The burgeoning interest in the contemporary Arabic detective novel (See Arablit.org, “the Mysterious Rise and Fall of Arabic Crime Novels”), highlights the methodological challenges attendant to its study. Critical studies of Arabic detective novels seem particularly susceptible to reproducing a temporality of not-yet; whereby the genre is ostensibly struggling to take root in the Arab world. The latter view is sometimes read as symptomatic of, and representing, the not-yet modernity of Arab societies or states. Interestingly, authors of detective novels similarly project themselves as cut-off from any precursors, as if every novel is the first detective novel.

Yet, detective novels have enjoyed tremendous popularity in the Arab world from the early translations of Sherlock Holmes, Arsène Lupin, and Rocambole (Samah Selim, “Fiction and Colonial Identities: Arsène Lupin in Arabic”) all the way to writings by Yasmina Khadra (Inspector Llob), Mahmoud Salim (AL-Mughāmrūn al-Khamsa), and the Akashic Noir series. The rift between the continuous popularity of the genre on the one hand, and the critical discourse of crisis on the other throws into sharp relief the conflation between literary history, and a culturalist search for ‘organic’ origins. The weakest link, in this conflation, are the pre-modern detective-like narratives, mysteries, and all potential ‘local’ proto or precursors to the modern detective narrative. Put differently, even the few studies that have attempted to side-step the aforementioned critical discourse of crisis are yet to work through what it means to think about these pre-19thcentury narratives (that are often referred to as ‘local’ narrative forms). In this workshop, we ask what it means to think simultaneously about this body of texts without resorting to a narrative of origins? As such, we invite scholars to temporarily suspend genre-specific approaches with its intertwinement to a question of origins and to rather think along and push further the following themes (we welcome contributions from scholars working on different periods of literary production):

• How have detective narratives (broadly conceived) contributed to the negotiation of the boundary between the Juridical and the literary? What is the distinction between the procedures and performance of juridical and literary revelation of truth? The latter is of import for the conception of adab itself, and for the affective deployment of language.
• What role do these narratives play in negotiating the distinction between the public/private? We are especially interested in how this divide creates a sense of the city and a way of seeing it.
• How does the interplay between the juridical/literary, public/private, language and the city enable thinking anew the changing connections between adab and subjectivity?
• Law, Literature, & the State.
• Mysteries, the messianic, and the political (we are particularly interested in how this connection pans out in the ancestral histories of ruling classes such as the Mamluks ordisappearance of figures of power.
• How can these questions offer a prism that may be extended to some Qur’anic/Biblical episodes and their interpretations? What are the implications of such an extension for adab.

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