

HOUARI TOUATI:

Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages.

(Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane.) xiii, 304 pp.

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I would have titled this translation, *Islam and the Notion of Travel in the Middle Ages: The History and Anthropology of a Scholarly Praxis* – closer to the French original (2000) and a better reflection of its argument. Touati focuses on travel in the central Islamic lands to show that between the eighth century (“the birth” of the *rihla* as a scholar’s journey in search of knowledge) and the twelfth (“the appearance of the *rihla* as a travel narrative” p. 2), journeys undertaken by men of letters “more than a means for acquiring knowledge, became the prime modality for creating it” (p. vii). He looks at five types of “men of letters”: ḥadīth scholars (ch. 1, “Invitation to the voyage”, pp. 11–43); philologists (ch. 2, “The school of the desert”, pp. 45–77); geographers, properly, geographical writers (ch. 4, “Autopsy of a gaze”, pp. 101–55); mystics/ascetics (ch. 5, “Attaining God”, pp. 157–99); and scholar-warriors (ch. 6, “Going to the borderlands”, pp. 201–20); and also at the personal and financial (ch. 3, “Price of travel” (79–100) and the late development of writing *about* journeys undertaken (ch. 7, “Writing the voyage”, 221–55). These chapters are complemented by an introduction, conclusion (“Journey to the end of the same”, 259–66), a “Chronological list of principal travel accounts” (267–8), glossary, bibliography and index.

There are astute insights: contrasting a “paradigm of hearing” and *autopsia* (chs 2, 4 and 5); noting that for traditionists the voyage was essential to ward off forgetfulness (p. 25); analysing al-Jāḥiẓ on *tabayyun* (“lucid understanding”, p. 109); realizing that “residents of the frontier saw themselves as vigorous defendants of Islam” (p. 220). Because much of the book describes modes and modalities of scholarly activity and aspiration it can profitably be read as an introduction to eighth–tenth-century Islamic culture generally. Occasionally though, important scholarship is not cited or not up-to-date, e.g. citing Arazi and Ben-Shammai (correcting “Azari” and “Ben Shammai”) on the *risāla*, but not Schoeler. Also, many works in the notes are absent from the bibliography, e.g. al-Iṣbahānī’s *Aghānī* (13 n. 9) and some confused, e.g. al-Jāḥiẓ’s *Ḥayawān* with the *Tahdhīb al-ḥayawān* (280 *et passim*) and Ibn Sa‘īd’s with Ibn Sā‘īd’s.

The translation is excellent, though “bulimic” (p. 119) should be “compulsive”, “Ravishment” (p. 167) should be “Ascension”, and “Dhāhir” should be “apparent” (p. 269). “In the end they [“men of letters”] ended up saturating it with Islamism [sic]” (p. 3) is notionally captured better in the later “work collectively on the enormous enterprise of changing their geopolitical space into a dogmatic space” (p. 259). Alas numerous inconsistencies (esp. transliteration of feminine endings and *‘ayn/hamza*) and countless orthographic errors litter the text, e.g. *fiqq* > *fiqh* (22 n. 50); al-Sulfiyah > al-Salafiyya (25 n. 59); Louami > Souami (33 n. 92); ijai > Sizjī (36 n.102); Mu‘in > Ma‘īn (38 n. 106); *mu‘ammir* > *mu‘ammar* (40, 270); Fadi > Fadl (48 n. 11); *Mukhtalaf* > *Mukhtalif* (102 n. 1); Istārī > Istaḥrī (132 n. 87, 291); Nifarrī (175) > Niffarī (pace 175 n. 54); Ta‘ālibī > Tha‘ālibī (188 n. 105); Karrāz > Kharrāz (196 n. 136, 136 n. 139); *shadādat* > *shahādat* (271, thrice); etc. The bibliography is not immune; in the first half of p. 274 alone we find: Habīburrāhmā > Habīburrāhmān, A‘zamī > A‘zamī, Zughbū > Zughbī,

Muṣannāf > *Muṣannaf*, ‘Abd’ > ‘Abd, Ihya > Ihyā’, Wabawiyah > Nabawiyya, *Thaniya* > *Thāniya*. Though not integral to the argument, these infelicities intrude unnecessarily in an otherwise handsomely produced volume.

The University of Chicago Press is to be commended for bringing this imaginative exploration of travel as praxis to an Anglophone readership, but to be faulted for not rigorously copyediting and proofreading.

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AMYN B. SAJOO (ed.):

A Companion to Muslim Ethics.

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A Companion to Muslim Ethics is edited by Aryn B. Sajoo, author of *Muslim Ethics: Emerging Vistas* (2009). In this edited book, eminent scholars have contributed ten chapters on various topics related to Muslim ethics.

In the introduction, “Roots and branches”, Sajoo sets the tone and the framework of the book. He maintains that taking ethics seriously does not mean engaging in normative ethics or metaethics and trying to establish a theory that might provide criteria for deciding right and wrong, nor does it mean following the rules loosely described as legitimate or in accordance with the sharia law. He also agrees with Fazlur Rahman, who states that “the paramount valuation of human conduct was moral not legal” (p. 11). In his comprehensive introduction Sajoo explores scriptural, political, theological and philosophical foundations of moral thought and practice in Islam. Most of the book’s chapters are descriptive, in the sense that they describe different aspects related to practical or social ethics ranging from art to literature, from philosophy and politics to economics. Nevertheless, as expected of a book on Muslim ethics, the normative dimension is heavily present throughout. The authors avoid monolithic presentation, while challenging stereotypes, past and present. They do so by studying scriptural, social and historical roots of some important matters such as tolerance, non-violence, gender equality and conflict resolution.

Charles Butterworth examines the ethical teaching of some prominent Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Rāzī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, focusing on al-Fārābī (c. 870–950), the founder of political philosophy in medieval Islam, whom he praises for “linking ethical training or soul-craft with the political or statecraft” (p. 32). Eric Ormsby discusses the popular ethical literature of early Islam. He notes that whatever Muslim writers took from other cultures, they made it unmistakably their own (p. 56). Ormsby’s chapter investigates different forms of literature such as fables, maxims and poems and unveils their moral teachings. The books he discusses include the *1001 Nights*, *Kalila wa Dimna* and the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. He focuses on the poetry of the Ismaili missionary Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Sadi Shirazi and highlights the supremacy of knowledge and the reality of human free will in the writings of Khusraw. Fahmida Suleman takes us to the field of Islamic art. She shows that figural presentation was not banned in Islam: it was accepted in different times and spaces and many works of art and architecture witness the diversity and integrity of Islamic art. In his chapter on ecology, Seyyed Hussein Naser draws attention to what might be called the “theology of nature” and shows how a sacralized vision of nature is central to Islam through exploring the