

gen. Vf. täte jedoch gut daran, historisch angemessen zu urteilen und eine rechtliche Schlechterstellung von Frauen und Andersgläubigen nicht nur im Islam wahrzunehmen.

Vf. bedient sich häufig einer „christlichen Lesart des Korans“ (z. B. der Titel Jesu), um christliche Glaubenslehren zu verteidigen – was er für spezifisch libanesisch hält. Doch ist diese Methode weder nur im Libanon zu finden noch sehr ergiebig: Sie hat kaum Muslime überzeugen können. In diesem Rahmen betont Vf. zu Recht, dass der Koran kein vollständiges Jesusbild liefert – im Gegensatz zur Meinung vieler muslimischer Gelehrter – und die dort zurückgewiesene Trinitätslehre nicht diejenige der offiziellen kirchlichen Lehre ist. Fraglich ist jedoch, wie Vf. allen Ernstes zu der Meinung gelangt, die koranische Ablehnung von Inkarnation und Trinität sei eine vorweggenommene Verurteilung späterer innerislamischer Häresien; in den ersten 300 Jahren finde sich angeblich keinerlei Zeugnis für die Ablehnung der Gottheit Jesu. Völlig abwegig ist es ferner, die Basmala als islamische Trinitätsformel zu bezeichnen und zur Erklärung der christlichen Trinitätslehre anzuführen, ein Christ kenne Gottes Innenleben etwas besser – „wie einen Wassertropfen unter dem Mikroskop“. Dass die christliche Dreifaltigkeitslehre mit dem Offenbarungsverständnis zu tun hat – in dem er zu Recht den wirklichen Unterschied zwischen Islam und Christentum sieht –, kommt Vf. nicht in den Sinn. Interessant ist dagegen die Auslegung von Sure 5,17, derzufolge ungläubig seien, die sagen: „Gott ist Christus, der Sohn Marias“: Damit werde lediglich die Vermischung von Vater und Sohn zurückgewiesen, denn Gott (Vater) ist tatsächlich nicht Christus.

Fazit: Das Buch verfolgt ein äußerst bedeutsames Anliegen, sc. beide Religionen verständlich zu machen und miteinander ins Gespräch zu bringen. Die Umsetzung kann jedoch leider nicht als gelungen bezeichnet werden.

Am Ende des Werks findet sich ein Literaturverzeichnis, das fast nur ältere Literatur auflistet. Störend wirken hier wie im gesamten Buch zahlreiche Schreibfehler bei Autoren- wie anderen Namen und Fachbegriffen.

Mannheim

Oliver Lellek

Roger ALLEN: *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism*. Cambridge 1998: Cambridge University Press. xxxvii and 437 p.

The pleasures of Arabic poetry would be lost on a reader who does not relish the subtleties of rhetoric. Roger ALLEN clearly relishes them. In the preface he recalls that most colleagues considered the writing of this work “intrinsically impossible or, at least, unwise” (p. x). The author humbly admits the daunting nature of a project that covers roughly 1500 years of Arabic literary history, and then graciously passes the buck to his critics.

The book has seven chapters. In the first three ALLEN sets the stage for his task. In “An essay on precedents and principles” (pp. 1–10) he outlines his metho-

dological approach. He summarizes the physical, linguistic, historical and intellectual background of Arabic literature in "The contexts of the literary tradition" (pp. 11–82). Then he rounds off the introduction with the "The Qurʾān: sacred text and cultural yardstick" (pp. 83–102). The next three chapters form the central part of ALLEN's book. He presents the development of the three literary genres – "Poetry" (pp. 103–217), "Belletristic prose and narrative" (pp. 218–315) and "Drama" (pp. 316–360) – from the Jāhiliyya to the end of the twentieth century. In the final chapter "The critical tradition" (pp. 361–406), ALLEN summarizes the Arabic discourse on Arabic poetry since the eight century.

In the preface ALLEN acknowledges the growing influence of literary theory upon the field of Arabic studies in general, and upon his own work in particular (pp. ix–x, compare p. 361). The subject of literary history – the development of the typical characteristics of a literary genre as represented in its more or less unique masterpieces – and its ulterior purpose – the lessons of literary history – constitute central issues of literary theory. ALLEN characterizes his book as "an attempt to present an alternative approach to the production of a survey of Arabic literature" (p. 7), yet he does not mention the methodological problems of writing literary history.

ALLEN gives precedence to "the literary dimension over the historical" (p. 4). and hence arranges his survey in chapters on literary genres: from the third chapter on the Koran to the seventh chapter on *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* and poetics. Although he acknowledges that the importance of "political and societal contexts" follow from tradition and "the societal function of the reader" (p. 4), he rejects the dynastic concept of a Sunnite Arabo-Islamic historiography – Jāhiliyya, Umayyads, ʿAbbāsids, decline under the Mamlūks and Ottomans, and the onset of modernization after Napoleon's occupation of Egypt – because it has "no internal consistency" (p. 6). ALLEN's sovereign display of the vast riches hoarded in the treasure troves of medieval and modern literature is truly impressive. His survey documents continuity and tradition, since he does not neglect the major authors of the period from 1258 to 1798. He is careful to link the literatures of al-Andalus and North Africa to the literary traditions of the central Arab lands. But the "traditional modes of periodisation of Arabic literature" (p. 6) enter through the backdoor. On the one hand, ALLEN always respects the temporal order so that he describes the literary development as a continuous process from the past to the present. On the other hand, he does not examine the impact of the Mongol invasion on the further development of the Arabo-Islamic civilization or the relationship between European Imperialism and the emergence of both Panarabism and Pan-Islamism.

ALLEN's examples of the social roles and political significance of Arabic literature since the *nahḍa* are insightful, and demonstrate his depth of knowledge and passion for this literature. Although he identifies authors and intellectuals as Christians, Jews or Muslims, he does not reflect on the role of religion in the decision to participate in the *nahḍa* or to immigrate to the Americas. His vivid descriptions of social settings for the practice of poetry in today's Middle East are a testimony to his perception of poetic traditions as "the most prevalent force in

the cultural life of society” (p. 219). He classifies this so-called modern literature within a system of conservative neo-classicism, individualistic romanticism and modernism, so that ostensibly postmodernism, unlike the internet, has not yet arrived in the Middle East. With regard to twentieth-century novels, ALLEN employs the terms *romantic* and *modernist* to distinguish between popular literature for entertainment and high literary art forms (compare: Roger ALLEN: *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*. Syracuse, NY 21995: p. 67). Moreover, he also translates *muḥdathūn*, which is one of the ninth-century names for *badīʿ* poets, as “modernist poets” (p. 147, 369 and 429). Given ALLEN’s expertise in the field of contemporary literature, it is a pity that he does not explain the rationale for his terminology and classification (compare: “Romanticism” (I. J. BOULLATA), in: *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. London/New York 1998: pp. 665–666).

ALLEN’s decision to describe the development of poetry (*shīʿr*), *adab* and drama in three different chapters represents the familiar triad of poetry, prose and drama. The history of Arabic literature traditionally focuses on medieval poetry from the sixth to the tenth century, because within the Arabo-Islamic system of literary genres Jāhili poetry represented, next to the Koran, the epitome of poetry and became the constitutive part of so-called classical poetry. Therefore, the chapter about *adab*, prose and narrative constitutes the most important part of the book. ALLEN argues that, in modern Arabic, “*adab* is essentially coterminous with the concept of belles-lettres in contemporary critical writings” (p. 2), though he also recognizes “belletristic works” (p. 222 *et passim*) and “belletristic prose” (p. 366 *et passim*). He employs “a belletristic definition of literature” (p. 4), according to which literature comprises “writings whose value lies in beauty of form and or emotional effect” (p. 2). ALLEN does not reflect upon the critical interdependence between the questions of which literature is available and how to define it, though he identifies the inadequate state of research on preserved Arabic manuscripts as the “crucial and enormous gap in our knowledge of Arabic and Islamic studies” (p. 6). But he widens his focus on aesthetic artifacts to include medieval *adab* literature because the body of medieval works that were considered *adab* ranges from instructional manuals – such as *Adab al-kātib* by Ibn Qutaiba – to highly artistic fictional texts that mix rhymed prose and poetry – such as the *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī.

ALLEN’s efforts to construct, from the diverse body of medieval *adab* literature, a prehistory of modern fiction is the most innovative feature of his survey, even though the result itself is not fully convincing. The problems stem from his understanding of the medieval concept of *adab*, as well as his use of the modern terms *fiction*, *narrative* and *prose*, whose meaning and applicability to pre-modern literature he does not discuss. His list of the relevant *adab* works and genres ranges from “compilations of information and anecdote, ... types of fictional narrative, tales of history and travel, and autobiographies” (p. 222) to popular narratives whose relationship with forms of oral story telling are still not well understood. The list reflects a false syllogism, according to which fictional prose narratives are belletristic works and *belles-lettres* is *adab* and so *adab* works are

narratives. It is this syllogism that allows ALLEN to conflate *adab* with fiction, narrative and prose so that narrative becomes the criterion of a list of *adab* works and genres that comprise religious literature – technically, *ḥadīth* are prose anecdotes about Muḥammad – as well as popular literature – serialized narratives such as *The Arabian nights* and folk epics such as *Sirat ‘Antar*.

ALLEN presents his decision to treat popular narratives next to artistic prose as a critical gesture of class-consciousness: “The generic divide that appears to separate elite and popular literature is, ... essentially a misleading one” (p. 281). He argues that the stylistic peculiarity of mixing prose with poetry appears in high-brow and low-brow texts alike, which furthermore share stories and themes. Since all texts discussed by ALLEN originated within the context of medieval Arabo-Islamic civilization, the ability of stories and themes to cross the class divide of written/oral literature seems logical. But despite his inclusive understanding of *adab*, ALLEN does not discuss the implications of the fact that the coexistence of verse and prose also appears widely in the learned prose of non-aesthetic texts – such as Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. If according to the literary evidence poetry and prose are so closely intertwined in medieval texts across the board, what are the functions of verses in prose texts? Is language bound by meter and rhyme considered a superior means of verisimilitude? Why are poetry and prose usually considered to be separate, even discrete, modes of expression? ALLEN does not examine these problems and thus his treatment of *adab* represents the traditional approach to medieval prose, in which interspersed verses are removed from the works to produce texts that are pure prose (as an example for this strategy, see: Fedwa MALTI-DOUGLAS: *Structures of Avarice: The Bukhalā’ in Medieval Arabic Literature*. Leiden 1985; for a first effort to approach the stylistic phenomenon, see: Wolfhart HEINRICHS: “Prosimetrical Genres in Classical Arabic Literature”, in: Joseph HARRIS/Karl REICHL (eds.), *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*. Cambridge, MA 1997: pp. 249–275).

ALLEN regards the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, to which he has contributed as well (p. 9), as the scholarly counterpart to his survey: “I wish to emphasize ... that it is not intended for my fellow-scholars” (*ibid.*). Consequently, he presents the text without scholarly footnotes, and instead he has added a “Guide to further reading” (p. 407–416) and a chronological table, in which both events and people are listed to relate, first, the world to the Middle East and, second, political history to literature (pp. xiv–xxxvii). ALLEN, however, has adopted the transliteration system of the Library of Congress, which seems surprisingly technical for his target audience of non-specialists. In addition, even names and adjectives with reasonably well-established Anglicized forms are formally transliterated: al-Kūfah and al-Baṣrah; ibn Ḥazm and ibn Khaldūn; the Umāwī and ‘Abbāsī caliphs; Jamāl ‘Abd al-nāṣir and Khalil Jubran. One may also wonder why, in a survey of Arabic literature, Nasser is cross-indexed and Kahlil Gibran, whose works have been bestsellers in their English translations since the 1920s, is not. In general, the index (pp. 417–437) is overly long and thus difficult to use. It may have been more functional, if the listings had been separated into categories, such as Arabic terms, names, places and topics. the regular occurrence of additional

details in brackets within the text, terminological inconsistencies, missing references in the index and typos – such as “T. S. Eliot’s famous poem “The Wasteland”” (p. 211) – furthermore suggests a lack of editorial resources for a very comprehensive project that otherwise seems so close to many people’s hearts (p. ix–xi). ALLEN has also published an abridged edition, a paperback with the title *An Introduction to Arabic Literature* (Cambridge 2000). The new version is roughly 200 pages shorter and marketed as a textbook, but only the blurb identifies it as an abridgment of the earlier *Arabic Literary Heritage* (p. i.).

Bloomington, Indiana

Dagmar Riedel

Tayeb EL-HIBRI: *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography. Hārūn al-Rašīd and the Narrative of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate*, Cambridge 1999: Cambridge University Press. 236 + ix. (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization).

Die rezensierte Monographie behandelt die Darstellung früh-‘abbāsīdischer Geschichte in arabischen Chroniken. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf der Analyse der Kalifenbiographen von Hārūn ar-Rašīd bis al-Mutawakkil. Das Interesse des Autors ist nicht auf quellenkritische Erkenntnisse gerichtet, sondern auf die Frage, was diese Texte in ihrer Zeit bedeuteten, welche Sinnebenen sie dem zeitgenössischen Publikum vermittelten. *El-Hibris* Hauptargument ist, dass diese geschichtlichen Texte nicht geschrieben wurden, um als Ansammlung von Fakten gelesen zu werden, sondern, dass sie vielmehr als Texte voller Allusionen verstanden wurden. Sie waren dabei Kommentare der geschichtlichen Prozesse, die sie oberflächlich gesehen lediglich als chronologisch geordnete Ansammlung von Ereignissen beschrieben. Die Allusionen bezogen sich auf Texte unterschiedlichster Genres, insbesondere aber auf historische Berichte zu Ereignissen während der Entstehung des ‘abbāsīdischen Kalifats, sowie der früh-islamischen und vorislamischen Epochen.

In den fünf Hauptkapiteln werden nacheinander die Darstellung Hārūn ar-Rašīds, al-Amīns, al-Ma’mūns, des Bürgerkriegs und al-Mutawakkils behandelt. Die Nachfolger al-Ma’mūns, al-Mu’tašim und al-Wāṭiq, erfahren keine ausführlichere Darstellung. Das erste Kapitel kann als Einleitung zu EL-HIBRIS weiterer Argumentation gelesen werden. Die Hauptaussage, dass ar-Rašīd nach seinem Tode in den Texten als vorbildlicher Herrscher idealisiert wurde, überrascht wenig. Seine Bedeutung in den Texten war aber weitergehend, da seine Biographie auch als eine Art Mikrokosmos der gesamten islamischen *umma* gelesen wurde. Die Abfolge der zwei Hauptperioden seiner Herrschaft, goldene Epoche und Niedergang, wurde durch eine Vielzahl von Hinweisen mit dem Ablauf der frühislamischen Geschichte parallelisiert.

Am interessantesten sind die drei folgenden Kapitel, die zeigen wie komplex und vielschichtig die Darstellung der beiden Brüder al-Amīn und al-Ma’mūn, sowie des Bürgerkrieges zwischen ihnen war. Diese Komplexität wurde häufig als Widersprüchlichkeit oder mangelnde Organisation der Chroniken interpretiert.