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Sur le Coran. Nouvelles approches linguistiques

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Pierre Larcher (PL), now professor emeritus in Arabic linguistics at the Université Aix-Marseille, is undoubtedly the greatest specialist in matters linked to the so-called "classical" Arabic language in the current French academic world. With three monographs dedicated to "classical" Arabic to his credit¹, as well as several translations and commentaries of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry², and numerous scholarly articles devoted, among other subjects, to Koranic Arabic, the release of his first monograph centered on the latter comes at the right time at a moment when, albeit university studies on the Koran are experiencing impressive growth, it is clear that works in French on the Koranic language remain rare.

This monograph published in 2020 has the peculiarity that it is not a "new book" strictly speaking, but a collection of twelve articles that trace almost two decades of PL's contribution in the field of Arabic linguistic studies applied, in this case, specifically to the Koran. Eleven of these articles, published between 2000 and 2018, appear in this book in the same form as in their context of original publication (with a few "proofreading notes" added here and there and indicated by square brackets) and one of them is the revised and expanded French translation of an encyclopedic article published in English in 2003.

PL has chosen to distribute all of these items, which are here transformed into "chapters", into five thematic sections whose author summarizes the content of each in the introduction (p. 7-25). We note that in addition to reviewing the general content of these sections, PL sometimes brings some elements that are not in the body of the chapters (in particular, p. 12 the remarks on the example of discontinuity between Koranic and classical Arabic).

The first section devoted to the text contains two articles/chapters that seek to explain the reasons for the many forms of divergence between what is written in the *ductus (rasm)* and the way by which it is read/recited. The first article/chapter, "Le Coran: le dit et l'écrit" ["The Koran: The Said and the Written"] could have been titled: "The inconsistency of the said and the written in the Koran" as it deals with different paradoxical cases where one says it (understand: "where one recites it") some way that is not written (p. 37), where one writes twice in succession in the same way a word that is however uttered in two different ways (p. 41). This is the whole problem of the relationship between the said and the written in the text of the Koran which is announced from the beginning on the basis of three Koranic examples. (Q 33:66 and 67 where "is written what is said" and Q 33:4 where "the context suggests saying what is not written"). As PL convincingly demonstrates, the different examples of "inconsistencies" which he analyzes are explained by the relationship between the pause and the rhyme (p. 40-41, a subject also treated in the first chapter of the second section).

This study is also an opportunity to discuss a question relatively little addressed in the academic world³, but whose interest in our knowledge of the original pronunciation of Koranic Arabic or later modifications, in a text that is supposed to have

¹ *Le système verbal de l'arabe classique*, Aix-en-Provence, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003¹/2012²; *Linguistique arabe et pragmatique*, Beyrouth, Presses de l'Ifpo, 2014; *Syntaxe de l'arabe classique*, Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2017.

² Vide, e.g., *Les Mu'allaqât: Les sept poèmes préislamiques*, Paris, Fata Morgana, 2000; *Le Guetteur de mirages. Cinq poèmes préislamiques d'al-A'shâ Maymûn, 'Abîd b. al-Abras et al-Nâbigha al-Dhubyânî*, Paris et Arles, Sindbad/Actes Sud, 2004; *Le Brigand et l'Amant. Deux poèmes préislamiques de Ta'abbata Sharran et Imru' al-Qays traduits de l'arabe et commentés, suivis des adaptations de Goethe et d'Armand Robin et de deux*

études sur celles-ci, Paris and Arles, Sindbad/Actes Sud, 2012; *Le Cédrat, La Jument et La Goule. Trois poèmes préislamiques de 'Alqama b. 'Abada, Khidâsh b. Zuhayr et Ta'abbata Sharran*, Paris and Arles, Sindbad/Actes Sud, 2016.

³ The issue of the Koranic *hamza* has recently been addressed, among others, by Marijn van Putten, notably in his article "Hamzah in the Quranic Consonantal Text", *Orientalia* 87/1, 2018, p. 93-120, but note that it makes no reference to the work of PL, an absence that could not be explained by an ignorance of studies in French since his bibliography has three titles in this language.

never known changes, is central. This question is that of two phenomena that appear in the Koran as *a posteriori* constructions: the *tanwīn* and the *hamza*. Regarding the former, PL argues that the variation *an* (in context) and *ā* (at the pause) of the *tanwīn* is late and that, originally, *ā* in the Koranic spelling corresponded a false *ā* (p. 38), this that he demonstrates, in particular, by addressing the case of the “contradictory” treatment of the proper name *Thamūd* in the Koran, a name which is everywhere diptote (without *tanwīn*, therefore), with the exception of four verses - including Q 11:69 - where it is found with a final *alif* (p. 42). This letter is then neutralized in the modern edition of the Cairo Koran (reading it *Thamūd^a*, using a “round zero” above it) while the Maghreb edition of the Koran treats the word like a triptote, reading it *Thamūd^{an}*. But the Koranic context itself indicates however clearly that it must be read *Thamūdā* because of the multiple assonances in *ā* (*a lā; bu’dā*) which are found in this same verse (p. 43). Regarding the case of the *hamza*, PL starts from the observation that, according to traditional Arabic linguistics, the *rasm* certifies that the “Koranic language” (which will be identified *a posteriori* with the “language of Quraysh”) performs a “lightening” (*takhfīf*) of the *hamza*, even if the tradition of reading/reciting that will prevail is to do the reverse by “realizing” (*taḥqīq*) the *hamza* (p. 44). PL concludes that there is therefore on the one hand a “classicization” of the language of the Koran, and on the other hand that this phenomenon constitutes the distortion “most spectacular” between the written and the spoken, since one systematically reads/ recites something that is not written, as the cases undoubtedly demonstrate terms read/recited today *khāṭi^a* and *shay^{an}* whose surrounding rhyme confirms that they were originally to be pronounced *khāṭiya* and *shayyā* or *shiyyā*, respectively (p. 44-45).

The second article/chapter of this section begins by taking up some of the remarks made in the first (p. 43-44) about the divergence which can be seen in the very *rasm* of the modern printed editions of the Koran. To do this, PL examines three cases: first the *an law* of Q 72:16, which has only one phony: *allaw*, but which knows two different spellings since it is written in one word of three letters (*alif lām wāw*) in the Cairo Koran and in two four-letter words (*alif nūn lām wāw*) in the Maghreb

Koran. The author concludes that we find a greater adequacy between the said and written with the spelling of the Koran of Cairo which can be interpreted as a trace of the spoken word in the written word, where, in the case of the Koran of the Maghreb, one reads/recites something that is not written.

Then the case of *an lan* which again has only one sole phony: *allan*, but which we find written more often *alif nūn lām nūn* in both printed editions of the Koran, and more rarely *alif lām nūn*. In the first case, it is the analytic form which attests to a discrepancy between writing and speech and suggests an autonomy of the oral in relation to the written and, in the second case, it is the synthetic form which attests to a convergence between writing and speech, suggesting the primacy of the spoken word over the written word. In both cases, there is homogenization, through the spoken word, of a graphic heterogeneity.

Finally the case of *an lā* which once again has only one phony: *allā*, which coexists at the same time in the analytic (*alif nūn lām alif*) and synthetic spelling (*alif lām alif*) in the printed Korans of Cairo and the Maghreb. The first spelling is by far the rarest and PL looks at the reasons for maintaining the spelling *alif nūn*, one of which is that the *an* serves as epexegetic particle, signifying that what follows it is a quotation, or statement of fact. The author concludes that this spelling retains the memory of a pause between *an* and what follows (*a contrario* of the synthetic spelling which makes the connection between *an* and what follows), which leads to distinguish two forms of orality: the oralization of the written text (*tajwīd*) where one recites *allā* what is written there, and the vanished recitation which consisted in reciting *an lā* as it is written, with a pause between *an* and *lā*.

The second section devoted to language poses the question of the definition of “Koranic Arabic” by comparing it with other categories of Arabic (pre-Islamic, classic) as well as to the descriptions which are given in the first treatise on Arabic grammar.

In the first article/chapter [tr. Susan Emanuel, “Pre-Islamic Arabic, Koranic Arabic, Classical Arabic: a Continuum?” ed. Ohlig & Puin, tr. *The Hidden Origins of Islam*, Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2010; 6.263f.], PL compares the Arabic of the *rasm* of the Koran’s oldest manuscripts against the pre-Islamic Arabic which we only know epigraphically. He finds

that both have in common the fact that they are devoid of diacritic points, of vocalization and of systematic notation of long vowels (p. 63 [tr. 263]). This explains how these two forms of Arabic are ambiguous, but, in the case of Koranic Arabic, and *a contrario* of what the author rightly calls the “epigraphic pre-Islamic Arabic” whose decipherment is “random”, the late tradition of “readings” (*qirā’āt*) marks it out and makes it legible.

PL then brings his linguist perspective to two characteristics of the language of the Koran. The first one concerns the importance of the phenomena of pause (*waqf*) which determines the rhyme of the segments between them, the latter segmenting the text into verses (PL makes the significant remark that the Koran has more rhymes than verses! We’ll see the demonstration of this phenomenon applied to the Surat al-Fātiḥa, p. 78-79). In the Koran, the rhyme is so central that it affects both the syntax (in Q 80:12 we read *dhakarāh* to make it rhyme with the end of the previous verse which has *tadhkira*, then we should have *dhakarāh*) and the spelling (the Koran lengthens the short vowel *a* to *ā* to keep the rhymes, as in Q 33:66-67 where we read *al-rasūlā* and *al-sabīlā* to make them rhyme with the verses of the sura which all end in *tanwīn* pronounced *ā* to the break) (pp. 65-66 [tr. 268]). The second characteristic of the language of the Koran considered concerns the assimilation between final consonant of a word and initial consonant of the following word (*idghām*), which can be either total (*kabīr*), or partial (*qalb*). This phenomenon is here still heavy with consequences when we see that the reading of Q 2:284 attributed to Abū ‘Amr, for example, *ayū’adhdhim man yashā’ (idghām kabīr)* which implies, not the loss of the final vowel of the first word, but its absence, which would seem to demonstrate that originally there was a tradition of recitation without *i’rāb*, that is a variant not inflected or [Eng.] “caseless” from Arabic (p. 66-67 [tr. 269-70]).

PL ends this study by addressing the question of the Arabic called “classique”, a French adjective (from the Latin *classicus*) whose use is appropriate here insofar as where it connotes the idea of prestige (it is a language that belongs to the first *class* of citizens) and where he implies that the language, standardized by grammarians, is taught in the classroom (p. 69 [tr. 272]). The Arabic equivalent is found in the expression *al-lughā al-fuṣṣḥā*, which only

appears in the 4th/10th century, at a time when, for theological reasons, it will be identified with the language of the Quraysh, the very one which will be considered as the language of the Koran. Yet the characteristic features attributed to this *lughā fuṣṣḥā* are by no means those which are reported from the language of Quraysh (or more generally, of the language of the Hejaz). So, from a phonological point of view, the race of the Hejaz lighten the *hamza* while the other Arabs pronounce it: this “effective realization” will become the “classical feature” of Arabic. While that from a syntactical point of view, we find in the Koran the negation known as *mā al-ḥijāziyya* (cf. in particular Q 12:31) where the classical language would only use *laysa* as negation of a nominal phrase (p. 70 [tr. 273]).

PL concludes that the Arabic called “classical” does not represent the whole Arabic described by the grammarians, but only a part, which is the product of a selection. He adds that this classical Arabic is a construction – the culmination of a long and slow constitution process – whose central characteristic is the *i’rāb*, a trait that is not attested by the “pre-Islamic epigraphic Arabic” and of which a variant among the *qirā’āt* seems to be “caseless” (without inflexion).

The following article/chapter states in its title this main question: “Qu’est-ce que l’arabe du Coran?” [“What is the Arabic of the Koran?”]. PL has already partially answered it in the previous chapter, as well as in the very first (there is the importance of the pause phenomenon in the Koran, of the *tanwīn* which originally would not have been pronounced as *ā*, etc.). If the author does not know how to answer positively to the title’s question, he can answer it in the negative: the Arabic of the Koran is not the classical Arabic, the latter being an *a posteriori* construction formed from multiple Arabic dialects.

The third article/chapter stands out somewhat from its precedents by focusing on the first treatise on complete Arabic grammar: the *Kitāb* of Sibawayhi (d. 180/796), which is based on six sources of different quotations, including the Koran (421 quotations, far behind poetry with 1056 verses by 231 poets) and in the first place the “speech of the Arabs” (*kalām al-‘Arab*), doing, in the words of PL taking up those of H.L. Fleischer, a “grammar of Old Arabic” (*Altarabisch* for inflected Arabic, by

opposition to *Neuarabisch* for the Arabic of the modern, uninflected dialects) (p. 93-94).

The language which the *Kitāb* describes, which is there uniquely called *al-‘arabiyya* (it will have been understood, at the time of Sībawayhi there is no question yet of *lugha fuṣṣhā*), is composed of several tribal/regional variants, and PL notes that the most frequently cited are those of two tribes: the Tamīm as well as the *ahl al-Ḥijāz*. He also notes that while Sībawayhi has direct experience of the former speech, he has none from the people of the Hejaz, the examples which he reports being drawn solely from the Koran. Thus, the language of the *ahl al-Ḥijāz* which Sībawayhi qualifies as “the oldest and first language” is none other than the Islamic name of the Koran’s language. Indeed, this language is not documented outside of the Koran, the so-called “hejazisms” are not features of the Hejaz language, but simply the interpretation of the particularities of the Koranic language attested by the *rasm* (p. 96-97). If the author of the *Kitāb* presents the people of Hejaz as not realizing the hamza, it is simply because the Koranic *rasm* never writes the middle and final *hamza*. Here again, PL skillfully demonstrates that ultimately, this *lugha hijāziyya* is only a “construction” (in this language, the masculine/feminine marker after the *kāf* disappears at the pause, *‘alayk^a* and *‘alaykⁱ* becoming *‘alayk*, which no longer makes it possible to distinguish between both genders, whereas in the language of Tamīm as in many modern Arabic dialects, there are no short vowels in the final and the distinction between the masculine and the feminine is performed with the forms *‘alayk* and *‘alaysh*, respectively) (p. 99).

To answer the question posed by the title of the present article/chapter (“La langue du Coran: quelle influence sur la grammaire arabe?” = “The language of the Koran: what influence on Arabic grammar?”), PL concludes that it was not the Koranic language that influenced the grammar of Arabic, but that it is the latter which influenced the evolution of the first in the direction of a classicization (p. 103).

The third section devoted to the lexicon explores how the Koran addresses the issue of the language and studies, very usefully, the terms *salām* and *jihād* which are used indiscriminately in contemporary debates, in order to propose the “reactions of a linguist to propositions [... of] apologetics” (p. 16).

PL first looks at “The concept of language in the Koran” in a chapter unpublished since it is the French version, “entirely revised and considerably enlarged” (p. 107) of an encyclopaedic entry in English published seventeen years prior⁴. The author starts from the observation that the Koran never uses the now common term of *lugha* to speak of “language”, but only the word *lisān*, parallel to the verbs of root *q w l, k l m* and an occurrence of the verb *lafaza* which express the “language put into discourse” (p. 109). PL focuses on three Koranic occurrences of *lisān*, which have in common to transcribe a part of the biblical story about the difficulty Moses had speaking (his tongue is “knotted”), which is opposed to fluency of his brother, Aaron (his native language is “untied”). PL points out that these Koranic stories, parallel to those of the biblical book of Exodus, and especially the verse Q 28:34, which uses the Arabic relative *afṣaḥ* to say that Aaron is “more eloquent”, will receive all their importance on account they will provide the subtext of the expression *afṣaḥ al-lugha al-‘arabiyya* used by Ibn Fāris to describe the Arabic of the Quraysh, which in turn will provide the expression *al-lugha al-fuṣṣhā* (p. 109-112 and see p. 114-115).

PL concludes by examining the occurrences in Koranic texts of *lisān* where the word has the meaning of “langage articulé par la langue” (e.g. Q 14:4 which will constitute the subtext to the syllogistic reasoning that since the language of the Koran is that of Muḥammad who is a native of the Hejaz, the language of the Koran is that of the Hejaz), and by addressing the three cases where *lisān* is qualified by *‘arabī* (including two where it is also by *mubīn*) (p. 116-119).

In the following two articles/chapters, PL is interested in the concepts of peace and war in Arabic, starting by focusing exclusively on the former. The author starts [tr. Ibn Warraq, “The Concept of Peace and Its Expressions in Arabic” ed. *Which Koran?* Prometheus, 2011; 2.6.179f] from the question of whether there be a difference between the terms *salām* (exact analogue to the Hebrew *shālōm* for “peace”) and *silm* (whose adjectival form, *silmī*, means “peaceful”). Through two initial examples completed with remarks on the respective variants of *salam* and *salm* which are found in the Koran, PL seeks to show that the true antonym of

⁴ In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, Brill, Leiden, 2003, vol. 3.

Arabic *ḥarb* for “war” is *silm* (in the sense of being preserved of war) and not *salām*, the latter connoting both the idea of “peace” and “submission” (p. 121-123 [tr. 183]). So, for example, when Q 4:90-91 and Q 16:28+87 use the noun *salam* preceded by the verb *alqā*, it would not be a question of “offering peace” (as Denise Masson translated it), but rather “offering his submission” (pp. 124-125 [tr. 184]). PL complements these arguments by wanting to show that if *salām* is today commonly used in the sense of “peace”, originally, and therefore etymologically, it would rather connote the lexical field of “preservation” (p. 125-126). I am, however, not entirely convinced by the examples put forward by PL. The author begins with the case of the divine name *al-salām* (Q 59:23) which would mean that God is “preserved from defect, from vice”. This is there indeed the majority Muslim exegesis⁵, but however, it will be noted that in the Hebrew Bible, God is qualified by the name *shālōm* when Gideon builds an altar for God whom he calls “Lord peace” (*Yhwh shālōm* in Hebrew and Εἰρήνη κυρίου in the Greek of the LXX)⁶ and that in the New Testament, we find the expression “God of peace” (θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης in Greek and *Alōhō dēn da-shlōmō* in the Syriac translation of the Peshittā)⁷. It is not therefore excluded that the Koran echoes these biblical formulations.

The author continues with the example of the Koranic expression *dār al-salām* which, according to him, would designate the Paradise not as a [tr. 185-6] “house of peace”, but as the “house of preservation from evil ... from death”. If it is true that this second interpretation can be taken from the

context of certain descriptions in Koranic texts of Paradise⁸, one can just as well deduce that it is a place of peace since the term *salām*⁹, itself, is used many times, either to describe the manner by which the Chosen will enter in Paradise¹⁰, or to insist that it is the only word they will hear there¹¹. Further, Q 52:26 has the residents of Paradise say, “We were once, among our own, full of anguish”, implying, so that they are now at peace. We will add to this an extra- (or inter-) textual argument: the Fathers of the Church do not hesitate to describe Paradise in similar terms. This is particularly the case of famous Syriac poet Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) who speaks of it as a place devoid of wars, fights, traps, enemies, etc.¹², and depicts it often explicitly as a place of peace¹³. When we know the impact (direct or indirect) that had the descriptions of the Paradise of Ephrem on those of the Koran¹⁴, it is quite plausible that the Koranic *dār al-salām* echoes these Syriac writings and that it does indeed mean the “house of peace”¹⁵.

Finally, PL ends with the well-known expression (*al-*) *salām ‘alayk*. According to him, it would not be a question [tr. 186] “of a wish for peace, but as a wish for preservation”, for health therefore. However, an examination of the equivalent of this expression in other Semitic languages suggests otherwise. The Hebrew *shālōm* is found especially used as a greeting in the Hebrew Bible: “The old man answered: ‘That peace be with you!’ (*shālōm lak/Εἰρήνη σοι*)”¹⁶ and the same term is used in Aramaic in the Jerusalem Talmud when, when asked on how to greet Gentiles, the rabbi replies: “As we greet the Israelites: ‘May peace be upon you!’ (*shālōm ‘alaykōm*)”¹⁷. These greetings,

⁵ On this subject, see Daniel Gimaret, *The divine names in Islam*, p. 204-205.

⁶ Judges 6:24.

⁷ Romans 15:33 and 16:20.

⁸ See the many insistences that the pious there will be “immortal”.

⁹ Which is followed once by *āmin* (see note below); and compare to Q 44:51: “The Pious will be in a peaceful abode (*amīn*)”.

¹⁰ Cf. Q 15:46: “Enter there [among the gardens and springs heavenly] in peace, peaceful (*bi-salām āminīn*)!”; Q 50:34: “Enter there [Paradise] in peace (*bi-salām*)!”

¹¹ Cf. Q 14:23: “There [in the gardens...] they will be received by [the word]: ‘Peace!’ (*salām*)”; Q 19:62: “They will not hear verbiage but ‘Peace!’ (*salāman*)”; Q 36:58: “Peace (*salām*)”, will they be told...”; Q 39:73: “...his guardians [i.e. heaven] will shout: Peace be upon you (*salām ‘alaykum*)!”; Q 56:25-26: “They shan’t [i.e. in the gardens of Paradise] hear neither

boastfulness, nor incitement to sin, / but only, as a statement: Peace! Peace! (*salāman salāman*)

¹² Hymn on Paradise VII: 23: “They have no terror, For they have no trap. They have no enemy, Having finished the struggle. [...] Their fighting Has ceased.”

¹³ See, among others, *Hymn on Paradise V: 12*: “(Eden) of again strongly delights me, By its peace as by its beauty. [...] There lies a peace without alarm.”

¹⁴ We will read in particular Tor Andrae, *The origins of Islam and Christianity*, 1955 and Edmund Beck, “The houris of the Koran and Ephrem the Syrian”, 1959-1961.

¹⁵ It was moreover the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr who, drawing inspiration of this Koranic expression, will name his city madīnat *al-salām* (cf. A.A. Duri, “Baghdād”, *E.I.*², p. 921), to understand rather in the sense of the “city of peace” than in that of “city of the preservation of evils, of death”.

¹⁶ Judges 19:20.

¹⁷ Shebiith 35b.

which are unquestionably wishes for peace, are also found in many other Semitic languages such as Ge'ez¹⁸ and Sabaean (South Arabian)¹⁹. As for the Syriac translation of the New Testament, the Peshīttā, this renders the Greek εἰρήνη by the Syriac *shlōmō* which unequivocally means “peace”²⁰ and which is used in many instances as a greeting of peace, especially in the Gospel of Luke 24:36 (“As they spoke thus, Jesus was present among them and He said, “Peace be with you! (Εἰρήνην ὑμῖν/ *shlōmō* ‘*amkūn*)”). It therefore appears from this brief review that the Koranic Arabic *salām* ‘*alaykum* (cf. Q 39:73) is most likely a copy of the usual greeting in Arabic’s Semitic “sister” languages and which is commonly used in anterior biblical tradition.

Be that as it may, PL concludes with strong reason that we must be wary of retrospective readings that place a modern meaning upon an ancient term that originally had another one. As an example, he takes the translation which Denise Masson gives of Q 2:208 where she renders *silm* as “peace” by adding note that *silm* is put here for *islām* (pp. 126-128 [tr. 187]). PL recalls that this last word is the name of action of *aslama* whose primary meaning is that of “[to] surrender, hand over, submit to God” (he will take in second place the meaning of “becoming a Muslim”). I would add that this is confirmed, not only by the oldest Arabic dictionary that has come down to us, the *Kitāb al-‘ayn* attributed to al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/776)²¹, but also by a comparative (non exhaustive) analysis of Semitic languages²².

¹⁸ The greeting *lā’lehu salām* means “Peace be upon him!”.

¹⁹ The verb *silm* means “to seek peace”, the verb *hslm* means “to pacify; establish peace [between combatants]”, and the name *slm* is used, among other things, as a greeting (“Peace!”).

²⁰ For example in the famous phrase “Glory to God in the highest of the heavens, peace (εἰρήνην) on earth” from Luke 2:14.

²¹ He gives to *islām* the following definition: “Submission to the command of God the Most High, and it is a matter of letting oneself be led by His obedience and to accept His command” (*al-istislām li-amr Allāh ta ‘ālā wa-huwa al-inqiyād li-tā ‘atihi wa-l-qab ul li-amrihi*).

²² In Hebrew, the *hif’il* of the verb *shālem* (“to be whole, complete; to finish”), *hishlīm*, means in particular “[to] surrender, hand over, return”; in Aramaic, the *a’el* of the verb *shlem* (“to be perfect, complete; to be peaceful”), *ashleyim*, means in particular “to deliver, hand over, entrust”; in Ge’ez, the verb *tasālama* means, in addition to “salute” or “make peace”, “(submit)” and “bow”; and in Syriac, the verb *shlēm* in the *pe’al* means, among other things

The third and final article/chapter of this section devoted to the lexicon comes in the continuity of the previous one since it addresses the concepts of war (*jihād*) and peace (*salām*) from a linguistic point of view. PL dedicates the first seven pages (p. 131-137) to this former concept²³ starting from the observation, that today, it suffices that we pronounce the term *jihād*, so that immediately someone comes to affirm that it in no way signifies “holy war”, but “effort”, and that the latter is directed towards (or against) oneself in a completely peaceful way. This explanation is due to a double confusion: that of the service and designation on the one hand, and genus and species on the other.

Regarding the first confusion, PL notes that to speak of “effort”, no Arabic speaker would use the word *jihād* (or the third-form verb *jāhada*), but the word *jahd* (or the verb of the simple form *jahada*). What is the difference between these two words? The first, by its very morphology (the lengthening of the first radical) mimics the intensity/insistence value. Thus, if *jahada* means “to strive”, *jāhada* means “to strive in a manner intense or insistent”. Moreover, syntactically, this last verb becoming transitive in the intensive form, it takes on the meaning of an intense effort not *upon* a object, but *against*. Thus we are approaching the sense of “to combat” and of “combat”.

PL is then interested in the thirty-five occurrences from the trilateral root *j h d* of which thirteen appear in the context of the expression *fī sabīl Allāh* (literally

(its primary meaning is that of “to be completed, accomplished, finished”), “follow, adhere to [a doctrine, belief]” (a meaning that is probably not insignificant for understanding Arabic *aslama* and *islām*) as well as “surrender, deliver” (meaning reflected in ethpe’el *ēshtlēm*: “to be delivered” or “to deliver” whose Arabic equivalents, Louis Costaz tells us in his *Dictionary*, are respectively *aslama* and *istaslama*).

²³ PL dedicates the last five pages (p. 138-42) to the analysis of the term *salām* which reprises, by summarizing it, the previous article (which the author explicitly acknowledges in the footnote) adapting it, however, to the context of his present argument, which makes him for example add that in the same way that it is usual to hear said today in apologetic speeches that *jihād* does not mean “holy war” but “effort”, we also hear that Islam is a religion of peace since the Arabic term *islām* itself derives from the word *salām* and would therefore mean “peace”. Fortunately PL comes to set the record straight by demonstrating that this first means “submission” when the second has the senses of “peace” and of “salut(ation)”.

“in the way of God”, expression fixed whose meaning is simply “for” as he implies two occurrences of *j h d* followed of *fī Llāh* in Q 22:78 and Q 29:69), the latter being also employed fourteen times in the context of the verb *qātala* (synonym of *jāhada* which means “to fight”). PL concludes here in convincing fashion that through a phenomenon of collocation (a quite common phenomenon of which he gives several other examples p. 134, when a single word takes on the meaning of the entire phrase), *jihād* alone means *jihād fī sabīl Allāh* and that this former does not refer to just any combat, but to the combat for God, that is to say to the “holy war”, a *contrario* of the *qitāl* which is the generic name of combat.

Regarding the second confusion, PL observes that the spiritual or major *jihād* (*al-naḥs/al-akbar*) is completely absent from the dictionary entry *j h d* of the *Lisān al-‘arab* and that it is only a secondary and marginal meaning contrary to what the apologists claim. PL briefly retraces, on the one hand, the history of the *jihād al-naḥs* through a *ḥadīth* attributed to Muḥammad and of its employment by al-Ghazālī – this latter employing it in a warrior metaphor – to demonstrate that this meaning is indeed secondary, and on the other hand, that of *jihād al-akbar*, a concept also taken from a *ḥadīth* attributed to Muḥammad opposing the minor *jihād* to the major. PL quotes here Alfred Morabia who gives these two *jihād* an hierarchical interpretation – an apologetic contemporary interpretation²⁴ – whilst ancient Muslim authors did not do the same, giving them simply a *relational* relationship (p. 135-137).

The first article/chapter of the fourth section devoted to the discourse, “Coran et théorie linguistique de l’énonciation” [tr. Ibn Warraq, “The Koran and the Linguistic Theory of Utterance Act”, 2.3.141f.] (published in 2000) is the oldest article in PL dealing directly with the Koran. The author starts from the observation that most contemporary Arabic linguists are disinterested in the Koranic text. PL explains this, on the one hand by the fact that this discipline has broken with the slogan “Arabic, language of the Koran” and, on the other hand, that these linguists are Westerners whose Koranic

universe is “at their antipodes” (p. 145), a fact accentuated by the foil which are the phenomena such as, in particular, the “rise of Islamism” (p. 146). It will be suggested that it is perhaps, all simply, from too great a divide between disciplines (PL takes the example of a modern Arabic specialist who had not recognized that an expression that he regularly found in the press came from the Koran – but the reverse is just as true. Which specialists in the Koranic text know all the expressions of the Arabic of the press?). The author emphasizes that this lack of interest in the text of the Koran can lead to certain aporias and recalls that, for a linguist, the Koran is a text written in Arabic. From there he first addresses the question of the Koran as a text by dealing with the very constitution of the Koranic corpus which, according to the Muslim believer is the fruit either from a “revelation” (theological response), or from the “Othmanian recension” (traditional answer) – which is only a hypothesis and not a proven fact since we have no Othmanian Koran. It follows that a linguist is entitled to propose his own assumptions leading to consider that the Koran is a text that has a history. PL continues with the observation [tr. 142] “that the Koranic text ... today is not *ne varietur*” which tends to make one forget the domination of the text of the Cairo edition while even comparing this version (Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim) to that of the Maghreb (Warsh ‘an Nāfi’) always turns out linguistically fruitful. He emits the hypothesis that “the question of *qirā’āt* will soon be back in favor” (p. 148), although of note is that twenty years later, such is not the case, the problem probably stemming from the fact that these readings are more of an *a posteriori* exegesis that of only true textual variants as one can find among the various biblical manuscripts. However, the importance of research should not be overlooked of ancient Koranic manuscripts whose defective writing can lead to different hypotheses of reading which are entirely justified by the primitive *rasm*.

PL then tackles the question of the Koran as that text in Arabic asking: “Qu’est-ce que l’arabe coranique? = What is Koranic Arabic?” in a section that assembles many elements of chapters from the first part of the book (pp. 149-150), before moving

²⁴ Morabia’s monograph devoted to *jihād* dates from 1993, and we will see that nothing has changed six years later when we read Reuven Firestone’s *Jihād*, p. 16: “The semantic

meaning of the Arabic term *jihād* has no relation to holy war or even war in general” and p. 17: “There are [...] many kinds of *jihād*, and most have nothing to do with warfare”.

on to the question of “Arabic linguistics”. PL thus approaches the “linguistic theory of enunciation” part of this chapter through the examination of the definition of *ḥukm* in the *Kulliyāt al-‘ulūm* of al-Kafawī: it is in particular of the address (*khiṭāb*) of God, term that this same encyclopedia defines by mixing the linguistic and non-linguistic according to a double definition: verbal discourse, mental discourse (p. 152). PL notes that this is a solution provided by Muslim theology to a dispute, as well as a means of escaping the contradiction: God, eternal, cannot have a verbal speech (since it happens in time); he therefore has a mental Word which, itself, is eternal. PL indicates that the classification of *khiṭāb* among the *uṣūliyyūn* (who divide it into *ṭalab* / “ask” and non-*ṭalab*) has a close relationship with the *kalām* of the rhetoricians (who divide it into *khābar* / “affirmation” and non-*khābar*), before discussing the polyphonic analysis of the Koranic discourse (to start from the theological distinction between the two *kalām*-s which PL reinterprets linguistically as a speaker/enunciator distinction, p. 155) that the rhetoricians do herein. PL takes al-Qazwīnī as example, who illustrates the *khābar ṭalabī* (interrogative address in relation to an affirmation) by Q 36:14 responding to the first denial of the “inhabitants of the city”, and the *khābar inkārī* (negative address of affirmation) by Q 36:16 responding to the second denial (p. 156): the Koranic discourse being very frequently *polemical*, it allows the “voice” to be heard from the “other” (historical or invented). This polemical character arises in particular with the use of the *bal* connector used for rectification, and in the context of a dialogue, for negation-rectification (cf. Q 2:135). This question is longer covered in the next article. PL makes the transition and ends with the other connector which is *lākin(na)* which, *contrario* of *bal*, preventively rectifies a false conclusion (pp. 157-158). This is also a subject discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

It will be understood, this second chapter/article comes in the logical continuation of the end of the previous one (nine years later). PL makes two proposals there. On the one hand, it suggests that the difference between *mā fa‘ala* and *lam yaf‘al* is to

be found in the statute of the negation: the first is a descriptive negation in the field of *modus* assertion (“I affirm that it did not do”) while the second is a negation modal constituting the *modus* in the field of which is the propositional *dictum*/content (“I deny what he did”). On the other hand, he proposes that, like of German or Spanish, but on the contrary of French, Arabic knows “two buts”: *bal* (rectification of the statement which precedes it by that which follows, of type *SN* – abbreviation put for the Spanish *sino* and German *sonern*) and (*wa*)-*lākin(na)* (rectification of the false conclusion which could be drawn from the utterance preceding it, type *PA* – abbreviation for the Spanish *pero* and German *aber*). This is with zero doubt the most arduous article of the collection, at least for the reader unfamiliar with the intricacies of studies in Arabic linguistics.

Among other Koranic examples studied, PL shows that in the famous verse Q 33:40, it is not a question of the denial of paternity of Muḥammad (the biological father of), but of assertion that he is not *really* a father (he is the adoptive father of). For the author, it is therefore not necessary to treat this text as an *SN*-type negation (“but”) as many translators have done, but rather in the sense of “Muḥammad is not (of established manner) the father of any man among you, but (*PA* = “on the other hand”, “on the other hand”), it is (of established manner) the messenger of God and the seal of prophets” (p. 167). PL refers here to the context textual and extra-textual, and it would be appropriate to add the historical context (hypothetical, of course, but not less probable) according to which Q 33:40 would rather be an anti-Alide interpolation added, *a posteriori*, by the Umayyads (in the context of the discord concerning the succession of Muḥammad), giving this verse the meaning of an opposition of “not being a father” to “being a father”²⁵.

In conclusion, the author suggests that with this Koranic example (as well as two others) of *mā kāna* followed by *lākin*, it would seem possible to affirm that *mā fa‘ala* is a dictal negation (assertion/reinforced assertion) and that *lākin* is a *PA*-like negation. PL notes that it would be necessary

²⁵ On this subject, see in particular David Powers, *Muḥammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men*, 2009 and more recently Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi,

“Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*), (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine XII)”, 2014, p. 411-438.

obviously examine the other sixteen other Koranic occurrences of *mā fa 'ala... l ākinna*, but that the brief examination which he makes of Q 8:17 confirms this tendency, just as we should now consider the 127 Koranic occurrences of *bal* to finish verifying his hypothesis, to come and confirm it or to invalidate it (p. 171).

The fifth and final section of the book devoted to the medieval *Koranphilologie* consists of two articles/ chapters whose common point is to take an interest in two writings by Ziyād b. 'Abd Allāh al-Farrā' (d. 207/822): his work of "Qur'anic philology", the *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān*, in the first chapter, and in the second, a text discovered and translated into English by Paul Kahle in 2006.

In the first chapter, by noting some answers provided by al-Farrā' in his *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān* to Koranic problems (Q 20:63 and Q 76:31 which contradict the rules of "classical" Arabic », Q 76:4 where *salāsīl* ends in an *alif*, etc.) and with which "philology tempers theology" (p. 180), PL wants to show that a contemporary Western linguist will find matter for "dialogue" with a 2nd/8th century Muslim philologist, then that he finds none with those who, today, in the Muslim world, deal with these subjects "by peremptory assertions" (p. 188).

In the second chapter, the author focuses on a text from al-Farrā' which seems to be one of the first to establish the theological thesis according to which the language of the Koran is the *lughat Quraysh* and that the *lughat Quraysh* is *al-lughā al-fuṣṣḥā*. This thesis will be resumed almost two centuries later in the *Ṣāhibī* of Ibn Fāris (p. 190), which will however water it down by omitting, for example, the controversy between the two groups that are on the one hand the specialists of the Koran (of whom al-Farrā' is part) and specialists in the poetry and the history of the Arabs. For the former, the language of the Koran is *al-lughā al-fuṣṣḥā* and for others it is of the language of the Bedouins (p. 191). The argument of al-Farrā' is illustrated by nine traditions translated and commented on by PL (who also reproduces them in Arabic, p. 201). The author concludes by writing that al-Farrā''s hypothesis attempts to reconcile theological truth (language of the Koran = *lughat Quraysh* = *al-lughā al-fuṣṣḥā*) and philological truth (notably relief of the *hamza*) (p. 198), and that the nine traditions should be understood as reflecting the concerns of those who report them thus that the problems posed to them in their time and not as

historical testimonies of Muḥammad and his Companions about the Koran. PL quite rightly proposes that "the *lughat Quraysh* identified with the *lughat al-fuṣṣḥā* is to language what the *muṣḥaf 'Uthmān* is in the Koranic text: pious fictions" (p. 199), fictions which will begin as one opinion among others before imposing itself and become a dogma. He adds that the purpose of these fictions is to anchor the historical reality of a great work (the constitution of the *muṣḥaf* which, as PL reminds us, not completed until, at the earliest, the reign of 'Abd al-Malik as well as the "classicization" of Arabic) in a mythical past.

We have, with *Sur le Coran. Nouvelles approches linguistiques*, the too rare and welcome point of view from a specialist in Arabic linguistics on a number of topics related to the Koran. As PL reminded, it is a text which, for the linguist – to which will be added *and for any university-scholar* – must be viewed critically as a written text in Arabic and provided with a history (this one being well different depending on whether one takes the point of view of Muslim tradition or western Islamic research). The historical-critical approach of PL is therefore omnipresent in this study, so much and if although it is certainly the term "construction" which alone best summarizes the conclusions of the twelve articles which have become chapters that make up this work: construction by the Muslim tradition a semblance of homogeneity of Koranic spelling (which is anything but homogeneous!), construction from "classical" Arabic (which is posterior to the Koran and in the center of which is the *īrāb*) and in the same time "classicization" of Koranic Arabic and "de-saj'isation" of the Koran, construction of the triple equation *al-lughā al-qur'āniyya* = *lughat Quraysh* = *al-lughā al-fuṣṣḥā* as theological argument, modern and apologetic construction making the *islām* the religion of "peace" (while its only meaning is that of "submission") and of *jihād* not the "combat" (its true meaning, as found in the Koran) but the "effort" on/against oneself.

In my opinion, the only complaint one could do to this work and which only affects its form and not basically, is its repetitive character which is due to the fact that On the Koran is a corpus, a collection of articles that often echo each other.

It is thus regrettable that from the start of the second article/chapter of the first section (p. 47-48), we comes back to the same remarks as in the

previous (p. 43-44), that this second chapter concludes (p. 55) with the same example of Q 96:15 treated in the previous one (p. 38-40); that the second article/ chapter of the second section resumes, sometimes text message, entire sections of the previous one (for example the p. 75-77 which are taken from p. 62-64; p. 78 which takes up p. 64; p. 81 which takes up p. 64-65; etc.). It seems to me that it might have been good to do a synthesis of the whole in order to draw a real unpublished monograph, or at least, to prune certain redundancies in order to make the reading more fluid of the work. It will easily be opposed to this that doing the same would at the same time have deprived us of the interest of seeing the evolution over twenty years of thought of PL and the discipline of Islamology²⁶, of as well as having grouped and therefore simplified access, to all PL production about the Koran.

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[translated to English with reference to English translations: David Reid Ross, 2022-07-04]

²⁶ For example, when in its oldest article, in evoking the fact that the Koran is a text that has a history, PL mentions that in Germany, England and the United States this has long been accepted; noting that it is in France “extreme reluctance” about the critical spirit that makes the difference between

theological “truths” and historical realities (p. 147). The contemporary reader can only measure how much the things have changed in France since the publication of this article in 2000, the situation is even reversed!