Majid Daneshgar, Peter G. Riddell and Andrew Rippin (eds.)


The present book is a welcome addition to the growing number of publications on Qurʾan interpretation (tafsir) in other areas besides the Arab world. The book consists of an introduction and three parts which respectively address the historical background to the issue of Qurʾan interpretation in the Malay-Indonesian world (part i); Qurʾan interpretation in southern Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Part ii); and particular themes in Qurʾan interpretations from the region (Part iii).

The introduction, written by the three editors (one of whom, Adrew Rippin, passed away in November 2016), outlines the book and expresses as its primary goal that it will stimulate further research on the Qurʾan in the Malay-Indonesian World. A second introductory piece by Majid Daneshgar presents a select biography of literature on the subject (pp. 8–21). This is very useful, since many of the listed titles are very difficult to consult because they have only appeared in local journals.

Part i starts with a useful chapter by Peter Riddell in which he sketches the most important exegetical trends in the seventeenth century Malay world, recapitulating much of his own earlier work on the oldest piece of Qurʾan interpretation in the Cambridge manuscript and his groundbreaking work on the Tarjuman al-mustafid by ʿAbd al-Raʾuf al-Singkili. The second chapter by Ervan Nurtawab deals with translations of the Qurʾan in Malay, Javanese, and Sundanese; it addresses the notorious issue of whether these translations should be considered as commentaries or as a substitutions for the original Arabic Qurʾan. By discussing examples from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries (including the work of the eighteenth century ʿAbd al-Majid from Maguindanao in the southern Philippines), he shows that that the translations were often accompanied by the original Arabic text, appearing parallel to the translation, or in between the lines of the Arabic original. Moreover, the author confirms that, with some Javanese exceptions from around 1900, these translations were not undertaken to substitute the Arabic original.

Part ii of the book starts with Chapter 3 on Qurʾan interpretation in Thailand, written by Mustaffa Abdullah. After a brief historical overview of Islamic boarding schools (pondok) in southern Thailand, the author explores the study of tafsir in a number of Muslim educational institutions in the twentieth century and by a number of Thai scholars, including Ismail Lutfi Chapakia, the Rector of Yala Islamic University. Chapter 4 by Izza Rohman studies the new
approaches in Qur’anic studies in present-day Indonesia. In this chapter, he identifies three primary issues: the thematic interpretation of the Qur’an, introduced in Indonesia by Quraish Shihab; the historicity of the Qur’an (motivated by the ardent wish to contextualize the original message of the Qur’an in its historical context and next apply this to the present time); and the hermeneutics of the Qur’an. Chapter 5 focuses on the rise of Qur’anic exegesis in Malaysia. This chapter was written by Haziyah Hussin and gives a useful overview of *tafsir* in Malaya/Malaysia from the end of the seventeenth century until the present day.

Part III of the book contains four chapters, each investigating a more detailed topic. Chapter 6 (Mohd Faizal Musa) deals with a highly controversial issue in Malaysia, namely, apostasy regarding Islam. In this chapter the author investigates various Qur’anic verses, especially 2:256 (which states that there is no compulsion in religion) in the work *Tafsir Nur al-ihsan* by Haji Muhammad Sa’id bin Umar (d. 1932) and, in line with this *tafsir*, concludes that man is free to choose the religion he wants, and therefore is also allowed to reject Islam. In chapter 7 Mun’im Sirry examines Hamka’s *Tafsir al-Azhar* and shows that many of the elements of this Qur’an commentary are shaped by Hamka’s concerns about issues in his own days. Chapter 8 (by Majid Daneshgar) studies the Qur’anic figure of *Dhu l-Qarnayn* in modern Malay commentaries, while Chapter 9 by Christopher Furlow concludes by exploring the intersections of the Qur’an and science in present day Malaysia. This interesting investigation shows that the discussions in Malaysia about Islam and science are vital for the Malaysian development agenda, and therefore highly politicized.

As a whole, the book is mostly of a descriptive nature, with the notable exceptions of the more activist chapter on apostasy in Malaysia, and Chapter 9, which is of a more analytical character. The book is very rich in information and it is therefore fortunate that the work ends with an index, not only containing personal names, but also the names of organizations, books, and some concepts. To specialists who follow developments in Qur’an interpretation in the Malay-Indonesian world, the present book contains a lot of materials which is familiar and have been dealt with in previous studies, but it definitely has also new things to offer. For beginning students who want to familiarize themselves with *tafsir* in the Malay-Indonesian world the present book is an excellent starting point.

*Nico J.G. Kaptein*
Leiden University

*n.j.g.kaptein@hum.leidenuniv.nl*