

Classical Arabic literature

Mahmoud Mohamed Abdul hamed



" Classical Arabic literature "

By:

Mahmoud Mohamed Abdul hamed

Egypt

Classical Arabic literature is the enduring monument of a civilization, not of a people.

its contributors were of the most varied ethnic origins who nevertheless under the influence of their Arabic conquerors lost their national languages, traditions, and customs and were mounded in a unity of thought and belief, absorbed into a new and wider Arabic nation.

Its birthplace was the sandy plain, partly desert of central and north eastern Arabia. Except in the rare oases, the land was bare and monotonous.

Subject to violent alternations of heat and cold, drought and flood, It was unable to support settled communities. Its inhabitants were of necessity nomadic, subsisting chiefly on the produce of their camels and sheep and compelled to move unendingly from place to place in search of fresh pasturage. The monotony of their life was broken only by the fierce pleasures of years of plenty and the biting misery of years of famine, and by success of failure in their raids on one another on the settled comminuting on the fringes of the desert.

Their secular physical environment has mounded their habits, thought and speech impressing on them those repetitions and abrupt transitions which are reproduced in nearly all aspects of Arabic life and literature.

Out of this simple, rather monotonous way of life great Arabic literature was produced, Pre Islamic Arabic literature dealt with their typical

١



way of life, their search for water and food, their customs and conventions, their likes and dislikes and their rivalry (especially in love and in writing poetry), and their fights.

The most important Arabic contribution in poetry is the body of Pre Islamic poetry composed from the 6th century A.C. to the rise of Islam, Originally oral. Pre Islamic poetry deals with the desert environment. Some of the recurrent themes in their poetry were a sense of pride of belonging to a certain- tribe, description of a camel and the ruins of a camp where a certain beloved used to stay.

As if to counterbalance this limitation of ideas, the uniformity of life and environment conduces to an exceedingly rich development of language of the realm of material life. Not only do synonyms abound, but also every variety of natural phenomena, however complex, is expressed by a term proper to itself.

This feature of language may be observed also to greater or less extent in the speech of other peoples whose nomadic way of life degree of civilization resembles those of Bedouin of Arabia, but Arabic is unique in having carried over its super luxuriant vocabulary to play an important part in the literature of the highly developed civilization.

The Arabic tongue, however, was not the peculiar possession of the nomads in central and north Arabia. There existed also settled communities of north Arabia who came into closer contact with people of old established culture. Between the ancient civilization of the Yemen in the south west corner of Arabia, and the frontier districts of Syria and Iraq there were constant commercial relations, which opened way for cultural influences to penetrate into central Arabia. Along the trade routes substantial communities grew up, as at Mecca, akin in blood and language to the nomads apparently but little distinguished from them in man and outlook.

In the Islamic period, poets followed still their immediate predecessors as model, but added new themes connected with the new faith.



Moreover because their poetry was characterized by a great sense of sensibility and imagination, purity and spiritual strength, a feeling of morality and heart touching euphony, they had a great desire to be familiar with the different cultures of the territories they had invaded. This was naturally followed by unprecedented period of translation into Arabic which enormously enriched Arabic literature and widened its scope.

In addition to the translation, Arabic linguists exerted great efforts in the field of Arabic grammar, syntax and Arabic vocabulary. They had their roles based on their study of the traditional use of language and logic. Their dictionaries, encyclopedias and grammar books compiled a great wealth of Arabic vocabulary, grammar, and even volumes of poetry. In fact, due to their care, perseverance and patience they helped the men of letters to tread on firm ground.

