

The Qur'an and Its Readers Worldwide: Contemporary Commentaries and Translations, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki. Volume 14. Qur'anic Studies Series, edited by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga. Oxford University Press and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015. xviii + 633pp. Hb., \$180. ISBN: 9780198754770

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Over the last few decades the modern study of Islam in the academy has taken new methodological shifts to enhance understanding of modern Islam. Many new studies now focus on modern works in the *numerous languages of the Muslim world*, in addition to Arabic and Persian literary heritage. The current edited volume is one of such attempts to study Muslim contributions to the interpretation of their scripture, the Qur'an, in the twentieth century in its local and regional settings. The underlying thread that motivates this study is the assumption that modernity has shaped Muslim thinking in the twentieth century in sharply distinctive ways, and this force of modernity must be investigated in modern translations and readings of foundational texts such as the Qur'an. In addition to this context of modernity, the volume seeks to identify different interpretive communities, highlighting, in the process, similarities and differences in global interpretations of the Qur'an by Muslims (3).

The volume attempts to offer a representative sample of modern commentaries (Arabic *tafsir*) of the Qur'an in different local languages, incorporating much geographical diversity. Thus, we find critical analysis of the recent translations and commentaries written in Bosnian, Turkish, Urdu, Swahili, Chinese, Indonesian and Persian languages. Even English and German works, written by Muslims, get their share as well. In addition to the ten chapters devoted to individual languages, the editor's 107-page introduction (along with valuable endnotes) offers us a glimpse of the field of Qur'anic commentary in its historical and modern dimensions. This lengthy survey of the field is immensely useful to make oneself acquainted with the rich diversity of academic work on the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an. Taji-Farouki stresses on the identification of *continuities and ruptures* in modern interpretations of the Qur'an when compared to the premodern literary heritage of Qur'an commentaries. She concludes that while the continuities do persist, it is the coming of modernity in the shape of Western domination and the rise of the Muslim public sphere

(accelerated by print and other forms of media) that have made a considerable impact on the hermeneutical thinking of Muslim commentators. Public blogs such as Ziaduddin Sardar's "Blogging the Qur'an" in *The Guardian* raise the question of religious authority in "authentically" explaining the foundational text. While Taji-Farouki is convincing in much of this, many readers would accentuate the continuities more than the ruptures that somehow have come to command more attention in the academic study of modern commentaries of the Qur'an. The classical intellectual tradition of Qur'anic exegesis and lexicography, in my opinion, continues to constrain the understanding of Muslim scripture in many ways.

The ten chapters that form the core of this work are impressive in their scope and rigorous analysis. The bottom line is about identifying the distinctiveness of these different translations and commentaries. The writers have studied these works by situating them in their historical and sociological settings and have also highlighted the hermeneutical perspective of individual commentators. Through individual and comparative case studies, the contributors to the volume have brought to light various strands in these local works on the Qur'an, such as: the need to popularize the understanding of the scripture; the issue of reform in Qur'anic interpretation; the place of women in hermeneutical enterprise; the issue of Western influence on the study of Islam; Muslims' coping with the social and intellectual challenges emerged in modernity; and the role of Christian engagements with the Qur'an in prompting Muslim translations of the foundational text into local languages.

Equally important for the academic study of Islam is the point raised by the editor (borrowed from Andrew Rippin) regarding the possibility of developing a new field within Islamic Studies that focuses on the investigation of literatures, such as Qur'anic commentaries, in local languages (53). Taji-Farouki hints at some of the operational guidelines that can direct such studies, that is, identifying: "influences mediated by a *mufasssir*'s life-world; the operation of reflexivity in their stances; the interpretive strategies they adopt; their conscious purposes as social and political agents; the role of state in commissioning *tafsirs*" (27). Given the prospects of developing this promising field, the volume has impressively taken the first step in initiating further studies on the global *tafsir* corpus. The work can also serve as a useful pedagogical resource for teaching post-secondary courses on Islam and the Qur'an, particularly in the modern period.