

1970; cf. the obituary of the historian's father at pp. 175–82). Aḥmad Darrag, “La vie d’Abu al-Maḥasin Ibn Taghri-Birdi et son œuvre”, *Ann. Isl.* 11, 1972, 163–4, depicts al-Ṣayrafī as “the major detractor of Ibn Taghri-Birdi”. By confining his investigation to just the one chronicle by al-Jawharī, Massoud fails to illuminate the complicated nature of the relations between the two historians.

Hirschler has demonstrated the significance of the chronicles' titles. Elucidating the meaning of the Arabic is a useful exercise, and translating the books' names could have been a first step in this direction, but Massoud's contribution to this field is limited.

Despite these few minor critical notes the three books are a most welcome contribution to the fields of history and historiography of Syria and Egypt in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

**Yehoshua Frenkel**

RÜDIGER LOHLKER:

*Islam: Eine Ideengeschichte.*

282 pp. Vienna: Facultas Verlags- und Buchhandels AG, 2008. €18.90.

ISBN 978 3 8252 3078 4.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X09000597

Writing an introductory book on Islam poses the challenge of providing an accessible and succinct account of a multi-faceted and long-standing religious tradition while avoiding the danger of essentializing and generalizing its complex history, varied practices and diverse historical and cultural manifestations. Rüdiger Lohlker describes his introduction as a “fragmentarische Ideengeschichte” (fragmentary intellectual history) (p. 9) which seeks to eschew the totalizing tendencies of introductory textbooks without becoming lost in an array of disconnected and incoherent fragments. *Ideengeschichte* is understood as the history of symbolic structures which – as part of varied and dynamic processes of discursive formations – have provided meanings and identities to Muslim communities and societies. These processes are never completed and cannot be adequately encapsulated.

Following this particular approach, Lohlker's book is rather different; it contains chapters on Muhammad, the Quran, law, theology, Sufism, Shiism, Islam and modernity, Islam in Europe, etc., as one would expect in a textbook on Islam, plus more topical entries on the use of new media, *halal* and modern *jihadi* movements. However, the overall structure of the book suggests neither a coherent Islamic intellectual history nor a sense of its closure – illustrated, for example, by the lack of a conclusion. A good example of this fragmentary style, which is more interested in revealing relations and breaks in the discursive formations of Muslim identities, is the book's treatment of the Five Pillars of Islam. There is a brief chapter on prayer which also contains some information on the architectural styles and social roles of mosques. The pilgrimage to Mecca is mentioned in the chapter on politics relating this central ritual to efforts of Muslim rulers throughout the ages to gain religious legitimacy by securing travel routes to Mecca and sponsoring various activities around the annual *hajj*. Fasting during the month of Ramadan is treated in a chapter on the role the modern media plays in the formation of Muslim public discourses and connected to the perceived commercialization of this period through TV shows, Ramadan sales and restaurants offering special *iftar*-meals.

Aspects of Islam's intellectual history are presented accessibly, with a certain inevitable tendency to allude to issues and phenomena without in-depth discussion. Particularly useful are the chapters on law and Sunni theology; the former provides a succinct account of the intellectual environment within which early Islamic jurisprudence was formed, while the latter gives a very accessible overview of the rather complex theological problems discussed in early Islam. Some of the book's chapter headings are fairly unusual and respond to contemporary stereotypical perceptions of Islamic beliefs and practices. The chapter on paradise (pp. 145–54) must be seen as a response to the sensationalist media coverage of Muslim afterlife beliefs which, through their sensuous imagery, seem to portray paradise as a place fulfilling male sexual fantasies and have apparently provided suicide bombers with particularly strong eschatological motivations for their actions. Lohlker, in response, provides a discussion of various interpretations of the woman's place in Islamic eschatology. The chapter on Muslim women (pp. 234–40) illustrates the complexities enshrined in any non-Muslim discourse on "the Muslim woman" and counters common stereotypes by pointing at the diversity of Muslim women's experiences.

This book does not aim to provide the ultimate intellectual history of Islam, but rather alludes to various intellectual discourses within Islamic symbolic structures – discourses that are presented as dynamic, flexible and diverse. Particularly useful are not only the inclusion of topical issues and debates but also the up-to-date bibliography with the latest publications within the field and informative web resources. Although the fragmentary style of the book can sometimes be challenging, it is certainly a good example of a textbook that takes seriously the postmodern insistence on difference and scepticism towards totalizing discourses and their creation of "Otherness" in its account of Islam's intellectual history.

**Oliver Scharbrodt**

YOUSSEF M. CHOUERI (ed.):

*A Companion to the History of the Middle East.*

(Blackwell Companions to World History.) xvii, 602 pp. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. £85. ISBN 1405106816.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X09000603

Conceived with the most recent scholarly efforts in mind, this *Companion to the History of the Middle East* includes a balanced collection of essays on subjects from the early Islamic to the contemporary periods covering the Arab World, Iran, Turkey and Israel. As the editor suggests in the introduction, the study of the history of the modern Middle East has incorporated a number of different paradigms since it emerged as a separate field of study after the Second World War. These paradigms have ranged from Orientalist modes of historical explanation of regional cultures and societies to approaches which construed processes of modernization as the exclusive domain of Western influence. This edited volume is particularly timely as the field is undoubtedly more sophisticated and varied than it has ever been. It charts the historical development of the region from the world of early Islam and Islamic Empires to that of colonialism and nation building. Several key themes constitute its overarching framework: the evolution of political structures, institutions and state systems, and of the societies and ideologies which produced them. In providing a variety of insights into new scholarship on the region in a lively