An Introduction to, and a Bibliography of, Works by and about Christoph Luxenberg

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> *Fa-mā minkum aḥadin ʿanhu ḫāǧizīna*
> Surah 69:47, is also odd; such constructions occur quite often in Syriac, however.
>
> Theodor Nöldeke, *Zur Sprache des Korāns*[1]

1. Christoph Luxenberg's Theory and Its Reactions

Christoph Luxenberg is a scholar who has been engaged in research and teaching in Germany for many years, specializing in Semitic philology. He taught not only Classical Arabic, but also several vernaculars or dialects, and Syriac in German universities. His years of teaching, when he adopted what could be called a comparative study of the two languages, gave him a deeper understanding of Arabic and Syriac, an understanding that went beyond grammars and dictionaries. Luxenberg's doctoral thesis concerned a Syriac manuscript of the eight and ninth century CE that refers to earlier texts of the fifth and sixth centuries. He discussed homilies, among them the homily of Jacob of Sarug. He was able to give a fuller description, than hitherto, of the manuscript, having identifed the texts of the Syriac with the help of the original Greek. Luxenberg realised that often the translation of the Greek into Syriac was very literal, and difficult to comprehend. He had to constantly compare the Syriac to the original Greek, when extant, to understand or clarify the Syriac translation, thereby acquiring important insights that led him to develop a method that he was able to apply, with spectacular results, to the understanding of the opaque parts of the Koran. In the Syriac manuscript, his task was to identify the fragments and their authors, hitherto unknown, for which he needed to order an unedited Greek manucript from Cambridge, England. One of the original Greek texts was lost, but Luxenberg was able to identify the fragments in the Syriac manuscript as the work of Severus of Antioch, on the basis of their theological subject matter. A later discovery in Damascus, by a Jesuit scholar from Rome, of a manuscript confirmed Luxenberg's conjecture of the authorship of the fragments in the Syriac manuscript.

Luxenberg also taught several other subjects, such as medieval history (the Crusades) and German literature and language to foreigners, and he often provided translation services (Arabic to German and vice versa). Indeed it

was his experience in these translations that further opened his eyes to the difficulties that any serious translator between languages encounters.

The revolutionary works of Günter Lüling[2] and John Wansbrough[3] were met with, not just incomprehension, incredulity, and polite, intellectual disagreement but astonishing hostility, and ad hominem attacks that were a disgrace to the profession, and which, in the case of Lüling, destroyed a career. Unfortunately, the profession continues to disgrace itself, particularly in its initial reaction to the iconoclastic book, and the handful of essays, of Christoph Luxenberg. Two distinguished researchers in the field of Koranic Studies, Claude Gilliot and Jan van Reeth, very courageously called attention to the scandalous review that François de Blois wrote of Luxenberg's book. Gilliot referred to de Blois' critique in a footnote:

> Outre le fait que ce compte rendu déforme souvent la pensée de Luxenberg, il contient des allégations sur l'origine ethnico-religieuse de l'auteur qui sont à la limite du supportable (p. 96–7), et pour lesquelles le proverbe vaut qui dit: "si tu veux tuer ton chien, dis qu'il a la gale!"[4] [Apart from the fact that this article often distorts the thoughts of Luxenberg, it also contains allegations about the ethnic and religious background of the author (i.e., Luxenberg) which are hardly bearable (p. 96–7), and to which the proverb applies: "If you want to kill your dog, say he's got scabies"!]

Indeed, when seeking to harm someone, you can often do so with calumny, that is, false and malicious misrepresentation of the words of others calculated to injure their reputation, in brief, slander. Whereas Van Reeth wrote,

> Pendant de longues années, depuis la deuxième Guerre Mondiale, les études coraniques ont stagné, répétant avec une lueur de critique historique la tradition musulmane (la *Sīrat al-Nabī* et les *ḥadīṯ*-s) qui décrit la révélation de l'islam d'une façon légendaire. Cette présentation des faits est maintenant mise au défi, ce qui explique sans doute certaines réactions. Une des plus virulentes recensions du livre de Luxenberg est celle de François de Blois. À la fin, sa critique devient même malveillante et personelle; en outre, certaines de ses remarques nous paraissent dénuées de fondement. Ainsi, pour ne donner qu'un exemple, concernant le terme خليفه , *ḥalīfah* que Luxenberg met en rapport avec le mot syriaque ܚܠܝܦܐ, de Blois remarque: *no reason is given why, in this "phonetic transcription," the Aramaic laryngeal ḥ is not "transcribed" by the phonetically identical Arabic laryngeal ḥ but by x.* Or, l'emprunt de mots à une langue étrangère ne suit pas nécessairement les lois phonétiques; on rend les sons tels qu'on les entend, indépendamment de la dérivation étymologique correcte; aussi, dans sa nouvelle édition, Luxenberg met le doigt sur un *Sprachhistorischer Irrtum* de certains de ses critiques, qui considèrent l'arabe comme plus ancien que que l'araméen.[5] [For many years, since WW II, Koranic Studies had been stagnating, repeating with a glimpse of

historical criticism the tenets of Islamic tradition (the *Sīrat al-Nabī* and the *ḥadīṯ*-s), which describes the revelation of Islam in a legendary manner. This presentation of facts has now been challenged, which undoubtedly explains certain reactions. One of the fiercest reviews of Luxenberg's book is the one written by François de Blois. At the end, his criticism becomes wicked and personal; moreoever, some of his remarks show an apparent lack of foundation. Thus, to adduce an example, Luxenberg connects the term خليفه *ḥalīfah* with the Syriac word ܚܠܝܦܐ [translator's note: *ḥlīp̄ā*], which is commented as follows by de Blois: *no reason is given why, in this "phonetic transcription," the Aramaic laryngeal ḥ is not "transcribed" by the phonetically identical Arabic laryngeal ḥ but by x.* Well, the borrowing of words from a foreign language does not necessarily follow phonetic rules; one renders words as one hears them, irrespective of their correct etymological derivation; furthermore, in the new edition [of his book], Luxenberg points out the *Sprach-historischer Irrtum* [translator's note: historical linguistic mistake] of some of his critiques [brought forward against him], which consider the Arabic language as older than Aramaic.]

Now, it is true that borrowings do not always follow phonetic rules, the English word *hubris* going back to Greek *hybris* (as which it was adopted into German), whereas the Greek prefix *hyper-* does not appear in English as *huper-*, but as *hyper-*. So why were the English not able to adopt the first example as "hybris"?

Regarding Arabic *ḥalīfa* and its Syriac equivalent *ḥlīp̄-ā*, the case is more complicated: First of all, the Arabic word designates a male, but has a feminine ending *-a*, which is unique among the Semitic languages. Luxenberg's explanation is that the only *seeming* feminine ending *-a* is in fact the Syriac definite article *-ā*, the root of the word being *ḥlīp̄-*. So the problem remains why the Syriac *ḥ* was adopted as an Arabic *ḥ*.

At this point we have to consider not only the sounds of the languages involved, but also the *phoneme systems*, phonemes being abstract units of distinctive elements of a pronunciation system. In modern English, for example, we can distinguish words with the consonants *n* and *ng*, their phonetic symbols being [n] and [ŋ], as, for example, in the words t*hing* and *thin*. Such a pair of words is called a *minimal pair*. To establish the phoneme system of a language, we have to find minimal pairs.

In Italian, however, the situation is different. The two sounds [n] and [ŋ] do appear, pronounced exactly as in English, as, for example, in the word *mano* and the name *Franco* [fraŋko], but you cannot find a minimal pair distinguished only by these two sounds. Instead, there is a rule: whenever the letter *n* is followed by a *c* [k] or a *g* [g], it is pronounced [ŋ]. Therefore, we

can state that in Italian we have one phoneme /n/ (a linguist's way to write phonemes) with two allophones (=variants) [n] and [ŋ], *depending on their position*. In English, the sounds [n] and [ŋ] belong to two different phonemes /n/ and /ŋ/. An English native speaker might now assume that such a merely "theoretical" difference is negligeable and that it should not be too difficult for an Italian to pronounce an English word with *ng*, but this is not the case: "swing" is an English designation for a musical style that is used in Italian as well, but most Italians do not pronounce the *ng* correctly. As the sound [ŋ] in their mother tongue only appears before a *g* or a *c*, they will tend to insert a *g* after the [ŋ], which automatically leads to another problem: In Italian, words do not end in consonant clusters. Therefore, many speakers will add a vowel, at least a short one, their pronunciation resulting in something like [swiŋgᵊ].

In the relationship between Arabic and Aramaic, the situation is very similar: In Arabic we have three phonemes usually transliterated as *ḫ*, *ḥ*, and *k*, in phonetic script: *ḫ* – /x/, *ḥ* – /ħ/, and *k* – /k/. The same sounds appear in Aramaic, but here they belong to only two phonemes: *k* – /k/ and *ḥ* – /ħ/. The phoneme /k/ in Aramaic, as in the Masoretic pronunciation of Hebrew, was pronounced as a [k], for example, in initial position, and as a [x] (i.e., the sound of "ch" in *Loch Ness*) in most other positions, for example, between vowels. Moreover, in many cases the etymological equivalent of words that in Arabic have a *ḫ* have a *ḥ* in Aramaic, for example, the word for *brother*: Arabic *aḫ*, Aramaic *aḥ(-ā)*.

Luxenberg in one of his publications pointed out that in the Eastern Aramaic dialect the "*ḥ* is pronouned *ḫ* (often transliterated as 'kh' or 'x')."[6] Phonetically, this is not very surprising, as the sound [x] is already there in the language (albeit belonging to another phoneme), and the articulation of [ħ] and [x] is not very different—both are voiceless fricatives, [ħ] is pharyngeal and [x] velar. Moreover, at least in initial position (e.g., in the word *ḥlīp̄ā*), this sound shift does not affect the phoneme structure of the language and does not lead to misunderstandings, as their are no words distinguished by the sounds [ħ] and [x]; that is, even if *ḥlīp̄ā* is pronounced [xli:fa:] instead of [ħli:fa:] in the East, the form remains unambiguous.

For Arabic ears, however, the pronunciation [xli:fa:] instead of [ħli:fa:] will lead to a different phonemic interpretation of the word: it will be adopted with a *ḫ* [x] as its first consonant, and—as Arabic words never start with a consonant cluster—a vowel ("a") will be inserted. Moreover, the definite article -*ā* will be interpreted as the (normally feminine ending) -*a*, thus the resulting form is: *ḫalīfa* – خليفه.

Taking the phonological and etymological background of Arabic and Aramaic into consideration, no unbiased phonetician or general linguist would be surprised by an Arabic form *ḫalīfa* going back to a Syriac form *ḥlīp̄ā*. But the standards and achievements of other disciplines, be they historical, ling-

uistic, or philological, have hardly ever bothered scholars from the field of Koranic Studies!

Given that thirteen years after its publication Luxenberg's work forges on, and continues to bear fruit in the form of articles by an ever-growing group of scholars inspired by his methodology, perhaps another fitting proverb would be one from the Middle East: "The Caravan passes, and a few mangy dogs bark."

Jan van Reeth, who teaches the History of Religions, Ancient Philosophy, and Islamic Theology at the Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions (Antwerp), has written several articles that touch on Luxenberg's work.[7] In the article cited above, Van Reeth finds much of value in Luxenberg's study, which he calls "groundbreaking," though he would not necessarily endorse all of Luxenberg's new Syro-Aramaic readings. Van Reeth, with his unequaled knowledge of the history of Christianity, in general, and Syriac Christianity, in particular, builds on Luxenberg's thesis concerning the Koranic descriptions of Paradise to produce a totally convincing account of the sources of the entire tradition. Where Luxenberg goes back to St. Ephrem, Van Reeth's starting point is two Biblical passages in Genesis and Psalms that were then "combined, and glossed, giving rise to an apocalyptic vision in the book of Enoch 10:19."

Then comes the second Book of Baruch 29:5–6, the vision reaching its climax in the ecstatic words of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, with the *Hymns of Paradise* of St. Ephrem filling in the gaps and closing the story. Finally, Van Reeth describes Luxenberg's analysis of the Koranic *immortal ephebes* as brilliant. Van Reeth concludes that

> Luxenberg's method thus proves to be productive, provided that we compare the restored Qur'ānic text with its Christian sources. Only then may we hope to arrive at the true meaning of the prophetic text.[8]

In another article,[9] Van Reeth refers to Luxenberg's new reading of the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, and agrees with him that

> the name Muḥammad may very well be a title, given to the Prophet by his already *ḥanafī* family, pointing to a prophetic function, similar to that of the "first" Paraclete Jesus, without saying however that the Prophet Muḥammad would be an entirely fictitious, invented personality. There is no doubt in my mind, indeed, that he has been an actual living, historical person. All the elaboration in that sense, such as those of Ohlig, K.-H., "Vom Muḥammad Jesus zum Propheten der Araber: Die Historisierung eines christologischen Prädikats," in idem, ed., *Der frühe Islam: Eine historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion anhand zeitgenössischer Quellen*, pp. 327–76 (Berlin, 2007), are to be totally

rejected: they are not a "historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion," but unfortu-
nately only a mere *construction* of historical phanstasy. It is to be deplored that
Luxenberg has been led astray by all this.

Though he does *hint* that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, *may* only be a
symbolic figure, Luxenberg is far from being dogmatic on this issue, pointing
out that the historicity of Muhammad is "a task for the historians."[10]
Luxenberg does not claim to be a historian, and he is very careful in his
choice of words:

> The first name of his father, "'Abd Allāh," which may in fact be similarly sym-
> bolic, reflecting the expression "servant of God" from the Dome of the Rock,
> helps to suggest this latter possibility.[11]

"*May*," "helps to *suggest*," "*possibility*" are not the words of a dogmatist or an
absolutist. More decisively, in an interview with Christoph Burgmer, Luxen-
berg admits, "I would not go so far as to say that Muḥammad and the Qurʾān
never existed."[12] And, of course, Luxenberg is never "led" by anyone, astray or
otherwise. The conclusions that he has arrived at are a result of his own
revolutionary research—he is very much his own man. That was Luxenberg's
position in approximately 2005.

By contrast, what should we make of the absolute certainty of Van Reeth
himself, that Muḥammad did exist: "There is no doubt in my mind, indeed,
that he has been an actual living, historical person." Where does the burden
of proof lie?

And yet, Luxenberg's subsequent philological enquiries, conducted and
reported on after his new reading of the inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock,
have *indeed* led him to a far more skeptical position on the question of the
historicity of Muhammad and all the traditional accounts of the redaction of
the Koran. For Luxenberg, philology helps or can help to recover the histori-
cal truth, in the same way that archeology does. Thus, his skepticism is hardly
surprising for a scholar who feels he has managed to destroy the conventional
historical interpretation of various "terms" in the Koran: *Muhammad* is a
title, and it does not refer to a Prophet of the Arabs; *'Abd Allah* is not the
putative name of the father of the Prophet, but also a title derived from the
inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock; *Bakka* is not the alternative name for
the City of Mecca;[13] the so-called Battle of *Badr* never took place, and the
term *badr* has been misread;[14] the term *quraysh* in the Koran has nothing
whatsoever to do with a tribe called the *Quraysh*; "the year of the elephant"
has nothing to do with the year of the Prophet's birth, or with elephants;
'Arafāt (Surah 2:198) is not a place name but means "benefaction;"[15] and the
ka'ba is not the *Ka'ba* of Islamic tradition.[16] Just what is left of Islam after this
scholarly hurricane?

Since his important book *Exégèse, langue et théologie: L'exégèse coranique de Ṭabarī* appeared in 1990, Claude Gilliot, professor emeritus at the University of Provence, Aix-en-Provence, France, has established himself as one of the foremost authorities on the Koran in the West. Gilliot has written appreciatively of Luxenberg's work in a number of articles,[17] including one, cowritten with his colleague Pierre Larcher, for the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*,[18] of which he was associate editor. Gilliot and Larcher wrote,

> Of course, Luxenberg's work must be discussed by Semitists and Islamicists, and poses other complicated problems, e.g., on the history of the redaction of the Qur'ān. But some of his theses do appear convincing, at least to the present writers. For instance, Q 108 (Sūrat al-Kawthar), a text which has little meaning for a normal reader, and which is also a *crux interpretum* for the Islamic exegetes, has been convincingly deciphered by Luxenberg. . . . The method of Luxenberg applied to passages of the Qur'ān which are particularly obscure cannot be brushed aside by mere repetition of the Nöldeke/Spitaler thesis, or, as some would say, dogma. . . . It must be examined seriously. From a linguistic point of view the undertaking of Luxenberg is one of the most interesting. It will provoke in some Islamic circles the same emotion as did the hypothesis of Vollers formerly, because it amounts to seeing in the Qur'ān a kind of palimpsest. Such hypotheses, and the reactions they generate, push scholarship on the language and style of the Qur'ān continually to examine and question its acknowledged (and implicit) premises.[19]

Of course, Gilliot would not necessarily accept all of Luxenberg's new readings. Luxenberg's fecundity inspires skepticism, and leaves Gilliot wondering if there is something mechanical in his later productions:

> It should be clear to the reader that it is not necessary to follow either Lüling (pre-Islamic Arabic Christian hymns), or Luxenberg (entire passages of the Meccan Qur'ān being mere palimpsests of Syriac primitive text) in their systematic, sometimes probably too automatic ways of proceeding, if we consider that a part of their point of departure and some of their ideas have some *fundamentum in re*, or rather a certain basis in the Qur'ānic text itself, in the Islamic tradition, and in the cultural environment in which the Qur'ān was born.[20]

Federico Corriente, a Semitist and lecturer in Arabic literature at the University of Zaragoza, has written a number of highly regarded and discussed articles on Arabic linguistics and the Arabic of the Koran.[21] In his review of Luxenberg,[22] Corriente lauds Luxenberg's grasp of Syriac and Classical Arabic, writing,

> We must say here and now that [Luxenberg] appears to be an undoubtedly
> seasoned scholar, well at home in Syriac language and literature, also endowed
> with a remarkable command of Classical Arabic and versed in the Qur'anic
> sciences.

Corriente also finds much to praise in Luxenberg's study, accepting a certain
number of the latter's new readings,

> among the cases in which Luxenberg's proposals may be considered as posi-
> tive contributions to the interpretation of the Qur'anic text and to the present
> levels of knowledge of the Arabic language are some terms of Aramaic origin
> to be added to those listed by Jeffery, such as *qayyūm* "everlasting" (p. 44) in
> 2:255, 3:2 and 20:111, *musaḥḥarāt* (pp. 211–213), to be understood as Syriac
> *mšawḥrāt* "held") in 16:79, *šarrikhum* in 17:64 (pp. 219–220, "entrap them,"
> better than *šārikhum* "share with them"), *kawṭar* in 108:1 (p. 273, plausibly
> interpreted as Syriac *kūṭārā* "steadiness"; cf. also calques like *baqiyyah* "gain"
> in 11:86, pp. 200–201, where the uncommon meaning in Arabic reflects the
> semantics of Syriac *yutrānā*), as well as other instances in which his surmise of
> misreading of the consonantal skeleton provides an alternative interpretation
> which may be preferable to the traditional one (e.g., p. 60–61, *iḏḏāka* "they
> said then," vs. *āḏannāka* "we protest to Thee" in 41:47, pp. 138–139, *bāraknā
> 'alayhimā* "We blessed them," better as *taraknā* in 37:78–9, pp. 170–171,
> *arattu an uġayyibahā* "I wanted to hide it," better than *u'ayyibahā* "to damage
> it" in 18:79, p. 220, *ġayra nāẓirīna ināṭahu* "not looking to his wives." better
> than *ināhu* "his time" in 33:53), plus a host of other cases where each scholar
> may be more or less prone to accept the presence of Syrianisms, depending on
> his position regarding the rather complex issues of interference between
> Semitic languages and degree of authenticity of the received Qur'anic text.

However, Corriente terminates his review on a negative note (to which I shall
return), but even then he manages to squeeze in something positive:

> This rather negative judgment on his enterprise does not detract a bit from his
> merit as a very knowledgeable scholar endowed with an active and provocative
> mind, who has devoted considerable time and effort in an interesting attempt
> to cast light on an abstruse subject, surrounded by scientific and other perils.
> As stated above, he appears to have hit the mark at times, although his perso-
> nal convictions and professional preferences have not contributed to keep him
> in the middle of the road or let him avail himself of all the extant data, even
> those which he probably knows well.[23]

Corriente's negative conclusion is that

> Luxenberg's plea for an interpretation of dark passages of the Qur'ān based
> upon the hypothesis of a misread or misinterpreted Syriac *vorlage* of its texts is
> not convincing in most cases, because the philological arguments wielded by

him in order to prove his case do not have the necessary weight to counteract the previous more traditional views on this topic, grounded as they are on solid historical and socio-linguistic data.

Here we have Corriente's deficiencies as a reviewer—an astonishingly naïve faith in "traditional views," and his absolute certainty in the "solid historical and socio-linguistic data." Credulity, as P. R. Davis once said, does not become a historian. That is why, like many philologists, Corriente is not a historian, and lacks the necessary skepticism of the sources that is the hallmark of the true historian, and is, in fact, a basic methodological requirement. In his discussion of Luxenberg's proposal concerning Mecca, Corriente refers to "Ptolemy's famous report, the original name of that town was Macoraba, i.e., South Arabian *mkrb* 'shrine.'" Corriente's seems unaware of Patricia Crone's decisive refutation of the notion that *Macoraba* was Mecca:

> The plain truth is that the name of Macoraba has nothing to do with that of Mecca, and that location indicated by Ptolemy for Macoraba in no way dictates identification of the two.[24]

In note 2, Corriente tells us with supreme confidence that Vollers has been refuted:

> As purported by K. Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strassburg, 1906), whose theory has been repeatedly refuted by scholars since Th. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg, 1910) on account of both internal and historical grounds, as reported by Luxenberg himself (p. 4) who, nevertheless, appears to accept it.

He has not been refuted. On the contrary, as Jonathan Owens has argued recently, Nöldeke's arguments against Vollers are

> surprisingly weak for a scholar of his stature. . . . Rather than assume an air of caution, however, Nöldeke displayed a zealousness in rejecting Vollers's thesis which carried him beyond the bounds of measured academic judgment.[25]

Owens goes on to point out some of Vollers's insights that are still relevant.

Corriente evidently accepts without a murmur of doubt the entire traditional Islamic account of the rise of Islam, including the unexamined tales of the dialects of the Hijaz, pre-Islamic poetry, the language of the Quraysh, the oral transmission of the Koran, the role of Muhammad in the creation of the Koran, and even the mythic memories of the ancient Arabs. All our sources are dated two hundred years after the putative events, and *cannot*, I repeat, *cannot be the basis of a sound historical reconstruction*. Scholars such as John Wansbrough, Andrew Rippin, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, Martin Hinds,

Yehuda Nevo, and Judy Koren, among others, have been chipping away at this traditional picture. Skepticism of the oral tradition has been expressed by Fritz Krenkow, Gerd-R. Puin, Günter Lüling, and more recently Fred Donner. His criticisms of Luxenberg rely solely on what Corriente naively takes to be "trustworthy," "undeniable fact[s]," or "facts generally accepted as historical and recorded in the works of unimpeachable authors that cannot be contradicted without a heavy burden of proof," or "solid historical and socio-linguistic data" and not on philological arguments. Corriente innocently, once again, refers to Arabic grammars and dictionaries as though that should settle the matter. But these dictionaries and grammars are all eighth century or later productions, and they are precisely the problem, since they reflect and are solidly based on the erroneous readings that Luxenberg is trying to correct. Corriente does not realize that even if a small percentage of Luxenberg's new readings is correct, then we have to revise the traditional accounts of the redaction of the Koran. We cannot start with traditional Islamic account as the major premise, and then proceed, rather we should look at the philological arguments and then revise the traditional account. Let us stick with the philology, wherever it may lead.

Another Semitist, Martin F. J. Baasten of Leiden describes many of Luxenberg's new readings of the Koran as "stunning,"[26] and like Gilliot, he considers Luxenberg's rereading of *Sūrat al-Kawṯar* particularly convincing:

> It must be said that many of L.'s findings are stunning indeed. In some cases he even manages to reread entire sūrahs, which, when read against their Syriac background, suddenly turn out to be coherent texts. A convincing example is L.'s treatment (pp. 269–276) of *Sūrat al-Kawṯar* (108).

Baasten also feels Luxenberg's reading of *Sūrah* 96 (*al-ʿalaq*, "the blood-clot") is the correct one, though he does take issue with some of the details:

> The same can be said for L.'s reinterpretation of *Sūrah* 96 (*al-ʿalaq*, "the blood-clot"), another challenge to both traditional and modern exegetes. The word علق *ʿalaq*, according to L., does not refer to a blood-clot from which God is supposed to have created man. It should rather be connected with Syriac ܥܠܘܩܐ *ʿālōqā* "sticky clay." The fact that corroborating evidence for this idea is found in the Qur'ān itself simply clinches the matter: إنا خلقنهم من طين لازب *'innā ḫalaqnāhum min ṭīn lāzib* "We created them of sticky clay" (Q 37:11). Even though L. is at his most convincing here, one is inclined to disagree with some of his conclusions, such as his interpretation of the last word of this sūrah, واقترب *wa-qtarib*, which he translates as "and celebrate the Eucharist!" But the verb اقترب *iqtaraba* "to draw near" cannot simply be identified, as L. does, with the form تقرّب *taqarraba*, which is actually the Christian Arabic term for celebrating the Eucharist.

Baasten is critical of some other aspects of Luxenberg's work:

Sometimes it seems that when L. has found a pair of cognates in Syriac and Arabic, he simply declares the Arabic word to be a loan from Syriac, even when from a historical-linguistic point of view this is not plausible. Such is the case, for instance, with the root طغى *ṭaġā* and its Syriac cognate ܛܥܐ *ṭ‘ā*. In making such claims, however, one implicitly takes issue with major themes in historical phonology of Semitic: L. presupposes that we do not have merger of /ġ/ and /‘/ in Aramaic, but rather *split* of these phonemes in Arabic. While L. is entitled to such a view, a critical reader is justified in expecting an exposition on the matter.

However, Baasten's conclusion is positive:

> All in all, Luxenberg's *Syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran* contains a wealth of original ideas and interesting observations, which might indeed have major implications for our understanding of the emergence of Islam. In many instances he makes a convincing case for what he calls a "Syriac reading of the Qur'ān." His proposals often do lead to a better understanding of impenetrable Qur'ānic passages, which in itself is a major achievement and a challenge for historians of early Islam. Whether one should go along with his more far-reaching statements, on the Syriac-Arabic mixed language of Mecca or an Aramaic Urkoran, is something that further research will make clear.

The most hostile review from a recognized scholar came from Angelika Neuwirth, who concluded her joint review of Lüling and Luxenberg with these comments on the latter:

> It is striking that the alleged extent of hybridity in Qur'anic language as such does not interest Luxenberg seriously—he nowhere reflects about the actual use of that language, as limited to cultic purposes or as vernacular—hybridity merely serves as a means to de-construct the Qur'an as genuine scripture, or, phenomenologically speaking, to de-construct Islamic scripture as the transmitter's faithful rendering of what he felt to have received from a supernatural source. The Qur'an thus is presented as the translation of a Syriac text. This is an extremely pretentious hypothesis which is unfortunately relying on rather modest foundations. Luxenberg does not consider previous work in the diverse disciplines of Qur'anic studies—neither concerning the pagan heritage, nor the poetical Arabian background, nor the Jewish contacts. He takes interest neither in religio-historical nor in literary approaches to the Qur'an although his assumptions touch substantially on all these discourses. Luxenberg limits himself to a very mechanistic, positivist linguistic method without caring for theoretical considerations developed in modem linguistics. Luxenberg has the merit to have raised anew the old question of the Syriac stratum of Qur'anic textual history that had—since Mingana—been marginalised. But

the task of a profound and reliable study of the Syriac elements of the Qurʼan
is still waiting to be fulfilled.

Though she does concede that "Luxenberg has the merit to have raised anew
the old question of the Syriac stratum of Qurʼanic textual history that had—
since Mingana—been marginalised,"Neuwirth does not really engage with
any of Luxenberg's detailed philological arguments. Perhaps she does not
have the necessary competence in Syriac to do so. In any case, surely his work
needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and this is what is precisely
lacking. Luxenberg is not a historian, though his findings have enormous
implications for our knowledge of the rise of Islam and the redaction of the
Koran.

Simon Hopkins is another reviewer who does not engage with Luxen-
berg's arguments. Instead, Hopkins, a distinguished Semitist, seems to think
that by presenting two or three of those arguments with little or no comment
or analysis, he has accomplished his duty. He does not think it is even worth
going into particulars, and abdicates his scholarly obligation by telling us that
"there seems little point in going into further detail."

The closest Hopkins comes to voicing an opinion is when he finds Luxen-
berg's explanations of the presence of *tāʼ marbūṭa* on masculine words "ad
hoc and mechanical." Elsewhere, Hopkins describes Luxenberg's methodo-
logy as "reckless," and his philology "wayward," and accuses him of "exege-
tical caprice." Nowhere does he tell us where and how Luxenberg is wrong
philologically.

Hopkins pretends not to understand what Luxenberg was trying to
accomplish when the latter embarked on an analysis of the expression *hal
yastawiyāni maṭalan* found in Surah 11:24 and 39:29. But Luxenberg is
making an important point about the puzzling presence of a final *alif* in a
word following an Arabic dual verb. Arab grammarians see *maṭalan* as an
accusative singular. But this is problematic since one would expect an Arabic
dual noun after an Arabic dual verb. Second, why is *maṭalan* in the accusa-
tive? It should be in the nominative. Third, the definite article, *al*, is missing;
the *al* is necessary since two determined examples have been given. However,
in Syriac a final *alif* could also designate a plural (since, apart from a few
exceptions, the dual in Syriac is not usual). The interpretation of this *alif* as
tamyīz (accusative of specification) of Arabic grammar was a later ad hoc
creation precisely to explain this puzzling *alif*, the Arab grammarians being
evidently unaware of the function of the final *alif* as designating a plural in
Syriac. The final *alif* can also designate the definite article in Syriac. Surely,
Luxenberg's new reading yields a far more coherent sentence, "Are the two
examples somehow equal?" (instead of: "Are the two somehow equal as
example?"). As Luxenberg explains:

According to this, when translated into modern-day Arabic (and taking into account the Qur'ānic dual), the sentence would then read: *hal yastawiyāni l-maṯalān* (in Classical Arabic: *hal yastawī l-maṯalān*).[27]

Ironically, it is precisely this explanation of *maṯalan* that Professor Y. Tzvi Langermann finds convincing in his brief review, to which we now turn.

Perhaps the most surprising review appeared in the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*—surprising for two reasons: first it was a positive review, and in an Islamic journal, whose editors are committed Muslims; and second, it was written by an Israeli professor, Y. Tzvi Langermann, Professor of Arabic at Bar Ilan University. So, we have an Israeli scholar writing a positive review in an Islamic journal! Langermann wrote:

> However tenuous, even preposterous, Luxenberg's sweeping thesis may seem, the myriad examples he adduces of problematic passages, the meaning of which is clarified when their Syro-Aramaic roots are exposed, cannot be dismissed out of hand.[28]

He then goes on to endorse Luxenberg's new reading of *al-raqim* from Surah 18:9, albeit with circumspection, since Langermann suddenly feels obliged to make allowances for his Muslim audience. Furthermore, Langermann writes:

> On the strong side, Luxenberg suggests that the final alif, which has, with great difficulty, been interpreted as an accusative in words such as *mathalan* (11:24) or *al-ḥawāyā* (6:146), can be better explained on the basis of corresponding Aramaic forms.[29]

Professor Johannes J. G. Jansen of the University of Leiden urges the scientific community in the West to take Luxenberg's work seriously without constantly worrying about the tender sensibilities of Muslims, "Christoph Luxenberg offers a startling number of repunctuations that need to be considered seriously."

Luxenberg's methodology seems to give us convincing results, and could be a fruitful approach for the analysis of the difficult passages in the Koran.

> It is not difficult to see why pious traditional Muslims might have great difficulty with Luxenberg's work. But why would non-Muslim scholars hesistate to debate his views and to applaud him for his original approach—even if he might be wrong some of the time? Are they afraid of the Elders of Mecca and their Protocols? . . . It cannot be doubted that Luxenberg's book will cause distress to many pious Muslims. That is a sad thing. But, on the other hand, it is not the duty of Western scholarship to protect the Muslim masses from spiritual distress. Moreover, nobody will dare to accuse the Ulema of not being able to protect the Muslim masses adequately against such distress. It is, then,

to be hoped for that Christoph Luxenberg will take a look at the whole text of the Qurʾān, apply his unique method, and will soon publish his findings, that will consequently become the subject of a wide debate.[30]

Jansen discovered confirmation of one of Luxenberg's readings in some inscriptions. He wrote[31]:

> Enno Littmann, in a publication from 1940,[32] mentions three inscriptions in which Safaitic רוח *rwḥ* is used about the dead, after a vocative, "O God!" The meaning is obviously: "O God, give [them] rest." A version of Dona eis requiem?
>
> Luxenberg has suggested that Quranic *zawwaǧnāhum* (Q 44:54 and Q 52:20) might be a misreading for *rawwaḥnāhum*. These three Safaitic inscriptions may convince someone who has doubts about this suggestion that the reading *rawwaḥnāhum* (زَوَّجْنٰهُم < روحـنٰهم < رَوَّحْنٰهُم) at least deserves serious consideration.
>
> Also *an-nufūsu zuwwiǧat* in Q 81:7 looks improbable. Here too, a form of "to rest" seems to be much more plausible: *ruwwiḥat* (زُوِّجَت < روحب < رُوِّحَت).
>
> William G. Oxtoby (1968)[33] mentions Safaitic ארח *ʾrḥ* which, according to him, means "to give rest," a hiphʿil/aphʿel or form IV, Standard Arabic أراح.
> The context of the inscription in which *ʾrḥ* occurs, Oxtoby 79, is, however, different from that of the three Littmann inscriptions. Oxtoby 79 is a short inscription of ten words. It does not refer to the dead. It must refer to a herd since *rʿy*, "to pasture," cf. Hebrew רעה, is used.
>
> Oxtoby also refers to C 4956[34] where Allāt is asked to grant rest to the dead. Here too we meet with an imperative, of form IV of *rwḥ*, not a form II.
>
> C 2718, on the other hand, again may show a form II of *rwH*: פהבעלסמן רוח *f-h-bʿl-smn rwḥ*, "O Lord of the Heavens, give rest." It is difficult to put a precise date to Safaitic inscriptions. They are written in a form of early Arabic. They are assumed to date back to the third/fourth century AD.

Daniel King of Cardiff University has argued from the perspective of a Syriacist that though Luxenberg's "method is severely lacking in many areas, . . . he may on occasion have hit upon a useful emendation. Thus, although the hypothesis as a whole is faulty, the individual textual suggestions ought to be treated on a case-by-case basis."[35] King criticizes Luxenberg's frequent recourse to metathesis. However, even al-Manẓūr in his *Lisān al-ʿArab,* tells us that the "Arabs are exceedingly fond of metathesis," and Luxenberg's examples must be judged on a case-by-case basis. Also, King, like many others, deplores Luxenberg's use of Yaʿqob Awgen (Jacques-Eugène) Manna's *Chaldean-Arabic Dictionary*, which first appeared in 1900. But in fact Manna (1867–1928) frequently refers to the earliest Syriac literature, and he depends, for instance, on Bar Bahlul's tenth-century dictionary. Finally, here is how the

prestigious Dumbarton Oaks Library of Georgetown, Washington, DC, describes Manna:

> Y. A. Manna, *Qāmūs kaldānī-ʿarabī / Vocabulaire chaldeen-arabe / Chaldean Arabic Dictionary*, 2nd ed., with suppl. by R. Bidawid (Beirut, 1975).
>
> This is an outstanding dictionary. Its main defect is that Manna does not provide citations to let one know what texts he is deriving his words and definitions from, but Syriac scholars have often made recourse to this dictionary and always with profit. For instance, Brockelmann's second edition (still under copyright) is extraordinary in its coverage of rare words—it is a not uncommon experience to be reading an off-the-beaten-track text, come across an unknown or unfamiliar word, not find it in Mrs. Margoliouth's Dictionary or the Thesaurus, and then to find its meaning in Brockelmann, with a citation from precisely (and sometimes, only) the passage being read. Brockelmann also has meanings which you cannot find in Payne Smith (but, it should be noted, the opposite is sometimes true), and reading an author like Jacob of Sarugh is much easier when done with Brockelmann at one's side. With all this said, however, we have, on a number of occasions, found meanings in Manna that are in neither Brockelmann nor in Payne Smith. This can be especially true when reading unpublished texts in manuscript. Manna is definitely a lexical resource that is worth keeping ready to hand. It is Syriac-Arabic, but even a person with a basic grasp of the Arabic alphabet and a lexicon like Steingass's *Arabic-English Dictionary* nearby (which lists words alphabetically rather than by root) can profit from using Manna. It is a real gem and an underappreciated resource in the world of Syriac dictionaries. This is a re-typing of Manna, in modern Arabic and Syriac fonts.[36]

One may note that King does not accept Luxenberg's arguments concerning the *waw* of apodosis in Koranic Arabic (King, pp. 55–61). However, in a forth-coming article, Guillaume Dye makes a convincing case for its plausibility.[37]

Luxenberg's revolutionary study has given us not only new readings and interpretations of the difficult and problematic passages of the Koran, but he has also provided us with a methodology. Several scholars have taken up the challenge and applied his methods to make discoveries for themselves. Munther Younes, in an article included in the present volume, proceeds in an exemplary fashion, reconstructing

> the first five verses of Koran 100 (*wa-l-ʿādiyāt*) by changing the dotting scheme of four words. Informed by a close examination of the syntactic structure and vocabulary of these verses and a comparison with cognates in Syriac and Hebrew, two languages with a clear influence on the Qurʾān, this recon-

struction results in a narrative that is more coherent semantically and syntactically than the traditional interpretation. Whereas in the traditional interpretation these verses describe steeds charging into battle, in my reconstruction they refer to maidens bringing light to the world.

Munther Younes's study is one of two paths to follow in order to build on the work of Luxenberg. The second path is also very rewarding, especially in the hands of gifted scholars such as Jan Van Reeth and Guillaume Dye, who bring to bear on Koranic problems their immense knowledge of the history of Christianity, the Old and New Testaments, the Apocrypha, Targumim, and the Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac writings. Dye, in a superb essay,[38] builds on Luxenberg's insights on Surah 97 (*sūrat al-qadr*), submitting it, with patience and analytical brilliance, to the most thorough examination imaginable, suggesting every possible objection to Luxenberg's thesis, and then answering those objections. Dye thereby strengthens Lux-enberg's position. Finally, he clinches the argument by proposing a Syriac text as the direct inspiration for Surah 97, namely *Hymns on the Nativity* by Ephrem the Syrian. Luxenberg provides the restored text of the Koran, while Van Reeth and Dye refine the new readings and provide the Christian sources.

Thus Luxenberg's work has truly opened up a new era in Koranic Studies. He has provided the philology. His colleagues and coresearchers must now provide the historical context, and furnish the Judaeo-Christian and other Near Eastern and Babylonian sources.

2. Precursors of Luxenberg: Anticipations and Contrasts

Luxenberg, concentrating on philology, had left the historical context of his new readings of the Koran to the historians. By the mid-nineteenth century, Western historians of religion had already begun writing on the influence of Christianity on the religious ideas to be found in the Koran. More specifically, for a few scholars this Christianity was felt to be some form of Ebionism. It is also remarkable that many of these scholars came to the study of Islam with a solid grounding in Christian theology, hence their perspective was firmly theological, not philological.

In a tantalizing introduction to his *Der Ursrpung des Islams und das Cristentum*,[39] Swedish scholar Tor Andrae (1885–1947), historian of comparative religion and bishop of Linköping, indicates some of the scholars of the late-nineteenth century who had anticipated some of his own conclusions on the influence of Syrian Christianity on the Koran:

> Since Sprenger [1813–1893] established his important thesis of the similarity between the Qurʾānic doctrine of revelation and Elchaism, one finds, among all the scholars who consecrate some time on the influence of Christianity on

the world of religious ideas of Muḥammad, the conviction that this Christianity must have been some sort of Ebionism.[40]

Thus Harnack (1851–1930), the German Lutheran theologian, suggested in 1874 that Islam should be viewed as a branch or descendant of a Jewish-Christian heretical sect, very probably the Elkesaites. Harnack wrote,

> Islam is the transformation of Jewish religion, which itself had already been transformed by Gnostic Jewish Christianity on an Arabic base and by a great prophet.

This idea is bolstered by the remarks of the Syrian exegete Theodor bar Koni, who, toward the end of the eighth century, without mentioning Islam, confirms the presence of Elkesaites in northwest Arabia.

In a decisive manner, the Judaeo-Christian sects, particularly Elchaism, are taken to have provided the models to Muhammad as much as Christianity in the writings of Gerhard Uhlhorn (1826–1901),[41] also a Lutheran theologian; Hugo J. Bestmann (1854–1925)[42]; Henry Preserved Smith (1847–1926)[43]; and Édouard Sayous (1842–1898).[44]

Sayous, for instance, wrote:

> L'influence capitale sur la naissance de l'Islam a été celle de trois dérivés de l'Essénisme, à savoir le Nazaréisme, l'Elkésaïsme, et le Hanyfisme. . . . Le judéo-christianisme nazaréen, qui se distinguait de l'ébionitisme proprement dit par une tendance judaïque plus modérée, et par la reconnaissance de la naissance miraculeuse du Christ, a été certainement la provenance principale des notions de Mahomet sur la vie de Jésus. . . . L'elkésaïsme, secte de même origine, et qui a développé avec des allures mystérieuses, au Sud de la Mer Morte, les doctrines des Homélies clémentines; l'elkésaïsme, avec sa négligence systématique des épitres de Saint-Paul, avec son livre secret venu du ciel, avec son incorporation de l'Esprit de Dieu dans une série de prophètes depuis Adam jusqu'à Jésus, a dû être la provenance principale des opinions de Mahomet sur lui-même, sur l'Écriture et sur son Coran.[45] [Of paramount influence for the emergence of Islam were three offshoots of Essenism, i.e., Nazareism, Elchesaism and Hanifism. . . . Nazarene Judeo-Christianity, which was distinguished from Ebionism proper by a more moderate Jewish tendency and by the recognition of the miraculous birth of Christ, was certainly the primary source for Mohammed's notions about Jesus' life . . . Elchesaism, a sect of the same origin, which, on mysterious ways in the south of the Dead Sea, developed the doctrines of the Clementine Homilies; Elchesaism, with its systematic negligence of the epistles of St. Paul, with its secret book, which had come down from heaven, with its incorporation of the Holy Spirit in a series of prophets starting with Adam and ending with Jesus, must have been the

main source of Mohammed's opinions about himself and the scripture of the Koran!]

For Tor Andrae, it was Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) who gave the most penetrating account of the depth and extent of the influence of Christianity on nascent Islam deriving the Christian elements from Christian asceticism. The strands in the Koran that seem to depend on Jewish teachings were, according to Wellhausen, mediated through apocryphal and pseudepigraphal Christian sources.[46] For Wellhausen, the Christianity in question must have been Monophysite, Nestorian, or Judeo-Christian.

Andrae does not believe we can attribute everything in the Koran to Ebionism. Instead he turns to the history of Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula. Persuaded by Nöldeke, Andrae believes that it was Syrian Christianity that predominated in the Yemen, and that "the liturgical language, very likely, must have been Syriac."[47]

The Church in southern Arabia had lost touch with Western Christianity and was unable to fight Nestorian missionary zeal. Andrae wrote[48]:

> The similarity between Mohammed's religion and Syrian Christianity appears not only in the general agreement of the content of ideas, but also in expression, form, and style of preaching. In this connection a study of Afrem (Ephraim the Syrian) [i.e., Ephrem the Syrian or St. Ephrem the Syrian, Syriac: ܡܳܪܝ̱ ܐܰܦܪܶܝܡ ܣܘܪܝܳܝܐ, *Mār Efrêm Sûryāyâ*; Greek: Ἐφραίμ ὁ Σύρος; Latin: *Ephraem Syrus*; *ca.* 306–373, Ephrem, henceforth], the greatest preacher of the Syrian church is instructive. This church father, who was held in the highest esteem both by Monophysites and Nestorians, discussed no other subjects with such partiality and such rhetorical power as the eschatological themes: death, the judgment, and eternal rewards. We find many points of similarity between his sermons on the judgment and the well-known descriptions of the Qur'ān, even expressions and images being often in striking agreement. A glance at Ephrem's *Hymns of Paradise* is of special interest. . . . [It is an] irrefutable fact that the Qur'ān's descriptions of Paradise were inspired by the ideas of this Christian Syrian preacher. Ephrem's *Hymns of Paradise* depict the joys of the blessed in very mundane colours.
>
>> I saw the dwelling-places of the just, and they themselves, dripping with ointments, giving forth pleasant odours, wreathed in flowers and decked with fruits. . . . When they lie at the table the trees offer their shade in the clear air. Flowers grow beneath them and fruits above. Their roof is composed of fruits and their carpets are of flowers. . . . Swift winds stand before the blessed, ready to do their will. One of them wafts appeasement, another causes drinks to flow. One wind is filled with oil, another with ointment. Who among you has ever seen the winds act as servants! or breezes which one may eat and drink! In

Paradise the winds give nourishment in a spiritual fashion to spiritual beings. It is a feast without effort, and the hands do not become tired. . . . Think, O aged one, of Paradise! When its aroma refreshes you and its pleasant odours renew your youth, your blemishes will vanish in the beauty which surrounds you. Let Moses be an example to you. His cheeks, which were covered with wrinkles, became beautiful and radiant. This is a mystical symbol, showing how age shall be rejuvenated in Paradise.

The wine which the redeemed enjoy is likewise not lacking in the Christian Paradise, and one may recognize a veiled reference to the virgins of Paradise in Ephrem's saying:

Whoever has abstained from wine on earth, for him do the vines of Paradise yearn. Each one of them holds out to him a bunch of grapes. And if a man has lived in chastity, they (feminine) receive him in a pure bosom, because he as a monk did not fall into the bosom and bed of earthly love.

To be sure, Ephrem occasionally points out that this is only an attempt to give some idea of a joy which no earthly mind is able to grasp. But most of his listeners and readers no doubt remained quite oblivious to his feeble attempts to spiritualize his sensual images. Popular piety certainly interpreted this daring imagery in a crass and literal sense, and under such circumstances one cannot blame a citizen of pagan Mecca for doing the same thing.[49]

Where did Muhammad acquire the notion that the soul sinks into complete unconsciousness after death, so that the Day of Judgment seems to follow immediately after death? Tor Andrae believes the Koranic doctrine is derived from the Nestorian Church in Persia, and its most prominent theologian, Babai the Great. As Andrae argues:

Besides quoting scriptural passages to prove his theory, Babai also cites the legend of the seven sleepers, which Mohammed likewise used for the same purpose (18, 8–24). . . . In my opinion this, along with other reasons, proves that Mohammed received from the Nestorians of Persia the impressions which decisively influenced his personal message. The Christian Arabs of Hira, on the border of Mesopotamia, with whom the Meccans were in especially vital contact, belonged to the Nestorian Church.[50]

Tor Andrae's approach is theological, but he is not entirely insensitive to linguistic matters. Just before Alphonse Mingana, and several years before Arthur Jeffery, Andrae is confident of the origin of the word *qur'ān*: "The

word used in the Syrian Church for the scripture reading in Divine Service, *qeryānā*, Mohammed took and applied as a title to his revelation."[51] Andrae also believes that the Arabic *ḥanīf* comes from the Syriac *hanp̄a*.[52]

Edmund Beck famously attacked Tor Andrae for the above analysis. But as Sidney Griffith shows, in an article reproduced in the present volume, Beck simply missed Andrae's point altogether:

> Andrae did not actually say that Ephraem envisioned houris in Paradise. Rather, he suggested that "popular piety," not to mention "a citizen of pagan Mecca," might have been inspired by such lines as Ephraem wrote to conjure up the houris.[53]

Ephrem the Syrian is invoked once again to support another reading of Luxenberg's. Guillaume Dye, in the article referred to above, argues persuasively that Luxenberg's interpretation of Surah 97 (*al-Qadr*) is prefigured in Ephrem's *Hymns on the Nativity* or *Madrāšē ḏ-bēṯ yaldā*. Hymn 21: 2, 1–2 sings: "Let us not take our vigil (*šahrā*) as an ordinary vigil; It is a celebration whose reward passes beyond one hundred for one."

Though hymn 21 was not accepted, at first, as authentic by some scholars, but, for no less a figure than Edmund Beck, the editor of Ephrem's poems in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium,*

> who had a great sense of what is genuine and what is not, this hymn is pretty certainly genuine, even if it is not one of those preserved in 6th-century manuscripts.[54]

Sebastian Brock, one of the greatest contemporary scholars of Syriac literature, "would certainly agree with him."[55]

There is another scholar who arrives at a smilar conclusion to Luxenberg's concerning Surah 97. Padre Giulio Basetti-Sani (1912–2001), Tuscan nobleman and Franciscan, O. F. M (*Order of Friars Minor*, or *Ordo Fratrum Minorum*), firm believer, and active in Muslim-Christian dialogues, studied at the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies in Rome, and taught at various universities in Europe and the United States. Basetti-Sani began his Koranic research with the assumption that the Koran was of divine origin, a fact that, he feels, Catholic scholars can verify by applying to it the rules of hermeneutics used in Biblical research. He is convinced that the mystery of Christ may also be found in the Koran, whose mysteries can be revealed with a Christian key. Basetti-Sani wrote:

> The story of Christ, his apostles, and Christian origins is absent from the Qurʾān. Those for whom the Qurʾān is intended are just barely at the first glimmerings of some knowledge of Christ. It is reserved to Christians to supply what the Qurʾān did not proclaim.

In the section of his book *The Koran in the Light of Christ*,[56] titled "A Christian Reading of the Qur'ān Discovers Christ in the Full Meaning of the Texts," Basetti-Sani writes:

> It has been regarded as legitimate for Muslim exegetes to give full rein to their imaginations, which has resulted in fantastic interpretations of a text. This being so, I feel justified in attempting, in the light of Christ, and basing myself upon the hypothetically sacred origin of the Qur'ān, to bring out all that there may be in the Koran about Christ, reading the text in its "fuller sense."
>
> > In truth we revealed it [made it come down]
> > on the Night of Destiny.
> > Whatever may be the Night of Destiny?
> > The Night of Destiny is more beautiful than a thousand months.
> > There descend Angels and the Spirit
> > with the permission of God,
> > to settle every thing.
> > Night of Peace even to the coming of the dawn. (Sura 97:1–5)

The usual interpretation of Muslims and Orientalists sees this sura as describing the "night" in which the Koran was communicated, all at once, to Mohammed. But this descent of the complete Koran in one night contains a contradiction, which exegetes get around by saying that God took it back again into Heaven and then revealed it anew, but this time in sections, one at a time. Because this "explanation" is based upon the theory that the Koran was an actual, physical book, written in Heaven, I cannot accept it. This is one more place where we have to "dematerialize."

The night of *Qadr* is Christmas night, when Christ made his visible appearance upon earth. This is the night of "power," during which the divine decree was carried out: "the mystery which was hidden from ages and generations" (Colossians 1:26, Ephesians 1:4–14). The Semite's mind—and this includes the Bible, of course—sees night as the time of darkness, or ignorance and unbelief (Romans 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:5). It is also the time of affliction and sorrow (Isaiah 21:12). It is the time of death: "Night comes, when no one can work" (John 9:4). But *this* night is the only one of its kind; it is the night of destiny, and more beautiful than a thousand months. During it the angels descend, which immediately calls to mind the angels at Bethlehem (Luke 2:13). The Koran calls Jesus "a Spirit from the Lord" (sura 4:171). Jesus is witnessed to by the "Spirit of Holiness" (sura 2:87, 253; sura 5: 110). Hence the phrase makes sense if we read it as referring to the descent of the Spirit of Holiness with Jesus on Christmas night. The phrase "with God's permission," which is found in other texts of the Koran where the subject is Jesus' activity (sura 3:49), must be seen as the full adherence of the human will of Christ to

the divine will (John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38), as that perfect obedience to the Father which earned the exaltation of the Son's name (Philippians 2:7–11).

min kulli 'amrin, which some translate "to establish everything," granted its wide range of meanings (*'Amr* = "command," "order," "divine plan or decree"), can be understood in the Pauline sense that the whole plan of creation is fixed and founded upon Christ. And the "night of peace" is that night when peace was heralded by the angels to all men with whom God is pleased (Luke 2:14).

The Koran recites the story of the birth of Jesus in another passage (sura 19:22–35); but here we have a personal vision or revelation to Mohammed which calls up the tremendous mystery of God's goodness to men. Other passages of the Koran also refer to this night of destiny, or rather night of the birth, and Muslim exegetes and Orientalists explain them as the night of the Koran's descent. But this reinterpretation in the light of Christ allows me to refer them to Christ's birth:

> H. M.
> [By means of] the Most Clear Book
> In truth we have revealed it
> in a BLESSED NIGHT that men might be warned
> In that night every wise order was decreed. (sura 44:1–4)

The "most clear book" is not the Koran. When we dematerialize this passage, as we do for the vision of Ezekiel (2:9), the book is a symbol of the gospel revelation: of God's Word, who on Christmas night manifested himself to mankind. Christ enters the world to alert men and to witness to the truth. Nor is the plural *We* merely the majestic plural; it is the *We* of the three divine Persons. The sura goes on, and becomes an argument with the Jews of Mecca. It runs thus: If now, at this time, the preaching of the prophet Mohammed is a new call of God to his people, the fact that the Jews rejected the message of Christ in times past gives reason to think that they are about to do the same thing this time.

> But how can the Warning aid them,
> when a clear Messenger already came to them!
> And still they disdainfully turned their
> shoulders and said:
> "Crazy Imposter." (sura 44:13–14)

Cf. John 10:19–21:

> 19: There was a divison therefore among the Jews for these sayings.
> 20: And many of them said, "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?"
> 21: Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind.

The works of Luxenberg and Hartwig Hirschfeld (1854–1934)[57] intersect at a number of interesting points.

In his analysis of Surah 96:1–19, Luxenberg dicusses the correct interpretation of the expression *iqra'* (actually *iqrā*) *bi-smi rabbika*:

> Hartwig Hirschfeld, who in pointing to the frequent occurrence in the Bible of the Hebrew expression *qrā ḇ-šem Yahwē*, had translated the Qur'ānic expression correctly with "proclaim the name of thy Lord!"[58]

Hirschfeld[59] himself had written:

> [I translated the word *iqra'*] by "proclaim," my object being to call attention to the early misunderstanding of the word by traditionists and interpreters of the Qur'ān as well as by modern translators and biographers of the Prophet. For the sentence in question is nothing but an Arabic version of the phrase in the Pentateuch (Gen. XII.8 in connection with IV.26), "He proclaimed the name of the Lord."

Hirschfeld then discusses the various aspects of the legend of *Baḥīrā*, the putative mentor of Muhammad, mentioned in Ibn Ishaq's *Sīra* and in Ibn Saʻd's biography of the prophet. Hirschfeld concludes that the elements from which the legends have been developed "represent homilies on several Biblical passages which have become mixed up," passages such as 1 Sam. 16:2–13.

> The boy David who is left in the field to tend the sheep, while his brothers are brought before the Prophet, but who is fetched at the request of the latter, corresponds to the boy Muḥammad left behind with the luggage. . . . It may not be superfluous to remark that the term *bāḥar* ("has chosen") occurs three times (1 Sam. 16, verses 9, 10, 11) in the report of the proceedings. With this we must connect Ps. 78:10; 84:4, 20, where the word *b'ḥirī*, whilst referring to David, gives a clue to the meaning of the name *Baḥīrā* . . . [which] is thus nothing but the personification of the (New) Hebrew term *bḥīrā* ("Election") which is quite common. Now Muḥammad was acquainted with several verses in the Old Testament in which the form *b'ḥir* ("chosen") is used in reference to Israel (Isaiah 45:4: "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect. . . ."); Isaiah 44:1: "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen;" to Moses (Psalms, 104:23: "Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him. . . .") as can be seen from Qur'ān Sura 7:141: "He said: O Moses! I have preferred thee above mankind. . . ."; Sura 27:59: "Say: Praise be to Allah, and peace be on His slaves whom he hath chosen! . . ." (cf. Sura 35:32: "Then We gave the Scripture as inheritance unto those whom We elected of our bondmen. . . ."; Sura 44:32: "And We

chose them purposely, above (all) creatures."). The Arabic translation of *b'ḥīr* is *almuṣṭafā*, one of Muḥammad's names. He is himself the Baḥirā. . . . As we now see the Baḥīrā legend represents a profusion of Biblical ideas blended together in a manner similar to the Jewish Agāda. There is, however, another point which occurs in various versions of the legend, viz., the tree casting its shadow wherever Muḥammad sat. This situation is described, Song of Solomon 2:3, where we find the apple tree, the sitting under its shadow, and the word *himmadti* in which it should not be difficult now to recognize the embryo of the name Muḥammad, the roots ḤMD and BḤR being in some degree synonymous in Hebrew (see Ezek. 23:6, 12, 23) the former makes an appropriate rendition in Arabic for the latter which has quite a different meaning. From this we may conclude that the time when the Prophet assumed the name Muḥammad coincides with that when the first elements of the Baḥīrā legend were produced, which can only have been very shortly before his death. The name Muḥammad, it is true, occurs several times in the Qurʾān, but there are grave doubts as to the genuineness of the verses in question.[60]

Both Gerd Puin and Luxenberg, in forthcoming articles, argue, in their different ways, that the four terms in Surah 5, verse 103—*baḥīrāh*, *sāʾibah*, *waṣilah*, and *hami*—have nothing whatsoever to do with "sacrificial camels," rather they point to certain classes of people who, in other religions, may play a role as individuals who intercede with God for man but who are forbidden in Islam; ancient priests or notables; and finally, the elects. Luxenberg interprets *Baḥīrāh* in the same way as Hirschfeld above; that is, as a term meaning "chosen," "elect." Frère Bruno Bonnet-Eymard[61] also translates *Baḥīrāh* as "the chosen," "elect" ("élu"), referring to Isaiah 42:1 ("Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth"), and he cites from that passage in Isaiah the Hebrew word *bāḥīr*, meaning "elect."

Let us come back to Hirschfeld, who makes a series of observations that seem to me pertinent to Luxenberg's arguments concerning the term *muḥammad*, which Luxenberg takes to mean the "praised one," referring to Jesus. Silvestre de Sacy suggested in 1832 that Surah 3:144 (Flügel number= 3:138) was inauthentic; that is, a later interpolation. The verse concerned reads:

> Muḥammad is but a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dieth or is slain, ye will turn back on your heels? He who turneth back doth no hurt to Allah, and Allah will reward the thankful. (3:144)

Needless to say, the Islamic tradition has fabricated another specimen of those innumerable *asbāb al-nuzūl* ("occasions/reasons of sending down" [of Koranic verses]). For this verse, as Hirschfeld tells us,

the Moslims, relates Al Tabari, seeing the Prophet on the ground, called: "If he be dead, [remember that] all Messengers before him have died." When Muḥammad recovered consciousness, he revealed Sura 3:144.

Hirschfeld continues:

I believe neither in the authenticity of this exclamation, nor of the verse in question. . . . The verse contains yet another element which speaks against its authenticity, *viz.,* the name Muḥammad. I even go further and assert that all verses in the *Qur'ān* in which this name, or Aḥmad, occurs are spurious. The reasons on which I base my suggestions are the following.

In Chapter II. I have endeavoured to shew that the fabrication of the name *Muḥammad* stands in close connection with the elements of the Baḥīrā legend. If this be so, that name could not have come into practical use until a period of the Prophet's life, when the material of the *Qur'ān* was all but complete. Now it might be objected that the texts of the missionary letters which Muḥammad commenced to send in the seventh year of the Hijra to unconverted Arab chiefs, as well as to foreign potentates, were headed by the phrase: "From Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allah, to, *etc.*"—The authenticity of the majority of these letters, one of which will occupy our attention presently, is very doubtful, and besides, even if the genuineness of the texts of the documents be admitted, the superscription may have been added by the traditionists who took it for granted. At any rate I do not believe that *Muḥammad* was an official name till after the conversion of Abd Allāh b. Salām, or a year or two before his death. At the period of the battle of Uḥud (A. H. 3) there was certainly no trace of the name, and it is too superfluous to demonstrate how unlikely it was that Muḥammad's friends, seeing him prostrate, should have uttered the words quoted above. If they had really thought him dead, they would have run away, as all would then have been lost. If, on the other hand, we assume that the name *Muḥammad* was meant to signify something similar to *Messiah,* the verse in question is nothing but an imitation of the chief portion of another which was revealed *before* the battle of Badr (*Sura* 5:75) and runs thus: "The Messiah the son of Maryam, is nothing but a Messenger, the messengers before him have passed away. . . ." The authors of 3:144 simply replaced *almasīḥ 'bnu Maryama* by *Muḥammad,* and the verse was ready.

This is, however, not the only *Muḥammad-verse* which stands in connection with the Baḥīrā legend, as in *Sura.* 33:40 we find another reference to it. This revelation is appended to one of the paragraphs which deal with the affairs of Muḥammad's wives, though it does not belong to it, the preceding sermon ending with verse 39. As each of these paragraphs commences with the words: "O thou Prophet!" we have seen that they refer to matters prior to

the adoption of the name *Muḥammad.* The verse in question runs thus: "Muḥammad is no father of any of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets, Allah knows everything." From its very place we can gather that the verse's only function is the condonation of the Prophet's marriage with the divorced wife of his adopted son, which event took place in the year *four.* As to the "Seal of the Prophets," this is surely nothing but a skilful alteration of the "Seal of prophecy" in the Baḥīrā legend.

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une note savante sur commentaire coranique d'Ibn al-Naqīb (died 698/1298)," in R. Arnzen and J. Thielman, eds., *Words, Texts and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Studies on the Sources, Contents and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy and Science*, dedicated to Gerhard Endress on his sixty-fifth birthday (Leuven/Paris: Peeters, 2004), pp. 33–69; Gilliot, "Une Reconstruction Critique du Coran ou Comment en Finir avec les Merveilles de la Lampe d'Aladin?" in Manfred Kropp, ed., *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'ān: The question of a Historico-critical Text of the Qur'ān* (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2007).

18 Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, "Language and Style of the Qur'ān," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), pp. 109–35.

19 Ibid., pp. 130–32.

20 Claude Gilliot, "The 'Collections' of the Meccan Arabic Lectionary," in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh and Joas Wagemakers, eds., *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011), p. 108.

21 For example, F. Corriente, "From Old Arabic to Classical Arabic through the Pre-Islamic Koiné: Some Notes on the Native Grammarians' Sources, Attitudes and Goals," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 21 (1976): 62–98.

22 Federico Corriente, "On a proposal for a 'Syro-Aramaic' reading of the Qur'ān," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 1 (2003): 305–314.

23 Ibid., p. 314.

24 Crone wrote, "All [such] suggestions should be dismissed out of hand. . . . That places explicitly identified as southeast Arabian should have been misconstrued as Qurashī domains says much about the intoxicating effect of Mecca on the source-critical faculties of otherwise sober scholars. So does the identification of Ptolemy's *Macoraba* with Mecca, which has gained almost universal acceptance. It was first made on the ground that the names were vaguely similar and the location vaguely right, Macoraba being assumed to reproduce a name such as Makka-Rabba, 'Great Mecca.' But this is a most implausible construction, which has since been replaced by *makrab* or *mikrāb*, meaning temple. But in the first place the root *krb* does not denote holiness in Arabic, as opposed to South Arabian, so that once again the language reflected would not be the one expected. In the second place, a name composed of the consonants *mkk* cannot be derived from the root *krb*. It follows that Ptolemy would be referring to a sanctuary town which was not called Mecca. Why then identify the two? Rescue attempts such as *mikrāb* Makka, 'the sanctuary of Mecca,' are no better than Makka-Rabba, for all that we clearly need some sort of addition to account for the feminine form reflected in the Greek. The plain truth is that the name of *Macoraba* has nothing to do with that of Mecca, and that location indicated by Ptolemy for *Macoraba* in no way dictates identification of the two." Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.135–36.

25 Jonathan Owens, *A Linguistic History of Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 121.

26 Martin F. J. Baasten, "Review of Christoph Luxenberg (ps.), *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), " *Aramaic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2004): 268–72.

27 Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007), p. 44.

28 Y. Tzvi Langermann (Professor of Arabic at Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel) in *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 122.

29 Ibid., p. 123.

30 Johannes J. G. Jansen, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 60, nos. 3–4 (May–August 2003), columns 477–80.

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    http://www.arabistjansen.nl/rawwahnaahum .pdf (accessed April 24, 2014).

32 Enno Littmann, "Thamud und Safa," *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 25, no. 1 (1940), Kraus reprint, Nendeln (Liechtenstein) 1966. [See index at p. 161 sub רוח, rwḥ].

33 W. G. Oxtoby, *Some Inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 52–53.

34 *C: Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum: Pars Quinta Inscriptiones Saracenicas Continens,* inscription 4956: p. 607; C 2718: p. 355 (Paris, 1950).

34 Daniel King, "A Christian Qur'ān? A Study in the Syrian Background to the Language of the Qur'an as Presented in the Work of Christoph Luxenberg," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 3, 44–71 (2009): 1.

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36 Guillaume Dye, "Traces of Bilingualism/Multilingualism in the Qur'ānic Text," in Ahmad al-Jallad, ed., *Arabic in Context*, Papers of Congress, 2–3, November 2013, Leiden University. Forthcoming.

38 Guillaume Dye, "La Nuit du Destin et la Nuit de la Nativité," in Guillaume Dye and Fabien Nobilio, eds., *Figures Bibliques en Islam* (Brussels: E. M. E. and Inter-Communications, 2011), pp. 107–169.

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40 Ibid., pp. 9–10.

41 Gerhard Uhlhorn, "Ebioniten," in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (RE), 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1898), pp. 125–28.

42 Hugo Johannes Bestmann, *Die Anfänge des katholischen Christentums und des Islams* (Nördlingen, 1884).

43 Henry Preserved Smith, *The Bible and Islam* (New York, 1897).

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47 Andrae, *Origines de l'Islam et le Christianisme*, p. 21.

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57 Hirschfeld was born in Prussia, received his Dr. phil. from the University of Strassburg for his study "Jüdische Elemente im Koran: ein Beitrag zur Korān-forschung," and eventually became professor of Semitic languages at University College, London.

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