

Foreword to the English Edition

Comparative religious and cultural studies, historical linguistics and philology, especially when the object of one's study are ancient manuscripts, are generally perceived as disciplines of semi-autistic quixotic bookworms, who volunteer to be buried alive in an ivory-tower, where they can avoid contact with living beings and instead plunge into the assiduous study of yellowed manuscripts and dusty old books with incomprehensible contents.

A short look at the history of modern Western civilization, the roots of the Era of Enlightenment and the development of scholarly standards, however, teaches us that it was precisely this often ridiculed brand of humans that prompted a development bound to change the world.

Until the mid 17th century the Bible was considered the "word of God", and especially the Pentateuch was universally acknowledged as a series of books written by Moses himself. It was the philological studies of people like the philosophers Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), Thomas Hobbes, Isaac de la Peyrère and the French scholar Jean Astruc, who started to question the authorship of this legendary figure for the whole Pentateuch, one of their arguments being the use of the two forms "Yahwe" and "Elohim" to designate God.

The doubt they cast on the divine nature of the Bible led to the spiritual revolution commonly called the *Age of Enlightenment*, replacing the primacy of legends, superstitions and alleged revelation by reason, science and rationality.

This process, however, did not take place without backlashes – the human mind often favoring the comfortable way of *believing* over the more demanding one of *thinking* – and the struggle between rationalists and fundamentalists, in some cases rationalist and fundamentalist civilizations, is now more violent than ever.

"Enlightenment" – in Arabic "Inārah", – was chosen as the name of an interdisciplinary group of researchers, originally a Germany-based research society, albeit with members from many countries, which has taken the first steps to rewriting the Islamic history of the first two centuries as it can be reconstructed from material evidence and by strictly applying the historical-critical method.

If one consults any European or American encyclopedia and looks up the entry "Islam", one will find the same legendary story about the beginning of Islam, of the prophet Muḥammad who was born in Mecca around 570 CE, received his first revelation at about the age of forty, founded the religion of Islam and started a new Empire, which just one generation after his death had

become a superpower. The same applies for introductory books on religions, Middle Eastern history, documentaries, news programs etc.

Although the first doubts as to the veracity of these reports were already uttered almost forty years ago, – people like Günter Lüling, John Wansbrough and Patricia Crone/ Michael Cook have to be mentioned here –, their opinions and research results have deliberately been ignored and left out of standard works concerning Islamic Studies. At best they were mentioned as mavericks outside the accepted scholarly community.

Unlike Buddhist studies, Iranian Studies, Sinology, Indology and Egyptology – well-established disciplines in our universities –, it is only representatives of Islamic Studies who refuse to question the dogmata, tenets and axioms of the civilization they purport to study. In order not to be reproached with what Edward Said called “orientalism”, Western Islamicists keep treating the Muslim tradition as sacrosanct, no matter how thin and questionable the material evidence, and even the myths of the origin of the Qurʾān are taken as a basis for all further study.

INĀRAH wants nothing short of a *paradigm shift*. In Germany, so far six anthologies have appeared (the seventh is in preparation, see below) of an average size of about 600 pages. Moreover, two of our members, Christoph Luxenberg and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, have written monographs about their studies. The reactions to our publications have been mixed so far. While some Islamologists were very open-minded, others did not even deign to consider our arguments. Only two of our publications have been translated into English so far:

Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*, Berlin 2007.

Karl-Heinz Ohlig / Gerd-R Puin (eds.), *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research into Its Early History*, Prometheus Books 2009.

In the English-speaking world, the reactions were equally mixed as they were in Germany, with one major difference: Only the two publications that had been translated into English appear in bibliographies. Although Christoph Luxenberg’s monograph has been widely discussed in printed and digital form, one of his best articles – the one about the mysterious letters in the Qurʾān – has been entirely ignored as it was published only in German in our third anthology.

The plan to have all of our books translated into English is not new, but considering that INĀRAH is a private society entirely dependent on the donations of members and supporters, this plan had to be postponed.

The present translation of the second anthology would not have been possible without the donation of a private supporter and the kind help we have received from Ibn Warraq.

The translations were made by myself and a small team of translators/ proof-readers. In some cases the authors of the single contributions also checked the English version and in many cases suggested additions and some minor changes, which, however, never affect the core results.

In the German version most of the Qur'anic quotations had been taken from Paret's prestigious translation with copious commentary. If not otherwise indicated, the English "default" translation is Pickthall's well-known version. For Bible quotations the "New American Standard" was chosen. The transliteration of Qur'anic passages is from Hans Zirker's version, which is downloadable as a pdf-file:

http://www.eslam.de/begriffe/t/transliteration_des_quran.htm

We hope that this publication will help foster debate on the emergence of Islam, on scientific standards and on history in the sense of "what really happened" and not "what we would like to have happened".

*Markus Gross,
Editor of the English edition
Co-editor (together with K.-H. Ohlig) of INĀRAH anthologies 3-6*

Other anthologies of the "Inārah Institute for Research on Early Islamic History and the Koran":

Markus Gross / Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.), Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte (Inārah. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran, Vol. 3), publisher: Verlag Hans Schiler: Berlin 2008, 617 pages.

Markus Gross / Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.), Vom Koran zum Islam (Inārah. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran, Vol. 4), Verlag Hans Schiler: Berlin 2009, 721 pages.

Markus Gross / Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.), Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion I. (Inārah. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran, Vol. 5), Verlag Hans Schiler: Berlin 2010, 490 pages.

Markus Gross / Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.), Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion II. (Inārah. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran, Vol. 6), Verlag Hans Schiler: Berlin 2012, 820 pages.

in preparation:

Markus Gross / Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.), Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion III. (Inārah. Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran, Vol. 7), Verlag Hans Schiler: Berlin.