



Early Arabic Poetry: Select Poems

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As is often the case with oral literature, we know nothing of the origins of Arabic poetry. The first surviving pieces, from the beginning of the 6th century, are fully developed. The period from then till the second quarter of the 7th century was remarkable due to the amount and quality of the poetry that was composed. In later times, this period was acknowledged as the zenith of Arabic poetic composition, notable for its many masterpieces. Learning to appreciate this early poetry is difficult for a range of reasons: it is the work of people of a very alien milieu (the great composers were camel-dependent nomads) * it has an extraordinarily rich vocabulary * its grammar has many complications that do not survive in the later language * its texts were transmitted orally for up to two-and-a-half centuries * and there are serious problems about authenticity. However, since all later Arabic poetry stems from this, it is therefore important for our understanding of the language and ideas current in Arabia at the rise of Islam. The study of this earlier poetry is a necessity for all serious students of Arabic. This new edition of Early Arabic Poetry combines two volumes first published in 1992 and 1996, covering the major background problems faced by students of early Arabic poetry. The text itself comprises two main sections. The first section contains a study of 15 poems from two of the more vivid genres: laments and poems by the outlaws, the latter including the magnificent, brooding Lamiyyat al-'Arab. The second section focuses on famous odes, such as the Mu'allaqat of Imru' ul-Qays, Labid and 'Abid, the Kafiyya of Zuhayr and the Marthiya of Abu Dhu'ayb. The poems are analyzed in minute detail, providing the student with all the information needed to understand the texts and the accompanying translations, and then to consider each poem's overall thrust and purpose.

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