

TRANSLATION

Speech of Professor  
**Abd Al-Sattar Al-Halwaji**

Co-Winner of King Faisal International Prize  
For Islamic Studies 1998/1418H.  
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*In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate Thanks to Allah for His Bounty*

*and Generosity*

Your Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Ibn Abd Al-Aziz,  
Your Royal Highnesses,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,

The place of Saudi Arabia in the hearts of Muslims throughout the world cannot be over-emphasized. It is the land that Allah Almighty has blessed and chosen as the land of revelation and the home of Islam's most sacred shrine, towards which all Muslims, regardless of their location, turn their faces each day.

The deep affection and respect to this country does not come from a vacuum. Fourteen centuries ago its people carried the message of Allah to the four corners of the world. Following the steps of their forefathers, the Saudis continue the plea to preserve the purity of Islam. The establishment of the King Faisal International Prize has added cultural dimensions to this pioneering spiritual role of the Kingdom. The fact that the Prize bears the name of King Faisal adds to its value for he was a dedicated Muslim and Arab leader beloved not only by his own people but also by countless Muslims and Arabs throughout the world.

By recognizing individuals who have exceptionally serviced Islam or contributed significantly to the advancement of Islamic studies, Arabic Literature, medicine and science, the King Faisal International Prize continues an Islamic tradition which the late King Faisal was keen to maintain during his life.

The King Faisal International Prize could not have attained its prestigious position among leading international Prizes within a relatively short time without the dedicated efforts of its patrons and their insistence on preserving its integrity and neutrality.

In the name of thousands of workers in the field of library science throughout the world, I would like to express appreciation and gratitude to the King Faisal International Prize for selecting *Islamic Libraries and or the Evolution of Islamic Book Craft* as the topic of this year's award in Islamic Studies. This is a far-sighted view since Islamic Studies should indeed be seen to cover all aspects of life in Islamic communities.

Islam encourages learning and honours scholars. The first words of the Holy Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and prayers be upon him, were, "Read. In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created man out of a leech-like clot, read and thy Lord is most bountiful. He Who taught (the use of the) pen taught man that he knew not."

What honour is greater than the honour of opening the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an with the word "read" and closing it with the word "write"? Islam's deep respect for knowledge was one of the reasons for the dramatic development and prosperity of libraries and bookcraft in the shadow of the Islamic religion. Throughout the history of Islamic

civilisation, books and libraries were closely linked to the mosques. Furthermore, the Islamic book was like an encyclopedia embracing all forms of knowledge at the time. Islamic libraries spread throughout the Islamic state and, according to some authorities, they embraced millions of books in all fields. Some of the libraries not only housed and organized books and made them easily available to readers, but also provided researchers with papers, pens, ink, food, and financial support. No modern library provides these unique services to its visitors.

The history of Islamic libraries and book craft was a shining spot and a landmark of the Islamic civilisation; libraries and books were indeed the means by which the Islamic state was able to advance. Within a few years, Islam was able to overcome illiteracy and transform its followers into an enlightened nation, a nation leading the lines and holding the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings in one hand and a wealth of knowledge and accomplishments in all fields -mathematics, medicine, pharmacy, chemistry, and astronomy, etc. - in the other.

This is a brief idea to show the link between Islamic studies and the topic of libraries and books during the Islamic civilisation.

In conclusion, I would like above all to thank Allah the Almighty for His guidance and bounty. May I also extend my thanks and appreciation to the King Faisal Foundation and the King Faisal International Prize Board for honouring me with the Prize. May Allah have Mercy on the late King Faisal.