

PREFACE TO THE REPRINT

The essays gathered in this book have stood the test of time, and a reprint of the work certainly seems appropriate. When the original conference that stands behind the efforts of the contributors was convened in Calgary in 1985, the study of *tafsīr* could best be described as in its infancy. A few years earlier I had presented a paper at the International Conference on the Study of the Qur'ān in New Delhi on "the current status of *tafsīr* studies" (subsequently published in *The Muslim World* for 1982 and, in a slightly different form, *Hamdard Islamicus* for 1983) that encapsulated the discipline in the space of 15 pages and with some 150 items of bibliography. Since then, the field has grown exponentially and a proper bibliography would now undoubtedly be a book-length project. However, even given that swell in interest in the area, there are few, if any, books that can truly rival the scope of *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* in terms of setting out the dimensions of the field and creating the agenda for future studies.

The academic focus on the study of *tafsīr* of which this book is a significant element has recently been subject to a critique from those who feel that this attention has drawn scholars away from tackling the Qur'ān directly. Whether that argument holds any particular weight does not need to be assessed here because the evidence of this book is precisely the best response: there is much that we do not know about the history of the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the material is intrinsically fascinating. The study of *tafsīr* is now a subject in its own right that attracts students and scholars from around the globe.

The contributors to this volume went on to have careers which took them on multiple paths, but all have, in one way or another, seen their work on the Qur'ān and its interpretation as an important element in their scholarly achievements. I am saddened that three of

the contributors have passed away just recently: Meir Kister died in 2010, Charles Adams in 2010, and Marston Speight in 2011.

Each of the essays in this volume stands at a particular place and time in the study of the material that it tackles; some have been updated in other publications, some have been supplemented with additional work by their authors and by others. Because of the obvious limitations involved in reprinting the book in its original typeset form, it has not been possible (or seemed desirable) to provide annotations that would update the original essays. However, a few items are certainly worthy of being mentioned.

Issa Boullata, now Emeritus professor at McGill, translated Sections I to IV of his chapter in this book into Arabic and made it the introduction to the book he edited entitled *I'jāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm 'abr al-Ta'rikh* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa'l-Nashr, 2006), a work that contains the major Arabic theological and literary-rhetorical texts on *i'jāz*, from al-Jāhīz to Sayyid Quṭb and Bint al-Shāṭi', passing through al-Khaṭṭābī, al-Rummānī, al-Bāqillānī, 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Jurjānī, al-Suyūṭī, and al-Rāfi'i.

Meir Kister's essay on Adam was abbreviated by me for its publication in this volume in order to have the chapters remain reasonably balanced in length. Subsequently, Professor Kister published the longer essay as he originally wrote it in *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 113–74. That version of the essay is available online at <http://www.kister.huji.ac.il/>, a site which testifies to Professor Kister's remarkable contribution to Islamic studies as a whole.

B. Todd Lawson, now Associate Professor at the University of Toronto, has recently published his extended study of the Bāb and his work under the title *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'an, Exegesis, Messianism and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion* (Routledge, 2011).

Andrew Rippin

University of Victoria, BC, Canada, January 2012