

Books reviews

Descriptive Catalogue of Orientalists' Publications Preserved in the Research Centre, the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad Bin Saud. Prepared by Qasim al-Samarrai. Riyadh, 1st edition, 1408/1988.

Al-Fihris al-Wasfī li-al-Manšūrāt al-Istišrāqīyya al-Mahfūza fī Markaz al-Buḥūṭ, Ġāmi'at al-Imam Muhammad b. Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyya. I'dād wa-Taqdīm al-Duktūr Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī. Al-Riyāḍ, al-ṭab'a al-ūlā, 1408/1988.

90 pp.[Engl. text], 170 pp.[Arab. text] (Foreword by Dr. Abdullah Ibn Abdulmohsen Al-Torky.)

This catalogue heralds a new development in the appreciation of what is called 'Orientalism' in the Middle East. In the past few years the distrust of what 'the Orientalists' were doing has steadily increased in Muslim circles. Numerous books have been published in the past ten years or so in which Muslim authors contend, among other things, that the study of Eastern languages and cultures in the West has the sinister objective of producing knowledge concerning the Eastern psychology and way of thinking solely in order to provide the necessary means for Western colonialists and Christian missionaries to penetrate into the lands of Islam and into the hearts and minds of their inhabitants. 'Orientalism' is a danger that should be averted by all means, and many an apologetical work has been published with the sole purpose of exposing the wickedness of what often is styled as the 'movement of the Orientalists', apparently some kind of secret society of destructive scholarship. This has reached a stage where the word 'Orientalist', which originally had the neutral meaning of student of the East, has become a sort of invective, by which it has lost its usefulness in a civilised discussion.

Five years ago, the Riyadh-based scholarly journal *Ālam al-Kutub* ('The World of Books') devoted an entire issue (vol. 5, part 1 (1404/1984)) to questions pertaining to 'Orientalism'. Such questions as what the 'Orientalists' have done with the Islamic written heritage and how Hitti and Brockelmann have distorted Islamic history, along with many other subjects, are treated in it. The issue opens with a preface written by 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, the rector of the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad Bin Saud (who also wrote the foreword to the book presently under review). In it he writes: 'The question of Orientalism has aroused the attention of universities and research institutes as well as that of the general interested public, since it belongs to the struggle which is being waged between the civilisations and is considered one of the issues which Muslim scholars have set themselves to treat in defense of their creed, their history and their cultural heritage.' (p. 3). And: 'Now that God has awakened the Islamic peoples, and universities and specialized institutions

have been founded everywhere, in which the situation of the Islamic peoples is being taught, and where it is undertaken to restore their cultural pride to them, they must also look at this side of 'Orientalism', see what the Orientalists have done with the Muslim heritage and how their intellectual onslaught has affected the Muslims. The reader is invited to have a look at the purely scholarly research which they have brought about (if it exists at all) and to distinguish it from the other things the Orientalists have done: their attack on the Islam, the dissemination of doubt concerning its Prophet, the falsification of the history of Islam, the seduction of the Muslims by a way of life that is alien to their religion in order to maintain power over them and to uproot their fundamentals.' (p.4).

Compared to what one usually sees in attacks on the 'Orientalists', these are mild and moderate words. Now, five years later, the Islamic University in Riyadh has a 'Unit for the Study of Orientalism and Christian Missionary Works', and it is for the use of this Unit that a collection of older 'Orientalist' studies has been acquired. The book under review here is the catalogue of that collection. Dr. al-Turkī writes in his foreword: '... the first step in counteracting any erroneous ideology or hostile doctrine is to study it thoroughly, collect all the necessary information about it, analyse the information, delineate the various stages of its development and figure out its objectives and consequences.' (English part, p. 1). And this is great news. Whereas, till now, fantasies about 'Orientalism' could spread freely in the Islamic countries, the present collection of older works now kept in Riyadh is there to confront apologists with the facts and to force them to come to a more balanced view of their subject. As the compiler of the catalogue, Dr. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī, says in his introduction: '... no serious scholarly attempt has been made in the Arab world to look deeply into the influence that Orientalism has so far exercised on the intellectual, political and social aspects of the Orient ...' (pp. 11-2). The availability of the works by these 'Orientalists' in an Arab institution of major importance may have the effect that more informed views on Oriental studies can be put forward and contribute to a better understanding of what is really at stake.

Now that I have sketched the milieu in which this collection is going to be used, let us turn to the catalogue itself. It is of a simple structure. It consists of an Arabic and an English part, both of which describe the same collection. The compiler provides the catalogue with an historical introduction, in which he summarily mentions trends in the study of the Middle East, with reference to some of the works in the catalogue. The compiler is heavily indebted for this historical survey to Fück's *Die arabische Studien* ... (Leipzig 1955). The catalogue is arranged alphabetically by author throughout, without any arrangement

by subject. The works of the same author are usually, but not always, arranged in chronological order. Each item is numbered consecutively, but since the catalogue consists of two sections (an Arabic and an English one), each of which contains a complete description of the same collection, the works have different numbers in each section. As the indexes of each part refer to the pages anyway, these numbers are superfluous and only confusing. It struck me that the Arabic part contains 277 titles and the English part only 265. I have not tried to find a reason for this discrepancy.

The English part has a register of authors, the Arabic part one of authors and another one of titles. This double arrangement does not facilitate the use of the catalogue. The Arabic part of the book is in fact a sort of translation of the information contained in the titles, and a summary of the English annotation of the titles. Much of it is unintelligible in its Arabic spelling, to name but one impediment, and constant reference to the English part is necessary. An Arab user, however, who would like to spell a European name correctly, will not easily find the description of the same item in the other section, due to the lack of a number concordance. It is really a missed chance for the compiler. He should have made each title bilingual, and not have divided his book into two separate sections. Another defect in the book is the lack of a chronological index, while a topographical index would have enhanced the value of a catalogue as the present one even more. A subject index or a really good introduction in which reference is made to the majority of the items would have been an even greater asset. All this is not available, and the lack of order in the arrangement and the absence of elementary instruments such as additional indexes seriously jeopardize the catalogue's use.

More criticism may be uttered against this book. The compiler is referred to on the English title-page as a 'professor of palaeography'. In the Arabic part (p. 5), palaeography is translated as *'ilm al-iktināh*. *Iktināh* means 'to get to the bottom of something, to explore something, to understand thoroughly'. If the compiler is a professor in a field with such noble goals, it is curious, to say the least, that he evidently has no knowledge of some of the languages in which the books described by him are written. Odd quotations from Latin title-pages are by no means seldom, and this degrades the book considerably. If one has no knowledge of Latin and still wishes to study 'Orientalism', there is only one way to go about it: learn Latin and do it well. Serious is the fact that the learned annotations to the descriptions of the older imprints is almost without exception pilfered from sales catalogues of Messrs. Brill of

Leiden (most conspicuously from *Philologia Orientalis* 2, Leiden 1983), whereas this is only occasionally accounted for. Last but not least: typographically, the English part leaves much to be desired. It is clear that the publisher needs a more sophisticated typesetting equipment for this sort of work.

Had a chronological list been added to the present work, it would have yielded the following picture:

17th-century books: 12 titles; 18th-century books: 9 titles (strangely enough, there are no works published between 1668 and 1790); 1801-1810: 29 titles; 1811-1820: 37 titles; 1821-1830: 55 titles; 1831-1840: 67 titles; 1841-1850: 30 titles; 1851-1873: 23 titles

Of the 17th-century works, the Grammar of Peter Kirsten is conspicuous (No. 126 of the English section). Quite a number of 17th-century Rome imprints are available (Nos. 15, 16, 88, 97, 155, 160, 170). But it is evident that the greater part of the collection described in this catalogue consists of works published in the first half of the 19th century. Interesting are several products of the French press in Cairo, made during the short-lived French occupation of Egypt (Nos. 45, 49, 152, 153). Apart from the numerous European imprints, the following exotic imprints may be mentioned here: Algiers 1837 (No. 47); Beirut 1836 (No. 264), 1852 (No. 26); Calcutta 1814 (Nos. 148, 166), 1816 (No. 21), 1837 (No. 4); Delhi (?) 1846 (No. 229); Kasan 1813 (No. 74), 1822 (No. 55); Malta 1834 (No. 31), 1836 (No. 63); Shuwayr 1804 (No. 1), 1823 (No. 22), 1839 (No. 25), 1843 (Nos. 128, 150); Smyrna 1847 (No. 151). Many of the Paris imprints (62 Nos.) are not separately published works, but offprints from periodicals, such as *Journal Asiatique*. This, among other things, gives the collection a somewhat second-rate impression. None of the major works of Oriental scholarship in 17th or 18th-century Europe are represented. And to dismiss the 18th century as a period of 'widespread cultural and scientific stagnation', as the compiler does (p. 7), is really too far-fetched. Nor can it excuse the almost total absence of works produced in that period. It is at once clear that we have here not the collection of a private scholar who collected with a purpose, but nothing more than the incidental stock of an antiquarian bookseller. This does not apply to the 19th-century publications. They are a good representation of what went on in Oriental studies in Europe at the time. It can only be hoped that the study of this older literature will be so captivating to the students in Riyadh that the Islamic University will, in the future, add new items to a historic collection, the foundations of which have now been laid.

Leiden

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