El-Hibri argues that al-Mutawakkil’s caliphate in Sāmarrāʾ is a reprise of sorts of al-Rashīd’s in Baghdad. As is the case in the accounts of al-Rashīd’s reign, the narratives are “ordered around specific characters — family members, viziers, and commanders — who occupy roles that interact in a way that never fully resolves one political problem without engendering another ethical crisis” (p. 179). Of course, the most prominent ethical questions are raised by al-Mutawakkil’s assassination, which El-Hibri examines with considerable sophistication in light of the sources’ often-negative depiction of the Turkish commanders, their more nuanced treatments of the murders of ʿUthmān, al-Walīd II and al-Amīn, as well as their portrayal of the uncomfortable predicament faced by al-Muntasir upon succeeding his father as caliph.

*Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* is clearly intended for specialists, but can easily be used by graduate as well as advanced undergraduate students — especially in conjunction with the now-completed translation of al-Ṭabarī’s *History*. However, there are a two niggling issues that make it less user friendly, especially for the non-specialist, than it need be: (1) Since a literary-critical study of this type requires extensive quotations from the sources being examined, it is odd that not all the Arabic passages discussed are translated into English. Most are, but at times a passage is simply left in Arabic transliteration. Obviously, this does not pose a problem for Arabists, but not all readers of this book will be Arabists. (2) A chronologically accurate map of the area in question would be very helpful, especially one which indicated the many places discussed in the texts that are loaded with symbolic meaning — Khurāsān, Raqqā, Tūs, Tarsus, etc. But these are mere quibbles. *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* is a very welcome addition to the ongoing debates about early Islamic history — especially the early ʿAbbāsid period — and will likely become and remain the standard work on Islamic historiography of the late 8th and early 9th centuries for some time to come.

*James E. Lindsay*


This collection of essays is the product of the Fourteenth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference (May 7–9, 1993), held in honour of Professor George Makdisi, arguably one of the most influential cultural historians of medieval Islam. The six-year delay in the publication of these essays is one peculiarity of the book. Other peculiarities include a certain disparity in the quality of the essays and, more prominently, the inadequate editorial work on the part of Hovannisian and Sabagh. The serious editorial problem is addressed at the end of this review.
An important element of the Giorgio Levi Della Vida Award is that the recipient is granted the opportunity to invite scholars to participate in a conference on a theme that generally reflects his or her own scholarly interests. In this case, the very broad theme of religion and culture in medieval Islam elicited a group of essays that covers education, rhetoric, literature, science, and popular religious practices. Of the seven essays, three are of sufficient importance to warrant comment.

Makdisi's own contribution, “Religion and culture in classical Islam and the Christian West”, is a summary for a general audience of his previous scholarship on the transference of medieval Islamic educational institutions and practices to the medieval Christian West. Makdisi's basic argument is that scholasticism, defined as both “a movement of conservative traditionalist religion and intellectual culture” and a “method of research and writing” (pp. 3–4), originated in the legal schools of medieval Islam in the ninth and tenth centuries and was subsequently taken over in medieval Christian universities. Makdisi has identified a number of elements of this movement and method as originating in medieval Islam, including the endowment of the charitable trust to support such educational institutions, the legal methodology taught and employed there, and the license to teach (ijāzat at-tadrīs — licentia docendi, the precursor of the modern doctorate). Makdisi's essay here shares the shortcomings of reductionist definitions with his more expanded discussions in other publications on the subject of medieval Islamic education. The scope and function of the ijāzah has still to be fully explored; if, as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 1071 ce) maintained, an ijāzah could be granted to the unborn, it is surely problematic to reduce its scope to a simple license to teach (to be fair, Makdisi does single out the ijāzah as one type of many). Makdisi's reduction of the application of the scholastic method, i.e. dialectical argumentation, what he calls juridical theology in Islam, is questionable, as is his use of the term “guild” to refer to the Islamic madrasah. He does appear to have identified a very important similarity in the legal charitable trusts of Islam and the West, but it is not enough to simply suggest a “silent penetration” (p. 7) of Islamic educational practices into the West. However, Makdisi's importance for Islamic studies is that he does not hesitate to ask the larger questions. If, and when, the precise conduits of the transference of educational institutions and practices are identified, and as the terms of the debate become more honed, Makdisi's work will still define the framework of inquiry.

Merlin Swartz's essay, “Arabic rhetoric and the art of the homily in medieval Islam”, is of great significance for the simple reason that, as Swartz himself notes, virtually no sustained research has been applied to the medieval Islamic homily, despite the fact that the considerable size of the extant corpus testifies to its importance in medieval Islamic culture. Although ancillary to his primary focus, Swartz briefly lists some fundamental research questions that will undoubtedly form the basis for future work in this field (p. 37). The remainder of his essay is devoted to detailing the elements, structure, and style of the homilies of Ibn al-Jawzī (c. 1116–1201 ce), one of the most prolific authors of the genre and by all historical accounts one of the most successful preachers of the medieval period. In evaluating Ibn al-Jawzī's “multidisciplinary” approach to constructing his homilies, Swartz
does not hesitate to apply the term “humanist” to this medieval Muslim scholar (p. 40). He next proceeds to describe the four parts of a typical Jawzian homily.

The most interesting result of this research is the observation that the Jawzian homily concludes with verses of poetry often of an “amorous sort” (p. 45), a somewhat surprising element considering the presumed context of the homily. Swartz suggests at least two possible reasons for this use of “secular” love poetry. The emotive force and universal appeal of love poetry had its place in the primary function of the homily: to move individuals and masses in a non-intellectual fashion (p. 47). As such, its placement at the end of the homily, and its direct addressal of the audience served to “evolve a sense of personal crisis and to dramatize the need for decision as a precondition for resolution” (ibid.) These are certainly well informed possibilities of interpretation for the use of love poetry in the homily; further research may also suggest others. General remarks on the “molecular” structure of the Jawzian homilies with attention paid to their contents and structure conclude this ground-breaking study.

George Saliba’s study, “The Ash’arites and the science of the stars”, is the other seminal study in this volume. Saliba investigates the reception of Aristotelian natural philosophy among three representative Ash’arites theologians who, he argues, “set the tone for the image of Greek science within orthodox Islam”. (p. 80) The three figures whose arguments against Aristotelian causality Saliba succinctly reproduces are al-Bāqi‘ī (d. 1013 CE), al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111 CE), and al-Āmīdī (d. 1233 CE). Much of these Ash’arites’ rejection of Aristotelian natural philosophy is articulated through the dialectical argument against infinite regress in corporeal causality which proposes the alternative theory of God's custom (‘ādah) to explain change. This is to be expected, considering the commitment to God's unique power in the Ash’arite school. However, the additional element of a refutation of astrology (which was viewed as another “foreign” explanation for sublunary generation and corruption) is a fascinating development in the history of the medieval theologians' rejection of Aristotelian philosophy. While this element seems to have been introduced by al-Bāqi‘ī, it is with Ghazzālī that the important distinction between the “sheer folly” of astrology and the useful science of astronomy is firmly introduced. Saliba argues that the qualified acceptance of astronomy (and certainly the other mathematical sciences) by Ash’arite theologians should be viewed as instrumental in the continued growth of scientific research in medieval Islam. In essence, the attack against astrology formed an important part of the wholesale rejection of the theoretical underpinnings of Aristotelian natural philosophy. However, the sciences that did not appear to demand such a commitment to Aristotelian theory were largely accepted. Saliba's essay will surely set the historians of science to new tasks.

The remaining studies in this collection include another essay on “The Future of Islam” from W. Montgomery Watt, and instalments from Irfan Shahid, “Medieval Islam: the literary-cultural dimension”; Roger Arnaldez, “Religion, religious culture, and culture”, and Mahmoud Ayoub, “Cult and Culture: common saints and shrines in Middle Eastern popular piety”.

An unfortunate flaw in this volume is the very serious editorial shortcomings of Hovannisian and Sabagh. In fact, considering the major errors in the Arabic-
English transliteration (in dotting, vowelling, and syntax), as well as in English spelling, punctuation, and usage in many of the essays, there does not appear to have been any real editorial work undertaken. If only for present lack of space, it would be impossible to correct the errors in transliteration, but the task would be further hampered by the fact that the editors do not appear to have chosen any particular transliteration system at all for the volume. This disregard of editorial duties on the part of Hovannisian and Sabagh is a slight to all of the scholars involved. One would hope that these problems will be ameliorated in future Levi Della Vida Award volumes.

David C. Reisman


South Africa has attracted numerous visitors who were either officially invited or were lured to its shores because of what they had read or heard. Indeed, South Africa's colourful and heterogeneous Muslim community has been described, by quite a number of visitors, as dynamic and vibrant. However, despite their dynamism, they have been (and still are) in need of continuous guidance and advice from spiritually illuminated and inspired individuals from abroad. During the latter part of the 20th century there was an array of prominent individuals who came to South Africa from the South Asian continent; from amongst them was the renowned scholar Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqi, the principal founder of the now famous Aleemiyah Institute and Dr. I. H. Qureshi, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Karachi.

One of the most notable amongst these was the son-in-law of Maulana Siddiqi, namely Maulana Dr Fazl-ur-Rahman Ansari who is the author of a series of booklets (some of which were published by the [now defunct] Cape Town based Islamic Publications Bureau) and his two volume publication The Quranic Foundations and Structure of the Muslim Society; this work appeared in 1973 subsequent to his second South African visit, and it was very popular during that period because memories of his visit were still fresh in the minds of the community.

The Maulana's visits in 1970 and 1972 were memorable; they left a deep impression upon the minds of the South African Muslim community. They frantically followed him wherever he went and had all his lectures recorded and circulated after his departure. The Maulana's lectures were well appreciated and it is for this reason that they were transcribed and edited. This book under review contains the speeches which the Maulana delivered during his 1970 and 1972 tours.