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God's Banquet: Food in Classical Arabic Literature

G. J. H. Van Gelder

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Eating and speaking are physically linked by the obvious biological fact that both are concerned with the mouth; thus is formed the first of many connections between food and literature. Arabic culture in particular manifests a special concern for this linkage: the Prophet himself reputedly referred to the Qur'an as "God´s banquet." Geert Jan van Gelder´s *God´s Banquet* surveys the many and varied ways in which food appears in classical Arabic literature, including pre-Islamic poetry, the Qur'an, Islamic poetry and tales, the Thousand and One Nights, and popular genres such as the adab-anthologies and satires. Focusing more on dishes than foodstuffs, on concoctions rather than ingredients, van Gelder is concerned with how food is depicted, as well as how literary texts are shaped by the theme of food. Van Gelder traces this sumptuously rich topic across a broad swath of primary sources. In the process, he explores the connections between food and a great variety of themes central to Arabic culture, such as: · banquets and the prestige of prodigal hospitality · abstinence and piety vs. satiety and sin · smorgasbords and rich, literary diction · food and parody · "the two good things" (*al-atyaban*) -food and sex -without which life is not worth living *God´s Banquet* also investigates the representations of stereotypical diets to distinguish different types of people -contrasting, for example, Sufis and Bedouins, princes and peasants, aesthetes and "women of easy virtue." More unusual subjects, such as the roles of various dishes in dream interpretation, as well as the idea of the text itself as a sort of banquet, also receive witty and lucid treatment in van Gelder´s expert hands. *God´s Banquet* provides a feast of food-lore in one of the world´s most important cultures and a well-hewn gem of literary analysis for anyone interested in Arabic literature.

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