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PROJECT

The Qur'an as a Self-Referential Text

Any reading of the Qur'anic text reveals that many important passages in it are self-referential. While self-referential passages are not unknown in the bible and the New Testament, the Qur'an may well be the most self-referential text among the great Holy Books. Only recently has this self-referentiality been recognized as a major feature of the Qur'anic text. It has to the best of my knowledge never been investigated systematically.

Some of the most obvious instances are:

1. Self-predication and self-classification

2. Negative statements of the text on the text

3. The first traces of interpretation in Sura 3:7

4. Special linguistic indicators stressing the authenticity of the Qur'anic message (Qur'anic oaths)

5. Self-referentiality as a means of asserting the scriptural authority of the Qur'an on Jewish and Christian scripture

The basic assumption of this project is that the self-referentiality of the Qur'anic text stems from its rivalry with the practice of polytheist animism and from its competition with previous prophetic revelations (Judaism and Christianity).

While the project takes into consideration a variety of approaches to the Qur'anic text, it is methodologically mainly indebted to Jan Assmann's studies on "cultural memory" and on the link between canon and exegesis. The aim is a study that will be called "The Qur'an as Metatext".

Recommended Reading

Wild, Stefan. Mensch, Prophet und Gott im Koran. Münster: Rhema, 2001.

-. "The Self-Referentiality of the Qur'an. Sura 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge." In With Reverence for the Word, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Lost in Philology? The Koranic Virgins in Paradise

The notion of a primeval paradise (Paradise Lost) is shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The concept of an eschatological paradise rewarding the believers after the Day of Judgment is common to the New Testament and the Koran. A uniquely Islamic feature are the Koranic "Virgins of Paradise", the wide-eyed houris, which have inspired the religious imaginaire of Islamic culture and much adverse comment in Christian theology. They buttressed the judgment that the Islamic paradise was either ridiculous or disgusting or both.

The somewhat Orientalist debate among Western non-Muslim scholars about the "origin" of this concept was never resolved. The Prophet Mohammed might have seen Christian mosaics or miniatures of angels in paradise and taken them for virgins was one hypothesis. Another one was that he might have heard that Father Ephraem Syrus referred to heavenly maidens in one of his odes on paradise. Or possibly it was just Mohammed's crass materialism that manifested itself in these maidens? The discussion was never resolved, but became unfashionable.

This situation changed when Christoph Luxenberg recently published a book Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache, Berlin 2000 (The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran. A contribution to the decoding of the Koranic language). The book, in spite of its austere title, was an almost immediate success. I do not know of any other scholarly book in German on a Koranic subject that has been reported upon by the New York Times, Le Monde, The Guardian and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Recently, an issue of Newsweek was confiscated in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Malaysia because it featured an article about the book. The New York Times, predictably, compared Luxenberg to Salman Rushdie. The book has also sparked a lively debate among the specialists.

The main thesis of Luxenberg's book is that the Koranic text was "in countless places misread and mutilated". Luxenberg assumes an Aramaic substratum for the greater part of the Koranic Arabic text and postulates that hundreds of words and verses owe their "obscurity" to the fact that an Aramaic word was misread or misunderstood or that an Aramaic word was wrongly taken as an Arabic word. One of the more sensational revisionist findings of Luxenberg's is his interpretation of the "virgins of Paradise". In Luxenberg's view the wide-eyed houris owe their existence to a frivolous misunderstanding of an Aramaic word. Correctly understood, the houris turn out to be "white crystal-clear grapes".

The lecture gives an introduction to Koranic eschatology and attempts a critical view of method and importance of Luxenberg's study.

Wild, Stefan (Berlin,20142019)

Secularism, fundamentalism and the struggle for the meaning of Islam : collected essays on politics and religion ; [collected essays on Islam and politics]

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=74071841X

The struggle for the meaning of Islam$dcollected essays on Islam and politics

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=74071841X

Wild, Stefan (Berlin,2014)

Secularism, fundamentalism ... ; Vol. 1 ; On fundamentalisms

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=772220948

Secularism, fundamentalism and the struggle for the meaning of Islam ; Vol. 1

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=772220948

Wild, Stefan (2011)

Sadik J. Al-Azm - Speaking truth to power : a personal tribute

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=738613851

Wild, Stefan (2010)

Koran, Dschihad und Moderne

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=140087100X

Wild, Stefan (2006)

An Arabic recitation : the meta-linguistics of Qur␣␣nic revelation

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670705411

Wild, Stefan (2006)

Why self-referentiality?

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670705403

Wild, Stefan (Wiesbaden,2006)

Self-referentiality in the Qur'␣n

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=519810880

Diskurse der Arabistik ; 11

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Wild, Stefan (Münster,2001)

Mensch, Prophet und Gott im Koran : muslimische Exegeten des 20. Jahrhunderts und das Menschenbild der Moderne

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1618443046

Gerda-Henkel-Vorlesung

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1618443046

Wild, Stefan (Leiden,1996)

The Qur␣an as text

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=090049985

Islamic philosophy, theology and science

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=090049985