that hardly ever occur in ʿAlqama (antithesis, derivation, echo, double rhyme). The study thus vindicates Ibn al-Muʿtazz's view that pre-Abbasid poetry, too, used rhetorical ornaments extensively, even though later poets used certain tropes more often. As Hussein himself avows, to corroborate his findings one has to check them against larger corpuses of poems, but his analysis is sound, thorough and convincing. Moreover, it is the first such rigorous analysis.

Nefeli Papoutsakis
University of Münster

HELEN BLATHERWICK:
Prophets, Gods and Kings in Sirat Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan: *An Intertextual Reading of an Egyptian Popular Epic.*
(Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures.) x, 335 pp. Leiden: Brill, 2016. ISBN 978 90 04 31479 5.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X1700057X

Arabic popular epic, *sira shaʿbiya*, is a relatively under-researched branch of Arabic literature, which makes the appearance of Helen Blatherwick's monograph on *Sirat Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan* especially noteworthy.

Sirat Sayf tells how Sayf, the hero of the *sira,* founds Egypt and conquers the worlds of humans and *jinn* in the name of Islam. *Sayf* stands apart in the genre because it is full of wonder, brimming with magic, myth and fairytale motifs. It was for that reason disliked by a Moroccan audience that we (Claudia Ott and myself) interviewed in 1998. They considered it "full of sorcery and lies (*sihr* and *kdub*)". Yet *Sirat Sayf* must have been fairly popular, given the number of MSS known to modern researchers: 34 in four major European libraries alone, as Blatherwick points out.

Several scholars, past and present, have focused on *Sirat Sayf* and laid down their findings in monographs and articles. Blatherwick chooses an approach different from earlier studies, namely that of intertextuality. Analysis of the order-chaos concept underlying the narrative is a central theme in the study. She looks at the text from a comparative and folkloristic perspective, focusing on "symbolism, tropes and tale patterns that are culturally specific to convey meaning". Referring to Ulrich Marzolph, she points out that narrators consciously refer to themes, motifs and concepts that are familiar to the audience in order to connect their story to recognized tradition. Thus she sets out to discover whether reading *Sayf* with certain other texts in mind contributes to a better, or different, understanding of the text. Did any familiar older ideas and concepts influence the audience's expectation of what happens in the story? In other words, did older texts "inform" the reading of *Sayf*? This is a fascinating question, and Blatherwick sets out to explore three such intertexts, namely the *qisas al-anbiya'*, Stories of the Prophets; one of the branches of the Alexander romance; and ancient Egyptian myth.

The choice of the *qisas al-anbiya'* will not surprise, for their influence is widely present in Arabic literature. Blatherwick focuses in particular on Moses, Solomon and Abraham. These prophetic stories, in particular that of Solomon, yield elucidating interpretations of certain elements in *Sayf.* The Moses intertext was also studied by Chraïbi, with whom she partly agrees, without going along with his view that *Sayf* can be read as a retelling of the Moses story.

The Alexander romance, which widely left its traces in the narrative tradition from Europe to South-East Asia, also is an obvious choice. Sayf, like the Alexander of the popular romance, acts as a conqueror-prophet and, as Blatherwick argues, "any presence of a general Alexander intertext may add to our understanding of narrative meaning in *Sirat Sayf*". Her conclusion is that the Alexander intertext is relevant for audience perceptions of plot and characterization, but is not, like the other intertexts studied here, of much importance on a deeper conceptual level. Somewhat unexpectedly, she decided not to focus on the *Sirat al-Iskandar*, the Arabic popular version of the Alexander romance which forms part of the narrative corpus to which *Sayf* also belongs, but on Pseudo-Callisthenes and the Persian popular romances, the *Iskandarnamah* and the related *Darabnamah* (no mention is made of the Arabic *Sirat Firuz Shah*, a popular *sira* loosely connected to the *Darabnamah*). Blatherwick's argument is that the *Iskandarnamah* is possibly more closely related to *Sayf* than the non-Persian texts, especially in the way in which women figure in the text. The *Iskandarname* and *Sayf* both present multimarrying eponymous heroes, unlike the other texts. Yet there are also considerable differences between the texts in their approach to women: it is pointed out that *Sayf* is less misogynistic than the *Iskandarnamah*, in which gratuitous violence to women and rape frequently occur. While this is on the whole true, we ought to be aware that violence of this kind is not completely absent from *Sayf*: an example is the pond created by sorcerers between the city of women and the city of men, where girls going to bathe are grabbed by men lying in wait for them, and held captive to satisfy the men's lusts until a new victim turns up.

Of the chosen intertexts, the narrative and mythological tradition of ancient Egypt is particularly intriguing. *Sayf* is a decidedly Egyptian *sira*, presenting a foundation myth of Egypt itself as well as of specific locations and other elements, and the theory that ancient myths have left their traces on a deeper level is worth pursuing. Blatherwick makes clear that it is not her intention to point out direct links, but to look for elements that help to make sense of the *Sayf* text. This leads to fascinating new views on the level of motifs (*Sayf* contains a number of particularly curious and intriguing motifs) as well as of the general interpretation of the *sira*. The Osiris myth, which represents the struggle between life and death, chaos and order, is taken as the leading intertext. Similarities are pointed out between Sayf and Osiris: they are both conquering heroes who set out to spread civilization, and the power of both is essentially connected to the Nile. Although none of the characters in *Sayf* can be directly related to those in the Osiris myth, analysis of its concepts yields remarkable results that help to make sense of the story. Among them is the hero's relationship with his mother, the vicious and destructive Qamariya, who is constantly out to harm and destroy her son. We may add here that that destructive, son-killing women are not unknown in Arabic popular narratives, as the case of Princess Maymuna in *Dhat al-Himma* shows, but the Qamariya–Sayf relation is far more complicated and intriguing than that of Maymuna and her son Bahrun.

The mythical conflict between Horus and Seth forms the basis of Blatherwick's analysis, with Qamariya representing the destructive element of Seth. This offers a fascinating new outlook on the story, bringing coherence in the at first sight chaotic and illogical behaviour of the protagonists. One may of course ask whether there is sufficient evidence that these ancient concepts indeed continued to play a role in the Egyptian narrative tradition. This, of course, is not easy to prove. Blatherwick gives some examples, pointing out some possibly Ancient Egyptian motifs in Egyptian folktales, and arguing that the episode of Shajar al-Durr in *Sirat Baybars,* like that of Qamariya, may be interpreted along the lines of the Horus–Seth conflict.

Whether one goes along with all the interpretations is not really the point. What matters is that here we have a book that is admirable for its lucid and consequent

development of argument as well as for its stimulating new approach. A book highly recommended, and not only for *sira* scholars.

Remke Kruk
Leiden University

KAREN BAUER:

Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'ān: Medieval Interpretations, Modern Responses.
(Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization.) xi, 308 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. £64.99. ISBN 978 1 107 04152 3.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X17000581

In this book, Karen Bauer surveys a number of pre-modern exegetical works on the topic of gender and hierarchy in the Quran and also records her interviews with a number of contemporary Muslim intellectuals in Syria and Iran in order to take the pulse, albeit very selectively, of modern thinking on this topic.

Bauer focuses on certain Quranic verses that have invited the most attention in the pre-modern and modern periods in the context of gender. One such verse is Quran 2: 282, which has been used to devalue the worth of women's legal testimony in general despite the fact that the verse specifically refers to a loan transaction. Bauer presents the diversity of interpretations of this verse, which range from generally allowing to generally disallowing women's legal testimony. This allows her sensibly to conclude that the [male] scholars' larger social context often impinged upon their interpretations of key Quranic verses that have to do with gender.

In chapters 3 and 4, Bauer turns to a discussion of Quran 4: 1, a verse that has been foregrounded particularly in modernist and feminist discussions as positing the ontological equality of men and women, since neither is described as being created first. Bauer, however, goes against the grain of feminist exegeses when she claims that her analysis of Quran 4: 1 and related verses leads her to conclude "that the first woman was created from (*min*) and for man (*lahu*)" (p. 105). Three additional verses (Quran 16: 72; 30: 21 and 42: 11) that she cites in this context together with Quran 4:1, however, imply no such thing; none of these verses identifies the gender of the soul/s nor its mate/s who equally find rest in the other; no gender hierarchy can thereby be inferred. The author attempts to infer such a hierarchy however from Quran 7: 189, which states: *wa ja'ala minhā zawjahā li-yaskuna ilayhā ... fa-lammā taghashshahā ḥamalat ḥamlan khafīfan* which the author translates as: "... and created from it [him] its [his mate] so that he could find rest in her. When the man covered her, she bore a light burden ..." (p. 108). Grammatically speaking, *li-yaskuna ilayhā* must be literally translated as: "so that the mate" (since the verb is conjugated for the masculine and the only masculine referent in the sentence is *zawj*) "may find rest in the soul" (the enclitic pronoun is feminine and therefore must grammatically refer to the feminine noun *nafs*). If the mate is understood to be Adam's wife as is usually the case and as Bauer also assumes, then it is actually the woman who finds rest in the man, therefore implying instead that the man was created for her! Bauer's arbitrary suggestion that "The verse at that point changes from the feminine, which is used to describe the 'soul', to the masculine, to show that this soul is Adam" (p. 108) is utterly implausible. The referents change rather after the conjunction *fa-lammā*, which indicates a switch to the different topic of pregnancy. Unsurprisingly, male exegetes have privileged the idea of