

## Book Reviews

**The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis** edited by Martin Kramer. Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999. Pp.viii + 311. \$24.95. ISBN 965-224-040-0.

This collection of studies takes its inspiration from Bernard Lewis's article 'The pro-Islamic Jews', in which he presented a brief but wide-ranging sketch of Jews who studied Islam or campaigned on Islamic issues, such as Benjamin Disraeli, Gustav Weil, David Chwolson, Arminius Vámbéry and Ignaz Goldziher. 'Gratitude, sentiment, fellow feeling – all play their part in the growth of pro-Muslim sentiment among the Jews', according to Lewis and he ended up by quoting from a letter written by Goldziher shortly before his death and addressed to an Arab pupil: 'It is for your people and for mine that I have lived. When you return to your country, tell this to your brothers'. Others, however, have thought that they could detect more sinister motives in Jewish interest in Islam. In a series of wrathful articles published in *Islamic Quarterly* and *Muslim World*, A.L. Tibawi denounced the prominence of Jews among the contributors to the *Encyclopedia of Islam* and to other publications, such as *The Legacy of Islam* and *The World of Islam*. Tibawi took particularly severe exception to those scholars who thought that they could detect Jewish sources for some of the Qur'an.

Others again have dealt with the Jewish contribution to Orientalism by minimizing it or even ignoring it altogether. As Martin Kramer notes in his excellent general survey which introduces *The Discovery of Islam*, Hans Heinrich Schaeder, who had Nazi sympathies, managed to write an account of the field in 1940 which omitted any mention of Jewish scholars at all. In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said devoted attention to modern Jewish scholars, such as Bernard Lewis and Raphael Patai, in whose works he detected a Zionist agenda. However, he rather neglected Jewish Orientalist scholarship prior to the establishment of Israel. Conceivably this was because he seems to have taken an a priori decision that the Central European tradition of Orientalism was not important, being subsidiary to the mainstream of Orientalism, which he believed was dominated by the French and Anglo-Saxons. For whatever reason, most of Jewish Orientalist scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was elided from the record. Instead, Said conjured up a fantasy history of Orientalism in which Ernest Renan and Count Gobineau were central figures. (Of course lots of leading non-Jewish Orientalists were also omitted in Said's discussion. Particularly puzzling is the omission of any mention of Joseph Schacht, Goldziher's intellectual heir and the leading expert on the early evolution of Islamic law. Schacht, like Said, taught at Columbia University.)

In essays and interviews, the great Middle Eastern historian, Albert Hourani (1915–93) repeatedly drew attention to the weakness of Oriental studies in Britain until the Second World War. Thereafter, for a variety of reasons, things changed for the better. One of the reasons standards of Orientalist scholarship markedly improved in Britain (and, of course, also in the United States) was the influx of Jewish and other anti-Nazi scholars in the 1930s and 1940s, bringing with them continental standards and techniques of scholarship. As Hourani put it, when remembering his friendship

with Richard Walzer: 'He also told me much about the central tradition of Islamic scholarship, that expressed in German.' Samuel Stern made a similar impact on Hourani and on others who knew him in Oxford. Any serious history of academic Orientalism must take account of the diaspora of Jewish scholarship to Europe, the United States and what would eventually become the state of Israel.

In 'Pedigree Remembered, Reconstructed, Invented: Benjamin Disraeli between East and West', Minna Rozen concentrates on the novels, *Contarini Fleming*, *Alroy* and *Tancred*. The first is a *Bildungsroman* about the formation of a poet. The other two are wild, fantastic romances of Oriental chivalry. In his essay on pro-Islamic Jews, Bernard Lewis had concentrated on Disraeli's pro-Ottoman stance and on accusations that Disraeli favoured the Ottomans because of the inherent Jewish sympathy for Muslims. Said, in *Orientalism*, referred only to *Tancred* and noted how Disraeli worked with Oriental stereotypes, but failed to note how favourable those stereotypes were. (It is in any case clear from his approach to Gérard de Nerval and other writers, that Said does not care for fantasy in literature.) Rozen concentrates on Disraeli's sentimental Semitism and she tends to treat all these novels as *romans à clef*. In general, she is more interested in the novelist's engagement with Judaism than in what he has to say about Turks and Arabs.

In "'Jew" and Jesuit at the Origins of Arabism: William Gifford Palgrave', Benjamin Braude is mainly concerned with Palgrave's dissemination of the notions that the Jew and the Arab were natural allies and that the British could make use of those Arabs who were not Wahabis. Palgrave's advocacy of an alliance with anti-Wahabi Arabs was influential and later came to be adopted by Hogarth and Lawrence. Braude makes no reference to Mea Allan's *Palgrave of Arabia* (1972). Whether this is because he finds it unsatisfactory is unclear. Jacob M. Landau's 'Arminius Vámbéry: Identities in Conflict' is chiefly concerned with Vámbéry's campaigning for Oriental democracy and his polemics against the Russian threat to the Islamic lands (something which had also preoccupied Disraeli). Like so many Orientalists, Edward Granville Browne, Wilfred Blunt and Goldziher among others, Vámbéry was anti-colonialist. Braude alludes to the fierce falling out with Goldziher, a topic which Lawrence Conrad also touches on later in the volume. According to Conrad, Goldziher despised Vámbéry for converting from Judaism for material gain. Landau, however, also points to a broader ideological division: Goldziher supported traditional Sunni Islamic positions, whereas Vámbéry thought that the Islamic lands had to modernise themselves. 'Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam', by Jacob Lassner, investigates the circumstances of Geiger's researching and writing *Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* in the 1830s. Having demonstrated to his own satisfaction that Muhammad had indeed borrowed a considerable amount from Judaism, the youthful Geiger moved on to other purely Jewish matters. Like so many nineteenth-century Christians, Jews and atheists who made a study of Islam, he was not so very interested in the religion in itself, but rather used it as a kind of testing site for the deployment of source-critical and philological techniques.

Lawrence Conrad's 'Ignaz Goldziher on Ernest Renan: From Orientalist Philology to the Study of Islam' is one of the most interesting contributions to Kramer's volume and, since it deals with the leading Orientalist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is also one of the most important. Goldziher fiercely criticized Renan for maintaining that the Semitic peoples were incapable of developing a mythology or poetry (though Renan had allowed a few exceptions in Hebrew poetry). Although it is fair to label Renan as a 'racist', it is important to note that Renan's 'racism' was based

on language rather than blood, for it was language that constrained a culture's possibilities. Goldziher not only presented evidence that the Hebrews and the Arabs had developed mythologies, but he also called Renan's competence as an Orientalist into question. Although Renan had studied with Sylvestre de Sacy, it was the Indologists, Le Hir and Burnouf, who exercised the greatest influence on his thinking. Renan's Arabic was self-confessedly poor. When I recently read his famous book *L'Averroès et l'Averroïsme* (1852), it struck me that, wherever possible, he used poor Latin translations of the Arab philosopher's works. Unquestionably Goldziher had the better part in this debate with Renan.

Joel L. Kraemer's 'The Death of an Orientalist: Paul Kraus from Prague to Cairo' is another of the volume's star pieces. The subject matter is intrinsically interesting. Kraus, a brilliant student from Prague (the city of alchemists *par excellence*), turned himself into an expert in Arab alchemy. Later he moved on to study the metrics of the Bible and of a wide range of other ancient texts. The eccentricity of his views on this subject led several of his friends and colleagues to believe that he had gone mad. Then in 1944 he was found hanging in the bathroom of the Cairo flat of Cecil and Albert Hourani. Kraemer believes that Kraus did indeed commit suicide, though he presents some evidence that suggests that Kraus's death may have been a politically motivated murder. Although Kraus had studied with Julius Ruska, who was inclined to investigate alchemy merely as primitive chemistry, Kraus's approach was very different. For Kraus alchemy was part of the history of ideas. He rightly scorned the idea that the alchemist 'Jabir' was a single historical individual. Rather the Jabirian corpus was a vast body of material with many authors, much of that material veiled propaganda for the Qarmatian Isma'ili movement. However, Kraus's magnum opus, *Jâbir ibn Hayyân – Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam – Jâbir et la science grecque* (1942–43), ranges much more widely than that. It deals with such matters as the deliberate dispersal of knowledge, macrobiotes as teachers, the real authorship of *Nabataean Agriculture*, sexual alchemy, dyeing techniques, treatises on military strategy, Pythagorean numerology, Chinese technology, the origins of language and the generation of homunculi. Kraus's monograph is an astonishing work, but sadly I do not get the impression many people consult it these days. A volume of Kraus's *Nachlass* came out too late to be used by Kraemer. In his preface to Kraus's *Alchemie, Ketzerie und Apokryphen im frühen Islam: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (New York, 1994), the editor Rémi Braque quotes Alexander Kojève (whose lectures on Hegel, Kraus attended in Paris): 'I see a lot of Kraus and, thanks to him, I now know nothing of Islam. That's progress.'

Muhammad Asad, was a lighter-weight figure, though hardly less eccentric than Kraus. In 'The Road from Mecca: Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss)', Martin Kramer sets out the career of an Austro-Hungarian Jewish convert to Islam, a man who was in many ways a successor to Marmaduke Pickthall. Like Kraus and quite a few Jewish Orientalists, Asad was hostile to Zionism. On the other hand, his vision of a new democratic Islamic state, which he hoped Pakistan could be, was partly shaped by the intellectual background of Reform Judaism. The shaping role of the *Haskala*, or Jewish Enlightenment, is one of the running themes in *The Jewish Discovery of Islam*. It provides a key to understanding the ideas of Geiger, Goldziher and others. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh's 'The Transplantation of Islamic Studies from Europe to the Yishuv and Israel', demonstrates how much Israeli Orientalism owed to German traditions and techniques. Horovitz, Goitein Weil, Mayer and Baneth were the key figures here and, though the standard of Orientalist scholarship in Israeli remains extremely high, possibly something of the broad gymnasium culture has been lost with the passing of

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that founding generation. 'The Interaction of Judaic and Islamic Studies in the Scholarship of S.M. Stern' by Shulamit Sela presents another of the outstanding scholars formed by that culture. As Sela's title suggests, the article stresses Jewish influences and sources for Stern's work. By contrast in 'Evariste Lévi-Provençal and the Historiography of Iberian Islam', David J. Wasserstein presents a portrait of a Jewish historian who seems to have had no interest at all in the past history of the Spanish Jews and who avoided using Jewish sources which might have shed light on the history of Muslim Spain and North Africa.

At this point it is appropriate to return to Martin Kramer's opening essay, which lays out a context for all the other contributions. Though it is difficult to find common context for such differing figures as Asad and Lévi-Provençal, nevertheless, Kramer is skilful in picking out common themes that run between the contributions. I wonder if it would be similarly fruitful to produce a volume on Christian Orientalists and on how Christian preoccupations shaped their ideas about Islam and the Arabs? Such a volume might include contributions on de Sacy, William Muir, Lammens and Massignon, among others. In his introduction Kramer notes Massignon's sporadic outbursts of anti-Semitism (this despite Massignon's friendship and patronage of scholars like Kraus). Maxime Rodinson's recent memoir, *Entre Islam et Occident* (1998), also sheds a curious light on Massignon, who emerges as an even weirder figure than one might have guessed from the testimonials of his admirers and disciples. (Incidentally Rodinson knew Kraus and remembers him conversing with his Egyptian friends, speaking in the style of Jahiz. He also knew Sigmund Reich, later known as David Storm Rice, whose strange and colourful career certainly deserves to be chronicled in any future collection of papers devoted to Jewish Orientalists.) While still on the subject of Rodinson, Kramer's account of Orientalism with its stress on Germanic scholarship provides a useful corrective to Rodinson's *La fascination de l'Islam* (1980), which rather overemphasised the French contribution. Rodinson and Claude Cahen, both Marxist anti-Zionists, naturally feature in Kramer's round up of leading Jewish Orientalists. Kramer sees the crossing of Bernard Lewis and others over to the United States as marking the end of an era in European Orientalist scholarship. One wishes one could be more sanguine about the era that is to succeed it.

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**Kordofan Invaded, Peripheral Incorporation and Social Transformation in Islamic Africa** edited by Endre Stiansen and Michael Kevane. Leiden-Boston-Koln: Brill, 1998. Pp.x + 303, bibliography, index and illustrations. \$94.00. ISBN 9004110496.

A group of 11 scholars, guided by Endre Stiansen and Michael Kevane, have united in a praiseworthy effort to 'reinvade' Kordofan. They did so not in order to 'conquer' it, as invaders frequently did in the past, but in order to make it accessible to fellow scholars who never had the chance to delve into the remote regions of the western Sudan. They start from the premise that 'The states of sub-Saharan Africa appear to be disintegrating ... Yet it is misleading to regard the present exclusively as a period of destruction. While it is a period of disintegrating state power, it is also one of reconfiguration of local communities and dynamic interaction between state and non-state institutions' (pp.1-2).

The aim of the present volume, in which we are presented with 11 studies on a wide variety of topics ranging from tribal policy and Arabic literature, to agriculture