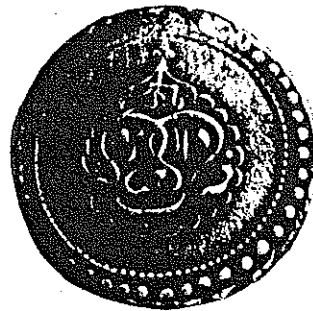




MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ASSOCIATION
BULLETIN

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COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE EDITOR should be addressed to JERE L. BACHARACH, Department of History, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195.

REVIEWS, and LETTERS may be sent text-only by electronic mail (with a printed copy to the appropriate editor). We encourage this practice, in order to help ensure accuracy and reduce input time.

Email address: mesaull@blake.acs.washington.edu

BOOKS AND AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS FOR REVIEW are to be sent to the Middle East Studies Association, Headquarters and Secretariat, 12 North Cherry Avenue, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721, (2) 621-5850. FAX: 602 321-7752. Books received are listed in the *MESA Newsletter*.

Email address: mesa@rvax.ccit.arizona.edu

Bitnet address: mesa@rvax.ccit.ariz.edu

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- BIRGIT SCHÄBLER, Research on the Modern Arab World in the Federal Republic of Germany 157
- MARIANNE BARRUCAND, Mashreq-Maghreb, Archives Photographiques du Monde Islamique 169
- TIMOTHY MITCHELL & ROGER OWEN, Defining the State in the Middle East: A Workshop Report 179

NOTES & TOPICS

- STEPHEN ALBUM, Islamic Numismatics at Tübingen King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies 185
- Middle East Center for Bergen 187
- British Library's Oriental Collection Moves 187
- The Max van Berchem Foundation 188

BOOK REVIEWS

Anthropology and Sociology

- SORAYA ALTORKI and DONALD P. COLE, *Arabian Oasis City: The Transformation of 'Urayzah* (Michael J. Reimer) 191
- AMIR BEN-PORAT, *Divided We Stand: Class Structure in Israel from 1948 to the 1980s* (Joel Beinin) 193
- SAUL S. FRIEDMAN, *Without Future: The Plight of Syrian Jewry* (Norman A. Stillman) 194
- SHAHLA HAERI, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran* (Jeanette Wakin) 194
- JAMAL J. NASIR, *The Islamic Law of Personal Status*; and JAMAL J. NASIR, *The Status of Women under Islamic Law and under Modern Islamic Legislation* (Farhat J. Ziadeh) 196
- MISACH PARSA, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (Farhad Kazemi) 198
- History before 1900
- MURHAMMAD IBN JARIR AL-TABARĪ, *The History of al-TabarĪ*, Volume 15, *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate* (Christopher Taylor) 201
- MURHAMMAD IBN JARIR AL-TABARĪ, *The History of al-TabarĪ*, Volume 21, *The Victory of the Marwanids* (Christopher S. Taylor) 203

opened doors. Having fought by her husband's side against the French, Zahra suffers the ignominy of being rejected by her husband for being too traditional: "for not eating with a fork; for not speaking French." It is this struggle for self-definition that forms the core of the story. Following her divorce, Zahra returns to her childhood home alone and impoverished, only to find comfort and strength in the realization of long-unused skills and spiritual resources. In describing this process of transformation, one that mirrors the larger social changes in Moroccan society at large in the first few decades after independence, this story, simply told through Barbara Parmenter's eloquent translation, resonates with elemental power.

What is perhaps most compelling is the multifaceted portrayal of Moroccan women which emerges. Through *The Year of the Elephant* and the traditional stories which follow, a complex portrait is revealed: young women gathering stones in ritualized play, the elegant machinations of the black marketer, two sisters waiting for death. Whether spinning original tales or imaginatively recounting a rich folkloric past, Leila Abouzeid's work proves an important contribution in the annals of modern Middle Eastern literature.

CONSTANCE NEWMAN
New York University

When the Words Burn: An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry, 1945-1987, translated and edited by JOHN MIKHAIL ASFOUR. 237 pages. Cormorant Books, Dunvegan, Ontario 1988. (U.S.) \$12.95.

I am not convinced that the publication of *When the Words Burn* is "a major event in the international world of translation and scholarship" (back cover). It is surpassed by Salma Khadra Jayyusi's 1987 *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (Columbia University Press, New York), whose 296 selections by 93 poets are preceded by a superb overview of the modern poetic scene in Arabic.¹ Asfour's introduction to his 97 selections is certainly an informative and extensive one, but it does suffer from several shortcomings.

The introduction begins with an investigation into the background to the modern period by looking at the classical tradition in Arabic poetry. The explanation of the Khalif metrical system is clear and prepares the reader well for the next section, "Free Verse and the Poetry of the *Tafiti*." The section on the "Tammuzi" poets is an able discussion of the use of Near Eastern myth and the inspiration of Eliot and Pound on a generation of modernists, notably al-Khāl and Adonis. His analysis of Adonis's "The Crow's Feather" and the title poem of the collection by al-Māghūt is an informed and useful comparison of the skillful way in which these poets, in

¹ Reviewed in this issue, pages 254-256. Ed. note.

different voices, the one prophetic the other ironic, subvert the conventions of language in addressing the circumstances of their culture and history. Asfour must also be applauded for addressing the increasingly important issue of colloquial poetry, a topic conspicuously absent from practically all discussions of modern Arabic poetry. He mentions Ahmad Rāmī, Abd al-Wahhāb Muhammad, and Kāmil ash-Shinnāwī yet includes but one Michel Trād vernacular poem in the anthology.

The anthology proper is subdivided into "The Free Verse Movement" with two subsections, "A 'Generation of Departures'" and "Explorations in Modern Form and Idioms: Non-Metrical Free Verse"; "Tammuz Rediscovered" with two subsections, "The Five Major Tammuzi Poets" and "In the Tammuzi Tradition"; and "Resistance Poetry." The selection of poets is appropriate given the categories "into which the poetry of this anthology seemed naturally to fall" (p. 15); one is tempted to ask which came first, the categories or the poems chosen? Be that as it may, Asfour includes a number of poets who, though deserving of attention, have been neglected in other anthologies: Lewis 'Awad and 'Izz al-dīn al-Manāsira, for example.

On the whole, the translations read very well. A comparison of several selections with the Arabic reveals that the translator has, for the most part, been faithful to the spirit and letter of the originals. Avoidable inattentions do, however, intrude. He considerably abridges the opening lines, and associated tone, in Mu'īn Basīū's "A Traffic Light," for example. He changes Ghāda as-Sammān's negative image into a positive one in "Imprisonment of a Rainbow." He needlessly alters the closing lines of Amal Dunqūl's "The Murder of the Moon." The line "at Cambridge and Harvard Universities in London" (p. 171) is not as absurd as "His epic poetry about the tribe's battles and his personal duels is representative of a decline in quality in classical Arabic verse, although it has perpetuated a body of popular legends around his name" (p. 225), said of 'Hilālī, Abu Zayd al-." Abū Zayd al-Hilālī neither wrote this living oral epic, of which he is a main character, nor ought he to be held responsible for what Asfour (alone?) judgementally sees as a "decline" in something it is not: classical Arabic verse. And Salāh ad-Dīn was by no means "King and Sultan of the Fatimid dynasty" (p. 226) but a member of the Ayyubid one.

This volume of modern Arabic poetry in translation is a positive contribution to the English-reading public. Although North African poets receive no attention and Gulf poets little, the breadth of the selection is good, the majority of the poems are, as one would expect of a new anthology, previously untranslated, the introduction is accessible, and the biographical information accurate. The dating of the poems would have been equaled in usefulness by citing the source of the selections, a glaring omission in most anthologies. I do, however, have a bone to pick. I have written elsewhere—and shall continue to voice this frustration—that the need is for translations

of individual *divans*. Collections by Eliot and St. John Perse exist in Arabic. It is high time that as-Sayyid and al-Khal be known to the English-reading public for their *divans Unshiddat al-matar* and *Al-Bir' al-mahyira* (so name but two on my personal list of seventy-odd) and not simply for the title poems translated and retranslated every time someone compiles an anthology.

SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA

Duke University

Taj Mahal: The Illumined Tomb: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Mughal and European Documentary Sources, compiled and translated by W. E. BEGLEY and Z. A. DESAI. ii + 320 pages, chronology, bibliography, 22 color plates, 168 black-and-white illustrations. The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge; distributed by The University of Washington Press, Seattle. Supplementum of Persian passages planned for release by The Aga Khan Program, 1989.

The Taj Mahal, the magnificent white marble tomb built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for Mumtaz Mahal, his favorite wife, is among the best known of all Islamic monuments. Yet general and even academic knowledge about the Taj Mahal is steeped in mystique, much of it stimulated by unreliable writings of seventeenth-century Europeans who visited the city of Agra, the site of the Taj Mahal. With the goal of demythologizing the Taj Mahal, Wayne Begley, responsible for the introduction and commentary, and Z. A. Desai, the chief translator, produced this superb documentary volume. It is a repository of all known contemporary documents relating to this famous seventeenth-century tomb.

The volume is divided into six sections. Parts 1 and 2 concern references to the Taj Mahal in contemporary Mughal chronicles and imperial orders (*farman*). In addition, Part 1 contains references to the personalities associated with the tomb, its construction and on-going maintenance. Part 2 concerns official orders and court documents. Surviving *farman* pertain to the cutting and transport of marble, which Begley assumes was largely for the Taj Mahal; he might have noted that marble also was needed for Shah Jahan's concurrent Agra fort renovations. Since many of the original documents concerning the Taj Mahal are destroyed, the authors have included surviving waqf deeds for a contemporary mosque to indicate how buildings were endowed and maintained. Almost all of these passages, especially in part 1, are from previously unpublished manuscripts or texts that had been published only in Persian. Desai's translations of the ornate courtly Persian, polished by Begley, are highly readable.

Part 3 gives translations of all the inscriptions on the Taj Mahal. Accompanying the text are photographs of the calligraphic panels. This highly

useful section allows the reader to understand the programmatic preoccupation with the Day of Judgement, which Begley had observed earlier in "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning" (*The Art Bulletin* 61 [1979] 7-37). It might have been useful for non-specialists had the authors indicated where one Qur'anic passage ends and the next begins, although this is a minor matter. A discussion of the work and career of the calligrapher, Amanat Khan, are the focus of part 4.

The careers of the Taj Mahal's architect and the construction supervisors comprise part 5. This is particularly valuable since official Mughal chronicles never mention the architect, although the supervisors are discussed. Here the authors sum up earlier yet little known arguments that indicate Ustad Ahmad was responsible for the tomb's design. The volume concludes with relevant seventeenth-century European sources. Here it is unclear why some passages are given first in the original language and others only in translation. As the authors indicate, these gossip-based sources serve as foils for the official Mughal texts that present Shah Jahan and his family as ideal.

This copiously illustrated volume is of tremendous value to historians and art historians. While the lack of an index is unfortunate, the volume will remain a basic source for Shah Jahan's architecture. Begley and Desai are to be commended for compiling this well-organized and well-translated work.

CATHERINE B. ASHER

University of Minnesota

A Computer Dictionary of Literary Arabic: Arabic-English, by WILSON B. BISHAI. The Arabic Software Center, 434 William Street, Stoneham, MA 02180. Program includes program disks, Sentinel module. Hardware requirements: IBM PC or AT or XT or PS/2 or equivalent. Minimum or MSDOS or later; parallel port; Color Graphics Adapter or color monitor; 5.25-inch disk drive. Versions I and II allow for use with 2 floppy drives and version III for use with hard disk. Student prices for I and II: \$200; III: \$300.

This computer dictionary certainly has the technology to outstrip any print-bound lexicon. The program has four main options: It will (1) supply the English definition of an Arabic word entered (modified to fit a predefined dictionary form), (2) display all entries for a particular root, (3) "examine a family of weak roots," that is, take two letters, combine them with a weak radical in any position, and display all permutations and combinations, and (4) scan the entire dictionary for certain letter combinations. The program deals well with unvocalized words, and the transliteration system used throughout is straightforward.

According to the introduction, the user is expected to know how to "strip" nouns and adjectives of their "obvious prefixes ... and ... suffixes," and "reduce" verbs "to their active perfect 3rd person singular masculine forms" before looking them up. The assumption that the user can do this successfully in the case of non-sound roots is at odds, however, with Bishai's contention that for "students and scholars" the process of looking up "irregular and defective roots ... [is] very complicated indeed." Some knowledge of morphology is necessary simply to choose from the myriad possibilities the program sometimes generates. If, for example, the user encounters the form /td'/, and enters it as such, the computer replies "no match." The next step, according to the instructions, is Option 3, which requires the user to identify /d'/ as part of a weak root and enter it, whereupon the computer generates forty-five possibilities based on the roots /d'w/ and /wd'/. Should the user then seek help from Option 4 to search for the string /d'/, the computer returns fifteen different possible roots (including /ddd'/). Similarly, for the form /yrd/, a check using Option 1 produced derived forms of /rdd/ and /wrd/ but not /rwd'/; Option 3 gave sixty-four entries derived from six different roots. Thus, identifying the form /yrd/ as the jussive of /'arada/ is virtually impossible for the neophyte the program is intended to help.

The program is certainly very efficient at generating possibilities, but there is a certain circularity in all this efficiency. One simply has to know some morphology in order to start looking up words, yet most of the program's brainpower is devoted to relieving the user of the burden of having to know any morphology. In the attempt to have this dictionary double as a tool for teaching weak roots, neither purpose is well served.

For those who prefer working on a computer, this is indeed a good alternative to a dictionary in book form. It is easier to look up a word in Bishai than in Wehr. However, the computer dictionary loses in utility what it gains in speed. One of the great advantages of Wehr is the broad range of English equivalents it offers. This is by no means a luxury: it is often essential for understanding the precise meaning of an Arabic word in context. The Bishai dictionary provides only two or three English definitions: enough if they suit the context, unhelpful if they do not. The program is, on the other hand, constantly being revised and updated and new possibilities are being added. Yet Bishai, which appears to rely heavily on Wehr, as is perhaps inevitable, does not go beyond it in its coverage of modern usage.

THE MEMBERS OF RRALL
Duke University

Arab history and the Nation-State: A Study in Modern Arab Historiography, 1820-1980, by YOUSSEF M. CHOUEIRI. xix + 238 pages appendices, glossary, list of dynasties, bibliography, index. Routledge, London and New York 1989. \$59.95.

As Arnold Toynbee wrote in *A Study of History*, historians tend to illustrate rather than correct the opinions and ideas of the communities in which they live, and since the relatively recent development of the national sovereign state, historians have come to regard the nation-state as the natural field of historical study. *Arab History and the Nation-State* takes up this theme, analyzing the ways in which the contemporary concern to legitimize state structures and to promote a sense of national identity within them has shaped the portrayal of the Arab past.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part surveys the beginnings of modern historiography in nineteenth-century Egypt, Syria, and North Africa. The historians of this era are appropriately described as patriotic amateurs, writing to create and glorify a national past and to prepare the ground for a national renaissance. Their works, while not devoid of merit, are unsystematic, tendentious, and often unreliable.

The second part, the heart of the book, is an analysis of three professional Arab historians: Shafigh Ghurbal, Kamal Salibi, and Abdallah Laroui. The author has selected these three as representative of modern academic historiography in the Arab world. A separate chapter is devoted to each historian. Choueiri focuses on their principal works and how these contributed to the construction of a distinct national identity with historical depth in Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, respectively.

Dr. Choueiri is very critical of all three historians. He excoriates Shafigh Ghurbal for his Carlylean adulation of Muhammad 'Ali. He accuses Salibi of "carrying the torch for the Maronites," of distorting the history of Lebanon with a view to justifying European intervention and the antebellum status quo. Laroui is praised for his criticism of colonialist historiography, but rebuked for groundless speculations and the artificial attempt to prove the reality of a Moroccan nationality prior to colonization.

The underlying question in this inquiry, concerning the unit of historical study, is worth asking. And it is certainly true that much of modern historiography (and not only in the Arab world) is tinged with a retrospective nationalism. However, it is difficult to accept as valid this extremely negative assessment of the historians in question. While not above criticism, they have made (and are making) significant, substantive contributions to our historical understanding of the Arab world.

Another weakness of the book is its failure to situate the evolution of historical thinking in a social and institutional context. Little effort is made to compare these historians with their contemporaries and successors. It

been noted) were also told about al-Ḥaymārī and other protagonists, which introduces wider perspectives than the editor has envisioned. The fables of Luqmān (which include §760) and the transmission of Aesop into Arabic should have been consulted to see what light they shed on the five mysterious "Greek parables" in §§760-764 (probably misplaced, as the editor rightly speculates).

What is now needed is the kind of commentary which will make sense of ripostes which depend on allusions no longer transparent. It is known, for example, that men of wit made playful, even near-blasphemous use of the holy book in their repartee, and so al-ġāhiz, in §1128, may well be punning on Qur'ān Sura 11, v. 40 by invoking the dual in connection with *tanwir*—certainly a more exciting interpretation than is proposed on page 80. Someone far less modest than this editor will have to deal with the frequent obscenities (the real point of the grammatical puns in §1193 is hardly obvious from the paraphrase on page 100, and the story clearly belongs under sexual as much as grammatical anecdotes!). However, in spite of only limited success in this domain, this book provides a sound basis for more intensive study of the tastes and mentality of the *adīb* in one of Islam's most creative periods.

M. G. CARTER
New York University

Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology, by SALMA KHADRA JAYYUSI xviii + 498 pages. Columbia University Press, New York 1987. \$45.00.

The appearance of Salma Jayyusi's anthology is a major event in the translation of modern Arabic poetry. With the help of 11 first translators and 17 second translators, Jayyusi has put together 296 poems by 93 poets from all over the Arab world, including a large number of poets who have not appeared in anthologies, or are in some cases unknown.

Jayyusi's introduction is, to my mind, the finest available in English. It is unique, too, in that it is one of the few pieces that not only mentions the role of Yusuf al-Khal in the history of the tradition but elaborates on the nature of his contribution. The anthology is divided into two parts, "Poets Before the Fifties" and "Poets After the Fifties."

The Gibran selection begins with "Veiled Land," which the translators handle superbly; the cadences and rhythms are sustained, the language fluid and the rhymes natural and unforced. The opening lines to Salah 'Abd as-Sabur's "The People of My Country" (p. 123) are the best yet to appear in translation:

The people of my country wound like falcons
Their songs are like the chill in the rain's locks
Their laughter hisses like flame through firewood
Their footsteps dent the firm earth,

even though there is some freedom taken here and elsewhere. The six Adonis selections are all elegant. It is gratifying that one of his long poems, "A Grave for New York," is included but unfortunate that the translators, or the editor, deleted about a quarter of the poem. But in all fairness let me add that what is there is first-rate and utterly faithful to the form of the original, keeping the line breaks and emphasis of given words.

Salim Barakat's inclusion is praiseworthy. Extracts from his long poem "Diana and Diram" are followed by six poems on animals, unfamiliar subjects in modern Arabic poetry to be sure. Vaguely reminiscent of Ted Hughes, they are controlled and careful pieces rich with keen observation and steeped with the poet's awe of nature.

The large number of Iraqis in the anthology, twenty-four out of ninety-three, may be explained by the close relationship between PROTA and the Iraqi Ministry of Information and Culture. Three of these, Hasab ash-Shaykh Ja'far, Shaḥīq al-Kamali, and 'Abd al-Karīm Kasid, use a language that is very refreshing.

The Yusuf al-Khal poems read well, but "The Deserted Well," from his eponymous collection, which in parts is far superior to previously published translations, in its other parts inexplicably violated. His Christian imagery finds an eloquent counterpart in the verse of the late Sudanese poet Muḥammad al-Mahdi Majdhub where it is Islamic imagery that predominates. The Egyptian Muḥammad Yaffī Matar, though complex and incomprehensible to many, is a brilliant poet who uses much mystical and folk imagery. He is expertly translated by Ghazou and Middleton.

The poetry of Amjad Masir, a Jordanian, the third youngest poet in the anthology is experimental but rooted. His "Loneliness" is one of the finest and most accessible pieces in the anthology. The second youngest poet, the Omani Sayf al-Rahabi, is at ease with his simple but unusual images: "How can I want time / with all its strength drag sheep / in broken chariots," "I stand in God's creation / like a sun wrapped in grief," from "Entering the Gardens of Doom" (pp. 386-87). The writing of Kamai Sabi, the youngest poet, is informed by his involvement in the Iran-Iraq War.

The volume closes with the "Transliterated Arabic Names of Poets," and the biographies of the translators. The biographies of the poets precede their selections but, regrettably, no bibliographical details are provided. It would have been useful to cite the poems by date of composition and *diwan*. The volume opens with a preface that explains the translation methodology. My only criticism here is of Jayyusi's contention that "The more 'modern' a poet is, the further away from his traditional idiom his or her poetry is, and therefore the more easily translatable" (p. xxii).

This is a superlative volume, ideal for the classroom and essential on the bookshelf of every library, institutional or personal. I cannot commend or recommend it enough.

SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA
Duke University