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## ***A World of Beasts: A Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Arabic Book on Animals (the Kitāb Na't Al-ayawān) in the Ibn Bakhtīshū' Tradition.* By Contadini. pp. xii, 209. Leiden, Brill, 2012.**

Sheila R. Canby

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## Reviews of Books

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A WORLD OF BEASTS: A THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ILLUSTRATED ARABIC BOOK ON ANIMALS (THE *KITĀB NA'T AL-ḤAYAWĀN*) IN THE IBN BAKHTĪSHŪ' TRADITION. By ANNA CONTADINI. pp. xii, 209. Leiden, Brill, 2012.

doi:10.1017/S1356186312000363

*A World of Beasts* is a long-awaited, very welcome addition to the small but growing literature on illustrated Arab manuscripts. While essentially a monograph on a single thirteenth-century manuscript, the *Kitāb Na't al-Ḥayawān* in the British Library (Or. 2784), Contadini's book provides far more than a simple description and stylistic analysis of a pre-Mongol scientific manuscript. The thorough description of all of the physical properties of the manuscript, its textual components, its illustrations and their relationship to related images in other texts, and Contadini's arguments for and against possible sources of patronage and provenance broaden the frame of this book substantially. Through the extensive footnotes Contadini not only draws the reader's attention to a wide range of publications that directly or tangentially treat Arab painting but also are used to support her points and refute the arguments of others. These are interesting and erudite but make for very slow reading of her main text. On the other hand, the exhaustive notation of literature, *comparanda*, and other information contained in the footnotes is a goldmine for anyone wishing to work on pre-Mongol manuscripts.

Using her 1992 PhD thesis as a point of departure, Contadini has travelled widely looking at manuscripts and read voraciously to arrive at a deep understanding of the context in which such a manuscript would have been produced. Chapter Two includes a detailed description of the manuscript, a chart mapping the page-by-page relationship of text to image, and reference to the inks and pigments used, which is enhanced by the results of scientific analysis of pigments contained in an appendix at the end of the book. Next Contadini reviews the literature and the various early copies of Ibn Bakhtīshū' 's *Manāfi' al-Ḥayawān*, demonstrating how the *Na't al-Ḥayawān* combines the zoological tradition of Aristotle with the medical tradition of Ibn Bakhtīshū', an eleventh-century Nestorian physician serving at the court of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. Thus, the *Na't al-Ḥayawān* is a compilation of two primary texts by an unknown author. Contadini notes that the aim of the book was to elicit wonder at the qualities of animals. A very interesting discussion of Ibn Bakhtīshū' includes information about Jundishapur in Persia, where Ibn Bakhtīshū' 's ancestors were said to have practiced medicine in a more empirical, less theoretical way than those who followed the Galenic tradition (p. 44). Whether or not the Jundishapur hospital ever existed is unclear, but the dynasty of doctors into which Ibn Bakhtīshū' was born ensured his high status at the Abbasid court. On the Aristotelian side, Contadini notes that the text is not a direct translation from Aristotle but may have been based on a pseudo-Aristotle text transmitted in the sixth century at the Byzantine court by Timotheus of Gaza. While none of the

lines of transmission is beyond question, Contadini provides the various explanations with customary thoroughness.

Chapters Four and Five deal with the illustrations, first of human figures and next of animals. This section includes a number of comparisons, illustrated as text figures in black and white, to images in other manuscripts and architectural settings. The illustrations from which many of these details come also appear as colour images at the end of the book. Contadini questions the inclusion of four illustrated frontispieces and delves deeply into their iconography. She identifies the figures in the frontispieces as a sage, possibly a Christian, facing the compiler of the book, a scholar-prince and attendants facing a ruler-prince and attendants, Aristotle and a pupil facing a pair of lions and Ibn Bakhtīshū' and a pupil facing a man and woman. In addition to a painstaking analysis of the art-historical analogues and predecessors of these figures, Contadini provides a guide to how to 'read' the images (p. 81). The chapter on animal pictures follows the same methodology and includes colourful passages from the text that explain some of the more outrageous behaviour of certain animals. Throughout both chapters Contadini makes comparisons with a Dioscurides manuscript of 1224 and an Ibn al-Sufi manuscript in Tehran, making the point convincingly that the illustrations of these three manuscripts are more closely related to one another than to any others of their period.

The very long chapter on composition, iconography and style continues the art-historical analysis of the illustrations and includes three grids that chart particular details and their appearance in or absence from the illustrations. This might be a bit of overkill, but the grid listing a number of roughly contemporary manuscripts and the points of convergence or divergence with the *Na't* is quite useful for students of Arab painting. The final two chapters on dating, provenance and patronage use the comparative material introduced in earlier chapters to lead to suggestions of what milieu is the most likely context for the *Kitāb Na't al-Ḥayawān*. While some readers might be frustrated that Contadini doesn't pull the rabbit out of the hat with a name, date and place, her conclusions are more honest than sensational and ultimately help situate many thirteenth-century Arab illustrated manuscripts in relation to each other, not just the one that is the focus of her book. She addresses the confusion of manuscripts attributed to Baghdad versus those assigned to Syria or the Jazira, pinpointing where scholars have made attributions on the basis of very dubious evidence. While some may quibble with details of Contadini's arguments, the case she builds over the course of her book is very well documented and persuasive. Aside from some careless editing, this book contains little to complain about and a great deal that advances our knowledge of medieval Arab painting and the milieu in which it was produced.

SHEILA R. CANBY  
*Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HINDU RITUAL; TEMPLES AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GODS. By MICHAEL WILLIS. pp. xiv, 375. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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This is an unusual and important book. It sets out to "ground", in the author's term, a vast range of textual sources in the archaeological evidence provided mainly by Udayagiri as it was refashioned by Candragupta II but also makes comprehensive references to the epigraphic and archaeological insights afforded by other Gupta, or Gupta-subordinate, sites. The volume consists of three long parts each of between 70 and 80 pages and each made accessible to the reader by frequent sub-divisions. They treat: 1.