

EDITORIAL

A dream we have always entertained has finally come true; namely, to convene seminars on the pre-Islam history of Arabia and its archaeology. I have been of the opinion that Islam has harvested ancient civilizations and purified them of paganism and all shadows of beliefs in more than one God. Islam, therefore, renders civilization unified in believing not in Idols but in one God. Accordingly, necessity calls for unveiling that prior period of 10,000 years. To have brought about the first forum in the most cherished archaeological area of our country, Abdul Rahman Al-Sudairy Foundation has indeed reified the dream. And our joy was further enhanced by the strong return we received in response to invitations we sent via various media to a group of distinguished scholars interested in the inception and development of the Arab town.

Our meeting in Al-Jawf was a great and long anticipated occasion. Accomplished researchers in scholarly work and archaeological excavation presented new and rich research, trying to bring together history and archaeology in an oasis of knowledge and learning; i.e., Dar al-Jawf for Learning. We have included in this issue a full review of this forum; and we are certain those interested in the heritage and civilization of this nation will find it an edifying reading. It may please those interested to know that another forum will be held in two years time at the same place, and in our next issue we will announce its main topic. The topic, however, will relate to archaeological excavations, for we are interested not in the repetition of already known information but in new knowledge that may help in rewriting our history on the basis of fresh discoveries and new lights. Not only will such orientation and pursuit of newly discovered knowledge enrich our understanding, but it will also help change most of the well worn-out notions. Our thanks and gratitude are owed first and foremost to God, and are owed next to the protectors of the Abdul Rahman Al-Sudairy Foundation who generously spent, and are still spending, on the cause of uncovering the nation's heritage.

"Fifty Plentiful Years" is the motto our King Saud University has adopted as it celebrates its half century anniversary; over that period, the university has armed generations of young people with education and knowledge in all fields. Founded in 1377H (1957), King Saud University was the first minaret of knowledge not only in Saudi Arabia but in the entire Arabian Peninsula. It was the source of enlightenment during a period its sons used to be sent abroad to other Arab universities in pursuit of knowledge and learning to come back to their newly evolving country (thirsty for those who were able to read and write) and assume leading positions and help in spreading education. The creation of the Directorate of Education was the first lit candle to disperse the darkness of ignorance; then the Ministry of Education was established and His Royal Highness Prince Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz (the late Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd, may God bless his soul) was its first Minister. Under his leadership of the parade of education, elementary, primary, and high schools spread fast throughout the four corners of the kingdom. During his reign, King Saud University was established; then came King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Islamic University in Al-Madinah Al-Munwarah, Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, and King Faisal University in Dammam and Ahsa'.

King Saud University occupies the forefront in terms of academic and material capabilities. To this university, college education owes its wide expansion, and has been a basis for other universities. It established two campuses in Abha and Qassim; recently, the first became King Khalid University, and the second became the University of Qassim. Still, King Saud University has several new colleges in other areas and its campus in Riyadh consists of 15 colleges and institutions with some 90 departments and academic programs.

As early as its first years, King Saud University, again, was the first school to open its doors for female students who enrolled in colleges of Arts, Medicine, Sciences, Agriculture, Computer Science, Education, Administration, Languages and Translation, Dentistry, and Pharmacy. In these colleges, female students have been able to pursue B.A., M.A., and Ph.D degrees. It goes without saying that the university has contributed immensely to the education of woman and qualified her to the point of enabling her to shoulder with

man the responsibility of fortifying the Saudi society.

My own experience with the university began in 1380H (1960) when I was given a Teaching Assistant position in the Department of Arabic. At the time, the construction was led by a man known for his unwavering commitment, patriotism, and wide ranging education; he was H. E. Nasser Al-Mangour. He cherished our presence as first members of T.As. At that time, the academic staff members were among the leading figures in their academic fields in the Arab world. They were carefully selected by a man to whom this university owes much; he was the late professor Abdul Wahab 'Azam who took an active part in planting the first seeds of this towering edifice. Our thanks are due Almighty Allah that we, later, were able to contribute to its fortification. During my year as a T.A., a young man came back from England with a Ph. D. degree; he was the first Saudi youth to hold this academic title. We used to throng around him, eager to learn about his experience in England. Later, he presided over the university as its president; he was H. E. professor Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Khwaiter. He was known for his firmness and resolution; with such traits, he was able to set the university on the right tracks and lead it forward unhurriedly. During his time, the university had its statutes and regulations; their effects are still felt even today. And during his time, many staff members, whom he sent abroad on scholarships, returned with their higher degrees. He received them well, extended to them a helpful and encouraging hand, and placed them at the head of colleges. I was the first Deputy Dean then first Dean of the college of Arts. Professor Al-Khwaiter used to support us; from him we learned how a resolute administration must be.

Professor Al-Khwaiter then handed over the banner of the university's head position to one of those late comers; i.e., to Professor Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Fadda. In his tern, Al-Fadda carried on; he carefully put forward plans for the new (present) campus. His project was ambitious, and each and every staff member participated in the blueprint of the new campus which was meant to accommodate a maximum of 15000 students (ironically, the number now is beyond 50,000 students). During his tenure, the university began to travel a new road. The celebration of the university's 15th birthday was the first of its kind for the university and the kingdom. For the first time, people were able to see deans, faculty members and students filing in lines, wearing gowns especially designed and hemmed with particular colors to distinguish each college (the college of Arts had the white color). That was a great joy Riyadh and the university members had lived; His Royal Highness Prince Fahd bin Abdul Aziz (the late Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques) headed that occasion. Again, the university started convening conferences and seminars: the first was the conference of "The Mission of the University" in 1394H (1975), then followed suit many others. Under the title of "Sources of the History of the Arabian Peninsula," The First International Symposium for the Arabian Peninsula Studies in 1397H (1977) initiated all consequent studies of the history of the Arabian Peninsula and its archaeology. The second Symposium of 1399H (1979) dealt with "The Arabian Peninsula before Islam" and the third Symposium of 1403-1404H (1983-4) addressed itself to the "Arabian Peninsula during the times of the Prophet and the Righteous Four Caliphs." Those three Symposia materialized in five scholarly volumes that are still today compelling references for scholars. Since then, the process of scholarly seminars and conferences advanced in all colleges and departments in various fields; suffice it to say that between 1394-1418H (1975-1998) some sixty five international conferences and forums were held on the campus of King Saud University.

From Al-Fadda, Professor Mansour bin Ibrahim Al-Turki received the presidency of the university. His tenure was an historical departure which did witness the creation of the new campus with its various colleges, laboratories, administration buildings, Publishing Presses, and Central Library. Academic research enjoyed a period of prosperity and advancement; this was promoted by the many new Ph.D. holders who had just returned from abroad. Owing to pressures of the time, new departments and fields of concentration were launched or added. Significant among those was perhaps the creation of the Deanship of Community Service and Continuing Education which I had the chance to direct for a decade since 1402H (1982). Professor Al-Turki's generous and willing response to every academic project or work was the best creative catalyst for activity in all fields. During his time, again, the university celebrated its 25th anniversary in a wonderful festival; its success was sanctioned by all available means and expertise. His Majesty late King Khalid bin Abdul Aziz (may God bless his soul) graced the celebration and decreed that the university return to its original King Saud Univeristy name instead of its then "Riyadh University" name.

The leadership banner of the university was then received in 1410H (1990) by our colleague Professor Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Dhubaib, just five months before the invasion of Kuwait. One may imagine what conditions engulfed all our affairs: educational, cultural, social, and economic. Still, Professor Al-Dhubaib did all he could to advance the level of academic research and regulations of academic promotion, and to terminate the replica of academic fields between the Colleges of Arts and Sciences on the one hand, and the College of Education, on the other. Despite the harsh and consequent conditions, he further established the college of Languages and Translation, along with other different academic activities. During Al-Dhubaib's term, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz, nominated me for the Shura Council in its first session of 1414H (1994).

On the first of day of the third Arab month (Rabie Awal), 1416H (1996), Professor Abdullah bin Muhammad Al-Faisal assumed the presidency of the university. He still today holds that position. He has been able to steer the university in accordance with the requirements of the period and along the lines of statutes and regulations. Consultation and research centers have been created; graduate studies have thrived; academic staff members as consultants penetrated government ministries and private sector bodies. The university has thus been able to break out of its own walls, and disseminate practical and academic knowledge and experience to those in need. With a half century heritage behind the institution, Al-Faisal is guiding the university into a new half century along with more than 60,000 student body, of which female students make up 50%.

At this stage of the parade, the university needs, I think, a time of reconsideration and self-scrutiny: its needs to rethink where it succeeded and where it failed, what were the reasons of success and what were the causes of failure? A neutral agency, unprejudiced by emotional affiliation with the university must initiate a comprehensive study which must be realistic in both vision and analysis. This neutral evaluation body must receive all curricula during the past 50 years, academic standing of faculty staff members along with their academic research, yearly results of students at each and every department and major, the role of the university in the community, the university's reputation in the world, the reputation of its scholarship students abroad, and the university's status in comparison to local, Arab, and International schools, especially those that were inaugurated at the same period if not the same year such as the University of Assut in Egypt whose first president was the late Professor Suliman Husain. Would we be entreated to such a difficult but rightful duty? Let us map out a new strategy for serving the community, advancing the level of academic research, and upgrading what the university ought to be in the next fifty years!

"Benedikt (S. J.) Isserlin, who has died aged 89, was a philologist, archaeologist and historian with an encyclopedic knowledge of the cultures and languages of the ancient Near East," the British Daily Telegraph began its obituary on the 28th of November, 2005. And this is true of the honorable, culturally encyclopedic scholar we knew.

My first acquaintance with Professor Isserlin was at the beginning of 1961 when I was sent by King Saud University on a scholarship to the University of Leeds, Yorkshire. At that time, the department was in an ancient house that had nothing but limited rooms. However, few months later, the department moved to its new place in the building of the college of arts. Dr. Isserlin supervised a number of Saudi graduate students in the following fields: archaeology, ancient inscriptions, Arabic literature, modern Arab history, Byzantine history, contemporary Arabic dialects, Islamic archaeology, and Hajj routes. In guidance and supervision, he was incredibly innovative. He taught his students the right scientific methodology, and was sometimes harsh with them, yet was most of the time generously kind. I personally owe to him his having redirected me from a student wishing to specialize in pre-Islamic Arabic literature to a specialist in archaeology and ancient inscriptions; the difference between the two has been great. With much uncertainty for having switched fields, I returned to my country. But doors were open to me, and I started feeling grateful for the days I spent with my supervisor Isserlin in north Britain (the Roman Wall), then Twice in Sicily. Finally, he sent me to his own supervisor, Kathleen Kynon, to supervise the student of her student. Perhaps he was looking far ahead, and wanted to send his student to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which lacked this major in the field. Perhaps, even if much later, the country would benefit from such a student. His hopes did materialize.

Editor-in-Chief