According to the traditional point of view, the Qur’ān as a literature work remains aside of the main trends of the literary activities of the Arabians, being connected with them only by the use of the common language and saj’ as a literary form. No serious attempt was undertaken, however, to study the Qur’ānic text in connection with the literary tradition preceding or contemporary with it. Meanwhile this attitude, in our opinion, could elucidate not only the specific features of the contents and the form of the Qur’ān but also explain some key points of the understanding and interpretation of the Qur’ān by medieval Muslim authorities.

In the mid-1980s Andrew Rippin implored to view the text of the Qur’ān within the continuum of literary experience [1]. The main stress, however, was put by him on the necessity of exploring the Qur’ān within the literary tradition it had created, first of all the tafsir literature, taking into account the changes in the perception of the Qur’ānic text which had occurred in the course of centuries.

Recognising the fruitfulness of this approach for the study of the history of Islam and of the Muslim civilisation as a whole, we would like to observe the place of the Qur’ānic text not within the literary tradition it created, but within the one which produced the Qur’ān.

Everyone knows that the Qur’ānic text as a historical, cultural and literary phenomenon has not come out of nowhere. By the seventh century the literary tradition of the Inner Arabia was already several hundred years old; different texts had been created and circulated there. Only a small part of the literary works of the last pre-Islamic century has survived, being conveyed through a later tradition. Those are for the most part tribal poetry, tribal lore, proverbs and sayings (amthāl) and small fragments of religious texts. Let us try to define each of these types of texts, making a simplified model of the real situation.

Tribal poetry was called tribal for that very reason that it served the interests of one clan inconsistent with the interests of others. A poet was the herald of his tribe, the embodiment of its public opinion and the protector of its interests. The term shā'ir, as it is known, at that time meant not only poet but also wizard; his connections with the other world he used to practice magic arts — to harm the enemy and to help his kinsmen. That was how the traditional genres — hijā’ (satire, abuse), madh (panegyric), fakhr (self-praise) — functioned [2].

Poetry, as a rule, was directed outside but was preserved and transferred within the tribe, being its valuable property which they were proud of, which they exposed as a banner, when trading with other tribes, and used as a weapon in the forum of justice. This function of poetry ensured the development of the common language of literature, a kind of inter-tribal poetical koinē.

Arabian lore which is preserved in Ayyām al-’Arab ("The [Battle] Days of the Arabs") was also, like poetry, a pure tribal phenomenon. Unlike poetry, however, the legends were directed not outside but mainly inside, being a way of preserving and conveying the collective historical experience of the ancestors, a record of tribal history. Much of this lore is a collection of precedents going back to the stories of tribal arbitrary judges. Here the experience important both for the tribal unit and for inter-tribal relations was refined. The “external” function of the Ayyām was not, however, the dominating one. It was first of all one of the foundations upon which the tribesmen were realising their unity. Arabian lore in the Ayyām was, to some extent, a factor of ethnic consolidation and ethnic distinction. Tribal lore included poems and war-songs, orations made by tribal war-leaders (sing.: gā’id, ra’is, ‘aqīd), tribal chiefs (sing.: sayyid), fiery orators (sing.: khāṭib) [3], soothsayers (sing.: kāhin, ‘arrāf), arbitrary judges (sing.: ḥakam), texts of treaties between tribes.

Though the Ayyām were recorded only in the second century A.H./eighth century A.D. and the manner of rendering the material was distorted by the literary standards of that time, it is still possible to consider them, as a whole, as a very reliable source preserving both the
contents and the most important elements of the verbal textual form [4].

Proverbs and sayings (amthål) also had their place within the frames of the functional unit of tribal poetry — tribal lore [5]. The term mathal was applied to actual proverbs, sayings of proverbial type, wise sayings, formulae. Amthål preserved the memories of outstanding events: achievements of the ancestors, failures of the enemies. Their functions could be similar to those of hiya’ or madh ú, for a proverb is the most coded unit appearing in speech and, at the same time, the shortest poem [6].

One of the characteristic features of the classical Arabic amthål is the abundance of proper names. Amthål and, at the same time, the shortest poem [6] for a proverb is the most coded unit appearing in speech and, at the same time, the shortest poem [6].

According to the tradition, Mufammad was once shown the results of the development of social and religious consciousness of the Arabian society, were the negation of the preceding experience. This expressed itself, in particular, in almost complete disappearance of pre-Islamic religious texts. Nevertheless, often through indirect evidence, we are able to form some general idea about their role and their main components.

The kâhin tradition existing in Arabia before Islam often attracted the attention of scholars, who took notice of its proximity to a number of Qur’ânic revelations [18].

Poetry often played with proverbs, and felicitous poetic lines were turned into proverbs. Mathal, as a rule, was going along with a concise commentary easily developing into a short story which had much in common with tribal lore [10]: “Faster than Khudàja, a man from Baní ‘Abs. He was sent by the ‘Abisites, when ‘Umar b. ‘Umar b. Ghuds had been killed, to warn their people” [11]. “More greedy than Rabí’a al-Bakkâ (‘Mourner’). This is Rabí’a b. ‘Amir b. Rabí’a b. ‘Abd al-Rahmân b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd al-Malik. A man, he saw her mother under her husband and began to cry, thinking that he was killing her. Therefore he was weeping and crying, and they told him: ‘The easiest “death” for a woman is under her husband” ’ [12].

There were, of course, many proverbs and sayings neutral in regard to relations between tribes. Most of them, however, were also preserved and transmitted within the frames of the tribe, implying some persons known to their circle of external contacts, specific features of the language and of the tribal culture. It is only natural that in the oldest of the survived amthål collections Kitâb al-amthål by al-Mufaddal b. Muhammad al-Dabbi (eighth century), the texts of amthål are grouped by their tribal provenance, not by their subjects as in later anthologies [13].

A somewhat different group is formed by didactic sayings dealing with ethics in general. There are testimonies that “leaves” (suhuf) of similar sayings were circulated in pre-Islamic Arabia, ascribed to the legendary Luqmân b. ‘Ad al-Mu’a’mmar al-Ḫakîm (“The Long-lasting”, “Sage”), and also possibly to a historical personality, arbitrary judge Tamimite Aktham b. Šayfî — “the Sage of the Arabs (Ḫakîm al-‘Arab)” [14].

The extraordinary wisdom of Luqmân was praised by Imrù’l-Qays, Nàbihga, al-Aššâ and Tarafa [15]. He was believed to be one of the builders of the Mârib dam [16]. According to the tradition, Muhammad was once shown a scroll which contained the wisdom of Luqmân [17]. The absence of the actual texts and the obscurity of the tradition do not allow to define their place in the general context of pre-Islamic literature. They were possibly linked in some way with religious texts.

Of the last ones much less has survived to the present time than of poetry, tribal lore and amthål. There is only one explanation of that: early Islam and the Qur’ânic, being the results of the development of social and religious consciousness of the Arabian society, were the negation of the preceding experience. This expressed itself, in particular, in almost complete disappearance of pre-Islamic religious texts. Nevertheless, often through indirect evidence, we are able to form some general idea about their role and their main components.

The scholar who published it dates the text to the ninth century [19]. It is not by pure chance that among those who were the first to write in Arabic the tradition names Zayd b. Ḥamâm (ca. A.D. 500) and his son, the famous poet ‘Adî b. Zayd, who lived in al-Hîra [21], and that the best speaker of the pre-Islamic past was Quss b. Sâ’ida, who was also connected with Arabian Christians (possibly — of Najrân) [22].

In Damascus four parchement leaves were found with the Arabic text of the 77th Psalm written in Greek script. The scholar who published it dates the text to the ninth century; such specialists, however, as Bernard Levin and Nábpp Abbott consider that it possibly could be dated back to the sixth century [23]. A. Baumstark thought that some of the manuscripts containing Arabic translations of the texts of the Scriptures could be attributed to the pre-Islamic period. G. Graf and S. Griffith actively argued with him [24].}

The almost word-by-word parallelism of the Qur’ânic ûyât corresponding to the text of the Scriptures (21, 105 — Ps. 37:29; 5, 45 — Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 27:17-20; 7, 40/38 — Matt. 19:24) is evident. Preliminary observations over the Arabic epic lore recorded by the Qur’ân and accepted by the early Islamic exegetics demonstrate that these legends had possibly undergone Christian editing in the pre-Islamic time. In this case, however, a special investigation is required.
“ethnic”, sacred texts of this kind served the interests of those ethno-social groups which belonged to a corresponding confession. The specific form of the sacred text’s existence was to a great extent determined by the ethnic diversity of the Arabians.

Possibly in al-Hira, Najrân, Yathrib or somewhere else, there circulated certain sacred texts in Arabic recorded in the Hebrew or Greek script (the imperfection of the Arabic script revealed itself much later, in the early history of the Qur’anic text). A large number of terms of Ethiopian or South Arabian origin present in the “Christian fragments” of the Qur’ân points, in our opinion, to the South of Arabia as the principal source of Christian preaching in Hijaz. Here one can recall also the Ethiopian Hijra [28]. The extant sources, however, testify that legends, stories and themes from the Bible or around the Bible circulated in Arabia first of all in the word-of-mouth form.

On the eve of Muhammad’s appearance and at the time of his preaching there were people in Arabia who recognised the principle of monotheism though did not consider themselves Christians or Jews. Some of them, who were not claiming a direct contact with the God and were not going into ecstatic trances, were known, evidently, under the name of hânifs. Others were denounced by the Muslim tradition as “false prophets”. There was also an intermediate variant — Muhammad’s adversary, poet Umayya b. Abî-l-Salt was half-hânîf, half-false prophet. Musaylima, Sajâh, Tulayya, al-Aswad, Ibn Sayyâd were preaching to their adepts. After Umayya a diwân of poems ascribed to him has been left. The analysis of these verse and some indirect evidence on the “false prophets” allows us to make an important conclusion: the texts they created were from the start addressed to a very limited audience. Musaylima addressed the inhabitants of Yamâma, his Hânafî fellow-tribesmen; Sajâh, the prophetess, spoke to the nomadic Tammites; Tulayya, who acted in Najd, addressed the Asad tribe, al-Aswad looked for his followers among the people of Yemen. Ibn Sayyâd’s audience were the Jews of Yathrib — people of his own creed; Umayya was the shâ’ir of Banû Thaqif. It is almost impossible, however, to say anything definite about the sermons they made at that time. The little that survived doubtless points to the kâhin tradition.

So, what was common for all these types of texts circulated in Arabia of Muhammad’s time: tribal poetry, tribal lore, amithâl and sacred texts? They all existed mainly in oral form, first of all within the frames of the community fellow-tribesmen, accumulating cultural and religious traditions of the tribe, its collective experience, events of its history and memories of those who took part in them. Though poetry implied authorship, by its functions it, as well as the other kinds of texts mentioned above, was standing close to folklore. According to the definition of specialists in folklore, it implies a group digesting and sanctioning it, ensuring its preliminary censorship by the community [29], although all folklore texts, at least the texts of the tradition in question, describe one and the same world [30].

The sermons of Muhammad remained very close to such texts while he was still addressing only his kinsmen. But as long as they rejected his summons more and more fiercely, Muhammad, being convinced in the truth of his prophetic mission, began to look for followers outside Mecca. His considerations about the origin of mankind were connected with this search. Then came the realisation of the fact that all people were the sons of Adam (bânû Adam) [31].

The logical outcome of the development of external events, as well as of the ideas of the prophet himself, led to the Hijra, marking his final break with his fellow-tribesmen and the appearance of a new starting point in his preaching. Muhammad began to address a potentially unlimited audience, while the functional features of the pre-Islamic literature were determined by the tribal discreteness of the population of Arabia. A distinctive step forward took place: from poetry the Qur’ân inherited its main external function, the function of a weapon connected with the notion of the magic power of verse. That was the way Muhammad’s sermons, summons and curses were viewed by his contemporaries — as a weapon able to bring him victory. What made them even more powerful, was that in the consciousness of Muhammad’s contemporaries they belonged not just to some poet connected with the powers of the other world, but to the most powerful deity. The victories of Muslim arms helped to confirm the belief in the magic power of Muhammad’s sermons. The magic sûrâs of the Qur’ân (112, 113, 114), curses on Abû Lahab and other enemies (111, 108), were naturally connected with the corresponding functions of the pre-Islamic poetic tradition. Like poetry, the Qur’ân was using the language understood everywhere in Arabia. The similarity of their artistic methods, the unity of their system of images is doubtless, several sûrâs demonstrate the use of the poetic metre of rajaz and of traditional subject motifs.

Often the Qur’ân maintains a direct dialogue with poetry, borrowing from it its imagery and passion. Sûra 80 : 34–35 is speaking about the Last Judgement: “... the day when a man shall flee from his brother, his mother, his father, his consort, his sons ...” [32]. And here comes a fragment of a war-song survived in one of the narratives of the Ayyâm al-‘Arab cycle, dealing with a battle: “And the one of you who will flee, will flee from his wife, from the one under his protection, will flee from his friend!” [33].

The Qur’ân inherited also the essence of the tribal lore, thus becoming the foundation upon which Muslims realised their new community. The idea of blood-succession (we are fellow-tribesmen, we share the same blood, the same ancestor, the same heroes) was replaced in the Qur’ân by the succession of spirit (we are of the same creed, we share the same sacred law given us through the Prophet, the leader of our community; our history is the history of God’s appeal to his people through his prophet). Here the religious experience of the Arabian Jewish and Christian communities was employed. This deep link between the Qur’ân and the lore of the Ayyâm cycle basing upon the same way of comprehending events looks especially important. There are many cases when Muhammad is building his system of arguments in favour of the new creed upon precedents: the destruction — punishment of ancient peoples, the role of prophets—missionaries, etc.

Qur’ânic oaths and idhâ passages demonstrate evident parallelism with the language, style and inner logic of the corresponding texts in the treaties between pre-Islamic tribes.

In the text of the alliance concluded by the grandfather of Muhammad ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and the chiefs of Banû ‘Amr of Khuzâ’a we read the following: “They contracted
and covenanted together for as long as the sun rises over
(Mount) Thabir, as long as camels cry yearning in a desert,
as long as a man performs the lesser pilgrimage to Mecca,
an alliance for time without end, for all time, which sunrise
will further confirm, and night-darkness add to its
and darkness to its terms" [34].

It is not so difficult to find parallels in the Qur'anic
text: "By the fig and the olive and the Mount Sinai..." (95,
1—2). "When the sun shall be darkened, ... when the preg-
nant camels shall be neglected ...") (81, 1—4). "By the Mount
... by the House inhabited (= Ka'ba — E. R.) (52,
1—4). "By the white forehead and the brooding night"
(93, 1—2).

Amthal were widely used by Muhammad [35]: "We
have indeed turned about for men in this Koran every man-
ner of similitude (amthal); yet most men refuse all but un-
belief" (17, 89/91; see also 18, 54/52; 30, 58; 39, 27/28). Amthal
were cited by the Prophet also in confirmation of
his arguments — to his followers, and in polemics —
against his opponents (13, 117/118; see also 16, 60/62). The
last ones were paying back in the same coin (17, 48/51):
"Behold, how they strike similitudes (amthal) for thee, and
go astray, and cannot find a way!"

The use of amthal in sermons was not always felici-
tous. It produced caustic remarks from the opponents and
made Muhammad go into additional comments: "God is
not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat, or aught
above it. As for the believers, they know it is the truth from
their Lord; but as for unbelievers, they say, 'What did God
desire by this for a similitude (mathal)?' Thereby He leads
many astray, and thereby He guides many; and thereby He
leads none astray save the ungodly..." (2, 26/24).

Muhammad is stressing his exclusive right to use
amthal (16, 74/76): "So strike not any similitudes (amthal)
for God; surely God knows, and you know not". Then fol-
low the amthal struck by Allah (16, 75/77—76/78).

Recent events, victories and defeats of Muslims and of
their adversaries in the context of Muhammad's preaching
were turned into examples, models, moralising stories and
divine edifications: "God has struck a similitude (mathal): a
city that was secure, at rest, its provision coming to it ease-
fully from every place, then it was unthankful for
the blessings of God; so God let it taste the garment of
hunger and of fear, for the things that they were working"
(16, 122/113). Thus the fate of Mecca, formerly prosperous
and flourishing, then suffering in consequence of its
confrontation with Muhammad, became, first for the listen-
ers of the Prophet and then for the readers of the Sacred
Book, an example of God's design preserved for peoples
edification.

Muhammad employed the amthal known to his audi-
ence, endowing them with new meaning. His sermons
were gaining acuteness and vividness: "The likeness
of those who have been loaded with the Torah, then they
have not carried it, is, as the likeness of an ass carrying
books" (62, 5).

Sometimes only a comparison of the Qur'anic text with
the survived amthal can shed light on the contents of the
Qur'anic fragment considered traditionally to be difficult
for interpretation: "And be not as a woman who breaks her
thread (naqadat ghalzalah), after it is firmly spun, into fi-
bres, by taking your oaths as mere mutual deceit, one na-
tion (umma) being more numerous than another nation
(umma). God only tries you thereby; and certainly He will
make clear to you upon the Day of Resurrection that
whereon you were at variance" (16, 92/94).

The anthologies of amthal [36] preserved the following
mathal: akhraqu min nāqāda ghazalah (variant — akhraqu
min nākitha ghazlah; — "More stupid than she who broke
her thread". This quite traditional proverb current in the
pre-Islamic time became overgrown with details after it had
been fixed by the Qur'ān. Commentators even mention the
name of this Quraishite woman: Umm Rayta bint Ka'b b.
Sa'd b. Taym b. Murra. The āya in question most proba-
ably deals with the conflict which developed in Medina between the muhajirūn (umma here stands for
"group") and the ansār (another umma — group), threaten-
ing to undermine the position of Muslims as a whole.
Citing the well-known proverb Muhammad means to say:
"So much effort wasted to bring us together. Any schism,
any quarrel between Muslims is only to the advantage of
our enemies. Do not become like that stupid woman who
worked so hard and was left with nothing!"

It is important to notice that in the use of the
mathal form, in the appeals to associate and com-
pare which go through all Muhammad's preaching, a spe-
cific form of thinking is revealed, when not a logical con-
struction but subject image and simile served as an
argument.

The tradition connected with the use of moralising
sentences of more general character was also absorbed by
the Qur'ān. Especially interesting in this connection are
āya 13/12—19/18 of sura 31 going back, evidently, to
the sayings of Luqmān circulated before Islam: "And when
Lokman said to his son, admonishing him, 'O my son, do
not associate others with God; to associate others with God
is a mighty wrong'. (And We have charged man concerning
his parents — his mother bore him in weakness upon
weakness, and his weaning was in two years — 'Be thank-
ful to Me, and to thy parents; to Me is the homecoming.
But if they strive with thee to make thee associate with Me
that whereof thou hast no knowledge, then do not obey
them. Keep them company honourable in this world; but
follow the way of him who turns to Me. Then unto Me you
shall return, and I shall tell you what you were doing'.)
'O my son, if it should be the weight of one grain of
mustard-seed, and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens,
or in the earth, God shall bring it forth; surely God is All-
subtle, All-aware. O my son, perform the prayer, and bid
unto honour, and forbid dishonour. And bear patiently
whatever may befall thee; surely that is true constancy.
Turn not thy cheek away from men in scorn, and walk not
in the earth exultantly; God loves not any man proud and
boastful. Be modest in thy walk, and lower thy voice; the
most hideous of voices is the ass's' ".

It is important to note that nowhere in the Qur'ān there
is any mention of any connection between Luqmān and the
tribes of 'Ad, of his longevity or his participation in the
building of the Márib dam. At the same time it is possible
to notice some parallelism between the Qur'ānic texts and
the aphorisms of Ahiqar (Arab. al-Hayqár: Russ. — Akir
Premeurdi — "Akir the Wise") [37] going back to the
Ancient Near East tradition. Pre-Islamic Christian poet
'Adl b. Zayd [38] also mentions al-Hayqár. Probably even
before Islam wisdom of that kind coming to Arabia from
outside could be associated with the name of Luqmān. It is
easy to distinguish here the proper elements of the Qur'ān,
which declare monotheism, the obligatory character of
prayer, submission to the rules and limitations accepted among Muslims. The traditional form of moralising sayings ascribed to Luqman the Sage was filled with ideas important for the Prophet.

This situation is characteristic of the Qur'an as a whole. It reflects a complicated tangle of ideas, legends, scenarios, and images coexisting in the culture and religious consciousness of the population of pre-Islamic Arabia. By the beginning of the seventh century many of those legends and images, going back to the cultural fund common for the Ancient Near East and having numerous parallels in the Bible and in the apocryphal literature formed around the Scriptures, were accepted in Arabia as native, became connected with local cultural heroes. In many cases when Muhammad was making just a reference to a subject well-known to his audience, he, at the same time, introduced a number of elements corresponding to his aims or to the general pathos of the sermon. Depending on the circumstances the stress was made either on the Arabian element or, in other cases, like in the āyāt connected with Luqman, the background motif could be the unity of the ancient wisdom bringing together Muslims and the men of the Scriptures.

The Qur'an had also incorporated a significant amount of religious lore deriving from the circle of the Bible and circulated, as we have seen, in different forms long before Islam. These, now Qur'ānic, tales should not be regarded just as borrowings from the Old Testament and apocryphal literature, or from the contemporary Christian literature of the Prophets' time (like the legend of "The Seven Sleeping Youths" or "The Romance of Alexander"). What was borrowed in most cases was only a form used to embody the ideas preached by Muhammad.

Let us illustrate it by two examples. Sūra 19, 5–6 presents the prayer of Zakariyā, indirectly it goes back to the corresponding passage (Luke, 1) of the Gospels: "And now I fear my kinsfolk (al-mawālī) after I am gone; and my wife is barren. So give me, from Thee, a kinsman (wālī) who shall be my inheritor and the inheritor of the House (al) of Jacob" (cf. 4, 33/37). The term al indicates here "the individual stock", the line of the ancestors and the descendants of Ya'qūb (Jacob), and the word mawalī means mawalī rahim, the members of the same āshira, i.e. those, who according to the pre-Islamic legal practice, had the right to inherit the property of one of their kinsmen. This passage tells about the unwillingness of Ya'qūb (Jacob) to leave his heritage to indirect blood relatives. He is dreaming about preserving everything within individual stock (al). Here we have a conflict between al and āshira characteristic of the mercantile environment of Mecca and having nothing to do with the New Testament story. Muhammad is re-working the story from the Gospels, giving it a new meaning which his audience could easily understand. Making Zakariyā speak these words, he is creating a precedent for the solution of the conflict situation constantly arising in the mercantile society of Mecca.

One more example. In sūra 38, 21/20–22/23 Muhammad is retelling the Old Testament story (2 Kings, 12, 1 ff.) about Dāwūd (David) and prophet Nathan: "Has the tiding of the dispute come to thee? When they scaled the Sanctuary, when they entered upon David, and he took fright at them; and they said, 'Fear not; two disputants are — one of us has injured the other; so judge between us justly, and transgress not, and guide us to the right path.'

'Behold, this my brother (ākh) has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. So he said, 'Give her into my charge'; and he overcame me in the argument.' Said he (David), 'Assuredly he has wronged thee in asking for thy ewe in addition to his sheep; and indeed many intermixers (al-khulāṭā) do injury one against the other ...'".

The term al-khulāṭā used here indicates the circle of kinsmen, who, according to the tradition, could have common property, in this particular case — cattle. They are called "brothers" (sing.: ākh), and though the term ākh could also mean fellow-tribesman, here it most probably stands for real brothers. Within the frames of the story from the Bible Muhammad is inserting a situation characteristic of the Mecca society: disintegration of patriarchal family, unequal division of property among its units — brothers, who are becoming enemies and do injury one against the other.

The list of similar examples could be long. Practically all Qur'ānic stories about prophets and patriarchs of the Scriptures describe the situations faced by Muhammad in Mecca and Medina [39]. The Qur'ānic story of Ibrāhīm (Abraham) was filled by Muhammad with absolutely new contents: he made Ibrāhīm a hākim, the destroyer of idols. Stories from the Bible were used to motivate the cult of Ka'ba, etc. That was what we call the Qur'ānic lore, legends founded upon the old tradition but filled with new contents.

As we have already mentioned, Muhammad had united in his own person several traditional social functions formerly belonging to different people (qā'id, hākam, sayyid, shā'ir, khātīb, kāhin). In his sermons, which make the text of the Qur'ān, he could, when it was necessary, accept any of these functions, re-working, re-interpreting and melting together the existing forms and traditions. Not aiming at making a complete list of the corresponding āyāt (which means to sort much of the Qur'ānic text) [40], let us bring just several examples. Muhammads prophesy (101; 30, 1—6/5), early sūras with oaths (89—93, 95, 100, 103, etc.) go back to the kāhin tradition [41]. The Qur'ān contains direct regulations of military character (8, 15—16) reminding of the orders given by qā'id. A number of āyāt (4, 7/8—13/17, etc.; see also 13, 37) appeared in the Qur'ān due to the attempts of deciding (like a hākim) quarrels and disputes arising among the members of the community. A number of āyāt remind of the performance of a sayyid (59, 7; 4, 3) and a khātīb (9, 1—29). According to Ibn Hishām [42], after the subjugation of Mecca Muhammad appeared before his kinsmen as a khātīb. The comparison of the Qur'ān with the Medina treaty reveals parallelism between some of the āyāt and its articles [43]. In each particular case Muhammad was moulding his sermons into the forms required by the tradition. It explains much of the stylistic diversity of the Qur'ān.

In that way the Qur'ān unified practically all types of texts current in pre-Islamic Arabia. They became bound together by the common form of the Prophet's revelation. However, the Qur'ān was not just reproducing familiar patterns. By melting together in his sermons those different types of texts Muhammad re-considered and re-worked the existing tradition preserving at the same time its principal elements. Along with a new expanded view from the audience it brought forth a basically new type of text. It would have been a grave simplification to confine all stylistic variety of the Qur'ānic texts to the influence of specific functional
forms of verbal activity. A particular form of organisation was inherent in Muḥammad's sermons, especially in those he delivered in Medina. They included not only the revelation itself, but its interpretation as well.

By the end of Muḥammad's stay in Mecca, after numerous sermons had been delivered and their character definitely formed, there appear in the Qurʾān summons to create anything similar to the Qurʾān, and the Qurʾān itself was declared a miracle (/ayā).

To the period of A.D. 620–622, i.e. just before and immediately after the Hijra, belongs a whole series of such verse: "Or do they say, 'He is a poet for whom we await Fate's uncertainty'... Or do they say, 'He has invented it'..." Then let them bring a discourse like it, if they speak truly" (52, 30–33) [44]. Evidently, the adversaries of the Qurʾān testifies that among Muḥammad's adversaries there was someone who claimed: "I will send down the like of what God has sent down" (6, 93), and those who listened to his sermons were saying: "We have already heard; if we wished, we could say the like of this; it is naught but the fairy-tales of the ancients" (8, 31, see also 6, 25), or "it is not the speech of a poet (shā'ir)... nor the speech of a soothsayer (kahin)" (69, 41–42). Why then Muhammad thought it possible to challenge his adversaries in that way? They could, of course, compose or recite qaṣidas, legends or religious stories, but every Qurʾānic sura was considered already as a part of a whole, and the whole "Divine word" was then something new in shape and quality, a miracle for Muḥammad himself and for his followers. It developed from the former tradition inheriting its essence, it was comprehensible and therefore even more wonderful: "Say: 'If men and jinn banded together to produce the like of this Koran, they would never produce its like, not though they backed one another'" (17, 88/90).

It becomes evident that the text of the Qurʾān was genetically connected with the corresponding pre-Islamic tradition marking a new stage of its development. It was only natural therefore that the notion of iʿāj al-Qurʾān — the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān, impossibility of imitating it, appeared in the Muslim dogma. Traditionally it is accepted that this notion developed in the course of polemics around the nature of the Qurʾān, its eternal and "uncreated" character, as well as in the course of the struggle of Islam against Christianity and Judaism, when it had to prove the truth of Muḥammad's prophetic mission and the advantages of the Muslim religious teaching. One should look for the sources of the purely Islamic dogma of the impossibility of imitating the Qurʾān in the historical environment where it developed (similar notions are missing in the dogmatic systems of Christianity and Judaism).

We hope that further studies of the development of the Qurʾān within the frames of Arabian cultural tradition will allow to trace how the new ideology came into being, to give an adequate interpretation of some specific features of the Qurʾānic sermons which to a great extent affected all further developments of Islamic ideology.

Notes

5. Some evidences prove that the path the forth and the fifth centuries there existed in Arabia the practice of composing so-called "Books of the Tribe" (kitāb diwān al-qabīla) intended to record the achievements of the tribe and putting together the poetry composed by tribal poets and ayyam material (I. Shahid, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century (Washington, 1984), pp. 448–55).
8. Ibid., fol. 26a, 4.
10. It has been proved that most of the stories supplementing mathal were of a later origin, see R. Sellheim, Die Klassich-arabischen Sprichwörtersammlungen ins besondere die des Abū 'Ubaid (The Hague, 1954), pp. 27–44, though they could be there from the start but in a different form, with other names, etc.
11. Abū Sa'id, op. cit., fol. 27a, 2.
12. Ibid., fol. 26b, 4.
23. Beeston, op. cit., p. 49.
26. E. Rezvan, "The Qur’ân and its world: I. The Problem of reconstructing ancient Arabian cosmogonic and anthropogenetic lore", Manuscripta Orientalia, II/4 (1996), pp. 30–4. N. Abbot, considering the way to solve the problem of the existence of the pre-Islamic Arabic Bible, suggested a combined study of passages from the Bible cited in the seventh–tenth century Arabic manuscripts. In our opinion, even if we take into account the problem of falsification, it would be of great interest to analyze the corresponding verse of pre-Islamic Arabic poets.
30. G. A. Levinton, "Zamechanii k probleme literatury i fol’klor" ("Notes to the problem literature and folklor"), Trudy po znakovernym sistemam, VII (1975), p. 77. A typologically close situation we find in medieval Japan with its similar relations between Shinto folklore and Buddhist preaching, see A. N. Mesherliakov, "Izobrazhenie chełovecka v ranneiaponskoi literature" ("Image of man in early Japanese literature"), Chelovek i int v inaponskoï kul’ture (Moscow, 1985), p. 29.
32. Here and below we use the translation of A. Arberry.
34. Translation by R. B. Serjeant who concluded that the text’s "generar tenor, language and circumstances furnish no cause that it is not basically authentic", see R. B. Serjeant, “Pacts and treaties in pre-Islamic Arabia”, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (Cambridge, 1983), i, pp. 129–30.
35. As far as we know, Fr. Buhl’s "Über Vergleichungen und Gleichnisse im Qur’ân" in AO, II (1924), pp. 1–11, dedicated to the Qur’anic anmîrâh, remained for a long time the serious work on this subject. There is also a number of medieval Muslim works dealing with anmîrâh in the Qur’ân and Ḥadîth (Sellheim, op. cit., p. 20). This subject is one of the most popular among the modern Muslim scholars, see Maṣwâ‘î at-al-anmîrâh al-Qur’âniyâh. Ta’îlî Muḥammad ’Abd al-Wâhîh ’Abd al-Latîf (al-Qâhirah, 1993–1994); Muḥammad Jâbir Fâyâyäd, Al-anmîrâh fi l-Qur’ân al-kârim (Baghdâd, 1988); Samî‘ī ‘Âţîf Al-Zayn, Al-anmîrâh wa l-mîthnîh wa l-tâmaṭhîl wa l-muṭâlîh fi l-Qur’ân al-kârim maṭnîa al-bayân al-hadîth (Bayrût, 1987). A serious attempt to consider the Qur’anic anmîrâh within the general context of semantic, structural and stylistic features of the Qur’anic phraseology was undertaken by V. D. Ushakov in his Frazelologija Korana (Phraseology of the Qur’ân) (Moscow, 1996), pp. 100–13. Of great practical use is his Index of Qur’anic Phraseology (ibid., pp. 167–88).
40. This approach could be very fruitful and deserves a special study.
44. Passages from sura 52, 30—33 and sura 17, 88/90 cited below, although incorporated into the suras composed before the indicated period, are actually of a later date, see Koran, perevod i kommentarii I. Yu. Krachkovskogo (The Qur’ân, translation and commentaries by I. Yu. Krachkovsky) (Moscow, 1963), p. 600, note 1; H. Hirschfeld, New Researches in the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran (London, 1902), pp. 70, 144.


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COLOUR PLATES

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Back cover:

Plate 1. The Ainu loom, 38.2 × 26.5 cm, an illustration to the anonymous manuscript Higashi Ezo iko, Manuscript fund of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies.

Plate 2. The weaving process (attush-kar), 38.2 × 26.5 cm, an illustration of the anonymous manuscript Higashi Ezo iko, Manuscript fund of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies.