

A Study on the Source of Arabic Literature

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1.Introduction:

Arabic is the writing, both prose and poetry, produced by writers in the Arabic language. The Arabic word used for literature is "Adab", which is derived from a meaning of etiquette, and which implies politeness, culture and enrichment. Arabic literature emerged in the 5th century with only fragments of the written language appearing before then. The Qur'an, widely regarded by Muslims as the finest piece of literary work in the Arabic language, would have the greatest lasting effect on Arabic culture and its literature. Arabic literature flourished during the Islamic Golden Age, but has remained vibrant to the present day, with poets and prose-writers across the Arab world achieving increasing success. In this present topic it will be focused some source of Arabic literature.

1.1 The Quran:

The source of classical Arabic literature:

The Holy Book Quran is one of the best source of Arabic literature .The Qur'an had a significant influence on the Arab language. The language used in it is called classical Arabic, and while modern Arabic is very similar, the classical has social prestige. Not only is the Qur'an the first work of any significant length written in the language it also has a far more complicated structure than the earlier literary works with its 114 suras (chapters) which contain 6,236 ayat (verses). It contains injunctions, narratives, homilies, parables, direct addresses from God, instructions and even comments on itself on how it will be received and understood. It is also, paradoxically, admired for its layers of metaphor as well as its clarity, a feature it mentions itself in sura 16:103. Although it contains elements of both prose and poetry, and therefore is closest to Saj or rhymed prose, the Qur'an is regarded as entirely apart from these classifications. The text is believed to be divine revelation and is seen by Muslims as being eternal or 'uncreated'. This leads to the doctrine of i'jaz or inimitability of the Qur'an which implies that nobody can copy the work's style. Say, Bring you then ten chapters like unto it, and call whomsoever you can, other than God, if you speak the truth! This doctrine of i'jaz possibly had a slight limiting effect on Arabic literature; prescribing exactly what could be written. Whilst Islam allows Muslims to write, read and recite poetry, the Qur'an states in the 26th sura (Ash-Shu'ara or The Poets) that poetry which is blasphemous, obscene, praise worthy of sinful acts or attempts to challenge the Qu'ran's content and form is forbidden for Muslims.And as to the poets, those who go astray follow them. This may have exerted dominance over the Pre-Islamic poets of the 6th century whose popularity may have vied with the Qur'an amongst the people. There were a marked lack of significant poets until the 8th century. One notable exception was Hassan ibn Thabit who wrote poems in praise of Muhammad (sm.) and was known as the

"prophet's poet". Just as the Bible has held an important place in the literature of other languages, The Qur'an is important to Arabic. It is the source of many ideas, allusions and quotes and its moral message informs many works.

Aside from the Qur'an the hadith or tradition of what Muhammad (sm.) is supposed to have said and done are important literature. The entire body of these acts and words are called sunnah or way and the ones regarded as sahih or genuine of them are collected into hadith. Some of the most significant collections of hadith include those by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj and Muhammad (sm.) ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari.

The other important genre of work in Qur'anic study is the tafsir or commentaries. Arab writings relating to religion also includes many sermons and devotional pieces as well as the sayings of Ali which were collected in the 10th century as Nahj al-Balaghah or The Peak of Eloquence.

1.2 Islamic Scholarship:

The research into the life and times of Muhammad (sm.) and determining the genuine parts of the sunnah, was an important early reason for scholarship in or about the Arabic language. It was also the reason for the collecting of Pre-Islamic poetry; as some of these poets were close to the Prophet—Labid actually meeting Muhammad (sm.) and converting to Islam—and their writings illuminated the times when these event occurred. Muhammad (sm.) also inspired the first Arabic biographies, known as al-sirah al-nabawiyah; the earliest was by Wahb ibn Munabbih, but Muhammad ibn Ishaq wrote the best known. Whilst covering the life of the prophet they also told of the battles and events of early Islam and have numerous digressions on older biblical traditions.

Some of the earliest work studying the Arabic language was started in the name of Islam. Tradition has it that the caliph Ali, after reading a copy of Qur'an with errors in it, asked Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali to write a work codifying Arabic grammar. Khalil ibn Ahmad would later write Kitab al-Ayn, the first dictionary of Arabic, along with works on prosody and music, and his Persian pupil Sibawayh would produce the most respected work of Arabic grammar known simply as al-Kitab or The Book.

Other caliphs exerted their influence on Arabic with 'Abd al-Malik making it the official language for administration of the new empire, and al-Ma'mun setting up the Bayt al-Hikma or House of Wisdom in Baghdad for research and translations. Basrah and Kufah were two other important seats of learning in the early Arab world, between which there was a strong rivalry.

The institutions set up mainly to investigate more fully the Islamic religion were invaluable in studying many other subjects. Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik was instrumental in enriching the literature by instructing scholars to translate works into Arabic. The first was probably Aristotle's correspondence with Alexander the Great translated by Salm Abu al-'Ala'. From the east, and in a very different literary genre, the Persian scholar Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa translated the animal fables of the Panchatantra. These translations would keep alive scholarship and learning, particularly that an ancient Greece, during the Dark Ages in Europe and the works would often be first re-introduced to Europe from the Arabic versions.

1.3 Classical Arabic Literature:

Arabic Poetry

A large proportion of Arabic literature before the 20th century is in the form of poetry, and even prose from this period is either filled with snippets of poetry or is in the form of saj or rhymed prose. The themes of the poetry range from high-flown hymns of praise to bitter personal attacks and from religious and mystical ideas to poems on sex and wine. An important feature of the poetry which would be applied to all of the literature was the idea that it must be pleasing to the ear. The poetry and much of the prose was written with the design

that it would be spoken aloud and great care was taken to make all writing as mellifluous as possible. Over two centuries later with two important compilations of the Mu'allaqat and the Mufaddaliyat. These collections probably give us a biased picture of the writings of the time as only the best poems are preserved; some of the poems may represent only the best part of a long poem. However they can be stories and novels and even fairy tales as well.

2.1 Fiction literature:

The Arabic version of One Thousand and One Nights: In the Arab world, there was a great distinction between al-fus'ha (quality language) and al-ammiyyah (language of the common people). Not many writers would write works in this al-ammiyyah or common language and it was felt that literature had to be improving, educational and with purpose rather than just entertainment. This did not stop the common role of the hakawati or story-teller who would retell the entertaining parts of more educational works or one of the many Arabic fables or folk-tales, which were often not written down in many cases. Nevertheless, some of the earliest novels, including the first philosophical novels, were written by Arabic authors.

2.2 Non-fiction literature

Compilations and manuals

In the late 9th century Ibn al-Nadim, a Baghdadi bookseller, compiled a crucial work in the study of Arabic literature. Kitab al-Fihrist is a catalogue of all books available for sale in Baghdad and it gives an overview of the state of the literature at that time.

One of the most common forms of literature during the Abbasid period was the compilation. These were collections of facts, ideas, instructive stories and poems on a single topic and covers subjects as diverse as house and garden, women, gate-crashers, blind people, envy, animals and misers. These last three compilations were written by al-Jahiz the acknowledged master of the form. These collections were important for any nadim, a companion to a ruler or noble whose role was often involved regaling the ruler with stories and information to entertain or advise.

A type of work closely allied to the collection was the manual in which writers like ibn Qutaybah offered instruction in subjects like etiquette, how to rule, how to be a bureaucrat and even how to write. Ibn Qutaybah also wrote one of the earliest histories of the Arabs, drawing together biblical stories, Arabic folk tales and more historical events.

The subject of sex was frequently investigated in Arabic literature. The ghazal or love poem had a long history being at times tender and chaste and at other times rather explicit. In the Sufi tradition the love poem would take on a wider, mystical and religious importance. Sex manuals were also written such as The Perfumed Garden, Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah or The Dove's Neckring by ibn Hazm and Nuzhat al-albab fi-ma la yujad fi kitab or Delight of Hearts Concerning What will Never Be Found in a Book by Ahmad al-Tifashi. Countering such works are one like Rawdat al-muhibbin wa-nuzhat al-mushtaqin or Meadow of Lovers and Diversion of the Infatuated by ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah who advises on how to separate love and lust and avoid sin.

3.1 Biography, History, and Geography:

A side from the early biographies of Muhammad (sm.), the first major biographer to weigh character rather than just producing a hymn of praise was the Persian scholar al-Baladhuri with his *Kitab ansab al-ashraf* or Book of the Genealogies of the Noble, a collection of biographies. Another important biographical dictionary was begun by ibn Khallikan and expanded by al-Safadi and one of the first significant autobiographies was *Kitab al-I'tibar* which told of Usamah ibn Munqidh and his experiences in fighting in the Crusades. This time period saw the emergence of the genre of *Tabaqat* (biographical dictionaries or biographical compendia).

Ibn Khurdadhbih, apparently a Persian-born official in the postal service wrote one of the first travel books and the form remained a popular one in Arabic literature with books by ibn Hawqal, ibn Fadlan, al-Istakhri, al-Muqaddasi, al-Idrisi and most famously the travels of ibn Battutah. These give a view of the many cultures of the wider Islamic world and also offer Muslim perspectives on the non-Muslim peoples on the edges of the empire. They also indicated just how great a trading power the Muslim peoples had become. These were often sprawling accounts that included details of both geography and history.

Some writers concentrated solely on history like al-Ya'qubi and al-Tabari, whilst others focused on a small portion of history such as ibn al-Azraq, with a history of Mecca, and ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, writing a history of Baghdad. The historian regarded as the greatest of all Arabic historians though is ibn Khaldun whose history *Muqaddimah* focuses on society and is a founding text in sociology and economics.

3.2 Diaries

In the medieval Near East, Arabic diaries were first being written from before the 10th century, though the medieval diary which most resembles the modern diary was that of Ibn Banna in the 11th century. His diary was the earliest to be arranged in order of date (*ta'rikh* in Arabic), very much like modern diaries.

4.1 Epic literature:

The most famous source of Arabic fiction is the *One Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights), easily the best known of all Arabic literature and which still affects many of the ideas non-Arabs have about Arabic culture. A good example of the lack of popular Arabic prose fiction is that the stories of Aladdin and Ali Baba, usually regarded as part of the *Tales from One Thousand and One Nights*, were not actually part of the *Tales*. They were first included in French translation of the *Tales* by Antoine Galland who heard them being told by a traditional story-teller and only existed in incomplete Arabic manuscripts before that. The other great character from Arabic literature Sinbad is from the *Tales*.

The *One Thousand and One Nights* is usually placed in the genre of Arabic epic literature along with several other works. They are usually collections of short stories or episodes strung together into a long tale. The extant versions were mostly written down relatively late on, after the 14th century, although many were undoubtedly collected earlier and many of the original stories are probably pre-Islamic. Types of stories in these collections include animal fables, proverbs, stories of jihad or propagation of the faith, humorous tales, moral tales, tales about the wily con-man Ali Zaybaq and tales about the prankster Juha.

4.2 Maqama Literature

Maqama not only straddles the divide between prose and poetry, being instead a form of rhymed prose, it is also part way between fiction and non-fiction. Over a series of short narratives, which are fictionalised versions of real life situations, different ideas are contemplated. A good example of this is a *Maqama* on musk, which purports to compare the feature of different perfumes but is in fact a work of political satire comparing several competing rulers. *Maqama* also makes use of the doctrine of *badi* or deliberately adding complexity to display the writer's dexterity with language. Al-Hamadhani is regarded as the originator of the *Maqama* and his work was taken up by Abu Muhammad (sm.) al-Qasim al-Hariri with one of al-Hariri's *maqama* a study of al-

Hamadhani's own work. Maqama was an incredibly popular form of Arabic literature, being one of the few forms which continued to be written during the decline of Arabic in the 17th and 18th centuries.

5.1 Romantic literature:

A famous source of romantic Arabic poetry is Layla and Majnun, dating back to the Umayyad era in the 7th century. It is a tragic story of undying love much like the later Romeo and Juliet, which was itself said to have been inspired by a Latin version of Layla and Majnun to an extent. Layla and Majnun is considered part of the platonic Love (Arabic: حب عنري) genre, so-called because the couple never marry or consummate their relationship, that is prominent in Arabic literature, though the literary motif is found throughout the world. Other famous Virgin Love stories include Qays and Lubna, Kuthair and Azza, Marwa and al-Majnun al-Faransi and Antara and Abla.

The 10th century Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity features a fictional anecdote of a "prince who strays from his palace during his wedding feast and, drunk, spends the night in a cemetery, confusing a corpse with his bride. The story is used as a gnostic parable of the soul's pre-existence and return from its terrestrial sojourn".

Another medieval Arabic love story was Hadith Bayad wa Riyad (The Story of Bayad and Riyad), a 13th-century Arabic love story. The main characters of the tale are Bayad, a merchant's son and a foreigner from Damascus, and Riyad, a well educated girl in the court of an unnamed Hajib (vizier or minister) of Iraq which is referred to as the lady. The Hadith Bayad wa Riyad manuscript is believed to be the only illustrated manuscript known to have survived from more than eight centuries of Muslim and Arab presence in Spain.

Many of the tales in the One Thousand and One Nights are also love stories or involve romantic love as a central theme. This includes the frame story of Scheherazade herself, and many of the stories she narrates, including "Aladdin", "The Ebony Horse", "The Three Apples", "Tale of Tàj al-Mulúk and the Princess Duniya: The Lover and the Loved", "Adi bin Zayd and the Princess Hind", "Di'ibil al-Khuza'i With the Lady and Muslim bin al-Walid", "The Three Unfortunate Lovers", and others.

There were several elements of courtly love which were developed in Arabic literature, namely the notions of "love for love's sake" and "exaltation of the beloved lady" which have been traced back to Arabic literature of the 9th and 10th centuries. The notion of the "ennobling power" of love was developed in the early 11th century by the Persian psychologist and philosopher, Ibn Sina (known as "Avicenna" in Europe), in his Arabic treatise *Risala fi'l-Ishq* (Treatise on Love). The final element of courtly love, the concept of "love as desire never to be fulfilled", was also at times implicit in Arabic poetry.

6.1 Murder mystery:

The earliest known source of a whodunit murder mystery was "The Three Apples", one of the tales narrated by Scheherazade in the One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights). In this tale, a fisherman discovers a heavy locked chest along the Tigris river and he sells it to the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid, who then has the chest broken open only to find inside it the dead body of a young woman who was cut into pieces. Harun orders his vizier, Ja'far ibn Yahya, to solve the crime and find the murderer within three days, or be executed if he fails his assignment. Suspense is generated through multiple plot twists that occur as the story progresses. This may thus be considered an archetype for detective fiction. Hereafter, satire and comedy, Theatre, Philosophical Novels, Science fiction, Novels etc. is also a great part of Arabic Literature.

7.1 Literary Criticism:

Early on in the Arabic literary world, there has been a culture of academic criticism. The poetry festivals of the Pre-Islamic period often pitched two poets against each other in a war of verse in which one would be deemed winner by the audience. Literary criticism also grew into theology, and thus gained a more official status with Islamic study of the Qur'an. Although nothing which might be termed 'literary criticism', in the modern sense, was applied to a work held to be i'jaz or inimitable and divinely inspired, analysis was permitted. This study allowed for better understanding of the message and facilitated interpretation for practical use, all of which help the development of a critical method important for later work on other literature. A clear distinction regularly drawn between works in literary language and popular works has meant that only part of the literature in Arabic was usually considered worthy of study and criticism.

Some of the first studies of the poetry are Qawa'id al-shi'r or The Rules of Poetry by Tha'lab and Naqd al-shi'r Poetic Criticism by Qudamah ibn Ja'far. Other works tended to continue the tradition of contrasting two poets in order to determine which one best follows the rule of classical poetic structure. Plagiarism also became a significant idea exercising the critics' concerns. The works of al-Mutanabbi were particularly studied with this concern. He was considered by many the greatest of all Arab poets but his own arrogant self-regard for his abilities did not endear him to other writers and they looked for a source for his verse. Just as there were collections of facts written about many different subjects, numerous collections detailing every possible rhetorical figure used in literature emerged as well as how to write guides.

Modern criticism at first compared the new works unfavorably with the classical ideals of the past but these standards were soon rejected as too artificial. The adoption of the forms of European romantic poetry dictated the introduction of corresponding critical standards. Taha Hussayn, himself keen on European thought, would even dare to challenge the Qur'an with modern critical analysis in which he pointed out the ideas and stories borrowed from pre-Islamic poetry.

Literary criticism in Arabic literature often focused on religious texts, and the some long religious traditions of hermeneutics and textual exegesis have had a profound influence on the study of secular texts. This was particularly the case for the literary traditions of Islamic literature.

Literary criticism was also employed in other forms of medieval Arabic poetry and literature from the 9th century, notably by Al-Jahiz in his al-Bayan wa-l-tabyin and al-Hayawan, and by Abdullah ibn al-Mu'tazz in his Kitab al-Badi.

8.1 Conclusion:

Now we may come to a logical conclusion that the Literature in Arabic has been largely influential outside in the Islamic world. One of the first important translations of Arabic literature was Robert of Ketton's translation of the Qur'an in the 12th century but it would not be until the early 18th century that much of Arabic's diverse literature would be recognized, largely due to Arabists such as Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot and his books such as Arabic Authors: A Manual of Arabian History and Literature.

Antoine Galland's translation of the Thousand and One Nights was the first major work in Arabic which found great success outside the Muslim world. Other significant translators were Friedrich Rückert and Richard Burton, along with many working at Fort William, India. The Arabic works and many more in other eastern languages fuelled a fascination in Orientalism within Europe. Works of dubious 'foreign' morals were particularly popular but even these were censored for content, such as homosexual references, which were not permitted in Victorian society. Most of the works chosen for translation helped confirm the stereotypes of the

audiences with many more still untranslated. Few modern Arabic works have been translated into other languages.

However, towards the end of the twentieth century, there was an increase of translations of Arabic books into other languages, and Arabic authors began to receive acclaim. Egyptian writer Nazib Mahfouz has most if not all of his works translated after he won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. He was the first Nobel Prize winner in Arabic Literature. Several other writers, including Abdul Rahman Munif and Tayeb Salih have been taken quite seriously by Western scholars, and both Alaa Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* and Rajaa al-Sanea's *Girls of Riyadh* attracted significant Western media attention in the first decade of the 21st century.

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