Al-Kitaab fii Ta ᶜallum al-ᶜArabiyya: A Textbook for Arabic, Part Three

Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal, and Abbas Al-Tonsi
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The latest in the series of *Al-Kitaab fii Ta ᶜallum al-ᶜArabiyya* books, *Kitaab 3* offers some new activities to challenge advanced Arabic learners. Of the familiar, tested themes, *al-ᶜibaaraat al-jadiida* (new expressions) rank among my favorites. Native speakers take idioms for granted, while students are often confused by them. The authors provide a generous list of translated idioms and how to use them. One of those oft-repeated exercises shows students several rows of four Arabic words and asks them to choose which word does not belong there. The students have to justify their choice in Arabic, as the authors want them to "reach the level of the educated native speaker."

Kitaab 3 consists of 10 chapters. Chapter 1, "Islam and Politics," features two articles on "Islamic fundamentalism": "Resolving the Dispute with the Islamic Situation" (Fahmi Hewaydi) and "Whither This Islamic Spread?" (Ahmad Kamal Abul Majd). In the area of grammar, it covers special uses of the demonstrative pronoun, the hollow verb, and the verbal and adverbial *maa*. In chapter 2, "Between Classic and Popular Heritage," we read "The Anecdotes of Goha," that lovable fool who has kept Arabs of all ages laughing since time immemorial. The same chapter highlights Youssef Idris in his "On Egyptian Theatre," and Nizar Qabbani's poem *"qaari'at al-finjaan"* [The Reader of the Cup]. More discussion of *maa* ensues, this time its nominal and conditional meanings, along with the defective verb's morphology.

Layla Abu Zayd lashes the American news media unapologetically in her "The Ambush of American News" (chapter 3: "The Arabs and the West"). In an excerpt from Hisham Sharabi's "The Embers and the Ash," the author reveals the origins of his own abhorrence of western imperialism. Here we encounter "heritage" or classical Arabic, in passages from Osama Bin Munqidh's *kitaab al-i'tibaar*. This eleventh-century Arab writer recounts his experiences during the wars against the Crusaders. Quadriliteral verbal roots, defective passive participles, and numeration round out the grammar section.

Poetry takes center stage in chapter 4: "On Arabic Poetry." The poet Ahmad Abd al-Mu'ti Hijazi kicks off the discussion with an article first published in *Al-Ahram*: "Has Poetry Died?" Five Arabic poems or poetic passages follow, but not before nine pages of background information and preparatory exercises. If students master this chapter, they will gain access to the premier art form in Arab culture. It is not all poetry, however, for chapter 4 also treats grammar: *kaana* and her sisters, *kaada* and her sisters, *dhu* and the "five nouns," the jussive conditional, and the use of the quantifier *kilaa*. With all of its cultural and grammatical points, this chapter is the longest and perhaps most difficult one in the book.

We return to more mundane (but not less compelling) subjects in chapter 5: "On Development and Advancement in the Arab Societies." Abd al-Rahman Mounif discusses petroleum's impact on the Gulf states' economy and demographics in his "In the Beginning, There Was Oil." Later, A. Ali Ibrahim considers "The True Face of the Political Crisis in Algeria." This chapter features a short classical Arabic piece by Al-Jaahedh, "Abu'l-Hudhayl and his Chicken," from his *kitaab al-bukhalaa'* [The Book of the Misers], as well as a short poem by Yemeni poet and scholar Abd al-Aziz al-Maqaleh, from his *kitaab san'aa'* [The Book of San'aa']. The use of *qad* and verb tenses comprise the grammar lessons.

"Religion and Society" forms the thematic hub of chapter 6, and one statement leaps off the page: "Islam in Egypt is influenced by the civilizations which preceded it. It is one Islam which does not know ideological rifts: its face is Sunni, its blood is Shi'ite, its heart is Coptic, its bones are Pharaonic" (Milad Hanna, "The State of Egypt's Copts"). Other articles include "Stop the Emigration of the Christians of the East!" a collaboration by Samir Morqos, George Khadhar, and Jerome Shaheen. The four writers scrutinize the precarious situation of Christians in Arab countries where Islam has become more "fundamentalist." This chapter also features passages from the Old and New Testaments, as well as an interview with Rashed al-Ghanoushi, founder

of al-ittijaah al-islaamiy [the Islamic Orientation], and Amal Dunqul's poem "An Interview with the Son of Noah." Students get a heavy dose of grammar: *waaw al-ma'iyya, al-maf'oul ma'ahu,* more on the passive voice, the *masdar* + active participle + direct object, and lexical derivation.

Chapter 7 concentrates on "Humanities and the Arts," and introduces four modern Arab literary figures: Hannan al-Shaykh, Nabil Shabbi, Rashid Boujadra, and Yahya al-Taher Abdallah, as well as one classical writer: Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani. This chapter's grammar lesson is blessedly short: color morphology and *idha al-fujaa'iyya.* Chapter 8, "Between Belonging and Alienation," delves deeply into socio-psychological themes and leads off with "The Grievances of the Educated and the Peasant under the Relentless Sun of the East" by noted Arab sociologist and author Halim Barakat. Celebrated Sudanese novelist Al-Tayeb Saleh's "A Letter to Ellen" is followed by the Egyptian scholar Jalal Amin's "Globalization and the Retreating Role of the State" and "Alone on the Night of New Year's Eve," a poem by Samih al-Qasem, a Palestinian poet and journalist. The use of *iyya-*, the quasi-absolute object, the *faa'il* for the active and passive participles and adjective comprise the grammar lessons for this chapter.

"Feminist Visions" dominate chapter 9, where we read a variety of works by prominent Arab women: "The Horses and the Night," a story by Siham Bayoumi; the reflections of Nawal Sa'dawi, the Arab world's leading feminist intellectual; and Mona Hilmi's "They All Prefer Her Obedient," a fascinating – and sometimes funny – critique of male-female relationships. The chapter ends with a short article about women by the 'Abbasid author Ibn Tayfour, and a long poem by Palestinian poet Sumayya Abd al-Razzaq al-Sousi. Grammar lessons in this chapter include singular and pluralization, and the *haal* with active and passive participles.

Any student who reaches the tenth chapter, "The Past Future" (which is also the title of the article by Muhammad Abed al-Jaberi), earns the *laqab* (title, honorific) *mahmoud*: "Worthy of Praise." In his "The 19th Century: Americanization and Mamlukization," Ilyas Khouri points out how "the world is preparing to greet the 21st century by returning to the 19th century," in other words, regressing to an era of imperialism … this time, the American brand, as despotic and unjust as that of the Mamluks of centuries past. The lead article is Muhammad al-Rumayhi's "Transformations of the Arab Century: Long Wars and Victims … and the Arab Intellectual Is a Witness Searching for Self and Identity." Al-Rumayhi must have aimed this writing at Arab intellectuals, for his writing is deep and dense. If non-Arabs can penetrate this prose, they have "reach[ed] the level of the educated

native speaker." And if al-Rumayhi's piece does not challenge advanced students enough, an excerpt from Ibn Khaldoun's *al-muqaddima* and a two-page poem by the Sudanese poet Muhammad al-Faytouri, "It Happened in My Land," will remedy the situation.

In their introduction, the authors reveal a sad but true phenomenon: Most students of Arabic or other foreign languages quit before they reach the advanced level. *Kitaab 3* goes the extra mile to keep advanced students engaged. It bursts with provocative articles, stories, poems, and opinion pieces by some of the leading Arab intellectuals and literary figures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Students who complete this book are ready to read, discuss, and write about virtually any contemporary Arabic prose. May Brustad *et al* be proven wrong about the paucity of advanced Arabic students: may *Kitaab 3* enjoy a vast audience.

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