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Theological Presuppositions in the Historical Study of God's Word: Examining Angelika Neuwirth's Extra-Historical Premises in Her Historical Approach to the Qur'ān as Explained in the Book "The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity"

Mostaan Sabet[1] | Seyed Mohammad Ali Dibaji[2*]

1. Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Faculty of theology, College of Farabi, University of Tehran, Qom, Iran. Email: mostaan.sabet@gmail.com
2. Corresponding Author, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of theology, College of Farabi, University of Tehran, Qom, Iran. Email: dibaji@ut.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Angelika Neuwirth is one of the most prominent contemporary scholars of Qur'ānic studies. In response to traditional orientalist biases, she proposes a new historical approach to understanding the Qur'ān based on the historical-critical method used in Biblical studies. In the first chapter of her book *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*—which serves as an introduction to her multi-volume exegesis—she outlines her method, emphasizing the gradual development of the Qur'ān within an interactive context between the proclaimer and her audience, with the audience playing a formative role in shaping the text. In the second chapter, she discusses the nature of the Qur'ān, venturing beyond the scope of literary or historical inquiry into theological territory. This descriptive-analytical article first identifies the non-historical presuppositions in Neuwirth's approach and then critiques them. Contrary to her claim of offering a purely historical reading, Neuwirth imports theological assumptions into her work. These include the ideas that the Qur'ān is a product of the Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him and His Progeny) interaction with his community, that its verses are adapted from Biblical texts, that revelation is merely a mystical experience, and that some verses do not convey objective truths.

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1. Introduction

Amongst western Islamic scholars, the Qur'ān, at least from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, has predominantly been studied in a phenomenological framework (Mujiburrahman, 2001, p.425). This approach, apart from the fact that it does not, by itself, provide a complete understanding of the Qur'ān, sometimes implicitly relies on ontological presuppositions and premises. This article attempts to examine such premises in Angelika Neuwirth's Qur'ānic study, seeking to draw researchers' attention to misconceptions in the perception of the Qur'ān. These are errors that lead to ontological conclusions about the nature of the Qur'ān based on phenomenological studies.

Angelika Neuwirth, professor emerita of the Free University of Berlin, is one of the important Qur'ān researchers in the West. In her numerous publications, particularly in the book *Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, published in 2010 in Germany and in 2019 in English, Neuwirth explains her theories, which she claims are based on a type of historical perspective at the Qur'ān.

Neuwirth believes that most Western studies rely on the presupposition that the Qur'ān is a replication of the holy Books of Jews and Christians. However, in her opinion, in view of the Qur'ān's proclamation over a period of 22 to 23 years and considering the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) was in constant interaction with nonconformists—who were mainly followers of Judaism and Christianity—we must study the Qur'ān as part of the intellectual and ideological dialogue of late antiquity. In the introduction of her book, *The Qur'ān and the Late Antiquity*, she explains her approach, describing, vaguely and using obscure language, some of her presuppositions. However, we shall see that she herself is not immune from presuppositions that go beyond the realm of a historical study.

2. Neuwirth's Belief That the Qur'ān Is a Product of the Prophet's Interaction with His Audience

From Neuwirth's perspective, the works of earlier orientalists—who typically viewed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the author of the Qur'ān and sought to demonstrate how he borrowed content from the Bible to present to his followers—lack scholarly credibility. In her view, the Qur'ān's formation must be understood within the context of a dynamic interaction between the Prophet (PBUH) and his audience, comprising both Arabs and the "People of the Book." Although she had previously introduced this view in an article in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Neuwirth, 2002), she expands upon it in her book, *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*.

Neuwirth argues that the methodological biases of some historians rest on two flawed historical assumptions: first, the region of Hejaz was culturally barren; and second, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was illiterate (Neuwirth, 2019). In her opinion, ignoring the cultural and literary history of pre-Islamic Hejaz is a serious oversight. Today, there is ample evidence attesting to the existence of a vibrant, cultural and literary environment in the region prior to Islam. Accordingly, Neuwirth resists interpretations that treat the Qur'ān as either a fragmented compilation—implying multiple authors—or as a unified, divinely authored text, as is maintained in mainstream Islamic belief. She regards both views as retrospective projections that hinder objective analysis. Instead, she attempts to interpret the Qur'ān through the lens of its interactional context between the Prophet (PBUH) and his contemporaries.

In this regard, Neuwirth's approach aligns with that of certain modern Arab scholars who initiated the literary interpretation movement. This school of thought, which heavily emphasizes the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), is viewed by Neuwirth as a promising foundation. However, unlike Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Neuwirth does not seek to derive legal rulings for contemporary application from the Qur'ān. She does, nevertheless, advocate for expanding the literary interpretive framework to include Damascene, Greek, and Hebrew literary traditions, arguing that many members of the Prophet's audience belonged to or were influenced by these cultures.

Regarding the Qur'ān's intertextuality—those elements with reference to Biblical and post-Biblical narratives—Neuwirth offers a distinctive perspective. She argues that such intertexts are useful only when examined within the Qur'ān's unique dialectical framework; specifically, they should be considered in relation to how the Qur'ān reuses and recontextualizes earlier texts in response to its audience and societal context (Neuwirth, 2019, p. 40). According to this view, the intertextual elements of the Qur'ān represent reworked Biblical and post-Biblical narratives that are repurposed to serve new functions within a new sociocultural milieu.

Accordingly, it becomes clear that Neuwirth seeks to differentiate her stance from the simplistic theory that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) merely appropriated Judeo-Christian material for public recitation. She also rejects the idea that he was the sole agent in the Qur'ān's emergence. Instead, by taking into account the concerns and inquiries of his audience, Neuwirth endeavors to understand how earlier religious stories were rewritten, revised, or replaced within the Qur'ānic discourse. In her framework, the Qur'ān is viewed as the outcome of a dynamic exchange between the Prophet (PBUH) and the Arabian society of his time—an exchange that, while rooted in earlier traditions, produced a distinct and contextually responsive text.

2-1. A Critique of the View That "The Qur'ān Is the Product of the Prophet (PBUH)'S Interaction With His Audience"

Despite Neuwirth's assertion that her approach is confined to a textual and literary critique of the Qur'ān, she transcends literary analysis and offers a perspective on the nature of the Qur'ān itself. According to Neuwirth, the Qur'ān is a product shaped by the specific time, place, and culture in which it emerged. Furthermore, while she critiques earlier scholars who contended that the Prophet (PBUH) merely repeated Biblical stories, she adopts a similar perspective, suggesting that it is essential to examine how the Prophet (PBUH) adapted and reproduced Biblical and post-Biblical narratives.

Throughout her work, Neuwirth refrains from recognizing the Prophet (PBUH) as a divinely appointed messenger. She treats the Qur'ān as a text that was proclaimed, rather than revealed, since she does not accept the divine nature of the Prophet's prophethood. In her view, the Prophet (PBUH) is depicted not as a recipient of divine revelation but as an individual who modified the religious practices of idolaters, Christians, and Jews, with the Qur'ān's prophetic claims serving primarily as a rhetorical device to challenge his adversaries. In this way, Neuwirth essentially denies the divine status of the Prophet (PBUH).

Regarding the claim that the Qur'ān is the result of a dialogue between the Prophet and his audience, it is important to note that the mere presence of dialogue-like structures—such as verses that suggest queries and responses—does not substantiate the assertion that the Qur'ān is primarily an account of such interactions. Neuwirth's claim is underpinned by profound ontological and theological presuppositions. She assumes, without providing adequate justification, that the Prophet (PBUH) was not a divinely appointed messenger, that no words were revealed to him, and that his mission was merely to establish a religion for the Arabs, grounded in Biblical and post-Biblical traditions, with unclear objectives. At the very least, Neuwirth's preference for these interpretations of history over the view of the Prophet as a divinely sent messenger raises significant questions regarding the scholarly basis for her conclusions.

Moreover, it appears that Neuwirth limits the dialogue between the Prophet and his audience exclusively to the Qur'ān itself, overlooking broader historical contexts, the life of the Prophet, and his documented sayings. Thus, the assertion that the Qur'ān is a mere reflection of such dialogues is not only unreasonable but also neglects substantial evidence to the contrary. From an Islamic theological perspective, the Qur'ān is not merely an account of human dialogues; rather it is considered the direct revelation of God. The dialogical and responsive structures within certain verses do not, therefore, detract from the divine nature of the Qur'ān's words and meanings.

Neuwirth also commends the literary interpretive approach to the Qur'ān and the study of the historical contexts of specific verses (e.g., Abū Zayd, 2004, 2010), as these approaches seek to understand the Qur'ān within its historical milieu rather than as a prewritten or divinely dictated text. However, her disregard for the history of Islam and the life of the Prophet leads her to overlook certain limitations within the literary interpretive movement as well. The examples Neuwirth cites to support her claim that the Qur'ān is an account of the dialogue between the Prophet and his audience indicate a tendency to introduce multiple assumptions into her framework. These assumptions include the view that the Prophet (PBUH) was not a divinely appointed messenger, that the Qur'ān is derivative of Biblical and post-Biblical narratives, and that it is primarily a product of the interaction between the Prophet and his contemporaries.

3. The Essence of the Qur'ān and Revelation in Neuwirth's View

Despite the fact that Neuwirth identifies herself primarily as a scholar of literary studies—an aspect she emphasizes in several of her public addresses (Neuwirth, 2009)—she nonetheless ventures into the realm of theological discourse, offering her views on the nature of the Qur'ān. However, her perspective on this matter, which appears in various forms throughout her work, is never explicitly stated. In Chapter 2 of *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, she begins by analyzing the terms "revelation" and "sending down" according to her own particular methodology. Subsequently, by framing the Prophet's night vigils as the context for divine revelation, she appears to recognize forms of revelation that are non-verbal and inspirational in nature.

Neuwirth starts by investigating the terms "sending down" and "revelation," asserting that the concept of revelation is fundamentally a Jewish-Christian idea and, as such, should not be applied to the Qur'ānic revelation. In adopting this position, Neuwirth, along with many of her Western colleagues, overlooks the distinctive nature and significance of Islamic revelation, failing to acknowledge its profound impact on the intellectual developments of late antiquity. This impact, which Neuwirth herself acknowledges, greatly influenced Western intellectual traditions. By relying on the notion of self-referentiality in the Qur'ān, Neuwirth attempts to gain a more accurate understanding of the text (Madigan, 2001; Wild, 2006). However, she maintains that this understanding can only be achieved if the Qur'ānic terms related to revelation are interpreted within their historical context and in relation to other religious texts of the same period (Neuwirth, 2019).

This approach reveals a clear bias on Neuwirth's part, as it becomes evident that, in her framework, the ultimate standard or measure for the Divine Word is, in essence, the Biblical and post-Biblical traditions. Such a stance suggests a predisposition to interpret the Qur'ān through a comparative lens, which raises significant questions regarding her objectivity and the underlying assumptions guiding her analysis.

3-1. The Meaning of "Sending Down" (*Tanzīl*) in Neuwirth's View

In her analysis of the term "sending down" in the Qur'ān, Neuwirth asserts that this concept was not present in the Qur'ān from the beginning of its revelation. Instead, it emerges in the early Meccan surahs of *Qadr*, *Haqqah*, and *Waqi'ah*. She further explains that this term evolves over time, with its initial usage in these surahs reflecting the early stages of revelation. Neuwirth then references verses 221 and 222 from *Sura Shu'ara*, which she places in the middle Meccan period, where she interprets "sending down" as the descent of devils and the emergence of words attributed to poets and rabbis. As the verse states:

> "Should I inform you on whom the devils descend? They descend on every sinful liar." (Qur'ān 26:221-2, [Qaraʿī, trans., 2003])

In a somewhat unexpected shift back to the early Meccan period, specifically in verses 41 to 43 of *Sura Haqqah*, Neuwirth contends that the Qur'ān seeks to redefine "sending down" as the transmission of texts from a prewritten divine source. The relevant verses state:

> "And it is not the speech of a poet. Little is the faith that you have! Nor is it the speech of a soothsayer. Little is the admonition that you take! Gradually sent down from the Lord of all the worlds." (Qur'ān 69:41-43)

Neuwirth proceeds by analyzing the first verse of *Sura Qadr*. Here, she argues that the phrase "we sent it down" should be understood as a personification of God's Word, which has been transmitted in the form of sounds. However, Neuwirth suggests that this notion of "sending down" in the Qur'ān reflects a concept borrowed from Christianity, particularly the Nicene Creed's belief in the descent of Christ from Heaven. She warns, though, that extending this viewpoint too far may lead to errors, such as the mistaken association of the belief in God's incarnation in the Qur'ān with the Christian doctrine of reincarnation. In support of this claim, Neuwirth references Wolfson's theory that the concept of *Inlibration* in Islam (the belief in God's embodiment in the Qur'ān) is derived from the Christian notion of incarnation (Wolfson 1976).

3-2. The Meaning of "Revelation" (*Waḥy*) in Neuwirth's View

In her exploration of the concept of "revelation," Neuwirth references verses 4 to 12 of *Sura Najm*, which she considers to be one of two examples of such revelation in the early Meccan surahs. In her interpretation, these verses describe a vision, and the term "revelation" is employed to designate the vision's message, with its truth and authenticity reinforced by its association with divine proximity:

> "It is just a revelation that is revealed [to him], taught him by one of great powers, possessed of sound judgment. He settled, while he was on the highest horizon. Then he drew nearer and nearer until he was within two bows' length or even nearer, whereat He revealed to His servant whatever He revealed. The heart did not deny what it saw. Will you then dispute with him about what he saw?!" (Qur'ān 53:4-12)

In Neuwirth's analysis, she interprets these verses as an account of a vision, wherein the term "revelation" is used to describe a divine communication. She contends that the vision's truth and originality are bolstered by its depiction of a divine relationship. While such an interpretation may be plausible as a literary technique, Neuwirth's analysis seems influenced by certain presuppositions that color her reading. Immediately following her citation of these verses, Neuwirth draws parallels between these Qur'ānic verses and verses 1 to 11 from Chapter 6 of the Book of Isaiah. In this Biblical passage, Isaiah recounts his own visionary experience of revelation. He describes seeing God seated upon a throne, His cloak filling the temple, surrounded by angels who sing praises to God. In response to God's call, Isaiah volunteers to deliver God's message (English Standard Version Bible 2001, Isa. 6:1-11).

Neuwirth's comparison between the two visions is framed within her view that the Qur'ānic depiction of revelation is not meant to be an expression of divine communication per se; rather, it reflects a shift toward emphasizing the transcendence of the proclaimed verses. She draws connections between the two narratives in two specific instances: first, Neuwirth interprets the word "istawā" as a shorthand for "ʿalā l-ʿarshi stawā," drawing a parallel between Isaiah's revelation and the Qur'ānic verses. Second, both narratives involve proclamations: in Isaiah's account, the angels praise God, while in *Sura Najm*, inspiration is conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Despite these similarities, significant differences exist between the two texts. Notably, the Qur'ān avoids any anthropomorphic portrayal of God, which contrasts sharply with the physical imagery in Isaiah's vision. Neuwirth suggests that this difference aligns with the theological adjustments the Prophet (PBUH) sought to make regarding the nature of God.

Neuwirth continues by referencing the second vision in the Qur'ān, found in verses 19 to 23 of *Sura Takwīr*:

> "It is indeed the speech of a noble apostle, powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne, one who is obeyed and is trustworthy as well. Your companion is not crazy: certainly he saw him on the manifest horizon." (Qur'ān 81:19-23)

Here, unlike in her interpretation of *Sura Najm*, Neuwirth accepts the mediation of angels in this vision. However, she contends that the invocation of a meta-material entity (in this case, the angels) serves to substantiate the truth of the message, a device she compares to the praising of God in Isaiah's revelation.

Neuwirth then posits a third vision, found in verses 13 to 18 of *Sura Najm*:

> "Certainly he saw it yet another time, by the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, near which is the Garden of the Abode, when there covered the Lote Tree what covered it. His gaze did not swerve, nor did it overstep the bounds. Certainly, he saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord." (Qur'ān 53:13-18)

In this instance, Neuwirth argues that no message is transmitted to the Prophet in this vision. Rather, she suggests that God's presence is manifested through natural phenomena, drawing a parallel to the Biblical account of God's manifestation to Moses through the burning bush.

Neuwirth further elaborates on her view of the Qur'ānic revelations by stating:

> "All the three Qur'ānic vision reports are clearly not immediate imitations of reality, but rather are 'overdetermined,' charged with Biblical textual evocations." (Neuwirth, 2019, p. 70)

However, the English translation of this sentence from the German language is somewhat unclear. The original German reads:

> "Alle drei koranischen Visionsbericht sind offenbar nicht unmittelbare Abbildung von Realität, sondern überformt von biblischer Texterinnerung." (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 128)

A more accurate translation would be: "All three Qur'ānic accounts of revelation are not direct representations of reality, rather modified versions of Biblical textual memories."

This statement highlights Neuwirth's position that the Qur'ānic vision reports are not intended to reflect an objective external reality; rather, they represent reinterpreted versions of Biblical narratives adapted with theological modifications.

Neuwirth further contrasts the Qur'ānic depiction of "spoken word" in *Sura Takwīr*, where the angels' words are heard, with the non-verbal "revelation" in *Sura Najm*. She maintains that comprehensible utterances from the angels are contrasted with the non-verbal, direct inspirations from God. This distinction, according to Neuwirth, aligns with the theological goal of removing anthropomorphic depictions of God, which she sees as prevalent in Biblical and post-Biblical texts.

Neuwirth concludes by questioning the nature of revelation itself: "So, what is revelation?" She defines it as the transfer of meaning through signs, which she links to a form of ambiguous inspiration, similar to the kind described in the pre-Islamic poetry of the *jāhilīya*. She refers to Abu Zayd's theory of "non-verbal revelation," which posits that what is revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) is not in human language but in the form of inspiration, which the Prophet then verbalizes in Arabic (Abū Zayd, 1995, pp. 50-70; Abū Zayd, 2014, pp. 120-165; Zāhidī & Ibrahimi, 2004, pp. 146-147). Neuwirth appears to share this view, regarding revelation as a form of ambiguous inspiration that finds expression in the Prophet's words, although she does not elaborate on the specifics of this process.

Finally, Neuwirth asserts the belief among contemporary Muslims that the entirety of the Qur'ān, including its words, constitutes divine revelation emerged after the Prophet's death, as part of the process of consolidating and promoting the belief in the Qur'ān as the literal Word of God.

In summary, Neuwirth goes beyond the realms of literary and historical scholarship by offering a theological perspective on the nature of Qur'ānic revelation. Her interpretation, which presents revelation as a form of non-verbal inspiration, is rooted in selective readings of the Qur'ānic verses and is influenced by biased presuppositions. This view lacks sufficient supporting evidence and fails to take into account historical and interpretative sources that would provide a more balanced understanding of the nature of revelation in Islamic tradition.

3-3. The role of Night Vigils and Prayers in the Sending Down of Revelations From Neuwirth's Point of View

In Neuwirth's interpretation, the Qur'ān presents inspiration as the medium for transmitting divine messages in a limited number of cases, with the three previously discussed instances being central examples. However, she identifies another scenario in the Qur'ān where the process of receiving God's words is less dramatic and more introspective, involving self-edification and the repetition of existing texts. She characterizes this mode of revelation as a form of meticulous engagement with earlier scriptures, in which new meanings emerge through careful recitation and reflection. Neuwirth refers to this process in the context of verses 1 to 9 of *Sura Muzammil*:

> "O you wrapped up in your mantle! Stand vigil through the night, except for a little [of it], a half, or reduce a little from that or add to it, and recite the Qur'ān in a measured tone. Indeed, soon We shall cast on you a weighty discourse. Indeed, the watch of the night is firmer in tread and more upright in respect to speech, for indeed during the day you have drawn-out engagements. So celebrate the Name of your Lord and dedicate yourself to Him with total dedication. Lord of the east and the west, there is no god except Him; so take Him for your trustee." (Qur'ān 73:1–9)

In Neuwirth's view, the content and tone of these verses resemble passages from the Psalms, and she identifies several points of similarity between them. On this basis, she argues that the early Qur'ān constitutes, to a significant extent, a reworking of Psalmodic themes. Neuwirth posits that this resonance should be considered as contributing to what she calls a "Psalmsic Piety," arising in a cultural context where no Arabic translation of the Psalms existed (Neuwirth 2019).

Furthermore, Neuwirth contends that, during this formative period, the Qur'ān was less concerned with asserting a distinct textual identity. The term *Qur'ān*, she argues, originally referred more to the act of recitation rather than to a codified, written scripture. It was only in the course of the community's expansion that the Qur'ān began to assert its textual authority and define its nature explicitly, in part to distance itself from both pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and previously revealed scriptures (Neuwirth 2019).

However, it must be noted that Neuwirth offers these conclusions without providing sufficient textual or historical substantiation. Her argument rests primarily on thematic similarities between the Qur'ān and the Psalms and a lexical reading of the term *Qur'ān*, with little engagement with traditional Islamic exegesis or the broader semantic range of the Qur'ānic terminology. As such, her interpretation remains speculative and lacks the methodological robustness required to substantiate claims regarding the Qur'ān's textual origins or theological self-conception.

3-4. Critique and Examination of Neuwirth's Observations About the Essence of the Qur'ānic Revelation

Regarding the discussion presented in *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity* about the nature of the Qur'ān, several points should be addressed individually:

2. Neuwirth exercises selective freedom in translating and interpreting Qur'ānic verses. In other words, she tends to extract meanings that support her thesis, effectively practicing a kind of "confirmation bias." For instance, if the word *tanzīl* (sending down) appears in the Qur'ān with a variety of usages—such as the descent of angels (Qur'ān 97:4), the descent of devils (Qur'ān 26:221), the sending down of heavenly books (Qur'ān 3:93), the descent of verses and signs (Qur'ān 69:43), and the descent of rain (Qur'ān 29:63)—she highlights only the usages that align with her argument (in this case, emphasizing the descent of devils and linking them to the soothsayers).
3. Neuwirth shows a notable disregard for classical Islamic exegetical and historical sources. This neglect has not gone unnoticed by others. For example, the prominent Jewish scholar of Islam, Andrew Rippin, points this out in his review of the German edition of *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity* (Rippin 2011). As an example, in her interpretation of verses 13–18 of Sūrat al-Najm, Neuwirth refers to the *Lote Tree of the Boundary* (*sidrat al-muntahā*) as a purely material and natural phenomenon. This ignores both Sunni and Shiʿi exegetical traditions, which understand these verses as referring to the Prophet's *Miʿrāj* (Ascension). (See al-Suyūṭī 1984, vol. 6; al-Ṭabarānī 2008, vol. 6; Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1970, vol. 19; Ṭabrisī 1994, vol. 9). Neuwirth instead draws a parallel between this imagery and the biblical story of Moses at the burning bush (Neuwirth 2019). In these instances, she makes considerable efforts to provide historical context for Qur'ānic verses. However, by entirely disregarding the vast body of Muslim scholarship, she turns instead to Biblical sources to interpret the text. Her approach seeks to explain the Qur'ān through a historical lens while neglecting the relevant Islamic, Arabic literary, exegetical, and historical traditions. By disregarding both literary and historical evidence—a fundamental methodological flaw in her scholarly inquiry—Neuwirth bases her conclusions primarily on superficial parallels between the Qur'ān and Biblical texts. This approach constitutes speculative conjecture rather than rigorous academic analysis.
4. In her chronology of the Qur'ānic surahs, Neuwirth allegedly follows the model proposed by Theodor Nöldeke. In the second chapter of the first volume of *Geschichte des Qorāns* (*The History of the Qur'ān*), Nöldeke (1909) presents theories on the historical ordering of the Qur'ānic chapters that have themselves been subject to scrutiny. His sources (see Raḥīmī Rīsih 2003) and some of his methods have been critiqued previously (Nouraei 2018; Salmanzadeh et al., 2018). However, Neuwirth uses Nöldeke's chronology selectively. For instance, in her discussion of *tanzīl*, she does not fully adhere to Nöldeke's chronology; rather, she adjusts the

sequence to better serve her conclusions. In this case, she fails to follow her own claimed presupposition thoroughly.

5. Neuwirth claims that the concept of *tanzīl*—as referring to the "descent" of God's word—is an adaptation from the Nicene Creed. This assertion is made without providing adequate evidence, relying merely on conceptual similarity. This stems from her biased presupposition that the qur'ān cannot be considered a divine revelation on its own merits.
6. Neuwirth considers the textual parallels between the Qur'ān and Biblical scriptures sufficient to claim that the Qur'ān—being later—has borrowed from those texts. Yet, she offers no corroborating evidence beyond these surface-level similarities.
7. Whenever the Qur'ān refers to revelation (*waḥy*), Neuwirth treats it merely as a literary device and a polemical technique rather than a genuine claim to divine revelation. Here, again, one can clearly sense her biased view on the qur'ān's nature.
8. Despite her assertion that no Arabic translation of the Psalms existed at the time (Neuwirth 2019), Neuwirth does not explain how the Prophet (PBUH) could have adapted verses of Sūrat al-Muzzammil from the Psalms. Here, she relies on two mutually contradictory assumptions: on the one hand, she denies the existence of an Arabic translation of the Psalms; on the other, she claims that the Qur'ānic verses reflect the Psalms.

4. Conclusion

Considering the discussions outlined in the previous two sections, it is evident that Angelika Neuwirth's methodology and approach to the Qur'ān contain multiple critical flaws. First, she oversteps the bounds of a literary and historical scholar by expressing views about the truth and essence of the Qur'ān. This includes making judgments about the correspondence of Qur'ānic verses with external realities—an approach that exceeds the scope of purely literary or historical inquiry.

Second, her translation and interpretation of Qur'ānic verses and terminology are selective and unrestricted, as discussed earlier. This selective approach reveals a further error in her work: engaging with the Qur'ān while carrying strong theological presuppositions. Although she outwardly claims to derive an understanding of the Qur'ān based on the Qur'ān's own self-referential framework, in practice, she relies on the same biased orientalist assumptions she herself has previously critiqued. These include denying the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), rejecting the divine origin of revelation, and considering the Qur'ān as a product adapted from Biblical texts.

Another issue is that, despite presenting her research as historical, she neglects other available historical evidence beyond the Qur'ān and Biblical or post-Biblical literature. In particular, she pays no attention to the broader Islamic tradition, such as historical accounts, hadith literature, and exegetical works by Muslim scholars.

Moreover, based solely on certain similarities between the Qur'ān and Biblical texts, Neuwirth concludes that the Qur'ānic verses are derived from those earlier scriptures simply due to their chronological precedence. This conclusion is reached without sufficient supporting evidence.

It should also be noted that she does not consistently adhere to her own stated presuppositions and, at times, contradicts them. In some cases, her foundational assumptions conflict with one another.

Taken together, these issues cast serious doubt on the validity and reliability of her conclusions. Furthermore, as this article has indicated, although Neuwirth introduces herself as a scholar of literature and claims in this book to be presenting a distinct historical approach to the Qur'ān, she actually makes a number of ontological and theological assertions—such as those about the nature of revelation, the process of its descent, the source of the Qur'ānic text, and the truth or falsehood of its verses. In addition, what she presents as a historical study is, in fact, based on extra-historical premises and presuppositions.

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