

# World History Encyclopedia

**Era 4: Expanding Regional Civilizations, 300–1000 ■ Volume 7**

**GENERAL EDITOR**

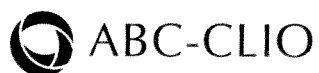
Alfred J. Andrea

**ASSOCIATE GENERAL EDITOR**

Carolyn Neel

**ERA 4 EDITOR**

Wilfred J. Bisson



Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

Copyright 2011 by ABC-CLIO, LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

World history encyclopedia / Alfred J. Andrea, general editor ; Carolyn Neel, associate general editor.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-85109-929-0 (hard copy : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-1-85109-930-6 (ebook)

1. World history—Encyclopedias. 2. History—Encyclopedias.

I. Andrea, Alfred J., 1941- II. Neel, Carolyn.

D9.W67 2011

909—dc22

2010045324

EAN: 978-1-85109-929-0

EAN (Ebook): 978-1-85109-930-6

15 14 13 12 11 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.  
Visit [www.abc-clio.com](http://www.abc-clio.com) for details.

ABC-CLIO, LLC

130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911  
Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper ☺

Manufactured in the United States of America

Christian writers wrote instructional handbooks to help the clergy spread the good word. Such an effort was the *Pastoral Care* of Pope St. Gregory I (“the Great”) (ca. 540–604). St. Gregory was a prolific author who contributed to shaping church doctrine and practice. *Pastoral Care* was well received and was reproduced throughout medieval Europe. Within the text, St. Gregory gives practical advice for the clergy’s care of its spiritual charges. Gregory outlines what kind of men should work for the Church, how to conduct oneself as a pastor, how to preach to various kinds of parishioners, and how to do all of this with humility. This influential work served as a handbook for clergy and as a meditation on all kinds of rule, both secular and sacred.

Once the right person was found for the job of pastor, he had to be able to deliver mass. This duty spawned a large body of liturgical writing. While the Scripture was the bedrock of Christian mass, interpretative sermons provided the means of bringing the Scripture’s message to the people. Abbot Aelfric of Eynsham (ca. 955–1010) was an acknowledged master of the form. Aelfric’s passion for reaching his audience was made plain in the preface to his *Catholic Homilies* (ca. 989). He wrote that his reason for writing in English rather than Latin was to “more readily reach the hearts of those who read or hear.” Liturgical texts, then, were not merely to announce the teachings of the Church but also to genuinely connect with the congregation.

Some of those early medieval Christians eagerly sought that connection to help explain the mechanics of their lives, giving rise to many philosophical treatises on religion. One of the early medieval era’s most influential meldings of philosophy and religion was the work of Boethius (ca. 480–524). A Roman citizen during the rule of King Theodoric the Ostrogoth (r. 493–526), Boethius wrote his *Consolation of Philosophy* (ca. 523–524) while imprisoned on spurious treason charges. Within his text, Boethius posits a discussion between his alter ego and Lady Philosophy. Following a model of Platonic discourse, Lady Philosophy brings Boethius to understand that everything happens for a divine greater good; all suffering is part of the divine plan. If liturgical texts like *Pastoral Care* helped to bridge the spiritual gap between clergy and

parishioner, philosophical texts such as *Consolation* helped to provide a rational understanding of the mechanics of providence.

Spiritual and intellectual understanding of Christian teachings inspired a large number of imaginative works in the early Middle Ages. Anglo-Saxon poets could turn the biblical Exodus into a heroic poem in the eighth century or have a gospel book speak the riddle of its identity in the tenth century. Christian teachings had passed from the precincts of the churches and cloisters into the popular imagination. The impact of Christianity on the literature of the early Middle Ages is profound and, ultimately, inestimable. What the religion fostered was a diverse, profuse, and meaningful literary heritage.

—Todd Preston

#### Bibliography

- De Jong, Mayke. “Religion.” In *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400–1000*, edited by Rosamond McKitterick. Short Oxford History of Europe. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Gamble, Harry. *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Gameson, Richard, ed. *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*. Cambridge Studies in Palaeography and Codicology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Pope, John C., ed. *Homilies of Aelfric: A Supplementary Collection, Being Twenty-One Full Homilies of His Middle and Later Career*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Wood, Ian. “Christianisation and the Dissemination of Christian Teaching.” In *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 1, c. 500–c. 700, edited by Paul Fouracre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

#### Arabic Literature

Arabic literature has a rich and wide-ranging history. In its Classical Period (sixth to twelfth centuries CE), it developed in diverse artistic directions. In the cultural melting pot of the early Islamic world, indigenous Arabian literary ideas and forms blended with middle Persian, Greek, and Indian traditions to produce a colorful literature in the Arabic language. Poetic genres such as tribal odes, brigand poetry, ele-

giac laments, love lyrics, court panegyrics, scathing satires, and mystical verses emerged side by side with prose genres such as scripture, orations, epistles, fables, mirrors for princes, and popular tales, all with their own intriguing features. Centuries later, these texts still provide us with a firsthand view of the culture and thought of the classical Arabic-speaking world.

Arabic was a distinct language by the third century CE. In the pre-Islamic period of the sixth century CE, poetry and oratory had already emerged in the Arabian Peninsula as fully developed art forms. From this period some short poems, primarily elegies by women, and a larger collection of odes by men have survived. The latter form typically included the following tripartite structure: first a love prelude, with the poet weeping over the deserted encampment of the departed beloved, followed by a journey through the wilderness with descriptions of the poet's mount, camel or horse, and of desert landscapes and animals, and finally a section of tribal praise or self-praise, focusing on the twin heroic motifs of generosity and courage. These odes, on average between 60 and 130 verses in length, were set in monorhyme and monometer verse. Their composers used a standard nondialect form of Arabic that was used for intertribal communication and for all "high" literature. Among these odes, the most famous are the seven called *mu'allaqat*, and of them, Imru' al-Qays's *mu'allaqa* is perhaps the best-known poem in all of Arabic literature.

Poetry was considered the register of the Arabs, a record of their great deeds and culture, even their conception of the meaning of life and death. It had a ritual and mythic function, and poets, in the pre-Islamic period, were believed to possess semidivine, shamanistic powers.

Although oratory was the major Arabic prose genre during pre-Islamic times, relatively few examples of this form have survived. Extant pieces consist of rhymed pronouncements by soothsayers, pious sermons about the inevitability of death by pagans and Christians, and political speeches by tribal leaders during periods of intertribal hostility.

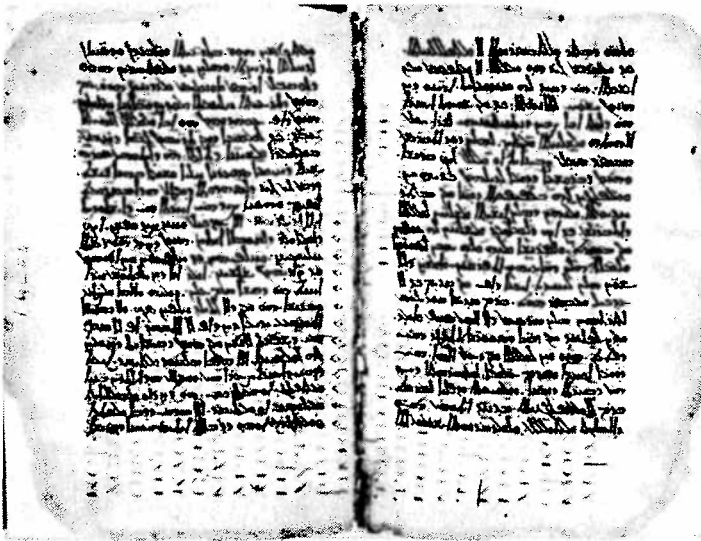
With the advent of Islam in the early seventh century CE came its Holy Book, the Quran. Muslims believe that the Quran was the word of God, containing knowledge of all things revealed to

his prophet Muhammad through the archangel Gabriel. The Quran had no literary precedent, being neither poetry nor prose. Its miraculous nature was attributed in part to its use of language. The Quran had an enormous influence on subsequent Arabic literature. The desire for Muslims to understand the linguistic and idiomatic context of the Quran, in addition to their wish for tribal valorization, motivated many Muslims to preserve earlier poetic materials.

In this period oratory continued to exist as a major prose genre. 'Ali b. Abi Talib, an important religious and political personage of early Islam, composed orations that delineated the Arabic path of eloquence. Most of the literature produced up until the mid-eighth century was oral. Scholars memorized and orally transmitted these works to subsequent generations. In the late eighth and early ninth centuries scholars such as Sukkari, Mufaddal, and Asma'i began physically copying these works.

The Arabic language spread to Persia, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt in the mid-seventh century with the Muslim conquests of these lands and, to a large degree, replaced the local languages. The emerging Islamic empire adopted the bureaucratic forms of the Sassanian and Byzantine empires it had conquered. Although written Arabic prose had existed since early Islamic times in the form of treaties and brief epistles, as the empire expanded Islamic leaders found it increasingly necessary to disseminate policy edicts more widely. This gave rise to a chancery that produced polished policy documents.

In 697, when the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik required the use of Arabic in the imperial chancery, it became the seat of Arabic literary prose. Most chancery officials were Persian or Greek; therefore, the first written Arabic literary prose developed under the impetus of these groups' respective writings on statecraft while being simultaneously influenced in style and theme by the indigenous Arabic oratorical tradition. In comparison to oratory, this epistolary style emphasized longer syntactically parallel constructions. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Katib was this form's most celebrated proponent. The vast majority of writers emulated his style, although a century later the emphasis shifted again to rhyming prose.



Part of a text by Severus, Christian Patriarch of Antioch, about 800 CE. By this time, the majority of the literature in the West, whether by Muslim or Christian writers, was in Arabic. (The British Library)

Umayyad poetry brought in new dimensions with the introduction of vituperative poetic duels. Farazdaq, Jarir, and Akhtal are famous for their bawdy satires. Furthermore, two new schools of love poetry emerged. ‘Umar b. Abi Rabi’a represents the Hijazi style, with flippant dialogue and a coquettish beloved, and two poets from the tribe of ‘Udhra, Jamil and Majnun, represent the ‘Udhri style, with expressions of grieving laments and unfulfilled, undying love. Poets of the Umayyad period, such as Farazdaq and Kumayt, also composed religio-political poetry in praise of the family of the prophet.

The subsequent Abbasid period was one of great literary efflorescence. In the early ninth century, the caliph Ma’mun founded an institute in Baghdad, called the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma). Under the leadership of a Nestorian Christian, Hunayn b. Ishaq, its scholars translated works of Greek philosophy, via Syriac, into Arabic. This translation movement produced a rationalist trend in Arabic literature that influenced many contemporary writers. Abbasid society’s appreciation of literature, its opulent multiethnic courts that encouraged literary production, and its openness to new ideas and cultures gave rise to creative innovations in both

prose and poetry. The geographical compass of Arabic literature also expanded. In addition to the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and Iraq, Arabic literary production was now coming out of Egypt, Persia, and central Asia.

Fiction, in the Arabic mind, had initially been considered “untruthful” and thus morally reprehensible. This negative perception changed gradually but never really disappeared until modern times. Early Arabic authors of fiction adopted the form of historical writing. This form consisted of real or made-up anecdotes, each framed by an oral chain of transmission (*isnad*). These early works also exemplify a genre of prose called *adab*, literally meaning “good manners” but also “literary culture.”

Ibn al-Muqaffa, a Persian scribe, produced the first Arabic work of fiction. His “mirror for princes” fable *Kalila and Dimna* was an Arabic reworking of a Persian book that itself was a translation of the ancient Sanskrit text *Panchatantra*. A prose writer from Hamadan nicknamed Badi’ al-Zaman, or “Marvel of the Age,” produced an original picaresque protonovel titled *Standings*, with an eloquent rogue as its hero. Jahiz, an essayist from Basra of East African lineage, wrote approximately 200 *adab* treatises on a vast range of topics, including animals, misers, politics, geography, and literary theory. These authors’ works were immensely influential in shaping the course of Arabic prose.

Poetry also expanded in new directions. A multiplicity of new and reworked genres emerged in Abbasid lands, such as homoerotic, wine, Arab-bashing, and ascetic poetry. In Fatimid Egypt, a new genre of religious mission poetry developed. This was also the age of the professional panegyrist (a poet who wrote praise for an individual) who was often a salaried employee of the state. And it was the age of stylistic innovation, with the introduction of far-fetched metaphors and excessive wordplay. Abu Tammam was a state panegyrist who famously praised the Abbasids’ military victories over the Byzantines. He is considered the principal proponent of the “artificial” *badi’* school. Mutanabbi was another celebrated panegyrist who lived in the tenth century. His descriptions of battles and horses as well as his gnomic pronouncements

on death are memorized and quoted by Arabic-speaking peoples to this day.

By the mid-ninth century, literary culture was widely accessible to the masses. Many famous litterateurs rose from humble socioeconomic beginnings to enjoy some of the best education of the day. Public lectures were commonly held in mosques on religious and secular topics, as were public debates. Baghdad boasted an entire market devoted to booksellers, which consisted of approximately 100 shops. The public libraries of Baghdad and Cairo contained tens of thousands of books (some reports go up to 200,000). Library budgets routinely included expenses for paper and ink in order to allow individuals to make their own copies. Arabic literature, in this period, transitioned from a primarily oral to a primarily written mode as paper-making techniques from China reached the Islamic world.

Alongside “high” literature composed in pure, classical Arabic, a tradition of popular tales had existed since at least the ninth century. These tales were in “middle” Arabic, a mixture of colloquial dialects and standard classical. Professional storytellers narrated fantasy tales sprinkled with myth, folktales, history, poetry, and Scripture, Arabic tales that had echoes from Persian, Turkish, Greek, and Indian cultures. The famed collection *Thousand and One Nights* (also known as *Arabian Nights*) took its Shahrazad frame story from an old Persian tale and used it to encompass all aspects of fascinating stories. It evolved over many centuries and was eventually written down in several versions. The storytellers also narrated epic story cycles (*sira*) of valiant heroes, such as the pre-Islamic ‘Antar, the warriors of the migratory tribe of the Banu Hilal, the warrior-princess Dhat al-Himma, and later of the Mamluk prince Baybars.

In the Far West, Arabs had entered Europe through North Africa as conquerors in the early eighth century. The Umayyad caliphate of Andalusia produced a good deal of literary material. Most of the important literary figures of Arab Spain are, however, from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries and thus outside the scope of this article. Non-Arabic speaking Muslims in South, Far East, and central Asia also

## ➤ “PRECIOUS GEMS”

“Halt, O companions both! Let us weep at the remembrance of a beloved and a campsite by the winding of the dunes, between Dakhul and Hawmal

and Tudih and Miqrat, whose traces have not been effaced from the weaving through of the North and South winds.

You see the droppings of white antelope in its open spaces and lowlands, like balls of peppercorn.

As though I—on the day they loaded their camels near the tribe’s acacia trees—were peeling bitter colocynth-onions.”

(Translated from Arabic by Tahera Qutbuddin)

Thus opens Imru al-Qays al-Kindi’s famous muallaqa ode, some of the best-known lines of Arabic literature. Sixth-century CE Dakhul, Hawmal, Tudih, and Miqrat are the names of ancient tribal camping sites in Arabia.

Poetry was the main art form of the Arabs in pre-Islamic times, and the best odes were reportedly selected by an intertribal council at the annual cultural fair of Ukaz to be written in letters of gold and hung on the holy shrine of the Kaaba in Mecca.

The poet gave the ode no real title. It is known as “the muallaqa of Imru al-Qays.” The etymology of the word “muallaqa” is disputed. The meaning might be “precious gems.” Or it could mean “the hung one” (on the walls of the Kaaba).

—Tahera Qutbuddin

produced a large amount of religious Arabic literature from the eighth century onward, but modern scholarship currently lacks a detailed study on this topic.

In conclusion, classical Arabic literature developed from an oral tribal-inspired set of odes and orations into a largely urban writing culture that included religious tracts, historical works, geographical studies, and grammatical texts and, in belles-lettres, incorporated new genres of poetry as well as literary epistles and fictional prose.

—Tahera Qutbuddin

**Bibliography**

- Cooper, Michael, and Shawkat Toorawa, eds. *Arabic Literary Culture, 500–925*. Detroit: Thomson-Gale, 2005.
- Irwin, Robert, ed. *Night & Horses & the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001.
- Meisami, Julie Scott, and Paul Starkey, eds. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. 2 vols. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*. 2nd ed. Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2007.

**Persian Literature**

Persian is the ancient language from the region of Fars in modern-day Iran. As the language spread northeast into central Asia during the first millennium, Persian solidified its position as the cultural language in Greater Iran. This region underwent massive change in the mid-seventh century when the population rapidly converted from Zoroastrian to Islam, and the Persian language adapted to the introduction of Arabic vocabulary and script, resulting in the transformation of Pahlavi, or Middle Persian, into New Persian. These two major changes sig-

nificantly influenced Persian literature by incorporating new vocabulary, introducing innovative literary styles, and shifting themes within poetry and prose. Despite a lull immediately preceding the Islamic Conquest, Persian literature experienced a revival during the reign of the Samanids (ca. 850–999 CE), culminating in the composition of the great Persian epic the *Shahnama*, written by Firdawsi (935–1020 CE). Firdawsi's work is the quintessential Persian chronicle, and Persian children continue to study it for its patriotic and nationalistic value.

Early Persian literature emerged from the versed *Gathas*, or psalms, of the Zoroastrian sacred book the *Avesta* (written ca. 1000 BCE); lyrical hymns better enabled priests to remember the words of recitation. Since only a small portion of the reported 20-volume text remains, the *Avesta* is not generally regarded for its literary significance. Zoroastrian influence decreased following Alexander the Great's conquest of Greater Iran in 331 BCE, and there was a subsequent decline of religious, secular, and literary efforts.

It was not until the Sassanian dynasty (224–651 CE) and the ensuing surge of Persian identity that there developed significant secular literature as well as literary professionals such as court poets and historians. The role of poets was often combined with that of court singers. Despite very few remaining Sassanian writings, information from later sources identified a few poets including Barbad and Nakisa as well as several kings. Popular subjects of poetry included love, wisdom, and wine, and poetry was even used to deliver bad news, such as when a beloved horse died and the poet-singer Barbad was selected to inform the king, which he did in a versed tale. During this time, the writing of dynastic histories became popular, as they could further solidify the power of monarchs. Such panegyrics, or highly praising verses, were the most common examples of prose, along with scholarly topics such as philosophy and sciences. There are very few remaining examples of fiction and drama; such works of prose resemble poetry, as they contain elements of rhymes and rhythms.

The seminal division in Persian literature is the 651 Muslim Arab conquest of central Asia, which introduced new literary topics. Persian

**THE SHAHNAME**

The *Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*) is the only Persian epic of Iran's glories and people. It begins at creation and continues through the Sassanian defeat by the expanding Muslim Arab empire. The *Shahnama* is divided into three sections: the mythic, the legendary, and the historic. The mythic section focuses on the creation of the world and the development of society. A prince named Rustam is the central figure of the legendary section. In order to save his king, Rustam faces seven trials, including slaying a dragon, killing a witch, and defeating a demon. This hero also faces tragedy when, during battle, he inadvertently kills his son, Sohrab. The legendary section also features several well-known romances, such as that of Zal and Rudaba. The final section is factual and covers the centuries between Alexander the Great in 331 BCE and the Islamic conquest in 651 CE.

—J. Tia Wheeler