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Review of Susan A. Spectorsky, *Women in Classical Islamic Law: A Survey of the Sources* (Themes in Islamic Studies V), Leiden: Brill 2010, 223 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-17435-1

By Tazeen M. Ali, Boston University, USA

In *Women in Classical Islamic Law: A Survey of the Sources*, Spectorsky's primary objective is to provide an introductory overview of legal issues pertaining to women during the formative (7th–9th century CE) and classical (10th–12th century CE) periods of Islamic law. She seeks to provide an accessible framework through which more in-depth inquiries regarding legal aspects of Muslim women's lives during the premodern period can be further explored. Writing as a legal historian, Spectorsky achieves her goal through compiling a cogent synthesis of major Islamic legal texts, neatly presenting and exploring the views represented by the four Sunni *madahib* (schools of law), and sometimes including other lesser-known jurists for comparison, on topics relevant to women and issues of gender. Her intended audiences are graduate students and scholars who have not yet explored classical *fiqh* texts and are seeking an introductory work on the subject. As such, Spectorsky's method is to engage in a close reading of the primary sources, while emphasising that her goal is not to interpret these sources or write a 'social history,' but rather to 'survey' them on the basis that 'libraries are filled with primary sources whose length and difficulty are daunting for the beginning student of Islamic law' (2010: ix).

Spectorsky organises the book into five main chapters preceded by an introduction which clearly presents to the reader in a succinct fashion the types of *fiqh* texts that are explored in the chapters to come. She takes care to differentiate between *furu*, *usul*, and *ikhtilaf* texts, providing brief descriptions of how they signify 'compilation of legal rules', 'theoretical underpinnings' of those rules, and records of varying opinions among different legal schools, respectively (2010: 17). By highlighting relevant Qur'anic verses that are concerned with women and legal status, Spectorsky's first chapter entitled 'Women in the Qur'an' serves as a valuable foundation with which the reader can approach the

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main issues dealt with in the following main chapters which include marriage, divorce, male guardianship, and family roles and responsibilities. In the second and third chapters, Spectorsky spotlights various topics relating to marriage and divorce in the formative period, which helps to contextualise the fourth chapter that focuses on a small selection of classical texts that deal with the issues addressed in the previous two sections. In this fourth chapter, Spectorsky effectively highlights significant developments, transformations, and shifts in opinions and interpretations of classical jurists from the formative period, in light of evolving social norms. The final chapter entitled 'Women's Lives' offers important (albeit brief) insights into other legal aspects of women's lives that are not directly linked to the institution of marriage, such as how a husband should allot his time between wives in polygamous marriage, child custody after divorce, and matters of women acting as witnesses in legal affairs. It may have been useful for the reader if this section were expanded upon in order to incorporate a bit of the social and culture history of Muslim women in the formative and classical periods.

The main strength of Spectorsky's monograph is the meticulousness with which she engages with major legal texts and figures in order to approach her discussion of women's legal positions pertaining to entering, fulfilling, and ending marriage contracts. She presents in careful detail the nuanced differences of opinion amongst jurists of different *madahib*, regarding issues related to different types of marriage contracts, while taking care not to advocate for a particular view or interpretation which allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. The issues explored include various rulings on the role of the *wali* (guardian), in regards to whether a woman can enter into a marriage without one, which male relatives could qualify as a woman's *wali*, and which members of a woman's kin were prohibited from marrying her. Spectorsky highlights the different legal categories of marriageable women, outlining the varying expectations of *bikr* (virgin) women versus *ayyim* or *thayyib* (women who had previous marriage contracts). Other legal aspects of marriage and divorce that are addressed include *mahr* or *sadaq* (the 'marriage portion,' payment by the groom to the bride) and *mut'a* (temporary marriages of enjoyment). Accordingly, divorce is also explicated in great detail, incorporating a thorough examination of matters such as *khul* (female initiated divorce), and *'idda*, the waiting period required for divorced and widowed women before another marriage can be entered. Spectorsky's work, in its careful detail, demonstrates the extent of *ikhtilaf* in the formative and classical periods of Islamic law and significantly analyses in a concise fashion, changing trends and developments in the Islamic legal tradition.

Spectorsky's task in this project is by no means simple or straightforward, yet she skilfully directs the reader through technical legal concepts such as *furu' al-fiqh* and the complexity of key fiqh texts including Shafi'i's *Kitab al-Umm*, Ibn Hanbal's *Masa'il al-Imam Ahmad b Hanbal*, and Malik's *Muwatta* with great success. She provides significant contextualisation in discussing the way in which specific texts and figures engage with each other, and is overall an illuminating and informative read. Spectorsky's introductory work will surely prove compelling and useful as a primer into further issues of women and Islamic law, and will also appeal to those interested in issues of gender and exegesis. Naturally, given the short length of the monograph, there are certain limitations in the range of topics covered but considering the primary focus on classical marriage

contracts, it may have been useful to incorporate a more in-depth analysis of marriage regarding females other than 'free Muslim women' (2010: 2), such as slaves and Christian and Jewish women, as these categories were surely of great interest to classical jurists. That being said, *Women in Classical Islamic Law* is a uniquely significant contribution to the field of Islamic jurisprudence and gender because of the sources it effectively engages with. This volume will certainly appeal to a broad range of readers interested in the early Islamic legal tradition and its impact upon matters of women and gender.