

# Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/BSO>

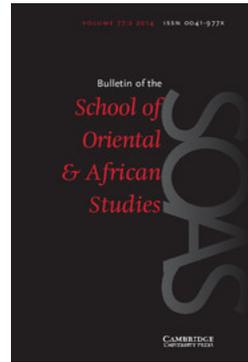
Additional services for *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

**A. J. Droge: *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*. Ixii, 488 pp. Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013. £24.99. ISBN 978 1 84553 945 0.**

Shawkat M. Toorawa

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies / Volume 77 / Issue 02 / June 2014, pp 377 - 379

DOI: 10.1017/S0041977X14000160, Published online: 13 June 2014

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0041977X14000160](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0041977X14000160)

**How to cite this article:**

Shawkat M. Toorawa (2014). Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 77, pp 377-379 doi:10.1017/S0041977X14000160

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

nor Rifa' a al-Tahtawi, the advocate for the new order of things. The Tanzimat and Young Ottoman reformers receive very terse coverage. The Ottoman Constitution of 1876, a genuinely foundational document, surely deserves an entry of its own. Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1905–11), an event of mythic stature in modern Iran, is mentioned only at scattered moments, under the entries "ayatollah", "liberalism", and "Qajars". Obviously editors must make hard choices, and not everyone or everything of importance can be included in a work of this size. Still, these omissions seem particularly painful.

In addition, the biographical entries in particular are of very unequal length and depth, so that thinkers or political actors of similar stature and influence receive markedly disparate treatment. For example, Ibn Taymiyya is treated at some length and with considerable nuance, as he certainly deserves, but the entry on Ibn Khaldun is very concise and mostly biographical. To what degree these disparities reflect the guidelines laid down by the editors or the choices of the authors, I cannot say.

Overall, the longer thematic articles, some written by the editors and some by outside contributors, seem far more consistent and often offer analyses and interpretations that repay close reading. Indeed, some of the issues discussed above are mitigated, if not entirely resolved, in these essays. In fact, the most effective and satisfying way to use this encyclopaedia may be to browse through it as if it were a synthetic rather than a reference work, focusing first on the thematic articles and then following up as needed with entries on specific persons, events, terms, etc. In any case, and despite the problems presented above, this is certainly a very useful contribution to the field – a convenient and reliable first reference, and through its longer articles a good means of finding one's way through the complexities of Islamic political discourse over the last fourteen centuries.

**R. Stephen Humphreys**

University of California at Santa Barbara

A. J. DROGE:

*The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation.*

Ixii, 488 pp. Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013. £24.99. ISBN 978 1 84553 945 0.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X14000160

I am very often asked which English translation of the Quran I favour. For a long time, my answer was: none. Then, thankfully, appeared those by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2004, revised 2008), Tarif Khalidi (2008), and Wahiduddin Khan (2009). I am also often asked which I teach with, and I have replied that there is no ideal classroom translation. Until now, that is.

In his short "Preface" to this translation, A.J. Droge states that "This annotated translation of the Qur'ān is designed for students of religion by a fellow student of religion" (p. vii): indeed, the half-page of "Acknowledgments" underscores the importance to him of the "comparative agenda" (p. ix). He goes on to note that although there is "no shortage of English translations of the Qur'ān currently on the market . . . there has been a longstanding need for an edition of the text suitable for use in an academic setting". I fully expect this translation to become – and to set – the standard for such a translation.

The translation is preceded by a longish introduction (pp. xi–xxxvii), one that provides a very good overview of the questions the Qur'ān raises about itself,

including: the virtue or liability of reading it in light of the Prophet Muḥammad's life (and the *Sīra*); the possibility that it is an early collection, or a later collation/compilation; the internal contradictions in the traditional(ist) account(s); and the contradictory Western accounts (Burton, Wansbrough). About the translation itself and the translation process, Droge says less. He "aims not at elegance but strives for as literal a rendering of the Arabic as English will allow [...] literal to the point of transparency ... maintain[ing] consistency in the rendering of words and phrases" ... mimic[king] word order wherever possible. The result is a kind of Arabicized (or Qur'anicized) English which strives to capture in translation something of the power and pervasive strangeness of the original" (p. xxxv).

To this end, Droge has succeeded. Overall I find the quality of the translation, i.e. the English rendition, excellent. For the refrain *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān* (Q Raḥmān 55:13, repeated 31 times), for example – the cadence of which eludes most translators – Droge has the simple and elegant "Which of the blessings of your Lord will you two call a lie" (pp. 366 ff.). The refrain is from a Sūra ("55 The Merciful") about which more could have been said. In his synopsis Droge writes: "The first half of this sūra recounts God's blessings, the second describes the punishments of the wicked and rewards of the righteous. One of its distinctive features is that it addresses both people and jinn". There is no mention here, or anywhere, of rhyme. Given the importance of rhyme in the Quran (eight/tenths of it rhymes), given Droge's finely attuned ear, and given his desire to provide readers with maximum information, silence on this matter is hard to understand.

Nevertheless, Droge has unarguably succeeded with the annotations, the quality of which is superb. Providing cross-references within the Quran and to Biblical material is a master stroke and has been long needed. And there are important observations and insights throughout, such as this one, from the end of note 115 in Sūra 2: "Contrary to popular opinion, Gabriel is never identified in the Qur'ān as one of the angels. . ." (p. 11). He uses traditional superscripted footnotes so perhaps this is why he opted for in-text bold-type Arabic numerals for āya (verse) markers: in any event, the visual and readerly effect is excellent. His paragraphing (or sectioning of verses) reflects his breakdown of the sūras into constituent parts. Thus, for Q Luqmān 31, we have:

- 1–9 The Book, a source of guidance and object of ridicule
- 10–11 Signs of God's power and providence
- 12–19 Luqmān's advice to his son
- 20–26 Disbelievers ungrateful and stubborn
- 27 Oceans of revelation
- 28 Creation and resurrection inseparable
- 29–32 Signs of God's power and providence
- 33–34 Judgment certain

And he routinely provides the literal rendering. For *fa-yakīdū laka kaydā* (Q Yūsuf 12:5), for example, he translates "or they will hatch a plot against you" (p. 142), and in note 13 has:

- 13. *hatch a plot against you*: lit. "plot against you a plot."

For *qāla qā'ilun minhum* (Q Yūsuf 12:10), he annotates:

- 21. *A speaker among them said*: Reuben, according to Genesis 37.21–22.

One can always quarrel with a translator's choices. No one would naturally "say" "He is God, One", so I find that rendering of *qul huwa llāhu aḥad* (Q Ikhḷāṣ 112:1) uninspired. And I do not quite see the expression *asrā bi-'abdihi laylan* in the opening verse of Q Isrā' 17 as meaning "journeyed with His servant by night" (also Jones' rendering, p. 261): *asrā bi-* is to "to carry" or "to take". As for "and We have sent it down once and for all", discussed at length in the introduction (pp. xxii–xxiii), for *nazzalnāhu tanzīlā* (Q Isrā' 17:106), this rendering might reveal a *parti pris*; though, to be fair, Droge does provide the literal translation in a note ("lit. We have sent it down [with] a sending down" [p. 183, n. 129]), allowing even non-Arabophone readers to "decide" for themselves what is going on. These are really only quibbles, because the translation is characterized overwhelmingly by elegance, simplicity and transparency. The cognate accusative, for example, is dealt with extremely well. "They have not changed in the least" nicely conveys *wa-mā baddalū tabdīlā* (in Q Aḥzāb 33:23).

The "Guide to further reading" (p. xxxix) is judicious. Muhammad Asad's translation could be added, and also references to the "corrected edition" of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's translation (2008), to the revised edition of Ingrid Mattson's *The Story of the Qur'an* (2013), and to Abdur Raheem Kidwai's *Bibliography of the Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an into English, 1949–2002* (2005). The "Glossary of key names, terms, and abbreviations" (pp. xliii–xlv) is short and apposite. One entry, "Cairo edition", reminds the reader of something Droge is at pains to explain in the introduction, namely that translators, Droge included, all rely on the so-called Cairo edition of 1924, but never say so explicitly (Alan Jones does in *The Qur'an* (2007), p. 19). The "Timeline" (pp. xlvii–xlix), which would have been slightly more useful had it been organized in side-by-side columns, is a good idea, as is the map (p. li). The "Synopsis: the Qur'ān at a glance" (pp. liii–lxii) is also useful but the synopses provided at the beginning of each chapter are more substantive: when the book goes into future printings, I would replace the current prefatory synopsis with these.

On the production front, I noticed no typographical errors. Becca (p. xii) instead of Bakka, I take to be an attempt to show its similarity to Mecca (with which it is identified). Rather than having the Sūra number in the footer at the bottom of the page next to the page number, I would move it to the more user-friendly header, currently (unnecessarily) featuring "The Qur'ān" on every single page. I would also mention the total number of verses in the synopses at the beginning of the book, and at the head of each sūra.

In sum, I cannot recommend a better English translation of the Quran for an academic setting. Both Droge and his publisher are to be warmly congratulated.

**Shawkat M. Toorawa**  
Cornell University

BIRGIT KRAWIETZ and GEORGES TAMER (eds):

*Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.*

(Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients.) xxvii, 583 pp. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013. €129.95. ISBN 978 3 11 028534 5.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X14000172