

## Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion V

# INÂRAH

Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran

Hg. von Inârah – Institut zur Erforschung  
der frühen Islamgeschichte und des Koran  
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Der Koran als Werkzeug der Herrschaft

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Band 9

SCHILER & MÜCKE

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Berlin und Tübingen

Erstausgabe

1. Auflage 2020

Umschlagabbildungen: siehe Seite 617

Druck: Standartu Spaustuve

Printed in Litauen

ISBN: 978-3-89930-215-8

# Inhalt

## DIE ENTSTEHUNG EINER WELTRELIGION V DER KORAN ALS WERKZEUG DER HERRSCHAFT

K.-H. OHLIG	Vorwort.....	7
I. ZUR VOR- UND FRÜHGESCHICHTE DES ISLAM		
ROBERT M. KERR	„Forging Ahead into the Islamic Past“ – Einige Bemerkungen zur Inschrift von Zuhayr .....	11
RAYMOND DEQUIN	Zayd, der Adoptivsohn des arabischen Propheten – Der Koran als Werkzeug der Herrschaft des arabischen Reichs .....	52
MAZDAK BAMDADAN (PSEUD.)	Die dunkle Krypta – Eine vergleichende Analyse der islamischen Historiographie .....	146
JOHANNES THOMAS	Al-Andalus-Propaganda – Verteufelung des Westens, Christentumskritik und Lobgesänge auf die (nur angeblich) tolerante islamische Theokratie.....	179
JOHANNES THOMAS	Zu den beiden Mythen „Entscheidungsschlacht am Guadalete (711)“ und „Zerstörung der Städte“ .....	193
JOHANNES THOMAS	Mythos „Die islamische Eroberung...führte die Iberische Halbinsel aus der Massenverdummung des europäischen Mittelalters in den Glanz der arabischen Zivilisation.“ – Beispiel: Recht .....	208
II. ZUM KORAN UND SEINER SPRACHE		
VOLKER POPP	Vom Logos zum Nomos (1. Teil) .....	235
GERD-R. PUIN	Ein Alif zuviel? – Ein omayyadisches Gewicht, Lesarten des Korans und eine Lülingsche Idee.....	294
ROBERT M. KERR	Die islamische Kabbala: eine Neuorientierung.....	318

## III. Islam und Gesellschaft

HABIB TAWA	Da‘wa, Ġihād, Taqīya und Takfir bei den Muslim-Brüdern im Werk von ʿArwat al-Ĥirbāwī, ehemaliger ranghoher Kader dieser Organisation.....	349
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## IV. ZUR REZEPTION HISTORISCH-KRITISCHER ISLAMFORSCHUNG

MARCIN GRODZKI	Günter Lüling – Islam as a non-trinitarian faith of Semitic forefathers.....	372
MARKUS GROSS	<i>Audiat et altera pars</i> – Revisionistische Islamwissenschaft und ihre Rezeption (Teil 1).....	424

## V. ZUM UMSCHLAGBILD

GERD-R. PUIN	Das „Siegel des Propheten“ .....	617
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## VI. NACHRUf

DANIEL A. BRUBAKER	In Memoriam, Keith Small (1959-2018).....	636
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## IV. ZUR REZEPTION HISTORISCH-KRITISCHER ISLAMFORSCHUNG

### Günter Lüling – Islam as a non-Trinitarian faith of Semitic forefathers

Marcin Grodzki

*„And thus a paradox of truly world-historical proportions presents itself: although Judaeo-Christianity perished in the Christian church, but it preserved itself in Islam and reaches into our days in some of its driving impulses” - Hans Joachim Schoeps<sup>1</sup>*

#### 1. Introduction

Günter Lüling (1928-2014) was among the leading German scholars of the Qur’ān at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In Islamic studies, he represented the nonconformist trend calling for a specifically perceived demythologization of early Islamic history. In his works, beginning in the 1970s, one may trace Lüling’s basic conviction that the historical and dogmatic canvas of the holy book of Islam was originally Arab Judaeo-Christian hymns with an admixture of old Arabic gnosis. Lüling was not the first scholar of Islam (and probably not the last) to put forward such or a similar thesis. Before him, it was, inter alia, postulated by Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930)<sup>2</sup>, and

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1 Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1949, p. 342.

2 The German Lutheran theologian and historian Adolf von Harnack believed that Islam is the fruit of a Judaeo-Christian tradition modified under the influence of

more recently – in parallel to G. Lüling's research – the ideological roots of Islam in the tradition of Judaeo-Christianity were sought after by other sceptics, such as John Wansbrough (1928-2002), Édouard-Marie Gallez (1957-) and many others.

The research conducted by the German scholar, (who was a theologian by training and a Gnostic by passion), fits into the broadly understood quest for the birth of Islam in the religious and cultural heritage of the Late Antique Middle East. Lüling for his part focusses mainly on the Qur'ān, referring only upon chance to other elements of the early Islamic tradition such as the *Sīra* literature (life of Muhammad) and the prophetic *sunna*. He analyzes the Qur'ānic text by using a number of methodological tools and criteria, by and large originating mainly from the fields of dogmatic theology, history of religion, and – further afield – philological and literary studies<sup>3</sup>. His goal is primarily to apply the tools of biblical criticism to the text of the Qur'ān. The German scholar perceived himself as a continuator of the scientific heritage of liberal Jewish and Christian theologians and thinkers, including mainly those Protestant ones, who dealt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the critical-scholarly analysis of the Bible<sup>4</sup>.

Lüling authored several books devoted to the results of his unconventional research. They were published at his own cost due to the controversial nature of the theses contained therein and the growing ostracism towards him in German mainstream scholarly milieus. The best-known book is *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophlieder im Qur'ān* (published later in English under the title: *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery and reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under the earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*) from 1974<sup>5</sup>, as well as *Der christliche Kult*

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gnosis; a tradition created on Arabic grounds with an inspiration of a local prophet.

- 3 Günter Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery and reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under the earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi 2003, p. XVII.
- 4 Ibidem, pp. XXII, XXVI, XXXVI.
- 5 Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophlieder im Qur'ān*, Verlag Hannelore Lüling, Erlangen 1974. The supplemented edition in the English language: *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery and reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-*



*an der vorislamischen Kaaba als Problem der Islamwissenschaft und christlichen Theologie* (the title can be translated into English as: *The Christian cult in the pre-Islamic Al-Ka'ba as a problem of Islamic scholarship and Christian theology*) from 1977<sup>6</sup> and *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad* (the title can be translated into English as: *The Prophet Muhammad re-discovered*) from 1981<sup>7</sup>.

The German researcher argues that the Qur'ān consists, historically speaking, of several textual layers, the oldest of which precedes the mission of the Islamic prophet probably by about two hundred years, and the latest (last) one can be dated to the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE<sup>8</sup>. Lüling mainly devoted his life to the reconstruction and research of the oldest layer of the Qur'ānic text, which he considered to be Judaeo-Christian, non-Trinitarian, strophic compositions used in the first centuries of the Common Era for – among other things – liturgical purposes. These materials found their way to the Arabian Peninsula, to the Hijaz (or they maybe even originated there) gaining recognition among the Arab population practicing pagan or gnostic cults. What happened then was a kind of symbiosis between the North Arabian Judaeo-Christianity and the aniconic Arab beliefs from the south. At the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Arabs were finally given a prophet of great spiritual depth, a prophet who merged these beliefs into one, promoting the idea of humanity's return to the indigenous “religion of Abraham and the tribes” – i.e. Islam. On the basis of the aforementioned texts, as a result of editorial works conducted during the time of Muhammad, and inspired by his revelations, the second layer of the Qur'ānic text was to emerge. This layer constituted the dogmatic nucleus of the already Islamic Qur'ān and the axis around which the further process of formation of this holy book evolved. As Lüling sees it, this second textual layer still bears the characteristics of non-Trinitarianism and Judaeo-Christianity, which – according to Lüling's theory – was consistent with the

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*Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under the earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi 2003.

- 6 Günter Lüling, *Der christliche Kult an der vorislamischen Kaaba als Problem der Islamwissenschaft und christlichen Theologie*, Verlag Hannelore Lüling, Erlangen 1977.
- 7 Günter Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Eine Kritik am „christlichen“ Abendland*, Verlag Hannelore Lüling, Erlangen 1981.
- 8 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XIII, 26.

original spirit of Islam as proclaimed by the prophet. The second layer is also quite elaborately investigated by the German theologian in his works.

As we know, in the first three centuries of Christianity, the main dogmatic issue discussed in the communities of believers was the question of the nature of Jesus Christ and his relationship to God the Creator. Was Jesus of divine, angelic or maybe even human nature? The ongoing dispute divided the faithful into those who believed in the dogma of the Holy Trinity (Trinitarians) and its opponents (non-Trinitarians and anti-Trinitarians). The latter are nowadays classified by Christian theology as being part of Christian-based gnosis, and it is with them that Günter Lüling sympathises ideologically. Through his research, he arrives at the conviction that it was non-Trinitarianism that was the original, primeval Christian dogma, later distorted in the historical process<sup>9</sup>. For the German scholar, the dogma of the Holy Trinity was not a native Christian belief, one that was introduced gradually, along with the progressive Hellenization of this religion<sup>10</sup>.

Lüling drew the inspiration for his research on Qur'ānic strophics from the results of studies by David Heinrich Müller (1846-1912)<sup>11</sup> and Rudolf Geyer (1861-1929)<sup>12</sup> who had pointed to the presence of strophic texts (hymns) inside the Qur'ān, and from Karl Vollers (1857-1909)<sup>13</sup> who argued on the basis of studies by Carlo de Landberg (1848-1924) that the Qur'ān was originally written down in a non-literary vernacular Arabic and only

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- 9 G. Lüling describes himself in the following way: „(...) the author (i.e. G. Lüling), frankly speaking, would see himself no longer as a Christian neither in the orthodox-traditional nor in the Evangelical sence [original spelling] but as a sort of mixture of a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, a Bhuddist and even some worn bits of atheist and polytheist". Ibidem, p. LXIII.
  - 10 Ibidem, p. LXIII. This and other theological theses Lüling owes mainly to liberal, German-speaking Protestant theologians of the turn of the 19th and 20th century – Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and Martin Werner (1887-1964). Cf. inter alia: Martin Werner, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas*, Paul Haupt, Berlin-Leipzig 1941.
  - 11 Author of, inter alia: *Die Propheten in ihrer ursprünglichen Form. Die Grundgesetze der ursemitischen Poesie, erschlossen und nachgewiesen in Bibel, Keilinschriften und Koran und in ihrer Wirkungen erkannt in den Chören der griechischen Tragödie*, Verlag Hülder, Wien 1896.
  - 12 Author of, inter alia: *Zur Strofik des Qur'āns, Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, v. 22 (1908), pp. 265-286.
  - 13 Author of, inter alia: *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien*, Verlag Karl J. Trübner, Strassburg 1906.

later reworked into classical Arabic<sup>14</sup>. Also Martin Hartmann (1851-1918) and Enno Littmann (1875-1958) wrote that in certain suras (eg. 55, 77, 78) there are more or less regular repetitions of verses in refrains that might be a relic of Old Arabic, pre-Islamic strophic folk poetry<sup>15</sup>. We shall return to this thread later.

## 2. In search for the original structure of the Qur'ān by the means of liberal dogma-criticism

Methodologically speaking, Lüling undertakes a reconstruction of a hypothetical original stratum of the Qur'ān's strophic composition by means of a series of criteria, of which first and foremost is the internal coherence of ideas in the analysed text (the dogmatic and spiritual consistence and integrity of the message)<sup>16</sup>. And so, the process includes a semantic analysis of the Qur'ānic suras, the dogmatic and theological consistency and integrity of their contents, the soundness and consequence of thoughts and threads, correctness of biblical topoi etc. If a distortion of the strophic order implies that a possible intervention had been made into the passage in question in the past, it can be verified by analysing the dogmatic message or shifts in the language<sup>17</sup>. For this purpose Lüling uses above all textual criticism, examining the textual content of a given passage in terms of its theological and dogmatic coherence, which he considers to be a *sine qua non* for the analysis of religiously sanctified texts<sup>18</sup>. It is only secondarily that he makes use of the tools of philological analysis. By the means of philology and strophic rules (i.e. taking into account, inter alia, rhyme, rhythm,

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14 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XX, 18, 513. It is also worth noting here (by quoting Lüling) that the Egyptian writer and literary critic Ṭaha Ḥusayn supposedly wrote in 1926 in the first draft of his book critical of the existence of Ġāhiliyya poetry (after protests by orthodox circles, the book *Fī al-adab al-ġāhili* was published in a modified form) that the Qur'ān contained a certain number of metric compositions preceding the time of prophet Muḥammad's mission. This fact was mentioned by his friend Robert Graves – then professor of English literature at the Cairo University, in his book: *The White Goddess. A historical grammar of poetic myth*, Faber & Faber, London-Boston 1961, p. 241ff.

15 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 101.

16 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. XIII, 368.

17 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 103.

18 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. L, 7.

strophic number and sequence) applied to old-Arabic, Byzantine, Syriac<sup>19</sup> sources, Lüling reconstructs the anticipated, original morphological and syntactical structure of the Arabic text. Finally, he confronts the results of such analysis with the alternative *qirā'āt* (Qur'ānic variant readings) of particular Qur'ānic verses preserved in Muslim literature. It should be noted here that Islamic law schools recognise from seven to ten primary *qirā'āt*, and that the most commonly printed text of the Qur'ān in the world nowadays – that of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim reading – is but one of these variants<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, in his methodological approach, the German researcher is a traditionalist, or even an archaist. He criticises the use of textual criticism if and when it is limited exclusively to the field of philology itself. Following the old classification of academic disciplines, he considers philology as an auxiliary field, subservient to theology, and not vice versa. G. Lüling writes, *inter alia*, that

„It is a tragedy of Enlightenment as a whole that at its start the emancipation of the philologies from theology (...) tragically happened in the way that these classical philologies, till then despised by the churchmen and theologians, separated from theology with a deeply felt resentment as if theology had all along solely been and would for ever remain a merely dogmatic matter”<sup>21</sup>.

Lüling works with the assumption that already in pre-Islamic Arabia there existed poetry in a Central Arabian vernacular *koine*<sup>22</sup>. It was predominantly

19 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, pp. 30, 33.

20 Before Ibn Muğāhid suggested in the 10th CE his classification consisting of seven *qirā'āt*, their number might already have reached eighty (i.e. variant readings consistent with the rasm of the 'Uṭmānic codex). Later, in the 15th century CE, a similar division into ten variant readings was introduced by Ibn al-Ġazārī. Besides the *qirā'āt*, Muslim theology also describes the enigmatic term of *aḥruf* referring, *inter alia*, to recitation modules. According to the hadith, Muhammad when asked about the correctness of a given interpretation of the Qur'ān, replied that it was revealed to him in seven different *aḥruf*. The exegetical literature mentions 35 (!) different interpretations of this vague term. For a detailed discussion see now: Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2011; Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān. The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādh*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2013, and also: Ignác Goldziher, *Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1920, p. 37ff.

21 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. L.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 177.

authored by Arab Christians (or at least Arabs strongly influenced by different forms of Christianity)<sup>23</sup>. According to Lüling's thesis, the language of this poetry was closely related to the language in which the textual foundations of the Qur'ān were originally recorded<sup>24</sup>. At the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, essentially the entire Arabian Peninsula was already Christianised<sup>25</sup>. Before Islam, in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, quite a large number of Arab-Christian strophic compositions, widely used for liturgical purposes, were in circulation<sup>26</sup>. The German researcher claims that Muslim scholars later erased most traces of the existence of this poetry. They supposedly did so, because the textual core of the Qur'ān did actually originate – as Lüling claims – from Arab-Judaeo-Christian heritage, which they attempted to marginalise and or hide<sup>27</sup>.

In Lüling's thesis, the concealment of the Christian roots of the Qur'ān (and, more broadly, of Islam) was primarily a political decision, quite understandable, because it was dictated by the need for self-defence on the part of dogmatically yet unconsolidated nascent Islam against an open theological confrontation with the powerful arsenal of Byzantium's ideological weapons. Undoubtedly, the immediate political and religious benefits for the rulers of the Arab-Muslim caliphate after Muhammad's death were also not without significance, as they gained in this way another argument for legitimising their power<sup>28</sup>. It was a necessary self-defence because, as Lüling writes, "in order to secure the victory of Islam over Hellenised Christianity,

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23 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, pp. 18, 21. Lüling refers to the work of the Lebanese Jesuit: Camille Hechaïmé, *Louis Cheikho et son livre 'Le christianisme et la littérature chrétienne en Arabie avant l'islam'*, Dar el-Machreq, Beyrouth 1967.

24 G. Lüling supports the thesis of Julius Wellhausen that Arab Christians were the first to use Arabic in writing. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, s. 178.

25 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 15. Lüling refers to: Casper Detlef Gustav Müller, *Kirche und Mission unter den Arabern in vorislamischer Zeit*, Sammlungen gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte, vol. 249, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1967; as well as to: Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, ed. IV, Leipzig 1924, vol. II, p. 699ff.

26 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 183.

27 Ibidem, pp. 24, 61-62, 70; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 310, 315.

28 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. XIV, XXXVII, 8-9, 202, 517; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 125.

it was necessary to sacrifice this Judaeo-Christian position of Islam”<sup>29</sup>. And Islam (along with the Qur’ān) is in Lüling’s conviction “in a substantial and immediate way the continuation and modification of the Judaeo-Christian tradition”<sup>30</sup>. The Christian threads ousted from the history of the pre-Islamic era were then replaced in post-prophetic Islam by pagan motifs<sup>31</sup>. This process included, among other things, relabelling the identity of Muhammad’s enemies from Trinitarian Christians to polytheistic heathens. Lüling calls this a defensive policy of “appeasement” by the early Arab-Muslim caliphate towards the Hellenised West<sup>32</sup>.

The German scepticist came to the conclusion that it might have been on the initiative of these authorities, as well as under the influence of external political factors, that the original message of Muhammad’s revelations became deformed. Likewise, the denial of the existence of Christian, Old-Arabian, vernacular non-inflected poetry and strophic compositions before Islam was aimed at nipping in the bud a possible discussion on Christian contents that had found their way into the Qur’ān<sup>33</sup>. Lüling enumerates that – in addition to dogmatic interventions – the original texts of Judaeo-Christian strophic hymns were modified by later Muslim editors also due to one or more overlapping non-political reasons: an erroneous diacritisation of the Arab *rasm* (i.e. the consonant skeleton devoid of diacritics); an incorrect vocalisation of some consonants; modifications to the *rasm* together with diacritics; bypassing, interpolating or exchanging graphemes within words, sentences and entire passages; changes of language style, e.g. from non-literary to literary classical (the so-called Qur’ānic style); overlapping of semantic fields of the same consonant roots between Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic (Syriac) languages e.g. in the case of borrowings from these languages; constructing new lexical meanings for individual words based on incorrect associations and the above-mentioned alterations of the original text<sup>34</sup>.

Lüling argues that written sources of the early Islamic period (as well as more broadly speaking – of many other ancient Oriental, pre-Muslim civilizations during other eras) were “completely deformed and disrupted due

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29 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 65.

30 Ibidem, s. 70.

31 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 209.

32 Ibidem, pp. 209, 212, 220-221; Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 54.

33 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 125.

34 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 9-10.

to repeatedly new overlapping, far-reaching dogmatic interventions of editors into the text<sup>35</sup>. Thus, in order to make a competent diagnosis for text passages that originated in a distant past, one should study such available sources in terms of the meaning they convey (the continuity of their semasiological functions) within the historical frame of these sources, and not merely taking them literally, as this might have changed many times since. A pillar of the German scholar's methodology is, hence, also the assumption that in order to correctly interpret an old text, one should first find a semi-otic (semasiological) key to reconstruct the system of how reality was perceived in a given epoch<sup>36</sup>. In the light of this approach, the average modern reader of the Qur'ān has hardly any chance of reaching the original message of this book. An additional difficulty is the lack of a comprehensive etymological dictionary of the Arabic language.

### 3. The oldest layer of the Qur'ānic text

What conclusions did Günter Lüling come to as a result of his research? The main one is that the text of the Qur'ān in the form canonised by Muslim orthodoxy hides a core layer of non-Trinitarian strophic compositions that are currently scattered in different Qur'ānic suras (mostly in the so-called Meccan suras, although Lüling disagrees with the classification proposed by Theodor Nöldeke [1836-1930], who divided the suras into Meccan and Medinan). Later, during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, these fragments, constituting the primary textual core of the holy book of Islam, were re-edited and re-shaped so as to include new elements<sup>37</sup>.

According to Lüling, the Judaeo-Christian texts constituting the first layer could have originated up to two centuries before the appearance of Muhammad, in the form of hymnodies in honour of the One God (e.g. in the form of psalms, responsories). These works, kept in a strophic convention, were to serve the liturgical needs of Christian communities in the central-western part of the Arabian Peninsula<sup>38</sup>. As the German researcher postulates, they belong form-historically with their rhymed structure to the

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35 Günter Lüling, *Sprache und archaisches Denken. Aufsätze zur Geistes- und Religionsgeschichte*, ed. II, Verlag Hannelore Lüling, Erlangen 2005, p. 8.

36 Lüling, *Sprache und archaisches Denken*, p. 8.

37 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 1, 174.

38 Ibidem, pp. XII-XIII, 7-8, 21, 23, 27, 184, 426.

“chain or international web of strophe-poetical traditions reaching from Old Egyptian, Old Testament, pre-Islamic Old Arabian, and Old Jewish models across the equivalent Byzantine, Coptic, Syriac, Arabic (of pre-Islamic and early Islamic times) and Ethiopian hymnody more or less simultaneously to early Islamic times, to spread finally even right up to the late medieval and modern Arabic strophic poetry (named *zagal* or *nabati*)”<sup>39</sup>.

These hymns were supposedly composed in a supra-dialectal Arabic language, possessing simultaneously many features of the literary language. It was a weakly inflected language, being on the one hand still not very far from colloquial speech, but on the other hand already elegant and sophisticated lexically. As Lüling put it,

“The Arabic language of these strophic Christian base texts, despite its distance from the Old-Arabic classical language (the Old-Arabic quantitative poetry) on the one hand, and the other hand with its affinity to colloquial language (everyday speech of illiterate people), is undoubtedly an upgraded literary language whose lexical, orthographical, morphological and syntactical regularities indicate a remarkable erudite tradition”<sup>40</sup>.

Elsewhere, the German scholar describes this language as “a high literary vernacular”<sup>41</sup>. The lack of inflection can be seen clearly for example in the hymnodies, in that grammatical endings (e.g. case-endings) were not systematically rendered (and then not necessarily in the correct linguistic form)

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39 As an example of texts that have undergone editorial alterations through various languages and alphabets in the Middle East, G. Lüling mentions Ethiopian Christian hymns from the beginning of the 6th century CE, which are largely derived from Coptic *Vorlagen* (translated through Arabic), sometimes coinciding more or less word-for-word for several hundred verses, maintaining the same strophic sequence. The frequent misunderstandings of the meaning of such Coptic originals by scribal editors who translated them into Ge'ez result from the misidentification of ambiguous Arabic text passages devoid of diacritic and orthographic marks. In parallel to the Coptic-Arabic-Ge'ez translations, strophic texts were also translated from Syriac into Arabic (through the so-called Arabic-garshuni system, i.e. the Arabic language written down in Syriac alphabet in times before the Arabic alphabet itself became stabilised). Garshuni is still used by Arab Christians in a limited scope). Ibidem, pp. 7-8 (the above quotation), 183, 184, 431.

40 Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'an*, p. 3.

41 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 17.



with the aim to preserve rhythm or rhyme<sup>42</sup>. Lüling writes with reference to the language of the Qurʾān that “(...) it very often seems that the rhyme-composer misuses classic-grammatical endings intentionally and humorously as a skilful poetical device, a trait which is not alien to any vernacular and popular poetry in any language at any time”<sup>43</sup>. Between this supra-dialectal language of the Qurʾānic text and the vernacular speech of the Arabs there might have been a similar relationship to what exists today between forms of supra-dialectal communication of Arabic-speakers from various regions of the Middle East (e.g. Syro-Palestine, the Persian Gulf area, Nile Valley, etc.) and individual dialects within these regions. The German scholar favours the aforementioned theses by Carlo de Landberg and Karl Vollers (still from the 19<sup>th</sup> century) that in the times of Muhammad some ninety percent of verbal communication on the Arabian Peninsula was performed – just like today – in local dialects and vernaculars<sup>44</sup>. At the same time, as today, different registers were used for different occasions: supra-dialectal Arabic, literary Arabic and classical Arabic (a kind of *koiné* that only a few people might have been using actively in pre-Islamic times)<sup>45</sup>. Literary and classical Arabic were used in speech (the nascent Arabic alphabet was coming into its own at this time) mainly for poetry and arts (by the Arab population at large, not limited to the Arabian Peninsula). Comprehensive grammatical norms for the classical language were established only along with the development of Arabic literature in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, and thereafter.

Thus, in Lüling’s theory, the oldest core of Qurʾānic materials was composed in a quite sophisticated, (semi-) literary form of Arabic – a supra-dialectal “lingua franca” of the Arabic-speaking inhabitants of the Levant. It was a speech which might have been preferred due to its lightness, melodiousness and aesthetic nature. Only after these texts had been reworked (reedited) by the so-called ‘Uṭmānic commission (the Islamic tradition informs us that ‘Uṭmān was a caliph in years 644-656 CE), as well as after its alterations by later editors, these compositions eventually took the form stylised to classical, pre-Islamic Old-Arabic, what was all actually carried out

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42 Ibidem, pp. 18, 155.

43 Ibidem, p. 18.

44 Lüling, *Sprache und archaisches Denken*, p. 194; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 101-102, 106;

45 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, pp. 32-33.

– as the German theologian sees it – in a very awkward way<sup>46</sup>. During these editorial activities, the Qur’ān was given a distinguished, fully inflected form which the later exegetes mistakenly regarded as reflecting the ecstatic tone of the message of Muhammad’s revelations<sup>47</sup>. In reality however, as postulated by Lüling, the original core of the Qur’ānic text was composed of a supra-dialectal linguistic layer with a predominance of nominal (i.e. non-verbal) structures.

Moreover, the language and style of these Arabic hymnodies seems also to reflect features of Christian literature found among neighbouring Semitic peoples. Therefore, according to Lüling, for a proper understanding and reconstruction of these hymns, it would also be necessary to analyse their content through the prism of Semitic sister languages (including literary archetypes, as well as syntax, lexis and grammar).

#### 4. The second textual layer of the Qur’ān

To this original Christian underlay of Qur’ānic materials was then superimposed a second textual stratum. This stratum is crucial for the genesis of the Muslim faith. It consists of modifications to the texts of the previous layer in the spirit of nascent Islamic teachings, still during prophet Muhammad’s lifetime<sup>48</sup>. Already here it is worth noting that Muhammad was – in the German theologian’s theory – a prophet calling for the restitution of the primeval, non-Trinitarian faith of the ancestors, at the same time drawing from the rich treasury of Judaeo-Christian traditions, which were retained to a varying extent among Christian Arabs. However, he did not preach Islam in its modern sense, but propagated – as Lüling claimed – a pre-Semitic cult of the spirit which was to reconcile humanity with its Creator. We will come back with a more detailed description of this hypothetical spiritual current later in this paper. And so, the second textual layer of the Qur’ān as reconstructed by Lüling is therefore – in terms of dogmatism – the closest one to the original message of the Arab prophet, and was labelled the “Prophet’s Qur’ān”.

The early editors of this Qur’ānic layer intended primarily to cleanse the text from its central Christological motifs<sup>49</sup>. These alterations usually took

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46 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 360.

47 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 10, 18, 340.

48 Ibidem, p. 11, 18, 427.

49 Ibidem, p. 443, 513.

the form of interventions into the text itself, by inserting mostly short glosses and comments between existing verses, whether in their original form or altered. On the one hand, these treatments reinterpreted the (Judaean-)Christian compositions to make them consistent with the dogmatic message of the prophet; on the other hand, they often caused syntactical distortions and incoherencies within the text. Linguistically, the main drawback of this Qur'ānic textual layer is, according to Lüling, the grammatical chaos introduced by the interpolated texts<sup>50</sup>. The editorial works at this stage disturbed, among other things, the strophic symmetry of the original text<sup>51</sup>: “the strophic order ... had been undoubtedly intentionally blurred to establish a prose text ...”<sup>52</sup> – as Lüling noted.

The originally rhymed hymnal structure was thus disturbed by secondarily inserted short elements of prose (modern Oriental scholarship calls the Qur'ānic style “rhymed and rhythmic prose”, giving it the rank of literary uniqueness, modelled after the old-Arabic *sağ'* technique). This resulted, among other things, in the deformation of the internal rhymes and rhythms of verses<sup>53</sup>, as well as in the appearance of many lexically and grammatically substandard forms<sup>54</sup>. As Lüling judges, “This language is actually not a language in the true sense of the word (...)”<sup>55</sup>. In Muslim exegesis, the occurrence of some non-standard grammatical forms in the Qur'ān is on occasion explained by the specifically oral nature of revelations preserved on paper<sup>56</sup>. As observed by the German scholar,

“Many of the numerous logical and linguistic cracks of the Qur'ānic text (resulting from an unbelievably crude editorial work!) have been explained away with the excuse that the Prophet spoke in ecstasy”<sup>57</sup>.

Lüling was quite blunt in his assessment to the second and subsequent textual layers which lead to the “decay of the Qur'ānic text”<sup>58</sup> as well as of “inserts and strange breaks in style, syntax and linguistic usage that point to

50 Ibidem, pp. 15, 16, 23; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 118; *Der christliche Kult*, p. 27-28, Über den Ur-Qur'ān, p. 8.

51 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 30.

52 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XVIII.

53 Ibidem, p. 16.

54 Ibidem, p. 18.

55 Ibidem.

56 Ibidem, pp. 18, 26.

57 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 360 (note 27).

58 Ibidem, p. 361 (note 27).

an editorial work with insertions of words and sentences” which Muslim theology itself cannot convincingly explain<sup>59</sup>. “It was an editorial activity that actually did violence to the Prophet's heritage”<sup>60</sup> – concludes the German Qur’ānist.

According to his estimates, the first and second textual layers of the Qur’ān constitute one third of its current content<sup>61</sup>. In practice, therefore, the longer the sura, the less of its text belongs to the two oldest layers. The original Christian hymns of Qur’ān usually consisted of only a few stanzas. Some of the shorter suras have almost completely escaped post-prophetic editorial reworking and survived as a recension with two layers only. An example is sura 78 *an-Naba’* (The Announcement). Following the analysis of the German scholar, it was originally an 8-strophic Christian hymn composed long before Islam, which was then expanded by editorial insertions of entire verses (4, 5, 15, 16, 18, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 39) or parts of verses (37, 38)<sup>62</sup>. These verses were added to make the text comply with the spirit of the Arab prophet’s message redacting Trinitarian Christianity. Verses 4 and 5 may still carry, according to Lüling’s thesis, authentic utterances of the prophet Muhammad<sup>63</sup>. Lüling’s reconstruction of the hymn involved the elimination of all interpolated verses, and otherwise – in the case of this particular sura – it was limited only to minor changes in the text. The result is a three-verse strophic structure. Each strophe builds up a separate thematic unit. The first two verses of each strophe are in principle uniform in message or closely related to each other, while the third verse stands in opposition to them. Lüling underlines that it is often characteristic of responsorial compositions, that the first two lines are chanted by a cantor, while the third verse is the response of the choir or congregation.

Here below, the reconstruction of the content of sura 78 *an-Naba’* (The Announcement) using the method of Günter Lüling (differences marked in grey):

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59 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, pp. 27-28.

60 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 426.

61 Ibidem, p. 11.

62 Ibidem, pp. 411-429.

63 Ibidem, pp. 426-427.

Three-verse strophes	Standard verse no.	Leading theme	Traditional Prose Text (as presented by Lüling leaning on translations by R. Bell and A. J. Arberry)	Reconstruction of the pre-Islamic hymn by Lüling(English version)
1a	78:1	Introduction: the Unbelief of Heathendom	Of what do they question one another?	Of what do they question one another?
1b	78:2		On the mighty tiding <sup>64</sup>	On the mighty tiding
1c	78:3		Whereon they are in variance.	Whereon they are in variance.
	78:4		Not at all! They shall soon understand!	INSERTION
	78:5		Again: Not at all! They shall soon understand.	
2a	78:6	Creation of Earth as a lovely Home	Have We not made the earth as a cradle	Has He not made the earth as a cradle
2b	78:7		And the mountains as pegs?	And the mountains as pegs?
2c	78:8		And We created you in pairs.	And has He not perfumed you with shifting winds?
3a	78:9	Creation of Night for Rest and Day for Living	And We appointed your sleep for a rest,	And He appointed your sleep for a rest,
3b	78:10		And We appointed the night for a covering	And He appointed the night for a covering
3c	78:11		And We appointed the day for a livelihood.	And He appointed the day for a livelihood.
4a	78:12	Creation of seven Heavens, Sun,	And We have built above you seven	And He has built above you seven (heavens)

64 According to traditional exegetes, the „mighty tiding” (Arabic: *al-naba’ al-‘aẓīm*) may refer to the announcement of the Day of Resurrection and the Last Judgment. Whereas Lüling explains that it’s a clear reference to the gospel of Christ, already then proclaimed many centuries with varying degrees of success, also among the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. In the following verse, people cannot agree on which Christian denomination is the closest one to the truth. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 425.

		Moon, Stars and Weather	(heavens) firm,	firm,
4b	78:13		And We have set a lamp blazing (=the sun)	And He has set a lamp blazing (=the sun)
4c	78:14		And We have sent down out of the rain-clouds water cascading	And He has sent down out of the rain-clouds water cascading
	78:15		That We may bring forth thereby grain and vegetation,	INSERTION
	78:16		And gardens luxuriant.	
5a	78:17	The Catastrophes of the Coming Doomsday	Verily, the Day of Distinction is an appointed time.	Verily, the Day of Distinction is like an eclipse of the sun,
	78:18		The day when there will be a blast on the trumpet and you will come in crowds;	INSERTION
5b	78:19		And heaven is opened and become gates (inviting the pious)	And heaven is opened and becomes gates (of gushing water),
5c	78:20		And the mountains are set in motion and become a vapour.	And the mountains are set in motion and become a vapour.
6a	78:21	Hell waiting for the Sinners	Behold, Gehenna has become an ambush	Behold, Gehenna is like an ambush
	78:22		For the proud transgressors a place of resort,	INSERTION
	78:23		In which to remain for ages,	
6b	78:24		They shall taste therein neither coolness nor any drink,	You will taste therein neither coolness nor any drink,
	78:25		Except boiling water and pus	INSERTION
	78:26		For a suitable recompense.	

	78:27		Verily, they used not to hope for a reckoning.	
	78:28		And they counted Our signs false utterly.	
	78:29		And everything We have numbered in a Book.	
6c	78:30		So: „Taste; We shall not increase you except in punishment.”	So: „Taste; He will not increase you except in punishment.”
	78:31	Mankind before the Judgement Seat God	Verily, for the godfearing waits a place of felicity.	INSERTION
	78:32		Gardens and vineyards	
	78:33		And maidens with swelling breasts, of equal age	
	78:34		And a cup overflowing.	
7a	78:35		In which they will hear no idle talk, no cry, no lies,	In it you will not make heard (yourself) either by idle talk or by lies,
	78:36		A recompense from thy Lord, a gift, a reckoning,	INSERTION
7b	78:37		Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, the Merciful, of whom they have no power to speak.	INSERTION ...of Him you will not gain to be addressed.
7c	78:38		On the day when the spirit and angels shall stand in ranks they will not speak; except him, to whomsoever the Merciful may give permission and who says what is the truth.	INSERTION ... you will not speak; except him... INSERTION... who says the truth.

	<b>78:39</b>	That is the true day; so whosoever wills takes unto his Lord a resort.	<i>INSERTION</i>
<b>8a</b>	<b>78:40</b>	Lo, We warn you of a punishment near, On the day when a man will see what his hands have sent forward.	Lo, We warn you of a punishment near, On the day when a man will see what his hands have come forward with,
<b>8b</b>		And the unbeliever will say: "O would that I were dust!"	And the unbeliever will say: "O would that I were dust!"
<b>8c</b>			

## 5. Prophets as angelic messengers of heavens

Interestingly, one of the most important dogmatic elements of the first and second layer of the Qur'ānic text was angelology<sup>65</sup>. The German researcher got his inspiration from the liberal theology of Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and Martin Werner (1887-1964) who dealt with, among other subjects, Biblical Christology<sup>66</sup>. According to Lüling, the Qur'an – in its original import consistent with the spirit of the teachings of Muhammad – presented the figures of Jesus Christ and Muhammad as eternal archangels belonging to a high angelic choir who adopted human bodies for their mission on Earth<sup>67</sup>. In this thesis, Jesus is not son of the Creator, but a creation of God, in all perfectly subservient to Him, and imparted with the task to ultimately save all of God's creation by suffering as his servant<sup>68</sup>. It is the task of man to

65 Ibidem, p. 21. Lüling, *Sprache und archaisches Denken*, p. 196.

66 Ibidem, p. 194; Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XXIII (note 13); *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp.19, 88; In Britain, the philosophy of Schweitzer and Werner is known as the school of S. G. F. Brandon (who translated Werner's book into English under the title: *The Formation of Christian Dogma. An Historical Study of its Problems*, Harper & Brothers, New York 1957).

67 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 28; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 70, 81, 84.

68 As Lüling believed, Jesus saw himself as the expected Messiah in the sense of the highest angelic envoy of the heavenly High Council (and precisely such a Messiah was expected by believers), according to Isaiah as per the Septuagint (Is 9,6ff.): „For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder, and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel, for I



follow the footsteps of Christ. The mission of both Jesus and Muhammad was to enable mankind to choose – to stand up either for believers or to unbelievers<sup>69</sup>.

In G. Lüling's theory, the belief in incarnation<sup>70</sup> of God's angels as prophets, which was widespread in Antiquity, was still current during the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>71</sup>. Muhammad was supposedly aware of his angelic identity, being actually one with the spiritual figure of Jesus and also older prophets<sup>72</sup>:

will bring peace upon the princes, and health to him“. *The Septuagint version of the Old Testament*, transl. L. C. L. Brenton, Samuel Bagster & Sons, London 1879, p. 844; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 55; *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 21, 70, 73, 432, 442-443; *Der christliche Kult*, p. 71.

69 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, s. 28-29; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 55, 320: The Lutheran philosopher and theologian Albert Schweitzer and the Bernese professor of dogmatics Martin Werner were convinced that original Semitic Christianity did not attribute divinity to Jesus. Werner wrote, among other things, that „Christ is not to be identified with Jesus. He is – as the ‘Spirit of God’ – in the very sense the force of Good in history, and the historical Jesus is not its only representation, but surely a unique one“ („Christus ist nicht mit Jesus zu identifizieren. Er ist, als der ‘Geist Gottes’ im prägnanten Sinne die Macht des Guten in der Geschichte und der historische Jesus zwar nicht ihre einzige, aber eine einzigartige Offenbarung dieser Macht“). Quote after: Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 228 (Lüling refers to a private letter by M. Werner to H. E. Weber from 28.4.1942).

70 This idea is also adopted by G. Lüling from the philosophy of Martin Werner (and more specifically, from his book: *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas*), which is also found in anthroposophical spirituality. A similar thesis regarding the Islamic prophetology was also put forward by Arent Jan Wensinck (1882-1939), who wrote that „Prophets as beings “in between” are not only immortal, but also preexistent, they are a kind of angels, but as such have no sharply defined personality and are therefore similar to each other.“ („Die Propheten als Mittelwesen sind nicht nur unsterblich, sondern auch präexistent, sie sind eine Art Engel, haben als solche keine scharf gezeichnete Persönlichkeit und sind daher einander ähnlich“; Arent Jan Wensinck, „Muhammad und die Propheten“, *Acta Orientalia* vol. II (1924), p. 183. John Wansbrough also pointed to the semantic affinity of the Arabic words *malāk* (angel) and *rasūl* (prophet, messenger). John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977, p. 55.

71 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 77-79. Cf. the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples (Mt 16, 13-14): „13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the

“... [Muhammad] undoubtedly believed (...) that he is himself an Angel of the High Council of God, pre-existent in this High Council before his lifetime and destined to return to this eminent place in afterlife”<sup>73</sup>.

He saw himself as the last link in the historical chain of biblical prophets<sup>74</sup>. The German Orientalist postulates that the Qur’ān refers to angels of the High Council by using the ambiguous Arabic terms of *al-muqarrabūn* (“those posted near God”, eg. verses 3:45, 4:172) and *ar-rabbāniyyūn* (eg. 3:79ff.). In the spirit of this interpretation, verse 3:45 speaks of Jesus (an angel of the High Council) incarnating into another prophet. It was only in the course of later editorial work (the third and fourth layers) that these two terms were reinterpreted from angels to “scholars” / “wise men”<sup>75</sup>.

Lüling places Muhammad and Jesus among the highest created angelic beings<sup>76</sup>. He even postulates, as a result of his own reconstruction of verses 79, 80 and following from sura 3 (The Family of Imran), that all of the prophets of salvational history were not human beings but incarnated angels instead<sup>77</sup>. He points out that Muhammad, while speaking of his own role in the Qur’ān in a similarly allusive manner, as does Jesus in the Gospels (Mt 16:20), never denies being an angel; on the other hand, neither does he confirm this directly, rather he avoids giving a straight answer to the question about his own identity (in verse 6:50 we read: “Say: I tell you not that with me are the treasures of Allah, nor do I know what is hidden, nor do I tell

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Son of Man is?”<sup>14</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” *Holy Bible. New International Version* NIV 1984.

72 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 79, 84.

73 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 75.

74 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 309. Consequently, this thesis means for Lüling, that a prophet – being an angelic incarnation – could not have received revelations from the archangel Gabriel, as the Muslim tradition would have it. And so, references to Gabriel in the Qur’ān can only be later editorial glosses. Lüling, *Sprache und archaisches Denken*, p. 196.

75 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 88; *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 74-75.

76 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 56.

77 Ibidem, pp. 70, 81; *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 28-29 (note 3), 75-76.

you I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me.”<sup>78</sup>). Hence, as the German theologian further concludes, it is an obvious mistake made by post-prophetic Islam (i.e. later Muslim exegetes) – and largely accepted uncritically by Western Orientalists – in asserting that the prophet was illiterate and lacked familiarity with dogmatic questions of the so-called revealed religions<sup>79</sup>. On the contrary, Muhammad, as an envoy of the high angelic council, must by definition have been an accomplished theologian and fluently conversant all questions theological and religious<sup>80</sup>. The Arab prophet, as depicted in the theory of the German researcher, was perfectly intimate with pre-Christian and Judaeo-Christian traditions, his theological arguments were furthermore extremely to the point<sup>81</sup>. Lüling calls Muhammad “the best [theologically] informed last fighter for the restitution of the pre-Christian message of Christ and the prophets abandoned by the Hellenised Christian West for imperialist reasons”<sup>82</sup>. The prophet’s illiteracy and ineptitude, as posited by post-prophetic Islam, must therefore be a later myth dictated by political pragmatism<sup>83</sup>.

By perceiving prophets as angelic beings, Günter Lüling also suggests that docetism, concomitant with Quranic Christology, (present, i.e., in surah 4:157:

“That they said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah’; – but they killed him not, nor crucified him,

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78 G. Lüling reminds us that the Hungarian Orientalist Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921) found in the *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* by Ibn Sa’d al-Baḡdādī (d. 845) gnostic and neo-Platonic elements of Muhammad’s utterances, allegedly claiming that he was an incarnated higher being: “I was sent (by God) from among the best human generations once and again at various times, until I finally am sent at this very time”. Ignác Goldziher: “Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīṡ,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*, vol. 22 (1909), p. 340; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 84; Goldziher quotes Ibn Sa’d in reference to the expression *taqabbuluka fī as-sāḡidīna* from the Quranic verse 26:219 with the explanation of the Hungarian Orientalist that it is about transmigration of the prophetic spirit in bodies of people worshipping God.

79 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 80, 89.

80 Ibidem, p. 80.

81 Ibidem, p. 219.

82 Ibidem, p. 89.

83 Ibidem, p. 225; *Der christliche Kult*, p. 34; *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 17.

but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not.”

is derived directly from early Christian angelic Christology<sup>84</sup>. According to the German theologian, the last meaningful attempt to defend the spirit of this angelic Christology within Christianity was Arianism<sup>85</sup>.

This notion, original to Muhammad’s revelations did not, however, fit into the dogmatic views of the creators of Islam as we know it today. During the course of ensuing editorial work, they must have degraded the prophet to the rank of a man, the first of the enlightened ones. Originally, however, as seen by the German scholar, we are dealing here with “*ur-Christian non-Trinitarian angel-christology*” [original spelling]<sup>86</sup>. Also fragments of the oldest textual layer of the Qur’ān relating to salvation through teachings of Christ must have been redrafted by Muslim scholars to make them refer to the teachings of the Qur’ān, or reformulated to become utterings of the prophet’s Trinitarian foes with a negative overtone (e.g. sura 74:11-17)<sup>87</sup>.

## 6. Islam as the indigenous tribal faith of Abraham

What is this enigmatic “pre-Semitic faith of the ancestors” repeatedly brought forward in Lüling’s theory? It’s a hypothetical religious current that was supposed to exist widely before the advent of the great monotheistic religions; an ancient Oriental cult of the freedom of spirit, faith in One God without religious institutions or earthly hierarchies of power<sup>88</sup>. Although from a historian of religion’s perspective, such a form of religious awareness can be called gnosis, Lüling does not use this term. He writes about “pre-Judaism” (ur-Judaism), “pre-Christianity” (ur-Christianity) and “pre-Islam” (ur-Islam) as referring to one and the same one and the same religious idea which can take on different terms throughout the history of mankind. The primeval faith (“pre-faith”) of humanity was neither monotheistic nor polytheistic; moreover, in Lüling’s theory, these two terms are not mutually exclusive, but constitute relative determinants coined by the religious establishment hostile to freedom of spirit. Institutionalised Judaism, Christianity

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84 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 61.

85 Ibidem, p. 236.

86 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XXIII.

87 Ibidem, pp. 15, 440-450.

88 Lüling, *Sprache und archaisches Denken*, p. 197.

and Islam, striving for global hegemony, monopolised and distorted the real revelations of the prophets, embezzling God in the process. In Lüling's nomenclature, the "pre-Qur'ān" (ur-Koran) is a pre-Christian text, and must have come into existence among the remnants of pre-Christian old-faith communities (and specifically: Judaeo-Christians). A dogmatic movement directed against the domination of Hellenistic, Trinitarian Christianity was initiated in Mecca, probably by the grandfather of Muhammad – 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (c. 497-c. 578)<sup>89</sup>.

According to Lüling, the term *islām* in the pre-Muslim era meant a departure from Christianity grosso modo towards the original faith of "Abraham and the tribes". Lüling postulates that the Arabic root of *islām*, *aslam*<sup>a</sup> and *muslim* originally related to the semantic field of "forsaking, abandonment, betrayal, falling off / leaving the church to one's faith"<sup>90</sup>. In their original sense, these words could have been pejorative terms denoting

89 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 20.

90 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 227, 243, 251. Supposedly these words were used in such a way before Islam, among Arab Christians (similarly to Syriac *ašlēm*, *mašlēm*, *mašlamū*, meaning 'being abandoned, forsaken, surrendered, betrayed'. Lüling found this meaning i.a. in an Arabic-Greek, pre-Muslim translation of the gospels of St. Mark and Matthew (probably translated from Syriac) where this root was used in the context of Judas' betrayal (Greek παραδιδόναι [paradidónai] – 'betray'). Scholars who drew attention to this point previously included Otto Spies in "Islam und Syntage", *Oriens Christianus* 57 (1973), p. 19. According to Lüling, this usage is also attested in old-Arab poetry, in which the verb *aslama* (meaning in modern Arabic "to convert to Islam") was used in the sense of "betraying, leaving the church, falling from faith" in accordance with its morpho-semantics, i.e. the causative fourth form of the verb (this usage was preserved, among others, in the poetry of one of the first martyrs of Islam, Ḥubayb Ibn 'Adī al-Anṣārī, in Ḡarīr's poetry and in the *Sīra* by Ibn Hišām, i.e. as late as the 9th century CE). Following this argumentation, Lüling suggests that verse 14 of sura 49 (interpreted in the classical Yusuf Ali's translation as: "The desert Arabs say, 'We believe.' Say, 'Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say, 'We have submitted our wills to Allah,' For not yet has Faith entered your hearts") should be rather understood in the following sense: "The desert Arabs say, 'We believe.' Say, 'Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say that ye have submitted [your] faith [from before]', For not yet has Faith entered your hearts". Similarly, the last words of verse 6:163 should be read in the sense of "I am the first of those who denied themselves / liberated themselves (towards the truth)" (Yusuf Ali's translation is: "No partner hath He: this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His will". Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 243, 251.

apostasy and used by the church hierarchy<sup>91</sup>. It wasn't until the Muslims seized power in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE that these lexemes gradually took on a new, positive meaning "denial of idolatry and polytheism"<sup>92</sup>. It is in this same sense that Abraham was the first who "denied himself" for God. In this manner too, Muhammad denied the ideologies lurking behind institutionalised Judaism and Christianity<sup>93</sup>. Only in a full retrospective of history, forced forward by post-prophetic Islam which imposed onto these concepts a meaning completely different from the original one<sup>94</sup>. The German Islamologist postulates further on that there is no etymological or historical evidence that before Islam (and at the time of nascent Islam) this root was used in reference to God, i.e. in the sense of "submitting oneself to God's will"<sup>95</sup>. Lüling also shared the view of contemporary Orientalist sceptics such as Patricia Crone (1945-2015) and John Wansbrough (1928-2002) in claiming that during the early stages of the development of Muslim religion, the terms *islam* and *muslim* could not yet have been in official use as religious nomenclature (cf. the first righteous caliphs who called themselves *amīr al-mu'minīn* in the sense of "leader of the faithful" and not yet "leader of the Muslims"). At the same time, Lüling reproaches both researchers for having

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91 Ibidem, pp. 241-256; *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. XXXV (note 27), 229, 250-251.

92 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 257. The German theologian believes that the underlying root of *aslama/muslim/islām*, attested in the Qur'ān 62 times (22 times as a verb, 32 times as a participle and 8 times as a verbal noun), mostly in the Medinan suras, had, according to the prophet's intention, an overtone of negation (or at least a neutral meaning), but not of affirmation (to be compared with the root *āmana/mu'min/īmān* used in the Qur'ān 812 times – 537 times as verbs, 230 times as participles and 45 times as verbal nouns in the meaning of "faith / faithfulness" with a definitely positive meaning). Lüling also postulates that the frequency in usage of the word stem *aslama/muslim/islām* pejoratively increases in the late Meccan suras on into the Medinan ones. Ibidem, pp. 244-245, 250-252, 260.

93 More on the theological justification of the Muhammad's "denial thesis" (i.e. denial of family, kinship and tribal ties for the sake of truth): Ibidem, pp. 251, 252, 260.

94 Ibidem, p. 242.

95 Lüling gives an example from Ibn Hišām's *Sira* (1st half of the 9th century CE), where the word *muslim* – as interpreted by Lüling – is used in certain contexts as if in the sense of a traitor. Ibidem, p. 243.

drawn from this the erroneous conclusion that these terms were therefore still non-existent at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, which is untrue<sup>96</sup>.

As for the word *qur'ān*, for Lüling it denotes a text intended for recitation or chanting/incantation, i.e. a liturgical work<sup>97</sup>. Until the time of 'Uṭmān's caliphate (644-656), the Qur'ān (*qur'ān*) existed as a set of texts, including – as postulated by the German Islamicist – “various books [writings] inseparably connected with each other, apparently of different volumes”<sup>98</sup>. Until the editing of the 'Uṭmānic codex (c. 652), the term *qur'ān* allegedly referred to this collection of texts, circulating among the faithful in divergent recensions<sup>99</sup>.

## 7. Third and fourth textual layer of the Qur'ān

Returning to the archaeology of the Qur'ānic textual strata, the third chronological layer is composed with texts that can be described as early Islamic. They mainly take the form of glosses and comments incorporated into the text, forming a total of two-thirds of the current final volume of the Qur'ān. They must have been written rather shortly after the death of Muhammad. Perhaps, as Lüling suggests, it was due to a dogmatic redrafting of the text in a way that was intended to favour the political authorities of the Arab-Muslim state at the time<sup>100</sup>. Nominal constructions still prevail in the text, though they are not as stylistically light and imaginative as in the first textual layer nor as sophisticated as the classical language of the fourth layer. The German researcher writes that it is a “non-literate language, (...) a language without a discernible distinct literary tradition”<sup>101</sup>.

In turn, the fourth stratum (also post-prophetic) must naturally have appeared in the Qur'ān after what by all accounts must have been a longer interval<sup>102</sup>. It consists mostly of longer, coherent blocks of prose (including

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96 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. XXXV, 57-58, 229, 251-252.

97 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 99, 359; *Der christliche Kult*, p. 28.

98 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 359.

99 Ibidem, p. 113; interestingly enough, in one hadith, the caliph 'Uṭmān is reproached for having made one book out of many books (*qur'ān*). More on this: Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Zweiter Teil, 2nd edition, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1919, p. 90.

100 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 18, 19, 427.

101 Ibidem, p. 19.

102 Ibidem, p. 24.

rhymed prose, but without a strophic arrangement)<sup>103</sup>. Usually these are lexically and grammatically harmonious texts, written in classical Arabic<sup>104</sup>. They often take the form of skillful and philologically refined repetitions of, or explanations to inconsistent lexical or grammatical matters belonging to the third layer. The fourth layer is not attached to the original *rasm* of the text (i.e. letter characters lacking consonant diacritics), but modifies it as needed<sup>105</sup>.

Why did editors of the third and fourth textual strata of the Qurʾān need to tamper so extensively with the received text by interpolating glosses and commentaries which, as far as the fourth layer is concerned, amounts to a retroflexed exegetical commentary on the text as transmitted hitherto? Perhaps because, after a longer period of time, the sense of the older Qurʾānic passages might no longer have been completely understood. But perhaps also to limit the ambivalence of Qurʾānic verses and to harmonise their theological interpretation<sup>106</sup>.

Thereafter, the Qurʾānic text remained stable until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, until the appearance of the standard Cairo edition, which though revises the text to a much lesser extent (more precisely, the modifications were made into the reconstructed variant reading of Ḥaḥṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim). In 1924 (and then in 1936), a commission of the Egyptian Ministry of Education undertook a philological redaction of the text, adjusting it to the needs of inhabitants of modern Egypt (issuing the so-called royal edition). Currently, due to its popularity (and the lack of a critical edition of the Qurʾān based on the oldest manuscripts), this edition is considered the normative text of the Qurʾān<sup>107</sup>.

What is crucial in Lüling's theory, are the four intertwining philological sublayers of the Qurʾān which in turn correspond to the dogmatic division of the text. The Arabic language of each layer differs in style and grammar, as well as in sense and message<sup>108</sup>. While the original passages of strophic text usually had just one leitmotiv which was developed consistently throughout, subsequent editorial activities, however resulted in numerous interpolations

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103 Ibidem, p. 154.

104 Ibidem, p. 15.

105 Ibidem, p. 19.

106 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 118.

107 Cf. Gabriel S. Reynolds, *Variant readings. The Birmingham Qurʾān in the context of debate on Islamic origins*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 05.08.2015.

108 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 17.



of varying lengths, each introducing new independent ideas, often not directly related to the original leitmotiv of a given passage<sup>109</sup>. The result is, as Lüling writes, that the message of the oldest Qur'ānic suras (in their present form) diverges from the original idea of both their initial authors and the Arab prophet himself<sup>110</sup>. And since the modern reader of the Qur'ān (even someone who knows Arabic very well or a native speaker) is thus often unable to guess the sense of the text on his own, he is wont to resort to the historised exegesis of the Qur'ān proffered by Islamic tradition. The consequence is, therefore, a communal understanding of the sacred text through the lens of anachronistic historical exposition.

An example of the late post-prophetic redaction is found in sura 80 (He Frowned) analysed by Lüling both dogmatico-historically and philologically; in his opinion, it was originally a pre-Islamic strophic hymn. Its intent was originally to focus on one compact idea – the fate of the faithful and unfaithful before God's throne on the Day of Judgment. Post-prophetic editors of the Qur'ānic text, however, modified the textual arrangement, form and meaning of this sura, which resulted in its semantic division into four separate sections. This editorial intervention, made perhaps to change the interpretation of the sura for specific reasons after Muhammad's death, radically altered the sense of the text<sup>111</sup>. According to Lüling, verses 27-32 were not present in the original version, but were inserted therein by secondary Qur'ānic editors due to their misinterpretation of the preceding verses 23-26 (perhaps in order to give these verses a non-eschatological overtone). Similarly, verses 33-37 are to be seen as a later interpolation, although this time it has actually been continued in the spirit of eschatology (as also explained by Muslim tradition). In Lüling's reception, these insertions disturb the structure and rhythm of the preceding strophic corpus. Significantly, they are also characterised by a large accumulation of narrative conventions which usually means a late interpolated text<sup>112</sup>. It should also not be excluded that – as one can indirectly deduce from Lüling's

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109 An example is sura 80 (He Frowned) and 96 (The Clot).

110 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 27.

111 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 98-150 (which is an extensive chapter dedicated to the analysis of sura 80, with the main target to reconstruct the Arabic text).

112 Ibidem, p. 144; on the role of time conjunctions in interpolating text fragments, cf.: John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1977, pp.18-19.

explanations – sura 80 might originally have consisted of two strophic hymns on the same subject, combined into one entity (verses 1-22 and 23-41).

What follows is Lüling's reconstruction (translated into English, Lüling's interpretation) of sura 80, aside the traditional Islamic translation / interpretation<sup>113</sup>.

Three-verse strophes	Standard verse no.	Translation according to the interpretation of the orthodox Islamic tradition (as presented by Lüling, with his comments in brackets, in verses 25-42 English translation by Yusuf Ali)	Reconstruction of the pre-Islamic hymn by Lüling (English version)
1a, 1b	80:1	He (presumably Muhammad himself is meant) frowned and turned away	He is indignant and turns away
1c	80:2	(indignant at the fact) that the blind man came to him.	when the unbeliever comes to Him.
2a, 2b	80:3	But who knows, perhaps he (that is the blind man) wants to purify himself (from hitherto sinful living)	And what will teach you? Perhaps He! Purify yourself!
2c	80:4	or he wants (as long as there is still time for that) to be reminded so that the reminder profits him.	Then the praise will profit Him!
3a	80:5	If someone (on account of his reputation and wealth) acts presumptuously ( <i>istağnâ</i> )	Isn't it He who is autonomous?
3b	80:6	you oblige him eagerly ( <i>tasaddâ</i> )	Isn't it He who is autonomous?

113 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 138-140ff.

3c	80:7	without carrying about (or, but less probable: without anybody being able to hold you responsible for that) that he wants to purify himself ( <i>wa mā ‘alaika allā yazzakkā</i> )	And are you thirsting for Him?
4a	80:8	But if somebody (of good will) comes running to you	And what is else incumbent on you unless: Purify yourself!
4b	80:9	and being godfearing	Isn't He who comes to you and labours and is worrying?
4c	80:10	you do not have a soft spot for him ( <i>fa-anta ‘anhu talahhā</i> )	But you turn away for idle enjoyments!
5a	80:11	No! it is a reminder (what is preached here)	Not at all! Restrain! Praise Him (thy Lord)!
5b	80:12	Whosoever wants thinks of it (that is: of the Koran)	And whosoever wants may praise Him!
5c	80:13	(it exists in its original text with God) on pages held in great esteem	On pages may he declare Him as noble!
6a	80:14	raised high and (of every pollution) clean (word-for-word: cleansed)	On writing plates he may make Him manifest!
6b	80:15	in the hands of writers (or: written by the hands of writers)	By good deeds he may glorify Him!
6c	80:16	(of) noble and devout (angels).	By virtues he may prove Him existent!
7a	80:17	Damned man (word-for-words: killed be man)! How ungrateful (equivalent to “unbelieving”) is he!	Killed is everybody as long as he is unbelieving in God,
7b	80:18	Out of what has God (literally: He) created him?	out of what He may have created him,

7c	80:19	Out of a drop (of sperm) He created him and He set for him measure and destination (for the stay in the womb?) ( <i>fa-qaddarahu</i> )	created him and destined him!
8a	80:20	Thereupon He made (for him) the way (at delivery) easy (into being) (or: Thereupon he made (for him) the way [of life] easy)	The way has ended he pleased for himself!
8b	80:21	Then He makes him die and brings (in the text the perfect is given as likewise in the preceding case) him into the grave.	The way has ended! He has killed him and buried him!
8c	80:22	Thereupon He raises him from the death (for a new life?).	The way has ended! But if He wants He makes him rise from death!
9a	80:23	No! Man has (at the end of his life) not yet accomplished what God has ordered him.	Not at all! When He fulfills what He has promised
9b	80:24	Man should after all (even) direct his attention to his food (and consider how it comes about).	Everybody shall see his judgement
9c	80:25	For that We pour forth water in abundance,	When heaven pours down and earth splits.
	80:26	And We split the earth in fragments,	----- <sup>114</sup>
	80:27	And produce therein corn,	-----
	80:28	And Grapes and nutritious plants,	-----
	80:29	And Olives and Dates,	-----
	80:30	And enclosed Gardens, dense with lofty trees,	-----

114 Empty spaces indicate the absence of a given verse in the oldest layer of the Qur'anic text as reconstructed by Lüling.

	<b>80:31</b>	And fruits and fodder,	-----
	<b>80:32</b>	For use and convenience to you and your cattle.	-----
<b>10a</b>	<b>80:33</b>	At length, when there comes the Deafening Noise,	For when the deafening (hours) comes
	<b>80:34</b>	That Day shall a man flee from his own brother,	-----
	<b>80:35</b>	And from his mother and his father,	-----
	<b>80:36</b>	And from his wife and his children.	-----
<b>10b, 10c</b>	<b>80:37</b>	Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others.	There is for everybody of all of them On that day something concerning him.
<b>11a</b>	<b>80:38</b>	Some faces that Day will be beaming,	On that day there will be shining faces
<b>11b</b>	<b>80:39</b>	Laughing, rejoicing.	Laughing ones and spreading good tidings.
	<b>80:40</b>	And other faces that Day will be dust-stained,	-----
<b>11c</b>	<b>80:41</b>	Blackness will cover them:	He shall let them come to the fore and they will be the ones who shall see the Dawn.
	<b>80:42</b>	Such will be the Rejecters of Allah, the doers of iniquity.	-----

Lüling held that Muslim theologians were originally aware of the textual stratification in the Qurʾān, what is expressed, inter alia, by old theological terms such as *al-mutašābih*, *al-muḥkam* and *al-mufaṣṣal*, which, however, quite quickly took on a different meaning in later Islamic tradition<sup>115</sup>. Classical Islamic tradition informs that the Qurʾān consists of two types of text: *al-mutašābih* (ambiguous text, allowing different interpretations; a text that should be interpreted only in relation to the *al-muḥkam* verses) and the *al-*

115 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 12-13; Der christliche Kult, p. 29.

*muhkam* verses (unambiguous, firm, decided) together with *al-mufaṣṣal* (comments on these verses). In Lüling's view though, the *al-mutaṣābih* passages were originally understood by Islam in the sense of texts of religious traditions preceding Islam, but whose meaning was straightened by Muhammad's mission; the *al-muhkam* passages on the other hand are precisely this new, clear interpretation / exemplification of the underlying texts, inspired by the mission of Muhammad (and *al-mufaṣṣal* passages are later exegetical commentaries on them in the form of glosses and interpolations, which were later merged with them and considered inseparable parts of the Qur'ān)<sup>116</sup>.

Lüling suggests that redactional work on the Qur'ān might have continued until the introduction of diacritical marks by Arab philologists (at the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE)<sup>117</sup>. As a result of the editorial activity, the Qur'ānic text hitherto transmitted in *scriptio defectiva* acquired its final form in *scriptio plena*. Hereafter, its text became considered sacred and immutable.

Given the above, Lüling postulates the following nomenclature for the prehistory of the Qur'ān's text<sup>118</sup>:

1. *The Pre-Qur'ān (Ur-Qur'ān)* – an initial collection of old Arabic (Judeo-) Christian texts that Muhammad used as an initial source for his religious polemics. Most of these texts were suffused by non-Trinitarianism conjoined with elements attesting to the influence of paganism or gnosis. In Lüling's theory, in the days of Muhammad's grandfather – 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib – opposition was formed in Mecca, not so much against orthodox Judaism, but rather against pro-Byzantine, Hellenised Christianity<sup>119</sup>. It was the Christian religion, not Judaism, that had the decisive influence on emergent Islam<sup>120</sup>. As the German researcher writes in this context, "*Islam developed almost exclusively out of the influences of a*

116 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 99-100.

117 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 23.

118 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 119-120,

119 Ibidem, pp. 227, 255; Lüling also quotes the historian Aḥmad al-Ya'qūbī (d. 897): „The Qurayshites [in Mecca] used to say: 'Abd al-Muttalib is the second Abraham". Aḥmad al-Ya'qūbī, edited by Martijn Th. Houtsma, *Ibn Wādhīh qui dicitur Al-Ja'qubī, Historiae, Historiam Islamicam continens*, Brill, Leiden 1883, p. 9.

120 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 184.

*Christian environment*<sup>121</sup>. The purpose of Lüling's work is to reconstruct the *Pre-Qur'ān* – the first and oldest layer of the text. The scholar claimed, supporting the thesis of the islamologist John Burton, that already at the time of Muhammad the Qur'ān must have existed in written form constituting of some indefinite, structured collection of texts<sup>122</sup>.

2. *The Prophet's Qur'ān* – a text based on the *Pre-Qur'ān* and the closest in meaning to Creator's original message to mankind. Perhaps it was authored by person(s) from the prophet's entourage. The appearance of the *prophet's Qur'ān* was certainly inspired by the prophetic mission of Muhammad who drew on Judaic, Christian and Judaeo-Christian (e.g. Ebionite) traditions which were known to his interlocutors<sup>123</sup>. The *prophet's Qur'ān* is the aforementioned second layer of the Qur'ānic text, with elements of angelology and preceding the editorial works of the 'Uṭmān's commission (for Lüling, this redaction can be identified with the third layer). The overarching goal of the prophet was to fight Trinitarian Christianity that was dominant in the Middle East and whose acolytes in Mecca – according to the researcher's analysis – were the Qurayş (Qurayshites)<sup>124</sup>.
3. *The Post-prophetic Qur'ān* – Today's canonical, authorised version of the Qur'ān, the result of numerous, extensive editorial re-workings (of the second and third layers), during the course of which the original prophetic message became completely distorted for pragmatic and political reasons and due to – as Lüling writes – “*theological incompetence of the [Qur'ānic] editors*”<sup>125</sup>. In this light, the textual and reading variants of the Qur'ān (*aṣāḥif* and *qirā'āt*) are relicts of older, redactionally unmodified passages of the *prophet's Qur'ān*, differing dogmatically from its present canonical version<sup>126</sup>. In Lüling's theory, in the course of caliph 'Uṭmān's

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121 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XXXIX.

122 John Burton, *The Collection of The Qur'ān*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1979, pp. 239-240.

123 Ibidem, p. 120; cf.: John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977, p. 205ff.

124 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XV, 426-427.

125 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 120.

126 Ibidem, p. 103.

redactional efforts to unify the text, editors cleansed it, inter alia, from such textual variants that were the closest to the *prophet's Qur'ān* contentwise (including variant reading versions by Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, Ubayy Ibn Ka'b), which until that time had been tolerated by the authorities because of their usefulness in combatting Hellenistic-oriented Meccans<sup>127</sup>. Probably also Shiite manuscript traditions of the text, along with the non-canonical versions of the *prophet's Qur'ān*, were burned on 'Uṭmān's order. Lüling postulates that Shiites were eventually forced by political and historical circumstances to adopt the 'Uṭmānic codex. It also means that they had definitively separated themselves from Sunni Islam only sometime after the completion of this Qur'ānic edition. Lüling believes that Shiism (and also Alawism, for example) preserves elements of the authentic (unmodified) teachings of Muhammad (from the *prophet's Qur'ān*). This includes, among other things, belief in the metempsychosical transmigration of the prophetic spirit into the persons of successive Shiite imams<sup>128</sup>. Lüling also suggests that in both the *post-prophetic Qur'ān* and in Islamic dogmatics, there still remain elements of the aforementioned pre-Semitic, anachronistic faith, as postulated by his theory. An example is that Muslim *ulamas* (i.e. theologians) recognise only the Mosaic Pentateuch and not the entire Hebrew Bible. This, according to Lüling, can be called the "Samaritan Syndrome" – because the putatively conservative Samaritans also rejected (centuries before Muslims did) the Prophets and the Writings, canonised by Rabbinic Judaism, which had neither been revealed to nor authorised by Moses<sup>129</sup>.

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127 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, s. 65.

128 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 108-109, 111; Lüling refers to *aḥbārs* from the Shiite traditions reporting that the 'Uṭmānic commission intervened into the Qur'ānic text in a manner discordant with the will of the prophet in over five hundred places; see also: Ignác Goldziher, *Spottnamen der ersten Chalifen bei den Schiiten*, Wiener Zeitung für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 15 (1901), pp. 321-334.

129 Lüling postulates that Samaritans – by leaving the mainstream of orthodox Judaism around the 10th century B.C. – might have regarded Abraham as a metempsychical incorporation of an angel-prophet. For more on the supposed analogies between Samaritanism and prophet Muhammad's Islam: Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 73-76, 235, 361-362.



## 8. The Qur'ān expressing a spurt of the freedom of spirit

In G. Lüling's unconventional theory, the ultimate message of the Qur'ān (if, as he writes, it had ever been the Prophet's intention for the Qur'ān to become a single book at all) and the purpose of Muhammad's mission was an attempt to restore the faith of the ancestors to the world, an analogy to Jesus' message a few centuries earlier<sup>130</sup>. This hypothetical set of ancient beliefs was claimed by him to derive from the heavenly order of creation and be the eternal message of the Creator for his Creation. It concerns the return of mankind to an ancient, Old-Semitic cult of the One God dwelling or worshipped on "high places", spiritual heights (the so-called *ġannāt al-ġibāl*), as well as at *asherahs*, in fertility groves and holy votive places (which are, seemingly in this sense, repeatedly stigmatised by the Old Testament); a return to the service of God in spirit and truth, following the example of the Patriarch Abraham personifying unshakable steadfast faith unrestricted by the shackles of religious laws and institutions<sup>131</sup>. In high gardens, the highlands of the Earth, the human spirit eagerly rises to grasp the truth. The highland cult also venerates the "*innocently suffering and dying prince, rising anew, 'the shepherd giving his life for his sheep'*"<sup>132</sup> (in this sense the Old and New Testaments have preserved the image of this cult as a form of prefiguration of Christianity). As Lüling explains, the Arabs took it over from the Old Israelite tribes some two millennia before Islam<sup>133</sup>.

During the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, this cult was still supposedly preserved to a large extent among Arab tribes inhabiting central parts of the Arabian Peninsula (the so-called *Arabia Haeretica*), who continued to resist the Hellenised imperial orthodoxy of institutionalised Byzantine Christianity, as well as amidst branches of pre-Chalcedon Christianity and in some anachronic structures of Judaism<sup>134</sup>. Amongst tribes cut off from the turbulent transformations sweeping through contemporary Mediterranean civilizations, old beliefs and customs survived longer here than elsewhere. Defending them, a prophet from Arabia stood up in the spirit of his predecessors:

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130 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. LX.

131 Ibidem, pp. XIV, XV, XLIX, 14, 15, 16, 21, 37, 80, 515; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 215, 227, 278-293.

132 Ibidem, p. 293.

133 Ibidem, pp. 260, 277.

134 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XV.

“(...) the main concern of the Prophet Muhammad was to leave Christianity, – and Judaism also, but Christianity was the stronger, more wicked, and more dangerous foe –, Christianity as a fundamental falsification of the historical truth of the original Christian religion (...) nascent Christianity has bluntly denied the central intentions of the founder Jesus Christ”<sup>135</sup>.

And so, Muhammad was merely defending the primeval, unstained Semitic faith against both Judaism and Christianity, and opposing, among other things, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (the Qur’ān calls the adherents of this teaching *mušrikūn* – associators, those who associate partners with God<sup>136</sup>) that was legitimised by the Church, initially at the First Council of Nicaea in 325<sup>137</sup>. Lüling was convinced that after that date the remote desert outskirts of the Arabian Peninsula remained one of the few refuges of the aniconic, non-Trinitarian faith dating back to the days long before the first Ecumenical Councils. Its followers denied Christ’s divinity, believing instead that he was an incarnate, created angelic messenger sent to Earth to strengthen simple faith in God<sup>138</sup>. It was only post-prophetic Islam that deformed the significance of high places and gardens of spiritual initiation to such an extent that their original meaning was no longer recognisable in the Qur’ānic text<sup>139</sup>. Lüling writes that

“This realization, that the move of nascent Islam away from Christianity was at the same time a resolute turn back to the ancient heathen/tribal cult in the ‘Gardens, Holy Groves or High Places’, – just as it is known to us from the Old Testament as the ancient religion of tribal Old Israel later on condemned by orthodox Judaism and orthodox Christianity –, is indeed something completely new and quite unexpected”<sup>140</sup>.

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135 Ibidem, p. LX.

136 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, pp. 56-57.

137 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 21.

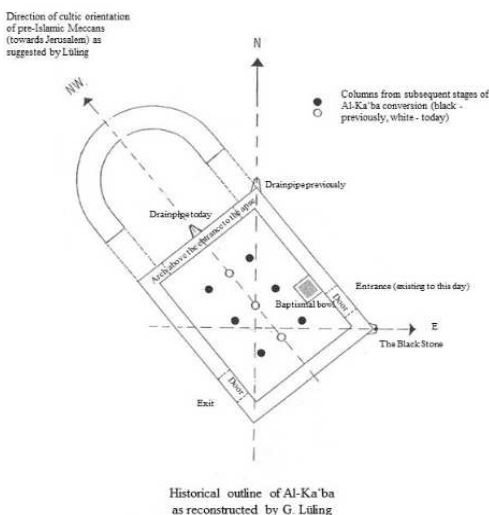
138 Lüling connects the threads of non-trinitarianism and anti-trinitarianism among the Arabs with the Arians and Judaeo-Christian Ebionites. However, only very hypothetically can the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries be regarded as the border period of their presence in the Middle East. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 21.

139 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 287.

140 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XV.

## 9. Mecca Mahometi

For LÜling, the centre of non-Trinitarian worship by old believers was the sanctuary of Al-Ka'ba in Mecca<sup>141</sup>. Already for two centuries before the mission of the prophet Muhammad it had been the temple of a 'pre-Christian' cult. Then, in the period immediately preceding the birth of Islam, the Ka'ba – as was the case with many other pagan temples in the first centuries of Christendom – was converted into a church<sup>142</sup>. Old symbols were left inside the shrine, but were imparted with a different religious significance, and in furthermore, additional cultic paraphernalia was brought in. Architecturally speaking, Al-Ka'ba was supposedly a church-like structure with its apse directed towards the north-west (i.e. in the direction of Jerusalem, in accordance with the orientation of Jewish and Christian sacred structures at that time), and divided by two short rows of columns demarcating the main nave and two side aisles, decorated inside with murals (including Abraham, Jesus, the Mother of God, angels)<sup>143</sup>. LÜling argues (here in accordance with Muslim tradition<sup>144</sup>) that



141 LÜling devotes one entire (aforementioned) book to the problem of Al-Ka'ba: *Der christliche Kult an der vorislamischen Kaaba als Problem der Islamwissenschaft und christlichen Theologie (The Christian cult in the pre-Islamic Al-Ka'ba as a problem of the Islamic scholarship and Christian theology)*.

142 LÜling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 44.

143 Ibidem, pp. 47-50 (quoting, among others, the Meccan chronicles *Kitāb Aḥbār Makka* from the 9th century by the Muslim historian Al-Azraqī, edited by Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Chroniken der Stadt Mekka*, Bd. I, Leipzig 1861, In Commission bei F. A. Brockhaus, p. 110ff.)

144 Marek Dziekan, "The Arabs before Islam – the Birth of the New Religion," [in:] Teresa Wolińska, Paweł Filipczak (ed.), *Byzantinum and the Arabs. The En-*

– much like the Ka’ba – Muhammad initially thought of adapting (or rather reforming) Judaism and Christianity to the needs of his prophetic mission. When this failed, however, he founded a separate religious movement.

The community of Mecca and its environs in Muhammad’s time was not religiously uniform, but apparently divided (as postulated by Lüling) into conflicting Christian factions, among which the leading party might have been pro-Byzantine, Hellenistic Chalcedonians (i.e. Trinitarians)<sup>145</sup>. So too the Meccan opponents of the prophet, including at first also his relatives – the Qurayshites, were neither pagans nor polytheists (as Muslim tradition would have it), but Trinitarian Christians impacted by Hellenism<sup>146</sup>. Initially, they considered Muhammad a *kahin* (Arabic: *kāhin*; according to Lüling, a pagan prophet or cult leader), and hence rejected his message<sup>147</sup>. Politically influential “outposts” among believers in Mecca might have been also maintained by Christians from Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine, Egypt and Ethiopia. The victory of Muhammad’s party over the Trinitarian Christians of Mecca paved the way for his conquest of the adjacent regions such as the Hijaz, and then of neighbouring lands.

Pre-Islamic Mecca, ostensibly inhabited by Christian communities of varying denominations, is also said to have possessed its own well-established tradition of Old Arabic literature<sup>148</sup>. As postulated in the 1920s by the Swedish theologian and Islamologist Tor Andræ (1885-1947), pre-Islamic Arab-Christian poets were wont to refer to the deity of al-Ka’ba as if he were the Christian God<sup>149</sup>. According to Lüling’s analysis, the contents of Old Arabic poetry and the text of the Qur’ān indicate that the Christian cult at the Ka’ba was put an end to by the Muslim capture of Mecca<sup>150</sup>.

Thus, the primary opponents of Muhammad at Mecca were Hellenised Christians against whom he put up a fight because of their belief in the Holy Trinity, their veneration of the Cross and the putative worship of images. It

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*counter Civilizations from VI to VIII Century*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA, Warszawa 2016, p. 51.

145 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XXXIX (note 34), pp. 20-21.

146 Ibidem, p. XV, 443; *Der christliche Kult*, pp. 56, 70; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 94, 95, 186, 200-201.

147 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 16.

148 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 43.

149 Ibidem, pp. 5, 17. Tor Andræ, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum*, (reprinted from *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* in 1923-1925), Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala - Stockholm 1926, p. 39.

150 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 52.

was they whom the Prophet (being himself a preacher of the pre-Christian theology) made out to be “associators” (sectaries of *širk* – a doctrine affiliating associates to God; Arabic: *mušrikūn*) and “idolaters” (Arabic: *‘ubbād al-awṭān wa-al-aṣnām wa-at-tamāṭīl*). He impugned them, bespeaking the falsehood of their beliefs with the help of religious books.

In Lüling’s hypothesis, emergent Islam was not an enemy of Arab paganism, but merely of Meccan Christianity<sup>151</sup>. Muhammad saw no foes in pagans, just in Trinitarian Christians, expressly at Mecca<sup>152</sup>. Only post-prophetic Islam, which in its early phase was particularly interested in the eradication of Mecca’s Christian past, reconfigured the prophet’s erstwhile rivals as Arab pagans from central Arabia<sup>153</sup>. In Lüling’s estimation, Muslim tradition presents “an extremely unrealistic picture of the religious situation in Mecca before Islam and in the early Islamic period”<sup>154</sup>. However, the German researcher, unlike some other sceptical scholars (H. Lammens, B. Bonnet-Eymard, P. Crone, J. Wansbrough), still does not doubt in the historicity of the 7<sup>th</sup>-century city of Mecca itself, nor the existence of the religious cultic site, the pre-Islamic Ka’ba<sup>155</sup>. He held the quest for the origins of Islam outside of Arabia as scientifically groundless<sup>156</sup>.

## 10. Post-prophetic Islam and institutionalization of faith

The birth of Islam in the Hijaz, the historicity of Mecca and the authenticity of the prophet Muhammad are some of the few elements which Lüling’s theory has in common with the traditional Muslim account(s) and the conventional narrative of the history of Islam adopted by modern Oriental studies. The more, however, we go into detail, the fewer similarities we are able to find. For the German theologian, the genesis of the Islamic religion, the image of Mecca, the person(ality) of the Prophet, the holy book of Muslims as well as the entire corpus of Islamic religious literature (including the hadiths and Sīra) underwent a rigorous evolution, countless revisions

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151 Ibidem, p. 15.

152 Ibidem, pp. 39, 41, 61, 70. See now Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.

153 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 202, 205.

154 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 41.

155 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XXXIX.

156 Ibidem, p. XLIII.

and modifications after the death of Muhammad. This was mainly due to political reasons, and to a lesser extent on account of the theological ignorance of the Qur'ān's editors. Some of the historiographic materials were fabricated<sup>157</sup>. The history of Islam's genesis, as we know it today, in historiographic and dogmatic terms, is believed to be a version written by generations of ulamas for some two centuries after the death of the Islamic prophet<sup>158</sup>. In this respect, Lüling sees an analogy to the first two hundred years of Christianity<sup>159</sup>. Muslim theologians and exegetes, however, had in Lüling's view an easier task in this regard: he came to the conviction (unlike most historians of Islam, including also the sceptical scholars such as J. Wansbrough) that "(...) there was in principal no oral tradition at all, either for Old Arabic poetry or for the Koran (...)"<sup>160</sup>. To justify this proposition, the German Islamicist referred to selected studies by Ignác Goldziher (1850-1921) and Joseph Schacht (1902-1969), who showed that many isnads (the chain of authorities attesting to the historicity of a particular hadith) were partially or entirely fabricated anachronistically by posterior tradition compilers<sup>161</sup>.

As the years passed, post-prophetic Islam gradually underwent an internal process of purging all Christian traces of its past: the Christian history of the Hijaz and the Christian, pro-Byzantine religious identity of Muhammad's enemies in Mecca. They were replaced by images of a pagan Arabia, including the idolatrous beliefs of Muhammad's opponents. Lüling writes that

"creating such particularly repulsive images of enemies as defeated ghosts of the distant past is actually an 'addictio in adjecto' feature of every orthodoxy"<sup>162</sup>.

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157 Ibidem, pp. XV-XVI, 431, 517.

158 Ibidem, p. XXXV.

159 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 304.

160 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, sp XLI; Lüling refers to Fritz Krenkow's work entitled "The use of writing for the preservation of ancient Arabic poetry," [in:] Thomas W. Arnold, Reynold A. Nicholson (ed.), *A Volume of Oriental Studies, presented to E. G. Browne on his 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1922, pp. 261-268; and also to the aforementioned book by Louis Cheikho entitled: *Le christianisme et la littérature chrétienne en Arabie avant l'Islam*, 3 tomes, Imprimerie catholique, Beyrouth, 1913, 1919, 1923.

161 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 31.

162 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 54.

A long-term side effect all this, though unintentional, but significant in outcome, was the ongoing process of mythologization and deformation of the history of one's own religion, intensified from one generation to the next, perpetuating an unhistorical image of the prophet, distorting the original meaning of the Qur'ān's verses, etc.<sup>163</sup>. As a consequence, a fanciful myth of the dark era of ignorance (Arabic: *al-ġāhiliyya*) immediately preceding Islam arose<sup>164</sup>.

"To name this picture a 'forgery' is too harsh, because after a considerable initial period, when awkward circumstances were suppressed, there was bound to be much ignorance involved on the part if innumerable, sincere, late-born persons transmitting the story, so that in time they themselves could no longer understand what had really been going on"<sup>165</sup>

– writes the German scholar. In his theory, the process of creating Islamic religion in this way – de facto thwarted Muhammad's intentions and reversed the meaning of his message<sup>166</sup>. Whereas the "old-faith" prophet came to offer the world a "return to sources"<sup>167</sup>, preaching pre-Christianity and pre-Judaism<sup>168</sup>, Muslim orthodoxy "abducted" his mission and used it as its own "springboard" to rule over souls<sup>169</sup>. G. Lüling was convinced that the final, canonical version of the Qur'ān is not the same text that could have been anticipated by Muhammad during his own lifetime<sup>170</sup>: "(...) the prophet recited a substantively different text of the Qur'ān and had a completely different image of the Qur'ān and its issues from what was later developed by orthodox Islam"<sup>171</sup>. The political and religious authorities of the Arab-Muslim caliphate, who by manipulating the message of the holy book of Islam and its traditions, emulated the religious authorities of

163 Ibidem, pp. 24, 54.

164 Ibidem, pp. 24, 54, 61-62, 70; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 209, 212, 220-221, 310, 315.

165 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XVI.

166 Ibidem, p. 516; *Der christliche Kult*, p. 70.

167 Lüling equates this "return to sources" with events from the history of the Roman Catholic church of the 16th century, when reform movements appeared with similar aspirations to revive the original spirit of faith.

168 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 223.

169 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XIV.

170 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 62, 95.

171 Ibidem, p. 94.

Judaism and Christianity<sup>172</sup>. Only then, could a caste of exegetes come forth<sup>173</sup>. The German scholar quotes the well-known words of one of the godfathers of modern Islamic studies, Ignác Goldziher, referring to the Qurʾān's redaction:

“We can (...) conclude that as regards the constitution of the sacred text, in the oldest period of Islam there prevailed an all generous liberty reaching up to individual arbitrariness, as if people did not care whether they convey the text in a form fully corresponding to its archetype”<sup>174</sup>.

Lüling also shares the harsh opinion of J. Wansbrough that the Qurʾānic text in its current standardised form is a “distinctly theological patchwork”<sup>175</sup> and a collection of “mechanically linked prophetic logia”<sup>176</sup>.

For the German theologian, Islam as originally preached by Muhammad was never a distorted form of Christianity, but rather a restitution of the primordial Abrahamic faith in its purest form<sup>177</sup>, cherished on account of its simplicity for centuries by Semitic tribes of the interior of the Arabian Peninsula – the descendants of Ishmael<sup>178</sup>. Centrifugal tendencies were dormant among them long before the era of Muhammad, whose arrival was but the culmination and embodiment of these growing archetypal resentments<sup>179</sup>. Hence, “(...) the prophet's intention, to restore the Abrahamic religion, was [in him] clear, well-grounded and time-honoured through tradition”<sup>180</sup> – writes Lüling. And Islam – according to his theory – is derived dogmatically from two religious traditions, which the prophet in his own way merged into one:

“the tradition of the anti-Trinitarian, non-sacramental Judaeo-Christianity, and the tradition of aniconic, non-sacramental, Central Arabian paganism essentially preserved from Judaic and Christian in-

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172 Ibidem, p. XXXVI; *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 88, 93.

173 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 95.

174 Ibidem, p. 62; Goldziher, *Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, p. 33.

175 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 114.

176 Ibidem, p. 115; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 120.

177 More on Abraham's faith as understood by the German theologian: Ibidem, pp. 229-236.

178 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 14, 520.

179 Ibidem, p. 14.

180 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 59.



fluences; the prophet rightly considered and proclaimed the latter tradition as a return to the 'religion of Abraham'"<sup>181</sup>.

Unfortunately, in the view of the German scholar, the true mission of Muhammad evanesced upon his death – the power over communities of the faithful was taken over by the up and coming political and religious elites of emergent Islam, which quickly turned the spurt of freedom of the spirit into yet another solidified monotheistic religion, enclosed by walls of dogmatism, duties, commands and prohibitions which all restricted this freedom. The last followers of this ancient faith of the ancestors (according to Lüling, it is them whom the Qur'ān calls *ḥanīfs*) were to become extinct at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE<sup>182</sup>.

### 11. Hellenisation of the forefathers' faith

As Lüling saw it, the advent of Islam at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century appears to be an attempt to rescue primeval, simple Abrahamic monotheism. Islam was intended to carry a message that was spiritually closer to the Semitic original than to what little remained of it in Late Antique, post-Chalcedon, Byzantine imperial Christianity<sup>183</sup>. The scholar argues that Christianity by then had become Hellenised to such an extent that it departed from teachings of Christ, who had proclaimed the necessity of a return to the ancient ancestral faith<sup>184</sup>. As a result, it lost much of its fundamental spirit by turning away from its source. The takeover of political power, the institutionalisation of ecclesiastical hierarchy and the decisions of subsequent church councils were to wreak further havoc on developing spirituality and remaining true to the teachings of the Semitic forefathers<sup>185</sup>.

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181 Ibidem, p. 69, and also: p. 71.

182 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, pp. 21, 443.

183 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 26. In this context, Lüling quotes the historian of antiquity Eduard Meyer (1855-1930) who wrote that "The victory of Christianity over competing religions was in fact – it should be stated with all firmness – in a much broader dimension the victory of paganism over Christianity". Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums. Die Entwicklung des Judentums und Jesus von Nazaret*, J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, Stuttgart 1925, p. 23 (note 1).

184 Cf. the dogmatic dispute between St. Peter and St. Paul concerning the direction of the development of Christianity after the ascension of Christ.

185 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 26.

“Ultimately Hellenized in the fifth and sixth century CE, Christianity, defeating the Semitic pre-Christianity, is the fruit of a unique historical fusion of various ideological currents of the Antique, and becomes a completely new, highly effective and politically powerful imperial system devised to control masses of human units deprived of tribalism and tradition”<sup>186</sup>

– writes the researcher. He shares the view of the Muʿtazilite theologian ʿAbd al-Ġabbār al-Asadabādī (935-1025) that “It was not the Romans who became Christians, but the Christians who became Romans”<sup>187</sup>. In other words, pre-Christian theology as preached by the prophet Muhammad was much closer to the original spirit of inherited faith than the teachings of the Church itself in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (and closer to that spirit than the teaching of the Muslim dogmatists of the Umayyad or Abbasid period due to the distortion of the prophet’s teachings after his death). Lüling suggests that Islam, like Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, appeared on the stage of history in order to re-awaken the living spirit of pre-Christianity from its long recreant slumber<sup>188</sup>. This element of Lüling’s theory is a continuation of the idea put forward by the aforementioned Adolf von Harnack, who wrote that

“Islam, which stormed this construct [i.e. the Hellenised, Late Antique Christianity] was in fact its rescuer; because, despite all its severity and emptiness, it [Islam] was a more spiritualized force than the Christian religion which became the religion of amulets, fetishes and magic in the Orient (...)”<sup>189</sup>.

Lüling believes that one of the manifestations of Christianity’s Hellenization was the unprecedented attribution of divinity to Christ, which could have been motivated by, among other things, the need for sacralisation of worship, the hierarchisation of the clergy and the introduction of the cult of saints<sup>190</sup>. This process was additionally stimulated by the imperialisation of the Christian religion within the Roman Empire. The German scholar shares the thesis of some liberal Western European theologians at the turn

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186 Ibidem, p. 325.

187 ʿAbd al-Ġabbār al-Asadabādī, *Taṭbīt dalāʾil an-nubuwwa dated 995 CE*. (quote from: Ibidem, p. 25).

188 Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 72.

189 Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas*, vol. 1, Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, Freiburg 1888 (quote from: Ibidem, p. 63).

190 Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, pp. 27, 53, 57.

of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that the original teachings of Christ (and the Christian communities founded by him) were gradually eradicated in Late Antiquity by the dominant, Hellenising denominations of Christianity. It is against the manifestations of this “imperial theology” that the prophet Muhammad fought in the Arabian Peninsula, seeing in it his main ideological enemy. He equated its theology with polytheism and idolatry (Arabic: *širk* and *‘ibādat al-awṭān*)<sup>191</sup>. In Lüling’s theory, the original message of Jesus, which Muhammad for his part sought to restore in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, was at this time preserved only in a few places of the Levant, including some Judaeo-Christian communities, specifically in areas inhabited by conservative Arab tribes<sup>192</sup>. It is worth remembering here that the German researcher considers the historical figures of Christ and Muhammad as incarnations of “the divine spirit” – two of the many representations of the power of good in human history<sup>193</sup>.

However, Muhammad’s true message must have given way to the pragmatic needs of the contemporary political agenda anon, proving to be too ambitious and problematic to realise for future generations<sup>194</sup>. Hence, for similar reasons that centuries earlier had led to the rejection of Jesus’ original pre-Christian teachings, the kindred pre-Islamic teachings of Muhammad were also dispensed with:

“The pragmatic-political reorientation carried out by the post-prophetic Islam did not result in a renaissance of the biblical religion in its original spirit as desired by the prophet, but brought in its place a renaissance of the secular Late Antique culture (...) which was dressed in completely deformed and entirely subdued words of Muhammad”<sup>195</sup>.

According to Lüling, the post-prophetic Islam changed Muhammad’s message so much that, as a consequence, the figure of the prophet himself was inevitably redrawn as well.

As mentioned above, unlike other representatives of the sceptical school of Oriental studies (such as Henri Lammens or Patricia Crone), G. Lüling had no doubt as to the very historicity of the person of Muhammad. More-

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191 Ibidem, p. 53.

192 Remarkably, Lüling firmly believes in the existence of Judaeo-Christians in the Middle East in the 7th century CE. Ibidem, p. 28.

193 Ibidem, pp. 27, 460.

194 Ibidem, p. 211.

195 Ibidem, p. 206.

over, in Lüling's theory, he is a glorious figure – a symbol of the struggle to revive and restore the natural order of God's creation. In a similar way, the German scholar approaches the problem of the historicity of the Qur'an and the sources of early Muslim literature. Contrary to many modern sceptics who diminish or deny their historiographic value (such as J. Wansbrough, P. Crone, M. Cook or G. Hawting), Lüling is of the opinion that one should not reject sources of Muslim tradition *a priori*, but rather subject them to thorough academic criticism<sup>196</sup>. He moreover defends the high value of early Islamic literature for studying the origins of Islam. In his conviction, the reasoning of some of the above-mentioned Orientalists is based on a number of alogisms which in turn lead to unilateral conclusions:

"The main omission results from a wrong interpretation of the correct and undenied evaluation that, with very few exceptions, all written Arabic and Islamic tradition has come down to us only in the form of Arabic texts all of which had been edited [Lüling's emphasis] at the earliest around the turn of the eighth and ninth century AD (that is approximately two centuries after the death of the Prophet)"<sup>197</sup>.

According to the German theologian, when taking into account the lateness of these sources, one should not, however, reject the rich legacy of Islam's writings, but study them using scholarly tools such as source-, form-, and textual criticism etc., combined with an appropriate historical and theological-dogmatic knowledge on that era.

Limiting the academic discourse on the beginnings of Islam only to external sources (mainly Christian ones in Syriac, Greek, Coptic, as advocated by, among others, P. Crone and M. Cook) is for Lüling an uncertain methodology which can only lead to ambiguous results. One may not completely jettison the historiographic value of a religious tradition by the fact that it was written down many dozens or even hundreds of years after the events described. Recording (in a written form) and editing the history of Judaism and Christianity took place a very long time after the events narrated transpired – a much longer time span than in the case of Islam. However, scholars did not simply forsake these sources completely and look for alternatives exclusively in the writings of neighbouring civilisations. For the German theologian, the solution to it is a meticulous archaeology of the texts in the form in which they have been preserved, i.e. their reconstruction

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196 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XXXV.

197 Ibidem.

using the available methodological workshop<sup>198</sup>. At this point, Lüling's method intertwines with that of mainstream Western Islamic studies.

## 12. Theory without continuation

The theory of the German scholar has not gained recognition in wider islamicological circles, and the author himself fits into the pantheon of eccentric sceptics at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21st centuries. Lüling has been reproached for bearing prejudice against Islam in favour of Christianity. However, a thorough analysis of his theory leaves no doubt that this particular accusation against him is wrong. His theory is an attempt to argue that originally the prophet Muhammad intended Islam to be a return to the sources of true faith, which had been defiled by both Judaism and Christianity.

In search of the spark that gave rise to this great world religion, Lüling turns his eyes to Late Antique Judaeo-Christianity and beyond. In the first centuries of the Common Era, Middle Eastern Judaeo-Christian communities were very numerous, but usually small and heterogeneous dogmatically speaking. The vast majority of their literature has not survived to this day, and so we must learn about their syncretic beliefs from polemical treatises of their theological adversaries. Judaeo-Christian sects and gnostic movements appear among heresies enumerated by Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-403), John of Damascus (c. 675-c. 749) and other authors, but usually these are generally not systematised, first-hand descriptions. Lüling too is unable to proffer more specifics using his research method, and he limits himself to general claims about the alleged Judaeo-Christian roots of Islam. Entering into the scholarly quicksand of Judaeo-Christianity's dogmatics, which is still so little known and remains very ephemeral, every theory – including that of Lüling – is automatically more concerned with speculative conjecture than hard facts. Nevertheless, assessing the internal coherence of his rather unorthodox theory, it must be admitted that it does not leave out deeper, inspirational dogmatic considerations.

Some modern scholars of the Qur'an (e.g. Gerhard Böwering or Gabriel Said Reynolds), despite their sceptical attitude towards Lüling's theory as a whole, seem to agree that individual passages of the Qur'anic text could have actually been based on Judaeo-Christian source texts, and not only on

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198 Ibidem, p. XXXVII.

the oral transmission of Islamic tradition<sup>199</sup>. Referring to the research of the German scholar, Böwering states that the sublimated and highly diverse text of the Qurʾān must ultimately derive from an undetermined, earlier written form, as Lüling justly presupposes<sup>200</sup>.

The icon of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century historical-critical Islamic studies – John Wansbrough – criticised Lüling’s theory in its substance. The reproaches concerned, among other elements, ideas of the sacrificial fertility cult and angelic Christology allegedly rejected by Arab Christianity and adopted by primitive Islam. Wansbrough calls these theses “provocative” and “unsound”, and furthermore describing Lüling’s text reconstructive methodology as “undisciplined”<sup>201</sup>. On the other hand, however, he supports Lüling’s thesis that the Qurʾān originally consisted partly of (Judaean-Christian) hymnic compositions. He also considers it possible that Islamic orthodoxy aimed at camouflaging the connections between the holy text and poetry<sup>202</sup>.

A shortcoming of Lüling’s theory is that it takes no stand on the question of Arabo-Muslim conquests, an issue that usually holds one of the central places in unconventional theories about the origin of Islam. It seems, however, that since the German scholar accepts the birth of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, the historicity of these conquests would not be questioned by him. Even so, he would probably not call them “Arabo-Muslim”, because he believed – as indicated above – that the original followers of the prophet Muhammad did not yet call themselves “Muslims”.

The strength of Lüling’s methodology lies in his semasiological experiment, i.e. an attempt to trace the historical semantic changes of selected Qurʾānic concepts along with their development in later Islamic doctrine. Until his studies, similar attempts were largely limited to the field of the etymology of the Arabic language. The German scholar also received positive reviews for “breaking the chains” of a dry philological analysis of the Qurʾānic text. Praising Lüling, the French islamologist Claude Gilliot points

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199 Gabriel Said Reynolds, “Introduction. Qurʾānic Studies and Its Controversies,” [in:] Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, Routledge, New York 2008, p. 10.

200 Gerhard Böwering, “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qurʾān,” [in:] Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, Routledge, New York 2008, p. 74-77.

201 John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu. Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978, p. 52.

202 Ibidem, p. 69.

out that philology should be used as only one element of the analysis of texts of religious traditions, and in this case should be subjected to the hierarchically superior discipline of theology<sup>203</sup>.

Lüling was one of the proponents for the use of the now commonplace methods of biblical criticism in analysing the Qur'ānic text. For various reasons, this field is still quite neglected in modern Islamic studies, and almost unknown in the Islamic World. From this perspective, it is a pity that G. Lüling's theory, along with himself and his academic career, first put forward in the 1970s, was immediately condemned to academic purgatory since on the whole, the discipline could well benefit from it by adopting certain theses and methodological elements. Regardless of the substance of the controversial theses postulated by the scholar, his extensive historical, theological and philological Qur'ānic exegesis, the result of many years' tedious work, is a collection of valuable insights, clues and connotations that cannot be overestimated to this day in Qur'ānic studies. Lüling himself was quite immodestly convinced that if his method of Qur'ānic criticism had gained recognition in academic circles,

“it could quite possibly become the cornerstone of a Reformation of Islam comparable to the Protestant Reformation of the Roman Church in the sixteenth century”<sup>204</sup>.

It should be noted here that the theologian limited himself in the reconstruction of the Qur'ānic text only to the first of the above-mentioned four textual layers (devoted mostly to religious, immutable topoi derived primarily from biblical contexts). As he himself pointed out, it would be much more valuable for a deeper understanding of the origins of Islam to undertake an analogous analysis of the second and third textual layers by eye-witnesses of events and early Muslim theologians<sup>205</sup>. Lüling was no longer able to achieve this, and now, due to a lack of disciples, this ambitious task remains unrealised<sup>206</sup>.

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203 Claude Gilliot, “Deux études sur le Coran,” *Arabica* 30 (1983), pp. 1-37.

204 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. XIV; see also: Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*, p. 72.

205 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, p. 431.

206 In the last years of his life, Günter Lüling worked on the protohistory of Hebrew. For additional information on Lüling's theory, see also the two following sources (both in Polish): Marcin Grodzki, Günter Lüling i “starochrześcijańskie” hymny Koranu, [in:] Adnan Abbas, Adrianna Maśko (ed.), *W kręgu zagadnień świata arabskiego*, Uniwersytet Adam Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań,

### 13. Afterword

The sceptical school was born out of the shortcomings and imperfections in methodologies applied hitherto to the study of early Islam, and especially the Qur'ān. Stepping out of the prevalent lamestream, G. Lüling sketched an inspiring, mystical image of the spiritual depth of the inhabitants of the Middle East in Late Antiquity and their complex fideistic dilemmas. His unorthodox methodology involves elements of dogmatism and philosophy (with the focus on the evolution and continuity of dogmas), hermeneutics, cultural anthropology, anthroposophy, and *Mentalitätsgeschichte*. By these means, Lüling attempted to draw a spiritual portrait of Late Antique man – his mentality and hierarchy of values, providing what may be one of the keys to understanding the actual meanings of the oldest, recorded historical testimonies of Islamic culture (including the Qur'ān) in accordance with the intentions of their authors. Modern man reasons and judges differently from his Late Antique counterpart, and hence – despite having nowadays a wide range of scholarly tools at hand, and a thorough substantive preparation – the modern scholar is frequently not able to fathom the spirit of the texts studied and therefore more often than not interprets them in his own anachronistic, modern sense.

Although rejected academically in Germany, Lüling is a phenomenon in his own right among the ranks of contemporary Western sceptical Islamists, as he advocates a return to classical scholarly methodologies (in particular to historical-critical methods focussing on the continuity of the evolution of dogmatics) and pleads in favour for their enrichment with elements of more modern methods (such as form-, redaction-, source-, literary- and text-criticism, i.e. higher and lower criticism, etc.). For Lüling, the tools of philology, literary studies and other academic disciplines that are extensively employed today in the study of historical artefacts cannot provide reliable scholarly results when separated from theology. Interdisciplinarity in the case of historical-religious research should be hierarchised by again granting a leading role to disciplines that follow the development of philosophical thought and religious ideas. Dogmatic theology (philosophy), and more specifically – tracing the historical evolution of faith doctrines – is for Lüling the requisite starting point for philological, historical and cultural

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pp. 443-459; Marcin Grodzki, *Panteon sceptyków. Przegląd współczesnych teorii naukowych poświęconych genezie islamu*, Warszawa: Katedra Arabistyki i Islamistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2017, 416p.



studies. Other disciplines may play a supporting role. A thought does not appear out of nowhere, but has its beginning and an evolution, its course can be tracked by scholarly methods. A thought does not die either, but takes on new forms and is constantly developing. What counts for Lüling are scientifically verifiable facts that must be necessarily integrated into a rational framework encompassing the development of theological thought (such schemata are for example provided by the cognate field of biblical studies). In his method, Lüling therefore does not bother too much about the mythologised corpus of Islamic religious tradition, although he does not reject it as a research material and draws upon it when deemed necessary.

The perusal of Lüling's publications requires at least a general theological preparation, but even for the "outsiders" it can be an intriguing, out-of-the-ordinary adventure, leading to the esoteric outskirts of the Near Eastern world at the crossroads of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. As mentioned above, Lüling is commonly and quite schematically classified as a researcher with a pro-Christian bias, a scholar trying to ascribe Christian roots to Islam, but this is certainly not true for Lüling. The German theologian himself denies being a Christian in the modern sense, and his theory drifts uncompromisingly towards gnosis, dualism and hypothetical forms of religious syncretism, all in the wider aspect of cultural evolutionism. Regardless of the academic evaluation of Lüling's unconventional theory on the origins of the Qur'ān, his research brought new impulses into this long inspissate field of study.

Looking back from today's perspective, probably the greatest value of Lüling's theory is not, in fact, its scholarly influence, but yet another contribution to advancing the academic field through innovative scepticism: the unconventional and innovative application of methodological instruments in opposition to fixed axioms; courage and uncompromisingness against pressure from the academic milieu; the postulated continuity of historical processes and, of course, an attitude of scholarly criticism – quite neglected in the modern discipline of Islamic studies. Finally, it is difficult to disagree with one of America's leading Islamologists, Fred Donner, who wrote that

"The very openness of the current debate is healthy and may eventually lead us to a stage of real consensus on basic issues, which, if it comes to pass, will be a more durable consensus because it will be achieved through the careful scrutiny of real evidence and all

possibilities of interpreting it, not on a preconceived dogmatic vision<sup>207</sup>.

#### 14. Anhang

Reconstruction of the sura 107 – Al-Mā‘ūn (The small kindnesses) by Günter Lüling’s method<sup>208</sup>:

	<b>Translation according to the interpretation of the orthodox Islamic tradition (as presented by Lüling)</b>	<b>Reconstruction of the pre-Islamic hymn by Lüling (English version)</b>
<b>107:1</b>	What do you mean of him who declares the Judgement to be lies?	Have you seen that he denies them there?
<b>107:2</b>	That is the (same) one who pushes away (from himself) the orphan.	That is the one who invites the orphan
<b>107:3</b>	and not persists on feeding the poor.	and impels to feeding the poor.
<b>107:4</b>	Woe to the prayers	But woe to the prayers
<b>107:5</b>	who of their prayer are careless	who of their prayer are careless
<b>107:6</b>	who want to be seen	who want to be seen
<b>107:7</b>	and do withhold succour!	and do withhold succour!

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207 Fred M. Donner, “The Qur’ān I recent scholarship. Challenges and desiderata,” [in:] Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context*, New York 2008, p. 43

208 Ibidem, pp. 52-55.