Contemporary Bedouin Poetry II: A Reading Guide

I. Please consider the following questions as you read the assigned material from Kurpershoek’s *Arabia of the Bedouin* and *Poetry and Politics in Contemporary Bedouin Society* by Holes and Abu Athera. In your responses, please provide the appropriate reference information (page number, etc.) to enable an efficient and dynamic discussion of these questions in class.

From Marcel Kurpershoek, *Arabia of the Bedouin* (“He Who Breaks The Bones”):

1. How would you describe the view of national (Saudi) authorities towards *nabati* poets and their poetry?

2. How does social status influence the composition of *nabati* poetry?

3. Without suggesting any direct influence of the *mu’allaga* of Imru al-Qays on the *nabati* poetry of Dindan, how does the latter resonate with the themes and emotional tone of the former?

4. What elements and themes in the poetry of Dindan are absent from pre-Islamic poetry? Which elements and themes of the pre-Islamic poetic tradition has Dindan preserved?

Holes & Abu Athera, *Poetry and Politics in Contemporary Bedouin Society*:

1. On an aesthetic level, how do the poems in this collection compare with those that we’ve previously read?

2. How do the Bedouin understand their status as citizens of a modern state, as well as their being subject to broader global powers and influences?

3. Looking at the poems collected by Holes & Abu Athera and those composed by Dindan, how do Bedouin poets intermingle ancient notions of an uncaring, cyclical Fate with Islamic notions of a benevolent deity?

4. What is the “world turned upside down” trope, and in which poems can you locate it?

5. What do you make of Holes’ and Abu Athera’s translation of these poems? How do they compare with the translations by Kurpershoek?

II. New Vocabulary

*madh* - praise for someone else, a common topic of *nabati* poetry; formerly relegated to the “boast” section of the *qasida*