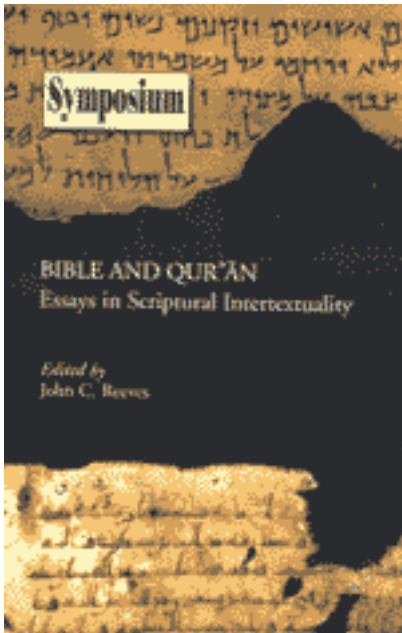


RBL 08/2004



Reeves, John C., ed.

Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality

Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 24

Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; Leiden: Brill, 2003. Pp. xiv + 240. Paper/cloth. \$31.95/\$90.00. ISBN 1589830644/9004127267.

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Among the literary corpora from the ancient Near East that share some affinity with the Bible, none is more ignored by biblical scholarship than the Qur'an and its allied traditions. The sacred book of Islam and other Muslim sources, such as the traditions of the prophet Muhammad (*hadīth*), stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), and universal histories (*ta'rīkh*), all make frequent reference to biblical figures, events, and themes. Despite this shared material, biblical scholars rarely engage in any kind of systematic study of these texts to determine their relevance for or connection to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

The work of earlier scholars such as Goldziher, Nöldeke, Wellhausen, and Robertson Smith provides ample witness that this was not always the case, since they consulted the Islamic material regularly, often with fascinating results. John C. Reeves, the editor of this well-conceived collection of essays, identifies two main reasons for the modern shift away from studying the Muslim sources. In the first place, the dominant American model of training in biblical studies that stresses specialization is markedly different from the European model of a comprehensive philological education. Secondly, there is a general suspicion of the aims and method of comparative study.

Reeves and his collaborators allay those suspicions and fears by demonstrating the value of putting the biblical tradition in conversation with its qur'ānic counterpart. The variety of approaches and the range of topics found in the volume's nine essays give a good sense of the possibilities that await the biblical scholar ready to buck the current trend and study the Islamic texts.

Reuven Firestone's contribution, "The Qur'ān and the Bible: Some Modern Studies of Their Relationship," presents an overview of the most prominent and accessible attempts by Western non-Muslims to read the Qur'ān in a critical and nonpolemical way. Tracing developments in the field occurring between the mid-nineteenth and latter twentieth centuries, he considers the work of Abraham Geiger, Richard Bell, and John Wansbrough, three scholars who have exerted tremendous influence on study of the Qur'ān in the non-Muslim world. The essay by Vernon K. Robbins and Gordon D. Newby ("A Prolegomenon to the Relation of the Qur'ān and the Bible") is an attempt to offer a sociorhetorical reading of the Qur'ān. They identify miracle, wisdom, prophetic, and apocalyptic as the primary discourses in the text and then cite examples of each from the Qur'ān. This is simultaneously the most intriguing and least successful essay in the volume. The major flaw is that the authors identify texts that fit their categories but are not able to adequately treat them in the space of twenty pages. Their closing comment on the utility of their approach has to be accepted in good faith by the reader because Robbins and Newby have not demonstrated its value. The usefulness of the method would be more apparent had they limited their treatment to one or two of the discourses and studied them in more detail.

The literary ramifications of the connections between the Bible and the Qur'ān are discussed in Reeves's essay, "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān." Two of the three examples he considers treat the identification of Enoch with the Islamic figure Idris. This association is established through a careful study of biblical, extrabiblical, qur'ānic, and Muslim historical writings that shows how the Qur'ān and related Islamic literature can shed light on the Bible and associated texts. His third example concerns the reference in Qur'ān 2:30 to humanity shedding blood. In Reeves's reading, this Islamic text and its interpretive tradition serves as a key witness to understanding the shedding of blood as a central motif of Gen 2–9, a theme that has been largely ignored by Christian commentary. Brannon M. Wheeler's essay, "Israel and the Torah of Muḥammad," treats the exegetical dialogue and polemic between Muslims and Jews on the status of the Qur'ān in light of the Torah. He gets at this encounter through Qur'ān 3:93, which refers to food prohibitions among the Jews. Wheeler's study of the exegetical tradition shows that commentary on the passage attempts to legitimize Muhammad's claim to be following the religion of Abraham and refutes the Jewish assertion that the dietary regulations stem from divine revelation.

Brian M. Hauglid's contribution, "On the Early Life of Abraham: Biblical and Qur'ānic Intertextuality and the Anticipation of Muḥammad," highlights the phenomenon of the islamization of biblical traditions. He consults the *tafsīr* (commentary on the Qur'ān), universal history, and stories of the prophets in order to demonstrate how the Muslim sources reinterpret the story of Abraham's early life so that it prefigures Muhammad's birth and conflict with idolatry. This is a fascinating examination of the interface between the biblical and qur'ānic environments that suggests early intertextual points of contact. "The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad," by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, is an essay on what its author calls "Muslim biblical scholarship." She looks at how al-Ṭabarī, a ninth/tenth century Muslim historian and commentator, treats the three Qur'ān verses that are the basis for the view that the Bible announces Muhammad's coming. The Islamic text expresses this idea in relation to Abraham (2:129), Moses (7:157), and Jesus (61:6), with each figure reduced to a sign or prototype in the Qur'ān so that Muhammad can be foregrounded. The essay ends with an analysis of the similarities between Muhammad and Jesus in al-Ṭabarī's history.

Muslim scholars have displayed very little interest in the canonical Gospels due to the belief that Christians and others corrupted the prior scriptures. An exception to this is the ninth-century historian Aḥmad al-Ya'qūbī, whose *History (Ta'riḫ)* offers a portrait of Jesus that is based on quotes from all four Gospels. In "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the Presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qūbī's *Ta'riḫ*" Sidney H. Griffith discusses al-Ya'qūbī's reliance on the canonical Gospels and early Christian exegetical traditions. Throughout the work, which is most heavily dependent on John, al-Ya'qūbī is faithful to the Gospel accounts in a way that is unusual in early Islam and not adopted by later Muslim scholars.

Kathryn Kueny's essay, "Abraham's Test: Islamic Male Circumcision as Anti/Ante-Covenantal Practice," addresses how circumcision was given an Islamic identity despite the fact that it is performed by non-Muslims and is closely associated with the Jewish covenant. Kueny shows how the Islamic sources, primarily the *ḥadīth*, present circumcision as an Islamic practice prior to the coming of both Judaism and Islam. The key concept in this regard is *fiṭra*, a term used in connection with purity rituals that highlights the relationship between God and true followers, most fully personified by Abraham. Fred Astren's contribution ("Depaganizing Death: Aspects of Mourning in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Judaism") is a study of how Islam and Judaism view excessive expression of grief and religious activity at the grave, two practices that are identified with nonbelievers. It is primarily the rabbinic sources and the *ḥadīth* that address these issues in the two traditions, and Astren presents an overview of how and why these two bodies of writings discourage Muslims and Jews from improper funerary practices. Astren concludes that a parallel development can be noted in both religions whereby their legal authorities attempted to address the social, moral, and religious issues

of their own times by making the threat of paganism a contemporary concern for ritual life.

This book amply demonstrates that Islamic texts, like those from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other parts of the ancient Near East, can be a valuable resource for biblical scholarship. It is required reading for anyone interested in the relationship between the Bible and the Muslim traditions that are affiliated with it. In particular, the current need for increased mutual understanding among the followers of the monotheistic faiths makes it a welcome and timely volume.