The core of this book consists of a study of the *madāris* founded in Egypt during the final decades of the Fatimid regime, then under Salah al-Din and his successors until the rise of the Mamluks in the middle of the 13th century. The story of Egyptian *madāris* probably begins with that founded by the Spanish scholar Abu Bakr al-Turtushi (d. 1126) in Alexandria. Al-Turtushi settled in Alexandria at the end of the 11th century after years of travel had taken him to (among other places) Baghdad, where he "very likely" (p. 78) studied in the famous madrasa established by the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092)—a madrasa which is frequently cited as an institutional model of sorts. In this way, a new institution, which, as Makdisi reported, had originated in Khurasan and then spread into Iran and Iraq through the patronage of Nizam al-Mulk and others, reached Egypt.

This development proved critical for the subsequent history not just of Egypt but of the Middle East more generally. An earlier generation of scholars had considered the madrasa an instrument in the struggle against Shiʿism associated with a period sometimes characterized as that of a "Sunni revival" after decades of Shiʿi political dominance in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. Leiser shows that the madrasa in Egypt served less to combat Shiʿism—which, despite almost two centuries of rule by the Ismaʿili Fatimid caliphs, had remarkably few adherents in Egypt, at least outside some districts in Upper Egypt—than to organize and mobilize the Sunni community.

In chapters on the *madāris* established by Salah al-Din in and around Cairo, those founded by his Ayyubid successors, and especially in an important final chapter on "The Madrasa in Egyptian Society," Leiser describes what this involved. By now this story is well known, but Leiser's dissertation anticipated many of the salient points developed in subsequent scholarship: the diversity of institutional types identified as *madāris*; the relationship between jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and its ancillary subjects in their curricula; the connections between professorships in the *madāris* and other offices and functions including that of the chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) of the Islamic courts; the veritable dynasties of scholars which sometimes exerted control over lucrative professorships; even the surprising role of women in the founding and operation of some *madāris*.

Under the Ayyubids' successors, especially the Mamluk regime with its capital in Cairo, the madrasa became one of the most ubiquitous religious institutions in the medieval Islamic Middle East. Many subsequent scholars who have written about later *madāris*, the present reviewer included, have relied on Leiser's dissertation as both a model and a source of important detail and analysis. That dissertation, despite remaining unpublished until now, has been cited remarkably consistently in later scholarship. The field is fortunate indeed that a more accessible version has finally seen the light of day.

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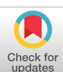
All the World Is Awry: Al-Maʿarrī and the *Luzūmiyyāt*, Revisited

R. Kevin Lacey (New York: SUNY Press, 2022). Pp. 478. $95.00 hardcover, $35.95 paper. ISBN: 9781438479453

Reviewed by Sona Grigoryan, Central European University, Vienna, Austria (grigoryans@ceu.edu)

R. Kevin Lacey's *All the World Is Awry* examines one of the most complicated authors of medieval Islam, Abu al-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarri (d. 447/1057), the blind poet of Syria—dubbed as



freethinker and atheist, on the one hand, and a pious ascetic, on the other—through one of his most controversial works, a collection of poems entitled *Luzum ma la Yalzam* (*The Self-Imposed Unnecessity*; hereafter, *Luzum*), widely known for its literary virtuosity and contradictions. *Luzum* is the work most closely associated with al-Maʿarri's controversial thoughts, especially regarding matters of faith and (un)belief. Lacey's study is the most thorough examination of *Luzum*'s content to date. It offers the most versatile reading of this lengthy *dīwān*, diligently bringing forth the entire thematic landscape and touching upon every important topic in the collection.

Chapter 1 is an excellent sketch of al-Maʿarri's biography, with a comprehensive account of his family, social network, and main works. Lacey also reveals the purpose of his study, which is "how we are simply to understand al-Maʿarri, regardless of whether we feel compelled to accept or reject, like or loathe, whatever confessional tendencies or life orientations he may or may not have exhibited" (p. 36). Lacey states that the methodological core of the study is to allow the source to speak for itself, instead of relying on various interpretations. However, this statement does not bear much analytical value—Lacey himself, as we shall see, uses an interpretative paradigm that goes beyond the text itself.

In chapter 2, Lacey surveys the milieu in which al-Maʿarri worked, also summarizing preceding political and intellectual developments. This chapter is unnecessarily lengthy and descriptive; a brief analytical discussion would have sufficed to underscore the intense political, intellectual, and religious scene of the time. Moreover, Lacey misses an opportunity to discuss contemporary critiques of religion (he dedicates a few pages to the famous freethinker Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. ca. 313/925), but only as an individual and philosopher). By al-Maʿarri's time, motifs of religious critique were significant across multiple genres. The fact that freethinkers "did not establish any sect" (p. 247) should not diminish their input.

Chapter 3 provides a wonderful overview of *Luzum*'s literary characteristics, detailing al-Maʿarri's most distinguished technique of "conceits" (*kulaf*). This chapter could be a reference for anyone who wants to understand the character of *Luzum*'s extraordinary literary features. The most problematic part of this chapter, and of the book as a whole, is Lacey's approach to contradictions. It is well known that *Luzum* is full of contradictions, especially concerning tenets of religion and faith. For instance, one finds verses portraying God in scriptural terms next to verses presenting God as unjust. Lacey writes that the contradictions are sometimes resolvable but are usually blatantly incompatible statements. In order to resolve these contradictions, the author relies on the well-known theory of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), which suggests that orthodox verses exist only to cover the poet's unbelief and save him from persecution. Already Alfred von Kremer in the 19th century thought that al-Maʿarri applied *taqiyya*, and Taha Hussein was the Arab author who advocated this theory.

Having set this rule of thumb for the reading of *Luzum*, Lacey then explores its major themes in the fourth and final chapter, which is the most essential part of the study. He carefully surveys all the verses in which al-Maʿarri contemplates humankind, God, religion, cosmology, ethics, and other themes. In addition to a thorough exposure of themes, Lacey also integrates previous scholarly work and interpretations of *Luzum*.

In the first part of chapter 4, the author scrutinizes al-Maʿarri's views on humankind—from its physical totality to its essential properties like soul, intellect, and mortality. An intriguing discussion here is how al-Maʿarri views free will and predetermination. The poet fluctuates between these two notions, sometimes favoring the former and sometimes the latter. Fortunately, in this case, Lacey does not use the concept of *taqiyya* and instead concludes that al-Maʿarri holds neither view, situating himself somewhere in the middle and thus having space for both beliefs. When it comes to resurrection, Lacey concludes that al-Maʿarri allowed only the possibility of the resurrection of the soul and not the body, but this conclusion is unconvincing, given the many verses that suggest that resurrection is possible without any further specification.

In the second part, Lacey discusses the notion of God and religion. He uses the idea of *taqiyya* to explain why al-Maʿarri should frequently confirm the reality of God as a pious

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Muslim, while also frequently presenting God as unjust and the cause of evil. Lacey also sheds light on verses in which al-Maʿarri speaks of God ironically and those which state that human beings can never obtain enough knowledge about God.

The third part considers al-Maʿarri's social and political views. Here, Lacey exhaustively exposes the verses showing the poet's disapproval for family, women, people of state, and learned classes—religious or secular. The only group al-Maʿarri treats mildly are philosophers, and Lacey thinks this is because he agreed more with philosophers than anyone else. This claim can be justified only to a certain degree. While in many cases al-Maʿarri uses philosophical ideas, he never sustains a series of philosophical arguments on any of the issues he raises in a categorical assertive style akin to philosophers.

The next part is a rich discussion on al-Maʿarri's perception of creation and cosmogony. In many verses, al-Maʿarri mentions the eternity of matter, time, and space, thus going against the theory of God's creation of the world *ex nihilo* and the belief that God is the only eternal. In this case too, al-Maʿarri's ideas are complicated by contradictions, which Lacey says are "intended to provide at least a semblance of camouflage for belief in the eternity of the natural elements" (p. 287). Lacey suggests that al-Maʿarri was influenced by al-Razi, as the latter also believed in the co-eternity of God. While al-Maʿarri was certainly knowledgeable about al-Razi's views, comparing the two requires a more nuanced approach, especially in relation to the notion of God—who is benign, just, wise, and compassionate for al-Razi but not for al-Maʿarri—and the notion of intellect—which is an absolutely positive agent for al-Razi but not for al-Maʿarri.

When concluding the book, Lacey states that, despite its nonconformist views, *Luzum* "largely reflects on the natural progression of Islamicate thought, its ethical guidelines and doctrines stretching back to Qur'an and the books of *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, *taṣawwūf*, *adab*, and *ʿilm al-akhlāq*" (p. 352). It is hard not to see the conflict Lacey invokes here, given that the entire study presents al-Maʿarri as someone alienated from all this, as a maverick unbeliever who disguised his ideas to preserve his life. The impression here is not that Lacey integrates al-Maʿarri and his thought into this broader culture, but tries to defend al-Maʿarri's legacy in the face of modern accusations of unbelief. One might ask whether al-Maʿarri needs any apologetic attitude.

Overall, relying on the idea of *taqiyya* is restrictive. The notion of religious persecution should always be historically contextualized. Al-Maʿarri's fame was not based primarily on his religious thought but on his literary merits—especially his virtuosity and mannerism—and his thorough knowledge of Arabic. It is true there were rumors about his unbelief, but these were only rumors, not threats. We find no serious allegations of unbelief in contemporary chronicles; it is not until centuries later that the staunchly accusing narrative became dominant in Hanbali circles, specifically in the writings of Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 598/1201). Moreover, had there been any serious motivation to punish al-Maʿarri, *Luzum* contains numerous straightforwardly freethinking verses, in addition to its allegories and double entendres. It seems strange that someone who supposedly feared persecution would openly state the paucity of his religion and his covert writing. Ultimately, al-Maʿarri avoided punishment not because he successfully hid behind contradictions, but because in his historical context there was no need for him to hide—the sociopolitical setting was not conducive to such punishment. In a way, Lacey seems to be aware of this, but being too tempted to resolve the contradictions, he insists on the notion of *taqiyya*.

Further, the impression one gets from the study is that by al-Maʿarri's time, religious discussions had set all the boundaries of belief, and one could either accept or reject them. However, it would be more accurate to say that skepticism and uncertainty lay at the heart of the religious realm. The lengthy overview in the book about religious and intellectual trends leading up to al-Maʿarri's time speaks to the anxiety and accumulation of knowledge that led to skepticism and confusion, not to certainty. Al-Maʿarri in fact had an aversion to anyone who claimed to know things for certain (his *Epistle of Forgiveness* is an indicator of

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this). By placing opposing discourses in one and the same text, al-Maʿarri allows space for both belief and unbelief.

Despite this restrictive mode of interpretation, the work under review remains a greatly valuable contribution to al-Maʿarri's scholarship.

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L'Algérie des oulémas: Une histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine (1931-1991)

Charlotte Courreye (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 2020). Pp. 536. €43.00 paper. ISBN: 9791035105334

Reviewed by James McDougall, Trinity College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK (james.mcdougall@history.ox.ac.uk)

Charlotte Courreye's *L'Algérie des Oulémas* is a major contribution to the historiography of 20th-century Algeria and to the growing literature on the relationship between the ʿulamaʾ, or "religious intellectuals" more generally, the state, education, religion, and politics. The book explores the location and the meanings of religious authority in Algerian society and state-formation through the history of the Islamic reformist movement, institutionalized in the 1930s. The reformists' subsequent significance for anti-colonial nationalism, state-building and Arabization, political legitimation and opposition, Islamism and anti-Islamism is explored in meticulous detail and with impressive lucidity through a combination of institutional, social, intellectual, and political history. Courreye's treatment of the thinking, preoccupations, and activities of the ʿulamaʾ and their inheritors covers a great deal of ground with remarkable precision. Politics, education, social and institutional spaces, practices, and discourses are all considered. The author approaches these topics through a loosely Bourdieusian sociological framework (drawing on the concepts of field, social capital, and habitus), which helps organize her exposition without ever becoming reductive or restrictive. Combining detailed archival work in French with interviews carried out over four years of fieldwork, and an exhaustive reading of the press, memoirs, and other publications in Arabic, the resulting book is a first-rate work of scholarship.

Courreye's study shares two aims with much of the recent, especially francophone, scholarship on Algeria. Firstly, she contributes to the de-particularization, or "de-provincializing" (*désenclavement*), of Algeria as a case, situating the country more fully and properly within a wider Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic world context, rather than as a wholly *sui generis* case or one confined in a Franco-Algerian echo chamber. Secondly, she connects the colonial and post-independence periods, considering Algeria's history across the "threshold" of independence in 1962. In both respects, she succeeds admirably. Indeed, it can now be said, thanks to works like this one, that the history of Algeria today is no longer at all determined by the constraints of chronology and spatiality that earlier scholarship, including my own, complained about fifteen or twenty years ago. Three of the book's eight chapters, but two-fifths of its page length, cover the late colonial period (1931–54) and the war of independence (1954–62), while another five chapters, three-fifths of the volume overall, address what happened to the reformist ʿulamaʾ from the 1960s to the early 1990s. There are also several glances forward to the early 2000s, including in the introduction, which opens

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