Schippers, A.

Published in:
Bibliotheca Orientalis

Citation for published version (APA):

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In the group of articles on RELIGIOUS STUDIES we find Dominique Urvoy’s article on “The ‘Ulama’ of al-Andalus” [p. 849], Manuela María’s on “Muslim Religious Practices in al-Andalus (2nd/8th-4th/10th Centuries)” [p. 878], Maria Isabel Fierro’s on “Heresy in al-Andalus” [p. 895], and Claude Addas’s “Andalusi Mysticism and the Rise of Ibn ‘Arabi” [p. 909].


The book as a whole concludes with a closure article by the hand of Margarita López Gómez (“Islamic Civilisation in al-Andalus: A Final Assessment”; p. 1059); Biographies of the Contributors [p. 1063]; an Index [p. 1074]; and Maps by Jezus Zanon [p. 1099].

It should by now be clear that I could not discuss all the articles. However, the bulk of the articles give a good and balanced survey of the present state of research. In this connection I would like to mention the above mentioned article by Raymond Scheindlin on the Jews in Muslim Spain, which also deals with the presence of Judeo-Arabic culture in medieval Christian Spain and the article on translation by Charles Burnett. The book will be useful for the coming decennia, although since its appearance many other studies in the field of the history, cultures and literatures of Muslim Spain have come to light. In this connection I do not wish to leave unmentioned the last five monographs which appeared in Brill’s Medieval Iberian Peninsula, Texts and Studies, by O. Zwartjes (Love Songs From al-Andalus, 1997), N. Roth (Jews, Visigoths and Muslims in Medieval Spain, 1994), P.C. Scales (The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba, 1994), G. Wiegers (Islamic Literature in Spanish and Aljamiado, 1994), and by myself (Spanish Hebrew poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition, 1994).

Amsterdam, October 1998

Arie Schippers


This book brings together a number of essays and articles by Rachel Arie which has previously been published in various periodicals, the aim being to make the reader more at ease in rereading the articles, and to focus anew the reader’s attention upon many interesting historical aspects of Muslim Spain. All the articles included in this book have appeared earlier in French and Spanish periodicals. As we know, Rachel Arie is one of the leading specialists in the field of the history of Muslim Spain. The First Chapter (pp. 7-20), entitled “Contacts de civilisation et échanges culturels entre l’Espagne musulmane et l’Espagne chrétienne”, offers interesting material about the contacts between Christians and Muslims in Spain (e.g. the introduction of, among other things, rice, chess and bathhouses by the Arabs) and raises various interesting questions such as the linguistic situation (the co-existence of Romance and vernacular Arabic) and the enduring importance of Arabic in Toledo, even under Christian rule. Rachel Arie presents a global survey of Muslim Spain, a civilization which produced eminent scholars in different fields of sciences (philosophy, mathematics, medicine, astronomy) and art (poetry, singing, music). Spain of this period was a rich ethnic and cultural mix, which influenced not only the rest of the Iberian peninsula but the whole of Christian Western-Europe. The Christian kings imitated the luxury and comfort of the Muslim cities. Likewise they adopted orchestras and singers, clothing, games and tournaments. Rachel Arie also speaks about the Christian Feasts (Christmas, Easter, the Holy Week and the Night of St. John) in Muslim Spain, as well as holidays with Persian names such as Nawrūz and Mihrājân, which are connected with the beginning of the season or the year in the solar year. Many arabisms have survived in the Romance languages of the Iberian peninsula. The work done by Alphonse X the Wise and the translators of Toledo, Seville and Murcia is also discussed, as well as the Arabic influence in Castilian literature and poetry as seen in medieval works such as the Conde Lucanor and the Libro de Buen Amor.

The Second Chapter (pp. 21-44), entitled “Aperçus sur la femme dans l’Espagne musulmane,” covers the position of Muslim women vis-à-vis Christian and Jewish women of the Iberian peninsula. In spite of the scarcity of data, Rachel Arie is able to extract valuable material from the juridical works, historical descriptions and sources and the biographies of some of the poetesses.

Maliki jurisprudence, which dominated al-Andalus, placed women and men on an equal level in the fields of ethics and religion; women were, however, inferior to men in the political and legal domains. This inferiority was confirmed by the Koran, the penal code, matrimonial law and the complex hereditary law. There is a discussion of the marriage ceremony, as well as visits by women to the public bathhouses, and to the cemeteries, the great religious feasts and the vintage feasts. As far as the professions are concerned, women worked as milk merchants, embroiderers, weavers, and in the less favoured classed as servants, singers and prostitutes called kharājīyyāt [i.e. involved in the tax called kharāj] in brothels called kharājī-houses or girls’ houses.
There seems to have existed a greater freedom in the period of the petty kings [reyes de taifas] and particularly during the Nasrid reign of Granada. Also, on the basis of poetic excerpts, there are descriptions of the garments, perfumes and jewels of the Andalusian women. Women were instructed in sciences such as calligraphy, poetry, religious sciences, medicine, law. Some of the verses by poets are quoted.

The Third Chapter (pp. 45-52), entitled “Un lettré hispano-musulman du Haut Moyen Age: Ibn 'Abn Rabbib,” gives a complete survey of all the works and poems and facts of his life. Lévi Provençal included in his evaluating judgement of 1953 about Ibn 'Abd Rabbib the remark by the famous Buyid vizir al-Sâhib Ibn 'Abbâd about his main work, the 'Iqd al-Farîd (“Unique Necklace”): “It is our merchandise which is sent back to us,” which implies that the western author took everything from the East. However, opinions about the value of Ibn 'Abd Rabbib’s work have varied. Similarly, judgements have varied as to the poetry of Ibn 'Abd Rabbib, especially his urjîzû (i.e. poem in rajâz metre on the history of Muslim Spain). Rachel Arie gives an overview of all these opinions spanning the last century. Thus, the points of view of R. Dozy, F. Pons Boigues, C. Brockelmann, A. Gonzalez Palencia, H.G. Farmer, and G. Wiet are reviewed. She also mentions the somewhat negative opinions, by Jibra'il Jabbar and Continente respectively, from the two editions of his personal and love poetry. Rachel Arie comes to the conclusion that, although the poet is influenced by the great oriental poets, he cannot be accused of plagiarism. She also quoted the opinions of Cowl, Nykl and Monroec. The latter is convinced of the influence of the eastern caliph Ibn al-Mu'tazz upon the historical urjûza of Ibn Abd Rabbib and shows his disagreement with Ribera who considered the urgûza to have been influenced by Visigothic epic poetry. María Jesús Rubiera Máté, in her literary history which appeared in 1992, does not even find this poem very epic.

The Fourth Chapter (pp. 53-64) entitled “Les minorités religieuses dans le royaume nastride de Grenade,” again deals with the relations between the three religious groups, Muslims, Jews and Christians. Arie discusses the position of the Christian minority — the mozarabes — during the Nasrid reign. There were Christian elements, renegades, who took refuge to Granada. A small group of Christians had remained in al-Andalus, after the persecutions of the 12th Century, taking care of the land and paying a legal percapita tax at the beginning of the 14th Century. Another group consisted of Castilian cavaliers in the service of the kings of Granada. Some missionaries were sporadically present. Also present were a large number of captives. Some of these, having converted to Islam, occupied important posts in the Nasrid administration, but the majority were deprived of their freedom, and were dependent upon redemption. Finally, Arie mentions the Christian merchants from Castile and Aragon and the prosperous Venetian and Genoese colonies. As far as the Jewish presence in Granada — which dates back to Roman times — is concerned, they were protected from persecution and intolerance, under the Nasrids as they had been earlier under the Umayyads. Moreover, the Jews had an important role in politics during the Zirids of Granada (eleventh century). Little information is available, and nothing is known about the internal organization of the Jews. The author offers some data about the bearing of yellow badges by the Jews for purposes of fiscal control, and provides some interesting notes: Muhammad V saved the life of the Jews of Jaén when he took this town in 1367 and evacuated 300 families to prevent them falling into the hands of Henri de Transtamare. From 1391, following the killings of Jews in the Christian kingdoms, many survivors were able to find refuge in the kingdom of Granada. As far as demography is concerned, Arie estimates their number at 1,500 persons in the last years of the 15th Century. She demonstrates the significant extent to which Jewish intellectuals contributed to scientific, economic and administrative activities during the Nasrid reign. One of the outstanding Jewish intellectuals in 15th Century Granada she mentions is Sa'adyah ibn Dannân, who also wrote Arabic poetry.

The Fifth Chapter (pp. 65-82), entitled “Les échanges culturels entre le royaume nastride de Grenade et les pays musulmanes de la Méditerranée,” is also about intercultural exchange. Firstly she discusses the Andalusis who travelled to the East in order to visit the Holy Places of Islam and followed lessons of the most famous scholars to gain a diploma. Due to the great Christian Conquests in Spain, from the 13th Century onwards there was a conspicuous emigration to the Maghreb of poets such as Ibn Sahl, scholars such as the historian Ibn al-Abbâr and literary figures such as the members of the Banu Sa'id family. Others went to Egypt, where they commented and propagated their juridical and other knowledge. On the occasion of the pilgrimage to Mecca or during journeys in search of wisdom and science, many Andalusis frequented scientific circles in the East and The Maghreb. Some of them returned to their native country, while others emigrated. Rachel Arie enumerates and presents the most interesting figures, and focuses on certain great Andalusian travelers who practised the riblah genre and reminded us of travelers from the East who left us such captivating descriptions of Muslim Spain. Finally, she describes the final situation of the Nasrid reign and the last Andalusian emigrants.

The Sixth Chapter (pp. 83-106), entitled “Boabdil, sultan nastride de Grenade: le personnage historique et la figure littéraire,” presents us a complete picture of Boabdil, the last Nasrid prince of Granada, as a historical and a literary personality. First the author offers a survey of the history of the last years of the kingdom of Granada. She then discusses both the physical and the moral portrait which we find in the Romancero, whose many romances lack authenticity. She also deals with the negative and untrue interpretation of the historical truth by Ginés Pérez de Hita in his Las Guerras civiles de Granada. She dwells upon the figure of Boabdil as seen by the Romantics — Spanish as well as French — of the past century (Chateaubriand, Théophile Gautier), and by the American Washington Irving. Finally, she refers to an extensive poem by Louis Aragon, entitled Fou d'Elsa, published in 1963, which tries with great originality to rehabilitate the person of Boabdil without using either the Romancero or the Spanish literature of the Golden Age. Nor does he try to idealize him, as did the Romantics.

This book presents us in a few hundred pages with the most important facts about the history of Muslim Spain, with particular focus on the socio-cultural facts and all the aspects dealing with the relationship between the different ethnic and religious groups during the seven centuries of the Muslim presence in Spain. We are grateful for Rachel Arie’s very eru-

Dr. Bottcher's study — originally published as a dissertation presented in 1997 to the University of Freiburg in Germany — contains a meticulously detailed, occasionally somewhat encyclopaedic, description and analysis of how Syria's official Sunni Islamic institutions were gradually brought under full control of the Ba'th regime which came to power in 1963. She recounts how various of these religious institutions managed to survive and develop by way of a compromising symbiosis with the Alawi-dominated secular Ba'th regime.

Bottcher analyses the developments and changes in various Syrian Islamic institutions, describing organisational authority structures, relevant posts in ministries, the administrative apparatus, the higher Awdaf Council, the institution of muftis and grand muftis, the position of preachers, imams and mosque teachers, the place of mosques in political life and religious education, the Hafiz al-Asad Qur'an institutes, the Shari'a Faculty of Damascus University, etcetera. She furthermore deals extensively with the position, background and teachings of the Syrian Grand Mufti, Shaykh Ahmad Kaftaru, whose religious centre Majma' Abi al-Nur is described by her as "the largest 'Islamic laboratory' which built a Sufi movement with support of the state." (p. 219). Bottcher concludes that Shaykh Kaftaru's Naqshbandiya-Kaftariya Sufi order can be considered as the organisational backbone of Syrian "state Islam." (p.149).

In contrast with Syria's Islamic opposition, Shaykh Kaftaru's Kaftariya movement has taken an "extremely friendly position towards the Shi'i" (p. 206), trying to build a bridge between Sunnis and Shi'is in a way which could be seen as a conscious effort to put the Alawi-dominated Ba'th regime at ease.

Bottcher notes that the strength of Ahmad Kaftaru is at the same time his weakness: his willingness to cooperate and compromise with the Ba'th regime also discredits him in the eyes of the Islamic opposition and many others in Syria: "He has neither support in the Ministry of Awdaf, nor among the Syrian Ulama. Similarly, the Kaftariya has little support among Syrian society." (p. 220). Bottcher concludes that whatever precautionary measures President Asad has taken, his "avalanche walls" may nevertheless be unable to ultimately prevent "Ba'th Islamists" from forming a (temporary) coalition with other Islamic forces with the aim of seizing power (p. 228).

To some extent the Ba'thist governmental domination of religious institutions is nothing but a continuation of a long tradition, which also existed under Ottoman rule and before. Different from Ottoman times, however, the Ba'th regime preferred to have a Sunni Shaykh as Grand Mufti who lacked a strong following among the local Sunni establishment and who might therefore be used as a counterweight against, for instance, the traditionally strong Damascene Sunni establishment.

Bottcher observes that the aim of the strategy of the Ba'th regime was not just to control the religious administration, but also to transform it into a powerless instrument. In addition to changing the structure of official Islamic institutions in this sense, the ruling Ba'thists also filled the various key religious functions with personalities who were expected to be cooperative and willing to support their regime (p. 65).

Bottcher discovered from an internal memorandum circulated in 1989 that Ba'thist control over Islamic life in Syria reached such proportions that the Ministry of Awdaf did not only prescribe the central themes of the Friday sermons, but for some specific provinces even dictated their full text (pp. 100-101). It is not fully clear why some provinces have been supervised more strictly than others.

Whereas Bottcher has thoroughly studied the official Sunni Islamic structures and establishments, she does by far not deal as extensively with the other Islamic communities in Syria, such as the Alawis, Druzes and Isma'ili. To this reviewer this was somewhat disappointing, because members of these communities have played — as is fully acknowledged by Bottcher — such an important role during the Syrian Ba'thist era, Alawis in particular. Nevertheless Bottcher provides interesting insights in their respect. She notes for instance that in certain Syrian circles it is customary to speak on purpose of "five" instead of four Islamic law schools: Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali and "Shi'i", so as to take account of sensitivities among the predominantly Alawi rulers of the country. Without much further comment, Bottcher follows the official position of today's Alawi religious leaders that Alawis are in fact "Twelver Shi'i" or "Ja'faris" Muslims. In line with this view, the concept of "Alawis", "Twelver Shi'i" and "Ja'faris" are mostly used interchangeably in the book. Bottcher notes that in areas with a "Twelver Shi'i" or Isma'ili population like Lattakia, Salamiya, Haffa, etc., there are apparently Shi'i muftis. These constitute a paradox in the Sunni Ifta' system, because such an institution does not exist in Shi'i law. Making any distinction between Sunni and Shi'i Ifta' would be contrary to Ba'thist ideology which officially aims at eliminating sectarian differences and discrimination. In this spirit the first Mufti Conference in Damascus in 1980 reportedly even recommended to do away with the "distinctions that colonialism had created between Islamic law schools." (!)(pp. 71-72).

Syrian parlance of "five" Islamic law schools is not reflected in daily practice, however, as Bottcher notes for instance that the Shafi'i Mufti of Aleppo used to issue fatwas according to "all four law schools" (p. 75), thus being "open minded" towards the three other Sunni schools, while ignoring the fifth "Shi'i" school. The fact that the Grand Mufti of Syria continues to be officially considered as the representative of "all Muslims" in the country, including the Sunnis, Alawis, Isma'ilis and Druzes (p. 145), does not take into account that many, if not most Syrian Sunnis, do not even consider the members of these other Islamic communities as real Muslims.

This is the first time that an academic work with such depth has been published by a western scholar on the earlier mentioned subjects. The reader is repeatedly confronted with a lengthy mass of data, including for instance the detailed