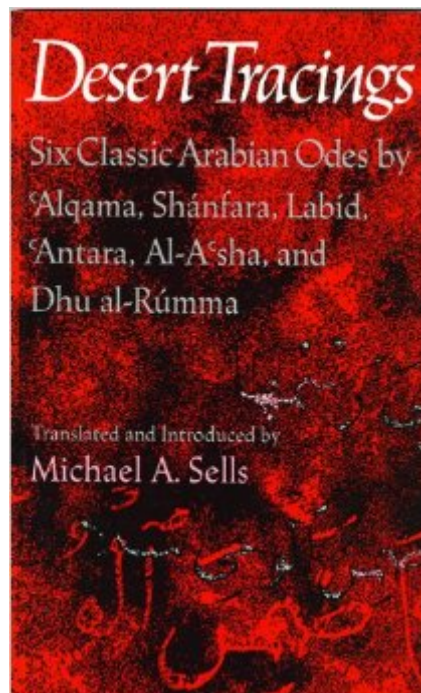


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Desert Tracings : Six Classic Arabian Odes By 'Alqama, Shanfara, Labid, 'Antara, Al-A'sha, And Dhu Al-Rumma



Synopsis

According to legend, the Bedouin tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia held poetry competitions during annual fairs near Mecca. The winning poems called *Muallaqāt*, or Hanging Odes, were embroidered in gold on banners and suspended from the walls of Arabia's most sacred shrine, Ka'ba. *Desert Tracings* is a translation of six classical sixth to eighth century odes. Arabic odes (*qasidas*) traditionally begin with the relationship of the lover to the loved. Usually set at opening in the beloved's abandoned desert campsite, where the only evidence that remains is tent marks and torrent beds in the sand – "naked tracings, / worn thin, like inscriptions / carved in flat stones" – the *qasida* moves gracefully through the thematic parts, the lover's grief, the quest, and the final acceptance of a world deprived of the beloved. Like the oryx-doe trapped within the unyielding cycles of the desert world. As Michael Sells writes in his introduction, the *qasida* has been overshadowed in the West by other Arabic literature, such as *The Arabian Nights*, but the *qasida* is the primary literary tradition in both pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabia. The remarkable richness of language and range of mood captured in these translations help explain their enduring fascination.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A lovely book if you want to have some understanding of the context of Classical Arabic of the Koran. Without Sells' notes, some of the trapping of pre-Islamic culture would be lost on the reader, the poems would be opaque. I highly recommend the book, the poems, and Prof. Sells' notes.

Beautiful, the most lyric translation of the odes I have encountered

I really enjoyed this book when I first read it in college back in the 90s. I just picked up another copy here on . A great introduction to jahiliyya poetry.

Solid, accurate introduction to pre-Islamic poetry.

I think this is a great product, but I wish I had realized that it only had the English. I wish it had both English and Arabic. The translations do seem very well done and the selection is on point

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