

*Medieval and Early Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean.*

Arzu Öztürkmen and Evelyn Birge Vitz, eds.

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This volume is truly a gem. The scholarship is well organized, deftly written, and I can say in earnest that every single contributor has made a contribution in the truest sense of the word. The subject area covers an impressive geographical area; nonetheless, the

reader never loses track of the thematic terrain set forth surely by the editors. Sometimes it is as though all the chapters are part of a single monograph, which is rather different than what one might otherwise face in a typical edited volume where the essays address a focal theme but somewhere along the line the thematic chain breaks. The thematic chain is intact throughout this volume. I would attribute this feat to the fact that this volume took ten years to produce, giving the editors plenty of time to maintain such thematic flow, while offering such a potpourri of enjoyable reading.

Now to the theme itself: "This book represents a preliminary attempt to lay out and analyze a broad set of performance genres," and it does so under the geographical rubric of the Eastern Mediterranean, covering of course the Ottoman and the broader Muslim world. The reading of the introduction is a must before one ventures into the vast array of topics presented by the contributors. One can even say that through the deft and apt summarization of the articles, although they are short descriptions, the editors highlight the scope of the theme of the volume and make sense of the geographical area they are covering. That said, I think it would have done the editors well to delve into the theoretical aspects of the poetics of performance in general, giving readers a chance to compare beyond the borders presented. Alas, no book is perfect, although this one really does try to be, and it shows.

This volume is divided into a logical group of sections, wonderfully organized. Section 1 of the volume addresses subjects such as storytelling as a genre and the concept of the *maqāma*, and has in it a very interesting article, "Signals of Performability in the Croatian Glagolitic: 'Legend of St. John Chrysostom,'" which is a must read. Section 2, "Performance under Imperial Realms," has many insightful articles, like one I found very close to my heart, "The Fusion of *Zar-Bori* and Sufi *Zikr* as Performance: Enslaved Africans in the Ottoman Empire," by Ehud R. Toledano. It is an articulate and polemically sound essay addressing the anxieties of separation and performance as the reestablishing agent for the existential self. It institutes a novel format in addressing occasion as hermeneutics and nostalgia among slave communities in the Ottoman societies. Space is too limited to discuss all the chapters in this section, but the level of scholarship is superb and the editorial exactness visible throughout. There were minor mistakes in the book as expected in any book, so I won't make a point of fussing about copyediting oversights.

Section 3 of the volume is a tour de force, and the most novel of all the sections. The essays by Daryo Mizrahi ("One Man and His Audience: Comedy in Ottoman Shadow Puppet Performances") and Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov ("Gypsy Musicians and Performances in the Ottoman Balkans") are philological venturings into creating a parallel world of laughter, making sense of everyday life in Ottoman Istanbul (in the former) and the "monopoly" Gypsy musicians exercised in the Ottoman empire (in the latter). The next two sections offer no less interesting coverage of an array of subjects from "Theatrical Features in Armenian Manuscripts" to celebrations of *Nevruz* in pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Anatolia.

I would have to stress that the reader should continue reading from essay to essay in this volume without putting it down, as there is a flow of argument no doubt intended by

the editors. On that, I congratulate them. This is a novel volume of essays that addresses sociopolitics, societal cognitive nuances, literature, and artistic expression in an accessible manner: a great read for those who are interested in the abovementioned subjects and those enthusiastic about learning about topics that I dare say are rarely investigated.

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