

ca. 950). Interestingly, the description of Qāsim's *thurayyā* explicitly mentions the length of the longest night (the winter solstice) in Ifrīqiya and calculates it for a latitude of some 33°; this does not fit any city in al-Andalus but corresponds well to Qayrawān and to Baghdad. We have here an example of the role of Qayrawān as a link in the chain of transmission between East and West.

On p. 64 the authors ascribe a Latin translation of Ibn Abī l-Rijāl's famous *al-Kitāb al-bāri' fī aḥkām al-nujūm* to Constantine the African. To the best of my knowledge this book was first translated into Castilian by Alfonso X in 1254 and the Castilian version was translated twice into Latin.

The third debatable point appears on p. 67 where the authors deal with Maghribī astronomical tables of the 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> c. and mention three authors: Ibn al-Kammād, Ibn Ishāq and Ibn al-Raqqām. As regards Ibn al-Kammād (fl. 1116), there is no evidence of any connection of his with the Maghrib, and his *al-Zīj al-Muqtabas* (extant only in a Latin translation by Johannes de Dumpno) is calculated for the coordinates of Cordova; he is also the author of two other non-extant *zīj*es named *al-Kawr 'alā l-Dawr* and *al-Amad 'alā l-Abad*. As for the second author, Ibn Ishāq (fl. Tunis and Marrākush ca. 1193-1222) left an unfinished *zīj* containing numerical tables but not canons, which was the object of five recensions: one of them, by an anonymous Tunisian astronomer, is extant in ms. Hyderabad Andra

Pradesh State Library 298; another one is Ibn al-Bannā's *Minhāj*; finally, Ibn al-Raqqām (fl. Tunis, Bijāya and Granada, d. 1315) compiled three different recensions of Ibn Ishāq's *zīj*, all of which are extant: *al-Zīj al-Mustawfī*, *al-Zīj al-Shāmil* and *al-Zīj al-Qawīm*.

These shortcomings do not detract in any way from the value of the book. I would be most grateful if Prof. Djebbar or any of his disciples could write a more detailed survey of the history of Mathematics in the Maghrib and al-Andalus, a task for which they are the only competent scholars alive today.

Julio Samsó

Sonja Brentjes, *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, 16th-17th centuries. Seeking, Transforming, Discarding Knowledge*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Ashgate-Variorum, 2010, 350p.

First of all, we should welcome the apparition of this volume, which is an important contribution to Arabic and Islamic studies. There are number of reasons supporting this statement. On one hand, the choice of the topic and, specially, the period of time considered are truly attractive. Whereas cultural interchanges between Islamic countries and Europe in Medieval or Contemporary times had been a subject of many essays, the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were almost forgotten by most of scholars. When, in 1999, the

author started to analyse these centuries, a major change happened. On the other hand, Sonja Brentjes covers the gap seeking for an innovative point of view, rejecting the borders between closed disciplines (i.e. Islamic studies vs. European studies). The author claims –and I agree with her– that it is not possible to understand the whole subject if one half is forgotten. This goal, of course, made the research more complete, but also more difficult because the elements included are from a different origin.

As usual in *Variorum Collected Studies Series*, the book is a reprint of different articles except number III, which is the first publication. The authorship of the eight works included is individual excluding the article number IV, “Pietro della Valle’s Latin Geography of Safavid Iran (1624-1628): Introduction”, written in collaboration with Volkmar Schüller. Thus, the volume gives an overview of the research on cultural transmission carried out by Professor Brentjes during the last decade. The eight articles are I “The interests of the Republic of Letters in the Middle East, 1550-1700”; II “On the relation between the Ottoman Empire and the West European Republic of Letters (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries)”; III “The presence of ancient secular and religious texts in the unpublished and printed writings of Pietro della Valle (1586-1652)”; IV “Pietro della Valle’s Latin Geography of Safavid Iran (1624-1628): Introduction”; V “Early modern Western European travellers in

the Middle East and their reports about the sciences”; VI “Pride and prejudice: the invention of a ‘historiography of science’ in the Ottoman and Safavid empires by European travellers and writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”; VII “Peirec’s interests in the Middle East and Northern Africa in respect to geography and cartography”; and VIII “Astronomy a temptation? On early modern encounters across the Mediterranean Sea”.

One of the main contributions of the book is questioning the methodology used so far in order to avoid prejudices. The evaluation of a culture is always dangerous, especially if it only consists of the contraposition of identities seen as dichotomies (Europe vs. Islam; West vs. East) without considering important factors, namely, the diversity inside each area. In fact, appropriation of evaluation has been a European privilege so far. The cultural translation, hence, takes up the complexities of the early modern writing about Western Asia and the scientific traditions of Islamic societies. Furthermore, S. Brentjes adds new data on the geography of knowledge showing how merchants bought manuscripts not only from Northern Africa and Western Asia, but also from the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Iran and Mughal India. Besides, the unpublished letters from the European travellers such as Pietro della Valle offer a new sight on the way some visitors understood these “unknown regions” and demonstrate how the official vision of a link

between Europe and the ancient authors was built. Indeed, European authors from the seventeenth century interested in geography were more attentive to contemporary information than to the classical one.

A new approach to the role played by missionaries is also given. That is, although this role has been analysed in other areas (such as China or Latin America), it was still necessary to show that Catholic and Protestant priests spent long time in Islamic countries, learnt Arabic and acted as cultural promoters of the Christianity largely through schools. Although they accomplished their official aim, they also took part in astronomical observations or other activities seen sometimes as damaging and other times simply as condoned.

Crucial are the author's considerations concerning those who were the intermediaries working with visitors in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. In this sense, Christian communities in Asia appear to work as the key contact for travellers. Some cities, like Aleppo or Cairo were a hub where Europeans learnt Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish and other languages. From a philological point of view, it is interesting to notice that centuries ago some travellers complained about the difficulties to learn oriental languages because language teaching methods –and specially the achievement of speaking skills– of certain languages are currently being discussed.

The articles about Pietro della Valle and François Pétis de la Croix

are good examples of how elites acquired formation and on how scientific translators reached certain level of a foreign language.

S. Brentjes claims that it is necessary to deconstruct the traditional point of view about the role the Ottoman Empire played –and still plays–, otherwise, history would keep the negative perception of its influence. It is true that Turkish and Iranian studies in some European scholastic traditions are if not excluded, at least, marginalised. But, it is also true that negative perceptions are not limited to these areas, but to any subject which is simply not related to the Christian Western culture.

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