Qurʾan Revelation and Ḥadīth Credibility

Despite all the questions about the revelation and inspiration of the Qurʾan, “the permanent and perplexing binomial of Muslim philosophy, of the pure intellect—that answers to the immanent Qurʾan and of the divine intellect, that answers to the Logos” rests on the “Uncreated Qurʾan, from which derives, by revelation, the earthly Qurʾan”.1

Thus, the contrary assumption that is possible to construct the Qurʾan is at odds with the eternal credit of its uncreated matrix and with its revelation learnt by heart,2 as plainly stated by its own definition as a glorious recitation inscribed in a Preserved Tablet (Q 85:21-2), an archetypically celestial matrix—the Mother of the Book (Q 13:39)—that was written in Heaven by the Angels (Q 68:1-4).3

According to Hans Küng, however, “Muslims of the twenty-first century need not maintain the uncreatedness and therefore the perfection, infallibility and immutability of the seventy-eight thousand words of the Qurʾan (and, indirectly, the words of the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Shariah)”.4

The number of Muslims and non-Muslim specialists in Muslim studies that can agree with Küng may not be negligible, but if it is consensual that Ḥadīth can and should be disputed in terms of credibility, the matter of Qurʾan is altogether different. The dividing lines between the revelation—historically unveiled and narrated through the Qurʾan—and “what is regarded as Islamic law nowadays” result from the hybridization of references, building on centuries of juristic opinions.5

Ḥadīth can be emphasized to serve an anti-traditional orientation, a manifest peril since the outset of Islam, being the fabrication of reports to support this or that ruler or political leadership an age-old practice:

“Ḥadīth reports (‘Tradition’) form only a part of the actual Islamic tradition; that a stress on such reports may or may not indicate what is ordinarily called traditionalism in a man; that, in fact, a strict ḥadīth-mindedness, now as ever, may well imply an anti-traditional orientation in several respects.”6

To take into account what we are debating, is of the essence. Each ḥadīth must be tested for credibility, i.e., for the strength of its connectivity in relation to Qurʾanic and Prophetic standards. Striving to religiously7 assess earthen architecture in Islamic terms, with an approach based on actor-network theory, one must test its eventual direct connection to Qurʾanic and Prophetic standards, while following its actors and tracing them back, tracking down its trajectories.8

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1 Gomes, História da Filosofia Portuguesa, 17.
2 Wadud, Conspiracies against the Qurʾan, 98; Guellouz, O Alcorão, 102.
3 Lings, Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources, 45.
5 Sardar, Reading the Qurʾan, 287.
6 Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, 65.
7 Heeding Latour’s advice, one must strive “to treat it [religion] on its own ground, so as not to speak ‘of’ religion but instead to speak ‘in’ a religious tone, or, using the adverbial form, religiously”. Latour, “Will Non-Humans Be Saved?” 461.
8 Considered “the Qurʾanic term most often used in connection with theft and murder”—qisas—and quoting with
Our goal is to contribute to an understanding of “the role of the modifier ‘Islamic’ in framing the term ‘Islamic architecture’ at present,” recollecting an earthen frame of reference and checking its status vis-à-vis Al-Shāfīʿī’s categorization of human actions (wājib, obligatory; mandūb, recommended but not obligatory; mubāḥ, indifferent but not obligatory; maksūr, disapproved but not forbidden; and ḥarām, prohibited) and, in the process, mobilizing some of its non-human actors. This will be attempted by opening some black boxes indexed to clay, namely regarding the Prophet’s Mosque, whose actants would be tested in terms of their connectedness to the clay of Adam’s creation in order to attain some effective religiously savvy concreteness:

“Concreteness does not come from choosing figuration over some other ones in the place of the actors, but from the increase, in the accounts, of the relative share of mediators over intermediaries.”

Islamic Architecture: The Raw and the Cooked

Although the exceptional quality of the land is directly indexed to the Creator in the Islamic tradition—one of the five human rights prescribed by Islam, as quoted by S.M. Ghazanfar, is the “right of ownership through labour”—the recollection of man’s usufructuary condition differs among the believers; if not in frequency, then certainly in quality.

Considering that “even if actants are separate from each other, it must be possible to link them through their qualities,” our task will consist of “drawing attention away from the irrelevant difference between what is constructed and what is not constructed, toward the crucial difference between what is well or badly constructed, well or badly composed”.

Vying to religiously assess earthen architecture, one attempts some “dislocation in the distribution of the sensible” by drawing attention to the connection between Adam’s clay, and the clay of the bricks of the Prophet’s Mosque.

Religious Clay

There are three different Arabic words for clay—ṭīn, ṣalṣāl and sijjīl—as manifested in the context of the Qur’an.

Al-ṭīn is the material used to bake the bricks mentioned in Q 28:38, wherein it is stated that the Pharaoh ordered Haman to kindle a fire to bake bricks out of clay, then build a tall building so that...