

### ***The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary***

edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, and Joseph E. Lombard (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 2048 pp., ISBN 978-0-06-112587-4 (paperback, \$41.06; E-book as PDF or ePub, \$22.41)

The *Study Quran* (SQ) is a painstaking endeavor that takes several years before it is completed. This study consists of an introduction, Qurʾān translation, a synopsis of certain commentaries, and essays explaining the sacred text's place and thought in Islam. Recently, the topics that are discussed include "How to Read the Qurʾān" and "Islamic Views on the Qurʾān" to "Al-Qurʾān Ethics, Human Rights, and Society," as well as "The Qurʾān and Sufism" and "Commentary on the Qurʾān." This essay involves introductions and maps that exceed 2,000 pages to reconstruct the Battle of Badr and the Conquest of Makkah. However, the editors' preference and approach to translating the Islamic text, inclusion of commentary, and a map of each of these elements were selected to understand the Qurʾān properly.

This study focuses on how the commentary tradition is represented and modified on gender issues. Regarding gender, SQ is an excellent example of modern conservative methods and perspectives. Data were collected by picking and selecting, summarizing, and modifying pre-modern commentaries and prioritizing information written during and after the fourteenth century. However, using the commentaries only provides antiquity to a modern interpretation. This essay failed to perfectly represent medieval heritage because it sometimes diverged from the archaic comments (p. xlv). The discussion below shows the selection and

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preference that represent a distinctive expression of modern Muslim conservatism. The first is selecting sources to construct the “Islamic tradition.”

A total of 40 commentators representing a broad period and several views on the text were selected as participants. However, the respondents are somewhat misleading because the listed and early modern authors were not referenced in their comments but only appeared at the end of the essay or the introductory aspect.

For instance, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) and Ibn Āshūr (d. 1973) only appear in the introductory part of the book. Also, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1854) quoted Sūrat al-Nūr verse 31, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb verse 56, Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt verse 56, and Sūrat al-Mujādilah verse 22 in the commentary aspect. Al-Shawkānī (d. 1839) quoted the Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā verse 1-2, while the Shādhilī Sufi Ibn ‘Ajībah Aḥmad (d. 1809) shared 46 comments. Furthermore, al-Burūsawī (d. 1725) interpreted Sūrat Qāf verse 43, while Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1680) appeared only in the introductory aspect. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), interpreted nine verses, and al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) shared two verses in the commentary aspect. Al-Biqāʿī (d. 1480) quoted in the introductory and concluding aspects. Meanwhile, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1336) interpreted nine verses, while Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) appeared many times in all aspects.

Briefly, authors who died during and after the twentieth century are omitted from the commentary aspect, but the earlier ones have the most citations. Also, authors except for Ibn ‘Ajībah, who appeared from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, are rarely cited in the book. These basic statistics give an excellent idea of the meaning of “Islamic tradition.” Meanwhile, the commentators prefer to represent the intellectual output of Muslim scholars during and after the fourteenth century because they fully admit to making a tough preference. This indicates that commentators have a deeper insight into the Qurʾān than current scholars. However, it is more important to present the readers’ views in the 14<sup>th</sup> century than in the modern period. In actual interpretation, these opinions become clear that editors feel uncomfortable with the idea presented in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, these views are modified in ways that suit certain sensibilities about what it means to be a modern conservative

Muslim. In the traditional aspect, this Qur'ān interpretation is entirely new because it is a common pattern in terms of gender.

SQ's interpretation of Sūrat al-Nisā' verse 1 provides a good example of a modern conservative approach. The verse reads: "O mankind, fear your Lord who created you from one soul and its mate that are dispersed as men and women." Meanwhile, *ittaqu* does not mean "fear" but "respect" when translated modernly. This leads to eliminating all the negative connotations that the term fear brings in a new context.

This interpretation combines medieval understanding with a modern conservative sensibility. In the ancient sources, the "one soul" and the "mate" are referred to as Adam and Eve respectively. Meanwhile, the modern line is added that "this interweaving of masculine and feminine references shows the reciprocity in human relations and marriages which is implied in other verses including Sūrat al-Baqarah verse 187 and Sūrat al-Rūm verse 21" (p. 189). The notion of "reciprocity" is absent in medieval source because this verse creates a hierarchy. Therefore, hierarchical elements are missing in SQ comments.

According to Maria Massi Dakake, this verse refers to the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. Meanwhile, other commentators interpreted that the creation of Adam and Eve is from the same substance known as clay. Several linguists interpret the verse "*min nafs<sup>in</sup> waḥidab*" to mean "of the same kind or character" (p. 189) because it becomes the representation of the medieval sources. Most ancient interpreters explained that Eve is a secondary creation due to her being formed from Adam. All the medieval commentators failed to indicate that Eve was the same as Adam. Hūd ibn Muḥakkam cited a ḥadīth that compares Eve to a man with a crooked rib: "a crooked woman abides with him." This interpretation showed that the creation of women from the same substance has nothing to do with gender equality. The medieval sources did not comment or indicate that Eve was additionally formed. Dakake interpretation of Sūrat al-Nisā' verse 1 established the understanding of man and woman as equal beings in creation.

The pattern of discarding unpleasant interpretations is repeated in Sūrat al-Nisā' verse 34, which reads, "*Men or husband are in charge of women or wife through the wealth that was given by Allah.*"

*Therefore, righteous women are devoutly obedient but you need to advise those full of arrogance. The husband needs to forsake the wife in bed and strike them lightly if the arrogance persists. However, the man has to seek no means against women if they are an obedient type.*" Dakake's comments are extensive in this verse because he tries to summarize past interpretations and construct new opinions. This study provides a brief example of how the modern conservative paradigm of selectivity and reinterpretation is applied. Dakake agrees with the hierarchy between the genders set out in the opening verse 34 of Sūrat al-Nisā', which reads, "*Men are in charge of women...*". This is in line with the comments of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Tabrisī, al-Zamakhsharī, and others.

Meanwhile, Dakake refers to the husband's obligation to support the wife financially, while medieval commentators allow a man to discipline his woman. In this verse, the interesting part is not the general approach of picking and selecting but the object being picked and selected. Regarding gender, the editor's preference usually represents a modern conservative perspective that Sunnīs and Shi'īs share.

This approach is inevitable because the work edited by many people is uneven. Dakake's interpretation of Sūrat al-Nisā' verse 1 cited Sūrat al-Baqarah verse 187 as an example of reciprocity in husband-wife relationships, which reads, "*They are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them.*" Meanwhile, Caner Dagli failed to mention this verse because it is less important to medieval commentators than the modern ones. This scholar relies on al-Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr, who are interested in *asbāb al-nuzūl* and the period when intercourse is permissible during Ramadan (p. 82).

Dagli's comment on Sūrat al-Tawbah verse 71 only referred to contemporary understandings of this verse which reads as: "*The believing men and women are allies of one another because they enjoin what is right and forbid wrong act by establishing prayer and giving zakāb as well as obey Allah and His Messenger. This enables Allah to have mercy upon them.*" Dagli's comment on Sūrat al-Aḥzāb verse 35 cited, "This verse is important because it places the same spiritual and social obligations including moral authority and protection on the shoulders of men and women" (p. 525). In this

verse, the interpretation reflects modern sensibilities and concerns with human equality between the genders.

*The Study Quran as A New Translation and Commentary* becomes a monumental work that requires a strong scientific effort to explore. This work is not clearly understood as a representation of medieval interpretive and modern thought but instead serves as a good example of the current conservative trend. A new perspective tends not to be indicated because the book is not an academic work that contains a clear statement about a particular worldview. For instance, the gender issue demonstrates how modern conservative thinkers used parts of medieval tradition as a springboard to fully build a new view where male privilege was guaranteed but not based on the idea of men's innate superiority.

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