



The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran

Christoph Luxenberg

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Throughout its history the Koran has presented problems of interpretation. Some scholars estimate that at least a quarter of the text is obscure in meaning, not only for Western translators but even native Arabic speakers, who struggle with the archaic vocabulary that is no longer used in modern Arabic.

In this in-depth study of the language of the Koran, scholar Christoph Luxenberg dispels much of the mystery surrounding numerous hitherto unclear passages. The key, as Luxenberg shows exhaustively, is to understand that Aramaic--the language of most Middle Eastern Jews and Christians of the pre-Islamic era--had a pervasive influence on the development of the Arabic text of the Koran. For a thousand years preceding the advent of Islam, Aramaic (or Syriac as it was sometimes called) was the lingua franca of many parts of the Near East. It was the native language of the first Christian evangelists and the main liturgical language of the early Christian churches from Syria to Iran.

Based on this historical context and a profound knowledge of Semitic languages, Luxenberg clarifies many thorny textual puzzles. Perhaps his most interesting argument is that the passage often translated as referring to the "virgins" that are believed to greet the departed faithful in paradise was long ago misunderstood. In fact, knowledge of ancient Christian hymns in Aramaic suggests that the word in question refers to "grapes" that the departed will enjoy in a paradisiacal garden. Luxenberg discusses many other similar fascinating instances where Aramaic vocabulary and concepts influenced the text of the Koran

This highly erudite work makes a significant contribution to the study of the Koran and the history of Islamic origins.

The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran Details

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N. says

Though the book is written in English, I think a reader who doesn't read Arabic will suffer a lot to follow the author's analysis. As a matter of fact, even the reader who knows good Arabic will suffer as well, this is not an "easy read" by any means ! The book is full of very interesting and some times intriguing remarks about the text of Quran, however some of the conclusions came unconvincing for me and some others were very difficult and complicated for me to follow, which left me with almost 50% of the book's content which I was able to follow and was much convincing. However, it's worth mentioning that the 50% that I was able to extract, was of much value and, one must say, must have took much effort and research from the author. To sum this review up: don't try to read this book if you are not familiar with Arabic letters, but if you do, the book gives you enough to change the way you see and think about many things.

mahatmanto says

gak usah direview.
takut.

peiman-mir5 rezakhani says

[illegible]

[illegible]

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Nicole says

Interesting book, however too technical for me. I was hoping for a book aimed more at the general public and less at linguists intimately familiar with the (history of the) languages discussed in the book. I stopped reading after the first seven chapters.

Mel says

A truly ground breaking book that has shed light on the Qur'an's Syro-Aramaic origins in the context of a pre-Islamic Christian monastic community. His thesis is backed up by the linguistic evidence but it also dovetails with other evidence, such as from Dan Gibson and Patricia Crone, that place the context of Islam's beginnings in Petra, rather than in Mecca.

Chedy Riahi says

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[illegible]

Jamal Armel says

There was no reason for the 11 September 2001 Muslim hijackers to expect 72 virgins with big eyes and round bosoms as a reward for their "martyrdom". They would rather find vineyards with white and cold grapes waiting for them in paradise. A simple misreading caused by misplaced diacritics symbols in the text of the Qur'an is the cause of such disappointing news for the jihadists.

Sami says

Despite I read and speak Arabic it was a hard book to read and understand everything it would be easier to read if you were a linguistic expert and advanced in Arabic grammar

But still very interesting book if you accept that the Quoran was written in Syro-Arameac first which explains a lot of hard to understand verses also hard to understand Arabic Grammar

Jamal Esam says

A boring book. Although I read dozens of articles about the Syro-Aramic origins of Arabic language and listened to hours of speeches, but this book is too much boring (I read 50 pages), I felt like reading one of the sheets the Doctor (as he suppose to be) of parasitology and microbiology department gave us!!

Nadim Karmoussa says

Too difficult.

Andriy says

Proves the koran is no more divine than my grandmothers recipies for biscuits!

Tariq Mahmood says

Fascinating insight into the first book written in the Arabic language, the Koran. The author presents a detailed and well researched translation of the confusing words of the Koran which he claims are descending from the Syriac language. I think this area of research should be owned by Muslim scholars.

Bchara says

I bought this book as a gift to myself after my thesis defense last february, after i heard so much about it. Finally a year later i read it. I do know arabic, and can read syriac, but that was not enough to totally grasp the whol of the book. At times it gets too technical, using expressions such as mater lectionis or gemination (words that could be understood) or using english (i am reading the english translation) terms related to arabic and syriac languages studies - while myself, in arabic classes, never had to use such english terms. This made reading the book quite challenging.

But overall the idea is clear : the author goes from the assumption that the Quran was written in syriac, and its alphabet had no dots on the letters. Its recitation changed over the years which led islamic scholars to alter some of its writing, such as adding hamzas while before it was just "y".

The author fails to reply to one question though, in as much as he plunges into details: what about continuity? I suppose his thesis can be understood if the original reading of the Quran had ceased for a while, to be forgotten, then when newer people tried to read the Quran they no longer remembered the original reading.

Now of course, this objection is minor, since much of the Quran's early history is reconstructed, and the Quran, while moving from Mekka and Medina to Damascus and Bagdad might also have changed readings, and subsequent scholars reconstructed its history as they thought convenient. But in any case, i think the authr must have dealt with this point.

As for the many many examples given, it clearly appears the author masters his topic. Many of the examples are example, mostly when nothing much has to be changed to change the meaning. For example, when you

have to substitute a hamza by a "y" or put the dot below a "g" above it to make it a "kh". When too many changes are to be made, it gets more speculative. And the method the author mentions p. 24 - method f - is actually a bit far out and could be used in both ways, since syriac too was influenced by arabic after the arabic invasion.

At the end, the book was quite interesting, and it does make a point: it breaks this idealised relation between Quran and arabic language, which leads to a whole new understanding of the Quran, since usually islamic scholars explained Quranic words by a closed circle: they explain the meaning of a word by how it was used in arabic poetry - while the meaning in the poetry was initially given to suit the Quran.

Ranooshe says

It's the messed up first step effort of a foreigner to the region, the culture and the religion, at trying to decipher a holy book. I call it a first step because the book makes a number of erroneous assumptions, one of the most basic is claiming that the Assyrian language is the same as the Aramaic, he even thinks it's the same as the kaldean language. Which is outright false.

He also completely misses the relation between the Arabic and Aramaic languages, reducing it to 'Aramaic being the language of the educated at the time'.

He is further hampered by the translations of the Qur'an that found their way to Europe. He challenges them correctly many times, but he forgets that the mistake is in the translation and goes on to challenge the original text.

It is easy for people from the region, especially Syrians and Iraqis, to see the errors of his ways.

The author treats the book from the linguistic angle only, with a Christian background. He has very little facts about the region and its history and the circumstances surrounding the Qur'an, even though he claims otherwise. Understanding the history is an integral part of understanding and using the regions languages. This lack of knowledge has seriously hampered the author's ability at presenting a convincing argument to people of the region: Muslims and Christians alike.

It claims that some words or verses are mispronounced or misspelled in the Qur'an because they are spelt in a different way in Aramic or Hebrew. This is not the way to conduct scientific sound research. Imagine using French letters or pronunciations to claim that an English word is mispronounced. Even if it had a root in French it is now an English word and should be pronounced, spelt and understood according to the new language. How many English words have meanings completely different to their French roots? This argument about having to use the Aramaic pronunciation for the Qur'an is totally absurd, and unscientific. Furthermore, the book has been exploited for promoting discriminatory and inflammatory agendas further alienating it from Muslim and Arab readers.

Having said that, the book does explain some words or phrases that have remained mysterious for the most knowledgeable Muslim clerics.

Wish the effort was based on sound facts and arguments and methods of research.
