North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia alongside each other, and to get a sense of the immensity of the Islamic ecumene and the diversity within it. It is also sobering to consider the pervasiveness of slavery within Muslim societies. There is a tendency among scholars of the Islamic world to fall into the trap of perceiving Islamic slavery as of less significance, and more benign, than other forms of slavery – Trans-Atlantic slavery for instance. The array of evidence here, however, explodes the myth that slavery in Muslim societies was predominantly elite slavery, or a form of domestic slavery in which slaves were treated as family members, and shows that it could be as brutal as any other form of slavery and was extremely widespread.

On the other hand, the vast array of evidence cited by the author leaves little space for a fuller analysis of the situation, or for the drawing of conclusions. On occasion the level of detail and rapid shift from location to location leave the reader bewildered. This is perhaps inevitable, and Clarence-Smith notes the areas where research needs to be done and suggests several useful questions that should be investigated. The focus on slavery may also, in some cases, decontextualize the stances of particular actors. One example of this is the opposition of the scholar Ibn Jasus to the sultan Mawlay Isma'il's enslavement of blacks in Morocco: although his actions can be read as opposition to slavery, they also reflected scholarly opposition to the monarch's pretensions.

That said, this book is a major contribution to our understanding of slavery in Muslim societies: it synthesizes the work done by myriad scholars on many different epochs and regions of the Islamic world. While the early Islamic attitude towards slavery is fairly well known, it is extremely useful be able to compare the variant readings of quranic injunctions, the input of different sects, and the divergent views of rulers and scholars. One of the most striking, and indeed controversial, aspects of the book is its exploration of contemporary debates on slavery in Muslim circles and indeed the perpetuation of slavery in many Muslim societies, to some extent supported by literalist interpretations. This sheds new light on characters like Sayyid Qutb and al-Mawdudi, and provides an important additional dimension to our understanding of the potential impact of such interpretations of Islam in contemporary society. It is a stimulating and thought-provoking addition to Islamic studies in general.

Amira K. Bennison

COLETTE SIRAT:
Writing as Handwork: A History of Handwriting in Mediterranean and Western Culture.
(Bibliologia – BIB 24.) 575 pp. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006. €75.
ISBN 2 503 52116 9.

Writing, from billboards to the Internet, engulfs our lives today. As Colette Sirat's fascinating study shows, this has been the case in the Western world for five millennia. The magnitude of the numbers she amasses is startling: an estimated six million inscriptions from the Roman world, and that a conservative estimate; two hundred thousand fragments of Greek papyri collected from only some forty Greco-Roman sites in Egypt; 1,450 tombstones inscribed in Hebrew re-used to build a house in Würzburg after the expulsion of the Jews in the fourteenth century; a million documents dating from the

thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries in the Vatican archives; and two hundred and fifty million in the historical archives of nine banks in Naples. These figures also give some idea of the wide range of sources that Sirat, director of the study of medieval Hebraic palaeography at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris and author of numerous works on Hebrew palaeography and manuscripts, has plumbed to construct this comprehensive history of writing around the Mediterranean.

The book studies the physical act of writing. It considers humans as writers, beginning with their organization into schools and then moving from people to manuscripts, script, movement, and personality. The focus is thus on the writers rather than the content of what they wrote. Her evidence comes from both depictions of people writing (22 plates of scribes, ranging from an Assyrian relief to an Italian Renaissance miniature) and the documents they wrote (36 plates, ranging from a Mesopotamian chalk tablet dating from before 3000 BCE, one of the earliest written documents known, to ten styles of Arabic script by the modern calligrapher Hassan Massoudy). An additional 250 black-and-white illustrations elucidate points made in the text. Figure 9.5, for example, shows how writing is an acquired and kinesthetic skill quite distinct from reading. The illustration contains handwritten samples by a schoolgirl fluent in two languages (German and French), but taught to write in only one. Both samples are written in the Latin alphabet in a similar layout with equivalent punctuation, but the German hand is flowing and cursive, whereas the French is clumsy and disjointed, an awkward imitation of a written text that she knew how to read but had not learned how to write.

Sirat is well aware of the uneven nature of her evidence and is careful to use it judiciously. Many samples of writing exercises, for instance, have been preserved on clay tablets, whereas the wood and gesso examples from ancient Egypt have often disintegrated. Examples from the Muslim lands are especially rare, and therefore one might add to her admirable corpus the depiction on the interior of a large lustre bowl in the David Collection (50/1996) in Copenhagen that shows a school master holding a reed pen in his right hand surrounded by two dozen boys and girls with their writing boards with abecedaries. As Sirat notes, many depictions of writers, especially those in medieval codices, are symbolic or conventional, designed to evoke the sanctity of scripture, not to show how writers actually worked. Her ability to draw conclusions from such scattered evidence is remarkable.

From writers, Sirat moves to a close examination of what they wrote. As she points out, photographs and reproductions are useful adjuncts to study, but a two-dimensional object cannot reproduce the three-dimensionality of an inscription or a manuscript. Thus, it is necessary to examine an object first-hand to glean such details as the depth or angle of a cuneiform stroke or the flow of ink. One can easily apply her observations to Arabic script. When writing with a reed pen, for example, the end of the stroke is darker due to the surface tension and pooling of the ink created as the writer lifts his pen. As she shows, right-handers in all scripts (and there is a universal preference for writing with the right hand) typically draw vertical strokes from top downward and horizontal strokes from left to right, thereby pulling the writing implement towards the body. Close examination of early Quran manuscripts shows that scribes writing the angular style (or in Sirat's classification, the "stroke" formal family of scripts) drew horizontal strokes from left to right, the universally preferred direction to execute individual strokes, but one that is exactly the opposite of how the round Arabic styles (or in her classification, the "line" formal family of scripts) are typically written. Posture and furniture also

affected writing. Egyptian scribes in Antiquity sat on the ground using their tunic stretched across their knees as a support. The introduction of oblique writing boards and desks in medieval Europe facilitated the growth of Gothic script, in which straight strokes predominate.

In the final section of her lengthy monograph, Sirat turns from writing as a social phenomenon to an examination of how individuals wrote, distinguishing controlled or careful writing from personal or more haphazard examples. She devotes the longest chapter to colophons, which, although they occur in only about 5 per cent of medieval manuscripts in Greek, Latin, Arabic and Hebrew, tell us about the way a particular exemplar was produced and hence its individuality. They presuppose that the scribe enjoyed sufficient status, but they also add details about the scribe's personality and the circumstances under which he wrote.

In sum, this engaging book has much to offer that is new and thought provoking. It raised all sorts of questions for me, a historian of Islamic calligraphy, and I think that it will do the same for others, for it puts our individual fields into a wider context. It turns the topic of writing from subject matter to process and shows how studying writers and their writings can illuminate the history of civilization in the West.

Sheila S. Blair

GERALD DE GAURY (ed. Bruce Ingham):
Review of the ʿAnizah Tribe.
xvii, 92 pp. Beirut: Kutub, 2005. $40. ISBN 9953 417 97 0.

This short, beautifully produced book is a carefully edited version of a previously unpublished typed notebook. Gerald de Gaury, a British army intelligence officer and diplomat, compiled the *Review* in Baghdad in 1932. De Gaury, who died in 1984, had a long career in Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and published five books on the region. This notebook was evidently sold with his estate and was only recently discovered by Ingham in an oriental bookshop in London.

The *Review* focuses on the otherwise virtually undescribed Iraqi branch of the ʿAnizah Bedouin tribe, the ʿAmārāt, under Ibn Hadhdhāl. The *Review* is slight in comparison with the stunningly rich sources on other branches of the ʿAnizah, such as Musil's *Manners and Customs of the Rwalah Beduin* (New York, 1928), but it adds precious details to our knowledge of a way of life which has long since disappeared.

The *Review* has the style and character of a British imperial gazetteer. There are maps, genealogies and a diagram of Ibn Hadhdhāl's camp. Tribal names and divisions are carefully documented, brief notes on the pastoral economy, religion, the institution of the feud, domestic customs and household budgets are included, as is a glossary of the ʿAnizah dialect. The latter is treated with considerable care by Ingham, himself a linguist and scholar of Arabic dialects.

Iraq was under British Mandatory Government at the time de Gaury wrote his *Review*. It was a time when the tribal sheikhs lived in goat-hair tents, were served by slaves, hunted gazelle and ostrich and recognized only gold coins as having any permanent monetary value. Much of de Gaury's description of ʿAnizah social life has a timeless character, yet a few passages anticipate the rapidity of the changes the tribespeople would shortly experience. In his informative introduction, Ingham suggests that the purpose of the report was