

# AL-KARMIL

STUDIES IN ARABIC LANGUAGE  
AND LITERATURE

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The studies published in this special issue of *al-Karmil* (Volumes 18-19, 1997-1998) are dedicated to the memory of DAVID SEMAH (1933-1997), founder and first editor of the journal. David's untimely death last year after a brief but cruel illness has bereft us of a much beloved colleague and friend. Admired as much for his thorough and original scholarship as for his warm and generous personality, he is greatly missed by all of us.

Albert Arazi's opening article "Ibn Zaydūn's Love or the Dialectics of Elevation and Degradation" discusses the love poetry of Ibn Zaydūn. From the section related to the *ghazal* in the poet's *Dīwān*, one might get the impression that the author is a licentious and shameless person, as illustrated by the immoral and vile behavior he displays towards Wallāda. In addition, careful examination of Ibn Zaydūn's *Musammaṭ* shows that in his poems he favors elevating man and degrading woman. This is an attitude the licentious poets of Ḥijāz express already in the first century of Hijra. The second part of the article extends the discussion to the love poetry in general. In contrast to the conventional Hispanic thesis which says that courtly love was brought to perfection by the Andalusian poets, Arazi claims that the honor belongs to the Arab poets of the East two centuries before Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Zaydūn.

In "The Children of Israel as a Prototype of the Shī'a: Notes on Some Early Imāmi-Shī'ī Exegetical Traditions," Meir Bar-Asher states that various early Imāmi-Shī'ī *Qur'ān* commentaries, introduce the idea of the Shī'a as being identified with the Biblical Children of Israel (*Banū Isrā'īl*). *Qur'ānic* verses in which the Children of Israel are explicitly mentioned in traditions attributed mainly to the fifth and sixth Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Šādiq, are interpreted as references to Shī'ism, its history and doctrines. "Every nice [*Qur'ānic*] expression which in its external [meaning = *ẓāhir*] addresses the Children of Israel, is in its hidden [meaning = *bāṭin*]

addressing me and my household (i.e., the Shi'a)," the Prophet is said to have declared in one such tradition. Bar-Asher analyzes these traditions as against the background of other Imāmi-Shi'i exegetical material referring to the Jews and Judaism.

Shimon Ballas' article "Emile Ḥabībī: Between Memory and Commitment" shows that Ḥabībī made a point of basing his creative writing on personal experience, in a way which juxtaposes memories of the past with present reality. Still, his writing should not be regarded as autobiographical because he managed to integrate the personal with the collective memory, and thus to turn the speaking voice of the narrator into a collective "I". Though concentrating on the play *Luqa' ibn Luqa'*, which gives comprehensive and forceful expression to the Palestinian people's collective memory, Ballas tackles the writer's total output. As an active communist, Ḥabībī had no qualms about loading his writing with political statements. As he admitted in his final novel *Sarāyā bint al-Ghūl*, he recognized himself at a later stage that this may have been an error: since they often proved superfluous, the artistic quality of the work suffered.

In "Human Beauty in *Ḥumayni* and Judaeo-Yemeni Colloquial Verse", Moshe Piamenta meticulously traces citations from a large corpus of MSS and printed *Ḥamayni* (i.e., post-classical form of Muslim colloquial Yemeni verse arranged in stanzas), and Jewish religious (male) and secular (female) verse. Relating them to human beauty as expressed in tropes and figurative symbols Piamenta traces them in descriptions of the human body and its organs so as to come to a systematic survey of the semantic field of the "concrete human beauty" as found in colloquial Yemeni verses, and interpreted in neo-Arabic style by the writer.

Christian Szyska, in his article "On Utopian Writing in the Prison of Gamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir," analyzes the play *al-Bu'd al-Khāmis* (The Fifth Dimension) of the Egyptian writer and historian Aḥmad Ra'if. Written in 1967 and published in Egypt in 1987, the play tells the story of its three main characters' flight from earth to Mars where they find an utopian society. Their encounter with leading members of Martian societies confirms their hypothesis about the existence of a metaphysical "Fifth Dimension" which explains the world better than purely materialist ideas. The article analyzes the play's ideological background in the thought of Muslim intellectuals and how the piece fictionalizes their ideas, through the use of traditional motifs from *ḥadīth*, *Qur'ān*, and Arabic literature as well as Western utopian literature and science fiction. The analysis finally tackles the problematics of utopian writing done in prisons as one important aspect of the so-called "prison literature" written by members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and discusses rational usages of original religious images.

Ibrāhīm Geries's article "The Boasting of the Rice and the Pomegranate's Seeds or *al-Maqāma al-Simātiyya*" introduces a literary text of the 15th-16th century belonging to the genre of debate (*manāẓara*), though some consider it to be a *maqāma*. Geries describes the various manuscripts used in editing the text and deals with questions of authorship and period and provides a literary analysis which emphasizes its theatrical character and stylistic aspects. The introduction with the annotated full text, will be published in a separate monograph shortly.

Vardit Rispler-Chaim in her "Sex-Change Surgeries: Between Modern Medicine and Contemporary Islamic Law," deals with the issue of the hermaphrodite, the only disabled person to whom Islamic law books devote full chapters. This is surprising since many other disabilities which are

statistically more common and socially more noticeable in any society are not given similar attention. Rispler-Chaim suggests this may be because the inability to gender the hermaphrodite clashes with the Islamic life-style and religious duties which depend on a clear gender identification. She states that modern surgery offers a solution to some hermaphrodites via sex-change surgeries. Muslim muftis have opined on this option and found it legitimate in principle. But they also added certain stipulations for granting an individual the permission to undergo sex-change surgery, which might again jeopardize this solution in practice.

Joseph Sadan's article "The Moral and Cultural Lesson of the Epistle On 'Cat and Mouse War'" treats the perpetual struggle, hatred and competition between animals such as cats and mice, a favorite theme in world literature, especially folktales. In the Middle East, popular compositions on cats and mice influence certain authors of higher--often ornate--style. These authors create humorous texts in verse and prose, in Arabic, Persian and other languages. Sadan notes that in many of these texts the weak (but smart) mouse overcomes the menacing (but less clever) cat. Already al-Jāḥiẓ in the 9th century observes that Persian culture (considered an intermediary between the Indian and the Arab cultures) is "pro-mouse"; on the other hand, Jewish and Islamic traditions often show a "pro-cat" tendency and locate the origin of that hatred between the two animals in Noah's Ark. Sadan's article contains a study and text edition (based on three MSS) of a "pro-cat" composition on the apparently definitive war between cats and mice, a war in which the entire mouse race is almost annihilated. It is written in half-colloquial Arabic and reflects, in its style and features, many of the qualities, problems and hesitations characterizing the storyteller (*Ḥakawātī*) as well as the interesting relationship between oral and written narratives.

Reuven Snir's article "A Study of 'The Fire of Poetry' by the Iraqi poet 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Bayāti" is an analysis of one of al-Bayāti's poems of the 1980s found in his collection *Bustān 'Ā'isha*. Snir offers a detailed study of the poem, which he sees as another stage in the poet's attitude towards commitment (*iltizām*) in poetry begun in the early 1950s. He traces its intertextual allusions to the ancient and modern Arab heritage and to world literature, as well as its intratextual allusions to al-Bayāti's own poetry. The reader's responses to the text and the gradual construction of the meaning of the poem in his or her mind is offered from the vantage-point of "a reconstructed first reading" which concentrates on the sequence of the words, especially the importance of the enjambment for the constructing of meaning.

Muḥammad Şiddīq's "The Reason of Poetry: An Aesthetic Reading of the *Mu'allaqa of Imru' al-Qays*" deals with the question of unity in the classical Arabic *qaṣīda* which has occupied critics ever since literary criticism emerged in Arab Culture. In more recent times, this question has come under renewed examination within critical perspectives and practices rooted primarily in Western literary and critical traditions. The *Mu'allaqa* of Imru' al-Qays invariably figures in these various interpretive approaches, often in a paradigmatic capacity. Notwithstanding their diversity and marked differences, these interpretations share a common characteristic: they all tend to banish the poet from the text of the poem. Şiddīq reexamines some of the major premises which informs these critical performances and suggests an alternative reading that, by contrast, attempts to preserve the integrity of the text of Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allaqa* and to reinstate the poet as a unifying presence in the artistic unity of the poem.

Rafi Talmon's article, "Şalḥa and the Emir Mu'ḏād: An Edition and Linguistic Analysis of a Contemporary Druze Poem," discusses a modern poem currently circulated in the Druze village of northern Israel, Syria and Lebanon. The poem, edited in a broadly phonemical transcription based on a recording by a local performer, is an artistic description of a dramatic event which harks back to the formative era of this community in southern Lebanon in the mid 11th century. The study compares this description with the relevant passages in the book of the 17th century Druze historian al-Ashrafānī. It is followed by a linguistic analysis of the various registers of the poem. An attempt is made to distinguish features pertaining to the North Israel Druze villagers from others that are typically Syro-Lebanese and yet others borrowed from the literary idiom of Arabic fuṣṣḥā.

Yosef Tobi's "Hebrew and Arabic Poetry: Imitation versus Distinction" deals with the comparative investigation between secular medieval Hebrew poetry and the contemporaneous Arabic poetry. Presenting several conclusions regarding the relationship between them, Tobi attempts to formulate new directions for comparative research between Hebrew and Arabic poetry. These conclusions are based on his own work in comparative studies as well as on the comparative investigations made by other scholars since the early 20th century.

Ibrāhīm Ṭaha in his article "The Image of the Modern Hero in a Story by Muḥammad 'Ali Ṭaha" treats one type of heroism through Muḥammad 'Ali Ṭaha's short story "One night at Reiga's Train." Ṭaha suggests a model of five components--motivation, will, ability, execution, and result--for defining the final status and position of the main character in any literary text. Applying this model, Ṭaha discusses the psychic and the physical activities of Marwān, the main character of the story, on his way to his final target. Although his

role in shaping and achieving his goal is extremely restricted, in comparison with those of the text's chronotope and its other characters and data, Marwān's obvious and absolute success in his mission turns him into a hero. Yet, the absence of serious obstacles, which might have caused him to fail, reduces his heroism, unlike the common concept of heroism in classical literature, to a local, specific, personal, and to some extent, banal one.

In "'Abd Allāh b. 'Awf b. al-Aḥmar: The Poet of the "Repentants" in the First Century A.H.," George Kanazi treats a poem by 'Abd Allāh b. 'Awf b. al-Aḥmar, an enthusiastic Shī'ite who was the most prominent poet of the *Tawwābūn*. He fought against the Umayyads in 'Ayn al-Warda to avenge the blood of al-Ḥusayn b. Ali who was killed four years before in Karbalā'. After the killing of al-Ḥusayn he called upon his fellow Shī'ites, in a long poem, to revolt against the Umayyads. His poem was so dangerous that "it was kept hidden during the Umayyad period." Depending on the extant passages, Kanazi reconstructs the poem, puts together the available pieces of information about the poet and his efforts in the Umayyad period and gives a survey of what has been written about him in modern research.

In her article "A Project for the Comparative Study of the Modern Literatures of the Middle East," Hilary Kilpatrick argues for the comparative study of modern Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish and Greek literature. They have historical connections, share linguistic features such as diglossia or the experience of radical language reform, and have all undergone the profound influence of European and North American literatures in the past two centuries. The comparative study of these literatures on a scholarly basis, according to Kilpatrick, can shed light on how and why they have developed as they have, and contributes to the understanding of processes of literary



influence. It can also further appreciation for the literatures of the region as expressions of a common humanity.

Sadok Masliyah's article "Abū and Umm in the Iraqi Colloquial Language" treats the different meaning of the words *Abū* and *Umm* as they appear in the Iraqi colloquial language. He examines the ways they are used in addressing young men; welcoming; irony; rebuke; oath; apology; sighing; astonishment; politeness; in the names of Iraqi families; names of places; ownership; names of animals; diseases; crafts; popular sayings, etc. Masliyah concludes that the examination of these words in various phrases in Iraqi colloquial language provides us with a comprehensive picture of the manners of the Iraqi people, their attitudes and outlooks in different fields and reflect their moral values.

In the final article "New Light on the Term *Kharja*, its Meaning and Function in the Andalusian *Muwashshahāt*" Shmuel Moreh discusses the meaning of the term *kharja* (last refrain in the Andalusian *Muwashshah*), arguing that it should be understood in the sense of performing an imitation, representation and mime, i.e., as a term derived from the verb *akharja* used in the medieval Arabic theatrical terminology. This suggestion coincides with the condition required for a typical *kharja* given by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk and S. Stern: the *kharja* should be introduced in the transitional stophes by phrases such as "she" (or "it") "said" or "chanted" by persons into whose mouth *kharja* is put: lovelorn girls, who complain of the absence of their lovers; drunkards; animals, inanimate things or even abstract concepts. All these elements are confined to the realm of imitation and representation contained in the term *akharja* and its derivations.

In our book reviews section al-Ṭayyib al-ʿArūsī writes on *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūta* edited by ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Tāzī, and Jacob M. Landau on *Arabic Sociolinguistics: Issues and Perspectives*, edited by Yasir Suleiman.