

how the concept of the caliphate was realized at key points in the pre-modern and modern Muslim eras. While structurally this reader would have appreciated more connectivity among the chapters and a more robust concluding section, Hassan's rigorous scholarship propels the field forward in its approach. This reviewer applauds Mona Hassan on her foray into one of the more understudied institutions in the field of Islamic studies. *Longing for the Lost Caliphate* gives us a hint as to the reason so few scholars have taken on the arduous task and scholars should be thankful for Hassan's courage and efforts in this regard.

ELIAS MUHANNA, *The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018). Pp. 232. \$39.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780691175560

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Elias Muhanna's *The World in a Book* is a delightfully readable and careful study of Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri's (d. 1333) impressive encyclopedia, *Nihayat al-Arab fi Funun al-Adab (The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition)*, and follows Muhanna's abridged English translation of al-Nuwayri's vast Arabic text. Muhanna's robust contextualization of al-Nuwayri's project allows him, through his study of the *Ultimate Ambition*, to bring into relief both the idiosyncratic and common motivations and the working methods that drove the fervent encyclopedic activity of late Islamic medieval scholarship and administration.

The questions undergirding this study concern why and how Arabic encyclopedism thrived during the 13th through 15th centuries, and Muhanna's approach to them considers factors ranging from the sociological, professional, and political to the epistemological and psychological. The multifaceted answers he proposes throughout this monograph successfully challenge the long-held belief that what drove encyclopedic activity in the Mamluk Empire was a fear, inspired by the Mongol conquests, that all knowledge would be lost. Muhanna suggests that the persistence of this explanation may stem from the strong evidence that similar anxieties did indeed drive early modern European encyclopedism. In the medieval Islamic context, however, Muhanna argues that the principal motivations for encyclopedic production emerged from the distinctive characteristics of the scholarly (Chapter 3) as well as administrative (Chapter 4) institutions in the Mamluk Empire. A more detailed discussion of the particular differences between Mamluk and Abbasid administrative structures and practices might further focus this otherwise persuasive argument, which deemphasizes the impact of the conquests on this production. Their impact, Muhanna points out, was not psychological but sociological, as it led to a "more densely interconnected" Eurasian continent and the transformation of Cairo and Damascus into "school cities." These changes, then, contributed to a sense not of loss but of "the expanding boundaries of knowledge" and "an overcrowding of authoritative sources" (p. 19).

Chapter 2 presents in detail, including useful tables and charts, the encyclopedic form, modular organization, and generic range of al-Nuwayri's massive text, which it compares to other compendia of the time. The result is a panoramic view that conveys a vivid sense of the *Ultimate Ambition's* hypotactic, hierarchical structure as well as its other particularities, such as the centrality of history to its program. This view also includes the text's self-conceptualization as a work of *adab*, a term that generally indicates an evolving corpus of literary knowledge and the constellation of social practices of transmitting, redefining, and performing that knowledge. Chapter 3 then details al-Nuwayri's choice and use of his sources, which Muhanna interprets through the world of scholarly institutions in which al-Nuwayri participated. The "antiquarian" quality of the *Ultimate Ambition*, Muhanna argues, reflects the "valorization of highly informed, intertextual, *recherché* engagements with the Arabic literary heritage" among Mamluk writers and their delight in literary influence (p. 72).

Among the questions that arise when considering a text like *Ultimate Ambition* are those that pertain to its relationship to and conceptualization of *adab*. Muhanna's careful examination of the nuances of *adab* that can be felt in al-Nuwayri's book expands our understanding of the dynamic and manifold conceptualizations of *adab* as a category and ideal. Muhanna chronicles how Mamluk institutions and writers participated in, produced, and reconceptualized *adab* and how al-Nuwayri's text, a clear product of these institutions, represents "a totalization of *adab*" (p. 49). The text situates itself as *adab* and incorporates into *adab* a particularly broad range of disciplines and genres, such as historiography, botany, zoology, and cosmography. Not only does Muhanna demonstrate the expanding purview of *adab* and disciplinary and generic syntheses that characterized Mamluk scholarship, he calls attention to the subtleties of its use among various nexuses of the time by noting the particular ways in which scholars, and especially compilers of encyclopedias, posited the relationship between *adab* and other forms of knowledge.

Indeed, the benefit of Muhanna's monograph extends beyond its detailed presentation of the text's structures and sources of knowledge. Muhanna sets out to examine the *Ultimate Ambition* as "a coherent intellectual project" (p. 30), and in doing so, he offers a multiplicity of convincing and fresh interpretations that build on current trends in the study of medieval Islamic texts, history, science, and society. Muhanna's book carefully navigates, and complicates, the categories—such as fact/fiction, history/literature, classical/post-classical, and oral/written—that can preoccupy and encumber studies of medieval Islamic texts.

Particularly refreshing is his explanation in Chapter 3 for al-Nuwayri's inclusion of two contradictory accounts of the hippopotamus in the *Ultimate Ambition*. These accounts, as Muhanna puts it, actually "describe different animals": the "real hippopotamus" and the "literary hippopotamus" (p. 76). Unlike the other members of what Muhanna refers to as a "triumvirate . . . in Mamluk encyclopedic literature" (p. 22), al-Qalqashandi (d. 1418) and Ibn Fadl Allah (d. 1384), al-Nuwayri adopted an ecumenical approach to compilations that allowed for the presentation of kaleidoscopic truth. Muhanna proposes his reading of this compilatory choice alongside, rather than in place of, two other possible readings, namely that al-Nuwayri included both accounts either due to the burden of tradition or out of a desire to exhibit cultural cachet. Muhanna's proposed reading borrows from Karen Pinto's distinction between mimetic and schematic modes in her study of Islamic cartographic images to suggest that the two accounts belong to distinct

discourses and serve distinct functions (*Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016]). Here and elsewhere in his study, Muhanna offers new interpretations that incorporate and exist alongside conventional interpretations. This practice of incorporating multiple valid readings resonates with al-Nuwayri's tendency toward ecumenism, as Muhanna describes it. But more importantly, it energizes an expanding understanding of encyclopedism and the Mamluk textual legacy, an understanding which can embrace the multiplicity of factors determining the text's construction. That Muhanna's ecumenism limits itself to these more minor interpretative questions does not, certainly, diminish the significance of this contribution.

Chapter 5 offers a fascinating account of the strategies implemented in producing large compilations in the Mamluk period. Muhanna makes great use of the preserved autograph volumes of the *Ultimate Ambition* as well as other extant manuscripts copied by al-Nuwayri, which he considers alongside al-Nuwayri's own detailed account of the education and practice of the copyist. Muhanna points toward a more literary reading of compilation in which we might consider the archival practices that copyists such as al-Nuwayri brought to the art of *adab* (pp. 111–12). Yet he stops short of a real consideration of the implications of such a reading. Similarly, while the discussion of the history of the reception of the *Ultimate Ambition* in Chapter 6 is entertaining and instructive, it offers less compelling insights and arguments than those that characterize the other chapters of Muhanna's study.

The World in a Book is a valuable and original contribution to the study of premodern Islamic literature and history that calls attention to the texts, until recently largely neglected, of the Mamluk period. Muhanna's study delivers "meaningful questions and meaningful answers" in refreshingly readable prose and is strongly recommended by this reviewer (p. 82).

ABBAS AMANAT, *Iran: A Modern History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017). Pp. 1,000. \$40.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780300112548

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Without a doubt, Abbas Amanat's *Iran* represents a tremendous undertaking. The writing of such a book can only be achieved by a mature scholar with a truly impressive ability to see the forest for the trees, and vice versa. Amanat is clearly such a scholar. The appearance of *Iran* is also illustrative of the considerable advances in Iranian history that have occurred over the past thirty years. Amanat draws on scholarship in areas such as women's and gender studies, environmental and fiscal history, and minority studies that were little more than a twinkle in the eye of historians a generation ago. This tome, while undoubtedly Amanat's own seminal accomplishment, also marks the achievements of the expansive field of Iranian history.

Iran is ambitious, in both scope and depth. Amanat achieves a difficult balance between suggesting themes and patterns of the long arc of Iranian history, while also attending, often in great detail, to scholarship from disparate fields. The book would