

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATIONS



**THE ISLAMIC LEGACY,
AND THE ROLE OF SAUDI ARABIA
IN PRESERVING IT**

A PAPER PREPARED BY

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HEAD OF POST GRADUATE ARABIC DEPARTMENT, KING
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IN THE NAME OF GOD THE MOST GRACIOUS, MOST MERCIFUL.

This is a short paper with the aim of giving a simple Idea about the Islamic LEGACY. Its main characteristics and in particular the main characteristics of the Arabic Language, the Language of this LEGACY. It is followed by the explanation of the main functions of one the centers which take care of this Islamic LEGACY, the place in which the Holy QURAN was revealed to the Prophet MUHAMMAD (Peace be upon Him) the place in which the Arabic Language, the Language of the Holy QURAN and the traditions of the Holy Prophet had developed.

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THE ISLAMIC LEGACY.

When we talk about the Islamic Legacy, we are obliged to talk about the Arabic Language, the language of the Holy QURAN and the traditions of the Holy Prophet MUHAMMAD (Peace be upon him), from the point of view being pronounced and heard, and the point of view being written and read, as the Arabic Islamic writing, is the vehicle which carried and still carrying the Islamic legacy. We are also obliged to make it clear, in brief, the most important characters of the Arabic language, being pronounced and heard, written and read, as these characters gave to the Arabic Islamic legacy their distinctive colour. As the Arabic language, almost one century, after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, became the language of the Islamic State which covered the whole distance between China in the east and the frontiers of France in the west. There was not a great need to use any other language. That means that the Arabic language played the Universal role successfully. It is nice to state that the countries which refused for almost one thousand years before Islam, to be absorbed in Greece, Persia and Rome, religiously Linguistically and culturally, agreed happily to abandon their former religions, languages and cultures, and to embrace Islam, the Arabic language and the Islamic culture. Because Islam is a Human religion

(1) See here, Al-Islam Quwwat Al-Gehad Al-Aalamiyyah, translated by Dr. Muhammad Shamah, P. 24

towards the whole mankind, and because Islam is the religion of brotherhood among its followers all the inhabitants of the Islamic states participated in building the Islamic civilization. It is well known that Islam is the Religion of knowledge. It is useful to state that the first verses from the Holy Qur'an which were revealed to the Prophet MUHAMMAD (Peace Be Upon Him) dealt with knowledge and praised reading and writing. God⁽¹⁾ said "Read in the Name of THY LORD WHO Created; Created mankind, out of a mere clot of congealed blood, Read and THY LORD is the most Generous; He WHO TAUGHT the use of the pen. Taught Mankind what they did not know".

The first swearing in the HOLY QUR'AN is by the pen. It occurs at the beginning of the second sura according to the revelation. God said "Nun by the pen, and by what mankind write".⁽²⁾ The word of knowledge and its derivations

(1) Surat Al'Alag, Verses, 1-5.

(2) KHUTUWATUN NAHWAL QUDS, Dr. A.Kamil, P.149.

are found in the Holy Qur'an about 880 times⁽¹⁾ Before Islam the Arabic Language was Isolated in the Arabian Peninsula and most of its Legacy used to be related by heart, because most of the Inhabitants were illiterate, so poetry, the Major Legacy of that period, because it was easy to keep in memory on account of its music. Because Islam is the religion of knowledge and the Arabic Language became universal, both the ear and the eye have their equal share of the Legacy of Islam which deals with things written and heard.

The Islamic Legacy turned into a written Legacy, starting with the writing of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet MUHAMMAD. The Muslim Scholars were eager, that the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet MUHAMMAD should be well understood, so they collected the Arabic Legacy from those who were able to keep it in memory. When they were quite sure that the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet were well understood, collecting the Arabic Legacy turned into an AIM for itself. Scholars did not rely only on memory to preserve this Legacy, they used to write it in the same way in which the Holy Quran was written since the time of the third Pious Caliph , OTHMAN B. AFFAN. and later the traditions of the Holy Prophet.

(1) Al Islam wal Mustaqbal, Dr. A.Kamil. Page 43.

It is well known that Islam preserved all that was good among Arabs before Islam. Islam itself got the benefit from the two arts which deal with speech, in which the Arabs excelled, poetry and oratory. Islam directed both of them to the benefit of the Muslims. If we added to this that Islam urged every body to seek knowledge, we could understand the great desire of Muslims to get the benefit from their whole useful Legacy such as medicine, Astronomy, Genealogy, Zoology, and the other kinds of knowledge that, are useful to be built on. We must add new Islamic sciences that were brought by Islam, we mean the Qur'anic and Hadith sciences, Sciences of which Islam was their subject such as Biographies, Holy wars and conquests, and sciences for which Islam was the reason for their existence such as grammer and Philology. Arabs also embraced all that was useful from the knowledge of other nations, translated it into the Arabic language and added a lot to the whole field of knowledge.

If the middle ages were, for non Muslims, the ages of darkness, they were for Muslims, the ages of light, as Muslims, represented at that time the peak of civilization. We would like to refer, in particular, to the great role of public libraries in building the Islamic civilization.

We would like to refer in particular to a library in the eastern part of the Islamic state, and to another in the western part. The library of the east was Baitul Hikma (The House of Wisdom) in Baghdad, the Capital of the Abbaside state, and the library of the west was the Zahra' Library (The Library of the Palace of Zahra') in Qurtuba of Al ANDALUS (Spain).

Baitul Hikmah, which is considered the biggest and the oldest Arabic Public Library in Baghdad, and which was established by the Abbaside Caliph Harun Arrasheed, carried the load of translating the Human Legacy in medicine, Philosophy and astronomy, during the time of Harun Arrasheed and Al-Mamun, from the old Languages into the Arabic Language⁽¹⁾ Qurtuba, with its Zahra' Library, which was established by the nineth Ummayyed Caliph, Al Hakam Aththani (the second) who was known as Al Mustansir Billah (one who asked God for Victory) carried, during the period of Al-Hakam Aththani in particular, the load of translating the Islamic Legacy from the Arabic Language into the European Language, Spanish and Latin in particular.⁽²⁾ If Baghdad was, for almost five centuries, a goal for the students of the Arabic and Islamic world, Qurtuba was the goal for the European students. It is well known that the Islamic State in Alandalus which lasted almost eight centuries, used to be, during its power and unity,

(1) Turathuna Bain Madhin Wa Hadhir, Bint Ashshati, P.20

(2) Ibid, P.26

a light house of civilization which lighted for west Europe to the darkness of its middle ages, and aided it in abundance with the treasures of the Islamic thought and the Arabic culture. Al-Andalus was one the most important bridge for the passages of civilization from the east to the west, (1)

The Arabic Language, for which is the Arabian peninsula is considered the first cradle, appears suddenly as a complete language in its first poetic texts, that have reached us, and which go back up to two centuries before Islam. The same is the case with texts that deal with prose. The childhood of the Arabic language is not known at all. The Arabic language is one of the semitic group of languages. Because it was isolated in the Arabian peninsula, which is considered the biggest peninsula in world, for a long period, its own characteristics had the opportunity to develop. One of the main characteristics of the Arabic language is that it is an ETYMOLOGICAL language. From the root we can derive many words for different meanings. If we know that most of these roots in the arabic language are formed from three letters that the etymological language forces the derived forms from different roots to express similar type of meanings,

(1) IBID, P. 25

such as the present participle or the past participle, thus giving the derived words of a certain form a music and rythm, that there are no Arabic words, despite the additional letters, which have more than seven letters, we would, then, realize the reasons for the musicality which is considered one of the fundamental characteristics of the arabic language. This music appeared in the Arabic poetry. Music is in fact considered one of the two main conditions of Arabic poetry, the second being the emotional feeling. This music appears in the Arabic prose as well. The Arabic language is really considered as a musical and poetical language.

One thing that helped the Arabic language to be a musical one, is desinential inflection which allows the word to preserve its meaning in the sentence and, at the same time, gives it a great freedom to move in the sentence and choose the place that suits it in accordance with the meaning that the Author wants to express.

It seems that one of the most important reasons that gave the ear a great role to play in both poetry and prose, is that most of the Arabs before Islam were illiterate. They relied upon the ear more than the eye and upon memory and hearing, more than writing and reading in relating their

legacy, which deals mainly with poetry and oratory. If we moved to Islam, we would realize that the ear and eye, hearing and reading had participated in carrying this legacy. This participation occurred for the first time dealing with the Holy Quran.

The Prophet MUHAMMAD, (Peace be upon him) was the first reciter of Holy Quran by heart. What is revealed to him from the Holy Quran, he dictated to the writers of the revelation.

The companions of the Prophet used to write it as well as to learn it by heart, Zaid B. Thabit, who was the last person to recite the Holy Quran in front of the Prophet, who was one of the reciters of the Quran by heart, and who was one of the scribes for the revelation, when he was ordered by the first Pious Caliph, Abu Bakr, to collect the whole Quran in one Volume, he did not rely only upon his own memory.

For his collection he worked on the principle that what was written from the Holy Quran must correspond to what was in the memory and hearts of men. If someone brought a manuscript which contained a portion from the Holy Quran, he had to bring with him two witnesses to the fact that what was included in that manuscript had been written in front of the Holy Prophet. (Peace Be Upon him)

Dealing with the traditions of the Prophet, we know that writing had accompanied them since the time of the Prophet. The best example for that was Al Sahifa Assadiqa.

(the truthful paper) in which, the companion of the Prophet, Abdullah. B. 'Amr.B.Al'Aas had written all that he heard from the Prophet MUHAMMAD, (Peace be upon him).⁽¹⁾ All that mean that the heart and writing, had cooperated in order to preserve the Holy Quran, the traditions of the Holy Prophet, and the whole Islamic Legacy as well. It is well known that what is called as carrying the knowledge and the student taking it from the teacher directly, is something that is linked with the Islamic civilization and has no parellel in any other civilization.⁽²⁾ This way of carrying the knowledge is linked, in particular, with the science of the traditions of the Holy Prophet. It was possible to classify the ways of relating the Hadiths of Holy Prophet into different ranks.⁽³⁾ The teacher will not allow his student to spread the knowledge that was taken from him unless the teacher is quite confident that his student had heard from him properly and had the ability to pronounce what he had

(1) Arrisalatul Muhammadiyyah, by Sulaiman Annadawy.
P. 80.

(2) Tarikh Atturath Al Arabi, by Faud Sezgin, the Arabic translation Vol. 1 P.230.

(3) IBID, P. 230.

heard properly as well, The lowest rank is what is called Al Wijadah, which means that the student quotes from a trustworthy book, either was written by the hand of the Author, or came through a reliable well-known way. ⁽¹⁾ These ways of carrying the knowledge were wide spread and also included the subjects of the Arabic language. The highest way was when the student heard the knowledge from his teacher directly, so that he would pronounce what he heard properly, The lowest way was when the student or the scholar states that he read in such a book so and so.

Ibn Sallam, the great critic, states in his famous book TABAQAT FUHUL ASHSHU'ARRA' that those scholars are not ⁽²⁾ reliable,

At this occasion, we would like to state that this Islamic writing of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the prophet, is the same writing in which the rest of the Arabic Islamic Legacy was written, including a huge amount of the Islamic Legacy which was composed in other Islamic language. Muslims scholars, everywhere, tried hard that there should be one edition of the Holy Quran which could be read by all the Muslims.

That Aim was possible by embracing Islamic writing, which is still functioning up in its essence till to-day

(1) See here, Tarikh Atturah Al' Arabi, Vol. 1. P.284

(2) See for example, P.P 5,6

under the shelter of the writing of the Holy Quran from time of third Pious Caliph, Othman B. Affan. All the progress that occurred in this Islamic writing stems either from attempts to remove obscurity (such as adding dots, Vowels Fatha, Damma, Kasrah and Sukun), or by writing the same letters in different nice shapes, whether these letters were linked to others or were separate. That is why it is very easy to read in these days all the old manuscripts that go back to more than one thousand years.

The care undertaken by muslims with the Arabic Islamic writing was huge, Because it was linked with Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet!

Great also was the care the Muslims devoted to the pronunciation of the Arabic language, because it was the language in which the Holy Quran had been revealed and the traditions of the Prophet had come. The care undertaken by the Arabs and non Arabs was of a very high rank. It is efficient to state that Al-Maqdici, in his book entitled AHSANUTTA QASEEM talking about the fourth Islamic century in which Philology became a well arranged science, stated that the care of Persian with the Arabic language was more than the care of the Arabs themselves. The Holy Quran is guaranteed

(1) See here Al'Arabiyyah, translated by Dr. A Annajjar.

By God to protect it. God said " We Who Sent Down the Holy Quran and Surely We Would Gaured It."

That means that the Arabic language and the Islamic legacy are preserved.

At this occasian, we would like to refer in particular, to two miracles. The first one deals with the Islamic civilization that might be the only civilization that known the birthday of more than one science in its complete shape.

I mean in the first place the arabic Grammer, rules of which were taken from the Holy Quran, the traditions of the Prophet, and the Islamic legacy. This science was born in its complebe form, when its rules were collected together, for the first time, in the book which was entitled Al-Kitab (The Book) by SEEBAWAIIH who died in the year 180 A.H. (796 A.D.)The whole generations. up to date, could not change any thing of its bases and rules. (2)

The second miracle deals with the pronunciation of Arabic Alphabet which has never been changed. This miracle could happen because of the recitation of the Holy Quran during the prayers and outside, and because of the great care taken by Muslims in the Sunna of the Holy Prophet, (the Sunna means what the Prophet said or did, his description and what he approved) and in the whole Islamic Legacy of high ranking

(1) Surat Al HIJR, Verse, 9.

(2) Al 'Arabiyya, P.50

poetry and prose which was composed in accordance with the grammatical and philological rules which were derived from the Quran and the Hadith. Because of the cooperation between the Islamic writing whose essence has not changed, and the nature of the pronounced Arabic language, whose rules have not changed, we are able nowadays to read the pre-Islamic Arabic texts and taste them as we read our current texts and taste them. This character might be linked only with the Islamic legacy. From this point of view we may say that the literature of the Arabic language is the oldest literatures of all the universal language. The main reason is that the Arabic language is the language of a Holy book which is protected by God.

The arabic language always fulfilled the new desire throughout the ages. For example, during the golden age of translation from the old language to the Arabic language, the latter fulfilled that aim through these four ways.

(1) By adjusting the old meaning of the Arabic word, so the word could include the new meaning.

(2) By deriving some new words from Arabic or non Arabic roots to give the new meaning.

(3) By translating the meaning into the Arabic language.

(4) By adopting the foreign word and considering it a
(1)
correct word.

(1) Dirasat Fi FIQHILLUGHAH, by Dr. SUBHI ASSALIH P. 374

It is well known that the Arabic language is known before Islam that it is a rich language! It is well known to-day that the Arabic language is the richest among all the universal languages: ⁽¹⁾ In the whole history of the Arabic language, there is, almost, no difference between its remote past and its present dealing with writing and pronunciation. That means that the written legacy of this language is extremely rich. But most of this legacy, for different internal and external political and religious reasons, was lost. The sleep of the Islamic world during the last few centuries is one of these reasons.

When this nation awoke from its sleep, it realized that most of this legacy was lost, and that a huge amount of what had survived was outside the frontiers of the Islamic world. Different efforts are cooperating nowadays to save the rest which might have survived from this Legacy, by collecting it, protecting it, describing it, editing it and publishing it. Orientalists preceded to translate the master pieces of this legacy, to index it and to edit some of it properly. We must refer to the great efforts of the Arab and Muslim Scholars in this field. As long as the time does not allow us to say a lot in this matter, so we would like to refer, in particular, to one index done by a Muslim scholar. This index is called the history of the Arabic literature, by Fuad Sezgin of

(1). IBID. P. 338

Turkish nationality.

This book represents the highest peak in describing the Arabic culture and index the Arabic legacy from its beginning up to date. (1)

(1). The introduction to the Arabic translations.

P. N.

The role of Saudi Arabia to protect the Islamic Legacy.

Saudi Arabia, which contains the Holy places for Muslims, in Makka Al Mukarramah and Al Madina Al Munawwara, takes a great care of the Islamic legacy.

I would like to refer shortly to one of the centres that takes care of this Islamic legacy. That is, the centre of academic research and for editing the Islamic legacy, in Sharia College, King Abdulaziz University, Mecca. The most important roles of this centre are very clear from its name. In this centre, there are different Departments for editing, researches and Photography. There is a library which is growing rapidly and a library for slides. The centre is working hard to train some students to carry the burden of editing the Islamic legacy. In spite of the short age of the centre which was established in the year 1976 A.D (396 A.H), it contains more than ten thousand photo of Manuscripts. The centre is happy to extend its help to all those who serve this Islamic Legacy.

This centre publishes researches and books that suit its Aim.

Mecca. March 1978.

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Izzat

