

NECROLÓGICA

IHSAN ABBAS: CUSTODIAN OF ARABIC HERITAGE AND CULTURE *

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It would be difficult to imagine who in the twentieth century could have deserved this title more, for with the death of Ihsan Abbas on 29 July 2003 at the age of 82, after some years of declining health, the Arab world has lost a figure who for decades dominated many important aspects of its cultural life and the ways in which this would be understood and interpreted in Arab scholarship.

Ihsan Abbas was born in the Palestinian village of ‘Ayn al-Ġazāl, near Haifa, on 2 December 1920; he was the third of five children in his family, and his father was a trader in cattle. His acumen in Arabic and his enthusiasm for cultural topics soon became evident, and, like many other promising Palestinian students of his generation, he was sent to the Arab College in Jerusalem for his studies. He completed his secondary education there and was certified as a school teacher in 1941, as war engulfed the world and tensions mounted in Palestine. He spent some years teaching in Safed, and shortly after the end of the war he enrolled in the University of Cairo, where he completed his bachelor’s degree in Arabic literature in 1949, his master’s degree in 1951 for a thesis on Arab literary culture in Sicily, and his Ph.D. in 1954 for a dissertation on asceticism (*zuhd*) and its influence on Umayyad culture. He taught Arabic while a graduate student in Cairo, and between 1951 and 1961 he was a lecturer at Gordon Memorial College, which later became Khartoum University. In 1961 he moved to Beirut to take up a professorship in the Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages at the American University of Beirut (AUB), a position he held for 25 years. After his retirement in 1986, and in

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the midst of increasing danger during the Lebanese civil war, he accepted an invitation to come to Amman, where he taught advanced courses in Arabic literature at the Jordanian University and continued to pursue his studies and research until shortly before his death. In 1996 he published his autobiography, *Ġurbat al-rā'ī: sīra dātīya* ("Alienation of a Shepherd: an Autobiography").

His years in Cairo and Beirut were decisive in different ways. Cairo was of course the great cultural capital of the Arab world, a vibrant focus of intellectual life to which all Arabs could freely contribute. Abbas was fond of recalling his participation in the café gatherings of Nagib Mahfouz, and indeed, fellowship with his colleagues was always an important part of Abbas' life. In those days he was writing poetry (his verse from the period 1940-48 has recently been published; *Azhār barrīya*, 1999) and found it an important source of inspiration and solace. As he described it: "Composing poetry has always saved me from myself and from the moments of despair that threatened to engulf my very existence. Poetry sparks in me beautiful feelings for life." It was poetry that confirmed to Abbas the creative power and beauty of the Arabic language, and Cairo that stressed to him the past achievements and current potential of Arabic culture. This also served to launch him on his prolific career as an author; by the time he received his Ph.D. he had already published four books.

Beirut provided the environment in which his formidable skills were able to flourish in such a comprehensive manner. The Lebanese capital was a vibrant and tolerant cosmopolitan center where different cultural trends and ideas could interact and influence one another, and its numerous Arab and international universities and research centers provided access to enormous and comprehensive library resources and supported a wide range of colleagues pursuing important work in every field from Arabic and ancient Egyptian, to Immanuel Kant and James Joyce, to medicine and engineering. Abbas' increasing commitment to the study of Arabic literary culture was sealed and confirmed in Beirut, and it was there that he came to appreciate the potential and significance of broadly based international collaborations. The Arabic Department at AUB quickly gained a worldwide reputation as one of the most important academic centers for Arabic studies, with Abbas as their foremost representative.

The combined impact of Cairo and Beirut can be seen in his curriculum vitae, which, as collected and printed by an appreciative for-

mer student in the 1970s, already comprised a small volume. He acknowledged and respected the role of religion in the formation of culture; his magnificent library contained all the classics of the Arab-Islamic religious sciences, and his command of this literature was precise and comprehensive. But his professional and personal domain was not that of Qur'ān commentators, jurists, and theologians, but rather of poets and litterateurs, historians and observers of culture in all its breadth and detail. He wrote a book on al-Šarīf al-Raḍī (1959), for example, but his interest in him was primarily as a poet, and his world was rather that of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, the subject of another study (1956). His work, then, focused primarily on his cultural predecessors and contemporaries, and pursued such endeavors as text editing, literary criticism, classical Arabic literature, history, and what one might call intercultural communications. This is in itself an astonishing range, and a closer look at his work will illustrate the full extent of his achievements.

The formal canons of textual editing that had emerged in European philology in the classics in the early nineteenth century were within several decades decisively shaping the way in which European Orientalists approached the task of editing Arabic texts. By the 1950s, however, these principles were not yet fully developed in the field of Islamic studies, and among Arab scholars working in the Middle East they were largely unknown. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn's edition of the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* by al-Ġāḥiẓ, for example, was an impressive achievement and was widely recognized as such; but it was famously condemned by Hellmut Ritter on methodological grounds: in his review he commented that the entire stock of the edition should be "sunk in the deepest part of the Nile". Attitudes of this sort deeply offended some Arab scholars, and Hārūn himself regarded the tension as yet another manifestation of Western imperialism. Abbas, however, took up the challenge, inspired by the model of textual editing pursued in the best Orientalist editions of ancient Arabic poetry produced in the early twentieth century (e.g. Rudolf Geyer's edition of al-A'šā, 1928), where multiple manuscripts were carefully compared, variant readings noted, emendations suggested, and parallel versions in other sources collected and consulted for further insights. Work of this kind produces editions of a very high caliber, but is of course extremely time-consuming and unforgiving where the editor's expertise is concerned – among the Orientalists it was already considered a

great achievement to produce one such work in a lifetime. Abbas, however, edited more than 40 medieval Arabic texts, and not just single volumes in the same field. He undertook editions of multi-volume cultural and biographical encyclopedias extending to thousands of pages, and his editing included texts in the fields of poetry, proverbs, literature, literary criticism, philosophy, political thought, biography, history, and geography. These editions were often the products of his extensive worldwide travels in search of rare and previously unknown manuscripts, and many of his discoveries were in themselves of tremendous importance. He also brought to his task an uncanny knowledge of Arabic in all its classical and dialectical forms, and his emendations routinely make perfect sense of passages that had previously seemed hopelessly corrupt. Earlier work had cast light on an ideal that on occasions *could* be achieved – Abbas seized this and by the end of his life had turned it into a practical standard.

As a young man, Abbas' transition from litterateur to professional university scholar was made through the field of literary criticism, a domain of research that continued to engage him throughout his life. His first book (1950), published while he was still a graduate student in Cairo, was in fact an Arabic rendering of Aristotle's *De poetica*, made from an English translation. This was followed by studies of the art of poetry (*Fann al-ši'r*, 1953) and the art of biography (*Fann al-sīra*, 1956), which served to identify him as an original and perceptive young critic in his own right. Over the years he prepared accurate critical editions of the verse of numerous ancient and medieval Arab poets, such as Ibn Ḥamdīs (1960), al-Ruṣāfī (1960), al-Qattāl al-Kilābī (1961, 1989), Ibn Sahl al-Andalusī (1967), al-Ṣanawbarī (1970), Labīd (1962), al-A'mā al-Tuṭīlī (1963), Kuṭayyir 'Azza (1971), al-Šarīf al-Raḍī (1994), the section of 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḥarīdat al-qaṣr* on the poets of Egypt (1951), and the verse associated with the Ḥārījite movement in early Islamic times (1963 and three successive revised and expanded editions). His definitive statement on this subject came in 1971 with his *Ta'riḥ al-naqd al-adabī 'inda l-'arab*, a study of the reception and criticism of poetry from the second to the eighth centuries AH. This book, full of insights and ideas and frequently reprinted, remains the definitive work on this subject.

But Abbas did not remain in the safe and secure domain of the ancients. In the days of his early career, trends emerging in modern

Arabic poetry involved the assimilation of influences from the West, the confrontation of new issues and questions, and the abandonment of many of the themes and structures familiar to Arab readers from their school education and the classical Arab-Islamic heritage. This new verse was widely disparaged, and, for example, an especially notorious tale had it that a number of Arab literati were each asked to compose one verse of modern Arabic poetry, as obtuse and as difficult as they could possibly make it. The verses received were then lined up one after the other, in no particular order, and sent to a literary magazine, which published the nonsensical poem and hailed it as a modern masterpiece. While still a lecturer in Khartoum – that is, as a young scholar with much at stake – Abbas rejected the currents of opposition and rejection and sought to orient modern Arabic poetry in its proper context. Confronted by repeated instances of obscure and unprecedented references to the city among the modern poets, for example, he did not reject these as influenced by the West and unfaithful to the ancient tradition of Arabic poetry, but rather asked how does the motif of urbanism connect with social and intellectual developments in the contemporary Arab world. A groundbreaking work in this field was his analytical study of the verse of the Iraqi poet ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (1926-99), a leading proponent of free verse and a leader of the socialist-realist school of modern Arabic poetry; in his study Abbas demonstrated how modern Arabic verse emerges from, describes, and reacts to prevailing circumstances in the Arab world and represents one aspect of the great changes through which Arab culture was passing (*‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī wa-l-šī‘r al-‘Irāqī al-ḥadīṭ: dirāsa taḥlīlīya*, 1955). This was followed by another pioneering work on Arabic poetry among emigrants to North America, his *al-Šī‘r al-‘arabī fī l-maḡar* (1957), and appreciations and anthologies of such individual modern poets as Badr Šākīr al-Sayyāb: 1926-65 (1969), Kamāl Nāšīr: 1925-73 (1974), and the “poet of Palestine” Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān: 1905-41 (1975, 1993). His work on trends in modern Arabic poetry, *Ittiḡāhāt al-šī‘r al-‘arabī al-mu‘āšīr* (1978), was of immediate impact when first published, and today, though nearly 30 years old, it continues to hold a place among the most important works in its field.

Other works of Abbas were in the field of classical Arabic literature more generally, especially in the domain of medieval Arabic cultural dictionaries and encyclopedias. His first venture into this area

was his definitive edition of the dictionary of important Muslim political and cultural personalities by the thirteenth-century scholar Ibn Ḥallikān in eight volumes (1968-72), followed soon thereafter by his edition of the supplement to Ibn Ḥallikān by al-Kutubī in four volumes (1973-74). Later there came a new and extremely important edition of the dictionary of learned men by the thirteenth-century scholar Yāqūt in seven volumes (1993), and then his edition of the cultural encyclopedia of the twelfth-century author Ibn Ḥamdūn in ten volumes (1996). In between these massive projects he also completed the edition of Mu‘āfā ibn Zakarīyā’s *al-Galīs al-ṣāliḥ* begun by Muḥammad al-Ḥawlī (1981-93), prepared editions of the proverb book of al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (1981), another work on proverbs by Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (1971), the letters of Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (1982), the *ta’ziya* book by the same author (undated), and a medieval Arabic work on falconry (1983), and collected and published the fragments he had found during his researches and travels from the essays of the late Umayyad writer and secretary ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā (1988).

A special interest of his was the culture and history of al-Andalus, an area that had long suffered from fundamental deficiencies where access to basic sources was concerned. While he esteemed the work of such orientalist as Dozy, Lévi-Provençal, and Asín Palacios, he felt that more emphasis should be placed on developments in Andalusian culture than had hitherto been the case. In the first instance he acted, as in so many of the fields he commanded, as an editor of important texts. The majority of the medieval poetical anthologies that he edited were collections of the verse of Andalusian poets, and he published editions of medieval works on the history and criticism of Andalusian poetry by Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb (1963), Ibn al-Kattānī (1966), and Ibn al-Abbār (1986). The great encyclopedia of Andalusian and North African culture, the *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* by al-Maqqarī, he published in eight volumes (1968), and this was followed by an eight-volume edition of the *al-Daḥīra fī maḥāsīn ahl al-Ġazīra* by Ibn Bassām (1975-79), and a volume of historical and biographical extracts from the lost *Mu‘ḡam al-safar* of al-Silafī (1979). In the area of Andalusian geography, he edited the *al-Rawḍ al-mi‘ṭār* by al-Ḥimyarī (1975), and in the field of Andalusian letters he focused on the figure of Ibn Ḥazm, producing a series of important editions of historical, philosophical and other essays by this important scholar (1959, 1960, 1980, 1990, 1993). In Andalusian history he edited the final volume

of Ibn 'Idārī's *al-Bayān al-muğrib* (1967), thus completing the Leiden edition by Colin and Lévi-Provençal (1930-51). In addition, he also produced several original works of his own, and it must be recalled that the research for these would have been undertaken – or completed – while he was a teacher in Khartoum, far from the resources of Cairo. His *al-'Arab fī Ṣiqillīya* (1959), based on his MA thesis, was a thoughtful and perceptive account of history and culture in Sicily under Arab rule, and two years later he published his *Ta'rīḥ al-adab al-andalusī* in two volumes (1962), covering developments through the twelfth century. Both are still regarded as contributions of considerable importance. His *Mu'ğam al-'ulamā' wa-l- šu'arā' al-ṣiqillīyīn* (1994) is a synthetic work in which, again, his skills in the field of Andalusian literature are clearly displayed, and in one of his last publications, *Dirāsa fī l-rahḥāla Ibn Ġubayr* (2002), he devotes his attention to the life, travels, and literary career of a renowned thirteenth-century Andalusian traveller to the eastern lands of Islam.

In Arabic historical studies his interests can be seen developing early with a study of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (1952), a prelude to his Ph.D. dissertation. One of his greatest and most enduring achievements in this domain was based on one of his many journeys to investigate collections of Arabic manuscripts. In Morocco in 1968, he discovered three hitherto unknown manuscripts of al-Balāḍurī's extremely important geneological history of early Islam, his *Ansāb al-ašrāf*. A previous edition project at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and based on one Istanbul manuscript had been moribund for decades, so Abbas arranged with two colleagues, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī at the University of Jordan and Maḥmūd Ġül at the AUB, to prepare a complete edition based on all the manuscript evidence. Participation in the edition has since changed and the publishing schedule much delayed, but before his death Abbas was able to publish two massive volumes from this crucial text (1978, 1996). He also published a useful edition of the early work on taxation and administration, the *Kitāb al-ḥarāğ* by Abū Yūsuf (1985), although unfortunately the text was not properly marketed and is therefore not to be found in most libraries. In the field of medieval Islamic history, as in others, his wide reading and research turned up many fragments and quotations from important lost works; these he published in his *Šaḍarāt min kutub maṣqūda fī l-ta'rīḥ* (1988).

In this field as well Abbas produced his own original work. Some of his introductions to his editions were long and elaborate, and are themselves important studies on the text and its author. A good example of this is his detailed introduction to Ibn Ḥallikān (1968), which is a valuable account of both the author and his *Wafayāt al-a'yān*.

After his retirement from AUB Abbas was invited to come to Jordan by Crown Prince Hassan ibn Talal, a remarkable patron of the humanities and a vigorous advocate of intercultural communications and understanding. Abbas' task was to prepare, in Arabic, a history of geographical Syria, Bilād al-Šām, based on a critical assessment of the best sources and the most reliable results of modern historical studies. The first volume in this daunting project was a volume on the Nabataean kingdom, *Ta'rīḥ dawlat al-anbāʾ* (1987), while the main undertaking, entitled *Ta'rīḥ bilād al-Šām*, opened with a volume covering the pre-Islamic period up to the beginning of the Umayyad caliphate (1990) and was followed by four others on later periods, bringing his account down to Mamluk times (1992, 1995, 1998).

The formidable academic output of Ihsan Abbas may suggest that he was a scholar who worked alone without interest in contacts with others, but in fact the opposite was the case, and this can be seen in the last category of his work. Abbas considered that external influences on a culture were both inevitable and stimulating, and that contacts between Western and Arab scholarship were essential to the welfare of the latter. His career was checkered by publications in which this concern is evident. As noted above, his first book (1950) was a translation of the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Years later he wrote a book in which he explored the ways in which the Greek heritage had influenced classical Arabic literature, *Malāmiḥ yūnānīya fī l-adab al-'arabī* (1977). He also served on endless boards and committees overseeing important academic projects: the most prominent of these were the committee appointed in Amman to plan and direct the creation of an Arabic encyclopedia of Islam, and the editorial board overseeing the English translation of the *Ta'rīḥ* of al-Ṭabarī, which was eventually published in 38 volumes (1985-2003).

More informal, but equally decisive, was his long-term relationship with the Orient-Institut of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (DMG) in Beirut. In 1961, just about the time Abbas began his career at AUB, the DMG established a research center in Beirut; a few years later it purchased and renovated a fine old traditional

house in the neighborhood of Zukāk al-Blāt, near the city center, that became its permanent headquarters. The OI featured a magnificent library, an ambitious acquisitions policy, energetic and effective academic and administrative leadership, and a constant stream of both younger and more established German scholars who came to work on projects or lead it. Abbas gave the OI his enthusiastic support, and with this there began a long and important collaboration between the OI and the Arab scholars and intellectuals of Beirut. Abbas established his al-Balāḍurī project in one of the OI's several publications programs, and also participated in one of its most ambitious long-term undertakings, the edition of al-Ṣafadī's *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, in which Abbas edited volume 7 (1982).

In the domain of translation, another intercultural endeavor, he was also active. Here he is best known among his colleagues in Islamwissenschaft for his masterful Arabic translation (1974) of a collection of historical and cultural essays by H.A.R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, but there were others, often undertaken with Muḥammad Yūsuf Naḡm, his AUB colleague and friend from their student days in Cairo: essays by G.E. von Grunebaum on 'Abbāsīd poets, published as *Dirāsāt fī l-adab al-'arabī* (1959), and George Antonius' famous work, *The Arab Awakening* (1974). Together with Charles Issawi he translated Ra'if Khuri's *al-Fikr al-'arabī al-ḥadīṯī* into English, *Modern Arab Thought* (1983). Other translations, in particular of American works on literary criticism, could be named here, but of all his translations his greatest achievement was undoubtedly his translation of Herman Melville's classic, *Moby Dick* (1965). This masterpiece of the translator's craft not only perfectly evoked the world of the *Pequod* and the personality of Ahab, but also demonstrated that modern Arabic was fully capable of meeting even the most difficult of translation challenges and of expressing the most complex concepts and ideas of other cultures.

No Arab academic has ever gained the extent or scope of recognition that Ihsan Abbas received. He was a member of the Arabic language academies of Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Amman, and the DMG took the unusual step of naming him as an honorary member. During the academic years 1975-77 he was a visiting professor at the Department of Near Eastern Studies of Princeton University, where he taught Arabic literature and advanced grammar. For his sixtieth birthday the AUB published a Festschrift for him entitled *Studia*

Arabica et Islamica (1981), which was presented to him at a celebration attended by throngs of his colleagues, friends, and students past and present. That same year the Lebanese government bestowed upon him its Gold Medal for Education. In 1983 he won the King Faisal Prize for Arabic Literature and delivered the Commencement address at AUB. His seventieth birthday witnessed another circle of colleagues uniting to honor him in a new Festschrift entitled *Fī mihrāb al-ma'rifa* ("In the Shrine of Knowledge", 1990). In 1993 there came two honors from the United States: Columbia University awarded him its Translation Prize for his years of distinction as a translator, and the University of Chicago awarded him an honorary doctorate in the humanities, the first time the University had granted such an award to an Arab scholar. In 1998 he was named Jordan's "Man of the Year" in culture, and only a few months before his death he was awarded the prize of the Furqan Foundation in London for the editing of Arabic texts. In addition to the two Festschriften published in his honor, there have been several publications devoted to discussion of or extracts from his work (all in Arabic, understandably; a similar work in a European language would be very useful).

Abbas was thus the focus of a world that was entirely cultural and academic, and this was, at one level, his entire life. But this focus was not a selfish one, nor was it narrow or obsessive. He was forever helping and encouraging young scholars, writing prefaces for the works of others, and participating in joint projects when he had quite enough of his own to do. He always seemed to have time for questions and discussion of topics of concern to students, and he went to great lengths to set them at ease. When I first met him in 1973, it was in his room in AUB's College Hall and I was armed with questions concerning the *futūḥ* literature, in which I was developing an interest. When he bid me to enter I was terribly nervous and embarrassed, it having only just occurred to me that my queries must be absolutely elementary. His effuse greetings and warm welcome only befuddled me further, and when he asked me what did I want, I had to confess that I had entirely forgotten. With a kind and understanding smile he rose to his feet and proclaimed: "Excellent! I have had enough of science this morning. You shall be my guest for lunch, and then you will remember." No subject could be discussed without coffee, and discussions and debates often continued in one of his favorite restaurants. He worked with an uncanny precision and sense of purpose and direc-

tion, and often had students helping him with various tasks: correcting proofs, preparing indices, or checking up specific difficulties under his direction. But the grossest student error would be excused with assurances of how difficult the task had been, and even a small success would be hailed by him as a great triumph. That said, it was clear that he was neither giving nor willing to accept anything other than the absolutely best work: the results would come in time, he knew, but what he demanded from the outset was interest and commitment, however raw and unfocused. One left his study exhausted, but glowing with the feeling that one was learning the genuine nuts and bolts of the field, and in a way that could not be had from books and lectures.

Much of this work took place in his elegant home facing the Sanaya Gardens in Beirut, which featured a spectacular personal library in which he had placed six desks: three always covered with his own current projects, but the others reserved for the younger colleagues and students of his circle. These were welcome to come and do their own work, use his books, raise whatever questions came to mind, and learn from him in many ways – and not just in the world of texts, seminar papers, theses, and page proofs. Until about 7:00 pm the house would remain a quiet haven for research, but soon thereafter a shadow would cross one's desk, and there would stand Abbas, armed with his cigar and a glass of his favorite scotch and come to announce that the time for writing and reading was now past. This did not mean that the learning would end. In the evenings his home became a hive of activity, hosted by Abbas and his gracious wife Ni'mat and with visitors – announced and unannounced – from all over the Arab world and beyond: poets, novelists, critics, artists, and scholars from many fields. Every conceivable topic would be open for discussion, but only in an open-minded, serious and critical way. Then finally someone would rise and announce that the assembled company was invited for dinner, and off all would go at whatever hour of the night.

Out of all this hospitality, kindness and generosity, however, there gradually emerged a more important picture: that of scholarship as a calling that required not only training, dedication, and hard work, but also such qualities as integrity and courage. Abbas had no time for gossip, backbiting, bigotry, polemics, intolerance, or cynicism, and was a man of uncompromising principle. At a personal level he was

tenaciously loyal to friends and colleagues, and while he never hesitated to express differences of opinion this was never done in an *ad hominem* way. The same held true in the domain of ideas. Through his career he repeatedly argued positions that were unpopular or misunderstood at the time, but which he knew to be valid and which ultimately proved to be justified. And what he argued in his books he also taught in his lectures, instilled in his students, and upheld in public. There were no compromises where scholarship was concerned.

This extended to an area that, as Lebanon spilled into the abyss of communal violence, was especially sensitive – his sentiments as a Palestinian. Abbas was a dedicated scholar and lived a scholar's life, but though he lived most of his adult life outside of Palestine he remained a Palestinian at heart. This was not known to many people, simply because he was not given to reminiscences, but it emerges clearly in his 1996 autobiography and is perhaps to be seen elsewhere. His interest in modern Arabic poetry, for example, focused for a time on al-Bayātī, although other poets were also prominent and well-known to Abbas. But al-Bayātī was not only a poet who made a dramatic and radical shift from traditional forms with the publication of his *Abārīq muhaššama* (“Shattered Pitchers”, 1954), he was also a leading cultural figure and an exile, having left Iraq after being dismissed from his teaching position for his anti-monarchical views. At this time Abbas did not yet know al-Bayātī personally, though later they were to become good friends, and there may have been something in his colleague's situation as a man of letters that struck a resonant chord in Abbas. A similar situation may perhaps be seen thirteen years later with respect to the Palestinian novelist, playwright, and PFLP activist Ġassān Kanafānī (1936-72), who was, like al-Bayātī, a bold innovator in the use of language and literary forms, and like Abbas, a Palestinian exile. When Kanafānī died in an Israeli car-bomb attack in Beirut, Abbas participated in a volume published in his memory (*Ġassān Kanafānī: insānan wa-adīban wa-munāḍilan*, 1974). Two decades later he published a book of essays on cultural and intellectual life in Palestine, *Fuṣūl ḥawla al-ḥayāt al-ṭaqāfiya wa-l-'umrāniya fī Filasṭīn* (1993).

But whatever his feelings for his native land, he would brook no cynical, racist, or *ad hominem* remarks about scholars of Arabic – colleagues he would never meet – in Israel. One day a student made such a comment, sneeringly suggesting that an Israeli could never

know Arabic. This immediately drew a thunderous and fiery rebuke from Abbas, who declared that Israeli scholarship on Arabic and Islam ranked among the best in the world. Nor did the fact of his uprootedness affect his own personal relationships. During his visiting professorship in Princeton one of his best friends was the German-Israeli-American scholar and Geniza specialist S.D. Goitein; the two met shortly after Abbas' arrival and recognised each other – Goitein has been an inspector of schools in Palestine during the Mandate, when Abbas was a school teacher in Safed. The two became very close friends, spent many congenial evenings together, and parted with great sadness when Abbas returned to Beirut.

It would thus be a great mistake to reduce Abbas' impact to his literary output, though this amounts to an astonishing total of close to 200 volumes of studies and edited texts and perhaps 100 articles. He was the architect of the Arab world's modern understanding and appreciation of its cultural legacy in the latter half of the twentieth century, and a vigorous champion of the integrity of its contemporary literary scene. The field of Islamic studies worldwide will remember him for his fundamental contributions to Arabic literature and culture, especially in criticism, modern Arabic poetry, and the culture of al-Andalus. But he also leaves behind hundreds of students, friends, and colleagues whose lives and careers were touched by his company, his generosity, his integrity, and his learning. What especially honors his memory is the way in which, even within his own lifetime, his work could be seen to continue among the many whose lives he enriched over a career of more than 50 years.