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booklet contains various contributions that explain the phe
omenon itself and a bibliography of those works that have been
found in the project (pp. 159-171). The 2004 booklet includes
contributions on the use of Arabic scripts to write
Islam-related texts, both within the People's Republic of
China, such as modern Uyghur (a Turkic language, spoken
by a large non-Han group in western China), Han-Chinese
(among whom there are numerous groups) that are of an
Islamic persuasion), Salar (a non-Han group in northwestern
China), and outside China, such as Spanish, Malay and
Punjabi. Taken together these articles provide a good
impression of the extent of the use of Arabic script for local
languages in the early twentieth century. The illustrations of
original Chinese booklets are usually too small and of insuf
ficient quality, to be of much use for the reader.

Sadly, the research seems to have been carried out in iso
lation of Western scholarship on related phenomena. Thus,
there has been published quite recently an excellent study on
the late sixteenth century revival of Islamic culture in Arabic
and Persian in China proper, in other words not in the tradi
tionally Islamic periphery of the Chinese empire, but among
Han-Chinese scholars of Islamic descent in Shandong and the
Lower Yangzi region.

This study in its turn refers to recent Chinese scholarship that could also have been fruitfully used. Equally important is the fact that various Western writers already noted the phenomenon many decades ago. A 1925 bibliographical survey by Isaac Mason already had some wonderful depictions of the kind of combined Arabic/Chi
nese texts which are the object of this project. Similarly I have found no references to the extensive work by Donald Leslie and others on related topics.

Finally, a very real weakness of the book is the lack of anthropological fieldwork to accompany the search for texts. Despite the possible significance of this kind of material for linguistic and historical linguistic purposes, its real import ance is as a cultural phenomenon within particular religious as well as political contexts. In the 2003 report a table is included (pp. 46-50) which summarizes the rather non-committal answers of those who sold or otherwise handled such booklets. However, given the extremely sensitive nature of Islam in China today, both for its supposed and highly exagger ated connections to terrorism, and as the religion of sev eral large (and still growing) so-called minority peoples, it is not to be expected that merely polite questioning will yield much interesting information on the usage context of such booklets. This would be true of any ethnographer, but even more so of Japanese scholars speaking excellent Chinese who, certainly to local minorities, must look suspiciously like the Han-Chinese that, from their point of view, suppress them and economically compete with them.

A proper fieldwork project is required in order to supple
ment this information. Some of those who grew up with such books in the 1930s and 1940s will still be alive and eager to share their memories, once they have come to trust the researchers, something that takes time and is not easily done on the basis of guerilla-fieldwork. Similarly, these books are again being produced and utilized, no doubt in different ways from in the past. All of this should be studied in order to improve our understanding of the curious hegemonic interrelationships between a once powerful cultural center and again powerful politico-economic system (i.e. China Proper) and a highly powerful religious culture (that we usually label Islam, but is as diverse in China today as it is elsewhere).

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Humanities, September 2006

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FLEISCHHAMMER, M. — Die Quellen des Kitab al-Aghani.
(Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, Abhandlungen
für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Band LV, 2). Verlag
ISBN 3-447-05079-9, ISSN: 0567-4980. € 58.

In the preface the author explains that the present book is an elaborated version of his Habilitationsschrift entitled Quel
lenuntersuchungen zum Kitab al-Aghani, which he presented to the Philosophical Faculty of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in 1965. He did not publish it at the Sax onian Academy in the 1960s because the remaining volumes of the Cairene Dar al-kutub edition were unobtainable. Pub lication in the original form was not planned until later, though there was much interest in the typewritten version. The debate about oral and written transmission in the Middle Ages had, of course, moved on since then, but the author did not make any major changes in his present work.

After the Introduction the author turns his attention in Chapter One to structure and order in the Kitab al-aghani, the Book of Songs of Abu l-Faraj al-Ishbahi. He also deals with the problem of sources, methods and identification. As the other chapters in the book is a schematic overview of various aspects of the Aghani, the discussion of the results and conclusions is presented in this first chapter. Here, he provides a concise survey of the most important results (espe cially on a statistical level). The results are based on the schemes of Chapters Two to Five, which give an exact idea of the number of informants of Abu l-Faraj, i.e. 150 persons, including two women. This figure is then broken down into 51 informants (34%) who were responsible for 96.1% of the isnads (chains of trustworthy transmitters); 21 informants (14%), each with over 100 quotations, featuring at the top in 83.3% of the isnads, etc. The writings of the historian al-Tabari (d. 922) are widely quoted in the Aghani, notably his History of Prophets and Kings with its passages on the mag
hāzi (raids and battles) in the time of the prophet.

Among the long list of other sources (pp. 23-26) are Ibn al-Marzubani’s (d. 921) Tabaqat al-shu’ārā’ (Generations of

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In other words, shorter fieldwork visits on tourist visa, because a formal research permit is unlikely for bureaucratic and/or political reasons.
The book comprises 9 chapters. When explaining the organisation of the work the author herself says (p. 278): "The first five chapters have been designed chiefly to document research on the Aghānī, its author’s life, and the statements he made when compiling the book. Even when the interpretations which I have added can be called into question or turned out to be wrong, the information itself should still be useful to scholars."

Chapter 1 runs through the research to date on the Kitāb al-aghānī; Chapter 2 deals with Abū l-Faraj’s life; Chapter 3 focuses on songs and singers — with remarks on the integration of the song settings into the text — and on Abū l-Faraj’s interesting comments on the transmission and sources of songs, for which he relied on both written and oral texts. One important question is whether the settings can be attributed to a certain composer, which was sometimes the subject of strong disagreement. The accounts of the origin of the 100 songs and Abū l-Faraj’s problems around it are also discussed, along with the compiler’s comments on and appreciation of certain songs, and his attitude towards contemporary singers and musical life.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to "Abū l-Faraj on Poetry and Poets". The poetry is placed in the respective contexts. These include poetry intended for songs, such as the lyrics of the Top Hundred transmitted and evaluated by rawātī (transmitters), songs embedded in narratives, and independently quoted poetry. The profiles of poets and singers are compared and contrasted.

Chapter 5 deals with Abū l-Faraj’s views on prose, the akhbār and the organisation of the material. Reports on sa’j (rhymed prose) and narrative motifs in the book are discussed.