

Edward Pococke (1604–91), the First Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford

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SUMMARY

Edward Pococke (1604–91), the first Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, was the son of a Berkshire clergyman. He was educated at Lord Williams's Grammar School in Thame, Oxfordshire, and at Corpus Christi, Oxford. He studied Arabic under Matthias Pasor, a German refugee, and William Bedwell, the pioneer English Arabist. As chaplain to the merchants of the Levant Company in Aleppo (1630–6), he acquired a profound knowledge of Arabic, and on his return to Oxford was appointed by Laud to his newly endowed 'Arabick Lecture'. Residence in Constantinople from 1637 to 1641 resulted in the acquisition of many manuscripts for Laud's and his own collection, to the ultimate benefit of the Bodleian Library. During the Civil War and Interregnum, Pococke (who was also appointed to the Chair of Hebrew by Charles I in 1648) lived a retired family life in his rectory at Childrey, although as a royalist and episcopalian he was not immune from harassment. From the Restoration until his death, he lived mainly in his canonry in Christ Church. His Arabic publications include two chronicles with Latin translations, and Specimen historiae Arabum (1650). The importance of this last lies in Pococke's notes, which, over 300 pages long and immensely erudite, deal with aspects of Arab history and Islam. The book's authority was widely recognized by scholars, who drew largely on the information it supplied, and it was republished by one of Pococke's successors in 1806. General interest in Arabic studies declined in the later 17th century, and it is significant that the next Laudian Professor, Thomas Hyde, concerned himself chiefly with Persian.

Three hundred years ago there died in Christ Church Dr. Edward Pococke, a canon of the House, Regius Professor of Hebrew, and the first occupant of the Laudian Chair of Arabic, a scholar of outstanding reputation in 17th-century Europe. The following pages outline his long career (he was born in the reign of James I and died in that of William and Mary), and attempt to show his significance as a pioneer of Arabic studies in Western Europe. The principal source for any account of Pococke's life is necessarily the biography prefaced to the two great folio volumes entitled *The Theological Works of the Learned Dr. Pocock*, which were published in London in 1740.¹ The author of the life, Leonard Twells, an Anglican clergyman, could hardly have had any personal acquaintance with Pococke, since he was a Cambridge man, and did not graduate until

¹ Leonard Twells (ed.), *The Theological Works of the Learned Dr. Pocock* (2 vols., London 1740). The biography is in Vol. I, pp. 1–84 (hereafter, Twells). It was republished anonymously with modernized spelling by A.C., i.e. Alexander Chalmers, *The Lives of Dr. Edward Pocock, . . . Dr. Zachary Pearce, . . . Dr. Thomas Newton, . . . the Rev. Philip Skelton* (2 vols., London 1816). The biography is in Vol. I (hereafter, Chalmers). The biography was the chief source of the article on Edward Pococke by Stanley Lane-Poole in *DNB*, xvi, pp. 7–12, where the spelling of the surname is discussed.

1704. He had however at his disposal an earlier, although incomplete, biography, the author of which (one Humphrey Smith of Queen's College), had been assisted by Pococke's eldest son. Even this earlier biographer had been hindered by the loss of much of Pococke's correspondence, which had been placed in the care of Dr. Arthur Charlett, and disappeared when he moved from Trinity to be Master of University College in 1692. The Bodleian Library has a number of Pococke's papers, sadly few and fragmentary, while other sparse biographical data may be assembled from items in other collections of manuscripts, the published lives and correspondence of his contemporaries, and incidental references here and there. Pococke's published works, seen after the passage of three centuries, themselves form the best evidence of both the inclination and the quality of his scholarship. But Twells's biographical memoir remains the essential clue to our knowledge of Pococke as a person, and to the details of his career.

Edward Pococke was born in Oxford, and was christened on 11 November 1604 in the church of St. Peter-in-the-East. He was the son of the vicar of Chieveley in Berkshire, another Edward Pococke of Hampshire origin, a county with which the younger Pococke had some personal links, as will appear. His schooling was at Thame in Oxfordshire, where a grammar school had been founded by the executors of John Williams, an adroit Tudor politician of the middle rank, who died the first and last Baron Williams of Thame.² In the early 17th century Lord Williams's Grammar School produced a number of distinguished pupils. Among them was Pococke's older contemporary, John Hampden, who in later life was to represent the political and religious standpoint which Pococke found most uncongenial. A pupil of a younger generation, John Fell, was to become the formidable Dean of Christ Church and Pococke's somewhat domineering colleague. Pococke's teacher was the second headmaster, Richard Boucher, a graduate of New College, with which the school was institutionally linked. Under him Pococke learnt Latin and perhaps Greek, and Twells describes him as 'a Man of great Accuracy in Grammatical Learning, whose Skill and Industry the Doctor, even in his old Age, would often very gratefully remember'.³ With this foundation for his further studies, Pococke proceeded to Oxford, first to Magdalen Hall, then to Corpus Christi. He graduated as Bachelor of Arts in 1622, as Master in 1626; and in 1629 he was ordained priest by the bishop of Oxford, Richard Corbet, the author of 'Farewell rewards and fairies'.

In the meantime his bent for oriental studies had shown itself. English scholars and universities were later in this field than some of their continental neighbours. A pioneer of the new studies was the Frenchman, Guillaume Postel, who was sent by Francis I to the Levant, where he collected manuscripts, and acquired a knowledge of Arabic. After returning to France in 1537, Postel published an Arabic grammar, the first in the series of Western grammars of the language. Towards the end of the 16th century, Rome also began to play an important part in the development of Arabic studies. Two factors particularly contributed to this: the foundation in 1584 of the Medicean Press, the first to use movable Arabic type; and the establishment about the same time of the Maronite College, which established a permanent link between Western Europe and the Arabic-speaking Christians of Lebanon. In Protestant Europe, the university of Leiden, founded in 1574, became a notable centre of Arabic studies in the next century under two outstanding scholars, Thomas Erpenius, professor of Arabic from 1613 to 1624, and his successor, James Golius, from 1628 to 1667. A hopeful beginning was also made in

² See further J. Howard Brown, *A Short History of Thame School* (London 1927).

³ Twells, I, 1; Chalmers, I, 2.

Heidelberg, where the Palatine Library was enriched by the purchase of Postel's oriental manuscripts; but the troubles of the Thirty Years War led in 1622 to the dispersal of the scholars, and the seizure of the manuscripts for the Vatican Library.

Among the refugees from Heidelberg was a certain Matthias Pasor, a teacher of Hebrew, philosophy and mathematics. During the winter of 1624–5, he added to his accomplishments by studying Aramaic and Arabic in Paris under a Maronite, Gabriel Sionita. The following year he was in Oxford with an appointment to lecture in Arabic, Aramaic and Syriac, and one of his hearers was the young Edward Pococke. Disappointed in his hopes of a professorial chair at Oxford, Pasor in 1629 moved on to Groningen. Pococke also moved on, 'being arriv'd at as great a Height in Oriental Learning as Mr. Pasor could lead him to',⁴ and went to the one man in England who was competent to instruct him, the Revd. William Bedwell, vicar of Tottenham High Cross. Bedwell, a Cambridge graduate and a member of the circle around Lancelot Andrewes when Master of Pembroke Hall, seems to have taught himself Arabic. His *magnum opus* was an Arabic lexicon, on which he was working in 1595, and which he left in manuscript to his university with a fount of Arabic type for its printing. It remained unpublished. Meanwhile he acquired an international reputation, and taught two of the greatest Arabists of the next generation: Erpenius of Leiden and Pococke of Oxford.⁵

Two years before Bedwell's death, an unusual opportunity for the further study of Arabic was taken by Pococke. This was his appointment on 31 March 1630 as chaplain to the merchants of the Levant Company in Aleppo. He reached Aleppo in the following October, and stayed there until 1636, thereby more than fulfilling the terms of his appointment, which stipulated a residence of four years at an annual salary of £50. Pococke thus rivalled Postel in the extent of his eastern sojourn, but it seems to have occasioned him little enjoyment. In a letter written to a friend at Oxford about two months after his arrival, he expresses himself in the unmistakable language of homesickness. 'My chief Solace is the Remembra[n]ce of my Friends, and my former Happiness, when I was among them. . . . I think that he that hath once been out of England, if he get home, will not easily be persuaded to leave it again. There is nothing that may make a Man envy a Traveller'.⁶ Nevertheless, Pococke's stay in 'this very melancholy Place' (as his biographer styles Aleppo) was of considerable importance in furthering his career. He now obtained a patron who was highly influential both in the university of Oxford and the realm of England. This was William Laud, chancellor of the university, bishop of London, and soon to become primate of all England. Laud's attention had been drawn to Pococke by Bedwell – and here a shared discipleship to Lancelot Andrewes may have been the bond between the vicar of Tottenham High Cross and the bishop of London. However that may be, Laud wrote in October 1631, asking Pococke to buy on his behalf ancient Greek coins, and Greek and oriental manuscripts suitable for a university library. In a further letter, dated May 1634, Laud gave the significant hint, 'I hope you will, before your Return, make yourself able to teach the Arabick Language'.⁷

Indeed Pococke lost no opportunity of so preparing himself as he passed his daily life among speakers and writers of Arabic. His principal Arabic teacher was a certain Fathallah, now identified as a poet usually known as Ibn al-Nahhas, 'the paragon of his

⁴ Twells, I, 2; Chalmers, I, 5.

⁵ See further Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell the Arabist 1563–1632* (Leiden 1985).

⁶ Twells, I, 4; Chalmers, I, 15.

⁷ Twells, I, 7; Chalmers, I, 28.

age', who was to end a wandering life at Medina in 1642.⁸ Pococke's Arabic studies in Aleppo had their outcome in a vast manuscript work. This was a transcription of a collection of six thousand proverbs compiled by the 12th-century philologist, al-Maydani, furnished with Pococke's own Latin translation and commentary. Like Bedwell's lexicon, this remains one of the great unpublished works of the period, although a selection of the proverbs, entitled *Specimen proverbiorum Meidanii ex versione Pocockiana*, edited by the Dutch scholar, Henry Albert Schultens, was printed in London in 1773. Pococke's labours in Aleppo were rewarded when Laud wrote to say that he intended 'to establish a Lecture, and to encourage it with a considerable Stipend',⁹ and that he designed to nominate Pococke for the appointment. Thereupon Pococke set about his return to England, assured by Fathallah that his knowledge of Arabic was 'in no Sort inferior to the *Mufti* of Aleppo'¹⁰ – possibly a double-edged compliment, if the mufti of Aleppo was a Turkish-speaking Ottoman!

Laud's decision to establish an Arabic lecture in his university of Oxford was perhaps prompted by recent developments at Cambridge. There the university librarian, Abraham Wheelocke, a friend and correspondent of William Bedwell, had already succeeded in obtaining a yearly stipend of £40 for an Arabic lecture. His benefactor was a prosperous London draper, Thomas Adams (later to become knight, then baronet), whose action was not due to any appreciation of the commercial utility of Arabic in the textile trade but rather, perhaps, to county solidarity, since both he and Wheelocke were natives of Shropshire. So in 1632 the Sir Thomas Adams Chair of Arabic was founded at Cambridge, to be followed effectively four years later by the Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford – also with an annual stipend of £40.

Pococke was back in England in 1636, took his B.D., and on 10 August gave his inaugural lecture, which he followed with a course of lectures on the proverbs ascribed to the Caliph 'Ali. It is an indication among others of the more advanced state of Arabic teaching in continental universities that the textbook for the course had been published anonymously by Golius at Leiden in 1629. Twells describes Pococke's procedure as a teacher as follows:-

Upon this Book, . . . he spent an Hour every *Wednesday* in *Vacation-time*, and also in *Lent*, explaining the Sense of the Author, and the Things relating to the *Grammar* and *Propriety* of the *Language*; and also showing the Agreement it hath with the *Hebrew* and *Syriack*, as often as there was Occasion. The *Lecture* being ended, he usually tarried for some Time in the public School, to resolve the Questions of his Hearers, and satisfy them in their *Doubts*; and always, that Afternoon, gave them Admittance in his Chamber, from One a-Clock till Four, to all that would come to him for further Conference and Direction.¹¹

An embryonic system of lecture and tutorial! But the passage suggests that Arabic was marginal to the university curriculum with lectures relegated to vacation and Lent, while an air of voluntary attendance hangs about the whole procedure. However, the teaching itself was serious enough, as a surviving fragment of Pococke's own lecture-notes shows. References in this and another fragment, apparently written by a student (possibly Pococke's eldest son, a third Edward), show that the grammars used were published in Leiden like the textbook, and were the work of Erpenius. Another of his

⁸ Al-Muhibbi, *Khulasat al-athar* (Beirut n.d.), iii, pp. 257–66. The identification was made by Sami al-Kayyali, *Safhat min ta'rikh Halab al-adabi* (n.p., n.d.), p. 8.

⁹ Twells, I, 7; Chalmers, I, 29.

¹⁰ Twells, I, 6; Chalmers, I, 26.

¹¹ Twells, I, 9–10; Chalmers, I, 39.

grammars was reissued by Golius in 1656 with some additional reading-matter. This included the first *Maqama* of al-Hariri, a masterpiece of classical Arabic rhymed prose, on which Pococke gave a more advanced course of lectures. Another text on which he lectured was to have a further history in this country. Included with the proverbs of 'Ali in Golius's book, it bore the Latin title of *Carmen Tograi*, i.e. the ode (otherwise known as *Lamiyyat al-'Ajam*) by al-Tughra'i, who died in 1120. The Arabic text was republished in 1661 by Pococke with his introductory lecture, a Latin translation of the ode, and 233 pages of notes, which presumably represent the substance of his course of lectures. The ode, itself a conventional and uninspired piece, was given a further lease of life by an English translation, published in 1758, by Leonard Chappelow, then the Sir Thomas Adams Professor at Cambridge.¹²

Within a twelvemonth of his inauguration, however, Pococke was off on his travels again for a stay of nearly three years in Constantinople. This may seem a curious action by one who had already shown himself to be a reluctant traveller, and the reason for his journey apparently lay in a realization that Oxford simply did not possess the resources he needed for his work. The personal contacts through which Pococke obtained leave for his journey are of some interest. He had at this time a close friend in John Greaves, a mathematician and Arabist, who was a fellow of Merton and professor of geometry at Gresham College in London. Greaves was also, incidentally, the son of a Hampshire clergyman. His predecessor in the professorship at Gresham College had been one Peter Turner, who had returned to Oxford in 1631, and had prepared the final draft of the university statutes promulgated by Laud in 1634. To him Greaves wrote, stating a case for him to put to Laud on behalf of both Pococke and himself for permission to travel in the Levant. Pococke was working on a Latin translation of the 13th-century Arabic chronicle of Abu'l-Faraj Ibn al-'Ibri, alias Barhebraeus, and was finding difficulty (in Greaves's words) 'in matters of Geography of the remoter parts of Asia, often in the lineal discent[sic] of many of the g[ra]t monarchs there, of which the Greeks, and Latines hitherto, as you are best able to iudge, haue been vtterly ignorant'. He wished therefore, 'once more to goe into those Parts, and to get farther light for the perfit edition of that same excellent authour, with which he is in hand, and for the printing of some others not yet extant, which he likewise intends'. John Greaves went on to suggest that his own younger brother, Thomas, newly a fellow of Corpus, would 'most willingly supply Mr Pocockes absence, if my Ld so please'.¹³

My Lord did so please, and in July 1637 John Greaves and Edward Pococke took ship for the Levant. In Constantinople they separated. Greaves went on to Egypt, where he measured the Pyramids, and engaged in a frustrating search for manuscripts, finding '*besides common Things, nothing but a few old Papers, or rotten and imperfect Books*'.¹⁴ He was, in fact, an unconscious witness to the cultural plundering of Egypt which followed the Ottoman conquest in the previous century. His lack of success led him to write to Pococke, asking him to obtain the desired manuscripts, and advising him (perhaps somewhat unnecessarily) how to set about the business,

not only by solliciting [sic] the Assistance of their common Friends at *Galata*, but even by going over the Water himself to the *Bezars*, and Shops at *Stambol*; which he supposed *might be done without Hazard*, provided a due Caution were used about such Books as relate to Religion. He intreated him also to make a further

¹² Arthur J. Arberry, *The Cambridge School of Arabic* (Cambridge 1948), pp. 17-18.

¹³ The letter is now in the Public Record Office: S.P. 16/381/No. 75.

¹⁴ Twells, I, 15; Chalmers, I, 64.

Enquiry after the *Libraries of private Men*, and to attend the Return of the then victorious Army from Persia, which, perhaps, among other Spoils, might bring with them many Books in the Language of that Country.¹⁵

Greaves's reference here is to the Ottoman reconquest of Baghdad from Shah Safi I in 1638.

Pococke was much more successful than his friend in the procuring of manuscripts. One of his agents was an old acquaintance in Aleppo, who had probably been one of his Arabic teachers there. Five letters from this man, who signs himself 'al-Darwish Ahmad' are extant in the Bodleian.¹⁶ Although they are undated, it appears that three of them were written to Pococke while he was still in England after his return from Aleppo, and two while he was at Constantinople. Written in semi-colloquial Arabic (apart from their flowery salutations in rhymed prose), they are not without personal touches. Thus, in his second letter al-Darwish Ahmad informs Pococke that he has married a lady to be a support to him in his affairs. Two letters later, however, he remarks despondently, 'I am living in the city of Aleppo, and I want to go to Damascus, make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and return to Aleppo. For I married seeking someone to serve me, and I have become their servant'.¹⁷ The lasting interest of these letters is the information they give on details of the trade in oriental manuscripts. Al-Darwish Ahmad was not only purchasing manuscripts but also transcribing works for Pococke, and forwarding his acquisitions through an unidentified Girolamo, perhaps a dragoman at the English consulate in Aleppo. He was working against competition from a keen purchaser, none other than the brother of 'Ya'qub Kul al-Flamanki', i.e. James Golius the Dutchman. Peter Golius had become a Carmelite, and was at this time resident in Aleppo. Pococke's two periods in the Levant, and his contacts with Arab, English and Greek agents, enabled him to build up for his patron, Laud, and himself the great collections of oriental manuscripts which so enriched the Bodleian in the 17th century.

Pococke returned home by way of Paris, where he met Pasor's former teacher, Gabriel Sionita, one of the group of Maronite scholars who made a notable contribution to the development of Arabic studies in Europe in this period. When Pococke reached England in 1641, he found political changes under way which permanently and adversely affected his career. The Long Parliament was in session, and Archbishop Laud was in the Tower of London. The following years were to see the collapse of royal authority and the overthrow of the episcopalian order in the Church of England – the two pillars of the society which had fostered Pococke's early success. As far as his post at Oxford was concerned, he had some security: in 1640 Laud had made over to the university Budd's pastures in Bray 'for the perpetual endowment of an Arabick Lecture'.¹⁸ Then in 1648 he received a last advancement from the old regime, when Charles I, at that time a prisoner in the Isle of Wight, nominated him to the Chair of Hebrew, and this appointment was allowed to stand by the Parliamentary visitors, who were carrying out a purge of the university. But Pococke and his circle of like-minded friends were increasingly vulnerable as the revolution went on. John Greaves, Professor of Astronomy at Oxford since 1640, was deprived of his chair in 1648; and with his death four years later, Pococke lost one of his closest friends and most energetic colleagues. He was fortunate in having for a year or two longer an influential patron among the Parlia-

¹⁵ Twells, I, 15; Chalmers, I, 64–5.

¹⁶ Bodl. MS Poc. 432, ff. 5–9.

¹⁷ Ibid., f. 7.

¹⁸ Twells, I, 20; Chalmers, I, 85.

mentary visitors. This was the jurist, John Selden, at whose request Pococke began in 1652 a Latin translation of the universal chronicle of Sa'id Ibn al-Bitriq, alias the Patriarch Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 939). Part of this had already been translated by Selden for controversial purposes concerning episcopacy, and published in 1642.

Pococke's reaction to the uncongenial circumstances in which he now found himself was to withdraw as much as possible from the life and politics of the university. In 1643 he was presented to the Corpus living of Childrey in the Vale of the White Horse. Three years later he married a Hampshire woman, Mary Burdett, by whom he had in due course a family of six sons and three daughters. He thus attempted to settle down in quiet rural domesticity, keeping out of Oxford apart from his statutory duties, and concerning himself, apart from his studies, chiefly with his parish. It seems that he kept his learning out of his sermons, although it is not clear whether his parishioners approved of this, as a little anecdote suggests. 'One of his *Oxford* Friends, as he travel'd through *Childrey*, enquiring, for his Diversion, of some People, who was their Minister? And how they liked him? Receiv'd from them this Answer: *Our Parson is one Mr. Pocock, a plain, honest Man; but, Master, said they, he is no Latiner*'.¹⁹

Pococke had to encounter more serious and more dangerous criticism from his parishioners. In 1654 under the Protectorate, commissioners were appointed for the ejection of ignorant, scandalous, insufficient and negligent ministers. The rector of Childrey was duly cited to Abingdon and Wantage to answer the commissioners concerning charges laid by one Thomas Bush and others of his parish. Twells notes that there had previously been acrimony between Bush and his rector over the matter of tithes. The scandals of which Pococke was accused to the commissioners had nothing to do with his private life, and the first two of the nine articles exhibited against him give the tenor of the whole series:-

1. *That he had frequently made use of the Idolatrous Common-Prayer Book, as he performed Divine Service.*
2. *That he was disaffected to the present Power.*²⁰

Pococke defended himself point by point, and received influential support from the wealthy local family of Fettiplace, six of whose members lie handsomely interred in the parish church of their former manor of Swinbrook. One of the Fettiplaces, a Turkey merchant, had acted as Pococke's banker during his visit to Constantinople. The charges of scandal failed, but the commissioners then turned to consider whether Pococke might be ejected on the grounds of ignorance and insufficiency, one of the witnesses having deposed 'that he sometimes preached pretty well, but at other Times not so well, and that his Deadness and Dullness drove People from hearing him'. Such accusations against the Professor of Arabic and Hebrew were too much for the university, and a powerful remonstrance was delivered by its Puritan vice-chancellor, Dr. John Owen. At which 'the *Commissioners*, being very much mortified, . . . thought it best for them wholly to put an End to the Matter, and so discharg'd Mr. *Pocock* from any further Attendance'.²¹

The restoration of the monarchy and the re-establishment of episcopacy in 1660 might have seemed to promise Pococke a resumption of his interrupted academic career and preferment in the Church. This did not occur. Apart from proceeding Doctor of

¹⁹ Twells, I, 22; Chalmers, I, 94-5.

²⁰ Twells, I, 36; Chalmers, I, 152.

²¹ Twells, I, 41; Chalmers, I, 174-5.

Divinity and obtaining the canonry annexed to the professorship of Hebrew, which had originally been detained for the benefit of Dr. Peter French, Cromwell's son-in-law, Pococke received no further advancement. He was never a self-assertive man, and he found no patron after Laud and Selden to protect his interests. His particular qualifications were called upon from time to time. In 1668 the secretary of state's office sent him 'an Arabick Letter . . . from the Emperor of Morocco, to King Charles the Second, desiring from him a Translation of it, they having No-body in Town Masters enough of that Language, to give them the Contents of it'.²² Many years later a Moroccan ambassador came to England, and Anthony Wood describes his visit to Oxford on 30 May 1682:-

About 8 of the clocke at night came into Oxford, Hamet ben Hamet ben Haddu Ottur, . . . and put in at the Angell inn within East gate. Where being settled, the vice-chancellor and doctors in their scarlet with the bedells before them congratulated his arrivall; and the orator spoke a little speech, and Dr. Pocock something in Arabick which made him laugh.²³

The thirty-one years from the Restoration to Pococke's death were thus a period of unambitious quietude after the disturbances of the Civil War and the Interregnum. It was the time during which the last of his learned publications in Arabic appeared; *Carmen Tograi* in 1661, and then in 1663 *Historia Dynastiarum*, the chronicle by Barhebraeus on which he had already been engaged during his first return to England. His interests in these later years turned increasingly to Hebrew and Old Testament studies. He had published in 1655 *Porta Mosis*, an edition of six discourses on the Talmud by Maimonides, with a Latin translation and long notes intended 'to shew . . . how much the Knowledge of Arabick and Rabbinical Learning, will contribute towards the finding out the genuine Sense of many difficult Places of Holy Scripture'.²⁴ Thereafter he was occupied with the production of English commentaries on four of the Minor Prophets. Micah and Malachi were published in 1677, Hosea in 1685, and Joel in 1691. This work seems to have been undertaken at the instance of Dean Fell, a prototype of the modern series editor, who,

intending to oblige the World with a Commentary on the entire Bible, or, at least, on the Old Testament, made by the learned Hands of that University, had divided the Task among a set Number of them, and . . . the Books of Micah, Malachi, Hosea and Joel, fell to our Professor.²⁵

The relations between Fell and Pococke were indeed somewhat ambivalent. Pococke's generosity in alms-giving 'was so notorious, and brought such Numbers of necessitous Objects to him, that Dean Fell, himself a most munificent Person, used complainingly to tell Dr. Pocock that he drew all the Poor of Oxford into the College'.²⁶ More serious in its consequences was Fell's interference in one of Pococke's projected Arabic publications, as described by Thomas Hearne:-

A Book in Arabick written by Abdollatiphi, containing a compendious History of Egypt was begun to be translated by Dr. Pocock and printed at the Theatre in Bp. Fell's time at the expense of Dr.

²² Twells, I, 75; Chalmers, I, 276.

²³ Anthony Wood, *Life and Times*, iii (Oxford Hist. Soc. xxvi, 1894), p. 17.

²⁴ Twells, I, 44; Chalmers, I, 188.

²⁵ Twells, I, 72; Chalmers, I, 305-6.

²⁶ Twells, I, 82; Chalmers, I, 347.

Marshall Rector of Lincoln College, and was a pretty way advanc'd; but on a sudden the Bp. having occasion for the Latin letters [had] the Book stop'd wch. so vex'd the good old man Dr. Pocock tht. he could never be prevail'd to go on any further.²⁷

It was not until 1800 that the translation of 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi's book was completed and published with the Arabic text by one of Pococke's successors, Dr. Joseph White.

This disagreeable incident is symbolic, indeed symptomatic, of a period in which interest in Arabic was declining. In 1663 Pococke wrote to his former deputy, Thomas Greaves, 'the Genius of the Times, as for these Studies, is much altered since you and I first set about them; and few will be persuaded, they are worthy taking notice of'²⁸ – a melancholy view, in which Greaves concurred. Edmund Castell, the successor to Abraham Wheelocke at Cambridge, who was appointed to Sir Thomas Adams's Chair in 1664, experienced the same loss of academic interest, as Twells observes:-

His Lectures were heard at first with great Applause, but in a few Years were so much neglected, that, being then easy, and disposed to be pleasant, he put up this Affix upon the School Gates; Arabicae Linguae Praelector cras ibit in Desertum.²⁹

And as in England, so also abroad. In 1671 Pococke received 'a most melancholy Account of the Neglect of Arabic Literature' at Leiden. His correspondent blamed this, first, on the inactivity of Golius before his death in 1667; and, secondly, on 'the Avarice of the Age, which gave no Attention to any Sciences, that were not greatly lucrative'.³⁰

Clearly these are indications of a general phenomenon, and a little consideration should be given to its deeper causes. One may begin by examining the motives which led scholars to study Arabic in the 17th century. These are suggested with some repetition in the inaugural lectures delivered by the university teachers of Arabic in the 17th and even the 18th century. A primary motive is religious. Arabic as a kindred language to Hebrew can, they say, give a better understanding of the text of the Old Testament. It can also serve a missionary purpose by making possible discussion with Muslims, which would lead (so it was hoped) to their conversion. It would also enable contact to be made with oriental Christians living under Muslim rule. In this connection it is significant that Pococke devoted much time and effort to the production of missionary literature in Arabic. He began in 1660 with a translation of Grotius's tract *De veritate religionis Christianae*. Copies of this were sent out for distribution by Pococke's successor as chaplain at Aleppo, Dr. Robert Huntington, from whose collection of manuscripts also the Bodleian was to benefit in due course. The translation of Grotius provided him with something of a problem; he 'was obliged for his own Safety, to cut the last Book, wherein *Mahometism* is confuted, out of some Copies, before he distributed them'.³¹ It was at Huntington's suggestion that Pococke went on to publish in 1674 a translation of parts of the Anglican liturgy. He had already in 1671 produced a translation of the Catechism.

A second motive for the study of Arabic in this period may be summarized in Pococke's own words: 'In every kind of literature, the Arabs have oriental treasures yet undisclosed'.³² A knowledge of Arabic was seen as the key to the Arabian philosophers,

²⁷ Thomas Hearne, *Collections*, i (Oxford Hist. Soc. ii, 1885), p. 224.

²⁸ Twells, I, 60; Chalmers, I, 254.

²⁹ Twells, I, 51 (footnote); Chalmers, I, 214 (footnote).

³⁰ Twells, I, 67; Chalmers, I, 283.

³¹ Twells, I, 58; Chalmers, I, 247.

³² *Specimen historiae Arabum* (Oxford 1650). Praefatio ad Lectorem A2: 'Sunt enim Arabibus, in omni literarum genere, gazae nondum reclus[a]e'.

physicians and scientists, known hitherto, so far as they were known, only in barbarous medieval versions. This was the motive which led John Greaves, the astronomer and mathematician, to travel to the East in his eager search for manuscripts, such as the astronomical writings of the 15th-century Timurid, Ulugh Beg, the geography of Abu'l-Fida', the ruler of Hamah, and the works of Avicenna.

As the 17th century went on, these essentially utilitarian motives to the study of Arabic lost much of their force. The assistance which Arabic could render to biblical studies was limited, and for this period culminated in the Arabic versions published during the Protectorate in Brian Walton's Polyglot Bible, a major work of collective scholarship in which Pococke collaborated. Hopes of converting Muslims to Christianity, and of diverting oriental Christians to Anglicanism, proved almost equally illusory, while the development of experimental science, institutionalized in the establishment of the Royal Society in these years, marked the passing of the authority of the Arabians and their Classical predecessors alike. Thus the old reasons for the study of Arabic lost their attraction and relevance, and nothing came in their place. Nearly half a century after Pococke's death, the inaugural lecture of one of his successors, Thomas Hunt, might have been composed a hundred years before, as he continued to assert the utility of the Arabian writers to students of geography, mathematics, astronomy and medicine.³³ In view of this lack of realism and purpose, it is not surprising that the 18th-century professors of Arabic at Oxford and Cambridge were undistinguished men, whose contributions to their subject were negligible.

What was almost wholly lacking in the Arabists of the 17th and 18th centuries, at least to judge from the public advertisement of their wares, was an appreciation of the Arabic language as the principal key to Islamic civilization, in itself a worthy subject for study. Centuries of ill-informed polemic, mutual religious bigotry and political hostility had created a deep gulf between Islam and Christendom, so that even scholars in the West had difficulty in shaking off long-ingrained prejudices. So, for example, one of Bedwell's publications, intended as a reading-book for students of Arabic, appeared under the title of *Mohammedis Imposturae*, and in a second edition *Mahomet Unmasked*, while to Twells, a century and a quarter later, the Prophet of Islam was still 'that impostor'.

Pococke, although a 17th-century clergyman, fully convinced of the truths of Christianity as mediated by the Church of England, gives evidence of a more scholarly and unbiased attitude. At one level this appears in the way in which he deals with some fables about Islam current among Christians. The story that the Prophet lies entombed in an iron coffin, suspended by magnets between earth and heaven, is dismissed with a burst of laughter. 'Where', says Pococke, 'do our people get the story of Mahomet enclosed in an iron chest, hanging in the air by magnetic force? When these things are told to Mahometans, they are laughed off the stage as proof of the ignorance of our people about their affairs'.³⁴ Pococke's scholarly incredulity was later to be confirmed by the ocular evidence of Joseph Pitts, an Exeter boy enslaved by Algerine corsairs in 1678. Accompanying his master on pilgrimage, he visited the Prophet's tomb in Medina.

When I looked through the brass Grate I saw as much as any of the *Haggas* [*hajjis*, i.e. pilgrims]; and the Top of the Curtains, which cover'd the Tomb, were not half so high as the *Roof* or *Arch*; so that 'tis impossible his Coffin should be hanging there. I never heard the *Mahometans* say any Thing like it.³⁵

³³ Thomas Hunt, *De antiquitate, elegantia, utilitate, linguae Arabicae* (Oxford 1739).

³⁴ *Specimen historiae Arabum*, Notae, pp. 180-1: 'Unde igitur nobis *Mohammedes* cistae ferreae inclusus, & magnetum vi in aëre pendulus? haec cum Mohammedistis recitantur, risu exploduntur, ut nostrorum, in ipsorum rebus, inscitiae argumentum'.

³⁵ Joseph Pitts, *A faithful account of the religion and manners of the Mahometans* (London 1731), p. 157.

Another ancient Christian fable was that of the dove trained to eat out of the Prophet's ear, and so impersonate the Holy Ghost. Grotius had repeated this story in his *De veritate religionis Christianae*, and held it up to scorn as a feigned miracle. Asked by Pococke about this, he admitted that his only sources for the tale were Christian; and when Pococke made his translation of Grotius's book, it was omitted.³⁶

At a different level, Pococke sought to present Islamic civilization as it actually was by drawing on his own very extensive knowledge of Arabic source-materials, particularly the manuscripts which he had acquired for Laud and himself. This he did to remarkable effect in his most celebrated work, *Specimen historiae Arabum*, published in 1650, although the notes are separately dated 1648. This book long remained one of the most authoritative works on the history of the Arabs and the institutions of Islam. The kernel of the work is an excerpt from the 13th-century chronicle of Barhebraeus, which, as already mentioned, Pococke subsequently published in full. The portion given with a Latin translation in the *Specimen* comprises Barhebraeus's very bald account of the early Arabs, the life of the Prophet, and the Muslim sects and law-schools. This brief résumé (the Arabic text occupies only fifteen pages) is followed by Pococke's notes, over 300 pages in length, which amplify and comment on every significant point in Barhebraeus's text, some of them being substantial essays. In their course Pococke refers to, and quotes from, over seventy Arabic writers. His range of sources is remarkably wide, going back to al-Jahiz in the 9th century. His historical sources, as was general at the period, were late and derivative, much reliance being placed on the 14th-century chronicle of Abu'l-Fida', *al-Mukhtasar fi akhbar al-bashar*, i.e. 'A short history of mankind'.

Much of the information contained in the *Specimen* is now so well-known and commonplace among Islamists, where indeed it has not been superseded by a wider and more critical use of sources, that it is difficult to recognize how considerable an advance Pococke's work represented in his own and even the following century. One of the great aids to the understanding of Islam was George Sale's English version of the Qur'an, first published in 1734. In his long Preliminary Discourse, Sale draws heavily (and often without acknowledgement) on Pococke, sometimes directly, and sometimes through the Latin translation and work on the Qur'an published by Marracci in 1698. Some lengthy passages of the Preliminary Discourse are simply translations or paraphrases from Pococke; for example, Sale's account of the idols of the Arabs is largely taken from the *Specimen*, while his exposition of Islamic eschatology is a condensed translation of Pococke's Seventh Note to *Porta Mosis*. Half a century after Sale, Gibbon, when introducing his account of the Arabs, bids the reader 'Consult, peruse, and study the *Specimen Historiae Arabum* of Pocock!'³⁷ In 1806 a second edition of the *Specimen* was published by the same Joseph White who brought Pococke's translation of 'Abd al-Latif to completion.

On 10 September 1691 Edward Pococke died. 'His Parts continued sound', we are told, 'and his Memory but little impaired, to the very last'.³⁸ He lies buried in the cathedral which he had served so long, and where his carved bust, set up by his widow, looks down from the wall. In the following year, Mrs. Pococke sold her husband's

³⁶ Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose* (Oxford 1937, repr. New York 1965), pp. 406-9, cites this fable, and erroneously states that Pococke 'himself gave the tale further currency in his own writings'. The passage here referred to by Chew (*Specimen historiae Arabum*, Notae, p. 186) in fact contains Pococke's own rejection of the story. The Christian fables about the Prophet are discussed by Chew in pp. 387-451, and by Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh 1958), esp. pp. 79-108.

³⁷ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J.B. Bury, London 1898), v, p. 314, fn. 9.

³⁸ Twells, I, 81; Chalmers, I, 342.

collection of 420 oriental manuscripts to the University for £800, and so they passed into the Bodleian Library, where they are today.³⁹ There had been some expectation that he would be succeeded in the Laudian Chair of Arabic by his eldest son, but the choice of the electors fell on Thomas Hyde, a pupil of Wheelocke's, whose interest was in Persian rather than Arabic, and the third Edward Pococke died a country parson in Wiltshire in 1727.

An appropriate tribute to Pococke, as well as to his earliest patron, was given by a scholar of the next generation: Simon Ockley, the fifth Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge from 1711 until his death in 1720. Ockley's principal work, *The Conquest of Syria, Persia, and Aegypt by the Saracens*, first published in 1708, and reprinted as late as 1848, was dedicated to Dean Aldrich of Christ Church, and the dedication opens with these words:-

It would have been a great Breach of Good Manners, and a Want of Gratitude in me, not to have return'd this little Book to that Place, whence it took its Rise and Original, I mean *Oxford*, to which we owe that Incomparable Archbishop *Laud*, whose great Bounty and Munificence has furnish'd the *Bodleian Library* with a vast Number of the Best *Oriental Authors* . . . To which we owe so many learned and eminent Promoters of Eastern Learning, and above all the admirable Dr. *Pocock*, to whose Labours how much we are indebted, no Tongue can sufficiently express.⁴⁰

It is indeed fitting that Edward Pococke should be remembered for his scholarly labours as a gifted and erudite pioneer in a field of learning which, three centuries after his death, still flourishes in his University of Oxford, and which has become yet more relevant to our national life than it was in his own day. And in commemorating the scholar, let us also remember the man as he was seen by his contemporaries. Living in an age of social unrest, political and religious divisions, and civil war, he kept his loyalties and fulfilled his pastoral and academic duties undismayed.

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³⁹ Ian Philip, *The Bodleian Library in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford 1983), p. 60.

⁴⁰ Simon Ockley, *The Conquest of Syria, Persia, and Aegypt by the Saracens* (London 1708), pp. iii-iv.