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ARABIC LITERATURE IN IRAQ DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

The Ottoman occupation of Iraq continued for a little less than four centuries 941–1335 A. H./1534–1917 A. D.

Many historical studies dealing with the various aspects of this period have appeared. Most of these historical studies however, divide the Ottoman rule into five periods, depending on various significant political characteristics and events. These are: —

1. The period of Ottoman conquest which is also called the period of Ottoman-Safawi (Turkish-Persian) conflict 941–1048 A. H./1534–1638 A. D.

2. The period of Inkishariya Power; 1048–1162 A. H./1638–1749 A. D.

3. The Mamluki period (1162–1247 A. H./1749–1831 A. D.).

4. The period of Direct Ottoman Rule (1247–1289 A. H./1749–1872 A. D.).

5. The final Ottoman period 1289–1335 A. H./1872–1917 A. D.). Some historians prefer to observe three rather than five different periods by merging the first and second into one and the fourth and fifth into another in the following manner:

1. The First Ottoman period (941–1162 A. H./1534–1749 A. D.).

2. Period of Mamluk (1162–1247 A. H./1749–1831 A. D.).

3. Final Ottoman period (1247–1335 A. H./1831–1917 A. D.).

For the purpose of literary, cultural and intellectual studies this division seems more convenient, for despite the general agreement among historians that the literary achievement of the whole period is rather poor in comparison with the other Islamic periods, this is largely attributed to the political and socio-economic defects and problems. The literary works of each of the three above mentioned periods appear to possess certain characteristics that can be noticed in style, themes, arts and manners of expression and genre; such as the emergence of poets and writers who

were able to produce works of art in Persian and Turkish in addition to Arabic such as the famous Poet Fuzuli Al-Baghdadi, his son Fuzli, Ahdi, Shamsi, . . . etc. Moreover, the flourishing of Arabic literature in Basrah and the neighbouring districts, and in some other Iraqi cities and intellectual centres such as Hilla, Najef, Kerbala and Mosul can also be taken as a second characteristic of this first period.

The second period also has its specific characteristics indicating the types of literary works which were produced, as the flourishing of literature in Baghdad was encouraged by the Mamluk governors in order to support their tendencies towards independence from the central Ottoman authorities in Istanbul and to serve as propaganda to cover their faults and illmanagement of the various affairs of the country.

The increasing literary and scientific activities in Mosul by grace of the emergence of the Al-Jalili pedigree was another sign of the second period.

The Third period is characterised by certain aspects such as the appearance of some new characteristics due to the influence of the Arabic Renaissance the, conflict between the conservatives and the movement for change in Istanbul and the arrival of some European ideas and means of communication. Another factor worth mentioning here is the spread of national feelings and ideas in the Arab World, several examples of which can be found in the various literary works especially in poetry.

There is one single important development which resulted from the new European influence on modern literature. This was the appearance of some attempts at a new mode of literature unknown previously to the Iraqi scene such as some plays written and performed by the Christians in Mosul. I have found evidence of such modern dramatic activities unknown to scholars and I have published a study of this particular style.

THE PROBLEM OF SOURCES

The period of Ottoman rule of the Arab world is generally known among historians and research workers as the Dark Age of Arabic history and Literature. The reasons for this are notably two: —

1. The general backwardness of all aspects of political and socio-economic life.

2. The absence of sufficient sources dealing with the different literary and scientific activities of the ages. In our opinion, however the label »Dark Age« constitutes unwarranted generalization unfairly used for a large territory comprising the whole Arab World for an extensive period of nearly 400 years. During this period and in various parts of the Arab World, many literary activities and works of arts are mentioned.

This point of view is adopted and assured by research workers interested in this period, particularly those who have written about the history of Arabic Literature during the first half of this century.

Studies conducted by some Iraqi scholars, though few in number, have given more backing to this opinion. Examples are the study of Abass Al-Azawi »History of Literature in Iraq«, Ya'qobb Sarkis' articles (Mabahith Iragiyah), Imad Abdul Salam Ra'oof's »Mosul During the Ottoman Era« and many others.

The emergence of a humanistic literature in three different languages (Arabic, Turkish and Persian) achieved by Fuzuli and his contemporaries (about 40–50 poets) can be taken as further evidence in support of this opinion. Furthermore, the relative flourishing of literature in Baghdad, Mosul and other centres Hilla Najef... etc, the appearance of new arts such as Al-Bend (a form of poetic prose) in the first period and more particularly the resurrection and renaissance during the last period of Ottoman rule are phenomena that prove the inaccuracy of the term »Dark Age« and that justify a serious study of the entire literary achievement of the three periods.

There is no denying, however, that research workers dealing with this period will face the problem of lack of sources concerned with this period. This is particularly true of literature in Iraq which has received less attention than its Egyptian and Syrian counterparts. A few pages and lines scattered in this book and that have little to offer to the interested researcher. Very short biographies of the poets and writers of this period can be found in »Sulafat Al-Asr« by Ibn Ma'soom and Khulasat Al-Athar, »Nafhat Al-Rayhana« Al-Muhibbi, »Silk Al-Dorar« by Al-Muradi and »Al-Kawakib Al-Sa'eira« by Al-Ghazzi.

Unfortunately these sources do not give more than a very small part of the whole picture of literature in Iraq during this period.

The shortage of sources has been testified to even by Turkish historians and scholars who have studied the early Turkish literature of this period, especially that of Fuzuli, although these historians have access to a relatively greater number of manuscripts and books written in Turkish and kept in Turkish libraries.

Since the beginning of the recorded half of the present century, several manuscripts relevant to the subject have been discovered. These can certainly shed light on the size, nature and characteristics of literature during the period. One of the most important of these books is »Nashwat Al-Sulafat« by Muhammad Ali Bashara (1200 A. H.). The author mentions 4 Iraqi poets and writers along with short selections and texts none of whom was previously mentioned by the known sources that cover the period. Another good source written by a poet and writer of the first Ottoman period, Abid Ali Al-Hawizi (lived in Basrah and died 1087 A. H.) entitled: »Al-Ghaith Al-Hami' Fee Adab Al-Iqleim Al-Rabi'«, was recently discovered. It

contains some useful information about the first Ottoman period. This manuscript is mentioned by Agha Bizirg, the author of a large biography called »Al-Therî'a« who affirms that the manuscript is kept either in London or Berlin.

In addition to these sources, we have discovered a number of Diwans (collection of poetry) such as Diwan Al-Hawizi. One of them, Diwan Ibn Ya'qob has already been published.

All the above mentioned books, short biographies and diwan of poetry, particularly the texts quoted therein, should make it possible to venture a fresh study of the common themes, ideas, subjects, types of literature and poetry, the modes of expression and the variety of highly ornamented figures of speech that were popular among poets and writers of those periods.

After the Revolution of the 17th of July 1968, the Iraqi Government made great efforts to collect the manuscripts and publish some of them making it easier to attempt new studies based on larger amounts of information, especially information concerned with the second and third periods of Ottoman rule in Iraq.

To conclude, it can be said that the literature of the period of Ottoman rule in Iraq was in essence a continuation of the tendencies common in previous periods except for the fact that it expressed greater concern with highly ornamented modes of expression and figures of speech to an extent that some poets became innovators in this respect, always looking for some new techniques and ways of playing with words & expressions. I regret, however, that in this summary it is not possible to specify in detail all the characteristics of Iraqi literature during the Ottoman period but I hope that this brief outline will encourage some researchers and writers to make fresh attempts at the subject.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the characteristics of Arabic literature were common to almost all other writings in the different languages of the Islamic world at that time such as Turkish Persian, Urdu, . . . etc. which shows the amount of literary and artistic exchange, interaction and influence among the literary works of the oriental Arabic & Islamic World.

R é s u m é

LA LITTÉRATURE ARABE EN IRAK DE L'AGE OTTOMAN

1. Les notes bibliographiques:

Manque des études modernes assez détaillées. Manque des sources imprimées, caractère des études déjà parues:

a) la période ottomane dans les ouvrages générales sur l'histoire littéraire arabe.

b) la période ottomane dans l'étude de Abbas al-Azzami sur la littérature arabe en Irak après la chute de Bagdad de 656 h.

c) programme proposé

2. Vue d'ensemble sur la vie politique, sociale, économique.

3. La vie littéraire et intellectuelle

la poésie: les genres

les styles

la prose: les genres

les styles

Les ouvrages littéraires encyclopédiques

Les poètes les plus importants

Les écrivains assez célèbres

Caractère des notes générales.

R e z i m e

ARAPSKA KNJIŽEVNOST OSMANSKOG PERIODA U IRAKU

1. Bibliografske zabilješke

Nedostatak modernih, dovoljno detaljnih studija. Nedostatak štampanih izvora, karakter već pripremljenih studija:

a) osmanski period u glavnim djelima o istoriji arapske književnosti

b) osmanski period u studiji Abbas al-Azzamija o arapskoj književnosti u Iraku poslije pada Bagdada 656 h.

c) predloženi program

2. Jedinstven pogled na politički, socijalni i ekonomski život

3. Književni i intelektualni život

poezija: vrste

stilovi

proza: vrste

stilovi

Književna enciklopedijska djela

Najznačajniji pisci

Prilično slavni pisci

Karakter generalnih zabilješki