



Qatar National Library

Overview

Literature has always been an integral element of the Arabic world, and Qatar is no exception. For many centuries, poetry was the primary form of literature in Qatar, and still enjoys an important place in the nation's culture. However, more modern types of writing have emerged as central to Qatari literature, such as fiction, short stories, and novels.

With a 97.3% literacy rate, it is no surprise that libraries, writing centers, and publishers have become widespread institutions in the country. Qatar's literature is rooted in its ancient heritage and tradition combining the old with more modern writing styles to create something that is uniquely Qatari.

Qatar's Interest in Literature

Qatar, like many Middle Eastern nation boasts a strong history of poetry. Poetry is a part of Qatari culture; it is present at social gatherings, weddings, and even national events.

In the early days of Qatari literature, poems and stories were verbally recorded by men and women as a means to preserve local traditions and

customs. Men and women in Qatar have been equally involved in their people's literary successes; a trend that continues today.

In the 1950s, Qatar began to gain revenue off of its oil exports, and more Qataris were able to receive a higher education, allowing the literary canon to be preserved and continued through writing.

While the old was preserved, the new was able to develop. Short stories and novels began to replace poetry as the dominant form of literature. Today, Qatar aims to preserve its unique heritage of writing, while simultaneously exploring more possibilities of how they can narrate their story.

Qatari Writers

Qatar has many famous writers who offer diverse opinions on a large selection of topics, from war to women's rights.

Dr. Kaltham Jaber was the first Qatari woman to publish a significant collection of short stories in 1978. She is currently a professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Qatar University and has

published two articles relating to women's rights in the Arab world.

Another female Qatari writer is **Shu'a' Khalifa**, who, along with her sister, **Dalal Khalifa**, was one of the first two people to publish a novel in Qatar.

Shu'a' wrote "*al-Ubar ila al-haqiqa*" (*Passage to Truth*) in 1987, and "*Ahlam al-bahr al-qadima*" (*The Old Dreams of the Sea*), in 1990; both published in 1993. Her third novel, "*Fi intizaral-safira*" (*Waiting for the Whistle*), was published in 1994.

As an author, she often questions modern life in Qatar and has nostalgic descriptions of the nation's past. She wrote about the transition period in Qatar's history when profits from oil began to roll in, and modernization began.

Abdul Aziz Al Mahmoud is the author of the critically acclaimed historical novel, "*Al Qursan*" (2011), which has become one of the best-selling books ever to be written by a Qatari author. Al Mahmoud's story explores Gulf history and politics of the early 19th century in a creative and entertaining way.

“The inauguration of Qatar National Library invokes a great sense of historical pride and belonging to the Arab world, which pioneered writing, transcription, and libraries in Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago. The idea of the National Library was inspired by this glorious history, in hopes of restoring an Arab renaissance that we do not want to lose. The library was established to be a treasury of written history and a medium for the transfer of knowledge between different cultures.”

—H.H. Sheikha Moza bint Nasser

“The Qatar I lived in for eight years is unrecognizable from the television ads running in Washington. In these Saudi-sponsored spots, Trump administration officials denounce Qatar’s aid to terrorists while fires burn in the background. This is a harsh and largely unfair judgment of the peaceful, globalist city-state I knew.”

—Professor Gary Wasserman

Qatar’s writers are skilled in looking at the past, present, and future through an artistic, literary lens. They open dialogues, not only about their country’s origins but where it is going as well.

Doha International Book Fair

While the literacy rate in Qatar is already 97%, the State of Qatar wants to reach the 100% mark. The annual Doha International Book Fair was instituted with that goal in mind. As the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV2030) strives to decrease the country’s reliance on hydrocarbons and to transition to a more knowledge-based economy, the national book fair serves as a forum to foster cross-cultural dialogues and intellectual interactions.

The Doha International Book Fair, which is organized by the Ministry of Culture and Sports, is the largest international book fair in the region. Each annual edition celebrates and focuses on different topics and themes.

The theme for the 2018 Doha International Book Fair was “*Doha, A City of Knowledge and Conscience.*” 427 publishers from 30 Arab and other countries participated, and out of these, there were 287 Arabic book publishers, 68 children’s book publishers, and 17 educational book publishers.

The U.S. Embassy also participated, promoting literacy by offering “a wide selection of English-language books written by American authors [that] were on sale at affordable and reasonable prices.” The Doha International Book Fair is an essential component of QNV2030, and it will continue to improve literacy and interest in literature in the country far into the future.

The 2020 Doha International Book Fair took place from January 9th to 18th, at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC). This year’s theme was “*Do you then not contemplate,*” and was inspired by a verse from the Holy Quran. 31 countries participated in the fair’s 2020 edition, with Belgium and Australia making their inaugural fair debut. In commemoration of the 2020

France-Qatar year of culture, France was welcomed as the guest of honor at this year’s fair.

Qatar National Library

There are many public libraries in Qatar, all devoted to making knowledge and Qatari culture more accessible to everyone who lives in the country.

The nation’s premier library is the Qatar National Library, which is a cultural research and heritage library that collects, preserves, and gives access to the country’s recorded history. The Qatar National Library contains more than one million hard copy books, as well as over 500,000 ebooks, periodicals, and special collections. The library was inaugurated by H.H. Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in April 2018, where many Arab and non-Arab world leaders attended the event.

Qatar’s libraries are another step in the right direction for their transfer to a knowledge-based economy. The knowledge stored in the libraries can be accessed by all, and lead to increased cultural understanding and peace.

American Authors in Qatar

American writers who sojourned or have lived in Qatar have also contributed to Qatar’s rich literature via their published works.

Gary Wasserman, a former professor at Georgetown University’s new Foreign Service School in Doha and author of “*The Doha Experiment: Arab Kingdom, Catholic College, Jewish Teacher,*” chronicled his time as a professor of American politics in Qatar in 2017.

Mohana Rajakumar, an American award-winning author, literature scholar, and playwright wrote “*From Dunes to Dior*” - a collection of essays about her experiences while residing in Qatar. She moved to Qatar in 2005, where she met her husband and had two children. Furthermore, she authored “*Loves Comes Later,*” a literary romance story set in Qatar and London that won the 2013 Best Indie Book Romance Award.