

Linda G. Jones. *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 298 pages. \$99.

There are books that open up a new world for the eyes of the readers, and Linda Jones' book, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World*, has the potential to do exactly this. The almost 300 pages of this book lead readers into the world of medieval Muslim preaching by combining sound research and source study with an intriguing ability to guide the readers on a smooth path into the sources and the different forms of Muslim preaching in the Middle Ages, which is true also for readers who are not specialists in Islamic history and even for those who do not even know Arabic. It seems to me that this book is of utmost importance at least on three levels: the historic, the homiletic, and the dialogical.

As a Visiting Professor of History of Religions at the University of Barcelona, Jones succeeds in concisely presenting the results of an in-depth source study of Islamic preaching, primarily in Muslim Iberia and Maghreb from the 11th to the 15th centuries. She offers this immense material in a well-structured and easy accessible way. The initial three chapters of the book open up the horizon, describing the scope of the study (chapter 1), presenting the *khutba*, as the “central jewel” of medieval Arab-Islamic prose and as the main liturgical sermon form in the Islamic Middle Ages (chapter 2), and describing its main rhetorical and discursive strategies (chapter 3). The next three chapters analyze some sermons of different types in more detail—the “canonical orations” on Friday and at weddings (chapter 4), political sermons and sermons on *jihad* (chapter 5), and the two types of homiletical exhortation and storytelling in para-liturgical settings (chapter 6). The two final chapters deal with the role of the preacher (chapter 7) and the behavior and reaction of the audience (chapter 8). The extraordinary diligence of this book is proven by the fact that not only a helpful index of names and terms, but also a “Glossary of Arabic Terms” is attached. Of course, a lot of these terms appear in the book's main text, but all of them are translated and transcribed, with even the Arabic letters printed in the main text (126) and explained to the readers.

Jones shows how the *khutba* (a form of oratory which existed also in pre-Islamic times) and the *khatib* (the preacher) became institutionalized in the Islamic community, and underscores the established form of the *khutba*, usually consisting of three parts: the introduction with liturgical formulae, the main body, and the conclusion. In the Islamic Middle Ages the *khutba* was seen as “patterned upon customs and practices attributed to Muḥammad and his closest followers” (49). Preaching meant imitating the Prophet and making His voice heard again in the congregation. This practice included also the bodily behavior of the *khatib*, which was meant to resemble Muḥammad's behavior. Even the number of stairs of the *minbar* (the ‘pulpit’) was seen to be in accordance with the prophet's context. In the Middle Ages the style of the sermon (including consideration of whether the preacher should use rhymed forms) and the use of the vernacular or classical Arabic were under discussion (as was the use of Latin or vernacular in Christian homiletics!). Besides the canonical sermon form of the *khutba*, Jones presents various forms of homiletical exhortations and their rhetoric, and offers insights in the biography of preachers from different contexts—among them, wandering preachers and even one woman preacher (preaching only to women congregations (226-227)).

All these aspects make the book not only important for those interested in the society and culture of Islam in the Middle Ages, but also for Christian homileticians. Jones quotes a description about a Muslim preacher: “he cried and made [others] cry whenever he preached” (232). From this starting point, Jones discovers the “mimetic aspect of preaching” (247): the congregation imitates the preacher's behavior, who himself is imitating Muḥammad—thus uniting past and present. Jones shows that the study of sermons must combine the text

(language and rhetorical features), bodily actions (ritualized and individual behavior), and the reactions of the audience. To achieve this goal, the author makes use of the ritual theories of Catherine Bell, Talal Asad, Pierre Bourdieu, Marsha Witten and others in order to show that the combination of these levels offers new insights into historical sermon research (whereas studies of the history of preaching among Christians often only consider sermon texts). In addition, Jones' book may challenge homileticians to consider how this intermingling of language, body, and ritual is taken into account in our homiletical discourses.

Reading the book may initiate a homiletical dialogue. In the 1990s Lawrence A. Hoffmann and Paul F. Bradshaw edited the "Two Liturgical Traditions" series, reflecting worship in Jewish-Christian contexts. Some years later, I was among those who sought to establish a Jewish-Christian homiletical dialogue (see: *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity*, 2008). The time has now come to open this up for a dialogue working on the history of Jewish, Muslim and Christian preaching and their various interrelations. For example, it would have been great if Jones had compared an Islamic Holy War Sermon, *khuṭab jihādiyya*, and a Christian sermon during the crusades, or developed ideas for an international and interreligious dialogue today.

Linda Jones' book is full of helpful information, interesting details, and open questions for further research. It is like a hand stretched out and open for Christian homileticians to grasp.

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