does not tell us anything about whether or not the text was (or was intended to be) a complete copy of the Quran. With about 40 per cent of the text present across the disparate sections of the Quran, with all the conventional Surah transitions present, I see no reason to assume that it was not.

Serena Ammirati (pp. 99–122) presents a survey of some of the Latin fragments from the Qubbat al-Khazna of Damascus. It gives useful historical insight into the work of B. Violet on this important store of a whole variety of oriental manuscripts, including many important quranic manuscripts. This article identifies for the first time a variety of Latin manuscripts found there that span a period from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries and a variety of different genres. They appear to have been imported.

Bruno Lo Turco (pp. 153–78) examines the function of the Gaṇeśa episode in the *Mahābhārata*, and recontextualizes the role that it plays. Importantly, he suggests the writer of the passage used Gaṇeśa to enhance the status of the scribe, and ironically plays with the claims of pre-composed unchanging oral form of the author's composition. Such commentary on the position of writing in traditions that (often paradoxically) revere the oral transmission – reminiscent of the Islamic tradition – helps to recontextualize the relation of the spoken and written in practice.

Lucio del Corso (pp. 29–52) discusses literary papyri in funerary contexts, exploring both bookrolls used as grave offerings and papyri reused as papier-maché shells of mummified bodies called *cartonnages.*

Michelle P. Brown (pp. 73–98) examines Latin manuscripts from St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai and identifies at least two Insular scribes at work in this region during the early Middle Ages. This reveals contact between the Near East and the British Isles.

Maria Migliore (pp. 179–91) explores the diplomacy of ancient Japanese administrative documents and their development.

The book is a welcome collection of articles that brings to light the broad field of palaeography and how it can contribute to our understanding of history.

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JONATHAN E. BROCKOPP:
Muhammad's Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622–950.
(Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization.) xi, 232 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. £75. ISBN 978 1 107 10666 6.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X20002499

In 1980, Joan Gilbert ("Institutionalization of Muslim scholarship and professionalization of the *ʿUlamāʾ* in medieval Damascus", *Studia Islamica*, 1980, 105–34) provided us with a neat periodization of Muslim learning: close to the end of the fourth/tenth century, the *madrasa* appeared as an institution in the Islamic world. This new mode of transmission of religious knowledge contributed enormously to making the ulama a professional class, in the sense that for their scholarship the ulama could now systematically receive a financial reward for teaching, and thus their scholarship could help them act as breadwinners. Additionally, Islamic knowledge was

compartmentalized since an accepted curriculum of teaching and learning came into being, offering a standardized version of what a novice scholar or religious functionary would have to learn to be accepted as such.

The book under review deals with the period prior to this professionalization and institutionalization of Islamic knowledge. The author is interested to discover when and how the ulama came to be known as ulama, acquiring the necessary authority to be accepted as such. Unlike most studies that rely heavily on literary texts (the *ṭabaqāt* works, or biographical dictionaries, in particular), Brockopp brings in material culture to help analyse the way in which men and women initially interested in knowing all they could know about the new religion slowly but surely transformed into a separate class of Muslims: the ulama. Unlike most studies, this book departs from the central lands of the Islamic world and focuses on the community of Kairouan in North Africa, which happens to offer us the oldest known extant manuscripts.

This book consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, appendix, bibliography and index. The author's thesis is tightly bound to the definitions he gives us. Prior to the 680s very little evidence exists to suggest an authoritative scholarly community. The thrust of the book's argument is based on non-literary material – inscriptions, architecture, coins, and papyri. Also crucial to the book's argument, and well described in the appendix, are some 30 of the earliest extant manuscripts, 22 of which were used and reliably dated before 300 AH/912–3 AD, produced by savants working in Kairouan.

A basic assumption is that up to the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705) there was little coherent and sustained ideological unity – scholars who lived and worked between 622 and 680 the author calls "proto-scholars". The reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik paved the way towards a unified Islam, which only fully crystallized in the third/ninth century. And, the assumption goes on, only a unified Islam can produce a book that fits into what Shawkat Toorawa has dubbed a "writerly culture" that came into existence in that same century. This writerly culture marked the end of oral transmission of religious knowledge and led to the production of real books (as defined by the author), i.e. a text written in a uniform style, passed in its entirety to later generations.

There was not much societal change during the first two centuries of Islam. Those specializing in religious knowledge acted as guides to believers rather than as scholars producing a coherent Islamic worldview. In these centuries, Muslims were a minority and they relied on scholarship drawn from the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, with noticeable influences from Zoroastrianism. As noted above, the changes introduced by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ushered in the move towards a distinct Islamic culture with its own history. The author stresses that any writer, premodern or modern, who assumes a unified conceptualization of Islam prior to the third/ninth century is using an artificial construction.

The book works towards this crucial century when the scholars became "Muhammad's heirs". Despite the many merits of the book's approach, the author seems to have missed the importance of the inquisition (*miḥna*) in buttressing the recognition of the ulama as authoritative, a definition the author uses to determine the difference between the proto-scholars and the scholars. Although it is mentioned (including the trials and tribulations of the ulama's hero during the *miḥna*, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal) more emphasis should have been given to the failure of the caliphate to attract religious authority to this institution that was competing at the time with the emergence of a socially distinct group of people who considered themselves the inheritors of religious knowledge. The failure of the *miḥna* ensured that the

ulama were now accepted as the bearers of true religious knowledge, rather than the incumbent of the caliphal institution. The emergence of a scholarly class, accepted as authoritative, was primarily the result of the failure of the caliph to become the supreme leader in religious affairs as he was in worldly affairs. Had the author fully incorporated this important factor, we would have had a more complete account of the emergence of the ulama.

This observation should not detract from the merits of the book, and the author is to be commended for introducing us to a different approach with clear definitions so that the reader can follow the book's argument. It is also refreshing that non-literary sources were employed to draw a picture of how people interested in the Islamic faith would develop into a distinct societal class. More than that, this "class" has helped to define what makes a society Islamic or not: it is not the presence of a caliph in a society that determines whether that society is Islamic, but whether there are ulama to be found. Brockopp's book provides us with a convincing narrative on how this group not only came into being, but how its existence helped to develop a coherent Islamic worldview (including the past) that contributed greatly to the transition from an Arab-dominated minority-society to a fully universal Islamic society in the course of the third/ninth century, which turned out to be foundational for the Islamic community.

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AYDOGAN KARS:
Unsaying God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam.
(AAR Academy Series.) xii, 344 pp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. £64. ISBN 978 0 19 094245 8.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X20002347

In this original and extremely informative work, Kars achieves both a highly impressive breadth and a great degree of subtlety in delineating the developments and interchanges within and between a variety of negative theological approaches. Taking impetus from his doctoral dissertation on apophaticism among thirteenth-century Sufis, Kars has considerably expanded his study to provide a rich history which even takes in aspects of the permeation of Muslim negative theologies among medieval Jews. In his introduction, setting out from the doxographical categories which he translates "paths of negation" (*masālik taʿṭīlihim*) of the scripturalist al-Tamīmī (b. 1959), Kars problematizes simplistic definitions of Muslim negative theology, such as the identification of Ismaili or Zaydi esotericism as the Muslim apophatic tradition *par excellence*, or the characterization of Sufi mystical paradox as the supreme "unsaying" of God within medieval Islam. He devotes his own study to "self-negating strategies", that is, speech-acts concerning God (wherever found) which consciously cancel themselves in performance of the unsayability of God's essence.

The work's organizing principle is the delineation of four apophatic "paths". The double negation strategy (path one) is a fascinating approach used among Ismailis from the tenth century to achieve expression of the inapplicability of statements on God's essence. Kars provides excellent technical analysis of this strategy,