



हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

Distinguished Leibniz Lecture

Three Copyists and a Rat: Anonymous Redaction in Manuscripts of Kalīla wa-Dimna

by

GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ PRIZE HOLDER

Professor Dr. Beatrice Gründler

Chair of Arabic Language and Literature,
Freie Universität Berlin

on

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at 03.00 pm

Venue

School of Humanities Auditorium

Vice-Chancellor will preside



About the Speaker

Beatrice Gründler received her M.A. (1989) and Ph.D. (1995) from the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University. Thereafter, she joined Dartmouth College as a visiting Assistant Professor of Arabic Language and Literature, and in 1996 moved to Yale University as an Assistant Professor for Arabic Literature. From 2002 to 2014, she was a Professor for Arabic Language and Literature at Yale University and in 2014 moved to Freie Universität Berlin as a full Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies. Since 2016, Prof. Gründler has been the President of American Oriental Society. She has received numerous awards and recognitions including the prestigious Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Award of the German Research Foundation in 2017.

Lecture Abstract

Kalīla wa-Dimna is one of the most popular books of premodern times and a pioneering work of Arabic literature in more than one way: first, it has two layers of meaning, one overt and one hidden, which has to be decoded by the reader; second, it displays a sophisticated framing structure with exchangeable modular elements, which makes it adaptable to new cultural contexts; third, it is one of the first Arabic books and reflects on how books are to be read and their content applied in real life. Finally it is one of the most frequently illustrated books of Arabic literature and speaks about the functions of illustrations in one of its prefaces.

But above all it is a cosmopolitan work. From Sanskrit it traveled it to Europe and Asia, via an intermediate Arabic phase, and it became the most widely spread European medieval text. However, the quest to untangle the tortuous textual history of the Arabic version is as complex as the book itself. The extant witnesses of the Arabic version, more correctly, versions, vary to such a degree that any expectation of reconstructing an "original" is unrealistic, and no critical edition has indeed been accomplished to this day.

Moreover, Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 756 CE), the Arabic translator-redactor of Kalīla wa-Dimna, has all but disappeared behind iterations of rewriting. We can no longer tell what he himself may, or may not, have written in the mid-eighth century, because his words have been overwritten by countless later copyist-redactors many of whom remain anonymous. In the present lecture the chapter of "The Cat and the Rat" about strategic friendship is investigated for the traces of these anonymous co-authors, based on the changes they implemented in their respective versions of the tale.

