

INTRODUCTION

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This volume assembles the papers read at a symposium¹ on the diverse forms of literary reception and intertextuality in Middle Eastern literatures and Arabic literature in particular. The event was intended to alert to a desideratum in Arabic studies where questions of intertextuality have only rarely been systematically pursued² and where a comprehensive study in the various modes of literary reception is equally missing. This gap in scholarship is particularly striking in a discipline like Arabic (and Near Eastern) Studies that is widely confronted with powerful traditions and notions of canon. Innumerable early Arabic works have been discussed over and again in later literary texts thereby often crystallizing into canon. Though this maybe particularly true for religious writings, a no less impressive profane canon of Arabic literature exists that is widely made up of re-workings of earlier texts in later writings. Reception must, however, not necessarily occur over a temporal distance, it may as well be spontaneous: the much cherished *muʿārada*, the practice to counter an existing poem with a new poem that in terms of form and content matches the earlier – to mention only a particularly prominent example – emerged already in early Islamic times and was maintained until the present. Various other techniques of poetical playing on existing literary works that were developed later, have been highlighted in a number of recent studies on both the *qaṣīda*³ and the *ghazal* poetry⁴ focusing on problems of genre.

¹ The symposium was held on June 27th to 29th, 2001, at the Freie Universität Berlin. It was sponsored by the German Research Council, DFG, and the Aussenamt der Freien Universität Berlin.

² A rare example is Thomas Bauer, “Formel und Zitat: Zwei Spielarten von Intertextualität in der altarabischen Dichtung“, in *Journal of Arabic Literature* XXIV (1993), pp. 117-138.

³ See Stefan Sperl / Christopher Shackle (eds.), *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, 2 vols. (Leiden 1995-1996).

⁴ See Thomas Bauer / Angelika Neuwirth (eds.), *Ghazal as World Literature i. Transformations of a literary genre* (Beirut 2005), and Angelika Neuwirth / Michael Hess / Judith Pfeiffer / Börte Sagaster (eds.), *Ghazal as World Literature ii. From a literary genre to a great tradition: Ottoman Gazel in*

At the symposium we attempted to screen diverse fields of Arabic literature as to the reception processes they reflect and as to their intertextual potential, asking in what way authors had read earlier works. Though contributions⁵ to the present volume are concerned mainly with processes of reception, a note on intertextuality may not be out of place here. In a narrow sense, 'intertextuality' denotes the perusal of earlier texts in the creation of a new text. The earlier text being inscribed in the newly emerging literary work keeps looming behind, it is therefore part and parcel of that new text and should be recognized by its reader to achieve a fuller understanding. Whereas 'intertextuality' in this conventional sense functions as a descriptive heading for conventional forms of relationships existing between individual texts, in its broader sense, is ubiquitous: Texts as such do not exist in a vacuum, they are, to the contrary, unthinkable without the assumption of intertextual relations, since the mere classification of a text as to its genre presupposes a statement about similarities or dissimilarities *vis-à-vis* other texts. In this comprehensive ontological sense, 'intertextuality' serves as a qualitative reference not only for written texts, but for all kinds of meaningful utterances. The broader notion of intertextuality that emerged within a wider and more radical theoretical project that questioned the perception of auctorial intentionality as much as the unity and autonomy of the 'artistic work', would of course transcend the framework of any small scale project such as ours. According to Mikhail Bakhtin utterances as such are inseparable from dialogue and quotation, since they are "filled with dialogic overtones", with "echoes and reverberations of other utterances"⁶. The processes of literary reception that are discussed in our volume though classifiable among Bakhtin's "reverberations of other utterances" are hardly fully describable in these terms. Though reception theory does agree with Bakhtin's questioning of the autonomy of the 'work' and insistence on considering extra-textual factors in text analysis, it focuses on the literary work's impact on the reader who is considered to be targeted by the network of structures of appeal that are viewed to be implied in the text.

The contributions to our volume are perhaps best described as oscillating between the two focuses, the reflection of a text or a genre in another text or genre – intertextuality in the conventional sense – and the re-reading of texts under new perspectives – forms of receptions – practiced not seldom with the side-effect of subversion. Some essays fit both models, reflecting one particular text in another while presenting at the same time a subversive new reading, such as Christian Szyska's study of Ḥayyim Nahman Bialik re-read by Anton Shammas.

context (forthcoming).

⁵ Instead of those participants in the symposium, who did not submit an article, some other scholars: Kirill Dmitriev, Wolfhart Heinrichs, Angelika Neuwirth, Ulrike-Rebecka Nieten, and Christian Szyska, volunteered to fill the gap.

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. C. Emerson / M. Holquist (Austin 1989), pp. 91f.

It is true, that there are very early examples of literary works displaying intertextuality. The pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* closely follows an already established pattern. But its structure as such provokes questions that can best be answered in an interdisciplinary context implying reception theory. Kirill Dmitriev's contribution pursues the various readings of the *qaṣīda* form through the ages eventually proposing a new hermeneutic apt to decode its structure. — Poetry is without doubt the core part of the canon of Arabic profane literature, not only in *Jāhiliyya* but in later times as well. Geert Jan van Gelder introduces us to a non-individual poet, the "poet Anon." whose reception in classical literature had for obvious reasons escaped scholarly consideration until now. What makes the reception of an anonymous piece of poetry different from that of an 'onymous' poem? — Poetry is not confined to *belles lettres*, it is as we know, ubiquitous in Arabic literature permeating various prose genres as well. Gerhard Wedel discusses its peculiar presence in the 13th century biographical lexicon compiled by Ibn Khallikān. — With Thomas Bauer's presentation we turn to a genre of religious poetry that has gone through a six-hundred-years history of reception: the *badī'iyya*, a praise-poem on the prophet that at the same time exemplifies and glorifies sophisticated rhetorical tropes. The merger between a religious piece of poetry and a learned piece of rhetorical theory was to become a success story.

Whereas 'canon' in the framework of profane literature is predominantly represented by poetry, in the predominant Sunni religious tradition it is rather a set of theological dogmas, particularly those formulated in Ash'arite *kalām*, that occupy the most authoritative place. Shī'ite thinking, however, rather clinging to Mu'tazilite *kalām*, has at a later phase integrated elements of Sufism as well as *ishrāq* theology. Sabine Schmidtke introduces us to the techniques of reception applied by the prolific Shī'ite writer Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 906/1501) in his last great work, where he attempts to reconcile theology and philosophy. — With Bernd Radtke's essay we turn from individual texts to a meta-text. The 'Good Old Days', or – as they are nowadays often labeled – the Golden Age, have come to constitute a mythic model of social and religious consummateness that in present times is imposed as an ideal on the thinking of wider circles of Muslim believers⁷. It is worth remembering, however, that Islamic thinkers through the ages occupied a critical stance *vis-à-vis* this topos. Radtke pursues the reading of the topos in the writings of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.

The Qur'ān, the earliest Arabic text, is perhaps the first literary work to display obvious traces of intercultural intertextuality. The Qur'ān is not only strikingly rich in self-referentiality, including the practice of re-shaping earlier qur'ānic texts in new, later, contexts⁸, but it is equally replete with re-readings of extra-qur'ānic traditions. Indeed one might claim that many of those qur'ānic texts that are labeled Medinan cannot be fully understood within their 'original' social and cultural context without refer-

⁷ See the collective volume edited by Angelika Hartmann, *Geschichte und Erinnerung im Islam* (Göttingen 2004).

⁸ See Stefan Wild, *Self-referentiality in the Qur'ān* (forthcoming).

ence to extra-textual traditions. The Qur'an as a communication process between a speaker and his successively changing community that at some time transcended the mono-linguistic Arabic language community to include Jewish acculturated individuals as well, is a structurally as well as conceptually unique case of reception⁹. — Challenges from across the border of the Arabic language community did, of course, not cease after the first 'intercultural venture' had come to a conclusion, i.e. after the Qur'an was collected to become the Book, Islamic Scripture, but increased with the expansion of Islam. The Book soon triggered new intercultural encounters promoting a process of exegesis that was to involve a plethora of new cultural intertexts. Further new interfaces between Arabic and other Near Eastern literatures and traditions emerged. Early Islamic writing displays intertextuality and traces of reception processes that are no less intriguing than those of the Qur'an itself, again linking indigenous traditions with new foreign traditions – responding to the challenges of Hellenistic writing as the articles by Andras Hamori and Gotthard Strohmaier shows.

A cross-cultural encounter *sui generis* is the European transmission of a famous ode traditionally ascribed to the Jāhili poet Ta'abbata Sharran. The *lāmiyya*, made known through an early edition of Abū Tammām's *al-Ḥamāsa*, was translated into Latin and German several times before it reached Goethe who gave it a poetic rendering. Goethe's German version as well as his commentary aroused debates among Arab scholars. Wolfhart Heinrichs traces the poem's itinerary and discusses the valorization of Goethe's work, particularly that by the prominent Egyptian scholar Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir.

A classical problem of reception is tackled with in Ulrike-Rebecca Nieten's essay on the relationship between Arabic love poetry and songs of the troubadours. The powerful impact of Arabic love poetry can hardly be underestimated: what had begun as a literary genre, the Arabic *ghazal*, soon developed into a great tradition that was to imprint the literatures of Iran, India, the Ottoman Empire and even profane Jewish literature. The relationship between the Arabic and the European tradition of love poetry is contextualized with musicological considerations by Ulrike-Rebecca Nieten¹⁰.

Turning to modern Arabic literature we realize that the canon of works that serve as artistic orientation has substantially broadened. More often than not this canon is composed of western literature that is reclaimed side by side with the inherited Near Eastern canon, as a survey of modern and post-modern prose Arabic works has demonstrated anew¹¹. Susanne Enderwitz comparing the attitudes of both Latin American and

⁹ See Angelika Neuwirth, "Reclaiming the Tower of Babel: The multiple languages of the Qur'an", in Michael Marx / Angelika Neuwirth / Nicolai Sinai (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ See Susanne Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf: al-'Abbās Ibn al-Ahnaf und das Ghazal* (Beirut / Stuttgart 1995).

¹¹ See Angelika Neuwirth / Andreas Pflitsch / Barbara Winckler, *Arabische Literatur, postmodern* (München 2004).

Arabic autobiographies concludes that both Latin American and Arabic literature of the 20th century through the process of “savage rereading” and “disquieting rewriting” of the European Book themselves have come to produce models for world literature. For writers of the age of globalization, canons have given way to hybridity, to a concept of shared properties to be disposed of according to preferences unlimited by exclusions.

It is perhaps no surprise to notice that in Palestinian literature, Biblical texts and modern Hebrew literature present themselves as intertexts in the writings of two major authors. Maḥmūd Darwish in his poetry re-reads Biblical books, initially with the intention to subvert their Zionist understanding, later within a more universal project intending to integrate them into his own literary canon. The process discussed by Angelika Neuwirth mirrors a more general development in Palestinian thinking in general. — Turning to the literary orbit of the Israeli Arabs, Christian Szyska discusses the intertexts of Anton Shammas’ in his celebrated Hebrew language novel *Arabesque* revealing Shammas’ highly sophisticated reading of the Hebrew ‘national poet’ Hayyim Nahman Bialik. In this case, a complex process of reception at once subverts the meaning of the earlier text. The title of Christian Szyska’s article that seems to capture the essential dynamics behind the processes discussed in our volume, has inspired the – nearly identical – title of the book.

Among the most powerful classical texts that have exerted a lasting influence on modern literature, Western and Arabic alike, is the collection of *The 1001 Nights*. Sonja Mejcher studies the case of Ilyās Khūrī’s reception of ‘*The City of Brass*’, a tale that with its multiple mythical dimensions has been a challenge to various contemporary authors, among them Emil Ḥabībī who employs the tale as a sub-text in his picaresque novel “*The Pessimist*”, *al-Mutashā’il*. — A classical genre and mode of performance living on in a modern performance of women singers at the Abbasid court and contemporary Moroccan *shikhāt* focusing the themes of their love songs (*ghazal*) and the audience’s reception of their performance. — Not an individual text, but a figure of Islamic religious lore is the subject of Verena Klemm’s investigation who studies a modern reading of early Islamic tradition focusing the figure of Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. Her image was recast in modern writing and has found a particularly impressive form in the work of ‘Alī Shari‘atī, an Iranian reformer who projected the very ideals of Muslim female activists on the saintly figure of the ancient heroine. Verena Klemm traces the fate of that re-interpretation in recent political developments.

Our volume reflects the rich diversity of topics and approaches staged at the symposium. We wish to thank the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) for kindly supporting the symposium and the publication of the proceedings.