

Book Review

The Sublime Qur'an and Orientalism

By Muhammad Khalifa. Karachi: International Islamic Publishers (Pvt.) Ltd., 1989, 262pp., second edition.

The Qur'an, being central to both the Islamic faith and its practice, has been studied in a plethora of orientalist writings – ranging from such a crudely polemical one as Alexander Ross's English translation of the Qur'an entitled *The Alcoran of Mahomet . . . for the Satisfaction for all those who Desire to look into the Turkish Vanities* (1649) to those with scholarly pretensions and claiming to be "objective" studies, such as Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorans* (1860), Goldziher's *Die Richtungen der islamischen Korānauslesung* (1920), Bell's *The Quran translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs* (1937-39), Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* (1977), and Burton's *The Collection of the Quran* (1977).

The book under review, first published in 1983, recounts the full stock of the orientalists' misconceptions, down the ages, about the Qur'an—their outlandish theories about its authorship (pp. 7-18), their assaults on its textual history and its arrangement (pp. 52-63), their brazen attempts at twisting its meaning in their Qur'an translations (pp. 64-92), and their bizarre views on abrogation in the Qur'an (pp. 93-104). Khalifa deserves every credit for assembling so much information. What is more remarkable is that it is followed by a stout refutation of these allegations about the form and contents of the Qur'an and an extensive, authentic exposition of the Qur'anic teachings, concepts, and morals, all of which constitutes the second part of the book (pp. 111-205). In elucidating the Qur'anic worldview, Khalifa's discussion is subtle, in large part persuasive, tenaciously pursued, and well presented. Appended to the book are two highly informative appendices on the order of the Qur'an's *sūrah*s.

This well-intentioned and detailed scholarly study, however, does not really succeed in delivering what its title promises. In discussing the orientalists' ventures into establishing the chronology of Qur'anic *sūrah*s, Khalifa says little about Gustav Flügel's *Corani Textus Arabiscus* (1834) and the theories propounded by Grimme and Hirschfeld's *New Researches in the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran* (1902). More serious is the lack of any reference to a host of orientalists' writings on the philological and lexical aspects of the Qur'an, namely Baljon's *Modern Muslim Quran Interpretation* (1961), Torrey's *The Commercial-Theological Terms in the Quran* (1892), Watt's

Companion to the Quran (1967), and Welch's "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself—the Koranic Data" in Hovannisian and Vryonis (eds.), *Islam's Understanding of Itself* (1983), among others. The theme of the so-called Judeo-Christian antecedents of the Qur'an is taken up in Khalifa's book, but he appears to have overlooked some quite significant writings in English on the subject: Hirschfeld (1902), Horowitz's *Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran* (1964), Katsh's *Judaism in Islam: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Quran and Its Commentaries* (1954), and O'Shaughnessy's *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran* (1953). The inclusion of these writings would have made Khalifa's book all the more authoritative.

Khalifa does not go in for any dense treatment of the orientalist's translations of the Qur'an. One wishes he would have been more forthcoming in bringing out their motives, their dogmatic presuppositions, their mental make-up, instances of unpardonable mistranslation and omission, and unaccountable liberties in their translations of the Qur'an. Moreover, Khalifa would have done well to have used a proper, consistent transliteration system. His far-ranging exploration of the Qur'anic worldview is nonetheless one of the valuable elements of the book, for it reflects his meticulous scholarship, wide familiarity with relevant works, and constant insights into the *sīrah* and Islamic history.

Despite the narrowness of its concern in places, it is indeed a coherent and impressive work, perhaps the first systematic book in English by a Muslim evaluating the writings of the orientalists. The book well serves the purpose of bringing into sharp focus, for the benefit of both orientalists and Muslims, the fallacies and pitfalls in the orientalist discourse on the Qur'an.

A. R. Kidwai
The Islamic Foundation
Leicester, England

Book Review

Challenges of Reality: Towards the Quran

By Muhammad Ali Hashmi, Ph.D. The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, England

Reviewed by Dr. M. A. Khan, Ph.D. The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, England