

## HOW IS THE QUR'AN READ?

- The Qur'ān is an oral tradition. The oldest known fragments of the written Qur'ān are about 100 years after the time of Muhammad's life and conquests- mid 8<sup>th</sup> C. We don't know much about its history and origins as a written form (in comparison the Gospel of John is dated within 40 years of Jesus' life)
- The Qur'ān is both a sacred link to God; sacred in itself because of the revealed words it contains, and an object of immense worth to Islamic scholars. Muslims have been involved in both of these lines of enquiry- the religious or spiritual and the historical and scholarly.
- Therefore the Qur'an is valuable both in religious terms, as a revelation from God, and its value as a historical artefact and record.
- There is a third way of looking at the Qur'ān - reading what it says. 'This tends to be the major interest of contemporary readers who suffer from the modern, secular habit of thinking of a book chiefly as a means of conveying a message. But this is not the primary way in which a great many Muslims have experienced the Qur'ān. ... they experience the Qur'ān as an object of devotion, a thing of beauty and a nexus of spiritual power, but not necessarily or primarily for its discursive meaning.' (70)

**Daniel W. Brown (2009) *A New Introduction to Islam, Second Edition***

- The Qur'an was revealed over 23 years and each new revelation required Muhammad's total concentration. Some verses were a struggle to understand, some were clearer, but each and every revelation demanded entering into a totally different consciousness.
- For Muslims Muhammad's experiences of revelation show the Qur'an to be a series of signs, or messages from the divine. Individual verses are called '*ayat*' or '*signs*' (168).
- The Qur'an was not revealed to Muhammad in the order we know it today. Around 20 years after Muhammad's death others began to compile the collections of verses into the book. These editors placed the shortest passages at the end and the longest at beginning. This is because the Qur'an 'is neither a narrative nor an argument that needs a sequential order' (164). Rather it 'reflects on various themes: God's presence in the natural world, the lives of the prophets or the Last Judgment' (164)
- Passages are repeated, this is because the Qur'an 'was not meant for private perusal but for liturgical recitation' (164).
- The Qur'an 'is meant to be recited out loud and the sound of the language is as essential part of its effect' (168). 'When they hear the Qur'an recited in the mosque Muslims 'they feel enveloped in a divine dimensions of sound' (168). 'It is not a book to be read simply to acquire information. It is meant to yield a sense of the divine' (169).

**Karen Armstrong (1999) *A History of God***