

EDITORIAL

How happy we, academic historians, have felt at the initiation of the prize of Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Amir of Riyadh Region, Head of the board of directors of King Abdul Aziz Darat (Archives) and the Honorary President of the Saudi Historical Society.

The prize is granted to pioneers and those actively working in the field of history. With the grace of God, I was one of the first group to have, two years ago, received the prize. Within the field of history in particular, and the field of Humanities in general, the prize has shown its fruitful effect. It is, after all, the first local prize for academic scholars; other local prizes are general and scholars have yet to be awarded any. Again, prizes in Arab history enjoyed a long history; they were granted to poets at the courts of Ghasanids and Lakhmids and at the annual Festivals of Okaz.

During the age of Islam, Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him) authenticated this true Arab manner, and bestowed in the mosque of Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah his personal cloak to the poet Ka'ab bin Zuhair bin Abi Sulma for his poem "Su'aad's Parting." The poem itself became a paradigm for other poets. Therefore, the first poet to follow suit was Mohammad bin Sa'id Al-Busairi in his poem "The Cloak", then came during the Arab Renaissance the poet Laureate Ahmed Shawgi in his famous poem "The Way of the Cloak." These are only examples of the poems in which poets followed the example of Ka'ab bin Zuhair, the poet who paid to the Prophet this poem as a ransom for his life, and was awarded the personal cloak of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him). Lucky indeed was he to have clothed his body with the cloak that clothed the body of the Prophet himself! Muslim Caliphs and Amirs throughout the various periods followed the graceful path of the generous Prophet in honoring scholars, scientists, and poets with grants and gifts; at times they even awarded an equal weight of pure gold for translated or authored books. We cherish the attention paid to academic historians because it honors a certain group of scholars and sheds light on their works. In turn, historians deserve this attention for they record the movement of time, event, and place. And these together register the movement of Man: ideas, culture, works, and roles.

I do not know how to thank my two friends and colleagues, professors Ahmad bin Omar Al-Zaila'ie and Saad bin Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid who, along with a group of friends and colleagues from the Department of Archaeology and Museums and the Department of History, College of Arts, King Saud University, have surprised and pleased me with honoring me with a Festschrift consisting of thirty one article in Arabic and English, crowned with an introduction penned by His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz, the admired Prince among academics. Professor Al-Zaila'ie clothed me with high praise which only reflects his own character and manners and of which he is the worthier. What I have given to my university, friends, and colleagues stemmed from the famous statement: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you, and deal with people civilly.

The articles the Festschrift included were written by Eastern and Western worthy friends; they are from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, the Sudan, India, Germany, Scandinavia, Austria, and England. These articles are the precious fruit of their thoughts, and the writers have seen to present them to one they deemed worthy of being honored with academic work that serves the present and the future. The Festschrift tradition is new to our Saudi culture; and it has appeared in the Arab world only a decade or so ago. In Europe, however, this tradition appeared first in Germany, where the first Festschrift goes back to the year 1640, four centuries ago.

Perhaps this kind of work crossed into the Western world from the Arab world, for Sicily, Andulus and Syria were crossing points through which Arab civilization during its golden age seeped; it is also an example to be followed. We should not forget that Chaucer, the great English poet, wrote his poetry in English after having visited Andulus at a time when in Briton particularly and Europe generally poetry was supposed to be written in Latin. His work revolutionized the English literature. We may also point to a related incident to which my colleague professor of English at King Saud University Ezzat Abdul Majid Khattab has drawn my attention; namely, the incident that took place between Lord Chesterfield and the 18th century man-of-letters Samuel Johnson. The latter presented the project of his Dictionary to Lord Chesterfield in the hope that the Lord, who was known for encouraging men of letters and for his interest in literature, may patron the project and the author. The Lord praised and admired the project, but neglected and at times “repulsed” Johnson. Johnson in turn ignored and cared less for the Lord’s patronage. Seven years later, when the Dictionary was set for publication, Lord Chesterfield wrote two articles commending the author and the Dictionary to the public. Johnson, though eager for praise, especially that of dignitaries, was able to see through the Lord’s encomium. Johnson knew that, by praising the Dictionary at its final stage, Lord Chesterfield was entertaining the hope that Johnson would dedicate the work to him and thus acknowledge the Lord’s patronage. Johnson disappointed the Lord’s implied hope by openly and firmly rejecting acknowledgement of any patronage. His letter to the Lord in this regard shows Johnson’s high self-esteem, and is considered one of the wonderful examples of communication between a man-of-letters and a Lord (see Khattab, *A Second Reading: Texts*. Riyadh Book 77, April 2000; pp.139-143).

The Arab world felt ecstatically delighted when “Petra” was included in the new Seven Wonders of the World; I myself was thrilled. After all, the Arabs have no opportunity or victory over which to be delighted. All they have had were continuous misfortunes. One may just watch the daily news-broadcast to see nothing but killings, fires, bombings, kidnapping, overseas prisoners, and secret detentions. These make up the general atmosphere in which we live. The enemies, on the other hand, are tearing us to pieces and preying on our cultural heritage and wealth. One, I have just said, can find nothing to be pleased about! The choice of Petra, therefore, was the opportunity to be happy. We may feel that, if our present pleases no one, our past is patting on our shoulders saying: Here I am compensating for a present you were unable

to defend. You lost your Andulus; your Mosque (Aya Sofya) in Islam-bol (i.e. Istanbul), the city of peace, has been very cleverly turned by UNESCO into a museum after being renovated. The aim, of course, is to remove the thin screen under which Mohammad the Conqueror meant to hide the images of Jesus and the Christian Crosses and symbols. With this renovation, the Mosque returns to its original status as if Mohammad the Conqueror did not win and was not victorious. Again, forty years ago we lost Jerusalem which became a toy in the hands of the Jews, excavating there wherever and however they like, thereby continuing what foreign expeditions had begun many decades before the actual occupation. Finally, invaders ravaged our ancient and Islamic histories, taking revenge against Nabonassar, Haroun al-Rashid, Saladin, and our civilization which was erected by the great minds of the ages of Renaissance of Assyria, Babylon, and Islam. Even the “spiral” minaret of Samara did not escape the destruction of the enemy; it has until now been a unique archetype among minarets in the East and West since the Abbasid period, the only exception being the Spiral minaret of Bin Tolon Mosque in Cairo which was built after the model of Samara’s.

Petra is one jewel among other Arab archaeological jewels. It is one stage among others of which we are proud, beginning with M’arib in the south through Najran, Fau, Ula, Hija, Tayma, and Jawf, then Petra the bright shining face overlooking civilizations between the Fertile Crescent and the Nile Valley, up to Jarash, Bosra Ash-Sham, and Palmyra and those in its vicinity which show the wonders of the arts of architecture, sculpture, and ornamental decoration as their contributions to passing and lasting civilizations. With his graceful taste, the Arabian artist was able to bring together all these elements in breath-taking and eye-pleasing portraits.

What if the Arabs participated with more sites than just Petra? What if Egypt nominated the temple of Karnak or Abu-Simble temple, Syria Bosra ash-sham, Lebanon Baalbeck, Palestine the Dome of the Rock, Yemen M’arib, and Tunisia Kerkouane or Carthage? Had this been the case, we would have won more wonders of the new Seven Wonders of the World. Yet, it is enough that with Petra we won as Arabs, and with Taj Mahal we won as Muslims.

Editor -in-Chief