Titus Burckhardt on Fez, and Afif Bahnassi on Aleppo which review the contemporary situation briefly; an article by B. F. Musallam, “The modern vision of ‘Ali Mubarak”, reviews ‘Ali Mubarak’s literary contribution, his views about Europe and about the development of the Muslim world, but does not directly treat of cities.

In this volume the two most valuable contributions are R. B. Serjeant’s “Social stratification in Arabia”, a study of Ṣan‘ā’, describing the social classes and especially the artisan and working groups, the quarters, and a comparison of Ṣan‘ā’ with Ta‘īrîm and al-Shīhr. Professor Serjeant gives a circumstantial account of the variations in social organizations and quarter life in the different towns and comments on the characteristic customs of each. His work preserves a sense of the originality and specificity of each of these Arabian cities.

An article by Paolo M. Costa is an account of the historical development of Ṣan‘ā’, especially the physical fabric of the city and a close analysis of the redevelopment of the town since 1962. The government of the Arabic Republic in Yemen is attempting not only to develop the physical infrastructure of the city but to preserve its cultural heritage. The article by Costa concludes with a close analysis of the main features of the city, with recommendations as to how to reconcile modern improvements with the preservation of historic and cultural monuments.

The two articles by Serjeant and Costa are the most detailed and specific contributions in this volume to the study of cities. Along with the concrete contributions of Chalmeta and Ibish, they make this volume a welcome addition to the literature on the Islamic city.

IRA M. LAPIDUS.

A CONTRASTIVE TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR: ARABIC AND ENGLISH.


One would like to be able to give a work of this nature the warmest possible reception. Alas, the methodological presuppositions are intensely idiosyncratic and the practical application to Arabic is more than a little worrisome.

In his preface Dr. al-Khuli says that he intends to apply transformational theory to Arabic, in itself a most laudable undertaking, provided it yields results that are commensurate with the requirements of economical linguistic description and also shed some light on the complexities of Arabic. The author goes on to claim that Arabic “has not entered seriously till now into the field of modern linguistic research . . . it has always been described as it was done one thousand years ago”. This statement is a travesty of the true position; one need only think of A. F. L. Beeston’s The Arabic language today or Harrell’s and Blanc’s Contributions to Arabic linguistics or Stetkevych’s The modern Arabic literary language (especially in the light of Beeston’s review in BSOAS, XXXV, 1972, 138–41) or the Journal of Arabic Linguistics, none of which is mentioned in the bibliography.

By “finding out where Arabic and English are different and where they are similar” the author claims to be able to establish “universal” and “particular” categories (pp. xi and 1). Adherents of TG have often attempted to establish universal grammatical categories on the basis of relatively small samples, but it must be plain that the evidential value of a comparison of English and Arabic is limited to these two languages only; it contributes little or nothing to a comparative assessment of Indo-European and Semitic languages — let alone to claims of a universal character.

The procedure adopted (and carried through with competence and in strict adherence to received models) involves the collection of a representative sample of Arabic sentences (the use of the numeral “9” to indicate the sound ‘ayin is somewhat disturbing), the selection of a suitable model, the writing of transformational rules to account for deep and surface structures, etc. Dr. al-Khuli admits (p. 3) that “this type of grammar may seem overly complicated”. However, it is not only exceedingly complicated in terms of Occam’s razor but leads to a degree of mental obfuscation which, in my judgement, is not compensated for by insight into linguistic structures which might justify such complexities.
This is not intended as a general rejection of TG, to which many of us owe some intellectual debt, but as a warning against the wholesale transference of the full and rigorous orthodox methodology to an entire and disparate linguistic ambience without making contingent allowances. Beeston has shown (Language, L, 1974, 474-7—also absent from the bibliography) how certain TG recognitions can with advantage be applied to well defined syntactical phenomena in Arabic, i.e. embedding and topicalization.

The author concludes (p. 106) that at the level of surface structures English and Arabic grammars show a "limited degree of similarity", while the deep structures reveal "a remarkable sameness between the two languages" or "a high degree of universality". I do not know in what way it is possible to attribute any real meaning to this last term in the present context—or indeed how significant this alleged deep structure agreement can be held to be, since it would appear to relate only to very trivial or immensely general notions. To claim, however, that such "universality argues against the descriptive position which holds that each language is unique and must not be described in terms of other languages" seems quite unwarranted by the facts, for cumulatively every language is unique by definition, and only individual features are capable of being compared with those in another language.

I set out to bless this book, and although in the end I have certainly not come to curse it, I feel on balance it can only be adjudged a gallant failure; but assuredly gallant.

EDWARD ULENDORFF.

CATALOGUE OF EARLY ARMENIAN BOOKS, 1512–1850. By VREJ NERSESSIAN.

Whilst printing spread rapidly through Christian Europe in the 15th century after its earlier invention in China, its diffusion into other parts of the world was slow. It took over a century, for instance, before it was introduced into India. Even within Europe, the first press in Greece was not set up until 1821, although books in Greek had been printed in Italy beginning in 1476. In this situation the Armenians, as often, held a unique position.

They saw the advent of printing as a means of distributing the Bible more widely among their people, and for this reason the church sent men to various European cities to learn the art. The first Armenian books were printed in Venice in 1512; we know little about the printer other than his name, Iakob. He used the undeciphered printer's mark DIZA, in which the "I" is presumably "Iacobus" and the "Z" may represent "Zmyrnaesii", since the language of his books is an unattractive West Armenian dialect similar to that of Smyrna (Armenian Zmir'nia).

The present catalogue describes two important collections of early Armenian books and maps: those of the British Library and the Bodleian. A historical introduction by Dr Nersessian and a review of the Armenian collections in Oxford will be of especial value, since no definitive study, utilizing original documents, on the early Armenian press is available.

In the period covered, Armenians had established presses over a wide area from Amsterdam to Madras, in the course of which they had introduced printing to the two empires of western Asia, and in 1841 published the first Turkish-language newspaper. An Armenian press had been established in Constantinople in 1567, apparently the first in the Ottoman Empire, while Khatchatour Kesaratsi set up a press in New Julfa, near Isfahân, in 1636, probably the first in Iran. But it was not till 1666 that the first printed Bible appeared: in Amsterdam by Oskan Yerevantsi.

This was because the Armenians persisted, for some reason not established, in printing their books in Italy, where they were frustrated by the church authorities. Even in Amsterdam, Oskan used the Vulgate to modify his Armenian manuscript. It was consequently criticized on the one hand for being Latinized and on the other for having been printed in a "heretical" country. However, he also published an unmodified version, a copy of which has now been discovered in the library of Wadham college (HHG 56). Later, in Marseilles, the church intervened to prevent Oskan from completing the production of the