

Communication

The Library of Andrew Rippin: The Rise of a Qur'ānic Philologist¹

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"IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THE POINT WITH WHICH I STARTED: ONE MUST DECIDE UPON A READING STRATEGY AS THE FIRST STEP IN UNDERSTANDING – AND THUS TEACHING AND STUDYING – THE QUR'ĀN" (RIPPIN 2013, 13).

Andrew Rippin passed away in Victoria, Canada, on 29 November 2016. The current generation of scholars, many of whom began working on Qur'ānic studies within the last decade, have paid a lot of attention to Rippin's scholarship. His books and articles have been translated and reviewed in Arabic, Indonesian, Malay, Persian, Turkish and Urdu languages,³ and are the subject of dissertations⁴ and articles⁵ throughout the Muslim world. He is frequently mentioned in social media and in online academic forums. In 2017 Jane Dammen McAuliffe published a detailed essay in a Festschrift dedicated to Rippin in which she notes that he appeared on the Qur'ānic studies scene in 1985, and that his books and edited volumes have contributed to the understanding of Islamic

1 My thanks go to David S. Powers and Bruce Fudge for their constructive comments. All errors are mine.

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3 On the reception of Rippin's works in the Muslim world until 2016, see Daneshgar (2016, 367–385). Recently, some of his edited volumes and articles have been translated into Turkish and Persian.

4 E.g., Muhammad Dimas Geraldy (2024).

5 E.g., Rizal Faturohman Purnama, and Rizal Samsul Mutaqin (2021, 145–155).

texts across the world (McAuliffe 2017, 386–395). As a contribution to Rippin’s legacy almost a decade following his death, I would like to share some accounts about the young Rippin who began to build his library in the 1970s and 1980s. His library explains a lot how he became one of the most significant historians of Islam and philologists whose ideas and works contributed to Muslim and non-Muslim Qur’ānic studies.

A Young Philologist

Prior to his death, I visited Rippin and his family in Victoria in October and November 2016. He was in the hospital at the time. I was asked by them to check his home library, and to see if the books, theses, and other materials⁶ were shelved properly.⁷ As I began work, I noticed that Rippin had arranged most of his books based on the language, theme, and type of publication (e.g., periodicals and encyclopedias). He collected materials in Arabic, English, French, German, Hebrew, Indonesian, Italian, Latin, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Syriac, and Turkish. A light brown cabinet in the basement hallway contained Arabic volumes by Sunnī, Sufi and Shī‘ī figures, e.g., an edition of *Haqā’iq al-ta’wil fi mutashābih al-tanzīl* by al-Sharīf al-Rādi (d. c. 1015 CE), with a commentary by Muḥammad al-Riḍā Kāshif al-Ghitā’ published in Beirut in 1986. Another small cabinet contained his own publications or rare facsimile editions of Qur’ānic codices and Arabic texts.

As a graduate student in the mid 1970s, Rippin studied Persian and the *Gulistān* of Sa‘dī. He was an enthusiastic reader of Persian texts and culture and visited Iran prior to 1979. He purchased a copy of Bess Allen Donaldson’s *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammad Magic and Folklore in Iran*, and he read Ignaz Goldziher’s *Islamisme et Parsisme*, which he cited in his Master’s thesis and later publications. He also studied Arabic texts and literature, including the Qur’ān. He purchased some copies of the Qur’ān in different countries, including several miniature

6 Among them, unpublished theses that he reviewed as well as texts and unpublished essays that he wrote on several topics, including “vegetarianism”. He should have written on vegetarianism following his study of L. Berman’s *Vegetarianism and the Jewish tradition* (1982) as well as R. Schwartz’s *Judaism and Vegetarianism* (1982).

7 Rippin suggested to me and to some of his close friends to take as many books as we wanted. I chose six volumes. Most of his books and materials, exceeding five hundred items, are now held at the Rippin Collection, Simon Fraser University Library, Canada. A handlist will be compiled in the near future.

Qur’āns with metal and gilded covers, chains and locks.⁸ He liked lexicons, glossaries, and Arabic grammar. He purchased a copy of *Tāj al-‘arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs* by Murtadā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791 CE)—cited in his first academic article (Rippin 1979)—and *Asās al-Balāghah* by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1141 CE). He also began to study Hebrew and Syriac. To improve his skills, he copied texts in each of these languages, and he later reproduced these citations in his Master’s thesis.

He also studied Jewish literature, Hebrew texts with Tiberian vocalization, and Biblical texts. In August 1976, he purchased a copy of Rabin’s *Qumran Studies*, which he read closely, leaving marginalia on page 117 in Arabic and English (Rabin 1975 [first paperback edition]). He cited this monograph in his later publications and reproduced the section on “Islam and the Qumran Sect” in his “The Qur’ān: Style and Contents” published with Ashgate Press in 2001. Scholars of religion should study Qumran as well as Zoroastrianism and paganism, as they are, according to Rippin, “grounded frequently in philology but also introduce elements of folklore” (Rippin 2006, 241).

Rippin wrote his Master’s thesis on philology and terminology: “HRM and Associated and Synonymous Terms in the Qur’ān: An Analysis of Their Use and Meaning”. To satisfy a requirement for his Master’s degree, he studied Indo-European and Latin philology. Willem Bijlefeld (d. 2013),⁹ his MA advisor, exposed Rippin to German and Dutch materials. According to Rippin, “[Bijlefeld] guided me through much German material, translated Dutch for me and provided the necessary feedback in order to write this thesis” (Rippin 1976, v). Subsequently, Rippin purchased, studied and cited Latin treatises (e.g., G. Flügel’s *Corani textus arabicus*), German texts (e.g., R. Paret’s *Der Koran* and Th. Nöldeke’s *Geschichte des Qorans*), and French materials (e.g., T. Fahd. *La divination arabe*).

In the 1970s, Rippin read and was influenced by three books written by the Japanese scholar, Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993): *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān*; *God and Man in the Koran*; and *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*. Rippin spoke highly of Izutsu’s scholarship: “The study of the Qur’ān was, with Izutsu, moved out of its

8 See “Andrew Rippin” (2014).

9 On Bijlefeld’s legacy, see “Seminary Mourns Loss” (online source).

biblical context and situated in an explicit methodological framework of semantic analysis" (Rippin 2004, x).

Rippin's understanding of Qur'ānic studies was also influenced by Jeffrey, Jomier, Katsh, Kister, van der Leeuw, Mead, Mingana, Moubarak, Ringgren, Snouck-Hurgronje and Watt. He received his Master's degree in November 1976, at the age of 26. He could now read and write Arabic and Hebrew (Rippin 1976, 15–21), and inscribe Qur'ānic verses (Rippin 1976, 76).

Inclusive Approach

In 1978, Rippin visited the Kazi Publications & Import, INC. in Illinois and purchased Rev. Ahmad Shah's *Miftah-ul-Quran, a Concordance and Complete Glossary of the Holy Quran* (1906), in the three languages of Arabic, English and Urdu. According to the bookplate, on which Rippin signed his name, this was the first Urdu text that he purchased.

In 1977, Rippin enrolled as a PhD student at McGill University, where Charles J. Adams (d. 2011) became his thesis advisor.¹⁰ He also worked to expand his academic networks, establishing contact with other professors like Hermann Landolt, Issa Boullata (d. 2019), Donald P. Little (d. 2017).¹¹ Between 1978 and 1979, he spent a year as a guest student at SOAS, London, where he studied with John Wansbrough (d. 2003). Rippin had heard about Wansbrough after completing his Master's thesis. Once Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* came out, Rippin bought a copy to write a review. Prior to this moment, Rippin could only viewed the field of *Qur'ānic studies* from the eyes of the above-aid Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. However, Wansbrough's book enriched his academic life. In April 1978, Rippin published a short review of Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies* that was finally released in 1977 (Rippin 1978, 120). Wansbrough, according to Rippin, could challenge the field of Qur'ānic studies and tackle the origins of Islam effectively in the last century:

Although literature on the Qur'ān has proliferated in recent years, views of the book have not changed substantially from those expounded in the second edition of Nöldeke's *Geschichte*

10 On Adams, see Lawson (1991, 1–5).

11 For the full list of McGill University's Faculty, see McAuliffe (2017).

des Qurans (1909-1938). This book by Wansbrough, however, marks a new era in Qur'ānic studies and it is likely that, in its wake, a wholesale reevaluation of previous work done on the Qur'ān will have to take place (Rippin 1978, 120).

Impressed with Wansbrough's competency in Semitic and Germanic languages, Rippin was eager to study primary sources with him. Rippin knew that Wansbrough was forging a path for scholars to rethink method and theory in the study of the Qur'ān. He raised, as Rippin wrote, serious questions about:

all accepted notions concerning the composition, collection, and chronology of the Qur'ān by using a variety of insights from biblical studies (e.g., oral tradition, prophetic motifs) in his analysis of the Qur'ānic text. Coupled with this is an examination of Qur'ānic exegesis prior to the tenth century which elucidates the development of the major trends in that exegesis (Rippin 1978, 120).

In his PhD thesis, Rippin added the following comment about Wansbrough:

Finally, I consider it a great privilege to be in the position to need to acknowledge my greatest debt to Dr. John Wansbrough, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. During the academic year 1978-79, I was able to impose myself upon Dr. Wansbrough's time, energy and goodwill as a SOAS Research Student. Dr. Wansbrough's enthusiasm for my work, his willingness to read it and comment upon it even after I left London, has been a constant source of encouragement to me. Dr. Wansbrough's influence will, I think, be seen throughout this thesis and, while I am sure that he may not agree with everything I have done and said in it (Rippin 1981, vii).

At SOAS, Rippin remained in close contact with his Ph.D. advisor, Adams, who had mixed feelings about Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies*. Although he admired the novelty of the book's thesis, he critiqued its complexity and confusion. Adams wrote, "Any scholar who wishes to probe Wansbrough's ideas deeply must be equipped with several lan-

guages in addition to English and the Arabic that is basic to all such inquiries” (Adams 1997, 75).

Rippin had learned the languages needed to grasp Wansbrough’s ideas. He could also, like Wansbrough, read German, in particular Paret’s *Der Koran: Übersetzung* (1961). At the same time he studied further works along with that of Wansbrough related to the origin of the Qur’ān. In his Ph.D. thesis “The Quranic *asbāb al-nuzūl* material: An Analysis of Its Use and Development in Exegesis”, Rippin studied and cited a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including al-Wāhiḍī’s (d. 1075 CE) *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* and Ḥājjī Khalīfa’s (d. 1657 CE) *Kashf al-Zunūn*. He also read Goldziher’s *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* and reread Nöldeke/Schwally’s *Geschichte des Qorans*. In London, Rippin studied several primary Arabic texts with Wansbrough, including *Qatf al-Thamar fi Muwāfaqāt Sayyidinā ‘Umar*, a text in verse about “a common object or person, in this case, ‘Umar” (Rippin 1981, 23). Impressed by Wansbrough’s citation of original exegetical manuscripts, Rippin examined manuscript copies of al-Samarqandī’s *Tafsīr* and Māturīdī’s *al-Ta’wīlāt* —And we now know that Muslim scholars of *tafsīr* (not *mufassirūn*) in Asia and Europe have only paid more attention to such exegetical texts in recent years.

Like Wansbrough, Rippin did not regard Abū ‘Ubayda’s *Majāz al-Qur’ān* and al-Farrāṣ’s *Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān* as true *asbāb al-nuzūl* texts (Rippin 1981, 89–90). But he did consult these sources for his article on Qur’ānic semantics, “Qur’ān 7.40: ‘Until the Camel Passes through the Eye of the Needle’” (1980). Rippin’s Ph.D. thesis contains numerous references to and interpretations of Wansbrough’s *Qur’ānic Studies* —a practice that he continued until his death.¹² He also read and reviewed books by Richard Bell and Watt about the formative periods of Islam. Further he developed his studies about history of Mecca and Medina with a particular attention to Patricia Crone’s (d. 2015) critical monograph: *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987). Rippin’s engagement with recent publications on history of Islam and pre- and post-Islamic Arabia allowed him to discuss the formation and development of various trends in Qur’ānic studies in his further articles and reviews.

12 Rippin attempted to reformulate some of the Wansbrough’s statements and hypotheses: Rippin (1997a).

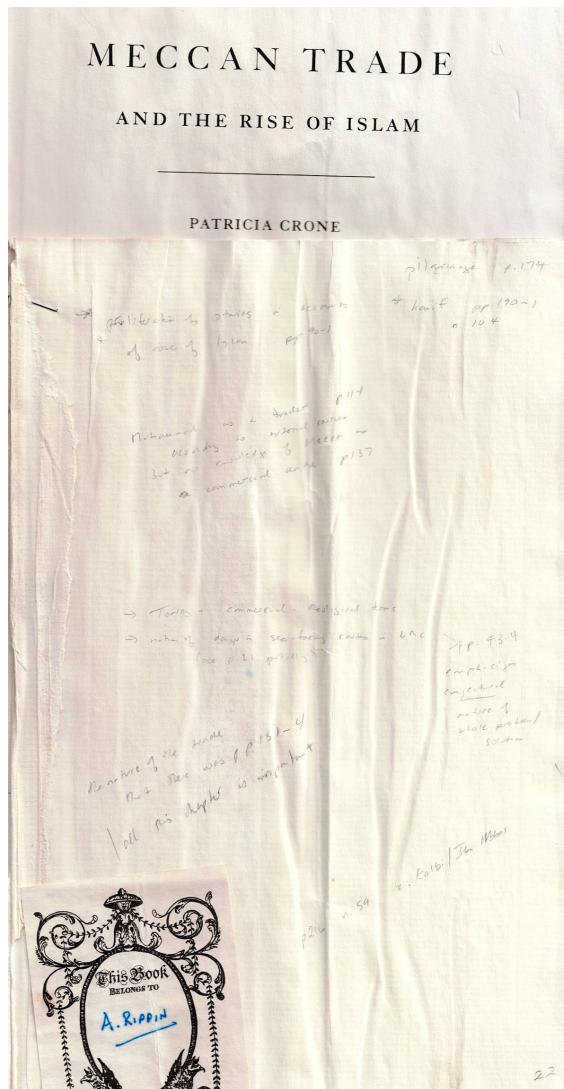


Figure 1 Rippin's Notes on Crone's *Meccan Trade*. Photo by Majid Daneshgar

In 1979-1980, while he was finishing his Ph.D., Rippin taught for one year at Michigan State University. He defended his Ph.D. thesis in February 1981. Soon had he secured a teaching position at the University of Calgary, Canada (see, McAuliffe 2017). With the benefit of financial support from the university, he purchased several Arabic books on *tafsir* and the Qur'ānic sciences, most of them he cites in his publications.

Remembering Earlier Scholars

Rippin was impressed by Harris Birkeland (d. 1961), a Norwegian scholar of religion. As a Master's student, he read Birkeland's "The Lord Guideth; Studies on Primitive Islam" (1950), which he cited in his thesis.

In the 1980s he purchased a copy of his Stress patterns in Arabic (1954) and *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammad's Breast* (1955). According to Rippin, Birkeland's works are essential for students of Islamic origins, and especially, early Qur'ānic exegesis. Scholars like Birkeland understood how *Sira*, *Ta'rikh* and *Hadīth* functioned as sources about the origins of Islam. Subsequently, Rippin placed Uri Rubin's Muhammadology next to Birkeland's studies (Rippin 1997b). He lamented the fact that Colin Turner excluded Birkeland from the list of "prominent" scholars of the Qur'ān in his *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* (Rippin 2006b). Out of respect for Birkeland and in response to his critics, Rippin republished one of his articles "Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran" in his edited volume *The Qur'ān: Formative Interpretation* (1999).¹³

While travelling with Rippin in 2013, I asked him about his favorite scholar of Islam in the past. "Ignaz Goldziher," he responded immediately. He had frequently cited Goldziher (d. 1921) and he purchased an English version of *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* in 2006. Notwithstanding his respect for Goldziher, Rippin believed that one scholar cannot produce a monograph on early Muslim literature covering all historical and religious topics and areas. Such

13 The late Shahab Ahmed (d. 2015) reviewed Rippin's book and wondered why Birkeland should have been listed in the book. According to Ahmed, Birkeland misidentified "the family *tafsir* transmitted by Muhammad b. Sa'd al-Awfi." See Ahmed (2003, 217).

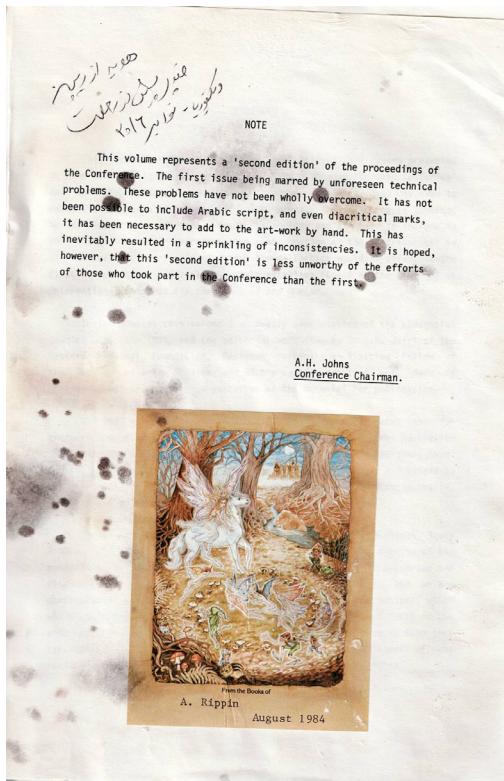
projects need to be done by a team of scholars in collaboration with scholars of Islamic history and religious studies (McAuliffe, 2017). The late professor Claude Gilliot (d. 2025) inform us that Rippin, in 1984, sent invitation letters to leading Muslim and non-Muslim scholars on *tafsir* literature to come to Calgary, Canada for a conference on “the history of the interpretation of the Qur’ān” (Gilliot 2017). The conference, held in April 1985, “was an ambitious undertaking, gathering a group of internationally renowned scholars for three days of papers and presentations” (Gilliot 2017). The goal of the conference was to “re-create a history of the reaction to the Qur’ān” (cited in McAuliffe, 2017). Rippin’s favorite topic, *Nāsikh and Mansūkh* — a topic that he had discussed frequently with Wansbrough in London — was treated by David S. Powers (1988), a historian of Islam (and, of course, a philologist) whose remarkable projects on *Zayd*, the adopted son of the Prophet was admired by Rippin. Lectures on *athārī* and *Shī‘ī tafsīr* and *ta’wil* literature were given by Jane D. McAuliffe and Mahmoud Ayyub (d. 2021), respectively. The late Anthony Johns (d. 2025) delivered a lecture on the Southeast Asian exegetical tradition, inserting this topic into the study of the Qur’ān. The lectures were revised and published as an edited collection.

The Southeast Asian Commentaries on the Qur’āna

Eight months prior to the Calgary conference, Rippin added a new volume on Qur’ānic studies to his library, the proceedings of the “International Congress for the Study of the Qur’ān”, edited by Anthony Johns, held at the Australian National University, Canberra, between 8-13 May 1980. He studied the text with great interest. Many scholars from different backgrounds attended this conference, some of whom, like Lode Frank Brakel (d. 1981), discussed the application of Qur’ānic verses in Malay-Indonesian classical texts.¹⁴ Rippin paid close attention to an essay by the Malaysian scholar Muhammad Abul Qasem, “al-Ghazali’s Theory of Qur’ān Exegesis according to One’s Personal Opinion” (1980). It is my impression that this volume stimulated Rippin’s interest in Southeast Asian exegetical studies. He

¹⁴ Although Brakel attended the conference, he passed away before sending his article “Quranic Quotations in the Poetry of Hamzah Pansuri” for publication. See Johns (1980, 185).

frequently reminded me of recent scholarship on Islam in Southeast Asia, especially publications by Anthony Johns and his student Peter G. Riddell. Like Rippin, Riddell was a multilingual scholar who worked with Arabic manuscripts and Hebrew texts. They knew each other for a long time, and Rippin always desired to see further works by Riddell on the origin of *tafsīr* in Southeast Asia.



*Figure 2 Rippin's Bookplate- The proceedings of the International Congress for the Study of the Qur'an, edited by Anthony Johns in 1980.
Photo Majid Daneshgar.*

I was motivated to run a joint project with both. In 2012-2013, Rippin, Riddell and I discussed how to move the field of Qur'ānic studies in a different direction and towards lesser-known areas.¹⁵ We initiated a project entitled: "The Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Malay-Indonesian World" to address early and modern Muslim exegetic activities in the Archipelago. And the three of us published *The Qur'ān in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation* with Routledge in 2016. This was Rippin's last publication.

Reviews and More Reviews

During an online conversation with Rippin in 2015, he told me about his intention to review S.H. Nasr's *The Study Qur'ān*. Alas, he was unable to accomplish this task. But he did manage to write reviews of no less than 186 books in his personal library! For Rippin, a book review was as important as an academic article, and he advised me to begin writing books reviews prior to completing my Ph.D. thesis. The book review facilitates revision and correction, a task in which Rippin was engaged for more than four decades. His long list of book reviews, covering not only pure studies on religions and Islam but also interdisciplinary subjects like religion and science, helps to explain how he produced a series of articles on new methods and theories in the study of Islam and the Qur'ān, and to write on groundbreaking studies by his predecessors and colleagues. In 1978, he wrote short reviews of books of William Graham and John Wansbrough.¹⁶ Rippin's later reviews were sharper and more critical.¹⁷

A few days before Rippin's passing, several of his friends, colleagues and students gathered in his home library. Some of us picked up his publications and related how they had changed the field of Islamic studies for the better. Rippin's library presents us with evidence of his philological knowledge and expertise, through which he became a well-versed reader of the scriptures, including the Bible and the Qur'ān, as

15 Email contact with Rippin and Riddell (dated March 6, 2013).

16 For the list of his publications, see Daneshgar and Saleh (2017, 399–422).

17 See, for example, A. Rippin (2016).

well as the humanities. His library demonstrates his passion for learning new languages, cultures, and people. Although it may not be much different from the library of other scholars of the Qur'ān, I wanted to remember the legacy of Andrew Rippin almost a decade following his death and to show how a scholar's home library can shed light on his scholarship.



Andrew Rippin (1950-2016)

Dean of Humanities at University of Victoria, 2009.

Photo Credit: Syd Bauman

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