

Editorial

# Introduction: The Qur'an in History, the History of the Qur'an

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The relationship between History and the Islamic revelation has been debated in Academia over the last few decades; its complex framework has usually been investigated in aspects such as the form, the language and the facets of structure that have not always been considered as relevant in the analysis of a historical milieu.

Nevertheless, it is evident that we are rarely faced with a *textus receptus* (received text) which, due to its linguistic complexity, religious-inter-religious milieu and cognitive background, has increasingly provoked investigative debates in the academic research. The difficulties in establishing a convincing canonization process, the emergence of the scripture with a preliminary Islamic community, the association and the influence of the Old and New Testament narratives and monotheistic milieu clearly made the Qur'anic narrative, as reported by A. Neuwirth (2003, p. 14), not a linear but a cyclical concept of revelation, a repeated narrative that from an Abrahamic milieu seems to avoid the historical contextualization through the tentative of being prophetically "universal" and inclusive.

However, the already considered plurality and complexity of the *textus* was greatly increased by the revisionist analysis made by J. Wansbrough in *Quranic Studies* (1977) and by P. Crone-M. Cook in *Hagarism* (1977), provoking an enhanced fracture in the academic community, as well as the emergence of a more dubious attitude towards many aspects concerning the Islamic revelation.

In parallel, Günter Lüling, three years before the books edited by Wansbrough and Crone-Cook, published *Der ur-Qoran*, a work that probably also inspired Luxenberg's *The Syro-Aramaic reading of the Qur'an*, another paradigmatic essay on the linguistic origin of the revelation.

Without entering the debate, as this is not the place, the purpose of this Special Issue has been to explore and to enrich the discussion on the correlation between the Qur'ān as a *textus receptus* with those historical events and stages, figures and protagonists, ideas and theological assumptions that emerged in the Islamic revelation.

More specifically, the association between the Qur'ān as a historical "repository" of information on the one hand and the impact that historical events had on Qur'anic hermeneutics on the early but also the contemporary Islamic age on the other hand continue to be significant in the academic debate.

It is therefore evident that the original facets of the Qur'ān: the language, the orality, its musicality, etc., are innate characteristics that have framed its canonization process; nevertheless, the historical information included in the *textus*, such as the impact that different historical phases played in a new reception and hermeneutics of the same *textus*, needs to be considered a priori as part of the evolutionary understanding of the Qur'ān; this is not usually an aspect that is considered in the comprehension of the revelations.

Historical events have always had a significant effect on the reception, interpretation and understanding of verses, which, although in some cases have continued to be understood in continuity with a first conceptualization, in other cases, they have been differently re-interpreted.

It is clear, for example, that the interpretation of 33:40, the "only" Quranic verse on the *Khātim an-Nabīyyīn* (The Seals of the Prophets) has been differently understood following



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the passage of the centuries (Evstatiev 2002, pp. 455–68; Power 2011, p. 226; Demichelis 2021, pp. 1–16), while the *verses of the sword* in different *suwar* have been more violently interpreted in specific phases of Islamic history, for example, by al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) or Ibn Khatīr (d. 1373).

Contemporary issues have emphasized a more feminist interpretation of the Islamic revelation (Asma Barlas 2001, pp. 15–38; Aysha Hidayatullah 2014, pp. 115–29) or otherwise more closely linked to Social Justice (Amina Wudud 1995, pp. 37–50); the same Islamic revelation has been reinterpreted to promote or negate the death penalty for apostates (O’Sullivan 2001, pp. 63–93) or to justify terrorism (Holbrook 2010, pp. 15–28).

The “contextualist” interpretation of the Qur’ān (Saeed 2008, pp. 221–37) is a “discourse” in which historical and geographical facets are predominant in identifying how to interpret the ethic-legal content of the Islamic revelation and associate the same content with the changing needs of the contemporary Islamic community. This change is not univocally related to “modernity” and its impact in the Islamic world; it is plausible that different needs in different epochs have already had an impact on the *Ummah* in various phases of Islamic history: this Special Issue tries to widen the understanding of the correlation between History and the Qur’ān in considering the latter not only as a *textus receptus*, but as a *symbiotic-contextualist* one within the evolutionary existence of human beings.

It was a revelation which not only imposed an ethical-moral vision, albeit with a clear Abrahamic matrix, but that through *ijtihād* remained contextually associated with History.

For the above reason, this Special Issue needs to be read differently from the article list presented online, but following the table of contents below.

First of all, **Brannon Wheeler’s** contribution is important in widening the contextualization of the Islamic revelation in properly understanding its complexity, but also its *symbiotic* coexistence with the historical-geographical milieu in which it was revealed. This environment clearly evolved, expanded its geographical boundaries, increased the ethnic-cultural audience, etc. This article is significant in explaining the interpretative key factors of the Islamic revelation, as well as in giving a great deal of feedback on its contextualization.

The table of contents has to be coherently considered through the analysis of the contributions of **Ismail Lala**, **Abdulla Galadari**, **Marco Demichelis** and **Ismail Albayrak**.

All of them focus their articles on the early Islamic milieu and how this background emerged in the Qur’ān.

Lala’s Queen of Sheba, a historical-mythological figure of antiquity that the Qur’ān identified as Bilqīs (27: 29ff.), is particularly interesting in the consideration of the different interpretations that Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767), al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and Ibn Khatīr (d. 1373) gave about the few verses in which the Queen of Sheba is mentioned. The importance of her faith and her subsequent conversion to monotheism seem more relevant than her gender: this is a major suggestion that has an impact in the different ages of those Muslim exegetes, but even more so in the contemporary debate on gender issues.

Galadari’s contribution is an interesting comparative article on the meaning of Inspiration and Revelation between the Qur’ān and the Bible. The roots of *wahy* and *tanzīl*, the linguistic and cognitive origins of which remained complex, emphasized the correlation between the symbolic necessary understanding of the revelation in Arabic, through which the Qur’ān became understandable, and its interpretative meaning that, on the contrary, remained obscure. The debate which started in the Early Islamic age, via the disagreement of different authors on the Uncreated–Created discussion in the 9th century, has reached the contemporary period with an inconclusive outcome.

The article by Demichelis focuses attention on the Nature/Natures of ʿĪsā’ ibn Maryam as it emerged in the Islamic revelation, considering the possible influence played by centuries of Christian debates on the Christological topic. Specifically, the most important aspect that the article tries to clarify is related to the same complex understanding of Jesus’s figure in the Qur’ān: on the one hand, it is evident that his nature is unequivocally human;

on the other hand, miracles as well as paradigmatic facets and qualities that he had since childhood are clearly less human.

Finally, Albayrak's article focuses on the divine preservation of the Qur'ān with specific attention on the verse 15:9: "We have sent down the Quran Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it. Even before you [Prophet]". His analysis through Islamic history is an interesting exegetical excursus from Ibn Qatāda (d. 735) and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767) passing through al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) via the most important exegetes of the early and classical Islamic age, in which Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) plays a prominent role in the interpretation of *Dhikr*. The study reaches a more contemporary interpretation with Sa'īd Nūrsī (d. 1960) in the clear tentative to better explain the "divine protection of the Qur'ān" in the ongoing debate.

The correlation between History and the Qur'ān brings us to a different historical phase, no longer associated with Antiquity or Late Antiquity but with the Middle Ages: the contributions from **Alena Kulinich** and **Javier Albarran** are particularly significant for this Special Issue because their works, the former on Sūra 102 and its medieval interpretation and the latter on the war discourse in the Almohad movement, highlight the correlation between specific historical phases and geographies with a peculiar interpretative emphasis and association of the Islamic revelation. Albarran's article focuses on the sacralization of fighting through a "Quranization" of the war narrative that is irremediably associated with the context, a unitary Arab-Berber project, in contrast with their historical counter-opposition. This is an inclusive attitude that will allow the Almohad to make brief but important conquests in North Africa and in al-Andalus.

Kulinich's work focuses on the medieval interpretation of Sūra 102, the meaning of *al-takāthur* and *an-na'im* and the evolutionary significance that these terms assumed in different phases of Islamic history, from Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767) to al-Māturīdī (d. 944), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) and many others, assuming first of all how the moral injunctions of the Qur'ān were not perceived by the exegetes as unequivocal and rigidly established. The interpretation of those two concepts, usually associated with specific vices, have been related to everyday aspects of life, such as food and wealth that have a different background in relation to historical tradition and geography of the exegetes who worked on the topic.

In other words, moral vices are different depending on the latitude and longitude of the Islamic world.

Finally, the last articles by **Stephen R. Burge** and **Ines Peta** reflect on more contemporary topics and authors, both of the Nahḍa, the historical cultural reformist movement which started in the 19th century and failed once and for all in the 20th century.

Burge's article analyzes the *Mabḥath al-sihr wa-Hārūt wa-Mārūt* (2: 101–3) in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* of Rashīd Riḍā, focusing on the influence of the 19th century Biblical criticism on Rashīd's interpretative task. It is evident that the impact of Liberal European Biblical criticism was usually adopted during the Nahḍa's interpretative key-points, often taking up anti-Christian polemics; the doubtful approach of 'Abduh and Riḍā to the divine origin of Hārūt and Mārūt, as well as the magical power of King Solomon, suggests the historical cognitive impact of European Biblical criticism during the Nahḍa.

In parallel, Ines Peta's work seems in clear continuity with Burge's analysis. Aḥmad Amīn's intellectual work and neo-Mu'tazilite position on many aspects of Islamic intellectual thought clearly affected the literature on the Qur'ān and the Traditions, supporting logical and rational assumptions. Amīn's assumptions against the immobility of the textus receptus as the reliance of the same, in contrast with the *ijtihād*, assumed that the Qur'ān as the word of God was clearly subject to a "creative process", and even if Amīn took a contrary position to the *Miḥna* (the inquisition started under the caliph al-Ma'mūn in 833 and ending under al-Mutawakkil in 849), his pro-mu'tazilite positions remained prominent in his understanding of the evolutionary progress of the Islamic world.

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