

Review Essay



On Reading the Library of Arabic Literature

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Books from the Library of Arabic Literature discussed:

- ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūniyyah, *Kitāb al-Muntakhab fī uṣūl al-rutab fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* (*The Principles of Sufism*). Edited and Translated by Thomas Emil Homerin, New York: New York University Press, 2014. 224 pages. Cloth \$30.
- Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (*Virtues of the Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*). 2 volumes. Edited and Translated by Michael Cooperson. New York: New York University Press, 2013-15. Volume 1, 592 pages. Cloth \$40. Volume 2, 544 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Ibn al-Sāʿī, *Nisāʾ al-khulafāʾ* (*Consorts of the Caliphs*). Edited by Shawkat M. Toorawa and Translated by The Editors of the Library of Arabic Literature. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 272 pages. Cloth \$30.
- Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ghufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*). Edited and Translated by Geert Jan Van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler. 2 volumes. New York: New York University Press, 2013. Volume 1, 464 pages. Cloth \$40. Volume 2, 360 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Maʿmar ibn Rāshid, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (*The Expeditions*). Edited and Translated by Sean Anthony. New York: New York University Press, 2014. 424 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* (*What ʿĪsā ibn Hishām Told Us*). Edited and Translated by Roger Allen. 2 volumes. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Volume 1, 496 pages. Cloth \$40. Volume 2, 416 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Kitāb Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* (*Disagreements of the Jurists: a Manual of Islamic Legal Theory*). Edited and Translated by Devin J. Stewart. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 448 pages. Cloth \$40.

- Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā'ī, *Dustūr ma'ālim al-ḥikam wa-ma'thūr makārim al-shiyam* (*A Treasury of Virtues*). And *Mī'at kalimah* (*One Hundred Proverbs*). Attributed to 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ. Edited and Translated by Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press, 2013. 306 pages. Paperback \$28.
- Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* (*The Epistle on Legal Theory*). Edited and Translated by Joseph E. Lowry. New York: New York University Press, 2013. 544 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *Kitāb al-Sāq 'alā l-sāq* (*Leg over Leg, or The Turtle in the Tree*). Edited and Translated by Humphrey Davies. 4 volumes. New York: New York University Press, 2013-14. Volume 1, 416 pages. Cloth \$40. Volume 2, 464 pages. Cloth \$40. Volume 3, 488 pages. Cloth \$40. Volume 4, 584 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār Abī Tammām* (*The Life and Times of Abū Tammām*). Edited and Translated by Beatrice Gruendler. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 336 pages. Cloth \$40.
- Two Arabic Travel Books. Riḥlāt: Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa-l-Hind* (*Accounts of India and China*) by Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfi. Edited and Translated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith. And *Kitāb Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān* (*Mission to the Volga*) by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān. Edited and Translated by James E. Montgomery. New York: New York University Press, 2014. 328 pages. Cloth \$40.

A Testament to Translation

At the age of seventeen, or thereabouts, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (d. 260/873), the famed Nestorian translator, physician, and philosopher, first translated from Greek into Syriac Galen's (d. ca. 200 CE) *On the Natural Faculties* (*Kitāb al-Quwā l-ṭabī'yyah*), a medical treatise on physiology. The Monophysite priest and physician Sergius of Resh'ainā (d. 536), who had studied philosophy and medicine in Alexandria, preceded Ḥunayn in this endeavor by some three hundred years. Ḥunayn was critical of many of Sergius's Syriac translations, including his rendition of this particular Galenic treatise, which according to Ḥunayn deserved opprobrium. As with much of his professional activity, Ḥunayn produced his translation at the behest of a powerful patron, in this case, Jibrīl ibn Bakhtīshū', a fellow Nestorian who served for decades as the chief physician in the Abbasid court.

Originally, Ḥunayn had only a single error-ridden Greek manuscript at his disposal as the basis for this particular translation. Yet he continued to work on the text over the course of a professional career that took him from al-Ḥīrah, the provincial stronghold of the former Lakhmid dynasty in Iraq, to the palatine city of Baghdad, the seat of Abbasid authority. Over the course of a life

dedicated to procuring rare manuscripts of ancient Greek learning, Ḥunayn twice reworked his translation and incorporated improvements to the text. He made note of this as a way of explaining why there were different copies of his Syriac redaction in circulation. Like many of his other Syriac translations, Ḥunayn went on to produce an Arabic version of the treatise for a wealthy benefactor, namely Ishāq ibn Sulaymān, a high-ranking prince of the Abbasid royal family. Ḥunayn's life in books (both acquiring and losing them) intersected with a broad network of Nestorian Christian physicians and translators, including several members of his extended family who often worked collaboratively to collect, collate, and correct manuscripts while translating Greek material, generally first into Syriac and then into Arabic.

Many of these philological details of the translation process are recorded in Ḥunayn's renowned epistle on all the Galenic works that he translated over the course of his life.¹ As a treatise, Ḥunayn's *risālah* is consciously modeled on Galen's bibliographical report, *De ordine librorum suorum*. Ḥunayn transliterates Galen's title as *fīnaks*, i.e., from the Greek *pinax*, a list or registrar, which he glosses in Arabic as a *fihrist*, itself a loanword from the Middle Persian *pahrist* [*phlyst'*], an index or table of contents. This medley of words circulated in a social-linguistic milieu in which Arabic, Persian, Syriac, and Greek could commingle and live side by side. As a category for ordering books, the word *fihrist* has been claimed indelibly by another bookman from Baghdad, as the short title by which Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 380/990) extensive bio-bibliographical survey was known over a century later; among his numerous stacks of books, Ibn al-Nadīm has several shelves dedicated to the introduction, naturalization, and absorption of classical learning into Arabic letters.

As for Ḥunayn's own *fihrist*, beyond its importance for Galenic studies and the history of medicine, its value lies in its status as a first-person testament of the intellectual mechanics and physical capital that financed the extensive project of translation sponsored by the Abbasid elite, who provided the requisite material conditions that would make the work of Ibn al-Nadīm so vital. The Abbasid translation movement was generational, collaborative, and encyclopedic. It was profoundly cosmopolitan in its reach across languages, ethnicities, and religions, just as it was deeply bibliographical and philological in its concern for amassing, editing, and collating a vast body of material from antiquity and beyond. As an intellectual phenomenon, the movement

1 Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, *Risālat Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq ilā 'Alī ibn Yahyā fī dhikr mā tarjama min kutub jālīnūs = Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-übersetzungen*, ed. and trans. Gotthelf Bergsträsser (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1925); *Hunayn Ibn Ishaq on His Galen Translations*, ed. and trans. John Lamoreaux (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2016).

of letters was preceded by earlier, if limited, forays made during the Umayyad period. However, by all measures the work of Ḥunayn and his coterie had a much greater impact.

Among the various factors contributing to this success, we must include a technological revolution underfoot that unalterably transformed the nature of the book and the funding needed to underwrite it. The introduction and proliferation of paper in Mesopotamia starting toward the end of the eighth century occasioned significant changes in recording, storing, and disseminating the written word, which in turn left a lasting imprint on the history of Arabic book culture. Baghdad, the City of Peace and the Abbasid cosmopolis, became also a city of bibliophiles, teeming with public and private libraries and gilded reading salons, outfitted by booksellers, papermakers, copyists, and calligraphers, all with scholars and translators rambling along the way. What this short anecdote of Ḥunayn and his cohort highlights is that translation has always been a collaborative enterprise, embedded in particular historical contexts that are animated and conditioned by a variety of social and political forces. Like all communicative acts and interpretive interventions, translation demands continual revision and reformulation in the process of moving meaning, both temporally and spatially, across an expanding horizon of reception.

Uneven Terrain

Today this tale of philology, empire, and technological transformation retains much of its allure as it parallels, in great measure, dominant humanist values invested in the cultivation and promotion of knowledge. In European intellectual history, these ideals are often associated with the positive power accorded to philology and with it translation as vehicles for preserving and transmitting knowledge of classical antiquity over the course of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Often this story is told with a rather self-serving posture that views the intellectual achievements of Arabic letters as only a conduit for the ultimate rise of European supremacy; they are presented as achievements that preserved, through the darkness of the Middle Ages, the learning of Greek antiquity, the sole and rightful patrimony of Western civilization. The lineaments of such proprietary fictions, like all ideological formations, are imaginary and thus must be continually cultivated and asserted. With regard to intellectual and social practice, translation movements, whether in Baghdad, Toledo, or Paris, are at times rather arresting in the asymmetrical terms of exchange. This reality is often encapsulated in the linear progression imagined in the trope of the *translatio imperii et studii*, where political and

intellectual legitimacy are transferred from the vanquished to the victor. As a model of exchange, in the transference of value, translation always produces, in some basic sense, both deficit and surplus, in the course of what is lost and what is gained.

For the history of Arabic letters and its more recent intersections with colonial regimes of knowledge, the inequities of translation and philology have received a great deal of attention over the course of the last several decades. This can be measured in the sustained critique of the epistemic and ethical structures that governed the scholarly and creative business of capturing and conveying the Orient, often through the illusion of an encyclopedic totality that could speak for and ultimately displace the other. When writing in English and in the framework of the American academy about Arabic or Muslims, the legacy of Orientalism and the full array of critical responses that it has engendered are all but inescapable. Once unveiled, this ethical dilemma abides as translation's unspoken syntax when possessing, claiming, or voicing the mimetic productions of others. By the very conditions of history, today's study of Arabic still labors under the shadows of empire, now in the evisceration of the successor states to European colonialism and in the circulation of American power. To read about the past grandeur of Baghdad cannot but conjure up stark juxtapositions with the violence and destruction wrought by successive decades of war in the region and the vertiginous power of petroleum fueling it all.

This punishing and starkly unbalanced tableau would appear to offer rather rough terrain for the cultivation of a dialogue, literary or otherwise. Yet it is precisely in the face of such disparities and inequalities that sustained and open engagement is all the more necessary. In the push and pull of meaning, translation can certainly dominate, domesticate, or displace; but when done with a certain measure of transparency, facing difference can also create the possibility of seeing in intimate terms the aspirations, values, and basic humanity of others.

Transparency and the Interlinear Ideal for Translation

It is precisely this optimistic and transformative power of translation that by all measures motivates the Library of Arabic Literature, an ambitious new publishing initiative of New York University Press. The series forms part of the university's recently established satellite campus in Abu Dhabi and is overseen by Philip Kennedy, who serves as the project's general editor. He is supported by a team of editors: Sean Anthony, Julia Bray, Michael Cooperson, Joseph Lowry,

James Montgomery, Maurice Pomerantz, Tahera Qutbuddin, Devin Stewart, and Shawkat Toorawa. Only a few years into the venture, the series is now well underway and has produced English translations with facing Arabic editions of significant works of Arabic literature—generously defined—which span a vast stretch of time, from the eighth century well into the modern era. As a vehicle for conveying literature in its original form, these finely produced bilingual editions consciously take their cue from the Loeb Classical Library, an imprint of Harvard University Press, which started in 1911, with the aim of publishing scholarly editions of ancient Greek and Latin literature with facing English translations. This followed the aspiration of the original benefactor of the series, the banker and philanthropist James Loeb (d. 1933), that the translations themselves “be real pieces of literature . . . to be read for the pure joy of it, and not dull transcripts of ideas that suggest in every line the existence of a finer original from which the average reader is shut out.”²

The facing-page editions of the Loeb Library in turn built on a well-established paradigm for collecting, editing, and translating in serial form the vast multilingual corpus of Christian patristic writing, with the facing translations of the *Patrologia graeca* (Jacques Paul Migne, 1857-66) and the *Patrologia orientalis* (Brepols, 1904-). As a framework for rendering literature in foreign languages accessible in its original form, the Loeb Library has been followed by several other scholarly publishing endeavors, notably the *Sammlung Tusculum* (De Gruyter, 1924-2013), which likewise centers on Greek and Latin editions, with facing German translations; the Tatti Renaissance Library (Harvard University Press, 2001-), dedicated to Italian Renaissance Latin literature; the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Harvard University Press, 2010-), which concentrates on medieval Latin, Greek, and Old English texts; the Clay Sanskrit Library (New York University Press, 2005-10), which focuses on the classical tradition of Sanskrit epics, drama, poetry, and narrative; and most recently the Murty Classical Library of Indian Literature (Harvard University Press, 2015-), which aspires to publish bilingual editions from a dizzying array of premodern literature of the Indian subcontinent, from Awadhi to Urdu. In very obvious ways, the Library of Arabic Literature also follows after the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative, published by Brigham Young University Press and distributed by the University of Chicago (1997-). The Middle Eastern Texts Initiative takes the Abbasid translation movement as a kind of ecumenical model for cross-cultural communication; it offers a platform for producing dual language editions

2 James Loeb, “The Loeb Classical Library, A Word About its Purpose and its Scope” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. Kirsopp Lake, 2 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Co. 1912), 1:iii-iii, a preface printed in the first Loeb editions.

of classical materials in Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew, and Armenian, with a particular focus on theology, philosophy, medicine, and mysticism.

The bilingual model has the obvious effect of obviating the rather normative ideal that translations physically replace the original source language measure for measure. By presenting the original text, such transparency stands at the opposite end of effacement and with it the spellbinding charm of translation to displace its original double. The ethic of transparency famously guided Walter Benjamin (d. 1940) in his essay, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers [The task of the translator]," which he published in 1923 as a preface to his German translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*. In a typically iconoclastic turn, Benjamin contended that "die wahre Übersetzung ist durchscheinend, sie verdeckt nicht das Original [real translation is transparent, it does not hide the original]." This led to his conclusion that the archetype (*das Urbild*) or ideal of all translation is an interlinear version of sacred text.³ Benjamin's rather radical pronouncement was then followed by his translation, itself accompanied by Baudelaire's original verse on facing pages. Above all, such transparency highlights (or at least seeks to) the belief that the communicative dimension of translation is fundamentally a process of approximation. As we flow back and forth between the source and its target, the presence of the original continually draws attention to the task at hand, of rendering one symbolic order into another. This transparency has a double voicing: not only does the dual-language model insist on the continued vitality of the original (which in other contexts is normally all but abandoned as translation's inevitable detritus), but it also accentuates, line by line, the actual choices made in the linguistic process of conversion. By exposing the inner workings of the process, in the presence of the foreign other, the translator's choices are laid bare, they unveil what is usually left hidden, in the alchemical power of transforming one substance into another. For readers who can navigate both sides of the page the effect can be as felicitous as it is disorienting, as it conditions a mode of reading that is poised at the cusp of cognition, that pulls us into the creative flows that lie beneath the translation, at the syntactic, lexical, and symbolic confluences of two languages.

With the Library of Arabic Literature the presence of the original opens up a unique set of possible configurations, beyond basic questions of access or pedagogical transparency. Foremost, the facing Arabic pages serve as a testament to the intrinsic value of the texts in their original form. In terms of social function, however, the importance of the original Arabic is not just as an ancestral

3 Walter Benjamin, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," in Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux Parisiens*, ed. and trans. Walter Benjamin (Heidelberg: Richard Weissbach, 1923), xv, xvii.

totem to an imagined community that seeks some particularistic confirmation of its own history. Contrast this with what, historically, have been the dominant patterns of parallel editions, where the source language is preserved precisely as it transmits a symbolic order that is designed to affirm the integrity of the community in which it is received. The interlinear or parallel form is often invested in internalizing and affirming a vital connection to the past, promoting the illusion, in some fashion, of atavistic continuity. This is certainly the case with the interlinear models of translation that prevail among numerous scriptural communities, as it arguably holds true, at some basic level, for the dual-language model of the Loeb series, which serves as a monument to the “everlasting consolation of the classics,” with its impetus in the supposition that the literature of Greek and Latin antiquity is essential to and coterminous with the liberal humanism of Western modernity.⁴ If the split view of the Library of Arabic Literature is tethered to any particular argument, it would be the assertion that as a corpus, the aesthetic and intellectual aspirations of Arabic literature deserve to stand on an equal footing with those foundational texts that have been advanced as the basis of the Western canon, accessible in translation, and in their original form.

Even more promising is the range of materials that the Library of Arabic Literature has already brought to press, which are not limited to the classics of some distant era. In the very selection of works curated lies the contention that Arabic literature has continued to develop and thrive; it is neither moribund nor pinned to that false narrative of decay usually identified as beginning in 1258 with the Mongol siege of Baghdad and the looting of the storied caliphal library. The point deserves mention, for in very obvious ways the bilingual edition has been closely associated with the study and preservation of Greco-Roman antiquity and early Christianity. The choice to move beyond a glorious, enshrined past serves to illuminate the intimate routes linking classical Arabic to its modern descendants that are spread across numerous branches of linguistic, literary, and social activity. Such a sweeping vista lets us take in jarring ruptures in the course of modernity, as well as persistent continuities that remain invested in the canon of Arabic letters.

4 “The Loeb Classical Library,” *The Nation*, vol. 93 no. 2419 (November 9, 1911), 438-9.

“You Taught Me Language, and My Profit on’t is, I Know How to Curse”

Currently holding down the modern end of the library are two mammoth and ambitious works of fiction that each in its own way weaves satire and stinging social commentary together with journeys to the exotic lands of Europe. The first, by the Lebanese littérateur Fāris al-Shidyāq (d. 1887), is the irreverent and resolutely unclassifiable *Kitāb al-Sāq ‘alā l-sāq fī mā huwa l-Fāriyāq* [Leg over Leg or The Turtle in the Tree Concerning the Fāriyāq, What Manner of Creature Might He Be], published in 1855 in Paris and edited and translated for the series in four volumes by Humphrey Davies. The second is *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā ibn Hishām aw Fatrah min al-zamān* [What ‘Īsā Ibn Hishām Told Us or A Period in Time], by the Egyptian critic and writer Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (d. 1930), published as a two-volume edition and translation by Roger Allen. Al-Muwayliḥī originally serialized the episodic and at times highly topical adventures of his fictionalized narrator and titular hero, ‘Īsā ibn Hishām, from 1898 through 1902, in the newspaper *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq* [The light of the east], which he edited with his father, Ibrāhīm (d. 1906). The serial, which originally took the name *Fatrah min al-zamān*, was published in 1907 in the form of a book (after significant editing and redacting by the author) under the title *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā ibn Hishām*.

Both *al-Sāq ‘alā l-sāq* and *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā ibn Hishām* are threaded through the weft of classical Arabic letters, particularly poetry and the prosimetrical, often satirical and burlesque genre of the *maqāmah*, by the likes of al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008) and al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122), which as a literary form is characterized by an itinerant penchant for the picaresque and exorbitant, if orotund, displays of rhetorical pyrotechnics. In their journeys across the shores of imperial radiance and nineteenth-century European chauvinism, both works are intimately concerned with go-betweens and dragomen; yet their tongue-lashing, often deafening peals of eloquence, and their utter resistance to the all-encompassing gravitational pull of the novel as a generic form of universal literary modernity *tout court*, would appear to all but confirm as complete folly the aspirations of any translator who would dare set foot down their path. Both are also read as examples of the modern Arabic literary and cultural movement of renewal known as the *nahḍah*. The first work, jam-packed with colorful obscenities, base vulgarisms, and pretentious witticisms, originally had a relatively recondite circulation and has been repeatedly bowdlerized in the course of its print history. All but condemned to obscurity through much of the last century, al-Shidyāq’s satire was censored by the Lebanese critic, novelist, and historian Jurjī Zaydān (d. 1914) for crossing the limits of decorum and good taste in its buffoonery, all in “a style the likes of which we have never before seen

in Arabic.”⁵ In contrast, Muwayliḥī’s *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, propelled by the public power of the press, ultimately emerged as a classic of Egyptian nationalism and *fin de siècle* print culture, published in 1927 by the Egyptian ministry of education as a textbook for secondary schools, albeit in a redacted form.

Like many other labels of periodization, the *nahḍah* carries with it an explicit logic of progress; it points to an awakening or revival in both epistemic and aesthetic terms, fomented by the modernizations and reforms that began in the nineteenth century and continued into the next through sustained, if fraught, engagements with European precedents. Yet, as both al-Shidyāq and al-Muwayliḥī demonstrate, it would be too simplistic to view these literary and cultural transformations as culminating in any singular, teleological ideal of Western progress. They are both inherently hybrid and situational, deeply imbued with the weight of classical Arabic letters, while resistant to all forms of homogenization; they point rather to the protean plurality of multiple modernities contested in the reflection of multiple others, to be conjured both abroad and at home.

Put side by side, these two editions and translations represent Allen and Davies at their finest. Both are leading scholars and translators of modern Arabic fiction who have spent years honing their craft and are finely attuned to the inner workings of the Arabic language, its lexicography, and its literary history, all with an astute sense of how to convey the beauty and intricacy of Arabic in a harmonious English cadence. Over the course of their professional careers, Allen and Davies have translated masterpieces of modern Arabic letters; their craftsmanship is on full display in these magisterial translations of what by any sensible standard are merciless and unrelenting manifestations of supreme literary complexity. As Ḥunayn demonstrated centuries before, the task of the translator is never complete: Allen has been working on al-Muwayliḥī’s *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* since his graduate days at Oxford University (DPhil 1968), following the book’s elaborate publication history, its innovations of style and content, and its delightfully sardonic lampoons of the customs of Egyptians and Europeans that are meted out with an equal measure of brio and nerve. In this latest incarnation, Allen has edited and translated the work as it appeared in its original form, as a series of newspaper articles at the turn of the nineteenth century, and he has benefitted along the way by further access to archival materials from the period.

5 Jurjī Zaydān, *Tarājim mashāhīr al-sharq fi l-qarn al-tāsiʿ ashar*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1922), 2:81.

In the respective works translated here, al-Shidyāq and al-Muwayliḥī present very different attitudes toward language and the weight of the classical tradition. To some degree this can be measured in the simple matter of legibility versus the opacity of semantic resistance. Both works invite a kind of sophisticated literary play made possible by satire and the precedence of the *maqāmah*; but they do so by presenting very different aesthetic and ethical postures that cannot be reduced to a spectrum of semantic accessibility or literary complexity.

This divergence extends beyond al-Shidyāq's mere rupture of taboos and his orgiastic parades of human flesh laid bare in quaking carnality, whether in Parisian brothels or Damascene latrines that excrete from every imaginable orifice, often penetrated by sundry maneuvers and positions, scatological or otherwise. All of this follows a subversive tradition of obscenity (*sukhf*) in Arabic letters that stretches back well before al-Ṣaymarī (d. 275/888) penned his epistle, *Faḍl al-surm 'alā l-fam* [On the superiority of the ass over the mouth]. For the chameleon al-Shidyāq, a Maronite-turned-Protestant who ultimately ended his days, publicly, as a Sunni, the real perversion is, perhaps, not so much of topic but of language, in his inordinate use of figurative speech and irreducible word play, his repeated recourse to rhymed prose, humorous puns, double entendres, palindromes, portmanteaus, and the like, and the innumerable parallelisms made possible by Arabic's acrobatic morphology, often in the form of paronomasia (*tajnīs*) and its many subcategories. These figures are tied together with great prolixity through aphorisms, sermons, dialogues, debates, ornate poetry, and stylized descriptions, to produce what Shidyāq terms "a strange, new style" that fixates above all on the marvelous lexicality of the rare and self-similar power of language to both enchant and nauseate.

In his affinity for lists of synonyms, al-Shidyāq—a bookman, typesetter, copyist, translator, and, at least as Fāriyāq, his fictionalized double, an interpreter of dreams (*mu'abbir al-aḥlām*)—is quick to assert that synonymy is not the same as equivalence. In this basic incommensurability of language lies the translator's dilemma. If we are to take al-Shidyāq at his word, then the noise that resonates through all communication is as irreducible in a grocery list as it is in the unspooling lexicon that flows, page after page, from *al-Sāq 'alā l-Sāq*. Here the matter of untranslatability would appear to be a problem not of scale or type, but of the basic semantic fact that meaning is inherently wedded to linguistic form. This paradox finds expression in the classical Arabic philological discourse on the dichotomous relationship between *lafẓ* and *ma'nā*—a semantic field that frequently diverts al-Shidyāq. But if nothing can be truly translated, Davies has also demonstrated with aplomb and dexterity that the opposite also holds true. By refusing to bend to the siren's call of one-to-one equivalence,

Davies is freed by an aesthetic appreciation of approximation. He meticulously insists that the original text in all its sheer complexity communicates at every turn. Davies's commitment here is as profoundly generous as it is significant.

The rubric that guides the entire series of the Library of Arabic Literature appears to all but disavow the notion that the mettle of a translation must be measured solely by its literal fidelity to the original. In the creative elasticity of language, Davies creates for himself a space that is free from the impossible task of rendering the Arabic text word for word, while remaining faithful to the spirit, if not the literal form of the original. Take, for instance, al-Shidyāq's enumeration of synonyms for wretched smells; this segues into an onomatopoeic list of speech defects—just one of the numerous assortments of words that issue through the entire work:

ثم جآ على عقبها روائح هنيئة صُباحية زنجية سنجية إفاخية عبّادية خجربة ذفربة
 عُدّارية امدرية امدرية خنازية طفاسية حُطاطية عفاطية عفاطية شياطية ناضية
 زهمية خيراكية صلية خيامية صنمية قنمية عجانة لحنية نجوية محتاطة بطمطمانية
 ولحناخية ورتية ولغلاخية وقلقلانية وكسكسية وكشكشية

Presented here are a series of adjunct adjectives coined from various noun forms all ending with the attributive *nisba* suffix (*-iyyah*). As with many of the other lists that al-Shidyāq strings together, this first group, which focuses on foul smells, is arranged according to an alphabetical order based on the third radical of the Arabic root. This organizing principle, ubiquitous to classical Arabic lexicons, fits into al-Shidyāq's much broader project of lexical enumeration and is deeply invested in the organizing and authoritative power of dictionaries. Undoubtedly, the general tenor of the words and the broad contours of the description at hand are quite legible, yet the range of phrases mixed together draws heavily on a register of rare and arcane vocabulary that is largely obtuse—the strange and obscure (*al-gharā'ib wa-l-nawādir*) of classical lexicography.

As with many of these enumerative moments, Davies takes a fair measure of liberty, with recourse to numerous nonce words and other neologisms:

[a wind] followed fast on its heels by odors overpowering, rotten, rank, putrefying, putrid, puent, fetid, fecal, feculent, stinking, reeky, reechy, rancid, rancidous, noisome, cacodorous, maleolent, mephitic, flatulent, flatus, armpit-redolent, smegmatic, nidorous, hircine, plebeo-sudoral, latrinal, urinal, annulo-vermicular, oleaginous, nose-wrinkling, cata-mitic, tannic, and oro-dyslalic, mixed with Himyaritic hapax legomena,

mispronunciations, lispings, misspeakings, schwa-ations, sibillations, and shibillations (3.18.7).

The organizing lexical principle for the order of the original set is all but lost, yet much is gained. For instance, a good deal of the formal morphological repetition carries over (*puent*, *feculent*, *malevolent*; *rancidous*, *cacodorous*, *flatu-ous*; *mephitic*, *smegmatic*, *catamitic*; *fecal*, *plebeo-sudoral*, *latrinal*, etc.). Yet, here and elsewhere in the endnotes Davies acknowledges that he abandoned any attempt to adhere word for word to the Arabic text. Notably, the translated list, in this particular instance, adds six more adjectives to al-Shidyāq's original, resisting any attempt to reduce translation down to the task of mere lexical correspondence. Rather Davies seeks "a representation, not a one-to-one translation, of the latter using words from the same semantic areas drawn from thesauri, dictionaries, and other lexical resources." The Latinate neologisms certainly delight, although the fulsome potential of English effluvium has been hardly exhausted—what of stenchy, graveolent, olid, or olidous? But such invented words as "plebeo-sudoral" and "annulo-vermicular" are meant to convey the deeper texture of the original, both in the impenetrability of the list, even for native speakers, and the very nonsensical nature of the rarity of the lexical plane itself.

As for Davies's "oro-dyslalic," the coinage would appear to be better suited for the second group, namely that of defects of the tongue, as the phrase evokes at once an orifice and the speech impediment of dyslalia. But when set beside "catamitic," the neologism is evocative, perhaps by design, of oro-anal and with it the suggestions of sodomy lying beneath the original, which surface, for instance, in the likes of *khay'āmiyyah*, *ijāniyyah*, and *najwiyyah*. For Davies, the word serves as a kind of bridge between the two semantic lists, and connects, through a rather subtle turn, the sonorousness, if vaporous wind of the first series (e.g. *'affāṭiyyah*, *'afaṭāniyyah*, picked up nicely in "flatulent, flatuous") to the errors of the mouth and tongue in the next. At this point in the narrative we follow the Fāriyāq's life in Malta where he is occupied "correcting the foul of breath" (*iṣlāḥ al-bukhr*), a moniker which in al-Shidyāq's satirical universe corresponds autobiographically to his own stint teaching Arabic to students on the island. Here the translation is self-consciously loose, as such latitude helps make manifest what lies latent in al-Shidyāq's parallelism, pairing incorrect speech and thundering flatulence with buggery—the old *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo* excised from the first Loeb editions of Catullus.⁶

6 Catullus, *Carmina* = *Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber*, ed. and trans. Francis Warre Cornish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904); republished in the sixth volume of the

Similar wordsmithing is exhibited in the “Himyaritic hapax legomena,” which takes its inspiration from al-Shidyāq’s *tumtumānīyyah*, a term that morphologically follows a pattern of reduplicative quadrilateral roots commonly used onomatopoeically in Arabic for a host of sounds. The classical authorities define the word as the barbarous speech of the South Arabian Himyarites, known for their reprehensible expressions (*al-kalimāt al-munkarah*). Strictly speaking the word is not the same as a *hapax legomenon*, at least not in the technical, bibliographical sense of a word or phrase that appears only once in a corpus. But in so far as such rare instances are difficult to decipher, there is certainly room for latitude here. In any case, the phrase rolls so smoothly off the tongue while imprinting its strangeness on the mind that Davies is able to convey a semblance of what the original Arabic does—he goes beyond the semantic level of significance, to the exterior, formal expression itself. Here the dual language model arguably helps to liberate the translation from the tethers of literalism, for the hidden architecture underneath the English phrasing is in plain sight on the facing page, visible to anyone whose knowledge of Arabic allows a look at the mechanics of it all.

Across facing pages we are often mesmerized by the enumerative capacity of language to fill space in arabesques, in a bewitching, if numbing, drone that hums with the recursive and terrifying aspiration of words to capture through ekphrastic totality the sum total of being—a kind of *horror vacui* that once set in motion inflects everything in sight. It is what the Fāriyāq’s wife argues to be the very denominative power of language to oppress through naming (voicing a critique redolent of Vincent Wimbush’s notion of scripturalization).⁷ From men’s habit to claim the natural subordination of women “they have created the language in such a way as to serve their exercise of tyrannical power over and violence against women.” This is a sentiment that still retains a radical edge, as it undoubtedly did in its own time. The Fāriyāqiyyah (as the author has named her) issues this critique as a retort to her husband’s reliance on classical dictionaries, particularly *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* [The encircling ocean] by al-Firūzābādī (d. 817/1415), as he asserts that the inherent inferiority of women and superiority of men is based on the very lexical definition of words. In the end, she just begs to be left to her own thoughts, which she describes in rather enigmatic terms, “*wa-hiya laysat min al-ḥarakati wa-lā l-sukūn*.” Davies

Loeb Classical Library = *Catullus, Tibullus, and Pervigilium Veneris* (London: W. Heinemann, 1913); revised Loeb edition, ed. and trans. George Patrick Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), §16, l. 1.

7 See Vincent Wimbush, *White Men’s Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

admirably renders this as “which are neither voweled nor unvoweled” (4.9.9). The expression points to the matter of Arabic grammatical inflection, as it nods toward the theological argument that articulated speech (*al-kalām al-lafẓī*), as a series of differentiated sounds, is distinct from pre-linguistic thought or inner speech (*al-kalām al-nafsī*), which has neither sound nor division. For the *Fāriyāqiyyah* this inner space is untouched by the treachery of translation, free from the historical contingency of the *status quo*, where the natural sign of language is used as a force for coercion. Behind her comment lies the theory expounded in classical Arabic philology that the meanings of words are established (*waḍʿ al-lughah*) in time through human convention and agreement (*al-iṣṭilāḥ wa-l-tawāduʿ*) and not by some transcendent, divine determination or revelation. This is a topic that al-Shidyāq develops further in the course of his lexicographical career, when he focuses on the onomatopoeic origins of language, itself a *cause célèbre* among medieval Arabic philologists. What is novel about this ancient debate replayed here is that it is put to the service of starkly new ethical and dialogical ends.

The definitional basis of language as a foundation for oppression is no small matter for a man who repeatedly professes (undoubtedly with tongue in cheek) to have recourse throughout his journeys to a single book—the aforementioned dictionary by al-Fīrūzābādī. Such is the fate of bibliophiles to be divested of their libraries—a lament that can be carried back to Ḥunayn, whose books were treacherously confiscated, and forward to Erich Auerbach (d. 1957), incredulously bereft in Istanbul of a well-equipped library—or so we are left to imagine.⁸ Al-Shidyāq trawls al-Fīrūzābādī’s terse, yet immense ocean to no end, repeatedly resurfacing with a priapic, if puerile fascination for human anatomy. In the impossibility of the whole world within a word, al-Shidyāq plays with the conceit of the single dictionary precisely to undo it, as he combs the vast history of Arabic letters from pre-Islamic poetry through the classics of the Abbasid age with repeated references to the *enfants terribles* of a new, ornate style in poetry: Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 198/831), Abū Tammām (d. ca. 232/845), and al-Buḥturī (d. 284/897). He also follows closely the conventions of modern Frankish authors, and in doing so demonstrates himself to be not only a nimble translator, but also acutely aware of the stylistic transformations underway in narrative forms.

Yet it is the *maqāmah* that serves as his lodestar across this open sea of literary possibilities. With a *maqāmah* for each of the four sections that divide the work, al-Shidyāq is not only a master of the genre, but he also traverses its

8 See Kader Konuk, *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 133-66.

boundaries, both in the content of the assemblies and through his exegetical expansions that mimic the commentary tradition of classical philologists. It is in this arena of philology that he polices the probity and rectitude of language, turning his attention backward to the ancient authorities, particularly his dear companion al-Fīrūzābādī, and forward to withering critiques of European Orientalists who feign dominance over the Arabic language.

The climactic appendix that concludes the entire work is by no means ancillary to the project—in the enumeration of errors that al-Shidyāq exposes in the edition of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī undertaken by Baron Silvestre de Sacy (d. 1838) and republished with corrections by Joseph Toussaint Reinaud (d. 1867) and Joseph Derenbourg (d. 1895), all leading Orientalists of their day.⁹ René Khawam excises the section entirely from his French translation, *La jambe sur la jambe* (Paris, 1991). Yet Davies is right to preserve this decisive list of lists (he does leave out, however, al-Shidyāq's final two pages of errata to *al-Sāq 'alā l-sāq*, perhaps as obtuse to the actual process of editing the Arabic text; yet the original paratext makes for a succinct bookend to al-Shidyāq's insistence in the opening that given the nature of the work, slips of the tongue and pen should all be excused). The fine details of the emendations proposed for the Parisian edition of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* are largely lexical and grammatical matters of orthography and vocalization. They are all but lost to those with no knowledge of the Arabic, as Davies maintains the errors and al-Shidyāq's corrections in their original Arabic. Other possible solutions may have presented themselves for rendering this transcriptional material meaningful in English, but this is certainly beside the point. The words function as something akin to proper names, which, at least following Jacques Derrida's musings on Babel, resist any attempt at translation.¹⁰ Only correct in its irreducible form, the list of errata "is what it is" in the tautological mythology of pure signifiers (or "*anā akūn allādhī akūn*," as al-Shidyāq would have known it from his work translating the Bible for the Anglican Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge while in Malta).¹¹ Yet, these errors are also, of course, a stinging indictment of

9 al-Qāsim ibn 'Alī al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt* = *Les séances de Hariri*, ed. Baron Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, second revised edition by Joseph Toussaint Reinaud and Joseph Derenbourg, 2 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1847-53).

10 Jacques Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," trans. Joseph Graham with notes in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165-207, original French as appendix, 209-48.

11 *Kutub al-Muqaddasah*, trans. [Aḥmad] Fāris al-Shidyāq et al., 2 vols. (London: W. Watts 1857-59), vol. 1, "Sifr al-khurūj," 3:14, p. 80.

the pretentious claim to command with superiority the language of others, while disdainfully rejecting native informants as either schooled in a moribund tradition that fails to grasp its own significance, or merely as go-betweens, who are not authorizing agents in their own right and thus can be effaced for the illusion of immediacy.

Categories and Contours

Such back talk exposes the uneven terrain of cross-cultural dialogue in the economic and social conditions necessary for exchange. The editorial board of the Library of Arabic Literature is certainly aware of these historical incongruities and has done a great deal to subvert earlier paradigms of curating eastern lore. This can be seen particularly in the collaborative spirit that animates the series and in the detailed and transparent reflections on the process of translation and editing that accompany several of these volumes. In the breathtaking array of material selected, this subversion extends most notably to the primary category under consideration, namely Arabic literature. The term is noticeably missing from the Arabic title for the series, which merely takes the concise and much less restricted name “Arabic Library” (*al-maktabah al-‘arabiyyah*; as opposed to, *maktabat al-adab al-‘arabi*). This slippage between categories in the very name of the series is undoubtedly redolent with meaning. The juxtaposition between a library of Arabic literature versus an Arabic library speaks to a certain degree of ambivalence, if not a recognition of the limits of literature as an organizing principle or primary category of analysis for the range of writing under consideration. It is also a further example of the preferred method of translation in the series, a method that promotes meaningful approximation as opposed to slavish adherence to the literal word.

Foremost, literature in English carries a very different set of associations and values than *adab*, its Arabic equivalent. By and large, literature has come to serve as a category of human experience universal in its reach. As with all second-tiered organizational principles, this particular universalism is not without its problems. Literature as a comparative endeavor often carries with it a specific kind of positivist teleology and secular sensibility. The very global aspirations of world literature, as a way of organizing a discrete sphere of activity, also tend to collapse the writings of others into discursive practices that are in some basic sense interchangeable. With this also comes the tendency to view sacred writings as literary productions, divested of heavenly origin. Like the modern field of history as a mode of inquiry, literature is generally

predicated on disenchantment; it casts out divine agency from the daily din of human exercise. To what extent these assumptions animate premodern or non-Western writerly practices is certainly debatable. Today in anthologies of world literature in English translation, selections of the Qur'an and other sacred texts, from the Bible to the Bhagavad Gita, are commonly included as comparative examples of literature. Nonetheless, it would still be rather strange, if working within Islamic doctrinal norms, for example, to speak of the Qur'an, a paragon of Arabic rhetoric and eloquence, as an example of *adab*, which is generally viewed as a sphere of human literary activity.

Yet, the power of the category in all its catholicity carries over in modern Arabic neologisms, seen, for instance, in the phrase *al-adab al-muqāran*, the standard Arabic translation for comparative literature. Although *adab* serves today as the equivalent to literature, it is in many senses closer to the ethical implications of *belles-lettres*; this parallelism is also reflected in *ādāb*, the Arabic plural form. Similar observations can be made about the place of *adab* or *adabiyāt* in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, which in historical terms also drew heavily from classical Arabic models. Like other means of organizing the world, literature is as much an ideological posture about how and why writing is produced as it is a particular kind of production. We know *adab* above all for its deontological lilt, as a moral and ethical system of aesthetics and a corporeal discipline of embodied knowledge that normatively links beautiful speech with urbanity, and rectitude of behavior with the mastery of a vast, though circumscribed, body of practices (hence *ādāb bajānā* and other variants in Urdu, to signify politely paying respect). The companion of *adab* as a model of comportment has been *al-'arabiyyah al-fuṣḥā*, the standardized speech of classical Arabic. In this sense, historically, *adab* has been much more restrictive in generic, aesthetic, and normative terms than literature, distinct from a range of other spheres of written activity. This is not to say that boundaries were not crossed, as any prosopographical study of the learned elite demonstrates—a case patently seen in the biographical encyclopedia of literati (*udabā'*) by al-Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229), a polymath who in his own right was a master of numerous disciplines and fields of learning.¹² While these boundaries are by no means fixed or even stable, we can point to a body of written material generally associated with *adab* that is quite separate from other fields of writing. There are numerous indices for what would likely be included in such a list, which would invariably include poetry, a range of prose, and the full array

12 al-Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'* = *Irshād al-arib ilā ma'rifat al-adib*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993).

of lexicographical sciences. Yet, these hierarchies of value have also been conditioned, reaffirmed, and contested by successive generations.¹³

Putting this aside, one could certainly argue that the English category of literature obtains what the editors of the series seek to achieve: it not only denotes the literary, but in its very etymology literature can stand for writing itself. Here the distinction would thus be not one of genre, i.e., literary versus non-literary forms of expression, but one of language, highlighting a collection of Arabic letters that is separate from, if informed by, other cultural and linguistic processes. It is this very linguistic unity, or the semblance thereof, that gives coherence to the series in all its expansive heterogeneity. Yet, while the pursuit of the literary, as configured in the aesthetic and moral enterprise of *adab*, is not the sole defining feature of the series, the editorial board is clearly guided by a notion of literature that is narrower than simply any form of writing.

So far the series has focused largely on works renowned for their literary, legal, historical, or pietistic value, and has yet to turn to philosophy, dialectical theology, or the array of practical sciences from astronomy to medicine and the occult—all of which could be plausibly included under the rubric of literature. Some of this ground has been covered already with the bilingual editions of the Islamic Translation Series, which forms part of the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative at Brigham Young University, with its focus on the classics of Arabic philosophy, theology, and science. Yet the expansive purview of the Library of Arabic Literature is by all measures primed to accommodate an ever-increasing corpus of significant Arabic sources, not limited to any particular genre, discipline, creed, historical period, or geographical region. What counts as a work of lasting value is certainly open to debate. Yet, already, the selection of published sources is designed to exhibit the sweeping multiformity of Arabic writing over the course of its development. When put together collectively as a corpus across an expanding shelf of books, the materials elicit a range of intersections, both intentional and serendipitous.

Currently, on the other end of the bookshelf, representing the formative period, is the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* [The Expeditions], as redacted by the Yemeni traditionist Maʿmar ibn Rāshid (d. 153/770). This collection is translated for the first time into English by Sean Anthony, who supplies extensive and informative annotations, as well as an introduction that concisely addresses the scholarly debates over the significance and authenticity of this early material. As a

13 For more on this problem, see Michael Allan, "How *Adab* Became Literary: Formalism, Orientalism and the Institutions of World Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43.2-3 (2012): 172-196.

genre, the *Maghāzī* fits into a body of sacred history that details in epic form the early life of the Prophet and his Companions. Where the Qur'an is often painfully elliptical and concise, this early corpus of material expands in vivid, if at times contradictory, detail the events surrounding the rise of Islam, in historical, geographical, and religious terms. The *Maghāzī* of Ma'mar ibn Rāshid survives solely through a single manuscript (Istanbul, Mullā Murād 604, fols. 66r-99r), which forms part of the sprawling—multivolume *muṣannaf* collection of hadith reports collected by Ma'mar's student, 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), the bulk of which is preserved in this unicum. 'Abd al-Razzāq's *muṣannaf* remained unedited for much of the last century and was only first published in its entirety in 1972. Compared to the renowned collection by Ibn Ishāq (d. ca. 150/767) as redacted by 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām (d. ca. 218/833), the *Maghāzī* of Ma'mar ibn Rāshid, historically, was less known and enjoyed only a limited dissemination. Ibn Hishām's life of the Prophet has been edited and translated numerous times. In terms of the curatorial process of selection, the editorial choice here is telling, as it seeks to fill out a body of learning that is only now in the process of recovery. Rather than merely reduplicating an established canon of writings, the breadth of the series values the very expansive horizons of Arabic literature as a vehicle of expression. This touches not only on the kinds of materials presented but in the notable heterogeneity of confessional, social, geographical, temporal, aesthetic, and linguistic perspectives made manifest.

Numerous other examples abound. On the one hand we have the foundational text on Islamic legal theory, the renowned *Risālah* by Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), eponymous founder of the Shāfi'ī school, famed for his development of hermeneutical tools for adjudicating general principles of positive law through the practice (*sunnah*) of the Prophet and its relationship to the legal authority of the Qur'an. Joseph Lowry had edited and translated the text for the series. Over the course of his academic career, Lowry has worked intimately on the *Risālah*. Here he has produced a translation that greatly improves upon earlier English and French endeavors, and offers wide-ranging insights into the technical nature of the work and its broad significance as a pivotal articulation of legal hermeneutics. This famous treatise on jurisprudence fits into a normative progression in the historical development of Sunni orthodoxy. Contrast this with the other manual of Islamic legal theory published thus far in the series, the *Kitāb Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib* [Disagreements of the Jurists], by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 364/974), one of the most important legal authorities in the Fatimid Empire, and a central figure in the broad development of Ismā'īli jurisprudence. As opposed to Shāfi'ī's well-known epistle, the

translation by Devin Stewart introduces al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s work for the first time to a broader audience beyond just specialists in Islamic law. In the course of his informative introduction and notes to his translation, Stewart demonstrates that al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān was deeply attuned to broader judicial developments of a diverse array of sectarian authorities, from al-Shāfi‘ī to Muḥammad ibn Dāwūd (d. 297/970), founder of the long-extinct Zāhirī, or literalist school, of jurisprudence. Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s work proves to be of crucial importance for the historical development of manuals on legal disputation and jurisprudence. Moreover, it also represents a lasting multiplicity and enduring divergence of religious authority that drew on similar materials and modes of analysis, but did so for very different juridical and theological ends.

A similar heterogeneity of experience and orientation can be seen in two works of sayings, sermons, and proverbs attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet; these works have been edited and translated in a single volume by Tahera Qutbuddin for the library. The first is the *Mī‘at kalimah* [One Hundred Proverbs] attributed to the Abbasid man of letters al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869). It enjoyed a wide dissemination and survives today in multiple manuscripts. It also inspired numerous commentaries and translations into Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. The second is the *Dustūr ma‘ālim al-ḥikam* [The Treasury of Virtues], also a widely read work. It was compiled by al-Qāḍī al-Quḍā‘ī (d. 454/1062), a Sunni judge and adherent of the Shāfi‘ī school of law, who rose to fame while in the service of the Fatimid caliphate. Both of these homiletic collections of wisdom and ethics enjoyed a broad reception that crossed a range of sectarian boundaries and transcended the significance of ‘Alī as the first Imam in Shi‘ī contexts of piety and soteriology. Sunni authorities from an array of periods and places also expressed a devotion to ‘Alī and his family, though with obvious points of divergence in aim and purpose. Similar statements can be made about *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-sajjādiyyah*, a collection of sayings attributed to Zayn al-‘Abidīn (d. ca. 94/712), the paternal grandson of ‘Alī. This work, which, historically, crossed sectarian divisions, reflects a common well of piety expressed by both Sunnis and Shi‘a, who have historically shared in their veneration toward the family of the Prophet, through forms of devotion that, needless to say, have been articulated in very distinct ways.

At many junctions, the selection of material in the series runs counter to dominant ideals of the significance and scope of Arabic literature and the history of Muslim religious practice and devotion. It pushes back, as it were, against a range of stereotypes or misconceptions. As with the bilingual model, these insights are undoubtedly meant to extend in multiple directions, for diverse audiences of Muslims and non-Muslims and for those with various

levels of proficiency in Arabic and in English. This breadth can be seen in the staunchly normative material from traditionist circles featured in the *Manāqib* [Virtues] of al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), the eponymous founder of Ḥanbalī jurisprudence, which was collected by an acolyte of the school, the Baghdadī preacher and scholar Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). The masterful edition and translation by Michael Cooperson not only preserves the entirety of the onomastic weight that lends gravitas to the authority of religious traditionalism, here in the form of the long lines of transmission characteristic of hadith literature, but it also shows in great detail the complex humanity and charismatic power that animates traditionalist devotion. This is no small feat, as it challenges modern Salafi discourses that tend to oversimplify the significance of Ibn Ḥanbal, his practices, and his importance for those who followed him. Particularly telling in this regard are the rather strong currents of mystical piety and physical mediation that inflect Ibn al-Jawzī's portrayal of the great ascetic. This includes the characterization of Ibn Ḥanbal as one of the "substitutes" (*abdāl*, 94.1), a term strongly associated with Sufi cosmography, and the description of Ibn Ḥanbal's use of the hair and a bowl, both said to have belonged to the Prophet, for their curative and intercessory powers (24.2, 69.21, 79.10).

In terms of the articulation and maintenance of religious authority, we encounter a very similar reorientation of expectations in the *Kitāb al-Muntakhab fī uṣūl al-rutab fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf* [The Principles of Sufism] by 'Ā'ishah al-Bā'ūniyyah (d. 923/1517), a prolific poet, writer, and mystic from Damascus. Edited and translated by Thomas Emil Homerin, this manual of the Sufi path offers insight into the means by which Muslim women harnessed authority within historical frameworks of rather circumscribed positions. Bā'ūniyyah's collection is a further testament to the historic participation of Muslim women in the transmission of religious knowledge. The role of women in the diverse arenas of devotion and learning has begun to receive increasing scholarly attention, notably in the work of Asma Sayeed, among others.¹⁴ When read alongside Quḍā'ī's *Dustūr* and Ibn al-Jawzī's *Manāqib*, we can appreciate how Bā'ūniyyah's work draws on a transhistoric discourse of piety and sobriety articulated through a common vocabulary, which while invested in the regeneration of authority and power, can also be put to the service of rather radical ends.

14 See Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Corpus, Canon, and Collaboration

Reading broadly across these shelves of books inevitably elucidates patterns of continuity and change, beyond merely a shared idiom of piety and citational practices that betoken Islamic normativity. Aesthetics of wonder and enchantment animate a good deal of this corpus, often coalescing at unexpected points of intersection. These pages, filled with dazzling word puzzles, mystifying enigmas, and travels across far-off lands, seek beauty and befuddlement and trade in a literary economy of the rare and extraordinary, the glistening and the confounding. In this library we are invited to travel through the market of ‘Ukāz, the ancient site of the annual fair on the trade route through the Hijaz, once bustling with merchants, soothsayers, and above all poets. This landscape is well trodden in the early *maghāzī* collections on the life of the Prophet and pre-Islamic Arabian lore. It is also the name that Muwayliḥī gives the Exposition Universelle of Paris in 1900, evoking the Sodomite decadence that precedes utter destruction. For him, the world’s fair set the stage for the culminating series of sardonic newspaper dispatches back to Cairo. Plucked out of the assemblies of Hamadhānī, Muwayliḥī’s narrator, ‘Īsā ibn Hishām, is both enthralled and deeply ambivalent in the face of ‘Ukāz’s extravagant hedonism, the wanton waste of wealth, and the brackish brew of European progress and civilizational superiority sloshing around.

But what’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Take, for instance, Muwayliḥī’s lampoon criticizing the stagnation of the ulema of Azhar University in Cairo, who eschewed modern advances in science and relied instead on dusty old cosmographies filled with marvels and monsters and absurd tales of buxom women growing off trees on the Wāq Wāq islands. The critique reflects the great epistemic shifts underfoot and quite succinctly parrots nineteenth-century European discourses on the benighted backwardness of Orientals and their childish fascination with superstitions—they may dwell in the world, but they do not truly know it, let alone do they master its global expanse. Contrast such sentiments with the spirit of exploration, adventure, and, yes, wonder that animates the two famous travel books: one collected and written by the seafarer Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī (d. 303/916) and the other penned by the caliphal envoy Ibn Faḍlān (fl. 310/922). Both have been edited and translated together in a single volume for the series by Tim Mackintosh-Smith and James Montgomery, respectively. Joining these famous travelogues together is rather propitious, as both are filled with the strange and the uncanny, the bizarre, and at times the positively unverifiable. These journeys certainly catalogue wonders and rarities (*al-‘ajā’ib wa-l-gharā’ib*), which as a category for

organizing existence is as much an aesthetic sensibility focused on the rare, remote, and seldom seen, as it is a means for comprehending the world. Yet in their narratives across the Indian Ocean, China, and deep into the Volga Basin both Sīrāfi and Ibn Faḍlān are intimately concerned with ocular authority as a form of authenticating and verifying the strange commodities—mercantile or otherwise—in which they traffic. Neither slavishly believe what they are told, nor are they given over to facile credulity; rather both cultivate a lasting appreciation of the exotic and bizarre, whose value lies not in impossible absurdity, but in the surprising potential of reality.

As this corpus of material demonstrates in numerous instances, the pleasure of astonishment is as intricately clothed in the savagery of foreign lands as it is folded into the artfulness of literary performance. This is on full display in the work of the Baghdadi bookman Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 336/946) in his literary biography of Abū Tammām, a paragon of the new style of poets at the Abbasid court, whose shadow extends across the long history of Arabic letters. In contrast to a mere collection of poetry, al-Ṣūlī's biography, edited and translated here with superb finesse by Beatrice Gruendler, is staged as a series of critical observations, woven together through anecdotes (*akhbār*), whose value lies precisely in their facticity. The courtly audiences of revelry and merriment do little to hide the rivalries of the poets who vied for lucrative patronage and pride of place. With the captivating power of their sharp-witted verse and quick retorts of one-upmanship, these masters of verse often sought to outdo or to expose the plagiarized and ill-gotten material of one another. The stories are situational, set against various contexts of performance. As concise accounts, they highlight both the intricacy of the verses and their immediate reception. Take, for instance, the following quotation cited by al-Ṣūlī from one of Abū Tammām's famous panegyrics, recited in honor of the Abbasid governor Abū Dulaf al-'Ijlī (d. ca. 226/840), who presided over an assembly attended by both Arab and Persian nobles:

وَلَوْ كَانَ يَفْنَى الشَّعْرُ أَفْنَاهُ مَا قَرَّتْ حَيَاضُكَ مِنْهُ فِي الْعُصُورِ الذَّوَاهِبِ
وَلَكِنَّهُ صَوَّبَ الْعُقُولَ إِذَا أَتَتْ سَحَابٌ مِنْهَا أُعْقِبَتْ بِسَحَابٍ

If poetry could run dry, then the abundance collected in your pools
over the passing of the ages would have made it run dry.

But poetry pours from men's minds:

When one group of clouds departs, another follows. (69.3)

Such intricate metaphors and ornate figures of speech are characteristics of the new style of *badī'* poetry, whose creative reworking of earlier motifs and

imagery achieved entirely new ends. This point is consciously featured in the complete version of the ode, not cited here by al-Şūlī, where Abū Tammām describes his poetry as having “abided in the garden of marvelous motifs (*tamahhala fī rawḍi l-ma‘ānī l-‘ajā‘ibi*),” soaking up rare expressions (*gharā‘ib*) that only the wit of his patron could fully grasp.¹⁵ Al-Şūlī notes that on the completion of the ode Abū Dulaf granted the poet the incredible sum of fifty thousand dirhams.

These anecdotes not only showcase marvelous feats of poetic genius, they also underscore the power of patronage needed to finance it all. The economic dimensions are significant as they speak to the material means necessary for the production and circulation of the written word and hint at the diverse values animating its preservation. Literary canons are forms of economic exchange and privilege, of what one generation values enough from the past to preserve for the present. Such systems of value are not fixed across time, but are, rather, artifacts in need of continual curation.

The mordant classic *Risālat al-ghufrān* [The Epistle of Forgiveness], by the Syrian poet and prose writer Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057) is a case in point; it has been edited and translated here with great erudition by Geert Jan van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler, two leading European scholars of Arabic letters. Al-Ma‘arrī was famous in his own day as a gadfly, deeply critical of established convention and societal norms, from standards of diet and decorum to orthodox creeds—for this he was often branded a heretic. A vegan based on moral conscience, al-Ma‘arrī was blind from youth and lived his life as an ascetic who never married. He was renowned for his frugality and was honored by scholars and ministers alike. The *Ghufrān* is just one work in a much greater body of writing that extended over the course of al-Ma‘arrī’s life. Although he was, by all measures, an accomplished and influential poet, al-Ma‘arrī’s renown lies largely in the *Ghufrān*, a stunning indictment of sycophancy and sanctimony. With its ribbing of the luminaries of Arabic letters, the epistle is as unclassifiable as al-Shidyāq’s *al-Sāq ‘alā l-sāq*; it mixes a range of literary forms and themes with criticism and extended digressions. With a keen sense of satire and a sophisticated use of rhymed prose and ornate poetry, al-Ma‘arrī indulges in the complexities of Arabic morphology, grammar, and lexicography. This and much more is brought out in great detail by van Gelder and Schoeler in their two-volume edition, the first unabridged translation of the entire text.

Yet, the modern fame of the epistle rests not only on its exquisite literary expression, but also on its simple eschatological conceit: the tale of a poet’s journey in the afterlife through heaven and hell, where he encounters

15 Abū Tammām, *Dīwān Abī Tammām bi-sharḥ al-Khaṭīb al-Tabrizī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh ‘Azzām, 4th edition, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1951-7), 1:213-4, §15, ll. 40-1.

renowned philologists and poets of ages past and converses with sinners, heretics, and even the Devil. The parallels with Dante's *Divina Commedia* have been observed by several modern readers, including notably the reformist Jurjī Zaydān and then later by Miguel Asín Palacios (d. 1944), the renowned Spanish Arabist. In 1919 Asín Palacios published a monograph dedicated to the argument that Islamic eschatological literature, including al-Ma'arrī's epistle and the *mī'rāj* cycle of the heavenly ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad, served as the direct inspiration for Dante's *magnum opus*.¹⁶ In succeeding generations, other Arabic writers took up similar lines of analysis, turning to al-Ma'arrī's lampoon as the unacknowledged basis for one of the greatest classics of the Western canon. In the context of Arab nationalism, this narrative of direct influence, if not outright pilfering, was quite attractive, as it fit into a larger set of arguments that saw in the rise of Western civilization the stolen achievements of Arabic learning and ingenuity, a debt which had never been truly acknowledged in the course of the European subjugation of Muslims worldwide. In the well-maintained halls of Dante studies, Asín Palacios's theory of influence was rejected outright with equal measures of religious provincialism and nationalist jingoism. To be sure, the recondite phrasing of al-Ma'arrī's epistle would not appear to be the most obvious vehicle for such a line of transmission. Moving beyond the rather simple notions of influence that animated this discussion, Jan Ziolkowski, among others, has demonstrated that the power of Arabic learning and Islamic mythology, even at times as an antithetical force, in this period of Italian letters should not be ignored.¹⁷ A veritable Babel of languages streamed across the Mediterranean, including not only a full range of vernaculars and Medieval Latin and Byzantine Greek, but also, importantly, both Arabic and Hebrew. This historical period witnessed the circulation of stories and technologies across various frontiers throughout the region. The translation movement from Arabic into Latin and significantly into both Spanish and Italian brought with it the wide diffusion of not only science and medicine but also polemical attacks on Islam and the Prophet Muḥammad, including acerbic presentations of Muḥammad's night journey through heaven and hell.

The problem for our appreciation of al-Ma'arrī, of course, is that such a linear framework of purported reception limits the significance of his work, in so far

16 See Jurjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh al-ādāb al-lughah al-'arabiyyah*, ed. Shawqī Ḍayf, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Hilāl, 1957), 2:265; Miguel Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina comedia*, 2nd edition (Madrid: E. Maestre, 1943).

17 Jan Ziolkowski, "Introduction," *Dante Studies*, 125: *Dante and Islam*, issue editor Jan Ziolkowski (2007): 1-34.

as it relates solely to the development of Western literary history. The theory of direct influence not only proves ill-founded, but it entirely ignores the actual impact that the epistle had in the course of its reception within Arabic letters, an influence that extends well into the modern period. For instance, included among the many manuscripts that al-Muwayliḥī transcribed during his residency in Istanbul was a copy of al-Maʿarrī's *Ghufrān*. As van Gelder and Schoeler note in their introduction, al-Muwayliḥī's *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā Ibn Hishām* shares many notable parallels, in both form and content, with al-Maʿarrī's satirical epistle.

For their exhausting work on al-Maʿarrī's epistle, which built on a collective expertise obtained after years of working in classical Arabic letters, van Gelder and Schoeler were awarded the very lucrative first prize of the "Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding" (Doha, Qatar 2015), under the category of Arabic to English translation. This new competition was founded in honor of the emir of Qatar, Shaykh Ḥamad ibn Khalīfah II (r. 1995-2013), with the stated aim of building bridges of understanding through the transfer of knowledge, while correcting the "unfair distortions and stereotyping" that color perceptions of "Islamic and Arabic culture." On display here is the optimistic potential of translation as a vehicle of communication to promote mutual understanding—certainly a powerful proposition in this age of blistering hostilities. The more jaundiced may view the entire endeavor as an exercise of monarchal self-promotion. Beyond the numerous merits of the edition and translation prepared by van Gelder and Schoeler, al-Maʿarrī's epistle might appear at first glance to be rather anodyne: it reflects a work long esteemed in the history of Arabic letters as a paragon of literary expression, whose status has been all but confirmed in the looking glass of European estimation. Yet as both of these scholars demonstrate with thorough lucidity, the epistle is also a deeply challenging text, not only in its aesthetic rigor, but also in its moral and ethical demands. Al-Maʿarrī is a rabble-rouser who leaves almost no one unscathed and he represents a long and subversive tradition of Arabic satire neither easily digested nor co-opted.

The requisite capital necessary to commemorate such literary pursuits should not be overlooked. Patronage has long been the lifeblood of the written word, in the capacity to generate page and ink, and to assemble a team of copyeditors, typesetters, graphic designers and, of course, authors, scholars, and translators to telegraph it all. This is something that both al-Shidyāq and al-Muwayliḥī understood well, as did Abū Tammām and Ḥunayn before them. Yet these material conditions for the production of knowledge are often forgotten as the unsung labor of others. The numerous dragomen and munshis of past Orientalists were all but passed over for the illusion of a frictionless expansion of learning that sought to identify, codify, and possess the value of others.

At the other end of knowledge production lies the often unacknowledged paratext of political and institutional power that bookends the entire enterprise.

Keenly attuned to such aesthetic, ethical, and epistemic complexities, the editorial board of the Library of Arabic Literature has navigated these tensions in rather innovative ways. The managing editor of the series, Chip Rossetti, has written on the many hands involved in producing these fine bilingual editions, both in a traditional print form as well as for various digital platforms.¹⁸ The typographical beauty of the series and the attention both to elegance and ease of use is noteworthy, despite the fact that readers are confronted with the challenge of facing Arabic pages in their opposite direction, that is moving left to right through the editions, rather than following the traditional format governed by the right-to-left Arabic script. Granted, this decision is thoroughly pragmatic; it does though give weight to the centrality of the English translation, at least as far as orientation is concerned. This challenge of script is to a certain degree obviated in the electronic format. Beyond just a means for distributing, the digitization of these bilingual sources opens up further possibilities in the expanding possibilities of the digital humanities and in the further presentation of material on the LAL website (www.libraryofarabicliterature.org). This takes the form of author interviews, blogs about the publications, and supplementary resources for the editions themselves, which hold the potential to stretch the series well beyond the limitations of the printed book.

The library champions above all an ethic of collaboration that encourages the collective effort driving the entire project. This is manifest perhaps most patently in Shawkat Toorawa's opening notes to the edition and translation of *Nisā' al-khulafā'* [Consorts of the Caliphs] by Ibn al-Sā'ī (d. 674/1276), a historian, bookman, and religious scholar from Baghdad. Here Toorawa elucidates in great detail the collaborative process of preparing the text for publication, a procedure that included the participation of several members of the editorial board, in various stages and capacities. This joint effort culminated in a sequence of workshops in which the translation was collectively reworked.

Following a similar pattern, the series promises further collaboration with several significant projects that could clearly benefit from collective wisdom, including, among other notable titles, the *Maqāmāt* of Ḥarīrī and the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. Both have been translated into English, though like other great works that endure for generations, both merit new translations. A similar sensibility guided Ḥunayn, who insisted, over the course of his life, that the task of

18 Chip Rossetti, "Al-Kindi on the Kindle: The Library of Arabic Literature and the Challenges of Publishing Bilingual Arabic-English Books," in *The Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies*, ed. Elias Muhanna (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 93-102.

translation is never really finished, but only approximated, as he was continually called upon to return to his own work and the work of others.

Like all articulations of prestige and power, canon formation is a commemorative process that enshrines not only a body of material, but also the very apparatus necessary to reconstitute over time the intellectual capital to be enshrined. Such complex hereditary systems of collective heritage—to draw on the modern Arabic concept of *turāth* at play here—are neither linear nor unidirectional. These endeavors of both remembering and forgetting are as profoundly social as they are collective. When a corpus ceases to be replicated across the folds of time it eventually disappears. Who and what deserves to be revived is ultimately a matter of what we value enough to preserve. As a library, the title of the series bears the metaphoric weight of an institution dedicated to collecting and memorializing, burnishing well-worn classics of Arabic literature and also bringing to light materials that have received far less attention. With the range of works already published and those set for print, the collective pursuit of the library pushes the boundaries of what is canonical to Arabic letters. Yet its very form is also bound to create future lines of canonicity. What is included here appeals to the sensibilities of our time, which privilege complex polyphony over semblances of conformity, in an array of voices that are not easily homogenized. We are called to cross ranges of Classical and Middle Arabic while we traverse genre, audience, and purpose, met by irreducible wonders and oddities that comele as they unravel. The typeset uniformity of binding and font that elegantly unites this library of letters all but belie the tumultuous rhapsodies that unfold in the mirror of its pages, facing each other in translation, turn by turn.