patterns in the medieval period, followed by J. de Menasce’s important article on the importance and antiquity of *qanats* in Iran and the different ways in which land distribution came about as a result of the use of *qanat*.

Touraj Daryaei


This monograph by Alice Hunsberger on the life and thought of Nasir [Nāṣīr] Khusraw (d. 463/1077) is a long overdue study that fills a gap in the secondary literature. The status of Nasir Khusraw as a leading intellectual and literary figure of medieval Islam was never disputed, yet, as the author explains, his Ismaili [Ismā‘īlī] affiliation left him with few champions. Scholars who are interested in the thought and life of Nasir Khusraw can now use this work; more importantly, teachers in colleges and universities can assign the work or parts of it for their students. One hopes that a paperback edition will soon appear.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this monograph is that it synthesizes all the available works of Nasir and presents us with a comprehensive study and analysis of his thought and life. Moreover, the author engages all the secondary studies available on Nasir, both in European and Persian languages. Hunsberger is aware of the major debates surrounding the author and brings the reader up to speed on these debates. The book is also supplied with a clear map that charts the stages of Nasir’s travels in the Islamic world of the eleventh century.

Hunsberger informs the reader that she decided to use the journey of Nasir in the different parts of the Muslim world as the structural grid on which she will elucidate his philosophy and outlook. The idea is in many ways attractive, yet I myself would have wished that she had stuck to the original plan she had in mind, the thematic approach. Such an approach would have been easier to read and much more pragmatic when it comes to assigning sections to students.
A look at the map, with its lines that connect the cities (should one say fabled cities) of Medieval Islam (Balkh, Sarakhs, Nishapur, Rayy, Tabriz, Harran, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Makkah, Madinah, etc.) what brings to mind are the main difference that separates the worldview of medieval Muslim intellectuals from our own. One cannot but feel the parochial limitations of our modern upbringing. A medieval Muslim was, despite himself or herself, a cosmopolitan being, even if he or she never left his/her little hamlet. To become cosmopolitan, the modern-day counterpart has either to migrate to the west, where an Arab can meet Iranians, Turks, Pakistanis, etc. and learn to appreciate their shared Persian heritage or the glory of Ottoman art, and hear the music of the Urdu Qawwal musicians, or he or she can turn fundamentalist, a perverse cosmopolitanism, a fake resurrection of a unified universal mythical Muslim Ummah, which both reconnects one to a lost heritage and trivializes that connection by declaring the past and the present as a corruption of a lost ideal.

The significance of this work, thus, is that it refocuses our gaze on the inexhaustible richness of medieval Islamic culture. Nasir Khusraw was not at the centre of it, but he was not at the periphery, either. Medieval Islamic culture, by virtue of its conceiving of itself as self-sufficient and self-centered (the hubris of all great cultures at their highest) made central all of its members, no matter how marginal they were. A modern-day Muslim, on the other hand, has literally to rediscover Ismailism, for now the very centre of Islam is oblivious to the richness of its formerly constituent elements that once made it up.

Ismailism was not a mere sect, a minority on the fringe of a mass. It was an option, viable, vibrant, and self-consistent. One need only look at al-Ghazali's discussion of Ismailism as a salvific option in his Deliverance From Error to be reminded of this; Ismailism could not be overlooked then, and it still has to be engaged. Hunsberger has made an important contribution by allowing us a closer look at the thought and ideas of a leading Ismaili intellectual. One has to admire the richness of the Islamic tradition that allowed competing and contradictory claims to coexist and flourish. The only complaint to make about this fine book is that it is marred by repetitions. A shorter work would have been much better.

Walid Saleh

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