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The Rise of the Arabic Book

Beatrice Gruendler

“An exciting and original look at the subject of Abbasid book production from one of the leading authorities on classical Arabic literature. Gruendler brings to life the role of the stationers as book makers and book sellers, humble craftsmen usually overlooked by historians, whose labors enabled Arabic book culture to flourish. This fascinating work inaugurates a new way of looking at the subject.”

—Hugh Kennedy, author of *Caliphate: The History of an Idea*

“A window into the vibrant intellectual history of the classical Arabic book, from the pen of an eminent scholar of Abbasid belles lettres.”

—Tahera Qutbuddin, author of *Arabic Oration: Art and Function*

During the thirteenth century, Europe’s largest library owned fewer than 2,000 volumes. Libraries in the Arab world at the time had exponentially larger collections. Five libraries in Baghdad alone held between 200,000 and 1,000,000 books each, including multiple copies of standard works so that their many patrons could enjoy simultaneous access.

How did the Arabic codex become so popular during the Middle Ages, even as the well-established form languished in Europe? Beatrice Gruendler’s *The Rise of the Arabic Book* answers this question through in-depth stories of bookmakers and book collectors, stationers and librarians, scholars and poets of the ninth century.

The history of the book has been written with an outside focus on Europe. The role books played in shaping the great literary cultures of the world beyond the West has been less known—until now. An internationally renowned expert in classical Arabic literature, Gruendler corrects this oversight and takes us into the rich literary milieu of early Arabic letters.

Beatrice Gruendler is a recipient of the Leibniz Prize and the author and translator of numerous books, including *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry*. The former President of the American Oriental Society, she is Professor of Arabic at Freie Universität Berlin.