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# TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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## TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'ĀN AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF DAILY LIFE

“The great translations of the Qur’ān” [1] of the mid-20th century (A. Arberry, R. Blachère, R. Paret, I. Iu. Krachkovskii) came as the result of the completion of a most significant stage in the text research that is, first and foremost, linked to the names of T. Nöldeke, G. Bergsträsser, O. Pretzel, A. Jeffrey. These translations are very close in kind and have been evoking similar comments until now (“solidity”, “thoroughness” “literalism” and so on). The results obtained by the outstanding researchers turned out to be close to each other due to the common scholarly and methodological approaches as well as the common historiographic base. Really interesting translation by Richard Bell based on different approaches remained unfinished, mainly due to the author's attempt to go beyond the then dominant academic tradition. During the years when the translation was in the works, there was obviously a lack of materials for a new leap in the Qur’anic studies [2].

The second half of the 20th century saw the arrival of several new, often opposing, theories of the Qur’ān's emergence (G. Wansbrough, G. Barton) [3] accompanied with continued collective study of the sources available. Materials accumulated by the end of the 20th century in Europe and the Muslim East are many times larger than everything available in the middle of the past century. In the meantime, a leap for a new quality of understanding the key issues in the Qur’anic text and its language has not been made. As of today, this is what is reflected in the major collective works published both in the West (“Encyclopaedia of Qur’ān” [4]) and in the East (encyclopaedias of Qur’anic readings published in Kuwait and Cairo). A. Rippin is working today on an introduction to a scientific study of the Qur’ān. The aim of the work is to establish a new starting point for further Qur’anic research as was done by T. Nöldeke in 1860 when he published his famous “Geschichte des Qorans”.

The analysis of the major academic trends allows to suggest that a new level in the understanding of the most pressing issues in the Qur’anic studies will presumably be achieved during the upcoming twenty to thirty years

and will come upon the completion of a number of projects aimed at studying and publishing the most ancient Qur’anic manuscripts similar to the project started but left unfinished by Sergio Noja Noseda [5], as well as upon the completion of a number of studies on Ancient Arabian dialects and comparative textual analysis of the Qur’anic terminology and pre-Islamic poetry. By the middle of this century a new series of the “great translations” should be expected. It has become evident that these translations will be a result of joint effort of researchers from different countries. Apparently, texts in different languages will be rooted in the corpus of studies, common to a significant degree, and in the national translation traditions. Prior to the series of translations, a joint multilingual digital Qur’anic studies library will be created.

This, however, does not mean to suggest that today we should simply wait to see the results of enormous work of an international academic group and refuse from attempting at new translations of the Qur’ān. Every new generation certainly deserves new translations of the Holy Book since every generation will “read their own meaning into it”.

The situation has radically changed with the publishing of documented dictionaries of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry [6]. In Jerusalem, work that has been under way for several decades is essentially completed to create a “Concordance of Ancient Arabic Poetry” [7]. This is a detailed index and a dictionary of Arabic poetry from pre-Islamic time to the end of the Umayyades period at around 750 AD. The concordance contains hundreds of thousands of *bayts* systematically collected from the surviving literary works. It also covers quotations from the comments to the Qur’ān and genealogical works. New specific works on the Qur’anic language have been published [8]. Finally, a multitude of specialized dictionaries and rare reference works are now digitally available, often online [9]. All of the above has greatly influenced the capabilities to effect a Qur’anic translation at a totally new level.