

especially in the context of rising urban cultures and the fascination of wealthy patricians with courtly life and manners. *Melusine* has become a popular topic for research in recent years, and this edition has laid a cornerstone for broader study into the popularity and reception of this curious work. Fortunately, funding for an initiative dedicated to *Melusine* research was recently announced. This two-volume set aims to appeal to both specialists and general readers, and it largely succeeds. While the size of the two volumes does not encourage casual reading, the set offers plenty for researchers from a wide variety of fields (literature, social history, printing history, gender studies, etc.) and should be a welcome addition to any academic or research library collection.

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SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad*. (RoutledgeCurzon Studies in Arabic and Middle-Eastern Literatures, 7.) London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. Pp. xiii, 214.

This study constructs the life of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (819–93) through his writings. Shawkat Toorawa has sifted through a prodigious amount of medieval Arabic literature (see the bibliography, pp. 180–92), but he must nonetheless speculate considerably because few of this author's works have survived. Toorawa suggests that the number of lost works attributed to Ibn Abī Ṭāhir indicates the degree to which books dominated intellectual life in ninth-century Baghdad: a writer could make a living by catering to a middle-class market for education and literature. Toorawa argues that Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's independence from patronage was possible only because "the transition from a predominantly oral and aural literary culture to an increasingly textual, book-based writerly one" (p. 1) had been largely completed. He identifies as his aim "to suggest ways in which Ibn Abī Ṭāhir is illustrative of that shift" (p. 2), stressing that his study is not intended as an in-depth exploration of how the new book culture impacted Arab-Islamic civilization. Toorawa's lively style is engaging, and his decision to construct a bookman's life through a focus on book culture is an important contribution to Arabic studies.

Toorawa unfolds Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's biography in nine steps: seven chapters framed by an introduction (pp. 1–6) and an "Envoi" (pp. 123–30). He explains the term "writerly culture" in his title as a partial translation of the Arabic term *adab*—the precise meaning of the term is debated among specialists—and defines a practitioner of *adab* as "someone who embodies and practices writerly culture" (p. 1). A discussion (pp. 7–17) of how writing and literacy were "widely adopted as a basis for discussions of cultural activity and as a standard of cultural progress" (p. 11) is followed by an examination of literary references to books, paper, and writing (pp. 18–34). Against that background Toorawa constructs Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's pursuits in the fields of poetry and storytelling (pp. 35–50) and in teaching and writing compilations (pp. 51–70). After a discussion of the influence of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's presumed Iranian descent on his writings (pp. 71–86), Toorawa analyzes his engagement in the genres of debate literature (pp. 87–101), including the controversy of *qadiml muḥdath* poetry, the medieval Arabic version of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*. Toorawa then traces professional networks through a survey of the instances in which Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's name appears close to the names of his Baghdad contemporaries (pp. 102–22). Toorawa believes that such associative proximity in the minds of others probably reflected the men's personal acquaintance at least, if not their friendship (p. 103). The study ends with a modern example of *Rangstreit* literature (pp. 123–29). Toorawa suggests that the independent-minded Ibn Abī Ṭāhir was a better representative of Baghdad's writerly culture than the patron-hunting Jāhīz (d. 868), one of the most accomplished stylists of

Arabic prose, although admitting that “we actually know very little with any degree of certitude” (p. 124) about his life. The same, of course, could be said of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir.

Toorawa is serious about reaching all those “interested in deepening their understanding of classical and medieval Arabic literary culture and history, and also . . . those with an interest in books, writing and authorship” (blurb, p. i). His choice of the Library of Congress transliteration system, a glossary of Arabic terms (p. xii), and the generous provision of dates reflect his concern for non-Arabist readers. Unfortunately, this monograph does not include Toorawa’s collection of the scattered lines of poetry ascribed to Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (provided in Toorawa’s 1998 University of Pennsylvania dissertation), nor does it repeat the detailed information about Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s connection with Iran published by Toorawa in a 1998 article (*University of Mauritius Research Journal: Social Studies and Humanities* 1:121–40). Moreover, Toorawa’s work illustrates a methodological predicament. Speculation and the willingness to seek answers beyond an existing paradigm easily appear alike because in both cases a scholar is pushing the boundaries of knowledge and understanding. Other reviewers of Toorawa’s book (Michael Cooperson in *Comparative Education Review* 50 [2006], 538–40, and Robert Riggs in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38 [2007], 107–10), while praising Toorawa’s research as groundbreaking, have acknowledged that the predominance of circumstantial and indirect evidence will make some readers uneasy, and I must admit that Toorawa’s notions of authorship, literary genres, and book culture did not fully convince me.

Toorawa presents his research as an act of scholarly justice to an understudied man of letters. But an author with entries in the major reference works (e.g., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., 2:357; 2nd ed., 3:392–93; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 7:663–64; *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 1:348–49; *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 1:138) can hardly be called neglected (p. 5). Toorawa discounts these entries (pp. 3, 35) because they focus on Ibn Abī Ṭāhir as the author of the first extant local history of Baghdad and do not discuss his poetry. Yet Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s poetry has survived only as scattered lines attributed to him by others. Toorawa is the first ever to collect them, but unfortunately he has excluded this corpus of evidence from this book, and thus Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s poetic voice is not always audible amidst the wealth of citations. Toorawa provides a date whenever he cites an author for the first time, but he never explains his parallel use of material from different centuries. While this synthetic approach allows for an indispensable pragmatism toward the ninth-century’s astounding literary heritage, it also allows Toorawa to avoid a detailed debate about the written genres of Arabic literature and the societal roles of poetry. That lines of poetry are found in diverse prose genres, from philosophical treatises to historiography to entertainment literature, suggests that language training aimed at the ability to express oneself on appropriate occasions in verse, or at least to cite some famous lines. Speaking in bound language as the hallmark of a good education is particularly important with regard to satire and humor because their impact depends on the discrepancy between aesthetic decorum and offensive content. Toorawa (p. 109) draws on Everett Rowson’s definition of licentious literature (*mujūn*), and his relaxed treatment of *mujūn* as just another genre of medieval Arabic poetry is exemplary. In East and West, contemporary notions of classical Arabic literature exclude obscenity and, in general, scholars avoid the discussion of *mujūn*. Toorawa’s interpretation of *mujūn* anecdotes about Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (pp. 29, 36, 42) convincingly shows the author as a wit never at a loss for words. Unfortunately, Toorawa does not examine whether Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s association with *mujūn* is connected to the loss of his poetic oeuvre. That a well-spoken man could ad-lib in verse does not make him a poet who could create art ex nihilo. Nor does the continued circulation of a writer’s most amusing quips render him a poet.

Toorawa provides a list of sixty-one titles ascribed to Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (pp. 63–70), though only parts of two books have survived (pp. 3–4, 180). The list combines Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s

writings in the annotated catalogue of the Baghdad bookman Nadīm (before 937?–995 or 998) with remarks, anecdotes, and citations by other ninth-century Baghdad literati and with biographical notices about Ibn Abī Ṭāhir that are preserved in later Arabic reference works. Yet Nadīm himself knew of only thirty-six original works of varying lengths and twelve anthologies of poetry (ed. Rizā Tajaddud [Tehran, n.d.], pp. 163–64; trans. Bayard Dodge [New York, 1970], pp. 320–22). Toorawa does not venture any explanation why certain of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's books have survived (p. 62), and he proposes instead a shift of focus. Toorawa studies Ibn Abī Ṭāhir because of what the man was not: neither a spectacular poet nor an outstanding prose stylist. He was not associated with any known patron. His literary output does not include panegyric, the religious sciences (*ʿulūm*), philosophy, or the natural sciences (p. 3). It is impossible to divine his doctrinal affiliations (pp. 73–75), though the beginning of his literary activities coincided with the last years of the *mihna* (827–48). This period, during which the Abbasid caliphs unsuccessfully used inquisition and persecution to impose the dogma of the creation of the Quran as the sole foundation of the theology and law, is mentioned only indirectly, when Toorawa compares Ibn Abī Ṭāhir with Jāhiz (pp. 125–26). Components of his name have been interpreted as evidence for an ethnic Iranian background (pp. 72–73), but Ibn Abī Ṭāhir did not participate in the *shuʿūbiyya*, the debate about the superiority of Arabs and the Arabic language (pp. 82–86).

Toorawa supports his thesis that the life of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir illustrates new societal uses of writing and books with references (pp. 134, 135, 144) to the role of Latin manuscripts in medieval theological education (he cites Mary and Richard Rouse and Brian Stock) and to nineteenth-century philology (Bernard Cerquiglini). Yet he does not discuss why Latin codicology, Scholasticism, and written French vernacular offer insights that are applicable to a ninth-century Muslim author who was not associated with theological, legal, or philosophical pursuits. Toorawa combines references to books, paper, and writing in the medieval Arabic sources with research on literacy (Jack Goody, Eric Havelock, Walter Ong) and the history of the Islamic book (Johannes Pedersen, Franz Rosenthal, Geneviève Humbert, Jonathan Bloom, Gregor Schoeler), but he does not adduce any specific codicological evidence to support his argument for a book-based intellectual life in ninth-century Baghdad. The bibliography cites a few extant manuscripts of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's works (p. 180), and Toorawa mentions differences between manuscripts and printed books (p. 170 n. 7). Research on Islamic codicology could be added to his bibliography (François Déroche, *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe* [Paris, 2000]; Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition* [Leiden, 2001]). His comment on indices as important evidence for book-based reading habits does not suggest familiarity with Arabic manuscripts (p. 134 n. 12). Although their page layout reflects reading habits, an important characteristic of the organization of medieval Arabic manuscripts is the absence of indices. The corpus of preserved ninth-century Arabic manuscripts on paper or parchment is extremely small, while there are huge caches of preserved Arabic papyri containing documents such as bills and letters. From an outsider's perspective, the source-critical disadvantage makes a forthright discussion of the methodological predicament even more imperative. Toorawa, however, should not be singled out for this omission. The riches of medieval Arabic literature vis-à-vis the enormous practical problems of working with Arabic manuscripts have made it acceptable for Arabists to rely on often-inadequate nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions whenever available.

The cooperation between oral and written transmission is passionately debated among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars of the Quran, prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), and Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) because the conceptualization of this process impacts every judgment concerning the text of the Quran and the historical foundations of doctrines. But the sophistication of these fiendishly difficult texts has ensured that their study is still dominated by

a quest for linguistic mastery, and debates on literacy and writing seem less crucial for the elucidation of meaning. Toorawa is reluctant to qualify *adab* as fully secular (p. 129), and his partial definition of it as “writerly culture” (p. 1) allows him to circumvent the sticky issue of the relationship between poetry (*shīʿr*) and nonreligious prose genres that are traditionally subsumed under *adab*. Ninth-century Baghdad is considered the first apogee of Arab-Islamic civilization, and it has received so much attention that it may have seemed superfluous to explore in any depth the historical development of literary genres and the historical context of the adduced sources beyond dates for the authors. Yet Toorawa’s ideas about how life is reflected in books would have benefited from a dose of skepticism, especially since he otherwise argues that these ninth-century bookmen were quite sophisticated.

Toorawa assumes “the rise of a middle class seeking education” and “the growth of a lay readership” (p. 123, cf. p. 33), but easier access to books is conducive not only to more reading and better education. Increasing the number of books in circulation necessarily increases the challenge of keeping up with their contents. The desire to stay abreast with the continuous growth of knowledge explains the attraction and the commercial success of anthologies and abridgments. Some readers, however, may resort to tampering with texts or even stop reading altogether. Despite the importance of Nadīm’s booklist for Toorawa’s view of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir (pp. 33–34), Toorawa does not explain why this tenth-century catalogue is a reliable and representative starting point for constructing the ninth-century circulation of books: did the thriving book market suddenly stagnate? Toorawa uses the terms “print run” (p. 32) for commercial copies and “mass publication” (p. 139 n. 1) for personal lecture notes when he discusses the distribution of texts. While he should be commended for raising those quantitative questions, his attribution of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s intellectual independence to a rising middle class and their thirst for education (pp. 128–29) reads like a modern paean to the virtues of free-market capitalism. Toorawa faults Jāḥiẓ for opportunism because of his dependence on patronage (pp. 125–26). But in the end both men sold their art to make a living: they just had a different attitude to the risks involved. Toorawa’s difficulties in finding sufficient evidence even to speculate about Ibn Abī Ṭāhir’s doctrinal affiliations or political inclinations do not suggest that the middle-brow marketplace outside the palaces cherished poets for their independent minds.

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ULRICH VON ZATZIKHOVEN, *Lanzelet*, 1: *Text und Übersetzung*; 2: *Forschungsbericht und Kommentar*, ed. Florian Kragl. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006. 1: pp. xv, 1–794. 2: pp. iv, 795–1389 plus CD-ROM; tables and 1 diagram. €278.50.

The editio princeps of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s Arthurian romance *Lanzelet* (ca. 1194), edited by Karl August Hahn, appeared in 1845. In the intervening years a number of planned new editions have failed to come to fruition. The fact that well over a century and a half stands between that initial text of the 9,445 lines of *Lanzelet* and this recent, gargantuan work by Florian Kragl is rather astonishing, not because Ulrich’s romance has ever been counted among the lofty courtly tales of the German Middle Ages—it hasn’t—but because of the centrality of the Lancelot tradition within medieval literature and because Ulrich was one of the very earliest Lancelot poets. Indeed, it is for those reasons that Ulrich’s story has traditionally attracted scholarly attention to a degree disproportionate to its intrinsic literary merit. Thus it is that specialists and generalists alike will eagerly welcome this long-overdue edition.

Yet to label this two-volume, nearly fourteen-hundred-page tome a “mere” textual edition is seriously to undervalue both the wide-ranging scope and the critical detail that Kragl