HUGH KENNEDY (ed.):
Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East.
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Of the eleven contributions to this volume (all authors but one being based at SOAS, University of London) only two are about the contemporary Middle East: war is nothing new there. "The history of war begins in ancient Iraq" as A.R. George writes at the beginning of his contribution. After an introduction by the editor, Hugh Kennedy, the opening chapter is by Stefan Sperl, who provides a comparative study of city laments: Sumerian poetry on the destruction of Ur, the Hebrew *Book of Lamentations*, and an elegy on Basra by the Arabic poet Ibn al-Rūmī, after it had been ravaged by the Zanj revolt in 871. Sumerian and Babylonian poems are analysed by A.R. George, in particular a long Babylonian poem consisting of speeches describing the destruction of Babylonian cities through civil war and foreign invasion, perhaps around 1000 BC. Hittite and Hurrian poems and their interrelationships are the subject of Mark Weeden's chapter. Robert Anderson deals with warfare in ancient Egyptian poetry, from the third millennium BC to the time of Alexander the Great. Most is of an "official" character, celebrating the glorious feats of the Pharaohs. The many Arabic poems connected with the fateful Battle of Ṣiffīn in AD 657, as found in the book on this battle by Ibn Muzāḥim (d. 827), are investigated by Peter Webb, who points out the significant role of poetry in Arabic historiography. The editor of the collection, Hugh Kennedy, contributes a study of the poems on the siege of Baghdad during the civil war (809–13) between the sons of Hārūn al-Rashīd. These poems, composed by contemporaries and often anonymous, provide lively and often poignant commentaries. The wars between the Byzantines and the Arabs, as reflected in the poetry of the princely warrior Abū Firās (d. 968), captive of the Byzantines, and in popular tales such as *Sīrat al-amīra Dhāt al-Himma*, form the subject of Wen-chin Ouyang's chapter. The most famous of fictional heroes in Arabic popular tales, usually composed in prose but containing much poetry, is surely the warrior-poet ʿAntar, who is the hero of the contribution by Peter Philips. Marlé Hammond's chapter straddles premodern and modern times: she studies an anonymous Arabic poem, possibly from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, about a legendary pre-Islamic event; the story was still used in an Egyptian film of 1937. At some stage the film was banned because of Iranian sensitivities (the story is about Arabs overthrowing Persian rule). The Palestinian conflict, finally, is represented by two modern poets in the two last chapters, Haim Gouri (b. 1923) and Maḥmūd Darwīsh (1941–2008), by Tamar S. Drukker and Atef Alshaer, respectively. Although on opposite sides of the conflict, the best poems of both Gouri and Darwīsh transcend one-sided rhetoric and partisanship, and address the human condition in more general terms, stressing the inevitability and horror of war rather than celebrating it.

The extraordinary range chronologically and linguistically – of the major Middle Eastern languages only Turkish and Persian are conspicuously absent, though the dust wrapper at least shows a Persian illustration and verses on fighting the "Turanians" or Turks – is matched by a wide diversity in approaches and in the poetry itself. Poetry on war takes many different forms and modes: it may be heroic or elegiac, assume characteristics that may be called epic or lyrical, be very specific and personal or general and universal, militant or pacifist. It can be voiced by a

participant in the fighting, a witness, a victim, or an outsider. Many of the contributors take pains to discuss the poetic forms. One of the laudable features of the book is the presence, in many cases, of the texts in the original languages, either in transliteration (Sumerian, Babylonian, Hittite, Hurrian) or in the original script (Hebrew, Arabic). Robert Anderson even needs to argue at the outset that the ancient Egyptian texts he presents are actually poetry, and with Hittite one is confronted with similar problems, as when Hurrian poetry was translated in more prosaic Hittite. Kennedy, in his introduction to the volume, stresses this diversity when he speaks of a "complex gamut of emotions". Heroic boasting and celebrating individual prowess are common, yet what stands out in the volume, says Kennedy, "is [not] the triumphant or the heroic" (I have supplied the crucial negative that seems to be missing) but "the grief and suffering which war causes". This is evident in the earliest Sumerian laments and the most recent Hebrew and Arabic poetry on the Palestine conflict by Gouri and Darwīsh.

One cannot claim that the various poetic traditions, from Sumerian and Egyptian to modern Hebrew and Arabic, form a continuous and uninterrupted tradition; unfortunately, conflict, warfare and destruction seem to be virtually continuous in the area. The paradox that many of humanity's blessings in the field of technology and science (and, yet more paradoxically, a dramatic drop in general death by violence since prehistoric times, according to some recent studies) have their origin in organized warfare also applies to culture and literature, to some extent. War spawned some of the greatest poetry in the world and much of it can be admired by outsiders, lovers of literature. To the poets and their original audiences, however, it often was much more than a matter of aesthetics: poetry may be a means to overcome the trauma of war, to cope with suffering, a function especially pointed out by Stefan Sperl.

Some of the more philological passages, especially in the chapters on the earliest poetical traditions in the Middle, or Near, East ("the ancient Middle East" sounds quaint), will be somewhat hard-going for the general reader, but sound philology is always welcome and the volume can be enjoyed by a wide readership. For reasons of space I have to curb my customary pedantry in pointing out some minor shortcomings and errors, which on the whole are far and few between. The editor and SOAS are to be congratulated on producing this varied and fascinating collection.

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REMKE KRUK:
The Warrior Women of Islam: Female Empowerment in Arabic Popular Literature.
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This accessible volume presents and contextualizes a collection of stories in order to inform scholars and the public about depictions of warrior women in Arabic popular epic. Remke Kruk is one of the foremost pioneers in *sira* scholarship. Her interest in *sira* stories began in the 1980s, with her first article on warrior women appearing in 1993. She overcame several prejudices that have shaped Arabic studies historically: a focus on written texts to the exclusion of oral texts, a focus on elite members of