now debating whether or not it has the material power and moral authority to lead a post-Cold War world, will be entertaining dangerous illusions.

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The volume covers what the editors understand to be the "belles-lettres" of the 'Abbasid age (132-656/750-1258), produced in the eastern regions of the caliphate (Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula), while a companion volume treats "technical" literature on Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period (Cambridge, 1990). It opens with three introductory chapters that provide the salient aspects of the historical, literary, and social background. The first is a concise historical overview of the political history of the 'Abbasid caliphate (H.N. Kennedy), the second discusses critically the concept of *adab* and its various interpretations by Arab and Western scholars (S.A. Bonebakker), and the third provides an exposition of the social context of tribal and ethnic prejudice (šu'ūbiyya) within which much of the literature of the period was written (H.T. Norris). Then follow six chapters on prose literature (pp. 48-145) and eleven on poetry (pp. 146-338), as follows: "Ibn al-Muqaffa' and early 'Abbasid prose" (J.D. Latham), "al-Jahiz" and "al-Sāhib Ibn 'Abbād" (C. Pellat), "'Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī" (M. Bergé), "'Al-Hamadānī, al-Harīrī and the *maqāmat* genre" (A.F.L. Beeston), "Fables and Legends" (H.T. Norris), "'Abbasid poetry and its antecedents" (M.M. Badawi), "Hunting, Political, Love, Wine, Mystical, and Ascetic Poetry" (G. Rex Smith, R. Rubinacci, A. Hamori, F. Harb, M. Lings, and A. Hamori, respectively), "Bashshār b. Burd, Abū ʾl-ʿAtāhiyyah and Abū Nuwās" (G. Schoeler), "Al-Mutanabbi" (A. Hamori), "Abū Fīrās al-Hamādānī" (A. el Tayib), and "Abū ʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī" (A. ʿAbd al-Rahman). "Literary criticism" is dealt with both in a general chapter (K. Abu Deeb) and in a special analysis of "Ibn al-Muʿtazz and *Kitāb al-Badi"* (S.A. Bonebakker).

The volume ends with two chapters on regional literature, one on Egypt (S.M. Ayyad) and another on the Yemen (A. el-Shami with R.B. Serjeant).

The treatment of the material is matter-of-fact and documentary. The chapters aim at providing basic information on the life and work of the individual author or on the genre under discussion, present the contents of books or poems, cite extensive passages in refreshingly high quality translations, and analyze their literary aspects: rhetorical figures, rhythm, assonance, meters, etc. This is literary history narrowly conceived, dealing with the nuts and bolts of literary composition. It also meets a
longtime need in the study of Arabic literature; there is nothing like it in English that covers as lengthy a time span. Particularly useful but disproportionately extensive is the treatment of poetry, which will henceforth constitute the student's first recourse in English; a special section on rağaz poetry, however, is missing. By contrast, prose literature is underrepresented (see below), although the chapters that are included are authoritative. The informative account of classical literary criticism by Abu Deeb is marred by his clinging to an outdated and largely irrelevant structuralist theoretical construct ("binary opposition" etc.); Bonebakker's essay on the Kitāb al-Bādi', on the other hand, is a useful summary of the issues involved and will be appreciated by students. The last two chapters on regional literature constitute the most original contribution and point the direction for future studies toward greater appreciation of the regional background of authors and of the particularity of literary movements.

The benefits of this volume for the study and understanding of 'Abbāsid literature in the English speaking world are therefore obvious, and this is neither the occasion nor the place to bring up points of disagreement or criticism that are of a more specific nature. However, as this book will be used by many who may have little or no prior knowledge of Arabic literature, it is necessary to make a few general remarks calling attention to some of its omissions and the resultant misrepresentation of 'Abbāsid literature they entail.

The single most problematic aspect of the volume is its very title and the literary categories it presupposes. The editorial preface does not explain the term "belles-lettres", but merely defines it negatively by contrasting it to "technical" literature "on such subjects as grammar, philosophy, history and law" (p. xi). This leaves the reader in a position of having to glean the subject of the volume implicitly from the actual contents. The subject, however, is 'Abbāsid adab, as discussed at length in Bonebakker's chapter, and it should have been so stated in the title. Since there is no single English word that covers the range of the Arabic term, to render it by the equally inadequate French term "belles-lettres" means precisely to impose upon medieval Arabic literature Western literary categories, something which Bonebakker rightly decries (p. 30). This editorial misjudgment could have been avoided by means of a theoretical discussion explaining the divergences between native Arab and contemporary Western conceptions of literary taxonomies. As it is, the categories of artistic prose and poetry developed by medieval Arab critics and succinctly expressed in an author like Ishaq b. Ibrahim al-Farabi (d. 350/961; see D. Gutas, "Arabic Wisdom Literature: Nature and Scope," Journal of the American Oriental Society 101 [1981] 63-64) are disregarded both in determining the contents of the volume and in Abu Deeb's chapter on "Literary Criticism."

The grave consequence of the choice of "belles-lettres" as an arbitrary category is that the uniquely Arab literary genre of adab anthology and its various sub-genres are not discussed, while writings that no medieval Arab would have thought of as constituting adab, fables and legends (1001 Nights and the various folk epics), are accorded a chapter of their own. This is not to imply that fables ought to have been excluded; but the reader should have been informed of the operative Arab aesthetic criteria. At the very least, Bonebakker's own relatively restricted definition of adab (p. 30) could have been followed. As it is, the entire tradition of adab anthologies, with masterpieces like Ibn Qutayba's 'Uyun al-aḥbār or ar-Raḡib al-Isfahānī's Muhādārat al-udābā', is excluded. The artistry in these anthologies lay not merely in the selection of material but primarily in its arrangement; it established a link between the associa-