

Introduction

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Arab Linguistics: An introductory classical text with translation and notes

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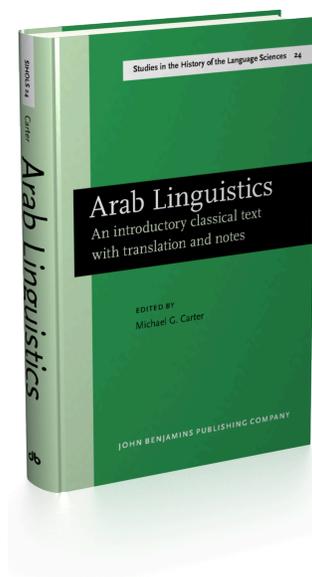
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INTRODUCTION

If the *Ājurrūmiyya* is the quintessence of Arabic grammar, then aš-Širbīnī's commentary on it is surely the essence: it is modest yet comprehensive, not over-long, but detailed enough for serious study, and as orthodox and well-meaning as aš-Širbīnī himself (whose life is briefly outlined on p. 467, Epilogue n 8). His *Nūr as-sajjiyya fī ḥall 'alfāz al-Ājurrūmiyya* is the distillation of some nine centuries of linguistic speculation; what is left is both wholly unoriginal and entirely typical of a discipline which had already reached its peak more than two hundred years before aš-Širbīnī's death in 1570. It is, therefore, an ideal introduction to the vast technical literature devoted to the preservation and propagation of one of the world's few divine languages, the Classical Arabic in which the Qur'ān was revealed and through which the Islamic faith finds expression.

This edition has been prepared with the aim of making accessible both to Arabists and non-Arabists the main elements of indigenous Arabic linguistics, and thereby at least partially filling a large blank in the history of linguistics, which has hitherto paid little heed to non-European traditions and systems. The remainder of this Introduction will help the reader to make the best use of the book.

In the Arabic text Ibn Ājurrūm's own words have, according to the practice of the day, been directly integrated into aš-Širbīnī's commentary, and are therefore distinguished by overlining (see p. 466, appendix, on the manuscripts used). The translation does what it can to reproduce this peculiarly medieval method of explication, with what success the reader may judge, and this time (for want of better typographical alternatives) Ibn Ājurrūm's words are marked by underlining. The transliteration is as close as practical to that of H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Wiesbaden 1979. In the actual translation the material has been broken up into numbered paragraphs to facilitate cross-reference, sometimes adopting aš-Širbīnī's own subdivisions where available, otherwise quite arbitrarily. So much for form; as for content, it can only be said that the translation is bound to be too literal for some and not literal enough for others. Either of these defects, however, is less serious than outright errors, and it is hoped that whatever mistakes have been made are few and harmless.

The notes, optimistically no doubt, attempt to answer as many foreseeable kinds of questions as possible, covering technical, historical, textual and comparative topics as seems appropriate. Paradigms are provided in abundance (ideally all the facts of Arabic morphology should be there), partly to supplement the information already set out in transliteration in other works of reference, and partly to offer the reader more opportunities to verify or extend the theories advanced in the text and annotations. Inevitably many notes can be no more than hints or pointers, where space does not allow an idea to be developed thoroughly. But the labyrinthine further references and their frequent circularity are deliberate, on the one hand being a means of connecting together matter which is too bulky for a single note, and on the other hand hopefully stimulating wider enquiries, aided perhaps by serendipity. The fact that annotations and text, with very few exceptions, are face to face, may somewhat compensate for this inconvenience.

The notes will have achieved their purpose if they make readers aware of the inner coherence of the grammatical system by imparting some of the automatic presuppositions of the native Arab linguists, for whom no term, category or structure exists in isolation. The reader will nevertheless often come across remarks which have little justification beyond the intrinsic interest of their contents. This is an inescapable predicament of annotators, who must say something about everything; aš-Širbīnī answers this charge in 16.4, and I will simply add here (with similar false modesty) these words of Sir Thomas Browne: 'There are many things delivered rhetorically, many expressions therein merely tropical, and as they best illustrate my intention; and therefore also there are many things to be taken in a soft and flexible sense, and not to be called unto the rigid test of reason'.

The principles of reference to other primary and secondary sources (see Abbreviations following this Introduction) are thus:

Four representative Arab grammars are chosen, *Jum.* because it is an important early work, *Muf.* because it gives access to Ibn Yaʿqūb's commentary and the paragraph numbers of Howell (cf. 3.53 n 6), *Alf.* (cf. 21.61 n 6) because, as well as having been translated, a whole array of commentaries and supercommentaries can easily be consulted through its verses, and *Qaṭr* because (like *Āj.* and *Taṣr.*) it is a major source for aš-Širbīnī and has, moreover, been published in translation.

Western treatments (Beeston, Fleisch, Bateson, Yushmanov, Nöldeke, Cantineau) are referred to as often as possible, as are certain standard grammars such as Wright, Reckendorf (*Ar. Synt., Synt. Verh.*) and Cantarino. Individual technical terms are often discussed at length in *E.I.* (1) & (2), to which reference is accordingly made.

Qur'anic quotations are attributed to the Sūra (S.) and verse of the standard Egyptian edition. Translations are either borrowed from published versions or are ad hoc when a particular grammatical feature needs to be emphasized. Bibliographical details of translations and well known commentaries are not given, since these references are easily traceable through Sūra and verse numbers.

Poetry is identified by reference to *Schaw. Ind.*, and again, translations are either borrowed or ad hoc.

Journal titles are generally abbreviated according to *Index Islamicus* (q.v. Epilogue n 7).

This book would not have appeared without help from many quarters. I thank my friend C. H. M. Versteegh for mediating on my behalf with the editor and publisher of this Series, and I thank Sydney University for providing a congenial and encouraging working atmosphere, as well as for some very valuable secretarial help with the preparation of the final copy. Above all I am grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, under whose sponsorship I was able to complete the writing of the annotations in appropriately well equipped surroundings at Munich. This had not been my original plan in accepting the honour of a Humboldt research fellowship, but a visit to the homeland of Goethe was enough to prove the wisdom of his words:

Du glaubst zu schieben und du wirst geschoben.

M. G. Carter
Sydney, 1981