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CHAPTER 13

What Was Oriental Studies in Early Modern Europe? "Oriental Languages" and the Making of a Discipline

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1 In Search of the Orient of Early Modern Scholars

The history of oriental studies has become an established subfield of early modern European intellectual history, with books and articles on the study of Arabic, Hebrew, Islam, ancient Judaism, biblical history, and related topics appearing at an accelerating pace.[1] In 2015 Brill launched the series, 'The History of Oriental Studies', which to date has published ten volumes, almost entirely focused on the early modern period. While authors employ the expressions "oriental studies" and "orientalists" frequently, they rarely define these terms explicitly. Some take oriental studies to refer broadly to European knowledge of Asia; others understand it to refer more narrowly to the study of near eastern languages and cultures. Hardly any attempt has been made to survey the field of early modern oriental studies as such. It is not even clear what kind of object "oriental studies" refers to when speaking of the early modern period. Does it correspond to an actors' category whose meaning can be discovered inductively by studying what it meant to early modern practitioners, as one might investigate, for example, "natural history"? Or is it more like "ethnography", an analytic category that may be used retrospectively to make sense of early modern texts, even though the concept wasn't known to early modern actors? Amid such ambiguity, it goes without saying that the relation between early modern and modern oriental studies remains poorly understood. In sum, it is widely acknowledged that "oriental studies" existed in early modern Europe, but there is no consensus about what it was.

This essay proposes a framework for understanding early modern oriental studies. Beginning with the premise that orientalists were, first and foremost, scholars of oriental languages, an expression that appears frequently

1 An early version of this research was published as "Les langues orientales et les racines de l'orientalisme académique: une enquête préliminaire" in *XVII^e siècle* 268 (2015) 409–426. Thanks to Joan Cadden, Jonathan Sheehan, and Carl Stahmer for helpful comments.

in early modern texts, I thought it might be possible to answer the question, what was oriental studies, by examining the history of the concept of "oriental languages".[2] Which languages were deemed "oriental"? In what contexts did the concept occur? On the basis of this inquiry, I argue that oriental studies (*studia orientalia, philologia orientalis*) emerged as a coherent intellectual field during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (Oriental studies was an actors' category that can be studied in terms of the self-understanding of its practitioners.) It was rooted in the concept of "oriental languages", a category that philologists understood in relatively stable and restricted terms as referring to Hebrew and other near eastern languages, especially Arabic and Aramaic, but excluding other Asian languages, notably those of India and China. (It is incorrect to equate early modern oriental studies with the study of Asia generally.) During the seventeenth century, the study of oriental languages coalesced into a new scholarly discipline, perhaps more mature in some parts of Europe than others, but widespread. These claims are not necessarily controversial – in its broad contours, I expect this essay's image of oriental studies will ring true to those who study the work of early modern oriental philologists. But their composite force is significant, with the potential to clarify a cloudy picture and overturn some common misconceptions.

Without question, the central focus of oriental studies was Hebrew and the Bible, with other aspects of near eastern history and literature playing a subordinate role. But this reality is not reflected in the existing scholarship. A balanced history of early modern oriental studies requires a synthesis of the history of Arabic and Islamic studies with the history of Hebrew studies, subfields of intellectual history that, for the most part, remain separate. It is primarily the ~~latter~~ former that locates its subject matter within the context of "oriental studies", while the ~~former~~ latter rarely refers to that broader domain. Even though many historians of Arabic and Islamic studies acknowledge their subjects' fundamental connection to Hebrew and the Bible, historiographic segregation inevitably results in a distorted representation of oriental studies as a whole. Instead of the early modern formula, "Hebrew and other oriental languages", we encounter expressions like "orientalist and Hebraist", as if the

2 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *orientalist*, meaning an 'expert in or student of oriental languages, history, culture, etc.', is first attested in English in 1723. It was used in German in this sense at least as early as 1692. Cognate synonyms like oriental philologist (*philologus orientalis*) were in use earlier. For examples, see: *Novellen aus der gelehrten und curiösen Welt* (Frankfurt and Gotha: Augustus Boëtius; Leipzig: Friedrich Groschuff, 1692) 170; Voetius Gisbertus, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum, Pars Tertia* (Utrecht: Johannes van Waesberghe, 1658) 1148.

categories were distinct.[3] In the 1660s, when Paul Colomiès set out to chronicle oriental studies in France, Italy, and Spain, he took it for granted that orientalists were first and foremost experts in Hebrew.[4] Today, by contrast, to be classified as an early modern orientalist in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, the essential qualification appears to be expertise in Arabic, not Hebrew.[5] To date, no contribution to Brill's History of Oriental Studies focuses on Hebrew scholarship.

To equate oriental studies with knowledge of Asia in general, as many scholars do, is anachronistic before the eighteenth century. As an example, consider Nicholas Dew's *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France*, a study of 'French scholarly engagement with the Ottoman world, India, and China', which the author identifies with "orientalism" and "oriental studies". By emphasizing the commonalities in how Europeans studied the near and far east, Dew successfully shows how interest in Asia crossed disciplinary boundaries, bringing *érudits* and *curieux* into dialogue with one another. But Dew's "oriental studies" is not the oriental studies of early modern scholars. Although he acknowledges that, 'in seventeenth century usage, the term "Orient" was frequently used for the Levant, and "Oriental" was a standard adjective to refer to Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish books', he opts for a broader definition, which he justifies with the observation that usage was not stable and 'the adjective "Oriental" was capable of being applied across the whole of the Asian continent'.[6] In practice, Dew slips back and forth between using oriental studies in a restricted, early modern sense and equating it expansively with the European study of Asia, obscuring the fact that some of his practitioners of 'Baroque orientalism' understood themselves to be doing "oriental studies", while others did not. (Dew's most important sources provide confirmation: "oriental" was a key term for d'Herbelot and Thevénot, scholars of the near east, but it was absent from texts on China, such as *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* and Bernier's *Voyages*.) For the most part this conceptual fuzziness proves harmless – overall, Dew's book is insightful and well informed – but it

3 Grafton A. – Weinberg J., *'I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue': Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: 2011) 111, describing Agostino Giustiniani, who studied Aramaic and Arabic as well as Hebrew.

4 Colomiés Paul, *Gallia orientalis, sive Gallorum qui linguam Hebraeam vel alias orientales excoluerunt vitae* (The Hague, Adriaan Vlacq: 1665); idem, *Italia et Hispania Orientalis, sive Italorum et Hispanorum qui linguam Hebraeam vel alias orientales excoluerunt vitae*, ed. Johann Christoph Wolf (Hamburg, Theodor Christoph Felginer [widow of]: 1730).

5 Of 24 individuals classified in the ODNB as orientalists and active before 1750, I found only one example of a Hebraist without knowledge of Arabic: Robert Clavering (1675/6–1747). https://www.oxforddnb.com/, accessed 31 July 2020.

6 Dew N., *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford: 2009), quotations at 4–7.

leads to some dubious generalizations. Defining oriental studies so broadly, Dew underestimates the degree of specialization and disciplinary cohesion achieved by erudite orientalists during the seventeenth century. Despite its merits, something is amiss when a book about early modern oriental studies, which purports to follow the self-understanding of its subjects, all but ignores the study of Hebrew and the Bible while dilating on the study of China.

Finally, a proper understanding of oriental studies before 1750 changes our understanding of modern oriental studies. On the one hand, it reveals greater continuity with the subsequent period than is usually acknowledged, belying the standard narrative which locates the discipline's origin in the late eighteenth century. On the other hand, it makes evident one very significant difference: in the earlier period, oriental studies did not involve the ideas of a distinctive oriental mentality or an essential dichotomy between east and west. In the final section of this essay, I show how the framework it lays out helps to explain the process by which oriental studies came to be based on such ideas during the eighteenth century.

2 Methodology

To take a broad sounding of the key concept, I searched the OCLC WorldCat bibliographic database for publications from the period 1450–1750 that employ the Latin phrase *linguae orientales* as well as related concepts that imply the notion of oriental languages, such as "oriental philology" and "oriental books". I chose 1750 as an endpoint for two reasons. Primarily, I doubted that focusing on Latin publications would provide a reliable portrait of European scholarship beyond this date. Secondarily, I suspected that the rise of Indology later in the eighteenth century might complicate an already challenging analytical task in ways that were better left to future research. WorldCat is the world's largest union catalogue, pooling the records of tens of thousands of libraries worldwide. I accessed the database using FirstSearch, which allows complex Boolean searches and the use of truncated search terms, which was essential since words in Latin titles may appear in various declensions.[7] The initial results then required substantial manual filtering, made with occasional reference to other databases. The majority had to be rejected because they did not refer explicitly or implicitly to oriental languages. I also eliminated multiple

7 http://firstsearch.oclc.org/. I performed the search in stages between June and September 2014, using the following command: 'ti: orient* and (ti: lingu* or ti: memorial* or ti: libr* or ti: philolog* or ti: studi*) and yr: 1450–1750'.

records of the same book, later versions of books that saw multiple editions, and non-Latin books. I let remain, however, many titles that included terms that I hadn't deliberately searched for, but which implied the concept of oriental languages, such as "oriental erudition", "oriental authors", and "oriental antiquities". When I detected cataloguing mistakes, such as erroneous publication dates, I corrected them, but I did not systematically cross-check the entries against other sources. I was left with a database of 335 titles attributable to 192 distinct individuals.[8]

The limits of this kind of inquiry must be acknowledged. First, the data were messy. In retrospect, there are ways in which I might have refined my search to be more comprehensive, for example, by including terms such as *eruditio orientalis* and *literatura orientalis*, which appear in the dataset but which I did not systematically search for. Another complication has to do with the nature of the WorldCat database. While it is the closest thing that exists to a catalogue of all surviving early modern European publications, it is important to remember that it contains omissions.[9] More significantly, its bibliographic entries, which originate with many different libraries, are heterogeneous in ways that affected my search. Probably the most significant inconsistency has to do with how completely different entries record early modern titles, which are often extremely long. Some bibliographic records include every word from a book's title page, but others are abbreviated to a greater or lesser extent. As a result, I have surely overlooked many relevant works. However, the principal limitation of this investigation would apply even if I had been able to create a perfect dataset of every Latin title published before 1751 that expresses the concept of oriental languages: the presence of a phrase in title pages is an imperfect proxy for its prevalence in texts. At this time, however, there is no means to perform a full-text, Boolean search of an equivalent pool of early modern books. In any case, my goal was not to produce a rigorously quantitative analysis of the sort claimed by exponents of "culturomics", but simply to collect a data sample that

8 In most cases, these individuals are the books' authors. However, in the case of titles that refer to a person other than the author as a 'professor of oriental languages', I have counted that other person. For example G.J. Vossius's *Oratio in obitum clarissimi ac praestantissimi viri, Thomae Erpenii, orientalium linguarum in Academia Leidensi professoris* (Leiden, 1625) is attributed for this purpose to Thomas Erpenius.

9 A 2006 study comparing the pre-1956 National Union Catalog (the largest print union catalogue) to WorldCat concluded that slightly more than a quarter of titles found in the former were missing from the latter: Beall J. – Kafadar K., "The Proportion of NUC Pre-56 Titles Represented in OCLC WorldCat", *College & Research Libraries* 66.5 (2006) 431–435. The future of this kind of research belongs to the Universal Short Title Catalogue (https://www.ustc.ac.uk/), but currently it only includes books published before 1650.

would be sufficiently representative to serve as meaningful evidence of the use of the concept "oriental languages". In this, I believe the method was successful.

3 Defining a Field

The dataset begins considerably later than one might expect. The emergence of oriental philology as a field involving languages beyond Hebrew goes back to the 1520s and 30s, when scholars like Teseo Ambrogio, Guillaume Postel, and Sebastian Münster began to study Syriac, Chaldean, Ethiopic, Arabic and other near eastern languages.[10] (The terms "Chaldean", "Syriac", and, much less frequently, "Aramaic" were not used consistently in this period, but, by the seventeenth century, Chaldean usually referred to forms of Judeo-Aramaic, written with the Hebrew alphabet, while Syriac usually denoted Christian forms of Aramaic, written with the Syriac alphabet.)[11] Yet the first title in our dataset is from 1595[12] [Fig. 13.1]. Before 1620 we encounter only two other titles that refer to oriental languages, both German, the first focusing on Samaritan and the second on Hebrew, Chaldean, and Syriac.[13] A search of the Google Books database for instances of the phrase *linguae orientales* (in all its declensions,

10 Wilkinson R., *Orientalism, Aramaic, and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation: The First Printing of the Syriac New Testament* (Leiden: 2007); Burnett S.G., *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660): Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden: 2012).

11 The use of "Chaldean" to refer to Jewish forms of Aramaic was longstanding, dating as far back as the time of Saint Jerome, and continuing well into the nineteenth century. It originated in a misunderstanding of Daniel 2:4, which was taken to imply that biblical Aramaic was the language spoken by the "Chaldean" people, and that the Jews had brought it to Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. Early modern scholars were familiar with this and other common meanings of "Chaldean" – i.e., an inhabitant of ancient Babylonia (*Chaldaea*) or a member of various eastern Christian churches – and moved comfortably among them, depending on context. See Kautzsch, "The Aramaic Language", *Hebraica* 1 (1884) 110–111; King D., "*Vir Quadrilinguis?* Syriac in Jerome and Jerome in Syriac" in Cain A. – Lössl J. (eds.), *Jerome of Stridon, His Life, Writings and Legacy* (Farnham: 2009), 216; Baskins C., "Popes, Patriarchs, and Print: Representing Chaldeans in Renaissance Rome", *Renaissance Studies* 28 (2013) 405.

12 Cayet Pierre Victor Palma, *Paradigmata de quatuor linguis orientalibus praecipuis, Arabica, Armena, Syra, Aethiopica* (Paris, Étienne Prévosteau and Guillaume Morel [heirs of] 1595).

13 Crinesius Christoph, *Läšôn Šāmrāytā, hoc est, Lingua Samaritica ex scriptura sacra, libris impressis et MScripto, fideliter eruta, cum aliis orientalibus quatuor, typo aeneo, collata* (Altdorf, Balthasar Scherf: 1608); Baumbach Johann Balthasar, *Quatuor utilissimi tractatus I. De trium Orientalium, Hebraeae, Chaldaeae et Syrae, linguarum antiquitate, necessitate ac utilitate, etc.* [...] *II. De appellationibus Dei* [...] *III. De Urim et Thummim, et Bath kol. IIII. De modo disputandi cum Iudaeis* (Nürnberg, Abraham Wagenmann: 1609).

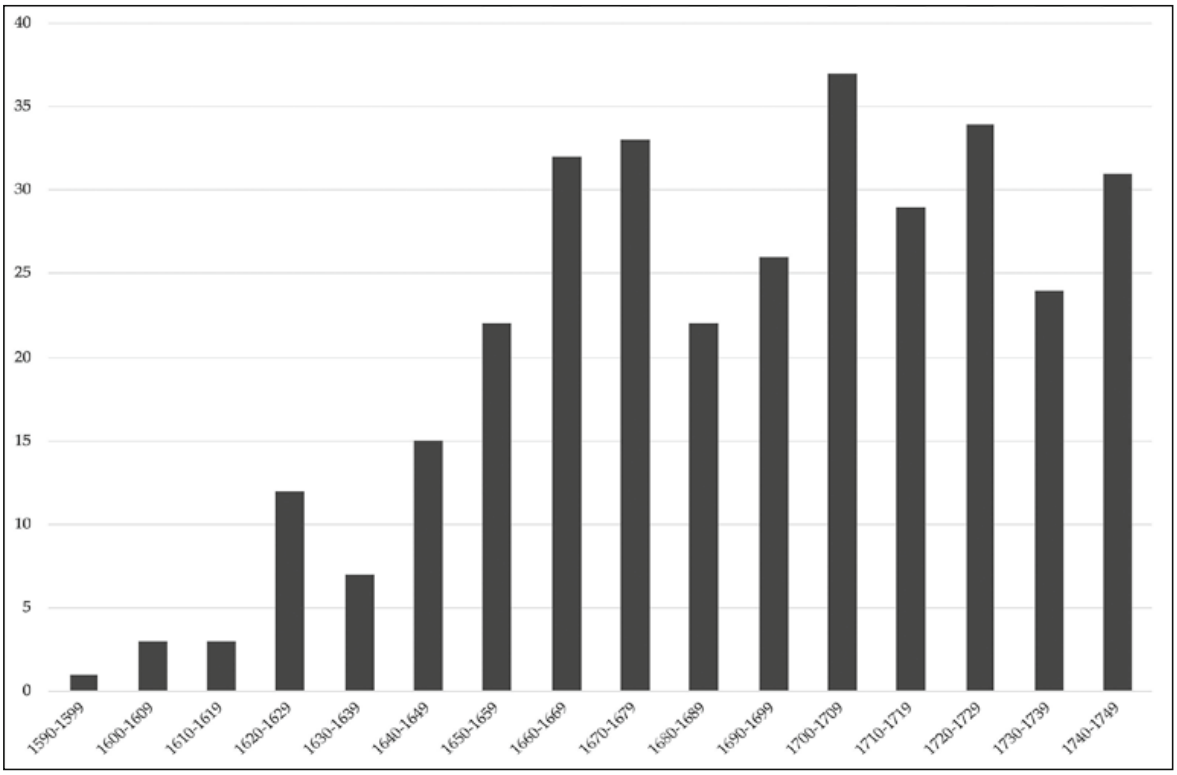

FIGURE 13.1 Number of titles in the dataset, by decade

singular and plural, with the words adjacent) similarly yields no results from before 1596, despite including the full text of many works. (Google Books does not allow for more complex Boolean searches.)[14] There is thus good cause to ask if the expression was common before the seventeenth century and, if not, what accounts for the time-lag between the rise of the study of the various languages that would be called "oriental" and the widespread adoption of the term "oriental languages" to describe them.

Which languages were "oriental"? The dataset provides a clear answer. When early modern Latin writers referred to oriental languages they meant: Hebrew,[15] Arabic, Chaldean, Syriac, Ethiopic, Persian, Samaritan, Armenian, Turkish, and Coptic. There are also isolated references to Punic, Georgian, Tatar,

14 I also searched text and notes in Wilkinson, *Orientalism*; idem, *The Kabbalistic Scholars of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible* (Leiden: 2007); and Smitskamp R., *Philologia Orientalis: A Description of Books Illustrating the Study and Printing of Oriental Languages in Europe*, 3 volumes (Leiden: 1976–1991), and found no examples of the use of the term before the seventeenth century.

15 In addition to the many works that refer simply to Hebrew, five titles in the dataset mention Mishnaic Hebrew as a distinct language, referred to as 'Talmudic', 'Rabbinic', or 'Talmudic-Rabbinic'.

and Greek as oriental languages, but these are few. Particularly illuminating are twenty-eight titles which list multiple languages that are defined explicitly as "oriental". Four languages appear most often in these enumerations: Arabic (23 times), Hebrew (22), Chaldean (22), and Syriac (22). They are followed by Ethiopic (10), Persian (10), Samaritan (9), Turkish (6), Armenian (3), Coptic (3), Rabbinic (i.e. Mishnaic Hebrew) (2), Phoenician (1), and Greek (1).

By any measure, Hebrew was the most important oriental language. Its centrality is evident in the dataset as a whole, in which it is mentioned far more frequently than any other language (76 instances as opposed to 50 for Arabic, the next most frequently mentioned). Indeed, Hebrew can accurately be described as the paradigmatic oriental language. It had temporal priority, both in the sense that it was the first oriental language to be cultivated by Christian Europeans, and also because it was commonly thought to be the oldest language in the world. Hebrew also had conceptual priority. There are five works in the dataset that refer to the 'principal oriental languages'. Hebrew appears in first place in all of them with one exception. This is Pierre Victor Palma Cayet's *Paradigms of the four principal oriental languages* (1595), which was devoted to Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, and Ethiopic on the grounds that supposedly these were the oriental languages spoken by the most people. In the body of the work, however, Cayet made these languages subservient to Hebrew, describing them all as 'flowing from the same ancient source, the most holy language of Hebrew'.[16] Hebrew appears in almost all the other lists of oriental languages, almost always in first position. (The four exceptions are by authors in Vienna, where an imperially sponsored school of oriental languages promoted the study of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian for diplomatic purposes.)[17] Hebrew's primacy within the field is also evident in the recurrent use of phrases such as 'Hebrew and the other oriental languages' (24 instances). One finds no cases of analogous formulations that give priority to other languages, such as 'Arabic and other oriental languages' or 'Chaldean and other oriental languages'.

16 Cayet, *Paradigmata*, 10: 'Istae igitur 4. Orientales linguae eiusmodi sunt, ut ab eodem sacrosanctae linguae Hebraicae fonte antiquissimo fluxerint: etsi magna rivulorum confusione'.

17 Meninski Franciszek, *Linguarum orientalium Turcicae, Arabicae, Persicae institutiones seu grammatica Turcica* [...] (Vienna: 1677); idem, *Complementum Thesauri Linguarum Orientalium, seu Onomasticum Latino-Turcico-Arabico-Persicum* [...] (Vienna: 1687); Podestà Giovanni Battista, *Dissertatio Academica, continens specimen triennalis profectus in linguis orientalibus, Arabica nempe Persica et Turcica, cui varia curiosa et scitu digna intermiscentur* (Vienna, Leopold Voigt: 1677); idem, Podestà Giovanni Battista, *Cursus grammaticalis linguarum orientalium, scilicet Arabicae, Persicae et Turcicae* (Vienna, Leopold Voigt: 1686).

Hebrew occupied the centre of the field of oriental languages and helped to define its boundaries.

Arabic, Chaldean, and Syriac were the most important oriental languages besides Hebrew, appearing significantly more frequently in the dataset than other languages. In lists of multiple oriental languages, Hebrew, Chaldean, and Syriac are frequently grouped together, almost always in that order. Arabic is present in every enumeration of more than three oriental languages, but not in any particular position. Thus, while Arabic appears as one of the four core oriental languages, Hebrew, Chaldean, and Syriac formed a privileged triad. The association of these three languages can be traced back to the beginning of oriental studies in the first part of the sixteenth century, when Christian Hebraism led naturally to the study of various forms of Aramaic. It persisted throughout the period covered by the dataset, with the last instance being Thomas Bennet's *Advice on establishing and perfecting the study of the principal oriental languages, namely, Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, Samaritan, and Arabic*, published in London in 1727.[18]

Equally significant are those languages that were excluded from the field. East Asian languages such as Chinese, Indian, and Japanese, were objects of interest in early modern Europe, but scholars did not usually think of them as "oriental". The dataset contains only four titles that refer to such languages (specifically, Chinese, Japanese, Malayalam-Tamil, and Malay) but, with the exception of G.S. Assemani's inclusion of materials in Malayalam-Tamil ("Malabaric") in his catalogue of the Vatican Library's "oriental" manuscripts, they are never referred to as oriental.[19] (In this regard, it may be significant that Malayalam-Tamil was the language of Kerala's indigenous Christian community.) In fact, in two cases East Asian languages are explicitly distinguished from oriental languages. In 1672 August Pfeiffer referred to 'oriental and other non-European languages' in the title of a work that treated Chinese, Japanese, Congolese, and Malay as well as Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, Samaritan, Punic, Arabic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Persian, Turkish, Coptic, and Georgian.[20] Likewise,

18 Bennet Thomas, *Grammatica Hebraea* [...] *Accedit consilium de studio praecipuarum linguarum orientalium, Hebraeae scil. Chaldaeae, Syrae, Samaritanae et Arabicae, instituendo et perficiendo* (London: 1727).

19 Assemani Giuseppe Simone, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana in qua manuscriptos codices Syriacos, Arabicos, Persicos, Turcicos, Hebraicos, Samaritanos, Armenicos, Aethiopicos, Graecos, Aegyptiacos, Ibericos, et Malabaricos* [...] (Rome, Congregation Propaganda Fide: 1719).

20 Pfeiffer August, *Introductio in Orientem, sive synopsis quaestionum nobiliorum de origine, natura, usu et adminiculis lingg. orientalium et plerarumque extra Europam, Ebraicae, Chaldaicae, Syriacae, Samaritanae, Punicae, Arabicae, Aethiopicae, Armenicae, Persicae,

in a 1737 treatise on languages useful for Dutch missionaries in the Far East, the preacher Georg Heinrich Werndly, distinguished "Indian" from "oriental" languages.[21]

We are not accustomed to think of Greek as an oriental language, and the evidence of the dataset confirms that neither did most early modern scholars. But it is worth asking why, since there are many reasons that Greek might have been considered part of the field. After all, the primary associations of the term "oriental" at the beginning of the early modern age, which persisted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were with eastern Christendom (*ecclesia orientalis*) and the Eastern Roman Empire (*imperium romanum orientale*), and Greek was the primary language of both. (Many of the initial, unfiltered results of my bibliographic search used the term "oriental" in these contexts.) Furthermore, as I discuss in more detail below, oriental philology was profoundly intertwined with sacred philology, and Greek was a language of scripture, like Hebrew and Chaldean, as well as documents of the early church, like Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Armenian. Such logic may explain Guy-Michel Le Jay's inclusion of Greek as an "oriental language" alongside Hebrew, Rabbinic, Samaritan, Syriac, Turkish, and Armenian, in his 1636 alphabet book.[22] But Le Jay's is the only title in the dataset that unambiguously refers to Greek in such terms. By contrast, several authors explicitly separate Greek from the oriental languages, sometimes grouping it with Latin and European vernaculars. In 1629 Christoph Crinesius expressed this dichotomy by opposing the "oriental" languages – Hebrew, Chaldean, Samaritan, Arabic, Persian, and Ethiopian – to the "occidental" ones – Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish.[23] The dataset contains six other works which distinguish oriental from occidental language groups as well as two that distinguish oriental from "European" languages.[24]

Turcicae, Copticae, Ibericae, Sinicae, Iaponicae, Congensis, Malaicae, etc. […] (Wittemberg, Daniel Schmatz: 1672).

21 Werndly Georg Heinrich, *Oratio inauguralis, de linguarum orientalium et Indicarum cognitione necessaria theologo ad Indos profecturo*. (Amsterdam, Wetstein: 1737).

22 Le Jay Guy-Michel, *Linguarum orientalium Hebraicae, Rabinicae, Samaritanae, Syriacae, Graecae, Arabicae, Turcicae, Armenicae alphabeta* (Paris, Antoine Vitré: 1636).

23 Crinesius, *Lingua Samaritica*.

24 Havemann Michael, *Amusium sive Cynosura studiosorum* […] *Quaque methodo ducendi, per linguarum, tam Orientalium quam Occidentalium, studiis nostris famulantium, omniumque celebriorum scientiarum maria* […] *in calidis votis habent* (Hamburg, Jakob Rebenlein: 1644); Hardt Hermann von der, *Iubileum academicum* […] *per orientem et occidentem bonis autoribus, Graecis Latinisque poetis, serenam precatus vitam, Theocrito et Virgilio congaudentibus* […] (Helmstedt, Johannes Drimborn: 1739); Leiding Gilbert, *Bibliothecae Leidingianae, sive catalogi librorum* […] *Complectens libros biblicos, concionatorios theologicos ecclesiae historicos, disputationes et manuscripta varia omni genere*

Greek was not only a sacred language but also a classical one, and its association with Latin must have exerted a powerful influence on how scholars categorized it. Greek's lack of relation to the Semitic languages, by kinship or loan words, was likely a factor as well. (The significance of linguistic affinity among Semitic languages for the definition of oriental languages is discussed below.) Professorships of oriental languages never involved instruction in Greek, although there were many cases of a single individual simultaneously holding chairs in Greek and oriental languages (just as others were professors of oriental languages and mathematics, or oriental languages and rhetoric). In a dissertation oration delivered at the University of Basel in 1705, the orientalist Johann Dudovicus Frey proposed to combine the separate programs of study for oriental languages and Greek, apparently an opportunistic move occasioned by the vacancy of the Greek chair.[25]

4 Professing Oriental Languages

The concept of "oriental languages" was strongly associated with academic instruction. Just over half the works in the dataset (173 works out of 335) refer to individuals (usually but not always the author) who were professors of oriental languages.[26] While many of these works treat orientalist subject matter, many others do not. Professors of oriental languages, who often held another academic chair simultaneously, frequently published works on unrelated topics. (For this reason, I have found it useful in parts of this essay to consider

linguarum tam Oriental. quam Occidentalium conscriptos […] (Hamburg, Beneke: 1742); Justus Johannes von Einem, *Genuina et compendiaria methodus docendi discendique praecipuas linguas orientales et occidentales* […] (Magdeburg, Gottfried Vetter: 1743); Oertel Johann Gottfried, *Harmonia ll. Orientis et Occidentis speciatimque Hungaricae cum Hebraea* (Wittemberg: Michael Teubner: 1746); Bode Christoph August, *Sēfer Be-rêšît Pēreq I, pāsûq I, hoc est, Ex libro Geneseos cap. I. commatis I. ex consilio fontium et interpunctionis authenticae nec non versionum praecipuarum tam orientalium quam occidentalium maximam partem in bibl. polygl. Angl. obviarum interpretatio* (Helmstedt: Leuckardt: 1750). Nissel Johann Georg – Petreius Theodor, *S. Jacobi Apostoli epistolae catholicae versio Arabica et Aethiopica* […] *cui accedit harmonia variarum linguarum, qua Orientalium qua Europaearum* […] (Leiden: Johann et Daniel Elsevier, 1654); Pfeiffer, *Introductio*.

25 Frey Johann Dudovicus, *Dissertatio philologica de coniungendo studio linguarum orientis cum studio Graeco* (Basel, Brandmüller: 1705).

26 To be precise, 169 items use the phrase *linguarum orientalium professor* or, as in the case of inaugural lectures, describe the author as taking up *linguarum orentialium professionem*. Four others refer to a *lector*, *magister*, or *doctor linguarum orientales*. Often, 'professor of oriental languages' was abbreviated to some variant of 'Prof. orient. LL'. Had I included 'LL' as a search term I would have found more examples.

only those works that refer to oriental languages in contexts other than an academic title.) The first such example in the dataset is a work by the Benedictine scholar, Gilbert Génébrard, published in Paris in 1600, which is dedicated to Pierre Victor Palma Cayet, 'royal reader and proclaimer of oriental languages'.[27] In 1612 the Lutheran Hebraist Valentin Schindler published a polyglot lexicon whose title page described the author as 'professor of oriental languages' at Wittenberg and Helmstedt. In his 1613 *Oration on the Excellence and Dignity of Arabic*, Thomas Erpenius described his new charge at the University of Leiden as the teaching of Arabic 'and other oriental languages', and G.J. Vossius referred to Erpenius as *linguarum orientalium professor* in a posthumous tribute.[28] His actual title, however, was professor of Arabic, a useful reminder that the monikers that professors assumed in print did not always correspond to the official description of their positions. Erpenius's association with the field of "oriental languages", a term he likely did much to popularize, was also due to his founding of the *typographia Erpeniana linguarum orientalium*, which printed works in Arabic – including his immensely influential grammar – as well as Syriac and Hebrew. After Erpenius, the dataset's next examples are two publications from Rome in the 1620s, both by teachers at the Arabic school for missionaries at the monastery of San Pietro in Montorio, which identify their authors as *linguarum orientalium lector*.[29]

The title "professor of oriental languages" appears not to have become widespread, however, until the 1630s, when it became overwhelmingly a phenomenon of Protestant schools in Germany and Holland[30] [Table 13.1 and Fig. 13.2]. Of 173 titles that mention professors of oriental languages, 137 refer to German

27 Génébrard Gilbert, *Chronographiae libri IV* […] *Per Petrum Victorem Palmam Caietanus I. V. D. et Regium linguar. oriental. Lectorem et anagnosten* […] (Paris, Sébastien Nivelle: 1600).

28 Erpenius Thomas, *Oratio de linguae Arabicae praestantia et dignitate* […] *cum eius linguae, et aliarum Orientalium professionem auspicaretur* (Leiden, [Thomas Erpenius]: [1613]); Vossius Gerardus Johannes, *Oratio in obitum clarissimi ac praestantissimi viri, Thomae Erpenii, orientalium linguarum in Academia Leidensi professoris* […] *Item Catalogus librorum orientalium, qui vel manuscripti, vel editi, in bibliotheca erpeniana exstant* (Leiden, Jean Marie: 1625).

29 Germanus Dominicus, *Fabrica linguae Arabicae cum interpretatione Latina, et Italica* […] *Authore P.F. Dominico Germano, de Silesia* […] *in conventu S. Petri, Montis aurei, linguarum orientalium lectore* (Rome, Congregation Propaganda Fide: 1625); Obicini Tommaso, *Īsāghūkhī. Isagoge, id est, breve introductorium Arabicum, in scientiam logices: cum versione Latina: ac theses sanctae Fidei. R.P. Fr. Thomae Novariensis Ord. Min. Reg. Obser. nuper Orientis Apost. Commissarii, Ierosolymorum Guardiani, ac linguarum Orientalium magistri* […] (Rome, Stefano Paolini: 1625).

30 For the purpose of locating teachers of oriental languages, I have classified books according to the institution where the individual held his academic title, rather than the city of publication.

TABLE 13.1 Number of professors of oriental languages in the dataset, by location and decade

	Total	Germany	Dutch Republic	Scandinavia	Italy (Rome)	France (Paris)	Switzerland	England*
1600–1609	1					1		
1610–1619	2	1	1					
1620–1629	3	0	1		2			
1630–1639	4	4						
1640–1649	5	2	1		1	1		
1650–1659	7	7						
1660–1669	12	11						
1670–1679	15	13		1			1	
1680–1689	10	7	2				1	
1690–1699	18	17	1					
1700–1709	24	19	4					1*
1710–1719	19	15	3				1	
1720–1729	22	16	3	2		1		
1730–1739	12	11	1					
1740–1749	17	13	3	1				
1750	2	1	1					
Total	173	137	21	4	3	3	3	1

* This is a reference to a reprint of a work by the English scholar Edward Pococke printed in Leipzig that incorrectly identifies the author as a "professor of oriental languages".

institutions, all but a few of them Lutheran. These 137 works refer to 56 unique individuals with such a title. While Reformed universities, such as Heidelberg and Herborn, are also represented, there is not a single example in the dataset of a professor of oriental languages at a Catholic school in Germany, apart from Athanasius Kircher's retrospective self-description as formerly having been *orientalium linguarum professor* at the Jesuit college in Würzburg, although his actual title had been professor of Hebrew.[31] Outside the Lutheran world, the largest group of professors of oriental languages was found among reformed

31 Kircher Athanasius, *Athanasii Kircheri Fuldensis Buchonii e Soc. Iesu presbyteri, olim in Herbipolensi, et Avenionensi Societatis Iesu gymnasiis orientalium linguarum, & matheseos, nunc huius in Romano collegio professoris ordinarii. Ars magna lucis et umbrae* [...]. (Rome, Hermann Scheus: 1646). Jesuit administrative documents record him as 'Professor Ethicae, Mathematicae, et Linguae Hebreae'. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rhen. Sup. 25, fol. 38v.

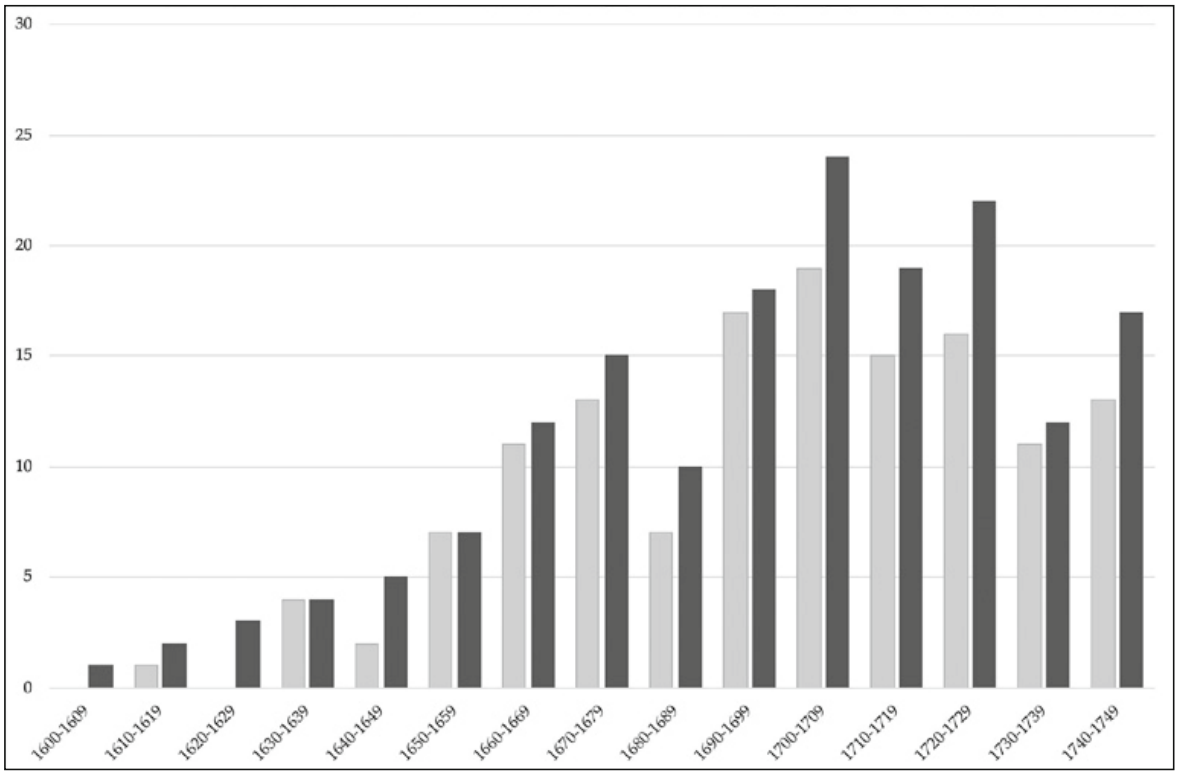

FIGURE 13.2 Number of professors of oriental languages in the dataset, in Germany (light gray) and overall (dark grey)

Protestants in the Dutch Republic (21 out of 173 titles, representing 15 unique individuals). While the dataset includes three professors of oriental languages at Geneva, it has none from German Switzerland. Likewise, it contains no English publication that refers to a professor of oriental languages, although a work by Edward Pococke printed in Leipzig describes the author as professor of oriental languages at Oxford.[32] (His actual title was professor of Arabic.) Although some of the earliest examples of "readers in oriental languages" come from Paris and Rome, the title was rare in Catholic countries. Leaving aside an inaccurate posthumous description of Guillaume Postel published in Leiden in 1723, there are only five references to professors or readers of oriental languages at Catholic schools, two from Paris and three from Rome, and none later than the 1640s.

There are several reasons to be cautious in interpreting this data. It is plausible that German scholars published more academic occasional

32 Pococke Edward, *Eduardi Pocockii linguarum orientalium in academia Oxoniensi quandam professoris. Notae miscellaneae philologico-Biblicae* [...] (Leipzig, Friedrich Lanckisch [heirs of]: 1705).

literature – inaugural lectures, theses, eulogies, celebratory verses on the occasion of the doctorate, and so forth – than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, leading to overrepresentation in the dataset. It may also be the case that early modern German scholars were more likely to use academic titles on their title pages, or that later German librarians were more inclined to include this information in catalogues. But even allowing for such possibilities, the evidence remains overwhelming that academic chairs in "oriental languages" were primarily a phenomenon of Protestant universities in Lutheran Germany and, to a lesser extent, Holland. It is less obvious what this result means. Protestant Germany and Holland may have had more professors of Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic and other oriental languages than other parts of Europe, especially from the mid-seventeenth century onward, but certainly not to the extent suggested by the distribution of professorships in "oriental languages". Professors who taught oriental languages in other parts of Europe, not least in Catholic schools, did so under titles that referred to specific languages, such as "professor of Hebrew" or "professor of Arabic". The Society of Jesus, for example, specified in the *ratio studiorum* of 1599 that professors of Hebrew at its colleges should, if possible, also know Syriac and Chaldean.[33] Many of the chairs of "oriental languages" that emerged in the mid-seventeenth century seem formerly to have been chairs of Hebrew.[34] The new name may indicate that after the mid-seventeenth century it became more common for professors to know and teach other oriental languages in addition to Hebrew. (Such was the case at Zurich, where, in 1643, the chair of Hebrew was changed to a professorship in "oriental languages", with Hebrew instruction supplemented by Arabic, Syriac, and Chaldean, in order to take advantage of J.H. Hottinger's linguistic skills.)[35] But we need not assume that the change in name reflected a significant change in the nature of instruction or the scope of most professors' expertise. Before the mid-seventeenth century, it was already common for instruction in Hebrew to be supplemented with other oriental languages, especially Syriac and Chaldean. (On this account, some sixteenth-century orientalists were retroactively redefined as "professors of oriental languages" in posthumous editions of their works.)[36] And after that time it was common

33 Burnett, *Christian Hebraism* 35.

34 Burnett, *Christian Hebraism* provides data on the geographical and confessional distribution of professors of Hebrew before 1660 that is very congruent with my data (primarily from later decades) on professors of oriental languages.

35 Loop J., *Johann Heinrich Hottinger: Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: 2013) 42.

36 For example, Valentin Schindler (1543–1604) was professor of Hebrew at Wittenberg and Helmstedt, but he appears as 'professor of oriental languages' in Schindler Valentin,

for professors of oriental languages to possess expertise primarily in Hebrew. What, then, accounts for the shift in academic nomenclature in the course of the seventeenth century? One possibility is that the shift was linked specifically to the spread of Arabic studies, which became prominent in Holland in the early seventeenth century and in Germany in the later part of the century, and which may have been less easily subsumed under the rubric of Hebrew studies than were Chaldean and Syriac.[37] Whatever its reasons, why was the shift largely confined to Holland and to Protestant Germany? This is an intriguing question that can only be answered by further research.

5 Mapping Oriental Languages

The dominance of Germany and Holland went beyond the prevalence of academic chairs in oriental languages. The dataset as a whole includes 231 works published in Germany and 60 in the Dutch Republic as opposed to 10 in Italy, 10 in England, 9 in Austria, 9 in Switzerland, 8 in France, 7 in Scandinavia, and 1 in Prague. If we exclude works that appear only because of a reference to a professor of oriental languages, it contains 81 works published in Germany, 38 in the Dutch Republic, 9 in Austria, 8 in Switzerland, 9 in England, 7 in Italy, 5 in France, 3 in Scandinavia, and 1 in Prague. At a more local level the dataset includes books published in fifty-one Protestant cities as opposed to six Catholic ones. Again, removing items that only appear because of a reference to a professor of oriental languages does not significantly alter the picture, leaving forty Protestant and six Catholic cities. Only three Catholic cities are represented by more than two items: Vienna (9), Rome (8), and Paris (8). That these three locations top the list of Catholic cities accords with their reputations as centres of orientalist scholarship. It is surprising, however, that there are no examples from Spain, which had an active orientalist community, or from the

Lexicon pentaglotton, Hebraicum, Chaldaicum, Syriacum, Talmudico-Rabbinicum et Arabicum […] *a clarissimo et doctissimo viro, Dn. Valentino Schindlero Oederano, linguarum orientalium in celeberrimis Witenbergensi et Helmstadiensi academiis, quondam professore* (Hanau, Hans Jakob Henne: 1612). Guillaume Postel (1510–1581), who occupied Europe's first chair of Arabic, was given the same treatment in Postel Guillaume, *Guilielmi Postelli, linguarum orientalium professoris* […] *de Etruriae regionis originibus, institutis, religione ac moribus commentatio* (Leiden, Pieter van der Aa: 1723).

37 On the late flowering of Arabic studies in Germany, despite its strong tradition of Hebraism, see Toomer G.J., *Eastern Wisedome and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: 1996) 35–40.

Spanish Netherlands, home of the Antwerp polyglot Bible (1568–1573).[38] The nearly complete absence of works from Catholic Germany is particularly striking, given the enormous number of works from Protestant Germany. The only item in the dataset that was published in a Catholic German city is a work of biblical scholarship from Munich in 1718, which refers to "oriental editions" of Holy Scripture.[39]

The link between confession and oriental studies is strong but complex, raising many questions. While the large majority of items in the dataset are from Protestant Europe, we find more works from Italy than from England, and more from Austria than from Switzerland. My anecdotal impression from reading early modern Catholic scholarship is that the category "oriental languages" had broader currency than indicated by this particular collection of data. It nonetheless seems to be the case that the term was especially prevalent among Protestant scholars. It is not obvious, though, how to quantify this prevalence or identify its cause. To what extent does the dominance of Protestant Germany and Holland in the dataset reflect the numerical superiority of Protestant scholars in the study of near eastern languages? (Conventional wisdom – exaggerated, but true to an extent – holds that the style of biblical scholarship that depended on oriental philology was a Protestant specialty.) Did Protestant scholars, at least in Germany and Holland, have a greater tendency to refer to these languages as "oriental"? Did the rise of professorships of "oriental languages" in parts of Protestant Europe lead scholars in those places to use the expression more than their counterparts elsewhere? And what accounts for the relatively paucity of examples from Protestant England, which was a significant centre of Hebrew and Arabic studies?[40]

6 Establishing a Discipline

Was oriental studies a discipline before the nineteenth century? That is to say, was the intellectual field of oriental philology embodied in a self-conscious, self-replicating community of practitioners united by common methods,

38 García-Arenal M. – Rodríguez Mediano F., *The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Lead Books of Granada, and the Rise of Orientalism*, trans. Consuelo López-Morillas (Leiden: 2013); Wilkinson, *Kabbalistic Scholars*.

39 Bretagne Pierre de, *Clavis Davidica seu compendiosus ad Sacram Scripturam apparatus*, […] *Explicantur editiones variae, orientales, Hebraicae, Syriacae, Arabicae, Graecae LXX* […] (Munich: Johann Jakob Remy: 1718).

40 Feingold M., "Oriental Studies", in Tyacke N. (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume IV Seventeenth-Century Oxford* (Oxford, UK: 1997) 449–503.

terminology, recognized authorities, scholarly problems, and debates as well as associated institutions?[41] The approach taken in this essay – namely, investigating how early modern scholars employed the term *linguae orientales* – suggests an affirmative answer. It does so, first, by delineating boundaries: oriental studies was the study of Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, Chaldean, and certain other near eastern languages. By providing a narrower definition of the field than studies that equate oriental studies with European writing about Asia in general, and by linking the study of oriental languages to institutional settings, distinctive genres of publications, and shared scholarly agendas, this essay's focus on early modern terminology makes visible the contours of a disciplinary community. (To describe oriental studies as a discipline does not imply that it was practiced in isolation from other disciplines. Contemporary academic discourse about "interdisciplinarity" fosters the exaggerated idea that disciplines, by nature, tend to be hermetic. Against this notion, one might observe that an entire class of scholarly disciplines, the so-called auxiliary sciences or *Hilfwissenschaften*, such as epigraphy and diplomatics, have been defined by their utility to another discipline, historical scholarship. Oriental studies, like philology in general, has often functioned in such a manner.)

The endeavour that early modern scholars knew as *philologia orientalis* found coherence not merely in a common agreement about the languages that constituted its field of study, but, more importantly, in the underlying logic that determined what those languages were. Geography played a role, as one would expect from the fundamentally spatial significance of the word "oriental". From a European perspective, oriental languages were spoken in the east (*oriens*). But the limits of the philological Orient were determined by other rationales. Above all, the field comprised languages that were important to Christian scholars because they were languages of Holy Scripture and its interpretation, languages of early Christianity, or languages spoken by contemporary eastern Christian communities (excluding the Greek and Slavic churches). To a large extent, then, *philologia orientalis* was coextensive with *philologia sacra*. Linguistic similarity also played a decisive role in defining the category. As it happens, most of the "oriental languages" were related, belonging to the group known to modern linguistics as the Semitic languages. Although that term was not coined until 1781, oriental philologists noticed the

41 On the significance of the concept of *discipline* for European history before the nineteenth-century, see Vidal F., *The Sciences of the Soul: The Early Modern Origins of Psychology* (Chicago: 2011) 3–8, and Kelley D., "The Problem of Knowledge and the Concept of Discipline", in Kelley D. (ed.), *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Rochester, NY: 1997) 13–28.

structural affinities among the Semitic languages much earlier, and the kinship of Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Ethiopic, and other "oriental languages", was an enduring theme in oriental studies from its inception in the early sixteenth century.[42] Indeed, some scholars described Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Samaritan, and Ethiopian as dialects of a single language.[43] References to non-Semitic languages, such as Persian, Armenian, Turkish, and Coptic, as "oriental" may indicate that close linguistic relation was not a *sine qua non* to belong to the category. But such an inference must be tempered by awareness that early modern philologists, misled by loan words, often held exaggerated ideas about the closeness of languages, believing, for example, that Armenian and, to some degree, Persian, derived from Hebrew.[44] To describe "oriental" simply as the early modern synonym for "Semitic", as some historians of linguistics assert, perhaps goes too far.[45] There can be no doubt, however, that linguistic affinity played an important role in creating consensus about the boundaries of the category, "oriental languages". Finally, early modern oriental studies was shaped by the humanist preference for ancient, literary languages and cultures. This helps to explain why oriental philologists devoted so little attention to topics like Turkish, the Ottoman Empire, and the history of the near east since antiquity, despite the appetite for such information among European readers. (Many books treated these subjects, but most were not written by oriental philologists.) These overlapping, reinforcing logics – geographic, intellectual, and linguistic – defined the category of oriental languages as well as the emerging discipline of oriental studies. The most important oriental languages, Hebrew, Arabic, Syrian, and Chaldean, checked all the boxes: they were ancient literary languages, relevant to sacred philology, and members of the Semitic linguistic branch.

At the centre of oriental studies was the study of Hebrew – often referred to simply as *lingua sacra* – and at the centre of the study of Hebrew was the Bible. Moving outwards in concentric circles it is natural that we come first

42 Loop J., "Introduction", in Loop J. – Hamilton A. – Burnett C. (eds.), *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: 2017) 5.

43 Loop, *Hottinger*, 74–80.

44 Gruntfest Y., "Harmonic Dictionaries and Grammars in Semitic Linguistics", in Ahlqvist A. (ed.), *Diversions of Galway*, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences 68 (Amsterdam: 1992) 107.

45 Gruntfest Y., "On the History of the Classification of Semitic Languages", in Jankowsky K.R. (ed.), *History of Linguistics 1993*, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences 78 (Amsterdam: 1993) 67–74. See also Loop J. "Language of Paradise: Protestant Oriental Scholarship and the Discovery of Arabic Poetry", in Hardy N. – Levitin D. (eds.), *Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: An Episode in the History of the Humanities* (Oxford: 2019) 395–415.

to Chaldean and Syriac, which, as we saw above, commonly formed a triad with Hebrew in enumerations of the principal oriental languages. In addition to their linguistic affinity to *hebraea mater*, Chaldean and Syriac were, like Hebrew, languages of scripture. Indeed oriental philology's first phase of development found its focal point in the production of the first edition of the Syriac New Testament.[46] Chaldean was the language of the books of Daniel and Ezra, as well as the paraphrases of the Jewish Bible known as Targumim, which began to interest Christian biblical scholars in the sixteenth century, as did the Talmud, much of which was also recorded in a form of Judeo-Aramaic. Likewise, Samaritan came to prominence because of scholarly interest in the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch.[47] Coptic, Ethiopic, and Armenian, like Syriac, were languages of ancient Christian communities, which preserved valuable documents of the early church.

Arabic, too, was studied largely within the framework of *philologia sacra*.[48] Christian scholars widely believed that knowledge of Arabic would aid biblical study by deepening understanding of Hebrew. Arabic was also deemed important as the mother tongue of many oriental Christians. Oriental philologists were aware of the profound relationship between Arabic and Islam and the importance of the Qur'an for serious study of the language. But the dataset provides telling evidence of their overall lack of interest in Islamic religion and civilization.[49] While Arabic is mentioned in fifty titles (more than any language besides Hebrew), Islam is referred to only in three: a translation of a history of Islam, a "harmonic glossary" of Arabic and other oriental languages, based on a comparison of the first four chapters of Genesis with the first three Qur'anic sutras, and a treatise arguing for the influence of Jewish traditions on Islam.[50] To these we might add a fourth, Giovanni Battista Podestà's transla-

46 Wilkinson, *Orientalism*.

47 Miller P.N., "A Philologist, a Traveller and an Antiquary Rediscover the Samaritans in Seventeenth-Century Paris, Rome and Aix: Jean Morin, Pietro Della Valle, and N.-C. De Peiresc", in Zedelmaier H. – Mulsow M. (eds.), *Die Praktiken Der Gelehrsamkeit in Der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: 2001) 123–46.

48 Hamilton A., "The Study of Tongues: The Semitic Languages and the Bible in the Renaissance", in Cameron E. (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 3. From 1450 to 1750* (Cambridge, UK, 2016) 31–4.

49 On the lack of interest in Islam among early modern Arabic philologists, see Malcolm N., "The Study of Islam in Early Modern Europe: Obstacles and Missed Opportunities", in Miller P.N. – Louis F. (eds.), *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500–1800* (Ann Arbor: 2012) 265–87.

50 Erpenius Thomas, *Historia Saracenica, qua res gestae Muslimorum, inde a Muhammede primo imperii et religionis muslimicè auctore, usque ad initium imperii Atabacaei* [...] *fidelissime explicantur* (Leiden, Thomas Erpenius ['Ex typographia Erpeniana linguarum

tion of a Turkish Ottoman chronicle.[51] The early modern study of Arabic and Islam must be understood in relation to a larger field of orientalist scholarship that was dominated by Hebrew and biblical studies.

At the root of the concept of a discipline is the relationship between master and disciple. The central role played by teaching positions and curricula in organizing the field is a strong reason for thinking of early modern oriental studies as an academic discipline – a branch of knowledge with coherence and continuity based not only on its subject matter but also on personal relationships among its community of practitioners. Chairs in oriental languages provided some early modern orientalists an institutional home and helped train future generations. This applies not only to those positions defined explicitly as professorships in "oriental languages", but also to professorships in Hebrew and Arabic. It is plausible, however, that the institutionalization of the specific expression "oriental languages" in certain parts of Europe fostered more disciplinary consciousness. For example, the necessity to deliver inaugural lectures on the topic of "oriental languages", rather than on specific languages such as Hebrew or Arabic, might have encouraged scholars to think of oriental languages as a cohesive framework that organized and gave meaning to the study of the individual languages that belonged to its domain. This essay's dataset provides ample evidence that a discipline of oriental studies, with the characteristics described above, existed in Lutheran Germany and in the Dutch Republic. To what extent we can speak in similar terms about other parts of Europe is somewhat less clear. It is worth noting, however, that a significant, early act of discipline-building, the compiling of a biographical dictionary of orientalists (those 'who cultivated Hebrew and other oriental languages') was carried out by a Frenchman and devoted to French, Italian, and Spanish scholars.[52]

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orientalium']: 1625); Maius Johann Heinrich, *Brevis institutio linguae Arabicae, Hebraicae, Chaldaicae, Syriacae, Samaritanae ac Aethiopicae harmonica: accedit Glossarium Arabicum cum reliquis orientis linguis harmonicum, in IV. Geneseos capita priora et tres praecipuas alcorani suratas. Opera Justi Helffrici Happelii* (Frankfurt, Johann Philipp Andreae: 1707); and Mill David, *Oratio inauguralis. De Mohammedanismo e veterum Hebraeorum scriptis magna* […] *dicta* […] *Quum linguarum orientalium professionem ordinariam, in inclyta Academia Trajectina auspicaretur* (Utrecht, Johannes van de Water: 1718).

51 Podestà Giovanni Battista, *Ioannis Baptistae Poedstà Sacrae Caesarae Regiaeq*[*ue*]*; Maiestatis Orientalium Linguarum Secretarii, Translatae Turcicae Chronicae pars prima* (Nürnberg, Michael and Johann Friedrich Endter: 1672).

52 Colomiés, *Gallia Orientalis* and *Italia and Hispania Orientalis*.

7 From Early Modern to Modern Oriental Studies

Understanding early modern oriental studies as a coherent scholarly field, with the study of Hebrew and the Bible at its centre, has implications that extend beyond the seventeenth century. Classic disciplinary histories, such as Raymond Schwab's influential *Oriental Renaissance* (1950), locate the origin of oriental studies as an academic discipline in the late eighteenth century.[53] They assign the decisive role to the rise of interest in Sanskrit and India, which is taken to represent an eclipse of Christian theological agendas and a departure from earlier scholars' preoccupation with the biblical Orient. Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), much research on oriental studies has focused on the study of Arabs and the Muslim world, but the chronology remains similar, explaining the institutionalization of academic orientalism in terms of colonialism and secularization, beginning at the end of the eighteenth century.[54] When the standard histories acknowledge oriental studies' pre-eighteenth-century roots, the picture is inaccurate and imprecise. They often accord as great a role to the Middle Ages as to the Renaissance, frequently invoking the ineffectual decree of the Council of Vienne (1311–12), which called for the establishment of chairs in Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and Greek at European universities, while finding the main contribution of the early modern period in China missions, rather than near eastern philology.[55] These narratives, which minimize and obscure the continuity between early modern and modern oriental studies, are untenable.

In reality, the "new orientalism" of the late eighteenth century was a development within an already established discipline, as the individuals customarily identified as its "founders" would have acknowledged. Both Abraham

53 Schwab R., *Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. G. Patterson-Black and V. Reinking (New York: 1984).

54 Marchand S., *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: 2009) xxvii–xxix; Kalmar I., "Orientalism and the Bible", in Nash G. (ed.), *Orientalism and Literature* (Cambridge: 2019) 133–8.

55 See, for example, Macfie A.L. (ed.), *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: 2000) 19: 'The history of oriental studies in Europe may be traced back to the year 1312, when the Church Council of Vienna [*sic*] decided to establish a series of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac, in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon and Salamanca. Later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, following the great voyages of discovery undertaken by the European maritime powers, and the dispatch, by the Roman Catholic Society of Jesus, of Christian missions to the East, a series of institutes and academies were set up for the study of the languages and cultures of India, China and Japan. But it was only in the final quarter of the eighteenth century that orientalism, as a profession, became firmly established'.

Hyancinthe Anquetil-Duperron and William Jones, for example, began their orientalist careers in the conventional manner by studying Hebrew and Arabic, before turning to Indology and redefining oriental studies in "Asiatic" terms. The traditional concerns of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century orientalists did not ebb, even as new fields, such as Indology and Assyriology, rose alongside them. Ivan Kalmar has called attention to the unwarranted neglect of biblical studies in scholarship on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century oriental studies, and Suzanne Marchand has extensively documented the persistence of Hebrew and the Bible as the primary concerns of German orientalists into the twentieth century.[56] Furthermore, the "new orientalism" of the far east did not, at least initially, entail a radical break with the conceptual paradigms of the "old orientalism". William Jones continued to operate within the parameters of sacred philology and biblical history, exploring new Sanskrit sources in order to establish a 'Mosaic ethnology' that traced all nations to Noah and his offspring.[57] Similar motivations guided Anquetil-Duperron's famous study of Zoroastrian scriptures.[58] This is not to deny that oriental studies was significantly reshaped in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by forces such as European colonialism in Asia, the expansion of oriental philology to the far east, and the rise of the Semitic and Aryan paradigms. But the discipline's history begins earlier, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when orientalists pursued the study of near eastern languages primarily within the context of biblical scholarship.

In one important respect, however, this essay reveals a discontinuity. It is almost always taken for granted that oriental studies is about the Other; it is the study of Asia by Europeans, based on belief in an antithesis between east and west. But this was not the case in the discipline's first, formative period. Oriental studies was not founded as a discipline for 'dealing with the orient', that is to say, for making sense of (and potentially subjugating) something foreign or exotic.[59] On the contrary, sixteenth-and seventeenth-century scholars invented oriental studies to better understand things that were, ostensibly, familiar: the Bible and Christianity, their own religious tradition. They were not seeking knowledge of the Other, so much as they were seeking knowledge of

56 Kalmar, "Orientalism and the Bible"; Marchand, *German Orientalism*.

57 Trautmann T. *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: 1997) 28–61.

58 App U. *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: 2011) 363–439.

59 Edward Said's definition of orientalism as 'the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient' is echoed in Dew, *Orientalism* 6. Kalmar and Penslar similarly describe orientalist discourse as based in 'the Christian West's attempts to understand and to manage its relations with both of its monotheistic Others'. Kalmar I. – Penslar D., "Introduction", in Kalmar I. – Penslar D. (eds.), *Orientalism and the Jews* (Hanover, NH: 2005) xiv.

the Self. To put it differently, it is usually assumed that first there was the place, "the orient" (a discrete entity in the European imagination, if not an objective geographic or cultural entity); then came the scholarly field that studied that place, "oriental studies". As I have argued above, this is mistaken. The scholarly study of so-called "oriental languages" came first; the "orient", as it was construed by the new field of oriental studies, was defined by reference to the languages called "oriental", a designation that had less to do with geography than with relevance to sacred philology. The association of oriental languages with the non-European world and with regions controlled by Muslim infidels was not absent. Nor were ancient tropes about the difference between European and Asian temperaments (though before the eighteenth century these were less prevalent than is often assumed). But an essentialist distinction between east and west was absent from orientalist scholarship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not until the eighteenth century did it become common to place the "orient", increasingly identified with all of Asia, in opposition to Europe.

How did this come to be? How did oriental studies come to understand the object of its knowledge as an Other, in terms of the dichotomy of east and west? (Granted that modern oriental studies did not always view the Orient as negatively as some of its critics contend, there is no doubt that it was frequently characterized by essentialist distinctions between Orient and Occident.) A comprehensive answer to this question would require its own substantial study. But the framework laid out in this essay points to an answer, which, by way of a conclusion, I will briefly sketch.

As early modern scholars applied the methods of Renaissance humanism to Holy Scripture, the ancient Jews came to seem strange and primitive. Insisting that ancient Israel, although guided by God's special providence, belonged to its time and place, they used oriental philology to explain Jewish customs and rituals by reference to the broader world of the ancient near east. The unintended outcome was a new understanding of ancient Israel as an archaic tribal society that in many ways had more in common with its idolatrous neighbours than with Christian Europe. In this context, some scholars made claims about the mentality of the ancient Jews, describing them as earthly and unrefined, limited in their ability to think abstractly, susceptible only to material, not spiritual, rewards, and so forth.[60] Negative views of the Jewish national character were as old as Christianity, but this vision was new and unsettling. Christian theology divided human history in two: on one side, the providential

60 Stolzenberg D., "John Spencer and the Perils of Sacred Philology", *Past and Present* 214 (2012) 129–163.

fold of sacred history united ancient Israel and the Christian Church, successive recipients of revelation; on the other, the realm of profane history encompassed the pagans and infidels who made up the rest of humanity. By describing the ancient Jews in ethnographic terms as radically different from modern Christians, but of a kind with other ancient peoples, historicist biblical scholars of the seventeenth century placed pressure on this scheme. They did not, however, explain ancient Israel in terms of its "oriental" character. For seventeenth-century scholars, "oriental" primarily referred to languages that shared common attributes, though by extension the people who spoke those languages were also called "oriental". The idea that oriental nations shared essential characteristics gained currency in the following century, expressed in concepts like "oriental spirit", "oriental genius", and "oriental style". That these notions were rooted in seventeenth-century descriptions of the biblical Jews is plainly evident in the earliest authors that employed them, as two influential examples, Voltaire and Herder, illustrate.

In works such as *Essay on the manners and spirit of nations* (first edition, 1756), Voltaire referred frequently to "Orientals" and "the Orient", a region that, for him, encompassed Asia, 'from the Dardanelles to Korea'. Reliably inconsistent, Voltaire generalized about all oriental peoples when it suited him, while elsewhere identifying significant differences among them. But he always contrasted the Orient with Europe. Even as he departed from the older, narrower conception of the Orient, he betrayed his large debt to seventeenth-century oriental studies by defining the 'oriental genius' (*génie oriental*) in terms of the traits that earlier scholars had ascribed to the ancient Jews. For example, in declaring that the ancient Jews revealed their 'carnal and fierce' (*charnel et sanguinaire*) national character by praying to God for earthly rewards 'in the oriental style' (*dans le style oriental*), Voltaire borrowed a trope of early modern biblical studies and redefined it as, not merely Jewish, but oriental. Voltaire identified the same "oriental genius" in the Arabs, Turks, Persians, and Indians, who shared a passionate and unruly imagination (*imagination ardente, sombre, et déréglée*) as well as a penchant for fables, allegories, and figurative speech.[61]

In *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (1782–3), Johann Gottfried Herder made significant use of the term "oriental" (*morgenländisch, orientalisch*) as he interpreted the Old Testament in terms of the historically and culturally distinct character of the ancient Jewish people. Herder's Orient remained confined to the near east and more specifically to Semitic peoples (indeed, he was among the first authors to use the term Semitic, which he treated as a synonym for

61 Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (Paris, Thomine et Fortrec: 1822) vol. 1, 196, 308, vol. 2, 389, vol. 3, 283, 327, and passim.

orientalisch), and, like seventeenth-century philologists, he defined "oriental" as 'the general term for languages with a kinship to Hebrew' (*der Hauptbegriff der mit dem Hebräischen verwandten Sprachen*).[62] But, for Herder, whose theory of the folk-genius equated language and national character, linguistic kinship implied cultural kinship, and he thus spoke of an 'oriental style' (*morgenländische Weise*) that united the ancient Jews with other peoples. Concerned above all with poetry, which he deemed the pure expression of the *Volk*, Herder defined oriental style in terms of distinctive modes of literary representation, such as allegory, enigma, and a lofty, sententious tone. Though derived from the study of the Hebrew Bible, he had no doubt that these traits belonged equally to the Arabs, Persians, and other oriental nations. Describing the religion of the Semites, Herder anticipated many commonplaces of nineteenth-century orientalist scholarship:

> Thun Sie nun einen Blick in die Sprache und Religion der Semiten (denn im Grunde haben alle diese Stämme vom Euphrat bis zum Roten Meer nur eine Sprache), wie hell und einfach ist ihre Religion! […] eben diese semitischen Stämme, die Araber mit eingeschlossen, haben das Verdienst um die Welt, daß sie die Einheit Gottes und die reinsten Ideen von Religion und Schöpfung mit einem Eifer erhalten und fortgebreitet haben, die ihnen die höchste Stammesehre schien. […] Die meisten der Semiten blieben lange Hirtenvölker, oder erhielten sich wenigstens auch bei anderen Einrichtungen der Einfalt nahe: und Sie sehen, wie gut das für die Sprache und Sage der Urwelt war. Sie wurde nicht verkünstelt, nicht verschwemmt und verdorben: einfältig und abgesondert wie das Zelt, blieb sie auch Väterheiligtum im Zelte
>
> Now take a look at the language and religion of the Semites (since all these tribes from the Euphrates to the Red Sea have essentially a single language), how clear and simple is their religion! […] To these tribes of Shem, the Arabs included, belongs the credit of having zealously preserved and spread to the world the oneness of God and the purest ideas of religion and Creation, which they deemed the greatest glory of their tribe […] For a long time most of the Semites remained pastoralists, or, even if they adopted other arrangements, at least remained close to such simplicity: and you see how good this was for the language and tradition

62 Herder Johann Gottfried, *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie* (Gotha, F.A. Perthes: 1890) vol. 1, 126.

> of the primeval world. It didn't become artificial, nor diluted and ruined; simple and isolated like the tent, it remained, in the tent, a patriarchal sanctuary.[63]

While neither Herder nor Voltaire was an oriental philologist (though the former knew Hebrew), they were influenced by orientalist scholarship, and their ideas, in turn, had an impact on the field. Among others, Voltaire inspired Louis-Mathieu Langlès, first director of the École Spéciale des Langues Orientales, while Herder profoundly influenced German oriental studies, especially through his relationship with Johann Gottfried Eichhorn.[64] The transformation of oriental studies in the eighteenth century was the product of mutual influence between orientalists and non-specialists. To what extent new ideas about the oriental mind and an essential east/west dichotomy originated outside the discipline (as the schematic story I have presented suggests) or within it is an open question for further research.

Herder, who taught that every *Volk* was an organic entity with a unique culture that must be understood on its own terms, viewed the biblical Jews and the oriental character they embodied with sympathy and admiration. Voltaire, for whom anti-Judaism was a central tenet of his campaign against the Bible and Christianity, viewed the Jews and other oriental peoples more derisively. He measured the oriental spirit against the European and found it wanting. Despite such profound differences, both authors bear witness to the semantic and conceptual shift that took place in the eighteenth century, which made "oriental" a transitive principle. Many of the stereotypical "oriental" traits, made familiar by studies of modern orientalism – the timeless and unchanging character of oriental cultures, their primitivism, simplicity, and tendency toward the concrete, which easily devolved into excessive sensuality – were first attributed to the ancient Jews as the result of reflection on the Old Testament and then transferred to other oriental nations, including the Arabs. The seventeenth century made the ancient Jews strange; the eighteenth century made them oriental. Just as Hebrew was the paradigmatic oriental language, the ancient Jews were the paradigmatic oriental people.

63 Herder, *Geist der ebräischen Poesie*, vol. 1, 259.

64 App, *Birth of Orientalism* 75–6, 473; Cheyne T.K., *Founders of Old Testament Criticism: Biographical, Descriptive, and Critical Studies* (London: 1893) 16–19.

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