BOOK REVIEWS

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Roxanne Euben agrees with Edward Said on the point that a close connection between exteriority and power resides at the core of Western rationalist discourse. Far from being non-normative, ahistorical, and unbiased toward its subject of inquiry, Western rationalist discourse constructs and controls the images of political phenomena through the filter of Western categories of knowledge. This discourse is not attentive to its contingency on specific “historical a priories,” to use Foucault’s language, and accordingly stays oblivious of the socio-political functions of its “truth”-producing activities.

According to Euben, the current scholarship on Islamic fundamentalism is an exercise in disciplinary power, which dictates the parameters of enframing the identity, meaning, and function of Islamic fundamentalist movements without reference to the adherents’ own understanding of their political behavior. In other words, within Western rationalist discourse, Islamic fundamentalism serves as the irrational Other to the intelligible Western Self. Hence, it is no wonder that modern rationalist scholarship focuses exclusively on the function or on the socio-economic and political “causes” of Islamic fundamentalism and dispenses with the “reasons” those Islamic fundamentalists uphold.

The author, however, finds hermeneutics less susceptible to the distortions of power than the social-scientific models parasitic on rational discourse. She therefore applies the hermeneutic/dialogic method of understanding to give voice to a set of subjugated truth claims. To achieve such an understanding, Euben emphasizes the moral/epistemological necessity of Gadamerian “openness” and, at the same time, reminds us of “the finitude of our capacity to understand complex matrixes of meaning in part constituted by systemic inequalities of power” (p. 42). The first two chapters of the book set this agenda and establish the methodological basis for a thick description of Islamic fundamentalism in subsequent chapters.

Euben’s concept of fundamentalism reflects “contemporary religio-political movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundation of the community, excavating and re-interpreting these foundations for application to the contemporary social and political world” (p. 17). This attempt, according to the participants, is guided and informed by divine truths that are unknowable by purely human means. They maintain that divine truths are not matters of hermeneutic and contextual re-interpretation of religious sources. As a result, Islamic fundamentalism is believed to initiate a rediscovery of eternal, non-negotiable divine truths and values that are abandoned in the pagan epoch of jahiliyya. The author rightly locates this anti-hermeneutic epistemology among the background assumptions of all varieties of fundamentalism. Indeed, one might take her observation one step further and analyze the political function and social outcomes of hermeneutic epistemologies in societies that are currently prone to fundamentalism.

In Chapter 3, Euben analyzes the ideas of Sayyid Qutb on such issues as philosophy, the natural and social sciences, morality, politics, and the Islamic state. She concludes that
Qutb managed to alter “the very terms of Islamic political debate concerning the legitimacy of authority, the nature and necessity of political activism and the characteristics of just community” (p. 55). Chapter 4 is devoted to the 19th-century Islamic “reformist” arguments of the likes of al-Afghani and Abduh on the compatibility of Islam and reason. Euben maintains that the issue of compatibility between Mu‘tazila reason and revelation is the main point that differentiates the reformist al-Afghani from the fundamentalist Qutb.

In the fifth chapter, Euben studies the similarities between Qutb’s critique of rationalism and contemporary Western voices on the problems endemic to the modern condition. According to her, this comparison between two apparently different sets of political theories reveals a correspondence between the Other’s and the Self’s critiques of modern rationality and thus facilitates the overcoming of the reified Self–Other dichotomy. As she specifies, Qutb’s fundamentalist program is to re-enchant the world through implementing a metaphysical account of truth, which justifies absolutist authority. In contrast to Qutb, internal Western criticisms stay loyal to a viable conception of democratic freedom, which—as a shared democratic end—is to be realized through participatory social engagements.

We might expect to know Euben’s opinion of why—at least, in Egypt—the revolutionary voice of Qutb overshadowed the rationalist reformist program of al-Afghani and Abduh. Why was reason not as attractive to Qutb as it was to al-Afghani or Abduh? The answer may lie partly in the point that these thinkers have different historical experiences of modernity. Qutb, as the author briefly observes (p. 166), seems to regard colonialism, the world wars, and the present torment in the Third World and their associated human disasters as the direct—and historically accidental—outcomes of Enlightenment rationality. As a consequence, he would share the post-modernist idea that there is something rotten in modern rationality itself, though, as Euben mentions in Chapter 5, Qutb’s prescription is radically different from the ones advanced by post-modernists. What I want to highlight here is a suggestion that we might need to revise the hermeneutic method of understanding by expanding the domain of meaning-formative context to historical and socio-political interactions. Euben approvingly quotes Taylor that “meaning is derived from the practices that constitute everyday social existence” (p. 153). However, it seems that the meaning-formative frame of reference in her work is mainly restricted to the written (not lived) texts. The suggested expansion of context takes place within the meaning-oriented hermeneutic methodology. Thus, it is different from the familiar idea of complementary combination of hermeneutics and the sociology of knowledge.

In all, Enemy in the Mirror offers an astute interdisciplinary study that calls on Western scholarship to take a short (irrational?) break from its instrumental rationality. This might help it to see that the scary face of Enemy/Other is depicted in a mirror that the modern rationality, for centuries, has held in front of its own face. Euben relies on original sources and demonstrates sound scholarship. Her book makes a positive contribution to the present knowledge of Islamic fundamentalism and introduces a good case for what she calls “comparative political theory.” Students of political science, postcolonial studies, and Middle East studies will definitely benefit from this important book.

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A. G. Noorani is a lawyer, and this book is a piercing prosecution of a narrow interpretation of jihad, of attitudes he calls “Muslim bigotry,” and of U.S. and Western policies vis-à-vis the
Middle East and the world. In this short yet thorough book, Noorani offers a valuable contribution to the “clashist” debate and makes strong argument advancing the rationalist position. With his extensive reference to sources and issues of South Asia, this volume will help to broaden the perspective of those who may be focused exclusively on the Arab world.

This book is an assertion that bāb al-ijtihād should remain open. Through a well-organized progression of logic, the reader is led through an argument that starts with an overview of the representation of Islam in Western media and culture, offering the intellectual roots of this “specter” that “haunts” the West and that recalls Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis. The haunt of the Islamic specter can be found “in the media, in academia, in the arts and in scholarship. Few care to free themselves from its thrall” (p. 23). Noorani singles out Bernard Lewis, who has perpetuated the association of Muslims and militant fundamentalists. Noorani’s approach is reminiscent of the breadth and conviction of Edward Said’s Orientalism. Noorani appreciates those—such as Said and John Esposito—who have cared, and attempts to continue in that vein. Referring to 11 September 2001, Noorani writes, “Who was it, then, militant Arab nationalists, or militant Islamists? The former wreak vengeance for wrongs done by Western colonialism and the corrupt rulers it props up. The latter strive to establish an Islamic state. Only a political illiterate would confuse the two” (pp. 12–13).

After exposing the intellectual framework behind the “clash,” Noorani begins to chip away at its foundations. He starts by defining “jihad”—correctly—as “struggle,” but without any hesitation links it in the next sentence to ijtihād, the “exertion of the intellect” (p. 45). Recognizing that the term “jihad” can be misinterpreted by Muslims as well as by non-Muslims, Noorani compares its use to “crusade,” which has neutral as well as historically loaded meanings. He cites commentators such as Chiragh Ali and Sayyid Ahmad Khan who have refuted such narrow interpretations and who have developed the positive interpretations of jihad as found in the Qur’an and in the Prophet’s sunna. Similarly deconstructing the idea of a fatwa as an “edict,” Noorani cites both South Asian and North American scholars to conclude that popular usage of both terms is inspired by “politics, not religion . . . exposing both to ridicule and Islam to misunderstanding and misrepresentation” (p. 62).

In Chapter 4, Noorani addresses the 20th-century “malaise” called fundamentalism, which is found in all of the major religions and characterized by “revivalism, hostility toward minorities, anti-intellectualism, intolerance, arrogant insularity, intellectual bankruptcy, and moral blindness” (p. 65). He is especially critical of the (recently defeated) Bharatiya Janata Party of India and its nationalistic Hindu outlook. Tracing the intellectual roots of fundamentalism to Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Abul A’la Mawdudi, he differentiates between Arabic speakers and non-Arabic speakers, the former who interpret the language of the Qur’anic texts and the latter who are only able to read the texts literally and therefore less able to access historical contexts (p. 81). Asserting the need to engage in rational thought, Noorani condemns fundamentalism of all sorts. Nevertheless, he attributes its rise to all that the West, especially the United States, is responsible for, as well as the failure of the Muslim political class and intelligentsia to contain it (p. 90).

In the last two substantive chapters of the book, Noorani proposes for Islam an argument for respecting human rights and facing modernity. Regarding human rights, Noorani treats the matter historically, highlighting the concern among the first Muslim community, and thematically, with a focus on the place of non-Muslims. Recognizing the reality of history, he admits that the “record of actual practice [of Muslims] reveals both tolerance and intolerance towards the non-Muslims, dhimmis as they were called” (p. 96). Noting that the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (included in Appendix 1) “does not list among the rights of minorities (article X) the right to share in the governance of the State,” Noorani concludes, “[t]his is utterly unacceptable in modern times” (p. 97; emphasis in the original). He then makes a historical and textual case for non-Muslims to enjoy that very right.
Noorani’s prescription for Islam as it faces modernity is to ensure that bāb al-ijtihād remain open. Again, he skillfully builds a case for the use of reason, appealing to the modern Islamic discourse of many scholars, including Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, and Fazlur Rahman, but he reserves the “last word” for Abul Kalam Asad, who espoused the place of human freedom to develop an “Islamic theology of liberation” in the context of British rule in India. Noorani concludes by demonstrating that the nonviolent jihad of liberation from alien rule was superlative, but that a “jihad is yet to be fought out against ignorance, economic deprivation, social injustice, constitutional abuse and political wrongs” by first waging the greater jihad to change the self (p. 118). In this greater jihad, Noorani makes an example of Iranian President Muhammad Khatami, who has called for the “dialogue of civilizations,” despite the temptation to resort to extremism in response to Israeli suppression of Palestinians. He writes, “No other wrong stirs the Arab and Muslim world as much as the brutal repression by Israel...and the support it draws from the United States” (p. 126). Nevertheless, Noorani concludes by calling for dialogue based on rational self-examination in which the “West reflect[s] on the iniquities it...continues still to impose on the world” and Muslims avoid the temptation to “wallow in memories of grave wrongs, seek comfort in apologia, turn a blind eye to the injustices of Muslim society and, worse of all, refuse to discard their monstrously wrong notions of their own majestic faith, Islam” (p. 128).

In his reliance on Western, Middle Eastern, and South Asian sources, A. G. Noorani has demonstrated that there is much fodder in the sources to advance such an argument. His select bibliography reflects the breadth of the literature. Noorani’s approach is scholarly, even as he advances a clear position and prosecutes another. This book is very accessible to the specialist, offering in one place the ideas of many rationalist, reforming scholars. The emphasis on South Asian thinkers is especially helpful. In addition, the two appendixes—containing the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights and a resolution from the First Islamic Conference on “The Protection of Human Rights in Islamic Criminal Justice”—are also useful primary documents. The book offers a clear alternative to the prevalent media and therefore can also be recommended enthusiastically to the nonspecialist and for libraries.

*Islam and Jihad* is a book that ought to be read as an example of current intellectual trends among Muslims struggling with globalization; economic, political, and social suppression; and the stereotypes advanced by other, less discerning outlets.

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In the course of some forty years, Jacques Waardenburg (b. 1930), a Dutch-born scholar of Islam and comparative religions, has produced a stream of work on contemporary Islamic thought, society, and culture in the modern Islamic world, East–West relations, Muslims in Europe, and the “science of religion” (*Religionwissenschaft*). Widely cited is his *L’Islam dans le miroir de l’Occident* (Paris, 1963), a close, methodical study of significant figures of Orientalism such as Ignaz Goldziher, Carl Becker, and Louis Massignon. According to the author’s very useful survey of Orientalism in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, a third edition of the book was published in 1970.
The present work is a collection of essays that reflect the breadth of Waardenburg’s interests. An introduction situates the stages of his career against the recent history of Islamic studies in the West. It serves his immediate purpose—that is, to provide a sense of his training and research areas—but one wishes for a bit more substance here, given the extent of his career and publications. Thirteen of the nineteen essays appeared previously between 1979 and 1995. Each was apparently revised for the present volume (no attempt was made for this review to assess the extent of the revisions).

Inevitably in a work of this sort, particular chapters are more successful than others. Two essays (chaps. 3 and 4) on theoretical approaches to the study of Islam, for example, are more suggestive than substantial. Other essays have a narrow focus and thus will be chiefly of interest to specialists and students in the respective fields. Chapter 1, for example, “Changes in Belief and the Rise of Islam,” outlines the “reordered” spiritual landscape of Arabia following the onset of Muhammad’s teachings. The essay can be read usefully alongside those cited by Robert Hoyland in his chapter on pre-Islamic Arabian religion (Arabia and the Arabs [London, 2001], 139–66). Similarly, Waardenburg’s essay (chap. 11) on the history of the Wahhabi movement prior to the establishment of the Saudi state provides a succinct narrative of events leading to the movement’s success. A companion essay on Daniel van der Meulen (d. 1989), Dutch consul in Jeddah and later minister plenipotentiary in 1926–31 and 1941–45, is of even narrower interest, though it provides, from Van der Meulen’s own writing on his tenure in the Hijaz, an intimate glimpse of ‘Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa’ud, founder of the Saudi state.

More substantial are essays on currents of the modern Islamic world. While again it is difficult to find the appropriate means to assess a long and wide-ranging set of essays, the remaining chapters tend to view their respective subjects in broad historical and theoretical terms. The modern Islamic world in recent years has come in for considerably more than its share of attention by journalists and scholars alike, so, particularly for specialists, Waardenburg covers much familiar territory. Many of these essays, however, could be used to positive effect in the classroom. Waardenburg is sensitive to the array of ideological currents that have surfaced from Morocco to Indonesia, all in the name of Islam, and for the most part avoids explicit judgment of his subject. Students may have trouble with Waardenburg’s formal style (notwithstanding the effort to render the author’s “hollandish English into present-day American English” [p. vii]). Waardenburg also hews closely to the apparent dictates of a “history of religions” approach. He is interested throughout, as he says early on, in the problem of meaning, particularly when cast in religious forms.

Chapter 7 introduces the thought of six modern North African scholars (Bennabi, Djait, Merad, Talbi, Laroui, and Arkoun) as it relates to the Islamic tradition and the impact of colonialism and modernity. Arkoun—and little surprise, given the extent of his writing on these topics—receives the largest share of attention. Waardenburg is clearly receptive to Arkoun’s reasoned, cosmopolitan approach to the study of Islam and religious traditions more generally. A subsequent chapter, “Human Rights, Human Dignity, and Islam,” seems particularly timely given recent turns in the U.S. occupation of Iraq. It provides, as do many of the other chapters, a decent bibliography.

Six chapters on modern formulations of Islam—one might say, overtly politicized forms of the tradition—close the book. These later essays, if one can generalize, concern the variety of reactions by Muslim ideologues, movements, and nation-states to the project of nationalism and state formation, on the one hand, the presence of a postcolonial West, on the other. Again, Waardenburg is careful enough to underscore the variety of formulations and stances—the shaping of plainly Islamic forms of political ideology, the emergence of what he terms “new Islamic states” (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Libya), and the shaping of Islamic protest movements, for example—adopted by states and nonstate players alike.
Geneviève Gobillot, professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at Lyon-III University and specialist of the mysticism of the first four centuries of Islam, is the author of *Les Chiites* (1998) and a translation of al-Tirmidhi’s *Kitab Ghawr al-Umur*, “Le Livre de la Profondeur des choses” (1996). In her latest work, *La conception originelle, ses interpretations et functions chez les penseurs musulmans*, she contextualizes the notion of *fitra* within the complex intellectual milieus it evolved with a historical analysis of the genesis and the development of its varied interpretations. These interpretations emerged out of debates (up to the 10th century) over the significance of *fitra* into seemingly contradictory interpretations that referred both to (1) God’s universal religion (Abraham’s) or to the spiritual element that everyone possesses; and (2) its exegetical understanding as the individual religion that Jews or Christians transmit to their children. Gobillot presents a historical, synthetic, and analytical study of the use of *fitra* in the reports (hadith) and the exegetical interpretations of the first centuries of Islam and focuses on the legal, theological, and mystical uses of its sole Qur’anic occurrence (Q:30.30).

Gobillot provides a preliminary exploration of the various interpretations found in the nine Sunni canonical collections of reports where 110 citations, with many repetitions, amount to thirty-one different texts, with twelve different series of reports with similar meanings.

The work is divided into thematic sections that provide the semantic, historical, legal, and theological framework in which the notion was discussed. The first section, which serves as an introduction, explores and unearths the complex “network” of meanings and interpretations of *fitra* at the heart of the early developments of theological and legal discourses. The second section dwells on the semantic origin of the root “*f*-t-r,” its derivatives, and their Qur’anic occurrences (Meccan/Medinan), and provides a number of examples that illustrate the coexistence of a number of semantic layers until the 15th century. The next section analyzes the earliest discussions about *fitra* that were related to the report “*kull mawlūd yūkād ‘alā al-fitra*” via the texts of Abu Hanifa, Ja’far al-Sadiq, and the proto-Isma’ili *Umm al-kitab*. The fourth section identifies legal problems associated with the report “*kull mawlūd*” about the status of the People of the Book, discussed by Ibn Hanbal, Shafi’i, Abu Dawud al-Sijistani, Ibn al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qutayba, and Ibn Taymiyya, and the polemics against the Qadaris and the Mu’tazulis over the killing of non-Muslim children. The section that follows presents theological problems raised by the same report, Mu’tazili discussions on the possibilities of God damning innocents—for example, Mankdim Sheshdiv, disciple of ‘Abd al-Jabbar and al-Maturidi’s polemics against the Mu’tazili positions. Gobillot suggests that early legal and theological debates and polemics (end of the 1st century) revolved around the nature of predestination. The sixth section highlights the role of *fitra* in relation to the original pact of the prophets, found in some reports used by Tabari, and its use for the elaboration of a stronger notion of predestination, an interpretation that was opposed by Mu’tazilis and Shi’i theologians such as al-Sharif al-Murtada. An understanding of *fitra* as universally shared—for example, al-Tirmidhi—made it possible to associate *fitra* with the notion of intellect or light. Gobillot finds in the works of ‘Abd al-Jabbar, al-Tirmidhi, Ruzbahan Baqli, Isfarayini, Ibn ‘Arabi, Qashani, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Batta, and the Shi’i and Nizari traditions traces of this *fitra*-light. The next section explores the affinity between *fitra* and *sibgha* found in the reports...
about the fitra of Abraham. The eighth section discusses fitra and the soteriological role of Muhammad found in the mi’rāj traditions, the Shi’i notion of a primordial light associated with Fatima-Fatir, Tustari’s Muhammadan light, Qummi, Kulayni, and Sunni Ruzbahan Baqli’s appeal to fitra-light, which authors such as al-Tirmidhi, Ibn ’Arabi, and Jili associated with the notion of universality and omnipotence of the divine. The next section explores the use of fitra within more secular and philosophical discourses that naturalize the notion with its embodiment in the four temperaments or natures—for example, Jahiz and Ibn Qutayba—but also the Ikhwan al-Safa’ or al-Farabi, who understands it in terms of quiddity, and Avicenna, who identifies it with an individual substance.

Gobillot concludes with a historical perspective on the interpretative contexts of her hypothesis of a development of the use of fitra. She identifies two different “exegetical tendencies” (p. 130) within the theological and legal systems: the “universal” interpretation posits fitra as the commonly shared divine nature of all human beings, at least, within the monotheistic traditions, linking it with Abraham; while the “exclusive” interpretation posits fitra as a “primeval conception” that applies exclusively to Muslims and their children, affirming either freedom of choice or divine predestination. Gobillot concludes by noting that the Qur’anic verse about fitra originates in the context of an affirmation of a Meccan monotheism whose interpretative horizon is an absolute “Abrahamic ḥanīfīyya,” without opposition to Christians and Jews (p. 136). Her analysis illustrates the “porosity” of the boundaries that existed between these different interpretations, operating under theological, legal, and mystical considerations.

Gobillot’s work is grounded in the analysis of primary sources. Each section begins with and dwells on the relevant Qur’anic verses and reports, making this work a rich source of important material. The limits of her project are set forth by her own stated goals to propose a preliminary investigation rather than a comprehensive, comparative, and exhaustive analysis of fitra (p. 130). Gobillot concludes by noting that various interpretations of fitra remained both within and went beyond traditional exegeses of the Scriptures. The merits of her work lie in its ability to highlight subtle interpretations and the (thematic) historical framework that maps out their development. Although footnotes are provided, a bibliography is lacking, which makes it difficult to locate sources.

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BRANNON M. WHEELER, Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis (London: Routledge/ Curzon, 2002). Pp. 193. $75.00 cloth.

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This work examines Islamic exegesis related to the figure of Moses, focusing on the commentary on two Qur’anic passages in particular: Q:18.60–101, where Moses’s servant leaves a fish on a rock and it escapes into the water, the mystic teacher identified as al-Khidr by the later tradition takes Moses on a didactic tour, and the figure of Dhu al-Qarnayn appears; and Q:28.21–28, the story of Moses’s sojourn in Midian. Wheeler investigates the connections between a wide range of commentaries on these passages and many other texts, including the Alexander Romance, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and Jewish and Christian accounts regarding Abraham, Moses, and other biblical figures. He endeavors to show through these rich examples that Muslim exegetes appropriated texts from Jewish, Christian, and other traditions intentionally, molding and modifying them to achieve specific ends and purposes.

The book consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion, followed by indexes of Qur’anic and biblical citations and a general index. The four chapters—and part of the conclusion, as well—deal with the textual connections surrounding several passages in the
Qur’an, placing the emphasis on exegesis rather than on the text itself and arguing consistently against seeing Qur’anic passages as deriving directly or in an unmodified manner from earlier Jewish, Christian, and other sources.

Chapter 1, “Q:18.60–82,” discusses the stories of the lost fish (Q:18.60–65), the interaction of Moses and the servant of God (al-Khidr) (Q:18.66–82), and the figure of Dhu al-Qarnayn (Q:18.83–101). Muslim exegetes came to associate all of these episodes with the fish episode in Alexander stories, drawing on Jacob of Serugh’s sermon on Alexander, Greek recensions of the Alexander Romance, and an Alexander story in the Babylonian Talmud. Here, Wheeler critiques A. Wensinck’s claim that Q:18.60–65 is itself based on the Alexander Romance and the Epic of Gilgamesh. The next section questions Wensinck’s argument that Q:18.60–82 derives from the story of Rabbi Joshua ibn Levi and Elijah, pointing out that the source, Hibbur yafeh me-ha-yeshu’a, is actually based on an Arabic original by Ibn Shahin that probably derives from the Qur’an itself through an account concerning al-Khidr attributed to Ubayy ibn Ka’b. The Epic of Gilgamesh probably influenced Muslim exegesis indirectly through Alexander legends and theodicy stories. All of this allowed Muslim exegetes to link the figure of Moses with Alexander, stressing the overweening and excessive pride of both and highlighting the difference between Moses and the Prophet Muhammad.

Chapter 2, “Q:28.21–28,” discusses commentary concerning Moses’s sojourn at Midian, critiquing the suggestion of Speyer that the Qur’an has muddled biblical accounts here, conflating the story of Moses’s meeting of Jethro’s daughters at a well with the story of Jacob meeting Rachel at a well. Muslim exegetes purposely conflate Moses with Jacob and Jethro with Shu‘ayb, the Arab prophet of Midian, to emphasize a split in the Abrahamic line of prophecy. For them, Moses represents the disobedient Israelites, while the Arab Shu‘ayb—and, by extension, the Prophet Muhammad—represents the more authentic and superior line.

Chapter 3, “Sanctuary at Beersheba and Mecca,” looks at the link made between Abraham’s establishment of a sanctuary at Beersheba in Genesis 21:22–34 and his establishment of the sanctuary at Mecca, highlighting commentaries that portray him in contact with Dhu al-Qarnayn at both sites. This is done to counter Jewish claims of the continued primacy of Jerusalem as a site for devotion.

Chapter 4, “Cities at the Ends of the Earth,” examines commentary on Q:7.159 and the story of Muhammad’s “Night Journey and Ascension” associated with Q:17.1–8 stressing the Israelites’ loss of their chosen status through disobedience. A number of legends claim that one tribe of the Israelites was absolved of wrongdoing and miraculously saved and transported to China or the mythical lands of Jabars and Jabalq at the eastern and western ends of the earth. Arguing that this saved group represented pre–Islamic Muslims, Muslim exegetes stressed again the condemned status of contemporary Jews and the privileged status of the Muslims as the authentic representatives of the tradition of Abraham.

The conclusion, “Prophet Muhammad and the Water of Life,” discusses the Prophet Muhammad’s presiding over the Pool, or the fountain, of Kawthar in Paradise, portrayed as the Water of Life. This motif again links Muhammad with Abraham, keeper of the sanctuaries, each with an important well, at Beersheba and Mecca.

While pointing out earlier Western scholars’ lack of care in dating sources and tracing the historical paths of influence, Wheeler argues convincingly that Muslim exegetes were not borrowing haphazardly from Jewish and Christian sources and garbling accounts in the process. Rather, they were selectively drawing on and modifying accounts available to them to make conscious and deliberate statements about the meaning of the Qur’an and the biblical tradition. Their emphasis on the distinctions between Moses and Muhammad, the failings of the Israelites and Moses himself, together with the similarities between Abraham and Muhammad, serve the polemic goal of stressing Islam’s antiquity, authenticity, and superiority to Judaism in particular.
The book makes a secondary argument about religious authority in Islam, claiming that Muslim exegetes sought to bolster their own authority as the sole legitimate interpreters of the Qur'an's message by virtue of their privileged access to the interpretative material of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. As presented here, the argument is embryonic and insufficiently developed. It ignores the historical development of exegesis as well as the significant differences among its various types, including grammatical/lexicographical, "Midrashic," legal, theological, and mystical, and does not address specifically how the exegetes justified their authority over and against other contemporary claimants, such as jurists, theologians, hadith experts, or the caliphs.

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The main achievement of this book by Qamar-ul Huda is to draw our attention to the historical role and doctrinal aspects of the 'Awarif al-ma'arif of 'Umar al-Suhrawardi, one of the most important and ancient manuals used by Sufi lineages throughout the Muslim world. Although it contains an analysis of Sufi theology, the 'Awarif is essential because it served as a manual for Sufi practices and was helpful in the organization of the structure of the brotherhoods. The French Indianist Denis Matringe, for example, demonstrates in a recent article how the 'Awarif was influential in the life of some Indian Sufi lodges (‘Adāb al-sūfiya: Les Règles de vie dans les couvents soufis de l’Inde médiévale,’ Journal Asiatique 289, 1 [2001]: 67–86).

Now we have in Huda’s Striving for Divine Union the first attempt at a complete analysis of Suhrawardi’s Sufi theology and of the spiritual exercises practiced by the members of the Indian Suhrawardiyya.

After a presentation of the life of ‘Umar al-Suhrawardi in Chapter 1, Huda analyses his Qur’anic interpretation and understanding of the hadith within a Sufi context. According to the author, al-Suhrawardi’s authority on Qur’an and hadith allowed him to write one of the most definitive spiritual guidebooks on the Prophet from a Sufi perspective. The 'Awarif played an important role in reconciling “the historical conflicts of sūfī and shari‘ā obey- ing individuals by a distinguished government religious figure” (p. 44); the book tried to maintain a “balanced lifestyle between Sūfīsm practices and living on earth” (p. 49). However, al-Suhrawardi dismisses Sufis who were extreme and outside the tradition and takes the opportunity to correct the ways of Sufi shaykhs and masters. Huda also draws our attention to the language of Suhrawardi, who has opened the doors for a wider audience to read his treatise. Then Huda focuses on some Sufi or Qur’anic concepts: the origin of the word “sūfī,” the differences between Sufis and Sufism (taṣawwuf), the degrees of Sufism, the role of the prayers, the sufi ḏāb (which Huda considers an “important instructional tool of the shaykh-murīd relationship,” p. 65), the art of patience (ṣabr), poverty and asceticism, the khirqa. Huda pinpoints that al-Suhrawardi emphasized the use of reasoning, of developing the “mind in conjunction with striving toward spiritual enlightment” (p. 77). Regarding the role of the 'Awarif as a manual of the Sufi way of life, Huda ventures that al-Suhrawardi desired to make an additional contribution to the famous treatise of al-Hujwiri (Kashf al-mahāb) to Sufi life in the lodges (khānaqāḥ). He writes also that al-Suhrawardi “believed that the
advantages of establishing khānaqāḥī were an important and positive contribution to society at large” (p. 79). There are some other concepts analyzed by al-Suhrawardi in his ‘Awarif that Huda does not cover, including celibacy, Sufi travel, khalwa, samā‘, and dance. The sections on celibacy and Sufi travel are particularly original and directly concern the Sufi way of life.

In Chapter 3, Huda focuses on ritual theories and spiritual rituals in the Suhrawardiyya order. He criticizes the performance theorists who “do not recognize that cultural and religious rituals have the potential to connect to another spiritual world” and that these rituals are “channels to access a separate dimension” (p. 88). He then analyzes in detail the Suhrawardiyya dhikr rituals, demonstrating that they are a “living, breathing internal spiritual phenomenon that is interested in creating and connecting themselves to another spiritual force” (p. 106). Chapter 4 concentrates on the history of the Suhrawardiyya order in Multan during the Delhi sultanate period, and particularly on their relations with the political order. The Sufi life and political activities of the prominent figures of this brotherhood in Multan, such as Baha’al-Din Zakariyya, Jalal al-Din Tabrizi, Qadi Hamid al-Din Nagauri, Nur al-Din Mubarak Ghaznavi, and Sadr al-Din ‘Arif, are investigated. A subchapter is devoted to the expansion of the Suhrawardiyya in Ucch and of Jalal al-Din Bukhari, one of the major representatives of this order. Huda shows how, thanks to this shaykh, the Suhrawardi brotherhood was transformed into a ruling dynasty, a phenomenon that was unprecedented in the Indian Subcontinent. Such an event is explained by the fact that the Suhrawardi order was not a quietistic lineage that rejected the world; rather, it was one that combined Sufi practices with political activities. Later, the tradition of involvement with state politics was stopped by a descendant of Shaykh Zakariyya. Chapter 5 deals with the Suhrawardi rituals: here Huda describes and analyzes the spiritual teachings of Baha’al-Din Zakariyya and emphasizes the “ten specific ways one must follow to achieve higher levels of inner knowledge” (p. 148). He demonstrates also that Baha’al-Din Zakariyya’s interest lies more in spiritual practices than in theological demonstrations defending the legitimacy of the Sufi tradition. Zakariyya’s texts are “specific and detailed spiritual practices for Suhrawardi sufis to incorporate into their life” (p. 154). The way Zakariyya interprets dhikr is quite interesting, as he has organized for each Islamic calendar month particular dhikr recitations and salutations for blessing and spiritual enhancement, and he teaches additional practices of recitations and remembrances for prayers. Huda describes and comments on some of these dhikr—dhikr-i namāz, dhikr-i namāz khriftan, dhikr fi al-Sha’bān, dhikr fi al-Ramadān—and salutations. One is devoted to the celebration (‘urs) of the death of Shaykh Suhrawardi. To conclude, this book is a notable contribution to the history of Sufi mysticism in general, and of Indian Sufism in particular.

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According to the early Sufi ‘Ali ibn Ahmad Bushanji, as quoted by the towering scholar of Sufism William Chittick, “Today . . . Sufism is a name without a reality, but it used to be a reality without a name” (p. 1). Chittick begins and ends Sufism: A Short Introduction with Bushanji’s saying, attempting to evoke something of this “reality” of Sufism throughout
Reviews

the work. Chittick faults much of previous academic scholarship on Sufism in the West for ignoring Sufism’s reality by being overly preoccupied with its “name”: its origins, schools, luminaries, histories, and definitions. He likewise faults modern devotional works on Sufism for their promotion of a single contemporary branch of the movement as representing Sufism’s essence. Chittick thus strives to bridge the gap between purely academic and purely devotional approaches to Sufism by translating extensively from pre-modern Arabic and Persian primary sources, largely letting the early texts “speak for themselves.” He arranges these translations, along with his accompanying introductions and commentaries, into ten thematic chapters.

Each of the ten central chapters of *Sufism: A Short Introduction* can stand alone as an independent essay, a point underscored by the fact that each is a revised and rewritten version of Chittick’s earlier work (p. viii, fn. 1). Chapter 1, “The Sufi Path,” lays the basic groundwork for the rest of the book, explaining the fundamental connection between Sufism and shari’a-based Islam. It contains a nice section on God’s mercy and wrath, employing the yin-and-yang symbol to explore subtleties in this dichotomy. The chapter also introduces the recurring idea that all things have two faces: eastern and western. Chapter 2, “The Sufi Tradition,” begins with the crucial point that in essence Sufism has nothing to do with the Sunni–Shi’i split, with the various theological schools, with the different schools of law, or with particular geographies, a point that readers new to Islamic studies sometimes have difficulty grasping. The chapter introduces the distinction between sober and intoxicated approaches to Sufism, and it ends with a somewhat selective but nevertheless useful survey of Sufism in the modern world. Chapter 3, “Name and Reality,” explores the reality of Sufism through a discussion of key dichotomies and paradoxes, through the concept of love (introducing hadīth al-nawāfīl), and through a discourse on divine names. Strangely, there are no footnotes in this chapter, but the reason perhaps lies in Chittick’s privileging of oral teachings. Significantly, he asserts that “the literary output [of Sufis] represents only the name of a much deeper and broader reality that by nature cannot be known from the outside” (p. 33). Chapter 4, “Self-Help,” offers a nuanced presentation of the concept of the nafs and the importance of prophetic guidance to self-purification. Chapter 5, “The Remembrance of God,” presents one of the best discussions of the meaning and practice of dhikr that I have seen in an introductory work. Chapter 6, “The Way of Love,” focuses on the teachings of two of the most famous Sufis, Rumi and Ibn ‘Arabi. Chittick’s translations of ghazals from Rumi’s *Kulliyat* are lyrical and lovely, and he lets the poetry speak for itself with few explanatory notes. Chapter 7, “The Never-Ending Dance,” again emphasizes Rumi and Ibn ‘Arabi in its elucidation of samā‘ and the stages of the soul’s growth and return to God. Chapter 8, “Images of Beatitude,” draws on selections from Baha Walad’s *Ma‘arif* to examine the idea of the vision of God. Chapter 9, “The Fall of Adam,” offers the interpretation of that event by Ahmad Sam‘ani in *Rawh al-arwah*, illustrating how Adam serves as a paradigm for humanity. In the final chapter, “The Paradise of the Veil,” Chittick explores the notion of the veiling and unveiling of reality as described by diverse Sufi authors. In line with his didactic purpose of introducing the reader to a Sufi perspective, Chittick concludes his text with a paradoxical twist on Bushanji’s insight: “[P]eople will always remain ignorant of the reality, and they will always know only the name. Yet, the veil is the same as the face, and the name is identical with the reality” (p. 153). This ultimate turn toward paradox demonstrates how the work attempts to offer a broad-based insider’s perspective while simultaneously nodding to the conventions of contemporary Western scholarship.

Chittick’s essentializing approach to Sufism walks a fine line between devotional and academic discourse. He speaks at times for “what Sufis believe,” as if that univocal articulation could be isolated from the background noise of particular historical contexts. He defends “authentic” Sufism from its critics, alleging that true Sufis understand Sufism to presume an
uncompromising adherence to Qur’an, sunna, and shari’a, implicitly disparaging those Sufis who have a different understanding of their tradition. That is, he identifies the self-understanding of some early Sufi theoreticians, who portray Sufism as the living spirit of “authentic” shari’a-based Islam, with the essence of Sufism’s reality. Readers unfamiliar with the history of Sufism may not be aware that this position is a polemical one, challenged by some Sufis and non–Sufis alike.

This issue raises the question of how successful Chittick’s *Sufism: A Short Introduction* can be considered as an introductory text. Despite a few difficult passages, the work is more accessible than Annemarie Schimmel’s classic *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975). Furthermore, Chittick’s work complements Carl Ernst’s outstanding *Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston, 1997), differing from the latter in the way that it downplays historical development and specific context in favor of emphasizing timeless Sufi ideas and practices. Chittick’s ten chapters succeed in concisely introducing a wealth of central Sufi ideas. This formidable and valuable work will therefore serve as a useful text in an undergraduate course on Sufism, especially when supplemented with primary and secondary texts that offer a more historical and contextual approach to the subject.

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By now, only those who rarely read are likely not to know that all nations are, in Benedict Anderson’s celebrated phrase, “imagined communities.” *Frontier Fictions* takes up Anderson’s challenge, but rather than simply applying his theory to Iran, it focuses on the notion of territory, an aspect neglected by him and everyone else writing on nationalism. Under the Qajars, land—and, especially, the loss of land—caused Iranians to imagine themselves a community, and the frontier marked the friction and fluctuation that gave identity its edge.

*Frontier Fictions* presents this thesis in six substantive chapters covering the period between the early 19th century, when Iran lost a good deal of land to Russia, and 1946, when Iran’s territorial sovereignty was restored after four years of British and Russian occupation. The author has mined an impressive array of archival and published sources to buttress her claim that, throughout the Qajar period, Iranians grew intensely nostalgic about their loss of land. The first two chapters document efforts to come to terms with that loss. Faced with military defeat, intellectuals reached back to pre–Islamic times to find greatness in the feats of Iran’s ancient heroes. A desire to integrate the country underlay the various travels of Nasir al-Din Shah throughout his realm. Journals began to tout connections between the new science of geography and notions of progress, economic prosperity, and diplomatic advantage; in the 20th century, fundamental visions of the state underwent transformation as geography and cartography became integrated into the curriculum of some schools.

Chapter 3, covering 1897–1906, examines how a preoccupation with the nation’s resources and achieving self-sufficiency prompted Qajar officials to encourage indigenous industry. Chapter 4, which covers the constitutional period of 1905–11, describes the new heights of patriotic pride that marked the transition of Iran from the king’s property to the home of its citizens. Chapter 5 discusses the infamous 1919 Anglo-Persian Accord, which shattered optimistic illusions of territorial integrity, and circumstances surrounding the rise of Reza Khan. Chapter 6 addresses Iran’s precarious disunity in the period 1921–26, when Reza Shah
was busy consolidating his rule. This period saw the adoption of various educational reforms designed to instill a sense of patriotism and the mobilization of women for the nation. The period following Reza Shah’s coronation is covered in Chapter 7. Here the author discusses how textbooks distilled a historical narrative that weighed former dynasties and rulers on their patriotic valor and success in preserving the country’s territorial unity. Land and language increasingly became synonymous as nationalism grew in stridency. Even as Reza Shah insisted on the name “Iran” abroad, he focused on the Persian language and culture as a way of distinguishing Iran’s inhabitants from Turks, Arabs, and Kurds.

This study raises important questions regarding how age-old anxieties about territory have shaped modern Iranian nationalist discourse. It is innovative in the ways it looks for the roots of self-awareness in internal processes and developments without denying foreign patterns and models of inspiration. It also does a marvelous job of showing the unity of purpose that inspired leading constitutionalists in the early 20th century. Yet it also suffers from some lapses and blind spots.

One problem involves the term “nationalism.” Beyond asserting that land has unduly been omitted as a factor, Kashani-Sabet does little to analyze—rather than describe—the indigenous manifest destiny that Iranians felt around the long-standing notion of Iranzamin. Tracing the genealogy of this term requires covering the long gap between its use by the Il-Khanids and its application in Qajar times. Affirmative rather than exploratory in her reiteration that land was the essential ingredient of Iran’s national consciousness, the author gives little thought to the degree to which we can speak of active consciousness and how this bears on the shifting meaning of land. Reclaiming lost land was a principal goal for policymakers, but does that reflect nationalism or simply the natural instinct of rulers—anywhere and at all times? As the author herself points out, “A monarch with no land, or kingdom, was akin to a people with no country” (p. 23).

Another question concerns representativeness. Nasir al-Din Shah wrote various travel accounts, but were they really meant for public consumption? Whom did the other authors cited represent? It is not at all clear that Shirazis, Tehranis, Bakhtiaris, and others thought of themselves as Iranians first. The author recognizes that the nationalist rhetoric was mainly confined to elite circles but nonetheless presents a history in which “Iranians” or the members of the “homeland” often take the place of specific and well-defined actors and agents. Another problem concerns the image that Iranians have long had of their country as a natural miracle bountifully dispensing wealth. The image permeates this study, yet the author fails to explore the origins and consequences of this overblown national pride and does not seem to realize that one of its corollaries, a preoccupation with autarky, long preceded Qajar times (and, for that matter, did not die with the dynasty).

This failure is felt most keenly when it comes to behavior toward foreigners. Students of 19th-century Iranian history must be struck by the dissonance between the effusive rhetoric of national pride and the widespread reality of elite pandering to foreign influence peddling. This book makes no attempt to disentangle that paradox. “Iranians ardently expressed their love for a homeland that supported their new civil society” (p. 142), but it was not uncommon for Qajar politicians to openly favor foreign intrusion to promote economic dynamism or offset other foreigners. Many collaborated with the British and the Russians for political and personal gain. The famous distinction between dawlat, the state and its representatives, and mellat, the nation and people, might have been used to differentiate between those who were selling out the country and those who decried this practice. Some who wrote in the last years of the 19th century showed an awareness of the corrosive effect of modern European norms on traditional Iranian values. Yet most indulged in nostalgic lamentations about their country’s lost grandeur and glory, blaming the Arab invasion and introduction of Islam rather than engaging in a critical assessment of the invasion at hand.
"Frontier Fictions" represents a significant step in the direction of a sophisticated discussion of the emergence and nature of Iranian nationalism, but it is only a first one.

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This book is part of the Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations series that includes books on the histories of Japan, Mexico, and Spain. The aim of the series is to provide up-to-date and concise histories of many of the nations of the contemporary world. As the editors of the series explain in the foreword to this volume, the series aims to educate the interested U.S. public about the histories of the many nations that the United States deals with on a daily basis. “Each of [the authors of these histories], however, has devoted a significant portion of the book to events of the past thirty years, because the modern era has contributed the most to contemporary issues that have an impact on U.S. policy” (p. viii). The editors have asked the author to devote a large part of the book to the events of the past three decades. Herein lies what may be the biggest weakness of the present volume.

Elton Daniel starts his book with a general overview of the land and people of Iran before embarking on a brief study of ancient Persia. In this section, as in the following chapters, he proves himself to be deeply interested in, if not in love with, Iran and its people. Yet he is able to maintain an unbiased, balanced attitude toward historical developments in Iran. One cannot but be impressed by Daniel’s ability to carry out this dual task at the same time.

The book is intended for the general reader or as an introduction to Iranian history for undergraduate students. In a work of this nature, it is futile to hope for a detailed analysis of particular historical periods that could be considered a contribution to our knowledge of the subject. Instead, what is presented is a brief overview of the most significant historical developments that, at times, leaps over centuries.

After a brief review of ancient Persia, the author discusses the medieval period, which he considers to cover the period from the fall of the Achaemenids in the 4th century B.C. to the emergence of Safavid rule in the 16th century. One may question the author’s characterization of this vast period as “medieval.” It would perhaps be more accurate to consider the pre–Islamic period as ancient Persia and to treat Islamic Iran up to the reign of the Safavids as medieval. Be that as it may, the fact is that Daniel is a distinguished expert on the medieval period, and it is a pity that he has had to deal with this period so briefly. One would have liked to see this section greatly expanded. But this would have come into conflict with the aim of the series and the guidelines set by the editors, who emphasize the modern period. This explains why more than half of the book is dedicated to covering 20th-century developments.

For a historian writing about a period that is not his, Daniel’s treatment of modern Iran is admirable. He manages to cover all the important developments without giving too much or too little space to any one of them. Modern Iranian history, however, is a minefield, and no historian or political scientist can hope to be able to walk through it unscathed. There are developments and individuals that are very contentious: Amir Kabir, the Constitutional Revolution, Reza Shah, Khomeini, to name only the most famous cases. What makes the study of these characters and developments particularly difficult is the fact that a myth already exists around each of them. For example, Daniel’s treatment of Amir Kabir more or less follows
the prevalent opinion—the myth, if you prefer—that sees the amir as a strong, modernizing nationalist politician who had the good of his people at heart and was tragically killed on the orders of the Shah. This image of the amir is so dominant in modern Iranian historiography that it has turned into a myth. In more recent years, however, the works of Abbas Amanat and others have focused attention on Amir Kabir as the politician who ruthlessly put down the Babi insurgency. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Shah and the conservatives agreed to his premiership because they knew him to be an efficient and ruthless man and perhaps the one best able to put down the Babis. After the rebellion was crushed, neither the court nor the traditional forces had any use for the amir anymore.

The Constitutional Revolution is another minefield in Iranian history. Again there is an existing myth, largely made up by Ahmad Kasravi, that wants to see in this revolution something like a Persian equivalent of the French Revolution. Those who made the Constitutional Revolution may not have had the French Revolution as their model, but many of those who later wrote about this revolution seem to have had the French Revolution in mind. Daniel is more careful to distance himself from the traditional interpretation of that revolution and presents a more balanced view of the events.

In conclusion, it must be said that Daniel has had the unenviable task of presenting a concise brief history of more than 2,500 years of Iranian history in fewer than 300 pages. The result is a very good book that can greatly help students new to the subject gain a general view of Iranian history and what has made Iran what it is today. This is no small achievement.

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This work, a revision of Saleh Said Agha’s Ph.D. dissertation, looks at the origins of the revolution that toppled the Umayyads. Agha’s principal thesis is that this was not an Arab revolution but, rather, an Iranian revolution, and that the leadership was not Abbasid, at least at the onset. Agha argues that the leaders of the “Organization” (this is the name that he uses for the followers and leaders of the revolution that toppled the Umayyads) had no particular person—neither Alid nor Abbasid—in mind for the leadership. The only qualification was that he be from Al Muhammad—that is, from the al-Banu Hashim clan. He argues further that it was through the machinations of Abu Muslim that the Abbasids were able to usurp leadership of the revolution.

Agha uses two sets of data to support his theses. For the first thesis, discussed in Part 3 of the book, he uses statistical analysis to back up his claim regarding the make-up of the members of the Organization. As for the second thesis—the Abbasids being “Johnny come latelies”—it rests, for the most part, on critical analysis of the sources. It should be noted that the author sees the three-month period between the triumph of the revolution and the eventual proclamation of an Abbasid caliph as the “smoking gun.” These theses, as Agha admits, are a reaffirmation of Wellhausen and his Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz. Still, students and scholars in the field would do well to read Agha’s work for his new take on the (un)-Abbasid revolution. The unfortunate problem, as is the case with many Brill books, is that the price remains a formidable deterrent.
In Part 1, the author successfully presents his ideas with regard to the leadership of the Organization. Agha’s analysis and short biographies of the main players in the Organization are based on sound and accurate scholarship and reflect well on his capabilities with regard to the sources. One problem is the scarcity of isnād analysis as part of the overall approach to the narratives. A case in point is his discussion of Abu Muslim’s true origins and identity. It would have been helpful to the reader to have more discussion of the sources of these narratives. The argument that some stories are unreliable while others make perfect sense simply because of an author’s own sensibilities does not wash anymore. There has to be a discussion of the sources of these stories and an explication of why the author believes some and not all of what they report. When Agha does mention the transmitters, he provides only basic information or a few sentences with little or no analysis.

This is a dense book that contains a tremendous amount of information for the reader to digest. The book is divided into three sections, some of which—more precisely, Parts 2 and 3—could be made into appendixes. This judgment may stem from my own prejudice, but these parts were rather tedious and seemed unnecessary, especially in the body of the text. This is in no way a comment on the usefulness of the quantitative approach. The field would do well to encourage more of its students to use such tools, which would indeed help to buttress many theses that depend on too little data. But such information does better as one of the many foundations for a work rather than being the work itself.

On the whole, this is an interesting scholarly work that should be consulted by all students of the Abbasid movement. There are two problems that detract from the work. The first is the form in which this book is presented: this work has not easily made the transition from a dissertation to a book. As noted earlier, the author would do well to condense or even omit much of the statistical information. The other problem relates to theory on the revolution that toppled the Umayyads. The premise that Abu Muslim was the one who made the connection with the Abbasid house (which had nothing to do with the revolution to begin with), and was responsible for taking over the Organization and eliminating the organizers themselves, is intriguing and definitely a new approach. But it does not affect in any way the older theory that Abu Muslim was the agent of the Abbasids, who were using him to bring people to their cause. It is, after all, an optical illusion, like the young girl–old woman picture. Depending on how you look at it, you will see what you are already imagining.

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REVIEWED BY RULA JURDI ABISAAB, Department of History, University of Akron

Kathryn Babayan attempts to illuminate the way Persianate modes of consciousness, ethos, and religious practices have persisted in the Iranian world against hegemonic Arab Muslim (Sunni) cultural constructs. A “calcified” Persianate structure of thought and experience of the sacred, “entrenched for generations,” according to Babayan, has informed history, historical memory, and identity among Alid loyalists and “heterodox” groups labeled by shari’a-minded authority as ghulāt. Drawing on a number of theoretical and conceptual elements, particularly Yuri Lotman’s emphasis on heterogeneity, Babayan explores continuities and disjunction with the Iranian
“past” and ways in which this “past” blended with the Islamic “present” or became transmuted. She explains historical change largely on the basis of a binary model, a dualist struggle between the religious landscape of late antiquity and a monotheist paradigm provided by Islam. Babayan draws historical links between “Safavid Islam” or “Qizilbash Islam” and earlier Alid movements, arguing that they all find expression in Persianate cultural constructs. Thus, she states that structural elements in the Qizilbash worldview in the 16th century “survive” in the Babi movement of the 19th century. Babayan adequately stresses the need to bring the narrative of “heterodox,” ghuluww groups to the center of Safavid history. The ghulāt version of spirituality and temporality empowers these groups against the dominant authority and challenges the official story of cosmology and faith.

This project may explain why the book is organized thematically rather than chronologically. Babayan argued that the early ghulāt of Islam entertained beliefs that continued throughout history to shape Shi'i and Sufi forms of experiencing the sacred, time, and prophecy. She argues that the religious symbolisms of ghuluww have vivid “Persian lineages” even when they appear in areas such as Bahrain and Syria. When she looks at the first century of Islamic rule, Babayan’s conclusions are better argued than for later centuries. Her examination of Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh, with its invocation of Mazdean cosmologies, is illuminating. But beyond this period, Babayan paints a static and somewhat oversimplified picture of Iranian history. Millenarianism is a global phenomenon, but it is unclear which manifestations of it are uniquely Persianate and which local social forces, material and spiritual, signaled its appearance and defined its particular Persianate flavor and color. Is the Qizilbash messianic revolt simply a prototype of revolts born out of a convergence of Mazdean (Persianate) and Abrahamic (Alid) apocalyptics? Moreover, there were different modes of consciousness during late antiquity, and they were undergoing change before the Arab Islamic invasion took place. Surely, there were internal societal changes in that world that pre-empted such developments, only to be augmented and hastened by the invasion. Not all modes of religious experience—be they of the Sasanid rulers or their subjects or even Jewish and Christian gnostics—were appropriated by advocates of heterodoxy in the Islamic era. That some of these modes appear in the Islamic era while others disappear is only partly caused by Arab Islamic political domination.

In Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs, the complex and quite distinct circumstances that produced the shu’ūbiyya and the nakātaviyya movements seem to collapse into one mythical moment—an anti-Islamic apocalyptic change that applies equally to “dispossessed Persians” in the 8th and 9th centuries and to betrayed Qizilbash Turks in the 16th century. When Babayan discusses the use of Zoroastrian legends and Alid themes in Abu Muslim Nameh, we are left in the dark as to the particular function of each of them beyond mustering a unified opposition to official Muslim interpretations. When discussing the fatwas that ‘Ali al-Karaki and his student Mir Hamavi issued against Abu Muslim’s devotees and the debates surrounding the glorification of Abu Muslim, Babayan concludes that these debates are an enactment of a “millennium of friction” between two archetypal entities: the Alid ghulāt and legalistic Shi’ism. But surely fundamental changes have occurred between the social environment of such debates in the early Safavid period and those in the mid-17th century, as reflected, for instance, in the works of Mir Lawhi.

Without an analysis of the internal dynamics of Iranian history, all religious movements and ghuluww actors will look the same and mean the same, with a few variations on degrees of rejection and transmutation between the Iranian “past” and the Islamic “present.” The main problem with this is that it undermines the very nature of the “heteroglossia” that Babayan uses in this study and fails to unearth its dynamic expression and formations. The binary tension between an Iranian “past” and an Islamic “present” does not encompass the full reality of either Islam or what we label “heterodoxy.” The picture seems to me more
of a creative redefinition and negotiation of that “past,” not a reproduction of a fixed set of immortal Persianate signs and symbols. We need an analysis of the multiple, changing heterodoxies as well as the Islams, the Shi‘isms (tribal, rural, urban; folk and legalistic), and the Sunnisms in each historical period. Shi‘i clerics such as al-Karaki sometimes faced accusations of ghuluww, and defended tabarra‘iyyān against both Sunni and Shi‘i clerics in Safavid and Ottoman territories—one group casting the practice as reckless, and the other as ghuluww. In addition, it is unclear how one is to identify what and who is “Persianate.” Babayan notes, for instance, that Qarmati Arabs entertained Persianate notions of cyclical time even though they did not invoke “the Iranian genealogies in which these precepts had converged.” Babayan defines “Persianate” as a multiracial cultural category, but it appears at times to be a religious category of a racial origin—namely, Alid/Shi‘i/heterodox of Iranian qualities. There is also little consideration of socioeconomic factors. Does a Sunni Persian aristocrat from Qazvin share and have access to the same sets of cultural meanings as a Shi‘i/Alid guildsman from Isfahan in the late 15th century?

Overall, Babayan’s attempt to shift the emphasis from shari‘a-based Islamic narratives to heterodox experiences in understanding Islamic history is a praiseworthy task, and a challenging one. Despite the questions I have raised, Babayan’s study is a welcome attempt to integrate millenarianism and “unorthodox” notions of time and prophecy into the trajectory of Islamic history.

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The cession of the Alexandretta region to Turkey in 1938–39 is one of the key events of French colonial policy during the Mandate period in Syria. France’s favorable treatment of the Turkish minority in the so-called Sanjak fit well into its “divide and rule” policy of strengthening communal and confessional identities to weaken feelings of Syrian unity. Furthermore, the final cession of the region was a concession to Syria’s strong northern neighbor at a time of heightened international tensions that finally led to World War II.

While the history of Arab nationalism in Syria has been written primarily from the perspective of the Syrian metropolis, Damascus, Dalal Arsuji-Elamir’s book now provides students of Arab nationalism with an in-depth study of resistance activities against the respective French and Turkish policies and the international and domestic implications of the Alexandretta crisis in the 1930s. Arsuji-Elamir follows a dual approach in writing this history. In the first part of her book, she uses biographical material on the life of her uncle, the Arab nationalist leader Zaki al-Arsuzi, as a starting point to inquire into the special conditions of Syrian Arab nationalism in the multiethnic and multiconfessional environment of the Alexandretta region. In the second part, she makes extensive use of Arabic-language material—scholarly as well as autobiographical material and interviews—and archival sources of multiple origins to write the political history of the events and developments preceding the Alexandretta crisis and the cession of the Sanjak to Turkey. The last section of the book is dedicated to
al-Arsuzi’s life and political activities in Damascus after he migrated to Syria together with a large number of Arab inhabitants of the Alexandretta region following the events of 1938.

Arsuzi-Elamir’s merit is that she shifts the point of focus away from the Syrian capital toward the specific conditions of the periphery. Her research makes clear that these conditions made the Arab nationalist movement in the Alexandretta region more committed and focused and provided it with a wider appeal than in the rest of Syria. On the one hand, this was due to the existence of a clear opponent embodied in Turkish Kemalists in the Sanjak. On the other hand, the personality and the teachings of al-Arsuzi himself promoted a form of Arab nationalism that entailed socialist principles. Arsuzi-Elamir describes her uncle as a charismatic leader who turned Alexandretta’s branch of ‘Usbat al-‘Amal al-Quami into a popular movement reaching beyond the small intellectual circles that the same organization appealed to in Damascus. Apparently, al-Arsuzi rejected the exclusive and intellectual appeal of the ‘Usbat in Damascus.

A weakness of the book is that it is a biography of al-Arsuzi and a political history of the Alexandretta crisis at the same time. Arsuzi-Elamir tries to localize her main protagonist in his sociopolitical environment, but her approach lacks the necessary theoretical foundations for an in-depth interpretation of the biographical material. Many quotations of al-Arsuzi’s and his followers’ accounts pass without analytical comments. The reader has to accept the statements at face value. An interpretation of the statements in the light of contemporary discourses or the hermeneutical implications of an autobiographer’s perspective would provide interesting answers to a variety of psychobiographical questions. There is a tendency in many of the cited quotes to glorify or even mystify the “grand teacher.” These psychosocial aspects of the sources are largely overlooked, even though they would lead to an interesting level of interpretation. An example of where this would have been fruitful is a section in which Arsuzi-Elamir mentions her uncle’s metaphysical tendencies, which apparently helped him bring secular nationalism into line with the people’s religiosity.

One of the book’s strengths lies its comprehensive grasp of the existing Arabic literature. Too many researchers in the so-called West still do not make the effort to gain an overview of such sources that otherwise remain closed to Western readers. Thus, the book contains very interesting material, such as the account of the French practice of creating schools in Alexandretta that were divided along confessional lines to discourage Alawite students from obtaining higher education (to serve “divide and rule” principles). With the same goal, the Mandate authorities seem to have favored Turkish institutions of higher learning. Some of these accounts, however, are based solely on Arab historiography, which gives rise to the question of whether this is a biased point of view. Finding this out would have required more source critique.

Arsuzi-Elamir offers a deep insight into the complex international and domestic implications of the Alexandretta crisis in the late 1930s based on her extensive research in German and British diplomatic archives and Syrian private and public collections. Some sections could have been presented in a more concise way, especially those that look beyond the Alexandretta region to describe the context of Syrian Arab nationalist politics. Some lengthy passages simply paraphrase existing studies.

The book closes with an appendix that reproduces several of the quoted documents together with a German translation, among them some handwritten letters by al-Arsuzi. To sum up, the study offers a lot of interesting material on the life and political activities of Zaki al-Arsuzi as well as on Syrian politics in the period between the two world wars. Thus, the book will be an important source for all researchers of Arab nationalism and Syria who read German.
Yucel Guclu must be congratulated for being the first to complete two important monographs in the English language on two prominent Turkish diplomats. One hopes that his works will be the harbinger of studies about those individuals who have played important roles in Turkish foreign-policy making and implementation. Indeed, this kind of research will make Turkish foreign-policy analysis more nuanced and intriguing. Besides, it is only when the number of studies such as Guclu’s increase that scholars interested in Turkish politics will better understand the subtleties of Turkish foreign-policy making.

Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has traditionally been one of the most prominent institutions in Turkish politics, there is still a lack of ample understanding of how the ministry works. In addition, the lives and career achievements of Turkish diplomats are largely unknown. This deficiency has two important causes. First, Turkish diplomats have rarely written memoirs, making it very difficult for researchers to find detailed information about them. The “secret” nature of the foreign-policy–making process makes information gathering about diplomats a rather complicated task. Second, and more important, the widely established belief that Turkish foreign-policy making has been guided by Kemalist ideals has led to a style of historiography that reduces individuals to the followers of Kemalist principles. Consequently, many scholars have not felt a need to examine the life and works of Turkish diplomats. Although it is true that Kemalist foreign-policy ideas have guided Turkey’s policy orientation, and sometimes reduced the maneuvering capability of Turkish diplomats, individuals and their ideas do matter. Fortunately, the two books by Guclu reviewed here attempt to fill this gap. Eminence Grise and The Life and Career of a Turkish Diplomat are valuable contributions to the literature and important reference books for Turkish historians and foreign-policy scholars.

Guclu’s Eminence Grise is about Numan Menemencioglu, a legendary Turkish diplomat; The Life and Career of a Turkish Diplomat covers the life of another renowned Turkish diplomat—namely, Cevat Acikalin. Both books are written with two purposes in mind. The first is to give an account of the accomplishments of these two prominent diplomats, who each served in the late Ottoman–early Turkish Republic periods. The second is to put them in their proper historical contexts (Eminence Grise, p. 7) and examine their impact on Turkish foreign-policy making.

Eminence Grise is divided into six chapters. The first chapter discusses the family and educational background of Menemencioglu, while the second chapter is devoted to his professional service career. Chapter 3 discusses his achievements as the secretary-general of the ministry of foreign affairs. His positions as the minister of foreign affairs and ambassador in Paris are the topics of examination in Chapters 4 and 5. The book’s last chapter is devoted to Menemencioglu’s personality traits. The Life and Career of a Turkish Diplomat has four chapters. Chapter 1 discusses Acikalin’s family and educational background. Chapters 2 and 3 examine his professional and political life, respectively. The author discusses Acikalin’s personality traits in Chapter 5. The most important chapters in both books, both qualitatively and quantitatively, are those related to the professional service careers of the two diplomats.
Born in Baghdad in 1893, Menemencioglu was related to the well-known Turkish nationalist Namik Kemal on his mother’s side (p. 16). After receiving his law degree from Lausanne University, he joined the Ottoman Foreign Service and served in Vienna, Bern, Bucharest, Athens, Budapest, and Beirut as an Ottoman diplomat. In 1928, he became the director-general of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the young age of thirty-five. Menemencioglu’s diplomatic experience helped him attract the attention of President Atatürk and Prime Minister İnönü, and he was rapidly promoted to become the deputy to the minister of foreign affairs (p. 41). Menemencioglu was to serve in this post for an uninterrupted period of thirteen years, until 1942, a record that has not yet been broken. He later became the minister of foreign affairs from 1942 to 1944, during the closing phase of World War II, and was influential in keeping Turkey neutral during the war (p. 73). He later served as Turkey’s ambassador to Paris, from 1944 and 1956, thereby setting a record (twelve years) for ambassadorship. Menemencioglu retired from active diplomatic service in 1956, was elected to Parliament in 1957, and died a year later in Ankara.

Guclu’s account of Menemencioglu’s career shows that he was one of the most, if not the most, important powers behind almost all of Turkey’s important decisions of the 1930s. A cursory look at the political history of Turkey reveals that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to deal with many pressing foreign-policy issues in the 1930s, including the Balkan entente (1934); concluding the Saadabad Pact (1937); and staying out of World War II. The author emphasizes Menemencioglu’s role especially in two important foreign-policy issues that dominated the Turkish foreign policy agenda in the 1930s: the question of the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and the problem of Sancak of Hatay. The Montreux Convention of 1936 recognized the full sovereignty of Turkey over the straits, thus resolving the problem in the best interests of Turkey. The matter of Sancak was also resolved peacefully in 1938, and Hatay became a part of Turkey. In both of these cases, according to Guclu, Menemencioglu was instrumental in the formation of Turkish foreign policy under the guidance of Mustafa Kemal and its implementation. His knowledge of negotiation tactics and realistic approach to the issues at hand contributed to Turkey’s success. In addition to his diplomatic successes, the author also mentions Menemencioglu’s reform initiatives within the Foreign Affairs Service and his role in creating much needed training programs for young foreign-service officials.

In The Life and Career of a Turkish Diplomat, Guclu meticulously exposes Acikalin’s life and achievements as a career diplomat. Born in 1901 in Istanbul, Acikalin joined the ministry of foreign affairs in 1922 after receiving his law degree from the University of Geneva. From 1924 to 1926, he served in Warsaw until he was assigned as legal adviser to the government of Afghanistan (p. 28). After his post in Afghanistan, Acikalin served in Prague, Belgrade, and Tehran. In 1934, Acikalin became the chief of the private cabinet of the secretary-general in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (p. 41). He later was promoted to the post of the director-general of the Political Department, reaching the rank minister plenipotentiary and extraordinary in January 1938 (p. 46). In 1942, Acikalin was made Turkish ambassador to the Soviet Union, and in 1945 he was dispatched as ambassador to Britain, where he served for some seven years. In 1952, he was asked to resume the post of secretary-general (p. 78). He served in this post until 1954 and was then posted to Rome as ambassador for a period that lasted seven years. Following the 1960 coup d’état (p. 90), he was nominated as a senator by President General Cemal Gursel, where he served until 1968. Acikalin died on 24 May 1970.

Guclu suggests that Acikalin played a very important role in bringing Turkey into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by persuading British officials while he was serving as the Turkish ambassador in Britain. The author also shows Acikalin’s important position in the Turkish delegation during the Montreux Convention Conference in 1936 and during the negotiations with the French over the Sancak of Hatay problem in 1938–39. In both of these
cases, Acikalin worked very closely with Menemencioglu. In fact, Guclu suggests that when Menemencioglu was promoted to minister of foreign affairs in 1943, he asked Acikalin to be his secretary-general because of Acikalin’s trustworthiness and experience.

Eminence Grise and The Life and Career of a Turkish Diplomat give important information about these two Turkish diplomats. One wishes, though, that Guclu had added a chapter to one of the books discussing the working relationship between Menemencioglu and Acikalin in greater detail. Such an informative chapter could have added to the overall quality of the author’s work. Nevertheless, Guclu has been extremely successful in depicting the lives and achievements of these two great Turkish diplomats. I warmly recommend both books to those interested in the recent diplomatic history of Turkey.

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The author of Iran’s Unresolved Revolution is concerned with the evolution of the 1979 revolution and the roots of the turmoil in Iran (p. x). He faults the prevailing policies and perspectives adopted toward Iran over the past two decades as being “misguided,” overly Western, and uninformed. This, Downes feels, is due mainly to the closed nature of Iranian society and analysts’ minimal reliance on Persian sources (pp. x, xii), neither of which is remedied in the present work. Rather, the author wishes to propose a new analytical model based on “first hand experience” (p. x). The book’s approach is both theoretical and policy oriented. As regards the former, the author maintains that (1) the term “revolution” is ambiguous and inappropriately used, because it focuses on “an event in time” rather than on an “evolutionary” process (pp. 43, 66); (2) a revolution should be understood by its goals, not its causes, and by how it changes the role citizens play in governance (p. xiii) (he considers a revolution incomplete when its initial goals are unmet or the new elites block “the reallocation of power” [p. 166]); and (3) the present concept of revolution is weak because it does not “measure the propensity for socio-political unrest in society” (p. 63), does not tell us “when revolutions are likely to occur” (pp. 65–66), does not tell us when the “process is complete” (p. 72), and fails to “assess the tangible changes in society” (p. 165). To remedy these, the author suggests using “Binary Opposition Analysis.”

As for policy issues, Downes advances the following propositions: (1) the Iranian revolution is incomplete because its original goals (liberty, freedom, republicanism, and development) remain unmet, and therefore its final outcome remains unknown (p. 65); (2) the Islamic movement that started the revolution has lost direction; and (3) the revolution has come full circle because those who staged it are now opposed to its present tenants and are being persecuted for their opposition.

In explaining the 1979 Iranian revolution, Downes gives primary importance to the concept of alienation and the theory of rising and unmet expectations (pp. 60, 66), which are heavily rooted in economic arguments. Yet he also devalues economic considerations in favor of greater need for political participation (p. 165). At the same time, he accepts at least five other, equally applicable theories as to the causes of the Iranian revolution (pp. 106–107). What is missing here is a framework inside which data and analysis can be applied to desired scenarios, leading to clearer conclusions.
Maintaining that revolutions follow a process, that the turmoil in Iran is ongoing (and likely to continue), and that its end result is still unknown are not novel insights. There seems to be a bit of confusion in this work between a revolutionary condition, a revolutionary outcome, and a period of consolidation. Whether this calls for a new and “universally acceptable definition” of revolution that encompasses all that the author suggests is neither obvious nor realistic. Going by these definitions, almost all revolutions may have to be reclassified, since it is questionable whether revolutions ever meet all—or even most—of the objectives that the original revolutionaries had in mind. One challenge in determining whether the objectives of the 1979 revolution were met relates to whose objectives we are more concerned with. As the book acknowledges, most of the groups that supported the revolution had divergent ideologies (pp. 82, 164). However, the dominant themes that brought the clergy to power were those clearly outlined by Ayatollah Khomeini long before 1979. Those themes pertained to the overthrow of monarchy, a return to Islam, and independence from foreign influence, not the establishment of a liberal democracy, which was rejected as Western. In many ways, these goals have been met. Is it not possible, then, that the present turmoil points to a rejection of the excesses of these earlier goals rather than a desire to espouse them more fully?

The fact that the initial supporters of the revolution are being persecuted is not a new phenomenon, either, as this seems to be a common development in revolutions. In Iran, however, the purges and persecutions that began in early 1979 have continued. Hence, this situation is not synonymous with a revolution having come “full circle.” This issue brings us to the problem of how we can determine whether a revolution is still in progress, or whether it has even occurred (pp. 79–80). Downes’s measurement looks at the pre- and post-revolution periods and compares them through five variables. These variables, which are assigned “arbitrarily determined” numbers (p. 78), include such factors as “the political system’s capacity for change.” But even under the unlikely scenario that the required numbers are accurately derived, and a methodology for deriving them actually exists, predicting a revolution would be altogether a different matter.

As is, the book contains useful descriptive material pertaining to periods leading to Khomeini’s rise to power and the conflicts that arose in the consolidation phase of the revolution (1991–2001). It provides a brief overview of Iranian political events and theories of revolution, but the reader requires good knowledge of both to navigate through them. The author’s idea of keeping an eye on the equilibrium of societal forces is worth expanding. However, the supporting arguments and the sources cited by Downes fail to reinforce one another coherently or to provide a set of solid and novel conclusions. In short, Iran’s Unresolved Revolution could benefit from fewer generalities and contradictions, improved use of theoretical material, and more attention to the sources and the bibliography (page numbers are often omitted).

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JUDITH CAESAR, Writing Off the Beaten Track: Reflections on the Meaning of Travel and Culture in the Middle East, Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002). Pp. 193. $29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY NINA BERMAN, Department of Comparative Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus; e-mail: berman.58@osu.edu

This thoughtful exploration of various aspects pertinent to intercultural contact presents itself as a blend of autobiography and ethnography. Caesar’s portrait of the United Arab Emirates is a close reading of one particular Middle Eastern context and succeeds in highlighting its complexity and distinctness. Before accepting a teaching position at the American University
of Sharjah, Caesar had lived for six years in Egypt and Saudi Arabia and also traveled in China and Japan; by the time she began her stay in Sharjah, she was a seasoned traveler who was familiar with the stages of enthusiasm and alienation felt by anyone who spends a relatively long period in an unfamiliar cultural setting. Drawing on these prior experiences, her study of Emirati society becomes a springboard to reflect on questions related to intercultural contact. In addition, Caesar meditates on the views Americans hold of themselves and those that others hold of them.

The book is highly didactic in that Caesar takes the reader through a learning process by describing the different stages of entering a previously unknown cultural setting and acknowledging fears and preconceived notions to demonstrate how Emirati society can be explored in meaningful ways by gradually abandoning prejudiced attitudes.

The study is divided into four sections; the first two focus on describing Emirati “places” and “people,” and the last two sections are designed mainly to reflect more directly on the nature of intercultural contact, on the “multilayeredness” of cultures, and, in the last section, the necessity and practice of teaching multiculturalism.

The dominant theme that emerges in Caesar’s discussion of the Emirati locale is complexity, even contradiction, particularly when it comes to the coexistence of the modern and the traditional, the West and the East, all of which is visible in the architecture, the infrastructure, and the composition of the population. Meticulously constructed heritage villages contrast with often extraordinary examples of modern architecture and with areas of pristine natural and inhabited places. Observing these diverse modes of living raises questions about authenticity and about the relationship between past and present expressions of cultural belonging and self-definition.

Caesar highlights the range of ethnic groups who live in the Emirates, where foreign-born individuals outnumber local Emiratis and all groups combined make up a multicultural society. Whereas Emirati society is distinguished by a high degree of compartmentalization when it comes to housing and private life, other public areas of the society, such as shopping malls, are portrayed as more cosmopolitan than any area in the United States. Cultural, social, and religious differences are visible especially in the wide range of accepted dress codes, which indicate a great deal of tolerance for diverse identities. Pressing issues, such as the role of immigrant workers in raising Emirati children or the career prospects of female students, are discussed in informative and sensible ways. Caesar convincingly describes cultural complexity when she observes that “those students who adopted American clothing styles and body language were among the most adamant in condemning the ‘decadence’ of Western society, or what they thought was Western society” (p. 70). The section on Mohammad al-Murr’s novels is persuasive (and, once more, very pedagogical) in that it allows the reader to think through the various stages of engaging with literature from a culture he or she knows little about.

Caesar’s reflection on the multilayeredness of cultural systems dominates the third section of the study and leads her to discuss the ways in which Americans’ understanding of themselves at times clashes with the views others hold of the United States. The question of when a particular aspect of a culture is to be taken as representative or as exceptional is central here; in addition, the author emphasizes the difficulty of stepping outside the norms and belief systems of one’s own culture to be able to perceive its internal contradictions. As Caesar writes: “from Sharjah . . .I saw a different America than I would have seen if I had stayed at home” (p. 150). On the last few pages of the book, Caesar argues strongly for the significance of teaching about multiculturalism, with all its inherent ambiguities and tensions. This credo amounts to the central thesis of the book.

The study is written for an audience curious about traveling and the Middle East, in particular an audience not familiar with or interested in academic explorations of the topics touched on here. Caesar offers historical information when relevant, for example, about political
movements or the economic relevance of specific places. But the reader will find no footnotes, index, or bibliography. The insights and the factual information shared here are based on scholarly knowledge and on years of first-hand experience of the subject that is at the center of the account. Even without the scholarly apparatus, Caesar’s book is no less sophisticated than other, more scientific studies. The readable style of the exploration will make the book appealing to a large audience, and its level of analysis is clearly superior to some presently popular titles. This inspiring study is also an ideal read for undergraduate courses on issues of multiculturalism and intercultural contact.

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ANNE WOLFF, How Many Miles to Babylon? Travels and Adventures to Egypt and Beyond, from 1300 to 1640 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003). Pp. 311, £40.00 cloth; £12.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY CAROLINE WILLIAMS, Lecturer, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

The subtitle of this book succinctly describes its contents. Long before the 19th-century military and cultural pre-emption of the Middle East by Europe, Egypt exerted a powerful commercial and religious pull on Europeans. Another descriptive subtitle might have been “In the Name of God and of Profit,” since these early travelers were for the most part merchants and pilgrims. Italians from Venice, Genoa, and Milan came to buy the Indian and Far Eastern spices traded at depots in Cairo and Alexandria, while pilgrims from the continent visited Alexandria, Cairo, Matariya, and Sinai for their apostolic, biblical, and saintly associations to receive indulgences from the Catholic church (p. 8).

Wolff aims to present a panoramic view of Egypt by medieval and Renaissance travelers. The choice of 1300 as the book’s beginning seems logical, since by then the Mamluk sultans who ruled Egypt had successfully protected it from the Mongol menace and removed the Crusader presence along the eastern Mediterranean shore. The long reign of al-Nasir Muhammad (1310–41) ushered in a period of stability that encouraged dramatic increases in trade and exploration. The 14th century also saw the beginning of a new literature of travel in sprightly and informing travelogues. Why Wolff selects 1640 as an ending is less obvious. To do so, she includes observations of a venture into the pyramid of Cheops by John Greaves, a professor of astronomy at Oxford, and a much more riveting account by an earlier German traveler (Sam Kiechel). Furthermore, to flesh out her description of travel to Nubia, she incorporates Amelia Edwards’s account, which was not written until the 19th century.

Wolff organizes her book geographically, as one would if one were making the journey by sea across the Mediterranean. After disembarking in Alexandria, a city renowned throughout the civilized world, she moves her reader upstream to Cairo, the “meeting place of comer and goer,” where there are visits to the Citadel, neighboring pyramids, and mummy fields. From there, one travels by caravan east to Sinai and the monastery of St. Catherine or south into Nubia. This compression indicates the boundaries of her subject; this is the material on which the individual descriptions of her story, like patches of color, are stitched and woven to form a narrative quilt. Wolff’s material is organized and presented in sensible form. Working from the various accounts, each with its own selective information and individual timeline, she splices together the various observations into a coherent whole. She has paraphrased the records so that her narrative has a single voice, informal and easy to read and often with a dry turn of phrase. When necessary, she elaborates and amplifies from her own research so that her portrait of former times is rich and engrossing.
Wolff deals with footnotes efficiently so that they do not intrude on her story. The bibliography lists her primary and secondary sources, and in the “notes” at the end of each chapter, she indicates the applicable topics and pages from these books. The vast majority of writing travelers were merchants and pilgrims, but her list also includes a nobleman, an ambassador, a doctor/naturalist, and an impressed European slave. In an appendix she lists her sources chronologically: date, name, profession, and reign of Mamluk or Ottoman sultan. The travelers divide evenly between the two periods: eleven during Mamluk times, and twelve for the Ottomans. The index provides suitable cross-references so that the reader can easily look up a particular person, reign, or item. The illustrations she has chosen—more than sixty of them—complement and enliven the chapters.

A few corrections should be made when the book is reprinted. The Great Mosque in Damascus is of Umayyad, not Ayyubid, origin (p. 15). In Cairo, the tombs of the “Circassian Mamluk lords” are located to the north of the Citadel, not to the south (p. 119). In Old Cairo, it is inserts of carved ivory that enrich the sanctuary screens rather than “sheets of ivory” (p. 140). The Emperor Justinian, the great patron of St. Catherine, died in 565, not 548 (p. 209). In the same section (p. 219), the Amir “Abu al-Mansur Anuchtakim” (sic) is far more commonly referred to as al-Afdal Shahanshah.

Wolff was born into the world she describes—her father was a cotton merchant who lived for five years in Egypt—and she has great empathy for her subject. In presenting this little-known travel literature, she has made it both informative and fun to read. At a time that travel is as easy as boarding a jet, and group travel eliminates initiative and rigor, this book gives the reader the flavor of travel as enterprise and adventure. Her accounts belong to an era when it took a convoy of seventy camels to carry what now can be moved by a seventy-ton mechanized truck and one of the challenges to writing was to describe something never seen before.

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LESLIE MCLOUGHLIN, In a Sea of Knowledge: British Arabists in the Twentieth Century (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2002). Pp. 298. £29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PAUL STARKEY, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Durham, Durham, U.K.; e-mail: p.g.starkey@durham.ac.uk

This book, by an author who is himself an Arabist with a distinguished teaching and interpreting career, “aims to examine the various categories of British Arabists in the twentieth century, [and] to consider their achievements and influence” (p. 1). For this purpose, McLoughlin defines an Arabist as “anyone with a knowledge of Arabic which is relevant to his or her principal activities and which, to a greater or lesser extent, defines that individual’s identity” (p. 3).

It will at once be obvious that this definition is both loose and potentially wide-ranging, extending far beyond the ranks of “academic” or university Arabists—and, indeed, the author himself lists a number of categories that figure prominently in the study. They include, inter alia, “archaeologists, spies, Intelligence chieftains, traitors, two defectors to the Soviet Union . . . a not inconsiderable number of homosexuals, and descendants of Lebanese émigrés” (pp. 2–3). He adds, “A number of those discussed in the book were women” (p. 3). Despite this, the author notes that he hopes “to avoid a purely gossip-column approach to the subject,” at the same time suggesting that “among the thousands of Arabists are some of the most exotic of creatures” (p. 3).

Underlying McLoughlin’s account appears to be a view that the Arabic language, for historical reasons, has come to occupy a place in British life that cannot be matched by other
languages. His approach to his topic is a largely chronological one. After a short chapter titled, “British Arabists in the Third Millennium,” designed to demonstrate the impact of Arabic and Islam on Britain at the turn of the century, McLoughlin jumps back to “British Arabism in 1900,” to provide what is actually a historical backdrop to the study of Arabic in Britain stretching back to the 17th century, when professorships in Arabic were established at both Oxford and Cambridge. Succeeding chapters guide the reader through the years from the beginning to the end of the 20th century, in chapters spanning a decade or more apiece. The book concludes with a survey of Arabic provision in British universities at the millennium (chap. 11); a “Summing Up” (chap. 12), in which the author asks a number of leading questions about British Arabists; and an “Envoi” (chap. 13), presenting some of the author’s personal reflections on his experiences and career.

While the development of Arabic studies in Britain is a potentially intriguing topic, this book, in my view, does not do justice to the subject. Despite his protestations of academic objectivity and desire to avoid a “gossip-column approach,” McLoughlin in fact shows a distinct partiality for gossip that at times borders on sleaze. The tone is set early (p. 3) in his reference to a scholar “who survived years of contact with the roughest of rough trade,” and is continued at intervals through the book. The impression of reliance on gossip, justified or not, is reinforced by the fact that, despite the ample bibliography, much of the narrative is underreferenced.

If McLoughlin’s book has a central thesis, it appears to be that it was British imperial interests in India that provided the stimulus toward an “active interest in Arabic” (p. 20) and that British foreign interests (not least, in relation to British involvement in Palestine) have played a large part in shaping the course of Arabic studies during the 20th century. This is, of course, a plausible thesis, and one that undoubtedly contains more than a grain of truth. Less self-evident—at least in the eyes of a reviewer who never attended a Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) course—is the writer’s almost obsessive emphasis at times on the role of MECAS, the British so-called spy school, which functioned, mainly in Shemlan, Lebanon, between 1944 and 1978. What other book can one recall in which the bibliography marks with an asterisk works whose author “studied or taught at MECAS”?

What seems particularly odd is McLoughlin’s apparent complacency about the present state of Middle East studies in Britain and his failure to take account of developments during the past few years. It may well be (though I have no means of checking) that the United Kingdom has the “greatest concentration in the world . . . of centres for the academic study of Arabic, the Arab world and Islam” (p. 253; presumably this statement refers to centers outside the Middle East itself). The survey of U.K. university provision in chapter 11, however, which depends to a large extent on answers to a questionnaire, seems strangely dated and uncritical. It is some years, for example, since the University of Alexandria’s Centre for Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language had a British director or could be regarded as a “British Centre” (p. 256). Most surprising is McLoughlin’s statement, “Funding for the continuation of Arabic studies seems to be assured for the foreseeable future” (p. 256), which may well raise several eyebrows in a country where Arabic and Middle East studies generally are widely regarded as being in a state of near-permanent crisis and where the national association of subject specialists, BRISMES, is currently engaged in a struggle to keep the subject in the forefront of government attention.

Most readers will doubtless derive some enlightenment—and possibly a little amusement—from the accounts of the personalities discussed in McLoughlin’s book. It needs to be read, however, with a critical eye and at times taken with a generous pinch of salt.