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*Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt: Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft.* Edited by SEBASTIAN GÜNTHER and DOROTHEE PIELOW. Leiden: BRILL, 2019. Pp. xlii + 644. \$179, €149.

To do justice to this impressive compilation in a brief review is a challenge that will be answered by

borrowing an idea from one of the contributors, namely, that quality should be allowed to make up for lack of quantity. Space will also be saved by dispensing with almost all attributions and references.

The scope of the work is vast, from the third millennium BC to Harry Potter, from Indonesia to North and South America, and from magic bowls and amulets to photographs and mobile phones. The intention is clearly to present a comprehensive account of Islamic magic in all its varieties, from individual magicians and technical terms to global religious, ideological, and literary developments, with the primary focus on cultures that use the Arabic script.

To this end, by way of introduction, there is a lengthy updating of the history of magic in predominantly Arabic sources and secondary Western translations and studies, which aims to fill the gap since the last most significant work in this field, the monograph of Manfred Ullmann, which has dominated studies of Islamic magic since 1972. This is followed by fifteen chapters grouped into six topics: technical vocabulary and concepts, magic documents, amulets and magic formulae, occult scripts and incantations, literary manifestations, and two case studies of contemporary magic in the non-Arab world. The work concludes with a closely argued proposal for a more refined approach to the history of magic that distinguishes between first order “insider” and second order “outsider” evidence, documenting respectively the actual practice of magic and attitudes to it. Each section of the work has a specific bibliography attached, and there is a general classified bibliography at the end, along with several different kinds of index. Some papers are accompanied by illustrations in a most elegant and well-ordered volume that does its publisher credit.

As we might expect, a number of contributions (including the preliminary and final chapters) stress that the field is relatively under-researched, but even as it stands—and this may have been in the mind of the editors—this work could already serve as a textbook for a university course in Islamic magic. Inevitably, only readers of German would be able to benefit from this, but an English version might well be worth considering.

As a *Fachfremder* himself, the reviewer is not well placed to make significant comments, positive or negative, about the contents. Nevertheless (a faint echo of the Goethean *doch*, which the reviewer encountered many decades ago as a student), some observations will be offered here with due diffidence.

The overlap of magic with mysticism, theology, law, and philosophy, along with its literary, anthropological, and economic dimensions, are all fully acknowledged throughout the work. But there are no firm boundaries between these categories, nor can we put them on a spectrum. What they have in common, however, is that they all depend on the power of the

word—indeed Islam stands out among world religions for treating language as both a human medium of worldly discourse and a divine medium of direct revelation. All this is duly taken into account by the contributors, with particular emphasis on the power of naming, supported on one occasion by a quotation from Isaiah (p. 347, correct to 43:1). This prompts the comment that there is a cluster of quranic verses, not mentioned in this work, that could be added to the evidence. They express the divine creative power of words themselves, effectively asserting that creation is itself an act of language. Q 16:40 is a convenient example: *innamā qawlunā li-shay’in aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun fā-yakūnu* (speaking in the first person!). Through this power of language, Islamic “logocentricity” goes much further than the Christian *logos*. Interestingly, the idea was floated long ago in Western scholarship that learning the Quran by heart is analogous to the Eucharist for the way in which the metaphysical and the physical become one.

The sources of data for this volume should be extended to include all the technical dictionaries and classifications of the sciences. Only one such work is mentioned, but the corpus as a whole would help to define the place of magic in the Islamic intellectual structure. A minor bibliographical omission is the 1992 article by G. Endreß in the *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie*, perhaps because by its nature it is a summary of current scholarship rather than a presentation of original research. Finally, a small addition to the paper on magic bowls: inscriptions on bowls are also found in pre-Islamic times, and one in particular is interesting because, although it is not a magic bowl in the strict sense, it bears the owner’s name QYNW BR GŠM, and is dated to the fifth century BC. This GŠM has been identified as the same person as Gessem, the only Arab mentioned by name in the Old Testament (so Rabinowitz, *JNES* 15 [1956]: 6, citing Neh. 2:19 and 6:1–7).

On p. 522, Biesterfeld is listed as a contributor: to be sure he receives special thanks in the introduction for his key role in bringing the work to publication, but there is no article by him in it. This mysterious lacuna reminds the reviewer of the novel *Here We Are* by Graham Swift (2020, the title is worth the price of the book). It concerns a magician who is famous for making himself disappear on stage, rather than an assistant or volunteer, employing all the artifices of his trade. One day he performs his disappearing act as usual, but (spoiler alert) is never seen again, to the consternation of all who knew him. We would not wish this on Biesterfeld, but he does in any case reappear on pp. 59–60, in the footnotes, the nether world of literature.

As a stimulus and guide for further research the value of this work is self-evident: it provides a combination of new data and methodological models that will reinvigorate the study of this somewhat diffuse

multidisciplinary field. Its contributors are justly critical of the inherited “orientalist” approach, and they replace it with a welcome objectivity and scholarly empathy.

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