the text in the tradition of Arabic erudite, even as she places its author within the world of double exile: exile in Spain from his Islamic culture which was stripped from him progressively by the Inquisition, then exile in Tunisia from Spain and the Spanish literary world which he loved.

As López-Baralt states, much of the material in her article will need a new generation of scholarship to explore fully. This would apply to the articles of Iyovshet, Monerez, and Menocal as well. What these articles demonstrate in Arabic literature—questions of its origins, distinctiveness, and influence—to touch our deeper sensibility and inflame our scholarly passions.

These five essays comprise only a small portion of this valuable volume, which belongs in the library of any institution with a graduate or undergraduate program in Islamic, Mediterranean, or medieval studies.

MICHAEL SELLS

Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry, Edited by SUSANNE PINSKY, STENKOVICH, Bloomington: INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1994, pp. x + 269, $16.95 (paper).

Members of the A.O.S. or M.E.S.A. who attend the annual meetings will be familiar with the panels of the self-styled “Chicago school,” panels consisting of Suzanne and Harootunian Stenkovich (hereafter SPS and JS) and usually their current and former students from the University of Chicago. It is not only their presence that has earned the name “Stenkovich panel;” but also the sense that they dominate the enterprise. This dominance is evident in Reorientations. Of the 262 pages of articles, 129 are by SPS and JS; of its 510 footnotes, 261 are by them. They account, therefore, for half the volume.

Quantity is admitted not an arbiter of quality, but as the contributions are of a more or less even standard, the statistics are significant. But SPS’s belief that the articles (called studies) represent a wide spectrum is curious. Of the eight articles, six treat Arabic poetry, two Persian poetry; of the former, five concentrate on the nasib section of the classical qasida. Indeed, Horowitz’s article on mystical verse, Lewis’s on the nasib, and Losensky’s on a Bibil Fighātī lyric, seem to be here less for the “broad spectrum of literary critical issues addressed” (p. vii) than for the need to include other members of the “Chicago school.” Substituting those with other articles on the nasib might have turned this book into a coherent volume.

Although the “school” does not have “a distinct theoretical or methodological approach”—surely nuances the applicability of the term—SPS explains in the preface that its members do share certain literary critical assumptions, primarily that the classical literary traditions of the Islamic Middle East are fully literatures in the same sense of the term as we apply it to Western literary traditions. In whatever ways they differ from Western literatures, they are nevertheless not to be relegated to mere fodder for philological, sociological, or anthropological pursuits. And however impenetrable they may seem (from a Western stance, Arabic and Persian poems are works of art and are regarded as such by the cultures that produced them). (p. vii)

I am unclear who the implied “relegators” are—perhaps those who “positively follow” the latest critical trends of New York or Paris . . . fashionable but never original” (p. vii). Moreover, it seems to me that the last sentence of the “manifesto” quoted above replicates the position it indicts. Prefatory editorial remarks notwithstanding, the contributors are obviously comfortable with contemporary theory.

The articles also include “original translations . . . that strive to capture the power and poeticity”—do not all translations so strive?—of the originals. This inclusion is useful as it provides the reader with the texts in question. The Arabic is provided for the texts discussed by SPS but, inexplicably, not for those of other contributors, though transliterations are provided throughout.

The volume opens with “Pre-Islamic Panegyric and the Poetics of Redemption: Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣādqi’s al-Kibb al-Ṣahar,” (pp. 1–57). Drawing on Mauss’s theory of gift exchange, SPS argues that the poems function as commodities in a ritual exchange, i.e., as ransom payments (p. 2); and, using Gaster’s seasonal pattern paradigm, she further identifies the poems as pledges of fealty. She also suggests that it was the Mufadda al-Ṣādqi that generated the story of the Prophet Muhammad’s donation of the mule to Kāf and not vice versa, thus revealing the poet’s mythogenic and mythopoetic aspects. Indeed, her choice of poems rests on the fact that both “have been handed down in a context of ancestral materials that testify to their redemptive function” (p. 2). The commentator al-‘Abṭārī explains in his gloss of the last line of M 119 that it was composed to have the poet’s captive nephew released. SPS sees al-‘Abṭārī’s decision to do so (and to release others besides) as a way to avoid exhibiting a “failure to make return gifts, meaning[ing] a loss of dignity” (pp. 5).

These positions are used to challenge assertions that the nasib (sura’s prelude) and sull (desert journey) “perform only a preambular rhetorical function” (p. 1). But the agenda is more far-reaching. SPS proposes not only a new “estimation” of the qasida’s structure, but also a new understanding of the ritual function of poetry in premodern societies, a role she considers “fundamentally at odds with our Romantic and post-Romantic notions of poetry, poetics, and aesthetics” and
"etext" to "poetic language" the better to interpret the tangled words of mystical verse. Before this (unexplained) strategy can be put into practice, Homerin says that the question "what makes a poem mythical?" must be answered. He shows first how difficult it is to distinguish sajj poetry from non-sajj poetry by recourse to themes alone, citing "the two references on the subject have found in literary works," exceptions, as it turns out, that prove the rule, quoting al-Tha'labi's complaint about al-Mutanabbi's use of "kamal al-nisa'a'naqsha" (their [Sa'ībi] tangled words) (p. 194). Homerin concludes, with al-Tha'labi and Ibn Jinni, that the use of multiple propositions, antithesis, and paradox are "characteristic of mystical verse" (p. 196). The article is extremely short (only eight and a half pages) and samples very little verse. Perhaps this will be remedied in the analysis of Abī Nasr al-Sa'ādi's Kitāb al-Luma' of al-tabwiyya which Homerin mentions he is undertaking in note 7. I am also surprised that he makes no reference to the admittedly idiosyncratic attempt on the part of Martin Lings to survey and characterize "Mystical Poetry" in Abūl Bābah Belles-Lettres (Cambridge, 1990), 235–64.

I am on unfamiliar territory with the contributions of Franklin D. Lewis and Paul E. Losensky, but both are clearly comprehensive discussions of two aspects of Persian poetry. Lewis's "The Rise and Fall of a Persian Refrain: The Radif 'Āṣa'ish-ī A'ād" (pp. 199–226) is a study of the "fire and water" nādīf (a word, or phrase which recurs in every line after the ghifāsh) in an attempt to evaluate the way it has been deployed and redeployed by succeeding generations of poets. Lewis then draws conclusions about literary influence and intertextuality by evaluating instances of istiqlāb ("honoring or using with an earlier poem and its creator by imitating, alluding to, or pastiching it"), ṭazā/m (quotation), and sarvīn (plagiarism). Influence, in its manifestations as istiqlāb and jāwīd-gāz (speaking-in-reply) are also the subject of Losensky's ""The Allusive Field of Drunkenness"': Three Safavid-Mughal Responses to a Lyric by Bābā Fīghtāi" (pp. 226–62). He systematically shows, with the wit to which he has accustomed his readers and audiences, that imitation and creation can often be one and the same thing. He concludes with the programmatic observation that istiqlāb is an important focus for the study of the nature and development of poetic device and talent. The analyses in Lewis and Losensky are the result of a great deal of familiarity with their material. This may be true of all the contributors to the volumes, but Lewis and Losensky write with a fluency and urgency that the others lack in varying degrees.

In what sense are these articles reorientations? The only explicit statement about the taking of a new direction is to be found in SPH's preface:

("Through reorienting our critical approach to classical Middle Eastern literatures we will gain a new vantage point on our own tradition that will lead us to a more profound and multidimensional new poetics") (p. 51; emphasis added)

I must confess to seeing no relationship between this
preatory hope and the articles, Peter Monaghan's report notwithstanding.3

SHAWKAT M. TOCHAWA

UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS


Shoshan's book is brief (seventy-eight pages of text) but ambitious, casting together a variety of intriguing sources ranging from sermons and hagiographies to accounts of public proceedings and economic and political history. What emerges is an attempt to understand the Islamic tradition as it was experienced by the non-elite population of Mamluk Cairo.

Borrowing from methods developed by scholars of European popular culture, Shoshan in his introduction discusses ways of gaining access to non-elite understandings of classical traditions. Basing his approach in part on the work of Roger Chartier, a historian of early modern France, Shoshan asserts that elite and popular cultures are to be distinguished from each other not by identifying compartmentalized texts and labeling them either aristocratic or vulgar (whether these "texts" are to be understood as books or as religious proceedings), but rather by identifying the differing uses that elites and non-elites made of the commonly acknowledged sources of the tradition. With regard to Islamic society, this would mean analyzing the range of responses to texts such as the Qur'ān and hadith. Shoshan does not develop fully this important point, but it is worth further articulation. To take one example: whereas the medieval ulama drew on Qur'ānic scripture to develop a framework of legal guidelines for the structuring of Islamic society, professional storytellers (of the type described by Ibn al-Jawza'ī in his Kitāb al-sawāqī) combined Qur'ānic narratives with geographers' accounts and travelers' wonder-tales to produce pious entertainment for the masses.

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UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS

Shawkat M. Toddawa


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