



Classical Arabic Stories: An Anthology

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Short fiction was an immensely innovative art in the medieval Arab world, providing the perfect vehicle for transmitting dazzling images of life and experiences as early as pre-Islamic times. These works also speak to the urbanization of the Arab domain after Islam, mirroring the bustling life of the Muslim Arabs and Islamized Persians and reflecting the sure stamp of an urbanity that had settled very staunchly after big conquests. All the noises and voices of the Umayyads and Abbasids are here. One can taste the flavor of Abbasid food, witness the rise of slave girls and singers, and experience the pride of state. Reading these texts today illuminates the wide spectrum of early Arab life and suggests the influences and innovations that flourished so vibrantly in medieval Arab society. The only resource of its kind, Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *Classical Arabic Stories* selects from an impressive corpus, including excerpts from seven seminal works: Ibn Tufail's novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; *Kalila wa Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa; *The Misers* by al-Jahiz; The Brethren of Purity's *The Protest of Animals Against Man*; *Al-Maqamat* (The Assemblies) by al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri; *Epistle of Forgiveness* by al-Ma'arri; and the epic romance, *Sayf Bin Dhi Yazan*. Jayyusi organizes her anthology thematically, beginning with a presentation of pre-Islamic tales, stories of rulers and other notables, and thrilling narratives of danger and warfare. She follows with tales of love, religion, comedy, and the strange and the supernatural. Long assumed to be the lesser achievement when compared to Arabic literature's most celebrated genre-poetry-classical Arabic fiction, under Jayyusi's careful eye, finally receives a proper debut in English, demonstrating its unparalleled contribution to the evolution of medieval literature and its sophisticated representation of Arabic culture and life.

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Editorial Review

Review

Extremely readable and at times utterly captivating, this anthology presents previously untranslated narratives and challenges the hegemony of an all-embracing Western canon. Salma Khadra Jayyusi's work will be of interest to all students of comparative literature and multiculturalism and will give the discerning reader lasting enjoyment and be read over and over again. (Khaldoun Al Shamaa, author of *Modern Arabic Literary Theory: From Literary Criticism to Cultural Critique*)

If in their fame the *Arabian Nights* represent the visible side of the moon of Arabic story-telling, this anthology for the first time discloses the hidden side, a world largely unknown to the wider public yet one even more varied than the *Nights* and every bit as rich, profound, humorous, and wise. A new realm of world literature is here explored. (Stefan Sperl, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London)

Classical Arabic Stories is a rare combination of scholarship and entertainment, providing a road map of medieval Arab prose fiction. In this great anthology, Salma Khadra Jayussi has done a great service by bringing a wonderful literary heritage out from under the shadows of neglect. The book serves as a portal through which Western readers can encounter a neglected medieval culture and enjoy tales of passion, madness, comedy, and wisdom. (Robert Irwin, editor of *The Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* and author of *Camel*)

Dr. Jayyusi's anthology is a good contribution to Arabic literature in English translation. It demonstrates, among other things, that the art of classical Arabic prose narratives is worthy of deeper study by scholars... (Issa J. Boullata *Review of Middle East Studies*)

About the Author

Salma Khadra Jayyusi is the author of the two-volume *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry* and the editor of *Modern Arabic Fiction: An Anthology*; *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*; *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*; *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, and general editor of the award-winning *The City in the Islamic World*. The winner of the Sultan al-Owais Cultural and Scientific Achievement Prize, the Edward Said Award for Career Excellence, the award of the Olive Branch Organization in Lebanon for "Cultural Accomplishment," and the award of the Ministry of Higher Education in Riyadh for services to Arab civilization, she is the founder and director of *PROTA*, for the translation of choice selections from Arabic literature classical and modern, and *East-West Nexus*, dedicated to the study of Arabic civilization and cultural achievements.

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