

Conference Report

Approaches to the Study of Pre-Modern Arabic Anthologies (Beirut, 10–12 May 2018)

Conference Organizers:

Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn and Bilal Orfali

Report by:

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The conference was organized over three days by Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn and Bilal Orfali and generously supported by the Jewett Chair of Arabic Studies and the Center for Arts and Humanities of the American University of Beirut (AUB). The first day of the conference was held on the premises of the AUB, after which the Bristol Hotel in Beirut became the venue for the second and third days of the conference.

Nadia Maria El Cheikh (Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, AUB), Bilal Orfali (Chair of the Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages, AUB) and Abdul Rahim Abu-Husayn (Director of the Center for Arts and Humanities, AUB) welcomed participants on the Thursday. This conference, which they had hoped to organize for many years, should result in the publication of the papers presented. The different presentations explored the overwhelming presence of anthologies in pre-modern Arabic literature, a phenomenon unique to this literature,

where you find such works on a variety of themes, including love, wine, travel, death, music, difficult words, and blaming or praising things. What were the reasons for the popularity of the genre, and what was its function? To what extent can they be considered as original works in themselves, how the author's influence can be traced in his manner and method of compiling? What can be inferred from the chosen excerpts over what has been left out by an author and most of the time lost to us? What do these compilations say on the historical and cultural context in which they were produced? These questions and many others have long been raised about this genre, and continue to rise for the readers and scholars today.

The conference was composed of eight panels on the following themes: "Emotions," "Pleasure," "Faith and Education," "This is Not a Tale," "Poetry," "Compilation, Authorship and Readership," and "Geography." Each panel was followed by discussion that allowed



the audience to participate and engage with the participants. Ramzi Baalbaki (AUB) gave the keynote address on the second day, Beatrice Gruendler (Freie Universität of Berlin) a guest honorary speech on the third day. The conference concluded with a dinner.

Thursday May 10th

Panel 1: "Emotions"

Chaired by Julia Bray (University of Oxford), the first panel of the conference opened with a paper by Lyall Armstrong (AUB) on the subject of death and dying, as seen through the reconstruction of one of the earliest works by a Muslim scholar on the topic. Indeed, *Dhikr al-mawt* by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894-5), an author known to have had a special interest in the matter of death, and whose work influenced later scholars interested in writing on the subject. It contains excerpts from the Qurʾān and religious literature as well as poetry and anecdotes.

Going back to the world of the living, Karen Moukheiber (University of Balamand) presented a paper on *al-Imāʾ al-Shawāʿir* by al-Isfahānī (d. 356/967), an anthology of courtesan-poetesses of the early Abbasid period. She analyzed the vocabulary pertaining to emotions used in the text, thus reflecting a male gaze on female characters, by using Barbara Rosenwein's concept of "emotional community." Without being able to discover the reality of emotions felt by individuals at the time, her analysis allows us nonetheless to explore the representation of gendered relations and what emotions were highlighted and valued (or not) in written testimony of this kind.

The panel concluded with a return to the idea of dying, this time specifically with martyrs of love, with the presentation of Vahid Behmardi (Lebanese American University) on *Maṣāriʿ al-Ushshāq* by Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad al-Sarrāj al-Qārīʾ (d. 500/1107). An anthology dealing specifically with tales and poetry of poets dying from love, it also contains the author's own poems on passionate forms of love. Through an analysis of the text, its *isnāds* and organisation, clearer light can be shed on the origins of love stories in classical Arabic love literature.

Panel 2: "Pleasure"

Chaired by Bilal Orfali (AUB) the second panel included two presentations on the theme of pleasure. Musical pleasure came first, with the presentation of Carl Davila (State University of New York) on *Kunnāsh al-Ḥāʾik*, a famous collection of song-texts of the Andalusian tradition of North Africa, as found in MS#144 at the Khizāna Dāwūdiyya in Tetouan, dated from 1202/1788. His analysis of the manuscript spoke to the social context of the Moroccan Andalusian musical tradition.

The second paper dealt with physical pleasures. Jeremy Kurzyniec (Yale University) discussed an unedited manuscript in a presentation entitled "The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure: a Ḥarīf's Guide to the Bedroom Sciences*," a medieval example of diversely sourced knowledge on the particular subject of sex. From poetry to medical sources, from Greek, Persian and Indian sources, the anthology lists and categorizes what needs to be known regarding matters of the bedroom. Analyzing the text and situating it in its larger cultural milieu, one discovers that

the Indian kama-sutra was known and circulated, at least in part, in the medieval Islamic world.

Friday May 11th

Panel 3: "Faith and Education"

The second day began with the theme of faith and education. Kristen Brustad (University of Texas) chaired a panel in which sadly two participants were unable to attend. Kirill Dmitriev (University of St Andrews) opened with a presentation on the anthology tradition and its theoretical aspects through an example from Christian Arabic sources. The combination of the popular Arabic anthology genre and the medieval Christian literature and traditions made it natural that Christian authors would engage with this genre. The presentation reviewed the different categories of Christian Arabic anthologies and their authors, and focused on *Buṣṭān al-ruhbān*, an anthology compiled by Jirmānūs Farḥāt (d. 1732).

The second presentation by Samer Traboulsi (University of North Carolina) explores the use of anthologies as educational tools, specifically in the Ṭayyibī Ismāʿīlī tradition in Yemen and the teaching of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*. The paper used the *Kitāb al-azhār* by Ḥasan ibn Nūḥ al-Bhārūchī (d. 939/1533) as an example. This unpublished and lengthy text exists in several manuscripts, hinting at its wide circulation among scholars. The analysis of its great variety of content provides a better picture of the ways in which Ismāʿīlī doctrine was taught, where most historians have focused on sermons rather than on these instruction manuals.

Panel 4: "This is Not a Tale"

Chaired by Enass Khansa (AUB), this panel started with Maurice Pomerantz (New York University, Abu Dhabi) who presented a paper focused on 'Uqalā' *al-majānīn* by al-Nisābūrī (d. 406/1016). This is an example of an anthology on the theme of the madman; the text mentions around a hundred of such characters, from the historical to the legendary, in tales dealing with piety, foolishness and truth. Matthew L. Keegan (American University of Sharjah) presented the second paper on "commentary as anthology" with the example of the Andalusī al-Sharīshī's (d. 619/1222) commentary on al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*. Using the device of commentary, the author collected and compiled *adab* excerpts from the Islamic East and West. Analyzing the commentary and the ones inspiring the author, Keegan showed how commentary evolved into an anthologizing form of writing in itself.

Panel 5: "Poetry"

Chaired by Tayeb El-Hibri (University of Massachusetts, Amherst,) the last panel of the day, on the topic of poetry, began with a presentation by Adam Talib (Durham University) on the relationship between poetry anthologies and *dīwān*. Talib spoke to what has been recovered of poetry thanks to anthologies against what has been lost, that is, poetry left out of anthologies. This is an important question for a type of literature that has not been transmitted to us in a direct fashion, most of it having been recorded through anthologies, with what it implies of the reasons for which authors included poems or left them out. Talib also argued that the making of a poetry *dīwān* did

not necessarily precede the making of anthologies; it might have been the other way around.

David Larsen (New York University) presented an on-going project of anthology reconstruction from the fragments found in subsequent works and his method for doing it. He dealt with the genre of *maʿānī* texts, that is, the study of obscure meanings. Working on the now lost *Kitāb abyāt al-maʿānī* by Abū Naṣr al-Bāhilī (231/855), Larsen showed how sifting through citations of the work in later anthologies allows for an attempt at reconstructing the original text. He spoke of the challenges he faces in doing so. His reconstruction will be published in an upcoming edition and translation.

Bilal Orfali (AUB) concluded the panel with a presentation on poetry in Sufi anthologies or manuals. The poems constitute in their own right an anthology with its own uses within wider anthologies such as works by al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120). Poetry is used in this type of work to express sentiments otherwise difficult to express in prose. It is also used during the beatific audition (*samāʿ*), as well as to conclude chapters. These thematic chapters compile different sources on a particular theme, from the Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, and other types of literature such as poetry. The choice of poetry excerpts is particular to an author, even though the author does not compose poetry himself. The paper concluded with discussion of the use of poetry in the *Kitāb al-Bayāḍ wa-al-sawād* of al-Sīrjānī (d. ca. 470/1077).

Keynote Speech

Ramzi Baalbaki (Jewett Chair, AUB) delivered the keynote address on overlooked aspects of pre-modern lexical anthologies. Shedding light on an understudied genre, Baalbaki focused on Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) and his famous *Lisān al-ʿArab*, and the process by which he combined five different sources in his lexicon. Baalbaki demonstrated, for the first time, how Ibn Sīda (d. 458/1066) internally arranged his lemmata on semantic grounds and how Ibn Manẓūr adopted that system and supplemented Ibn Sīda’s material from his four other sources.

Saturday May 12th

Panel 6 & 7: “Compilation, Authorship, and Readership”

The theme of compilation, authorship, and readership was explored through a double panel, the first one chaired by Adam Talib, the second by Maurice Pomerantz. Enass Khansa (AUB) presented the first paper on different aspects of the anthology genre: an anthology presents itself as a reference work, a scholarly endeavor, that sources material from different fields to be presented to a wider readership than what some of these excerpts might have been previously been exposed to. These aspects were presented with an attempt at exploring a possible reconstruction of the readership of these anthologies, and how they inform material research of history and culture through examples such as Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* in al-Andalus.

The second talk was given by Boutheina Khaldi (American University of Sharjah) on *Maṭālaʿ al-budūr fī manāzil al-Surūr*, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bahāʾī al-Ghuzūlī’s

(d. 815/1412) anthology of the Mamluk period. Khaldi highlighted the process by which the anthologist organized his compilation; his presence throughout the text; and in this particular case, how the process follows or differs from classical times, challenging the thesis of decline in literature after the Abbasid age.

Presented by Rana Siblīni (Doha Institute for Graduate Studies), the third paper focused on a particular example, *al-Manāzil wa-al-diyār* by Usāma ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1188). On the theme of the homeland, it includes many excerpts otherwise lost. One of the particularities of this work is its personal character. Siblīni showed how the author, grieving for his hometown, included poetry of his own, and interfered with other's verse, and how this relates to the author's views on rhetoric and general experience.

As one of the participants was unable to attend, the second panel had only a single presentation. Isabel Toral-Niehoff (Freie Universität of Berlin) spoke on the theme of authorship and readership. Her talk focused her talk on *al-Iqd al-farīd* by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940) and the author's organizational principle. It was related, in a complex way, to the organization of the *Uyūn al-akhbār* by Ibn Qutayba (276/889). The paper placed the work in its historical context before following its gradual reading through time, from being read as a literary anthology to being read as an encyclopedia.

Panel 8: "Geography"

Chaired by Vahid Behmardi, the final panel of the conference explored the geographical dimensions of anthologies. The first paper, by Nathaniel A. Miller

(University of Cambridge), explored the geographical and ideological dimensions of the evolution of anthologies. Miller used the example of the works by 'Imād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī (d. 597/1201), and his predecessors, al-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/1038) and al-Bākhārī (d. 467/1075). He explored the shift in literary social practices; the Sunni revival coupled with the transfer of an Iranian institution such as the anthology on Syrian lands; and the decline of court patronage in the Mamluk period, which influenced both the content and readership of the anthology genre.

Ghayde Ghraoui (New York University) presented a paper on *Rayḥānat al-alibbā* by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1658), a literary anthology compiling works of the author's contemporaries as well as his own, in a particular political context. The author's rejection from imperial patronage is one of the main reasons for the anthology's existence; the presentation explored why al-Khafājī chose this means to respond to the Ottoman elite, and the historical information contained in the text. The work situated itself in continuation with an established literary tradition while being a support for political stances.

The final paper, by Suleiman A. Mourad (Smith College/Nantes' Institute for Advanced Studies), dealt with a subgenre of religious and historical anthologies, the compilation of the *fadā'il* of Jerusalem, showing the importance of the city in Islam. Reviewing authors from al-Ramlī (d. 300/912) to authors contemporary to the Crusades, the presentation focused on an understudied aspect of these anthologies, that is, the agency of their authors in selecting and presenting their

compilations, each anthology shaping a specific legacy for its readers.

Honorary Guest Speech

Beatrice Gruendler (Freie Universität of Berlin), in her honorary guest speech, spoke on her on-going project on *Kalīla wa-Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 139/756), which should be the object of an upcoming critical edition. She presented it as an anthology, that is, a compilation of edifying and educative tales, with its sources in Indian wisdom, an example of the transfer of Indian material to Arabic literary works. Before its medieval translations into Syriac, Greek, Persian, Hebrew, Castilian and Latin, not much is known of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*'s early textual history. Gruendler used several

charts to map the numerous translations, across time and geography; the different known sources of the work; and studies done on the subject. She also spoke to the difficulties in reconstructing the original sources used by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ; her critical edition will involve juxtaposing and comparing versions of the different existing manuscripts. This will allow for documenting the history of the text and an analysis of the context of its development. So, for example from an indirect transmission of the Buddhist tale “King Shādrām and the Wise Bilād,” found both in the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and in a treatise on wisdom sayings by Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), she will consider differences in translations and the manner in which the Arab translators adapted Indian sources to fit the Arabic corpus and readers' demands.