

especially since these measurements are rarely used to indicate a precise length.

The appendices provide useful tools for teaching: a bibliography, an annotated list of the sources used by the editors of *Taiping guangji*, and three tables showing different categorizations of the translated stories: by chronology, by their *Taiping guangji* chapter headings, and by theme and topic. An additional key to the latter approach is provided by the general index.

*Record of the Listener* is the work of an individual author, Cong Ellen Zhang, which incidentally mirrors the single-authored, if multi-vocal *Yijian zhi*, since Hong Mai, although he presents himself as the title's legendary "listener" and receiver of stories told by others, has clearly shaped their literary form. Cong Ellen Zhang does not group the one hundred stories she selected according to theme but offers them in the order suggested by the Chinese edition of the *Yijian zhi*. Addressing the question of selection, the translator emphasized that she aimed to provide "a representative sample of Hong's work" (p. xiii) while at the same time choosing texts that have not yet been translated by other scholars (p. xxxvi). Relying on the twenty-five page general introduction as a frame of reference, *Record of the Listener* presents the stories, usually one page in length, without individual introductions and only sparingly annotated. The two-page "Thematic Guide," the only appendix to this book apart from a brief bibliography, allows the identification of some of the topics treated in the stories; an index would have helped to make the rich contents of these stories more accessible.

Zhang translates accurately and produces readable enough texts, although she frequently interrupts their flow with additional information in brackets: often short and useful (identifying dates, places, etc.), but sometimes also cumbersome and either superfluous (e.g., "The father was angry [to learn about his daughter's inappropriate behavior] and planned to move the coffin and burn the body") or confusing to anyone not familiar with Chinese ("the Fiscal Commissioner's office of the Liangzhe [Zhe East and Zhe West]," p. 30). The Chinese measurements used throughout the translations also disrupt the reading experience without adding any benefits, e.g., "fifteen *li* [about 7.5 kilometers or 5 miles] away from where he lived" (p. 13) or "between the *chen* [7 a.m. to 9 a.m.] and *si* [9 a.m. to 11 a.m.] hours" (p. 88).

*Tales from Tang Dynasty China: Selections from the Taiping Guangji and Record of the Listener: Selected Stories from Hong Mai's Yijian zhi* will not only make for immensely useful teaching materials, especially for instructors who want to venture beyond the usual anthology pieces, but hopefully also reach appreciative readers beyond the classroom.

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*Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*. By CHRISTIAN LANGE. New York: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. xvii + 365. \$84.99, £54.99 (cloth); \$29.99, £18.99 (paper); \$24 (ebook).

Christian Lange divides his book—winner of the 2016 British–Kuwait Friendship Society Book Prize—into two almost equal parts. In the first part he examines the textual foundations of Islamic eschatological thinking, while in the second part he moves the attention from textual foundations to the lived reality of Muslim engagement with eschatological and apocalyptic thinking, with particular reference to the twin themes of paradise and hell.

In part one, the first text to be examined for references to paradise and hell is the Quran. Lange points out (p. 37) that "[r]oughly a tenth of the Qur'ān, perhaps more, deals with matters eschatological." He provides precise statistics about the frequency of use of the terms for this world (*dunyā*) and the otherworld (*ākhirā*), making much of this binary divide, which is helpfully presented in two charts. He then reflects on the balance within the Quran between paradise and hell, concluding (p. 46) that "the Qur'ānic landscape of hell is more developed and detailed than that of paradise."

Lange considers the matter of Quranic chronology and observes with circumspection (p. 48) that "whether the actual chronological sequence of suras and verses can be reconstructed, is a matter of controversy among scholars." Notwithstanding that reservation, he proceeds to draw a series of fascinating observations about the developing understanding of the themes of paradise and hell that emerge from a reading of the Quran according to the Nöldeke chronology.

While the decision to begin the discussion of textual foundations with the Quran is understandable, in many ways it represents merely a prolegomenon to the study of eschatological themes in Islamic literature. As Lange observes (p. 71), "as rich as the Qur'ān is in eschatological ideas and images, it only provides the skeleton for the variegated body of texts that form the Islamic tradition of imagining paradise and hell." And just as the Quran pictures paradise and hell in intimately concrete and worldly terms, this is even more the case in the tradition materials. The author proceeds to examine the rich eschatological material in the literature on Islamic tradition writing, from the early formative period, including but not limited to the six core Sunni compilations of hadith, right up to the nineteenth century, taking in the writings of such notable scholars as Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) and al-Suyūfī (d. 1505).

This study then moves from a consideration of tradition material to a valuable examination of the themes of paradise and hell in popular writings. Particular attention falls on the eschatological thinking of al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyā'*, but also considered are popular manuals, much needed given the currency of eschatological

thinking among the Muslim masses down the ages. Rich visions of paradise and hell appear in the ascension narratives associated with Muḥammad's night journey. Due attention is given to the popular genre of *qiṣāṣ al-anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets), which have had such a profound effect in shaping the views of the Muslim masses. These stories rival the hadith traditions for graphic portrayals of the pleasures of paradise and the torments of hell. Lange concludes his consideration of the textual foundations with a detailed study of works by two late medieval Muslim scholars, al-Suyūṭī and al-Majlisī (d. 1699).

In the chapters of part two, the author considers wide-ranging debates regarding the otherworld among diverse Muslim groups. He approaches these debates from three perspectives: cosmology (location, creation, and duration of paradise and hell), soteriology (debates about salvation), and ontology (focusing on the reality of the afterlife). Lange succeeds in capturing the sense of vigorous debate on all of these topics that took place within Islamic scholarship, giving voice to diverse Sunni, Shī'i, and Sufi perspectives, drawing on a vast body of Islamic scholarly literature and demonstrating his erudition in the process.

The eighth chapter of this work is especially interesting. As Lange points out, most discussion in the previous chapters has related to textual material, whether primary sacred text or scholarly writings. In this chapter, therefore, he turns his attention to "representations of paradise and hell translated into tangible spatial and material phenomena" (p. 245), namely, imagery of the twin themes that appear in graphic representation in topography, architecture, and ritual. In the process, he demonstrates clearly that "there is no single Islamic understanding of paradise and hell, a fact that on occasion troubled Muslim scholars" (p. 32).

Lange's consideration of diverse scholarly perspectives has included an engagement with biblical material and Christian writings by thinkers such as Augustine. He also consults modern Western scholarship on Islamic eschatology, including the views of such notables as Tor Andrae, the Jewish orientalist Joseph Horowitz, and the French priest Louis Gardet. This serves to enrich the discussion in a most interesting fashion. Another strength of this work lies in the balance achieved between scholarly erudition and accessibility. The bibliography includes a vast and comprehensive list of primary sources consulted, highlighting the author's scholarly gifts. Similarly, he obviously has an excellent mastery of Arabic, and often draws on his linguistic proficiency; yet he is able to do so in a way that retains the general accessibility of this book to non-specialist readers. This accessibility is enhanced by the visual aids—diagrams and paintings—that occur at intervals throughout the book.

Unusually, Lange makes the counter-intuitive proposal that readers begin not at chapter one but at chap-

ter four "where stock is taken of the vast reservoir of images and ideas about paradise and hell in late medieval Muslim hadith literature" (p. 31). He suggests that only then should they turn their attention to the first three chapters, which deal with the textual foundations. This shows an all-too-rare scholarly concern for reader comfort and accessibility.

Readers who only have time to gain a snapshot of this work would do well to read the introductory chapter (pp. 1–34). It lays out the key themes of the work, the prominent authors and scholarly writers who have contributed to both Islamic thinking on eschatology and Western perspectives on the same, and finishes with a very helpful chapter-by-chapter abstract of the book.

*Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* is particularly pertinent in the early twenty-first century, with the multiplication of Islamist groups preoccupied by apocalyptic thinking and stressing this in their public pronouncements.

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ʿUthmān ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī. *The Sword of Ambition: Bureaucratic Rivalry in Medieval Egypt*. Edited and translated by LUKE YARBROUGH. Library of Arabic Literature. New York: NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. xliv + 261. \$40.

A self-serving, whining, and bigoted appeal by a medieval bureaucrat for a job might seem like a strange choice for a critical edition and English translation, but Luke Yarbrough has done the field of medieval Middle Eastern history a service. In addition to his excellent edition and exemplary translation, Yarbrough provides the reader with a carefully thought-out introduction that places this fascinating, if rather unpleasant, text in its historical context.

Al-Nābulusī (d. 1262) was a bureaucrat in the tax administration of the Ayyubid empire in Egypt. As a result of the machinations of a rival, he says, he lost his job and his family became impoverished. He blames this turn of events on the appointment of unworthy individuals to positions of importance. In particular, he notes the important role played by Coptic Christian bureaucrats in the financial administration of Egypt, and he provides the reader with a long list of historical and literary anecdotes intended to drive home the point that it is unacceptable for an Islamic state to give preference to non-Muslims over Muslims in state employment. Read in isolation, one might get the sense of unremitting Muslim hostility to Christians and Jews. As Yarbrough points out, however, the reality was more complex.

Al-Nābulusī addressed his text to the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Šālih Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, who had