



# THE QUR'ĀN IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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## BEYOND SINGLE WORDS

*Mā'ida – Shayṭān – jibt and ṭāghūt. Mechanisms  
of transmission into the Ethiopic (Gə'əz)  
Bible and the Qur'ānic text*

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This is a workshop report on ongoing research; bibliographical references have been reduced to a minimum. The aim of the report for this conference is to present the first salient results of project, “Ethiopic influence on the Qur'ān and Early Islam,” that I have undertaken since 2002. It developed out of the larger frame of the *Thesaurus linguae aethiopicae*, meant as a collection of digital Ethiopic texts and presented on-line to the scientific community.<sup>1</sup>

The Ethiopic influence on the Qur'ān has been recognized for some time but the treatment of the question has suffered several drawbacks. Other aspects of Qur'ānic research, including the influence of Syriac/Aramaic language, monophysite-Jacobite or Nestorian theology and arguments, and the special question of Jewish ideas, have been demonstrated and treated at length. After the fast progress of South Arabian/Sabaeen studies, the influence of Old South Arabian religion and culture were discussed to some extent. Yet besides these studies the question of Ethiopic influence has been treated by and large only from the point of view of philology, more precisely in form of the discussion of possible loan words from Ethiopic in (Classical) Arabic and thence into Qur'ān. The two fundamental studies remain those by T. Nöldeke in 1910 and the materials contained in A. Jeffery's 1938 book.<sup>2</sup> Commentary on possible theological influence from the Ethiopian side on Muḥammad's views and teachings remained vague and casual, perhaps due to the rather marginal importance and relevance of Ethiopian Christianity in the framework of scientific research on Christian Oriental churches and theologies.

Now it is evident that the loan words are the best and clearest indicators of influence. But even these have not been really studied exhaustively; many questions have been left open, even in the magistereal study of Nöldeke and those of his followers, up to the recent compilation of the results of these studies in Leslau's *Comparative Dictionary* of 1987.

The question has to be studied starting from certain Ethiopic loan words in the text of the Qur'ān. Thereafter the facts have to be scrutinized: were these words already known in the contemporary Arabic of Muḥammad's time or are they innovations of the Qur'ānic text and message? Certainly, this crucial question cannot always be answered, since our documentation of pre-Islamic Arabic is meager and the authenticity of supposedly pre-Islamic literature (i.e. Jāhili poetry) is doubtful.

Thus the research of Ethiopic influence beyond single words must nevertheless start with specifically religious words and concepts. Even if we cannot tell whether these words were already current in pre-Islamic Arabia before Muḥammad's time and before his message, these terms form a special layer of the vocabulary expressing religious concepts in the core of that message. If we can say and decide that they are definitely Ethiopic, and not, let us say, Aramaic, Syriac and so on, or at least that they have not arrived directly from these spheres, then we will have an important statement about possible religious and cultural influence.

In this volume Böwering rightly points out that still today we cannot precisely identify textual parallels in the Qur'ān and Jewish or Christian texts. Instead we have only loose or vague allusions which point to a rich oral transmission to Muḥammad of the concepts and contents of foreign texts, not to a direct contact by reading or reciting those texts. Thus it would be very important to identify a specific channel, which has not yet been rightly defined, of this oral tradition.

I need not argue for the importance of Ethiopian, especially Aksumite, history, the knowledge of which must serve as a background for any discussion of Ethiopian influence on pre-Islamic Arabia, Northern Arabia and Early Islam. As for the political, religious and cultural history of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia from attested historical times – second millennium BC in Egyptian sources – has its own history and plays an important role in the commercial and cultural exchange between Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean world. Needless to say, this region, I mean the Red Sea, had and has its solid ties to the neighboring African countries and regions. Thence it acquired its specific products, animal hides, ivory, musk, gold and so on, and sent them to the civilized regions to the North. For a lucky moment in history, starting perhaps from the third century BC and lasting till the eighth century AD, this commercial and cultural exchange allowed for the emergence of an empire, a widespread urban civilization on the Ethiopian plateau. For almost a millennium, Aksum participated rather actively in the political, cultural and religious life of the *oecumene*.

Linguistically the medium of this culture were Semitic languages, Classical Ethiopic, Gə'əz, attested from the fourth century BC at the latest, if not earlier. Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigre and so on were to follow later. These languages were strongly influenced by underlying Cushitic, which acted as an adstratum or a substratum. The script also, the South Semitic script (e.g. in the Sabaean script) underwent a fundamental change: the writing direction changed to left-to-right. At the same time that the Bible was translated a pseudo-syllabary was introduced,

perhaps under Indian influence: each letter received seven slightly different forms which now expressed regularly a consonant and a following vowel. The Christianization of Ethiopia and the subsequent translation of the Bible and other theological and secular literature – mostly from Greek – marked a deep change in the civilization and culture of Ethiopia.

Whatever the relationship of the first Ethiopian states on the plateau and the South Arabian states may have been – whether there were colonies or independent Ethiopian states assimilating elements of a neighboring culture or society in South Arabia – in the third century AD Ethiopia was exerting military and political force in Yemen. It established garrisons and stable settlements in the Tihama. Probably the Ethiopians never left Yemen again until the time of Abrəha (Ar. Abraha), the Ethiopian but independent king of Yemen of the middle of the sixth century, and the subsequent Persian invasion, some decades before Islam. Some mosques in the Tihama till today show architectural features of Christian Ethiopic churches.

But this Christian influence in Arabia is not without rivals. The peninsula sees the establishment of Jewish communities from the Northwest to the South. Yemen becomes a Jewish kingdom in the fifth century which is the direct cause for further Ethiopic invasions in the region – as told in the famous story of the martyrs of Najrān.

Thus it comes as no surprise to find all kinds of Ethiopic linguistic and conceptual influence in the text of the Qur’ān. When it comes to the question of Ethiopic influence one has first to consider an important fact: Ethiopia is first Christianized by a Lebanese man, a merchant’s son of Tyre /Ṣūr. The Ethiopian church formally and juridically depended on the Patriarchate of Alexandria, but most of the important and influential missionaries came from Syria and Palestine. The same region also heavily influenced adjacent Arabia: as a result it can be difficult to decide if a given word or a given influence came directly from Syria–Palestine or via Ethiopia to Arabia. Refined research on the history of the words, the context where they appear for the first time, their phonetic shape and semantics should be done in order to decide these questions. The following report will give the examples of three words where this has been done.

But first a last word to this introduction: The Muslim tradition has it that Muḥammad understood and spoke even Ethiopic.<sup>3</sup> This may well be a *topos* of (Muslim) hagiographical literature, as I. Goldziher pointed out,<sup>4</sup> but it may reflect Ethiopia’s significant historical role in Islamic origins.

### *Mā’ida and Shayṭān*

The first results of this ongoing research have already been published and may thus be simply summarized:

**Mā’ida** in the Qur’ān (Q 5, 112; 114) is a clear borrowing from Ethiopic *mā’əd(d)ə* with the meaning “table; dishes; banquet.” As usual for the words for “table” in these languages it is a foreign word, having no etymological explanation

in Semitic. The etymon is most probably (vulgar) Latin or Koiné Greek *mágida* “table; plate of wood, silver and so on,” only rarely attested in literature. The translators of the Ethiopic Bible replaced consequently *tarapeza* by *mā'ida* thus following the general guidelines for early Christian Bible translators: to use a popular, generally understood language, not necessarily a literary one. This is naturally even more the case when there was yet no literary language, when it had to be created exactly by Bible translation. For the case of Ethiopic and Ge‘ez, however, we have to acknowledge an already existing literary tradition, that seen the pagan Aksumite inscriptions.

The plausible conclusion is that *mágida* was a currently used, “popular” word in Gə‘əz at the time, part of a lexical layer of loanwords that resulted from the multifold contacts and exchanges between Ethiopia and the Mediterranean world in Late Antiquity.

The Qur’ān received the word *al-mā'ida* as part of a narrative motif, namely the passage of *sūrat al-Mā'ida* (5:111–15) that has led to so much guessing about the Biblical passage behind it (the “Our Father” or the Last Supper or *Acts* 10:9 the vision of St Peter?).<sup>5</sup> At the end of this paper I will present a passage taken from an Ethiopic homily which “breathes” the atmosphere of the Qur’ānic text.

*Shayṭān* proves to be a more complex but equally illustrative example of a Qur’ānic loanword. Let us start with the fact that there is a genuine Arabic root √SHṬN. with the general meaning “fetching water (from a well) by means (of a bucket and) a rope;” *Shayṭān*, “rope,” then means in metaphorical use “snake, serpent” – from where later on the link to the “devil” was made – and was used as a proper name among pre-Islamic Arabs. These words originally have nothing to do with Qur’ānic *Shayṭān* “devil; Satan.”

The interesting and illuminating problem is the phonetic shape as *Shayṭān*. The meaning and lastly the word is certainly taken from the well-known “Satan” as present in nearly all the languages sharing a common (religious and linguistic) heritage with the Hebrew Bible. One could easily propose – and it would be a plausible proposal – to explain it as a kind of phonetic and popular etymological assimilation and adaptation into Arabic.<sup>6</sup> But there is the fact of Ethiopic *Shayṭān* in the Ethiopic Bible which precedes the Qur’ān, and, moreover, the fact that *al-Shayṭān al-rajīm* is clearly not the “stoned devil” but “the cursed one” from *rəgum* in Ethiopic.

As in the case of *mā'ida* the Ethiopic translator(s) found *satanas* in their Greek *Vorlage* and put regularly *Shayṭān*. The conclusion in parallel to the above proposal is that this form was common, current, popularly used and understood by the people of the time. How can we explain this form by phonetic shifts? This requires several and admittedly (as of today) hypothetical steps. It starts with the phenomenon of strong *imāla* (ā → ē and lastly → ī) in spoken languages in Palestine.<sup>7</sup> As a second step such long vowel tends to become a diphthong under accent.<sup>8</sup> The final assumption is that the missionaries and translators coming from Syria preferred again this – hypothetical as of now – popular form to literary “Satan,” unless this form was already received and used by the Ethiopian people at the time.<sup>9</sup>

## New examples

*The word pair jibt/ṭāghūt in the Qur'ān versus  
gəbt/ṭā'ot in the Ethiopic Bible*

The question of Ethiopic influence on the Qur'ān has been neglected to some extent as has been said. The question of the two words *jibt/ṭāghūt* is a slight exception to this statement. The fact that Muslim commentators and lexicographers recognized *jibt* nearly unanimously as Ethiopic, giving it normally the meaning of “soothsayer” or something similar, led modern (Western) scholars to conclude the same. The meaning there was given according to its actual meaning in the Ethiopic Bible<sup>10</sup> – *amaləktä gəbt* “the new and foreign gods” or similar as will be explained later. How it came to stand in a pair in the Qur'ān with the second hotly disputed loanword *ṭāghūt* “idol(s)” has not been really explained, nor has the precise origin and development of the particular Qur'ānic and Arabic form *ṭāghūt* in comparison to (Palestinian–)Aramaic *ṭā'ūthā* and Ethiopic *ṭa'ot*.

Modern, well-organized and technical research disciplines, numismatics for example, have adopted the rational usage of shortcutting the older scientific discussion and literature by giving one bibliographic reference where an exhaustive bibliography can be found, and taking the knowledge of the foregoing arguments for granted: “... für ältere Auffassungen siehe...” and then starting right away with the argument on the schedule. I do not say that Oriental philology has reached this state of organization and internal coherence but for the sake of shortness refer for the whole argument and its treatment in earlier scientific discussion to Wahib Atallah, “*Jibt et ṭāghūt dans le Coran*,” *Arabica*, 17, 1970, 69–82.<sup>11</sup>

After this rapid shortcut I must only add that I do not share Wahib Atallah's new thesis that *jibt* goes back to *qibṭ* “Egyptian” and *ṭāghūt* has to do with the Egyptian deity Thot, for phonetic reasons and because I doubt the proposed meanings of these words in the Qur'ān. Thus I come right away to the exposition of what I have to say on these two words, according to the following guidelines. After a look into the Ethiopic Bible text and its relationship to its Greek *Vorlage* and – in the broader perspective – to their common *Vorlage* in the Hebrew Bible I will see if the results provide an adequate explanation of the Qur'ānic facts. We will see that the two words are definitely linked in usage and meaning already in the Ethiopic Bible to such a degree that they are virtually synonymous. Furthermore we will see how the manifold, complicated and diverse terminology in the Hebrew Bible for the details and utensils of religious cults, especially heathen cults, has been translated first in the LXX in Greek, and subsequently with considerable freedom into Ethiopic, after the application of all the different translation techniques at the disposal of the Ethiopic translator(s).

There is no doubt about the – isolated – meaning of the Ethiopic word *gəbt*. Derived from √WGB, rarely used as a finite verb, the adjective/noun means “new; invented; casual; sudden; unforeseen.” It is mostly used as an adverb.<sup>12</sup>

In the Ethiopic Bible it renders in the first place Greek *prosfatos* “fresh, new,” for example, Sir 9:10: *i-təhdəg ‘arkä-kä zä-təkat, əsmä i-yəkäwwänä-kkä käma-hu ‘arkä gəbt*; “Do not forsake your friend of old, because the new one will not help you like him.”<sup>13</sup> Referring to god(s) and deities the next relevant passage is the oft-cited Psalm 81(80), 9(10): “You shall have no foreign god among you, you shall not bow down to an alien god!” where Hebrew *ēl zār, ēl nēkār* corresponds to Greek *theos profatos, theos allotrios* and Ethiopic *amlakä gəbt, amlak näkkir*. The semantic shift from “new” to “foreign, alien” is clear. Typical for the stereotype and repetitive polemical utterings in the Hebrew OT against alien gods, foreign cults and new idols, which require a sophisticated terminology for description, is Deuteronomy 32:17: “They sacrificed to demons which are not God – gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear;” Greek *prosfatoi* is rendered and even explained in Ethiopic *amaləktä gəbt əllä yəgəbbəru wä-i-yəbäq<sup>w</sup>q<sup>w</sup>ə<sup>u</sup>* “new alien gods which they recently themselves had fabricated and are of no use = without power.”<sup>14</sup>

This addition makes clear that the translator did not only translate the specific passage in question, but also had a clear idea of the category to which all these “stelae, idols, altars, images, new and alien gods”<sup>15</sup> belong in the Biblical polemics of the partisans of Yahweh. That is, he had an idea of idols in general, if you think of the material representation and fabrication, which was rendered by *ṭā‘ot* (still to be discussed) and of “new, foreign, alien deities,” if you think of the theological concept, which was rendered by *amaləktä gəbt*. Deuteronomy 7:5 is another nice example of the developed terminology not to be discussed in detail here. But we have to treat the question of interchangeability between the two aforesaid categories; in fact, Paralipomena 2 = 2 Chronicles 23:17 and 24:18 may serve as an illustration where Greek *idola*, regularly translated by *ṭā‘ot* in Ethiopic, is rendered by *amaləktä gəbt* “new, alien gods.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus given evidence for the interchangeability of the two terms in the Ethiopic Bible (both meaning “vain, new, foreign gods and their respective idols”) we have to have a look at the word *ṭā‘ot*. The meaning thereof is clearly attested in many passages in the OT as “idol.”<sup>17</sup> The origin and etymology of the word is clear and has long been recognized: Aramaic *ṭā‘ū(thā)* is the widely attested grammatical form.<sup>18</sup> The specific meaning “idol,” derived from the general sense “error” is only attested in Western (Jewish) Palestinian Aramaic.<sup>19</sup>

Finally we venture into the Qur’ānic text and the attestations of *jibt* and *ṭāghūt* there. The communicative situation of the Qur’ānic passages in question is remarkably similar to that in the Bible. The text attacks polemically either people who are worshipping idols instead of God, or people who after having received a part of the revelation (*naṣīb min al-kitāb*) are turning nevertheless toward idolatry. *Jibt* is a *hapax legomenon* and comes in pair with *ṭāghūt* in Q 4 (*al-Nisā*):51: *a-lam tara ilā lladhīna ūtū naṣīban mina l-kitābi yu‘minūna bi-l-jibt wa-l-ṭāghūt?!* “Don’t you look at these people who, having received a share of the revelation, believe (nevertheless) in new and alien gods and in the idols?!”<sup>20</sup> The second element of the Ethiopic expression *amaləktä gəbt* “gods recent” has

been understood as a kind of proper name or specification which may stand alone, just as *ṭāghūt* does, without the general regent “gods.”

There remains a word to be said about the Arabic form *ṭāghūt*, with the *ghayn*. This certainly has been triggered by the affinity with the homophonous Arabic root √ṬGHY widely attested in the Qur’ān, meaning “to oppress, to be a tyrant.” And a good number of later commentators made speculations and guesswork about the meaning of *ṭāghūt* derived from this root. After the discussion of the Ethiopic origin this is not my topic and problem. But my problem is, naturally, why Muḥammad and the “original” reading or recitation of the Qur’ān did not have *tā’ūt* rather than *ṭāghūt*?

It is difficult for the moment to find decisive arguments for one possibility. But the Qur’ānic text has proved to be well informed about other Ethiopic linguistic details (see earlier). Moreover, at the moment I am hesitant to draw conclusions about the authenticity of the canonical reading and recitation of the Qur’ān.

***Regarding the word mā’ida: Qur’ānic reflection  
of an Ethiopic homily?***

This last paragraph is meant only to give an impression of the “atmosphere” of the emerging research on the larger context of Qur’ānic passages where Ethiopic loan words appear. The story told in Q 5 (*al-Mā’ida*):111–15 has not found a convincing parallel in the Gospels and related texts.

111. And when I inspired the disciples, (saying): Believe in Me and in My messenger, they said: We believe. Bear witness that we have surrendered (unto Thee) “we are muslims.” 112. When the disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary! Is thy Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven? He said: Observe your duty to Allah, if ye are true believers. 113. (They said:) We wish to eat thereof, that we may satisfy our hearts and know that thou hast spoken truth to us, and that thereof we may be witnesses. 114. Jesus, son of Mary, said: O Allah, Lord of us! Send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us, and a sign from Thee. Give us sustenance, for Thou art the Best of Sustainers. 115. Allah said: Lo! I send it down for you. And whoso disbelieveth of you afterward, him surely will I punish with a punishment wherewith I have not punished any of (My) creatures.

The comments of Western scholars on this passage are manifold on one side, convergent on the other: they propose different passages from the NT as possible sources – usually the “Our Father” or the Last Supper or Acts 10, the vision of St Peter – but they agree on emphasizing either the ignorance of the Arab Christians at Muḥammad’s time, or Muḥammad’s misunderstandings of what he had been told or otherwise received from the Christian message.<sup>21</sup> Could it be that



they were too focused on Biblical texts alone, or the extrabiblical Jewish and Christian traditions and texts to the exclusion of the Ethiopic heritage? I am fully aware that the Ethiopic text I am proposing as having “Qur’ānic atmosphere” is far from offering literal or otherwise direct parallels to *sūrat al-Mā’ida*, 111–15. But in both texts emphasis is laid on the common table: of the Saints in the Ethiopic text, of the disciples of Jesus in the Qur’ān. And the table (and the light descending on it) is in both texts a miracle and a feast for the believers. The passages are taken from the homily of a bishop of Aksum on one of the “Syrian saints” of the Ethiopic church who lived and evangelized, as the tradition has it, in Ethiopia in the fifth century AD. The homily, which is translated later, should have been written not too long thereafter.

But first two last remarks: One, the Ethiopic text has been edited, but not translated, now more than one hundred years ago. I had the occasion above to make a general remark on the state of Near Eastern philology and history – certainly due to the relatively small number of “laborers in the vineyard,” especially so when Christian Near Eastern subjects are concerned. How often has this text been read by specialists in these more than one hundred years? Two, I want to repeat that the research on Ethiopic influence on the Qur’ān and early Islam “beyond the single words” has just begun. Notwithstanding this very tentative beginning, it seems a promising field.

The Homily of John, Bishop of Aksum, in Honor of Gärima.<sup>22</sup>

(The nine saints from the Byzantine empire have come to Ethiopia, share a house there, celebrate common prayers and dedicate their lives to preaching and works of charity).

Every time they came together at the table (*ma’əd(d)ə*), lights descend on them shining like the sun; they tasted food only at dawn in the morning and on the Sabbath, on Christmas, the day of His birth, and on the day of Epiphany; on the day of the miracle of Qana they did not taste food except the Eucharist (flesh and blood of Christ), and on Easter and Pentecost they ate only three grapes of wine.

(p. 153, line 117ff)

Angels descend to tell them to disband, that each of them might search his own region to preach; the angels are welcomed in the saints’ house.

And when they had completed the washing of the feet of the angels and had drunk the remaining water they sat for meal and the light appeared as usual. When they had finished the table (*ma’əd(d)ə*) they heard a voice coming and calling on them: . . . Angels were visiting them, they had visions of our Lord, until they were capable of resurrecting the dead, healing the lepers by their prayer, as well as making the blind see and the

lame walk and the deaf hear. Thus they performed many miracles and the lights as usual kept descending from heaven on their table (*ma'əd(d)ə*). Thus they stayed for 13 years.

(p. 157, line 228ff)

Then a monk came to them named Malkiyanos who did not know any other work than women's hairdressing. He made his living out of that. He did not sit at their table and he ate his bread alone. Thus they rebuked him, but thereafter these lights departed from them and shone above that monk. The saints then asked: "Where are our lights that used to come down (from heaven) on our table (*ma'əd(d)ə*)? Why are they now hidden from us?" The monk answered them: "My masters, today this light is shining upon me!" At this moment they understood and said: "That happens because we have rebuked this monk!" They embraced each other, wept bitterly for 40 days and nights...and then they departed separately, each one in his new region.

(p. 159, line 295ff)

### Conclusion

Let us briefly summarize the results of the research project hitherto achieved:

- The Ethiopic Bible and the Qur'ān have in common a layer of mostly religious terminology. Some of this terminology is of foreign origin in both languages. When of Aramaic origin then Palestinian Aramaic (to the exclusion of other branches of Aramaic) seems to be a prominent donor language.
- The Ethiopic Bible text precedes chronologically the Qur'ān.<sup>23</sup>
- The translator(s) of the Ethiopic Bible use(s) different techniques for rendering specific terminology, in most cases religious terminology, including
  - a neologisms and or explanatory translations with genuine Ethiopic words;
  - b simple transliterations of the foreign – mostly Greek – words (some of which become current words in the literary tradition afterward);
  - c foreign words which are not identical with those in the Vorlage. The presumption is that these words were already spoken, popular ones, part of a lexical layer of Old Ethiopic (Gə'əz) which borrowed from the international languages in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea worlds of late Antiquity (Greek and Aramaic). As in the concrete translation process at least two partners certainly participated – Christian missionaries having arrived from outside and cultivated native Ethiopian speakers. The fact that, according to the Ethiopic tradition most of these missionaries (monks and clerics) came from "Syria," is of importance (see earlier Palestinian Aramaic). Thus one may speak of cultural and linguistic contact and exchange in a channel of oral transmission.

- Some of these foreign words are to be found later in the Qur’ān and can be defined as Qur’ānic innovations, that is, they were not present in Northern Arabic in Muḥammad’s time, at least as far as we can tell. Cross checking is only possible via the only preserved attestations of pre-Islamic Northern Arabic, the very rare inscriptions and pre-Islamic Arabia poetry (the latter being highly disputed in its authenticity).
- On the basis of phonetic shape and semantic peculiarities it is probable that some of these Ethiopic words – even when ultimately of Aramaic origin – came into Arabic and the Qur’ān via direct and possibly oral transmission: Ethiopian merchants, mercenaries, slaves and, why not, priests, or – perhaps most importantly – Muslim Arab *muhājirūn* of the first *hijra* to Ethiopia. This last assumption is corroborated by the fact that the respective Qur’ānic passages are all (late) Medinan ones.
- These words are not isolated lexical items, not isolated borrowings. The context of Ethiopic words in the Qur’ān demonstrates that they are part of transmitted material. This material has to be scrutinized and taken into account carefully.

Future research along the guidelines of this working hypothesis on the respective vocabulary and passages in the Ethiopic Bible and the Qur’ān will probably yield new results which can enable us to draw a more detailed, precise and correct picture of Ethiopic influence in general on the Qur’ān and early Islam. This, it is hoped, will do justice to this important but rather neglected field of linguistic, religious, political, cultural, and economic exchange between both shores of the Red Sea.

### Notes

- 1 This larger enterprise has suffered considerable delay, caused first by technical difficulties. These are being slowly overcome, by the general progress of technology suitable for philology and languages written in non-Latin script, and with the good service of Mr Reinhard Hiß, the technical specialist for this project. The second reason was my somewhat unforeseen and unplanned transfer from Mainz University to the Orient-Institute in Beirut to serve as a director for now more than six years. The third reason is the behavior of colleagues at Mainz University during my absence. This has led me to the conclusion to organize and research only individual projects, without personal or financial resources from third parties – the specifics and peculiarity of studies in the field of humanities allowing.
- 2 T. Nöldeke, “Lehnwörter in und aus dem Äthiopischen,” *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Strassburg: Trübner, 1910, 31–66; *FV*.
- 3 Cf. *FV*, 12–14. To cite one of the more critical scholars as to the possibility and probability of direct (religious) Ethiopic influence on Muḥammad and the Qur’ān: “There are many loanwords in Arabic aside from those in the Koran . . . and something is known in regard to their origin. S. Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, 210–16, in discussing the numerous Arabic words of Ethiopic origin dealing with ships and shipping, showed that these are a partial fruit of the long period during which the Arabs and Abyssinians were associated . . . in charge of the traffic

round the Red Sea.” C.C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967 (New edition of the Hilda Stich Stroock Lectures at the Jewish Institute of Religion, 1933 and introduction by F. Rosenthal), 53. The project described in some examples in this paper is a contribution to this undecided question.

The fact of the first *hijra* to Ethiopia and its reasons is discussed by Frants Buhl (*Das Leben Muhammads*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961, 171–4). He married a woman who had lived in Ethiopia for a long time, precisely one of these first *muhājirūn*. An anecdote of the later Medinan time of Muḥammad tells that emigrants having come back from Ethiopia came with their children to the prophet. One of their girls embraced him and showed him nice yellow Ethiopian shirt. Muḥammad exclaimed, joking: “*sana, sana*” (what can be read as “*shanna(y)*”, *shanna(y)*” also, meaning in Ethiopic: “nice, nice.”). The Arabic translation given in the text of Ibn Sa’d, *K. al-Ṭabaqāt*, E. Sachau (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1905–21, 4, 72 is “*ablī wa-akhlaqī*” but the better version is in the edition: Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1982, 4, 69, “*ablī wa-akhlifī*,” meaning: “wear this cloth until it is worn, and then have another (one as nice as this)” = “I wish you may have always a cloth as nice as this one” (this expression in a slight different wording is known still today in vernacular Arabic). This anecdote is not only a good hint that Muḥammad was able to converse and joke with children, as Watt has it (*Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956, 323 and note 5; idem: *Muhammad. Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961, 230). It is a hint in the Muslim tradition that Muḥammad knew at least some Ethiopic words.

The thorny question of a “revisionist” view of contested Muslim tradition can be retained, even if a radically skeptical view cannot be discussed here. I am fully aware of the fact that I am using part of this tradition to support arguments developed and supported from other sources. In my case, I am making points about the history of the Qur’ānic text based on linguistic and philological methods; the results obtained have their own scientific value. A necessary comparison with the historical tradition, be it Muslim or otherwise, be it concordant or contradictory, is a second step which should not be confused with the first one. The independence of text-critical work (linguistic or philological) as a methodology is an essential condition if such work is to contradict historical tradition. A subsequent scientific discussion must then work out syntheses – or simply candidly acknowledge contradictions.

- 4 I. Goldziher, “Linguistisches aus der Literatur der muhammedanischen Mystik,” *ZDMG* 26, 1872, (764–85) 770.
- 5 For the full discussion see M. Kropp, “Viele fremde Tische, und noch einer im Koran: Zur Etymologie von äthiopisch ma’əd(d)ə und arabisch mā’ida/mayda,” *OC* 87, 2003, 140–3.
- 6 A recent proposal was to interpret the yā’ as a mater lectionis for the long vowel ā and thus to read right away “Satan.”
- 7 For pre-Islamic Arabic in the region (Syria) it is proven by the existence of the form Ibrāhīm instead of Abraham; cf. Muḥammad Abū l-Faraj al-‘Ushsh, “Kitābāt ‘Arabiyya ghayr manshūra fī jabal Usays,” *Al-Abḥāth*, 17, 1964, 227–316; here no. 85 p. 302. Such phonetic laws and peculiarities seem to cling to the geographic region, across the time and change of languages. Western, Palestinian Aramaic is highly likely to share these features.
- 8 Lebanese Arabic offers a lot of examples: *hādā* “this” → *haydā*; a prominent one is *bērūt* “wells” → Bayrūt (the name of the city).
- 9 For the full discussion see M. Kropp, “Der äthiopische Satan = Shayṭān und seine koranischen Ausläufer; mit einer Bemerkung über verbales Steinigen,” *OC* 89, 2005, 93–102.
- 10 One has to add here a note on the character of Muslim research into the text and the history of the Qur’ān. They tell us near to nothing about the historical origins of the

text they try to explain – excepting the genre of the “legends of the prophets” which includes material from the Jewish and Christian tradition. For the rest – in our case what is needed is a simple investigation into Old Ethiopic and its Bible, something totally feasible to Muslim scholars – there is only guessing. Reading through the enormous material gathered by Muslim scholarship from early to modern times one soon gets the impression of a radical isolation of this scholarship from that which preceded it. Certainly, for the Islamic period this material forms a point of reference which has to be studied carefully for the history of Islam itself. However, the history of the origins of the Qur’ānic and Islamic message is a totally different matter.

- 11 That is perhaps not really doing justice to the contributions to the problem found in: R. Dvořák, “Über die Fremdwörter im Korān,” *Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phil.-Hist. Classe. Sitzungsberichte* 109, 1, 1885, 481–562. T. Nöldeke, “Lehnwörter in und aus dem Äthiopischen,” 31–66. *FV*. But a future publication of the results of the project “Ethiopic Influence on the Qur’ān” will have the necessary space to do full justice to 150 years of scientific research.
- 12 Cf. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae aethiopiae* (henceforth *DL*), New York: Ungar, 1955 (Reprint of Leipzig, 1865), 938; W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic)* (henceforth *LCD*), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987, 608a.
- 13 I am citing the Ethiopic text according the partial edition of the OT in Gə’əz with the Andəmta-commentary: *Mäṣahəftä Sälomon wä-Sirak*. Addis Abeba: Tənsä’e Masätämiya Dərəjjis, 1988 a.m. = 1995; Reprint of the edition 1917 a.m. = 1924.
- 14 Cf. A. Dillmann, *Octateuchus Aethiopicus* (= *Biblia Veteris Testamenti Aethiopica* 1), Lipsiae: Vogelii, 1853–97, 157, apparatus criticus to Deuteronomy.
- 15 To cite all the relevant terminology in Hebrew, for example, *asherah*, *‘aşab*, *pesel* and so on, Greek *idola*, *glypta*, *cheiropoiētoi* and so on, is relegated to a future extensive study of this terminology in the framework of a study on its translations from Hebrew to Greek to Ethiopic. It is important to see first, that the Ethiopic translators dispose of separate, specific terms such as *gelfo* (*glypta*) (*LCD* 190a), *məsl* “image” (*LCD* 365b), *gəbrä ədawi-hon* “work of their hands,” *məḥramatä ‘om* (*ashērāh*) “grove” (*LCD* 62a; *DL* 994) and so on. But thinking in categories he takes the freedom to add a general explanation to such terms in the text, or to translate a specific directly by a categorical one. This means that in the two earlier cited results the categorical terms (*amlakä*) *gəbt* and *ṯä’ot* prevail in the texts.
- 16 I am using here the Ethiopic text in the partial edition of the OT *Mäṣahəftä nägäst*, Asmära: Maḥbärä Ḥawaryat Fəre Haymanot, 1974 a.m. = 1981.
- 17 Cf. for example, Isaiah, 10:11; *DL* 1243 with further attestations; *LCD* 584a.
- 18 But note that the Syriac word is different: *ṯä’yūthā*.
- 19 Cf. (1) M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, (= *Dictionaries of Talmud, Midrash and Targum*. (2), Ramat Gan (Israel): Bar Ilan University Press, 1990, 227b; M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, (= *Dictionaries of Talmud, Midrash and Targum*. (3), Ramat Gan (Israel); Baltimore: Bar Ilan University Press; John Hopkins University Press, 2002, 509a. It is certainly due to the very restricted and lacuna-filled documentation of Christian Palestinian Aramaic that the word in the same meaning is not (yet) attested there. Nevertheless, in this case as well, our hypothesis of oral transmission from Palestinian Aramaic to Ethiopic works.
- 20 The other passages where *ṯāghūt* figures alone are partly parallel to this text; in every one of them the meaning “idols” for *ṯāghūt* fits: Q 2:256, 257; 4:76; 16:36; 39:17.
- 21 To cite one of the more frequently used reference works: “5,112–115 Der Abschnitt über den Tisch (*mā’ida*), den die Jünger Jesu aus dem Himmel erbitten, bezieht sich offensichtlich auf die Einsetzung des Abendmahls. Vielleicht ist er aber auch durch die Vision des Petrus in Apostelgeschichte 10,10 ff beeinflusst. Jedenfalls ist der Sachverhalt mangelhaft erfaßt und weithin mißverstanden. Siehe W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgart 1992, S. 81 f.”

R. Paret, *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Stuttgart (etc.): Kohlhammer, 1971, 133. Yet Rudolph does not really widen the horizon, except for the mention of the thesis of Ebionite influence.

- 22 C. Conti Rossini, "L'omelia di Yohannes, vescovo d'Aksum in onore di Garimâ," *Actes du Congrès international des Orientalistes, section sémitique*, Paris, 1898, 139–77.
- 23 By Bible text I mean not strictly the text of the Bible only, but rather the rich religious literature – homilies, lives of saints and so on – that developed quickly in Ethiopia after Christianization and the translation of the Bible. Biblical citations, for example, appear very soon in secular texts, such as royal inscriptions.