

ANNA CONTADINI:

A World of Beasts: A Thirteenth-Century Illustrated Arabic Book on Animals (the *Kitāb Na't al-Ḥayawān*) in the *Ibn Bakhtīshū'* Tradition.

xiii, 209 pp., 56 plates. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012. €99. ISBN 978 90 04 20100 2.

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This book uncovers the pictorial and textual delights of a thirteenth-century Arabic bestiary datable to *c.*1225 and most probably produced in Baghdad, the *Kitāb Na't al-Ḥayawān* (British Library, Or. 2784), the earliest of a group of Arab and Persian manuscripts within the so-called Ibn Bakhtīshū' bestiary tradition that deals with the characteristics and usefulness of animals. It is the first detailed study of a bestiary from the Islamic world and reproduces all of the eighty-six paintings contained in the manuscript in colour. Too often in art-historical studies of this nature, the reader is only offered a view of a few chosen paintings and the text is not considered in any depth, but in this book the reader is able to explore and understand both aspects of the manuscript.

As Contadini points out, the *Kitāb Na't al-Ḥayawān* cannot be considered either a zoological or a medical handbook but “a composite product reflecting the inquisitiveness of intellectual life during the Abbasid period”. The book is divided into eight chapters which discuss the manuscript from a variety of perspectives.

It begins with a detailed examination of the group of contemporary manuscripts, both illustrated and non-illustrated, to which the *Na't* belongs, and re-evaluates the earlier scholarship of Hugo Buchthal and Kurt Holter. The second chapter considers the manuscript itself, giving an account of important codicological details such as the paper, inks and pigments used in the texts and paintings, and incorporates the results of technical investigations conducted at the conservation laboratory of the British Library, which also have a bearing on the author's discussion of line drawings and the application of gold and colour in chapter 6. Elements such as these are often not included in the studies of illustrated Arabic manuscripts, so this discussion is a welcome addition. An enormous amount of work has gone into the reconstruction of the manuscript from its current jumbled state, drawing comparisons with other manuscripts and identifying missing folios and paintings. A full table is provided at the end of the chapter giving a clear overview of the current and reconstructed foliation providing a useful guide for the reader.

The following chapter deals in depth with the text and its transmission from the sources of Ibn Bakhtīshū' and Aristotle, along with those in Syriac which show that the *Na't* is a unique manuscript not a mere copy. A complete chapter is then dedicated to the study of the four frontispieces, with detailed comparisons drawn with those of other contemporary manuscripts. Contadini studies each of the figures and their postures, bringing to light new iconographical relationships which have not been considered previously. The author ranges widely in her erudite study of the many elements found in the paintings that have often been overlooked, such as the use of dark skin and the appearance of fruit bowls, and includes interesting parallels from the Western tradition.

A full discussion of the text and its sources is found in chapter 5, with translations of relevant entries on various animals giving a fascinating insight into both their characteristics and possible medicinal uses. The camel, for example, is described as “malevolent and extremely spiteful and bitter. It has a long and retentive memory and forgets nothing”. The various parts of the elephant have myriad

uses: the boiled meat as a cure for asthma; the dung smeared on to the body prevents lice and if taken by a woman prevents conception.

The paintings are analysed in depth in chapter 6, taking into account the landscape elements and the spatial relationships between the various elements in the paintings. There is, here, the first thorough study of *mise-en-page* of an Arabic medieval manuscript. The paintings of the *Na't* are discussed in the context of their relationship with other contemporary manuscripts such as the Dioscorides of 1224 and the al-Šūfī manuscript of the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran. Contadini points out that the date of the al-Šūfī manuscript of 554/1159 is a later interpolation based on the analysis of the ink and calligraphy, and given the close stylistic relationship that exists with the 1224 Dioscorides, it should be considered a manuscript of the thirteenth century. The book concludes, in chapter 8, with a discussion of the patronage and the milieu in which this manuscript was produced, with a number of possible scenarios providing an important insight into book production of this period. The author suggests that the manuscript was probably produced within a scholarly environment, reflecting the intellectual revival of late Abbasid Baghdad under the Caliph al-Nāṣir. The book has a comprehensive apparatus of appendixes, an impressive bibliography, and a useful, detailed, index.

In sum, although the book is centred around the manuscript of the *Na't al-Ḥayawān*, it is in fact a discussion of thirteenth-century Arab painting that deals with the subject in unprecedented depth. The research is grounded in meticulous scholarship and the chapters arranged so that they provide a rounded and complete picture of the manuscript and the context in which it was produced. The book is a significant contribution to the field and will remain a key work for many years to come. It is also a great pleasure to read.

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M.E. McMILLAN:

The Meaning of Mecca: The Politics of Pilgrimage in Early Islam.

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This book addresses the much-understudied question of the *hajj* in the early Islamic period. In so doing, it provides valuable material on the successive leaders of 120 *hajj* seasons, from the beginnings of Abū Bakr's caliphate to the coming of the Abbasids. It sheds light on the efforts of various rulers to imitate Muḥammad's precedent of the Farewell pilgrimage of 10/632, and on the place occupied by the *hajj* in the different political agendas of the caliphs. The pilgrimage to Mecca thus appears as a central ritual in the legitimation process of the caliphs as well as an ideal platform for rebels to make their own bids for power.

Leading the *hajj* was mostly a caliphal prerogative under the *Rāshidūn* until 'Uthmān's assassination in 35/656. 'Alī's tormented reign clearly marks a significant departure from this practice as the context of the first *fitna* prevented him from ever leading the pilgrimage, a challenge that some of his Umayyad successors would face again in the course of the second and third civil wars. Indeed, the *hajj* "could just as easily be manipulated by rebels as it was by rulers" (p. 38). This paradoxical situation is perhaps best exemplified by the pilgrimage of 68/688, when four