

Christians accuse the Qurʾān of being an imperfect text, then they need to realize that their own scriptures suffer from far more serious problems. Some readers of al-Azami's book might ask whether, in light of his own views on the subject, he had any right to make a critical study of the Biblical text. Al-Azami writes: 'Certainly anyone can write on Islam, but only a devout Muslim has the *legitimate* prerogative to write on Islamic [scripture] and its related subjects. Some may consider this biased, but then who is not? Non-followers cannot claim neutrality, for their writings swerve depending on whether Islam's tenets agree or disagree with their personal beliefs, and so any attempts at interpretation from Christians, Jews, atheists, or non-practising Muslims must be unequivocally discarded' (p. 13; see also the opening sentence of ch. 20). If non-Muslims are barred from writing on the Qurʾān, then are Muslims not barred from writing on the Bible?

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Hadith: Origins and Developments

EDITED BY HARALD MOTZKI. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 'The Formation of the Classical Islamic World Series, 28', 2004), 394 pp. Price HB £75.00. ISBN 0-860-78704-4.

Harald Motzki has produced an excellent reference work for students and researchers. It brings together articles by sixteen well-known scholars including himself. J. Fueck, Joseph Schacht, John Burton, Ignaz Goldziher, Gregor Schoeler, Etan Kohlberg, Joseph Horowitz, James Robson, G. H. A. Juynboll, Michael Cook, J. H. Kramers, R. Marston Speight, M. J. Kister, Albrecht Noth and Maher Jarrar. These essays may be seen as an Orientalist metanarrative on hadith.

Muslims produced several metanarratives on hadith since its rise as a narrative genre in Islamic history, which gradually became more and more systematic. Among them are *uṣūl al-ḥadīth*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *ʿilm al-rijāl*. Sociologically speaking, this phenomenon was to be expected because every major narrative in the world, religious or secular, gives rise to its metanarrative(s). These metanarratives may sometimes conflict with each other. Indeed, it is commonly observed that every major narrative is subject to conflicting interpretations.

In tandem with European colonial expansion over the last two centuries or so, Orientalists produced a metanarrative on hadith so as to understand and better control—if not to shape—the culture of their subjects. However, this metanarrative is far from being consistent and coherent. Rather, it has been divided on many issues, in particular concerning its approach to the Muslim metanarrative on hadith—some scholars are more in tune with the latter, while others appear committed to its deconstruction.

The most important question for the Orientalist metanarrative on hadith has been the question of origins. The above-mentioned division among Orientalists has been reflected in their answers to this question. Some Orientalists, concurring with Muslims, adopted a critical approach to individual hadiths, but on the whole saw hadith as originating from the time of the Prophet. By contrast, others saw hadith as originating in later centuries. As the essays in the book demonstrate, it is almost impossible to find two Orientalists dealing with this question who concur in their opinions. The essays collected here, as well as the excellent chronological survey by the editor, reflect this controversy. However, it is noticeable that, as Motzki demonstrates in his introductory essay, earlier Orientalists ascribed the rise of hadith to a much later date than have more recent ones. It would appear that, as the research grows, a better understanding among Western scholars of the complexities involved in the question of determining the origins of hadith is also growing. Motzki's own approach, calling for a focus on individual hadiths rather than making sweeping generalizations about the entire corpus, as the early Orientalists did, can be seen as the latest and most finely tuned approach.

The question of determining the social origins of a narrative or metanarrative has long vexed sociologists of knowledge and literature. Some have tried to approach this from the perspective of historical materialism: narrative and literature—like other elements of 'superstructure'—originate from economic and political 'substructure'. However, the impossibility of answering the social origins question eventually led them to ask other questions about narrative and metanarrative. Another reason for this development is that narrative, language and literature have come to be seen in a new light. In particular, there is growing awareness that these not only reflect, but also construct, social structure. However, as the collected essays in this book demonstrate, Orientalist discourse still sees the function of narrative merely as a reflection of social reality and not as constitutive or constructive of it.

The book aims to present the evolution of the views of Western Orientalists on the origins of hadith. As Motzki describes well in his Introduction, despite the debates unfolding over two centuries, the question of origins has yet to be answered unanimously. I think this is not because we do not have enough studies about hadith, but perhaps because the question of the origins of a literary corpus as a whole is itself unanswerable. Instead, it would be much wiser for the scholarship to focus on critically researching the origins of particular hadiths. This is what the editor of the book, Motzki, himself advocates. And this is also the approach Muslim scholars of hadith have adopted since the inception of their discipline.

The success of an edited book on a controversial subject can be judged by looking at the extent to which it reflects the diversity of the views in the field. The origins of hadith is one of the most controversial topics among Orientalists. Perhaps it would have been an impractical task to seek to represent all the views on this issue in a single edited book on the subject. In any case, Motzki's collection reflects the divergence of opinions among only a particular segment of scholarship on hadith. Strikingly, the Muslim

views on the origins of hadith are not represented. One would be completely surprised by an edited book about the origins of the Bible if the Christian views were not represented at all. Not only the work of Muslim scholarship on hadith, but also the work of non-Muslim scholars are not fully covered. For instance, neither the work of Mustafa Azami nor the work of Nabia Abbott is included in the collection although, as Motzki mentions in his introduction, both authors have made serious contributions to the debate on the origins of hadith.

A person who is familiar with the evolving debates among contemporary scholars on narrative is struck by the theory of narrative employed by the Orientalists whose work is included in the collection. It should be noted that it is a debatable, if not yet an outmoded, theory. It is striking that the Orientalists, whose work is included in the collection, persistently apply a particular theory of narrative to hadith. According to this theory, narrative—thus hadith—reflects social and historical structures and processes. One of the major problems with this approach is that it assumes that it is easy to know and determine social reality. Yet, historians who try to reconstruct past social reality are aware that this is not so in practice. Therefore, one has first to construct the social reality and then demonstrate, as the second step, how narrative reflects it. However, it would be deeply problematic for one to reflect upon a narrative using the same corpus of data by means of which one has attempted to reconstruct the social reality of which the narrative is constitutive. The reader can easily see that some of the authors fall prey to this circularity.

Motzki could have analyzed the Orientalist discourse on hadith as a narrative, or more precisely as a metanarrative, in its own right, and then look towards its origins. It would be interesting to apply to the Orientalist hadith metanarrative reflexively the same theoretical and methodological approach they apply to their subject matter, namely hadith. What, one might ask, are the origins of Orientalist hadith metanarrative and how does it reflect the social, economic and political reality in which it emerged? Yet such an analysis is lacking in the volume. Instead, the editor merely surveys and describes the evolution of the hadith metanarrative without asking why European scholars became engaged in the study of hadith in the first place.

The analysis of Orientalist hadith metanarrative should not only explore its origins but also explore its pragmatics: What is it that Orientalists, who produced their metanarrative on hadith, aim to do with it? How many of their goals have been achieved? Have there been any unexpected consequences? These questions also await the attention of researchers.

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