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Abstracts

The Neo-Aramaic dialect spoken by Jews from the region of Arbel (Iraqi Kurdistan)

GEOFFREY KHAN

Various dialects of Aramaic continued to be spoken by Jewish communities in Kurdistan until the early 1950s, when most of the Jews of the region emigrated to the State of Israel. These dialects are now spoken only by elderly members of the immigrant communities in Israel and will become extinct within a few years. In this article a brief overview is given of the Neo-Aramaic dialect that was spoken by Jewish communities in the plain of Arbel in northern Iraq. This region lay on the south-western periphery of the neo-Aramaic speaking area. Comparison with other known dialects shows that it was closer in structure to the Jewish neo-Aramaic in the north-east of Kurdistan (e.g. Urmia) than in the north-west (e.g. Zakho).

The mystery at Chùrchuro: conspiracy or incompetence in twelfth-century Sicily?

JEREMY JOHNS and ALEX METCALFE

The subject of this article is a mystery within the Arabic administration of Norman Sicily. In 1149, the *dīwān al-tahqīq al-ma'mūr*, the chief supervisory office of the Arabic administration of the Norman kings, granted five households of Muslim villeins and the estate of Raḥl al-Wazzān to the Greek monastery of San Nicolò di Chùrchuro, near Palermo. Five years later, at the request of the monks, the *dīwān* issued what purports to be an exact copy of the donation of 1149, which grants the same five households of villeins, but a completely different estate, Raḥl Ibn Sahl. Recent scholarship has declared the 'copy' of 1154 to be a forgery, perpetrated within the *dīwān*. By means of a new, critical edition of the two documents, and of other relevant primary sources, the authors conclude that the mystery is the result not of a conspiracy to defraud the royal *dīwān*, but rather of administrative incompetence. This conclusion is less important for itself than for what it reveals about the Norman *dīwān*, and the reception of its products by recipients whose native language was not Arabic.

Homeropticism and homosexuality in Islam: a review article

SABINE SCHMIDTKE

The study of homosexual practices in Islamic civilization has until recently been a closed subject of inquiry among scholars. However, the past few years have seen a marked growth of interest in the subject, and among the results of this research are the two books reviewed here (Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (ed.): *Islamic homosexualities: culture, history, and literature*: New York and London, 1997; and J. W. Wright Jr. and Everett K. Rowson (ed.): *Homeropticism in classical Arabic literature*, New York, 1997). The contributors to the first volume are mainly sociologists, anthropologists and historians, while the second is a collection of articles by specialists in Arabic literature.

Winged words revisited: diction and meaning in Indian epic

JOHN D. SMITH

The last two decades have seen great progress in the study of oral epics from India, and yet almost no attempt has been made at analysis of the formulaic component of their diction. The enormity of the task involved has also deterred scholars from attempting serious formulaic analysis of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. This paper sets out to apply the 'Parry/Lord theory' to both the *Mahābhārata* and the Rajasthani oral epic of Pābūjī, in order to see what light the theory may cast on the epics and what

light the epics may cast on the theory. In particular, three topics are examined in detail: the extent to which formulaic diction is used; the nature of the formula; and the meaning of formulaic language, a topic addressed earlier in Parry's article 'About winged words'.

Indian influences on early Chinese ophthalmology: glaucoma as a case study

VIJAYA DESHPANDE

This study deals with an interesting chapter in the development of Chinese ophthalmology. Sino-Indian medical contacts developed with the spread of Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era. Soon after, Chinese historical and medical texts as well as popular literature began to reflect the influence of Indian medicine, especially ophthalmology. Two works which appeared between the eighth and the twelfth centuries A.D. were attributed to Nāgārjuna, suggesting their connection with the Indian medical tradition. A case study of glaucoma-like diseases in these texts is followed by a comparison of passages from these works, as well as from those which appeared immediately before and after them in China, with corresponding passages in Indian medical texts. Inferences are drawn regarding the nature of the influence of Indian ophthalmology on the formative and developmental stages of Chinese ophthalmology.

On two Xerxes inscriptions

RÜDIGER SCHMITT

Presented here for the first time are photographs of two minor Old Persian texts of King Xerxes found in the materials collected by Émile Benveniste for an edition in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* series. They add to the only documentation available until now (Ernst Herzfeld's drawings). The texts in question are XPk, on the garment of a royal figure from Persepolis, and XH (better XHa), on a silver pitcher from Hamadan. Both texts are treated in the required detail as on the basis of the present state of Old Persian textual studies.