

Reid's discussion of Islamist and other challenges to pharaonism in the 1930s and 1940s, as the zeitgeist of 1920s Egypt faded into the horizon of a new political generation, is one of the best argued sections of the book (chapter 10).

Perhaps the greatest jewel in the story, however, is Reid's chapter 7 on "Copts and Archaeology." Nowhere else are the stakes in Egypt's contested antiquity so clear, and Reid's inspired telling of this chapter in the history of Egypt's underrepresented Coptic community restores it to its rightful place in the mainstream political discourse of the reform era.

*Contesting Antiquity in Egypt* does not so much answer as reframe the question posed in *Whose Pharaohs?* The meaning of Egypt's heritage is elusive, and the struggle over Egyptian identity is ongoing. For Reid, the historical balance of the struggle lies between the forces of imperialism and nationalism, in the central power of institutions to shape knowledge and identity. This framework is fundamental to any understanding of the relationship between knowledge and culture in modern Egypt, though it leaves open questions of economic imperialism outside institutional walls, tensions between science and religion, and class differences in Egyptian society. The remarkable legacy of Donald Reid's work belongs not just to historians, however. It belongs to everyone with an interest in Egypt's past, from its deepest sources in antiquity to its most familiar aspects today. Few other historians have brought us so close to understanding what makes Egypt Egyptian.

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*The Quṣṣās of Early Islam.* By LYALL R. ARMSTRONG. Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 139. Leiden: BRILL, 2017. Pp. xii + 342. \$165, €135.

In this groundbreaking work, Lyall Armstrong offers the first comprehensive discussion of "story-tellers" (*quṣṣās*) during the formative period of Islam. While the *quṣṣās* appear frequently in early Islamic sources, they have received little scholarly attention. As Armstrong aptly points out, they are typically dismissed as curiosities or as "second-rate religious figures" suspected of corrupting the faith (p. 1). Relying on works specifically addressing them, by Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Taymiyya, and others, as well as historical chronicles, biographical dictionaries, and works from the genre of Stories of the Prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), Armstrong presents a more nuanced picture of the *quṣṣās* and their activities. His study demonstrates that their role in early Islamic society was complex and varied, while underscoring the difficulties inherent in any study of a group that is both common and ill defined.

Armstrong begins by grappling with the problem of determining who the *quṣṣās* actually were. Given that the storyteller or sermonizer (*qāṣṣ*) did not occupy an official, paid position like the qadī or the amir and that even the function performed was murky, distinguishing the composition of this group proves problematic. Armstrong opts to err on the side of caution by including only those who are explicitly identified somewhere in his sources as *quṣṣās*. This creates a manageable list of 109 individuals who were active between the advent of Islam and the fall of the Umayyads. Geographically, they are broadly distributed throughout the early Islamic world. Chronologically, they appear throughout the period under consideration.

Armstrong next turns to an examination of what the *quṣṣās* actually say. This is a more complicated exercise because, as Armstrong recognizes, not every statement uttered by a *qāṣṣ* is a *qiṣṣa* (pl. *qaṣaṣ*), whatever that vague genre of pronouncements might actually include. Here again, Armstrong uses a very strict criterion. He includes only statements described as such, or somehow associated with the verb *qaṣṣa*, which produces a corpus of a mere forty-three *qaṣaṣ* texts, most of which are quite brief. This effort to narrow the list of texts illustrates the difficulty the stories present as a topic of analysis. Armstrong is aware that his restrictive standard likely excludes many texts that might easily be considered to be *qaṣaṣ*. However, including additional texts creates the risk of defining them according to the author's modern standards rather than by contemporaneous criteria.

In his analysis of the texts, Armstrong divides the *qaṣaṣ* into three separate but often overlapping groups: thirty-four religious *qaṣaṣ* focus on questions of theology, law, and proper conduct, eight mar-

tial *qaṣaṣ* include primarily exhortations to fight for the faith, and a single religio-political *qiṣṣa* is critical of the caliph ʿUthmān. Some of the martial texts might also be considered political, particularly those associated with ʿAlid and Kharijite rebellions. The content of the *qaṣaṣ*, particularly the religious ones, is diverse—there are lessons on human free will (or the lack thereof), judgment day, past prophets, and assorted legal injunctions. In addition to the disparate content, what is most striking is the brevity of these texts. In popular imagination, story tellers and street corner preachers are typically long-winded and dramatic. Yet the few texts of these orations Armstrong has found tend to be only a few lines long. One wishes the author had explored this aspect of the texts more fully.

After his discussion of the content of the surviving *qaṣaṣ* texts, Armstrong focuses on those who delivered them and on the networks of scholars and officials with whom they associated. This portion of Armstrong's work is more revealing and demonstrates clearly that the *quṣṣāṣ* were not, as is often assumed, marginal religious figures. Instead, a significant portion of those Armstrong identifies as *quṣṣāṣ* were reputable scholars known for their Quran recitation, hadith transmission, legal scholarship, and other contributions. Armstrong underscores their importance in the early exegetical literature, where for instance some seventy percent of the reports found in the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī derive from *quṣṣāṣ*, while al-Ṭabarī also relied heavily on the *qāṣṣ* Qatāda b. Diʿāma al-Sudūsī. Armstrong also points out that, contrary to prevalent assumptions, the *quṣṣāṣ* were not primarily relied upon for reports of Old Testament prophets (*isrāʾīliyyāt*). Instead, they reported these stories no more frequently than did other scholars. It is important to note, however, that the apparent influence of the *quṣṣāṣ* is skewed by the exegete's heavy reliance on a few prominent scholars thus identified, particularly Qatāda. However, it remains significant that Armstrong is able to show that the sources indicate that nearly seventy percent of the *quṣṣāṣ* contributed to other fields of early Islamic scholarship and were respected as ulema.

Armstrong next describes what being a *qāṣṣ* actually entailed. He delves into the skills a *qāṣṣ* was expected to have, including knowledge, eloquence, and a pleasing voice. He discusses where and when they performed, along with some reports of controversy regarding their presence and behavior in the mosque. He also describes the excesses and offenses ascribed to them, which included loudness, dramatic swooning and gestures, and performing for audiences of mixed gender. Here Armstrong touches on the distinctions between the *quṣṣāṣ* and the *khuṭabāʾ* (orators, sing. *khaṭīb*) in terms of both the speakers' conduct and the content of their orations, offering glimpses of the sometimes chaotic interplay between formal and informal activities at the mosque. The book concludes with an appendix of very brief biographical sketches of the 109 *quṣṣāṣ* included in Armstrong's study. While the appendix provides a welcome starting point for additional research, an alphabetical arrangement would have been preferable to the chronological approach Armstrong chose.

In his final two chapters, Armstrong addresses the controversial and sometimes contradictory image of the *quṣṣāṣ* in the early Islamic sources—either reputable figures, preaching the Prophet's message to the masses, performing an important service in propagating the faith, and encouraging moral rectitude, or rabble-rousers who spread doctrinal innovation and political discord. Armstrong finds evidence to support both images and suggests that the status of the *qāṣṣ* in the community evolved and, over time, became increasingly political and polemical. He rebuts the notion that the *quṣṣāṣ* were a later innovation emerging from the civil war following the murder of ʿUthmān, and presents evidence for their presence during the Rāshidūn period and even during the life of the Prophet. He even finds reports describing Muḥammad himself as a *qāṣṣ*. Armstrong argues that they became more prevalent during the Umayyad period, during which they played a more overtly political role, at times appearing to have at least quasi-official positions. His descriptions of individual *quṣṣāṣ* and their relationships to Umayyad rulers demonstrate that they often enjoyed both good reputations and access to power. Many apparently used their talents as *quṣṣāṣ* as stepping stones to judicial positions and other better-defined and better-compensated roles.

Overall, Armstrong offers a nuanced discussion of the *quṣṣāṣ* and their evolving role in early Islamic society. The book does, however, present a number of challenges. The questions of who is a *qāṣṣ* and what is a *qiṣṣa* remain problematic and elusive. Armstrong's narrow definitions surely exclude a significant number of *quṣṣāṣ* and their performances from his analysis (although broadening the definitions does create the risk of projecting our own assumptions about the *quṣṣāṣ* onto the sources). In all likeli-

hood, contemporaneous observers would have included many more individuals and orations, knowing both *qāṣṣ* and *qiṣṣa* without feeling compelled to use the terms explicitly. Conversely, some of those labeled as *quṣṣāṣ* in later Islamic sources may have rejected the label—famously pious early Muslim figures, such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Zayd b. Thābit, Qatāda b. Dī‘āma, Ibn ‘Abbās, and others, tended to accumulate labels posthumously as their legacies grew, becoming all things to all people. Practical questions about the *quṣṣāṣ* that could have offered a clearer understanding of the *quṣṣāṣ* are not asked. Thus, it remains unclear how one became a *qāṣṣ* to begin with and whether this was some sort of official or quasi-official position. Armstrong mentions a few reports about payments to the *quṣṣāṣ*, but does not offer much insight into how they were compensated, if at all. The silence of the sources makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, to answer such questions definitively, yet some discussion of these aspects would have been useful. In addition, it is striking that so much of Armstrong’s discussion of the *quṣṣāṣ*’s status in society focuses on their relationships with political leaders, as well as with occasional rebels, despite only one of the *qāṣaṣ* texts he uncovered being overtly religio-political. This incongruity between their perceived relationship to power and their preserved orations merits further discussion. These minor shortcomings, however, are inherent to any first attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of a somewhat nebulous early Islamic social group. Armstrong’s study is thorough and well researched and provides opportunities for more in-depth research to fill in the inevitable gaps now revealed. While a clear picture of the *quṣṣāṣ* and their significance in early Islam remains elusive, Armstrong’s work is an impressive contribution to our understanding of this important element of the early Islamic scholarly community.

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*The Rhetorical Fabric of the Traditional Arabic Qaṣīda in Its Formative Stages: A Comparative Study of the Rhetoric in Two Traditional Poems by ‘Alqama l-Faḥl and Bashshār b. Burd.* By ALI AHMAD HUSSEIN. *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, vol. 98. Wiesbaden: HARRASSOWITZ, 2015. Pp. xv + 292. €78 (paper).

In the study under review, Ali Ahmad Hussein turns his careful, honest, and engaging scholarship to the challenge of analysing exactly what happened to rhetorical texture during the transition from pre-Abbasid to *muḥdath* (“modern”) poetry. He develops a literary critical toolbox that combines Classical Arabic poetics with twentieth-century European criticism.

The challenge of accounting for change in poetry is one Hussein faced in his earlier work. In *JAL* articles in 2004 and 2005 (35,3: 297–328 and 36,1: 74–102 respectively) and in his monograph *The Lightning-Scene in Ancient Arabic Poetry: Function, Narration and Idiosyncrasy in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Poetry* (Harrassowitz, 2009), he argues that Classical Arabic accounts of structure failed to enable critics to either locate or discuss development and innovation. This holds true whether the critics were Classical Arabic scholars or twentieth-century Europeans. The Europeans failed to identify the changes observed by Hussein because of their dependence on the Arabic scholarly heritage to understand how the sections of Classical Arabic poems fit together; this led them to treat the poetry as “imitative and traditional” (*The Lightning-Scene*, xii).

In *Rhetorical Fabric* the challenge is the same, but this time Classical Arabic resources are substantially more useful to the author. Hussein commits to the Classical Arabic toolbox of rhetorical figures, and supplements it with European accounts of rhetorical figures. He explains that he wants to do for his two poems what the Mu‘tazilī exegete al-Zamakhsharī did for the Quran in the twelfth century: give a complete account of poetics throughout a literary text. Hussein selects eleven rhetorical figures from al-Zamakhsharī, ranging from metonymy (*kināya*) to redirection (*iltifāt*) via paranomasia (*tajnīs*) and ploke (πλοκή, *radd al-‘ajuz ‘alā l-ṣadr*), and then builds his own critical toolbox with the help of François Moreau from late twentieth-century France: metonymy, simile, metaphor, analogy, and the loose trope (synecdoche). Hussein is careful, and appropriately historicist, when it comes to historical