

*Western Representations of the Muslim Woman* is a corrective to the tendency to project Orientalism backward in time to periods in which it did not exist, examining European images of the Middle East during earlier periods that are interesting in their own right. The author is an enthusiastic reteller and analyst of tales. Her literary examples are numerous and her analyses nuanced, and it is not possible to do justice to them in a short review. The book gives more than the title promises. Beyond the topic of Muslim women in pre-Orientalist literature, it provides short, useful overviews of European attitudes toward the Muslim world, European-Middle Eastern relations, and changing gender relations in Europe from the 11th to the 19th centuries, not only in literature, but also in other domains. This book will appeal to scholars interested in what came before Orientalism, as well as to a broader audience of those interested in gender, literature, history, and the Middle East.

MUHAMMAD SA'ID AL-'ASHMAWY, *Against Islamic Extremism: The Writings of Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy*, ed. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998). Pp. 139. \$49.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY F. BRAHIM MOOSA, Department of Religious Studies, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif.

In this book-length essay, Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy, the former Egyptian judge turned writer on contemporary Islam, engages with issues that have occupied Muslim communities for much of the 20th century. He addresses Islam's encounter with the "Other" (Jews and Christians), the role of religion in politics, and the application of Islamic law in modern Muslim societies. The author, whose writing was produced in English with the assistance of Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban in the capacity of editor, seeks to combat what he terms the phenomenon of Islamic extremism from which the book derives its title.

Before addressing the theme of the essay, 'Ashmawy argues that the common thread to the three Abrahamic faiths is that they are salvific in nature. The purpose of religion is to save the totality of humankind, with the ideal motto for salvation being: "Live as *One in All, and All in One*" (p. 66). However, 'Ashmawy also tries his hand at being a comparativist and spends a considerable part of his argument championing the cause of ancient Egyptian religions, going to great lengths to show that Judaism is mainly derived from these religions. After cataloging a number of correspondences, he states that "it is quite certain that Judaism began in Egypt and was developed through much of Egyptian mythology, ideas and words. Most historians and scholars do not know, or neglect, the Egyptian elements in Judaism, looking for and mentioning only, the Mesopotamian influence [*sic*]" (p. 47). This novice-like effort may be grist to the mill for polemics about the origins of Judaism. But 'Ashmawy may be overstating his case in trying to interrogate the historiography of Judaism. Most scholars would readily agree that there are parallels between some Old and New Testament narratives and Egyptian wisdom literature. But to take that resemblance any further requires much more detailed argument and cogent evidence than what this author provides. The imprint of borrowing from Egypt is less visible on Christianity and Islam. But 'Ashmawy finds parallels between Christianity's claim of Jesus being the "word" turned flesh and the Egyptian deity, Osiris, who, like Christ, had a dual nature—divine and human—and was also called the "Great Word."

Two authorities govern human life, according to 'Ashmawy: spiritual authority and civic authority. The former is in the hands of the clergy, who mold religion, and the latter is the realm of politics in order to regulate human conduct. Of the two, he privileges governance by means of civic authority. "Politics should be practiced unfettered by religion but on the basis of [a] civil code. At the same time religion needs to be protected from political distortion or

corruption and unimpeded by earthly disputes or conflicts" (p. 71). Religion, if mixed with politics, turns into a fatal ideology. For this reason, religious parties should be excluded from politics by the "civil state." Politics is the big culprit that is unable to grasp the significance of faith. Instead, politics turns faith into dogma and results in deviance from the noble tenets of "original" faith and, finally, fails to universalize ethics. "True" religion is open to all humankind, 'Ashmawy argues, and the "original" purpose of religion is to integrate all human beings. How one attains a non-ideological religion and how exactly one unites humanity with non-ideological ideas remain unexplored.

In the case of Islam, only the governance of the Prophet and that of the second caliph, 'Umar, were exceptional periods. On these rare occasions, there was an effective administration of justice, which he believes is the meaning of the Qur'anic term for "government." On this basis he is much opposed to describing the past and present Muslim political authority as "Islamic government" (pp. 73, 79). At this point, 'Ashmawy's arguments become almost telegraphic in their brevity, then rapidly regress into gross generalizations of history. Almost all of Islamic history is cast as a massive distortion of disturbing proportions. Ironically, 'Ashmawy's *bête noire*, the Muslim extremists, also deem much of Islamic history to be a distortion of the elusive ideal. Muslim modernists and fundamentalists share a proclivity to be selective with history. Both groups have to prove much of Muslim history to be wrong, lapsarian, and an aberration from the norm—with a few periods being exceptions, of course. The implication is that only in modernity do we rediscover "true" Islam once again. 'Ashmawy does not hesitate to state that political jurisprudence in the past was the self-serving work of jurists in league with the rulers. One is reminded of that "enormous condescension of posterity," in E. P. Thompson's now famous words, to avoid making such sweeping judgments. Few would argue that there were *some* jurists who were willing to please their rulers. But to tarnish the entire legal record with the flaws of a few, and without adequate evidence, is a different story altogether.

To explain his position, 'Ashmawy says that the "liberal, intellectual and enlightened movement" in Islam distinguishes between "Islamic law" as the perfect ideal and "Islamic jurisprudence" as the aberration of that ideal (p. 125). In the vein of the liberal movement, he offers a corrective understanding of jihad and some of the more problematic features of Islamic law and specifically responds to the constructions of some Islamists on these topics. He argues that not all of the rules stated in the Qur'an are permanent, the best example being that the rules regarding slavery have been rendered redundant. He also discusses the penalty for theft and the special conditions that must prevail before a thief's hand is amputated, such as freedom from need and that the stolen property must have a personal owner. For this reason, Caliph 'Umar suspended the penalty when there was widespread famine: because public funds did not have an individual owner, theft and embezzlement of such funds was not punishable by amputation (p. 100). With this tantalizing nugget of information from the corpus of traditional Islamic law, 'Ashmawy is trying to show that the severe penalty was not applied without discretion, but he leaves us wondering what the liberal view would advocate as a penalty for such crimes.

'Ashmawy's reformist method creates binary relationships: original Islam versus distorted Islam; true versus false; Islamic law versus Islamic jurisprudence; and Islam versus Muslims, with the second category always representing the lesser element and prefiguring its opposite. However, reality does not lend itself to such neat compartmentalization. The idealism of modernists as well as traditionalists is at times stifling, to say the least. Can one seriously distinguish between "Islam" and "Muslims," a rhetorical apologetic to which modernists, Islamists, and traditionalists frequently resort? Such a pure realm is of course only possible in the angelic world, God's mind, or at the level of pure abstraction. Because such a distinction is meaningless, we have to acknowledge that Islam is a phenomenon that occurs within history and that one ignores it at a cost. 'Ashmawy's reformist sentiment and his efforts at that are laudable, but his method of reform does not offer an intervention that we have not heard of before. Reformist

projects are ideological in nature, and it might have been easier had he admitted that all efforts at reconstruction are ideological, including his project as well as those of his opponents. Of course, they will differ at the level of sophistication, complexity, and efficacy, and these will also be the features that will make them attractive or repulsive as intellectual projects. The text would also have profited from a more rigorous scrutiny of transliterated terms.

WILFRIED BUCHTA, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Konard Adenauer Stiftung, 2000). Pp. 255. \$19.95 paper.

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Arguably, the most distinguishing facet of Iran's post-revolutionary regime has been the plethora of institutions and competing power centers. The myriad religious and revolutionary bodies are constitutionally empowered to subdue and duplicate the functions of the central government and the republican institutions. This structural enigma is exacerbated by the existence of political factions dispersed throughout the Iranian polity. Although they maintain their allegiance to the tenets of the Islamic Revolution and the ideological legacy of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, factions provide divergent renditions on policies in different realms. For this reason, political outcomes in the Islamic Republic of Iran depend largely on the faction that controls the relevant organization or ministry.

Buchta's book is an attempt to shed light on the Islamic Republic of Iran's multifarious state and the role of powerful factions in it, with a particular focus on Iran since the election of Muhammad Khatami as president in 1997 and the fate of the reform movement. The author's pronounced goal is to provide "a systematic overview of the different power centers and competing ideological wings and individuals" (p. 4). Consequently, this book seems to have been conceived more as a lengthy report-like publication on Iranian current affairs than as a well-researched academic book about the highly ephemeral politics in the republic. With the possible exception of his account of Iran since Khatami's election, Buchta's book is largely a narrative exposé of politics and instrumental personalities in present-day Iran.

The first part of the book, "Iran's Maze of Power Centers," discusses Iran's religio-political and revolutionary institutions: formal and informal power structures, the competing factions, the president, the leader, and the revolutionary bodies. The major theme—explored previously and far more thoroughly by others, particularly by Asghar Schirazi in *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*—is that real power lies not with the president but with the supreme leader (*faqih*) and various religious bodies, such as the Guardian Council and the Assembly of Experts. This explains the difficulties Khatami has faced in implementing his reforms since his election. Although Buchta accurately identifies the basic views of factions and provides some insightful information about the institutional powers of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his entourage, this part is basically a summary of Iran's complex political system, and it oversimplifies the Iranian polity to a great degree. For instance, Buchta characterizes Iran's power structure as "quasi-feudal," where "upper level [?] posts are assigned exclusively to immediate relatives and friends of the individuals in power" (p. 6) but gives little significance to the "modern," quasi-democratic components of the regime that have challenged this so-called feudal system. The Iranian state does have institutional "filters" such as the Guardian Council, among others, to ensure the compatibility of laws with Islamic precepts and the suitability of candidates running for Parliament and the presidency. It is also true that cronyism, nepotism, and corruption are often rampant among what Buchta refers to as clerical "patriarchs." However, prominent officials of the regime, including the supreme leader himself, are elected di-