90:20; Q 104:8); *kaʾs > kaʾs* (all readers). While most readers retain etymological *hamzah* in all but one context (a sequence of two *hamzahs* as in *aʾkulu > ākulu*, “I eat”), several omit it in additional contexts, as for example in the case of Ḥafṣ’s reading *kufuwan* instead of either *kufuʾan* or *kufʾan*. There are also cases where a *hamzah* was historically present but is nevertheless omitted by the majority of readers, even those who

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*topic of disagreement among the readers themselves, Classical Arabic eventually lacks it altogether, but based on the QCT Van Putten concludes it was operative in the language underlying it (154–155).*
maintain *hamzah* elsewhere, as for example in the word *nabīʾ*, which is recited as *nabīyy* by all except Nāfiʿ, who reads it with the *hamzah*. This collection of evidence is incompatible with the notion that the readers were attempting to transmit the original Qurʾānic composition as much as possible; rather, it is most plausibly interpreted as the readers imposing the *hamzah* on the text, but in different ways according to different grammatical and aesthetic criteria.

In Chapter 7, Van Putten attempts what is perhaps his most challenging task, which is to detect signs that the nominal case system was imposed on the QCT. Van Putten here builds on a previous paper that reconstructs a partial case system in which only indefinite accusative was retained word-finally, but in which short case vowels were retained when non-word finally. Finding evidence for the imposition of the Classical Arabic system in the reading traditions is difficult, as Van Putten notes when he writes that “[l]ooking for evidence in the reading traditions for traces of the original language of the Quran in terms of the case system is therefore something that is not possible as that was not the goal of the readers” (187—188; emphasis mine). Indeed, it is highly unlikely that a reader would have become canonized without reciting with the *iʿrāb* characteristic of the *ʿarabiyyah*. But, Van Putten does offer “evidence that the readers of the Quran were not trying to syllable-for-syllable transmit the pronunciation as they received it from their teacher, but instead... sought to beautify the language” (188).

In fact, possible evidence for caselessness is proffered. For example, Ibn Kathīr recited the word *sabaʾ*, “Sheba,” without case inflection in Q 27:22 and Q 34:15. Ḥamzah recites the word *as-sayyiʾ* once with and once without case in Q 35:43. In most instances of caselessness, the word is treated variously in the *ʿarabiyyah* tradition, such as when the same word is treated either as a triptote or diptote, or when ending in *alif maqṣūrah* or the first person singular pronominal suffix -*ī*/*iya*. The point, then, is that when a word is morphologically and syntactically transparent, there is no disagreement about its case assignment; in a minority of cases, however, where one of those aspects is unclear, or where there is attested variation in the *ʿarabiyyah*, there is likewise difference among the readers. This is unlikely if the Qurʾān had been composed in a variety with full case inflection; however, it is completely comprehensible if the Qurʾān lacked these vowels and readers were subsequently forced to supply them.

I found the discussion of ʾAbū ʿAmr’s reading tradition, especially the phenomenon of *al-ʿidgām al-kabīr*, or “major assimilation,” to be especially intriguing. While Van Putten disagrees with previous scholarship claiming that ʾAbū ʿAmr’s reading was originally caseless, he nevertheless highlights aspects of ʾAbū ʿAmr’s reading,

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7 Van Putten and Stokes, “Case in the Qurʾānic Consonantal Text.”
especially the reduction (or syncopation) of i and u when followed by heavy syllables (e.g., bāriʾ-i-kum “your [pl.] creator [gen.]” > bāriʾ-ǐ-kum/bāriʾ-kum), which reflect a development of the Classical Arabic system but which leaves no trace in later Classical Arabic. This window into an alternative system, clearly developed from the one known from Classical Arabic but distinct from it, suggests further diversity which has unfortunately not, to our knowledge, survived.

The final chapter of the main body of the book is Chapter 8 (“From Hijazi Beginnings to Classical Arabic”), which serves not only as a general conclusion, but also provides an opportunity for Van Putten to present a tentative timeline of Qur’ānic Arabic, from the language of the QCT to the reading traditions, and finally to the set of norms found in Classical Arabic. Here Van Putten picks up Al-Jallad’s thesis, in his study of the Violet Psalm Fragment, that the first prestigious variety of Arabic – during the first century or so of Islam – was Old Hijāzī Arabic, and that the features associated with the language of the qaṣīdah poetic corpus (which Al-Jallad, and subsequently Van Putten, connect to the tribe of Maʿadd, based on Peter Webb’s study of the poetic corpus) only became prestigious after the founding of the Umayyad dynasty.8 It was during this period that the readers were active and began the process of artfully reciting the Qurʾān – based on interpretations of the QCT – with the features of the qaṣīdah poetry. Based on evidence from manuscript vocalizations, Van Putten concludes that by the ninth and tenth centuries CE the features typically associated with standardized Classical Arabic had begun to crystalize (though he points out that many non-standard features occur until quite late).

I very much enjoyed reading this monograph and consider it to be one of the more significant contributions to the topics it covers in decades. It is characterized by numerous strengths, and very few weaknesses. Van Putten approaches the topic with clarity and methodological consistency. Each chapter is clear in terms of the scope of its topic, and how it fits into the larger question regarding the original language of the Qurʾān. The breadth of sources upon which Van Putten relies is also quite impressive, including numerous early manuscripts of the Qurʾān, and pre- and early Islamic inscriptions. These sources have, until now, not played a significant enough role in answering the question posed in the book.

To my mind, though, one of the great strengths of the book is Van Putten’s extensive interaction with the works of the grammarians, especially Sībawayh and al-Farrā’. As noted throughout this review, this interaction goes beyond mere citing of features. In the first two chapters, for example, the features are cited and con-

considered from a historical linguistic perspective. Particularly groundbreaking is Van Putten's linguistic analysis of the so-called “extra” phonemic vowels, which have heretofore been assumed to reflect allomorphic variation, similar to modern dialectal *imālah*. Further, Van Putten's convincing demonstration of the regularity and exclusivity of many of these features – that they reflect regular linguistic developments, but which were nevertheless reflective of different outcomes that could not have occurred in the same dialect – will change the way scholars approach the material collected and commented upon in the early grammatical literature.

Another important aspect of the book is the seriousness with which it engages the traditional Islamic-era sources. First and foremost, it makes a strong case for taking the Qurʾānic Consonantal Text seriously as a witness to the language of the text. This is, as noted throughout, a rare perspective. Neither Nöldeke et al., nor Vollers (and Kahle), considered the written text worth extensive study or consideration as a primary witness. But I will go further and suggest that the approach adopted in this volume takes the grammatical and reading traditions more seriously than has heretofore been common. Indeed, at numerous places where Van Putten compares what the tradition holds on the one hand, and how more recent scholars have interpreted it on the other, it becomes clear that, in many of those cases, later interpreters have minimized or dismissed various aspects of the tradition, which Van Putten has shown are quite important. One particularly noteworthy example is the discussion of the traditional position that the Qurʾān was revealed in the dialect of the Quraysh on the one hand, and readers’ free use of non-Hijāzī features in their recitations on the other. Most scholars have held this opinion to be dogma, because of their assumptions about what the language of the Qurʾān could and could not look like (see 148–149).

*Quranic Arabic* joins other recent works, such as Al-Jallad’s book on the Damascus Psalm Fragment, in helping to re-frame the way that Arabic in the early Islamic period should be studied and conceptualized. These studies have profound implications for the study of, e.g., early “Middle Arabic” texts, such as those composed by the Melkite Christians in Palestine, Syria, and the Sinai. I offer here a few thoughts on how the present book fundamentally changes how scholarship on Christian Arabic might be done.

First and foremost, *Quranic Arabic* forces scholars to recalibrate what they expect to find in early Christian manuscripts. Virtually all scholarship on early Islamic Arabic in general, and Christian Arabic in particular, has assumed the default grammar of these manuscripts should be Classical Arabic. Differences between the Arabic of Christian texts and Classical Arabic were believed to result *either* from inadequate acquisition of Classical Arabic standards, which resulted in hyper- and hypo-correct forms, *or* from intrusions of dialectal forms. Traditionally, the spectrum within which Middle Arabic has been conceptualized was bookended
by spoken dialects on the low end, and Classical Arabic on the high end. As Van Putten shows, however, this is an anachronism, at least in the centuries during which many of the earliest Christian manuscripts were written. And while it is of course possible that some scribes were targeting some mix of ʿarabiyyah forms, this cannot be imposed on the manuscripts any more than they could be on the Qurʾān. It is equally – if not perhaps more – likely that early Christian scribes were targeting Hijāzī, whether a more archaic form as expressed in the Qurʾān, or a more contemporary one as expressed in the Damascus Psalm Fragment. It is thus time to let the early Christian manuscripts tell their own story, as Van Putten has helped to do for the QCT.

The detailed study and description of the linguistic practices attested in the Qurʾānic reading traditions also holds potentially profound implications for the study of subsequent texts. Here again, I focus on connections with Christian data. While the earliest copies of, e.g., the Gospels in Arabic are either unvocalized, or only sparsely vocalized, by the tenth and eleventh centuries CE vocalization becomes quite common. These vocalizations have only randomly and haphazardly received attention, and are typically compared with textbook Classical Arabic patterns when they do. Rather than such a comparison, it might instead be profitable to compare the vocalizations in Christian manuscripts not only with the full range of ʿarabiyyah forms, but also with patterns attested in vocalized Qurʾānic manuscripts, as well as the reading traditions.

In *Quranic Arabic*, Van Putten has emphasized the likely artificial nature of the Qurʾānic reading traditions – in which readers combined features based on aesthetics and grammatical frameworks. This has already been

9 Thankfully, scholars are increasingly recognizing the likelihood that Middle Arabic cannot be reduced to imperfect Classical Arabic. For a discussion of these developments, see Johannes Den Heijer, “Introduction: Middle and Mixed Arabic, A New Trend in Arabic Studies,” in Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic: Diachrony and Synchrony, ed. Liesbeth Zack and Arie Schippers (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–26. Still, by and large, features which are found in neither Classical Arabic nor modern dialects are often analyzed as having originated in hyper- or hypo-corrections, but which were subsequently normed in a particular register of Middle Arabic. For this perspective, see the discussion in Geoffrey Khan, “Middle Arabic,” in The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook, ed. Stefan Weninger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 817–835.

proposed as a lens through which to read Middle Arabic texts, but by expanding the typologies of this kind of creativity, as well as the pool of features from which composers of these texts might have drawn, we might provide greater texture and gain greater insight into the activities of Middle Arabic authors. Hopefully, *Quranic Arabic* will spur more comparative work, which incorporates insights from Van Putten’s work, and which allows for more possibilities as to how this early diversity continued to be remembered and appropriated. Such work, to my mind, has great potential to uncover more diversity in the registers and varieties of Arabic that were popular and deemed prestigious among different communities well into the Islamic period.

To conclude, while Van Putten might not convince everyone of every argument he makes, the book contributes novel and important arguments and interpretations to the discussion, advancing it more than anyone has since Vollers. Further, the book is a must for anyone interested in the early Arab grammarians, as well as the Qur’anic readers, and finally for anyone doing linguistic analysis of pre-modern texts.

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