

PRESS RELEASE



THE BANIPAL PRIZE FOR ARABIC LITERARY TRANSLATION

This new prize for published literary translation from Arabic into English will be awarded for the first time in 2006. It will join a number of well-established UK prizes for European language translation, such as the prestigious Scott Moncrieff Prize for translation from French, which are administered by the Translators Association of the Society of Authors and awarded at an annual translation prizes ceremony in London hosted by the British Centre for Literary Translation.

The annual prize of £2,000 will be awarded to the translator of a published translation in English of a full-length imaginative and creative Arabic work of literary merit published in the thirty-five years prior to submission of the translation. Entries can have been published anywhere in the world but must be available for purchase in the United Kingdom.

The Prize has been set up by *Banipal*, the magazine of modern Arab literature in English translation, and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature, which was founded last year to support and celebrate the publication of Arab authors in English translation and the production of live literature events in the UK with Arab authors.

The Patron for the first year of the Banipal Prize is **Mohammed Ahmad Al-Sowaidi**, Secretary-General of the Cultural Foundation of Abu Dhabi. A poet and well-known patron of the arts, he explained that "the aim of sponsoring the prize in its first year is to participate in building bridges between Arab culture and the Western reader" Over the last few years Mohammed Al-Sowaidi has founded and sponsored a number of projects to revive interest in the literature of travel and the writings of Arab and Muslim geographers. They include The Ibn Battuta Prize for Geographic Literature" awarded annually to five distinguished classical or contemporary works, The Ibn Battuta Prize for Photography, and "The Forum of Arab and Muslim Travellers" which is held annually in an Arab or other capital, and attended by academics and scholars specialising in the literature of travel. Spring 2006 sees the launch of a new magazine *Al-Rihla [Travel]*, founded and sponsored by Mohammad Al-Sowaidi, to promote the literature of

travel and geographical discoveries. His two major internet projects are "The Electronic Village, which includes Al-Warraq interactive website and library of Arab heritage, and The Golden Web website which brings the history of civilisation to life through mapping travel, trade and cities.

In talking about his sponsorship of the Banipal Translation Prize, he said: "We consider this participation to be very necessary at this time, even for existential reasons. For literature plays the role of narrating the self in a world of numerous narrations, a world that no longer permits the isolation of cultures. Furthermore, supporting serious European cultural projects like Banipal is imperative, because it works to close the gap between Arab culture and readers in the West, and attempts to create a balance in cultural exchange at a time when it seems that the knowledge of the West by the Arabs outweighs the knowledge of the Arabs by the West – culturally, intellectually, artistically, and socially. We believe that Banipal's project and the translation prize can participate admirably in creating a better Western knowledge of the Arabs. Hence, they deserve all our support; and those who are responsible for Banipal merit our appreciation."

Banipal was founded in 1998 by **Margaret Obank** and Iraqi author **Samuel Shimon**. Its three issues a year present poems, short stories and excerpts from novels of both established and emerging Arab authors and poets in English translation for the first time. Through the magazine, its off-shoot Banipal Books, the Banipal Live tour of Arab writers, and now this new translation prize, the literature of today's Arab authors is being made ever more accessible to the multicultural readership of the UK and to English speakers worldwide.

The British Centre for Literary Translation welcomes the establishment of a new prize for literary translation from the Arabic. Rarely has the anglophone world been more keen to hear Arab voices sharing their realities, and their fantasies, in their own words. We look forward to reading, learning and enjoying the new books that will now be brought to our attention.

Amanda Hopkinson, Director, British Centre for Literary Translation

The Arts Council is very pleased to support the establishment of the Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation. Despite the efforts of Banipal magazine and others, the British public still has little access to literature from the Arab world, which could do so much to promote cross-cultural understanding. We hope that this prize will go some way towards raising the profile of Arabic literature in the UK, encouraging translators to translate more, publishers to publish more and readers to read more.

Kate Griffin, International Literature Officer Arts Council England

This prize is the first major prize for the translation of a work of contemporary Arabic. It will be an inducement to the growing band of translators and will surely expand a global awareness of one of the most vibrant literatures in the world.

Peter Clark, **Honorary President**, The Banipal Trust for Arab Literature
Literary Translator from Arabic



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Image: Detail of painting by Youssef Abdelké for the front cover of the first issue of *Banipal* magazine, February 1998

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