Book Review

Tahera Qutbuddin. *Arabic Oration: Art and Function*. Handbook of Oriental Studies, 131 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019). ISBN 9789004394407 (cloth); 9789004395800 (e-book). xv+643 pp. $209.00 cloth; $59.00 paper; $209.00 e-book.

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Early Islamic history is a history made of speeches. Muslim sources are peppered with countless orations, next to other types of direct speech like poetry recitations or simple dialogues, and most early Islamic caliphs, generals, governors, rebels, and other salient figures have famous orations ascribed to them. Medieval Islamic scholars have preserved these speeches in writing and cherished them as models for eloquent speech alongside the Qurʾan and Arabic poetry. Oratory was so crucial to medieval Arab identity that the famous polymath al-Jāḥiẓ stated that only the Arabs and Persians have oratory, and only the Arabs have the gift of spontaneous and extemporaneous speech "as though it is simply inspiration" (p. 61). Yet, despite the omnipresence of speeches in historical and literary sources about the early Islamic period and despite the importance that medieval Arabo-Islamic society ascribed to them, Arabic oratory has been a forgotten genre in modern Western scholarship.[1] Tahera Qutbuddin's erudite, comprehensive, and detailed survey of the genre has the potential to change that. Her exploration of the early Arabic oration (*khuṭba*) has already won the prestigious Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2021 in the category Arabic Culture in Other Languages, recognizing

1. The first monograph on early Arabic oration as a genre in a Western language was Stefan Dähne's 2001 dissertation: Stefan Dähne, "Reden der Araber: die politische ḫuṭba in der klassischen arabischen Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2001). Important articles on the topic are Tahera Qutbuddin, "Khuṭba: The Evolution of Early Arabic Oration," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in their Own Terms*, ed. Beatrice Gründler, with Michael Cooperson, 176–273 (Leiden: Brill, 2008) ; and Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Early Ornate Prose and the Rhetorization of Poetry in Arabic Literature," in *Literary and Philosophical Rhetoric in the Greek, Roman, Syrian, and Arabic Worlds*, ed. Frédérique Woerther, 215–34 (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 2009).

its merits. Qutbuddin's *Arabic Oration* is an indisputable contribution to the field of classical Arabic literature that can pave the way for studies in new directions.

In this voluminous book, Qutbuddin sets out to chart the early Arabic oration's thematic, functional, and aesthetic topographies and its major orators, to discuss notions of authority and public space as they relate to oratory, and to tackle the complex issues of the orality, authenticity, historicity, and literary impact of orations. She argues that the oration was "the most important communicative event of the public sphere in classical Arabian and Islamic society" (p. 10). Although the focus is on the early period (pre-Islamic, early Islamic, Umayyad, and early Abbasid), she also follows the story of the oration into later periods, including the contemporary era. Most chapters end with a translation and analysis of one oration that illustrates the features discussed in the chapter.

In the Introduction, the author delineates the horizons of her project, outlines her methodology, and explains her approach to the broader issues of genre, orality, and authenticity. She defines the oration as "official discourse serving various religious, political, legislative, military, and other purposes, and containing diverse themes of piety, policy, urgings to battle, and law" distinguished by extemporaneous composition and oral delivery (p. 13). She identifies orality as generative of the oration's mnemonic design and metonymic evocation. She bases her discussion here (and later) in large part on Walter Ong's influential 1982 *Orality and Literacy.* One may object that this work is now outdated, having attracted much critique for creating the so-called Great Divide between the "primitive" Oral mind and the "civilized" Literate mind.[2] On the other hand, theoretical work by scholars such as Ong, Eric Havelock, or Jack Goody that addresses broader cultural changes related to the transition from orality to literacy has not yet been fully integrated into discussions of Arabic literature, so including it should be seen as a step in the right direction.[3] Qutbuddin also refers to other doyens of orality studies, such as John Miles Foley and his discussion of metonymy's importance to oral production, in order to support her own consideration of the uses of metonymical evocation in orations.

Chapter 1 contains a thorough discussion of authenticity, a question that has dominated the modern field of early Islam. Among the different types of sources for early Islam (Qurʾan, *ḥadīth,* poetry, *akhbār*), oratory has generally been afforded the lowest degree of historicity. Albrecht Noth in his influential *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* dismissed the entire genre of early Arabic orations as "fictions from beginning to end."[4] Qutbuddin has argued elsewhere that a genuine core of early

2. See the author's disclaimer on pp. 4–5, n.4.

3. Among the exceptions in this regard is Suzanne Stetkevych, who has integrated the broader theoretical discussions of Ong and Havelock into her work in a sophisticated fashion. See, for instance, Suzanne Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to Badīʿiyyah: Orality, Literacy, and the Transformations of Rhetoric in Arabic Poetry," *Oral Tradition* 25, no. 1 (2010): 211–30. See also Shawkat Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005).

4. Albrecht Noth and Lawrence Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, trans. Michel Bonner

orations exists based on what we know about their cultural context, such as the high degree of memorization, their public nature, and note-taking.[5] Her statement "Invent an oration? It is possible. Invent a genre? Not likely" (p. 56) most eloquently encapsulates her attitude to authenticity here: it's complicated, but it cannot be dismissed altogether. Additionally, she proposes criteria for determining tentative authenticity, making the point that we should always focus on individual pieces and naming some positive criteria, including, for example, a wide dissemination of the oration across "generic, political, and sectarian lines" or a lack of anachronistic terminology (p. 59).

In Chapter 2, the author studies the structure of the oration. She argues that despite the fragmentary nature of the material, a clear structure emerges, which she sees as fivefold: a formulaic praise-of-God introduction (*taḥmīd*); a transition phrase (*ammā baʿd*); a phrase of direct address; the main body of the oration; and a concluding formula of prayer for God's forgiveness. Based on the themes and contexts, she identifies four major types of oration: the sermon of pious counsel, the Friday and Eid sermon, the battle oration, and the political speech (p. 81). She explains that the fixed structure and themes do not take away from the orations' resonance with their religio-political context. For example, Sulaymān b. Ṣurad, the leader of the Tawwābūn ("Penitents," an early Shiʿite group who were penitent for not fighting alongside the Shiʿite martyr Ḥusayn) could use an oration to pray for courage in battle before he went to fight the Umayyads, while the Umayyads could use one to pronounce a curse on ʿAlī. Qutbuddin's analysis emphasizes the sophisticated structure of early Islamic orations, which facilitated the delivery of the message for both orator and audience, each of whom had clear expectations of what an oration should look like.

In Chapter 3, the author sets out to answer the question, "wherein lay the beauty and power of the oration?" (p. 91) by analyzing the style of Arabic oratory. She identifies its signature style as characterized by rhythm, elements of audience engagement, vivid nature imagery, testimonial citation from the Qurʾan and poetry, and dignified yet direct language (p. 92). She ascribes the main stylistic features of the oration to its mnemonics-based production, returning to a discussion of orality, which although it had been first applied to Arabic poetry may be a much better fit for oratory.[6]

(Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1994), 87–96.

5. Qutbuddin, "Khutba," 187–89; and idem, ed. and trans., *A Treasury of Virtues: Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of ʿAlī by al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī, with The One Hundred Proverbs attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), xvi.

6. Michael Zwettler and James Monroe pioneered the use of orality theory in the field of classical Arabic poetry. Zwettler and Monroe applied the famous Parry-Lord oral formulaic theory to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and were critiqued in more recent scholarship, most influentially by Gregor Schoeler and Thomas Bauer. See James T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 (1972), 1–53; Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1978); see also "Oral Composition and Transmission of al-Ḥajjāj's Speeches: Beyond 'Authenticity'" and "Appendix II" in Pamela Klasova, "Empire through Language: Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī and the Power of Oratory in Umayyad Iraq" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2018), 272–341, 419–41.

There is indeed much potential in the application of orality theory to Arabic oratory, especially as a way of including Arabic materials in comparative studies of orality. One more thing to be applauded is Qutbuddin's effort to use native Arabic rhetorical terminology to describe the different stylistic elements and explain them clearly so that even a reader not familiar with *ʿilm al-balāgha* (the Islamic science of rhetoric) can understand them. This reinforces the point about the sophistication of Arabic oratory as well as its medieval Arabic literary scholarship. The main example of this chapter is ʿAlī's oration after the Battle of the Camel.

In Chapter 4, the author studies the dynamics between orators and their audiences. She notes that most orators were people of political, military, or religious authority (p. 166). Using Hannah Arendt's discussion of authority, which is to be understood as distinct from both coercion and persuasion, Qutbuddin argues that in the Arabic context these categories were not mutually exclusive but existed on a spectrum (p. 167). She documents a move over time from a more pliable to a tougher approach. Although this general trend is clearly observable when one looks to political orations from pre-Islamic times to the Umayyad period, I would hesitate to say that Umayyad governors like Ziyād b. Abīhi and al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī "did not root their power in a religious mandate" (p. 183).[7] Qutbuddin also notes that an important part of oratorical performance is the active participation of an audience. Listeners wept, gestured, asked questions, or made promises in response to the orator, making the whole performance an interactive event. To illustrate the interactive nature of the oration, Qutbuddin uses the speech delivered by Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī at Karbala on the morning of ʿĀshūrā to the Umayyad army before he was killed by them.

With Chapter 5, the author begins a series of chapters (Chapters 5–8) dedicated to the four types of Arabic oration she identified earlier: the sermon of pious counsel, the Friday and Eid sermon, the battle oration, and the political speech. The sermon of pious counsel is marked by themes of piety and obedience, the imminence of death, and preparation for the Hereafter, as well as by its own distinctive vocabulary and concepts. Qutbuddin notes a crossover with other literary genres, such as the testament, condolence, and admonishment. The famous oration by Qaṭarī b. al-Fujāʾa censuring this world serves as the main example of the sermon of pious counsel.

In Chapter 6, the author moves to the Friday sermon and the Eid sermon (i.e., the sermon delivered during the two annual festivals, ʿĪd al-Fiṭr and ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā), which are the most important ritual speeches in Islam. Qutbuddin discusses the ritual and its structure, themes of piety and politics, and paradigms of authority. Both the Friday and the Eid sermons are delivered in two parts with a short break in the middle, a convention traceable at least to the late second/eighth century, as she notes. She describes the structure of the sermons as beginning with the *taḥmīd*, in the Eid *khuṭbas* followed by the *takbīr* (saying *Allāhu akbar*, God is the greatest),

7. I have discussed the religious rhetoric of al-Ḥajjāj throughout my dissertation and explore it further in my forthcoming book. See Klasova, "Empire through Language," 225–71.

occasionally including *ṣalawāt* (blessings on the Prophet), and then transitioning to the vocative address to the audience and various themes. The same structure would be repeated in the second part of the sermon. Qutbuddin emphasizes that in ritual speeches, as in other genres, piety blended with political, administrative, and military themes (p. 282). Ritual orations could include an announcement of policies and their justifications, executive commands, or exhortations to fight in the path of God. The main example given here is Muḥammad's first Friday sermon with its mostly pious themes, instructing listeners to be conscious of God, obey him, perform good deeds, and prepare for the hereafter.

In Chapter 7, the author discusses the battle oration, whose main goal was to rouse warriors to fight by promising heavenly reward (wealth or women) or retribution for non-compliance (certain death). Other effective ways to mobilize masses were to issue threats connected famously with al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf[8] or to call for vengeance for the blood of Ḥusayn, which was the central feature of the movement of the Tawwābūn. Using Theodore Burgess's division of ancient speeches into twelve types, Qutbuddin notes a considerable overlap in the themes between classical Arabic and Greco-Roman oratory (pp. 310–11). One difference she pinpoints is a lack of national patriotism in the Arabic materials; another is the Greco-Roman focus on the superiority of their commander, which contrasts with the Arab emphasis on moral rectitude. She also points out that the concept of just war—or jihad in the Islamic context—had its counterparts in the Greco-Roman world (p. 312). The main example of this chapter is the oration by Ṭāriq b. Ziyād at the conquest of Spain.

In Chapter 8, the author explores political speech. As she explains, in the pre-Islamic period, these speeches dealt with issues of tribal leadership, while in the early Islamic period they were speeches of succession, policy, and control. She identifies as the main themes of the political speech succession, accession, threats and maintenance of order, fiscal policy, and pious counsel (p. 334), and provides examples from the speeches of caliphs and governors. To show that oratory was shaped by historical developments, she mentions for instance that the punitive flavor of the Umayyad governors' accession speeches reflects the uneasy relationship between the subjects of the region and the central power (p. 345). The main example of this chapter is a famous accession speech by al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf.

In Chapter 9, the author discusses other types of orations: legislative, theological, oracular, and matrimonial. Legislative orations expounded religious rules and disseminated ritual, civic, and criminal legislation and are mainly connected with the Prophet Muḥammad. What stands out compared to ancient Greek oratory is the absence of the forensic subtype. A famous oration of the legislative type is the sermon that the Prophet Muḥammad delivered on Mount ʿArafāt during his last pilgrimage. Regarding theological speeches, Qutbuddin names a number of examples by ʿAlī, which ponder monotheism and God's transcendence. For the marriage oration

8. In my dissertation and book, I show that there is more to al-Ḥajjāj's oratory than threats.

she gives the example of Abū Ṭālib, Muḥammad's uncle who officiated his marriage to Khadīja (p. 379). For the oracular oration, distinguished by the rhyme of the soothsayers (*sajʿ al-kuhhān*), she notes consonant rhyming and rare vocabulary, oaths by auspicious natural objects (moon, stars, rain), syntactic parallelism, staccato sentences, and contents that involved mantic judgment regarding issues of leadership or divination about outcomes of battles, meanings of dreams, or possibilities for rain. She also notes that soothsayers were often female, in contrast with the overwhelming number of male speakers among regular orators (p. 381), which leads us to the topic of the next chapter.

In Chapter 10, Qutbuddin deals with women's orations. Given the predominance of male speakers, she asks what prompted women to speak and if there were any special characteristics to their speeches. The main examples she uses in this chapter are speeches by Fāṭima bt Muḥammad, ʿĀʾisha bt Abī Bakr, and Zaynab bt ʿAlī. In her analysis, the two features that characterize their speeches are that the women derive authority from kinship with the Prophet Muḥammad and that their speeches are grounded in trauma. Introducing Gayatri Spivak and scholars of trauma to speak about the muzzling of women's voices, Qutbuddin argues that in the early Islamic context, trauma had the opposite effect; it was a catalyst for freeing women's voices from the usual societal constraints (p. 401). Further, she connects women's oratorical reactions to the deaths of their relatives to the pre-Islamic female poets who were known for their elegies (p. 402). She also uses Yuval Hariri's theory of "flesh-witnessing" (p. 403) to analyze orators who have undergone the experiences that they describe, in particular in her discussion of Zaynab's post-Karbala oration.

In Chapter 11, the author discusses oratory's influence on Arabic prose, returning once more to discussions of orality and literacy. She sees the locus of the link between the oral and the written in the relationship between the (oral) oration and the (written) epistle, which took up many of the oration's functions in the more literate world that emerged beginning in the late second/eighth century. And insofar as the epistle played a role in the development of the *maqāmāt* genre (important to the development of modern prose), the oration, the predecessor of the epistle, should also be part of the story. It does not mean, however, that with the onslaught of literacy, orality disappeared entirely. Qutbuddin emphasizes that an oral-written hybridity lasted into the high literate period. The oration also preserved some of its oral aspects, while undergoing a transformation. One change she notes is that orations were now prepared first in writing and made more consistent use of the consonant rhyme (*sajʿ*, p. 421), which was typical of chancery style (*inshāʾ*). Finally, the functions of the genre changed, with the oration losing its political role to the epistle and becoming increasingly limited to the religious realm, especially the domain of Friday and Eid sermons. Qutbuddin sees the gradual political demise of the oration as parallel to the growing centralization of the state and the caliph's seclusion from public view (p. 425).

In Chapter 12, the author's journey continues to the modern era. She makes a novel argument for the influence of

classical Arabic oratory on contemporary Muslim sermons and speeches. Her observations are based on site visits in 2009, 2011, and 2017 and on printed and online materials, and concern Egypt, Iraq, India, and Turkey—an interesting selection, given the mix of Arabic-speaking countries and countries where Arabic is not a majority language. The main difference between modern and classical orations is that the features of orality, such as rhythm and parallelism, are limited in the modern sermons. Also, colloquial Arabic is occasionally used. What remains are the Friday and Eid ritual itself, the pulpit, some elements like the *taḥmīd,* and regular Qurʾan and *ḥadīth* citation. In the countries where Arabic is not the spoken language, Arabic can be either used liturgically or interspersed in the sermon, which is in the local language. She observes that in Egypt, the political opposition especially, including Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood, uses speeches and historical references to bolster their agenda (pp. 445–46). In Iraq, she notes that the oratory of the pro-ISIS leader and preacher Badrani is distinguished by the classical register and includes many historical and religious references. In India, the Friday and Eid sermon is in full classical Arabic, and it is often a recitation of a model sermon from compilations of sermons. Interestingly, there are differences between the Shiʿites and the Sunnis in using Arabic (p. 463). In Turkey, preachers also look to the early Arabic oration, in terms of both the formulae and citations from the early texts. The framing formulae are usually in Arabic while the main part of the sermon is in Turkish. This final chapter also serves as a conclusion. Qutbuddin ends her long journey that extended over 1,500 years with a call to Western scholars to ground their analysis of political discourse in Arabic-speaking countries within a knowledge of the earliest oratorical sources, which provide tools to decode it. Only then can we understand a sermon's appeal.

The important contribution of *Arabic Oration* lies in its comprehensive nature. The book brings most early Arabic oratorical texts together in one volume, either in discussion or in examples. It contains so many long quotations from primary sources that it can serve as a reference work of early Arabic oratory. Qutbuddin has also compiled a long reference list of orations (pp. 486–551), which supplies for each oration the page numbers where it is discussed in the book, its historical and geographical context, and the primary sources that preserve it. This list, organized alphabetically based on the names of the orators, too, will be valuable to future researchers.

The comprehensiveness of the book naturally also entails some limitations. One byproduct of the amassing of information is the blurring of differences between individual orations. The book includes a wide variety of oratory, each with its own particular flavor. Qatarī b. Fujāʾa's speech, for example, is very different from a speech by Abū Bakr, which in turn differs from a speech by al-Ḥajjāj. Qutbuddin's typologies are helpful for understanding the broader contours of the tradition, but they occasionally distract from the particularities of individual orators and orations. This book is also not an easy read. It is full of names, long quotations, lists of typical expressions, lists of formulae, etc. At the same time, this makes it a great resource for researchers. As noted

above, Chapter 1 takes the question of authenticity head on in a nuanced way, but the reader may lose track of this question in the course of the book, which presents orations as they appear in the sources. For example, it is difficult to imagine that those of ʿAlī's speeches which contained later theological terms like *mawṣūf* (thing described), *ṣifa* (attribute), and *kaynūna* (existence), which would have been foreign to the first/seventh century (p. 373), would be authentic. Qutbuddin, however, attempts to defend their authenticity (pp. 374–75), subverting her own criteria related to anachronistic terminology.[9] In other words, on many occasions, I would not be as certain as she is of the authenticity of the individual orations; at the same time, however, her inclusion of all speeches, even the ones less likely to be early, is useful: it lays out clearly and comprehensively all that medieval Muslim sources have preserved for us in the genre of the Arabic oration. Future scholars may make their own judgments concerning the individual pieces, as the author recommends.

Arabic Oration holds great potential for future researchers, whether they want to study early Arabic oratory, early Arabic oral production more broadly, or early Islamic ideology of state, warfare, or religion, or to compare early Arabic oratorical production with the verbal art of other cultures. Staying close to the tradition, and mostly within its bounds, means that the book presents a coherent and singular picture of Arabic oratory. In the future, scholars could take this work as a basis to examine Arabic oratory from different or comparative perspectives, which may nuance or complicate some of the concepts that Qutbuddin presents. I suggest three such concepts to illustrate possible future directions for research: improvisation, piety, and persuasion. Qutbuddin follows the sources (for example, al-Jāḥiẓ or Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd) to emphasize that what distinguishes early Arabic oratory from oratory in other cultures (and in the Abbasid era) is that it was extemporaneous, spontaneous, or, in other words, improvised. But when we look to classical and medieval rhetoric, improvisation was a common topos there too.[10] Mary Carruthers, in her classic book on the central role of memory in medieval Europe, explained that improvisation is "the highest reward of our long labors,"[11] the result of days spent memorizing, learning the rules, practicing, and training. Who can say that the accounts that we have from the early Abbasid period about the assiduous training for orators do not reflect something from the practices of the early period?[12] The theme of piety, which returns in *Arabic Oration* as the binding theme of most texts, is another that lends itself to comparison. Fred Donner identified piety as perhaps the

9. The author does include a caveat in Chapter 1 (p.59) that some terms may have been inserted later to an earlier oration.

10. See, for example, Glyn P. Norton, "Improvisation, Time, and Opportunity in the Rhetorical Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*, ed. George E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut, 262–88 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

11. Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 205.

12. Klasova, "Empire through Language," 380–83.

most important form of legitimation in the early Islamic period and connected it with the broader late antique milieu.[13] So rather than thinking about piety as a feature specific to Arabic oratory, we may think about it as the common rhetoric of its time and place. Finally, let us look at the concept of persuasion, which, as mentioned, Qutbuddin uses to highlight the unique nature of Arabic oratory, combining persuasion and coercion in its bid for authority. Qutbuddin calls the techniques that Arabic oratory espoused "tacit persuasion" (crediting Robert Lanham with the term).[14] That is, the combination of the orator's high status and potent delivery is what made a speech effective. Persuasion has been at the heart of Greco-Roman oratory and political theory, inextricably connected with argumentation since Aristotle. Is it really the same persuasion that Qutbuddin talks about? (Or the same concept of authority as the one Arendt discusses, for that matter?) *Arabic Oration* could serve as an important starting point to nuance these concepts in the framework of early Arabic public speaking. These points illustrate how new studies could explore important phenomena of the early Islamic world through the prisms of ancient and medieval rhetoric, memory studies, late antiquity, and literary theory.

Finally, I would like to circle back to an earlier question—why has Arabic oratory not been studied in the West?—for it highlights the importance of Qutbuddin's intervention in the field. One reason why Arabic oratory has been neglected in Western scholarship, despite its ubiquity in Arabic sources and its cultural relevance in medieval Islamic society, may be that it has been regarded as inauthentic. But then, the authenticity of Thucydides' speeches has long been debated, and yet the speeches have been studied, admired, and discussed from Antiquity to modern times.[15] Another reason is one proposed by Philip Halldén: the misalignment of Western and Islamic taxonomies of learning.[16] In Islamic tradition, oratory and homily fell under ritual knowledge and thus not under the purview of philosophers and rhetoricians. By the nineteenth century rhetoric came to be understood mainly as encompassing matters of style and aesthetics (*elocutio*), which according to Halldén led Western scholars to identify "rhetoric" with *ʿilm al-balāgha* while oratory (*al-khaṭāba*) was cast aside.[17] Consequently, Islamic rhetoric

13. For his treatment of Islamic piety, see Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), 64–97.

14. See Richard Lanham, "Tacit Persuasion Patterns and a Dictionary of Rhetorical Terms" in *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* 2nd ed., ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 177–94 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

15. With regard to modern discussions about Thucydides' speeches, Donald Kagan says: "There are few arguments of longer standing in the scholarship on Thucydides than the one concerning the speeches in his History, and none is more important for understanding it and its author. The main question is: did Thucydides try to reproduce the arguments put forward by the speakers on each occasion as accurately as he could, or did he feel free to invent arguments and even whole speeches?" Donald Kagan, "The Speeches in Thucydides and the Mytilene Debate," *Yale Classical Studies* 24 (2010): 71–94, at 71.

16. Philip Halldén, "What Is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the History of Muslim Oratory Art and Homiletics," *Peace Research Abstracts Journal* 42, no. 4 (2005): 19–38, at 25.

17. Ibid., 27.

came to be understood as hermeneutics and textual aesthetics while Western rhetoric retained its ancient connotations of debate and critical thinking. In my view, the chronology here could be flipped. The preconceptions about the East and the West should be the point of departure, not the conclusion. The heart of the matter lies in the continuing essentialist dichotomies of Western democracy vs. Oriental despotism. Western intellectual production is imagined to be creative and worth grappling with, while "Oriental" literature is assumed to be passive and formalistic. It is therefore crucial to begin to bring to light some of the beauty and power of early Arabic oratory.

Arabic Oration is a magisterial study of early Arabic oratory that is mainly aimed at specialists in the field of Arabic literature. Due to its comprehensive nature, it can serve as an important resource for scholars of early Islamic history. Thanks to the long quotations from primary texts translated into English, it provides much comparative material for scholars in other fields, such as orality, rhetoric, and communication studies. The close analyses of individual texts can also be used in the classroom context. I look forward to seeing the new interest in the study of early Arabic oratory that Qutbuddin's *Arabic Oration* should spark.