

Muḥammad's Ḥiġāz
in Focus

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Rebecca R. Williams

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Preface

This volume brings together contributions from different disciplines relating to various topics regarding the Ḥiǧāz as well as its populations and societies in the late sixth and early seventh centuries CE. Most articles originated as presentations at a series of public lectures accompanied by workshops between April 2018 and February 2019 at the Institute for the Study of Islamic Culture and Religion at Goethe University Frankfurt. The stated purpose of this seminar was to familiarize students with the discipline of Islamic philology and its methods. To these contributions have been added several additional articles that are pertinent to the topic at hand.

Recent research in Qur'anic Studies has resulted in important findings. These results were made possible by (re)embedding the Qur'anic text into the context of Late Antiquity. At the same time, Muḥammad as an individual has receded somewhat into the background. The same can be said for his immediate social, religious and political milieu. The present volume attempts to shift the focus to both Muḥammad the individual and the society surrounding him.

The different papers are presented in ascending alphabetical order according to the contributors' last names. They are preceded by the editors' introductory essay which reflects the various contributing and interacting factors coming into play in (early) Islamic philology from a methodological and epistemological point of view. It discusses the complexity as well as the problematic nature of sources and the various complementing yet conflicting approaches. Given the context of the seminar from which this volume originated, the introductory essay is worded rather generally. It focuses on the tools and methods necessary for doing philology. It also examines the potential for socio-political conflict and tension that Islamic philology may carry while addressing the socio-economic situation graduates of respective study programs may face after completing their degrees.

Ayşe Başol explores various aspects of Zaynab Bint an-Nabī's life as depicted in Early Islamic sources both frequently and rarely consulted. She focuses on Zaynab's birth, childhood, marriage, conversion to Islam and emigration to Medina, and her efforts to save her husband. Starting with the observation that early Islamic historiography follows ancient established practice by emphasizing individual events as exemplary deeds and sayings, she demonstrates how Zaynab's life events are typically presented through her relationship with her father while showing how piecing together the various scattered pieces of infor-

mation nevertheless succeeds in transforming her traditionally passive depiction into a more complex and multi-layered narrative.

François de Blois investigates the cosmographic models in pre- and early Islamic Arabia. He first examines the Eudoxian and Ptolemaic models, focusing on the cosmological terminology in Arabic scientific writings, including both original works and Greek translations. He demonstrates that the usage of the term *falak* indicates a merger of these two models, creating a third, hybrid cosmographic model. He then delves into the etymology of *falak* and discusses several Qur'anic passages containing this term. Through these discussions, he shows that the Qur'an adopts a (pseudo-)Ptolemaic cosmographic model, reflecting some awareness of its basic elements and highlighting the complexity of early Islamic cosmography.

The contribution of Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort revisits the narratives concerning Surāqa's pursuit of the Prophet Muḥammad during the latter's migration from Mecca to Medina. She adduces new materials from various sources of Hadith. Subjecting previously investigated as well as newly discovered reports to an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis, she shows that the different versions of the story ascribed to az-Zuhrī (d. 742 CE) can indeed be traced back to him as demonstrated by their similarities when compared to other versions of the story. Her contribution shows the value of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis as a tool for dating Hadith and illustrates how it can yield results more easily and quickly, once the manner is established by which a given scholar transmits his material.

Ash Geissinger investigates two traditions involving the Prophet's wife Ḥafṣa Bint 'Umar, one describing her jealous reaction to Muḥammad having sexual relations with a concubine in her (Ḥafsa's) apartment, the other describing her role in administering her father's endowment after his death. Subjecting the sources to a historical-critical and literary analysis, they demonstrate that the different versions of these two traditions create a complex and multi-layered picture. They show, how the different ways of reading these traditions throughout history result in a mistaken understanding of the intentions behind the wordings of the early sources, suggesting that research will need to ask new questions regarding the role of women in Early Islamic society.

The contribution of Miriam Lindgren Hjälms addresses the question of oral Arabic Bible translations and the familiarity with Biblical narratives at the time of Muḥammad. She discusses the various approaches taken by scholars to explain this familiarity. She also highlights the problem of determining the denominational identity of Christians living on the Arabian Peninsula and elucidates the reasons giving rise to oral translations of the Bible. She then examines the emergence

of written Arabic translations and demonstrates the role the Qur'an plays as a subtext for these translations. She shows that neither the Qur'an nor the Arabic Bible translations emerged in a cultural vacuum, but rather take into consideration ongoing discourses and present their own interpretations of the other's Scriptural material.

Michael Lecker presents new data concerning the location of the new market established by Muḥammad early after he migrated to Medina in 622 CE. He revisits the primary sources originally used by M.J. Kister, the first Western academic to tackle this question. Rereading these sources and utilizing additional ones that have hitherto not been analyzed for approaching this topic, Lecker discusses some of the locations used as commercial hubs in Medina before showing that the evidence indicates that the new market was most likely located to the south-west of the Prophet's Mosque. He demonstrates how passing remarks in later sources can contain relevant information regarding the history of seventh-century Arabia.

Angelika Neuwirth tackles the question of the Qur'an's handling of and concern with the Temple of Jerusalem. She shows that the Qur'an's downgrading of the Temple and Jerusalem as a cosmological center is both a part and an expression of the shift in spiritual and theological perceptions it advocates. She demonstrates how Qur'anic passages can be read as a disavowal of the apocalyptic and messianic expectations of Late Antiquity with their focus on earthly stages on which history must take its predetermined course. She draws attention to the Qur'an's disruption of the causality between the Temple's destruction and the coming of the Messiah as historical destiny and illustrates the focus placed by the Qur'an on the concept of non-terrestrial spiritual sanctuaries and God's absolute dominion over the course of history.

The contribution of Rebecca Williams examines the narratives concerning the conception of Muḥammad. She investigates Early Islamic reports depicting the Prophet's conception as a transferal of light and adduces parallel accounts describing similar phenomena in pre-Islamic literature. Utilizing strategies of literary analysis, she demonstrates that the tale of the miraculous conception of the Prophet can be regarded as a typical Late Antique narrative relating the conception and birth of distinguished individuals. She shows that the popular view claiming that early sources including the Qur'an depict Muḥammad as a mere human being without any supernatural traits is mistaken and establishes that any individual regarded as touched by the Divine would necessarily have also been regarded as being connected to the supernatural realm.

In conclusion, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the authors for their invaluable contributions, to Michael Asbury for his meticulous language proofreading and to the series editors, Udo Simon and Ömer Özsoy, for their unwavering support and guidance. The creation of this volume has taken an exceptionally long time due to various factors, including health-related and private reasons, as well as the unprecedented challenges posed by the Corona pandemic. We sincerely apologize to the contributors for the delays this has caused. Finally, we express our deep gratitude to our families for their continuous support and to the contributors for their remarkable patience throughout this process.

Frankfurt, January 2025

Ayşe Başol, Daniel Birnstiel and Miriam Djahani

Contributors

Ayşe Başol is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for the Study of Islamic Culture and Religion at Goethe University Frankfurt. In her research, she focuses on evolutions in the perception and narration of Muḥammad and his family with an emphasis on their depiction in Qur'anic passages and pertinent hadiths as well as exegetical materials. She has also worked on early Islamic historiography, researching the development of different versions of a tradition complex.

Daniel Birnstiel has worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for the Study of Islamic Culture and Religion at Goethe University Frankfurt. His research interests include the emergence and development of the Qur'anic text and its variant readings, the syntax of Qur'anic Arabic, Arabic grammar in general and Semitic linguistics. Further interests are the dynamics of language, religion and identity in Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew texts from the early Islamic Near East.

François C. de Blois has worked at the Department of the Study of Religions at SOAS London and the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London. He is the author of numerous publications on Semitic and Iranian languages. His research interests include the history of religion in the Middle East, pre-Islamic and non-Islamic calendars in the Near East, the disambiguation and elucidation of religious vocabulary in Iranian and Semitic languages as well as Iranian and Semitic lexical studies in general.

Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort is an Assistant Professor of Islam and (Classical) Arabic at Radboud University Nijmegen. Her main research interests include the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad as well as the analysis of reports ascribed to the Prophet more generally. She has published on the concept of *sunna* in early Islam and analyses of hadith materials.

Miriam Djahani is completing her master's program at the Institute for the Study of Islamic Culture and Religion at Goethe University Frankfurt. Her academic interests center on pre-Islamic and Early Islamic history and historiography, Islamic law and gender studies. For her MA thesis, she is investigating the roles of women in Early Islam as depicted by Islamic history and law.

Ash Geissinger is an Associate Professor of Religion at Carleton University, Ottawa. Their research focuses on the Qur'an and its exegesis, the Hadith literature and its interpretative tradition, literary approaches to the reading of classical Islamic sources as well as North American Muslim appropriations of classical Muslim texts. Their academic publications tackle questions of gender within the framework of Early Islamic society.

Miriam Lindgren Hjälm is the Academic Dean for Religious Studies and Theology at Sankt Ignatios College and a senior lecturer at the Department of Eastern Christian Studies at University College Stockholm, where she teaches Biblical Hebrew, the history of religion and the use and understanding of sacred texts in Eastern Christianity. Her research centers on Arabic translations of the Bible, especially translation techniques and the paleography and dating of these translations.

Michael Lecker is a Professor Emeritus at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research publications focus on early Islamic texts and the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad with an emphasis on economic, geographic and socio-political history. His academic interests include inter-tribal and inter-religious relations and the prosopography of the first Islamic centuries in general.

Angelika Neuwirth is Professor Emerita of Arabic at the Seminar of Semitic and Arabic Studies at the Free University of Berlin. Her research interests include Qur'anic studies and modern Arabic literature, especially Palestinian poetry. She is most well-known for initiating the *Corpus Coranicum* project and for her contributions to a better understanding of the Qur'anic corpus which she studies from an interdisciplinary perspective as a text of Late Antiquity.

Rebecca R. Williams is an Associate Professor for Islamic Civilization at the Department of History at the University of South Alabama, Mobile. Her research interests focus on Islamic historiography, the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad as well as Qur'anic exegesis. In her publications, special attention is given to the question of supernatural powers and qualities surrounding the person of the Prophet.