

white, they are more than fit for purpose, and well arranged on the pages of what is a modestly sized but handsomely produced publication. There is no doubt that Ersoy's book will prove an influential and much-used work among scholars and students of Ottoman art history; but more than that, it deserves to be read by anyone with an interest in the visual and cross-cultural dimensions of global modernity in its formative years. (ur221@cam.ac.uk)

ÜNVER RÜSTEM

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THE ARABIC INFLUENCES ON EARLY MODERN OCCULT PHILOSOPHY. By LIANA SAIF. pp. 278. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2015
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The attractive cover of *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* features a man seated on air and floating above the back of a bull. He is stripped to the waist, wears a turban and loincloth and holds an enormous key. The image is a detail from one of frescoes executed by Francesco del Cossa for the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara in 1469 or 1470. In Hellenistic times the zodiac was divided into thirty-six parts, known as decans, each sign being assigned three decans. What is featured on the cover of Liana Saif's book is the second decan of Taurus, for the month of April, under the governance of Venus. Some of the decan imagery frescoed on the walls of the palace's Hall of the Seasons derived from a magical treatise known as *Picatrix* and *Picatrix* was in turn a thirteenth-century Latin translation of an Arabic magical text, the *Ghayat al-hakim*, or 'Goal of the Sage'. The compiler of the *Ghayat al-hakim* appears to have been an Andalusian *hadith* scholar and magician, Maslama al-Qurtubi (not to be confused with the famous Andalusian mathematician, Maslama al-Majriti). Al-Qurtubi's work was apparently compiled in the tenth century (a century earlier than used to be thought).

The *Ghayat al-hakim* has a long history with London University's Warburg Institute. Helmut Ritter, who had been in close contact with the Warburg Institute's members since his time as a university lecturer in Hamburg (where the Institute was originally based) produced an edition of the Arabic text in 1933, *Das Ziel der Weisen*. The Institute's founder Aby Warburg (1866–1929) had become fascinated by the way in which Renaissance artists rescued the monstrous shapes of the decan figures conjured up by medieval western texts on sorcery and how they were able to reconstitute them in Classical forms and he published an article on the iconography of the Palazzo Schifanoia. Martin Plessner, Fritz Saxl, Frances Yates and David Pingree, all of whom were associated with the Warburg's programme to one degree or another, went on to make important contributions to *Picatrix* studies and Pingree edited the Latin version of the text.

Maslama al-Qurtubi's compilation was one of six key Arabic authorities that had an influence on early modern occultism in Europe. The other five discussed by Saif are the astrologer Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi (787–886), the philosopher and physician Ibn Sina (d.1037), the polymath al-Kindi (d. after 865) whose treatise on rays *De radiis* survives only in its Latin translation, the ninth-century so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (actually anonymous) and the *Sirr al-Asrar* ('Secret of Secrets') a tenth-century mirror-for-a-prince that contained many occult elements and which was also spuriously attributed to Aristotle.

The truth of astrology seemed to be attested to by the Qur'an: "In the creation of the heavens and the earth, in the rotation of night and day, are sure signs for those people possessed of minds". In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle had identified the stars as the efficient causes of generation and corruption.

Al-Kindi and Abu Ma'shar used an Aristotelian model to argue that God causes celestial motion and in so doing affects the lower world. They and other Muslim thinkers were concerned to present astrology as something that could be distinguished from other forms of divination and from sorcery more generally since those had been condemned by the Qur'an.

Similarly, in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe such scholars as Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno and John Dee were at pains to establish astrology's status as a part of natural philosophy and to disassociate themselves from the practice of sorcery and they drew on the Arabic sources in order to do so. Twentieth-century scholarship on these and related European thinkers tended to place greater stress on the influence of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, an assemblage of Greek texts, that was for a long time thought to date from remotest antiquity and to be the work of the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus, a personage who was imagined to be a priestly philosopher. In Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century these tracts were translated into Latin by Ficino and Ludovico Lazzarelli. Renaissance thinkers were eager to invoke the authority of Hermes Trismegistus for their writings on occult matters, since that sage was supposed to predate Moses and some of what he was supposed to have written seemed to cryptically prefigure Christian doctrine. Frances Yates (1899–1981), in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964) and in later publications, took those tributes at face value. But the Egyptian Hermes gave little coherent guidance on what should be the practical basis for the conduct of magical operations or the management of astrological calculations. European writers tended to draw for practical details not on the piously theoretical *Corpus Hermeticum*, but on other occult texts that had been spuriously attributed to Hermes. Often when Hermes was referred to by European occultists it was because he had also featured as Idris, in Abu Ma'shar's *Kitab al-uluf* ('Book of Thousands'), or in the *Ghayat al-hakim* where he had a more practical role as a sorcerer.

Saif's book queries Yates's overstress on the centrality of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in Early Modern occult philosophy. In particular, Yates had exaggerated the influence of Ficino's enthusiasm for the Hermetic and the Neoplatonic on his younger contemporary, Pico. Yates and her followers had also presented Dee as working in the Hermetic tradition, but Saif argues convincingly that Dee took more from the writings of Abu Ma'shar and al-Kindi on astrology. According to Saif: "Hermeticism is also nostalgia for a magician's utopia located in Egypt". Somewhat similarly (in 'Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt', *Studia Islamica* 17 (1983), p.71), Michael Cook has characterised Hermetic history as "teem[ing] with priests learned in astrology and magic, sage rulers, marvellous constructions, talismans, treasures, ancient wisdom and occasional glimpses of monotheist truth". Ancient Egypt was once a beguiling fiction that offered some of the same pleasures as Harry Potter's Hogwarts.

David Pingree (1933–2005), who published two important articles on the *Ghayat* in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, took a thoroughly downbeat view of the book, for he could discern no overarching methodology that underpinned this grimoire. Despite its pretensions to higher wisdom and its pious opening invocation, he found the text to be full of 'nauseous' practices and crude spells which could be deployed for base ends. (Indeed, when I first read the *Ghayat*, its author, with his sinister and gruesome preoccupations, reminded me of the fat boy in *Pickwick Papers*: "I wants to make your flesh creep".) But Saif is not inclined to linger over the creepy or the malevolent in the *Ghayat* or, for that matter, in any of her sources. Not only is Saif unimpressed by Pingree's moralistic verdict on the *Ghayat*, but she goes on to argue that the book's contents are consistent with the kind of astral magic that had previously been developed by such esteemed thinkers as Abu Ma'shar and al-Kindi, in which "the stars and planets are the efficient causes of generation and corruption, and the reasons behind the magical efficacy of all practices regardless of purpose whether high or low".

But were the stars causes or effects in medieval thinking? In *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), translated into English in 1970 as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault set out the premodern 'semiology of signatures', in which the occult properties of things, including the stars and planets, used to be deduced on the basis of perceived resemblances and analogies. In

the semiological version of astrology the stars embody messages that the astrologer can interpret on the basis of 'as above so below', but the stars do not actually influence events on earth. The role of this kind of version of magical thinking can be exaggerated and Saif demonstrates that this theory of correspondences based on resemblances was not incompatible with also giving the stars and planets a causative role in astrology and magic.

Of particular interest (to me at least) is Saif's discussion of the animation of statues as it features in the writings of Plotinus, St Thomas Aquinas and Ficino. Here again Saif takes issue with Yates who pointed out that Ficino mentioned the legendary figure of Hermes when explaining how statues could be animated by intermediaries of the Anima Mundi (the World Soul). Yates took this as evidence that Ficino's occult philosophy was essentially hermetic. But Ficino, who seems to have read *Picatrix* on the subject, doubted that statues could be animated and that intermediaries of the Anima Mundi would be involved in such activity if it took place: "The Arabs and Egyptians ascribe too much power to the statues and images fashioned by astronomical and magical art that they believe the spirits of the stars are enclosed in them... This could indeed be done, I believe by daemons, but not because they have been constrained by a particular material as because they enjoyed being worshipped". Aquinas similarly seems to have believed that the animation of statues, if it happened, would only be through the power of demons and he claimed that this was the opinion of Hermes.

I was surprised to learn that in Arabic occult texts the term *nafs* is used to designate the 'soul', in contradistinction to the *'aql*, or 'intellect', since in Sufism the word *nafs* more commonly refers to the ego in contradistinction to the *ruh*, the 'soul' or 'spirit'. So the Sufi disciple has to struggle against his *nafs*. But the occultists' quite different sense of *nafs* may be an indication of the compartmentalisation of certain lexical items in medieval times.

Readers of Saif's book will need to learn to make themselves at home with such terms as emanationism, ensoulment, transumptive, hylomorphism, eduction, cacodaemon and addressative magic and the book's index is lacunary. But, though *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* is a challenging book which demands much of its readers, it richly rewards the effort. On the book's final page the magician and theologian Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) has provided a concise summing up of its subject matter: "But this is true, this is sublime, but occult philosophy; to understand the mysterious influences of the intellectual world upon the celestial, and of both upon the terrestrial; to know how to dispose, and fit ourselves so, as to be capable of receiving those superior operations, whereby we may be enabled to operate wonderful things, which indeed seem impossible, or at least unlawful when as indeed they may be affected by a natural power, and without either offence to God, or violation of religion". The Frankfurt-school philosopher Theodor Adorno memorably described astrology as 'the metaphysics of dopes'. Notwithstanding this, in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period it attracted the attention of lots of very clever people—and it still does. <irwin960@btinternet.com>

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It is good to see this influential series of introductory texts expand their titles to include more topics within the study of Islam. And for those of us animated by intellectual history, this current offering by