

who was to assist me in procuring the chief materials for the composition of my work. For it was only by his means that I could reasonably hope to obtain the use of manuscripts in the libraries of mosques; that is, by his borrowing those manuscripts as though for his own use: and one of the librarians showed himself to be desirous of urging any pretext in order to refuse the loan of the work that I most needed. I therefore made my place of residence to be as far as I could from the quarters frequented by Franks, and conformed with such of the general usages of the Muslims as did not involve a profession of their religion. But my precautions did not suffice to secure me from every difficulty. Even the Viceroy, Moḥammad 'Alee Páshá, though almost an absolute prince, could not enable me to overcome them. Hearing of my project, I know not how, he spontaneously informed me, by his Prime Minister, that he was desirous of showing his respect for my Patron by rendering me any assistance within his power. I replied that his Highness would very greatly aid me by granting me authority to demand the loan of certain manuscripts in the libraries of mosques. But it was feared that the wardens of the mosques would in this case urge the necessity of an order from the Sultán, or abstract considerable portions from those manuscripts and so defeat my plan. I could therefore only endeavour to obtain, according to the usual custom, through the sheykh my assistant, a small portion at a time of each of the required manuscripts: and even this I was unable to do until after the lapse of some weeks. In the mean time, however, I had the good fortune to acquire a large folio-volume, consisting of nearly the whole of the first tenth portion, of a copy of the great work to which I have alluded before as comprising in about one seventh part of its contents the whole of the celebrated Kámoos. This work, entitled "Táj el-'Aroos" (تاج العروس), a compilation from the best and most copious Arabic lexicons, in the form of a running commentary on the Kámoos, with necessary critical and other illustrations, original, and selected from various authors of high repute, fully justified my expectation. I found, from the portion before me, that it would of itself alone suffice to supply the means of composing an Arabic lexicon far more accurate and perspicuous, and incomparably more copious, than any hitherto published in Europe. But I should not have been satisfied with making use of it for such a purpose without being able to refer to several of the most important of the works from which it was compiled.

Of these works, and others particularly deserving of notice, as well as of the Táj el-'Aroos itself, and of the principles of Arabic lexicology, I must now endeavour to give a brief account. In doing this, I shall frequently have occasion to cite the "Muzhir" of Es-Suyooṭee, a compilation of the utmost value to students in general, and more especially to lexicographers, of the Arabic language. Its author died in the year of the Flight 911, a date to be borne in mind in perusing my extracts from it. I possess a most excellent copy of it, (written by a learned man, the sheykh Naṣr El-Hooreenee, with the exception of a portion which, while he was suffering from an attack of ophthalmia, was written for him by one of his disciples,) transcribed from the best that is known to exist in Cairo, (namely, that of Es-Sej'á'ee, in the library of the great mosque El-Azhar,) and enriched with copious marginal notes.

What is called the classical language of Arabia, often termed by the Arabs "the language of Ma'add," and "the language of Muḍar," is a compound of many sister-dialects, very little differing among themselves, which were spoken throughout nearly the whole of the Peninsula before the religion of Moḥammad incited the nation to spread its conquering armies over foreign countries. Before that period, feuds among the tribes, throughout the whole extent of their territory, had prevented the blending of their dialects into one uniform language; but this effect of disunion was counteracted in a great measure by the institution of the sacred months, in which all acts of hostility were most strictly interdicted, and by the annual pilgrimage, which had obtained from time immemorial, and the yearly fair held at 'Okádh, at which the poets of various tribes, during a period of about a century before the birth of Moḥammad, or perhaps during a somewhat longer period, contended for the meed of general admiration.*

* Respecting this fair, see some extracts from the first of M. Fresnel's "Lettres sur l'Histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme" in Note 18 to the first chapter of my Translation of the Thousand and One Nights.