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Editorial

Juliette Honvault

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Nouveaux accents de la poésie dialectale en péninsule Arabique

Editorial

Juliette Honvault



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Editorial

Juliette Honvault

- 1 While closely linked to the globalization of trade and perfectly integrated into the exponential development of information and communication technologies, the Arabian Peninsula has never ceased doing one of the fundamental characteristics of Arab culture: poetry. Although it should be pointed out that by “poetry”, we mean of course dialectal —and therefore oral— poetry. At a time when the written word, be it on something as fragile and ephemeral as a tract or a wall, is subject to a conservation frenzy, the art of oral poetry may appear as a liberating alternative for those who practice it. The contexts in which it is uttered means it mostly eludes any programming or advertising, as it offers itself as a space defying classification or rational archiving. However, due to the difficulties in transcribing it, as well as the sophisticated language skills it requires, dialectal poetry is not easily accessible for study and analysis.
- 2 In this fifth issue of *Arabian Humanities*, a handful of European Arabic language specialists have taken on the challenge of capturing this poetic language, its uses, issues and influences in the Arabian Peninsula —Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen— that is to say, precisely where its meaning and the contexts which give rise to this poetry have perhaps already started to fade away. As such, their work as “mediators” is highly valuable. The materials they use are the few material traces of oral poetry: poems transmitted orally and well after they were first produced, audio cassettes, or descriptions by local experts. There are at least two advantages to having to use these intermediate sources: firstly, it underlines the importance of blending linguistic and literary studies of current poetry with anthropological approaches; secondly it helps to show how poetic production in the Arabian Peninsula adapts to the specific requirements of modern life, and to what degree the media used by the researchers are integrated into the form and content of current poetry. Thus, the present field brought to light is a treasure trove inviting poets, linguists, anthropologists and historians to come together and engage in a dialogue over the future, in order to understand this original and valuable means of communication and exchange, without perverting it.
- 3 In addition to this issue devoted to research and analysis, the editors have added the most interesting reflections of Saudi researcher Saad al-Sowayan on whether to

broaden questions about *Nabaṭī* poetry, the term referring to various poetic productions in colloquial Arabic languages, very popular in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, where they are the subject of prestigious competitions and hit TV shows. By focusing on the ancient vocabulary that adorns this poetry, Saad al-Sowayan invites us to go beyond the scope of the Arabian Peninsula and the illusion of its exclusively local origin, in order to emphasize its links with ancient Greek and Levantine traditions. This reflective counterpoint, presented as a program for research, demonstrates again the lively and dynamic nature of the poetic field in the Peninsula, and the impetus it can give to its observers.