**Clarifications of the meanings of the term “literature” through the ages and its social and cultural connotations**

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**Summary**

“Literature” in its broad, holistic sense is considered an important field that has embraced various conflicting categories of knowledge, arts and sociological and intellectual practices in Arab-Islamic civilisation.

Taking the term “literature” on its own as a loose abstract framework means it encompasses quite a few inconsistencies, because of the very diverse concerns of the intellectuals, their different tendencies and the many different cultures they came from.

The connotations of the term “literature” have evolved over time as a result of changes in the living, lifestyle, social and political circumstances in the Arab countries.

One observes the emergence of an enormous number of leading thinkers who contributed to determining the shape of Arab and Islamic culture by giving guidance in the sphere of literature, including those who came from a background of religious jurisprudence, such as the jurists and scholars of the Hadith; others who came from a purely creative background, such as poets and authors and artistic prose writers; and including those who came from a background of rational theoretical philosophy such as the philosophers and intellectuals; and also those with a background of practical expertise in administration, such as Diwan clerks and counsellors.

We will discuss selected examples of such literary intellectuals, shedding light on their contribution to defining the image of “literature” through the ages, and we will discuss their motives for writing in these apparently contradictory spheres: the sphere of religious affairs versus the sphere of worldly affairs; and the sphere of the mind and thought, versus that of emotion and the poetic vision, referring to examples of their work that come under the heading of what is known as “literature.”