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CLAUS VALLING PEDERSEN

al-Miṭwī, MuḤammad al-‘Arūsī

MuḤammad al-‘Arūsī al-Miṭwī (b. 19 January 1920, d. 25 July 2005) was a Tunisian novelist, literary critic, and politician. His most celebrated works include the short novels *Wa-min al-daḥāyā* (“And among the victims,” 1957), *Ḥalīma*, (1964); and *al-Tūt al-murr* (“Bitter mulberries,” 1967). The third of these works, which remains his best-known work outside Tunisia, is a realist political novel, laced with a love story, that tackles problems of drug consumption and attachment to the homeland. *Ḥalīma* tells the story of an eponymous female character from southern Tunisia, whose father and husband both joined the fight against French colonial rule. *Ḥalīma* moves between countryside and capital city, something that gives the reader a sense of both settings and of the significant exodus of people from rural areas. The novel attempts to valorise the contribution of women to movements of liberation and resistance.

When first published, al-Miṭwī’s work was greeted with great acclaim. It continues to be included in the Tunisian primary and secondary curriculum, although it has hardly been anthologised, translated, or studied academically. In his writing he displays little concern for style or narrative technique, preferring instead to focus on portraying the life of the common people at an early phase in the country’s modern history, and recording both their struggle

against colonialism and their endurance in the face of exploitation and poverty. A reformist spirit dominates his novels, while his short stories concentrate more on city life and individual concerns. Critics point to a clear difference between the loose, rudimentary narrative skill in his novels, and the more structured and well-researched short stories. In these aspects he differs from his contemporaries Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī (d. 2004), who wrote a more searching, inquisitive kind of literature, and al-Bashīr Khurayyif (d. 1983), who was more adventurous in both his historical fiction and realist writing.

Critics classify al-Miṭwī as a leading figure of the so-called “traditional” novel, with its limited stylistic and aesthetic achievements, and compare this with the major, even decisive, role he played in Tunisian prose fiction as an editor and publisher. His services to that literary tradition include the part he played in founding institutions such as the Union of Tunisian Writers, several literary clubs, and specialised magazines. He also made contributions to historical writing, produced editions of classical texts, and wrote children’s literature. He was a loyal participant in the institutions of the state and one of its major cultural policy makers, serving as ambassador in Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and as member of parliament between 1964 and 1985.

Aside from excerpts in French anthologies, none of al-Miṭwī’s work has been translated into European languages.

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MOHAMED-SALAH OMRI

al-Mizzī, Jamāl al-Dīn

Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Hajjāj Yūsuf b. al-Zakī 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yūsuf al-Quḍā'ī al-Kalbī **al-Mizzī** (654–742/1256–1341) was a high-ranking Syrian religious scholar of the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* (school of law). Officially committed to the Ash'arī creed, he was sympathetic to Salafī thought, presumably as a result of his affiliation with Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). He is known best for two works in the field of *ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions): *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, a biographical dictionary of *ḥadīth* transmitters, and *Tuhfat al-ashrāf*, an encyclopaedia of the *isnāds* (chains of transmitters) of the six canonical *ḥadīth* collections.

1. LIFE

Al-Mizzī was born on 10 Rabī' II 654/7 May 1256 in al-Ma'quliyya, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Aleppo, and grew up in al-Mizza, a wealthy village just southwest of Damascus. His family, which included no noteworthy *'ulamā'* (religious scholars), afforded him a basic education in Qur'ān recitation, Arabic grammar, and some Shāfi'ī *fiqh* (jurisprudence). In his youth, he associated for a short time with 'Affī al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291), a Damascene Ṣūfī poet championing Ibn

'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) pantheistic monism (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) (al-Dhahabī, *Dhayl*, 488; *Tadhkira*, 4:1499; al-Ṣafadī, 5:651).

It was not until he left home, at the age of twenty-one, that he pursued further religious education with established authorities. His focus shifted to *ḥadīth*, and he soon became a specialist in the *'ilm al-rijāl* (knowledge of the transmitters). A lifelong learner, al-Mizzī chose his *shaykhs* so as to receive the best possible education and acquire impressive credentials. He studied with *shaykhs* in Baalbek, Hamā, Aleppo, and Jerusalem. When he travelled to the Hijāz to perform the *ḥajj* pilgrimage, he seized the opportunity to hear *ḥadīth* in Mecca and Medina. Finally, in 683–4/1284–5, his quest for knowledge took him to Egypt, where he stayed in Cairo, Bilbeis (Bilbays), and Alexandria. He also copied manuscripts for himself and others and was praised for his attractive handwriting (al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkira*, 4:1498; Ibn Ḥajar 4:457; Ibn al-'Imād, 8:236–7).

His first professional appointment was at al-Nāṣiriyya *madrasa* in Damascus, founded, like its namesakes in Palestine and Egypt, by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn b. Ayyūb (Saladin, r. 564–89/1169–93). From 718/1319 until his death, al-Mizzī headed the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya, a prestigious Shāfi'ī-Ash'arī institute in Damascus that focused on the study of *ḥadīth* (Ibn Ḥajar, 4:458; on the Dār al-Ḥadīth, see al-Nu'aymī, 1:15–35). He combined this position with shorter stints as a teacher at other Syrian *ḥadīth* academies (al-Nu'aymī, 1:45, 84).

He belonged to a tight-knit circle of Damascene intellectuals that vacillated between Shāfi'ī-Ash'arism and Salafism and included, besides al-Mizzī, his students 'Alam al-Dīn al-Birzālī (d. 739/