Book Review: Scripture, Poetry And The Making Of A Community– Reading The Qur'an As A Literary Text

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al-Islam.org

Message of Thaqalayn Vol. 16, no 4, Winter 2016

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Publisher(s):

Ahlul Bayt World Assembly [5]

Book Review – scripture, poetry and the making of a community: Reading the Qur'an as a literary text

Review by Muhammad Legehnhausen The Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute, Qom, Iran. This book, by Angelika Neuwirth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) published by OUP in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, contains forty pages of front material, 430 pages of text, including notes at the end of each chapter, and another forty pages divided among the bibliography, index of Qur'anic citations, index of Biblical and Post-Biblical citations, and a general index. The text is a collection of articles that were written between 1990 and 2012, some of which have been substantially revised for this collection, and many of which are translations of German publications. The author, who has been acclaimed with honorary doctorates and academic prizes, including the Iranian book of the year award for her *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, and, most recently, the prestigious Leopold-Lucas prize, holds a chair for Arabic philology as professor at the Freie Universität in Berlin, and is director of the Corpus Coranicum projecthttp://www.corpuscoranicum.de [6] . It is not without reason that Muslims often view the writings of non-Muslims about Islam with suspicion. Orientalists are sometimes agents of a neocolonialist political agenda whose, and some of their writings, are bald attacks on Muslim faith. Because of this, many Muslims have misgivings about secular academic writing about Islam, and as a result, this book by Angelika Neuwirth may not receive the attention and concentrated study it deserves. However, even a cursory skimming of the text will suffice to alert Muslims to the polemical value of Prof. Neuwirth's work, at least, for she has used her consummate mastery of the methods of the historical, rhetorical, and exegetical sciences to prove that the most important claims made by Orientalists against the authenticity of the Qur'an are completely untenable. Be that as it may, it would be a shame if Muslims limited their appreciation of Prof. Neuwirth's work to its value for Islamic apologetics, for its greatest worth lies in demonstrating how our understanding of the Qur'an is enriched beyond measure when due attention is given to both: (1) the cultural background of the Hijaz in the wider landscape of

late antiquity, especially to the religious and literary lore that gives context to the divine revelation of the Qur'an, and (2) the manner in which the Qur'an was gradually revealed, and was recited by Muslims as they formed a community whose knowledge of what had been revealed earlier further contributed to the context in which subsequent revelations were given by Allah to his final prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ). The collection introduces itself as a European reading of the Qur'an. It is an academic rather than a devotional reading of the Qur'an that displays unusual sensitivity to the social function of the text and its recitation in the formation of Muslim communities. The academic character of the text is marked by the fact that its arguments make no use of the kind of religious assumptions that are common in Islamic *tafsīr.* The methodological naturalism that is de rigueur for historical studies is taken for granted. Another difference from works of *tafsīr* is that there is an especially heavy reliance on knowledge of the literary styles that were in use in the area at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, and the texts that were current then among Christian, Jewish and pagan Arabs. A central premise of Prof. Neuwirth's reading is that our understanding of the Qur'an is deepened by increased awareness of the literary and religious context of late antiquity. Factors such as the importance of *sira* (biography of the Prophet), *sha'n al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of the sending down of verses), and the literary qualities of the Qur'an, have also been recognized and discussed by non-European Muslim exegetes. Prof. Neuwirth proves the value of attending to a broader background of non-Islamic sources in the course of her analyses. Prof. Neuwirth's essays are also a European reading of the Qur'an because of her attention to and criticism of other Western studies of the Qur'an, especially those that are keen to find "sources" for the Qur'an in Jewish and Christian literature. These studies view the Qur'an as having various hidden "subtexts" that originate in the Bible and other Christian and Jewish writings. Prof. Neuwirth rejects the idea of a subtext, and observes that the Qur'anic allusions to earlier written and oral religious traditions are comparable to the allusions made to contested interpretations of earlier religious claims in Biblical and other texts in late antiquity. This intertextual dialectic in no way detracts from the religious value of the Bible or the Qur'an; and to present such parallels with the Qur'an as undermining its claims to divine origin is not only a logical error, but displays historical naivety and philological obliviousness. The Qur'an addresses the issues current in the society of its first listeners, and what it proclaims about these issues initiates a social, theological, and cultural transformation, the effects of which continue to shape history. The Qur'an not only comments on religious ideas current among Christians, Jews, and pagans, but its later *āyāt* often serve as comments on earlier ones, which is neglected by studies that fail to consider the historical progression of the prophetic revelation. So, if the view of the Qur'an presented here is European, it is one that is very critical of the tendencies that dominate much if not most Western Qur'anic research. It is tempting, therefore, to say that what emerges is as much anti-European as European, for it painstakingly questions, undermines, and exposes the unwarranted presumptions of much that characterizes studies of the Qur'an by European and American orientalists; however, it remains a European reading because it is grounded in critical methods and a scholarly tradition from which the tendencies she rejects also arise, and in this way, her criticism becomes all the more penetrating and effective. The historical progression of the revelation and reception of the Qur'an provide the grounds in which those who listened to the revelation from the Prophet (ﷺ) underwent an educational

process in which Muslim identity emerged. A diachronic reading of the Qur'an is requisite for a full analysis of how this process shaped the community and its theology. Allusions to the beliefs and lore of one's listeners is by no means unique to the Qur'an; even some of the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry introduced some new ethical concepts into its cultural milieu, including elements consonant with the Greek *epimeleia heautou* (cultivation or care of the self). The Qur'an, however, goes far beyond this by subsuming some such elements in a comprehensive new ethic of *ra□mat*. The transformation is brought about through the powerful rhetoric of the Qur'an that juxtaposes a variety of literary genres in such a way as to provoke the listener to question moral and theological assumptions as it redirects the various streams of thought that were current in late antiquity. A central example of this redirection is the challenge to the Christian theology of the logos, whereby the divine word is made incarnate in the person of Christ, by presenting the idea of divine speech and writing that not only becomes incarnate in a single person, but provides the means through which all of creation takes place, and revelation is given through the Prophet so that the community of believers may be unified and guided. During the process of formation that took place as the Qur'an was revealed and then collected and recited, the Qur'an transformed itself from recited fragments to a revealed book, and it transformed its listeners into a new people united by its recitation, transcription, and study, by the theology of taw□□d, the ethos of ra□mat, the charismatic leadership of the Prophet (□), and a new understanding of Biblical history and the divine plan for humanity. Beyond this transformation of the Qur'an and its people in the supplementation of recitation by writing, Neuwirth speaks of a further stage of the transformation of the Qur'an by which it becomes, *"a medium of divine empowerment enabling mankind in general to decode the world according to the signs* (□y□t) *displayed in the text."* (XXVII) At this point the academic "outsider" stance from which historical works about the Qur'an are written is threatened by the confession to the extraordinary, if not explicitly supernatural, power of the revelation. It is here, too, that Prof. Neuwirth's text manifests itself as appropriate for devotional reading, even if it is not written with this intention. The fourteen essays of the book are divided into three sections: I. Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks II. The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community III. Narrative Figures between the Bible and the Qur'an. The first section, *"Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks"* contains four essays, all of which are concerned with literary features of the Qur'an: the *"unexpected leap in development"* in the literary form of the Qur'an, which defies historicist explanations; the social transformation instituted by the Qur'an from the primacy of tribal bonds to the centrality of scripture; the descriptions of paradise in the Qur'an, which introduce a new view of time and eschatology; and the Qur'anic oaths of the early Meccan suras, that emphasize and affirm the prophetic mission and the immanence of the Day of Judgment. The second section, *"The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community"* contains five essays that treat various ways in which social cohesion was generated in the early Muslim community through its relation to the Qur'an, including the recitation of the Qur'an, the establishment of the prayer, and the twin roles of the *F□ti□ah* as opening of the canon of the scripture and in the recitation of the formal prayer; the setting up of the *qibla* and its shift from Jerusalem to Mecca, the allusions to the Decalogue in *Sura Isr□'*, and the overturning of the Arabian ethos of tribal accountability in favour of an ethos of *ra□mat* and individual responsibility before God to help others in need. The third section, *"Narrative Figures between*

the Bible and the Qur'an" also contains five essays that focus on narratives in the Qur'an for which there are also versions in the Bible: There is a chapter on Moses (ʿa), followed by one on the golden calf. Then there are two chapters on Jesus (ʿa) and Mary (ʿa) pertaining to the Meccan and Medinan suras, respectively. Finally, there is a chapter in which the various stories found in both the Bible and Qur'an are classified according to literary criteria. In all of her discussions, Prof. Neuwirth is guided by several important hermeneutic principles: ● The Qur'an is to be read diachronically, that is, to the extent possible, the temporal order of revelation is to be respected as an important element of the nature of the revelation. ● The ʾyʾt of the Qur'an are to be understood in the context of the suras in which they occur. The meaning of an individual ʾyah is to be understood as it contributes to the meaning of the sura as a whole. ● The changing social and ideological situation of the early community of Muslims (*Sitz im Leben*) must be appreciated for a proper understanding of the revealed text. ● Literary form and linguistic guise contribute to the meaning of the text, and are clues to its chronology. ● Later additions to earlier narratives, identified as stylistic interruptions, are signals of interpretive expansions occasioned by different reactions and questions that arose within the community, so that the gradual revelation of the Qur'an may be seen as a kind of conversation between Allah and those who first heard the Qur'an, *"a persistent divine– human communication."* (XXXVI) In what follows I will cull a few points from each of the essays in order to give prospective readers a taste of their contents and as it were to whet the appetite, for the essays are often too complex to be summarized in a few sentences. **I – 1. Neither of the East nor of the West (lʾ sharqiyya wa lʾ gharbiyya, Q. 24:35): Locating the Qur'an within the History of Scholarship** Prof. Neuwirth takes the ʾ*yah* mentioned in the title of this essay to have a lesson for researchers: attempts to limit the Qur'an by finding "origins" for its contents are bound to fail. Although the Qur'an is understood by Muslims to transcend history, its relation to the historical circumstances of its revelation must not be ignored. Western scholars have attempted to come up with alternatives to the origins of the Qur'an as found in Muslim traditions, but all such attempts have failed miserably. Nevertheless, the historical–critical and literary approaches on which these scholars have relied make it possible to recognize how the Qur'an provides answers to the core problems people faced at the time of its revelation. This chapter contains a brief but valuable critical review of research about the origins of the Qur'an. Although Prof. Neuwirth rejects the views of "revisionists" who offer alternative accounts of the Qur'an to those found in the Islamic tradition, she does not do so dismissively. In addition to historical considerations, such as attention to the sequence of revelation insofar as this can be determined, techniques of literary analysis are also applied to the Qur'an. We are to consider an exterior level of communication from God and an interior level that takes place between the Prophet (ʾ) and his listeners. A micro structural analysis of the Qur'an is also employed, which is based on methods of biblical scholarship, to show that the various structures exemplified by the suras of the Qur'an reflect a historical development. Throughout relevant comparisons are made with Biblical and apocryphal Christian and Jewish literature. **I – 2. From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant: Qur'anic Refigurations of Pagan Arab Ideals based on Biblical Models** One of the central messages found in the early Meccan suras of the Qur'an is that genealogical loyalties are to be superseded by religious ones. In this essay, Prof. Neuwirth shows how the Qur'an systematically disempowered the Arab clan

system and replaced it by a consciousness of individual responsibility before God by propounding an ethic of "care of the self" whose themes are also discernible in other late antique literature. Believers are encouraged to take the steep way of moral endeavour by freeing slaves, feeding the hungry, and caring for those in need. In the middle Meccan period, the idea of the divine covenant is given emphasis in the example of the story of Abraham (ʿa). In the Medinan period Jewish claims to genealogical entitlements are rejected. In the transformation brought by Islam, earlier conceptions of sacrifice are displaced as the sacrificial alter gives way to the sacred space of the sanctuary, and the message of the Qur'an teaches: ***"It is not their flesh or their blood that reaches Allah, Rather it is your taqw that reaches Him."*** (***22:37***) **I – 3. Glimpses of Paradise in the World and Lost Aspects of the World in the Hereafter: Two Qur'anic Re-readings of Biblical Psalms** The eschatological theology of the Qur'an provided hope in a pagan environment in which pessimism was predominant. References to divine rewards in the Qur'an and the Psalms are compared to show that while the Psalms made use of nature imagery to evoke admiration for divine majesty, in the Qur'an this imagery is used to remind believers of the gifts of God and the need for human gratitude. Although striking similarities are found between some of the Psalms and portions of the Qur'an, a conspicuous difference is that anthropomorphic descriptions of God are eliminated in the Qur'anic texts: for example, where the Psalms (136:5) refer to the divine reason, the Qur'an (55:7) introduces the image of God setting up a balance. While the Psalms seek evidence for God in divine salvific acts through history, the Qur'an point to the balanced order of nature as a wonder to give cause to praise of God. Prof. Neuwirth ends this essay with another example of how the devotional study of the Qur'an manifests itself from behind the cloak of academic reserve: *"With this new paradigm* [*of revelation, wa y*] *the Qur'an offers its listeners a promise: not of divine loyalty exemplified by divine interventions in salvation history but of God's liberation of man from his cultural and ontological bereavement, his being cut off from a meaningful history and his being prisoner to the irreversible elapsing of time."* (98) **I – 4. Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Early Meccan Suras** If we consider the suras that begin with oath clusters [e.g., ***"By the dawn and the ten nights*** (***89:1-2***)], we find that there is a dynamic in which a rhythm is established and an enigma that require some fulfilment or culmination that is usually found later in the sura. Different types of oath clusters are examined and charted. Many of the oath clusters appear to allude to nocturnal devotions. Through the course of the revelation of the Qur'an, there is a movement from functional uses of the oaths to highlight themes that will be treated in their suras to a more abstract use in which the oath indicates the revelation itself. In addition to the complex oaths of some early suras, the types of oaths of the Qur'an considered are those alluding to sacred localities, those referring to cosmic phenomena, especially the phases of day and night, and, finally, those referring to the revelation. **II – 5. From Recitation through Liturgy to Canon: Sura Composition and Dissolution during the Development of Islamic Ritual** The Qur'an provides two important services in religious life: its recitation is itself a religious ritual, especially in the formal prayers and it serves as a source of religious teaching. Religious services in Judaism and Christianity are much more complex than the formal prayers of Islam. In this essay Prof. Neuwirth speculates on the evolution of the formal prayer and how this is related to the canonization of the Qur'an. The course of the development of the Muslim community parallel to the

gradual revelation of the suras of the Qur'an explain, at least in part, the simplicity of the Islamic ritual. **II – 6. Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q. 1): Opening of the Textual Corpus of the Qur'an or Introit of the Prayer Service?** The themes introduced in the previous essay are explored further in this one with particular attention to the Fātiḥa. Five issues are explored: the numbering of the āyāt; its position at the start of the Qur'an; its name; its uniqueness in classifications of the suras; and its relation to the *basmala*. Prof. Neuwirth contends that it is possible to use genre criticism, that is, attention to the function of the Fātiḥa as a prayer, to understand how it was received by Muslims prior to the collection of the Qur'an. To this purpose, the Fātiha is compared with St. John Chrysostom's Enarxis. Both begin with a hymnal part praising God, followed by reference to the divine kingdom, an acknowledgment of divine sovereignty, and finally a supplication with several parts. Prof. Neuwirth rejects the idea that this means that the Fātiḥa is in any way derivative from Christian rituals. The point is that the ritual function makes its own demands that apply to prayers used in rituals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: as the opening of a ceremony of worship, the text to be recited should have solemnity and incorporate topics needed to establish communication between the worshippers and God. Prof. Neuwirth concludes that not only does the Fātiha fulfill the conditions needed for it to serve its ritual function: *"indeed, by virtue of its brevity and its climax with the triple petition for true guidance, it even exceeds them."* (179) **II – 7. Referentiality and Textuality in Sūrat al-Ḥijr (Q. 15): Observations on the Qur'anic 'Canonical Process' and the Emergence of a Community** Contrary to sceptical views about the canonization of the Qur'an, Prof. Neuwirth argues that the picture based on reports in the hadith literature that the Qur'an was canonized from an early stage of its revelation is not at all implausible. Under this assumption, the sura may be studied as a literary genre, that is, *"as a stage in a communicational process."* (188) This communication process is not simply that of God addressing the Prophet, but a complex phenomenon through which various believers and unbelievers, angels and demons, are addressed by God and His prophets, who respond in accordance with the manner in which the divine mission is received, and all of this is revealed in the course of the emergence of the Muslim Ummah with its own sense of identity. These themes are explored through an examination of the pivotal sura, *al-Ḥijr.* The sura is pivotal in the sense that it marks the beginning of the self- awareness of the Muslims as a distinct religious community, for the believers are addressed for the first time in this sura as muslimūn to whom God refers collectively as His community ('ibādī, my worshippers). The text of the sura is divided into five parts on the basis of their dramatis personae. On the basis of the analysis of the sura, several prominent features are observed. First, those hearing the sura are presented with an either/or choice: to accept the revealed truth, or reject it with ingratitude and rebelliously. Second, the choice presented is coupled with the summons to reflect upon the signs that have been revealed, so that what has been revealed are to be considered as signs some of which, self-reflectively, demand the application of reason to consideration of the signs. Al-Ḥijr concerns itself with the emergence of the Muslim community at three levels: (1) through cosmic and salvation historical themes; (2) through its structure as a text for ritual recitation; and (3) through its intertextual allusions to al-Fātiḥa. **II – 8. From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: Sūrat al-Isrā' (Q. 17), between Text and Commentary** This essay, more than the others in this volume, can be expected to provoke the criticism of traditional scholars, for in it Prof. Neuwirth argues that the hadiths

about the *mir'□j* are incompatible with *s□rat al-Isr□'*, but before we come to this controversy, we are presented with a discussion of the *qibatayn*, and an ingenious explanation of why al-Quds is considered the first *qibla* even if prayers were conducted facing the Ka'aba prior to its recognition as *qibla*. Then, an extended discussion is devoted to the first □*yah* of the sura, and why it does not fit the rhyme scheme of the rest of the sura. It is concluded that the first □*yah* was revealed before the rest of the sura, which was subsequently revealed to address issues that arose with regard to the first □*yah*. The first □yah reports that God carried the Prophet (□) in a miraculous journey by night. When this report was met by ridicule and even apostasy, the rest of the sura was revealed with the reminder that the previous prophets were also ridiculed and rejected. In response to demands for miracles, God assures the believers that the Qur'an itself is the greatest miracle. Prof. Neuwirth contends that the entire cast of the experience as reported in the Qur'an seems entirely different from the reports that have been narrated about it: In the Qur'an we witness a communication process in which divine prerogatives (guardianship, providence, etc), and human attitudes and perceptions (gratitude, reason, etc.) as links between the speaker and the audience never fade, while leaving the modalities of the transcendent experience undisclosed, whereas the Hadith version has taken the form of a narration that unfolds particular elements in a fantastic way to satisfy an audience requesting a narrative closure for some of their most cherished Qur'anic images and an aetiological explanation for the core elements of their rituals. (233) For further reason to question the authenticity of the hadiths of the *mi'r□j*, Prof. Neuwirth appeals to research on the topic conducted by Josef van Ess, who has argued that the interpretation of *isr□'* as an ascension through the heavens resulted from theological debates about whether one could physically approach God. Although we might venture that the relevant hadiths and the account presented in the Qur'an might be interpreted in such a manner as to remove the apparent inconsistencies between them, serious work on the topic will have to take into account the strong reasons Profs. Neuwirth and van Ess give to the contrary. **II– 9. A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an? Revisiting Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context of Pagan Arab Late Antiquity** There are three passages of the Qur'an that are comparable with the ten commandments as presented in the Torah. In order of revelation, they are: (17:22–39); (6:151–153); and (2:83–85). The first, from the middle Meccan period, reads like a manifesto. The second, from the late Meccan period, functions as a reminder of what was already revealed. The third, a Medinan text, employs the theme of the Decalogue to address the conflict that had arisen with the Medinan Jewish tribes. In this essay, all three versions are subject to meticulous analysis and comparison, both with the Biblical account and with one another. These comparisons yield insights into the different notions of sin and evil that are found in Islamic, Christian and Jewish traditions. Transgression of the commandments is not explicitly referred to as sin in the Qur'an, although observance of the commandments is idealized and violations require penitence. Another prominent feature of the discussions in the Qur'an is the emphasis on mercy (*ra□ma*). The commending of mercy or kindness toward others, especially towards parents, and toward those in need, directs believers to introspection and a cultivation of qualities of the heart characteristic of the ethic of "care of the self", which the Greeks called *epimeleia heautou.* **III – 10. Narrative as Canonical Process: The Story of Moses Seen through the Evolving History of the Qur'an** In this essay the Qur'anic narratives about

Moses (a) are examined in order to address the dispute between traditional scholars and revisionists about the emergence of the Qur'an. Revisionists hold that the Qur'an was fabricated by Muslims with a particular religious and social agenda. Prof. Neuwirth shows that a careful analysis of the references to Moses (a) considered in the order of revelation shows that the Qur'an is best explained as the result of a process of gradual revelation, as the Islamic tradition has always maintained. Because the stories related in the Qur'an are scattered and do not provide a continuous treatment of each of their figures in succession, Westerners have often considered the Qur'an to be a historical. Prof. Neuwirth shows that this view is mistaken because the events related about the prophets in the Qur'an are appropriate to the conditions of those who heard it at the time of its revelation. In particular, Prophet Moses (a) acts as a kind of mirror to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). His exodus from Egypt mirrors the prophets' nocturnal journey to al-Quds and later it mirrors the *hijra*. The victory at Badr was also seen as similar to Moses' delivery of his people from the Pharaoh, for in both cases divine intervention saves the followers of a prophet from annihilation at the hands of an oppressive enemy. In the early Meccan period the parallel is drawn between the two prophets as having been given divine authority. In the middle Meccan period the shared theme is perseverance in the face of oppression. As a result of such observations, we find that the Qur'an is historical in that it reflects on various aspects of the careers of the prophets and salvation history as appropriate to the divine guidance needed by the Ummah in the circumstances of revelation.

III – 11. Oral Scriptures in Contact: The Qur'anic Story of the Golden Calf and its Position between Narrative, Cult and Inter-communal Debate Many Western scholars have assumed that the inclusion in the Qur'an of Biblical stories means that the Qur'an is the result of a process of commentary on Biblical sources. In this essay, Prof. Neuwirth refutes this assumption by giving detailed attention to the example of the story of the Golden Calf as it appears in the Bible and in several places in the Qur'an. An analysis of the literary qualities of the text of the Qur'an demonstrates that it does not have the form of a commentary, but of orally delivered prophetic speech. The Medinan texts include direct addresses to the Jews of Medina. This suggests that instead of a commentary on a Biblical text, the revelation of the Qur'an addresses a controversy that was taking place in Medina between Jews and Muslims. The theme of atonement is highlighted in the Medinan texts in a manner significantly different from the Torah and its commentaries at a time when the Jews there were being asked to repent for their rejection of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). While Jewish texts describe the divine wrath as extending over the course of several generations, the Qur'an promises immediate divine forgiveness for the sincerely repentant. Prof. Neuwirth concludes this essay with the admission that its themes require further investigation. Why is it that communal rituals of atonement are found in Judaism and Christianity, but not in Sunni Islam? How is it that the Shi'a have been able to recover expression of repentance enacted by Jews on the Day of Atonement, the tenth or Tishri, in the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to ﷺshﷺra in the Muslim calendar? There is evidence that some of the tawwabﷺn who were martyred at Ra's al-Ayn when they revolted against the Umayyads believed that some of the Bani Israel gave up their lives to atone for worshipping the calf. **III – 12. Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus: Reading Sﷺrat Maryam (Q. 19) and Related Meccan Texts in the Context of the Qur'anic Communication Process** Compared with the Qur'anic depictions of Moses (a), those of Jesus (a) seem sketchy. In the case of Moses (a) we can put

together a career; while in the case of Jesus (a), there are only a few incidents. By examining the texts of the Qur'an in which Mary (a) or Jesus (a) appear, Prof. Neuwirth contends that traces of an intense theological exchange with Christian believers can be found, and that this exchange is evidenced in a polemical fashion in later Medinan revelations, particularly in S□rat al-Nis□. All of the Qur'anic texts are given minute attention in this essay, with attention to the order of revelation, and are compared with Biblical texts and with the Protevangelium of James. In comparison with the Christian texts, the Qur'an gives a de-allegorized version of the events such as the mission of John the Baptist (a), who is admitted to be a prophet, but not the precursor to Christ (a), and, likewise, the virgin birth, which is admitted but is not taken to signify that Jesus (a) is the Son of God. The issue is complicated by the fact that the denials that God has offspring are directed against pagan beliefs rather than Christian ones. The pagans claimed that their deities were better offspring of God than Jesus (a), to which the response of the Qur'an is the clear statement that God does not take offspring. Jesus (a) is likened to Muhammad (□) in that the missions of both were to bring about unity; yet both missions led to disagreement and conflict. ***"Whatever thing you differ about, its judgment is with Allah."*** **(*42:10*) III – 13. Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs. A Re-reading of S□rat Maryam (Q. 19) in S□rat □l 'Imr□n (Q. 3)** This essay continues to address issues of Christology that were mentioned in the previous essay; but it also demonstrates one of the core claims of the volume: that echoes of earlier suras can be heard in later ones, and that by comparing them, we learn something of the development of the Qur'anic revelation. As we learned in essay 2 of this collection, one of the dominant themes of the Qur'an is the replacement of clan loyalties by those based on piety. It is in terms of this agenda that we are to understand how S□rat □l 'Imr□n upsets the patriarchal system of genealogy by describing the lineage of Jesus (a) from his mother, and she from her mother, so that Jesus (a) is given the matronymic nasab: ibn Maryam. Prof. Neuwirth shows how this and other references to the feminine and to multiplicity of meaning, polysemy, are employed to overturn the established pagan order. Those who reject the divine message seek to abuse ambiguity to cause *fitna*, while the believers accept all that is revealed, even the ambiguous, as related to the "mother of the book" (*umm al-kit□b*). Likewise, Mary (a) is an unambiguous sign of faith for the believers, but causes disputation among the disbelievers. Jesus (a) and Mary (a) together are considered a sign from God; but they are presented in the Qur'an without any hint at the divinization of Jesus that was to cause so much division and heresy in the Christian church. **III – 14. Myths and Legends in the Qur'an? An Itinerary through its Narrative Landscape** The final essay of this fascinating volume begins by distinguishing myths (*"narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world by laying bare its archetypal patterns"*) from legends (narratives of pious imagination celebrating an exemplary figure or groups of figures). The Qur'an, like other scriptures, makes use of myths and legends in this sense; but Prof. Neuwirth argues that the message of the Qur'an is one that systematically rejects the pagan notion of the mythic as that which is due to various occult powers of anthropomorphic deities and legends of demigod heroes. In order to illustrate the Qur'anic stance on the mythic, comparative analyses are given of the transgression of Adam, the story of Noah and the flood, David and Solomon, the Exodus, and the lessons of past nations (*al-umam al-kh□liya*), Joseph and Zulaykha, and Abraham. In each instance, it is seen that elements of the pagan worldview of heroism

and anthropomorphic divine powers are subdued in favour of injunctions to piety and morality and recognition of the exclusive sovereignty of Allah. So, for example, the importance of Abraham is not that of a forefather, but of an imam, a paradigm of simple submission to God. In each case, the Qur'an challenges its listeners to rethink and revise their views of what had been narrated before. Prof. Neuwirth succeeds admirably in her task of showing how our understanding of the Qur'an is profoundly enriched through the employment of the methods she illustrates so effectively in this volume of essays.

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