BOOK REVIEWS


In 2002 Arabic linguistics and semitology were enriched with a new study accomplished in English, Italian and Maltese research centers with consultations with Israeli and Maltese scholars. The author of the book — Martin R. Zammit — is a Doctor of Philosophy (since 1990) in Arabic studies and semitology, and a teacher of the Arabic language of the Department of Arabic and Near East studies of the University of Malta.

It is well-known that the study of the Qur’an has a centuries-long history and is represented with extensive multifold scientific literature in the East as well as in the West. But even in such a sphere as the language of the Qur’an, where, it seems, “everything has been studied”, the appearance of the concerned work is not at all a common event. The author of the book opens a new aspect of linguistic study of the largest and, in many respects, initial monument of the Arabic language. By attracting comparative-lexical material of eight Semitic writings, Mr. Zammit aims at determining quantitative relation between Arabic vocabulary of the Qur’an which traces to the pente-Semitic fund and truly Arabic vocabulary, i.e. vocabulary which does not have correlations in the Semitic languages involved in this comparative analysis. By determining different amounts of common lexemes between the Qur’anic Arabic (hereafter QA) and each of the Semitic languages involved in the study, the researcher intends to determine not so much the degree of genetic closeness of the QA and the concerned Semitic language, as the degree of their “cultural-historical closeness”, the level of socio-cultural inter-Semitic ties (p. 1). The book is supplied with full reference data. The appendix at the end of the book includes: bibliography (pp. 617–27), containing 223 items; an index of Arabic roots of ten characters; a concordance to the Qur’anic text (pp.629–45); a common index of personal names and terms (pp. 646–52).

The research part of the book consists of: an introduction (pp. 1–8), six chapters (pp. 17–589) and notes (pp. 589–616). In the introduction and the aims and the program of the study are formulated. Chapter 1 (pp. 17–28) is dedicated to an analytical review of works on Arabic and Semitic lexicology (pp. 29–63) is dedicated to the history of formation of the QA, to the problem of adopted words and semantic classification of the concerned QA vocabulary. In chapter 3 (pp. 64–513) tables of lexical composition of QA are presented in comparison with corresponding in each of the eight Semitic languages. If there are no such correspondences, there is a blank space before each language. Chapter 4 (pp. 514–60) is dedicated to semantic analysis of the QA vocabulary in historical aspect. Tables of statistical calculations and estimations of comparison results are given in chapter 5 (pp. 561–77). In chapter 6 (pp. 78–90) the author sums up the study and presents his main inferences and conclusions.

In the Introduction (pp. 1–16) an account of the author’s starting point is given. The material of the study is the vocabulary of the Qur’an as the most trustworthy and reliable monument of the Arabic language of the 7th c. AD. Lexical units are selected from the text of the Qur’an which correspond to 1304 roots. Taking into account the latest calculations of the root fund of the Arabic language (3775 units), the QA roots form about 40% of all Arabic roots (p. 2). Adopted words and proper names found in the Qur’an are not ranked among these 1717 lexical units. In the comparison with the QA vocabulary the material of eight Semitic languages is involved. In the order of their permanent arrangement in tables and schemes: Gezeh, epi-graphical South-Arabic languages (indiscrere), Syrian, Aramaic (indiscrere); Hebrew, Phoenician, Igurit and Akkadian.

The first chapter (pp. 17–28) is a historical review of literature dedicated to the study of Arabic vocabulary beginning from national philological schools of the first centuries of Islam. Then the author looks at the main research trends: (i) comparative-historical study of the Arabic language and its vocabulary in the West and in the East, the first attempts to define and reconstruct the common vocabulary of Semitic languages and, broadly, Afro-Asiatic (Semito-Hamitic) languages; (ii) lexical-statistical methods which allow to determine the degree of genetic closeness between related languages and the chronology of their division. Mr. Zammit in detail reviews the results of lexical-statistical research in the sphere of Semitic languages and Arabic dialects in the works of D. Koen, H. Rahib and some other western arabs and semitologists of the second half of the 20th c. However, he does not mention the latest glottochronological classification of Semitic languages suggested by A. la Milkarev in the Semitology dictionary1 although the name of this book is included in the bibliography and is mentioned regarding other issues.

Pointing out to the inaccuracies and contradictions in lexical-statistical unity of the QA and Arabic languages and Avaz dialects based on limited lists of the so-called “basic vocabulary”, Mr. Zammit believes that such limited lists of words are not enough to establish real genetic relations between languages. Instead of such limited lists of basic vocabulary he suggests a new approach — to consider full lexical material of the QA and determine what correspondent correspondences it has in other Semitic languages and the amount of such correspondences (p. 28).

The second chapter (pp. 29–43) is a detailed account of the “outside” history of the Arabic language in connection with the history of its native speakers. Mr. Zammit uses all known sources and studies dedicated to the pre-Islamic history of Arabs and the Arabic language, gives a short characteristics of its first monuments and touches upon the old discussion of the correspondence of pre-Arabic poetry and the question of possible diglossia as early as in the pre-Islamic period and formation of supra-dialectal forms of the language. In this connection the author considers the question of the place of the Qur’anic language in the system of contemporary tribal dialects and supra-dialectal forms of verbal poetry and koine. A special section is dedicated to the issue of adopted words in the Qur’an, their statistical estimation, semantic classification and the percentage ratio of thematic groups with the total amount of adopted words. The given material may be of great interest for arabsmiths and researchers of the Qur’an.

I shall point to some cases when the etymological interpretations can be made more exact. Thus, in the author's opinion, original Arabic words drs “to be erased, vanished”; qr “to be going to” (in the QA almost meaningless); A. (8) meanings “to study, to read; to call; to tell, to applaud” (p. 66). However, at a closer study of comparative Semitic material one should be aware that original meanings of the mentioned Arabic verbal roots are not only all-Semitic, but trace to an older, Aforasian period. Compare the data of Aforasia reconstruction: Arabic dhrs “to be erased, covered with dust” (footnotes on the ground)’; “to window, to thrash” Syrian dhr/s Hebrew Aramaic dhr Akkadian dhr/s “to pound, to trample”, all from Aforasian dhr/s “to trample”. In such a situation we can assume that a direct adoption penetrates into the QA from the north-west Semitic verbal root drs “to learn, to study”, and as a result two homonymous roots appeared. The same can be said about the etymology of the verbal stem qr which has the meaning “to be going to, to involve, to call guests to a feast” not only in the Arabic language, but also in a number of Semitic languages. From there we can assume the following semantic development: “to call, to tell, to applaud” and in the latter case we can assume the semantic development of one root, in the first case a direct semantic connection is not traced and one can suppose the existence of two homonymous roots as early as in ancient-Semitic languages.

Mr. Zammit completes the second chapter with a classification of the QA vocabulary in seven semantic fields: the universe, physical being, soul-intellect, human being as a social organism, social structure, man and the universe, geometrical calculus.

On the whole, according to the plentitude of documentary data and the fullness of the most important sources and scientific literature, the second chapter of Mr. Zammit’s work is a unique contribution to the study of the pre-Islamic period the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabic language were isolated from the sur-roundings of the ancient-Semitic and non-Semitic civilizations (pp. 50–1).

In chapter three (pp. 46–546) tables of the QA vocabulary are presented in the Arabic alphabet. To each unit of the Arabic language correspondences from the abovementioned Semitic languages are given. If there are no such correspondences, the Arabic words are given in the following form: noun stem in singular, perfect verbal stem in singular, 3rd person, masculine. The correspondences from the Semitic languages are presented in forms given in the corresponding dictionaries or in the form of the consonant root. Mr. Zammit justifies the choice of the Semitic languages with the fact that they are represented in most reliable sources and studies.

In the last part of the third chapter (pp. 447–513) the so-called “lexical grants” are presented — tables in which the percentage was estimated, of correspondence between a QA unit and each of the Semitic languages is fixed. The lexical grant is represented with nineteen positions. All 1717 units of the QA are divided into these positions. Among these positions are semantic characteristics (according to field numbers) and areal geographical characteristics.

In the last part of the third chapter (pp. 514–60) Mr. Zammit draws attention to the fact that the author allows readers to see full characteristic of each lexeme they are interested in, at least within the limits placed by the author himself.

The fourth chapter (pp. 514–60) is dedicated to an interesting and complicated question of semantic changes and their direction in the lexical system of a language and in the QA vocabulary in particular. Mr. Zammit traces this process by the example of 210 lexemes selected from the vocabulary concerned in the third chapter — from the 1717 lexical roots. By comparing the QA with the meanings of its correspondences in other Semitic languages, the author attempts to identify the tendencies (or directions) of its semantic changes. He considers three main processes established in general linguistics: (i) preservation of the original meaning; (ii) narrowing of the original meaning ("specialization"); (iii) widening of the original meaning. As a criterion of the antecedence of a lexeme's meaning, the author accepts the identity or the closeness of meanings of lexemes found on the opposite peripheries ("East—South") of the Semitic area (p. 515).

The semantic analysis carried out by Mr. Zammit according to those criteria leads him to the conclusion that in the considered lexemes of the QA the preservation of the archaic (or initial) all-Semitic semantics prevails (pp. 559–60).


Concerning some semantic interpretations of Arabic and Semitic lexemes connected with anatomy, it could already be appropriate to take into account reconstructions and consider the possibility of the existence of the hypothesis included in the works of M. Zammitti. M. Zammitti included such ideas in the Arabic language. Some rare notes, for example, could have turned to the key of the Arabic grammar "body, inside" (p. 531–2), concerning the Arabic qawm (p. 538) "arm", concerning the Arabic 'azam (p. 536) "bone". 

The fifth chapter of the book (p. 561–77) presents tables and the statistical, quantitative and percentual estimations of the distribution of the QA and other Semitic languages in the territory. According to M. Zammitti's calculations, the biggest percentage of the QA vocabulary correspondences falls at north-western Semitic languages (25.36%). Other Semitic languages show a smaller percentage. For 535 out of 1717 lexical units of the Qur'an correspondences have been found in the eight Semitic languages (p. 575). According to the author of the book, the origin of these exclusively Arabic lexemes is hard to define today. One can only assume that: (i) some of them have preserved from an older pre-Semitic period and have not preserved in other Semitic languages; (ii) some of them represent re-interpretation of all-Semitic roots; (iii) some of them represent lexical innovations; (iv) for some lexemes the meaning is determined by the context (p. 576–7).

Not calling in question the valuable results of laboratory statistical and critical research, the author, I would like to point out to the fact that attraction of a wider range of Semitic languages could have slightly changed the current picture. For example, the lexeme muwašša (rotted in a garb) the author finds no correspondences in the concerned eight languages (p. 209–10). However, in the Hebrew language there is a verbal stem z'mal (to pull saddle-girth of a car) which can be matched with the Arabic one. The same can be said about the QA lexeme sḥurja "a tree, a plant" that has no correspondences in any of the eight languages (p. 235), however in Mahr there can find a lexeme tšin (plants, trees)⁴. Also compare the QA lexeme l'aham "alien, speaking Arab- badly" (p. 288) given without correspondences in the Semitic languages involved in the study. However, in Mahr there is a root jm and its derivations "to be dumb, speechless"⁵. For the QA lexeme lāhun "a kind, a wing" identified the author in the Mahr lexicon Al-Basari that can find additional material in MARD supported by Ablashian material.

In the final part of the book (chapter six, pp. 578–90) M. Zammitti raises his question: to what extent can the results of the lexical-statistical analysis of the QA define the place of the Arabic language in the family of Semitic languages. To answer this question M. Zammitti presents to the reader a detailed review of studies and discussions on the history of division of Semitic languages, on localization of their pre-homeland, the "Amorite hypothesis", the "hypothesis of the Semitic language" (or group of dialects) that was the centre of innovation development of west-Semitic languages; touches upon the unanalyzing discussion about the genetic classification of Semitic languages and the criteria of its classification. Eventually, despite the divergence of approaches, positions, criteria and principles of classification, it seems that the Arabic language most often occupies an intermediate, middle position between the main areas of Semitic languages "west-south" (the east with the Akkadian language is less often involved in classification debates).

Taking into account the fact that the considered QA vocabulary forms about 40% of the whole of the roots' knowledge in some languages of the Semitic world, M. Zammitti believes that the determined lexical correlation between the nine Semitic languages is quite indicative. In relation to Semitic language groups "North—West—South" the Arabic language is in an equivocant position from each of the groups (p. 587). At the same time the likeness in the sphere of semantic fields between the QA and the considered Semitic languages testify to a greater semantic differentiation on certain themes (table on p. 588). In the question of the degree of semantic variability and the stability of the initial root M. Zammitti comes to the conclusion about a certain stable balance of archaic semantics as well as of the "specialization" of ancient meanings (p. 589).

Forestalling the general assessment, I would like to emphasize that all statistical data, the tables of lexical correspondences and semantic fields present us a picture of only one, although the most important, monument of the Arabic language. Its lexical composition and the character of its semantic fields are in many respects determined by the genre and the purpose of the monument. The comparative material is limited to eight languages. Aside was left the vocabulary (it is not adopted from the Arabic language) of such an important group of Semitic languages as modern south-Arabic (Mahr, Pšar, Saqfah and Awal-Ethio-Semitic languages).

The attraction of monotony and different in genres monuments of the Arabic language and a more complete comparative Semitic material can sufficiently alter the status position of the Arabic language in the Semitic area.

What concerns semantic analysis of a Semitic root, the occurrence of archaisms or innovations in this system can

⁴ Compares SED, No. 100.
⁵ Compares SED, No. 100.
⁶ Compares ibid., No. 25.
⁷ Qur'a, 73:1.
⁹ Ibl, p. 374.
¹⁰ Ibl, p. 16.
¹¹ S. Shalit, p. 86.
¹² In my opinion, while considering different genetic classifications of Semitic languages one should clearly distinguish the etymological principle of classification based on a completely different criterion. See, in particular, the suggested classification by A. I. Militarev given in SED, pp. XXXI—XLII.
be identified more exactly through attraction of comparative material of other Afroasiatic languages, on which there is a number of researches in the world science and which were not fully taken into account by the authors.

On the whole, the big and complicated task carried out by M. Zammit can be evaluated as a serious pioneer work on examination of the boundless ocean of Arabic vocabulary. Owing to special cultural-historical circumstances it is the Arabic vocabulary that can serve as the most extensive source of many roots and words which have not preserved in other Semitic languages.

The reviewed book by M. Zammit is, in a way, a prologue of the long impending task of compiling an etymological vocabulary of the Arabic language, which, undoubtedly, will require collective effort of a big group of scholars.

A. Behova

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**Efim A. Rezvan**

«The Qur`ān of ‘Uthmān»

- (St. Petersburg, Katta-Langar, Bukhara, Tashkent)

Since the late 15th century, the Qur`ānic manuscript, one of the most important in the world, was preserved in the memorial complex of the ‘Ishāqīya Sufi brotherhood in the small village of Katta-Langar, some 100 km to the south of Samarkand. It was venerated for centuries as a genuine copy of the 'Uthmanic Qur’an, written in the hand of the third ritee of caliph and bearing traces of his blood.

Nineteen large parchment folios in Hijazi script dated to the 8th century A.D. are held now in St. Petersburg, Katta-Langar, Bukhara and Tashkent. They contain approximately half of the text of the Qur’an. The history of the manuscript spans at least twelve centuries and tells a remarkable tale of dynasties and states, cities and people. It is, to some extent, the story of Islamic civilisation itself, from its emergence in Arabia in the 7th century to the triumph of Islam, which survived and outlasted communism in the Muslim republics of the former USSR.

Prof. Dr. Efim Rezvan, author of the project, is the well known specialist in Qur’anic studies, Deputy Director of the Institute of Semitology Museum and Editor-in-Chief of Manuscripta Orientalia. His latest book «The Qur’an and the World» received the UNESCO award «for the important contribution to the culture of non-violence and dialogue among the civilizations»; the title of the best book published in Russia in 2001 and the World Prize for the Book of the Year of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2002).

New monograph of the scholar presents a thorough study of the manuscript, viewing it historically through the prism of how the Qur`ānic text was gradually established. The study is accompanied by a facsimile reproduction of the manuscript (black and white in the book and in full colour in the DVD). The DVD also contains video film by Efim Rezvan and Sasha Averbakh on «Search of the Qur’ān of ‘Uthman» (52 minutes). The film that is included along with the book brings the reader/viewer into the scholar’s workshop, allowing him to come along for visits to mountain villages in Central Asia and the bustling cities in the East, as well as sit quietly in the hush of the library. The story of the Muslim scripture based on the unique manuscript and field materials could be very important for mutual understanding and inter-confessional dialogue both in Russia and worldwide.

One can now state with confidence that the banks of the Neva are home to one of the most ancient and important Qur’anic manuscripts in the world, a Muslim relic no less significant than those venerated by Muslims in Cairo, Istanbul and Tashkent.

The publication (hard cover, A4 format, parallel texts in English and Russian, DVD) came out of press in August of 2004 in the series «Oriental Calligraphy and Miniatures from St. Petersburg Collections» (established 1962, renewed 2002, Academic Director – Mikhail Piotrovsky) after the delay connected with the appearance of the newly discovered fragments.

For details and film multilingual pre-view, please, visit book web-site at http://www.mushaf.sph.ru

To buy the book via Internet, please, write to mushaf@mail.ru

Efim Rezvan’s book not only brings us close to an understanding of how the Sacred Text was established, it also gives us all, Muslims and non-Muslims, a chance to brush up against the History that is recorded in this remarkable copy of the Qur’an. I welcome the publication of this book and congratulate its author on the scholarly coup that is he’s right to claim.

Mikhail Piotrovsky,
Director,
State Hermitage Museum