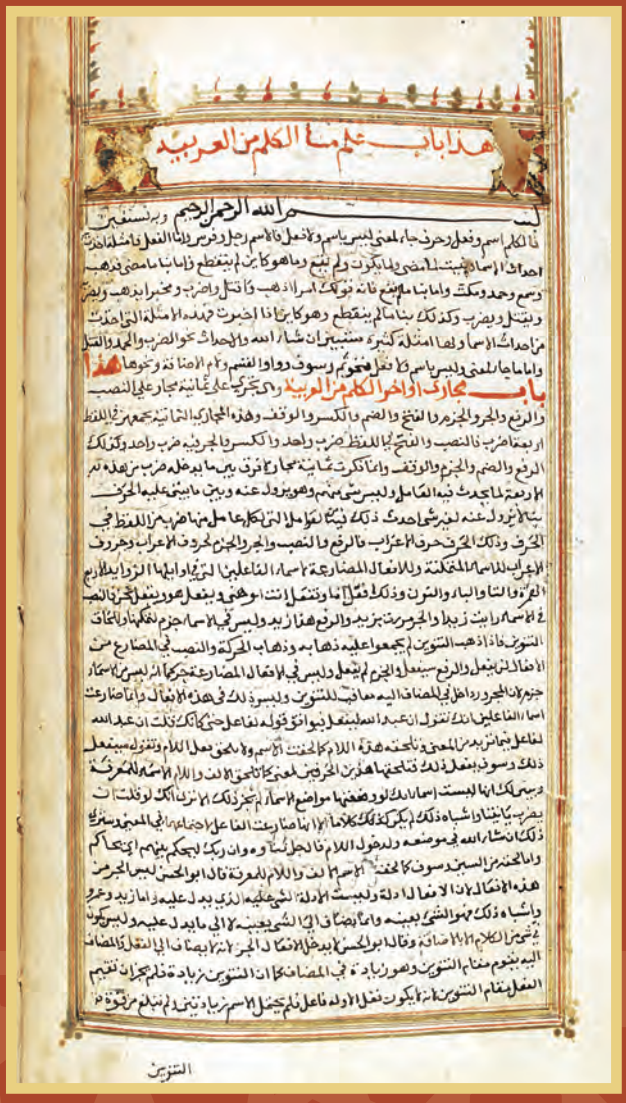

Sībawayhi's Principles

Arabic Grammar and Law in Early Islamic Thought

Michael G. Carter

Resources in Arabic and Islamic Studies

SĪBAWAYHI'S PRINCIPLES

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Michael G. Carter

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Series Editors' Preface

Michael Carter has had a long and very distinguished career as an Arabist. His first published article was the still much-cited 'The Kātib in Fact and Fiction' (1971); in 2006, a bibliography of his work appeared in a collection honoring him, and another appeared in 2009 in a special issue of the *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* dedicated to him. Remarkably, in the seven years since, his work rate has not diminished. He has written on ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, on Andalusian grammarians, on Sufi commentary, and on much else besides; in 2013, the text of his Presidential Address to the American Oriental Society appeared, exhibiting his characteristic humor, incisiveness, and erudition. But, as the editors of his Festschrift note, Michael Carter's name "will always be most strongly linked with Sībawayhi." We are delighted, therefore, that he agreed to let us publish his 1968 Oxford doctoral thesis, "Sībawayhi's Principles of Grammatical Analysis," in our series.

Sībawyhi's Principles: Arabic Grammar and Law in Early Islamic Thought is a corrected version of the thesis, updated with copious Addenda after each chapter. It systematically argues that the science of Arabic grammar owes its origins to a special application of a set of methods and criteria developed independently to form the Islamic legal system, not to Greek or other foreign influence. These methods and criteria were then adapted to create a grammatical system brought to perfection by Sībawayhi in the late second/eighth century. It describes the intimate contacts between early jurists and scholars of language out of which the new science of Arabic grammar evolved, and makes detailed comparisons between the technical terms of law and grammar to show how the vocabulary of the law was applied to the speech of the Arabs. It also sheds light on Sībawayhi's method in producing his magisterial *Kitāb*. Although Professor Carter first formulated the arguments in his thesis fifty years ago, and although many of the ideas found their way into his formidable scholarly output thereafter, there is still an enormous amount to be learned and gleaned from this defining study.

We are grateful to: Mike Carter for his careful corrections and addenda and we crave his and the reader's indulgence for any errors that crept in when we converted the text; Susanne Wilhelm for the splendid book design; Ian Stevens for making RAIS books widely available; and publisher Billie Jean Collins for untiringly helping us promote Arabic and Islamic Studies.

Joseph E. Lowry
Devin J. Stewart
Shawkat M. Toorawa

Preface

In writing this thesis I have always been conscious of the warning of Māzinī: Whoever intends to perform a great deed in grammar after the *Kitāb* of Sībawayhi, let him be humble.[a] If in the pages below I appear to have reserved my humility for the *Kitāb*, and shown less regard for the opinions of other scholars, I hope that my intemperance will be taken as a sign of zeal and not of rancour. Writing a thesis is rather like piercing a silk handkerchief in the air with a sword: the necessary violence of the manoeuvre leads one into some pretty strange postures.

My object throughout has been to remove the patina of critical misrepresentation which overlays the *Kitāb*, by presenting an account of the various ways in which Sībawayhi's grammar differs from what is generally regarded as typical Arabic grammar. By thus returning directly to the *Kitāb*, and discounting the prejudices of the later grammarians, it is hoped that Sībawayhi's achievement will at last be discovered.

As a matter of convenience, the narrow transcription of Arabic has been used only in the bibliography, and, with one exception, page [210], no diacriticals or quantity marks are employed in the text.[b] I feel I ought to apologise to the professional linguists for the brief use I have made of the method of Immediate Constituent Analysis; this short excursion across the boundaries of academic disciplines will surely be excused for the light it throws on Sībawayhi's methods.

I do not know whether to believe Ibn Jinnī, who regarded the study of grammar as something to learn to like and to exercise one's mind upon,[c] or Kramers, who reports the view of another Arab, that too much grammar [ii] drives one mad.[d] I have, however, been guided between these two extremes by my supervisor, Professor Beeston. The hard work of producing the thesis was largely done by my wife, who alone knows how grateful I am. I would also like to thank the Principal and Librarian of Manchester College, who generously put at my disposal the Carpenter Library of Comparative Religion, and thus afforded me that rarest of commodities for the Oxford student, simple privacy.[e]

The work completed, I am more than ready to echo the plea of Labīd:[f]

قُلْتُ هَجِّدْنِي فَقَدْ طَالَ السُّرَى

Addenda to the Preface

(a) Reported in Sīrāfī, *Aḫbār al-naḥwiyyīn* 50.

(b) When this thesis was typed there were no diacritics or quantity marks available, but they have now been inserted in the present version. The digraphs *dh*, *gh*, *kh*, *sh*, *th* are replaced by *ḏ*, *ġ*, *ḫ*, *š* and *ṯ* , but reproduced as printe din book title (see further in the second Preface).

(c) Strictly speaking he is referring to *taṣrīf*, those morphological games which test the student's mastery of conjugation, of which Ibn Jinnī remarks, *Ḫaṣā'iṣ* 2, 487, that "their only goal is that you should become familiar with the process and exercise your mind on it", *innamā l-ġaraḍu fīhi l-ta'annusu bihi wa-i'māl ul-fikrati fīhi*.

(d) "He who occupies himself much with grammar becomes unhinged thereby," attributed by Kramers, *Analecta Orientalia* 2, 167, to Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi (d. 328/940).

(e) The reference is to the married graduate student, a social category which at the time was scarcely acknowledged by the Oxford system.

(f) See Fischer/Bräunlich 1945, 175, rhyme غَفَلْ, for the edition of the *Dīwān*: it is quoted by Ibn Qutayba, *Adab al-Kātib* 483. The original هجّدنا has here been adapted to هجّدني.

Preface to This Edition

It is customary for an academic career to begin with a thesis and end with a festschrift. In my case the sequence, albeit not the chronology, has been reversed.

It is an honour to have been invited to issue the thesis in this Series, and I thank the editors and the publishers, all of whom have had to deal with more than the usual range of technical difficulties. My special gratitude goes to Shawkat Toorawa, who spent so much time and energy on the preparation of the final version that his name should appear on the title page, not as editor, but as co-author.

The text of the thesis has been left unaltered, apart from the correction of typographical errors and a few minor emendations, and some long paragraphs have been broken up. In a number of cases (indicated in the Addenda) outright mistakes of fact or interpretation have been corrected. As for my frequent intemperate critical outbursts, there was nothing to be done except to apologise in situ and leave them as they stand, to be a lesson to others.

The discursive and often speculative Addenda make few concessions to the non-specialist reader, and most of the evidential material is untranslated. Every effort has been made to paraphrase recent work in the field accurately and justly. Two things will be obvious: there has been an enormous output of research on Sībawayhi in the last few decades, and we are still a long way from understanding him completely.

The linking of the Addenda is not always ideal, and sometimes the reference is in a footnote rather than the body of the text. In their apparent randomness the Addenda mimic the non-linearity of Sībawayhi's thought, with which readers of the *Kitāb* are familiar.

The bibliographical conventions of the thesis are preserved, but the Addenda and its supplementary bibliography refer to Author, year and page. Given the semi-antiquarian nature of this publication, it was decided not to venture into the world of the Internet.

Although the thesis did generate a number of articles, which are mentioned in the Addenda, presenting the full form of the arguments here will have a greater impact than their less detailed abridgements, whereby this work may acquire a usefulness beyond a simple contribution to the history of scholarship.

Michael G. Carter

Index of Arabic Terms and Proper Names

The page numbers are those of the original thesis. This index does not include persons named in the addenda, though they can usually be traced through the topic of the note in question. All entries are under the Arabic term, when there is one, with cross-references from their English equivalent.

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