

participant in the fighting, a witness, a victim, or an outsider. Many of the contributors take pains to discuss the poetic forms. One of the laudable features of the book is the presence, in many cases, of the texts in the original languages, either in transliteration (Sumerian, Babylonian, Hittite, Hurrian) or in the original script (Hebrew, Arabic). Robert Anderson even needs to argue at the outset that the ancient Egyptian texts he presents are actually poetry, and with Hittite one is confronted with similar problems, as when Hurrian poetry was translated in more prosaic Hittite. Kennedy, in his introduction to the volume, stresses this diversity when he speaks of a “complex gamut of emotions”. Heroic boasting and celebrating individual prowess are common, yet what stands out in the volume, says Kennedy, “is [not] the triumphant or the heroic” (I have supplied the crucial negative that seems to be missing) but “the grief and suffering which war causes”. This is evident in the earliest Sumerian laments and the most recent Hebrew and Arabic poetry on the Palestine conflict by Gouri and Darwīsh.

One cannot claim that the various poetic traditions, from Sumerian and Egyptian to modern Hebrew and Arabic, form a continuous and uninterrupted tradition; unfortunately, conflict, warfare and destruction seem to be virtually continuous in the area. The paradox that many of humanity’s blessings in the field of technology and science (and, yet more paradoxically, a dramatic drop in general death by violence since prehistoric times, according to some recent studies) have their origin in organized warfare also applies to culture and literature, to some extent. War spawned some of the greatest poetry in the world and much of it can be admired by outsiders, lovers of literature. To the poets and their original audiences, however, it often was much more than a matter of aesthetics: poetry may be a means to overcome the trauma of war, to cope with suffering, a function especially pointed out by Stefan Sperl.

Some of the more philological passages, especially in the chapters on the earliest poetical traditions in the Middle, or Near, East (“the ancient Middle East” sounds quaint), will be somewhat hard-going for the general reader, but sound philology is always welcome and the volume can be enjoyed by a wide readership. For reasons of space I have to curb my customary pedantry in pointing out some minor shortcomings and errors, which on the whole are far and few between. The editor and SOAS are to be congratulated on producing this varied and fascinating collection.

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REMKE KRUK:

*The Warrior Women of Islam: Female Empowerment in Arabic Popular Literature.*

xxv, 272 pp. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. £15.99. ISBN 978 1 84885 927 2.

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This accessible volume presents and contextualizes a collection of stories in order to inform scholars and the public about depictions of warrior women in Arabic popular epic. Remke Kruk is one of the foremost pioneers in *sira* scholarship. Her interest in *sira* stories began in the 1980s, with her first article on warrior women appearing in 1993. She overcame several prejudices that have shaped Arabic studies historically: a focus on written texts to the exclusion of oral texts, a focus on elite members of

society to the exclusion of popular genres, and a focus on male characters and personages, to the exclusion of the female. Publication of *sira* scholarship has risen markedly in the past two decades. Scholarly disciplines have never been so well positioned for *sira* studies.

The genre of *sira* (translated as geste, epic or romance) refers to a number of story cycles that retell the adventures of one or more heroes, and thus reimagine certain periods of history in Arabic culture. In the introduction to *The Thirsty Sword* (1996), Peter Heath identifies nearly a dozen historical periods and their accompanying epics, starting from early Persian history in *Sirat Firuz Shah*, and ending with Mamluk history in *Sirat Baybars*. Remke Kruk's monograph is limited to passages pertaining to warrior women in five story cycles, the historical events of which stretch roughly from the seventh to the sixteenth centuries: 1) *Sirat 'Antar* set in pre-Islamic North Arabia; 2) *Sirat Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan* in pre-Islamic South Arabia; 3) *Sirat Hamza* in early Islamic Arabia; 4) *Sirat al-amira Dhat al-Himma* in the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates; and 5) *Sirat Baybars* in the Fatimid and Mamluk periods. The *sira* genre bears on most aspects of Arabic studies, including literary and social history, gender studies and linguistics.

This monograph draws together Kruk's earlier writings with an eye to a broader audience. It includes images never before published together, providing a unique source for the visual culture of the epics discussed. It also addresses an ignorance of Arabic sources among non-Arabists, as attested by earlier studies of warrior women that include no mention of women in medieval Arabic epics (for example, Antonia Fraser's *The Warrior Queens*). Kruk's work points out the need not only to dig up historical evidence (as demonstrated in *Warrior Women* by Jeannine Davis-Kimball), but also to recognize the importance of mythology and folklore in cultural studies.

Chapter 1 introduces the genre of *sira*, or Arabic popular epic. Chapter 2 discusses the character type of warrior women, including two excerpts from *Sirat 'Antar*. This chapter helpfully discusses how warrior women in Arabic epics connect to, or compare with, heroic women in contemporary anglophone popular culture, the Amazons, and historical women leaders. Chapters 3–13 focus on paraphrasing tales from five of the most popular Arabic epics.

Chapter 3 introduces *Sirat al-amira Dhat al-Himma*, the longest extant Arabic epic and the only one named for a woman, in terms of its live performance in Morocco that Remke Kruk observed and documented in a 1999 article co-written with Claudia Ott. It discusses the epic's eponymous warrior woman ("Princess" Dhat al-Himma) and her comrades, summarizing some of the early episodes in the epics. Chapter 4 tells of Dhat al-Himma's role as parent, and her relationship with her son 'Abd al-Wahhab and his four wives, and how these characters develop the larger narrative. Kruk observes a pattern, with each new wife acting more independently than the last, although she does not analyse this pattern. Chapter 5 retells the tale of Ghamra, a heroic warrior woman character in the same epic. Ghamra's story may interest those familiar with the medieval French romance *Silence*, since both tell of a girl raised as a boy, and her exploits as a knight.

Chapters 6 and 7 move to warrior women in *Sirat 'Antara*, retelling their stories without analysis, although Kruk does point out how this particular epic ends with the hero's daughter. She suggests that this strategy allows the audience to retain respect for the hero, even after he no longer dominates events in the narrative, since a young male hero would compete with the older hero, while "[a] daughter does not challenge her father's image, but enhances it" (p. 146). Chapter 8 discusses how the heroic tale of *Qissat Hamza* takes a distinctive approach to warrior women, valorizing a patriarchal ideal of female submission. Chapters 9 and 10 discuss

warrior women in *Sirat Baybars*, most of whom appear in the narrative only to recede into the background. Chapter 10 focuses on the exception, a foreign queen who retains her authority and independence. Chapters 11, 12 and 13 examine the female characters of *Sirat Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan*. Kruk is most interested in sharing these characters' stories, and in measuring their degrees of independence and authority within the narrative context.

In chapter 14 Kruk analyses the tales briefly, recommending further research on gender in Arabic literature. She astutely explains how the presence of women in epic connects to gender issues in their societies of origin: "the martial women do not represent the female angle in a male discourse, but embody the perceptions, anxieties and desires of men" (p. 225). Such anxieties include: the social stigma of having only daughters, anxieties and risks of marriage and sexuality, and the fascination with the (sometimes sexual) appeal of domination and dominant women. This analysis complements and applies to many other literary contexts, including female characters in popular Arabic poetry or in Classical Arabic literature, not to mention female characters in many non-Arabic sources.

The only weakness in this book is the brevity of analysis, but this is also its strength, offering accessibility to a broad audience. The book contains an extensive bibliography. This highly informative book represents the culmination of more than twenty years of research, providing a great contribution to *sira* scholarship, gender studies, Arabic studies, literary studies and cultural studies.

**Melanie Magidow**

JOHN MORGAN O'CONNELL:

*Alaturka: Style in Turkish Music (1923–1938)*.

(SOAS Musicology Series.) xviii, 287 pp. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013. £70. ISBN 978 1 4094 4741 2.

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The early Republican era in Turkey has generated a wealth of scholarship dealing with the political aspects of the transition from Ottoman Empire to Turkish nation state, but less in the way of cultural or artistic studies. This book, which explores contested historical narratives through debates about musical style, is therefore a welcome addition to the literature. O'Connell brings together a wide range of materials including interviews, ethnographic research, archival documents, sound recordings and record catalogues to provide a richly textured account of early Republican musical life. The central argument of the book concerns the emergence of a binary discourse about "east" and "west", in which different musical styles reflect a wider division between what were perceived as regressive and progressive world views. The key terms of this discourse, *alaturka* and *alafiranga*, provide a locus for discussing musical reforms in the context of politicized interpretations of the past as propagated by ideologues such as Ziya Gökalp. In O'Connell's view, the *alaturka-alafiranga* divide was skilfully negotiated by proponents of *alaturka* music in order to maintain their cultural prestige and economic position in the face of the Republican elite's support for *alafiranga*-style reforms. Pre-eminent amongst them was vocalist Münir Nurettin Selçuk (1899–1981), who acted as a bridge between tradition and modernity by introducing Western performance practices (ranging from stage manner to voice production) into what was increasingly referred to as "Turkish classical music". In this manner, Selçuk "was able both to