The Golden Book

Documenting the Festival
Celebrating

Aleppo

as Capital of Islamic Culture

1427 H / 2006 AD
The Golden Book

Documenting the Festival Celebrating

Aleppo

as Capital of Islamic Culture

Supervisor:
Mr. Mohammad Kujjah

Translator:
Dr. Mohammad Maher Jissry

Revised by
Dr. Munzer Absi

First Edition: 2011
Book Supervisory Board

Dr. Riyad Na'san Agha
Minister of Culture

Dr. Eng. Tamer Al-Hujjeh
Minister of Local Administration
(Mayor of Aleppo at the time of the Festival)

Dr. Ahmad Badr Eddin Hassoun
Grand Mufti of the Republic

Eng. Ali Ahmad Mansoura
Mayor of Aleppo

Prof. Mohammad Nizar Akil
President of Aleppo University
(at the time of the Festival)
Executive Board
Prof. Dr. Ahmad Adeeb Al-Sh'aar
Dr. Eng. Baghdad Abdul Munim
Mr. Fuad Hilal
Eng. Tamim Kasmo
Dr. Mohammad Jamal Tahhan

Book Advisory Board
Dr. Ibrahim Salqeeny
Mufti of Aleppo

Prof. Dr. Ahmad Erhayem Hebbu
University of Aleppo

Paulos Yazji
Bishop of the Greek Orthodox
Archdiocese of Aleppo

Prof. Dr. Sakhr Olabi
University of Aleppo

Mr. Adel Issa
Plastic Artist

Dr. Ali Al-Qayyem
Deputy Minister of Culture

Fuad Ballat
Media Consultant

Mohammad Abu Ma’atouq
Literary Figure and Novelist

Mohammad Qadry Dalal
Musicologist

Dr. Mahmoud Akkam
Mufti of Aleppo

Nadeem Faqsh
Director of Aleppo Antiquities

Nazeeh Khoury
Director of Cultural Relations - Ministry of Culture

Waleed Ikhlasi
Novelist

Yuhanna Ibrahim
Bishop of Syriac Orthodox
Archdiocese of Aleppo

Designer
Mohammad Abu Al-Kheil

Typists
Lina Mohammad
Nour Trakji
Thuraya Qasmo

Photography
Ahmad Haffar
Anwar Abdul Ghafour
Bilal Sabouny
Jihad Hasan
Haig Orfalyan
Introduction

Alexandria, the Blessed City: the awe-inspiring history, the unique blend of cultures, the ancient city that has been both an inspiration to poets and a benchmark for modern cities. The birthplace of the vibrant capital of the Roman Empire, its story is a testament to the power and influence of the Hellenistic world. The city has been a symbol of enlightenment and sophistication, attracting scholars, artists, and adventurers from across the Mediterranean.

Alexandria, the City of Learning: the intellectual hub of the ancient world, it was home to the Great Library, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and the Museum of Alexandria, which was considered the world’s first university. It was here that the famous Pharos of Alexandria stood, a wonder of the ancient world.

Alexandria, the City of Light: the city’s history is marked by its role as a center of cultural and intellectual exchange, and its influence continued to be felt long after its fall. Today, it stands as a testament to the rich heritage of the Mediterranean world.
light of the criteria used for selecting the cities after Holy Mecca, the cultural and heritage roles came first. In this respect, Isfahan comes at the top of the list as a non-Arab city. And if we were to count the number of scholars, literary figures and researchers whose names were associated with Isfahan, they would amount to about 200 names; some of whom are well known such as Abi al-Faraj al-Asfahani - author of the book Al-Aghani (The Songs), al-Imad al-Asfahani (the historian, and a vizier in the Ayyubid state), and dozen narrators of the Prophet’s sayings (hadeeth), scholars of religion, linguistics and literature. In this respect, Baghdad excels in the number of prominent figures who were named after it and had the title «Al-Baghdadi». Aleppo comes third and is equal with Rey with regard to those who have the title «Al-Halabi» or «Al-Razi», whereas Isfahan comes second.

However, this criterion was not literally sufficient on its own. Instead, it includes the quality of the shining periods. In this regard, Aleppo comes first being characterized by its Hamadani lavish court under Saif al-Dawla about whom al-Tha’alibi says, «the scholars, literary figures, and poets who used to meet in Aleppo under Saif al-Dawla had not been seen in any other caliph’s, sultan’s, king’s or prince’s court.» Some were the pioneers in their field throughout the Islamic history, such as:

- Al-Farabi came first in philosophy and music.
- Al-Mutanabbi came first in Arabic poetry.
- Al-Sanawbari came first in the poetry of nature.
- Ibn Jimni came first in properties of language.
- Abu Firas al-Hamadani came first in the poetry of chivalry.
- Al-Khawarizmi came first in linguistics, lexicology, logic, art, and medicine.
- Abu Ali al-Farisi, Ibn Khalaweh, and Abu al-Tayyeb al-Laghawi all were pioneers in linguistics.

**Abu al-Faraj al-Ajali and his daughter Maryam** were astronomers; and Al-Raqqi was a physician and a poet. Moreover, Al-Khalidiyan counted more than 10,000 lines of verse recited about Saif al-Dawla. Also in al-Tha’alibi’s book, Yateematu Al-Dahr the history of that period was written.

Furthermore, and throughout the ages the names of many poets and literary figures - such as Al-Buhturi and his beloved Ulwa al-Halabiya and al-Ma’arri, whose mother was from the tribe of Bani Sabeeka from Aleppo - were linked to Aleppo. Al Ma’arri wrote his best production about this city, for example Risalatul Ghufran (The Treatise of Forgiveness) and Assahlil wa Shahij (The One that Neighs and the One that Brays). In the former, he says that in the imagined journey for Ali Ibn al-Qarib al-Halabi, God has chosen cooks from Aleppo to be responsible for the kitchen of Paradise.

On the other hand, the criterion of architecture was there in the minds for the choice of the would-be Capital of the Islamic Culture. In this regard, Aleppo outdoes Isfahan and other cities in the Islamic world due to conditions that are not available in any city but Aleppo. These conditions are:

- The Islamic architecture includes all the urban functions: the defence construction is symbolized by the citadel, gates, doors, towers and tunnels dug under the city. Aleppo Citadel is characterized by its being the oldest in the world, 7000 BC, according to the ancient finds which were unearthed. It is also the largest inside a city with its tight defensive moat, networks of tunnels under and around, and the historical, political, military, and cultural role that it played during its lifetime.

- The religious architecture is represented by the mosques, which were more than a thousand mosques in Greater Aleppo, and the churches, which were more than 50. Some of the mosques go back to the first century AH, for example al-Shu’aybiya Mosque in Bab Antakiya (Gate of Antioch) goes back to 16 AH, and the Great Umayyad Mosque which goes back to 98 AH. There are other mosques that cover all the Islamic periods that Aleppo had known with their various architectural styles whether Seljuk, Zengid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Ottoman or modern.

Also, in Aleppo, there are a number of Sufi takaya and zawaya (corners for religious activities) that represent the various Sufi orders such as Mawlawiya, Qadiriya, Naqshbandiya, Shatuliya, etc.

- As for the urban architecture, it includes everyday needs such as Suqs, khans, qaysariyat, hammams (public baths), bimarists