

Brazil: How the Orient Shaped the Portuguese Language

Contributed by Marina Sarruf
Friday, 07 October 2005

A Lebanese descendant, and the current secretary of Culture of the city of São Paulo, Carlos Augusto Calil, will release next Tuesday, October 11, the republication of the book *Oriental Influences on the Portuguese Language*, by Miguel Nimer, first published in 1943. The author, son of Lebanese immigrants and Calil's uncle, was a great student of oriental languages such as Arabic, Aramaic, Persian and Turkish.

"I believe the book will help in the effort of strengthening cultural bonds between Brazil and the Arab countries," stated Calil. According to him, the first edition of the book was homemade. As it was restricted to São Paulo, few people had access to it.

In this second edition, the secretary believes the book may have repercussion even in Portugal. "The book's novelty is the originality of the study of the influences of the oriental languages in general, not only one," he added.

With over 700 entries, the book brings, as well as the linguistic influences brought by the expansion of Arab civilization to the Portuguese vocabulary, a historical and social panorama of Arabic words. Nimer explains, for example, the phonetic transcription of each entry.

According to the Arabic and Arab literature professor Mamed Mustafa Jarouche, of the University of São Paulo (USP), the book is of great historical importance.

"There are few people dedicating themselves to the study of Arabic in Brazil. The book is an excellent starting point," he said.

To him, the work has a very good repertoire and will serve as a reference for researchers, scholars and those interested in improving their knowledge of the language. "It is an important book, which is going to help provide a service to academics," he completed.

Jarouche, who already knew the first edition of *"Oriental Influences on the Portuguese Language,"* stated that 95% of the entries in the book are of Arab origin, a fact that reflects the strong influence on Portuguese. "This is due to the long life of the Arabs in the Iberian peninsula," he said.

The republication of the book, coordinated by Calil, took four years to be completed. The secretary, who does not speak Arabic, counted on the help of an Arabic language and literature professor at USP, Safa Jubran, to revise the entries.

According to him, the idea behind the reediting was also connected to the sentimental value that it had to his uncle, who died in 1974. "Miguel's plan was to write five volumes," he said.

According to Calil, the second edition of the book, which started being published in June this year, is having good repercussion. "It is a rare book. The book deserves it," he explained.

According to the secretary, it was necessary to reassemble the first edition. Apart from an errata, Calil also had to eliminate part of the letters about the book, which had been added to the end of the first publication.

The official release of the book will be during the visit of the Spanish professor and linguist specialized in Arabic, Federico Corriente Córdoba, from the University of Saragoza, to São Paulo. With the support of the Arab Culture Institute, he will give a talk at the Cervantes Institute about the influence of the Arabs on the Iberian Peninsula and in Iberian America.

Córdoba will also give a talk at USP on Tuesday morning, October 11, at the College of Letters. The theme covered by the professor will be 'The kharjah: witnesses of bilingual medieval dialectal poetry (Arab-romance) on the Iberian Peninsula'.

Service

Release of book *Oriental Influences on the Portuguese Language*

Date: October 11

Location: Cervantes Institute Auditorium

Address: Avenida Paulista, 2439

Time: 6 pm

Talk by professor Federico Corriente Córdoba

Date: October 11

Location: Room 261 at the Letters building at USP

Time: 10 am

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