

## **Gustav Lobon's Position on the Pre-Islamic Era in His Book *Arab Civilization*\***

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### **Abstract**

*After scrutinizing Gustav Lobon's book Arab Civilization, the authors found many issues that need to be addressed, especially regarding what he says about Arabs and their life in the Pre-Islamic Era. The authors find it essential to both praise this man for what he said at times and respond to him at other times. While Lobon celebrated Arabs before Islam more than many Arab writers did and offered a reading of the pre-Islamic Era that demands our respect and admiration, he failed sometimes with respect to specific issues we will highlight and explicate in the course of this paper. However, this should not discredit the man or belittle the numerous virtues he cites in favor of this era and Arabs themselves. The authors find it adequate and necessary to explicate the good points Lobon briefly makes and to respond to his inaccuracies with both reasoned and logical arguments based on common sense and tradition. Suffice it to say that Lobon positively presents Arabs during the Pre-Islamic Era, for he logically denies their being savages and offers evidence to prove that they were adequate for carrying the responsibilities of the Islamic message to the whole world.*

**Key Words:** Lobon; Arab Civilization; Cultural Criticism; the Pre-Islamic Era; Arabs; the Other; Women; Islam; Arab History

### ***I. Review of the Old Views***

Lobon reviews the views of those who came before him on the Pre-Islamic Era. He does not list specific names but lists only their views. He says: "Many deem that Arabs had no history prior to the emergence of Mohammad, and their proof is that Arabs before Mohammad were idle, nomadic tribes who left nothing memorable for humans to understand."<sup>1</sup> He then specifies one writer by listing this writer's views and then responding to him. He says: "And this opinion has been joined by some smart contemporaries, including the renowned writer of the *History of Semitic Languages* Renan who said "There is no place for Arab nations in the global politics, culture and religion of the world before the supernatural and sudden reversal through which Arabs became a powerful, creative nation whose might and fortitude did not show until after the sixth century anno Domini."<sup>2</sup>

### ***II. Logical Response Through Reason***

After he establishes this view, Lobon discusses it logically by refuting it through reason. He rejects Renan's view and holds it to be irrelevant. He argues that logic has it that no nation can emerge through history until after some graduation in reaching elegance and prominence.

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\* The current paper was originally written in Arabic. It was translated into English by the second author. *Arab Civilization*, 87. Translations into English are ours and are based on the Arabic translation. See References. <sup>1</sup> Ibid, 87. <sup>2</sup>

He says: "We hold this view to be immediately irrelevant, even if we do not know anything about the history of Arabs, for if a nation with a language and civilization can emerge at the global historical arena this necessarily happens due to a slow process of intellectual maturity since individuals, nations, and systems of thought evolve gradually. And a degree of high achievements does not become noticeable until after attaining other levels of development."<sup>3</sup>

Lobon insists on this logical reason by offering another example after he establishes the general rule, for the general rule for him is in the gradual and slow development of phenomena, so what about a nation with civilization and culture? Similarly, individuals, nations and systems of thought evolve but gradually. And then he offers a third logical explanation. He argues that it is impossible for a nation with a refined civilization to appear through the historical arena unless this civilization is the product of a long history. He says: "And when a nation with a refined civilization appears at the historical arena we say that this civilization is the product of a lengthy history."<sup>4</sup> Lobon adds to this logical reasoning by asserting that "Our ignorance of this lengthy history does not mean it did not exist. In fact, investigating and researching often make this invisible past visible for the onlooker."<sup>5</sup>

Lobon here exaggerates in his defense of the Pre-Islamic Era. It is as if he is enacting the logical rule: lack of evidence does not necessarily indicate the absence of the signified, i.e. the absence of significance or meaning. And judging things is part of their conception. Therefore, he shows how our ignorance of the Pre-Islamic Era does not necessarily mean the absence of this era.

And when he finishes providing his evidence, Lobon presents his conception of this era. The matter of this era is congruent with such evidence and its civilization is similar to that of Babylonians and Assyrians. He says: "Arab civilization before the emergence of Mohammad was not otherwise. Although it is difficult for us to say how this civilization was, archeological evidence and documents we possess prove its existence and that it was not, probably, below those of Assyrians and Babylonians and whose importance arose recently due to archeology after they were unknown."<sup>6</sup>

### ***III. Reasons for the Misbelief About The Savagery of Arabs***

Lobon entitles the first section—in the third chapter "Arabs before the Emergence of Mohammad"—"The Misbelief in the Savagery of Arabs before the Emergence of Mohammad." Such a title intrigues us to examine it closely; upon examination, the authors found the following two points:

1. Lobon names this chapter "Arabs before the Emergence of Mohammad," and in this the authors find an invitation for contemplation and reasoning. He did not name it "Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era." This, we think, is due to the fairness and objectivity of this man. To do Arabs some justice, Lobon refuses to dub them "Pre-Islamics" or call their age as the "ignorant" Pre-Islamic Era, thus avoiding embarrassment and staying on the safe side. In naming his chapter "Arabs before the Emergence of Mohammad," he appreciates the Prophet Mohammad and makes him a divider between two eras.
2. By naming the first section "The Misbelief in the Savagery of Arabs before the Emergence of Mohammad," Lobon rejects ascribing savagery to Arabs before he even gets into details. He on purpose uses the word "misbelief" (i.e. illusion) to indicate that Arabs were not savages.

Now as for the reason behind this misbelief/misconception, Lobon ascribes it to a lack of discrimination between urbanites and bedouins. He says: "People's illusion about the savagery of Arabs before the emergence of Mohammad did not grow out of historical negligence alone but also evolved because of not distinguishing between bedouins and urbanites among Arabs."<sup>7</sup>

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Ibid, 87. <sup>3</sup>

Ibid, 87. <sup>4</sup>

Ibid, 87. <sup>5</sup>

Ibid, 87-88. <sup>6</sup>

Ibid, 88. <sup>7</sup>

#### IV. Proof from Tradition

Lobon offers his proof from tradition in refuting this illusion by defining Arabs as tough people just like others and by stating that they are just essentially Arabian.<sup>8</sup> We find him distinguishing urbanite Arabs according to what the educated Arab would know. However, what can be taken against him is that he does not document the information he brings in his book. As for urbanite Arabs, they live in cities and are skillful in agriculture. He sees that it is easy for us to verify the existence of a great civilization for those urbanites among Arabs even if we do not know its details.<sup>9</sup>

Lobon gives us an important and clear picture about Arabs' knowledge of agriculture, and he refers to this quickly without elaboration. Suffice it for us to look into the Holy Quran to verify that many plants have been mentioned. And we believe that Allah (God) has sent them the Holy Quran in their language and addressed them with what they know. Mentioning plants indicates that Arabs have known and planted crops. For example, Allah says: "... is it you that make it grow, or are We the grower?"<sup>10</sup> And He also says: "By the fig and olive, and the Mount of Sinai"<sup>11</sup> and "and with fruit that they may choose"<sup>12</sup> and "olives and pomegranate similar and different."<sup>13</sup>

Arram bin Al-Asbag Al-Salami has listed a huge number of fruits and vegetables which were planted like beans, melons,<sup>14</sup> arrar, edible roots and other plants.<sup>15</sup> Arram refers to a place called "Warman": "And in Warman there are different sorts of fruitful and non-fruitful trees."<sup>16</sup> And this is no time for elaborating such kinds of fruits and vegetables, but they are documented in Arram's book which we have already cited. All of such references are important in indicating that Arabs knew agriculture and practiced it. As a result, the majority of them were settlers rather than itinerants as agriculture requires settling down in a place to attend crops.

Lobon continues to offer proof from tradition regarding the civilization of Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era, or as he called it "Before the Emergence of Mohammad." Thus, he offers two proofs from tradition:

##### 1. Mature Arts and Lofty Language

Our author finds it sufficient to briefly refer to arts and languages as if he is offering us a summary of what he reached after it becomes manifest that he is well acquainted with the language and literature of the Pre-Islamic Era. He says: "And history has never been silent regarding the ancient Arab civilization as it has been silent regarding other civilizations which modern science has recovered from the realm of mystery. And even if history has been silent regarding the Arab civilization we would have cut this doubt, nevertheless, that Arab civilization has been there for a long time before the appearance of Mohammad as evidenced by mature arts and lofty language before the appearance of Mohammad."<sup>17</sup>

The authors find it curious to elaborate on literature and language in the Pre-Islamic Era, for literature at that time was richly diverse—and it cannot appropriately be dealt with in such a hurry as it is definitely beyond the scope of such a paper.

##### 2. The Other: Commercial Ties

Gustav Lobon alludes to commercial ties existing between Arabs and other nations; he says: "... and they had commercial ties with the most civilized nations from old, and thus they were capable in less than a hundred years to establish a civilization among the most refined civilizations history has ever witnessed."<sup>18</sup>

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Ibid, 88<sup>8</sup>

Ibid, 88<sup>9</sup>

Al-Waqi'a, 64<sup>10</sup>

Fig, 1-2<sup>11</sup>

Al-Waqi'a, 20<sup>12</sup>

Al-Anam, 141<sup>13</sup>

*Asma' Jibal Tohama wa Sokkanoha*, 428:2<sup>14</sup>

Ibid, 428:2-429:2<sup>15</sup>

Ibid, 431:2<sup>16</sup>

*Arab Civilization*, 88<sup>17</sup>

Ibid, 88<sup>18</sup>

Pre-Islamic poetry has testified to the existence of such commercial ties by mentioning many nations, and since they were mentioned in poetry this means that commercial relations with Arabs evolved. The markets Arabs held at the time like Okaz, Ze al Magaz, and Ze al Meganna are but a proof of such relations.

In addition, pre-Islamic poetry has signs of a clear economic activity. For example, we find Al Murakkash al Asghar mention the market and the selling of wine as he describes the mouth of his beloved. He finds it sweeter than wine when he says:

وما قهوة صهباء كالمسك ريحها  
تطان على الناجود طوراً وتتنحُ  
سباها رجال من يهود تواعدوا  
بجبلان يدينها من السوق مُرْبِحُ  
بأطيب من فيها إذا جنت طارقاً  
من الليل بل فوها ألدّ وأنصحُ

Since such Arabic poetry loses much of its meaning when it gets translated, the authors prefer to retain the original Arabic in our text. We also find Al Shammakh mention the market and the selling of his bow and the exchange taking place between the seller and the buyer. He says:

فواقى بها أهل المواسم، فانبرى  
له ببيع يُغلي بها السّوم رائزُ  
فقال له: هل تشتريها؟ فإنها  
تباع إذا بيع التّلاذ الحرائزُ  
فقال له: بايع أخاك، ولا يكن  
لك اليوم عن بيع من الربح لاهزُ  
فقال: إزار شرعيّ، وأربعُ  
من الشّيز أو أواق تير نواجزُ  
ثمانٍ من الكوريّ ممرن كأنها  
من الحُمّر ما أذكى على النّار خابزُ  
ويردان من خالٍ وتسعون درهماً  
على ذلك مقروظ من القدّ ماعزُ  
وظلّ بناجي نفسه وأميرها  
أياي الذي يعطي بها أم يجاوزُ  
فلما شراها فاضت العين عبرةً  
وفي الصّدّر حُرّازٌ من الوجدِ حامزُ

The examiner of such verses finds the tactics of selling, buying, display, supply, and bargaining together with the terms denoting such tactics. This emphasizes the economic side of life the Arabs lived during the Pre-Islamic Era. As such, the Arabs reached a good position of civilization in economics and were dealing with other nations and thus benefited from such knowledge and experience.

Gustav Lobon insists on offering evidence about the high status of Arabs in the Pre-Islamic Era. He offers more rational evidence to be added to what he mentioned before by showing that literatures and languages do not come accidentally or superficially but show rootedness in history. He says: "In fact, literatures and languages are among the things that do not come accidentally but rather show an evidence of a long history and evolve out of the contact of one nation with other civilized nations and a copying of what such nations have of civilizations only if this nation has the potential for civilization."<sup>21</sup>

If we closely examine this text, we find that Lobon subtly refers to an issue; it is difficult to determine whether he made this reference to the beginnings of pre-Islamic poetry or its infancy by chance or intentionally.

19 جمهرة أشعار العرب (Jamharat Ashaar al Arab) : 565:2  
20 المصدر السابق (Ibid) : 832:2

This issue has kept the classicists and the modernists busy researching a big question: Has this pre-Islamic poetry we read and sing with such concise expression and rhetoric been born like this? Does it have beginnings? The mind dictates that this poetry has undergone stages until it reached this lofty, impressive status.

Therefore, Lobon deems that literatures and languages indicate a long history, a rootedness in the peninsula and the spread of their civilization through the ages, for they are not newcomers but people with a long-established history.

And then he comes with another logical piece of evidence, for he sees that those people who were able to establish a state in less than a century had a legitimate civilization. He says: "Arabs proved that they were capable of copying. It is doubtless that Arabs who were able to establish a great state in less than a decade and create a new great civilization were people of such minds that inherit cultural influences and build on a continuing culture. It was Arabs, not Red Skinned people or Australians, through whom the caliphs of Mohammad created such prospering cities which lasted for eight centuries as centers for sciences, arts, and literatures in Asia and Europe."<sup>22</sup>

Lobon finds in his book that Arabs, had they not had a long history and a continuing culture, would not have been able to establish a state. Such logical evidence is in line with the previous one the authors mentioned when we discussed the history of literature and language. It is as if Lobon wants to show that such companions who entered Islam were from the Pre-Islamic Era with all of its literature, culture and historical rootedness, which is why they were qualified to be leaders and masters, and thus were able to establish a state.

Lobon insists on the word "Arabs" and underscores it in the above quotes by way of giving them credit and distinguishing them from other nations since as a race they have such traits and virtues and differ from others like Red-Skinned people and Australians. As a result, they were able to establish a civilization and great prospering cities that endured for eight centuries and shined with arts, sciences, and knowledge in Asia and Europe.

## ***V. Aspects of Arab Civilization***

Lobon praises the status of Arab civilization before the emergence of Prophet Mohammad.<sup>23</sup> He reiterates the commercial ties Arabs had with others and mentions prosperous Arab cities, especially those in Yemen. Lobon celebrates the lofty culture Yemen cities reached by saying: "And one piece of evidence on the prosperity of Yemen cities in the old times is the vast commercial ties it had with other countries."<sup>24</sup> Then he offers logical evidence that civilization does not come to people but with commerce as commerce entails dealing with the other. He says: "And since it is difficult to find a nation in history adept at commerce but without being civilized and since the commercial ties Arabs had with others remained about two thousand years as mentioned in the Torah, we say that Arabs had a great share in human civilization and that their stores had the same importance as those of Venice during its heyday."<sup>25</sup>

Lobon shows the expanse of the commercial ties of Arabs, how they were brokers between Europeans and the East but without documenting this statement. He says: "And Arabs were the link between the old Europe and the far East."<sup>26</sup> But we do not know how accurate or true such a statement is.

And he discusses the goods Arabs used to trade with and how they were not limited to their products but included African and Asian goods. He says: "The trade of Arabs was not limited to the products of their lands but included goods they brought from Africa and India as well. Precious things like ivory, perfumes, gems, gold and valuables, etc., were among the most important things Arabs used to trade with."<sup>27</sup>

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Ibid, 88 <sup>22</sup>

Ibid, 94-97 <sup>23</sup>

Ibid, 95 <sup>24</sup>

Ibid, 95 <sup>25</sup>

Ibid, 95 <sup>26</sup>

Ibid, 95 <sup>27</sup>

Lobon goes beyond discussing commerce as a sign of Arab civilization and urbanization. He sees that Arab countries were among the richest in the world because of the existence of palaces in them and what such palaces would hold in terms of gold and silver. He cites Herodotus who described such lands about 400 years before Christ and says: "Herodotus described the merry Arab countries about 400 years before Christ as the richest in the world as there was in Ma'rab and Saba' (which was mentioned in the Torah) lush palaces with golden gates and silver and gold utensils as well as many ancient metals."<sup>28</sup>

He also quotes Estrabón who basically reiterates what Herodotus said and then cites Al Masoodi on Ma'reb.<sup>29</sup> Such signs about Arab civilization were mentioned in the Holy Quran which has one whole chapter entitled Saba' and in which Allah says: "Indeed there was for Saba' (Sheba) a sign in their dwelling place, - two gardens on the right hand and on the left (and it was said to them) 'Eat of the provision of your Lord, and be grateful to Him,' a fair land and an Oft-Forgiving Lord."<sup>30</sup>

However, what can be taken against Lobon in this context is that he refers his discussion to the Torah only. He should have made a reference to the Quran as we have just mentioned. Still, he discusses the Quran in a separate section and with a good deal of objectivity.<sup>31</sup>

Lobon finds in Arab civilization and what it reached in terms of distinguished commercial relations a clear piece of evidence that the people were capable of carrying the message of Islam to the rest of the world. And because the message of Islam is universal in its import, and not limited to certain nations as with previous religions, we found the companions of the Prophet Mohammad roam the horizons to deliver the message of Islam without feeling embarrassed or being hindered as they were used to dealing with the other from outside the Arab peninsula and benefited from other civilizations. He says: "The star of Arabs culture did not shine before the emergence of Prophet Mohammad in Yemen only since what came down from ancient history about the civilization of Al Heera and Al Gasasenah also proves the readiness of the followers of Mohammad to deliver the message of their religion to the civilized world."<sup>32</sup>

Lobon concludes after all the historical introductions he made about Arab civilization that Arabs were not savages but civilized people who emerged before the Romans. He says: "The references we have made, and which can be inadequate, remain accounts that complement ancient versions and testify to the prosperity of the remote Arab civilization and which people currently forget waiting for whoever unveils it. The references and allusions we made prevent us, with the little we know about Arab civilization, from considering Arabs savages. Those Arabs emerged to the arena of history many centuries before the Romans and established great cities and also had strong ties with the world's most civilized nations."<sup>33</sup>

## **VI. The Religions of Arabs**

Lobon mentions the religions of Arabs before Islam, including idol worship. However, he blunders when he says about the Ka'bah: "...and it had when Mohammad emerged 360 idols and pictures. And those of Christ and Mary the Virgin were among those pictures as came down in Arab chronicles."<sup>34</sup> The authors do not know where he got his information about the existence of such pictures since he does not document the Arab chronicles he mentions, which makes his account awkward and inaccurate. And then he makes another blunder in his reference to the Ka'bah when he says: "... and Ibrahim built this Ka'bah in the Arab peninsula as told by Arabs." He commits the same mistake of not documenting his sources when he says "as told by Arabs" as this fact is specifically mentioned in the Quran when Allah says: "And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) and (his son) Isma'il (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the House (the Ka'bah at Makkah), (saying), 'Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us. Verily! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower.'"<sup>35</sup>

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Ibid, 94 <sup>28</sup>

Ibid, 94-95 <sup>29</sup>

Saba', 15 <sup>30</sup>

*Arab Civilization*, 117-129 <sup>31</sup>

Ibid, 96 <sup>32</sup>

Ibid, 97 <sup>33</sup>

Ibid, 99 <sup>34</sup>

Al Bakarah, 127 <sup>35</sup>

Then Lobon discusses the seeds of monotheism in the Arab peninsula by saying: “and we found in the folds of such diverse religions the seeds of monotheism that Mohammad later made sure to develop.”<sup>36</sup> Shortly after this, he states that some Arabs were monotheists: “It was found among the Arabs, aside from the ample Christians and Jews, those who worshipped one God and who were dubbed the true believers.”<sup>37</sup>

He who keenly observes such a statement finds that Lobon is making an allusion to the fact that Islam was already paved for because some Arabs followed the monotheistic religion of Ibrahim and such people were the true believers.<sup>38</sup>

And this does not necessarily mean that Prophet Mohammad did not face obstacles and hardships as he suffered and endured but it can be inferred from those who entered Islam what came in the holy tradition of the Prophet that “the best of you in the pre-Islamic era and the best of you in Islam” and also “but I was sent to complement the best manners.” And this supports the reference he made to Arabs when he said that they were capable of carrying the message of Islam to the world as they have the qualifications for this like the ability to argue and influence the other as well as the knowledge some of them had about monotheism. Such things were among the reasons why Allah chose them to carry his message to the whole world.

Lobon discusses an important virtue in such true believers, which is belief in destiny and predestination. He says: “And the creed of belief in one God, which is one of the most important principles in Quran, is not all that the true believers have. They also said, just as the Quran later did, that man should believe in God's providence and preordained destiny just as Ibrahim did when he saw the sacrifice of his son Isaac.”<sup>39</sup>

However, Lobon commits an unfortunate generalization when he describes such true believers as people believing in God's providence and preordained destiny as his generalized view is not based on a clear, definite evidence. Moreover, these two Islamic concepts were not known in the Pre-Islamic Era. Therefore, Lobon built his judgment without adequate evidence except what he mentioned about Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son Isaac. But Arabs were not aware of it until the Quran told them about it after the prophecy of Mohammad. And when Lobon refers to the sacrifice of Isaac, he does not document this as there is a controversy among the interpreters as to the sacrificial victim being Isaac or Ishmael. As he mentioned the incident, he makes as if Isaac was surely the sacrificial victim without clear evidence, and this is a careless mistake he should have avoided.

## VII. Woman in the Pre-Islamic Era

It seems that what Lobon offers regarding the pre-Islamic woman is not accurate and in need of a pause. He says: “And men before the emergence of Mohammad considered women as in between livestock and man in their status, i.e. a tool for producing offspring and service. And they considered the birth of girls a big misfortune, which led to the spread of infanticide as an unquestioned practice as if girls were puppies thrown into water.”<sup>40</sup> Such a statement needs consideration because it poses the following issues:

1. That men consider women in a status between that of livestock and man is inaccurate. Indeed, it is a weak statement as poetry tells us otherwise. Arabs honored women and gave them beautiful descriptions. Suffice it to say that many poets commenced their poems by praising women, what the authors cannot incorporate here, and defended women and respected them. The view that women are in between livestock and man is unjust. Once again, Lobon does not document his sources. What is the source of this judgment? A consideration of the status of women in the Pre-Islamic Era tells us that she was a spouse and a respected lady. She was even consulted when it comes to marriage, just as Otba bin Rabee'a did with his daughter Hind.<sup>41</sup> Women at that time had the right to choose a husband, which is what Khadeeja did with the Prophet Mohammad in the Pre-Islamic Era.

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*Arab Civilization*, 99<sup>36</sup>

*Ibid*, 99-100<sup>37</sup>

The first author of this article has mentioned some of those in a research paper presented in a conference at Al Mina University and entitled “Attempts at Renewal in Arabic Values during the Pre-Islamic Era” 2005. See References.

*Arab Civilization*, 100<sup>39</sup>

*Ibid*, 402-403<sup>40</sup>

*Al Amali*, 104:2<sup>41</sup>

However, if Lobon means those women who were not free like maids, then that is a different case since we are concerned with free women and spouses, women with the best qualities. As for maids, they were there because of slavery that was common in their time.

2. That they considered the birth of a girl a big misfortune is basically right, but again we cannot overgeneralize it. It would be a blunder to overgeneralize because this was not always the case as we already explained. Nevertheless, some did hold this viewpoint and acted accordingly as stated by Allah in the Quran: "And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the earth? Certainly, evil is their decision."<sup>42</sup>  
Some cases of infanticide were found, but they do not rise to the status of a social phenomenon.
3. That Infanticide was common is not accurate either and in need of evidence. But the authors can say that this issue was exaggerated and put out of its context. Only few tribes practiced this habit. If Allah mentions it in His book it is not because it was widespread but because, despite the scarcity of its practitioners, it relates to man and his existence and dignity. Moreover, the pre-Islamic poetry does not document this habit except in few lines. In addition, we find that men of virtue and order like Sa'sa'a bin Najeeah al Tamimi, the grandfather of Al Ferazdaq and who was dubbed the life-giver to the infanticide victim, and Zaid bin Amr bin Nufail who was an advocate of women, rebelled against such a habit and did not approve of it.

## CODA

The authors have reviewed the most important issues Lobon presented in his book *Arab Civilization* regarding the Pre-Islamic Era. The authors have discussed his views and pinpointed his sound judgments and elaborated on them. They have also refuted inaccurate views and responded to them logically. However, "a close look at this book reveals that Lobon did justice to our Islamic civilization to a good extent. And due to his overall views about this civilization, we conclude that the writer's good intentions and fairness are clear and that his oversights and overgeneralizations should be taken with good intentions and away from charges of grudge or interpolation. Lobon started from an admiration to a civilization he did not belong to, a civilization that had a leading role in contemporary renaissance and current scientific advancement. He wanted to do justice to this civilization and show its greatness to his people so as to shatter their inherited misconceptions about it."<sup>43</sup>

Lobon is a key figure since he "admired our heritage and relics and loved Arabs and their grace in their conquests and touched their creativity in building their civilization, a civilization that was a reason behind the awakening of Europe when it got in touch with it."<sup>44</sup>

As Shawqi abu Khalil observes, in his book *On Scale: Gustav Lobon*, "a key to this man's personality is that he did not take for granted unjust oriental studies and did not like Jews. This way, he was free from the influence of their studies and views regarding our history and civilization. Therefore, his views came down as generally fair. And when he blundered or made an oversight, he did so not out of bigotry or malice or misintentions."<sup>45</sup>

Lobon's book remains a cultural text that aids us in understanding our collective human history. It is a text that demystifies some of the myths about Islam and Arabs, and hence its cultural significance to students of cultural studies, religion, and history. Due to the relative objectivity with which this text deals with Arabs and their issues in the Pre-Islamic Era, we recommend that researchers give more positive attention to this text and study Lobon as a positive Orientalist. In brief, Lobon's book *Arab Civilization* is a rich text that tackles many issues beyond the scope and limited focus of this paper. His defense of Islamic conquests and his positive talk about Arab women and Arabic language are but a case in point.

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Al Nahl, 58-59 <sup>42</sup>

*On Scale: Gustav Lobon*, 17 <sup>43</sup>

Ibid, 177 <sup>44</sup>

Ibid, 178 <sup>45</sup>

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