

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/BSO>

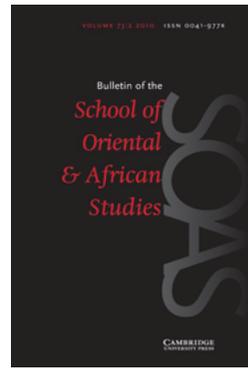
Additional services for *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Anna Contadini (ed.): *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*. (Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1: The Near and Middle East.) 272 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007. €99. ISBN 978 90 04 15722 4.

Anna McSweeney

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies / Volume 73 / Issue 02 / June 2010, pp 316 - 318

DOI: 10.1017/S0041977X10000157, Published online: 23 June 2010

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0041977X10000157

How to cite this article:

Anna McSweeney (2010). Review of Anna Contadini 'Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts' Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 73, pp 316-318 doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000157

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

prophet. At the time of the decline of Abbasid imperial power, these canonical texts conflated Arab, post-Roman and post-Sasanian cultural practice into a coherent Islamic sacralized tradition and vision of the past with the Prophet at its centre.

Although Marsham considers other ritual and material elements of caliphal accession, he focuses on the *bayʿa* and *wilāyat al-ʿahd* (the latter not being practised after the ninth century) as the main threads of his analysis. The title of his book, however, evokes the expectation of an exploration of the whole inauguration ritual where the central element of the *bayʿa* is treated as one of its parts and systematically, not occasionally, analysed in relation to other ritual elements such as space, time, movement, emblems, actors, the body of the deceased predecessor and so on. This study, therefore, is less a work referring to methodological outlines and problems of ritual research, and more a meticulous – and much-needed – analysis of textual evidence for the *bayʿa*. This focus allows the author to analyse the *bayʿa* in the context of the changing political, societal, administrative, religious and scholarly conditions. The book impresses particularly because of the author’s critical treatment of the sources and resulting historical approach. Andrew Marsham has not only filled an important gap by presenting a comprehensive study of the caliphal *bayʿa* up to the tenth century, his study is also an example of how to deconstruct a normative view of Islamic history that uncritically takes classical sacralizing Sunni interpretations of the Muslim past for granted.

Almut Höfert

ANNA CONTADINI (ed.):

Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts.

(Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1: The Near and Middle East.)
272 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007. €99. ISBN 978 90 04 15722 4.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000157

Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts is a volume of thirteen articles taken from an international conference organized by the editor, Anna Contadini, at the School of Oriental and African Studies in September 2004. The book was awarded the Iranian Ministry of Culture’s 2010 prize for the International Book of the Year in Islamic art.

Its focus is on early Arab manuscripts and the relationship between image and text. This approach, which looks at the manuscript as a whole rather than separating image from text, is one which has been developed in European scholarship and particularly in medieval art. In Islamic art, however, images and text have tended to be studied in isolation from each other. In Ettinghausen’s groundbreaking book *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1962) for example, the images have been taken out of their context and divorced from their texts. This new volume places context at the centre of its examination of a variety of early Arab manuscripts and highlights the “indelible” relationship between image, text and book. This approach, Contadini argues in the first article on theoretical issues, shifts the perspective from a traditional, hierarchical, aesthetic (and often chronological) comparison of images which happen to be found within texts, to an approach which insists on the relevance of the economic, political and cultural contexts, for a full understanding of the manuscript as a whole.

The thirteen articles are studies of illustrated Arabic language texts which were made across the Islamic world from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries.

The volume is organized into four sections according to subject matter and function of the manuscripts and the author's approach, addressing first theoretical issues, followed by scientific manuscripts, literary manuscripts and finally European connections. This thematic organization brings a fresh perspective on the manuscripts, as it draws attention to the importance of the function of the manuscript within its appropriate cultural context, rather than following a more traditional chronological or geographical approach.

Two essays introduce important issues in the study of Arab painting. The first, by Contadini, argues for the contextualization of Arab painting within the study of Islamic manuscripts, as explained above. The second, by Oleg Grabar, looks at the meaning of the problematic term "Arab painting" and argues that the terms "Arab" and "Arabic" should be used only when referring to texts and language, and that dynastic terms (so "Fatimid painting" for example) should be used to classify images in the texts.

The second section includes five articles dedicated to the often neglected study of scientific manuscripts. Michael Rogers looks at the role of Dioscorides in the Islamic tradition of herbal manuscripts, which highlights the changing relationship between text and image over time and its impact on the type of illustrations included in the manuscripts. Moya Carey focuses on the iconographic origins of al-Sufi's *Kitāb ṣuwar al-kawākib al-thābita*, a treatise on constellations with prose text, tables of data and labelled line images which help the astronomy student to memorize the positions of the stars in the night sky.

This section also includes three articles on the sources and meanings of the various representations of real and fantastical animals in scientific manuscripts: the *Kitāb al Diryāq* (J. Kerner), the *Bada'i al-Akwan* (R. Kruk) and *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* (P. Berlekamp).

The section on literary manuscripts includes two discussions on al-Hariri's *Maqamat*. The first by Geoffrey King looks at the representations of graves and graveyards in early *Maqamat* manuscripts and compares them with real, brick gravemarkers in a twelfth- or thirteenth-century Jewish cemetery on the coast of Oman, arguing that the similarities between them reflect a period of interlinked cultures and forms within the Jewish, Christian and Islamic worlds. The second, by Robert Hillenbrand, examines the important issue of double-page frontispiece design in Arabic manuscripts, focusing on the celebrated "Schefer-Hariri" *Maqamat* of 1237 AD.

Cynthia Robinson revisits her study of the unique illustrated manuscript from Al Andalus, the thirteenth-century *Hadith Bayād wa Riyād*, looking at the subject matter of the images and their stylistic relationship with Arabic manuscript painting from the eastern Islamic world.

The formal body of text is not the only kind of text which informs our understanding of an image within a manuscript; the caption of an image, written by the calligrapher and contemporary with the main text, can act as an intermediary between the viewer and the calligrapher, the text and the image. Bernard O'Kane studies the use of captions in Arabic manuscripts, focusing on *Kalila wa Dimna* manuscripts, the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century illuminated animal fables.

In the fourth section, on European connections, Emilie Savage-Smith deals with the origins and influences of anatomical illustrations in Arabic manuscripts, which were dominated by rather abstract, geometrical forms, and discusses the transmission of anatomical knowledge from the eastern Islamic world to the western European world. The final essay by Charles Burnett develops this idea of the transmission of knowledge from east to west, focusing not on one particular manuscript or type of manuscript, but on how diagrams and illustrations in Arabic manuscripts were interpreted and reused in a European context.

The volume is beautifully illustrated with eighty-four, full page, colour images collected at the end, and black and white images integrated within the texts. The inclusion of the introductory bibliography is a useful addition for further research, particularly the catalogue of exhibitions and collections where Arab painting material can be found. This is an essential text for any student or scholar of Islamic art which brings to the fore a fascinating body of new or often neglected material, within a contextual approach which provides a blueprint for the future study of Arabic manuscripts.

Anna McSweeney

FAHD AL-SEMMARI (ed.); SALMA K. JAYYUSI (trans.):

A History of the Arabian Peninsula.

viii, 312 pp. London: I. B. Tauris, in association with the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, Riyadh, 2010. £35. ISBN 978 1 84511 688 0.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000169

This book consists of translations of sixteen articles originally published in Arabic between 1975 and 1998 in the journal *al-Dārah*, edited at the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives in Riyadh. Most of the authors are scholars who worked or are working in Saudi Arabia, among them ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Uthaymīn, retired professor of modern history at King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, who contributed three chapters. Fahd al-Semmari, secretary-general of the King Abdul Aziz Foundation and current editor-in-chief of *al-Dārah*, selected the articles, and Salma Khadra Jayyusi, a literary scholar, poet and former faculty member at the universities of Khartoum, Algiers and Constantine, translated them.

The chapters mainly deal with the history of the areas within the contemporary borders of Saudi Arabia in the Umayyad age, the period preceding the Wahhabi movement and the periods of Saudi rule until the mid-twentieth century. Two chapters deal with Yemen and Egypt, but these focus on the influence of the Wahhabi mission in the two regions. The areas of today’s Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and Oman are almost excluded, so this volume presents studies in the wider, and mainly modern, history of Saudi Arabia rather than in the history of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole.

Although the volume lacks a proper introduction and conclusion to link the chapters and produce a single consistent narrative, the selection and ordering of the chapters presents the history of Arabia in a specific way. In the Umayyad age, a variety of factors related to the Muslim conquests led to the emigration of tribesmen from the Banū Ḥanīfah (to whom the genealogy of the House of Saud is frequently traced back) from the Arabian Peninsula to Iraq, Syria and North Africa. Thereafter, centuries passed in which Arabian society remained divided into sedentary people and nomads, conflicts between families and tribes prevailed, in Najd in particular, people performed polytheist rites, such as worship of the dead. In the eighteenth century then, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb preached monotheism, as it was practised in the early Muslim community. His mission overcame opposition from other religious scholars and spread from al-Dir‘īyah, the capital of the Saudi rulers, to wider parts of the Arabian Peninsula and even to Egypt, where it influenced the teachings of Muḥammad ‘Abduh in the nineteenth century.