
Building Bridges Between Brazil and Arab World Through Portuguese

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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During the Revolution of the Malês, in 1835, in the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia, the African slaves who fought against the Brazilian government spoke Arabic. Muslim, they stood out among the others as they could write. This is so true that books and notes in Arabic found on them were considered proof for them to be arrested.

This was one of the times in history in which Arabic and Portuguese met. Both languages also met during the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, by the Arabs. These moments and others will be the subject of a talk that professor and writer João Baptista de Medeiros Vargens is going to give on August 9th at the Arab-Syrian Cultural Center.

At the opportunity, João Baptista, who lives in Rio de Janeiro, is also going to release the book *Português para Falantes de Árabe* (Portuguese for Arabic Speakers), which focuses on themes of Arab-Brazilian culture, in São Paulo. The book, published by his publishing house, Almadena, will be released during an autograph session.

While teaching Portuguese to Arabic speakers, the book teaches Brazilian culture. It was released in Rio de Janeiro in April. Apart from Vargens, the book was co-authored by Geni Harb, Suely Ferreira Lima, Bianca Graziela da Silva and Heloisa Ellery, all professors at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Vargens is retired from UFRJ.

The talk to be given by Vargens, like the autograph session, is called "The part of language in cultural interaction between Brazil and the Arab world". It will be, according to the author, a historic rescue of relations between Brazil and Portugal through Arabic.

Vargens is going to discuss the moments in which both peoples had contact with the other language. In this area will be from the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Moors, the presence of Muslims in the expedition by Pedro Álvares Cabral, which discovered Brazil, the Revolution of the Malês, mentioned above, and the trips by Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro II, in the 19th Century, to the Arab countries.

"Dom Pedro II studied Arabic. He had Arabic lessons at his house, in Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro," said Vargens. Books in Arabic are part of the Teresa Cristina Maria collection, donated by the emperor to the institution.

The ease for arrival of the first Arab immigrants to Brazil, according to Vargens, was granted by the emperor himself. Immigration, incidentally, is another form of contact between Brazil and Arabic.

"At the moment in which civilizations meet, not only habits and culture are transferred, words are too," stated the professor, recalling the Arabic origin of Portuguese words and vice versa.

Publishing house Almádena was created by Vargens at the end of last year with the proposal of specializing in Arab-Brazilian culture. The first book, "Portuguese for Arabic Speakers", is the fruit of the group's research and experience with the language.

Vargens himself has already studied and taught in Arab countries and the method taught in the book is used in the Portuguese course at the University of Damascus, in Syria.

Service

Release and autograph session of book Português para Falantes de Árabe and talk "The part of language in cultural interaction between Brazil and the Arab world"

Date: August 9th, Thursday, at 8:30 pm

Site: Arab-Syrian Cultural Center.

Address: Rua Augusta, 1053, São Paulo

Further information and confirmation of presence: (+55 11) 3536-6358

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