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ARABISTS AND LINGUISTS
IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

While religious and economic motives encouraged the development of interest in Arabic in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, it was also actively propagated by a number of enthusiasts. The first of these was Robert Wakefield (d. 1537), a scholar who at various times taught Hebrew at Oxford, Cambridge and Louvain as well as publishing, in 1524, a eulogy on the virtues and usefulness of the three Semitic languages, Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew, entitled Oratio de laudibus et utilitate tria linguarum. In this work, he referred with admiration to the linguistic achievements of his friend Richard Pacy (1542-1563) a member of Henry VIII's diplomatic corps and, at one time, Dean of St Paul's, although Pacy did not display his Arabic learning in print. A less scholarly account of Arabic was given by John Eliot at the end of the sixteenth century. In 1593 he describes Arabic as 'a goodly speech, rich, fluent, and which hath more scope then any other that is spoken in the world'.

There are many manuscripts, he remarks, but few printed texts available, in spite of attempts made (when Eliot himself was in Rome) to set up a press. Pope Gregory XIII 'caused very faire Caracters to be cut at his charges, and sent all abroad to get workmen in that mysterie' but Eliot doubts his success, because no printed texts had come to hand yet in England. Eliot was particularly concerned with the value of Arabic for commercial purposes; not only was it valuable in the Levant, it was 'the best tongue in the world to trauele over all the great Turks kingdoms, over greatest part of Asia, through all the countries of the Iapanians, through China, through the Empire of Pershier John, and through all Afrike ... by it', he says, 'a man passeth well over the third part of the world. It is a singular fine tongue'.

Eliot's interest was that of a teacher of modern languages who used this information in a dialogue 'Of the dignity of Orators, and excellence of tongues'. A more scholarly account of Arabic was provided by a French writer, Claude Duret, in his Thesor de l'histoire des langues de cest univers, published at Cologne in 1613. One chapter is devoted to an account Des Arabes & de la langue Arabeque, though with comparatively little on the language apart from the Lord's Prayer in italic type. This work must have been a useful source, however, for contemporary authors in England like Edward Brewood. A year later, in 1614, Brewood provides an account of the 'seuerall Languages wherein the Liturgies of Christians in seuerall parts of the World are celebrated' and includes among them Arabic. He describes it as the 'vulgur language' throughout North Africa, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt even though 'somewhat corrupted and varied in dialect, as among so many seuerall nations it is vnpossibill but it should bee'. He disagrees with those who, like Eliot, claim that it is spoken in two-thirds of the inhabited world, but agrees that it is known wherever the religion of Mahomet is adopted because 'all their religion is written in that language, and for that every boy that goeth to schoole, is taught it, as in our schools they are taught Latin and Greeke. Inasmuch, that all the Turkes write their owne language in Arabique characters.'

Brewood had no specialised interest in Arabic, but one of his contemporaries did, and he published two texts of relevance to linguistic studies. William Bedwell translated St John's Epistles from an Arabic version into Latin, and published both at Leiden (where Arabic type was available) in 1612 under the title Epistolae Catholicae omnes Arabicae. In his introduction Bedwell points out the usefulness of learning Arabic. It is, he says, the only language of religion in extensive areas of the world; it is the chief language of diplomacy there; it is of immense value for reading medical and other scientific works; and it is invaluable as an aid to the elucidation of obscure Hebrew texts. A German scholar arriving in Oxford in the 1620s, Matthias Pasor, supplements this list of virtues in a lecture to the University printed in 1627. He points to the 'copie' or copiousness of Arabic vocabulary, the elegance of the script, and the assistance it offers to the understanding of unusual words of Arabic etymology, such as Zenith, Nadir, Asmuth and Algol.

Thomas Gresaves, giving another lecture at Oxford (in 1637) as deputy for Pococke, who had been appointed to the Chair of Arabic (1636), introduces a new theme. Arabic contains a large number of 'primitive' or 'root' words, which are capable of almost infinite variation to provide an immense vocabulary. It is also an admirable language because it is free from the innumerable inflections of Latin and Greek.

Bedwell, Pasor and Gresaves wrote in Latin for learned colleagues. The next Oxford scholar to specialise in Arabic, Christian Ravis [Ravins] was unusual in writing in English, although he was himself German by birth. His encomium of Arabic was contained in A Discourse concerning the Eastern Tongues, published in London in 1648, 1649 and 1650, with different title-pages, and bound in a single volume together with A Generall Grammar for
the Ready Attaining of the Hebrew, Samaritan, Calde, Syriac, Arabic, and the Ethiopic Languages. He distinguishes clearly between occidental and Oriental languages, most of the former demanding 'far greater toil in composition, [with] many terminations without any need'. He claims also that Arabic avoids ambiguity and offers a systematic method of word-formation. He argues forcibly for the study of Arabic, pointing out that it is still a living language in Spain, and that as Mansuel's dictionary, Verbalium Hispanicocalatinum (1617), had revealed, many thousands of Arabic words had been incorporated into Spanish. He further emphasizes that merchants, Biblical scholars and young travellers would particularly benefit. The first group could 'buy any ware cheaper, and at a better rate, than he that can speak nothing' even if they could only 'prattle'. For Biblical scholars, he points out, 'Hebrew is Arabic, which being yet living and in use, is easier to be learnt, and being obtained, will give a more clear and true interpretation of the Hebrew Bible'; and he sums up, 'the Arabic tongue will do as much (nay more) good to the understanding of the Ebrue Bible, then all the Rabbinic or the Talmud'. Finally, he argues, young gentlemen should not travel to France, Italy, Spain or Germany 'to quench their numerous fancies with some Roman antiquities, having no life or salvation in them', but should visit Arabic-speaking countries and learn a living language as well as gain a first-hand knowledge of the geography of the Bible.

One more general encomium of Arabic is worth noting here since, unlike that of Ravis which was offered when he was hoping to replace Pococke in his Chair, it was apparently without self-interest on the author's part. Published in 1663, it indicates just how firmly Arabic had become established as an appropriate subject for scholarly study. The Greek and Hebrew scholar Edward Leigh (1602-71) claims that Arabic is elegant, both for the 'pleasure' of words and the 'sweetness' of its phrasology. It is profitable both for travellers and for students of mathematics, algebra and medicine, and it is an easy language to learn, without distinctive dialects or inflections and anomalies in grammatical forms. Oddly enough, the book is dedicated to a scholar, James Ussher, who told John Evelyn in 1655 'how great the loss of time was to study much the Eastern languages, that excepting Hebrew, there was little fruitle to be gathered of exceeding labour'. Even 'the Arabic itselfe' had 'little considerable'. This is a fairly uncommon view of Arabic; otherwise it was regarded both as admirable as a language in itself, and a vital instrument in acquiring ancient scientific knowledge.

Returning now to the motives which prompted the study of Arabic in seventeenth-century England, we shall find that religious considerations had been influential long before the time of Bedwell. He himself refers to the Council of Vienne which, in 1312, had enjoined various universities, Oxford included, to maintain teachers of Arabic and to have a care not of medicine and astronomy, but 'of Diuinitie only'. Robert the Englishman's translation of the Qur'an had not only been printed in the sixteenth century, it had been translated into Italian by one Andreas Arrivabene, claiming to have taken his version from the original text. Bedwell comments that it is nothing but 'Rhetorica Italianata'; 'neither do I thinke', he says, 'that he understood much Arabicke'. Robert had many successors in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England who were interested in Arabic for religious reasons, though not all of them, unlike Robert Wakefield, expressed their interest in print. Among them were Hugh Broughton, who put forward the view, in a discussion of Biblical translation, that 'Arabique ... is almost Ebrew' and Walter Travers, second Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, and teacher of James Ussher, patron of scholars interested in oriental languages. Robert's Scottish successor, James Hepburn, stands somewhat outside this tradition because, as a Catholic convert, he moved to Rome and became keeper of the oriental manuscripts in the Vatican. He was one of the first scholars born in Britain to produce an Arabic-Latin grammar, but it was never printed and the manuscript has not come to light.

When Bedwell published in 1615 his translation of a dialogue between two Arabs on religious topics, entitled Mohammedis Impostura, he was by no means the earliest English scholar to be concerned with translating Arabic texts as an aid to missionary endeavour. Not only does the dialogue give some account of Muslim beliefs, but an addition, entitled The Arabian Trudgman, provides translations of Arabic 'names of honour' and other 'technical' terms intended for the assistance of scholars interested in oriental history. A third text, entitled the Index Assuratarum, lists the names of the 114 chapters, or 'Assurats' of the Qur'an. The whole Qur'an was translated into English again in 1649, although on this occasion it was a translation of the French version, published in the same year, by Alexander Ross (1591-1654) the theologian, schoolmaster and royal chaplain. Dutch and German translations followed in 1658 and 1697 respectively. Important as it was for English theologians to have access to Arabic texts in order to refute their religious arguments, it was equally important for potential English missionaries to provide Christian texts for Arabic converts. One such text, which was translated into many vernaculars, was the Veritate Religionis Christianae of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), which was printed in 1600 at the charge of the wealthy and benevolent natural philosopher, Robert Boyle (1627-91). While this set out the arguments for Christianity, Arab converts needed, in addition, access to the liturgy of the Church of England.
In 1671 Pococke sent out to the Levant three dozen copies of the Church catechism translated into Arabic, and in 1675 part of the Book of Common Prayer was translated by Pococke himself under the title of Parsae Precipue Liturgiae Ecclesiæ Anglicæ. The translation may also have owed something to another scholar, Isaac Bostre (1607–1676), a self-appointed missionary for the Church of England in the Near East, where he had learnt a modicum of Arabic.

Translation to and from Arabic was important for missionary activity; but a second religious motivation which led to the study of Arabic was the desire to provide a more accurate English text of the Bible than those which had been available in the sixteenth century. Under James I, a company of theologian-linguists was established to translate "out of the Original Sacred Tongues, together with comparing of the labours, both in our own, and other foreign Languages, of many worthy men who went before us" (Epistle Dedicated to the Authorised Version, 1611). They set to work in 1604, examining and comparing a large number of early sources. One of the versions they needed to compare was an early Arabic text—a harmony of the four Gospels by Tatian (fl. 160), the Diatessaron, first composed in Syriac; and there were other versions in early Semitic languages which required the services of oriental specialists. The importance of comparing the Arabick-Translation of the Scripture was pointed out by a teacher of oriental languages in early seventeenth-century London, one Edmund Rive. He argues that the Arabic translation was "set forth neere unto the days of the first Disciples of our Lord... and whereas the Greek copies through Writers negligence in former times are lost, here are divers readings, by the Arabick Translation it may appear, which is the auctorexit. And in Rev. 1. 10. the Arabick reads: I was in the Spirit on the first day of the week." This is used by Rive to prove that the Sabbath was not simply a human tradition, but of Divine origin. Among the fifty-four translators of the Authorised Version were at least twenty-five who were acquainted with Old Testament Hebrew, while Bedwell was preeminent in Arabic in the group which met at Westminster. As Thomas Hayne remarked in 1639, Bedwell "judged that many Hebrew sounds occurring only rarely in the Old Testament, could derive some light from a knowledge of the Arabic language"—a value for which Bedwell himself recommended the study of Arabic in the preface to his translation of St John's epistles.

There is little doubt that the intensive study of oriental texts for the purposes of the Authorised Version proved a lively stimulus to Arabic linguistic scholarship later in the seventeenth century; so that when the need was felt for an even more massive contribution to Biblical studies in the shape of a Polyglot Bible, scholars were at hand for the enterprise. The Cambridge scholar Brian Walton (1600–1661) moved to Oxford in 1645, and in 1652 published a circular advertising a proposal to print versions of the Bible in nine languages. Walton explains his intention of comparing "ancient Translations... especially those of the Eastern Languages; which in regard of their affinity and nearesse to the Original are fittest to express... that sense and reading which was then generally received in the Church of Christ". Among the languages to be printed was Arabic, and several noted Arabists like Pococke, Thomas Greaves and John Vicars were among those who lent their support to his proposal. As Burnet remarked, "Learning was then high at Oxford; chiefly the study of the oriental tongues, which was much raised by the Polyglot Bible." Bedwell, however, received only a brief mention as translator of the Johannine Epistles in the Proteogomena to the Polyglot Bible, published in 1657.

While written Arabic was of prime importance to theologians and Bible translators, it was the spoken language which was essential for merchants and diplomats, as Bedwell himself noted, in expressing his gratitude to one "M. W.G." who had spent most of his youth in Arab-speaking parts and had assisted Bedwell, together with many other merchants, in understanding many Muslim 'morall sayings'. The identity of M.W.G. is not known, but it appears that he was an English merchant then trading to Turkey and Venice, [Mr.] William Garraway, who may have learned Arabic, as Pococke did, by employing Arab servants in their private houses. To some extent the secrets of Merchandise in Africa and Asia had been revealed in English writings, but Ravus poured scorn on those who did not think it worth their while to acquaint themselves with the vernacular. What, he exclaims, 'a tongue to be the only Country tongue in whole Africa, and the third part of Asia... and all this tongue without use?' He points out that a merchant who can speak the language will be much more successful in his transactions than one who has to rely on an interpreter; such advice would have been useful outside the major Arab-speaking countries too. Arabic was often an important component of the Creole languages which developed along the great trade routes. In Madagascar, for example, the local dialect was a mixture of Arabic; in Mocobela, an island to the south-east, the language was a mash-up of Arabick and Portuguese; in Persia, it was reported, there were many loan-words from Arabic. The language of Arabia itself had, of course, 'no original, but [was] a derivative from the Hebrew.'
geometrical, geographical and medical writings has been clearly demonstrated elsewhere.

With so much interest being evinced in Arabic studies, the question of where the language was taught is a matter of some importance. Teachers were to be found associated with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and independently in London. Some of these teachers left few records of their expertise in print, and their achievements are known mainly through the writings of seventeenth-century biographers like Anthony à Wood. Richard Brett (1560-1637), Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, is described by Wood as 'skill'd and versed . . . in Chaldaic Arabic and Ethiopic tongues' among others, all of which were, of course, useful to him as one of the translators of the Authorized Version. Another little-known Oxford teacher to whom Wood refers was the Egyptian scholar Joseph Barbatus, associated briefly with the University in the early years of the century.41 Better known, because of his publications, was Matthias Pasor, Professor of mathematics in Heidelberg, who came to Oxford in 1624, and taught first mathematics and then Arabic. One of his pupils was Edward Pococke. Thomas Greaves (1612-70) became Pococke's deputy when he returned to the Levant with Thomas's brother John in 1637. Most important of these early teachers of Arabic was Christian Ravis, born in Berlin in 1613. After studying oriental languages at Wittenberg and Leiden, he came to England in 1638 and was commissioned by Archbishop Usher to collect manuscripts in the Levant. On his return to Oxford, he became a Fellow of Magdalen, but failing to obtain the reversion of Pococke's Chair during the Interregnum, he left England.42

In spite of political problems caused by his Royalist sympathies, Pococke was able to assist Brian Walton by collating the Arabic version of the Pentateuch, and to return to Oxford at the Restoration in 1660. By now, several young Oxford scholars were proficient in Arabic; they included Edward Bernard (1638-1696), Fellow of St John's (and also a mathematician); Narcissus Marsh (1638-1713), later Provost of Trinity College, Dublin; and Thomas Hyde (1636-1703) an orientalist with a primary interest in Persian, who left Cambridge to succeed Pococke in 1691. Having proved useful to the government in translating diplomatic correspondence, Hyde was asked to train young scholars for the newly-established Lord Almone's professorship of Arabic.43

At Cambridge there was hardly less activity in the study of Arabic. William Bedwell was one of the earliest Arabic scholars at Trinity College, although he left the university in 1607 became vicar of Totternham. Pococke's biographer Twells remarks of Bedwell that 'the Praise of being the first who considerably promoted the Study of the Arabic Language in Europe may perhaps more justly belong to him, than to Thomas Erpenius, who commonly has it.'44 Among the Cambridge alumni who encouraged Arabic was Sir Thomas Adams (1586-1608), a graduate of Trinity College and Clare Hall. He founded an Arabic lecture at the instigation of another Trinity and Clare graduate, Abraham Wheelocke (1593-1653), student of Arabic, Persian, and Anglo-Saxon. Adams's interest in the language sprang from religious motives, and in particular from his desire of helping to convert Muslims to Christianity. Other Cambridge scholars, like Thomas Comber, are known to have been proficient in the language, but the most important figures in the university were Abraham Wheelocke, who occupied the lectureship (later Chair) founded by Adams in c. 1630, and Edmund Castell (1606-1685), his successor. Wheelocke himself declared that he could publish little because of the lack of Arabic type in Cambridge, even though William Bedwell had bequeathed to the university, together with his manuscripts, a font of Arabic type which he had obtained from the Leiden heirs of the printer Raphelengius, but this was never used.45 Nevertheless, Edmund Castell, appointed to the Cambridge Chair of Arabic in 1664, was able to produce, using types cut by the university, a splendid dictionary, the Lexicon Hepialiottianum (1669), in which he acknowledges, by means of the abbreviation B., his frequent borrowings from Bedwell's manuscripts. Distinguished in research, he appears to have been no teacher. Finding himself abandoned by his pupils, he posted up a notice at the entrance to the lecture room, saying 'To morrow the professor of the Arabic language will go into the wilderness.'46

London, sometimes described as 'the Third University of England',47 was the remaining English centre for the study of Arabic. It is somewhat surprising to find that one of John Eliot's dialogues, set in a bookseller's shop, shows buyers asking for copies of the Qur'an in Arabic;48 but early in the century it was certainly the case that there be also in the City [London] Teachers and Professors . . . of . . . Arabic, or Larbey ['Iarbay?] Languages',49 which like others listed, are 'fit for Embassadors and Orators, and Agents for Marchants, and for Trauaylers, and necessarie for all Commerce or Negotiation whatsoever'. We know practically nothing of these independent teachers, though perhaps Bedwell, in his vicarage at Totternham, might be included among them. Certainly there were private academies by mid-century which offered foreign language teaching. One of the best known was that of Sir Balthazar Gerbier.50 Christian Ravis gave a public lecture on Arabic51 at 'London House' in which he advocated the establishment of separate colleges for teaching Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Malay and Chinese 'with a whole Collège for every Nation apart'.52 So popular did the study of Arabic become that it was even taught in the upper forms of one London
schools—Westminster—where the Headmaster, Richard Busby, had written an Arabic grammar for the use of his pupils; and so successful was his teaching that the schoolboys were able to ‘make orations’ in Arabic and other oriental languages, as John Evelyn reported witnessing in 1661. One of the great difficulties for English scholars in publishing the results of their research in Arabic was the lack of Arabic type. Early works quoting Arabic words presumably used engraved wood blocks; the earliest type was cast for the Medici Press in 1585, but seems not to have been known in England for some time. The scholarly printer Francis Raphelengius (1539-1597), who taught Arabic at Leiden, had Arabic type cut there, probably in 1594, and it was introduced into Breslau by Peter Kirsten in about 1608. In 1649, however, Ravis felt impelled to claim that ‘there are some coppy bookes published in sundry countries, wherein (that they might bee thought to bee skillfull in strange tongues) they have made such foul worke about the Syriece, Arabic... Letters that I am ashamed of them. Nay among printed bookes onely France and Italy have good Arabic characters.’ By now matrices of Arabic had been acquired from Leiden by Archbishop Laud; these were sufficient to print a text by Pococke and some passages of Arabic in other works. But it was not until 1654-5 that a large supply was cast by the University’s foundry, and printing Arabic texts became entirely feasible. Before Arabic writings could be appreciated by English scholars, appropriate textbooks had to be provided, and these in time became available in the form of dictionaries, grammars and readers. The earliest form of Arabic lexic on printed in Britain was that to be found in Bedwell’s Arabian Trugman, which included translations of ‘certaine Arabicke terms... used by Historians’ (title-page) of mainly Arabic titles of honour. His great lexical achievements were not made public until after his death, when in seven folio manuscripts and two quarto volumes, they were incorporated by Edmund Castell in his Hepatalogion.

Another work available in England was Minshew’s Vocabularium Hispanicolum (1617), which although a dictionary of Spanish, gave some assistance to students of Arabic by marking with an obelisk loan words from Arabic into Spanish; after 1613 they would have had access to the dictionary printed by Raphelengius. Some twenty years later there was available an abridged version of Valentine Schindler’s Lexicon Pentaplogion, which was made in 1635 by William Alabaster (1567-1640). Like Bedwell an alumnus of Trinity College Cambridge, he had probably learned his Arabic, not in academic surroundings, but in Spain, which he had visited in the entourage of the Earl of Essex. English scholars had to rely on Continental sources for more comprehensive dictionaries until the publication of Edmund Castell’s Lexicon Hepatalogion (1669), intended more as a simple dictionary of seven languages ‘descended from the Hebrew’. Its purpose was to show ‘the cognition and dependance which is betwixt these languages, whereby they will very much illustrate one another’. He pointed out, however, that this dictionary would not only enable scholars to read the Polyglott Bible, but also to understand the Qur’an itself. Furthermore, he claimed that the arrangement would enable the ‘unskillful’ to find derivatives from the root, or radix, by means of the so-called ‘servile’ letters. These words come from the prospectus entitled Lexicon Linguarum Orientalium, which Castell issued in 1658, inviting subscriptions to the work, and which was signed by a large number of supporters, including Walton and Pococke.

Grammars of Arabic were also, in the early years of the century, the work of Continental rather than English scholars. The Dutch scholar Erpenius, who visited Bedwell in about 1608, produced a Grammatica Arabica (1613) in which he referred to Bedwell’s expertise in the language, and a revised version, entitled Rudimenta Linguarum Arabicae, in 1620. In the same year the important grammar by Francis Martellotus, Institutiones Linguarum Arabicae, was published in Rome. It was dedicated to Pope Paul V in acknowledgement of his encouragement of Arabic studies for the conversion of the Muslims. English scholars had little to contribute to the development of Arabic grammar, and it was the German Ravis who produced the first major grammatical study of Arabic and cognate tongues in the English language, as part of a comparative treatise. Ravis was helped by the fact that he was well acquainted with Hebrew grammar, having studied John Udall’s English translation of Martinus’s grammar, The Key of the Holy Tongue (1593), of which he was later to produce an annotated version. In 1649 he published A Generall Grammar for the Hebrew, Samaritan, Calde, Syriece, Arabic, and Ethiopic Tongue (a work with a complex bibliographical history and with a slightly different title-page in the 1650 impression). He justified producing a single grammar for all these languages because he said they ‘are but one and the same language’, all of which began with the creation of Adam. He notes in particular that Martinus had, without knowing Arabic, made certain features of his grammar so like those of Arabic ‘as if he had the knowledge of that tongue perfectly’. A second general observation he makes is that Arabic and Hebrew must not be treated as if they were cognate with Greek and Latin; ‘it is but in vain’, he says, ‘to fashion the ebraic grammar after the greek & latine grammar’. He constantly attacks the attempt to model oriental on occidental grammar, claiming, for example, that if the grammarians had not ‘the anomalies and defects of the pronouns in latin and grecke ... yet in their memorie, and had never yet learned great grammars, but some little compendious ones they would have made more plaine worke about the
pronouns here. A third observation made by Ravis is that classical Arabic grammarians made the production of new grammars far too difficult because they 'gave us their terms, and titles, which are so strange, that no body knows what to make of them, some Nouns were sound, others broken, whereof no sound sense can be made at this very day in all England.'

It would be inappropriate in a collection not devoted specifically to linguistic studies to discuss in technical detail Ravis's approach to grammatical analysis, but one principle of general interest might be mentioned. At a time when scholars writing grammars of the European vernaculars felt it necessary and desirable to make the categories of the language under description fit the well-understood and traditional categories of Latin, Ravis, following the precedent of some sixteenth-century Hebrew-Latin grammars, treated Hebrew and other Semitic languages as wholly independent. He argues (though incorrectly), for example, that there is no need whatsoever to allow for a category of conjunctive in Arabic because, as he says, there is 'no special termination' which marks it off from the indicative.

In view of Ravis's inadequate understanding of Arabic, it is not surprising that Walton thought it desirable to produce another and simpler textbook in 1655, Introductio ad Lecitorem Linguarum Orientialium, which includes a description of the phonology of Arabic including its non-English category of 'gutturals'. As for a reader in Arabic, one was produced by Pococke in 1661. This is the Lamiyat al-Ajam, generally known as Carmen Tograni (from the author's name, 'Ali al-Tughra'i, d. 1120 AD) consisting of an Arabic poem with detailed textual, explanatory and grammatical notes. As his biographer Twells notes, he composed it 'to make the Attainment of the Arabick Tongue more easy to those, that study it; for those, containing a Grammatical Explanation of all the Words of this Author, are very servicable for promoting the Knowledge of that Language'. It also contains 'a succinct, yet as accurate an Account of the Arabick Tongue, as is any where extant'.

It is appropriate to give this factual account of Arabic language study in seventeenth-century England, because there has been hitherto so little discussion of its progress and extent. What is more important to the student of linguistics, however, is the insight which the study of Arabic gives into the evolution of comparative philology. It is true, of course, that a Semitic language, Hebrew, was already quite well known in the sixteenth century, as well as Aramaic and Syriac. In the seventeenth century, Ravis identified Hebrew with Arabic (cf. p. 3 above), and by the late eighteenth century it was clear that there was a language family quite distinct from Indo-European; that its structure, vocabulary and script were totally independent of the European vernaculars, and that they ought to be studied as quite distinct phenomena.

Secondly, the knowledge of Arabic gave an impetus to the search for a new form of language which would be of special value for 'philosophical' (scientific) and international communication. It would provide for a totally unambiguous, one-to-one relationship between word and concept, and include in the form of the word itself the meaning of the object denoted; that is, it would have an iconic vocabulary based on a coherent organisation of concepts. Among those who were involved in the construction of philosophical languages were four scholars conversant with Arabic or Hebrew. Francis Lodwick, author of the earliest printed attempt at a universal language (1652), left a manuscript discussion of 'the sound of some of the hebr. and Arabick letters'. John Wallis, Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford, while ignorant of the language as a whole, often referred to the sounds of Arabic in his Tractatus de Logica. It was composed while he was discussing with John Wilkins the construction of his philosophical language, An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language (1668). In this work there are various references to Arabic, as well as the text of the Lord's Prayer in Arabic (both language and script). George Dalgarno cites Hebrew and 'many other of the Eastern languages' as the ultimate inspiration for his philosophical language entitled Ars Signorum. Wallis, Wilkins, and Dalgarno were all resident in Oxford for at least part of the time when Pococke was teaching Arabic, and Wilkins actually headed a petition to the Parliamentary Committee which was enquiring into universities, asking them (successfully) not to implement their proposal (made for purely political reasons) of discontinuing Pococke's Arabic lectures.

Although only Dalgarno refers directly to oriental languages as a source of inspiration, certain characteristics of Arabic correspond closely with desires by which the language-planners laid down for their projects. They must be based on reason, that is, on principles common to 'all languages laid down by men'. Ravis argues that Arabic is 'most agreeable to the nature of man, requiring to be studied more by reason than an infinity of rules, more trying the use of our reason, than the strength of our memory'. The lexicon of a philosophical language should be contrived in such a manner as 'to suit Words to the Nature of the Things they signify', a characteristic which Pococke claims for Arabic. The philosophical language should also, like Arabic, be 'perspicuous'. Such clarity resided partly in the coherent ordering of words 'depending upon one another without interruption, it being impossible that any should be entered or taken out without the dissolution of the natural chain; so also doe those things hang together which they signify'.
formed from each ‘primitive’,45 by reason of ‘the addition of scrivile, or detraction of some Radical Letter, or Letters’.46 The semantic ramifications of these derivatives enable Arabic to ‘provide just the right word for any concept, abstract or concrete’, as a modern critic has remarked, pointing out that the key word is ḥaṭīq, which may be glossed ‘derivation’.47 Such a method of word formation was to be found in the projects of Lodwick and Wilkins, as one element in conceptual classification. Another feature of both Arabic and of philosophical languages was the structure of the word, which depended on a regular alternation of consonants and vowels producing combinations without contiguous consonants. The Protestant missionary, John Eliot, longed for an invented language based on the ‘tri-grammatical foundation’ of Hebrew, which, like Arabic, is ‘capable of a regular expiation into millions of words’.48 Dalgaro, in 1680, also referred with approval to the fact that in Hebrew and other oriental languages no composition of either vowels or consonants is allowed within a single syllable, but all radical words consist of consonants and vowels succeeding one another in alternation (p. 163). This construction gave rise to an ‘iconic’ lexicon in Wilkins’s project, in which each individual vowel or consonant is endowed with a specific signification, referring to some property of the object denoted. A further characteristic of both Arabic and philosophical language projects was the fairly simple nature of their grammars, both in respect of the number of grammatical categories and the lack of complex inflections. Arabic grammar was based on Noun, Verb and Particle;49 and as Thomas Greaves remarked,50 it was free from the ambiguity and complication of innumerable inflexions—a feature of the ideal philosophical language much commended by Wilkins. It cannot be claimed that philosophical language projects were directly inspired by Arabic, but it was certainly the case that the most distinguished scholars among those interested in the topic were acquainted with Pococke; Wilkins and Wallis themselves had some slight knowledge of Arabic. More generally, many of the language projectors were motivated by the desire to recreate, if not the language of Adam itself, at least something comparable in its perfection.51 The Adamic language is a topic of discussion in both the Hebrew Genesis and the Arabic Qur‘ān.52 While the Biblical account of the origin of language is limited to showing God purging the animals before Adam so that he can name them, the accretion of details which inspire so much mystical speculation in seventeenth-century England may ultimately have derived from either Hebrew or Arabic traditions of the Middle Ages.53

NOTES

I should like to thank D. Agius, A. Hamilton and G. A. Russell for being kind enough to read this paper and to save me from some mistakes partly due to my amateur status as an Arabist. I am, of course, solely responsible for any errors that may remain.

2 Ibid., p. 22.
4 E. Brenwood, Enquiries touching the Diversity of Languages, and Religions (London, 1614), Chapter 26.
5 Ibid., p. 61.
6 Ibid., p. 62.
7 M. Passo, Oratio pro Lingua Arabica Professione (Oxford, 1627), sig. 82r.
10 Ibid., p. 30.
11 Ibid., p. 69.
12 Ibid., p. 48.
13 Ibid., p. 33.
16 R. Wills, 'England and the Decree of the Council of Vienna on the Teaching of Greek, Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac', Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, XIV (1952), 1-9.
17 W. Bedwell, Mohammadis Impositur; The Arabin Trudyxman; Index Asseratianum (London, 1615), sig. A4v.
18 Ibid., sig. A4v.
19 H. Brighton, An Epistle ... Teaching Translating the Bible (Middelburgh, 1597), p. 52.
20 It was seen by a contemporary, Thomas Dempster, and mentioned in his Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scottorum (Bologna, 1627), p. 36.
23 Rose's translation is entitled The Alcoran of Mahomet ... A Newell Collect or Admonition. The translation inspired a lively interest in Islam; between 1649 and 1683, the 'Englishmen felt for the last time that they could not afford to be ignorant or indifferent to Islam.' See N. I. Mattar, 'Islam in Interregnum and Restoration England', The Seventeenth Century, 6 (1991), 68. On the other translation, see J. Fäck, 'Die Arabischen Studien in Europa vom 12. bis in den Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts', Beitrdge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islam-Wissenschaft, eds. R. Hartmann & H. Schef (Leipzig, 1944).
25 Ibid., p. 68.
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