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### THE TREATMENT OF ARAB HISTORY BY PRIDEAUX, OCKLEY AND SALE

UNTIL the last years of the seventeenth century, writings upon the history of the Arabs had been, in England as in Europe generally, academic in their purpose and nature. The study of Arab history was not in that period a specialized discipline; oriental studies had developed as ancillaries to Old Testament studies and ecclesiastical history and polemics. Few scholars were primarily interested in Arabic; still fewer made any significant investigations of Arab history. In comparison with his contemporaries, Pococke made an outstanding contribution to historical knowledge, and in his writings he displays the temperament of an historian—a notable achievement as will appear by contrast with some of his successors. Nevertheless Pococke's work was limited both in its scope and its impact. He produced no organized body of history: his publications consisted of the text and translation of two late Christian Arabic chronicles, and the erudite notes, not confined to history but ranging over the whole field of Arab antiquities and Muslim religion, which he appended to his *Specimen historiae Arabum* (Oxford, 1650). Translations and notes were alike in Latin, addressed to an academic audience rather than to the educated public at large. During the last twenty-eight years of Pococke's long life (1604-91), he was pre-occupied with Hebrew and the writing of commentaries on the minor prophets. He made no further contributions to the study of Muslim history.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Humphrey Prideaux*

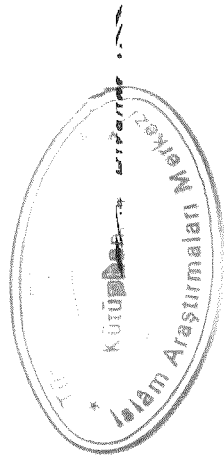
Humphrey Prideaux,<sup>2</sup> born in 1648 in Cornwall, was a pupil at Westminster School under Dr. Busby. This was of some importance, since Busby was keenly interested in contemporary orientalism, and added Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic to the normal classical curriculum of his school.<sup>3</sup> In 1668 Prideaux went to Christ Church, Oxford, where in 1679 he became a lecturer in Hebrew. He left Oxford in 1686, when James II appointed a Roman Catholic as dean of Christ Church. The remainder of his life was spent in East Anglia. He had already been appointed a canon of Norwich in 1681; from 1688 to 1694 he was archdeacon of Suffolk, and from 1702 until his death in 1724 he

was dean of Norwich. When Pococke died in 1691, Prideaux was offered the chair of Hebrew at Oxford, which he declined, and in 1697 he published his most famous work, *The true nature of imposture fully display'd in the life of Mahomet. With a discourse annex'd for the vindication of Christianity from this charge. Offered to the consideration of the Deists of the present age.* The book won an immediate success; there were two editions in 1697 and others subsequently, while a French translation was published in 1698.

The full title of Prideaux's work announces its polemical purpose and its appearance was closely connected with the theological controversies of the late seventeenth century. Prideaux had originally intended to publish a much larger work entitled *The history of the ruin of the Eastern Church*, covering the period 602 to 936, from which he hoped to illustrate by example the dangers of theological disputes. The controversies of the Eastern church, Prideaux believed, "weari'd the Patience and Long-Suffering of God", so that "he raised up the *Saracens* to be the Instruments of his Wrath, . . . who taking Advantage of the Weakness of Power, and the Distractions of Counsels, which these Divisions had caused among them, soon overran with a terrible Devastation all the *Eastern Provinces* of the *Roman Empire*".<sup>4</sup> Prideaux saw in this a terrible warning to the sects in England after the Revolution of 1688: "Have we not Reason to fear, that God may in the same Manner raise up some *Mahomet* against us for our utter Confusion . . . And by what the *Socinian*, the *Quaker*, and the *Deist* begin to advance in this Land, we may have Reason to fear, that Wrath hath some Time since gone forth from the Lord for the Punishment of these our Iniquities and Gainsayings, and that the Plague is already begun among us."<sup>5</sup>

Prideaux's composition of this tract for the times was, however, abruptly suspended on the outbreak of the Trinitarian Controversy.<sup>6</sup> He feared that his account of the dissensions in the Eastern Church might unintentionally provide fresh ammunition for those prowling enemies of the Establishment, "the *Atheist*, the *Deist*, and the *Socinian*". He therefore selected the passages of his work which dealt with the life of Muhammad and published them in the form we have today.<sup>7</sup>

The book forms a curious contrast to an earlier work on the life of Muhammad and the early history of Islam, which had been circulating for some years in manuscript. Its author, Henry Stubbs (alternatively Stubbes or Stubbe), who died in 1676, had also studied at Westminster under Busby, and had graduated at Oxford. He had served in the Parliamentary army during the Civil War. In later life he practised medicine and involved himself in controversy about the Royal Society, towards which he was hostile. His book, which was



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OCKLEY AND SALE

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Prideaux (MSS. Tech)

Until the last years of the seventeenth century, writings upon the history of the Arabs had been, in England as in Europe generally, academic in their purpose and nature. As I have indicated in an earlier paper,<sup>1</sup> the study of Arab history was not in that period a specialized discipline; oriental studies had developed as ancillaries to Old Testament studies and ecclesiastical history and polemics. Few scholars were primarily interested in Arabic; still fewer made any significant investigations of Arab history. In comparison with his contemporaries, Pococke made an outstanding contribution to historical knowledge, and in his writings he displays the temperament of an historian—a notable achievement as will appear by contrast with some of his successors. Nevertheless Pococke's work was limited both in its scope and its impact. He produced no organized body of history: his publications consisted of the text and translation of two late Christian Arabic chronicles, and the erudite notes, not confined to history but ranging over the whole field of Arab antiquities and Muslim religion, which he appended to his *Specimen Historiae Arabum*. Translations and notes were alike in Latin, addressed to an academic audience rather than to the educated public at large. During the last twenty-eight years of Pococke's long life (1604-91), he was preoccupied with Hebrew and the writing of commentaries on the Minor Prophets. He made no further contributions to the study of Muslim history.

Humphrey Prideaux

Humphrey Prideaux,<sup>2</sup> born in 1648 in Cornwall, was a pupil at Westminster School under the celebrated Dr. Busby. This was of some importance, since Dr. Busby, who has lived on in popular fame as a flogging headmaster, was keenly interested in contemporary orientalism, and added Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic to the normal classical curriculum of his school.<sup>3</sup> In 1668 Prideaux went to Christ Church, Oxford, where in 1679

<sup>1</sup> P. M. Holt, 'The study of Arabic historians in seventeenth century England: the background and the work of Edward Pococke', *BSOAS* (1957), xix/3, 444-55.

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, xlii, 352-4; article by Rev. Alexander Gordon.

<sup>3</sup> *The Diary of John Evelyn*, Everyman Edition (London, 1945), i, 357, entry of 13 May 1661: 'I heard and saw such exercises at the election of scholars at Westminster School to be sent to the

University in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, in themes and extemporary verses, as wonderfully astonished me in such youths, with such readiness and wit, some of them not above twelve, or thirteen years of age.' Letter from Edmund Castell to Samuel Clarke in 1667, Baker MSS., Cambridge University Library, Mm. 1. 47, p. 347: 'I also send you some papers from Dr. Busby, who . . . desires the cast of your eye, and your most exact censure, alteration, and emendation of the Hebrew, Chaldee, Arabique . . . Papers, which he sends to you, as also that you would, with his service, present them to Dr. Pococke . . . Our request is, that he would also be pleased to do the like with you, to read, censure, etc. with as much severity as may be.'

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<sup>4</sup> Prideaux, *Life of Mahomet*, 8th edition (London, 1723), 'To the Reader', pp. vii, viii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>6</sup> For the Trinitarian Controversy, see E. M. Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 226-31.

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