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The Significance of the Arabic Language

by Mohtanick Jamil

Popularity:

Arabic is an official language in over 25 countries across North Africa and the Middle East, putting it in third place behind English and French.

Arabic is also one of the 5 official languages of the UN.

It boasts between 300 and 400 million native speakers and has over 1.2 billion people that can read its script.

This language was spoken in its classical form as early as 2 millennia ago and remains vibrant in cultures spanning 2 continents as well as in scholarly circles as the liturgical language of Islam. As such, Arabic has enjoyed countless millions of works of scholarship throughout the centuries.

Arabic has also contributed to many other languages. It has given English, for instance, the following familiar words: admiral, alcohol, algebra, algorithm, almanac, apricot, arsenal, candy, chemistry, coffee, cotton, gazelle, giraffe, hazard, lemon, lime, magazine, racket, safari, sofa, sugar, syrup, zero and many others.

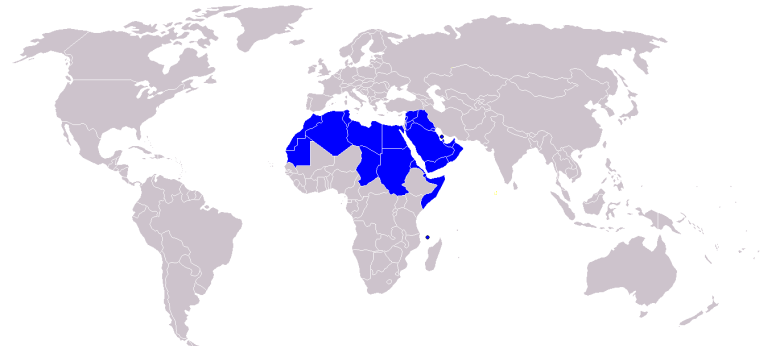
Calligraphy:



The phrase Bismillah by Hassan Musa

The Arabic script is a very unique and magnificent form of art. Few other languages have ventured to take their calligraphy to this extent, to the point where it becomes art in its own right.

The various forms of calligraphy are basically divided into 6 types. Naskh is the simplest and most straightforward. Muhaqqaq and Rayhani are also quite simple excepting that letter endings are exaggerated and extended. Riqa and Tawqi are characterized by long lines and large loops. And Thuluth is arguably the most exaggerated of all the above major forms.



But it was major influence from other regions such as Persia which gave even more outrageous exaggeration to the script, making it the marvel that it is today.

Liturgy:

The two sources of Islamic scholarship are the holy Qur'an and the codified tradition of the prophet (PBUH). Both sources are in the Arabic language. And the first generations of disciples were also Arabs. As such, most of Islamic scholarship is done within the confines of this language.

Moreover, history sees many Arabs obliging other Arabs to learn their own language and listing consequences for not taking the study seriously.

The prophet (PBUH) himself mentioned: learn Arabic as you learn the [Islamic] obligations and rites.

Several of the prophet's (PBUH) disciples repeated this sentiment in other words. Imam Shafi'i, an Arab, mentioned once to his Arabic students: what scares me most is a student who refuses to learn Arabic grammar.... Imam Abu Hanifa is recorded to have said that he would have made learning Arabic (even for native speakers) an obligation had he deemed it feasible.

The Secrets of Arabic:

In most languages, it would be considered silly to ask certain grammar questions. For example, asking why the suffix 'er', as in 'teacher', is two letters, why *these* two letters in particular, why in the order E then R and why at the end of the word. It's silly to ask these.

But Arabic is an extraordinarily deep language and it answers questions just like these about its own grammar. These questions and answers are actually completely memorizing and are closely kept secrets of the language. They will blow your mind away to the point where you will yearn to learn the language. Stay tuned for the next issue where we ask and answer one of these questions.