
PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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A UNIQUE 14TH CENTURY LITERARY ANTHOLOGY MANUSCRIPT FROM BAGHDAD

Arabic literature is rich in anthologies. The tradition of composing literary anthologies has a long history. It came into existence at a very early stage of literary development and continued through many centuries, till the time of cultural renovation of the Arab world in the 19th century. The earliest anthologies were made most probably in the first half of the 8th century, under the last Umayyads, at the same time when the first records of the oral Arab tradition came into being — both of the old and the recent, some of it folklore, some created by individual authors. None of these first collections have survived, though some of their materials are preserved in later anthologies.

There are different kinds of Arabic anthologies. Several principle types can be distinguished. For example, a collection of verse by one poet — his *dīwān*, where poems can be arranged: by rhymes; in the alphabetic order; by the length of poems, beginning with the longest and ending in single lines; by the subject, in the chronological order; and, finally, by a combination of different principles.

In anthologies which include works by several different poets materials can be arranged: by the tribal origin of the poets (tribal *dīwāns*); by the subject — love-poems, war-poems, hunting-poems, feast-songs, odes, etc.; by the time of the authors' lives or the place of their birth; by the type of the occasion on which the poems were composed. There were also collections of model poetic works.

All types of poetic anthologies could be supplemented with the lexical and grammar comments, on the lives of the poets, on the occasions on which the poems were written. Sometimes the volume of these comments exceeded that of the verse, growing into independent philologico-biographical treatises.

There were anthologies of prose as well. But while poetry was a purely Arabic phenomenon in spirit and origin, with dominating individualistic features, prose for the most part was translated from other languages and remained anonymous, or was artificially tied to some famous name, often didactic, illustrating certain moral sentences. It was devoid of any characteristic ethnic or even confessional features. Prose was translated from Persian, Syriac, Greek, it included texts going back to even more remote literary

traditions — Iranian, Ancient Near Eastern, Mediterranean. Translated prose was often arabicised — not only the language, but also the personages and social types were affected. Prosaic narratives written either in plain prose or exquisitely rhythmic were often interwoven with poetic lines.

Among the favourite genres of Arabic literature were anthologies of verse and prose mixed in various proportions. New anthologies were constantly created in different parts of the Muslim world. Materials from earlier collections were transferred to new anthologies, while the old ones were forgotten and lost. Most of the popular anthologies appeared in print in the 19th—20th centuries, finds of manuscripts containing new works of this genre now became rare.

Of this kind of rarities one manuscript (call number B-99) belonging to the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies attracts special attention. Its florid title is built upon the image of a garden — *Zuhar al-riyāḍ wa-nuzah al-murtāḍ* ("Flowers of the Gardens and the Pleasure of Those Who Walk There"). This anthology was composed by one Maṣūḥ ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Ṣubayḥ al-Shanbakī (al-Shunbukī?) al-Asadī. His name becomes known only from this manuscript, there is no mention of him elsewhere. What we have is his autograph, where the compiler is reporting from time to time on the progress of his work. He worked in the City of the Peace, *i. e.* Baghdad, in A.H. 769/A.D. 1367—1368.

In the preface (fol. 1b) the compiler tells us the following: "Into this book I include wonderful stories of different kinds selected by me, and examples of verse, so that they may serve a reminder to him who opens this book and reads it, to make this book his permanent companion, so it could brighten up his leisure hours with a conversation. It is not divided into chapters, because it is made from borrowed passages recognisable by references; the name I gave it is metaphoric, close in spirit [to its contents], namely ... I divided it into two parts: prose and poetry". Here the preface is interrupted by a lacuna, as one or two folios next to the first one, but not more, are seemingly lost.