

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Paul Lettinck, *Aristotle's Meteorology and its Reception in the Arab World with an Edition and Translation of Ibn Suwār's Treatise on Meteorological Phenomena and Ibn Bājja's Commentary on the Meteorology* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999), ix+505 pp, HB, ISBN 90 04 10933 1

For a desert people winds, rain, thunder, lightening, hurricanes, thunderbolts, whirlwinds, and other meteorological phenomena held tremendous fascination. This interest in meteorology is reflected in diverse forms and manners in Arabic poetry, lexicography, and grammar. In addition, there existed a theoretical aspect of meteorology which constructed a theoretical framework for a scientific inquiry of various meteorological phenomena.

When Greek texts were translated into Arabic, the science of meteorology was one of the first to evolve as a distinct discipline and was known as *ʿilm al-āthār al-ʿukwiyya*, the science of the upper phenomena. Al-Fārābī (d. 950) lists it under this name in his *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*, al-Khwārizmī (fl. 980) mentions it in his *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm* and it is found in the *Rasāʾil* of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (end of 10<sup>th</sup> century). A vast body of literature grew around Aristotle's *Meteorology*, either by way of comment or works inspired by him. Numerous philosophers wrote on one or the other aspect of meteorology. Thus, we have works by al-Kindī (d. ca. 873), Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), Ibn Bājja (d. 1138) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198). The subject also attracted numerous cosmographers, geographers, encyclopedists and writers of belle letters (*adab*). It also found its way into the heresiographies and works on medicine.

When Paul Lettinck published his *Aristotle's Physics and its Reception in the Arab World with an Edition of the Unpublished Parts of Ibn Bājja's Commentary on the Physics* in 1994, his carefully documented work opened a new window for understanding the complexities of the reception of the Aristotelian corpus in the Islamic scientific tradition;

with this companion volume, he widens that window.<sup>1</sup> The two works share the general format of presentation of material: both have detailed bibliographies, an Index Locorum, an Index of Names and Subjects, bi-lingual texts of the supplements, but the present volume also includes a useful Greek-English-Arabic Glossary, not included in the previous work.

Divided into ten chapters and two supplements, the book treats a group of mutually related meteorological phenomena in separate chapters; these chapters do not correspond to those in Aristotle's *Meteorology*. The structure of the book envisages a uniform treatment of the material in all chapters: a summary of Aristotle's text, followed by an account of various Greek commentaries, followed by Arabic versions of *Meteorology* by Ibn al-Biṭrīq and Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and an Arabic version of the paraphrase by Pseudo-Olympiodorus. The chapters end with miscellaneous Arabic commentaries and other treatises on meteorology, such as those by al-Kindī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Bājja and Ibn Rushd. The two bi-lingual Arabic-English supplements contain *Maqalah fī'l Āthār al-Mutkhayyilah fī'l Jaww* (*Treatise on Imagined Phenomena in the Atmosphere*) by Abū'l Khayr Ḥasan ibn Suwār (d. ca. 1030) and *Commentary on the Meteorology* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Ṣā'igh ibn Bājja (b. Saragossa, al-Andalus, end of 11th century; d. Fez, 1138 or 1139).

The book under review is mainly concerned with treatises on meteorology inspired by Aristotle's *Meteorology* and written by philosophers. These include a number of letters by al-Kindī, those chapters of Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Shifā'* which deal with meteorology, the *Short and Middle Commentary on the Meteorology* by Ibn Rushd, and the two aforementioned treatises, which have not been previously published. In addition, the book includes discussion on the meteorological sections of the encyclopedic works of Bahmanyār ibn

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1. The earlier book was published by E. J. Brill in 1994 as volume 7 of the same project, *The Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus*, under which the present work has been published. This project "envisages the publication of Syriac, Arabic and Hebrew translations of Aristotle's works, of the Latin translations of those translations, and of the mediaeval paraphrases and commentaries made in the context of this translation tradition". H. Daiber and R. Kruk are the General Editors of this project. *Aristotle's Meteorology and its Reception in the Arab World* is volume 10 in the series.

al-Marzubān (d. 1067) (*Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*), Abū'l-Barkāt al-Baghdādī (d. 1165) (*Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*), and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) (*Kitāb al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah*), grouped together under the heading "School of Ibn Sīnā". It also discusses Ibn al-Haytham's (d. ca. 1040) work on the halo and rainbow and traces the developments in this area in Ibn Rushd's works. Arabic paraphrase of Aristotle's *Meteorology* by Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq (d. ca. 830) and *Olympiodorus' Commentary on Aristotle's Meteorology*, which was translated into Arabic by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq is also part of the discussion; this translation was revised by Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn.

Paul Lettinck traces the history of the reception of the first three Books of Aristotle's *Meteorology* in the Muslim world, leaving aside Book IV, which most scholars consider to be authentic but which does not belong to meteorology proper. Through a survey of the contents of translations, Lettinck clearly establishes various axes of influence which were operative in the Islamic scientific tradition and which transformed Aristotle's *Meteorology* in the course of centuries.

What is highly impressive in Lettinck's work is its systematic approach that brings a large body of literature within a clearly defined framework of inquiry, its lucidity, distinctions of various meteorological phenomena, and a solid understanding of the complexities of the translation movement that brought Aristotle's text into Arabic. Numerous references to the influences of various works upon the later writers, summary descriptions of the views of major philosophers and scientists upon different aspects of meteorological phenomena, and a synthetic ability that compresses a large body of information into precise units without losing its salient features are some of the highlights of this work which, when read with his *Aristotle's Physics and its Reception in the Arabic World*, significantly adds to our understanding of a hitherto under-studied aspect of the Islamic scientific tradition.

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Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999), ix+261 pp, HB, ISBN 90 04 11374 6

Denoting the period around the third-fourth century after the *hijrah* (migration) of the Prophet of Islam to Madinah as “medieval”, “early medieval Islam” and “early Islam”—all treated as near synonyms—this book explores “two paradoxes” of this era: (i) the relative marginal position accorded to two “freethinkers” of this period; and (ii) the vehemence with which Muslim thinkers supposedly attacked freethinking even though this was a “marginal and short-lived” phenomenon of the medieval Islam.

The two protagonists of Sarah Stroumsa’s book are Abū Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Ishāq ibn al-Rāwandī (b. 205/815) and Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyā’ al-Rāzī (b. 251/865). Given the contemporary social and political realities, the subject matter of this book is, indeed, explosive, and given the fact that the two original texts related to this inquiry have not survived intact, “the likelihood of misinterpretation becomes almost a certainty”, as Stroumsa herself informs us in her Preface. Yet, she then puts herself on the line, setting out with a deliberate care worthy of a medievalist, only to let it be blown to pieces as the minefields around her inquiry start to explode due to ambitious over-arching definitions and concepts.

To begin with, the borrowing of the key term of her title—freethinking—from early modern European intellectual history opens the question of the legitimacy of her paradoxes, but this is a choice that Stroumsa has consciously made and justified—in her own manner, that is. The task of the critic, then, is to examine the justification, not the choice. For this, one has to first examine her definition of “freethinking”, as applied to medieval Islam. “I suggest we limit the application of the term ‘freethinkers’ in early Islam to those Muslim intellectuals who, in opposition to other heretics, did not adhere to any scriptural religion” (p. 8). According to her working definitions, “one cannot really consider [these freethinkers] to have been ‘Muslim heretics,’ since they did not offer a new, heretical, interpretation of Islam”. Rather, it was the very message of Islam, its very foundations—The Qur’ān and the Prophet—which they rejected” (p. 8).

Having defined her term as well as what it does not denote,

Stroumsa emphatically rejects any dilution of her definition and categorically labels as misleading all usages of this term which include those critically-minded intellectuals who accepted the presuppositions of the monotheistic religions; she only allows this term to be used for those who did not accept these presuppositions. Thus, even before she begins her own inquiry, she feels the need to weed out numerous other usages of the term and isolate her protagonists from all others who might stand next to them. Her “freethinkers” are not “atheists”, she insists; it would be incorrect to call them atheists because “their criticism of religion never included the negation of God’s existence. What they did deny was the scriptural religion’s idea of God, His epithets, and His interference in the world through revelation” (p. 8).

They can also not be called “deists” in the sense in which this term is used in modern European thought, she contends, because, although

the thinkers who are the subject of the present book did indeed have some traits in common with the deists; like them, they believed that natural reason was sufficient to attain truth; like them, they believed in the natural laws and science which should be the only guide to human conduct; and like them, they regarded with suspicion all established religions. But other central components of deism, and primarily the belief in the goodness of divine providence, were missing in the thought of some of the freethinkers of Islam. In the search for a term that will identify the common traits of these people, ‘deists’ thus seems unsuitable (p. 9).

They cannot also be called “materialists”, she informs us, for the same reasons. Thus, having weeded out the extraneous matter, she reaffirms that her term “freethinkers” only denotes “the advocates of autonomous reflection on the major metaphysical and human issues, with no commitment to the monotheist tradition” (p. 9); a little later, she rephrases her definition: “the term ‘freethinking’ is used here solely to denote the rejection of the authority of both revelation and of the revealed religions” (p. 9). But in spite of her consideration that the precise meaning of the term is essential for her project, there appears an internal consistency in her variously stated definitions when she comes to examine the phenomenon of freethinking in Islam. Here, she makes two self-contradictory claims: (i) this phenomenon entailed a total rejection of prophecy; and (ii) it rejected all but one manifestation of prophecy—the initial, primal mode that cannot be abrogated by a succession of prophets; hence, in this second mode,

freethinking involved rejection of succession of prophets, not of prophecy.

This inconsistency notwithstanding, she rejects numerous other contemporary usages of this term by such scholars as Dominique Urvoy, Majid Fakhry, and Josef van Ess, and makes her two protagonists stand alone in the spotlight. She disagrees with Fakhry, for instance, in his categorization which puts al-Nazzām (d. 845) and al-Rāzī “on the same footing” (p. 11); with H. S. Nyberg, who lumped ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd and Ibn al-Rāwandī together; and with a host of other scholars—Kraus, Kraemer, Abrahamov, Goodman, Calder—anyone who diluted the definition to include independent thinkers of classical Islam in this category. Thus, so far as she is concerned, Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq, Abū’l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī do not qualify for the distinction of being “freethinkers”, although she does clarify that Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Rāzī were not the only “freethinkers”, she yet insists that the number of freethinkers was extremely small, without telling us who else could stand next to her protagonists.

As soon as she finishes with the task of creating her watertight compartment to hold her freethinkers, Stroumsa’s whole project becomes a spider’s web: having incessantly worked to establish the boundaries of her framework, she becomes trapped in it. The very first objection that can be raised is none other than her own objection against Majid Fakhry’s categorization: How can one lump two individuals as different as Ibn al-Rāwandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī in this watertight compartment? Believing in her own construction with a single minded tenacity, Stroumsa foresees this objection to her framework of inquiry and attempts to justify it. She acknowledges the enormous “difference in their intellectual backgrounds and tastes”, but insists on keeping her two “freethinkers” together on the premise that “they had in common a vociferous rejection of all religions based on revelation”, a rejection founded “on the assumption that the human intellect should be, and indeed is, a sufficient source for all knowledge” (p. 13).

Whether or not one can lump together Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Rāzī may not be the most important issue here; however, because the main problem is the fact that the whole edifice of Stroumsa’s daring enterprise rests on two fragmentary texts, the *K. al-Zumurrud* (*B. of the Emerald*) of Ibn al-Rāwandī and *K. Makhārīq al-anbiyā’* (*The Trickery of the Prophets*) of al-Rāzī, which she needed to reconstruct from a host of

secondary, often mutually contradictory, sources. But before launching into this enormously difficult task, she presents “the Muslim dogma which is the backdrop to freethinking in Islam” in the first chapter of her book, which is divided into two parts; the first part consists of five chapters which deal with the phenomena of freethinking in medieval Islam; the last three chapters, constituting the second part of the book, explore its repercussions in Islamic thought.

In order to reconstruct the two salient texts of her “freethinkers” in the religious-historical context in which they lived, Stroumsa first outlines the central position of prophecy in Islam in her first chapter, “The Signs of Prophecy: The Touchstone of Muslim Prophetology”. As soon as she begins, one can sense a deliberate sense of steering the discourse toward a peculiar goal through selective use of source material. Even the first sentence is problematic: “The basic Islamic position toward other religions is reflected in the two ‘testimonies’ (*al-Shahādātayn*) which constitute the Muslim declaration of faith: the belief in the unity of God and the belief in the prophecy of Muḥammad” (p.21). How does this statement reflect Islamic position toward *other* religions? It can only be said to have an indirect connection with the basic Islamic position toward other religions outlined in the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān constructs a coherent account of the prophetic chain, initiating with Adam and ending with Muḥammad. It makes use of historical data connected with the mission of these prophets in order to reaffirm the centrality of its message, Unicity of God. But Stroumsa does not refer to any of this; instead, she begins her study on a linear historical plane, using selected source material from Arabic literature.

It is, however, with her reconstruction of the two primary texts of her protagonists—*The Book of the Emerald* and *The Trickery of the Prophets*—in the second and the third chapters of her book that her whole project starts to fall flat due to internal contradictions in her source material as well as in her own usage of these highly complex and problematic texts. Since the extant material does not present the position of her two freethinkers in a coherent manner and since this material is full of mutually exclusive claims, extrapolations, additions, deletions and distortions that make these two “freethinkers” schizophrenic personalities who devote all their strengths to espouse one position only to dismantle it as soon as it has been proclaimed,

Stroumsa's attempt to present their peculiar "freethinking" as a coherent, thoroughgoing affair is fraught with internal inconsistencies. This renders her task of making sense of this diverse source material extremely challenging. In her self-assumed task of imparting coherence to the self-contradictory statements of her protagonists, she accepts and rejects historical data arbitrarily. Thus, against Paul Kraus, she equates the historical Indian Brahmins with Ibn al-Rāwandī's *Brāhima*, who accept and reject prophecy at the same time, just as she describes the Sabians of Harrān as a community believing in messengers, but messengers who, "on closer examination...do not fit exactly the biblical or Qur'ānic notion of a succession of prophets" (p. 165).

The zeal with which Stroumsa has constructed her freethinkers is then transferred to the second part of her book in which she examines their repercussions in Islamic thought. If one were to believe her construction, it would appear that the impact of her freethinkers infiltrated the whole spectrum of Islamic thought; no one—from *ṣūfis* to philosophers—seems to have remained unaffected by them. She even makes al-Ghazālī's self-reflection "reminiscent of that of the freethinkers" (p. 169) and misreads his autobiographical description of his epistemological dilemma as evoking "the familiar theme of the equivalence of religions (*takāfu' al-adyān*)", claims that al-Ghazālī "struggles to counter this dangerous notion with a belief that enjoys perfect certainty" (p. 169). Her claim is based on a passage from *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, in which, according to Stroumsa "Ghazālī recycles the argumentation of the freethinkers against the prophets' miracles.... like the freethinkers, Ghazālī refuses to accept the evidentiary power of miracles" (p. 170).

Anyone familiar with al-Ghazālī would find this juxtaposition highly problematic. The quest for certainty underlying al-Ghazālī's so-called spiritual crisis, so poignantly narrated in his *al-Munqidh*, has absolutely nothing to do with the impact of freethinkers and there is no reference to the "familiar theme of the equivalence of religions (*takāfu' al-adyān*)" in *al-Munqidh*; rather, al-Ghazālī is systematically leading his readers to the inner processes that led him to examine the epistemological foundation of certain knowledge. Furthermore, the immediate reference to the quoted passage, which Stroumsa does not mention, is to a saying of the Prophet—upon whom al-Ghazālī invokes God's blessings and peace. This *ḥadīth*, which al-Ghazālī quotes, says:

“Every child is born endowed with the *fiṭrah*, then his parents make him Jew or Christian or Magian”. He then goes on to explain: “I felt an inner urge to seek the true meaning of the original *fiṭrah*, and the true meaning of the beliefs arising from blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of parents and teachers...So, I said to myself: what I seek is the knowledge of true meaning of things (*al-‘ilm bi ḥaqā’iq al-‘amūr*), therefore I must begin by inquiring into the true nature of knowledge”.<sup>2</sup> It is in this connection that al-Ghazālī cites the arithmetical example quoted by Stroumsa and it has nothing to do with the impact of freethinkers. Likewise, her passing remark about the mystical experience of ṣūfis posing a threat to the mission of the prophets (p. 169) is totally unsubstantiated.

What remains, then, is a confusing account of “freethinking” and its impact on Islamic thought, a muddle produced by reading into the classical Islamic texts what Stroumsa wants to read, against all other scholars, as if she herself aspires to do what her protagonists supposedly did: freethinking. Yet, one cannot be a free thinker in vacuum; after all, there is a solid core of literature with its power of influence from which no mind can remain detached. All attempts to ignore this historical contingency merely produce illusive flights of self-delusion that may convince one that he or she is a freethinker. Such fanciful flights may lead one to believe in one’s own conclusions, but they remain a personal tragedy, rather than a generally accepted perception. In her “Conclusion”, Stroumsa extends her freethinking to the poetry of Jalāl al Dīn Rūmī, whose poetic expression of mystical states are construed as blunt expressions of freethinking!

All that can be said about the book’s merit is its scattered testimony to, and a fragmentary account of, the intellectual effervescence of that era of Islamic thought during which so many currents were flowing through its fabric—a period that deserves to be studied in much more detail and in its proper context; Stroumsa’s book adds only a few disjointed strands to our understanding of that century.

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2. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (Beirut: Mū’assah al-kitāb al-thaqāfiyah, 3rd ed., 1991), p. 18.

Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), xv+236 pp, cloth, ISBN 0-691-05950-0 2001

Islam is frequently characterized as a “religion of the Book”. Many scholars consider it the most developed example of this kind of religion, probably because the words of scripture occupy a more central position in the faith and practice of Muslims than in other religions. Yet, there is no physical book at the center of Islamic rituals. Muslims’ approach to their scripture is almost totally oral. Many recite the whole sacred text from memory, and it was years after the Prophet’s death that it was first put in book form. What does the Qurʾān mean, then, when it insistently calls itself *kitāb*, a term that is usually translated as ‘book’ or ‘scripture’? In order to answer this question, Daniel Madigan reexamines this key term, *kitāb*, as it occurs in the Qurʾān’s own discourse about itself. The main task of *The Qurʾān's Self-Image* is, hence, to bring to light the complex connotations of the Qurʾān’s ‘book’ and ‘writing’ language as “it is allowed to interpret its own concepts and speak for itself” (p. 9).

To discern the Qurʾān’s particular conception of *kitāb*, Madigan adopts a dual strategy: to reevaluate a consensus long held both by Muslim and Western scholars of Islam about the way the Qurʾān views itself, and to outline an alternative approach not only for the expert in the study of Islam but also for anyone interested in the comparative study of scripture and hermeneutics. From the outset, Madigan makes it clear that he treats the Qurʾānic text as a coherent whole “because that is the way it functions within the community that canonizes it and that looks to it for guidance. The notion of *kitāb* is the overarching theme that proclaims and maintains that coherence” (p. 11).

Overall, Madigan adopts a critical approach. He regards with skepticism straightforward renderings of the words derived from the Arabic root *k-t-b* and takes into consideration as much evidence as can be found, both within the Qurʾānic text and in selected parts of the Muslim tradition as to their earliest field of meaning. He starts by noting that the Qurʾān uses words derived from the root *k-t-b* mostly to refer, not to the Qurʾān itself, but to different phenomena, such as the recording of all that is pre-ordained (e.g., *al-ʿimrān*: 145; *al-Mujādalah*: 21); divine decrees (e.g., *al-Anʿām*: 12, 54); the inventory of what exists (e.g., *Yūnus*: 61; *Hūd*: 6); the registers of an individual’s

good and bad deeds (e.g., *al-ʿimrān* :181; *Yūnus*: 21). Many scholars read into these categories what they had learned about similar notions on other religious contexts and thus understood them as separate writings. However, Madigan contends that this approach to the categories of writing fails to recognize that the notion of writing evidenced in the Qurʾān exhibits an extraordinary fluidity. Part of what God writes is legislative, some of it consists of judgments, while other writing is merely descriptive; a great deal concerns the revelation and explanation of the nature of things; in yet other instances, God reveals something of His nature by revealing what He has “written” for Himself. Within all this variety, however, there is an indisputable unity to the notion of divine writing. According to Madigan, the very use of the single term *kitāb* to describe so many aspects of the phenomenon, itself points to a unity “that goes deeper than some idea of a heavenly library or archive” (p. 6). Thus, he concludes that the commonly accepted translation “book” cannot do justice to the complexities of the Qurʾānic term *kitāb*. Madigan suggests instead, the translation “writing”, albeit with some qualifications.

A book, inherently, purports to be bound, complete as well as structured and ordered. It is the incongruity of this implicit claim with the actual form of the Qurʾānic text that prompted many Western authors to presume that the production of the envisaged ‘book’ was left unfinished and incomplete. In chapter 1, Madigan demonstrates how this assumption about the structure and form appropriate to the Qurʾān does not arise from the Qurʾānic revelation itself, but rather from what scholars know of the structure and function of other scriptures. According to these scholars, for “the Book” to function as the complete record of revelation and as a code of legislation for the community, it should have a more orderly structure. However, Madigan finds no hint, in either the text or the tradition, that there is anything incomplete about the Qurʾān or that its structure was in any way problematic at the time of the Prophet’s death. Madigan quotes Wilfred Cantwell Smith who maintained that “Muslims, from the beginning until now are that group of people that has coalesced around the Qurʾān” (p. 52). He further notes that “the evidence indicates that they coalesced around it while it was still incomplete, still oral, still in process. They committed themselves to believe in a God who had initiated a direct communication with them. They

gathered around the recitations as the pledge of God's relationship of guidance to them rather than as a clearly defined and already closed textual corpus" (p. 52).

The second chapter focuses on the Qur'an's own rejection of the proof value of heavenly writings and on its refusal to behave as an already closed and codified text. It also emphasizes the Qur'an's insistence on remaining open and responsive, functioning as voice of God's continuing address to humanity. Furthermore, Madigan asserts that the Qur'an's *kitāb* cannot be mistaken for a book because its boundaries are not fixed: it is not made completely clear whether this text—the Qur'an—is the whole *kitāb* or part of it, one of several *kutub* or the only one. Indeed the Qur'an does not even identify itself with the *kitāb*, to which it refers in the third person when proclaiming, defending, and defining it. Yet the Qur'an does not speak of the *kitāb* simply as something already fixed and separate, for the Qur'an 'reciting' is the very mode by which the *kitāb* is made manifest and engages with humanity. Thus, Madigan concludes that the Qur'an is interested not so much in writing as a mere description of the form of the divine word as in the source of its composition, authority and veracity. The Qur'an's claim to being a *kitāb* is a claim to authority and knowledge rather than a simple statement about the form of its eventual storage.

Chapter 3 deals with the task of mapping the semantic field of "writing" language in the Qur'an in view of understanding precisely how symbol of *kitāb* functions in the Qur'anic discourse. Madigan first lays the ground by examining the background of semantic field analysis and analysing some of its applications in the context of Qur'anic studies.

In the next three chapters, Madigan presents a compelling semantic analysis of the Qur'an's self-awareness. He argues that the Qur'an views itself not as a completed book, but as an ongoing process of divine writing and re-writing; as God's active engagement with humanity. He also demonstrates the pervasiveness of the phenomenon of *kitāb* in the Qur'anic discourse, while asserting its elusive character. In fact, the seventh chapter explores how this elusiveness is also the reason the *kitāb* cannot be understood as a fixed, closed corpus.

Once a book is produced, it exists independently of its author. The Muslim community, however, has always had a lively sense that the

*kitāb*'s Author remains engaged with his audience. The concluding chapter attempts to identify the ways this richer and broader conception of the *kitāb* has remained operative in Islam in spite of the Muslims' preponderant concern for the closed corpus of the Qur'ān. Madigan astutely remarks that the appeal of tradition to *kalam Allah* as the key to understanding revelation is probably a means to escape the term *kitāb*, which became often associated with the *mushaf*. The term *kalam* offers the flexibility, freshness and responsiveness that *kitāb* has in the Qur'ānic text, but no longer in the tradition.

*The Qur'ān's Self-Image* constitutes a major contribution in studying the Qur'ān and Islam's self-understanding. The author, Daniel Madigan, has grounded his conclusions on a cogent reading of the Qur'ān and other primary texts. His focus on the key-term *kitāb* is well founded, for it plays a crucial role in defining not only the nature of sacred texts but also the mission of the Prophet, the characteristic way of God's interaction with humanity, the relationship between the Creator and creation and the relationship of Islam to other religions.

Although now it is widely accepted that the Qur'ān is not textually dependent on the earlier scriptures, it is still often assumed that it knew their content at least partially. What is rarely suggested is that the Qur'ān could mirror the role that other scriptures played within their own communities at the time and place of Islam's emergence. Madigan's approach to the Qur'ān sheds light on how the Qur'ān actually can provide insight into the way it saw the *ahl al-kitāb* relating to their *kutub*. In the appendix, Madigan turns to the revelations, in which terms the Qur'ān defines itself, to see whether the notion of *kitāb* emerging from his semantic analysis would have made sense to the other people who were defined by the phenomenon of the *kitāb*. It is hoped that this attempt to read *from* the Qur'ān what the Muslims were learning from the *ahl al-kitāb* with whom they had contact, will pave the way for a new and positive dialogue between these religions.

Moreover, Madigan's emphasis on the understanding of the *kitāb* as a token of access to the totality of God's address to humanity rather than a static and fixed book is extremely important, because the implicit claim to totality and the completeness contained in the word 'book' may open the way to a 'fundamentalism', which identifies the limits of God's *kitāb* with the boundaries of the received text. Such understanding may become dangerous, for if one imagines oneself to be in possession of complete wisdom and knowledge, rather than

having access to the knowledge of God, one may claim hegemony over the understanding of revelation.

Madigan's well-researched approach to the complex issue of the Qur'an's self-referential terms is not really a new reading of the text. It is rather an attentive reading predicated upon the idea that a unity underlies the Qur'an's use of the root *k-t-b*. Such a reading may appear as a radical departure from the traditional Muslim approach. However, the latter in many ways implicitly supports the position advanced by Madigan.

*The Qur'an's Self-Image* successfully unravels the characteristic self-awareness of the Qur'an: It observes and discusses the process of its own revelation; it asserts its own authority and claims its place within the history of revelation. Grasping this dynamic dimension of the Qur'an is crucial to understanding Islam and Islamic identity. From this point of view also, Madigan's book is a very useful source not only to the expert in the study of Islam but also to anyone who is interested in the study of scripture and hermeneutics.

To conclude, *Qur'an's Self-Image* is a significant breakthrough not only in the area of Qur'anic studies but more importantly in the hermeneutics of sacred texts. In its content, it is a challenge not only to traditional Western scholarship on Islam but also to the works written by Muslim scholars.

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