

difference is obvious in the translated text, although *Mission to the Volga* reads well in translation, it lacks the polished and chiseled narrative force of *Accounts of China and India*. The editor-translator makes sweeping, commonplace statements in the Introduction without substantiating them with scholarly references (for instance, the remarks about the execution of al-Hallaj, which could have benefited from the Massignon's magisterial four-volume work); it raises seriously scholarly concerns about the *raison d'être* of the work, but fails to provide a fully articulated and historically grounded answer. Perhaps such scholarly discussions are not needed in a work that has been presented as a travel account rather than a historical document; yet the series in which the volume has been published claims scholarly attention. The translation reads well in general, but at places it does not correspond to what is being said in the original text, or the manner in which certain phrases have been translated does not convey the intent of the original (e.g., "they had built a wooden masjid to pray in" for *wa qad banū lahum masjidan min khushab*, which may be better translated as "they had built a masjid with wood" (p. 233); on the same page, we have "did not know how to read the Qur'an", whereas the intent of the original is to indicate that they did not know the correct recitation during obligatory prayer, *al-qirā'at*, p. 233). At other places unintelligible words appear (e.g., W*r' on p. 237). Notwithstanding these reservations, *Mission to the Volga* does have its merits and reading it in translation, with parallel Arabic, allows one to enter into that enchanted world of discoveries and descriptions of strange people and things.

MUZAFFAR IQBL

Center for Islamic Sciences
Canada

S. R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik* • Routledge • London and New York • 2012; pp. 338 • ISBN: 978-0-415-67292-4 (hbk) • 978-0-203-14497-8 (ebk)

This monograph focuses on "angels in Hadith literature" through the lens of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik*, which—the author erroneously claims—consists of approximately 750 Hadith related to angels (p. 21; see below for more on this) and a substantial postscript, *khātima*, on theological issues related to angels. Al-Suyūṭī actually has 810 narrations, not all of which are Hadith, and these narrations are of all categories of authenticity, including *marfū'*, *mawqūf*, *maqṭū'*. Thus, it is not correct to say that this monograph deals with angels in Hadith literature.

The format of the monograph follows standard academic pattern: Part I consists of a survey of scholarship on angels and it places al-Suyūṭī in his historical and scholarly context; Part II focuses on themes in Islamic angelology; Part III presents a translation of *al-Habāʾik fī akhbār al-malāʾik*; and Part IV contains “Conclusions”. Supplemented by two appendices, notes, bibliography, and indices, this monograph aims to fill an important gap on a relatively neglected area of research in Western scholarship.

More significantly, the author is aware of the previous unsatisfactory approaches of Western scholarship on angelology in Islam, both in terms of their paucity and problematic approaches, some of which are mentioned by him, and others are only alluded to. In general, these approaches have either focused on “the Jewish or Christian provenance of particular angels and, secondly, the development of Islamic angelology and its relation to pre-Islamic religion, both usually relating to the study of the Qurʾān” (p. 9). The author also shows critical insight about the “aims of these investigations” which “are often associated with some degree of polemic, or, at least an intention to place the development of the Qurʾān within a specific locale: by associating vocabulary with Syriac, or any other language, it is possible to argue that the Qurʾān was not the divine word, as is implied by Christoph Luxemburg” (p. 9). The author also briefly mentions some heterodox modern Muslim views on the subject, though his list is not comprehensive.

Given this clarity of thought and author’s admirable detachment from certain enduring biases of Western scholarship on Islam, one would expect a totally different treatment of the subject compared to what has been done so far. Sadly, this is not the case. Having stated the obvious biases of secular, polemical, or religiously motivated “scholarship” which studies Islam and its foundational texts as if they were plagiarized versions of the Jewish and Christian texts, the author actually does exactly the same in the very first chapter of the monograph, “Angels in Classical Islam and contemporary scholarship”: he makes sweeping, unfounded statements, such as, “The Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptural traditions do not present a systematic homogenous dogma of angels” (p. 3), which lumps together the three monotheistic religions and which is all the more surprising given that the very foundation of Belief (*īmān*) in Islam mentions angels as the second of the six required components of Belief in the Hadith of Jibrīl, which the author cites later on and a Qurʾānic verse states: *The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from His Lord, and so do the believers. Each believes in Allah, His Angels, His Scriptures, and His Messengers* (Q 2:285).

The same chapter has an astonishing quotation from A. J. Arberry (p. 19), without any comment, which states that “It must have been a very elaborate card-index of traditions and traditionists that al-Sakhāwī kept, with such excellent cross-references that he was obviously able at very short

notice to compile a new treatise on the subject...”]; this displays a less than full understanding of the Hadith scholarship of pre-modern Muslim scholars, who did not need index cards to produce their works, as they lived with their source material, internalized these texts, and transmitted and received Hadith texts and commentaries as if they were living, breathing, pulsating texts, which could be quoted from memory whenever needed. Furthermore, to say that the Qurʾān does not contain a fully developed, and fully articulated angelology is surprising, especially because “angels are explicitly mentioned 88 times in the Qurʾān, 73 of which in the (mostly definite) plural form (*malāʾika*), 13 times in the singular, and twice in the dual—besides other-named mentions”.¹

“Al-Suyūṭī and his works”, the second chapter of the book, is a fairly standard historical account of the time and intellectual milieu of al-Suyūṭī (849-911/1445-1505), although one would have expected a further elaboration on his intellectual pedigree, especially in reference to how al-Suyūṭī’s work benefited from those of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) and how these two most important scholars of Mamluk Egypt contributed to the classical heritage on angelology in Islam. A useful comparison is made of sources used by al-Suyūṭī in his various books, the comparison between the *al-Ḥabāʾik* and *al-Hayʾa al-samniyya fīʾl-hayʾa al-sunniyya*—his major work on Qurʾānic cosmology—is especially insightful (p. 19-25).

Part II of the book, consisting of four chapters, seriously undermines claims which the author made in Part I, as it heavily draws on previous Western works without any critical examination, and in stark isolation from the Islamic sources. For instance, Burge makes a comparison between naming of angels in Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions and concludes by stating: “This, in itself, suggests that angels and their names were incorporated into Islam in different ways and the origins and development of Islamic beliefs about angels are more complex than some scholars have believed...” (p. 33), without even hinting at the Islamic belief that named angels who appear in the Qurʾān are an exception, because Muslims believe that all that is in the Qurʾān—including the names of the angels—is revealed knowledge and, thus, no human agency is involved in naming those angels.

To make matters worse, several chapters and sections begin with the patent orientalist way of presenting Judeo-Christian content before mentioning Islamic content, with the underlying implication that Islam borrowed these from the Judeo-Christian sources, misreading of source material abounds and juxtaposition of methods and interpretive frameworks of Biblical scholarship on the Qurʾān leads to cul-de-sacs, such as the attempt to blur the firmly established lexical distinction associated with the word *malak*, leading to the intractable situation where the author has to provide a literal translation of the

1. See Gibril Fouad Haddad’s entry “Angels” in *The Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān (IEQ)*.

description of Prophet Yūsuf by the ladies in Potiphar's house and construe *malak karīm* as noble angel (p. 53-57)—an interpretation which no Muslim scholar could even imagine. In addition, in a monograph of this nature, one would expect source-based discussion of the main word (*malak*) for an angel, rather than Biblical usage. *Malak*, as Gibril F. Haddad points out in his excellent entry in *The Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, is “the Qur'ānic word for “angel” (used both for the individual and the collective), plural *malā'ik(a)*, is a hamza-suppressed derivation of *mal'ak*, itself a hamza-lām substitute form of *ma'lak*, the *maf'al* form of the root verb *ā-l-k*, literally “to chew” (aorist *yalūku*, infinitive nouns *alk* and *ulūk*), the nouns *alūk(a)* and *ma'lūk(a)* signifying “message,” which indicates the aural nature of messengership and, as for *rasūl*, “messenger,” and *nabī* in the sense of “bringer of news,” presupposes the existence of a tremendous unseen but communicative sender (Farāhīdī, ‘Ayn, *sub m-l-k*; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, *sub ā-l-k*; Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr*, *sub Q 2:30*).²

Most non-Muslims approach Hadith texts from a perspective diametrically opposed to that of Muslim scholars of Hadith and Burge's translation, notes, and commentary on al-Suyūṭī's *al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik* displays the same lack of training in reading Hadith texts. He makes the right decision to translate chapters, rather than selections: “Instead of bowdlerizing the collection and making selections from across the collection, whole chapters have been translated to retain the integrity of each chapter of the work.” (p. 111), yet the very next sentence indicates lack of understanding of the *raison d'être* of specialized Hadith collections, such as al-Suyūṭī work he studies and translates: “As al-Suyūṭī provides no personal comments about the ḥadīth that he includes, it is only through an appreciation of his selection and contextualization that one can begin to understand al-Suyūṭī's agenda for the work.” Included in the whole range of Western biases toward Hadith literature—which underline this statement—is the assumption that every Hadith collector has an agenda. Furthermore, this statement and comments about the organization of *al-Ḥabā'ik* that follows betray a total lack of understanding of an existing hierarchical arrangement which al-Suyūṭī uses for organizing his selection of Hadith: The book is, in fact, arranged on the pattern of other Hadith collections of similar type which had existed for well over five hundred years before al-Suyūṭī undertook to do what he did with this particular book. Thus, chapters are not simply “logically” arranged (p.111); rather, they are *hierarchically* arranged, following a certain order of priority and spiritual etiquette prevalent in Hadith scholarship, especially given that “belief” in the angels is second only to belief in Allah Most High among the pillars of faith (*arkān al-īmān*). This is shown by the sequences taught in the Qur'ān, Each one believes in Allah, His Angels, His Books, and His Messengers (Q 2:285), and the Prophet's definition in the famous “Hadith of Jibrīl” narrated from ‘Umar (d. 23/644) and Abū Hurayra

2. *IEQ*, Volume 1, p. 170 .

(d. 57/681)—Allah be well-pleased with them—in Bukhārī, Muslim, Nasāʾī, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, and Ibn Mājah (the six authoritative hadith collections together known as the *kutub sitta*): ‘Belief is that you believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, and the Last Day; and to believe in foreordained destiny, for better or worse,” in Muslim’s wording (Īmān, bayān al-īmān wal-islām wal-iḥsān). It is also obligatory to believe in the inward and outward attributes by which the angels are described in the Qurʾān...”³

The main section of the monograph, dealing with the partial translation of al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ḥabāʾik*, is where one would expect the author to provide a critical evaluation of the book based on what it contains, yet it is here that his scholarly apparatus simply disappears; Burge makes no attempt to provide the reader with any critical analysis of the text, the purpose of its compilation, the details about opinions of Hadith masters on the narrations it contains, and—most importantly—its reception in the scholarly circles since it was written some five hundred years ago. Because all of this is missing from the monograph, one is left with just the partial translation of the selected chapters, and erroneous claims such as “there has been relatively little study of al-Suyūṭī and his approach to ḥadīth (p. 21). This can only be true if Burge simply wants to ignore hundreds of works on the author of *al-Ḥabāʾik* which exist in Islamic scholarship and which continue to emerge. Burge prefaces his translation with two and a half page introduction in which he provides description of the two manuscripts he used and he states (twice) that “the text is written in a clear *nakhsh* with a text box containing...” (p. 112 and 113); one wonders what it means, as there is no such style of calligraphy; perhaps the manuscripts were written in *naskh*.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

Center for Islamic Sciences
Canada

3. Ibid, p. 171.