

## Book reviews

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Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 244. \$73.50 (hbk); \$34.99 (pbk).

The popular belief among Muslims is that the Qur'ān has been transmitted miraculously free from any serious variants from the time of Muhammad. Indeed 'the miracle of the Qur'ān' is a common notion, and contrasts are sometimes posited (in Muslim apologetics) with the transmission-history of biblical texts, characterised by many textual variants and several 'text-types'. It is difficult to find much in the way of serious text-critical work, in part, because it can be perceived by Muslims as a threat to that cherished notion of its miraculous transmission. Small's study is all the more to be welcomed, both because of the obvious and admirable scholarly work which lies behind it, and also because he studiously attends to the factual issues and does so with an intention he describes as 'objectivity with respect'.

Small's aim is to contribute towards putting the study of Qur'ānic manuscripts 'on the same level as Hebrew Bible and New Testament manuscript studies' (p. viii), and this book will be a significant step in that aim. To engage fully the data he presents, of course, requires one to be familiar with Arabic, but even those (such as this reviewer) lacking this competence can still learn a great deal from Small's discussion. Along with a raft of technical and specific information about the manuscripts studied and their textual characteristics, Small also helpfully interprets and summarises at many points along the way.

In part 1 (chapters 1–2), Small lays out introductory matters and identifies the twenty-two manuscripts examined (sample photos of them are given after p. 94), nineteen of them from the first four centuries of Islam and three from the most recent two centuries. Small's project was to study and collate the texts of these manuscripts for a particular portion of the Qur'ān, surah 14:35–41, as a means of obtaining a sample of textual transmission. In addition, he takes account of studies of several palimpsest manuscripts (in which an earlier writing has been overwritten). Given that 'neither Western nor Muslim scholars have done an extensive comparison of variants from a representative sampling of extant Qur'ān manuscripts' (p. 33), Small's study is path-breaking.

In part 2 (chapters 3–8), he discusses the types of variants found, and here is where the specifics of Arabic dominate. But the types of variants

will be recognisable as those which one also finds in biblical manuscripts: orthographic variants, copyist mistakes, grammatical ‘improvements’, *rasm* variants in the consonantal text, variant verse-divisions and ‘physical corrections’ (erasing words or sections of text and overwriting). Then, in part 3 (chapters 9–11), Small assesses how these variants compare to Islamic records of textual variants, considers intentionality and non-intentionality of copyists, and the role of orality in the textual transmission of the Qur’ān.

In chapter 12, Small lays out the conclusions of his study. Essentially, the Qur’ān manuscripts studied show an impressively controlled transmission, with very few variants of any real significance. This reflects the success of early efforts, especially those ascribed to the Caliph ‘Uthmān (seventh century), Al-Hajjaj (early eighth century) and Ibn Mujāhid (tenth century), to standardise the text of the Qur’ān ‘to a pre-conceived form’, and to suppress textual variants. The result is that the earlier diversity in the text and the recitation of the Qur’ān was largely lost. In short, instead of the aim of Western text-critical work on biblical and classical literature to recover the earliest form of a given text, traditional Islamic textual criticism has sought to create a text-form ‘that satisfied as many of the dogmatic and practical liturgical conditions as possible’, which, however, ‘has led to the irreparable loss of the most original forms of its early text’ (p. 168).

Though not discussed much by Small, this obviously contrasts with the textual history of the New Testament, and the major factor appears to be the difference in the institutional and political history of early Islam and early Christianity. The structures necessary to attempt any translocal standardisation of Christian belief or scriptural text were not in place until after Constantine in the fourth century. But within the first century of Islam, the Caliph ‘Uthmān was able to orchestrate a crucial first major effort towards standardisation of the Qur’ān. This also means that the belief that is ‘a mainstay of popular Islamic discourse’, that there is ‘one precise version of the Qur’ān going back to Muhammad’ is difficult to maintain ‘because of the amount of editing done after Muhammad’s death’ (p. 179). In Small’s bold statement, ‘the history of the transmission of the text of the Qur’ān is at least as much a testament to the destruction of Qur’ān material as it is to its preservation’, and ‘is also testimony to the fact that there never was one original text of the Qur’ān’ (p. 180). What we have in the Qur’ān as transmitted is ‘a text-form that was chosen from amidst a group of others, which was then edited and canonized at the expense of these others, and has been improved upon in order to make it conform to a desired ideal’ (p. 184).

This is not so totally different from the textual histories of other scriptural texts. And perhaps that is the chief point which emerges from Small’s

analysis. It is richly documented, informed by other recent scholarship (both traditional Muslim and 'Western'), eirenic and respectful in tone, and a solid and impressive case for the observations advanced. A ten-page bibliography and indexes of Qur'ān manuscripts and authors/subjects complete this commendable study.

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Jonathan Brant, *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film: A Theoretical Account Grounded by Empirical Research into the Experience of Filmgoers* (Oxford, OUP, 2012), pp. xii+270. £65.00 (hbk).

Jonathan Brant's study promotes and critically develops the dialogue between religion and film. Important for the project is the interaction between Paul Tillich's 'modern' 'theology of culture' and 'postmodern' practices of film making and film viewing. The result is exciting. The study opens up new paths in theological thinking. Brant's empirical research and his theoretical and practical conclusions are especially enriching and compelling for recent creative theology as well as for religious film art today. The author shows that religious revelation through film is, indeed, possible: religious films can testify from God's word. They have the power to create healing and saving experiences in the heart of the believer. Like Tillich, Brant understands revelatory breakthrough and human ecstasy as theoretical terms grounded in religious life-experiences as well as in concrete political and social encounter.

The study contains four parts and seven chapters: part I (chapter 1) presents the research project; part II (chapters 2–3) focuses on Tillich's theological understanding of religion and culture; part III (chapters 4–6) contains a large and detailed empirical research; part IV (chapter 7) rereads the theological theory in the light of the empirical work.

The *theological* impacts of the study are the focus of my analysis now. Brant's intention is to put into dialogue two different topics, interests, and, most importantly, two different theory-languages. On the one hand, Brant has a theological, i.e. a theoretical interest. Tillich's 'modern' 'theology of culture' serves him as a theoretical platform for the encounter between religion and film. On the other hand, the research has an empirical and practical interest. It gives fresh insights into today's methods of film production. Moreover, it illuminates how religious films encounter the viewers. 'Modern' theology meets 'postmodern' movie art! A fascinating project. However, how exactly