



The Etymological Dictionary: The Arab Ideal (Construct) between Lexicological Study and Lexicographical Achievement

Dr. BENNABI Kaddour¹, Dr. Mokhtar Benouzghar², Pr. Berbara Mustapha³, Dr. Chaida Sofiane⁴

¹University of Relizane. (Algeria); Email: kaddour.bennabi@univ-relizane.dz

²University of Relizane. (Algeria); Email: mokhtar.benouzghar@univ-relizane.dz

³University of Oran 1. (Algeria); Email: Berbara.mustapha@univ-oran1.dz

⁴University of Oran 1. (Algeria); Email: chaida.sofiane@univ-oran1.dz

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the features that will guide lexicographers in creating the great edifice that is lacking in the Arabic language: a living, widely used dictionary in the truest sense of the word, which shows no signs of ageing and decline — signs that generally lead languages to die out. Accordingly, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive and inclusive concept that brings together the desired Arabic etymological dictionary and clarifies its technical principles and multiple sources, providing the material from which lexicographical definitions can be derived with precision.

Keywords: etymological dictionary, etymology, lexicology, etymon, historical dictionary, origin of words, semantic change, terminology, terminography.

1. Introduction

The central problem of this article lies in an attempt to establish the fundamental requirements that the Arabic etymological dictionary—conceived as we envision and seek it—should have. First, we distinguish it from its counterpart in European languages and identify its closest sibling: the historical dictionary. We then explain the techniques and sources needed to enrich its content and address the shortcomings that still characterise Arabic lexicographical and lexicological practice, despite its possession of features that distinguish it. These requirements are intended to lay the groundwork for the creation of a comprehensive, structured etymological dictionary that covers the entire vocabulary of the language — one that presents word origins, manifestations of their

development and the circumstances surrounding the transformation of words into different forms and meanings.

In this context, we have seen the creation of a historical dictionary of the Arabic language. We rejoiced at its birth, feeling proud, admiring it and taking pleasure in it. However, this did not stop us from identifying what is still lacking in terms of etymological treatment, specifically the etymological elucidation of both form and meaning. If the dictionary has any merit, it lies in collecting the dispersed meanings of words and arranging them in chronological order. It is a significant achievement that this work has been realised after existing only as a hoped-for dream.

Therefore, we consider it necessary to strengthen this edifice by making it more robust, coherent and comprehensive — through seeking etymology rather than history alone and focusing on scrutinising the etymological bases of words in terms of both form and meaning. In our view, this approach is more complete and perfect, and more appropriate and fitting in the Arabic language.

For this reason, we will pause briefly to consider the term ‘etymology’ in terms of its foundation, concept and usage, so that it is clear why it is the more appropriate choice. In Arabic, the notion of etymology extends to encompass origin, chronology, history and development; it includes the form and meaning of words. Therefore, there is no need for us to follow Western lexicographical practice ‘step by step’ by creating two separate dictionaries — one historical and the other etymological.

The concept of etymology in European languages stems from the etymon: the original form from which a word originates. The purpose of etymological work among lexicographers of these languages is to identify that etymon and document the changes it undergoes. Therefore, they also require a historical dictionary that documents semantic change. This is what we shall attempt to clarify in this article.

To the best of our ability, we have tried to identify the cognitive, terminological and specialised scholarly factors available to us in order to form a comprehensive picture of the desired Arabic etymological dictionary, as detailed in this article.

2. The Concept of Etymology in Western Lexicology:

The term ‘etymology’ was not used in Arabic until the late twentieth century, when it gained popularity among most Arab researchers. In Western terminology, however, the word denoting it (étymologie) goes back to ancient Greek culture, particularly the Stoics led by Zenon of Elea in the late 4th century BCE. At that time, the term was ‘etymologia’, composed of two words: *etymos*, meaning “true” or “real”, and *logia*, meaning “inquiry” or “study”. From this, the term acquired its first meaning: the search for truth¹.

The term was then adopted by Plato (428–347 BCE) in his dialogues, in which he ‘etymologised’ many words, especially the names of the gods².

The emergence of ‘etymology’ as a specialised lexicographical concept related to dictionary entries occurred through the work of ‘Isidore of Seville’ (Isidor de Séville) in his Latin work *Etymologiae*, written in the seventh century CE. There, he shifted the meaning of the term towards the notion of the element that is truly original and essential to a word³.

This concept remained dominant, though contested, in philosophy and theoretical discussion rather than in lexicology and etymological study until the appearance of the works of ‘Papias’ (Papias) in

lexicographical term referring to a word unit that is rooted in the earliest languages of the Arabs without being borrowed or newly coined.

4. The History of the Term (Etymology) in Linguistic Studies Among the Arabs

There is no doubt that the use of the term (التأثيل) within the terminology of the sciences of language was late among the Arabs. Moreover, its adoption later gained popularity among researchers: some refer to this lexical branch as **the science of derivation (, while others call it “the fundamentals”. Still others do not take the trouble of translating it and instead use “etymology”—as if Arabic had become incapable of producing a clear and eloquent word that would convey the meaning of the foreign term etymology

As for the earliest person—based on what could be consulted—who was found to have used تأثيل to denote research concerned with the origins of words, to trace the ways in which they were formed, and to document the first usage of such words in Arabic: this, as far as can be seen, was the Iraqi scholar Abdelhak Fadil⁹.

The introduction of his proposed term appeared in articles published in the journal Al-Lisan Al-Arabi, which is a testament to the competence of this Arab scholar. Though he did not receive due recognition, he took on the difficult task of arriving at etymons for many words. He himself explained the rationale behind his choice of term, saying:

‘As for ta’thīl, it is a linguistic science known among Europeans, and its name in English is etymology. Some Arab linguists have translated it as ‘the science of the origins of words’, but I found this name too long. Therefore, I proposed the name ‘etymology science’, considering that etymons in the lexicon mean origin. I am therefore responsible for giving it the Arabic name, and that is enough.¹⁰’

Regarding the earliest use of the term ta’thīl in Arabic studies, it is an article by Abdelhak Fadil, published in 1966 and titled Sketches of Linguistic Etymology. This constitutes the oldest documented evidence of the introduction of the Arabic form ‘athīl’ to express the concept of the Western term ‘etymology’. The only thing missing from that introduction is something to indicate that it denotes a scientific branch, something reflected by the ‘-logy’ pattern (suffix -logy), which frequently appears at the end of the names of sciences among Europeans. Nothing is more fitting for Arabic than a synthetic/industrialised verbal noun form, so that Arabic terminological usage is enriched by the word ‘التأيلية’.

5. The conceptual definition of the desired Arabic etymological dictionary

The concept of an etymological dictionary among Western scholars has been shrouded in confusion at both the definitional and procedural levels. As a result, researchers have sometimes identified it with the historical dictionary, while at other times they have modified it accordingly.

If this confusion applies to those who have previously compiled etymological dictionaries, how much more must it concern anyone who seeks to establish a clear definition and adorn the Arabic lexicon with one? It is therefore essential to clarify the factors behind this confusion, so that people are made aware of it and the means that lead to it are blocked.

5.1 Some manifestations of confusing the etymological dictionary with the historical dictionary

It is impossible to analyse any issues related to the etymological dictionary without addressing the problem of it being confused with the historical dictionary. Anyone examining the Western lexicographical¹¹ corpus will find that it contains two kinds of diachronic dictionaries devoted to tracing the development of words in terms of both form and meaning from their origin to their present usage. These are the etymological dictionary and the historical dictionary¹².

Although the birth of the first historical dictionary of the Arabic language in Doha and Sharjah has illuminated the achievements of Arab scholarship, the Arabic lexicographical library still lacks an etymological dictionary. While producing such a dictionary may seem impossible, it is nonetheless necessary to identify the best approaches to accomplish this, along with the kinds of studies and in-depth research required to give the Arabic language what it deserves.

In doing so, we must avoid the errors that occurred in the creation of the historical dictionary, while acknowledging the value of its publication and addressing its shortcomings. This is precisely what should be undertaken in a dedicated scholarly project. For this reason, this article presents some manifestations of the mixing of historical and etymological dictionaries within Western lexicography, and then, among researchers, their hidden contents and methods for combining or separating the two types of dictionary. This could be achieved by ensuring that one type of dictionary does not become indistinguishable from the other, so that the etymological dictionary retains its unique features without being conflated with other types of dictionary. Alternatively, a path could be provided towards combining the two types of dictionary within a single Arabic project that would both etymologise and chronicle. Within the concept of linguistic etymologising, we have what suffices for this purpose and even more¹³.

When browsing the plentiful etymological and historical dictionaries found in Western libraries, one finds a clear overlap between them in terms of both their content and the way they analyse dictionary entries. In both types of dictionary, the entry begins by indicating the origin of the word; then it identifies its etymon; and then it proceeds to trace changes in the word's form and meaning, providing dating information for each stage.

Furthermore, the naming of these two types of dictionary suggests confusion over what they contain. For example, although the Oxford dictionary is historical, it is titled Oxford English Dictionary¹⁴ without any indication of a diachronic or etymological approach. Another French dictionary, whose compilers labelled it (*Dictionnaire étymologique et historique du français*)¹⁵, reflects a different emphasis by explicitly combining etymological and historical dimensions.

Algerian scholar Djelali Hallam, intentionally or not, embodied this confusion in his attempt to formulate an all-encompassing, restrictive definition for each dictionary, drawing a clear boundary between etymologising and history. He compiled his observations into two equations intended to eliminate the confusion between the two works. It is as though he aimed at something impossible: he nearly replaced one with the other when he asserted that:

An etymological dictionary is a dictionary of origins, structures and meanings (history).

A Historical Dictionary = Meaning + History + Structure (Origin)¹⁶

What is striking about these two definitions is that they contain the same elements; the only difference is in the order of those elements, indicating a difference in the degree of emphasis placed on each.

Does this imply the existence of two distinct categories of dictionary?

In any case, Ḥusayn Naṣṣār, one of the leading scholars of lexicography, states:

‘In studying the historical dictionary, one studies the emergence of materials, their variation across languages and dialects, and related topics. One arranges everything in historical order according to the appearance of forms...’

Speaking about the etymological dictionary, he says: ‘It is a kind of intermediate dictionary that we may call “the foundational” (uṣūlī)—which is what is termed an Etymological Dictionary in English.’ It especially concerns the origins of words, whether borrowed or native, as well as their forms and first meanings, and their synonyms in the language from which they were taken or cognates if borrowed, or synonyms within the linguistic family if native. It may also be concerned with its history.’¹⁷.

Thus, both dictionaries first locate the word’s earliest ‘settlement’ or ‘installation’ (its initial emergence/placement) and then trace subsequent changes, dating them. According to Hocine Nassar, there is a high degree of closeness between the two dictionaries.

5.2 Ways of Reconciliation or Preference Between Historical and Etymological Dictionaries

What has gone before leads us to conclude that one of two approaches is necessary: either (1) to establish a clear distinction between historical and etymological dictionaries, ensuring that each has its own distinct concept and content, or (2) to combine the two types of dictionary, treating them as one, so that two different titles no longer compete for dominance.

Separating them requires an in-depth examination of what each dictionary should focus on exclusively. Therefore, decisive differences that can resolve the conflict and eliminate confusion must be identified. As far as can be observed, these differences are as follows:

5.2.1 Defining the domain assigned to each dictionary

The etymological dictionary focuses on the word’s form and structure, whereas the historical dictionary focuses on its meaning. This clarifies the field that each dictionary author is addressing.

5.2.2 Assigning etymons exclusively to each dictionary

In the etymological dictionary, etymons should be restricted to the first formal representation of the word at its inception. In contrast, in the historical dictionary, etymons should be confined to the first original meaning of the unit, which may precede, coincide with, or follow the emergence of the formal etymon image by a short interval.

5.2.3 Tracking the word’s formal development only through the etymological dictionary and limiting this to meaning in the historical dictionary.

These are the most important controls for distinguishing between the two types of dictionary. However, such a distinction has not yet been established for any language, nor is it expected to be in the future, given the close relationship between etymologising and historical documentation, as reflected in the content of diachronic lexicographical works in all languages.

Thus, the only option left is to attempt an integrated model of definition within a single dictionary, one that would favour applying either the historical or etymological label to it.

5.3 Justification for Calling the Desired Arabic Dictionary an ‘Etymological’ Dictionary

A preliminary indication has already highlighted the confusion created by Arabic scholars in naming a dictionary devoted to the origins of words, whether formal or semantic. This is because Western lexicography uses two different terms for two distinct types of dictionary: historical and etymological. Had the Arab scholars examined the contents of these works within their own scholarly traditions, they would have found them far from clear and prone to confusion.

As has already been shown, one of these dictionaries differs from the other only in a few elements. The Arabs have no compelling reason to treat one of these books differently from the other because they do not have to establish the provenance of individual words and demonstrate what that implies.

By contrast, the histories of European languages are close at hand and they have numerous parents. Latin, for instance, was not abandoned by ordinary people until the end of the tenth century CE, and remained the language of the Church until the late eighteenth century. Therefore, it is not surprising that scholars of these languages devote considerable effort to tracing the origins of their vocabulary. This leads to the concept of etymology (ta’thīliyya), which is based on the term ‘etymon’: the form in which the word was ‘born’, which may also provide information about its origin.

However, in the case of the Arabic language, the origin of its words is already within it; its vocabulary has not descended from another language — or at least this has not been proven. Consequently, in Arabic diachronism, etymologising and historical documentation converge, making it permissible to use either label for the desired dictionary, rather than requiring a separate distinction between them.

This is why, among the Arabs, the term تَأْتِيل is the most appropriate for use in naming the desired dictionary. This is due to the linguistic characteristics of its meaning, which qualify it to take the foremost position within Arabic lexicographical terminology.

For the lexicographical meaning of تَأْتِيل revolves around rooting/authenticating, assembling, and increasing—specifically through attaching branches to their roots. Moreover, this meaning begins with the very root from which the word **تَأْتِيل** itself is derived. Ibn Faris says regarding it:

> “The hamza, thā, and lām indicate the origin (the root) of a thing** and its gathering together.¹⁸”

As for the constructed form of the material derived from تَأْتِيل, Ibn Manzur states:

> “Everything that has an ancient origin, or that is gathered until it comes to have an origin, is (مؤْتَل).¹⁹”

In the Intermediate Dictionary, ‘ta’thil’ is defined as ‘increase’²⁰.

All of this lends weight to the synthetic/industrial noun form “ (التأْتيلية) elements of both etymologising and dating. Therefore, the concept is comprehensive and restrictive in the sense that it is well-defined, and it is well-suited to occupy a firm place within Arabic lexicographical terminology. It is thus a fitting title for works that aim to trace a word’s earliest landmarks, following both its formal and semantic developments while providing dates for each stage.

6. Importance of the Etymological (Historical) Lexicon

The etymological lexicon is the scholarly work in which the findings of linguists in general and lexicologists in particular are embodied. It brings together what has been dispersed among them, and refines it into a single field after it had nearly been claimed by various disciplines—phonetics, morphology, syntax, and comparative studies. In this sense, the etymological lexicon is the instrument that selects these results, organizes them, and formulates them into lexicographic definitions characterized by clear techniques, and by well-defined boundaries.

Moreover, according to the broad conception we proposed for it, the benefits of the etymological lexicon are not limited to tracing the origin and development of words alone. Rather, they extend to providing general linguistic studies with information that rigorous linguistic literature sometimes cannot supply. Indeed, it provides many branches of knowledge with information that their specialists would find difficult to locate elsewhere. After all, nothing is more deserving of truthful testimony than a nation's spoken lexicon.

As this article cannot provide detailed coverage of such an important matter, we will content ourselves with indicating the significance of the etymological lexicon through a few key points:

6.1 Comprehensiveness of the etymological lexicon in capturing the components of language

A complete etymological lexicon is a genuine, comprehensive compilation of a language, both etymologically and historically. It traces words from their earliest emergence to their contemporary form and documents this with dispersed sources. Consequently, nothing — whether among the units of high or everyday discourse — can escape it.

This is particularly evident in the case of Arabic, whose deep antiquity has caused many of its earliest features to fade, making them the subject of inquiry and research for etymologists.

6.2. Providing linguistics with research material

The etymological lexicon provides linguistics and other sciences with linguistic phenomena. These phenomena may constitute data from which important laws governing aspects of language that might otherwise be overlooked can be inferred. This is an embodiment of the theory of studying language 'as it is', in both its present and past forms, rather than the way it ought to be, as proclaimed by de Saussure (De Saussure), a view for which he was undoubtedly entitled.

Without knowledge of how speakers alter word forms and meanings to make pronunciation easier and expand expression, it would not be possible to establish the various rules of alternation, assimilation, vowel changes, shifts in meaning, shades of expression and related patterns.

6.3 Tracing Words Back to Their Derivational Families

Etymological lexicology restores words to their derivational (etymological) families. A descriptive, synchronic study of a language can mistakenly lead to a word being associated with a set of vocabulary items to which it does not belong by derivation. This does not reveal a word's origin as effectively as etymological analysis does.

A long passage of time can erase a word's earliest features, causing it to acquire an appearance in later usage that aligns it with a class of vocabulary items that had no kinship with it in origin. The etymological lexicon is the only means capable of restoring such a word to its correct derivational family.

This indeed demonstrates the need for that precious lexicon, as we have outlined its features — namely, our analysis of the shortcomings of the Historical Lexicon. The lexicon is recent and undoubtedly a source of pride and esteem. The problems found in it arise from the compilers' lack of attention to etymological analysis prior to historical description and their neglect to record both the formal and semantic etymons before tracking the word's various uses.

One example is the word **** (ب , , , طيخ) ****. In the Sharjah Historical Lexicon, it is listed under the root (ط خ ب) in accordance with its familiar form (19). This is how descriptive, synchronic lexicons present it. However, the word is actually a reversal of '(, , , طبيخ)' which is derived from the root '(خ ط ب)' — a root that contains semantic etymological foundations accounting for the naming of the well-known fruit. Ibn Faris, a pioneer in establishing the semantic etymology of Arabic roots, specified this when he said: 'Sad (or ta), ba., and kha. are one root, which is known for cooking [...] and for heat-made things.' Thus, the original sense is 'ripeness attained through the action of heat — from a fire, the sun, or the like'.

Perhaps the Arabs named this fruit *tabikh* for its rapid ripening compared with other fruits. The watermelon blossoms forty days after planting and begins to ripen about five days later. It has also been established that speakers of Hejazi Arabic used the term (, , , طبيخ) for the original form in Arabic lexicography.

The etymological approach, also known as the historical approach, requires tracing the word back to its earliest derivational root. This corrects its attribution, after which its various meanings are traced and their development dated using the texts in which the word circulated.

The etymology of (ب , , , طيخ) is supported by what Ibn Manẓūr states when defining it: 'Al-battikh and al-tabbiikh are dialectal variants'²¹. We may also note that Ibn Fāris derives the root (ط-ب-خ) from a set of roots whose etymological sense branches into words stemming from them. With great skill, he restores the term (ب , , , طيخ) to its derivational family, stating: 'Ba, ta and kha are one word; it is al-battikh. I do not think it is its original form, as it is a reversal of tabbiikh, which is more consistent and regular'²².

6.4. Providing true models of the experience of real people

The etymological lexicon offers authentic representations of people's lived experiences, whether they are religious, intellectual, social or civilisational. For instance, it traces the meanings of words back to their tangible sources. In doing so, it reveals the sophistication of Arabic thought in an early period of human history by showing how meaning is abstracted and transformed into conceptual (immaterial) ideas.

For instance, the root (ع-ق-ل) originally refers to the rope with which camels are tied, but later extends to the mental faculty endowed by God to human beings to govern their behaviour. Another example is the word 'ṭāriq', which, among the desert Arabs, refers to 'the one who comes to his people at night'. This dates back to the distant past of the emergence of its root, which may date back to the Stone Age. Its first etymological foundation arose from the sound of striking one stone against another. Thus, the binary onomatopoeic root (ط-ق) took shape, and then, when tri-literal roots were formed from binary ones, it was 'infixed' by the letter (ر), yielding (ط-ر-ق). This gave rise to the word ṭāriq, whose original meaning is "to strike a hard door — by one's hand or with something hard". Therefore, 'the origin of ṭuruq (ṭarq) is ṭarq (knocking/striking), and the one who

comes at night is called ʔāriq because he needs to knock on the door'²³.

This shows that the earliest Arabs did not only live in tents, but also had houses with doors that were knocked on and lived in towns from ancient times. This is one of the subtleties and benefits of etymological inquiry. There are many examples of this, but the scope of this article does not permit presenting them all.

6.5 Clarifying the Desired Etymological Lexicon for Inter-Peoples Relations

The etymological lexicon we are looking for helps to clarify the nature of relationships between peoples. This is achieved by recording borrowed words and determining the semantic domains to which they belong. After all, peoples do not borrow words in isolation; rather, they receive the concepts and types of objects and completed works that those words come to denote before the vocabulary.

When a particular field is repeatedly involved in exchange, transfers of lexical items from one language to another become more frequent. Thus, linguistic borrowing reflects ongoing human experience and repeated contact.

In this respect, the European lexical inventory of borrowed terms originating from Arabic is a prime example of the cultural exchange that took place between Muslims and the inhabitants of the lands under their influence. Words denoting sciences, industries, agriculture, institutions and other manifestations of culture and urban civilisation constitute the vast majority of units borrowed into these languages. By contrast, terms related to fighting and weapons were relatively few in number²⁴.

For this reason, no lexicon provides more compelling evidence for understanding and documenting relations among peoples than the etymological lexicon.

7. Sources of the Etymological Lexicon

The most important matter is compiling the desired material for the etymological lexicon. Although Arabic is an ancient language with rich cultural and creative resources, it lacks prior experience in etymological or historical lexicography. Therefore, careful attention must be devoted to the sources that supply the material for the lexicon, beginning with the determination of the scope of those sources.

Arab scholars established standards for what may be used as evidence. These standards may restrict observers of etymological models, even when those models are abundant in the material. The following are some proposals in this regard:

7.1 The need to adapt the criteria of eloquence to etymological work

Arabic scholars defined the criteria of eloquence in terms of time, place and condition. In terms of time, these criteria did not extend beyond the third Hijri century. In terms of place, the criteria were limited to two horizontal lines: the northern Najd region and the approaches to Yemen. As for conditions, they depended on reports from transmitters, specifically with respect to their Arabness and the soundness of their language.

This level of detail is appropriate for phonetics, syntax and morphology because it establishes stable rules for these fields. However, the task of the etymological lexicon is different: it gathers all speech usages across all periods, compares them and derives judgements from that comparison.

For this reason, lexicographers in general, and etymologists in particular, are required to expand the range of sources from which they compile their lexicons. The level of eloquence changes over time. Moreover, Arabic is a living language that is intact and free of signs of ageing or extinction. It is spread across many regions of the Earth. Its usage is not confined to the third Hijri century or the tribes of Asad, Tamim, Hudhayl, Thaqif, Kinana or Ghatafan.

By limiting language sources to the specified period, one effectively ignores linguistic developments that lexicographers did not record, either because they emerged after the era of evidentiary quotation or because they were used outside the territory where such quotation was accepted.

Indeed, we have a fine model in the initiatives of some early scholars (al-salaf). For example, Ibn Hisham relied on the poetry of al-Motanabbi in his book *The Sufficient Companion Concerning Books of Syntactic Analysis*, and al-Firouzabadi included “innovated”, “foreign”, and “rare” words in his dictionary, taking the testimony of physicians and sages as a source. Thus, he added a new terminological category to Arabic, one that he was proud of, believing that his lexicon was an ocean of knowledge. He therefore named it al-Bahra al-Kafi (“The Encompassing Ocean”).

7.2 Expanding the Sphere of Poetic Evidence and Addressing Its Problems

Ancient Arabic lexicographers limited themselves to poetic citations that were already recognised for their eloquence. Consequently, their work remained outdated and did not progress beyond the second century of the Hijra. Consequently, many citations from the Abbasid period and beyond were neglected. Anyone seeking to verify and produce a complete, well-formed and linguistically appropriate historical lexicon suited to the Arabic language and Islamic civilisation must consider the poetry of the period after the Umayyad era, as the greatest masters of this period truly experimented with the development of word meanings. This is precisely what should be relied upon in the history of words.

Therefore, it may be beneficial for Arabic lexicographers to take their cue from Western scholars, who create a special dictionary for every major writer in which they track lexical usage, especially that which departs from what came before. Much of this usage may become widespread and transmitted, thereby becoming lexicalised. Indeed, ‘writers have a significant role in reviving, putting to death and directing words in different directions’²⁵. Therefore, it is fitting that al-Mutanabbī, Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, Bashshār b. Burd and Aḥmad Shawqī — those at the top of the scale of eloquence and in control of the most eloquent and highest Arabic — should each have a separate lexicon, to which historians can refer when studying linguistic generation in its two aspects: formal (morphological) and semantic (significational).

If you wish, I can also standardise transliterations (e.g. Ibn Hisham/Firuzabadi) to align with a particular academic style (Chicago, MLA or EI/Encyclopaedia of Islam).

7.2.1 Verifying the attributed authorship of poetic evidence

The aim is to trace each poetic citation back to its era and environment to determine how words were used, so that the historical lexicon (an etymological/attribution-based dictionary) can accurately show how words changed over time. This call is reinforced by the fact that earlier lexicographical works sometimes attributed poetic citations to people other than their real authors, a practice that continued in later works and compositions.

This kind of disordering of the work of lexicographers and etymologists undermines its very foundations. Attributing a poem to someone who did not compose it is not merely an error of attribution; it falsifies its geography and chronology and thus undermines the value of an important document on which the intended Arabic dictionary depends. If al-Jawhari made this mistake when he cited a line as evidence for the assimilation of the jim of the verb 'he found' — attributing the line to Labīd when it is actually by Jarir, despite the fact that the relevant usage is not present — then what can be built upon that citation? The entire claim that the tribe of Labid used to assimilate the jim of wajada in the Prophetic era or shortly before it collapses. If al-Jawhari made this mistake, what about others among lexicographers and linguists?

7.2.2 Treating Poetic Citations Whose Authors Are Unknown

Nearly one-third of the total poetic citations in the Lisān al-‘Arab are not known to be by a specific author, and a similar situation appears in other lexicographical works. Lexicographers and historians of the Arabic language must pay special attention to this issue, as knowing the poet of a verse is crucial for monitoring a group’s lexicon and determining usage times.

One of the most important ways to address this phenomenon consists of three steps, namely:

Searching for the Authors of Unknown Poetic Citations

This requires substantial effort because it involves consulting poetic diwans, encyclopaedias, biographical dictionaries, indexes and knowledge archives, among other resources.

- Collecting indications that lead to the poets

Even with their utmost efforts, researchers may not find the name of the author of a linguistic verse. In this case, they treat the text of the verse as a documentary record through which they can identify the author. They then resemble someone verifying an unpublished manuscript of a book, employing every means to determine the era of the verse and its social and environmental context. This is a more difficult undertaking than the previous step²⁶.

- Dispensing with the citation

This is necessary when identifying the poet becomes impossible, no matter how much effort is invested. At this stage, the goal of creating a comprehensive etymological/attribution-based lexicon requires the omission of the citation to avoid the risk of a linguistic usage being incorrectly attributed to a different time period. Otherwise, etymological study (ta’thil) would be uprooted from its very roots.

7.3 Seeking assistance from linguistic heritage

Although earlier Arabic linguists did not leave behind an etymological lexicon, they did lay the foundations for one through studies that require reference to enrich contemporary material. Perhaps this material exists dispersed across works, the sheer quantity of which makes tracking them all difficult. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify the body of linguistic heritage truly worth drawing upon to supply the etymological lexicon. This heritage may consist of:

7.3.1 The Ancient Lexicons

Undoubtedly, an Arabic etymological lexicon should build upon the work of the great general Arabic lexicons. Within their pages, there is a rich store of material, including indications of etymological derivation concerning the emergence of words in terms of their form and/or meaning, alongside ancient linguistic evidence, whether in poetry, prose or proverbs. Similarly, these lexicons contain valuable notes on dialect differences, rare Arabic vocabulary, eloquent 'pure' Arabic, 'assimilated/Arabicised' words and speech errors (i.e. incorrect usage)²⁷.

Indeed, we have identified some of these indications in *Kitab al-Ayn* by al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad al-Farahidi, which is the earliest example of an Arabic lexicography text and also the most influential. These indications contain etymological observations worthy of serious attention. For example, al-Khalil's attribution of the word *ism* ("name")²⁸ to its dual root *sim* aligns with its form in ancient Akkadian and Aramaic. He also held a view regarding the origin of the word 'things', which the two great schools — the Basran and the Kufan — had been unable to improve upon. In the history of languages, al-Khalil also alludes to the earliest beginnings of ancient Arabic when he states: 'Canaan, son of Shem, son of Noah — that Canaan is attributed to the Canaanites, and they spoke a language that resembles Arabic.'

Al-Khalil also provided statements about the Arabicisation (or foreignness) of certain words, tracing them back to their original language. He was also the first to introduce the terms: *al-mu'arrab* ("Arabicised/assimilated") and *al-mu'arrab* ("borrowed/foreign words")²⁹. This approach was followed in subsequent lexicons, as their authors adopted al-Khalil's methods for defining entries. Then, when Ibn Faris appeared, he opened people's eyes to another dimension of etymological enquiry — one aimed at signification (meaning). He devoted a complete lexicon to this, called *Standards/Principles of Language*, and he organised his entries by root rather than by word (i.e. the entries are 'roots', not 'lexical items').

This is true, and indeed, early Arabic lexicography contains much that could contribute to an integrated and complete Arabic etymological lexicon with useful guidance. Among its most important components are:

- Lexicons of metaphor, foremost among them "The Foundation of Eloquence" by al-Zamakhsharī. In this work, the author aimed to distinguish metaphor from literal meaning and metonymy from explicit statement. Moreover, it is a storehouse of citations that can help determine how word meanings evolve from literal to metaphorical. Such a lexicon would be useful for a historical or etymological dictionary of Arabic, as it reveals, or at least points towards, the history of sensuous and metaphorical meanings.

- Lexicons of terminology. These are worthy of inclusion in the intended etymological lexicon because they provide information on the time of emergence of a term and the fields in which it is used. Arabic heritage contains a substantial stock of terminology in many sciences, such as jurisprudence and its principles, philosophy, *kalām* (Islamic theology), and others.

- Lexicons of semantic distinctions and supplementary works. Such lexicographical works, including books on linguistic distinctions such as Abu Hilal al-Askari's treatise, as well as supplementary dictionaries covering what earlier works omitted, are of no less importance. After all, a lexicon should not omit anything that establishes Arabic words and documents their development. The former type is expected to indicate the time and source of new significations and to provide researchers with rare citations relating to them. The latter type benefits etymologists by adding

words that earlier lexicons with careful standards of eloquence may have overlooked, such as expressions labelled ‘colloquial’, alongside vocabulary recorded in historical works by historians, geographers, travellers and others that reflects the vivid, continuous renewal and vitality of everyday life.

7.3.2 Works of Linguistic Studies:

- Books of rare/obscure vocabulary: The rare expressions that Arabic scholars singled out for dedicated books are, in practice, part of the older lexicographical stock — or the stock belonging exclusively to a particular tribe that was either neglected or abandoned in general public usage. Such materials are obviously beneficial for etymology. Works devoted to *gharīb* are numerous in the Arabic heritage, beginning with the companion ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās and continuing through later scholars who inherited this art, followed it and enriched it through additions.

- Books of Arabicised (assimilated) and borrowed words (*al-mu‘arrab* and *al-dakhl*): Works on Arabicised/assimilated and borrowed words provide an insight into linguistic borrowing — which is one of the most important topics in etymology and one of the most prominent components of the definitions found in dictionaries in this field. These books are valuable additions to the etymological lexicon as they list a large number of borrowed terms, whether they have been Arabicised or remain in their original form.

Among the most famous of these books are: ‘Arabicised Speech from Foreign (Non-Arabic) Speech’ by al-Jawaliqi (d. 540 AH), which contains 530 words of non-Arabic origin, and ‘The Impeccable/Refined Extract on What Occurred in the Qur’ān of Arabicised Words’ by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, which lists more than 120 words that the author deemed to be Arabicised etymons occurring in the Qur’ān of non-Arabic origin. Other notable works include (‘Healing the Irritability concerning What Is Borrowed (Non-Arabic) in the Speech of the Arabs’) by Chihab al-Din al-Khafaji (d. 1069 CE). The broader heritage of Arabic linguistic sciences contains many other works that deserve further investigation.

Works on the ‘Mistakes/Corruption’ of Common Speech (‘Ammat’s Lapses)

This important body of writing began to be compiled in the second century of the Hijra. It was initiated by al-Kisai (d. 189 AH), who produced the book ‘What is Cited as Incorrect in Which the Common People Fall into Error’. Ibn al-Sikkīt (d. 244 AH) then followed with *Rectification of Speech*. Next came Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH) with *The Discipline of the Writer*, and then al-Zoubaydi (d. 379 AH) with *The Lapses of Common Speech*.

Al-Jawaliqi and al-Khafaji also contributed to this field through their works: al-Jawaliqi’s contribution was titled **(takmilat iṣlāḥ mā taghalat fīhi al-‘awāmm)** (“Supplement to the Rectification of What the Common People Err In”), and al-Khafaji’s was titled **(sharḥ durrah al-khawāṣṣ)** (“Commentary on the Pearl of Distinctions”). Supplement to the Rectification of What the Common People Err In; and al-Khafaji, *Commentary on the Pearl of Distinctions*³⁰.

The authors of these books clearly provided abundant and rich material that can be used to supply the intended Arabic etymological lexicon with information about the developmental stages of Arabic. This is because the temporal dimension is unmistakably evident in many of the models of linguistic ‘lapses’ that these scholars recorded. Consequently, they are an invaluable resource for contemporary researchers, enabling them to track the succession of usage among speakers and

prepare material for the integrated etymological lexicon we seek. This can be achieved by identifying discourse units to date successive usages, after restoring the 'common' (i.e. non-eloquent) form to eloquent Arabic (i.e. standard classical usage).

This is true, and indeed, early Arabic lexicography contains much that could contribute to an integrated and complete Arabic etymological lexicon with useful guidance. Among its most important components are:

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- Lexicons of terminology. These are worthy of inclusion in the intended etymological lexicon because they provide information on the time of emergence of a term and the fields in which it is used. Arabic heritage contains a substantial stock of terminology in many sciences, such as jurisprudence and its principles, philosophy, kalam (Islamic theology), and others.

Moreover, these antonymic books offer another benefit to the Arabic historical etymological lexicon: they provide models of antonymy supported by examples and textual evidence. Understanding the historical context in which the authors lived can help to clarify the point at which a word came to signify a meaning opposed to that which it had previously signified. There are many works of this genre in the Arabic heritage, including *The Antonyms* by al-Asmai (d. 217 AH), *The Antonyms* by Ibn al-Sikkit (d. 244 AH), *The Antonyms* by Abu Hatim al-Sijistani (d. 248 AH), *The Antonyms* by al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan al-Sanani (d. 650 AH) and others.

Due to their sheer number, it is not possible in this article to survey all the sources that should be consulted in an attempt to produce a comprehensive Arabic historical etymological dictionary project. Among the sources that deserve a dedicated study are books that carefully address the issue of semantic innovation (*muwa llad/mu wlad*) in words, when their authors recognised the linguistic capacity of Arabic for derivation and generation. Despite opposition from those who argued that the periods of linguistic citation (i.e. pre-established attestations) were sufficient for the purposes of Arabic lexicography, they therefore studied this phenomenon. Many of these authors were philosophers, including al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazali.

These books also include works on Islamic terminology, such as *The Adornment* by Abu Hatim al-Razi, which established the foundations of the science of the meanings of names and Islamic terminology. This type of work can be used to date the emergence of vocabulary items or changes in their meanings within a timeframe confined to the period between the advent of Islam and the time when its writers were active. This is a beneficial diachronic (etymological-semantic) approach if undertaken for this purpose.

Conclusion:

Thus, the article concludes with a clear and well-defined picture of the desired Arabic historical etymological dictionary—one that possesses the appropriate conceptual foundation and sustaining sources needed to establish its intended definitions. The techniques required to achieve this are

beyond the scope of this specialised scientific article, but could form the basis of another dissertation or study.

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Footnotes:

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- 1- Encyclopedia Universalis, Paris, 1996, Corpus 9, p. 5.
 - 2- Philosophical Universal Encyclopaedia: Philosophical Concepts Dictionary, Vol. 1. Presses Universitaires de France, 1990, p. 900.
 - 3- Historical Dictionary of the French Language, edited by Alain Rey, Le Robert, Paris, 1992, vol. 1, p. 745.
 - 4- Philosophical Universal Encyclopaedia, Vol. 1, p. 900.
 - 5- See: Encyclopædia Universalis: 'Etymologies', Corpus 9, p. 5.
 - 6- See: Ibid., Corpus 9, p. 6.
 - 7- Ahmad ibn Faris, Standards of Language, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, n.d., vol. 1, p. 58.

⁸- Surat Saba' verses 15–17.

⁹- He was an Iraqi scholar who taught the sciences of language for many years at the University of Rabat in the Kingdom of Morocco. He was one of the most prolific contributors of scientific articles to the journal *al-Lisan al-Arab*. His research focused on investigating the origins of words in the Arabic language, and on distinguishing what is original from what is borrowed. This series appeared in the journal over many years under the title "Original or Borrowed?"

¹⁰- Abd elhak, Fadil: 'On Linguistic Adventures', *Journal al-Lisan al-Arab*, Permanent Office for Coordinating Arabisation in the Arab World, Arab Organisation for Culture and Sciences (University of the Arab League), Rabat, Morocco, Vol. 9, Dhū al-Qi'da 1391 AH / January 1972, p. 332.

¹¹- Lexicography refers to the field of knowledge concerned with creating and developing dictionaries, including their methods, sources, definition techniques and entry organisation. This term is proposed as the equivalent of the Western term 'lexicography'. By contrast, the term lexicography also denotes the study of a nation's dictionary vocabulary, which is the appropriate translation of lexicology because it is formed using the pattern of an artificial verbal noun (artificial substantive).

¹²- See Hilmi Khalil, 'The Arabised and the Borrowed in the Historical Linguistic Lexicon', *Proceedings of the Symposium Organised by the Arabic Lexicographical Association in Tunis (14–17 November 1989)*, p. 301.

¹³- *Philosophical Universal Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 1, p. 900.

¹⁴- See: *Etymological Dictionary of the French Language*, PUF, Paris, 5th edition, 1968; and also: *Historical Dictionary of the French Language*.

¹⁵- See: T. Benbow, 'Historical lexicography and the Oxford English Dictionary', *Proceedings of the Symposium of the Arabic Lexicographical Association in Tunis, 14–14 November 1989*, Bayt al-Hikma, Carthage, Tunisia, 1991.

¹⁶- See: H. Mitterand, J. Dubois and A. Dauzat, *Etymological and Historical Dictionary of the French Language*, Larousse, Paris, 2001.

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¹⁸- Hocine Nassar, *The Arabic Lexicon: Its Origin and Development*, 4th ed., Maktabat Misr, Cairo, Vol. 2, pp. 613–617.

¹⁹- *The Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language*, Government of Sharjah, electronic version, entry (t-b-k).

²⁰- Ibn Faris, *Standards of Language*, Vol. 3, p. 437.

²¹- See: ('The Intermediate Dictionary'), p. 550.

²²- Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 3, p. 9.

²³- Ibn Faris, *Standards of Language*, Vol. 1, p. 261.

²⁴- Previous reference, Vol. 10, p. 217.

²⁵- See: Boualem Benhamouda, *L'origine exacte et arabe de certains mots espagnols (The Exact Arabic Origin of Certain Spanish Words)*, Dar El Umma, Algiers, 1991, p. 11. All Western etymological dictionaries.

²⁶- Hocine Nassar, *The Arabic Lexicon: Its Origin and Development*, Vol. 1, p. 618.

²⁷- Al-Jawhari, Hamad ibn Ismail (*As Sihah: The Crown of Language and the Sihah of Arabic*), edited by Ahmad Abd al-Ghafour, *Dar al-Ilm lil-Malayin*, 3rd ed., 1984, vol. 2, p. 547.

And see: Jarir ("Diwan of Jarir"), edited by Nuaman Mohamed Amin Taha, *Dar al-Maarif al-Misriya*, Cairo, 1979, vol. 1, p. 107.

²⁸- Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi, *The Book of Ayn*, vol. 7, p. 318.

²⁹- Same reference, Vol. 1, p. 205.

³⁰- Al-Farahidi, al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, *Kitab al-Ayn*, Vol. 2, p. 265.