

Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624)

on the Value of the Arabic Language

Translated from the Latin by Robert Jones

Translator's note: Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624) taught Arabic in the university of Leiden from 1613 until his untimely death of the plague at the age of forty. He is chiefly remembered as the author of a grammar book which was to introduce the rudiments of Arabic to generations of Europeans. Indeed his realistic approach to his responsibilities as a teacher is still exemplary. But from his manuscript collection (now housed for the most part in Cambridge University Library), his correspondence, and his publications we know that his interests and abilities as an orientalist were extraordinarily advanced. Erpenius published this second oration on the value of Arabic at Leiden in 1621, together with his first oration on Arabic and another on Hebrew. That inaugural address on Arabic had already been published separately in 1613. The arguments he put forward on that occasion in favour of Arabic as a serious subject for study are repeated in his second oration, which gives in addition an increased emphasis on the importance of Arabic historical texts, the announcement of an ambitious publishing programme, an example of how Arabic cognates may elucidate Hebrew, and further information on Oriental and European collections of Arabic manuscripts.

My thanks are due to the organisers of the 6th MELCOM International Conference, held at Leiden on 15-18th April 1984, who allowed me to cast the participants in the role of Erpenius' students while I delivered part of my version of his oration to celebrate the 400th anniversary of his birth; and to Professor J. B. Trapp, Director of London University's Warburg Institute, who kindly gave his time to amend and refine my original draught. The literal style of the final version is, however, my own choice. The pagination of the original Latin publication of 1621 is given in square brackets.

THOMAS ERPENIUS ON THE VALUE OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

[39] *The second oration on the Arabic language given on 5th November in the year 1620 when, on return from his second journey to France, he resumed his regular lectures.*

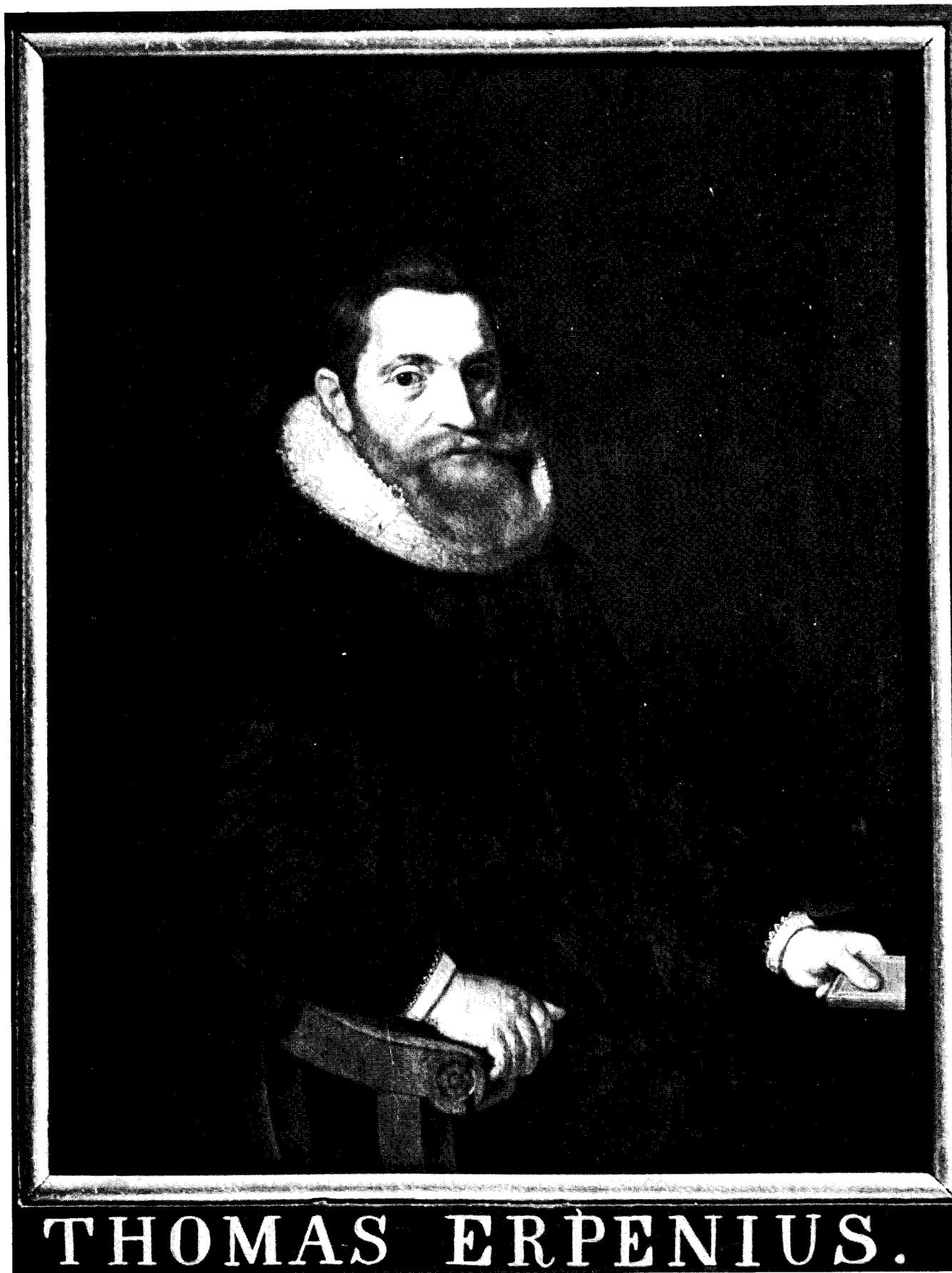
Noble and studious young men!

On the point of reverting to regular lectures after this long break away from my duties, [40] I thought it would be worth my while before embarking on the matter itself if I were to say a few words to you about the subject of which I am professor, that is the language of the Arabs, as well as about the study of Arabic and how it should be taught. I have decided to treat these in that order which I think will be both useful and welcome to you. So give me your accustomed attention.

In order that you may better understand the nature of the Arabic language a few preliminary remarks on Arabia and its inhabitants are in order.

Arabia, the most renowned peninsula in Asia, is surrounded on three sides by the Persian, Indian and Red Seas; its other side borders on Syria. Its area is equivalent to, or even greater than, that of Spain, France, Germany and Italy. It is divided, at any rate by our own authorities, into three parts, [41] one of which is called Petraea, the other Deserta, and the third Felix. From earliest antiquity, however, the Arabs themselves divided it into five provinces, which are Tihāma, Nejd, Hījāz, 'Arūd and Yamāma. These were so well guarded by their inhabitants — some of whom descend from Seba, the descendant of Noah and after whom the province of Sabaea was named long ago, and others from Ishmael, the son of the Patriarch Abraham by Hagar — that they were never subjugated by other peoples. They maintained the independence of their states without interruption and they kept their own rulers, with whom even the Romans were not ashamed to ally themselves. The most distinguished Ishmaelite state was that of the Quraysh, which had its capital [42] at Mecca, a market-town the size of our Amsterdam where, in about 580 A.D., Muḥammad Abū 'l-Qāsim was born of Ishmaelite stock from parents of no mean standing, according to our authorities.

At the age of thirty, Muḥammad began in earnest to force his way to prominence and, in the name of a religion which he had newly fashioned from Christianity, Judaism and Arianism, to gain authority for himself. He had already been extending his sect secretly



THOMAS ERPENIUS.

Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624), professor of Arabic and Oriental languages in the University of Leiden from 1613 till his death. Anonymous portrait of 1614 or earlier. Oil on panel 49.5 × 39 cm. Leiden University Library (See *Icones Leidenses*, Leiden 1973, No. 69).

for a whole decade, when the leaders of the state gained an inkling of his trickery and set about capturing him and destroying his endeavour. But towards evening on Friday the sixteenth of July in the year 622 A.D. [43] he stole away and fled with a few of his followers to Medina, a small town ten days' journey from Mecca, not far from Mount Sinai. It is from this flight that his partisans, the followers of his religion, are accustomed to calculate their calendar in the same way that the Romans did from the foundation of the City, the Greeks from the first Olympiad, the Jews from the creation of the world, and the Christians, for the most part, from the nativity of the Messiah, Θεανθρώπος. The reason for this was that when he had escaped from the city he was no longer subject to its authority and called himself, and wished to be considered, a supreme leader, who was dependent in matters of state and of religion on God alone as well as being the representative and deputy of God on earth. He was honourably received by the Medinese, [44] whose leaders he had already attracted to his faction and beliefs at Mecca; and with bold enterprise he prepared himself for waging war against the Meccans, saying that he was under God's orders to influence and compel those who were unwilling to yield to him and to believe in him, not with words and miracles but with swords and spears.

Without delay he prepared an army and attacked the city to no avail at first and with considerable loss of men; but not long after the outcome was most successful. He captured it without bloodshed and subdued it, not in an oppressive way, but rather — which was cunning — by making all his greatest enemies indebted to him, by showing them not only unexpected kindness but also great favours, and by repaying them with goodwill so that he utterly convinced those he had feared before [45] to become his most faithful helpers.

To be brief, in the space of a decade he managed, as much through his wisdom and ability as by force and arms, to subjugate successfully those towns, provinces and states of Arabia that had most bravely resisted his campaigns and to establish himself as the first absolute ruler of Arabia. But when he became more ambitious and decided to go beyond the boundaries of Arabia, in the eleventh year of the *hijra* (i.e. his flight) he passed away. Our authorities who say that he invaded Syria and captured Damascus are in fact wrong, as are those who maintain that his body was placed in an iron coffin and supported in the sky at Mecca by means of magnetism. In fact he was buried at Medina in the house of his wife, 'Ā'isha. [46] This was later made a shrine, and that tomb survives to this day.

This unholy and polygamous prophet left no son from the fourteen wives that he had and only one daughter by the name of Fātima, who followed her father to the grave forty days after his death. On account of the law habitually followed by most orien-

tals that excludes females from succession to the throne, his authority could not devolve on her. That eminence was therefore conferred by a ballot on his decrepit friend, one of his fathers-in-law, Abū Bakr. He was followed by other friends and relatives of Muḥammad in a long succession of fifty-eight Caliphs (i.e. 'Deputies'), [47] so-called because they were the deputies of Muḥammad in the same way that he had said he was the deputy of God; and they were also called *أمرء المؤمنین*, Commanders of the Faithful.

With great effort and application they endeavoured to expand and consolidate the kingdom that Muḥammad had founded. They achieved this very successfully but, alas! with great damage to Christians. What I am about to say will seem astonishing, even unbelievable, to my audience. It is nevertheless quite true. In the space of sixty years they subjugated — which means they tore from the Christians and added to Muḥammad's devilish kingdom — Palestine, Syria, and both Armenias; the whole of Asia Minor, Persia, India, Egypt, Numidia, the entire Barbary coast right up to the Niger river: [48] Lusitania, Spain, a large part of Italy as far as the very gates of the City of Rome; Sicily, Crete, Cyprus; and the other islands of the Mediterranean Sea. They acquired as much in a few years as perhaps any absolute ruler ever possessed before them. This is the reason why the very celebrated Jean Bodin finds the title of 'Fourth Monarchy' more appropriate to them than to the Romans. Their realm lasted for some 650 years until gradually, by reason of the valour of the Christians but also of their own civil discords and wars, it was greatly weakened and then divided and torn into innumerable parts as the Roman Empire had been. I hope you will see this more clearly in the future in that *Historia* [49] *Saracenicæ* which I shall shortly be publishing in Arabic and Latin.

In a few words, my learned hearers, we have made clear who the Arabs were. It is now the moment for us to turn to their language. Right from the origin and diversification of language — as well known to you all as it is to me — Arabic was confined to the Arabs themselves within the borders of Arabia. Those who think that the Punic language was Arabic are wrong. Later their rule wearied of such narrow confines and began to disperse itself far and wide in Asia, Africa and Europe. Disseminated by the Arabs and established through colonies in many places, Arabic was then adopted [50] and developed in beauty and elegance by almost every people that they had subjugated.

The Arabs were certainly more successful in that respect than even the Greeks and the Romans. Indeed, it was not difficult for them to harness their language to their authority almost everywhere so that not only Arabia, but also Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and all Libya, even Spain and most of the islands of the Mediterranean Sea, were Arabic speaking; and today the whole of Egypt, Libya and a good part of Asia speak Arabic.

Not only was that language received by the people with open arms, as they say, but it was also very studiously cultivated and developed. As a result, experts past and present in the most important languages with a good knowledge of Arabic have testified, [51] and still testify, to the fact that it has absolutely no lack of sweetness, elegance, dignity and perfection.

There is no reason for my audience to be surprised at this. Although before the time of the false prophet, Muḥammad, the Arab people were barbarous and were destitute and ignorant of the politer sort of literature, nevertheless their immediate successors, who along with Arab authority also received their language, displayed great zeal towards the whole of culture and learning — while that rule was firm and was flourishing — and by their example moved the Arab-born themselves to do likewise. Nor, indeed, should my hearers think that the Arabs were anything like those who have now gained power over matters in the Orient, the Turks — a tribe of Scythian barbarians who took over power some three centuries ago when that famous kingdom of the Saracens [52] had been broken up. The Turks neither were nor are lovers of learning.

Yet the Saracens (as our modern authorities allow us to style the men of that illustrious empire of the past) were so addicted to letters and to study that their empire alone had universities greater both in number and in reputation than the whole of the rest of the world. Do you doubt this? Read Leo Africanus' book about Africa and you will see that in that part of the world alone there were up to thirty famous universities. And Asia had far more, even in those regions bordering on the Kingdom of China and India where we thought men had scarcely ever been literate. This will be clearly seen at some future time in my *Commentarius in linguam* [53] *Arabicam* and in other books that I am preparing.

Very few, if any, of their universities did not have several thousand students and a large number of professors and illustrious men in every faculty. With great zeal they all cultivated and illuminated every discipline; and having taken over, augmented, explained, and embellished the literature of almost all other peoples, they handed it on to posterity. You should realise that they translated into their own language all the most important ancient authors — not merely the Egyptians, Persians and Chaldeans (who are thought to be the first authors of all wisdom and knowledge), but also the Greeks and the Latins. This is the reason why, [54] thanks to them, innumerable writings by those peoples that have perished in the original, owing to the rigours of time and men's carelessness, still exist in Arabic today. Let me corroborate that with one or two examples.

Know that the most trustworthy authorities maintain that all Livy's books are extant among them, even

those the loss of which the whole of the Latin world laments. Moreover, all the books of Pappus of Alexandria relative to the plain and exact solution of mathematical problems, an incalculable treasure, are available in Arabic even in this part of the world. There is also a considerable number of writings by Hippocrates and Galen and innumerable others by learned men: we shall later list [55] in our *Commentarius* the large proportion of them which has come to our attention.

This has led not a few men well-known among us for their erudition to say that, if the sciences of the Greeks were lost to us, they could be restored from the Arabic language. And this was exactly what happened in a previous age, before the flowering of Greek learning, when a considerable number of Greek writers was translated from Arabic into Latin. Later, after the recovery of Greek, these were transmitted to us in their original language by most distinguished men.

The Arabs did not only borrow the writings and the learning of very many other peoples but, as I said, they also illuminated and augmented them as far as they were able; in fact they embellished most of the Classics with notes and commentaries. Furthermore, they produced plentiful new material of every kind of learning, [56] much of which was subtly invented, ingeniously thought through, learnedly observed and put forward in a clear, methodical and erudite way. I am not now talking about foreign books. These they probably possessed in no less number than the Latin and Greek books we command. The difference is that they had them translated into Arabic sometimes, as is reasonable to suppose, less felicitously, whereas we have them in the original and understand them as native speakers. No, what I mean is the books of the Arabs themselves which were written, as far as I can gather, in incredible quantities during the heyday of the Saracen Empire — that is from 650 A.D. to about 1250 A.D. — in Asia, Africa and Spain. [57]

As for doctors, let anyone who doubts look at the huge work by the Arab doctor, Rhazes, entitled *الحاوي*, *Continens*, which was translated into the Latin language in a previous century. In this book alone he will see that three hundred, or even more, erudite and very famous doctors are cited; and there is no doubt that Rhazes leaves many out and that many will have been added after him.

I can claim the same for jurists: in just the one or two books that I have looked at, I have found the judgments and opinions of very many lawyers cited.

As for books on mathematics and the other parts of philosophy, everybody knows about them from the few Latin translations we have of the innumerable Arabic works.

Up to thirty notable and famous geographers [58] are cited by the great king of Syria, Ismā'īl Abū

'l-Fidā, in his famous geographical work which is beyond all praise. This he composed three centuries ago and entitled تقويم البلدان, *Directorium regionum*.

They have historical works, good God, how many! how exact! how trustworthy! not only about the history of the Greeks and Romans, but also about the Chaldeans, Assyrians, Persians, Indians, Tartars, the Arabs themselves, Egyptians and Africans, and more-over from the origin of those races. I know you believe me. Should anyone be in doubt, then, for instance, my library on Asiatic subjects will convince him. I possess the most accurate and reliable histories about all these peoples [59] by which we will one day prove, if life remains, that they are able to shed far the greatest light on the Scriptures and on Greek and Latin histories. As for African affairs, about which the authors wrote very accurately, would that I possessed their works with the same certainty that I know they exist from others as well as from Leo Africanus, who cites many and highly esteems a certain ابن عبد الملك, Ibn 'Abd al-Malik, among others.

There are not in the rest of the world, nor were there ever, as many poets as in Arabia alone. I am not misleading my audience. They number sixty poets of the first rank, who have many squadrons under them, and in whose writings there is such elegance of invention, as well as learning, care in composition, and sweetness of harmony and rhythm [60] that anyone who reads or hears them is totally carried by their charm. Thus it is not surprising that Leo Africanus and other authors say that Arabic poetry is such an incredible delight that there is nothing in other languages that can be compared to it. I will see to it, students, that you are taught that with the actual material and that shortly you will be able to read the greatest of all poets the world has ever seen, whom they call المتنبى, al-Mutanabbī, as if we were to say the Prophet. They gave him this name in order to pretend that he was the next after their prophet, Muhammad, who they are convinced, wrongly, acted under divine inspiration. Indeed, I will publish him in Arabic with a Latin translation in prose and also one in verse if a distinguished poet [61] will give me his services for the task — for I myself was not highly endowed by Thalia.

As for the refinement of the Arabic language itself and the books that they wrote for its embellishment, definition, explication and preservation, I am indeed afraid that if I tell you the truth you will think I am overstepping the mark. But as far as my knowledge extends, no other people is known to have expended so much toil, effort and industry on refining their language. An almost countless number of their most distinguished men have written grammar books and diverse grammatical tracts, some of which are in verse and others in prose. And they had already left off writing grammars when the Jews began to do that,

borrowing the whole science and all its [62] terms from the Arabs, as is quite clear to anyone who looks into the matter.

They also left a large number of dictionaries in which the significance and meaning of words are explained. Of these about twenty very large and copious ones still exist today including two, more important than the rest, القاموس, *al-Qāmūs*, and الصحاح, *al-Sahhāh*, in very many volumes. These you can see in my collection. Nor do they lack large numbers of specialised tracts on the etymologies and distinctions of words as well as on technical terms, difficult expressions from every kind of subject-matter, and forms of speech.

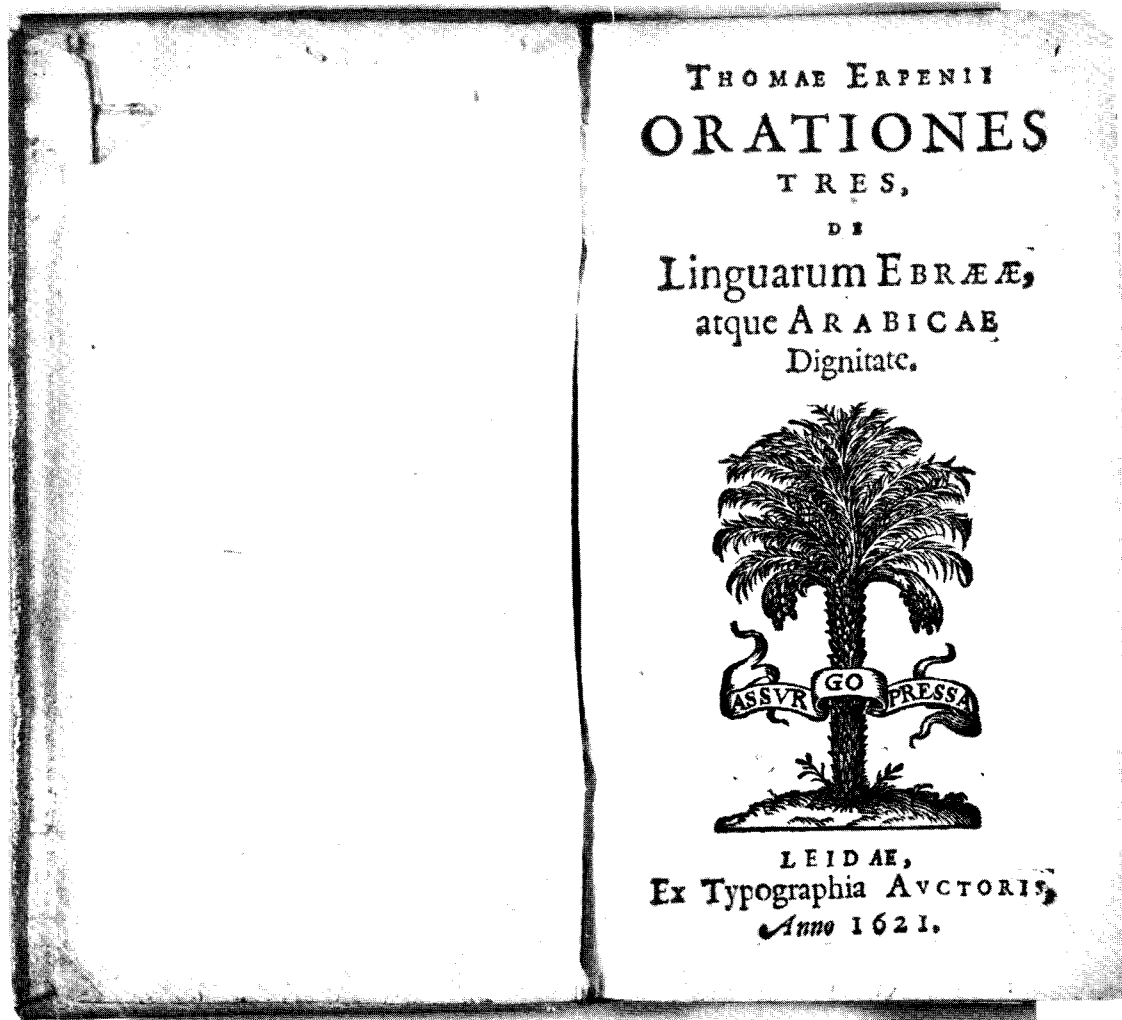
To cut short the story my audience is hearing, they engaged in every function of men of letters [63] and of the learned, both in refining their own language and in embellishing the other disciplines. That is the reason why I do not hesitate to repeat that the Arabs have more important books on every sort of knowledge than can ever be found anywhere else. But perhaps I seem to you to be talking about marvels and extraordinary chimeras. Where are these books, you ask? I do indeed concede that it is true that we know few of them; but believe me, you would find even fewer Latin books in Africa or Asia. Would you therefore conclude that few Latin books exist, or would you find that difficult to credit?

The same applies to Arabic books, my friends. African and Asiatic books are available in large quantities in those places in the same way that European books are here. [64] But there are not such vast quantities of particular texts, since books are copied only by hand there and none are printed as is the case here, where it is usual for one text to be printed in many thousands of copies within a short space of time. Nevertheless, they have far more kinds, that is to say varieties, of books.

Trustworthy eye-witnesses testify that thirty-two thousand different books are to be found in one library in Fes. At Constantinople Cornelis Hagha, the ambassador of our illustrious people to the Turkish Emperor there, has also written that there are two Arabic libraries, each worth a hundred thousand ducats, which in our terms is four tons of gold; and, moreover, there is one that is estimated at four hundred thousand ducats, [65] that is sixteen tons of gold.

I admit that books are really expensive in those places as the fact that they are copied by hand and usually on silk paper contributes to their high cost. But it is not just that (you can believe one with long experience): such a high value also implies that the quantity of manuscripts is vast.

It is five or six years since the Arabic library of the King of Morocco was treacherously abstracted to Spain by a certain Nearcha, a Numidian, and transfer-



Thomas Erpenius, *Three lectures on the Value of the Hebrew and Arabic Languages*. Leiden: the author's press, 1621. Titlepage (Leiden University Library 854 F 27).

red to the King of Spain's library. According to the ambassador of that same King of Morocco, it consists of seven thousand eight hundred separate and distinct manuscripts. Many other such libraries exist in Africa and Asia; and in their more famous cities a large quantity of books [66] are for sale at any given time. Indeed, when I sent a long list of well-known books to our illustrious ambassador, Cornelis Hagha, asking him to let me know which of them were available there, he replied that there was none of them nor of other excellent books that could not be bought for money.

So my audience will see that Arabic has at least as great an importance and usefulness for the acquisition of learning. To this one should add that Hebrew — of which a knowledge should be as desirable to us as an exact understanding of the faith and mysteries of our salvation — is susceptible of so much illumination from Arabic, both with regard to [67] expression and to figures of speech and the meaning, origin, and etymology of words, as to deserve a book in itself. My *Commentarius in linguam Arabicam* with its six hundred examples will confirm this. It will also provide certain rules useful and necessary for a solid grasp of

Hebrew expressions that I have brought out of the inmost recesses of the Arabic language. Now to give you some sort of foretaste of this and to whet your appetite, I will adduce nothing less than the first verse of the Bible:

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואח הארץ

Arabic can shed much light on three words in this. The root of the word אֱלֹהִים, 'God', and its significance are in dispute, [68] not to say unknown. But since the same word is in use among the Arabs and may be derived in a regular way from a quite common root الله, meaning 'to worship' and 'to adore', who can remain in doubt about the origin and meaning of the Hebrew word? Those who compound שָׁמַיִם meaning 'sky' from שָׁמַיִם 'in that place water' are wrong. For the Arabs also employ the same word, saying that سماء is quite regularly formed from the root ساء, with a final weak radical, meaning 'to excel' and 'to stand out above the rest'. Similarly, אֶרֶץ meaning 'earth' is not from רוץ 'to run', as many suppose, but from אָרַץ which means 'to be humble or low'. It is true that this root, like the other two, may be found only within the very narrow limits of modern Hebrew. [69] My audience will under-

38 ORAT. DE LING. ARAB.

Professores constituendos & lautis stipendijs munerandos esse decreverint : moverunt non ita pridem Paulum V. P. M. ut in cujuscunque ordinis & instituti Regularium (ut loquuntur) majoribus Collegijs Doctores quoque ejus alendos esse jussit: movent nunc Amplissimos hujus Academiae Curatores, ut Professione ejus Academiam suam instruant atque ornent: Moveant & vos, studiosi Adolescentes, animumque vobis addant ad ejus studium, quod non dubito quin brevi admodum tempore summopere jucundum, facile, & utile esse, re ipsa comper-turi sitis. Dixi.

F I N I S.

O R A -

39



O R A T I O II.

D E

Lingua ARABICA,

Habita V. Novembris, Anno M. D. C. XX. cum e secundo suo itinere Gallicano reversus, ad praelectiones suas ordinarias rediret.

Nobiles & Studiosi Juvenes.



O s t diurnam hanc muneris mei vacationem, ad ordinarias praelectiones reversurus, operæ mihi pretium

C 2 tium

Thomas Erpenius. The second lecture on Arabic held on 5 November 1620. Opening page (Leiden University Library 854 F 27).

stand that I do not mean by this that Hebrew words are derived from Arabic, but that the meanings and origins of the more obscure words in the Hebrew language, of which only defective and scanty evidences remain in the Old Testament, may be illustrated and explained by the same words that still exist in the Arabic language, which is preserved entire and has very many roots and word patterns in common with Hebrew.

What I have said about Hebrew can also be discerned in Aramaic, Syriac, Rabbinical Hebrew, and Ethiopic, all of which have the greatest affinity to Arabic so that Arabic should be called and considered their common light.

The languages of the Persians and the Turks, which are also widely [70] diffused throughout the Orient, while differing in kind almost as much between themselves as they do from Arabic, cannot nevertheless be understood without a knowledge of Arabic. This is because those who use Arabic in speaking and writing (and the Persians in particular write much in it and well too) regard it as fashionable to mix Arabic words as a rhetorical embellishment in their language much more frequently even than the Latins use Greek words or the

more refined in the Low Countries use Latin and French.

Moreover, any of you who know that Arabic is the common and exclusively used language in Egypt, Libya, and all coastal Africa, as well as in Arabia and Palestine, cannot fail to recognise how useful it would be on African and Asiatic journeys. Furthermore, in Turkey — that is to say the whole of Asia Minor, Armenia, [71] Mesopotamia, Persia, India and Tartary — it performs the same service as Latin does for us by being the language of learned and cultured men and the common instrument of diverse peoples. So it is that in all those realms one comes across those who understand and speak Arabic in great numbers.

We must not overlook the fact that it is only by means of this language that the pestilent doctrines of the Arabian pseudo-prophet — the most dangerous enemy of the divinity and cross of Christ, that is to say of our salvation — doctrines with which, alas! he wretchedly seduced and blinded by far the greatest part of the Christian world, can be understood, effectually refuted and exploded. In this connexion, my audience will be aware how shaming it is to recall how un-

productively [72] occupied very many of our people were in unsheathing their pens against the Muhammadans without having understood their laws and beliefs which are stated and set forth in the Arabic language alone — not to mention the fact that those writers, being ignorant of Arabic, were forced to compose their refutations in a language which in turn was not understood by the Muhammadans. Their effort was therefore in vain.

Not to take advantage of your patience, I shall not on this occasion dwell on these and other less important advantages of the Arabic language. Some time ago, however, it was these uses that inspired the clergy at the Council of Vienne to approve the establishment of public professors of Arabic, supported by ample stipends, in the more famous universities. These uses also moved Pope Gregory XIII and the Grand Duke of Tuscany to set up their famous presses [73] and to attempt the promotion of Arabic. Moreover, they prompted Pope Paul V to order the support of teachers of Arabic in the larger colleges of all the orders, the Most Christian King to appoint two very learned professors of it to his Parisian academy, and those in charge of this and of other universities to institute Arabic teaching. Indeed, the uses of Arabic induced not a few learned men, both in previous centuries and in this, to acquire some sort of knowledge of this most noble language in whatever ways they could.

It was not too much trouble for some of them to undertake lengthy, dangerous and costly journeys for its sake. Nicolas Cleynaerts, Etienne Hubert and others [74] went to Africa for that reason alone. Gerard of Cremona, Andrea Alpago, Guillaume Postel, Giovan Battista Raimondi and many others made their way to Asia and stayed long there. On the other hand, Jean Mercier, of all Christians the most distinguished in Hebrew philology, similarly set out on a journey for the same purpose, but within a short time — even before leaving his homeland — he was called to the homeland that is common to us all. Also, Agostino Giustiniano, Bishop of Nebbio, famous for his six-language psalter, is believed to have perished in a shipwreck while on that same journey. Likewise, Georg Weigenmeier, author of a most excellent Hebrew grammar, perished *en route*.

Others, whose circumstances did not permit them to make such long and dangerous journeys, [75] managed with great effort and application and by taking any opportunity that presented itself at home, to make progress as far as they were able in acquiring a most serviceable knowledge of Arabic. Among them, those you know best by repute — not to mention the others — were Joseph Scaliger, Franciscus Raphelengius, Isaac Casaubon, Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius, all most distinguished men who cannot be mentioned without first being praised. The extent to

which they benefited the Arabic language and vehemently desired to promote its study is abundantly shown in both their published and unpublished writings. May they inspire you, noble and studious young men, may their arguments inspire you, may their example inspire you! [76]

You have an opportunity such as they never had and, if you spurn it, I greatly fear that you would be considered senseless and ignoble in the opinion of these many men, and you will not achieve great things. You need not undertake dangerous journeys to the Orient or torment yourselves night and day over one or two pieces of paper at home without a guide and — worst of all, according to Cleynaerts — with only yourselves as teachers. Thanks to the most noble governors of the university, you may make more progress every day than they did in a month. I make so bold as to say that and I am not afraid of being accused of lying. You can command the requisite books and you have a teacher who is, if I might say so without [77] arrogance, well-disposed and so far not unsuccessful.

I am quite sure that some of you are taking the trouble, or will some time take the trouble, to learn French, as others do Spanish or Italian, that is to say the particular languages of those parts. Perhaps you have even set out to those places for that purpose. Do you really propose to do that and to neglect the very language which extends throughout the greater part of the ancient world; in which there are more monumental works by learned men than in all the other languages: which has every degree of sweetness, elegance and perfection; which you may learn with practically no difficulty at this time and in this place where you have been sent to study; and by which, when you have learnt it, you will be raised above [78] the common kind of student so as to acquire a considerable excellence which may win you renown and bring you unbelievable benefit and pleasure? I hope, for my part, that you will be wiser than that.

1. Those of you who are candidates in Sacred Theology, consider what it would be to learn this language without the help of which your Sacred Language (and in my judgement you do not deserve to call it yours unless you lay claim to and acquire Arabic) cannot be fully and perfectly understood, or the impious doctrines of the Muhammadans be examined and beneficially refuted.

2. Those of you who are devoting yourselves to Medicine, consider how important it would be to be skilled in the one language that can offer you far more good volumes in your discipline [79] even than Greek. It can inform you about three hundred or more most useful simple remedies hitherto unknown to you and the Greeks, as is established by the books of Ebenbitar and others which have been such a desideratum for you until now. Nor is it just a question of simple remedies.

Compound remedies, the causes of illnesses, signs, and other aspects of your science are also dealt with. Moreover, by means of Arabic, you will be able to make the best use of the best known doctors — Avicenna, Mesuë, Rhazes, and others. The Latin versions that are in your hands are such that, believe me, the translators can truly be said to have done the utmost harm to the original authors.

3. Lawyers, consider [80] how much satisfaction and profit there would be in being able to compare with Roman and provincial law the laws, statutes and practices, as well as the justice itself, of all Asia and Africa, and of that great empire of the Saracens.

4. Philosophers, consider how important it would be to be able to hear that other Aristotle, ابن رشد, Ibn Rushd, teaching in his own language. You name him ineptly Averroes and, because of the way he stammers in Latin, you rightly complain that you can scarcely understand him and that you need an interpreter for his interpreter.

5. Students of Mathematics, consider the rewards you could reap from the language of a people who are thought to surpass even [81] the Greeks in the study of your discipline; to have preserved more of their books than we have; and to have written much more themselves on all aspects of your field. Indeed, they were so strong in speculative thought that, with an acumen almost exceeding the powers of human ingenuity, they devised that admirable, useful and insufficiently praised science of arithmetic which they very recently passed on to the Christian world. Its ten figures, which you call 'ciphers', maintain their Arabic shape and order among you today. Yet the Greeks did not have an inkling of this most remarkable invention, not to mention that astounding and most dependable art of divination, of which that most trustworthy author, Leo Africanus, wrote [82] in his golden work about Africa, and which leaves all the Greek astrologers a long way behind.

6. Those of you who are attracted to History and Geography, consider whether it would not be worth while to acquire a knowledge of the one language in which there are so many and such eminent histories of events unknown to Europeans from many centuries and many realms; and in which so many accurate descriptions are to be found of the ancient world, especially Asia and Africa, over which we are in particular difficulties in these parts. Think carefully and consider in your minds how useful and satisfying it would be to compare the books of history and geography written by the ancient Greeks with these and to elucidate them with their help. [83]

7. Finally, those of you who love poetry, consider how much pleasure and delight you would derive from so many poets of a people who were born for that art, if

ever a people was. How agreeable it would be to digress into both the serious and the humorous pieces written by so many ingenious authors.

But perhaps two things still deter you. One is the dearth of Arabic books in these parts and the other is the great difficulty of the language. As far as the books are concerned, it is true that up till now not so very many are to be found here and those that are available are locked away in libraries as κρηλῖος, treasures. But be of good heart, young gentlemen. In the last century the same applied to those Greek books which are now [84] available in such abundance everywhere. Once Greek letters had been revived here by learned men, the Latin world was filled with Greek books by a few printers — Aldus, Froben, Etienne, Plantin, and several others. Just as Greek and Latin letters have now been so successfully restored, why may you not expect this for Arabic too, especially at this time when not a few great men devote all their effort and industry to it? Several Arabic printing presses have already been established: at Rome there is the most extravagant and tasteful Typographia Medicea, in Milan the Borromea, in Paris the Savariana, in Breslau the Kirsteniana, and here, as well as the Raphelengius press, there is my own from which a number of important books have already been published and [85] from which more will be published in due course. Thus you have no cause to complain that you are unable to obtain books in which to study and to acquire a knowledge of this most noble language.

As far as it is in my power and capability, I will certainly see to it that from my press you will have ample material deemed useful and necessary for learning this language: grammatical treatises and lexicons, as well as certain historians, geographers, poets, and important ethical books. As you exercise your knowledge of this most noble language in them — a knowledge, let me add, of much delight and instruction in matters hitherto [86] unknown to our people — you will reap, and gain great pleasure from reaping, the most delightful reward of your study. Certain other works similar to these will also be published as well as books on medicine, mathematics and the other disciplines.

Moreover, you need have no doubt that, when you have gained a knowledge of this language, manuscripts will not infrequently be available to you: their number is growing daily in these parts. Public libraries house quite a few. There is our collection at Leiden from the legacy of the great Scaliger, the Palatine library and the libraries of Milan, the Vatican, Oxford, Wittenberg, Hesse, Bavaria and elsewhere; and in particular there is the King of Spain's library where, apart from the Moroccan books we have already mentioned, there is a great number of books, most of them medical. There are many manuscripts in private libraries also. In

France there are the libraries of François Savary de Brèves and Harlay de Sancy, who were [87] ambassadors to the Emperor of the Turks in the name of the most Christian King; in Spain there is the library of Marco Dobelo; in Italy there are those of the Maronite college and of Cardinal Montalto; in England there are the libraries of the most noble Earl of Arundel and Sir Robert Cotton as well as William Bedwell's; in Germany there are those of Sebastian Tengenel, Peter Kirsten and others; here in the Low Countries there is the library of the Secretary of Middelburg, the very celebrated Johannes Boreel, as well as my own.

When individuals among you have acquired a knowledge of this language there will be plenty of opportunity for you to collect the books you especially want or, to your greater glory, to acquire them cheaply from Africa, Egypt, or the Orient and send them to our land.

I come now to your second [88] doubt, the difficulty of the language. I am, sadly, well aware of the view fixed in many people's minds that Arabic is a more difficult language than others and that anyone who wishes to learn it well must be well-versed in Hebrew beforehand. They are wrong, wrong, my friends! and those who think and say that do this finest of languages grave injury. It is, of course, not easy to acquire a perfect knowledge of any language. They are all difficult and there are few people who are proficient in another language in addition to their own vernacular. Indeed, how few of us can say that he speaks and understands his own vernacular perfectly? But anyone who says that acquiring a knowledge of Arabic, whether exact or ordinary, is harder than learning other languages, [89] is misled and mistaken; and he will have to contend with me as an adversary, for I maintain that it is the easiest of all renowned languages. In order to understand the truth of this, students, consider the fact that languages are either easy or difficult on account of pronunciation or the three parts of the word unit — meaning, mutation, and construction.

If there is any difficulty for us over the pronunciation of Arabic, it is neither as great as, nor greater — or of greater significance — than in the pronunciation of Hebrew and other Oriental languages. In other words the difference is slight and we can easily cope with it if we happen to be among that people. If not, we do not anyway require a perfect pronunciation since we do not wish to impose upon the people in [90] this part of the world in Arabic or to seem like Arabic orators.

With Arabic the meaning of words requires a memory that is no more faithful than that needed for other languages. The composition or phraseology is simple, natural, and more suited to the order of things than any other languages. Consequently it is very easy. It is, however, the inflection and mutation of words that constitutes the greatest difficulty in most lan-

guages. But in none, save perhaps Turkish, is this less of a problem than in Arabic. What I am about to say to my audience is quite true. This language is so regular that there are no exceptions to rules. I know that this seems astonishing to you who, from childhood have been used to hearing that 'there is no rule in grammar without an exception'. [91] But believe me, just one small book of the Bible or of Homer contains more anomalies, irregularities and difficulties than the whole Arabic language. If erudite men declare that Hebrew is an easy language, and rightly so, what will you say about Arabic? It is very similar to Hebrew in most respects, and recognises only three vowels, which do not undergo any change in almost the whole grammar on account of affixes, gender, number, and so forth. Moreover, it has practically no anomalous guttural letters and the inflection of both strong and weak verbs is completely regular. For my part, I do not see what those who assert the necessity of knowing Hebrew for acquiring Arabic wish to gain for themselves. [92]

Those who learn Hebrew in order to facilitate their learning of Arabic seem to me to have undertaken their study as if they were setting out from here to The Hague via Delft. 'But', you will say, 'according to you, the Hebrew language is close to Arabic'. Indeed that is the case and Delft is closer to The Hague than Leiden. But the journey from here to Delft is longer than from here to The Hague. True, Hebrew is the mother of Arabic and the first of all languages. The dispute as to whether Hebrew or Aramaic is the mother of the other languages is still *sub judice*. Certainly the Aramaists wield some weighty arguments in favour of their language and we believe they have the right of it. It is the first. Must it therefore be learnt before the others? Is it not possible to learn them adequately without a prior knowledge of Aramaic? Why do not those who argue thus maintain that it should be learnt before Latin? [93] If they say that should be done may they master Arabic also. I have certainly had quite a few students unversed in Hebrew letters whom I taught along with those who had a good knowledge of it. But believe me, the Hebraists did not keep ahead of the others for long and, although they tended to commit the verb paradigms to memory a little more quickly, that is only a few hours' work for those who do not know Hebrew. The words that are common to both languages are also detected a little more easily by the Hebraists than by the others, but that is a small thing. You will readily experience that what I am saying is true. Come, both those expert and those inexpert in Hebrew!

There will be no question of making a distinction between Trojan and Tyrian [Aeneid I. 574]

[94] I shall teach you in equal stages so that there will be no holding back for the Hebraists and no going too fast for the others. I shall, in addition, say this to my

audience. If both languages are to be learnt, it seems to me that Arabic should be put first since it is the easier and more regular and everywhere makes good the defects of Hebrew. Away with those who want discord among us and are trying, with imaginary difficulties, to put you off from the study of this most excellent and useful language! I admit that, not so long ago, it presented difficulties for us here. But that was because the necessary means — the rules, the teachers and the books — were missing, not because of its nature. But now I hope you will never lack them in abundant supply.

Therefore, set about it young gentlemen; [95] call the mind to this noble study; give a few hours to it every day; and do not doubt that in a few months I will summon you to testify to the things I have just said.

I have decided to teach you in such a way that, provided you show due diligence, when I have dismissed you before the next dog days, you will understand on your own account a historical text in Arabic and, with the use of a dictionary, other more difficult texts. In order to achieve this, I will lecture you at first on the rudiments of the language and deal with that in four or five weeks. Then I shall show you how to put them into practice publicly with the book of Proverbs with the Latin version and [96] notes by Joseph Scaliger, which I have edited; and in private study, with the Story of Joseph from the Quran also published by me with my translation and notes. To these I will add a historical text of some sort, in which, having left the grammatical niceties aside, I will, as far as I am able, accurately examine the sense and proper meanings of words and expressions.