PART I

Latin and Arabic: Macro-historical Perspectives

Benoît Grévin (CNRS, Paris)

1. Comparing Medieval "Latin" and "Arabic" Textual Cultures from a Structural Perspective

The history of relations between medieval Latin and Arabic textual cultures is generally understood to be a multifaceted history of transmissions, contacts, and hybridizations. The study of these relations has become an entire subfield of medieval textual studies.[1] The nature of the links between these two textual cultures raises many questions indeed, at different levels and in different fields. What forms of interaction were characteristic of the areas where Latin and Arabic coexisted over long periods, such as on the Iberian Peninsula, or in Sicily? More generally, what were the mechanisms that facilitated the transmission of Arabic knowledge or textual forms to the Latin West? Such questions have become the object of intense scientific investigations, as well as fierce first- and second-hand debates. In some Western academic milieus, we observed in recent years how representatives of right-wing political tendencies "denied," in a certain way, the influence of Arabic culture on the Latin West.[2] At the same time, representatives of left-wing political tendencies managed to establish influential currents of thought such as the concept of "postcolonial medieval studies." Such currents, often having originated in the United States, propose to narrate the story of these Latin-Arabic entanglements on a new basis, thus implying that preceding investigations were conceptually invalid or at least ideologically biased.[3]

1 For a bibliographical sketch, see Chapter 2 in this volume. For the now rapidly-developing sub-subgenre of studies on Latin translations of the Qurʾān, Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'ān in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), provides one example of the general explosion of studies on Latin translations from Arabic. See also Chapter 5 in this volume.

2 See the controversy that arose in France in 2008 around the book by Sylvain Gouguenheim, *Aristote au Mont Saint-Michel: Les racines grecques de l'Europe chrétienne* (Paris: Seuil, 2008). For a summary of reactions to this book, see Daniel D. König, "Traductions et transferts de savoirs: À propos des relations entre l'Occident latin et le monde arabo-musulman," *Trivium: Revue franco-allemande de sciences humaines et sociales* 8 (2011) https://trivium.revues.org. [Accessed October 31, 2017].

3 For example, see Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), which has a stronger focus on Romance languages and Arabic. See also Karla Malette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250: A Literary History* (Philadelphia: University of

1.1 A history of two (and more) languages: Can we deconstruct the "grand narratives" of Medieval Latin and Arabic?

There exists a different, complementary approach to the history of the relations between Arabic and Latin textual cultures. This approach consists in comparing the two linguistic cultures of the Islamic(ate) and Latin medieval spheres, thus treating them as two distinct, equivalent entities. It temporarily puts aside the problem of plausible or asserted relationships between the two spheres in order to examine possible structural similarities. This may evoke the somewhat old-fashioned structural and functionalist approach favoured by some researchers during the second half of the twentieth century, in the wake of the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). Many have pointed out that structural comparatism cannot be regarded as an adequate tool to study historical societies that experienced permanent changes, particularly with regard to their linguistic usages and cultures; for how can we model the similarities between two cultures in permanent evolution? Although the challenge seems overwhelming, our knowledge of the workings of language in medieval societies—in both the Latin and Islamic(ate) spheres—has advanced rapidly in the last thirty years.[4] This includes, for example, our understanding of

---

Pennsylvania Press, 2005), on the interaction between Greek, Latin, and Arabic in Sicily, followed by Karla Malette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). This is perhaps the most elaborate theorization of the doctrine of "post-colonial medievalism."

4 On the sociolinguistic evolution of Latin in the Christian world of Late Antiquity, see e.g. Michel Banniard, *Viva Voce: Communication écrite et communication orale du IVe au IXe siècle en Occident latin* (Paris: Institut des Études augustiniennes, 1992). For the period from Late Antiquity to the late Middle Ages, see Pascale Bourgain and Marie-Clotilde Hubert, *Le latin médiéval* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005). On the birth of humanism, see Ronald Witt, *"In the Footsteps of the Ancients": The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). For the early modern period, see Françoise Waquet, *Le latin ou l'empire d'un signe*, *XVIe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998). For a contrastive examination of the dawn of the Western vernaculars, see Michèle Goyens, Werner Verbeke, eds, *The Dawn of the Western Vernacular in Western Europe* (Louvain: Presses de l'Université de Louvain, 2003). For an accurate study of the interactions between the vernacular and Latin in a teaching context during this crucial period, see Anna A. Grotans, *Reading in Medieval St. Gall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On the history of Arabic, see the seminal but now dated Johann Fück, *ʿArabīya: Untersuchungen zur arabischen Sprach- und Stilgeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955). Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) provides a more recent synthesis. The *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2006–2009), largely reflects the current state of the art. On various aspects of Arabic sociolinguistics in the medieval period, neglected or unknown until quite recently, see Li Guo's exploration of popular Egyptian poetry of the Mamlūk era, *The Performing Arts in Medieval Islam: Shadow Play and Popular Poetry in Ibn Daniyal's Mamluk Cairo* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For medieval reading practices, see Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). For the shifting

memorizing and mnemonic processes,[5] of the oral dimension of traditional literature, of pragmatic writing and techniques of writing, and of medieval multilingualism. Consequently, it seems plausible that a relatively old tool such as "structural comparatism" can be reused with some effectiveness, provided that it is correctly adapted to the present needs.

It is worth asking whether it is actually possible to establish a valid frame for such an experiment.[6] Researchers from the two fields of textual studies—of the Latin Middle Ages and of classical Islam—might deny the validity of such a comparison on a broader scale right from the start, for a number of reasons. The histories of Arabic and Latin—understood here as cultural tools and linguistic mediums—differ enormously, from a chronological as well as from other points of view. The assumption that the histories of Latin and Arabic are ultimately incomparable necessarily contains some truth. No history of a great, culturally influential language, that is, a language used as the ultimate reference language in a large number of cultural sectors, can be identical to other, grossly similar histories. However, such an assumption misses the mark to a certain extent. We should consider that we cannot reduce the history of a highly complex sociolinguistic field to a "grand narrative" that explains the emergence or decline of a language in teleological terms. Such a reduction is equally impossible if the task is to compare two highly complex sociolinguistic fields and their evolution.

A good starting point to approach the method of structuralist comparatism from a new angle consists in cross-examining the traditional ways in which the broad histories of Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages are put into perspective. There are naturally some basic, unavoidable, and apparently considerable differences between the sociolinguistic histories of the two languages as employed by their speakers between ca. 550 and 1500. During Late Antiquity (ca. 300–650), Latin was already a wildly diffused idiom, a language of culture used at different levels of communication in the western Mediterranean as well as in the Romano-Germanic kingdoms that had emerged within the space formerly held by the Western Roman

relations between Arabic and non-Arabic languages in the teaching of Arabic in non-Arabophone areas, see Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾān: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5 For these questions in connection with the Latin sphere, see the now classical work of Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*: *A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Pilgrim Books, 1990); see also Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

6 A tentative approach has been tested in Benoît Grévin, *Le parchemin des cieux: Essai sur le Moyen Âge du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), an essay in comparative sociolinguistic history between the Latin Christian West and classical Islam, focusing on the period 565–1500. For another, still broader perspective, comparing the medieval and early modern Latin West, Islam, and the Orthodox world, see Siegfried Tornow, *Abendland und Morgenland im Spiegel ihrer Sprachen: Ein kulturhistorischer Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), where the author focuses on the differing developments of the three sociolinguistic spheres from an evolutionist perspective.

Empire. The common representation of the history of this language during the thousand years stretching from 500 to 1500 is that some late Latin varieties were still spoken until the Carolingian period in the linguistic space usually known as *Romania*,[7] but that they shifted gradually to forms that became more and more alienated from classical Latin. At the end of this process, which took place between 650 and 950 depending on the region, Latin remained the written tool of the entire "Latin sphere," whereas the population spoke not only Romance, but also German and Celtic vernaculars. Then, in a third phase, the so-called modern languages—to which various Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages must be added in line with the pace of the Christianization of Central and Northern Europe[8]—entered a process of literarization that resulted in the progressive marginalization of Latin as a written tool. This process was still incomplete in Central Eastern Europe by around 1500,[9] but the tendency was relatively clear. Thus, the entire story seems to be one of a gradual process of the birth and rise of modern languages and of the progressive sclerosis and death of Latin.

When we try to map out the history of Arabic during the Middle Ages, our first impression is that of a linguistic history diametrically opposed to that of Latin. Apparently not an important language of culture outside the Arabian peninsula and its peripheries before the beginning of Islam, pre-classical and classical Arabic was rapidly diffused into the expanding Islamic(ate) area during the first centuries of Islam. In the centre and in the

7 On this dynamic, see Banniard, *Viva Voce*. The interesting point in a comparison between Arabic and Latin is that, contrary to older models, mainstream research on the history of Latin now considers the relevant criterion to measure the exact pace of the dissociation process between Latin and the future Romance languages to be the degree to which contemporary speakers perceived a linguistic crisis. Before the eighth century in Gaul, and even later in Italy, there is no clear indication that uneducated people were thought to speak any language other than Latin. Consequently, one can argue that the interaction between written and oral forms of Latin is more comparable to the dialectic process of interaction between "classical" and "non-classical" Arabic during quite a long period of the Middle Ages (until 700–950, or even later, depending on the region) than to a real diglossic interaction. Sardo-Latin documents even provide evidence of a total lack of conceptualization of a difference between Latin and Romance languages, in certain cases as late as the beginning of the eleventh century (see fn. 23 below). During the early Middle Ages, the (linguistic) Romania also extended outside Western Europe. It survives today in Romanian and other residual Latin Balkan languages. In the Maghreb, it was progressively absorbed into Arabic and Berber from the eighth century onwards. For more on the final point, see Serge Lancel, "Fin et survie de la latinité en Afrique du Nord," *Revue des Études Latines* 59 (1981), 269–297.

8 The inclusion of Latin Central Eastern Europe in an analysis of the cultural and sociolinguistic role of the Latin language is fundamental. Paradoxically, it was in these territories, the greater part of which had never been Romanized during Antiquity (with the exception of Croatia and south-western Hungary), that Latin was to prove strongest as an oral and written communication tool until the late modern era. In Poland, Hungary, and Croatia, Latin would fall out of use as a political and administrative tool only in the course of the nineteenth century.

9 Even in Western Europe, there is a lot to be said in favour of a global re-valorization of Latin as a prestige language and a communication tool during the early modern period. See Waquet, *Le Latin*.

west, from Syria and Iraq to the Maghreb, it thus progressively (and more or less radically) marginalized the pre-existing languages, such as Aramaic in the Fertile Crescent, Coptic in Egypt, or Berber in the Maghreb. In the East, on the contrary, it deeply influenced the formation of classical (neo-) Persian, but did not prevail as a spoken language in a linguistic landscape characterized by a multiplicity of Iranian and Turkic idioms. In various parts of the Mashreq, its prestige was thus counterbalanced in some important areas of communication. According to some proponents of Arabic literary studies, Arabic suffered a sort of literary and linguistic crisis after 1100[10] (we will not enter into the problem of Middle Arabic here).[11] Even considering this, one must acknowledge that Arabic was still spoken from Morocco to Oman at the end of the Middle Ages, and was even progressing as a vernacular language in Africa.

In view of this proposed dichotomy between a supposedly "Latin" history of extinction and an "Arabic" history of successful propagation, the prerequisites for a comparison between the two linguistic cultures seem to be non-existent—at least at first sight. However, a more detailed analysis helps to downplay some of these differences, especially if it questions the scale of the frame that constituted the basis of comparison so far.

First, classical Arabic was certainly introduced into all societies of the medieval Islamic(ate) sphere. However, even in the early centuries, the majority of the population never learnt to express themselves in this language as native speakers. From the start, they began to create as many Arabic dialects as there were local societies, and these dialects or varieties were *in some aspects* as different from classical Arabic as early medieval Romance languages were from classical Latin. This situation resulted in what, in the 1950s, the linguist Charles Ferguson defined as structural

10 For a standard view of the stylistic, literary, and linguistic decadence of Arabic at the time of the Turcization of political power in the Mashreq (to be followed after 1500 by an analogous Turcization in a large part of the Maghreb), see Djamel Kouloughli, *L'arabe* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), 93–94, 100. There is a lot to be said against the tendency to analyse the period 1200–1800 as a time of general linguistic, literary, and stylistic decadence, an idea that is too heavily influenced by literary criteria and by the legacy of the *nahḍa* to be of much use from a sociolinguistic and sociohistorical point of view. The persisting sociolinguistic importance of Arabic, even in a context of partial Turcization, is illustrated by the linguistic acculturation of the Turkic elites in Mamlūk Egypt. On this, see Ulrich Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988), 81–114. However, on the importance given in Egypt to Turkic and Turkish studies, to the point of starting a "grammatization" of the language, see Robert Ermers, *Arabic Grammars of Turkic: The Arabic Linguistic Model Applied to Foreign Languages and Translation of Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī's Kitāb al-Idrāk li-Lisān al-Atrāk* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

11 On Middle Arabic as a conceptual tool for examining the intermediate levels between theoretically "pure" classical Arabic and "pure" dialect, and on the confusions that result from different uses of the concept, see Pierre Larcher, "Moyen arabe et arabe moyen," *Arabica: Revue d'études arabes et islamiques* 48 (2001), 578–609; Jacques Grand'Henry and Jérôme Lentin, eds, *Moyen arabe et variétés mixtes de l'arabe à travers l'histoire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

diglossia.[12] Not only people in the "Latin," but also in the "Arabic" sphere used highly different varieties of language to write and to speak, with an entire scale of intermediate levels mingling on different occasions.

Second, the eastern half of the Islamic sphere never switched to Arabic at the level of daily speech: Iran and Central Asia were integral parts of the classical Islamic sphere, and they consequently developed a relationship with Arabic that was more akin to the interaction with Latin characteristic of German- and Slavic-speaking areas in the Latin-Christian sphere. In these regions, Arabic persisted as a prestigious written (and in some contexts oral) language, but Persian progressively acquired some pre-eminence in the fields of poetry and even administration. Other languages, in turn, such as the Iranian vernacular languages of Afghanistan or Khwarezm, or the Turkic languages, remained confined to a predominantly oral dimension until very late in the medieval period.[13] Symbolically and conceptually, Arabic remained at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of languages. At the written level, however, it interacted with other idioms in increasingly complex forms of triangulation. We can thus find the same kind of linguistic complexity, and the same kind of linguistic and sociolinguistic latent or open tensions, in thirteenth-century Seljuk Anatolia or in fifteenth-century Transoxiana as in, for example, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Bohemia or England, with a Persian–Turkic–Arabic triangle versus a German–Czech–Latin triangle, or a French–English–Latin triangle (see Fig. 1.1). In the last

12 On diglossia, see Charles A. Ferguson's seminal presentation, "Diglossia," *Word* 15 (1959), 325–340. On its application to the sociolinguistic situation in Latin Europe in the early and high Middle Ages, see e.g. the discussion by Peter Koch, "Le latin—langue diglossique?," in *Zwischen Babel und Pfingsten: Sprachdifferenzen und Gesprächsverständigung in der Vormoderne (8.–16. Jh.)—Entre Babel et Pentecôte: Différences linguistiques et communication orale avant la modernité (VIII^e–XVI^e siècle)*, ed. Peter von Moos (Zurich: Lit, 2008), 287–316. On its numerous applications to past and present Arabic, see Pierre Larcher, "Diglossie arabisante et fuṣḥā vs ʿāmmiyya arabes: essai d'histoire parallèle," in *History of Linguistics, 1999: Selected Papers from the Eighth International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS VIII)*, ed. Sylvain Auroux (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003), 47–61. Also consider Naima Boussofara-Omar, "Diglossia," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 629–637.

13 On the rise of neo-(classical) Persian, see Gilbert Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4. *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 595–632; and Gilbert Lazard, *La formation de la langue persane* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995); and in a teaching context see Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾān*. From a comparatist point of view, the important point is perhaps that the process of Islamization went hand in hand with the lexical and stylistic Arabization of Persian in a way akin to the mutation from Anglo-Saxon Old English (pre-1066) to the far more Latinized Middle English. The analogy is not perfect for two reasons: the Latinization of Middle English was accomplished under the double influence of Latin and of one of its Romance derivate languages, Old French. Moreover, this particular process of Latinization began centuries after the Christianization of the island. However, from a sociolinguistic point of view, the comparison is valid as a testimony to the profound impact of the "reference languages" Latin and Arabic, in zones and at times in which they were neither spoken nor written by the majority of the population.

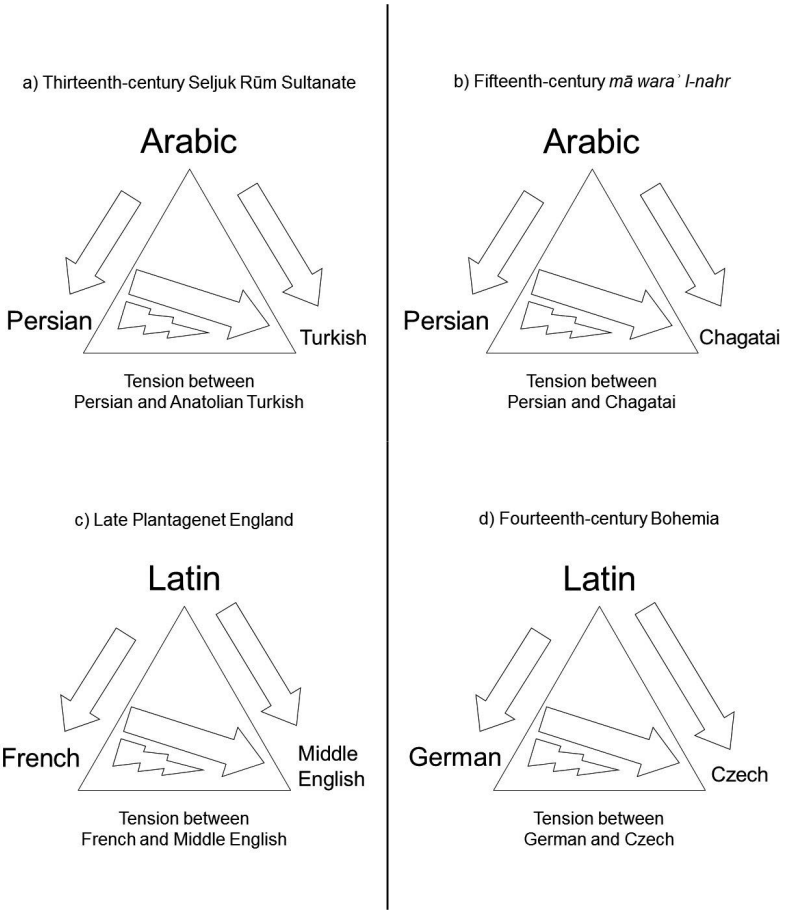

Figure 1.1, a–d: Four linguistic triangles with Latin and Arabic in a semi-symbolic, semi-effective domineering position at the end of Middle Ages. The arrows symbolize lexical and stylistic influence; the lightning arrows symbolize tensions.

centuries of the Middle Ages, be it in the Latin or in the Islamic(ate) sphere, symbolic competition for linguistic pre-eminence was no longer reduced to a dialectical rivalry between the theoretically most prestigious language (Arabic, Latin) and an idiom with an inferior status (e.g. Persian, French, German). In late Seljuk Anatolia or fifteenth-century Transoxiana, tensions arose between Persian—a prestigious intermediate language now firmly established as a court and administrative medium, and early Ottoman or Chagatai—the latter being a language widely spoken by the average population, which lacked the prestige of its courtly rival.[14] In this process, Arabic

14 In the case of fifteenth-century Central Asia, this tension comes to the fore in ʿAlī Šīr Nawāʾī's pamphlet on the pre-eminence of Chagatai over Persian, see Robert

still retained religious pre-eminence and even exerted lexical and stylistic influence on Persian and Turkic, even if the latter was already being deeply influenced by the strongly Arabicized language of Persian. Similarly, in late Plantagenet England, the theoretically uncontested status of Latin as the most prestigious ecclesiastical and royal language did not preclude the progressive reinforcement of French as a courtly and administrative language from the twelfth century onwards. Thus, rather than there being an issue with the use of Latin, the actual linguistic battle occurred between French—still a very prestigious medium even after the progressive Anglicization of the nobility, and Middle English—a language that styled itself as an outsider courtly medium under the double influence of Latin and French.[15] The establishment and assertion of a courtly form of Czech presents a somewhat similar case. Czech emerged as a written tool under the influence of German in a Bohemian linguistic landscape still largely dominated by Latin, the latter still serving intellectual and ecclesiastical purposes throughout the fourteenth century.[16]

As soon as we turn to an analysis of a more dialectical relationship, between either Arabic or Latin and a less prestigious vicinal language, a detailed history of the medieval textual cultures of Arabic and Latin offers many counter-narratives that seriously question the idea of a dialectically opposed evolution in the two linguistic spheres. Recent works, for example, have re-evaluated the role of specific forms of Berber in the construction of the Almohad ideology in the Maghreb of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. An attempt to promote Berber as an alternative sacred language, symbolically opposed to Arabic as "the Maghrebian/Occidental language" (*al-lisān al-maġribī*) was accompanied by its temporary promotion as a courtly language. Admittedly, the traces of this experiment are relatively scarce, since the collapse of the Almohad Empire and the subsequent *damnatio memoriae* of its cultural and religious programme

Devereux, "Judgment of Two Languages: Muḥākamāt al-Lughatain by Mīr ʿAlī Shir Nawāʾī: Introduction, Translation and Notes," *Muslim World* 54 (1964), 270–287, and 55 (1965), 28–45. See Ernst Werner, *Die Geburt einer Großmacht: Die Osmanen (1407–1480)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966), on the occasional tension between Persian, considered the elite language, and Anatolian Turkic at the end of the Seljuk era in western Anatolia. Werner's study contains a sketchy presentation of the initial attempts to substitute Turkic for Persian and Arabic in the political and administrative areas of late Seljuk Anatolia in a period of political turmoil.

15 On the relations between Latin, French, and English in late medieval England, see Serge Lusignan, "Communication in the Later Plantagenet Empire: Latin and Anglo-Norman as Regal Languages," in *The Plantagenet Empire, 1259–1453*, ed. Peter Crooks et al. (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2016), 273–289.

16 See Éloïse Adde-Vomácka, *La chronique de Dalimil: Les débuts de l'historiographie nationale tchèque en langue vulgaire au XIV^e siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015), on the rise of Czech as a subsidiary courtly and written language in the shadow of German and under the general umbrella of Latin. This process took place amid rising tensions between the German-speaking minority and the Czech-speaking majority in Bohemia.

deprived this linguistic initiative of a future.[17] However, while we cannot deny that Arabic relegated the Berber language to the margins of the written tradition in the long-term, this process was neither unilinear nor total during the Middle Ages. Nor was it the case of a simple battle of Arabic against Berber. According to what can be deduced from its few surviving testimonies, Almohad courtly Berber was elaborated as a new medium under the strong lexical and stylistic influence of Arabic. Comparable to the case of Persian or later Turkic, the creation of a sophisticated literary medium occurred through a process of hybridization, in which Arabic served as a stylistic and lexical matrix, in accordance with its status as a reference language.

At the same time, the conventional idea that Latin's evolution from a dominant to a marginalized language in the political communication of the Christian West was essentially linear must be somewhat tempered. The Canadian researcher Serge Lusignan, for example, has demonstrated quite successfully that the progressive emergence of the king's (Parisian) French as the political language of the French royal administration during the fourteenth century was not a smooth process.[18] Indeed, after an initial period during which the proportion of written French documentation had steadily increased, the royal chancery suffered a total process of "re-Latinization." King John II (r. 1361–1365) even considered the (at that time) comparatively recent use of French for royal communication one of the factors of decay that led to the early French defeats in the Hundred Years' War. Consequently, he ordered the royal chancery to re-establish the Latin monopoly for writing royal letters and mandates. It was only after John II's death that the process of "Francization" began anew, resulting in the total elimination of Latin, but only at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The eastern parts of the classical Islamic sphere offer parallels to this notion that the use of the traditional idiom would have politically stabilizing effects, which, in this case also, resulted in a process of transitory linguistic restoration.[19]

However, my point here is more general. While the histories of the attempted promotion of Berber as an alternate, sacred, and courtly language in the Almohad Empire and of the ephemeral effort to re-Latinize the French chancery during the reign of John II diverge strongly, both suggest one thing. In the broader, almost infinite variety of sociolinguistic

17 On this point, see Mehdi Ghouirgate, *L'ordre almohade (1120–1269): Une nouvelle lecture anthropologique* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2014), 215–251; and Mehdi Ghouirgate, "Le berbère au Moyen Âge: Une culture linguistique en cours de reconstitution," *Annales HSS* 70 (2015), 577–605.

18 See Serge Lusignan, *La langue des rois au Moyen Âge: Le français en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), particularly 107–116.

19 On this point, see Richard N. Frye, "The Sāmānids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4. *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 136–161, particularly 144–145, which addresses hesitations to switch from Arabic to Persian as the chancery language in the period of the Samanid and Ghaznavid dynasties.

constellations that characterized the two enormous spheres during the medieval period, there is no lack of examples to challenge an overly strict teleological vision of the histories of either Arabic or Latin. The former represented far more than a language that was bound to prevent the emergence of other courtly languages west and south of the Turco-Iranian-speaking world. The latter, in turn, cannot be reduced to an idiom doomed to become obsolete as a consequence of the increasing use of the European vernacular languages for administrative and political purposes. Both Arabic and Latin could temporarily assume a defensive or offensive role, for example, when the Almohads promoted Berber to the detriment of Arabic, or when the French royal administration restored Latin as a chancery language in 1351. Even when both languages were confined to a prestigious but not pervasive role linked to the sacred sphere and learned controversies rather than to courtly and direct political use, they played a somewhat analogous role as media of supra-regional and even global linguistic communication. This we have seen in connection with late Seljuk Anatolia or fifteenth-century Transoxiana in the case of Arabic, fourteenth-century England and Bohemia in the case of Latin.

This suggests that we cannot reduce the comparative history of Latin and Arabic to the times and spaces in which they were most intensively spoken and/or held an almost total monopoly in the sphere of writing. On the contrary, their status as reference languages, in societies where other languages competed for intermediate positions as courtly prestigious languages, bears striking similarities, in particular because they remained the ultimate source of inspiration for the stylistic and semantic improvement of idioms emerging more or less rapidly as prestigious tools of communication. Elizabethan English, after all, is a combination of the triple heritage of Medieval Latin, Old French and Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English, just like Ottoman Turkish depends in almost equal parts on classical and post-classical Arabic, semantically and stylistically Arabized Persian, and Anatolian Turkic. Consequently, there is a lot to be said in favour of a new comparative history of Medieval Latin and Arabic that fully considers the role of both languages as symbolically and conceptually central in multilingual areas. A new comparative approach should neither exclude those areas during the classical Islamic period where Arabic ultimately disappeared or was marginalized as a spoken language, nor should it consider as secondary the history of late Medieval Latin as a communication tool that naturally competed in many fields with the written vernacular languages. A comparison of the two linguistic spheres must consider the various stages and different spaces of their respective histories, including a variety of sociolinguistic combinations between the two reference languages and other idioms.

1.2 Thinking the world through two languages: Limits and perspectives of a comparative study of Medieval Latin and Arabic as conceptual tools

We have seen that it is possible to establish a number of structural similarities between two linguistic histories that mainstream scholarship has tended to regard as essentially different. These similarities have more than just general implications, as they apply to a variety of sociolinguistic levels as well. In the classical Islamic sphere, for example, a tradition of grammatical excellence existed among scholars who were not native Arabic speakers but of Iranian origin. To some degree, this tradition echoes the relevance of non-Romance speakers among some important schools of grammar in the Medieval Latin sphere, such as the Danish grammarians of the Parisian "modist" school of the thirteenth century. The reason for this perhaps is that these literati were not native speakers of language varieties that displayed a strong genetic relation to either Arabic or Latin. This would have allowed them to analyse either Arabic or Latin from an external, more analytical perspective.[20]

At a broader level, processes of literarization in the shadow of the respective reference language also display interesting parallels. The literarization of modern languages in the Latin West did not begin with the Romance languages such as French, Occitan, or Italian, but rather with

20 On this grammatical current, see Martinus de Dacia, *Opera*, ed. Heinrich Roos (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1961); Irène Rosier, *La grammaire spéculative des Modistes* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1983); Costantino Marmo, *Semiotica e linguaggio nella scolastica: Parigi, Bologna, Erfurt 1270–1330. La semiotica dei modisti* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1994). On the Arabic grammarians of Persian origin in early and classical Islam, see Victor Danner, "Arabic Literature in Iran," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4. *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 566–594. For Zamaḫšarī, see Djamel Kouloughli, *Le résumé de la grammaire arabe par Zamaḫšarī* (Paris: ENS Éditions, 2007). Naturally, there were also numerous Arabic grammarians with some sort of Arabic as their native language, as well as Latin grammarians issuing from Romance-speaking milieus. We must assume, however, that the interference between dialects and classical Arabic, or between Romance languages (or, at an early stage, colloquial late Latin) and classical Latin, was bound to create some difficulties. In fact, the necessity to learn Latin or Arabic as a foreign language could actually prove useful from a conceptual point of view. See what seems a strange confirmation of this hypothesis *per absurdum* in a Franciscan correspondence edited by Michael Bihl and Arthur C. Moule, "De duabus epistolis Fratrum Minorum Tartariae Aquilonaris," *Archivum franciscanum historicum* 16 (1923), 89–112. While trying to convert Qipchak-speaking populations in the first half of the fourteenth century, a number of friars based in a Crimean convent complain that the Italian and French brothers are unable to learn the language correctly, whereas the Anglo-Saxons, Germans, and Hungarians have no particular problem. Could this be a testimony to the formation of good linguistic learning habits, facilitated by the initial effort made by speakers of non-Romance languages to master Latin and one or two Romance *linguae francae*? Such learning habits would stand in contrast to a more instinctive and less grammaticalized approach to Latin on the part of Romance speakers that later obstructed their systematic learning of foreign languages.

the Germanic or Celtic languages. This is comparable to the Arabic sphere, where—apart from certain sociolinguistic exceptions, such as Judaeo-Arabic,[21] and certain forms of mixed poetry—we do not find many early attempts to write dialectal Arabic regularly, but an early tradition of writing neo-Persian.[22] With regard to dialectal Arabic or the Romance languages, the strong etymological and linguistic interferences with classical Arabic or classical Latin certainly contributed to obstructing a clear distinction between the two varieties of language, thus delaying the emergence of written forms. This is why Italian speakers refrained from theorizing about the existence of Italian, as distinct from the Latin, until the twelfth century. When they finally created such a theoretical framework, they did not use the term "Italian," but used the term "volgare," meaning a vulgar variety of speech, just as an average Arab literate would speak of his Egyptian in the fourteenth century as his dialect or "loose language" (using the term *ʿāmmiyya*, or a similar one), not as a separate tongue.[23] This situation persisted in the Arabic-speaking sphere after the medieval period, leading to the actual imbalance between the neoclassical *ʿarabiyya mutawassiṭa* used for literary or press purposes and for highly formal levels of communication,

21 On Judaeo-Arabic, see Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic* (Jerusalem: Ben-zvi Institute, 1999 [reprint of 1965]); and Geoffrey Khan, "Judaeo-Arabic," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2:526–536.

22 The first texts of what we could consider plain Middle Arabic are texts of Judaeo-Arabic or Christian Arabic origin. A fully developed literature in Middle Arabic (understood as a permanent negotiation between Classical Arabic and some forms of local oral practices) in an Islamic context occurs later (see, e.g. Guo, *The Performing Arts in Medieval Islam*). However, the breadth of the definition of what can be considered Middle Arabic, i.e. every sort of compromise between an almost inaccessible classical perfect norm and the almost equally inaccessible writing of pure "dialectal Arabic," makes it difficult to draw a clear boundary between the two categories of classical and Middle Arabic.

23 In the special case of southern and central Sardinian dialects (classified separately from Italian by Romanists), the conservatism of the language left continental *literati* of the late Middle Ages under the impression that Sardinians did not speak a language akin to Italian, but rather an absurd form of Latin. This belief is expressed by Dante Alighieri, for example, in *De vulgari eloquentia* (written shortly after 1300), ed. Enrico Fenzi et al. (Rome: Salerno editrice, 2012), lib. I, cap. 11, 7, 82–83): "Sardos etiam, qui non Latii sunt sed Latiis associandi videntur, eiciamus, quoniam soli sine proprio vulgari esse videntur, gramaticam tanquam simie homines imitantes: nam domus nova et dominus meus locuntur." ["As for the Sardinians, who are not from Latium but must be associated with the people of Latium, let us cast them outside, because only they seem not to have a 'vulgar' language, for they parody the grammar (= Latin) just like apes: indeed they say *domus nova* and *dominus meus*"]. Interestingly, this difficulty of dissociating a conservative Romance language from Latin is reflected in some documentary choices. In the cartulary of the influential Italian abbey of Monte Cassino compiled at the beginning of the twelfth century, some linguistically mixed Sardinian-Latin documents are included in otherwise completely Latin documentation. See *Registrum Petri Diaconi (Montecassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia, reg. 3)*, ed. Jean-Marie Martin et al. (Rome: École française de Rome, 2015). The inclusion of such documents without alteration probably relates to some confusion over the status of the language; or, more correctly from a sociolinguistic point of view, relates to the copyist's assumption that the language employed was some form of Latin.

and the pervasiveness of dialectalized forms in everyday speech. Today, a blatant difference exists between the linguistic regimes of western and central European countries, where Latin has disappeared even as a stylistic reference and where almost every country elaborates and defends its national language, and the Arabic-speaking sphere, where the transformation of dialect-based languages into national tools of communication is met with fierce resistance at different levels. However, this observation of contemporary phenomena does not invalidate the fact that many similarities existed between the two linguistic spheres in earlier periods. Rather, it explains why scholarship has downplayed these similarities in accordance with a general tendency to separate the two histories.

A reasonable guess is that the sociolinguistic similarities characteristic of earlier periods mirror structural similarities between two hierarchically organized clusters of societies that were marked by restricted literacy. In these societies, the "high" written varieties of language were mastered by a caste of linguistic specialists who had no intention whatsoever of imposing their linguistic tools on the rest of the society. In these societies, it was an accepted fact that commoners spoke all sorts of local, vernacular languages. The ruling and intermediate elites, in turn, developed a variety of intermediate levels, for example, using a form of linguistic *koinē* for their poetic production such as the poetical Langue d'Oc in southern France and, temporarily, in large parts of the Iberian Peninsula and Italy, or standard poetical neo-Persian in the Turco–Iranian world. We would thus have had at the very least a three-level linguistic organization in these societies, with a permanent interaction between those three broad levels, the mechanisms of which could vary according to time and place. During the Middle Ages, there would have been symbolic and concrete rivalries between languages of the "low" and the intermediate levels. Latin and classical Arabic, however, would have occupied the most prestigious level. This would have gone uncontested, because these languages were so strongly associated with the respective holy books, as well as with the religious and social orders that went with them (Table 1.1).

This structural isomorphism leads us to another set of questions. Can we retrace some similarities between the linguistic ideas prevalent in these societies, despite their obvious differences, determined by the original histories of the two languages? We certainly cannot deny that certain conceptual differences existed. The Qurʾān, for example, was created or revealed only through Arabic, while part of the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, another in Greek, whereas Latin was but the third "official" vehicle of the text (only for the Roman Catholic Church, and leaving Aramaic aside). However, looking beyond such a fundamental difference, we can find some common tendencies to analyse the respective sacred texts. Latin theologians took advantage of the Bible's multilingualism to define a form of "biblical Latin," a linguistic variant interspersed with Hebrew and Greek, a sort of super-language that potentially included the three "languages of the Cross." Some Islamic theologians, in turn, asserted that, due to the

Table 1.1: Different levels of language-use in Latin Europe and the classical Islamic Sphere

	"Latin" Europe: Romance-speaking areas	**"Latin" Europe: German, Celtic, Slavic, Finno-Ugric areas**	**Classical Islamic sphere: (partly) Arabic-speaking areas**	**Classical Islamic sphere: Iranian, Turkic-speaking areas**
High level (sacralized language)	Latin	Latin	Arabic	Arabic
Intermediate level (elite languages in various occasions)	Late Latin, then Romance literarized languages (courtly uses of French, Occitan, etc.)	Literarized German languages, Romance languages adopted as literary and societal prestigious tools (Old French in England).	Various forms of Arabic, dynamic equilibrium between the tendency to formalization (towards classical Arabic) and the linguistic accommodation with regional uses	Courtly languages, standard classical neo-Persian; tendency to the elaboration of courtly Turkish. Competition between intermediate forms of languages
Common/ low level	Various Late Latin, thus Romance dialects. Fragmentation	Various vernacular languages, in their dialectal forms. Fragmentation	Various Arabic (and local non-Arabic) dialects. Lower impact of the classical Arabic. Fragmentation	Various non-Arabic (in the East, essentially Iranian and Turkic) dialects. Fragmentation

use of terms of Coptic, Greek, Persian, Ethiopian, and Syriac origin in the Qurʾān, the holy text, in fact, contained every language of the world.[24]

More generally, perhaps it is possible to say that—both in the medieval Latin and the Islamic(ate) spheres—linguistics were characterized by two complex and interfering trends: on the one hand, a trend towards scientific, logical approaches to the language; on the other hand, a mystical tendency which saw language as a magical tool providing access to the supernatural. Both trends resulted from the exceptional status given to classical Arabic and classical Latin in their respective spheres. As the languages of holy texts and the original written linguistic norms, they came to define what language as such actually is, and did so for many centuries to come.

A good example of the practical consequences resulting from these similarities is the common asymmetrical development of grammatical analysis of other languages that used Arabic and Latin grammars as their starting point. As a science, grammar had experienced a rigorous development in

24 On the statements and disputes among early scholars about the Qurʾān as a sacred text written in Arabic but containing mundane language, see Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, "Language and Style of the Qurʾān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 3, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 109–135, particularly 117–118.

the Arabic sphere since the eighth and above all in the ninth century. The medieval Latin West, in turn, inherited and developed a Latin grammatical science, which had been forged during Late Antiquity and further developed during the sixth century by Priscian.[25] In the late Middle Ages, new grammatical techniques and schools flourished in northern France, then in Italy and Germany. In spite of this, 99 per cent of the grammatical thought preserved in the Latin sphere is devoted to classical Latin until the end of the medieval period. The remaining one per cent, naturally, has attracted a lot of attention, since the first tentative descriptions of the grammar of Middle French, Occitan, Icelandic, or Old English represent precious monuments of the linguistic and literary history of Europe.[26] These texts have a common quality: whatever the language concerned, it is always strictly analysed through the grammatical categories of Latin. Late Middle French, for example, did not have declensions. Notwithstanding this, fifteenth-century grammars still present this language with reference to the six cases of Latin.

Robert Ermers made the (unfortunately still relatively neglected) observation that Muslim scholars also produced some tentative but brilliant grammatical analyses of non-Arabic languages during the late Middle Ages. In particular, Egyptian (or Egypt-based) Arabic-writing scholars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries developed a tradition of analysing Turkic—a consequence of the prominent role of Mamlūk elites in Egyptian and Syrian societies at the time. Some treatises of these masters have survived.[27] We also know that similar analyses have been attempted for Persian, even if the greater part of the manuscripts concerned seem to have been lost.[28] A closer look at such material reveals that the relationship between Arabic and Turkic as manifest in such treatises displays striking parallels to the relationship between Latin and late Middle French. In terms of percentages, the number of grammars of Turkic as opposed to the masses of Arabic grammars is as small as the number of late Middle French grammars as opposed to the masses of Latin grammars. Moreover,

25 On Priscian, see Petrus Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. Leo Reilly, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1993); *Priscien: Transmission et refondation de la grammaire, de l'antiquité aux modernes*, ed. Marc Baratin et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

26 For Occitan, see e.g.: John Henry Marshall, *The "Donatz proensals" of Uc faidit* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), and John Henry Marshall, *The Razos de trobar of Raimon Vidal and Associated Texts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); for (Middle) French see Pierre Swiggers, "Le Donait françois: la plus ancienne grammaire du français," *Revue des langues romanes* 89 (1985), 235–251; and Pierre Swiggers, "Les premières grammaires de vernaculaires gallo-romans face à la tradition latine: stratégies d'adaptation et de transformation," in *L'héritage des grammairiens latins de l'Antiquité aux Lumières*, ed. Irène Rosier (Paris: Société pour l'information grammaticale, 1988), 259–269.

27 Ermers, *Arabic Grammars of Turkic*, principally deals with the works of Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī on Turkic.

28 See Ermers, *Arabic Grammars of Turkic*, 25, for the (apparently lost) works of Abū Ḥayyān on Persian, Coptic, and Ethiopian. When one thinks of the quality of this grammar on Turkic, one cannot but regret bitterly the apparent loss of these other treatises.

the grammatical categories used to analyse Turkic are the same categories that are used to describe classical Arabic in traditional Arabic grammars as well. Thus, Arabic grammarians analysed Turkic according to the grammatical categories invented for classical Arabic, just as Latin grammarians subjected late Medieval French to the system of Latin declension. These parallels suggest that we cannot oppose a Latin sphere radically open to other languages to an Arabic sphere radically closed to other languages at a conceptual level. Instead, we are confronted with two linguistic spheres, which combined the widespread use of a variety of languages with a conceptual predominance of a high-standard language, with permanent consequences for the process of linguistic conceptualization.

In the wake of the Mongol conquests, parallel attempts to create impressive polyglot dictionaries and linguistic tools in both cultural spheres offer yet another example of similar potentialities, produced this time by similar geopolitical and sociolinguistic impulses. In both cases, the conceptual predominance of Latin and Arabic overshadowed attempts to develop full linguistic programmes. The *Codex Cumanicus*, a complex working tool for "Latin" travellers and preachers venturing into Mongol Inner Asia, contains a trilingual Latin–Persian–Qipchak Turkic lexicon, as well as other (generally Latin, but also German) tools for learning Qipchak Turkic.[29] In some ways, it mirrors the almost contemporary Rasūlid Hexaglott, a six-columned lexicon created under the auspices of the Yemenite sultan al-Malik al-Afḍal (r. 764–778/1363–1377) in the second half of the fourteenth century. This complex artefact contains a copious list of terms in six languages: Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Mongol, and Armenian.[30] It was part of a set of linguistic books created under the patronage of al-Malik al-Afḍal, most of which concerned merely Arabic.[31] In the two cases, the linguistic aperture vis-à-vis other spheres had been accelerated by geopolitical circumstances, that is, the *pax Mongolica* and its aftermath. Notwithstanding these new Eurasian linguistic horizons, the linguistic conceptualizations that form the basis of both works continue to reflect the unavoidable predominance of the two reference languages of Latin and Arabic.

---

29 On the *Codex Cumanicus*, see the pioneering edition *Codex Cumanicus bibliothecae ad templum Divi Marci Venetiarum*, ed. Geza Kuun (Budapest: Editio scientifica Academiae Hungariae, 1880), with an interesting loop-effect: as his name suggests, Geza Kuun was a Hungarian of possible Cuman descent. Also see *Codex Cumanicus: Édition diplomatique avec Fac-Similés*, ed. Vladimir Drimba (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2000); and *Il codice cumanico e il suo mondo*, ed. Felicitas Schmieder and Peter Schreiner (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e di letteratura, 2005).

30 On the Hexaglott, see the edition *The King's Dictionary: The Rasūlid Hexaglot*, ed. Peter B. Golden (Leiden: Brill, 2000), with new details provided in Éric Vallet, "La grammaire du monde: Langues et pouvoir en Arabie occidentale à l'âge mongol," *Annales HSS* 70 (2015), 637–664.

31 For an assessment of his production, see *The King's Dictionary*. For a court treatise with some examples of linguistic/stylistic anecdotes concerning Arabic, see Renato Traini, *Uno "specchio per principi" yemenita: la nuzhat aẓ-ẓurafāʾ wa-tuḥfat al-ḫulafāʾ del sultano Rasūlide al-Malik al-Afḍal (m. 778/1377)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei lincei, 2005).

Such an effort to register similar intellectual tendencies linked to comparable sociolinguistic contexts can yet lead to other discoveries in a broad range of fields. This is the case, for example, with the more classical lexicography, that is, the lexicography of the most famous unilingual lexicons of the two spheres.

One of the most important Arabic medieval lexicons is undoubtedly the *Qāmūs al-Muḥīt* of al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415).[32] This lexicon, like many others, is organized around roots, that is, the consonant stemmata of individual lexemes. Each entry contains dozens to hundreds of words, based on the (predominantly) triliteral root system characteristic of the Semitic languages. Medieval lexicographers thus classified entries of semantically very different words, such as *fāris* (the Persian), *fāris* (the horseman), and *fāris* (the lion), among many other words using the root *fāʾ–rāʾ–sīn*, all under the same section. Moreover, they tried to explain the derivation of these terms from the same root with etymological creativity.[33] At first glance, this seems to provide evidence for the relativistic idea that the structure of a language predetermines the ideas, rhetoric, and to some extent, the uses that people make of it—for the triliteral root system uncontestably encourages this trend. What kind of results will we obtain, however, if we compare the gigantic entries characteristic of Medieval Arabic lexicons to the organization of a classical lexicon of Medieval Latin, such as the *Derivationes* of Uguccione da Pisa (d. 1210)? In the second half of the twelfth century, this Italian scholar created a lexicon that was to become one the most popular tools of the late Middle Ages. The bulk of its entries are strangely akin in their dimensions to the multiple-word entries of the *Qāmūs*. In this lexicon, words are not analysed separately, but are regrouped according to their supposed etymological affinities, for example, *augere* (augment), *augustus* (emperor), *augur* (augur), *avis* (bird), and so on. Just like al-Fīrūzābādī, Uguccione da Pisa makes an effort to justify these semantic constellations with the help of sophisticated etymological reasoning.[34] We could conclude that traditional societies displayed a general tendency to understand the links between words, their forms, and their definitions in terms of broad semantic clouds, rather than from strictly analytical perspectives. The comparison between the *Qāmūs* and the *Derivationes* also seems useful to relativize the idea that the basic structure of the language represents the only determinant factor that conditioned linguistic thought. To be sure, the internal

32 On the place of the *Qāmūs* in classical and post-classical Arabic lexicography, see John A. Haywood, "Arabic Lexicography," in *Wörterbücher—Dictionaries—Dictionnaires: Ein internationales Handbuch zur Lexikographie—An International Encyclopediae of Lexicography—Encyclopédie internationale de lexicographie*, ed. Franz Joseph Hausmann et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), vol. 3, 2438–2447.

33 In connection with the root *fāʾ–rāʾ–sīn*, see the complex reasoning in al-Fīrūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, ed. Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿArqasūsī (Damascus: Maktabat al-risāla, 1998), 562–563, to justify the homonymy between *fāris* ("lion") and *fāris* ("gentleman").

34 Uguccione da Pisa, *Derivationes*, ed. Enzo Cecchini, 2 vols. (Florence: Galluzzo, 2004).

structure of classical Arabic and its modes of derivations incited scholars to arrange words with different meanings but the same triliteral root into groups—a tendency that has been prolonged in numerous modern dictionaries. But the detailed logic of construction that is characteristic of these traditional lexicons certainly also had to do with traditional modes of thinking—the same modes of thinking that were more or less reflected in the "etymological lexicons" of the late Latin Middle Ages. Thus, I believe that the linguistic structure of the languages examined here constantly interfered with the needs of a traditional society boasting a caste of linguistic specialists who controlled linguistic thought. The latter were not only highly educated in the art of writing, but also—both in the Arabic as in the Latin sphere—strongly dependent on very similar processes of learning and memorizing.

1.3 Language in society (I): On some mnemonic, metrical, and rhythmical tools and the logics of medieval teaching

Indeed, one of the apparently original facts of certain medieval Arabic lexicons is that they are constructed according to the last consonants of the roots of the words, rather than to the first one. What, from a modern point of view, would seem to be an aberration must have been a very useful feature in a traditional society, which used the poetic medium in a considerable amount of its textual production. Since classical Arabic poetry combines a metrical system broadly akin to the quantitative system of Latin metres[35] with the systematic presence of rhymes, scholars, whether just starting out or established, had some need for a lexicon organized according to the endings of the words to be retrieved.[36]

The poetic medium was in actual fact essential to the learning processes in both cultural spheres. This led to the creation of numerous versified teaching tools. The study of these didactic versified manuals, as they were used in the Latin sphere, has long been neglected in medievalist scholarship, because positivist researchers despised them as pedagogical aberrations. The situation has improved notably in recent years,[37] but there is

35 On this system see e.g. Sandro Boldrini, *La prosodia e la metrica dei Romani* (Rome: Carocci, 1992).

36 On Arabic metrics in early and classical times, see Bruno Paoli, *De la théorie à l'usage: Essai de reconstitution du système de la métrique arabe ancienne* (Damascus: Institut français du Proche Orient, 2008).

37 On this matter, see the important article by Vivien Law, "Why Write a Verse Grammar," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 9 (1999), 46–76. For a very short selection of various metrical Latin pedagogical treatises of the thirteenth century recently edited or studied, see Elsa Marguin-Hamon, *L'Ars lectoria Ecclesie de Jean de Garlande: Une grammaire versifiée du XIII^e siècle et ses gloses* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003). This is a study on a metrical treatise of liturgical reading, to be compared with the Arabic arts of psalmody. Moreover, see Rüdiger Lorenz, *Summa Iovis: Studien zu Text und Textgebrauch eines mittelalterlichen Lehrgedichts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), the study of a metrical treatise on the writing of prose letters.

still much to do in this area. As every specialist in Arabic traditional literacy knows, an entire set of counterparts—functional and structural—of these Latin instruments exists in the medieval and early modern literary culture of the Arabic sphere. The hypothesis that one culture borrowed them from the other to enhance the significance of this similarity is not required.

In the thirteenth century, famous Latin versified grammars such as the *Graecismus* of Eberhard of Béthune (d. ca. 1212)[38] find a parallel in the *Alfiyya* of the Andalusī scholar Ibn Malik (d. 672/1274).[39] On both shores of the Mediterranean, we encounter versified medical treatises, or rather introductory lessons to university medicine. The poem *Urǧūza fī l-ṭibb* by Ibn Sīnā/Avicenna (d. 428/1037), composed in the *raǧaz* metre and later translated into Latin under the poetic title of the *Canticle of Avicenna*, provides one example,[40] the *Regimen sanitatis* of the Salerno school, composed in Latin hexameters, another.[41] There are some apparent limits to these parallel manifestations of comparable linguistic phenomena. In the Latin West, for example, a metrical abstract of the Bible existed, the so-called *Summarium Bibliae*,[42] whereas I do not know of a versified abstract of the Qurʾān. However, this apparent asymmetry has a functional cause. The Latin Bible, being far longer than the Qurʾān, was never entirely committed to memory. Nevertheless, memorizing sections of it was part of the clerk's average curriculum. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the Book of Psalms, i.e. the section of the Bible that the majority of clerks would have already memorized during their schooling, is the only portion of the Bible that is not contained in the verses of the *Summarium Bibliae*.

We should not classify such similarities as superficial. The same writing and reading processes often form part of an entire textual cycle. Thus, the versified grammars did not only use the most common metrical form—the Latin hexameter in one case, the Arabic *raǧaz* metre in the other.[43] We also notice the same tendency to use these texts as mnemonic support for

See also Alexander de Villa-Dei, *Das Doctrinale des Alexander de Villa-Dei*, ed. Dietrich Reichling (Berlin: A. Hoffmann, 1893, reprint Aalen, 1974), which represents a classical grammatical and lexical manual.

38 On the *Graecismus*, see Anne Grondeux, *Le Graecismus d'Évrard de Béthune à travers ses gloses: Entre grammaire positive et grammaire spéculative du XIII^e^ au XV^e^ siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

39 On the *Alfiyya*, see Antoine Sylvestre de Sacy's pioneering work in Ibn Mālik, *Alfiyya* [= *Alfiyya ou la quintessence de la grammaire arabe: ouvrage de Djémal eddin Mohammed connu sous le nom d'Ebn Malec*], ed. Antoine Sylvestre de Sacy (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1833).

40 See the Arabic-Latin edition in al-Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Sīnā, *Urjūza fī ṭ-Ṭibb—Cantica Avicennae. Texte arabe, traduction française, traduction latine du XIII^e^ siecle avec introductions, notes et index*, ed. Henri Jahier and Abdelkader Noureddine (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956).

41 On the *Regimen sanitatis*, see *Flos medicine (regimen sanitatis salernitanum)*, ed. Virginia de Frutos González (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2010).

42 On this central Latin mnemonic tool, understudied despite its expansive diffusion, see Lucie Doležalová, "*Biblia quasi in saculo: Sumarium Biblie* and Other Medieval Bible Mnemonics," *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 56 (2007), 5–35.

43 On the *raǧaz*, see Jaakko Hämeen-Antilla, "Rajaz," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 32–37.

broader, ever-growing commentaries. Just as the *Graecismus* served as an anchor for a textual web of glosses and notes that proliferated during the fourteenth century, the *Alfiyya* saw the development of a thicket of commentaries and sub-commentaries. These similarities and parallels form an integral part of so many types of knowledge characteristic of the Arabic and Latin Middle Ages that they deserve further analysis.

1.4 Language in society (II): *ʿilm al-inšāʾ* and *ars dictaminis*

I would now like to discuss briefly the existence of another "structural" similarity between the medieval Latin and Arabic literary cultures, which so far has received only partial recognition in medievalist scholarship; I allude to the importance of the two arts of creating musicalized, ornate prose. They are part of the global set of writing techniques mastered in both literary cultures, and are known respectively as *ars dictaminis* and *ʿilm al-inšāʾ*.

Numerous forms of rhythmical prose existed during the Latin Middle Ages. The system of political, solemn, epistolary Latin communication of the late Middle Ages, for example, was dominated by a set of writing techniques known as *ars dictaminis*. This roughly translates as the "art of composition," with connotations quite similar to the Arabic term *ʿilm al-inšāʾ*, which roughly translates as "the science of [literary] production."[44] The principal characteristic of this Latin writing style is the use of a set of rhythmical ornamentations called *cursus rhythmicus*. The presence of these rhythmical embellishments was mandatory before every minor or major pause of the phrase.[45] These ornaments are found in an enormous num-

44 On *Ars dictaminis*, see Martin Camargo, *Ars dictaminis ars dictandi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991); and Martin Camargo, ed., *Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition: Five English "Artes dictandi" and their Tradition* (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton Press, 1995); Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk, "Répertoire chronologique des théories de l'art d'écrire en prose (milieu du XI^{e} s.–années 1230). Auteur, œuvre(s), inc., édition(s) ou manuscrit(s)," *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi* 64 (2006), 193–239. See also Benoît Grévin and Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk, eds, *Le dictamen dans tous ses états: Perspectives de recherche sur la théorie et la pratique de l'ars dictaminis (XI^{e}–XV^{e} siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), which contains an extensive and updated bibliography.

45 The theory and the use of the *cursus* was reactivated at the papal chancery after a long period of relative neglect. From there it was diffused in a semi-standardized form to every important European laical or ecclesiastical chancery from the twelfth century onwards. See Gudrun Lindholm, *Studien zum mittellateinischen Prosarhythmus: Seine Entwicklung und sein Abklingen in der Briefliteratur Italiens* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1963); Tore Janson, *Prose Rhythm in Medieval Latin from the 9th to the 13th Century* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975); Benoît Grévin, "L'empire d'une forme: Réflexions sur la place du cursus rythmique dans les pratiques d'écriture européennes à l'automne du Moyen Âge (XIII^{e}–XV^{e} siècle)," in *Parva pro magnis munera: Études de littérature tardo-antique et médiévale offertes à François Dolbeau par ses élèves*, ed. Monique Goullet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 857–881; Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk, "La théorisation progressive du cursus et sa terminologie entre le XI^{e} et la fin du XIV^{e} siècle," *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi* 73 (2015), 179–259.

ber of average or sophisticated Latin prose texts from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. Since solemn political writings were composed according to these techniques, these rhythmical effects were not limited strictly to the literary field, but also affected a vast array of texts, from law via epistolary communication to diplomas and official historiography.[46]

The example presented below is taken from a banal epistle written in the papal chancery during the first half of the thirteenth century. The passages in italics show the sequences that were constructed according to rhythmical schemes; the accents indicate the stressed syllables that musicalized these segment-endings; *velox*, *tardus*, and *planus* are the respective names of the rhythmical combinations thus created. The translation gives insight into the topic of the text, but is not really relevant for the discussion, since every possible theme could be the object of similar "musicalizing" processes.

> Cur Florentie *tráxeris tantam móram*[velox] gravans *ecclésias sine cáusa*[velox], *scíre non póssumus*[tardus] nec id *grátum habémus*[planus]. Quare tibi presentium *tenóre mandámus*[planus], quatenus ad nos visis *preséntibus revertáris*[velox].[47]
>
> Why do you have to stay so long in Florence and why do you burden the churches without good reasons, that is what we can neither know, nor approve! Consequently, according to the tenor of the present letters, we order you, as soon as you will have read them, to come back to us!

46 For the most important letter collections, which were formalized according to this technique and served as a model for papal and royal propaganda during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Matthias Thumser, "Les grandes collections de lettres de la curie pontificale au XIII[e] siècle: Naissance, structure, édition," in *Le dictamen dans tous ses états: Perspectives de recherche sur la théorie et la pratique de l'ars dictaminis (XI[e]–XV[e] siècles)*, ed. Benoît Grévin and Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk (Bibliothèque d'histoire culturelle du Moyen Âge 16) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 209–241. For an application of the same technique to ordinary administrative royal correspondence, see *Il registro della cancelleria di Federico II del 1239–1240*, ed. Cristina Carbonetti Venditelli, 2 vols. (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano, 2002), the edition of a chancery register that covers six months of administrative mandates in the Kingdom of Sicily under Frederick II. For its literary use see e.g. the famous essay on the love of books *Philobiblon*, written in rhythmical prose by Richard of Bury: *The Philobiblon of Richard de Bury*, ed. Ernest C. Thomas (London: Paul Kegan, Trench and Co, 1888).

47 Thomas of Capua, "*Summa dictaminis*," in *Die Briefsammlung des Thomas von Capua: Aus den nachgelassenen Unterlagen von Emmy Heller und Hans Martin Schaller*, ed. Matthias Thumser and Jakob Frohmann (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 2011) http://www.mgh.de/fileadmin/Downloads/pdf/Thomas_von_Capua.pdf. [Accessed October 24, 2017], Book I, chapter 62, 46. This collection regroups letters written in the name of various popes from the thirteenth century, as well as the personal correspondence of some members of the papal chancery. It has been selected as an example here because, from the 1270s onwards, it became one of the major formularies for political correspondence in the Latin West.

However, despite its ubiquity, the mechanisms of composing the rhythmical prose of *ars dictaminis* are familiar only to a handful of specialists of Medieval Latin. Their study represents a very small part of the actual scholarship on medieval textual history. To the imperial, royal, or papal notaries, to the clerks and administrators of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, these small ornaments signified a lot more than just simple rhetoric. Some of them even regarded these techniques of formalization as indispensable tools that reflected the harmony of the universe. Consequently, they credited these rhythms with a number of highly emotional, almost magical powers.[48]

Comparing this Latin art of composition with the sociolinguistic and stylistic cultures of the classical Islamic sphere might enhance our understanding of both the uses and social implications of these styles. The Arabic counterpart of *ars dictaminis*, the so-called *ʿilm al-inšāʾ*, is far better known and studied. This "science of composition" was taught to the Arabic-writing scribe (*kātib*) enabling him to write every sort of political or personal prose texts in a lavish, rhythmical, and rhymed prose.[49] Obviously there are significant differences between *ars dictaminis* and *ʿilm al-inšāʾ*, mainly because the ornamentations of *ʿilm al-inšāʾ* require not only the use of rhythm, but above all of rhyme (in the form of *sağʿ*). Rhyme is a pervasive feature of classical Arabic poetry and clearly plays an important role in the Qurʾān.[50] In classical Latin poetry, by contrast, it was generally absent, as it was from the Latin version of the Bible. Consequently, rhyme had not conditioned the development of sophisticated Latin prose to the same degree, even though rhyme had acquired some importance in Medieval Latin, in a complex process of interaction between vernacular and Latin poetry. An extract from a letter of submission (*bayʿa*), which was addressed to the caliph of Baghdad and composed for the ephemeral ruler of a province of the Spanish Levante by an Andalusī stylist during the first half of the thirteenth century, provides an example of the classical rhyme (and rhythm) effects of a solemn document composed according to the science of *ʿinšāʾ*.[51] While

48 On this question, see the first pages of one classical *ars dictandi* (theoretical treaty of *ars dictaminis*), the *Candelabrum* of Bene of Florence (1225), that is, Bene Florentini, *Candelabrum*, ed. Gian Carlo Alessio (Padua: Antenore, 1983), and, above all, the short treatise of Giovanni del Virgilio, edited in Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Un '*ars dictaminis*' di Giovanni del Virgilio," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 4 (1961), 181–200. According to this treatise, the choice of appropriate rhythmical ornaments "moves the soul" of the auditor.

49 For an introduction that remains valid and contains a substantial but dated bibliography on *ʿilm al-inšaʾ*, see H. R. Roemer, "Inshāʾ," in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1273–1276. On epistolography, one of the major fields of application, see the bibliography in Werner Diem, "Arabic Letters in Pre-Modern Times: A Survey with Commented Selected Bibliographies," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 62, no. 3 (2008), 843–883.

50 On the *sağʿ* in the Qurʾān, see Devin J. Stewart, "Sajʿ in the Qurʾān: Prosody and Structure," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21 (1990), 101–139.

51 Quoted from Werner Diem, *Ehrendes Kleid und ehrendes Wort: Studien zu tašrīf in mamlūkischer und vormamlūkischer Zeit* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), 120; extracted from Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Qalqašandī, *Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā fī ṣināʿat al-inšāʾ*,

the passages directly conditioned by the rhythmic and rhyming effects are proportionally less extensive than the rhythmic sections of the papal missive, the redoubling effect of the two-, three- or even four-syllable rhyming sequences is striking in musical terms. The passages in bold characters show those parts of the text that seek to create rhymed and rhythmical parallelisms):

> Wa-ʿadda ilā s-sulṭāni fulānini l-mušāri ilayhi min tašrīfi d-dīwāni l-ʿazīzi n-nabawīyi mā wasamahu mina l-faḫāri bi-aǧalli ***wasmih*** / wa-qalladahu s-sayfa ṣ-ṣārima wa-sammāhu ***bi-smih*** // fa-talāqā s-sayfāni l-maḍrūbu ***wa-l-ḍārib*** / wa-štabaha l-wasfāni l-māḍī ***wa-l-qāḍib***. Wa-barazat tilka l-ḫilaʿu fa-byaḍḍa waǧhu l-islāmi ***min sawādihā*** / wa-wuḍiʾa l-kitābu fa-kādati l-manābiru tasʿā ilayhi šawqan ***min aʿwādihā***.[52]
>
> He [the caliph] has transmitted to the Sultan "NN," the elected, the honour/cloth-gift of the powerful and prophetical dīwān, an honour that has impressed on him the pride of the most exalted mark, and he has vested him with the edged sword when he named him with a name, so as to bind the two sabres, the one that is struck and the one that strikes, thus combining the two qualities of penetration and edge. And when the gift-clothes appeared, the face of Islam whitened under their darkness, and when the writing was bestowed, one could have said that the minbar-chairs were running toward it, such was the impulse of their wood.[53]

Apart from the fact that they accorded a different role to rhyme, we can postulate that the two rhetorical techniques broadly served the same purposes. They were employed to magnify the linguistic liturgies of medieval power and enhance its communication. They were supposed to enable

---

14 vols., ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1987), vol. 9, 310. Diem's selection of ceremonious texts—a genre of the *tašrīf*, letters that accompany cloth presents—are good examples of an official, courtly *inšāʾ*. They are generally of *Mašriqī* origin, although the text quoted here is an exception. For *Maġribī* usages of political *inšāʾ*, see the *taqdīm* letters in Almohad formularies, such as those edited in Pascal Buresi and Hicham el Aallaoui, *Gouverner l'empire: La nomination des fonctionnaires provinciaux dans l'empire almohade, Maghreb, 1224–1269: manuscrit 4752 de la Ḥasaniyya de Rabat contenant 77 taqdīm-s "nominations"* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2013); English version: *Governing the Empire: Provincial Administration in the Almohad Caliphate (1224–1269): Critical Edition, Translation, and Study of Manuscript 4752 of the Ḥasaniyya Library in Rabat Containing 77 Taqādīm ("Appointments")* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). One can observe the same tendency that prevails in Western Latin culture: the *inšāʾ* is not restricted to a literary (or to a reputedly non-literary) genre. It is used in the literature of the *maqāmāt*, as well as in the official correspondences of sovereigns, or in epistolary exchanges among literati; it transcends textual boundaries.

52 Diem, *Ehrendes Kleid und ehrendes Wort*, 120.

53 This translation, not really necessary since every kind of rhythmic prose could serve as an example, is only tentative, given that the text is full of word play.

scribes and professional writers to make full use of their memorized poetic knowledge, even as they wrote prose documents. Finally, they were intended to satisfy a general aesthetic of writing which could not conceive of a text written without some musical effect.

In the case of this writing technique, as with many others, comparing the two literary spheres helps us recall more effectively that the textual cultures of pre-modern times were as different from ours now as they were similar to each other then. Today, we no longer possess an intermediate level between poetry and purely administrative, political, or epistolary prose. In the Islamic or Latin Middle Ages, however, such an intermediate level not only existed but was ubiquitous: rhymed or rhythmical prose texts were a prevalent feature of literary and also political and administrative communications, and the rhetorical techniques invented to compose such texts inside the linguistic frame of Latin and Arab were progressively transposed into vernacular languages such as, for example, German, Italian, Persian, or Turkic.[54]

1.5 Conclusion

The ornate prose systems of the Latin and Arabic Middle Ages are certainly not a popular research theme—outside of a handful of specialists obsessed with stylistic questions, few scholars care to explore their intricacies.[55] However, more than one researcher has noticed the similarities

54 Taking a comparative perspective, an additional aspect of the comparison between *inšāʾ* and *ars dictaminis* seems relevant: the two stylistic concepts originated in Arabic and Latin writing cultures, but they were tentatively adapted to other languages. For a good example of Arabo-Persian *inšāʾ* used in princely political communication, see David Durand-Guédy, "Diplomatic Practice in Salğūq Iran: A Preliminary Study Based on Nine Letters about Saladin's Campaign in Mesopotamia," *Oriente Moderno*, new series 88, no. 2 (2008), 271–296. For the first attempts at Italianization of *ars dictaminis*, see e.g. Matteo dei Libri, *Arringhe*, ed. Eleonora Vincenti (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1974). The work contains models of political speeches formulated in the northern Italian communes by the notary Matteo dei Libri in around 1260. Partly due to the differences of accentuation between Latin and many vernacular languages, Western Christian scholars encountered various difficulties when they tried to replicate the schemes of *ars dictaminis* and to adapt them to the vernacular languages. Such difficulties are a testimony to the limits of a structural, isomorphic comparison, when it collides with an evolutionistic approach.

55 There certainly is an imbalance between Islamic (particularly, but not only Arabic) and Western Latin studies. In Islamic studies, *inšāʾ* is perhaps not always admired—for its association with the decadence of Arabic, see Kouloughli, *L'arabe*, 93–94. However, it is relatively well-known as an important device of traditional writing practices, even among historians who are not particularly interested in the theme. In Western Latin studies, in turn, the study of *ars dictaminis* and the rhythmical ornamentation of medieval Latin prose is the reserve of a handful of specialists. An interest in conceptualizing political or annalistic prose practice from this angle is lacking almost everywhere, a discrepancy that can be explained by the continuity of this writing practice in Arabic letters into the nineteenth century, as opposed to the collapse and the oblivion of the

between *dictamen* and *inšāʾ*. In one case at least, it has led the scholar George Makdisi to postulate that the development of these writing techniques in the Latin world depended on the importation of Arabic writing techniques via Sicily and Italy.[56] Makdisi was one of the forerunners of the "post-colonial" variant of medieval studies to which I briefly alluded in the introduction to this chapter. Makdisi's hypotheses are probably founded on an error: he equated the very striking structural similarities of numerous textual forms and cultural processes in the medieval Latin and Arabic spheres with a direct causal relationship between the two phenomena. It is undeniable that the Latin West was influenced in some important ways by Arabic knowledge, particularly in the spheres of philosophy and the sciences. However, on a mere formal linguistic level, we do not have to postulate as such that Latin versified grammars or Latin rhythmical prose texts were formally dependent on their Arabic equivalents.[57] The history of these linguistic and literary universes, rather, implies that pre-existing tools were adapted to common needs, with the result that similar causes led to similar effects. For example, the two metres most commonly used

---

dictamen in the Western world after 1500. More broadly, this raises the question of what impact the apparent continuity between classical and written modern Arabic, on the one hand, and the almost total discontinuity between Medieval Latin and the vernacular modern languages, on the other, has had on the form assumed by medievalist textual studies during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Scholars interested in the older Latin written culture do not seem to have developed the same empathy with their sources as scholars interested in the older Arabic written culture, with the benefits, but also the disadvantages of a greater estrangement.

56 George Makdisi, "*Ars dictaminis* and Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West," *Revue des études islamiques* 55/57 (1987–1989), 293–309.

57 Not much has been done towards examining the generic and formal differences between those parts of Arabic knowledge and textual culture that were translated into Latin in the medieval period—such as the works on medicine, philosophy, magic, and the Qurʾān—and the far more extensive parts that remained almost completely untranslated—such as poetry, historiography, local historiographical production, *maqāmāt*, etc. Medievalist scholarship seems to have taken for granted that the more literary sort of production was too specific and perhaps stylistically too difficult to be understood outside its own cultural context of production and consumption, and thus less likely to be fit for translation into Latin. This could have been true at a general level. However, medievalist scholarship failed to draw the obvious conclusion. Since it is obvious that texts more heavily concerned with rhetoric and metrical devices were less susceptible to being translated, with the exception of the Qurʾān, the lack of translations in this textual field also implies a lack of strong interferences between the literary tools of formalization characteristic of classical Arabic and their Latin equivalents. That is not to say that, in some geographical areas of potential interaction, *some* Islamic literary texts could have influenced the emergence of *some* Latin-Christian counterparts. On this question, consider the problem of the possible interference of popular and hybrid Andalusī poetry on the birth of Romance poetry. It is summarized by Laura Minervini, "La poesia ispano-araba e la tradizione lirica romanza: Una questione aperta," in *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*. Part 3: *Le culture circostanti*, vol. 2*: La cultura arabo-islamica*, ed. Mario Capaldo (Rome: Salerno editrice, 2003), 705–723. Nevertheless, these possible formal interferences concerned neither the bulk of highly formalized Arabic nor highly formalized Latin literature.

to create the versified didactic manuals, the dactylic hexameter and the *raǧaz*, have a very long, independent history in the two literary cultures, which relate to remote antiquity.[58] Rather than a direct cultural transfer from one area to the other, the importance of poetry as a teaching tool of the classical language, be it Latin or Arabic, explains why similar matters, such as grammar or medicine, were taught in a similar way.[59]

I am aware that a structural comparison can go too far and that there is the risk of over-stressing the similarities. In order to strike the correct balance between structural equivalences and concrete differences in the textual cultures of Latin Europe and medieval Islam, we must be able to underscore the differences too. The same sociolinguistic potentialities were certainly not bound to develop in an identical way at every level of textual production, even if many similarities are worth investigating. I believe, however, that a fresh start in the investigation of the structural affinities between the two textual cultures would contribute not only to anthropologists' efforts to define what traditional literacy and traditional writing are, but also help to highlight aspects of these ancient cultures

58 On *raǧaz*, see Hämeen-Antilla, "Rajaz." On the dactylic hexameter, see Boldrini, *La prosodia e la metrica dei Romani*.

59 In specific cases, the comparative history based on structural affinities and the history of entanglements (translations, etc.) between Arabic and Latin can intersect. See e.g. the existence of numerous medical poetic Latin treatises composed in Italy (school of Salerno) or in France (*studium* of Montpellier) in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, and the concomitant translation into Latin of the metrical *Urǧuza fī l-ṭibb* of Ibn Sīnā. Even in such a case, it seems that we must resist the temptation to attribute the surge of the Latin genre to the attention accorded to putative Arabic models. The Latin translation of Ibn Sīnā's text (eds. Jahier and Noureddine) was composed during the late thirteenth century, after a variety of independent poetic Latin treatises on medicine had already been written. Gilles de Corbeil provides an example at the beginning of the thirteenth century. See Camille Viellard, *Gilles de Corbeil, médecin de Philippe Auguste et chanoine de Notre-Dame, 1140–1224* (Paris: Champion, 1909); and now Gilles de Corbeil, *Liber de virtutibus et laudibus compositorum medicaminum*, ed. Mireille Ausécache (Florence: Sismel, 2017). The idea of using the metrical Latin form was probably more efficiently stimulated by the surge of all sorts of pedagogical Latin metrical treaties at this time, rather than by the specific influence of the *Urǧuza fī l-ṭibb*, which, to my knowledge, was the only Islamic metrical text translated into Latin during the Middle Ages, for obvious medical reasons. However, such connections must be examined accurately in order to gauge the possibility that structural similarities could, in some cases, have resulted from more or less punctual formal influences. For my part, I remain persuaded that the complexity of the cultural foundations of the prosody and stylistics of classical Arabic and classical Latin exclude the possibility that a profound formal influence (such as the imitation of metrical or specific rhythmical ornaments) could have taken place between the two spheres at this level (classical Arabic towards sophisticated Latin). A more direct influence, at lower stylistic levels (Arabic popular or intermediate poetry towards Romance popular poetry) remains more probable, or at least plausible. However, the question remains eminently complex, since we must also take other forms of influence between the two languages into account. The semantic impact of Arabic on the languages of the Iberian Peninsula, for example, necessarily had some influence on a part of the Latin vocabulary there, even if it was relatively limited, if compared with the impact of Arabic on Castilian or Portuguese. However, this problem leads us away from the issue of a structural comparison.

that—for cultural, modern reasons—are not always clearly perceived by current research. We could thus help to re-valorize ancient ideas, such as the multilingual complexity of the Qurʾān, highlighted by some early Muslim scholars, by comparing them with the Latin analysis of the multilingual lexicon of the Bible. Reciprocally, we could assist scholars of Latin philology to grasp the importance of the Latin *ars dictaminis* and musicalized prose with the help of its structural, better studied Arabic equivalent, *ʿilm al-inšāʾ*. Without devaluing the interest of other, more entangled narrations, a comparative analysis of Arabic and Latin textual cultures could thus serve as a sort of corrective lens that helps to sharpen our understanding of both the Latin and Arabic textual histories.