he knows that Goshtasp’s demands are unjust and will almost certainly lead to his death, as in fact they do. This story, along with “The Legend of Seyavash” (also included in this translation), are among the best supports for Davis’s argument about the theme of the epic; they are also two of Ferdowsi’s greatest accomplishments as an artist. The other stories in the volume are examples of types of stories—such as Rostam’s fight with the demon, the Akvan Div—that, taken with the stories about Seyavash and Esfandyar, give a good sense of the overall nature of the epic and of Ferdowsi’s storytelling.

Davis has chosen a prosimetrum, a mix of prose and poetry, as his mode of translation. As he suggests, “at its best such an arrangement can have an operatic drive and opulence, with the verse moments serving as arias of vivid intensity punctuating the overall narrative flow of the stories” (13). It is also, he points out further, the form that is currently used by traditional performers in their tellings of the Shahnameh. Although the poetic form of Ferdowsi’s epic is important, what is most important is the story. And Ferdowsi is such a marvelous storyteller that it would be wrong to divert attention away from his skills through the use of an arcane meter.

Though there are a few things that one could quibble about (there is no commentary or bibliography, for instance), Davis’s accomplishment has been to give us a well-illustrated and readable translation of the Shahnameh, and for that he is to be warmly congratulated by students of Iranian and comparative epic.


Daphne Shafer  
Craven Community College

Rich Remsberg’s Riders for God is a realistic portrayal of a group of motorcyclists who have overcome difficult pasts to find God. Included is social-documentary photography about the Indiana bikers who ride to prisons and jails, biker rallies, and other gatherings of
people on the fringe, to preach the word of God. They’re known as the Unchained Gang, and they’re mostly made up of ex-drug dealers, ex-convicts, recovering addicts, and even ex-bikers. Eight bikers, men and women, tell their stories about how they came to the outreach ministry and how it changed their lives.

Having encountered both bikers and Christians from hitchhiking around the country, Remsberg developed a curiosity about their lifestyles, being neither a biker nor a Christian himself. The impetus for approaching the subject came from an incident in a Bloomington, Indiana, park involving the police and park regulars, which led to a division in the town. The journalist in Remsberg didn’t know yet that he would come to understand the Christian biker world and the importance the ministry plays in the lives of its members.

The driving force of the book was Remsberg’s desire to show truth, and photography played a major role in presenting it. Of course, photography is subjective: “It is a matter of telling the truth as one sees it. Truth is truth, even when it is difficult or not immediately understood” (5). Remsberg considers the Christian notion to “witness” similar to photography, as seeing what becomes clear to you; thus, his approach to this subject seemed to be in keeping with the spirit of his consultants themselves.

Remsberg spent the first three months getting to know the bikers—riding, eating, and sleeping with them, giving them a chance to get used to his presence. While he took pictures minimally in the beginning, in order to learn the boundaries of what picture-taking would be allowed and by whom, he kept his camera handy at all times as a constant reminder of his intentions. He also conducted interviews, which he transcribed to form the text, and freely answered the bikers’ questions, to continue an open dialogue between them. The progression of the text follows his own growing familiarity with the group.

Remsberg organizes his book chronologically through his association with the group in the following chapters: “Worship,” “The Word,” “Fellowship,” “The World,” and “Redemption.” The chapters begin with a brief introduction by Remsberg, but they then are comprised entirely of some of the eight voices, without much textual interruption by Remsberg’s questions. Remsberg in fact omits most of his questions and edits the responses for length to maintain a fluid
narrative. At times he changes names for confidentiality. The book is accessible since the text is comprised almost entirely of narration, and the riders’ different voices come through well and are easily distinguished. Pages of photography separate the chapters and tell as much of the story as the text does.

The final chapter, “Redemption,” begins with a wedding, suggesting a new beginning and hope for all. Five of the bikers—in short directed narratives—talk briefly about how they got to the ministry, where they see themselves in relation to it in the future, and how much work is left to be done. It is a positive closing to the book. The postscript places the bikers, despite their unconventionality, firmly in relation to other individuals and groups; Remsberg writes that they “are searching for fulfillment of the most common basic needs: love, structure, and spirituality” (253).

Riders for God, a book that taps into a little-explored population, may suggest new chapters in folklore studies, and may be a useful model for those wishing to use photography as part of ethnographic narratives.


John Fenn
Indiana University, Bloomington

A welcome volume dealing with an underexposed subject, Mashindano! provides a sweeping tour of musical practices around East Africa that are based in a notion of competition. As Gunderson points out in his introductory chapter, studies of musical cultures of East Africa—much less expressive practices in general—are few, and one aim of this book was to address the scholarly gap by collecting current research projects across the broad geographic area. A second aim of the book was to explore questions surrounding competitive musical performances, examining such performances both in terms of their specific contexts and larger qualities that they share across time and space. Finally, the book was intended, in part, to revisit some