



LIVING AND WORKING AT THE
WISSENSCHAFTSKOLLEG
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Born in 1943 in Tantâ, Egypt. 1981, Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Cairo University. 1982–95, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor in the same department. 1995–, Visiting Professor at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands. Major publications: *Mafhûm an-nas: Dirasa fi ûlûm al-Qur’ân*. Cairo, 1410/1990. *Ein Leben mit dem Islam* (Life with Islam). Autobiography edited by Navid Kermani, translated by Sharifa Magdi. Freiburg, 2002. *Politik und Islam: Kritik des religiösen Diskurses*, translated by Cherifa Magdi. Frankfurt/Main, 1996. – Address: INIS, Leiden University, Nonnensteeg 1–3, 2311 VJ Leiden, Netherlands.

During the period from October 2002 to February 2003, while a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, I was involved in so many academic activities. First and most of all, I made some progress on my initial research project “Towards Qur’anic Hermeneutics”. This progress is expressed in two papers.

The first paper is “The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur’ân”, now published in the *Journal of Comparative Rhetoric*, the American University at Cairo, last issue 2003. The major intention of this paper is to discuss some of the difficulties challenging the literary approach to the Qur’ân, the approach that focuses on the Qur’ân as basically a literary text. This approach was invoked by Amîn al-Khûlî (1895–1966) as the only approach capable of explaining the inimitability, *i’jâz*, of the Qur’ân. His point is that the Arabs’ acceptance of Qur’ân, and accordingly the acceptance of Islam, was based on recognizing its absolute supremacy over any human text. In other words, the Arabs accepted Islam on the

basis of evaluating the Qur'ân as a literary text. The literary method should, therefore, supersede any other religio-theological, philosophical, ethical, mystical or judicial approach. The data analyzed in this paper is the discussion that took place in the late forties in Egypt around Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah's (1916–98) Ph.D. thesis, presented to the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Fu'âd al-Awwal University (Cairo University now) in 1947 about "Al-fann al-qasasî fi l-Qur'ân" (The Art of Narration in the Qur'ân). The first section of the paper traces the literary approach to the Qur'ân back to the classical discussion of the doctrine of inimitability, *i'jâz*, in order to analyze the impact of the traditional elements on the modern dispute about the literary approach. The modern Islamic reformation movement, which, as is commonly known, started in the middle of the time of European military and political domination of the Muslim world, is the focus of the second section. Because modernity was imposed from above, either by the colonial power or by the post-colonial political regimes, some of the European cultural and philosophical elements touched upon religious matters, and thus provoked polemical as well as apologetic reaction from Muslim scholars. The major issue raised in "Al-fann al-qasasî", for example, is the historical authenticity of the events mentioned in the Qur'ân. This issue is present in a great many articles in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, whose Arabic translation appeared in the early thirties in Cairo. The last section presents the basic presupposition and conclusions of Khalafallah's thesis in the light of the context analyzed in both the first and the second sections.

I initially delivered my second paper in the form of a public lecture in the context of the Wissenschaftskolleg colloquium on January 15, 2003. Afterward, it was elaborated and updated in the form published in this volume.

Besides concentrating on my own research project, I was not only eager to broaden my knowledge and to expand my horizons by communicating with my Co-Fellows during meals and by participating in the weekly colloquium, I also tried to be part of the German academic community in general and that of Berlin in particular. Below is a list of some of my activities:

October 29, 2002 – November 1, 2003, Hagen

Participated in the "International Conference: Restless Culture – Potentials of Utopian Thought" by delivering a lecture "Utopian Thought in Classical Islamic Culture"

November 21, 2003, Berlin

Delivered a lecture and chaired a seminar at the European College of Liberal Arts (ECLA) on "Modern Islamic Thought"

November 24, 2003, Berlin, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz

Participated in a Panel Discussion with Navid Kermani on “Islam in the New Post-Modern Context”

December 5–7, 2003, House of World Cultures, Berlin in co-operation with the Free University

Participated in a panel discussion in the context of the conference “Religious Authorities in Middle Eastern Islam”

December 12–15, 2003, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

The Second Workshop in the “Modernity and Islam Working Group’s Project: Jewish/ Islamic Hermeneutics ‘Mysterium Tremendum: Horror and the Aesthetics of Religious Experience’”

January 15, 2003

Delivered a public lecture within the Fellow Program at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, “Towards Hermeneutics of the Qur’ân”. This lecture appears, updated and elaborated, in this volume.

January 29–30, 2004, Tübingen

Delivered a lecture and organized a seminar at the Faculty of Jewish Studies, Tübingen University

February 4, 2003, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

Delivered a presentation about “Islamic Human Rights and Globalization” within the Fellows’ project “Globalization and Economic Politics”

February 7, 2004, The Arab Cultural Organization in Berlin

Delivered a lecture in Arabic followed by public discussion about “Islam in Europe”

February 11, 2004, Musical Qur’ân Recitation at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

A farewell presentation of “The Artistic and Poetic Dimension of the Qur’ân”: musical recitation of the Qur’an’s chapter 55 (The Compassionate, Al-Rahmân)

In addition, I regularly participated in the two AKMI (Arbeitskreis Moderne und Islam) Berlin Seminars, Cultural Mobility and Jewish and Islamic Hermeneutics, sometimes as a presenter and most of the time as a discussant.

It is obvious how fruitful the experience of living and working in an academic context like the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin always is. It goes without mentioning that, without the great and the enthusiastic help provided by all the working staff in every corner of the institute, the richness of every Fellow experience could not be maintained.

I wish I could spend the whole period of ten months instead of only the five months I was able to stay. Certain practical circumstances did not permit me to stay longer. But now I have become a permanent friend of the institute and am very proud of this friendship.