

هو طيب الطعم حدي السعده مليس
للطرمدر للبول وقد خلط حله
عمر حمره بالادويه المبره للجرب
ادويه نفا له حاله سخيه و

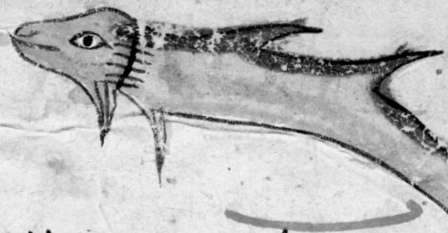
WIT AND WISDOM IN CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERATURE

Leiden Lectures on Arabic Language and Culture

Petra M. Sijpesteijn, James E. Montgomery, Geert Jan van Gelder

بالسليجس نعوم ورجع الللي ومرا
اللحم والفالح ودا الفيا واندا الحبر جمله وبعطع سنيلا رالمواد الى الاحسنا وكبده
جعف على خرقه في السمسر الحاره وسقي مسها واقف ما نوا فعه لحمه ومرارته تمنع الن
مرار مس

اسوفا مهور
هو حووار صغير في الحرا اذا احرق و
احرق ماداه وخالط بزفت رطب وسم
عنم عشوا ودهر الاحوار وطلع به
العلب انت الشرفه



برفوراً وهو صدو الفرو
هد اذا احروك استله فوه ميتس
جاليه للاسنان باجته الحمر الزايد منق
للغروج مدمله لها وتعمل ذلك الص
الدر يعال له فونفس ادا احرو وهو ا
حرفه ادا وضع على الدر فار حش
احدملح وصبره في قدره حنر واد
بلا الاسنان واورامر عمرو النساء اذا ذر عليه وسعي ان تزك الدوا على حرو النار
يخف عنه وقد يعمل



WIT AND WISDOM IN CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERATURE
LEIDEN LECTURES ON ARABIC LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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Preface

This book contains the first three Leiden-Aramco Lectures on Arabic Language and Culture delivered at Leiden University in 2013 and 2015. The lecture series was initiated on the occasion of the 400-year anniversary of the founding of the chair of Arabic in 1613 at Leiden University. The first lecture, by Petra Sijpesteijn, the current holder of the chair, took place on February 4, 2013 in the presence of representatives of the university, and the international scholarly and diplomatic community.

Under the auspices of the University Board and with the generous support from the European headquarters of Aramco, the decision was made to honour Leiden's long and rich tradition of Arabic studies through an annual lecture. Outstanding scholars in the field were invited to present subsequent lectures opening up the rich and enjoyable variety of classical Arabic texts and their significance and relevance for today's world.

Petra Sijpesteijn's lecture, which appears as Chapter 1 in this book, presents the history behind the founding of the chair of Arabic at Leiden and sketches the achievements of some of its most prominent holders. She then focuses on how the Leiden tradition in the study of Arabic and Islam has developed over time. In conclusion she discusses the continuous relevance of the study of Arabic language and culture for today's students, the public, and scholarly and political institutions, not only as a way to gain an insight into the Muslim and Middle Eastern world but especially to enrich one's understanding of our global existence.

On February 12, 2015 James Montgomery, Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University, presented his lecture entitled "On Hedgehogs, Foxes and Magpies, and Why the World Should Read Classical Arabic Poetry," here published as Chapter 2. In his lecture Montgomery shed light

on three major intellectuals in the history of Arabic civilization: al-Fārābī (d. 339/950-1); al-Bīrūnī (d. after 442/1050) and al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868-9), considering them in terms of the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin's famous division of human beings into hedgehogs and foxes. In the context of how we study Arabic civilization Professor Montgomery proposed that we in fact need a third category, that of the magpie. The lecture concluded with a plea for the study and enjoyment of classical Arabic poetry.

Geert Jan van Gelder, emeritus Laudian professor at Oxford University, will present his lecture entitled "Antidotes and Anecdotes: A Literary History of Medicine from 13th-Century Syria" on October 8, 2015. It is published here as Chapter 3. The lecture reflects on the book *Choice Reports on the Classes of Physicians* by the Syrian physician Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, who died in 1270 CE. After an introduction on how medicine as an art and a craft arose in society, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah devotes chapters on individual physicians, 442 in all, from the ancient Greeks (Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen) until his own time. The book is a very important source for our knowledge of Hellenic learning in Islamic society and the history of science. At the same time it is an entertaining work of literature, for it is full of anecdotes and contains lots of poetry, some 3,600 lines of verse, sometimes on medicine but often on all kinds of different topics and themes. While some serious scholars consider the poetry irritating, encumbering, and superfluous ballast, mostly mediocre and unworthy of study, this lecture will focus precisely on the literary character of the book.

Our main aim with these lectures is to demonstrate the historical and cultural richness of the Arabic literary world. It is a world entirely different from our own. Entering this world allows us to experience the works produced by a society dedicated to learning with impressive achievements in any cultural field imaginable. Through it we can see our own environment and achievements in a different light. More importantly, however, exposing ourselves to this world, through the Arabic texts produced by it, provides a common ground to communicate and share cultural experiences with individuals from any background. Discussing Arabic poetry or humorous anecdotes brings people together as they experience the universal pleasure of interacting with moving words and thoughts.

The lectures are here presented as they were delivered, with only a minimum of scholarly notes. We are grateful to the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society for its support and to the European headquarters of Aramco for its sponsorship which made the publication of these lectures possible. Nienke van Heek is thanked for her invaluable help in the editorial process. The Leiden University Library generously made available the image on the cover of this volume.

Leiden, 19 August 2015

The Wisdom of the Arabs 400 Years of Cross-Cultural Interaction¹

Petra M. Sijpesteijn

Dear Rector, Dean, your excellencies, learned colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of Leiden's remarkable 400-year history of Arabic studies, and to do so before so many distinguished guests. Your presence is an eloquent testament to the importance of the tradition we are here today to celebrate, and vividly shows the relevance and significance for so many people of this country's long-standing engagement with the Arabic world. I thank you very much for coming.

Anniversaries are occasions to take stock. It's not bad to ask ourselves every now and then – every 400 hundred years – why we do something, are we doing it right, is it really necessary. Academics, although we're question-askers by profession, tend to be somewhat impatient with these sorts of questions when applied to our own disciplines. But it's understandable: when you've dedicated your life to something, you fairly naturally consider its value and utility self-evident. But I speak for most of my colleagues when I say, we are acutely conscious that some kind of reckoning is not only legitimate, but essential. Indeed, I welcome it.

What I would like to give you then is a broadly interpreted 'mid-term report' (with an emphasis on the "mid"!).

The story begins in 1599, when the decision to create a chair of Arabic was first taken. The ground had already been prepared to some extent by the professor of Hebrew and hobby Arabist, Franciscus Raphelengius (1539-1597), who had given Arabic classes on the side since his appointment in 1586.² Still, it's well at this point to remember what an extraordinary step this was. The university was only 24 years old. It had been founded at a time of stunning inauspiciousness, when Leiden, a third of its population dead from starvation and plague, and its economy ravaged by war, was at a bitterly low ebb,

and the country whose aims and hopes it embodied fighting for its very life. Most of those 24 years had been spent struggling to secure its survival in a highly uncertain environment. It was only in the 1590s, with the slow revival of Leiden's economy, that the university's future began to look secure.

The shadow of the Middle Ages too still touched many parts of life. Disease and sudden death were ever-present and uncontrollable menaces. The first Leiden professor of Arabic would succumb to the plague in 1624 at the age of only 40. Public executions were a common and unremarkable occurrence – taking place right across the canal from here, in fact, on *Het Gerecht*. Witches went in fear of their lives. In a fine example of applied science, in 1594 the faculties of medicine and philosophy were asked by the Court of Holland whether a woman who remained floating after having been subjected to trial by water did so due to witchcraft or natural forces. The professors, encouragingly, found for natural forces, though not before having earnestly discussed the scientific issues at stake.³ Religious controversies, indeed, remained a matter of life and death, compounded by the proliferation of heretical protestant sects. The city's prison, in the interests of protecting public and moral order, had to be extended in the sixteenth century to accommodate them all. Urban renewal in the form of new buildings and rationalisations had also started at the end of the sixteenth century, but most of the city's fabric, including its walls and gates, was largely unaltered, giving the town – not for nothing – still very much a medieval look.

But the founders of the university had an idea, a big idea. While the university was expected to attend to the business of supplying the cadres of bureaucrats and clergymen needed to staff the new republic, its primary goal was something altogether more ambitious: to be a centre of *learning* in the best European humanistic tradition. The Church, naturally eager for the university to be placed under its control, was deliberately kept out. And indeed, for one of Europe's first purpose-built Protestant universities, the atmosphere in Leiden's early years was strikingly heterodox. Catholic students, to the dismay of the leaders of Holland's catholic community, flocked there. In its first 50 years fully half of the university's students came from abroad. The internal tensions with which the young Republic was riven, and the external pressures that buffeted it, nevertheless created an atmosphere of almost feverish intellectual energy.

Oriental languages were there from the beginning. The university's very first library book – Christoffel Plantijn's great Polyglot Bible, a gift of William of Orange – was printed in five languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac.⁴ And Biblical exegesis was to remain an important stimulus to the study of these languages. But although a better understanding of the scriptures was an important motivation for Oriental studies throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Leiden's interest in 'the Orient' was more complex.⁵

Textiles were the basis of Leiden's wealth and trade with the Ottoman Empire played an important role in this industry. Angora wool (named after the region around Ankara) was imported from Anatolia, dyed and woven, and exported again as 'Turkish cloth' – to, amongst others, the Ottoman Empire. The Turks were also seen as sharing a common cause in the Republic's existential struggle with the Spanish Empire, and it's to this sense of shared cause that we owe the Islamic crescents that still adorn the Leiden town hall. *Liever Turks dan Paaps* ("better Turkish than Catholic"), the saying went. There was an ideological dimension here too, in that it was recognised that religious minorities tended to fare markedly better under the Muslims than they did under the Hapsburgs. And it's true that the *dhimmī* status, outlined in the Qur'ān and elaborated upon in Islamic law, did afford Christians, Jews and other monotheists in the Islamic lands an unusual level of protection and communal rights.

Still, it has to be emphasised, this was a very distant world. The first recorded Muslim to live in Leiden – a North African – settled here around 1596, lodging with a Flemish family just down the road on the spot near where the old observatory now stands. He must have been a very exotic creature indeed. Access to written Arabic was extremely limited, with manuscripts rare and printed books even rarer. There were no adequate grammars or lexicons. Knowledge could only be acquired from other savants, of which there were only a handful in the whole of Europe, or from the stray native speaker, hence the tendency – impressive even by today's standards – of Europe's early Arabists to travel. And hence too, when the first appointee to the new chair in 1599 died before being able to take up his duties officially, it took the university more than a decade to find a replacement.⁶

That replacement was the remarkable Thomas van Erpe, better known by his Latinised name, Erpenius. It is with Erpenius that the Leiden tradition really begins, and so it is from his assumption of the chair of Arabic on the 9th of February 1613, 400 years ago this week, that the anniversary is reckoned.⁷

The creation of the chair was driven by a variety of aims. For the university's governors the practical advantages were attractive. The teaching of Arabic would benefit the Netherlands' commercial activities, especially in South-east Asia where Dutch trading activity was gathering pace (the Dutch East India Company was founded in 1602), but also in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire (treaties were concluded with the Moroccan Sultan in 1610 and with the Ottomans in 1612), and communication with Muslims would be facilitated through knowledge of the Arabic sources. Thomas Erpenius did what he could to help, translating a wide variety of diplomatic and commercial letters for the States General in The Hague, and it was in fact on one of these missions to The Hague that he contracted the plague that killed him. Undeterred, several of his successors continued the practice and many of these letters can still be found in the University Library.⁸

But the prime mover behind the new chair was the Leiden super scholar, Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), who had been recruited from France in 1593 with a chutzpah worthy of Premier League football to put the fledgling university firmly on the map.⁹ This he very much did, not only with the astonishing breadth of his erudition, but with the thrilling new kinds of scholarly approaches he promulgated. Scaliger was a philologist, indeed a philologist *par excellence*. To today's ears philology has a somewhat antiquated sound, as something fusty and rather abstruse. But – then as now – it is a discipline, indeed a mind-set, of revolutionary potential. In their painstaking attempts to reconstruct clean and uncorrupted archetypes of canonical texts, philologists pioneered the understanding that texts are not mere repositories of words, but engage with their readers and contexts in complex and dynamic ways. Only by minute attention to the manifold intricacies of language, rigorously grounded in historical context, and supported at every level by careful and systematic comparison, can meaning be slowly unpicked. It is the application of the scientific method to texts, based on undogmatic, empirical research, and direct and intensive engagement with original sources in all their linguistic complexity. When applied to revealed texts, however

pious the original impetus, the effects could be highly subversive, and it was the philological revolution of the sixteenth century that, with surgical focus, pulled apart the compositional layers in the Bible and revealed the human hands behind them.

Scaliger's specialty was the classics, Greek and Latin, but his vision was universalist; his life work was an attempt to integrate the totality of ancient history into one chronological system.¹⁰ A part-time Arabist himself, he fully appreciated the indispensability of Arabic literature to any understanding of the human achievement. His collection of over 60 Oriental manuscripts, bequeathed to the university when he died in 1609, form the nucleus of Leiden's priceless and world-famous holdings in this area.¹¹

Thomas Erpenius, an alumnus of this university, was one of Scaliger protégés, and it was Scaliger who pointed him in the direction of Arabic, and arranged for him to study with some of Europe's leading Arabists in England, France, Italy and Germany.¹² An outstandingly gifted linguist, by the time he returned he was ready for appointment to the Leiden chair of Arabic.

How Erpenius envisaged the role of Arabic at Leiden we happen to know because he tells us in two public lectures, the first delivered three months after he took up the position and the second seven years later, after a return trip to France.¹³ It is a surprisingly enlightened view, and as a manifesto has inspired and guided Arabists ever since.

In the spirit of Leiden's venerable tradition of applied learning, Erpenius emphasises the practical dividends. For anyone travelling in the Middle East or North Africa, it is extremely useful. For those studying Hebrew – itself equally important as an, and I quote, “exact understanding of the faith and mysteries of our salvation” – it offers vital illumination, allowing us fresh insights into origins and meanings of crucial words and expressions.¹⁴ And for those looking to controvert and refute Islam, knowledge of Arabic is a *sine qua non*. “My audience,” he says, “will be aware how shaming it is to recall how unproductively occupied very many of our people were in unsheathing their pens against Muhamadans without having understood their laws and beliefs which are stated and set forth in the Arabic language alone.”¹⁵ It is a situation that, 400 years later, sadly, is all too familiar.

But for Erpenius the real utility of Arabic operates on a higher plane. Learning Arabic allows students to access Arab *sapientia*, wisdom.¹⁶ The ability to read the Arabic texts in the original is not just the gateway to the Arabs' unsurpassable contributions in the fields of medicine, philosophy, mathematics, geography, history and poetry, but provides a level of insight – achievable in no other way – into a civilisation, longer-lived than Rome, which had in just 100 years conquered the Mediterranean, right up into Spain and Italy, and all the way to India. It is a model of success that is unignorable.

And it is a civilisation that is “addicted to letters and to study” to use again Erpenius' words.¹⁷ “The Arabs have more important books on every sort of knowledge than can ever be found anywhere else,”¹⁸ Erpenius says. And by entering this immensely rich and extensive world – via its texts – one not just encounters a wealth of new and arresting knowledge, but confronts a culture provocatively alien to our own.

Erpenius's 11 years at Leiden stimulated the study of Arabic at Leiden and the rest of Europe tremendously. The Arabic grammar he published in the year he was appointed professor remained in use until the nineteenth century and forms the basis of the still widely used and much respected *Grammar of the Arabic Language* by William Wright.¹⁹ He also produced the handbooks and studies that he used in teaching the language to his students.²⁰ His student and successor, the equally brilliant Jacob Gool, or Golius (1596-1667), was a scholar also of pan-European significance, under whose care, consolidating the reputation built by Erpenius, Leiden became the pre-eminent centre of Near Eastern studies in Europe.²¹ Students came from all over the continent to work in its ever growing store of manuscripts; Golius himself added no less than 300 to the collection. His Arabic dictionary would remain a standard reference work for the next two hundred years.²² Not only had Arabic studies become a proper field of study and specialisation, Leiden had become its academic heart.

Golius's successors by and large maintained these standards of learning and energy, with an efflorescence of exceptional brilliance in the nineteenth century under Theodor Juynboll (1802-1861), Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883)²³ and Michaël Jan de Goeje (1836-1909).²⁴ Their achievements are truly dazzling. Many of the editions of classical Arabic texts still unsurpassed today were

made by these Leiden scholars. Even more Arabic texts are known through Leiden manuscripts, including several unique ones preserved only here in our university library; famous Orientalists have spent – and continue to spend – prolonged periods of time at Leiden working in the manuscript collection and collaborating with Leiden scholars. It is this – I like to think ongoing – scholarly tradition, and the fundamental commitment to the language that underlies it, that has given Arabic studies at Leiden the international standing it has today.

Across those 400 years, of course, priorities have shifted. With increasing commercial and political interaction with the Middle East and Muslim world, the need to know and understand not only intensified but assumed new forms. Holland's empire in the East Indies gave it the largest Muslim population in the world. From Erpenius on, Leiden professors have, in addition to their own research, participated actively in debates on the Muslim and Arabic world. The great early twentieth-century legal scholar Cornelis van Vollenhoven (1874-1933), himself a graduate of Semitic languages, and his contemporary, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936), my predecessor in this chair, were deeply involved in colonial policy and the challenges of colonial administration.²⁵ Committed to preserve Dutch colonial possessions, Snouck Hurgronje nevertheless developed the rather enlightened view that only by culturally and socially emancipating the Netherlands' Muslim subjects could colonial rule survive in Southeast Asia. His writings on Arabia and Indonesia, where he was stationed as a Dutch civil servant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, are still relevant today. They parallel, on the research side, the increasing importance – in addition to the philological studies, which lay at the foundation of Leiden's reputation – of interpretative and analytical studies, as well as the link between the study of Arabic and Islam.

Today, academics ask different questions again, and do so with different tools at their disposal and on the basis of different material, and the channels by which they communicate their findings and their audience are also different. Cultural, societal and academic ideals and goals have changed, with important consequences for the relationship between the academy and other power nexuses in society, politics, the economy and public arena. Some aspects and questions have lost their significance for the public debate,

while other elements of the study of Arabic and Muslim society and culture have risen to sudden and pressing relevance.

So where does this leave us in 2013? How is the study of Arabic integral to the Leiden University today?

Our engagement with the Muslim world is clearly somewhat different today. The Netherlands no longer administers Muslim countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs nowadays employs its own translators and regional experts and, while many of our graduates end up working for companies that are active in or trade with the Middle East, the role of the university and its employees in facilitating our interactions with the region is clearly no longer so directly practical and applicable. Since the days of Snouck Hurgronje, we academics might still have ambitions to inform and discuss policy, but hardly want to make it.

Recent developments in the Muslim world and beyond have obviously increased the call for information and explanation, especially by those professionally engaged with the understanding of Muslims and Islam. We feel very keenly the responsibility to share our insights beyond the academy and Leiden has developed several initiatives for this purpose. At the instigation of the University board, the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society was founded in 2009 to support research on Muslim societies in the past and present, aiming to disseminate the results to a wider audience.²⁶ Valorisation of academic knowledge in co-operation with public partners has similarly resulted in joint programmes and continue to inspire teaching and research at the University.

Knowing Arabic is still extremely helpful for anyone travelling in any of the 26 countries (at least) in which it is spoken, of course, and is also very helpful in smoothing trade links (and a third of Netherlands' energy consumption is supplied by OPEC countries, in which Muslim countries are heavily preponderant). And although with some 300 million native speakers Arabic might not form the 'largest' language on earth (it is still impressive enough!), the points of contact with this linguistic sphere and its various ethnic, political, religious and historical particularities are extremely numerous and diverse. Both in the practical and the more contemplative sense, the study and teach-

ing of Arabic remain highly relevant. For this reason alone, the production of Arabic-speakers – people who can engage directly with the culture and its people – remains of fundamental importance.

But the university is not a language school. Proficiency in Arabic is the point of entry; what we aspire to give our graduates and the public at large is something more – the ‘indefinable something’. I’m going to spend the remainder of this lecture trying to define what that indefinable something is. And in doing so, I’m going to advance two main arguments. The first is largely practical in nature, if not quite as functionalist as Erpenius’: the need to understand, and to propagate that understanding, of a critically important region and culture. The second is somewhat more abstract: to expose ourselves to a fundamentally different way of organising human experience.

Let me begin then with the first. The current title of the chair is Professor of Arabic Language and Culture. There are two aspects, in other words, to this position and the scholarship it covers. The combination and intertwining of these two aspects takes us to the heart of the university curriculum, because understanding – really understanding – even the simplest Arabic sentence requires an understanding of the customs, history, rituals and *Weltanschauung* of those that produced it.

For all its perceived exoticism and distance, the Middle East and the Muslim world are our direct neighbours. It is a region of immense geo-political significance, and it is one that is changing daily. These changes will affect us, whether it’s in terms of fluctuating oil prices or Dutch troops being posted to Afghanistan or the Syrian border or even, perhaps, Mali. It is also fair to say that the West’s interventions in the Middle East have frequently not been productive, based all too often on shockingly misguided readings of the region’s history and politics. For although the Middle East is today marked in several of its largest countries by fragility and extreme uncertainty, there are also deeper structures at play, some rooted in the region’s very distant past. Excavating, and explicating, these structures is work of great precision and delicacy. The university remains the primary repository of the tools and expertise necessary to do this. Four centuries of concerted study and engagement with the Arabic language and culture have built a depth and weight of accumulated insight that simply cannot be replicated in any one lifetime.

Such understanding makes our interaction with the Arab world at once more meaningful and effective, or, if you want, less disruptive and *ad hoc*. It is based on the weight carried by places, buildings, behaviour, memories and symbols and the constantly moving historical threads that connect them. These multitude of messages and layers in cultural expression and interaction, of which the spoken and written words are in fact only the easiest to be apprehended, can only be fully understood in the round, by data and insights from all angles of understanding. In Leiden we are able not only to draw upon a huge reservoir of such experts working in multiple languages and disciplines – already Erpenius and Scaliger thought Arabic should be studied together with Turkish and Persian, an ideal that continues to be upheld by this university – but our informants also extend into the past as we build on the knowledge and experience of generations of predecessors. Again, this depth of insight is beyond a single individual, however much experience and erudition he or she can boast. Moreover, it cannot be learned from books alone, but requires an active, living body of researchers, scholars, teachers and students, and a constantly evolving, updated and upgraded knowledge base. Without such a continuously renewing critical mass, the chain will be broken, a rupture that cannot lightly be compensated for.

Arabic, as the language of Islam, as well, for many centuries as the language of culture, science and politics in the whole Muslim world, holds a position unmatched by any other in the Muslim world. Indeed, I cannot think of any language that possesses the cultural significance, attracts the veneration or serves as point of reference in the way Arabic does. Even where Arabic dialects must compete with other languages, such as French and English, the history and religious associations of Arabic give it an unassailable centrality. Communicating in Arabic puts one immediately within this circle of insiders. And in spite of increased levels of education and interaction with the non-Arabic speaking world, and regardless of the increased use of social media, the majority of the Muslim world does not speak foreign languages. On the other hand, educated Muslims will always possess a rudimentary acquaintance with Arabic. It is thus by communicating in this language with them that *they* can start to understand us. In the current globalising world, where distances are becoming smaller all the time and interaction between remote corners of the earth is constantly increasing, this is becoming ever more important. This is not only true for contacts between the West and the

Muslim world, including those areas where the largest Muslim population lives, namely in South and Southeast Asia, but also for the Muslim world itself. Many Muslims in the Netherlands consult the same internet mufti as their Indonesian or Moroccan co-religionists. On social media, an Arabic lingua franca is coming into existence which goes beyond the dialectical differences that we hear spoken in the streets of the Middle East. We need to understand this world that is rapidly coming closer to our own but whose ideas and assumptions remain in many ways fundamentally contrastive.

This brings me nicely to my second argument. The study of Arabic, as Erpenius observed, allows us access to an incomparably rich literary and scientific literature replete with information and knowledge unavailable from any other source. There is perhaps no need any more to turn to mediaeval Arabic texts for the latest and fullest medical, mathematical and astronomical models. What Arabic texts still offer us, however, is something ultimately even more stimulating: a completely different, entirely developed model and system to organise the world and human experience. Through the Arabic texts we can step outside our own head, as it were, and see what the world looks like outside. Refreshed and informed by such an excursion, our own world might be re-examined and discovered anew.

The Muslim world offers an especially fruitful terrain for such experimental excursions. On the one hand, it shares our own Abrahamic pedigree, a product of the same Judaeo-Christian Near Eastern milieu that shaped our own world. Born in Arabia but coming of age in the areas conquered from the empires of Byzantium and Persia, in the Mediterranean borderlands and on the Iranian plateau, where so much of our Western civilisation was formed, this Muslim world nevertheless grew up to be radically different from the West. Its model for social organisation, although drawing upon many of the same religious texts and cultural movements that informed Christianity, differed profoundly. When studying this world, it is immediately recognisable how much we have in common, but also that the roads have nevertheless diverged in dramatically different directions.

One such area in which these differences present especially stimulating contrasts is Muslim political thought and how political power should be constituted and interact with the social order on which it rests. Politi-

cal thought and political philosophy were of great concern to the Muslims and they expended a vast amount of paper and ink on it. The result is an extraordinarily rich and extensive body of thought. In these texts questions about the role and purpose of state and the correct nature of their relation to those they govern are relentlessly posed. Such concerns about the distribution of power and the uses to which it should be put will be familiar to any student of political philosophy, but the answers these Muslim theorists reached were distinctively their own. Although looking to the same Old Testament precepts as Christian and Jewish thinkers, Islam's particular, historically conditioned trajectory gave their discussions about power a highly specific character. The tenets of this fundamentally different viewpoint still exert a profound influence in determining the political arrangements and responses of Muslims throughout the Muslim world.

In the West, power and religious truth, even though both derived their eventual authority from God, were separated by distinct historical roadmaps. Christianity arose explicitly *besides* the polity of the day, the Roman Empire, and, indeed, in its earliest years, in self-conscious apposition. It consequently preached a message of transcending politics, rather than annexing it. By the time state and religion came together in the fourth century, the Church had already a momentum of its own, with its own ambitions, institutions and history. Christian theology confirmed this separation, expounding the view that coercive government had only come into existence after man's expulsion from Paradise, with humanity's traumatic loss of immortality and innocence – it was part of the human worldly sphere. Human history was the account of adjusting to this loss and the search for a prelapsarian paradise of social harmony and equality. Church and state thus never blended, although they co-operated of course often enough. But ultimately they governed different arenas of human activity, each being given a share of the world. The debate about the relation between religious and political power expressed in a long-running tussle between Church and state continues in fact to this day. But it has nevertheless led, eventually, to the West's generally agreed-upon division of state and religion, with a secular socio-political order, and religion confined to the private realm.

In Islam, the opposite is true: truth and power originated at the same time in history, with God's revelations to Muhammad, as laid down in the Qur'an, which made him at once prophet and statesman in one. Religion was thus the source of the state in Islamic thought and religious truth leads automatically to political power. The two formed, from Islam's very inception, an extricable unity.²⁷

The historical rise of Islam in Arabia and the role of its first leader, Muhammad, are supported by Muslim theology. God is the sole and absolute ruler of the universe, and He rules in a very real sense directly or via his deputies on earth. This was already so before the coming of man. It continued while Adam and Eve lived in Paradise and after their ejection. Divine government thus has always been and always will be – and is by its nature – directive. It manifests itself, as an *a priori* necessity, as government on earth. Religion is, after all, supposed to govern life in this world and the next through God's laws and God's laws are simply best imposed by political powers. Truth and power thus regulate the same aspects of life, all aspects of life. Completely fused, religious authority and political power in Islam are embedded in a single, divinely sanctioned Islamic community – the *umma*. And the existence of the *umma* automatically requires a political structure that facilitates and governs correct human behaviour. When political controversy enters this picture, therefore, it does so in quite a different way, taking the form of a debate not over the correct relationship between dual sources of authority, but over the piety and rightness of the leadership.

The political structure that originates from the existence of God's community is realised in the person of the *umma*'s rulers. Good rulers execute God's will and work towards the fulfilment of the collective needs of the *umma*: religious and political leadership in accordance with God's will allow for proper relations between people. God's will is expressed in his laws covering every aspect of human behaviour, from interaction with God, in the sense of praying and fasting, and other humans, in the form of marriage, commercial exchanges, and so forth, to moral conduct and even etiquette. Laws do not prescribe what is allowed on earth or not, but rather explain to what extent human behaviour leads to salvation (or not).

The fusion of political and religious authority under a first prophet-ruler finds a parallel in Moses, who led his people from Egypt to Palestine, and Moses figures prominently in the Qur'ān as the paradigmatic prophet.²⁸ Although many had the ambition, Muhammad was the first to rule as a second Moses on earth according to these principles. Most Muslims maintain that this correct leadership continued under his four immediate successors, the Righteous Caliphs, who ruled from Arabia. Other groups, such as the Shi'ites, to name one of the most populous, argued that this period continued for a while longer, namely as long as the imams were present on earth. It is this period of correct rule (and not to some lost Paradise of equality and freedom) to which Muslim political purists long to return. This is what drove mediaeval Muslim intellectuals and rebels, when propagandising or fighting for an alternative leadership, but it also motivates modern Muslims, such as the Salafists, to emulate everything about that earliest period, whether it is correct rule according to God's will (His laws) or the way one should wear one's hair or brush one's teeth. But this is, of course, a very complicated matter, as the question continues to be for Muslims: how can we restore correct rule on earth, what form will it take, and how far will it extend into other aspects of life, i.e. brushing one's teeth and styling one's hair? Or put another way, is behaving according to those living under correct rule a condition for such correct rule to exist, or can it be in some way given a different shape?

But soon after this earliest period, Muslim rulers no longer united all of God's governmental tasks on earth. A division of power was created between, on the one hand, religious scholars who were in charge of guiding community conduct and upholding moral standards, and, on the other, political rulers, who executed the coercive power. In fact, in form and appearance this seems little different from the division of power between Church and state that developed in the West. But there is one important difference: in Islam this is not a way in which religious authority is in some way removed from political power, which thereby emptied. This division only constitutes a different way of organising God's government on earth, and God is not removed to the private sphere, but continues to occupy the public domain.

This then is the theory. I've painted it with a pretty broad brush, and I apologise for the rather Olympian generalisations. It's essential to emphasise too that Islam is not simply an algorithm that mechanistically determines

how every Muslim behaves. Far from it. What I've outlined are deep structures that provide the principles, parameters and terms of reference through which communities comprehend and interpret the challenges posed by the world around them. They are not deterministic. We are talking about what is meaningful on the aggregate; within these structures individuals, of course, will make their own decisions, often idiosyncratically and unpredictably.

The separation of religion and politics that has *de facto* characterised most of the Muslim world since the early Middle Ages might look like a more or less conventional division of Church and state, with ever-increasing secularisation eventually leading to the confinement of religion in the private sphere and the public domain ceded to human ordinance. There are, in fact, many Muslims, and not only those who grew up in the secularised West, who have worked – and are working – towards such an outcome. There are, however, as many more – and recent developments in the Middle East might give one the impression that there are in fact very many more – who would rather see the three interpenetrating realms of religion, society and state not just move closer but actually merge. Their motive is, as I hope to have made clear, not some kind of anti-Whig perversity to unwillingness to reform, but it is based on the completely different set of premises and a fundamentally different world view.

I spent a long time talking about Muslim political thought. Not only because it is a fascinating topic but also because it demonstrates well what I tried to argue earlier, that confrontation with a different thought system stimulates – and, in fact, is almost the prerequisite of – self-reflection. I do not want to discuss which of the two models is preferable. Although some may care to differ, we in the academy do not aim to create an understanding *for* Islam, nor are we any longer using our academic armoury to impose our cultural, religious or political values on our objects of study. Instead, we observe, analyse and explain. What I wanted to do instead, then, was first to use academic insights to create an understanding *of* Islam, to show that by looking closer at the Arab-Muslim model we can understand why the distribution of religious and political power is such a complicated and hotly debated issue amongst Muslims.

There is, after all, a very great deal at stake. Only correct rulers can assure the operation of God's will on earth and thereby the salvation of the Muslim

community, the *umma*. I think it is clear that whatever the outcome of the developments in the Middle East today, the road to secularised democracy in the Muslim world will never be the same as that followed in the West. Again, this is not to impose a value judgement, it is only to say if this reality is not recognised, the West's cycle of bloody and expensive missteps in the region is unlikely to end soon.

As importantly, however, is that I hope to show that by spending some time engaging with a system based on premises so very different to our own, we are led to a re-examination of our own way of viewing the world, and to question, test and rationalise the assumptions on which it is based. Such questioning is the beating heart of the academic enterprise.

There is another dimension to this – a further way in which the organisation of the *umma* is structurally different, and it relates, again, to the role of Arabic, because to a degree that has no parallel in the West – even Latin in the mediaeval and early modern periods – it is the holy Arabic language that holds Islamic civilisation together. Much more than ethnicity or tribal affiliation, it is Arabic, and the access it provides to Islam's sacred texts, as well as the wider hinterland of Arabic culture, that defines membership of the Muslim collective. Under the Islamic Empire, this centripetal force was further strengthened by the empire's immense bureaucracy, which was similarly grounded in Arabic, and helped to impress Arabic throughout the Muslim domains. And it is through Arabic that religion and state continue to be linked. Arabic-based sciences and knowledge form the social capital on which hierarchy and power – that is, religious and political authority – were and, to a large extent still are, determined in Muslim societies. This is why traditional Muslim education starts with the grammar of the Arabic language. It's also why one can still find one's way around in Arabic even when visiting the great centres of Shi'ite learning in Iran, such as Qum, or why the courses in law, philosophy or even medicine are taught in Arabic at Malaysia's International Islamic University. It also explains why everyone in the Muslim world still claims the heritage of Arabic literature, and why a mediæval Arabic poem about the mantle of the prophet can inspire a contemporary Southeast Asian rock-band, and be immensely popular throughout the whole Muslim world.²⁹ It also explains why Muslims, who grew up without

much knowledge of the language, so often turn to the study of Arabic and its cultural and literary legacy – we have quite a few students like that.

What these examples show, and this is the important point, is that the prevalence of the Arabic language in the Muslim world is not based on chauvinistic pride, because many of those who have embraced Arabic language and elevated it to this place of special eminence, were non-Arabs from diverse cultural origins. The Arabic language and all the academic, administrative, literary and other activities in that language that followed from it, underpins Muslim society and shapes its social organisation.

Arabic, as those who have grappled with it will attest, is not an especially easy language to master. But for those seeking full participation in the *umma* and advancement in Muslim society, it is a strikingly manageable precondition. Islam itself is of a piece.

Islam explicitly defines itself as a religion open to all mankind. Its price of entry is conversion and conversion alone. The Muslim *umma* is based on a faith that transcends all racial and cultural distinctions, in which all believers begin from a position of basic equality. The reality over the centuries, of course, has been rather more complicated, but the principle is nevertheless of huge historical significance. It precipitated a complete break not only with the conditions underpinning tribal society in Arabia, but also caused the total upheaval of social structures in the areas conquered by Islam. The very easy procedure of conversion allowed total access to the community of the conquerors at their own level. The prospect has understandably been an extremely attractive, and contributes to making Islam the world's fastest-growing religion.

Christianity, of course, makes similar claims to egalitarianism, although its conversion process is somewhat more involved. The important difference in the Muslim situation is again the inseparable link between state and religion: joining Islam means not just joining a religious community but a political organism, with all the extra opportunities this implies. It allows non-Arabs free access to positions of leadership.

This levelling principle is probably what lies behind one of Islam's most distinctive and hard-to-explain precepts: the prohibition against alcohol. From pre-Islamic Jahiliyya poetry we know that wine, because of its rarity and expense, was a common unit of currency in hospitality, ostentatious display and hierarchical differentiation in Arabian Bedouin society generally. "Ah, but you do not know," boasts the pre-Islamic poet Labīd b. Rabī'a (d. ca. 661) to a lover who has spurned him, "how many nights ... I have spent chatting away the dark hours; how often a trader's sign has been my goal when it has been hoisted to proclaim costly wine – I pay high prices for its purchase, all stored in dark skins or jars." Forbidding wine therefore was one way assertively to flatten these distinctions.³⁰ (Of course *khamriyyāt*, or wine poems, continued to be produced under Islam.) It shows how the egalitarian ideal of Islam has a very real impact on Muslims' daily lives at least in theory, because theory and practice relate not in obvious ways and again there are of course always also other motives at work. It also shows that it did so right from the beginning and that Islam, for all its continuities with pre-Islamic society, also meant a fundamental break with the world that went before.³¹

I'll cite just one more example: the medieval *adab al-kuttāb* handbooks, which set out in great detail the technical knowledge required to execute the daily tasks of the Islamic bureaucracy, how to compose documents, how to deal with petitioners, how to assess and allocate tax demands, how to process the Empire's income, right down to how thick the reed should be cut to write official letters. The *adab al-kuttāb* texts also delineate the literary and cultural training a civil servant should undergo, what books he should read and how he should compose poetry and prose, how he should employ wit, metaphors and other stylistic devices in his daily speech and work. What these books speak to is not just a remarkably developed administrative system, but an open profession. Again, it is mastery of the pen and the holy language of Islam that underwrites the authority on which the Islamic state is based, and provides the means of access to all those who could master them. Not for nothing, these bureaucrats tended to be for a large part converts from the areas conquered by the Arabs, especially Persians.

This does not mean that there were no counter movements to the Arabisation of Muslim societies. Strong local pride movements in the form of *shu'ubiyya* or other nativist rebellions took place especially in Iran and amongst the

Berbers. But these movements never – significantly – aimed at breaking up the Islamic Empire into its constituent ethnic units.³² Rather, the aim was to purge corrupt or misguided leaders and return the Islamic Empire to the service of the whole Muslim community. It is clear that there are amongst Muslims also very potent forces that exacerbate differences: new ones in the form of nationalism and old ones such as ethnic-racial divides, or even the very banal but hugely influential power politics of individuals or groups, and that they can lead to very violent consequences. We are at the moment, of course, witnessing in places across the Middle East and North Africa such violent exchanges, some very violent indeed. Again, I do not want to advocate that Islam determines everything in the Muslim world. Rather, I want to emphasise that it is the back and forth of these forces, more than the failure of any one of them, that determines the expressions of Muslim political power in our own times. Although history is made today, it is exactly the way in which history underpins society that makes it also unmoveable and permanent. The social conditions then continue to keep religion tied to politics in Islam, which make the call for rule in the name of Islam so attractive and gives this call a universal community-wide ambition. The transcending power of Islam and its historical connection with political organisation is what underlies the continued attraction of political Islam. It also lies behind the powerful community feeling in the Muslim world, the membership of Islam crosses political and cultural borders and makes Muslims throughout the *umma* feel connected and related. It also explains why Islam, especially in its equalising and denationalised ideal form, continues to be such a magnet for converts. It is important also to remember how unusual this is, while Islam brings inclusive membership for all Muslims, in other hegemonic relationships full inclusion, in this sense, remains elusive.

To sum up. When Erpenius took on the professorship 400 years ago, he linked the necessity of learning Arabic to very practical and rational objectives. Arabic texts gave unique insights into a range of academic disciplines because of their extreme richness and extensiveness, unmatched by any other corpus of texts. Arabists would also be able to communicate with the Arab and Muslim world, with the obvious advantages that this would bring for the Netherlands. He also pointed at the power of comparative study and how the Muslim world offered a great new variant to the mix. But although it would do no harm at this time to emphasise what a wealth of beautiful

and interesting texts were and continue to be produced in the Muslim world, a source of endless delight and satisfaction for those willing to delve into them, it is not this direct reward of the study of Arabic that I want to praise here.

Throughout the ages the university has played a crucial role in providing a voice of reason in heated debates. By providing the scientific means, constantly refreshed, to think through problems and issues of public concern, and by providing the historical depth and the contextualising power of history, the academy can play its part in applying new sources of light, opening dead-ends, and enriching the decision-making process. It is here where the Leiden tradition of Arabic has so much to offer. The insights it offers take us beyond the narrow concerns of the day, the headlines and tweets, to the deeper patterns of human organisation and conduct that allow us to sort and make sense of the questions, challenges and dilemmas that bombard us every day, and without this view of the wider horizon, would overwhelm us. It is about watching the hour hand *as well as* the minute hand. In the case of the Arab and Muslim worlds, this has never been more important.

The point is that we need to train citizens at our university who can function in the fast and changing world of today, whose reactions are as fast as the events around us, but besides them we need to continue to train those who can take a step back, pause and think and point to developments that have a longer breath. At Leiden these two needs of training Arabists and specialists of the Middle East interact and are covered.

Most importantly in this is that we continue to build on what we have, to extend without letting go of the strengths of the past but definitely by moving ahead with the fast changing world of today. We can conclude perhaps by echoing what J. H. Kramers (1891-1951) said when he delivered his inaugural lecture for this chair in 1940: "We owe it to our culture to develop Oriental studies. It is a privilege to work in an institution where this is possible, and this tradition is valued and supported. Long may it continue."³³

The lecture today is only the first in a series of activities that we have organised to commemorate this important event. I hope your visit to Leiden today

will thus not be the end of our engagement, and I hope that this is the beginning of a new era for Arabic studies in Leiden.

Notes

- 1 Lecture delivered on February 4, 2013 in the Academy Building of Leiden University to commemorate the 400-year existence of the professorship of Arabic.
- 2 For a description of Raphelengius' life and work as a printer, teacher and scholar at Leiden, see Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands. A Short History in Portraits, 1580-1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17, 19.
- 3 Willem Otterspeer, *The Bastion of Freedom: Leiden University Today and Yesterday* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2008), 67.
- 4 William of Orange donated the bible printed by Christopher Plantin in 1575 to the University (Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, *Magna Commoditas. Leiden University's Great Asset. University Library* [Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012], 13).
- 5 Jan Brugman and Frank Schröder, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 11.
- 6 Philippus Fernandus (1556-1599) had been invited by Scaliger to teach Arabic at Leiden where he arrived in 1599. After a trial period of six months he was appointed Professor of Arabic as of February 8, 1600, he died only a few months before being able to take up his position. See, Alastair Hamilton, 'Ferdinand, Philip (1556-1599),' Colin Matthew, Brian Harrison and Lawrence Goldman (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 7 For the life and works of Erpenius, see Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 31-40.
- 8 Brugman and Schröder, *Arabic Studies*, 15-16.
- 9 For the life and work of Josephus Justus Scaliger, see Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger. A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983-1993).
- 10 This was his *Opus novum de emendatio temporum* (A new work on the improvement of chronology) published in Paris in 1583 which included the ancient Greek and Roman traditions, but also information from Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Ethiopian and Persian texts.
- 11 As stated in his will, his eastern manuscripts and printed books were to be acquired by the University Library where they were displayed in a special book case (Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 27).

- 12 Brugman and Schröder, *Arabic Studies*, 6-7; Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 31-33.
- 13 His first inaugural lecture was delivered on 8 May 1613 and published as *Oratio de Linguae Arabica Praestantia et Dignitate* (On the excellence and dignity of the Arabic language). The second public lecture in which Erpenius repeated his arguments on the value of the study of Arabic was delivered on 5 November 1620. It was published together with his inaugural lecture and another public lecture on Hebrew in Leiden in 1621 as *Orationes tres de Linguarum Ebraeae atque Arabicae Dignitate*. The second oration was translated by Robert Jones as: 'Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624) on the Value of the Arabic Language. Translated from the Latin.' *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 1 (1986), 15-25.
- 14 Jones, 'Thomas Erpenius,' 20. The discussion on how the understanding of Hebrew is aided by a knowledge of Arabic, with, added in the second oration, several specific examples of how Arabic cognates clarify the Hebrew words, is discussed (in Jones' translation) on pages 20-21.
- 15 Jones, 'Thomas Erpenius,' 22.
- 16 It takes up the largest part of his arguments. See Jones, 'Thomas Erpenius,' 18-19; 22-23.
- 17 Jones, 'Thomas Erpenius,' 18.
- 18 Jones, 'Thomas Erpenius,' 19.
- 19 William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896-1898). Wright's translation of the Norwegian Carl Paul Caspari's (1814-1892) *Grammatica Arabica* published in two volumes in Leipzig between 1844 and 1848 also benefited from emendations by the Dutch Arabist Michaël Jan de Goeje and William Robertson Smith (John Robert Jones, *Learning Arabic in Renaissance Europe, 1505-1624* [PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 1988], 212; Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 38).
- 20 See for a discussion of his publications, Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 38-40.
- 21 For the life and works of Jacobus Golius, see Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 41-48.
- 22 *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*, published in 1653 by the publishing house Elzevier (Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 47).
- 23 For Dozy's life and work, see Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 95-102.
- 24 Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 103-113.

- 25 Hurgronje accepted the chair of Arabic at Leiden as part of an agreement that saw him also appointed as a government advisor on ‘Native and Arab affairs’ (Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Short History*, 133).
- 26 www.hum.leidenuniv.nl/lucis
- 27 The following argument owes an obvious debt to Chapter 1 ‘The Origins of Government,’ of Patricia Crone’s *God’s Rule. Government and Islam. Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- 28 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 16-20.
- 39 *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* (poem of the mantle) was written by the Egyptian Sufi poet al-Būṣīrī (1211-1294).
- 30 Labīd seems to have stopped writing poetry after his conversion to Islam (Carl Brockelmann, ‘Labīd b. Rabī’a’ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first edition, s.v.). The poem’s translation appears in Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 32.
- 31 See also the prohibition on the wearing of silk by Muslim men which differed profoundly with pre-Islamic sartorial laws (Petra M. Sijpesteijn, ‘A Request to Buy Silk from Early Islamic Egypt,’ in Hermann Harrauer and Rosario Pintaudi [eds.], *Gedenkschrift Ulrike Horak. Papyrologica Florentina XXXIV* [Florence: Edizioni Gonelli, 2004], 255-272).
- 29 See also the different state structures that arose in the post-Roman West and East, with several ethnically defined Kingdoms in western Europe and one Muslim Empire in the Near East (Discussed in the introduction to: Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner and Richard Payne [eds.], *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World. The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*. [Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012]).
- 30 Kramers gave his inaugural lecture as professor of Arabic entitled ‘The Qur’ān’s Language’ (in Dutch: ‘De taal van de Koran’) on 9 February 1940. It was published in Leiden in 1940 by publishing house Brill.

On Hedgehogs, Foxes, Magpies, and Why the World Should Read Classical Arabic Poetry

James E. Montgomery

INTRODUCTION

Dean, your excellencies, learned colleagues, ladies, gentlemen, friends.

πόλλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχῖνος ἔν μέγα

Many things the fox knows but the hedgehog knows one big thing

So the archaic Greek poet Archilochus enigmatically informs us. This was translated by Erasmus in his *Adagia* (1500) as:

*Multa novit vulpes, verum echinus unum magnum*¹

In the seventh century, the pre-Islamic warrior Antarah described a coward in a battle:²

إِذَا تَقَعُ الرَّمَاحُ بِجَانِبِيهِ تَوَلَّى قَابِعًا فِيهِ صُدُودٌ

As the spears rain down on him, he screams, turns and hides his head

The verb *qaba'a*, “to hide the head”, was obscure. It was explained by the following anecdote in the commentary to the collected poems of the pre-Islamic poet Ḥādirah:

Ibn al-Zubayr spoke, and someone replied. “Who speaks?” he asked. Silence. “What a fool! He yelps like a fox, then hides his head like a hedgehog.”³

For Jāhiz, writing in the ninth century, the hedgehog and the fox provide an opportunity to appreciate the ancient Greek notion of the Great Chain of Being:

Consider how amazing the food chain is. The wolf hunts and eats the fox. The fox hunts and eats the hedgehog. The hedgehog pursues and eats the viper and other snakes as long as they are not large snakes. The snake hunts and eats the sparrow. The sparrow hunts and eats the locust. The locust preys on the young of the hornet and any other creature that lays its eggs in the open. The hornet hunts and eats the bee. The bee hunts and eats the fly. And the fly hunts and eats gnats.⁴

Despite the title of my lecture, I am not here this evening to talk exclusively about hedgehogs, foxes, and magpies, though they will never be too far away. It would be foolish of me to talk about hedgehogs anyway, when we have a distinguished expert on the subject present this evening, my esteemed colleague and dear friend Professor Dr Remke Kruk. I refer you to her article, “Hedgehogs and their Chicks” should you wish to know more.⁵

I am here to celebrate Arabic and the creative and literary heritage in Arabic. I am also here to celebrate the long tradition of Arabic at Leiden. Since my election as Sir Thomas Adams’s Professor of Arabic in 2012, I have visited few institutions where the Chair of Arabic is older than my own, endowed in 1632. Leiden is an exception; the Chair here is 19 years older than the one I have the privilege to occupy. Universities and academics often suffer from an anxiety of antiquity. Therefore I console myself that I am a fellow of a Cambridge College, Trinity Hall, founded in 1350.

My celebration will take the form of a whistle stop tour in two parts. I will begin by thinking about three towering intellects: Bīrūnī, scientist; Fārābī, philosopher; Jāhiz, theologian. The study of each figure poses challenges for the modern scholar, challenges that can only be surmounted by a readiness to forget much of what we think we know. I will then present you with some Classical Arabic poems in translation, as part of my plea that more people should read and enjoy it. I will conclude with a modest proposal for the future study of Arabic.

ISAIAH BERLIN, THE HEDGEHOG AND THE FOX

My lecture begins with the Oxford political philosopher Isaiah Berlin and a short study he published in 1953: *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. Berlin takes as his starting point the verse by Archilochus I quoted and uses it to:

mark one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers, and, it may be, human beings in general ... those, on one side, who relate everything to a single central vision ... a single, universal, organizing principle ... and ... those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory.⁶

The first are hedgehogs, the second foxes. Hedgehogs have a “unitary inner vision.” Foxes “lead lives, perform acts and entertain ideas that are centrifugal.”⁷ Dante, Plato, Hegel, Dostoevsky and Proust were all hedgehogs. Aristotle, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Erasmus, Goethe and Joyce were foxes.

Berlin's point is clever and makes a useful distinction. But we should not take it too seriously. Berlin certainly did not and was surprised by how seriously people took it. We will see that on occasion we might want to set his dichotomy aside and behave like magpies rather than hedgehogs or foxes.

Bīrūnī

“Counting by numbers is natural to man,” Bīrūnī remarks.⁸ He was a hedgehog.

His scientific works have been well studied, his mathematical discoveries codified and appreciated. As a pupil whose scientific ineptitude was celebrated among my teachers, I stand in awe of Bīrūnī's achievements: his open-mindedness about the hypothesis of a heliocentric universe if it could better account for empirical data; his conclusion that northern India had once been under sea level; his measurement of the circumference of the earth; his calculations of the speed of the movements of the heavens. So gifted was he as a mathematician that an impact crater on the far side of the moon has been named after him.

So surely what made Bīrūnī a hedgehog was applied mathematics, be it observation of planetary transits, the study of shadows or the measurement of the earth? But when I think about all of Bīrūnī's extant writings, I am not sure mathematics gives us the full picture.

Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī was born in 973 in Khwārazm, modern Uzbekistan. And this reminds us that not all those writers who contributed to making Arabic such an astonishingly creative language were Arabs. Bīrūnī wrote 155 books and died sometime after 1050.

In the year 1000 at the age of 27 he began *The Extant Remains of Bygone Eras*, a history of religions, from the pre-Zoroastrian Persians, thought to be Buddhists, to Zoroastrians, Sogdians (an old Iranian civilization), Khwarazmians (Bīrūnī's own people), Jews, Syrian Christians, pagans of Edessa, pre-Islamic Arabs and Muslims.

Bīrūnī concentrates on the history of these religions and how calendars, feasts and festivals were fixed. The first three chapters explain the basics: how do we establish temporal units? Chapters 4 to 8 outline the reigns of kings and pseudo-prophets in an attempt to establish a chronology against which the other periods can be determined. Chapters 9 to 20 describe calendars and Chapter 21 gives an account of the stations of the moon.

Bīrūnī's primary sources are textual, and not oral. He collects as many accounts as he can and tests them against reason and plausibility. He looks for consistency. He records his sources carefully and is impartial when confronted by contradictory reports. The book is effectively an exercise in chronography, the mapping of time. I consider it one of the most original histories I have ever read for its analysis of the very idea of what recorded time might mean.

In 1017 an Afghan warlord, Maḥmūd of Ghaznah, took control of Khwārazm. Bīrūnī was probably detained against his will. He served Maḥmūd from 1017 to 1030, and accompanied him on his raids in present-day Pakistan, where many Brahmins were captured as prisoners of war.

This was when Bīrūnī wrote one of the most remarkable books ever: an extensive and detailed codification, in Arabic, of Indian thought, beliefs and practices. Often referred to simply as *The India*, its full title is *On the verification of the philosophical categories developed by the Indians which reason will accept or reject*. The *India* is a jewel of a book, written in impeccable Arabic of beautiful clarity and accuracy.

Why was Bīrūnī interested in Indian civilisation? He thought the Indians and the Greeks were members of the one household and that they shared a similar belief system.⁹

Bīrūnī's interest in Indian star-lore led him to the study and translation into Arabic of the *Yoga-Sutras* of Patañjali. In the course of this project he realised that the Indians of his day had kept their past alive. The same could not be said about the ancient Greeks: they had disappeared a long time ago. But it was not only the Indian past that they kept alive. It was also the ancient Greek past:

For seven years Brahman, the founder of Brahmanism, was the disciple of Philāyūs who had travelled to India. It was from him that he learned the teachings of Pythagoras.¹⁰

Thus the Indians offered Bīrūnī a chance to bring the past to life through codifying a living civilisation. But this was no easy matter. How does one capture a whole civilisation in writing, an ancient and sophisticated one, preserved in a language of forbidding difficulty?

Bīrūnī began painstakingly to read and translate as many Sanskrit texts as he could. He did so in the company of Maḥmūd's Brahmin prisoners of war. He amassed his evidence. But how was he to present this evidence in a meaningful way? No book like it had ever been attempted before. The project was vast.

Perhaps Bīrūnī knew the answer to this problem before he began his book. Perhaps he had a 'eureka' moment. We do not know. His solution is what he calls 'the geometrical path'. After an outline of the problems involved for a Muslim studying Indian civilisation, he begins with God and theology. He

proceeds to geography and astronomy, and then to the measurement of time and the stars. The work ends with an investigation into Indian rites and cultic observances and how times are determined.

So what made Bīrūnī a hedgehog? What was his “single, central vision”? I think it was an obsession with time. Bīrūnī was obsessed with time: with time future, time present and time past. He devoted much of his life to chronometry in an effort to measure, capture and contain time. This obsession with time was a response to God’s injunction in the Qur’ān to measure the movement of the sun and the moon.

His passion for chronometry led him to explore time past, in his *Extant Remains of Bygone Eras*. In the India, he endeavoured to capture present time. His codification of an entire people and their beliefs was designed to preserve them for all time. By describing the Indians, Bīrūnī sought to achieve permanency through keeping their ideas alive in writing. At the same time, he sought to keep the past alive, because he considered the Indians and the Greeks of long ago to have been ‘like one household’.

Throughout this life of scientific discovery, Bīrūnī pursued his obsession with time relentlessly. Scientific discovery was a means to an end: its true purpose was to worship God through seeking to comprehend time.

Fārābī

Our next hedgehog is Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, who had such a grasp of *falsafah*, Arabic philosophy in the Greek tradition, that he was known as *al-shaykh al-thānī*, the Second Master – second to Aristotle, that is.

When I read Fārābī I want to shout out Bertold Brecht’s words when he had finished Descartes’s *Meditations*, “This man must live in another time, another world from mine!”

I do not know how to read the Fārābian corpus. In part this is because Fārābī is invisible. What we know of his life comes, not from his biographers, but from marginal notes and comments derived from his texts as copied by his students. We do not even know where he was born! This is in marked contrast to the many legendary Fārābīs: the talented lutenist, the polyglot, the

judge, the sufi. This biographical invisibility is matched by a bibliographical invisibility. Few works are listed in the standard classical bibliographies. Fārābī seems to have lived and composed his works in accordance with the Epicurean ideal of the inconspicuous life.

This bio-bibliographical invisibility contrasts strongly with Fārābī's awareness of the history of philosophy and with how he presents his philosophical autobiography as the direct heir of Aristotle.

In his *Commentary on the Prior Analytics* Fārābī declares that he intends to 'strive to express Aristotelian syllogistic, as much as possible, by means of words familiar to people who use the Arabic language.'¹¹ While the lexicon may be familiar, the Arabic generated out of this desire for clarity must surely rank amongst the most unusual if not the most outlandish types of Arabic ever written.

Fārābī's Arabic is anything but invisible. It is completely unmistakable. No one else but Fārābī could be speaking. His struggle for clarity is regularly so contorted that it takes on the quality of an oracle, each word freighted with such a burden of significance that it seems on the verge of collapse.

A number of years ago I became obsessed with a short work by Fārābī entitled *The Philosophy of Plato*. It is a brief survey in Arabic, based on a lost Syriac prototype, of Plato's writings cast in the form of a biography. Plato's life is devoted completely to enquiry: he has no existence outwith enquiry. As the text explains, Plato considered that the life of someone who did not enquire was not the life of a man. The only other activity that exists for Fārābī's Plato is the drive to clarify the conclusions of enquiry.

The question I wrestled with was: what is the relation of Fārābī's text to its lost Syriac prototype? Or put differently, why would Fārābī write such a work? I came to see *The Philosophy of Plato* as an "attempt", in the words of the Italian composer Luciano Berio (after Borges), "at 'exorcising' the overwhelming presence" of the philosophical library, a library "unable to offer coherence" but ready to "receive it from the right visitors". Fārābī, I think, was exploring what Berio calls "the possibility of remembering the future". The philosophical past could only be remembered as a vision for the future.

For as long as I kept to Fārābī's other works or the philosophical tradition, this insight eluded me. My 'eureka' moment came from a visit in 2008 to the Francis Bacon exhibition at the Tate Britain in London. What caught my attention most forcefully was one of Bacon's 1953 series surrounding his *Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, part of an extended series of transcriptions of Diego Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1650). In these studies we see two paintings at once. We are invited to reconcile them but when we prove unable to, the artist allows us to glimpse a third (non-existent) painting. It is a radical form of exorcising the past in order to remember possibilities for the future.

Fārābī, like Bīrūnī, was a hedgehog. His unitary vision was the attempt to incarnate Aristotelianism in tenth century Baghdad.

Jāḥiẓ

We have met two hedgehogs. Are there no foxes? For anyone in the audience who has ever read a page of Jāḥiẓ's Arabic, surely here is a writer whose thought was, in Berlin's words:

scattered or diffused, moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves without, consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them into, or exclude them from, any one unchanging, all-embracing, sometimes self-contradictory and incomplete, at times fanatical, unitary inner vision?¹²

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ composed many works during his long life: we know of some 245 titles. Not all have survived, of course, and there is considerable overlap between some of these titles. A conservative estimate would fix his corpus at around 200 compositions. His writings are greatly cherished. He is admired and loved as the 'father of Arabic prose.' Few would nowadays refer to him outright as a buffoon, but most discern in his joyous (childlike) sense of wonder a childish fascination with the mundane and the everyday. Many read this presumed childishness in his mercurial and tumultuous corpus of writings and in his style of composition – full of digressions, asides, meanderings, a helter-skelter inability to stick to the point, an exuberant relish for arguing both sides of a case, because he loved argumenta-

tion so much but also because he could not decide which side to root for. He is notorious for his witty and often apparently irreverent caricatures, for his indefatigable curiosity, and his sophistry. Only a fox could have composed works like his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, The Book of Living.

After some two and a half decades of reading the works of Jāḥiẓ I no longer recognise the characterization of him I have just offered. He saw his role as a spokesperson for his society. He thought that his compositions could save society, a society arranged in terms of his beloved Muʿtazilism.

Jāḥiẓ was an intellectual who wrote as proselytizer, apologist and ideologue. Admitted into the entourages of the caliphs Maʿmūn, Muʿtaṣim and Mutawakkil and of other powerful patrons as a scholar and a special advisor, he advised, counselled and admonished the imperial elite, as an expert in religious, legal, political, scientific and historical matters. He offered the caliphs and their gubernatorial agents a vision of how to regulate their society through a correct theologico-political system and in the process offered his readers a way to save their souls.

Today I see Jāḥiẓ as a hedgehog who wrote as a fox. (Berlin's view of Tolstoy is that he "was by nature a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog").

Why should Jāḥiẓ have written as he did? What was his unitary idea? His brand of Muʿtazilism furnished him with a belief in 'divine unity': God was absolutely one, and no qualifications to His oneness could be recognized. Jāḥiẓ was vehement in his opposition to any form of anthropomorphism (the idea that God shared any attributes or characteristics with man) and contemptuous of corporealism (the idea that God was or had a physical body). He paid extremely close attention to how God can be described in human language, for he was chary lest any statement imply that an attribute such as 'knowing' was somehow co-eternal or even co-extensive with God.

This involved him in an uncompromising stance on the question of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān is God's speech. Did God always have the power of speech? If He did not, how, why and when did He acquire it? If He did, was speech then co-eternal with God? If it were, then a qualification to His absolute unity would have to be admitted.

Jāḥiẓ argued that the Qur'ān was created in time, and not eternal. He tasked himself with ensuring that an uncontaminated form of monotheism prevailed. This not only established caliphal legitimacy and authority, but also guaranteed that if the End Time were to come (and the Caliphs and their entourages were convinced it could come at any moment), the Caliph would not be judged by God to have been deficient in his promotion of the one, true faith. The Caliph, after all, was responsible for the salvation of his subjects and without the means for the enforcement of belief, a rightly ordered society could not be produced.

This desire to preserve God's absolute unity at all costs also led Jāḥiẓ to locate moral responsibility for good and evil firmly within the human domain. This was part of what he meant by the notion of 'divine justness.' God may have the power to create good and bad, but He would never exercise the latter. Instead man was charged with the responsibility for his own actions.

As the spokesperson of his society Jāḥiẓ did not seek to position himself as supreme authority. Rather his writings were designed to combat what in Arabic is referred to as *taqlīd*: the unquestioning acceptance of a belief, view, or opinion taken on the authority of another person. Jāḥiẓ sought to promote reading as an antidote to *taqlīd*. Reading as the process of dismantling *taqlīd* would guide society.

Jāḥiẓ was unwilling to accept the views of others without questioning them. His style of writing was an invitation to his readers to challenge and examine his views through a mode of reading that required of them profound and extensive scrutiny, that demanded that they subject his writings to their reasoning intellect. In order to do this they had to read as foxes in order to become hedgehogs.

But surely this style of reading is anti-authoritarian and would constitute a danger to the society I have just said Jāḥiẓ wanted to save? Would it not lead to anarchy, or relativism, or to the predominance of interpretive error and caprice? Jāḥiẓ might have countered that it would lead to no such thing, that there was no such threat: reading was the application of reason and would lead inexorably to the same conclusions as its application had led him.

MAGPIES

The survival of the modern university needs hedgehogs, though it spends a lot of time and effort on thinking about how to produce foxes. This at least is how I understand the recent hegemonic move in many institutions towards funding ‘interdisciplinarity’.

I am by inclination a fox though I was educated and trained and often work as a hedgehog. But in my view neither of Berlin’s categories will help us gain a deep appreciation of the Arabic creative heritage. I hope I have in the foregoing case-studies given you a sample of an approach I have developed, what one reviewer has referred to as ‘indiscriminate reading’.

For the last fifteen or so years I have been trying to read as a magpie. The ‘*aq‘aq*, the magpie, according to *Jāhiz*, has unerring sensory perception, is extremely timid, and highly intelligent but liable to lose its young.¹³ It is one of the three kinds of animals that pilfer and hide silver coins and jewellery.¹⁴ The magpie is intelligent and honest. It can be trained to respond to calls, and responds exactly as saker falcons do. It can be given instructions and will understand what is wanted. It hides jewellery and when summoned by shouting, it will take its owner to the place where it hid the jewellery, so there is no need to go looking for it. Despite this however it often loses its eggs and chicks.¹⁵

Magpies are intelligent: they have an impressive cognitive ability, and are capable of recognising themselves in a mirror. They are omnivorous. And they collect bright objects. Of course the Bedouin considered the magpie a bird of ill omen. I will leave it to you to decide if this applies to my approach too.

WHY THE WORLD SHOULD READ CLASSICAL ARABIC POETRY

When I am not mimicking magpies, I am an enthusiast of classical Arabic poetry. It deserves to be so much better known. But classical Arabic poetry has rarely been translated in any language and when it has, it has often seemed insipid and banal. But I am determined to try to raise awareness of it in the contemporary world. So I want now to share with you some versions of

classical poems I have made, to see if I can convince you to spend some time getting to know this poetic tradition better.

Imru' al-Qays

My first reading is a version of the first Arabic poem I ever tried to read, thirty-two years ago. I put the emphasis on “tried”. As I revisited the poem over the last month or so I was struck once again by how difficult it is as a work of art.

The legend of Imru' al-Qays is a powerful one. The poet sets out to win back the kingdom he has been deprived of by the slaughter of his father. He visits the Byzantine emperor for support. The Emperor gives him a poisoned shirt and the poet dies on his way back to reclaim his throne.

Our poem is a meditation on ambition and personal worth in the face of death, uncertainty and failure. It makes me think of Hamlet's famous soliloquy, “To be or not to be”. Imru' al-Qays, on his quest for greatness, compares present isolation with past achievements, as, in Hamlet's words, he rekindles “his native hue of resolution” and resumes his “enterprise of great pitch and moment.”

There are two episodes. On a journey, the poet stops at a place where a woman called Salmā once lived. They had an affair, though she was married to another man. He recalls their time together. Then, enigmatically, he describes a convent or a brothel or a temple where he finds a group of bewitching sirens worshipping a steatopygeous goddess. He rejects their enticements and retreats in a state of fear. In order to justify his act of cowardice, he reviews past exploits, including a thrilling oryx hunt, and recasts them as a sign of dedication to his quest to win immortal fame and glory.

Imru' al-Qays, *Poem Rhyming in L*¹⁶

Live, dead ruins! Find peace! Can the dead ever come back to life?
Do only blessed immortals live a life of peace free from night terrors?
Can you find peace when your last tryst is three years past?

Salmā once lived in this wasteland where ravenblack rainclouds glower –
Salmā thinks she would see fawns and eggs in the lush wadi,
Thinks she is as she was then, amid the *khuzāmā* buds, at Aw'āl well,
When we met by night. Her teeth shone, jewels gleamed on her doe's neck.
Ha! Basbāsah said I'd grown old, that men like me are no fun. Lies!
I can still steal a bride from a man and keep mine safe.
I've had my fun with shy girls, bright figurines
Who light up the love bed in lamp blaze,
Breasts aflame like tamarisk fire on a hilltop
Fanned by the winds, lit for the caravan on its way home.

Salmā's like them: pretty mouth, soft, flirty
Like soft sand where boys walk and slide,
A tremble of delicate torso, she turns, her scent spreads.
When her lover strips her, she yields, gently, softly.
When I get up I forget my clothes, leave them behind.

I saw her light in Yathrib from far off Adhri'āt
Looked for her by starlight, bright lamps lit by monks at night,
I crept to her: steady, stealthy, like water. Her folk slept.
“Damn you! You'll shame me. Didn't you see people up late?”
“By God – if they cut off my head, I'd still not leave!” I swore,
Invoked God with a lie: “Anyway, they're asleep. Talk is done, fires are out.”
She lost our war of words. I tamed her. She was testy but broken.
I pulled her to me, lissom date-branch. We took our muted bliss.

Daylight. She's in love. Her travel-dusty lord knows.
“You're a dead man!” he yells, a camel bull scream, neck choked.
But he's no killer!
I sleep with *mashrafī* swords and grey, ghouf-fang arrowheads
He has no spear to impale me, no sword, no bow, no arrows.
Kill me? I own her the way herders smear pitch on their mangy camels⁴⁷.
He may be her lord, but Salmā knows – he is all talk, no action.
What does he care if I speak of coy does in royal halls?

Rain. I penetrate a convent. A languid, gargantuan woman is worshipped
By soft, delicate voluptuaries, girls with perfect figures, faultless faces.
To want them is a death wish. To strong men they say, "Self-control? No way!"
I like women. They like me. But I turned away. I did not want them. I feared death.
It was as if I'd never ridden a horse for fun or taken a busty beauty in anklets,
Bought a skin full of wine, or said in a rout, "Wheel about! Charge!"
Or went on a morning raid on a colossal mightyleg warhorse:
Shazā joints: sound, legs: stout, nerves: taut, croup: high above thighs,
Hooves: hard, unbreakable rocks, pillion point: like an ostrich chick¹⁸;
Or hunted when no birds stir before dawn, in a rainwet field, off beaten track,
Guarded by fierce spears, blessed by ravenblack rainclouds,
On a titan, a roan mare, flesh dry, loom-beam hard.

I startled a herd of pure whitehides, legs striped like Yemeni cloth,
That pelted across Jamazā like horses clad in blankets,
Protected by Oldbull: longback, longhorn, snubnose, proud.
My mare sensed my rancour and attacked a bull, then a cow,
As if I had let loose a swift eagle, a strongwing hunter that snatches
Sharabah's hares while Awrāl's foxes cower in their holes,
Her eyrie packed with ripped bird-hearts – moist grapes, dried dates.

If I wanted a meagre life, a little wealth would be a fortune
But I am on a quest to capture ancient glory!
Men's souls cling to life. They will never scale the heights.

Abū Nuwās, 1

The poetry of Abū Nuwās thrills, excites and delights for the fluency of his Arabic that has all the sounds and rhythms of natural speech. Our next poem is a *khamriyyah*, a wine poem. Like one of Horace's *Odes* it is a perfect expression of the injunction: *carpe diem*. It is a simple poem and is typical of the genre. Such simplicity can only come from true craft.

Abū Nuwās¹⁹

He declaimed the following description of spring (the metre is *kāmil*):

Time is sweet, trees are in bud.
Winter is gone, Spring is here.
Earth struts in a flower gown
So bright it scorches your eyes.

Be dour no more. Let go! Enjoy the taste
Of a sharp red moonbeam mix.
Fate has struck you down.
Seek justice
At the hands of a moonface flirt,
With his fawn's eyes and neck
New coin bright,
And, to add to my misery,
His belt tied tight.
He pours a teardrop glass
And serves a vintage from Karkh –

An old virgin: she's keen
But won't let the water touch her skin.
Her decorous spirit
Glides gravely in our veins.

Refined men of noble mien
We make Time our slave.

Abū Nuwās, 2

Now, another poem attributed to Abū Nuwās, this time a *ṭardiyyah*, a hunting poem. One of my current projects is to edit and translate the hunting poetry of Abū Nuwās. The poem describes a Saluqi sight-hound. Unusually, the attack of the dog is described in terms usually reserved for a falcon or hawk.

Abū Nuwās, Poem Rhyming in B²⁰

I raid
Parched deserts
Soaked by cloudrain,
With a lankleap²¹ dog –
Leanflank, queenbee²² yellow,
Whitechest shock,
Hocks let down,
Deepwell mouth
Dark: a hyena or wolf burrow.

Over hilltop and dunecrest,
Through low scrub,
He swims
As ships sail the sea in a south wind.

He sees panic-heart zabys
Far, out of sight of fear,
Aims at them, fire-fast,
An angry Tornado,
Stoops on swift wings²³
Makes for the Alpha, feared by all –
Death topples him:
Thwacks into his mighty chest
Crunches bones from tail to shin
Tears flesh clean off.
A stoop.
A thwack.
A heartstop.
An avenging fury.

What a clever hunter!

Mutanabbī

No celebration of Arabic poetry would be complete without the mighty Mutanabbī, whose sonorous verses sing loud of his vaunting ego. Bombas-

tic, overweening, Achillean, Mutanabbī wrote poetry that continues to be hugely popular in the modern Arabic-speaking world. His poetry is fearfully difficult and quite impossible to translate. In fact it is barely able to breathe when divested of the rich timbre of its Arabic.

Mutanabbī composed the following elegy in 961 for a dead patron during his stay in Egypt. This work reminds me yet again of Shakespeare, this time Marc Antony's famous oration for Julius Caesar, "Friends, Romans, countrymen." Mutanabbī's "heart is in the coffin" beside his patron, and his poetry "must pause till it come back."

I do not consider my version to be a success. It does not escape a charge of banality. But we cannot celebrate classical Arabic poetry without Mutanabbī and this is the best that I can do at the moment. Perhaps when I have tried to translate more of Mutanabbī's poetry, I will be able, in the words of Samuel Becket, "to fail better":

Mutanabbī, *Poem Rhyming in 'Ayn*²⁴

A bold face tries to hide my grief. I am out of control.
My emotions fight over me. My tears do as they please.
I cannot sleep.
Night drags its heels, stars limp across the sky.
Sleep fled when Abū Shujā' parted.

I'm brave when my soul senses Death but afraid to leave those I love.
I'm hard in the face of a foe's wrath but crushed by a friend's harsh word.
If you do not care about the past or know what the future will bring,
If you deceive yourself about what is and set your sights on what can never be
You'll live an easy life, care free.

Who built the pyramids? When did he live, how did he die, where is he now?
When we move on, our exploits abide for a while
But soon they too meet their fate.
Before death, Abū Shujā' knew no rest, could not stand still
His home was full of gold, or so we thought.
He died. Look now – empty.
He hoarded great deeds, fine swords and spears, noble A'waj mares.

Glory? Great deeds? A bad deal.
They failed to give our proud prince life.

In your day you were too mighty to live among other men.
Speak to me. Please. Cool the fire of grief.
You used to act at will, inflict harm, dispense good.
You respected comrades: they felt no doubt, knew no pain.
So often I watched as you met disaster full on
With your keen mind and strong hand
That gave out gifts and fought wars
As if they were God's holy duties.

Each day you gifted a robe:
How can you be happy, dressed as you are now?
You would give a robe to any who asked.
Today you cannot give away the robe you wear.

You bore the burden of every crushing debt.
Then it happened. Unbearable.
Helpless,
You could only watch as it came over you:
You raised no spear, unsheathed no sword.

I would give my life for my one true lord. His troops stand here, in tears.
Tears are poor gears of war!
If tears are your only weapons, trouble:
You will tear apart your guts
Strike your own face!

My lord, you are gripped by a hand that does not care
Whether it holds the speckled gos or the pied crow.
Your loss means we have no light to guide us.
Why should men meet?
Why muster the army, why ride at night?
Your guests are lost. Have you named a successor to tend to them?
Men like you do not disappoint their guests.

Fate, hide your ugly face!
It is a horrid face – cover it in a veil.
Is a man like Abū Shujā' to die?
Is that crooked Eunuch, that dirty envious pig
And his vile gang of thieves
To live?
You have given life to the worst liar that ever was.
You took away a man devoted to the truth.
You have left a putrid stench behind.
You claimed as prize the sweetest scent.

Today wild beasts rejoice to be alive. They had been on high alert.
Horses can rest their legs. Knotted whips are at peace.
The hunt is over.
No spearhead drips with blood, no sword glints.

He has gone. The inevitable has come.
Comrades walk with the bier, bid him farewell.

In Persia, he was lord Chosroes:
All kneel!
In Rome, he was Caesar.
Among the Arabs, he was Tubba' – King!
He could shield all the tribes,
Slake his sword's thirst with their blood.

He was the quickest knight ever to ride in a charge.
Death was quicker.
No knight will tilt a lance again! No horse bolt!

Ma'arrī

Ma'arrī was a great admirer of Mutanabbī. He seems to have been driven by a desire to outmatch his idol's grasp of Arabic and poetic skill. But he did not have Mutanabbī's heroic ego, his ambition for greatness. Ma'arrī was a blind socio-path, a vegan widely suspected of heresy. His writings are couched in forbiddingly difficult Arabic. Central to his legacy is his collection of poems widely referred to as the *Luzūmiyyāt*, Rhyming Impositions. In this work he

set out to compose poems rhyming in every letter of the Arabic alphabet, by imposing the requirement of a double rhyme as an extra challenge. So each poem has two rhyme-letters instead of the customary one.

Most of the poems intone Ma'arrī's *Weltschmerz* and encourage us to prepare for the grave. I confess that I have never been able to make my mind up about whether I like the *Luzūmiyyāt*, though there's no denying the extent of Ma'arrī's poetic achievement.

Thus I will end this evening's celebration of the classical Arabic creative heritage on a sombre note. I hope however that I have provided you with enough evidence for you to decide for yourselves why the world should read classical Arabic poetry.

And briefly, my modest proposal for the future study of Arabic – translation. Translation forces us to be outward and not inward looking. That can be no bad thing. But the modern academy undervalues translation. I often hear academics state that translation does not constitute original research. Of course, that's tommyrot. Translation is the life-blood of our subject. It is for this reason that New York University Abu Dhabi Research Institute's *The Library of Arabic Literature*, of which I am honoured to be an Executive Editor, is, in my opinion, such an important venture for the future of our field. By presenting the world with lucid English translations of classical Arabic literature, *The Library* hopes that we can throw open the doors to our subject and invite anyone in.

Ma'arrī, *Poem Rhyming in B and H*²⁵

A friend bids you good day. Talk to a lion, you'd be better off.
You're nice to him and expect him to be.
Don't. Stay away, you'd be better off.
Avoid people: they're wolves and foxes.
Listen to them howl and yelp.

Be brave in a crisis, that's best.

Ignore the bad others do.

Your deeds are worse.
Day after day,
No good ever comes from you.

Time is an ocean swell:
Swim if you like.
You're about to die of thirst.

Notes

- 1 Quoted from the inventory of adages given at: <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Latijn/ErasmusAdagia.html> where it is number 418 (1.5.18).
- 2 Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets* (London: Truebner, 1870), 38 (poem 10, verse 3).
- 3 Al-Ḥāḍirah, *Dīwān Shi'r al-Ḥāḍirah*, ed. Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad, *Revue de l'Institut des Manuscrits Arabes* 16/1-2 (1970), 335.
- 4 Al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Babī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlādihi 1937-1947), 6.313.7-12.
- 5 Remke Kruk, 'Hedgehogs and their 'chicks': a case history of the Aristotelian reception in Arabic zoology,' *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 2 (1985), 205-234.
- 6 Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1953), 3.
- 7 Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 3.
- 8 Al-Bīrunī, *Kitāb al-Bīrūnī fī Ṭaḥqīq mā lil-Hind min maqūlah maqbūlah fī l-'aql aw mardhūlah* (Hyderabad: Maṭba'at Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1958), 123.18
- 9 See *Hind*, 18.10 ff.
- 10 See Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh, 'A New Contribution to the Materials Concerning the Life of Zoroaster,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 8 (1935-1937), 953.
- 11 Deborah Black, 'Fārābī,' *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 214a (Black is quoting Rescher).
- 12 Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 3.
- 13 *Ḥayawān*, 5.151.12-13.
- 14 *Ḥayawān*, 5.152.5-153.2; 6.479.2-3.
- 15 See *Ḥayawān*, 6.478.10-14.

- 16 Imru' al-Qays, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1990), 27-39. Metre: ṭawīl.
- 17 Translation conjectural.
- 18 The translation of these two lines is conjectural.
- 19 Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Ewald Wagner (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1988), III, 172-173.
- 20 Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, ed. Ewald Wagner (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1972), II, 280-281.
- 21 The phrase *mukhtaḥaf al-wuthūb* is unusual in Arabic. I presume it means with slender, thin legs, but I like the unusualness of the phrase and have not tried to explain it away. Professor van Gelder suggests *mikhtaḥaf al-wuthūb*, "snatchleap".
- 22 The queen bee was thought to be male.
- 23 The translation of *khāfiyatā raqūb* is conjectural.
- 24 Al-Mutanabbī, *Al-'Urf al-Ṭayyib fī Sharḥ Dīwān Abī al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī*, ed. Nāṣif al-Yāziji (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n. d.), 351-356. Metre: kāmīl.
- 25 Al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm mā lam yalzam* (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt, 1983), I, 282. Rhyme *bā'-ḥā'*. Metre: ṭawīl. See also Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 118 (English) and 248 (Arabic), poem 150.

Antidotes and Anecdotes: A Literary History of Medicine from 13th-Century Syria¹

Geert Jan van Gelder

Classical Arabic literature seems to lack certain genres and forms that are often considered essential by western standards. Until modern times there was no true drama: there is no Arabic Aeschylus or Shakespeare; there exists no foundational epic such as those composed by Homer and Virgil for Greek and Latin, or like the Persian *Shāhnāma* and the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. There has not been an Arabic Dante who created an influential masterwork in the vernacular language such as the *Divine Comedy*. Overt fiction was generally frowned upon, so that the *Thousand and One Nights* was long condemned and deemed to be suitable only for women, children, and the illiterate. As for the novel as we know it, it did not exist in Arabic until about a century ago. So what has classical Arabic to offer then? Poetry certainly; not long narrative poems such as those by Virgil, Chaucer, or Milton, but shorter, lyrical poems, sonorous odes, wisdom poetry and so on. As for prose, many of the most enjoyable works from a literary point of view are mixtures of the scholarly and the literary, harmonious blends of the informative and the entertaining. Among my favourites is the book called *Living Beings* from the ninth century by al-Jāḥiẓ, a fascinating mixture of popular biology, theology, poetry, plus countless digressions on all sorts of things, a book on which my colleague James Montgomery recently published an important monograph.² Another is the splendid book called *Meadows of Gold* from the early tenth century by al-Mas'ūdī, a combination of geography and world history, full of facts, opinions, curiosities, anecdotes, and poems, a work justly lauded by another colleague, Professor Remke Kruk, in her Farewell Lecture in 2007.³

IBN ABĪ UŞAYBĪ'A AND HIS LITERARY HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Today I want to talk about another such work that has great value for scholars but is at the same time eminently readable and enjoyable. Its author was a practising physician and poet from Syria. His full name is rather full indeed

by modern standards: Muwaffaq al-Dīn Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn al-Qāsim ibn Khalīfa ibn Yūnus Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a al-Khazrajī, normally shortened to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a. This is unfortunate, for even this short version does not easily trip from western tongues. Literally translated, this name means “son (or rather descendant) of the father of the little finger”, but “father of” is often used metaphorically in Arabic. So it could mean that his ancestor had a deformed finger, had a supernumerary finger, or indeed missed a finger. Well, it can’t be helped; you will have to get accustomed to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a.

He was born in or shortly after 1194 into a family of physicians in Damascus, studied medicine under his father and others, and practised in the hospital in Damascus founded by Nūr al-Dīn, who had once been Saladin’s superior when the latter was still working on his own glorious career. Our author also worked in Cairo for a time before returning to Ṣarkhad in Syria, where he worked and eventually died in 1270. He wrote several works on medicine now lost, but one work gave him lasting fame: it is entitled in Arabic, with a rhyming title as was customary, ‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’. This means approximately *Choice Reports on the Classes of Physicians*. We may perhaps call it *The Book of Physicians, By One of Themselves* (to use a variation on Thackeray’s description of his *Book of Snobs*). The genre was popular in classical Arabic: biographical dictionaries or compilations devoted to categories of people, for instance the so-called Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, or jurists, grammarians, poets, or famous people in general, arranged chronologically, or geographically, or alphabetically by first name. Our author had a few predecessors who also wrote books on physicians or philosophers, but he surpassed them all with his large scope.

The book opens with a chapter on the origins of medicine in human society. The following three chapters are devoted to the ancient Greeks, starting with the mythical and legendary beginnings: Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing, then continuing with lengthy sections on historical figures: Hippocrates, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle – one sees that the scope is broad, for we don’t think of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as physicians. It is understandable from the standpoint of the author, for in Islamic history medicine and philosophy were closely connected. Many of the most celebrated philosophers who wrote in Arabic, such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) or al-Rāzī, known in the West as Rhazes, were both. A very long entry

is devoted to Galen (Galenus, Jālīnūs in Arabic); deservedly, for his influence was enormous and long-lasting, both in Islam and in the West. His name is mentioned 535 times in the book. After a short chapter on Alexandrian and early Christian physicians we arrive at the Arabs and Islam. One chapter deals with the Christian physicians in the early centuries of Islam, some of whom were extremely important because they translated masses of Greek works, on medicine, philosophy and other subjects, from Greek into Arabic, sometimes via the intermediate of Syriac, a form of Aramaic used by eastern Christians.

The last six chapters are geographically arranged: Iraq, Iran, India (this is a very short chapter), North Africa plus Spain, Egypt, and Syria. In all, there are 442 entries on individual physicians, of varying length: some get only a line or two, others thousands of words: 15,000 on Galen, more than seven thousand on Ibn Sīnā (these are Arabic words; the English translation would have many more). Normally, the length of a section reflects the importance of the physician in question. But there are exceptions. Understandably, near-contemporaries of the author tend to have longer entries simply because the author knows more about them. There are other reasons, however, why an entry can grow. We know that Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a also made poetry, like so many others in pre-modern Arab society. In a short entry on him in a 14th-century biographical dictionary he is described as “the excellent physician” but the author adds: “he was a lettered man, a physician, and a poet”. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a had literary inclinations. Although his prose style is simple, devoid of the rhetorical artifices that make the prose of many of his contemporaries rather difficult to read, he could not resist quoting reams of poetry, including some of his own. The book contains some 3,600 lines of verse in all. This is also the reason why I became involved in the preparation of a new edition and translation of the work. I must say something about this and the earlier editions of the work.

The work was fairly well known in the Arab world; several manuscripts of the whole work or parts have been preserved, though none in the author’s own handwriting. The first critical edition was published in 1882 by a German scholar, August Müller, who used the best manuscripts known to him. Unfortunately he sent his Arabic text to Cairo to be printed. There, to Müller’s great chagrin, the printers made a real mess of it. They used a worn-

down font that is often unclear and looks ugly, and, more seriously, there are very many errors. Müller had carefully prepared an index, but the printers thought that for each entry one line of page references was enough, so that for instance for “Aristotle” most page numbers were simply left out. Subsequently, Müller published, in Germany, a long list of corrections. Several editions, more legible ones, were made in the Arab world in the twentieth century, but none incorporated Müller’s corrections and they are all derivative of the Cairo edition of 1882. A six-volume edition made a few decades ago by an Egyptian scholar pretends to be critical but is virtually worthless.

THE ALHOM PROJECT (A LITERARY HISTORY OF MEDICINE)

My Oxford colleague, Professor Emilie Savage-Smith is a specialist in mediaeval Islamic medical history. Together with Professor Simon Swain of the University of Warwick, a Greek scholar who knows Arabic and is interested in the Greek tradition in Arabic, she decided that it was very desirable to make a proper edition and a full, annotated translation of the work. Some partial translations, of individual chapters, were made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but a complete one does not exist. It cannot really be done by a single person, for one needs several kinds of expertise in the fields of classical Arabic language and literature, mediaeval Arab and Islamic history, mediaeval medicine, and Greek medical texts.⁴

Part of the problem was the large quantity of poetry, which not only tends to be difficult and full of pitfalls for those unfamiliar with it, but was also considered irrelevant by many scholars. The entry on Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*⁵ says of the work that it is “of inestimable value for the history of Arabic science, in spite of a number of confusions” and that it contains “some long series of verses which have nothing to do with the main theme”. It is true: much of the poetry does not add anything to our knowledge of medical history. Poetry that does have concrete medical interest certainly exists. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) wrote a very long poem on medicine, which is versified knowledge without any “poetic” pretensions; the text is preserved and was even translated into Latin several times, the first time as early as the thirteenth century; but this poem is not found in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s book, nor are any similar ones. He is far more interested in literary and “social” poetry, friendly exchanges full of praise and flattery but also vicious lam-

poons on physicians. Pre-modern writers in Arabic liked digressions, they liked poetry and countless scholarly works on diverse topics quote poetry or other material that we would call literary. Historical works are usually full of poetry, uttered by the historical actors or quoted by the author “to point a moral or adorn a tale”. Much, perhaps most, of the poetry in the book can be called mediocre, but that does not bother me, for mediocre poetry can be very interesting. It throws light on how Arabs (and Persians writing in Arabic) conversed and interacted socially, often quoting and composing poetry. If a similar book were written today there would be many illustrations, portraits of the physicians, photographs of surgical instruments, pictures of medicinal plants, and graphic images of horrible diseases. Mediaeval scholarly works rarely contain such illustrations. Instead, there is poetry, and lots of it; the same is valid even for literary works such as *The Thousand and One Nights*. Poetry, through its imagery, evokes pictures in the mind, and some people would probably argue that such images are intellectually superior, even though less scientifically accurate.

Emilie Savage-Smith and Simon Swain applied to the Wellcome Trust for funding and their application was honoured, a couple of years ago, with a grant that will enable a whole team to work on this for a few years. In addition to producing a scholarly edition and annotated translation we also hope to make a shortened version for a general reading public.

CHOICE REPORTS ON THE CLASSES OF PHYSICIANS

After this introduction on the book and the project, I propose to give some examples of what the book contains. As was customary, the author begins by stressing the importance of his subject. In the preamble he says:⁶

The art of medicine is among the noblest of arts and the most lucrative of trades. Its excellence is attested in divine scriptures and the ordinances of revealed law, to such an extent that knowledge of the human body is deemed on a par with the knowledge of religion. Wise men have said that pursuits are of two kinds: the good and the pleasurable. Now, one cannot attain either of these unless one is healthy, for pleasure is obtained from this world, while the good is hoped for in the world to come. To arrive at both, one needs continuing good health and a strong

constitution, and those can be achieved only through the medical art, for it maintains present health and restores lost health.

He states that his purpose with the book is:⁷

to relate a number of anecdotes and choice reports that are told of the ranks of distinguished physicians, both the ancient ones and those of recent times, to present the knowledge of their various categories in chronological order. I also intend to record some of their sayings, stories and anecdotes about them, and their discussions. I shall also list the titles of some of their writings, from which one can infer how much learning God the Exalted has bestowed upon them and the excellent genius and understanding He has given them.

In the first chapter, on the origins of medicine, he speculates on when, where, and how it was first practised, summing up the various views. Some people, including Hippocrates and Galen, think that it was revealed to mankind by God; others, such as the Empiricists and the Sophists, believe it was a human invention. Some say it originated among the ancient Egyptians, or on the Greek island of Cos, the birthplace of Hippocrates, or somewhere in Asia Minor, or among the Chaldaeans, the Babylonians, the Indians, etc. – in short, one cannot be sure. Wherever it happened, it could well have been a combination of divine inspiration, for instance by means of dreams, with experience and sheer luck, of which he quotes some examples.

I shall not dwell on the chapters on Greek physicians but focus on Islamic times. Arabo-Islamic medicine has always been a mixture of several traditions: the Greek, the indigenous, and a bit of Persian. The earliest Arab physician is said to have been al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada, who died in 634 or 635, just a couple of years after the prophet Muḥammad. He studied in Persia. He is supposed to have impressed the Persian Sasanian emperor with his knowledge and Arabic sources reproduce at some length the conversation they had, duly given also by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a. Here are some of the sayings attributed to al-Ḥārith:⁸

Four things ruin the body: sexual intercourse after overeating, entering the hot bath on a full stomach, eating dried meat and sex with an old

woman ... Marry only young women; never eat fruit unless it is ripe; let nobody seek treatment as long as his body can bear the disease. Use a depilatory every month, for it dissolves the phlegm, destroys the bile and promotes the growth of flesh. After the midday meal you should lie down, and after supper walk forty paces. ... Avoid the use of medication as long as possible; take it only when it is necessary, for whatever its benefit, the harm it does is as great.

Asked what is the best medicine in general, al-Ḥārith summarised it by saying: “Abstinence!”, meaning going hungry, or dieting. Once he was asked to cure the mysterious illness of a young man.⁹ This man had in fact fallen in love with the wife of his brother, but being fond of his brother he had kept it quiet. Al-Ḥārith, as an experiment, gave the man some wine and when the wine had taken effect he burst out in some love poetry and the cause of the ailment was revealed. The brother magnanimously divorced his wife and offered her to his brother (we are not told if the wife was consulted at all). But the lovesick young man refused and died of his love. This anecdote combines two motifs frequently found in Arabic: first, a sagacious man, often a doctor, diagnosing an illness as lovesickness; the second motif is dying of love. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, hundreds of pages later,¹⁰ gives another example of a clever doctor diagnosing love-sickness and he comments that Galen had already described a similar case.

PHYSICIANS AT COURT

It is said that al-Ḥārith converted to Islam. Very many physicians, however, including numerous court physicians to the caliphs, were Christians, who were part of the Greek medical tradition. The caliphs of Damascus and later Baghdad had no qualms about employing non-Muslim doctors. Some of these played their part in the intrigues of the court. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a relates¹¹ that the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu‘āwiya (who died in 680) made a certain Ibn Uthāl, a Christian, his court physician because of his knowledge of poisons. The caliph wanted his son Yazīd to succeed him. But when he consulted the leading Syrians they preferred someone else, not related to Mu‘āwiya. Succession from father to son, or at least to someone of the same family, was unknown in early Islam until then. The caliph was not pleased, so he had Ibn Uthāl poison the rival candidate, and he had his way.

As a counterpart to this, possibly invented, story, there is an interesting account¹² of the last days of al-Ma'mūn, the caliph, a son of Hārūn al-Rashīd who reigned from 813 to 833. While on campaign against the Byzantines together with his brother al-Mu'taṣim he falls ill. His Christian physician, the famous Yūḥannā ibn Māsawayh is with him. Al-Mu'taṣim orders Yūḥannā to treat the recurrent swelling on the Caliph's neck, but Yūḥannā realises that the swelling should not be lanced and that al-Mu'taṣim wants his brother to die. Yūḥannā pretends to be ill and leaves the Caliph in the hands of a pupil, who is told to lance the swelling. The pupil does so, though even he knows it to be wrong. The caliph dies and is duly succeeded by his brother. Instead of blaming al-Mu'taṣim, our author criticises the doctor, saying:

Ibn Māsawayh did this only because he lacked virtue, religion, and loyalty. He did not belong to the community of Islam and did not firmly uphold his own religion either (...). If someone has no religion to hold on to and to believe in, a sensible man one must not give him credit and a prudent person must not rely on him.

But the large number of non-Muslim physicians in Muslim society and at the courts of rulers is eloquent testimony to the trust they enjoyed. One of the great translators from Greek into Arabic, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, was another Christian physician; he lived from 808 to 873. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a reproduces a very interesting autobiographical account by him of his troubles with rival Christians.¹³ It is too long to quote in full. First, Ḥunayn complains that his fellow Christians dismiss him as a mere translator, an overpaid craftsman, like a smith who makes swords but does not know how to handle a sword. They say he should not dabble in medicine but leave it to them. Then Ḥunayn tells of a plot against him. The very influential court physician Bakhtīshū' ibn Jabrā'il had a beautiful icon made of Mary, the Madonna, with Christ on her lap. He presented it to the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, while kissing it demonstratively. The caliph admired the icon but asked why the doctor kissed it. "Well," said the doctor, "if I did not kiss the picture of the Mistress of All Beings, then whom should I kiss?" The Caliph asked. "And all Christians do this?" "O yes, Sire", said Bakhtīshū', "or even more than I do, because I restrain myself, being in your presence. Yet, in spite of the favours shown to the community of Christians, I know one man from among the Christians, who is in your service, who enjoys your favour and your fees, but who

despises her and spits on her. He is a heretic, an unbeliever, who believes neither in the oneness of God nor in the Afterlife. He hides himself posing as a Christian, while in fact denying God's attributes and the truth of the Prophets". The caliph asks who he is, and is told that it is Ḥunayn, the translator. The Caliph says, "If it is as you have described, I shall make an example of him and put him in a dungeon forever, but not before I give him a bad time, with repeated torture."

Bakhtīshūʿ asks for a delay of an hour, rushes to Ḥunayn and tells him that he has seen the Caliph, that he was shown an icon, and that he told the Caliph that Christians do not think much of such paintings. The Caliph had asked him to spit on it, to show his contempt; he had done so, and he advises Ḥunayn to do the same when he is summoned by the Caliph. Ḥunayn believes him, and is summoned to see the Caliph only an hour afterwards. The Caliph shows him the icon and says, "Look, what a wonderful picture! What do you think of it?" Ḥunayn thinks he knows how to answer: "Yes, beautiful, but not something that one should revere." "So this picture has no power, useful or harmful?" asks the Caliph. When Ḥunayn confirms this he is ordered to spit on it to prove the point. He does so and is immediately thrown into prison. He is given one hundred lashes and is confined for six months. He is about to be executed, but the Caliph falls ill. Christ appears in his dreams, telling him to forgive Ḥunayn, who will cure him. This happens. Ḥunayn is richly rewarded and given compensation for his tribulations. End of story, which is interesting on several counts, for instance in showing that Muslims do not always abhor pictures as is sometimes thought.

This malicious Bakhtīshūʿ had risen to his leading position after he had been summoned when the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd had a headache. The new doctor was tested first:¹⁴

Al-Rashīd ordered one of his servants to bring Bakhtīshūʿ the urine of a riding animal, in order to test him. The servant went and came back with a bottle. When Bakhtīshūʿ saw it, he said, "Commander of the Faithful, this isn't human urine." Abū Quraysh [an established court physician, who was present] said, "You are wrong, this is the urine of the Caliph's concubine." Bakhtīshūʿ replied, "I am telling you, my esteemed master, that no human being ever produced this; if what you say is true, then

perhaps that concubine has turned into a beast.” The Caliph then asked him, “How did you know it isn’t human urine?” The doctor replied, “It hasn’t got the consistency of human urine, nor its colour or smell.” (...) The Caliph then asked him, “What kind of food do you think we should give to whoever passed this urine?” Bakhtīshū’ said, “Good barley”. The Caliph laughed loudly and ordered Bakhtīshū’ to be given a beautiful and precious robe of honour and a large sum of money. Then he said: “Bakhtīshū` will be my chief physician and all the others must obey him.”

CURIOUS CURES

The book is rich in anecdotes about interesting cures. One doctor of the Bakhtīshū’ family, Jabrā’īl (Gabriel) ibn Bakhtīshū’, son of the one in the preceding story, was once summoned to the palace of Hārūn al-Rashīd for an unusual case. This is how our source relates the story:¹⁵

During those days one of the concubines of al-Rashīd stretched herself and raised her hand, which remained stretched; she could not move it back. The physicians treated her with ointments and unguents, but all to no avail. Then al-Rashīd said to [his vizier] Ja’far ibn Yaḥyā: “This girl is still suffering!” Ja’far replied, “I have a skilled physician, the son of Bakhtīshū’. If you summon him and tell him about this ailment, perhaps he will find a way to cure it.” The Caliph ordered him to be brought in, and when he arrived he asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Jabrā’īl.” – “What do you know about medicine?” – “I can make cold what is hot and warm what is cold, I can humidify what is dry and make dry what is unnaturally moist.” The Caliph laughed and said, “Quite so, this is what the art of medicine is all about!” He explained the girl’s condition, and Jabrā’īl said, “If you, Commander of the Faithful, will not be angry with me, I’ll be able to cure her.” “How?” asked the Caliph. Jabrā’īl said, “Let the girl be brought here, in the presence of the people gathered here, so that I can do as I wish, but have patience with me, don’t be rash and get angry!”

The Caliph gave orders for the girl to be brought in. When Jabrā’īl saw her, he walked quickly to her, bent over and grabbed the edge of her

dress, as if he were going to uncover her. The girl was greatly upset and she was so embarrassed and shocked that her limbs became relaxed; she moved her hands down to catch the edge of her dress. Then Jabrāʿīl said; “Commander of the Faithful, she is cured!” The Caliph said to her, “Stretch your hands to the right and the left!”, which she did, and the Caliph and all those present were amazed. Al-Rashīd immediately ordered that Jabrāʿīl be given five hundred thousand dirhams. He became fond of him and made him his chief physician. When Jabrāʿīl was asked about the cause of that sickness, he replied, “When this girl had sexual intercourse a soft mixture was poured into her limbs, resulting from all the movement and the spreading of heat. When the movements caused by the sexual act stopped suddenly, the rest of this mixture coagulated inside all her nerves, and nothing could dissolve it but a similar movement. I used a trick to cause her heat to spread, and so the rest of the mixture dissolved.”

Some cures make for uncomfortable reading if one has a normal empathy. There is the cure of a man in Seville in al-Andalus, who, when asleep with his mouth open, had inadvertently swallowed a snake.¹⁶ In fact, part of the snake was still sticking in the man’s throat. The doctor, when summoned, first made the snake descend into the stomach, so as not to let the man choke; then he made him drink a potion that killed the snake in the stomach, and then another potion that made the man vomit up the reptile. Even more painful to read I find the story¹⁷ of the man, an Egyptian, whose penis is badly swollen and inflamed, being blocked by a grain of barley. The treatment, described in some detail, involves a sharp blow with a stone. When the man comes to after having fainted, he confesses that he has sodomised an unspecified animal, perhaps a mule. Altogether more innocent and amusing is the following story about Abū l-Barakāt Awḥad al-Zamān (d. ca. 1164), a philosopher, originally Jewish, but a convert to Islam.¹⁸

Some sick person in Baghdad had been afflicted with melancholy. He believed that there was a jug on top of his head that never parted from him. Whenever he walked he would avoid places with a low ceiling; he walked carefully and let nobody approach him, lest the jug would tilt or fall from his head. He had this illness for some time, suffering considerable discomfort because of it. A number of physicians had treated

him but without any beneficial effect. Finally his case was brought to the notice of Awḥad al-Zamān. He considered it, deciding that there was nothing left but to cure the man by means of imaginary things. He told his family, "Bring him to me when I am at home". Then Awḥad al-Zamān gave orders to one of his servants, to the effect that when this sick man entered into his presence and started to talk to him, and when he would give the boy a pre-arranged sign, the latter should quickly swing a large stick, aiming above the man's head but at a distance, as if wanting to smash the jug that the man claimed was on his head. The doctor instructed another servant, whom he had provided with a jug, to sit on the roof and, when he would see the first boy hitting the air above the sufferer of melancholy, to drop the jug that he had with him on to the floor. When Awḥad al-Zamān was at home and the sick man came to him, he began to converse with him and to talk to him, reproaching him for carrying the jug. He gave the sign to the servant that was present, while the sick man was unaware. The servant turned to him and said, "Really, I must smash this jug and relieve you of it!" Then he swung the stick that he carried about a cubit above the man's head. At the same time the other servant dropped the jug from the roof. With a loud noise it shattered into many fragments. When the sick man saw what had happened to him and saw the broken jug, he moaned because they had smashed it, while not doubting that it had been on his head, as he claimed. This delusion affected him greatly and he was cured of his illness. This is an important part of therapy. Similar cases were dealt with by a number of the ancient physicians, such as Galen, when they cured delusions by means of imaginary things.

The man was suffering from melancholy, in Arabic *mālīkhūliyā*, straight from the Greek. In ancient and medieval times this term referred to many psychosomatic ailments involving madness and delusions. There are other anecdotes that are about the interaction of mind and body. Here is one, about an 11th-century doctor called al-Tamīmī, told by his son:¹⁹

My father (God rest his soul) told me that once he was so excessively drunk that it overpowered his reason. He fell from a high place in the caravanserai (a hostel or inn), right down on to the lowest part of the hostel, while being unconscious. The innkeeper and his servants car-

ried him inside, bringing him to the room in which he was staying. The following morning he got up, feeling pain and bruises in various parts of his body but not knowing what caused it. He mounted his riding animal and went on some business until around midday and then returned. He said to the innkeeper: "I feel a bad pain and bruises in my body but I've no idea what caused it." The innkeeper said, "You ought to praise God that you are alive." – "Why is that?" – "Don't you know then what happened to you last night?" – "No." – "Well, you fell from the top of the inn to the bottom, while you were drunk." – "From which place?" The man showed him the spot. When he saw it, he immediately felt a throbbing pain that he found quite unbearable. He began to bellow and moan until they got him a doctor, who bled him and bandaged his bruised limbs. He stayed for many days until he was better and the pain had gone.

[Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a comments:] There is a story that resembles this one. A certain merchant was travelling in a desert with some companions. There, in a stopping-place on the way, he slept while his companions were sitting down. From some corner a snake appeared, which chanced to run into the man's foot, bit him there, and disappeared. He woke up in a fright, because of the pain, and went on to hold his foot, moaning. One of his companions said to him, "Don't worry, you stretched your leg suddenly and a thorn chanced to hit it in this spot that is hurting you." He pretended to pull out a thorn, adding, "Nothing more to worry about!" The pain subsided gradually after that and they journeyed on. Some time later, when they camped in the same spot on their return journey, his friend said to him, "That pain that happened to you in this spot, do you know where it came from?" – "No." – "A snake bit you in the foot. We saw it but we did not tell you." Immediately he felt a throbbing in his foot, which spread through his body until it came close to his heart, and he fainted. Then it got worse and finally he died. The reason was that illusions and psychological events exert a strong influence upon the body. When the man had found out the truth, namely that the pain that had happened to him had come from a snake-bite, he was influenced by this and the remains of the poison in that spot spread in his body, and when it reached his heart it killed him.

There is a happier ending to the following story about a Jewish doctor called Hibat Allāh Ibn Jumayʿ, who died in 1198:²⁰

Ibn Jumayʿ was sitting in his shop one day, near the market of the chandeliers in Fustat [Old Cairo], when a funerary procession went past. He looked at the bier and called out to the relatives of the dead. He told them that their man was not dead and that if they buried him they would bury him alive. The people looked at him, amazed, not believing what he had said. But one of them said to the others, “It won’t do any harm to try and find out. If it is true, that is what we would like, and if it isn’t, what’s the difference?” So they asked him to come to them and they asked him, “Show what you said to us!” He told them to enter his house, to remove the shrouds from the deceased. Then he said, “Take him to the hammam!” He poured hot water on him, heated his body, applied warm compresses to it, and immersed him. They perceived a very slight movement in him. “Good tidings!” said Ibn Jumayʿ, “He’ll be all right!” He completed his treatment until the man came to and was healthy again. This was the beginning of his fame as a skilled and learned doctor; it had appeared to be a miracle. Subsequently he was asked how he knew that there was still some life in the man, though he was carried on a bier wrapped in shrouds. He replied, “I looked at his feet and noticed they were pointing upward, but the feet of those who are dead are flat. So I guessed he was alive, and I was right.”

LAMPOONS AND LIGHT VERSE

Despite the success of Ibn Jumayʿ, or because of it, he was lampooned by many others. One lampoon was:²¹

Ibn Jumayʿ is stupid, with all his medical knowledge;
The medical skill of the Messiah is reviled because of him!
He cannot determine the urine of a sick man
in the glass, even when he rolls it on the tongue.
And the strangest of all is that he takes
a fee for killing his patient, from the next of kin.

I note in passing that he was not reviled because he was Jewish. In the book there are countless non-Muslim physicians, most of them Christians but also numerous Jews, many of them praised in glowing terms. There is little evidence of anti-Semitic, or rather anti-Jewish, sentiments that are so common in the Arab and Muslim world today. Satire and lampooning seem to have been rife among rival doctors, irrespective of their religion.

Here is an epigram by a Christian physician on a Jewish colleague who is accused of possessing the evil eye:²²

With his ill omen, his poor patient is totally at sea,
a sea without shore where he will perish.
At the doctor's visit three enter at the same time:
his face, a bier, and the person who washes the corpse.

A physician who was also a poet is mocked in a poem by another:²³

We have a doctor, a poet, with an inverted eyelid,
May God relieve us of him!
Whenever he visits a patient in the morning
he composes an elegy for him in the evening.

The book is a rich source of light verse. It is obvious that some physicians were given an entry not because they were eminent doctors but because they composed poetry that pleased the author. A case in point is this doctor “with the inverted eyelid”, Abū l-Ḥakam al-Maghribī (d. 1155), the joking doctor, as I called him in an article about him,²⁴ who was active in Damascus. There is no time to recite his amusing longer poems such as “A Domestic Scandal” or “A Pair of Badly Made Shoes”, which is full of scientific and logical terminology; I merely present a few lines of this poem, which requires a rhymed English translation:²⁵

... He showed me *shamshak* shoes²⁶ with toes too tight,
And heels that would kill heel and foot all right!
And backs almost as bad, to soles attached
In utter worthlessness not badly matched.
A figure hard to solve for cracks, if ever,

Defeating people powerful and clever.
The heel is downward to the nadir bent,
The front makes to the zenith its ascent.
And their proportions all unsound to boot;
Their shoddiness had spread to branch and root.
The two shoe-sides do not run parallel:
The one goes up, the other down (to hell!).
There's so much to find fault: loose stitches, holes,
And there are awful cuts in strings and soles.
The joining had been necessary, stringent;
But that the shoes came unjoined was contingent.
A compound syllogism in confusion:
Without a categorical conclusion.
I can't protect my feet with their transversal:
Shoe-shapes like these should not exist, God curse all!
...
They had, we hoped, potentiality,
But did not come as actuality.
Not "not quite perfect": they are below par
In general and in particular.
Let's not affirm what's truly negative,
Or make bad propositions positive.
Their categories look all wrong to me
Their substance, quality, and quantity.
All propositions wrong, it's evident;
All syllogisms are deficient.
All proofs are wrong, though types may vary:
The gen'ral, positive, and necessary.
The instep, as a dial's gnomon made,
Would soon be seen to swerve from sun to shade.
They flip-flop on my feet. It is still dry;
How will I walk in mud, if I'm to try?

As for more serious poetry, I merely mention the several poems by the famous Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), most of which have hardly received the attention one would expect. Some interesting philosophical poems are by the 12th-century Ibn al-Shibl al-Baghdādī, who was obviously given an entry for his poetry, for

he was not famous as a physician or a scientist. In one of his longer poems he wonders if God should have consulted us about being created by Him.²⁷

TITLES TITILLATING AND TANTALISING

Of course much of the book is rather dry, with lists of facts, biographical data, and lists of books and treatises. But even these lists can be amusing, for it is amazing to see how many curious titles one comes across, with numerous titillating and tantalizing titles mostly of books and treatises now lost. Here is a small selection, without authors' names: *A Treatise on Vertigo*; *On the Finite and the Infinite*; *A Discourse on the Vacuum*; *A Treatise on Hunchbacks*; *A Treatise on Rhubarb and its Beneficial Properties*; *An Epistle on Why it is Difficult to Find a Competent Physician and Why Ignoramuses are Numerous*; *A Treatise on Why Women Become Fat when Past their Youth*; *A Treatise on the Fact that Ignorant Physicians are Too Strict in Preventing the Sick from Indulging in their Sensual Cravings*; *A Treatise on the Mouse*; *The Main Plants and Trees of al-Andalus*; *An Epistle on Buttocks and Pains Affecting Them*; *The Book of Hallucinations*; *An Epistle on Why Wild Beasts and Lions Were Created*; *On the Fact that Those who have no Experience with Demonstrations cannot Grasp the Fact that the Earth is Round and the People are Around it*; *The Art of Playing Backgammon*; *An Epistle on Why People Use Ambiguities in their Speech*; *Why Seawater is Salty*; *A Treatise on Tickling*.

I hope to have shown in this talk that the book is indeed entertaining. It also gives lots of advice, in the form of aphorism or lengthy instruction. Many of the cures and medicines seem dubious, of the kind of "Do not try this at home", but much of the general counsel seems sound enough. Medics and health experts have always contradicted one another and sometimes themselves. Our author, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, says that one day he was studying with a certain doctor, Raḍī al-Dīn al-Raḥbī; they were reading the great al-Rāzī, who says that one should have two meals on one day and one meal the next day.²⁸ Al-Raḥbī did not agree. Rather, he said, you must eat whenever you have a true appetite, no matter whether it is once or twice, day or night; for it is eating with a true appetite that benefits the body, while the opposite is harmful. This is the kind of advice that I myself like to hear.

It will be a few years before our edition and translation will appear in print, so I can only hope that until that time you will continue to be in good health

and, if you are ill, you will manage to stay out of the hands of bad doctors with scaring scalpels, horrible potions, and perhaps the evil eye, so that you will be able to read, or even buy, our translation, even if merely the popular version. As for now, I thank you for your kind attention and if you have fallen asleep, rest assured that sleep is quite natural and beneficial; as Abū Sahl al-Masīhī said (he died in 1010 and was one of Ibn Sīnā's teachers): *al-nawmatu bi-l-nahāri ba'da aklatin khayrun min shurbati dawā' in nāfi'*, "A daytime nap after eating is better than drinking a useful medicinal potion".²⁹

Notes

- 1 Annotation and references will be kept to a minimum in this article, the text of which is virtually identical with that of the lecture given on 8 October 2015. For further information on Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, see the short entry by J. Vernet in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New [= Second] Edition, (Leiden: Brill, vol. iii, 1971), 693–694; on the history of medicine in Islam see Peter Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). I thank Sheila Ottway for polishing my English.
- 2 James E. Montgomery, *Al-Jāhīz: In Praise of Books* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
- 3 Remke Kruk, *Gouden weiden van Arabische cultuur* (Leiden, 2007).
- 4 An incomplete and very defective English translation was unfortunately put on the internet, a few years ago, long after the death of the translator, Lothar Kopf, who clearly would not have liked to have his unfinished version published.
- 5 See above, note 1.
- 6 Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*, ed. August Müller, 2 vols. (Cairo - Königsberg: al-Maṭba'a al-Wahbiyya, 1882–4, i, 2); ed. Nizār Riḍā, (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, n. d., 7). In subsequent notes these two editions will be indicated with M and NR, respectively. All translations from the book are mine.
- 7 M i, 3, NR 7–8.
- 8 M i, 112–3, NR 165–6.
- 9 M i, 113, NR 166.
- 10 M ii, 128, NR 595.
- 11 M i, 116–7, NR 172.
- 12 M i, 182, NR 254–5.
- 13 M i, 191 ff., NR 265 ff.
- 14 M i, 126–7, NR 187.

- 15 M i, 127, NR 188.
- 16 M ii, 83, NR 539.
- 17 M ii, 43, NR 488.
- 18 M i, 279, NR 374–5.
- 19 M ii, 88, NR 547–8.
- 20 M ii, 113, NR 577.
- 21 M ii, 113, NR 577.
- 22 M ii, 107, NR 569. The poet is a certain Jirjis al-Faylasūf (George the Philosopher), on Salāmah ibn Raḥmūn (Egypt, 12th century).
- 23 M ii, 145, NR 615. The poem, on Abū l-Ḥakam al-Maghribī, is by Ḥassān ibn Numayr, known as ‘Arqalah (d. 1171–2).
- 24 Geert Jan van Gelder, ‘The Joking Doctor: Abū l-Ḥakam ‘Ubayd Allāh Ibn al-Muẓaffar (d. 549/1155),’ in *Actas XVI Congreso UEAI [Salamanca, Aug–Sept. 1992]*, eds. Concepción Vázquez de Benito and Miguel Ángel Manzano Rodríguez (Salamanca, 1995), 217–218; cf. Idem, *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 97–102 (a revised version of the translation of “A Domestic Scandal”).
- 25 M ii, 165–6, NR 639–40. I intend to publish, in the envisaged translation of the book, a rhymed version as well as a fully annotated, more literal translation.
- 26 A Baghdadi type of shoe; the word is derived from Persian *chamshak* or *chamshāk*. Apparently the shoemakers of Damascus were not up to the task.
- 27 M i, 249, NR 335. See Geert Jan van Gelder, *The Doubts of Ibn al-Shibl al-Baghdādī (d. 474/1081–2), Poet, Philosopher, and Physician* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2014) (The Margaret Weyerhaeuser Jewett Chair of Arabic, Occasional Papers).
- 28 M ii, 194, NR 674.
- 29 M i, 328, NR 436.

About the authors

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James E. Montgomery, an internationally acclaimed specialist on Classical Arabic, is the Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University. He studied Arabic and Ancient Greek at Glasgow University (1980-1984), spent two years on an unfinished DPhil at Oxford (1984-1986), where he was a Snell Exhibitioner at Balliol College before taking up a lectureship at Glasgow (1986-1992), where he decided to do a different PhD. Senior Lectureships at Oslo and Leeds preceded his move to Cambridge in 1997. His long-term project is to explore the third/ninth century through the writings of 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868-9). This is complemented by a project to translate the early tenth century historiographical masterpiece by al-Ash'arī, *The Doctrines of the Islamicists*. His other major interest revolves around literary translation and the translation of classical Arabic poetry in particular.

Geert Jan van Gelder studied Semitic Languages in Amsterdam and Leiden. He was Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Groningen (1975–1998), Laudian Professor of Arabic, University of Oxford (1998–2012), and is currently Research Associate (Oxford) on a project with others involving a new edition and complete English annotated translation of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah’s *Book of Physicians* (‘Uyūn al-anbā’). He has published widely on classical Arabic literature. Among his books are *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (1982); *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes Towards Invective Poetry (Hijā’)* in *Classical Arabic Literature* (1989); *Of Dishes and Discourse: Classical Arabic Literary Representations of Food* (2000); *Close Relationships: Incest and Inbreeding in Classical Arabic Literature* (2005); *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry* (2012); *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology* (2013); *Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, The Epistle of Forgiveness (Risālat al-Ghufrān)*, edited and translated with Gregor Schoeler (2013–2014).