Muslim Qur'ānic Interpretation Today: Media, Genealogies, and Interpretive Communities
Johanna Pink
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Johanna Pink, who is mainly interested in modern Qur'anic exegesis and translations, attempts to draw a panorama of the different interpretations of the Qur'ān between 2000 and 2016 in her book *Muslim Qur'ānic Interpretation: Media, Genealogies and Interpretive Communities*. She seeks to provide an outline of different interpretations from many regions of the Muslim world, extending from Indonesia to Egypt, from the United States to Iran, and from Turkey to Saudi Arabia. At first, Pink discusses the increasingly central position and function of Qur'anic exegesis in the contemporary period. The author underlines that exegesis had a more modest place in the hierarchy of classical religious sciences and manages to examine its positioning in the classical period with much clarity. In the second chapter, Pink emphasizes that the context-oriented approach of classical tafsir has undergone a text-centered transformation in line with that of Ibn Taymiyya's approach. Thereafter, the author discusses the impact of this transformation in the contemporary Arab world, especially through various abridgments and editions of Ibn Kathīr's tafsīr.

The third chapter is truly stimulating and informative. This chapter deals with the relationship between the modern world's ever-changing and diversifying communication and broadcasting technologies and the production and distribution of Quranic interpretation. Controversially, the author takes seriously YouTube videos of preachers who engage in topics that they call tafsīr, such as Nouman Ali Khan and Yasir Qadhi. Although they are very influential among the new generations, their speeches can be classified alongside public sermons presented from mosque pulpits for hundreds of years. Nonetheless, being a commendable work, the author's book may pave the way for more radical assessments of such new mediums' impact, importance, and future.

The central theme of the fourth chapter, titled "Modernism and its Paradigms," is the effects of modernism on Islamic thought and the reflex of reinterpreting Islam to meet the needs of the modern age. In the fifth chapter, entitled "In Defense of a Perfect Scripture: The Qur'ān as a Holistic System," Pink examines the different defense strategies and shared apologetic

attitudes developed by Muslim scholars in response to Christian missionaries, orientalists, and secularists in the post-colonial Islamic world.

In the sixth and seventh chapters, the author considers the usual and unusual factors affecting the interpretation of the Qur'ān. She presents case studies appropriate to the theme in each chapter. Although the author is highly selective in these case studies, it is clear that she evaluated the examples she dealt with thoroughly and meticulously.

However, the strength of these well-organized chapters is hampered by the relatively selective and superficial analyses of some issues. This superficiality becomes apparent especially when it comes to Quranic studies in Turkey. At first, the author seems to be less familiar with the Qur'ānic studies in Turkey during the period of interest. This may be because she did not have access to important sources. However, pursuing academic studies in a language that one has not mastered entails an assertive entry into a field in which one is not competent. The author seems to have limited knowledge of studies in Turkey as she references only Talip Özdeş's book and two websites, which hardly represent the full corpus of Qur'ānic studies in Turkey. She also deals with a book written by Cemâlnur Sargut in the context of Sufi interpretation. She enters the "monopoly on paradise" debate, started by Süleyman Ateş, in an irrelevant context, but seems unaware of the depth of this debate between Süleyman Ateş and his opponents. This is evident because, instead of evaluating what Talat Koçyiğit (d. 2011) and others wrote in response to Ateş, she considers the position of Muḥammad Ali al-Ṣābūnī—who has no place in the discussion—as the opposite of Ateş's position. The author enters such a discussion within the framework of the semantic analysis of the word "al-Islam" in the Qur'ān, and I think her assessments here are superficial. According to the author, the word "al-Islam" must include Jews and Christians because this word had not yet acquired its current meaning at the time when this verse was revealed. However, she does not include the Qur'an's clear differentiation between Muslims, Jews, and Christians in her analysis. In the same vein, she argues that the rejection of abrogation among the verses of Qur'ān is a completely modern idea; in a footnote at the end of the chapter, she even states that the exceptional view attributed to Abū Muslim (d. 322/934) from the Mu'tazila was not remarkably effective in the classical period. Certainly, the author does not seem to have performed any fundamental analysis of the concept of abrogation and its historical development. However, several scholars rejected abrogation in the classical period, and their views were influential to a certain extent. In this context, it can be suggested that the author should at least examine al-Ṣafadī's (d. 696/1296) tafsir called *Kashf al-asrār wa hatk al-astār*.

Secondly, the author sometimes sets up very sharp contrasts and associates certain ideas with marginal groups. For example, she attributes the classical idea that the vocabulary of the Qur'ān should be explained using hadiths and that its propositions always contain valid provisions for all times only to Salafis. In addition, she assigns the idea of making a diachronic analysis of Qur'ānic vocabulary with tools such as *semantic* and *conceptual history* only to modernist and postmodernist thinkers. Making a diachronic analysis of Qur'ānic vocabulary can be considered one of the most important virtues of classical tafsir. Furthermore, upon careful consideration, it can be said that there is no complete opposition between these two approaches. The author tends to categorize different interpretations of the Qur'ān within the framework of certain methods, characterizing some of them under the labels of Salafi, some of them under modernist, and some of them under other labels. As Gadamer masterfully shows in many parts of his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, the activity of understanding and interpretation is too complex and deep to be reduced to methodological principles. Perhaps, for this reason, each interpretive activity should be studied in its uniqueness and without being placed in some standard and generalized category. A modernist does not always maintain a modernist stance, just as a Salafi commentator does not consistently act on the basic premises of Salafism in every claim or interpretation. This shortcoming becomes evident in the author's evaluation of al-Jābirī's approach. The author evaluates the work of Al-Jābirī only with regards to his views and practices on the relationship between tafsīr and sīrah, which explains only half of the whole. The other relevant half here is al-Jābirī's structuralist approach, and it would be incorrect to consider only one of these two aspects when evaluating his work.

Finally, the author claims to perform a Foucaultian "history of the present" and tries to identify the genealogy of the problems expressed in current terms. According to Foucault, we can understand disciplines, concepts, and theories produced in the past only from our present situation. Therefore, Foucault does not suggest anything new but instead emphasizes the need to be aware of the context and positioning of our work. However, I am skeptical about the extent to which Pink's work relates to Foucault's concept and strategy. Foucault's genealogical analysis is a future-oriented analysis of the past, even though it seems to deal with the concepts and theories of the past. The main goal of this strategy is to question the unexamined. In other words, this strategy aims to reveal elements that are left obscure or devalued in the narrative of history and to make the hidden visible. In this respect, it is not descriptive but deconstructive. This strategy—just like other strategies of deconstruction—is based on the idea that every act of speaking or writing

reveals something while hiding something, and that the hidden part is much more important. Therefore, in such strategies, the interpreter (historian, literary critic, etc.) does not accept the text as true and does not describe it, but on the contrary, thinks about the text's content as a diversion and tries to understand what the text leaves unsaid. The author of *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation* does not follow this deconstruction strategy, but instead (taking a proper stance) deals with interpretations of the Qurʾān from a specific period, categorizes them roughly, and provides analysis—some of which are quite profound, but others quite trite. On the other hand, the fact that the author is not obsessed with searching for the "origins" of every contemporary interpretation may bring her work closer to a genealogical analysis. Maybe that is exactly what she meant to achieve, but it still seems unwarranted to place this book under the "history of the present" label.

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