Introduction

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The idea for this little *dossier spécial* emerged from a workshop, held in Berlin in December 2016 to discuss the possibilities of fundraising for projects related to the study of the etymology of Arabic. The workshop came as a follow-up of two others: one larger, held in Oslo in June 2013, with the aim (as expressed in the title) of *Breaking the Grounds for an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic (EtymArab)*,[1] and another, smaller one, arranged in Erlangen in December 2015 and designed for a younger generation ("jīl ǧadīd") of researchers interested in Arabic etymology.[2] All three events were motivated by the fact that, strangely enough, there is to this day no full-scale etymological dictionary of Arabic,[3] although this language is among the most widely spoken languages of the world, can count as the most important living Semitic language, has a long and fascinating history and a rich literary heritage, is the language of one of the "hot spots" of contemporary global politics and, aside from all that, even enjoys the status of one of the official languages at the United Nations.[4]

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[1] This workshop was convened by myself in collaboration with Catherine PENNACCHIO (CERMOM, INALCO) and Lutz EDZARD (IKOS, Oslo) as an ESF Exploratory Workshop, financed by the European Science Foundation and co-sponsored by the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS, University of Oslo) and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences.

[2] *The Etymology of Arabic: A "jīl jadīd" Workshop*, December 19, 2015, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. The papers given on this occasion included: my own report on the *EtymArab* dictionary project ("*EtymArab* – work in progress"), as well as Orhan ELMAZ, "Evaluating the Ḥadīṯ corpus as a source for the linguistic history of Arabic"; Georg LEUBE, "Bürgerforum einer Planstadt? Jabbānat Kinda in early Islamic Kufa between urban topography and etymology"; Frank WEIGELT, "Greek loanwords in Arabic"; Gizem GÖZLETEN, "Zur praktischen Arbeit an einer vergleichenden arabisch-semitischen Wortliste"; Lutz EDZARD, "Arabisch und Semitisch: Probleme des lexikalischen Vergleichs".

[3] For an etymological dictionary of Arabic words of *non*-Semitic origin, cf. ROLLAND 2015.

[4] Among the reasons for this more than deplorable lacuna we may mention, on the Arab side, the notorious lack of an indigenous tradition of historical linguistics, owing itself to the traditional view of Arabic as a sacrosanct 'unchanging' language, the idiom God Himself had chosen to address mankind in his ultimate, 'eternal' message, the Qur'ân; and, perhaps even more important, the experience of colonialism and, continuing even after political independence, of Western cultural domination, resulting in a reluctance to allow Western theory to 'invade' and 'colonize' one of the last reservations of indigenous culture and identity; on the Western side, the disregard for, or neglect of, etymology in Arabic Studies can partly be traced back to the marginalisation of philology as such after Edward SAID's verdict, which saw old-style philology as part of an overall Orientalist discourse that made colonialism possible; to a large extent this disregard and neglect is however also the result of the subjection, or subjugation, of academic research to the principles of neoliberal market economy, a process that increasingly resulted, and continues to result, in the abolishment of "small" linguistic disciplines in favour of the large Middle East Studies programs with their focus on politics and society of the contemporary

After the Oslo meeting, work on the *EtymArab* project was taken up immediately, and the idea of gradually building up a nutshell "zero version" of an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic was spread, discussed and further developed on several occasions[5] and in a number of publications,[6] all drawing on material collected in the *EtymArab* database (incl. discussion and preliminary conclusions), the project's working platform currently hosted by *Bibliotheca Polyglotta*.[7]

Arab world, a process that often is accompanied by competitive fights among the "small ones," who desperately struggle for survival; focussing exclusively on best-selling disciplines, market economy, and with it university administrations, also create a 'neo-Orientalist' discourse that tends to reduce the Arab World to a sphere of religiously motivated violence and a potential threat for global peace; policy-makers in academic administration therefore are inclined to marginalise philological and culture-oriented disciplines, branding them as "irrelevant" due to a lack of public interest and demand (for an attempt at an assessment of the present situation, see GUTH 2018b, with further references, also to earlier and more comprehensive assessments); another reason for the deplored lacuna may lie in the frequent decoupling of Arabic Studies from Semitic Studies, a process seemingly necessitated by the growth of the disciplines, esp. after the oil crisis of the 1970s, and the need for specialisation within Oriental Studies; this process resulted in a situation where Arabic linguistics often only deal with Arabic itself, without a Semitist framework, or Arabic Studies do form part of Semitic Studies but are marginalised there due to various reasons, mainly the traditional focus of Semitic Studies on *other* Semitic languages than Arabic (Akkadian, Ethiopic, Aramaic, etc.).

5   Among the presentations in which I introduced the project, illustrated its main ideas with some concrete samples, and updated the interested academic community on progresses made in the years since the project's start-up, I may mention (in order of chronology): "EDALC – An Etymological Dictionary of Arabic Language and Culture," May 23-24, 2013, Oslo–Austin Workshop in Semitic Linguistics, University of Oslo (NO) ♦ "Neues vom Projekt eines Etymologischen Wörterbuchs des Arabischen," September 27, 2013, 32nd DOT, Münster (DE), accompanied by a poster, "Breaking the Grounds for an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic" ♦ "Kleiner arabisch-etymologischer Weihnachtskalender: Testlauf für ein etymologisch-kulturgeschichtliches Wörterbuch des Arabischen," December 17, 2013, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg (DE) ♦ "What has *påske* to do with Arabic eloquence?," April 25, 2014, Center for Islamic and Middle East Studies, Oslo (NO) ♦ "EtymArab© – A 1000-lemmata 'zero version' of an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic," August 18-22, 2014, 4th World Congress of Middle East Studies (WOCMES), Ankara (TR) ♦ "The Etymology of Arabic: Chances and challenges," 04 November 4, 2014, Dipartimento di Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa Mediterranea, Università Ca'Foscari, Venice (IT), and also November 13, 2014, Dipartimento degli Studi Umanistici, Università degli Studi di Torino, Turin (IT) ♦ معجم الدوحة" و"قاموس أوسلو" : لقاء استطلاعي لدراسة إمكانيات التبادل والتعامل" (The *Historical Dictionary of Arabic* and *EtymArab*: Exploring possibilities of cooperation and exchange), March 29, 2015, Doha Institute, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Doha/Qatar ♦ "EtymArab©—An etymological dictionary of Arabic: chances and challenges," October 21, 2015, Polska Akademia Nauk, Komisja Orientalistyczna, Kraków (PL) ♦ "Arabs, Hebrews and Europe: An etymological rhapsody," April 28, 2017, Center for Islamic and Middle East Studies, Oslo (NO) (video podcast available at <https://screencast.uninett.no/relay/ansatt/birgitabuio.no/ 2017/28.04/5670867/Guth_-_20170428 _114822_39.html>) ♦ "Wie auf einem anderen Stern: Ein zeitgenössisches arabisches 'etymologisches' Lexikon, fernab (?) westlicher Forschungstraditionen," September 18-22, 2017, 33rd DOT, Jena (DE).

6   Cf. GUTH 2015-18, GUTH 2017 and GUTH 2018a, in the List of References.

7   <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/>. – To access the *EtymArab* database/dictionary directly, go to <.../index.php?page=volume&vid=626> and choose "Go to the first sentence" (in the "Sentence by sentence view"). Search via the "Search" field or by clicking on an item chosen from the menu to the left where the Arabic roots are arranged alphabetically (Arabic *ʔalif-bāʔ*) and, within a root, according to the system used in WEHR's dictionary.

Practical work on the roots and individual lexical items suggested by the Oslo explora-tory workshop[8] proved to be highly giving—in many respects:

– First and foremost, it showed how much research has already been done on the etymol-ogy of Arabic. Much of this material is scattered here and there, in monographs or arti-cles on individual lexical items or larger semantic complexes, but also in many studies on, and dictionaries of, other Semitic languages. Originating, partly, from the begin-nings of Oriental Studies in Europe, it goes without saying that this material often is quite dated. In many cases, however, even a thorough revision could not shake its valid-ity. In any case, this material can serve as a starting point for further research, even though it will have to be replaced or modified at a later stage, when the picture becomes clearer thanks to the findings of more recent research. (An examination of etymological studies also sheds light on the history of the discipline as well as, connected to it, the conditions and motivations that have framed etymological research over the years and decades.)

– As a result of one of *EtymArab*'s main operations—the assembling and collating of extant research—we were also able to obtain, for many roots and individual lexical items, a number of insights that go far beyond what earlier studies had achieved: a viewing together of pertinent findings, often possible only now, thanks to digital tech-nology and facilitated access to old studies and the processing of larger amounts of data, helped to see things more clearly and paved the way for more advanced investigations in many cases. In this way, working on the *EtymArab* "zero version" proved an old Ori-entalist assumption wrong: it is not at all hopeless to try to make some advances into the history and pre-history of the Arabic language! This is not to ignore the many diffi-culties, obstacles, challenges that an etymologist still meets and has to deal with: the complexity of the subject matter itself, i.e., the richness and enormous multifacetedness of the Arabic lexicon, the diglossic situation, the huge regional diversity, resulting in polysemy, etc., not to speak of the scarcity of available sources for early stages of the language's history and the unreliability of editions in many subfields. However, Arabic

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8 The choice of items in the 1000-lemma start-up list was (and still is) meant to be somehow representa-tive of Arab cultural history and at the same time to be appealing to a larger general public. It includes most of the Swadesh basic vocabulary (cf. SWADESH 1971; for a 200-word version of this list, see, e.g., BENNETT 1998: 40, or <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Arabic_Swadesh_list>, last accessed December 28, 2017), almost all terms discussed in Arthur Jeffery's seminal study on *The Foreign Vo-cabulary of the Qur'ân* (JEFFERY 1938), all items from BERGSTRÄSSER's list (1928), many Islamic "key concepts" (as identified by ALI & LEAMAN 2008), a large number of items extracted from studies on the formation of Modern Standard Arabic during the *Nahḍah* (19th and early 20th century), such as MONTEIL 1960, STETKEVYCH 1970, LEWIS 1988, REBHAN 1986, AYALON 1987, or JACQUART (ed.) 1994, a certain percentage from the thematic lists in BUCKWALTER & PARKINSON's *Frequency Dic-tionary* (2011), collated with a selection from *The World Loanword Database* (WOLD) compiled by HASPELMATH & TADMOR. The list further filled up according to pure frequency considerations and, last but not least, own personal preferences, not seldom inspired by the place where, or occasion on which, I presented the *EtymArab* project: for instance, giving a paper in Venice (Arabic: al-Bunduqiyya), I searched, among others, into the roots √BNDQ and FNDQ; shortly before Christmas, I lectured on the etymology of Christmas-related terminology, etc.—cf. the list of presentations and pub-lications given in notes **5** and **6**, above.

is not too different from other languages in these respects. A quick glance at etymological dictionaries of other major languages should be enough to acknowledge the fact that etymologists of non-Arabic languages, too, struggle with similar problems, and they are in fact unable to solve these problems satisfactorily for larger parts of the lexicon as soon as they try to 'dig' themselves into older, unattested layers of the history of the respective languages. It is more than common to find concluding statements like "of unclear origin" or "etymology obscure," in addition to the revision of earlier findings or the discussion of the pros and cons of certain theories. Thus, previous assertions about an essential "otherness" of Arabic that would make any serious research impossible seem to owe their existence mainly to Orientalist prejudices.

– On the other hand, it is only natural that work on the etymology of the 1000-lemma start-up list also made numerous lacunae and challenges apparent. Of course, these *are* lacunae indeed, and challenges still *are* unsolved problems. However, one should not only see the negative aspects here. The identification of a lacuna or a challenge is an achievement in its own right, an essential first step towards closing the gap and finding a solution. Moreover, the most important benefit to be drawn from such challenges is probably a sensitization for theoretical and methodological questions of a more general nature.

It is in this spirit that the Berlin workshop convened—and concluded that at the present stage, the biggest desideratum is to reach an overview over theoretical and methodological obstacles and challenges and that therefore a publication that would make an effort to provide such an overview, or help to provide one, would be most welcome. The present *dossier spécial* is meant to be working towards the fulfilment of this task. Based on observations made in their source material, each of the articles presents the more general questions arising from these observations and discusses relevant methodological approaches and their theoretical underpinnings. The discussion is informed by the authors' long-standing 'exposure' to questions related to Arabic etymology and the experiences they made when applying certain theories and methods.

Of course, etymology is a vast field and has too many sub-fields as to be covered in this little *dossier:* there are phonological as well as semantic aspects and synchronous as well as diachronic approaches; there are the tracing of borrowings and the analysis of principles of word-formation (derivation, compounding, ...); there is the study of phenomena that can be explained by genetic relatedness or by language contact, as well as the reconstruction of hypothetical proto-forms; there are several cultural dimensions (What can a language tell us about the culture of those who use it? What can we learn from etymological data about contacts between peoples or the interaction of human beings from different language communities?), and many other aspects.[9] Yet, the seven articles gathered in the present collection cover quite a broad range of topics, questions, theories, and methodological approaches.

Taking some Arabic roots containing the pharyngeals ʕ and ḥ or the velar/uvular fricatives ġ and ḫ as his starting point, Zeus WELLNHOFER looks into phonetic features and

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9   For standard overviews and introductions to etymology in general, see, e.g., MALKIEL 1975, MALKIEL 1993, and DURKIN 2009.

regular sound changes, or deviations from standard patterns, to discuss the relevance of these features as heuristic tools that may help to distinguisch 'genuine' Arabic words from borrowings, particularly inner-Semitic loans, as well as for the explanation of pairs of phonetically distinct, but semantically close Arabic roots.

The latter phenomenon is also what the following three articles are interested in, though from different perspectives and drawing on different etymological traditions. While Wellnhofer sticks to what may be called the 'mainstream' in Western approaches to Arabic etymology, Simona Olivieri and myself present traditional Arab views. OLIVIERI demonstrates how early Arab grammarians understood the word *ism* and how their view on grammar influenced the way they 'derived' this word either from √SMW or from √WSM, and vice versa: how the derivation from either of these two roots influenced their view of the *ism* as a grammatical phenomenon—grammar, semantics, and etymology are intricately interwoven. Although the Arab grammarians' opinions about the etymology of *ism* certainly are not tenable from the point of view of Western historical linguistics, they are interesting in themselves nevertheless: on the one hand, they provide useful explanations for a certain semantic shading of Arabic *ism* as compared to its Semitic cognates (semantics are influenced by the use as a grammatical term); on the other hand, they also serve as a fine example of how *the* main principle of traditional Arab(ic) grammar and lexicography—the idea of the tri-consonantal "root" (*ǧiḏr*)—imposes on indigenous Arab etymologists a specific way of thinking that forces them to 'derive' (*ištaqqa*) every word from a hypothetical 3-radical *ǧiḏr*, an operation that often brings them close to what could look like 'folk etymology' from a Western perspective. Yet, this 'folk etymology' should not be easily dismissed as complete nonsense: the way a word is etymologised forms part of its meaning and therefore may, in the long run, contribute to a change in semantics, so that both, 'genuine' *and* 'folk' etymology, will have to be taken into consideration in order to provide convincing comprehesive explanations of semantic change.

The same holds true for a modern Arab etymologist's, the late Muḥammad Ḥ. Ḥ. GABAL's, approach that I am discussing in my own contribution (GUTH, "Biradicalist Mimophonic Triradicalism"). It has been a major concern of this article to not only present Gabal's basic assumptions and key operations, but also put these in dialogue with the Western tradition, both earlier findings and more recent approaches to the question of the composition of Arabic "roots", such as Christopher EHRET's idea of pre-Protosemitic root extensions, Rainer M. VOIGT's "Reimwortbildung", or George BOHAS's *matrices et étymons*.

The Bohasian approach and its possible bearings are exemplified *in extenso* by Jean-Claude ROLLAND in his essay on the terms for "stone" in Latin, Greek and Arabic. Basing themselves, like Gabal, on an essentially mimophonic approach, Bohas and with him Rolland widen the idea of a similarity of sounds and, as is assumed, corresponding semantic relatedness considerably, sketching huge (synchronic) semantic fields and sub-fields (like the "stone≡beating/breaking/cutting" field explored by Rolland) rather than trying to trace lexical items back, diachronically, to attested predecessors or reconstructed 'origins'. Their approach may seem quite different from traditional Western 'mainstream' ones, mainly because of their focus on (more or less) synchronous similarity in sound and meaning. On the other hand, also Western scholars like Rainer M. VOIGT operate with sound similarity ("rhyming") as explanation for semantic overlappings and vicinity, and none of them all—

neither Voigt, nor Gabal, nor Bohas and Rolland, nor the traditional Arab 'etymologists'—touch upon the idea that, except perhaps for the geminated R_1R_2. type, all *real*, existing roots are thought to be *tri*radical (it is only Ehret and some researchers with a background in Russian academia, which often was more open to include an Afroasiatic or even Nostratic dimension in the overall picture, who were/are ready to ascribe historic reality to *bi*radical roots). Moreover, it should be said again that even though sound similarity as an explanatory category tends to be refused (except for cases of assimilation, metathesis, etc.) as untenable, if not even as 'folklore', in Western etymological thinking there may nevertheless be more etymological truth to it than this academic tradition usually assumes, exactly because there are not only diachronic processes going on, but there is also synchronic interaction and association on account of phonetic similarity.

The composition and/or formation of roots is also the topic of Lutz EDZARD's contribution to the present *dossier*, although his study is not concerned with the question of bi- or triradical roots. Rather, he looks into phenomena of morpho-phonological re-analysis, for instance those in which an expression or a string of words is first abbreviated into a kind of "acronym" (e.g., *basmala* for "to pronounce the formula *bismi 'llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīm*") and then a corresponding root (here: *√ BSML) is extrapolated. The article also makes an attempt to establish a hierarchical typology of such processes.

While the preceding five studies shed light on the root concept, the composition of roots and their formation as well as the implications of the concept for grammatical and etymological thinking, Francesco Grande's and Gizem Işık's studies draw our attention away from the more formal, morpho-phonological aspects to another huge complex of etymological relevance: semantics and semantic categorization. GRANDE compares European notions of the concept of the "semantic field" to what may correspond to it in the native Arab lexicographical tradition, especially the idea of a *bāb* in Ibn Sīdah's *Muḥkam* and *Muḥaṣṣaṣ*. Elaborating on congruencies and differences among the two traditions, the article points to a fact that traditional etymology to this day tends to neglect: Semantic taxonomies are dependent on time, place, and the culture from which they emerge; therefore, familiarity with the semantic field(s) to which a given word is ascribed in a given language and, thus, an intimate knowledge of the *cultural* aspects surrounding the respective lexical item may help to solve etymological questions. Gizem Işık then goes a step farther, demonstrating how the application of a—in her case—*cognitive linguistic* approach can provide a useful instrument for the analysis of a complex semantic field such as 'vision', and how this grants the etymologist a better understanding of the development and distribution of the many facets of 'vision' in Arabic, and Semitic in general.

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It goes without saying that this little collection of articles related to etymological theory and methodology is far from being a comprehensive introduction to the field and the challenges that the project of an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic still will have to face. Moreover, it did neither provide an overview of the *history of the discipline* nor include a case study that could have served as an example of the *political dimensions* of etymology,

particularly the etymology of Arabic.[10] As the editor of the *dossier*, I also would have liked to see an article dealing with 'paretymology' (popular/folk etymology): To which other word(s)/idea(s) do 'lay' etymologists trace back certain words, irrespective of 'proper' etymological findings? What do people associate with a word that may be borrowed, but whose true origin is ignored or forgotten? What kind of history do they assign to such words? As for the *cultural* aspects (which also would have been quite prominent in a 'par-etymological' study), some of them have certainly been addressed by Grande and Işık; but there are of course many more, and each of them would deserve a study in its own right: investigations into borrowing, for example, often shed light on trade relations, knowledge transfer, cultic practices, migration movements, power relations under occupation/colonis-ation, etc. I would also very much have liked to include a study comparable to Huehnergard's brilliant essay on the Proto-Semitic lexicon in which he sketches a picture of the everyday world of the Proto-Semites (including agricultural tools and techniques, human relations, religious belief and practices, etc.), based on the vocabulary that can be reconstructed for this period of linguistic history (HUEHNERGARD 2011). I could imagine that similar studies on the etymology of Arabic words could be equally giving. (There exist already a fair number of studies on the two main periods of translation, the early Abbasid times and the *Nahḍah*, and also many others on borrowings from languages like Akkadian, Syriac, or Italian—to name only a few. But in many cases, these are either dated and would benefit from a thorough revision, or they are far from comprehensive and/or satisfactory, leaving ample room for addition and elaboration. Often they also content themselves with stating that '*x* is from *y*', without framing the instances of borrowing with informations on the circumstances and cultural environment in which the borrowing supposedly happened.)

Not to speak of the many aspects of more *traditional*, 'formal' etymology and historical semantics that have not been touched upon: There is much left to do with regard to sound changes (re-analysis, metanalysis, 'contamination', associative sound changes like Voigt's "Reimwortbildung"), word formation (neologisms, back-formations, etc.), borrowing (pat-terns of appropriation, motivation for borrowing, inner-Semitic borrowing), the relation between sound and meaning (onomatopoiesis, mimophony, phonaesthesia, expressive formations) as against the Saussurian arbitrariness of such a relation, and the sketching of individual word histories, and so on. Neverthelss, I still hope that this little collection of essays will serve the interested reader by contributing to a due survey of the field, mirror-ing the state of affairs in the study of the etymology of Arabic and its theoretical and meth-odological challenges, but also its vast chances and opportunities, and with all that hopeful-ly stimulating further research, and inviting to collaborate.

Oslo, December 2017

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10 Cf., however, in this context, my little "etymological rhapsody" on "Arabs, Hebrews and Europe," mentioned in fn. **5**, above.

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