

# SOME LANDMARKS OF ARAB ACHIEVEMENT IN THE FIELD OF LITERARY CRITICISM

By

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## INTRODUCTION

In this general survey of Arab achievement in Literary Criticism, the term "Arab" is used in a wide sense to include all the Arabic-speaking peoples, and the writers who used Arabic as their cultural medium, regardless of their racial origins.

Literary criticism is also broadly used to cover the whole field of literary appreciation, analysis, judgment and comparison both on the practical and the theoretical sides. In this broad sense, *Balaghia* - which concerns itself with the study of the figures of speech and the stylistic aspects of literature in general - may be included under literary criticism, at least during the golden era of the early centuries of Hijra, although the relation between the two fields is a matter for controversy.

The period covered by our treatment is likewise a fairly long one. It extends from the 7th century A.D. to the present time, and it corresponds to the Islamic era in the history of the Arabs. For although the Arabs achieved a high measure of perfection in their poetry two centuries before Islam, they did not reach the maturer stage of theorising about literature and its excellence until their minds were stirred and stimulated by the call of the new religion - which originated in their midst - to seek knowledge and to partake in the discovery of the secrets of the universe. The fact that the miraculous sign of the religion of Islam came in the form of a "Clear Arabic Book" was destined to play an important role in the life of the Arabic language and literature, and consequently in the enrichment of Arabic literary criticism.

From early times, the Arabs were noted for their literary excellence. Poetry and oratory were their chosen forms of artistic expression. As early as the second half of the 6th century A.D., when Arabic poetry was at its flowering period some rudimentary forms of practical criticism could be observed and had been preserved by narrators, and later recorded