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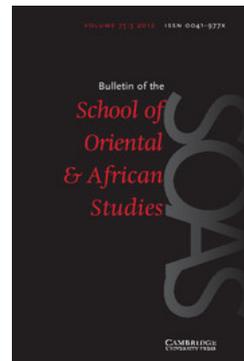
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**FRANKLIN D. LEWIS: Rumi: past and present, East and West: the life, teaching and poetry of Jalâl al-Din Rumi. 3 maps, 1 fig, 686 pp. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000. £26.99.**

George Lane

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## THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

G. R. HAWTING: *The idea of idolatry and the emergence of Islam: from polemic to history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. xvii, 168 pp. £35.00.

For over one hundred years Christian and Jewish scholars, driven by scholarly rather than polemical concerns, have been subjecting the history of the emergence of Islam, as widely accepted by Muslims themselves, to rigorous examination. Over the past thirty years some of the most important and challenging work in this field has come from scholars at London's School of Oriental and African Studies and from those sympathetic to its intellectual milieu. In 1977 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook produced *Hagarism: the making of the Islamic World*, which sought to demonstrate the intimate links between the earliest forms of Islam and Jewish messianism. In the same year, John Wansbrough, applying to the Quran the ideas and methods of modern biblical scholarship, argued in his *Quranic studies* that the establishment of the text and its acceptance as scripture were part of the slow emergence of Islam itself rather than an achievement which has been expressed in the life of the Prophet. Patricia Crone in *Meccan trade and the rise of Islam* (1987) undermined the old sub-Marxist argument about the relationship between trade, changes in trade, and the rise of Islam; she demonstrated the considerable difficulties of accounting for the origins of Islam in seventh-century central and western Arabia. Already, in the previous year, in work with Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph*, she had pushed back in time the likely development of Sunni Islam by indicating the crucial importance of the struggle between the caliphs and the 'ulama in the second quarter of the third Islamic century for establishing the latter as religious authorities. This was an understanding which Norman Calder was able to help consolidate in his *Early Muslim jurisprudence* (1993).

This book lobs another weighty shell into the traditional understanding of the emergence of Islam. Hawting argues that it is unlikely that Islam arose in a rather remote part of Arabia which was, at the beginning of the seventh century A.D., beyond the boundaries of the monotheistic world. Such an explanation is not supported by a thoughtful analysis of the Quran, by much recent scholarship, and by current understandings of how monotheistic traditions emerge; moreover, it is an interpretation which sets Islam apart, which suggests that the Quran is in all likelihood a miracle, a work of revelation. The emergence of Islam, he argues, was the outcome of debates amongst monotheists rather than arguments with idolaters and polytheists. The 'associators' (*mushrikūn*), who are attacked in the Quran, were monotheists whose standards fell below those of true monotheism and hence in polemic were branded idolaters. Subsequent commentators on the Quran and the authors of associated literature, however, interpreted the language of

this polemic literally and came to identify the 'associators' with the idolatrous and polytheistic Arabs of Muhammad's world. Hawting finds some support for his position from a most interesting source within the Islamic tradition. It was the position of the great eighteenth-century reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1796) that the quranic attacks on 'associators' and idolaters were directed at people who regarded themselves as monotheists.

Hawting carries forward his argument in closely argued prose which is throughout fully alert to scholarship in Arabic and in European languages that relates to his case. He embraces, too, the insights which philology, epigraphy, archaeology and modern biblical scholarship can bring to the matter. He begins by setting the context of current scholarship and examines the problems of seeing the Quran, and the tradition which elaborated it, as evidence for the nature of religion in the *jāhiliyya*. He goes on to examine the accusations of associationism and idolatry in the Quran finding them directed at backsliding monotheists. Then, turning to monotheistic polemic in general, he demonstrates how the quranic polemic echoes its practice. In his last three chapters he examines both the nature of the Islamic literary tradition about the idolatrous religion of the pre-Islamic Arabs and what can be learned from evidence from outside the Islamic tradition.

Hawting concludes by asking the question, if his argument about the unsatisfactory nature of the Islamic tradition's description of the *jāhiliyya* is right, and if the Quran itself is much more likely to be the outcome of internal debates amongst monotheists, how is it that the traditional understanding of the rise of Islam came about? He is sceptical of the idea that scholars were misled into understanding the quranic attacks on the 'associators' and idolaters literally. He prefers to suggest that 'one possible reason for the emphasis on the *jāhiliyya*, as it was conceived in the Muslim tradition, as the background to the Koran would be to associate the revelation with the career of Muhammad who was remembered to have been active in Arabia...' This conclusion is put tentatively, and with modesty; its implications are immense.

FRANCIS ROBINSON

FRANKLIN D. LEWIS: *Rumi: past and present, East and West: the life, teaching and poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rumi*. 3 maps, 1 fig., 686 pp. Oxford: Oneworld, 2000. £26.99.

The author states clearly in the introduction to this long overdue volume that his is not 'the

final and definitive biography of Rumi' but if not the final, this biography will surely more than satisfy the needs of both scholars and the growing number of Rumi fans while that definitive biography is being composed. In addition to providing a very thorough biography of the Sufi-poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Lewis has compiled an invaluable cross-referenced source book for the study of not only the work and teachings of Rūmī and the Mevlevi order, but also of the proliferating Rūmī 'industry', both past and present. This is a truly comprehensive book, labelled a 'Rumi bible' by the author, that has led Julie Scott Meisami so succinctly to opine of Lewis in her foreword that 'he appears to have read everything, in every relevant language, both by and about Rumi' (p. xii).

Lewis's biography of Rūmī incorporates not only the life and work of the poet's father, Bahā' al-Dīn Valad, and of his son and successor, Sulṭān Valad, but also of Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq Tirmidhī, Rūmī's early spiritual mentor (d.1241), and of the highly controversial figure, Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī, whose unaccounted disappearance is still the subject of much debate.

The three main sources for Rūmī's life and times, which were written between twenty and seventy years after the 'Maulānā's' death, come under close critical scrutiny. His son, Sulṭān Valad (d.1312), a disciple, Ferīdūn Sepahsālār (d.1295/1340?), and the Mevlevi sufi, Aḥmad Aflākī (d.1260), all wrote hagiographies concentrating more on Maulānā's spiritual influence and the fantastical than on the historically accurate details of his life. Lewis studiously compares and contrasts the work of each of these three intimates along with a wealth of other diverse source material to unravel the mythical and legendary from the plausible and verifiably authentic accounts of Rūmī's life. The discrepancies, the differing versions of events, and the relative weaknesses and strengths of the various sources are all laid out for the reader's benefit while concurrently, Lewis's own conclusions and solutions to this maze of material are also clearly expounded and justified. This pattern of presentation is repeated in all sections of this book and the result is extremely satisfactory. It leaves both the casual and scholarly reader with a clear and conclusive view of what is often a confusing picture of events, and at the same time it gives an account and an analysis of the background and alternatives to this view for the benefit of the scholarly reader.

The contextual details concerning the milieu in which Rūmī lived are a very welcome addition to this study. Lewis provides the fruits of his own research into the work of the mysterious Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī, with his own translations of this hitherto often inaccessible material, from which he gleans a great deal of information concerning both mentor and man. Tabrīzī has often been portrayed as an unschooled *qalandar* by such early commentators as the Herati poet, Jāmī, and anthologist, Dawlatshāh, and later by European scholars such as E. G. Browne, J. W. Redhouse and R. A. Nicholson. Lewis, basing his conclusions on the descriptions found in Sulṭān Valad, Aflākī, and from Shams al-Dīn Tabrīzī's own

writings, has now dispelled these myths and reveals Tabrīzī to have been 'a man well versed in the philosophical and theological discourse of his day, though something of an iconoclast' (p. 137). Lewis's is the first book in English to make use of the biography, a selection of writings and a critical edition of Tabrīzī's lectures produced and edited in Tehran by Muḥammad 'Alī Muvahhid. Also for the first time in English the work and influence of Rūmī's earlier mentor, Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq, is examined at length, and from this study Rūmī's traditional Islamic grounding and Sunni background are emphasized. Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq's work is quoted copiously and his profound influence on Rūmī's development is demonstrated through contextual citations. Rūmī's Islamic schooling was, of course, initiated by his father, Bahā' al-Dīn Valad, himself a cleric and preacher, and Lewis devotes a whole chapter to this often neglected man's teachings, writing, and spiritual life. However, though the three Rūmī hagiographers would paint their saint's father in glowing colours and embellish his career in renown and fame, Lewis debunks these fables and portrays a more modest figure who did eventually find some deserved status and recognition in Konya at the age of 80.

Moving on from the world of Rūmī and his family, Lewis devotes nearly a third of his book to the reception of Rūmī in the East and West, past and present. A chapter of his volume explores the Mevlevi order founded in Konya by Rūmī's son Sulṭān Valad, and which today can boast international following exemplified by the Mevlevi Order of America. However, Rūmī has had a greater impact on the Islamic world than he has on America and Europe, and Lewis has given a valuable overview of this influence on Persian, Turkish and Urdu literature in particular and on the theosophy and thinking of the wider Muslim world in general. Though less profound, Lewis does not dismiss Rūmī's influence in the West and he presents an exhaustive study of the translations and adaptations of Rūmī's work up to the present day even including appearances in cyberspace with a handful of web addresses. In fact, although a tongue-in-cheek attitude can be detected and his own misgivings are not always hidden, Lewis gives a comprehensive survey of the present day 'Rumi industry' in all its aspects, considering the role of Rūmī in the New Age movement and the depiction of Rūmī and Shams Tabrīzī as gay icons as well as Maulānā's entry into popular culture and his enduring presence as the subject of serious scholarly pursuit.

Evident in every page of this welcome volume is the author's deep knowledge and understanding of his subject, demonstrated not least by his own numerous translations of Rūmī's work scattered liberally throughout his text. One whole chapter is reserved for a critical analysis of Rūmī's poetry and includes fifty poems translated and annotated by Lewis.

Franklin Lewis's contribution to his subject is immense and is certainly as yet unparalleled.

GEORGE LANE