
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS WORLD: II. THE MIRACLE OF THE BOOK (THE QUR'ĀN AND PRE-ISLAMIC LITERATURE)

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 *saḥīḥ* 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 *tafsīr* 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), *madḥ* (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.: *qā'id*, *ra'īs*, *'aqīd*), tribal chiefs (sing.: *ṣayyid*), fiery orators (sing.: *khāṭīb*) [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 (*amthāl*) 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. *Amthāl* preserved the memories of outstanding events: achievements of the ancestors, failures of the enemies. Their functions could be similar to those of *hijā'* or *madh*, 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 *amthāl* is the abundance of proper names. *Amthāl* praised the merits of fellow-tribesmen, preserving their names in the peoples memory ("More generous than Khātim", "... than Ka'b b. Māma") [7]. They sarcastically laughed at the faults of the enemies, quickly turning the names of the most odious persons into a cliché ("More greedy than Mādir") [8]. *Amthāl* were often taken for a kind of a final reference to some well-known but missing story, being initially the moralising core of the story itself. Or, on the other hand, a proverb could be the core of a tale, it could open or terminate some narrative about real or imaginary events, "never existing but quite possible epic" after the laconic statement by Yuri Olesha [9].

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 Khudāja, a man from Banū 'Abs. He was sent by the 'Absites, when 'Umar b. 'Umar b. Ghuds had been killed, to warn their people" [11]. "More stupid than Rabī'a al-Bakkā' ("Mourner"). This is Rabī'a b. 'Āmir b. Rabī'a b. Ṣa'ṣa'a. Being a man, he saw his 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 contemporaries, events of the tribal history, reflecting the 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 *amthāl* collections *Kitāb al-amthāl* by al-Mufaḍḍal b. Muḥammad al-Ḍabbī (eighth century), the texts of *amthāl* 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" (*ṣuhuf*) of similar sayings were circulated in pre-Islamic Arabia, ascribed to the legendary Luqmān b. 'Ād al-Mua'mmar al-Ḥakīm ("The Long-lasting", "Sage"), and also possibly to a historical personage, arbitrary judge Tamimite Aktham b. Ṣayfī — "the Sage of the Arabs (*ḥakīm al-'Arab*)" [14].

The extraordinary wisdom of Luqmān was praised by Imru'l-Qays, Nābigha, al-A'shā and Ṭarafa [15]. He was believed to be one of the builders of the Mārib dam [16]. According to the tradition, Muḥammad was once shown a scroll which contained the wisdom of Luqmān [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 *amthāl*. There is only one explanation of that: early Islam and the Qur'ān, 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 *kāhin* tradition existing in Arabia before Islam often attracted the attention of scholars, who took notice of its proximity to a number of Qur'ānic revelations [18].

The problem of the existence of Arabic translations of the texts of the Bible circulated in pre-Islamic Arabia produced a considerable number of works, even though it is still far from any definite solution. Not going into the details of the discussion [19], let us consider only several facts. The Christian character of the most ancient known Arabic inscriptions allows to suggest that the system of writing which we know as Arabic was probably developed (like many other similar Oriental systems) by Christian missionaries somewhere in the region of al-Ḥira or al-Anbār [20]. It is not by pure chance that among those who were the first to write in Arabic the tradition names Zayd b. Ḥamād (ca. A.D. 500) and his son, the famous poet 'Adī b. Zayd, who lived in al-Ḥira [21], and that the best speaker of the pre-Islamic past was Quss b. Sā'ida, who was also connected with Arabian Christians (possibly — of Najrān) [22].

In Damascus four parchment 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 Nabia Abbot 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]. There is some indirect evidence that as early as the fourth century liturgy in Arabic, including corresponding texts from the Old and the New Testament, could be served in Iraq, Syria and in Ḥimyarit South Arabia [25]. The verse by pre-Islamic poets, especially by poets-monotheists, contain numerous parallels with the Bible which deserve special attention [26].

The almost word-by-word parallelism of the Qur'ānic *āyyāt* 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 Arabian epic lore recorded by the Qur'ān 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.

There was also a mysterious pre-Islamic sect of Sabaeans (*al-Ṣābi'a*), their name traditionally explained as "those who are reading or writing books". It is noteworthy in this connection that Muḥammad himself was initially called *al-Ṣābi'* [27].

It is important to take into account that in Arabia, where "religious" was in many aspects a synonym to

"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 disunity of the Arabians.

Possibly in al-Hīra, Najrān, 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'ānic text). A large number of terms of Ethiopian or South Arabian origin present in the "Christian fragments" of the Qur'ān points, in our opinion, to the South of Arabia as the principal source of Christian preaching in Ḥijāz. Here one can recollect 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 Muḥammad'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 *ḥanīfs*. Others were denounced by the Muslim tradition as "false prophets". There was also an intermediate variant — Muḥammad's adversary, poet Umayya b. Abi'l-Ṣalt was half-*ḥanīf*, half-false prophet. Musaylima, Sajāh, Ṭulayḥa, al-Aswad, Ibn Sayyād were preaching to their adepts. After Umayya a *dīwān* 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 Yamāma, his Ḥanafite fellow-tribesmen; Sajāh, the prophetess, spoke to the nomadic Tamimites; Ṭulayḥa, who acted in Najd, addressed the Asad tribe, al-Aswad looked for his followers among the people of Yemen, Ibn Sayyād's audience were the Jews of Yathrib — people of his own creed; Umayya was the *shā'ir* of Banū Thaqīf. 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 *kāhīn* tradition.

So, what was common for all these types of texts circulated in Arabia of Muḥammad's time: tribal poetry, tribal lore, *amthāl* 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 Muḥammad 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, Muḥammad, 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 (*banū 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. Muḥammad 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'ān inherited its main external function, the function of a weapon connected with the notion of the magic power of verse. That was the way Muḥammad'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 Muḥammad'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 Muḥammad's sermons. The magic *sūras* of the Qur'ān (112, 113, 114), curses on Abū Lahab and other enemies (111, 108), were naturally connected with the corresponding functions of the pre-Islamic poetic tradition. Like poetry, the Qur'ān was using the language understood everywhere in Arabia. The similarity of their artistic methods, the unity of their system of images is doubtless, several *sūras* demonstrate the use of the poetic metre of *rajaz* and of traditional subject motifs.

Often the Qur'ān maintains a direct dialogue with poetry, borrowing from it its imagery and passion. *Sūra* 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 *Ayyām 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'ān 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'ān 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 prophets). Here the religious experience of the Arabian Jewish and Christian communities was employed. This deep link between the Qur'ān and the lore of the *Ayyām* cycle basing upon the same way of comprehending events looks especially important. There are many cases when Muḥammad 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'ānic oaths and *idhā* 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 Muḥammad 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and the chiefs of Banū 'Amr of Khuzā'a we read the following: "They contracted

and covenanted together for as long as the sun rises over (Mount) Thabīr, 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 terms" [34].

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

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

The use of *amthāl* in sermons was not always felicitous. It produced caustic remarks from the opponents and made Muḥammad 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).

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

Recent events, victories and defeats of Muslims and of their adversaries in the context of Muḥammad'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 easily 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, 112/113). Thus the fate of Mecca, formerly prosperous and flourishing, then suffering in consequence of its confrontation with Muḥammad, became, first for the listeners of the Prophet and then for the readers of the Sacred Book, an example of God's design preserved for peoples edification.

Muḥammad employed the *amthāl* known to his audience, 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'ānic text with the survived *amthāl* can shed light on the contents of the Qur'ānic fragment considered traditionally to be difficult for interpretation: "And be not as a woman who breaks her thread (*naqaḍat ghazlahā*), after it is firmly spun, into fibres, by taking your oaths as mere mutual deceit, one nation (*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 *amthāl* [36] preserved the following *mathal*: *akhraqu min nāqiḍa ghazlahā* (variant — *akhraqu min nākitha ghazlahā*) — "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 Rayṭa bint Ka'b b. Sa'd b. Taym b. Murra. The *āyya* in question most probably deals with the conflict which developed in Medina between the *muhajirūn* (*umma* here stands for "group") and the *ansār* (another *umma* — group), threatening to undermine the position of Muslims as a whole. Citing the well-known proverb Muḥammad means to say: "So much effort wasted to bring us together. Any schism, any quarrel between Muslims are 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 compare which go through all Muḥammad's preaching, a specific form of thinking is revealed, when not a logical construction 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 *āyyāt* 13/12—19/18 of *sūra* 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 thankful 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 but 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 tribe of 'Ād, of his longevity or his participation in the building of the Mārib dam. At the same time it is possible to notice some parallelism between the Qur'ānic texts and the aphorisms of Aḥiqār (Arab. al-Ḥayqār = Russ. — Акир Премудрый — "Akir the Wise") [37] going back to the Ancient Near East tradition. Pre-Islamic Christian poet 'Adī b. Zayd [38] also mentions al-Ḥayqār. 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 Luqmān the Sage was filled with ideas important for the Prophet.

This situation is characteristic of the Qur'ān 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 Muḥammad 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 *āyyāt* connected with Luqmān, the background motif could be the unity of the ancient wisdom bringing together Muslims and the men of the Scriptures.

The Qur'ān 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 Muḥammad.

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 (*walī*) who shall be my inheritor and the inheritor of the House (*āl*) of Jacob" (cf. 4, 33/37). The term *āl* indicates here "the individual stock", the line of the ancestors and the descendants of Ya'qūb (Jacob), and the word *mawālī* means *mawālī raḥm*, the members of the same '*ashīra*, 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 (*āl*). Here we have a conflict between *āl* and '*ashīra* characteristic of the mercantile environment of Mecca and having nothing to do with the New Testament story. Muḥammad 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 Muḥammad 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 we 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 (*akh*) 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-khulaṭā'*) do injury one against the other ...'".

The term *al-khulaṭā'* 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.: *akh*), and though the term *akh* could also mean fellow-tribesman, here it most probably stands for real brothers. Within the frames of the story from the Bible Muḥammad 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 Muḥammad in Mecca and Medina [39]. The Qur'ānic story of Ibrāhīm (Abraham) was filled by Muḥammad with absolutely new contents: he made Ibrāhīm a *ḥanīf*, 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, Muḥammad had united in his own person several traditional social functions formerly belonging to different people (*qā'id*, *ḥakam*, *sayyid*, *shā'ir*, *khāṭīb*, *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 *āyyāt* (which means to sort much of the Qur'ānic text) [40], let us bring just several examples. Muḥammad's 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 *āyyāt* (4, 7/8—13/17, etc.; see also 13, 37) appeared in the Qur'ān due to the attempts of deciding (like a *ḥakam*) quarrels and disputes arising among the members of the community. A number of *āyyāt* remind of the performance of a *sayyid* (59, 7; 4, 3) and a *khāṭīb* (9, 1—29). According to Ibn Hishām [42], after the subjugation of Mecca Muḥammad appeared before his kinsmen as a *khāṭīb*. The comparison of the Qur'ān with the Medina treaty reveals parallelism between some of the *āyyāt* and its articles [43]. In each particular case Muḥammad 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 Muḥammad re-considered and re-worked the existing tradition preserving at the same time its principal elements. Along with a new expanded view on 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 Qur'ān summons to create anything similar to the Qur'ān, and the Qur'ān itself was declared a miracle (*āya*).

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 Prophet, among them Umayya b. Abī'l-Ṣalt or Quraishite Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith who, according to the tradition, searched for wisdom in the sacred books of Jews, Christians and Persians, could easily produce something similar to a *sūra* (2, 23/21) or ten *sūras* (11, 13/16), as Muḥammad demands in his sermons [45]. *Sūra* 18, full of numerous stories and legends, was possibly an answer to Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith [46]. The Qur'ān 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 (*kāhin*)" (69, 41–42). Why then Muḥammad thought it possible to challenge his adversaries in that way? They could, of course, compose or recite

qaṣīdas, legends or religious stories, but every Qur'ānic *sūra* 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 Qur'ān 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 *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* — the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, 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 Qur'ān, 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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic sermons which to a great extent affected all further developments of Islamic ideology.

Notes

1. A. Rippin, "The Qur'an as literature: perils, pitfalls and prospects", *British Society of Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*. X/3 (1983), p. 4.
2. I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, i (Leiden, 1896), p. 17.
3. In Gibb's opinion, only al-Jāhiz in his *Al-bayān wa'l-tabiyīn* preserved samples of Arabic eloquence which are most close to the original, see H. A. R. Gibb, "Arabiyya. Early Arabian Literature", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., i (Leiden, 1986), p. 585.
4. Fr. Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952), pp. 17–22.
5. Some evidences prove that throughout the fourth and the fifth centuries there existed in Arabia the practice of composing of so-called "Books of the Tribe" (*kitāb [diwān] al-qabila*) 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).
6. R. Iakobson, *Iazyk i bessoznatel'noe* (Language and the Unconscious), Russian edition (Moscow, 1996), p. 97.
7. Abū Sa'īd (Abū Sa'd) Maṣṣūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Abī, *Kitāb naṣr al-ḍurr*, manuscript C-679 of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, fol. 27a, 11; fol. 26a, 13.
8. *Ibid.*, fol. 26a, 4.
9. Iakobson, *op. cit.* p. 98.
10. It has been proved that most of the stories supplementing *mathal* were of a later origin, see R. Sellheim, *Die Klassisch-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'īd, *op. cit.*, fol. 27a, 2.
12. *Ibid.*, fol. 26b, 4.
13. Sellheim, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
14. I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, ii (Halle, 1890), pp. 204–5; Sellheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 41, 141; N. Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri. Vol. II: Quranic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 5–6; D. Gutas, "Arabic wisdom literature: nature and scope", *JAOS*, CI (1981), pp. 50–4, 57–8.
15. J. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin—Leipzig, 1926), pp. 133–5.

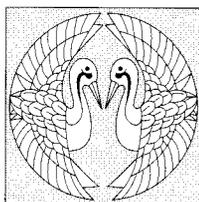
16. B. Heller — (N. A. Stillman), "Luḡmān", *EI*, 2nd ed., vi (Leiden, 1986), p. 811.
17. Ibn Hishām, *Al-sīra al-nabawiyya*, i (al-Qāhira, 1955), p. 427.
18. E. A. Rezvan, "Prorochestvo i religioznoe vdokhnovenie v Islame (k probleme nauchnoĭ interpretatsii fenomena prorocheskikh otkrovenii Mukhammadā)" ("Prophecy and religious inspiration in Islam: to the problem of scientific interpretation of the phenomenon of Muḥammad's prophetic revelations"), *Traditsionnoe mirovozzrenie u narodov Perednei Azii* (Moscow, 1992), pp. 39—59.
19. N. Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri. Vol. I: Historical Texts* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 46—50; Carra de Vaux — [G. C. Anawati], "Injīl", *EI*, 2nd ed., iii (Leiden, 1986), p. 1205; Ch. Rabin, "Arabiyya. (II). The Literary language. (I). Classical Arabic", *idem*, i, p. 564). In the introduction to Origen's Hexapla (third century A.D.) it is mentioned that the author used in his works translations of the Bible into Chaldean and Arabic. The first one meant Syriac, what Origen defined as Arabic is not clear, see A. F. L. Beeston, "Background topics", *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith (Cambridge, 1983), p. 23; Shahid, *op. cit.*, pp. 418—9, 422—30, 515—7.
20. N. Abbot, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Qur'anic Development* (Chicago, 1939), p. 5.
21. Abū'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghāni*, ii (al-Qāhira, 1345), pp. 100—2.
22. A. Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie*, (Vienna, 1971), ii, pp. 7—33; Shahid, *op. cit.*, pp. 409—22; Ch. Pellat, "Ḳuss b. Sā'ida", *EI*, 2nd ed., v (Leiden, 1986), p. 528.
23. Beeston, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
24. A. Baumstark, "Das Problem eines vorislamischen christlichen arabischen Schrifttums in Arabischer Sprachen", *Islamica*, IV (1931), pp. 562—75; S. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: an enquiry into its appearance in the first Abbasid century", *OC*, LXIX (1985), pp. 126—67.
25. Shahid, *op. cit.*, pp. 435—43.
26. E. Rezvan, "The Qur'ān 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.
27. N. Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri. Vol. II: Quranic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago, 1967), p. 7.
28. M. B. Piotrovskii, "Ob ēfiopskoi khidzhre" ("On Ethiopian Hijra"), *Ėfiopskie issledovaniia* (Moscow, 1981).
29. P. G. Bogatyrev, *Voprosy teorii narodnogo iskusstva* (Questions of the Theory of Folk-Art) (Moscow, 1971), p. 232.
30. G. A. Levinton, "Zamechaniia k probleme literatura i fol'klor" ("Notes to the problem literature and folklore"), *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, VII (Tartu, 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. Meshcheriakov, "Izobrazhenie cheloveka v ranneiaponskoĭ literature" ("Image of man in early Japanese literature"), *Chelovek i mir v iaponskoĭ kul'ture* (Moscow, 1985), p. 29.
31. Rezvan, "The Qur'ān and its world: I", pp. 31—2.
32. Here and below we use the translation of A. Arberry.
33. *Ayyām al-'Arab fi'l-jāhiliyya*. Ta'lif Muḥammad Aḥmad Jād al-mawlā bak, 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwi, Muḥammad Abu'l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (al-Qāhira, 1942), p. 32.
34. Translation by R. B. Serjeant who concluded that the text's "generatōr 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 Vergleichen und Gleichnisse im Qur'ān" in *AO*, II (1924), pp. 1—11, dedicated to the Qur'ānic *amthāl*, remained for a long time the only serious work on this subject. There is also a number of medieval Muslim works dealing with *amthāl* in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth (Sellheim, *op. cit.*, p. 20). This subject is one of the most popular among the modern Muslim scholars, see *Mawsū'at al-amthāl al-Qur'āniyah*. Ta'lif Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Abd al-Laṭīf (al-Qāhira, 1993—1994); Muḥammad Jābir Fayyād, *Al-amthāl fi'l-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Baghdād, 1988); Samīḥ 'Āṭif Al-Zayn, *Al-amthāl wa'l-mithl wa'l-tamāthul wa'l-muthulāt fi'l-Qur'ān al-karīm majma' al-bayān al-ḥadīth* (Bayrūt, 1987). A serious attempt to consider the Qur'ānic *amthāl* within the general context of semantic, structural and stylistic features of the Qur'ānic phraseology was undertaken by V. D. Ushakov in his *Frazeologīia Korāna* (Phraseology of the Qur'ān) (Moscow, 1996), pp. 100—13. Of great practical use is his Index of Qur'ānic Phraseology (*ibid.*, pp. 167—88).
36. *Madjma' al-amthāl li-Abī'l-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nīsābūrī al-ma'rūf bi'l-Maydānī* (al-Qāhira, 1310), p. 172; Abū Sa'īd, *op. cit.*, fol. 29b, 16.
37. F. C. Conybeare, J. R. Harris, A. S. Lewis, *The Story of Ahikar* (Cambridge, 1913), p. lxxvi (Arabic text, pp. 4, 11).
38. Th. Nöldeke, "Untersuchungen zum Achikar-Roman", *AGW Gott., Phil.-hist. Kl., N. F.*, XIV/4 (1913), pp. 25, 37; H. L. Starck and P. Balerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, ii (Munich, 1956), p. 587; B. Heller — (N. A. Stillman), *op. cit.*, pp. 811—2.
39. M. B. Piotrovskii, "Koranicheskie skazaniia kak istoriko-kulturnyi pamiatnik" ("Qur'ānic lore as a monument of history and culture"), *Vsesoiuznaia konferentsiia po problemam arabskoĭ kul'tury pamiati akademika I. Iu. Krachkovskogo* (Abstracts of papers) (Moscow, 1983); *idem.*, *Koranicheskie skazaniia* (Qur'ānic Stories) (Moscow, 1991).
40. This approach could be very fruitful and deserves a special study.
41. Ibn Habīb, *Al-Munammaq fi akhbār quraysh* (Ḥaydarābād, 1964), p. 107; R. B. Serjeant, "Early Arabic prose", p. 125.
42. Ibn Hishām, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 414—5.
43. R. B. Serjeant, "Early Arabic prose", *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, p. 134.

44. Passages from *sūra* 52, 30—33 and *sūra* 17, 88/90 cited below, although incorporated into the *sūras* composed before the indicated period, are actually of a later date, see *Koran, perevod i kommentarii* I. Iu. Krachkovskogo (The Qur'ān, translation and commentaries by I. Yu. Krachkovsky) (Moscow, 1963), p. 600, note 1; H. Hirschfeld, *New Researches in the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London, 1902), pp. 70, 144.

45. The term *sūra* stands here for brief single-term revelations making the foundation of Muḥammad's sermons. Here *sūra* is not equal to the present-day chapter of the Qur'ān, see E. A. Rezvan, "Issledovaniia po terminologii Korana: *sūra*; 'abd ('ibād, 'abīd) Allāh, ummāh — 16 : 121/120" ("Studies in Qur'ānic terminology: *sūra*; 'abd ('ibād, 'abīd) Allāh, ummāh — 16 : 121/120"), *Problemy Arab-skoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1987), pp. 219—22.

46. H. T. Norris, "Qissas Elements of the Qur'ān", *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, p. 252.

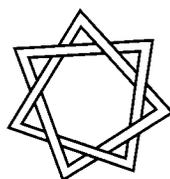
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COLOUR PLATES

Front cover:

Winding up threads into balls, 17.7 × 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.

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.