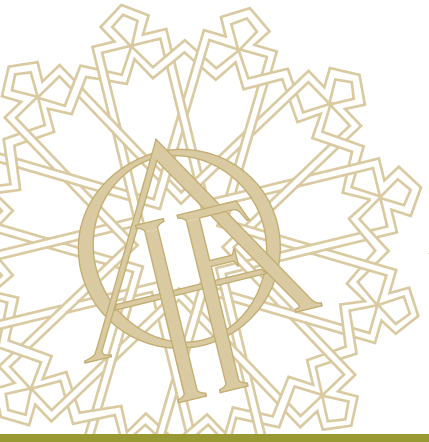
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ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

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Monica Balda-Tillier, Adam Talib

Arabic Literature, 1200-1800 : A New Orientation. Introduction

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MONICA BALDA-TILLIER, ADAM TALIB*

Introduction

The articles that comprise this special issue of *Annales Islamologiques* epitomize a turn in the maturing revisionist movement that seeks to redress an imbalance in scholarly histories of classical Arabic literature. This is not the place to rehearse the well-known history of scholarly biases against Arabic literature written between the fall of Baghdad and Napoleon's conquest of Egypt (1258-1798), nor is it an occasion to celebrate the important achievements of the burgeoning revisionist movement led by scholars like Thomas Bauer and Muhsin J. al-Musawi. Indeed this special issue seeks to turn the page on the long history of this scholarly bias and the preliminary and often abstract reactions to it by presenting several small studies of previously unknown literary works from precisely this stigmatized period of Arabic literary history. We are now entering a period of what we might think of as deep revision (or entryism), in which the primary revisionist method shifts from polemical and theoretical engagements to parallel scholarly activity. These studies do not address the centuries-old bias directly, but by presenting unknown, innovative, and rich texts from a period that was long stereotyped as one of decline and stagnation, these studies undermine this biased reasoning at its core.

In Cairo, where we met to discuss this project in February 2013, as elsewhere in the Arab world, the old prejudices against this period—which are not exactly the same prejudices—are putting up more of a fight. In some ways, Arabic-language scholarship overcame the bias against literature from this period by nationalizing it, by seeing in it evidence of regional renaissances

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or the roots of national genius. Nevertheless, there is no question that Arabic-language scholarship—to say nothing of school curricula—is still oriented toward poles of pre-Islamic purity and Golden Age apogee. Arabic-language revisionist scholarship is flourishing but the stakes of that revisionist movement are simultaneously less fraught and broader and more deeply rooted than that of the revisionist movement among Arabists working outside the Arab and Muslim worlds. Many Arab scholars working in the Arab world routinely publish on diverse periods of Arabic literary history, even if they channel old paradigmatic biases when framing these periods and the range of inquiry appropriate to each. They pursue this eclectic research agenda often in dialogue with—and as a counterpoint to—a fragmented social landscape of nationalist myth, popular wisdom, and political agitation in which specific historiographical models of the Arab past are touchstones in campaigns to advance particular views of a model 21st-century Arab society, culture, and politics.

Arabic poetry was itself a political vehicle in the pre-modern period—and continues to play a marginal role in modern Arab politics today in a few countries, especially when sung—and the political dimension of poetic expression is addressed by two articles in this collection. Kaïs Naouali offers a study of two poems embedded within Ibn Iyās' famous chronicle, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, which he analyzes as satiric attacks on judges, written with a popular audience in mind. Adam Talib's article discusses a new manuscript of the *Dīwān* of Ibn Maṭrūḥ, a poet and statesman active during the last decades of Ayyubid rule, whose poetry often addressed subjects of political significance, most famously the capture of Louis IX. Other articles in this collection also treat unknown or little known texts from this period, many of which still only exist in manuscript. Danilo Marino presents a study of the figure of hashish-eaters in Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-Tuqā al-Badrī's *Rāḥat al-arwāḥ fī al-ḥašīš wa-l-rāḥ*, a delightful anthology about cannabis and wine that has not yet been edited. Another unedited text, *al-Maqāma al-qāhiriyya* by Šaraf al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Rayyān, is the subject of Maurice Pomerantz's contribution to this volume. This article demonstrates the ways in which Ibn Rayyān references the popular epic of ʿAntar b. Šaddād to foreground differences and similarities between the *maqāma* form and the *sīra* tradition. Pomerantz also presents the first critical edition of the text as part of his study. In her article in this volume, Monica Balda-Tillier presents a study of Ibn al-Bakkāʾ's *Ġawānī al-ašwāq fī maʿānī al-ʿuššāq*, a 17th-century love treatise. Balda-Tillier shows that the author of the *Ġawānī* succeeded in reorienting older and well-known literary material about love to modify significantly the conception of profane love. Guy Ron-Gilboa's study of al-Maqrīzī's account of legends associated with *ṣaʿālīk*-poets shows that later retellings of early historical and pseudo-historical episodes are a crucial source that stands to tell us a great deal about how the Arabo-Islamic intellectual and cultural tradition developed over many centuries.

We chose to publish these articles in a special issue of *Annales Islamologiques* because it is one of the only international scholarly journals specializing in the Islamicate world that is headquartered in the Arab world, and we hope that by doing so, these papers will engage recalcitrant and revisionist scholars both within and without the Arab world. That being said, we know already that our effort is a partial failure: we were unable to identify suitable

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Arabic-language contributions and only one of the six contributors is a woman. This is not merely a mote in our eye: it reflects other old and stubborn inequities in our field that as revisionists we feel a particular duty to address. We hope, nevertheless, that this special issue will contribute along with a spate of recent dissertations—which are, as we speak, blooming into articles, monographs, and books—to provide empirical ballast for the often razor-sharp theorizing of the past decade.

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