

## Foreword

I am a firm believer that the sum of our values, norms, customs, the way we think and the way we act is determined and defined by the period of time we live in. Everything is simply in a state of flux when and if considered in its temporal and spatial totality, crossing different stages of the chronology of being. One simple thought provides perhaps undisputable evidence to the argument above. Fortunately or unfortunately, we do not think, feel or see the way our own children do. However, it is also evident that for change to happen, it needs to have something a priori to be changed, and no matter how drastic is the change, traces of what used to be will always be there. Accordingly, history is a chain of events driving from each other and feeding into each other.

Pre-Islamic Arab poets in particular and writers in general are without-being-conscious-of-it 'historians' who depicted through prose and verse everything they saw, felt and thought. They were willing or perhaps unwilling spokespersons of their time. Through what they wrote, they told us all about their period. This implies that what they told us is also the product of their own individual feelings and view of the world. However, no matter how individual that can be, it forms part of the collective conscience of the society they belonged to. Moreover, these 'historians' were also the thinkers, philosophers and heroes of their epoch, which means they themselves helped shaping the map of mind and the rules of being-or lack of it- of their own culture, which gives yet further importance to the study and analysis of their works, which this current book attempts.

The challenge of exploring Pre-Islamic Arabia is twofold. First, the written sources which provide us with a historical account of the period are essentially written by non-local (e.g., Greeks, Romans) historians rather than Arabs. Pre-Islamic texts, essentially poetry, are perhaps the only ancient Arab documents that help us understand the history of that period, although they were not meant to be historical documents. Second, the puzzling almost paradoxical structure of the Pre-Islamic society makes it even more challenging to analyze it or give a logical account of it. This perhaps explains the lack of agreement amongst the scholars researching that period of history over a wide variety of aspects of the culture of Pre-Islam. The present book presents telling evidence of that. The 13 writers who contribute to this book not only come from different countries (Egypt, Germany, Greece, Jordan, South Africa, Spain), they also belong to different disciplines (Linguistics, Literature, History of the Middle East,

Arabic and Islamic Studies). If we just go through these contributions, we will feel the rich mosaic of ideas, perspectives and research-approaches used.

The scholars who participate in this book address in detail various aspects of the culture and history of Pre-Islamic Arabia. What they all have in common is that their studies are text based; departing from the main argument I defend above: What we write is the product of who we are physically and spiritually. We find thorough studies of the poetry of *Imru' l-Qays*, *al-Shanfara*, '*Antarah*, *al-Khansā'* and more. We learn about Pre-Islamic religions, narratives, trade, women, the concepts of life and death and much more.

This book is the second of the series *Textualia: Jews, Christians and Muslims in their texts*, which is dedicated for the text-based study of the immensely rich culture of each of these three religions and the complex multiculturalism produced by the co-existence of these different yet similar religions through history. The present book is yet another attempt to approach an era where Christians, Jews and Pre-Islamic people lived and co-lived based on the texts produced during that era. Islam itself cannot be understood well without exploring this era.

As an editor, I would like to express my gratitude to all the scholars who contributed to this book. The quality of their contributions shows the high caliber and the distinguished academic stance of each one of them. I also would like to specially thank Professor Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala for his relentless support and contagious enthusiasm. Without him, this book would have been impossible.

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