



Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community (Qur'anic Studies Series)

By Angelika Neuwirth

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We are used to understanding the Qur'an as the "Islamic text" par excellence, an assumption which, when viewed historically, is not evident at all. More than twenty years before it rose to the rank of Islamic Scripture, the Qur'an was an oral proclamation addressed by the Prophet Muhammad to pre-Islamic listeners, for the Muslim community had not yet been formed. We might best describe these listeners as individuals educated in late antique culture, be they Arab pagans familiar with the monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity or syncretists of these religions, or learned Jews and Christians whose presence is reflected in the Medinan suras. The interactive communication process between Muhammad and these groups brought about an epistemic turn in Arab Late Antiquity: with the Qur'anic discovery of writing as the ultimate authority, the nascent community attained a new "textual coherence" where Scripture, with its valorisation of history and memory, was recognised as a guiding concept. It is within this new biblically imprinted world view that central principles and values of the pagan Arab milieu were debated. This process resulted in a twin achievement: the genesis of a new scripture and the emergence of a community. Two great traditions, then, the Biblical, transmitted by both Jews and Christians, and the local Arabic, represented in Ancient Arabic poetry, appear to have established the field of tension from which the Qur'an evolved; it is both Scripture and Poetry which have produced and shaped the new Muslim community.

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Review

"As everyone who follows the scholarly study of the Qur'an in our times knows, Neuwirth's work has been trendsetting. The publication of her very original studies in English is long overdue as the delay has prevented one of the most important voices in Qur'an scholarship today from being clearly heard in the English-speaking academic communities." --Sidney H. Griffith, Professor in the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures, Catholic University of America

"Neuwirth's discussions of the canonization of the Qur'an and her analyses of specific suras are very significant, and the arguments and interpretations in the articles are intellectually impressive. A volume such as this will be of tremendous use not only to scholars of the Qur'an but to scholars in Biblical studies and religious studies generally." --Shawkat M. Toorawa, associate Professor of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies, Cornell University

About the Author

Angelika Neuwirth was educated in Classics and Oriental Studies at German and international universities (Italy, Iran and Israel). She has taught at the Universities of Munich, Amman, Bamberg, and Cairo, and has held the Chair of Arabic Studies at the Freie Universitat Berlin since 1991. From 1994 to 1999 she served as the director of the Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft in Beirut and Istanbul. Her major fields of research are classical and modern Arabic literature and Arab Late Antiquity studies. In several recent publications, Professor Neuwirth has tried to vindicate the Qur'an as a Late Antique text, which--though deeply rooted in Arab culture--has contributed creatively to a number of major theological discourses. Professor Neuwirth has been acknowledged for her novel approach to interreligious studies by being bestowed several honorary doctorates, academy memberships and professional awards.

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