

# Kongress 2014

## Horizonte der Islamischen Theologie

### Abstract – Sektion 5, Panel 1/3

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**Thema**        *Qur'anic Terminology in the context of Aramaic Biblical Texts*

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The Qur'anic revelation considers itself to be a confirmation of God's earlier messages to mankind. Accordingly, we find that the Qur'an deliberately picks up, alters and modifies theological traditions, that were existent and cultivated in pre-Islamic Arabia and its multicultural surroundings towards the end of the 6th century AD. This aspect cannot surprise, if we take into account that Muḥammad's first or primary audience was mainly comprised by pagan Arabs, as well as Jews and Christians, who lived among them or maintained trade relations with them. It might be referred to, of course, that the Qur'anic soteriology claims to be of universal and timeless quality, reaching far beyond the concepts of Christianity, Judaism and Arabian paganism. Nevertheless, it seems at least doubtful, whether it would have made much sense for the Qur'anic revelation to deal with topics, problems or stories (e.g. about saints, prophets or heroes), that neither were part of the religious environment of Muḥammad's contemporaries nor shared their cultural memory.

However, the Qur'anic ability to align with earlier theological traditions is not merely represented by its continuation or modification of the Biblical salvation history, but also by means of language and diction. Religion and language are often interdependently combined and together make up a cultural dictionary, where many words or phrases are each identified or associated with certain ideas, concepts or meanings. Similarly, the Qur'an uses a theological vocabulary, that shows a long tradition and manifold usage in the holy texts of other Semitic people or religious communities. Thus, the verses of the Qur'an deliberately seem to evoke images or associations, that their Arab listeners were familiar with, because they belonged to their cultural code. One might argue, that the rapid spread of Islam after the prophet's

demise can also be understood – without ignoring other crucial factors, of course – in the context of the revelation's “linguistic proximity” to the scriptures of other Abrahamic religions.

I shall examine this aspect a little closer in the course of my presentation. In order to achieve that, Aramaic seems to be a proper tool for comparison, not only because of its lexical similarity to Qur'anic Arabic, but also due to its widespread usage – both as a vernacular as well as a liturgical/scholarly language – in those days. On the eve of Muḥammad's appearance, dialects of Aramaic can be considered the very literary medium in Syria and Iraq, which served Jews, Christians and Mandaeans likewise as a means of theological expression. However, as Aramaic literature is broad and manifold, I will limit my comparative analysis to three exemplified texts: the Biblical Book of Daniel (2:4b–7:28), the Syriac translation of the Gospel of Matthew and Onkelos' targum of the Genesis (i.e., the 1st Book of Moses). Thereby I shall mainly focus on the examination of words and terms, dealing with belief and unbelief, religious observance and the attributes of God. As will be shown, both terminological continuities as well as interesting reinterpretations of central theological concepts can be found.