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Book Review

Solomon I. Sara SJ. *Sībawayh on ?imālah (Inclination): Text, Translation, Notes and Analysis*. viii, 192 pp. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

This short text comprises a translation and analysis of selected chapters from the seminal 8th century treatise on Arabic grammar entitled *al-Kitāb* (the Book), which was composed by the Basran grammarian Sībawayhi (d. 180/796). The original work has long been considered the *magnum opus* of Arabic linguistic thought on the basis that it was not only the earliest systematic treatment of Arabic grammar, but it also definitively shaped the form and content of successive centuries of Arabic grammatical thought. Consisting of approximately 950 pages in some of its editions, the *Kitāb* is divided into three principal subject areas; syntax, morphology, and phonology. The selected chapters which are translated in this book cover the topic of *imāla*, which features in the work's phonological discussions as presented in the final part of the *Kitāb*. It should be pointed out that *imāla* constitutes the phonological phenomenon of the inclining of the *fathā* towards the *kasra* in the context of its pronunciation; it also includes the inclination of the 'ā' (*alif*) towards the 'ī' (*yā'*) (See Aryeh Levin 'The Authenticity of Sībawayhi's Description of the *imāla* (*Jerusalem Studies in Islam* 1998:15, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, pp. 74-92). In the literature on Qur'anic readings or *qirā'āt* this phenomenon was labeled *al-idjā'* and examined together with other related phonological traits such as *idghām* (assimilation), *fath* (raising), and *tashīl* (omission of the *hamza*), which were reviewed in the context of Qur'anic recitation. Despite being fleetingly treated at different junctures in the *Kitāb*, Sībawayhi devoted six chapters to the discussion of *imāla* (477-482) and these form the subject of Sara's translation and analysis. The book is divided into three parts: the first of these offers a general introduction to the translation; the second part features the six chapters, which are translated within a 'rich translation format' incorporating the transliterated Arabic terminology; the Arabic text is included alongside the translation; finally, in the third section corresponding chapters are devoted to the analysis of the materials. A glossary of technical terms and lists of sundry examples are included in the book's appendices. It is the case that earlier versions of selected parts of the work were previously published in the *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* (1994:9; pp. 58-115 and 37-82). Interestingly, a complete German translation of the *Kitāb* by Gustav Jahn was published between 1894-1900. It was based on the original Arabic edition edited by Hartwig Derenbourg (1881-5) and is actually used as the source of this text's translation. For those familiar with classical Arabic linguistic thought, Sībawayhi's work is an immensely challenging but rewarding text; it confirms not only the incredibly advanced levels of scholarship achieved within the discipline of grammar, but also the distinctly innovative approach to the study of language refined by its author. The decisive importance of Sībawayhi's work is reflected in the attention it continues to receive as evidenced by recent studies, including Ramzi Baalbaki's *The Legacy of the Kitāb: Sībawayhi's Analytical Methods within the Context of the Arabic Grammatical Theory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008) and Amal E. Marogy's *Kitāb Sībawayhi: Syntax and Pragmatics*. Leiden: E. J. Brill 2010). It is stated that the aim of Sara's translation, which despite covering only a minor portion of the original text,

is to make aspects of this influential work accessible to a wider academic audience. Overcoming ‘obstacles and challenges posed’ by the original work, it is hoped that the translation will foster interest in Sibawayhi’s book, inspiring ‘non-experts’ and ‘experts’ in Arabic to learn more about his theoretical accomplishments in the field of linguistic thought. Although it might be argued that such translations would not necessarily be required by those who are able to grapple with the language of the original materials, such efforts do draw attention to the richness and intricacy of the early sources and thereby allow a relative gauging of the sophistication of the constructs of Arabic grammatical thought.

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