that early Shi'i scholars were desperately trying to support their views with little regard for what God may have intended, which of course, is not exactly what Bar-Asher is trying to prove. This is not a necessary component of his argument and may easily have been left out. An alternative approach would be to treat the scripture as a “silent text” which gains meaning and voice only through interpretation. Hence, the issue of whether or not these are “correct” interpretations is eliminated altogether. This avoids the pitfalls of assuming that the text has a simple and clear meaning that can be understood by the average reader in an objective way. This being said, a distinction must be made between Bar-Asher's treatment of interpretations of the Qur'an and his cautious treatment of historical accounts such as the supposed dialogue between the Shi'i Imam al-Baqir and the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. It is important to treat such historical accounts as historical documents which require verification (as indeed Bar-Asher does), because they represent historical events that are, at least to some degree, verifiable unlike the meaning of the scripture.

This study is very thorough in its scope and very deep in its analytical treatment of texts. Throughout, Bar-Asher remains faithful to the original Arabic texts. In most cases, when he quotes from the sources he also provides the original Arabic words or phrases to give textual support. He is also conscious of the important role played by historical context in the evolution of ideas. It is a very difficult project that is carried out quite well. Bar-Asher's book is a must for anyone interested in the early development of the Shi'i tradition.

Kamran S. Aghaie


The publication of Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics, the 29th volume in Brill's distinguished series on Islamic History and Civilization, is another indication of the maturation of Sufi studies. The articles were presented at a conference on “Sufism and its Opponents”, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, from May 1–6, 1995. An impressive group of scholars representing European, American, Turkish, Algerian, Lebanese, Senegalese, Japanese, South African, and Iranian institutions participated. While the majority of the articles are in English, eight are in French, and one is in German. The meticulous scholarship of the thirty-six articles included in this collection makes it a necessary addition to all research libraries dealing with Sufism in particular and Islamic studies in general.

The topic of opposition to Sufism has been receiving more attention lately. In the past year alone two significant volumes were published: Elizabeth Sirriyeh, Sufis and Anti-Sufis (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon,1999) and Alexander Knysh, Ibn 'Arab in the Later Islamic Tradition (Albany: SUNY, 1999). The above works focus respectively on anti-Sufi rhetoric in the modern period and the embattled legacy of one Sufi intellectual, Ibn 'Arabi. Islamic Mysticism Contested distinguishes itself by offering the most impressive survey of responses of “contestation” to Sufism in a wide range of geographical and cultural areas. For the first time, the “contested” Sufi presence in sub-Saharan Africa, Maghrib, South Asia, Nile-to-Oxus region, Central Asia, Subcontinent, China, and
South Eastern Asia are brought together in a single volume. This, no doubt, is an impressive achievement of the conference and the edited volume.

Indeed, the most helpful contribution of *Islamic Mysticism Contested* is to move beyond the rigid and essentialized categories of “Sufism” and “anti-Sufism” and to document the fluid responses to Şûfîs in a wide range of time periods and regions. As a consequence, the all too facile dichotomy between 'ılamî and Şûfîs is problematized and deconstructed. The conclusion reached, which has been reiterated more recently by Carl Ernst in his *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), is that Şûfîs and opposition to Şûfîs are not transparent and “given” categories: they must be defined and “constructed” by a group. The value of this book is in documenting the multi-faceted constructions of anti-Şûfî rhetoric.

Following an introductory essay by the editors and a useful essay by Van Ess, the first section of the volume presents “Perimeters and Constants” (essays by Böwering, Sobieroj, Chodkiewicz, Madelung, Peskes, and Radtke). The subsequent sections are divided geographically. The next section focuses on “al-Andalus, North Africa, and the Middle East”, and includes essays by Fierro, Cornell, Homerin, Filali, O’Fahey, Luizard, and De Jong. Particularly noteworthy here are essays by Cornell and Homerin. The next section focuses on Africa, and features essays by Kane, Loimeier, Umar, and Naudé. No doubt much of the information regarding the presence of Şûfîs in Africa, and the “contestation” of that presence, will be new to many scholars of Şûfîs. The next section features familiar experts of Şûfîs in the Indian Subcontinent: Ernst, Gaborieau, and Arthur Buehler, and Bruce Lawrence (who suggested the title for the edited volume).

The subsequent section, one that links together the worlds of “Central Asia and China” again breaks new ground by extending discussions of Şûfîs into the Chinese milieu. Featured are essays by Deweese, Gross, Hamada, Lipman, and Cherif-Chebbi. The next region, titled “Anatolia, Iran, and the Balkan” has been analyzed through presentations of Ocak, Pourjavady, Bayat, and a joint article by Clayer and Popovic. The last section, one devoted to the “Malay-Indonesian World” features pieces by Azra, Steenbrink, Van Bruinessen, and Kraus. The allotting of four articles to this section is a refreshing change from many contemporary surveys of Sufism that tend to skip South Eastern Asia altogether after the obligatory nod to Hamza al-Fansûrî.

The recent history of Islam has witnessed two vastly different movements that have attempted to divorce Şûfîs from its Islamic origin. On one hand, contemporary Islamic “reformists” have sought to “purify” Islam by excising from it elements they deem to be foreign and alien: Şûfîs, Shi‘ism, neo-platonic philosophy, pilgrimage to saintly shrines, etc. On the other hand, certain contemporary spiritual movements in the West seek to divorce Sufism from its Islamic roots and proclaim it as a universally applicable mode of spirituality. Both attempts would have seemed oddly out of place to the overwhelming majority of Şûfîs and religious scholars in a pre-modern context, who could have no more imagined a Şûfîs outside of Islam than an Islam completely bereft of a Şûfî dimension. Even those who offered the most vehement critique of Şûfîs in the pre-modern period were not calling for the dismissal of Şûfîs as a whole: Ibn Taymiyyah (the would-be intellectual forefather of contemporary salafîs) wrote a commentary on the *Futûh al-Ghayb* of ‘Abd al-Qâdir Gîlânî, and was himself initiated in the Qâdirî *tarîqah* (George Makdisi, “Ibn Taymiyya: A Şûfî of the Qadîriya Order”, *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, 1 (1973), pp. 118–129). The critiques of Ibn Taymiyyah
and Ibn Jawzī and Ibn Jawzī were not aimed to dismiss Ṣūfism in toto, but to revise certain aspects of practices associated with the Ṣūfīs. Not infrequently, the Ṣūfīs themselves also criticized many of the same practices.

While the volume does pay attention to the first strand named above, that of salafīs, the omission of the second strand (Ṣufism in the West) is also problematic. Some of the most vigorous anti-Ṣūfī polemics today are expressed in Europe and North America, in response to the above mentioned Western Ṣūfī groups. Academic studies of Ṣūfism continue to shy away from a serious study of American Ṣūfism. When these phenomena are addressed, they tend to be classified— and quickly dismissed—as “New Age”, “distortions”, “pop spirituality”, and “bogus”. The classical dismissal of Western Ṣūfism was L.P. Elwell-Sutton’s article, “Sufism and Pseudo-Sufism” in Islam in the Modern World, eds. Denis MacEoin and Ahmed al-Shahi. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983). It is not my contention here to either affirm or deny the spiritual “authenticity” of any of these groups; indeed the whole question of an academic scholar judging the “authenticity” of spiritual communities raises a number of interesting problematic questions. However, my objection is from a more sociological perspective: tens of thousands of individuals in Europe and North America have formed communities along lines of what they have identified as Ṣūfism. Others have critiqued them for their loose following or even the complete abandonment of the Shari‘ah. Whatever our own estimation of the “spiritual worth” of these groups, surely the existence of these groups, and the polemics they generate, are social realities worthy of serious academic treatment. One may legitimately ask whether in this case it is not the very Western scholars, who are to study the phenomenon of Ṣūfism, who are acting to contest an expression of Islamic mysticism! The inclusion of articles on polemics against European and American Ṣūfism would have gone a long way towards bringing academic attention to this far too neglected area.

Not even a work which surpasses 800 pages can completely cover all the relevant areas, and the editors themselves acknowledge a few areas of shortcoming (p. 759): “The Middle-East is under-represented, while other areas, e.g. East Africa, Republican Turkey, the Volga-Ural region, and the Caucasus, are not covered at all”. While even more puzzling is the absence of articles dealing with the Safavid era in Iran. The recent articles of Leonard Lewisohn, Andrew Newman, Terry Graham, and Sholeh Quinn in The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism, Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, eds. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999) along with the ongoing scholarship of Kathryn Babayan are a testimony to the vitality of this field. The absence of articles dealing with this important time period is a significant omission, as the editors themselves acknowledged.

There is, however, another omission whose absence impacts a much larger number of articles: colonialism. The editors themselves admit (p. 759) that “Opposition to Sufism by the colonial powers is touched upon in a number of papers, but receives a far from comprehensive treatment”. No doubt the opposition by the colonial powers would have been an important insight, indeed. However, more pervasive has been the response to colonialism of many Muslim reformers who have sought to identify areas of Islamic thought and practice that they hold accountable for “weakening” Islam. It is these areas that they hold responsible for the collapse of İslām before European colonial domination. Time and again these reformers returned to a few predictable themes: “cult of saint-worship”, metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī, institutions of tariqab
Sufism. In these cases, colonialism is not directly opposing Sufis. However, it has contributed to the creation of a much wider context that has led many Muslim “reformers” to identify areas of Islamic thought in need of “purification”. Many of the critiques posed by the Wahhābī Sa‘ūdī, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the Jamā‘āt-i Islāmī in Pakistan, etc. against Sufism need to be contextualized in a much wider socio-historical reality that naturally includes a colonial and post-colonial experience. This context has not been adequately situated in this volume.

The most frequent fate of edited works such as *Islamic Mysticism Contested* is that the scholars working on a particular area (e.g. Indian Sufism, Persian Sufism) will refer to the essays in their own sub-specialty, and bypass important and other related areas. However, they provided indices for names, places, and concepts provide opportunities for intriguing comparative work across temporal and geographical areas. One could easily trace various polemics involving recurrent terms such as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, *dākhr*, *fiqh*, *kafir*, *shirk*, and *taqlīd*.

As with many hardcover books published in the academy and by Brill, the sheer cost of this book will restrict its circulation to research libraries. The volume’s exorbitant cost would seem to guarantee the book an honoured place in the long and glorious list of books photocopied *in toto* by interested scholars and students of Sufism. A comprehensive bibliography would have been appreciated and contributed to the collection of essays.

Even with the above shortcomings, that is, the few omissions, lack of attention to colonialism as a context for Sufi polemics, and the high cost of the book, it will become a classic in the area of documenting polemics against Sufism, and a valuable reference source in Sufi studies. It is strongly recommended for purchase by all research institutions focusing on Islamic studies.

Omid Safi

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