

**Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World:
Studies Presented to Claude Gilliot on the
Occasion of His 75th Birthday**

*Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli, eds.
Leiden: Brill, 2015. 398 pages.*

Claude Gilliot (b. 1940) stands at the forefront of Qur'anic and especially *tafsīr* studies in today's western academic world. His expertise extends also into other Islamic fields, notably theology, and his well-known encyclopedic learning and bibliographic erudition are as striking as the depth and breadth of his scholarly corpus and the sharp wit that all who know him have come to expect in their encounters with him. The book under review is a fitting tribute from twenty colleagues, nine writing in English, eight in French, and three in German across several fields of Islamic studies.

The book's first section (pp. 3-130), "Authors," consists of seven contributions, each of which treats one Muslim or European non-Muslim author or text, four of which pertain to Qur'anic studies and three to other areas. Three of the four Qur'anic contributions discuss different interpretive approaches through elucidation of exemplary texts. Pierre Larcher offers a close analysis of four Qur'anic phrases or sentences that pose particular problems of textual variants or readings as they are treated by al-Farra' (d. 822) in his *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*. Andrew Rippin gives a trenchant discussion of polysemy as a prob-

lem in *tafsīr* through the particular case of a short work on Qur'anic words by the grammarian al-Mubarrad (ninth century). Walid Saleh presents a brief but ramifying discussion of a gloss by Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 1284) on Zamakhshari's *Kashshāf* as studied by the contemporary Saudi scholar al-Ghamidi. The fourth Qur'anic study is an extensive, highly informative treatment by Roberto Tottoli of the previously largely unused Roman treasure trove of manuscripts belonging to Ludovico Marracci and related to his renowned 1698 translation of the Qur'an.

The remaining three articles in this section are Emilio Platti's substantial analysis of the arguments against the authenticity of Muhammad's prophethood in the *Risālah* of the Christian Abd al-Masih al-Kindi (written during the caliphate of al-Ma'mun); a carefully reasoned and documented argument by Michael Lecker that Ibn Ishaq was the grandson of a Jew captured as a boy early in Abu Bakr's caliphate; and an elegantly documented discussion by Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa of the treatment by the *adīb* Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. 1023) of the nobility of the Arab bedouin as chosen recipient of God's culminating prophet and revelation.

The second section of the *Festschrift*, "Genres," consists of seven articles dealing with topics involving the Qur'an, Hadith, poetry, and rhetoric. The first three focus on the Qur'an. In the first, Mehdi Azaiez offers a formal analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed in the Qur'an's discourse regarding its opponents, their identities, and their arguments. Next, Anne-Sylvie Bois-liveau discusses lucidly four principle messages that the Qur'anic preaching shares with previous prophets, then focuses on "unbelief" (*kufīr*), as the main element in the rejection by each prophet's audience of both God's messengers and the authority of His revelations. Third, in a masterly article that begins with a succinct, incisive survey of the state of academic study of the Qur'an today, Angelika Neuwirth argues for studying it as a formative text for late Antiquity that innovates theologically and literarily by presenting "a challenge of a general and transconfessional scope," a text that speaks to pagan, Jewish, and Christian traditions throughout the "process" of becoming that its final form vividly represents.

The fourth article focuses on God's word in Qur'an and Hadith. Tilman Nagel, in an extended, historically wide-ranging contribution, discusses how in early Islam the key instruments of salvation for a Muslim were holding fast to and repeating often in worship and prayer first the words of God in the Qur'an and subsequently also the words of the Hadith. After treating later theological disputes over the uncreated Qur'an, the development of *'ilm* alongside God's word, and the ensuing limitation of God's word to only the Qur'an,

he argues that the ongoing importance of “God’s complete words” was sustained subsequently in the Sufi tradition.

Next, in one of two articles on poetry, Reinhard Weipert discusses and characterizes early-Abbasid gnomic poetry, offering a reconstruction (from multiple sources) and a critical edition of a major portion (40 verses) of a wisdom poem that he believes was wrongly attributed to al-Khalil ibn Ahmad by an Iraqi scholar over 30 years ago. He follows this with a discussion of the form, the probable extent of the original whole (up to 60 verses), its content, and the difficulties of identifying its early-Abbasid author. In the second poetry contribution, Mohammad Ali Amir-Muezzi takes up the issue of the technical symbolic vocabulary of classical Persian mystical poetry, giving special attention to the treatment of breath (Ar. *nafas*, Pers. *dam*) and offering commentary on four examples of mystical poetic discourse from the beginnings of four ghazals of Hafiz.

The “Genres” section closes with Denis Gril’s treatment of Ibn Abi l-Isba’ al-Misri’s (d. 1256) treatise on the “openings,” or first parts, of the Qur’anic *sūrahs* (*al-fawātih*). Gril gives a lucid description of each of the three parts of this treatise and shows how al-Misri builds his argument for the inimitability (*i’jāz*) of the Qur’an on the basis of his analysis of the rhetoric and meanings of the *fawātih*.

“Traditions” is the rubric under which the final six articles in the *Festschrift* stand. This seems to refer to traditions of interpretation of particular words or phrases in the first two studies, and of particular traditional themes or figures ranging from the Bible to the Qur’an in the remaining four contributions. In the first article, Manfred Kropp argues in meticulous detail that the meaning long taken as obvious in virtually all translations of the Qur’an of the word *mubīn* in the phrase *lisān ‘arabī mubīn* (Q. 16:103, 26:195) is wrong. Based on other meanings of the word in the Qur’an and especially on Ethiopic parallels, he avers that *mubīn* should not be read here as “clear” but as “evident, obvious” (Ger. *evident, offenkundig*). Next Uri Rubin contrasts in his contribution the post-Qur’anic notion of Muhammad’s pre-existence with the Qur’anic presentation of Muhammad wherein there is no hint of pre-existence. He focuses on Q. 26:219 vis-à-vis its later treatments in *tafsīr* to show how the earliest understanding of the verse changed in Sunni, Shi‘i, Sufi, and other later interpretation and tradition, including that of poetry, likely under the influence of older Jewish and Christian notions of the transmission of a prophetic spirit across generations.

J. M. F. Van Reeth links Jesus’ presentation to the elders in the Temple to Ibn Hisham’s account of how Abd al-Muttalib took his young grandson

Muhammad into the Ka‘bah and offered thanks for him. In an extensive discussion of Biblical and post-Biblical linkages, he argues that the Ka‘bah episode is a clear parallel to the Temple story and effectively an initiation ritual identifying Muhammad with the Christian paraclete. Next, Jane Dammen McAuliffe offers a wide-ranging consideration of past efforts to read the Qur’an and *tafsīr* with a comparative view to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. She discusses the literary function of motifs such as those associated with Moses in Bible and Qur’an, the attitudes of Muslim scholars toward citation of the Biblical passages (such as ones suggesting Moses as possible precursor of Muhammad), and finally the possibility of ongoing and novel “intersections of biblical and Qur’anic scholarship” in the increasingly broad linguistic, geographical, and historical context of Near Eastern scriptural studies.

Jean-Louis Déclais then takes up the Biblical story of Moses’ rod striking water from a rock at the place in Sinai called Massah and Meriba (“trial and contention”), focusing on how al-Farisi (d. 851), in his *History of the Prophets*, treats this incident, which resulted in both Aaron and Moses being denied entry into the Promised Land (Ex. 20:13, 27:12 and Dt. 32:51), because Moses struck the rock with his rod instead of repeating God’s word as he was commanded. Déclais unpacks both Jewish commentary and that of al-Farisi in an effort to show how, in the early centuries of Islam, a Qur’anic story could be rooted openly in the Biblical tradition, yet in later times the connection would be forgotten. Finally, in a fitting climax to the “Traditions” section of the *Festschrift*, Harald Motzki provides a meticulous source and “*isnād-cum-matn*” analysis of a tradition found in major classical sources (e.g. Abd al-Razzaq, al-Bukhari, and al-Tabari) that deals with Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael and the building of the Ka‘bah. His conclusion is that we can safely trace this hadith report back to the last quarter of the first Islamic century and the reporter Sa‘id b. Jubayr (d. 711) as the earliest common source for the tradition ascribed by Sa‘id to Ibn ‘Abbas (d. 687-88).

In sum, readers will inevitably find some articles here more to their tastes or particular interests, but all are substantive contributions that honor a major contemporary Islamicist. The two outstanding scholars who edited this volume have coordinated a worthy *Festschrift* to honor Claude Gilliot.

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