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THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION IN ISLAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY¹

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Abstract

Revelation is an important topic in dialogues between Christians and Muslims, yet it is often understood in different manners. This article discusses a few significant texts from the Qur'an and juxtaposes this take on revelation to a recent development in the Catholic theology of revelation from a notional to a sacramental concept of revelation. In the main part of the article, three recent documents on revelation published by groups of Muslims and Christians engaged in interreligious dialogue are analyzed: documents published by the Mediterranean francophone Muslim-Christian Research Group (1989), the British Building Bridges seminar (2004), and the US Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue (2013). A comparative theological analysis of these document shows that some Muslim scholars move in the direction of a more sacramental understanding of God's revelation in God's signs, guidance and light and in the human recitation of the Word of God, while others stay with more traditional concepts of revelation that avoid any mediation between God's word and human realities.

Keywords

Qur'an, Islam, revelation, sacrament, Christ, Word of God, Christianity, Christian-Muslim dialogue, comparative theology

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¹ An earlier version of this article was published in German as: "Das Konzept der Offenbarung im Islam aus der Perspektive Komparativer Theologie". In: Reinhold Bernhardt, Klaus von Stosch (Hg.), *Komparative Theologie: Interreligiöse Vergleiche als Weg der Religionstheologie*. Beiträge zur einer Theologie der Religionen, 7. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2009, 123-145.

is arguably a serious philosophical interest lurking in the introductory part of the *qaṣīda*, the *nasīb*. (I will return to this issue in the discussion of the ambivalent perception of writing.)

It is, therefore, striking that the Quran appears—seemingly—out of the void, out of the "empty Hijaz,"¹⁹ as a full-fledged discursive text, extensive in range, and replete with theological and philosophical queries. This observation has tantalized Western scholars for generations. The Quran's surprising richness of ideas, and its consummateness of form, have even raised doubts about the genuineness of the Islamic narrative of the Quran's origin as such. How can such an intellectually sophisticated literary text emerge from a remote space like the Arabian Peninsula? The conventional image of an "empty Hejaz" has only been corrected in more recent scholarship, thanks to Peter Brown, Glen Bowersock, Christian Robin, Garth Fowden, James Montgomery, Robert Hoyland, Jan Retsö, and others, who have provided historical, epigraphic, and iconic evidence for the fact that a transfer of late antique knowledge, from both the northern and the southern neighboring regions to Arabia, had been going on during the centuries preceding the appearance of the Quran, although our knowledge of these processes is still incomplete.²⁰ Yet, the fact remains that the Quran comes as a sudden disclosure in the Arabic language of, until then, unspoken, or at least unattested, discursive ideas. What makes this novelty still more surprising is the fact that this discursive revolution appears in a consummate literary form. But, let us turn first to the issue of literary texts that were not available in writing.

3.2 The "Anti-image" of Writing: *waḥy*

I promised to say something about the ambivalent perception of writing in the eyes of those nomadic individuals represented by the ancient Arab poets. We

19 This term was coined by James Montgomery to designate the stereotypical perception of pre-Islamic Arabia. See Montgomery, Empty Hijaz 37–97.

20 Brown, *Making*; Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*; Robin, Himyar, 831–908; Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra*; Hoyland, *Arabia*; Retsö, *Arabs*. For a forceful *plaidoyer* for the assumption that such late antique cultural diversity in the Hejaz should be accepted as the backdrop of the genesis of the Quran, see Conrad, Qur'anic studies 9–15, esp. 11, where he adduces a representative example: "There is ample representation of Ethiopic loan-words in the Qur'an. In what context did this transfer of vocabulary occur? By the eighth century [according to the revisionist position this is the time of the Quran's genesis, A.N.] the Hijaz was an economic and political backwater, overtaken by dramatic shifts to Syria and Iraq that drew the laments of contemporary Arabian poets. Contacts with Ethiopia were insignificant." However, the context of the late sixth century gives us a literary tradition that makes frequent reference to Ethiopia, and to an Islamic scripture reflecting such contacts.

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owe a most useful overview to James Montgomery,²¹ who collected a corpus of *jāhili* verses that mention writing called by different names, such as *khatt zabūr* (the writing of a writ), *zabur* (writs), *ma khuṭṭa bi-l-qalam* (the writing of the reed-pen), *khatt al-dawāh* (writing with ink from an inkhorn), *rasm* (a writing), *ṣahīfa* (page), *ṣuḥuf* (pages of writing), and, in the urban context, even *kittāb* (book).²² However, one name used for writing in poetry stands out: *waḥy*.

Waḥy is not a technical term for writing; rather, it denotes a non-verbal communication through signs that may take place between animals, or—if between humans—in a foreign, incomprehensible language. In pre-Islamic poetry, however, it is applied mostly to writings the observer (i.e., the poet) found engraved on a rock, or graffiti, or writings on other materials (such as parchment). It was something written that the observer did not, or was unable to, decipher. It served as a sign system deprived of its meaning.

The strangeness of such unintelligible communication is spelled out in some cases. An example of this is a verse by 'Antara, who compares the devastated campsite to writing, perceived here as faded, old, and unintelligible:

Ka-waḥyi ṣahā'ifin min 'ahdi Kisrā / fa-ahdāhā li-a'jam ṭimṭimī.

Like the writing on pages from the era of Kisrā which he gave to one whose speech is barbarous, unintelligible.²³

The poet talks about a foreign language text written in a foreign alphabet. But, in most cases, *waḥy* denotes an inscription immediately visible in the landscape, one that is taken up as a metaphor for the ruinous state of the deserted encampment, unrecognizable, like faded writing, or reduced to mere linear traces, like those of writing, for example the verse of Zuhayr:

Li-man ṭalalun ka-l-waḥyi 'āfin manāziluhu / 'afū l-rassu minhu fa-l-rusaysu fa-'āqiluh

Who now inhabits a remnant like writing, its dwellings effaced—effaced, there, are al-Rass, al-Rusais and 'Aqil?²⁴

21 Montgomery, Deserted encampment.

22 There are comprehensive descriptions of the production of writing. See Tha'labah b. 'Amr's poem, Mufaddaliyyat 74, 1–3a, quoted and translated by Montgomery, Deserted encampment 291.

23 Ahlwardt 27.2, cited and translated by Montgomery, Deserted encampment 297–298.

24 Ibid., 284.

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مسألة الحديث القدسي في مناقشات أنواع الوحي*

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ملخص:

الحديث القدسي وحي من الله تعالى يرويه بلسان نبيه ﷺ. كانت هذه الروايات التي تسمى بالأحاديث القدسية، موضع نقاش دائم فيما يتعلق بنوع الوحي الذي أنزلت به، والاختلاف بينها وبين القرآن الكريم والأحاديث النبوية الأخرى. لم يتم وضع الحديث القدسي ضمن أي قاعدة من ناحية أصول الحديث، نظراً لاستمرار المناقشات المتعلقة بهذه الأحاديث وعلاقتها بالوحي، بغض النظر عما إذا كان هناك وجود لمصطلح الحديث القدسي في أصول الحديث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحديث القدسي، أصول الحديث، الوحي، القرآن الكريم

Vahiy Çeşitleri Tartışmalarında Kudsî Hadis Meselesi

İsa AKALIN

ÖZET

Kudsî hadis, mânası yüce Allah'a, lafzı ise Peygamber'e (s.a.v.) ait olan hadis olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Kudsî hadis olarak adlandırılan rivâyetlerin, vahyin hangi türüne dâhil olduğu, Kur'ân-ı Kerîm'den ve diğer nebevî hadislerden farklı olarak ne gibi özelliklere sahip olduğu tartışılmıştır. Kudsî hadis ve onunla bağlantılı düşünülen kudsî hadis-vahiy ilişkisi vb. tartışmalar; kudsî hadis teriminin, hadis usûlünde yerinin olup olmadığına bakılmaksızın sürdürülmesi nedeniyle, hadis usûlü açısından herhangi bir zemine oturmamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kudsî hadis, hadis usûlü, vahiy, Kur'ân-ı Kerîm

* تم إعادة تحرير هذا المقال بناء على أطروحة الدكتوراه التي أعدها الكاتب تحت عنوان الحديث القدسي من منظور تقنية الحديث (جامعة مرمره، معهد العلوم الاجتماعية، إسطنبول، ٢٠١٤م. وهذه هي الترجمة العربية للدراسة بعنوان "Vahiy Çeşitleri Tartışmalarında Kudsî Hadis Meselesi" التي نشرت في العدد العاشر من مجلة الإلهيات الأكاديمية. تاريخ إرسال المقال: ٠٤ / ١١ / ٢٠١٩ - تاريخ قبول المقال: ٢٤ / ١٢ / ٢٠١٩. (عيسى أكالين، مسألة الحديث القدسي في مناقشات أنواع الوحي، الإلهيات الأكاديمية، كانون الأول ٢٠١٩، العدد: ١٠، ص ٢٥-٦٤).

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