

historiography dealt with the specter of foreignness in the origins of the Arabic novel, reiterating that the history of these translated novels is always a history of comparison.


Stranger Fictions is enriched by its thorough, methodological research of Nahda-era journalism and literature, supported by an impressive bibliography of theoretical, historical, and literary scholarship. This is a sprawling study that deftly weaves between theories of nationalism, the public sphere, modernity, world literature, and translation as well as prior Nahda scholarship, while at the same time providing a wealth of data drawn from the 19th-century Arabic press. For example, the introduction to Part 2 offers a bibliography of 45 Arabic translations made between 1859 and 1919 that list one of the Dumas figures as author (to which, incidentally, we could add Esther Azhari's 1893–94 translation of a Dumas story based on *The Lady of the Camelias*; Azhari (aka Esther Moyal) also is overlooked as an Arabophone translator of Émile Zola [172]). Given its theoretical orientation, *Stranger Fictions* is best suited for sophisticated readers beyond the undergraduate level. Fortunately, Johnson's illustrative readings of the novels, articles, and readers' letters keep things lively for the reader while following the book's course of argumentation.

The last fifteen or so years have seen a boom in Nahda scholarship, with a still-growing body of work revealing the richness of a 19th-century corpus once passed over in favor of 20th-century prose fiction that more clearly served national(ist) literary agendas. *Stranger Fictions* profits from the growing body of work on the Nahda while steering it toward comparative conversations on translation, world literature, and transnationalism. Ultimately, the story it tells—that of emergent reading publics who read in translation and of serialized translated fiction as the progenitor of literary modernity—is not unique to the Arabic sphere; many of the book's arguments and findings will resonate with other case studies. For this reason, beyond its necessary and important work of rethinking the origins of the Arabic novel translationally and transnationally, *Stranger Fictions* also has much to offer to literary scholars on similar trajectories of textual recovery and revisionist historiography in the lesser-studied languages; thinking along with this book has enriched my own comparative understanding of the relationship between translation, reform, and modernity in the 19th-century Global South.

doi:10.1017/S0020743823000351

Ibn ʿAsakir of Damascus: Champion of Sunni Islam in the Time of the Crusades

Suleiman A. Mourad (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2021). Pp. 160. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780861540471

Reviewed by Rana Mikati , Department of History, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA (mikatur@cofc.edu)

This concise book on Ibn ʿAsakir (d. 571/1176), the foremost scholar of hadith in medieval Syria, is the result, as the author Suleiman Mourad states, of thirty years of engagement with the world and the work of its biographee. The author's primary concern is to demonstrate the centrality of Ibn ʿAsakir and his heirs to the revival of Sunni scholarship in 6th-/12th-century Damascus. Mourad's opening chapter paints a picture of a depressed Damascus, "a grim reality" as he states (p. 3). In addition to the political instability under the Seljuks (468/1076–498/1104) and Burids (498/1104–549/1154), religious scholarship institutions and networks had substantially declined. In Mourad's view, the poverty of



Syrian scholarship was best exemplified by the establishment's reception of al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463/1071), Nasr b. Ibrahim al-Maqdisi (d. 490/1097), and al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111). Yet, one could argue that their residence in Damascus was equally a reflection of their appreciation of the local scholarly tradition.

For Mourad, this political and scholarly decline meant that Damascene Sunni scholars were hungering for a reviver, especially in light of the recent history of Shi'ī political hegemony over Damascus and Crusader occupation of large parts of Syria. Ibn 'Asakir mirrored Nur al-Din Zanki's salvific role for Damascus. Set against this background, the portrait that emerges is of a self-aware scholar who amassed "certificates" at home and abroad and harnessed Nur al-Din's patronage to realize the dreams and hopes of his teachers to transform their city. Ibn 'Asakir's monumental and unprecedented *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* should be seen in this context. It encapsulates his fight against the enemies within and without: Shi'ā, Hanbalis, and Crusaders.

Although the book's thrust is to demonstrate Ibn 'Asakir's centrality to the revival of Sunnism in Damascus and Syria, Mourad also attends to several side issues. He rightly addresses the prevailing tendency among some modern historians to think of Ibn 'Asakir as primarily a historian, thus obscuring his identity as a hadith scholar; his identity as a *muḥaddith* and the methodologies that permeate and shape his hadith collections; his *Tarikh*; and his treatise in defense of the theological school of al-Ash'ari (d. 324/936). Mourad also emphasizes the role that Ibn 'Asakir's family played in Damascus and in the preservation and dissemination of his legacy. To do so, he details the efforts of Ibn 'Asakir's son al-Qasim to compile and shape the *Tarikh* and devotes a chapter to listing the scions of the Ibn 'Asakir clan and their involvement in hadith studies. One of the features of Mourad's book is his engagement with the manuscript evidence, which he uses to reconstruct a history of the writing and compilation of the *Tarikh*. He is able to clarify the confusion over the division of the *Tarikh*, first into 570 fascicles and then into 800 fascicles, attributing the dissemination of the latter to his son. He also provides an exhaustive list of the reading sessions of the book held during the author's lifetime and by his son after his death.

This book is a much-needed contribution about a scholar who has not received the attention he deserves outside specialized circles. Although the author and James Lindsay have published an edited volume on Ibn 'Asakir and an edition and translation of Ibn 'Asakir's *al-Arba'un fi-l-Hathth 'ala al-Jihad*, this work introduces Ibn 'Asakir and the specifics of his Damascene context to a broader audience. It provides an accessible and easily digestible overview of Seljuk, Burid, and Zengid Damascus; Ibn 'Asakir's relationship with Nur al-Din; jihad ideology; and of the work of a hadith scholar operating in the post-canonical era.

This last aspect brings me to my quibbles with the author, who, I assume due to the nature of the intended audience for this series, had to simplify and make translation choices regarding the terminology of hadith and manuscript studies. One of these simplifications touches on a critical aspect of hadith scholarship of the period, namely, the terminology and documentation of different modes of hadith transmission. The terminology of concern here is one dealing with the differentiation between receiving hadith and hadith collections through either a written or oral permission from a transmitter called *ijāza*, which Mourad explains in his glossary, and an oral/aural transmission process called *samā'*. Like scholars of his age, Ibn 'Asakir amassed and gained authority over an overwhelmingly large corpus of hadith through these two methods, and carefully recorded and detailed how he obtained his sources in his *Muḥjam al-Shuyukh*.

However, Mourad concentrates on the *ijāza*, which he glosses with the term "certificate," and throughout his description of Ibn 'Asakir's training he alternates between stating that the scholar "learned a book" and "received a certificate," without providing a clear explanation of the differences at play. This unfortunately effaces a distinction that, although seemingly esoteric, is absolutely fundamental in this highly technical field. The reader is at loss to discern whether he uses such terminology arbitrarily to vary the style of his own prose, or if

the terms were chosen to reflect a difference in the modality of Ibn ‘Asakir’s reception of a text, where “learned a book” would presumably stand in for *samā’* and “received a certificate” for *ijāza*.

This distinction is important enough in my reckoning to warrant an explanation in the body of the book and inclusion in the glossary alongside the listed *ijāza*, *musāwa*, and *abdāl*, especially given Mourad’s extensive description of the reading sessions Ibn ‘Asakir attended and held. Such an explanation would put the poignant episode of Ibn ‘Asakir’s agony over the loss of his books in the aftermath of his trip to the eastern Islamic centers of hadith in a different light. The loss of his books would not necessarily entail the irremediable loss of “the valuable knowledge he had learned in the east” (p. 26). Rather, Ibn ‘Asakir feared the loss of the *samā’āt* he recorded while in the east, the evidence for the assiduous reading sessions that Mourad effectively describes. By losing these records, he would have lost his ability to transmit these works, but most importantly he would have lost the claim to being linked to a short and rare chain of transmission that distinguished him from a run-of-the-mill hadith transmitter. These chains were prized possessions that Ibn ‘Asakir displayed in every one of his books. When his companion al-Muradi arrived from Baghdad in 540/1145, Mourad tells us Ibn ‘Asakir spent several weeks “copying them” (p. 26). He was likely copying the notices for the auditions (*samā’āt*) that he attended with al-Muradi. By Ibn ‘Asakir’s time, recording *samā’* sessions and collecting *ijāzas* had become a feature of post-canonical hadith scholarship. Indeed, it became part and parcel of the Sunnism that Mourad sees as central to Ibn ‘Asakir’s oeuvre.

Another unaddressed aspect of hadith scholarship in which Ibn ‘Asakir excelled and surpassed many of his compatriots through his early and extensive introduction to the discipline was his amassment of extraordinarily short chains of transmission. Ibn ‘Asakir was rightly proud of this achievement and displayed it in a dizzying array of hadith collections. Hence, in many of these collections, Ibn ‘Asakir followed the standard of his field and selected hadiths based on this criterion, ‘uluww (shortness or elevation of the chain of transmission). Contrary to what Mourad states, Ibn ‘Asakir did not purposefully ignore his “teachers” in Damascus to showcase his importance; rather, the scholar would have selected the hadith for which he possessed the best chains of transmission based on whether they were uninterrupted (*muṭṭaṣil*), elevated (‘*ālī*), etc. In this environment, hadith culture prized and centered the importance of the social and spiritual capital accumulated through the conspicuous collection of *isnāds*, these chains linking them to the Prophet. Through them, Ibn ‘Asakir became a nexus of the hadith tradition in Damascus and a fount of *baraka* (blessing).

Finally, the use of contemporary English terminology to translate some Arabic terms—such as college for madrasa, seminar for majlis, and colophon for *tabaqat samā’*—are laudatory insofar as it aims to demystify aspects of hadith education and transmission, but it poses risks, too, because such terminology also obscures some of its peculiarities and may mislead naive readers into making false equivalencies. A case in point is the use of the term colophon to describe the numerous audition notices (*samā’āt*) typically recorded throughout a manuscript (including on the title page, in the margins, and at the end) to record the date, place, and names of a reader and auditors of a book. Mourad’s use of the term colophon for this scholarly phenomenon is confusing and not current among modern scholars who study it. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. Another example is how the author translates the title *al-Araba‘un al-‘Abdal al-‘Awala* as The Forty Hadiths from the First Substitutes, and defines these substitutes in the glossary as “a collective reference to a group of seventy early Muslim individuals.” By doing so, Mourad has conflated two separate phenomena: the *abdāl*, who are the friends of God revered by the pious, and the *abdāl*, which are a species of hadith possessing short alternate chains of transmission. In these transmissions, the hadith scholar shows his ability to provide a variant and shorter chain that intersects with the sheikh of one of the authors of the canonical Sunni books of hadith. In his *al-Araba‘un al-‘Abdal*, Ibn ‘Asakir provided some of the same hadiths as the 9th-century hadith


giants Muslim and Bukhari in their *Sahihs* with alternate, but equally short, chains of transmission.

Overall, this book is an important step in presenting Ibn ‘Asakir and Damascus at the time of the Crusaders to a wider audience. The author effectively presents the political and religious role Ibn ‘Asakir played in a 12th-century Syrian Sunni renaissance. Now, one awaits a study that contextualizes the scholar and his sprawling oeuvre within the broader world of post-canonical hadith culture and examines his magnum opus, the *Tarikh*, and his choices therein.

doi:10.1017/S0020743822000630

The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Syria, 1915–1918

Khatchig Mouradian (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2021). Pp. 262. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781611863949

Reviewed by Elyse Semerdjian , Department of History, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA, USA (semerdve@whitman.edu)

Historians of the Armenian Genocide have long labored within what Talin Suciyan has called “a post-genocide habitus of denial,” the normalization of denial that affects minorities living inside Turkey and sometimes spills into academia. Within this context, Armenian Genocide historians encounter a cruel irony: Ottoman documents belonging to the perpetrator archive are often given more value than the wealth of published and unpublished sources generated by the victim community. The devaluing of Armenian sources extends to survivor testimony, typically the gold standard for evidence in genocide studies. Pushing back against these trends, Khatchig Mouradian’s impressive first book, *The Resistance Network*, highlights the rich potential that Armenian sources hold not only for Armenian Genocide studies but for scholars of mass violence, more broadly. The result is a stunning piece of scholarship that boldly suggests that the defining story of the Armenians is not so much the Armenian Genocide but their resistance to it.

The Armenian of *The Resistance Network* is no longer the passive victim marching off to her slaughter, but someone who renounces the dominance of the génocidaire from within the depths of necroviolence. Mouradian models the possibility of simultaneously recognizing these events as the story of a crime and a story of resistance. In so doing he not only challenges the notion that Armenians were passive recipients of state violence; he also confronts the dominant narrative that they were saved solely by Western humanitarianism. These historiographic interventions are interwoven throughout the text and supported by Mouradian’s skillful use of Western Armenian language sources alongside better-known English, French, German, and accessible Ottoman sources.

The Resistance Network focuses on Syria, where the foundations of Armenian humanitarianism could be found in an earlier Armenian diaspora community in Aleppo, a community exempted from deportation. As Mouradian writes, the resistance “did not just take place in Aleppo—it was of Aleppo,” so much so that one survivor called the city “a life raft” (xxvi, 7). Several institutions acted to save Armenian deportees, who began pouring into the city in 1915. Armenian Apostolic Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic churches mobilized alongside organizations at home and abroad to house, feed, clothe, and nurse refugees in Armenian hospitals and orphanages, and on the balconies, roofs, and courtyards of private homes.