received notions of gender relations. However, in other cases, such as in contemporary Iran, Islamist women’s groups are themselves in the forefront of demanding a wide range of rights of which they have been denied by tradition, grounded in their own vision of “Islamic feminism”. Again, Lawrence insists, the implications of Islamist activism for women must be seen in each local context separately. Broad generalizations here, as elsewhere, can be dangerously misleading.

The final section of the book deals, albeit all too briefly, with contemporary debates among Muslims on the much-misunderstood Islamic doctrine of jihād. Only a minority of Muslim scholars would see Islam as sanctioning offensive violence against people of other faiths. Lawrence writes that most Muslims would see jihād as essentially a defensive war on behalf of the oppressed. Others, such as Malaysia’s Mahathir Muhammad, would extend its scope to include struggling for the economic advancement of the poor, through peaceful means. One wishes that Lawrence had elaborated on this point, tracing it to the traditional Islamic debate on jihād as connoting all forms of struggle, not necessarily violent, to implement God’s Will on earth. In this broad understanding of Islam, working for the poor, providing them succour in need, could well be seen as the primary form of jihād. Or, as the Sufis would say, the principal jihād is the struggle against the basic passions of the ego.

This book is a timely contribution to an ongoing debate on the relationship between Islam and violence, a debate that has shed more heat than light. It cannot afford to be ignored by anyone interested in the relations between Muslims and people of other faiths.

Yoginder Sikand


In Muslims, Jews and Pagans, Michael Lecker argues for a new approach to the history of early Islamic Medina [Madinah]. Instead of concentrating on events, as has been customary among modern historians working on the period, he
proposes to undertake a critical analysis of that history by focusing on a specific region or geographical area, and by reading the pertinent historical sources in the light of what can be learned of the geography, the topography and the clan structure of the area. The area chosen for special attention in this study, the ‘Āliyah or “highlands”, is located just to the south of Madīnah and slightly to the east, and is bounded on the west by the Sāfīlah or “lowlands”. The Qubā’ district, which occupies an important part of this study, is located in the western part of the ‘Āliyah. In the late pre-Hijrah and early post-Hijrah periods the ‘Āliyah had a mixed population, part Jewish and part Arab. The more powerful of the Jewish clans, the Banū Nadīr and the Qurayzah, were located in the eastern ‘Āliyah; they owned the fortresses of the area and some of the choice plots of land. The Arab clans of the area belonged almost entirely to the tribe of Aws who were linked to the Jewish tribes by an alliance forged sometime prior to the Hijrah.

A point of special interest to this study is the fact that a substantial part of the Aws converted to Islam at a relatively late date, viz., sometime after the Battle of the Trench (Dhūl-Qa’dah 5/March 627), and that even after their conversion, a significant part of the tribe continued to resist the political authority of the Prophet for some time, indeed, until as late as 9/630 when, following the expedition to Tabūk, their vital centre, the Dirār Mosque, was destroyed on orders from the Prophet. In rather stark contrast to the behaviour of the Aws, the Khazraj had committed themselves to Islam already before the Ḫījra. Two of the clans of the Aws, the Banū ‘l-Salm and the Sa’d b. Murrah, did convert before the Battle of the Trench, but Lecker thinks this can be explained, in part, by the fact that both had previously moved out of the eastern ‘Āliyah and, from a date early in the Medinan period, were physically separated from the rest of the tribe.

Lecker maintains throughout this work that a knowledge of the geography of Madīnah and of the distribution of its clans makes it possible to move beyond the historical accounts provided by the chronicles and the sīrah-literature. A major reason behind the late conversion of the Aws — a crucial factor in the politics of Madīnah — has to do with a little noted geographical fact, viz., that they lived in an area beyond the Prophet’s reach and were allied with the Jewish tribes of the area. Had it not been for the location of the Aws and the fact of their political ties, they would probably have converted earlier. It is not accidental, in Lecker’s view, that after the collapse of Jewish resistance following the Battle of the Trench the Aws did choose to convert. By making use of the geographical details provided by the sources, especially the non-sīrah sources that have become accessible to scholars in recent years, and by
carefully reconstructing the clan system, Lecker believes it is possible to arrive at a reasonably reliable picture of what happened and why it happened.

By making a judicious use of geographical and genealogical data, Lecker is also able to throw new light on the affair of the Dirār Mosque. Contrary to the view presented in the sirah-sources, Lecker offers compelling reasons to believe that the Mosque had been constructed already before the Battle of Badr and that it continued to be in use until shortly after the expedition to Tab.uk when it was finally destroyed. Lecker is able to show that the Mosque was located in the western ‘Āliyah, more specifically in the Qubā’ quarter, and that it had been constructed by influential clans among the Aws as a centre for those parts of the tribe who were determined to resist the political authority of the Prophet. Lecker further argues, on the basis of geographical and genealogical information, that the opposition to Muhammad symbolized by the Dirār Mosque came from older elements of the population of the western ‘Āliyah, more specifically those of the Qubā’ quarter. This, in turn, would suggest that the Prophet’s support in the area came from elements of the population that settled there more recently and had remained on the margins of the social and political life of the district. What the evidence makes quite clear is that as late as 9/630, there were still many in Qubā’ who, despite their embrace of Islam, remained opposed to the political authority of the Prophet. Lecker maintains that the Dirār Mosque had not only been a place of gathering for those who were active in the resistance, but also a symbol of their tribal independence from the Prophet’s territorial base in the Sāfilah. The destruction of the Mosque at the end of 9/630 marked the abrupt end of that independence.

Lecker concludes that the delayed conversion of a large part of the Aws, and their continued political opposition even longer, is an historical fact that can no longer be in doubt. Moreover, the reasons for both the delayed conversion and the continuing opposition can only be adequately accounted for by paying careful attention to the configuration of the clan system and the geography of the region. Although his reconstruction of the history of the period diverges at certain points from that presented in the chronicles and the sirah-sources, Lecker believes that his findings, despite the points of divergence, do nonetheless confirm the trustworthiness of the broad contours of the history presented in these sources. Lecker is convinced that the arguments advanced by radical critics over the past several decades collapse in the face of a careful, i.e., detailed, critical examination of the sources.

Conclusions of a similar sort have been reached by a number of other historians of early Islam, who, working independently, have come to the conclusion that while the historical sources may frequently be wrong on
points of detail, the overall picture presented is generally reliable. The work of Harald Motzki, Marco Schöller, Adrien Leites and Gregory Schoeler, to name but a few, favours a somewhat more nuanced assessment of the early Arabic sources, but one that insists on taking them seriously. Lecker’s work is an important contribution to the history of early Islamic Madīnah but also to the study of early Islamic history more broadly through its methodological insights. Lecker rightly cautions, however, that his work on Madīnah represents only a beginning; much more remains to be done, but it can be said that in important respects his work points the way for future research.

Merlin Swartz


It would not be an exaggeration to state that no other mystic poet in the Persian language can match the popularity of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (603–672/1207–73) in the Muslim lands where Persian is, or has been the language of intellectual discourse. His poetry, especially the *Mathnawī*, became the subject of interest from Asia Minor to South Asia in Rūmī’s own lifetime. If the friendship between Rūmī and Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289), the disciple of Bāhā’ al-Dīn Zakariyyā Multānī (d. 665/1267) is not unambiguous, at least the reference in *Mathnawī-i Gul-o-Bulbul* to Rūmī is an ample proof that Bū ‘Ali Qalandar Pānipatī (d. 727/1327) was acquainted with him. Gradually the *Mathnawī* of Mawlānā Rūmī came out of the close circles of the Sufi poets. The Muslim populace recited it and enjoyed its folk wisdom; the intellectuals elaborated its message and deeper meanings; and the poets, sometimes even the non-Muslims, followed its style.

The West came across Rūmī at a later stage, when Rūmī scholarship had attained the level of maturity in the Muslim lands. Georgius de Hungaria (d. 1502) was perhaps the first European traveller to the Ottoman Turkey, who narrated his impressions, though not without bias, on practices of Rūmī’s followers. But it was in the nineteenth century, when Western scholars, one