

Brazilians Interest in Arabic Brings Old Book Back to Life

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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The Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce is relaunching the book "Elementary lessons in Arabic for non-speakers" (Lições elementares da língua árabe para os que não a falam), a basic manual of the language written by the Foreign Relations vice president at the organization, Professor Helmi Nasr.

Egyptian-born, Brazilian-naturalized, he was the founder of the Arabic course at the University of São Paulo (USP) and has lived in Brazil for 46 years.

"The book is meant for everyday life situations. For those who are going to travel, for instance, it contains the words required in order to maintain a conversation, greet someone, buy or sell something," said Nasr. The work was presented to journalists during a press conference, July 8, at the Arab Brazilian Chamber. "Later on I will give you all a test," the Professor joked with the journalists.

The president of the organization, Antonio Sarkis Jr., stated that the official launch should take place in the next few days.

The manual contains words and expressions in Portuguese, along with their translations into Arabic, in the Arabic and international phonetic alphabets. The book includes two CDs with the same words spoken in Portuguese by news reporter Cid Moreira, from the Rede Globo television network, and in Arabic by Nasr himself. The aim is to show readers the correct pronunciation.

According to the Professor, the first edition of the work was launched approximately 30 years ago, when the president at the Arab Brazilian Chamber was Walid Yazigi. "We were returning from a trip to Saudi Arabia and he [Yazigi] came up with the idea of us doing something so that Brazilians could have notions of Arabic," stated Nasr.

In order to write the book, he used the same technique that he applied to his students in the classroom. "What is new is the fact that now, instead of cassettes, the book comes with CDs," said the Professor. The original audio was recovered, remastered and converted into digital format.

According to Nasr, expansion of trade relations between Brazil and the Arab countries also led to an increase in the number of people interested in learning a little more about the language, and this demand reached the Arab Brazilian Chamber. "That was when we decided to reissue the book," he asserted.

This is only one of the Professor's works. He has already translated the Koran directly from Arabic into Portuguese. It has been in print since 2005 at the King Fahd Complex, in Medina, Saudi Arabia. He has also launched an Arabic-

Portuguese dictionary and translated "New World in the Tropics," a book by Gilberto Freyre, into Arabic.

His work led the World Muslim League to invite him to be part of the executive board at the International Meeting of Muslim Scholars and Thinkers, a gathering of Muslim thinkers from all over the world to discuss Islamic society. Nasr is the first representative from Latin America.

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