

Islamic Studies Today

Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin

Edited by

Majid Daneshgar
Walid A. Saleh



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

Preface	IX
Acknowledgments	XIII
List of Figures and Tables	XIV
List of Contributors	XV

PART 1

Islamic Exegesis and Tradition: Formative and Classical Period

- 1 “A Plaything for Kings”
Ā'isha's Ḥadīth, Ibn al-Zubayr, and Rebuilding the Ka'ba 3
Gerald Hawting

- 2 Remnants of an Old *Tafsīr* Tradition?
The Exegetical Accounts of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr 22
Andreas Görke

- 3 Muqātil on Zayd and Zaynab
“The sunna of Allāh Concerning Those Who Passed Away Before”
(Q 33:38) 43
Gordon Nickel

- 4 *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* as a Technical Term
Its Emergence and Application in the Islamic Sources 62
Roberto Tottoli

- 5 *Laylat al-Qadr* as Sacred Time
Sacred Cosmology in Sunnī Kalām and Tafsīr 74
Arnold Yasin Mol

- 6 Is There Covenant Theology in Islam? 98
Tariq Jaffer

PART 2

The Qurʾān and Qurʾanic Studies: Issues and Themes

- 7 The Qurʾān's Enchantment of the World
"Antique" Narratives Refashioned in Arab Late Antiquity 125
Angelika Neuwirth
- 8 Messianism and the Shadow of History
Judaism and Islam in a Time of Uncertainty 145
Aaron W. Hughes
- 9 Some Reflections on Borrowing, Influence, and the Entwining
of Jewish and Islamic Traditions; or, What an Image of a
Calf Might Do 164
Michael E. Pregill
- 10 Inheriting Egypt: The Israelites and the Exodus in the
Meccan Qurʾān 198
Nicolai Sinai
- 11 Re-examining Textual Boundaries
Towards a Form-Critical Sūrat al-Kahf 215
Marianna Klar
- 12 Philology and the Meaning of *Sūrat al-Burūj* 239
Bruce Fudge
- 13 A Flawed Prophet? Noah in the Qurʾān and Qurʾanic
Commentary 260
Gabriel S. Reynolds

PART 3

Islam, Qurʾān, and Taf̄sīr: Modern Discussions

- 14 An Asiatic and Moslem Jesus
Deracinating and Reracinating Jesus by Drew Ali 277
Herbert Berg

- 15 **Reading the Qur’ān Chronologically**
An Aid to Discourse Coherence and Thematic Development 297
Peter G. Riddell
- 16 **The Fig, the Olive, and the Cycles of Prophethood**
Q 95:1–3 and the Image of History in Early 20th-Century
Qur’anic Exegesis 317
Johanna Pink
- 17 **The “Scientific Miracle of the Qur’ān”**
Map and Assessment 339
Stefano Bigliardi
- 18 **Locating the “Esoteric” in Islamic Studies** 354
Feras Hamza
- 19 **Western Non-Muslim Qur’anic Studies in Muslim Academic Contexts**
On Rippin’s Works from the Middle East to the Malay-Indonesian
World 367
Majid Daneshgar
- A Concluding Appreciation** 386
Jane McAuliffe
- Andrew Rippin : La sainte sagesse et le saint silence** 396
(Ἁγία Σοφία, Ἁγία σιγή)
Claude Gilliot
- Appendix: Publications by Andrew Rippin** 399
- Index** 423

Philology and the Meaning of *Sūrat al-Burūj*

Bruce Fudge

Monsieur, surtout pas de philologie, la philologie mène au pire . . .

IONESCO, *La Leçon*



1 Introduction

In his response to Angelika Neuwirth's keynote speech at the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA) conference of 2014, Andrew Rippin heartily recommends an article by Sheldon Pollock entitled "Future philology? The fate of a soft science in a hard world."¹ It is an erudite discussion of the history and future of the ill-defined and oft-maligned discipline known as philology.² Pollock gives us his own "rough-and-ready working definition" as "the discipline of making sense of texts,"³ which certainly sounds relevant to those of us who study the Qur'ān. He also gives us a vision of how the discipline might be rehabilitated and how it should be practiced today. So what exactly might it mean "to make sense of" a qur'anic passage? In what follows, I attempt to test and contemplate Pollock's propositions through a case study of how one short *sūra* has been read in various circles and how one might improve on those readings. I begin with two examples.

Sayyid Quṭb's (1906–66) *Ma'ālim fi l-ṭarīq* ("Milestones on the path" [1964]) is his major statement on the need for the creation (or re-creation) of a true Islamic society. The book has been hugely influential, and it is not uncommon to hear of it described, rightly or wrongly, as the Islamist equivalent of Lenin's

1 Andrew Rippin, Angelika Neuwirth and philology: A response to the keynote lecture, available at <<https://iqsaweb.wordpress.com/publications/papers/>>.

2 Sheldon Pollock, Future philology? The fate of a soft science in a hard world, *Critical inquiry* 35 (2009), 931–61.

3 Pollock, Future philology?, 934.

*What is to be done?*⁴ In the final chapter of *Ma‘ālim fi l-ṭarīq*, Quṭb writes the following:

The story of the People of the Trench, as presented in *Sūrat al-Burūj* [Q 85], is a story that all believers who proclaim God’s word, everywhere, in every generation, should contemplate. With its introduction and its asides, with its statements and its directives, the Qur’ān presents the story in a style that etches a deep, sharp image of what the call to God is like and what man’s role in that call should be. It shows us the immense range of possibilities and consequences of that call, consequences going well beyond this world and this life. It draws for the believers the signposts along the path before them, preparing their souls for whatever may be decreed for them according to that hidden wisdom known only to God.

It is the story of a group who believed in their Lord and who made known the truth of their faith. Then they faced the ordeal at the hands of ruthless, tyrannical enemies, obsessed with denying man’s freedom to believe in what is right and true and to have faith in the Mighty and Praiseworthy God. They wanted to crush the dignity He granted to human beings, without which they may be playthings of tyrants who take pleasure in their pain and suffering and enjoy watching them as they are tortured by the fire!

But the faith they held in their hearts raised them above this ordeal and belief triumphed over life. They did not surrender to the threats of the cruel despots. They did not stray from their religion, even as they burned and died in the fire.

These hearts were liberated from the servitude of this material world. They were not disgraced by a desire to remain in this world, even as they found themselves facing an unspeakable death. Their hearts broke free from earthly chains, from all its temptations, as belief triumphed over life.

Against these noble, pious hearts were ranged evil, unbelieving men, and these sat by the edge of the fire to watch the torture and suffering of the believers. They sat down to enjoy the spectacle of human life being devoured by the flames, of noble human beings being reduced to dust and ashes. And whenever they threw another believer into the fire, whether man or woman, young or old, the vile joy increased in their souls and the crazed frenzy for blood and butchery grew fiercer.

4 E.g. John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the origins of radical Islamism* (London 2010), 231.

This horrible incident shows how the depths to which that company of despots had sunk, how they took pleasure in this scene of brutal torture, with a baseness that not even a wild beast could achieve, since the beast kills only to feed itself, not out of meanness, simply to take pleasure in another's pain.⁵

Let us now look at another description of the same passage. Rudi Paret's *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz*, originally published in 1977, is an extremely useful aid for understanding the Qur'ān, the relationship of its different verses to each other, and to a number of topics that have traditionally been of interest to European scholars of Islam. On *Sūrat al-Burūj*, Paret has this to say:

The expression *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* ("the people of the trench") had previously been associated with the Christian martyrs who were said to have met their end in a fiery pit in 523 at Najrān under the Jewish king of South Arabia Dhū Nuwās. The legend of the men in the furnace (Daniel 3) was also occasionally called upon to explain the reference. However, as Hubert Grimme (*Mohammed II*, Münster 1895, 77 n4) established and J. Horowitz (*Koranische Untersuchungen*, 12, 92 f.) further elaborated, the *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* are meant to be the sinners doomed to Hellfire. [Richard] Bell subsequently accepted this meaning as well. In the foreword to his translation of Sūra 85 he remarked, "The reference of 1–9 to the persecution of the Christians of Najrān, which I formerly favoured, can hardly be maintained. 'The fire fed with fuel' must be the fire of Gehanna. It may be that in 'the fellows of the pit' there is a subreference to the Quraysh slain at Badr, whose bodies were thrown into a well." See R. Paret, art. "Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd" EI2, 1 p. 692. Marc Philonenko, "Une expression qoumrânienne dans le Coran," *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici, Ravello 1–6 settembre 1966*, (Naples 1967), 553–556, 555: "The Qumran texts explicitly call the impious *bēnē haš-šahat*, 'sons of the ditch' or, even better, *anēšē haš-šahat*, 'men of the ditch,' by which we understand the damned, those destined for the infernal Ditch."

...

Wa-hum 'alā mā yaf'alūna bil-mu'minīna shuhūdun (Q 85: 7) ["and were themselves witnesses of what they did with the believers"] In place of the imperfect *yaf'alūna* one would expect the perfect *fa'alū* or at least the combination *kānū yaf'alūna*. Horowitz paraphrases thus: "the sinners

5 Sayyid Quṭb, *Ma'ālīm fi l-tarīq* (Cairo 1979), 173–4.

destined to Hellfire must on the Day of Doom bear witness to what they themselves do to their believing Meccan compatriots.” He adds, “One may also translate: While they (the sinners) must watch how the believers are dealt with (in Paradise)”, but this seems to me less likely. Also, in the translation given in the text, the imperfect *yafʿalūna* receives its due: Muhammad’s sigh is occasioned by what happens to his supporters; it is for him so present, he sees it incarnate before him” (*Koranische Untersuchungen*, 12).⁶

One would hardly think that Quṭb and Paret were discussing the same text. You will object, rightly, that they have completely different viewpoints, backgrounds, goals, and audiences. Yes, but let us not accept that as self-evident. Let us remind ourselves that this is a very short *sūra* and that both Paret and Quṭb are working with a knowledge of the Qurʾān and of Muslim tradition and both are concerned with what they consider the true meaning of the passage. Their strikingly divergent views raise the question, in my mind anyway, as to whether there is a way in which scholars should approach the Qurʾān that can comprehend this diversity.

In the pages that follow, I will briefly discuss Pollock’s article, before turning to the understanding of *Sūrat al-Burūj*, and especially the section on the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*, and to what we should understand by the philologist’s goal of “making sense of texts.”

2 “Future Philology?”

The title of Pollock’s piece refers to its starting point: *Future philology!* (*Zukunftsphilologie!*) was the title of an 1872 pamphlet penned by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff in response to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The birth of tragedy*. The dispute, as Pollock reminds us, did not concern the importance of philology: on that there was absolute agreement. Rather, the conflict arose over “the method and meaning of classical studies,” with Wilamowitz arguing for the careful observation of all possible historical detail, well detached from contemporary concerns or prejudices. Nietzsche had argued that this traditional historicist approach stripped the classical past of all that made it worth studying. He saw the combination of the rational and the emotional, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and the genre of tragedy as the full embodiment of the human experience. The dry and nonjudgmental scholarly view of antiquity had no relevance and entirely missed the point of the exercise. More

⁶ Rudi Paret, *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart 1993⁵), 505–6.

broadly, in Pollock's words, the crisis, which led to Nietzsche's resignation from his chair at Basel, was

... a struggle between historicists and humanists, *Wissenschaft* and *Bildung*, scholarship and life, of a sort not unique to European modernity (Sanskrit pandits often recite the verse, "when the hour of death is at hand, no grammatical paradigm will save you").⁷

The historicism of Wilamowitz carried the day, but the subsequent century would see philology's fortunes dwindle to near extinction. And as Pollock usefully demonstrates, this was a global, not merely a Western, phenomenon. He notes the historical difficulty of reaching a definition of the term philology itself, whence his own: "the discipline of making sense of texts . . . the theory of textuality as well as the history of textuality itself."⁸

There is far more in Pollock's essay than can or should be summarized here. I can only echo Rippin's advice: "If you have not read the essay yet, you should – it is well worth the time."⁹ I do, though, want to draw attention to Pollock's three-fold theory of meaning in history, a schema by which he hopes that philology might consolidate itself.

The schema begins with a distinction between (1) textual meaning and (2) contextual meaning, distinguishing between an original meaning ("true" in an absolute sense) and the meanings that people over time have attributed to a text (what people have held to be "true"). To these Pollock adds (3) the philologist's meaning, in which the practitioner attempts two crucial operations. The first is to take into account and mediate between the textual and contextual meanings, the second is to take account of his own historicity, to recognize that the present moment, too, is historically conditioned: "A double historicization is required, that of the philologist – and we philologists historicize ourselves as rarely as physicians heal themselves – no less than that of the text."¹⁰

The example above of two wildly divergent approaches to the same short text of *Sūrat al-Burūj* (Q 85) prompts me to ask if Pollock's theory can help us formulate an approach to a section of the Qur'ān.¹¹ The theory is appealing, but what would it mean in practice? And does the theory forged in European and

7 Pollock, 934.

8 Ibid.

9 Rippin, Angelika Neuwirth and philology, 2.

10 Pollock, 958.

11 Pollock does mention the Qur'ān in his article, referring to "Christoph Luxenberg's" claim of an ancient Syriac stratum in the text (Ibid., 952). This is, of course, an attempt at a "textual" or original meaning, irrespective of what subsequent generations have held.

Sanskrit furnaces need to be modified for Arabic philology and particularly when applied to the Qurʾān?¹²

3 The Orientalist Tradition

By “Orientalist” here I mean the European study of Middle Eastern texts, and more specifically the philologically-oriented tradition that prevailed until, say, the 1980s. It is characterized by a heavy emphasis on language and linguistic training, a particular interest in origins, and an attempt to integrate Islam into what was known about the Near Eastern monotheist traditions. I do not intend the pejorative associations the terms has acquired, but there does not seem to be any alternative shorthand for this scholarly tradition.

The text by Rudi Paret cited above sets the tone for much of what has been done. As already mentioned, *Sūrat al-Burūj* has received relatively little scholarly attention to date, and the main interest it raises is the identity of the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* mentioned in the fourth verse. As Roberto Tottoli rightly points out, this is the only element of the *sūra* to evoke any differences of opinion.¹³ In the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Paret stated that they were “unbelievers, who will go into the hell fire, as punishment for what they did to the believers (verse 7).”¹⁴ A common opinion was that the verse refers to the persecution and subsequent martyrdom of the Christians of Najrān in the early sixth century, but on this opinion was divided. Richard Bell originally adhered to the Najrān thesis, but then changed his mind, as noted in the passage above from Paret, opting instead for a more generic hellfire. He also admits the possibility of “a sub-reference to the Quraish slain at Badr, whose bodies were thrown into a well.”¹⁵ Régis Blachère considered the Najrān hypothesis a legitimate one, but was more moved by the similarity to the Book of Daniel. Claiming that the more standard definition of *ukhdūd* was “furrow” or “trace left by a whip,” he wondered if one should not understand here “People of the Oven,” which would be supported by the following verse, “the fire abounding in fuel.” Though the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* appear at first to be either the tortured or the torturers, Q 85:7 confirms that it is the latter: “and were themselves witnesses of what

12 Tellingly, Pollock makes relatively little reference to biblical philology (see below), which would no doubt be more analogous to the qurʾānic situation.

13 Roberto Tottoli, *People of the ditch*, *EQ*.

14 R. Paret, *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*, *EI2*.

15 Richard Bell, *The Qurʾān, translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the surahs* (Edinburgh 1937), 2:646.

they did with the believers,” and with this the reference to Daniel 3:20 is “beyond any doubt.”¹⁶ The Daniel connection is given further credibility by the discovery of Qumran texts in which the Hebrew *shaḥat*, “ditch,” is repeatedly used for Hell in phrases such as “men of the ditch,” which would correspond exactly to the qur’anic *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*.¹⁷

Outside of these efforts to identify the Trench and its people, there are two other overlapping examples of Orientalist preoccupation: language and what might be termed literary style. The first is seen in the extract from Paret’s *Konkordanz und Kommentar*, where he muses that the perfect or past continuous would have been preferable to the imperfect; the second we see in remarks of Blachère and Bell to the effect that the *sūra* is not a single piece but is, rather, composed of at least two distinct sections (Bell) or an unspecified number of “textes anciens juxtaposés” (Blachère). Neither gives much detail here, but on the whole this type of commentary is based on vocabulary, thematic content and coherence, and formal qualities such as rhyme and metrics. One should add though, that these qualities and characteristics serve not to evaluate (in literary terms) the text so much as to distinguish and identify different sections (a sort of textual archeology).

In all of these we can detect an overarching project: a quest for origins, for the original sense of what the text means, and where it came from. This corresponds, of course, to Pollock’s “textual meaning.” How do our European philologists go about determining this “original” meaning? With what tools? First, we note a tendency to identify the necessary referents, in this case the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*. Of use here are Christian histories, specifically of the martyrs of Najrān, as well as knowledge of pre-Islamic history and Semitic languages in general.

It is telling, of course, that these scholars are relatively disinterested in what Muslim scholars themselves have traditionally had to say about the *sūra*. There is some overlap between the Muslim and Orientalist traditions: both mention Najrān as a possible location for the Trench, and the story of Daniel is evoked as a possible referent by both¹⁸ (though that is not to say that this is always the case, that the Orientalists disregard the “indigenous” interpretations, but it is indeed so here¹⁹).

16 Régis Blachère (ed. and trans.), *Le Coran (al-Qor’ân)* (Paris 1980), 644–5.

17 As in Paret, *Kommentar*, and see also Christian Julien Robin, [al-]Ukhdūd, *EQ*.

18 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān* (Beirut 1995), 15:167.

19 Obviously, when dealing with sections relating to the life of the Prophet, they made good use of the indigenous sources.

If one is really only concerned with the sources of such a text, then perhaps this disinterest in Muslim sources is understandable and justified. Although one should not discount them out of hand, it is certain that conventional Muslim sources for the history of the Qur'anic text offer a perspective more limited than that of the multi-lingual, multi-disciplinary Orientalism. As Pollock notes: "It may not be fashionable to say so these days, but the lies and truths of texts must remain a prime object of any future philology." We have largely lost sight of how high the stakes were perceived to be back in "the heroic age of positivist philology," when J.J. Scaliger (1540–1609) could claim that "all religious strife arises from an ignorance of grammar."²⁰ The world has changed considerably: if only religious strife could be resolved by supplementary grammar lessons! At root here is the idea, now almost quaint, that religious adherence is a simple matter of faith in historical facts, that the most important question to be asked of religious texts was that of their historical origins, rather than the beliefs they espouse and how believers have acted upon them.

The Orientalist tradition here (and elsewhere) is attempting to determine the "pre-history" of the text. A perfectly valid and necessary exercise, but one deaf to what the original intentions of the text might have been and what it was attempting to do. There was a tendency to judge Qur'anic references to biblical characters in terms of their conformity to the Judeo-Christian versions. Today we are more aware that the Qur'an possesses its own internal coherence, and it is in this light that its biblical references are best understood, not to mention the fact that we are less certain as to whether the conventional biblical versions are the best yardstick by which to measure the status of these narratives in Late Antiquity.

In any case, we need not accept all the conclusions of our Orientalist forerunners, and the historicizing reading Pollock calls for means we can understand them in their own context. As he says, "We should not throw out the baby of textual truth, however, with the bathwater of Orientalism past or present."²¹ But what may be too often missing from "textual truth" is a sense of why these texts were important, why they were valued, and what they might have meant to their first audiences. In short, a sense of why these texts are worth studying in the first place. It is curious to observe that some of the qualities of Orientalist scholarship are shared with the Muslim tradition of premodern Qur'an commentary, to which we now turn.²²

²⁰ Pollock, 951.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 952.

²² By "premodern" I mean up to the thirteenth/nineteenth century, although the temporal boundaries are not distinct. There was, of course, a good deal of variation in the genre up to this point, but before the modern age continuity was more prevalent than change.

4 The Muslim Tradition

When we talk about the interpretation of the Qurʾān, or how Muslims have understood their text of revelation, we are usually talking about *tafsīr*, the genre of Qurʾān commentary. For better or worse, this genre dominates the discussion.

The first thing to note about the Muslim tradition of interpreting *Sūrat al-Burūj* is the similarity to what we have called the Orientalist approach. Both are strongly philological in nature in that they are concerned above all with a correct understanding of the text's language. And both are concerned primarily with uncovering the original meaning. Yet despite these fundamental similarities, the results are drastically different.

Let us survey what the *tafsīr* tradition has to tell us about this *sūra*. Rather than list the topics addressed, it is perhaps more useful to consider the kinds of questions the exegetes pose.

a. Most basic is the lexical definition, the essential building block of philology: What are *al-burūj*? What is an *ukhdūd*? When Q 85:6 reads *idhhum ʿalayhā quʿūd*, does this mean they sat *by* the fire, or *on* the fire, as the preposition *ʿalā* would seem to indicate?

b. The second category would be identification, in which the lexical sense of a term is known, but the particular referent needs to be determined. For example, for Q 85:2 there is no dispute that *wa-l-yawmi l-mawʿūd* means “and by the promised day.” The question remains as to what day this would be (there is near unanimity that “the promised day” is the Day of Judgment). Similarly, with regard to *wa-shāhidin wa-mashhūd* in the next verse: what is meant by “witness and witnessed”? (and here, more possibilities are offered²³). Or the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* of Q 85:4: “People of the Trench” is the literal sense, obviously, but who are they?

c. The third type of explanation is grammatical, and this may consist of identifying the parts of speech, or clarifying the syntax of a passage or the morphology of a word. More often though, it is a question of explaining why the

23 Among the works consulted are: Ṭabarī, 15:159–65; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Beirut 1995), 4:716; al-Qāsimī, *Tafsīr al-Qāsimī al-musammā maḥāsīn al-taʿwīl* (Beirut 2002), 7:294–5; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī l-musammā muʿālim al-tanzīl* (Beirut 2002), 366–7; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* (Beirut n.d.), 9:704–5, 707–9; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut n.d.), 11:106–8; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, (Beirut n.d.), 10:315–6; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfi* (Tehran 1996), 308. For reasons of space I will not repeat the whole range of sources cited while summarizing the commentaries; readers will have no difficulty locating the relevant passages.

language of the Qurʾān appears to be at odds with the conventional norms of classical Arabic. In *Sūrat al-Burūj* the main such question concerns the oath at the beginning: *By heaven of the constellations, by the promised day, by the witness and the witnessed* (Q 85:1–3). The commentators are at pains to explain the apparent absence of the complement of the oath (*jawāb al-qasam*). (There are three main responses: the complement is elided, it is Q 85:12, or it is Q 85:4, with elision of *la-qad*.²⁴)

The main question is the identification of the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*. The verses that follow make it clear that a group of people were punished for their faith by being burned in a pit. Muslim tradition associates three main narratives with the People of the Trench. One version has Yūsuf Dhū Nawās, the Judaizing king of Yemen, hearing of a group of Christians in Najrān and demanding they renounce their faith. Those who refuse are then burned in a fiery pit.

A second narrative has a Magian king getting drunk and sleeping with his sister. The king is full of regret and despair but she persuades him that all he needs to do is proclaim to the people that God has sent down a revelation permitting incest. This he does, and those who fail to accept that this can be God's will are burned in a fiery pit.

The third tale, the longest and the most common, is the most unusual. It tells the tale of a young boy who, while taking lessons from a magician at the behest of a king, meets a monk and receives instruction from him. Eventually he heals the sick with his newfound knowledge. The king is enraged by this and tries in vain to kill the youth, eventually succeeding but only by uttering the name of God while using one of the youth's own arrows. The people are so impressed by all this that they convert to the religion of the youth and the monk. The king, further enraged, demands that they renounce their new faith. Those who refuse are burned in a fiery pit. The story ends with a young woman hesitating to throw herself into the pit of fire. Her infant child miraculously speaks and urges her on, saying that death is preferable to going back on her beliefs.²⁵

The commentators' concerns remain largely philological, in Pollock's terms of "making sense of texts," and, with that, are largely focused on the language. For example, the Qurʾān is ambiguous as to whether the *aṣḥāb* are the victims or the perpetrators, and this has implications for how one is to understand

24 For example, Ṭabarī, 15:169–70; Zamakhsharī, 4:717.

25 In addition to the commentaries, see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge 2007), 20, 172–3, and, more thoroughly, David Cook, "The *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*. History and *ḥadīth* in a martyrological sequence," *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 125–48, which is an excellent analysis of the different narrative strands and points out well the difference between historical plausibility and importance to the Islamic tradition.

the verb *qutila*. If the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* are those doing the killing, then we can read it as “may they be killed,” invariably paraphrased by the commentators as “Accursed be the People of the Trench!” A qur’ānic analogy would be Q 80:17, *qutila l-insānu mā akfara-hu* (“Perish Man! How ungrateful he is!), or Q 51:10, *qutila l-kharrāsūn* (“Perish the conjecturers!”). The second possibility is simply that the verse is informing us that those persecuting the believers were themselves killed by the fire. Thirdly, it may be that the murdered believers were the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*, and thus the sentence is simply enunciative (a *khbar*), i.e. “the men of the trench were killed.”²⁶ Here the narrative is given in terms of the function of the verb.

On the one hand, this is not much different from the Orientalist tradition: a desire to seek the original and correct meaning along with close attention to language and how to read the text. Definition, identification, and grammar (broadly defined) are the main areas of inquiry, and there is a concern to cite one’s sources and a reluctance to speak directly of thematic issues.

But there are also differences. First, Muslim scholars working in the *tafsīr* genre used different sources. They used, it would appear, sources exclusively in Arabic: *ḥadīth* or other narrative reports (*akhbār*), transmitted in the conventional manner by recognized authorities.²⁷ For linguistic norms, they have recourse to (a) the Qur’ān itself; (b) pre- and early Islamic poetry; (c) grammarians’ opinions; and (d) examples from what would appear to be regular usage. Of course, the Orientalist tradition had access to all these sources as well, but the difference lies in the sources the Muslims did *not* have access to, in their conceptions of history, and in the faith they had in the reliability of those they did possess.²⁸

The most important difference between the Orientalist and the *tafsīr* tradition of qur’anic interpretation is the goal. *Tafsīr* does attempt to explain or reveal the meaning of the qur’anic text, but that is not all. It also has as its

26 Many *tafsīr* contain all these elements. This brief summary paraphrases the remarks of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 11:110.

27 It is true that for reports of pre-Islamic prophets and matters not pertaining directly to doctrine or ritual the rules for transmission and the concern for verifiable authenticity were somewhat relaxed; see, for example, Bruce Fudge, Qur’anic exegesis in medieval Islam and modern orientalism, *Die Welt des Islams* 46 (2006), 119–23. However, the form and means of transmission were essentially the same.

28 On Orientalist use of early poetry, see, for example, A.F.L. Beeston, Ships in a quranic simile, *Journal of Arabic literature* 4 (1973), 94–6, and, more ambitiously, Thomas Bauer, The relevance of early Arabic poetry for qur’anic studies, including observations on *kull*, and on Q 22:27, 26:225, and 52:31, in Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qur’ān in context. Historical and literary investigations into the qur’anic milieu* (Leiden 2010), 699–732.

unstated goal the preservation of certain ways of interpretation, as well as ensuring that the interpretation conforms to acceptable doctrinal standards, although this aspect of maintaining conformity is not especially evident in the treatment of *Sūrat al-Burūj*, in which the doctrinal stakes are low. Of course, the *tafsīr* tradition permits a divergence of opinions, but only within fairly limited parameters. This is a point to which I will return below, but the Qurʾān is a far richer text than the *tafsīr* literature would lead us to believe. *Tafsīr* is an extremely conservative genre, and even in the modern period it is not a place where one finds remarkable innovation or creativity. However much we value diversity today, the guardians of orthodoxy were more wary of it and more concerned to uphold correct or acceptable understandings of the text of revelation.²⁹

Andrew Rippin highlights one of the main goals of the genre:

The genius of Muslim *tafsīr* is perhaps best seen in its historicisation of the text through the general tools of narrative provided by prophetic history, both of the distant past as found in the *ḵiṣāṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, and of the contemporary as found in the *sīra* of Muhammad. In that manner, the extraction of law was facilitated, the sense of moral guidance was emphasised and the “foreign” made Islamic. Whether this was a matter of filling in the details on the life of the former prophets with incidents to which Muslims could relate, a concern with identifying the unknown within the context of the life of Muhammad (*taʿyīn al-mubham*), or a polemical impulse from the context of Sunnī-Shīʿī interaction, historicisation of the text was comprehensive and compelling. Of course, this is not the history of contemporary historians, but a history which is both controlled by, and productive of, the meaning of the text of the Qurʾān.³⁰

This is an excellent summary of the ways in which Muslim scholars’ attempts to explain the Qurʾān were conditioned by religious and/or ideological concerns.³¹

29 I am not stating that change did not occur, that *ʿulamāʾ* were not themselves at times agents of transformation or that diversity of opinion is not tolerated in Islam. I am merely saying that the premodern *tafsīr* genre was not the site of intellectual or religious innovation.

30 Andrew Rippin, *Tafsīr*, E12.

31 It would be naïve to assume the Orientalists were not also subject to their own ideological concerns, but for the most part these were less explicit than the faith-claims of Islam.

Sheldon Pollock is unambiguous about the relationship of philology to religion, although one wishes he had treated it at greater length. He approvingly cites Spinoza and his

... historical and critical analysis and resulting desacralization of biblical discourse. For Spinoza, the method of interpreting scripture is the same as the method of interpreting nature. To understand the text of the Bible there can be no appeal to authority beyond it; the sole criterion of interpretation is the data of the text and the conclusions drawn from them. Nor does the Bible have any special status over against other texts; it is equally a human creation, produced over time and in different styles and registers. Close attention must therefore be paid to “the nature and properties of the language in which the biblical books were composed.”³²

Now, Muslim scholars had of course been paying close attention to qur’anic language for centuries; in philological terms they were very advanced. But God was very much present, and the dogma of the Qur’ān as direct revelation from God precludes any type of source criticism. Muslims themselves did allow for certain types of criticism regarding the transmission of the text, such as the existence of variant readings (*qirā’āt*, and especially the recourse to non-canonical readings³³), as well as accepting that certain verses were revealed separately from those around them (mainly the division between Meccan and Medinan verses). But the criteria for determining interpolated verses rested on the fact of the tradition saying so. If the tradition, that is, previous generations of scholars, was silent, there was nothing to be done. Thus the unity of *Sūrat al-Burūj* is not an issue for Muslims, but Bell and Blachère could state confidently that it is a pastiche of distinct passages.³⁴

But to recognize the limitations of *tafsīr* does not mean we should disregard it, as early Orientalists were wont to do.³⁵ Let us ask, how would it fit into the schema of Pollock’s three types of reading? Some of it, the definitions, for instance, could certainly count as “textual” meaning, attempts to uncover the original sense of a word or phrase. Some of the grammatical explanations, too, might fit here, for example in noting the existence of parallel phrases in the

32 Pollock, 937; citation from Spinoza, *Theological-political treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge 2007), 100.

33 On this see Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam* (Paris 1990), 145–51.

34 Bell, 2:646; Blachère, 644–5.

35 See Fudge, Qur’anic exegesis, esp. 132–7.

Qur'ān. To demonstrate similarities of *qutila aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* with Q 80:17 and 51:10 is to note that presumably contemporary texts contained the same forms.

Much of what we find on *Sūrat al-Burūj*, though, must fall under Pollock's second category of "contextual" meaning, "the certitudes people have at various stages of their history and that provide the grounds for their beliefs and actions" or "vernacular mediations – competing claims to knowledge about texts and worlds available in past traditions."³⁶ In this category fall, for instance, the various explanations of "witness and witnessed" (*shāhid wa-mashhūd*) in Q 85:3. These include Friday and the day of *ʿArafā* during the pilgrimage (*yawm al-jumʿa* and *yawm ʿarafa*).³⁷ Other possibilities include Muḥammad and the Day of Judgment (*al-qiyāma*), or Muḥammad and Allah.³⁸ None of these identifications is particularly convincing, and the disparity of interpretations indicates that from the earliest times there was no agreement as to how to explain the terms *shāhid* and *mashhūd* in this verse.

The traditional explanations for the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* are also "vernacular meditations" on the meaning of the text and can hardly be said to represent actual historical events, even if there is a possibility that the verse does indeed allude to the Christian martyrs of Najrān.³⁹ But one should be careful here. Even if the details are fantastical, the idea that the verses refer to the horrible persecution of believers seems beyond doubt, though one should, nonetheless, keep in mind the firm opinion of Paret, Bell, and others that the fire of the "Trench" is in fact that of Gehenna. Surely there is a sense in which persecution and punishment constitute the main message or point of the *sūra*, and we must recognize that there is more to an "original" meaning than the dry historicism of the Orientalists. But here we arrive at a curious paradox: neither Orientalists nor *mufasssīrūn* liked to speculate on the thematic meaning. Obviously the moral or the message of the story is more evident with the Muslim commentators, but even there it is not as evident as one might expect.⁴⁰ The *tafsīr* tradition resembles the Orientalist philology in this reluctance to speculate.⁴¹ Both share, for apparently different reasons, a desire to narrow down the meanings of a verse into smaller and smaller units, a historical positivism that puts matters into a specific context, be it ancient Near Eastern history or the life of the

36 Pollock, 951, 954.

37 See, for example, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Cairo n.d.), 533.

38 E.g. Baghawī, 4:467.

39 On which see Cook, *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*.

40 For an example, see Bruce Fudge, The men of the cave. *Tafsīr*, tragedy and Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, *Arabica* 54 (2007), 67–93.

41 And no doubt classicist philology as well.

Prophet. Thus do we find, for example, a discussion of what the “fuel” (*waqūd*) consisted of in Q 85:5.⁴² This is, in some ways, the negative stereotype of philology: a descent into minutiae at the expense of the broader meaning.

The precision of such commentary bears some similarity to the Orientalist penchant for historicization, and it is interesting that both are at odds with the dominant qur’anic style, which does not purport to present detailed, historically grounded events in the manner of the Hebrew Bible, but seems rather, even consciously, to be writing in a different mode, allusive rather than direct, timeless rather than historically grounded. It is instead a matter of typology of events (prophecy, warning, persecution, punishment, reward) rather than a series of discrete incidents. The search for a theme, something perhaps not mentioned explicitly in the text, is something that philological tradition, whether premodern Muslim or European, has largely eschewed, but it surely deserves a place in the quest for “textual meaning” alongside the pre-history of the Orientalists.⁴³

There are two conclusions to be drawn here. The first is that it would seem wrong to exclude the thematic from the “textual” meaning. The second is that there are many similarities between the Orientalist and *tafsīr* traditions: despite fundamentally different goals and methodological constraints, their methods remain quite similar. That Orientalists betrayed the text with their arrogant philology is not an uncommon complaint; what is less well known but no less valid is that the same accusation can be, and has been, levelled at the *tafsīr* genre as well. The commentarial tradition sought to limit and control the potential of the text. Rather than dwell on the thematic possibilities and rhetorical potential of the revelation, commentators tended to go in the opposite direction, deeper and deeper into lexical and morphological minutiae.

Such resistance to speculation, sobriety, and meticulousness does a disservice to the power of scripture (and, in Nietzsche’s mind, to the Greeks). Whatever the formal weaknesses of the Qur’ān, and despite the legitimate doubts concerning its history and composition, it is nonetheless an extraordinary piece of literature. It is extraordinary in its beauty, its allusiveness, its fascinating rhetorical techniques, its refrains. But one would not really know this from the *tafsīr* tradition. Some of the literature on the inimitability of the Qur’ān (*i’jāz*) brings out these aesthetic elements, but much of it is firmly

42 E.g. Rāzī, 11:110–1.

43 For an accessible overview of European philology as a scientific or quantitative discipline, as well as the strong feelings it aroused, one may consult Tom Shippey, *The road to middle earth* (New York 2003), 6–23. Obviously, this quest for precision and accuracy did not lend itself to thematic interpretations.

theoretical or theological, accessible only to specialists, and less concerned with conveying the literary qualities of the Qur'ān than one might expect. (Similarly, one might add that if European scholars did not come to a literary appreciation of the Bible until relatively recently, poets, painters, and composers had long had a fruitful engagement with the scripture.)

There is, in academe at least, a perhaps inevitable tendency to over-privilege the sober tradition of *tafsīr*. On the face of it, this privileging is perfectly reasonable: who better to entrust with explaining the Qur'ān than those great Muslim scholars of history who devoted great energy to doing so? But several difficulties remain: there is the fact that the *tafsīr* genre aims not just at explaining but at establishing conformity to certain norms; there is the fact that much of the literary and rhetorical power of the Qur'ān is taken for granted; there is little attempt to explain these features to a *tafsīr* audience (no doubt in part because they did not need to); there is the fact that the Qur'ān found its way into secular poetry, literature, and rhetoric and made its presence felt; there is the *topos* of one who converts to Islam upon hearing the beauty of its recited verses. All of this is absent from the dry and sober commentaries. The reliance of scholars on this genre does not do any favors to the revelation. Take, for instance, the treatment of *Sūrat al-Burūj* in *The Study Quran* (2015), a recent work produced by academics aimed at a wide audience: its translation and line-by-line exegesis of this *sūra* is perfectly accurate and reasonable, but equally lifeless and flaccid.⁴⁴ This English-language epitome of Arabic-oriented commentaries produces a pale summary that neither exposes the potential meanings and force of the text nor engages in a close philological reading of its language. Its main achievement is to make, for once, bedfellows of sobriety and flaccidity.

4.1 *Beyond Tafsīr*

So how, then, do we get from *tafsīr* to Sayyid Quṭb's use of *Sūrat al-Burūj* in *Ma'ālim fi l-ṭarīq*? On the one hand, it is quite a leap: Quṭb gives his imagination full rein to fill in whatever is blank and round out his vision of the People of the Trench as he sees fit. After reading the conventional commentaries, there is something exhilarating about Quṭb's unbridled enthusiasm. But if Quṭb is a little too free with his interpretation of the story, there is a compelling logic to what he is doing. The Qur'ān is a message from God. What is this message? Quṭb tells us in no uncertain terms. And it seems equally certain that the message of the *sūra* has more to do with what Quṭb is telling us than with

44 *The study Quran*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (New York 2015), 1497–9.

mediaeval exegetes agonizing over the apparent absence of the complement to the oath.⁴⁵

Another example is that of Michael Sells, whose translations of and commentary on the early Meccan *sūras* are, in ideological terms, diametrically opposed to Quṭb's reading. His is an elegant translation (though it sacrifices the rhyme) and the commentary dwells primarily on the *sūra*'s imagery and its reception by the initial Arabian audience. His imaginative rendering is methodologically similar to that of Quṭb; both extrapolate from Qur'ānic allusions to specific images:

... after insufferable heat, dust, and glare, the air suddenly becomes fragrant with blossoms and fruit. The sounds of birds and the rippling of streams replace the howl and lash of wind-whipped sand.

A sense of intimacy and peace is overwhelming. The glare and bleached out environs give way to the deep, velvet red of pomegranate blossoms...⁴⁶

Sells's commentary is idiosyncratic in its own way, a more irenic reading than most, but it, like Quṭb's, is more compelling than those of academe, and brings out some of the life and force that are no doubt part of the reason for the Qur'ān's success.

In an early work entitled *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qur'ān* ("Artistic imagery in the Qur'ān"), Sayyid Quṭb himself voiced harsh criticism of the *tafsīr* genre, how it completely neglects the aesthetic element, the "artistic beauty" of the Qur'ān. He notes how the richness of his own personal experience with the text from childhood onwards was nowhere to be found. The commentators reduced the revelation to a dull series of grammatical points (though he does make a partial exception for al-Zamakhsharī [d. 538/1153]).⁴⁷ It is worth noting that Quṭb composed this work in the 1940s, well before his full conversion to

45 Quṭb's emphasis on the thematic aspects of the Qur'ān, rather than the grammatical, theological, etc., has some roots in the modern period. Beginning probably with Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā's commentary, one sees a slight but marked increase in "holistic" readings of passages, in particular of complete *sūras*. For a short *sūra*, such as Q 85 (*al-Burūj*), this is less of an issue, but what is most important to me is, in any case, the explicitly thematic interpretation. I have benefitted from a forthcoming paper by Nicolai Sinai, Reading *Sūrat Al-An'ām* with Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), in Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (eds.), *Reclaiming Islamic tradition. Modern interpretations of the classical heritage* (Edinburgh 2016).

46 *Approaching the Qur'an. The early revelations*, introduced and translated by Michael Sells (Ashland, Oregon 1999), 64–7.

47 Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qur'ān* (Cairo 1994), 27–8.

radical Islamic activism. It is striking today to read Quṭb's introduction to his book, where he claims that the *'ulamā'* have failed to account for the beauty of the Qur'ān, and how one must look at the revelations from the early Meccan period to understand the enchanting effect it had on listeners. These pages are intriguing because Quṭb says that it was the verses first revealed at Mecca that captivated the hearts and minds of those who heard them, such as 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Later verses, mainly those revealed at Medina, do not possess the same magical effect. Now, one of the things that makes Quṭb's reading convincing is precisely his judgment. The fact that he recounts his own experience and pronounces his own opinion, stating that certain verses have a captivating effect and others do not (though these others may have different merits) lends weight to his words. The doctrine of the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān, as well as its directly divine origins, has rendered the Qur'ān immune to criticism both from without and comparatively, since obviously one cannot explicitly elevate one section over another. This immunity to criticism serves well its theological purpose, but is less satisfying in other ways.

I give this attention to Sayyid Quṭb because, whatever one thinks of the content of his writings, his stance is, as such, at odds with the very conservative tradition of *tafsīr*. His is a Muslim critique of Muslim scholarship and the firm grip it had on what could be said and written about the Qur'ān. *Tafsīr* is a tradition that, in its own way, is as blinkered as that of nineteenth century Orientalism in its limited reading of the revelation. Few academics today would leave the interpretation of the Qur'ān to Theodore Nöldeke and Richard Bell, but we have few such reservations, it seems, about giving the floor to the *tafsīr* genre.

5 The Philologist's Meanings

Pollock argues that we, philologists of the present in search of meaning, stand to gain from "contextual" readings, the vernacular meditations that communities have made on their texts. They are unlikely to help us with the historical element (the historicism in question being "an invention of the early modern conceptual revolution") but:

A careful and reflexive search for both textual and contextual truth can help us recover not only dimensions of shared humanity but the occluded and productively disruptive otherness of the noncapitalist non-West. Such otherness cannot just be imagined; it must be laboriously exhumed from the depths of the textual past.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Pollock, 955.

If Pollock's customary clear and jargon-free prose has briefly eluded him here, the point holds nonetheless. We stand to learn from *tafsīr* even if the genre does not share our historiographical principles. What we learn from *tafsīr* or other "vernacular" traditions we cannot know in advance, and it may not conform to our own scientific categories.⁴⁹

Pollock characterizes his own undergraduate education as "a hard Wilamowitzian historicism" that neglected even the existence of alternative commentaries, and he noted both how formative this was as well as incomplete: "How different my first experience of reading Virgil would have been had I read him through Donatus-Servius rather than through Conington-Nettleship."⁵⁰ The responsible philologist must take into account the plurality of interpretations, for that plurality is itself part of the meaning.

I confess I am not entirely certain what the "philologist's meaning," Pollock's third category and desired goal, of *Sūrat al-Burūj* would look like. Nonetheless, this brief survey of material and Pollock's article does give me some signposts for being a better, or more thorough, reader of the passage. That is to say, to fulfil the philologist's goal of making sense, as much sense as possible, of texts.

The preceding pages have touched on, broadly speaking, three different categories of reading. First, a textual-historicist meaning that seeks not just the original meaning but the origins, the pre-history of the passage. This is represented by the "Orientalist" tradition. Second, we have the conventional Muslim view of the *sūra*, as found in premodern Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*), a genre to which one conventionally turns when seeking the meaning of a Qur'ānic verse. Third, we have two examples of what we might call truly "vernacular" interpretations, unfettered by tradition or convention, in a passage by Sayyid Quṭb and the commentary of Michael Sells. The ideal reading of *Sūrat al-Burūj* would comprise all of these. Each is valid in its own terms, and the *sūra* itself would seem incomplete without any one of them. And yet this kind of inclusive reading is exceedingly uncommon, in part for disciplinary reasons.

The Orientalist reading, for all its broad focus on the world beyond and before Islam, is hobbled by a narrow historicism. The *tafsīr* tradition has what might be called theological limitations: its sources and methods are limited, and one of its (unspoken) briefs is to reinforce a certain version of orthodoxy. The third category, represented by Sayyid Quṭb, could comprise any number of non-canonical/non-commentarial versions: poetic, mystic, mythic, but which remain equally partial readings. One should add here that it is very difficult,

49 I would fully concur with Rippin (Response to the keynote, 4–5) that the "contextual" meaning is too easily neglected, and I would argue, as this essay should make clear, for a very broad conception of what constitutes contextual meaning.

50 Pollock, 954–5.

if not impossible, to escape the *tafsīr* tradition. Even Quṭb's vision of *Sūrat al-Burūj* is based on a single interpretation of *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* found in the sources of which he was so critical. His understanding of the text's essential message is perfectly consistent with the tradition.

As I have indicated, a weakness, or at least a lacuna, in the Orientalist and *tafsīr* traditions is the reluctance to treat thematic meanings. For a divine revelation, one would think that this would be an essential aspect. What I propose is a reading that will supplement the overly historicist or orthodox readings: a literary one, which adds to the above a reading sensitive to both formal and thematic qualities. It is odd to note how rare such readings are. To my mind, one of the most sensitive and accurate descriptions of the Qur'ān is that of Régis Blachère, certainly a dry and sober Orientalist of the old school. A surprise is that this description comes not in his work on the Qur'ān itself, but in his *Histoire de la littérature arabe*.⁵¹ Over 25 clear and lucid pages, Blachère gives us not only a survey of the changing content over the Meccan and Medinan periods, but of the rhetorical styles and devices that characterize each period. The result is a far more compelling account than the more common summary of theological messages and prophetic history. It is a true philologist's reading, one that makes sense of the text at all levels, precisely by treating it *as literature*. To the historicist and the religious should be added the literary, which is, after all, how many readers of the text experience it. Blachère was also guilty of excessive historicism, most obviously in his insistence on re-numbering the *sūras*, but that should not diminish the merits of his work. Today's philologist must historicize the colleagues of yesterday, not reject them out of hand.

And of course we must historicize ourselves. However, this should not obviate the need for judgment and critique. One of the convincing moments of Blachère's analysis is his brief comparison of the biblical and qur'anic Joseph stories, where he is not afraid to pronounce firmly on the superiority of the latter. Perhaps because this is unexpected for such an Orientalist, it carries more weight, more legitimacy. But it also serves as a reminder of how little critique there is. *Tafsīr* commentators occasionally pronounce on the beauty of elegance of a phrase, but not very often, and they are prohibited from offering criticism. It is true that Orientalists were full of unkind remarks on the text, but these stemmed not from literary judgment but from historicist or linguistic prejudices. Can one render judgment free of prejudice and chauvinism? Probably not, but does that mean we have to give it up entirely? Can we be good readers, good philologists while always withholding judgment? As Pollock says, objectivity should not imply neutrality.

51 Régis Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe* (Paris 1980), 2:205–30.

I would not advocate the overthrow of traditional philological methods in favor of some kind of romantic or imaginative program of reading. I do think, though, that it is wise for those of us who study the Qurʾān and Islamic texts to keep the Wilamowitz-Nietzsche spat in mind. Just as Nietzsche argued for inclusion of both the Dionysian and the Apollonian, today's scholars of the Qurʾān would do well to allow for a degree of interpretation that allows for a more complex range of meanings. Obviously we must remember the Orientalists and the Muslim commentators, but we should also keep in mind that these same *sūras* can inspire the likes of Sayyid Quṭb to far more radical conclusions, and that this power is one of the essential qualities of the Qurʾān.