

Workshop

with David Powers (Professor of Islamic History and Law, Cornell University)

From Nuzi to Medina: The Qur'anic Law of Inheritance in the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Adoption Contracts

at the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin (Villa Jaffé, Wallotstr. 10)

Thursday, May 24, 10.00 -12.00

Friday, May 25, 10.00-12.00 and 14.00 – 16.00

Q 4:12b is a syntactically and semantically difficult Qur'anic verse that traditionally has been taken to stipulate the inheritance shares of "collateral relatives" (*kalâla*), i. e. relatives more distant than a parent or child (e.g., siblings). In 1982, Prof. Powers proposed that *kalâla* originally signified "daughter-in-law", as in Akkadian *kallatu*, Hebrew *kallâh*, Aramaic *kalltha*. Based on this hypothesis, he reconstructed what he calls the proto-Islamic law of inheritance, which exhibits crucial differences from later Islamic law. In a forthcoming book, this re-reading of Q 4:12b, in a slightly revised form, is substantiated with evidence from two documentary sources: (1) adoption contracts preserved on cuneiform tablets written in the town of Nuzi in the middle of the second millennium BCE, the language of which exhibits a striking similarity to a crucial element of Q 4:12b; and (2) palaeographic evidence from an early Qur'an manuscript, Bibliotheque Nationale 328a, which suggests that the consonantal text (*rasm*) of the original 4:12b was modified in the early process of its transmission in order to change the original meaning of this verse.

Prof. Powers will discuss a chapter from his forthcoming monograph at each of the three sessions of the workshop. Session one, "From Nuzi to Medina: Q. 4:12b Revisited", will be devoted to early exegesis of the Qur'anic inheritance verses; to the connection between the language of 4:12b and ancient Near Eastern adoption contracts found in Nuzi; and to the paleographical evidence of BN 328a. Session two, "History or *Midrash*? The Death and Martyrdom of the Beloved of the Messenger of God", will be devoted to the motives behind the reinterpretation of 4:12b, with special attention to Islam's abolition of adoption in 5 AH and to the connection between this legal development and Muhammad's repudiation of his adopted son Zayd. Session three, "Pretexts, Intertexts, and Subtexts" will be devoted to Biblical, *midrashic* and pre-Islamic Arabian texts that may lie behind the story of Muhammad's repudiation of Zayd, his marriage to Zaynab bt. Jahsh, and the abolition of adoption.

Although the workshop will start from the consideration of a single Qur'anic passage, such an in-depth case study provides a convenient way of approaching broader questions such as the relationship between the Qur'an and its Near Eastern environment, the collection and early transmission of the Qur'an, the interplay between law and theology, and the sectarian environment in which Islam emerged.

Drafts of the three chapters will be circulated to seminar participants, who are expected to read them in advance of the seminars. Our meetings will take the form of discussions that will be introduced by a short summary of the chapter at hand, to be given by Prof. Powers, followed by a response from a colleague who will raise objections, pose questions and, if possible, link the subject to his own area of research..

23. April 2007 / david powers / nicolai sinai / georges khalil