

Arabic Literature as a Mirror of Its Era: A Historical Study from the Jahiliyyah Period to the Peak of Islamic Civilization.

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Article History:

Received: April 12, 2025

Revised: May 10, 2025

Accepted: June 25, 2025

Keywords:

Arabic Language, *Jahiliyyah*,
Islamic Civilization

Abstract:

Arabic literature is the most authentic reflection of the social, cultural, and political dynamics that have shaped the Arab world from the pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyyah) to the peak of Islamic civilization. This article examines the historical development of Arabic literature by highlighting the shifts in themes, forms, and functions of literature within the context of Arab societal changes. During the Jahiliyyah period, poetry served as the primary medium for expressing tribal identity, pride, and collective existence. With the advent of Islam, literature underwent a major transformation with the revelation of the Qur'an, which not only altered the structure of language and rhetoric but also expanded the intellectual horizons of Arab society. This evolution reached its peak during the Abbasid era, when literature flourished as a vehicle for intellectualism, social critique, and philosophical exploration, alongside the advancement of knowledge centers such as Baghdad. This study employs historical-philosophical and philological approaches to demonstrate that Arabic literature is not merely a cultural product, but also an agent of civilizational change. By viewing literature as a mirror of its era, this article underscores the importance of understanding literary works as an integral part of the history of Islamic civilization.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Arabic is one of the richest intellectual and cultural legacies in the history of world civilization. It has served not only as a medium for aesthetic expression, but also as a vehicle for conveying the moral, religious, social, and political values of Arab society across the ages. From oral poetry in the pre-Islamic era to modern novels addressing contemporary issues, Arabic literature has consistently demonstrated a complex and dynamic evolution that invites in-depth study.

In the pre-Islamic period, also known as the Jahiliyyah era, poetry (shī'r) was the primary form of expression among the Arab people. Poetry functioned not only as entertainment, but also as a means of recording history, expressing tribal pride, and serving as a platform for competition

among poets. The beauty of the language, the power of metaphor, and the depth of meaning were hallmarks of classical Arabic poetry. Poets such as Imru' al-Qais, Antarah ibn Shaddad, and Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma were renowned for their mastery in crafting verses that were both captivating and profound. Poetry during this period also reflected the social structure and core values of Arab society, which was still rooted in tribalism and traditional norms. (Al-Khatib, 1997)

The advent of Islam brought about a fundamental transformation in Arabic literature, particularly in terms of themes, values, and linguistic style. The Qur'an, as the sacred text of Islam, introduced a new dimension to the use of the Arabic language—marked by elevated diction and profound rhetorical beauty. The emergence of prose in the form of sermons (khutbah), letters, and exegeses (tafsir) also broadened the scope of Arabic literature. Literary works began to incorporate spiritual values, ethics, and the Islamic worldview. Writers started to blend religious elements with strong literary aesthetics. This early Islamic period marked a significant transitional phase in the history of Arabic literature. (Abdul Wahhab, 2001)

The Abbasid period (750–1258 CE) is regarded as the golden age of Arabic literature. During this era, there was a remarkable integration between traditional Arabic literary forms and the intellectual heritage of Greek, Persian, and Indian civilizations. New literary genres emerged, such as maqamat (rhymed prose), philosophy, history, and literary criticism. Writers like Al-Jahiz, Abu Nuwas, and Al-Mutanabbi made significant contributions to the development of Arabic literary aesthetics and intellectual depth. Literature during this time was not merely a medium of artistic expression but also became an integral part of intellectual and philosophical discourse. Complex linguistic styles, wordplay, and social criticism became defining characteristics of Arabic literature in this period. (Hitti, 2002)

Nevertheless, the development of Arabic literature cannot be separated from the historical context surrounding it. In each of its phases, Arabic literary works reflect the socio-political changes of their time: from tribal romanticism during the Jahiliyyah period, to the spirit of morality and religious preaching in the Prophetic era, and on to social critique and existential philosophy during the golden age. In other words, Arabic literature serves as a mirror of its era, reflecting not only the beauty of language but also shifts in paradigms and socio-cultural structures. (Hourani, 1991)

The study of the development of Arabic literature from the Jahiliyyah period to the golden age of Islam holds particular relevance in today's world. In an era of globalization and information disruption, the intellectual legacy of Islam—including the rich tradition of classical Arabic literature—is often marginalized or viewed ahistorically. Yet, understanding the dynamics of Arabic literature also means understanding the broader dynamics of Islamic civilization. This is crucial not only for academics and literary scholars but also for young Muslims who are seeking identity and cultural roots in a rapidly changing and fast-paced global landscape. (Badawi, 1992)

Moreover, classical Arabic literature offers an integrative model that combines aesthetic beauty, spiritual depth, and intellectual breadth. In a modern world experiencing value fragmentation and a crisis of meaning, the study of classical Arabic literature can serve as a reflective alternative for rebuilding a civilization rooted in noble values while remaining open to dialogue and the developments of the times.

Therefore, this article aims to historically examine the development of Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic period to the peak of Islamic civilization, emphasizing the role of literature as a mirror reflecting the social, cultural, and spiritual changes of the Arab and Muslim communities. This study will explore not only the formal and thematic aspects of literature but also the sociological and philosophical contexts that underpin it. Through this approach, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding will emerge regarding the strategic position of

Arabic literature in the intellectual history of Islam and its relevance to the present day.

Method (منهج)

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in the historical-philosophical and philological approaches to trace the evolution of Arabic literature from the Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic) era to the peak of Islamic civilization. A qualitative design is particularly suited for exploring the richness of literary texts in their socio-historical contexts. According to Sugiyono (2017), qualitative research emphasizes understanding phenomena in depth through descriptive data, often in the form of words and texts, which aligns well with the study of classical literary works that are rich in cultural, linguistic, and ideological content.

The historical-philosophical method is employed to analyze Arabic literature in its temporal and intellectual frameworks. This involves reconstructing the socio-political conditions and worldview of various historical periods, from the tribal values reflected in Jahiliyyah poetry to the religious, philosophical, and scientific dimensions of literature during the Abbasid era. Through this lens, the researcher examines how literature not only reflects but also participates in the formation of dominant ideologies and cultural identities. For instance, the rise of panegyrics during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods is analyzed in relation to the centralization of political power and court patronage systems.

In parallel, the philological approach is applied to interpret the language, structure, and stylistic features of selected texts. Philology provides the tools to critically examine manuscripts, resolve textual variants, and understand the linguistic nuances of classical Arabic, including meter, rhetorical devices, and semantic development. This method is crucial when analyzing poetry, prose, and treatises, particularly those preserved in various manuscript traditions. It also enables the tracing of intertextual links and the influence of earlier oral traditions on later written forms.

Data for this study is collected through a documentary study of primary literary sources such as *mu'allaqāt* (pre-Islamic odes), early Islamic sermons and poetry, classical *maqāmāt*, and philosophical prose. Secondary sources include works of historical analysis, literary criticism, and commentaries by classical and modern scholars. The researcher conducts a close reading and content analysis to identify recurring themes, shifts in literary form, and philosophical undercurrents across periods. Where available, manuscript variants are consulted to explore textual integrity and interpretative traditions.

The data analysis process involves thematic coding, historical contextualization, and comparative analysis. Thematic coding is used to categorize key motifs (e.g., honor, divine justice, love, exile) and literary forms (*qasida*, *risalah*, *maqāma*) that recur across time. These are then contextualized within specific historical and cultural frameworks, allowing for a diachronic understanding of how Arabic literature responded to and influenced societal transformations. Comparative analysis is also employed to highlight continuities and innovations in style and content, especially between pre-Islamic and Islamic literary production.

Finally, the study maintains research validity through triangulation of sources, expert consultation, and transparent interpretation. Triangulation is ensured by comparing multiple primary texts and scholarly interpretations, while philological accuracy is supported by referencing critical editions and established commentaries. The researcher also engages in reflexive analysis to account for the influence of contemporary perspectives on the reading of historical texts. This comprehensive methodology ensures that the study captures both the aesthetic and intellectual legacy of Arabic literature as a mirror of its era.

Result (نتائج)

Arabic literature is one of the cultural heritages of the Islamic world, rich in history and deeply meaningful in its language. It reflects the intellectual, social, and cultural evolution of Arab society from the pre-Islamic era to the modern age. Literature is not merely a form of artistic expression, but also a portrayal of the historical development, philosophy, and way of life of a society that has continually changed over time. This long journey is fundamentally divided into two major periods: pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Arabic literature, along with the modern transformations seen in contemporary Arabic literature. The beauty and complexity of Arabic literature lie in its ability to remain relevant across the ages, responding to the challenges of the times while preserving its rich traditional legacy. (Khotimah, 2025)

In the pre-Islamic era, Arabic literature developed in the form of oral traditions (expressions). At that time, Arab society was not yet familiar with a writing culture, so poetry became the main medium for expressing their thoughts, emotions, and worldview. This era is more commonly known as the Jahiliyyah period, which is translated into Indonesian as the "age of ignorance," although the term more accurately refers to the time before the enlightenment brought by Islam, rather than a complete lack of culture or knowledge. During this period, Arabic literature flourished in the form of highly structured and complex oral poetry. In essence, Arabic literature began to develop in the 6th century AD, when most people were still in the Jahiliyyah period, although written literary works from that era were still very few.

There are at least two of the most renowned works of pre-Islamic Arabic literature written by Arab poets of that era: *Mu'allaqat* and *Al-Mufaddaliyat*. These were introduced to the Western world by the British Orientalist William Jones (1749–1798) in his work *Poeseos Asiaticae Commentarii Libri Sex*, or his explanation of *Mu'allaqat As-Sab'a*, published in 1774. He was the first European to introduce Jahiliyyah-era Arabic literature to the Western world. Pre-Islamic Arabic literature is characterized by themes of pride in one's self (or tribe), lineage, and way of life. Arabic literature entered a new chapter with the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, whose teachings were conveyed through the Qur'an. (Sangsoko, 2021)

The lives of Arab tribes during the pre-Islamic era can be understood through literary works that reflect the daily realities of the Arab people at that time. These works convey their geographical conditions, social structures, economic systems, and even their spiritual beliefs. Pre-Islamic Arabic literature tended to focus on themes such as *Ar-Ritha'* (elegies or laments), *satire* (attacks on rival tribes), *Al-Fakhr* (tribal pride), and depictions of the customs and traditions of the time. These literary descriptions were often interwoven with messages of advice, wisdom, or the life philosophies held by the society. (Haerudin, 2020)

The most renowned form of Jahiliyyah-era Arabic literature was *shi'r* (poetry), alongside *amthāl* (proverbs or wise sayings), and short speeches delivered by poets, known as *prosaliris*. All of these were memorized and passed down orally from generation to generation by the Arabs, who were well known for their remarkable memory. The poems were typically written on sheep or camel skin, as well as on dried papyrus leaves. These poems were usually the works of great poets and were displayed on the walls of the Kaaba. Most of the written poems were not complete works but rather fragments consisting of a few lines or verses. These written poems were known as *Mu'allaqat*, meaning "suspended odes," because they were hung on the walls of the Kaaba.

Famous poets of the *Mu'allaqat* include Imru' al-Qays, Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, Nabighah al-Dhubyani, Tarafah ibn al-'Abd, 'Amr ibn Kulthum, Labid ibn Rabi'ah, and Antarah ibn Shaddad. Some of them embraced Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. Among the most well-known was Labid ibn Rabi'ah, who, after converting to Islam, became a devoted supporter of the religion through his poetry. An example of pre-Islamic Arabic literature can be found in

excerpts cited by researchers from the book *Al-Wasit* :

مصارع الرجال تحت بروق الطمع/ من سلك الجداد أمن العثار/ خير الموت تحت ظلال السيوف
كلم اللسان أنكى من كلم السنان/ العتاب قبل العقاب/ خير الغنى القناعة/ رضا الناس غاية لا تدرك

"A man's downfall is caused by his greed. Whoever walks humbly on level ground will not stumble. The best kind of death is when one dies in the midst of struggle. A wound from words is better than a wound from a bite ". (Buana, 2012)

صوت البكاء مع الكلام على الميت/ صوت الكلام أثناء البكاء على الميت.

"The sound of weeping while speaking to the corpse / or speaking while crying over the dead."

This brief overview of pre-Islamic Arabic literature serves as both a textual testament to history and an enduring body of work that time has never erased. The literary creations from the Jahiliyyah period—whether in prose or poetry—demonstrate that the Arab people already possessed a rich linguistic civilization, abundant in artistic expression and deep meaning. This affirms that the term *Jahiliyyah* should not be understood as ignorance or backwardness in a general sense, but rather as referring specifically to spiritual ignorance and social corruption, as most Arabs at the time practiced idol worship and committed acts such as the killing of female infants.

Arabic Literature in the Early of Islam

Arabic literature in the early Islamic period, known as *fi 'Ashr Shadr al-Islām*, represents a crucial phase in the development of Arabic literary tradition. This period was marked by the emergence of the Qur'an, which became the primary foundation for the evolution of Arabic literature thereafter. At this stage, Arabic literature encompassed not only poetry and prose but also religious and scientific works written in the Arabic language.

Following the appointment of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Arabic literature entered the Islamic period, which was heavily influenced by the Qur'an as the holy book of Muslims. The Qur'an had a profound impact on the development of Arabic literature in terms of structure, content, and linguistic style. As a divine revelation delivered in eloquent and beautifully crafted Arabic, the Qur'an is considered the highest pinnacle of linguistic eloquence (*balāghah*) and rhetorical beauty (*bayān*). Its unique style, which differs from both classical Arabic poetry and prose, made it both a source of inspiration and a standard of aesthetics for poets and writers throughout the ages. (Yusuf, 2013)

From a linguistic and stylistic perspective, the Qur'an introduced innovative structures. Its use of *tajnis* (parallelism), *saj'* (rhymed prose), and subtle metaphors greatly influenced the rhetoric and structure of both classical and modern Arabic literature. For example, the Qur'an's style of repetition and musicality inspired the development of religious prose forms such as *khutbah* (sermons) and *maqāmah* (rhymed episodic prose), while also enriching the literary diction of Arabic. Writers like Al-Jāhiz and Al-Ḥarīrī adopted these stylistic features in their own literary prose works. (Al-Jahid, 2001)

Thematically, the Qur'an broadened the scope of topics in Arabic literature, which had previously been limited to praise, love, and war. After the revelation, themes such as the oneness of God (*tauhid*), justice, the hereafter, as well as moral and social values began to dominate literary works. Muslim poets like Hassan ibn Thabit used poetry as a medium for preaching and defending Islam. Even in modern literature, the spiritual and moral influence of the Qur'an can be seen in the poetry of figures such as Mahmoud Darwish and Adonis.

From this aspect, the Qur'an also transformed the perception of the function of literature. Whereas literature was previously often used for entertainment or insult, after the advent of Islam, literature was directed to convey moral messages, truth, and education. This elevated the status of poets and writers as conveyors of wisdom (*hukamā'*), rather than mere seekers of fame. This influence remains relevant in contemporary Arabic literature. Many modern Arab poets and novelists continue to adopt Qur'anic symbolism and religious linguistic styles in their works as a form of cultural and spiritual identity. Even in literary studies at Arab universities, linguistic analysis of Qur'anic verses plays an important role in understanding the structure and beauty of the Arabic language. (R, 2000)

One of the most renowned figures in the world of literature during the early Islamic period (Shadr al-Islam) was Abdullah Ibn Rawahah. He hailed from the Khazraj tribe and was highly skilled in composing beautiful poetry that reflected the greatness of Islam. He was also one of the first twelve individuals from the Ansar to embrace Islam before the Hijrah, during the First Pledge of Aqabah. As a poet, his verses flowed smoothly and were pleasing to the ears of the people. From the moment he embraced Islam, he dedicated his poetic talents to the glory and advancement of Islamic civilization.I

A prominent figure in the world of literature during the early Islamic period was Abdullah Ibn Rawahah. He belonged to the Kharaj tribe and was skilled in composing beautiful poetry that reflected the greatness of Islam. He was also one of the twelve people from the Ansar who first embraced Islam before the Hijrah (during the First Pledge of Aqabah). As a fluent poet, his verses flowed smoothly and beautifully from his tongue, captivating the community. Since embracing Islam, he dedicated his poetic talents to the glory of Islamic civilization.. (Andnag Tamara Pratiwi, 2019)

" O Son of Hashim, the noble one,Allah has granted you from among all mankind a blessing not given to others. Truly, I hold a good intuition about you, a feeling unlike that of others. If you were to ask them for help in solving problems, they would only answer or defend out of habit.Therefore, Allah affirms the goodness and teachings you bring, just as He affirmed and aided Moses. Upon hearing this, the Prophet Muhammad became joyful and pleased, then said, "May Allah grant you steadfastness." While the Prophet was performing Tawaf round the Kaaba during an Umrah Qadha, Ibn Rawahah stood before him, reciting this poem. (Ahmad, 2014)

O my Lord, if it were not for You, surely we would never find guidance, we would not give charity, perform prayers,uphold the truth,nor fight falsehood.Indeed, the disbelievers will always oppose Your believing servants.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabic literature – particularly poetry – was often composed and expressed orally, without the aid of tools like those used today. It was delivered spontaneously, much like ordinary speech. In the early Islamic period (*Shadr al-Islam*), Arabic literature served as a medium for expressing the art of language in everyday life. Beyond mere performance or display, it helped to sharpen the conscience, evoking empathy and emotional sensitivity toward others. Moreover, the art of language was seen as a reflection of life itself, as literature was created to convey the true meaning of existence.

hus, a poet could attain both benefit and wisdom through their verses. The following is an example of a poem (*shi'r*) from the early period of Islamic preaching among the Arab people:

إن الرسول لنور يستضاء به / مهتد من سيوف الله مسلول / في عصابة من قريش قال قائلهم
ببطن مكة لما أسلموا زولوا / زالوا فما زال أنكاس ولا كشف / عند اللقاء ولا ميل معازيل

The poem above illustrates the significant and undeniable contribution of Arabic literature in the spread of Islamic teachings. From the very beginning of Islam's emergence, the Arabic language served as a unifying medium used to disseminate the message of Islam across different parts of the world. Various religious literatures – such as Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), hadith collections, and other theological works – were written in Arabic and later translated into many languages, thereby expanding the global reach of Islamic da'wah.

Not only formal religious texts, but literature in the form of poetry and prose also played a vital role in the process of da'wah. Muslim poets often used their literary works to convey moral values and religious teachings to the public. In the Sufi tradition, poetry became a spiritual medium that expressed the intimate relationship between humans and God, while also conveying the profound and heartfelt principles of Sufism.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that the sources of innovation and inspiration in the development of Arabic literature are:

1. The Qur'an – As the highest model of eloquence and rhetorical beauty, the Qur'an has deeply influenced the structure, themes, and stylistic elements of Arabic literature across eras.
2. The Prophetic Hadiths – The sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad serve as linguistic and moral references, enriching the content and ethical dimension of Arabic literary works.
3. Pre-Islamic Oral Traditions – The rich legacy of pre-Islamic poetry and prose provided foundational forms and techniques, which later evolved in Islamic contexts.
4. Cultural and Religious Diversity – Interactions with Persian, Greek, Indian, and later European civilizations introduced new genres, ideas, and literary criticism methods.
5. Sufi Spirituality – Mystical thought inspired symbolic, emotional, and philosophical themes in Arabic poetry, particularly in expressing divine love and human longing.
6. Social and Political Transformations – Historical events, caliphate expansions, colonial experiences, and modern reform movements fueled themes of resistance, identity, and reform in Arabic literature.
7. Arabic Language Mastery – The deep appreciation for the Arabic language itself, with its vast vocabulary and rhetorical richness, has always been a source of pride and creative inspiration for writers and poets.

These elements collectively shaped Arabic literature into a dynamic, evolving tradition that continues to influence the literary world to this day.

The Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) play a fundamental role in the development of Arabic literature – in terms of language, style, and the content of aesthetic and moral values. As the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an is not only a guide for life but also a literary masterpiece that has deeply influenced both classical and modern Arabic language styles. Its rhetorical beauty, rich vocabulary, and profound meanings have inspired the emergence of elevated forms of literary expression, such as *qasidah* (odes), literary prose (*nathr*), as well as Sufi and philosophical poetry.

Arabic Literature in the Golden Age of Islamic Civilization

The influence of Arabic literature was not limited to the Arabian Peninsula but extended to various regions that became part of Islamic civilization. In Andalusia, for instance, Arabic literature reached its golden age with the emergence of prominent figures such as Ibn Zaydun

and Al-Mutanabbi. Their works were not only highly esteemed in the Arab world but were also translated and studied in Europe, significantly influencing the development of Western literature during the Middle Ages.

During the Golden Age of Islam, particularly between the 8th and 13th centuries CE, the Islamic world witnessed a remarkable surge in knowledge and literature. This era saw the rise of major intellectual centers such as Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, and Andalusia, where Muslim scholars, philosophers, and literary figures produced influential works that would later impact the Western world. The Umayyad dynasty played a crucial role in initiating the process of Arabization across newly conquered territories. Caliph Abd al-Malik led this movement by replacing local languages with Arabic in social systems, administrative policies, and even in the minting of coins. This shift helped unify the vast and diverse Islamic empire under a common linguistic and cultural framework, thereby laying a strong foundation for the flourishing of Arabic literature and scientific thought.

Entering the Abbasid period (750–1258 CE), the advancement of knowledge expanded across a wide range of disciplines, including medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. Renowned figures such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Farabi, and Al-Razi made groundbreaking contributions to modern science, with their works serving as key references for European scholars centuries later. Many of these scientific writings were composed in Arabic and later translated into Latin, playing a pivotal role in shaping European intellectual development, particularly during the Renaissance. The Abbasid era thus marked a peak in the Islamic civilization's intellectual and literary achievements, bridging cultures and laying the foundation for global scientific progress.

In addition to scientific advancements, literature also flourished during this period. Arabic literature was not merely a form of entertainment, but also served as a means of education and a vehicle for conveying moral and spiritual values. Poetry, prose, and Sufi literary works experienced rapid development, with prominent figures such as Al-Jahiz, Al-Hamadani, Az-Zamakhshari, Ibn Faris, and Abu Ali Al-Farisi, as well as Sufi poets like Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah and Jalaluddin Rumi, whose works continue to be read and appreciated to this day.

The development of Arabic literature during the Abbasid era marked the peak of Islamic civilization. This is evidenced by the establishment of a standardized and modern Arabic Language Institute, which served to expand the reach of Islamic da'wah into newly conquered territories. Even more fascinating is the emergence of Christian Arabic literature during the Abbasid Caliphate, initiated by Nestorian priests. Their mastery of the Arabic language enabled them to translate the Bible into Arabic. During this period, Muslims and Christians lived side by side in peace, collaborating in the advancement of knowledge and science.

In addition, many non-Arab Muslim communities engaged deeply in literature, cultural traditions, and critical thinking, which significantly influenced the development of Arabic literature in fields such as poetry, prose, and beyond. They explored the meanings of language found in the Holy Qur'an as a foundation for composing and refining Arabic. The purposes of studying the Arabic language during that era included the following ; (Azizah, 2020)

1. Compilation of Islamic Sciences that had not been previously documented – This included the development of disciplines such as *Usul al-Fiqh* (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence), *Aqidah* (Islamic Creed), *Balaghah* (Rhetoric), *Nahwu* (Grammar), and *Sarf* (Morphology).
2. Translation of foreign books by Muslim scholars into Arabic, particularly works originating from the Greek era. These texts were primarily focused on philosophy and became the foundation of what was later known as Islamic philosophy (*falsafah*).

3. Absorption of Qur'anic interpretations (Tafsir) that contain commands to advance technology and contribute to the development of various sectors such as agriculture, pharmacy, architecture, and even the concepts of modern technology
4. The widespread accessibility of education within the Caliphate played a major role in improving the quality and capabilities of the Muslim community's human resources during that time.

In the mid-10th century CE, a new literary genre reemerged in the Arab world known as *maqamat*. It is a collection of entertaining anecdotes narrated by a witty wanderer who navigates life through intelligence and eloquence. *Maqamat* was pioneered by Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (d. 1008 CE). In general, Arabic literature is divided into two main categories: prose and poetry. Prose consists of three key elements:

1. Stories (Qışaş) - A *qışaş* is a narrative or composition that conveys various themes, whether fictional or based on real events. These stories include forms such as *al-ḥikāyat* (tales), *ar-ruwāṭ* (narratives), and *uqūṣaṣ* (short stories or episodes). During the Abbasid period, the development of stories was not limited to religious themes alone but expanded into a wide range of genres, including philosophy.
2. Proverbs (*Amtsāl*) and Wisdom Sayings (*Al-Ḥikmah*) - These are brief yet profound expressions rich in life lessons, aimed at cultivating ethics and character. What makes them even more fascinating is their connection to broader themes such as philosophy, society, and politics. These sayings often served as tools for moral guidance and intellectual reflection in both personal and public discourse.
3. Literature of Histories (At-Tarikh). The Abbasid era, which lasted from 750 CE to 1258 CE, was a golden age in the history of Islamic civilization. This period witnessed remarkable advancements not only in science, philosophy, and literature, but also in historical writing—known in Islamic tradition as *tarikh*. Historical narratives during this time underwent significant development in terms of methodology, content, and writing style. This progress was greatly influenced by the active support of the Abbasid caliphs, who promoted intellectual pursuits and established Baghdad as the center of Islamic civilization.

Philip K. Hitti, in his book *History of the Arabs*, notes that during this period, literature began to flourish under the influence of Abu Uthman 'Umar ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, who earned the title "the master of Baghdad's literary figures." Al-Jahiz is best known for his work *Kitab al-Hayawan* (*The Book of Animals*), an anthology of animal-related anecdotes that blends curiosity with both fact and fiction. He also authored *Kitab al-Bukhala* (*The Book of Misers*), a brilliant study on human character, showcasing his keen observation and satirical style..

The development of literature continued to progress and eventually reached its peak around the 10th century. Prominent literary figures emerged, such as Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani, al-Tha'alibi of Nishapur, and al-Hariri. Al-Hamadhani is known as the creator of *maqamat*, a form of anecdotal prose in which the content is secondary to the author's display of poetic skill. However, out of approximately 400 pieces he wrote, only 52 can still be traced. Another literary figure, al-Hariri, further developed the *maqamat*, using al-Hamadhani's works as a model. Through *maqamat*, both al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri presented anecdotes as a means to subtly convey social criticism of the prevailing conditions in society.

According to Philip K. Hitti, before the development of *maqamat*, there was a literary figure who was a direct descendant of Marwan, the last caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty. This writer was Abu al-Faraj al-Ishbahani, more commonly known as al-Isfahani. Abu al-Faraj resided in Aleppo, Syria, to complete his magnum opus, *Kitab al-Aghani*. This work is a valuable legacy of poetry and literature and is regarded as a primary source for the study of Islamic civilization. The

renowned historian Ibn Khaldun referred to Abu al-Faraj's work as the official record of the Arab people. So valuable was this work that prominent government figures, such as al-Hakam of Andalusia, sent a thousand gold coins to Abu al-Faraj as a gift. Before the mid-10th century, the first draft of a work later known as *Alf Laylah wa Laylah (One Thousand and One Nights)* was compiled in Iraq. The primary reference for this draft was prepared by al-Jahshiyari.

Initially, this was a classical Persian work known as *Hazar Afsanah*, which contained several stories originating from India. Later, al-Jahshiyari added additional tales from local storytellers. Another prominent literary figure who emerged during the Abbasid period was Abu al-Tayyib Ahmad al-Mutanabbi, widely regarded as one of the greatest poets. Another influential figure was Abu al-'Ala al-Ma'arri, who lived between 973 and 1057 CE. He became an important reference for Western scholars. His poetry reflects a sense of pessimism and skepticism about the era in which he lived. This literary development also had an impact on Spain.

The presence of Arab literary figures in Spain, particularly during the golden age of Islam in al-Andalus (711-1492 CE), marked a brilliant chapter in the history of Arabic literature and Islamic civilization as a whole. Islamic Spain, or al-Andalus, became an intellectual and cultural hub that produced great writers who not only composed in Arabic but also contributed monumental works across various literary genres such as poetry, prose, tales, and literary philosophy. One of the most renowned Arab writers from Spain was Ibn Hazm (994-1064 CE), a scholar and poet best known for his work *Tawq al-Hamamah (The Ring of the Dove)*, a treatise on love that combines literature, psychology, and Islamic ethical values. This work exemplifies how poetry and prose were used to express human emotions through refined and philosophical language. In addition to Ibn Hazm, figures like Ibn Zaydun were also widely celebrated, especially for his romantic poetry filled with longing and deep emotional resonance—particularly directed toward his beloved, Walladah bint al-Mustakfi, a female poet who was also famous in her time.

Arab writers in Spain did not create solely for aesthetic purposes; they also served as agents of civilization, bridging knowledge, culture, and spiritual values. They made significant contributions to enriching the corpus of Arabic literature with styles and themes distinctive to Andalusia—such as the beauty of nature, interfaith tolerance, and praise for knowledge. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of cities like Córdoba, Seville, and Granada fostered the growth of an inclusive literary culture, where poetry and prose became mediums of cultural and spiritual communication that transcended ethnic and religious boundaries.

Thus, the Arab writers in Spain left behind a profoundly meaningful literary legacy—not only for the Arab world but for global civilization. They demonstrated that literature can serve as a bridge between culture and faith, as well as a means to express universal human values. Their imprint on Andalusia stands as concrete evidence that the power of words and the beauty of language can etch an everlasting mark on history.

Discussion (مناقشة)

Research findings show that Arabic literature developed in tandem with the social and intellectual transformations that occurred in the Arab-Islamic world. During the Jahiliyyah period, poetry served as the primary medium for conveying tribal values such as bravery, honor, and solidarity. Works like the *Mu'allaqat* stand as evidence that poetry in this era functioned as a form of collective identity documentation for Bedouin communities untouched by monotheistic teachings.

Entering the Islamic era, a significant shift occurred in the orientation of literature. The Qur'an, as divine revelation, became the primary source shaping the structure of language, rhetoric, and even the worldview of Arab society. Literary expression evolved from oral poetry to more functional prose forms such as sermons, epistles, and exegeses. Moral values, justice, and the oneness of God became dominant themes, replacing tribal pride. Literature in this period became a means of religious outreach (*da'wah*), the formation of Islamic identity, and the dissemination of knowledge.

The peak of Arabic literary development occurred during the Abbasid period, when literacy and intellectual activity reached their height. Literature was no longer limited to aesthetic expression but evolved into a space for philosophical dialogue, social critique, and reflection on urban life and the complexities of multicultural society. The works of al-Jahiz, al-Mutanabbi, and Abu Nuwas reflect the intellectual freedom and maturity that characterized this era. Knowledge centers such as *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) helped elevate literature as a medium for articulating scientific and philosophical discourse.

These findings affirm that Arabic literature is not merely an aesthetic artifact but also a mirror of its time, capturing the pulse of history, shifts in values, and the intellectual dynamics of Arab society. Literature acted as both a documenter and driver of civilizational change – from the pagan tribal era to the birth of a cosmopolitan and transnational Islamic civilization. Therefore, understanding the history of Arabic literature also means understanding the trajectory of Islamic civilization itself.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

A historical study of Arabic literature from the Jahiliyyah period to the peak of Islamic civilization reveals that Arabic literature is a dynamic mirror of the social, cultural, and spiritual realities that evolved with the changing times. During the Jahiliyyah era, literature – especially poetry – served as a medium for expressing tribal identity, pride, and the heroic values of pre-Islamic Arab society. The language was rich in metaphor, rhythm, and grandeur, reflecting a social structure that was tribal and centered on ethnic pride.

With the advent of Islam, the direction and substance of Arabic literature underwent a significant transformation. The Qur'an, as a sacred text, brought about a revolution in language and meaning, influencing the development of literary aesthetics and introducing profound divine values, ethics, and spirituality. The classical Islamic period witnessed the emergence of literary works that were not only beautiful in language but also rich in knowledge, philosophy, and wisdom. Literature was no longer merely a tool for entertainment, but became a medium for *da'wah* (religious outreach), education, and intellectual reflection on universal values.

Thus, Arabic literature is not a static entity, but a historical representation of the intellectual and civilizational transformation of the Muslim community. It evolved alongside its society, serving both as a witness to and a participant in the historical dynamics of Arab-Islamic civilization from the Jahiliyyah era to its golden age.

Acknowledgment (شكر وتقدير)

Given the important role of Arabic literature as a reflection of the historical journey and Islamic civilization, it is recommended that the study of Arabic literature should not be limited solely to linguistic or aesthetic aspects. Instead, it should also be approached as an interdisciplinary source that encompasses history, philosophy, and sociology. Academics, students, and researchers in the fields of Islamic and literary studies should be more active in exploring classical Arabic works as a means of reflecting on the dynamics of past civilizations

and their relevance to contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, there is a need for the digitization and wider dissemination of classical literary texts in the form of translations and critical studies, making them more accessible and comprehensible to younger generations across cultures and disciplines. Educational institutions are also encouraged to integrate classical Arabic literature as an essential part of curricula in Islamic studies and the humanities.

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