



Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts

By Keith E. Small



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This unique work takes a method of textual analysis commonly used in studies of ancient Western and Eastern manuscripts and applies it to twenty-one early Qur'an manuscripts. Keith Small analyzes a defined portion of text from the Qur'an with two aims in view: to recover the earliest form of text for this portion, and to trace the historical development of this portion to the current form of the text of the Qur'an. Small concludes that though a significantly early edited form of the consonantal text of the Qur'an can be recovered, its original forms of text cannot be obtained. He also documents the further editing that was required to record the Arabic text of the Qur'an in a complete phonetic script, as well as providing an explanation for much of the development of various recitation systems of the Qur'an. This controversial, thought-provoking book provides a rigorous examination into the history of the Qur'an and will be of great interest to Quranic Studies scholars.

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Editorial Review

Review

This detailed study of a series of early manuscripts of the Qur'an is the first work to bring out the full implications of several generations of scholarly activity in the area of Quranic textual studies. By situating the manuscript evidence alongside the information provided by Islamic tradition, Small brings new insights to the history of the development of a standardized text of the Qur'an. Employing processes of textual criticism rigorously developed in New Testament studies, this work provides a fresh view of a controversial topic that has rarely been broached before regarding the establishment of the written text of the Qur'an. Small's work is certain to reignite a vigorous debate about how scholars assess the evidence provided by written sources when faced with assertions concerning the primacy of simultaneous and robust oral transmission. (Andrew Rippin, University of Victoria, Canada)

In this study, Keith Small applies the principles of textual analysis to twenty-two manuscripts—most of them early—that contain Q. 14:35-41, which describes how Abraham settled his son—presumably Ishmael—in Mecca. Based on a careful and systematic analysis of the manuscripts, Small traces the historical development of the Qur'anic text from the rise of Islam until the 10th century CE. Comparison of the manuscripts with the evidence of literary sources suggests that the text remained open and fluid during the first half of the seventh century, and that the production of a standard text was not completed until the end of that century. This editorial project, sponsored by the Umayyad caliphs, resulted in the destruction of most if not all of the earliest manuscripts, with the result that it is currently impossible to recover the original form of the text. This is an important contribution to scholarship on the Qur'an. (David S. Powers, Cornell University)

Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts by Keith E. Small should find a prominent place in libraries of academic institutions involved in the field of Qur'anic studies and the early period of Islam. . . . [I]t is a good introduction for scholars new to the field. (*Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*)

About the Author

Keith E. Small is an associate research fellow and visiting lecturer for the Centre for Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Relations at the London School of Theology.

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