Minstrel Poetry from the Pamir Mountains: A Study on the Songs and Poems of the Ismâ'îlîs of Tajik Badakhshan. Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2004, 786 p., accompanying CD.

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Minstrel Poetry from the Pamir Mountains: A Study on the Songs and Poems of the Ismâ'îlîs of Tajik Badakhshan. Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2004, 786 p., accompanying CD.

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- 1 This substantial book, an extended version of a doctorate written at the University of Leiden, publishes a wealth of material collected during extensive fieldwork among the Isma'ilis of Badakhshan. The material, in Tajik Persian, Shughnî-Rûshânî and Waxî, amply illustrates the complexity of the relationship between orality and literacy in this area. The boundaries between oral and literate poetry have blurred; many of the poems take the form of literary genres such as the ghazal and the quatrain. Some are known compositions of literary poets, others wrongly attributed to these poets. Many are folksongs, of unknown composition. The corpus consists of both religious and secular poetry, the former being mostly performed in prestigious madâh ('praise') performances, which are both didactic and ceremonial in function. Their performers tend to be semi-professionals, whilst secular performers are often professional musicians.
- 2 The author makes a distinction between formal poetic genre and performance genre, which underpins the structure of the book. After an introduction to the field and the position of the poetry there, the first part describes the different genres of poetry current in Badakhshan. The chapter on the ghazal, for instance, covers form, content (dominant themes are ecstasy and love both earthly and divine), function and authorship. The second part covers the performance practice of the genres – thus the ghazal's role in madâh, ghazalxânî (ghazal performance) and dafsâz (performance accompanied by frame-drum) is described, and so on for the other genres. The concluding discussion firmly sites this Badakhshani performance poetry within the

Persian literary tradition as well as the Iranian minstrel tradition, making a persuasive case that its variety and richness make it worth studying in its own right, not merely as a clue to ancient Iranian poetic traditions. Pages 425-670 consist of an anthology of poems, which even without the preceding discussion would be an important contribution to Iranian scholarship, offering much opportunity for comparative study.

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Thèmes : 17.1.Musique

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