

Yugoslavia) revived linkages between religious and political identity that had been forged in the early post-Ottoman period. Irredentism became an important element in this quest leading to the bloodbaths of the 1990s. This decade was an important juncture for the Arab states as well. The First Gulf War, the new unipolarity in international relations, and concomitant globalization, coupled with impasses in the Palestine Question, further undermined the solidarity of Arab states, as the gap between popular sentiment and the regimes widened in individual countries. In Turkey, the global and regional dislocations coincided with the political and social ruptures that followed the military rule of the 1980s, including the Kurdish insurgency. The legitimacy deficit in the reconstituted political arena attenuated state authority everywhere and created political, moral and ideological vacuums into which religion moved as “the glue to hold society together” (p. 255).

State, Faith, and Nation is an engaging and erudite book that will be as accessible to a general readership as it will be stimulating to students of the Middle East and the Balkans. The prose is readable, witty and provocative. Anscombe has digested several bodies of historiography and introduces some new insights from research in British and Ottoman archives. Many of us preach about bridging historiographies and moving beyond established nation-centric narratives. Anscombe accomplishes this masterfully.

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JAMES E. MONTGOMERY:

Al-Jāhīz: In Praise of Books.

(Edinburgh Studies in Classical Arabic Literature.) vi, 586 pp.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013. £95. ISBN 978 0 7486 8332 1.

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The first book in a new series edited by Wen-chin Ouyang and Julia Bray, *In Praise of Books* takes on one of the giants of Classical Arabic literature and the “father of Arabic prose”, al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868–9). The work forms the first of a two-volume project by the author on al-Jāhīz’s attitudes towards books, which range “from glowing adoration to profound mistrust and outright rejection” (p. 5). The volume currently under review deals al-Jāhīz’s praise of books, which is most prominently displayed in his magnum opus, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, the *Book of Animals*, or the *Book of Living*, as Montgomery prefers to interpret its title (cf. pp. 9–10). To see al-Jāhīz as merely praising books, however, is to understate the matter. As Montgomery argues, al-Jāhīz saw in books in general, and in his *Book of Living* in particular, the potential to save a society in decline.

Written in an “apocalyptic” age (towards the mid third/ninth century), of which even al-Jāhīz’s ugliness seems to have been a sign (!) (p. 29), Montgomery argues that there was a particular sense of urgency to save the morally corrupt and riven ‘Abbāsīd society before the coming of the End Time (ch. 1.1). The logic, as Montgomery delineates in Parts 4 and 5, is as follows: in order to bring back cohesion to the fragmented society, al-Jāhīz needed to find a common principle on which all would agree. This basic principle is that “life as a product of creation necessitates a creator whom we should celebrate out of gratitude for the blessings He has showered upon us” (p. 265). This obligatory celebration and appreciation of God (agreed

upon by all except the Eternalists, the *Dahrīya*, the century's "atheists", p. 277) takes place in two forms: by writing an account of God's creations (5.3) and doing so through the proper use of the Arabic language (5.2).

God's creations, from the most despicable creatures to the most admired, are all signs of His majesty. The world is thus a "semiotic system" to be read and interpreted, and humans (who are themselves signs) have the unique intellectual capacity to do so (pp. 270–1). The process of "composing" (*ta'lif*) a book, and the *Book of Living* in particular, is a way to interpret and assemble these disparate "signs" in one aggregate whole of the author's own "creation". The result is a seemingly haphazard "kaleidoscopic" account in the case of the *Book of Living*, which is nevertheless not without its internal organizational micro-schemes (pp. 333–9). *Al-'Arabīya*, in turn, had to be mastered and used properly since it was the language which God had chosen to communicate His message. Montgomery points out how both endeavours imply a desire to imitate God: Writing "the book of the book of creation" (p. 387) mimics God's divine governance of His creation; doing so in *al-'Arabīya* mimics His divine language. While this seems to come close to violating the Mu'tazilite aversion to anthropomorphism, Montgomery reassures us that it was an attempt "to draw near to God yet not make himself like God" (p. 360).

The problem with such a totalizing encyclopaedic mission is that it is bound to remain incomplete. Al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Living*, however, is not an "encyclopaedia" in the modern sense of an ordered, systematic compilation of knowledge for easy retrieval (p. 266). Rather, Montgomery suggests that al-Jāḥiẓ aims to teach his readers "the correct interpretations of the signs which his treatise contains and so to establish for them the mechanisms whereby all the signs not contained in his treatise can in turn be successfully interpreted" (p. 273). In this way, al-Jāḥiẓ solves the problem of incompleteness through providing "an interpretative key to the signs" (p. 273).

Montgomery explores what this "interpretative key" might entail through an analysis of the work's roughly 200-page "Introduction", which seems to have been added to the work at a later stage, as it addresses criticisms already voiced against the book (p. 169). The identity of the Addressee remains a mystery, although Montgomery provides a compelling, though speculative, possibility in 4.3. The Addressee's primary target of attack is first, al-Jāḥiẓ's *Book of Living*, then his other books, and finally the book in general, as an artifact (Part 3). Al-Jāḥiẓ's defence of books consists of highlighting its praises, including that they promote social wellbeing by suppressing factionalism, through replacing competitive debate with solitary study (p. 166). However, "at the heart of the disagreement between al-Jāḥiẓ and the Addressee [...] lies a fundamental disparity over how to classify things" (p. 255). While the Addressee is concerned with "pure categories" and is suspicious of hybrid (p. 168), al-Jāḥiẓ "erects taxonomies in order to take delight in collapsing them" (p. 170). Another "interpretative key" presented by al-Jāḥiẓ is that there are "two characteristics by which things are judged": one is "apparent to the senses"; the other is "hidden away for the reasoning intellect" (p. 406). A seemingly frivolous debate presented in the "Introduction" about the Dog and the Rooster, therefore, contains hidden within it a debate about human autonomy and moral obligatedness (Part 6).

In Praise of Books is not an easy read, as the author himself acknowledges on various occasions. While some of the difficulty is unavoidable, the book would have benefitted from some more signposts for the reader, such as clarifying upfront the purpose of certain discussions. The translation of extensive sections of the "Introduction" and the paraphrase of much of its remaining parts are in themselves tremendous contributions to the field. The page numbers referring to the original text in Arabic could have been placed in the margins rather than at the end of

paragraphs for easier scanning. The “Commentary” and the “Argument” sections in Part 3 have the reader cumberingly flipping back to the “Translation”. Notwithstanding these organizational matters, the book is a must-read for any student of Arabic literature. It not only gives the reader tools with which to read and interpret al-Jāhiz’s works, but it also paints an impressively expansive picture of third/ninth-century intellectual life in Iraq.

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BEKIM AGAI, OLCAY AKYILDIZ and CASPAR HILLEBRAND (eds):

Venturing Beyond Borders – Reflections on Genre, Function and Boundaries in Middle Eastern Travel Writing.

(Istanbul Texts and Studies.) 264 pp. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2013. €59. ISBN 978 3 89913 977 8. doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000348

This book deals with modern and early modern Middle Eastern travel writing, especially by Ottoman authors. The contributions result from a 2010 workshop on travel writing at the Orient-Institut, Istanbul, and the works analysed date from the sixteenth century to the post-WWI period and range geographically from Ottoman Europe to Egypt, West Europe and Russia. Many of the essays deal with travel to Europe and the authors’ perceptions of Europeans, while others discuss imaginary rather than real travels, the religious element in the Muslim worldview, or the Ottoman perspective on the empire’s Arab subjects. The volume contributes to the field of cross-cultural travel studies by introducing several lesser known authors and by enriching cross-disciplinary theoretical and critical dialogue.

The essays are grouped into three sections: “Approaching the field of travel writing – the broad picture” (pp. 11–74), “Writing on the self or other – a closer look” (pp. 75–156), and “Drawing lines – borders and crossings in genre” (pp. 157–226). The appendix (pp. 226–62) contains “A researchers’ list of Ottoman travel accounts to Europe: bibliographical part” by Caspar Hillebrand. This is a very useful companion to the book and Hillebrand’s own chapter titled “Ottoman travel accounts to Europe. An overview of their historical development and a commented researchers’ list” (pp. 53–74): it provides an overall introduction to the book and a systematic overview of the sources. Hillebrand proposes a statistically reasoned periodization for extant Ottoman travel writing, distinguishing three periods from c. 1500 to c. 1920. Within each period, he assesses the frequency and types of accounts, the degree of conventional or official reporting, and the growing diversification of genres. The bibliography in the appendix has now been expanded and published as a working paper by the Bonner Forum Osmanistik at <http://www.bfo.uni-bonn.de/projekte/ottoman-travel-accounts>.

The co-editors’ brief introduction (pp. 7–9) sets out the aims of the collection: to create a basis for comparative studies of Middle Eastern travel writing; to present a broad analytical framework across disciplines, geographies and time; and to apply the theory and methods of diverse fields and disciplines to the multicultural travel studies. Individual essays demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of research in the genre and history of travel writing in various ways. Certain themes and motifs recur in different chapters, including discussion of, and challenges to, the concept of “Western” Orientalism. Jasmin Khosravie adds to the prevailing Ottoman–European