Thomas Bauer
Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

In Search of "Post-Classical Literature": A Review Article

Readers interested in Arabic history have waited a long time for a history of Arabic literature during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods that would provide an outline, both comprehensive and concise, of this much-neglected field. Finally, a volume of the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature has appeared that promises to fill the gap. All too soon, however, the reader interested in Mamluk and Ottoman literature will realize that the wait is not over. Whereas some of the articles are of high quality (others are of much lower quality), the volume as a whole does not give an overall impression of the period in question, because its concept is marred by a highly Eurocentric approach. First of all, it treats Mamluk and Ottoman literature under the heading "post-classical." Second, it is divided into the categories poetry-prose-drama; and third, poetry and prose are each subdivided according to a characterization as elite or popular. In the following, I will address these three major points as they relate to the book in general without treating each article individually. In a last section I will deal especially with Salma Jayyusi's opening article on Mamluk poetry. As is often the case with reviews, aspects that discomfited and even angered the reviewer are dealt with in more detail than those that satisfied him. Therefore I found it more useful to focus on the problematic points of the book than to praise individual authors for their new insights, of which there are many. Further, I will focus on the topics especially relevant to the present journal and treat articles on the Ottoman period rather briefly.

1. "Post-Classical"

The term "postclassical" is a relative one. In order to define the postclassical, it is necessary to know what the classical is. The term "classical," however, has no indigenous counterpart, and its meaning is not given *a priori*. Since the editors do not even touch the issue, it has to be dealt with here in more detail because it is the central issue in the perception of Arabic literature and culture as a whole, as we shall see.

As for the term "classical literature," it is a European term coined to designate the literature of classical antiquity. Subsequently, literature that shared certain

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A review of *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period,* edited by Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (Cambridge, 2006). Pp 481.

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characteristics with the literature of Greece and Rome was also termed "classical." These characteristics may have been of either form or content, such as harmony, clarity, and simplicity. In another respect, just as Greek and Latin literatures were considered models for several periods of European literature, a literary corpus that was considered a model for future generations was called classical. In this last respect, "classical" has always been a stamp of quality implying that the "classical" is something exemplary, good, and excellent, whereas the non-classical is not.

Since the reference to classical antiquity cannot possibly be a major point for defining Arabic "classical" literature, what else can?

There exists a sense of "antique, old" when, during most of pre-modern Arabic literature, authors used to distinguish between the *mutaqaddimūn* and the *mutaʾakhkhirūn.* But this distinction between "the ancients and the moderns" is too vague and varies too much over the centuries to be of great help. In most periods of Arabic-Islamic culture, continuity was considered a major virtue. It is no wonder, then, that many a litterateur paid lip-service to the achievements of the ancients, though considering contemporary authors more captivating and interesting than the old stuff, as countless anthologies of the Mamluk period clearly demonstrate. Even Ibn Ḥijjah does not hesitate to pronounce proudly the superiority in the field of the *tawriyah* in his own time.[1] However, he would never have gone as far as to denounce the older literature as outdated and worthless and to consider it as something against which one has to rebel, as was often the case in European literary history. Instead, a statement like that of al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1832), who wrote that Ibn Nubātah was an "excellent and creative poet, who, in all kinds of poetry, surpassed his contemporaries, all those who came after them, and even most of those who lived before him,"[2] not only proves the high esteem in which Ibn Nubātah was held (see below), but articulates a strong perception of literary continuity that makes it rather improbable that "classical" and "postclassical" are adequate equivalents of *mutaqaddimūn* and *mutaʾakhkhirūn*.

A similar problem with the use of the term "classical" becomes obvious when we observe the fate of the term "neoclassical" in the scholarship of Arabic literary history. The term was coined in Western scholarship to designate poets of the third/ninth century such as Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī[3] since their *qaṣāʾid* seemed to follow the model of the pre- and early Islamic *qaṣīdah,* the most obvious equivalent to the "classical" (in the sense of "antique") literature of the West. As it became clear, however, that the poets of the "neoclassical" *qaṣīdah* did not aim at imitating

[1] Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-Adab wa-Ghāyat al-Arab,* ed. Kawkab Diyāb, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1425/2005), 3:185–93.

[2] Al-Shawkānī, *Al-Badr al-Ṭāliʿ bi-Maḥāsin Man baʿda al-Qarn al-Sābiʿ* (Beirut, 1418/1998), 2:131.

[3] See, e.g., Charles Pellat, "Al-Buḥturī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd. ed., 1:1289–90.

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the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah,* the term was rendered inappropriate in the view of most contemporary scholars. But it may still serve as an illustration of the confusion that can be caused by the terms "classic" and "classical." For if we accept the term "neoclassical" in this sense, we can hardly accept the existence of a "postclassical" literature *after* the "neoclassical" because the "neo" has to come *after* the "post." According to that logic, Mamluk poetry should be labeled "postneoclassical," and consequently, the poets of the nineteenth century who continued in the vein of Ibn Nubātah, such as Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī, should be termed neopostneoclassical poets, and Aḥmad Shawqī, rather than simply calling him neoclassical, as is generally done, should therefore be called a neoneopostneoclassical poet!

Since the reference to an allegedly "classical" (in the sense of antique) period leads us nowhere, let us try the criterion of "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur."[4] Arabists tried to apply this notion by contrasting "mannerism" and "classicism" in the tradition of Curtius.[5] But whereas one may differentiate between a classical and a mannerist *style,* the dichotomy does not yield a period. There is no classical *period* as opposed to a period of mannerism. Instead, both styles coexist during nearly all periods of Arabic literature. There were mannerist poets already in the Umayyad period (to mention only al-Ṭirimmāḥ, d. 110/728) and the style of Abbasid poets ranged from the simple and unsophisticated to the highly stylized and contrived, changing often from poem to poem.[6] This plurality of style is also obvious in the Mamluk period, to mention only Ibn Nubātah's poems to ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ibn Faḍl Allāh as an example for the *maṣnūʿ* style and his hunting *urjūzah* as an example of the *maṭbūʿ* style, considered a model for unmannered poetry by Mamluk critics.[7] Given this permanent stylistic plurality, the criterion of "classical" style is unsuitable for periodization and does not provide us with a classical or a post-classical period.

So the last possibility to find a classical period is to look for what has been considered as exemplary and taken as a model. Again, the result varies a great deal over the centuries. Whereas it may be possible to speak of a "canonization

[4] Winckelmann's characterization of Greek sculpture, which became a guiding principle of German classical literature: "Kennzeichen der griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Größe so wohl in der Stellung als im Ausdruck," first in *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Dresden, 1755).

[5] See Wolfhart Heinrichs, "'Manierismus' in der arabischen Literatur," *Islamwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen: Fritz Meier zum sechzigsten Geburtstag,* ed. Richard Gramlich (Wiesbaden, 1974), 118–28; see also Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge, 1989).

[6] See Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden, 1998), 106–49.

[7] See Geert Jan van Gelder, "Poetry for Easy Listening: *Insijām* and Related Concepts in Ibn Ḥijjah's *Khizānat al-Adab,*" *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 31–48.

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of the *jāhiliyyah*,"[8] this does not constitute a classical period, since it soon lost its function as a model. For Mamluk poets, *jāhilī* poetry was something old and distant, a noble heritage learned at school and alluded to from time to time, but not considered as *the* classical period of Arabic literature, just as Beowulf and contemporary Old English poetry can hardly be said to constitute the classical period of English literature.

In any case, the editors of the book under review who use the term "postclassical Arabic literature" seem to have something else in mind. To call a period "from approximately 1150 till 1850" (p. 8) a postclassical period implies that Arabic literature had a classical period from approximately 500 to 1150, i.e., for six and a half centuries! This stands in marked contrast to the few decades of classical French, German, or English literature! Is there any sound argument that can justify the existence of a classical period of 650 years? And is there any sound argument that can explain why an author of the eleventh century should be in any way more classical than an author of the thirteenth?

The notion "classical" in the sense "exemplary, providing the standards" cannot be applied to more than half a millennium. It makes sense, however, in respect to singling out authors or works. Certainly Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī were "classical" authors of *madīḥ* poems (rather than "neoclassical") in providing models much admired and followed for centuries. In the same sense, it is justified to speak about the "classical *maqāma*" as Steward does on p. 148, having in mind the *maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī. In the same sense it is an undeniable fact that the letters of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 596/1200), "mannered" as they may be, are a most "classical" work, admired and emulated far into the Ottoman period. In the same sense, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 750/1350) is the author of the classical *badīʿīyah* and Ibn Dāniyāl (d. 710/1310) the author of the classical shadow play. For al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1832) Ibn Nubātah (d. 768/1366) was a classical author par excellence, as we have seen above.

This might be one possibility for the use of the word "classic" in the context of Arabic literature in a meaningful way. But to try to construct monstrous periods of "classical" and "postclassical" literature leads to the most ridiculous results. So Rosella Dorigo Ceccato, forced to adhere to the senseless terminology of the volume, divides her (excellent) article on drama into two parts: "Origins" (pp. 348–56) and "Post-Classical Drama" (pp. 356–68). Shouldn't there be something "classical" in between? Did the Arabs really tumble immediately from "semi-dramatic texts" (p. 356) into the "postclassical"?

It becomes clear, therefore, that the word "classical" can only by applied to Arabic literature in two ways. First, it has become customary to differentiate

[8] See Heinrichs, *Manierismus,* 121.

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between "classical Arabic literature" as opposed to "modern Arabic literature." I can see no reason to object to this usage, since "classical Arabic literature" in this sense does not refer to a certain period, but to a continuous though manifold and heterogeneous literary tradition based on the classical Arabic language (though not exclusively composed in it). Second, it can be applied to certain authors or works that gained "classical" status in the course of literary history. This, however, happened repeatedly and at any time, and what was "classical" in one time was not necessarily so in another. Only this notion can do justice to the dynamic nature of the history of Arabic literature.

The way the terms "classical" and "postclassical Arabic literature" are used in the present volume has the opposite effect: It *denies* this very dynamic nature of Arabic literature, *denigrates* its history of one and a half millennia, *disregards* its manifold developments, and *squeezes* it into the corset of the imperialist "decline and fall" model. Since none of the meanings of "classical" discussed above can be reconciled with the assumption of the existence of a postclassical period between 1150 and 1850, it becomes obvious that the designation "postclassical" is nothing but a euphemism for "decadence," and the title of the book nothing but a polite English version of *ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*. In the introduction it is further suggested that one should distinguish a postclassical period from a premodern period (esp. p. 21). But a foolish idea does not become better when it is elaborated. Just the opposite. It is not only illogical in itself, since every period that was before the modern period is a premodern period, but displays even more clearly the teleological concept that is behind a terminology of this kind.

The idea of a "postclassical" period is a concept heavily dependent on the philosophical ideas of Hegel, who presupposed that the whole of human history is a process of steady progress of mankind that gradually advances to self-knowledge. In this process, the different cultures of mankind contribute their own share and thus help to attain the overall progress of the human race. But as soon as they have done their bit, they have fulfilled their purpose and are prone to vanish in the general stream of progress, which, destined to reach a single goal, cannot be a manifold one. Though there may be a little disagreement about the telos of mankind (the Prussian monarchy, Victorian civilization, communist society, or Western democracy), Hegelian teleological thinking is the background as well of the idea of the "white man's burden," of Fukuyama's "end of history," of the current extinction of the cultural plurality of the world in the wake of "globalization"—and also of a concept like "postclassical literature" or the thoughtless application of the notion "Middle Ages" to the world of Islam.

Terms like "Islamic Middle Ages" and "Arabic postclassical literature" are not as harmless as they seem, but inevitably carry a strong political connotation.

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According to the Hegelian teleological worldview that is behind them, Islamic culture has to fulfill one single important task, that is, to bring classical thinking (here: science and philosophy of antiquity) to the West during the "dark" Middle Ages. A nice formulation of this task is given by Léon Gauthier, who wrote in 1948:

> Dès la fin de ce XIIe siècle, le [sic] tâche principale, bien qu'inconsciente, de l'Islâm est accomplie, qui était de transmettre à l'Europe . . . l'inestimable trésor de la science et de la philosophie grecque. Désormais, la pensée arabe ne produit plus dans l'ordre des sciences physiques ou métaphysiques un seul ouvrage vraiment digne d'attention, Ibn Rochd avait été, pour la pensée spéculative gréco-arabe, comme le bouquet final d'un brillant feu d'artifice.[9]

Salma Jayyusi's introductory remarks to her article, in which she strives to expose the decadence and worthlessness of "postclassical" poetry, are an echo of this world view: "The history of the Arab world in medieval times was one of great effervescence; a truly brilliant civilization was forged and served as a link between the older Mediterranean cultures and the European Renaissance" (pp. 25–26)—but then things went wrong.

In the world of the eastern Mediterrenean, the urban culture of the (Eastern) Roman Empire was not destroyed, but gradually transformed. The cultural milieu of Aleppo at the time of al-Mutanabbī was not essentially different from that of the Roman Empire, whereas those of Rome, Cologne, and Paris were. Recently, Gotthard Strohmaier again stressed that one cannot speak of a "reception" of antiquity in Islam, because there was no crossing of boundaries and the creation of something completely new, which is the essence of reception, but rather the continuation of something given, adapted to new circumstances, i.e., as Rosenthal has called it, a "Fortleben der Antike im Islam."[10] In the absence of a cultural break between antiquity and the Middle Ages as in the West, it makes no sense to speak about the "Islamic Middle Ages." Nevertheless, the expression is still current and repeatedly used in the volume under review. The expression "Islamic Middle Ages," however, clearly reflects the teleological, Eurocentric view exposed above, since it makes no sense to speak about Middle Ages when Europe is not the reference. There was obviously no "medieval culture of the Pueblo Indians" and there were no "Aztec Middle Ages." Islam, instead, had to fulfill its single task in

[9] Léon Gauthier, *Ibn Rochd (Averroès)* (Paris, 1948), 11; see also Anna Akasoy, "A Baghdad Court in Constantinople/Istanbul," *Das Mittelalter* 10 (2005): 136–47, here 138.

[10] See Gotthard Strohmaier, "Das Bild und die Funktion vorchristlicher griechischer Religion bei arabischen Autoren des Mittelalters," in *Reflections on Reflections: Near Eastern Writers Reading Literature,* ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Christian Islebe (Wiesbaden, 2006), 181–90.

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the history of human progress, i.e., to enlighten the dark Middle Ages. According to this ideology, Islamic culture must necessarily be a phenomenon of the Middle Ages, since it was in the Middle Ages when it had to fulfill its duty for the human race. Because this notion posits a single history of the Weltgeist, the entire human race lived in the Middle Ages at this time. Therefore, only a few scholars (most prominently Mez and Hodgson) came to doubt the very existence of an Islamic Middle Ages. As has been realized repeatedly, the mentality of the people of these "Middle Ages" was anything but "medieval," rather more akin to the mentality of Renaissance and baroque Europe.[11] The inevitable connotation of the construction of "Islamic Middle Ages" is to deny Islam's own history, and to derive its history exclusively from a European point of view.

For reasons probably better sought in European history than in the history of Islam, the second half of the twelfth century seems to be a key date in the Hegelian historiography of Islam: note the exact coincidence of Gauthier's date for the accomplishment of Islam's principal task for world (i.e., Western) history and the onset of Allen's period of "postclassical" literature! At that time Islam had fulfilled its duty, and, consequently, lost the right to exist as a culture in its own right. From then on, only Europe (and later North America) had a history, whereas the Orient lay in a deep motionless sleep awaiting the moment to be awakened by well-meaning European imperialists, whose mission it was "den Neuaraber . . . in die Hallen moderner europäischer Gesittung einzuführen," as Alfred von Kremer put it in 1871.[12] Having fulfilled its task for the Middle Ages, Islam had nothing to do other than await the onset of modernity, generously brought to the Orient by the colonial powers. According to this imperialist ideology, Islamic history of the period after the fulfillment of Islam's task to the Weltgeist can only be "post-" and "pre-," since Islam has no right to persist as a culture of its own, a culture that has the right to set its own "post-s" and "pre-s." The echoes of this kind of thought can be heard clearly enough in contemporary political discourse, and even, I would dare to say, in the sound of the bombs exploding at this very moment in Iraq and other Islamic countries.

I have not the slightest doubt that Roger Allen, the co-editor and writer of the introduction, had no thought in mind of subscribing to this ideology. Nevertheless, "bien qu'inconsciente," to use Gauthier's words, he contributed to it with all his "pre-s" and "post-s." His introduction to the volume ("The Post-Classical Period:

[11] See Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islam* (Heidelberg, 1922), English transl. *The Renaissance of Islam* (London, 1937), and Bauer, *Liebe*, 93–98.

[12] Alfred von Kremer, "Nâṣîf aljâziǧî," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 25 (1871): 243–47, here 245; see also Thomas Bauer, "Die *badīʿiyya* des Nāṣīf al-Yāziǧī und das Problem der spätosmanischen arabischen Literatur," in *Reflections on Reflections,* ed. Neuwirth and Islebe, 49–118.

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Parameters and Preliminaries," pp. 1–21) is puzzling enough, since beside his "pre-" and "post-" ideas, Allen severely criticizes the notion of "decadence," subscribes to Hodgson's critique of the notion "Islamic Middle Ages," and encourages efforts to achieve a new perspective on the period in question. Reading these lines, one cannot help but feel that the editor is criticizing the foundational concept of his own volume rather than justifying it. Unfortunately, the fact remains that the volume *is* called *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period,* and that the series title "Cambridge History of . . ." ascribes authority to a designation which does not designate anything but a colonialist Western concept that denies more than half a millennium of Arabic literature its own right. As Samir Kassir has recently pointed out, the concept of "Golden Age" and subsequent "decadence" has done much harm to the Arabs and still prevents them from rethinking their own history.[13] It goes without saying that an editor of a volume in such a prestigious series as the Cambridge History has a responsibility not to use terms that do more harm than good. The present editors, though obviously not unaware of the problematic, failed to assume this responsibility. In the introduction, the reader comes across a quotation of Abdelfattah Kilito that says (p. 20):

> To us it seems more appropriate to regard Arabic poetics on its own terms and to avoid treating the subject as a kind of deviation from a model realized in other times and under other skies. The governing principles should be derived from characteristics that are intrinsic to it, not those of works from some other poetics. . . . To be sure, the negative approach can also be fruitful, but only when, in studying what a culture has not done, it manages to identify what it has done and not what it ought to have done.

How true this is, but how strange it is to find this quote in a book whose title conveys a notion that is nothing but a derogatory term for six hundred years of Arabic literature that failed to live up to Western standards!

Previous volumes of CHAL that dealt with the centuries prior to 1150 were named after the ruling dynasties ("Umayyad" and "ʿAbbasid"). While it is true, as Allen complains, that a periodization along dynastic lines means "to categorize the literary output from without rather than within" (p. 5), it has the great advantage that, after all, the dynasties *existed,* whereas a phantom such as a "postclassical period" did not. A term used for periodization has no other task than to delimit a certain time span. It is futile to search for a term that can sufficiently characterize a literary epoch. A single term can never do justice to a whole period, and interpretations of literary periods vary greatly. Therefore, instead of interpreting

[13] Samir Kassir, *Considérations sur le malheur arabe* (Paris, 2004).

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a period in order to label it, the procedure should be the opposite, i.e., to delimit the period by some external feature and only then to interpret it. Italians are completely satisfied with sorting their literature according to centuries. After all, the *cinquecento* is as undeniable a fact as is the Mamluk period. The image of the period may change, and it may turn out that the turn of centuries or the change of dynasties did not correspond to literary changes. To find this out is the task of the literary historian, who has to give his own interpretations but must not be hampered by senseless concepts such as "medieval" or "postclassical." Since it is a Herculean task to fight against such concepts once they are established, their creation is not a contribution to the progress of scholarship. Therefore I strongly advocate "Saljuq," "Ayyubid," "Mamluk," and "Ottoman" as terms for the periodization of Arabic literature. It is true that they do not say much about the literature of the time. But this is an advantage rather than a handicap because it provides for the possibility of changing interpretations without being burdened with a prejudicial terminology. Further, dynastic terms are quite precise. Whether to ascribe the years of Shajar al-Durr's reign to the Ayyubid or Mamluk dynasty is a very minor problem compared to the task of delimiting the Islamic "Middle Ages" or the phantom of a "postclassical" period. And, of course, there are a number of dynasties that can serve for periodization rather than only a single "postclassical" period, and a period that bears the name of a dynasty will not be mistaken for a given reality of literary history.

Several contributions to the book do in fact take periods as a given reality and do not shrink from a plain reification, if not personification, of "the period." The article on "Criticism in the Post-Classical Period: A Survey" by William Smyth (chapter 19, pp. 387–417) may serve as an example. Smyth's article is especially strong on Ibn al-Athīr, but a bit cursory on other authors and fields. Yet it may pass as a good article, though I cannot help the impression that it would have been a better article if the author were less infected with the idea of a postclassical period. Smyth uses formulations according to which the period becomes an actor in itself, as when he says that "the post-classical period is mainly concerned with organizing the heritage of the classical" (p. 417). Besides the fact that the statement is patently incorrect, it displays a view according to which a period is not a tentative abstraction derived from a careful examination of the works created during a certain span of time, but rather an entity that has a character in itself, which is imprinted on everything created during this period just as the genetic code is imprinted on one's offspring. According to this concept, which again owes much to German idealism, Smyth can say that Ibn Maʿṣūm's *Anwār al-Rabīʿ* "demonstrates the level of artificiality and elaboration that scholars and poets regarded as aesthetically satisfying in the post-classical period." The text is taken as an offspring of its period, the existence of which is

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simply taken for granted. The geographical background of its author (India and the Yemen), his social position, his interesting biography, his particular character, the target audience of the work—all this seems to be irrelevant to understanding the text, since it was shaped by the character of the *period*. The text is believed to necessarily embody the "genetic code" of the mother period. Therefore, its characteristics can be generalized without hesitation, since the text cannot do other than display the characteristics of the period, and since all texts bear the stamp of the mother period, they can hardly display different characteristics. This procedure, however, does not do justice to the plurality of a period, which in this case is not acknowledged at all. As for Ibn Maʿṣūm's *Anwār,* it is one of only four large *badīʿīyah*-cum-commentary-cum-anthology works that were composed between Ibn Ḥijjah (d. 837/1434) and Muṣṭafá al-Ṣalāḥī (d. 1265/1849).[14] With an average of one per century, one may ask how characteristic these works actually are. On the other hand, we have the genre of the hunting *urjūzah,* which displays a very low level of "artificiality and elaboration," written, however, by authors who were also producers of highly artificial prose.[15] Given Smyth's statement, one wonders if these texts were either not conceived as "aesthetically satisfying," or if the mother period gave birth to monsters.

One of the consequences of this approach is the obsession with the question of what is *new* in this period. According to Smyth, everything that has any sort of predecessor is not new. Therefore, neither al-Sakkākī nor Ibn al-Athīr nor al-Qarṭājannī produced anything really new, because they had predecessors. "In the post-classical period, the disciplines that deal with criticism are largely a continuation of the subjects and methods established in the previous five centuries" (p. 387). Well, this is the nature of scholarship. What would be the benefit of disregarding everything that had been written in the previous five centuries simply to produce something completely new? Smyth's article itself presents hardly anything that is new. This does not diminish its value. Smyth's obsession with innovation, however, prevents him from recognizing what really was new. To take one example, he writes in quite a deprecating way about al-Ṣafadī's book on the *tawriyah* ("There was very little by way of real analysis," p. 407). He forgets, however, that this was the first treatise ever written about the subject, and that it was considerably improved upon by Ibn Ḥijjah's treatment of the same subject. He is also unaware of the simple fact that there is no theory of double entendre in modern Western stylistics whatsoever. Ibn Ḥijjah's book, therefore, is not only the best book ever written on the double entendre, but is still *state of the art!* But for Smyth, for whom periods are closed entities, it is perhaps inconceivable that

[14] See Bauer, "Die *badīʿiyya* des Nāṣīf al-Yāziǧī."

[15] See Bauer, "The Dawādār's Hunting Party: A Mamluk *Muzdawija Ṭardiyya*, probably by Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Faḍlallāh," forthcoming in *Festschrift Remke Kruk*.

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a work written more than five hundred years ago in another culture can have any immediate relevance for the present.

It is quite obvious that the volume was not a labor of love for the editors. As Allen realizes quite clearly, the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods on the one hand, and the Ottoman period on the other hand, are periods quite different in nature and character, and each of them would have deserved a volume of its own. But the deprecatory nature of the whole enterprise becomes clear already in the first line of the introduction, which says that the present volume is "probably the last" of the CHAL. We thus learn that the Mamluk and Ottoman periods are not deemed worthy of two volumes, while the Abbasid period was granted a volume dedicated to literature and another one dedicated to "religion, learning and science" (Cambridge, 1990). Obviously the publishers think that there was no "religion, learning and science" during this time about which a Western public needs to be informed. Could there be a clearer expression of the Hegelian worldview described above?

Not only will there be no volume on Mamluk and Ottoman learning and science, but the volume under review is also marred by several disturbing lacunae. The volume is not called "Arabic literature of the Mamluk and Ottoman *empires,*" but "Arabic literature in the post-classical *period.*" Therefore it should cover the whole of the literature written in the Arabic language irrespective of the country in which it was written. But this is not the case. The chapter on Mamluk historiography is limited exactly to the historiography of the Mamluk empire. Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb is not mentioned, and the author even apologizes for mentioning the Tūnis-born Ibn Khaldūn (p. 166). In the whole volume, the name al-Maqqarī does not appear once. Despite its title, the chapter on historiography of the Ottoman period is not limited to the Ottoman *period,* but to the Ottoman *empire*. Consequently, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs and his *Nūr al-Sāfir* are not mentioned (despite its importance for our knowledge of the history of Egypt and Syria in the tenth/sixteenth century), nor is any other of the many Yemeni historiographic works. In the entire volume, the Yemen is only mentioned in Larkin's article on popular poetry, while the extremely rich *fuṣḥá* literature of this important part of the Arabic world is completely disregarded in all other chapters. The quite remarkable bloom of Arabic literature in India during the eighteenth century is either completely unknown to the editors or deemed, for whatever reason, unworthy of mention. Its most famous protagonist, Āzād al-Bilgrāmī (1116–99/1704–84), however, is still today venerated and studied intensively in Pakistan and India. By neglecting authors like him—not to mention those of Oman or sub-Saharan Africa—an important aspect of the later Ottoman period is obscured, i.e., its tendency to a specific form of cultural "globalization" of the Islamic world.

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Two further general critical remarks may be allowed here. First, the nearly complete disregard of French, German, and Italian scholarship in many articles is a sad sign of the increasing provincialism of Arabic studies. This provincialism is further manifested in several contributions due to their being, as a Mamluk author would have put it, "bare of the clothes of literary theory." Only if terms and concepts are applied with the same diligence and theoretical knowledge as is the practice in fields dealing with Western literatures will Arabic studies become a discipline on an equal footing with its more progressive neighbors and, due to the wealth of its material, be able to inspire these disciplines instead of stumbling on mired in the prejudices and ill-defined concepts of the nineteenth century.

2. Poetry–Prose–Drama

As we have already seen in the case of the term "postclassical," the editors scarcely discuss the central notions of the book and its basic principles of organization. The first of these principles was to organize the articles in sections on poetry, prose, and drama, and to add an article on criticism. Poetry and prose (but not drama) are again split into two parts, one dedicated to elite poetry/prose, the other to popular poetry/prose. Is this organization, which is not explained with a single word, really as plausible as the editors obviously assume? The three categories "poetry," "prose," and "drama" obviously were applied because the editors wanted to avoid the more usual Western classification "epic/narrative," "lyric," and "drama," and they were right to do so since this partition is no longer the state of the art of literary scholarship, and it obviously does not fit Arabic literature at all. For example, *inshāʾ* is not epic and a lot of Arabic poetry is not really lyrical. Nevertheless, to substitute "prose" for "epic" and "poetry" for "lyric" does not make things any better. First, the three notions are now no longer on the same level, for what else could a drama be than either poetry or prose? And second, even these notions cannot deny their Western origin and they prevent the reader from conceiving of Mamluk and Ottoman literature under categories other than established Western ones. Inconsistencies resulting from this classification become obvious all too soon. The *maqāmah* is discussed at length both in the prose section and in the drama section. The fact that *maqāmāt,* shadow plays, chancellery letters, the *Sīrat ʿAntar,* and the *Thousand and One Nights* consist of a mixture of poetry and prose is obscured by this division, and so is the fact that poetry and prose so often interacted in a single act of communication. A letter of praise, congratulation, or condolence often comprised both a *qaṣīdah* and a prose text referring to it. Still, in the case of Ibn Nubātah, we find the *qaṣīdah* in the *Dīwān* and the corresponding letter in one of his prose collections. But later Mamluk authors gave up this formal division between poetry and prose. The *Dīwān* of al-Qīrāṭī, to take only one example, comprises both prose and poetry

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and no longer separates the *qaṣīdah* and its accompanying prose letter.[16] These developments are necessarily obscured by the division into prose, poetry, and drama, a concept that runs contrary to the indigenous development. This becomes very clear in the instructive article "The Role of the Pre-Modern: the Generic Characteristics of the *Band*" by ʿAbdallah[17] Ibrahim (chapter 4, pp. 87–98), where Ibrahim argues convincingly that the *band,* despite its rhythmic structure, is rather to be considered prose. But the editors found it not prosaic enough and put the article in the poetry section.

The concept of dividing the book into chapters dedicated to prose, poetry, and drama meets its final collapse in the section "popular prose." Here we find all the chapters dealing with the popular epics. It is only reasonable to unite these chapters under a common heading, but the heading cannot be "prose," since the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* is a work of oral poetry, its formal aspects being so excellently presented in Reynolds' article (see pp. 314–18) that the editors should have understood that this *sīrah* is not a work of prose, and therefore does not belong in the "popular prose" section. It would have belonged in an "epic" section, but most of the other prose chapters would not. Therefore we see, as so often, that the application of modern Western categories and the disregard of indigenous categories can never do justice to any other culture than the Western. Ibn Sūdūn was wiser in not separating prose and poetry in his *Muḍḥik al-ʿAbūs.* Instead of separating prose and poetry, he separates *jidd* and *hazl,* which, by the way, would have been an indigenous concept that could have been of more use for a volume of this kind (it is only touched upon accidentally on p. 138). The same is true for many other indigenous concepts. But there are no chapters on anthologies, epigrams, chronograms, *badīʿīyāt,* travelogues, *muṭāraḥāt, taqārīẓ,* and so on; all these are forms or genres that were of exceeding importance for Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman authors and readers, but of no importance to the editors of this book, who prefer to apply modern (though partially dated) Western concepts instead. This does not mean that there are no Western terms and concepts that do fit. A particularly fitting one is the term *prosimetrum,* a Latin term for a literary piece that is made up of alternating passages of prose and poetry. It is only too obvious that many literary genres of Arabic literature such as the *maqāmah* are far more adequately described as *prosimetrum* than as prose or poetry. The term *prosimetrum* has already been applied successfully to Arabic literature and other Near Eastern literatures, but is not taken into account in the volume under review.[18]

[16] See al-Qīrāṭī, "Kitāb Maṭlaʿ al-Nayyirayn," Istanbul, MS Fātiḥ 3861.

[17] Or ʿAbdullah, as on pp. v and viii.

[18] *Prosimetrum: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse,* ed. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Cambridge, 1997). See especially the contributions by Wolfhart Heinrichs ("Prosimetrical Genres in Classical Arabic Literature," pp. 249–75) and Dwight Reynolds ("Prosimetrum in

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Instead, we get a whole section on "drama," comprising an article by Rosella Dorigo Ceccato (chapter 17, "Drama in the Post-Classical Period: a Survey," pp. 347–68) and a second one by Philip Sadgrove (chapter 18, "Pre-Modern Drama," pp. 369–83). These two articles complement each other. While Ceccato focuses on the *maqāmah* genre and the traditional ("classical"?) shadow play, Sadgrove treats forms of drama attested mainly in a later period such as the Karagöz, the marionette theater, masquerades, burlesques, and other forms of popular entertainment. Both articles are highly informative. Nevertheless they raise doubts as to whether it is really justified to devote a separate section to "drama." *Maqāmāt* are "semi-dramatic texts" (p. 356) and not drama, and the early shadow plays are still very close to the vulgar *maqāmah*. The performative aspect of these genres—all of them *prosimetric* genres—is high, just as is that of the recitation of the *sīrahs* (mentioned p. 367), but a performative aspect does not make a text a drama in the Western sense of the word (and there is no other sense). Sadgrove's article is, to my knowledge, the best existing summary of popular dramatic enterprises in the Arabic world, though I hesitate to accept the heading "pre-modern drama" since the main part of his article talks about the nineteenth and even the twentieth century. The heading thus creates the impression (certainly unintended by Sadgrove, who is probably not responsible for the title) that "modernity" is a property of enlightened intellectual (i.e., Western) culture, and the popular is a residuum of the unenlightened past. Further, problematic as the category "popular" is, it cannot be justified that the dramatic or semi-dramatic texts dealt with in Sadgrove's article do not bear the word "popular" in their heading and are treated separately from popular poetry and prose, though they are nothing other than popular poetry and prose and do not even differ in their performative character from most of the other popular poetic, prosaic, and prosimetric genres.

Despite the quality of these articles, the expectations of a reader not familiar with Arabic literary history will be rather disappointed by the drama section. Instead of finding something like Euripides, Molière, and Shakespeare, he is confronted with semi-dramatic forms such as the *maqāmah* on the one hand and popular dramatic representations that were not regarded as high literature on the other. This will not convince the reader that there was a "real" dramatic culture in the Arabic world. But what else could one expect? In most cases when a non-Western phenomenon is measured against a Western concept, the difference comes out as a deficit, even if this is not the aim of the author. Drama is a good example. Since Shmuel Moreh tried to refute the common prejudice according to which pre-modern Arabic literature did not know drama, it has become *en vogue* to argue the opposite. However, the two chapters on drama in this volume,

Nineteeth- and Twentieth-Century Arabic Literature," pp. 277–94).

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good as they are, rather corroborate the prejudice than correct it. But why do we have to prove that there was "real" pre-modern drama in the Arabic world? Has anybody ever questioned the value of English literature on account of its failure to develop the genres of *maqāmah* and *badīʿīyah*? Why then do we have a separate section on drama, separating texts from the genres and forms to which they were felt to belong when they were created, and crowd them together under a concept that did not play a decisive role in the minds of the creaters of these texts and their audiences? In pre-modern Arabic literature, the property of being dramatic did not necessarily create a different genre. Just as there were *muwashshaḥāt* that were composed as song texts and others that were never sung nor intended to be, there were texts with a minimal performative potential and others with a great one. Some of these texts could be performed by more than one person, and some implied the use of masks or puppets. Thus they are drama in the full sense of the word, but this did not set them apart from related non-dramatic genres in a way similar to the way "drama" is separated from "lyric" and "epic" in the traditional Western conception. Though there was drama, for pre-modern Arabic literature the notion of "drama" can only be of heuristic value, since it was hardly perceived as a separate category of texts. The structure of the book, dividing Arabic literature into the three categories poetry, prose, and drama, therefore means nothing but to squeeze Arabic literature into the Procrustean bed of a Western concept that can only present Arabic literary history in a distorted form.

A further shortcoming of the book is the fact that there are no articles on the indigenous conceptions mentioned above with the exception of the *band,* certainly not the most important of them. And while there are no separate chapters on the different poetic genres like love, praise, description, or satire (and some of the more important ones such as hunting and chronograms do not receive a single word), there is again one exception, Emil Homerin's article on "Arabic Religious Poetry, 1200–1800" (chapter 3, pp. 74–86). It is, of course, a futile attempt to exhaust six hundred years of flourishing religious poetry (both Muslim and Christian) in a mere thirteen pages. But thanks to Homerin's gift as a translator these pages are among the most enjoyable in the volume.

3. Elite versus Popular

What is true for the genre division is also true for the division into the parameters "elite" vs. "popular." As usual, the editors have little to say about it. Allen at first seems to be aware of the problem and quotes Heath's all too true statement that "warns the researcher against establishing the concepts of elite and popular as static monoliths" (p. 19). But this did not prevent Allen from making this dichotomy one of the guiding principles of the volume. His own expositions are not very helpful. They focus on the equation standard language = elite vs.

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vernacular = popular, which is very problematic, as we will see. In any case, the authors of the individual contributions must have felt abandoned by the editors and left to escape as best they could. Let us take the section "popular prose," which comprises six contributions, all of them good, some of them excellent.

Dwight F. Reynolds opens this part with a summary article (chapter 11, "Popular Prose in the Post-Classical Period," pp. 245–69). The same author tells the story of "*A Thousand and One Nights*," especially the story of its reception, which, in this case, is to a certain extent also the story of its genesis (chapter 12, pp. 270–91). A lively picture of the "*Sīrat ʿAntar ibn Shaddād*" is drawn by Remke Kruk (chapter 13, pp. 292–306). Especially remarkable is her elaboration of the "feminist" aspect of the epic. Equally informative is the article on "*Sīrat Banī Hilāl*," again by Reynolds (chapter 14, pp. 307–18). Peter Heath's "Other Sīras and Popular Narratives," especially strong on bringing out a typology of the different epics, could well have served as an introduction to the whole *sīrah* section. Some overlapping could have been avoided, but the principle of editorial minimalism proved stronger (chapter 15, pp. 319–29). Though one would miss Kamal Abdel-Malek's chapter on "Popular Religious Narratives," its connection to the period in question and the section "popular prose" remains somewhat vague (chapter 16, pp. 330–44). A chapter on the popular anthology, important as it is for an understanding of the intellectual world of the middle classes, is missing.[19]

Six good articles, but the whole is not more than the sum of its parts, because no conclusive picture about the social place of a distinct literary phenomenon emerges. This is mainly due to the lack of a consistent concept of "popular" and "elite" that could serve as a basis for all the articles. Let us see how the authors tried to help themselves out of the dilemma.

At first, one would assume that "popular literature" should be "popular" in a certain way. However, in Reynolds' article on the *Nights* we read that "the *Nights* was neither a highly regarded nor even a particularly popular work during these centuries." Given the small number of manuscripts and references to it, Reynolds is certainly right. But this confronts us with the remarkable phenomenon of "unpopular popular literature." Obviously, the term "popular" is not as self-evident as the editors seem to suppose. Similar to Allen's introductory remarks, Reynolds tries a definition according to linguistic criteria. According to him, popular texts of the pre-modern period are those "that preserve or imitate to varying degrees a colloquial aesthetic" (p. 246)—"colloquial" in the sense of "colloquial Arabic" (ibid.).

[19] See Thomas Bauer, "Literarische Anthologien der Mamlukenzeit," *Die Mamluken: Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur: Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942–1999),* ed. Stephan Conermann and Anja Pistor-Hatam (Hamburg, 2003), 71–122, esp. 98–106, and Giovanni Canova, "Una pagina di *al-Kanz al-madfūn* sugli uomini più illustri," *Ultra mare: Mélanges de langue arabe et d'islamologie offerts à Aubert Martin,* ed. Frédéric Bauden (Louvain, 2004), 93–107.

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Though the point is important, it is not enough for a definition of the "popular." If it were, Abdel-Malek's contribution would have no place in this section because none of the texts treated by him display any elements of colloquial language. On the other hand, the historiographic writings of Ibn Duqmāq (d. 809/1496), one of the *awlād al-nās* and certainly a member of the social elite, display a reasonable amount of colloquial influence. Ibn Ḥajar, who drew heavily on Ibn Duqmāq's writings, cannot help stating that Ibn Duqmāq, "despite his passion for literature and history, was bare of the clothes of the Arabic language, and his speech was vulgar (*ʿāmmī al-ʿibārah*)."[20] Should one, then, establish a new category "popular historiography"? (Note that the name of Ibn Duqmāq is not mentioned in the book under review).

The colloquial element is central in the poetry of the *zajal*. In the east, the *zajal* first flourished at the turn of the seventh–eighth/thirteenth–fourteenth centuries. Its most important early representative was al-Maḥḥār (d. 711/1311). His *dīwān* contains the remarkable number of 37 *azjāl*, which represent a major corpus of the eastern *zajal* in its earlier period. Of middle class origin, he soon became the court poet of the Ayyubid branch that still reigned in the province of Ḥamāh in the Mamluk era. Some of his *azjāl* display a definite middle-class flavor,[21] but he used this form also to praise ulama and members of the ruling dynasty (note that the name of al-Maḥḥār is not mentioned in the book under review). It is obvious that the *zajal* tradition became firmly rooted in the courtly milieu of Ḥamāh, which is not a "popular" milieu at all. Still Ibn Nubātah, the most elite poet of the period, found it inevitable to compose—however reluctantly—a panegyric *zajal* on Abū al-Fidāʾ, then ruler of Ḥamāh known by his regnal title al-Malik al-Muʾayyad.[22] An elite poet, addressing a panegyric poem to an author of several scholarly books who happens to be at the same time a most distinguished governor of a province, bearing the title of a sultan—if this is not elite, what is? It is only too obvious, therefore, that the linguistic form of a work of literature is not enough to serve as a shibboleth between elite and popular literature.

Obviously, the social background of Mamluk literature is different from the expectations of the editors. Allen's statement that "we have a . . . representative sample of the literary productions of the elite, often centered around the court" (p. 19) reflects the idea of a modern Western intellectual about how "medieval" literature should be. But it has little to do with reality. Instead, the court (which court?) did not play a major role in Mamluk literature any more, since there were

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[20] See *MSR* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 257–62.

[21] See *MSR* 10, no. 1 (2006): 211–13.

[22] Ibn Nubātah published it in his *Muntakhab al-Hadīyah;* and it is quoted in nearly all manuscripts of his *Dīwān*, but not in the printed version; see my "The Works of Ibn Nubātah," forthcoming in this journal.

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few courts left in which Arabic poetry played a role. The major exceptions were courts in areas not addressed in this volume (Maghrib, Yemen), and the short-lived court of the Ayyubids in Ḥamāh, mentioned above. But precisely this court was a center of vernacular poetry! Allen fails to notice that Mamluk literature (and probably Ottoman literature as well), as it has come down to us, is mainly a bourgeois phenomenon. The ulama did not compose poetry for a court, but for other members of their own social group, and the standards of ulama poetry were adopted to a large extent even by members of the artisan middle class, as the poetry of al-Miʿmār and other craftsmen shows.[23] The ulama elite was not in principle against “popular” literature, but since mastery of flawless classical Arabic was one of their main means of distinction, they hesitated to produce texts in the vernacular. Yet there are some, and, more important, elite ulama were among the readers and admirers of vernacular poetry. Thus it is no wonder that a secretary of the chancellery and elite poet like ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Mawṣilī (d. 789/1387) “adorned,” as he says, the *dīwān* of the popular poet al-Miʿmār with a pompous preface.[24] The contrast between ʿIzz al-Dīn’s sophisticated rhymed prose and the vernacular *azjāl* on sex and drugs in the later part of al-Miʿmār’s *dīwān* could hardly be greater, nor could there be any more instructive proof that there was no clear-cut boundary between the popular and the elite in Mamluk times. Instead, there was a continuum that reached from the *mawwāl* of the illiterate, the poetry—partly in the vernacular, partly in often deviant standard language—of the artisans, the *muṭāraḥāt* of ulama who cultivated poetry as a pastime and a means of presenting themselves as a perfect “gentilhuomo,” to the extreme end of the highly sophisticated creations of the professional *udabāʾ*. All these creations, however, belonged to a single poetic world, that was governed by a set of similar aesthetic norms and subtle social mechanisms that determined which sort of literary text was to be produced or read/heard at which social occasion and in which linguistic form. This issue, which is not only central to the history of Mamluk literature, but also essential for the understanding of Mamluk society as a whole, has hardly been touched upon in scholarship so far. The arrangement of the book under review even fosters the notion of a dichotomy between “elite” and “popular” and thus impedes scholarly progress rather than encouraging it.

While “popular prose” received six chapters, the section “popular poetry” has only one, albeit long and important: “Popular Poetry in the Post-Classical Period, 1150–1850” by Margaret Larkin (chapter 10, pp. 191–242). In her article, Larkin discusses many of the features mentioned above. She is well aware of

[23] See Thomas Bauer, “Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār: Ein dichtender Handwerker aus Ägyptens Mamlukenzeit,” *ZDMG* 152 (2002): 63–93. There is a strange preoccupation with courts in this volume. On p. 83 even the stonecutter and architect al-Miʿmār is labelled a “court poet.”

[24] See “Dīwān al-Miʿmār,” Dār al-Kutub MS 673 Shiʿr Taymūr, fols. 1v–2r.

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the difficulties in defining the popular and the elite and stresses several times that there is no clear-cut division between them. She is right in emphasizing the fact that members of different social layers "shared much in the way of cultural paradigms and life experience, including the use of colloquial language in their everyday lives" and that members of the elite often enjoyed popular poetry in non-standard form (p. 193). As one of the reasons for the fact that the Mamluk era was "the heyday of popular Arabic literature" she identifies a "blossoming of the middle strata of society, including craftsmen and shopkeepers" (p. 220). For this group, in which literacy must have been quite widespread (p. 220), she uses the felicitous term "petite bourgeoisie" (pp. 194, 219, 222). While I completely agree with her sociological analysis, Larkin perhaps overestimates the role of patronage for Mamluk literature. There were hardly any professional poets in this period, who depended entirely on poetry for their livelihood. Most poetry was composed by persons who made their living mainly as secretaries, religious scholars, traders, or craftsmen. On the other hand, one must not overlook the fact that there was a flourishing book market in the Mamluk period, which provided a more secure income than patronage for an *adīb*. The poet al-Bashtakī derived his entire income working as a scribe and "editor" of books,[25] and with his many popular anthologies, the *adīb* al-Nawājī achieved financial success in the book market.

After general considerations about the nature and background of "popular" poetry, Larkin gives a profound survey of the history and the different forms of strophic poetry in which she happily also includes the Maghrib, Sudan, and the Yemen. Two subsections are dedicated to a more detailed presentation of Mamluk and Ottoman popular poetry. Since her article will become a standard text on its subject, some additions and corrections may be in place here: the poet mentioned on p. 211, line 6, is known as al-Shihāb al-Ḥijāzī rather than as al-Ḥijāzī al-Anṣārī. Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār "the architect" (mentioned pp. 211, 212) was also known as al-Ḥajjār, "the stone-cutter." Probably he started as a stone-cutter and acquired more sophisticated skills in the building crafts later. He was never a weaver. Instead, al-Ṣafadī mixed him up with a different person named Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥāʾik in his *Wāfī*, but corrected his error later in his *Alḥān al-Sawājiʿ*.[26] Unfortunately,

[25] See Bauer, "The Works of Ibn Nubātah, Part 2," forthcoming in *MSR*.

[26] See Bauer, "Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār," 63–93; see also idem, "Die Leiden eines ägyptischen Müllers: Die Mühlen-Maqāme des Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār (st. 749/1348)," *Ägypten–Münster: Kulturwissenschaftliche Studien zu Ägypten, dem Vorderen Orient und verwandten Gebieten (Festschrift Erhart Graefe),* ed. Anke Ilona Blöbaum et al. (Wiesbaden, 2003), 1–16; and idem, "Das Nilzağal des Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār: Ein Lied zur Feier des Nilschwellenfestes," in *Alltagsleben und materielle Kultur in der arabischen Sprache und Literatur (Festschrift Heinz Grotzfeld),* ed. Ulrike Stehli-Werbeck and Th. Bauer (Wiesbaden, 2004), 69–88.

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Brockelmann chose al-Ḥāʾik as the main part of the poet's name. Nevertheless, he should not be called something other than al-Miʿmār, a name he repeatedly uses himself in his poetry. His *dīwān* does not contain a *kān wa-kān* poem (p. 212), but rather thirty-four *mawwāliyā* and twelve *azjāl* and *balālīq*, in addition to about five hundred epigrams in *fuṣḥá* (or what al-Miʿmār considered to be *fuṣḥá*). This case shows clearly that the epigram, which is completely ignored in the volume under review, was also an important form of popular literature. Ibn Nubātah composed at least eighteen *muwashshaḥāt*, but was not a "*zajal* specialist" (p. 217). There is only the one above-mentioned *zajal* on Abū al-Fidāʾ and a *bullayq* in the autograph manuscript of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānīʾs additions to Ibn Nubātah's *dīwān,*[27] which nicely corroborates the interest of the elite in vernacular poetry. The bowdlerized edition of al-Nawājī's *ʿUqūd al-Laʾālī* (p. 218) is superseded now by the much better edition by Aḥmad Muḥammad ʿAṭā (Cairo, 1999). Ibn Sūdūn did not acquire sufficient religious education to "equip him for a life as . . . [a] religious scholar" (p. 227).[28] Instead, we must reckon the lower-level personnel of madrasahs and mosques such as lamp-lighters, muezzins, and imams as part of the petite bourgeoisie. Many of them may not have had any more religious knowledge than the butcher next door. The existence of this group again demonstrates the continuum between middle class and high-brow ulama. At the present, it is still difficult to assess how much popular poetry has been preserved (p. 231). There may be more than expected. I refer only to the still unpublished text presented by Madeleine Voegeli: "*Manṣūbat Ṣafā l-ʿaiš*–ein volkstümliches, ägyptisch-arabisches Zağal aus dem 17. Jahrhundert," *Asiatische Studien* 50 (1996): 463–78.

A few words on the five chapters dealing with "elite prose" shall conclude this section.

Muhsin al-Musawi's survey article on "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose" (chapter 5, pp. 101–33) is certainly one of the best contributions in this volume. The author is familiar with the enormous output of the prose literature of the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman period and its multifariousness, which does not fail to impress him: "The sheer variety of prose-writing surveyed in this chapter attests to the existence of a dynamic culture characterized by the active involvement of littérateurs, widespread networks and a magnanimous devotion to the world of writing" (p. 132). More than most other contributors he succeeds in putting the literary works into their proper social context. He does not look for nonexistent courts, but points to the overwhelming importance of the chancellery and other learned milieus for the literature of the period. These findings enable him to

[27] Göttingen, 8o Cod. Ms. arab. 179, fols. 59r–v.

[28] See *MSR* 7, [no. 1] (2003): 267–72.

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explain the stylistic properties of different genres in an unprejudiced way. Contrary to Salma Jayyusi, who complains about a "lack of virility" (see below), al-Musawi appreciates the stylist's "quest for elegance" (p. 109) and notices the broad stylistic range of the texts of this period. This literature's "variety, richness and energy defy sweeping generalizations. Indeed it calls for a more serious and careful analysis. . . ." (p. 133). Would that all editors and contributors had followed this maxim!

The chapters on "The Essay and Debate (*al-Risāla and al-Munāẓara*)" by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (chapter 6, pp. 134–44) and on "The *Maqāma*" by Devin Stewart (chapter 7, pp. 145–58) are too short to give a comprehensive idea of the rich output in these fields. It turns out further that it is hard to distinguish between *risālah*, *maqāmah*, and *munāẓarah* without doing injustice to the autochthonous understanding of these notions. Stewart's concept of the *maqāmah* is focused too strongly on the Ḥarīrian *maqāmah*. The wealth of forms and subjects of the latter *maqāmāt* appears as a deviation from the classical model rather than as an enrichment. Both contributions are hampered by the fact that the contributors do not treat texts that are still in manuscript, which, however, is the case for the majority of the texts relevant to these chapters.

The inadequate short chapter on "Mamluk History and Historians" (chapter 8, pp. 159–70) by Robert Irwin can hardly be called a scholarly contribution. Its last sentence, according to which the "Mamluk age was obsessed by the past and we cannot mention here all who ventured to write history" (p. 170), true as it may be, is a weak excuse for the lack of any discernable concept. Sometimes one cannot help but feel that Irwin followed the method of one of the historiographers which he, for whatever reason, chose to mention at the expense of more important ones. "When Qirṭāy was bored or short of information, he made things up and his chronicle contains the most fantastic misinformation" (p. 164). Let us take a paragraph from page 162. Here we read the following sentences, none of which can go unchallenged: "Al-Kutubī . . . and Ibn Kathīr . . . were the last prominent representatives of the Syrian *ʿulamāʾ* school of historiography." What about Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah? "Al-Ṣafadī . . . believed in history as a vehicle for moral uplift." What gave Irwin that idea? ". . . [Y]et he wrote no chronicle. Instead he produced . . . the *Wāfī*. . . . He also produced two smaller biographical compendia, on blind persons and on contemporaries." There is another one on one-eyed persons and another on the rulers and governors of Damascus. Irwin continues by saying that al-Ṣafadī "produced, among other things, a *maqāma* on wine." I know of no such *maqāmah*; perhaps he misunderstood the title *Rashf al-Raḥīq fī Waṣf al-Ḥarīq*—"a quantity of pederastic verse"; perhaps he means the *Lawʿat al-Shākī*, which is a *maqāmah* and, in any case, quite mislabeled as being

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"pederastic verse,"[29] ". . . and a famous poem on the beauty spot (*khāl*)." Famous the text is indeed, but not to Irwin who otherwise would have realized that it is an anthology of epigrams written by many different authors. Irwin goes on: "He also interested himself in occult matters and wrote on alchemy as well as on *malāḥim* (disasters prefiguring the end of the world)." As a matter of fact, al-Ṣafadī never wrote on *malāḥim* or any related subject, and he was an outspoken opponent of alchemy. In his *Al-Ghayth al-Musajjam*, which is an anthology ordered in the form of a commentary on al-Ṭughrāʾī's *Lāmīyat al-ʿAjam*, al-Ṣafadī starts with a biography of al-Ṭughrāʾī. Since al-Ṭughrāʾī was an alchemist, al-Ṣafadī takes up the subject, discusses the pros and cons, and comes to reject it vehemently. But since alchemy provides a lot of nice concepts for love poetry, the literary side of alchemy becomes the main aspect of al-Ṣafadī's chapter.[30] This grave misunderstanding of al-Ṣafadī would have been reason enough for the editors to intervene, as is also the strange fact that, of all articles, an article on history and historiography does not give the hijrah dates.

More carefully written is Michael Winter's contribution on "Historiography in Arabic during the Ottoman period" (chapter 9, pp. 171–88). It is a detailed presentation of Ottoman period historiography in the central Arab lands (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq). In a volume on literature, more information about the literary aspects of the chronicles mentioned would have been desirable. The diaries, such as the sensational *Al-Taʿlīq* by Ibn Ṭawq (874–915/1430–1509), are not mentioned. The original version of the chronicle written by the barber Ibn Budayr is not lost (p. 182), but preserved in a Chester Beatty manuscript.[31]

The lack of a uniform system of dating is symptomatic of the carelessness with which the book as a whole was produced. To give but two more examples: on p. 123, Ibn Ḥabīb is mentioned for the first time. The dates of his birth and death are given correctly. For whatever reason, the index refers to this page calling him Ibn Ḥabīb al-Dimashqī (p. 123). On pp. 144 and 158 he is called by his more common *nisbah* Ibn Ḥabīb al-Ḥalabī. Though on p. 144 the date of his death (but not of his birth) is given, we are surprised to read on p. 158 "death date unknown." In the index, Ibn Ḥabīb is split into two persons, a Dimashqī and a Ḥalabī. Al-Khafājī is subjected to a similar schizophrenization (p. 469).

[29] On the work see Everett K. Rowson, "Two Homoerotic Narratives from Mamlūk Literature: al-Ṣafadī's *Lawʿat al-shākī* and Ibn Dānyāl's *al-Mutayyam*," in *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature,* ed. J. W. Wright, Jr., and Everett K. Rowson (New York, 1997), 158–91.

[30] Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Ghayth al-Musajjam fī Sharḥ Lāmīyat al-ʿAjam* (Beirut, 1411/1990), esp. 1:22.

[31] See Dana Sajdi, "A Room of His Own: The 'History' of the Barber of Damascus (fl. 1762)," *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (2003): 19–35.

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4. Mamluk Poetry: Forgotten by the Universal Spirit?

The article by Salma Jayyusi prompts two questions: First, why does a scholar who has earned indubitable merit in several fields of Arabic literary history choose to write about one on which she is poorly informed and for which she displays a disquieting lack of empathy? And second, why do the editors publish an article that falls far short of scholarly standards?

We have to deal with this article in more detail for several reasons. First, its position as the first chapter of the book and its title "Arabic Poetry in the Post-Classical Age" (pp. 25–59) suggest that it is meant to be one of the central articles of the volume. Second, it is an aggregation of virtually all common prejudices against Mamluk and Ottoman literature.[32]

The first phenomenon that strikes the reader is Jayyusi's concept of literature, which is completely ahistoric. It is inconceivable to her that the perception of a literary period is necessarily shaped by the literary background and the value system of the critic. These factors are subject to change and therefore the perception of whole periods of art are constantly undergoing change. One need only point to the term "gothic," which was coined as a derogatory term, while the Gothic period is considered nowadays one of the greatest periods of European art history. In a similar way, the term "baroque" was created to denounce the art of a whole period, and not too much time has elapsed since the time when baroque literature (quite similar to much of Arabic poetry) had been considered a senseless aggregation of silly word-play, and baroque opera as the most idle thing that has ever appeared on the stage. In the meantime, Gryphius, Marino, and Donne have taken their proper places in the history of literature again, and many opera lovers are of the not-entirely-unjustified opinion that the revival of baroque opera was one of the most exciting occurrences on the stage during the last fifty years. For any historian of art and literature who deserves this name, it has become commonplace not to rely blindly on personal taste, but to critically question the standards she/he is applying to the object of research. Not so for Salma Jayyusi. While the Arab critics of the period in question were quite aware of the fact that the taste of the audience changes through the centuries and that to appeal to a certain taste is not yet enough to qualify a text as good or bad, Jayyusi does not consider such changes significant, and thus neglects a significant aspect of the way modern scholarship has come to consider literary history. Instead, literature is the manifestation of an essence that is not subject to historic change. Jayyusi does not ask about the background of a poetic text. Her only concern is if the text is part of "the poetic"—Jayyusi uses the word with the definite article—or rather,

[32] It is amazing how exactly Jayyusi's article corroborates the list of prejudices against Mamluk poetry that I drew up in my article "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," *MSR* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–32.

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"the genuinely poetic" (p. 57). In her essentialist conception, it is "the essence of poetry" (p. 29) or the "poetic essence" (p. 41), imbued with "the essence of a free Arab spirit" (p. 38) to capture the "human essence" (p. 29), "the essence of life" (p. 29).

According to this conception, the history of poetry is simply the history of the realization of the immutable "poetic essence." Consequently, the expectations and reactions of contemporary audiences are of no importance whatsoever. Thus Jayyusi can say in her critique of Ibn ʿUnayn's style with its alleged "use of new and still unidiomatic words and the coining of new derivatives" that "such a technique manages only to shock the reader's sensibility with its alien effect, stunting any possible achievement of emotional and rhythmic fulfillment in the poem" (p. 44). But what if Ibn ʿUnayn's readers were not shocked? What if they considered the poem perfectly emotionally and rhythmically fulfilled (whatever "rhythmic fulfillment" may mean exactly)? For Jayyusi this would make no difference at all, because the audience of this decadent age, estranged as it was from "the poetic essence," had no ability to judge what is shocking and what is not. Even worse, this very audience prevented the "poetic essence" from coming to light. Unnoticed by this audience, however, there was something great and unchangeable in the background, something like "the broad, ever living memory of Arabic poetry" (p. 51). "Ever living"? Obviously not, since the sentence in which this phrase occurs deals with poems by al-Shābb al-Ẓarīf that even Jayyusi finds "gentle and musical." However, she asks, "one wonders why the poems in question failed to enter the broad, ever living memory of Arabic poetry" (p. 51). But how can she know how actively al-Shābb al-Ẓarīf's poems were memorized during the Mamluk period? Judging by the many quotations of his poems in anthologies, I would guess that they were memorized for well over several centuries. Even though it may have been memorized by thousands of people over several centuries, all this is of no relevance whatsoever to the author, who evaluates the poetry of this period against the standard of an unchanging "poetic essence." Stating that there was "no single poetic genius" during the period in question, Jayyusi then proceeds to modify this statement in a most revealing way: "Many such were surely born, and yet the development of their talents was hampered by the standards and expectations in vogue during their lifetime" (p. 39). Poetry, in this conception, has nothing to do with its time and audience, but is an unchangeable entity that incarnates itself in poetic geniuses. Society's only role in this model is to help or to hinder the poetic essence in its natural growth in its genius.

Jayyusi arrogates for herself the competence to define the aesthetic criteria according to which all poetry of all periods must be measured. This is not only contrary to the established premises and methods of literary scholarship, but, even more, the criteria applied by Jayyusi sometimes seem bizarre. So we read in

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a short passage on p. 27, headlined "An unstable world," that pre-Islamic Arabia was a stable world, whereas the advent of Islam with its "unique capacity to maintain an a-racial attitude" shattered this very stability and planted the seeds of instability. "Once converted, a new Muslim was accepted into the community of believers without undue regard for origin, race or color. But while this may be regarded as a superior quality in Islam, it was not conducive to a continuation of the old stability." (p. 27) Re-reading the passage time after time, I cannot help but read as its central message that in principle, it is the racial egalitarianism of Islam that brought about the mess of the "period of decadence." This basis of Jayyusi's conception of literature helps us to find the place where, according to this conception, the "poetic essence" and the "ever living memory" of Arabic poetry has been situated all this time, concealed, but still present: it is in the Arab race itself, in which there has always been the "enduring latent power of a once great poetry" (p. 59), though this could not manifest itself in times of "extraneous linguistic intrusions" (p. 37), and therefore "its vigour diminished . . . hemmed in by the circumstances of Arab life" (ibid.). Little surprise then that it is the pre-Islamic period against which the Mamluk and Ottoman poets have to be measured, because this was the only period in which "a free Arab spirit, linking creative expression to the roots of the soul and imbuing it with the vision and meaning of life and living" (p. 38) could unfold. The author goes on to portray a picture of the pre-Islamic Arabs that is similar to the way the pure and heroic ancestors were portrayed during the many outbreaks of ideological madness during the European twentieth century: "How estranged had the Arabs of the urban centuries become from the values of the Arabs . . . who had aestheticized their contradictions through the eloquent sayings of the poets . . . tenderness, devotion and selflessness towards women and love, but also a defiant and boastful self-centredness in tribal hostilities . . ., generosity and hospitality, but also a relentless aggression bent on plunder and the use of force for survival? This was the law of the desert, of scarcity and aridity, and it organized their life, gave it shape and challenge, and filled it with nostalgia, a constant sense of loss, a perennial craving for the impossible, for a constantly receding point of anchor, for a love that will be never requited . . ." (p. 38).

So there we are, with the pure Arab spirit of the *jāhilīyah,* which was revived to a certain degree by al-Mutanabbī to yield a second climax of Arabic literature (p. 27), and to be destroyed by the foreign intruders of the period of decadence. But the "true poetic spirit" lived on in the Arab race. Blinded by her nationalist ideology, Jayyusi claims in an amazingly anachronistic way that even in the dark times of decadence there "was a basic concept of Arab literary identity . . ., and it made poetry and literature not a regional but rather a national cultural output" (p. 39). Thanks to this everlasting Arab spirit, poetry could be revived by "the great

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neoclassicist" "Aḥmad Shawqī . . . and the poetry of some leading modernists such as Adūnīs . . ." (p. 38), totally irrelevant as all this is to a history of the literature between the Abbasid and the modern period. In her article on poetry of the Mamluk and Ottoman period, Jayyusi mentions more poets from the periods before and after than from the period in question itself. She praises al-Akhṭal, Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī, al-Mutanabbī, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (p. 33); she hails Shawqī, Gibrān Khalīl Gibrān, Badawī al-Jabal, Adūnīs, Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, Maḥmūd Darwīsh (p. 38), but does not mention al-Maḥḥār, al-Shihāb al-Ḥijāzī, al-Āthārī, al-Damāmīnī, al-Ḥājirī, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ḥammāmī, al-Qīrāṭī, al-Tallaʿfarī, al-ʿAzāzī, Ibn Maṭrūḥ, Ibn Qurnāṣ, ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Mawṣilī, or Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī, to mention only a few major Mamluk poets that are treated nowhere in the volume.

Instead we learn that the "universal poetic spirit" is embodied in the Arab race and manifested itself in the poetry of the *jāhilīyah* and the few centuries during which its "power" still lasted. But already the Umayyad period (on which Jayyusi has made some lucid notes in her contribution in the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres* volume) is marred by the "ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿah . . . syndrome" (p. 49), an abominable degeneration that consists of enjoying one's life without feeling guilt. In the typical schizophrenia that characterizes many pro-Western intellectuals of the Arab world, who hail Western liberal modernity and at the same time are stuck in puritan Victorian morality, she complains: ". . . rarely do we encounter a genuine spiritual conflict in poems where the poet describes wine drinking and frolicking. On the contrary, the treatment of the subject is often lighthearted, and the notion of sin and punishment is not usually a disturbing, heart-wrenching experience" (p. 29). Again and again she laments the "failure of the era to uphold moral ideals" (p. 43) and grumbles about the "poets of decadent morality *(mujūn)* with whom the age abounded" (p. 47). And indeed, a period during which people enjoyed life, sex without guilt, and racial harmony—what a horrible world this must have been!

This urban, tolerant, and cosmopolitan culture, a culture of refinement, sophistication, and elegance, a culture of friendship, love of beauty, and wit, is not Jayyusi's world. She yearns for a culture of primitive heroism ("poems pulsating with life and pregnant with the vision of glory and infallibility," p. 27), of puritanism and sexual guilt, in which a fascination with beauty has to be rejected for not being "a decisive avowal of an exclusive emotion" (p. 51). Love is a "universal experience" (pp. 48, 51) the true nature of which is as unchangeable as the "poetic essence." For all times and cultures it is true that it "is always the particularity and exclusivity of love, its transcendence of beauty and physical qualities, that really matters. The whole period, it must be said, exhibits this deficit, the love it offers being more dependent on physical passion and desire than on any absorbing and abiding attachment" (p. 51). Throughout the article,

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Jayyusi displays a strange obsession with the subject of sexuality, which is raised in half of the pages of the chapter; see pp. 29 ("sex"), 35 ("homosexuality," "promiscuity," "sexual satiety"), 38 ("perverse and graphic sexual depictions"), 39 ("homosexual poetry"), 41 ("heterosexual and homosexual"), 42 ("homosexual," "sexual promiscuity"), 43 ("sexual imagery of a graphic and repellent quality"), 44 ("reckless sexual escapades"), 47 ("decadent morality"), 48 ("erotic encounters," "addiction to pleasure"), 51 ("physical passion and desire"), 53 ("homosexuality," "polygamous outlook on love and sexuality"), 54 ("homosexual and heterosexual"). Jayyusi does not consider the social and mental history of love and sexuality, and ignores studies that have been written on this subject in recent years. Instead, the subject of sexuality is raised mainly to defame the period as morally decadent and to contrast it with her prudish concept of heroism. This heroism is "virile" but asexual. It is revealing that whereas sexuality is only mentioned in a degrading way, "virility" is seen as the main quality of poetry. The words "virility" and "virile" occur five times throughout the article (pp. 26, 29, 31, 40, 41). "Virility," however, was not a goal sought by Mamluk and Ottoman Arabic authors, whereas "elegance" was. However, the word "elegance" does not appear even once in Jayyusi's article.

Given this attitude towards her subject, an impartial scholarly treatment of any of its aspects cannot be expected. Her only concern is to draw as negative a picture of the period in question as possible. Therefore, there is little point in trying to refute her attacks against Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk (too much "sexual promiscuity" and therefore—?—too many "intricate figures of speech," p. 42), Ibn ʿUnayn ("reckless sexual escapades," p. 44), al-Bahāʾ Zuhayr ("lacks a vision of life or of the future," p. 48), al-Shābb al-Ẓarīf ("lacks the necessary immediacy," p. 51), al-Ḥillī (considers "wine drinking and homosexuality . . . a source of amazement," p. 53), and Ibn Nubātah ("senses little depth or philosophy of life," p. 56). For every one of them Jayyusi manages to find a criterion according to which the poet in question cuts a poor figure. Further, to depreciate the later Mamluk and Ottoman poets, she states that "ʿUmar Mūsā Bāshā, the scholar best known for his specialization on the Syrian poets of this era, closes his study with al-Shābb al-Ẓarīf." Did this great scholar, the indefatigable fighter against prejudice and the protagonist of a revaluation of the Mamluk and Ottoman period, deserve this treatment? Did he deserve to be mentioned as a crown-witness for the feeble state of Ottoman literature while his pioneering work on ʿUmar al-Yāfī[33] is not mentioned a single time in the whole volume? His is, by the way, the only book-length study known to me that is dedicated to an Arabic poet of the Ottoman period, and since it is furthermore a good study, it should be a central point in

[33] ʿUmar Mūsá Bāshā, *Quṭb al-ʿAṣr ʿUmar al-Yāfī* (Damascus, 1996).

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every discussion of Ottoman Arabic poetry. In the entire volume under review, however, *neither* al-Yāfī *nor* ʿUmar Mūsá's study on him are mentioned even once! And what is true for ʿUmar Mūsá's study on al-Yāfī is also true for his groundbreaking study on Ibn Nubātah,[34] perhaps the best contribution to the history of Mamluk literature in the Arabic language, which Jayyusi ignores. Since I cannot believe that a person writing about Mamluk literature who knows the name of ʿUmar Mūsá has never heard of this scholar's principal work, which first appeared in 1963 and is available now in a third edition, I can only conclude that she does not mention it on purpose because it contradicts her thesis. Thus, the most important monograph ever written on a poet of the Mamluk period is in all probability *purposely omitted* from this volume, which claims to be a standard work on this period!

It is quite clear by now that Jayyusi tries to portray everything in the darkest possible colors, and everything that cannot be portrayed in an outright negative fashion is nevertheless seen against a negative background. So nature poetry is not a sign of the love of nature or a new, individualistic, and completely non-medieval perspective on nature, but only an "escape . . . from tiresome external demands" (p. 36), "a refuge from the burden of eulogy" (p. 37), and we learn that flower poems (p. 36: read *zahrīyāt* instead of *zuhrīyāt*) "lacked any active communication with the human condition" (p. 37). Though I do not know exactly what "to actively communicate with the human condition" means, it is clear enough to me that it probably cannot be accomplished by flower poems or Chopin waltzes. But I cannot see how this speaks against them. I, for my part, do not play Chopin waltzes in order to communicate with the human condition but to find a charming entertainment, and I read flower poems to enjoy poetic imagination and to be surprised by a pointed literary conceit. It is, after all, not the task of a work of art to communicate with the human condition or the world spirit, but with the audience.

It is Jayyusi's practice to prescribe for every theme, form, and genre what it *should* do in order to be able to criticize the poets for not having done exactly that. Jayyusi never asks what the poets themselves wanted to accomplish, which, of course, is the only standard according to which they can be measured. For just as one cannot blame Chopin for not having composed Beethoven's ninth symphony, one cannot blame Ibn Qurnāṣ for not having composed al-Mutanabbī's ode on al-Ḥadath. Ibn Qurnāṣ, by the way, is the author of some of the most charming nature epigrams of the period. His name does not appear anywhere in the volume under review. His *Dīwān* is unpublished, but al-Ṣafadī, who held him in great esteem, quotes him quite often in his *Al-Kashf wa-al-Tanbīh ʿalá Waṣf al-Tashbīh,* ed. Hilāl

[34] ʿUmar Mūsá Bāshā, *Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī: Amīr Shuʿarāʾ al-Mashriq* (Cairo, 1963, 3rd ed. 1992).

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Nājī (Leeds, 1420/1999), which is a rich source of Mamluk nature poetry, and is not mentioned by Jayyusi.

Let us have a brief look at what Jayyusi has to say about nature poetry. In her enthusiasm for *jāhilī* virility, Jayyusi cannot find much worth in Abbasid descriptive poetry. Though "fully artistic, fully inventive," it was nothing but "a solution for poets who had reached the end of their tolerance of the age of poetic utilitarianism" (p. 37). It is not easy to make sense out of this utterance. At least it is clear that, according to its author, descriptive poetry of the Abbasid period is not of great value. But if it is so in Abbasid times, it must be even worse in Mamluk times. Therefore Jayyusi continues: "During the period under study, poets continued to compose such miniatures with inventive, though often dispassionate, skill." What makes her assume that Ibn Qurnāṣ felt less passion towards dewdrops than al-Ṣanawbarī did? Jayyusi continues: "Yet the search for novelty did not abate, as these purely descriptive examples were independent of other themes." On p. 30, this literature is disparaged for its "repetition," and now it is faulted for its "search for novelty"—what could these poets have done to satisfy Salma Jayyusi? What, after all, is wrong with descriptive poetry that is descriptive? And the rest of the sentence is simply wrong, for among the most impressive longer nature descriptions of the Mamluk period were the introductory parts of hunting poems and letters. Different from Abbasid hunting literature, a Mamluk hunting *urjūzah* or a *risālah ṭardīyah* inevitably started with a long description of the breaking of dawn and the awaking of nature, until the hunting party set forth on their hunt. Here description is not at all "independent of other themes." Jayyusi, however, does not treat Mamluk hunting literature. And so she continues: "As greater affectation seeped in and the impact of external forces became overriding, poets became increasingly preoccupied with linguistic devices applicable to all themes. Gradually a greater artificiality can be seen in the use of poetic conceits and the vast array of figures of speech fashionable at the time" (p. 37). Even granted that by "linguistic devices" she means "stylistic devices," the sentence does not become much clearer. As we have known since antiquity, stylistic devises are used to bring about a certain effect on the audience. The theory of rhetoric, however, has no "overriding external forces" or "inseeping affectations" on its agenda. But even if the reader tries to make some sense out of this statement, it is still wrong, since al-Ṣafadī's, Ibn Nubātah's, and Ibn Qurnāṣ's descriptive poetry is by no means more mannered and loaded with stylistic devices than that of the Abbasid period. On the contrary, while young Ibn Ḥabīb tried to show off by imitating the Abbasid metaphor-based concetto (simply to demonstrate that he could do this as well),[35] most other authors used a simpler style or used *tawriyah*

[35] See Thomas Bauer, "'Was kann aus dem Jungen noch werden!' Das poetische Erstlingswerk des Historikers Ibn Ḥabīb im Spiegel seiner Zeitgenossen," in *Festschrift Hartmut Bobzin,* forthcoming.

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to please the audience with the intelligent use of *double entendre,* which, by the way, was not an idle play on words unrelated to the “human condition,” but in very direct and immediate relation to the world view of the time.[36]

In the course of her discussion of descriptive poetry Jayyusi gives a fragmentary and wrong (*uqḥuwān* does not mean “daisies”) translation of a poem ascribed to Ibn al-Muʿtazz (p. 36). It is surprising that Jayyusi, who mostly quotes Mamluk poetry second hand on the basis of al-Farrūkh’s *Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabī,* fails here also to check this Abbasid poem in the *Dīwān* of Ibn al-Muʿtazz. Had she done this, she would have noticed that the lines quoted start with a motif of love poetry (and therefore are not independent of other themes), and that the lines occur there in a different order.[37]

So we see that all the reader of the chapter on “descriptive poetry” in the article on “postclassical poetry” gains is some pseudo-psychological considerations about descriptive poetry as a means to escape a (nonexistent) constraint on panegyric poetry, two mistranslated lines taken randomly from a poem by an author who does not belong to the period in question, and a lot of erroneous and disparaging remarks about a form of poetry of which the author is clearly not well informed. But a reader of the volume, who wants to learn more about Mamluk and Ottoman Arabic literature, has a right to get an answer to questions like: Who were the protagonists of descriptive poetry during the period in question? What themes and motifs did they use? What did they describe? Is there a difference between the role of nature poetry in Syria and in Egypt (indeed there is)? Was there a continuation of the flourishing nature poetry of the Mamluk period in the Ottoman period? As to the last question, Jayyusi has not the slightest idea. Neither do I, having read nothing but a few nature poems by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAydarūs (1135–93/1722–78), another poet, well known and highly regarded in his time, who goes completely unmentioned in the volume under review.[38] But instead of telling the readers that Ottoman descriptive poetry, which seems to have produced some interesting specimens in the field of nature poetry, has not yet been studied enough to allow further judgment, Jayyusi announces her verdict that all of this literature is worthless.

It seems obvious by now that Jayyusi has never read the most important texts of the period and does not value the secondary literature about it in whatever language. Since she clearly does not know much about Mamluk and Ottoman

[36] I attempted some preliminary considerations in my article “Ibn Ḥajar and the Arabic Ghazal of the Mamluk Age,” in *Ghazal as World Literature I: Transformations of a Literary Genre,* ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth (Beirut, 2005), 35–55, esp. 44–48, but the whole topic needs more study.

[37] See *Dīwān Shiʿr Ibn al-Muʿtazz,* ed. Yūnus A. al-Sāmarrāʾī (Beirut, 1997), 2:594–95.

[38] *Dīwān al-ʿAydarūs al-Musammá Tarwīḥ al-Bāl wa-Tahyīj al-Balbāl* (Cairo, 1418/1998).

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society, her chapter on eulogy (pp. 32–34) lacks substance, and to declare that the "postclassical" poet was "a mere pawn at the mercy of princes and leaders who controlled his livelihood" (p. 36) reveals her lack of knowledge about the social role of poetry during these periods. Surprisingly, she considers Ibn Ḥijjah's *Khizānat* (sic, instead of *Khazānat*) *al-Adab* "a study of the poetic art of al-Sharaf al-Anṣārī" (p. 50). Her translations are at best whimsical, sometimes wrong. The only poem she quotes in the section on Ibn Nubātah is an epigram in which the poet asks for a pair of earrings. The epigram is quoted for no other reason than to disparage Ibn Nubātah and to show that he "was dedicated to the act of asking, sometimes shedding part of his dignity" (p. 56). But here she is quoting a poem she does not understand. Every experienced reader of Mamluk poetry will realize immediately that this two-line epigram has a point at the end of the second line that consists of a double entendre. Clear as this is, the point of the epigram is not easy to understand in this case. There may be an obscenity behind it. In any case, the humorous nature of the epigram is corroborated by the fact that the poem is the first poem of the section *al-mudāᶜabah wa-al-mujūn* in Ibn Nubātah's collection of epigrams entitled *Al-Qaṭr al-Nubātī.*[39] The whole poem, therefore, is nothing but a joke. Whereas I am ignorant of the double meaning of the last words, Jayyusi is even ignorant of her ignorance.

Jayyusi opines that her "study has been primarily devoted to a process of degeneration" (p. 59), but her contribution, with its arguably racist and homophobic overtones, is an example of the degeneration of Arabic studies. The same is true for Muhammad Lutfi al-Yousfi's article on "Poetic Creativity in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries" (chapter 2, pp. 60–73), which I will pass over in silence not only because it treats the Ottoman period, but also because to claim that the process of decadence started with the advent of Islam is simply absurd, and to publish this rubbish is an academic scandal. These two articles are a slap in the face of every serious scholar in the field of Mamluk and Ottoman poetry. In the blurb (p. i) we read that this book will be "a unique resource for students and scholars of Arabic literature for many years to come." Let us hope that this threat will not come true!

[39] Bibliothèque Nationale MS 2234, fol. 179r–v.

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