Acknowledgments

World Literature and Its Times, Volume 6: *Middle Eastern Literatures and Their Times* is a collaborative effort that progressed through several stages of development, each monitored by a team of outstanding experts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Hebrew literature and history. A special thank you goes to Professors Roger Allen (Arabic), Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (Persian), Arnold J. Band (Hebrew), and Bill Hickman (Turkish) for overseeing each stage, from the inception to the end of the development process. Warm gratitude is extended also to professors who, along with the above-named experts, provided continuous guidance in their respective fields: Terri DeYoung, for Arabic; Raymond P. Sheindlin, for Hebrew, and Sarah G. Moment Atis, for Turkish. Middle Eastern Studies is replete with conflicting views and innovative perspectives; negotiating the information to produce the most objective coverage possible was, in the end, achievable because of the exceptional consultants, writers, and librarians involved, and their joint commitment to fidelity with respect to the historical and cultural experiences in their given fields.

For their incisive participation in selecting the literary works to cover, the editors extend deep appreciation to the following professors:

Roger Allen, University of Pennsylvania, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (Arabic)

Terri DeYoung, Associate Professor, University of Washington, Seattle, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (Arabic)

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, University of Washington, Seattle, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (Persian)

Arnold J. Band, University of California at Los Angeles, Department of Near Eastern Studies (Hebrew)

Barbara Harshav, Yale University, Department of Comparative Literature (Hebrew)

Bill Hickman, formerly University of California at Berkeley, Department of Near Eastern Studies (Turkish)

Sincere gratitude is extended to the following professors and subject-matter specialists for their careful review of the entries to insure accuracy and completeness of information:

Roger Allen, University of Pennsylvania, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Russ Arnold, Ph.D. candidate, University of California at Los Angeles, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Sarah G. Moment Atis, University of Wisconsin, Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia

Arnold J. Band, University of California at Los Angeles, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Scott Bartchy, University of California at Los Angeles, Department of History

Nancy E. Berg, Washington University St. Louis, Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures

Terri DeYoung, University of Washington, Seattle, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Nili Scharf Gold, University of Pennsylvania, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Barbara Harshav, Yale University, Department of Comparative Literature

Todd Hasak-Lowy, University of Florida, Department of African and Asian Languages and Literatures

Bill Hickman, formerly University of California at Berkeley, Department of Near Eastern Studies

Richard Kalmin, Jewish Theological Seminary, Department of Talmud and Rabbinics

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, University of Washington, Seattle, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Kenneth Moss, University of Pennsylvania, Center for Judaic Studies

Adam Michael Rubin, Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles, Department of Jewish History

Raymond P. Scheindlin, Jewish Theological Seminary, Department of Jewish Literature

Benjamin D. Sommer, University of Chicago, Department of Religion

Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, Indiana University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

For their painstaking research and composition, the editors thank the writers whose names appear at the close of the entries that they contributed. A complete listing follows:

Glenda Abramson, Cowley Lecturer, Oxford University, England

Wali Ahmadi, Assistant Professor, University of California at Berkeley

Dina Amin, Lecturer, University of Pennsylvania

Walter G. Andrews, Professor, University of Washington, Seattle

Russell C. D. Arnold, Finkelstein Fellow, University of Judaism

Carol Bakhos, Assistant Professor, University of California at Los Angeles

Zekeriya Baskal, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin

Michael Beard, Professor, University Of North Dakota

Nancy E. Berg, Assistant Professor, Washington University, St. Louis

John K. Bragg, Ph.D. candidate, University of Wisconsin at Madison

Warren Carter, Pherigo Professor of New Testament, St. Paul School of Theology

Ipek Azime Çelik, Ph.D. candidate, New York University

Miriam Cooke, Professor, Duke University

Jonathan P. Decter, Assistant Professor, Brandeis University

Terri DeYoung, Associate Professor, University of Washington, Seattle

Ellen Ervin, Ph.D., Columbia University; professional writer

Stephen Geller, Professor, Chair of the Department of Bible, Jewish Theological Seminary

Todd Hasak-Lowy, Assistant Professor, University of Florida

Persis M. Karim, Assistant Professor, San Jose State University

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, Professor, University of Washington, Seattle

Trevor LeGassick, Professor, University of Michigan

Pamela S. Loy, Ph.D., University of California at Santa Barbara; professional writer

Majd Al-Mallah, Assistant Professor, Grand Valley State University

Caroline Sawyer, Assistant Professor, State University of New York, College at Old Westbury

Raymond P. Scheindlin, Professor, Jewish Theological Seminary

Samah Selim, Assistant Professor, Princeton University

Anna Oldfield Senarslan, Ph.D. candidate, University of Wisconsin at Madison

Irfan Shahîd, Professor, Georgetown University

Benjamin D. Sommer, Visiting Associate Professor, University of Chicago

Paul Sprachman, Assistant Extension Specialist, Rutgers University

Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, Professor, Indiana University

Christopher R. Stone, Assistant Professor, Middlebury College

Kamran Talattof, Associate Professor, University of Arizona

Barry Tharaud, Professor Emeritus, Mesa State College, Colorado

Mark Wagner, Ph.D. candidate, New York University

Nadiya Yakub, Assistant Professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Douglas C. Young, Lecturer, Stanford University

Joseph Zeidan, Associate Professor, Ohio State University

For determining the transliteration strategy and reviewing the Arabic-, Persian-, and Turkish-related entries to insure consistency of spelling of foreign words across the volume and with Library of Congress format, the editors thank Mary St. Germain of the Suzzallo Library at the University of Washington in Seattle. For the Hebrew-related entries, they thank David Hirsch of the Young Research Library at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Deep appreciation is extended to Michael L. LaBlanc of Thomson Gale for his editorial refinements. Anne Leach indexed the volume with great sensitivity to readers and content. An additional thank you goes to Mary St. Germain for facilitating the indexing of foreign names in ways that promote future research. Lastly warm gratitude is extended to Danielle E. Price for editing, to Lorraine Valestuk for editing and proofreading, and to Monica Riordan and Lisa Granados for proofreading and organizational management.

Introduction

Romeo and Juliet may be the world's most celebrated lovers, but the couple could learn a thing or two from Khusraw and Shirin, a star-crossed pair from Persian literature who lived far longer lives and ended up happily united for a time before meeting their own tragic fates. Of course, this Persian twosome, penned into posterity by Nizami of Ganja, "lived" some seven centuries before Shakespeare's duo and contended with issues pertinent to their own environs.

Still, the two plots, whose similarities are as striking as their differences, form just one of a host of parallels between the East and West that emerges from a close look at some of the finest literature generated in the Middle East. Another is the set of functions served by literature itself, from origin tales, to scripture, historical and realistic fiction, social criticism, philosophical introspection, moral edification, and ribald entertainment. In the Middle East, the rich storehouse of literary works that achieves these ends is especially revealing because of its longevity, stretching from the world's earliest recorded poem (*The Epic of Gilgamesh,* 1700-1000 B.C.E.), composed in Akkadian, to a present-day mix of writings in multiple genres and languages.

Most notable for *Middle Eastern Literatures and Their Times* are the works in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew, the four major languages of the societies that people the region, each of them multifaceted in its own way. In the beginning, before there was scripture, man—or more exactly, a Sumerian king by the name of Gilgamesh—wrestled in story with the already timeless issues of his own mortality and the dynamics of human relations. Several centuries later, there appeared the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, a scriptural compendium of narration, beliefs, and laws (in biblical Hebrew) that accounts for the origins of the ancient Israelites and includes prescriptions for personal and social behavior. This and subsequent texts testified early in history to the factious nature of humankind, a point well-illustrated by the lately discovered Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of a separatist group committed to Judaism, the religion of the mainstream population in ancient Israel.

While the separatists extracted themselves from this mainstream, others, also deeply disturbed by the direction it was taking, set out to transform it from within, most notably the artisan-peasant Jesus. Jesus' struggle gave rise to a second scriptural work (in ancient Greek), the Christian Bible, which became the basis for a new but related faith, Christianity. Composed five centuries after the Torah, the Christian Bible would not, however, be the last word in major scripture conceived in the Middle East. That word would come six centuries later from the Arabs in the form of the Quran, believed to be a record of all the Divine revelations delivered (in Arabic) to the Prophet Muhammad. Regarded by his followers as a true prophet in the line that began with the Hebrew Bible's Abraham, Muhammad inspired a third faith—Islam.

Thus, over the span of a millennium, the same wellspring gave rise to three major faiths and their associated scriptures, a line of sacred texts that were intimately interconnected indeed. For the Arabs, however, literary tradition did not start with scripture. Already a pre-Islamic literature existed that testified to the lifeways and values of the pagan Arabs, as demonstrated by the poem commonly known as *The Mu`allaqah of Imru al-Qays*—an ode concerned with the capricious desert environment, personal renewal, the hunt, and sexual conquest.

Poetry would continue to dominate Arabic literature for a dozen centuries, and within this genre, the ode—in Arabic, the *qasidah*—remained a pre-eminent form. After the advent of Islam, a special type of ode gained new importance, the praise poem. A panegyric celebration of a patron's victories or military prowess, the praise poem could be considered a type of historical document, with the understanding that it originated as a complimentary work of art by a poet in a patron's employ (see al-Mutanabbi's "Ode on the Reconquest of al-Hadath," for example). Such odes sometimes functioned as ancient tools of self-promotion on the part of a patron-ruler, as advertisements for his virtues; in today's world, they would easily qualify as public relations. A number of these also reached poetic heights in content and technique (see Abu Tammam's "Ode on the Conquest of Amorium").

In time, Islam spread through Asia and Africa; in the Middle East, it became a driving force not only in Arabic but also in Persian and Turkish writings. The Quran proved to be a fountainhead of poetic and aesthetic output in the three Middle East literatures. Politically their societies dominated the region in waves, during which the separate literatures came to the fore, the spotlight shifting from one to another over a few roughly delineable periods. First came an era of Arabic literary predominance (500-1100s C.E.), then Persian (900s-1500), and finally Turkish (1400s-1800s) before each of the three literatures moved into a modern phase in the nineteenth century.

This was the last in a progression of phases often ascribed to the three literatures, starting with the *ancient* or pre-Islamic phase, advancing to the *classical* phase (from the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the nineteenth century) and culminating with the *modern* phase (nineteenth century to the present). The terms that designate the different phases, though familiar to many, are not to be confused with their altogether different meanings in the West. While the three literatures share some key elements, such as the profound influence of the Quran on their later works, each also maintains its own traditions, the pre-Islamic Arabic ode being a case in point.

Both the Persian and Turkish literatures likewise hark back to works featuring characters and values at the root of their societies (see the *Shahnamah* for the Persian, the *Book of Dede Korkut* for the Turkish).

Meanwhile, Hebrew literature in the Middle East experienced a separate trajectory, ruptured by unique ethno-historical developments—of conquest, exile, and return—during which Hebrew mostly fell into disuse as an everyday language. Its proponents nevertheless employed Hebrew to produce or help produce notable works in the biblical (e.g., the Torah), rabbinic (e.g., the Talmud), and medieval (e.g., *The Book of Tahkemoni*) periods before a concerted effort to revive the language and its literature was initiated in the late nineteenth century. The effort grew, despite formidable obstacles for writers and readers, propelling Hebrew literature in the Middle East into its own distinctly modern period in the twentieth century.

In Arabic letters, not all poetry was stately or deadly serious; there were poetic lampoons and irreverent verses, the poet exemplar in this last tradition being Abu Nuwas. Aiming probably to entertain the elite in Baghdad in the 900s, this literary rebel gained distinction for his erotic verse and his verse about the pleasures of wine drinking, despite the Islamic prohibition against it. Open to sacred as well as profane interpretations, the poems of Abu Nuwas reached literary heights and left audiences thirsting for more. But other rebels of the age met with a less happy fate, among them, the Islamic mystic al-Hallaj, whose martyrdom was documented a thousand years later in the verse play *Murder in Baghdad.* While poetry won the highest esteem in the classical era, prose forms flourished then too. There were assorted genres—the didactic animal fable (*Kalilah and Dimnah*), the popular narrative (*Arabian Nights*), and the anecdotal *maqamah,* a mixture of poetry and prose unique to the Middle East (*Maqamat*).

The tendency of the region's different literatures to feed on and into one another becomes readily apparent in the various prose forms. From India, the animal fable identified above found its way first into Persian, then into Arabic letters, its plot gaining significant new features at each incarnation. All this cross-cultural literary interaction continued the type of exchange demonstrated earlier by the scriptural line that began with the Torah and ended with the Quran, and