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# Language of Paradise: Protestant Oriental Scholarship and the Discovery of Arabic Poetry\*

Jan Loop

**ABSTRACT.** *This essay discusses the discovery of Arabic poetry in Western Europe in the context of Protestant Arabic studies of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The piece centres on the work of the Dutch Orientalist Albert Schultens (1686–1750). His interest in Arabic poetry was driven by the idea that it preserves some of the characteristics of the primeval language and that it can help us understand the original meaning of the Hebrew texts of the Bible. The essay argues that in spite of its shortcomings, Schultens' work is a significant moment in the history of oriental studies. It stimulated an entire generation of young scholars in Protestant Northern Europe; and his comparative study of Semitic languages, his concepts of the primeval language and its transmission as well as his great interest in the poetry of the East still resonate in early Romantic approaches to oriental poetry.*

**KEYWORDS.** *Arabic Studies; Hebrew Studies; Bible; Protestantism; Poetry; Etymology; Linguistics; Enlightenment*

Die Poesie in allen ihren Zungen  
ist dem Geweihten Eine Sprache nur,  
Die Sprache, die im Paradies erklungen,  
eh sie verwildert auf der wilden Flur.  
Doch wo sie nun auch sei hervorgedrungen,  
von ihrem Ursprung trägt sie noch die Spur;  
Und ob sie dumpf im Wüstenglutwind  
stöne,  
es sind auch hier des Paradieses Töne.<sup>1</sup>

Poetry in all its tongues  
is to the initiate but a single language,  
the language which sounded in Paradise  
before it echoed escaped in the ragged field.  
But wherever it emerges  
it bears yet the traces of its origin,  
and though it sighs dully in the scorching  
desert wind,  
there remain the notes of paradise.

We find this poem by Friedrich Rückert in the preface to his German translation of the *Ḥamāsa*, the famous collection of poems by Abū Tammām, published in 1846. Rückert's work is beyond the scope of this article, but the verses express an idea which has been current among European orientalists since the beginning of the eighteenth century and became an important incentive for the study of Eastern poetry. It is the idea that Arabic poetry not only preserves the original and essential sense of Arabic but also

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<sup>1</sup> F. Rückert, 'Ermütigung zur Uebersetzung der Hamāsa (1828)' in id., *Hamāsa oder die ältesten arabischen Volkslieder, gesammelt von Abu Temmām* (Stuttgart, 1846) (unpag.)

retains characteristics of earliest historical stages of language. The idea finds expression in Johann Gottfried Herder's writings on the Old Testament and on the origin of language: 'Den Genius der Sprache', he says in his *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, 'können wir nie besser, d.i. wahrer, tiefer, vielseitiger, angenehmer studieren, als in Poesie, und zwar soviel möglich in der ältesten Poesie derselben'.<sup>2</sup> Before Herder, however, it already played a central role in Protestant comparative approaches to the 'oriental' languages in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the work of the Dutch Arabist Albert Schultens. Inspired by the Arabs' own concepts about the prehistory of their language and the role of poetry in its cultivation, Schultens promoted the idea of Arabic poetry as a vehicle of the 'genius' of the original Hebrew language and embarked on a life-long research project into Arabic poetry. In the course of this research he also introduced a selection of poems from Abū Tammām's *Ḥamāsa* to the West.

I would like to discuss Schultens' linguistic and socio-linguistic theories in the light of his seventeenth-century predecessors and some of his eighteenth-century successors, placing a particular focus on his promotion of the study of Arabic poetry. I hope to show that, in spite of its shortcomings, Schultens' work is a significant moment in the history of oriental studies. It stimulated an entire generation of young scholars in Protestant Northern Europe; and his comparative study of Semitic languages, his concepts of the primeval language and its transmission as well as his great interest in the poetry of the East still resonate in early Romantic approaches to oriental poetry.

Schultens' interest in Arabic poetry is situated in the Protestant tradition of Arabic philology that developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. While we find some occasional discussions of Arabic poetry and prosody in grammars or textbooks produced in Roman Catholic scholarly circles, the greatest achievements in editing, translating and interpreting Arabic poetry were produced in the Protestant world. As it was their central aim to improve the understanding of the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, grammars and textbooks published in Holland, England and Germany tended to follow the Arabic grammatical tradition which took as its linguistic criterion the Qur'an and archaic

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<sup>2</sup> J. G. Herder, *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie. Eine Anleitung für die Liebhaber derselben und der ältesten Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes*, in id., *Werke in zehn Bänden. vol. 5: Schriften zum Alten Testament*, ed. R. Smend (Frankfurt, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), pp. 661–1308 at 670.

poetry. So they included from the very beginning examples from classical Arabic poetry and belles lettres, in addition to excerpts from the Qur'an.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this, Arabic learning and teaching in the Roman Catholic world was motivated primarily by missionary intentions. Therefore it displayed not only a much greater interest in vernacular forms of Arabic, but also showed a tendency to 'Christianize' or 'de-Islamize' the Arabic language and to instruct students on the basis of Christian texts, such as the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms and the Apostles' Creed.

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Albert Schultens is mainly remembered today for his comparative studies of the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. Although he repeatedly emphasizes the pioneering character of his work, he also acknowledges his indebtedness to the seventeenth-century tradition of Protestant Arabic scholarship and its predecessors among Medieval Jewish Hebraists. And indeed, the similarity of Arabic and Old Testament Hebrew had played an important role in the history of oriental scholarship in the West since the Middle Ages,<sup>4</sup> and it gained currency among seventeenth-century philologists who expected to find in the Arabic language solutions for semantical and grammatical problems they encountered in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup>

The Jewish tradition of comparative study of Arabic and Hebrew dates back to the beginning of the tenth century and the linguistic work of Sa'adya Gaon and, particularly, of Judah ibn Quraysh, who in the third chapter of his *Risāla* presented an extensive comparison between Hebrew and Arabic words and their meanings.<sup>6</sup> An early work completely devoted to comparative Hebrew linguistics is the *Kitāb al-Muwāzana bayn al-lughā al-'Ibrāniyya wa 'l-'Arabiyya* (*Book of Comparison between the Hebrew*

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<sup>3</sup> See J. Loop, 'Introduction' in J. Loop, A. Hamilton and C. Burnett (eds), *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Brill, 2017), pp. 1–12, at 6–7.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Maman, *Comparative Semitic Philology in the Middle Ages. From Sa'adiyah Gaon to Ibn Barūn (10th–12th C.)* (Leiden, Brill, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See J. Loop, *Johann Heinrich Hottinger 1620–1667. Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 77–8.

<sup>6</sup> On the significance of the *Risala* see D. Téné, 'The Earliest Comparisons of Hebrew with Aramaic and Arabic' in *Studies in Linguistic Historiography*, 20 (1980), 355–77 and W. J. van Bekkum, 'The "Risala" of Yehuda Ibn Quraysh and its place in Hebrew Linguistics', in *Historiographia Linguistica*, 8 (1981), 307–27.

and *Arabic Languages*, written after 1128) by the Iberian linguist and philologist Isaac Ibn Barūn from Saragossa.<sup>7</sup>

In the sixteenth century, Christian Hebraists like Guillaume Postel and Angelo Canini asserted the close structural and semantic similarities of Hebrew and Arabic and the usefulness of a comparative approach for their understanding. In fact, Canini's preface to his Aramaic grammar from 1554 called Arabic, Syriac and Ethiopic 'dialects' of the Hebrew language, which 'differ from each other more in the shape of the letters than in themselves'. He is, as far as I can see, the first to compare them with the four dialects of Greek, Attic, Ionic, Doric and Aeolic.<sup>8</sup> In doing this, he reflected a more general trend in the linguistic thought of sixteenth-century Italy, where the five dialects of Greek became the mirror of Italian vernaculars and the use of the word *dialect* is widely attested.<sup>9</sup>

For a number of reasons, which I have discussed in more detail elsewhere, the comparative method became extremely fashionable in Northern European orientalist circles in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the comparative philological approach appears to have been a major incentive for the boom in Arabic studies at Protestant universities of the time. Convinced, in principle, of the accessibility and intelligibility of God's scriptural communication, many Protestant Biblical scholars expected comparative oriental philology to offer them the key to unlock the mysteries in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament and, finally, to solve all theological questions.

Protestant scholars who studied and documented the 'continuous harmony between the oriental languages'<sup>11</sup> (Louis De Dieu, Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Johann Ernst

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<sup>7</sup> See José Martínez Delgado, *La semitística comparada en Andalucía, de los orígenes a Ibn Ibn Barūn* (Saragossa, Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> *Institutiones linguae Syriacae, Assyriacae atque Thalmudicae, una cum Aethiopicae, atque Arabicae collatione* (Paris, Carolus Stephanus, 1554). See J. Weinberg, 'A Hebraic Approach to the New Testament', in C. Ligota and J.-L. Quantin (eds), *History of Scholarship* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 238–47.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Alinei, 'Dialecto: un concetto rinascimentale fiorentino. Storia e analisi' *Quaderni di semantica* 2 (1981), 147–73; P. Trovato, "'Dialecto" e sinonimi ("idioma", "proprietà", "lingua") nella terminologia linguistica quattro- e cinquecentesca', *Rivista di letterature Italiana*, 2 (1984), 205–36.

<sup>10</sup> See Loop, *Hottinger*.

<sup>11</sup> See the title of Johann Ernst Gerhard's book *Harmonia perpetua aliarum linguarum orientalium, Chaldae, Syrae, Arabicae, Aethiopicae cum indicibus necessariis* (Jena, 1647).

Gerhard, Samuel Bochart and Edward Pococke and others), insisted on categorizing them as different languages that closely resemble their divine mother tongue, Hebrew, rather than dialects as suggested by Canini. A notable exception, however, is Christian Ravius, who developed a linguistic and exegetical system on the assumption that the six oriental tongues (Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Syriac, Samaritan and Ethiopic) are not merely related, but are in fact one and the same language. First in Latin, most thoroughly in his *Orthographia et Analogia (vulgo Etymologia) Ebraica* from 1646 and later in his English publications,<sup>12</sup> Ravius expounded this theory of the fundamental unity of the oriental tongues. This unity he calls the ‘holy primitive and orientall tongue’, arguing that ‘if one [of its] dialects is sacred, all the [other related] dialects are sacred and the whole language is sacred.’<sup>13</sup> In view of Schultens’ method it is interesting to notice Ravius’ distinction between an essential ‘significatio prima’ and an accidental ‘significatio secunda’, whereas the unity of the oriental dialects is ensured by the former. It was, he argues, acknowledged by many learned men that every root of the Hebrew language had one primary, abstract, essential, proper, eternal and unchanging meaning.<sup>14</sup> In the oriental tongue this one essential meaning is expressed in a root consisting of three consonants, and ‘all languages which have three consonants as the essence of each word, are sacred, because they represent the divine Trinity, and while each of them is a dialect of the other, they all constitute the Sacred Language’.<sup>15</sup> From this Ravius distinguishes a secondary meaning, which is grown, accidental, common, transitory and changeable. The differences between the oriental dialects are all due to these secondary meanings, which are the result of figurative speech. Ravius, like Schultens half a century later, urged any interpreter of the Old Testament to

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<sup>12</sup> *A Discourse of the Orientall Tongues viz. Ebrew, Samaritan, Calde, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic. Together with a Generall Grammar for the Said Tongues* (London, 1649) and *A Generall Grammer for the ready attaining of the Ebrew, Samaritan, Calde, Syriac, Arabic, and the Ethiopic Languages* (London, 1650).

<sup>13</sup> *Generall Grammer*, p. 46 and *Orthographiae et analogiae (vulgo etymologiae) Ebraicae delineatio juxta vocis partes abstractas* (Amsterdam, Johannes Janssonius, 1646), p. 42: ‘Et si una dialectorum sacra est, omnes sunt sacrae, & tota lingua erit sacra.’ For similar statements see *A Discourse Concerning the Eastern Tongues*, p. 40: ‘If Ebrew be good, holy, and primitive, and Caldaic, Syriac, Samaritic, Ethiopic, and Arabic be the same primitive tongue: then if you deny, wheter with, or without reason, any one of them, the name of primitive, you may as well deny it to Ebrew it selfe, the denying of one being the denying of the other’.

<sup>14</sup> Ravius, *Orthographiae et analogiae Ebraicae delineatio*, p. 42. See also *A Discourse Concerning the Eastern Tongues*, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ravius, *Orthographiae et analogiae Ebraicae delineatio*, p. 42.

reconstruct, on the basis of all the oriental dialects, the original root words and their meaning, because only these would lead to the true, divine sense of Sacred Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

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The semantic and structural similarity between Hebrew and Arabic was not the only reason why Arabic became an eager object of study for many Protestant exegetes of the Old Testament. In almost all of the many early modern panegyrics on the value of the Arabic language we encounter the topos of its great antiquity and purity. The idea that the Arabic language has preserved many characteristics of the most ancient language in its original purity has frequently been used as an additional argument for its exegetical use and confirmed its status as a linguistic archive.<sup>17</sup> It will become evident from the following that this concept received important impulses from Arab accounts of the prehistory of their language, many of which are collected in al-Suyūṭī's major linguistic work *al-Muzhir fī 'ulūm al-lughā wa anwā'ihā* (*The Luminous Work Concerning the Sciences of Language*) and transmitted by the first Laudian professor of Arabic, Edward Pococke.<sup>18</sup>

For most Arab scholars, Arabic was the earliest existing language: '[Arabic] was the first of the languages and all other languages occurred later either by revelation (*tawqīfan*) or by convention (*iṣṭilāḥan*) and this can be concluded from the fact that the Qur'an is the word of God and it is in Arabic and this is a proof that Arabic is the oldest of all existing languages (*lughatu l-'arab 'asbaqu l-lughāti wujūdan*).'<sup>19</sup> However, Arab Islamic historians and genealogists had some difficulty bringing together traditional native genealogies of the Arabs with Islamic aspirations to produce a direct genealogical line that connected Muhammad with the Biblical Patriarchs. These difficulties are also reflected in the often contradictory accounts of the prehistory of the Arabic language in al-Suyūṭī's linguistic work. A popular tradition, reported among others by the Andalusian scholar 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥabīb, was that 'the first language

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<sup>16</sup> Ravius, *Orthographiae et analogiae Ebraicae delineatio*, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> On the concept of Arabic as a linguistic and cultural archive see M. Olender, *Les langues du Paradis: Aryens et Sémites, un couple providentiel* (Paris, Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> al-Suyūṭī *al-Muzhir fī 'ulūm al-lughā wa anwā'ihā* (Cairo, 1325 A.H.) For an interesting overview of histories of the Arabic language written by Arabs, see Stefan Wild, 'Arabic avant la lettre. Divine, Prophetic, and Heroic Arabic', in E. Ditters and H. Motzki (eds), *Approaches to Arabic Linguistics. Presented to Kees Versteegh on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday* (Leiden, Brill, 2007), pp. 189–208.

<sup>19</sup> al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, p. 18.

with which Adam came down from Paradise was Arabic.’ ‘Abd al-Malik and others argue that, as a result of corruption or divinely imposed confusion, Arabic became Syriac – ‘Syriac resembled Arabic, but it was corrupted.’<sup>20</sup> In the report of ‘Abd al-Malik mentioning is also made of Jurhum, who plays a pivotal role in many Arab accounts of the history and transmission of their language: ‘Syriac was the language of all people in Noah’s ark except for one man, Jurhum whose language was still the original Arabic language.’<sup>21</sup> However, Jurhum also appears in other narratives and genealogies, for example in the one that Edward Pococke presented to the European reader in his annotations to Abū ‘l-Faraj’s (Bar Haebraeus) *History of the Dynasties*. Pococke showed that most Islamic historians considered genuine Arabs to be descendants of *Qaḥṭān*, whom they identified with the Biblical Joktan, the second son of Eber (Gen. 10, 25).<sup>22</sup> According to these traditions Joktan had two sons, Ja‘rub, who figures as the progenitor of the Yemeni Arabs, and Jurhum, whose tribe inhabited the Hijaz and gained control over the Ka’aba at Mecca.<sup>23</sup> It is here that the native Arab genealogy meets with the Koranic narration that links Arabs and Muslims with Ismael. Ismael, whose mother tongue was Hebrew, but who, according to the Islamic tradition, was taken to Mecca by his father Abraham, married a woman from the tribe of Jurhum and ‘he acquainted himself with their manners, their dialect and their way of life, and he began to grow together with this group.’<sup>24</sup> Most interesting in our context, however, is Pococke’s discussion of the linguistic situation at the time. The passage is meant to shed light on Abu ‘l-Faraj’s statement that ‘the erudition which the Arabs were particularly eager to attain glory in, was the knowledge of their language, propriety in conversation, the structure of poetry and the composition of speeches.’<sup>25</sup> I believe that Pococke’s learned annotations to this passage and the many ideas they provided about

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<sup>20</sup> al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> The identification has been contested by modern scholars: ‘Though virtually nothing is known of the rôle of this people in pre-Islamic times, it seems reasonable to suppose that the apparent similarity of the name with Yaḳṭan led the Arb genealogists to make the identification in order to provide the South Arabian peoples with a respectable biblical ancestry, just as the Northern Arabs, under the influence of the Bible and the Qur’ān, had been linked with Ishmael, son of Abraham, through the fictitious ‘Adnān’: A. Fischer and A.K. Irvine, ‘Kaḥṭān’, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Brill Online, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> E. Pococke, *Specimen historiae Arabum*, ed. J. White (Oxford, Clarendon, 1806), p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Pococke, *Specimen*, p. 40: ‘Hos cur ita nuncupent, rationem hanc assignant; quod scilicet *Ismael* eorum pater, cum origine et lingua non *Arabs*, sed *Hebraeus* fuerit, postquam cum *Jorhamidis* affinitatem contraxisset, ipsorum moribus, dialecto, et vitae instituto assueverit, ipsoque oriundi in unam cum illis gentem coaluerint.’

<sup>25</sup> Pococke, *Specimen*, pp. 5–7: ‘Eruditio autem Arabum, cujus gloriae praecipue studiosi erant, haec erat: linguae suae peritia, sermonis proprietas, carminum textura, et orationum compositio’.



the ancient Arabs' reverence for their language and the mnemonic function of poetry was an important factor in triggering an interest in pre-history of the Arabic language and its transmission in early Arabic poetry. But Pococke also presented new historical explanations for the similarity or – as some saw it – the congruency of Arabic and the primeval Hebrew language. According to the philologist Salām al-Jumaḥī, who is quoted by al-Suyūṭī, there was a difference between the Arabic spoken by the tribe of Jurhum and the Arabic that was spoken by Ismael and his followers, which is the language in which the Koran was revealed.<sup>26</sup> This, Pococke concluded, can only mean ‘that Ismael, after his association with the (tribe of) Jurhum by marriage, refined the Arabic language, and that he may have corrected and polished it according to the norms of the original Hebrew, from which it had long deviated (*deflexerat*). For there is a consensus in the Arabic tradition that Ismael received his vernacular language from the *Jurhum*, not that he taught them a new one.’<sup>27</sup>

Of particular significance for the future of Arabic scholarship in Northern Europe was the role which Arab historians and linguists assigned to poetry in the cultivation and preservation of the pure Arabic language. Pococke had mentioned this not only in the annotations to Bar Hebraeus, but also, more extensively, in the *praelectiones* to his edition of the *Carmen Tograi* (*Lāmiyyat al-‘ajam* by al-Ṭuḡhrā’ī) from 1661. Ibn Salām al-Jumaḥī in his *Ṭabaqāt al-fuḥūl al-shu‘arā’* (*Classes of Poets*) had summarised the function of pre-Islamic poetry neatly: ‘Arabic poems of the Jahiliyya’, Pococke translated, ‘were encyclopedias and collections of their wisdom, a treasury in which they stored all the valuables of their language, a cornucopia, from which they sought all the things that contribute to practice and embellishment, an oracle, from which they sought the solution of all controversies which could arise from things or from words.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Pococke, *Specimen*, p. 156: ‘[...] quod non aliter intelligi potest quam quod *Arabum*, post affinitatem cum *Jorhamidis* nuptiarum interventu contractam, linguam defaecatiorem reddiderit, et forsan ad Hebraicae primigeniae normam, a qua longius deflexerat, correxerit et limaverit. Illum enim linguam ipsius vernaculam a *Jorhamidis* accepisse, non illos novam docuisse, ipsi unanimi consensu tradunt [...]’.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Pococke, *لامية العجم Lamiatu’l Ajam, Carmen Tograi Poetae Arabis doctissimi; unâ cum versione Latina & notis [...] accessit Tractatus de Prosodia Arabica* (Oxford, 1661), sig. \*5<sup>v</sup> (Oratio): ‘[Erant] ἐγκυκλοπαιδείας & sapientiae eorum Pandectae, Gazophylacium in quo omnia linguae suae κειμήλια reponebant, Cornucopia, unde omnia ad usum aut ad ornatum conferentia, oraculum, unde omnium, quae de rebus vel de verbis oriri poterant, controversiarum solutionem petebant.’ See also his *Specimen*, p. 164.

By presenting the Arabs' view of the pre-history of their language and the role of poetry as a guardian of its originality and pristine authenticity, Pococke provided the main argument on which Schultens based his life-long scholarly interest in Arabic poetry. While Schultens' linguistic theories are well known,<sup>29</sup> hardly any attention has so far been paid to his ideas about the transmission of the primeval language through the poetry of the Arabs. In what follows, I would like to assess this central aspect of Schultens' scholarship and try to show how it builds on the work of his Protestant predecessors and resonated deep into the eighteenth century and the Romantic movement in Northern Europe.

As mentioned before, Schultens's work marks the culmination of the Protestant linguistic comparative tradition of the seventeenth century, and he repeatedly invokes the work of his predecessors Samuel Bochart, Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Pococke and others.<sup>30</sup> However, he went further than most of his predecessors by overthrowing the traditional hierarchy of the oriental languages and by challenging the primacy of Hebrew.

Remarkably, Schultens nowhere in his work makes mention of Christian Ravius, but the similarities between their approaches went well beyond the use of the same vegetal metaphor when describing the semantic developments of primeval word roots into secondary meanings, the trunk, the branches and the greens of the word stock.<sup>31</sup> As with Ravius, Schultens' interest was not so much with these 'degenerated', often contradictory and inconsistent secondary meanings, which were developed by figurative uses, but with the 'pure', 'essential' and original meanings of the Hebrew language. Only on the basis of these could the true meaning of the texts of the Old

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<sup>29</sup> On Schultens's language theories, his concept of oriental dialects and his etymological speculations see my 'Kontroverse Bemühungen um den Orient. Johann Jacob Reiske und die Orientalistik seiner Zeit' in Hans-Georg Ebert and Thoralf Hanstein (eds), *Johann Jacob Reiske. Persönlichkeit und Wirkung* (Leipzig, 2005), pp. 45–85 and Arnould Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands. A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 73–9 as well as their 'Albert Schultens grondlegger van een dynastie', in *ZemZem*, 5 (2009), 58–67.

<sup>30</sup> See my *Hottinger*, p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> For Schultens' vegetal metaphors in describing the development of languages see my "Von dem Geschmack der morgenländischen Dichtkunst". Orientalistik und Bibelexegese bei Huet, Michaelis und Herder', in Daniel Weidner (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder: Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (Munich, 2008), pp. 155–83.

Testament be recovered. And the most certain way to penetrate the primeval essence of the Hebrew language of the Old Testament was to turn to its dialects, most importantly to its twin sister, the Arabic language. For Schultens, just as for Ravius, the oriental dialects constituted one and the same language,<sup>32</sup> and he reduced the difference between Arabic and Hebrew to a difference of name only. Hence, their relationship turned from the traditional relationship of mother and daughter to that of twin sisters who share their paradisiac origins and qualities.<sup>33</sup>

For Schultens, the study of the Arabic language and the other oriental dialects not only opened the windows to the true meaning of the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, but also to the linguistic conditions before the confusion of tongues at Babel.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the original Hebrew ‘dialect’ had been completely corrupted and had degenerated because of Jewish negligence and inconstancy, the living Arabic dialect has preserved characteristics of the ‘primeval language, the oldest one, which had been developed and instituted together with mankind’.<sup>35</sup>

Schultens repeatedly referred to Pococke’s source-based reconstruction of the pre-Islamic linguistic history, for example in his collection of pre-history of the Arabian Peninsula *Historia Imperii Vetustissimi Joctanidarum in Arabia Felice ex Abulfeda, Hamza Isphahanensi, Nuweirio, Taberita, Mesoudio*, published posthumously in 1786. His reconstruction of the early genealogy and the transmission of the original language from Joktan to the Jurhum and to the Quraish via the purifying intervention of Ismael

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<sup>32</sup> See for instances the preface to the *Proverbia Salomonis. Versionem integram ad Hebraeum fontem expressit atque commentarium adjecit* (Leiden, Johann Luzac, 1648), pp. XCII–XCIII.

<sup>33</sup> ‘It is my intention to reveal to you’, Schultens told his audience in his first *Oration on the Origin of the Arabic Language* in 1729, ‘the ancient origin of the Arabic language, its intimate and sisterly relationship with the Hebrew language and its purity, not tarnished by the ravages of time, which is still breathing the same nobility, vigour and antiquity, which the original, and as it were, Paradisiac origin inspired in it and which completely inseminated its deepest roots.’ (‘Pandere mihi decretum est [...] *Linguae Arabicae*, precelsae illius Arboris, *Originem antiquissimam, intimam ac sororiam cum Hebraea Lingua consanguinitatem, nullaque temporum injuria praefloratum puritatem*, qua idem illud generosum, vegetum, antiquum, adhucdum spirat, quod ortus primigenitus, ac quodammodo Paradisiacus, ei inspiravit, penitissimisque ejus radicibus inseminavit.’): Albert Schultens, *Oratio de Linguae Arabicae antiquissima origine, intima ac sororia cum lingua Hebraea affinitate, nullisque seculis praeflorata puritate*, habita [...] Kal. Junii 1729 (Franeker, 1729), p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> See his preface to the *Proverbia Salomonis*, p. xcii.

<sup>35</sup> Schultens, *Oratio de Linguae Arabicae antiquissime origine*, p. 6: ‘Ad *Linguae Arabicae* natales ex densissima temporum caligine, ultimaeque memoriae vetustate eruendos, paucula mihi praelibanda esse sentio de *Lingua Primaeva*, sive Antiquissima illa, quae cum genere humano condita atque instituta fuit.’

after the model of the Hebrew language was copied verbatim from Pococke.<sup>36</sup> But while Pococke in his annotations presented a complicated and often contradictory panorama of Arab accounts of the antiquity of their language and its preservation, Schultens moulded the material into a straightforward hermeneutic argument: the Arabs, because they lived in isolation and have a natural aversion to everything new and changeable and, particularly, because of their sacred reverence for their divine language and the celebrated efforts of their poets to cultivate its ‘ancient character’ and to ‘deliver the evaporating meanings of words to posterity’, have preserved many elements of earliest linguistic stages in their language.<sup>37</sup> Hence Arabic poetry was for the Protestant scholar a rich etymological archive that would lead to the original and essential meaning of the Old Testament. It was this argument that triggered an unprecedented scholarly interest in Arabic poetry and a number of editions and translations of Arabic poems, together with translations and etymological and philological annotations, throughout Northern Europe.

Some occasional editions and translations of Arabic poems had appeared long before Schultens entered the stage. Esteemed to be of central cultural importance to the Arabs, poetry had a place in the teaching and learning of Arabic, and we find selected Arabic poems printed in mostly Protestant seventeenth-century textbooks and grammars, often together with accounts of the system of Arabic prosody.<sup>38</sup> Usually the editions were equipped with detailed grammatical, syntactical, semantic and metrical comments, while questions of historical circumstances, of cultural functions and poetical traditions were only occasionally touched upon. It will become evident from the following discussion of some of Schultens’ editions of Arabic poems that his approach was still greatly indebted to this grammatical tradition and that his main interest was in linguistic – particularly in semantical and etymological – aspects of the poems.

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<sup>36</sup> See for instance his ‘Dissertatio Theologico-Philologica de utilitate linguae Arabicae’, in his *Opera Minora* (Leiden et al., 1769), pp. 498–510, at 492.

<sup>37</sup> A. Schultens, ‘Oratio altera de linguae Arabicae antiquissima origine, intima ac sororia cum linguae Hebraea cognatione, nullisque seculis praeclorata puritate’, habita a.d. 20 Junii 1732, in id. *Originum Hebraearum tomus secundus cum vindictis tomi primi [...] accedit gemina oratio de linguae arabice antiquitate et sororia cognatione cum Hebraea etc.* (Leiden, 1738), pp. 33–58, at 47.

<sup>38</sup> See J. Loop, ‘Arabic Poetry as Teaching Material in Early Modern Grammars and Textbooks’, in Loop, Hamilton, Burnett (eds), *Teaching of Arabic*, pp. 230–51.

His greatest achievement in the field of Arabic poetry and *belles lettres* is his pioneering edition of the first *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, which he started in 1731 with the publication of *Haririi eloquentiae Arabicae principis tres priores consessus*. Excerpts of this literary work already featured in some seventeenth-century grammars and textbooks, most prominently in Jacobus Golius' 1656 edition of Erpenius' grammar.<sup>39</sup> It was praised not only as an ideal text with which to practice and teach the Arabic language, but also as a testimony of the Arabic rhetorical and literary tradition, which certain European observers likened to the Greek and Roman one. Among them was the Hamburg pastor Abraham Hinckelmann who, in the preface to his edition of the Arabic Qur'an at the end of the seventeenth century, had enthusiastically called for an edition of the work of the 'Arabic Cicero', al-Ḥarīrī.<sup>40</sup> Hinckelmann was in possession of a manuscript of the *maqāmāt* which was handed down to Johann Christoph Wolf, who later gave it to Johann Jacob Reiske.<sup>41</sup> Probably as an 'admission ticket' to the circles of Albert Schultens the twenty-year-old Reiske transcribed and translated the greatest part of it and, in 1737 published a version of the twenty-sixth *maqāma*, thus placing himself in the tradition of Golius and Schultens. Later in life, however, Reiske regretted the premature publication – 'eine elende Schülerprobe, deren ich mich jetzt schäme' – and was glad that the work was only printed in a very small number of copies.<sup>42</sup> The first English translation, based on Schultens' 1731 edition, was prepared by the Cambridge professor of Arabic Leonard Chappellow, who seems to have made a career by translating other Arabists' works into English.<sup>43</sup> Complete editions only started to appear in the nineteenth century,<sup>44</sup> but in the century prior to this Schultens already

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<sup>39</sup> J. Golius, *Arabicae linguae tyrocinium, id est Thomae Erpenii grammatica arabica* (Leiden, 1656). The first to publish a *maqāma* was the German student of Golius, Johann Fabricius in his *Specimen arabicum quo exhibentur aliquot scripta arabica partim in prosa, partim ligata oratione composita* (Rostock, 1638).

<sup>40</sup> A. Hinckelmann, *Al-Coranus s. Lex Islamitica Muhammedis, Filii Abdallae pseudoprophetae, ad optimorum codicum fidem edita ex museo Abrahami Hinckelmanni* (Hamburg, 1694), preface sig. [j].

<sup>41</sup> On this manuscript see also Johann Christoph Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, vol. 4 (Hamburg, 1723), p. 776, and C. Brockelmann, *Katalog der Orientalischen Handschriften der Stadtbibliothek zu Hamburg*, part 1 (Hamburg, 1908), pp. 46–7, no. 97.

<sup>42</sup> J. J. Reiske, *Von ihm selbst aufgesetzte Lebensbeschreibung* (Leipzig, 1783), p. 4. See also *Johann Jacob Reiskes Briefe*, ed. R. Foerster (Leipzig, 1897), pp. 5–17.

<sup>43</sup> L. Chappellow, *Six Assemblies, Or Ingenious Conversations of Learned Men Among the Arabians, Upon a Great Variety of Useful and Entertaining Subjects* (Cambridge, 1767).

<sup>44</sup> The first complete edition was published in Calcutta (1809–14), followed by Caussin de Perceval's edition of the Arabic text in 1818 (1819) and by Silvestre de Sacy's edition of 1822. See C. de Perceval, *Les cinquante séances de Hariri, en Arabe* (Paris, 1819) and S. de Sacy, *Les séances de Hariri, publiées en Arabe, avec un commentaire choisi* (Paris, 1822). In 1826, Friedrich Rückert published a free translation of almost the entire work: *Die Verwandlungen des Ebu Seid von Serug oder die Makamen des Hariri in freier Nachbildung* (Gotha, 1826).

intended to make more of al-Ḥarīrī's work public. In 1640 he edited the *maqāmāt* four to six, and he kept working on the translations of subsequent *sessions* until his death. In the preface to the 1640 edition, Schultens inserted excerpts from the entry in Ibn Khallikān's biographical lexicon *Wafayāt al-a'yān*.<sup>45</sup> The passage starts with an eulogy of al-Ḥarīrī's text and hails it as a unique treasury of the riches of the Arabic language, of rare words, proverbial sayings and figurative and enigmatic expressions. However, apart from a few biographical anecdotes, no historical or literary context was provided in Schultens's edition. Hence the reader was informed that al-Ḥarīrī was extremely ugly – a topos that is applied to many other Arab poets –<sup>46</sup> but not that he had lived in the twelfth century, nor that his *maqāmāt* were structured after the model of al-Hamadhānī, who is considered to be the initiator of the genre.

Instead, the text was explained with a detailed linguistic analysis, which drew upon the rare sixteenth-century commentary by Abdallah b. Muhammad al-Ṭaballabī, a manuscript of which had been purchased by Golius.<sup>47</sup> Following the aforementioned tradition of publications of Arabic poetry in seventeenth-century textbooks and grammars, Schultens's notes were mainly devoted to the explanation of difficult sayings and grammatical and syntactical constructions. The annotations typically provide an analysis of the word form and the semantic field of the root, together with other occurrences in Arabic literature, and references to Hebrew cognate words. The most important source was Golius' Arabic-Latin dictionary and al-Ṭaballabī's commentary. It was the commentary of 'Teblebius', Schultens said in the preface to the 1731 volume, which had showed him a secure way to 'reduce the very disparate meanings from which Arabic roots in lexica suffer to an agreeable unity and harmony.'<sup>48</sup> By editing the work of al-Ḥarīrī, Schultens presented the European reader with what he thought was a particularly illustrative example of the 'prisca grandiloquentia' of the Orient, which would also characterise the book of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs and the other poetical books of the Old Testament.

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<sup>45</sup> 'Excerptum ex Ibn Chalikān de Viris Illustribus quo occasio operis enarratur', in *Consensus Haririi quartus, quintus & sextus*, ed. A. Schultens (Leiden, 1740), sigs. 3\*<sup>r</sup>–1\*\*<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> My colleague Marcel Kurpershoek informed me that it seems to be a topos for Arabic poets for such figures to be 'extremely ugly' but still able to impress women because of their poetic talent.

<sup>47</sup> It is still kept at the University Library, Ms. Or. 136.

<sup>48</sup> Schultens, *Hariri*, Praefatio, \*\*<sup>v</sup>.

The peculiarity of Schultens's approach to Arabic poetry becomes evident if we look at the second part of his 1740 publication. Together with al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* he also published a collection of old Arabic poems and fragments of poems – the *Monumenta vetustiora Arabiae*, the oldest documents of Arabia.<sup>49</sup> Schultens had found most of these ‘priscae Linguae monumenta’ in the work of the Syrian historian Abū al-Fidā’. He found others in Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī’s great encyclopedia *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (*The Ultimate Ambition in the Branches of Erudition*<sup>50</sup>) and had apparently taken some from al-Mas‘ūdī’s universal cultural history *Murūj al-dhahab*. A number of them also came from Abū Tammām’s famous anthology of old Arabic poems, the *Diwān al-Ḥamāsa*. From these oldest records, Schultens believed, it would appear with the utmost clarity that ‘the Arabic dialect was from earliest memory and antiquity in a most intimate relationship to Hebrew and constituted the most flourishing branch of the same stock.’<sup>51</sup> Schultens dated some of the poems back to Solomonic times – for example, the first two poems in the collection, which he attributed to ‘Amr ibn al-Hārith ibn Muḍaḍ, the legendary chief of the Jurhum who had gained control of the Ka‘ba.<sup>52</sup> He went even further with the third poem, which he had also found in Abū al-Fidā’s *Annals* and which he dated ‘not later than Moses, but possibly a bit older.’<sup>53</sup> Other poems in the collection he ascribed to pre-Islamic Himyarite kings, decades before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

The joint publication of *maqāmāt* written by a twelfth-century Basra state official together with fragments of pre- and early Islamic tribal poetry is characteristic of Schultens's approach to Arabic poetry, and also explains the lack of any contextual and historical information. Schultens treated the texts indiscriminately as archives of oldest and purest linguistic forms of the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, regardless of the fact that they had completely disparate geographical, social, and cultural origins and belonged to different literary genres.

<sup>49</sup> *Monumenta vetustiora Arabiae sive specimina quaedam illustria antiquae memoriae. Ex manuscriptis codicibus Nuweirii, Mesoudii, Abulfedae, Hamasa etc.*, ed. Albertus Schultens (Leiden, 1740).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Elias Muhanna, *Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk Period: The Composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī’s (d. 1333) Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, Ph.D thesis (Harvard, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> *Monumenta vetustiora, praefatio*, sigs. \*4<sup>r-v</sup>: ‘Ex iis Arabicum Dialectum ab ultima inde memoria, & Antiquitate, intime cum Hebraea connexam fuisse, atque ejusdem Stirpis alterum constituere Ramum multo florentissimum, luce meridiana clarius patescet.’

<sup>52</sup> Schultens, *Monumenta vetustiora*, 3. See W. Montgomery Watt, ‘Djurhum or Djurham’ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Brill Online, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Schultens, *Monumenta vetustiora*, p. 11: ‘Aetas Viri Mose non inferior: vel et superior aliquanto.’

This was also the case with another pioneering edition of Arabic poems: a selection of thirty-one poems from the *Ḥamāsa*, Abū Tammām's already mentioned collection of single verses and extracts from pre- and early Islamic poetry. Schultens published the poems together with a Latin translation as an appendix to his new edition of Erpenius's grammar in 1748. Quite remarkably, this selection of poems was the only change Schultens had made to Golius' 1656 edition.<sup>54</sup> However, the poems were again explained with detailed annotations of a grammatical, semantical and etymological nature, based on important Arabic commentators like Yaḥyā al-Tibrīzī and Aḥmad al-Marzūqī. Considering the fact that the poems were published as an appendix to an Arabic grammar, such a commentary seems to be appropriate and followed again the seventeenth-century practice. Whether or not these poems were a sensible choice for young pupils to exercise their Arabic, however, is another matter.

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Johann Jacob Reiske, who was Schultens' student in Leiden between 1738 and 1746, publicly doubted this. The poems from the *Ḥamāsa*, he wrote in a review of the re-edition of Erpenius's *Grammatica arabica*, should have been published separately, as they were much too difficult for students of Arabic and not suitable material for a grammar. Rather than forcing his students to jump directly from the fables of Luqmān to the infinitely more challenging poems of the *Ḥamāsa*, Schultens would have done better to edit examples of texts of different styles, genres, and content, in order to facilitate progressive learning.<sup>55</sup>

And what about the edition of the poems itself? As I have shown elsewhere, Reiske found Schultens' commentaries, which 'forced' certain original 'primary meanings' instead of established 'secondary meanings' upon words, completely beside the point and counter-intuitive.<sup>56</sup> Were not the Germans, the Dutch, the French and the English

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<sup>54</sup> *Thomae Erpenii grammatica arabica cum fabulis Locmanni etc. accedunt excerpta anthologiae veterum Arabiae poetarum quae inscribitur Hamasa Abi Temmam ex mss. bibliothecae Academ. Batavae edita* (Leiden, 1748).

<sup>55</sup> *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 690–704, at 691.

<sup>56</sup> *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 692. For this and the following, see my 'Kontroverse Bemühungen um den Orient'.



able to understand each other and to write and speak in an elegant and sensible manner without knowing the original significance of the words they use? Equally, the old Arabic poets themselves were unaware of the original meanings and yet were able to understand the meaning of their works or to convey it to others.<sup>57</sup>

This was one in a string of scathing reviews that Reiske wrote of editions of poems by Schultens and his students in the late 1740ies. In these reviews, as well as in his own editions of Arabic poems, Reiske not only polemicized against his teacher's methods, but he also propagated alternative historical concepts and editorial and hermeneutical maxims which not only took seriously the oral transmission of poetry in pre-Islamic times but also established the literary and historical context of any poem as the main point of reference for an accurate interpretation.

The target of Reiske's most hostile attacks were two students of Schultens: Gerard Kuypers, who edited and translated a collection of gnomic verses ascribed to 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib,<sup>58</sup> and Johan Gerard Lette, who edited *al-Burda* by Ka'b ibn Zuhayr,<sup>59</sup> together with one of the famous seven *mu'allāqāt*, the poem by Imru' al-Qays. Reiske accused Lette in this review, and in a couple of private letters, of having used without proper acknowledgement not only his own manuscripts, transcription and annotations, but everything that he had taught him during his time in Leiden.<sup>60</sup> But more than this, Reiske deplored the damaging effect such works had on the reputation of Arabic literature among the European public. Lette's translation of the *Burda*, reviewed and endorsed by Schultens, was 'obscure and far removed from the *sensu auctoris*'. With this translation, which was neither clear enough nor Latin enough, all those would be confirmed in their opinion 'who think that the Arabs have lost their minds and that they blurt out whatever comes into their mouths [...] The Arabs are human beings, very

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<sup>57</sup> *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 693

<sup>58</sup> G. Kuypers (ed.), *Ali Ben Abi Taleb Carmina. Arabice et Latine*. On Kuyper, see C. Huisman, *Geloof in Beweging. Gerardus Kuypers pastor en patriot tussen vroomheid en verlichting* (Zoetermeer, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> Gerardus Johannes Lette, *Caab ben Zoheir. Carmen panegyricum in laudem Muhammedis. Item Amrulkeisi Moallakah. Cum scholiis, et versione Levini Warneri ...* (Leiden, 1748).

<sup>60</sup> *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 688. 'Gratius mihi fecisset, si [...] simpliciter dixisset, quod ego ipsi primus autor suasorque fuerim edendi Caabi, eum in finem commodaverim apographum meum Codicis Lipsiensis, quod ipsi subministraverim lectiones variantes ex *Sebekaeo*, quod usus fuerit mea directione in concinnanda sua versione, et meis emendatiunculis in scholiasta.'

similar to us, and they speak very much like human beings, but the ignorance of this translator makes them bray like asses and moo like cows.’<sup>61</sup>

Reiske's reviews in the *Acta Nova Eruditorum* of Lette's and Kuyper's editions were a sharp-tongued denunciation of dilettantism, academic fraudulence and dishonesty.<sup>62</sup> They publicly exposed the shortcoming of Schultens' method:

They write commentaries on Arabic poets, which they do not understand and they think it sufficient quickly to copy and defile the *Golius* [lexicon] in a few days. The true and hidden sense of the poets, the histories to which they look back, the better versions ('puriores lectiones') which only an understanding *Sprachkritiker* can assess and distinguish, and the fate of the songs, and of the poets and of all the Arab people, without which they can never be understood, they fail to investigate, be it out of contempt, as something they consider to be useless or of no importance, or be it because they do not dare to investigate slowly, since such commentaries cannot be brought out as quickly as the offspring of rabbits.<sup>63</sup>

Reiske had demonstrated how in his opinion Arabic poetry should be edited and interpreted properly in the early 1740s in his edition of a poem by the pre-Islamic poet Ṭarafa (c. 538 – 564 AD).<sup>64</sup> This pioneering work is also the result of Schultens' influence – according to Reiske's autobiography, he spent most of his first years in Leiden transcribing and translating Arabic poetry – 'mehr dem alten Schultens zu Liebe, als aus eigenem Triebe.'<sup>65</sup> At the end of his *Lebensbeschreibung*, Reiske listed

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<sup>61</sup> *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 691: 'Arabes homines sunt nobis similes, & maxima ex parte humane locuti. Sed interpretum inscitia eos saepe asinorum instar rudere, & ut vaccas mugire, jubet.'

<sup>62</sup> See *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 535–40 and 679–701. As mentioned before, Reiske accused Lette to have used his own manuscripts and annotations and everything that he had taught him during his time in Leiden without proper acknowledgment. This reproach he already had made in a letter to Valckenaer, 16 July 1745, *Johann Jacob Reiskes Briefe*, p. 147. Cf. also Reiske's *Von ihm selbst aufgesetzte Lebensbeschreibung* (Leipzig, 1783), pp. 49–50. The controversy between the two carried on – in the preface to his *Observationes philologico-criticae in Deborahae et Mosis cantica* (Leiden, 1748), Lette tried to vindicate his work, to which Reiske again reacted with a long and acrimonious letter: *Johann Jacob Reiskes Briefe*, pp. 301–14.

<sup>63</sup> *Nova Acta Eruditorum* (1748), 694: 'Commentarios scribunt in Arabicos Poetas, quos non intelligunt, satis fecisse se putantes officio, si *Golium* exscribant & commaculent, paucorum dierum cum jactura; veros autem & reconditos Poetarum sensus & historias, ad quas illi respiciunt, & puriores lectiones, quas non nisi Criticus linguae intelligens aestimet atque discernat, fataque carminum & ipsorum Poetarum & totius Arabicæ gentis, absque quibus illa intelligi nequeunt, aut præ contemptu non indagant, tanquam rem inutilem & nullius momenti, aut non audent indagare segnes, quia tales commentarii æque cito atque cuniculorum foetus in lucem excurrere nolunt.'

<sup>64</sup> Johann Jacob Reiske (ed.), *Tharaphae Moallakah cum Scholiis Nahas* (Leiden, 1742).

<sup>65</sup> Reiske, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 26.

all the manuscripts that he had transcribed during his time in Leiden, among which are a great number of poems, ranging from the *Maqṣūra* of Ibn Durayd to the *dīwān* of the great early Islamic poet Jarīr and the collections of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.<sup>66</sup> Schultens' encouragement also led to a number of pioneering editions of Arabic poems – in 1765 he was the first to print a number of verses by the great poet al-Mutanabbī in his *Proben der Arabischen Dichtkunst in verliebten und traurigen Gedichten aus dem Motanabbi. Arabisch und Deutsch nebst Anmerkungen*.<sup>67</sup> The edition was based on his transcription and the translation of al-Mutanabbī's *dīwān* from a Warner manuscript.<sup>68</sup> Almost ten years earlier, Reiske had published the first German translation of the most popular Arabic poem in Europe – the *Lāmiyyat al-‘ajam* by a Persian-born poet known as al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Ṭughrā’ī.<sup>69</sup> *The poem of the non-Arabs, rhyming in lam* is a *qaṣīda* in fifty-nine stanzas, each of them ending in the same letter, *lam*. It is named after the famous *Lāmiyyat al-‘arab* – *The poem of the Arabs, rhyming in lam* – attributed to the pre-Islamic poet al-Shanfarā, to which it has some superficial similarities. It was written in Baghdad in 1111-12 and became famous immediately for its beauty, depth and rich vocabulary, leading to the composition of a number of commentaries.<sup>70</sup> Although it was written by a twelfth-century administrative secretary, it retains the literary conventions of early Arabic poetry and abounds in ‘heavy and rather Pharisaical moralizing’.<sup>71</sup> The sententious morality of the poem was certainly one of the reasons for the enormous popularity it held among European orientalists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Golius's 1629 edition of the *Lāmiyyat al-‘ajam* marks the beginning of a long series of publications of this poem, many of which are milestones in the history of Arabic philology and scholarship.<sup>72</sup> In 1661, based on

<sup>66</sup> Reiske, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 152–67.

<sup>67</sup> *Proben der Arabischen Dichtkunst in verliebten und traurigen Gedichten aus dem Motanabbi. Arabisch und Deutsch nebst Anmerkungen* (Leipzig, 1765). The occasion of the publication was the thirtieth birthday of his wife, Ernestine Christine, whom he had married the year before. The publication provoked a sarcastic review in the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* (1765), 465–71.

<sup>68</sup> Reiske, *Lebensbeschreibung*, p. 163. There are earlier prints of a few verses by al-Mutanabbī in one of Erpenius's outstanding contributions to oriental scholarship, his edition of al-Makīn's *Ta'riḫ al-Muslimīn*, the *Historia Saracenicā* (Leiden, 1625). Some additional verses by al-Mutanabbī were also published by Jacobus Golius. See my ‘Arabic Poetry as Teaching Material’, p. 233.

<sup>69</sup> *Thograi's sogenanntes Lammisches Gedichte aus dem Arabischen übersetzt nebst einem kurtzen Entwurff der Arabischen Dichterey* (Friedrichstadt, 1756). This publication is very rare; we know that only one hundred copies were printed.

<sup>70</sup> Franz Rosenthal, ‘Blurbs (taqrīz) from Fourteenth-Century Egypt’, *Oriens* 27/28 (1981), 177–96, at 179.

<sup>71</sup> Peter M. Holt, ‘Arabic Studies in Seventeenth-Century England, with Special Reference to the Life and World of Edward Pococke’, B.Phil thesis (Oxford, 1952) (MS. M.Litt. c.15), p. 65.

<sup>72</sup> In 1707 the Danish orientalist Matthias Ancheren re-edited the Arabic text of the poem with Golius's Latin translation, which had been provided by his friend Adriaen Reland. See *Poema Tograi, cum*

the Arabic text of Golius's edition,<sup>73</sup> Edward Pococke published a commented bilingual Arabic-Latin edition, together with a ground-breaking essay, *De Prosodia Arabica*, by his student Samuel Clarke.<sup>74</sup> Reiske supplemented his own edition with an interesting *Short Sketch of Arabic Poetry – Ein kurtzer Entwurf der Arabischen Dichterey*, to which I will return below.<sup>75</sup>

Although encouraged by his mentor Schultens, Reiske's approach to Arabic poetry followed completely different editorial and hermeneutical methods from those of his teacher. An obvious difference is in the fact that most of his translations of Arabic poetry were into German rather than Latin and were meant for a broader readership outside the narrow circles of academic oriental studies. While the first impulses to work on Arabic poetry originated in the Protestant exegetical tradition, Reiske's approach and methodology constitute a post-confessional scholarly project that moved beyond the linguistic and etymological interests which had defined Protestant Arabic studies up to this point. And so, Reiske argues in the preface to his edition of *Ṭarafa*, merely commenting on the grammatical value and the meaning of certain words would be below the dignity of this poem, as well as a waste of paper. Reiske criticised this 'dry and grammatical' practise not only in the work of Schultens and his students, but also in the scholar who was his personal hero, Edward Pococke. He contrasted it with a 'philological' method that revealed the 'sensus auctoris' and the poetical characteristics, the perspicacity, and the charm of the poem.<sup>76</sup> Thus Reiske's preface and his annotations to *Ṭarafa's mu'allāqa* provided the European reader with a detailed and thorough description of the historical, cultural and literary context of this pre-Islamic poem. Basing himself on an impressive amount of Arabic source material,

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*Versione Latina, Jacobi Golii, hactenus inedita. Quam ex MSto Goliano praefatione, & notis quibusdam auctam edidit Matthias Ancheren* (Utrecht, 1707), sigs. A4<sup>v</sup>–B<sup>f</sup>. Another Latin-Arabic edition, based on Golius's translation, was published by Henrik van der Sloot (Franeker, 1769). Another German translation appeared as 'Eine arabische Elegie' in the journal *Neuer Teutscher Merkur*, 1 (1800), 8–18. This free translation in distichs was apparently produced by the poet and translator Karl Ludwig von Knebel: see Anke Bosse, *Meine Schatzkammer füllt sich täglich* (Göttingen, 1999), p. 505.

<sup>73</sup> See Vrolijk and van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies*, p. 46.

<sup>74</sup> Pococke's translation was reprinted by J. F. Hirt in his *Anthologia Arabica* (Jena 1774), pp. 119–74, and partly in his *Institutiones arabicae linguae* (Jena, 1770).

<sup>75</sup> *Thograi's sogenanntes Lammisches Gedichte aus dem Arabischen übersetzt nebst einem kurtzen Entwurff der Arabischen Dichterey* (Friedrichstadt, 1756). This publication is very rare; we know that only one hundred copies were printed. **DL: THIS NOTE IS A REPEAT OF N. 69 ABOVE.**

<sup>76</sup> Reiske, *Thograi*, p. 25: 'Nur wünschte ich, daß seine Anmerckungen nicht so trucken, und bloß grammaticalisch, sondern mehr philologisch seyn, das ist, den Sinn des Dichters, die Geschichte und Sprichwörter, darauf er anspielt, in ein heller Licht setzen möchte.'

Reiske gives an account of the lives of the poets of the seven *mu'allāqāt*. He offers an outline of the content of each poem, tries to establish their dates, dwells on their cultic function, discusses their title '*mu'allāqāt*' (the suspended or hanging poems), their transmission, the known manuscripts and commentaries – particularly the one by Yaḥyā al-Tibrīzī<sup>77</sup> and the one by al-Naḥḥās, which he edited and translated alongside the poem<sup>78</sup> – and gives an account of their significance for Arabic literary history. Reiske's preface to his edition of the longest of the seven *mu'allaqāt* was an implicit critique of Schultens's attempts to give Arabic poems an aura of great antiquity and to 'scrape together every appearance of antiquity and to try to find it even where there is none.'<sup>79</sup> The late emergence of writing in Arabia, and the confused and unreliable historical and chronological information in old Arabic documents made the dating of the poems very difficult. Consequently, Schultens' attempts to trace them back to earliest antiquity were completely speculative and philologically untenable. 'I would like to alert my reader to two things', Reiske says at the beginning of the edition. 'First, that he does not think too highly of the great age of these poems, and secondly, that the chronology before Muhammad is very confused and rough, to the extent that I almost despair trying to smoothen and reconstruct it.'<sup>80</sup> Reiske took seriously the extent of orality in pre-Islamic times and the massive disadvantage this posed for the transmission of earlier poetry. Based on the historical information he could find in the works of Arabic scholars and historians Reiske came to the conclusion that Ṭarafa's poem could not have been composed before Muhammad's birth in the second half of the sixth century. Moreover, far from being of the greatest antiquity, none of the seven *mu'allāqāt*, Reiske argued in the preface to this edition, could reasonably be dated earlier than the beginning of the sixth century.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Reiske based his edition on this commentary, which is still preserved in Leiden under the shelfmark Or. 292: see Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts*, vol. 1, p. 148.

<sup>78</sup> The edition was based on Leiden University Library, Ms Or. 628; see Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts*, vol. 1, p. 263.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Acta Nova Eruditorum* (1749), 19.

<sup>80</sup> Reiske, *Tharaphae Moallakah*, praefatio, p. xix: 'Duo velim monitus sit lector benevolus, unum, non nimis magnifice de horum carminum antiquitate sentire: alterum, chronologiam Arabum ante Muhammedem tam esse confusam & salebrosam, ut fere, concinnari posse illam & restitui, desperem'.

<sup>81</sup> Obviously, Reiske completely undermined the work of his mentor in Leiden and publically questioned the validity of Schultens's central argument. And indeed, the publication was, as Reiske later recalled in his autobiography, the beginning of the discord between the two men: 'Mehr dem alten Schultens zu Liebe, als aus eignem Triebe, sahe ich mich in den arabischen Poeten um, und gab davon im Jahre 1740 zur Probe die Moallacah des Tharapha heraus; damit ich es aber Herrn Schultens nicht nach seinem Sinne machte. Das war der erste Samen der Mishelligkeit, die nach der Zeit uns getrennet hat' (*Lebensbeschreibung*, p. 23).

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Reiske's publication of Ṭarafa's song was a masterpiece of oriental philology, and it constituted a model for an interpretation of Arabic poetry which was independent of exegetical interests.<sup>82</sup> The approach was based on maxims of historical and philological scholarship to which, almost a century later, Antoine Sylvestre De Sacy, in a lecture *De l'utilité de la poésie arabe*, still referred with the greatest admiration. Reiske, de Sacy says, had developed the most reasonable principle that, even though they might not be to our taste, equity demands that we do not reject works of poetry which other centuries have admired, and that we judge them by taking into consideration the place and time they were produced, and the character, the genius and the manners of the peoples to whom they belong.<sup>83</sup> Reiske, to be sure, was not the first or the only European orientalist in the mid-eighteenth century to champion a historical approach to the poetical heritage of the East over a purely linguistic and grammatical one. The movement away from philological and exegetical ways of studying Arabic poems towards a more historical reading was also propagated by Johann David Michaelis and William Jones and received important impulses from Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* as I would like to show in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter.

An important, albeit sometimes unreliable, source of historical information was also d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, first published in 1690. Here, Reiske and his contemporaries were provided with first short entries on almost all the known (and unknown) poets of the time, which often linked their works with literary traditions and genres. Of far greater importance for Reiske, however, were the methodological considerations he had found in Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, first published in 1753 and later republished by Reiske's antagonist Johann

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. also the verdict of Johann Fück, *Die Arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1955), p. 111: 'Mit dieser Erstlingsarbeit schlug Reiske Wege in der arabischen Dichterinterpretation ein, die auch heute noch begangen werden, weil sie am ehesten zum Ziel führen.'

<sup>83</sup> Sylvestre de Sacy, *De l'utilité de l'étude de la poésie Arabe* (Paris, 1826), p. 7: 'Reiske en revient à un principe plus raisonnable; c'est qu'il ne faut ne rejeter ce que l'admiration de plusieurs siècles a consacré, ni louer ce qui est évidemment répréhensible, et que, lorsqu'on veut tirer des ténèbres de l'oubli les ouvrages d'une nation, les étudier et en faire son profit, l'équité veut qu'en les jugeant on prenne en considération les lieux et les tems qui les ont produits, le caractère, le génie et les moeurs du peuple auquel ils appartiennent.'

David Michaelis in Göttingen.<sup>84</sup>

It is, Lowth argued in the *Lectures*, a great danger that, given the different manner of living, of speaking, and of thinking which prevails in the East, we form an erroneous judgment on oriental poetry. To avoid this mistake,

it is not enough to be acquainted with the language of this people, their manners, discipline, rites and ceremonies; we must even investigate their inmost sentiments, the manner and connections of their thoughts; in a word, we must see all things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinions: we must endeavour as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it.<sup>85</sup>

To have introduced the German *Sturm und Drang* generation to the work of both Lowth and Schultens, and to have sparked their interest for the ‘oriental genius’, is one of the greatest achievements of Johann David Michaelis. Michaelis, in many respects, fashioned himself as a successor of Schultens, whom he had personally met on his way to Oxford in 1741. Title, style and content of his book *Beurtheilung der Mittel, welche man anwendet, die ausgestorbene Hebräische Sprache zu verstehen* (1757) closely follow similar texts by Schultens, for example his inauguration lecture *De fontibus ex quibus omnis linguae hebraeae notitia manavit horumque vitiis et defectibus* (1713). With Schultens, Michaelis not only declared the dialects of Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, etc., to form one oriental language and to be the ‘richest source of true Hebrew philology’. He also shared Schultens’ interest in Arab poets, who ‘probably add most to the proper knowledge of the language, because they use words and meanings that are not often used in other texts and preserve them for posterity.’<sup>86</sup> But, as I have shown in more detail elsewhere, Michaelis also distanced himself from certain obvious shortcomings and his book is to a great extent a revision of Schultens’ etymological

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<sup>84</sup> Reiske wrote a review of the first edition in the *Nova Acta Eruditorum* of 1754.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum. Editio altera* (Oxford, 1763), pp. 60–1: ‘Ab hoc errore semper cavendum, et incommoda ista quantum licet diligentia compensanda sunt: nec modo perdiscendus eorum sermo, mores, ritus, disciplinae; sed intimi etiam sensus pervestigandi, cogitationem modi nexusque eruendi; eorum oculis, ut dicam, cernenda sunt omnia, eorum opinionibus aestimanda: id denique enitendum, ut Hebraea, quantum fieri potest, tanquam Hebraei legamus.’ The English translation is taken from Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory (London, 1787), vol. 1, pp. 113–4.

<sup>86</sup> Michaelis, *Beurtheilung der Mittel welche man anwendet, die ausgestorbene Hebräische Sprache zu verstehen* (Göttingen, 1757), pp. 8, 252.

method under the impression of Reiske's criticism and Lowth's historical and cultural approach.<sup>87</sup>

Michaelis, in his well-known annotations to the second edition of Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* and in his lesser-known *Treatise on the oriental taste* from 1752, insisted on a pragmatic-historical study of oriental poetry, which also characterises his discussion of other cultural products.<sup>88</sup> This attitude was inspired by an experience of difference and it was based on the assumption of a cultural and social relativity of values and norms – be they linguistic, legal, or, aesthetic. It was the apologetic task of the interpreter to rationalise and to explain normative differences on the basis of linguistic, cultural and sociological observations. Whereas Schultens, following the Protestant seventeenth-century tradition of comparative Hebrew study, assumed that the true meaning of the Hebrew Bible could be elucidated by digging up the original meaning of Hebrew words in Arabic poetry, Michaelis argued that the study of Arabic, but also of Arabic literature, culture and society, would help us understand normative differences which we observe when reading the Bible and other oriental documents. In his discussion of Hebrew poetry as well as of Hebrew legislation, Michaelis' apologetic aim was to explain the arbitrariness and the changing nature of norms according to social, cultural and climatic factors. The prevalence of orality in the production and transmission of oriental literature, different forms of social organisation and the segregation of gender, as well as the different natural habitat of the poets are the most important explanations Michaelis gives in order to explain the peculiarities and characteristics of oriental taste and oriental poetry.

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The significance of Lowth's lectures, and their contribution to a more historically attuned approach to oriental poetry on the continent, can hardly be overestimated. Although ardent readers of his work like Michaelis and Herder had reservations about

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<sup>87</sup> See my 'Kontroverse Bemühungen um den Orient'.

<sup>88</sup> Particularly his study of Mosaic law, which was aimed at highlighting 'das Willkührliche des Rechts, das nach jedem Himmelstrich und nach hundert andern Umständen Veränderliche der gesetzgebenden Klugheit.' J. D. Michaelis, *Mosaisches Recht. Erster Theil* (Biehl, 1777), p. 2.



the classifications and the normative concepts used in the lectures,<sup>89</sup> they enthusiastically shared Lowth's call for an empathetic reading of oriental poetry: 'Werden Sie mit Hirten ein Hirt, mit einem Volk des Ackerbaues ein Landmann, mit uralten Morgenländern ein Morgenländer!' Herder tells the student of theology in his *Letters concerning the Study of Theology*, giving expression to an empathetic hermeneutic that characterised the approach of young scholars and writers from Johann Gottfried Eichhorn to Johann Wolfgang Goethe.<sup>90</sup> However, it was again Reiske who first pointed out the value of Lowth's lectures to the study of Arabic poetry: 'Lowth has written a marvellous book on the *Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*', Reiske says in his *Short Sketch of the History of Arabic Poetry*, 'and many of his principles', he continues, 'can also be applied to Arabic poetry.'<sup>91</sup> Reiske's *Sketch* was too short and his personal interest in Arabic poetry not great enough to embark on this enormous task and it was left to the young William Jones to follow this advice twenty years later in the epoch-making *Poeseos Asiaticae commentariorum libri sex*, which appeared in London in 1772. Not only did the entire appearance of this book, its title and title-page closely follow Lowth's, but so did its composition and the Latin terminology. Above all, it was Lowth's discovery of an energetic 'language of passion' as characteristic of poetry in general which was decisive for William Jones's own concept of poetry and his appreciation of the Eastern taste. The principle of poetry, Jones argued in his *Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative*, was not imitation but 'vehement passion expressed in strong words, exactly measured, and pronounced.'<sup>92</sup>

Like Reiske, the young William Jones had been inspired by the work of Albert Schultens and his interest in Arabic poetry too was most likely spurred by the work of the Dutch professor.<sup>93</sup> But Jones also detached the study of Arabic poetry from the

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<sup>89</sup> See my 'Divine Poetry? Early Modern European Orientalists on the Beauty of the Koran', in *Church History and Religious Culture*, 89 (2009), 455–88, at 483–4.

<sup>90</sup> J.G. Herder, *Briefe das Studium der Theologie betreffend* (2. Brief), *SW*, vol. 10, p. 14.

<sup>91</sup> Reiske, *Thograi*, Vorrede, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> William Jones, 'Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative' in id. *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages to which are added two Essays* (Oxford, 1772), pp. 201–17 at 206–7.

<sup>93</sup> See the entry about a meeting with William Jones in the diary of Albert's learned grandson, Hendrik Albert Schultens, on 30 September 1772 (appendix). 'Aan 't Arabisch vertelde hij mij, was hij voornamentlijk geraakt door 't leezen van mijn Grootvaders werken.' ['[Jones] told me, that he was mainly inspired to study Arabic by reading my grandfather's works.']. The manuscript of H. A. Schulten's diary is preserved at the Leiden University Library, shelfmark BPL 245 (VIII). I am quoting from the online edition <https://sites.google.com/site/haschultens/dagboek/appendix>. I am grateful to Alastair Hamilton for drawing my attention to this source.

exclusive linguistic and grammatical context in which it had so far been pursued, with far-reaching consequences for the entire conception of oriental studies. Until this moment, the linguistic and also cultural and historical affinities with Hebrew and the texts of the Old Testament had usually been behind the concerns with oriental languages in the Protestant world. The orient was consequently restricted to Semitic languages and to historical documents. Jones's orient, however, was neither exclusively Semitic, nor was it at all ancient. His orient was a geographical entity, covering the literature of the entire Asian continent, and the poems he translated in his six books on Asian poetry comprised works in Arabic, Persian, Indian, Turkish and even Chinese. The people who had composed this literature were not old Biblical or oriental patriarchs, but living human beings who, Jones says, experience the same passions as we do, modified only by the difference of their 'manners, their education and their climate.' Hence Jones, like Reiske before him, did not see any characteristics of great age or antiquity in this literature.

Although their interest in Arabic poetry can still be traced back to a confessionalized tradition of Arabic scholarship, the work of these two scholars emancipated Arabic poetry from its function as a linguistic archive in the service of Protestant Old Testament studies. Instead, their studies and translations contributed to the enlightened project of writing an *histoire de l'esprit humain* and provided vivid presentations of a different culture, with its unique aesthetical and poetical norms, genres and traditions.