

# Understanding and Believing

# Bonner Islamstudien

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Editor

Stephan Conermann

Volume 8

Mohammed Nekroumi and Lutz Edzard (eds.)

# Understanding and Believing

A Comparative View of  
Theological Scriptural Hermeneutics



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# Table of Contents

Preface.....	7
Between letter and spirit – understanding the Christian Bible as Holy Scripture .....	13
<i>Wolfgang Schoberth</i>	
The specialty of the Qurʾān as one of the principles of judgments’ deviation .....	19
<i>Hamadi Dhouib</i>	
Syllogism and the Principles of Jurisprudence in al-Ghazālī’s Philosophy.....	43
<i>Sobhi Rayan</i>	
Al-Ghazālī’s theory of interpretation .....	61
<i>M’hamed Aithammu</i>	
The Symbolism of Evil – the figure of the snake and the “Adamic” myth in light of Paul Ricœur’s textual hermeneutic* .....	69
<i>Michaela Bauks</i>	
Backstage Cognition in Religious Beliefs: ‘Azrāʾil and <i>Iblis</i> as Products of Conceptual Blending.....	83
<i>Amira Ghénim</i>	
How inclusive is Rosenzweig’s biblical hermeneutics?.....	117
<i>Hans Martin Dober</i>	
The human person in Islam – the approach of Mohamed Aziz Lahbabi .....	137
<i>Markus Kneer</i>	

Discourse markers as indicators of text division in the multiple-topic qurʾānic suras: A Meta-Analysis of Q 2 .....	157
<i>Salwa El-Awa</i>	
Renderings of the Arabic “Allah” in German translations of the Qurʾān .....	197
<i>Hartmut Bobzin</i>	
The <i>qirāʾāt</i> in the Qurʾān: an attempt at a typology .....	205
<i>Lutz Edzard</i>	
A narrative and its textual variants. Questions regarding the transmission history and normative relevance of Hadīth* .....	223
<i>Peter Spiewok</i>	
The moving Word. The intention of the Word of God* .....	269
<i>Mohammed Nekroumi</i>	

## Preface

The articles collected in this volume were presented at the international conference, “Understanding and Believing – A Comparative View of Theological Scriptural Hermeneutics”, which was held from June 20th, 2018, to June 22nd, 2018 in Erlangen and organized by Mohammed Nekroumi and Lutz Edzard. The participants were renowned specialists from several nations whose research focuses on the monotheistic religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

Theologians are increasingly aware that an understanding of the divine message in the three monotheistic religions requires a genealogical approach that entails deciphering the interactions between intellectual history and discourse in the scriptures. Alongside a traditional theological approach based on comparing and contrasting monotheistic beliefs, there has also emerged a promising comparative hermeneutic methodology that draws on semiotics and textual analysis. Nevertheless, all methods that have impacted the field’s discourse thus far mainly indicate that all comparative approaches essentially debunk dogmatic definitions, such as that of the Trinity or of the attributes of God. How, then, in light of these considerations, might comparative theological hermeneutics of the divine message look today? To what extent can methodological and epistemological diversity within a religious denomination or theological tradition contribute to an interreligious discourse on an academic level, conducted in the service of the ethical and spiritual essence of the divine word, which all religions have long proclaimed and laboriously laid bare in their scriptures? This conference provided the framework for specialized academic discussion of theological and epistemological questions relating to the process of understanding divine discourse in the three monotheistic religions and the ethical, moral and social implications found therein.

The contributions encompass a broad spectrum of topics and can be grouped into the following categories:

- A. Retrospective understanding: the ever-visible voice of the Lord
- B. Faith’s paths of reason: under the sign of the here and now
- C. The word and its transmission history

## A. Retrospective understanding: the ever-visible voice of the Lord

1. In his article, “*Between Letter and Spirit: understanding the Christian Holy Bible as Holy Scripture*,” Wolfgang Schoberth reflects upon the Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration. He describes how, under the effects of this doctrine, the bible grew into a stiff text that the Protestant mainstream tends to deconstruct, while fundamentalists absolutize it. The author searches for paths to revive the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura* in the sense of a living interpretation of the bible’s text directed towards the presence of God.
2. Hamadi Dhouib’s study, “*The specialty of the Qur’ān as one of the principles of judgments’ deviation*,” investigates the role of the Qur’ān in the system of norm derivation in the historical theological-juristic discourse between a theological ideal and the demands of the life-world. This contribution discusses how, on the one hand, the text of the Qur’ān was elevated to an absolute, normative textual authority, yet, at the same time, also had to concede some authority due to the establishment of the principle of consensus (*Ijmā’*) in favour of extra-qur’ānic sources.
3. In his contribution, “*Syllogism and the Principle of Jurisprudence in al-Ghazālī’s Philosophy*,” Sobhi Rayan locates more precisely the jurisprudential process of analogy in the work of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE). The author contextualizes the universalist theologian’s views in the acerbic debates of his day and age between advocates of logic as a structurally formational element of jurisprudence and their bitter enemies.
4. Entitled “*al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Interpretation*,” M’hamed Ait Hammu’s article sheds light on the hermeneutics of the universalist theologian al-Ghazālī from a perspective of alterity. Al-Ghazālī appears to understand the Qur’ān as a polyphonic text and to recognize a plurality of interpretations as a great asset to the Muslim community. The author investigates the extent to which he also remains open to systems of belief outside of Islam.



## B. Faith's paths of reason: under the sign of the here and now

5. In her article, "*The Symbolism of Evil – the figure of the snake and the 'Adamic' myth in light of Paul Ricœur's textual hermeneutic,*" Michaela Bauks investigates the psychological dimensions of the biblical myth of Adam. Shedding the doctrine of original sin, she locates this myth along the spectrum of various types of myths concerning the origin of evil in the world. From Ricœur's point of view, myth is a narrative-dramatic form of expression for dealing with complex ontological questions.
6. Amira Ghenim's innovative study, "*Cognition in Religious Beliefs: 'Azrā'īl and Iblīs as Products of Conceptual Blending,*" focuses on the modeling of Satan and the angel of death in traditional Islamic literature and presents the reader with strong impressions of the many faces of death and evil as existential experiences of being in Islamic systems of belief.
7. In his contribution, "*How Inclusive is Rosenzweig's Biblical Hermeneutics?*", Hans Martin Dober demonstrates how the Jewish thinker's initial development of his intellectual history, rooted in biblical hermeneutics, was motivated by the desire to challenge the claim of Christian narrative that divine love was a characteristic unique to the Christian experience of God. In light of current, multi-religious lifeworlds, the author measures Rosenzweig's work against its own standards of humanity and sheds a critical light on his view of Islam.
8. "*The Human Person in Islam – The approach of Mohamed Aziz Laḥbābi*" is Markus Kneer's contribution, in which he presents the Muslim personalism of the Moroccan philosopher Laḥbābi. This thinker, who has been the object of controversy in his homeland, appears as an independent mind that developed his own philosophy of liberation situated between post-modern Western ideas and attempts at revitalization of Islam. From a theological perspective, his reflexions about the existential power of the Muslim testimony of faith (*shahāda*) are particularly thrilling. Markus Kneer presents the reader not only with a review of Laḥbābi's philosophy but an attempt at a new reading based on the epistemological roots found therein as well.

### C. The word and its transmission history

9. In her contribution, “*Discourse Markers as Indicators of Text Division in the Multiple-Topic Qur’ānic Sūrahs: A Meta-Analysis of Q 2*,” Salwa El-Awa looks more closely at a gap in Qur’ān research and investigates the formal elements that structure the text of the Qur’ān beyond the borders of the Sūrahs and qur’ānic verses. In her study, the author examines a number of relevant contemporary works on the Qur’ān’s second Sūrahs in terms of how they structure the Sūrah both thematically and formally, while providing perspectives on the further development of this field of research.
10. Today, fundamental reservations regarding whether the Qur’ān should even be permitted to be translated into languages other than Arabic have by and large faded. However, what distinguishes an accurate translation of the Qur’ān? In a concise contribution entitled “*Renderings of the Arabic ‘Allah’ in German Qur’ān Translations*”, Hartmut Bobzin investigates one aspect of this question, taking as example the concept of “Allah” and explaining why he decided to translate it as he did in his own translation of the Qur’ān.
11. In his contribution, “*The qirā’āt in the Qur’ān: an attempt at a typology*,” Lutz Edzard focuses on traditional canonical and non-canonical texts and interpretive variants (*qirā’āt*) of the text of the Qur’ān, commenting on a hotly debated topic in qur’ānic studies. He analyzes case studies in order to discern various phonetic and phonological features of the *qirā’āt* as well as their semantic effects.
12. Peter Spiewok’s article, “*A Narrative and its textual Variants – Questions on the transmission history and normative relevance of Ḥadīths*,” is a study of a Prophetic Ḥadīth concerning a woman who laments to the Prophet about her marriage. Spiewok analyzes heterogenous textual variants, comparing them with their chains of transmission, following their many branches, and tracing them back to their source. He draws conclusions on how to interpret reported narrative transmissions with normative implications in a contemporary manner.
13. In his paper, “*The Intention of the Word of God*,” Mohammed Nekroumi attempts to investigate the argumentative relationship between qur’ānic verses whose content is comparable in terms of belief or a similar normative value, both semantically as well as in terms of the

transmission history of their interpretation. He does so by means of a hermeneutic categorization/reconstruction of the so-called concept of abrogation (*naskh*). Starting with the basic belief that understanding and re-reading are concomitant within the process of textual interpretation, this article points to the dynamic aspect of divine revelation in monotheistic religions, which proceeds from the true essence of the word as the place of a transposition of divine voice into space and time. Seen from this perspective, the concept of abrogation is reduced neither to a mere suspension of norms nor to a corrective position on the part of the discourse's author. It is, rather, a matter of a creative discovery of meaning that does justice to the ambiguity inherent and consciously intended in the word, particularly with a view to its liveliness and universality.

These contributions by researchers from Germany, Great Britain, Israel/Palestine, Morocco, and Tunisia reflect the compelling debate at the core of this conference, regarding different approaches to the “holy text(s)” in the three monotheistic religions of revelation.

It is with great joy that the editors present the contributions of this conference's speakers in a collective volume.

Erlangen, July 1st, 2019

Mohammed Nekroumi & Lutz Edzard