ABSTRACTS OF ARTICLES

Exegesis of the ḥurūf al-muqatta‘a: Polyvalency in Sunnī Traditions of Qur’anic Interpretation

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This paper seeks to explore the wide range of interpretations resulting from the ḥurūf al-muqatta‘a or ‘the disconnected letters’ of the Qur’an. Typically considered a paradigmatic case of the mutashābih in the Qur’an, exegetes have expended much time and energy speculating over the meaning(s) of these enigmatic graphemes. From the earliest exegetes to the later tradition, a chorus of possibilities and theories are encountered. The traditions of interpretations themselves are a testament to the Qur’an’s interpretive plurality throughout the centuries. This paper looks at the long tradition of broadly Sunnī Muslim interpretation in regards to the disconnected letters to uncover the historic expansiveness of Qur’anic hermeneutics. Linguistic, mystical and encyclopaedic approaches are especially highlighted for the sake of emphasising diversity. The paper concludes with an exploration of the ‘limits’ of interpretation as determined by the exegetes in response to the disconnected letters.

 Spiritual Hierarchy and Gender Hierarchy in Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī Interpretations of the Qur’an

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This article describes the relationship between gender hierarchy and spiritual hierarchy in the writings of three Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī authors: al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974), Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 380/990) and al-Mu‘ayyad fī’l-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 470/1078). These authors interpreted references to males and females in the Qur’ān as references to spiritual teachers and their students: verses that on the outward (ẓāhir) level speak of the gender hierarchy refer, on the inner (bātin) level, to the spiritual hierarchy. We show that, for them, physical gender matters in the physical realm, and a worldly gender hierarchy exists, but physical gender is not always a defining factor in spiritual rankings. We shed light on the way in which these prominent Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī thinkers view the base physical realm as a symbolic reference to higher spiritual truths, and give examples of the ways in which specific Qur’anic stories, such as that of Adam and Eve, or Joseph and Zulaykha, are interpreted as referring to the male/teacher and female/student relationship in the spiritual hierarchy. We then compare these writings to the
specific defence of a female spiritual leader put forth in the Ghayāt al-mawālid by a slightly later author, al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 533/1138–9).

Qur’anic Inscriptions on the Coins of the ahl al-bayt from the Second to Fourth Century AH
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This paper asks why early Muslims selected certain Qur’anic passages for inclusion in the legends of their coins. Coinage provides a form of historical documentation which is well suited to the study of the public reception of Qur’anic material because most Islamic coins were dated (either relatively or absolutely) and their place of origin known. This preliminary study begins with the earliest Islamic coinage, concentrating on the epigraphic coinage produced by ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān’s monetary reforms and the coinage of the ʿAlid pretenders to the caliphate in the ʿAbbāsid period. It discusses the anxieties expressed by some scholars about the exposure of Qur’anic text on coins to contact with persons in a state of ritual impurity. It examines the relationship of the cited texts to their Qur’anic background, proposing an inclusive reading which takes account of the textual, moral and political contexts in which these numismatic legends were used.

The jizya Verse (Q. 9:29): Tax Enforcement on Non-Muslims in the First Muslim State
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The jizya verse has been the basis of a huge amount of writing by Muslims in Islamic law and Qur’anic exegesis, and by non-Muslim scholars writing about Islam. It continues to be used by some academics, the media and anti-Islamic propagandists to denigrate Islam and its treatment of non-Muslims, especially the ‘People of the Book’. This article aims to examine the verse afresh, using close linguistic analysis and paying due regard to the linguistic and historical contexts of the verse and all its elements, as well as the style of the Qur’an, and what it says outside the confines of this verse. Such analysis will demonstrate that the picture that has been made of this verse, based on various historical contingencies, both by Muslim exegetes and jurists and non-Muslim writers, is far removed from the actual picture as given in the Qur’an itself.
Human Intervention in Divine Speech: waqf Rules and the Redaction of the Qur’anic Text

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Muslims regard the Qur’an as divine speech; therefore, the scope of human intervention in shaping and interpreting it is often downplayed. One hitherto neglected aspect of the history of the Qur’an and the redaction of its text is the introduction of waqf categories which dictate where a Qur’an reciter must, should or cannot pause while reading the Qur’an and how this affects its meaning. This paper deals with the history of the introduction of these waqf categories: how and on what basis they were determined by Muslim scholars, and what these scholars sought to accomplish by introducing them. It also discusses how this subject is significant to the understanding of the Qur’an by demonstrating how pausing at certain points affects the meaning of the text.

A Reading of Nöldeke’s Geschichte Des Qorâns

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The author explains Nöldeke’s importance as a leading European orientalist, especially in the field of the history of the Qur’an, and the significance of his Geschichte Des Qorâns which was written in 1859. He discusses the expansion of this work by Nöldeke’s pupils, comments on its importance, and describes the contents of the book. He then addresses Nöldeke’s views, together with those of his collaborators and other relevant European scholars. After assessing the work he concludes that very little of Nöldeke’s original ideas remain in the final revised edition and that Schwally contradicted Nöldeke in many ways. He ends with Nöldeke’s comment that even after the revisions undertaken by Schwally traces of ‘childish audacity’ could not entirely be removed without rewriting the entire volume. He quotes Nöldeke’s opinion that some of what he wrote at that time, either with little or great conviction, he later lost confidence in. Given this, like its original author, we can also no longer have complete faith in this work.

Contextual Semantics in al-Ṭabrisî’s Tafsīr majma‘ al-bayân

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Context plays a major role in indicating the meaning of words and grammatical structures. This is especially true for terms to which the Qur’an designated new meanings. Furthermore, over the passing of time meanings change, for example from the general to the specific or vice versa. On this basis the author
attempts to apply the theory of semantic fields to specific terms in al-Ṭabrisī’s Majmaʿ al-bayān. He then highlights the usefulness of this theory in composing in comprehensive dictionaries which include semantic fields as applied in other tafsīr.