

fodder rations he received were by no means his sole remuneration as a court poet (pp. 46, 49).

Part 2, “Legacy and controversy” (pp. 102–51), deals with some general features and problems of Ibn Dāniyāl’s art and also falls into three parts: “The making of the Arabic shadow play” relates Ibn Dāniyāl’s poetry to his shadow plays and convincingly argues for dating the plays to his later years, besides discussing other issues such as the heroes’ comic names and the music of the plays. “The ornament of the poetry” focuses on the most prominent stylistic ornaments of Ibn Dāniyāl’s poetry, the *tawriyya* (double entendre) and the *jinās* (paronomasia). “The many faces of a performer” seeks to account for the apparent contradiction between the poet’s wide respectability and the licentious character of some of his poetry and the shadow plays. Guo seems to suggest that the poet’s “libertine” persona was constructed over time (p. 147), but this need not be so, because libertinism was seen as a token of wit and was generally condoned in litterateurs (see Zoltan Szombathy, *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature*, Cambridge, 2013, 247–302).

Part 3 (pp. 155–220) is a translation of the first and longest shadow play, “The Phantom”. The texts of Ibn Dāniyāl’s plays are riddled with thorny lexicographical and philological problems. Apart from the many obscure colloquialisms and slang terms, their difficulty also relates to their often absurd humour and the several passages of nonsense prose and poetry which they contain. It is thus understandable that Guo’s translation is not free from mistakes and flaws, and the author should have made it clearer to the general reader that it is only a tentative rendering (there are several unjustifiable mistakes too, e.g. his rendering *ṣafa’a* as “to slap in the face”). Nevertheless, precisely because of the significant textual difficulties, his translation and the book as a whole are a useful contribution to the study of Ibn Dāniyāl. Much remains to be done to improve and elucidate the extant text of the plays and, more generally, to evaluate Ibn Dāniyāl’s work as a whole and set it in the wider perspective of Mamluk literature.

The book closes with two appendices (pp. 221–8): one on the manuscripts of Ibn Dāniyāl’s shadow plays and poetry; and the other on medieval Arabic sources for Ibn Dāniyāl’s life.

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MICHAEL COOK:

Ancient Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective.

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This impressive book offers a new approach to answering an old question: why did Islam develop a political profile which paved the way to a “pull of Islamism” (p. 336), even turning into militant sectarian conflicts? Is it because Islamic heritage offers resources for political life and political movements? Michael Cook’s answer is a clear “yes”: the Islamic tradition is well disposed towards the expression of modern politics since, for Cook, Islam was and remains primarily a political community. His Islamic case is characterized by: an increase in religiosity; deep-rooted

identity politics; the imposition of social values; an ideal to restore the Caliphate; and a rise in militancy. Comparing the case of Islam with Indian Hinduism and South American Catholicism, Cook argues that these five features are not restricted to Islam, but can be ascribed to any of these traditions, too, yet none of these non-Islamic traditions assemble all of these features. Thus the simultaneous presence of these features characterizes modern Islamicity. Cook suggests that there is a historical logic that links contemporary Islamic self-interpretations based on these five features to what he calls “Islamic heritage”. He defines a religious heritage “as a set of circuits that the politically inclined may or may not choose to switch on or as a menu from which they may or may not choose to make a selection; that is to say, an ancient religion, like a menu, provides its modern adherents with a set of options that do not determine their choices but do constrain them” (p. xii). Consequently, heritages “do change under exegetical and other pressures, but they do so gradually and against considerable inertia – a force whose role in human affairs is by no means to be thought of as limited to physical objects” (p. xv). In order better to profile his starting point, Cook cites Quentin Skinner (*Liberty before Liberalism*, p. 105): “What it is possible to do in politics is generally limited by what it is possible to legitimise. What you can hope to legitimise, however, depends on what courses of action you can plausibly range under existing normative principles”. Cook could also have cited Karl Marx who, in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, stated at the very beginning: “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living”.

For this purpose Michael Cook chooses the way of comparison. As he wants to avoid an imbalance he deliberately compares Islam to the Hindu tradition and the Roman Catholic tradition in Latin America. In order to determine the relationship between religion and modern politics, the author identifies three major subject fields which frame the concept of politics. The first concerns the issue of political and social identity. The second deals with the question of the values from which societal, militant, religious and political forms of social interpretations can be derived. The third topic finally deals with the question of fundamentalism, which Cook skilfully relates back to the first two topics since he considers “identity” and “values” as substantial forms of fundamentalism. The book is rigorously structured along these concepts, and each tradition is treated under the same sub-topics, making the comparative aspect easily comprehensible. Cook approaches the problem by means of a synchronous comparison which connects the three great traditions of Islam, Hinduism and Catholicism. On the other side he uses a diachronic interpretation which puts the originality of the religion into a relation to a modern politics. In a masterly fashion he formulates and elaborates on his interpretation on the basis of a very broad range of research literature; as is to be expected, the nature of the sources varies according to the traditions dealt with: as the focus is to compare Islam to Hinduism and Catholicism, it is natural that Cook treats the Islamic field in much greater detail by referring to an impressive corpus of primary sources. As for India, Cook relies heavily on information derived from the work of French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot, Indologist Pandurang Vaman Kane and Australian Indologist J.T.F. Jordens, and with regard to Catholicism, Cook uses an ample mix of (mainly Spanish) primary and secondary material.

The comparative methodology relies upon correlating interpretations of a multitude of textual evidence. These are extracted from hundreds of sources reconstructing a landscape of idiographic narratives. The choice of evidence confirms the

general assumption that Islamic heritage offers resources for a comprehensive interpretation of the political sphere, far outnumbering the equivalent offers of other religious traditions. Modern Islamic politics is primarily illustrated by portraying activists like Abū A'lā Mawdūdī, Sayyid Quṭb, Sa'īd Ḥawwā and Ḥasan al-Bannā, and “jihadists” such as Ayman az-Zawāhirī and Abū Muṣ'ab az-Zarqāwī. Cook, who tellingly refrains from using any social theory which addresses the problem of relating religion to politics, maintains that there is a strong tendency within the social imaginary of modern Muslim activists to define Islam as political. But is this because Islamic heritage offers the possibility to Islamize politics? Or is it, as Thomas Bauer says in his recent book *Die Kultur der Ambiguität* (Berlin, 2011), because modernity has created a new epistemology of valorizing tradition to justify an unambiguous normativity? Bauer uses the same idiographic approach and likewise bases his research on a very broad range of primary sources. Thus the same evidence can be read very differently. This is also true for Cook's argument that Islam has been a political community since its beginning. Hence the same sources allow radically different answers to the key question of why intellectuals and activists in the Muslim world developed such a distinct political profile. Cook's highly stimulating and knowledgeable reading of Muslims' use of tradition and his answer to the old question will certainly prompt a new discussion about the genealogy of political Islam.

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FARHAD DAFTARY:

A History of Shi'i Islam.

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In view of the significance of sectarian strife and Sunnite–Shiite civil war in the contemporary Islamic world, it seems anachronistic that the thorough and disinterested academic study of Shiite Islam is a comparatively recent phenomenon, roughly confined to the past five decades. Prior to this, the vast majority of Western scholarship drew on heresiographical or otherwise biased sources by Sunnite authors, with the foreseeable result that Shiism more often than not appeared as a heretical or even unislamic sect, as opposed to the seemingly orthodox Sunnite creed. Suffice it to remember what even erudite scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke and Ignaz Goldziher had to say, for instance, about Shiite Quranic exegesis – quoting the former, the latter called it “a miserable web of lies and stupidities” (cf. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden, 1920, p. 309). The first impartial comprehensive account of Shiite Islam, Dwight Donaldson's *The Shi'ite Religion*, appeared as late as 1933, but it was actually only in the 1960s that Shiism moved into the academic limelight as an Islamic denomination in its own right.

All this is summarized in a succinct, if sometimes apologetic, manner by Farhad Daftary in the introduction (pp. 1–24) to his *History of Shi'i Islam*, in which this well-known Ismaili history specialist opens up the horizon considerably and also