

Diaspora in Action

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In Recognition of the Christian contribution

The Christian presence played a seminal role in the progress of the Arab civilization that has been denigrated by ideology. The conditions caused by the **Arab Spring** raised issues of citizenship and identity. Part of the chain reaction to this was that one ideology has obliterated people's ethnicity, nationality and culture. This issue remains prevalent, as we are now witnessing the omission of Christian influence from schools in the Arab region. This Christian influence has had thousands of years to enrich the Arab civilization in all fields. Any attempts to marginalize, deny, or reject it should not be tolerated. Myriad Western and Oriental historians and writers have documented the Christian influence on the Arab cultures. Even the Syriac manuscripts discovered in the Ark of the Kaaba celebrate the Arab region's diverse cultural heritage. These works serve to acknowledge the reality of the past in order to move forward together as one. In order to create a multicultural society we must acknowledge all cultural contributions, including that of the Christians to the Arab world.

Christians in the Middle East have been persecuted for decades in part because of the lack of recognition of what their forefathers contributed prior to and alongside the advent of Islam. This unsung contribution gives justification to radicalize Muslims to oppress the Christian and other minorities. The truth of the Christian contribution must be acknowledged to remedy the relentless radicalization.

In "*The transfer of Greek medicine from Syria to the Arabs*" Michael Dulles alludes to some of the more pervasive influences in Philosophy: "The knowledge of the Syriac language as a historical background, is a fundamental factor in the study of Aristotelian philosophy among the Arabs", and at the same time the introduction of Syriac words into the Arabic language in large numbers."

Why discuss the Christian legacy and the contribution of Christian poets?

1- Multiculturalism should be the lighthouse that will guide us all to accept others and live in peace and harmony.

2. As a Syriac community in Australia from a diverse background, mostly Middle Eastern and Indian, our goals are:

* To promote our community and define it by our civilization and our contributions from before the birth of Christ until now, and with all aspects of life whether it was through literature, science and others.

*To encourage our members to learn from our ancestors, and build bridges with the rest of the society for the benefit of humanity and peace and love; and be an example of civilization as it was called: the mother of all civilizations.

Various Arab and Muslim writers and historians have denied the pioneering role and sacrifices of the Syriac community and Academics in philosophy and the sciences. This lack of recognitions plays no small part in the ongoing suffering of Christians in the Middle East. Of course, Christians are not treated as equal citizens with equal rights.

Poetry is not bound to rhyme, but instead the eloquent and skillful choice of words. I gravitated towards it as a tool to glorify the noble, and criticize oppressors, while sharing both the joys and sorrows of people.

My championing of Christian poets in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam is not to divide nor incite, but to be a lighthouse that guides us towards cultural and religious pluralism. Such cultural and religious pluralism has played a fundamental role in the progress of civilization, and the peaceful coexistence of peoples. Unfortunately, many masquerade false information and fabrications as knowledge to suit an agenda, whilst dishonestly rejecting what does not serve this agenda. For this reason, the marginalization of the role of the Christian poets has persisted in various media and also in school curricula. The purpose of this marginalization is to establish a culture of hatred and exclusion. My colleagues and I, as well as many of the generations that preceded us, were the victims of injustice and concealment of the truth. Indeed, this intellectual dishonesty has negatively impacted us all. However, we learned that some considered the best of Arab writers were Pagan before Islam. Their unique poetry and pendants were written with gold water and hung on the wall of the Kaaba in what they called the "pre-Islamic era" and the arguments not to recognize the seminal works of these poets as Christians, and not as pagan, speaks to their intransigence, religious intolerance and non-acceptance.

How did Christianity enter the Arabian Peninsula?

1. Preaching: Apostle Bartholomew and other apostles and missionaries and some monks went there to live away from the pleasures of the world.
2. Through trade.
3. Through professions, especially in medicine.
4. Finally, the escape of some Christians from the clergy and others because of the persecution of the Romans or because of the theological differences of Christianity, where many of them were persecuted.

And Ibn Khaldoun states that: "Bartholomew was sent to the land of Arabs and Hijaz."

And Dr. Shawqi Daif agrees in his book "*The history of Arab literature in the pre-Islamic era*", in which he states that "the spread of "Christianity" in Yemen began since the fourth century AD".

And in the region of Yathrib, Hassan ibn Thabit states in the book: "Kitab Al-Hayawan lejahiz": "There was also an affirmation of the presence of Christians and Jews in the Arabian Peninsula".

We can say that the spread of Christianity in that region was the result of the unison of the Syriac language. And its influence on Islam is acknowledged by the testimonies of Saed Al-Andalusian as he states: "This region was unison, ruled by one king, and spoke one tongue i.e. Syriac, the old tongue."

It is our responsibility to tell the truth, and correct all those who have committed themselves to falsifying facts to marginalize Christian poets in the Arab Peninsula. We should acknowledge their origins and the treasures of poetry and literature that they have left us

. It is incumbent on us to promote and preserve their culture, as well as the many others that have contributed to the herculean strides we've collectively taken as a civilization, for generations to come.

In addition to the difficulties faced by male poets, it is well documented that feminist's literature was further constrained by the women's backwardness imposed by Islamic conquests in general, as well as by the constraints imposed on them by Christian and social traditions in ancient times.

With all these restrictions, the Syriac women of the Arabian Peninsula managed to shake off the dust of backwardness and rise again to delve into the field of literature and others. Unfortunately, many researchers and historians have

provided a lot of literary, intellectual and political research for men, but they ignored the role of Syriac women in all aspects of life.

Therefore, I decided to shed a little light on the role played by Syriac women in the field of literature in the Arabian Peninsula, insofar as much as I have documented evidence that this step may be the cornerstone in the Syriac feminist literature.

I'd like to bring your attention to the women who had literary influence at certain stages of the Christian presence in the region, including: Laila Al-Afifah, Jalila Bint Morra and Al-Adnanieh.

1- Laila Al-Afifah (Died - 483)

One of the most famous feminist's poetry in the ancient Arabic, is the poetry of Laila al-Afifah. The Christian and the youngest child of Lokais Ibn Morra. She was the most popular poet and her literature was known from the Arabia till the end of Yemen. She refused to marry since she was in love with her cousin the poet Al-Burraq, and she owes his religion where he learned to recite the gospel since his youth. The son of one of the kings of Yemen, Amro, asked to marry her, during that time there was a war, and the Al-Burraq was well defeated. During that time, Ibn of Kosra, King of Ajam heard of her and of her beauty and wanted her for himself. He kidnapped her, but she remained there captive, and refused to marry him until Al-Burraq came to her rescue and married her.

The significance of her story is that given all her sufferings, she remained a strong, empowered and self-confident. She kept fighting for her freedom and liberation in both a physical and mental capacity. Through this notion, she was fighting for all women.

2 - Jalila: A poet from the tribe of Bani-Adnan (Died - 538 m)

Jalila Bint Mourra, her brother Jassas who killed Koulayb - (her husband), then Jassas was killed later as well.

Historians have agreed that Jalila, was the most beautiful women of her tribe, and she was the first female to write feminist's poetry.

P.S: her poetry while she was mourning her Husband and her brother was about making peace between her own family & her late beloved husband:

3 - Al-Kharnag Al-Adnanieh (Died about 574 AD)

She was a poet and had a book of poetry -. Most of her poetry was in her husband lamentation and the lament of those killed in a battle with him from her folks.

Lastly, in the context of today's society, the stories of the feminist poets I have discussed are relevant now more than ever. We cannot continue fostering and endorsing a society filled with hate and mistrust.

The young generations need to be aware of our history so that they can feel a sense of pride over the ways our forefathers overcame suffering. Through this, our community can be empowered to respect people of all cultures and it will especially help mend our relations to the Aspra community.

It is time that we acknowledge the truths of the past in order to build a bridge for the future of our people. Absent this, we forfeit the opportunity to be united and strengthened by acceptance, which is the contribution we can make today for the generations of tomorrow.

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