

Aziz Al-Azmeh

Entire Fragments



Born in 1947 in Damascus. 1973: Magister Artium in Philosophy with Islamic Studies and Political Science as minors, Eberhard-Karls University, Tübingen. 1977: Doctor of Philosophy in Oriental Studies, University of Oxford. 1980-81: Fellow of the Center for Near East Studies, American University of Beirut. 1981-83: Lecturer in Philosophy, Kuwait University. 1983-84: Research Fellow, University of Exeter. Since 1985: Sharjah Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Publications: *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship*, London, 1981. *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation*, London, 1992. *Historical Writing and Historical Knowledge: Introduction to the Craft of Historical Writing in Arab-Islamic Culture* (in Arabic), Beirut, 1983. *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, London, 1986. *The Politics and the History of 'Heritage'* (in Arabic), Beirut, 1987. *Arabs and Barbarians: Medieval Arabic Ethnology and Ethnography*, London, 1991 (in Arabic). *Secularism in Modern Arab Life and Thought* (in Arabic), Beirut, 1992. *Islams and Modernities*, London, 1993. *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Politics*, London, 1997.

This was my second year as a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg, and my relationship to Berlin became less exploratory, somewhat more routinized, with some friendships established, itineraries set, haunts identified. But it was also a year in which my relations within the city had come to set certain expectations, patterns of engagement, and indeed obligations, which is one thing that Fellows usually dream of being able to avoid. I did my very best not to allow this to interfere with the course of my research too much, but I was only partially successful.

I delivered a number of lectures locally: a lecture for the Einstein Forum in the series *Erbschaft unserer Zeit*, which took place at the State Library, and in which I took the opportunity to put together reflections on the broad themes of civilization and barbarism in relation to the cultural history of Europe. This I described as a reflection on the spectral impulses within, most specifically of the irrationalist discourses directed against the Enlightenment, Jacobinism, and revolution, and on the

forces of darkness without, specifically on Orientals and the contemporary culturalist construal of outsiders within and without Europe and North America. I also disseminated the findings of recent research on medieval and modern Muslim conceptions of polity at various seminars, panels, and lectures at various local institutions, and I was not spared the obligation of press and radio interviews. I further disseminated research findings on culturalism and Islamism in the form of lectures at Berkeley, Rabat, Cambridge, New Delhi, and elsewhere.

I was active in the context of the Wissenschaftskolleg's interests in the promotion of Islamic studies, as a member of the Arbeitskreis Moderne und Islam, leading its seminar in the Summer Semester (see the special report in this Yearbook) and participating as a faculty member in its doctoral summer academy. In a parallel context, I served a member of the Consultative Committee of the *Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren* (the research centres for the regional study of human sciences) in Berlin.

I spent much of my research time completing long-term studies on the historical and cognitive conditions of transition from apologetic and historical-critical study of canonical texts. I was much inspired by work on Biblical criticism and on reform Hinduism and Buddhism in preparing a comprehensive study on the study of the Koran and other Muslim canonical materials from Late Antiquity until the present day, which also included a section on Jewish preoccupations with the same themes in the context of Arab-Muslim civilization. Parts of this study were delivered at a conference on canonization in world religions at the University of Leiden and at the Tuesday colloquium here at the Wissenschaftskolleg. With the support of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Villa Jaffé I organized a small symposium on the treatment of canonical texts in various histories and religious traditions (a separate report on this is published in this Yearbook).

For the rest, I continued my long-term systematic study of the entire field of formally-constituted sciences in medieval Arab culture in relation to its institutional, social, and political settings. This work will continue in the coming year.

Altogether, this has been a pretty hectic and overloaded year, made very agreeable by various friendships at the Wissenschaftskolleg, communal cooking, and a good number of discussions, as well as musical companionship at the unforgettable *Ring* cycles at the Deutsche Oper and various other outstanding performances at different venues: György Granasztói, Nilüfer Göle, Christine Landfried, Yehuda Elkana, Valentin Groebner, Stephen Greenblatt, Péter Esterhazy, and others were all the source of much joy and inspiration. And at the risk of this

being misconstrued as a ritual formula of thanks, I should like to add that life would not have been the same without the impeccable courtesy and wonderful helpfulness of Barbara Sanders, Amy Sissoko, Christiane Kiesewetter, and the miracle-working of the library staff.