
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam, from Jihad to Dhimmitude: Seventh-Twentieth Centuries* by Bat Ye'or, Miriam Kochan and David Littman

Review by: Chase F. Robinson

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Muslims. Saudi Arabia also has had a considerable role in international events thanks to its oil wealth and its contributions to Islamic groups worldwide.

Muhammad Yusuf's *Guide* is a comprehensive and thorough Arabic-language reference work that contains a list of about 3,100 books and pamphlets written for adults and broadly dealing with religious subjects. Yusuf also included in an appendix a list of about 200 works intended for children. All works cited were published between 1400 and 1409 inclusive (November 21, 1979, through August 3, 1989). Useful subject, title and author indices and occasional cross-references increase the value of the book for researchers.

A typical entry consists of the book's title, author, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, number of pages and, where appropriate, the name of a series. Some entries indicate multiple editions or printings, sponsoring institutions or groups, translations from or to Arabic and information on publication outside Saudi Arabia.

Close examination of this *Guide* can reveal much about Islam in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s, while this work can also serve as a useful beginning point for comparisons with religious publication in other countries.

WILLIAM OCHSENWALD
Virginia Tech

The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam, from Jihad to Dhimmitude: Seventh-Twentieth Centuries, by BAT YE'OR. Translated from the French by Miriam Kochan & David Littman. 522 pages, illustrations, appendices, notes, glossary, bibliography, indices. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1996. \$45.00 (Cloth) ISBN 0-8386-3678-0

This book is a translation and slight expansion of the author's *Chrétientés d'Orient entre jīhād et dhimmitude, VIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1991). It offers, first, a broad overview of Muslim/*dhimmi* relations from the conquests to the 20th century, and second, a great number of translated texts (Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Hebrew), all organized under four rubrics: *jīhād*, "the peasantry's condition," "sedition, nomadism, and dhimmitude" and "the era of emancipation." Three appendices (on the sources) and notes follow. The packaging thus suggests real history, but readers interested in a dispassionate account of confessional relations or a nuanced discussion of the widely diverse experience of Jews and Christians in the *dār al-Islam* will need to look elsewhere: regardless of what Jacques Ellul asserts in the Foreword (p. 18), this is a work of polemic—scholarly polemic, but polemic just the same.

To list errors of fact would probably fill this entire number of the *Bulletin*, but an illustrative example comes in one note on page 321 ("Zotaye or Zanj: black slaves from Africa who farmed the domains of the Arabs in lower Iraq. They revolted in the early ninth century"); this is mistaken in at least three respects. Here it is certainly more important to say something about the spread and interpretation of the evidence. It is not just that many of the sources, far from being

“documentary,” are highly polemical literary accounts; nor is it simply that the texts and photographs misrepresent the Christian and Jewish traditions of the Middle Ages, and occasionally are intended only to provoke (see, for example, the photo on p. 240: “Armenians Shot in a Field. Ankara, Turkey, 1915”; cf. also p. 443); nor is it that anyone at all familiar with the Syriac tradition will find astonishing the author’s assertion that “... the *dhimmis* themselves had to await their liberation before writing their own history, as previously they could only express gratitude for having been tolerated, since all criticism of the *dhimma* was forbidden” (p. 257). It is rather that the texts have been selected to support a thesis, occasionally expressed in terms that border on intemperate, that is as historically unsound as it is ugly.

The author thus claims to have identified a “specific world of dhimmitude” (p. 28 & throughout), apparently created by a variety of legal, fiscal, economic and social pressures. The evidence adduced for “systematic oppression” is anecdotal, and unrestrained too by any temporal or geographic focus: “The recording in multiple sources of eye-witness accounts, concerning unvarying regulations affecting the Peoples of the Book, perpetuated over the centuries from one end of the *dar al-Islam* to the other (within the area studied here), proves sufficiently their (i.e., cases of anti-*dhimmi* legislation) entrenchment in customs” (p. 254). One jumps breathlessly from Christian testimony about northern Mesopotamia in the late 8th century to Jewish accounts of Fez in the 18th (p. 79); “dhimmitude,” it appears, is a transhistorical phenomenon, and one that manifests itself principally in psychological terms: “Reduced in extreme cases to a precarious survival, evaluated in monetary terms, the *dhimmi* perceives himself and accepts himself as a dehumanized being” (pp. 235 & following).

Of course pre-modern Islamic societies, like pre-modern non-Islamic societies, ascribed status in ways that we moderns (and some pre-moderns) find distasteful; and of course non-Muslims not infrequently suffered as a result. But to string together account after frightful account of oppression and persecution proves nothing, except perhaps that history can always be pressed into service in contemporary social debates.

CHASE F. ROBINSON

The Oriental Institute, Oxford

Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas, edited by MUHAMMAD KHALID MASUD, BRINKLEY MESSICK & DAVID S. POWERS. 431 pages, figures, appendix, notes, references, glossary, index. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. \$45.00 (Cloth) ISBN 0-674-46870-8

Muftis and fatwas, their place in the history of Islamic law and the lived experience of Muslim communities, have received little scholarly attention until recently. In line with the revisionist trend in the field of Islamic legal studies that is eschewing older visions of Islamic law as a static ideal, however, a number of scholars in different disciplines, including law, history, anthropology and political science, have begun to explore the ways in which Islamic jurists (muftis) and their legal opinions (fatwas) provide the crucial link between Islamic law as theory and as practical guide for a given community. The editors of this extraor-