

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Issue No. 45 Texas

July 15th, 2005

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Welcome

I have been trying to get the newsletter completed and sent out while at the same time preparing for an intensive summer school class. I was fortunate to find the article on page 2. It is a reminder of Who we represent in the world. The author, Alex Awad, is pastor of East Jerusalem Baptist Church and Dean of Students at Bethlehem Bible College. Alex's book, "Through the Eyes of the Victims" is available online (at <http://alexawad.org/about.php> click **Free Book**). I have split the article into two parts, and you can find the second in e-News 46, at the end of this month.

Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

Middle-Eastern Alphabets

The first civilizations developed in Mesopotamia, so it is not surprising that the first written words also developed there. As a result of the people's arrogance at the Tower of Babel the dispersion of languages also brought about the dispersion of peoples. In all directions of the compass people traveled, taking their own language with them, and eventually developing their own systems of writing.

Let us first consider some different possibilities:

Direction – L - R, R - L, Top to Bottom, or Bottom to Top.

Symbolism - *symbols* representing words (*cuneiform*)
- *pictures* representing words (*hieroglyphics*)
- *symbols* representing sounds (*alphabet*)

In the Middle East we are familiar with writing that progresses from right to left (*Arabic, Hebrew*) as well as from left to right (*English, Cyrillic, Greek, etc.*) and elsewhere there are languages that are written vertically (*Chinese*). The symbols used in written communication arise from the language used, but there is no real reason why any language in its writing could not use any of the three methods given above.

The earliest cuneiform texts are found in Sumeria and date from before 3000BC. They are actually wedge-like strokes (Latin - *cuneus*, "wedge") made with a tool called a stylus. It originated in the Sumerian language and was also adapted for the Akkadian language, from which the Babylonian and Assyrian (*Asshuric*) developed. Many other languages could be, and were also written in a system of cuneiform. One such system was Ugaritic, a Semitic language originating in Syria. Early cuneiform was in the form of *pictographs* (as is hieroglyphics) but in the soft clay straight lines were much simpler, and they began to dominate.

In the Sumerian language words are primarily single-syllable. In cuneiform, then, each word could also be read as a sound (syllable). The 600 signs of cuneiform could be either complete words or syllables, and about half of them had both meanings.

Hieroglyphics originated in ancient Egypt, but this written method was not as effective for cross-cultural communication, and as the Egyptian empire crumbled and was forgotten, so was the language. Hieroglyphs (Greek - "sacred carvings") were used by the Hittites (eastern Anatolia), Cretans and Mayans (central America). The pictures that were used to represent objects could also represent syllables - the symbol for SUN could also have been used for DAY, or even SON (or an equivalent in the Egyptian language).



The Tel El Amarna tablets were discovered in Egypt, south of Memphis. They were written in Babylonian cuneiform. Some of them recount the troubles that provincial governors faced as the Israelites moved into the Promised land after the Exodus.
"Let my Lord the king, the sun in heaven, take heed unto his land, for the Khabiri are mighty against us; and let the king, my lord, stretch out his hand unto me and let him deliver me from their hands, so that they may not make an end of us."

Next Issue: The Rosetta Stone

Learning to Live with Muslims

The high-spirited televangelist stands before thousands of his fans. He knows what words will get a thunderous applause from the crowd that has packed the stadium. Beside him stands an Israeli official he is trying to impress as well. With high evangelistic fervor, he launches a verbal attack on Islam and the founder of the Islamic faith. Then he concludes with the highest praise for the State of Israel. He feels good about his rhetoric; so do his guest and his fired-up audience. However, in this age of advanced communications, the televangelist's remarks also reach the homes of the many Muslims who live with us on this planet, and it should be noted that they do not feel good about the messages they are getting. In fact, most Muslims in Indonesia, Palestine, London and the United States, to name a few countries, are wondering why Evangelical Christians in America so zealously bash Islam. This question should concern us as well.

After Sept. 11, 2001, a wave of anti-Muslim feeling took over much of America and spread like wildfire in Evangelical circles. Some officials publicly insult Islam and its founder, while others attack the Quran and those who follow in its path.

Christians in general and Evangelicals in particular should think about where this crusade may lead us and what impact it will have on Christian-Muslim relationships around the world.

Evangelicals should also consider carefully whether their public rhetoric against Muslims advances or hinders the cause of Christ throughout the Muslim world. Furthermore, Christians might also consider taking a fresh look at the history of Muslim-Christian interactions in the last 15 centuries before taking a position in the current anti-Muslim war of words.

Crusaders: During the Middle Ages, Pope Urban II campaigned to unite the various competing armies of Christian Europe in a crusade to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims. The Pope blessed the crusades, and the brave fighters of Europe joined to fight what they perceived to be the enemies of God. The church sanctioned the killing of Muslims and other so-called infidels and heretics. Muslim men, women and children were butchered in great numbers. The Crusaders also killed many Jews and great numbers of non-Latin Christians. But the sword also turned against the invading armies, and most of the crusaders never returned to see their homelands. They killed and were slaughtered in the name of Christ; they thought that they were fighting for Christ and his church. After 190 years of unspeakable bloodshed, the Crusades failed when Muslims recaptured Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land. However, the Crusades created wounds in Muslim-Christian relations yet to be healed.

Today's rhetoric of hate against Islam clears the path for tomorrow's wars against Islamic nations. When our preachers, teachers, televangelists and politicians condition us to hate Muslims, they prepare us to kill Muslims or to watch their slaughter without having feelings of pity, guilt or remorse.

American Christians need to learn what Middle Eastern and European Christians learned centuries ago: Live in peace with your Muslim neighbors, and they will live in peace with you; oppress them and they will fight back.

(To be continued in the next issue.)

History of Islam

War Verses

Depending upon how one counts, it has been noted that there are at least 109 war verses in the Qur'an¹. (Some analysts list as many as 164). Some examples follow:

4:74 Let those then fight on the path of God, who barter this present life for that which is to come; for whoever fighteth on God's path, whether he be slain or conquer, we will in the end give him a great reward.

9:111 Verily, of the faithful hath God bought their persons and their substance, on condition of Paradise for them in return: on the path of God shall they fight, and slay, and be slain...

9:123 Believers! wage war against such of the infidels as are your neighbors, and let them find you rigorous: and know that your God is with those who fear him.

48:29 Muhammad is the Apostle of God; and his comrades are vehement against the infidels, but full of tenderness among themselves.

66:9 O Prophet! make war on the infidels and hypocrites, and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their abode! and wretched the passage to it!

4:101 And when ye go forth to war in the land, it shall be no crime in you to cut short your prayers, if ye fear lest the infidels come upon you; Verily, the infidels are your undoubted enemies.

5:190-193 And fight for the cause of God against those who fight against you: but commit not the injustice of attacking them first: God loveth not such injustice.

And kill them wherever ye shall find them, and eject them from whatever place they have ejected you; for civil discord is worse than carnage: ye attack them not at the sacred Mosque, unless they attack you therein: but if they attack you, slay them. Such is the reward of the infidels.

But if they desist, then verily God is Gracious, Merciful.

Fight therefore against them until there be no more civil discord, and the only worship be that of God: but if they desist, then let there be no hostility, save against the wicked.

¹. Don Richardson. Secrets of the Koran. Regal, 2003.

The Red Sea

SINCE THE SUEZ CANAL was completed in 1869 the Red Sea has been a major trade route between Europe and the Indian Ocean. The canal allows ocean-going ships to pass from Port Said on the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Suez at the tip of the Red Sea. It was under foreign ownership until nationalized by Nasser in 1956.

THE UPPER PART of the Red Sea splits into two arms, each gulf being named after the towns at the tip. The Gulf of Suez sees a large amount of sea traffic, whereas the Gulf of Aqaba is much quieter. It was the closing of the Straits of Tirana by Egypt in 1967 that precipitated the 6-Day War, since this would have prevented cargo reaching the Israeli port of Eilat. Between the gulfs of Aqaba and Suez is the Sinai Peninsula. Since the 4th Century tradition has identified this as the location of the mountain where God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses.

AT THE tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, between the towns of Eilat and Aqaba, the ruins of Solomon's port of Ezion Geber have been excavated by archaeologists. Since they lie on the Israeli/Jordanian border they are not currently accessible to tourists.

THE AREA of Saudi Arabia to the east of the Red Sea is known as the Hejaz. The sea port of Jeddah is active as a staging point for pilgrims en route to Mecca, which is not far inland. From the map it can be seen that the Mecca and Medina are a good distance from each other. What the map cannot show is how difficult travel through these mountains is. The Hejaz Railway, built by the Turks in 1910 reached as far as Medina, via Ma'an, Tabuk and Tema, but the planned extension to Mecca was never completed. Tema is the name of one of the Arab tribes mentioned in the Bible.

THE TOWN of Mukha (Mocha) was a key city of the early coffee trade. *Café Arabica* reminds us of the Arabian origins of coffee as a beverage.



