

ARABIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION TO ARABIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Course Description

This course aims to introduce students to the topic of autobiography in the Arabo-Islamic world. Despite claims that true autobiography is the invention of the modern West, many non-Western cultures were home to flourishing traditions of autobiographical writing, and examining these texts provides an opportunity to expand and refine notions of autobiography in comparative literature, enriching historians' understanding of social life, the transmission of knowledge, understandings of self and other, and conventions of representation. The course will include some discussions of Persian and Turkish autobiographies as well. I have intentionally excluded from consideration in this course some of the most famous autobiographies, such as those of Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali, which might be described as belonging to the philosophical branch of Arabic autobiography, on the grounds that they are treated in a separate course.

About the Professor

Devin J. Stewart is associate professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at Emory University. His specialties include Islamic law and legal theory, Shi'ite Islam, the Qur'an, and Arabic dialects. His written works include numerous articles and reviews. Stewart has also published three books: *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelve Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System*; *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*; and *Law and Education in Islam*.

Contents

Week 1 :Arabic Autobiography: Introduction and Overview

Unit I Genres in Arabic Autobiography

Week 2 *Sirah*: The Exemplary Life

Week 3 *Sirah* and Rulers' Autobiographies:

Week 4 *Tarjamah* (The Biographical Notice)

Unit II Topics in Arabic Autobiography

Week 5 Autobiography, Travel, and Education.

Week 6 Autobiographical Texts and the Quest for the Truth

Week 7 Sufi Autobiography.

Week 8 Autobiography and Rank.

Week 9 Autobiography, Dreams, Miracles, and Sainthood.

Week 10 Poetry and Emotion in Autobiography

Week 11 Apology for Autobiography:

Week 12 Childhood and Autobiography.

Week 13 Women in Autobiographies.

Unit III Modern Arabic Autobiography

Week 14 Men's Autobiographies in Modern Arabic Letters

Week 15 Women's Autobiography in Modern Arabic Letters.

Course Content

The course will focus on two large topics: 1) the formal features of Arabic autobiography and its relationship with other types of text, and 2) the conventions of self-representation in Arabic autobiographical texts. Within these categories, it will touch on:

- Two main types of biographical works in Islamic tradition—the exemplary narrative biography (*sirah*) and the topical biography or biographical notice (*tarjamah*).
- The constituent parts of a traditional *tarjamah*.
- The portrayal of childhood in Arabic autobiographies.
- The portrayal of the women in men's lives in Arabic autobiographies, and glimpses of women's autobiographical writing.
- The function of dreams in Arabic autobiographies.
- Establishing scholarly and saintly status in Arabic autobiographies.
- The transmission of knowledge and the connection to earlier generations.
- Boasting, modesty, and false modesty: the ethics of self-praise.
- The politics of rank, envy, and reputation in Arabic autobiography.
- The expression of emotion in Arabic autobiography.

Course Objectives

- To gain an overview of the history of Arabic autobiography in pre-modern and modern times, understand its temporal and geographical spread and the variety of its forms, and read a number of the best known exemplars.
- To gain a thorough understanding of the close relationship between autobiography and autobiography in Arabic literature, including the two main categories of biography, the *sirah* and the *tarjamah*.
- To gain a detailed understanding of the literary conventions of Arabic autobiography and the its constituent parts.
- To gain an understanding of the transformation that occurred in Arabic autobiography in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries as a result of the influence of western European education, literature, culture, and institutions.
- To improve composition skills.
- To improve skills of textual analysis.

Requirements

- Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and to complete a set of questions for each week. In many cases, there is not one correct answer. Students should aim to formulate their own opinions on the material and will not be expected to agree with the professor or the authorities whose studies we read. Their focus should be on explaining their points clearly and in a logical manner, supported by examples from the text. Arguing from the text is absolutely essential for success in this course. Answers should be written. For the question sets, footnotes are not required. Citations from the particular works we are reading for that week may be parenthetical, e.g.: (Ibn Ajibah, p. 54).
- Two assigned papers, 10 pages each. The papers will be judged first on argument, originality of thesis, and the use of textual evidence; second on proper form, structure, and documentation; and third on mechanics, clarity of expression, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and so forth. Footnotes and bibliography are required for the assigned papers and should follow the conventions of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

Two assigned papers, 10 pages each. The papers will be judged first on argument, originality of thesis, and the use of textual evidence; second on proper form, structure, and documentation; and third on mechanics, clarity of expression, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and so forth. Papers must include the following:

- Footnotes and bibliography. These should follow the conventions of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Page numbers.
- A proper title. The title should not merely catch the reader's attention but reveal the topic, theme, and main source material of the paper.
- Proper introduction and conclusion.
- Clear thesis statement.
- Clear identification of the main source materials used.
- Clear characterization of the methods used/
- Argument from specific pieces of textual evidence that are identified precisely.
- Clear explanations demonstrating how the evidence cited proves the claim or thesis proposed.

Suggested Topics for Paper #1:

1. Write a detailed analysis of an individual Arabic autobiography.
2. Discuss a theme that recurs in several autobiographical texts.
3. What are the sub-genres of Arabic autobiography? What are their distinguishing features? Do they differ in content, theme, rhetorical strategies, generic conventions?
4. Write a study of the *tarjamah* form using 10-20 examples from Ibn Khallikan's biographical dictionary.
5. What are the concepts of the self, personality, and individuality that emerge from the autobiographical texts we have read?
6. How is the genre of biography transformed when it becomes autobiography? Which elements remain the same, and which differ? Why?
7. Compare and contrast a pre-modern Arabic autobiography with a European autobiography of a similar individual—i.e., two theologians, two jurists, two poets, two philosophers.

Suggested Topics for Paper #2:

1. Write a detailed analysis of an individual autobiography.
2. How do modern Arabic autobiographies differ from pre-modern Arabic autobiographies?
3. Compare and contrast the defenses of autobiography we have read and the motivations for writing autobiography that authors writing in Arabic have expressed with those found in autobiographies from other literary traditions, such as those of John Bunyan, Benjamin Franklin, Goethe, Rousseau, et al.
4. Compare and contrast a modern Arabic autobiography with a European autobiography of a similar individual—i.e., two professors, two poets, two politicians, two communists, etc.
5. How do women's autobiographies differ from men's autobiographies in modern Arabic literature?
6. Compare and contrast two modern Arabic autobiographies with regard to form, themes, style, rhetorical strategies, motivations, and so on.
7. Did the concepts of the self, personality, or individuality change with the advent of modern Arabic autobiographies? How?

Required Texts

Dwight F. Reynolds (ed.). *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. [Contains many translations of autobiographical notices and translated selections from longer autobiographical texts, from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries].

Dwight F. Reynolds (ed.) *Edebiyât: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures -- Special Issue on Arabic Autobiography*. Guest Editor, Dwight F. Reynolds. NS 7.2 (1997). This special issue of *Edebiyat* includes the following articles that we will read, along with several others that are equally valuable:

- Kristen Brustad. "Imposing Order: Reading the Conventions of Representation in al-Suyuti's Autobiography," *Edebiyat* 7.2 (1997): 327-44.
- Joseph E. Lowry. "Time, Form, and Self: The Autobiography of Abu Shama." *Edebiyat* N.S. 7.2 (1997): 313-25.
- Nasser Rabbat, "My Life with Salah al-Din: The Memoirs of Imad al-Din al-Katib al-Isfahani," *Edebiyat* 7.2 (1997): 61-81.
- Dwight F. Reynolds. "Childhood in 1,000 Years of Arabic Autobiography." *Edebiyât*: 7.2 (1997): 379-392.
- Devin J. Stewart. "Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography." *Edebiyat* 7 (1997): 139-56.

Dwight F. Reynolds. "Shaykh `Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani's Sixteenth-century Defense of Autobiography." *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1-2 (1997-98): 122-137.

Dwight F. Reynolds. "Symbolic Narratives of Self: Dreams in Medieval Arabic Autobiographies." Pp. 259-84 in Philip F. Kennedy (ed.), *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005.

Devin J. Stewart. "The Humor of the Scholars: The Autobiography of Ni`mat Allah al-Jaza'iri (d. 1112/1701)." *Iranian Studies* 22.2-3 (1989): 47-81.

Devin J. Stewart. "Recounting God's Blessings: Linguistic Prophylaxis and Self-Representation in Arabic Autobiography." In *Studies Presented to Roger Allen on the occasion of his 65th birthday and commemorating 40 years of distinguished service to Arabic studies*. Ed. Shawkat M. Toorawa. Special issue of *al-Arabiyya: Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic* 40-41 (2007-2008).

Devin J. Stewart. "Women's Biographies in Islamic Societies: Mirza Abd Allah al-Isfahani's *Riyad al-Ulama'*." Pp. 106-39 in Louise Marlowe (ed.). *The Rhetoric of Biography: Narrating Lives in Persianate Societies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Devin J. Stewart, trans. Autobiography of Ali al-`Amili (d. 1692). Unpublished.

The Life of Muhammad (The Sirah of Ibn Ishaq). Trans. Alfred Guillaume. London: Oxford University Press, 2002.

The Tibyan: Memoirs of Abd Allah B. Buluggin, Last Zirid Amir of Granada. Translated by Amin T. Tibi. Leiden: Brill, 1986. Available on Google Books.

Paul Auchterlonie, *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries: A Summary Guide and Bibliography.* Durham: Middle East Libraries Committee, 1987. Available on line.

Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary (Obituaries of Prominent Men and the Sons of the Epoch), 4 vols. Trans. Baron Mac Guckin De Slane. Paris, 1843. We will examine vols. 1. All volumes available on Google Books.

Ahmad Ibn 'Ajībah. *The Autobiography (Fahrassa) of a Moroccan Soufi: Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba.* Trans. By Jean-Louis Michon and David Streight. Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999.

Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din (1445-1505 CE). *al-Tahadduth bi-Ni`mat Allah.* Paraphrase of many sections in Sartain, E.M. *Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Taha Hussein. *The Days, His Autobiography in Three Parts.* Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.

Fadwa Tuqan. *A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography.* Trans. Salma Khadra Jayyusi et al. Graywolf Press, 1990.

Arabic Autobiography : Introduction and Overview

Scholarship since the mid-20th century has shown that autobiography, once thought to be quite rare in Arabic, was in fact an important facet of literary production in the Arabic and Islamic world. This week we will read *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* in order to get an overview of the place of autobiography in the Arabic—and Islamic—tradition. The production of this book, edited by Dwight F. Reynolds and published in 2001 by the University of California, was somewhat unusual for books in the humanities. It was the joint effort of nine authors, but unlike the typical edited volume, which gathers together studies united by some common theme but consisting of individual chapters each written by an individual author on his or her own, with limited input from the editor and even less from the other authors, it was produced as an integral, unified work, composed, as it were, by a committee of the whole. *Interpreting the Self* responded to a widespread perception, both among scholars of Western European literatures and among specialists in Arabic literature, that the autobiography in Arabic literature was a modern import from Western Europe and that the autobiography in pre-modern Arabic either simply did not exist or was extremely limited in scope. In addition, the few scholars who recognized that there were more than a handful of such texts expressed views suggesting that they fell short of being “true” autobiographies and somehow failed to live up to the standards of modern Western European autobiographies.

We set out to show, as well as we could, that Arabic autobiographies were more numerous than generally supposed, identifying as many examples as we could, from the ninth century up until the early twentieth century. The appendix to the work—“Annotated Guide to Arabic Autobiographical Writings” pp. 255-88—represents the results of this survey. We set out to provide as well an overview of the history of the genre, its connections with other genres, the various types of autobiographies included in this large group, and something about the literary and stylistic conventions of Arabic autobiographies, as well as conventions of self-representation an understanding of which might make these texts more comprehensible to a modern audience. The work was admittedly preliminary and did not claim to be comprehensive. Many autobiographies are extant but have not been published, and new autobiographies are being discovered constantly. Many aspects of the literary conventions of autobiographies were not addressed in the work. Nevertheless, *Interpreting the Self* remains the most important introduction to the topic as whole. Together with other works on Chinese autobiography, Tibetan autobiography, Japanese autobiography, it has helped prove that the autobiography was not a Western European invention that was exported to other cultures during the colonial period.

Reading:

- *Interpreting the Self*, pp. 1-103, 241-53.

Questions:

1. What are the views of autobiography in general and Arabic autobiography in particular to which the authors are responding? What are the assumptions underlying these views? What is the western canon of autobiography?
2. What are the main genres with which Arabic autobiography has close connections? Give the Arabic terms that designate these genres and provide a short definition of each one.
3. About how many Arabic autobiographies were written before the 20th century? What is their historical and geographical range? Was the native language of the author Arabic in all cases?
4. When did the modern Arabic autobiography begin, according to the authors?
5. Discuss some features of Arabic autobiographies that you find interesting or surprising.

Further Reading:

Edebiyât: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures -- Special Issue on Arabic Autobiography. Guest Editor, Dwight F. Reynolds. NS 7.2 (1997): 379-392. This special issue of the journal *Edebiyat* includes a number of articles focusing on various aspects of Arabic autobiography by the authors of *Interpreting the Self*. Many of the ideas that found their way into *Interpreting the Self* were proposed and developed in these studies.

Genres in Arabic Autobiography

Overall, pre-modern Arabic autobiographies fall into three main genres, each one a sub-category of three genres connected with history and biography.

The first genre is the **tarjamah** or biographical notice, which tends to proceed by breaking up the individual life into concrete areas such as teachers studied with, travels, students, and works, and usually is included as one entry in a larger biographical dictionary devoted to a class of people such as grammarians, Shafi`i jurists, Mu`tazili theologians, scholars of the eighth Islamic century, and so on. The majority of known autobiographies in pre-modern Arabic are entries in such biographical dictionaries penned by the authors of the larger works, who wanted to include themselves in the class of scholars that they were memorializing in their work. However, a *tarjamah* can also be a single-volume work devoted to an individual, such as al-Sakhawi's (d. 1497) biography of his teacher Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani (d. 1449), and related to works such as this are the single-volume autobiographies of al-Sakhawi, Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493), Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505), Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani (d. 1565), and probably a number of the works that are known through the remarks of later authors but have apparently been lost, such as Ibn Jama`ah's *Daw' al-shams fi ahwal al-nafs* (The Light of the Sun, on the Conditions of Myself).

One may distinguish perhaps a sub-type of the *tarjamah* in which the author emphasizes his intellectual formation and the search for the truth. One might include in this sub-category the autobiographies of Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, `Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (in Persian), and others.

The second genre is the **sirah** or exemplary biography, which tends to be more narrative and anecdotal. The archetypal *sirah* is of course that of the Prophet Muhammad. Others were written about caliphs such as the Umayyad caliph Umar b. Abd al-Aziz and later rulers such as Saladin, Baybars, and other sultans. The genre was also borrowed into folklore, and the label *sirah* used to designate folk-epics revolving around particular heroes, such as the *Sirah* of `Antar, the *Sirah* of Sayf ben Dhi Yazan, the *Sirah* of the Bani Hilal tribe, the *Sirah* of Dhat al-Himmah (The Princess of High Resolve), the *Sirah of Adham al-Sharqawi*, and others. One may relate to this genre autobiographies like Usamah b. Munqidh's (d. 1188) *Kitab al-I'tibar* (*The Book of Warning*) and *al-Sirah al-Mu'ayyadiyyah* by al-Mu'ayyad fi al-Din al-Shirazi (d. 1078), an 11th-century Fatimid propagandist.

The third genre is the **chronicle (tarikh)**, which is organized as an annalistic history, in which the text marking off the beginnings of years and sometimes months and proceeds in strict chronological order. Related to this genre is the diary or day-book, which adopts the same form but includes personal information about the author. George Makdisi discussed this genre after publishing the diary of Ibn al-Banna' (d. 1079), an eleventh-century Baghdadi author. George Makdisi, "Autograph Diary of an Eleventh-Century Historian of Baghdad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 18 (1956): 9-31, 239-60; 19(1957): 13-48, 281-303, 426-443. A particularly striking example of this form of autobiographical work is the *Ta'liq* (Notebook) of Ahmad b. Muhammad Ibn Tawq (d. 915/1509), which describes the events that occurred in late Mamluk Damascus between 1480 and 1502, as well as information about his daily comings and goings, tending to various farms and orchards he owned outside the city, his wife and children, details about his expenditures, and so on.

Sirah: The Exemplary Life

Various theories have been proposed about its origins and connections with other intellectual traditions and literary genres, including a debt to the classical tradition and Galen in particular. However, it is difficult to downplay the influence of two particular literary genres, both biographical, on the majority of the autobiographical texts that have come down to us from the pre-modern period. Biography has played a major role in the history of Arabic letters, and also in Middle Eastern and Islamic culture in general. One might even claim that biography ranks alongside grammar primers and legal textbooks as among the most prolific types of writing in the Arab World in pre-modern times.

The first of these two biographical genres is the *sirah*—literally “comportment” “mode of living” but perhaps best rendered as “life” in the sense of Plutarch’s *Lives*—usually a monograph biography that presents the individual subject of the biography as a hero or exemplar to be emulated. The second is the *tarjamah* “biographical notice,” usually a relatively short text ranging from a single paragraph to dozens of pages that is most often included in a larger work such as a biographical dictionary. If the larger collection is organized by generations, it is called a book of *tabaqat* “classes, levels”; if not, *kutub al-tarajim* “books of biographical notices” is the general term. In some cases, biographical notices may occur in other works such as historical annals, typically as obituary notices at the end of each year. In some cases, the biographical notice type of biography was expanded into a full monograph: perhaps the most famous example of this type of biography is al-Sakhawi’s biography of his teacher Ibn Hajar.

The terms *sirah* and *tarjamah* were both applied to medieval Arabic autobiographies, in recognition of their intimate connection with biography, and the authors of autobiographical texts themselves used both terms to designate their works. In the readings for this week, we will examine the most famous biography in the history of Arabic: the *Sirah* of the Prophet Muhammad. This foundational document was originally written by Ibn Ishaq (d. 767) in the mid-eighth century, and has come down to us in the edited version of Ibn Hisham (d. 833), from about half a century later.

Reading:

The Life of Muhammad (The Sirah of Ibn Ishaq). Trans. Alfred Guillaume. London: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Questions:

1. Give a brief outline of *The Life of Muhammad*. Is it organized chronologically? What topics are emphasized?
2. What aspects of the work would you expect to find in a biography? Which seem unusual to you, and why?
3. Briefly compare and contrast *The Life of Muhammad* with the *Gospel of Matthew* from the New Testament.
4. What are the rhetorical strategies involved in the text? Of what is the author trying to convince the audience?
5. Which parts or aspects of *The Life of Muhammad* do you think might serve well in biographies of author figures? In autobiographies of other figures?

Further Reading:

Gordon D. Newby. *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989.

Sirah and Rulers' Autobiographies:

The term *sirah* came to serve as the modern generic label for the Arabic autobiography in the neologism *al-sirah al-dhatiyyah* "self-biography", but it has been less prominent than the tarjamah form in the history of Arabic autobiography. It has remained throughout Islamic history the main term for biographies of the Prophet, and has been applied also to prominent Companions of the Prophet such as the early caliphs Abu Bakr and `Umar, to the Imams of the Shiites, who were descendants of the Prophet, and to other early religious figures, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Out of this usage there developed a genre of historical chronical-cum-biography of a Muslim ruler, one of the most famous of which is Ibn Shaddad's biography of Saladin, the Ayyubid ruler, called variously *The Sirah of Salah al-Din*, *al-Sirah al-Yusufiyyah*, or *al-Nawadir al-sultaniyyah wa'l-mahasin al-Yusufiyyah*. Some Arabic autobiographies may be viewed as being closely related to this category. In addition, Nasser Rabbat has argued that Imad al-Din al-Katib's similar biography of Saladin may be viewed in part as an autobiography of the author, presenting, in effect, an account of "my life with Saladin" and not merely an account of the great ruler in which the scribe effaces his own role.

The members of this category of autobiographies focus on dynasties, the genealogy of ruling families, and their legitimacy; momentous events such as wars, battles, rebellions, alliances, coups, palace intrigues; the political and military spheres in general; and what we might term adventures in the broad sense, such as encounters with lions, narrow escapes, apparently magical or wondrous turns of events, and so on. They often seek to justify or legitimate past acts while arguing for the legitimacy of a particular ruler or dynasty, and often both.

Adventure, grand events, and concentration on a hero led the term *sirah* to be applied as well to the genre of folk-epic in Arabic oral literature. While often related to historical events such as the border battles with the Byzantines in the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th centuries, the migration of the Banu Hilal tribe across North Africa, the battles of the Mamluk sultan Baybars with the Crusader Franks and others, these are fictionalized accounts which include fantastic tales reminiscent of *The Arabian Nights*. These texts are not closely related to autobiographies, our main topic, but the fact that they were designated *sirahs* confirms the close connection of the term with heroism and exemplary lives in general.

The first reading, dating from the eleventh century, treats the exploits of a Fatimid missionary-agent in enemy territory in Iraq trying to engineer an overthrow of the local dynasty in hopes of adding the entire region to the Empire of his master, the Fatimid Caliph in Cairo. The second reading is an excerpt from Imad al-Din al-Katib's biography of Saladin, from the late twelfth century. The third reading is the autobiography of the last ruler of the Zirid dynasty, who controlled Granada in southern Spain in the eleventh century. The Zirids were Berbers descended from the general Zawi ben Ziri, who had served under the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova. He founded the principality of Granada, one of the many petty kingdoms that were formed upon the disintegration of the Umayyad Caliphate in the early eleventh century. The dynasty he founded lasted from 1013 until 1090, and Buluggin was the last ruler of the dynasty, reigning from 1073 until 1090. The text, written from exile in Morocco, tells the history of his family in the first four chapters and then concentrates on his own life in the last eight.

Reading:

- Excerpt from the *Sirah Mu'ayyadiyya*, translated by Joseph E. Lowry, in *Interpreting the Self*, pp. 132-44.
- Excerpt from *al-Barq al-shami* by Imad al-Din al-Katib al-Isfahani, pp. 145-55 in *Interpreting the Self*.
- *The Tibyan: Memoirs of Abd Allah B. Buluggin, Last Zirid Amir of Granada*.
- Nasser Rabbat, "My Life with Salah al-Din: The Memoirs of Imad al-Din al-Katib al-

Isfahani," *Edebiyat* 7.2 (1997): 61-81.

Questions:

1. How does Mu'ayyad al-Din al-Shirazi create suspense in his work?
2. What are his motivations for authoring the work? What is he trying to prove to the audience?
3. How much of Imad al-Din al-Katib's writing is focused on himself, and how much on the ruler?
4. What do we learn about the author's motivations and personality?
5. Outline the *Tibyan*. How does it compare with *The Life of Muhammad* in topics and structure?
6. What are the controlling ideas expressed in the work?
7. Analyze any one of the autobiographical chapters in detail.

Further Reading:

Other Autobiographies of the *Sirah* Type:

Usamah ibn Munqidh. *The Book of Contemplation: Islam and the Crusades*. Trans. Paul Cobb. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.

The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor. Trans. W.M. Thackston. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

On Folk-Epics:

Peter Heath. *The Thirsty Sword: Sirat Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic*. Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 1996.

Dwight F. Reynolds. *Heroic Poets, Poetic Heroes: The Ethnography of Performance in an Arabic Oral Epic Tradition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

The Adventures of Sayf Ben Dhi Yazan: An Arab Folk Epic. Trans. Lena Jayyusi and Harry Norris. New York: Prometheus Books, 1999.

The Biographical Notice (*Tarjamah*)

Most autobiographies in pre-modern Arabic letters are related more or less closely to the genre known as the biographical notice. These texts are usually quite brief, for the most part varying in length from a paragraph to dozen pages, and they are usually included in compendia termed biographical dictionaries in English. Some of these compendia organized by "generation" or chronological classes, in which case they are termed *tabaqat* "classes". Others are not organized in this fashion, but instead by alphabetical order, are usually termed in Arabic *kutub al-tarajim* "books of biographical notices."

Biographical compendia represent a very large and varied genre in Arabic letters, as well as in other literatures of the Islamic world such as Persian and Turkish. They vary significantly in size. Some are devoted to all of the important figures of an era. Some are devoted to people who visited Damascus, Baghdad, or Aleppo. Some are devoted to a particular category of scholar: theologians, jurists, grammarians, or poets. Some are devoted to a particular school or sect: Shiite scholars, Hanafi jurists, Mu`tazili theologians. In most cases, biographical dictionaries set out to claim authority for a particular group or professional category, and an understanding of this point must inform one's reading of the individual notices contained in the work. For example, Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi's *Tabaqat al-fuqaha'* aims to establish the authority of jurists by showing that the five schools of law that existed during his day in the eleventh century had unbroken traditions that went back to the founders of those traditions who lived in the eighth and ninth centuries, and through them, to the early generations of Muslims and ultimately to the Prophet. In addition, these traditions were preserved in the texts belonging to each tradition, and had been transmitted directly through intimate personal connections between law professors and their disciples. Against this large purpose, one sees that the logic behind including or excluding an individual from the work has to do with that person's share in the authority of the professional category. The way the author writes an individual's biographical notices shows whether he or she merits membership in the category and, often, the relevant standing or rank of that individual within the professional category. We will look into these issues of authority later.

The biographical notice is made up of pieces or building blocks many of which existed as independent literary genres. The main constituent parts of the *tarjamah* include the following:

- Name and Genealogy
- Epithets and descriptive terms
- List of Teachers.
- List of Works Studied.
- Certificates of Study.
- List of Posts held.
- Travel Accounts
- Miracle Accounts
- Dream Accounts
- Poetry Selections
- Anecdotes
- Bibliography.

Not all notices include all of these parts; in fact, few include every single one. However, many notices include the majority of these parts, so that the list provides a fairly good preliminary guide to the contents of the genre. The relative attention to the various sections varies quite a bit from collection to collection, though most authors try to maintain consistency within a single work. Thus, for example, al-Subki's *Tabaqat al-Shafi`iyyah al-kubra*, devoted to Shafi`i jurists from the ninth century until his own generation in the

fourteenth century, regularly includes, in addition to information about the travels, teachers, and students of his subjects, quotations from that author's legal works, something rarely found in other biographical dictionaries.

Some authors expanded the *tarjamah* genre was expanded by some authors into sizable monographs, and these became common by the fourteenth century. A particularly famous example of this type of monograph biography is al-Sakhawi's biography of his famous teacher Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 1449), entitled *al-Jawahir wa'l-durar fi Tarjamat Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Hajar (Jewels and Pearls, on the Biography of the Great Religious Authority, Ibn Hajar)*. Similar works had been written about Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and other scholars, as well as about Sufi masters. Al-Sakhawi's work, over 500 pages in modern editions, presents separate chapters devoted to the traditional topics of the biographical notice: Ibn Hajar's teachers, students, works authored, and so on.

Most autobiographies are closely related to the *tarjamah* genre, and many are entries in biographical dictionaries in which the author has seen fit to include himself as one member in the class of scholars that he is describing in the work. A number of the monograph autobiographies may be identified as *tarjamahs* as well: certainly the autobiographies of al-Sakhawi (d. 1497) and al-Suyuti (d. 1505) fit this description, being quite similar to al-Sakhawi's biography of Ibn Hajar.

This week's assignment is to read one volume of one of the most famous biographical dictionaries in medieval Islamic history, a thirteenth-century work entitled *Wafayat al-A`yan (Obituaries of Prominent Men)*, by Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282). Ibn Khallikan was a Kurd, born in what is now northern Iraq. After studying law in Mosul, he traveled to Cairo, where he settled and pursued a career as a jurist. He eventually became a deputy to the chief judge of Egypt and was later appointed chief judge in Damascus. He died in Damascus in 1282. *Wafayat al-A`yan*, which he compiled between 1256 and 1274, is one of the standard biographical dictionaries in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, and includes figure from the early history of Islam up until Ibn Khallikan's own time.

Reading:

- Skim through Paul Aucterlonie, *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries: A Summary Guide and Bibliography*. Durham: Middle East Libraries Committee, 1987.
- Ibn Khallikan, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary (Obituaries of Prominent Men and the Sons of the Epoch)*. Trans. Baron Mac Guckin De Slane. Vol. I.

Questions:

1. About how many works does Aucterlonie's survey cover?
2. What is their temporal and geographical spread?
3. To what particular types of groups are the biographical dictionaries devoted.
4. Discuss three titles that you find interesting.
5. What do you learn from Ibn Khallikan's introduction about his motivations for writing the work?
6. What are the categories of persons that he includes?
7. Write a detailed outline of one entry. Does the entry make an argument? Is an overall rhetorical strategy in evidence?
8. Choose three entries that are devoted to subjects of the same category—i.e. poets, jurists, rulers—and are similar in structure. What are their shared features? What are the standard building blocks of the entries?

Further Reading:

Michael Cooperson. *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Franz Rosenthal. *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Leiden: Brill, 1968. This work includes an important discussion of the biographical tradition in Islamic historiography.

Autobiography, Travel, and Education.

Accounts of education represent extremely important facets of Arabic biographies belonging to the *tarjamah* genre, and autobiographies as well. For it was study under masters that established one's connections with earlier generations of scholars, granted one a place in the transmission of knowledge, and legitimated one's own authority and membership in a scholarly elite, whether it be of grammarians, jurists or otherwise. The teaching of students fulfilled a religious duty to impart knowledge to others also ensured one's legacy and place in posterity. The books one studied and taught, as well as the books one wrote, played a crucial role in this process of transmission. Many, though by no means all, Arabic autobiographies devote considerable attention to enumerating teachers, works studied, students taught, teaching positions held, works authored, and so on. Some autobiographies provide a glimpse at the every-day existence of students that is often missing from biographical accounts, as well as information about the foibles of certain teachers and descriptions of their behavior toward their students. Thus, *tarjamahs*, whether biographies or autobiographies, provide information that is extremely valuable for the history of education in Islamic societies.

In addition, many autobiographies devote a relatively large portion of the narrative to the travels that the author found it necessary to undertake in pursuit of an education. From the early Islamic centuries, travel played a major role in education in many fields, and it was expected that students would travel long distances for the sake of an education unless they happened to live in a major scholarly center. The madrasah or college of law developed to a large degree in order to house students who had come from out-of-town. Travel was relatively easy in the medieval Islamic world, and there were few restrictions on movement such as requirements for citizenship in particular cities. Stories of quests for a particular teacher or mystical master, or for a better education in general, are quite common in autobiographies. These accounts overlap with a large and varied genre in Arabic letters, that of the travel account. Travel accounts often share a number of features with autobiographical texts. They are usually first-person narratives. They describe not only the events of a journey but also reveal something of the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of the author. In many cases, they describe travel over many years, covering significant portions of the authors' lives.

Most biographies and autobiographies belonging to the *tarjamah* genre include a bibliography toward the end of the notice. Termed *fihrist* "catalogue" in Arabic, the bibliography, and the self-bibliography, constitute an independent genre that has a long history in Arabic letters. Ibn al-Nadim's *Fihrist*, a large bibliographical work completed in 977, includes many individual bibliographies that clearly circulated as independent texts, and some of these, such as the bibliographies of the philosopher al-Kindi and the doctor Abu Bakr al-Razi, were probably auto-bibliographies. Franz Rosenthal have noted that the genre probably had classical roots, particularly since it is known that the 9th-century translator Hunayn ibn Ishaq translated Galen's works "On My Books" and "On the Order of My Books" into Arabic. I have argued in the article on al-Bahrani's autobiography below that scholars viewed their published works as their contribution to their fields and, rather than seeing themselves as indistinguishable parts of a collective enterprise, took pride in their individual gifts and contributions.

Reading:

- The autobiography of Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, pp. 156-64 in *Interpreting the Self*.
- The autobiography of Ni`mat Allah al-Jaza'iri: Devin J. Stewart, "The Humor of the Scholars: The Autobiography of Ni`mat Allah al-Jaza'iri (d. 1112/1701)." *Iranian Studies* 22.2-3 (1989): 47-81.
- The autobiography of Yusuf ibn Ahmad al-Bahrani, pp. 216-23 in *Interpreting the Self*.

- Devin J. Stewart, "Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography." *Edebiyat* 7 (1997): 139-56.

Questions:

1. What do we learn about the fields of learning and the order in which one studies them from the texts of Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi and Ni`mat Allah al-Jaza'iri?
2. In both these texts, why did the author feel compelled to travel?
3. In al-Jaza'iri's text, what do we learn about teaching methods, methods of study, and the daily lives of students?
4. What role does humor serve in al-Jaza'iri's text?
5. What are the two parts of accumulated wealth, how does the metaphor of accumulated wealth apply to the *tarjamah*? How does this affect how one interprets the information presented in a *tarjamah*?

Further Reading:

William E. Gohlman. *The Life of Ibn Sina: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1974. Available on line.

Travels of Ibn Jubayr. Trans. J.C. Broadhurst. London: Goodword Books, 1900. Available on line.

Ibn Battutah. *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, 5 vols. Trans. H.A.R. Gibb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953-71. Available on line.

Autobiographical Texts and the Quest for the Truth

One of the most famous Arabic autobiographies is that of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), a jurist and theologian from the city of Tus, near modern Mashhad in north-eastern Iran. Al-Ghazali is known for his engagement with philosophy and particularly for his work *Tahafut al-Falasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)*, which was refuted by Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) in *Tahafut al-tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*. The story related in *Deliverance from Error* is well-known in its outline and has been retold many times in Islamic lore: al-Ghazali was appointed professor of Islamic law at the recently-founded Nizamiyyah College of Law in Baghdad, the most prestigious professorship in the entire Islamic world. He was chosen for the post by Nizam al-Mulk himself, the Seljuk vizier who had founded the institution and who favored natives of Khurasan who followed the Ash`ari school of theology. After spending several years teaching there, al-Ghazali underwent a physical and spiritual crisis, and at this point gave up his position, gave away his possessions, and became a mystic. This thumbnail sketch is the popular view, which is lacking in accuracy: for example, it is clear that he did not give away all his wealth, but just some, and it is clear that he did not spend the remainder of his life as a wandering dervish, because he ended up back in Khurasan teaching law and theology. While telling this story, the work describes his attempt to determine which of the various groups of scholars of his time were successful in pursuing religious truth.

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274) lived nearly two centuries after al-Ghazali but was born in the same town as his predecessor. His Persian autobiographical text *Sayr va-Suluk*, rendered by Badakhchani as *Contemplation and Action*, resembles that of al-Ghazali in its discussion of the quest for religious truth. Nasir al-Din was an accomplished scholar of theology, logic, philosophy, math, and astronomy, composing approximately 150 works in Arabic and Persian, including *The Nasirean Ethics*, his astronomical textbook *The Memoir*, a Shiite Creed entitled *The Summation of Belief*. He appears to have been born a Twelver Shiite and then converted to Isma`ili Shiism, after which he associated closely with the Nizari Imams of the mountain fortress of Alamut in North Central Iran. When the Mongols invaded Iran, led by Hulagu, the grandson of Genghis Khan, Nasir al-Din was there at the fall of Alamut and became attached to Hulagu's court. He then witnessed the fall of Baghdad from the Mongol side in 1258, and ended up in Tabriz, the capital of the Ilkhanid dynasty founded by Hulagu. He was one of the leading scholars associated with the observatory and center for scientific study established by the Ilkhans at Maragha. *Contemplation and Action* is written from an Isma`ili point of view for an Isma`ili patron, it gives some information about Nasir al-Din's early studies but focuses on his search for correct guidance to religious knowledge, which he claims to have found in the Isma`ili Imam. There is some question about the sincerity of his conversion to Isma`ilism, for both the Twelvers and the Isma`ilis claim him as one of their own. The Twelvers argue that he was merely dissimulating—which is permissible in Islam in general and historically quite common among Shiites—and feigning to be an Isma`ili. Over the last few decades, though, scholars have identified a significant number of treatises authored by al-Tusi that bear an obvious Isma`ili stamp.

Reading:

- Al-Ghazali. *Deliverance from Error: Five Key Texts Including His Spiritual Autobiography, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*. Trans. R.J. McCarthy. Louisville: Fons Vitae Press, 2004.
- Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar*. Ed. and trans. S.J. Badakhchani. London: I.B. Tauris, 1998.

Questions:

1. What are the ways in which truth is sought, according to al-Ghazali? What are the problems with each?
2. Do these paths to the truth correspond to professional or scholarly professionalizations?
3. What is al-Ghazali's map of the sciences? Into which category does al-Ghazali fit?
4. Is this work an autobiography? What aspects would suggest that it is, and what aspects would suggest that it is not?
5. What was al-Ghazali's personal crisis? What was the solution to his problem? Are you convinced?
6. What is Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's map of the sciences? What are the possible paths to the truth?
7. What are his justifications for following the proponents of "instruction" (*ta`lim*)? Does this contradict al-Ghazali's view?
7. What is the *Fusul-i Muqaddas* that he mentions?
8. Is Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's work an autobiography, a creed, or a theological essay?
9. Compare and contrast the two works.

Further Reading:

Ibn Rushd. *The Decisive Treatise*. Trans. Charles E. Butterworth. Provo: Brigham Young University, 2002. On the harmony of revelation and reason, or religion and philosophy.
 Kenneth Honerkamp, "A Sufi Itinerary of Tenth Century Nishapur Based on a Treatise by Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17.1 (2006): 43-67. This treatise describes the search for truth from a thoroughly mystical perspective.

Sufi Autobiography

Sufism is Islamic mysticism. The most fundamental idea in Sufism is that the individual requires the guidance of a spiritual master in order to reach a higher state of spiritual awareness that those who focus on the outward appearances of things and on the routine fulfillment of religious duties never attain. The *shaykh* or master is the guide of the *murid* or disciple, who should show utter devotion to the master and obey his commands without question. Sufism was well established in Islamic societies already in the ninth century CE, but it underwent a fundamental transformation in the twelfth century with the establishment of the institutions of the Sufi order (*tariqah*) and the *khaniqah* or endowed Sufi lodge, both of which spread throughout the Islamic world. Sufi masters were often recognized as saints, termed in Arabic wali Allah "ward of God" or "ally of God," and visitation to shrines became a very important facet of Sufi religiosity from Morocco to Indonesia.

Sufism developed a very substantial biographical tradition of its own, going back at least to the tenth century and including such works as the now-lost biographical dictionary *Hikmat al-awliya'* (*The Wisdom of the Saints*) of Ja`far al-Khuldi (d. 959), *Tabaqat al-Sufiyyah* (*The Generations of Mystics*) by Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021), and *Hilyat al-awliya'* (*Adornment of the Saints*) by Abu Nu`aym al-Isfahani (d. 1038). Mojaddedi has discussed the genre of *tafaqut* works devoted to Sufis in a monograph published in 2001. Sufism also boasts a large number of monograph hagiographies, often written by disciples about their masters, or by members of Sufi orders about a founding master of the past. In the later middle ages, the worlds of Sufis and other categories of scholars mixed so thoroughly and Sufi literature became so well established that many features of Sufi biographies became standard features of the biographies of non-Sufis. A typical feature of Sufi biographies are *karamat* or miracle accounts. These accounts describe saints' miracles or minor miracles, which should be distinguished from *mu`jizat* or prophets' miracles, the function of which is to attest to the veracity of a prophet's mission. *Karamat* describe many different types of miracles, such as bilocation, knowledge of the unseen, miraculous healing, and so on; the inclusion of accounts of these in biographies—and autobiographies—is to attest to the powers of the mystic master in question, and often to establish his status as a full-fledged saint. Pre-modern scholars compiled extensive lists of the types of *karamat* Sufi masters might perform. One such classification is found in *Tabaqat al-shafi`iyyah al-kubra*, a biographical dictionary devoted to Shafi`i jurists by Taj al-Din al-Subki (d. 1369), one indication that the *karamat* account became a nearly indispensable part of the Islamic academic biography, let alone the Islamic hagiography. The modern Palestinian scholar Yusuf ibn Isma`il al-Nabhani (d. 1932) produced an even more extensive classification of saints' miracles in his *Jami` karamat al-awliya'* (*Compendium of the Miracles of Saints*).

Ahmad Ibn Ajibah was an 18th-century Moroccan Sufi master and saint who belonged to the Darqawa Sufi order. He was born near Tetuan in Northern Morocco in 1747 and died in 1809. He termed his autobiography a *fahrasah* "catalogue", a term used for biography and autobiography, essentially equivalent to *tarjamah*, exclusively in North Africa and the Andalus, along with the even less frequent *barnamaj*. The author is known and mentions earlier autobiographical works in the tradition, and covers a wide variety of topics, including his teachers, conversion to Sufism, disciples, miracles, writings, wives, and even the time he spent in prison. The English translation was done from the French of Jean-Louis Michon. It serves as an excellent example of an autobiography in the Sufi tradition. While a number of other Sufi autobiographies exist, most are not translated into English.

Reading:

Ibn Ajibah. *The Autobiography (Fahrasa) of a Moroccan Soufi: Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba*. Trans. By Jean-Louis Michon and David Streight. Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999.

Questions:

1. How does Ibn Ajibah introduce his autobiography and describe his motivations for writing the work?
2. Ibn Ajibah includes a discussion of his early studies and teachers. How does this compare with the accounts of studies you have read in other autobiographies?
3. How did Ibn Ajibah begin to follow the Sufi path?
4. What does Ibn Ajibah do in the autobiography to establish his authority as a mystic master? How is the early part of the book related to this rhetorical strategy?
5. What roles do travel and physical hardship play in the work?
6. What are Ibn Ajibah's charisms (*karamat*)? How is the reader supposed to interpret them? Is it odd that he recounts his own *karamat*? Do his accounts differ from accounts of the *karamat* of a third party?
7. In your view, what functions do the last three chapters, on his wives, sciences learned, and prose and poetry serve? Why do they appear at the end of the work?

Further Reading:

Scott Kugle. *Rebel between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood, and Authority in Islam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. This work contains a number of paraphrased accounts from an important but as yet un-translated autobiography of a fifteenth-century Moroccan Sufi master, Ahmad Zarruq (1442-1493).

M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. *The Tree That Fell to the West: Autobiography of a Sufi*. Philadelphia: The Fellowship Press, 2003. A very recent example of a Sufi autobiography.

Vincent J. Cornell. *The Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998. This work includes a discussion of monograph biographies of Sufi masters as well as biographical dictionaries devoted to Sufi masters.

Jawid A. Mojaddedi. *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Tabaqat Genre from al-Sulami to Jami*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001.

Autobiography and Rank

We have seen that one of the key functions of biographical dictionaries is to argue for the authority of a certain type of scholar or a professional category. An important related function is to establish the relative ranks of individual members in that professional category. Many of the formal features of the *tarjamah* genre serve these rhetorical strategies: the adjectives applied to the subject of the notice, the teachers with whom he has studied, the books he has mastered, the fields in which he has excelled, his contemporaries' statements about him, the reputation of his works, the positions he has held—all of these are means to establish his authority. In addition—and this is often not sufficiently understood—all of these, through a calculus of inclusion, exclusion, number, and degree, work to establish the rank of the subject within his professional category—Shafi'i jurists, for example—relative to the other members of the category. This ranking is on occasion made explicit but is most often left for the perceptive reader to deduce. One imagines that if the reader were a contemporary of the author and a member of the professional category in question, but at a distance of several centuries, it is often not immediately possible to read the message between the lines. If one has any doubts that biographical dictionaries frequently engage in this sort of evaluation, the *Tabaqat al-sughra* of Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani (d. 1565) is quite explicit on this score. Al-Sha`rani informs the reader that he will begin each section of the work with the leading scholar of the group and proceed down the ranks. He explains that he must put contemporaries at the end, outside of the set line-up, because, since they have not died yet, their rank may yet change. His statements show that 1) he has a very definite idea about the relative ranks of scholars; 2) he thinks that these ranks may be determined objectively; and 3) he deems the recording of these relative ranks a standard requirement of the *tafaqut* genre.

Autobiographies, inasmuch as they are intimately related to *tarjamah* biographies, likewise engage in the determination of relative rank, with the only difference being that the authors assess their own rank. Claiming a high rank for oneself is of course a morally suspect act, and we will discuss authors' defenses of autobiography and the strategies they use to avoid seeming overly boastful for another assignment. For now it suffices to point out that much of the content of autobiographies is intended to establish the rank of the author and should be interpreted with this strategy in mind. Perhaps the best example of a self-aggrandizing autobiography is that of al-Suyuti, in which he argues that he is peerless, the greatest scholar alive in all of Islamdom, that he is the sole living *mujtahid*, a legal authority on a par with the founders of the four Sunni legal traditions, and that he is the *mujaddid* "the reviver" of Islamic learning, one of whom appears at the beginning of each Islamic century.

Reading:

- Elisabeth Sartain. *Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, vol. I Biography and Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Excerpt from al-Suyuti's autobiography, pp. 202-7 in *Interpreting the Self*.
- Autobiography of al-Aydarus (d. 1628). Pp. 208-15 in *Interpreting the Self*.

Questions:

1. When and where did al-Suyuti live? What did he study?
2. What were his relationships with contemporary Muslim scholars like?
3. What elements of his autobiography are designed to prove his rank to his reader?
4. What are his specific claims about his rank?
5. Can you provide examples of statements or features from the other autobiographies that we have read which similarly are involved in establishing the rank of the author relative to other scholars?

Further Reading:

Michael Chamberlain. *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. This work describes the social competition among Syrian scholars in the 12th-14th centuries over endowed positions such as professorships at colleges of Islamic law, one of the key battlegrounds in which scholarly status was claimed and contested.

Devin J. Stewart. "Islamic Juridical Hierarchies and the Office of *Marji' al-Taqlid*." Pp. 137-57 in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions*. Ed. and Trans. L. Clarke. Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Publications, 2001. This study describes some of the relational hierarchies that have existed among Sunni and Shiite jurists in various historical periods and discusses some of the ways in which rank was established.

See the chapter "Knowledge, Power, and Authority in Monographic Biography." Pp. 63-92 in Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.

Autobiography, Dreams, Miracles, and Sainthood

One of the recurring features of Arabic autobiographies—and biographies as well—are accounts of dreams. Dream interpretation is a well-known field in Arabic letters, and manuals of dream interpretation were an important genre. In general, dreams were divided into two categories, symbolic and realistic. In a symbolic dream, the dreamer sees a snake, for example, and this is interpreted as meaning that the dreamer will acquire wealth. In a realistic dream, the dreamer sees recognizable characters—himself, his teacher, his father—and the scene which occurs conveys a particular message. For example, the 16th-century Lebanese Shiite scholar Zayn al-Din al-Amili (1506-1558) dreamt that he was invited to a banquet of great Shiite luminaries of the past, hosted by al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), a prominent and wealthy—it was a large banquet, after all—Shiite jurist, theologian, and poet of Baghdad. When Zayn al-Din arrived, al-Sharif al-Murtada seated him next to the eminent jurist Shams al-Din Muhammad Makki al-Jizzini (d. 1384), who was a native of Jizzin in southern Lebanon, lived and taught in Damascus, and was executed by the Mamluk authorities there in 1384. The dream indicates not only that Zayn al-Din would rank among the greatest scholars of the Shiite Islamic legal tradition but also that he would die a martyr, just as al-Jizzini had. Dreams were generally taken very seriously, and it came to be nearly a feature of the Islamic religious creed that any dream in which the Prophet appeared—or for Shiites, the Prophet or any of the Imams—could not possibly be false, for Satan could take on any appearance he wished in order to delude people, but could not assume the form of the Prophet or the Imams. It was even said that dreams are 1/46th of prophecy.

Dream accounts serve several purposes in biographical and autobiographical accounts. A very prominent function is the affirmation of status; dreams are thus one of a number of strategies used to establish authority and relative rank. In the history of Sufism, dreams are one of the most frequent means of establishing sainthood. Dreams are a frequent means of discovering the location of a shrine or legitimating visitation to a particular tomb. Dreams of a Sufi master, posthumous or even during his life, attest to his spiritual gifts and relative status among the saints. Dreams serve somewhat distinct but similar purposes in academic biographies, attesting to, affirming, or predicting the attainment of high scholarly status. This is one of the many areas in which biographies and autobiographies devoted to Sufis shared features with those texts devoted to jurists, hadith specialists, and experts in other fields.

In addition, dreams often appear at critical moments in the life of the author of an autobiography, the subject of a biography, or in the life of the author's father, and help him make important decisions such as naming a child, choosing a teacher, embarking on a journey, choosing a career path. They also help the protagonist in narrative change his ways, choose a legal school, abandon or adopt a certain teacher, and so on. They signal some anxiety or indecision on the part of the author, and they sanction his eventual course of action. They may correct or alter his behavior, or alert him to some error that he has committed.

Reading:

- The autobiography of al-Tirmidhi, pp. 119-31 in *Interpreting the Self*.
- The autobiography of Abu Shamah, pp.
- Joseph E. Lowry. "Time, Form, and Self: The Autobiography of Abu Shama." *Edebiyat* N.S. 7.2 (1997): 313-25.
- Dwight F. Reynolds. "Symbolic Narratives of Self: Dreams in Medieval Arabic Autobiographies." Pp. 259-84 in Philip F. Kennedy (ed.), *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005.

Questions:

1. Examine the dreams accounts that are narrated in the autobiography of al-Tirmidhi and that of Abu Shamah. Do these dreams require interpretation? Is their meaning evident?
2. What functions do the dreams in these two autobiographies serve? How many different categories can you identify?
3. What is the difference between dreams the autobiographer has and dreams other characters in the narrative have? Why might it be advantageous to recount the dreams of others rather than one's own dreams?
4. Do the dream accounts themselves have generic conventions? How do they begin? How do they end? Are there any structural or stylistic peculiarities?
5. Now read the two articles of Lowry and Reynolds. Write a short evaluation and response to each. Have your views changed? Did they bring up any points that you overlooked? Do you agree with their interpretations? How many functions do they identify? How would you modify that list?
6. Apply what you now know to any dream account not discussed in the two articles and explain its role in the autobiography in which it occurs.

Further Reading:

John C. Lamoreaux. *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Amira Mittermaier. *Dreams That Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Jonathan G. Katz, "Visionary Experience, Autobiography, and Sainthood in North African Islam," *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992): 85-118.

Jonathan G. Katz. *Dreams, Sufism, and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad al-Zawawi*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

Poetry and Emotion in Autobiography

In an insightful article we will read this week, Brustad argues that actions in al-Suyuti's autobiography often reflect the emotional state of the author. So, for example, when al-Suyuti was about to deliver his first formal lesson in public, he does not say directly that he was afraid or nervous, but rather reports that he went to pray at the tomb of al-Shafi'i beforehand. In other passages, he again seems to avoid discussing his emotions or inner psychological state directly, but hints at them indirectly by reporting actions—either his own or those of others—and the emotional states of other characters in the text. This study reveals in a particular way, one of the large problems faced by the interpreter of pre-modern Arabic autobiographies: the conventions of representation found in these texts differed radically from those to which a modern audience is accustomed, and an understanding of those conventions is crucial in the quest for an adequate reading of the text.

A related convention is the use of poetry to express emotion. Poetry was and remains highly valued in Arab and other Islamic cultures—the equivalent to Shakespeare's plays in Arabic literature are the *Mu`allaqat* (The Suspended Odes), ten pre-Islamic poems that were hung up for all to see after being judged the finest poem at the annual market at the Arabian town of `Ukaz. Prior to the wave of European influence on Arab letters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most literary prose genres were in fact *prosimetrum*, containing a mixture of poetry and artistic prose; accomplished authors were expected to be able to write in both media equally well and to shift from one mode to the other without difficulty. This changed in the course of the transformation to modern Arabic literature, in which the idea that prose and poetry needed to be kept separate became the norm. In such texts, poetry served many functions and was not randomly peppered throughout the text but rather inserted at key junctures. However, one of the main functions was to indicate heightened emotion, conveying the idea that something about the situation described was too intense, extreme, or moving to be conveyed in ordinary language. One may gain some understanding of this practice from reading one of the more extensive translations of the *1001 Nights*. A poem occurs in the narrative when the treasure trove is finally opened, revealing piles of gold and precious jewels, taking the place, as it were, of an ornate illustration in the text. A poem occurs when the protagonist first sees the princess, indicating that her beauty was beyond ordinary means of description. A poem occurs when the hero appears to be in an impossible predicament, expressing his anguished state. In many cases, therefore, one might view the poems that occur in literary prose texts as similar to the songs in a Broadway musical, which intrude upon the ordinary dialogue of the play at particular junctures of heightened emotion in order to express the relevant feeling.

Biographical notices in many biographical dictionaries regularly included examples of the poetry of the author, primarily to serve as proof that the subject of the notice was a cultivated individual who had a broad education in many fields, and was not, for example, a narrow-minded jurist who knew of nothing else. The paired terms *`alim* and *fadil*, which both mean in a basic sense 'learned', appear frequently in biographical notices to express this idea. The term *`alim* denoted a scholar who was learned in the religious sciences, such as the study of the Qur'an, hadith, law, or theology, while the term *fadil* referred to a scholar who was accomplished in the 'extra' sciences—for *fadl* means a superabundance, something that is in excess or overflows—such as the literary arts, including grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, and poetry. Being both entitled one to a certain amount of social capital—it was considered a mark of an excellent upbringing and education. The frequency with which this point is insisted on in biographical texts and the poor quality of some of the poetry cited to prove it indicate that many scholars could not legitimately claim the two epithets.

Poetry occurs in many Arabic autobiographies, and in some cases it appears to serve this last purpose, simply to announce to the reader that I have a well-rounded education

and literary sensibilities, the signs of a cultivated and sophisticated intellectual. In other cases, however, it serves to convey the emotional state of the author, his inner feelings in reaction to the great—and often traumatic—events of his life. For this week, we will read one autobiography that contains a number of selections of poetry, that of the seventeenth-century Shiite scholar `Ali al-`Amili.

Reading:

- Autobiography of Ali al-Amili. Trans. Devin J. Stewart. Unpublished. Available as a pdf.
- Kristen Brustad. "Imposing Order: Reading the Conventions of Representation in al-Suyuti's Autobiography," *Edebiyat* 7.2 (1997): 327-44.
- Skim through the autobiographies we have read thus far looking for examples of poetry and for examples of the expression of emotion through indirect narrative means.

Questions:

1. Analyze his account of the pilgrimage to Mecca he undertook when he was sixteen years old.
2. Explain `Ali's account of the dream concerning 'the two Trustworthy Ones.'
3. Explain `Ali's other dream accounts that feature the figure of his great-grandfather, Zayn al-Din, "the Second Martyr".
4. Explain the dream of Zaynab Begum, the Safavid princess. What is the effect on the audience of presenting a dream by someone other than the autobiographer himself?
5. Does Ali al-Amili regret emigrating from Lebanon to Iran? Why? Explain his comments: what is his intended meaning, what is he leaving unsaid?
6. Analyze his account of his second pilgrimage to Mecca.
7. Ali al-Amili's autobiography includes a number of poems. Why? What is their function in the text? How many different functions can you identify?
8. Analyze any one of his poems.
9. Can you cite any other examples from the texts we have read in which the author uses poetry to express emotion? You might examine the autobiographies of Ibn al-`Adim and al-`Aydarus in *Interpreting the Self*. Analyze one example.
10. Can you cite any examples from the texts we have read so far in which the author alludes to his emotional or psychological state indirectly, by reporting an act? Analyze one such passage.

Further Reading:

Lila Abu-Lughod. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. This modern anthropological study of Bedouins in north-western Egypt makes the point that certain emotions can be expressed in poetic medium, while remaining within the bounds of social propriety, that cannot ordinarily be expressed in ordinary speech. The author seems to be unaware that this is function of poetry is ubiquitous in Arab and Middle Eastern culture, and has been since the pre-Islamic period.

Apology for Autobiography

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at least three authors included sustained defenses of the autobiographical act in the introductions to their own autobiographies, all sizable monographs: Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi (d. 1497), in the introduction to his *Irshad al-ghawi li'l-i`lam bi-tarjamat al-Sakhawi* (Guidance of the Enthusiast to Informing of the biography of al-Sakhawi), which has not been published but is extant in manuscript; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) in *al-Tahadduth bi-ni`mat Allah* (Speaking of God's Blessings); and Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani (d. 1565) in *al-Lata'if wa'l-minan*. Al-Suyuti's defense is discussed in *Interpreting the Self*, and Dwight Reynolds has discussed al-Sha`rani's defense in a separate article. These defenses of autobiography are intriguing and important for a number of reasons. They include lists of earlier Arabic autobiographies, a number of which have been lost, so they are useful for the historian of the genre who hopes to identify more examples that fit into the genre. Those very lists demonstrate that Arabic autobiography was a recognized genre, at least by the time these authors were writing because it was discussed as such, and referred to by the phrase *tarjama nafsu* "he wrote a *tarjamah* or biography of himself." (This is the origin of the title of *Interpreting the Self*). They also demonstrate the moral and literary tension involved in writing autobiography. It was deemed morally suspect to sign one's own praises, so these authors felt compelled to justify their authorship to the readership, and to expend considerable effort in doing so. In addition, the fact that these authors, nearly contemporaries and all living in Egypt, wrote very similar apologies for autobiography suggests that the defense itself had become a conventional component of autobiography by their time.

These were not the only authors who wrote justifications of autobiography, and even the first of these, al-Sakhawi, was likely drawing on earlier models in doing so. The defense of autobiography, as a meta-generic discussion, reveals many of the assumptions and unspoken conventions and concerns behind writing autobiography in a pre-modern Islamic context. These three authors presented a number of justifications for writing the autobiography which we will see below, and attention to those justifications may draw the reader's attention to specific aspects of autobiographical texts, help the him or her to interpret them more reliably through an understanding of the unstated ethical and literary rules governing the texts.

Reading:

- Al-Suyuti's defense of autobiography: *Interpreting the Self*, pp. 1-6.
- Dwight F. Reynolds. "Shaykh `Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha`rani's Sixteenth-Century Defense of Autobiography." *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1-2 (1997-98): 122-137.
- Devin J. Stewart. "Recounting God's Blessings: Linguistic Prophylaxis and Self-Representation in Arabic Autobiography." In *Studies Presented to Roger Allen on the occasion of his 65th birthday and commemorating 40 years of distinguished service to Arabic studies*. Ed. Shawkat M. Toorawa. Special issue of *al-Arabiyya: Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic* 40-41 (2007-2008).

Questions:

1. What are the moral or ethical problems involved in writing an autobiography, as evident from the statements of al-Suyuti and al-Sha`rani?
2. What are the justifications of autobiography that al-Suyuti cites? What justifications does al-Sha`rani cite? To what extent do these lists overlap or differ?
3. What guarantee does the reader have that the autobiographer will not lie, exaggerate, or conceal the truth about himself or herself? How can the author convince the reader that he is not doing this?
4. What is linguistic prophylaxis, and how does it work? What is the prophylactic phrase

used by Arabic autobiographers? What phrase was used by autobiographers in English such as Benjamin Franklin? Can you identify phrases that are functionally similar in other languages?

5. Why is it important for autobiographers to use such phrases? What is the effect on the reader? How can the reader be sure that the author making a disclaimer is sincere? What could the author do further to convince the reader that he or she is indeed sincere?

6. Which of the autobiographers whose texts we have read thus far made this or similar disclaimers? How convincing were they?

Further Reading:

Roy Pascal. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Philippe Lejeune. *On Autobiography*. University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Childhood and Autobiography

In one of the best-known scenes in modern Arabic literature, Taha Hussein writes in his autobiography *al-Ayyam* of how he attended Qur'an-school as a child but at first failed to memorize the holy scripture, embarrassing himself and his father. One of the striking features of pre-modern Arabic autobiographies is that many of them include similar scenes or anecdotes about a childhood failing. Such stories suggest that medieval authors viewed childhood as a separate, distinct stage in one's life in which one's character and responsibilities were not the same as those of an adult. After a fashion, they confirm the autobiographical pact between the autobiographer and his audience, proving that he is going to be truthful and sincere in his account, not hiding negative information, and showing that his autobiographical account will be factually superior to any biography, because no one else would have access to this childhood experience of his. However, the author admits failings with hardly any risk to himself, because, as a child, he had not reached the age of moral responsibility, and any error he committed before maturity would not affect his moral probity (*`adl*) a condition for employment in any post subject to the strictures of Islamic law, such as notary, witness, market inspector, alms-tax collector, deputy judge, judge, and so on.

Reading:

Dwight F. Reynolds. "Childhood in 1,000 Years of Arabic Autobiography." *Edebiyât: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures -- Special Issue on Arabic Autobiography*. NS 7.2 (1997): 379-392.

Skim through the autobiographies that we have read so far for mentions of childhood.

Questions:

1. What are the childhood failings that are mentioned in the autobiographies? What particular ones recur?
2. Does the immediate context provide any clues as to the motivations behind including the anecdotes?
3. What is Reynolds' main argument?
4. How does the treatment of childhood in the Arabic autobiographies compare with that found in other literatures?

Further Reading:

Richard N. Coe. *When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

Tetz Rooke. *"In My Childhood": A Study of Arabic Autobiography*. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1997.

Women in Autobiographies

It is often claimed that pre-modern Arabic—and other Middle Eastern—literature in general, and autobiographical texts in particular, do not reveal much of the private sphere, including information about inner thoughts, family life, relationships, and sex. There is some truth to this claim, even though it is not categorically true. In addition, part of the problem has to do with the conventions of representation in Middle Eastern societies and in Arabic literature, which can be lost in translation. For example, it is common in pre-modern Arabic for a speaker to use euphemisms when speaking of his wife, for it was deemed improper for him to refer bluntly to his “woman”. Typical euphemisms are *ahl* “family,” *ahl al-bayt* “the inhabitants/family of the house”, and *ʿiyal* “dependents”. When translators render these terms literally, it often obscures the fact that these terms refer directly—and in many cases, unambiguously, to an informed audience—to the author’s wife. In al-Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error*, al-Ghazali, as is well-known, tells the story of his resignation from his position as professor of law at the prestigious Nizamiyyah College of Law in Baghdad, giving up his wealth, making the excuse that he wants to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, and setting off to escape the courts of Baghdad and devote himself to an intellectual and spiritual quest. Most readings of the work pass over or ignore entirely some of his references to the mundane realities of the material world in which he lived, for he reports that his family wanted to return to Khurasan. It becomes clear that al-Ghazali’s wife was one of the main causes of his return to his native region, Khurasan in north-eastern Iran. When Imad al-Din al-Katib writes, “I missed my family dreadfully and expressed my feelings in verse at every stop on the road,” he is actually lamenting being separated from his wife on account of government business.

Attention to such details shows that pre-modern authors of autobiographies do reveal information about what we might call the private sphere in general, and about their relationships with women, but it sometimes requires careful reading and interpretation to understand what is being conveyed. Women are the subject of their own biographical notices in many biographical dictionaries—though many leave them out completely. Perhaps the most assiduous author in recording biographical notices of women is al-Sakhawi, whose biographical dictionary of people of the ninth Islamic century (fifteenth century CE) devotes an entire volume—out of twelve—to women. Many larger monograph biographies include a chapter on the subject’s wives and children, an feature that may be related to the Sirah of the Prophet, works on the lives of the Imams, and genealogies of descendants of the prophet. Al-Sakhawi’s large biography of his professor Ibn Hajar includes such a chapter. Ibn Ajibah’s autobiography also includes a chapter of this type. In addition, many biographical and autobiographical texts include references to women who are related to the male subject, and collecting many of these instances reveals significant information regarding the treatment of women, their place in men’s lives, and some of their experiences and concerns.

Did women write autobiographies in Arabic in pre-modern times? Unfortunately, we have only hints of such writings until the nineteenth century. One of the greatest female scholars of the pre-modern Islamic world, A’ishah al-Ba`uniyyah (d. 1516) was widely recognized by her male contemporaries as an excellent scholar and expert on hadith and mysticism. She was even granted the license to teach law and grant legal opinions, the pre-modern equivalent of a doctorate of Islamic law, demonstrating that she successfully completed her legal education. In a biographical notice devoted to her, Najm al-Din al-Ghazzi includes a fragment of her autobiographical writing, which derives, perhaps from the introduction to one of her books. Given the significant number of qualified female scholars in pre-modern times, it is certainly possible that more extensive autobiographical work by a female scholar may be discovered in the future.

Readings:

- Ruth Roded. *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Saʿd to Who's Who*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994. This is important work provides a survey—large, but not comprehensive—of biographical dictionaries that include biographical notices on women.
- Devin J. Stewart, "Women's Biographies in Islamic Societies: Mirza Abd Allah al-Isfahani's *Riyad al-ʿulamaʿ*." Pp. 106-39 in Louise Marlowe (ed.). *The Rhetoric of Biography: Narrating Lives in Persianate Societies*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Skim through the autobiographies translated in *Interpreting the Self* and the other texts you have read thus far for mentions of women.

Questions:

1. What are the main categories of women about whom biographical dictionaries provide information, according to Ruth Roded?
2. Do all biographical collections devote the same level of attention to women? What are the extreme examples?
3. Does Roded see an overall historical trend in the attention paid to women by authors of biographical dictionaries? What is it?
4. What do we learn about women and social history from these works?
5. Does Stewart's study the notices on women in Mirza `Abd Allah al-Isfahani's *Riyad al-ʿulamaʿ* revise, alter, or add to Roded's conclusions in some fashion?
6. Are the formal features of biographical notices devoted to women distinct from those of biographical notices devoted to men? How so? Do they constitute distinct genres of writing?
7. How frequently are women mentioned in the men's autobiographies that we have read?
8. What types of women are mentioned in the men's autobiographies? In what roles or capacities do they appear?
9. Why are they mentioned? What narrative or rhetorical purpose do they serve?

Further Reading:

Marilyn Booth. *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. This work focuses on 19th and early 20th-century Egypt and discusses the use of women's biographical dictionaries by early feminists and modernists.

.....

Men's Autobiographies in Modern Arabic Letters

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a radical transformation of Arabic literature as a result of close contact with European education, institutions, and literature, particularly with French and English literature. The main centers of this transformation were Cairo and Beirut. The standard narrative of this cultural transformation, termed the Nahdah "Renaissance", is that it proceeded by stages: first Arab authors translated European works, such as the plays of Molière, then they wrote works closely imitating European models, then they wrote independent works, having fully assimilated the European genres. This narrative does not do justice to the complexity of the process, the inventiveness of translators, and the role played by classical Arabic literature, but the result is clear: Arabic literature came to be dominated in most contexts by the imported genres of the play, the short story, and the novel. Modern Arabic biographies and autobiographies came as well to resemble their modern European counterparts more closely, though the transformation has not been studied in detail.

The authors of *Interpreting the Self* argued that the autobiography of Taha Hussein, itself a story of a transition from a culture and education viewed as native and unaffected by the West to one heavily indebted to and shaped by European culture and institutions, represents a turning point. Taha Hussein (1889-1973) studied the religious sciences at the Azhar but was among the first groups of students to study at the Egyptian University (later King Fu'ad University and now Cairo University), which was founded in 1908 and was organized along the lines of European universities. He earned his doctorate there in 1914 for a thesis on the eleventh-century poet Abu al-`Ala' al-Ma`arri (d. 1057), who shared Taha Hussein's blindness and profound skepticism. After earning another doctorate in France in 1917, he returned to Egypt and took a post as professor at the Egyptian University. He went on to become the dean of Alexandria University and later Minister of Education. He came to be enshrined figuratively in the Egyptian national cultural pantheon, earning the sobriquet *`Amid al-Adab al-`Arabi* "the Dean of Arabic Literature," and is particularly remembered for stating that education should be like water and air—i.e. free for all Egyptians. Taha Hussein was a thorough modernist and nationalist, willing to question and reject traditional views. He earned the criticism of traditionalists and was declared a heretic for his book *Fi al-Shi`r al-jahili* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry), in which he argued that much of what has been transmitted as pre-Islamic poetry and used as lexical evidence in commentaries on the Qur'an is not authentic and was probably forged or from later periods. His autobiography has been compulsory reading for Egyptian schoolchildren for decades and is recognized for its moving content and masterful style.

The authors of *Interpreting the Self* have pointed out that the autobiography, like the author, straddles two worlds, that of traditional Arabic literature and that of modern, European-influenced Arabic literature, and that this may help explain some of the oddities of the work in comparison with autobiographies in French and English and with later autobiographies in Arabic, such as the use of third person narration. We will first read part of the autobiography of Ali Mubarak, a civil servant who attended a new institution of education, one of the European-style secondary schools established by the ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali (1805-1849) in the mid-19th century. Then we will read Taha Hussein's autobiography. It will be particularly useful to see which elements of these works reflect the conventions of the pre-modern Arabic autobiographical tradition and which follow European models and to determine their relationship to the cultural transformation that Egypt underwent.

Reading:

- Excerpt from the autobiography of Ali Mubarak. Pp. 224-40 in *Interpreting the Self*.
- Taha Hussein. *The Days, His Autobiography in Three Parts*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.

Questions:

1. What effect does reading of Ali Mubarak’s childhood misadventures have on the reader? What is the author’s intention by presenting them in this fashion?
2. How does the author view the government, and how does the government influence societal norms? Why does he want to enter the government school?
3. Outline Taha Hussein’s autobiography. How does this outline compare with that of a traditional *tarjamah*?
4. How does Taha Hussein refer to himself in the early part of the work?
5. Is the establishment of authority a main goal of the autobiography? How is it accomplished? What is the evidence?
6. Compare and contrast Taha Hussein’s autobiography with the pre-modern *tarjamah*. Could he have been influenced by specific European works in writing this work?

Further Reading:

Jurji Zaydan. *The Autobiography of Jurji Zaydan*. Trans. Thomas Phillip. Three Continents Press, 1990.

Ahmad Amin. *My Life: The Autobiography of an Egyptian Scholar, Writer and Cultural Leader*. Trans. Issa J. Boullata. Leiden: Brill, 1978.

Salama Musa. *The Education of Salama Musa*. Trans L.O. Schuman. Leiden: Brill, 1961.
Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature. Ed. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild. London: Saqi Books, 1998.

Women's Autobiography in Modern Arabic Letters

While some women did obtain an education in pre-modern Islamic societies, as we have seen, their numbers increased with the establishment of mission and other schools during the colonial period and particularly with the establishment of national, public, compulsory education in most Arab nations in the wave of revolutions and independence following WWII. Over the course of the twentieth century, more and more women became writers, and many of them penned autobiographical texts. This week we will read one of the more prominent women's autobiographies in Arabic, that of Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003), a well-known Palestinian poet and sister of Ibrahim Tuqan (1905-1941), a famous poet as well. Fadwa was born in Nablus in Palestine, and her brother Ibrahim educated her after she was forced to quit school at the age of thirteen. The title sets the tone of the work: in Arabic it is *Rihlah jabaliyyah rihlah sa`bah* (*A Mountainous Journey—A Difficult Journey*). It describes her own suffering in childhood—as well as that of her mother and other women—on account of the severe social restrictions placed on women and girls in Nablus of her day. It devotes considerable attention to her education, the figure of her brother, travel to England in the early 1960s, and political events related to Palestine.

Reading:

- Fadwa Tuqan. *A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography*. Trans. Salma Khadra Jayyusi et al. Graywolf Press, 1990.

Questions:

1. Which features of Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography resemble those of pre-modern Arabic autobiographies, and which do not?
2. What do we learn about the author's relationships with family and others from the autobiography?
3. What are her views on Britain and the people of England? What is the relationship between Arab and western European culture, in her view?
4. What are the salient themes of the work? What is the relationship between literature and politics?
5. How does Fadwa Tuqan's work compare with the autobiography of Taha Hussein, Jurji Zaydan, or Ahmad Amin?

Further Reading:

Nawar Al-Hassan Golley. *Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.

Margot Badran. *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*. London: Virago Press, 1986.

Nawal al-Saadawi. *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*. Trans. Sherif Hatata. London: Zed Books, 1999.