

Brief Reviews of Books

David in the Muslim Tradition: The Bathsheba Affair.

By KHALEEL MOHAMMED. Lanham, MD: LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2015. Pp. ix + 225. \$85, £51.95.

Exploring the rich treasuries of traditional lore surrounding scriptural characters and prophets is becoming an increasingly popular endeavor. The present volume contributes to the advancement of this important field of study by providing a number of significant textual resources and critical observations that focus on the ways in which the character of the Israelite king and psalmist David, a figure who enjoys varying levels of notoriety in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literature, has been assessed by Muslim commentators (*mufasssīrūn*). While the name of David occurs sixteen times in the Quran, the author chooses to focus on one particular passage (Q 38:21–25), which appears to intersect with the extensive biblical narrative that describes a sordid criminal plot involving David, his involvement in the murder of Uriah the Hittite, his lust for and seduction of Bathsheba, and his eventual condemnation for orchestrating these events by his own court prophet Nathan (2 Sam 11–12). These unseemly behaviors threaten to undermine the pious reputation that David displays in later biblical literature such as that produced by the Chronicler. Writings found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian New Testament show that David acquired the status of a “prophet” and enjoyed that label’s aura of rectitude by the end of the first century C.E. While the names of Uriah, Bathsheba, and Nathan do not figure in this quranic passage, the continuing circulation of biblical and para-biblical sources (*Isrāʾīliyyān*), which communicated and commented upon “the Bathsheba affair,” ensured that this troubling episode could not simply be ignored by later exegetes, commentators, and tale anthologists.

The book consists of seven chapters, the heart of which (chapters two to five) supplies an extensive chronological survey and selected translations of the quranic commentaries (*tafāsīr*) that the author has chosen to represent the dominant trends in the interpretation of this quranic pericope. In chapter one the author provides a detailed introduction summarizing previous studies of the figure of David in Islamic literature, giving a valuable overview of the genre of *tafsīr*, or the classical exegetical tradition expounding Quran, and explaining the organizational principles behind his presentation of interpreters in the remainder of the work. Chapter two, dubbed “The Formative Period” (following a rubric used by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Andrew Rippin, and Claude Gilliot), treats the period extending from the emergence of classical *tafsīr* in the early

eighth century until the end of the ninth century. Seven commentators are selected for a more extensive analysis within this chapter, and the efforts of two of these interpreters (Muqātil b. Sulaymān; Hūd b. Muḥakkam) to explicate Q 38:21–25 receive an annotated English rendering. Chapter three, “The Golden Age of Classical Tafsīr,” covers *mufasssīrūn* working from the beginning of the tenth century until the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258, and features relatively lengthy English translations of the influential commentaries of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Rāzī. Chapter four, entitled “The Era of the Qurʾānic Supercommentaries,” examines the period extending from 1258 until the end of the eighteenth century. Valuable English translations of the exegeses of al-Qurṭubī and al-Kāshānī bring that chapter to a close. Chapter five, “From Modernity to Late Modernity,” handles exegetical material from the beginning of the nineteenth century up to the present day, and the author provides English translations from the commentaries of Sayyid Quṭb and Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ṣābūnī. Chapter six briefly surveys how Jewish and Christian literatures construct and reconfigure the image of David, and chapter seven presents the conclusions that emerge from the author’s close study of this exegetical tradition. Briefly stated, the author points out that there is a discernible chronological progression in stances toward the figure of David: early exegetes entertain the possibility of David being involved in a situation that required forgiveness from God, but this interpretative option gradually wanes as attitudes toward the admissibility of *Isrāʾīliyyāt* harden and the theological doctrine of *ʿiṣma* or “prophetic inerrancy” gains strength and determines what sorts of discourse were deemed acceptable about “prophets.” Some interesting reflections about how the concept of “Bible” should be understood within the cultural milieu of nascent Islam are also offered.

This work makes an important contribution to the comparative study of the scriptural characters shared among the sacred texts of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Unfortunately, the author was not well served by his copy editors, as a large number of typographical errors—particularly in the final third of the volume—mar the text. One hopes that future printings will rectify this shortcoming.

JOHN C. REEVES

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE