

# Research Statements

## Azaiez

Notre contribution au Qur'an Seminar est le prolongement d'un parcours universitaire essentiellement dédié aux études coraniques et qui se poursuit dans le cadre d'un projet international intitulé « Mapping the Qur'an » à l'Université de la KU Leuven. Notre thèse de doctorat soutenue à l'Université d'Aix Marseille en 2012 s'intitulait « La polémique dans le Coran, essai d'analyse du Contre-discours et de la riposte coranique ». Publié récemment sous le titre *Le contre-discours coranique* (Berlin : De Gruyter, 2015), ce travail étudie les discours rapportés directs tenus par les adversaires réels ou fictifs dans le Coran. Cette forme explicite de la polémique est l'occasion d'interroger les thèmes, les formes, les stratégies discursives mobilisées mais aussi le contexte supposé de la polémique coranique (en lien notamment avec la littérature de l'Antiquité Tardive).

Fidèle à cette recherche et parfois au-delà de celle-ci, nous proposons vingt commentaires issus d'une sélection de passages choisis principalement pour leur forme littéraire polémique. L'analyse utilise les méthodes et les concepts des sciences du langage et de l'argumentation. Plus précisément, nous avons utilisé des méthodes de lecture empruntées à l'analyse rhétorique (QS 4, 25, 36, 39) et à la narratologie (QS 2, 21, 31, 34), mais également à de nombreux concepts tels que le contre-discours (passages principaux QS 12, 16, 22, 26, 37), la polyphonie et le dialogisme (QS 2, 21, 31), la métatextualité (QS 5, 31, 42), le mono-prophétisme et l'anaphore (QS 2, 10, 26, 31) ou encore les figures et tropes (QS 24, 27, 39, 41).

Chaque commentaire est l'occasion de définir ces méthodes ou notions et d'illustrer leur application sur le texte coranique. Trois exemples viendront illustrer notre propos. Premièrement, la méthode de l'analyse rhétorique issue des études bibliques et initiée pour les études coraniques par Michel Cuypers, propose de rechercher (en premier lieu) la disposition des textes et les structures de composition des sourates du Coran. Appliquée aux QS 4, 25, 39, cette méthode révèle des dispositions textuelles répondant à des structures concentriques, l'une parfaite comme pour le cas du verset dit du « trône » -2, 255- (QS 4, 25) ou spéculaire dans le cadre de description (QS 39). Deuxième exemple, le concept de « mise en scène » emprunté à la narratologie permet d'être attentif entre autres à la singularité de la narration coranique et particulièrement à la présence de plusieurs types de temporalité dans un même texte (QS 21). Enfin, troisième exemple, la notion de polyphonie permet d'être sensibilisé à la mise en scène de « voix » qui se confrontent. Ces confrontations dialoguées sont l'un des ressorts les plus visibles de l'argumentation coranique. La présence du contre-discours coranique comme mise en voix de la parole de l'adversaire en est une parfaite illustration.

Dans le cadre de ces commentaires, nos analyses souhaitent illustrer la pertinence d'une application raisonnée des outils de la linguistique et de la rhétorique contemporaine pour une meilleure intelligence du discours coranique. L'objectif est

d'interroger à la fois les singularités formelles et structurelles du texte mais également d'introduire une réflexion future sur les techniques d'écriture qui président à la rédaction et à la composition du Coran.

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### **Crone**

I come to the Qur'ān as a historian interested in the question of how a new religion arose in the Near East, in a quite unexpected time and place. Like so many others, I am trying to place the Qur'ān on the religious map of Late Antiquity, by which I mean the period from c. 200 to 600 on both the Greek and the Persian sides of the Euphrates, with a view to making it possible one day to trace an uninterrupted history of the development of religious beliefs in the Near East from ancient times to the Qur'ān (and beyond: the religious history of the Islamic Near East interests me greatly too). Unlike many others, I focus particularly on the views of the people that the Qur'ān condemns because they represent the milieu with which the Qur'ānic prophet broke: they give us a sense of what things looked like before he started preaching. But this concern is not reflected in the comments I have written for the present project thanks to the particular time at which I was able to participate. The fact that I spend so much time reading sources for the Near East outside Arabia in no way means that I underestimate the importance of Arabia itself. On the contrary, north-western Arabia is the immediate environment in which the Qur'ān arose, and we really need to know what happened there. But unfortunately the sources for the religious developments in that region are both poor and late: brief inscriptions apart, they form part of the Islamic tradition, which emerged well after the Qur'ān. Accordingly, I have found the wealth of literature composed in the pre-Islamic Near East in languages other than Arabic to be more rewarding to work with.

\* Patricia Crone (1945 – 2015) was Professor Emerita in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ. Her many publications include *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), *God's Rule: Government and Islam. Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Columbia University Press, 2004), and *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

### **Cuypers**

Je suis venu aux études coraniques par l'analyse littéraire. J'ai d'abord pratiqué celle-ci en littérature persane, en appliquant l'analyse structurale moderne du récit à une œuvre de littérature persane (thèse à l'Université de Téhéran, 1983). Vers le milieu des

années 1990, après des études d'arabe, j'ai voulu comprendre quelle pouvait être la structure du texte coranique, réputé ne pas en avoir. L'analyse structurale ne me semblait pas très pertinente pour éclairer la question. C'est dans les études bibliques que j'ai trouvé la réponse, dans l'analyse rhétorique du texte, selon les principes de la rhétorique sémitique, très différente de la rhétorique grecque. Après une série d'articles sur les sourates courtes, j'ai publié une longue étude sur la sourate 5, *al-Mâ'ida* (Cuypers 2007), suivie d'un livre théorique expliquant la méthode de l'analyse rhétorique, appliquée au Coran (Cuypers 2012b). Un livre reprenant les articles sur les sourates courtes est paru en 2014 (Cuypers 2014). Tous les passages analysés pour le Séminaire reprennent des points que l'on trouve dans le premier livre et le troisième. Les illustrations de structures montrées dans des tableaux manifestent toutes la fréquence, dans le Coran, de la structure circulaire ABA', à côté d'autres structures : les parallélismes (AA', BB' ou AB/A'B'), les structures en miroir (AB/B'A') ou les structures circulaires complexes (ABCD/x/D'C'B'A').

Cette approche du texte est commandée par l'idée que le sens du texte ne se révèle que si ce dernier est replacé dans son contexte littéraire immédiat, c'est-à-dire, dans sa structure rhétorique. Ce principe d'exégèse s'oppose à la pratique traditionnelle d'une exégèse « atomiste », verset par verset, ainsi qu'à l'explication du texte par les « occasions de la révélation » (*asbâb al-nuzûl*), lesquelles sont le plus souvent des constructions *a posteriori*.

Le contexte intégral du texte est cependant plus large que la simple structure rhétorique et englobe aussi l'intratextualité (*tafsîr al-Qur'ân bi-l-Qur'ân*) (Q. 8, 49) et l'intertextualité, chaque fois que le texte coranique manifeste une référence à d'autres textes, antérieurs à la rédaction du Coran (Bible, littérature parabiblique, rabbinique etc.). C'est pourquoi il convient de joindre une étude intertextuelle à l'analyse rhétorique, chaque fois que le sens y invite.

Je me réfère aux *hadîts*, non comme source d'interprétation, mais éventuellement comme confirmation d'une interprétation (QS 49, *hadît* de 'Ikrama).

L'usage, par le Coran, d'une rhétorique sémitique en usage chez les scribes de l'Antiquité du Moyen Orient, et les nombreuses relations intertextuelles du Coran avec le monde des écrits religieux qui circulaient à l'époque de son avènement, situent clairement le Livre dans le contexte littéraire de l'Antiquité tardive.

\* Michel Cuypers est docteur, chercheur à l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales, le Caire, et auteur de *Le Fesîtn. Une lecture de la sourate al-Mâ'ida* (Paris, Lethielleux, 2007) et *Une apocalypse coranique. Une lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran* (Pendé : Gabalda, 2014).

## Dye

Je considère le Coran comme un texte du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, relevant pour l'essentiel du « monde biblique » proche-oriental. Je me propose donc de l'étudier selon des méthodes qui ont porté leurs fruits dans des domaines comparables, comme les études bibliques (moyennant, bien sûr, les ajustements nécessaires) – notamment la

*Formgeschichte* et la *Redaktionskritik* (une telle approche ne nie nullement le substrat arabe préislamique). On peut présenter une esquisse de cette méthode en cinq points.

Premièrement, d'un point de vue strictement historique: il convient de s'écartier du lien systématiquement établi entre le Coran et la Sîra. Il est souvent plus éclairant de lire le Coran à la lumière de ses références à la littérature biblique, à savoir non seulement la Bible et les écrits apocryphes, mais également la littérature exégétique, homilétique et liturgique chrétienne et juive, sans oublier bien sûr les traditions orales et populaires, plus difficiles cependant à étudier, puisqu'elles ont naturellement laissé moins de traces écrites. C'est là un moyen plus sûr de replacer le Coran dans son contexte historique et littéraire.

Deuxièmement, d'un point de vue linguistique : il n'y a aucune raison de penser que l'environnement dans lequel naît le Coran n'était pas, d'une façon ou d'une autre, multilingue (l'ensemble du Proche-Orient l'était) – autrement dit, il convient de reconnaître la présence de nombreuses traces de bilinguisme/multilinguisme dans la langue même du Coran (le dogme théologique de « l'arabe pur » n'a aucun sens linguistiquement et historiquement).

Troisièmement, du point de vue de la *critique textuelle* : il est parfois nécessaire de faire abstraction de la mise en place des points diacritiques et des voyelles, telle qu'on la trouve dans le *textus receptus*. Même si elle est correcte la plupart du temps, elle ne remonte pas aux plus anciens témoins matériels du texte, et il n'existe pas de tradition orale, fiable et ininterrompue, qui nous assurerait de sa nécessaire justesse. Idéalement, il faut donc partir du *rasm* seul.

Quatrièmement, du point de vue de la *Formgeschichte* : quels que soient les procédés littéraires et herméneutiques destinés à accréditer l'idée d'un ouvrage doté d'une profonde unité, le Coran est moins un livre qu'un *corpus* (qui plus est composite et, élément remarquable, sans cadre narratif), à savoir la réunion de textes relativement indépendants, pour ne pas dire hétérogènes (relevant de genres littéraires assez variés, et qui n'étaient pas initialement destinés à être réunis en un *codex*), dont la signification et la fonction originelles peuvent avoir été en partie modifiées, voire masquées, par la collecte elle-même – notamment en devenant une *partie* d'un *corpus* clos, bien déterminé, et considéré comme canonique. Il ne faut donc pas confondre le *Sitz im Buch* (dans le texte canonique) et le *Sitz im Leben* originel de la (strate la plus ancienne de la) péricope ou de la sourate.

Cinquièmement, du point de vue de la *Redaktionskritik* : si de nombreux passages du Coran datent de l'époque du Prophète, il ne convient pas pour autant de se limiter *a priori* au Hijaz du premier tiers du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle pour comprendre l'histoire de la composition du Coran. Il semble en effet qu'il y ait eu une activité, non seulement éditoriale, mais aussi *rédactionnelle*, après la mort du Prophète. Le texte (*rasm* seul) issu de cette activité éditoriale et *rédactionnelle* prend vraisemblablement forme, pour l'essentiel, entre le début et la fin de la seconde moitié du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle. En d'autres termes, le ou plutôt les rédacteurs du Coran sont bel et bien des *auteurs* (et non de simples compilateurs) qui ont pu réorganiser, réinterpréter et partiellement

réécrire des textes préexistants, voire ajouter des péricopes, selon leur propre perspective. Les éléments indiquant un travail de rédaction, par des interpolations, suppressions, ou diverses interventions éditoriales, doivent systématiquement être pris en compte (le Coran est donc un texte certes composite, mais aussi composé). Il convient par conséquent d'envisager le Coran selon une diachronie plus large que la chronologie traditionnelle entre sourates mecquoises et médinoises (la confiance en cette chronologie, souvent arbitraire, constitue d'ailleurs un des moyens les plus sûrs de stériliser la recherche).

\* Guillaume Dye est Professeur d'islamologie à l'Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). Ses travaux portent notamment sur les études coraniques, envisagées, aussi bien du point de vue méthodologique que thématique, comme une partie des études bibliques. Il a récemment publié *Partage du sacré : transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, Isabelle Dépret et Guillaume Dye (Bruxelles-Fernelmont : EME, 2012) ; et *Hérésies : une construction d'identités religieuses* édité par Christian Brouwer, Guillaume Dye et Anja van Rompaey, (Bruxelles : Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015).

### El-Badawi

The commentaries I provide in this volume are informed by my training as a historian and philologist at the University of Chicago. Readers seeking more detail on my views are encouraged to consult my book on *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (2013). For me, studying the Qur'ān means paying close attention to what Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010) calls the “instruments of the text” (*āliyyāt al-naṣṣ*). Therefore, comprehending the Qur'ān undoubtedly requires a mastery of its “clear Arabic language” (*lisān 'arabī mu'bīn*), including its rhyme and rhetorical devices. However, our comprehension of the Qur'ān today has also benefited a great deal from advancements in the areas of Biblical Studies, Historical Linguistics, Paleography, Archeology and other related disciplines.

Despite the pious and legal nature of later Islamic tradition, a critical reading of some reports in the *tafsīr*, *sīra* and *ḥadīt* literature can on occasion yield what Fred Donner refers to as a “kernel of truth,” and provide researchers with useful insights concerning the world surrounding the text. Islamic tradition is also useful since medieval exegetes sought to better understand the Qur'ān in light of the Biblical canon and loan words, like al-Biqā'ī (d. 808/1460) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). Such works provide a foundation upon which modern Qur'ānic Studies can build and improve. In sum, the Qur'ān is most fully and honestly appreciated as a bridge between the religious traditions of Late Antiquity and that of Islam.

It is fair to accept a number of traditional views concerning the Qur'ān which are germane to the text itself, including the fact that it is an Arabic text from an Arabian geographical context between Yathrib, Bakkā (Mecca?; Q 3:96) and Jerusalem (Q 17:1). The details of this context, of course, are not so clear. It is also fair to accept that the core of its articulation goes back to a man called Muḥammad, a messenger and

prophet styled after heroes in earlier Biblical, Arabian and Hellenic traditions (Q 33:40).

However, I am not fully convinced of the extent to which the Qur’ān’s environs were pagan in nature, nor the extent to which its audience were simple idol worshippers. To the contrary, the text appears to be speaking primarily to monotheistic groups, including believers, Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, and Zoroastrians (Q 2:62; 22:17) who were, furthermore, steeped in the clear expression (*bayān*) and sophisticated argumentation (*ḡadal*) of religious discourse. It appears to me, furthermore, that the Qur’ān operates in a cosmopolitan society where bilingualism and religious syncretism are widespread.

I have some reservations about the traditional chronology in which Qur’ānic *sūras* are placed. Numerous literary and rhetorical indicators within the text—such as its self referentiality, its self-designation in some *sūras* as “recitations” (*Qur’ān*) and elsewhere as “epistle, scripture” (*kitāb*), and insertions or interpolations between the short verses within what are known as the Meccan *sūras*—demonstrate its development over time. However, the detailed and all too neat chronology proposed by later Islamic tradition and revised by Theodor Nöldeke are not apparent in the Qur’ānic text itself.

For me, the Qur’ān’s overall concern that mankind worship the one God with no partners before the coming of the Day of Judgment, and its disputation with the People of the Scripture are the result of its masterful conversation with late antique Syriac Christian homiletic literature and Rabbinic commentary. Likewise, I see its promotion of scriptural authority as a move towards simpler, less hierarchical religious practice, and as a response to the splintering of the Eastern Churches into competing patriarchal authorities. We also find that the text’s ethical and legal sensibilities, especially its criticism of the Christian and Rabbinic clergy (Q 9:31–34) and its defense of widows and orphans (Q 4:2–12), echo that of Jewish-Christian conservatism.

These considerations have given shape to my commentaries, in which I both try to propose answers as well as ask questions shedding light on several dimensions of the Qur’ān’s message. They include: its distinct anti-Trinitarian theology which come in response to the Christological controversies of the time (QS 4, 6, 9, 32, 33, 35, 39, 40); its vivid apocalypticism (QS 36, 42); its affirmation of earlier prophecy and emphasis on the authenticity of its revelation (QS 9, 31, 37, 46); and the ethical as well as legal concerns of the community that crystallized around the text (QS 7, 38, 44).

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### Firestone

I come to the Qur’ān Seminar with training in traditional and modern approaches to the study of Judaism, its sacred texts and its practices, followed by academic training in Arabic literature, Qur’ān and Islamic studies. I have written on the Qur’ān separate from Jewish literatures in such works as *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, but even in such research my methodology is informed by my training in Judaic Studies. I hope that such background does not prejudge my appreciation for the depth, complexity and spiritual power of the Qur’ān, but it does always place it in relationship with a long tradition of revelatory literature. This is something the Qur’ān itself very clearly articulates (2:41; 3:3; 5:48; 46:12).

Every time I approach a topic or issue in the Qur’ān I employ the same methodology to an examination of Biblical scripture. The purpose is not comparative, *per se*, but rather methodological. That is, I need to be certain that I am not engaging in a tendentious approach to the scripture of an “other” that I would not employ to “my own” scripture. In the course of working out of this method I sometimes discover particularly interesting issues in either scripture that might have otherwise been missed. One result of this method is my book on holy war in Judaism, which emerged out of my earlier work on holy war in Islam with particular focus on the scriptural layers of the Qur’ān.

One of my professors of Hebrew Bible mentioned forty years ago that he was sometimes criticized for his particular method of analysis in which he refused to consult traditional Jewish commentaries for fear that they would negatively influence his strict contextual approach. He believed, rightly I would add, that the traditional commentaries might derail one from allowing the text to speak purely for itself. On the other hand, he would consult pre-Biblical or contemporary literatures in his diachronic method, because he understood that irrespective of a scripture’s claims for revelatory authenticity, it must appear in a human language, and language conveys cultural *realia* that reflect contemporary and prior oral or written literatures. This training informs my reading of the Qur’ān. However, after having struggled with the meaning of the Qur’ān in its own *Sitz im Leben*, I examine traditional commentaries, which adds layers of understanding that can deepen illumination of its meaning.

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### Grodzki

I arrived in the field of Qur’ānic Studies by way of Semitic linguistics in general, and the Arabic language in particular. My doctoral work (at the University of Warsaw, 2007) is an analytical commentary and critical text edition of one of the great classics

of Arab grammar – *al-Muṣṭafā fī ṣan'at al-i'rāb* – by the Persian polymath Abū l-Qāsim al-Zamahšarī (d. 538/1144). Yet, however enlightening and fascinating classical Arabic grammatical treatises may be for Semitic linguists, they do not offer answers or clues to help resolve and better understand the intricacies, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of Qur'ānic Arabic. Although the Qur'ānic text is considered an authoritative linguistic system on its own, a critical scholar of the text is faced with borrowings, irregularities, ambiguities, hapax legomena, unorthodox morphology and syntax and other abrupt and seemingly inexplicable divergences from normative grammatical structures. These features of Qur'ānic Arabic pose a great challenge to uncovering both explicit and subliminal meanings of the text.

In terms of the Qur'ān's language and its linguistic structure, my commentaries (inter alia, QS 11, 13, 31) hone in on certain recurrent patterns in the text, e.g., the repetition of the lexeme *qāla/qālū/qīla* at the head of verses 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 26 in *sūra* 36; the evidently anachronistic ordering of verses 7–17 in *sūra* 8 and the elusive *al-muqatta'āt* (mysterious letters that precede several *sūras*). Building from the various scholarly attempts to explain such linguistic phenomena, my aim is to understand why the Qur'ān (or its final redactor, if you will) applied these conventions and forms, what it tried to convey to its audience through their usage, and to what extent can other contemporary Near Eastern literary traditions help us better understand their application. A perfect command of the Arabic language is not sufficient to comprehend and excavate the intertwined inner *strata* of such linguistic features the Qur'ān.

As for my theological points of interest, I am convinced that the Qur'ān possesses a scriptural history which encapsulates the natural evolution of the theology and worldview of the early religious community. As a text, the Qur'ān may yield some insight into its early history to those who want to delve into it, by means of various scholarly methodologies. Thus, in my commentaries on theological issues (e.g., passages 22, 25, 33) I approach the Qur'ān's metaphysical and eschatological dimensions as elaborations on or developments of certain Jewish-Christian ideas circulating in the late ancient Near East. I thus argue for a historical continuity in the transmission of certain theological concepts, traces of which are present in the allusive text of the Qur'ān.

Astonishingly even within Western scholarship on Islam, the Qur'ān is seldom approached through the prism of its historical, doctrinal, philological and social background, i.e., the multicultural, multireligious and multilingual world of the late ancient Near East. This background can be reconstructed through evidence, which includes the vast repository of treatises from the Jewish-Christian as well as non-monotheistic communities, the non-Arabic contemporary literature of various peoples in Syriac, Hebrew, Persian, Greek, Ethiopic, Latin, Armenian, and Coptic, the eschatological anxieties, apocalyptic dimensions, political and military tensions experienced by those who lived during these times, as well as the important archeological, paleographical and numismatic evidence that is now available to us.

Traditional Muslim understandings of the Qur'ānic text thus must be combined with source-critical, form-critical and tradition-critical Western methodologies. The field of Qur'ānic studies remains largely uncultivated and thereby receptive to new methodologies that are attuned to the Qur'ānic text and that can enhance our understanding of the Muslim scripture. John Wansbrough noted in the seventies that, “as a document susceptible of analysis by the instruments and techniques of Biblical criticism [the Qur'ān] is virtually unknown” (1977:1). His observation remains largely true to this day.

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## **Hawting**

For an historian of the early and pre-modern Islamic world, the Qur'ān is a primary source, offering evidence about the environment from which the religion and culture that was to become Islam began to emerge. The evidence naturally relates mainly to religious matters, but may also throw light on, e.g., social, economic and political conditions. It is not, however, simply lying there, evident to any or every reader of the text. If it were possible to uncover the evidence simply by reading the holy book, historical analysis of the emergence of Islam would not be the complex and contested issue that it still is, for the Qur'ān is one of the most read and studied texts in history, its contents known not only to millions of believers but also to generations of non-Muslim readers, academics and others. The question, obviously, is how one reads it and what one brings to the reading of a text that is characterized by its extreme allusiveness.

The long and rich tradition of Muslim exegesis of the Qur'ān (*tafsīr*) informs us about the multiple and various ways in which believers made sense of their scripture, but there are other, equally feasible ways of understanding it. In common with many of the other contributors to this volume I share the view that the text arises out of and responds to diverse ideas and discourses existing in the Middle East in Late Antiquity. Because those ideas and discourses are only known to us through texts, that means that the attempt to understand the Qur'ān must largely be a process of contextualization in the literal sense.

The Qur'ānic prophet, however, probably did not respond directly to texts but to people, and it is especially interesting to try to obtain some idea of the views of those who rejected him and his teachings. In many passages the Qur'ān, in the course of refuting them, seems to reproduce the ideas and arguments of its opponents. Even

allowing for a degree of polemical exaggeration and distortion, the text offers us the prospect of understanding the religious views of those against which it is arguing, and the results are not easy to reconcile with the portrait of the opponents (most frequently called *mušrikūn*) that we find in the traditional commentaries and other traditional literature.

More fully to understand the views of the opponents, however, it is not enough to reproduce what the Qur'ān tells us about them. In order to make sense of what it tells us we have to turn to the textual evidence from Late Antiquity to see how far that casts light on the information provided in the Qur'ān. How far do the views that the Qur'ān attributes to those who reject its prophet seem comparable to those reported of others in literature that has survived from Late Antiquity? That question may have implications for any discussion of influences and the environment from which the Qur'ānic texts came, but primarily is intended to make the Qur'ān itself more comprehensible.

Very few scholars command all the linguistic and other skills required for the knowledge and understanding of all the evidence of the late antique Middle East, and for me one of the prospective benefits of participating in this joint project is that the insights, knowledge and skills of others will compensate for my own deficiencies.

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### Hilali

My contribution to the Qur'ān seminar consists of analyzing the issues which arise in the Qur'ānic passages through the perspective of history of transmission of religious texts in early and medieval Islam. In my comments, I use two main sources: *ḥadīt* literature including theoretical writings about authenticity as well as collections of apocryphal *ḥadīt* (*mawdū'* pl. *mawdū'āt*) and the oldest manuscript of the Qur'ān, manuscript 27.1 DAM (the so-called Șan'ā' palimpsest) and more precisely the lower text of the manuscript dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Manuscript 27.1 provides evidence of the transmission of the passages when they occur, in their oldest form and sometimes shows discrepancies between the manuscript and the standard Qur'ān (for this perspective I use the so-called Cairo edition of 1924.). The *ḥadīt* literature, often mixed with exegetical material, offers a view on the interpretation of the passages and reports medieval discussions. In my contribution, I build bridges between the Qur'ānic text as it has been transmitted in its, perhaps, oldest state, and the Qur'ān as it is interpreted in the medieval literature. When the various textual issues in the Qur'ān manuscript allow me, I proceed by the *deconstruction* of the exegetical categories and propose the re-interpretation of the text.

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### Imbert

Chercheur en épigraphie arabe et islamique au Proche-Orient (discipline qui étudie les inscriptions arabes gravées sur la pierre), mes travaux se sont concentrés depuis plus d'une dizaine d'années sur la question des graffiti islamiques datant des premiers siècles de l'Hégire (vii<sup>e</sup> et viii<sup>e</sup> s. ap. J.-C.). Dès 1985, j'ai mené des prospections de terrain en Jordanie, Syrie et dernièrement en Arabie Saoudite afin de rassembler ces textes épigraphiques gravés sur des rochers et qui représentent les plus anciennes traces écrites de l'histoire de l'islam. Mes premières recherches (en Jordanie dans les années 1980–90) ont permis de montrer que plus de 70 % des inscriptions que l'on pouvait relever étaient des graffiti et que la grande majorité de ces textes était antérieure au iii<sup>e</sup> / ix<sup>e</sup> siècle (Imbert 1998). Ainsi, ma démarche scientifique s'est petit à petit construite autour de ces textes qui développent une problématique particulière: ils ont été apposés librement par les musulmans appartenant aux toutes premières générations qui suivirent l'avènement de l'islam; n'étant pas soumis à la recopie ni à la censure politique, religieuse ou linguistique, les graffiti nous livrent des informations historiques, anthropologiques et religieuses mais également linguistiques totalement inédites. Massivement analysés, ils nous fournissent une photographie étonnante de la société arabe durant les deux premiers siècles de l'Hégire. Les informations relatives aux toutes premières décennies de l'islam sont inédites et particulièrement intéressantes dans la mesure où notre connaissance de cette période cruciale ne reposait, jusque là, que sur les textes de la tradition historiographique, hagio-biographique et littéraire tardive d'époque abbasside, mais aussi sur des papyri au contenu plutôt administratif.

L'analyse du corpus des graffiti est longue et fastidieuse. En effet, le nombre de graffiti actuellement relevé sur des rochers de la steppe ou des murs de monuments (arabes ou antiques) s'élève à 600 ou 700 textes environ dont seuls deux tiers ont été publiés dans des articles ou des monographies généralement saoudiennes à la diffusion toutefois assez restreinte (al-Rāṣid 1993; al-Muaikel 1994; al-Kilābī 2009, 2010; al-Ghabbān 2011; Ragheb 2011). La réalité du terrain est tout autre: les prospections menées ces dernières années au Proche-Orient font état de plusieurs milliers de graffiti répartis principalement sur l'Arabie, la Jordanie, la Syrie, le Liban, la Palestine, sans parler de l'Egypte et de l'Irak où encore peu de prospections ont été menées.

C'est dans le domaine de l'histoire et de l'anthropologie religieuse que mes récentes découvertes peuvent aider à renouveler un certain nombre d'approches

méthodologiques. En effet, les graffiti au contenu surtout religieux citent des formulations qui permettent de mieux appréhender la figure du divin aux premières heures de l'islam, mais également celle du prophète Muhammad. De même, des extraits du Coran ont été relevés dans des graffiti et il convient également de les analyser, non pas uniquement à la lumière du Coran tel qu'il nous est parvenu aujourd'hui, mais à la lumière du texte tel qu'il était présent dans l'esprit et la mémoire de ces premiers musulmans. C'est le *Coran des pierres*, des extraits coraniques cités dans les graffiti et qui représentent l'un des fondements de mes recherches (cf. Hoyland 1997; Imbert 2000, 2011, 2013). Dans la veine des études sur le corpus coranique ancien impulsées par F. Deroche ou sur les variantes dans les palimpsestes de Şan'a' menées par A. Hilali, ce travail de recension évolue au fur et à mesure des découvertes de graffiti citant des extraits du Coran (Deroche 2009; Hilali 2010). J'ai répertorié 85 textes mentionnant du Coran sous forme soit de versets isolés (très rare), soit d'implants coraniques (extraits implantés à l'intérieur d'un autre formulaire), soit en début ou fin de graffiti. Seuls 36% seulement peuvent être considérés comme conformes à la lettre au texte de la vulgate dite de 'Utmān. Autre constatation étonnante: l'ensemble des extraits coraniques retrouvés sur les pierres appartient au Coran plutôt tardif, à savoir des sourates révélées, selon la tradition, à la fin de la période mecquoise et à la période médinoise. Du Coran "ancien," celui du début de la prédication muhammadienne, nous n'avons pas de trace. Cette étude pose frontalement la question de la diffusion du texte coranique durant le premier siècle de l'Hégire, de sa place au sein de la première société musulmane. Elle interroge aussi la question de la souplesse avec laquelle les lapicides anonymes utilisaient les extraits coraniques afin qu'ils s'insèrent dans la phraséologie de leurs graffiti et non le contraire. L'analyse des versets *verbatim* et des expressions d'inspiration coranique est longue et exige beaucoup de recul vis-à-vis du texte; elle aboutit à une sorte de cartographie coranique du i<sup>er</sup> / vii<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les milieux privés de l'Arabie et du Proche-Orient. Ce recul est nécessaire afin de travailler le texte à la lumière de son contexte d'origine et non en reproduisant nos connaissances actuelles sur ce que l'on pourrait appeler un Coran en phase de constitution.

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### **Khalfallah**

Mes commentaires ont pour objectif d'analyser les ambiguïtés lexicales, syntaxiques et rhétoriques de certains énoncés coraniques. Les innombrables embarras, hésitations et contradictions de la tradition exégétique en sont les témoins. J'ai donc essayé

de mettre en évidence les aspects d'ambiguïté et d'en proposer des explications plutôt d'ordre linguistique: constructions syntaxiques, choix morphologiques ou structures imaginées qui seraient derrière l'incompréhension de ces expressions, mais aussi des solutions imparfaites et contradictoires qu'on a envisagées pour dissiper l'ambiguïté.

Ces incohérences s'expliquent en partie par la mobilisation d'une encyclopédie (au sens de Eco 1995), elle-même contradictoire et inachevée. D'autre part, elles se justifient par le poids des contraintes interprétatives, d'ordre dogmatique et politique, qui auraient orienté la lecture en imposant des lignes orthodoxes (cf. Larkin 1999). Je me suis donc efforcé d'examiner ces deux sources d'embarras afin de voir comment on a géré le sens pour maintenir intacte la théorie de l'inimitabilité.

Gilliot (2004b) et avant lui Birkeland (1956) ont esquissé ce genre d'études qui théorisent les générateurs d'ambiguïté, souvent reliés à des phénomènes d'agrammaticalité, d'emprunts lexicaux et de ressemblances phonétiques ou thématiques.

Aussi, sur les pas de Djai (2007) et ceux de Chabbi (2010), j'ai essayé de réintégrer davantage ces ambiguïtés dans le cadre d'une sémantique anthropologique qui reprend les codes, les symboles, les références métaphoriques issues des paysages, peuples, institutions, pratiques religieuses, politiques, culturelles, au sein desquels le Coran a émergé. Cette réintégration aiderait à comprendre non seulement ces ambiguïtés, mais les distances que certains exégètes ont prises dans leurs interprétations.

D'un autre côté, les études de Cohen (1966, 1979), et celles des écoles stylistiques occidentales nous ont été d'une grande utilité pour analyser les phénomènes d'agrammaticalité (ambiguïté où le lecteur aura l'impression que le texte, qui ne renvoie à rien, perd temporairement son sens) dans ces passages. Cf. M. Riffaterre, « La production du texte » (Paris: Seuil, 1979, 16)

L'approche sur laquelle j'ai plus particulièrement fondé mes commentaires est la sémantique moderne. Lors des trois dernières décennies, les sémantiques: structuraliste, cognitive, fonctionnelle ont fourni de nombreux outils qui permettent de comprendre les phénomènes de l'ambiguïté et de sa gestion. Appliquée aussi bien au texte coranique qu'aux ouvrages exégétiques (produits de l'Histoire des idées et des institutions politiques), cette approche aide à déconstruire les dessous d'un processus collectif et symbolique visant à combattre l'ambiguïté et le *tašābuh*, perçus comme une menace au dogme de la clarté.

Dans mon parcours, cette approche s'est développée en deux étapes: la première, en cours de la préparation de mon doctorat portant sur la théorie du sens d'après 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Ǧurğānī (m. 1078) qui s'est ingénier à défendre que l'inimitabilité coranique réside dans sa composition (*nazm*), où se conjuguent les structures syntaxiques et rhétoriques. Nos analyses sur son oeuvre montrent à quel point la structuration syntaxique rend le sens subtil, voire impossible à atteindre. La seconde, en consultant les ouvrages exégétiques, j'ai pu mesurer des divergences fondamentales allant même à l'encontre du dogme de la clarté absolue du Coran.

Dans ce travail, j'ai observé une exigence méthodologique: ne point taxer d'insensés ces passages ambigus, car je pense que notre connaissance de l'univers sémantique dans lequel s'est mu et a évolué le Coran est encore loin d'être affinée. J'ai conséquemment évité le recours aux explications systématiques qui rattachent l'ambigüité, sans le moindre argument, à des sous-textes supposés, à des « fautes » de rédaction ou à une vague circulation de notions communes.

Au fil des commentaires, une hypothèse est née: ce sont ces ambigüités mêmes qui font la singularité des structures sémantiques du Coran (et peut-être de tout texte liturgique). Cette hypothèse s'inscrit dans l'optique lancée par Arkoun, (Lectures du Coran, 1982: ch. 1), à la recherche des structures sémantiques propres aux modes de signification des textes religieux. Une des principales fonctions anthropologiques que jouent ces textes est d'étonner l'auditoire par des proclamations, doctement ambiguës, dont le but n'est nullement de transmettre un contenu intelligible, mais de provoquer l'éblouissement.

En somme, mon travail est une recherche dans l'histoire des interprétations, et des codes, institutions et héritages qui s'infiltrent pour façonner la lecture et la « gestion » de ce qui pourrait paraître comme une ambigüité embarrassante.

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### Kropp

I came to Qur'ānic studies quite late in my work as philologist and historian in the field of Semitic Studies, following the wise council of Hans Jakob Polotsky, given to me in a personal conversation at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Tel Aviv, April 1980: “Betreiben Sie Arabisch unter Ausschluß des Korans” (study Arabic excluding the Qur'ān). And in fact the state of Qur'ānic Studies in the 2nd half of the 20th century in Germany was not really attractive to critical minds and from the perspective of comparative historical, cultural and religious studies, as proven by the most clamorous case of Günter Lüling and how his works were received, better: often totally ignored by the German Islamic Studies *academia*. Finally it was a biographical detail, i. e., the relationship to Christoph Luxenberg which made me take up this kind of studies, as a complement to my research work in Ethiopian history and Semitic (South Arabian and pre-Islamic Arabic) epigraphy.

The critical distance to conventional and traditional Qur'ānic and Islamic Studies proved fruitful, even though the material amount of this new field of studies remains limited. It nevertheless added a colourful accent to my historical studies mainly in Ethiopian history, epigraphy and manuscript studies. There the accent lies on

pragmatical, juridical texts in stark contrast with the nature of texts one has to deal with in the Qur'ānic corpus.

Thus my first approaches to Qur'ānic texts came definitely from the Ethiopian side: continuing the work of Nöldeke on “Lehnwörter in und aus dem Äthiopischen” I proposed new etymologies or explanations for *mā'ida*, *šaytān*, *gibt* and *tawrāt* and then tried a new overview of Ethiopian loan words or words deriving ultimately from Ethiopic. A step further was to distinguish Ethiopian influence beyond single words.

An unexpected offer for a year's chair and lectures at the Collège de France gave me the opportunity to deepen the question of Aramaic influence on Qur'ānic language, fostered by the famous (otherwise infamous) works of Christoph Luxenberg. This gradually led to more questions as to the nature of Qur'ānic discourse. But first I have to declare some position towards this text.

I am not interested in questions of revelation, inspiration, or truth: this I leave to people who have peculiar talents and, perhaps, specific interests. For an academic scholar there are no holy texts, but only human products which must be analysed and seen as any other human linguistic artefacts.

We as historians, historians of religion, treat religion and its phenomena as an object with the inner distance and coolness required by a scientific approach and methodology. We are not exchanging our personal faith or trying to harmonise it. We are not comparing our beliefs, but we try to know about others' beliefs in order to give a plausible image of the past. Taken as such a scientific object, the Gospels represent a patchwork of citations of the Old Testament and ancient literature, written in a rather poor Greek and on a mediocre level as a piece of literature. Long, impartial and sincere research has to be done, before one may come to an analogous and similarly short description of the Qur'ānic corpus. We thus strive for “scientific,” if relative and limited, truth in the framework of possible human knowledge. In short, we should look for what we can know about our subject, not for what is believed about and around the subject. What unites scholars and researchers of this type is – and that may be very different from harmony and mutual and individual understanding – is the participation in this human and universal enterprise of positive secular science.

But back to my actual fields of interest – besides those already mentioned above – in the Qur'ānic corpus.

[1] Inquire as to which – Arabic – language was intended to be written down by the undotted and unvocalised *rasm* of the text. If it was what we call Classical Arabic today, the orthography could be considered strange at least. Notwithstanding some groundbreaking studies in the last century, the problem remains unsolved, even while many details point to an Arabic of the “modern, analytic” type without *i'rāb*. This leads, naturally, to the next historical question and problem: why and how the original *rasm* was partially changed, but mostly reinterpreted and “completed” by the actually quite sophisticated Qur'ānic (and Classical Arabic) orthography?

[2] Collect and study the written witnesses of pre-Islamic Arabic in order to elucidate the historical and linguistic background from where the Qur'ānic texts could have originated.

[3] Broaden the “(Syro-)Aramaic” track by multiplying and thus rendering more solid and plausible the examples where a “Syro-Aramaic” reading offers solutions to opaque and enigmatic words and passages. This micro-linguistic approach has to be paralleled by deepened research into the literary background of the Qur'ānic corpus, i.e., Biblical and other parallel and sub-texts.

[4] See and study the Qur'ānic texts as speech acts in the realm of a) psychology and b) ideology and politics. Quite different from other approaches – self-referentiality, discussion in the community, second audience etc. – I am following the hint at political, multiple-addressed discourse, whatever the author or the authors may have been and how the final canonical text was established. Thus the rapid and often unmotivated change of speaker, addressee, subject in language and contents is seen as a highly sophisticated political or ideological discourse – speech act – which at the surface has much in common with psychologically unbalanced discourse. The question could be: was the author a religiously motivated but unbalanced individual or is the actual text structure the result of careful elaboration under the premises of politico-religious goals. Given the complexity of early Islamic history these two perspectives are not, perhaps, alternative but complementary.

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### Madigan

What drew me to the study of the Qur'ān in the first place was its obvious influence on the theology of fellow Christians in Pakistan. The Qur'ān and the tradition that grew from it was the air they breathed, so it is not surprising that their understandings of revelation and scripture seemed more attuned to the Qur'ān than to the New Testament.

In approaching the text, I take very seriously the Qur'ān's own assertion that it belongs to the same realm of discourse as the Christian and Jewish scriptures – that like them it is *kitāb*, originating with God and establishing with humanity a relationship of guidance: a sharing of God's knowledge and a clear insight into what God wills. Far from seeking to conceal its context (or at least one major element of its context) in the discourse of late antique Christians and Jews, the Qur'ān boasts of its relationship with them and claims that it is recognizable to them. I find myself more willing than many of the classical *mufassirūn* were to take these claims at face value and to acknowledge the echoes of the Qur'ānic text with the earlier traditions.

At the same time, I recognize that it has its own voice, which keeps its distance from those traditions and sees itself offering a corrective to them. An example of this would be QS 2 (Q 2:30–39) in which the story of Adam and his wife has echoes both of Genesis and of Rabbinic materials, yet recounts the story with its own independent voice.

I would want to distinguish carefully between, on the one hand, this recognition of a common discourse and, on the other, the stronger claim of intertextuality. Of course, that term is used in many ways, sometimes merely to point to the shared world of discourse, but at others to propose a connection between two specific texts, precisely as *texts*. One might be tempted, for example, in considering the story of David in QS 34 (Q 38:17–26), to propose a textual link with 2 Sam 12. However, there are many elements in the Qur’ānic version that suggest the story had already developed a life of its own beyond the Biblical text, and that any “intertextuality” is substantially mediated rather than direct.

It seems to me that the apparently very strong self-referentiality of the Qur’ān – a phenomenon that has long intrigued me – can often exist more in the eye of the beholder than in the text itself (Madigan 2001, 2006). After the canonization and codification of the recitations, it is easy to read these passages as self-consciously claiming to be a canon of scripture. However, I try to hear such texts in the still oral, still partial, still fluid and interactive situation in which they are understood to have first been announced. In this regard, see my comment on QS 5 (Q 3:1–7). Having said that, however, I should note that I do not approach the text taking for granted the context and chronology proposed by Islamic tradition. The diversity and inconsistency of the proposals for the context and dating of particular parts of the Qur’ān surely indicates that they are based on more or less plausible attempts at reconstruction rather than on certain knowledge. Furthermore, the reconstructed contexts are arguably chosen more with an eye to the desired interpretation of a polyvalent text than with a concern for recovering historical detail.

Though for me the Qur’ān does not hold the status of scripture – a category that is necessarily defined by the community of faith to which one belongs – this self-confident new voice emerging in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE within the broader discourse of Abrahamic religion addresses Christians and poses challenges to me as a theologian. I take seriously its perplexities about Christian affirmations about God, its call to return to the pristine religion of submission to the one God, and its claim to offer guidance towards the truth, since it is a voice many have found convincing, and there is no denying that it has borne lasting fruit.

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### Pregill

My approach to Qur'ānic Studies is informed by two distinct, yet complementary, concerns. First, I am interested in thinking about the Qur'ān not only as the product of the religious discourses and sociohistorical trends of the late antique world, but as an integral part of the long process through which the legacy of ancient Israelite monotheism was claimed, contested, and reinterpreted by various communities. This process occurred over centuries, from the Second Temple period to the high Middle Ages, and would eventually produce the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions as we know them today. Second, I am interested in the Qur'ān's reception in the Islamic societies established after the Arab conquests – not only the substantial scholarly edifice built up around the Qur'ān in Islamic commentary literature proper (*tafsīr*), but the wider impact exegesis of the Qur'ān had on the formation of Muslim beliefs, values, and culture. (I should also add that as far as I am concerned, the impact of the Qur'ān and its interpretation upon the Jewish and Christian cultures of the Islamic world is an important, even indispensable, aspect of Qur'ānic Studies, though it is one that has largely been ignored.)

A contextual approach to the Qur'ān often produces readings of the text that collide with the diverse meanings assigned to scripture by classical Islamic tradition. Such conflicts are inevitable, but they should serve to draw our attention to the fact that *both* the contextual meaning and that assigned to scripture by the commentators are worthy of scholarly investigation. The emergence of an emphatically “scripturalist” approach to the Qur'ān among some scholars working in the Western academy today – a “Qur'ānist” school – is surely a welcome development. But this approach must not supplant the complementary project of fully exploring what the Qur'ān has meant throughout the history of its reception in Islamic societies. On the contrary, the attempt to distinguish what the Qur'ān meant to its original audience at the time of its revelation – the precanonical Qur'ān known to the “paleo-Islamic” community – from what it came to mean in classical Islamic interpretation should lead us to recognize and celebrate the achievements and contributions of traditional exegesis.

Historically, the attempt to examine the larger literary, cultural, and religious contexts of the Qur'ān has often been marred by polemical agendas. At the very least, examination of parallels from the literatures of older monotheistic communities has sometimes been conducted in reductionist and problematic ways; today, overly sensationalistic efforts at uncovering the “hidden origins” of the Qur'ān justifiably inspire suspicion. But this should not discourage us from the critical work of illuminating the dense penumbra of allusions, associations, and subtexts that endow the Qur'ān with its unique depth, power, and mythopoetic force. Comparison of the Qur'ān with older literary materials drawn from the scriptural and parascriptural traditions of various late antique religious communities, in Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, Persian, Ethiopic, and other languages, should not be misunderstood as an attempt to “colonize” the Qur'ān or reduce it to a cacophony of “influences” that were dimly understood, garbled in transmission, and deployed in a maladroit or

even incomprehensible way by its author or authors. Rather, I proceed from the assumption that the originators of Qur’ānic discourse – at least in its precanonical state – naturally drew upon the constellation of literary resources available to them in an extremely sophisticated and nuanced way. To me, careful examination of the text confirms its rich, complex, and subtle artistry time and time again.

I cannot accept the premise that the Qur’ān’s original language was not Arabic, or that its original audience could not or did not understand it. I am likewise unsympathetic to attempts to alienate the Qur’ān from the revelatory context of seventh-century Arabia. Rather, I firmly believe that exploration of the cultural, social, political, and religious processes through which Arabia was integrated into the wider world of the late antique Near East, especially the expansion of the Roman and Sasanian dominions through cultural and religious imperialism, will continue to enrich our understanding of the origins of the Qur’ān. I am convinced that examination of the Qur’ān’s relationship to the traditions of older monotheistic communities demonstrates that it is not a conglomeration of random vectors of “influence” presented to an overwhelmingly pagan audience; rather, it reflects a highly sophisticated engagement with the civilizations of the larger Near Eastern and Mediterranean *oikouménē*, particularly late antique Christianity. Its audience must have been quite familiar with this world – if they were not already an important part of it.

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### Reynolds

I come to the Qur’ān Seminar with an academic background in Islamic Studies, Muslim-Christian relations, and in particular the study of the Qur’ān. As regards Qur’ānic Studies, my principal work is *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (2010). This work is shaped by my study of the languages and literatures of Late Antiquity and by my conviction that the Qur’ān has a special relationship with the literature of Christians written in Syriac. My commentaries in the present volume are largely concerned with two questions: first (and above all), the Qur’ān’s relationship to its Biblical subtext and, second, the Qur’ān’s theology.

By the Qur’ān’s relationship to its Biblical subtext I mean the Qur’ān’s allusions to, or transformations of, Jewish and Christian narratives and traditions of Late Antiquity. This relationship seems to be important, for example, in QS 6 (Q 3:33–63), where the Qur’ān alludes (v. 44) to the elders’ casting *aqlām* over Mary. Many commentators assume that this allusion concerns a contest (won by Zachariah) among scribes (hence the *aqlām*, understood to mean ‘pens’) over who would be Mary’s guardian in the Temple (thus they connect v. 44 to v. 37). However, in the light of works such as the *Protoevangelium of James* it appears that the Qur’ān is alluding

instead to the contest among Israel's widows (who come bearing rods, which may be the proper meaning of *aqlām* here) over Mary. The Qur'ān does not retell the tradition of this contest; it rather refers to this tradition while articulating its distinct religious message. In other cases the relationship of the Qur'ān with its subtext is less direct. The complications of this relationship are evident, for example, in the way the Qur'ān puts the figure of Haman in Egypt instead of Persia (Q 28:6, 8, 38; 29:39; 40:24, 36), or the way it identifies Mary the mother of Jesus with Miriam the sister of Aaron (Q 3:35–66; 19:28; 66:12).

As for the Qur'ān's theology, I mean what the Qur'ān says about God, the manner in which the Qur'ān critiques what its opponents say about God, and the ways in which the things the Qur'ān says about God are shaped by its concern to convince its audience to fear God and obey the Prophet. In regard to QS 35 (Q 43:81–83), for example, I ask whether the Qur'ān implies that the idea of God having a son is logically absurd or simply not true of its God. In regard to QS 40 (Q 55), with its description of God's signs (including the detection and punishment of the guilty), I argue that the Qur'ān's theological rhetoric reflects its interest in the conversion of the audience through fear and wonder.

In my commentaries I try always to work without reference to any traditional narratives that are meant to provide a historical context for a particular passage. I believe that there is no way to confirm that such narratives are historically authentic, and that there is often reason to think otherwise. For example, traditional Muslim scholars might insist that QS 30 (Q 33:40) was revealed because the Prophet had no adult sons. It seems to me at least possible, however, that the Prophet was thought to have had no adult sons because of this verse. In the case of QS 29 (Q 30:1–7) two quite different historical contexts are offered depending on whether a word is read *ǵulibat* or *ǵalabat*. In such cases it seems to me that the historical context given by medieval Islamic literature can limit scholarly creativity and offer a decidedly unstable foundation for sound scholarly reflection.

Finally, I might add that I am interested in philology more than history. I am not particularly interested in proposing any new or revisionist context for the Qur'ān's origins. Instead I am interested in understanding and appreciating the Qur'ānic text and its message.

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## Rippin

As someone with an interest in the Qur'ān and how Muslims relate to it, the focus of my attention in my scholarly work has primarily been on *tafsīr*, as illustrated in my Variorum volume, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpretative Tradition* (Aldershot 2001). I have

not understood my main work as fitting within the emerging Qur'ānist focus as the Qur'ān Seminar project has defined its goal. But I have always been up for a challenge and so the idea of attempting to approach the Qur'ān as a naïve reader and to supplement that approach with some concern about the late antique context seemed like a stimulating idea. I have previously written a few essays that do deal with Qur'ān directly (my own favorite is “The Commerce of Eschatology” in *The Qur'ān as Text*, ed. S. Wild, Leiden 1996) but those all involve a synthetic approach to the scripture. Reading the Qur'ān linearly without *tafsīr* is not something I have written much about previously.

Thus, in the process of reading the Qur'ān in this manner and just thinking about what the text means, I discovered (not to my great surprise) that my attention tended to fall on issues of word use and striking images. I am not convinced by efforts to pay attention to the structure of the Qur'ānic chapters, and while I did note occasions where vocabulary choice is driven by considerations of rhyme and where line-length appeared to create natural divisions in the text, those “macro” issues remained for the most part in the background for me in my approach.

Of course, my focus on words and images served to confirm my view that reading the Qur'ān “outside” the Muslim tradition is not really possible. We inevitably must turn to the resources of Arabic lexicography to understand the text (even if on occasion parallels in other languages can help us see connotations of words). The significance of this struck me forcefully when I saw other scholars turn to Arabic dictionaries to find meanings of words that were different from the majority traditional point of view (and thus one can claim to be reading the text “outside” tradition) yet appealing to the authority of those dictionaries to justify that other meaning. It seems to me that, in fact, we cannot escape from this circularity.

Even if there are fundamental methodological issues that arise with the approach of reading the Qur'ān naïvely, that certainly does not reduce the fascination of the text itself or of the experience of reading it. When occasions were noted by others in the seminar of instances in which the text seemed to convey an immediacy of context – that is, something must have happened to stimulate such a text – a new challenge arose. How do we (if we can) explain such passages without resort to the traditional context of Muhammad's life? On other occasions apparent thematic shifts in a passage necessarily produce questions about intrusions, editorial control and composition. And finally, resonances with material from the Biblical tradition – especially in instances where explicit reference is made in the Qur'ān to the Torah and the Gospel – stimulate concerns about how we determine what constitutes an inter-textual passage. All this combines to say that the process of reading is complex and the act of reflecting upon it thought-provoking. I will continue to ponder this, as I did in my “Commerce of Eschatology” essay noted above.

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### Sirry

I approach the text of the Qur’ān as a scholar who is interested in inter-religious issues, including scriptural polemics. As such, for me, the Qur’ānic text represents an ongoing engagement with religious beliefs and practices of other, already established traditions in the early formation of Islam. Like other scriptures, the Qur’ān reflects the mood and attitude of the early community of believers in the earliest stages of their emergence into history. However, how much we can know of this early engagement and emergence is the subject of much discussion and debate. Certainly the problem of sources from which we can learn of the formation of the Qur’ānic text is responsible for much of our disagreements to such an extent that, as Donner has rightly noted, Western studies of the Qur’ān seem today “to be in a state of disarray” (2008:29) in the sense that there is little in consensus among them. Contrary to the nineteenth-century French scholar Ernest Renan’s contention, Muslim sources concerning Islam’s founding events are mostly problematic and do not show that Islam was born “in the full light of history.” I may also add that the text of the Qur’ān is so allusive as to presume the knowledge of Biblical traditions on the part of its listeners/readers. However, how and to what extent such traditions might have shaped the text of the Qur’ān is still disputed.

My approach in this regard is modest. The Qur’ān is certainly in conversation with Biblical traditions. Even if we grant that the Qur’ān is the word of God verbatim, we may still want to ask how its audience in early 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia might have possibly understood the Qur’ān’s highly allusive and often opaque references to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets without prior knowledge of Biblical materials. Therefore, Biblical sources are useful to illuminate and explain the allusive Qur’ān. Even on the most elaborate story of Joseph in the Qur’ān, as I demonstrate in my comment on QS 15 (Q 12), reading it side by side with the Biblical narrative of Joseph can tell us something about the Qur’ānic way of telling and retelling of the Biblical stories. It is interesting to note that the Qur’ān often presents its own version of those stories to fit into its own culture and audience. Scholars have for a while been perplexed by the ways in which the Qur’ān describes the religious beliefs of others, notably Jews and Christians, which seems to suggest that it addresses heretical sects or those who believe in heretical teachings. While the existence of those sects is not unlikely, it is also possible that the Qur’ān develops a distinct rhetorical argumentation in such a polemical environment to win over the debate against those who rejected its theological agenda.

I would also argue that looking at Biblical literature should not be the only way of explaining and understanding the Qur’ān. Equally important is to understand a certain passage in light of other passages. This method of interpreting the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān (*tafsir al-Qur’ān bi-l-Qur’ān*) has a profound impact on my com-

mentaries. It has been generally acknowledged that a certain part of the Qur'ān may shed some light on another. By examining how one theme or story is retold in another place or places we can understand the specific rhetorical devise the Qur'ān employs to convey its message. Perhaps, if we consider the Qur'ānic recasting of Biblical narratives as rhetorical strategies to achieve its own purposes, then the discrepancies and differences between the Biblical and Qur'ānic narratives can be understood not as historical inaccuracies, but rather as literary strategies. The most appropriate way to approach such narratives is a literary method, not a theological one.

Since my specialization is on modern Islamic thought, I am interested in exploring how and to what extent the Qur'ān can be interpreted in such a way that it addresses issues of modern concern. How can this seventh-century text be understood in the twenty-first century? For me, the text of the Qur'ān is multi-vocal in the sense that it opens to various interpretations. There is no fixed meaning of the Qur'ān. As the historian of religion W.C. Smith has argued, "the meaning of the Qur'ān is the history of its meaning" (1980: 504). Our understanding of the Qur'ān, as of any other texts, is conditioned by our situated perspectives, or what Gadamer calls "effective history" and thus "*understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event*" (2004: 299). In a somewhat different way from that of Gadamer, Rahman (1982) proposes what he calls "a double movement" in his reading of the Qur'ān, namely, from the present situation to Qur'ānic times, then back to the present. The problem with Rahman's approach is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the meaning of a given Qur'ānic passage in the past. I would argue that Gadamer's theory of "effective history" is useful in that it does not assume that the objective situation of the past can be ascertained. Once the meaning of the Qur'ān is understood within the situatedness of the past and the present, then our reading of this scripture is as authoritative as that of the past generations.

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### Stefanidis

Originally trained in social anthropology, I am currently a doctoral student at the Sorbonne in Paris. My dissertation focuses on diachronic readings of the Qur'ān, which claim that variations in the style and content of the Muslim scripture are best explained by ascribing the Qur'ānic texts to different moments in the Prophet's career. From this perspective, short rhythmic *sūras* asserting the truth of the Day of Judgement typically represent an early stage of the Qur'ānic revelation while longer passages addressing community regulations indicate a later Medinan context. This particular way of making sense of the Qur'ānic corpus shaped the early Orientalist study of the Muslim sacred text and culminated in a number of chronological reorderings of the *sūras*. In recent decades, however, this reading strategy has been shak-

en by the complex and delicate question of the historical reliability of the *sīra*, the Prophet's traditional biography. Since the *sīra* literature itself often seems to have been elaborated on the basis of Qur'ānic data, its use to explain the Qur'ān runs the risk of circularity. In my article "The Qur'ān Made Linear" (2008), which analyzed the Qur'ānic reordering suggested by Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930), I reflected on the ways scholars, as readers, fashion the Qur'ān into an intelligible historical document.

As is well known, not only are documentary sources about seventh century Arabia scarce but the Qur'ān itself offers few direct clues about the context in which it emerged. Devoid of both a social context and a constraining narrative framework, the Qur'ān can be aptly described as an "open" text (Eco 1962), that is a work which is ultimately completed by the reader's choices to make certain connections and fill in things left unsaid. In the specific case of historical-philological approaches, the hypothetical reconstructions of the Qur'ānic milieu influence the way the text is interpreted and vice versa, providing striking examples of hermeneutic circles. Some interpretative choices are of great consequence: for example, whether we understand the *mušrikūn* to be pagans, as Muslim exegesis and historiography assert, or rather Bible-inspired monotheists (QS 12, 22); whether or not we assume that the Qur'ānic singular addressee is Muḥammad (QS 11); and whether or not we grant a literary unity to the Qur'ānic corpus (QS 46). Even readings that share an acceptance of the overall *sīra* framework can end up being widely divergent depending on how a passage is fitted into the Prophet's biography (QS 49).

Besides these methodological concerns, my commentaries have been guided by the question: what is the Qur'ān here trying to *do*? This question rests on two main assumptions. Firstly, it presupposes that the Qur'ānic corpus, despite its fragmented character, displays broadly coherent understandings of the world, of its environment and of itself as a supernatural communication. Secondly, it posits a direct engagement with a living audience (rather than with texts), emphasizing the oral dimension of the recitation (*Qur'ān*) over its current written form (the *muṣḥaf*). Unresolved questions surrounding the writing of the Qur'ānic corpus and its transmission over time, which are the legitimate concerns of tradition and textual criticism, do not prevent us from considering the Qur'ān as a polemic that intended to persuade its immediate interlocutors of the truth it is announcing. How did the Qur'ān proceed in doing so (QS 2, 21, 27, 30, 41)? As a number of scholars have suggested, assuming the oral performance of the Qur'ānic proclamations and taking into account their irreversible temporality highlights the dramatic and dialogical tension that characterizes the Muslim scripture (QS 13). The Qur'ān thus appears as the expression of "an ongoing dialogue raising questions and giving answers, only to be questioned again and responded to again" (Neuwirth 2004: 75).

Finally, I have from time to time offered my own interpretations regarding the social context in which the Qur'ān might be situated. In some cases, the textual evidence appears to me to be persuasive. For example, I argue that the Qur'ānic understanding of the *lex talionis*, which implies collective moral responsibility, strongly

suggests a society organized along tribal lines (QS 3). In other cases however, I keep in mind that, as literary theorist Stanley Fish has put it, “text, context, and interpretation all emerge together, as a consequence of a gesture (...) that is irreducibly interpretative” (Fish 1980: 340).

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### **Stewart**

Beyond an awareness of the Qur'an as a fundamental text in Muslim societies, I knew little of Islam's scripture when in the early stages of my studies of Arabic and Islam, which concentrated on the history of Shi'ite Islam and Islamic institutions, and none of the professors who taught me especially focused on the Qur'an in his work. It was an unexpected turn in research for a course on medieval Arabic literature that first caused me to investigate the Qur'an assiduously. Prompted by the professor's remark that the medieval critics had written exhaustively on poetry but had said nothing on *sag'*, I set out to trawl the Arabic rhetorical tradition for discussions of *sag'* composition. It was surprising to find that the medieval rhetoricians quoted Qur'anic verses in nearly all of the examples they chose to illustrate the features of *sag'*. The result of my investigation was a preliminary attempt to describe the prosody of *sag'* (Stewart 1990). This effort revealed to me that questions of rhyme, rhythm, and meter are regularly ignored in the translation, interpretation, and investigation of the Qur'an despite their tremendous importance, and I have continued to investigate these aspects of the text (Stewart 2009; 2013; forthcoming–b). I aim eventually to produce a comprehensive work on rhyme and rhythm in the Qur'an. End-rhyme is very regular in the Qur'an and constitutes one of the most fundamental features of Qur'anic style. The necessity to create end-rhyme has profound influences on the structure and syntax of verses, many of which have profound implications for the translation and interpretation of the text.

Attention to genre also has shaped my approach to the Qur'an, and in this I have been influenced by Bakhtin's essay “The Problem of Speech Genres” [in Bakhtin, M.M. (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.] and by experience not only with pre-modern Arabic texts but also with Arabic dialectal speech genres, including blessings, curses, proverbs, and so on. Genres, whether written or spoken, follow conventional rules, and an understanding of those rules helps one to understand better texts that draw on those genres. This was the fundamental insight of Hermann Gunkel, the founder of Biblical form criticism, and I believe that form criticism has much to offer for the investigation of the Qur'an. Some medieval Islamic critics engaged in critical investigations that involve form critical insights, such as Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's

work *Aqsām al-Qur’ān* (Oaths of the Qur’ān), and some modern critics of the Qur’ān have performed form critical work, including Anton Baumstark’s article on prayers in the Qur’ān and several 20<sup>th</sup>-cen. German studies of the parable (*mātal*) in the Qur’ān, but much remains to be done.

The material in the Qur’ān draws on three great traditions: Jewish tradition, including the Hebrew Bible and post-Biblical literature, such as commentaries on the Biblical books; Christian tradition, including the gospels and non-canonical books such as the Life of Adam and Eve; and pagan, pre-Islamic tradition. In my view, the Qur’ānic text suggests that it draws both on textual as well as oral or folkloric sources. Western scholarship on the Qur’ān has tended to concentrate on the first two, the Biblical traditions, because of Western scholars’ expertise in Judaism and Christianity, and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century has involved a prolonged argument over which tradition was crucial. The truth is of course that both are important, so the extreme statements of the debaters regarding this may be ignored. The Islamic tradition in many ways suppressed the connections with pre-Islamic pagan tradition for the same reasons that early Christians denounced the Romans and the Greeks, and Western scholars for the most part followed suit, influenced as they were by Muslim scholarship. In both cases, there were exceptions, such as the works of Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Hamdānī on pre-Islamic lore, and Wellhausen’s work *Die reste des arabischen Heidentums*. Still, I feel that pre-Islamic religious tradition’s contribution to the Qur’ān has been relatively ignored, and I have explored some aspects of the Qur’ān that may be related to pre-Islamic traditions from a form-critical perspective in Stewart 2011.

It is my view that the early Muslims felt themselves to be living in an extension of Biblical history, and that subsequent events and doctrines served to separate the Qur’ān from the Bible in ways that have obscured the extent of the Qur’ān’s involvement with Biblical tradition. It is therefore not only useful but essential to pursue the investigation of Qur’ānic references to Biblical tradition and parallels between the Qur’ān and Biblical texts, but one must also be aware that the Qur’ān has brought together and shaped the three traditions into a unified whole with the Qur’ānic theory of prophecy at the center.

The differences one finds between Biblical and Qur’ānic versions of Biblical narratives generally reflect an ideological commentary on or adjustment of Biblical material for specific purposes, and it is the task of scholars to identify the purposes and strategies involved.

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## Tengour

Quel que soit l'objet qu'il choisit d'étudier, l'historien doit l'inscrire dans un temps et dans un espace qu'il aura au préalable défini. Le Coran comme objet historique ne saurait échapper à cette règle. Sa parole – car c'est d'abord ce qu'il a été – est née au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle à La Mecque, portée et proclamée par un homme de tribu au nom du devoir de solidarité qui le liait à son groupe. Si cette parole est devenue le texte fondateur du dernier monothéisme issu du Proche Orient, l'historien qui s'est assigné la tâche d'en saisir le sens s'efforcera de ne pas l'appréhender depuis ce devenir. Il mobilisera son énergie pour en retrouver l'enracinement sociétal, mental, temporel et territorial à partir duquel il entreprendra de raisonner.

Il s'agira ici de lire les seize passages coraniques choisis au sein du *Qur'ān Seminar* en interrogeant les mots et leurs sens les plus anciens dans la langue arabe. Bien sûr, ces acceptations ne sont pas un gage de certitude, mais elles permettent d'apprécier, à travers les glissements de sens et/ou l'apparition de mots nouveaux, l'évolution des représentations coraniques au fil de la Révélation ainsi que l'évolution de l'homme Muḥammad dans ses rapports avec son dieu, d'une part et avec ses différents adversaires, de l'autre. Le manque de sources arabes antérieures au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et même datant directement de celui-ci est la principale motivation de ma démarche qui s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une méthode de travail qui s'appuie sur l'anthropologie historique et la sémantique – méthode que j'ai éprouvée lors de mes recherches sur les représentations et les croyances dans l'Arabie du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, en particulier sur les djinns dans le Coran.

Un autre aspect de cette démarche consiste à soulever les points de décalages, parfois de contradictions, qui mettent en scène dans le discours coranique des représentations singulières ou non et les inscrivent comme telles parce qu'ils sont précisément ce qui va rendre l'analyse historique possible. Au-delà du fait que ces points de décalage aident à retrouver la chronologie des passages étudiés, ils obligent à expliciter le rapport du discours coranique à son milieu d'origine. Cette mise en relation est aussi le moyen de comprendre la portée d'un certain nombre d'emprunts bibliques dont le Coran s'empare et qu'il recontextualise dans son propre univers de représentation et de croyance. Elle est enfin, peut-être même surtout, le moyen de saisir la manière dont se symbolisaient les relations entre ces hommes qui ne sont plus et auxquels le Coran était destiné.

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### Tesei

I came to the Qur'ān thanks to (or because of) Alexander the Great. During my previous studies on the Alexander legends in the Islamic tradition, I followed backwards the steps that this incredible character left in the Arabic literature. This research path eventually led me to *sūrat al-Kahf* and to the stories displaying strong affinities with the Alexander stories of the water of life and of the wall against Gog and Magog (vv. 60–82 and 83–102). The *sūra* presented a number of complications susceptible of disorienting somebody like me, who had no background in Qur'ānic studies and at the time was completely unaware of the debate about the Qur'ān's history. Above all, the apparently close connection of the two consecutive pericopes on Moses and Dhū l-Qarnayn with contemporary Syriac texts raised the question of the dating of the passage and of the religious and geographical context from which it originated. The necessity to answer such questions represented the starting point of my involvement in the field of Qur'ānic studies.

My research interests mostly focus on two main aspects. [1] The Qur'ān's engagement with previous and contemporary Judeo-Christian literatures. [2] the Qur'ān's textual history and its connection with the development of the religious identity of the early Muslim community. I am particularly concerned with the relationship between the Qur'ānic text and its paratext, that is, the ensemble of knowledge transmitted by the Muslim tradition. In general, I consider the Qur'ān as a text reflecting the rapid evolution of (at least a part) of a nascent religious community over the 7<sup>th</sup> century, while I take traditional sources as containing elements of both continuity and discontinuity as regards the original core of such a community. I believe that the traditional understanding of the Qur'ānic text often reflects the process of loss or dilution of memory that followed the rapid territorial expansion of the early Muslim community and its removal from its original cradle. I have a special interest in those elements of the traditional framework of Muḥammad's life that are contradicted by the Qur'ān itself. In particular, I focus on the different representations of the surrounding social, religious and cultural environment reciprocally found in the Qur'ān and in traditional sources (a possible illustrative example being the massive presence of anti-Christian polemics and the constant evocation of Christianizing elements in the Qur'ān vs. the very marginal role Christians are credited with by the Islamic traditions on Muḥammad's life).

I should specify that, while acknowledging the (more than) occasional discrepancy between Qur'ān and tradition, I am not sympathetic with extremely revisionist views about the origins of Islam, neither with too skeptical attitudes toward the Islamic tradition. Instead of dismissing as unreliable the bulk of this transmitted knowledge, I am more inclined to investigate the reasons that provoked such discrepancy. I believe that a likely explanation to this phenomenon is that the Qur'ān and traditional sources do not always refer to the same historical context. In more concrete terms, I address the Qur'ān as a literary document that reflects not only Muḥammad's prophetic career in Central Arabia, but also the dramatic developments of his community during the first decades of its territorial expansion. I believe

that the Qur’ān as we have it now is not the product of or the collection of texts produced by a single author; it is rather the result of a redactional processes that involved the transmission, alteration, re-elaboration or even composition *ex nihilo* of a diversity of literary materials, some of which going back directly to Muhammad, some others having been composed after his death and attributed to him. I consider the extremely heterogeneous character of the Qur’ānic corpus to be the consequence of a multiple authorship phenomenon and not of the stylistic evolution of Muhammad’s *modus comunicandi* over time. I think that the task of Qur’ān scholar is to detect the different redactional strata which the text is composed of by studying the literary, linguistic and rhetorical internal Qur’ānic features and by comparing them with reliable literary and material extra-Qur’ānic evidence. In other words, their task is a stylistic and historical analysis of the Qur’ānic material independent from any a priori assumptions.

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### Toorawa

When I arrived at University in the early 1980s as a just turned 18-year old, the only thing I knew was that I wanted to learn new languages and thereby gain access to new literary traditions (in the original). For a variety of reasons—principally the combination of influential teachers and the challenge it posed—I devoted most of my time to Arabic. Once I was able to, I read pre-Islamic poets, medieval critics, modern novelists and more besides in Arabic. I also read the Qur’ān, a text I had previously only intoned liturgically. Fascinated as I was by the Qur’ān, I turned my energies mostly to modern poetry and classical and medieval materials. This was because I was not (and am still largely not) interested in religious questions, but rather in narrative (and the ways stories are told) and in rhetoric (and the way stylistic choices have an impact)—in short, in the act and art and craft of authoring or composing a literary text. In the late 1990s, I realized that I could apply these interests to the Qur’ān. The phrase *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning* (the title of a volume which appeared in 2000), to some extent captures what interests me.

My entry into Qur’ānic studies was through rhyme, scholarly attention to which was seriously lacking. I did not at first look at the way rhyme worked in the Qur’ān, but at the almost complete absence of it in English translations, something I found, and continue to find, inexplicable. *Qur’ān* means recitation, so to ignore one of its most insistent aural features—rhyme—strikes me as a flawed, and impoverished, way of thinking about it (or the 85% of it that rhymes). Translating the Qur’ān—the great French poet and translator, Yves Bonnefoy, has said we translate better to understand—inevitably led me to think more deeply and seriously about other sty-

listic, rhetorical and lexical considerations, such as characterization, dramatic irony, narrative structure, word choice and placement, the (re)deployment and repetition of words and roots, the presence of loan words (I reject the characterization “foreign words”), and the presence of hapaxes (words that occur only once or rarely in a text or corpus).

Hapaxes are of special interest to me as I believe they (can) reveal a great deal about Qur’ānic rhetoric; they are for example often in evidence in passages describing wonder and awe. Hapaxes are often of unknown or conjectural meaning, or loan words. This has led scholars to look for meanings of Qur’ānic words in other languages, an enterprise I regard as very risky because of what I term “the chocolate croissant effect.” Imagine encountering a text a millennium from now and discovering in it the phrase “chocolate croissant.” Linguistic research might tell us that the word “chocolate” derives from the Nahuatl *xocolātl* which means “bitter” (from *xococ*) and refers to a foodstuff. That research might tell us that “croissant” is a loan word from French *croissant*, meaning “crescent-shaped” (or “incipient,” as with the crescent moon, also called *croissant* in French), commonly applied to a baked good. Relying on this we would surmise that a “chocolate croissant” is a bitter, crescent-shaped baked good of the croissant family. We would only be right about the family of baked goods, but wrong about its specificities. “Chocolate croissants” it turns out are sweet and almost never crescent-shaped, but rectangular (called *pain au chocolat* in French, which eschews the word *croissant* for precisely this reason). The decision to call this item in English a “chocolate croissant” completely ignores the “original” meaning of “croissant” and to some extent of “chocolate.” As Robert Hoyland has said, a word means what it means in its own language, not in another (Hoyland, “The Earliest Written Evidence of the Arabic Language and Its Importance for the Study of the Quran,” a keynote “delivered” at the University of Notre Dame, April 21, 2009).

It is, I think, fair to say that generally speaking, attention is disproportionately paid by scholars to subtexts and paratexts and contexts, whereas the nuts and bolts of the Qur’ān’s prose itself—such as the *thumma* in QS 42 (Q 75) below—are often either forgotten or worse, emended, in the service of these very subtexts, paratexts and contexts. My own interest is, rather, in how words (especially rhyme-words and hapaxes) are deployed in the Qur’ān, in how those words produce meaning, and in how the stories that are told make meaning.

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### Winitzer

I come to the Qur’ān Seminar from the outsider’s perspective of an academic training in Assyriology that is coupled with interests in the *Nachleben* of ancient Mesopotamia in later texts from the Near East, in particular the Hebrew Bible but also others, the Qur’ān included. My approach to the Qur’ān corresponds thus to the historical study of the Hebrew Bible, which turns to the intellectual contexts within and against which Israel formed to shed light on her constitutive text. In the case of the Qur’ān, as with the Bible, this does not gainsay the creative genius of the younger tradition; it does, however, deny implicit variations of *creatio ex nihilo* that are inevitably afforded to the texts by other interpretive paths.

I have centered my comments on passages with clear ancient Near Eastern ancestry, even if such lineage is only known to the Qur’ān from its immediate forbears. The other possibility, that the Qur’ān enjoyed direct access to Mesopotamian remains has been deliberately avoided (for good reason). But if in the aggregate my comments are taken to suggest that the Qur’ān somehow perceived a measure of depth in some of the traditions it contended with, I shall not object. This would further highlight this text’s discerning ear and underscore its placement within the stream of scriptural tradition that gushes forth in Late Antiquity, a stream that on occasion yielded waters going back to deep sources.

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### Younes

My interest in the Qur’ān Seminar and in the Qur’ān in general is purely linguistic. I am convinced that understanding the language of the Qur’ān, for which sound knowledge of Arabic is key, is crucial to understanding its message.

It is a well-known fact that medieval Muslim commentators and interpreters of the Qur’ān did not fully understand certain Qur’ānic terms. One can cite as evidence the varying and often conflicting interpretations given these terms by different interpreters. I would like to use the different linguistic tools available to me, including comparisons with closely related languages such as Hebrew and Syriac, which are known to have had direct influence on the language of the Qur’ān, to try to understand these terms.

Another area of interest for me is the differences in the composition of different parts of the Qur’ān, which could be taken to imply different authorships or different times of composition. To illustrate, some groups of verses look like well-written hymns composed in rhymed prose on one specific theme which are interrupted by

a set of verses of a completely different structure, often of a different rhyme, and a message of warning or a threat of punishment. I will be examining cases of apparent “insertions” with an attempt at finding out if they follow certain patterns and what these patterns tell us about the linguistic structure of the Qur’ān and its composition.

A third area of interest is the case and mood system (*i'rāb*) as it is applied in the Qur’ān. Although the system was first developed primarily to ensure the correct reading of the holy book, there are numerous instances in which the system is violated. I look at cases in the 50 passages in which such violations occur and attempt to explain them.

My interest in the language of the Qur’ān is quite recent. My formal training was in Arabic linguistics, but my long career in Arabic instruction has led me to teach courses on the language of the Qur’ān, which in turn led me to examine this language more closely. And the more I examine it, the more fascinated I am by it and the more I feel there is more to understand about it.

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### Zellentin

I am predominantly a scholar of Jewish studies and of the sociology of religion, having published on rabbinic and Jewish Hellenistic literature and late ancient heresiology. Over the past decade, my work has increasingly focused on the Qur’ān. I came to its study with special attention for ritual and practice, and for the retelling of traditional materials in ancient cultures.

In my volume *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture* I present the Qur’ān as testifying to the prevalence of three Aramaic religious discourses in the Hijaz in the seventh century C.E.: a specific type of Arabian rabbinic Judaism with especially close ties to Palestine; the Jacobite (i.e. Syriac orthodox) Christian tradition as embodied perhaps most fully by Jacob of Serugh and his interlocutors; and the clearly definable “Judaeo-Christian Legal Culture” that can be accessed by jointly considering the *Clementine Homilies* (only part of which is preserved in Syriac, see my comments on passages QS 1, 4, 5, 6, 19, 24, 25, 27, 41, 44, and 49) and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (which offers a close and contentious outsider’s perspective on this tradition, see my comments on QS 6, 7, 11, 12, 18, and 44). In my view, the Qur’ān stands in closest relationship to the Judaeo-Christian tradition without being commensurate with it; it most openly confronts the rabbis, whose divine sanction it continues to recognize; and it implicitly, yet most emphatically and pervasively, polemicizes against those gentile Christians who “associate” (*yušrikūna*) Jesus, allegedly as a second divinity, with the one undividable God.

My defining scholarly pursuit is to read ancient texts in their historical context, and to define ancient groups by understanding their relationship to internal, external, and marginal outsiders (both real and constructed). I derive meaning from the reconstructible echoes which the texts instill in their intended audiences. It is no surprise, then, that I see the Qur’ān as a document that allows for glimpses at various stages in the life of a community that is in the process of emancipating itself from Judaism, Christianity, and the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As I argue at length in *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, I do not think that this Judaeo-Christian tradition was preserved by a socially distinct group; rather, it constitutes a demonstrable tendency within mainstream Christian and perhaps also Jewish groups. (There, I also reluctantly subscribe to a rudimentary, two-partite chronology of the Qur’ānic text, while admitting the likelihood of redactional interventions.) Reminiscent of and in close dialogue with aspects of the early Christian experience in the first century of the Common Era, the Qur’ān’s emancipation from previous movements allowed the emerging Muslim community to reformulate Judaeo-Christian doctrine from a gentile point of view, and to shatter what it constructs as the Jewish “fetters” of the rabbis, all the while exhorting gentile Christians to reform their imperfect monotheism.

For the Qur’ān, in contrast to the Judaeo-Christian tradition (as embodied in the two aforementioned texts, the *Clementine Homilies* and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*), the ideal religion for Jews and gentiles alike is embodied neither in Judaism nor in any Jewish attempt to embrace the gentiles. This Judaeo-Christian compromise had arguably led to a status for the gentiles in between Jewish election and pagan condemnation, better than the latter but necessarily inferior to the former. In its stead, the Qur’ān emphasizes the primacy—both chronologically and theologically—of the “gentile” over the “Jewish” revelation. The full emancipation of the gentiles, and the (not entirely supercessionist) subsummation of Judaism and Christianity within its own system, allows the Qur’ān to respond to the deficiencies it attributes to rabbinic Judaism and to Syriac Christianity with more forcefulness than the Judaeo-Christians had been able to. Its effective answer to pervasive and to posited intellectual tensions of its time may account in no small measure for the rapid success of Islam during the lifetime of Muḥammad and the Rāshidūn Caliphate.

The Qur’ān, like some Church Fathers, portrays its (mitigated) supercessionism as a return to the origins. It is not anti-Jewish, however, but merely anti-legalistic, deplored the alleged legal excesses it associates with parts of the Torah (here, as a punishment of the Jews) and with its rabbinic Jewish contemporaries (who add to the Torah). At the same time, the Qur’ān maintains the “Jewish” fulfilment of the eternal and universal parts of the divine law as prerequisite to salvation. It is not anti-Christian either, but anti-Christological, rejecting any divine status for Jesus. At the same time, it retains Jesus’ “Christian” centrality and divine election as the one who is sent first to the Jews, and then extends divine salvation to the gentiles. The Qur’ān indeed occupies a middle position between Judaism and Christianity, but this position in and of itself is not an invention of the seventh century: rather,

it stands in a continuous intellectual tradition that started developing when the first century Jesus movement started admitting gentiles in its midst, and encompasses texts such as the *Didache* and the *Clementine Homilies*.

To summarize, I fully welcome the “Syriac turn” of Qur’ānic studies which we are currently witnessing, yet would much rather see a more inclusive “Aramaic turn,” also including all “Judeo-Christian” and Jewish traditions to whose pertinence the Qur’ān testifies. All the while, we should realize how much all of us, *nolens volens*, continue to stand in the Muslim exegetical tradition. Some recent scholarship operates on what I would like to call the “Piñata Principle”: the harder you hit the tradition, the more sweets you get. Luxenbergian methods give me a belly ache all of their own, and looking for a text behind the text, rather than to uncover a finely spun web of intertextual references within an oral culture, seems a misguided exercise. We first have to understand the text as we have it before digging any deeper in the sands of our own literary imagination. My efforts, hence, are to reconstruct the Qur’ān’s implied and historical audience, to read the text as a call to reform to its contemporaries (with whom it shared most of its theological assumptions), and to improve our general historical understanding of late antique religion in the process.

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