

author's creativity and originality. (However, in the process he expends surprising energy in arguing against an unpublished McGill master's thesis). Two articles are dedicated to the influential but heretofore unsung work of the great Shi'i compromiser al-Sharif al-Radi. Ayoub offers a beautifully written general appreciation of his work, while Abu-Deeb compares his *Talkhis al-bayan fi majazat al-Qur'an* and *al-Majazat al-nabawiyya* with Abu 'Ubayda's *al-Majaz*. Boullata's survey of the life and work of the hero-martyr Sayyid Qutb will provide the student and comparativist with much food for thought on a variety of questions. Undoubtedly, one will be the Socratic confusion inspired by the image of "Muslim fundamentalist" as sophisticated litterateur. Boullata demonstrates that the most powerful and popular modern Qur'an commentary (which, we are told, is not really a *tafsir*) is written by a man whose obvious first and deepest love is language itself. That this love seems to suggest and reflect the Sufi tradition (surely, *al-maniq al-wijdānī* is "illuminated" rather than "emotional logic") is a topic left for another time.

A number of questions relating to both spirit and form naturally arise from reading this collection, most compellingly in the two studies of al-Sharif al-Radi. As Ayoub points out, this Shi'i (Twelver) author lived and wrote during the so-called Shi'i century. But neither Ayoub nor Abu-Deeb addresses the serious question of the relationship between al-Sharif's literary tastes and preoccupations with contemporary "religious" developments. Although the latter comes quite close in one passage, where he speaks of al-Sharif's commentary on Q.16:69, and the "metaphor" of the bees, we are not really informed that, in the same passage, al-Sharif actually subverts traditional—that is, original—imami *tafsir* by insisting that the bees are the ulema of the Shi'i community and not the holy imams, as had been taught heretofore. Not only does such an omission vitiate the greater achievement of this excellent article; it also prevents us from observing that however original al-Sharif al-Radi's literary acumen and taste obviously were, there was indeed a strong precedent for it in what might be called a proto-*akhbārī* exegetical tradition and its attendant metaphorical reading of reality as such. This fact is bound to be of interest for an appreciation of the achievement of the compiler and codifier of the incomparable *Nahj al-balagha*.

There are far too many stylistic errors and inconsistencies in the text, and there is no space here to list them. The indexing is also quite insufficient. There is, for example, no index of Qur'anic verses. Because these flaws distract from the urgent message of the book, Curzon must be held responsible for them.

However, the book's value is impossible to overestimate. The Qur'an is a text and more than a text. It is an active presence that is tragically under-appreciated and misunderstood in this post-modern world. And whatever else the Qur'an may be, it is also a classic of world literature: unique and compelling in voice, music, and logic; read and venerated by a simultaneously hopeful, helpless, and devout humanity. Issa Boullata has done a real service to scholarship and beyond by collecting and publishing these testimonials to this plangent truth.

DOI: 10.1017.S0020743803220213

CHRISTOPHER BUCK, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahā'ī Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Pp. 419. \$81.50 cloth; \$27.95 paper.

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This monograph is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation completed at the Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto in 1996. At the beginning, the author enunciates clearly his purpose, method, and organization, and he adheres closely to the agenda he has set.

His purpose is to provide a sophisticated comparison of early Syriac Christianity with the Baha'i faith as enunciated by its founder Bahau'llah. His method rests primarily on adaptations of concepts developed for cultural anthropology by Sherry Ortner and for comparative religion by Ninian Smart. Briefly characterized, his approach is a comparison of central symbols drawn from the two religious traditions as represented by a normative set of texts. While eschewing a strictly historical method, Buck strives to avoid the pitfalls of older comparative studies by attending to the distinctive historical contexts of the 4th-century Syriac Christian authors Ephrem and Aphrahat and the 19th-century articulation of the faith of Bahau'llah.

Thus, the chapters unfold systematically. Chapter 1, "Comparing Paradises," states the rationale and methodology; chapter 2, "A Historical Profile of Syriac Christianity," sets early Syriac Christianity in context, defends the choice of Ephrem and Aphrahat for the textual base, and addresses the question of characterizing the Church of the East as "Persian"; chapter 3, "A Symbolic Profile of Syriac Christianity," lays out "key scenarios" and "root metaphors" (from Ortner) according to a six-category system (Doctrinal, Ritual, Ethical, Experiential, Mythic, and Social) adapted from Smart; chapter 4, "A Historical Profile of the Baha'i Faith," situates Bahau'llah historically and proposes the view that his teaching is a "response to modernity"; chapter 5, "A Symbolic Profile of the Baha'i Faith," sets forth the "key scenarios" and "root metaphors" of Baha'i according to the six categories; and chapter 6, "Paradise Similarities and Paradigm Differences," a systematic comparison of the results of chapters 3 and 5, leads to the conclusion that the two traditions share many common metaphors and exhibit "substantive commonalities in the Doctrinal, Ethical, Experiential and Social dimensions . . . while in the Ritual and Mythic dimensions are seen the greatest divergences" (p. 257). The differences are rooted in their distinctive paradigms, Syriac Christian symbolism being "predominantly sacramental" while "Baha'i symbolism is unitive." Buck's conclusions in these chapters are schematically presented in the table based on his tables on pages 96 and 185 and his further discussion in chapter 6.

	Syriac Christianity in Ephrem's Poetry Paradigm: Sacramental Purification		Baha'i Faith in Bahau'llah's Writings Paradigm: Concentric Unity	
Ortner → Smart ↓ Dimension	Key Scenario (Strategy for Action)	Root Metaphor (for Conceptual Orientation)	Key Scenario (Strategy for Action)	Root Metaphor (for Conceptual Orientation)
Doctrinal	The Way	Physician	The Promised One	Physician
Ritual	The Robe of Glory	Medicine of Life	The Covenant	Wine/Water of Life
Ethical	Sons/Daughters of Covenant	The Mirror	Illumination	Mirrors/Gems
Experiential	The Wedding Banquet	The Pearl	Lover and Beloved	Journey/Path
Mythic	The Harrowing of Hell	Tree of Life	The Maid of Heaven	Lote-Tree/Sinai
Social	Noah's Ark/Mariner	Paradise	Crimson Ark/Holy Mariner	Paradise

In chapter 7, "Paradise and Paradigm," the conclusions and insights of the preceding chapters are brought to bear on a comparison of the Paradisal visions of the two traditions. This is, so to speak, a case study that illustrates the overlapping symbols and contrasting paradigms delineated in the previous chapter. Chapter 8, "Conclusions," is more a restatement, assessment, and defense of the author's methodological decisions than, strictly speaking, a summary statement of the book's argument and its results. As such, it is a useful reminder of Buck's assertion that his hoped for contribution in this work is "primarily methodological" (p. 9).

Thus, we are led to questions of method and contribution. According to William E. Paden, approvingly quoted by Buck, the “new comparativism” should comprise “the integration of a complex notion of pattern and system with an equally complex notion of history” (p. 30). Certainly a complex notion of pattern and system is at work here, but does the complexity yield meaningful results? In Ortner’s typology, while “root metaphors” provide conceptual orientation to a culture, “key scenarios” provide strategies for action. Although the action is broadly defined and may include performance of a ritual, the fundamental distinction between Ortner’s two modes of “elaborating key symbols” lies in differentiating between cognition and action. This distinction is not clearly delineated in Buck’s discussion of the “key symbols” within Syriac Christianity, where the link between “key scenario” and action is explicitly mentioned only once (p. 107). Otherwise the “key scenarios” are vaguely related to the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, ethical behavior, and sexual holiness. The discussion of Baha’i “key scenarios” as “strategies of action” is more explicit (pp. 185, 188, 191, 193, 199, 200). An adaptation of Ortner’s approach would be better suited to a comprehensive social analysis that includes legal and liturgical sources rather than a study based entirely on texts from a single author. Further, it is not evident that Smart’s dimensions of religion can be inter-related meaningfully with Ortner’s typology. Buck has not explained or defended this decision. Finally, his choice of particular symbols for a given place in his scheme is not entirely convincing. Ephrem’s hymns have been much studied for their symbolism; it is questionable whether this typology has brought a new clarity to earlier work by specialists in the field (especially Beck, Murray, Brock, and Bou Mansour). I am not sufficiently familiar with Baha’i studies to evaluate his work in that respect.

Turning to the second component of the criterion enunciated by Paden, “the integration of a complex notion of pattern and system with an equally complex notion of history,” we must ask, how sophisticated is Buck’s historiographic method? Although chapter 2 is a competent overview of early Syriac Christian history, it does not attend to fundamental controversies among scholars in the field. For example, the role of Greek culture, both Christian and non-Christian, in shaping early Syriac Christianity in general and Ephrem’s poetry in particular has been debated. Buck alludes to an important article by Koonammakkal (p. 34) but does not discuss or incorporate the issues it entails. Without such a discussion his characterization of Ephrem as a representative of “Persian Christianity” is problematic. Generally he hints at historical connections between the two bodies of literature at the heart of his study but backs away from claiming to have shown them (e.g., pp. 7, 9, 32, 321–23). In conclusion, this is a suggestive study that juxtaposes two disparate and equally appealing bodies of religious symbolism. It opens new possibilities for comparison and suggests new methodological approaches, but does not quite succeed as a rigorous scholarly endeavor.

DOI: 10.1017/S002074380323021X

ALBRECHT FUESS, *Verbannes Ufer: Auswirkungen mamlukischer Seepolitik auf Beirut und die syro-palästinensische Küste (1250–1517)*, *Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts*, vol. 39 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001). Pp. 530. \$172.00 cloth.

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Albrecht Fuess has written a detailed history of the Syro-Palestinian frontier during the Mamluk era in order to discover why this Turko-Muslim state, which occupied such an important geographical position astride Asian-to-Mediterranean trade routes, did not develop a naval force. Because this issue arises during a period that oceanic voyages of Europeans and the Indian