



What 'Isa ibn Hisham Told Us: or, A Period of Time, Volume Two (Library of Arabic Literature)

By *Muhammad al-Muwaylihi*



What 'Isa ibn Hisham Told Us: or, A Period of Time, Volume Two (Library of Arabic Literature) By Muhammad al-Muwaylihi

With *What 'Isa ibn Hisham Told Us*, the Library of Arabic Literature brings readers an acknowledged masterpiece of early 20th-century Arabic prose. Penned by the Egyptian journalist Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, this exceptional title was first introduced in serialized form in his family's pioneering newspaper *Misbah al-Sharq* (*Light of the East*), on which this edition is based, and later published in book form in 1907. Widely hailed for its erudition and its mordant wit, *What 'Isa ibn Hisham Told Us* was embraced by Egypt's burgeoning reading public and soon became required reading for generations of Egyptian school students.

Bridging classical genres and the emerging tradition of modern Arabic fiction, *What 'Isa ibn Hisham Told Us* is divided into two parts, the second of which was only added to the text with the fourth edition of 1927. Sarcastic in tone and critical in outlook, the book relates the excursions of its narrator 'Isa ibn Hisham and his companion, the Pasha, through a rapidly Westernized Cairo at the height of British occupation, providing vivid commentary of a society negotiating—however imperfectly—the clash of imported cultural values and traditional norms of conduct, law, and education. The “Second Journey” takes the narrator to Paris to visit the Exposition Universelle of 1900, where al-Muwaylihi casts the same relentlessly critical eye on European society, modernity, and the role of Western imperialism as it ripples across the globe.

Paving the way for the modern Arabic novel, *What 'Isa ibn Hisham Told Us* is invaluable both for its sociological insight into colonial Egypt and its pioneering role in Arabic literary history.

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Editorial Review

Review

"While illustrating his novel with local examples from that time, al-Muwaylihi's effective critique is as broad and relevant as much classical Western satire; surprisingly much of it feels very modern, the various arguments and examples easily imaginable in contemporary settings...a cohesive (and still very far-reaching) work that also offers a lot of entertainment value. It's an enjoyable read, with some great anecdotes and very funny scenes—and a lot of interesting arguments."-*The Complete Review*

"[Allen's] craftsmanship is on full display in these magisterial translations... of supreme literary complexity."-*Journal of Arabic Literature*

About the Author

Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (1274-1348 H/1858-1930 AD) was an Egyptian writer and political journalist, a career that he shared with his prominent father, Ibrahim al-Muwaylihi, with whom he also published the reputable and incisive newspaper *Misbah al-Sharq* (Light of the East). Other notable works include *Critique of Shawqi's Collected Poems* and *Cure for the Soul*.

Roger Allen retired in 2011 from his position as the Sascha Jane Patterson Harvie Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, where he served for forty-three years as Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature. He is the author and translator of numerous publications on Arabic literature, modern fiction and drama, and language pedagogy.

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