

data on the storytellers either. All these much curtail the value of the *Islamic Legends* as an intended folklore guidebook, and make it indeed difficult to utilize these books for further research.

It is a pity, since the book contains a wealth of narrative material, which can be useful, if one finally undertakes the task of typologization of Islamic folk-literature, following in the footsteps of the late H. Schwarzbaum, the outstanding expert of the field.

I shall give a few examples as follows: "The ghouls' daughter" from the King Solomon cycle (162-166) is a perfect fairy tale, a mixture of the familiar motives of Z 27.5.1. (Seven brothers and one sister) and K 1911 (The false bride). "The great serpent" (445-447) is a (Swahili?) variant of the AT 670, and "Prophet Isa and the wooden queen" (179-181) is a fusion of AT 653 and 945. "The history of the sultan, master of ten thousand ships" (447-452) is a version of the Polycarp-tale (AT 836). In the legend of the fallen angels, Hārūt and Mārūt (59-62) the central motif is J 485 (Three sins of hermit), in the story of Juraih from Turkey (335-336) it is T 575.1.1.2. (Child in mother's womb reveals adultery), cf. also H 426 (Chastity test of holy men). These are familiar motives from the early Oriental Christian hagiography.

There is also a striking example of diffusion of Iranian motives into the Islamic East Africa in the story of Princess Hasina (386-387) which is a late Swahili version of the ancient Kombabos-story, first recorded in Greek by Lucian in the second century, but better known from Firdausi's *Shahname*.

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SWIDERSKI, RICHARD M. *Voices: An Anthropologist's Dialogue With an Italian-American Festival*. Culture and Performance Series. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1986. Xii+202 pages. Photos, bibliography, author and subject indexes. Paper US\$8.95.

This is both an interesting and a frustrating book. It is interesting because it details

an American festival after an anthropological fashion. Years ago a grade school reader fired my imagination with its account of the Portuguese blessing of the fleet festival in Gloucester, Massachusetts. With those memories in mind, I was curious to learn of the Italian festival which replaced it. And to an extent I was satisfied because *Voices* describes the historical background and the details of the four-day 1970 celebration of the Sicilian-American "fiesta" of St. Peter in Gloucester.

But it is also a frustrating book because of its organization (information—"voices"—from all sides, but no unification) and ambiguous or missing information. For example when did the statue of St. Peter come to Gloucester? In 1929? That's when the Italian festival began, but the statue could have come a year or so earlier. If the festival's establishment shows the "upper hand" of the Terrisini natives over other Sicilians (41), how was unity achieved? Were the Terrisini women the ones who requested that the statue be carried in procession (40)? Which of the women's organizations were responsible for the floats (108)?

Similarly, statements are often made without further explanation, statements that make the reader wonder whether it is a true exception (which would then call for further comment) or merely a misunderstanding either on the part of the observer or the informant. Two examples concerning St. Joseph will suffice. One is that "St. Joseph stands at the center of the household altar, the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child forming the Holy Family beside him" (45). Since St. Joseph is usually pictured off to the side and in the back, this is an unusual arrangement. Another unusual combination is the float which supposedly presents St. Joseph comforting Mary who is mourning over the body of her dead Son (106). This is a significant departure from the tradition which says that St. Joseph had died some time before Jesus began his preaching. It is also significant in light of the general theme of the book explained below. But again, no comment. Perhaps some of the ambiguity, lack of details, and "exceptions" are due to the fact that the study was based mainly on oral communication. The informants may have become tired of questions and would not tolerate further questioning of their answers and explanations.

Especially hard to swallow in the beginning is the first chapter which seems to be the beginning of a doctoral dissertation in Anthropology. There in splendid multiplicity are all the theories about festival. Yet no direction is given for their use. Even with a certain amount of suspended judgment, one keeps wondering how much longer this conglomeration of data has to be kept in mind until it can be jettisoned in favor of the theory adapted by the author. Such a chance is not in the nature of this book. Gradually you begin to appreciate the various theories and arrangement of chapters. For this is not a mere study of a festival; it is a study of a festival as text, making use of the critical theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, which defy a final interpretation.

According to Raman Selden, Bakhtin stressed how "language is made to disrupt authority and liberate alternative voices" (1985: 17). (In the fiesta, the dominant voice of the town fathers gives way to the Italian-Americans and the dominant voice of the Italian men liberates the Italian women. At the end, the authority of the Church is mocked by the teenagers.) Also Bakhtin referred to Dostoevsky's novels as "polyphonic," that is, in these novels "no attempt is made to orchestrate or unify the various points of view expressed in the various characters." (Selden 1985: 17). At the end of *Voices*, we are left with the conclusion that of all the interpretations of festival, what best fits this fiesta is the notion of festival as text. And as text it has many voices, all of which deserve to be heard.

Furthermore, as Selden reads Bakhtin's treatment of carnival, there "hierarchies are turned on their heads . . . opposites are mingled . . . the sacred is profaned"

(1985: 18). Consequently, throughout the chapters, Richard Swiderski refers to the distance that existed between himself and the informants, how they would want him to mind his own business, how they seemed to resent educated jargon, how he was plainly an outsider. Thus from the parody of a doctoral dissertation and one's efforts to be one of the people under study to the gradual insistence that even for one investigating a festival close to one's own culture there is difficulty in understanding, Swiderski maintains his interpretation of festival as a Bakhtin text. So the book serves both to show the possibilities of studying festivals in a modern society and at the same time it warns against taking any such study whether of a more "modern" or more "primitive" society too seriously, that is, seriously as if the interpreter has really hit upon the reasons for the particular vents.

For example, there are two sports events at the festival. One involves a boat race in which only three boats compete: the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, the three boats of the Columbus voyage which "discovered" "America." Considering the importance the Italian-Americans give to Columbus in their self-identity as Americans (initiation of Columbus Day; dedication of Columbus Circle in New York), the choice is right. Swiderski then wonders if there is further significance in limiting the boats to just these three and to having the kind of race which ends with the boats pulling up to shore: is it perhaps a reenactment of Columbus discovering America (and, may we add, putting themselves in touch with this primordial event)? He asks his informant and gets the reply: "What? No. One time, that's enough" (92).

The other event involves some kind of plank or pole stretched out over the water and greased. (Even this important item is ambiguously described. On page 42, it is said to be an "erect flag pole," i.e., generally speaking, rising perpendicular to the ground. On page 88, however, it is said to be parallel to the surface of the water—"erect"? a pun?) At the end of the pole is a flag which the contestants are supposed to knock off by getting there without falling off themselves. Many of these contestants, however, dress in women's clothes and mince their way among the crowd. In an aside the author dismisses the too obvious Freudian interpretation involving a kind of fertility rite with "women" clambering over an erect, slippery pole. But by raising the question Swiderski makes us reconsider our bias which refuses such interpretations in an American festival but would be inclined to believe the Freudian patterns if the festival were conducted in less "modern" circumstances.

There are other dismissed interpretations. The transvestism is not to protect the male from the evil eye. The flowers in front of the altar do not indicate a status struggle. In one place the statue of St. Peter is described as the male divinity meeting the female divinity when it stops before a shrine of the Blessed Virgin, but no comment is made when it stops at St. Anne's Church nor is there any explanation why it doesn't stop at the church of Our Lady of Good Voyage. The usual interpretations are not adequate.

By treating the festival as text, Swiderski focuses on the problems of interpretation. The drive for meaning, for explanation, the trust in the reasonableness of things causes people to speak and write all sorts of opinions which are pure figments (as this review may also prove to be). Here in Japan we are treated to a genre of writing called *Nihonjinron* 日本人論 in which the uniqueness of Japan is considered and explained. Often the facts do not fit the fabrications, but they are passed on anyway. For example students solemnly tell me that Japanese are closer to nature than other people because Japan is blessed with four distinct seasons. Now, it is true that there are many festivals, activities, and foods connected with the seasons, and these items might be more than in other countries, but the reason is not due to "four" distinct

seasons peculiar to Japan.

In contrast to such “studies,” *Voices* provides an entertaining account of a festival which continues to survive despite predictions of its imminent demise. While there are details that should have been given or further investigated, *Voices* does make known the many activities and motives involved in the Gloucester fiesta. In addition, it has the unique feature of applying Bakhtin’s principles to an anthropological study. In keeping with its model, *Voices* irreverently subverts the authoritative study and allows the folk voice to come through: “He guessed it was because ‘festival’ sounded too stuffy—‘like the way you guys always talk.’ ‘Fiesta’ is more like ‘festa, the Italian word. It means have a good time. Okay, go have one’” (96). Read *Voices* in the same spirit.

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