

**EXTRAIT DE "A Hundred and One Rules !"**

**Mohammed Jiyad**

**Spring 2006**

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/mjiyad/Arabic%20Grammar%20Book.doc>

**INTRODUCTION**

The Arabic language developed through the early centuries in the Arabian Peninsula in the era immediately preceding the appearance of Islam, when it acquired the form in which it is known today. Arab poets of the pre-Islamic period had developed a language of amazing richness and flexibility. For the most part, their poetry was transmitted and preserved orally. The Arabic language was then, as it is now, easily capable of creating new words and terminology in order to adapt to the demand of new scientific and artistic discoveries. As the new believers in the seventh century spread out from the Peninsula to create a vast empire, first with its capital in Damascus and later in Baghdad, Arabic became the administrative language of vast section of the Mediterranean world. It drew upon Byzantine and Persian terms and its own immense inner resources of vocabulary and grammatical flexibility.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, a great intellectual movement was underway in Baghdad, in which many ancient scientific and philosophical tracts were transposed from ancient languages, especially Greek, into Arabic. Many were augmented by the new wisdom suggested by Arabic thinkers; other text were simply preserved, until Europe reawakened by the explosion of learning taking place in Arab Spain, saw its rebirth in the Renaissance. That is how Arabic became by the eleventh century the principal reservoir of human knowledge, including the repository for the accumulated wisdom of past ages, supplanting previous cultural languages such as Greek and Latin.

And it was the Arabic language alone which united many peoples in the Arab Empire and the civilization which flourished under it. For when we speak of the Arab civilization and its achievements we do not necessarily mean that all its representatives were Arab, or that all were Muslims. It was the peculiar genius of Arab civilization that it attracted and encompassed people of many races and creeds. Citizens of the Arab Empire, they identified themselves with this civilization and it was the Arabic language, with its great flexibility, that made them exponents of that civilization.. Between the eighth and twelfth centuries, Arabic was as much the universal language of culture, diplomacy, the sciences and philosophy as Latin was to become in the later Middle Ages. Those who wanted to read Aristotle, use medical terms, solve mathematical problems, or embark on any intellectual discourse, had to know Arabic.

The first rules of Arabic language, including its poetry metrical theory, and its syntax, morphology and phonology, were written in Iraq. This task was conducted both in Al-Basrah under Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmed Al-Farahidy and in Al-Kuufah under Abu al-Hasan Al-Kisaa'i. During the Middle Ages Al-Khalil in his book كتاب العين and, his student, Siibawayh in الكتاب concluded that task. The first complete dictionary of the Arabic

language was composed by Al-Khalil, who had also been involved in the reform of the Arabic script and who is generally acclaimed as the inventor of the Arabic metrical theory. The professed aim of كتاب العين , which goes under his name, was the inclusion of all Arabic roots. In the introduction, a sketch is given of the phonetic structure of Arabic, and

## II

the dictionary fully uses available corpora of Arabic by including quotations from the Qur'an and from the numerous pre-Islamic poems, which had both undergone a process of codification and written transmission by the hands of the grammarians.

The early attempt to write the Arabic grammar began as early as the time of the fourth Well-Guided Caliph, Ali Ibn Abi Taalib, when he commissioned a man named Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du'ali for the task. In his book (نزهة الالبا في طبقات الادبا) Al-Anbari, الانباري reports the following anecdote .

دخلت على امير المؤمنين علي بن ابي طالب ( عليه السلام ) فوجدت في يده رقعة، فقلت ما هذه يا امير المؤمنين؟ فقال: إني تأملت كلام العرب فوجدته قد فسد بمخالطة هذه الحمراء -يعني الاعاجم- فأردت أن اضع شيئاً يرجعون إليه، ويعتمدون عليه. ثم القى إليّ الرقعة وفيها مكتوب: ألكلام كله إسم وفعل وحرف. فالاسم ما أنبأ عن المُسمَّى، والفعل ما أنبىء به، والحرف ما افاد معنى. وقال لي: إنح هذا النحو، واضف إليه ما وقع إليك.

I came to The Leader of the Believers, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, and found that he was holding a note in his hand. I asked, "What is this, Oh Leader of the Faithful?" He said, "I have been thinking of the language of the Arabs, and I came to find out that it has been corrupted through contacts with these foreigners. Therefore, I have decided to put something that they (the Arabs) refer to and rely on." Then he gave me the note and on it he wrote: Speech is made of nouns, verbs and particles. Nouns are names of things, verbs provide information, and particles complete the meaning." Then he said to me, "Follow this approach and add to it what comes to your mind."

Al-Du'ali continued to say,

وضعت بابي العطف والنعت ثم بابي التعجب والاستفهام، إلى ان وصلت الى باب إنَّ واخواتها، ما خلا لكنَّ. فلما عرضتها على عليّ (عليه السلام) أمرني بضم لكنَّ إليها. وكنت كلما وضعت باباً من ابواب النحو عرضتها عليه (رضي الله عنه) إلى ان حصلت ما فيه الكفاية. قال ما أحسنَ هذا النحو الذي نحوته!  
فلذلك سُمي النحو.

I wrote two chapters on conjunctions and attributes then two chapters on exclamation and interrogatives. Then I wrote about إنَّ واخواتها and I skipped لكنَّ. When I showed that to him (Peace be upon him), he ordered me to add لكنَّ. Therefore, every time I finish a chapter I showed it to him (May God be satisfied with him), until I covered what I thought to be enough. He said, "How beautiful is the approach you have taken!" From there the concept of النحو came to exist.

Following Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du'ali came a group of grammarians that we know most of by their names, not their works. The list includes:

Ibn 'AaSim , نصر بن عاصم , Al-Mahry المهرى , عنيسة بن معدان , Al-Aqran الاقرن , Al-Adwaany عبد العدوانى , يحيى بن يعمر العدواني , Al-Akhfash الاخش الكبير , Al-'Araj , Al-Hadhramy عبد عيسى بن عمر الثقفي , Al-Thaqafy , أبو عمرو بن العلاء 'Alaa' , Ibn Al- , الله بن ابي اسحق الحضرمي , who wrote two famous books, الإكمال and الجامع

Waafi credited Al-Thaqafy الثقفي for transferring the interest from Basrah to Kuufa, because he began his work there, and Al-Khalil was his student. Among the other Kuufic grammarians were Al-Tamiimi التميمي عبد الرحمن and Al-Harraa' الهراء أبو معاوية شيبان بن عبد and Al-Ru'aasy أبو جعفر الرواسي أبو مسلم معاذ الهراء . If Siibawayh was considered the 'Imaam of grammar in Basrah, the Kuufic version was Al-Kisaa'y أبو الحسن علي بن حمزة بن فيروز الكسائي who studied under Al-Harraa' الهراء and Al-Ru'aasy الرواسي . Unfortunately, Al-Kisaa'y did not author any major work in Arabic grammar. However, he became one of the best seven readers of the Quran.

The framework of the Arab grammarians served exclusively for the analysis of Arabic and, therefore, has a special relevance for the study of the language. From the period between 750 and 1500 we know the names of more than 4000 grammarians who developed a truly comprehensive body of knowledge on their own language.

Siibawayh was the first grammarian to give an account of the entire language in what was probably the first publication in book form in Arabic prose. In his book, *Zahr al-Adab* , وثمر الألباب , Al-Husary reported that Siibawayh used to have his work reviewed by another grammarian of his time named Al-Akhfash Al-Saghiir who said that, " Siibawayh showed me the grammar rules he came up with thinking that I knew better than him. In fact, he had better knowledge than me." Siibawayh's example set the trend for all subsequent generations of grammarians, who believed that their main task was to provide an explanation for every single phenomenon in Arabic. Consequently, they distinguished between what was transmitted and what was theoretically possible in language. In principle, they accepted everything from reliable resources, which included the language of the Qur'an, pre-Islamic poetry, and testimonies from trustworthy Bedouin informants. After the period of the Islamic conquests, the sedentary population of Mekka and Medina began to regard the free-roaming Bedouin, whose language preserved the purity of the pre-Islamic times, as the ideal type of Arab, and the term *كلام العرب* 'Language of the Arabs' came to denote the pure, unaffected language of the Bedouins.

Versteegh stated that the early beginnings of grammar and lexicography began at a time when Bedouin informants were still around and could be consulted. There can be no doubt that the grammarians and lexicographers regarded the Bedouin as the true speakers of the Arabic FuSHa, and continued to do so after the conquests. In the words of Ibn Khaldun, the Bedouin spoke according to their linguistic intuitions and did not need any grammarian to tell them how to use the declensional endings. There are reports that it was fashionable among notable families to send their sons into the desert, not only to learn how to shoot and hunt, but also to practice speaking pure Arabic. The Prophet Mohammed was one of those when he was a small boy. Other reports come from professional grammarians who stayed for some time with a Bedouin tribe and studied their speech because it was considered to be more correct than that of the towns and cities.

The Arabic linguistic references tell us that the need for some "linguistic authority" came to exist long before the time of Al-Khalil and Siibawayh. There is a vast amount of anecdotes concerning the linguistic mistakes made by the non-Arabs who converted to Islam. It is commonly believed that these anecdotes document a state of confusion and corruption of the Classical language. According to many resources, the Well-guided fourth Caliph, Ali Ibn 'Abi Taalib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, was the first to insist that something to be done. One anecdote mentioned that Ali came to perform his pre-dawn prayer at the Mosque of A-Kuufah. As he went in, he heard a non-Arab Muslim reading the Quran and that man was assigning the end-words vowelings incorrectly. The verse in question was from FaaTir (Chapter #35. Verse # 28):

إنما يخشى الله من عباده العلماءُ  
Those truly fear Allah,  
Among His Servants  
Who have knowledge

Apparently, that man had the nominative case assigned to what was supposed to be the direct object الله, and the accusative case was assigned to the subject العلماء. Because the end-word vowelings is the manifestation of Arabic language grammar, the meaning of that verse was completely messed up. That same day Ali handed a note to Abu Al-'Aswad Al-Du'ali which said that, "Speech is made of three elements; nouns, verbs, and particles." Ali asked Al-Du'ali to expand on that definition and write the first grammar rules for Arabic. In other words, Ali was asking for a "linguistic authority" whose rules should be enforced.

According to some historians, Al-Du'ali at first hesitated but was later persuaded when his own daughter made a terrible mistake in the use of the declensional endings, by confusing the expressions:

ما أحسنُ السماء؟ / ما أحسنَ السماء!

How beautiful is the sky!/What is the most beautiful thing in the sky?

She was reported to have said:

ما أحسنُ السماء؟ / ما أحسنَ السماء!

The origin of the "dot," notation of the three short vowels, and the Nunation is ascribed to 'Abu Al-'Aswad, and the names of the vowels (FatHa, Dhamma, Kasra) are connected to their articulations. From that we have the common expression, ضع النقاط على الحروف!, literally meaning "put the dots on the letters!", i.e., to "be more clear/specific." Two other innovations attributed to 'Abu Al-'Aswad concern the notation for hamza (glottal stop) and Shadda (consonant gemination). Both signs are absent from the Nabataean script.

Most Arabic grammars follow the order established by Siibawayh and start with syntax النحو, followed by morphology التصريف, with phonology added as an appendix. Phonology did not count as an independent discipline and was therefore relegated to a position at the end of the treatise, although a considerable body of phonetic

knowledge was transmitted in introductions to dictionaries and in treaties on recitation of the Qur'an, تجويد

The grammarians' main preoccupation was the explanation of the case endings of the words in the sentence, called إعراب , a term that originally meant the correct use of Arabic according to the language of the Bedouins but came to mean declension.

Kees [Verseegh] believes that the works which appeared after Al-Khalil and Siibawayh only contributed either by offering commentaries or further explanations.

Pages extraites de "**A Hundred and One Rules !**" un petit ouvrage de grammaire arabe (en anglais) téléchargeable sur le site:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/mjijad/Arabic%20Grammar%20Book.doc>