

## AFTERWORD: THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF THE QUR'ĀN—ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS

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Qur'ānic Studies is a broad field that includes many categories and subtopics, including grammar, lexicon, rhetoric, theology, law, textual history, textual variants, the history of interpretation, and many others, any one of which is, or has the potential to be, large and complex. The investigation of these fields is not new but goes back to the early Islamic centuries. As the Islamic societies matured and spread, so did the scholarly genres that grew up around the Qur'ān, including *tafsīr*, *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, grammatical treatises, rhetorical manuals, and so on. Such works were penned in all corners of the Islamic world, primarily in Arabic, but also in other Islamic languages. Translations and primers were written in Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, and other languages in order to facilitate comprehension of the Qur'ān on the part of Muslims who were not native speakers of Arabic. Study of the Qur'ān was also taken up by non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians in the Islamic world, and Jews and Christians in Western Europe. If the immediate motive for this interest was often polemical—the urge to counter Muslim claims to exclusive or superior access to the will of God—the result was an increase in general knowledge of Islamic doctrine and of Islam's sacred text. The Qur'ān was translated into Latin in the twelfth century, retranslated in the seventeenth century, and subsequently translated into many of the modern European languages. In a sense, then, Qur'ānic Studies has been a large, international project for centuries. It has involved Muslims, Christians, Jews, adherents of other religions, and adherents of no religion. And it will continue to do so.

It is indeed simplistic to imagine that critical investigation of the Qur'ān was the invention of the moderns, for the scholarship of medieval Islamic tradition already included such investigations. Muslim scholars such as Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/928), Abū Sa'īd al-Dānī (d. 444/1052), and others critically analyzed the orthography of the Qur'ān, and carefully investigated the form and rhyme schemes of the Qur'ān's *sūrahs* and verses in order to determine where to place verse divisions. In addition, *sūrahs* were

analyzed historically and divided into two classes, Meccan and Medinan, indicating the historical period in which they were revealed. In order to determine which verses could have abrogated—that is, canceled the legal effect of—other verses, medieval scholars endeavored to figure out the exact chronology of revelation of the *sūrahs*. Classical chronological lists of qurʿānic *sūrahs* were established in the works on “sciences of the Qurʿān” (*ʿulūm al-Qurʿān*) of al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), in his *Al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʿān*, and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), in *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʿān*.

Meanwhile, an entire science of “readings” (*qirāʾāt*) was devoted to the collection and examination of textual variants. The study of *qirāʾāt* included speculation on reports of what was once found in the codices of Companions of the Prophet that were destroyed (according to the standard historical account) by the caliph ʿUthmān as part of his program to eliminate all competing texts to his authorized version. These “Companion variants” often involve significantly different material, including whole words and phrases not found in the standard text. A variant reading attributed to Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 29/649) adds to Q Ṣaff 61:6 (after “whose name will be Aḥmad”) the phrase “the community of whom will be the last community and with whom God will place a seal on the prophets and messengers.” The study of *qirāʾāt* also involved the organization and codification of variant readings of the standard text. These “canonical variants” involve smaller changes than the “Companion variants” inasmuch as they do not affect the consonantal text attributed to ʿUthmān. Eventually such variants were organized into seven (or ten or fourteen) acceptable manners of reading the text of the Qurʿān, in part through the work of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936). On such questions, we might note, indeed admire, the degree of freedom that the culture of medieval Islamic scholarship allowed to scholars to explore different readings and interpretations of the qurʿānic text.

Nevertheless, we should not allow our admiration to cross into naïveté or anachronistic assumptions about medieval Islamic scholarship. In this culture certain doctrinal boundaries were not crossed, large and important topics were nearly entirely ignored, and traditional views that had limited support in the text itself but had arisen for extraneous reasons were accepted almost without question. To illustrate this point, we might note that the term *al-kawthar*, a *hapax legomenon* that appears prominently in Sūrat al-Kawthar, is often interpreted in traditional commentaries as a pool or river in which the believers are cleansed before entering Paradise. The evidence for this interpretation in the text is non-existent—the context does not support it. Instead, it appears that *al-kawthar* is related to the common root *k-th-r* and means an abundance of some sort, probably the numerous spiritual “progeny” of the Prophet; in other words, the family of believers.

In addition, Muslim scholars eventually developed a largely skeptical perspective on the legitimacy of referring to Jewish and Christian tradition to explain the (considerable) biblical material of the Qur'ān. Only a small number of medieval Muslim scholars including Ismaili Shi'a such as Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) and the Sunni exegete Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar b. Ḥasan al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480) actively investigated the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and other Jewish and Christian texts as a means toward understanding the qur'ānic versions of biblical stories (but even then not as a source of new or different understandings of legal principles). Many actively discouraged the use of biblical tradition in this manner, preferring to arrive at interpretations that were entirely independent of "outside" traditions. In practice this was difficult because the traditional Islamic commentaries had early on assimilated much biblical material. Thus, for example, most traditional Muslim commentators—even those who refuse on principle to consult Jewish and Christian traditions—report (in line with the Bible) that the prophet Jonah was sent to the city of Nineveh.

As for exegesis proper, most Muslim commentaries are marked by an atomistic verse-by-verse approach to the Qur'ān, and also by an openness to a diversity of interpretations of any particular verse. Commentaries by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) are encyclopedic inasmuch as they include considerable discussion of the views of earlier scholars, even those with whom they disagree pointedly. For example, on the meaning of the disconnected (or "mysterious") letters which open twenty-nine of the Qur'ān's *sūrahs*, they speculate widely. Indeed, at times their openness extends even to the possibility of admitting disagreement or uncertainty, to establishing only the "more correct" (*aṣaḥḥ*) meaning, or to concluding that the true meaning of a verse is known to God alone. Nevertheless, dogmatic ideas about the Qur'ān's revelation and proclamation also affected the history of Muslim scholarship. The idea that a passage of the Qur'ān could have been added into the Qur'ān or significantly modified after the time of the Prophet was not considered a real possibility, and indeed was considered blasphemous. Even the possibility that 'Uthmān's particular collection of the Qur'ān (which, according to the tradition itself was only one of many) was less than perfect was eventually considered unacceptable.

Scholarship on the Qur'ān in the West was of course free from the dogmatic concerns of Muslim scholars but it too had a particular history that shaped its development. The interest in the Qur'ān in the West was related to the history of biblical scholarship. Beginning in the sixteenth century, and spurred on, in some sense, by the challenge of Protestantism and the Wars of Religion, a new mode of studying the Bible developed in Christian Europe. It was not expressly aimed at undermining tradition, but the scholars who championed this mode of scholarship set out to investigate the biblical text in a scientific

manner without adhering closely to traditional sources, methods, and modes of interpretation. They tried to find the oldest textual materials related to the Bible. They studied languages like Old Slavonic, Syriac, Georgian, and Armenian. They produced massive polyglot Bibles that made it possible to compare six versions of the biblical text in six different languages, quickly. They produced concordances and dictionaries. They examined apocryphal texts that had not made it into the canon. By the nineteenth century, scholars of the Bible had become adept at textual criticism, which they had learned from the Classicists, and they made significant breakthroughs in the analysis of the biblical text.

Julius Wellhausen (d. 1918), building on the work of previous scholars, proposed the Documentary Hypothesis, according to which the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, was produced by combining four traditions. Scholars of the New Testament worked assiduously to characterize the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—so called because they related parallel accounts of Jesus Christ (in contrast to the Gospel of John). After long debate, a “two-source hypothesis” emerged by which the Gospel of Mark was the earliest gospel, and Matthew and Luke both wrote their gospels using the Gospel of Mark as a source, along with another work that preserved a collection of Jesus’ sayings, which New Testament scholars term *Q* (which comes from *Quelle*, the German word for “source”). Both of these hypotheses have been widely accepted and have informed the scholarly understanding of the Bible since the late nineteenth century. Scholars of the Bible have continued to produce a great deal of scholarship in the same vein, and now, in the twenty-first century, biblical scholarship is a massive enterprise, involving hundreds of academic journals and learned societies.

Scholars of biblical tradition turned their attention to the Qur’ān in a systematic way in the nineteenth century. The progression was natural. Just as scholars of the sixteenth century such as Joseph Scaliger and Thomas Erpenius had developed an interest in Arabic and the Qur’ānic text, scholars in nineteenth-century Europe sought to expand the purview of their field to include a cognate tradition. The Qur’ān clearly shared a great deal with the texts from Jewish and Christian tradition with which they were familiar, not only in terms of individual stories but also in terms of concepts, forms, and textual history. Abraham Geiger, Gustav Weil, Gustav Wüstenfeld, Theodor Nöldeke, and others applied elements of biblical criticism to the Qur’ān and related texts. Of particular note in this regard is the 1833 work of Abraham Geiger, “Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?,” in which Geiger discusses the relationship of the Qur’ān with Bible, Talmud, and midrash.

Another noteworthy moment in the history of nineteenth-century scholarship on the Qur'ān was a competition announced by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres de Paris in 1857, which challenged scholars to study the history of the Qur'ān within the lifetime of the Prophet, or more specifically to

research the primitive division [of the text] and the character of the different passages of which it is composed and to determine, as much as possible and with the aid of Arab historians and commentators, and in light of an examination of the passages themselves, the moments in the life of Muḥammad to which they are related.

The guidelines of this competition reflect the fundamental presuppositions of nineteenth-century scholarship on the Qur'ān, above all that the traditional method of explaining certain passages of the Qur'ān through accounts (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) found in medieval Islamic literature, which purport to explain when and why those passages were revealed, is reliable. These guidelines also reflect a certain confidence—represented famously by Ernest Renan (d. 1892), one of the judges of the Paris competition—that this literature, even if it included certain mythical elements, also contained reliable historical information on the circumstances of the Qur'ān's revelation. “Islam was born in the full light of history (*pleine histoire*),” quipped Renan. Among the three winners of the competition—along with the Italian Michele Amari (d. 1889) and the Austrian Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893)—was a young German named Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930). Nöldeke would later translate his Latin entry to the competition into German as “Geschichte des Qorans” (1860, “History of the Qur'ān”), the first volume of which was dedicated to establishing a chronology of qur'ānic *sūrahs*. Subsequent volumes would be written by Friedrich Schwally (d. 1919) on the collection of the text, and then by Gotthelf Bergsträßer (d. 1933) and Otto Pretzl (d. 1941) on the subsequent history of the qur'ānic text, especially the Islamic literature on variant readings (*qirā'āt*) and variant codices. Together these three volumes would become a sort of canon for the study of the Qur'ān in the academy.

Building on the advances in Arabic philology made in France with the founding of the École des Langues Orientales, and working individually at first, such scholars succeeded in creating a tradition of qur'ānic scholarship centered in Germany and Austria. Thereafter, this academic specialization spread to Britain, France, and Sweden in the early twentieth century.

The European scholars of Qur'ānic Studies had an approach that differed significantly and was thus, to an extent, complementary to the customary modes of Islamic scholarship. Their strong point was their knowledge of biblical tradition and other Semitic languages, and so a major facet of their

work was the identification of references to and adaptations of biblical material in the Qurʾān. Abraham Geiger had begun this in 1833, and it was pursued by a series of scholars such as Hartwig Hirschfeld, Alphonse Mingana, Josef Horowitz, Daniel Sidersky, and others, culminating in the work of Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (1931). They were also less restrained in their investigation of the text, and they could suggest that this or that feature was due to the purposeful action of the Prophet Muḥammad or that it had been interpolated at a later date. They could likewise suggest that this or that aspect of the biblical tradition had been garbled, miscomprehended, or misconstrued.

The European tradition of Qurʾānic Studies, however, never gained a strong, international presence. It was interrupted by the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, the consequent flight of Jewish scholars from Germany, and the interruption of normal academic life. What had been a continuous tradition for several generations was broken up, and it was not reconstituted in England, the United States, Israel, or other nations to which scholars fled. For the remainder of the twentieth century, qurʾānic scholarship was often undertaken by individuals working in relative isolation. Key works of qurʾānic scholarship from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were out of print and inaccessible. What is more, most scholars who decided to write on the Qurʾān during this period were actually specialists in other areas of Arabic and Islamic Studies. They had undergone no rigorous training under accomplished specialists in the investigation of the Qurʾān. Recognized curricula, courses of study, and reference works were next to non-existent. Scholars were unaware of the works of their predecessors and made unfounded claims of originality. They also failed to build on the work of their colleagues in a regular fashion.

One area in which scholarship on the Qurʾān continued at a great pace was translation. In 1937, the Scottish scholar Richard Bell published a translation of the Qurʾān accompanied by detailed notes meant to illustrate additions and edits which took place during its composition. In his original 1949 annotated French translation of the Qurʾān, Régis Blachère rearranged the *sūrahs* according to their supposed chronological order. In 1962, Rudi Paret published his German translation of the Qurʾān, followed in 1971 by his *Kommentar und Konkordanz*, a reference work of unparalleled usefulness for the study of the Qurʾān. Meanwhile other translations of the Qurʾān have appeared in greater frequency. Whereas the translation of the Qurʾān was a matter of great controversy in Muslim circles in the early twentieth century, it was eventually embraced as Muslim scholars such as Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), Yusuf Ali (1938), and Muhammad Asad (1980) translated the Qurʾān into English. Today several translations of the Qurʾān, of varying quality and diverse ideological perspectives, are published each

year. While most translators of the Qur'ān were not accomplished scholars of Qur'ānic Studies, and some translations are mere paraphrases of earlier translations, others have academic value, including the 2013 work of A. J. Droge, which includes notes with relevant cross-references, biblical parallels, and insights into the meaning of qur'ānic vocabulary. Numerous translations report the views of traditional Muslim commentators in their annotations but avoid entirely questions of source criticism.

In recent decades, scholarly interest in the Qur'ān, and not only in translating the Qur'ān, has grown rapidly. This is due, in part, to a revived interest in biblical texts—especially Syriac Christian texts—that are related to the Qur'ān. However, it is also due to a rise in interest in the Qur'ān in general, inspired in part by a general appreciation of its importance in the life of Muslims and Islamic societies and in part by the greater participation of Muslims in the Western academy. Indeed, all areas of Qur'ānic Studies today, one can say without exaggeration, are flourishing. If scholars of the Qur'ān often find themselves in sharp disagreement, that disagreement itself is a sign of the vibrancy of the field.

Perhaps the area of scholarship in the field which has received the most attention recently is that which explores the relationship of Jewish, and especially Christian, texts and traditions and the Qur'ān. Christoph Luxenberg's 2000 work *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, later translated into English as *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (2007), led many scholars to reexamine the traditional doctrine (defended by Nöldeke) that the Qur'ān is written in classical Arabic, and to consider the possibility that new meanings of the text could be derived by understanding certain qur'ānic terms according to a possible Syriac meaning. While Luxenberg was criticized for focusing too narrowly on individual terms, other scholars began to look more broadly at the intersection of elements of the Qur'ān—such as the account of the prostration of the angels before Adam, or of the Companions of the Cave—and Syriac tradition. Emran El-Badawi, Sidney Griffith, Gabriel Reynolds, and Joseph Witztum have all worked on this question, while Holger Zellentin has studied the possibility that not only the narrative, but also the legal material in the Qur'ān might have a particular connection to Christian, or Jewish-Christian, communities who wrote in Syriac. Kevin Van Bladel and Tommaso Tesei have drawn attention to the Syriac Alexander legend and its connection to the *Dhū'l-Qarnayn* account of Sūrat al-Kahf.

In general, such scholars have been moving away from a model in which this or that feature of the text is identified as biblical and in which discrepancies are viewed as errors on the part of the Qur'ān, to a model in which qur'ānic departures from biblical material are understood to occur for particular reasons. In some ways we might say that such scholars have discovered the Qur'ān's independent, creative, and sometimes polemical voice. The Qur'ān

does not simply borrow: it adapts, develops, modifies, and criticizes earlier traditions. For example, the way in which the Qurʾān insists that the Israelites did not crucify Jesus (Q Nisāʾ 4:157) is today rarely approached as a vestige of the heresy of the Docetists, but rather as a reflection of the qurʾānic teaching on the inability of a prophet's enemies to defeat him.

The Corpus Coranicum project, which began in 2007 under the leadership of Angelika Neuwirth, has avoided the language of influence by reference to “intertexts” that are related in some fashion to the Qurʾān but perhaps only indirectly. A number of scholars, including Neuwirth, have come to speak about the Qurʾān within the larger context of Late Antiquity. They mean thereby to highlight the Qurʾān's relationship to Jewish, Christian, and other Near Eastern traditions without implying a hierarchy, or the superiority of one tradition over the others. Effectively, this late antique emphasis means enlarging one's view of the Qurʾān's historical context from only Mecca and Medina (and then only from 610–632) to the Near East generally over a broader sweep of time.

Another major area of research is that of qurʾānic manuscripts. Until recently, scholars had only paid attention to complete manuscripts, and had therefore concluded, tentatively and clearly incorrectly, that it would not be possible to say much about the textual transmission of the Qurʾān on the basis of manuscripts before ca. 900 CE. Bergsträsser and Pretzl, together with the Australian Arthur Jeffery, worked in the early/mid-twentieth century on the collection and study of early Qurʾān manuscripts along with the study of medieval Islamic literature on qurʾānic readings, with the aim of producing a critical edition of the Qurʾān. In part, their work was inspired by the appearance and diffusion of the 1924 Cairo edition of the Qurʾān, produced on the basis of medieval Islamic literature alone. While they never completed their project, the study of manuscripts has accelerated in recent decades. With the discovery of fragments of early Qurʾān manuscripts in Yemen and with the assiduous study of fragments extant in collections in European libraries and libraries throughout the Islamic world by François Déroche, Gerd Puin, Elisabeth Puin, Alba Fedeli, Behnam Sadeghi, Asma Hilali, and others, significant advances have been made. The aforementioned Corpus Coranicum project has organized a database of qurʾānic manuscripts with the goal of allowing scholars to see ancient variants to standard readings of the text. Together this work has shown that the study of manuscripts in conversation with Islamic *qirāʾāt* literature can advance our knowledge of the early history of the qurʾānic text, if not lead to a critical edition which reflects the text's original shape.

Attention to calligraphy, decoration, format, and other physical features in addition to the text has made it possible to provide a chronology of qurʾānic manuscripts that will make it possible to determine the type and provenance



of other early fragments. This scholarship has moved the frontier of our knowledge of the qur'ānic text back over a century earlier: whereas scholars a century ago were reluctant to say anything about the history of qur'ānic manuscripts before about 300 A.H., modern investigation has revealed elements of the textual history of the Qur'ān going back to the Umayyad period. It has in some cases confirmed what is known from the traditional science of *qirā'āt*, and in other cases not.

Another area of fruitful research has been on the stylistic and aesthetic features of the qur'ānic text. Carl Ernst, Navid Kermani, Michael Sells, Devin Stewart, and Shawkat Toorawa have in different ways highlighted the Qur'ān's acoustic features, the importance of its rhyme, and its literary qualities.

Yet another major area of research is the structure of *sūrahs*. Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930), Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997), and others have attempted to argue for the unity of the *sūrah*, including long, Medinan *sūrahs*, against the critiques of earlier European scholars—notably Bell—who claimed that the Qur'ān, or at least particular *sūrahs*, were mixed compositions of originally discrete passages put together without careful attention to logical progression. They have sought to do this by identifying the central theme of each *sūrah* for all of the *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. Mustansir Mir has made much of the scholarship of Islahi available to scholars in the Western academy. Other scholars such as Neal Robinson, Mathias Zahniser, Marianna Klar, Nevin El Tahery, and others have examined in particular long *sūrahs*, such as Sūrat al-Baqarah and Sūrat al-Nisā', in order to argue for their unity.

A particular trend in this scholarship has invoked the term “Semitic rhetoric” (developed by Roland Meynet in Biblical Studies) and tried to show that a number of *sūrahs* exhibit ring structure: that sections of the text mirror each other around a central pivot. The founding figure of Semitic rhetoric studies as applied to the Qur'ān is the Belgian Michel Cuypers. In his 2007 book *Le festin: une lecture de la sourate al-Mā'idah*, translated into English as *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (2009), Cuypers argues for the coherence of Sūrat al-Mā'idah and maintains that a richer understanding of the Qur'ān's message generally is achieved by detecting ring structures therein. Not all scholars have accepted the method of Semitic rhetoric; some have insisted that this method is so flexible that the insights into the text which it seems to achieve might in fact be the construction of the researcher and say little about the original composition of the Qur'ān.

Meanwhile other scholars have focused on certain features of the qur'ānic text that are found across a variety of *sūrahs*. Both Daniel Madigan (who reapplies some of the semantic analysis of Toshihiko Izutsu) and Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau have emphasized the uniqueness of the Qur'ān's self-referentiality, or meta-textuality. The Qur'ān frequently refers to itself in a way that is

unusual for most late antique texts (although it has some precedence in Syriac Christian homilies). These references are often taken by traditional Muslim scholars as allusions to a complete version of the Qurʾān that existed already in heaven before it was brought down to earth. Madigan, however, has argued that the Qurʾān's references to a "book" or a "recitation" (*qurʾān*) reflect more closely a notion of oral revelation (that is, the Arabic word *kitāb* in the Qurʾān need not always refer to a written book). Boisliveau has emphasized that the Qurʾān's self-referentiality is a manifestation of its apologetic and argumentative nature: it is concerned to defend its claims of revelation to a skeptical audience (which included Jews and Christians who were familiar with the category of prophecy). The concern with argument is also prominent in the work of Mehdi Azaiez on the Qurʾān's counter-discourse. Azaiez has examined the voice that the Qurʾān gives to its opponents in the Qurʾān and raised the question of whether it is actually quoting its opponents or attributing to them those opinions which it wishes to refute. Again through Azaiez's scholarship, one has the sense of discovery of the Qurʾān's unique voice. The Qurʾān, such studies show, is intimately connected to the biblical tradition but independent in its religious perspective and rhetorical constructions.

Some historians have called many of the agreed-upon features of the Qurʾān and early Islamic history into question by focusing on non-Islamic sources, instead of the familiar Islamic literature. This trend was begun by *Hagarism*, a work published in 1977 by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook that, despite criticism, has inspired later scholars such as Fred Donner, Stephen Shoemaker, Guillaume Dye, Yehuda Nevo, and the scholars of the Inarah group in Germany. One of the key facts made much of in this trend is that accounts of the Islamic invasions do not call the invaders of the seventh century conquests Muslims but rather *mhaggrāyē* (Hagarenes, or perhaps *muhājirūn*) or *tayyāyē*. Others have looked at the Dome of the Rock, an idiosyncratic building that seems to have been associated with Abraham before being associated with Muḥammad's ascension into heaven, and which includes quotations from the Qurʾān that seem to deviate from the standard reading, as a vestige of primitive or proto-Islam. Both Shoemaker and Dye have argued that the Kathisma Church in Jerusalem (after which the Dome of the Rock was apparently modeled) may help explain why Sūrat Maryam associates the birth of Jesus with the miracle of the palm tree (a miracle associated instead with the flight to Egypt in early Christian legend). Some scholars, most recently Robert Hoyland, suggest that we should speak of the Arab, not Islamic, conquests. Collectively this research suggests that we should not think of the Qurʾān emerging from a fully formed religious community but rather a community still in development. Fred Donner has suggested as much in his 2012 work, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

Finally, we might note that scholarship on the Qur'ān produced in Islamic languages, including investigations of qur'ānic rhetoric and themes, whether theological, social, or political, is too often unknown to researchers working in Western languages. As a learned society, and particularly through its international conferences, IQSA will seek to build bridges between different scholarly communities.

In recent years a number of observers have noted that Qur'ānic Studies is a field with deep ideological divides. Some have suggested that the field as a whole is barely coherent or even chaotic. In our opinion, however, the ideological divides in Qur'ānic Studies, which reflect the general increase in interest in the Qur'ān, make for constructive academic discussions. At the same time, it will no doubt be useful for scholars of the Qur'ān to have a learned society that will host those discussions and allow for the serious and rigorous debates which ultimately redound to their benefit. Accordingly, the foundation of IQSA is an auspicious development for a field which in many ways is already thriving.