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A History of Arabic Literature. By Clément Huart. 2002. Translated by Ladry Mary Loud. Revised and Edited by Edmund Gosse. New Delhi: Goodword Books, 478pp, ISBN: 81-87570-68-7 and Price: DH. 6.00.

This book is originally written by Professor Clément Huart (1854-1926), a French Orientalist who is renowned as editor and translator of Arabic, Persian, Romaic and Turkish sources and for his prolific works covering most of the vast linguistic area. He dealt with many aspects of Oriental studies, including art and literature, history of religions, linguistics, philology, and political history. This is one of his earliest books writing about a history of Arabic literature. From the title itself, the text should be an indispensable guide for any literature student who wishes to have a complete and logical understanding of the Arabic literature, especially for those foreign readers who are non-native speakers of Arabic.

This book has been divided into twelve chapters. It composes about the origins of Arabic poetry, pre-Islamic poetry, the Quran, the Omeyyad dynasty, the Abbasids, Arabic literature of Baghdad down into the nineteenth century and also the periodical press.

The first chapter places the topic of "the climate and the race – origins of Arabic poetry" (pp. 1-9). The author starts his introduction by describing the environment of Arab country, its natural habitat and characteristics of Arab people; how do they relate and affect each other into the mood & concept of composing poems in their poetry. He also mentions that *hija* (satire poetry) seems to have been one of the most popular forms of early poetry. The poets which also known as the saga and soothsayer were called on to compose these satires, which passed from lip to lip amongst tribes of a common origin and were swiftly answered by other satires, sprung from the brain of the poet of the tribal adversaries.

The second chapter discusses about "the pre-Islamic poetry", which is commonly referred to in Arabic as "الشعر الجاهلي" or *Jahili* poetry. This chapter mentions about the Muallaqat (Arabic: المعلقات); title of a group of seven long Arabic poems that have come down from the time before Islam. Each is considered the best work of these pre-Islamic poets. The name means "The Suspended Odes" or "The Hanging Poems," the traditional explanation being that these poems were hung on the Ka'ba at Mecca. The author also provides a short biography of every single the Muallaqat to expose their background and life. Besides the Muallaqat, he also mentions about the Jewish and Christian poets. Anyway, the way he spells some of Arabic names is quite rare. For instance "Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma;" if the word of "*ibn*" is put at the beginning, it's written as *ibn* but if it appears in the middle of a name like that, the *alef* will get left off and be written as *bin*.

The third chapter speaks about the Koran which also often transliterated as "the Qurʾan"; how it was revealed and to whom was the Qur'an revealed. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was repeatedly revealed from Allah to Muhammad verbally through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). Qur'an means "reading" and it has many other names. Among those found in the text itself is *al-Furqan* means "liberation, deliverance" of the "revelation." The style of the Qur'an differs very much according to the periods of the Prophet's life at which the revelation was received. Generally, longer chapters appear earlier in the Qur'an, while the shorter ones appear later. Chapters are classed into two, depending on when the verses were revealed and produced; Mecca (*Makkiyyah*) or Medina (*Madaniyyah*). The text of the Quran was certainly not bought together during the Prophet's lifetime. So, the caliph Abu Bekr decided to collect the different chapters and verses into one volume after realizing many reciters were killed and he finally confided this task to Zaid ibn Thabit to collect the chapters and verses and produce several hand-written copies of the complete book. The caliph Uthman ibn Affan ordered the preparation of an official, standardized version, to preserve the sanctity of the text and this remains the authoritative text of the Qur'an to this day.

Chapter four discusses about the Omeyyad dynasty and its literature and poets. Although the Umayyad family originally came from the city of Mecca, Damascus was the capital of their Caliphate. The Islamic civil wars and the rise of sectarian rivalries contributed to the emergence of a poetry that became a favorite platform for expression of the divergent points of view. Most of the poets of the Umayyad period were all polemicists who used their poems to support political factions but there were a few poets who composing their poems far away from politics. For instance Qays ibn al-Mullawah, who composed splendid love poems and dedicated them to his love Laila. He was famously known as

"*Majnun*" which means "the madman" because of he went mad after separating with Laila. Beside the classic tradition of the long rhythmic recitations, the *razaj* suddenly springing into considerable important in this period. The elegy poetry form traditionally written in response to courage of a tribal comrade fallen in battle or the death of a person or group. In Laila al-Khyaliyya contributions to the genre, she mourns the loss of his love Tauba ibn al-Humayyir, who loved her and suffered the anguish of seeing her married by her father's choice. She was one of the few early female Arab poets who dared to speak of her love in public and her strong personality and fame gave her access to the courts of the Umayyad.

Chapter five to nine discuss about the Abbasids dynasty. The Abbasids had transformed the Omeyyad's Arab empire into a multinational Muslim empire. They moved the capital of the empire from Syria to Iraq, where they built a new capital, Baghdad from which, during the next centuries, they would influence many of the main events of Islamic history. They had depended heavily on the support of Persians in their overthrow of the Omeyyad. Al-Mansur, moved their capital from Damascus to the new city of Baghdad and welcomed non-Arab Muslims to their court. While this helped integrate Arab and Persian cultures, it alienated many of their Arab supporters who had supported them in their battles against the Omeyyad before. In this period, Arabic poetry now began to alter but a kind of poetry appeared on the banks of the Tigris, whither the imperial splendor was attracting the most brilliant talents. The most famous poet in this group that beyond all contradiction is Abu Nuwas.

Chapter six focuses on the history of Arabic grammar. There are two schools that have been focused in this chapter; "the school of Kufa and Bassora" (p. 137). In my opinion, the author should put the word of "Bassora" first before "Kufa" in the title because it's obviously mentioned in every single references that Bassora was founded first, even in this book. Bassora was a very important center of grammar. The first one who had established the base of the school of Bassora was Abul Aswad and the great master of this school was an Arab from Uman, Khalil ibn Ahmad. He was the author of the first known work about lexicography on his book "the *kitab al-Ain.*" Beside Khalil, his pupil named Sibawaih also had a book benefit the people of Basra which was called as "*al-Kitab,*" but it thereafter became one of the greatest books on grammar to have ever been written in history. Another scholars came from this school were Akhfash, Qurtub, Abu Omar Salih ibn Ishaq al-Jurumy, Abo Uthman and many more. The school of Kufa came few years later after Bassora, established by al-Kisai. He was a well-known reciter of the Qur'an; until this very day, he is known as one of the Seven Famous Reciters. He studied under Khalil at Bassora and was the tutor of Amin and Ma'mun, sons of Harun ar-Rashid. The two rival schools of Bassora and Kufa disappeared in the fourth century of the Hegira and were fused into the Baghdad school. At the time, there was one university established for the study of classical literature, known as the Nizamiyya University of Baghdad. Here numerous works on poetry, rhetoric and lexicography were elaborated and mostly the professors there were Persian origin.

Chapter seven still discussing about Abbasids dynasty. In this chapter the author more focusing about *Sirat al-Rasul* and its authors. *Sirat* is the Arabic term used for the various traditional Muslim biographies of the Prophet Muhammad from which, in addition to the Qur'an and Hadith, most historical information about his life and the early period of Islam. It was more commonly known as *maghazi* and the term later popularized by the work of Ibn Hisham. Beside him, the early writers were Al-Waqidi, whose only surviving work is "*Kitab al-Maghazi,*" his pupil Ibn Sa'ad wrote the work called "*Tabaqat,"* Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari wrote the well-known work "*Akhbar al-Rasul wa al-Muluk*" means History of the Prophets and Kings, whose earlier books include the life of Muhammad. There was a poet who was noted for collecting and preserving ancient Arabic lyrics and poems in his major work, the *Kitab al-Aghani* (Book of Songs), and his name is Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani. He was born in Isfahan, Persia, but spent his youth and made his early studies in Baghdad. He was a direct descendant of the last of the Umayyad caliphs and was thus connected with the Umayyad rulers in Spain, and seems to have kept up a correspondence with them and to have sent them some of his works. In this chapter, the author also provides the biography of Saladin, Ibn Munqidh and also about one of the most popular books ever written is the book the Arabs know as *Kalila wa Dimna*, an adaptation book of the Indian tales of the *Panchatantra* that had been translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa.

Chapter eight discusses about the traditions of the Prophet. The Sunnah of Muhammad includes his specific words, habits, practices and so on. Scholars of the Abbasids period were faced with a huge corpus of miscellaneous traditions, some of

them flatly contradicting each other. Many of these traditions supported differing views on a variety of controversial matters. Scholars had to decide which the science of the *hadith* was to be trusted as authentic and which had been invented for political or theological purposes. So this chapter explains about the *hadith* study like *Sahih* books, related terms, the Musnads biography and also explanation about the four great orthodox rites – the Hanafite, the Malikite, the Shafi'ite and the Hambalite.

Chapter nine is the last chapter related to Abbasids dynasty. The scope of this chapter is about the translation of the numberless science from the Greek. Syria and Mesopotamia were both influenced by Greek civilization. The Greek works on philosophy and science were translated into the Syrian tongue and to these Syrian reproductions the Arab translators went their material. During this period the Muslim world became the unrivaled intellectual center for science, philosophy, medicine and education as the Abbasids championed the cause of knowledge and established the House of Wisdom in Baghdad (بيت الحكمة); where both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars sought to translate and gather all the world's knowledge into Arabic. It was a library and translation institute founded by the Caliph Al-Ma'mun. The fields that were up for this translation were Philosophy, Mathematics, Astronomy, Geography, Medicine, Alchemy and Encyclopedias.

Chapter ten discusses about Arabic literature from the capture of Bagdad down to the end of the eighteenth century. There are a lot of poets that have been highlighted in this chapter, one of them is Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Khaldun al-Hadrami or famously known as Ibn Khaldun. He is considered by many to be the father of a number of knowledge disciplines and of social sciences in general for anticipating many elements of these disciplines centuries before they were founded in the West. He was descended from the tribe of Kinda in the Hadramaut. Ibn Khaldun. He is one of the greatest historians of Arabic literature because he formulated in his Prolegomena a whole philosophy of Muslim history as conceived by a statesman and magistrate of the close of the fourteenth century. His work is called the Book of Examples (*Kitab al-'Ibar*); it is divided into three parts – The Prolegomena, the main history of the Arabs and neighboring peoples and lastly the history of the Berbers and the Muslim dynasties of Northern Africa. Beside Ibn Khaldun, al-Suyuti also played great role as the writer at the time. His name is Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti and he was an Egyptian writer, religious scholar, juristic expert and teacher whose works deal with a wide variety of subjects in Islamic theology. His father had been *qadi* at Cairo and afterwards retired from the world, so as to devote his time to reading the Sacred Book. There was a book, very famous and overshadowed all others – One Thousand and One Nights (ألف ليلة وليلة). It was collected over many centuries by various authors, translators and scholars across several countries. The main frame story concerns a Persian king and his vizier, his daughter and his slave, Shirazad and Dinazad. The remarkable point about this passage from the worthy chronicler is the very ancient and purely Persian.

Chapter eleven speaks about the Arabic literatures in the nineteenth century. Among the Arabic-speaking countries there is a more or less active stir in literary matters, donated by the publication of a number of newspapers and evidenced also by the production of various works in book form. This resurgence of writing in Arabic was confined mainly to Egypt and Lebanon until the 20th century when it spread to other countries in the region. Some of the most known writers in this period are Mikhail ibn Niqula (Syria), Elyus Boqtor (Egypt), Sheikh Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, (Egypt), Burtus Bistani (Lubnan), Burtus Karama (England), Jurji Zaidan (Syria) and so much more.

Last chapter discusses about writing, cultural production, and the periodical press in the 19th century. There were numerous of the newspapers and reviews published in the Arabic tongue, which appear not only in the Arab countries but even in lands where Arabic is studied. The great body of Arabic literature includes works by Arabic speaking Turks, Persians, Syrians, Egyptians, Indians, Jews, and other Africans, as well as the Arabs themselves. During this time printing in Arabic began in earnest, centered in Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus. Newspapers, encyclopedias, and books were published in which Arab writers tried to express their sense of themselves and their place in the modern world. The author also expresses up his personal view about Arabic language's future with thought-provoking messages to the general reader.

While several books have been written that seek to give the ordinary reader a background to the Arabic literature that are being made available today in English translation, none does the task more entertainingly than this book. It provides good assortment of clearly biographic references and the chapters are nicely composed one to another. It is hard to break off reading this book, which even in

English, it has a unique Arabic poetry – the message is delivered at some points, but the author seems focusing more into the stories behind the writers' background than Arabic literature history. There are a lot of important points that haven't been highlighted and presented in details. This book is recommended reading for Arabic literature students or anyone who are interested in a different perspective, but not to be taken as the main reference.

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