

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-Ṣālih Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, who had

issued a decree enforcing sumptuary laws that required non-Muslims to distinguish themselves from Muslims. "Aha!" one can almost hear al-Nābulusī cry, "Now is my chance to get back in favor with the court." It was also an opportunity to avenge himself on his enemies there, not a few of whom were Coptic converts to Islam. The text in our hands, however, was written and edited over a period of some years, perhaps decades. The final version was completed in 1261 or 1262, based on an internal reference.

On the one hand, al-Nābulusī's text belongs to a long tradition of advice works written by bureaucrats for powerful patrons in an effort to secure promotion or employment. Yarbrough compares al-Nābulusī to the sixteenth-century Ottoman bureaucrat Muṣṭafā 'Ālī, who was similarly venomous in his literary attacks on his rivals. On the other hand, however, Yarbrough argues that al-Nābulusī's text is best understood in the context of two historical developments: the "Sunni shift," which brought about a close alliance between rulers and religious scholars, and the "counter-crusade," in which a series of Muslim rulers fought ideologically charged holy wars against Western Christian invaders and the states they established in the Middle East.

Both of these explanations enjoy some support in the historiography of the medieval Muslim world. Nonetheless, they seem to be of limited utility in explaining the genesis of this specific text. One would like to know more about the history of relations between the Coptic Church and community and medieval Muslim states. It is not clear, for example, how widely read this text was or whether it influenced Ayyubid or Mamluk policy. Tamer el-Leithy has noted the composition of a number of anti-Coptic treatises in the late Ayyubid and early Mamluk sultanates ("Sufis, Copts, and the Politics of Piety: Moral Regulation in 14th-Century Upper Egypt," in *The Development of Sufism in Mamluk Egypt*, ed. A. Sabra and R. McGregor [Cairo, 2006], 75–120). A more detailed history of anti-Coptic polemic would have been beyond the scope of the introduction to this translation, but is necessary to assess the impact of this treatise. In general, the Ayyubid period (1171–1250) was significantly less destructive for the Coptic Church than the first half of the fourteenth century, when much harsher measures were put in place and conversion to Islam was much more common.

These facts raise questions about whether the Sunni shift proposed by Yarbrough really helps us to understand the circumstances in which the text was composed. Certainly, the Ayyubids presented themselves as champions of Sunnism and as holy warriors against the Franks, but there are plenty of examples from this period that show them to be much more flexible than their ideological claims might suggest. More to the point, it is questionable whether opposition to the Crusader states influenced Ayyubid official opinion against the Copts they employed in their administration.

Al-Nābulusī portrays the Copts as a potential fifth column, but generations of Muslim rulers had found Coptic administrators to be useful tools of the state.

This brings us to what may be the supreme irony of al-Nābulusī's text. He is incensed that non-Muslims and peasants are being allowed to occupy the highest positions of government. For al-Nābulusī, state service is a hereditary occupation, and upstarts from inappropriate backgrounds need not apply. Conversion is insufficient to address the issue of religious loyalty, and generations must pass before the descendants of converts can qualify as sufficiently Muslim to be entrusted with such great responsibilities. The irony is that state service, especially in the financial sector, was a hereditary profession in some Coptic families, and had been since the time of the Islamic conquest of Egypt. Although Muslims were increasingly employed in these tasks, during the Ayyubid period many Coptic Christians continued to follow in their ancestors' footsteps.

Inevitably, this text will be read in the context of Muslim-Christian relations in the Islamic world. It paints a significantly less tolerant picture of medieval Islam than one might desire, and Yarbrough is careful to hedge against a literal reading of the text as historical truth. He makes good use of Cornell Fleischer's work on Muṣṭafā 'Ālī (*Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Āli (1541–1600)* [Princeton, 1986]), and it is tempting to refer here to Fleischer's concept of bureaucratic consciousness. Readers of this text and translation will learn much about al-Nābulusī's worldview and about the obsessions of a mid-thirteenth-century Egyptian bureaucrat, but how useful an entrée that is into the world of inter-religious relations in the Middle Ages is open to debate.

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Land Tenure, Fiscal Policy, and Imperial Power in Medieval Syro-Egypt. By DAISUKE IGARASHI. Chicago Studies on the Middle East, vol 10. Chicago: MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, 2015. Pp. vi + 264. \$79.

The state and society of the declining Mamluk sultanate in Egypt and Syria have long been a topic of discussion in the field of Mamluk Studies and among Islamic historians in general. The characteristic features of the sultanate were the leading role of a military of foreign ethnic origin, the institution of military slavery, the introduction of a system of an allotment of arable land in exchange for military service (*iqṭā'*), and a deliberate patronage of Sunni religious culture. All these had roots that went back to the fourth/tenth century but came to a certain culmination under earlier Mamluk rule. The