

sensibility, her personal aesthetic tastes, her personal sympathy and, not least, her specific interest in their ideas in the light of her analysis.

Despite the complexity and richness of the subjects treated by Wen-chin Ouyang in these two volumes, and despite the undeniable difficulty in rationalizing a phenomenon as rich and composite as the evolution of the modern Arabic novel, Ouyang's work is serious and interesting, and offers a valuable contribution to the study of modern Arabic literature, in a new and variegated key.

Rosella Dorigo

Ca' Foscari University of Venice

SARRA TLILI:

Animals in the Qur'an.

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This work is not, as the title might suggest, a thorough examination of the various occurrences of non-human animals in the Quran, although for readers interested in such information, two appendixes provide a comprehensive catalogue of Quranic non-human animal species and categories. Rather, in this revision of a PhD dissertation written under Joseph Lowry at the University of Pennsylvania (2009), Tlili mounts a formidable argument for animal rights in Islam rooted in Quranic concepts. She challenges the prevalent Muslim view of humanity's elevated status over other animals through what she calls an eco-centric reading that disputes common interpretations of Quranic passages that seem to suggest human superiority, and by arguing that anthropomorphic perspectives have often been projected on the Quran. With the help of the polyvalent interpretations of four Muslim exegetes (al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, and ibn-Kathīr) and intricate philological detective work, she foregrounds a Quranic depiction of animals as spiritual, moral, intelligent and accountable beings, a depiction she believes stands out from the less positive representations of animals in other faith traditions.

After introductory chapters on portrayals of animals outside of Islamic tradition, and on Quranic exegesis, Tlili first deconstructs the notion of the inferiority of non-human animals attributed to the Quranic concepts of *taskhīr* and *tadhīl* (subjugation of non-human animals), *istikhlāf* (vice-regency of humans), and *maskh* (metamorphosis of disobedient humans into non-human animals). She argues that *taskhīr* and *tadhīl* do not imply coercive subjugation of non-human animals to humans (a notion she attributes to the biblical concept of "dominion"), but rather the God-ordained willing serviceability and adaptability of only certain animals for human needs; that humans require such service shows their lack of self-sufficiency instead of their superiority. Vice-regency, she submits, has been read into the Quranic notion of *istikhlāf* from the later political development of the caliphate; the term originally refers simply to "succession". And metamorphosis of disobedient humans into non-human animals does not necessarily imply the inferiority of the latter, but rather signifies the punishing confusion and pain of humans trapped in non-human bodies.

Tlili then turns to construct a non-speciesist, theocentric Quranically-based view of non-human animals, beginning with a key verse that places humans and animals

into the same category: “There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like you . . . Then unto their Lord they will be gathered” (6: 38). Engaging in extensive dialogue with the four exegetes she has chosen, Tlili points out that a literal interpretation often allows non-human animal depictions in the Quran, such as those that attribute to non-human animals the ability to speak, to be taken seriously; more rationalist interpretations import the Hellenistic notion of the “Great Chain of Being”, with its elevation of humans above non-human animals, into the Quran. Al-Rāzī is particularly guilty of this move, although Tlili discerns a gradual shift towards a less anthropomorphic position in his thought. In sum, the Quran portrays non-human animals to be much the same as humans in terms of complexity, spirituality and morality; that the Quran does not elaborate on these characteristics is due to the fact that it is exclusively addressed to humans and their particular need for guidance.

Finally, Tlili considers the status of humans in the Quran. An investigation of the Quranic concept of *tafḍīl* (preferment) reveals that it refers to an extra and unmerited bounty that is conferred freely by God on (certain) humans, sometimes as a test, but that it does not connote that the recipient is qualitatively superior; rather, it points to God’s generosity. To be better is a status that must be earned, and the Quran is very critical of human ability in this area, seeing humans among all creatures as the “most contentious” (18:54). If anything, that humans have an eternal destiny in heaven or hell might indicate their elevated status over non-human animals, but even here Tlili argues that the Quran leaves the ultimate fate of non-human animals open, despite the usual Muslim interpretation that animals will be turned into dust.

In conclusion, Tlili turns to moral admonishment, suggesting that humans should attempt to learn from non-human animals instead of feeling superior to them. The Quran overall depicts non-human animals as fellow creatures and worshippers of God, she argues, valued for their own sake, who have much to offer humans, not least, how to submit to God.

Tlili’s work is a marvellous example of deconstructive and constructive theology, in which the received tradition is subjected to intense scrutiny and a new direction is mapped out as a more authentic reading and application of the sacred sources of the past. Increasingly, such works of theology are done in conversation across interfaith lines; it is regrettable that Tlili does not engage more with similar efforts to reinterpret scriptural sources in Christian and Jewish ecotheologies, for example. However, as it stands, Tlili’s work represents a substantial advance beyond other English-language examinations of non-human animals in Muslim scripture and tradition (e.g. by Al-Hafiz B.A. Masri and Richard C. Foltz) by not just representing the tradition but contesting it.

This reviewer wonders, however, that this work of theology is published in a historically-focused series. While Tlili is clearly aware of historical developments, they do not play an important role in her argument. She, along with her exegetical companions, reads the Quran synchronically, with no reference to the unfolding of the Quran’s message over time in conversation with its original audience in a Late Antique context, as Angelika Neuwirth, Carl W. Ernst, and others have shown. Nor are the specific historical contexts of her exegetes, or of the present, given much recognition. But that is not necessarily the task of theology, and from a theological perspective, this is a superb work, one in which also historians can find much to chew on.

F. V. Greifenhagen
Luther College, University of Regina