



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

DIPARTIMENTO DI STORIA
ANTROPOLOGIA RELIGIONI
ARTE SPETTACOLO



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DIPARTIMENTO DI
STUDI UMANISTICI
lingue, mediazione,
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Call for Papers

International Workshop on

Greek Myths in Arabic Literature: Reception, Translation, Circulation, Re-Creation

6-8 November 2025, Sapienza University of Rome

There are no echoes from Homer here.
When myths are needed they simply knock on our doors.

No Homeric echoes for anything...
only a General digging up a comatose state
under the ruins of an encroaching Troy.

Mahmoud Darwish, *State of Siege*, Translated by Munir Akash and Daniel Abdal-hayy Moore, Jusoor and Syracuse University Press, Syracuse (NY) 2010

In short

The workshop invites contributions that explore the phenomenon of the reception of **Greek myths in Arabic literature**, not only through the analysis of hitherto neglected works and writers, but above all through **a reflection on the politics and aesthetics of their reception, translation, circulation, and re-creation**. The workshop aims to stimulate debate on different types of texts, including poetry, staged or manuscript plays, fiction, translations, essays in the periodical press, encyclopaedic entries, school and university curricula, as well as in oral literature, music, cinema, and visual arts. The main focus is modern and contemporary Arabic literary production (1800-today), but special sessions will be dedicated to the reception of Greek myths in premodern Arabic literature and in the literature in languages that have interacted with Arabic for a very long time.

The reception of Greek myths within Arab cultural production is primarily **a phenomenon of the 'modern' era**. While Greek cultural achievements, particularly in the domains of science and philosophy, were extensively studied and assimilated during the flourishing period of Greek-Arabic translations in the Abbasid era (Abbās 1977; Rosenthal 1992; Gutas 1998; Capezzone 1998; Strohmeier 2003), it was not until the 19th century that Arab culture became systematically acquainted with ancient Greek literary works and, by extension, with their mythological traditions.

Modern Arab interest in Greek mythology is marked by several **key contributions**: in 1867, Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's translation of *Télémaque* introduced Greek myths (Tageldin 2017; Cormack 2019), followed by Sulaymān al-Bustānī's 1904 translation of the *Iliad*, often seen as a starting point for the study of Greek mythology in the Arab world (Avino 2002; Pormann 2006). Ṭāhā Ḥusayn furthered classical studies in the 1920s by founding a

[DIGIMYTH](#), the project leading to this workshop, has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101065808.

dedicated department at Cairo University and translating Greek plays. In the 1940s, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's plays, such as *Biḡmāliyyūn* and *al-Malik Ūdtb*, set the stage for a wave of Greek mythology-inspired works in Arabic theatre (Ruocco 2010; Cormack 2017).

Meanwhile, during the first three decades of the 20th century, poets associated with the Egypt-based *Dīwān* and *Abūllū* groups introduced and developed myths and characters from Greek literature, primarily through the lens of English Romanticism (ʿAbd al-Ḥayy 1977; Abdul-Hai 1982). From the 1950s onwards, references to Greek myths multiplied in poetry, primarily through the Tammūz experience, which spread in the Arab world as part of a broader trend interested in the myth. This phenomenon has been examined in several studies (Razzūq 1959; Dāwud 1975; Moreh 1976; Jayyusi 1977; Jabra 1979; al-Sharʿ 1993 and 1999; Ḥallāwī 1994; Khairallah 1997; Deyoung 1998; Jawad 2014; Al Rayes 2020).

The reception of Greek myths in Arabic literature has generally been considered as **part of the broader movement of translation and assimilation of the European cultural heritage** (Avino 2002), in the period of the rampant “Hellenomania” in Europe (Bernal 1987: 281-336). This context fostered the belief that such a reception was a crucial step for the development of Arabic literary writing and its integration into World literature (Noorani 2019). This is certainly true, as the European channel played a crucial role in the reception of Greek myths. Throughout the modern and contemporary history, only a few scholars and writers mastered ancient Greek (e.g. Sulaymān al-Bustānī) and had a direct access to the classical sources. These were consulted mainly through European translations or European works where they were mentioned. As a consequence, Greek myths were learned through this European mediation.

However, a closer examination of how these texts were translated and assimilated reveals that, from the outset, a different approach was also at play. This challenges the notion that the reception of Greek myths was merely an assimilation of their European representation.

Looking closer at their writings, it emerges that **Arab authors often used the Greek mythical material claiming a position of equality with their European counterparts**. In other words, the classical Greek heritage is not always - or necessarily - seen as part of the European tradition, but rather as a universal heritage, to which all intellectuals are allowed to have free access. On the one hand, this positioning is sustained by the memory of the direct connection with the classical Greek world established by the Graeco-Arabic translation movement during the Abbasid era. On the other hand, Arab authors seem to have been conscious of what Bernal (1987) labels as the “ancient model” of Greek history, which emphasises the connection and debt of Greek civilisation to earlier great civilisations, among them being the Phoenicians and Egyptians (Etman 2008). By adopting this stance towards the classical Greek heritage, **Arab intellectuals**, consciously or unconsciously, thus **questioned the European monopoly** both on this heritage and its interpretation. At the same time, it can be hypothesised that this positioning facilitated the process of building what Yaseen Noorani calls the “shared framework that [...] allowed Greek poetic works to have prestige and meaning for Arabic readers” (Noorani 2019, 252), ultimately legitimising this heritage, and Greek myth in particular, as a source of inspiration for literary and artistic production. In the attempt to emancipate from European literary representations, Greek myth thus re-emerges in its archetypal essence, providing Arab poets, playwrights, and writers with a primordial material for their works.

This workshop aims to delve deeper into the phenomenon of the reception of Greek myths in Arabic literature, not only through the analysis of hitherto neglected works and writers, but above all through a reflection on the politics and aesthetics of

their reception, translation, circulation, and re-creation. Which Greek myths made their way into Arabic literature and when? How were they collected and introduced to the Arab/Arabophone readers? Which of the many meanings of myths is conveyed by each text? What are the reasons behind the choice and the success of some myths over others? Is there a connection between each myth and the time and place of reception? How does the extra-textual context influence the re-configurations of the myths in each rewriting?

The workshop is open to discuss **different types of texts**, including poetry, staged or manuscript plays, fiction, translations, essays in the periodical press, encyclopaedic entries, school and university curricula, as well as in oral literature, music, cinema, and visual arts. The main focus is **modern and contemporary Arabic literary production** (1800-today), but special sessions will be dedicated to the reception of Greek myths in **premodern Arabic literature** and **in the literature in languages that have interacted with Arabic for a very long time**. Each session will invite participants to explore specific experiences within the context of their production and activity to highlight the principles guiding the process of reception and re-elaboration of Greek myths. **Contributions in English are welcome in the following areas**, though not limited to them:

- Greek myths in Arabic literary production: theatre, poetry, fiction
- Greek myths in Arabic literary criticism
- Archetypes, Greek myths, and Arabic literature
- Comparative mythologies
- Greek myths in premodern Arabic literature
- Translation of Greek myths into Arabic
- Channels of reception of Greek myths: institutions, journeys, encounters
- Circulation and readership of texts on Greek myths
- Greek myths in non-canonical or non-literary forms (e.g., encyclopaedias, travel literature, historiography)
- Greek myths in school and university curricula
- Greek myths, archaeology and Arabic literature
- Greek myths in Arab visual arts
- Reception of Greek myths in cultural contexts close to the Arab one from a comparative perspective (e.g., Turkish literature, francophone literature in Arab countries, Hebrew literature)

Participants will have **20 minutes** to present their papers. An extensive amount of time will be reserved for discussion in each session. To facilitate it, participants are required to send a **pre-circulated paper** approximately one month before the workshop.

A selected number of papers will be published in a **peer-reviewed edited volume**.

Please **submit** to the organisers **an abstract and a short bio** including your name, institutional affiliation, email address, and any publications related to the workshop topic **by 15 May 2025**.

A limited number of **grants** may be available to support young scholars, and scholars from disadvantaged contexts. Applicants who fall into these categories and wish to be considered for a grant are kindly requested to submit a brief **cover letter**, along with their abstract and short bio, explaining their eligibility.

Deadlines

15 May 2025: submission of abstract and short bio

31 May 2025: notification of acceptance

30 September 2025: submission of pre-circulated paper

6-8 November 2025: Workshop

Organisers

Mariangela Masullo is Associate Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Macerata. Her research interests cover Arabic contemporary poetry, Iraqi poetry, women's writing during the *Nahḍa*, and the transition from classical to modern in Arabic poetry. She wrote a monographic essay on Nāzik al-Malā'ika (2015) and translated and commented Amal al-Joubouri's *Agar before the Occupation/Agar after the Occupation* into Italian (2019).

Arturo Monaco is an MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow at Sapienza University of Rome and he is currently working on the project [DIGIMYTH](#). His research interests include modern Arabic poetry, Arab surrealisms, Arab literary press, and intercultural exchanges between Arabic and foreign literatures. In the field of the Arab reception of Greek classics and myths, he translated into Italian Sulaymān al-Bustānī's *Introduction* to his translation of Homer's *Iliad* (2022) and published the article *The Reception of Greek Classics and Mythology in Faraḥ Anṭūn and "al-Ġāmi'ah"* (*La rivista di Arablit*, 2024).

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