

Université Paris Sorbonne
Paris IV

To Mr. Pascal Renouard de Vallière

April 5, 2009

Dear Pascal,

Thank you for the magnificent and very useful gift you presented to me at our last meeting: “Arabie saoudite, découverte d’un royaume,” the book by Dr. Nasser Ibrahim Rashid and Dr. Ibrahim Shaheen, whose French translation you published in 1995. I learned a great deal on this country and its history, as well as on the entire Middle East, and I used it extensively for a lecture I recently gave on Rimbaud in Arabia at the Effat University, specifically at Jeddah, on a mission I participated in with the rector, Jean-Louis Boursin, President of the Sociétés des Amis des Universités de Paris.

During this trip, we were even better able to observe the great impact the Abu Dhabi-Sorbonne Foundation has in this part of the world. I was fortunate to be involved in this project thanks to the President of Paris-Sorbonne, Professor Jean-Robert Pitte, and to travel with him twice as Vice-President of the university. He told me that the idea was yours and that on the occasion of a meeting at the Sorbonne (a lecture given by Mrs. Mubarak in the Louis-Liard room), you mentioned this potential project for the first time, which has now become a reality.

I did not participate in this noble enterprise. But I will never forget my first trip to Abu Dhabi in the preparatory phase with the former President and the presidential team: you came with us, of course, and you opened doors for us, and I remember that you knew how to manage delicate issues to perfection.

I returned at the time of the signature of the official document by our then Minister for National Education, Gilles de Robien, and the inauguration ceremony, which was magnificent. Once again, you were with us and could see the triumph of the project you initiated.

I have never taught in Abu Dhabi. I only once gave a lecture on “Rimbaud and the Orient” outside of the university itself (on my third trip). I returned last January on the occasion of the “Knowing the Orient” conference at the invitation of Professor Bernard Franco, who was the main organizer. I was struck by the progress of Abu Dhabi-Sorbonne under the recent leadership of the new President of Paris-Sorbonne, Professor Georges Molinié, and I was able to observe the capable presence of the new presidential team headed by Professor Michel Fichant, who is the President’s delegate for Abu Dhabi. A meeting of the “missionary” teachers on the occasion of a dinner hosted by the French Ambassador and very promising news on the construction of the future building confirmed that all is well and that you can be very pleased!

What a journey since the first evening when, at the President's office of the Paris-Sorbonne, we met for the first time. On that occasion, you had indicated your concerns, which are still relevant. I can only reaffirm the crucial role that you played and I have, of course, often heard well-deserved praise in your regard on this matter, in particular when you were awarded the Ordre National du Mérite decoration in the Grand Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne. Having been a close witness to this venture and having had the good fortune of meeting you and following the genesis of this Abu Dhabi Sorbonne University, I am proud and happy to be your friend.

For my part, the time has come for me to retire. The activities I am involved with to promote French language and civilization cause me to constantly look back to all that you have shown me.

To the collective recognition we all owe you, I also want to add my personal gratitude, and hope that your actions are rewarded as they deserve to be.

Sincerely,

Pierre Brunel
Professor Emeritus
Paris Sorbonne University