

The Qur'an Modern Muslim Interpretations, by Massimo Campanini, (translated by Caroline Higgitt; London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 149 pp., ISBN: 978-0-41555830-3, £18.99 (pb)

This is the second book of Professor Campanini that has been translated into English. His first book, *The Qur'an: The Basics* (also published by Routledge, 2007) was very favourably reviewed and received. These translations into English are a very welcomed development for they make available the scholarship of Italian scholars which is not usually known in the Anglo-American sphere. Professor Campanini's work joins now the work of his Italian compatriot Professor Roberto Tottoli which has been available in English for a while. Actually the current book under review grew out of the last chapter of his book *The Qur'an: The Basics*.

The Qur'an: Modern Muslim Interpretations is a timely book that surveys the modern developments in the Islamic world regarding the Qur'ān. Campanini starts his book by a profound insight into the peculiar repositioning of the Qur'ān as the most central feature of modern Islam, a development that he compares to the beginning of Islam "we have seen in modern times a period of intense activity, comparable to that of the Middle Ages, in the field of the study and interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Islamic world." (p. 1) I happen to agree with this insight and I think it actually helps us understand many of the characteristics of the modern Islamic religious landscape.

The book is divided into four chapters each surveys a certain aspect of the modern approaches to the Qur'ān. Chapter 1, "Traditional commentary", covers three trends in Qur'ān commentary: the Salafī, the Traditionalist, and the "Scientific." The author uses the term Salafī in this work to refer to the reformist movement of the 19th century which attempted to an "Islamisation of modernity" and which espoused the notion that Islam and rationality are compatible. (p. 9) Campanini gives a detailed analysis of the ideological make up of this movement (p. 12) and its main protagonists. Campanini sums up the approach of this movement to the Qur'ān by stating that "the Salafī approach was to *construct* the Qur'ān, in other words to use it as an underpinning for thought, as a source of theological and moral teach-

ings that would be useful in helping the Islamic peoples know how to come to terms with modernity.” (p. 13) The main Qurʾān commentary of this current was *Tafsīr al-Manār* of Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935). Campanini believes that the notion that the Qurʾān was rational text was the inspiring premise of this work. (p. 14) What I find instructive about the work of Campanini is that he has enlarged the scope of our understanding of this movement by introducing us to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ben Bādīs and his Qurʾān commentary. (pp. 18-20) Ben Bādīs was noted for his call to making the study of the Qurʾān “come before all other traditional religious sciences.” (p. 19)

The second current is that of Traditionalist commentary; Campanini discusses four major Qurʾān commentators in this section: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (1903-1983), Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr (1879-1973), Maḥmūd Shaltūt (1893-1963), and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1916-1996). Campanini is to be commended for grouping here Sunnī and Shīʿī scholars on the same footing; the unspoken argument is that in modern developments the division that divides the two hermeneutical traditions in Sunnism and Shīʿism is much less significant than in the classical period. (p. 24) Campanini highlights a fascinating contradiction in this trend in Qurʾān commentary, its admixture of traditional and modernist principles at the same time. (p. 28) Campanini to his credit bases much of his analysis on the work of Ḥʾmīda Ennaifer who has summed up the characteristics of these two groups (the Salafī and the Traditionalist) in his monograph on modern approaches to the Qurʾān. (p. 34) What I find fascinating about Campanini’s dependence on Ennaifer is the complex trajectory that his scholarly utilization of an underutilized Arabic work has to traverse before it reached English. Ennaifer wrote his work originally in Arabic, thanks to the effort of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic Studies the work was translated into French in 1998 (see p. 132 note 76 for reference to the French translation). Campanini wrote this book under review in Italian and it has now appeared in English. It is sobering that Arabic scholarly works on the Qurʾān (and on many fields for that matter) are haphazardly picked up in the European and North American scholarly circles. We lack any systematic scholarly following or connection to the scholarly works being published in the Islamic world. Ennaifer’s work is a first rate study of modern *tafsīr* and the position of the Qurʾān in the Arab world. The decision of the Pon-

tifical Institute to translate the work is indicative of the insights of the European Christian institutions that study Islam and its profound insights – in *tafsīr* of course we have the towering figure of Claude Gil-liot. Yet, apart from few examples Arabic secondary literature in *tafsīr* has little or no effect on the scholarly debates in European languages – Campanini being a notable exception. If we add to this the scholarly literature being produced in Turkish universities – especially the PhD dissertations in the İlahiyat departments, we realize the magnitude of the rupture and gap between the various scholarly worlds. Apart from the intrinsic merit of the work of Professor Campanini I think his heavy drawing on Arabic scholarly works on the Qurʾān and *tafsīr* is perhaps the most important aspect of his work, since it enriches our understanding of modern Islam through a continuous refinement of our collective scholarly collaborations.

The final current discussed in Chapter One is the “Scientific” commentary tradition. Here Professor Campanini covers the major figures in this trend but also their opponents in the Islamic world, making this section a fascinating read and a window onto the complexity of the position of scriptural authority in the age of science.

Chapter 2 titled “The Qurʾān as text, discourse and structure” is an extensive survey of modern – and by that I mean modernist approaches to the Qurʾān, from literary approaches to philosophical. This is the most interesting chapter of the book and it covers a large number of scholars and works which makes this chapter a reference to the Qurʾān in the modern period. In addition to Khalafallāh (1916-1998), al-Khūlī and Bint al-Shāṭiʿ (d. 1998), Campanini discusses Arkoun’s work as well as Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. These are the usual names one would expect to find in such a chapter, Campanini however also includes ‘Abdullah Saeed, a Professor at the University of Melbourne, who uses Gadamer’s insights into hermeneutics, as well as Mālik Bennabī and Muḥammad Ṭalbī. (p. 65)

These are not however the only scholars discussed in this chapter. Campanini also discusses the works of the Iranian scholar Muḥammad Mujtahid Shabestāri, the Sudanese Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, the Egyptian Ḥasan Ḥanafī and the Pakistani-American Fazlur Raḥmān. Finally, Campanini discusses the Egyptian-UK professor Muḥammad ‘Abdel Ḥaleem, a Professor of Islamic studies at SOAS, and the founder of the *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies*, the leading aca-

demic journal on the Qurʾān in the world now. As a final effort at comprehensibility, Campanini discusses the works of Abū l-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī (1903-1979), that of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (1907-1997) and the Syrian writer Muḥammad Shaḥrūr. This is definitely one of the most extensive surveys of modern Muslim scholars who have written on the Qurʾān. This chapter on its own has enough material to be enlarged into an extensive monograph. The succinct analysis of Campanini is a welcomed introduction to these scholars, and now we have in English a very serious survey of the Qurʾān in the modern period.

Chapter 3, the shortest in the book is dedicated to the Radical hermeneutics of Sayyid Quṭb. Once more what I find inspiring about the approach of Campanini is his intimate engagement with previous scholarship, both utilizing it and building on its insights. In the case of Quṭb, Campanini relies on the work of O. Carré (for reference for his work see p. 139, note 12).

Chapter 4 entitled “The Qurʾan and the hermeneutics of liberation” brings the book to its final conclusion. This chapter covers what has become the equivalent of liberation theology in modern Islam and the feminist approaches to scriptures. This chapter is more of a quick survey of this trend, starting with the ideologues of the Iranian revolution. Campanini then covers the thought of the South African activist and scholar Farid Esack as well as the feminist scholars Margot Badran and Fatima Mernissi. This chapter ends with a detailed survey of the thought of the African American Muslim scholar Amina Wadud. Finally, Campanini attempts to give a brief look at the situation in Indonesia and Turkey in an Appendix at the end of the book.

This is an impressive survey of the topic of the Qurʾān and its interpretation in the modern period. Despite its 150 pages this work is daunting in the amount of details that it offers and the range of authors covered. The only regret is that the book does not have a bibliography at the end to make it easier to refer to works. But that is a minor complaint. Professor’s Campanini’s work deserves to be widely read and its appearance in English is a very welcomed addition to our understanding of the Qurʾān in the modern period.

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