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Youssef Rakha , ????

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Mohamed El-Attar says

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ReemK10 (Paper Pills) says

The old adage that Egypt writes, Lebanon publishes and Iraq reads certainly holds true as Egyptian novelist, Youssef Rakha presents us with his ever-intriguing novel, The Book of the Sultan's Seal - Strange Incidents from History in the City of Mars.

Mars? Yes, Mars, and there is a delightful story told about how al- Qahir (meaning Mars), the city that we all know as Cairo got its name, a city that was actually built by Sicilian Jawhar al- Siqilli! Rakha tells a fascinating story and keeps entertaining the reader with many more of these interesting facts.

For me, personally, there was a lot that was utterly irresistible! I loved that Rakha's chapters were titled the epistle on (al-risala): The Epistle on Matrimony, The Epistle on the Subject and Predicate, The Epistle of the Sultan, The Epistle on Plans and Antiquities and the Epistle of the Ring of the Dove. I also loved that there were other chapters titled the Book of (kitab): The Book of the Demons, The Book of Friends' Secrets, and The Book of Umar. There were also chapters that started with praises to Allah. All this was in line with the rich literary tradition of medieval Islamic writing. Rakha also gave the reader quotation after quotation of many of the Muslim greats who wrote during the period. This reader feels lucky to be lavished in such glorious medieval style. I imagined myself reading in the great Islamic Library of Cordoba, the capital of al-Andalus in Islamic Spain. Around me were more than 600, 000 volumes and patrons from this city of 200,000 people, a city that had an astounding 100 percent literacy rate!

Yes, the Muslim glory days, the celebration of the Arab canon, the corpus of Arabic literature, Rakha takes us there with his truly groundbreaking novel!

I sometimes think that The Book of the Sultan's Seal arrived at the right time! I was already enamored with Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Ibn Khaldun's The Muqaddimah and had also just read Sinan Antoon's The Poetics of the Obscene in Premodern Arabic Poetry Ibn al -Hajjaj and Sukhf. I was in the zone! Perhaps surprisingly, it was by reading Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy and the unparalleled books of Maria Rosa Menocal's The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage (The Middle ages Series) and The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain that put me on this enchanting path of reading. I was mesmerized.

Al Jahiz, Ibn Hazim al Andalusi, al-Hallaj, al- Maqrizi, Ibn Iyas, al- Mas'udi, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Arabi, al-Jabarti... an absolute treasure trove for people like me who like to collect quotations. And there's more!

I kept finding myself thinking, oh how clever - what absolute genius!

Rakha takes these literary medieval strategies and delivers a " tale of a man's transformation during twenty-one days from a Europeanized intellectual to a semi- madman who believed he could perform magic deeds to resurrect the Islamic caliphate" (p 349) and does so brilliantly! Even the name of the hero, Mustafa Çorbac? or chorbaji, chorbadzhi, tschorbadji. translated from the Turkish into Shorbagy, al Shurbaji (the soup cook) is perfection itself.

This is a novel that begs one to decipher all the delicious riddles, dreams and digressions and to try to figure out where Rakha is leading us with his map of the tughra. The novel is deep, intelligent, and multilayered with numerous themes and underlying meaning. The reader of this novel has to be aware that this is an interactive novel that requires you to be alert and observant of the tughra as a talisman yet continuously gush over all the gifts that Rakha keeps giving us! You will learn so much!

The tughra of the Ottoman Sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent from which Rakha's novel gets its title is a calligraphic emblem of the sultan's power that served as an imperial monogram on all royal decrees.

"It speaks of power, glory, magnificence and there's a statement behind his signature." (Elif Shafak)

Like the strong and bold lines of Suleyman's Royal Tughra , Youssef Rakha's The Book of the Sultan's Seal is a signed, sealed and delivered demonstration of high art.

Mohamed Nabil says

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Mohamed Salah says

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Salah El Mouled says

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Hanan says

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Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

via the literary saloon ::
<http://www.complete-review.com/saloon...>

This one here garners its translator, Paul Starkey, the 2015 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation. Also listed on the award=announcement page are the 29 contenders "which also makes for a useful overview of the most notable translations from the Arabic published last year."

Those 29 (because gr needs another nice list this fine day) ::

Stealth by Sonallah Ibrahim, trans. Hosam Aboul-Ela (New Directions, USA)
The Penguin's Song by Hassan Daoud, trans. Marilyn Booth (City Lights Publishers, USA)
African Titanics by Abu Bakr Khaal, trans. Charis Bredin (Darf Publishers, UK)
Butterfly Wings by Mohamed Salmawy, trans. Raphael Cohen (The American University in Cairo Press, Egypt/USA)
Fullblood Arabian by Osama Alomar, trans. C.J. Collins (New Directions, USA)
The Broken Mirrors: Sinalcol by Elias Khoury, trans. Humphrey Davies (Maclehose Press, UK)
Diary of a Jewish Muslim by Kamal Ruhayyim, trans. Sarah Enany (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
Who's Afraid of Meryl Streep by Rashid Al-Daif, trans. Paula Haydar and Nadine Sinno (Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin, USA)
French Perfume by Amir Tag Elsir, trans. William M. Hutchins (Antibookclub, USA)
Nothing More to Lose by Najwan Darwish, poetry trans. Kareem James Abu-Zeid (NY Books, USA)
The Iraqi Nights by Dunya Mikhail, poetry trans. Kareem James Abu-Zeid (New Directions, USA)
The Woman from Tantoura by Radwa Ashour, trans. Kay Heikkinen (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
Dates on my Fingers by Muhsin al-Ramli, trans. Luke Leafgren (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
Oh, Salaam! by Najwa Barakat, trans. Luke Leafgren (Interlink, USA)
Where Pigeons Don't Fly by Yousef Al-Mohaimeed, trans. Robin Moger (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing)
Women of Karantina by Nael Eltoukhy, trans. Robin Moger (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
The Crocodiles by Youssef Rakha, trans. Robin Moger (Seven Stories Press, USA)
Days of Ignorance by Laila Aljohani, trans. Nancy Roberts (Bloomsbury, UK/USA)
Chaos of the Senses by Ahlem Mosteghanemi, trans. Nancy Roberts (Bloomsbury)
The Lanterns of the King of Galilee by Ibrahim Nasrallah, trans. Nancy Roberts (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
Blue Lorries by Radwa Ashour, trans. Barbara Romaine (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing)
Beirut, Beirut by Sonallah Ibrahim, trans. Chip Rossetti (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing)
The Book of the Sultan's Seal by Youssef Rakha, trans. Paul Starkey (Interlink, USA)
Monarch of the Square: an Anthology of Mohamed Zafzaf's Short Stories by Mohamed Zafzaf, trans. Mbarek Sryfi and Roger Allen (Syracuse University Press, USA)
The Chronicles of Majnun Layla and Selected Poems by Qassim Haddad, poetry trans. John Verlenden and Ferial Ghazoul (Syracuse University Press, USA)
Rain Over Baghdad by Hala el Badry, trans. Farouk Abdel Wahab (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
Land Of No Rain by Amjad Nasser, trans. Jonathan Wright (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing)
Temple Bar by Bahaa Abdelmegid, trans. Jonathan Wright (The AUC Press, Egypt/USA)
Chewing Gum by Mansour Bushnaf, trans. Mona Zaki (Darf Publishers, UK)
[http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/...](http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/)

Farghali says

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Mazin Koleilat says

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Soha Bayoumi says