International Journal of Middle East Studies (2022), **54**, 779–808

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

BOOK REVIEWS

Lives of the Great Languages: Arabic and Latin in the Medieval Mediterranean. Karla Mallette (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). Pp. 264. $105.00 cloth, $35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780226795904

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Karla Mallette specifies that in *Lives of the Great Languages* she seeks "to describe and (for the most part) to eulogize languages that modern men and women of letters often view with suspicion, contempt, or disdain" (3). She often terms such languages Alexandrian (5, passim) because these elite, learned tongues cross the borders of ethnicity and nation with the boldness of that Greek conqueror, and require great effort to master since they are no one's mother tongue. The medieval Mediterranean was unique, perhaps, in possessing and being possessed by several such languages—Greek, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, perhaps Syriac/Aramaic—that Mallette also calls "cosmopolitan" languages (9) and, most arrestingly, "mistress" tongues (18), languages that one must desire to learn for the larger audiences, greater temporal stability, and power that they offer.

As the above description indicates, *Lives of the Great Languages* is decidedly a manifesto against the obsession of much of modern Euro-American literary scholarship with the national languages that emerged at the end of the Middle Ages. But Mallette's many fascinating insights are of great interest to a broader scholarly audience of historians, medievalists, and Mediterraneanists, for whom the wide dominance of mistress languages in the very sources that they work with should make thinking about how they function imperative. Mallette's book is not, however, an exhaustive account of the history of Latin and Arabic, but a thoroughly readable series of snapshots of these mistress tongues at various moments and places that shed light on their poetics, function, and meaning.

In the first of the book's four parts, Mallette provides her reader with an overview of her subject, Chapter 1 ("A Poetics of the Cosmopolitan Language") serving as an introduction to the volume as a whole. Chapters 2 and 3 then allow us to watch as "language workers" (passim) decide to embrace the hard work of learning and deploying Arabic and Latin respectively. Here we meet, for example, Bashshar ibn Burd, an 8th-century courtier, administrator, and poet originally from Bactria who, as a non-Arabic speaker by birth, adopted Arabic "in part as an alternative to the confusion of tongues that surrounded him," but also because "it moved him from one location to another": from the Persianate world of what is now Afghanistan, to Basra and then Baghdad, at the heart of Abbasid political power and Arab culture (30). Petrarch, ironically remembered as a champion of the vernacular, similarly "placed his trust in Latinity" (35), writing far more Latin text than Italian. Cosmopolitan languages tended to inspire such commitment.

Part 2 ("Space, Place, and the Cosmopolitan Language"), begins with Chapter 4, an insightful reflection on how "The circulation of people, texts, and ideas on the routes that led between the far-flung empire played a generative role in the constitution of the megalanguages of the Mediterranean" (53). In the following chapter we watch Dante, as the twilight of Latin's cosmopolitanism is beginning, investing a vernacular tongue—the Tuscan of his birth—with the features of an Alexandrian language: he, like Boccacio at about the same

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823000144 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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time, put it into writing, thereby making it "an estranging filter that both alienates and clarifies thought," a language that possessed "the attractions to lure [other Italians] from the mother tongue" (67). The sixth chapter allows us to look on as the great Arabic grammarian, Sibawayhi (a Persian speaker by birth), worked to keep what was becoming classical Arabic alive "in sound and texture" (84), and fit, therefore, for use as a cosmopolitan language "at home only on the road" (79). His great work, the *Kitab Sibawayhi* , to a substantial degree created what we now think of as classical Arabic, the language that scholars carried with them along the distant trade routes of Dar al-Islam which, although deeply influenced by the language of the Qurʾan, is by no means identical with it..

"Translation and Time," Part 3, introduces us to the strategies that the Alexandrian language uses to stabilize and renew itself across time. Mallette focuses on two: its burrowing "into its own lexical history" to resist change, and the intriguing way that it "exploits the presence of adjacent language systems" through translation (90). Chapter 7 introduces this theme through a reflection on the birth, midwifed by St. Cyril, of Old Church Slavonic which, in a compressed period, became a cosmopolitan language through the creation of an alphabet and the translation of Greek liturgy and a wide range of other Greek texts, becoming in the process a *lingua sacra* ("a cosmopolitan language with religious credentials," 99). In the following two chapters Mallette lingers over the two great Mediterranean translation movements, from Greek into Arabic, and Arabic into Latin, by following the transmission of Aristotle's *Poetics* from Greek to Arabic to Latin. Here we watch "the cosmopolitan language tinkering with its own workings" (115), especially through an extended analysis of how translators and commentators rendered the *Poetics*' key Greek term, "mimesis," in Arabic and Latin. The Arab Christian translator and philosopher, Matta ibn Yunus (d. 940), for example, chose the term *ḥikāya*, meaning something like "pantomime" or "mimicry," for this purpose, taking a concept originating in Greek drama and inserting it into the very different theatrical culture of imitation and mocking of "the nonhuman and foreigner," a choice that both fundamentally changed the meaning of the Greek text, and led eventually to a transformation of the Arabic word itself. Chapter 10 jumps to the modern period to examine what Mallette calls "*cura linguae*, the human ministrations upon which superhuman language depends" (141), through, for example, the labors of Edward Lane, the 19th-century author of a still irreplaceable lexicon of classical Arabic.

Fuṣḥā, classical Arabic, continues to live on as an Alexandrian language used by poets, journalists, and scholars, whereas written Latin survives only in the pronouncements of the Vatican. In the final part of *Lives of the Great Languages*, Mallette first looks on as "Latin stumbles and falls silent" (146). Here we see some of the weaknesses of the cosmopolitan language. For one thing, it "grants immense expressive power, but only to a privileged few" (154), with Latin, in particular, becoming associated in many early-modern and modern minds with what were perceived to be moribund monastic and scholastic cultures. The decline of Latin, Mallette argues in Chapter 12, is set in stark relief by juxtaposing it with the sea-borne pidgin of largely Romance origin that was the commercial lingua franca of the late medieval Mediterranean. Limited in its vocabulary and grammatical structures, and almost never written down, it is "The Shadow of Latinity" (156), a useful but scarcely Alexandrian instrument. The book's final chapter then reprises many of the themes Mallette has dwelt upon earlier: the mistress tongue's haughty rejection of incompetence (via a reflection on the botched first printing of the Qurʾan by Paganini that survives in a single copy); the sense of distance from their chosen linguistic instrument that all who adopt a cosmopolitan language necessarily feel; the ability nonetheless of the Alexandrian language, in its richness and playfulness, to inspire virtuosity (as she sees in Michael Cooperson's recent, daring English translation of al-Hariri's famous *Maqamat*).

In celebrating "the ability of the cosmopolitan language to transcend regional and historical difference and bring its community together, across continents and centuries" (168), Karla Mallette has thrown down a challenge to medievalists and Mediterraneanists not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823000144 Published online by Cambridge University Press

only to appreciate these well-honed instruments, but to give them a much more central place in scholarly engagement. As her many vignettes make absolutely evident, not only are there many questions that remain about how they function and flex over time, but far from being stuffy, obscurantist tongues, these mistress languages are full of surprises that shed abundant new light on the literary, intellectual, and cultural history of the Middle Ages in general.

doi:10.1017/S0020743823000144

Metrics of Modernity: Art and Development in Postwar Turkey. Sarah-Neel Smith (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022). Pp. 216. $50.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780520383418

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Since its conception in 1937, Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture has reflected the political, art historical, and economic structures of its time. Following years of preservation hazards, decades-long closures, and management crises, the museum has recently opened to the public once again. With its politicized and recently gentrified physical location in the historically commercial neighborhood of Karaköy, numerous restoration and conservation issues around its vast and poorly maintained collection, and the gaps its absence leaves in the art history of Turkey, the museum embodies many issues at the heart of Sarah-Neel Smith's *Metrics of Modernity: Art and Development in Postwar Turkey*, which serves as the subject of the book's epilogue. The museum's current and "semiperipheral" status is positioned as a question of Turkey's artistic futurity, as the author traces the convoluted patterns of Turkey's art scene in the mid-twentieth century over the course of four chapters. The convergence of economic, artistic, and political spheres, namely, the country's fragile economic market, its transition into a multiparty democracy, and artistic experimentation with tradition, means that Smith is also largely telling a story of obsolescence. Indeed, Smith chooses to thematize places that have ceased to exist today or have taken on new, often diminished, forms. The intersections of state control, ownership, and private enterprise are at the center of contemporary political discourse, and their centrality to *Metrics of Modernity* adds a significant contribution to modern and contemporary Turkish art history. Importantly, Smith demonstrates how mid-twentieth-century Turkey's contested political and economic past translates to its art institutional models, a connection that has often remained overlooked in contemporary scholarship.

Smith primarily focuses on the socioeconomic modernization and artistic modernisms of Turkey in the 1950s. This decade in Turkey's political and economic history marks the country's integration into an American-instigated capitalist free market, shifting from state-driven economic policies to private enterprise and the rise of individual consumption, which are what Smith deems the "metrics" of modernity. Drawing on a wide array of sources, from close readings of artworks and art criticism to theories of public policy and economics, Smith analyzes the modes of artistic production and consumption in Turkey. The main protagonists of the book, Adalet Cimcöz, Bülent Ecevit, Aliye Berger, and Füreya Koral, appear almost in every chapter, articulating an interwoven narrative on the confined institutional networks and shared missions ascribed to the artists of postwar Turkey. Artists

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