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Translator:	Arthur J. Droge
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## Review

The need for a modern, critically annotated translation of the Qur'an that can serve as a teaching tool for students and a reliable resource for the non-specialist scholar has been strongly felt for a very long time. This book aims to fill that need, and it does. It is a 'Study Qur'an' that fully matches the works of that genre that have long been available for the study of the Bible.

Droge's translation gives the non-Arabic reader closer access to the text of the Qur'an than any previous translation I know of. Being 'as literal a rendering of the Arabic as English will allow' (p. xxxv), and generously supplied with clarifying notes, the translation consistently manages to convey a precise impression of what the Arabic text says. Difficulties of interpretation and what appear to be errors in the transmitted text are not glossed over, but are brought to the attention of the reader.

A 27-page introduction explains Droge's approach to the text. His aim is to present the Qur'anic text on its own terms as a religious document of the early seventh century, unprejudiced by the contextualising accounts of later Muslim tradition and the theological concerns of Islamic exegesis. The centre of interest is thus the text itself and what it chooses to speak about. The Prophet's biography is given scant attention since it is not an important feature of the text. For similar reasons, Droge is not particularly interested in the chronology of the *suras* (though in his notes to each *sura* he duly reports whether it is traditionally considered to be 'Meccan' or 'Medinan'). Instead, the introduction, subtitled 'The Myth of the Book', concentrates on the Qur'an's view of itself, its self-image as revealed scripture. It offers excellent sections on the two main

ideas by which the Qur'an construes itself as divine revelation: prophetic inspiration and the revealed heavenly book. The analysis situates the issue of the Qur'an's scripturality in a wider history of religions perspective and at the same time does justice to its complexity within the qur'anic text itself. Droge is right, in my view, to stress that the idea of a written book 'sent down' is an essential aspect of the Qur'an's self-image as scripture, as against recent trends in qur'anic scholarship that insist on the predominantly oral character of the revelation.

The introduction discusses also, as one would expect, the traditions about the 'collection' of the Qur'an and the problems inevitably faced by critical scholarship wishing to reconstruct the path that has led from the prophetic revelations themselves to the book today known as the Qur'an. Droge does not advocate a particular position himself on this thorny issue,<sup>1</sup> but provides a good survey of the various theories and the essential evidence, insisting, above all, on the necessity of a critical approach to the sources.

Thus this is a work that can be highly recommended both for its critical scholarship and its general usefulness. Readers will quibble with some of the statements made in the notes. Not everybody will be happy with suggestions that the Qur'an confuses different biblical stories (e.g. p. 26, n.326; p. 195, n.31). It is unclear what is meant by the statement that 'the mother of the Book', i.e. its 'clearly composed verses' (Q. 3.7) refers to its 'essence' (p. 31, n.10). Basilides (p. 60, n.176) was not a Syrian but from Alexandria, and the long quotation about him from Irenaeus is rather unnecessary. In notes 71 and 75 on p. 210 it would have been helpful to have been given some more information about the 'traditions' of David and Solomon referred to. In Q. 106.3, *rabb hāda 'l-bayt* has been inexplicably translated by 'God', whereas the note on the word correctly refers to *Lord of this House*. But these are minor deficiencies.

A very useful index concludes the book. This annotated translation of the Qur'an is likely to become the standard tool in the years to come for courses involving the study of the Qur'an in a secular academic context.

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<sup>1</sup> In his notes, however, Droge suggests that some kind of first edition of the Qur'an is already alluded to in certain passages of the Qur'an itself (Q. 16.98, p. 172, n.103; Q. 16.45, p. 179, n.58).