Book Reviews


This volume is part of the Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān series edited by Andrew Rippin. The titles coming out of this series have already enriched the field of Qurʾānic studies and transformed the academic dynamics of publishing on the Qurʾān. This offers an opportunity to scholars to write monographs relating to any aspect of the study of the Qurʾān, and have them published and made available to the scholarly community. Routledge is to be commended for having included the series as a part of its publication programme.

Dr El-Awa aims in this work “to discuss the problem of textual relations in the Qurʾān from a linguistic point of view” (p. 1). She is specifically interested in studying “the way in which verses of one sūra relate to each other and to the wider context of the total message of the Qurʾān” (p. 2). Ultimately the aim is to ascertain whether “Qurʾānic sūras possess coherence, or organic unity and is this necessary at all as a quality of the text or is it not?” (p. 2). By “textual relations” El-Awa refers to “relations that hold together the variety of topics within one sūra” (p. 3). Her main concern in this study is focused on the “relations between different and seemingly unrelated topics that occur in one sūra” (p. 3). She, moreover, highlights the fact that her study is not a “rhetorical or literary study or a study of iʿjāz. It looks at the language from a communicative viewpoint and deals with the text mainly as an act of verbal communication” (p. 6). The case studies from the Qurʾān are two sūras, *al-Ahzāb* (Qurʾān 33) and *al-Qiyāmah* (Qurʾān 75).

The author then describes her methodological approach in detail, basing herself on linguistic theories available for the study of textual relations. The linguistic theory adopted for the study is called Relevance Theory (RT) which has been discussed in detail later in the book.
Chapter one is a historical review of the textual relations studies done on the Qurʾān both in the classical period and the modern period. The first work El-Awa discusses is the work of Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Bahādur al-Zarkashi (d. 794/1392), *al-Burḥān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qurʾān*. She then discusses the contributions of medieval Qurʾān commentators namely Fākhru l-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) in his *Mafṣāth al-Ghāybi* and Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Biqā’ī (d. 885/1480) in his *Nāẓm al-Durar fī Tanāṣūb al-Ayāt wa l-Suwār*. The term most discussed in these works is *munaṣṣabah*, *nāzīm*, *taʾalluq* and *waḥb al-naẓm*. It is important to note here that this is not the sum total of the medieval scholarly activities on this aspect of the Qurʾān. The problem lies with our inadequate knowledge of the *tafsīr* tradition. To the degree that most of the Qurʾān commentary tradition is still unedited, we are hardly in a position to issue the final word on the worth of this tradition.

For the 20th century, El-Awa discusses Richard Bell’s (d. 1952) translation of the Qurʾān which is based on a reconstituting of the textual relationships between various pericopies in each *sūrah*. El-Awa then discusses the *tafsīr* works of two scholars of the recent past, Sayyid Ḥub (d. 1966) and Aḥṣan Iḍlāḥi (d. 1997). El-Awa states that both authors believed that “each chapter has a ‘main subject’ at its heart and that the various passages or sections of that chapter might touch upon other major themes in order to enhance the reader’s understanding of this ‘main subject’” (p. 20). Finally, El-Awa discusses the work of Neal Robinson in terms of what he calls ‘register’ (p. 22). Perhaps the only complaint here could be that all the works discussed in this book are either written in Arabic or in English. There is a wealth of Qurʾānic studies in German and French languages and one would have liked to see some of the works of these two scholarly traditions mentioned in the bibliography or the discussions. Yet the author does not need to justify her work by older approaches. Hers is a relatively new approach, and the question is: what sort of review of literature should one undertake?

Chapter two is a detailed discussion of the methodological approach followed in the book. The author discusses two theories from linguistics: Relevance Theory and Coherence Theory. Here she depends on the works of the linguists R. Blass, M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hassan. The implication of this approach to the Qurʾān is explained by El-Awa: “I will divide the text into parts, establish the propositional content of each part and then look for the contribution of this part towards the context of the Qurʾān as a whole on one hand, and the immediate context of the sura itself on the other” (p. 40). There are two types of divisions: the section and the paragraph.

Chapters three and four provide a detailed analysis in terms of Coherence Theory. The analysis carried on the two *sūrabs* 33 and 75 is rich, complex and
quite engaging. The author shows how these two sūrabs cohere and what are the main contextual relationships between the various themes in them. In this the author offers a detailed study of the two sūrabs of a kind that has not been undertaken before.

New studies on the Qurʾān using new methods is a very encouraging sign of the now growing field of Qurʾānic studies. This is a very useful study and it advances our understanding of the composition of the Qurʾān in very significant ways. It is to be hoped that more detailed studies of the Qurʾān will be carried out in this manner.

Walid Saleh


Movements of revival and reform are an important part of the histories of Muslim societies. Distinctive movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were complex expressions of major developments of that era and also provide significant foundations for contemporary developments in the Muslim world. Understanding these historical and contemporary movements requires analyses based on in-depth knowledge of what the individuals and groups actually thought rather than simply viewing such movements of renewal with perspectives shaped by contemporary polemics about Muslim activism. Bernard Haykel provides this type of study of the important transitions in Yemen associated with the thought and career of Muḥammad b. ʿAli al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834).

Haykel’s study of al-Shawkānī, “a towering figure in both Yemeni Islam and modern Islamic reformist thought” (p. 1), “aims at providing a detailed analysis of a specific project initiated by a reformist scholar” (p. 2). This book is an intellectual biography embedded in the history of the Zaydī imamate of Yemen, showing al-Shawkānī’s place in two fundamental socio-political transformations: the transformation of the imamate itself from a “charismatic style into dynastic and patrimonial modes of domination” (pp. 2-3) and the simultaneous rise of “scholars who subscribed to Sunni Traditionist ideas, men