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THE LEGACY OF

Islam

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The Legacy of

Islam

Edited by Sir Thomas Arnold
And Alfred Guillaume

Oxford
The Legacy of Islam, that is of the Islamic world, describes what has been bequeathed to Europe by the arts, the thought, and the sciences which flourished under Moslem rule, from Central Asia to Spain. The great names of Avicenna and Averroes will occur to everyone, and the Arabic origin of words like 'illicit' and 'admiral' is well known; but the influences of the Islamic world were far-reaching and complex, and are to be found where they might be least expected—in our commercial vocabulary, which has taken 'cheque', 'tariff', 'donum', and many other terms from medieval trade with Arab merchants; in music, with its Arabian lute and guitar, and its Morris or Moorish dancers, besides a vast legacy of theory; in architectural ornament, with arabesque patterns and bands of ornament based on Kufic script, as on the rafter of Westminster Abbey. Many more examples might be taken from nearly every page of this volume, which includes the following chapters:

Spain and Portugal, by J. B. Trend; The Crusades, by Sir Ernest Barker; Geography and Commerce, by J. H. Kramers; Islamic Minor Arts and their influence upon European Work, by A. H. Christie; Painting, by the late Sir Thomas Arnold; Architecture, by M. S. Briggs; Literature, by H. A. R. Gibb; Mysticism, by R. A. Nicholson; Philosophy and Theology, by Alfred Guillaume; Law and Society, by D. de Santillana; Science and Medicine, by Max Meyerhof; Music, by H. G. Farmer; and Astronomy and Mathematics, by Carr de Vaux.

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THE LEGACY OF ISLAM
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LEGACY OF ISLAM

Edited by the late

SIR THOMAS ARNOLD
C.I.E., F.B.A., Litt.D.

and

ALFRED GUIillaume
M.A. Oxon., Principal of Cullam College
Formerly Professor of Oriental Languages
in the University of Durham

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Legacy of Islam is a companion volume to The Legacy of Greece, The Legacy of Rome, The Legacy of the Middle Ages, and The Legacy of Israel. It seeks to give an account of those elements in the culture of Europe which are derived from the Islamic world. Broadly speaking, the Legacies of Greece and Rome are the legacies of two homogeneous and original cultures, each emanating from a definite geographical centre. The Legacy of the Middle Ages is the legacy of an epoch in the development of western European civilization. The Legacy of Israel is ‘the contribution that has come to the sum of human thought from Judaism and from the Jewish view of the world’. The Legacy of Islam is to be understood in a different sense from any of these. It is a provocative title, the meaning of which is only fully explained by the book itself. The nearest parallel is the Legacy of Israel. But whereas it is from the religion of the Jews that the complexion of the Legacy of Israel is derived, in the Legacy of Islam we do not treat of the Legacy of the religion of Muhammad qua religion: the reader will learn from this book that there is little that is peculiarly Islamic in the contributions which Occidental and Oriental Muslims have made to European culture. On the contrary, the legacy has proved least valuable where religion has exerted the strongest influence, as in Muslim Law. But Islam is the fundamental fact which made the Legacy possible. It was under the protection and patronage of the Islamic Empire that the arts and sciences which this book describes flourished.

Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, and the language of Arabia lies behind all that has been written in this book. Islamic and Arabic have often been used as interchangeable terms, and Language and Religion in the great days of the Muslim Caliphate were inseparable. Arabic is the Greek of the Semitic
world, and it was a fortunate thing for Islam that its message was delivered at a time when Arabic was potentially at its zenith. Aramaic was a poverty-stricken tongue compared with Arabic, and not even classical Hebrew at its best could rival Arabic in its astonishing elasticity. From its own inner resources it could evolve by autogenous processes the non justi which new arts and new sciences demanded for their intellectual expression.

A fundamental characteristic of the Semitic languages is to have only three consonants to the verb. There are exceptions to this rule in the various languages, but such exceptions are comparatively rare. It follows almost inevitably that compound words to express complex ideas are practically unknown in Arabic. Consequently, it is the more interesting and remarkable that a language which is so circumscribed should be able to cope with all the lore of the Greek world and so seldom give rise to a suspicion that any strain is being put upon its resources.

Arabic is fitted to express relations with more conciseness than the Aryan languages because of the extraordinary flexibility of the verb and noun. Thus, the ideas: break, shatter, try to break, cause to break, allow to be broken, break one another, ask some one to break, pretend to break, are among many variations of the fundamental verbal theme which can, or could, be expressed by vowel changes and consonantal augments without the aid of the supplementary verbs and pronouns which we have to employ in English. The noun, too, has an appropriate form for many diverse things, such as the time and place of an action, bodily defects, diseases, instruments, colours, trades, and so on. One example must suffice. Let us take the root d-w-r, which, in its simplest form, means to turn or revolve (intransitive).

dawwara, to turn a thing round. dāwara, to walk about with some one.

'adāra, to make go round, and tādawwara 
so, to control. istadāra } to be round in shape.

davor, turning (noun). davorah, one turning.
dawwarān, circulation. duwār, vertigo.
dawwarī, pedlar or vagrant. dawwarābh, mariner's compass.
mudār, axis. mudārah, round water-skin.
mudār, controller.

None of these forms is fortuitous, but is predetermined by the structural genius of the Arabic language.

It will be realized that with such manifold nuances at the disposal of every verb and noun the Arabic language could readily be adapted to express the scientific terminology of the classical world. The Arabs were an observant race. If analytical reasoning was not indigenous to their language they compensated for the lack of it by having a specific name for every different type of thing. A camel of so many years of age, the mother of so many foals, a good trotting beast, a milch camel, and so on, all these had their proper names, a fact which makes an exact and felicitous rendering of Arabic poetry notoriously difficult.

The triliteral root with its ramifications through a thousand forms, each of which has an assonance with the same form of another root, produces a rhythm in Arabic as natural as it is inevitable. When we utter an abstract idea we have no thought of the primitive meaning of the word we employ. 'Association' sits very loosely to socius in the mind of the speaker. We have no socius nor ad in English. But in Arabic the material is never more than faintly obscured beneath the abstract; its presence can always be felt. What in English would be but an indifferent pun at best, is merely etymological consciousness in an Arab, who would perceive at once the nicety of the explanation of Mene, Mene, tekel upsarsin which is given in Daniel v. 25. The Hebrew of the Old Testament can hardly be said to be free from artificial etymologies which are obviously self-conscious attempts to find a radical justification for names whose primitive significance has been lost. But I do not know of such an extreme example as
can be seen in the naive explanation given by an Arabic writer of the name of an ancient chieftain Muzaiqiyah, the little man who tore up (mazaqa) his clothes every evening!

Belief in the paramount superiority of the Arabic language is an article of faith among Muslims, and an exact knowledge of its grammar in cultured circles the distinguishing mark of a gentleman. Yet it is a remarkable fact that before the end of the first century of the Hijrah an Umayyad caliph was unable to convey his meaning to the pure-blooded Arabs of the desert. The fact that the chaste language of ancient Arabia is only to be found in the ancient pre-Islamic and early Islamic writers, so far from discouraging attempts to master its intricacies has incited Muslim scholars of all lands to a laborious study of its grammar and rhetoric. Nor are such labours fruitless. If it is profitable for the cultured European to imitate the periods of Cicero, it is also profitable for the Oriental to acquire a discriminating taste for the classics of his own language.¹

The charm which the Arabic language and Arabic literature never fails to exert on its devotees lies in its unexpectedness, its unaffectedness, and its love of direct speech. Elsewhere in this volume examples will be found of the contributions which the Arabic tongue has made to the languages of Europe. How many words lived only for a day or were slain by the European Renaissance only specialists can say. What, for instance, have the physicians done with the suda, which once formed the opening discourse of the third book of Avicenna's Qanun,² the Sermo universalis de Sod.de This barbarous transcription stands for suda, headache, and comes appropriately enough from the root sada'a, to split. Beside this service we owe a great debt to Arabic in the field of Old Testament studies.

¹ Professor Nicholson's Translations of Eastern Poetry and Prose, Cambridge, 1912, is invaluable as an indication of the pleasure and profit to be gained from reading Islamic literature.
² See further, p. 329.

As soon as Arabic became an imperial language the Jews perceived its close affinity with Hebrew. In the third century of the Hijrah the Jews had imitated the Arabs, or rather, the non-Arab Muslims, and submitted their language to grammatical analysis. The grammar of Rabbi David Qimhi (died c. 1235), which exercised a profound influence on the subsequent study of Hebrew among Christians, borrows a great deal from Arabic sources. His exegesis, which was founded on his Grammar, is frequently to be traced in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament scriptures.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century there has been constant recourse to Arabic for the explanation of rare words and forms in Hebrew; for Arabic, though more than a thousand years the junior as a literary language, is the senior philologically by countless centuries. Perplexing phenomena in Hebrew can often be explained as solitary and archaic survivals of forms which are frequent and common in the cognate Arabic. Words and idioms whose precise sense had been lost in Jewish tradition, receive a ready and convincing explanation from the same source. Indeed, no serious student of the Old Testament can afford to dispense with a first-hand knowledge of Arabic. The pages of any critical commentary on the Old Testament will illustrate the debt that biblical exegesis owes to Arabic. And the legacy is not yet all spent. When Julius Wellhausen, whose writings still dominate the study of the Old Testament, ceased to write on matters Arabian, the study of Arabic and of Islamic institutions lost the services of a genius. Yet a fair exchange was effected when Ignaz Goldziher forsook Hebrew for Arabic. An outstanding example of what may be done by him who holds the balance true can be seen in the writings of Robertson Smith, whose Religion of the Semites is a masterly synthesis of old Arabian and ancient Canaanitish lore.

It is difficult to write calmly of the loss which our book has suffered in the untimely death of my fellow-editor, Sir Thomas
Preface

Arnold. He was a personal friend of every contributor, and his death was not only an irreparable loss to Oriental scholarship, but it has left a wound in the hearts of his friends which time alone can heal. His own contribution, a chapter on the Legacy of Islamic Painting, he left unfinished. His knowledge of the subject was unique in England, and it has seemed fitting to print his article, just as he left it, as an appendix to the chapter on Minor Arts, rather than to attempt to add anything to it.1

Sir Thomas Arnold and I drew up the plan of the book, and he lived to read most of the articles in proof. Since then Professor Nicholson has been good enough to read every chapter with me, and besides making a number of valuable suggestions has allowed me to consult him on any doubtful matter.

For arranging the illustrations of the volume, apart from the articles on the Minor Arts and Architecture, for which the authors provided their own illustrations, I am indebted to Mr. A. L. P. Norrington, of the Clarendon Press.

It has seemed advisable to confine the scope of this book to the achievements of the past. At the present time Modernism has interrupted the reform movement in the religious world of Islam, while Materialism encroaches daily on the thought and literature of the East. It would be the height of rashness to attempt to forecast the course of events. On the one hand, the past history of Arabic and Islamic institutions displays their extraordinary vitality despite attacks from within and without; on the other hand, many far-reaching innovations have been made in Islamic countries during the last few years. This book may help the observer to estimate the importance of those changes and to pursue them to their outcome with interest and sympathy.

The system of transliteration is that recommended by the Royal Asiatic Society. This system permits certain variations

1 This course is further justified by the fact that the author had said that the influence of Muslim painting on European painting was negligible.

which will be found from time to time in the different chapters, e.g. the diphthong oy may be written ai as in Hunain (Hunayn). Well-known names like Mecca and Caliph and so on have been left in the forms familiar to generations of English readers. The name Muhammad, on the other hand, is generally written as it is spelt in Arabic.

In a work of this kind in which each chapter is a unity in itself, the same writers and the same subjects must sometimes be discussed more than once. The only alternative is a cross-reference. Occasionally it will be found that the contributors differ in their estimate of the significance of certain phenomena common to East and West. Such differences of opinion have been allowed to stand in order that the reader may see both sides of the question and form his own judgement.

A. G.
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SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

The modern Spanish school of scientific historians is not favourably disposed towards the legacy of Islam. A hundred years ago the importance of 'the Moors in Spain' was unduly exaggerated; to-day the subject is out of fashion among serious workers and apt to be despised by intelligent readers. This attitude may be regrettable, but there are reasons for it, and not all of them are bad reasons. The inaccuracies in Conde's Historia de la dominación de los árabes en España, the somewhat unfortunate conclusions reached by Dozy regarding the Cid—conclusions which subsequent research has proved to be fallacious, and partly the tendency emanating from French and American universities to trace everything, if possible, to a Latin origin, have led Hispanists to regard oriental studies with a certain feeling of distrust, from which not even the solid achievements of an Asín or a Ribera have altogether been able to save them.

Other influences also have been at work, as a result of the social and political conditions of modern Spain. An idea has gained ground that oriental studies, and Islamic solutions for the problems of Spanish history, philology, and art, belong to that romantic but disastrous tradition, which, after a nineteenth century of invasion, civil war, and unrest, ended in the Spanish-American conflict of 1898. The movement for reform and recuperation, begun by the generation of 1898 and encouraged by the inspired teaching and blameless life of Francisco Giner, led to the development of that sense of accurate scholarship which is so conspicuously manifest in the work of Professor Menéndez Pidal. Yet it was singularly unfortunate that wherever Pidal turned—to the old ballads, to the poem of the Cid, to the origins of the Spanish language—he found a body of ill-supported assumptions concerning Moorish origins, assumptions which had to be cleared away before any real progress could be made.