

# EUROPEAN SCHOLARSHIP AND ARABIC LINGUISTICS :

## The case of Velarization in Arabic

by  
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This paper was delivered at the IVth International Conference on the History of the language sciences, Trier, West Germany, August 24 - 27, 1987.

Hosted by prof. Dr. Hans-J. Niederehe, Romanistik, University of Trier, this 4th Conference was a model of organization and hospitality. There were several excellent papers and a few not so excellent but on the whole, the international committee that accepted the papers on the basis of their abstracts did a signal job.

Two papers were critical of works on Arabic by two superb scholars and researchers, the late Roman Jakobson of Harvard University and the dean of American Islamists, George Makdisi of the University of Pennsylvania : The first was prepared specially for the conference by this writer, the second by M.G. Carter of the University of Sydney, Australia who is at the present time serving as visiting professor of Arabic at New York University. In his essay, this writer tried to show that, in the absence of Arabic learning, carelessness and mistakes are likely to be made, no matter how competent and learned the researcher who, for one reason or another, sought to discuss Arabic linguistic or cultural matters. The second paper, Carter's, attempted to show that no matter how learned a scholar/researcher, mistakes in research results cannot be avoided.

The consecutive delivery of these two papers constituted a most interesting socio-politico-academic study in ethnocentricity : This writer's paper which was critical of a Western scholar was vehemently attacked by a member of the staff of the Hebrew University who rose «to defend my compatriots ;» he used an objectionable tactic,

namely, addressing the chairman of the session instead of the speaker and thus embarrassing the chairman by forcing him to shoulder a responsibility that is not his. And by refusing to respond to challenges such as, «If it is true as you say there is an institution called the «University of Jerusalem» (sic), to which you yourself belong, why do we find the name «Hebrew University» after your name in the Conference Handbook ?» The man turned the session into a racist masquerade. As for the second paper, Carter's, which criticized the work of an Arab-American, without showing definitively that his idea was wrong, was received with enthusiastic applause. That paper discussed «the latin term *regere for* govern «in grammar» claiming without substantiality that it was *not* «of Arabic inspiration».

Following is an abridged text of this writer's paper showing that the very best of Western scholars is not good enough when he tackles a subject in Arabic studies on the basis of secondary sources that are not genuinely and primarily Arabic.

This study's point of reference, when the term «Arab» is mentioned therein is Philip K. Hitti's ideas related to objectively study the Arabs and their contribution to civilization<sup>1</sup> in the manner mentioned by the great Russian Arabist, I. Iu. Kratchkovskii, in his little known book, *Among Arabic Manuscripts* ;<sup>2</sup> my own research which shows that, despite the availability of Manuscripts dealing with linguistic subjects in a number of European languages, historians of linguistic science such as Holger Pedersen and Otto Jespersen were unable to realize the importance of the study of Medieval Arabic linguistics and thus produced histories of linguistics that are defec-

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