

August 2014

RENAISSANCE MONTHLY

Your monthly update on The Renaissance Project



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Yasmine Saqer

Dear Friends,

In this month's newsletter we celebrate the life and accomplishments of yet another inspiring female figure in Islamic history, **Al-Khansa**. We are pleased to share her story, brought to us by contributing writer **Farrah Ghanawi**.

In addition, you'll find that we address the current crisis in **Gaza** to provide readers with the necessary information to better aid and assist the Palestinian people during this difficult time.

It is our hope that the provided links encourage change in public opinion on the issue, recognize and respect the people whose lives have been lost, and inspire a call to action. We urge our readers to get the word out and share these links with family and friends!

As always, we thank you for your support.

Best,

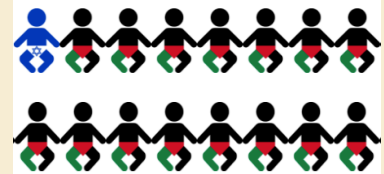
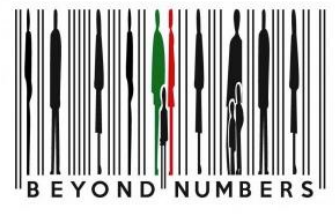
Yasmine Saqer

The Gazan Crisis and How We Can Help

In the last couple of months, the situation in **Gaza** has made countless headlines, raising questions and prompting discussions, as a serious international crisis facing the world today. **But are we really doing enough to help?**

One problem in our talks on the matter is that the Palestinian people are represented and viewed as numbers, rather than the actual people.

The following websites were created to rectify this very problem. **Beyond the Numbers**, **Humanize Palestine**, and **Count the Kids** remembers the victims of Gaza, paying tribute to their lives and to their names, and prompts the public to see past the numbers.



To stop the growth of lost lives, we have the power to discontinue aid to the Israeli forces by **boycotting** the businesses and products that support this ongoing injustice.

Our combined effort can make all the difference in the world, and all it takes is a small sacrifice. So do your part and spread the word!

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“The Poetess” – Al-Khansa

Muslim of the Month By Farrah Ghanawi

Hello to all, and I hope this edition will bring you an entertaining read. For the past year, we’ve been bombarded with the news of the devastating events that are occurring within Syria and Palestine as well as many other Arab nations. Therefore, I think a recollection of Al-Khansa the great poetess whom endured many struggles in life, is suitable to tell at this time. Many scholars describe Al-Khansa as an example to Muslim women; I however, disagree, for I think she should be an example to men as well. I therefore hope this story of strength and patience will inspire you, as it did me.

Al-Khansa born in 575 A.D, was a member of the tribe of Banu Sulaym. She was known for her renowned beauty and out-spoken boldness. Her poetry was so piercing that people would gather within the tribal council to hear her recite. Her popularity grew to the extent that she occupied a seat as a member of the delegation, a seat occupied primarily by men. Her life, therefore, was filled with much contentment, until a considerable amount of heartbreak came her way.

Al-Khansa first married 'Abd al-'Uzza, however, due to his gambling, it resulted in the dissolution of their marriage. She remarried Mirdas ibn Abi 'Amir, of whom she had four sons and a daughter. His death brought her much pain, for she constructed a deeply emotional elegy in his honour. Her recital of elegy was not common, until the death of her two brothers Mu'awiyah and Sakhr. This event, coupled with the suffering of orphaning and widowhood, marked a significant turning point for the strong willed-women.

Al-Khansa carried this pain upon her conversion to Islam in 630 A.D. Several attempts were made by the Prophet as well as the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab to ease her pain and cease her mourning, proved ineffective.

Aa'ishah, came across her one day, wearing a belt made of camel hair (as was the pre-Islamic tradition), walking on a stick with her back bent and head shaved. When she asked her about the reason for her appearance, Al-Khansa confessed that she did so due to Saqar's death. For 22 years this woman dwelled over her loved ones, but it is noteworthy that, with great struggle comes great strength.

In 636 A.D, the Muslims entered into the battle of Al-Qadisiyah. Amongst them were her four sons. On the eve of the fight, Al-Khansa addressed them and said:

‘When you wake up tomorrow morning... go and fight against your enemy with conviction and seek Allah’s help over His enemies. When you see that the war has become tense, engage yourselves in the fight gallantly and resiliently that you may attain treasures and honour in the Abode of Eternity.’

The next morning, they did so, fighting gallantly and courageously, till all four of them were martyred, one after another. As the news approached Al-Khansa swiftly, fear was that this old woman would not bear such misery. Nevertheless, her recital is most heartfelt and brave, as it marked her name down in many books to come. The poetess stated:

“AllHamdulliah to Allah who honoured me with their martyrdom. And I hope that Allah will make me join them in the Abode of His Mercy!”.

If I met Al-Khansa today, I would tell her this: ‘I envy you, for to believe this strongly in something that reality tells us otherwise, is truly a gift of strength from Allah.’ To the reader I say ‘god gives strength to the weakest of his creations’. May Allah give us half of what he bestowed on Al-Khansa, especially in times like these, a bold and patient women.