

# Orientalism in Oriental Studies? Qur'anic Studies as a Case in Point

## Orientalism in Qur'anic Studies?

What is at stake in Qur'anic studies? Is it the search for an understanding of the text the way the Prophet Muḥammad understood it, or even of the urtext? Or for an understanding of the Qur'an the way later readers received it, the so-called reader-response? Or is it still about something else? The dilemma that presently paralyses Western Qur'anic scholarship seems to be pre-figured – and perhaps solved – in the famous anecdote about the Tijuana Indians:<sup>1</sup>

Every day for thirty years a man drove a wheelbarrow full of sand over the Tijuana border crossing. The customs inspector dug through the sand each morning but could not discover any contraband. He remained, of course, convinced that he was dealing with a smuggler. On the day of his retirement from the service, he asked the smuggler to reveal what it was that he was smuggling and how he had been doing so. 'Wheelbarrows; I've been smuggling wheelbarrows, of course'.

I mention this humorous anecdote for two reasons. First of all, I wish to argue that what Qur'anic scholars should be looking for is not a particular 'right' understanding of the text, that polarises another understanding as 'wrong' but rather the text itself as a medium of transport, as reflecting a communication process. Secondly, I will suggest that those very 'inspectors' of scholarly borderlines who still loom large in our approaches have imposed their rules – or defined their objectives – not without ideological bias, but, as we shall see, with a sizeable interest in their own identity politics.

I wish to put forward the claim that Qur'anic studies is not informed by the methods of religious studies as currently practiced internationally, but still follows a limited and selective set of methods which tend to be essentialist in their attitude towards the Qur'an. Already in the nineties Aziz al-Azmeh, lamenting the fact that the Qur'an was not submitted systematically to the set of methodological steps that are pursued in Biblical studies, could not imagine any reason for that failure other than the Qur'an's exceptional position as a non-Biblical scripture, its alleged 'alterity'.<sup>2</sup> Western Qur'anic studies, according to al-Azmeh, partake in the 'orientalist discourse' that tends to de-contextualise Near Eastern cultural phenomena, thus allowing scholars to dispense with the rigid laws applied in related Western fields of academic research. What is orientalist is the exotic perception of the Qur'an that fails to acknowledge it as a scripture of monotheism like the other scriptures, i.e. texts that through the particular

process of their canonisation have acquired an extraordinary position in their communities.<sup>3</sup> In precise terms – I quote the definition of scripture by William Graham:<sup>4</sup>

Scripture is not a literary genre but a religio-historical one. No text is authoritative or sacred apart from its functional role in a religious community and that community's historical tradition of faith. The sacred character of a book is not an *a priori* attribute but one that develops and achieves widespread recognition in the lives of faithful persons who perceive and treat the text as holy or sacred ... In other words, the scriptural characteristics of a text belong not to the text itself but to its role and standing in a religious community.

What is striking in the Qur'anic case is that such a generic and relational understanding of scripture as that which is now common in the study of religion is – according to Graham – 'largely compatible with the Qur'ān's own frequent use of *kitāb* ... *kutub*, to refer to scriptural revelation(s) given by God to previous prophets or messengers ... before the bestowing of the Qur'ān upon Muḥammad as his *kitāb*'.<sup>5</sup> This observation implies that the Qur'an constitutes an exception among scriptures, insofar as the scriptural character of the Qur'anic text is not due to a later development, but is an intrinsic feature of the Qur'an itself. In Graham's words:<sup>6</sup>

It is ... the generic use of *kitāb/kutub* to refer to earlier scriptures and to the Qur'ān itself that is special, or even unique, about the Qur'ānic notion of scripture. Typically, the other sacred texts of the world's religions that we call 'scriptures' were not written with any similar consciousness of belonging themselves to a category of texts called 'scripture'. Most if not all great scriptural texts other than the Qur'ān are unconscious of being even potentially 'scripture', for 'scripture' or any analogous concept is usually a category developed *ex post facto*.

If this is true, then the 'widespread recognition in the lives of faithful persons' that bestow on the text its scriptural character is not that of the later Muslim community but that of the group involved in the first Qur'anic communication process. This conclusion is of momentous consequence for Qur'anic studies. It implies that no serious study of the Qur'anic text – that goes beyond external, linguistic and grammatical aspects – can dismiss the Qur'an's 'scripturality' that is inscribed in its pre-canonical text. Yet, the distinction between the scripturally-informed pre-canonical text that was communicated to the first listeners, and the later canonised official text of the Muslim community has continuously been glossed over in Qur'anic scholarship.<sup>7</sup> The unique claim raised by the Qur'an itself that it constitutes a scripture and thereby that it closely belongs to the triad of monotheist scriptures originating

from the Late Antique Near East, still awaits discussion and moreover to be employed as a point of departure from which to re-think the Qur'an's position in modernity. In what follows, I will try to outline first what in my view is problematic in current Qur'anic studies, then turn to the development that preceded and perhaps induced the present crisis, and, as a conclusion, propose some ideas of how to cope with the problem.

### **Current Problematics in Qur'anic Studies**

#### *1. The 'Invisible Text'*

The failure of Qur'anic studies to locate the Qur'an at eye level with the other Semitic scriptures is evident in many respects. Its most striking consequence is the disappearance of the text as such from scholarship. The Qur'an has become an 'invisible text'. Not only is the Qur'anic text in contemporary scholarship not being studied systematically as a literary artifact;<sup>8</sup> scholars moreover shy away from dealing with the Qur'an as such, preferring to read it through the lens of its later commentaries.<sup>9</sup> What presently occupies scholarly attention is not the Qur'an as a cultural self-expression of its historical epoch, documenting a particular response to the discourses contemporary to it, but the Qur'an mirrored in the Muslim community's later understanding.

This reading of Qur'an-cum-*tafsīr* has become the standard approach since the 'methodological turn' in Qur'anic studies introduced by John Wansbrough in 1977.<sup>10</sup> His claim that the Qur'an should be regarded as an anonymous later compilation emerging from the 'sectarian milieu' of the eighth or ninth century southern Iraq widely shattered confidence in the historical genuineness of the Qur'anic text. Though this loss in confidence has certainly been a most serious reason for scholars to withdraw from the text, postmodern literary theory which sees the reader as creating rather than discovering meaning in the text, has certainly played an equally important role in the momentous shift of interest.<sup>11</sup>

#### *2. The Seductiveness of the Myth of Origin*

Let me stress that a comparable marginalisation of the text itself in favour of its exegesis would be unconceivable in serious Biblical studies. Nowhere in the current academy does critical Biblical scholarship build on exegetical traditions. Neither are the texts of the Hebrew Bible read through the lens of the Midrashic discussions, nor is the New Testament read with reference to the treatises of the Church Fathers. In both fields of Biblical studies, individual units of the scriptural texts are contextualised with the writings and traditions current in the milieu that they emerged from.

What I want to say is that the Biblical texts have been thoroughly historicised. The deconstruction of myth – the myth of a transcendent origin of the texts – that was

thus achieved was, however, counterbalanced by a new invention of history, staging the Near East as the mythical birth-place of Europe. The ancient Near East, identified as the milieu of the genesis of the Biblical texts, was monopolised as the cradle of European civilisation. Let me quote one example, the introduction to Biblical history by Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg:<sup>12</sup>

Since the study of the ancient Near East, or Bible World, is the study of the roots of Western civilization, it has a particular meaning for intellectuals in the West. For intellectuals in the Near East, it has an additional significance; for the antiquity of the Near East as it is being discovered through archeological excavations has a growing effect on the nationalisms in the area today ... Iraq and Syria dedicate themselves to the rediscovery of the old cuneiform cultures that distinguish their lands from other Arab lands, Turkey ... Iran .... Lebanon distinguishes itself from the surrounding countries with an ideology whereby its people are the descendants of the Phoenicians .... The final example, and probably the best example of a nation attaching itself to a glorious past is Israel. The momentum of Israel's long history, including notably the undying hope of biblical prophecy, is an indispensable factor in the shaping of the modern nation of Israel. Israel is also different from the other Middle Eastern countries, because its people not only live on the same land as their ancestors, but there is also an unbroken continuity of religion, culture, and language ...

This evaluation implies the view that Middle Eastern societies, though presently reclaiming their local heritage, are – with the sole exception of Israel – not 'really' entitled to it. Their claim is merely ideological, while the history thus claimed is that of the land, not of the people living on it today. According to the European and American narrative reflected here – that regards the Middle East up to the Islamic conquests of the seventh century as the setting of important developments in Western history – it was the advent of the Arabs that led to a cultural disconnection of the Middle East from its own past, be it Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Phoenician or Hellenistic, and from Judaeo-Christian tradition.

This vision, that virtually 'excommunicates' Islam from the realm of the Biblical cultures, by negating the legitimacy of its Near Eastern pluri-cultural context, had perhaps the most far-reaching consequences in Qur'anic studies. In contrast to the writings of the Church Fathers and the rabbis, originating in almost the same time and space, which were considered part of the European heritage, the Qur'an in scholarship was severed from its pluri-cultural milieu, being essentialised as a corpus without a genuine cultural context. Though historicism, as we shall see, did admit a connection between the Qur'an and earlier traditions, this was understood in terms of

influence rather than interaction. The Qur'an was thus negated *a genesis* out of a process of cultural negotiations, comparable to those that generated the other scriptures.

### 3. *The Pre-canonical and the Post-canonical Qur'an – Two Literary Genres*

Current Qur'anic scholarship situates the Qur'an at a stage when it has already become a canonised text, i.e. when it has acquired a 'status beyond history'.<sup>13</sup> In this post-canonical text the dramatic scenario of the communication of the Qur'anic message has given way to a written compilation, thus glossing over the exchange process between the transmitter of the message and his listeners. The differences between the two manifestations of the text can hardly be overestimated. Whereas in the case of the post-canonical Qur'an the scriptural character is due to the *mushaf* being acclaimed as the Book of the Muslim community and an integral part of that community's beliefs, scripturality in the pre-canonical text is due its emergence from a Biblically imprinted world. To summarise a survey presented by Nicolai Sinai: 'The Qur'an, not unlike other scriptures, grew out of a process of a community's successive appropriation of earlier traditions and thus forms a heterogeneous composition. A vast though undetermined body of narratives, theological concepts and beliefs was received and lengthily debated by an emerging community. With the emergence of the Qur'an, one set of such recountings came to acquire an authority analogous to that of the Bible itself. Unlike the latter, however, the Qur'an materialised in an environment familiar with pre-existent notions of sacred books, and consequently had to stake its own claim to authority in terms of these precedents. The Qur'anic consciousness of its own scripturality in turn shaped the kind of text that was evolving, and determined its literary and theological configuration. The Qur'anic revelations were from very early on subject to a kind of gravitational pull exerted by the notion of scripture.'<sup>14</sup>

But the pre-canonical text is equally conditioned by its 'situatedness', its responding to particular social and dogmatic problems discussed in the community, a feature that manifests itself in the text's dialogical structure. The Qur'anic argument first directed towards pagan unbelievers, turned into polemic-apologetic debates once the community became exposed to the exegetical challenges of the other heirs of scriptural tradition, Jews and Christians. The Biblical and post-Biblical traces in the Qur'an are thus imprinted with a new discursive character that is typical of the Qur'an.

Once the Qur'an's participation in a scriptural paradigm shared with the other Biblical religions is negated, essential features of the text are blurred. Not only are the Qur'an's structural references to liturgical contexts stripped of their functions, but equally its dialectic relation to the earlier scriptural discourses is obliterated. The negation of scripturality also induces a radical re-interpretation of the Qur'an in terms

of literary genre: the Qur'anic polyphone exhortative texts reflecting the dramatic process of the emergence of a community are violently forced into the narrow frame of a prose compilation, achieved by one autonomous 'author', who allegedly premeditated the collection manipulating the material to fit his message.

### **The Historical Background to the Dilemma**

#### *1. Abraham Geiger (1810–74)*

This particular re-coding of the Qur'an in auctorial terms is already a *fait accompli* when the Qur'an, which for centuries had been subjected to Christian bias, is for the first time in Western research made the object of a purely philological analysis. This development took place within the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the study of the Jewish religion and people), a German Jewish intellectual movement starting in the nineteenth century that was primarily concerned with the historicisation of Jewish religious traditions.<sup>15</sup> Judaism in this movement is regarded as a religion bearing universal values, applicable in any given place or time. It is here that scholars with a solid philological training turned to the Qur'an – no longer to refute it as had been the case with their Christian contemporaries, but to apply the newly acquired tools of historical research to the text. It would, however, be exaggerating to claim that the initiative targeted Islam in the same way as it targeted Judaism, i.e. as another religion to be acknowledged as bearing universal values. The purpose of their enterprise was 'to recover earlier Jewish sources and kernels of ideas that had embedded themselves in new (Muslim) literary environments: Jewish themes in Muslim texts'.<sup>16</sup>

Already one of the founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Abraham Geiger, took particular interest in the history of the Qur'an. In 1832 he won a contest, sponsored by the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Bonn, which had called for an enquiry into those themes of the Qur'an which were derived from Judaism, and within one year presented his famous work – originally in Latin – that in German was to be entitled *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*<sup>17</sup> Geiger's title not only presupposes a material dependence of the Qur'an on Judaism but an auctorial intention on the side of Muḥammad as well. In Geiger's view, Muḥammad consciously looked to the Jews and the Jewish past when establishing his own faith and formulating a Muslim world view. Geiger refers to the Qur'an as 'the product of a seventh-century Arab's literary imagination and oracular skill'.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Geiger 'in opposition to a long established Christian tradition did not regard the Islamic prophet as a self-serving adventurer. "Muhammad seems to have been a genuine enthusiast (Schwärmer) who was himself convinced of his divine mission."<sup>19</sup>

Yet, Geiger's approach to Qur'anic studies – though in terms of contemporary methodologies pioneering – epistemologically was to set the course for a narrow and simplified perception of the Qur'an. The assumption that Muḥammad authored the

Qur'an apodictically negates the interaction of the multiple agencies involved in the genesis of the Qur'an: the Prophet, the emerging community of his listeners and those adjacent groups who acted as transmitters of the multiple traditions current in the Late Antiquity Near East. To reduce this polyphone scenario to one individual agent would mean to lay the hermeneutical burden of the re-formulation of the multiple traditions reflected in the Qur'an on the shoulders of the one person, Muḥammad, who consequently – in view of the frequent Qur'anic divergences from those traditions – is to be blamed for innumerable 'misunderstandings'. It was the negation of the Qur'an's scripturality that kept scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* blind to the intrinsic discursive dimension of the Qur'anic references to earlier traditions, and thus the Qur'an's rank as an autonomous new paradigm. Yet it needs to be acknowledged that the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* – Geiger, Hartwig Hirschfeld,<sup>20</sup> Josef Horowitz<sup>21</sup> and Heinrich Speyer,<sup>22</sup> to mention only the most prominent – introduced a vast amount of Qur'anic intertexts, indispensable for the understanding of the Qur'an's situatedness. Qur'anic scholarship has never recovered from the violent disruption of their work that was brought about through the Nazi expulsion of Jewish scholars from German universities in the 1930s.

## 2. Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930)

Only twenty-seven years after Geiger, another pioneering Arabic scholar, Theodor Nöldeke, initiated his scholarly career with a work commissioned by the Paris Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres in 1858: a chronological analysis of the Qur'an. His study, originally written in Latin, that appeared in German under the title *Geschichte des Qorans* in 1860, later revised by Nöldeke himself and Friedrich Schwally (in 1909) and again extended by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl (in 1937),<sup>23</sup> consists of an attempt at re-arranging the suras and sections of suras according to their chronological sequence. Though making critical use of pertinent traditional Muslim scholarship, Nöldeke dealt with the text as such, scrutinising it in search of formal, stylistic and logical criteria for a chronological allocation of individual sections. He thus laid the basis for a critical reading of the Qur'an as the outcome of a developmental process.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, Nöldeke's work itself was hampered by the limits of his method. What has been lamented about nineteenth-century *sīra sha'biyya* studies applies to Qur'anic studies as well: The object of nineteenth-century Orientalists 'was to cut away the encrustments of time in order get back to the "original". The foundation stone of this brand of hermeneutics was philology: the study, comparison, and evaluation of texts through which time was defeated, the layers of history peeled, onionlike, away, and the original state of affairs ... revealed in all its pristine glory.'<sup>25</sup> Nöldeke's analysis, not unlike that of Geiger, proceeded on the lines of a textual archaeology. Although intending to re-construct the chronological sequence of the Qur'anic

communications, he did not consciously consider the pre-canonical text as a communication process. In his work 'later additions' to earlier texts are not acknowledged as the outcome of a listener's response, but are discarded as disturbing intrusions into a more original stratum of the text; later re-formulations or re-writings of earlier sections are disqualified as surplus 'repetitions' rather than identified as self-referential comments. This procedure, built on the assumption of a linear auctorial compilation, necessarily resulted in the misperception of the Qur'an's strongly dialogical structure in terms of disorder and repetitiveness. It eventually consolidated the established trivialised image of the Qur'an.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. *Later Developments in Qur'anic Scholarship*

Qur'anic scholarship after the disappearance of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, deprived of the cultural and linguistic skills demanded to identify Jewish Qur'anic intertexts, lost interest in the Qur'an's Late Antique setting altogether. Richard Bell<sup>27</sup> and Regis Blachere<sup>28</sup> further elaborated Nöldeke's chronology without substantially superseding it.<sup>29</sup> Post-war scholars like Rudi Paret<sup>30</sup> and Montgomery Watt,<sup>31</sup> turned their focus to a more general reading of Muḥammad's message, making ample and often somewhat naive use of the Islamic tradition – a development that was finally to provoke the sceptical response of John Wansbrough<sup>32</sup> and his school in the late-seventies. Wansbrough's work advocating a wholesale dismissal of Islamic tradition and with it the Qur'an's chronological and geographical frame, induced a turn in Qur'anic studies. Though manuscript evidence has meanwhile been discovered<sup>33</sup> that disproves a later emergence of the Qur'an, Anglo-Saxon Qur'anic scholarship still largely continues to dismantle the historical and critical apparatus that contextualises the Qur'an: or at least to water down the autonomy of the Qur'anic corpus by merging Qur'an and commentary, *tafsīr*, to serve as one joint source text. As against this de-historisation, two German scholars, Günther Lüling<sup>34</sup> and Christoph Luxenberg,<sup>35</sup> more recently ventured to restore a dubious history to the Qur'an, considering it as a re-writing of earlier Christian texts. The two cases of a revival of textual archaeology, however unprofessionally applied and thus quickly rejected by scholars of early Islam, have further widened the hermeneutic gap that has long been dividing Qur'anic scholarship into Islamic and Western.

### **Ways Out of the Dilemma?**

This is a state of affairs that calls for a re-thinking of Qur'anic studies. How can Western Qur'anic scholars produce knowledge that is both relevant and hermeneutically acceptable to their Muslim colleagues as well? One venue, already successfully tested in the Near East – by the Egyptian text linguist Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd<sup>36</sup> – might be 'semantic analysis' introduced by the Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu.<sup>37</sup> Another would be the investigation of the Qur'anic aesthetics as perceived by its



readers, drawing on traditional Arabic rhetorics, such as has exemplarily been conducted by Navid Kermani;<sup>38</sup> and recently Stefan Wild has proposed 'mantic speech'<sup>39</sup> as a further venue. These methodologies, however avoid the crucial question of the Qur'an's historicity and thus its relation to the traditions of the adjacent cultural groups. For both epistemological and political reasons, however, it seems indispensable to go beyond these post-canonical approaches and try to re-locate the Qur'anic genesis in the context of Late Antique culture.

The 'pre-canonical' reading that I am advocating is not intended to replace the accepted post-canonical, i.e. exegesis-informed reading. It is meant to add another voice to the already existing readings that have been proposed and tested during the history of the Qur'an's reception, like the philosophical presented by al-Rāzī or the mystical of Ibn ʿArabi, etc. At the same time it is more than an additional option, it is a political exigency. The historicisation of the Bible, as we saw, generated a myth of origin for European culture, inventing the Near East as its birth-place. This invention rested on the exclusion of Islam from the Biblical Near Eastern cultures, it thus uprooted the Qur'an from both its Late Antique origin and its participation in the exegetical discourse of Biblical tradition. It is this 'excommunication' that in the post-modern era has to be reversed.

This reversal, the re-introduction of Islam and its scripture into Europe's mythical core, in my view, can be achieved with scholarly means: through repeating the experiment of historicisation. Like the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the Qur'an has to be re-contextualised with the cultural milieu of its origin, that has been monopolised by the Western narrative. Re-established in its historical space and time, the Qur'an will finally be posed on eye level with the other scriptures, and thus reveal itself no less than the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as a substantial part of the European heritage.

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#### NOTES

1 The famous anecdote is quoted verbatim from Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 1.

2 Aziz al-Azmeh, 'The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism' in Arie van der Kooij (ed.), *Canonization and Decanonization*, Studies in the History of Religion, 82 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), and again to appear in: Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, forthcoming).

3 A quite different critique of Qur'anic studies has been presented by Mohamed Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert?* (Beirut: Saqi Books, 2006). Arkoun pleads for a crossing of the 'epistemic and epistemological threshold' (p. 77) to update Qur'anic studies and achieve a deconstructionalist analysis of the Qur'an. Though he unilaterally favours linguistic and

psychological approaches without sufficiently regarding the still existing desiderata in historical-philological scholarship; his plea for a 'diversification of the methodologies and the enlargement of the scope of a compared history of religions, coupled with the elaboration of an anthropological frame of understanding' is certainly in line with the claim raised in this paper.

4 William Graham, art. 'Scripture and the Qur'an' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. It is true that 'scripture as a particularistic concept seems to have first developed fully in Jewish and Christian contexts and it was in later phases of these and, most recently, in secular contexts primarily within the Western world (especially those of the modern academy) that generic use of the term was subsequently developed to refer commonly not only to particular Jewish or Christian biblical texts but also to the sacred texts of other religious communities ... This is not to say that in other religions traditions there are no analogous concepts that might be adduced, rather it is to note that the inclusion of the Qur'an (or Veda or Lotus Sutra) under the rubric of the Latinate word "scripture" is not terribly old historically and was relatively infrequent until the past century or so – at least since the 1879–1894 publication of Max Müller's edited series Sacred books of the East. Such generic usage is now much more common but scripture as a phenomenon occurring in diverse religious contexts and traditions is still something that has only begun to be studied comparatively and globally in any adequate way' (p. 258).

5 Graham, 'Scripture and the Qur'an', p. 259.

6 Graham, 'Scripture and the Qur'an', p. 260.

7 It is not acknowledged by William Graham either, who discusses the relation between 'Scripture and Qur'an' as applied to both the pre-canonical and the post-canonical text without differentiating between them. Such a distinction is, to some degree, discouraged by a current more general scepticism towards historical approaches to scriptures. Thus Biblical studies have recently seen a move, spearheaded by Brevard Childs, away from tradition and redaction history towards a growing interest for the final version of the Biblical text as it has become canonical within the Christian church. A similarly 'synchronic' approach to the Qur'an has been advocated, among others, by Daniel Madigan. Even though both positions are by no means ahistorical – the final version of the text is after all viewed as having come into being at a particular moment in time – they privilege the final stage in what they recognise to be an extended process of textual genesis over preliminary stages, and they do so by virtue of the fact that it is the canon in its final shape which has been accepted as binding.

8 There are only isolated attempts; see Michael Sells, 'Sound, Spirit, and Gender in *Sūrat al-Qadr*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991), pp. 239–59; Michael Sells, 'Sound and Meaning in *Sūrat al-Qāri'a*', *Arabica* 40 (1993), pp. 403–30; Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981); Angelika Neuwirth, 'Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*: Some Observations on the Qur'anic "Canonical Process" and the Emergence of a Community' in I. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (London: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 143–72; Angelika Neuwirth, 'Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan Suras' in Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds), *Approaches to the Qur'an* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 3–36; Angelika Neuwirth, 'Qur'anic Literary Structure Revisited: *Surat al-Rahman* between Mythic Account and Decodation of Myth' in Stefan Leder (ed.), *Story-telling in the Framework of Non-fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1998), pp. 388–420; Marilyn Waldman, 'New Approaches to "Biblical" Materials in the Qur'an' in W.M. Brinner and S.D. Ricks (eds), *Papers Presented at the Institute of Islamic-Judaic Studies* (Atlanta: University of Denver, 1986), pp. 47–63; Mustansir Mir, 'The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes and Characters' in *Muslim World* 76 (1986), pp. 1–15. See also Issa J. Boullata, art. 'Literary Structures in the Qur'an' in *Encyclopaedia of the*

*Qur'ān*. The present author has tried to demonstrate Qur'anic scripturality in 'Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon: Zur Entstehung und Wiederauflösung der Surenkomposition im Verlauf der Entwicklung eines islamischen Kultus' in Stefan Wild (ed.), *The Qur'an as Text* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 69–111.

9 B. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London: Routledge/Curzon Press, 2002).

10 John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Methods of Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). See the review by Angelika Neuwirth in *Welt des Islam* 3–4 (1984), pp. 539–42.

11 It is advocated by Andrew Rippin: 'To re-create a history of the reaction to the Qur'an in terms of what people have actually thought it means, through an analysis of exegetical texts, appears to be a most appropriate, intellectually convincing, and rewarding task for the modern scholar of the Qur'an'; see Andrew Rippin's introduction in his *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 2. Putting it even more provocatively, William Cantwell Smith has stated that 'the reader's response is not to the meaning: it is the meaning'; see William Cantwell Smith in Anthony Thiselton (ed.), *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, and Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 539. This verdict, which relies on a highly skeptical attitude towards the text itself, has been contested by a number of other scholars, among them David Marshall. He writes: 'However, there is a striking inconsistency in this approach. Rippin acknowledges that he is indebted to the idea popular among some literary critics that "a text does not exist in any real sense without a reader to react to and with the text", and, as we have seen, Cantwell Smith expresses similar views. By applying this principle to the field of Qur'anic studies, these scholars aim to shift our attention from the text of the Qur'an to the history of reader-response to the Qur'an. But surely, and this is where the inconsistency lies, that history of reader-response to the Qur'an is (again) embedded in texts ... Why are those texts not equally inaccessible to Rippin and Cantwell Smith as the Qur'an on which they comment?' (David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), p. 10). Marshall adduces an observation made by R.M.L. Gethin, a scholar in Buddhism (R.M.L. Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 6): 'the gap of understanding between two cultures may be of a different order but is not logically different from the gap of understanding that exists between two individuals of the same culture. They too will occupy their own particular worlds. Logically, then we are left with the question of whether anyone can ever communicate with anyone else.'

12 See the introduction by Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg to their work *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), pp. 17f.

13 See Aziz al-Azmeh, 'Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition' in D. Tracey and F. Reynolds (eds), *Religion and Practical Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 163ff.

14 Nicolai Sinai, unpublished project proposal for the 'Corpus Coranicum' project established at the Berlin Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

15 See Jacob Lassner, 'Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam' in Martin Kramer (ed.), *The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, 1999), pp. 103–36.

16 Lassner, 'Abraham Geiger', p. 112.

17 Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? Eine von der Königlich Preussischen Rheinuniversität gekrönte Preisschrift* (Bonn: F. Baaden 1833); translated as *Judaism and Islam* (Madras: n.p., 1898, reprinted New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970, with an introduction by Moshe Pearlman).

- 18 Lassner, 'Abraham Geiger', p. 114.
- 19 Lassner, 'Abraham Geiger', p. 106.
- 20 Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Koran* (Leipzig: O. Schulze, 1886); translated as *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902).
- 21 Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter De Gruyter, 1926).
- 22 Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Gräfenhainichen: n.p., 1937).
- 23 Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, new edn by F. Schwally, G. Bergsträsser and O. Pretzl (3 vols, Leipzig: Dieterich, 1938).
- 24 Marco Schoeller's judgement (art., 'Post-enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur'an' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*), 'Nöldeke's Geschichte des Qorans (GdQ), since its appearance in a second enlarged edition in the first decades of the twentieth century – considerably augmented by three other scholars – has proven to be the decisive standard text to which all modern scholars interested in the Qur'an must refer', seems to be, however, wishful thinking, since Nöldeke's diachronic approach had already been given up in post World War Two scholarship and has been dismissed as obsolete in more recent scholarship.
- 25 Peter Heath, *The Thirsty Sword: Sirat 'Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1996), pp. 14f.
- 26 Various aspects of Qur'anic scripturality have been discussed by Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938).
- 27 Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953); see Schoeller, art. 'Post-enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur'an'.
- 28 Regis Blachere, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947).
- 29 Schoeller, art. 'Post-enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur'an'.
- 30 Rudi Paret, *Mohammad und der Koran: Geschichte und Verkündigung des arabischen Propheten* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1980).
- 31 Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).
- 32 John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*. See the review by Neuwirth in *Welt des Islam*, pp. 539–42.
- 33 Gert Rüdiger Puin, 'Observations on Early Qur'an Manuscripts in San'a' in Stefan Wild (ed.), *The Qur'an as Text* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 107–11; Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-Ruediger Puin, 'Neue Wege der Koranforschung', *Magazin der Forschung* 1 (1999) pp. 33–46.
- 34 Günther Lüling, *Über den Ur-Koran: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vor-islamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Koran* (Erlangen: privately published, 1974); Günther Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad: Eine Kritik am „christlichen“ Abendland* (Erlangen: privately published, 1981). See the review by Gerald Hawting in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 27 (1982), pp. 108–12.
- 35 Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2000); see the review by Claude Gilliot, 'Langue et Coran: Une lecture syro-araméenne du Coran', *Arabica* 50 (2003), pp. 381–91; Francois de Blois, 'Islam in its Arabian Context' in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (eds), *The Qur'an in Context* (forthcoming).
- 36 Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥūm al-naṣṣ: dirāsa fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: n.p., 1410/1990); Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Ishkāliyāt al-qirā'a wa-alīyyāt al-ta'wīl* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-ʿArabī, 1410/1992); cf. Navid Kermani, *Offenbarung als*

*Kommunikation: Das Konzept wahy in Nasr Hamid Abu Zayds 'Maḥmū al-nass'* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996).

37 Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran: A Study in Semantics* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1959).

38 Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön: Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999).

39 Stefan Wild, unpublished draft of a research project 'The Qur'an as Mantic Speech'.