

## Book Reviews

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### **Religion and Culture in Medieval Islam**

RICHARD G. HOVANNISIAN and GEORGES SABAGH (Eds), 1999

Giorgio Levi della Vida Conferences, 14

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

viii + 118 pp., UK£32.50

ISBN 0-521-623502

This book contains the proceedings of a conference whose speakers and theme were chosen by Professor George Makdisi, recipient of the Giorgio Levi della Vida Award in 1993. Although the theme is quite wide, the tone and viewpoint of the book are consistent with each other and coherent with Makdisi's own position, which he summarises in the first chapter, "Religion and culture in classical Islam and the Christian West". Here, Makdisi gives an overview of the fascinating theory which he has expounded in several works over the past decades (especially his *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981) and *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh, 1990)), explaining how he came to be interested in this subject and linking it to the modern-day American situation. Makdisi's view is that the European scholastic and humanistic movements had their origin in two equivalent movements that had begun some centuries earlier in the Middle East and, through Spain and Sicily, reached the West. This first chapter sets the tone of the whole book, which deals with several Arabo-Islamic subjects, making ample references to equivalent or parallel themes in the medieval (and occasionally modern) Christian (and occasionally Jewish) world. W. Montgomery Watt's essay on "The future of Islam" compares Jewish reactions to Hellenism in Antiquity with contemporary Muslim reactions to the Western, Christian culture. It is a very stimulating piece, and the daring juxtaposition of past and present provokes important questions: to what extent can one think, today, of different parts of our globalised world as simply Muslim or Christian, albeit with varying degrees of secularism? How can one deal with the fact that large portions of all societies do not identify themselves in any religion? Returning to a medieval subject, the following two chapters illustrate aspects of the relation between religion and literature. Merlin Swartz writes on "Arabic rhetoric and the art of the homily in medieval Islam", pointing to the lack of secondary scholarship on this genre, whose Christian parallel has instead received great attention. Swartz begins filling this gap by describing in great detail the norms laid out in two handbooks for preachers written by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). The fourth chapter, by Irfan Shahīd ("Medieval Islam: the literary-cultural dimension") reflects on the Qur'ānic idea of *i'jāz* (inimitability) and its consequences for the field of literature, from the times of Muḥammad to the present day. This is followed by George Saliba's more specific illustration of how three prominent Ash'arite authors refute astrology ("The Ash'arites and the science of the stars"); the issue is placed within the context of the Islamic-Arabic approach to classical Greek heritage. Roger Arnaldez ("Religion, religious culture, and culture") provides an outline of the development of Islam from its starting point as a religion containing ancient practices whose origins were forgotten,

into a system that came to include Greek influences. Finally, Mahmoud Ayoub gives a very interesting account of popular cults of saints, shrines and even celebrations that are shared by the three monotheistic religions, and the different (indeed opposite) consequences they have caused in various parts of the Middle East and North Africa (“Cult and culture: common saints and shrines in Middle Eastern popular piety”). One would expect a book with such a general title to be an introductory work aimed at a non-specialist readership. Indeed, most of the essays are wide-ranging enough, and contain enough references to the ‘Western’ (for want of a better word) tradition, to be able to attract the interest of, for instance, students of medieval Europe, and encourage them to read more on each of the subjects treated. This is why the chapter on homily, with its large set of footnotes and its pioneering subject, seems ill placed in such a collection. The lay reader will probably be left asking a number of basic questions about the genre and its context, which Swartz considers understood. The number of footnotes with which each piece is equipped also varies greatly, as does the style. However, the great coherence of the book in its outlook makes up for these differences, and its readability makes it a good starting point for the beginner in Middle East Studies.

LETIZIA OSTI

*Università di Venezia “Ca’ Foscari”*

### **The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin**

D.S. RICHARDS, 2001

[Crusade Texts in Translation 7]

Aldershot: Ashgate

x + 265 pp. incl. Maps

ISBN: 0754601439

*The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin* represents the latest English translation of *al-Nawādir al-Sultāniyya wa’l-Maḥāsīn al-Yūsufiyya* (the Rare Qualities of the Sultan and the Merits of Yūsuf), by Bahā’ al-Dīn ibn Shaddād (d. 632/1234). Born (in 539/1145) and brought up in Mosul, Ibn Shaddād received a primarily religious education, including study of the Qur’ān, *hadīth* (stories of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions) and Islamic law. He spent about four years teaching in Baghdad, then in 569/1173–4 he returned to Mosul, where he continued to teach and also served the Zangid rulers as an ambassador. After completing the *ḥajj* (greater pilgrimage) in 583/1188 he took service with Saladin (564/1169–589/1193), who made him *qāḍī al-‘askar* (the judge of the army). He continued to serve the sultan until the latter’s death. Two years later he moved to Aleppo, where he continued to serve the Ayyūbids as an ambassador, and attempted to preserve peace between the various members of the dynasty, until two years before his death.

Ibn Shaddād wrote a number of works; indeed, it was a (sadly lost) treatise on *jihād* (holy war) that enabled him to secure his position in Saladin’s service. However, the best known of his works is that under discussion here, which is his biography of the sultan. Given that the last English translation of Ibn Shaddād’s work was made in 1897, this new translation has been long overdue.

D.S. Richards opens his translation with a short but thoughtful study of the *Nawādir*. After an initial survey of Ibn Shaddād’s life and works, he discusses the text itself,

considering in particular the purposes for which it was written (a warning to the current Ayyūbid rulers as well as a eulogistic memorial to Ibn Shaddād's deceased master), the date of composition and how far it is possible to derive the latter from the former. He also discusses previous editions and translations of Ibn Shaddād's work, and helpfully explains certain choices he has made in the way he has presented his translation.

The remainder of the text is taken up with the translation itself. Richards presents the reader with a text that strikes an excellent balance between preserving accuracy in translation and readability. He makes imaginative use of a wide and varied English vocabulary that allows him to express intangible subtleties of the Arabic language that are difficult to preserve when it is translated into English. For those who do read Arabic he also provides, in square brackets, page references to the latest edition by Gamal al-Din al-Shayyal (Cairo, 1964), enabling easy reference to the Arabic text. Richards has based his translation on al-Shayyal's edition, but has also made use of the earliest manuscript of the work, currently preserved in Berlin, which al-Shayyal did not use. In footnotes to the text, Richards provides variant readings from this manuscript, as well as brief notes to identify personages mentioned, explanatory comments and transliterations of parts of the Arabic text for which the meaning is unclear.

To summarise, Richards has produced an accurate and readable translation of Ibn Shaddād's work, which is presented in such a fashion as to ensure that it will be of utmost use to both students of the crusades and scholars conducting deeper study of the period, regardless of whether they concentrate on the European or the Middle Eastern point of view.

NIALL CHRISTIE  
*University of British Columbia*

**Palácio Almoada da Alcáçova de Silves**

ROSA and MÁRIO VARELA GOMES (Eds), 2001

Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arqueologia

154 pp. (paperback)

ISBN 9727761003; DL 166836/01

This slim volume is the catalogue of an exhibition held in the National Museum of Archaeology in Lisbon between June and December 2001. The purpose of the exhibition was to display over two hundred and fifty artefacts discovered by the editors during recent excavations of the palace of Silves, the southern Portuguese town that once dominated an extensive section of the Algarve during the Almohad period in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Silves was taken briefly by Sancho I of Portugal in 1189–1191, with the help of a group of northern crusaders on their way to Acre, and then permanently conquered by Afonso III of Portugal in 1248. This volume concentrates on the period between these two Christian conquests; the palace was built in the middle of the twelfth century, later heavily remodelled, probably after 1191, and finally abandoned after 1248. Moving evidence of its sad fate is a photograph of the skeleton of a young man discovered in the palace courtyard, lying exactly as he must have fallen seven hundred and fifty years ago, face down with his left arm clutching at his chest, and the crossbow bolt that killed him embedded in his ribcage.

The volume comprises the catalogue, pictures of about half the exhibited artefacts, and seven short essays on the history and archaeology of the palace and town of Silves.

António H. de Oliveira Marques, an eminent Portuguese medievalist, contributes the first of these, a brief historical introduction to the period that includes discussion of the few written sources describing the palace. It is clear from these essays that the scope of the volume is far greater than its title suggests. The exhibition included pieces dating from as early as the eighth century BCE, and the third essay, on pre-Islamic Silves, explores the history of the town as Bronze Age fort, Phoenician colony, Roman port and Visigothic town. The fourth essay then describes the Muslim city between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. One of the reasons for such continuous settlement was the abundance of copper, and indeed the second essay, on the history of archaeology in the town, suggests that it was possibly a combination of mining and treasure hunting that led to the first excavations in the nineteenth century. Two massive Almohad cisterns remained in use until modern times, but other structures were not discovered until quite recently. A well, now incorporated into the Municipal Museum, was only discovered in 1979. The last essay in the volume explores what happened to the Almohad buildings after Silves was captured in 1248: the palace was quickly abandoned, the main mosque and *madrassa* were completely destroyed, and the town baths became a prison. The sixth essay reconstructs what it might have been like to live in thirteenth-century Silves, when all these structures were intrinsic to Muslim daily life. The description of the small Almohad houses uncovered by the editors' urban excavations contrasts with their discussion of the palace itself. Although the longest essay in the volume does indeed deal with the palace; as the fifth essay and at only fourteen pages it does not perhaps do justice to the building that purports to be the focus of this volume. A better title for the catalogue might have been 'Muslim Silves' as this reflects the broader scope of the essays.

The breadth and brevity of this volume leave one eager for more information. The writing is quite sparse and matter-of-fact. There are three detailed maps but they are too small to decipher easily. There is also a short chronology and a bibliography, but no index. One should remember of course that this is a catalogue for an archaeological exhibition. Until relatively recently there was very little archaeological work done in Portugal and little was known about Muslim Portugal. It is revealing that the editors of the present volume wrote two-thirds of its bibliography. As far as non-Portuguese historians and archaeologists are concerned, Portugal has generally failed to attract the attention enjoyed by Spain. It is in the light of this information that the volume can best be appreciated. The editors regularly compare their findings with those of archaeologists working in Granada, Seville and Murcia, and they fully establish the significance of Silves as a key Almohad city. This is ground breaking archaeological research and it is to be hoped that the editors will soon publish an extensive monograph on Silves that satisfies the curiosity raised by this short but fascinating catalogue.

IONA MCCLEERY  
*University of St Andrews*

## **Il-Malti Elf Sena ta' Storja**

JOSEPH BRINCAT, 2000

Malta: Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza

xii + 236 pp.

ISBN 99909-41-68-8

A thousand years of the history of a language is an ambitious project, but one that

Brincat has addressed with much detail in his work entitled *Il-Malti Elf Sena ta' Storja*. The origins of Maltese have been the subject of a number of linguistic works over the past century and much of what has been said and argued was repeatedly copied offering little in the way of new insights. For the first time Brincat's *Il-Malti Elf Sena* re-analyses the theories with new interpretations about the history of Maltese. It is a remarkable work, bringing together a number of perspectives and hypotheses succinctly presented, both historically and linguistically. The book is a history of Maltese but more than that, a socio-political history, full of ideas, presenting a dynamic view of how a language interacts in a crossroads of politics, cultures and religions.

What is the underlying structure of Maltese? It is a question that has intrigued Arabic and non-Arabic scholars in search of the origins of Maltese. Maltese, today is basically Arabic morphologically and syntactically with a superstructure of Italian and to some extent English (150 years of colonial domination) affecting the underlying structure of Arabic as well as the semantics of the language. As to the origins of Maltese there seems to be no linguistic link with the Punic (or Neo-Punic), Latin or Greek, as was once believed (pp. 13–24). It was based on the hypothesis that Punic, Greek and Latin inscriptions found on the islands (from 725 BC to 870 AD) suggest the presence of a spoken language. However, the number of Punic, Greek and Roman artefacts that surfaced in excavations does not necessarily prove that the islanders spoke these languages. Ironically when it came to the Islamic period (870–1091 AD), very few Arab-Islamic artefacts were unearthed but the language spoken by the Maltese was and still is Arabic. Theorists of language development would agree that a deep-seated Arabic existed in the islands of Malta before the Arab-Islamic period and most probably side-by-side with Punic or Neo-Punic people. This, I need to stress, is purely hypothetical and archaeological and textual evidence would be needed in order to reconstruct the earlier linguistic strata. One thing that is certain about the Arabic stratum of Maltese is that toponymically, the islands have Arabic well rooted in the spoken language of the people.

Several linguistic works on Maltese seem to dwell on using the word "Semitic" in reference to Maltese. This is a misleading term and Brincat has carefully avoided using it unnecessarily in his work; it is correct to speak of Maltese as Arabic-based but not Semitic as if Maltese is a mixture of Semitic languages (i.e. Aramaic, Hebrew, Phoenician etc.). Evidence of an earlier Semitic language spoken in Malta is non-existent and speculations as to what could have been spoken should not be attempted unless we have textual evidence of the indigenous speaking or writing, corroborated with archaeological findings.

One obscure period that needs careful study is the Byzantine, often related to Greek or geographically and politically to Classical or Byzantine Greece. The studies cited by Brincat (pp. 22–24) ignore the fact that the Byzantine culture is not specifically Greek. The history of this period is complex. Other routes need to be explored, the Levant (i.e. Syria or Egypt) is strongly possible and, though liturgically the Christian Arabic-speaking communities of the Levant had contacts with Byzantium, culturally belonged to a pre-Islamic ideology, which was Aramaic, Arabic and, of course, Greek thinking. That the islands may have had Aramaic or Arabic-speaking Christians from the Levant with Byzantine connections should be considered and I strongly support such thinking; the presence of such Christians on the North African shores prior to the appearance of Islam has long been established and poses interesting questions on the development of Arabic in contact with existing languages in the subsequent centuries. Admittedly, there is nothing concrete yet to suggest that the inhabitants of

Malta and Gozo spoke a language other than Arabic during the Islamic period, but if the Maltese islands were populated with Muslims, Christians and Jews from Sicily it is most probable that they spoke Arabic or a mixed language of Arabic and Latin-based variety. This remains hypothetical and unless written records come forward we will continue to rely on the rich Arab-Islamic toponymical corpus of the Maltese islands, the only historical source of an Arabic-based Maltese, which could not possibly have developed during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, a time when a number of Latin-speaking people started to settle on the islands, mostly from Sicily.

The core of Brincat's linguistic data starts in chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 39–74): a list of words of Arabic origin found in the Sicilian and Pantellerian dialects reinforces the Maltese Arabic strata more than any archaeological evidence. But whether Wettinger's claim (p. 94) that the Hebrew spoken by a small number of Jews in the fifteenth century is close to the Arabic of Sicily and to the Maltese of today should be taken seriously is questionable because of the limited corpus of textual evidence with a very restricted vocabulary.

Immigration brought a demographic change during the time when the islands were under the rule of the Order of St John from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (pp. 123–136). The linguistic impact was strong; it influenced the native language lexically but, interestingly enough, not much in the way of syntax, as is evident in the language today. The lexical expansion was Italian while the structure remains Arabic. In all instances it is Italian that influenced Maltese on different linguistic layers (phonetic, morphological and syntactic). However, like the term "Semitic", do we have to continue to stress the word "Romance" as part of the Maltese linguistic repertoire giving the impression that Maltese is a mixture of Romance languages (i.e. Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese etc.)? Brincat correctly does not follow the many Maltese linguistic works (including contemporary ones) that insist on using the term "Romance" when what they mean is the Sicilian and Italian of Maltese.

For ideas and technology Maltese borrowed heavily on Italian; consequently, a variety of Maltese was developing independently of the rural register (pp. 75–122). Settling in the new port towns, immigrants from the sixteenth century onwards mixed with local Maltese and a new variety emerged with phonetic and morphological features different from the rest of the islands. It may be argued that in terms of vocabulary, expressions and phraseological structures the development of Standard Maltese (oral and written) owes its first roots to the population mixture, which formed part of the growing towns (pp. 137–168).

The forming of Maltese as an official literary and political language is one that would interest researchers in language development and Brincat's analysis with examples extracted from different published works brings new light in the study of a language in contact. Brincat's work explains a number of important issues that makes the diversity of modern Maltese highly variegated and dynamic. He is perhaps the first to present a framework and a methodology of how Maltese should be analysed and studied. Highly informative and interpretative, the book opens a whole set of questions for linguists, historians, ethnographers and archaeologists with suggestions for further research. This is a definitive book for theorists of language contact.

DIONISIUS AGIUS  
*University of Leeds*

### The Qur'ān's Self-Image. Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture

DANIEL A. MADIGAN, 2001

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

xv + 236 pp., ills., tables, US\$ 45.00 (Cloth)

ISBN: 0-691-05950-0

This book is based on a dissertation submitted to the Department of Religion at Columbia University. It is an outstandingly thorough, well-documented and insightful study that deals with issues that are as crucial to the study of Islam as they are fascinating. The volume addresses Islamicists and those interested in the comparative study of scripture and hermeneutics alike (p. xiii). It has two main objectives: first, "to re-examine a consensus long held by both Muslim and western scholars about the way the Qur'ān understands itself"; and, second, to outline an alternative view in this regard.

A major premise of this study relates to the very fact that the precise meaning of significant Qur'ānic terms such as *kitāb* (usually translated as "book") and other derivatives of the root *k-t-b* (usually related to "writing") is not easily ascertained in the Qur'ān. In other words, one may ask whether or not the understanding of the Qur'ān as a holy "scripture" (similar to those bestowed upon Jews and Christians) is indeed "present and fully enunciated in the Qur'ān itself"; or if, in contrast, this perception has "only gradually emerged among Muslims during the centuries of their community's development" (p. 4). Hence the introduction to the book (pp. 3–11) addresses the complexity of the meaning of Qur'ānic words such as *kitāb* and *k-t-b* derivatives. Among other things, it notes that these words refer mostly to phenomena which many scholars perceive as "writings" different from the Qur'ān (and its heavenly "archetype"); i.e. they point to: the recording of what is destined to happen; divine decrees binding either on humanity or on God; the inventory of all that exists; and the registers of each individual's good and evil deeds, written either by God or by heavenly agents, for example (pp. 4–5).

Chapter 1, "The Qur'ān as a book" (pp. 13–52), seeks to challenge the widely held consensus that the prophet Muḥammad – if not initially, at least later in his career – envisaged the Qur'ān as a written, canonical document. It deals with the written nature of the Qur'ān assumed by western scholars such as: Widengren, Goldziher, Nöldeke, Bell and Blachère. Furthermore, it examines some relevant classical Muslim statements evident in prophetic traditions and in the anonymous *Kitāb al-mabānī*, al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) famous *Itqān fi 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and 'Abdallāh al-Sijistānī's (d. 316/928) important *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*. It also refers to Burton's critique of the traditional Muslim accounts and comments on some approaches in western and Muslim scholarship *vis-à-vis* the Qur'ān and the concepts of "the speech of God" (*kalām Allāh*; an essential attribute of the divine nature according to orthodox Muslim understanding).

Chapter 2, "The Qur'ān's rejection of some common conceptions of *kitāb*" (pp. 53–77), addresses the significant idea noticeable in the Qur'ān that the sacred text of Islam shares one and the same tradition with the previously revealed holy *kutub* (p. 76). Furthermore, Qur'ānic evidence is provided which suggests that – in using the term *kitāb* – a technical term was adopted, which was used by religious communities with which Islam claims kinship. In contrast to those previously revealed books, however, the Qur'ān appears "to operate as the voice of divine address to the present situation" rather than "an already codified corpus (*jumla wāḥida*)" (p. 76). This can be concluded, as the author states, from the fact that the Qur'ān comments upon itself and upon its

encounters with contemporaries of its revelation. Consequently, this particular nature of both the Qur'ānic text and the process of its constitution (i.e. revelation/composition – display/communication – storage/codification) is suggested to help explain why the Qur'ān's existence as “physically written material” is relatively unimportant in the Qur'ān itself. It is interesting to note that the term *kitāb* – when used in the Qur'ān for the Qur'ān – is understood by the author of this study to function as a primary “symbol” of God's sovereignty and knowledge rather than a “concrete entity”; it means the “point” where God's “timeless authority and insight address the time-bound human condition” rather than a (mere) “record” of His wisdom and judgement (pp. 76–77).

Chapter 3, ‘Semantic analysis and understanding of *kitāb*’ (pp. 79–105), maps “the semantic field of ‘writing’ language in the Qur'ān” (p. 79). Furthermore, it provides the ground for an understanding of how the “symbol” of *kitāb* functions in Qur'ānic discourse. The author greatly benefits here from the semantic field analysis applied by T. Izutsu to the study of the Qur'ān, and from the structural analysis of the Qur'ānic text by A. Neuwirth. In more detail, he deals with semantic fields and synchronic analysis, diachronic analysis and periodisation of the text, and the *kitāb* as a focus-word. This chapter outlines the semantic field of *kitāb* in the Qur'ān, defined by two inseparable components: the keywords ‘*ilm* (knowledge) and *ḥukm/ḥikma* (authority). It convincingly concludes in saying that “the *kitāb* in its fullest sense is the record of both God's knowledge and the authoritative divine will”. Yet, *kitāb* appears to be “an emblem of access to that realm of ‘*ilm* and *ḥukm*”, rather than “the sum total of God's knowledge and authority” (p. 105).

The results of a minutely conducted semantic analysis of *kitāb* is presented in chapters 4–6. While chapter 4 deals with the verbal use of the root *k-t-b* (pp. 107–124) in the Qur'ān, chapter 5 (pp. 125–144) is dedicated to titles and processes recognised by the Muslim community to be terms that are central to the revelation and the Qur'ān's self-image. These latter terms include the words: *furqān*, *Qur'ān*, *dhikr*, *zabūr*, *rahma*, *tanzīl*, and *waḥy*. Chapter 6 impresses by its sophisticated examination of important Qur'ānic synonyms and attributes of *kitāb* (pp. 145–165), which are based on roots such as *b-y-n*, *n-w-r*, *ḥ-q-q*, and *f-ṣ-l*.

Revisiting A. Welch's and R. Bell's viewpoints, chapter 7 stresses the fact that “The elusiveness of the *kitāb*” is nowhere more evident than in the predominance of indefinite and partitive forms, in which it appears. Among others things, it is noted that the Qur'ān “seems undecided about the exact relationship between what we might call “*al-kitāb* writ large” and what has been given to Muḥammad and the other messengers” (p. 168). Here the author provides an important insight, when he says that “the elusiveness of *kitāb* is also the reason it cannot be translated as ‘book’”, nor would “writing” be an appropriate equivalent since the latter alludes in English too much to “a mere mnemonic device for display or storage for the divine word” (p. 178).

The conclusion, chapter 8, “The continuing life of the *kitāb* in Muslim tradition” (pp. 181–191), makes it clear to what a large extent “the Muslim community has always had a lively sense that the *kitāb*'s author remains engaged with his audience”. It shows that the “understanding of God's ‘writing’ as a process rather than a finished product has profoundly shaped Islam in spite of its preponderant concern for the closed corpus of the Qur'ān” (p. 179).<sup>1</sup>

The appendix, “The people of the *kitāb*”, finally, states that the holy texts revealed to Jews and Christians were for the first Muslims as much God's address to humanity



as was “the divine-revealing word” of the Qur’ān (M. Arkoun), for which the Muslims became the hosts. Nonetheless, “whatever scrolls and codices [of Jews and Christians] may have been in Madīna were not seen by Muḥammad as conspicuously important, and certainly not as constitutive of the authority of the scripture” (p. 212). In contrast to the People of the Book, the Muslims “would not initially have learnt ... that this word of address had any boundaries, that it could be confined between the folds of a scroll or the covers of a codex. This is perhaps why the Qur’ān’s *kitāb* remains so authoritative and definitive, so present and active, yet at the same time so elusive” (p. 213).

In other words: the author of the study under discussion seems to suggest here that, for the first Muslims, it was not in itself important that the Jews and Christians had their holy texts constituted in “book form” (*kitābs*). Rather, while it was acknowledged that the *ahl al-kitāb* had received the divine word as did the Muslims, the Muslims would not initially have embraced the idea of making a “book” out of revealed divine word, a word which “contains an inherent claim to being complete and bounded, to being structured and ordered” (p. 181).

This reasoning in fact would be an argument against equating the term Qur’ān with *kitāb* and codex at the foundational level of Islam. D. Madigan’s conclusions, however, seems to be profoundly challenged by the ancient Qur’ān copies found in 1972 in the Great Mosque of Sanaa. Initial research on these fragmentary manuscript copies of the Qur’ān seems to suggest three things.<sup>2</sup> First, along with oral preservation and transmission of the Qur’ānic text by the first Muslim generations, there was significant written transmission of the scripture from a very early time on. This is shown by the fact that a particular number of these ancient Sanaa Qur’ān copies “date, with certainty, back to the second half of the first century [i.e. second half of the seventh century CE]”. Second, in so far as these manuscripts have been preserved, this latter group of the most ancient Qur’ān copies, taken as a whole, “comprises the entire text [of the Qur’ān]”. In other words, this group displays the Qur’ānic text “without the variants [occasionally] observed hitherto; and it includes the first and last *sūra*. Consequently, [this evidence] contradicts the assumption [stated by some western scholars; not by Madigan] that the final edition [of the Qur’ānic text] was made only at the end of the second, or even in the third century [i.e. eighth and ninth century CE]”.<sup>3</sup> Third, and most importantly in the context of Madigan’s thesis: in my view, (the photographs of some of) these most ancient manuscripts of Qur’ānic text do, for the second half of the first/seventh century, seem to indicate basic characteristics of text-codification such as: (a) visual division of the text into chapters and verses (chapters, for example, are separated from each other by: blank lines, ornamental trims, and other graphic elements), along with (b) a certain orthographic consistency, including consistent use of archaic spelling for particular words. Consequently, they would militate in favour of an understanding of Qur’ān as “book” that goes back to the very beginning of the Muslim community.

A brief remark may finally be made on certain methodological premises seemingly underlying Madigan’s approach, when he speaks of “the Qur’ān’s insistence”, and that “the Qur’ān refuses”, “prefers to operate” (p. 76), and “conceives of itself” (p. 177), etc. This way of expression may easily have been used more sparingly, if at all, in an otherwise highly academic and remarkably intriguing study such as Daniel Madigan’s.

## NOTES

1. As for the “continuing life” of Islam’s Holy Text in Muslim tradition, one may now also consult Kermani’s book on *Experiencing the Qur’ān Aesthetically*: Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön. Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (Munich: Beck, 2000). See also my review of this book, forthcoming in the *Journal of Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, 6(i) (2003).
2. Hans-Casper Graf von Bothmer, Karl Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, “Neue Wege der Koranforschung”, *Magazin Forschung, Zeitschrift der Universität des Saarlandes*, 1 (1999): 33–46. This article is available online: [http://www.uni-saarland.de/verwalt/kwt/f-magazin/1-99/Neue\\_Wege.pdf](http://www.uni-saarland.de/verwalt/kwt/f-magazin/1-99/Neue_Wege.pdf)
3. “Dennoch hat die zuletzt besprochene Fragmentgruppe mit einer als gesichert anzusehenden Datierung in die 2. Hälfte des ersten Jahrhunderts für diese Frage eine Bedeutung; soweit erhalten, gibt sie nämlich den vollständigen Text ohne bisher beobachtete Varianten, und sowohl die erste als auch die letzte Sure ist erhalten. Somit widerspricht sie der Annahme, die Endredaktion sei erst zu Ende des zweiten, wenn nicht sogar erst im dritten Jahrhundert entstanden”. *Ibid.* 46.

### **The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks. War and Diplomacy During the Reigns of Het’um II (1289–1307)**

The Medieval Mediterranean, Vol. 34

ANGUS DONAL STEWART, 2001

Leiden: E.J. Brill

This study, based largely on Mamlūk Arabic sources, is carefully structured, and its chronological range substantially wider than its title indicates. After a survey in the Introduction (pp. 1–30) of the previous scholarship on the subject, the sources, and the geography of the Armenian kingdom, Part 1 on the historical background (pp. 33–61) covers in the first chapter the earlier history of the Armenians in Cilicia and their kingdom, the history of the *mamlūk* system from ‘Abbāsīd times, the history of the Mongols and the Ilkhanate from Chingiz Khan onwards, and finally the history of the crusader states from 1099 to their extinction in 1291. The second chapter concentrates upon relations between the Mamlūk sultanate, the Mongols and the Armenians from the mid-thirteenth century to the truce between Qalāwūn and King Lewon II (1269–1289) on 2 Rabi‘ II 684/7 June 1285, which is examined in detail. Part 2 (pp. 65–183) consists of chapter 3: “The reigns of King Het’um II (1289–1307). It is followed by the author’s Conclusions (pp. 185–193) and the Bibliography (pp. 199–206). Between pp. 196 and 197 are 16 useful photographs, taken by the author, of mountain castles, centres of administration and communications in Cilician Armenia. The book is very heavily annotated.

To turn to some points of detail, in describing the collaborative work edited by T.S.R. Boase, *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, 1978, it is somewhat harsh to dismiss Boase’s own detailed Gazetteer of the region as “a list of place names” (p. 3). On p. 34 it is stated that the Armenian catholicos transferred his see to Hromgla (Qal’at al-Rūm, Rumkale) in 1151. This is an improbably late date since at that time the remnants of the former county of Edessa had passed, or were about to pass, under Muslim rule. The date 1148, as given in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition), VIII, 606b, seems preferable. At p. 45, n. 8 (and also Bibliography, p. 205) it should be noted that Linda S. Northrup’s thesis on Qalāwūn was published as *From Slave to Sultan* (Freiburger Islamstudien, Band XVIII) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998). On p. 71, the valid point made by the author about al-Ashraf Khalīl’s self-presentation in his titulature, based on evidence in the *Gestes des Chiprois*, could have been strengthened by reference to the inscription in the citadel of Aleppo: cf. *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe*, xiii, no. 4957. Pages 75–83 deal in some detail with the siege and capture of Hromgla

in 691/1292. A participant in the operation was the Mamlūk amir Baybars al-Manṣūrī, an excerpt from whose major chronicle, *Zubdat al-fikra*, is cited in the Bibliography (p. 199) and elsewhere. Unfortunately this excerpt, cited from S.M. Elham, *Kitbuḡā und Lāḡīn* (Freiburg, 1977), begins with A.H. 693, and so does not give al-Manṣūrī's account of the siege. It is perhaps worth noting that two of al-Manṣūrī's minor chronicles, including brief reports of the siege, are available in *al-Tuḡfa al-mulūkiyya* and *Mukhtār al-akhbār*, both edited by Dr 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ṣāliḥ Ḥamdān and published in Cairo in 1987 and 1993 respectively.

Taken as a whole this book is a useful contribution to Armenian and Mamlūk historical studies, and its detailed examination of Het'um's interrupted reign and clarification of the role of Cilician Armenia in Near Eastern history will be welcomed. A more rigorous pruning of data in the first two chapters would perhaps have been an advantage in concentrating the work on its real and important subject.

PETER M. HOLT  
*University of London*

