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Kitāb al-Siyāḥah Review

ḤANNĀ DIYĀB: *Kitāb al-Siyāḥah (The Book of Travels)*

(ed. Johannes Stephan, trans. Elias Muhanna) (Library of Arabic Literature.) 2 vols; xlii, 328 pp. & vii, 330 pp. £46. New York: New York University Press, 2021. ISBN 978 1 479 89230 3.

Ḥannā Diyāb, a Maronite from Aleppo who lived from approximately 1687 until after 1764, has gained increased fame in the last decades. It is now known that he was the source for a number of stories of the *Arabian Nights* published in French (1704-1717) by the orientalist Antoine Galland. These stories, albeit not found in the written Arabic tradition of the *Arabian Nights*, remain an important oral contribution, as they include some of the best-known stories from the collection, such as Aladdin and the Lamp and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, among others.

Kitāb al-Siyāḥah, or *The Book of Travels*, is another contribution of Ḥannā Diyāb, yet this time written. In this book, he narrates his travels as an assistant to Paul Lucas, the envoy of French king Louis XIV, to collect antiquities from the Ottoman Empire. Ḥanna's travels started in 1707 and included Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, and France (where he met Galland), before his return home to Aleppo in June 1710. This account is recorded in Arabic in a single manuscript, which is MS Vatican, BAV, Sbath 254.

The book in hand opens up Ḥannā's travel account to a wider Arabic- and English-speaking audience. It comprises an Arabic edition of the text with extensive notes and an introduction by Johannes Stephan, along with a parallel English translation by Elias Muhanna. It comes in two volumes with a foreword by Yasmine Seale and an afterword by Paolo Lemos Horta. The account is divided into chapters, each covering a specific portion of the journey.

While the whole journey is framed by the presence of Lucas, Ḥannā's master, the author still manages to make the account his own, conveying the distinct experience of a Maronite Syrian traveller. It is unclear, however, why it took Ḥannā around fifty-four years to sit and write his travel account: he wrote it in 1764 when he was around seventy-five years old. In fact, the influence of time on his memory is something that has occupied scholars to the extent of legitimately wondering how much of Ḥannā is shared with Aladdin, one of his story's heroes, or even how much of truth is to be found in his travel account.

The English translation eases the comprehension of unusual Arabic words and expressions along with the considerable number of foreign idioms, for example transliterated Turkish words. Although the translation tends to use more common English words like 'bell' and 'biscuits' for *nāqūs* and *buqsumāt*, rather than more specialized vocabulary (in this case, 'semantron' and 'rusk'), it deserves praise for its accuracy and for preserving the original style of the story and its discourses.

Two meticulous studies in the form of the introduction and afterword cover issues that were not elaborated on in earlier works (see Heyberger, *d'alep a paris*, 2015). One of the major issues is the parallels between the orphan stories added to the *Arabian Nights* by Ḥannā and Galland and the tales which Ḥannā inserted in his travel account.

Stephan's introduction focuses on the relationship between Ḥannā and Lucas as the driving force of the storytelling in Ḥannā's account. While Bernard Heyberger considers that this account should not be

overloaded with implications about the relationship between the East and the West, Stephan notices some glimpses of this through the prism of the relationship between Ḥannā and Lucas.

Ḥanna's storytelling abilities are recognized not only in his orphan stories recounted to Galland, but also in more than forty stories that he recorded in his travel account. These stories could be narrated independently from the travel account. Stephan observes examples of Ḥannā's astuteness in his storytelling, such as when he narrates them in third person via an individual whom he meets on his travels, or when he either arranges the stories into groups or naturally weaves them into the trajectory of his travels. From a linguistic point of view, the introduction offers interesting observations on Ḥannā's Middle Arabic and writing style in comparison to his contemporaries, such as Ḥannā al-Ṭabīb (Krimsti, *Riḥlat al-Shammās Ḥannā al-Ṭabīb*, 2021), and Elias al-Mawṣilī (Ghobrial, *The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon*, 2014). Moreover, the introduction connects Ḥannā to external sources, such as the manuscripts he owned.

In the afterword, Horta recognizes Ḥannā's distinctive contributions to the *Arabian Nights* collection. He examines the travel account through the lens of these stories told to Galland by Ḥannā. His analysis retrieves Ḥannā's place and stolen rights as the main player in the orphan tales, rather than Galland. Horta argues how the account of Ḥannā reveals the same characteristics of the stories he supplied to the *Arabian Nights*. Moreover, Horta evaluates what has been taken for granted in scholarship about the role of Galland in terms of developing of the characters in the *Nights* and modernizing the stories and making them coherent. Comparing the *Nights* and the travel account, we can surmise that Ḥannā is more likely to have done what is usually attributed to Galland. Although Lucas had written a travel account that never mentions Hanna, the afterword sheds light on many parallels between the two accounts..

Readers will appreciate the map of the travels at the beginning of the two volumes. At the same time, they will miss an image of the manuscript to get a sense of it during discussion of its orthography and handwriting, or at least a clear reference to the Vatican website where its digital photos are available. It would have been helpful to add subtitles to the edition, or at least to the translation, to distinguish the different sections of the account and the narratives. Overall, the work is significant and bears new insights into the life and travels of an early modern Aleppan Christian.

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