

READINGS IN SOCIAL AND ISLAMIC ISSUES

JAMIL FAROOQUI



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Edited by
Jamil Farooqui



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FOLKLORIC STUDIES ON THE QUR'AN: A CRITIQUE

Ahmad Abd Al-Rahim Nasr*

This paper deals with two publications, which are to my knowledge the only ones that approach the Qur'ân folklorically. The first work studies the narrative material embodied in the Qur'ân, *Hadith, tafsir* (Islamic exegetical literature), and *Qisas al-Anbiyâ'* (the stories of the prophets) by applying the laws of story telling and oral transmission and thus trace them to their allegedly Jewish sources. The second applies two folkloric theories, namely the oral-formulaic and folktale theories to the Qur'ân to attest its orality by finding traces of oral tradition in it. In discussing the two works it will be shown that the first is based on an old argument, that is, the denial of the prophethood of Muhammad (SAAS), with an allegedly scientific approach. Whereas the second considers some of the stories in the Qur'ân as folktales, i.e. fables of the ancients, and applies a theory that focuses on 'improvised performance' to the Qur'ân whose wording remains the same in every instance of recitation and transmission. Since the paper deals with folkloric studies on the Qur'ân, it is appropriate to start with a word on the definition of folklore.

Folklore conjures up a variety of images. For some, folklore may mean folktales and lullabies. For others, it is charms and superstitions. For still others, folklore is concerned with traditional food, dance and music. Folklore means all the above and more. In 1846 a British scholar, William Thoms coined this term to replace "Popular Antiquities" and "Popular Literature".

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