

systems of other cultures; and so on.

The corpus investigated in these volumes consists of excerpts from the works of two authors (*Naṭr ad-durr* by al-Ābī [d. 1030] and three works by Ibn al-Gawzī [d. 1201]), supplemented by excerpts from *adab* encyclopedias and smaller anthologies from the mid-ninth to the late-twelfth century. Altogether Marzolph collected a total of 11,500 texts, comprising 5,600 "types" (1,247 of which are listed in the index in volume 2, 1–268). The types listed have been found in multiple versions in one or more of five kinds of literature: 1) Arabic folk literature before the year 1200; 2) Arabic medieval literature after 1200; 3) modern Arabic oral literature; 4) medieval and modern written and oral literature from non-Arabic-speaking Muslim countries from Turkey through India; 5) European oral and written folk literature. The corpus is not complete—not all written works in Arabic from before 1200 have been examined, for example. The author concentrates on the main works of *adab* entertainment prose (see list in vol. 1, 35–36).

Many indices facilitate use of the work. It is a pity that the publisher did not see fit to add a few more pages and print the indices in columns (vol. 1, 276–81; vol. 2, 269–312), this to the great frustration of both the reader and the unfortunate author. A work of such fundamental significance for so many disciplines should be made as easy to consult as possible.

Arabia ridens is of prime importance to the literary and cultural historian: for the first time the "short forms" of written Arabic folk literature are systematically indexed and thereby made accessible to comparative literary studies. Marzolph's work complements CHAUVIN's monumental index (1892–1922) of medieval Arabic "long-form" written folk literature (or "entertainment literature"). At the same time it comprises a first attempt at indexing the "short form" medieval prose folk literature of Persia, which Marzolph lists as "additional versions," to types found in Arabic sources (see section C in the list of versions to each type). *Arabia ridens* is a must for the library of every Arabist, Iranist, literary and cultural historian, and, last but not least, folklorist.

REFERENCE CITED:

CHAUVIN, Victor

1892–1922 *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes, publiés dans l'Europe chrétienne de 1810 à 1885* [Bibliography of Arabic works, or works akin to Arabic (literature), published in Christian Europe between 1810 and 1885]. 12 vols. Liège: Vaillant & Carmanne.

Heda JASON
Wassenaar

SOWAYAN, SAAD A. *The Arabian Oral Historical Narrative: An Ethnographic and Linguistic Analysis*. Semitica Viva, Band 6. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992. xii+323 pages. Facsimile of Arab text, appendices (lists of characters, genealogical charts, place names), glossary, bibliography. Paper DM 98.00; ISBN 3-447-03224-3; ISSN 0931-2811.

Saad Sowayan, professor of folklore at King Saud University in Riyadh and a Bedouin of the Anazah tribe, has been exposed to Bedouin oral literature since his early child-

hood. *The Arabian Oral Historical Narrative*, his most recent book, effectively complements his earlier *Nabaṭi Poetry: The Oral poetry of Arabia*, in which he studied the work of the tribal poets who celebrate raids over water, camels, and grazing land—activities that were part of everyday life in premodern Arabia. In the book under review he focuses upon the narratives that provide the historical and sociocultural context for these poems. These narratives (*swālif*, sg. *sālfih*) have no beginning or ending formulae, unlike folktales, and are usually interspersed with poems. The narrators are men, and the tales are told at any time of the day before audiences consisting of male adults.

Sowayan's narrative, the incidents of which took place 150 years ago, concerns the Sammar and Anazah tribes. It tells of the raids and forays of a Sammari warrior named Hiḍlūl aš-Šwēhril, of how he was killed by an Anazi fighter, and of how his death was avenged by another Sammari hero. Sowayan collected versions of the narrative during fieldwork in 1983–84 from eleven mostly old and illiterate Sammari Bedouin informants. He provides ample information about his informants, but his information on the audience is meagre in spite of his claim that the audience "contribute[s] to the shaping of the narrative and to some extent direct[s] its development" (28).

The narrative is an amalgamation of the eleven different versions. From each version Sowayan selects the best linguistic, literary, and/or ethnographic feature, edits it, and puts it in its proper place within the text. He opts for this "bold editorial procedure" (13) in order to better manage the oral material on the printed page as well as to make the account a more interesting introduction to Bedouin literature for first-time readers. Regardless of the merits of this approach, scholars interested in studying and comparing the various versions are certain to have their reservations.

The narrative is, nevertheless, a source for historians. Indeed, it begins with the words, "History is something like a trust . . . A man who relates history must fear God and not tip the balance one way or the other. He must give his account free of bias, as it really happened" (87). Still, Sowayan warns historians that the account *is* biased, reflecting the Sammari informants' point of view and presenting their own interpretation of how and why the narrative's events transpired. Sowayan is keen on giving examples of how Anazi informants view some of the incidents in the tale from their own perspective.

The narrative is also a rich and reliable source of ethnographic data, containing information—sometimes apparent and sometimes not—about the nomads' daily life, their customs, traditions, values, cultural norms, and social institutions, among other things. Sowayan's discussion of Bedouin social institutions helps non-Arab readers free their minds of stereotypic images of the nomads and objectively evaluate desert life as presented in the narrative.

In his stylistic analysis Sowayan discusses the function of certain general features that apply equally to all Arabic narrative. These include use of the descriptive imperative, redundancy, repetition, courtly expressions, and faint traces of gesture. In his linguistic analysis he confines himself to syntax, a lightly trodden field in Arabian dialect studies. He uses examples to highlight some of the most important syntactic patterns exhibited in the narrative, such as the subordinate usage of certain particles.

Sowayan does not accompany his study with extended footnotes. Instead he provides a glossary, which he advises the reader to refer to frequently while reading the text and analysis. The reader will find the glossary extremely useful, since it is indeed, as Sowayan claims, "a repository of syntactic, semantic, and ethnographic information" (77). However, Sowayan enters lexical items according to their consonantal roots, a

procedure that, he admits, involves some problems, such as when the radical consonant of a root is a semivowel. Moreover, readers unfamiliar with Arabic will find reference to the glossary cumbersome, since the lexical items are organized according to the Arabic alphabet rather than the Roman alphabet.

Sowayan provides the Arabic text in the Bedouin dialect (52 pages) along with transliterations and translations. His translations succeed in conveying both the literal sense and artistic effect of the narrative. Arab readers unfamiliar with the Bedouin dialect might have to refer to the English translation occasionally in order to follow the story; since Sowayan has provided a transliteration he might also have included excerpts from the Arabic text. And he could have made use of the available space by extending his analysis to other aspects of the syntax, phonology, or morphology (something he has promised to consider in the future).

With the changes taking place in different aspects of Saudi Arabian life today, the collection and study of folklore has become of vital importance. Despite the above minor criticisms, *The Arabian Oral Historical Narrative* is a valuable addition to the few scholarly works in this field. It is, in my view, essential reading for those seriously interested in Bedouin studies, and a work of a great value for any reader wishing to learn about the aesthetics and culture of the desert nomads.

REFERENCES CITED:

SOWAYAN, Saad A.

- 1985 *Nabaṭi poetry: The oral poetry of Arabia*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

Ahmad A. NASR
G.C.C. Folklore Centre
Doha, Qatar