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4. Between Arabic and Latin in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy

4.1 Introduction: A peculiar position in the middle of the "corrupting sea"

In the study of interaction between Arabic and Latin during the Middle Ages, the importance of certain periods and areas stands out. Three major regions of interaction are the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, and the parts of Palestine and Syria ruled by Frankish crusaders during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The common link between these regions is that they were all part of a broader Mediterranean space situated at the frontier of the Arabic- and Latin/Romance-speaking spheres, and thus bound to be at the epicentre of, or at least the starting point for some major interaction between the two languages. More specifically, all of them were strongholds of Christian-Latin powers at different times, ruling for some duration over Muslim populations that had originally been predominantly Arabic speaking.

The peculiarities of local or regional history certainly make any attempt at comparison between the three zones hazardous. The Iberian Peninsula presents a special case, insofar as the interaction between the two linguistic systems, Arabic and Latin/Romance, stretched from the early Middle Ages well into the modern era. When the Muslim conquerors entered Spain in 711, the local Christian elites wrote in Latin, and also governed using Latin as a prestige language. One could even argue that the entire population (with the exception of the Basque-speaking areas) was still speaking what could be characterized as a variety of evolved forms of late Latin rather than proto-Romance languages.[1] By the ninth century, the Muslim presence had become pervasive in the south and centre of the peninsula. The laments of Alvarus of Cordoba (d. ca. 861) on the attraction of Arabic literature and the decadence of Latin studies among the Christian elites of

1 On this point, see Michel Banniard, *Viva voce: Communication écrite et communication orale du IVe au IXe siècle en Occident Latin* (Paris: Institut des études augustiniennes, 1992); and Reinhard Kiesler, *Einführung in die Problematik des Vulgärlateins* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006).

al-Andalus are well known. They are a testimony to the complex processes of interaction that had meanwhile occurred between a Muslim power and an appealing Arabic-Islamic culture on the one hand, and the part of the population that had so far remained faithful to the Christian religion and, to some extent, to the former prestige language, Latin, on the other hand.[2] In the aftermath of the most important phase of the so-called *Reconquista* (1085–1248), the conquering Christian kingdoms of León-Castile, Aragon, and Portugal faced the opposite situation. Now vastly expanded "Christian" states, whose populations spoke various forms of Latin-derived Romance languages, but whose cultural traditions and church apparatus still depended heavily on Latin writing and Latin knowledge,[3] administered important Muslim minorities for whom Arabic in its Qurʾānic and classical forms was a prestige language. These Muslims maintained a tradition of communicating in local Arabic dialects, even if they increasingly tended to use Romance dialects for their internal and extra-communitarian communication. In fact, Islamicized Iberian populations had never totally ceased to use Romance languages in their daily lives. The extent to which Romance was used may be contested, but no one doubts that this widespread use of Romance had important consequences for the emergence of bilingual textual practices, from the elaboration of the *muwaššaḥ*-poems to the birth of Aljamiado.[4] Thus, in some form or another, the Iberian Peninsula was to remain a potential place of interaction between Arabic and Latin (and derived languages) for almost a thousand years, from 711 to the expulsion of the Moriscos at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

2 On that point, see Banniard, *Viva voce*, 459–489. See also Chapter 2.3.3 in this volume.

3 Latin would be substituted more or less gradually as an official language of administration only from the thirteenth century onwards, beginning with Castile and Portugal. Due to complex sociolinguistic, symbolic, and educational factors, the Latin language resisted better in England and in France (where the shift occurred partially during the fourteenth century at the royal chancery), and even later in Italy, Germany, and Eastern Europe. See Serge Lusignan, *La langue des rois au Moyen Âge: Le français en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), on the rhythm of this progression, for a brief comparison between different Western European countries, and a more specific discourse on France. For the situation in 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.

4 The question of the rhythm of Arabization before the *Reconquista*, and of the de-Arabization of the Muslim populations in the Christian kingdoms after the *Reconquista*, has been the object of numerous and often fierce debates. See Mercedes García-Arenal and Katarzyna Starczewska, "'The Law of Abraham the Catholic': Juan Gabriel as Qurʾān-Translator for Martín de Figuerola and Gilles de Viterbe," *Al-Qanṭara* 35, no. 2 (2014), 409–459, particularly 412–415, who prove that knowledge of Arabic was more resilient than ordinarily thought, even as late as 1500, and even in northern zones like central Aragon. For Aljamiado culture and Arabic culture in Castile in the mid-fifteenth century, see Gerard Wiegers, *Islamic Literature in Spanish and Aljamiado: Yça of Segovia (fl. 1450), his Antecedents and Successors* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). See also Chapter 2.4.2 in this volume.

As late as the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, during the "second wave" of Latin translations of the Qurʾān, Spanish Arabic-trained literati of Muslim background still acted as informants.[5] Their activities testify to the persistence of this Iberian-Arabic culture and its contribution to the elaboration of Latin knowledge of Islam at a European level.

In comparison, the history of Arabic-Latin linguistic relations in Syria-Palestine and in Italy seems rather meagre. In the first of these two cases, the only period of possible major interaction would have been the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. One should consider, however, that the histories of Latin pilgrimages, eastern Mediterranean commerce, and the Kingdom of Cyprus provide backgrounds for linguistic interaction beyond this period.[6] With regard to Italy, the major institutional framework for linguistic interaction between the two languages was certainly the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. This polity officially became a kingdom only in 1130. However, its specific relation with Islam and Arabic began between approximately 1060 and 1090, during the progressive conquest of the island by a Norman aristocracy, that had installed itself in the southern parts of the Italian mainland a generation earlier.[7] This realm thus included a continental part covering the entire Italian Mezzogiorno, where Arabic had been spoken only very sporadically.[8] Although Sicily was subjected to a process of Latin colonization that reduced the Muslim, Arabic-speaking majority to a minority during the course of the twelfth century, there remained an

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5 To the famous couple Yça of Segovia and Juan de Segovia (Wiegers, *Islamic Literature*) we can now add the pair Juan Gabriel of Teruel and Egidio da Viterbo. The Aragonese Muslim convert Juan Gabriel of Teruel helped Egidio create a new, sophisticated Latin version of the Qurʾān. For more on this, see Chapter 5 of this volume. On the concept of a second wave of Latin translations of the Qurʾān, see Benoît Grévin, "Les traductions médiévales du Coran: une question de cumulativité? (XIIe–début XVIe s.)," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 90 (2016), 471–490.

6 On the circulation of Latin travellers and pilgrims in the Holy Land after the Mamlūk "Reconquista" (and the abundant Latin literature that resulted from these exchanges), see Camille Rouxpetel, *L'Occident au miroir de l'Orient chrétien: Cilicie, Syrie, Palestine et Égypte (XIIe–XIVe siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2015). See also Chapter 2.4.4 in this volume.

7 On the linguistic dimension of the Norman conquest of Sicily, which involved the subjection of a large Muslim population (a culturally Graeco-Arabic minority was still Christian at the time of the conquest) to Latin-Christian power, see Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily: Arabic Speakers and the End of Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, 2003). For a general overview, see Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XIe et XIIe siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2011). On the Muslim presence in Italy before (a Sicilian emirate, but probably dominating an initially almost totally Greek-speaking population, rather than a Latin one), during, and after Norman rule, see Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). See also Chapter 2.4.1 in this volume.

8 Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 16–24. A number of "embryonic" emirates were founded in peninsular southern Italy during the tenth century. In contrast to the Sicilian emirate, they were never able to survive for more than a few years or decades. On the origins of the emirate of Sicily, see *Les dynamiques de l'islamisation en Méditerranée centrale et en Sicile: nouvelles propositions et découvertes récentes*, ed. Annliese Nef and Fabiola Ardizzone (Rome: École française de Rome, Edipuglia, 2014).

important Muslim, at least partly Arabic-speaking population on the island until the beginning of the thirteenth century.[9] The late linguistic history of this tradition will be examined in more detail in the following pages. For now, suffice it to say that this insular population of Arabic speakers was reduced to a few marginalized enclaves during the agitated history of the following dynasty (i.e. the Hohenstaufen, 1194–1266). Only the continental city of Lucera in northern Apulia, a city-garrison specially rebuilt by Frederick II to house loyal Muslim troops transplanted from Sicily, constituted some kind of exception. One must add that the official history of Arabic-speaking Muslim "Sicilians" was radically imperilled by the fall of the Hohenstaufen and their substitution by the Angevin kings of French origin in 1266. It met its end with the destruction of Lucera by the second sovereign of the new dynasty, Charles II, in 1300.[10] Based on this sketchy résumé, one could assume that the chronological span of major interaction between Arabic and Latin in Southern Italy was not much longer than in Syria-Palestine, with the very peculiar exceptions of the islands of Malta and Pantelleria.[11] We shall see, however, that this view is somewhat misleading, even if it can be considered correct in terms of the concrete interaction between Christians and Muslims.

Indeed, one could claim that the years 1060–1300 assume a special significance for the history of medieval interaction between Arabic and Latin in the entire Mediterranean area. This period witnessed the apogee of several Latin-Christian political entities with partly or predominantly Arabic-speaking populations. After this period, such polities either disappeared, like the Frankish principalities of the eastern Mediterranean, or were transformed into states that were more "classical" and lacked Muslim minorities, like the Kingdom of Sicily. When this had happened, the Iberian kingdoms were left isolated in their status of Christian Latin states with legally tolerated Muslim minorities.[12] Moreover, this period between 1060

9 On the Muslims in Sicily during the reign of Frederick II (1194–1250), see Annliese Nef, "La déportation des musulmans siciliens par Frédéric II: précédents, modalités, signification et portée de la mesure," in *Le monde de l'itinérance en Méditerranée de l'antiquité à l'époque moderne*, ed. Claudia Moatti et al. (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2009), 455–478.

10 On the history of Lucera, see Julie A. Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy: The Colony at Lucera* (Oxford: Lexington, 2003); Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 275–298; Nef, "La déportation des musulmans siciliens par Frédéric II"; and for the linguistic background of the inhabitants, see the literature cited above in fn. 7.

11 On the peculiar political, cultural, and linguistic context of Malta at the end of Middle Ages, see the excellent contribution by Henri Bresc, "Malte et l'Afrique (1282–1492)," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 71 (1994), 63–74, which also contains some details on the—quite different—situation in Pantelleria.

12 One could also note that the historiographical tendency to belittle the coexistence of Muslim minorities and Christian majorities distinctly affected the historical perception of other areas of Latin Christendom that possessed a Muslim minority until 1300. See in particular the persistent presence of Muslim (certainly Turkic-speaking) minorities in the Kingdom of Hungary; often at the service of the king, this was a presence that lasted until the thirteenth century, despite the hostility of the papacy—a somewhat interesting parallel to the role of Muslim elites in Sicily. On this not so well-known history, partly masked by the

and 1300 also witnessed peculiar forms of interaction between these three subspaces of the great "corrupting sea:"[13] an element of the most brilliant manifestations of cultural interaction between late medieval Arabic and Latin cultures resulted from the possibilities proffered by pan-Mediterranean impulses echoing from Syria to Spain. A small, but highly influential section of actors at the Sicilian court, for example, originated in the metropolitan Syrian city of Antioch.[14] The famous admiral George of Antioch is a testimony to the importance of a Greek-speaking emigration from Antiochia to Norman Sicily,[15] while Theodore of Antioch, in turn, was one of the major translators of Frederick II, and translated from Arabic into Latin, rather than into Greek.[16] One could also argue that the extraordinary cultural programme of translation from Arabic into Castilian (but also into Latin) coordinated by Alfonso X of Castile was at least partly rooted in Alfonso's desire to emulate the Arabic-Latin translation programme of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Sicilian king as well as emperor of Germany.[17] A cousin of Frederick and a pretender to the imperial throne left vacant after Frederick's death and the short-lived reign of his son Conrad IV, Alfonso developed his cultural programme not only as a tentative move to create a specific Castilian state culture, but also with a view to appropriating the universalistic ideology of the Hohenstaufen dynasty. Religious as well as political and geographical factors supported frequent collaboration between Italy and the Iberian Peninsula on Latin translations from Arabic in the late medieval and early modern era. One of the most important "Italian" Latin translations of the Qurʾān during the early sixteenth century, the

construction of a homogeneous Christian nation by traditional historiography, and partly obscured by the lack of sources on the origin of these Muslim populations (with possible connections with the Islamization of the Bulgarians of the Volga and the Eurasian commercial networks), see Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom. Jews, Muslims and "Pagans" in Medieval Hungary, c.1000–c.1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

13 I have borrowed the expression from the title of the seminal essay by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

14 On Antioch as a link between Arabic and Latin cultures, see Charles Burnett, "Antioch as a Link between Arabic and Latin Culture in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Occident et Proche-Orient: Contacts scientifiques au temps des Croisades*, ed. Baudoin van den Abeele et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 1–78.

15 Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni, eds, *Giorgio di Antiochia: L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam* (Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, 2009).

16 On Theodore of Antioch, see the bibliography up to 2000 in Wolfgang Stürner, *Friedrich II: Der Kaiser 1220–1250* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2000), 422–429; for new elements, see Giuseppe Mandalà, "Il Prologo delle Risposte alle questioni siciliane di Ibn Sabʿīn come fonte storica: Politica mediterranea e cultura arabo-islamica nell'età di Federico II," *Schede medievali* 45 (2007), in particular, 67–84.

17 On the translations at the court of Alfonso X of Castile and León, see Leonard Patrick Harvey, "The Alphonsine School of Translators: Translations from Arabic into Castilian Produced under the Patronage of Alphonso the Wise of Castile (1221–1252–1284)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1977), 109–117; and Vicenç Beltrán, *La corte de Babel: Lenguas, poética y politica en la España del siglo XIII* (Madrid: Gredos, 2005). See also Chapter 2.4.5 in this volume.

translation commissioned by Egidio da Viterbo, was made with the help of an Aragonese convert from Islam.[18] The career of some early modern interpreters and translators from Arabic, such as Diego de Urrea, took place between the Maghreb, Spain, and Italy.[19]

These last considerations suggest that the history of Arabic in Italy did not cease with the end of the Norman dynasty in 1194, the death of Frederick II in 1250, or even with the dismantling of Lucera in 1300. Indeed, during the early Renaissance—understood here as the period covering the Trecento and the Quattrocento, that is, 1300–1500—Italy provides a good starting point for an alternative history of Mediterranean Arabic-Latin relations at the end of the medieval and the beginning of the early modern period. It is a history that allows us to ask more precisely how the two languages could have interacted in a Latin-Christian Mediterranean context, in the absence of important Muslim Arabic-speaking minorities. This is a period when interest in Arabic had not totally disappeared, but was receding, according to traditional scholarship. On the one hand, it is true that the conditions for accessing this language had changed considerably, now that the period of creation and the first apogee of the partly Muslim-populated Latin-Christian kingdoms during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was over.[20] On the other hand, the importance of Italy as the centre of a variety of merchant networks, its cultural ascendency, and the vast number of sources preserved on the Apennine Peninsula make it possible to outline an alternative history, which reveals a far more complex story than the traditional narrative would have us believe. This history helps to explain how a considerable number of Jewish and Christian Europeans based on the northern shore of the Mediterranean could have had access to one form of Arabic or another, and could even have tried to transmit a part of this knowledge, without ever having succeeded in perfectly mastering classical Arabic, due to sociolinguistic and pedagogical limitations. In certain ways this Italian Arabic-Latin history of the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance period represents a missing link in the chain of a *longue durée*-history of Arabic-Latin relations that can be positioned between the "great narrative" of the medieval Arabic-Latin translations, and the birth of modern Orientalism. It shows that, in order to understand the

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18 See García-Arenal and Starczewska, "The Law of Abraham the Catholic"; see also Katarzyna Starczewska, *A Latin Translation of the Qur'an (1518/1621) Commissioned by Egidio da Viterbo: Critical Edition and Introductory Study* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018).

19 On Diego de Urrea and his voyages between Spain, the Maghreb, and southern Italy, see Fernando Rodríguez Mediano and Mercedes García-Arenal, "De Diego de Urrea à Marcos Dobelio, interprètes et traducteurs des 'plombs,'" in *Maghreb–Italie: Des passeurs médiévaux à l'orientalisme moderne (XIIIe–milieu XXe siècle)*, ed. Benoît Grévin (Rome: École française de Rome, 2010), 141–207.

20 For Italy after the fall of the Hohenstaufen, see Benoît Grévin, "De Damas à Urbino: Les savoirs linguistiques arabes dans l'Italie renaissante (1370–1520)," *Annales HSS* 703 (2015), 607–635.

sociolinguistic and sociohistorical implications of these processes of interaction, we should study not only the most obvious forms of these relations.

4.2 A brief history of Arabic and Arabic knowledge in late medieval and Renaissance Italy

The history of Arabic-Latin relations in Trecento and Quattrocento Italy was considered a minor field in the country's cultural history until quite recently, especially compared to the wide-ranging and continuous study of the complex linguistic and cultural interactions between Greek, Arabic, and Latin in Norman and post-Norman Sicily.[21] A series of recent studies, most notably initiated by Angelo Michele Piemontese, has helped to improve this historiographical panorama, even if numerous questions remain unresolved.[22] To understand how certain forms of knowledge about the Arabic language could sporadically flourish in various contexts, and be transmitted via Latin, between 1300 and 1500 in the Apennine Peninsula, we must first examine two potential backdrops to the learning and teaching of Arabic. In this context, the persistence of residual Arabic-speaking and/or writing/reading communities on the peninsula acquires particular importance, as does the import of a knowledge of Arabic by Italian travellers stationed, at different times of their lives, in various locations of the Arabic world and Italy.

21 Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*; Karla Malette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250: A Literary History* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*; Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique*.

22 On Beltramo Mignanelli, see, among others, Angelo Michele Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli (Siena 1443)," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 48 (1995), 155–170. On Arabic and Qurʾānic culture in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's circles, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino e i corani arabi di Pico e Monchates," *Rinascimento* 36 (1996), 227–273. On the Arabic in the *Hypnerotomachia Polifili*, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Le iscrizioni arabe nella 'Poliphili Hypnerotomachia'," in *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Charles Burnett, Anna Contadini (London: Warburg Institute, 1999), 199–220. On Arabic and other Oriental languages between Savonarola and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Lo studio delle cinque lingue presso Savonarola e Pico," in *Europe and Islam between the 14th and 16th Centuries* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 2002), 179–202. On the links between the Arabic teacher Moncada and the court of Urbino, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alla Corte di Urbino," in *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate: Un ebreo converso siciliano*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Caltabellotta (Agrigento), October 23–24, 2004, ed. Mauro Perani (Palermo: Officina di studi medievali, 2008), 151–171. On the study of the Qurʾān in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Il Corano in Italia umanistica," in *Bibbia e Corano: Edizioni e ricezioni*, ed. Carmela Baffioni et al. (Milan: Bulzoni Editore, 2016), 31–66. These papers, which contain rich bibliographical references, are written in a beautiful, intricate baroque Italian, sometimes with a deliberate attempt to create a labyrinth-like circular progression. Hence, some misunderstandings have occurred in their reception in non-Italophone milieus.

4.2.1 FROM INSIDE: A RESIDUAL BUT PERSISTENT LANGUAGE

Arabic was already in decline in southern Italy (Sicily was the only region where it was widely spoken) when the Norman dynasty was replaced by the Hohenstaufen. The latter retained parts of the Norman political ideological heritage, since the Hohenstaufen claim to the throne was based on the marriage of the German emperor Henry VI to the Norman heiress Constance of Sicily, who was the mother of the future king and emperor, Frederick II.[23] The idea that Frederick II, king of Sicily from 1198 to 1250, resided in Palermo with his court, is cherished in historiography, but mostly false. After his return from Germany, the king resided mainly on the Italian mainland, between Apulia and Campania.[24] Frederick II fought several minor wars in Sicily, particularly during the 1220s. His aim was to subjugate the last pockets of Muslim resistance, after this minority had retreated to the interior of the island, e.g. to the region south of Monreale, to avoid being annihilated during the civil wars that raged during the emperor's childhood. There were traces of unrest among the residual Muslim population on the island until very late in his reign.[25] After 1224, however, the year that saw the foundation of Lucera,[26] these movements can be considered insignificant. Around 1200, relatively little-known groups of originally Arabic-speaking (or Arabic-Greek speaking) Christian families existed, some of whom still played an important role under the rule of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, and probably maintained a working knowledge of some form of Arabic for part of the thirteenth century.[27] However, no obvious testimony can help us gauge the extent to which these skills survived over time. Some of the most learned men active at the court of Frederick II originated from this mostly Palermitan milieu, like the mathematician John of Palermo, who was probably selected for a diplomatic mission to Ḥafṣid Tunis in 1240 because of his linguistic abilities.[28] Still, the choice of the *Mašriqī*, Theodore

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23 Wolfgang Stürner, *Friedrich II: Die Königsherrschaft in Sizilien und Deutschland 1194–1220* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1992), particularly 34–85.

24 On this historiographical problem, see Benoît Grévin, "Linguistic Cultures and Textual Production in Palermo, from the End of the 11th to the End of the 15th Century," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. Annliese Nef (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 413–415.

25 Stürner, *Friedrich II: Der Kaiser*, 66–74; Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 275–280.

26 Nef, "La déportation des musulmans siciliens par Frédéric II."

27 On this particular milieu and its complex and frequently Graeco-Arabic linguistic roots, see Henri Bresc, "Arabi per lingua, greci per rito, i Mozarabi di Sicilia con e dopo Giorgio," in *Giorgio di Antiochia: L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam*, ed. Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni (Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, 2009), 263–282; for the question of a "Mozarabic" Sicilian milieu: see Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique*, 90–123; and Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, "Tra latini, greci e 'arabici': ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo," *Segno e testo: International Journal on Manuscripts and Text Transmission* 7 (2009), 143–238.

28 On John of Palermo and his links to Frederick II, see the bibliography in Stürner, *Friedrich II: Der Kaiser*, 387–397; and Mandalà, "Il prologo delle Risposte," 76, 79–86. The court's interest in sending John on a Tunisian mission is known

of Antioch, to write the official letter to the Tunisian sultan on this mission, suggests that these remaining Arabic-speaking Sicilians were not necessarily sufficiently versed in the stylistic intricacies of classical or post-classical Arabic to render the complexity of imperial Latin phraseology into fashionable courtly Arabic.[29] This raises questions concerning the kind of Arabic mastered by these Latinized Sicilian courtiers with an "Arabophone" background, as well as the linguistic level required to translate highly formalized Latin into Arabic and vice versa—a problem to be examined further.

Apart from these residual elites from Palermo or other Sicilian towns, a nucleus of Muslims loyal to the throne led organized lives in Lucera from 1224 to the end of the dynasty in 1266. They managed to resist the first two Angevin kings' attempts to suppress this religious and institutional enclave until 1300.[30] A papal letter provides an invaluable testimony concerning the linguistic status of this population ten years after its transplantation from Sicily to Apulia. Pope Gregory IX was quite unhappy at the prospect of a Muslim colony installed at the gates of the *Patrimonium Petri* by a Christian power that was often at odds with the papacy. In 1233 he sent a letter to the emperor and king to demand permission to send friars to Lucera with the aim of converting this "colony" to Christianity. In the missive, he underlined the fact that the Muslim population understood Italian (*italicum idioma*) very well, and could thus be subjected to preaching.[31] Although originating in the last extant Muslim pockets of Sicily, the Muslim population of Lucera was already bilingual. Its Arabic was perhaps already semantically contaminated to a large extent by Romance elements, in a way that would have had parallels in the earliest stages of the formation of the Maltese language. Gregory's request was denied, and the persistent adherence to Islam on the part of the troops based in Lucera was one of the factors in the renewal of the conflict between the Hohenstaufen rulers and the papacy—a conflict which ultimately led to the dynasty's downfall.

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through the only preserved *registrum* of Frederick's chancery (for the end of 1239 and the beginning of 1240), see *Il registro della cancelleria di Federico II del 1239–1240*, ed. Cristina Carbonetti Venditelli (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2002). On this precise embassy and the sociolinguistic questions raised by the selection of Frederick II's staff, see Chapter 4.3.1.

29 *Il registro della cancelleria*, no. 575 (February 10, 1240), ed. Carbonetti, 541–542: *Magistro Teodoro de litteris scribendis regi Tunisi in Arabica*.

30 On the fall of Lucera, see the recent publication by Benjamin Scheller, "Assimilation und Untergang: Das muslimische Lucera in Apulien und sein gewaltsames Ende im Jahr 1300 als Problem der Globalgeschichte," in *Europa in der Welt des Mittelalters: Ein Colloquium für und mit Michael Borgolte*, ed. Tillmann Lohse and Benjamin Scheller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 141–161.

31 See *Historia diplomatica Friderici secundi*, ed. Jean Louis Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, vol. 4 (Paris: Plon, 1855), 452 (August 27, 1233): "Gregorius etc. Federico etc. [. . .] imperialem mansuetudinem rogandam duximus et hortandam quatenus sarracenis qui Capitanate Nuceriam incolunt et italicum idioma non mediocriter ut fertur intelligunt, per tuas litteras firmiter dare debeas in mandatis ut fratres ordinis Predicatorum, pacis angelos, quos ad eos cum exhortationis verbo dirigimus, in pace suscipiant, patienter audiant et prudenter iis que pro salute sua proponuntur intendant."

The continuity of religious tradition would have assured a minimum knowledge of Qurʾānic (and thus classical) Arabic among these last, officially protected Muslims of the Sicilian kingdom. Certain high officials at the court of Frederick II, such as John the Moor, had strong links with this milieu, and were probably able to navigate to some extent between Arabic in various forms (classical and Sicilian dialectal) on the one hand, and Romance and Latin, the almost monopolistic language of the imperial Sicilian administration, on the other. The papal letter nevertheless suggests a progressive linguistic acculturation of these transplanted Sicilian Muslims, which raises doubts concerning their knowledge of classical Arabic, as well as the exact nature of the Arabic probably still spoken in this community.

Paradoxically, if Arabic survived as a written and (very probably still largely) spoken language on the island of Sicily after 1300, this was due not to the presence of a Muslim population, but to the existence of a massive network of Arabic-speaking Jewish communities.[32] These communities had remained attached to the use of Arabic in the sociolinguistic form of local Judaeo-Arabic dialects after the Norman conquest. Although its exact significance is open to interpretation, the famous quadrilingual inscription carved on behalf of the priest Grysantus in memory of his mother, proves that, in Norman Palermo, Judaeo-Arabic had acquired a symbolic status of some sort, together with Latin, "standard" written Arabic, and Greek.[33] Furthermore, the relevance of these Jewish communities was increased by events that would lead to an even more spectacular pervasiveness of Sicilian Judaeo-Arabic practices during the thirteenth century. Following persecution by the last Almohads in the Maġrib al-Aqṣā, i.e. far western North Africa, many Jews fled to more hospitable regions during the 1230s. Frederick II, hoping to repopulate the parts of Sicily that had been economically and demographically depressed by the internecine wars between Christians and Muslims during his minority, invited them to settle on the island, which they did, in around 1239–1240.[34] Jews made up an estimated five per cent of the total population of Sicily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[35] We possess numerous testimonies for the use of Judaeo-Arabic, including onomastic and other clues, as in the Aragonese dynasty's use of Sicilian Jews as official translators and ambassadors to Tunis. They suggest that a notable part of the Jewish community maintained a written and oral practice of the language until its expulsion from Sicily in

32 On the Jews in medieval Sicily, see Henri Bresc, *Arabes de langue, juifs de religion: L'évolution du judaïsme sicilien dans l'environnement latin, XIIe–XVe siècles* (Paris: Bouchene, 2001).

33 On Grysantus and the inscription in honour of his mother, see Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique*, 101–107.

34 On the migration of the Jews from *Ġarb/Garbum* (= *al-Maġrib al-aqṣā*) see Giuseppe Mandalà, "La migration des juifs du Garbum en Sicile (1239)," in *Maghreb-Italie: Des passeurs médiévaux à l'orientalisme moderne (XIIIe–milieu XXe siècle)*, ed. Benoît Grévin (Rome: École française de Rome, 2010), 19–48.

35 Bresc, *Arabes de langues, juifs de religion*, 88.

1492–1493.[36] From what we know about the origins of these communities, we can assume that the Judaeo-Arabic dialects spoken across Sicily were far from uniform, even if this issue still awaits further investigation. At least for some time after the immigration of the Moroccan Jews, a considerable difference must have existed between the linguistic practices of the older communities, whose language was perhaps more akin to the Judaeo-Arabic dialects of Ifrīqiya, and the newer ones, with their Moroccan dialects. As a testimony to the circulation of Arabic-speaking practices in the Latin Mediterranean world, we also know that, due to the deteriorating situation of Jewish communities in late fourteenth-century Castile and Aragon, some prominent literati with a Spanish Judaeo-Arabic background settled on the island around 1390, and even brought with them some important scientific Arabic texts.[37] Until their expulsion, the Jewish-Sicilian communities maintained specific scientific and cultural traditions, which made them potential candidates for teaching Arabic to Christian clerks or humanists.[38] Their working scientific language, in addition to the two sacred tongues of Judaism (Hebrew and Judaeo-Aramaic), was an Arabic transliterated into Hebrew characters. To some extent, this scientific language can also be described as culturally Judaeo-Arabic. Structurally, however, it was not directly connected to the Judaeo-Arabic dialects spoken by Jews throughout the ages.[39] In addition to these linguistic skills, the necessity or allure of cooperation with Christian authorities and Christian society incited them to acquire an often thorough knowledge, not only of Romance Sicilian,

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36 For the role of these Jewish ambassadors, sent to Muslim rulers as late as the fifteenth century, see Bresc, *Arabes de langues, juifs de religion*, 40.

37 On this point, see Giuseppe Mandalà, “Da Toledo a Palermo: Yiṣḥaq ben Šelomoh ibn al-Aḥdab in Sicilia (ca. 1395–1396–1431),” in *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell’ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Caltabellotta, June 30–July 1, 2008, ed. Mauro Perani, Giacomo Corazzol (Palermo: Officina di studi medievali, 2012).

38 See Chapter 4.2.3 for the career of Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada.

39 On Judaeo-Arabic, see Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic* (Jerusalem: Ben-zvi Institute, 1999, first ed. 1965); and Geoffrey Khan, “Judaeo-Arabic,” in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 526–536. The concept includes the spoken Judaeo-Arabic dialects from past to present, with all their peculiarities, as well as the original written Arabic production of the Arabic-writing Jewish communities, traditionally classified as Middle Arabic texts with some specific Jewish sociolinguistic idiosyncrasies. The relationship between the two poles of the concept is thus akin to the somewhat ambiguous pairing that characterizes Arabic historical dialectology and the study of “Middle Arabic writings.” The Judaeo-Arabic oral dialects had some sort of impact on the written forms of Judaeo-Arabic, but they were not its matrix. The higher the textual level, the lesser the possibility that the impact of the spoken dialect could have been statistically important; paradoxically, one could even argue that stylistic and linguistic interferences with the spoken practices of the communities form part of the peculiarities characteristic of copies of scientific texts of Muslim origin in the Arabic-writing Jewish communities, thereby raising the question of the boundaries of the concept of written “Judaeo-Arabic.” On such Arabic manuscripts written in Hebrew characters, recently attributed to the Sicilian communities, see Giuseppe Mandalà, “Un codice in caratteri ebraici dalla Trapani degli Abbate (vat. Ebr. 358),” *Sefarad* 71 (2011), 7–24.

but also of Latin. This is a competence attested to within the community during the times of Frederick II and Charles I of Anjou—the latter commissioned an important medical translation from Arabic into Latin from a prominent Sicilian Jewish scholar.[40] We will see below the extent to which, and with what limitations, this multilingual knowledge of scientific written Arabic and oral dialectal Judaeo-Arabic in its Sicilian variant, in addition to Romance dialects and administrative-scientific Latin, was transplanted to the continental courts of Renaissance Italy during the second half of the fifteenth century.[41]

We cannot expect that Jewish communities in continental northern, central, or even southern Italy would have used a form of Arabic as an everyday language in the same way that their Sicilian counterparts did. However, there are indications that members of Jewish communities in Campania or Tuscany, for example, had at least some working knowledge of Arabic during the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. In a booklet on Arabic which is discussed below, the Sienese diplomat and merchant Beltramo Mignanelli comments incidentally on the diffusion of comparable knowledge among members of the community of Siena.[42] We also have clues to some interest in Arabic in the Jewish communities of Naples.[43] The knowledge available in these circles would have been linked to the general pervasiveness of Judaeo-Arabic learning in a Jewish-Mediterranean setting and its limited diffusion as a scientific, philosophical, and medical language in communities based outside the areas where Arabic had formerly been spoken.

4.2.2 FROM OUTSIDE: MERCHANTS AND THEIR FELLOW TRAVELLERS

A second line of investigation concerns the networks established by Italian merchants with the Maghreb, particularly Tunis, and above all, the Mashreq, that is, Egypt and Syria-Palestine, particularly Damascus and Aleppo. These merchants generally hailed from areas controlled by the

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40 On this translation, executed by Farāǧ b. Sālim (Latinized Faracio, Faresche, or Faragius) for Charles I of Anjou between 1278 and 1282, see Gian Luca Borghese and Benoît Grévin, "Aspects linguistiques de la diplomatie sicilienne au XIIIe siècle (1220–1290)," in *Les langues de la négociation: Approches historiennes*, ed. Dejanirah Couto and Stéphane Péquignot (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017), 88–89.

41 See Chapter 4.2.3.

42 See the edition of this introduction to Arabic, a sort of preface to a bilingual anthology of the Psalms written in 1443 in Siena and still kept there, in Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 157: "Et etiam hebrei stolidi non tamen omnes extollunt linguam ipsorum propter primam cuius argumentum est falsissimum et sic esse probavi multis ex eorum doctoribus qui proh dolorem Senis prope me habitant et maxime arabicum scientibus qui negare non possunt nec negant."

43 On this point, see Ofra Tirosh-Becker [in Hebrew], "Ha-glosot ha-ʻaraviyot she-be-ʻMakre Dardeke' be-nusah ha-ʻitalki: mah tivan?" ["The Arabic Glosses Contained in the 'Makre Dardeqe' in its Italian Edition: What is their Nature?"], *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei di Italia* 9 (1990), 37–77.

commercial empires of Genoa and Venice, but not always. Again, the case of Beltramo Mignanelli allows a glimpse at the sort of career that acquainted adventurous Italians with Arabic, and in certain cases motivated them to try to transmit the knowledge they had acquired in the Arabic sphere to their contemporaries back home.[44] Mignanelli, a merchant and diplomat from Siena, was born in 1370, and travelled extensively, perhaps first to the Maghreb,[45] but above all to Egypt and in Syria, and even as far as Iraq, Iran, and Arabia. He headed diplomatic missions in the Orient on behalf of the Visconti, briefly masters of Siena at the end of the fourteenth century. Back in Italy, he made use of his knowledge to serve as a translator for the papal curia, for example, when important negotiations took place between certain Oriental churches and the restored Roman papacy during the council of Florence in 1439. Mignanelli reached an advanced age (d. 1455) and had time to write many texts related to his experiences in Islamic societies. He left concrete evidence and various traces of his knowledge of Arabic. Some of his numerous Latin historiographical and polemical works (*Ascensus Barcoch*; *De ruina Damasci*[46]) contain transcriptions of Arabic with a strong Egyptian flavour. Moreover, towards the end of his life, he wrote a Latin *Libellus*, which features a brief presentation of the linguistic characteristics of Arabic and an anthology of the Psalms. The latter includes three Latin versions as well as the Arabic text in Arabic characters lacking vocalization.[47]

Beltramo Mignanelli is exceptional in at least two ways: he did not depend on the Venetian or Genoese network for his Oriental travels, and he chose to leave some tangible traces of his knowledge of Arabic in his numerous writings, composed during his old age in Italy. However, he was certainly not the only Italian merchant of the Quattrocento who displayed an important knowledge of Arabic, which then had an effect on the contemporary production of Latin texts. With regard to historiography and literature, we know of the testimonies of Niccolò de' Conti (1395–1469), a merchant from the Venetian dependency of Chioggia. He learned Arabic

44 On Beltramo Mignanelli, see Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," as well as Nelly Mahmoud Helmy, "Memorie Levantine e ambienti curiali: L'Oriente nella vita e nella produzione di un senese del Quattrocento: Beltramo di Leonardo Mignanelli," *Quaderni di storia religiosa* 13 (2006), 237–268; and Nelly Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra Siena, l'Oriente e la curia: Beltramo di Leonardo Mignanelli e le sue opere* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2013).

45 This is claimed in traditional modern narratives, but finds almost no echo in the medieval sources. See Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 158.

46 An extensive description of his life and work can be found in Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra siena, l'Oriente e la curia*, with an edition of the *De ruina Damasci* (ibid., 307–340), and the *Ascensus Barcoch* (ibid., 341–387).

47 Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 155–157, 165 (transcription of the explanations on the nature of Arabic, and reproduction of the first page of the anthology of the Psalms); and Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra Siena, l'Oriente e la curia*, 266–270 (description of the *Liber de variantibus Psalterii*). Nelly Mahmoud Helmy has announced that an edition of this text will be forthcoming.

and Persian during his travels, which took him as far as the south of modern-day Vietnam, and which even forced him to convert to Islam on his way back to Italy. Poggio Bracciolini (d. 1459) then set down his travels in writing in a humanistic Latin of the highest quality.[48] Another example is Emmanuel Piloti (fl. *ca.*1371–1420/1438), a Cretan merchant of Venetian origin—Crete had been a possession of the republic since the thirteenth century. He traded on the Egyptian market for a long time. After settling in Italy in his later life, he wrote a treatise on the Orient. The original version has been lost, and the text survives only in a Middle French version.[49] It seems characteristic of the relations between Arabic and Western European languages in the late medieval and early Renaissance period that the greater part of these testimonies were originally written in Latin. It is probable that only Beltramo Mignanelli had the knowledge to write directly in this language without some sort of intermediary. In the case of Niccolò de' Conti, it is certain that he dictated his history in Italian, and that it was later Latinized. The status of Piloti's original text is less certain. It seems, however, that it was originally written in Italian and only later translated into Latin as well as Middle French.[50] Among these three merchants, Beltramo Mignanelli is the only one to have left tangible evidence of his degree of knowledge and the type of Arabic with which he was familiar. To a certain extent, he must have been able to navigate between a very dialectal and a more classical form of Arabic. Moreover, he was not a bad Latinist, albeit certainly not a first-rate one, according to the standards of fully blooming humanism. Speaking in general terms, however, the linguistic universe of these merchants was probably more conditioned by switching back and forth between Italian and an everyday variant of *Mašriqī*, i.e. Middle Eastern Arabic. However, when they wanted to commit their information to memory, they chose Latin, the prestige language—oral or written—in Italy of the Quattrocento, particularly with a view to the possibility of being acknowledged by the major Latin-speaking and Latin-writing institution, i.e. the papal curia.

These merchants' lives, travels, and alleged or proven linguistic capacities were certainly far from ordinary, but they were not unique. A

48 On Niccolò de' Conti, see Francesco Surdich, "Conti, Niccolò de," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* vol. 28 (Rome: Treccani, 1983), 457–460. The Latinized narration of his adventures is edited in Poggio Bracciolini, *De varietate fortunae*, ed. Outi Merisalo (Helsinki: Suoamalainen Tiedeakademia, 1993), 153–174.

49 On Piloti, see, most recently, Antonio Musarra, "Piloti, Emanuele," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 83 (Rome: Treccani, 2015), 678–679; Damien Coulon, "Regards contrastés sur les musulmans du sultanat mamlūk par des marchands chrétiens à la fin du Moyen Âge," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 90 (2016), 570–579.

50 On the problem of the status of Piloti's text, see the contradictory indications of Coulon, "Regards contrastés sur les musulmans du sultanat mamlūk," 570 (original treatise in Latin); Emmanuel Piloti, *Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti sur le passage en Terre sainte (1420)*, ed. Pierre-Herman Dopp (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1958), introduction (original treatise in Italian); and the synthesis of Musarra, "Piloti, Emmanuele" (initial version in Italian, with subsequent versions in Latin and French).

prosopographical study of Italian merchants in the Maghreb and the Orient of the Trecento and Quattrocento would certainly provide us with further clues regarding the potential extent of Arabic skills in the Italian merchant milieu of the period.[51] Some testimonies suggest a broader knowledge than would have been assumed traditionally, at least in specific circles. Unfortunately, however, the evidence is often ambiguous, if not profoundly frustrating for researchers interested in this issue. In one of his *Seniles*, written in 1370, Petrarch expresses disdain for Arabic poetry to his friend Giovanni Dondi dell'Orologio.[52] It is obvious that he did not read Arabic poetry in the original language. Consequently, we can deduce that some (possibly Venetian?) acquaintance had passed on some kind of information about Arabic literature to him. What kind of information this could have been remains open to speculation. However, two testimonies from the end of the period attest that, at the end of the Quattrocento, it would have seemed conceivable to use the merchant networks of Venice as a logistic base to acquire a profound knowledge of Arabic texts, later transmitted back into Latin.

These testimonies provide us with information on two medical authorities, Girolamo Ramusio (d. 1486) and Andrea Alpago (d. 1521). Both stayed in Damascus for a long period, where both were employed as physicians of the Venetian consulate, with Andrea Alpago arriving in Damascus at the time of Ramusio's death. Both pursued the same objective: to revise and improve the older translation of Ibn Sīnā's (d. 427/1037) *al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb*, i.e. the *Canon* of Avicenna.[53] Ramusio died before accomplishing this, but left a partial transcription of the *Qānūn* with working notes. Alpago, in turn, had time to return to Italy. From the Venetian republic, he obtained a position at the University of Padua, and, among other works, left an *Interpretatio arabicorum nominum*, that is, an explanation of the medical terms used by Ibn Sīnā/Avicenna, which was published in Venice a few years after Alpago's death.[54] In the two cases of Ramusio and Alpago, the similarity of their backgrounds, their language acquisition techniques, and their objectives is striking. Literati with precise scientific objectives used the institutionalized merchant infrastructure of the Venetian republic to spend long

51 See some possible interpretations in Grévin, "De Damas à Urbino," particularly 613–618.

52 See Pétrarque, *Lettres de la vieillesse XII–XV*, ed. Elvira Nota, trans. Jean-Yves Boriaud, presentation Ugo Dotti (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006), ep. XII, 2 [68], 92–95. On this subject, see Benoît Grévin, "Connaissance et enseignement de l'arabe dans l'Italie du XVe siècle: Quelques jalons," in *Maghreb-Italie: Des passeurs médiévaux à l'Orientalisme moderne (XIIIe siècle–milieu XXe siècle)*, ed. Benoît Grévin (Rome: École française de Rome, 2010), 103–104.

53 On Alpago and his activity as a translator from Arabic and corrector of the Latin version of the *Canon*, see Giorgio Vercellin, *Il Canone di Avicenna fra Europa e Oriente nel primo Cinquecento: L'Interpretatio Arabicorum nominum di Andrea Alpago* (Torino: Utet, 1991). On Ramusio, see Danielle Jacquart, "Arabisants du Moyen Âge et de la renaissance: Jérôme Ramusio († 1486), correcteur de Gérard de Crémone († 1187)," *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, 147 (1989), 399–415.

54 Published in Vercellin, *Il canone*, 52–140.

periods of residence in Syria. Their aim was to learn a vast amount of a very specialized form of Arabic, and to elaborate working tools in Latin on the basis of their acquired knowledge. Once again, these complex intellectual operations did not result in the writing of Italian treatises, but of Latin translations and lexicons. In around 1500, it was hardly conceivable to teach medicine at an academic level in any other tongue than Latin. Furthermore, Ramusio and Alpago's objective was to complete and correct a traditional corpus that had already been widely disseminated for centuries thanks to the great wave of medieval translations. The case of these two physicians also shows that the prevalent methods of acquiring linguistic information and translating skills had undergone substantial modifications. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, most Latin-Christian powers ceased to control large pools of Arabic-speaking populations and associated cooperative literate elites over the course of the thirteenth century. Consequently, linguistic skills had to be sought abroad. With the collapse of the Mamlūk state in 1517, the conditions for obtaining this linguistic knowledge altered substantially once again.

4.2.3 AT THE CENTRE: COURTS, HUMANIST NETWORKS, AND THEIR ATTRACTIVENESS

In Quattrocento Italy, knowledge of Arabic either persisted in partly Arabic-speaking and Arabic-writing Jewish communities in Sicily, or was acquired thanks to the linguistic exploitation of mercantile networks in the East. The Italian Quattrocento (in particular, the years 1460–1490) stands out, however, because of the increasing attention accorded to Arabic (and, in some ways, to Arabic artefacts) in a number of the most prestigious Italian courts. This attention was intrinsically linked to a shift in Italian humanism and humanist tastes.

In the Italian history of Arabic-Latin interaction, a handful of manuscripts suggest that ideological objectives and sociolinguistic possibilities converged at certain moments. This convergence resulted in the creation of artefacts that stand symbolically for the will to construct a bilingual/bigraphical culture. Unsurprisingly, the Norman Kingdom of Sicily lived through one of these moments. A still relatively ill-studied series of preserved trilingual Latin–Greek–Arabic manuscripts containing either the Psalms or parts of the New Testament are a testimony to the desire to create ecclesiastical writings able to reflect the trilingual universe of Norman (and, in some measure, Hohenstaufen) Sicily.[55] Although we do not know

55 Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Codici greco-latino-arabi in Italia fra XI e XV secolo," in *Libri, documenti, epigrafi medievali: Possibilità di studi comparativi*, ed. Francesco Magistrale et al. (Spolete: Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2002), 455; Guglielmo Cavallo, "La cultura italo-greca nella produzione libraria," in *I Bizantini in Italia*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo et al. (Milan: Schweiwiller, 1982), 525; Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique*, 214–215.

the exact context of their creation, it is clear that they originated within the boundaries of the kingdom. Other Latin-Arabic manuscripts, which have been present on Italian soil since the Middle Ages, are of less clear origins. A manuscript kept in the Municipal Library of Poppi in Tuscany, for example, also contains a bilingual version of the Psalms, together with an Arabic-Latin glossary. Although linked to the monastery of Camaldoli, it is not clear to my knowledge whether it was produced in Italy or rather in the East.[56] Another manuscript in the Biblioteca Riccardiana of Florence has a somewhat less nebulous history. This voluminous Arabic-Latin lexicon, already edited in 1871, was certainly brought to Tuscany during the Quattrocento, but is clearly of Iberian manufacture, providing further proof of the continuous interaction between the three major zones of Arabic-Latin entanglement during the late Middle Ages.[57]

In contrast to these examples, the ms. Urb. Lat. 1384 in the Vatican Library was obviously produced in Italy as the result of an impressive textual and artistic programme.[58] This manuscript was conceived from the start as a partly Arabic-Latin artefact. This was not the case, however, with every Arabic-Latin Italian manuscript, as we shall see. The ms. Urb. Lat. 1384 contains three sections. The first section presents an elegantly calligraphed bilingual Arabic-Latin version of a treatise on talismanic magic, attributed to an unknown author named Ibn al-Ḥātim.[59] The second section includes only the Latin translation of astronomic tables, attributed by the translator to Arabic sources. Finally, the third section contains an Arabic-Latin version of *sūra*s 21 and 22 of the Qurʾān. The text is richly illuminated, the astro-magical treatise in particular adorned with elegant medallions featuring the constellations, which are discussed in their Arabic nomenclature. The manuscript also contains a series of glossaries

56 Giovanni Cipriani, "Poppi: Biblioteca comunale," in *Inventari dei manoscritti delle Biblioteche d'Italia*, vol. 6, ed. Giuseppe Mazzatinti (Forlì: Luigi Bordandini, 1896), 137; Maria Elena Cataluccio Magheri and Antonio Ugo Fossa, *Biblioteca e cultura a Camaldoli: Dal Medioevo all'Umanesimo* (Rome: Anselmiana, 1979), 442; *I Manoscritti della Biblioteca comunale di Poppi (secoli XII–XVI): Un esperimento di catalogazione diretto da Emanuele Casamassima*, ed. Guglielmo Bartoletti and Ilaria Pescini (Florence: Editrice Bibliografica, 1993), 66–67; Piemontese, "Codici greco-latino-arabi in Italia fra XI e XV secolo," 464.

57 *Vocabulista in arabico*, ed. Cesare Schiaparelli (Florence: Le Monnier, 1871).

58 On this manuscript, see: Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino," 258–261; Piemontese, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alla corte di Urbino," 159–164; Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 133–148; Benoît Grévin, "Editing an Illuminated Arabic-Latin Masterwork of the Fifteenth Century: Manuscript Vat. Urb. Lat. 1384 as a Philological Challenge," in *Multilingual and Multigraphic Documents and Manuscripts of East and West*, ed. Giuseppe Mandalà, Inmaculada Pérez-Martín (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018), 286–306.

59 On this point, see: Kristen Lippincott and David Pingree, "Ibn al-Ḥātim and the Talismans of the Lunar Mansions," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987), 56–58; Kristen Lippincott, "More on Ibn al-Ḥātim," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988), 188–190; Marc Oliveras, "El *De imaginibus caelestibus* de Ibn al-Ḥātim," *Al-Qanṭara* 31, no. 1 (2009), 171–220; Grévin, "Editing an Illuminated Arabic-Latin Masterwork of the Fifteenth Century."

that explain certain Arabic terms directly transcribed in Latin characters in the magical and Qurʾānic translation. All this is complemented by three precious dedicatory introductions. Thanks to these prefaces, we are able to retrace a part of the manuscript's history, and above all, to identify both the person who designed it and the man for whom he worked. The sumptuous bilingual artefact was made at the request of Federico III, Duke of Urbino (r. 1444/1474–1482), known as an exceptional bibliophile and patron. A team of scribes and painters worked under the supervision of Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, alias Flavius Mithridates, who was responsible for the prefaces and, most probably, for the greater part of the translation. Although Moncada was still a relatively obscure figure in the history of Quattrocento humanism during most of the twentieth century, he is now far better known.[60] Born a Sicilian Jew in the small town of Caltabellotta, he converted to Christianity probably during his adolescence or young adulthood, and began building a career on the basis of his linguistic skills and cultural heritage. In the 1460s, he tried to convince powerful Christian patrons to help him establish a school for the teaching of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, the three languages with which he was acquainted thanks to the rabbinic education he had received during his childhood. It is highly probable that his mother tongue was a variety of the Sicilian form of Judaeo-Arabic, and that he lived in a bilingual Romance-Arabic community. Under the protection of cardinal Giovanni Cybo, the future Innocent VIII (sed. 1484–1492), he introduced himself to some of the major courts of central Italy. At the end of the 1470s, he worked at the court of Urbino. The ms. Urb. Lat. 1384 would have been finished in around 1482, at a time when he would have been well on his way to gaining entry to the papal court as official master of Semitic languages. A quintilingual sermon that he delivered before Pope Sixtus IV (sed. 1471–1484) on Good Friday, 1481, can be seen as the apogee of his career.[61] After this performance, he remained in favour at the papal court, where he obtained an official position, but was quite soon disgraced under unclear circumstances. Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada had taken to nicknaming himself Flavius Mithridates, thus alluding to his polyglot

60 The studies on Moncada/Mithridates, which were not so abundant during the greater part of the twentieth century, have increased notably, with numerous editions of the translations from Hebrew or Aramaic into Latin, and various studies. See, most notably, the proceedings of the two Sicilian congresses of 2004 and 2008 (published in 2008 and 2012), i.e. Perani, ed., *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate*; and also Perani and Corrazol, ed., *Flavio Mitridate mediatore*, with an extensive bibliography. For one of the best recent editions of Moncada's translations from Hebrew (with some of his comments on the relations between Arabic and Hebrew), see Gersonide, *Commento al cantico dei Cantici nella traduzione ebraico-latina di Flavio Mitridate: Edizione e comment del ms. Vat. Lat. 4273 (cc. 5r–54r)*, ed. Michela Andreatta (Florence: Olschki, 2009).

61 The sermon is superbly edited and commented in Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo de passione Domini*, ed. Chaim Wirszubski (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1963).

skills.[62] In the years 1486–1487, he attached himself to the young polymath and philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, whom he mentored and taught in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, and for whom he executed translations from Hebrew to Latin. After a rupture with his brilliant pupil, Moncada disappeared into the papal jails, apparently in 1489.[63] Important details of his early life as well as of his late years are missing, and not all of his extant manuscripts have been edited so far. However, we know enough about his career to retrace the mechanisms of his social ascension. What opened the doors of these courts and allowed him to gain access to the most fashionable intellectual milieus of his time was clearly a new type of demand for the sort of knowledge this ambitious convert could offer. The Italian courts and humanistic circles of the 1470s and 1480s were no longer satisfied with the mastery of Latin and Greek. They also began to display an interest in Hebrew and Aramaic, conceived as access gates to a broader and philologically more precise biblical culture as well as to esoteric speculations like Kabbalah. This new fascination also entailed a rising interest in Arabic. Those Sicilian Jews who lived in perpetual interaction between the three languages were potential purveyors of a corresponding intellectual culture, on the condition that they endorsed the cultural codes of the milieu that requested their skills. Converting to Christianity and, above all, learning to express himself in elegant humanistic Latin and to read Greek, gave the young Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, alias Flavius Mithridates, the opportunity to introduce his Sicilian Jewish heritage with its Arabic component into the courts of Northern Italy. This he did zealously and without showing excessive scruples as to the actual limits of his knowledge of Arabic[64] and the real nature of some of the intellectual issues connected with Aramaic.[65] We should not regard

62 The nickname Mithridates alludes to Mithridates VI Eupatôr, King of Pontus (135–163 BC), a formidable enemy of the late Roman republic, as well as a sovereign famous for his ability to speak the numerous languages of his realm.

63 On the life of Moncada/Mithridates, see the numerous résumés in the collected volumes quoted in notes 60 and 61. Important information on his Sicilian background and his first Hebrew names is provided by Angela Scandagliato, *Judaica minora sicula: Indagini sugli ebrei di Sicilia nel Medioevo e quattro studi in collaborazione con Maria Gerardi* (Florence: Giuntina, 2006). On his choice of different nicknames, see Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo de passione domini*, ed. Wirszubski, 48–49.

64 His knowledge of Arabic is thoroughly questioned by Hartmut Bobzin, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada e la sua traduzione della sura 21 ('dei profeti')," in *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate*, ed. Perani, 173–183; and Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom*, 133–148. Others highlight his Arabic skills, e.g. Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino"; and Piemontese, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alla corte di Urbino." See my comments in Chapter 4.3.2 for a possible sociolinguistic explanation not considered by these scholars.

65 Moncada certainly had a taste for cryptography, symbolism, and jokes. He used the Ethiopian alphasyllabary, quite new on the Italian cultural market at the time, to give an aura of mystery to the Judaeo-Aramaic of the Targums or of other texts, when he was teaching Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, or when he was transcribing fragments of Aramaic in his quintilingual sermon for the papal court. On this point, see Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo de passione domini*, ed. Wirszubski, 35–40. For the circulation of the alphasyllabary in Italy and

this lack of scruples as a mere social tactic. It also reflects the difficulty of reconciling the insular culture he had inherited with the expectations of his new continental milieu, and in particular, the discrepancy between the Judaeo-Arabic culture of his childhood and the Arabic-Islamic character of the texts that he would have to translate.

While promoting Arabic culture in circles that were speaking and writing in Latin, Moncada pursued a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, he created textual objects whose spectacular features were bound to attract the attention and admiration of his audience and readership—among these were the gorgeous miniatures of the ms. Urb. Lat. 1384 with its mysterious Arabic calligraphy, or his quintilingual sermon with its fireworks of Greek, Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew quotes scattered throughout the Latin text. On the other hand, he accomplished more substantial tasks, for example, when he tried to teach Arabic or made lengthy translations from Hebrew or Aramaic, with his many manuscripts attesting to his philological approach. Moncada left an enormous number of glosses and philological notes, predominantly in Latin, on a peculiar Qurʾān written in Hebrew characters (now ms. Vat. Ebr. 357 in the Vatican Library).[66] He had probably found or stolen this manuscript, probably created in western Sicily around 1400, from one of the libraries of his former co-religionists.[67] He seems to have used it not only as a personal working basis for translating the Qurʾānic text and for some Muslim Qurʾānic exegesis, but also to teach Arabic to his pupils during the 1480s, among them, probably, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Indeed, towards the end of the century, Arabic was not only the preoccupation of fashionable or powerful court circles, worried by the advance of Ottoman Islam or interested in esoteric or magic recipes. It had reached the status of an alternative hermetic language to be used, for example, together with Greek and Hebrew, in the cryptic

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the confusion of Chaldaean with Ethiopian, see, most recently, Samantha Kelly, "The Curious Case of Ethiopic Chaldean: Fraud, Philology and Cultural (Mis)understanding in European Conceptions of Ethiopia," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2015), 1227–1264.

66 On this manuscript and its links to Moncada, see Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino," 266–271, who was the first to understand the nature of the predominantly Latin annotations on the Arabic text, and their link to Moncada. See Benoît Grévin, "Le 'Coran de Mithridate' (ms. Vat. Ebr. 357) à la croisée des savoirs arabes dans l'Italie du XVe siècle," *Al-Qanṭara* 31, no. 2 (2010), 513–548, with more extensive quotations from Moncada's personal annotations. See also Benoît Grévin, "Flavius Mithridate au travail sur le Coran," in *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell'ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*, ed. Mauro Perani and Giacomo Corazzol (Palermo: Officina di studi medievali, 2012), 200–230. In the otherwise fundamental synthesis on Latin medieval Qurʾāns, that is, Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom*, 142, this manuscript seems to be the object of a misunderstanding. Burman characterizes the manuscript as a short anthology and doubts Moncada's authorship of the bulk of the Latin annotations on the Arabic text. However, the Qurʾānic text is almost wholly preserved, and Moncada's authority is beyond any doubt, given that he signs his very characteristic notes more than once.

67 On Moncada's successful attempts to acquire manuscripts at the expense of his former religious community in Sicily, see Scandagliato, *Judaica minora sicula*, 466.

pseudo-inscriptions of refined texts like Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, first published in 1499.[68] Still, the gap between the available teaching supply and the learning demand was enormous, and would be for centuries. The avidity with which the papal court accepted the help of Leo Africanus (alias al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Wazzān al-Fāʾsī) at the beginning of the sixteenth century attests to this, as does the fact that cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (sed. 1517–1532) was forced to recruit translators from Spain (and to receive the assistance of the same Leo Africanus) in order to publish a new, glossed translation of the Qurʾān.[69] A sizeable number of men with some knowledge of Arabic probably circulated in the Apennine Peninsula around 1480 or 1500. However, only a very few had the knowledge required to execute first-rate translations of complex texts such as the Qurʾān.

4.3 From diplomacy to translation: Sociolinguistic problems, recurring patterns, inflexions

The Arabic culture that flourished in certain parts of the Apennine Peninsula from the Norman conquest to the "syncretic" humanism of the late Quattrocento was strongly associated with the Latin language. For reasons of prestige as well as cultural habits, the language chosen to translate or accompany Arabic texts was very seldom a form of Italian. Certainly, linguistic interaction between the vernacular language—Italian of one sort or another—and Arabic existed. A vernacular sermon, preached by Giordano da Pisa in Florence in around 1305–1306 and transcribed by attentive clerks, contains an interesting and pertinent commentary on the equivalence between the term *podestà*—the official recruited on an annual basis from outside the Italian communes to maintain civil peace—and the significance of the Arabic word *sulṭān*.[70] The tendency to privilege Latin in line with humanistic aesthetics was not mandatory for every genre: a refined text such as the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, although teeming with Latin

68 On this point, see Piemontese, "Le iscrizioni arabe nella 'Poliphili Hypnerotomachia.'" For the inscriptions, see Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed. Giovanni Pozzi and Lucia A. Ciapponi (Padova: Antenore, 1980).

69 On the revision of the Qurʾānic translation commissioned by Egidio da Viterbo from Leo Africanus, see García-Arenal and Starczewska, "The Law of Abraham the Catholic," 421–437, and the introduction to Starczewska, *A Latin Translation of the Qurʾān.*

70 See Giordano da Pisa, *Quaresimale Fiorentino 1305–1306*, ed. Carlo Delcorno (Florence: Sansoni, 1974), the edition of the Florentine sermons preached during Lent by Giordano da Pisa in 1305–1306, sermon 44, 277. The Italian *reportatio* of the sermon specifies that Giordano da Pisa quoted a biblical sentence, or at least some words of it, in Arabic: "ma egli [podestade] è nome troppo alto: questo è il nome del soldano, podestade; onde soldano in nostra lingua è podestade. Onde dice il vangelo, il quale fu iscritto in quella lingua de' saracini, quando dice: 'Io hoe podestade di porre l'anima mia et cetera,' sì dice 'soldayn, *sulṭān*.' (Frate Giordano il disse in quella lingua egli)."

(and Greek) quotes, was written in Italian, albeit a very Latinized form of the language.[71] However, due to the persistent and even growing prestige of Latin as a political, cultural, and literary medium in Italy, the status of the texts to be translated, as well as the configuration of knowledge and learning techniques, Latin was generally privileged during the process of translating or interpreting an Arabic text. Rather than being Italianized, the text was to be Latinized, or presented together with a Latin version. The possibility of an intermediate Italian version was not excluded, particularly when the key informant was a merchant, but it was far from automatic.[72] In courtly or ecclesiastical contexts—one of the major humanistic courts during the Quattrocento being the papal curia—Latin was mandatory as the language of majesty or God. In this respect, the sociolinguistic situation of the Apennine Peninsula certainly differed considerably from that of the Iberian Peninsula. There, the new translation of the Qurʾān envisioned by Juan of Segovia, prepared in the years 1454–1456, included the Arabic text, a vernacular Castilian, and a Latin version.[73] The Castilian version had been prepared by the Mudéjar Yça of Segovia. Juan then translated the Castilian text into Latin.[74] The mechanism was not new: many twelfth- and thirteenth-century translations had been achieved with this staged, two-phase technique. However, older medieval translations generally did not conserve the vernacular intermediate version. In Italy, the creation of similar vernacular translations would only come later. The first Italian translation of the Qurʾān, for example, was not produced before the sixteenth century. It was not only very fragmentary, but also indirect, since it was based on the old Latin translation of Mark of Toledo, produced at the turn of the twelfth to the thirteenth century, rather than on the original Arabic text.[75]

71 See Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, ed. Giovanni Pozzi and Ciapponi.

72 On this point, see the considerations in Chapter 4.2.2 on the literary production linked to Niccolò de' Conti and Emmanuel Piloti.

73 On the translation of Juan of Segovia, almost entirely lost, see Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom*, 178–197; and see also the new discoveries presented by Ulrich Roth and Reinhold F. Glei, "Die Spuren der lateinischen Koranübersetzung des Juan de Segovia: Alte Probleme und ein neuer Fund," *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 11 (2009), 109–154, which is synthetized in Ulli Roth, "Juan of Segovia's Translation of the Qurʾān," *Al-Qanṭara* 35, no. 2 (2014), 555–578.

74 On the milieu and activities of the Mudéjar, who helped Juan de Segovia, see Wiegers, *Islamic Literature in Spanish and Aljamiado*.

75 On this translation, see *Iddio ci dia buona viaggio e guadagno: Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms. 1910 (Codice Vaglienti)*, ed. Luciano Formisano (Florence: Edizioni polistampa, 2006), introduction: 31–34, and text: 267–281. On the translation of Mark of Toledo, see *Alchoranus Latinus quem transtulit Marcus canonicus Toletanus*, ed. Nàdia Petruus Pons (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones científicas, 2016).

4.3.1 DIPLOMACY, LANGUAGE LEVELS, AND TRANSLATION SKILLS IN THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

We must keep in mind the Latin-Romance sociolinguistic context of this Arabic-Latin culture. However, in a time in which speakers and writers of Latin were also literati speaking and writing in Romance, the status of Latin, as the ultimate link in the translating chain, or, more often, as a direct translation tool from Arabic, did not present any particular problem, stylistic questions aside. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, there was no lack of excellent Latinists on the Apennine Peninsula, even if the aesthetics of writing and speaking Latin varied greatly between the biblically flavoured phraseology employed in the chancery of the Norman and Hohenstaufen kings of Sicily and the strict Ciceronianism that was fashionable in Renaissance Italy from around 1400 onwards. The situation was quite different and much less favourable with regard to Arabic. The lexicographer and jurist Ibn Makkī (d. 505/1107–1108) had already criticized the linguistic skills of the Arabic-speaking elites in pre-Norman Sicily in the eleventh century.[76] Such criticism was in line with the widespread obsession to condemn every deviation from the theoretical norms of classical *fuṣḥā*, and was certainly not specific to Sicily: the bad quality of Maghrebi Arabic, Andalusī elites excluded, was a topos during the High Middle Ages. In Sicily, however, the linguistic problem became ever more pressing towards the end of Norman rule and during the transition to the Hohenstaufen dynasty, that is from the reign of William II, starting in 1166, to the return to Italy of Frederick II in 1220. The reason for this was that the available pool of insular Muslim literati had significantly decreased. Under the Hohenstaufen dynasty, it was already difficult, not so much to find some speaker of Siculo-Arabic in the kingdom, but to find the human resources able to translate from Arabic to Latin or from Latin to Arabic according to the high standards requested both for scientific translation and for solemn political communication.

The above-mentioned diplomatic mission, directed by Frederick II to the Ḥafṣid sultanate, provides a good example of this problem of finding appropriate personnel. A series of Latin mandates, preserved in the imperial register for October 1239–May 1240, reveals the dilemma faced by the Sicilian court.[77] The emperor, who sojourned in northern Italy at the time, took great care to select the personnel. The mission was to be headed by Enrico Abbate, scion of an important Sicilian family. He was to be accompanied by Oberto Fallamonaca, another insular official of Frederick II, who probably came from an Arabic-speaking Christian family and may have had

76 On this point, see Annliese Nef, "L'analyse du taṯqīf al-lisān d'Ibn Makkī et son intérêt pour la connaissance de la variante sicilienne de l'arabe: propositions méthodologiques," *Oriente moderno* 77, no. 1 (1997), 1–17.

77 *Il registro della cancelleria di Federico II*, no. 539–542, 512–515, and 575, 541–542.

some knowledge of written Arabic.[78] The emperor's insistence on recruiting two additional literati for the operation reveals the imperial court's attention to the linguistic aspect of the negotiations. Frederick II tried repeatedly to ensure the presence of the mathematician John of Palermo in the diplomatic mission, probably because of the latter's linguistic as well as his scientific skills. He was a renowned mathematician, who translated from Arabic.[79] We have already seen that the emperor selected still another man of letters of *Mašriqī*, i.e. of Middle Eastern origin, Theodore of Antioch, to write the Arabic version of the official missive addressed to the Ḥafṣid sultan.[80]

The reason for this peculiar choice was not only Theodore's proficiency in Arabic. The letter needed to be written in the solemn rhythmic and rhymed prose used for diplomatic and political correspondence in the Islamic sphere in this period, and elaborated according to the stylistic-rhetoric discipline known as *ʿilm al-inšāʾ*.[81] Theodore was apparently considered the best Arabic writer at the court, perhaps because he had received the necessary stylistic-rhetoric training in the Orient, along with his scientific knowledge. Such training, associated with the prose and poetry of classical and post-classical Arabic literary culture, would certainly have been difficult to acquire in Palermo after 1190, even in the bilingual parts of the Christian elite or among the Jewish population. This dependence on an Oriental scholar on the part of a court reputed for its linguistic universalism was not necessarily scandalous: the stylistic qualifications required to master this particular type of writing were very high, even by Muslim standards. We should consider that, in the Christian West during the same period, a man of letters would have been able to read and write Latin fluently, without automatically mastering the subtleties of the structurally equivalent rhetorical techniques used for epistolary political communication, the so-called *ars dictaminis*.[82]

Indeed, a well-known but controversial testimony from the early Norman period illustrates the problems created by miscommunication in solemn literary correspondence. So far, no Arabic letter sent by a Sicilian Norman king to a Muslim sovereign has been discovered. However, a reply from the Fatimid chancery to a Sicilian royal letter has been transmitted by al-Qalqašandī's (d. 821/1418) *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā fī ṣināʿat al-inšāʾ*, one of the major encyclopaedias on the art of composing chancery documents from the Mamlūk period. The Fatimid letter, dated around 1137, touches on many subjects. One passage shows, however, that in a preceding Norman Arabic

78 On this point, see Mandalà, "La migration des juifs," 19; Mandalà, Moscone, "Tra Latini, greci e 'arabici'," 195.
79 Mandalà, "Il prologo delle Risposte," 76, 79–86.
80 Ibid., 67–84.
81 On *ʿilm al-inšāʾ* see Chapter 1.4 of this volume.
82 On the *ars dictaminis* in the context of the Sicilian Court, see Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir medieval: Les Lettres de Pierre de la Vigne et la formation du langage politique européen* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008).

missive, a linguistic error of some sort had been committed, to the effect that it had disturbed parts of the communication process. An excuse and an explanation on the part of the Normans had been provided in a subsequent letter. The Fatimid Arabic letter selected by al-Qalqašandī now put an end to the case. It assures the Norman addressees that their explanation has been accepted, and comments on the difficulties of translating from one language to the other in cases in which the target language does not possess the terminology of the original language. This, the letter asserts, can effectively prevent a writer from making himself understood—a highly interesting comment on the difficulty of translating from Greek or Latin into Arabic, as perceived in the chancery of Fatimid Egypt![83] Since the Norman part of the preceding correspondence is lost, we will never know what kind of Latin or Greek term or expression the Sicilian writer had used as part of the Arabic letter sent to the Fatimid caliph in Egypt, and what had actually caused confusion. We know for certain, however, that the letter was written during a stage of Norman-Sicilian history in which the island still featured an important Muslim and Christian elite capable of writing Arabic. That a linguistic error such as this occurred in a Western chancery reputed for its proficiency in Arabic demonstrates that, even under apparently favourable circumstances, the highly formalized communication processes of medieval political powers represented a challenge.

A linguistic history of medieval embassies has yet to be written.[84] There is certainly no lack of sources on peculiar Arabic-Latin exchanges during the reigns of Frederick II and the first Angevin king, Charles I. In recent years, Giuseppe Mandalà has battled some researchers' attempts to minimize the importance of direct scientific contacts between Arabic and Latin milieus during the thirteenth century. He was able to demonstrate repeatedly that numerous embassies sent by Frederick II to Egypt or to the Islamic West can be directly linked to scientific exchanges resulting in translations, not only from Arabic to Latin, but also from Latin to Arabic. This was the case, for example, in a diplomatic mission of 1227 destined to prepare the "crusade" of 1228–1229. During this mission, the Sicilian high dignitary Berardo, archbishop of Palermo, translated a Latin inscription carved at the base of one of the great pyramids for his Egyptian hosts either directly

83 See on this subject Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, 91–93, pointing to the study Marcel Canard, "Une lettre du calife fatimide al-Ḥāfiẓ (524–544/1130–1149) à Roger II," Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Ruggeriani (Palermo: Società siciliana di Storia patria, 1955), 125–146, reed. Marcel Canard, *Miscellanea Orientalia* (London: Variorum reprints, 1973), and on Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 259–265.

84 See the suggestions of Jean-Marie Moeglin and Stéphane Péquignot, *Diplomatie et "relations internationales" au Moyen Âge (IXᵉ–XVᵉ siècle)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2017), 112–126. For the Sicilian kingdom during the thirteenth century, see Borghese and Grévin, "Aspects linguistiques de la diplomatie sicilienne."

or with the help of some Arabic speakers.[85] Later, the redaction of a Latin version of the *Quaestiones sicilianae*, based on a series of questions sent by Frederick II to the Western scholar Ibn Sabʿīn, can also be connected to Hohenstaufen diplomacy in the Maghreb.[86] Finally, the Latin translation of the medical treatise *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* or *Liber continens*, made by the Sicilian Jew Faragius (*Farağ*) for Charles I, was a direct result of a gift made by the Ḥafṣid sultan to the Angevin king of Sicily.[87] A Sicilian medieval diplomatic mission could thus involve numerous linguistic operations. These included the redaction of Arabic letters potentially fraught with stylistic or linguistic deficiencies, as well as translations that have survived in the form of scientific treatises. Competent linguistic actors chosen for these tasks did not necessarily master the entire range of Arabic communication skills. Over time, southern Italian sovereigns had come to rely on minorities like the Arabic-speaking Jews for their diplomatic transactions with Tunis,[88] without being able to uphold the semantic and linguistic sophistication of the Norman and Hohenstaufen embassies. The sociolinguistic conditions of these exchanges changed considerably between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, as did the abilities of native Italian Arabic-speakers to understand and reproduce the linguistic intricacies of Muslim elite culture.

4.3.2 SOCIOLINGUISTIC LIMITS, PIVOTAL ROLES, AND WRITING STRATEGIES IN THE HEYDAY OF HUMANISM

Switching back from Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily to central and northern Italy in the heyday of the Renaissance, a few centuries later, we can examine yet another facet of the same problem. We have already suggested that the translation accomplishments of the fifteenth century were constrained by certain technical limits, which resulted from the cultural background of the actors involved. Beltramo Mignanelli's very short treatise on Arabic in the introduction to his bilingual anthology of the Psalms provides an example. In this case, we can argue that the relative lack of theorization in this treatise does not result so much from his own lack of linguistic or conceptual skills. Quite to the contrary, it has to be regarded as the effect of a general difficulty common to all Latin literati. Since the latter were mentally conditioned to identify Latin with grammar, developing

85 On this point, see Giuseppe Mandalà, "Un ambasciatore di Federico II in visita alle piramidi: Berardo arcivescovo di Palermo (a. 1227)," *Aevum* 85 (2011), 1–22.

86 Mandalà, "Il prologo delle Risposte"; and Giuseppe Mandalà, "The Sicilian Questions," *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 3 (2016), 3–32.

87 See Borghese and Grévin, "Aspects linguistiques de la diplomatie sicilienne," 88–89, on descriptions, fortunately preserved, of the process of redaction and production of the book in the otherwise destroyed registers of the Angevin Sicilian chancery.

88 Salvatore Fodale, "Un ebreo trapanese ambasciatore dei Martini a Tunisi: Samuele Sala," *Studia historica et philologica in honorem M. Batllori* (Rome: Publicaciones del Instituto Español de Cultura, 1984), 275–280.

an autonomous description of a foreign language represented an enormous challenge.[89] Despite its short length and its limits, Mignanelli's brief description of Arabic is rather impressive. It takes into account the linguistic structure and semantic richness of Arabic and addresses its geographical diffusion as well as its sociolinguistic variants.[90] Mignanelli's familiarity with the linguistic concepts and clichés of the Mamlūk and Timurid Orient results in some assertions that reflect an empathy with the Oriental view of linguistic culture, which is quite unusual in medieval Latin literature. His description of Arabic as a language characterized by three declensions and an overwhelming semantic richness surprises less than an anecdote, apparently related to the Mamlūk sultan Barqūq. Here, Arabic is defined as the language of religion/judgement (*judicium*: probably the Latinization of Arabic *dīn*), Persian (and Greek!) as the language of harems and women, and Turkic as the language of war and the army.[91] Despite its schematic character, this functionalist description of the three major languages used in the Muslim Orient, to which Greek is added, gives a good account of how the Mamlūk elite defined the different functions of Turkic—as the language of the military caste and of war, and Arabic—as the language of the legal religious system.[92] In another of his writings, the *Liber Machometi et opinio perfida iudeorum*, Mignanelli contradicts the notion, widely diffused in the Latin West, that Hebrew was the first language of humanity, that is, the language of Adam. Instead, Mignanelli argues that wiser Christians,

89 On this general problem, see Benoît Grévin, *Le parchemin des cieux. Essais sur le Moyen Âge du langage* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012), 178–186.

90 The text can be found in Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 155–156.

91 Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 157: "fuit itaque soldanus quidam Egipti et Siriae nomine appellativo Melchel dahar quoniam et ipsi Soldano mutant nomina quando ad illum appicem assumuntur ut Papa noster, credo tamen quod non assero proprio nomine propter famam et virtutem fuisse Saladinum qui quidem Soldanus, inter alia .IIII. idiomata eleganter sciebat, videlicet graecum, turcum, persicum et Arabicum, quibus utebatur; loca persona et tempore magno ordine distinguebat qui in camera cum suis mulieribus et ancillis loquebatur graeco vel persico, et in exercitu et noctis tempore turco, in audientia vero et in iuditio utebatur arabico, qui interroganti et admiranti quia sic, respondit sic convenit, quia graecum et persicum sunt dulcia mitia et muliebra, turcum vero rude tonans et acerbum, arabicum autem magis diffusum vocabulis abundans et compendiose bene distinctum ; et velle super huiusmodi disputare multa occurrerent quae censeo potius relinquenda." Contrary to the commentary in Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra Siena, l'Oriente e la curia*, 270, the history is quite clearly applied by Beltramo not to Saladin, but to the contemporary sultan Barqūq, on whom he speaks frequently otherwise. The reference to this cognomen (*laqab*), i.e. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, is probably due to a confusion on the part of Beltramo (who expressly doubts his memory here) between the *laqab* Sayf al-Dīn, used by Barqūq, and the *laqab* Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.

92 On the practice and representation of Turkic and Arabic in Mamlūk Egypt and the difficulties of reconstructing this linguistic constellation, 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. For a comparative approach to these representations of multilinguism (in pre-Islamic and Islamic Asia, and in Europe), see Grévin, *Le parchemin des cieux*, 70–120, 353–355.

Muslims (*Sarraceni*), and Jews agreed that the language of Adam was "Chaldaean," called *soriana* (*sūryānī*) by the Muslims, an indication that he may have discussed linguistic theories with Muslim interlocutors.[93]

While Mignanelli had developed a remarkable empathy for linguistic concepts and clichés that circulated in the Muslim sphere during his lifetime, his transcriptions from Arabic in the *Ascensus Barcoch* and his bilingual *libellus* reveal the limits of his extensive knowledge. As already mentioned, his Latin transcriptions of Arabic phrases—in this case of messages exchanged between the Mamlūk sultan Barqūq and Tamerlane—are strongly influenced by the Egyptian pronunciation of Arabic. Because of their lack of apparent sense, scholarship has neglected these transcriptions until Angelo Michele Piemontese explained them correctly.[94] The possibility of using his bilingual anthology of the Psalms, in turn, is limited by the fact that the Arabic text is not vocalized.[95] A third, indirect testimony gives yet another impression of the difficulties Mignanelli potentially faced during his work as a mediator between Latin and Arabic. Flavio Biondo, a first-rate humanist who wrote an interesting treatise on the exact nature of Latin as an elite or popular language during Antiquity[96] and participated in the council of Florence, harshly criticized the interpreters from Arabic to Latin active during the council for their inability to master the subtleties of theological phraseology.[97] Given the complexity of the matter and the total lack of qualifications on the part of the critic, this judgement was certainly ungenerous. It suggests, however, that the skills of Mignanelli and his colleague(s) were tested during the difficult negotiations. We are confronted again with the problem that institutional agents in need of linguistic mediators could not draw on an adequately trained pool of specialized linguists. This, in turn, obliged the interested institutions to rely on the stretched competencies of inadequately trained personnel, at the risk of making the latter work beyond their capacities.

With the activity of Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, alias Flavius Mithridates, we face yet another dimension of the same problem. Unlike

93 The text is edited in Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra Siena, l'Oriente e la curia*, 391–392. Quite interestingly, Beltramo uses this topos of Syriac as the first human language in a passage with a clear anti-Judaic tendency: "Et declarato hoc pura consciencia, ut reperi, transeo ad iudeos, magis malignantes et pessimos, dicentes eorum linguam ebraicam fuisse primam sub celo et ipsam Adam, primum patrem omnium, fuisse locutum." This is noteworthy because the idea that Hebrew was the first human language was in fact fairly widespread in Latin Christendom during his lifetime.

94 Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 163. See the edition of *Ascensus Barcoch* in Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra Siena, l'Oriente e la curia*, 374, for the passage concerned.

95 See Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 165.

96 On this argument, see Flavius Blondus, *De verbis Romanae locutionis*, ed. Fulvio Delle Donne (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2008).

97 See Mahmoud Helmy, *Tra Siena, l'Oriente e la curia*, 212–213, particularly 213 fn. 15, with Flavio Biondo's attack on the incompetence of the translators, first during the council of Florence (1439–1441), and then in connection with successive embassies from Oriental churches in 1442.

Beltramo Mignanelli, the Sicilian convert most probably never travelled to the Arab world. Whatever Arabic he knew when he undertook his translations, he had acquired on the streets of Sicilian towns or in the *Yeshiva*, where he received the necessary schooling to become a rabbi like his father. Although a man with obvious linguistic talents, Moncada did not live up to his self-proclaimed image of a specialist of Arabic. Several scholars have noted that his translations of *sūra*s 21 and 22 preserved in the ms. Urb. Lat. 1384 are rather mediocre and contain numerous errors.[98] The fragmentary character of his Qurʾānic and exegetical translations contained in the ms. Vat. Ebr. 357 makes it difficult to judge the level of proficiency of this work. However, it is clear that these texts also feature recurring linguistic problems.[99] In connection with the ms. Urb. Lat. 1384, scholars such as Harmut Bobzin and Thomas E. Burman concluded that Moncada was, if not an impostor, at least not sufficiently able to shoulder the roles of a translator and a teacher of Arabic. Some features of his personality seem to confirm this intellectual's tendency to obfuscate his real competencies.[100] The central part of the otherwise bilingual manuscript created for the duke of Urbino, for example, lacks an Arabic text for a simple reason: Moncada pretended to have translated these astronomical texts directly from Arabic. It has come to light, however, that they probably derived from a Hebrew intermediate created by Ibn al-Aḥdab, a Jewish scholar who emigrated from Castile to Sicily, and whose family was friends with Moncada's father.[101] We also know that Moncada borrowed one of the old Latin translations of the Qurʾān at the papal library when he worked on his quintilingual Sermon. It is very possible that he used unknown preexisting Latin, Italian, or Hebrew translations as supports for his proper work on various Arabic texts, without ever admitting this.[102]

All of this provides a complementary explanation for some of the linguistic "deficiencies" displayed by Moncada. This explanation is interesting from a philological point of view, and should not be read as an accusation of personal mediocrity. An analysis of recurrent translation errors in the

98 Bobzin, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada e la sua traduzione della sura 21 ('dei profeti')," 173–183; Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom*, 133–148.

99 For a detailed analysis of the recurring translation problems in the mostly Latin annotations of Moncada on the Qurʾān of ms. Vat. Ebr. 357, see Grévin, "Le Coran de Mithridate," 537–548.

100 On his use of the Ethiopian alphasyllabary, and his manner of dealing with the risk that speakers of Hebrew might reveal his trick to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, see Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo de passione Domini*, ed. Wirszubski, 38 fn. 1. Moncada is too often judged from a moral point of view and should rather be examined in the light of processes of individuation and of negotiating multiple cultural identities (Jewish, Christian, Arabic-speaking, Hebrew-learned, Latin-speaking, and even libertine and queer, since the notes abound in rather spectacular sexual allusions) in late Quattrocento Italy. On his exuberant personality, see Saverio Campanini, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada (alias Flavio Mitridate) traduttore di opera cabbalistiche," in *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate*, ed. Perani, particularly 72–80.

101 On this point, see Mandalà, "Da Toledo a Palermo," 14–15.

102 Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino," 268.

fragmentary Latin translations of the Qurʾānic ms. Vat. Ebr. 357 suggests that some of these lapses were caused by the very structure of the Arabic spoken by Moncada in Sicily. Like other Arabic dialects or varieties, Siculo-Arabic had very probably lost an important part of the conjugation system of Classical Arabic, e.g. the classical passive forms. Moncada makes repeated errors when encountering the same linguistic patterns—patterns that were probably lacking in spoken Judaeo-Arabic. Against this backdrop, it seems quite probable that his language skills and their respective limits resulted from his early linguistic conditioning. The latter had enabled him to speak and, at least partly, read some very specific forms of Judaeo-Arabic with a certain degree of fluency. However, this knowledge only gave him partial access to classical Muslim texts such as the Qurʾān, whose correct comprehension required a cultural and pedagogical immersion into Muslim culture, the lack of which Moncada could not fully compensate for. Fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century translations of the Qurʾān were accomplished with the help of a person with a Muslim background: Juan de Segovia (d. 1458) drew on the help of Yça of Segovia; Egidio da Viterbo (d. 1532) employed converts from Islam to Christianity, with Juan Gabriel of Teruel preparing parts of the translation and Leo Africanus adding some corrections. The disparity between these versions and the works of Moncada can be explained from a sociolinguistic and sociocultural point of view that considers the peculiar history of Siculo-Arabic and, more precisely, of the Sicilian variant of Judaeo-Arabic.

4.4 Conclusion

Much remains to be said, not only about the sociolinguistic, but also about the sociocultural biases that influenced and, in some ways, impeded the rapid development of a new culture of Arabic learning in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century, despite the increasing attention paid to this language in humanist circles. There existed, for example, a strong tendency to associate Arabic with Hebrew and Aramaic in its various forms, from Judaeo-Aramaic to Syriac. The conceptual interest inherent in this association can be regarded in some ways as a precursor to modern Semitic comparative studies. Among Italian humanists, however, this tendency resulted from a highly traditional representation of language and languages. Arabic was perceived as a sacred and scientific language, and as such became associated with the "Languages of the Cross" (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew). It represented one element in a mysterious pentacle of erudite tongues which, in the mind of humanists like Pico della Mirandola, included Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, the last being an important vector of texts like the *Sepher ha-Zohar*, considered at the time to be a book of prophetic valour produced in remote antiquity.[103] Since the time of the later crusades, the

103 On the evolution of this doctrine of the linguistic "pentacle," see Benoît Grévin, "Anamorphoses linguistiques: le pentacle des langues référentielles dans

medieval church had promoted the idea that these languages should be taught in European *studia* in order to help convert infidels. This formulated objective stood in clear contradiction to what would have been the practical linguistic requirements for better communication with the Arabic-Islamic sphere. Various forms of Middle Arabic were certainly used as a daily language from the Maghreb to the Mashreq. However, one could hardly argue that the study of "Chaldaean" or biblical Hebrew would help to promote Latin ecclesiastical propaganda in the Muslim sphere. The contrast between the linguistic goals proclaimed at the council of Vienne (1311–1312) in the famous bull that envisioned the creation of chairs of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic in the most important European *studia*,[104] and the realities of communication between European Christians and the Muslim sphere, is indeed striking. We do know that the friars in the East—from the borders of Hungary to Persia—did train in the languages prevalent in Inner Asia of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as Persian and Turkic.[105] The famous *Codex Cumanicus*, among other testimonies, shows that contemporaries were able to conceive of a rational approach to learning these languages, and it is possible that equivalent works concerning some form of Arabic existed.[106] Of greater importance, however, was the old conception of Arabic as a language of science and controversy. The Latin obsession with Hebrew cultural heritage and the traditional Jewish view of the Arabic language as a deformation of Hebrew[107] combined to form a conceptual understanding of the Arabic language that inevitably led to a conflation of the study of Arabic with the emerging study of Hebrew in Christian circles. This would heavily influence the projects and achievements of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century men of letters interested in Arabic, as the works of Beltramo Mignanelli demonstrate. Although he deplored the fact that he did not know Hebrew, he returned to the subject of the interrelation of Hebrew and Arabic more than once and even left a

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l'Occident médiéval," to be published in *Hiéroglossie I. Moyen Âge latin, monde arabo-persan, Tibet, Inde*, ed. Jean-Noël Robert, in print.

104 Berthold Altaner, "Die Durchführung des Vienner Konzilbeschusses über die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für orientalische Sprachen," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 52 (1933), 223–236.

105 On the practice of Persian in Domican milieus in the Trecento as attested by biblical glosses, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Le glosse sul vangelo persiano del 1338 e il codex cumanicus," *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 8 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2001), 313–349.

106 On the *Codex Cumanicus*, 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, Peter Schreiner (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e di letteratura, 2005).

107 Moncada supports this idea in his notes, in line with medieval Hebrew classics such as the *Kuzari*. An example is provided in Gersonide, *Commento al cantico dei Cantici nella traduzione ebraico-latina di Flavio Mitridate*, 189. Here Moncada incidentally comments on the influence of Hebrew on Arabic: "Et certum est quod lingua Arabica conformis est lingue Hebraice in pluribus, cum multa vocabula Hebraica adhuc servaverit, sicut filia que aliquid nostre consuetudinis habet." He left similar remarks in his annotations on the Qurʾānic text of the ms. Vat. Ebr. 357.

blank space in the *Liber de variantibus psalterii* to write down the Hebrew version.[108] This obsession with the link between Hebrew and Arabic was overwhelming in the writings of Moncada. Incited by his own Hebrew culture and Judaeo-Arabic writing habits, he could not avoid exaggerating the linguistic proximity between Hebrew and Arabic. Indeed, the ms. Vat. Ebr. 357 contains some very interesting attempts to explain the meaning of Qurʾānic concepts on the basis of traditional Hebrew religious concepts, while some translation choices are undoubtedly influenced by the filter of a Hebrew perspective.[109]

This dialectic relationship between Hebrew and Arabic was emphasized in Quattrocento Italy thanks to the marginal but increasing participation of Hebrew communities in the redefinition of Humanism.[110] However, if we want to understand the directions taken by Arabic studies between around 1470 and 1530, we must also regard this dialectical relationship as part of the broader cultural framework of the "linguistic pentacle." In a period that stood on the verge of enormous cultural changes brought about by the Reformation and the increasingly acknowledged political metamorphosis of Islam produced by the rise of the Ottomans, the five languages, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, boasted a significance that went far beyond their pragmatic functions. Because of their supposed or real significance as sacred languages, they represented far more than a simple means of oral and written communication.

In the preface to his translations from the Qurʾān contained in the ms. Urb. Lat. 1384, Moncada boasted about a project he had apparently discussed earlier with the duke of Urbino. He never realized this project which, given the complexity of the task, actually seems rather fantastic. It consisted in creating a gigantic quadrilingual version of the Qurʾān, translated into Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The intellectual premises of this vision are not only found in the cultural background of Moncada; in fact, they cannot be understood without taking into account the familiarity of Latin elites with the idea that Arabic constituted a sort of complement to the linguistic constellation of Latin–Greek–Hebrew–Aramaic. This idea found expression in some hermetic works such as the *Hypnerotomachia*, or, on a cultural level, in some syncretic aspects of the thought of humanists like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.[111] The preliminary work preserved in

108 Piemontese, "La lingua araba comparata da Beltramo Mignanelli," 157, introduction to the *Liber de variantibus*: "Et sciant me dimisse illud spatium quod inter versum et versum et differentiam et differnentiam est cupiens in eo ponere in Hebraico sicut in arabico scriptum est."

109 See, for example, Grévin, "Flavius Mithridate au travail sur le Coran," 36 fn. 27, on Moncada's gloss of the Arabic term *sakīna* with the Hebrew term *šeḫīna* (ms. Vat. Ebr. 357, commentary to *sūra* II, 248, fol. 57r), with all the theological implications that such an equation could create in a mind obsessed with Kabbalah.

110 On this point, see Giulio Busi, *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel rinascimento* (Torino: Aragno, 2007). See also the classic work of Moshe Idel, *La Cabbalà in Italia (1280–1510)* (Florence: Giuntina, 2007).

111 On the Arabic and the multilingual pseudo-inscriptions in the *Hypnerotomachia*, see Piemontese, "Le iscrizioni arabe nella 'Poliphili Hypnerotomachia'." On Pico

the ms. Vat. Ebr. 357, with its Qurʾānic text written in Hebrew characters, mirrors such a conception to a certain extent. It was neither isolated nor without a following, since one of the first (if not the first) long texts printed in Arabic was included in a multilingual programme just like this, albeit less ambitious in terms of the word count. In 1516, a quarter of a century after Moncada's disappearance, Agostino Giustiniani published a quintilingual Psalter, including Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Greek, and Latin versions of the text.[112] A generation after the sumptuously illuminated codex for the duke of Urbino, the teaching and learning of Arabic had entered a new phase, in pace with the popularization of printing. Various defining characteristics of the preceding periods were now missing: the last, at least partly Arabic-speaking organized communities of Italy had disappeared due to the expulsion of the Jews from Sicily in 1492–1493, whereas the Ottoman take-over in major parts of the Arab world led to a reorganization of European-Christian merchant networks. In spite of these significant changes, some entrenched cultural patterns were to give this interest in Arabic learning a line of continuity. It was to remain closely associated with religious controversy as well as the study of the Bible and the Qurʾān, until the beginning of a new phase of Orientalism.

and Islam, see Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Traccia araba su codice latino," *Litterae Caelestes: Rivista annuale internazionale di paleografia, codicologia, diplomatica et storia delle testimonianze scritte* 1 (2005), 41–60.

112 See Piemontese, "Il Corano in Italia," 53–54. On Agostino Giustiniani, see Aurelio Cevolotto, "Giustiniani, Agostino," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 57 (Rome: Treccani, 2001), 301–306.