SOME LATE ʿABBĀSĪD AND MAMLŪK BOOKS ABOUT WOMEN: A LITERARY HISTORICAL APPROACH*

BY

HILARY KILPATRICK

THE HISTORY of Arabic literature from the 12th to the 19th century has yet to be written.¹ This paper seeks to make a very modest contribution towards a better understanding of what may be termed the «Dark Ages» of Arabic writing, by undertaking a preliminary study of one particular genre, the books about women, in the domain of adab. In a sense the choice of subject, books about women, is arbitrary; I happened to have texts about women to hand. What interests me here are the characteristics and evolution of a distinct genre; books on misers, for instance, or secretaries would have been equally suitable.

The books I will discuss are, first, Al-ḥadāʾiq al-ḡannāḍ fī aḥbār al-nisāʾ² by the Andalusian ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Maʿāfīrī al-Mālaqī (d. 605/1208), second, Nisāʾ al-ḥulafāʾ² by the late ʿAbbāsīd historian Ibn al-Sāʾī (593/1196-674/1276), third, Al-mustazraf min aḥbār al-ḡawāʾir by Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (849/1445-911/1505), and finally the Aḥbār al-nisāʾ² attributed to the Damascene theologian Ibn Qayyīm al-Ḡawżīya (691/1292-751/1349). These are the only

---

* This is a revised version of a paper given at the first EURAMES conference held at the University of Warwick from 8-11 July 1993. Together with Dr Geert Jan van Gelder’s paper on al-Nawāʾī’s Ḥalbat al-kumayṭ it was in a session entitled «Post-classical Arabic literature».

¹ The most extensive survey to date is I.M. Fil’sinskii, Istoriya arabskoi literatury X—XVIII veka (A history of Arabic literature from the 10th to the 18th century), Moscow 1991, although much of it deals with the famous writers of the beginning of the period. For the 16th to early 19th century the first four chapters of A.E. Krymskii, Istoriya novoi arabskoi literatury XIX-načalo XX veka (A history of modern Arabic literature in the 19th and early 20th century), (Moscow 1971) are useful. The discussion of later Arabic collections of jokes in Ulrich Marzolph, Arabia ridens. Die humoristische Kurzprosa der frühen adab-Literatur im internationalen Traditionsgefl echt (2 vols., Frankfurt am Main 1992, vol. I, pp. 53-88) is also a contribution to literary history of the period. Yūsuf Ṣadān, Al-adāb al-ʿarabī al-hāzīl wa-nawādīr al-tuqalāʾ (Tall Abīb-ʾAkkā 1983) includes several excerpts from texts of the late 3rd/9th century on, relating anecdotes about bores (pp. 88-135).

© E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1995 Arabica, tome XLII
extent texts belonging to the genre which I have been able to collect; more are known to have existed, although they have apparently not survived.

For this investigation I have not taken into account sections about women in larger works, such as the volume on them in al-Saḥāwī’s biographical dictionary Al-da‘wā al-lāmi‘ li-ahl al qarn al-tāsi‘ or the chapter in al-Ibšīḥī’s adab encyclopedia Al-musta‘rafi fi kull fann musta‘rafi, because there the approach to the theme is determined by the organisation and character of the work as a whole. But any general conclusions about books on the subject of women also need to take some account of how women are treated in other types of literary work. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

1. **Al-ḥadā‘iq al-γannā‘ fī aḥbār al-nisā‘** is the only known work of its author, an Andalusian émigré who, after going East to perform the pilgrimage, spent much of his adult life in Damascus and Jerusalem, where Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn appointed him ḥāfīz of the Masṣūd al-Aqṣā after the reconquest of the city. His piety was renowned, and his funeral united Muslims and Christians in grief.

**Al-ḥadā‘iq al-γannā‘** is divided into 11 sections; it has no preface. The contents can best be given as follows:

I Qur‘ān on the disciples of Jesus  
II Qur‘ān on Eve, mother of mankind  
III Qur‘ān: 7 women, 6 of them with names  
IV Qur‘ān: Laylā al-‘Ayyāliya

XI Qur‘ān on Job and his wife  
XII Qur‘ān on Bilqīs and Solomon

---

2. GAS II p. 102 lists some further titles of books on women (here synonymous with books on poëtesses) which have not survived. I have not seen Ibn al-Batānī’s Kitāb al-‘Unwān fī makāyid al-niswān, which Fedwa Malī-Douglas discusses in her Women’s Body, Women’s Word (Princeton, 1991, pp. 54-66).

3. Abū l-Hasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Ma‘āfīrī al-Mālaqī, Al-ḥadā‘iq al-γannā‘ fī aḥbār al-nisā‘, ed. ʿĀ‘id al-Ṭībī, Tripoli-Tunis 1398/1978. The text was edited from an autograph MS, no. 3016 in the Chester Beatty collection, but the edition only covers sections three to nine. The Chester Beatty Library was kind enough to provide me with a microfilm of the MS. Page references are to the printed text, folio references to the MS. The MS. bears no title, and the editor devised Al-ḥadā‘iq al-γannā‘, as she admits, on the basis of a passage in the text describing the book as «muwaṣṣiḥan muntazīghan bi-mansūlata i-ḥadā‘iqi l-muṣṭamīlih ʿalā anwa‘in muḥtaṣibiyin» (p. 10). Unfortunately this passage is not by al-Ma‘āfīrī but part of a long quotation from al-Mu‘āfī b. Zakarīyā al-Nahrawānī, Al-ḥalīs al-sāḥīh al-kafi wa-l-anis al-nāṣīh al-sāfi (ed. Muḥammad Mursi al-Ḥūlī, vol. I, Beirut 1981, pp. 340-345); stylistically and in vocabulary it contrasts sharply with the rest of the book. But so long as no authentic title is discovered, Al-ḥadā‘iq al-γannā‘ does as well as any other designation.