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Karim Samji's *The Qur'ān. A Form-Critical History* is a timely study devoted to genre criticism in the Qur'ān. Samji applies form criticism to the Qur'ānic corpus and systematically identifies Qur'ānic genres by a careful classification that includes prayer, liturgy, wisdom, narrative, and proclamation. While John Wansbrough in his seminal work *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (1977) and Angelika Neuwirth in several

studies¹ dealt with issues of form and literary criticism, a more comprehensive study of genre criticism was yet to be published. Samji's monograph stands as an essential reading for specialists and generalists keen on understanding a form-critical history of the Qur'ān.

Methodologically, the author employs an approach corroborated by scholars of Biblical Studies, e. g., Hermann Gunkel and his students. Despite extensive research on a wide range of Qur'ānic genres and an increasing number of studies on this subject, the work overlooks important references including Hans Zirker's "Gleichnis"² and Michael Zwettler's "A Mantic Manifesto."³ When exploring the synchronic sequencing of genres, Samji is careful to note the diachronic dimension, as "genre history determines the relative diachronic growth of this historical *materia prima*" (p. 24–25). Given that outer literary form corresponds to the life setting of the text, Samji aims at discovering "objective linguistic criteria with which to discern the literary seams of the *corpus coranicum*, without recourse of exegetical and eisegetical *minutiae*" (p. 8). Still, the author does not take one step further by not putting his findings against the background of the Nöldekean chronology to see whether these objective criteria confirm or contradict the latter. Only the concluding chapter—Chapter Seven (pp. 270–280)—picks up the thread of genre history. Yet it merely synthesizes different opinions about the relative chronology of the Qur'ān to then state that the synchronic taxonomy can be interpreted diachronically, a process to which genre history is key.

The study is split into seven chapters: Chapter One (pp. 1–35) comprehensively introduces methodology and current state of research, whereas the main part of the study investigates the genres in the Qur'ān. While classifying the genres, a considerable part of the study consists of Arabic and English quotations of the Book. Although they

serve as evidence for a particular Qur'ānic genre, in terms of readability, it sometimes makes the flow of the text dull, as one sentence of analysis follows several Qur'ānic verses and is continued by another Qur'ānic passage. Thereby, some pages predominantly cite Qur'ānic verses.

Chapter Two (pp. 36–83) begins by exploring the prayer genre. Samji identifies an extensive number of prayer speech-forms in the Qur'ān. He especially focuses on prayers that mention the prayer formulae: *rabbanā* (Our Lord), *rabbi* (My Lord), and *allāhumma* (O God). Analyzing their occurrences, Samji classifies and contextualizes them as private prayer, domestic prayer of equally private and public nature, and corporate prayer, i. e., the collective prayer. Moreover, the author describes the Qur'ānic prayer as conversational, petitionary, penitential, complaint-like, imprecatory, commendable, and rhetorical in its form. Whereas petitionary prayer is depicted as brief and urgent as exemplified in Q 26:117–118, penitential prayers include optional address, confession, petition, and acknowledgement or renunciation, as in Q 7:22–24. Imprecatory prayers, in turn, relate to curses against adversaries as in Q 10:88, complaint-like prayers convey lamentations in e. g. Q 19:4–6. This thorough classification makes me wonder whether one can extract more information about the life setting of these different prayer formulae—*rabbanā*, *rabbi*, and *allāhumma*—that are an inherent part of the entire Qur'ān and interpret it diachronically.

Chapter Three (pp. 84–129) delves into the liturgy genre by addressing hymn and litany. It first identifies liturgical formulae: *rabbanā*, *Allāh*, *huwa* (He), and *subhāna* (praise be to...). Samji also investigates the imperative formula—*iqra'*—in terms of liturgical setting. He then classifies the forms according to motifs such as hymns to God, creation, the Creator of humanity, the Creator of the world, the God of salvation history, the God of salvation, and to victory. He proceeds to offer two classifications of litany: litany of praise and litany of lament while convincingly drawing a fine line between the hymn to the God of salvation history and the hymn to the God of salvation. Here, while the hymn to the God of salvation history assimilates prophetic motifs and thereby demonstrates the majesty of God, the hymn to the God of salvation is featured as praise and petition, composed of liturgical summons.

Chapter Four (pp. 130–174) turns to the wisdom genre and analyzes Qur'ānic sapiential speech-forms. Samji highlights wisdom formulae, e. g., *yā ayyuhā n-nās* (say: O people), *yā ayyuhā n-nabī qul li-* (O Prophet! Say to...), *yā bunayya* (O my son), *mā adrāka mā* (what can give you an idea of what), *yas'alūnaka* (they ask you). Mapping wisdom forms, he correctly argues that the Qur'ān includes a wide range of forms, such as admonition, exhortation promot-

1 Neuwirth, Angelika. „Einige Bemerkungen zum besonderen sprachlichen und literarischen Charakter des Koran.“ In *Deutscher Orientalistentag*, vol. 1, edited by Wolfgang Voigt, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977, 736–39; Neuwirth, Angelika. „Structural, Linguistic, and Literary Features.“ In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 97–113; Neuwirth, Angelika. *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 2nd ed., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007 [1981].

2 Hans Zirker. „‘Gleichnis’, ‘Vergleich’ und ‘Beispiel’ im Koran.“ 2008. Accessed on https://duepublico2.uni-due.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/duepublico_derivate_00016236/kor_gleichn_vergl_beisp.pdf.

3 Michael Zwettler. "A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of 'the Poets' and the Qurānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority." In: *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, edited by in James L. Kugel (ed.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, 75–119.

ing piety, oracle, lecture, lesson, and sermon. Though Samji recognizes that wisdom may overlap with narrative, he distinguishes wisdom genre from narrative genre and addresses them in two separate chapters.

Chapter Five (pp. 175–226) considers narrative genre and, accordingly, narrative material of the Qurʾān. Samji identifies e. g., *yasʾalūnaka*, *wa-ḍrib lahum mathal* (and coin for them a similitude), *mathalu lladhīna* (the paradigm of those who...), *idh* (when), *wa-dhkur* (and remember) as narrative formulae. Exploring narrative formulae and narrative material in the Qurʾān, Samji classifies narrative forms as anecdote, similitude, parable, paradigm, example story, legend, saga, episode, historical story, example story, controversy story, summary report, and report.

Chapter Six (pp. 227–269) investigates the proclamation genre that refers to the messenger situation. It includes regulatory prophetic speech-forms as well as vocative formulae. Samji introduces *yā ayyuhā lladhīna āmanū* (O you who believe), *qul yā ayyuhā n-nās* (say: O people), *yā ayyuhā l-muddaththir* (you who are wrapped up in a cloak), *yā ayyuhā r-rasūl* (O messenger) as pertinent formulae to the proclamation genre. He proceeds to explain that as the form of this genre is predominantly regulatory, prescriptive proclamations in the public sphere enable us to better understand the emergence of community. In the process, Samji analyzes salient examples of rules of inclusion, exclusion, authority, purity, ritual, order, propriety, property, matrimony, punishment, and war.

Although the author explores crucial genres, he overlooks those related to greetings and oracular oaths that also deserve focus in a book on a form-critical history of the Qurʾān. Clearly, while Samji considerably contributes to the mapping of Qurʾānic genres, urgent and important questions remain for future studies. Among them: What would the reconstruction of all occurrences of all Qurʾānic genres look like? Can one gain more information by connecting the employment of the Qurʾānic genres with “the situation in life” (*Sitz im Leben*)? In other words, what can the genre criticism tell us about the soundness of the Nöldekean chronology or the general framework of the *sīra*? For instance, if the rules of war in the proclamation genre are exclusively mentioned in the verses that are considered to be Medinan, could one safely conclude that the Prophet Muḥammad and his community were involved in some kind of confrontation at that time? Can this objective evidence—the rules of war—prove the Medinan providence of these verses as well as the framework of the biography of the Prophet as plausible? On the contrary, if the rules of matrimony solely occur in the Medinan verses, does that mean that the new community

had emerged, and the Prophet, finally, had legislative power?

Future studies will certainly benefit from and build on this work by elaborating on the genres and outer literary form alongside further attempts at diachronic reading of the Qurʾān. Scholars of Qurʾānic Studies but also anyone interested in the Qurʾān ought to warmly welcome this study as another important stepping-stone to our systematic efforts to better comprehend and appreciate Islam’s central religious text.