

REVIEWS

THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

ANDREW RIPPIN (ed.):

The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān.

(Blackwell Companions to Religion.) xiii, 560 pp. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006. £85. ISBN 1 4051 1752 4.

The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān is one of the latest additions to the Blackwell companions to religion series. Andrew Rippin has gathered a team of junior and senior scholars in the field of quranic studies who cover: historical and textual issues of the Quran, aspects of its content, and its use and interpretation by different sectarian movements and in various areas of Muslim religious life. In his preface Rippin describes the purpose of this companion as providing both an introduction to the Quran for readers with little knowledge of the text as well as “an opportunity for scholars to extend the boundaries of what might be deemed to be ‘accepted’ approaches to the text of the Qur’ān” (p. x). This twofold aim is reflected in the different levels at which the articles are pitched: some are very accessible to a general readership while others address quite specific issues and open new research questions for scholars.

The book is divided into different thematic sections. Part I, “Orientation”, consists of three articles introducing the quranic text from various angles. Tamara Sonn offers an excellent general introduction to the Quran providing brief and succinct information on the structure, history and content of the text and its use and interpretation. Christopher Buck in his article “Discovering” looks at insider/outsider approaches before discussing different themes of the text, while Abdullah Saeed in “Contextualizing” connects the Quran with the biography of Muḥammad and also looks at its themes. There is considerable overlap between the articles by Buck and Saeed, and Sonn’s introduction, in terms of their coverage of the history of the text, and its basic themes and doctrines.

Part II, entitled “Text”, contains articles dealing with textual and contextual issues. Salwa M. S. El-Awa looks at the linguistic structure of the Quran by investigating the structural and semantic relationship of different verses in the same suras. Rosalind Ward Gwynne discusses patterns of address found in the Quran and their interpretation by the medieval Muslim commentators al-Zarkashi and al-Suyuti. The language of the Quran and the use of different rhetorical means are investigated by Mustansir Mir. Navid Kermani provides a very accessible discussion of the relationship between poetry and the Quran, while Michael Carter engages in a more specialized survey of foreign vocabulary in the text. In her article, Angelika Neuwirth creates a correlation between the different self-designations of the Quran (*muṣḥaf*, *qur’ān*, *kitāb*) and the development the Muslim community underwent in Mecca, Medina and after Muḥammad’s death.

Aliza Shnizer discusses the relationship between the sacrality of the Quran as the word of God and historical awareness of its gradual revelation and later collection. François Déroche provides a survey of the written transmission of the quranic text from earliest manuscripts to the first printed edition and its appearance on the world wide web. Herbert Berg and Avraham Hakim

investigate the relationship between the Quran and Muḥammad and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb respectively. While Berg discusses the connection between the Quran and the biography of Muḥammad as providing the occasions of revelation and thereby a tool of quranic exegesis, Hakim looks into the role of ʿUmar in triggering revelations by raising concerns about certain issues.

Part III on “Content” begins with Andrew Rippin’s article on theology and Uri Rubin’s on prophetology in the Quran. The presentation of Moses in the Quran, the interpretation of passages referring to him by Muslim commentators and their use of non-Islamic sources is discussed by Brannon Wheeler. Kate Zebiri looks at the argumentative strategies employed by the quranic text to argue for certain doctrinal assertions like monotheism, Muḥammad’s prophecy or the belief in resurrection. A. H. Mathias Zahniser examines the quranic distinction between different types of knowledge, thinking and understanding. Quranic attitudes towards sexuality, marital and family life are discussed by Khaleel Muhammad in his informative article. A very thorough discussion of the pronouncements on *jihād* in the Quran is provided by Reuven Firestone.

Part IV, “Interpretation”, begins with Walid Saleh’s article on al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1025) and his hitherto underestimated role in shaping later Sunni approaches to quranic exegesis. Marianne Klar discusses al-Thaʿlabī’s work on the stories of the prophets. A historical survey of Sufi commentaries on the Quran is presented by Alan Godlas. Rather than providing a simple listing of Sufi commentaries, a discussion of their approaches and conclusions might have been more interesting. Jawid Mojaddedi looks at Rumi’s appropriation of and references to the Quran in his *Mathnawī*. Diana Steigerwald contributes two articles, one on Twelver Shii and the other on Ismaili *taʿwīl*. These articles cover important and understudied traditions of quranic exegesis but would have benefited from more coherent and stringent editing.

Part V, “Application”, consists of articles dealing with the different ways in which Muslims use the text in various areas of their religious and scholarly lives. An introduction to the exegetical sciences is provided by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, using the works of al-Zarkashi and al-Suyuti to illustrate the development of the discipline of Muslim exegesis and its concerns and approaches. Binyamin Abrahamov investigates the use of the Quran in theology, offering a basic discussion of the traditionalist and rationalist approaches in Islamic theological discourse. The classification of quranic verses according to their legal content and relevance in jurisprudence is presented in A. Kevin Reinhart’s article. Leah Kinberg provides several examples of contemporary interpretations of verses from the Quran by liberal or progressive Muslims in order to establish the tolerant, peaceful and pluralist nature of the Islamic religion. She looks in particular at interpretations that can be found on the internet and other modern media outlets. Roberto Tottoli discusses how Muslim narrative literature serves as an instrument for the exegesis of stories told or referred to in the Quran, using as examples the literary genre of the stories of the Prophets, the biographies of Muḥammad and the expansion of the eschatological teachings of the Quran in subsequent exegetical literature. The art form of quranic recitation, its tradition and contemporary revival, is introduced by Anna M. Gade.

The articles in this companion vary in quality and serve different purposes. Some are written for a general readership and can be used in undergraduate classes on the Quran. Others are more relevant for researchers or graduate students interested in recent trends in quranic scholarship.

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