

Nizāmī enjoys great respect for his deep erudition and devotion to academic pursuits, but this lecture seems to have been prepared in haste.

University of Delhi

Nisar Ahmed Faruqi

LIVE THEATRE AND DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN THE MEDIEVAL ARABIC WORLD. By Shmuel Moreh. New York University Press: 70 Washington Square South, New York 10012, USA. (New York University Series on Near Eastern Civilization, Number XVII.) 1992. Pp.214. \$45.00 (HB). ISBN 0 814 75481 3.

Scholars of literature and of medieval Islam have awaited the publication of this volume with high expectations. Regrettably, it does not succeed in doing what the cover promises: 'This exciting book uses detailed and scholarly research of impressive originality to prove that the pre-modern Arab world did have a tradition of live theatrical performance . . .' The book bristles with typographical and editorial errors, making it exasperating rather than exciting. The research is admittedly wide-ranging, including upwards of 30 manuscripts and books as far afield as Victor Mair's *Tun-huang Popular Narratives* (misspelled *Tun-huag* (p.146), and incorrectly dated '1980?' for '1983' (pp.146, 185)), but the detail and originality of the entire enterprise is open to question: both of these are surely predicated on an unfailing attention to accuracy and nuance. As for a tradition of live theatrical performance, one does leave the book convinced that live theatre existed, but not as convinced as the author about an entire tradition.

It is not possible in a short review to adequately and accurately rehearse the book's argument or its numerous flaws and shortcomings; suffice to mention four broad areas: terminology, organization, reasoning, and apparatus.

With regard to terminology, Moreh's argument relies in large part on his understanding of a number of key terms. Unfortunately, his interpretations of these are not at all nuanced. He elides the meaning 'effeminate' for *mukhannath* for example, confining it to 'actor, entertainer', when many of the sources he cites make a stronger argument for the former (he likely did not have access to E. Rowson's 'The Effeminate of early Medina', *JAOS* 111.4, (1991). *Samājāt* is for him animate in an Arabic passage he cites, whereas it may (should?) be read as inanimate (p.53). Part of Chapter 7 (*Khayāl* as Live Theatre) deals with the term *ikhraj*, which he renders as 'producing' and downplays the equally plausible and relevant meaning 'to act (a part)' for both *akhrāja* and *kharāja*. Moreh mentions this (p.132) but concentrates instead on 'produce'. Space does not permit a thorough evaluation of the treatment of *khayāl* and *hikāya*. In all cases, though, the author fails to see that a term may be used by an author, poet, or translator not because a particular signification resides in it but precisely because many significations reside in it (cf. Raymond Williams). A systematic, chronological, perhaps author-specific, investigation of the terms, technical or otherwise, would have been preferable to the scattered diachronic one he undertakes.

Moreh believes that in 'many respects, the popular theatre in the Muslim world represents a continuation of that attested for the pre-Islamic Near East' (p.3) and that *kurraj* (hobby-horse) performances may be understood 'only through analogy with Central Asian Shamanic and seasonal fertility rituals' (p.27). With this introduction, which is as much about Jewish and Christian attitudes towards theatre, the first 'Part' of the book closes. The remainder is divided into a second 'Part' about Actors and Entertainers and a third 'Part' entitled 'Medieval Theatre'. The order of the chapters and their internal organization is not a careful one. The penultimate chapter on *khayāl*, arguably the crux of the book, ought to have been placed earlier. Its relegation to the latter part both delays and dilutes Moreh's earlier argument. The reproduction of the original Arabic is laudable but the Arabic typeface employed is not a good one and Arabic is not produced for certain key passages (e.g. p.137).

The argument is carried along by conclusions that are made on the basis of inductive reasoning. Examples of this abound: about Ja'far the *khayālī* (p.137), daytime *khayāl* performances (pp.126-7), Abū Marwān's dancing (p.112), the introduction of the *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim* (pp.108, 110), the existence of a written text for a sketch (p.90), actors' costumes (p.76) and so on. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the book and the one which needed the most polishing after Moreh's highly suggestive article written in 1986 on 'Live Theatre in Medieval Islam'. This book, which ought to have been an expansion and refinement of that article, does not deliver.

The overwhelming number of typographical and editorial errors is intrusive and inexcusable. There are 83 outright errors in the first three chapters alone, mostly in the critical apparatus. At every turn, the reader must negotiate incorrect transliterations (e.g. *kurrah* for *kurraj* (p.29), 'Adb for 'Abd (p.39), Ibn Sīnī for Ibn Sīnā (p.116), *samājāt* for *samājāt* or *samājat* (p.48), *unmak* for *ummak* (p.89), *musjam* for *mu'jam* (p.149), inconsistencies in spelling (Nayrüz, Nawrüz, Nayrüz, and *passim*), punctuation mistakes (the absence of capitalization (p.155 and *passim*), missing commas, unnecessary colons), grammatical mistakes ('six century mimes' for 'sixth-century mimes' (p.93)), and countless other infelicities. Notes 59 and 60 of Chapter 2, for instance, refer the reader to 'p.00'. In the latter case, page 36 is meant but in the former it is anyone's guess. Neither A. Scher's *Histoire Nestorienne* (cited in n. 39, ch. 1 (p.16)), A. Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts* (cited in n. 23, ch. 8 (p.164)), nor the Jerusalem National Library ms *al-Murshid al-Kāfī* (cited in n. 89, ch. 2 (p.42)), can be found in the bibliography. The *Journal of Arabic Theatre* (n. 34, ch. 7) does not exist; rather it is the *Journal of Arabic Literature* which is referred to. In Chapter 7, footnoted items nos. 111 to 131 and the footnotes themselves do not correspond. Moreover, note 113, is rendered in the notes as 111, and note 131 is rendered in the text as 181. The Press and Series editors are to be admonished.