

BOOKS AND BIBLIOPHILES

Studies in honour of Paul Auchterlonie on the Bio-Bibliography of the Muslim World

edited by Robert Gleave

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Review.

Being a librarian myself, it is heartening to learn that Paul Auchterlonie, retired librarian of the Middle East Centre, Exeter University, has been presented with a *Festschrift*; a thing more often than not reserved for university professors than librarians, however ‘academic’ they may be.

The book, entitled *Books and Bibliophiles*, is well presented and is printed and bound to a pleasingly good quality – something also important to librarians. For example, unlike many other publications, this one happily opens quite flat on the desk. It only lacks a general index.

After an introduction by the editor, Professor Robert Gleave, and a look at Paul Auchterlonie’s career as a librarian and as office-bearer of MELCOM (Middle East Libraries Committee) together with a list of his publications by long-time friend and colleague Peter Colvin, *Books and Bibliophiles* is divided into two parts (of six articles each) dealing with ‘texts, contexts, and transmissions’ in the Muslim world and the West respectively.

The opening article (article 2) in part one by Ronald Buckley is a survey of the works attributed to the sixth Shī‘ite Imām, Ja‘far al-Šādiq, and is intended to be an initial outline of the field rather than an examination of the authenticity of the works. Dr. Buckley confines his list of 32 titles (mainly based on information from Fuat Sezgin’s *Geschichte Des Arabischen Schrifttums*, and manuscript catalogues of various libraries) to substantial works which are still extant and is to be thanked for this first attempt. As Dr. Buckley rightly points out, only a detailed examination of the works will show the relationship between them. However, to say as he does that the well-known works *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, and *Kitāb al-Ihlīlajah* are ‘indeed identical’ (p. 22) is not correct. The work known as *al-Tawḥīd* does not mention myrobalan fruit (*ihlīlaj*) at all and was apparently dictated to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī while in Medina, whereas *al-Ihlīlajah*, a completely separate work, was apparently written by al-Šādiq in reply to a letter from al-Mufaḍḍal. The *Tawḥīd* has been printed a number of times including that of Aleppo, 1928, when it was attributed to Abū ‘Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ under the title *Kitāb al-Dalā’il wal-i‘tibār ‘alā l-khalq wal-tadbīr*. (cf. p. 22, item 9).

It would also be interesting to examine the relationship between varying pieces of Qur’ānic exegesis attributed to al-Šādiq and how they compare to the one contained, for example, in al-Sulamī’s *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*, as well as to utilize bibliographies included in the introductions to modern Iranian editions of al-Šādiq’s works which mention many other possible titles to consider for the list.

Article 3 is made up of two essays – 3.1 is an examination by Saud Al-Sarhan (King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies) of six creeds attributed to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) by Ibn Abī Ya‘lā (d. 527/1133), author of the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, and, Dr. Al-

Sarhan says, accepted as genuine by Western Scholars (p. 32). 3.1 is a response to this essay by Professor Christopher Melchert (University of Oxford). After an introduction contextualizing the material, Dr. Al-Sarhan discusses the six creeds of varying size and content and assesses their relationship to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in terms of attribution and as a reflection of his beliefs. Interesting doctrinal points are the discussion of whether God may be assigned a 'limit' (*ḥadd*), the status of the first Caliphs in terms of both legitimacy, and merit, whether theological discourse (*kalām*) is licit, and, of course, the question of whether the Qur'an is created or uncreated, and Aḥmad's response to that post *miḥnah* at the behest of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861). Professor Melchert's response is detailed and thorough, and replete with examples, and he examines Dr. Al-Sarhan's methods and arguments closely and critically, explaining the consequences for scholarship of his [Al-Sarhan's] conclusions.

In the next (the 4th) article, Professor Sajjad Rizvi (University of Exeter) notes that Paul Auchterlonie was instrumental in developing the collections of the Library at the University of Exeter, particularly in the areas of Middle Eastern Philosophy and Shi'ism, two areas closest to Professor Rizvi's own interests. The article proper is an examination of the 'literary' anthologies of Safavid Shi'ite scholar and partisan Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, comparing them to those of classical Arabic authors as well as his near-contemporaries. After providing bio-bibliographical information, Professor Rizvi explains the function of al-Jazā'irī's more literary works both within the broader context of Safavid-Ottoman/Shi'i-Sunni polemical and political relations, and that of the edification and education of his Shi'ite readership, both lay and learned. As such, Professor Rizvi shows how these works of al-Jazā'irī can be a window onto the mindset of the middle to late-Safavid period.

In *Majlis Readings in the Golden Age of Islam* (article 5), a fine comparison between four literary works; Plato's *Symposium*, Xenophon's *Symposium*, al-Mas'ūdī's '*Arabic*' *Symposium*, and Moliere's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, Professor Ian Richard Netton looks at a number of themes at play in the idea of the Greek symposium, the Arabic *majlis*, and the French *salon*, and exposes the framework of a complex interplay of literary and philosophical motifs and ideas, central to which is love.

In *Intellectual Gold? Oxford's Book of Curiosities and its importance for research on the Middle East and the Islamic world*, Lesley Forbes, who was Keeper of Oriental Books in the Bodleian at the time, recounts the fascinating events which surrounded and followed on from the acquisition in 2002 by the Bodleian Libraries of the remarkable manuscript now known as the *Book of Curiosities*. Inspiring more than a decade of serious scholarship, an exhibition, a highly innovative website, not to mention a major publication with a reproduction of the manuscript, an Arabic edition, English translation, study and copious glossaries, as well as many papers and scholarly conversations, this reviewer wonders at the use, perhaps out of modesty, of a question mark rather than an exclamation mark in the title of Miss Forbes' essay.

In the final essay of part 1, Rasheed El-Enany assesses the history of and some aspects of the quality of translations into English of the works of Naguib Mahfouz (d. 2006). Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988 which provided a great stimulus to produce further translations of his works, and indeed, all his 33 novels are now available in English. The quality of these, says El-Enany, can often leave a lot to be desired, and he goes on to discuss several areas where functional and cultural losses occur in translation, and even questions the merit of the 'blanket' translation of all of Mahfouz's works.

Part 2 is almost as eclectic as part 1, and contains articles on European travellers to the Middle East, a reminiscence by the late C. Edmund Bosworth about his time as British editor of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, two articles on the History of Arabic printing in Scotland and the Netherlands respectively, an article (in French) on the Oriental Collections of the National Library of France, and a look at some curious Arabic textbooks from South India.

All in all, this is a varied and edifying collection of essays which contains much in the way of scholarly and historical interest to librarians and academics alike.

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