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MARIA ROSA MENOCAL, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. The Middle Ages. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987. Pp. xvii, 178. ISBN 0-8122-8056-3. $27.95.

In the Preface Professor Menocal relates an anecdote to describe what motivated her to write the book. When already well along in studying Romance philology, she undertook to learn classical Arabic. In the first year she encountered the verb *taraba* and was told by the instructor that it was the etymon of the word *troubadour*. After consulting numerous dictionaries, she realized to her surprise that this etymology, although accepted by many Arabists, has been almost universally rejected by Romanists. In her dissertation she aimed to demonstrate that the dismissal of Arabic influence on medieval literature, like the shunning of this etymology, has resulted more from prejudice than from sound judgment. As she states (xiv), her book—an extensively revised version of the dissertation—synthesizes the discoveries of previous scholars so as to establish why knowledge of Arabic language and literature would be fruitful for historians of medieval European literature.

The book contains few typographical errors and is written in a style that is generally effective, but that occasionally becomes feverish. Sometimes the blame lies with mixed metaphors, which break out early ("canonizes family trees that mesh" [1]) and suffer a recrudescence later ("inherited the mantle as an intellectual hotbed" [122]). Other awkwardnesses result from sloppy application of literary theoretical terms. An "I once meta man" syndrome is especially evident between page 100 (*metapoetic* and *metaliterary*) and page 102: "Although the metapoetic di-

alectic just discussed makes eminent sense, given our experience of dialectics, the subjective dialogue implied by this analysis does not correspond to our notions of common sense or the human experience." Such writing obfuscates, rather than glamorizes, the serious thoughts that Menocal wishes to convey.

In the first chapter ("The Myth of Westernness in Medieval Literary Historiography") Menocal sets out to explain why the extent of Arabic influence upon medieval literature has been minimized by literary historians since the nineteenth century. In her opinion this neglect has come about because scholars have distorted medieval evidence to make it consistent with their presumptions of European "cultural supremacy over the Arab world" (6).

The first chapter, which examines the outlook of modern scholars who have studied medieval literature, is concerned with "medieval literary historiography" (what could be termed the history of medieval literary history). In contrast, the second chapter ("Rethinking the Background") alternates between quick sketches of Arabic influence on particular individuals or coteries of people in the Middle Ages and even briefer analyses of the ramifications that such influence has for medieval literary historians. In Menocal's words, "although we are primarily concerned with literary history, it is virtually indisputable that the vicissitudes and trends of intellectual history are crucial factors in the general milieu within which literary texts are both created and received, and as such they are an indispensable part of our considerations" (58).

The five vignettes in the second chapter are meant to survey the depth and diversity of Arabic influence in medieval Europe. Eleven pages are devoted to al-Andalus (Arab Spain) and the knowledge that Duke William IX of Aquitaine, the first troubadour, would have had of its culture; six to Peter the Venerable and the translations of Islamic material that he promoted; four to ties between Eleanor of Aquitaine and Arabic culture; three and a half to the influence of Averroës and others on scholars in London, Paris, and Bologna; and three to Arabic learning and literature in the court of Frederick II.

By compressing a quintet of such portentous topics within a single chapter, Menocal condemns herself to do little more than issue a few pointers and caveats before she passes from one topic to the next. The diaphanously thin documentation does not remedy the superficial treatment of the individual topics. Indeed, the notes at the end of this chapter amount to a grand total of ten. Subtracting the three of these that draw analogies between the Middle Ages and our own day (Levis, Marlboros, and rock and

roll) leaves a remainder of seven notes, not one of which refers to specific pages within an article or book.

In appraising al-Andalus, Menocal stresses the importance of distinguishing between the adjectives *Islamic* (which denotes religion) and *Arabic* (which denotes language), and she differentiates sharply between Arabic culture in al-Andalus and Arabic culture elsewhere in the Islamic world (37). Arabic culture in al-Andalus had a special prestige and posed a special threat to Christians from the ninth century on, as she proves by citing a standard passage from Alvarus, a bishop of Córdoba (28). She fails to adduce any other early Andalusian evidence, such as the Arabic literature produced by Mozarabs. For example, she could have called attention to the Arabic notes written in the margin of a tenth-century Latin work by Samson of Córdoba; these notes are touched upon in Kedar's book (*Crusade and Mission* 27n62), which Menocal ought to have cited.

The section on Peter the Venerable is both cursory and misleading. It creates the misimpression that Peter himself rendered a corpus of Arabic texts into Latin; only a chance remark (48) reveals that Peter engaged others to translate the texts. The section is confusingly vague not only about the authorship, but even about the nature of the texts translated. Of these texts, we are informed, "only one—the Koran—is not an imaginative or literary text" (42); what we are not told is by whose standards the texts were thought to be imaginative or literary—by Muslims' standards, by Peter's, or by our own? Similarly, we are later informed that ". . . Peter's translations were spurious and apocryphal, not part of Islamic scripture at all . . ." (126)—but would Peter himself have believed that the texts translated were spurious and apocryphal? I suspect not.

Related shortcomings detract from the following section, in which Menocal states that ". . . Eleanor and her entourage, much like her grandfather and his crowd, were familiar visitors to their relatives in courts where, since knowledge of Arabic was often *de rigueur*, translations from the Arabic were not as important as they were in London" (49). In what sense was knowledge of Arabic "*de rigueur*," and in what way would this prerequisite have affected the Queen and her retinue? Would they all have had to speak Arabic? Or would the requirement have been waived for them? The reader is left to sort out matters in solitude, since the statement is underpinned by only the vaguest of notes. Later declarations, such as the four paragraphs on the rumor that Eleanor took Saladin as her lover (50-51), are left wholly unsupported.

From Eleanor of Aquitaine we move to "Paris, circa 1210." A passage early in this section tells of "prickly innovators, difficult iconoclasts, such

as Peter Abélard and Hugh of St. Victor, about whose orthodoxy suspicions and doubts had abounded" (55). Though these phrases characterize Abélard fairly well, they do not capture the spirit of Hugh, who was more commonly designated "a second Augustine" than an iconoclast.

Much of the section on "Paris, circa 1210" is concerned with the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (often called Averroës) and one of his translators, Michael Scot. It is tied closely with the section on "Frederick, circa 1240." Like the rest of the book, these two sections present a brisk and enthusiastic case in favor of Arabic influence. Although on the whole accurate, they too are flawed by inattention to scholarship. In the case of Michael Scot the reader is directed to only three works: a book published in 1924, an article published in 1853, and a book on Dante published in 1981. Without more substantial guidance, no one could guess that an entire conference has been held on the topic of Averroism in Italy and that its published proceedings include an essay on Michael Scot and Frederick (Manselli). Not even a passing allusion is made to the hypothesis that Frederick's letter accompanying the translation of Averroës is a forgery (Gauthier). If Menocal intends to provoke colleagues and students into mapping the intellectual commerce between medieval Arabs and Europeans (and to remind them that one group does not necessarily exclude the other), then she should equip them with as many surveying tools as she can locate.

At the end of the second chapter Menocal draws a series of exciting inferences. First, that Christian Europe in the Middle Ages was richly inspired by contacts with al-Andalus. Equally important, that "al-Andalus was a part of *both* worlds, not, as our old reading has often told us, a part of neither" (65). Consequently, that the literary history of medieval Europe should pay the same attention to Arabic elements as to Latin, Christian, Germanic, and Celtic elements (66-67).

In the third chapter Menocal takes up "The Oldest Issue: Courtly Love." Much of the chapter traces the history of scholarship, and of scholarly prejudices, about the Provençal lyric, from Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* through the present day. From the middle of the sixteenth through the middle of the nineteenth century an "Arabist" theory prevailed, only to become "virtually taboo" (82) from then on—notwithstanding the discovery and discussion of the *kharjas* that began forty years ago.

The *kharja* is the final strophe of a poetic form known as the *muwashshaha* (plural *muwashshahat*), which is the topic of the fourth chapter. The *muwashshaha* holds a double interest for Menocal, both because the form as a whole originated in Andalusia and because a few of the *kharjas* were composed in Mozarabic, the Romance vernacular of Andalu-

sia. Menocal argues sensibly against the tendencies to interpret the romance *kharjas* only in isolation from the other parts of the *muwashshahat* and vice versa. Yet she takes matters to the opposite extreme by contending that a *muwashshaha* and its *kharja* should be viewed only as a single poem. As in the case of certain macaronic poems in other poetic traditions, the two elements could be interpreted meaningfully *both* as a single poem—which they would have been to the elite who were trained in the prestige language and who were also fluent in the colloquial—*and* as two poems—which they would probably have seemed to the common people who knew only the spoken tongue.

As in preceding chapters, in this one too many shortcuts are taken in scholarship: for instance, on Ibn Bassām (not Ibn Bassam) is introduced without any hint of his dates and without citation of the passage from his work which is under discussion (98). More important, whether or not Menocal concurs with Hitchcock, she must confront his strong philological arguments for a moratorium on discussion of the romance *kharjas* until the original manuscript texts have been determined more rigorously than they have been to date.

From courtly love and love poetry, Menocal proceeds to a writer whose poetry responds to, and redefines, courtly love: Dante. In the fifth chapter ("Italy, Dante, and the Anxieties of Influence") she turns to "the question of what role and what effect material, artistic, and intellectual incursions of Arabic-European provenance had on his world and on his worldview" (116).

Early in the chapter (117) Menocal cites an Italian translation of an Arabic poem written in Sicily. As she shows in one swift paragraph (117-18), the poem has "myriad connections not only with the Italian *scuola siciliana* but also with other trends in mainstream *duecento* (thirteenth-century) Italian poetry." The poem leads her to a spirited plea on behalf of further study of the Arabic-Sicilian poets, particularly Ibn Hamdīs and al-Ballanūbī; unfortunately, she does not facilitate such research, since she provides incomplete bibliography for the first poet and none whatsoever for the second ("there is some difficulty in ascertaining much about Arabic editions of his poetry" [133]).

Most of the fifth chapter is dedicated to questions surrounding the relationship between Dante's *Commedia* and the *Kitāb al-miʿrāj*. Discovering any direct connection between the two texts requires great ingenuity, since Menocal conceded "that Dante appears to have little knowledge beyond the standard medieval view of Islam and its progeny and certainly very little sympathy for it" (127) and she admits "it has seemed to some

critics that Dante's complete lack of recognition or acknowledgment of any Arabic influence . . . precludes any assumption of such influences" (131); but nonetheless she suggests that "the *Commedia* is a challenge, a counter-text, an anti-*mi<raj*" (131).

From Dante, Chapter Six leads to Boccaccio, with the proposal (". . . and it can be no more than that" [140]) that the ninth story of each day is "concerned with some feature, problem, or story related in one way or another to Arabic or Arabic-derived cultural and intellectual forces" (140). An additional suggestion is that scholars should consult Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* and other such texts to determine whether or not they conditioned Boccaccio's use of "the scatological or scandalous story in an avowedly didactic context" (141). Subsequent pages ply the reader with further notions for research and with justifications for the utility and validity of such research.

The main conclusion of this sixth and final chapter, and of the book as a whole, is that Arabic, Hebrew, Morisco, and Mozarabic should be regarded as central rather than peripheral to the literary history of medieval Europe (151) and that the canon imposed upon medieval literary scholars should be broadened to include a generous sampling of Arabic authors (15, 151-52).

Many historians of medieval history, science, and philosophy have enlarged their perspectives and canon to encompass Arabic material. How can historians of medieval literature be persuaded to follow suit? Menocal avers that the construct must come before the facts—that theoretical issues have to be aired before anyone will agree to explore the Arabic role in medieval literature (143). She contends that attitudes must be changed before students and scholars will appreciate the value of studying texts written originally in Arabic (and of studying Arabic).

Although the passion and sincerity of Menocal's apologia is apparent, its integrity is not. Students and scholars may find that her approach puts the cart before the horse—or the caravan before the camel, as the case may be. They would perhaps be more easily convinced of the purpose of becoming familiar with Arabic literature if they were presented with anthologies of Hispano-Arabic and Siculo-Arabic literature in translation and with close and firmly substantiated comparisons between such literature and the literature within the conventional canons of their fields. In any event, scholars of medieval literature will demand firmer evidence of literary interchange and influence than is offered in this book before they will troop to elementary Arabic classes or even to handbooks on medieval Arabic literature.

To scholars of medieval literatures outside Romania the book offers scant reason to suppose that Arabic culture informed the literatures they study; because the book contains barely a whisper about medieval English, Germanic, and Celtic literatures, it should have been given a narrower title—perhaps *The Relevance of Arabic Culture to Romance Philology*.

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COLBERT I. NEPAULSINGH, *Towards a History of Literary Composition in Medieval Spain.* University of Toronto Romance Ser. 54. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1986. Pp. x, 296. ISBN 0-8020-2570-6. $37.50.

This is a compelling, provocative study, accompanied by extensive notes, on the nature of literary composition in medieval Spain, "a fundamentally biblical and apocalyptic phenomenon that, over a three-hundred-year period, varies from an advanced technique of stringing and juxtapos-