
Reviews of Books

THE STORIES OF THE PROPHETS. By IBN MUṬARRIF AL-ṬARAFĪ. Edited with an introduction and notes by ROBERTO TOTTOLI. pp. ii, 132 English, pp. 200 Arabic. *Islamkundliche Untersuchungen*, 253. Berlin, Klaus Schawz Verlag, 2003.
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Recent years have witnessed an increase of interest in the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* literature, and a major contributor to this research has been Roberto Tottoli, whose 1996 Ph.D. dissertation at the Istituto Universitario Orientale (Naples) comprised a detailed introduction to the genre and an annotated edition and Italian translation of the text presented here, with a full bibliography. The Italian translation has appeared as his *Storie dei profeti* (Genova, Melangolo, 1997), and Tottoli has since gone on to publish a comprehensive analysis of this literature – the first major comprehensive assessment since the seminal work of Tilman Nagel, *Die Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ. Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (Bonn, 1967) – in his *I profeti biblici nella tradizione islamica* (Brescia, Paideia, 1999), translated by the author as *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Curzon, 2002). The present volume provides the edition of al-Ṭarafī's Arabic text, with a revised introduction and expanded annotations in English.

Al-Ṭarafī (d. 454/1062) was an Andalusian scholar about whom little is known. He was born and died in Cordoba and seems to have spent his professional life there, and his scholarly interests are attested in the fields of *qirāʾāt*, *tafsīr*, and *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. In the introduction to the present work (pp. 5–6 Arabic, paras. 1–2) al-Ṭarafī lauds the prophets of Islam and observes that “every high-minded person” should be keen to study and know this material, thus suggesting that his own work has some didactic purpose. Be that as it may, in content his text is similar to others in the genre, and Tottoli convincingly argues that his purpose was narrowly exegetical: to provide additional information on the prophets mentioned in the Qurʾān. This principle he follows strictly throughout the book. He gives accounts of the 24 prophets named in the Qurʾān and the seven others alluded to in the Islamic scripture but not specifically named, but since his purpose is not to sketch out a paradigm of sacred history or draw connections among the various prophets he does not feel obliged to adhere to the historical sequence normally used for these figures. Similarly, he excludes personalities and events that often appear in *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* books, but which do not figure in the Qurʾān, or persons who appear in the Qurʾān but were not prophets (such as the *ahl al-kahf*). He is likewise silent on numerous topics that do arise in the Qurʾān, e.g. Abraham's visit to Ishmael and the miracles of Jesus. Such points might suggest that the work was left unfinished, but Tottoli considers this possibility and argues against it, although the end of the work does indeed seem to be defective.

Al-Ṭarafī's text does not offer a great deal that is new. More than half of his work is taken *verbatim* or abridged from the *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923), and in fact it appears that the book is essentially a selection of materials from al-Ṭabarī to which al-Ṭarafī has added from other works, in particular the *Mubtadāʾ* of Ishāq ibn Bishr (d. 206/821), to which he may have had access through an intermediary.

The importance of the work primarily lies in other considerations. Publication of this book makes a useful addition to the corpus of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* texts from al-Andalus, and it would be useful to study these works to see if there was any specifically regional perspective on this subject there (e.g. silence on the miracles of Jesus might be expected in light of conflicts and tensions with increasingly powerful Christian regimes to the north). Attestation of the old materials from Iṣḥāq ibn Bishr is also important, though this work does also survive independently. But what is most impressive about this book is the colossal labour that has been invested in the detailed annotations (pp. 21–110), which amount to a virtual commentary on the Arabic text. Ranging over all of the issues that arise in the book, this commentary is a resource that should prove very useful for future research on this genre and is based on extremely broad reading in primary sources (including eighteen anonymous *qiṣaṣ* texts in manuscript) and modern studies. It is in some ways reminiscent of the sort of thing one still sees in classicists' treatment of Greek or Latin texts, but in Arabic studies, which is of course a far younger field, it is still uncommon.

Some years ago I recall M. J. Kister commenting that if one wants to edit an Arabic text, the first task is to gain a thorough command of the field to which that book belongs. The goal may seem elusive, but here it has been fulfilled. Roberto Tottoli has provided a comprehensive treatment of al-Ṭarafī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, and in the course of his work he has greatly enriched our knowledge of the field in general and opened a number of potentially useful lines for future research.

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MEASURES AND WEIGHTS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD. By WALTHER HINZ. Translated by M. ISMAIL MARCINKOWSKI, with Foreword by C. E. BOSWORTH. pp. xxii, 98. Kuala Lumpur, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, International Islamic University, 2003.

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The late Walther Hinz (1906–92), professor for the history of the Near East at Göttingen, pursued most of his research in the field of Iranian studies and wrote numerous important works on various aspects of Iranian history and languages. But among non-Iranists he is best known for his brief handbook on Islamic weights and measures, which was published in Brill's *Handbuch der Orientalistik* series in 1955 and then reprinted with revisions in 1970. It has been a standard reference tool since its initial publication, and no other work has replaced it. Translations into Russian and Turkish are said to exist, but are apparently extremely rare; a recent Arabic work on the subject is largely derived from Hinz.

It may be worth noting some of the factors that have made Hinz's book so useful and important. The subject of Middle Eastern metrology was not at all developed when he took up this project, and while his task was primarily to indicate the metric equivalents of Middle Eastern weights and measures, his book actually did much more. It more or less defined the main issues in the field, clarified the most important problems, and set forth in its pages a good working bibliography. The way in which he presented his material, for example, stressed the fact that a single term for a certain unit of weight or measure could signify widely varying amounts in different parts of the Islamic world, and at different times. He also makes points that, while well known now, are worth stressing again in a form that many beginners in the field are likely to see, such as the vital observation that the modern study of standards for weights of coins (as opposed to what occurred in actual practice) should be based not on the extant coins but on the glass weights used to test samples of coinage.

Marcinkowski's translation is clear and accurate. He has incorporated into the text the revisions made by Hinz in his second edition, and for non-specialist readers he has also added explanatory notes on such matters as terms and names of cities, dynasties and individuals. The English rendering is therefore