Boaz Shoshan: The Arabic Historical Tradition and the Early Islamic Conquests. Folklore, Tribal Lore, Holy War. London/New York: Routledge 2016 (Routledge Studies in Classical Islam 4). VIII, 197 S. £ 110.00. ISBN: 978-1-138-91894-8.

Far too long have the plentiful Arabic sources describing the early Islamic conquests and early Islamic history in general merely been regarded as a somewhat confused source of contradictory dates and names. While the ground-breaking work of Albrecht Noth on *topoi* in the classical Islamic historiography of the conquests[1] was still motivated by a historicist concern to 'sieve out' recurring, stereotypical details from the narratives to arrive at a solid, 'authentic' body of historical fact to work with, the importance of reading the classical Islamic accounts of early Islamic history as narratives relevant in their own light for the establishment of an exclusively Islamic founding history of the early Medieval Near East is now widely acknowledged and has produced a number of important monographs and articles in the last years. Boaz Shoshan's monograph *The Arabic Historical Tradition and the Early Islamic Conquests* is a good example of the current interest in this field and very much illustrates the state and problems of the art.

As may be typical of such relatively recently emerging fields of inquiry, the 'proper ways' to conduct the study of the Arabic historical tradition and its importance for later Islamic discussions of 'Islamicity' are still very much uncharted. Due to the sheer wealth of Arabic and Persian narrative sources for this period, some sort of preliminary selection of sources is unavoidable: Ideally such a focus should be both 'systematic', so that the preliminary selection does not precondition the results of the discussion, as well as 'productive', so that the sources under closer consideration may productively be read together.

For a study of narrativity in the depiction of the first century of Islamic history in classical Islamic historiography, four approaches in this preliminary selection of sources appear especially viable: First, one can focus on the close reading of one pertinent source – this approach has been explored by Shoshan in his important, if somewhat over-confident, 2004 study of al-Ṭabarī's

1 A. Noth: Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung. Teil 1: Themen und Formen. Bonn 1970 (Bonner Orientalistische Studien, NS 25).

history[2], as well as in a number of other recent monographs concentrating on particular historical works. The main drawback of this focus lies in its inherent downplay of intertextuality and the openness of any particular narrative element to the multiple conflicting versions, in which it appears in the huge literature of classical Islamic historiography. At the same time, it also somewhat over-estimates the influence of the 'artistic personality' of the author, as the grounding of a particular version of events in a common intertextual framework of historical information is difficult to discern from any particular historiographical work alone.

The second possible focus concentrates on one particular geographical region or place. This approach has been chosen in a number of recent monographs, most notably Jens Scheiner's 2010 book on the conquest of Damascus[3]. Once again, however, the very concentration on one place is problematic for the study of narrativity as it appears in the Islamic accounts, as the motifs used to depict the fights and conquests to a large extent appear interchangeably in the descriptions of the conquest of very different locales, as Noth has shown in his classical study on interchangeable motifs in the description of the battles of Iṣfahān and Nihāwand in 1968[4].

The third approach would focus on one particular timeframe, such as the period of the early Islamic conquests or *futūḥāt* in its narrower sense, as suggested by Boaz Shoshan in the monograph reviewed here. Once again, however, this has its drawbacks: The instability of the term *futūḥ* as a temporal designation is amply borne out by classical Arabic historiographical works such as al-Balādhurī's *Conquests of the Lands* (*Futūḥ al-Buldān*) or Ibn Aʿtham's *Book of the Conquests* (*Kitāb al-Futūḥ*), both of which transcend the period commonly referred to as the 'Early Islamic Conquests' in modern scholarship by some 200 years. These 'Early Islamic Conquests' are in a similar fashion not clearly defined in regional terms: Both al-Balādhurī and Ibn Aʿtham include military campaigns in the Arabian Peninsula in their works, however al-Balādhurī starts his account with the military expeditions of Muḥammad on

2 B. Shoshan: Poetics of Islamic Historiography. Deconstructing Ṭabarī *History*. Leiden/Boston 2004 (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts 53).

3 J. J. Scheiner: Die Eroberung von Damaskus. Quellenkritische Untersuchung zur Historiographie in klassisch-islamischer Zeit. Leiden/Boston 2010 (Islamic History and Civilization 76).

4 A. Noth: Iṣfāhān – Nihāwand. Eine quellenkritische Studie zur frühislamischen Historiographie. In: ZDMG 118, 1968, 274–296.

the Western Arabian Peninsula, while Ibn Aʿtham begins with those 'conquests' that took place after Muḥammad's death. Accordingly, Donner's crucial framing of the Islamic Conquests outside the Arabian Peninsula as a direct continuation of the inner-Arabian campaigns commonly referred to as the *ridda*[5] very much resonates for the narrative features of sources purportedly referring to either the *ridda* or the extra-Arabic conquests: Both periods appear widely permeable to a common set of motifs and narrative structures, that underlay the treatment of any particular episode. Accordingly, from the point of view of a concentration on narrative aspects, it is difficult to draw a clear line between *futūḥāt* and other 'timeframes', as the different aspects and parts of Islamic history were transmitted, retold and discussed together and accordingly widely exchanged motifs and narrative structures.

A fourth possible mode in concentrating on a workable selection of sources would consist in selecting the sources for close reading not so much in terms of their – somewhat coincidental – occurrence in a particular historiographical work or by means of their temporal or regional affiliation, but in terms of their narrative shape itself. While this method was already suggested in Noth's *Quellenkritische Studien* of 1970, the difficulties in systematically tracing all the possible variations and combinations of particular narrative motifs included in the wealth of classical Arabic-Islamic writing make it near-impossible to progress beyond the discussion of parallels selected more or less by chance.

While Shoshan ostentatiously and in the title of his book follows the third approach of concentrating on the (hard-to-delineate) historiography on the extra-Arabian 'Early Islamic Conquests', the historiography of even this particular period of around a dozen years proves much too extensive for systematic discussion. Accordingly, Shoshan dedicates one chapter to the author Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam, two chapters to the narrative treatment of the 'conquest' of particular locales, while three chapters are arranged by motifs or *topoi* collected from across the timeframe of the 'early Islamic conquests'. While this testing of different approaches gives a good impression of the polyphonic vibrancy of classical Islamic historiography describing the reign of the first three successors of Muḥammad, the lack of a coherent, systematic

5 F. M. Donner: The Arab Tribes in the Muslim Conquest of Iraq. Ann Arbor 1975.

approach in the selection of his sources renders parts of the discussions conducted by Shoshan somewhat arbitrary: Even in a book ten times the size of the one under review here, systematic treatment of the wealth of narrative imagery in the depiction of the *futūḥāt* would probably be impossible, as there is 'always more pertinent material to be added'. Shoshan's monograph accordingly forms a most valuable demonstration of the respective viability and inherent problems of different approaches to the classical Islamic historiography and should be seen as a compelling encouragement for further, possibly more systematic study.

In the *Introduction* (pp. 1–28) Shoshan sets out to argue for the importance of his study and gives an overview over the main sources he is going to analyze. It is, however, unfortunate that his opening quotation of al-Ṭabarī's description of the battle of Fiḥl at the beginning of the chapter appears to continue the tradition of 'al-Ṭabarī-bashing' in modern scholarship (p. 1). While Shoshan takes al-Ṭabarī's expressed regret about the lacking clarity in the chronology of the battles in Syria as "a problem of chronology" (p. 1), his inference that the historiographer is entirely unaware of the difference in content of the respective accounts is quite certainly unwarranted in light of al-Ṭabarī's methodically pursued goal of "reporting what has been reported to me" unambiguously formulated in the *khuṭbat al-kitāb* at the beginning of his monumental history[6]. Mistaking al-Ṭabarī's methodological rigor as a fundamental lack of concern about the content of the reports collected in his history equals the mistake of admonishing al-Ṭabarī for including his chapter on the Islamic conquest of Egypt and Alexandria in the annalistic framework of his history *sub anno* 20 AH, while reporting massive shipments of grain from the Islamic governor of precisely this province during the *ʿām al-ramāda* or *Year of the Ashes* of 18 AH: It is precisely because of an acute awareness of the ultimate impossibility of reconciling all the different reports and their respective chronologies of events (a point very convincingly made by Shoshan himself in his critique of Jandora's *March from Medina* in footnote 21 on p. 18) on the part of al-Ṭabarī that he refrains from any 'logical' rearrangement of chronology, let alone narrative content!

This somewhat rash censure of al-Ṭabarī is all the more unfortunate as Shoshan himself goes on to most crucially argue that "when speaking or writing

6 Al-Ṭabarī: Taʾrīkh [no editor given]. Cairo [no year given], I,11.

about the past, facts were not necessarily the only, not even the prime, concern of the Muslims of old" (p. 2). This important insight could have been further strengthened by a short reference to the views of religious studies on the importance of 'Salvation Histories' as opposed to 'historicist histories' in the religious life of any community (excluding any misunderstood 'claim to Islamic exceptionalism'), but the point certainly is very well taken.

The approach to the Arabic historiography of the conquests as a '"history' of ideas" (p. 6) is once again a most important step beyond Noth's 'sieving out' of narrative elements, however a reference to Donner's prosopographical approaches in his *Arab Tribes in the Muslim Conquest of Iraq* and in his *Early Islamic Conquests* would have been helpful, especially during the demonstration of the topic character of the description of the battles (p. 3). The intertextual relation between the sources could have been included in the presentation of the sources (pp. 7–15) and a more systematical study might want to include additional material composed roughly during the same timeframe as the classical Islamic historical accounts, especially the early Christian Arabic tradition of Eutychius and Agapius, as well as Arabic-Islamic works not ostentatiously arranged as 'classical historiographies' but containing important material on the narrative treatment of the conquests, such as al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, Al-Kindī's *Kitāb al-Wulāt* and his *Kitāb al-Quḍāt*, al-Maqdisī's *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa-l-taʾrīkh* among others. Apart from these (probably unavoidable) 'additional nice-to-haves', the selection and presentation is magisterial and convincing.

The lack of a systematic approach to the sources and the omission to define crucial terms makes the subsequent first chapter, entitled *Tribal lore on the conquests* problematic. The lack of a coherent definition of tribe is already felt in Shoshan's opening claim that "[c]ontrary to a retrospective image of the young Islamic *umma* as a united body already operating as such during the early conquests, Muslim armies were organized in tribe-based formations" (p. 29). As the tribal affiliation or *nisba* forms one of the regular parts of Arab names as they are given in the Islamic sources, the contradiction constructed by Shoshan between 'united body' and 'tribe-based formations' is largely fictional in a context where virtually every Arab had a tribal affiliation and even non-Arab converts to Islam were affiliated to one of these 'tribes' as clients. Rather than construct a contradiction between 'tribal' and 'Islamic' affiliation, one should look into the motivation of the leaders of supra-tribal ar-

mies or even mono-tribal sub-contingents in such armies, carefully differentiating between 'rhetorically expressed tribality' and 'tribality relevant for the actions reported in the sources' to explore the (highly relevant) question of 'Islamic' vs. 'Arabic' motivation of the conquests, to borrow Donner's terminology.

In a similar way, the omission of Shoshan to clearly define 'tribal' motivation as opposed to 'the motivations of anybody having a tribal affiliation, i. e. every Muslim mentioned in our sources' turns his list of examples ostentatiously illustrating the 'tribal lore' to be analyzed in this chapter into a more or less haphazard collection of anecdotes arranged according to the tribal affiliation of their protagonists or their transmitter. An answer to the question raised by Shoshan, namely a systematic inquiry into the influence of tribal affiliation on the narrative aspects of Islamic historiography, would by contrast be a most important, if difficult, contribution to research on early Islamic history and historiography.

Another part of this inquiry would need to engage with the puzzling question of whether the tribal affiliation of the authorities mentioned in the *isnād* indeed has an influence on the content of the narratives transmitted about individuals with the same or distinct tribal affiliation. Shoshan assumes this implicitly, however formulations such as that a certain Kūfan authority was "possibly sympathetic to the Nakhaʿī settlers in his town" (p. 34), that Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī transmitted a particular detail "possibly to enhance Kūfan esteem" (p. 34) or even that the same Ibn al-Aʿtham reported a story "probably relying on sources from the tribe of Azd" (p. 36) are entirely too vague if not grounded in systematic study. Such a systematic study would need to first collect narrative motifs in all possible contexts and sources, then sketch their possible narrative functions and implications and then use this systematic overview to analyze the particular function of a narrative motif in a given context. This systematic groundwork might then be used to look for patterns that could show the influence of tribal affiliation on the content and implicit judgement transmitted in a particular story.

It is only through such systematic inquiry that the importance of intertextual networks in shaping the reports collected in our sources could be shown. Such a re-evaluation of the *isnāds* from *chains of transmission* to *chains of authorization*, departing from the assumption that 'every transmitter knows more than he is quoted with in our sources and every report is known to more people than are mentioned in its *isnād(s)*' could use the numerous doublets

of particular stories to show how different views of particular episodes or persons were narratively deployed. Shoshan includes such a doublet in this chapter without designating it as such in the story of the mother of four sons from the tribe of Nakhaʿ who went into battle, which is told at least twice with a different outcome (pp. 34 and 42).

In this context, a clear distinction must be maintained between the tribal affiliation of participants in a given story and the tribal affiliation of its transmitters. By failing to maintain this crucial distinction, Shoshan interprets conflicting reports about the role of the Bajalī Muslims at the battle of al-Qādisiyya on a 'factual' level as due to "[t]he fact that perhaps things were more complicated than the Bajalī self-complimentary version" (p. 44). This and similar conflicting reports must first be read as indicating the impact of a controversial process of transmission on the transmitted material, before a possible 'factual' background to the controversy can plausibly be reconstructed.

The unsystematic collection of particular details presented by Shoshan further weakens his argument for the relevance of tribal affiliation to the narrative form of the Arabic-Islamic sources by including material that ostentatiously is not linked to any particular tribal affiliation. While Shoshan himself notes that the boasting verses he presents as "al-Muzayna's lore" are quite possibly also lauding other tribes, as no particular tribe is mentioned in the particular verses themselves (p. 34), the verses ascribed to the women of the fleeing Arab allies at the battle of Yarmūk (p. 35) form a variation of a poetic *topos* to be found, for example, in a pre-Islamic setting in Ibn al-Kalbī's *Book of Idols*. Tribal affiliation is, by contrast, not mentioned in the verses quoted by Shoshan, so even a 'secondary appropriation' of the general *topos* to a specific situation connected to particular tribes would be difficult to argue on this occasion. Other instances of 'good stories' included in this chapter, even though the relevance of the tribal affiliation of protagonists or transmitters to the narrative is not clear, include the penises (p. 35) or sweets (pp. 40–41) taken as booty by some Arab-Islamic soldiers. In these contexts, the historically charged term of *tribe*, which may be salvageable for academic inquiry into early Islamic contexts if used strictly as a translation of Arabic *qabīla*, appears for Shoshan to imply aspects of 'backwardness', 'opposition to the state' or 'primitivism' which are derived from modern polemical discourses and quite out of place in the context of early Islamic history.

Unfortunately, this chapter also contains a number of mistakes in the transliteration of Arabic names and terms, which further obscure the argument. In the course of reading the chapter, the reviewer noted the following examples, while refraining from systematic comparison of all the names mentioned by Shoshan with their form in the primary sources: *Diwān* instead of *dīwān* is used consistently on pp. 29, 32 and 37, *Dinār* instead of *Dīnār* on p. 33, *al-Nʿumān* instead of *al-Nuʿmān* once on p. 36, *Dhū l-Hājib* instead of *Dhū l-Ḥājib* on p. 39, *al-Madāʿin* instead of *al-Madāʾin* on p. 42, *al-Madāʾin* instead of *al-Madāʾin* on p. 44, *Ṣanʿa*, possibly instead of *Ṣanʿāʾ* (?), on p. 42, *al-Qaʿqaʿ* instead of *al-Qaʿqāʿ* on p. 33 as well as in the detailed discussion of his involvement in the battle of al-Qādisiyya on pp. 38–40, *Zabrāʿ* instead of *Zubrāʾ* or possibly *Zabrāʾ* on p. 44.

To this list of oversights should probably be added the reference to the tribe of *Madhḥij* as "*B.* [Banū] *Madhḥij*" on p. 42: According to the usage of the sources and as noted by Caskel[7], Madhḥij is among the Arab tribes that are never described as *Banū X*. The well-known 'Pseudo-Prophet' of the *ridda*, Ṭulayḥa b. Khuwaylid al-Asadī, is rather imprecisely described as a mere former 'renegade' (p. 43), while the interpretation of the *nisba* of the transmitter Sulaym al-Saʿdī as "possibly" pointing to Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ (p. 38) is quite unlikely on historical grounds, as both clearly were contemporaries and familiar affiliations are in no way suggested. A more likely candidate might be a certain Sulaym b. Saʿd mentioned in Caskel (*Ǧamharat an-Nasab* II, p. 517), as affiliated to the ʿAmr b. Jundab b. al-ʿAnbar of Tamīm, as the Sulaym al-Saʿdī referred to by Shoshan does indeed praise a Tamīmī. The verses referring to Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ and Shuraḥbīl b. al-Simṭ, which Shoshan quotes according to al-Ṭabarī (p. 44), are given in a fuller form in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*[8]: Here it is clear that their (still somewhat ambiguous) message does not, as suggested by Shoshan, mean "that, under whatever circumstances, with them he [the anonymous poet] would always feel safe." The strange grapheme BBAYH, read as *bi-paye* and translated as a "command [...] to freeze" by Shoshan (p. 46) occurs in a doublet of the story quoted by

7 W. Caskel: Ǧamharat an-Nasab. Das genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī. Leiden 1966, I,62.

8 Al-Balādhurī: Ansāb al-Ashrāf (ed. M. Muḥammad Tāmir). Beirut 2011, VI,298–299.

Shoshan, which is also contained in the history of al-Ṭabarī[9], and is, as Shoshan fails to indicate, there glossed as "ka-mā anta" ("like you"?), which does not at all correspond to Shoshan's interpretation. While Shoshan's interpretation is not necessarily false, the doublet and the gloss should have been indicated.

The next chapter is entitled *Tropes of Islamic superiority* (53–82). Here, Shoshan discusses motifs depicting the superiority of Islam in the accounts of the conquests. While he certainly is correct in stressing the importance of an interpretation of the astonishing success of the early Islamic conquests as a miracle verifying the divine support for Islam, the unambiguous acceptance of this at least among the presumably Muslims audience of the historiographical works of the Arabic-Islamic tradition makes his conclusion that "the purpose of the various tropes they use [is] conveying the idea of the superiority of Islam and the Muslims when compared to their opponents" (p. 72) doubtful in its intransigence: As the political success of early Islam was out of the question, the plentiful material depicting the interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims cannot be explained from a need to show how superior Islam was alone. Rather, traces of later debates found in the reports ostentatiously referring to the conquests indicate that later inter-Muslim debates were projected backwards in an attempt to establish early Islamic precedents for particular positions.

In this way, the ascetic positions voiced by Muslims, which Shoshan discusses on pp. 57–59, while ostentatiously displayed towards their non-Muslim enemies, served to establish an early Islamic tradition of asceticism which must have been in marked contrast to the environment in which the stories were told. The paradigm of true Islam as ascetic and successful is therefore not directed exclusively against non-Muslims, but rather forms a powerful exhortation to reform in Islamic Cultural Memory. Similarly, the speech of the Persian convert to Islam "By God, you will not be defeated [...]. I do not need [any more] being associated with Persia" (p. 68) should not merely be seen as a praise of Islam at the expense of the Sassanians, but also be interpreted in the context of the Arab-Persian rivalry at the ʿAbbāsid court commonly designated as *shuʿūbiyya*.

9 Al-Ṭabarī: Taʾrīkh, II,504 (as note 6).

At the same time, Shoshan's inclusion of possible intertextual connections between Arabic-Islamic and Christian sources in his discussion (pp. 65–66) establishes this aspect as an important part of Islamic-Arabic narrativity that should be further explored. The parallel depiction of astrology and scripture as the sources for foreknowledge of Islamic victories among the Sassanians or the Byzantines respectively is also quite strikingly shown (pp. 64–67), it would be interesting to further investigate the functional equivalence between these two sources of ultimately divine knowledge as they are depicted in Islamic narratives.

The translation of martyrdom and conquest as *ḥasanayn* with "two good deeds" (translated somewhat better as "two merits" on p. 170) should probably be emended to "two good outcomes" (p. 55), the battle-site of *Jalūlāʾ* is miswritten as *Jalūlāʿ* and *Djalūlāʿ* in reference to the entry in the EI3 respectively (p. 77 n. 74), *al-Sāʾib* is written as *Sāʾib*, *al-Sāʾib* and (correctly) *al-Sāʾib* on the same page (p. 59), where *Jalūlāʾ* is also written as *Jalūlāʿ* multiple times. The translation of ʿUmar's reply to the question of "how much he might be allowed to keep of the spoils" in al-Ṭabarī also appears to be at least partly garbled (p. 59), however Shoshan here follows the translation of the passage given by Friedmann, so the mistake is – strictly speaking – not exclusively his. Finally, *al-Mughīra b. Shuʿba* is mistakenly called *al-Mughīra b. al-Shuʿbah* (p. 69).

The third chapter, entitled *Yarmūk – another view* (pp. 83–109), has its focus on the battle of al-Yarmūk. While the disregard inherent to this approach for the occurrences of the motifs discussed at other occasions could be used to focus on the specific impact and functions of individual motifs in this particular context, Shoshan regrettably largely limits himself to the enumeration and retelling of individual tropes without further analysis. The conflicting reports about the demission of Khālid b. al-Walīd by the caliph ʿUmar in particular are merely retold, while the importance of this stand-off between the normative concepts of a centralized state or local leadership for Islamic Cultural Memory is not discussed (pp. 95–97). Shoshan's conclusion that "[t]he contest for memorializing Khālid (and ʿUmar) is left open-ended" must be interpreted as a consequence of the fact that in Islamic tradition neither opinion could completely marginalize the other: The genesis and implications of this controversial discourse on centralization vs. regional autonomy in Islamic scholarly thought is crucial for Islamic intellectual history and deserves further study.

The Arabic word *taʿwīr* does not, as translated by Shoshan, stand for a "blinding", but for a 'making one-eyed' (p. 98). Accordingly, the 'Day of Inflicting One-Eyedness' during the battle of al-Yarmūk offers an example of the recurring topos of *battles in which many Muslims lost an eye*, which is also located for instance in the context of the battles of the Muslims with the Nubians by Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam[10] and in al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ al-Buldān*[11]. While Shoshan notices the particularities in the depiction of battles in the *Futūḥ al-Shām* traditionally ascribed to al-Wāqidī (p. 99), he does not discuss how this could be linked to the later date he suggests for this work (pp. 13–15). Further analysis of the growth and profusion of narrative tropes and motifs through the centuries would certainly yield most interesting insights into the narrative dynamics during the transmission of the Cultural Memory of the early Islamic conquests, as Shoshan himself demonstrates in other chapters.

Shoshan's analysis of one particular episode from the battle of al-Yarmūk as a scenic realization of *Sūra* 89 is most interesting, this approach should definitively be followed up in an exploration of the impact of figures of speech and quotations on the motivic depiction of Islamic history (p. 100). Finally, *al-Qaʿqāʿ* is at least once misspelled as *al-Qaʿqaʿ* (p. 98).

The fourth chapter, entitled *ʿUmar in Jerusalem* (pp. 110–133), is in the view of the reviewer the strongest chapter of the book. By focusing his investigation on the controversy about the capture of Jerusalem, Shoshan analyzes the ideological function of the various mutually contradicting motifs and tropes found in the sources to reconstruct different outlooks on the early Islamic conquests, which shaped the reports during the process of transmission. Shoshan convincingly dates the beginning of the intertextual controversies, which shaped the extant sources, to the beginning of Umayyad rule (p. 111) and goes on to posit individual strands of reports in the context of Jewish Messianism (pp. 115–119), before extending his analysis to the time of the Crusades by showing how the *Futūḥ al-Shām* ascribed to al-Wāqidī with their inclusion of Christians in the scenes during the capture of Jerusalem reflect the importance to 'place' Christians in a Muslim-ruled Jerusalem after the Crusades (p. 126). A more detailed analysis of the intertextual con-

10 Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam: Futūḥ Miṣr wa-l-Maghrib (ed. ʿA. M. ʿUmar). Cairo 2004, 215.

11 Al-Balādhurī: Futūḥ al-Buldān (ed. A. M. ʿArafa). Cairo [no date given], 280–281.

nections between Jewish Messianism and the narrative motifs used to describe the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem would probably merit further study, however this transcends the frame of Shoshan's investigation.

The fifth chapter is entitled *When Muslims meet infidels* (pp. 134–153). While Shoshan attempts to discuss the narrative depiction of meetings between Muslims and non-Muslim commanders as they are described in the sources, his analysis is frequently hampered by a (unintended?) historicist polemic against narrative elements that is quite out of place here. The choice of the term "concoction" to describe the process during which the narrative repertoire of the sources evolved (pp. 141, 145, 146, 147) in particular is rather unfortunate in light of the importance of these reports in Islamic Cultural Memory to this day: It is regrettable that Shoshan, who in the preceding chapter so convincingly demonstrated the rewards of taking the narrative form of the sources seriously, does not abide by this high standard throughout his book. The concept of a 'critical', i. e. historicist, reader, who recognizes that the meetings between the Sassanian commander Rustam and the Muslims before the battle of al-Qādisiyya are 'imagined' (p. 140–141) also represents a step backwards when compared to the careful discussion of motifs as reflections of particular contexts and interests during the process of transmission conducted in the preceding chapter.

The stories about Hurmuzān and ʿUmar are not, as described by Shoshan, exclusively tropes of Muslim superiority (pp. 134–135). In contrast, the narrative details that appear during the various descriptions of their discussions display the 'openness' to multiple interpretations that characterizes narrative iconographies. Shoshan discusses the prominence of al-Mughīra b. Shuʿba as a Muslim delegate to non-Muslim commanders in light of his 'historical' background as a delegate to Muḥammad, leader of Thaqīf and a sub-commander at al-Qādisiyya (p. 136). It may, however, in the context of an investigation of narrative function be even more fitting to frame him as a 'topical' Muslim delegate in Islamic Cultural Memory, who is correspondingly often described in the sources. Yazdegard's dream is not merely a motif related to the person of the last Sassanian emperor, but should rather be posited in the context of Islamic Apocalyptic thought (p. 142). The word *ummi* (p. 145) is both misspelled for *ummī* and misleadingly translated as 'sent to the nations': In the context of Islamic Cultural Memory, it should be understood as 'illiterate', as in the standard accounts of the life of Muḥammad. The end of the chapter does, however, focus more on the context of transmission in which

the narrative tropes and motifs must be understood and the concluding interpretation of the differences between narrative depictions of meetings with Byzantine and Sassanian rulers as reflecting the different fate of both empires after the conquests in particular is quite convincing (pp. 148–149).

The sixth chapter is entitled *The conquest of Egypt: Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam and beyond* (pp. 154–169). This chapter in particular suffers from a treatment of the sources that is not sufficiently systematic. Shoshan's suggestion to interpret one of Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam's versions of the story about the (lack of) authorization of an attack on Egypt by ʿUmar as "a local tradition" opposed to the reports transmitted by al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī (p. 157) is rather untenable as the latter in particular relies, as noted by Shoshan, on two Egyptian transmitters (Ibn Lahīʿa and Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb), who – as Shoshan does not note – are among the main sources of Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam. Accordingly, his report cannot be interpreted as a local tradition unknown to authorities writing about the Islamic conquests outside Egypt: Rather, the inclusion of reports other than the one described by Shoshan as 'local' needs to be explained as a conscious choice made by al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī.

For similar reasons, Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam cannot "compete with al-Ṭabarī's account" of the missions from Muḥammad to the surrounding rulers (p. 158), as Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam lived almost a century before al-Ṭabarī and is even quoted a number of times by the latter. Accordingly, we need to explain why al-Ṭabarī did not include the long story about Ḥātib and al-Muqawqis in his work, rather than frame Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam's account as a provincial reaction to marginalization in the 'global' accounts of the conquests.

The suggestion that a particular detail in Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam's report "[m]ost likely [...] echoes John of Nikiu's version" (p. 159) is most interesting, however a more detailed analysis of the ways in which this quite extraordinary chronicle could have been read in early Islamic Egypt would have been welcome. The majority of the motifs discussed in the subsequent pages (pp. 159–161) also occurs in reports from the conquests of Syria, Iraq and Iran: As this is not mentioned, the analysis of their narrative function in particular is rather unsystematic.

The introduction and selection of the sources for this chapter is also not quite convincing. While Eutychius' Christian Arabic chronicle is drawn upon during the discussion of some details (p. 158), it is not included in the introductory presentation of the sources (pp. 7–15). Shoshan's focus on Ibn

ʿAbdalḥakam and the *Futūḥ al-Shām* ascribed to al-Wāqidī (his interpretation of the latter on pp. 162–165 in particular is quite interesting) should have been complemented and contrasted with the narrative depiction of the conquest of Egypt in other sources: While al-Balādhurī and al-Ṭabarī are occasionally discussed as background to Ibn ʿAbdalḥakam, the works of al-Kindī (father and son) should have been drawn upon for a more detailed discussion of the scholarly milieu of early Islamic Egypt and its possible role in shaping the reports transmitted there. Finally, *al-Madāʾinī* is misspelled as *al-Madā'inī* on p. 157.

The concluding *Epilogue* (pp. 170–178) is in general quite convincing, however the "mosaics of tribal traditions" (p. 170) once again raise the question of how the term 'tribe' is used: As shown above, if this term is taken to refer to anybody affiliated to an Arabic *qabīla*, virtually all transmitters (and, for Shoshan, their reports) are 'tribal'. If, on the other hand, 'tribal' is used as a collective term for 'anything that from a historicist point of view seems unlikely', we might as well skip it as an analytical category. Another such category suggested by Shoshan, namely "[r]egional sentiments, or local patriotism" (p. 170) is similarly difficult to clearly differentiate: We need more systematic study to develop suitable categories for the analysis of the narrative repertoire of the Islamic tradition of the conquests.

The angels supporting the Muslim side in one of the battles described in the *Futūḥ al-Shām* ascribed to al-Wāqidī (p. 178, n. 30) should be connected with the angels fighting for the Muslims at the battle of Badr during Muḥammad's lifetime. From a narrative point of view, the return of the angels to battle on the side of the Muslims during the conquests should thus be seen as an affirmation of the divine sanction, which Islam continues to receive even after the death of its prophet. *Faḍāʾil* (p. 170) and *Jalūlāʾ* (p. 171) are once again written with an apostrophe as *Faḍā'il* and *Jalūlā'* respectively: Hamza scriptori lupus.

In conclusion, Shoshan's book engages with a most important and rewarding topic. While some aspects should best be taken as incentive for more systematic study charting this relatively new field, major parts of his interpretation yield refreshing and convincing results and represent important

milestones for a more integral understanding of the Islamic historiography on the early Islamic conquests.

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