

the older Arabic lexicons and other lexicological works by instances of the necessity of appeals to contemporary Arabs of the desert, respecting points of grammar, by learned men whose parents lived in the first century of the Flight. The celebrated lexicologist El-Aṣma'ee, who was born in the year of the Flight 123, and lived to the age of 92 or 93, was not a sound grammarian. (See De Sacy's "Anthol. Gr. Ar." p. 49 of the Arabic text.) And even Seebaweyh, who was contemporary, during the whole of his comparatively short life, with El-Aṣma'ee, appears to have erred in grammar. (See p. 133 of the present work.) Ibn-Seedeḥ says, in the "Moḥkam," in art. سِرَاط, (voce سِرَاطُ,) that El-Aṣma'ee was not a grammarian: and in art. شَرِب, (voce شُرُوبُ, as pl. of شَارِبُ,) he remarks that Ibn-El-Aṣarabee (who calls شُرُوب pl. of شَرِبُ) was ignorant of grammar. In short, not a single instance is known of any one's having acquired a perfect knowledge of the grammar of the classical Arabic otherwise than by being brought up among Arabs who retained that language uncorrupted. The Khaleefeh El-Weleed (who reigned near the close of the first century of the Flight), the son of 'Abd-El-Melik, spoke so corrupt a dialect that he often could not make himself understood by the Arabs of the desert. A ridiculous instance of the mistakes occasioned by his use of the simplified language which is now current is related by Abu-l-Fidā. The rapid progress of the corruption of the language among the learned is the more remarkable when it is considered that many of these, in the first and second centuries of the Flight, were very long-lived: for in a list of the most celebrated Arabic lexicologists and grammarians, in the 48th Section of the Muzhir, the first five whose lengths of life are defined attained the following ages: 92, 74, 93, 96 or 97 or 98 or 99, and 92 or 93: the first of these (Yoonus) was born in the year 90 of the Flight; and the last, in the year 123; this being El-Aṣma'ee. This series of five is broken only by one, whose length of life is not known. In some few spots, the language of Ma'add long lingered; and it may perhaps even survive to the present day; as appears from the following curious statement in the Kāmoos (article عَدْر): "'Akād is a certain mountain, near Zebeed, [a well-known city in the western seaboard of El-Yemen,] the inhabitants of which retain the chaste language:" to which is added in the Táj el-'Aroos, that they retain this language "to the present time [the middle of the eighteenth century]: and the stranger remains not with them more than three nights, [the period prescribed by the law for the entertainment of a stranger,] by reason of [their] fear for [the corruption of] their language." But instances of the corruption of the classical Arabic are related (in the 44th Section of the Muzhir) as having occurred even in the life-time of Moḥammad.

Such being the case, it became a matter of the highest importance to the Arabs to preserve the knowledge of that speech which had thus become obsolescent, and to draw a distinct line between the classical and post-classical languages. For the former language was that of the Kur-án and of the Traditions of Moḥammad, the sources of their religious, moral, civil, criminal, and political code: and they possessed, in that language, preserved by oral tradition,—for the art of writing, in Arabia, had been almost exclusively confined to Christians and Jews,—a large collection of poetry, consisting of odes and shorter pieces, which they esteemed almost as much for its intrinsic merits as for its value in illustrating their law. Hence the vast collection of lexicons and lexicological works composed by Arabs, and by Muslims naturalized among the Arabs; which compositions, but for the rapid corruption of the language, would never have been undertaken. In the aggregate of these works, with all the strictness that is observed in legal proceedings, as will presently be shown, the utmost care and research have been employed to embody everything that could be preserved or recovered of the classical language; the result being a collection of such authority, such exactness, and such copiousness, as we do not find to have been approached in the case of any other language after its corruption or decay.

The classical language they called, by reason of its incomparable excellence, "el-loghah," or "the language:" and the line between this and the post-classical was easily drawn, on account of the almost sudden commencement, and rapid progress, of the corruption. It was decided by common consent, that no poet, nor any other person, should be taken as an absolute and unquestionable authority with respect to the words or their significations, the grammar, or the prosody, of the classical language, unless he were one who had died before the promulgation of El-Islám, or who had lived partly before and partly after that event; or, as they term it, unless he were a "Jáhilee" or a "Mukhadram," or (as some pronounce it) "Mukhadrim,"