

TRANSMISSION OF TEXTS: FROM GREEK AND ROMAN THROUGH ARABIC  
FOR THE NEH INSTITUTE JULY 7, 2002-AUGUST 2, 2002 at the UNIVERSITY OF  
MICHIGAN UNDER THE ARAB WORLD BY BARBARA BUEHNER

We of the western world claim to have taken our heritage from the classical venue of Greece and Rome. But if Rome succumbed to the barbarians in approximately 476BC, how did the literature, language and culture transfer so that it was available for a period before the Renaissance? The tracing of the transmission of texts and the salvation of pieces of literature is in large through a very active eight hundred years of accomplishments by the Arabians who during the time line between roughly 500BC and 1300BC transferred, translated and salvaged the classical works. The Dark Ages as it is termed for the Classics was the brilliant advancement of the Arab scholars. Islam was at its peak and it helped bridge the gap in the blind spot in history which was necessary for later knowledge. Ironically the early Arabs knew much of art and philosophy that they learned from the Greeks, Jews, Romans, Iranians, Indians and Chinese. The Muslims later repaid the cultures by synthesizing literature and transmitted knowledge to the new culture.

The Arabs were particularly interested in architecture (especially in the creation of the Islamic design and the use in creation of mosque and minarets.) Arabesque was a product of many people since the Arabs melded them and came up with a well- respected art form which may be considered cosmopolitan. Geometric patterns were a specialty. Folktales were a rich source of commentary of myth and humanity. Aladdin, Sin bad, Ali Baba and the Arabian Nights are memorable today. Islam's sacred language is Arabic so Arabic letters (taken originally from Persian) are ornate and the calligraphy performed is truly a striking art form along with the illumination that was added later. The only true Quran must be written in Arabic. Astronomy, math and chemistry and alchemy along with optics and surgery in the medical field were important. Verses were very popular and were brought forth in Omar Kayyam's Rubiat. The concept of zero was developed and Roman numerals were changed to Arabic numbers that were taken from Indian numbers. Paper was obtained from the Chinese. The translation center in Baghdad, known as Bait al-Hikma, the House of Wisdom, was established at which the outstanding Hunain ibn Ishaq is said to have translated one hundred books by Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates and other physicians. Later Hunain's own authoritative Introduction to Medicine was translated into Latin and remained a popular manual of instruction for six hundred years.

The main center of Latin translations from Arabic was in Toledo, reconquered from the Arabs in 1085 and for two hundred years a center in which Latin, Greek and Arabic were all in use. Visitors and merchants had surrendered their volumes to create an Andalusian wonderland of treasured texts. The works of many of the most prominent thinkers and practitioners of al-Andalus, along with writings from the eastern Muslim world, were translated from Arabic into Latin by Spaniards. Through these translations, philosophical and scientific thought from the Greek and Roman worlds, preserved and expanded upon by Muslim scholars, passed into European consciousness to fuel both the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment. Another center was Sicily, where Norman

kings gathered a brilliant, multilingual court, which at the Bodelian, was represented by a translation of a manuscript made for the Emperor Frederick II.

Rediscovering and elaborating were strengths of the Arab scholars who were the custodians of learning of the ancient world. Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Hippocrates, Galen were carefully saved since Arabs felt the value of science, math and medicine. In the tenth and eleventh centuries Baghdad, Cairo and Cordoba were pronounced in their production. Universal learning became the source of the word university. The chair as used at many schools came from the posture a teacher would take while his students gathered around him in a learning position. Flowing graduation robes stem back to the looks of the Arabs. The Arabs were the torchbearers of rule and knowledge for eight hundred years. In 732BC Muslims went to Poitiers in France but lost the battle. If they had won the war, would we speak Arabic today? Since they have so much influence today, perhaps they did win in the finality.

## PROJECT LISTING SUGGESTIONS

You may choose either a Greek or Roman person to research. If you have other choices, please check with me first before proceeding.

### GREEK

PLATO, ARISTOTLE, HIPPOCRATES, EUCLID, GALEN DEMOSTHENES,  
ARISTOPHANES, EURIPIDES, EUMENIDES, AESCHYLUS, HOMER, PHILO,  
SAPPHO, XENOPHON, PINDAR

### ROMAN

CICERO, PLAUTUS, VERGIL, HORACE, SENECA, CAESAR, MARCUS  
AURELIUS, LIVY, TACITUS, TERRENCE, CATULLUS, QUINTILLIAN, OVID,  
TERRENCE, PETRONIUS, SUETONIUS, PLINY THE ELDER AND YOUNGER,  
APULEIUS, VARRO, JUVENAL, FRONTINUS, MARTIAL, SALLUST, STATIUS,  
LUCAN, GELLIUS

## LESSON PLANS FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF TEXTS RESEARCH AND ORAL PRESENTATION PROJECT

WHO: Latin Classes I, II, III, IV, and V Grades 9-12

GOAL: To teach a five-day unit on the importance of Arabic transmission of texts which preserved the Classics through the Dark Ages.

### OBJECTIVES:

1. To have students trace a Greek or Roman writer through the Middle Ages to discover the importance of the House of Wisdom and other Arabic translating centers which existed.
2. Students will do research in the library and on the computer and may use Xeroxed materials which pertain to the author. (A minimum of three sources is required. More is preferred.) There must be at least one computer source and one textual source included.
3. An oral presentation of five to seven minutes will be given from their research.
4. A discussion afterwards will show commonalities to the findings.

MATERIALS: Viewing of the video entitled "The Torchbearers."

Topics to be researched.

Use of library and computer sources.

Resource list and examples of materials

### DAILY PLANS:

Day 1 Background lecture; view the video on "The Torchbearers."

Day 2 Research in library (computer available as well.)

Day 3 Research in the computer lab.

Day 4 Interdiscussion in groups of discoveries.

Day 5 Presentation of topics and wrap up.

## RESOURCES FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF TEXTS

### VIDEOS

Medieval Conflict  
The Day the Universe Changed  
The Light Above  
The Torchbearers

### WEBSITES

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN & NORTH  
AFRICAN STUDIES  
[www.umich.edu/~iinet/cmenas/](http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/cmenas/)  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MIDDLE EAST NETWORK INFORMATION CENTER  
<http://menic.utexas.edu/menic.html>  
MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE  
[www.ari.net/mei/](http://www.ari.net/mei/)  
MUSLIM PHILOSOPHY  
[www.muslimphilosophy.com](http://www.muslimphilosophy.com)

### TEXTS AND ARTICLES

American Council of Learned Societies – Dictionary of the Middle Ages Volumes 1 & 3.

Aramco World May-June 1992

Aramco World January-February 1993

Black, D. Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric & Poetics.

Bowersock, G. Hellenism in Late Antiquity

Council on Islamic Education

Encyclopedia Britannica; "Antiquity and the Middle Ages."

Encyclopedia of Islam

Fakhry, M. A History of Islamic Philosophy

Fakhry, M. Ethical Theories in Islam

Fakhry, M. Ibn Rushd

Islamic Occasionalism and Its Critique

Grafton, A. Commerce with the Classics.

Grant, E. The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages

Gutas, Dimitri Abicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition  
Gutas, D. Greek Thought, Arabic Culture  
Gutas, D. Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation

Hourani, A. A History of the Arab Peoples

In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and Their Makers

Lindberg, D. Science in the Middle Ages

Martinus, P. Chronicles of Rome

Mc Auliffe, J. Quranic Christians

New Catholic Encyclopedia – Volume 8

O'Leary, D. Arabic Thought and Its Place in History

Reynolds, L. & Wilson, N. Scribes and Scholars A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Scribes et Manuscrits du Moyen-Orient

Scribes, Scripts and Readers

Shabbas, Audrey. A Medieval Banquet in the Alhambra Palace

Tracy, W. "Islam" Aramco World 1996

Waddy, C. "The Bodelian Tribute" Aramco World 1996

Walzer, R. Galen on Jews and Christians

Walzer, R. Galen on Medical Experience

Walzer, R. Greek into Arabic; Essays on Islamic Philosophy

West, M. Studies in the Text & Transmission of the Iliad