

Aḥmad Fāris
al-Shidyāq
(1805?-1887)

فارس الشدياق



Al-Shidyāq's contributions to MSA

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- Developed a new style for Bible translation
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- Wrote extensively in his own “modern” style

From *Leg Over Leg* (1855)

translated by Humphrey Davies

Certain scholars have said that metaphors may be divided into the literal and the analogical, the literal into the categorical and the presumptive, and the categorical firstly into the make-believe and the factual, secondly into the primary and the subordinate, and thirdly into the abstracted and the presumed, with some claiming that this last may be sub-divided into the aeolian,¹⁹³ the ornitho-sibilant,¹⁹⁴ the feebly chirping, the tongue-smacking,¹⁹⁵ the faintly tinkling, the bone-snapping, the emptily thunderous, and the phasmic,

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while the aeolian itself may be sub-divided into the stridulaceous, the crepitaceous, and the oropharyngeal, the crepitaceous may be sub-sub-divided into the absquiliiferous, the vulgaritissimous, the exquipilifabulous, the seborrhaceous, the squapalidaceous, and the kalipaceous, the crepitaceous into the panthero-dyspneaceous,¹⁹⁶ the skrowlaceous¹⁹⁷ and the skraaagh-halaceous,¹⁹⁸ as well as the transtextual and the intertextual,¹⁹⁹ and the oropharyngeal into the enteric, the dipterick, the vermiculo-epigastric, the intestinal, the audio-zygo-amatory, the anal-resonatory, the oro-phlebo-evacuative, the capro-audio-lactative, the ovo- (or assino-) audio-lactative, and other ‘may-be-sub-divideds.’ A book’s prologue²⁰⁰ is required to bring

From *Leg Over Leg* (1855)

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BUT

- There is no point in squabbling over matters of form

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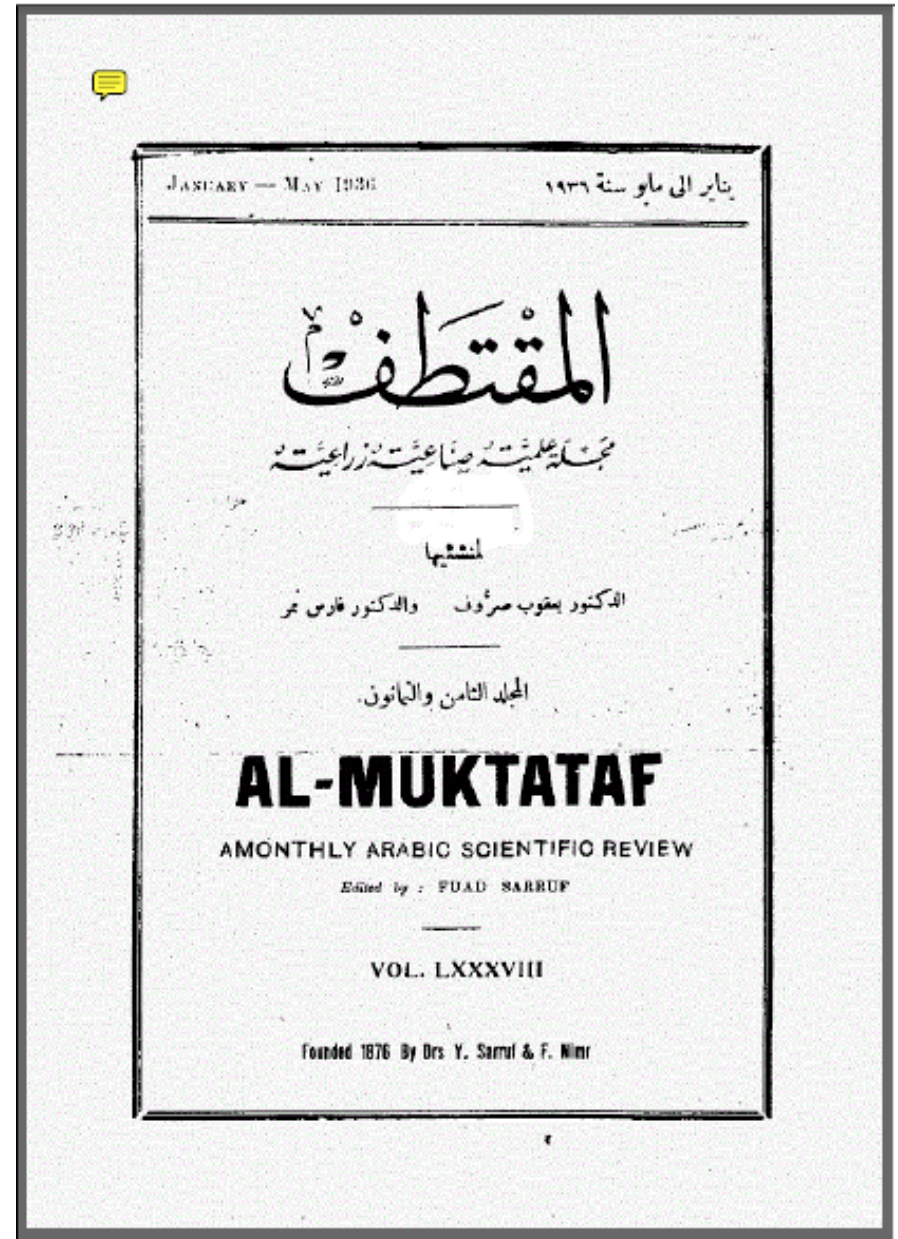
BUT

- There is no point in squabbling over matters of form

BECAUSE

- Language should be used to spread useful knowledge

Al-Shidyāq's work
predates the first
extended
discussion of
Arabic
“diglossia” (1881)

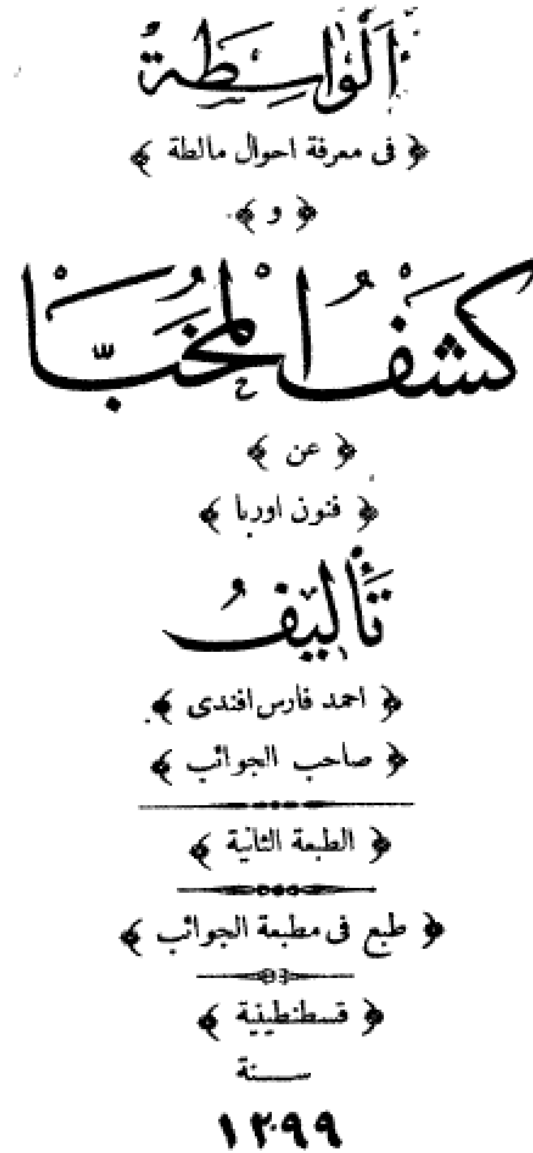




*A Middling Work,
Conveying Knowledge of
Conditions in Malta
(1863, 1881)*

Partially translated into English
by Cachia (1962-63)

Translated in its entirety into
Maltese by Cassar (1985)



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- Unusual Maltese words may be found in CA dictionaries

A Middling Work, Conveying Knowledge of Conditions in Malta

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A Middling Work, Conveying Knowledge of Conditions in Malta

- All features of Maltese verbal morphology occur in other Arabic dialects
- Sound changes in Maltese also occur in Arabic
- The survival of Maltese is a testament to the resiliency of Arabic

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- BUT
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- NOT by diverging from CA
 - NOT by borrowing from Italian and English
- BUT
- By not WRITING or PUBLISHING in their own language:

“The Maltese language has never been used to write about scientific matters, nor are any books published in it” (p. 55)

في لغتهم يعنوننا ولا يخطر لهم ببال ان لغة لم تضمن بطون الاوراق ولم تضبطها
 الاحكام النحوية لا تكفي النوع الانساني وقد تصدى مرة احد مؤلفيهم الى
 تأليف كتاب نحو فيها فكتب بعد طالعه الفابتو اللغة المألوية ثم ذكر العين
 بعد الالف فكان خلفا لان جميع اللغات التي يتبدي بهذا العنوان تكتب فيها
 الياء بعد الالف فلما وقفت على ذلك كتبت له
 * يا قائل الفابتو وبعدها الف عين * ان كان ذا البدء مينا فكل ذا النحومين *

“It has never occurred to them that, in order to meet the needs of the human race, a language must be written down in books and made subject to grammatical rules” (p. 60)

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- Al-Shidyāq's ideas about Arabic seem to have developed as a result of the fourteen years he spent in Malta
- In Malta he found a language that, to him, was just as much a form of Arabic as Syrian or Egyptian. He calls this language corrupt, but he also acknowledges that it is useless to expect people to speak any differently than they do.
- What the Maltese have done wrong is to neglect their language: they do not use it for literary or scientific purposes, and they do not publish books in it

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- Arabic is also corrupt, but not because the spoken forms are intrinsically wrong. Rather, writers care more about rhetorical embellishment than about conveying useful knowledge
- For both languages, the cure is the same: print books, make rules, and teach readers to understand and express complex ideas in their own words

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“At one point, one of their authors undertook to write a book of grammar, with the subtitle *The Maltese Alphabet*. But then after *alif* he put *ghajn*, which is absurd, since all languages that have *alif* follow it with *ba*. When I noticed this, I wrote to him:

You who say ‘Alphabet,’ and put *ghajn* after *alif*:
 If you start with a lie than all your work is false!”

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