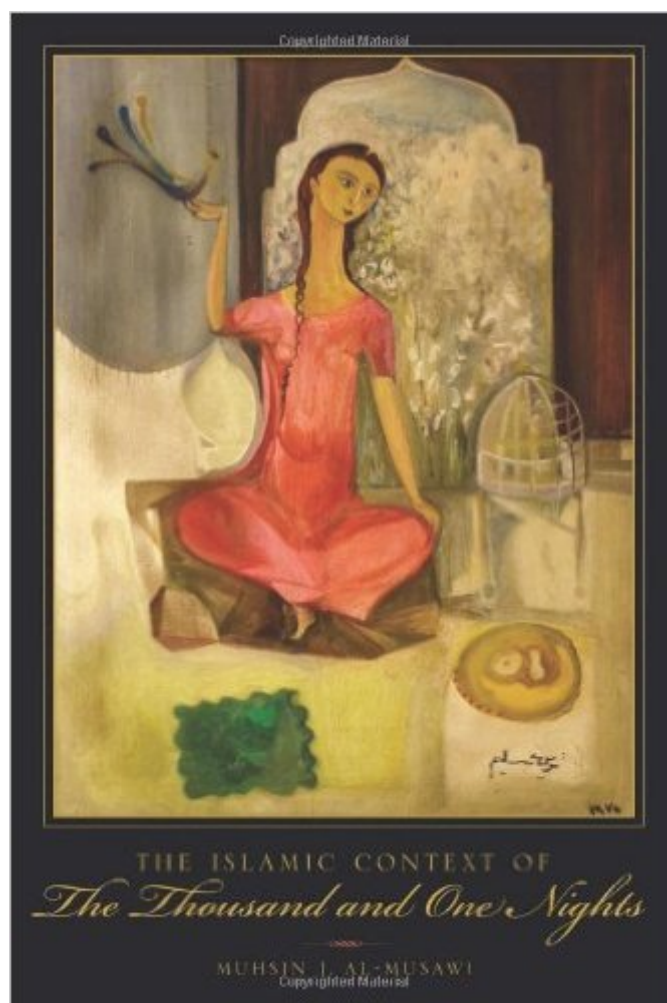


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The Islamic Context Of The Thousand And One Nights



Synopsis

In this fascinating study, Muhsin J. al-Musawi shows how deeply Islamic heritage and culture is embedded in the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* (known to many as the *Arabian Nights*) and how this integration invites readers to make an Islamic milieu. Conservative Islam dismisses *The Thousand and One Nights* as facile popular literature, and liberal views disregard the rich Islamic context of the text. Approaching the text with a fresh and unbiased eye, al-Musawi reads the tales against Islamic schools of thought and theology and recovers persuasive historical evidence to reveal the cultural and religious struggle over Islam that drives the book's narrative tension and binds its seemingly fragmented stories. Written by a number of authors over a stretch of centuries, *The Thousand and One Nights* depicts a burgeoning, urban Islamic culture in all its variety and complexity. As al-Musawi demonstrates, the tales document their own places and periods of production, reflecting the Islamic individual's growing exposure to a number of entertainments and temptations and their conflict with the obligations of faith. Aimed at a diverse audience, these stories follow a narrative arc that begins with corruption and ends with redemption, conforming to a paradigm that concurs with the sociological and religious concerns of Islam and the Islamic state. By emphasizing Islam in his analysis of these entertaining and instructional tales, al-Musawi not only illuminates the work's consistent equation between art and life, but he also sheds light on its underlying narrative power. His study offers a brilliant portrait of medieval Islam as well, especially its social, political, and economic institutions and its unique practices of storytelling.

Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press (May 13, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231146345

ISBN-13: 978-0231146340

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.1 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,836,375 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #215 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Middle Eastern #288 in Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > World Literature > African & Middle Eastern #892 in Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Islam

Customer Reviews

The product of a lifetime of studying and thinking about One Thousand and One Nights, this book argues that such a work could have coalesced, grown, and developed only within an urban Islamic literary and cultural context. The pervasive Islamic context of the Nights is relatively unstudied, and al-Musawi (Columbia Univ.) offers a wide-ranging, detailed explication of the subject, beginning with the adoption of the Indo-Persian frame story by an urban Arabic culture. Running throughout this study is the theme of Islamic law - its moral and legal dimensions and how they are interpreted and realized in the hisbah manuals (the code of moral and legal duties of the market inspector) and the behavior of the muhtasib (the official market inspector himself). These manuals change and evolve with the dominance of different legal schools and the interaction between Islamic law and popular urban culture. The chapter on nonverbal narrative - icons, codes, images, magic, food, paintings, and so on - is particularly interesting.

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