

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume of collected studies in classical Arabic literature and Islam is the result of an international enterprise. It consists of sixteen chapters written by scholars of Arabic and Islamic studies from Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Given the recently increased interest in Arabic culture and Islam, exemplified by the public's demand for more in-depth information, this publication is dedicated to casting light on a spectrum of issues in the classical literary and intellectual heritage of Islam, which are—due to their universal relevance—of interest not only to specialists in Arabic and Islamic studies, but also to a wider readership as well.

The book discusses a number of aspects which characterize the literature, life, and scholarship in Arabic-Islamic society at different historical periods. While underscoring the complexity and progressive nature of Islamic thought in medieval times, it points to a cultural specificity of Islam that facilitated the advancement of intellectual life and the formation of “modern” societies, even by today's standards. Furthermore, the book highlights such aspects as the creative interaction of Muslim scholars with different cultures in their attempt to refine and add to existing fields of knowledge, and the high esteem that knowledge and education are granted in Islam in general. It deals with non-Muslim literary and scholarly activities in the realm of Islam (a notion that challenges the stereotype of the exclusivity of religious societies), and explores controversial issues such as feminism and Islam, and the role of female figures in early Islamic history as portrayed in the classical sources, to mention just a few topics.

Thematically, the studies presented here are united in their primary objective which is to pursue *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal* in selected classical Arabic texts. Methodologically, these studies have in common a rigid focus on primary sources, the use of philological-analytical approaches, and the due consideration they give to the specifics of the Arabic literary tradition. These aspects are worth mentioning since the application of theory-oriented methods and methodologies as offered by contemporary literary theory, cultural studies, and social sciences is also a distinguishing feature of the contributions included here.

The topics dealt with in the book have been arranged in an approximately chronological order. This should help the reader to follow, to some extent, the general course of historical and literary developments in Islam. A chronological rather than a thematic design was chosen to make it easier to handle the material, and the chapters themselves will demonstrate that each topic has its own special merits and concerns that fully justify their inclusion in this book.

Thus this volume hopes to offer original and fresh *Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, insights that intend to stimulate thought and further the appreciation and understanding of the complexity and distinctiveness of Arabic-Islamic culture and civilization.

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