

they privileged rational jurists and theologians, the pious scholars (*'ulamā' abrār*) of the reformist tradition represented in the modern period by thinkers such as Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khālīṣī, Ḥaydar 'Alī Qalamdārān and more recently 'Abdol-Karim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, or were they the face of God on earth, the *deus revelatus*?

Amir-Moezzi's intellectual project has therefore been one of reorienting the study of Shii Islam towards a serious consideration of the esoteric nature of Imamology prevalent in the earliest *ḥadīth* collections such as *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903), which predates the "canonical" four books of al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Tūsī, and the earliest exegeses such as that attributed to 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (fl. 307/919), and secondarily tracing this tendency within later traditions of what nowadays is known as *walāya takwīnīya*, the authority and cosmological power that the Imams hold and wield over the creation, associated with Safavid thinkers such as Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635), and the Shaykhīya from the nineteenth century. This concern with the Iranian *ḥikmat* tradition in itself is a continuation of Corbin's esoteric reading of the later Shii tradition. It would have been a useful addition to the volume under review to have included some other articles which make Amir-Moezzi's method clearer, such as his piece in *Studia Islamica* in 1997 on the criteria for studying the authenticity of *ḥadīth* in the Shii tradition and its implications for juristic authority, and his article on al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī in *Journal Asiatique* earlier in the 1990s. The question of method is absolutely central to any assessment of Amir-Moezzi, not least because the reading of the classical Shii tradition that one gauges from Hossein Modarressi's (reformist) *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Darwin Press, 1993) is quite different. As Robert Gleave has commented in a recent article, the debate between Modarressi and Amir-Moezzi mirrors the perennial internal Shii debate between moderation/shortcoming (*taqṣīr*) and authenticity/extremism (*ghulūw*).

The fourteen chapters (the number itself has significance for the Twelver Shia) of the volume are divided into four sections on: the early emergence of the tradition; the nature of the Imam; the spiritual practice of Shii Islam; and eschatology. Each piece is a wonderfully executed *tour-de-force* based on a careful reading of the relevant texts. As such, they encompass the various aspects of the notion of *walāya* that lies at the heart of Shii thought: the status of the Imams as *walī*, the devotion and intercessionary relationship that believers have with them, and the role of the Imams at the beginning of time and at the folding up of the cosmos at the end of time. It is therefore not insignificant that the pivotal chapter is the one discussing the very notion of *walāya* in Shii thought. Overall, the volume is essential reading for anyone interested in Shii Islam.

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PERSIS BERLEKAMP:

Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam.

xi, 220 pp. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011. £45. ISBN 978 030017060 3.

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The research presented in this book is based mainly upon the analysis of five illustrated *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* manuscripts made between

1280 and 1388. Four contain Zakariya' b. Muhammad al-Qazwini's (d. 1283) Arabic work while the last manuscript has a Persian text composed by Tusi Salmani in the last quarter of the twelfth century. Both works present an inventory of the cosmos from the supralunar spheres to the earth to the constituents of the three kingdoms of nature, including the human being. Qazwini's *'Ajā'ib* in particular, and to a lesser degree Tusi Salmani's work, are best described as medieval encyclopaedias of natural history.

Berlekamp approaches the "Wonders of Creation" by building upon Qazwini's declared intention to inspire wonder about creation, its strange phenomena as well as its most familiar elements such as domestic animals or garden plants. Knowing and marvelling at them, Qazwini had argued, would inevitably lead the contemplative reader to acknowledge the power and providence of God. Berlekamp's focus is on the specific role the illustrations played in supporting Qazwini's intention during the formative phase of the illustrative programme. She aims to prove that – within a hundred years from the late thirteenth to the late fourteenth century – a shift in emphasis "from the cosmic frame to human agency" (p. xi) occurred in this programme and, accordingly, in the perception of the text. Later developments are only briefly dealt with in the epilogue, supplemented by a preliminary inventory of some illustrated "Wonders of Creation" manuscripts. The publication is provided with 95 high-quality illustrations, among them forty in colour.

The introduction places Qazwini's work in biographical and historical context and follows his understanding of key notions like *'ajab* (wonder, bewilderment), *'ajā'ib* (wonders, marvels) and *gharīb* (strangeness). Touching on the manuscript tradition, the author rejects earlier classification attempts and leaves it to future research. While it is indeed problematic to deal with the manuscript tradition of unstable texts like Qazwini's *'Ajā'ib*, Ruska's research on the early phase of transmission should not be dismissed. It would have helped, for instance, to distinguish clearly between the "first" and the "second" Arabic redaction (dated 661 H. and 678 H. respectively in the text). Taking into account his recognition of the crucial Munich codex of 1280 as the oldest manuscript of the second redaction ("Über den falschen und echten Kazwini", in *Studies on Zakarīyā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283)*, II, coll. and repr. Fuat Sezgin, Frankfurt/M. 1994, p. 156) would have solved much of the puzzle, including the omission of the dedication to 'Ala al-Din Juwayni in the second, more popular, redaction of the Arabic text, and clarified the relationship between the Munich manuscript and Or. 14140 of the British Library that represents the oldest extant copy of the first redaction.

Within the pictorial programmes of the five *'Ajā'ib* manuscripts, Berlekamp discerns four groups: iconic and narrative images, mirrored visions and talismanic images. In the following four chapters she analyses the ways in which each group, also called a visual idiom, induces wonder in the viewer. She maintains that although each manuscript contains images belonging to different groups, the above-mentioned shift manifests itself in the preponderance of the latter idioms in the Tusi Salmani *'Ajā'ib* of 1388 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, suppl. pers. 332). In contrast, iconic images dominate earlier manuscripts, the Munich cod. arab 464 and two Inju copies, one dated 1322. The author interprets those illustrations as the visual equivalent of Platonic Forms and very convincingly connects them to Neo-Platonic thinking which permeates both *'Ajā'ib* works.

With its considerable number of narrative images the BL manuscript (about 1300?) reflects a growing interest in this extraordinary event. Although these illustrations complement the iconic idiom rather than replace it, one agrees with the author that they distract the reader from the "timeless constancy of divinely ordained cosmic order" (p. 60). It also makes sense to relate the modification to expectations

of a courtly audience looking for higher entertainment value while marvelling at creation. One may add that the affiliation with a different branch of the manuscript tradition could have facilitated the shift.

Most tellingly, the visual idioms’ “mirrored visions” and “talismanic images” stand for the active role of humans in their relationship with nature. The first group responds to the human wish to view the “unseen” and engages the reader in seeing the wonders of the world with the eyes of spectators present at the spot, the second provides a means to manipulate the cosmic order to his advantage. As the author shows, these illustrations, too, have their origin in Neo-Platonic concepts of the influence of the macrocosm on the microcosm.

Thus, the material Berlekamp presents clearly demonstrates a growing interest in human agency displayed in the pictorial programme of the illustrated “Wonders of Creation” manuscripts of the fourteenth century. Making BnF suppl. pers. 332 the principal witness to this evolution, however, raises the question of compatibility. Its comparison with the Arabic Qazwini manuscripts is affected by the functional differences between Arabic and Persian texts dealing with scientific topics during the period in question as well as by the difference between Tusi Salmani’s and Qazwini’s texts with respect to content and literary devices. Besides, no illustrated copies of Tusi Salmani’s book are known to date from the two following centuries. It would be necessary first to separate the singular characteristics of the Paris manuscript from its genre-typical aspects. Since the fourteenth century was a period of intense and far-reaching experimentation in painting it also seems important to pay greater attention to the evolution of pictorial vocabulary. By establishing the different visual idioms applied in the illustration of natural history compendia and interpreting them in philosophical context, however, the author provides an intriguing approach to this neglected genre that allows us better to understand the functions of these images.

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ALEXANDER KNYSH:

Islam in Historical Perspective.

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Scholars’ production in English of introductory books to Islam seems to have undergone a transition during the past six decades from a “pre-modern” to a “modern” age. The inevitable passing of “pre-modern” versions may be marked curiously, but conveniently, by the appearance of H.A.R. Gibb’s unhappily titled *Mohammedanism: A Historical Survey* in 1949. Its later re-issue as *Islam: A Historical Survey* in 1980 was the publisher’s acknowledgement that times had indeed changed. However, Alfred Guillaume’s *Islam* (1954) and M.Z. Khan’s *Islam* (1962), despite their titles, failed to break new ground in coverage and treatment, while in contrast Fazlur Rahman’s *Islam* (1966) was clearly another insider’s engagement with and contribution to modern approaches and concerns. These observations may be disputed or dismissed out of hand but it would be difficult to deny that over the past three decades or so the market has notably exploded