

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910813508503321
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Titolo	The medieval Islamic republic of letters : Arabic knowledge construction // Muhsin J. Al-Musawi
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Notre Dame, Indiana : , : University of Notre Dame Press, , 2015 ©2015
ISBN	0-268-15801-0 0-268-07483-6
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (456 p.)
Classificazione	REL037010HIS037010LIT011000
Disciplina	892.7/09004
Soggetti	Arabic literature - 1258-1800 - History and criticism Islamic literature - History and criticism
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	""Contents ""; ""Acknowledgments ""; ""Illustrations ""; ""Preliminary Discourse ""; ""Chapter One: Seismic Islamica ""; ""Knowledge Under Duress ""; ""Transmitters Of Knowledge ""; ""The Mongol Court As Site For Debate: Al-Taftazani And Al-Jurjani ""; ""Dynamic Production And Producers ""; ""The Traveling Qasidah In A World-System ""; ""Ghazal Conversations ""; ""A Mantle For Islamic Nationhood: Genealogy Of A Subgenre ""; ""The Ode As Medium Of Sociability ""; ""A Language For A Republic? ""; ""Mobilizing Mourning Rituals ""; ""Reinvented Lexical Communities ""; ""Vagrant Intellectuals "" ""A Dialogic Space For The Republic """"Chapter Two: A Massive Conversation Site ""; ""A Prototype For A Republic Of Letters ""; ""Structural Components Of A Republic Of Letters ""; ""The ""Rattle"" Of Languages ""; ""The Rise Of Polyglotism ""; ""The Human Agent As Structural Component ""; ""Lexical Authentication For Imperial Rule ""; ""Cairo Beyond Timur ""; ""Cultural Production As A Structural Component ""; ""Authors And Preachers In Conversation ""; ""Archaeological Inventories ""; ""The Battle For Lexical Hegemony ""; ""Chapter Three: The Lexicographic Turn In Cultural Capital "" ""Models For Nahdah """"The Fight For Culture: Compendiums And Commentaries ""; ""Markers Of A Complex Phenomenon ""; ""Private Libraries And Scholarly Networks ""; ""Chapter Four: The Context Of An

Islamic Literate Society"; "Terms Of Exchange: Problems Of Authorized Transmission"; "Writing A Contemporary Cultural Scene"; "Cultural Trafficking In A Communicative Sphere"; "Cultural Production As Commodity"; "Diversity And Stratification"; "Institutionalized Knowledge Undermined"; "The Hard Politics Of Rhetoric: Decentering The Sacral"; "The Verbal Subtext Of Hegemonic Discourse"; "The Breakdown Of Representation"; "Rhetoric For The State"; "Gallery"; "Chapter Five: Superfluous Proliferation Or Generative Innovation?"; "The Transgeneric Medium: Hazz Al-Quhuf"; "The Subject Of Parody And Contrafaction"; "Countryside And City: Textual Juxtaposition"; "The Polymath As Knowledge Subject"; "Shifting Grounds In The Acquisition Of Knowledge"; "The Sacral As A Life Force: Al-Hilli's Badi'lyyah"; "From Court To Reading Communities"; "Keys To Sciences?"; "Textual Communities And Cultural Production"; "Chapter Six: Disputation In Rhetoric"; "In Pursuit Of Adab"; "The Litterateur's Anecdotal Network"; "An Open-Market Cultural Economy"; "Speculative Theology At Work"; "The Encyclopedic East"; "Defining A Cultural Milieu: Multiple Genealogies"; "Al-Safadi's Navigations: Theology And Traditionalists"; "Literary Venues"; "Logic, Grammar, And Jurisprudence"; "Traditionalist Alarm At Translating The Greeks"; "Chapter Seven: Translation, Theology, And The Institutionalization Of Libraries"; "Contentious Theological Grounds"

Sommario/riassunto

"In The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction, Muhsin J. al-Musawi offers a groundbreaking study of literary heritage in the medieval and premodern Islamic period. Al-Musawi challenges the paradigm that considers the period from the fall of Baghdad in 1258 to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 as an "Age of Decay" followed by an "Awakening" (al-nahdah). His sweeping synthesis debunks this view by carefully documenting a "republic of letters" in the Islamic Near East and South Asia that was vibrant and dynamic, one varying considerably from the generally accepted image of a centuries-long period of intellectual and literary stagnation. Al-Musawi argues that the massive cultural production of the period was not a random enterprise: instead, it arose due to an emerging and growing body of readers across Islamic lands who needed compendiums, lexicons, and commentaries to engage with scholars and writers. Scholars, too, developed their own networks to respond to each other and to their readers. Rather than addressing only the elite, this culture industry supported a common readership that enlarged the creative space and audience for prose and poetry in standard and colloquial Arabic. Works by craftsmen, artisans, and women appeared side by side with those by distinguished scholars and poets. Through careful exploration of these networks, The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters makes use of relevant theoretical frameworks to situate this culture in the ongoing discussion of non-Islamic and European efforts. Thorough, theoretically rigorous, and nuanced, al-Musawi's book is an original contribution to a range of fields in Arabic and Islamic cultural history of the twelfth to eighteenth centuries. "Muhsin al-Musawi's work systematizes a huge body of primary literary texts and current scholarship under a compelling and original thesis. The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters will be the starting point for a new generation of scholarship on this six-hundred-year 'republic of letters' that stretched from India to North Africa." -- Suzanne P. Stetkevych, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Georgetown University"--
