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The volume under review is the 36th in the series ‘The Formation of the Classical Islamic World’, a series that is dedicated to the reproduction and repackaging of such outstanding contributions, often in languages other than English, on specific subjects of classical Arabic-Islamic civilization. Generally speaking, such contributions must have appeared as journal articles or chapters in books. The volume under focus contains essays on the trajectory of the evolution and development of Arabic grammar from the earliest time until the 10th century CE. It is divided into three sections. The first section, viz, ‘The Beginnings of Arabic Grammar’ (pp. 1–133) contains six essays by different authors. These essays variously deal with the origins of Arabic grammar, its relationship with Qur’anic exegesis, influence of foreign traditions, specifically Greek and Indic, on its substance and structure, the theory about the origin of jurisprudence and its connection with grammar, and the examination of the logical framework expounded by Ibn al-Muqaffa’ in regard to the origins of grammar.1 The second section, which comes under the title ‘Analytical methods of the Grammarians’ (pp. 135–235), contains five essays. The underlying feature of this section is that the interplay between grammar and other classical subjects, for example, logic, jurisprudence, disputation, and rhetoric is clearly demonstrated. For instance, the concept of ‘illa/ta’li‘il (causation) has its root in Hellenic speculative thought as it does in medicine (p. 225). The final section ‘Major Themes in Grammatical Study’ (p. 237–348) also contains five contributions. Issues treated here include the systematic basis of Arabic word classification, the elaboration of the basic theory of the parts of speech, noun, substantive, and adjective according to native grammarians, subject and predicate, and the relationships between linguistics and other sciences. The themes treated in the second and third sections of this volume focus primarily on Sībawayhi’s monumental work on grammar, the Kitāb, rightly characterized by Abū al-Tayyib al-Lughawī as

1 For a recent study on Arabic grammar and Islamic legal taxonomical tradition, see, Everhard Ditters & Harald Motzki (Eds), Approaches to Arabic Linguistics. Presented to Kees Versteegh on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, especially pp. 25–44.
Qurʾān al-nahw (the Qurʾān of Arabic grammar) in recognition of the finality of its authority.

The introduction by the editor is more than a brilliant lead into the subject matters of the oeuvre; it is a redoubtable critique of many of the dubious assumptions that seem to situate Arabic grammatical categories, types, and analyses in foreign models. It also gives a bird’s eye view of six major theoretical notions found in Sībawayhi, namely, ‘āmal (regimen), qiyās (analogy), samā (received usage), taqdír (implicature, suppletive insertion), asl (basic usage), and hierarchical order of linguistic terms. Ibn Sarrāj’s (d. 316/929) historic success at formalizing the distinction between the fundaments (‘usūl) and the particulars (furū) in grammar is discussed, too. Although the highly formalized distinction between the so called Basran and Kufan Schools of Grammar has recently been shown to be more of an over dramatization of a social, conceptual, and taxonomical predilection, the introduction still finds a place for an analysis of it. It will be invidious, if not uncharitable, to single out any particular contribution for laudatory assessment in this weighty tome; every essay here deserves to be considered as fons et origo in its own right in regard to the subject matter treated; the work as a whole, gives a broad view and an overview of the themes which have so far engaged modern scholarship on the story and history of early grammatical tradition in the context of the specific problems and issues taken out for investigation and analysis.

In keeping with the underlying philosophy of the series, the volume under review is a remarkable eye opener into the state of current episteme on Arabic grammar, and will indubitably serve as a reliable launching pad for further investigations into a number of issues which may have been adumbrated or treated with graceful sidestepping in some of the essays brought together here. The Bibliography, according to the editor, “is intended to reflect the major themes of the field and the various methodologies applied to them” (p. xiv). This is certainly a work, praise for which may in fact be superfluous.

Amidu Olalekan Sanni