

## PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT



### Roger Allen wins 2012 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation



Bensalem Himmich and Roger Allen

**Roger Allen** is the winner of the 2012 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for his translation of *A Muslim Suicide* by **Bensalem Himmich**, published by Syracuse University Press.

**Humphrey Davies** is the runner-up for his translation of *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* by **Mourid Barghouti**, published by Bloomsbury.

The four judges, who met in December under the chairmanship of prize administrator Paula Johnson of the Society of Authors, are the poet, author and broadcaster **Ruth Padel**; the short-story writer, novelist and author of *Hideous Kinky* **Esther Freud**; the Iraqi poet, novelist, critic and literary translator **Fadhil al-Azzawi**; and **John Peate** who is a translator, university teacher and researcher based in the UK. They were pleased to see so many books from so many different Arabic-speaking cultures and countries being translated into English and discussed many important issues and questions before agreeing unanimously on the winner and runner-up.

#### ***The Judges' Announcement***

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### THE WINNER

**ROGER ALLEN** for his translation of *A Muslim Suicide* by Bensalem Himmich

**“A highly challenging, yet deeply enriching read . . . a major achievement”**

*A Muslim Suicide* is a highly ambitious and erudite work that opens up remarkable historical, cultural and religious perspectives on the Islamic heritage. It is a highly challenging, yet deeply enriching read in its English translation. This is chiefly due, however, to the immense insight and long and hard-earned cultural and linguistic awareness of its translator. It is very hard indeed to imagine anyone besides Roger Allen capable of bringing this serious book alive to English readers. All those able, even briefly, to browse a little of the Arabic original would quickly recognize the translation as a major achievement.

The Arabic original is written in a language not only related to the heritage, but also full of contemplations and Sufi ideas. The author enables us to accompany the main hero of the novel in his long journey across different cities and countries from Spain to Mecca, letting us get in touch with different dimensions of Arabic history, poetry, Islamic religion and heritage. In this work, Roger Allen shows us how fine and deep his linguistic awareness is: he succeeded with his wonderful style not only in turning Himmich's text into brilliant English prose, but also in creating a real piece of literature – this fascinating historical novel. It is a major work of translation that impressed all the judges with its remarkable sophistication and ambition, its rich philosophical and literary tapestry, and the seamless way in which it has been translated.

*On hearing the news, Syracuse University Press Director Alice Pfeiffer said: "Syracuse University Press is delighted and gratified to see Roger Allen receive this prestigious award. The prize will bring well-deserved attention to Bensalem Himmich's remarkable novel."*

### THE RUNNER-UP

**HUMPHREY DAVIES** for his translation of *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* by Mourid Barghouti

**“One of the masters of translation . . . a true exemplar to translators”**

Humphrey Davies is one of the masters of translation from Arabic into English. He knows how to find the right tone for his translated text and once more, in *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here*, he catches the spirit of the original text and lets us feel and enjoy the beauty of his English prose. He has adopted exactly the right palette of both vocabulary and tone right the way through, giving readers the beautifully rendered revisiting of a riven landscape. In this fluid translation of a thoughtful and moving book he manages a rare thing – to make you feel you are reading the book in the language in which it was written. The great skill in his translation is not just in the sophisticated understanding of the original, which should be beyond doubt. It is also in the rendering

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of an apparently effortless, yet deeply nuanced English prose, behind which – translators will know – undoubtedly lies long, long hours of intense (self) debate, reflection and research. Davies is a true exemplar to translators in work such as this.

*Bill Swainson, Senior Commissioning Editor at Bloomsbury, told us: "Bloomsbury is very proud to publish Mourid Barghouti's I Was Born There, I was Born Here in Humphrey Davies's elegant translation, the powerful sequel to his classic memoir I Saw Ramallah. This runner-up award of the 2012 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize is an accolade for both author and translator."*

*Neil Hewison, Assistant Director for Editorial Programs at AUC Press, and publisher of the Middle East edition of I was Born There, I was Born Here, released the following statement: "The AUC Press is delighted that Humphrey Davies has been named runner-up in this year's Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for his masterful translation of Mourid Barghouti's beautiful memoir I Was Born There, I Was Born Here. This further mark of distinction is most well deserved by one of the world's leading translators of Arabic literature into English."*

### **Monday 4 February**

**The Award Ceremony of Translation Prizes  
from Arabic, Dutch/Flemish, French, German, Italian, Modern Greek, Portuguese,  
Spanish and Swedish**

7.00pm  
King's Place  
90 York Way, London N1 9AG

with  
**Readings by the prizewinners**  
Prizes presented by **Sir Peter Stothard**

and the Sebald Lecture on the Art of Literary Translation  
**Boris Akunin on "Paradise Lost: Confessions of an apostate translator"**

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### **Tuesday 5 February**

**Roger Allen – Masterclass on Arabic Literary Translation**

10.00am to 1.00pm  
Meeting Room & Library, The Arab British Centre  
1 Gough Square  
London EC4A 3DE

**Prizewinner Roger Allen in conversation with Bensalem Himmich, author of *A Muslim Suicide***

Chaired by Paul Starkey, chair of the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature  
**Followed by Reception**

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7.00pm  
The Mosaic Rooms  
Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road  
London SW5 0SW

### **Notes to Editors**

***A Muslim Suicide***, ISBN 9780815609667, is published by Syracuse University Press, USA, ([www.SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu](http://www.SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu)) and distributed in the UK by Eurospan. The Arabic original *Hadha Al-Andalusi!* was longlisted for the 2009 International Prize for Arabic Fiction.

**Roger Allen** is Sascha Jane Patterson Harvie Professor Emeritus of Social Thought and Comparative Ethics, School of Arts & Sciences and Professor Emeritus of Arabic & Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania. He obtained his doctoral degree in modern Arabic literature from Oxford University in 1968, the first student to obtain a doctoral degree in that field at Oxford, under the supervision of the late Dr. M.M. Badawi. In 1968 he took a position in Arabic language and literature at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where he served as Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature in the Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations for 43 years. He has been very involved in the improvement of methods of teaching the Arabic language in American universities and colleges. He has written a textbook (*Let's Learn Arabic* [with Adel Allouche], 1986-88) and from 1986 till 2002 conducted many workshops on language teaching in the USA, Europe, and the Arab world. It was in the late 1960s that Roger Allen began to concentrate his research on modern Arabic fiction, starting with his translation of a collection of short stories by Naguib Mahfouz, *God's World* (1973). He has also translated into English Mahfouz's *Autumn Quail* (1985), *Mirrors* (1st edition, 1977; 2nd edition 1999), *Karnak Café* (2007), *Khan al-Khalili* (2008) and *One Hour Left* (2010). He has also published many individual studies of works by Mahfouz. In addition to the fiction of Mahfouz, he has also translated (and worked closely with) Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (*The Ship*, and *In Search of Walid Masoud*, both translated in conjunction with Adnan Haydar), Yusuf Idris (the collection of stories *In the Eye of the Beholder* and also a volume of studies *Critical Perspectives on Yusuf Idris*), Abd al-Rahman Munif (*Endings*), May Telmissany (*Dunyazad* – short-listed for the 2001 UK Independent Foreign Fiction Prize), Bensalem Himmich (*The Polymath*, 2004, and *The Theocrat*, 2005), Ahmad al-Tawfiq (*Abu Musa's Women Neighbors*, 2006), and Hanan al-Shaykh (*The Locust and the Bird*, 2009). His book *The Arabic Novel: an historical and critical introduction* has been widely used throughout the world as an introduction to the novel genre in the Arab world, and it is also used at several Arab-world universities. He has also prepared a very large number of individual articles on modern Arabic fiction, novels, novellas, and short-stories, that have appeared in journals, festschrifts, and conference volumes. He is a contributing editor of *Banipal* and a trustee of the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature.

**Bensalem Himmich** was born in Meknès, Morocco in 1949. He has published eleven novels, four collections of poetry, and books of essays and literary criticism, with five novels published in several other languages. His novel *The Theocrat* (*Majnun al-Hukm*) won the al-Naqid Award, the Riad El-Rayyes Prize and was chosen by the Authors' Union in Egypt as one of the best novels of the twentieth century. He won the

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Great Atlas Prize for his novel *Al-'Alaama (The Polymath)* as well as the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2001, the Sharjah-UNESCO prize in 2003 and the Egyptian Writers' Union Naguib Mahfouz Prize in 2009. Both novels mentioned above were translated by Roger Allen along with the prize-winning translation of *A Muslim Suicide*. His novel *Mu'adhdhibati (My Tormentor)* was shortlisted for the 2011 International Prize for Arabic Fiction. He was the Minister of Culture of Morocco from 2009 to 2012.

*I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* is published by Bloomsbury in the UK, Walker & Company in North America, and the AUC Press in the Middle East.

**Humphrey Davies** studied Arabic at Cambridge University and the American University in Cairo's Center for Arabic Studies Abroad and completed a doctoral degree at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1981. He started translating in 1997 with his first translation of *Rat* by Sayed Ragab being published in Banipal in 2000. During this period he was approached by the American University in Cairo Press and asked to translate an early Naguib Mahfouz novel (*Thebes at War*, 2003); since then he has translated, for the same press, Alaa Al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* (2004) and *Friendly Fire* (2009), Ahmed Alaidy's *Being Abbas el Abd* (2006), Gamal al-Ghitani's *Pyramid Texts* and Hamdy el-Gazzar's *Black Magic* (both 2007), Mohamed Mustagab's *Tales of Dayrut* (2008) and Khaled al-Berry's *Life Is More Beautiful Than Paradise* (2009). His translation of Elias Khoury's novel *The Gate of the Sun* (Harvill-Secker, 2005) won the inaugural Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation in 2006 and his later translation of Khoury's novel *Yalo* (MacLehose 2009) won the prize for 2010, with his translation of Bahaa Taher's *Sunset Oasis* (Sceptre, 2009) being joint runner-up for the same prize.

**Mourid Barghouti** is a prominent and celebrated Palestinian poet and has spent most of his life in exile. Born in 1944 in the village of Deir Ghassaneh near Ramallah, he graduated from Cairo University in 1967. He has been published throughout the Middle East and lives and works in Cairo. His collected works were published in Beirut in 1997, and in the same year his memoir, *I Saw Ramallah*, an account of his first visit home after thirty years, won the 1997 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature. A best-seller in the Arab world and translated into English by Ahdaf Soueif, it was published by Bloomsbury in the UK in 2004 to critical acclaim. He has read at the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival, Edinburgh Book Festival, and was one of four authors on the first Banipal Live UK tour of Arab authors in 2004, where he also appeared at London's Poetry International in a special Arab poets' evening. Selected poems in translation have been published in *Banipal* No 15/16, in *A Small Sun* (Stephen Spender Trust/Aldeburgh Poetry Festival), with a first major collection in translation by Radwa Ashour, *Midnight and Other Poems* (Arc Publications) coming out in 2008.

**The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation** is an annual prize of £3,000, awarded to the translator(s) 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 and first published in English translation in the year prior to the award. Entries are judged by a panel of four distinguished authors, critics and literary experts, two of whom read and consider both the Arabic original and the English translation.

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The prize is administered by the Society of Authors in the UK, as are other prizes for literary translation into English from European languages. The Award Ceremony is hosted by the British Centre for Literary Translation, the Arts Council, and the Society of Authors. The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize entries can have been published anywhere in the world but must be available for purchase in the United Kingdom, either via a distributor or on-line.

The prize, the first worldwide for a published work of English literary translation from Arabic, was established in 2005 by Banipal, the magazine of modern Arab literature in English translation, and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature. It is wholly sponsored by Omar Saif Ghobash and his family in memory of his father, the late Saif Ghobash, a man passionate about Arabic literature and other literatures of the world.

- Both Roger Allen and Bensalem Himmich will be available for interview on 4 and 5 February.
- To attend the Award Ceremony on 4 February, please apply to King's Place for a Press Pass.
- For more information about the Masterclass on 5 February, and to register a place, please email [margaret@banipal.co.uk](mailto:margaret@banipal.co.uk)
- To attend the Prizewinner's Conversation and Reception on 5 February at The Mosaic Rooms, please email [margaret@banipal.co.uk](mailto:margaret@banipal.co.uk)
- If you require digital images of Roger Allen, Bensalem Himmich, or the front cover of *A Muslim Suicide*, or of runner-up Humphrey Davies, or logo of the Prize, please email [margaret@banipal.co.uk](mailto:margaret@banipal.co.uk)
- For further history of the prize, more information about the judges, the rules, and details of the winning books, please go to <http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/>
- To arrange an interview with Roger Allen, or for any other information, please contact the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature at:  
1 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7832 1350
- Or email the Trust's administrator Margaret Obank on [info@banipaltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@banipaltrust.org.uk) or [margaret@banipal.co.uk](mailto:margaret@banipal.co.uk)